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Strike over DP World deal cripples Ctg port

Govt, CPA negotiating contract with UAE-based company

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Ctg

Operations at Chattogram port came to a standstill yesterday over the planned handover of the New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT) to DP World.

The government and the Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) are negotiating the contract with the UAE-based operator.

Worker organisations at the port began their fresh protests on Thursday and went on an eight-hour strike yesterday.

The CPA yesterday afternoon transferred four employees, who have been leading the protests, to Pangaon Inland Container Terminal in Keraniganj. It asked them to join their new workplace by today.

The four employees are Humayun Kabir, audit assistant and coordinator of Chattogram Bandar Rokkha Parishad; Md Ibrahim Khokan, engine driver and general secretary of Bandar Jatiyatabadi

Protesters accuse the government of offering excessive concessions to DP World, warning that a large portion of earnings would be transferred abroad if the most profitable terminal is leased out.

Sramik Dal; Md Anwarul Azim, senior accounts assistant; and Md Faridur Rahman, a fourth-class employee of the engineering department.

However, Humayun told The Daily Star that they would not join their new workplace and continue the protests.

The CPA has also formed a six-member committee to assess the financial losses caused by the strike and identify those involved in the movement.

During yesterday's protests, speakers at a rally accused Executive Chairman of Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA) Ashik Chowdhury, CPA Chairman SM Moniruzzaman, and other top officials of spearheading the deal. Protesters chanted slogans against them during a procession in the port area.

This correspondent could not reach Ashik for comment despite repeated attempts yesterday. Shipping Adviser Brig Gen (retd) Sakhawat Hossain and his personal secretary were also unavailable for comments.

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With no cargo to carry to and from Chattogram port, trucks are parked in and around a terminal near PC Road yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Be wary of vote theft and ballot stuffing

Tarique urges voters in Tangail, Sirajganj; pledges export of heritage items



SAJJAD HOSSAIN from the campaign trail

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday warned against vote theft, urging voters to remain wary of people from other areas casting votes using someone else's name.

"You must be prepared from the day before to make sure no one can put a stamp on your vote using your name.... You must be careful and keep a watchful eye on your own polling centres," he told a rally in the Charjana Bypass area on the Dhaka-Tangail Highway last evening.

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A party canvassing for 'yes' under public pressure: Shafiqur Jamaat ameer also pledges unity govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman yesterday said public pressure has compelled a certain political party to start campaigning for a "yes" vote in the February 12 referendum.

Making an oblique reference to BNP, he said, "They did not allow the issue of the referendum regarding the July charter and reforms to come to the fore. They only began



Next govt faces 'clouded outlook', rising risks: IMF

LITANY OF RISKS

Delayed banking reforms may dampen depositor confidence, heighten contagion risk

Forex market imbalances may lead to losses in foreign reserves

Heightened uncertainty could raise the risk of stagflation

A sharp reduction in aid flows will limit budgetary resources

Geopolitical tensions will increase commodity prices

Trade barriers may lead to a loss of foreign market share for RMG

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The next elected government will inherit an economy with a "clouded outlook" and rising macro-financial risks requiring urgent action, according to the International Monetary Fund's latest assessment.

One of the dangers, the IMF said, is the possibility of delayed banking reforms -- or, more seriously, "reversals of exchange rate reform and fiscal discipline".

While a gradual recovery remains possible, the report argues that the

balance of risks is skewed sharply to the downside.

"Since the completion of the combined review in June 2025, the near-term growth outlook has deteriorated, and the pace of the decline in inflation is projected to slow," the IMF said.

Tight policies, weak investment amid financial sector strains and election-related uncertainty are expected to limit FY26 growth to 4.7 percent, which is projected to accelerate to around 6 percent over the medium term, according to an

IMF forecast.

Foreign exchange reserves have begun to rebuild, but the IMF cautioned that "buffers have yet to fully recover".

The report, released yesterday, comes as Bangladesh's interim government works to stabilise the economy ahead of elections scheduled for February.

Recent data show a strengthening external position, supported in part by continued IMF disbursements. Total purchases under the

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4

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

Nalchity, where Hadi's memory meets ballot box

SHAKEEL ANWAR, from Nalchity, Jhalakathi

Snaking through narrow, brick-laid lanes and by-lanes, I walked into Khas Mahal, a densely populated neighbourhood adjoining the Nalchity upazila headquarters launch ghat. Most houses here -- some barely more than shanties -- stand on khas, or government owned land.

On one such alley stands the ancestral home of Osman Abdul Hadi, a modest two-storey structure made of corrugated sheets. Since Hadi's assassination in December, the house has become an unlikely destination for visitors from far beyond this southern upazila of Jhalakathi district.

There was no family member

inside when I arrived. Instead, two young men -- Omer Faruque and Mithun, both college students -- and a police constable, Nasir Uddin, stood watch.

Omer and Mithun had travelled from Barishal, around 15 miles away, simply to see "Hadi bhai's

home". Both had met Hadi during the tumultuous days of the July 2024 movement. Omer recalled their first encounter vividly.

"He came to Barishal in August," Omer said. "We were demonstrating on the streets when we heard someone from

Dhaka University had arrived. People urged him to lead the slogans. He put one hand on my shoulder, climbed onto a rickshaw, and began chanting."

Omer said he later joined Hadi in guarding a Hindu temple in nearby Jhalakathi town during a tense period of communal anxiety immediately after August 5. "We came to pay respect to his memory," he said softly.

As the two young men rode away through the narrow lanes, constable Nasir Uddin said such visits had become common. "People come from far away just to see the house," he said. "The other day a woman from Khulna came and cried loudly. She said she watches Hadi bhai's videos on her phone all the time."

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"He came to Barishal in August," Omer said. "We were demonstrating on the streets when we heard someone from



PRESENTATION CEREMONY 2026

Announcement for O & A Level Private and School Candidates

Criteria

Students who appeared for the following sessions & qualify for the award criteria will be eligible for the gala event. The schools following Cambridge Curriculum will be eligible to register for October/November 2024, May/June 2025, October/November 2025 and schools following Edexcel Curriculum will be eligible to register for October/November 2024, January 2025, May/June 2025, October/November 2025 sessions.

Last date of registration is 28th February 2026.

Cambridge

(6 A's or above for "O" level or IGCSE in one or two consecutive sessions)
(3 A's or above for "A" level in one or two consecutive sessions)

Edexcel

(Grading of "7" or above in 6 Subjects for IGCSE in one or two consecutive sessions)
(3 A's or above for IAL in one or two consecutive sessions)

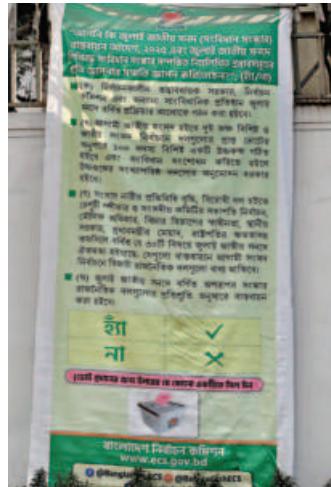
Private Candidates

Private candidates are requested to submit their information at The Daily Star office to be recognized as awardees. Contact The Daily Star, 64-65 Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, Dhaka-1215, till 28 February 2026, between 11:00 am and 4:30 pm (except on Fridays and Saturdays), with their original and a photocopy of the Statement of Results or Certificates and 2 (two) passport-size photos.

Please call this number at +8801786111100 or email at o.alevel.tds@gmail.com before heading to the specified address.

Note

- School candidates are requested to contact their respective schools for registration.
- If you know of any private candidate(s) or school(s) that may be unaware, please pass on the above information to them so that we may include them in this ceremony.



Clockwise from top left: BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman addresses a rally at the BSCIC Industrial Park in Sirajganj; Jamaat supporters join a rally of the 11-party alliance in Chaudhogram, Cumilla; Bangladesh Women Sports Federation displays a banner at the Women's Complex in Dhanmondi urging a "yes" vote in the February 12 referendum; colour posters seeking votes for Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis candidate for Dhaka-13 Mamunul Haque and BNP candidate for Dhaka-10 Shaikh Rabul Alam in Dhanmondi-32 area violating the electoral code; and an Election Commission banner on the upcoming referendum, hung from a Secretariat boundary wall, explains the power of choice in fine print but visually emphasises a "yes" vote with a tick and a "no" vote with a cross. The photos were taken yesterday.

PHOTO: BNP MEDIA CELL/STAR/ANISUR RAHMAN



Avoid use of lethal weapons during election duty BGB asks troops; 37,000 deployed across country

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Troops of the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) have been instructed to avoid using lethal weapons while performing election duties.

BGB Dhaka Sector Commander Colonel SM Abul Ehsan disclosed the information at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday, outlining the force's preparedness and operational plans for Dhaka and surrounding districts.

More than 37,000 BGB personnel have been deployed across the country to maintain law and order during the upcoming polls.

Col Ehsan said BGB has been deployed nationwide alongside its regular responsibility of safeguarding the country's 4,427 kilometre border, with the objective of ensuring a free, fair, neutral and credible election.

According to a press release from the BGB media wing, members will perform election duties in 489 of the country's 495 upazilas, while BGB will have sole responsibility for election security in 61 border upazilas.

Across all 300 parliamentary constituencies, BGB personnel will operate as both mobile and static forces, with two to four platoons deployed per upazila depending on risk assessment.

In the Dhaka sector, battalions under Dhaka (5 and

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Wrong choice will push the country backwards Warns Mirza Fakhrul Islam at Thakurgaon rally

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Thakurgaon



BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday said that if the wrong candidate or the wrong government is voted into power, the country will move backwards.

"We had to struggle a lot to get the February 12 election. We had to carry out a movement for 15 years. Cases were filed against around 60 lakh leaders and activists; 20,000 people lost their lives; 1,700 people were disappeared; and during the July uprising, nearly 2,000 students and citizens had to give their lives -- then did we get the election.

"That is why we consider this election to be very important. If we cannot elect the right government in this election, we will have to move in the wrong direction again," Fakhrul, also a candidate for Thakurgaon-1, said during an election rally in Akcha union of Thakurgaon Sadar.

The country has suffered immensely over the last 15-16 years, he said, adding that some people looted banks,

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26 hurt in pre-polls clashes in Bhola, Cumilla Case filed over Jamaat leader's death in Sherpur

STAR REPORT

At least 26 people were injured in separate clashes between activists of BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami in Bhola and Cumilla yesterday.

In Bhola's Borhanuddin upazila, 14 people were wounded when activists of the two parties clashed while campaigning in the Chowkida Bar area around 8:30am.

Locals said Jamaat men were campaigning for party candidate Mufti Fazlul Karim in the Bhola-2 constituency.

At one stage, as they entered the house of Ayub Ali, a BNP activist, to seek votes, an altercation ensued, triggering the clash.

Later, Jamaat men held a press conference at the Borhanuddin Upazila Press Club and demanded punishment of those involved in the incident.

Contacted, upazila unit Jamaat ameer Maksudur Rahman alleged that BNP activists carried out the attack in a pre-planned manner using local weapons.

Upazila unit BNP president Kazi Md Azam denied the allegation and claimed that Jamaat activists had launched the attack and vandalised the houses of BNP activists.

Borhanuddin Upazila Health Complex medical

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4

'A neighbouring country conspiring over elections'

Nahid says foreign meddling will be resisted

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A neighbouring country is attempting to engineer the electoral process and is engaged in conspiracies surrounding Bangladesh's upcoming national election, said National Citizen Party (NCP) Convener Nahid Islam yesterday.

"By openly taking a position against the 11-party alliance, the neighbouring country is siding with a particular political party," he said at a pre-election rally organised by the Jamaat-e-Islami-led alliance in the capital's Keraniganj.

The upcoming election would determine which path Bangladesh takes: whether hegemonic forces once again dominate the country or whether Bangladesh stands tall with dignity.

"If any neighbouring country attempts to interfere in the electoral process, the people of this country will respond on their own," he said at the rally in HJ Pilot High School ground in Chaudhogram upazila of Cumilla

Such actions run contrary to the country's sovereignty and democratic principles.



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Strike over DP World cripples port

FROM PAGE 1
The High Court on January 29 rejected a writ petition challenging the legality of the government's move to award the NCT contract to DP World.

Sources at the CPA and the shipping ministry said the interim government is now preparing to sign the concession agreement with the UAE firm before the national election.

They added that members of a seven-member tender evaluation committee and a subcommittee, along with the NCT project director and other senior port officials, have been in Dhaka for more than a week to finalise the deal.

Not a single senior port official involved in the process could be reached for comment despite repeated attempts over several days.

The government has set multiple timelines for completing the deal on the NCT, the port's largest facility.

On several occasions last year, senior officials, including BIDA's Ashik and Shipping Secretary Mohammad Yousuf, said the agreement was expected to be finalised by December 2025.

Port officials said the process slowed down due to the writ filed with the HC.

After a two-judge bench delivered a dissenting verdict on December 4, then chief justice Syed Refaat Ahmed assigned the case to the High Court bench led by Justice Zafar Ahmed.

In early January, the government initially set a 24-day timeline to complete the deal, fixing January 8 for issuing the Request for Proposal (RFP) and January 31 for signing the concession agreement.

Later, a February 1 deadline was set for the signing of the deal.

According to shipping ministry sources, DP World's proposal and its technical and financial evaluation, negotiations, vetting by the law ministry, and approvals from

multiple agencies were scheduled to be completed.

The CPA was to issue the RFP addendum and revised concession agreement on January 20, while the international terminal operator was expected to submit its bid on January 24. January 25 and 26 were earmarked for technical and financial evaluation, followed by negotiations and final approval by the CPA board on January 27 and 28.

A CPA source said yesterday

that a large portion of the port's earnings would be transferred abroad if the most profitable terminal was "leased out".

Protest leader Humayun Kabir, who chaired the rally, alleged that more than 30 CPA officials have been confined to the BIDA office in Dhaka for the last few days to complete negotiations with DP World.

He said the port currently earns \$161 for handling a 20 foot container (TEU).



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Worker organisations at Chattogram port demonstrate yesterday.

that negotiations over the financial proposal were still incomplete.

Contacted, CPA spokesperson and Director (admin) Md Omar Faruk said he was not well informed about the latest progress of the deal.

The eight-hour work abstention yesterday was enforced by several worker organisations, including Chattogram Bandar Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal. Loading and unloading of cargo and containers at almost all jetties was suspended from 8:00am.

Addressing a protest rally outside the port's administrative building, worker leaders accused the government of offering excessive concessions to DP World, warning

the port authority shows expenses at \$56 per container, 10 to 20 times higher than actual. Even after that, the port's net income per container stands at \$105," said Kabir, also a former publicity secretary of the now-defunct Chattogram Port CBA.

"It is a matter of great regret that BIDA Executive Chairman Ashik Chowdhury is pushing for the deal at a net income rate of only \$42," Kabir claimed.

Currently, CPA pays a small portion of per-container earnings to private operators. Under the proposed arrangement, the foreign operator would collect the full revenue and give the CPA a share.

A party canvassing for 'yes' under public

FROM PAGE 1

Speaking about the referendum later, meaning since yesterday [Friday], because of the push from the people."

He also said that if the July uprising did not happen, then there would be no question of holding an election in 2026. "Without July, the election in 2029 would have been held under a fascist regime. To demand elections in 2026 but not accept July, to deny the fulfilment of July's aspirations -- this cannot be."

Shafiqur made the remarks while addressing a rally at the Shaka High School playground in Keraniganj, Dhaka. The rally was held in support of the 11-party alliance candidates for the Dhaka-1, 2, 3, 19 and 20 constituencies.

Accusing a party of conspiring to deny recognition to the July uprising, he said, "We had hoped they would honour July. But members of the martyrs' families were disrespected. They were belittled, ignored."

"Respecting July cannot mean extortion, corruption, grabbing land from innocent people, case-filing trade, or raising hands against our mothers. These acts do not align with the spirit of July."

Referring to the July Uprising Memorial Museum, he said, "Many prototypes of the dictatorship's 'Aynagar' have been preserved there. Those who will govern the country in the future should go and see what the consequences are when people are subjected to oppression."

Speaking at an earlier rally in Cumilla, without naming any party, the Jamaat ameer said, "Once you too were oppressed. Then why did you choose to become oppressors? We hope they will correct themselves."

Addressing the rally at HJ Government Pilot High School ground in Chaudhogram upazila, Shafiqur said his party, if elected,

would form a "government of unity" and invite all stakeholders to join nation-building efforts.

"We will accept no more supremacy; we do not want to see fascism. We do not want to see any more corrupt governments in this country. We want to see a humane Bangladesh. Even those who are competing against us now -- if Allah grants us success, after victory we will invite them as well, asking them to come and contribute."

Mentioning that he did not see anyone through a partisan lens, he said, "Everyone in Chaudhogram is my brother. Those who support BNP are my brothers; those who support other parties are also my brothers. An MP is not a representative of any party; an MP is a representative of the people. That is why I am seeking votes from all the people of Chaudhogram, regardless of party affiliation."

The rally was held in support of Syed Abdullah Muhammad Taher, the alliance candidate for Cumilla-II.

The Jamaat chief said, "We do not believe in the policy of absorbing other parties within our own. That is why the 11 parties within the alliance are contesting with their own symbols. We have also declared that whichever symbol is allocated to whichever party will be the symbol of us all. This is how we are conveying a message of unity to the nation."

At the rally, National Citizen Party (NCP) Convener Nahid Islam, a member of the 11-party alliance, said, "Neighbouring countries are engaging in various conspiracies surrounding the election. They have openly taken the side of a party that is speaking against the 11-party alliance."

Also speaking at the rally, Mamunul Haque, ameer of Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, another partner of the 11-party alliance,

said without naming any party, "Sometimes they openly call for voting 'no' in the referendum, and at other times they call for voting 'yes'. Those who say one thing publicly and another behind the scenes are called hypocrites. The people of Bangladesh will not hand over the governance of the country to any hypocrite."

After the Chaudhogram rally, the Jamaat ameer joined a roadside meeting in Daudkandi.

Saudi-Pakistan mutual defence pact will not include Turkey: sources

AFP, Riyadh

Turkey will not join a mutual defence pact between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, a source close to the Saudi military told AFP yesterday, after a Turkish official said earlier this month that they had entered talks aimed at entering the alliance.

Speculation has been rife that the three countries were intent on forming a powerful alliance amid soaring tensions in the region, following Israeli air strikes in Doha over the summer targeting Hamas officials that preceded Iran's bombing of a US air base in Qatar.

"Turkey won't join the defence pact with Pakistan," the source told AFP, dismissing reports of negotiations.

"It's a bilateral pact with Pakistan and will remain a bilateral pact."

A Gulf official also confirmed the information. "This is a bilateral defensive relationship with Pakistan. We have common agreements with Turkey but the one with Pakistan will stay bilateral," the official said.

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Spanish ambassador condemns attack on Star

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Spanish Ambassador to Bangladesh Gabriel Maria Sistiaga Ochoa de Chinchetru visited The Daily Star office yesterday and expressed solidarity and support for the newspaper, which came under arson attacks and vandalism on December 19.

"I would also like to convey to you my solidarity and support, along with my appreciation for the work that the media do in a democratic society," he said while condemning the attack on the newspaper.

A group of attackers carried out a coordinated assault in the early hours of December 19 on the headquarters of The Daily Star and Prothom Alo in Dhaka, vandalising offices, looting valuables and setting fires.

At least 28 journalists

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PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Spanish Ambassador to Bangladesh Gabriel Maria Sistiaga Ochoa de Chinchetru talks to The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam and Consulting Editor Kamal Ahmed during his visit to The Daily Star Centre yesterday to express solidarity and support for the newspaper, which came under arson attacks and vandalism in the early hours of December 19.

A walk thru Dhaka-9 with Tasnim Jara



NILIMA JAHAN

Just after 9:00am on Friday, independent Dhaka-9 candidate Tasnim Jara stepped into the narrow lanes of Goran Bazar in Khilgaon with around 15 volunteers by her side.

There were no posters, loudspeakers, or processions. Instead, she blended easily into the neighbourhood, going door to door, speaking directly with street vendors, shoppers, and families.

They were asked to vote for the football symbol and encouraged to persuade five others in the constituency to do the same.

Dhaka-9 -- covering Khilgaon, Sabujbagh, and Mugda -- is one of the capital's most densely populated constituencies, with

about 4,69,360 registered voters.

Volunteers handed out leaflets outlining her manifesto, as the team moved slowly through South Goran and Baganbari Kacha Bazar.

Children ran ahead, while adults stepped out to exchange brief greetings. From balconies and rooftops, residents waved or called out as volunteers reminded them to spread the message among friends and families.

Jara drew attention almost everywhere she went. Some residents said they had followed her online videos as a doctor long before she entered politics.

Children approached her often for selfies. A toddler handed her chocolates, a four-year-old boy gave her a football, and his five-

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From boats to ballots

Manta people to vote for the first time

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

For the first time, members of the river dwelling Manta community in Barishal are set to exercise their voting rights in the upcoming 13th national elections.

The community has lived on boats along the Arial Khan, Sandhya, Mirganj and several other rivers in Barishal for more than a century. In the absence of national identity cards, most members were previously excluded from the



electoral process. This year, some of them have finally been enlisted as voters.

Currently, around 400 Manta people live with their families on 93 boats in a single fleet on the Arial Khan in Sadar upazila.

Jasim Sarder, a leader of the fleet, said while around 300 of them are adults, only 73 have



been included in the voter list. "Nonetheless, this will be the first time that 73 voters from our fleet will cast votes," he said.

Despite this milestone, members of the community said they are disappointed that political candidates have shown little interest in reaching out to them.

They claimed that although around 3,000 Manta people live on different rivers across the district, almost no candidates have visited them during the election campaign so far.

"Only one candidate came to see us last week in Laharhat.

Other than that, no candidate, no chairman, no member has visited us or asked us how we are living. It is disappointing," Jasim said.

He said many of them might not be able to cast their votes as they lack basic information about polling centres, voting procedures and candidates.

An elderly woman voter from the Laharhat fleet said, "We cannot even bury our dead on land. We drink river water. No candidate comes to us. What will I gain by voting?"

Echoing her, Rana, another Manta leader from Charbaria in

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Star ITIHAS ADDA Uprisings failed to deliver lasting change: speakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has repeatedly risen against authoritarian rule but has failed to turn popular uprisings into lasting structural change, said speakers yesterday, drawing parallels between the 1969 mass uprising and the July 2024 uprising.

The observations were made at the 10th session of The Daily Star Itihas Adda, titled "The Unfulfilled Mass Aspirations of Mass Uprisings," held at The Daily Star Centre yesterday.

Former caretaker government adviser and economist Hossain Zillur Rahman said the main challenge of mass uprisings lies not in the moment of revolt but in what follows, which he described as the unresolved "day after".

Referring to 1969, 1990 and 2024, he said all three movements challenged authoritarian rule, though in different forms. While 1969 and 1990 were movements against military regimes, July 2024 was a struggle against authoritarianism under civilian rule.

"When we talk about authoritarianism, we usually mean military rule. But it can also exist under civilian governments. If we forget that, our criticism becomes one-dimensional," he said.

He warned that phrases such as "it will take time" or

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Former caretaker government adviser and economist Hossain Zillur Rahman speaks at the 10th session of The Daily Star Itihas Adda, titled "The Unfulfilled Mass Aspirations of Mass Uprisings", held at The Daily Star Centre yesterday.

It's bizarre, medieval'

Naripokkho slams Jamaat ameer's remarks on female leadership

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Women's rights organisation Naripokkho has strongly condemned remarks by Jamaat-e Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman on women's political leadership, describing them as "objectionable" and "bizarre".

In a recent interview with Qatar-based broadcaster Al Jazeera, Shafiqur said it is not possible for a woman to hold the post of ameer of the party.

In a press statement, Naripokkho said the remarks reflect a "medieval mindset" and are pushing Bangladesh further backwards in terms of gender equality and democratic progress.

The organisation noted that in the past, when it suited its political interests,

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Swechchhasebak Dal leader killed in 'BNP factional clash'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

A leader of Swechchhasebak Dal has been killed in a clash allegedly between two BNP factions at Trishkania in Kanchan municipality area in Rupganj upazila.

The deceased was identified as Azhar Uddin, 48, senior vice-president of the Swechchhasebak Dal's Ward No 9 unit.

Three others -- Sabuj, Ripon and Emrat -- were injured in the clash and are receiving treatment at a local hospital.

Local sources said an internal discussion meeting of BNP and its associate bodies was held at the Ward No 9 office on Friday evening.

During the meeting, an argument broke out between Ward Swechchhasebak Dal president Sabuj and Juba Dal activist Rajib Hossain over the placement of names in a programme list.

At one stage, Rajib and his associates allegedly punched Sabuj and Azhar. Azhar fell to the ground after being injured. He was taken to a nearby hospital in critical condition where doctors declared him dead.

Rupganj Police Station Officer-in-Charge Shabzel Hossain said Azhar was killed during a scuffle stemming from a dispute over name placement in a party programme. The body has been sent to a morgue for autopsy, he said.

Applications for Hajj visa open from February 8

UNB, Dhaka

The Religious Affairs Ministry has announced that applications for Hajj visas for the current year will open on February 8 and continue until March 20.

The Religious Affairs Ministry issued a notice in this regard on Thursday.

All registered Hajj pilgrims, both through government and private channels, are currently undergoing health check-ups at government hospitals, it said.

According to the directives of Saudi Arabia, pilgrims must complete their medical examinations and receive the required vaccinations to obtain a fitness certificate.

With the certificate, they can apply for Hajj visas through the Saudi Nusk Masar system between February 8 and March 20.

The ministry urged all registered pilgrims, including expatriates, to complete health check-ups at any government hospital in Bangladesh, required vaccinations, and obtain fitness certificates before applying for visas.

This year, no pilgrim will be allowed to perform Hajj without a valid fitness certificate.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Businesspeople and local residents form a human chain at Charsindur Bazar in Palash upazila, Narsingdi yesterday, demanding a speedy probe and justice in the killing of businessman Moni Chakraborty, who was shot dead by miscreants on January 5.

3,200 doctors to join field services in 10 days

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Over 3,200 doctors are set to join field level services within the next 10 days, providing a major boost to healthcare, particularly in rural areas.

For the first time, upazila health complexes will have emergency medical officers to provide emergency services.

Recruited under the 48th special BCS, a total of 3,263 health cadres -- 2,984 assistant surgeons and 279 assistant dental surgeons -- will formally submit their joining letters today.

"The joining of such a large number of doctors at the upazila level and below will have a positive impact on rural health services," Prof Sayedur Rahman, special assistant to the chief adviser for the health ministry, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The development comes at a time when around 10,000 doctor posts remain vacant at the field level. There have been widespread complaints that many doctors are not providing services at upazila-level facilities and below, leaving patients deprived of

care.

The authorities completed the recruitment process within eight months. The circular for the 48th special BCS was published on May 25 last year, and the final gazette was issued on January 22 this year.

"This is unprecedented in the country," Sayedur said.

The health ministry has

AT A GLANCE

Upazilas to get emergency medical officers

Rural healthcare set for major boost

Automated system to handle postings

Doctor vacancies remain high at field level

"We will then begin the posting process and hope to complete it before the general elections," said Sanjida Sharmin, joint secretary of the health ministry.

Sayedur said around 3,500 nurses were appointed, mostly at the upazila level, late last year, and their postings were processed, for the first time, through a fully automated system.

The selected doctors will also be posted using the automated method. Each upazila health complex will receive four to five doctors, including two emergency medical officers, while some doctors will be posted at the union level.

According to 2023 health ministry data, 6,587 (18 percent) of the 36,760 doctor posts under the Directorate General of Health Services remained vacant.

The data also show that of the 1,636 doctor posts under the Directorate General of Family Planning, 686 (42 percent) were vacant.

asked all selected doctors to submit their joining letters today and has arranged a programme at the Shaheed Abu Sayed International Convention Centre in Shahbagh, Dhaka, for this purpose.

These pressures helped drive the 1969 movement, he said.

Drawing a parallel with the period before July 2024, he said claims of economic progress under Sheikh Hasina concealed structural problems such as youth unemployment, insecure work and rising living costs.

He said major student organisations united around a programme addressing labourers, peasants, the economy and, in particular, regional autonomy.

Through a non-violent struggle, students and people showed they had the capacity to remove Ayub Khan's military rule, he said.

Referring to 1969 and

Uprisings failed to deliver lasting

FROM PAGE 3

"some gains were made, some were not" can become a form of self-deception.

"After so much bloodshed, avoiding hard self-criticism is not just an analytical failure, it is an injustice to those who lost their lives," he said.

He also said the bureaucracy has strong "staying power" and can "diffuse, delay and nullify" reform, partly due to a lack of political literacy about how the state functions.

Academician Subho Basu said the 1969 uprising took place in a global context, as the 1960s saw student, youth and worker movements worldwide

and that unity forged during uprisings often fades after the fall of a ruler, and Bangladesh has repeatedly failed in the constructive phase that follows.

Referring to the July charter, he said it includes many positive recommendations from different commissions and expressed hope that at least the major proposals would be implemented, noting the persistent gap between decision making and execution.

At the event, Laisa Binte Kamal sang a song, while Mashrur Shakil recited a poem.

The discussion was moderated by The Daily Star journalist Emran Mahfuz.

It's bizarre

FROM PAGE 3

Jamaat joined hands with Sheikh Hasina and became a partner in governments led by Khaleda Zia.

It said that in the twenty-first century, such a regressive stance seeks to deprive more than half of the country's population -- women -- of their rights.

The statement also said the Jamaat leader spoke of reducing women's working hours and imposing dress regulations based on religion, which Naripokkho described as politically motivated and aimed at further restricting women's freedom and reinforcing a patriarchal society. Any attempt to deprive women of their rights is unacceptable, the organisation said.

Naripokkho called on all to resist any effort aimed at undermining the establishment of equal rights for women.

St Martin's closes for tourists from today

UNB, Cox's Bazar

St Martin's Island, the country's only coral island located in the northeastern part of the Bay of Bengal, will remain closed to travellers for nine months from February 1 as part of a conservation measure.

As a result, tourists staying on the island are returning to their respective destinations on January 31 and February 1.

Although Saint Martin's was opened to tourists for three months, overnight

stays were permitted for only two months. In addition, the daily number of tourists was capped at 2,000, and entry without prior registration was not allowed. Due to these restrictions, the local tourism business has suffered significantly.

Earlier, the government announced a nine-month suspension of tourism activities on St Martin's Island. According to a decision by the government, tourism activities for the current season officially ended yesterday. Consequently, no tourist vessels will operate to the island from today.

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Smoke and fire rise from a housing area for displaced Palestinians, after an Israeli air strike in the west of Khan Yunis, southern Gaza Strip yesterday. Israel carried out its heaviest airstrikes in Gaza in weeks yesterday, killing at least 28 people, including three children.

PHOTO: AFP

Iran warns US, Israel against making 'a mistake'

Says forces on high alert as Trump expects Tehran to seek deal to avoid strikes

AGENCIES

Iranian army chief Amir Hatami yesterday warned the United States and Israel against an attack, saying his country's forces were on high alert following Washington's heavy military deployments in the Gulf.

He also insisted the Islamic republic's nuclear expertise could not be eliminated, after Trump said he expected Tehran to seek a deal to avoid US strikes.

"If the enemy makes a mistake, without a doubt it will endanger its own security, the security of the region, and the security of the Zionist regime," Hatami said, according to the official IRNA news agency.

He noted that Iran's armed forces were "at full defensive and military readiness".

Meanwhile, at least one person was killed and 14 injured in an explosion in the southern Iranian port of Bandar Abbas yesterday, a local official told Iranian news agencies, but the cause of the blast was not known.

Iranian media said the blast was under investigation but provided no further information.

Separately, four people were killed after a gas explosion in the city of Ahvaz near the Iraqi border, according to state-run Tehran Times. No further information was immediately available.

Two Israeli officials told Reuters that Israel was not involved in yesterday's blasts, which come amid heightened tensions between Tehran and Washington over Iran's crackdown on nationwide protests and over the country's nuclear programme.

Washington sent a naval strike group to the Middle East led by the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier, with Trump threatening to



US approves major arms deals to Israel, Saudi

Iran army chief says nuclear technology 'cannot be eliminated'

Huge blast at Iran port kills 1, injures 14; Israel denies responsibility

intervene militarily after a deadly crackdown by Iranian authorities on two weeks of anti-government protests.

The deployment has raised fears of a possible direct confrontation with Iran, which has warned it would respond with missile strikes on US bases, ships and allies – notably Israel – in the event of an attack.

On Friday, Trump said he predicted that Iran would seek to negotiate a deal over its nuclear and missile programmes rather than face American military action.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi had said earlier that Tehran was ready for nuclear talks, but its missiles and defense "will never be negotiated".

On Friday, the United States approved multibillion-dollar weapons sales to both Israel and Saudi Arabia.

The State Department said it green-

lighted a \$3.8 billion sale of 30 Apache attack helicopters to Israel, which has agreed to a fragile ceasefire in Gaza. Also in the package was a \$1.8 billion sale of joint light tactical vehicles.

The US sends billions of dollars worth of military supplies per year to Israel, largely in aid rather than sales.

The US also approved a \$9-billion sale to Saudi Arabia for 730 Patriot missiles, which are used to defend against incoming attacks.

Saudi Arabia, while no friend of Iran, has voiced caution about an attack on Iran as Gulf monarchies fear instability that could jeopardise their reputation as business havens.

Saudi Arabia for years has been considering a historic normalization with Israel, which increasingly seems distant as the kingdom looks warily at Israel's military campaigns in the Palestinian territories.

The US carried out strikes on key Iranian nuclear sites in June when it briefly joined Israel's 12-day war against its regional foe.

Israeli attacks also hit military sites across the country and killed senior officers and top nuclear scientists.

Nationwide protests against the rising cost of living erupted in Iran on December 28, before turning into a broader anti-government movement that peaked on January 8 and 9.

Iranian authorities have said the protests began peacefully before turning into "riots" involving killings and vandalism, blaming the United States and Israel for fomenting the unrest in a "terrorist operation".

The official death toll from the authorities stands at 3,117. However, the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) said it has confirmed 6,563 deaths, including 6,170 protesters and 124 children.

US govt shuts down again

AFP, Washington

The US government yesterday entered a partial shutdown as a midnight funding deadline passed without Congress approving a 2026 budget, though disruption was expected to be limited with the House set to move early next week to ratify a Senate-backed deal.

The funding lapse followed a breakdown in negotiations driven by Democratic anger over the killing of two protesters in Minneapolis by federal immigration agents, which derailed talks over new money for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

"Instead of going after drug smugglers, child predators, and human traffickers, the Trump Administration is wasting valuable resources targeting peaceful protesters in Chicago and Minneapolis," Senate Democratic Minority Whip Dick Durbin posted on social media.

"This Administration continues to make Americans less safe."

Roughly three-quarters of federal operations are affected, potentially triggering shutdown procedures across a wide range of agencies and operations, from education and health to housing and defense.

VENEZUELA CRISIS

US rolls back oil sanctions after mass amnesty

AFP, Caracas

Venezuela's acting president announced on Friday a proposal for mass amnesty in the country, in her latest major reform since the US toppling of Nicolas Maduro just weeks ago.

Dely Rodriguez, in a speech at the Venezuelan Supreme Court attended by top government officials, said she will propose a "general amnesty law covering the entire period of political violence from 1999 to the present."

"This law will serve to heal the wounds left by political confrontation, fueled by violence and extremism. It will allow us to put justice back on track in our country," Rodriguez said, also announcing a "major national consultation for a new judicial system."

She also announced plans to close the notorious El Helicoide prison in Caracas, where rights groups say political prisoners were tortured by Maduro's intelligence services.

Formerly Maduro's vice president, Rodriguez, 56, has quickly moved in less than four weeks in power to overhaul Venezuelan society in ways sought by the United States, earning high praise from US President Donald Trump.

Along with her brother, National Assembly President Jorge Rodriguez, she has passed a new law opening up the country's critical oil sector to private investments -- a key demand of Trump.

The move on Thursday was almost immediately followed by a rollback on US sanctions targeting Venezuela's oil industry.

Guterres: UN risks financial collapse'

AFP, United Nations

United Nations chief Antonio Guterres on Friday warned that the world body is on the brink of financial collapse and could run out of cash by July, as he urged countries to pay their dues.

The UN faces chronic budget problems because some member states do not pay their mandatory contributions in full, while others do not pay on time, forcing it into hiring freezes and cutbacks.

"Either all Member States honor their obligations to pay in full and on time -- or Member States must fundamentally overhaul our financial rules to prevent an imminent financial collapse," Secretary-General Guterres wrote in a letter.

Trump's administration has, in recent months, reduced its funding to some UN agencies and has rejected or delayed some mandatory contributions.

Trump has often questioned the UN's relevance and attacked its priorities.

The organisation's top decision-making body, the Security Council, is paralysed because of tensions between the United States, Russia and China, all three of which are permanent, veto-wielding members.

Trump also launched his "Board of Peace" this month, which critics say is intended to become a rival to the UN.

Although more than 150 member states have paid their dues, the UN ended 2025 with \$1.6 billion in unpaid contributions -- more than double the amount for 2024.

The UN is also facing a related problem: it must reimburse member states for unspent funds, Farhan Haq, one of the Guterres' spokespeople, said during a press briefing.

Cuba under siege as US tightens grip

REUTERS, Havana

Cubans from all walks of life are hunkering into survival mode, navigating lengthening blackouts and soaring prices for food, fuel and transport as the US threatens a stranglehold on the communist-run nation.

Reuters interviewed over three dozen residents of towns and neighbourhoods around the capital Havana -- the country's political and economic engine -- from street vendors to private sector workers, taxi drivers and state employees.

Together, those discussions paint a picture of a people pushed to the limit as goods and services -- particularly those tied to ever more limited fuel supplies -- become scarcer and more expensive.

For much of rural Cuba, this is not entirely new. The island's frail and antiquated power generation system has been slowly failing for years and residents have grown accustomed to spending hours at a time without functioning electricity, internet or water pumps.

But the seaside capital, where the streets are lined with 1950s-era cars and colourful if decrepit Spanish colonial architecture, has until recently fared better.

Now crisis looks set to swamp it, too, as fuel shortages take hold, with first Venezuela, then Mexico halting oil shipments to the island.

US President Donald Trump has said tariffs will be imposed on imports from countries that supply Cuba with oil, ratcheting up the pressure on Washington's long-time foe in the wake of the ousting of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, a key Cuban ally, in early January.

Cuba's peso has lost more than 10% of its value against the dollar in three weeks, pushing up the price of groceries.



An LAPD officer fires a non-lethal munition while facing protesters during a "National Shutdown" protest against US Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Los Angeles on Friday.

Ukraine sees mass power outages

AFP, Kyiv

Ukraine's power grid experienced mass outages yesterday after a "technical malfunction" caused electrical lines between Moldova, Romania and Ukraine to fail, Ukraine's energy minister said.

The outages knocked out water supplies to Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, and prompted a complete shutdown of the city's metro network, paralysing transport for thousands.

President Volodymyr Zelensky called the incident an "emergency" and said restoration work was underway.

"The task is to stabilise the situation soon," he said on Telegram.

The issue piles further pressure on Ukraine's energy grid, which was already in a fragile state due to weeks of intense Russian bombardment.

Kyiv's metro system completely suspended operations yesterday due to the power cut.

Why are there so few women candidates?

Political parties have failed women and the spirit of July uprising

The number of women contesting the upcoming parliamentary elections starkly exposes the persistent under-representation of women in Bangladesh's politics. Of the 1,981 candidates competing in the polls, only 78 are women. This glaring imbalance reflects the deep-rooted chauvinism and discrimination faced by women with political ambition. Moreover, nearly a third of nominated women candidates are wives, daughters, or relatives of influential men, indicating how difficult it is for women to participate in politics independently and on their own merit.

This reality is particularly troubling in a country where women constitute half the population yet make up less than four percent of electoral candidates. Of the 78 women, only 17 are independents. As an analysis of Election Commission data by *The Daily Star* shows, around 30 parties have not nominated a single woman candidate. Two-thirds of parliamentary seats have no female contenders at all, and women with familial or marital ties to powerful political figures are far more likely to succeed than those without such connections. Thus, women are still not regarded as serious contenders.

The exclusion of women is especially disheartening given their central role in the 2024 uprising, where women mobilised, organised, and took significant risks alongside men. Yet, their participation has not translated into greater political representation. Instead, women have increasingly been pushed out of public and political spaces, both overtly through exclusion and more insidiously by intimidation. Anti-women rhetoric has intensified both online and offline in recent times, sometimes driven by religion-based political groups seeking to silence women's voices. Even the few women who have dared to contest elections have faced coordinated online attacks.

Existing legal frameworks have done little to address the prevailing imbalance. The Representation of the People Order, 1972 requires political parties to reserve at least 33 percent of committee posts for women, including at the central level. Yet, most parties have failed to comply with this provision. Even one of the country's largest and oldest parties, the BNP, has nominated fewer than ten women, while Jamaat-e-Islami has fielded none. Electoral politics in Bangladesh—shaped by money, patronage, and muscle power—systematically disadvantages women as parties, focused solely on winning seats, continue to prioritise male candidates. Women nominees are often expected to rely on the backing of fathers, husbands, or brothers.

Even the proposal by the Women's Affairs Reform Commission to increase the number of reserved seats to 100 with direct elections was not accepted by political parties. With no women representatives included in the July Charter consensus discussions, it was unsurprising that reserved seats were kept at only 50, with no provision for direct elections.

If we are serious about democratic reform, women's presence in parliament and political leadership must be substantially increased. A democracy cannot claim legitimacy when half its population remains so poorly represented. Political parties must move beyond tokenism and actively invest in developing women leaders, ensuring they have equal opportunities to compete, win, and shape the country's future.

The key is in proper execution of the law

New ordinances on women, children must not falter at implementation

We welcome the government's recent approval of two draft ordinances aimed at preventing violence against women (VAW) in homes, public spaces, and institutions, as well as ensuring justice for survivors. The Workplace and Educational Institutions Sexual Harassment Prevention Ordinance, 2026 defines sexual harassment broadly to include all forms of unwanted and degrading physical, verbal, and non-verbal conduct. Sexual harassment perpetrated through social media, email, messaging platforms, and other digital technologies has also been brought under the purview of the ordinance. Moreover, workplaces and educational institutions will be required to set up an Internal Complaint Committee (ICC) to receive and investigate complaints, ensure the complainant's safety during inquiries, and recommend appropriate disciplinary action. Penalties range from formal reprimand and demotion to termination of employment (or expulsion in the case of educational institutions).

Meanwhile, the Domestic Violence Prevention Ordinance, 2026—which will replace the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010—aims to protect women and children from domestic abuse, ensure speedy trials, and establish survivor-centric remedies. Commendably, the ordinance broadens the scopes of the definitions of domestic violence including physical and psychological abuse, sexual abuse, as well as economic abuse.

While these new ordinances provide a stronger legal foundation for addressing gender-based violence and violence against children, their effectiveness will ultimately depend on how well they are implemented. Past experience in this regard is not reassuring. It is worth recalling that enforcement of the High Court's 2009 guidelines on sexual harassment prevention was largely disappointing, particularly as no comprehensive law was enacted on the basis of those directives even 15 years later. Where committees were formed under the guidelines, they were often hastily constituted, incomplete, or ineffective in delivering justice. We, therefore, hope that the requirement to form ICCs under the new ordinance will be taken seriously and implemented in both letter and spirit, without delay.

The historical and ongoing challenges of enforcing preventive laws against sexual harassment and domestic violence must be carefully considered by all stakeholders tasked with implementing these ordinances. While the explicit recognition of online abuse is welcome, it also necessitates stronger coordination between the government and digital platforms, many of which fail to cooperate well with countries outside the Global North, despite having large user bases in the Global South.

Too often, it is not the absence of laws but the failure to apply them properly that allows violence against women and children to persist with impunity. The government and relevant institutions, both private and public, must acknowledge this reality and work proactively to address it. Most importantly, once parliament resumes after the upcoming election, the next elected government must ensure that these ordinances are enacted into full-fledged laws without delay.

EDITORIAL

Voters must hold politicians to task over health, education



Anu Muhammad
is a former professor of economics at Jahangirnagar University.

ANU MUHAMMAD

On January 25, a 20-year-old female patient suffering from kidney and heart complications jumped to her death from the eighth floor of Dhaka Medical College Hospital. The deceased, mother to a four-month-old baby, had been undergoing treatment intermittently for several months, but her family could no longer afford to continue it. Their resources were exhausted.

This incident received little media attention. But it should have shaken us because it is not an isolated tragedy, nor is it merely a personal story of despair. It is a clear and devastating signal of the deep insecurity within which the majority of people in Bangladesh are forced to live.

Across the country, countless families have been ruined while trying to pay medical bills. Many cannot afford treatment at all. In Bangladesh, illness does not only attack the body; it dismantles entire households. People sell off land, jewellery, livestock, and dignity. And often, even that is not enough.

At first glance, the healthcare sector appears to be flourishing. New private hospitals and clinics are emerging everywhere. They are modern, well-equipped, and prohibitively expensive. However, this surface-level brightness hides a darker reality. Access to healthcare, recognised as a fundamental right and enshrined in our constitution since 1972, has steadily moved further out of reach for ordinary people.

Healthcare has become expensive because it has been systematically commercialised. Successive governments, with policy support from institutions such as the World Bank, have promoted privatisation and market-driven reforms. As a result, healthcare is no longer treated as a public service but as a profitable business sector. The state has retreated, and citizens have been left to fend for themselves.

The interim government has not initiated any meaningful departure from this trajectory. The latest budget reflects the same pattern as previous governments: minimal allocations for health and education, which is among the lowest not only in South Asia, but globally. Even within these limited allocations, irregularities persist. There is no visible policy shift that recognises healthcare and education as fundamental rights deserving structural reform.

This absence of recognition is glaring, particularly given the promises made in the name of building a discrimination-free Bangladesh. Those commitments find no reflection in budgetary priorities.

The incident cited above and others like it are not random acts of desperation. They are the outcomes of continued systemic failures.

As the country moves towards another national election, political

parties are making a wide range of promises. Yet, among these, what is conspicuously absent is a clear and firm commitment to making the state fully responsible for ensuring healthcare for all.

This silence must be challenged. All political parties should clearly declare that healthcare is a fundamental right, a public good and that the state must bear responsibility for ensuring universal access. This requires a sustained increase in budgetary allocation, as well as the strengthening of public institutions, including government hospitals, clinics, and community health centres.

One crucial and often overlooked step towards strengthening public healthcare is accountability at the highest level. There must be a political

universities, private institutions dominate the landscape. There is no glamour and growth. But there is no uniform education standard. Instead, inequality has deepened.

Those with money can purchase better-quality education. Those without are confined to a deteriorating public system. Public schools, especially those in rural areas, are often in a state of neglect, struggling with poor infrastructure and limited resources. This has created a sharp divide between public and private education. However, even within the private sector, a wide spectrum of quality can be observed.

Multiple layers of inequality have emerged from the various streams of education—religious versus secular education, Bangla medium versus English medium, Bangla version versus English version and so on. Education, instead of reducing inequality, now actively reproduces it.

The interim government has not attempted to reverse this trend of increasing inequality in education. On the contrary, a new and dangerous development has taken hold within educational institutions. Teachers, from primary schools to universities,

were given no reasonable explanation and no opportunity to defend themselves. Their dismissal was not based on professional misconduct but on their independent views on certain ideologies or beliefs. It was carried out in response to mob pressure, using religion as a tool of intimidation. The teachers had no minimum guarantee of job security. Academic freedom was discarded without hesitation.

The ability to ask questions lies at the heart of education. It is meant to cultivate analytical and critical thinking, to bring everything under scrutiny and open new avenues of knowledge. What we are witnessing now is a direct assault on that foundation. It is deeply alarming.

As elections approach and political rhetoric intensifies, citizens must pay attention and note which parties genuinely recognise public education and public healthcare as fundamental rights. Those who do not must be questioned. Those who claim they do must be pressed for clear roadmaps. How will they bring these sectors back under public control and ensure universal access?

Political parties must also be held



VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

accountable for the threats facing freedom of opinion and academic independence. We must ask who is responsible for creating this climate of fear within academia. It is also crucial to note which parties oppose this trend and how vocal they are in demanding change.

Public scrutiny is essential. Political actors must be brought under public surveillance and accountability so that whoever comes to power cannot ignore these crises.

A society where people die because they cannot afford treatment, and where teachers are threatened for teaching, is not sustainable. Bangladesh must move towards a future where every citizen can access education and healthcare without fear or discrimination, and where dignity is not a privilege, but a right.

Time to seal off these wells of death



Md. Firoj Alam
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MD. FIROJ ALAM

As I began writing this, a community in Raozan, Chattogram, was desperately trying to rescue a boy named Misbah, trapped in the depths of an abandoned tube-well pit. Villagers, later joined by the fire service, mounted a frantic search to pull him out. They hoped that little Misbah would find his way back to his mother's arms. He did not. As a newspaper headline later read: 'Body of 3-year-old recovered 4 hours after falling into pit.' By then, of course, he was dead. I sat in silence after reading the news, overwhelmed by profound sadness, asking myself: How irresponsible can the authorities be?

Not long ago, on December 10, two-year-old Sajid fell into an abandoned 30-foot-deep tube-well pit in Tanore, Rajshahi. After 32 agonising hours of searching, rescuers could only retrieve his lifeless body. The nation also wept over that heartbreaking incident. The government was stirred into action, giving assurances that measures would be taken to prevent such incidents from

happening again. But barely six weeks later, another identical tragedy unfolded in a different unattended deep well shaft.

One may also recall the story of four-year-old Jihad in this connection. In 2014, the boy fell into a disused tube well belonging to WASA in Shahjahanpur, Dhaka. About 23 hours after his fall, rescuers brought out his lifeless body. The incident created such an uproar that it seemed the authorities would finally take responsibility and implement necessary safety measures.

They did not. One after another, similar incidents continue to occur, whether in abandoned or unsecured sewer lines or in forsaken tube wells.

I have spent my entire career in water supply and sanitation, working for a UN agency focused on children. And I have consistently raised alarms about the dangers of both abandoned and open wells. Newspapers published articles aimed at raising awareness and influencing policy directions. Yet there has been no concerted

national initiative to address the decommissioning of non-functional tube wells. The fundamental understanding that defunct and abandoned tube wells should be properly decommissioned remains absent from official policy.

It is not just child deaths that result from abandoned wells. These neglected structures are causing damage to our precious groundwater aquifers. Many tube wells are installed every year by both government and private entities, and many more become dysfunctional. These wells act as direct conduits, allowing contaminated, bacteria-laden surface water to seep down and pollute invaluable groundwater reserves. So, just as installing a tube well is important for a community, decommissioning it with equal seriousness is also critical.

Beyond tube wells, another death trap for children in rural areas is the unprotected, wide-mouthed *pat kua* (traditional wells). These wells, 20 to 40 feet deep, also claim lives. But despite repeated tragedies, the authorities have failed to take corrective action. Through abandoned tube wells and open sewer lines, they are effectively allowing preventable deaths and injuries to occur, while simultaneously degrading the environment and endangering our water table.

We must reverse this trend. It is imperative that the government

undertake a comprehensive national survey to identify all abandoned water and sanitation installations and systematically decommission them. Clear protocols must be established for proper decommissioning, including filling, capping, and monitoring these structures. A dedicated unit or task force could be created within the relevant ministry to ensure this. The government should also engage communities and NGOs with experience in water and sanitation management. Public reporting mechanisms should also be established, allowing citizens to alert authorities to hazardous wells. Additionally, policies should mandate that all newly installed tube wells are registered, tracked, and monitored over their lifetime, with funds earmarked for eventual decommissioning.

The importance of raising awareness and teaching basic safety practices to children and families is also crucial. Despite what it may seem to the families struck by such tragedies, these are not unpredictable "acts of God." They are acts of criminal negligence—a direct result of institutional apathy and lack of accountability. The tears shed for Sajid and Jihad have evidently evaporated without leaving a trace of meaningful action. Now, we mourn Misbah. The question is, how many more little children must we lose before the authorities finally seal these gaping holes of death on our land?

Why does the taka remain weak despite record remittances?



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MD MOMINUR RAHMAN

In 2025, Bangladesh achieved an unprecedented milestone in its economic history: remittance inflows surpassed \$32.8 billion for the calendar year—the highest ever recorded, marking a roughly 22 percent increase from the previous year. This surge was driven by expatriate Bangladeshis sending more money home, often through formal banking channels, and government policies which encouraged legal remittance transfers while cracking down on informal hundi networks.

Despite this historic record, many ordinary citizens are feeling the weight of a weak taka in their everyday life: prices for fuel, edible oil, medicine, and imported essentials remain high; foreign goods seem relentlessly expensive; and the cost of living hasn't eased in any palpable way. This disconnect between the remittance increase and people's lived experience points to deeper structural challenges: remittances are cushioning the economy, not curing its vulnerabilities.

Remittances do more than simply pad foreign exchange reserves; they are a lifeline for millions of Bangladeshi families. For households, remittance income helps pay for food, education, healthcare, and investment in small businesses. At the macroeconomic level, these dollar flows have played a critical role in shoring up Bangladesh's external balance and providing much-needed liquidity in foreign currency markets. While remittances arrive continuously, they are swiftly absorbed by the economy's overwhelming demand for foreign exchange, which explains why rising remittance inflows have not translated into a visibly stronger taka.

Bangladesh's reliance on imports remains deeply entrenched. Fuel, industrial raw materials, capital machinery, pharmaceuticals, fertilisers, and even many processed foods are sourced from abroad. A significant portion of remittances is quickly spent on these imports. In simple terms, remittances enter through the front door and exit via import bills—a cycle that weakens the currency's upward momentum. Although they reduce the pressure on reserves, they do not automatically cut import demand. As imports rebound with economic activity, the expenditure of remittance dollars on necessary imports continues to constrain the overall net foreign exchange position. Consequently, the taka's exchange rate reflects the tension between these inflows and even larger outflows: the continued necessity of paying for foreign goods. As a result, even increased remittance inflows does little to make the taka substantially stronger.

The surge in remittances has led to a notable rebound in Bangladesh's foreign exchange reserves. Gross reserves in early January crossed \$33 billion, the highest in three years since FY2021-2022, buoyed by strong remittances and continued dollar purchases by the central bank. But once again, the headline number masks underlying fragilities. Reserves measured under the International Monetary Fund's BPM6 methodology, which excludes certain illiquid or encumbered assets, stand at \$28.51 billion, illustrating that usable reserves are not as large as the gross figure suggests. Moreover, these reserves must cover months of import payments, leaving limited slack for unforeseen shocks. So, while reserves are

steadying, they are doing so largely because remittances are financing imports in real time instead of strengthening reserves sufficiently to support broad currency appreciation.

There's an intuitive expectation that if the taka stabilises, consumer prices should ease. But the mechanics of exchange rate pass-through (how well and how fast changes in the exchange rate show up in domestic prices) are often asymmetric. When the taka depreciates,

indicate stability, because those metrics do not translate directly or immediately into lower consumer prices.

Exchange rates are not just about numbers; they are also about confidence and expectations. The level of foreign reserves signals to markets how much buffer an economy has against external shocks. When reserves are under pressure or perceived to be so, traders and importers hedge by

competitiveness, technology adoption and industrial capability. Remittances, by contrast, are income transfers. They boost consumption and savings but do not necessarily enhance productive capacity, diversify the export basket, or reduce import dependence. As Bangladesh nears graduation from the least developed country status—a transition that will gradually strip away preferential trade benefits—reliance on remittances will be even less adequate as a long-term shield.

If remittances cushion the economy but do not cure its structural weaknesses, what would real strengthening look like? First, export diversification must become more than a slogan. Beyond ready-made garments, Bangladesh needs to promote new manufactured goods, digital services, pharmaceuticals, and creative industries. Second, import efficiency must improve. Investing in energy independence, local supply chains, and improved logistics can reduce foreign exchange outflows without throttling growth. Third, policymakers must enhance transparency and credibility in reserves management, communicating clearly and resisting ad-hoc measures that create mixed signals in markets. Finally, remittances themselves could be better leveraged, not just spent on consumption, but channelled into productive investments and diaspora-linked enterprise development.

While record remittances are a welcome headline and a lifeline for many families, the cushioning they provide is not a cure for the economy. Without addressing structural weaknesses in export capacity, import dependence, and foreign exchange management, the taka will continue to feel weak, and ordinary citizens will feel the pinch of prices that never truly ease. The economic equation is simple: remittances can support stability, but only broader, deeper reforms can sustain strength. Bangladesh should celebrate its remittance inflow milestone, but it must also treat it as a window of opportunity to fix the vulnerabilities which have held its currency and economy captive for far too long.



FILE VISUAL: FATEMA JAHAN ENA

increased import costs quickly push up domestic prices. Yet, when the pressure of depreciation eases, even significantly, prices rarely fall with similar speed or magnitude. There are several reasons for this asymmetry. Many import contracts are tied months in advance at previous exchange rates. Even if the taka stabilises, goods already priced at higher dollar rates will continue to contribute to inflation. Besides, higher costs of transport, financing, and energy persist even after exchange rate stabilisation, sustaining price pressures. Moreover, firms often adopt cautious pricing strategies in uncertain environments, preferring to maintain margins rather than lower prices. Thus, the "feel" of a weak taka persists even when official metrics

demanding higher premiums for dollars, driving up the effective exchange rate. While remittances have helped arrest reserve decline and even deliver gains, the broader confidence in the taka has not fully recovered. Ongoing external obligations and heavy import needs mean markets are still cautious. The result is that even with rising remittances, the taka remains sensitive to fluctuations in import and debt-servicing demands.

A deeper structural challenge lies in the fact that remittances are not the same as export earnings. Export growth, especially in diversified, high-value sectors, is far superior for sustainable currency strength. Export revenues represent returns from productive economic activity, tied to global

MERGER OF ISLAMIC BANKS

Depositors deserve transparency in Shariah decisions



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Views expressed in this article are the author's own.

MEZBAH UDDIN AHMED

On January 14, a Bangladesh Bank (BB) letter announcing a "haircut" on deposit profits (no profit on deposits) for the five merged Islamic banks for 2024 and 2025 took depositors by surprise. Following widespread reactions, the decision was revised. The profit rate for individual term and scheme deposits has now been set at four percent for those two years, with a provision to adjust any excess profit already distributed against future profit distributions.

In support of the previous decision, on January 15, the governor of the central bank had cited the BB's Shariah Advisory Board (SAB) opinion that no profit can be paid in the event of a loss. He further explained that, as the concerned banks incurred losses during these years, the cancellation of profit is in accordance with Shariah principles and based on the SAB's recommendations. Later on January 29, he mentioned that, although depositors do not have any entitlement to the profit, it will be provided as *ihsan* (benevolence) by the government. In addition, he announced that, from January 2026, the profit rate will be fixed at 9.5 percent for deposits with a tenure of more than one year, while deposits with a tenure of less than one year will earn nine percent.

Since Shariah compliance is the foundation of Islamic banking, an unclear articulation of this claim and a lack of disclosure regarding Shariah decisions may raise concerns. For instance, the cancellation of already distributed profits and the fixing of profits in mudarabah contracts are contentious issues. Without clearly outlining the narrative and parameters of these measures, such decisions may lead to unintended consequences, including setting a precedent for Islamic banks to retrospectively revise their profits based on claims of Shariah compliance, thereby increasing depositors' risks.

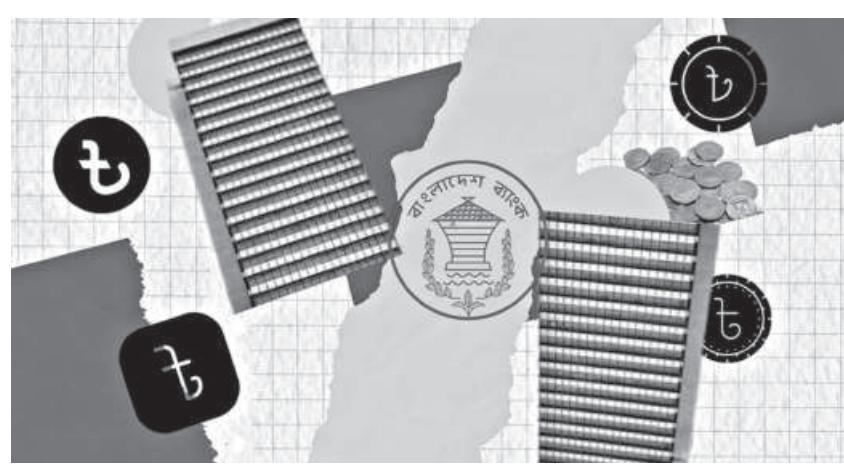
At the outset, it is worth noting that the Islamic banking system in Bangladesh has accumulated various weaknesses over time. Alongside forced takeovers and large-scale irregularities across several banks, persistent deficiencies in product structuring, governance, Shariah compliance mechanisms, and

disclosure practices have been evident in many instances. Significant gaps are also apparent in the regulatory and supervisory framework, and laws and regulations generally do not distinguish between interest-based and Islamic banking. The cumulative effect of these shortcomings has created deep structural vulnerabilities in the sector.

Furthermore, gaps in education and public awareness have contributed to widespread misconceptions, leading to the perception that Islamic banking is no different from interest-based banking. Some even view it merely as

being paid and a reduction in the deposit amount. In other words, there should be a direct link between the investments made from the deposited amount and the profits distributed to the depositors. At the same time, Shariah principles also establish that if a loss arises from the bank's negligence, misconduct, or breach of contractual terms, it cannot be transferred to depositors. Instead, it must be borne by the bank in its capacity as the investment manager (*mudarib*). The five merged banks are accused of the latter failures.

Additionally, there is a common practice among Islamic banks in Bangladesh of allocating additional profit beyond the amount accrued (based on the ratio in the contract) to maintain market competitiveness. It has also been common in Bangladesh for income from certain non-funded services (fees to issue letters of credit or bank guarantees) to be shared with mudarabah depositors. From a general Shariah perspective, once the profit is distributed to the depositors, their rights are established,



FILE VISUAL: ALIZA RAHMAN

Islamic banking is fundamentally distinct in principle. It is grounded in a coherent Shariah-based contractual and governance framework that emphasises the clear identification of ownership, risks, and liabilities of the contracting parties, along with equitable profit and loss sharing, proper accounting, transparency, and disclosure.

The primary source of funds for Islamic banks is mudarabah deposits. From the Shariah perspective, the fundamental principle is that these deposits are made on the basis that profits from investments made using their funds, that is, the investment income reflected at the top line of the income statement. The operating expenses, provisioning,

and reclaiming those profits would mean the bank unilaterally cancelling the depositors' rights without their consent. Furthermore, in certain mudarabah deposits, the profit distributed at the end of one period becomes the capital for the next. In such cases, revising profits from prior periods may directly affect capital in subsequent periods.

Another point merits particular emphasis. Mudarabah depositors do not share in a bank's net profit or loss, nor in its operating profit. Instead, they participate in the profits generated from investments made using their funds, that is, the investment income reflected at the top line of the income statement. The operating expenses, provisioning,

and taxes are borne by the bank's profit portion. Furthermore, Bangladesh Bank's 2009 Islamic banking guidelines permit Islamic banks to establish an Investment Loss Offsetting Reserve (ILOR) by allocating a portion of depositors' profits. As participatory accountholders, mudarabah depositors have the right to receive detailed information on the utilisation and performance of their funds, as well as the underlying calculations.

Depositors of the five merged banks entered into contracts separately with their respective banks, based on specific product terms. None of them entered into contracts with the newly formed Sommilito Islami Bank. The contractual terms for profit distribution across different products at the five banks may vary significantly, although all may be classified as mudarabah products. Moreover, two of the five banks reportedly have lower non-performing assets than the other three. Therefore, a uniform revision of profits raises concerns about whether the rights established under individual mudarabah contracts are being properly upheld.

Islamic banks primarily invest through deferred sale and lease contracts. Under Shariah, a sale establishes the seller's right to the sale price, and a lease entitles the owner to rental income. This raises the question of whether the income recognised by the banks in those two years constituted established profit from a Shariah perspective and, if so, on what Shariah basis that entitlement could be withdrawn since the actual payment has not been received yet. The distinction between the right to profit and the availability of cash for withdrawal warrants careful consideration.

There is no dispute that Bangladesh Bank may take decisions in the public interest under its legal mandate. However, when such decisions concern Islamic banks, transparent disclosure on the Shariah approval becomes necessary to protect public confidence. The Shariah decisions must reflect a rigorous methodological process supported by clear evidence and justification. Accordingly, it is hoped that Bangladesh Bank will publish a detailed explanation of its SAB's opinion, including the information presented to the SAB, the issues they considered, how the "loss" is calculated, the treatment of reserves, the mechanism for adjusting past profits with future profits, the specific Shariah principles applied in different contexts, and the basis for allowing a fixed profit rate for mudarabah depositors. Clarification is also needed on whether the decisions taken for the five merged banks are exceptional or may extend to other Islamic banks. Similar levels of disclosure should also be ensured throughout the merger process.

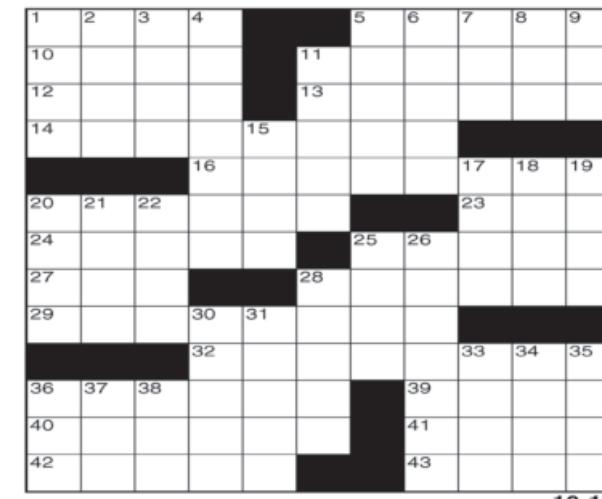
CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Courts
- 5 Emmy category
- 10 Different
- 11 Like some garages
- 12 Big Ben, for one
- 13 Show mercy
- 14 Old West cemetery
- 16 Outfit of the late 1930s
- 20 Fixate
- 23 Gene messenger
- 24 Sculptor Henry
- 25 Brick worker
- 27 Maximum amount
- 28 Praline nuts
- 29 Fizzy quaff
- 32 Nocturnal noisemakers
- 36 Old gold coin
- 39 Money for release
- 40 Almost never
- 41 "Diana" singer
- 42 Story means
- 43 Swarm

DOWN

- 1 "Dragnet" star
- 2 Toast topper



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

A	C	T	S		H	A	Z	E
S	H	E	A	R	T	O	N	E
P	I	N	T	A	O	R	G	A
I	N	A	C	A	N	N	O	L
C	A	N	N	E	R	R	O	E
S	T	A	R	T	F	A	T	
B	S	I	D	E				
A	M	S	O	A	P	S		
S	P	A	C	A	N	T	A	
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O	C	T	E	T	T	H	A	N
T	H	R	E	E	E	A	T	E
T	E	A	M			T	E	S

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'MEDITATIONS IN ENTROPY'

Three decades of Kashef Chowdhury's architectural prowess



"This book is not a celebration of objects, but a reflection on processes—on how architecture emerges from restraint, context and empathy," Chowdhury said, briefly outlining the ideas that informed the publication.

NAVEEN ISLAM TOREE

Architecture, for Kashef Mahboob Chowdhury, has never been about spectacle. He says, "The last thing the world needed was another architecture book." He wanted to focus on what feeling this book could arouse within people and thus, the journey started in 2019. That philosophy came into sharp focus at the launch of *Meditations in Entropy: The Work of Kashef Chowdhury / URBANA*, a comprehensive monograph reflecting on nearly three decades of architectural practice.

The book was launched on Saturday evening at the Crown Plaza Ballroom in Gulshan 2, Dhaka, at an event organised by Archiconnect and attended by architects, academics, planners, students, cultural figures and members of the media, marking a significant moment for contemporary architectural discourse in Bangladesh.

The evening opened with introductory remarks from Md Abrar Masum, co-founder of Archiconnect. He was followed by Dr Salahuddin Ahmed, founder of CARSA Foundation, who spoke about the cultural and scholarly value of recording architectural practices from the



PHOTOS: ABRAR FAIYAZ NILOY

Global South within a global framework. Wahiduzzaman Ratul, senior architect at URBANA, then provided insight into the firm's evolving design philosophy and long-term engagement with context driven architecture. Speaking at the event, Kashef Mahboob Chowdhury, the Aga Khan Award-winning architect and principal of URBANA, reflected on nearly thirty years of practice shaped by ecological vulnerability and social responsibility. He noted that in regions such as Bangladesh, architecture must move beyond form and aesthetics to respond meaningfully to climate pressures, human resilience and place.

"This book is not a celebration of objects, but a reflection on

processes—on how architecture emerges from restraint, context and empathy," Chowdhury said, briefly outlining the ideas that informed the publication.

He added that the book opens with an image by Hélène Binet, one of the world's most influential architectural photographers, setting the tone for a publication rooted in human experience rather than architectural self-assertion.

Published by Park Books of Zurich, "Meditations in Entropy" is the first full monograph on Chowdhury's work. The 500-plus-page volume documents thirty years of practice through sketches, drawings, photographs and reflective texts, featuring eighteen realised projects across

diverse typologies. Photography by internationally renowned architect Hélène Binet anchors the book visually, while critical essays by leading architectural thinkers including Kenneth Frampton, William J R Curtis, Robert McCarter, Ainun Nishat, and Philip Ursprung situate the work within broader global conversations.

Professor Dr Chowdhury Rafiqul Abrar, honourable adviser to the Ministry of Education, attended the programme as Chief Guest, while Reto Renggli, Ambassador of Switzerland to Bangladesh, joined as Guest of Honour.

Guest speakers including Dr Ainun Nishat, Professor Shamsul Wares and Dr Abu Sayeed M Ahmed highlighted the publication's significance as a critical architectural document—one that positions Bangladeshi practice within global discourse while remaining firmly rooted in local realities.

At a time when environmental uncertainty increasingly defines the built world, *Meditations in Entropy* offers an important reminder that architecture's most enduring strength may lie not in excess, but in attentiveness, humility and care.

Emmy-winning actor Catherine O'Hara dies at 71

Catherine O'Hara, the Emmy-winning actor best known for her roles in *Schitt's Creek* and *Home Alone*, died on January 30 at the age of 71. Her death was confirmed by a representative from the office of her manager, Marc Gurvitz.

According to the BBC, citing Creative Artists Agency, O'Hara passed away on Friday at her home in Los Angeles after a brief illness.

She was widely loved for playing Moira Rose in the hit TV series *Schitt's Creek*, a role that earned her the Emmy Award for best actress in a comedy series in 2020. The show also achieved major success at the 2021 Golden Globes.



Bhoirobee brings 'Gitranga Festival' to Dhaka

To showcase Bengal's indigenous theatrical traditions, musical drama and folk cultural heritage in a renewed form, the Bhoirobee group has organised the Gitranga Festival.

The festival began on Saturday with programmes at multiple venues across Dhaka, including film screenings, musical evenings and Gitranga performances. On the opening day, Satyajit Ray's *Heerak Rajar Deshe* was screened at the Bhoirobee office in Dhamondi. A musical evening titled *Gitol Shondha* will be held today at 7 pm at Stage 2 (Chilekotha) of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy.

The festival will conclude on February 2 with the Gitranga production *Sonai*, written and directed by Eleas Nobi Faisal, at 6 pm at the Studio Theatre Hall of BSA. All events are open to the public free of charge.



NEWS

Misinformation rose by 30pc in 2025

FROM PAGE 12

Other political figures who were subjected to disinformation are the now slain Inqilab Moncho leader Sharif Osman Bin Hadi, BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman, National Citizen Party (NCP) leader Hasnat Abdullah, US President Donald Trump, Bangladesh Army Chief General Waker Uz-Zaman, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alangir, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and BNP's late chairperson and former prime minister Khaleda Zia.

AI IN DISINFORMATION

Of all the distinct instances of misinformation fact-checked in 2025, 10 percent, or 417 cases, were created using AI. In other words, one in every 10 pieces of misinformation involved AI-generated content across almost all topics including politics, disasters, and international conflicts.

The use of AI in political misinformation was particularly striking. For example, on December 25, multiple AI-generated images circulated claiming that Tarique Rahman returned to the country, showing him at the airport with family members or stepping off a plane and touching Bangladeshi soil.

In addition, AI generated videos were circulated claiming to show Sheikh Hasina delivering a speech in the Indian parliament. Elsewhere, images were shared purporting to show students holding placards reading "We want Hasina" or painting similar slogans as graffiti on walls.

POLITICAL MISINFORMATION
Throughout the year, misinformation related to politics circulated consistently and was fact-checked in greater volume compared to any other topic. In every quarter, politics ranked first among all other issue-based false information.

However, the volume was highest between September and December as elections approached. While an average of around 200 political misinformation items were fact-checked each month, the number more than doubled to 408 in December.

One of the main contributors to the rise in political disinformation from September onward was the student union elections at different public universities across the country. In the following months, false information began circulating about the timing and method of the national parliamentary election and party nominations.



Top 10 individuals who appeared most frequently in disinformation headlines in 2025. Dismislab prepared the list after analysing the headlines of more than 4,000 distinct fact-check reports published in 2025.

SOURCE: DISMISLAB

In December, the killing of Osman Hadi and Khaleda Zia's illness and subsequent death were two top drivers of political disinformation.

Following the announcement of the parliamentary election and referendum dates, at least 55 instances of election-related misinformation were identified within just one month, most of them centering on various political alliances and fabricated survey results.

Overall, there was a persistent tendency to spread fear and anxiety about the country's law and order. Analysis shows that at least 90 fact-check reports had headlines related to rape, more than 100 focused on murder or killings, and 45 involved cases of abuse or torture.

In the religious category, false information about attacks on or persecution of Hindus or other minority communities in Bangladesh circulated throughout the year.

In 2025, nearly 52 percent of all false information circulated through video, including old and unrelated as well as AI-made clips. Graphic cards accounted for 21 percent of all misinformation fact-checked.

Rybakina wins

FROM PAGE 12
time but lost the French Open and Melbourne title deciders.

She was into her fourth Australian Open final in a row and had been imperious until now, with tears in her eyes at the end.

"Let's hope maybe next year will be a better year for me," Sabalenka said ruefully.

The finalists were familiar foes having met 14 times previously, with Sabalenka winning eight of them.

Sabalenka came into the final as favourite but Rybakina has been one of the form players on the women's tour in recent months.

She also defeated Sabalenka in the final at the season ending WTA Finals.

Rybakina second seed Iga Swiatek in the quarterfinals and sixth seed Jessica Pegula in the last four in Melbourne.

Draft media, broadcasting

FROM PAGE 12

an enabling environment for the development of free media and independent broadcasting in the country, he added.

Meanwhile, the Broadcast Journalists Centre (BJC) said it does not support rushing such an important law by allowing only four days to review public opinion at a time when the entire country is busy with the upcoming election.

In a statement, BJC Chairman Rezwanzul Haque and Member Secretary Ilias Hossain said the draft ordinance uses some vague terms such as "against public interest", "hate-motivated" and "a threat to national security".

Because of such phrases, any critical content could easily be labelled as a crime, it said.

"The clauses regarding suspension and cancellation of television and radio licences are framed in such a way that any media outlet could be shut down through administrative decisions alone."

The provision of fining broadcasting institutions for "failing to comply with government directives in the public interest" carries a risk of misuse, the BJC said.

Several other provisions would also allow the government and bureaucracy to control and dominate the broadcast media.

The BJC has called for an authority like a Broadcast Commission that would address ongoing deprivation regarding broadcast journalists' salaries, benefits and fair opportunities and ensure good governance in broadcast media, but this draft makes no mention of those issues.

Important issues such as net neutrality, digital content regulation, cybersecurity and internet governance need to be included within the scope of the ordinance.

It would be appropriate to leave the enactment of this law to an elected government after holding dialogue with all the stakeholders, the statement added.

They should establish a genuinely independent and impartial unified media commission that would be capable of ensuring the highest professional standards and creating

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Important issues such as net neutrality, digital content regulation

Chinese bhabi

FROM PAGE 3

It is a simple appeal, delivered without flourish. Yet it draws more attention than rows of black-and-white posters and banners. Her effort to speak the language, however broken, becomes the message.

Among party leaders and activists, Wang Lina is known as the "Chinese bhabi". To most voters, she is simply "Zakir's wife".

Yesterday afternoon, she campaigned in the Kanchanpur-Ratulpur area of Kushtia Sadar upazila. As she walked from house to house, adults paused their work, while children and teenagers followed closely behind. With schools closed for the weekly holiday, groups of children ran ahead to announce her arrival, eager to catch a glimpse of the foreign bride.

Asked how it feels to campaign in rural Bangladesh, Wang Lina smiled. "Village people are very friendly," she told The Daily Star. "They ask my name. They ask what I have eaten and when I arrived."

She was accompanied by Rokhsana Parvin Jonaki, wife of Zakir's cousin, who watched the interactions with a mix of amusement and admiration.

"I am Bangladeshi. This is my union," Jonaki said. "Yet I cannot engage with people the way she does."

"She mingles more than I do. Everyone loves her very much. People try hard to make her sit in their homes and offer her food. And the children just won't leave her alone."

At one point, an elderly woman in her eighties stepped out of her house after hearing the commotion.

"From inside I heard that Zakir's wife had come," she said. "So I came to see her."

In Kushtia 3, Zakir's main opponent is Jamaat-e-Islami-nominated candidate Amir Hamza.

Asked about his wife's role in the campaign, Zakir said her presence has made it easier to reach women voters. "As she is a foreigner, she wants to immerse herself in our country's culture and people," he said. "Together, our campaigning is taking on a new dimension."

Wang Lina has been living in Bangladesh since 2011-12 and is currently overseeing several of her husband's business ventures.

Comparison cannot justify

FROM PAGE 3

Judiciary is not independent of the executive and legislature, the institution's standing weakens.

He said during the previous administration, the judiciary failed to play an effective role in preventing serious violations, including enforced disappearances.

Describing enforced disappearance as "more than death", he said while families can mourn a death through religious rites, disappearances leave families in "complete darkness", often leading to social stigma and financial distress.

On the National Human Rights Commission Ordinance 2025, Moyeenul called it a major step forward compared to the 2009 Act, noting that it aligns with most of the 1993 Paris Principles.

He questioned why the previous commission failed to hold state agencies accountable, attributing the failure to a flawed law that lacked enforcement capacity. He said commission members must have the courage to challenge those in power.

A keynote paper presented at the symposium described enforced disappearances over the last 15 years as a "planned and systematic tool" to suppress dissent. The paper, read by retired justice Md Farid Ahmed Shibli on behalf of Moyeenul, said the commission's final report contains "horrifying" information on a "web of disappearances" involving multiple levels of government.

Referring to atrocities committed under the previous regime, BILIA Director M Maroof Zaman said in a statement, "We seek justice, not revenge, and the full restoration of the rule of law."

Rights activist Nur Khan Liton, a former member of the commission, said wrongdoing must be called wrongdoing regardless of the timeframe. He warned that "smaller" abuses today cannot be made acceptable because "bigger" abuses occurred in the past.

Nur Khan said he often hears remarks such as,

"You're talking so much now, where were you then?"

In response, he said, "I was there then, and I am here now. I will keep speaking."

He said attempts to legitimise today's wrongs by comparing them with the past are a warning sign for the future.

"The situation we have fallen into is an ominous sign. There are cases of custodial deaths and custodial torture. Mobs are being formed to harass people, extort money and grab property. These things are still happening. There is no way to deny them outright," he said.

Nur Khan expressed concern over murder cases filed after August 5, 2024, noting that some include the names of politically influential individuals, businesspeople, journalists and bureaucrats before investigations are completed. He said that while some have secured bail, many remain in jail.

He also raised concerns about women's safety during recent election campaigning, alleging incidents in which women's hijabs or burqas were pulled off alongside verbal and physical harassment.

Odhikar Director Taskin Fahmina said while enforced disappearances have not been reported under the interim government, allegations of custodial torture continue. Citing Odhikar data, she said 14 custodial deaths have been recorded during this period.

She said after the fall of the Sheikh Hasina administration, the effectiveness of the police force collapsed, leading to failures in controlling disorder and a tendency for people to take the law into their own hands.

Fahmina also reported attacks, vandalism and arson targeting media outlets.

She cited an incident on December 18 in which an "interest-seeking group" attacked the offices of The Daily Star and Prothom Alo following reports on the death of Inqilab Moncho spokesperson Sharif Osman Hadi. She said 28 of The Daily Star's journalists and staff were trapped on the rooftop during the

attack.

Among others, commission members Justice Farid Ahmed Shibli and Saazad Hossain, BILIA honorary treasurer Nazrul Islam, and honorary secretary Ekramul Haque spoke at the event.

Two victims of enforced disappearance, Hasinur Rahman and Iqbal Chowdhury, also shared their accounts.

From boats

FROM PAGE 3

Sadar upazila, said more than 100 people live on 28 boats in their fleet, but less than half of them are registered as voters.

Mohammad Ali Jibon, chief coordinator of Chandradip Development Society, an organisation working with the Manta community, said they operate in five unions of Sadar upazila -- Shayestabad, Char Kaua, Charmonai, Tungibaria and another adjoining area.

"There are more than 1200 people from 300 Manta families in these five unions, but only around 350 members are registered voters," he said.

Apart from Barishal Sadar, more than 400 Manta families live in Mehendiganj upazila, Mirganj in Babuganj upazila, Doplodop ferry ghat and several other locations in the district, he said.

"Altogether, more than 3,000 Manta people live in Barishal district, but less than half of them are registered voters," Jibon added.

According to the Barishal Social Services Office, 50 Manta individuals are being brought under government allowance programmes for the first time this year.

A k h t a r u z z a m a n Talukder, deputy director of the office, said, "Although some of them are voting for the first time, we have not been able to determine their exact population and number of voters."

According to the Barishal District Election Office, there are 22,55,601 voters in six constituencies of the district -- 11,36,476 men, 11,19,105 women and 20 hijras. The Manta community has not been listed as a separate category.



A couple organises their pottery items under a shed at Banglar Para of Jagirpur village in Puthia upazila, Rajshahi yesterday. They are among 45 families still upholding the traditional craft of making earthen pots, banks, plates and utensils, despite declining demand due to modernisation.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

A walk thru Dhaka-9 with Tasnim Jara

FROM PAGE 3

year-old sister passed down a rose from their balcony. Jara bent down to accept the gifts, asking the children about their schools.

A class six student stepped forward confidently. "I know you will win," he said. Jara smiled and gently patted him.

Not all conversations were light. One woman complained about repeated problems at Mugda Hospital -- the constituency's only government hospital -- where X-ray and ultrasound machines often fail.

"You are a doctor. We hope you will do something for people who have no option but government hospitals," she said.

Jara assured her that hospital mismanagement is a top priority and urged her to vote and convince five others.

Another woman promised her vote but added a condition. "I want my vote to mean something. Please work for women's safety

so my daughter can go out and return home safely," she said.

Jara responded immediately, citing plans for improved street lighting and safer roads to ensure women's security after dark.

One resident mentioned that her husband and sister-in-law live abroad and had already voted for Jara. The candidate recorded a short thank you video on the woman's phone, asking her to share it with them.

Volunteer Anila Tabassum Hridi said women voters are especially enthusiastic. "They feel heard because she is genuine in listening to their concerns," she said.

A man praised Jara's campaign style. "No processions, no posters -- just Facebook videos and personal engagement. This is innovative. Traditional methods waste time and energy," he said.

While talking to the media during campaigning,

Jara explained her approach. "People appreciate that we reach them directly. Processions often show power, not service. We are proving politics can be done differently -- without posters or loudspeakers -- and people are responding."

She said nearly 15,000 volunteers are active online, with friends and family from across the country and abroad encouraging voters to support her campaign.

If elected, Jara said she would focus on six priority areas, including government services, gas supply, roads, and waterlogging management. "Millions depend on this hospital, yet basic systems are missing. We have clear plans to address this."

On education, she said her goal is to equip children

with modern skills, mental health awareness, and AI literacy so they can compete globally.

"We also aim to establish daycare centres in every ward and provide e-commerce training and market access so women can work from home or in shops with proper support."

Regarding safety concerns, Jara said, "Residents want assurance that their daughters can go out and return safely. These basic needs have been ignored for too long."

"We plan to address these needs and ensure residents can reach us directly via local offices and a digital dashboard."

This year's Dhaka-9 race is competitive. BNP's Habibur Rashid Habib and NCP's Javed Rasin are also contesting.

The seat was previously held by Awami League leader Saber Hossain Chowdhury, who represented Dhaka-9 for four consecutive terms.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Office of the Director
DNCC Dedicated Covid-19 Hospital
Mohakhali, Dhaka
e-GP Tender Notice

Date: 31/01/2026

This is an online Tender, where only e-Tenders will be accepted in e-GP Portal and no Offline/Hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, please register on e-GP system portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>), for more details, please contact support desk contact numbers, e-Tender are invited in e-GP system portal (www.eprocure.gov.bd) by Acting Director, DNCC Dedicated Covid-19 Hospital, Mohakhali, Dhaka for the Procurement of:

Tender Id	Name of Goods	Tender/Proposal Publication Date & Time	Tender/Proposal Last Selling Date & Time	Tender/Proposal Closing/Opening Date & Time
1218839	MSR Medicine Non EDCL (Tablet, Capsul Items)-1 for 2025-26 FY	01 Feb 2026 10:00	15 Feb 2026 16:00	16 Feb 2026 12:00
1218948	MSR Medicine Non EDCL (Injection Items)-2 for 2025-26 FY	01 Feb 2026 10:00	15 Feb 2026 16:00	16 Feb 2026 12:00
1218954	MSR Medicine Non EDCL (Syp. Items)-3 for 2025-26 FY	01 Feb 2026 10:00	15 Feb 2026 16:00	16 Feb 2026 12:00
1218956	MSR Medicine Non EDCL (Eye Drop+Suppository+Cream+Gel+Saline Items)-4 for 2025-26 FY	01 Feb 2026 10:00	15 Feb 2026 16:00	16 Feb 2026 12:00
1218957	MSR (Light Instrument)-1 for 2025-26 FY	01 Feb 2026 10:00	15 Feb 2026 16:00	16 Feb 2026 12:00
1218958	MSR (Light Instrument)-2 for 2025-26 FY	01 Feb 2026 10:00	15 Feb 2026 16:00	16 Feb 2026 12:00
1218959	MSR (Light Instrument)-3 for 2025-26 FY	01 Feb 2026 10:00	15 Feb 2026 16:00	16 Feb 2026 12:00
1218964	MSR (Chemical Reagent X-Ray Film With ECG Paper)-1 for 2025-26 FY	01 Feb 2026 10:00	15 Feb 2026 16:00	16 Feb 2026 12:00
1218968	MSR (Chemical Reagent X-Ray Film With ECG Paper)-2 for 2025-26 FY	01 Feb 2026 10:00	15 Feb 2026 16:00	16 Feb 2026 12:00
1218970	MSR (Chemical Reagent X-Ray Film With ECG Paper)-3 for 2025-26 FY	01 Feb 2026 10:00	15 Feb 2026 16:00	16 Feb 2026 12:00
1218971	MSR (Chemical Reagent X-Ray Film With ECG Paper)-4 for 2025-26 FY	01 Feb 2026 10:00	15 Feb 2026 16:00	16 Feb 2026 12:00
1318973	MSR (Chemical Reagent X-Ray Film With ECG Paper)-5 for 2025-26 FY	01 Feb 2026 10:00	15 Feb 2026 16:00	16 Feb 2026 12:00
1218974	MSR (Chemical Reagent X-Ray Film With ECG Paper)-6 for 2025-26 FY	01 Feb 2026 10:00	15 Feb 2026 16:00	16 Feb 2026 12:00
1218961	MSR (Gauge, Bandage Cotton) for 2025-26 FY	01 Feb 2026 10:00	15 Feb 2026 16:00	16 Feb 2026 12:00
1218962	MSR (Linen) for 2025-26 FY	01 Feb 2026 10:00	15 Feb 2026 16:00	16 Feb 2026 12:00
1171658	Procurement of Cleaning Materials for 2025-26 FY	01 Feb 2026 10:00	15 Feb 2026 16:00	16 Feb 2026 12:00
1171873	Stationary for 2025-26 FY	01 Feb 2026 10:00	15 Feb 2026 16:00	16 Feb 2026 12:00
1171874	Computer & Accessory for 2025-26 FY	01 Feb 2026 10:00	15 Feb 2026 16:00	16 Feb 2026 12:00
1171660	Procurement of Diet for 2025-26 FY	01 Feb 2026 10:00	15 Feb 2026 16:00	16 Feb 2026 12:00

e-Tender details can be downloaded on e-GP System portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for pursuer, e-Tender will be accepted only as stated in above list; accepted tenders will be opened online on the dates stated above.

Colonel Latifa Rahman
Acting Director
DNCC Dedicated Covid-19 Hospital
Mohakhali, Dhaka
Phone: 0241082277



Workers play Ludo on a mobile phone as a gas supply cut halted operations at a CNG filling station on Rokeya Sarani in the capital's Senpara yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Nalchity, where Hadi's memory meets ballot box

FROM PAGE 1

Since Hadi was fatally shot on December 12, police have guarded his family home around the clock. No family member lives here now, citing security concerns. Yet the physical absence of the family has only amplified Hadi's symbolic presence. To many young supporters, he represents courage and an uncompromising demand for justice, equity and national sovereignty.

I came to Nalchity ahead of Bangladesh's February 12 elections to see whether that symbolism translated into political impact in the place where Hadi was born and raised -- and whether his slogans still resonated among voters here.

The answer was far from straightforward.

At the Nalchity launch ghat on the Bishkhali River, barely half a kilometre from Hadi's home, a group of local men were absorbed in a game of carrom. They all knew Hadi personally. One of them, Hasan, said they had been childhood friends. "We used to swim together in the Bishkhali," he said. "I didn't know he had become so famous. He never mentioned it. He was very modest."

That sentiment was echoed by others nearby, including close neighbours of the Hadi family. None said they had realised at the time that he had become a national political figure. Still, all expressed pride that he was from Nalchity. Many now watch his speeches and videos on social media, encountering a version of Hadi that feels larger than the boy they once knew.

Sitting at a small convenience shop

by the ghat, Mohammad Shaheen, a neighbour of the Hadi family, recalled seeing Hadi about a month before his assassination. "I noticed on Facebook that he was preparing to contest elections in Dhaka," Shaheen said. "I asked why not from Nalchity. He said he lived in Dhaka."

Why did Shaheen think Hadi stood out among thousands of July movement activists? He paused before replying. "Nobody criticised Hasina the way he did."

Hadi frequently spoke of uprooting corruption and oppression and replacing them with insaaf (justice). Would that ever happen? Shaheen looked uncertain. "That depends on politicians," he said.

Nearby, Idris, an engine boat driver, joined in. "In July 2024, we wanted the country to change," he said. "Didn't we? The country needs to change."

I asked whether Hadi's calls for justice, equity and freedom from oppression would influence how they voted, and what kind of candidate they were looking for. The carrom board fell silent. After a moment, Hasan spoke again. "We will choose someone who works for the country."

Was there such a candidate in their constituency? After another pause, someone said quietly, "No. There is none like that."

Still, everyone insisted they would vote. "Our vote should not go to waste," one man said, lining up a shot. "Voting is our right."

They were also aware that a referendum on the July charter would be held on February 12 alongside the parliamentary elections. But none

could clearly explain what the charter proposed, or how the referendum outcome might affect their lives. "We are trying to understand," one man said. "But we are not finding any answers yet."

This uncertainty has surfaced repeatedly during my travels over the past week. Despite the referendum being framed as a cornerstone of post-Hasina reform, aimed at curbing executive power and preventing a return to authoritarian rule, candidates have said little about it on the campaign trail. The silence, particularly among BNP candidates, has left many rural and semi-urban voters adrift on an issue they are expected to decide.

A mile away from the launch ghat, in Uttamabad Abashon Palli, a government settlement for landless families, Hadi's name barely came up.

For China Begum, Masuda and Sonia Akhter -- wives of rickshaw pullers and day labourers -- the election is about something far more immediate: relief from rising prices and the hope of steadier days ahead.

None of the candidates had yet visited the settlement to seek votes. If they did, Masuda said, she would ask for just one thing -- a concrete road, raised high enough to remain usable during the monsoon floods that regularly submerge the muddy paths through the area.

Here, the language of justice, sovereignty and constitutional reform feels distant. What matters is whether daily life becomes a little less precarious. (Shakeel Anwar is a former BBC journalist)

Be wary of vote theft and ballot stuffing

FROM PAGE 1

"The election result must not be manipulated like in 2008," he added. Referring to allegations that voters' personal information is being collected by campaigners, he said, "Those who can delve in such unethical acts before the election -- given the chance, they can even sell the country."

"They are sending different people, especially to women, to collect NID numbers and bKash numbers, and to confuse them in different ways."

If any such incidents occur, women in particular should remain cautious, he added.

The BNP chief further said voters must cast their ballots at their respective polling centres, but stressed the need to ensure that the person voting there is genuinely registered at that centre.

Highlighting pledges, Tarique said that if his party is voted to power, it will take initiatives to export Tangail sarees, a UNESCO-recognised national heritage, and pineapples from the region; build a barrage on the Jamuna to boost river-based trade and commerce; and set up factories to revive the jute industry.

Following a rally and meeting with district leaders in Bogura, Tarique and his wife Zubaida Rahman first went to Sirajganj and then Tangail.

On his way to Sirajganj, he addressed roadside rallies in Shahjahanpur and Dhunat intersections, seeking votes.

During his travel till Tangail, party activists lined both sides of the highways at various points

throughout the day, carrying party flags and placards bearing images of BNP candidates.

Many stood on road islands, overpasses, and rooftops of nearby buildings in an effort to catch a glimpse of the BNP chairman.

As the red and green bus, carrying Tarique and Zubaida, approached the Tangail rally, supporters rushed onto the road and stood in front of the convoy to greet him.

At the rally, Tarique called on all to put the moment to proper use "so that no one can again come and take away the people's right to vote, or take away the people's right to speak."

Recalling elections under fascist rule, he said people, especially women, would be standing in long lines that would not even move towards the polling centres. "Half an hour would pass, one hour would pass, one and a half hours would pass -- but the lines would stay in the same place. From far away it looked nice -- such a big line, so many people voting! You must be careful about this."

"Just voting and leaving is not enough.... You must ensure your vote does not go elsewhere. Stuffing empty ballot boxes cannot be allowed.... We saw the 'ballot box magic in 2008'...."

Tarique said the February 12 election could change people's fate if the "right candidates" are elected, adding that just as people from all political backgrounds took to the streets on August 5, all eligible voters must similarly come out to polling centres on the 12th.

Following the Tangail rally, Tarique and Zubaida returned to their Gulshan residence in the capital.

(Our Pabna and Bogura correspondents contributed to the report.)

that came with August 5, meaning if we fail to establish a strong foundation of democracy by voting on the 12th -- the democracy we are trying to build, the democracy that will ensure good governance and people's rights, and change people's fate, will be obstructed again."

He added that if the country cannot be rebuilt, the people will suffer the most.

Speaking at the Sirajganj rally, held earlier in the BSCIC Industrial Park, he said that if the BNP comes to power, it will take steps to export products from the handloom industries of Sirajganj and Pabna.

Farmers will be issued 'Farmer Cards' and families will receive 'Family Cards'. Vocational institutes will be set up to create jobs, stipends will be provided to imams, muezzins and other religious leaders, and roads and educational institutions will be renovated."

Tarique also said that those who try to mislead people ahead of the national election should be called "gupto" (roughly translating to "hidden" in English). "Because we have not seen them for the last 16 years. They were secretly involved with those who fled on August 5."

He said the BNP is the only experienced party capable of running the country properly and taking it forward.

Following the Tangail rally, Tarique and Zubaida returned to their Gulshan residence in the capital.

(Our Pabna and Bogura correspondents contributed to the report.)

Next govt faces 'clouded outlook'

FROM PAGE 1

IMF-supported programme reached \$798 million in January, taking fiscal year-to-date purchases to about \$4 billion.

This inflow, alongside improvements in the current account, has helped strengthen financial buffers. Gross international reserves rose to \$32.62 billion as of January 18.

Even so, the IMF urged the next administration to commit to "greater exchange rate flexibility" and the "full and consistent implementation" of the new exchange rate regime.

Any failure to do so, it said, remains a major risk that could trigger renewed foreign exchange market imbalances and instability.

Inflation, while easing from double-digit peaks, is expected to remain high. Annual average inflation is projected at 8.9 percent in FY26 before falling to around 6 percent in FY27, provided there is no premature loosening of policy or further supply-side shocks.

Bangladesh is implementing a \$5.5 billion IMF loan programme, which was launched with \$4.7 billion in January 2023 and later expanded by \$800 million in 2025. The programme aims to bolster foreign exchange reserves, reduce inflation and support climate resilience.

But the IMF warned that stability

depends on the "new administration's full ownership of the programme," which will be tested by "stubbornly high inflation" and a banking sector marked by "weak governance".

The "unresolved banking issues would restrict credit, suppress investment and dampen growth," the IMF said. It also flagged the risks of further emergency support to fragile lenders.

"Significant additional liquidity support to weak banks -- assumed to avert a loss of confidence -- would compress short-term interest rates, raise exchange rate risk premium and fuel capital outflows, triggering significant and rapid depreciation and inflation," the report said.

The IMF called for an "urgent need for a credible banking sector reform strategy", arguing the authorities should move away from the "unsecured liquidity injections" and "regulatory forbearance" of the past. It recommended asset quality reviews of lenders.

External conditions add further risks. The IMF highlighted a potential decline in international aid and escalating trade measures as high-probability threats that could worsen public finances and erode foreign market share, particularly for garments, Bangladesh's main export sector.

Beyond near-term stabilisation, the IMF said the country faces deeper structural constraints, including the "limited capacity" of industry to absorb the growing number of graduates. With youth unemployment a factor in recent unrest, the IMF argued that "comprehensive structural reforms" were increasingly unavoidable.

Fiscal policy, meanwhile, offers little room to respond. "Persistently weak revenue and large subsidies would squeeze public capital and social outlays," the IMF said.

The tax-to-GDP ratio fell sharply in FY25, leaving Bangladesh with one of the weakest revenue collection performances in the region. The IMF noted the fiscal deficit was contained largely by curbing capital and social spending, effectively balancing the books by cutting investment needed to sustain long-term growth.

To reverse that pattern, the IMF recommended "ambitious fiscal reforms" to simplify the tax system, reduce non-essential expenditure and cut subsidies, especially in the energy sector.

"Creating fiscal space," the report said, "is essential for development spending to sustain job-friendly growth and support the banking sector cleanup".

26 hurt in pre-polls clashes in Bhola, Cumilla

FROM PAGE 2

officer Dr KM Rezwanul Islam said, "A total of 14 injured people came to the hospital. Of them, 11 were released after primary treatment, two are admitted, and one was referred to Bhola General Hospital in critical condition."

On information, police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control. However, none of the parties has filed any complaint yet, said Borhanuddin Police Station officer-in-charge Moniruzzaman.

Contacted, Borhanuddin upazila nirbahi officer Manoranjan Barman, also the assistant returning officer, said law enforcers have been deployed in the area and both parties have been asked to submit written complaints.

In Cumilla's Chaudhogram upazila, at least 12 people were

injured as BNP and Jamaat activists clashed in the Hatbair village area.

Witnesses said some Jamaat activists were returning home from a rally of party Ameer Shafiqur Rahman at the HJ Government Pilot High School ground when they faced off with BNP men and got into a clash around 1:00pm.

Upazila unit Jamaat secretary Md Belal Hossain and upazila unit BNP general secretary Shah Alam traded allegations over the incident.

Contacted, Chaudhogram Upazila Health Complex doctor Asaduzzaman Nur said 12 injured people from both sides received treatment at the hospital.

On information, law enforcers went to the spot, brought the situation under control, and detained eight people over the incident, said

Chaudhogram upazila nirbahi officer and assistant returning officer Md Nurul Amin.

Chaudhogram Police Station officer-in-charge Abu Mahmud Mohammad said no complaint has been filed yet.

Meanwhile, in Sherpur, a murder case was filed on Friday night over the death of Jamaat leader Rezaul Karim, 42, in a clash between BNP and Jamaat activists on Wednesday.

Rezaul's wife, Marjia Begum, filed the case with Jhenaqati Police Station, accusing 231 named and some 400-500 unnamed people, said Sherpur Superintendent of Police Md Kamrul Islam.

[Our correspondents from Barishal, Cumilla and Mymensingh contributed to this report]

Avoid use of lethal weapons

FROM PAGE 2

26 BGB, Narayanganj (62 BGB) and Gazipur (63 BGB) will cover nine districts and four city corporations, spanning 51 constituencies. A total of 134 platoons will operate from 42 temporary base camps, supported by specialised K-9 dog squad units for search and screening operations.

Col Ehsan said BGB is strictly following directives issued by the government and the Election Commission and will remain politically neutral to ensure a level playing field for all candidates.

Regular patrols and intelligence surveillance are being conducted in close coordination with other law enforcement agencies so that voters can cast their ballots in a fear-free

environment.

To enhance transparency and operational efficiency, BGB members will use body-worn cameras, night-vision devices, metal detectors, armoured personnel carriers, and modern communication and signalling equipment during election duties. Special monitoring cells have also been set up at battalions and sector headquarters to oversee the situation round the clock, the media wing said.

BGB personnel have received specialised election-related training at various levels to enable them to respond professionally to any situation that may arise during the poll.

Addressing security concerns, Col

Ehsan said no specific threats have been identified so far. "Following the directive of our director general, BGB will not use any lethal weapons while maintaining law and order during the election," he said.

For emergency response, Rapid Action Teams, Quick Response Forces and BGB helicopter units will remain on standby throughout the election period and will be able to reach any incident site within a short time if required, the media wing added.

On polling day, BGB members will conduct patrols, set up checkpoints at key locations, and carry out vehicle and individual searches to prevent sabotage or attempts to destabilise the election environment.

'A neighbouring country conspiring over elections'

FROM PAGE 2

The anti-fascist movement aims to establish a state based on justice, where people's rights are protected and accountability in governance is ensured.

The upcoming election is not an isolated or sudden event, but a continuation of the July uprising that paved the way for a democratic electoral process, he said.

If the 11-party alliance comes to power, ensuring justice for the July

massacre and the killing of Sharif Osman Bin Hadi would be among the government's top priorities, Nahid added.

On the same day, speaking at the Jamaat-e-Islami-led alliance's "March for Daripalla" programme at Rahim Uddin Degree College in Adamdighi upazila of Bogura, NCP Spokesman Asif Mahmud said that if the BNP seeks to rehabilitate the Awami League, it would once again

fall into a trap and push Bangladesh into a vulnerable situation.

The people of the country had suffered for a long time due to the earlier decision to bring Sheikh Hasina back into politics.

According to him, the Awami League established BAKSAL and curtailed people's rights.

Allowing the party to return to politics would mean giving fascism a new opportunity, he added.

France tightens infant formula rules after toxin scare

AFP, Paris

France plans to impose stricter limits on the acceptable level of a toxin called cereulide in infant formula after potentially contaminated products were recalled over 60 countries.

The infant formula industry has been rocked in recent weeks by several firms recalling batches that could be contaminated with cereulide, which can cause nausea, vomiting, and diarrhoea.

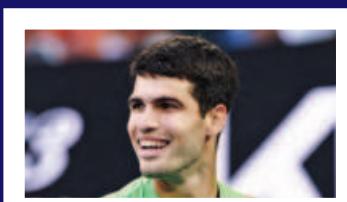
SPORT



KICKING OFF THE FUTURE

Young footballers take part in the BFF Football Academy Festival, organised under the Bangladesh Football Federation's grassroots programme, at the BFF artificial turf on Saturday. A total of 120 academy players were divided into three age groups – 8-10, 11-14 and 15-16 -- and featured in matches designed to promote enjoyment, learning and competitive spirit. The festival highlighted the federation's emphasis on long-term player development at the grassroots level. BFF vice-president and development committee chairman Naser Shahriar Zahedee, executive committee members and senior officials were present at the event.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



History beckons DJOKOVIC, ALCARAZ

History will be on the line in the Australian Open men's final on Sunday as tennis gladiators Novak Djokovic and Carlos Alcaraz lock horns, each vowing no surrender. Separated by 16 years, the two stand at opposite ends of their careers, chasing milestones that could define their legacies in very different ways.

Djokovic is striving to win a record-extending 11th Melbourne crown and, with it, a 25th major title that has so far eluded him.

A victory would see Djokovic surpass Australian icon Margaret Court, who also won 24 Grand Slam titles in the women's game.

The 38-year-old could also become the oldest man to lift the Australian Open trophy, surpassing Ken Rosewall, who won the title in 1972 shortly after turning 37.

This will be Djokovic's first major final since Wimbledon in 2024, having last claimed a Grand Slam title at the US Open in 2023.

Djokovic never lost an Australian Open final, boasting a perfect 10-0 win-loss record. He last lifted the trophy in Melbourne in 2023.

The 22-year-old Alcaraz has already won six Grand Slam titles and is bidding to become the youngest man to complete a career sweep of all four majors. Fellow Spaniard Rafael Nadal achieved the feat at the age of 24.

This will be Alcaraz's maiden Australian Open final, where he holds a 17-4 win-loss record at the tournament.

Alcaraz leads Djokovic 3-2 in their Grand Slam head-to-head, including a win in their most recent meeting at the 2025 US Open semifinals.



From heartbreak to redemption

AGENCIES

Born in Moscow but playing for Kazakhstan, Australian Open champion Elena Rybakina once said that "I don't live anywhere, to be honest".

One place she does feel very much at home, however, is the tennis court, and particularly Melbourne's hard courts.

The big serving 26-year-old upset world number one Aryna Sabalenka 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 in Saturday's title decider, drawing strong support from a section of the crowd.

"Thank you to Kazakhstan. I felt the support from that corner a lot," Rybakina said after lifting the trophy.

Saturday's match was a rematch of the 2023 Australian Open final, when Sabalenka had fought back to deny Rybakina a second Grand Slam title. On that occasion, the Belarusian prevailed in three sets, months after Rybakina had claimed her maiden major crown at Wimbledon.

This time, the Kazakh turned the tables, displaying her trademark composure to earn revenge on the sport's biggest stage in Melbourne.

Shy off the court but devastatingly powerful on it, Rybakina once again let her tennis do the talking. Standing at six feet tall (1.84 metres), she possesses a booming serve and relentless baseline power -- qualities that made the final a blockbuster encounter. She finished the tournament with 47 aces, comfortably more than any other woman in the draw.



Rybalkina's path to the title came against the backdrop of scrutiny off the court. Only a year ago at Melbourne Park, she was defending her coach Stefano Vukov, who had been provisionally banned by the WTA before the suspension was lifted in August following an investigation into a potential breach of its code of conduct. Vukov was again part of her team during this title run.

"I want to say thank you to my team. Without you, it wouldn't be possible," Rybakina said. "We had a lot of things going on, and I'm glad we achieved this result. Hopefully, we can keep on going strong this year."

Her semifinal opponent, American Jessica Pegula, summed up Rybakina's on-court presence by calling her "cool as a cucumber", a description that rang true once more in the final's decisive moments.

For Sabalenka, the defeat was a bitter one. The world number one admitted she was "really upset" with herself after failing to capitalise on a 3-0 lead in the deciding set. While acknowledging Rybakina's aggression, the Belarusian said she felt she had played strong tennis throughout the tournament and the final.

The two-time defending champion, who has now won four and lost four Grand Slam finals, remained optimistic despite losing her last two Melbourne finals. "Today you're a loser, tomorrow you're a winner," Sabalenka said, adding that her goals remained unchanged -- to keep fighting and put herself in position for another shot at the title.



Butler slams Pokhara pitch despite 12-0 win

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh coach Peter Butler delivered a scathing assessment of the pitch at the Pokhara Rangasala Stadium after his side began their SAFF U-19 Women's Championship title defence with a crushing 12-0 win over Bhutan on Saturday.

Despite the emphatic scoreline in the tournament opener at a venue hosting a SAFF-level competition for the first time, Butler said the playing surface was "not fit to play good football on" and questioned the fairness of staging a developmental tournament on such a pitch.

"Considering the circumstances, that pitch is not fit to play good football on," Butler said at the post-match press conference. "It has been sprayed green to make it look like there is grass, which, in my opinion, is totally unfair to ask of two teams that are trying to develop players and play the game the right way."

On the field, however, defending champions Bangladesh showed no mercy. Munki Akter struck four goals while Trishna Rani Sarkar and Alpi

Akter netted a hattrick each as the girls in red and green completely dominated a one-sided contest, adapting far better to the difficult conditions than their opponents.

Butler stopped short of praising the performance in footballing terms, insisting the surface prevented his team from playing their natural game. "I would not describe our performance as 'great' football because you cannot play good football on a surface like that," he said. "However, I believe we adapted to the conditions much better than the opposition. I am very pleased with the attitude, commitment and organisation of the group."

With a packed schedule ahead, the English coach said player welfare was his overriding concern and that he used the match to rotate his squad as much as possible. "I tried to make as many substitutions as we possibly could. It was very important that we finished the game unscathed, with the least amount of injuries possible," Butler noted, adding that rest and recovery would now be prioritised.

Bangladesh will next face India on Monday, after India edged hosts Nepal 1-0 in the day's other match.

What to WATCH

STAR SPORTS

SELECT HD2

Under-19 World Cup

Pakistan vs India

Live from 1:30 pm

SONY SPORTS 1,2

& 5

Australian Open

Final

Live from 2:30 pm

T SPORTS

Pakistan vs

Australia

3rd T20I

Live from 5:00 pm

STAR SPORTS

SELECT HD1

Premier League

Man United vs

Fulham

Live from 8:00 pm

Tottenham vs Man

City

Live from 10:30 pm

BCB limits media access at SBNCS

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) introduced new restrictions on media access to the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium (SBNCS) and its surrounding premises yesterday, enforcing revised entry regulations.

"As part of the ongoing security enhancement measures at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium (SBNCS) and its surrounding premises, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) wishes to advise that revised entry regulations are being introduced, which will be effective from now on," a press release stated.

Access for media representatives will now be limited to specific occasions only -- match days, official press conferences, events held upon formal invitation from BCB, and designated practice or training sessions as communicated by board.

Journalists have traditionally used the stadium's media facilities for regular coverage of Bangladesh cricket, and such limitations had not been imposed previously. According to BCB, the decision has been taken as part of ongoing efforts to strengthen security at the venue.

BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury and media committee chairman Amzad Hossain could not be reached for comments.

SHORT CORNER

Cummins ruled out of T20 World Cup

Pat Cummins has been ruled out of the upcoming ICC T20 World Cup after failing to recover fully from a lingering back injury. Cricket Australia confirmed that Cummins, who had been named in the provisional squad with the hope he could be managed through the early stages, "needs more time" to recover from a lumbar stress injury. Left-arm seamer Ben Dwarshuis has been drafted in as his replacement.

ICC, WCA locked in dispute over player terms

The ICC and the World Cricketers Association (WCA) are locked in a fresh dispute over player terms, including name, image and likeness (NIL) rights, ahead of the 2026 Men's T20 World Cup, reports ESPNcricinfo. The WCA has accused the ICC of distributing squad participation terms to players from several countries that differ from an agreement signed by both bodies in 2024. According to the WCA, the new version is significantly more exploitative and strips players of key protections.

Tigresses eye fourth qualifier title

Having already secured their place in the ICC Women's T20 World Cup, Bangladesh are now targeting a fourth qualifying title as they prepare to face the Netherlands in their final Super Six match in the qualifiers at the Mulpani Cricket Ground in Kathmandu today.

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

PAKISTAN CLINCH AUSTRALIA SERIES WITH RECORD WIN



Skipper Salman Ali Agha led from the front as Pakistan crushed Australia by 90 runs in Lahore yesterday to clinch the ongoing three-match T20I series 2-0, with a game in hand. It was Pakistan's biggest-margin victory in T20Is against Australia, providing a morale boost in a series serving as a build-up to this month's T20 World Cup. Agha smashed career-best 40-ball 76, while Usman Khan also registered a career-best 36-ball 53 as Pakistan piled up 198 for five in 20 overs at the Gaddafi Stadium. Australia never looked comfortable against Pakistan's spin attack and were bundled out for 108 in 15.4 overs.

PHOTO: PCB



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THE ONLY STEEL FACTORY IN BANGLADESH TO RECEIVE THE
GREEN FACTORY AWARD 2025



VIOLENCE IN PAKISTAN

Separatist attacks, retaliation kill 88

REUTERS, Quetta

At least 67 militants were killed yesterday as they battled Pakistan's security forces in multiple cities across the southwestern province of Balochistan, four security officials told Reuters.

Some 10 police and security personnel and 11 civilians were also killed during the orchestrated militant attacks, said the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity. Twenty-four police officers were injured.

The military's media wing did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, in a statement, condemned the attacks and praised security forces for repelling them, saying they had killed dozens of militants.

The attacks came a day after Pakistan's military said it killed 41 militants in separate raids in Balochistan, which borders Iran and Afghanistan and has faced a decades-long separatist insurgency.

The banned separatist group Baloch Liberation Army (BLA)

claimed responsibility for yesterday's attacks, saying it had launched them simultaneously across the province. The BLA said it had killed 84 Pakistan security personnel.

67 militants, 10 security personnel, 11 civilians among dead

Balochistan separatist group BLA claims responsibility

Pakistan blames foreign hand behind the attack

Security officials said armed men launched attacks in several urban areas, including the provincial capital Quetta and the port city of Gwadar, prompting operations by the army, police and counterterrorism units.

Hospitals were placed on emergency

SEE PAGE 8 COL 6



Pakistan security personnel inspect the blast site after an attack by Baloch separatists in Quetta yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Israeli strikes leave 32 dead across Gaza

IDF admits around 70,000 died in the Palestinian territory



AFP, Gaza City

Israeli air strikes killed 32 people, including children, in Gaza yesterday, according to the Palestinian territory's civil defence agency, as the military said it had attacked in response to a Hamas ceasefire violation.

Despite a US brokered truce entering its second phase earlier this month, violence in the Palestinian territory has continued, with both Israel and Hamas accusing each other of violating the agreement.

The latest bloodshed comes after Israel announced it would reopen the crucial Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt on Sunday for the "limited movement of people".

"The death toll since dawn today has risen to 32, most of them children and women," said the civil defence agency, a rescue force operating under the Hamas authority,

SEE PAGE 8 COL 4

Draft media, broadcasting ordinances a mockery
Say TIB, BJC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The draft ordinances of the National Media Commission and Broadcasting Commission are a parting mockery to the public expectations, said Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) yesterday.

The demand for a unified, independent and effective media commission for independent journalism in Bangladesh has existed for a long time -- a demand that was also reflected in the report of the Media Reform Commission.

The report was handed in more than ten months ago and the interim government did not implement any of its recommendations.

Instead, at the very final stage of its tenure, it has published two draft ordinances of the two commissions, it said.

TIB believes that the preparation of the two drafts -- with the apparent objective of imposing greater control over the media sector and seeking public opinion within only

SEE PAGE 8 COL 4

Misinformation rose by 30pc in 2025

Finds Dismislab; nearly 60pc of all disinformation involved politics

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In 2025, fact-checkers recorded a 30 percent surge in false or misleading content compared to the previous year, marking a sharp escalation in both volume and sophistication.

The nature of disinformation also shifted. Two out of every three fact-checks involved political narratives, half of them spread through video, and one in ten generated using artificial intelligence, signaling an increasing use of technology to circulate false information, according to an analysis by Dismislab, a fact-checking organisation.

For its annual review of 2025, Dismislab analysed the headlines of more than 4,000 distinct fact-check reports published in 2025 and compiled a top ten list of individuals who appeared most frequently in disinformation headlines.

Ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina topped the list, with her name appearing in 274 fact-check headlines. A large share of this disinformation involved her old videos, photographs, and statements that were spread as "recent". Another major strand centered on rumors of Sheikh Hasina's return to power.

Interim government Chief Adviser Dr Muhammad Yunus came second, appearing in 150 fact-check headlines. Most of these false claims involved

SHARE OF MISINFORMATION

Politics	57.90%
Law & order	7.40%
Religion	6.40%
International affairs	5.90%
Disaster	4.10%
Entertainment	3.50%
Defence	3.10%
Fraud	2.10%
Sports	2%
Education	1.30%
Economy & development	1%
Health	0.90%
Others	2.70%

portraying his government as unstable and illegitimate. Repeated false claims also circulated stating that "Yunus has resigned" or would resign, and that the army had issued him a "deadline" for resignation.

SEE PAGE 8 COL 1

Mob killings double in Jan

Says MSF's monthly report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Deaths from mob beatings more than doubled in January compared to the previous month, while the number of deaths in jail custody also saw a sharp rise ahead of the national election, according to a new study.

In January, 21 people were killed in mob beatings, up from 10 deaths recorded in December 2025, according to the Manabadihikar Shongskriti Foundation's monthly monitoring report.

The report, which was released yesterday, termed the human rights situation in January as "alarmingly violent and complex".

The human rights organisation led by Sultana Kamal highlighted a disturbing rise in mob violence.

"The failure of the state to take visible steps against such extrajudicial killings has emboldened perpetrators, leading to a rise in casualties," the report said, describing the incidents as a clear sign of the public's loss of trust in the rule of law.

The report also noted an increase in the recovery of unidentified bodies in January: 57. In December last year, 48 bodies were recovered.

The safety of individuals in state custody remains a critical concern: deaths in prison custody jumped to 15 in January from nine in December. Additionally, two individuals died in the custody of law enforcement agencies in January.

MSF attributed the rise in prison deaths to medical negligence, inhumane treatment and failures in prison administration.

With the 13th national election weeks away, electoral violence has also risen.

Four people were killed and 509 were injured in election-related clashes in January, as opposed to one death the previous month.

The report also pointed out a surge in the use of "unnamed accused" in police cases.

SEE PAGE 8 COL 6

Rybakina wins maiden Australian Open

AFP, Melbourne



Elena Rybakina took revenge over world number one Aryna Sabalenka to win a nail-biting Australian Open final on Saturday and clinch her second Grand Slam title.

The big serving Kazakh fifth seed held her nerve to pull through 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 at Rod Laver Arena in Melbourne in 2hrs 18mins.

It was payback after the Belarusian Sabalenka won the 2023 final between two of the hardest hitters in women's tennis.

The ice-cool Rybakina, 26, who was born in Moscow, adds her Melbourne triumph to her Wimbledon win in 2022.

"Hard to find the words now," said Rybakina, and then addressed her beaten opponent to add: "I know it is tough, but I hope we play many more finals together."

Turning to some Kazakh fans in the crowd, she said: "Thank you so much to Kazakhstan. I felt the support from that corner a lot."

It was more disappointment in a major final for Sabalenka, who won the US Open last year for the second

SEE PAGE 8 COL 3



EFFICIENT FARMING... Farmers in Khulna are growing tomatoes along the aisle of a fish enclosure, which is on a piece of land that is primarily being used for paddy farming. The photo was taken yesterday in Dakshin Beelabab.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

5 farmers die in Naogaon road crash

UNB, Dhaka

Five farmers were killed when a garbage truck crashed into a battery-run cycle van on the Mohadevpur-Patnitola Road in Naogaon's Mohadevpur upazila yesterday.

The deceased were identified as Biren Pahan, 35, son of Koko Pahan; Ujjal Pahan, 38, son of Naren Pahan; Bipul Pahan, 25, son of Jhutu Pahan; Sanju Orao, 45, son of Marang Orao; and Biplab Pahan, 22, son of Jhutu Pahan, of the upazila's Nupur area. All of them were passengers on the battery-run cycle van.

The farmers were on their way to Mohadevpur haat to sell turmeric when the garbage truck hit the cycle van, leaving two dead on the spot and three others injured, said Shahidul Islam, officer-in-charge of Mohadevpur Police Station.

On information, police recovered the bodies, he said, adding that the injured were taken to the upazila health complex, where doctors declared them dead.

Police could not arrest anyone as the driver and his helper fled the scene.

"Efforts are underway to arrest both of them," the OC said.