

CYBER MERCENARIES go into overdrive

Fake 'haha' reactions attack political opponents as polls near

STAR REPORT

On December 20, 2025, a female student activist at Dhaka University shared a screenshot of a Facebook post that called for violence against a fellow activist.

Alarmed, she wrote: "Getting seriously worried about ... [name withheld] bhai's well-being. Your views do not need to align with his in order to be concerned for his safety, especially in these dire times. If you recognise this person in the screenshot, or have any way to reach him, please step forward and take legal action."

By the time this report was filed,

than Bangla or English, and lacked profile photos or personal details. Among them were accounts such as Kokou Khelios from Togo and Olivier Randrianjaka from Madagascar -- names and listed locations with no plausible connection to the post.

An investigation by The Daily Star has found that such accounts do not land on a Bangladeshi student's post by coincidence. They are bot profiles that can be easily purchased online to attack opponents or fabricate support.

As part of this investigation, The Daily Star bought nearly 30,000 reactions across nine meme posts,

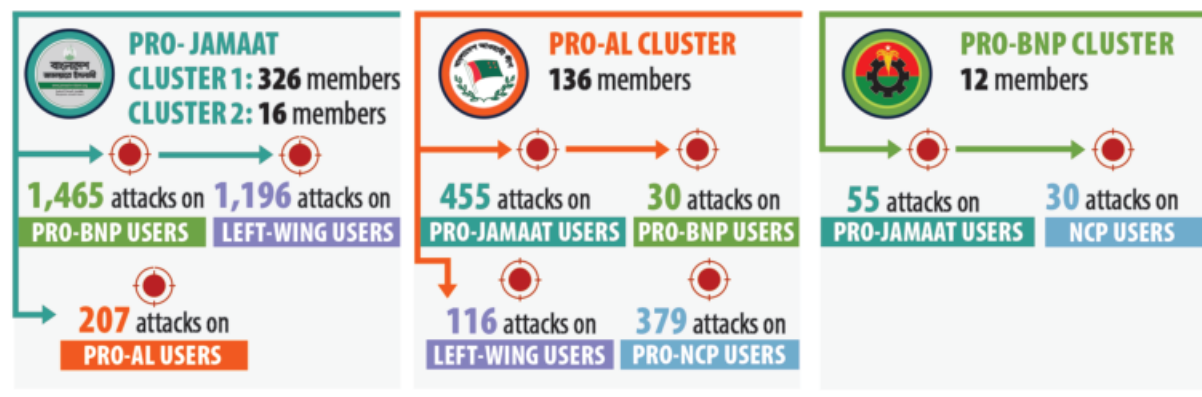
Experts warn that this kind of bot activities poses a serious risk ahead of the election, as it is often deployed to manufacture perceptions that are far from reality.

It also violates Meta's policies. Facebook's Community Standards prohibit any artificial amplification of engagement, explicitly banning fake accounts, automated activity, or coordinated click farm operations to inflate reactions, followers, or shares.

"We do not allow attempting to or successfully selling, buying, or exchanging for engagement, such as likes, shares, views, follows, clicks, use of specific hashtags, etc.," the standards state.

Yet the influence operations

ATTACKS ON POLITICAL OPPONENTS



ATTACKS ON MEDIA



the post drew over 10,000 reactions -- 8,500 of them "haha," signalling mockery rather than concern.

While social media users agreeing or disagreeing with a post may react with "like," "love," or "haha", a closer look at these 8,500 "haha" reactions revealed that one in every five came from suspicious profiles.

Many usernames appeared foreign, written in scripts other

using five dummy Facebook profiles and sourcing them from four separate "click farms" over two days.

Many of the same profiles delivering fake reactions for our posts were also active across the pages of dozens of political actors and at least six candidates running in the February 12 election -- supporting one side or trolling the

network uncovered in this investigation suggests that Meta's detection systems are failing to catch them.

Meta did not respond to requests for comment sent via email.

THE DIGITAL MOB
The Daily Star analysed "haha" and other reactions across 263 Facebook

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AUG 2024-DEC 2025

158 killed in 600 incidents of political violence

TIB report shows BNP linked to majority of cases, warns violence may continue beyond polling day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 600 incidents of political violence, resulting in the deaths of 158 political activists, were reported across the country between August 2024 and December 2025, according to a report by Transparency International Bangladesh.

The report said 7,082 people were injured during the violent incidents, the majority of which were linked to the BNP -- 550 incidents, accounting for 91.7 percent of the total.

The Awami League was involved in 124 incidents (20.7 percent), while Jamaat-e-Islami was linked to 7.7 percent and the National Citizen Party to 1.2 percent.

At least 15 political leaders and activists were killed within 36 days of the announcement of the election schedule on December 11, the report shows.

The report titled "Justice, State Reform and Election after the Fall of Authoritarianism: Expectations and Reality", was unveiled at the TIB office in the capital's Dhanmondi yesterday.

As of November 19, 2025, 1,785 cases, including 837 murder cases, related to crimes against humanity during the July uprising have been filed nationwide. Of those, 663 cases have been filed against deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina, 453 of which are murder cases.

The report said charge sheets have been submitted in only 106 cases, including 31 murder cases, indicating slow progress in investigations.

AT A GLANCE

- 1,785 cases filed nationwide centring the July uprising, 663 cases against Hasina
- Mob violence threatens the February 12 elections
- Media under pressure, ordinances restrict freedom
- Judicial politicisation hinders the progress of democratic reforms

So far, 128 former ministers and members of parliament from the Awami League government have been arrested in connection with the cases.

The report also revealed that 761 cases have been filed against 1,168 serving and former police officials for crimes against humanity during uprising. Among them, 61 have been arrested.

At the International Crimes Tribunal, 450 complaints have so far been lodged -- 45 have been taken into cognisance. These cases involve 209 accused, with 84 arrests made. Currently, 12 cases against 105 accused are under trial at the ICT.

TIB said many accused individuals have fled the country, with allegations that members of the military, law enforcement and local political leaders directly or indirectly facilitated their escape.

The watchdog expressed serious concern over the indiscriminate filing of cases following the uprising, with the report estimating that around 150,000 people across the country have been accused.

It cited widespread allegations of "case trade", retaliatory filings, political harassment and extortion, including threats of inclusion or promises of exclusion in cases. In many instances, the report said, law enforcement agencies accepted cases without proper investigation due to pressure.

TIB also raised concerns about the competence and

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Shab-e-Barat tonight

BSS, Dhaka

The holy Shab-e-Barat, the night of fortune, will be observed throughout the country tonight with due religious fervour.

On this occasion, Islamic Foundation has planned programmes at the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque. It will hold waz (religious sermons), doa-mahfil, special prayers, recitation from the holy Quran and Hamd-Naat at the mosque in the evening.

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HOLIDAY NOTICE

The Daily Star offices will remain closed today on the occasion of Shab-e-Barat. Therefore, the newspaper will not be published tomorrow. Our website will keep you updated 24/7.



'Don't let anyone exploit delays in vote count'

Tarique slams Jamaat ameer for alleged use of offensive language about working women

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday urged voters to remain vigilant during the vote-counting process, warning against any attempts to delay the counting or manipulate the results.

Addressing an election rally at the Sports Park in Jashore town, he alleged that a political party seeking to confine women to their homes was conspiring to make the election controversial.

"We are hearing new stories that vote counting will take much longer this time. The people of this country may not have been able to vote for the last decade, but that does not mean they lack experience. They voted in 1991, 1996 and 2001. The people of Bangladesh know how long vote counting takes," he said.

Earlier, at a rally in Khulna -- his first there in 22 years -- Tarique criticised a



Jamaat leader over alleged controversial remarks about women, referring to a post from the verified X account of Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman.

"Just two days ago, a leader of a political party used a word about working women, our mothers and sisters, that I feel ashamed to repeat here," he said.

Tarique said that amid nationwide

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July deniers will get 'red card' in polls

Says Jamaat chief, vows to expose those behind his 'X account hack'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman yesterday warned that voters would show a "red card" in the February 12 national elections to those who fail to recognise the spirit of the 2024 mass uprising.

"The nation today stands on the foundation of the '24 movement. Therefore, those who do not recognise '24 will be shown a red card in '26," he said while addressing a campaign rally at the Padua High School ground in Lohagara, Chattogram.

Shafiqur said the spirit of the "July revolution" must guide the country's future governance, adding that the 11-party alliance seeks victory not for itself alone, but for the country's 180 million people.

The Jamaat chief, who attended a series of rallies in Cox's Bazar, Maheshkhali, Sitakunda, and Chattogram city, also urged voters to cast "yes" vote in the referendum, calling it a crucial step to dismantle the remnants of autocracy.



"The first vote on February 12 will be for 'yes' in the referendum to uphold the July charter," he said at a rally in Maheshkhali.

Describing a "yes" vote as Azadi (freedom) and a "no" vote as Golami (slavery), Shafiqur said those who had previously remained silent were now being "compelled" to support the "yes" campaign. However, he stressed that their public statements should reflect their true convictions.

"Those who take a stand against

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Vote for the ideology, not for alliances

Says IAB ameer

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

Ameer of Islami Andolan Bangladesh Mufti Syed Rezaul Karim yesterday urged voters to use their voting power to bring real change, saying the country has failed to achieve peace or true liberation under the existing political system since independence.

"The conventional democratic system has failed to deliver peace or freedom over the past 54 years," he said, urging voters to prioritise political ideology over alliances in the upcoming national election.

Addressing an election rally at the Pilot High School ground in Nabinagar upazila of Brahmanbaria around 4:00pm, Rezaul Karim said, "We are taking risks

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Yunus govt's record uneven

Reports Crisis Group, praises July charter, economic steps, criticises weak policing, mob violence

STAR REPORT

As Bangladesh's interim government approaches the end of its tenure, the International Crisis Group has taken stock of its record since the ouster of Sheikh Hasina in August 2024.

In a report published yesterday, the Brussels-based think tank mentions that the interim administration led by Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus has drawn praise for pulling the economy back from the brink, reviving the International Crimes Tribunal to address past human



rights abuses, and drafting the July charter -- a set of 84 reform proposals aimed at curbing prime ministerial powers, strengthening parliamentary oversight, and reducing partisan influence over judicial appointments.

"Together with the central bank, the government introduced banking reforms and awarded port contracts to foreign operators to ease logistical bottlenecks."

Yet its record is uneven, notes Crisis Group, stating that "security sector reform has largely stalled, with a distrust of police after years of

politicisation; mob violence has risen; while agencies such as the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) remain unreformed."

Recommendations from the women's affairs and media reform commissions were sidelined, the report also says, citing possible reasons as "either due to resistance from conservative groups or a lack of political will."

Referencing critics, Crisis Group points to arguments that the interim government has failed to live up to its lofty ambitions and that it pursued vendettas against the Awami League while being too accommodating

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From left: Huge crowds gathered at a BNP rally at the Prabhati School grounds in Khulna’s Khalishpur; a Jamaat-e-Islami rally drew a large number of attendees at the Bandar Nagari School and College grounds in Chattogram city. The photos were taken yesterday.

PHOTOS: COLLECTED

July deniers will get ‘red card’ in polls

FROM PAGE 1
'yes', the people will assume they want to re-establish fascism and dynastic autocracy," he said, urging voters to remain vigilant against "vote thieves" on election day.

Turning to social reforms, the Jamaat ameer placed women's rights at the centre of the alliance's agenda.

Speaking at Muktiyoddha Maidan in Cox's Bazar town, he said that if the 11-party alliance comes to power, women's education will be made free up to the master's level.

"The government will take full responsibility for their education," he said, adding that his party is committed to ensuring women's safety both at home and outside.

Pledging zero tolerance for harassment, he said a just society must protect the honour of "mothers and sisters."

Highlighting alleged misdeeds of past rulers, Shafiqur vowed to establish Insaaf (justice) and recover money laundered abroad by the previous regime.

"With this money, we will build a Bangladesh of justice. We do not believe in 'winning at any cost.' We want to win the hearts of the people," he said.

He also promised to establish a public university in Cox's Bazar and upgrade regional infrastructure to international standards.

LDP President Oli Ahmed, a key ally in the 11-party coalition, speaking at the Lohagara rally, said his party would uphold the country's sovereignty at any cost.

Clarifying that the alliance is not "against India," he struck a

nationalist tone, saying, "If any neighbour thinks they can easily occupy this country, we can prepare 10 million people for war within 15 days."

Oli also recalled that he co-founded the BNP with Ziaur Rahman but left the party in 2006 after it "strayed from its founding ideals."

At a rally in Sitakunda, the Jamaat chief warned that "vote corruption" would be met with strong resistance, saying the "days of fascism" were over.

At the final rally of the day at the Chattogram Port Authority School and College ground, Shafiqur alleged that one of his social media accounts had been hacked to spread derogatory remarks about women.

"The hackers have been identified. Now we will find out who was behind them," he said, claiming the cyberattack was retaliation for his vocal stance against the harassment of women.

He also criticised political rivals for distributing "family cards" while allegedly failing to protect women's dignity.

Shafiqur further alleged that while Jamaat stood by the families of martyrs and the injured after the July uprising, another party was involved in "extortion and land grabbing."

Turning to Chattogram's development, he claimed the port had been "sold out" for decades for personal gain.

Under the 11-party alliance, he said, the port would be upgraded to international standards without corruption. "The people's port will remain with the people," he added.

Vote for the ideology

FROM PAGE 1
and contesting for change. But we are not alone. Allah is with us, patriotic people are with us, and those who love Islam are with us."

Drawing a distinction between local and national elections, the Charmonai Pir said local polls focus on development and public welfare, while national elections determine who formulates laws in parliament. Therefore, ideology matters most in national polls, he added.

He also said both the BNP-led alliance and the Jamaat e-Islami-led 11-party alliance have announced plans to

govern under the existing democratic and legal framework if elected.

"But this system has failed to bring peace or freedom in the past," he said.

The rally was presided over by Islami Andolan Bangladesh's Nabinagar unit president Jasim Uddin Sarkar, while the party's Brahmanbaria-5 (Nabinagar) candidate, Nazrul Islam Nazu, was the main attraction.

At the end of the rally, Rezaul Karim symbolically handed over the party's election symbol -- the hand fan -- to the candidate and urged voters to cast their ballots for peace.

FROM PAGE 1

posts over the last two months and found at least four clusters of politically aligned users who move together on the platform like an organised army.

These clusters swarm posts from political or ideological opponents with waves of "haha" reactions, creating the appearance of mass ridicule and suppressing the visibility of targeted content.

Two of these clusters appear aligned with Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, while one each is aligned with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the ousted Awami League. However, no official links with any of the party were investigated.

Their operations go far beyond simple trolling. By coordinating large volumes of hostile reactions, they exploit the way Facebook's algorithm works.

Internal Meta documents leaked in the 2021 "Facebook Papers" revealed that when a post receives signs of trolling, the platform may automatically reduce its visibility. This means that coordinated "haha" attacks do not merely mock a post, they can actively push it out of public view.

Such coordinated attacks are also easy to carry out. It only takes a willing buyer, a mobile wallet, one of the many "engagement" sellers on Facebook, and just about five minutes.

Findings show that what appears to be a genuine public backlash or

them, 5,49,129 (62%) were "hahas," with at least 19,708 coming from profiles that bear all the hallmarks of bot accounts.

For this investigation, a group was identified as a cluster if its members showed explicit support for posts within their own political camp and concurrently reacted with "haha" to at least seven posts from opposing camps in tandem with other profiles.

Based on this criterion, two Jamaat-aligned clusters were identified, with 326 and 16 members each, alongside an Awami League-aligned cluster with 134 members and a BNP-aligned cluster with 12.

Analysis shows the two pro-Jamaat clusters are the most combative, primarily targeting the pro-BNP users with 1,465 attacks within this limited dataset. Their second most frequent target was the left-wing camp, facing 1,196 attacks, while the Awami League saw a comparatively lower 207 strikes.

Two Dhaka University student leaders -- one from a leftist organisation and another from Chhatra Dal -- are among those attacked by these pro-Jamaat clusters.

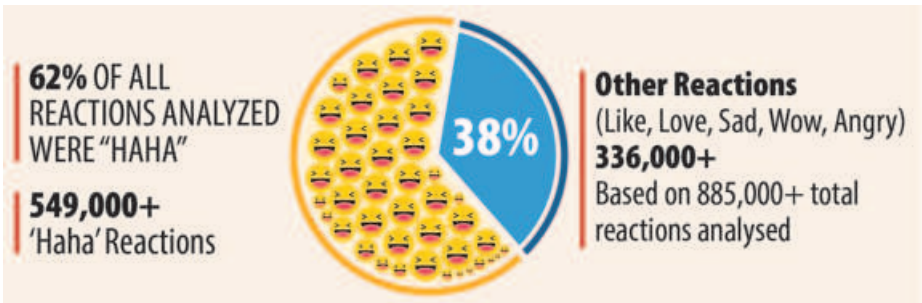
The Awami League-aligned cluster focused primarily on Jamaat-affiliated posts, followed by the NCP, and carried out fewer attacks on BNP and left-leaning content. Their targets included an NCP candidate from Dhaka as well as the female Dhaka University student who

attacks.

However, the most prolific harassment of journalists and media outlets came from a separate right-wing cluster with 234 profiles and no identifiable party link. It targeted journalistic content 970 times, nearly double the volume of the most active political clusters belonging to pro-Jamaat entities.

This group also showed strong ideological leanings, attacking left-wing posts 761 times, BNP content 488 times, and Awami League content 111 times. **THE BOT MARKET** This investigation uncovered a network of Facebook pages that openly advertise paid services to inflate social-media metrics by selling reach, reactions, and followers.

The Daily Star



approached four such click farms -- Socialfy, Finix IT, Tech Dreams, and Finix IT Boosting -- posing as potential clients. To test their services, we created five dummy Facebook pages and ordered reactions for meme posts shared from those profiles.

The process could not be simpler: they responded almost instantly, asking no questions about who we were or how the engagements would be used. Between January 19 and 21, we purchased 30,000 reactions, both "love" and "haha," across nine posts created for investigative purposes.

Nayeem Uddin, the owner of Socialfy, described how the system works.

"We have contacts with people who maintain servers [collections] of Facebook profiles," he said, adding that 500-600 people maintain such "servers" in Bangladesh.

According to him, Bangladesh server owners build these collections by purchasing Facebook accounts for around Tk 15-16 each, while foreign profiles cost slightly less. For international accounts, they rely on servers in Thailand, Vietnam and Pakistan.

"I send the link for which reactions are being purchased to one of these people with servers, and they do the rest," he explained.

Buying engagement is also cheap. Reactions typically cost between Tk 120 and Tk 200 per thousand, and in our case the rate dropped to Tk 500 for 5,000 reactions when purchased in bulk.

While reactions from profiles with foreign-sounding names

are delivered almost instantly -- sometimes 1,000 within a minute and 5,000 within five minutes in our case -- reactions from local-sounding names take longer and cost more.

These "domestic" reactions usually exceed Tk 200 per thousand and may take 24 to 48 hours to arrive. However, this can be expedited to 24 hours with extra money, signalling the deployment of pre-programmed bot swarms, our investigation found.

Unlike the seamless delivery of international batches, "Bangladeshi" reactions often appear inconsistently. They may trickle in over 12 hours or arrive in irregular bulk bursts every 15 to 20 minutes, as service providers often struggle to keep

Despite being independent companies with no visible connection to each other, all four agencies appeared to draw from the same shared pool of bot profiles.

Our investigation established a direct link between these commercially available engagement services and the coordinated digital attacks across the political spectrum.

At least 354 bot profiles that we purchased to boost our meme posts were also among the accounts delivering "haha" reactions to the 263 posts analysed for this report.

BOTS FOR CANDIDATES But these bots do not only attack, they also generate artificial popularity.

This investigation found that at least 547 bot accounts

confirmed that politicians regularly purchase engagement services, although he declined to give any name.

"I have had experiences where an Awami League politician came and purchased 'haha' reactions for a post, and another BNP politician purchased 'love' reactions for the same post," he said, describing a marketplace where political rivals draw from the same pool of bots.

This investigation did not examine the bot followers of all candidates. It only explored the candidates who share bots from the same click farms that sold fake engagements to the nine meme posts created for this investigation.

Of the six candidates, three did not respond to calls or text messages. The remaining three said they were unaware of any bot activity on their pages, explaining that their social media accounts are managed by party supporters or relatives.

THE SAME SERVERS Shahriar Islam, a Shahjahi-based entrepreneur behind Tech Dream, which also sold fake engagements to The Daily Star, explained why identical bot profiles appear across so many political pages.

"We use the same servers," he said.

Tech Dream openly advertises its services on Facebook and is currently running seven ads offering engagement-boosting packages.

One of the servers Shahriar and others rely on is Fatherpanel.com, an online click farm. Its listings show that "Bangladeshi" Facebook reactions, including "haha" and "love," cost less than Tk 1 per thousand, with delivery times between 15 and 49 hours.

It also offers a range of bot-profile categories, including "100% Bangladesh," "BD+Mixed," "Arab," and "Vietnam," with Bangladeshi-labelled profiles priced the highest. Payments can be made directly through bkash, Nagad, Upay, and other mobile wallets.

Saiful Islam Sami, who runs this farm, said he sources foreign bots from servers hosted in Vietnam, Pakistan, and other countries. "I am essentially a reseller for them."

For domestic bots, he depends on local suppliers who maintain collections of Facebook profiles.

"I only provide the services," he insisted. "I have no control over how people use them, or whether they are used politically."

Reporting and research: Zoya Islam, Mir Rownak, Nourin Sultana Toma, Abdullah Hel Bubun, Tarek Hosen and Abir Ayon
Graphics: Anwar Sohel

158 killed in 600 incidents of political violence

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political affiliations of judges and prosecutors appointed to the ICT.

It added that journalists and professionals were named as accused in murder cases, raising serious questions about the misuse of the justice system.

Addressing the event, TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman warned that failure to control mob violence could affect the upcoming February 12 election.

He added that the

phenomenon of mob violence in Bangladesh "actually started from within the government", saying the Bangladesh Secretariat became one of the first places where mobs emerged. According to him, these groups later gained power in this way, weakening the government's moral authority.

On election-related violence, Iftekharuzzaman cautioned, "We all hope there won't be a single killing... But we cannot guarantee that. From that perspective, we

believe the risk of violence will remain not only until February 12, but also for several days afterwards."

He said the government was aware of the risks and had the authority, skills and experience to act. However, he expressed concern based on Bangladesh's past electoral history. "Elections in Bangladesh have rarely been completely free of violence... Lessons from previous polls must be used to prevent violence this time."

The TIB chief also

expressed concern over the post-July accountability process, saying journalists have been detained in mass cases over allegations of involvement in killings during the movement.

He asked whether such actions against journalists were acts of justice or acts of revenge, warning that this approach makes it difficult to identify real perpetrators and supporters of authoritarianism.

While responding to reporters' questions, he said, "Politicians and

bureaucrats have learned nothing from the July movement and remain focused on protecting their own interests. As a result, they objected to proposals placed before the consensus commission aimed at creating a government accountable to the people."

He said if the basic concept of a "note of dissent" is accepted, then decisions reached through consensus could still be implemented.

"Prioritising the opinions of the majority is a global practice,

though it remains unclear whether this will be followed in Bangladesh... If a referendum verdict goes in favour of 'yes', implementation of reforms will depend on the goodwill of the future government."

He also said, "The interim government could have set an example by making their wealth statements public, but it did not."

Iftekharuzzaman criticised two recent ordinances -- the Broadcasting Commission Ordinance and the Media

Commission Ordinance -- saying the media has been deliberately ignored and new risks have been created.

He questioned whether the interim government truly believes in allowing the media to work freely, professionally and safely, describing the reform commissions concerned as symbolic measures aimed at placing the media under greater government control.

On judicial reform, he said, "The interim government has taken some positive steps, including forming

a judicial appointment committee and moving toward an independent judicial secretariat."

However, he noted that the effectiveness of these measures would ultimately be tested under the next government, adding that politicisation within the judiciary remains a major challenge.

He urged political parties to make a strong commitment to keeping state institutions and professional bodies free from politics.

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

Jamaat wants
Afghanistan-
style country
Fakhrul alleges

UNB, Thakurgaon

BNP
Secretary
General
Mirza
Fakhrul
Islam
Alamgir

yesterday alleged that Jamaat-e-Islami aims to turn Bangladesh into an Afghanistan-like state, raising concerns over the party's political agenda and its potential impact on national stability.

"They want to take Bangladesh backward. They are a party that prevents us from moving forward. We don't want to move backward; we want to move forward," he said while campaigning at Lalmia Market.

He also criticised Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman for his alleged controversial remarks about working women. SEE PAGE 9 COL 2



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Speakers at a roundtable titled 'Electoral Commitments on Addressing Discrimination against Women and Rights in the Family' at BRAC Centre Inn in Mohakhali, Dhaka yesterday. The Embassy of Denmark, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust, The Daily Star, and the Centre for Policy Dialogue organised the programme.

Women's inclusion in
state systems key to justiceSay speakers at roundtable by Danish
embassy, BLAST, CPD, Star

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a roundtable yesterday urged strict enforcement of existing laws rather than introducing new ones, calling for swift and exemplary punishment for offenders to prevent violence against women.

They said effective implementation of even 60 percent of Bangladesh's existing laws would significantly reduce the need for new legislation.

Participants emphasised that justice cannot be achieved unless women are integrated at every level of the system -- from law enforcement and healthcare to public services and the judiciary.

They called for balanced representation, ideally 60-40 or at least 55-45, warning that discussions without inclusion would bring little change.

The roundtable, titled "Electoral Commitments on Addressing Discrimination against Women and Rights in the Family," was held at BRAC Centre Inn in Mohakhali.

It was jointly organised by the Embassy of Denmark, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), The Daily Star, and

the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

In her opening remarks, CPD Executive Director Dr Fahmida Khatun highlighted gaps in law enforcement and victim support, particularly affecting marginalised groups such as persons with disabilities.

She stressed the need to align policy research with political commitment to secure lasting legislative reforms.

Moderated by Supreme Court lawyer Sara Hossain, the session questioned political party representatives on their plans to address violence against women, mobilise resources, improve access to family courts, tackle legal discrimination in families, and ensure women's representation in justice institutions.

Mahbuba Habiba, member of BNP media cell, said justice is impossible without women's integration into the system. She noted that structural barriers prevent effective enforcement of existing laws.

"Restoring victims to a reasonably normal life requires an urgently needed dedicated cell -- already included in BNP's planning -- where cases can be registered and addressed swiftly," she said.

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Policy reversals,
underfunding
hurting edn goals
Speakers tell dialogue

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Allocate 4-6 percent of GDP to education
- Form a task force to draft sector-wide plan
- Establish a permanent education commission
- Introduce universal mid-day meal programme
- Strengthen teacher capacity, status, recruitment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

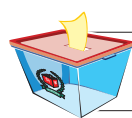
Bangladesh's education system is suffering from the absence of a long term plan, frequent policy reversals, weak learning outcomes and chronic underinvestment, speakers said yesterday, warning that the country is falling behind on Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4).

The observations were made at a policy dialogue titled "SDG-4 progress and challenges in Bangladesh: Expectations from the next government", organised by the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) at the Bangladesh Tourism Corporation auditorium in the capital.

Brac University Professor Emeritus Manzoor Ahmed said Bangladesh has operated for decades without a sector-wide education development plan.

"All governments have neglected education for the past 55 years," he said, arguing that reforms repeatedly fail because education is not treated as a priority in national planning.

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FEBRUARY 12 ELECTION | DHAKA-19

Labour rights, daily struggles
shaping election discourse

SHARIF M SHAFIQUE and SADI MUHAMMAD ALOK

A group of students were chatting at a tea stall on the Jahangirnagar University campus; their conversation centred on the upcoming national election.

They shared varied views on the electoral atmosphere, candidates, political parties, concerns, and their hopes for a post-election Bangladesh.

Many students of the university are voters in the Dhaka-19 constituency, which includes Savar and Ashulia.

The constituency comprises Shimulia, Dhamsona, Yearpur, Ashulia, Birulia, Pathalia, Savar Union, Savar Municipality, and Savar Cantonment.

Known for the garment industry and the Dhaka-Aricha Highway, the area holds major economic importance but has long been plagued by persistent problems.

Severe traffic congestion is a daily reality in Nabinagar, Baipail, and Savar Bus Stand.

Industrial waste has heavily polluted the Bangshi river and surrounding areas, while poor drainage causes waterlogging even after slight rainfall.

Furthermore, gas shortages for both industrial and residential use remain a consistent struggle.

As an industrial hub, the area also sees frequent criminal activities linked to transport, the jhut (garment scrap) trade, and land grabbing.

Any instability in the garment sector here affects national politics and the economy, making labour unions particularly influential in this region.

Khairul Mamun Mintu, a local garment workers' leader, told The Daily Star, "A large portion of voters in Dhaka-19 are workers. We discussed our demands on living standards and professional development with candidates and are now evaluating who addressed our rights."

"I haven't seen any clear programmes for workers in the candidates' manifestos," he added. "While many listened to us, heavyweight candidates did not seem to prioritise our demands."

According to locals, the main contenders are BNP's Dewan Mohammad Salahuddin, National Citizen Party (NCP) candidate Dilshana Parul -- representing the Jamaat-led alliance -- and Mohammad Faruk Khan of Islami Andolan Bangladesh.

Nabinagar, Baipail, Ashulia, and Savar Bus Stand areas are alive with campaign processions, banners, SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

Dilshana
ParulDewan Md
Salahuddin33% food samples
tested unsafe in
FY 2024-25

Food Safety Authority reveals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Food Safety Authority detected adulteration, contamination, and low nutritional content in 571 of 1,713 tested food samples (33.3 percent) in the 2024-25 fiscal year.

The samples included pickles, sauces, chips, puffed rice, fruit drinks, mustard oil, butter, soybean oil, dalda, and honey, among others, said Mohammad Mostafa, member (public health and nutrition) of the BFSA at an event yesterday.

The BFSA organised the event at the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council to mark National Food Safety Day 2026.

The samples were collected and tested following proper regulations, documentation, and use of accredited laboratories, Mostafa said.

He explained that adulteration includes adding prohibited substances to mislead consumers or for financial gain, such as urea in chilli or non-food-grade colours to enhance appearance.

Contamination refers to harmful substances introduced during processing or from environmental sources, such as trans-fats. Quality deviations occur when products contain too little or too much of a required ingredient, such as edible oils lacking the prescribed Vitamin A content, he said.

The BFSA now conducts targeted surveillance, focusing on high-risk products that are widely consumed, such as lentils, parathas, and snacks, and prioritises testing products consumed by

SEE PAGE 9 COL 3

MJF unveils
a platform
for energy
transition

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A coalition of 33 organisations under the Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) yesterday launched the Women's Energy and Empowerment Network (WEE-NET), calling for women and marginalised communities to be placed at the centre of the country's energy policies and just transition plans.

The platform was unveiled at a press conference at the Dhaka Reporters Unity, where speakers said women continue to face structural exclusion from employment, decision-making and economic opportunities, an inequality they argued is being replicated in the energy sector.

On behalf of the platform, Wasir Rahman Tanmoy of MJF said women's labour force participation in Bangladesh SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

FACT-CHECKED

Out of context
videos manipulating
religious sentimentDismislab says voters being
misled ahead of polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In recent weeks, several short video clips of political leaders' remarks on religion have gone viral on social media, triggering outrage and thousands of reactions labelling the speakers as "atheist" or "enemy of religion".

Media analysts and election observers warn that such videos are contributing to misinformation and could be used to manipulate voters.

Investigations show that while the videos were not technically altered, selective clipping and removal of context distorted their meaning and were strategically circulated ahead of the polls.

One such video featured BNP leader Habib-un-Nabi Khan Sohel. In the clip, he is heard saying, "People will be able to go and offer prayers at the Dhakeshwari temple, and priests of the temple will be able to perform puja at Baitul Mukarram when necessary."

Verification, however, shows this was not his full SEE PAGE 4 COL 6



The 25th convocation of East West University (EWU) was held on Aftabnagar playground in Dhaka yesterday. Bangladesh Public Service Commission Chairman Prof Mobasser Monem conferred degrees on the students. The convocation speaker was Tapan Chowdhury, managing director of Square Pharmaceuticals PLC. Prof Mohammed Farashuddin, chairperson of the Board of Trustees, EWU; and Prof Shams Rahman, vice chancellor, among others, spoke on the occasion.

PHOTO: COURTESY

Khurshida Haque's death anniv today

CITY DESK

Today is the 15th death anniversary of Khurshida Haque, a social worker and wife of late MA Haque, a former minister, founder president of the Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies, and founder of the Police Welfare Society.

On the occasion, food will be distributed among the orphans. Special prayers will be offered at mosques, said a press release.

Her relatives, friends, and well-wishers are requested to pray for the salvation of the departed soul.



Fishers from different villages in Rajshahi wade into a shrinking canal near Kaliganj Bridge in Tanore upazila, using poloi -- a traditional bamboo fish trap. As canals continue to dry up across the Barind region, they hurry to catch what they can before it's too late. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

Policy reversals, underfunding hurting edn goals

FROM PAGE 3

He called for an immediate taskforce to draft an education sector plan, which should eventually lead to a permanent education commission established through law to prevent policy shifts with changes in government.

Prof Manzoor said universal schooling cannot be achieved through partial measures such as extending compulsory education only up to Class VIII. Instead, the entire system -- particularly secondary education -- must be brought under a unified planning framework. He also said curriculum changes alone would not deliver results without addressing implementation failures.

"Before talking about new curricula, we must ask whether we can implement what we already have," said Prof Manzoor, who also serves as an adviser to CAMPE.

Presenting the keynote paper, CAMPE Programme Manager Abdur Rauf said enrolment has increased,

but learning outcomes remain poor due to poverty, child labour, child marriage, climate risks, infrastructure gaps and teacher shortages. These challenges continue to leave marginalised groups behind.

He urged the next government to allocate 4-6 percent of GDP to education, introduce a universal mid-day meal programme at primary and secondary levels, strengthen teacher capacity and status, and ensure foundational literacy and numeracy at the primary stage.

Fauzia Moslem, president of Bangladesh Mohila Parishad, said frequent curriculum changes in recent years have created confusion among students, teachers and parents, with learners becoming the most neglected stakeholders.

She warned that education policies often change with governments and called for safeguards against arbitrary shifts.

Fauzia also stressed the importance of cultural and

physical education alongside technical learning and urged stronger action against violence against women and child marriage, which she identified as major causes of girls dropping out of school.

Mohammad Golam Kibria, co-chair of the Education Local Consultative Group, said the National Education Policy 2010 needs urgent review and alignment with skills development and non-formal education frameworks. He also highlighted the need for decentralisation, better use of education data and stronger budget execution.

Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said Bangladesh is lagging behind on SDG indicators despite gains in enrolment and lower dropout rates.

He warned that literacy levels hovering around 50 percent raise serious concerns about readiness for STEM education, and said planning must now

move beyond SDGs given the limited time left to meet current targets.

From a humanitarian perspective, Gaza-returned physician and aid worker Nahrin Ahmed said education, health and protection must be addressed together through a multi-sector approach, particularly for women and children in crises.

Participants also stressed the need to protect educational institutions in disaster-prone areas, expand job-oriented and modern courses aligned with labour market needs, strengthen local-level decision-making, and bring madrasas, kindergartens and NGO-run schools under a mandatory

registration framework.

Chairing the programme, CAMPE Executive Director Rasheda K Chowdhury said education policies are often imposed from the top without consulting students or parents, leaving learners most affected by frequent changes in textbooks and assessment systems.

She reiterated the demand for a unified education law, noting that the absence of mandatory registration has allowed many madrasas, kindergartens and English-medium schools to operate without effective oversight.

She also stressed that education and health must be treated as priority sectors to safeguard the country's demographic dividend.

MJF unveils platform

FROM PAGE 3

stands at 19 percent, while their representation in leadership and technical roles in the energy sector remains below 10 percent.

He added that this compares with a global average of 32 percent female participation in the renewable energy sector. MJF Programme Director Banasree Mitra Neogi said rural women spend more than five hours a day on cooking and fuel collection, reducing time for education, income generation and leadership roles.

She also said nearly 90 percent of households still rely on biomass fuels, while only 28 percent of people have access to clean cooking fuel, exposing women to

serious health risks.

The platform further said it will work to expand women-led and community-based renewable energy initiatives, create employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for women.

The launch followed the Just Energy Transition Conference 2026, organised by MJF on Sunday.

The 33 organisations under the platform include Welfare Efforts (WE), Dalit Empowerment Foundation, Breaking The Silence, Bangladesh Indigenous Women's Network, Village Education Resource Center, UDAYAN, ESDO, POPI and ASHIKA Development Associates.

পুরাতন গাড়ী বিক্রয়ের বিজ্ঞপ্তি

ব্যাংকের নিম্নবর্ণিত পুরাতন গাড়ীসমূহ "যেখানে যে অবস্থায় আছে" ভিত্তিতে বিক্রির উদ্দেশ্যে আগ্রহী ক্রেতাদের নিকট হইতে আগামী ১৮.০২.২০২৬ তারিখ সকাল ১১.০০ ঘটিকার মধ্যে বা তার পূর্বে ২৬, দিলকুশা, বা/এ, ঢাকায় অবস্থিত অত্র ব্যাংকের প্রধান কার্যালয়ের সংস্থাপন ও সাধারণ সেবা বিভাগ (১৩তম তলায়) রক্ষিত টেন্ডার বাস্তবে দরপত্র দাখিলের জন্য সীলমোহরকৃত দরপত্র আহবান করা যাইতেছে এবং দরপত্র ১৮.০২.২০২৬ তারিখে সকাল ১১.৩০ ঘটিকায় দরদাতাগণের সম্মুখে (যদি কেহ উপস্থিত থাকেন) খোলা হইবে।

SL	Registration No.	Brand, CC & Year	Remarks
1	Dhaka Metro Cha-14-1250	Toyota Microbus (KR42), CC-1800, Year-2001	Kept at Officers quarter, Moghbazar
2	Dhaka Metro Cha-53-3032	Toyota Microbus (KR42), CC-1800, Year-2005	Kept at Officers quarter, Moghbazar
3	Dhaka Metro Cha-53-6718	Toyota Microbus (KR42), CC-1800, Year-2007	Kept at Officers quarter, Moghbazar
4	Sylhet Metro Cha-11-0782	Toyota Microbus (KR42), CC-1800, Year-2007	Kept at Officers quarter, Moghbazar
5	Dhaka Metro GA-37-2971	Toyota (Saloon) Car, CC-1500, Year-2009	Kept at Officers quarter, Moghbazar
6	Dhaka Metro GA-33-4775	Toyota (Saloon) Car, CC-1500, Year-2009	Kept at Officers quarter, Moghbazar
7	Dhaka Metro GA-33-3608	Toyota (Saloon) Car, CC-1500, Year-2007	Kept at Officers quarter, Moghbazar

বিস্তারিত তথ্যের জন্য আমাদের ব্যাংকের ওয়েব সাইটে (<https://www.pubalibangla.com/tender.aspx>) ভিজিট করার জন্য অনুরোধ করা হলো। দরদাতাগণ কর্তৃক প্রদত্ত দর ভাটি ও উৎস্য কর ব্যতিত বিবেচিত হবে এবং দরদাতাদেরকে সরকারী প্রচলিত বিধি মোতাবেক ভাটি এবং উৎস্য কর প্রদান করতে হবে।

(মো: কামরুজ্জামান)
মহাব্যবস্থাপক

পুতালী ব্যাংক পিএলসি.
PUBALI BANK PLC.

সংস্থাপন ও সাধারণ সেবা বিভাগ
২৬ দিলকুশা বাণিজ্যিক এলাকা
প্রধান কার্যালয়, ঢাকা।

TODAY IS THE 28th DEATH ANNIVERSARY OF FORMER SECRETARY M. AKHTAR ALI

Today 3rd February 2026, Tuesday is the 28th Death Anniversary of former Secretary Late M. Akhtar Ali. Relatives and well wishers are requested to pray for the departed soul.

Mrs. Akhtar Ali,
House # 14/A, Road # 95, Gulshan # 2, Dhaka-1212.
Phone: 01713069583

ষষ্ঠ মৃত্যু বার্ষিকী

বিগত ০৩/০২/২০২০ইং তারিখে বলিয়াদী জমিদার পরিবারের বৌরানী খুরশীদ আজিম সিদ্দিকী আমাদের সকলকে ছেড়ে না ফেরার দেশে চলে গেছেন। তিনি একজন প্রখ্যাত রবীন্দ্র সংগীত শিল্পী ছিলেন। আজ ০৩/০২/২০২৬ইং তারিখ তার ষষ্ঠ মৃত্যু বার্ষিকী। তিনি বিনপরি প্রতিষ্ঠাতা কোষাধ্যক্ষ, সাবেক বানিজ্য মন্ত্রী এবং এফবিসিসিআই ও ডিসিসিআই এর সাবেক সভাপতি চৌধুরী তানবীর আহমদ সিদ্দিকী সাহেবের সহধর্মিণী ছিলেন। আমরা মরহুমার বিনেদী আত্মার প্রতি সকলের দোয়া ও মাগফেরাত কামনা করছি।

-মরহুমার পরিবারবর্গ

TENDER NOTICE

- Name of Institution:** The East Bengal Regimental Centre (EBRC), Chattogram Cantonment.
- Job Description:** Expenditure related to installation of sound system at Major Saleh Multipurpose Training Shed for recruits' training of the regimental centre from Annual Training Grant of Financial Year 2025-2026.
- Tender schedule selling: 05 February 2026 (0900 hours). commence date
- Tender schedule selling: 15 February 2026 (1200 hours). last date
- Tender opening date : 15 February 2026 (1300 hours).

আইএসপিআর/সেনা/১০৫

GD-248

Commandant
EBRC
Chattogram Cantonment

বাংলাদেশ ব্যাংক

(সেন্ট্রাল ব্যাংক অব বাংলাদেশ)

প্রধান কার্যালয়
মতিবিল, ঢাকা-১০০০

বিজ্ঞপ্তি নং-৪০/২০২৬

তারিখঃ ১৪ মাঘ, ১৪৩২
২৮ জানুয়ারি, ২০২৬

ব্যাংকার্স সিলেকশন কমিটি (BSC)-এর সদস্যভুক্ত ২০২২ সাল ভিত্তিক ০২টি ব্যাংক এ সহকারী প্রকৌশলী (মেকানিক্যাল)/এসিস্ট্যান্ট ইঞ্জিনিয়ার (মেকানিক্যাল)' (Job ID-10213) এর ০৩টি শূন্য পদে নিয়োগের লক্ষ্যে লিখিত পরীক্ষার সময়সূচি, content, প্রবেশপত্র ডাউনলোড সংক্রান্ত বিজ্ঞপ্তি

ব্যাংকার্স সিলেকশন কমিটি সচিবালয়ের তত্ত্বাবধানে ০২টি ব্যাংক এ সহকারী প্রকৌশলী (মেকানিক্যাল)/ এসিস্ট্যান্ট ইঞ্জিনিয়ার (মেকানিক্যাল)' (Job ID-10213) এর ০৩টি শূন্য পদে যোগ্য বিবেচিত প্রার্থীদের এক সেশনে লিখিত পরীক্ষা আগামী ০৬/০২/২০২৬ তারিখ, শুক্রবার (সকাল ১১টা- দুপুর ১টা; ০২ ঘণ্টা ব্যাপী) অনুষ্ঠিত হবে। লিখিত পরীক্ষার প্রশ্নপত্রের Content ও নম্বর বিভাজন এবং কেন্দ্র সংক্রান্ত বিস্তারিত তথ্য বাংলাদেশ ব্যাংকের নিয়োগ সংক্রান্ত ওয়েবসাইট (<https://erecruitment.bb.org.bd>) এ আপলোড করা হয়েছে।

ডিসিপিঃ ৪৮/২০২৬-৩৬৮
তারিখঃ ০২/০২/২০২৬

স্বাক্ষরিত/-

ব্যক্তিঃ ও আর্থিক সেবা পেতে, হুমায়ুন শিকার হলে কিংবা কোনো অকিঞ্চিৎকর থাকলে ১৬২৩৬ নম্বরে কলন করুন।

মিজানুর রহমান আকন
পরিচালক (বিএসসিএস) ও
সদস্য-সচিব, বিএসসি

GD-245

Out of context videos

FROM PAGE 3

statement. The viral clip was a 10-second extract from a speech of more than three minutes, originally posted on the Facebook page of the daily Samakal.

In the full video, Khan criticises what he describes as "religion traders", saying they could issue "bizarre and strange fatwas" to gain power. He adds that people of all faiths -- Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians -- would resist such attempts through the ballot.

Fact-checking platform Dismislab said the BNP leader was criticising a political party, but selective editing and a misleading headline created confusion.

In another instance, a portion of a statement by BNP-nominated Manikganj-1 candidate

SA Jinnah Kabir was circulated with claims that he threatened to expel the Hindu community and Awami League supporters if the BNP was not voted into power.

The clip was shared on the verified Facebook page of the Bangladesh Awami League, the Basherkeilla page, and several pages operating under media outlet names. Many users shared the video and called for his arrest.

Verification shows the 28-second clip was taken out of context from a meeting with members of the Hindu community in Baniajuri union of Ghior upazila.

The full eight minute video, posted on Kabir's verified Facebook profile, shows him criticising Jamaat-e-Islami for its role

during the 1971 Liberation War, including allegations of targeting Sanatan followers.

"The video does not show threats against followers of the Sanatan religion; it is criticism of Jamaat-e-Islami that has been misleadingly presented by removing context," Dismislab said.

Election observers say such incidents point to a broader trend of religious rhetoric being selectively framed to polarise voters.

PRAYER TIMING

FEBRUARY 3

Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 5:30	12:45	4:15	5:52	7:15
JAMAAT 6:05	1:15	4:30	5:56	7:45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Project Director, Strengthening capacity of MoEFCC, DoE and BFD for natural resource management and improved climate resilience Project
Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
<https://moef.gov.bd>

Memo No: 22.00.0000.000.078.14.0004.26.42

Date: 02.02.2026

Request for Expressions of Interest (REoI) for Hiring Firm (Time Based)

General Information			
1 Ministry/Division	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)		
2 Agency	Department of Environment		
3 Name of Procuring Entity	Project Director, Strengthening capacity of MoEFCC, DoE and BFD for natural resource management and improved climate resilience Project		
4 Procuring Entity Code	NA		
5 Procuring Entity District	Dhaka		
6 Expression of Interest for selection of	Ecosystem Valuation of Sonadia ECA and Ecological Zoning and Carrying Capacity Assessment of Sonadia ECA including Biodiversity Monitoring Protocol		
7 Eol Ref No	22.00.0000.000.078.14.0004.26.42		
8 Date	02.02.2026		
Key Information			
9 Procurement Method	QCBS (Quality and Cost Based Selection)		
Funding Information			
10 Budget and Source of Funds	The Swedish International development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)		
11 Development partner (if applicable)	SIDA		
Particular Information			
12 Project Program Code	223055500		
13 Project Program Name	Strengthening capacity of MoEFCC, DoE and BFD for natural resource management and improved climate resilience Project		
14 Eol Closing Date and Time:	23 February 2026, Time: 12:30 pm		
Information for Applicants			
15 Brief description of the assignment (Details in the ToR)	The objective of this service will be: - Conduct ecosystem valuation of Sonadia ECA. - Perform ecological zoning and carrying capacity assessment. - Develop a biodiversity monitoring protocol.		
16 Qualification. Experience & Skill Required (Details in the ToR)	Required Qualifications of the Consulting Firm - Minimum 15 years of general experience of the firm. - Proven experience of 10 years in conducting Baseline Assessment, Carrying Capacity Assessment, Ecosystem Valuation, including Stakeholder Consultations. - Proven experience of 10 years in working Sonadia/Coastal ECA - Having valid and updated legal documents including VAT and TAX Certificate - Financial capacity to be supported by three years Audit Reports by independent and enlisted Audit Firms and Bank Solvency Certificates. - Registration status of the Consulting Firm.		
17 Other Details	During the term of the contract the consultant shall not be associated with any other Government agency consulting firm or private business entities. Project Director of Strengthening capacity of MoEFCC, DoE and BFD for natural resource management and improved climate resilience Project now invites eligible consulting firms of Bangladesh for submission of EOI of the aforementioned packages: Proposal should include: (a) Application (b) Organizational Profile (name, address, registrations, the primary sector of operations, consortium partners (if any), number of staff, annual expenditure, working experience, and key accomplishments, etc.) (c) If applicable, please also include VAT Registration & TIN Certificate, Joint Stock Company Registration Certificate etc.Details Terms of Reference (ToR) for the assignment is available in MoEFCC website https://moef.gov.bd .One original and two copies of the Eol must be submitted in a sealed envelope clearly marked with the title of service. Expressions of Interest (EOI) shall be submitted by 23 February,2026 up to 12:30 pm to the address below (in person or by e-mail)		
18 Phasing of Services	Location	Indicative Start Date (Month/Year)	Indicative Completion Date (Month/Year)
Single Time Based	Sonadiya Island, cox's bazar and Dhaka.	May 2026- December 2026	
Procuring Entity Details			
19 Name & Designation of official inviting Eol	Fahmida Hoque Khan Project Director		
20 Address of Official Inviting Eol	Room no. 1304, Strengthening capacity of MoEFCC, DoE and BFD for natural resource management and improved climate resilience Project, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.		
21 Contact details of official inviting Eol	Tel. No. – 02-55100771 Mobile: 01748293410 Email- fahmidahoquekhan@gmail.com wildrajib.bfd@gmail.com		
The Procuring Entity (PE) reserves the right to accept or reject any or all EOIs without assigning any reason whatsoever.			

World should be alarmed if New START treaty expires

Russia's Medvedev warns

REUTERS, Moscow

Dmitry Medvedev, deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council, said that if the New START treaty expired with no replacement then the world should be alarmed that the biggest nuclear powers had no limits for probably the first time since early 1970s.

The New START treaty, signed in 2010 by US President Barack Obama and Medvedev, who served as Russia's president from 2008 to 2012, limited the number of deployed strategic nuclear warheads to 1,550 on each side.

It is due to expire on February 5 and Russian officials have said they have had no official response from Washington on a proposal from President Vladimir Putin to stick to existing missile and warhead limits for one more year.



"I don't want to say that this immediately means a catastrophe and a nuclear war will begin, but it should still alarm everyone," Medvedev told Reuters, TASS and the WarGonzo Russian war blogger in an interview at his residence outside Moscow.

"The (doomsday) clocks are ticking and they obviously have to speed up," he said. Medvedev gives a sense of hardliners' thinking within the Russian elite, according to foreign diplomats.

In January, US President Donald Trump indicated he would allow the treaty to expire. "If it expires, it expires," Trump said in an interview with the New York Times. "We'll just do a better agreement."

Arms control treaties, Medvedev said, played a crucial role not just in limiting the number of warheads, but also as a way to verify intentions and to ensure some element of trust between major nuclear powers.



Smoke rises from the site of an Israeli airstrike on a building in the southern Lebanese village of Ain Qana yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Iran president orders start of talks with US

Trump hopeful of a deal with Tehran

AGENCIES

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian has ordered the start of nuclear talks with the United States, the news agency Fars reported yesterday.

"Iran and the United States will hold talks on the nuclear file," Fars said, without specifying a date. The report was also carried by the government newspaper Iran and the reformist daily Shargh.

Earlier in the day, Iranian foreign ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei said that details of various diplomatic processes to manage tensions with the US are being examined by Iran, adding that Tehran hoped for results in the coming days.

Amid a military buildup by the US Navy near Iran, US President Donald Trump told reporters last week that Iran was "seriously talking" with Washington, hours after Tehran's top security official Ali Larjani said on X that arrangements for negotiations were underway.

"Regional countries are the go-between for messages that have

been exchanged. Various points have been exchanged and we are currently deciding and examining the details of each diplomatic process that we hope will bring results in coming days," Baghaei said.

Iran summons EU diplomats over IRGC terror label

Top US, Israeli generals meet at Pentagon amid tensions

Iran protester Erfan Soltani released on bail

"This pertains to the process and framework of (talks)," he said, adding that Iran did not receive any "ultimatum" from Trump on negotiations.

On Sunday and yesterday, "representatives of all EU member

states that have an embassy in Tehran were summoned to the foreign ministry", after the EU's designation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist group, Baqaei said. "This is the smallest of measures" before other moves are announced, he told a foreign ministry press briefing.

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Sunday likened the recent protests to a "coup", warning that a US attack would trigger a broad conflict. Asked about the Iranian leader's warning, Trump told reporters: "Of course he is going to say that."

"Hopefully we'll make a deal. If we don't make a deal, then we'll find out whether or not he was right," he said.

The top US and Israeli generals held talks at the Pentagon on Friday, two US officials told Reuters yesterday, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The officials did not offer details about the closed door discussions between US General Dan Caine, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Eyal Zamir.

Turmoil offers reset opportunity

Says WHO chief on US withdrawal

AFP, Geneva

The head of the World Health Organization (WHO) said yesterday that the dramatic cuts of 2025 as the United States headed for the exit created the chance to build a leaner, re-focused WHO.

Washington, traditionally the UN health agency's biggest donor, has slashed foreign aid spending under President Donald Trump, who on his first day back in office in January 2025 handed the WHO his country's one-year notice of withdrawal.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told the agency's annual executive board meeting that 2025 was "undeniably one of the most difficult years in our organisation's history", with many donors tightening their belts.

Pakistan security forces hunt militants

22 more killed in different areas of Balochistan

REUTERS, Quetta

Pakistani soldiers were yesterday hunting down separatist militants who stormed schools, banks, and security installations, killing nearly 50 people, in a series of coordinated attacks across southwestern Balochistan province, the military said.

The attacks at the weekend brought Pakistan's largest province to a near standstill as the separatist Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) struck nearly a dozen targets in one of their largest ever operations, killing 17 security officials and 31 civilians.

Pakistan's military has killed 177 BLA fighters in three days of fighting, the interior ministry said yesterday.

Pakistan's government and military have said the group has received support from India, threatening to escalate hostilities between the nuclear-powered neighbours who engaged in their worst armed conflict in decades in May.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi said 22 more militants had been killed overnight in different areas of Balochistan, taking the total to 177.

"Security forces, police and intelligence agencies thwarted the nefarious intentions of terrorists by taking timely and effective action," Naqvi said in a statement.

Rafah crossing to allow 50 people in each way

Egyptian media reports after key Gaza border reopens

AFP, Rafah



Gaza's key Rafah border crossing was reopened to Palestinians yesterday, an Israeli security official said, but Egyptian state-linked media said only 50 people would be allowed to cross in each direction in the early days.

The resumption of operations comes after Israeli forces seized control of the gateway to Egypt in May 2024 during the war with Hamas.

A partial resumption of operations began on Sunday in a tightly restricted pilot phase that did not involve travel of people, following months of appeals from aid groups.

"As of this time, and following the arrival of the EUBAM teams on behalf of the European Union, the Rafah crossing has now opened to the movement of residents, for both entry and exit," the Israeli official said. Egyptian state-linked media reported that 50 people were expected to cross in each direction in the first days of the reopening.

Latest Epstein file dump rocks UK royals, politics

AFP, London

Britain's former prince Andrew, his ex-wife Sarah Ferguson and a career Labour politician were yesterday thrust back into the eye of the Jeffrey Epstein storm, as shocking, often intimate emails with the late sex offender rocked political and royal circles.

The cache of documents included multiple emails between notable UK figures and Epstein, often revealing warm relations, illicit financial dealings and private photos.

The fallout continued yesterday, with Prime Minister Keir Starmer's spokesperson saying Peter Mandelson, the UK's former

ambassador to the United States, should be stripped of his membership of the House of Lords, Britain's upper chamber of parliament.

Starmer has also ordered an inquiry into Mandelson's contacts with Epstein, after allegations that he passed a confidential government memo to the disgraced financier.

Right-winger elected Costa Rica president

AFP, San José

Right-wing political scientist Laura Fernandez won Costa Rica's presidential election on Sunday by a landslide, after promising to crack down on rising violence linked to the cocaine trade.

Fernandez's nearest rival, center-right economist Alvaro Ramos, conceded defeat as results showed the ruling party far exceeding the threshold of



40 percent needed to avoid a run-off.

With 94 percent of polling stations counted, the political heir of outgoing President Rodrigo Chaves had captured 48.3 percent of the vote compared to Ramos's 33.4 percent, according to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE).

As soon as the first results were announced, members of Fernandez's Sovereign People's party erupted in celebrations around the country, waving blue, red and white-striped Costa Rican flags.

US, India reach trade agreement

FROM PAGE 12

reciprocal tariff imposed on India during his waves of global "Liberation Day" tariffs last year from 25 percent to 18 percent.

A White House official told AFP that an additional 25 percent tariff Trump had slapped on India for its purchase of Russian oil in August would also be dropped.

Trump added that Modi "agreed to stop buying Russian Oil, and to buy much more from the United States and, potentially, Venezuela. This will help END THE WAR in Ukraine."

The United States is effectively overseeing Venezuelan oil exports since toppling the South American country's leader, Nicolas Maduro, in a military operation in January.

Trump called Modi "one of my greatest friends"

and said they spoke about "many things" including trade and ending Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Modi was one of the first leaders to visit the White House after Trump's inauguration for his second term in January 2025, but that did not stop difficult trade negotiations over the past year.

Russian oil has been the major hurdle.

As recently as December, Russian President Vladimir Putin during a visit to New Delhi that he was ready to continue "uninterrupted shipments" of fuel to India despite US pressure.

Trump also said in October that Modi had promised to stop buying Russian oil, but an agreement did not materialize at the time.

"Wonderful to speak with my dear friend President Trump today.

Delighted that Made in India products will now have a reduced tariff of 18 percent," Modi said in a post on X yesterday.

The Indian leader, however, made no mention of oil sales.

India emerged as a major buyer of Russian oil after the start of the Ukraine war, providing Moscow with a crucial export market as Europe sharply reduced purchases.

In 2024, Russia supplied nearly 36 percent of India's total crude imports, around 1.8 million barrels of discounted oil per day.

Modi added that "President Trump's leadership is vital for global peace, stability, and prosperity."

Trump has repeatedly claimed credit for ending the brief but intense armed conflict between nuclear-armed neighbours India and Pakistan in May.

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Peace on campaign trail non-negotiable

Govt, political contenders must ensure order in ‘high-risk’ areas

As the nation approaches the February 12 election, the campaign has devolved into a turf war in some constituencies. A new intelligence report from the Bangladesh Police identifies 13 constituencies as “highly risky” due to escalating violence surrounding the election. The geography of this violence is telling. It is not concentrated solely in the former strongholds of the fallen Awami League, such as Gopalganj or Faridpur (though security there remains tight). Instead, the flashpoints are in districts such as Dhaka, Cumilla, and Pabna, where heavyweights from the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami are turning on one another.

Data from the police headquarters paints a disturbing picture of conflict. Since the polling schedule was announced in December, there have been at least 57 clashes in 50 constituencies which have left 257 people injured and four dead. Nearly half of these clashes occurred between members of the BNP and Jamaat. Another eight were internal clashes within the BNP itself.

In Dhaka-8, the BNP’s standing committee member Mirza Abbas faces Jamaat-allied NCP’s Nasiruddin Patwary. In this constituency, there have been reports not of disagreements over policy, but of “eggings” and intimidation that suggest a reversion to the muscular politics that key stakeholders of the July uprising, including the interim government, pledged to eradicate. The high-risk designation of this seat shows how quickly, and easily, the fight for democracy can descend into a fight for territorial dominance. The tension is also acute in Dhaka-15, where the contest pits the national clout of the Jamaat head, Shafiqur Rahman, against the entrenched local influence of his BNP rival, Shafiqul Islam Khan Milton.

The police, under Operation Devil Hunt phase two, have arrested over 24,000 and recovered hundreds of firearms since mid-December. The sheer scale of the dragnet—averaging hundreds of arrests a day—suggests a jittery security apparatus trying to establish stability. But the violence still erupting in some constituencies of BNP and Jamaat stalwarts also bodes ill for post-election stability. The vicious competition for these “high-risk” seats reveals a political culture still addicted to zero-sum games. If the BNP and Jamaat cannot campaign without hurting each other, they will struggle to govern without doing the same.

We urge the police to fortify vulnerable polling centres and deploy mobile teams to patrol the streets. But the state alone cannot guarantee order; the onus also lies with the contenders, who must demonstrate political maturity. All parties and independent candidates must immediately rein in unruly members and supporters. The singular objective must be to ensure a peaceful vote. As the interim government enters the twilight of its term, its success will be partly measured by the confidence of voters on polling day. The political maturity of the next government will also be defined by the conduct of the very election that brings it to power.

Green funds must prioritise SMEs

Let no political influence, bureaucratic barriers undermine our green transition

At a time when the government urges industries to go green and reduce reliance on fossil fuels, small and medium-sized entrepreneurs willing to invest in renewable energy are being trapped in endless delays, paperwork, and silence from banks. The Tk 10,000 crore Green Transformation Fund (GTF) was created to support such initiatives, yet for many SMEs, the fund exists only on paper. While financing mechanisms are in place and banks are enrolled, loan disbursement remains sluggish, with large portions of the fund untouched.

Reportedly, excessive documentation requirements, rigid equity thresholds, and bureaucratic barriers, including the absence of accountability for banks, have made access to green finance very difficult for smaller firms. The story of Humayun Kabir Salim makes the situation painfully clear. Seeking to install a 1-megawatt rooftop solar system at his textile factory, he approached several banks for financing under an existing government-backed scheme. None rejected his proposal outright, but repeated demands for documents and prolonged delays left the process stalled indefinitely. Eventually, Salim was forced to abandon the effort.

There are also allegations that political pressure, relaxed risk assessments, and regulatory bias allowed powerful companies to obtain green financing, while smaller firms were left behind. For instance, many influential business groups including the S Alam Group and its subsidiaries have accessed large sums from the same fund with ease. Many of these companies later defaulted on their loans, leaving banks burdened with losses.

Climate-linked funds are failing to deliver their intended benefits and defaults are weakening the banking sector. While public funds meant to support sustainable growth are misallocated, the cost of failure is ultimately borne by depositors and the economy. Equally concerning is Bangladesh Bank’s (BB) position that it bears no financial strain because commercial banks must absorb the losses under the refinancing model. This arrangement discourages banks from supporting SMEs.

To make the GTF truly effective, urgent reforms are needed. BB must employ an oversight mechanism to ensure that green financing delivers real environmental and economic benefits. It must simplify lending procedures, enforce strict timelines for disbursement, and ensure transparency at every stage of approval. Political influence and regulatory bias must be eliminated, and banks should be held accountable for fair and timely lending to SMEs. The government should also earmark a significant portion of green funds for SMEs and innovators, while providing support such as partial equity grants or low-interest loans. Only through such measures can the government ensure that our green transition is equitable, effective, and sustainable.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

US ends trade embargo of Vietnam

On this day in 1994, US President Bill Clinton lifted a 19-year-old trade embargo on the Republic of Vietnam. The embargo had been in place since 1975, when North Vietnamese forces captured the city of Saigon in South Vietnam during the Vietnam War.

A tough fiscal test awaits the next government

MACRO MIRROR

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

FAHMIDA KHATUN



In the run-up to the national election, political parties in Bangladesh are making an array of commitments to voters, such as job creation for the youth, increased allocation for health and education, support for households, social protection, and price relief. These are attractive pledges at a time when citizens are facing prolonged economic hardship. However, in most cases, these pledges are not accompanied by detailed, fully costed fiscal plans explaining how they will be financed. What will be the timeline for implementation? How much additional cost will be required? How much revenue will be forgone if various cuts are offered? What are the implications for the budget deficit and government debt? In the absence of detailed proposals within a concrete fiscal framework, these promises remain only broad economic aspirations.

The lack of fiscal details is problematic on several fronts. The elected government will face a mounting challenge to create fiscal space in an economy already stretched to its limits. Due to weak revenue mobilisation, rising public liabilities, and growing contingent obligations, the manoeuvring space has narrowed sharply. But the demands on public funds, from development spending and social protection to debt servicing and institutional reform, are high. How the next government manages this fiscal balancing act will largely determine the country’s economic trajectory in the post-election period.

At the heart of this challenge lies an alarmingly low tax-GDP ratio. Bangladesh’s tax effort has fallen to a historic low, placing it among the lowest performers globally. In FY2025, the tax-GDP ratio was 6.8 percent, down from 7.38 percent in FY2024. During the first half (July-December) of FY2026, the National Board of Revenue recorded a shortfall of Tk 46,000 crore in revenue collection. This reflects deep structural weaknesses in the revenue system. For over a decade, revenue targets have been repeatedly missed, undermining budget credibility. This has forced the government to rely on external and domestic borrowing. Therefore, fiscal policy has increasingly become reactive rather than strategic.

Expenditure pressures are set to intensify sharply in the coming years. The government faces a growing list of financial obligations that cannot be postponed further. The Bangladesh Power Development Board needs to clear unpaid bills amounting to more than Tk 20,000 crore, largely owed to power producers. The government has also committed to injecting Tk 20,000 crore into Sammilito Islami Bank as part of its efforts to stabilise the banking sector. These fiscal burdens are likely to constrain the government’s policy choices.

Another challenge would be implementing the recommendations of the pay commission set up by the interim government. The proposal includes salary increases for government

employees by 100 to 142 percent. While there is a legitimate case for adjusting wages after years of high inflation, the fiscal implications are substantial. Implementing these recommendations without adequate preparation could crowd out development expenditures and exacerbate fiscal deficits.

External vulnerabilities compound these domestic pressures. Although the foreign exchange reserves have recovered to \$28.68 billion as of January 29, 2026 from \$20.49 billion on July 31, 2024, they remain insufficient to comfortably meet rising import bills and external debt obligations. Though remittance increase in July-November of FY2026 is high at 17.07 percent,

the growth is lower than that in July-November of FY2025. The recent trend in export income shows a worrying sign as export growth was only 0.62 percent in July–November of FY2026 compared to 9.76 percent during the corresponding period in FY2025. The country’s external debt reached \$112 billion by September 2025, reflecting years of heavy reliance on foreign borrowing to finance infrastructure and budget deficits. Servicing this debt will place increasing strain on public finances, particularly as concessional financing becomes scarcer after graduation from the Least Developed Country category in November this year.

Domestic borrowing has emerged as a double-edged sword. To address persistent revenue shortfalls, the government has increasingly relied on the banking system. While this has provided short-term relief, it has also inflated domestic debt. Reduced liquidity in the banking system raises borrowing costs for businesses. Net credit to the government sector has increased by 32.19 percent between December 2024 and December 2025.

Another aspect of fiscal management is public expenditure. Political parties



FILE VISUAL: REHNUMA PROSHOON

will also need to focus on public spending when making economic pledges. Although the allocation for the Annual Development Programme (ADP) is not necessarily at the optimal level due to resource constraints, the ADP implementation rate has declined since FY2022. In July-November of FY2026, the ADP implementation rate against the original budget allocation was 11.5 percent, the lowest in the last 10 years.

Improving the efficiency and quality of public spending is also crucial for creating fiscal space. Wasteful and low-priority spending has coexisted with the chronic underfunding of critical sectors, including health, education

Medium-term fiscal planning should underpin annual budget preparation. Usually, budgets focus on the short term, overlooking future liabilities and risks.

The incoming government’s success will depend on how effectively it manages this complex fiscal transition. Restoring fiscal space involves more than just balancing budgets. The new government should redefine the social contract between the state and the people. A fair and efficient tax system and public spending that clearly benefit people could help rebuild trust and legitimacy.

As Saarc remains dormant, South Asia must look elsewhere

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MD MOSTAFIZUR RAHMAN and NAFIS EHSAS CHOWDHURY

In this part of the world, we often maintain appearances while the foundation rots. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) faces a similar fate. The four-decade-old regional instrument has been idling since 2014, following the last summit in Kathmandu, while the rest of the world speeds ahead towards sophisticated multipolarity.

The numbers disappointingly represent an indictment of a shared, regional setback. While blocs like ASEAN have managed to weave their economies together into a 25 percent intra-regional trade powerhouse, South Asia remains a collection of neighbours who share a fence but refuse to trade through the gate. Our intra-regional trade is barely five percent. We have chosen to pay “poverty taxes” through expensive global shipping routes over building the simple, logical corridors using our own geography.

At the centre of this paralysis lies a gaping hole that no amount of diplomatic tea can fix. We must confront the paradox of power defining India’s role in this region. By sheer physical mass and strategic weight, India is undeniably the centre of gravity. Despite this perceived

power, India has failed to take its neighbours into confidence using the “Neighbourhood First Policy.”

The India-Pakistan rivalry, a relic of a 1947 divorce that never truly ended, continues to hold the aspirations of billions of people hostage. We’ve allowed a bilateral grudge to function as a regional veto. India must realise that asserting dominance is the quickest way to lose a neighbour; only trust and equitable partnership can build a prosperous region.

On the other side, China is already a neighbour to five SAARC states. Through the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, China has helped create the backbone of Pakistan’s energy and transport. In Bangladesh, China has partnered in many critical infrastructure projects, from power plants to bridges. In Sri Lanka, Nepal, and the Maldives, China’s footprint is measured in billions of dollars in infrastructure financing. To talk about “South Asian cooperation” while pretending China isn’t a central actor is a form of geopolitical delusion.

By formalising the inclusion of China into a revamped bloc—perhaps a SAC+ (South Asian Cooperation Plus) or ASIA CORE—we can create a platform that limits the monopoly of any single state. Yes, there are risks of debt dependency, but we must consider the benefits of enhanced connectivity and bargaining power that smaller countries can get through the existing Belt and Road Initiative.

The other country to consider is the United States. From maritime security in our chokepoints to climate diplomacy for our sinking islands, the US provides a necessary “geopolitical counterbalance.” By bringing in “plus

partners” such as the US, Japan, and Australia, we will be able to dilute the regional friction and gain access to the technology and markets that can lift our people out of poverty.

We should consider SACNet (South Asian Cooperation Network), a name that suggests flexible, modular cooperation, or BIPSA (Bay of Bengal–Indo-Pacific–South Asia), which anchors us in the maritime reality of our future. We need “issue-based

The failure of our regional blocs has a visceral, human cost. It is seen in the eyes of the Rohingya, who remain displaced because we lack a collective regional response. It is seen in our vulnerability to global crises—from the Ukraine war to the Gaza conflict—which hit our economies harder because we have no regional buffer, no shared prosperity to lean on.

working groups” that can bypass political deadlocks. If two capitals won’t speak, let the scientists, the environmentalists, and the academics build a SAC+ network that functions on an “opt-in projects” basis. This is “flexible regionalism”—a system where cooperation isn’t an “all-or-nothing” gamble.

The failure of our regional blocs has a visceral, human cost. It is seen in the eyes of the Rohingya, who remain

displaced because we lack a collective regional response. It is seen in our vulnerability to global crises—from the Ukraine war to the Gaza conflict—which hit our economies harder because we have no regional buffer, no shared prosperity to lean on.

Our current inter-state relations are held hostage to the political parties in power, rather than a reflection of the people’s aspirations. The common citizen of South Asia doesn’t understand international relations based on borders; they care about the cost of electricity, the survival of their farms against climate change, and the ability to travel and learn from their neighbours. We must transform these shared “vulnerabilities into collective strength.”

Bangladesh has a unique moral authority in this discussion. We were the ones who perceived and proposed this vision. We are the bridge for peace and prosperity in a region that is currently building moats. Our role is to lead with vision and inclusivity, pushing for a forum that is open to form and not limited by rigid numbers. If one forum is blocked by a rivalry, we should have another in parallel. We need a secretariat with actual autonomy and stamina to pursue the purpose, not a place where ambitious policies go to be filed and forgotten.

SAARC is dormant, but the need for cooperation is demanding our attention. We stand at a crossroads where we can either continue to be a collection of fragmented states being picked apart by global interests, or we can build a multipolar bloc that actually commands respect.

Election legitimacy and the absence of Awami League



David Bergman is a journalist who has written about Bangladesh for many years. His X handle is @TheDavidBergman.

DAVID BERGMAN

Apart from Bangladeshis' understandable preoccupation right now with the question of who will win the election—BNP or Jamaat-e-Islami—there are two further common points of contention that people are asking about the February 12 vote.

First, will there be any manipulation of votes, as has occurred to varying degrees in every election in Bangladesh, or will the result genuinely reflect how people voted? Second, a question few are willing to ask within Bangladesh itself, but which is raised more openly outside the country: can an election be considered fair and legitimate in the absence of the Awami League?

This article is primarily concerned with the second question, although a brief comment on the issue of electoral manipulation is warranted. There is little doubt that nefarious actors exist—at both local and national levels—within both major party blocs, as well as within the administration and the security forces, who, if given the opportunity, may seek to tilt the electoral process in favour of one side or the other.

While the government insists that this will be the cleanest election in the country's history, it remains uncertain whether sufficient safeguards and scrutiny are in place—within the Election Commission, among observers, or in the media—to prevent rigging. Ultimately, this is something that can only be judged on the day itself and in subsequent reporting. That said, it seems likely that any manipulation, should it occur, will be relatively limited in scope.

However, even assuming that there is no rigging, or no substantive rigging, there remains the question of whether the election can be described as “fair” or legitimate in the absence of the Awami League.

In principle, any genuinely fair election should allow the participation of all political parties, and throughout Bangladesh's history, the Awami League has consistently been either

the most popular or the second most popular party. Even now, were it permitted to contest the election, the Awami League would almost certainly win a number of seats, though it would not get close to securing a victory. Its participation would nonetheless likely have a decisive impact on the overall result, shaping which of the other parties emerged on top and potentially allowing the Awami League to hold the balance of power. In short, an election that included the Awami League would look markedly different from the one scheduled to take place in just over a week's time.

It is this line of reasoning that underpins the Awami League's claim that its exclusion from the election is wholly unjustifiable and renders the result illegitimate.

In advancing this argument, however, the Awami League ignores the context in which the decision to exclude it was taken. That context is the party's role in supporting—and in key respects, facilitating—the government's response to the July 2024 protests during which, as per detailed mapping of the killings cited by the International Truth and Justice Project, over 800 individuals were confirmed to have been killed by law enforcement authorities. This is not a peripheral issue. It is the central reason why the party now finds itself outside the electoral process. This context is not merely ignored by the Awami League but is also often minimised or omitted by journalists and others sympathetic to the party's current predicament.

The question is whether this is enough to justify the Awami League's exclusion.

One way to approach this question is through a thought experiment: to consider how such events would be viewed, and what political consequences would likely follow, if they occurred in another democratic country, however unlikely that may seem.

Imagine, then, that something similar happened in Britain.

The prime minister, Keir Starmer, orders

the police and security forces to use lethal force against protesters. Over the course of several weeks, hundreds of people are killed and thousands seriously injured. Almost all Labour ministers, MPs, and senior party figures either publicly support the policy, remain silent, or conspicuously fail to criticise it. Starmer and other senior figures actively encourage local Labour constituency parties to mobilise in support of law enforcement. In

any other liberal democratic country—would the country's political establishment allow the Labour Party to contest the next general election? It is extremely difficult to imagine that it would. The party would be widely regarded as having crossed fundamental democratic red lines and would not be allowed to contest. Only once the party had established an alternative leadership would you imagine the party being allowed to contest an election.



ILLUSTRATION: BIPLOB CHAKROBORTY

some areas, Labour activists take to the streets in support of the security forces; some carry firearms and shoot at protesters.

When the UK army refuses to shoot on protesters, Starmer and a significant portion of the Labour leadership flee the country, taking refuge in France. The United Nations dispatches a fact-finding mission to the UK, which issues a report concluding that in support of the government, “violent elements associated with” the Labour Party systematically engaged in serious human rights violations, including “hundreds of extrajudicial killings.” Yet, over the following year and a half, neither Starmer nor any senior Labour figure, whether abroad or at home, acknowledges the party or government's culpability; leaked recordings even suggest that Starmer, who remains leader of the Labour Party, is encouraging, from France, party activists inside the UK to continue using violence.

If this were to happen in the UK—or in

If such conduct would justify excluding the Labour Party from an election in the UK, it is difficult to argue that Bangladesh's authorities are now acting unreasonably in reaching the same conclusion with respect to the Awami League. There are circumstances in which the exclusion of a major political party from an election does not undermine the election's legitimacy, but instead represents a response to conduct that has placed that party, at least temporarily, outside the bounds of democratic legitimacy. The Awami League's response to the July uprising is one such circumstance.

It is true that Bangladesh has no shortage of highly partisan opponents of the Awami League who, for their own political purposes, exaggerate the extent to which the *entire* party—at national, district, and local levels—was complicit in the July killings. This overreach is reflected in the criminalising of Awami League activities and the arrest and imprisonment of hundreds, perhaps

thousands, of the party's members without supporting evidence.

These excesses are real, troubling, and must be acknowledged. But one need not accept the exaggerated claims or support the legal steps taken against the party to recognise the force of the more limited argument for why the Awami League, in its current form, should not be permitted to contest this election. Put differently, even allowing for exaggeration and abuse by its opponents, the core justification for the party's exclusion remains intact. On that basis, an election held without the Awami League cannot be dismissed as illegitimate.

That said, Awami League's exclusion is not cost-free. It distorts the electoral landscape in significant ways. A substantial portion of the electorate—long-standing Awami League supporters—are effectively disenfranchised, forced either to vote for parties they do not support or to abstain altogether. This reality cannot be wished away. Even if the party's exclusion from the election is justified, its total absence is not healthy for the country. It benefits only the Awami League's political opponents, not Bangladesh's democratic development.

For this reason, one does not need to support the party to recognise that serious efforts should be made in the coming years to enable the emergence of a renewed Awami League: a party grounded in its historic commitments to 1971, secularism, and social liberalism, but led by a new leadership that has clearly and credibly broken with those directly responsible for the July killings. But a return to normal democratic competition will require the party to undertake its own process of accountability, reckoning, and reform. And it must be encouraged, as well as pressured, to do so.

If such a process is to be possible, the next elected government will have a crucial role to play. It must move away from some of the most damaging practices of the interim period, including the banning of Awami League's party activities and the use of mass arrests and prolonged detention of its members without evidence. Only prosecutions supported by credible and sufficient evidence should proceed; all those currently detained without such evidence should be released. Those within the party who want to create a reformed Awami League cannot begin the difficult work of reckoning while a boot remains on the party's neck.

Better care for ovarian cancer is possible, and long overdue



Rafe Sadnan Adel is a board director of the World Ovarian Cancer Coalition.

RAFE SADNAN ADEL

Bangladesh has made notable progress in public health over the past decades. Maternal mortality has declined, immunisation coverage has expanded, and community-based health delivery has saved millions of lives. Yet, behind these gains lies a disease that continues to expose the structural weaknesses of our health system: ovarian cancer.

Findings from the Bangladesh cohort of Every Woman Study, a multi-country observational study across 22 low-and-middle-income countries, offer a sobering account of what Bangladeshi women endure from the first symptoms of ovarian cancer to life during and after treatment.

The findings do not point to indifference. They reveal women who recognise that something is wrong, families who exhaust every possible resource to keep loved ones alive, and clinicians doing their best within significant constraints. At the same time, the evidence exposes persistent gaps in awareness, diagnosis, financial protection, and psychosocial care - gaps that cost women time, dignity and, too often, survival.

Nearly half of the women interviewed for the Every Woman Study had never heard of ovarian cancer before their diagnosis. Even among those with some awareness, only a small fraction understood how the disease typically develops. Knowledge of genetic risk was even rarer, with most women unaware that a family history of cancer could increase their own risk. This matters because ovarian cancer rarely presents with clear warning signs. Its symptoms—persistent

bloating, abdominal or pelvic pain, difficulty eating, urinary urgency—are common, easily dismissed, and often normalised. In Bangladesh, almost all women experienced symptoms before diagnosis, but without awareness, these signs were frequently ignored until the disease had progressed.

This lack of awareness reflects deeper social realities. Almost one-third of the women had no formal education and more than half lived in households with below-average income. For many, access to health information was constrained by literacy levels, geography, and digital exclusion. Awareness efforts that rely primarily on urban, online, or technical messaging will continue to miss those most at risk. What is needed is community-based, culturally grounded communication that reaches women where they live and in language they understand.

The study also challenged the assumption that late diagnosis is driven by reluctance to seek care. Most women reported feeling concerned about their symptoms, and nearly nine in 10 consulted a healthcare professional, often within weeks. The failure occurs after the first consultation. Many women visited doctors repeatedly, sometimes up to 10 times, before receiving a diagnosis. This pattern points to missed opportunities within the health system, particularly at the primary and secondary care levels, where symptoms are not consistently recognised as potentially malignant and referrals are delayed.

This is not a matter of individual blame but of systemic preparedness. Ovarian cancer may be relatively less

common, but this does not justify repeated misdiagnosis. Evidence from the study highlights the need for continuing medical education, clearer symptom-recognition protocols, and stronger referral pathways so that a patient's concern is met with timely investigation.

Additionally, diagnostic access further compounds these delays. While abdominal ultrasound and CA125 blood tests were commonly used, access to transvaginal ultrasound, an important diagnostic tool, was strikingly low. Genetic testing after diagnosis was almost nonexistent. These services exist in Bangladesh, but availability does not equal accessibility. Women in Bangladesh reported some of the longest travel times among all countries in the study, with many travelling more than five hours to reach a hospital. For women already weakened by illness, distance becomes yet another barrier.

Once diagnosed, treatment outcomes reveal both strengths and vulnerabilities. Treatment generally begins quickly and surgical outcomes are comparable to global standards, reflecting the skill and commitment of oncology teams. However, this clinical capacity is undermined by overwhelming financial burden. More than 90 percent of women relied on family members to pay for care and most reported severe financial impact from treatment costs, diagnostic tests, travel, and accommodation. Bangladesh stood out in the study for its heavy reliance on crowdfunding and NGO support—clear indicators that families are pushed beyond their limits in the absence of adequate financial protection.

World Cancer Day (observed on February 4) is a good opportunity to remember that cancer is not a short-term crisis. Yet, health financing in Bangladesh continues to treat it as one. Without structured support, families are forced into debt, asset sales, or dependence on charity. Financial protection must be recognised as a central pillar of cancer care, not an afterthought.

Equally concerning are the findings on emotional and mental health. Fear—of death, recurrence, and treatment failure—was widespread. Most women needed emotional

Ovarian cancer may be relatively less common, but this does not justify repeated misdiagnosis. Evidence from the study highlights the need for continuing medical education, clearer symptom-recognition protocols, and stronger referral pathways so that a patient's concern is met with timely investigation.

support at diagnosis and during treatment, yet almost none were offered professional psychological care. Families provided comfort and practical help, but that alone cannot replace trained mental health services. Cancer is not only a physical illness; it is an emotional and psychological rupture. When mental health needs are ignored, quality of life suffers and recovery becomes harder.

Access to information mirrors these challenges. Nearly all women

wanted more information about their disease and treatment but many lacked internet access or did not use it for obtaining health-related information. Women expressed a

clear preference for hospitals and healthcare professionals as their primary sources of information. They want clear, trustworthy guidance in Bangla, delivered throughout their cancer journey—from diagnosis to survivorship or palliative care.

When asked what should change, almost every woman interviewed for the study believed the government could do more. Their priorities were clear: free or affordable access to treatment and diagnostic tests, and

stronger investment in early detection. These demands need to be translated into concrete policy actions, such as, national awareness initiatives, continuing medical education, expanded diagnostic services, financial protection mechanisms, integrated mental healthcare, and patient-centred information systems. None of these ideas are radical; all are achievable and long overdue.

Ovarian cancer in Bangladesh ultimately poses a moral question. The women whose experiences inform this evidence travelled long distances, endured repeated consultations, exhausted family savings, and relied on loved ones and strangers alike to survive. They did their part. The responsibility now lies with policymakers and the health system to act. Early diagnosis, equitable access, financial protection, and emotional support are not optional—they are the minimum standards of dignified, rights-based care that Bangladeshi women deserve.



বাংলাদেশ ইনস্টিটিউট অব ইন্টারন্যাশনাল এন্ড স্ট্র্যাটেজিক স্টাডিজ (বিআইআইএসএস)
১/৪৬, পুরান্ন এলিফ্যান্ট রোড, রমনা, ঢাকা-১০০০।

ইন্টারনিশিপ নিয়োগ বিজ্ঞপ্তি

১। বাংলাদেশ ইনস্টিটিউট অব ইন্টারন্যাশনাল এন্ড স্ট্র্যাটেজিক স্টাডিজ (বিআইআইএসএস)-এ ইন্টার্ন নিয়োগের জন্য বাংলাদেশী নাগরিকদের নিকট হতে আবেদনপত্র আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছেঃ

ক্রমিক	পদের নাম, সংখ্যা ও ভাতা	যোগ্যকাল	বিষয়সমূহ	আবেদনকারীর যোগ্যতা
ক।	পদের নামঃ ইন্টার্ন সংখ্যাঃ ১০ জন ভাতাঃ ইন্টার্নশিপ চলাকালীন মাসিক ১০,০০০/- (দশ হাজার) টাকা হারে 'ইন্টার্নশিপ ভাতা' প্রদান করা হবে। 'ইন্টার্নশিপ ভাতা' ব্যতীত অন্য কোনো ভাতা/সুবিধা প্রদান করা হবে না।	ইন্টার্নশিপ-এর যোগ্যকাল সর্বনিম্ন ০৩ (তিন) মাস এবং পরবর্তীতে বিবেচনা সাপেক্ষে ০৬ (ছয়) মাস পর্যন্ত হতে পারবে যা সংশ্লিষ্ট কর্তৃপক্ষ নির্ধারণ করবে।	আন্তর্জাতিক সম্পর্ক, রাষ্ট্রবিজ্ঞান, অর্থনীতি, বিসি এন্ড কমার্শিয়াল স্টাডিজ, উইনেন্স, এন্ড জেন্ডার স্টাডিজ, ইতিহাস, আন্তর্জাতিক আইন, ভূগোল, উন্নয়ন অধ্যয়ন, সামাজিক বিজ্ঞান, পরিবেশ বিজ্ঞান।	ক। প্রার্থীকে বাংলাদেশের নাগরিক হতে হবে। খ। আবেদনকারীর শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা ও অভিজ্ঞতা বিআইআইএসএস সংশ্লিষ্ট গবেষণা ও কার্যপরিধির সঙ্গে সংশ্লিষ্ট হতে হবে। গ। প্রার্থীকে কমপক্ষে স্নাতক/সমমানের ডিগ্রিপ্রার্থী হতে হবে (অবর্তীর্ণ প্রার্থীসহ) ঘ। স্নাতক/স্নাতকোত্তর/সমমানের ডিগ্রি অর্জনের ০২ (দুই) বছরের মধ্যে আবেদন করতে হবে; এবং ঙ। একজন প্রার্থী শুধু একবার বিআইআইএসএস-এ ইন্টার্নশিপ করতে পারবে।

২। আবেদনপত্রের সাথে আবশ্যিকভাবে নিম্নলিখিত কাগজপত্রসমূহ সংযুক্ত করতে হবেঃ

(ক) সর্বশেষ শিক্ষাপ্রতিষ্ঠান হতে তার মৌলিক যোগ্যতা ও অন্যান্য গুণাবলির বর্ণনা সংবলিত প্রত্যয়ন;

(খ) স্নাতক/স্নাতকোত্তর/সমমান পরীক্ষায় উত্তীর্ণের সনদ, অথবা উক্তরূপ পরীক্ষাসমূহে অবতীর্ণ হওয়ার প্রত্যয়ন (যথাযথ কর্তৃপক্ষ কর্তৃক) পত্রের কপি;

(গ) জাতীয় পরিচয়পত্র (NID)-এর কপি ও ০২ কপি পাসপোর্ট সাইজের ছবি।

(ঘ) কোনো আবেদনকারী অন্য কোনো কর্মে নিয়োজিত থাকলে নিয়োগকারী কর্তৃপক্ষের অনাপত্তি সনদ দাখিল করতে হবে।

৩। আগামী ১৫ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০২৫ তারিখের মধ্যে **মহাপরিচালক, বিআইআইএসএস** বরাবর আবেদনপত্র ও জীবনকৃত্য (CV) পৌঁছাতে হবে।

৪। প্রাথমিকভাবে বাছাইকৃত প্রার্থীদের লিখিত ও মৌখিক পরীক্ষায় অংশগ্রহণের জন্য এসএসএস/ফোন কল-এর মাধ্যমে অবহিত করা হবে।

উপ-পরিচালক (প্রশাসন)

বাংলাদেশ ইনস্টিটিউট অব ইন্টারন্যাশনাল এন্ড স্ট্র্যাটেজিক স্টাডিজ

GD-242

FULL
WINNERS LIST

SONG OF THE YEAR

Billie Eilish - Wildflower

Record of the year

Kendrick Lamar feat SZA - Luther

ALBUM OF THE YEAR

Bad Bunny - Debi Tirar Más Fotos

BEST NEW ARTIST

Olivia Dean

POP AND DANCE

BEST POP VOCAL ALBUM

Lady Gaga - Mayhem

BEST POP SOLO PERFORMANCE

Lola Young - Messy

BEST POP DUO/GROUP
PERFORMANCE

Cynthia Erivo & Ariana Grande -
Defying Gravity

BEST DANCE/ELECTRONIC
RECORDING

Tame Impala - End Of Summer

BEST DANCE/ELECTRONIC ALBUM

FKA Twigs - Eusexua

BEST DANCE/POP RECORDING

Lady Gaga - Abracadabra

BEST TRADITIONAL POP VOCAL
ALBUM

Laufey - A Matter Of Time

LATIN

BEST LATIN POP ALBUM

Natalia Lafourcade - Cancionera

BEST MÚSICA URBANA ALBUM

Bad Bunny - DeBí TirAR MaS FOToS

ROCK AND METAL

BEST ROCK PERFORMANCE

Yungblud ft Nuno Bettencourt, Frank
Bello, Adam Wakeman, II - Changes
(Live From Villa Park) Back To The
Beginning

BEST ROCK SONG

Nine Inch Nails - As Alive As You Need Me To Be

BEST ROCK ALBUM

Turnstile - Never Enough

BEST ALTERNATIVE MUSIC ALBUM

The Cure - Songs Of A Lost World

BEST ALTERNATIVE MUSIC
PERFORMANCE

The Cure - Alone

BEST METAL PERFORMANCE

Turnstile - Birds

RAP

BEST RAP PERFORMANCE

Clipse, Pusha T & Malice feat Kendrick
Lamar & Pharrell Williams - Chains &
Whips

BEST MELODIC RAP
PERFORMANCE

Kendrick Lamar with SZA - Luther

BEST RAP SONG

Kendrick Lamar feat Lefty Gunplay -
TV Off

BEST RAP ALBUM

Kendrick Lamar - GNX

COUNTRY

BEST COUNTRY SOLO
PERFORMANCE

Chris Stapleton - Bad As I Used To Be

BEST COUNTRY DUO/GROUP
PERFORMANCE

Shaboozey & Jelly Roll - Amen

BEST COUNTRY SONG

Tyler Childers - Bitin' List

BEST CONTEMPORARY COUNTRY
ALBUM

Jelly Roll - Beautifully Broken

R&B AND AFROBEATS

BEST R&B PERFORMANCE

Kehlani - Folded

BEST R&B SONG

Kehlani - Folded

BEST R&B ALBUM

Leon Thomas - Mutt

BEST AFRICAN MUSIC
PERFORMANCE

Tyla - Push 2 Start

PRODUCTION AND SONGWRITING

PRODUCER OF THE YEAR, NON-
CLASSICAL

Cirkut (Lady Gaga, Rosé, Jade)

SONGWRITER OF THE YEAR, NON-
CLASSICAL

Amy Allen (Rosé, Jennie, Sabrina
Carpenter)



Bad Bunny criticises ICE after winning
Best Música Urbana Album



Olivia Dean receives Best New Artist honour at the 68th annual Grammy Awards in
Los Angeles, California



Kendrick Lamar accepts the award for
Best Rap Album for 'GNX'

2026 GRAMMY AWARDS

Kendrick Lamar standout star with five wins

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

Kendrick Lamar was the standout star of the 2026 Grammy Awards, leaving the ceremony with five wins after entering with a leading nine nominations. His biggest accolade came with Record of the Year for *Luther*, his collaboration with SZA.

The Recording Academy presented awards across 95 categories, with 86 trophies handed out during the afternoon premiere ceremony and the final nine announced during the primetime broadcast, which featured live performances and major category highlights.

Despite Lamar's dominance, the top awards were spread among several artistes. Bad Bunny won Best Música Urbana Album for *DeBí TirAR MaS FOToS*, using his acceptance speech to make a political statement by opening with "ICE out". Olivia Dean claimed Best New Artist, a win many considered one of the evening's most anticipated outcomes.

Lamar had already earned three awards before the televised broadcast, winning Best Rap Song for *TV Off*, Best Melodic Rap Performance for *Luther* with SZA, and Best Rap Performance for *Chains & Whips*, on which he was a featured artiste. During the live show, he added Best Rap



Bruno Mars and Rosé perform

PHOTOS: REUTERS

Album, becoming the most-awarded rapper in Grammy history, surpassing Jay-Z's previous record. He capped the night with Record of the Year, bringing his total to five.

Lady Gaga also had a successful evening, winning Best Pop Vocal Performance for *Abracadabra* during the telecast, following her Best Dance Pop Recording win earlier in the day. The song earned a third Grammy through Gesaffelstein, who won Best Remixed Recording for his work.

Billie Eilish caused one of the night's

biggest surprises by taking Song of the Year for *Wildflower*, beating out major contenders including *Golden*, *Manchild*, and Bad Bunny's *DtMF*. Eilish, like several other artists, used her speech to make a political statement, openly criticising US immigration authorities.

In country music, Jelly Roll took home three Grammys, including Best Country Album for *Beautifully Broken* during the live telecast. Cirkut won Producer of the Year (Non-Classical) for his work on multiple projects, including Lady Gaga's *Mayhem*, while Amy Allen was named Songwriter of the Year.

The ceremony featured standout performances throughout the night. Rosé and Bruno Mars opened with their hit *Apt.*, immediately energising the



Sabrina Carpenter performs



Mamunur Rashid starrer 'Chithiwala' to premiere on Feb 21

Channel i will air the special television drama *Chithiwala* on February 21 to mark International Mother Language Day. Written by Shafiqur Rahman Shantanu and scripted and directed by Rashid Harun, the play centres on an unopened letter that unsettles a middle-class Dhaka household.

Anik, an aspirational urban father, sends his son to an English-medium school and equates progress with distance from Bangla and the village past. That certainty cracks when Hashem *Chacha* arrives carrying a letter meant for him. Written by a language movement activist and friend

of Anik's late father, it quietly questions what became of the ideals that shaped Bangladesh.

Veteran actor Mamunur Rashid stars as Hashem *Chacha*, with Ahsan Habib Nasim and Sushama Sarkar in key roles. The drama avoids slogans, treating language as inheritance, not nostalgia.

WHAT'S THE HAPS?



'Inferno'

Curated by Arfun Ahmed, *Inferno* brings five artists into quiet confrontation with Bangladesh's unsettled present. Straddling art and activism, the exhibition probes power, memory, and resistance—fracturing official narratives while gesturing toward alternative futures shaped by justice, dissent, and collective imagination.

DATE: SUNDAY-TUESDAY | FEBRUARY 1-10, 2026
TIME: 6:00PM ONWARDS
VENUE: STUDIO 6/6, BLOCK F,
MOHAMMADPUR

Bangladeshi short film makes Tampere main competition

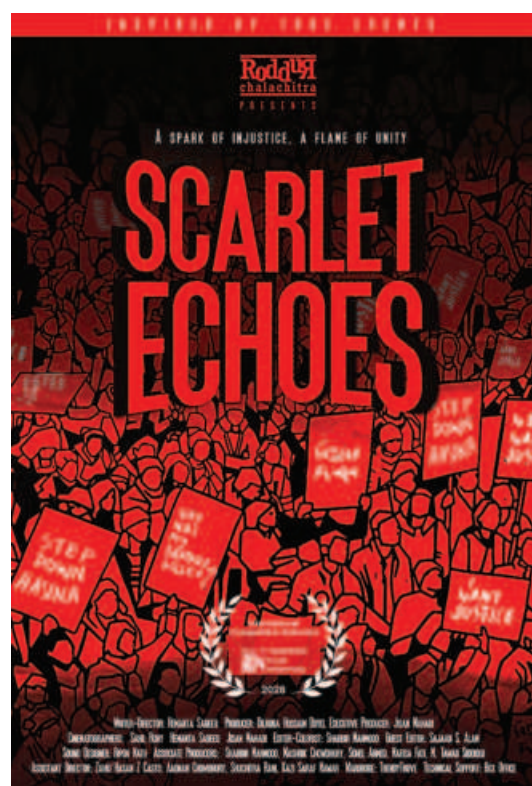
Bangladeshi short film *Scarlet Echoes* (Roktim) has been selected for the main international competition at the 56th Tampere Film Festival 2026, one of the world's most prestigious showcases for short cinema.

Out of 7,125 submissions, only 60 films were selected. Representing 44 countries, *Scarlet Echoes* is the sole entry from Bangladesh. Written and directed by Hemantaa Sadeeq, the docu-fiction is set during Bangladesh's July 2024 mass uprising.

The film blends real protest footage with a fictional narrative centred on a photographer navigating Dhaka amid unrest. Shot largely in black and white, it uses red as a symbol of resistance.

The project is dedicated to slain photojournalist Tahir Zaman Priyo. Filmed largely on smartphones, it was made without institutional funding.

The film will premiere in Tampere, Finland, from March 4 to 8.



Labour rights

FROM PAGE 3

billboards, and loudspeaker announcements as candidates vie to represent the constituency in parliament.

Some locals, however, are sceptical. Saphor Ali Matbor, a resident of Gazirchat in his sixties, said past MPs failed to deliver.

“We want representatives who will work to improve living standards, control commodity prices, and solve gas and water crises,” he said.

Jerin Tasnim Boishakhly, a JU student and a Dhaka-19 voter, said election discussions among students often focus on social media trolling and narratives.

“One major party faces criticism over extortion allegations. Another is questioned over its stance on women’s rights and the Liberation War. Many were initially hopeful about the NCP, formed by leaders of the July uprising, but its sudden alliance with Jamaat has left many confused,” she said.

In this regard, NCP candidate Dilshana Parul told The Daily Star, “This is a temporary electoral alliance, not an ideological one. While there are differences between NCP and Jamaat, there is also unity regarding the July spirit, reforms, justice, and building a new Bangladesh.”

She said she was receiving strong support from local Jamaat-e-Islami activists. Expressing optimism about her chances, she noted positive responses from female garment workers and senior citizens.

If elected, Parul pledged to establish international-standard training centres for young workers, a specialised government hospital for labourers, and state-run day-care centres for working women.

“Within the first 100 days, I will begin work on

waste management and waterlogging. I will free Savar-Ashulia from all forms of crime and extortion, de-pollute the Turag and Bangshi rivers, and develop natural parks along their banks for recreation,” she said.

BNP candidate Mohammad Salahuddin expressed confidence in his chances, calling the election “a result of a 17-year struggle to restore the people’s right to vote.”

“Voters have faith in me because I was imprisoned and faced numerous cases during the previous regime,” he said.

He pledged to prioritise the safety of female workers, ease Savar’s chronic traffic congestion, and curb river pollution through stricter enforcement of environmental laws.

However, he noted a major concern. “Since the election coincides with a long holiday, it may reduce turnout, as many garment workers might leave for their village homes.”

“I am working hard to bring voters to polling centres and explain the importance of voting,” he said.

The densely populated seat has 7,47,070 voters – 3,79,906 men, 3,67,151 women, and 13 hijra individuals.

Jamaat wants

FROM PAGE 3

“I don’t know if it is true or false, but if it is true, then he did wrong. Women will never accept it,” said the BNP leader.

Fakhrul, who is contesting the Thakurgaon-1 constituency, highlighted the importance of female education and employment. “If our girls don’t go to school and college, where will they get jobs? Men and women must live in Bangladesh with equal rights,” he said.

Women’s inclusion in state systems key to justice

FROM PAGE 3

She also emphasised early education for girls on personal, online, and physical safety at school and college levels, similar to basic safety training for children.

She added that the party aims to establish a one-stop, umbrella solution covering victim support services across sectors.

Humayra Noor of the NCP proposed structural reforms, including all-female police cells, guaranteed anonymity for victims, improved daycare facilities, and safe public transport.

She said her party plans a Tk 10,000 crore allocation for women and youth to promote entrepreneurship through simplified registration, tax

exemptions, and financial independence.

She also emphasised the need to move beyond token gestures towards genuine empowerment, sharing targeted support plans in education – especially through loans – and in science and technology.

She said her party advocates increasing women’s seats in parliament to enable those who have lagged to step forward.

Luna Noor of the Communist Party of Bangladesh called for ratifying international human rights charters and introducing a uniform family code, noting that ideological barriers must also be dismantled.

Prof Habiba Akter

Chowdhury, political secretary of Jamaat-e-Islami, stressed comprehensive education and political accountability to ensure women receive their rights and protection from violence.

On legal discrimination, she said Bangladesh already allows communities to follow their respective personal laws.

BNP’s Mahbuba Habiba noted that political parties must handle these sensitive laws cautiously, as change cannot happen overnight. She, however, emphasised that inclusive development and equal opportunities are essential.

She argued that reserved seats alone are ineffective without transparency and merit-based selection, calling instead for

minimum candidate quotas and leadership opportunities for women.

Maheen Sultan, senior fellow at BRAC Institute of Governance and Development, identified access to legal information, dedicated facilitators, and financial independence as key to survivor empowerment.

She warned that women without livelihoods are often forced back into abusive situations and called for state-funded social protection and legal aid.

Senior lawyer Fawzia Karim Firoze said political promises must be backed by research and evidence-based planning.

She said judges are often unsure about the type of orders to issue,

leaving victims without the protection they are entitled to.

She stressed the need for an effective screening mechanism in judicial recruitment and examinations to ensure integrity, and called for clear public information displays in courts and government offices.

She also highlighted that key service institutions, including victim support centres, lack a sustainable revenue framework, which results in uncertainty and disruption.

Mitali Jahan, programme manager at BRAC, argued that strong political commitment is required to transform legislation into tangible protection.

Naripokkho member

Rina Roy urged the state to act as the primary guarantor of rights and called for a Uniform Family Code to ensure equality.

She demanded that political parties move beyond verbal promises and include written commitments in their manifestos to eliminate all forms of legal discrimination against women.

Prapti Taposhi, organiser of Shekol Bhangar Podojatra; Banani Biswas, general secretary of Bangladesh Dalit and Indigenous Women Federation; Karishma Jahan, Supreme Court advocate; and Tanjim Ferdous, head of Strategic Partnership at The Daily Star, also spoke at the event, among others.

33% food samples

FROM PAGE 3

children, including chips and items never tested before, he also said.

Mostafa drew attention to several critical product-specific findings. For instance, 65% of chips tested contained acrylamide, a chemical that increases with frying or burning.

Also, some edible oils failed to meet nutritional standards, and certain mustard oils were found adulterated by mixing with soybean oil, he added.

Mostafa stressed that while Bangladesh is still developing specific national limits, the BFSa used references from international standards, such as the European limit of 0.75 ppm for acrylamide, which many local samples exceeded.

He also highlighted initiatives to train producers in using safer alternatives to reduce health risks.

He further stressed that these efforts are part of a data-driven, long-term strategy to ensure safe and nutritious food for the public, build robust food safety monitoring, and support informed policymaking and research.

As per BFSa’s data, the extent of adulteration, contamination, or low nutritional content in food samples is on the rise in recent years – 8.5% in FY 2022-23 and 15.4% in 2023-24.

Food Adviser Ali Imam Majumder highlighted emerging challenges, including overuse of fertilisers and pesticides in cultivation, and the use of hormones in livestock for higher yields.

BFSa Chairman Zakaria said for the first time, the BFSa has started compiling the test results into a database and has also initiated efforts to publish them online.

People's Republic of Bangladesh

Metropolitan Senior Special Judge Court, Dhaka.

Present: Mr. Md. Sabbir Faiz
(Metro Sessions Judge)
Metropolitan Senior Special Judge, Dhaka.

Permission Petition No.42/2026

Order No.- 01, Date: 11-01-2026

Investigation officer Mr. Mohd. Kamruzzaman, BP no.7502006224, Inspector of Police, Financial Crime, Organized Crime, CID, Bangladesh Police, Dhaka submitted a petition under Memo-CI/Financial Crime/225, Dated:-08.01.2026, Source Memo-Financial Crime/BFIU/Verification/55-2025/7786, Dated:-06.11.2025 under sections 2(¶) of the Money Laundering Prevention Act, 2012(ammendment-2015) to freeze assets of accused A.H.M Khairuzzaman Lition and 41 Bank accounts and his family members and also related to his interests under section 14(1) of the Mony Laundering Prevention Act, 2012.

The petition is taken up for hearing,

Heard learned Additional Public Prosecutor and gone through the petition as well as the records. It is found that an enquiry is undergoing against the aforesaid alleged accused A.H.M Khairuzzaman Liton and 41 Bank accounts and his family members and also related to his interests under section 14(1) of the Mony Laundering Prevention Act, 2012.

It appears from the record that the alleged offender has acquired huge amount of illegal wealth beyond his known source of income by adopting illegal means and if those assets are not attached and freezed those assets will be laundered or transfered and those can not be possible to be forfeited after trial which will frustrate this case. Hence those assets need to be freezed and attached.

Considering the facts and circumstances, I am convinced to allow the petition submitted by Investigation officer Mr. Mohd. Kamruzzaman, BP no.7502006224, Inspector of Police, Financial Crime, Organized Crime, CID, Bangladesh Police, Dhaka and accordingly the assets as mentioned in the petition are hereby freezed and attached until further order as per section 14(1) of the Money Laundering Prevention Act, 2012.

It is hereby further ordered that the copy of this order be issued to the Director, Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU), Bangladesh Bank, Head Office, Motijheel, Dhaka to the effect that while the freezing order is in effect regarding the said accounts, the account holders will not be allowed to withdraw any money. But they will be at liberty to deposit only.

Let this order be published in the Government Official Gazette along with widely circulated one daily Bengali and one daily English newspaper under section 14(3) of the Money Laundering Prevention Act, 2012 for information of the citizens at large.

Let this order along with the photy copy of the application be sent to Investigation officer Mr. Mohd. Kamruzzaman, BP no.7502006224, Inspector of Police, Financial Crime, Organized Crime, CID, Bangladesh Police, Dhaka and Publication department, Tejgaon, Dhaka; Director, Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU), Bangladesh Bank, Head Office, Motijheel, Dhaka, and other concerned authorities for necessary action.

Inform all concerned Authorities at once.

Directed & Corrected by me.

Sd/-
(Md. Sabbir Faiz)
Metro. Senior Spl Judge, Dhaka.
Memo Number: ৫৫০৮৩/১৮
Date: ০২/০১/২৬



Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Inspector General
Bangladesh Police
Police Headquarters, Dhaka



গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ
সরকার
গৃহমন্ত্রণালয়
আইনগণপরিদর্শন

Invitation for International Tender

Memo No. 44.01.0000.058.07.019.25/157

Date: 02/02/2026

Scaled tenders are hereby invited from the Manufacturers/suppliers in their official pad for supply of following items as required by Bangladesh Police in FY 2025-2026.

1	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Home Affairs.
2	Agency	Bangladesh Police
3	Procuring entity name	AIG (Arms & Ammunition), Bangladesh Police.
4	Invitation for	To Purchase 1) 7.62x51 mm Cartridge for Bangladesh Police
5	Invitation Ref. No.	44.01.0000.058.07.019.25/05(2025-2026)
6	Date	02/02/2026

KEY INFORMATION

7	Procurement method	One Stage Two Envelope (International Tender)
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FUNDING INFORMATION

8	Budget and source of funds	Revenue Budget (GOB)
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PARTICULAR INFORMATION

9	Tender publication date	03 February 2026
10	Tender last selling date	15 March 2026
11	Tender closing date and time	16 March 2026 at 12.00 hrs
12	Tender opening date and time (Technical offer only)	16 March 2026 at 12.30 hrs

Name & address of the office

13	Name & address of the office	Bangladesh Police, Police Headquarters, 6, Phoenix Road, Fulbaria, Dhaka.
	Selling tender document	AIG (Arms & Ammunition), Bangladesh Police, Police Headquarters, Dhaka.
	Receiving tender document	AIG (Arms & Ammunition), Bangladesh Police, Police Headquarters, Dhaka.
	Opening tender document	NCCOM Building (Conference Room 2 Floor), Bangladesh Police, Police Headquarters, Dhaka.
14	Place/date/time of pre-tender meeting (optional)	09 March 2026, at 12.00 hrs. NCCOM Building (Conference Room 2nd Floor), Bangladesh Police, Police Headquarters, Dhaka.

INFORMATION FOR TENDERER

15	Eligibility of tenderer	1) Up-to-date Export license 2) Written confirmation authorizing the signatory of the tender in accordance with the Memorandum of Association and Articles of Association of the Principal 3) Provide the legal and financial capacity of the tenderer with affidavit 4) Original full Brochure of products of the Principal 5) Other requirements are described in the standard tender document [PG SA).
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16	Brief description of goods				
Sl. No.	Description of Good	Quantity	Price of tender document (non-refundable)	Tender security in (USD)	Completion time (Date of Opening of L/C)
1	7.62x51 mm Cartridge	1,50,000 Pcs	12,000/-	6,130.00 USD	120 days

PROCURING ENTITY DETAILS

17	Name of the official inviting the tender	Md. Moniruzzaman, BPM-Sheba			
18	Designation of the official inviting the tender	Assistant Inspector General (Arms & Ammunition)			
19	Address of official inviting the tender	Assistant Inspector General (Arms & Ammunition), Room No. 315 (2nd Floor), 6, Phoenix Road, Police Headquarters, Dhaka.			
20	Contact details of official inviting the tender	Phone: 02-47120270, Fax: 02-55101641 E-mail: alga_a@police.gov.bd & aigarmsbd@gmail.com			
21	The tenderers shall submit their Technical and Financial offer in separate sealed envelope. Furthermore both envelopes shall be covered by an outer envelope which is sealed.				

Special instructions

22	a) No tender will be received after the deadline of submission time & date. b) The procuring entity reserves the right to reject all tenders or annul the tender process without assigning any reason. c) The Procuring entity also reserves the right to omit, increase and/or decrease the quantity of any item(s) of the tender. d) if not possible to receive/open the tender on the scheduled date for any unavoidable circumstance, the same will be received/opened on the next working date at the same time & same venue. e) Evaluation will be on item by item basis. f) Date of financial offer opening will be duly informed to the Technically Responsive Tenderers and their local agents. g) The Tenderer must comply with all requirements as per the tender data sheet provided with the tender schedule. h) The Tender Security shall be in the form of an irrevocable bank guarantee issued by an internationally reputable bank and shall require to be endorsed by its any correspondent bank located in Bangladesh. i) The Procurement will be performed according to the Public Procurement Act-2006 and Public Procurement Regulation 2025.				
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০২/০২/২৬

Md. Moniruzzaman, BPM-Sheba
BP-7806119738
Assistant Inspector General (Arms & Ammunition)
For Inspector General, Bangladesh Police
Police Headquarters, Dhaka
Phone: 02-47120270, Fax: 02-55101641
E-mail: aiga_a@police.gov.bd & aigarmsbd@gmail.com

GD-241

GD-243

Biman MD

FROM PAGE 12
under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act with Uttara West Police Station on Sunday.
Rejecting their bail petitions, a court sent the arrestees to jail in the afternoon, said Sub-Inspector Romer Mia, the investigation officer.

According to the forwarding letter, the complainant said he left his daughter in the custody of Shafiqur and Bithi in late June 2025 after they promised to bear her future expenses, including marriage.

He said he last saw the child in good health on November 2, 2025, but was later repeatedly prevented from seeing her. On January 31, 2026, Bithi called him and said the girl was sick and asked him to take her home.

The father alleged that when he went to their residence around 7:00pm that day, the accused handed over the child with severe injuries to both hands and other parts of her body, and she was unable to speak properly. The child was admitted to Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmad Medical College Hospital.

According to the document, the child told her father that she had been beaten several times on different occasions. She was also burned with a heated metal tool by the two accused and unidentified others after his visit on November 2.

Police said Rupali was sent to jail along with her two breastfeeding children as no guardian was available to take custody of them.

Shafiqur was appointed managing director and chief executive officer of Biman Bangladesh Airlines on September 4, 2024.

Defence talks

FROM PAGE 12
as a director of Biman Bangladesh Airlines.

When pressed by a TV journalist about becoming a Biman director while holding the post of NSA, he said, “Not all countries in the world have Biman.”

Recently, Khalilur, special assistant to the Chief Adviser on Posts, Telecommunications and Information Technology Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, and Senior Secretary of the Bangladesh Election Commission Akhtar Ahmed were appointed as directors of Biman Bangladesh Airlines Ltd.

The decision to include them on the airline’s board less than a month before the election raised questions among insiders in the aviation industry.

Shab-e-Barat tonight

FROM PAGE 1
Besides, religious sermons focusing on the Shab-e-Barat will be delivered at different mosques after Maghrib prayers, and special munajat will be held after Isha prayers.

On the occasion, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday issued a message greeting all Muslims in the country and around the world.

On this night, a large number of devotees visit the nearest graveyards and offer special doa and munajat seeking eternal peace of the departed souls of their near ones.

People also distribute money, food, and sweets among the poor and destitute.

Only 11 cases filed

FROM PAGE 12
the remaining 10 cases,” said Makam Coordinator Mohammad Abu Saeed.
About cases not being filed in many other incidents, he said, “In the majority of the incidents, shrine residents were beaten and evicted. They are currently not in a situation to return and file cases.”

The report found that most of the attacks were carried out by mobs rallying under the banner of “Tawhidi Janata”, with alleged involvement of political activists.

Makam made specific allegations against Islami Andolan Bangladesh leaders and activists in 13 incidents, while Jamaat-e-Islami activists, it said, were linked to four attacks, and BNP activists to another four.

Dhaka division recorded the highest casualties, with more than 180 injured and two killed. District-wise, Cumilla saw the most attacks (17), followed by Narsingdi (10) and Dhaka (9).

Ahmed Ibrahim, adviser to the Bangladesh Legal Aid and Service Trust, criticised law enforcers for failing to act despite video evidence circulating on social media. He noted that at least 44 of the targeted shrines remain abandoned, with annual Urs ceremonies halted.

The study identified religious intolerance as the primary driver, accounting for 61 percent of the attacks.

In at least six cases, attackers used bulldozers and heavy machinery to demolish shrine structures, while loudspeakers were used to mobilise crowds in 10 cases.

The report also criticised the interim government for failing to take effective steps or announce compensation for the damaged shrines, underscoring what it described as a climate of impunity.

Yunus govt’s record uneven

FROM PAGE 1
toward far-right Islamist groups.

Terming the July charter the administration’s “signature achievement”, the report observes that consensus came with “caveats”. It mentions the fact that the BNP issued “notes of dissent” on nine sections, objecting in particular to proportional representation in a new upper house.

“To overcome divisions, the interim government ordered a referendum to be held alongside the election, ensuring voters themselves would decide on key reforms. Even if the referendum fails, parties will face pressure to implement the proposals they endorsed, meaning some constitutional change is likely regardless of the outcome.”

Meanwhile, Yunus and his cabinet have maintained a fragile consensus among political parties and the army, keeping the transition on track, the report says.

The think tank believes the interim government’s final and most critical task is to deliver credible, peaceful elections on February 12, paving the way for an elected government to take office with a genuine popular mandate for the first time since 2008.

It notes the fact that national polls in 2014 and 2024 were boycotted by the opposition, while the 2018 election was marred by allegations of rigging.

“The electoral playing field has, however, shifted dramatically with the absence of the Awami League, whose activities were banned in May

2025.”

The report mentions Hasina’s conviction of crimes against humanity and the death sentence awarded to her in absentia by the ICT in November last year. “Millions of her supporters have effectively been disenfranchised, with thousands detained.”

The contest now centres on two blocs: the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami. The BNP, historically the Awami League’s main rival, retains a wide activist network but has struggled with corruption allegations and internal factionalism, says Crisis Group.

“Its prospects received a boost in late December when Tarique Rahman returned from 17 years of exile in the UK. His homecoming drew large crowds and temporarily silenced critics. Days later, the death of his mother, former prime minister Khaleda Zia, brought Dhaka to a standstill.”

Crisis Group, however, expresses uncertainty over whether Tarique can unify the BNP and appeal to disillusioned younger voters, mentioning in its report the lingering corruption accusations against him from the party’s last stint in power.

Jamaat-e-Islami, according to the report, has emerged as a formidable force in the meantime. “Long persecuted under Hasina, it capitalised on the 2024 mass uprising, with its student wing playing a prominent role. Party chief Shafiqur Rahman has become

one of the country’s most effective political performers, while Jamaat’s disciplined organisation and strong social media presence have resonated with younger voters.

“Jamaat appears to be gaining popularity among younger people, many of whom are less concerned about its controversial role during the Liberation War in 1971, when it sided with the occupying Pakistani army and its members participated in mass atrocities against civilians.”

Crisis Group believes Jamaat’s alliance with the National Citizen Party (NCP), formed by student leaders of the uprising, has further strengthened its position, though the report notes the internal dissent within the NCP as a result of that partnership, which led to the resignation of some key leaders.

Highlighting recent surveys that suggest the BNP holds a narrow lead, the report says that Jamaat is expected to surpass its previous best performance in 1991, when it won 18 seats with 12 percent of the vote.

Whether the elections proceed smoothly is far from guaranteed, Crisis Group says, adding political violence has historically spiked around competitive polls, and human rights groups have documented a rise in political violence since August 2024. Clashes between BNP and Jamaat supporters have already occurred, while Awami League strongholds remain volatile.

The killing of Sharif Osman Bin Hadi, a student leader turned

punishment in the new draft.

WHAT’S IN THE DRAFT

The draft Education Act, 2026, would empower the government to suspend or cancel approval, operation, and salary support for institutions found to be involved in irregularities, corruption, or activities that run contrary to the law or government directives.

No private educational institution could be established or operated without prior government approval and mandatory registration.

The government would also have the authority to merge, relocate or transfer institutions considered unnecessary due to population, location, or other factors.

Special educational institutions run by non-government organisations would be brought under the formal education system through separate rules and recognised certification.

Institutions following foreign curricula would also fall under the scope of the proposed law.

“English Version” institutions are defined as those teaching authorised English translations of National Curriculum and Textbook Board textbooks, while foreign curriculum institutions are those that follow international syllabi.

The government would be able to make certain subjects mandatory for foreign curriculum institutions through separate rules, with non-compliance risking cancellation of

independent MP aspirant, in December last year had heightened tensions. His murder sparked violent protests, attacks on consulates and media outlets. At least 16 politicians have been killed since the election schedule was announced in early December, most of whom were from the BNP, it adds.

Crisis Group sees a daunting agenda awaiting the incoming administration.

“Institutions remain weak, the economy is heavily reliant on garment exports and remittances, and climate change poses existential threats. Foreign policy will be equally complex, with relations with India strained, US-China rivalry intensifying, and the Rohingya refugee crisis unresolved.”

Perhaps the greatest challenge lies in meeting the aspirations of Bangladesh’s youthful population, the report says, adding that roughly half are under 30, many struggling to find jobs in line with their education.

Pointing to the challenge that is political reconciliation, Crisis Group states that Awami League, despite the ban, remains a major force in Bangladesh’s history and society.

“A consensus among parties and institutions on the conditions for its re-entry could reduce tensions, though this would require genuine remorse from its leadership for the violence of 2024 – something Hasina has yet to show.” Foreign governments, particularly India, may play a role in brokering dialogue, it adds.

registration.

At the school level, the draft assigns the government responsibility for ensuring access to education for disadvantaged children, ethnic minority communities and children with special needs.

Mother-tongue-based instruction would be allowed at pre-primary and primary levels for children from ethnic minority communities.

The national curriculum would be mandatory at pre-primary, primary and secondary levels across general, madrasa, technical and vocational streams, with separate curricula permitted for children with special needs.

The school curriculum would include instruction on independence, the Liberation War and the mass uprising, alongside science, civic rights, Bangalee culture and the cultures of ethnic minority groups. Activities contradicting these principles or hurting religious sentiments would be prohibited.

The proposed law seeks to regulate admission fees, tuition fees and other charges in Bangla-medium, English version and foreign curriculum institutions through government-approved policies.

Corporal punishment and mental harassment of students would be explicitly banned, with the institutions required to prevent bullying, ragging and cyberbullying.

member Nurul Islam, incumbent director Kamrul Islam, former director Sheikh Shahinul Islam and former assistant director Faria Sultana were jailed for five years in one of the two cases.

The court also fined them Tk 1 lakh each; in default, they will have to serve six more months in jail.

Only Rajuk’s former member Mohammad Khurshid Alam was present at the packed courtroom during the verdicts. He was sentenced to two years in jail in two cases and fined Tk 2 lakhs; defaulting, he will have to serve one year’s imprisonment.

His lawyer, Mohammad Shaheenoor Islam, said that they would challenge the judgements at the higher court.

China executes 4 more accused Myanmar scam centre leaders

AFP, Beijing

China has executed four leading members of Myanmar-based scam syndicates, a Chinese court said yesterday, the second such announcement in less than a week as Beijing ramps up a crackdown on cross-border telecom fraud.

Fraud compounds where scammers lure internet users into fake romantic relationships and cryptocurrency investments have flourished across Southeast Asia, including in Cambodia and the lawless borderlands of Myanmar.

Govt releases draft edn law at its fag end

FROM PAGE 12
Education formed by the interim government.

Speaking at a programme organised by the Campaign for Popular Education, a network of NGOs and educator groups, he said yesterday that the draft largely compiled existing rules and regulations into a single law, suggesting a hurried attempt to preserve existing system.

“We are not satisfied with such a status quo. We want reforms. And through this law, are we trying to obstruct the intended reforms?” said Dr Manzoor, who is now leading the advisory committee to improve the quality of secondary education.

The proposed law, he warned, could end up entrenching the existing education system rather than delivering meaningful reform.

Dr Manzoor, also professor emeritus at Brac University, added that the draft made no mention of rights-based education or decentralisation, nor did it address key issues such as resource mobilisation, whether per-student allocations would be adequate, or how equity in education would be ensured.

Instead, he said, it repeatedly referred to compliance with unspecified “rules”. “It simply legitimises existing practices.”

He added that this may be a bureaucratic strategy to maintain the status quo. “They may want to

complete this process within the tenure of the current government so that the discussion does not have to start anew under a future government. The question is whether this is what is really happening.”

‘SHADOW EDUCATION’
The deposed Awami League government, after coming to power in 2009, framed an education policy and took the initiative to prepare an education law for proper implementation of the policy.

The education ministry had then asked a subcommittee of the education policy implementation committee to draft a law on January 26, 2011. However, it took a long time as it underwent repeated revisions. The education ministry sent a draft of the Education Act to the Cabinet Division in December 2016.

But it took the draft act back following huge criticism as the ministry gave legitimacy to coaching and private tuition in the name of “shadow education”.

The then education minister, Dipu Moni, in June 2022, told the parliament that the draft bill would be finalised at the end of that month. But it did not see the light of day.

The earlier draft made printing, publishing, and marketing of notebooks and guidebooks punishable by a maximum imprisonment of three years, a maximum fine of Tk 5 lakh, or both.

However, there is no mention of

Hasina given 10 yrs, Tulip 4

FROM PAGE 12
alleged irregularities in the allocation of plots under the Purbachal New Town project, where Hasina was named as a common accused.

The anti-graft body alleged that Hasina, in collusion with senior Rajuk officials, unlawfully secured six plots, each measuring 10 kathas, in the diplomatic zone (Sector 27) of the Purbachal New Town project for herself, Putul, Joy, Rehana, Azmina and Bobby, despite their ineligibility under existing regulations.

On July 31 last year, charges were framed against 29 people, including Hasina, Rehana, Joy, Putul, Bobby, Tulip and Azmina, in their respective cases.

Yesterday’s rulings follow a series of legal blows for Hasina.

‘Don’t let anyone exploit delays

FROM PAGE 1
protests, the party claimed the leader’s account had been hacked, but experts had rejected the claim. “They are lying,” he said.

“If a party wants to confine half of the population before an election and speaks about women in such a disrespectful way, then you must ask yourselves: if they somehow come to power, what will their behaviour be like after the election?” he said.

Speaking at a rally at Prabhati School ground in Khalishpur, he addressed women voters directly. “The time has come for the mothers and sisters of Bangladesh to decide how they will respond to those who have insulted them,” he said.

Calling for public vigilance,

Tarique said those who lie to the nation, change their positions repeatedly, and insult half of the population must be resisted.

“They only care about their own interests and use religion wherever it suits them,” he said, adding that the country cannot develop if half of its population is left behind.

He said the party had shown its true colours during the 1971 Liberation War. “This party’s predecessors violated the dignity of lakhs of our mothers and sisters. Those who have no respect for human dignity cannot be trusted with the safety of the country,” he said.

He also claimed that conspirators were hatching plots from different places and urged voters to choose

Cops fear arms smuggling

FROM PAGE 12
nine in Nilphamari, 39 in Lalmonirhat, 28 in Dinajpur, 44 in Panchagarh, 20 in Mymensingh, 15 in Jamalpur and seven in Sherpur.

“We do not think these linemen will be able to disrupt the election atmosphere,” said Syed Rafiqul Islam, superintendent of police in Jashore, adding that regular joint drives are being conducted.

There is always a trend of illegal firearms entering the country ahead of elections, said Ashraful Huda, a former Inspector General of Police.

“This election is going to be held in a special moment, so there are ‘enough reasons’ to believe some groups may try to disrupt the election, damage the process, or raise questions about it by bringing weapons into the country through the border.”

He stressed that Border Guard Bangladesh and police must remain highly alert and that people living in border areas should also stay vigilant.

Smuggling through the border is unremitting and cannot be denied, said Khondokar Rafiqul Islam, additional inspector general (crime and operations) of Police Headquarters.

Police cannot claim with certainty that arms do not enter the country and that it “may happen”.

However, he does not see any elevated threat given the way law enforcement agencies are deployed across the field.

One such drive by Border Guard Bangladesh, Battalion 47 nabbed Azizul Islam, 35, from Daulatpur in Kushthia on Sunday with a foreign and a local firearm. At least three linemen are active at that border.

Besides the firearms being smuggled in through the border, the previously stockpiled firearms, kept for extortion, turf control and contract killings, could resurface during the election as a large portion remains unrecovered, according to investigators and intelligence officials.

Port workers call 24hr strike

FROM PAGE 12
One such vessel is SOL Prime, which berthed at CCT jetty-1 on Sunday afternoon. It is yet to complete unloading its total imports of 837 TEUs.

The vessel was supposed to leave Monday morning after receiving around 600 TEUs of export containers, but failing to receive enough volume, the ship now has to stay longer, said Muntasir Rubayat, head of operations of the ship’s local agent GBX Logistics.

The ship’s feeder operator will have to count additional charter hire worth \$15,000 and pay \$4,000 to the port authority for an additional day of stay at the jetty, he said.

Moreover, due to the delay, the export containers will surely miss connecting with the mother vessel at Singapore and ultimately be delayed in reaching destinations in Europe and the US.

Due to delays in cargo delivery, importers, mainly garment exporters, are facing delays in getting their imported raw materials from the port.

If the raw materials cannot reach factories on time, production will be severely hampered, said Rakibul Alam Chowdhury, a director of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

Due to several holidays for the national election as well as the slow work period during Ramadan, factories might suffer more production disruptions this month, he said.

Chowdhury stressed the need for an immediate solution to the crisis for the sake of the economy.

Over in Dhaka, negotiations between the government and DP World regarding the deal for handling NCT operations are ongoing at the Public-Private Partnership Authority office.

The government will not take any decision that goes against the national interest in managing the country’s ports, said Shipping Adviser M Sakhawati Hossain yesterday.

“The ministry supports whatever is good and beneficial for the port and the country,” he told journalists during a discussion at the shipping ministry, reports UNB.

Referring to the ongoing situation at Chittagong Port, Sakhawati said those involved in creating the ‘undesirable’ situation are being investigated.

HC questions BCB over women crickets' safety

SPORTS REPORTER

The High Court yesterday issued a rule questioning the inaction and failure of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and other authorities in ensuring a safe, harassment-free and gender-sensitive environment for women cricketers.

In the rule, the court asked the government and BCB officials to explain why the cricket board's failure should not be declared "unlawful and against public interest". While the rule remains pending, the court directed BCB to implement an anti-sexual harassment policy in line with the guidelines laid down in a previous judgment and to submit a report on the implementation of the interim order.

The HC bench of Justice Ahmed Soheli and Justice Fatema Anwar passed the order following a writ petition filed by former national shooter Sabrina Sultana, seeking necessary directives.

BCB had formed a three-member independent inquiry committee--later expanded to five members--to investigate sexual harassment claims by former national women's team captain Jahanara Alam against coach Manjurul Islam. The report was handed over to BCB president Aminul Islam yesterday.



Bangladesh U-19 Women's team celebrate a convincing 2-0 win over India in the SAFF U-19 Women's Championship in Pokhara yesterday. The defending champions struck twice in the first half -- through captain Arpita Biswas and Alpi Akter -- to remain perfect with two wins from two matches in the group stage. The victory keeps Bangladesh top of the table and firmly on course for a place in the final as the young ones bid to retain regional honours.

PHOTO: BFF

SHORT CORNER

Robiul, Sharmin off to India

Shooter Robiul Islam and coach Sharmin Akter left Dhaka on Monday afternoon for India to take part in the Asian Shooting Championships, scheduled to be held in New Delhi from February 2 to 14, after uncertainty over their participation was finally resolved.

From Mustafizur's IPL removal to global cricket turmoil: What next?

The spark that lit this wildfire wasn't a war, a border clash, or even a match. It was the quiet exclusion of Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman from an Indian Premier League franchise in early January -- a decision that, at the time, felt like just another cricketing call. But that single move slowly snowballed into something far bigger, now culminating in Pakistan's decision to boycott their T20 World Cup match against India on February 15 in Sri Lanka. What began as a controversial removal has transformed into a full-blown geopolitical and sporting standoff.

'Insulted' Benzema seeks to switch Saudi teams

Striker Karim Benzema, who is at odds with his club Al-Ittihad, has entered into negotiations to join rivals Al-Hilal, the Saudi Arabian league leaders, a source told AFP on Monday. "Negotiations are underway between the parties: Al-Hilal would like to sign Benzema for the remaining six months of his contract with Al-Ittihad, but the player's agent is demanding a one-and-a-half-year contract," the source told AFP.

*** Read full stories on The Daily Star website

BFL MID-TERM WINDOW Surge in foreign signings

SPORTS REPORTER

Foreign footballers dominated Bangladesh Football League's mid-term transfer window, which concluded on Saturday.

Across the window, seven clubs completed 49 new signings, excluding FIFA-suspended Bashundhara Kings, Abahani and Mohammedan. Of those additions, 20 were foreign players -- seven Pakistanis, five Guineans, three each from Bhutan and Ghana, and one each from Brazil and Russia. The remaining 29 signings were local players, with around 10 switching clubs from within the league.

Brothers Union, currently seventh in the 10-team standings, brought in 16 players in total, featuring five from Pakistan and four from Guinea, after releasing seven footballers -- three from Nepal, one Brazilian, one Ivorian and two locals.

Title challengers Fortis FC made only two additions, signing goalkeeper Nayeem Mia and Bhutanese winger Dawa Tshering. Rahmatganj MFS, meanwhile, recruited Ghanaian striker Ernest Boateng to bolster their bid to close the gap on table-toppers and five-time champions Kings, who also released four players.

At the lower end of the table, PWD and Arambagh also moved to reinforce their squads in the fight for survival. PWD signed two Pakistani players along with one each from Bhutan, Ghana, Brazil and Russia, in addition to six local recruits.

Arambagh added Ghanaian forward Kwame Kizito and seven local players, while mid-table Bangladesh Police signed five footballers, including Bhutan's Sherub Dorji. Fakirerpool Young Men's Club were also active, bringing in six players, among them a Guinean forward.



Ranjit Das no more

STAR SPORTS DESK

Legendary footballer Ranjit Das, one of Bangladesh's greatest goalkeepers, passed away early this morning at a Sylhet city hospital following a cardiac arrest. He was 94.

Das, a towering figure in pre-independence football, represented the East Pakistan football team from 1955 to 1961. He leaves behind his wife, four daughters, one son, and countless admirers who mourn his loss.

His funeral was held at Sylhet's Talibandar Crematorium in the evening.

A goalkeeper par excellence, Das played for Ispahani Club, Azad Sporting Club, and Mohammedan before Bangladesh's liberation. He also served as a coach for the East Pakistan youth team and Azad Sporting Club.

His contributions to the sport earned him the National Sports Award, cementing his place as a legend in Bangladeshi football history.

Will Taskin retain A-plus status?

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is in the process of finalising its central contracts, but doubts remain over whether any player will be retained in the A-plus category this time -- particularly Taskin Ahmed, who has not played Test cricket for some time despite previously being an all-format fast bowler.

Taskin last featured in a Test in Kingston, West Indies, in November 2024. He missed three Test series thereafter: the home series against Zimbabwe in April last year, the away Tests against Sri Lanka in June, and the series against Ireland in November.

In fact, Taskin's red-ball future remains uncertain, as he did not play any Tests last year, with any potential return dependent on further medical assessments due to his injury history.

"We have spoken to Taskin and asked him to rethink his longer-format commitments. His doctors in England had a similar assessment," BCB chief physician Debashish Chowdhury told The Daily Star.

"He has not been given a specific timeframe for a return to the longer version. When he feels ready, he will play, but for now, he has been advised not to."

"If he can play the shorter versions seamlessly, then we will think about his Test commitments. We have a five-



day tournament and then the BCL [Bangladesh Cricket League], so we will see. He wants to play all formats, but we have to see whether his body allows it. He has had Achilles issues, as well as knee and shoulder problems, so it's not just workload -- we have to focus on injuries."

Bangladesh named 22 players in central contract list last year. Board sources claim that six players are set to be added this time, taking the total to 27. Mahmudullah

Riyad will not be part of the list, having already retired from all formats.

Whether Shakib Al Hasan features in the contracts will depend on discussions between the player and senior BCB officials. One official claimed that the selectors did not propose Shakib's name to the board, although the current delay is believed to be linked to ongoing talks regarding his status.

There have been suggestions that the A-plus category may be scrapped altogether, but BCB officials have clarified that the category will remain.

"We are working on it and will announce it shortly. We have categories A-plus, A, B, C, D and a non-contract category. If no one is placed in A-plus, it doesn't mean the category is abolished," an official close to the development said.

"If the selectors and the board feel there are no A-plus category players, they simply won't name anyone there."

Pakistan Cricket Board last year did not retain any player in the A-plus category. Meanwhile, reports suggest Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) is considering doing away with the category altogether after Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma stepped away from Tests and T20Is.

With Taskin the only three-format player last year, it remains to be seen whether BCB adopts a similar stance to PCB and BCCI.



PHOTO: ICC

A swashbuckling 84-run knock by Darwish Rasooli powered Afghanistan to a 61-run victory over Scotland, who replaced Bangladesh in the ICC T20 World Cup 2026, in the opening warm-up fixture in Bengaluru on Monday. Rasooli's 46-ball innings featured seven fours and five sixes, helping Afghanistan post 184-6. The 2024 semifinalists then bowled Scotland out for 123 in 19.3 overs.

Arsenal move closer to title as rivals stumble

AGENCIES

Arsenal moved a step closer to ending a 22-year wait for the Premier League title after a flawless weekend saw the Gunners extend their lead to six points.

A commanding 4-0 win at Leeds quelled doubts over Mikel Arteta's side succumbing to the pressure of being favourites, with Martin Zubimendi's header and a Karl Darlow own goal giving Arsenal a 2-0 half-time advantage.

Viktor Gyokeres and Gabriel Jesus added late goals, silencing criticism over the team's goal-scoring reliance on set-pieces. "We really wanted to show how much we wanted it, and I think we've certainly done that," Arteta said.

Manchester City and Aston Villa faltered as Arsenal surged ahead.

City, appearing unsettled despite a significant squad overhaul, surrendered a 2-0 half-time lead to draw 2-2 at Tottenham, with Dominic Solanke striking twice.

Villa, seven points adrift, lost 1-0 at home to 10-man Brentford, highlighting the gap between the top two and the chasing pack.

The battle for Champions League places remained fierce. Manchester United staged a dramatic comeback at



Old Trafford, overturning a 2-0 deficit to beat Fulham 3-2 thanks to Benjamin Sesko's late winner, lifting them above Chelsea and Liverpool into fourth.

Michael Carrick described the rollercoaster victory as capturing the emotion that makes fans "love it so much." Chelsea and Liverpool, meanwhile, both secured vital wins to stay in contention, keeping the top-five race tense.

Newcastle suffered heartbreak at Anfield, losing 3-1 to Liverpool despite Anthony Gordon's early strike. Hugo Ekitike's quickfire double and Florian Wirtz's goal showcased Liverpool's attacking firepower, with Ekitike now on 15 goals this season.

Wirtz, after a slow start at the club, has



scored six times in 10 games since his £100 million move from Bayern Leverkusen, proving Liverpool's summer recruitment is beginning to pay dividends.

Arsenal, in contrast, looked steady and composed, seemingly determined not to repeat the late-season collapses of recent years.

With rivals dropping points and their own form peaking at the right moment, the Gunners appear poised to secure the title that has eluded them for over two decades.

The league's final stretch promises drama, but after a weekend of emphatic performances and slipping competitors, the question is no longer if Arsenal can win it, but when.



Biman MD, wife in jail over abuse of child worker

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday arrested Biman Bangladesh Airlines Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Md Shafiqur Rahman and his wife in a case filed over the abuse of an 11-year-old domestic worker.



A team from Uttara West Police Station arrested them along with two others around 3:30am from their residence in Uttara Sector 9, said Kazi Rafiqul Islam, officer-in-charge of the police station.

Apart from Shafiqur, 55, and his wife Bithi, 40, the other arrestees are Rupali Khatun, 35, and Sofia Begum, 55, both domestic workers at the household.

The arrests followed a case filed by the victim's father, a hotel employee,

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As part of heightened security to prevent sabotage ahead of the upcoming election, security personnel were checking passengers' belongings using a scanning machine at the entrance of Kamalapur Railway Station in the capital yesterday. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

US, India reach trade agreement

Announces Trump, claims Modi will stop buying Russian oil

AGENCIES

US President Donald Trump announced a trade deal with India yesterday, saying that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had promised to stop buying Russian oil over the war in Ukraine.

Trump said he was cutting tariffs on Indian goods to 18 percent. He had previously levied 25 percent reciprocal tariffs, plus an additional 25 percent for New Delhi's purchases of Moscow's oil.

Modi yesterday said he had a "wonderful" phone call with Trump and thanked him for reducing levies on Indian products – but made no reference to Trump's assertion about halting Russian oil purchases.

India's refusal to stop buying oil from Russia – which Washington says funds Russia's invasion of Ukraine – has been a bone of contention for months as Trump seeks an elusive end to the war.

"Out of friendship and respect for Prime Minister Modi and, as per his request, effective immediately, we agreed to a Trade Deal between the United States and India," Trump said in a post on Truth Social.

Trump said that the United States would lower the

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- ➔ US cuts tariffs on Indian goods to 18%
- ➔ Also removes 25% punitive tariff on India
- ➔ India will buy oil from US, Venezuela

Govt releases draft edn law at its fag end

Seeks public opinion by Saturday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With just nine days to go before the national election, the interim government has published the draft Education Act, 2026, which seeks to phase out coaching centres, private tutoring, and the publication of guidebooks within three to five years of the law's enactment.

The draft states that the government will frame rules to regulate coaching centres, private tutoring, and the publication of supplementary books such as guidebooks and will continue to discourage such practices as part of efforts to phase them out within the aforementioned timeframe.

The education ministry uploaded the draft to its website on Sunday night and invited public opinion until 5:00pm on February 7.

The sudden move has raised questions about both the intent and the process behind the draft, particularly over the short timeframe allowed for public feedback.

"What kind of initiative is this? There is a serious question about the sincerity and willingness behind it," said noted educationist Dr Manzoor Ahmed, who headed the Consultation Committee on Primary and Non-Formal

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"We want reforms. And through this law, are we trying to obstruct the intended reforms?"

Dr Manzoor Ahmed, noted educationist

Defence talks with foreign govts 'ongoing process'

Says Khalilur

UNB, Dhaka

National Security Adviser Khalilur Rahman yesterday described negotiations with multiple countries in the areas of defence and others towards the end of the government's tenure as an "ongoing process".

Speaking to journalists yesterday about what would happen to the interim government's commitments if the next government does not carry them forward, Khalilur, who also serves as the high representative on the Rohingya issue, said the question is "hypothetical".

Earlier, he held a meeting with Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain at the foreign ministry. Details of their discussions were not immediately available.

Since assuming office, the interim government has undertaken a series of initiatives with the US, Japan, China, South Korea, Turkey and Pakistan across various fronts.

Khalilur also deflected questions regarding his recent appointment

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Port workers call 24hr strike, Ramadan supplies threatened

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Ctg

The stalemate in import and export activities through the Chattogram port is set to deepen further as workers called for a 24-hour strike starting at 8:00am today to protest the government's decision to lease out the New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT) to UAE-based operator DP World.

This comes after the workers observed an eight-hour work abstention in the last three days, which halted all types of operations.

Humayun Kabir, coordinator of Chattogram Bandar Rokkha Sangram Parishad, said they vowed to wage a tougher movement if the government does not cancel its plan to lease out the NCT.

Meanwhile, the Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) until Sunday issued orders transferring 16 port employees, including two key coordinators of the movement, to Pangaon ICT and Kamalapur ICD. None of them complied with the order.

The CPA yesterday issued another order directing the transfer of 15 of these employees to Mongla and Payra ports.

The port yards and ICDs have already started facing a pile-up of containers, while export shipments have begun missing schedules, forcing

shipping lines to incur additional fees.

Such disruption may affect commodity prices ahead of the holy month of Ramadan, said port users.

The port usually delivers on average 4,000 TEUs of import containers per day, while daily delivery dropped to 1,700 TEUs in the last two days until yesterday morning, according to CPA data.



As a result, more than 5,000 TEUs of import containers have piled up at the port.

Congestion at the inland container depots has already reached an acute level and it might take one to two weeks to clear the piled-up containers, said Md Ruhul Amin Sikder, secretary general of Bangladesh Inland Container Depots Association.

Vessels have already started facing prolonged stays at the jetties due to disruptions in loading and unloading operations.

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PURBACHAL PLOT SCAM

Hasina given 10 years, Tulip 4

Bobby, Azmina get 7 years

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A special court yesterday sentenced deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina to 10 years' imprisonment and her niece, British MP Tulip Siddiq, to four years in two cases involving the Purbachal plot scam in Dhaka.

Judge Md Rabiul Alam of the Special Judge's Court-4 of Dhaka also handed down seven-year prison terms to Hasina's other niece Azmina Siddiq and nephew Radwan Mujib Siddiq Bobby, each in one of the two cases, said ACC Public Prosecutor Mir Ahmed Ali Salam.

The verdicts were delivered in absentia, and trials in each of the two cases filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) were completed within 15 hearings, according to court records.

The court found Hasina guilty of abusing her power to illegally secure two plots under a Rajuk housing project in Dhaka's Purbachal for Azmina and Bobby, despite the duo being ineligible.

Tulip, the MP for Hampstead and Highgate in London, was found guilty of influencing Hasina to secure the plots for her siblings, Azmina and Bobby – an allegation she had earlier rejected.

Hasina and Tulip were also fined Tk 2 lakhs each in two cases with an additional one-year imprisonment in the event of default, while Azmina and Bobby were fined Tk one lakh in a case, defaulting which they will have to serve six months more in jail.

Between November 27 and December 1 last year, Hasina, now in India, was sentenced to 26 years' rigorous imprisonment in four other cases involving the plot scam. Her daughter Saima Wazed Putul and son Sajeb Wazed Joy, and sister Sheikh Rehana and Tulip were also convicted in one of four cases each.

From January 12 to 14 last year, the ACC filed all six cases with its Dhaka Integrated District Office-1 over

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Cops fear arms smuggling ahead of Feb 12 polls

TOUSIF KAIUM and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Around 5:00am on January 11, a team of Rapid Action Battalion conducted a drive at a house in Raghunathpur in Benapole and recovered two firearms, six rounds of bullets and four magazines.

The words "Made in India" were written on the firearms, according to Mohammad Ashraf Hossain, the officer-in-charge of Benapole Port Police Station.

Police have information that such illegal arms are entering Bangladesh from the India border with the view to fuelling violence ahead of the polls.

At least 30 'linemen', individuals who are involved in firearms smuggling and illegal crossings, are active in Jashore alone, according to the police intelligence database seen by The Daily Star.

Linemen play a central role in border crime, with most being locals with detailed knowledge of remote routes, rivers, chars and hilly trails, and in many cases, information on patrol schedules of law enforcement agencies.

At least 757 other linemen are active across the 26 border districts: 12 in Chattogram, 37 in Brahmanbaria, 99 in Cox's Bazar, 10 in Feni, 38 in Cumilla, 116 in Bandarban, three in Rajshahi, 38 in Chapainawabganj, 16 in Joypurhat, 19 in Naogaon, five in Chuadanga, 16 in Meherpur, 52 in Satkhira, 21 in Jhenaidah, 58 in Sylhet, seven in Moulvibazar, 13 in Habiganj, 32 in Sunamganj,

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Mourners react beside the body of Palestinian Eyad Al-Rabaya, who medics said was killed by Israeli fire, at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Only 11 cases filed over 97 shrine attacks since Aug '24

Study identifies religious intolerance as primary driver

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A new study has revealed that only 11 cases were filed despite 97 attacks on shrines across the country over a year and a half following the July uprising, with investigations in 10 of the cases showing "no progress".

The findings were disclosed by Makam: Center for Sufi Heritage, a research organisation, in a report titled "Attacks on Shrines Across the Country in 2024-25", presented at the Dhaka Reporters' Unity yesterday.

The study, covering the period from August 5, 2024, to December 31, 2025, documented a pattern of violence that left three people dead and 468 injured.

"The attack on Nural Pagla's shrine in Rajbari created a stir, leading police to arrest several suspects. However, we have seen no progress in

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ILLUSTRATION: ADRIN SARWAR

A SLOW-BURNING NATIONAL EMERGENCY

Bangladesh is no longer confined to tertiary hospitals or oncology wards in Dhaka. According to 2022 data from the Global Cancer Observatory (GLOBOCAN), with a population of about 167.9 million, Bangladesh recorded 167,256 new cancer cases and 116,598 cancer deaths.

Non-smokers are now facing elevated risks of lung cancer and respiratory disease simply by living in urban environments. Over years, this exposure becomes normalised, yet its health consequences are profound and long-lasting. “Around 87% of lung cancer cases are caused by smoking.”

ADRIN SARWAR AND FARHAN MUSFIQUE

It develops without signs; exposure to carcinogens accumulates over years through food, air and water before symptoms appear.

Diagnosis typically comes late across gender, geography and class; by the time patients seek care, the disease is often beyond early intervention.

PATTERNS OF CANCER IN BANGLADESH

Among men, oesophageal, oral-cavity and lung cancers take a large share. Oesophageal cancer alone accounts for 15.1 per cent of new male cases and 20.9 per cent of cancer deaths. Tobacco remains a major factor, while occupational and ambient pollution also contribute: men in transport, construction, manufacturing and informal industries inhale polluted air for years.

For women, breast and cervical cancers dominate: breast cancer represents 18 per cent of new female cases and cervical cancer 13.3 per cent. Both are highly treatable if detected

early; screening is limited outside urban centres, and stigma, low awareness and cost delay diagnosis. As Prof. Dr Syed Md Akram Hussain, Chairman of the Clinical Oncology Department at Bangladesh Medical University, reflects, “Most patients in our country come for treatment very late. There is a significant delay in diagnosis. Because of the stage at which they arrive, the chances of successful treatment decrease significantly. Consequently, the death rate is relatively high.”

Public debate often reduces cancer to individual choices—smoking, diet or genes—but those explanations no longer suffice. Rapid industrialisation and weak environmental enforcement have created shared exposure pathways: people are not choosing these risks; they live inside them.

MAN-MADE REASONS

Chromium from tanneries illustrates this. Untreated tannery effluent has been discharged into rivers and land for decades, contaminating soil and groundwater; studies report tannery solid waste repurposed into poultry and fish feed.

Dr Sayed highlights the broader problem of adulteration: “In Bangladesh, adulterated food is a major issue. For example, urea is used to whiten pulled rice (muri). With Ramadan approaching, you’ll see jalebis and other fried snacks being cooked in brake oil.” He adds, “Fast food often contains chromium. This chromium comes from poultry feed made from tannery waste. That poultry feed eventually enters the fast food chain. Our children now consume a lot of fast food. While there is no specific research yet, these factors have raised questions in our minds that this could be the cause.”

Lead and cadmium from informal battery recycling settle into nearby soil, homes and playgrounds. Small-scale smelters operate without protective equipment or oversight; children in affected areas show elevated blood-lead levels. Chronic lead exposure increases the risk of kidney, lung and other cancers later in life.

BREATHING IN POLLUTED AIR

Air pollution compounds these risks. Bangladesh frequently ranks among the world’s most polluted countries.

Particulate matter from vehicles, brick kilns, diesel generators and factories penetrates deep into lungs, producing inflammation and cellular damage over years. For city residents polluted air is constant—during commutes, work and sleep.

Dr Sayed says, “The overall polluted air in Dhaka contains high levels of carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide, and lead from vehicles. Various studies show this is even more dangerous than smoking.”

Non-smokers now face elevated risks of lung cancer and respiratory disease simply by living in urban environments. “Around 87 per cent of lung cancer cases are caused by smoking. This situation can be managed by reducing air pollution. To achieve this, the government, stakeholders, and NGOs must work extensively and collaboratively,” says Dr Kazi Mazur Ahmed, senior consultant & head of the department of clinical oncology & medical physics.

ARSENIC AND SLOW POISONING

Arsenic in groundwater remains a

slow-poisoning crisis for millions who rely on tube wells. The problem is worsened by unregulated pesticide and chemical use in agriculture; recent evidence links heavy pesticide exposure to rising liver and stomach cancers among rural workers and urban consumers. Reflecting on this trend, Dr Manzur notes that farmers are increasingly falling victim to a toxic exposure of substances; improper handling of bleaching agents and detergent powders also contributes.

Cancer in Bangladesh is not only a medical challenge but also a mirror of social, environmental and industrial failures. Late diagnosis, contaminated food chains, polluted air and poisoned water have woven the disease into everyday life. Addressing it requires stronger regulation, improved screening and referral, public awareness campaigns and collaborative action by government, industry and civil society. Without urgent, coordinated measures, cancer will continue to claim lives silently. Now.

From prevention to personalised treatment



PROF. DR KAZI MANZUR KADER

Senior Consultant & Head
Department of Clinical Oncology &
Medical Physics
Delta Hospital Limited

On this World Cancer Day, the message for every citizen of Bangladesh is clear: Prevention begins with daily actions. Healthy eating, regular activity, avoiding tobacco, and participating in screening programs are vital steps. With national commitment and increased awareness across all communities, we can prevent thousands of cancer cases every year.

ADRIN SARWAR

Bangladesh is currently at a critical crossroads in its fight against cancer. According to IARC-GLOBOCAN 2022 estimates, the nation faces approximately 167,256 new cancer cases and 116,598 deaths annually. The profile of the disease reveals a stark gender divide. Men are most frequently diagnosed with cancers of the oesophagus, lip/oral cavity, and lungs, while women face a high prevalence of breast and cervical cancers. Reflecting on these figures, Professor Dr Md. Mofazzel Hossain says, “These are just the tip of the iceberg; without a robust nationwide registry, our current data underestimates the true scale of the crisis.”

PREVENTION FOR SURVIVAL

Despite this rising burden, nearly 40 per cent of all cancers are preventable through healthier lifestyle choices. In reality, the majority of patients in our country are diagnosed at an advanced stage, where treatment is significantly costlier. For this reason, prevention remains the most effective and cost-efficient strategy to save lives. By addressing preventable risk factors like tobacco use, poor diet, and inactivity, we can shift the narrative from treatment to total wellness.

NUTRITION AND THE 150-MINUTE RULE

A primary pillar of this shift is returning to our roots through the traditional Bangladeshi diet, which offers natural protection against various forms of cancer. Health experts recommend prioritising fresh vegetables, seasonal fruits, lentils, and whole grains while limiting processed foods and reducing salt intake. Alongside nutrition, staying active is essential. Dr Kazi Manzur Kader suggests the “150-Minute Rule,” aiming for at least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity per week, such as brisk walking or cycling. These activities strengthen the immune system and lower the risk of breast and colon cancers.

BREAKING MYTHS

Furthermore, we must confront the tobacco crisis, which remains the leading preventable cause of cancer in the country. This includes not only smoking but also smokeless forms like

jarda and gul. These contribute heavily to oral and throat cancers. Dr Manzur Kader emphasises that quitting tobacco at any age significantly reduces risk. There is this myth that cancer is entirely “in the genes.” In reality, only 5–10 per cent of cancers are purely genetic; the vast majority are triggered by lifestyle and environmental factors.

THE BIOSIMILAR REVOLUTION

While healthy living lowers risk, the shift toward local production of biosimilars has been a genuine game-changer for those already diagnosed. Dr Md. Mofazzel Hossain notes, “Today, locally manufactured advanced oncology drugs are 40 per cent to 60 per cent cheaper than their imported counterparts. This price reduction allows patients to complete their full treatment cycles without financial collapse and enables clinicians to offer targeted therapies at earlier stages rather than as a last resort.”

BRIDGING THE GAP IN EARLY DETECTION

To truly combat the prevalence of late-stage diagnosis, Bangladesh must “shift left” by prioritising early detection through mobile outreach, district-level screening camps, and evidence-based pathways like VIA/HPV testing for cervical cancer. By integrating telepathology and tele-oncology, rural clinicians can more efficiently triage patients and bridge the gap between remote areas and tertiary care centres. However, for these efforts to be truly effective, screening must be seamlessly linked to treatment capacity, ensuring that early detection leads to a definitive and accessible pathway to care.

A UNIFIED VISION

As we look toward World Cancer Day 2026, the priority is to make early detection and timely treatment the national default. This requires a unified effort: policymakers must fund district-level screening and financial protection, the industry must ensure an affordable and uninterrupted supply of medicine, and the public must act early on symptoms. By collectively reducing late-stage presentations, we can save more lives than any medicine alone, ensuring that neither geography nor income remains a barrier to survival in Bangladesh.



PROF. DR MD. MOFAZZEL HOSSAIN (LT. COL. RETD.)

Fellow Medical Oncology; Member - ASCO, ESMO & SSO

To ensure consistent availability, the government must streamline API imports and maintain mandatory buffer stocks of essential cancer drugs. Simultaneously, local pharmaceutical companies should invest in domestic API manufacturing to lower costs and position Bangladesh as a regional treatment hub. Finally, a real-time digital dashboard connecting hospitals and regulators is essential to predict and prevent shortages before they occur.

NATIONAL CANCER STATISTICS, 2022			
	Males	Females	Both sexes
POPULATION			
	84,788,982	83,096,698	167,885,680
INCIDENCE*			
Number of new cancer cases	94,922	72,334	167,256
Age-standardized incidence rate	120.8	89.5	105.6
Age-standardized incidence rate	120.8	89.5	105.6
Risk of developing cancer before the age of 75 years (cum. risk %)	13.0	9.3	11.3
Top 3 leading cancers (ranked by cases)**	Oesophagus, Lip, oral cavity, Lung	Breast, Cervix uteri, Oesophagus	Oesophagus, Lip, oral cavity, Lung
MORTALITY*			
Number of cancer deaths	68,591	48,007	116,598
Age-standardized mortality rate	87.8	60.9	74.7
Risk of dying from cancer before the age of 75 years (cum. risk %)	9.7	6.6	8.2
Top 3 leading cancers (ranked by deaths)**	Oesophagus, Lung, Lip, oral cavity	Oesophagus, Breast, Cervix uteri	Oesophagus, Lung, Lip, oral cavity
PREVALENCE*			
5-year prevalent cases	181,944	164,393	346,337

SOURCE: IARC / GLOBOCAN 2022, WHO

Bridging the gap in cancer care

ADIRIN SARWAR

In Bangladesh, the reality for thousands of families is the overwhelming physical, emotional, and financial burden of a cancer diagnosis. While the country battles a surge in cases the focus has shifted toward making high-quality treatment both accessible and affordable.

In this evolving landscape, Renata PLC has become a trusted name among patients and clinicians alike. Tracing its origins to Pfizer Bangladesh, which transferred ownership to local shareholders in 1993, the company has made oncology a strategic priority. By developing high-quality, bioequivalent cancer medicines, Renata has introduced notable innovations to the local market, such as Ready-to-Use (RTU) chemotherapy formulations designed to enhance safety and precision.

However, despite these advancements, accessing specialised medication remains a hurdle for many. Most oncology-focused pharmacies are concentrated in major urban centres, leaving patients in rural areas often out of reach. Believing that logistical barriers and physical exhaustion should never stand in the way of life-saving treatment, Renata provides free home delivery of cancer medicines directly from its depots. This service ensures that treatment remains uninterrupted, regardless of a patient's location.

Beyond accessibility, Renata PLC strengthens cancer care by ensuring every product meets global standards. Through rigorous quality controls across its oncology and haematology portfolio, the company guarantees that high-quality, life-saving medication remains reliable. This focus on clinical research ensures that international benchmarks are met locally. With its mission to "leave no patient behind," Renata continues to focus on affordable, quality-driven, and patient-centred cancer care in Bangladesh.



MD TANBIR SAJIB
Chief Marketing Officer, Renata PLC

Renata is expanding its global footprint with nearly 86 bioequivalent medicines planned for its portfolio by 2026. Today, the company is exporting cancer medicines around the globe. Renata continues to advance its belief that cancer patients in Bangladesh deserve world-class, affordable treatments without compromise on standards.



AMIR ABDULLAH
Head of Marketing & Sales
Oncology & Haematology Portfolio
Renata PLC

True cancer care extends beyond medicines. It requires holistic support to ensure the well-being of both the patient and the caregiver. Recognising this, the company launched "Renata Cancer Care" in collaboration with mental health professionals.



সঠিক চিকিৎসার জন্য প্রয়োজন সঠিক রোগ নির্ণয়

আধুনিক প্রযুক্তির মেশিন সম্বলিত ইউনিভার্সেল মেডিকেল কলেজ হাসপাতাল পূর্ণাঙ্গ ডায়াগনস্টিক সেন্টার

২৪ ঘণ্টা ল্যাব (সিসিআর ল্যাবসহ)

সিটিস্ক্যান ৫১২ স্লাইস

ইকোকার্ডিওগ্রাম 2D, 4D, TE

২৪ ঘণ্টা ক্যাথল্যাব

ডিজিটাল এসআরআই ১.৫ টেসলা

4D/5D আল্ট্রাসোনোগ্রাম

ফাইব্রোস্কোপি

ইউনিভার্সেল মেডিকেল কলেজ হাসপাতাল, ঢাকা

নিউ গ্লোবালপোর্ট রোড (ফ্লাইওভার সংলগ্ন), মহাখালী, ঢাকা-১২১৫

বিশেষজ্ঞের সিরিয়াল ০৯৬০৬ ১১১ ২২২ ০১৮৪১ ৪৮০ ০০০

হেলথলাইন ১০৬৬৭

সুস্থ থাকুক আপনার হৃদযন্ত্র

ইউনিভার্সেল কার্ডিয়াক হাসপাতাল, ঢাকা

২৪ ঘণ্টা কার্ডিয়াক ইমার্জেন্সি ১০৬৬৭



YOUR RELIABLE PARTNER IN CANCER CARE

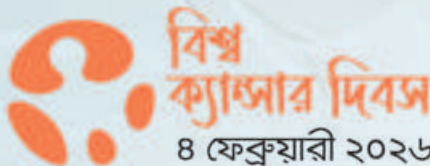
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স্বতন্ত্র যাত্রায় কবিতা আমরা

Know, check, act

Early cancer detection saves lives

TAGABUN TAHARIM TITUN

Cancer incidence in Bangladesh is rising and may more than double by 2050 if preventive measures are not strengthened. Late detection is a major contributor to high cancer morbidity and mortality in the country because many

“Do not ignore painless breast lumps, persistent voice changes, or unexplained bleeding. Starting early evaluation, especially for those over fifty or with family history, can be life-saving.”

Prof. Dr Syed Md Akram Hussain
Chairman of the Clinical Oncology Department at Bangladesh Medical University

patients are diagnosed at advanced stages when treatment options are limited and outcomes poor.

Globally, early detection through routine screening dramatically improves survival rates. According to World Health o For example, breast cancer detected

before the spread has significantly higher 5-year survival than cancers found at later stages, and programmes like mammography and cervical screening (Pap/VIA) have been shown to reduce deaths by enabling earlier treatment. Standard guidelines recommend regular

screening starting at specific ages tailored to cancer type, even for asymptomatic individuals, as most early cancers do not cause noticeable symptoms. Following recommended screening schedules increases chances of cure, reduces treatment burden, and saves lives.

CANCER TYPE	COMMON SYMPTOMS	RECOMMENDED SELF-CHECK / FIRST CHECK-UP AGE	GLOBAL SCREENING FREQUENCY
Oesophagus	Difficulty swallowing; chest/back pain; unexplained weight loss; persistent heartburn	No population screening recommended; seek medical check if symptoms occur at any age	No standard screening for general population; clinical evaluation when symptoms present
Breast	Lump in breast/ underarm; nipple discharge; change in breast size/shape; skin dimpling	Self-breast awareness from age 20+, seven days after period ends; clinical check from 25-30	Mammography every 1-2 years from age 40-50
Lung	Persistent cough; coughing blood; chest pain; shortness of breath	Not for routine self-check; medical evaluation if symptoms or high risk (e.g., smoking)	Low-dose Computed Tomography (CT) yearly around the age of 50 with significant smoking history
Cervical	Abnormal bleeding; pelvic pain; pain during intercourse	Start pelvic exams/ selfawareness by age 21	Pap smear / HPV testing every 3-5 years starting age 21-25 to 65; in low-resource settings, VIA may be used every 3 years
Colorectal	Change in bowel habits; blood in stool; abdominal discomfort; unintended weight loss	Begin awareness at age 40-45	Colonoscopy or similar test every 10 years starting from age 45-50

SOURCES: WHO, NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE, BANGLADESH SOCIETY OF COLPOSCOPY AND CERVICAL PATHOLOGY, INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES.

PERSONALISED CANCER CARE in Bangladesh

Labaid Cancer Hospital and Super Speciality Centre

FARHAN MUSFIQUE

As World Cancer Day 2026 underscores the theme “United by Unique”, attention is turning to how cancer care systems respond to a simple truth: no two patients experience the disease in the same way. In Bangladesh, where cancer cases continue to rise and late diagnosis remains common, this idea is reshaping how hospitals think

about treatment and support. Labaid Cancer Hospital and Super Speciality Centre now offers diagnosis, surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy and supportive services under one roof to reduce fragmentation and delays that frequently worsen outcomes. Leadership reports better results where patients receive timely, coordinated care, especially for cancers that respond well to early intervention.

CHANGING CANCER PATTERNS RAISE NEW CONCERNS

Shifting patient patterns worry clinicians. Sakif Shamim, Managing Director of Labaid Cancer Hospital and Super Speciality Centre highlights a rise in younger breast cancer patients, underscoring the need for earlier awareness and screening tailored to age-specific risks. This trend strengthens the hospital's emphasis on outreach and risk-based screening programmes for breast, cervical and colorectal cancers.

Early detection is central to the hospital's strategy. Screening and awareness campaigns are combined with clear referral pathways so patients move swiftly from screening to confirmed diagnosis and treatment planning. To shorten the interval between symptom onset and treatment, the hospital coordinates imaging, pathology and specialist consultations to minimise waiting times and unnecessary repeat visits which is helping patients transition faster from suspicion to care.



Cancer care must be affordable and tailored to each person's journey. We strive to ensure early detection and accurate diagnosis, alongside the full spectrum of modern treatments, in a compassionate environment without placing unnecessary financial hardship on families.

SAKIF SHAMIM,
Managing Director
Labaid Cancer Hospital and Super Speciality Centre

CARE DELIVERED BY TEAMS, NOT INDIVIDUALS

Cancer treatment here is delivered by multidisciplinary teams like surgeons, medical and radiation oncologists, pathologists, nurses and psychosocial support professionals whose decisions reflect clinical needs and patients' emotional and family contexts. The hospital regards psychosocial care as an essential component of treatment rather than an optional extra.

Affordability remains a barrier to early detection. To counter the belief that screening and diagnosis are prohibitively expensive, the hospital highlights low-cost options—Pap smears, HPV tests, faecal occult

blood testing and basic imaging—and provides counselling and pricing strategies to help patients navigate costs. Shamim stresses that screening is often far more affordable than people assume and that early detection is usually more cost-effective than treating late-stage disease.

BALANCING INNOVATION WITH PRACTICALITY

Advanced therapies such as targeted treatments and immunotherapy are discussed increasingly in Bangladesh. Labaid Cancer Hospital and Super Speciality Centre offers selected advanced options when clinically appropriate, with decisions guided by medical evidence, patient condition and

affordability. The hospital pairs clinical judgment with practical financial counselling and partnerships so patients can access suitable treatments without compromising care quality.

Prevention remains a priority. Tobacco cessation, HPV and hepatitis vaccinations, healthy diets, physical activity and regular health checks are promoted as the most practical, population-level ways to reduce cancer risk. On World Cancer Day, the hospital's pragmatic message is simple: seek screening when eligible and act early on symptoms. When systems are designed to respond quickly and support patients throughout their journey, outcomes improve.



ILLUSTRATION:
E. RAZA RONNY



HOSPITAL BASED CANCER REGISTRY (HBCR) OF Labaid Cancer Hospital & Super Speciality Centre

Division Wise Registered cancer Patients

Statistics 2023 - 2025

Organ Specific Registered Cancer Patients Statistics 2023 - 2025

Breast	54%
Adenocarcinoma	14%
Lung	11%
Bone	6%
Upper GIT	3%
Lower GIT	3%
Sarcoma	2%
Gynae Onco	2%
CNS	1%
Hematology	1%
Others	3%

Surgical Site Infection (SSI) Rate

Data is based on 1780 Surgery in 2024-2025

Institution/Country	% of SSI Prevalence	Based on research article
Labaid Cancer Hospital And Super Speciality Centre	0.4%	As per Hospital SSI records
Bangladesh	3% to 8%	ResearchGate GmbH
India	8.2%	Journal Of Population Therapeutics And Clinical Pharmacology
UK	1% to 5%	NHS Northumbria Healthcare
USA	0.5% to 3%	American Medical Association
Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality	2% to 4%	Patient safety network

DEPARTMENT WISE PATIENTS

- Oncology
- Surgical Oncology & Surgery
- Gynae oncology & Gynae
- Hematology
- Medicine, Diabetology & Endocrine
- Gastroenterology
- Orthopaedics & Trauma
- Interventional Radiology
- Urology & Nephrology

Cancer

Non Cancer

Average Length Of Stay (ALOS) after surgery

4.1

ALOS in Labaid Cancer Hospital & Super Speciality Centre

7.2

ALOS in Bangladesh Hospitals

6-9

ALOS in International Hospitals

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