"Our reporting provides credible information on atrocities... when truth is being eroded by disinformation and censorship."

UN human rights chief **Volker Turk**

YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW

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KSRM
শেকড় থেকে শিখরে

Lord of the WINGS

Simultaneously serving as the civil aviation adviser and chairman of Biman's board while pursuing a commercial helicopter licence, Sk Bashir Uddin has become a figure representing a conflict of interest and unabashed cronyism under the interim government

RASHIDUL HASAN

It takes a special kind of self-centred mindset to be the player, the referee, and the rule-maker all at once. In March 2025, a video conference was convened by the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh to vet an applicant for a new aviation licence. The face on the screen, however, was not that of just another wealthy entrepreneur, but of Sk Bashir Uddin -- a tycoon, yes, but more bizarrely, the interim government's commerce adviser. It was an awkward prelude to an even stranger reality. Within weeks, the applicant would be appointed the civil aviation adviser. Just four months later, he would assume the chairmanship of the national flag carrier Biman Bangladesh Airlines, a serious conflict of interest.

The timeline of events, pieced together by The Daily Star from CAAB records and trade documents, paints a picture of a government functionary seemingly unaware of where his private interests end and his public obligations begin.

Bashir Uddin was appointed to the advisory council in November 2024. By March 2025, while serving as the commerce adviser, his conglomerate, the AkijBashir Group, submitted a letter of

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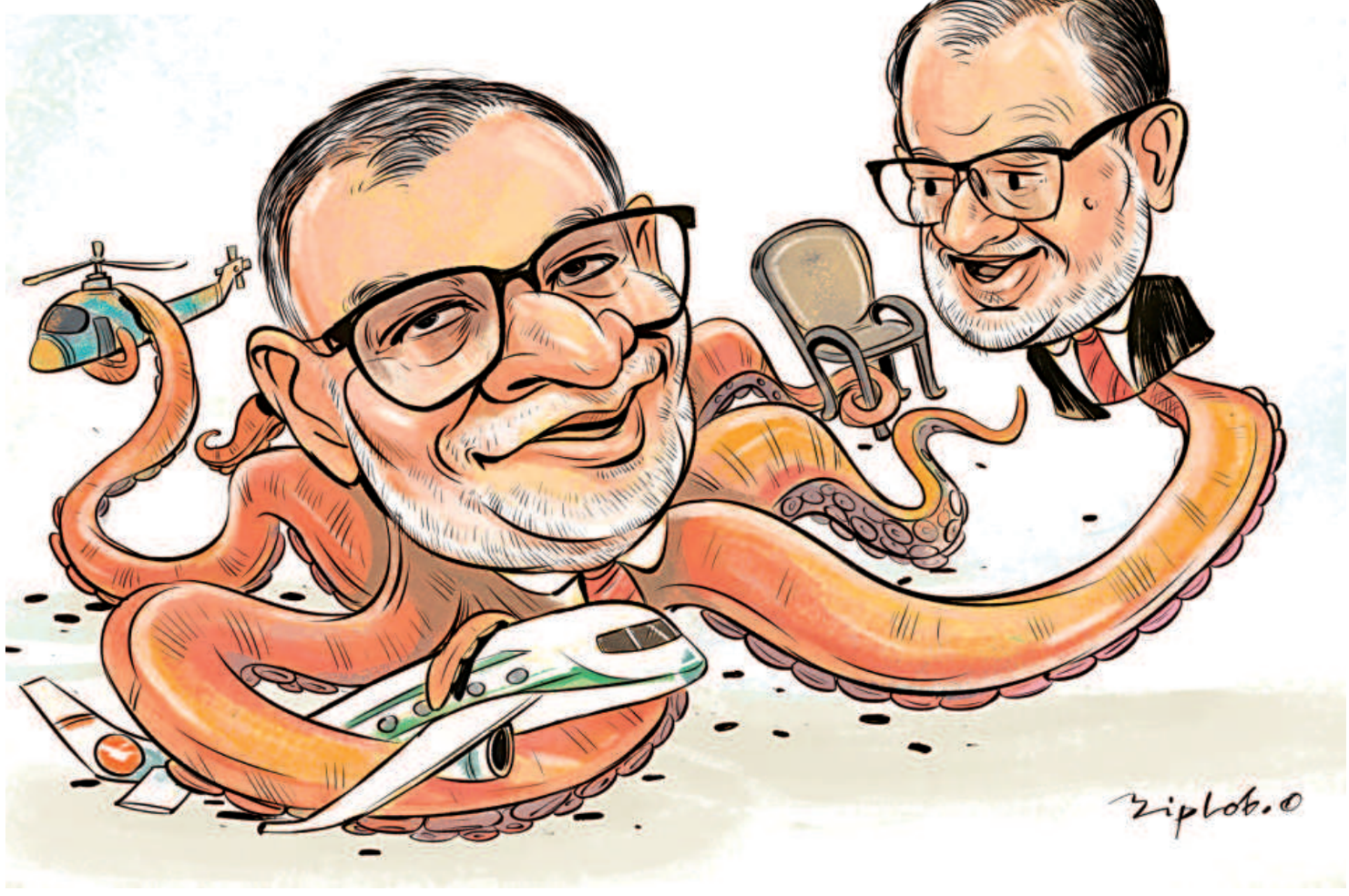
"The interim government has shown either a sheer lack of understanding that such actions or decisions in reality represent abuse of power, or they took it for granted."

Iftekharuzzaman
Executive Director of TIB



6 DAYS TO VOTE

Operations resume at Ctg port after 6-day stalemate

Strike to resume if workers' demands not met in two days

DWAIPAYAN BARUA *and*
REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Operational activities at Chattogram port finally resumed yesterday afternoon after a six-day impasse, as protesting employees postponed their ongoing work abstention until Saturday following assurances from Shipping Adviser M Sakhawat Hussain that steps would be taken to meet their demands.

In a meeting with the adviser at the port, leaders of the Chattogram Bandar Rokkha Sangram Parishad placed four demands: suspending the deal signing with DP World for New Mooring Container Terminal, withdrawing punitive actions against agitating employees and removing port chairman SM Moniruzzaman from the post.

At a press conference, Parishad Coordinator Md. Humayun Kabir said the adviser assured them he would discuss the deal-signing issue with senior government officials and inform them within a day

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Six to hang for Ashulia killings during July uprising

ICT-2 hands life terms to seven others

SHARIFUL ISLAM *and*
SIRAJUL ISLAM RUBEL

A tribunal in Dhaka yesterday sentenced six people, including a former lawmaker, to death for the killing of seven people during the July 2024 uprising in Ashulia on the outskirts of the capital, where the victims were loaded into a vehicle and set on fire, with at least one still alive.

The three-member International Crimes Tribunal-2 also sentenced seven accused to life imprisonment, handed down seven years' rigorous imprisonment to two others, and acquitted one accused who turned a state witness in the crimes against humanity case.

Reading out the concluding part of the judgment, the tribunal detailed how seven young protesters were killed, their bodies placed inside a vehicle and burned. At least one victim was alive at the time of the fire, an act the court said "shocks the conscience of humanity".

The tribunal found that the victims were unarmed students and civilians exercising their democratic rights

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A 36-PAGE DREAM

Jamaat promises prosperity, but the math doesn't add up

TANIM AHMED

Jamaat-e-Islami may be accused of many things but low ambition cannot be among them, at least not according to its election manifesto. The party's list of pledges feels less like a governing document and more like an exhaustive list of promises gesturing towards a happily-ever-after nation, while leaving questions of plausibility and execution largely unexplored.

A large portion of the voluminous manifesto coincides with provisions and recommendations of the July charter that the party had signed. There are, however, several sections that warrant attention. The 36-page document with just over 14,000 words covers almost every facet of public life worth mentioning—from a promise

NEWS ANALYSIS

to allow freight trucks in Dhaka only between 11:00pm and 6:00am to the lofty dream of growing Bangladesh's economy by almost four times to become a $2-trillion-dollar economy by 2040.

This economic prosperity will presumably come on the back of a 7% GDP growth, which by the way would only take us up to about $1.3 trillion and simple projection models show that the benchmark of $2 trillion dollars would require a nearly double-digit annual growth for 15 years.

Be that as it may, whether it is growth, education stipends or health benefits, Jamaat does not quite outline how it would achieve this in the five years they would have, to govern.

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BNP MANIFESTO

Likely to focus on justice, welfare, women's safety

- Media freedom thru' proposed national media commission
- One lakh workers for doorstep healthcare
- Unemployment allowance for jobless youth

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

Giving priority to justice, the rule of law, human rights, women's safety and religious freedom -- among 11 fundamental issues -- the BNP will announce its election manifesto today, outlining its vision for what it calls a new phase of democratic governance.

Party Chairman Tarique Rahman will unveil the manifesto at 3:30pm at the hotel Sonargaon ballroom. Leaders said the document has been prepared in line with late chairperson Khaleda Zia's Vision 2030 and Tarique's 31-Point Outline for Structural Reforms.

According to party sources, the manifesto will focus on agriculture, health, education, environment, information technology, women, employment and sports.

It will emphasise initiatives such as the Family Card, Farmer Card, health reforms, IT development, a corruption-free Bangladesh, and freedom of expression, along with pledges on the July charter, independence of the judiciary, decentralisation of administration, strengthening the anti-corruption framework, increasing employment

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গণবিজ্ঞপ্তি

প্লাস্টিকের স্ট্র উৎপাদন, আমদানি, ব্যবহার, মজুদ, বিক্রয়, পরিবহন ও প্রদর্শন নিষিদ্ধ

- সকলের অবগতির জন্য জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, প্লাস্টিক স্ট্র (Plastic Straw) পুন:ব্যবহার (Reuse) করা হয় না বিধায় একবার ব্যবহার করে ফেলে দেয়া হয় এবং পুন:চক্রায়ন (Recycle) লাভজনক না হওয়ায় পরিবেশসম্মত উপায়ে সংগ্রহ কিংবা ডিসপোজাল করা যায় না।
- প্লাস্টিক স্ট্র (Plastic Straw) প্রাকৃতিক পরিবেশে ক্ষয়প্রাপ্ত হয়ে মাইক্রোপ্লাস্টিকে পরিণত হয়, যা পরিবেশে প্রায় ২০০ বছর টিকে থাকে। ফলশ্রুতিতে ক্রমাগত পরিবেশ দূষিত হচ্ছে। **পরিবেশ দূষণ নিয়ন্ত্রণে এবং জনস্বাস্থ্য রক্ষায় সরকার বিগত ০১ জুন ২০২৫ তারিখ হতে একবার ব্যবহারযোগ্য প্লাস্টিক স্ট্র (Single-use Plastic Straw) এর উৎপাদন, আমদানি, বাজারজাতকরণ, বিক্রয়, ব্যবহার, মজুদ, প্রদর্শন এবং বাণিজ্যিক উদ্দেশ্যে পরিবহন সম্পূর্ণ নিষিদ্ধ ঘোষণা করেছে।**
- এই প্রেক্ষাপটে, প্লাস্টিক স্ট্র-এর ব্যবহার পুরোপুরি বন্ধ করে এর পরিবর্তে পরিবেশবান্ধব ও টেকসই বিকল্প হিসেবে জনসাধারণ এবং ব্যবসায়ীদের নিম্নলিখিত সামগ্রীগুলো ব্যবহার ও বিপণনের জন্য উৎসাহিত করা হচ্ছে:

ক) কাগজের স্ট্র (Paper Straw): এটি ব্যবহার শেষে দ্রুত মাটিতে মিশে যায় এবং পরিবেশের ক্ষতি করে না;

খ) কাচের স্ট্র (Glass Straw): এটি স্বাস্থ্যসম্মত, পরিষ্কার করা সহজ এবং বারবার ব্যবহারযোগ্য;

গ) স্টেইনলেস স্টিলের স্ট্র (Stainless Steel Straw): এটি স্বাস্থ্যসম্মত, অত্যন্ত টেকসই এবং দীর্ঘমেয়াদে সাশ্রয়ী।

প্লাস্টিক দূষণ রোধ করি, বর্তমান ও আগামী প্রজন্মের জন্য টেকসই পরিবেশ গড়ি

পরিবেশ অধিদপ্তর
পরিবেশ, বন ও জলবায়ু পরিবর্তন মন্ত্রণালয়

Thousands arbitrarily detained, denied bail

Says HRW report on 2025

STAR REPORT

The interim government has struggled to maintain law and order and deliver promised human rights reforms, with thousands of people arbitrarily detained and routinely denied bail, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in its 2026 annual report released yesterday.

While some of the fear and repression that characterised Sheikh Hasina's 15-year rule appeared to have ended, HRW said the interim administration has continued practices, including mass detentions of perceived political opponents and sweeping restrictions on political activity.

The New York-based rights watchdog noted that enforced disappearances and

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Trade bodies seek urgent fix to port deadlock

B1

Iran's Khamenei 'should be very worried': Trump

P5

Not playing, but Bangladesh still in discussion

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ABUL KHAIR GROUP

23rd Death Anniversary

In 2003, on this very day, you left us at the will of Almighty Allah the Beneficent. Your premature departure has made us and many of your relations overwhelmed with grief. It is straining that you are not in this mundane world with us. But we are feeling your existence by remembering the tender-aged days of your life.

We pray to Almighty Allah for the salvation of his departed soul and request all friends, relatives, well-wishers to pray for him from the core of heart.

May Allah the Beneficent bless you with the eternal bliss of paradise. Ameen.

Late Shah Rafiqul Islam (Titu)
Death: 6th February, 2003

Bereaved members of the family

Supporters raise their hands during the speech of Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman at an election rally of the 11-party alliance at the Madrasa Ground in Rajshahi yesterday. PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

BNP Standing Committee Member Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury speaking at Amra 11 Youth Talk ahead of the general election at Patenga sea beach in Chattogram yesterday. PHOTO: BNP MEDIA CELL

'Killings, verbal abuse of us have begun'

Alleges Jamaat ameer at Rajshahi rally

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman yesterday alleged that attacks on his party have begun.

He said killings and verbal abuse were taking place as political tensions rose ahead of the February 12 elections.

At a campaign rally at Rajshahi's Madrasa Maidan, he questioned whether voters would "entrust a cat with guarding the meat", referring to rivals who, according to him, cannot restrain their greed.

Hinting at the BNP, he said, "In trying to seize control of various areas, 234 of their own people were killed. Now, killings of our people have begun... ."

He added that those who avoid extortion, graft, and harassment are now being labelled as oppressors.

The Jamaat chief claimed corruption deepened over the past 54 years. "There has been development in depriving people of their rights, looting banks, forcing small traders out of business and building personal

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JP looks to retain its northern strongholds

Goes door-to-door braving obstacles

STAR REPORT

As polling day approaches, the Jatiya Party has shifted its campaign strategy to door-to-door outreach, focusing on retaining its traditional stronghold in the Rangpur region amid allegations of obstruction in holding large-scale rallies.

Party leaders and activists claim they are facing resistance in organising mass gatherings, prompting candidates to rely more heavily on personal contact. Party sources said Jatiya Party candidates are also seeking to attract voters of the Awami League, whose activities have been banned, in a bid to secure victory for the plough, the party's electoral symbol.

The GM Quader-led Jatiya Party has fielded 196 candidates nationwide for the 13th National Election, scheduled for February 12.

"If the election is held in a free and fair manner, we will win at least 12 out of 33 seats in Rangpur division," said Jatiya Party Co-Chairman Mostafizur Rahman Mostafa, also a former mayor of Rangpur City Corporation.

He alleged that campaigning has been disrupted in several constituencies. "Our candidates cannot conduct campaigns properly in many areas. Our activists are being obstructed, banners and festoons are being torn down, and in some places our party offices and leaders have come under attack," he said.

Similar complaints were echoed by candidates in northern

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'Stand up against new oppressors'

Nahid urges voters

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Cox's Bazar*

National Citizen Party Convener Nahid Islam yesterday said those involved in extortion, land grabbing, and the rehabilitation of fascist forces after August 5 have now emerged as "new oppressors" in the country.

February 12 would be the day to resist them, he said while speaking at an election rally in Boroghop, Kutubdia, Cox's Bazar.

The people of Bangladesh would decide who forms the government, asserting that no conspiracy from Delhi would be accepted and that there would be no place for foreign dominance in the country's politics, Nahid told the event, organised in support of Jamaat-backed 11-party alliance candidate AHM Hamidur Rahman Azad for Cox's Bazar-2 constituency.

He said the contest was not limited to

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BNP's vision is equal rights for all faiths

Fakhrul tells Al Jazeera

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir has said that secularism is not the party's objective, asserting that the term is not "congenial" for the politics of Bangladesh.

Speaking to Al Jazeera recently, Fakhrul defended party chief Tarique Rahman's leadership and outlined a vision focused on equal rights for all faiths rather than secularist ideology.

Addressing the 1977 removal of "secularism" from the constitution by BNP founder Ziaur Rahman, Fakhrul said, "Secularism is not our goal."

He explained that the decision reflected the "philosophy of the party at that time".

Highlighting the country's demographics, he added that the word "is not at all very congenial for Bangladesh's politics".

Instead, Fakhrul argued that the BNP's framework ensures religious freedom.

Regarding party chairman Tarique Rahman, Fakhrul described him as the "most capable man" to lead the

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Lord of the wings

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intent (LoI) to the CAAB chairman. The ambition was not small: the establishment of "Akij Bashir Aviation Limited," a B-2 category company proposing to operate both domestic passenger and cargo operations by helicopter.

To facilitate this, Bashir Uddin procured a trade licence from the Dhaka North City Corporation on March 11, 2025. The licence, bearing the adviser's photograph, listed the nature of business as "Import, Aviation Service, Export." Around the same time, his company applied to the CAAB chairman for a no-objection certificate (NOC) and an air operator certificate (AOC) to formally establish the company. As part of this procedure, Bashir Uddin joined the video interview as the company's owner. The certificates have not been granted yet, but are under active consideration, CAAB sources said.

To make matters worse, about a month later, on April 15, 2025, Bashir Uddin was handed the portfolio for the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism.

Bashir Uddin contends that the media and "syndicates" are conflating a personal necessity with commercial ambition. "I actually asked for a helicopter licence," he told The Daily Star on Wednesday, arguing that he has owned a helicopter for 14 years for corporate mobility. He claims that after his previous operator, South Asian Airlines, became untenable due to "extortionists," he was forced to seek an air operator certificate to keep his machine flying. "I am not running an aeroplane business; this is my personal helicopter," he insisted, adding that he has flown "Tk 1 crore worth" of flights at his own expense for state duties.

Yet, there is an ethical pothole in this defence. The LoI explicitly mentioned passenger and cargo operations on domestic routes—the definition of commercial aviation. Furthermore, the sheer act of a serving advisory council member obtaining a new trade licence in his own name violates established governmental ethics. And seeking a certificate for a sector he now regulates as the civil aviation adviser constitutes a textbook case of governance failure.

"These are clear examples of conflict of interest that has bedevilled governance under the interim government from the beginning till date," Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, told The Daily Star.

Experts say the sector is an area where licensing, AOC approval, safety certification, route permits and operational clearances are all highly regulated, and all of these fall under CAAB and the civil aviation ministry. Bashir Uddin has policy influence over both entities.

"It is certain there are some problems. It's a conflict of interest," Kazi Wahidul Alam, an aviation expert, told The Daily Star on Wednesday.

Bashir Uddin offers a defence of his participation in the video interview. When pressed by The Daily Star, he insisted his hand was forced by the CAAB bureaucracy. "I repeatedly refused to go there," he claimed, arguing that CAAB officials had "deliberately created such a situation" by demanding the presence of the "ultimate owner" rather than his managing director.

"I am not in the company's management, I am only a shareholder," Bashir Uddin said.

"I had two helicopters. Unable to endure harassment, I sold one. Later, I decided to sell this one as well. But people from the organisation explained to me that I should try to operate sustainably by obtaining an AOC in my own name. Then I agreed," he said.

BASHIR UDDIN SITS ON THE BIMAN BOARD

In a move that defied traditional norms, Bashir Uddin became the chairman of the Biman Bangladesh Airlines board in August 2025. Best practices dictate that the civil aviation minister (adviser) must maintain a healthy distance from the national flag carrier's boardroom, a separation designed to guarantee that oversight is not compromised. By assuming the chairmanship, Bashir Uddin collapsed the firewall between the ministry (the policy maker) and the airline (the market player).

In his defence, Bashir Uddin points to a 60 percent reduction in ticket fares and a crackdown on the "syndicates" that had allegedly siphoned off Tk 50,000 crore from Bangladesh. "I came to stop chaos in the aviation sector and at Biman," he said.

His logic is flawed. By sitting as chairman, the adviser is effectively regulating himself. If Biman violates safety protocols or engages in anti-competitive behaviour against private airlines, it is the ministry that must investigate. When the adviser is the chairman, accountability becomes a closed loop.

A $3.7 BILLION BOEING RUSH

The disquiet in the aviation sector has deepened in the final weeks of the interim government's tenure. With the 13th parliamentary election scheduled for February 12, the administration is exhibiting a frantic urgency to lock the state into long-term obligations before the first ballot is cast.

Most alarming is the imminent signing of a massive deal worth Tk 37,000 crore ($3.7 billion) with US aircraft manufacturer Boeing. Preparations are currently underway to ink this contract just days ahead of the polls.

The decision was rubber-stamped in late December 2025 at Biman's annual general meeting—a meeting chaired, inevitably, by Adviser Bashir Uddin. While the interim government had initially pledged to purchase 25 aircraft to reduce the trade deficit with the United States, scrutiny of the airline's actual capacity whittled the number down to 14. The shopping list includes eight Boeing 787-10 Dreamliners, two 787-9 Dreamliners, and four 737-8 MAX aircraft.

The timing is extraordinary. Bashir Uddin defends the haste, arguing that delaying the deal would push delivery dates back by years. "If you were in my place, what would you do?" he asked.

As part of final-stage negotiations, Biman has sent an urgent letter to Boeing's Seattle headquarters seeking an additional 10 percent discount on the total contract value. If Boeing obliges, the deal will be signed just before the election, binding the next government to a decade of payments and logistical integration for a fleet they did not choose.

"We have not excluded any procedural matters. Airbus has also been kept in the evaluation process. Biman's planning division conducted a techno-economic feasibility study. Based on that, a negotiation committee was formed from the Chief Adviser's Office under the leadership of Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud. A legal counsel has also been appointed. This government has no intention of doing any deal by excluding any process or legality," Bashiruddin said.

The rush for the Boeing contract is mirrored by the rushed appointment of three new board directors. On January 14, a gazette notification named the new directors for the Biman board: Khalilur Rahman, the national security adviser; Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, a special assistant to the chief adviser with the rank of state minister; and the senior secretary of the Election Commission (EC), Akhtar Ahmed.

With the electoral process already underway, the appointment of a senior election official to a corporate directorship at a state-owned enterprise is puzzling, and so is the appointment of Khalilur Rahman. When pressed on the rationale behind his appointment by reporters on February 2, Rahman offered a response that was as cryptic as it was dismissive: "Not all countries in the world have Biman." It was a retort that displayed a cavalier attitude towards public accountability.

For a technocratic interim government known for its disdain for the unchecked cronyism of the previous regime, such blatant mixing of public duty and private profit are not merely embarrassing. They are corrosive, as sector leaders point out. The administration's handling of the aviation sector has become a lightning rod for criticism, revealing a troubling indifference to conflicts of interest.

The cumulative effect of these actions -- the personal licensing, the dual roles, the eleventh-hour appointments, and the multibillion dollar scramble for aircraft -- has drawn sharp rebuke from many.

Iftekharuzzaman, the TIB executive director, said, "The interim government has shown either a sheer lack of understanding that such actions or decisions in reality represent abuse of power, or they took it for granted that their authority would be unaccountable forever just because they derived their authority from the people power July Movement."

The interim government has shown no consideration for the burdens it is leaving behind for the people of the country by such actions, according to Iftekharuzzaman. "Unless they have had some behind-the-scenes deals with the post-election political forces that will form the new government, they are leaving hugely difficult and messy obligations to be addressed for themselves and the new government," he said.

A HEAVY LANDING

Legal experts argue that in a mature democracy, Bashir Uddin's position would be untenable. "If such a thing had taken place in other countries, he would have been forced to resign," said Shahdeen Malik, a senior Supreme Court lawyer.

Instead, the adviser remains defiant, framing legitimate inquiries into his conduct as "smear campaigns" by disgruntled extortionists and the media. He seemed to be operating under the delusion that "patriotism" and "good faith" are sufficient substitutes for structural checks and balances.

"I came to do this work purely out of patriotism. But overall, the attempts being made to destroy my reputation make me sad," Bashir Uddin said. "I was appointed according to the Bangladesh Aviation Act. I am not a legal expert. I am working in good faith."

For now, the AkijBashir Group may get its helicopter licence. Biman may get its Boeings. But this flight of fancy has cost the interim administration its credibility.

Warfaze

FROM PAGE 12

In fine arts, Prof Abdus Sattar has previously received Honourable Mention awards at the Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh, along with the Best Award for Print and a Gold Medal, among many other awards.

Architect Marina Tabassum has earned international recognition, including the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 2016 for the Bait-ur-Rouf Mosque and again in 2025 for Khudi Bari.

Late musician Ayub Bachchu, founder and frontman of the highly popular rock band LRB, received multiple Meril Prothom Alo Awards and a Tele Cine Lifetime Achievement Award in 2017.

Islam Uddin Palakar, a renowned folk singer, is celebrated for performing pala gaan, a traditional narrative form popular in the haor region. He formed his own troupe in 1989 and became widely known for performances including "Komola Rani Sagar Dighi", "Jahangir Badsha", and "Motilal". Recently, he reached a new generation of listeners through Coke Studio Bangla with the song "Deora".

Sculptor Tejosh Halder Josh, known for socially engaged public sculpture, has previously received honours including a Media Best Award and an Honourable Mention Award at the Asian Art Biennale, among others.

In education, Prof Mahbubul Alam Majumdar, dean of the school of data and sciences at BRAC University, recently received the Spirit of Abdus Salam Award. He also serves as a long-time coach and mentor of the national Mathematics Olympiad team.

Warfaze, formed in 1984, is credited with popularising hard rock and heavy metal in Bangladesh, with albums spanning from Warfaze (1991) to Shotto (2012).

The Ekushey Padak, introduced in 1976, is awarded annually in recognition of outstanding contributions to various sectors. The award ceremony usually takes place on February 21, International Mother Language Day and Martyrs' Day.

Famine spreading in Sudan's Darfur

Warn UN-backed experts

AFP, *Port Sudan*

Famine is spreading in Sudan's western Darfur, UN-backed experts warned yesterday, after the paramilitary takeover of the region's main city El-Fasher triggered mass displacement into surrounding communities.

Since April 2023, Sudan has been engulfed in a devastating war between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces that has killed tens of thousands, displaced nearly 11 million and driven multiple regions into famine and hunger.

In an alert issued by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), global food security experts said that "famine thresholds for acute malnutrition have now been surpassed" in North Darfur's contested areas of Um Baru and Kernoi, near the border with Chad.

Bangabhaban staffer bailed in Shafiqur's X hack case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday granted bail to Bangabhaban employee Sarwar-e-Alam, who was arrested in connection with the alleged hacking of Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman's X (formerly Twitter) account.

Dhaka Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Awlad Hossain Muhammad Zonaid passed the order after a hearing on a bail petition, according to a police officer present at the court.

Hatirjheel Police Station Sub-Inspector Khandaker Saleh Abu Nayem, the investigation officer in the case, had produced Sarwar -- an assistant programmer in the ICT section of the president's official residence, Bangabhaban -- before the court and requested his confinement.

Sarwar was brought to the courtroom around

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Human hauliers illegally park in a row along the outer walls of Lalbagh Fort on Lalbagh Road in Old Dhaka. They continue disregarding law, obstructing pedestrians and vehicular movement while marring the historic site. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Prioritise rights, inclusion of persons with disabilities

Disability Rights Watch, TIB urge political parties ahead of polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ahead of the upcoming election, Disability Rights Watch and TIB have urged political parties to ensure the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities by reserving a 2 percent quota in government jobs, allocating ministry-wise budgets, and fully implementing existing disability laws.

At a press conference in Dhaka yesterday, the organisations said despite Bangladesh ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and enacting the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013, implementation has largely stalled, depriving millions of people of basic services.

Citing World Health Organisation estimates, they said nearly 15 percent of Bangladesh's population -- more than 20 million people -- live with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Reserve 2% quota in govt jobs
- Allocate ministry-wise budgets
- Fully implement existing disability laws
- Reserve parliamentary seats
- Ensure accessible education, healthcare, employment
- Guarantee accessible polling stations and transport

Excluding such a large group, they said, makes inclusive development and democratic participation impossible.

The press briefing, titled "Expectations of persons with disabilities from mainstream political parties ahead of the 13th national election," was

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7

DHAKA-5 | FEBRUARY 12 ELECTION | DHAKA-7

Little buzz, high hopes for a better future

SADI MUHAMMAD ALOK *and* SHARIF M SHAFIQUE

The Dhaka-5 constituency, spanning the eastern edge of the capital and covering Jatrabari and Demra police stations, is currently alive with election campaigning.

Areas such as Konapara, Sarulia, Demra College, Jatrabari Intersection, the Matuail Institute of Child and Mother Health and the Dhaka–Chattogram Highway are seeing frequent processions by candidates and their supporters.

However, voters say that although banners, billboards and rallies are visible across the constituency, the festive buzz associated with past elections is noticeably missing. Even so, expectations remain high.

Residents hope long-standing problems -- gas and water shortages, illegal occupation, extortion, terrorism, environmental pollution, traffic congestion, drug abuse and the rise of teen gangs -- will come under control after the election.

Abu Sayeed, a resident of Amulia in Demra, told The Daily Star that the area's drainage system is in a dire state and waste is scattered everywhere.

"There are serious security concerns. Muggings happen after dusk, and the drug trade has expanded unchecked," he said, adding that he hopes candidates will honour the promises made during door-to-door campaigns.

A resident of Jatrabari, speaking anonymously, noted a change in the election atmosphere.

"Earlier, people would crowd street corners all day -- there was barely space to stand. This time, there's much less noise," he said. "Campaigning is ongoing, but voters are mostly quiet. They will cast their ballots on February 12 in their own way."

Dhaka-5 comprises Wards 48, 49, 50 and 60 to 70 of Dhaka South City Corporation. The total number of voters stands at 4,19,996, down from 4,90,764 in the last election -- a decrease of around 70,768 voters.

Nabiullah Nabi
BNP

Kamal Hossain
Jamaat

Jamaat-e-Islami candidate Mohammad Kamal Hossain outlined plans focusing on development, anti-corruption measures and youth employment.

"If we form the government, we will make young people self-reliant," he told The Daily Star. He pledged interest-free loans for new entrepreneurs and said the two closed jute mills in the area would be reopened to create jobs.

He also promised to eliminate

SEE PAGE 9 COL 2

Festivities meet chaos in narrow alleyways

SHARIF M SHAFIQUE *and* SADI MUHAMMAD ALOK

Although Lalbagh and Chawkbazar areas of Old Dhaka are economically vital wholesale hubs, residents of this region continue to grapple with deep-rooted civic problems.

Unplanned housing, shops, factories and warehouses crammed into narrow alleys leave the area -- which falls under the Dhaka-7 constituency -- highly vulnerable to fires.

Residents also endure chronic traffic congestion, dysfunctional drainage systems, gas and water shortages, and a deteriorating law-and-order situation.

The constituency comprises wards 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 35 and 36 of Dhaka South City Corporation, covering Lalbagh, Chawkbazar, Bangshal, Kamrangirchar and parts of Kotwali police station.

Elections in the constituency are often influenced by business leaders and long-time locals of Old Dhaka.

"In business and in accessing civic services, corruption is everywhere. Law and order situation is not good either," said Anwar Hossain, 40, a Lalbagh-based businessman. "Currently, the government has no control over anything. We hope things will improve after the election."

With campaigning underway in the Dhaka-7 alleyways, candidates' offices have sprung up at key intersections. Supporters march through alleys, distribute leaflets and use loudspeakers to draw attention.

Mohammad Anwar, a businessman from Ward 27 in Hossaini Dalan area, said residents face gas shortages, waterlogging and insecurity. "We want a safe environment and security for trade," he said.

Voters say a festive election atmosphere has returned to the area, with processions, door-to-door visits and public outreach by candidates' supporters.

Seema Dutta, the Socialist Party of Bangladesh (Marxist)-nominated candidate for Dhaka-7, said growing

Hamidur Rahman
BNP

Md Enayet Ullah
Jamaat

public distrust in major parties has opened space for left-wing politics, though fear and anxiety remain among the general public regarding the election.

"If elected, I will work to protect Harijan Colony land in Lalbagh, resolve the gas crisis and address unemployment," she said, adding that her focus goes beyond infrastructure to representing ordinary people in national policymaking.

She also pledged to advocate for women's rights and urged young voters

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4

For Nurun Nahar, empowering women comes first

MD QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT, *Thakurgaon*

Under the afternoon sun on a rural earthen road, two jeeps slowed near a small gathering. A woman stepped out, greeted villagers warmly, shook hands and embraced several women before handing out leaflets bearing the plough symbol. It was Nurun Nahar Begum, the Jatiya Party nominated candidate for Thakurgaon-2, on a door-to-door campaign ahead of the 13th national parliamentary election scheduled for February 12.

In her sixties and a familiar face across Barabari union, Nurun Nahar has been canvassing villages, including Uttar Baliadangi, Phultala, Mahajanhat, Dangi Bazar and Haripur Katabari, seeking votes and urging residents to mobilise support.

Locals responded with recognition and encouragement. "Of course I know you. Isn't your father Chairman Badiuzzaman?" said Asia Begum with a smile.

Md Awal of Mahajanhat urged her to expand her outreach. "You are a daughter of this area, we are with you," he said.

At Dangi Bazar, shopkeeper Babul echoed the sentiment, noting that her election would make local representatives more accessible. "In times of need, we will be able to reach out to you easily," he said.

Digen Chandra Singh of Katabari added, "We are already with you."

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

KILLING OF OSMAN HADI

Govt decides to propose UN probe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The interim government has decided to propose an investigation by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights into the killing of Inqilab Moncho spokesperson Sharif Osman Hadi.

The decision was announced yesterday through a social media post by Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam.

Earlier in the day, leaders and activists of Inqilab Moncho staged a sit-in outside Jamuna, the official residence of the chief adviser, demanding a UN-supervised investigation into Hadi's killing. The demonstration began around 3:30pm.

During the sit-in, Inqilab Moncho Member Secretary Abdullah Al Jaber told reporters that the protest was organised with a limited number of participants due to security concerns.

He said they would not leave the site without assurances of justice, adding that the Inqilab Moncho would remain on the streets until the demand was not met.

Sources said eight to ten activists initially joined the protests, including Jaber, Dhaka University Central Students' Union (Ducsu) Liberation War and Democratic Movements Affairs Secretary Fatima Tasnim Zuma, and Hadi's wife, Rabaya Islam Shampa.

In the evening, protesters issued a one-hour ultimatum, which expired without any response from the authorities.

Meanwhile, another sit-in involving several hundred people was held outside Hotel InterContinental,

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

Ongoing violence, state inaction raising fear before polls

Say speakers at dialogue by Sompriti Jatra

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Continued election-related violence, attacks on cultural institutions, shrinking civic space, and administrative inaction are raising fears ahead of the national election, prompting doubts about whether a peaceful and credible democratic transition is possible, speakers said at a dialogue yesterday.

The discussion, titled "National Election 2026: The Continuity of Violence and the Sense of Responsibility for Harmony," was organised by Sompriti Jatra at Bishwo Shahitto Kendro in Dhaka.

Speakers noted that violence since the July uprising reflects a continuing pattern, compounded by state denial and weak accountability.

Samantha Sharmin, senior joint convener of the National Citizen Party (NCP), said instability at the local level is politically driven by a faction within the interim government.

She questioned the authority of Home Adviser Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury. "There is no point in blaming Jahangir Alam. He is just a face, just a spokesperson. I question how much control he actually has."

Sharmin added that claims of law and order being under control are hollow.

"This is not just denial. A big portion within this government actually wants this kind of instability," she added, warning that political deals had already begun to compromise women's rights.

Claims of law and order being under control are hollow. This is not just denial. A big portion within this government actually wants this kind of instability.

SAMANTHA SHARMIN
Senior joint convener, NCP

Rafsan Galib, journalist at Prothom Alo, said the state's repeated denial of mob violence was the most dangerous trend.

Referring to attacks on Prothom Alo and The Daily Star, he said threats and calls for violence were circulated openly on social media by identifiable student representatives beforehand, but the authorities took no preventive steps.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

Ekushey Boi Mela to begin on Feb 20

STAR REPORT

The month-long Amar Ekushey Boi Mela, organised by Bangla Academy, will start on February 20 this year.

Dr Md Selim Reza, member secretary of the Amar Ekushey Boi Mela 2026 Organising Committee, disclosed the information at a press conference yesterday at Bangla Academy's Shaheed Munier Chowdhury Auditorium.

Reading from a written statement, he said, "The fair is an inseparable part of the country's cultural heritage. However, due to practical reasons, it has not been possible to start the fair on February 1 this year like in previous years. The fair will begin on February 20."

Dr Reza added that stall rents have been reduced by 25 percent compared to last year following demands from publishers, adding that all preparations for the fair are complete.

"The government has allocated Suhrawardy Udyan for the fair. Construction of stalls is underway, and the schedules for discussions and cultural programmes have been finalised," he said.

Regarding stall allocation, he said that of the 527 institutions that participated last year and 53 new applicants, stalls have been allotted to all 527 previous participants and 24 new institutions due to space constraints.

He also addressed publishers' requests to postpone the fair until after Eid.

Bangla Academy Director General Mohammad Azam told journalists that arrangements have been made to accommodate Ramadan.

Pedestrians walk by an uncovered manhole near the Karwan Bazar Metro Station in the capital. This unsupervised state of the manhole, devoid of a safety barrier, can cause an accident. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Political will key to achieving Universal Health Coverage

Say experts policy dialogue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Health experts and campaigners yesterday said poor governance and inadequate funding continue to challenge the health sector, and overcoming them to achieve Universal Health Coverage by 2030 will require strong political will from the next government.

They also said current health sector discussions focus mainly on curative services, while greater emphasis should be placed on preventive care and people's wellbeing, particularly amid the rising burden of non-communicable diseases.

Meanwhile, four political party leaders and representatives of affiliated doctors' associations said their parties have already outlined plans to address these challenges and would implement them if voted to power.

They were speaking at a policy dialogue titled "Priority Health Reform Action Agenda: Bangladesh Road to Universal Health Coverage" at Dhaka Reporters Unity.

The Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) and the UHC Forum organised the dialogue with support from Unicef and Bangladesh Health Reporters Forum.

Aminul Hasan, member secretary of the UHC Forum, gave a detailed presentation on progress and challenges to achieve UHC, citing recent data.

He said Thailand introduced the Universal Coverage Scheme in 2002 and, due to sustained political ownership, the scheme helped reduce out-of-pocket health expenditure from around 50 percent to nearly 10 percent.

The model is now being considered globally, he said.

He said that, according to service coverage indicators, Bangladesh's score stands at 54 out of 100, while the global average is 71. Bangladesh is also lagging behind the regional average, performing better than only Pakistan and Afghanistan in South Asia.

"So, Bangladesh has many things to do to achieve at least 80 percent of the UHC target by 2030," he said.

He emphasised reforms in governance and leadership, health financing, strengthening service

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4

348 Rohingya people held in Chattogram

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Chattogram*

Law enforcement agencies detained 348 Rohingya individuals from the Dohazari area of Chandanaish upazila in Chattogram early yesterday.

A joint team comprising the Police, Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), and the Army conducted a four-hour raid from 5:00am to 9:00am at the "Burma Colony" in Dohazari municipality, said police sources.

Chandanaish Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md Elias Khan told The Daily Star that the drive was part of heightened security measures to maintain law and order in crime-prone areas before the February 12 polls.

According to police sources, the joint forces searched over a hundred houses in the colony. Among the detainees are 176 men, 86 women, and 86 children and adolescents.

"The detainees were brought to the police station where their citizenship and camp addresses were scrutinised until Thursday afternoon," a police official said.

OC Elias Khan added that all 348 individuals have been confirmed as Rohingya refugees who had illegally left their designated camps in Cox's Bazar. "We are in the process of handing them over to the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner representatives..."

PRAYER TIMING
FEBRUARY 6

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

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Trade, defence deals aimed at easing path for next govt: Touhid

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The trade and defence deals being signed at the far end of the interim government tenure are meant to make things easier for the next government, not to leave behind any burden, said Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain yesterday.

He was speaking at the farewell interaction with the media at the foreign ministry.

On January 27, Bangladesh Air Force and China Electronics Technology Group Corporation International signed an agreement for establishing a drone manufacturing and assembly plant, as well as for technology transfer.

On February 3, Bangladesh and Japan signed a deal on the transfer of defence equipment and technology meant for the modernisation of the Bangladesh defence sector.

The two countries are also likely to sign an Economic Partnership Agreement with Japan today, while a trade deal with the US is expected before the election.

Referring to the trade negotiations with the US, Touhid Hossain said the interim government has been continuously engaged and moved things forward, which led to the reduction of the tariff to 20 percent from 37 percent.

Govt sets Ramadan office hours

STAR REPORT

The government yesterday approved revised office hours for the upcoming month of Ramadan, setting the workday from 9:00am to 3:30pm for all public institutions.

The decision was taken at the Advisory Council's weekly meeting chaired by Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus.

Briefing reporters after the meeting at the Foreign Service Academy in Dhaka, Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam said the shortened schedule will apply throughout the fasting month.

Under the new arrangement, all government, semi-government, autonomous, and semi-autonomous offices will operate within the revised hours. A 15-minute prayer break will be observed from 1:00pm to 1:15pm.

For Nurun Nahar, empowering women comes first

FROM PAGE 3

Another voter, Subela (pseudonym), pointed to shifting political loyalties. "People have always treated us as voters of a particular party.

This time, we do not even have our own candidate," she said, hinting at the absence of a former MP. "We will vote for you."

Having contested the 12th parliamentary election in 2024 and earlier the upazila chairman election, Nurun Nahar is well known in the area. After her door-to-door drive, she addressed an election meeting at Adhardighi Haat.

Addressing the gathering, Nurun Nahar, daughter of a former union chairman and a native of the constituency, sought not only votes but active participation from residents.

She expressed regret that her brief tenure as an MP from a reserved women's seat in the 12th Jatiya Sangsad limited her ability to deliver on planned work.

If elected, she pledged to improve law and order, create jobs for unemployed youths and establish industrial units, including garment factories.

She also outlined plans to empower women by promoting cottage industries, offering vocational training and building a skilled female workforce, alongside measures to ensure women's safety and prevent domestic violence.

Speaking to The Daily Star, she said she had received a positive response, particularly from women. "Having grown up with my father involved in politics and serving as an elected representative, I have been connected with the people from a young age," she said.

"I have no personal wants or needs. I have entered politics with the sole aim of serving the public."

Some locals, however, voiced caution. Golam Mostofa of Belhara village said, "This is the first time we have seen her carrying out public outreach. She is known in the area, but the Jatiya Party's organisational structure is no longer as strong as it used to be. Managing such a large election will be difficult."

Other contenders in Thakurgaon-2 include Dr Abdus Salam (BNP), Abdul Hakim (Jamaat-led 11-party alliance), Faruk Hossain (Ganadhikar Parishad), Nahid Rana (AB Party), Rezaul Karim (Islami Andolan Bangladesh) and Sahab Uddin Ahmed (CPB).

The constituency comprising Baliadangi and Haripur upazilas and parts of Ranisankail has 340,049 voters.

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e-Tender Notice

The following e-Tenders are invited in the National e-GP System Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of:

Sl No.	Tender ID No.	Package No.	Reference No.	Description of goods/ works	Last selling date & time	Closing date and time	Opening date and time
01	ID-1219148	EE-GRL-10 (FY: 2025-26)	27.11.0000.304.26.216.26, Date: 03/02/2026	Supply of 15 Meter Steel Pole (650 daN & 550 daN)	11-Mar-2026, 17:00	12-Mar-2026 14:00	12-Mar-2026, 14:00

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted.
To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) is required.
The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank branches.
Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).
For more details please contract to the PE's Support Desk (01768015538).

বিদ্যুৎ/জন-৬৯৯(২)/০৫/০২/২৬

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

GD-268

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Department of Fisheries, Bangladesh
Matshya Bhaban, Ramna, Dhaka.
www.fisheries.gov.bd

Memo no: 33.02.0000.105.27.001.23- 124 Date: 03.02.2026

e-Tender Notice

The following Tender has been published through e-GP system:

Sl. #	Tender ID #	Package Description
01	1219839	Supply and Installation of LCMS-MS machine with related services for Quality Control Laboratory, Department of Fisheries, Dhaka. Package No: DoF/Own/2025-2026/GD-01.

All others information are available in www.eprocure.gov.bd.

03.02.26

(Dr. Fozlul Kabeer)
Deputy Director (General) (C. C.)
Phone: 02-223387217
Email: ddgeneral@fisheries.gov.bd

GD-263

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Executive Engineer
Education Engineering Department
Narail
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e-Tender Notice No. 113-13/2025-2026 Date: 05/02/2026

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of the following works under EED, Narail District as mentioned below.

Sl No.	Tender ID No.	Package No.	Identification of package	Procurement method	Tender document last selling date & time	Tender closing date & time
01	1194389	NARAIL/ENGG. COLLEGE/ 2025-26/WD-14	Construction of 10-Storied Academic Building (02) With 10-Storied Foundation including Sanitary, Water, Supply and Electrification Works at Narail Engineering College under Sadar Upazila Narail District.	OTM	08/03/2026 (16:00)	09/03/2026 (13:00)
02	1194391	NARAIL/ENGG. COLLEGE/ 2025-26/WD-18	Construction of 10-Storied Academic Building (03) with 10-Storied Foundation including Sanitary, Water, Supply and Electrification Works at Narail Engineering College under Sadar Upazila Narail District.	OTM	08/03/2026 (16:00)	09/03/2026 (13:00)

This is an online tender where only e-Tender will be acceptable in the National e-GP System Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender A1 renewed up to **FY 2025-26** enlistment category contractor of Education Engineering Department under all district who are registered in the National e-GP System Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) will be eligible. The fees for downloading the e-Tender document from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank's branches up to **12:00 on 09/03/2026**. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd). The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject any or all tender(s) without assigning any reason whatsoever.

Arunava Roy
Executive Engineer
Education Engineering Department
Narail

GD-264

বেসিক ব্যাংক পিএলসি
সমৃদ্ধির পথে মানুষের সাথে
শতভাগ রাষ্ট্র মালিকানাধীন বাণিজ্যিক ব্যাংক

বরিশাল শাখা স্থানান্তর

আরো উন্নত ব্যাংকিং সেবা প্রদানের লক্ষ্যে বেসিক ব্যাংক পিএলসি.-এর বরিশাল শাখা, ০১ ফেব্রুয়ারী, ২০২৬ ইং (রবিবার) নতুন ঠিকানায় ব্যাংকিং কার্যক্রম শুরু করেছে।

পুরাতন ঠিকানা	বর্তমান ঠিকানা
উলফত শপিং কমপ্লেক্স হোল্ডিং নং-১০২ চকবাজার রোড, ওয়ার্ড নং-০৯ বরিশাল সিটি কর্পোরেশন থানা ঃ কোতোয়ালী জেলা ঃ বরিশাল।	চন্দ্রদ্বীপ ভবন হোল্ডিং নং-৭৮৮, নতুন-১০৭৩ মাওলানা এনায়েতুর রহমান সড়ক ফলপট্টি, চকবাজার, ওয়ার্ড নং-০৯ কোতোয়ালী থানা বরিশাল সদর, বরিশাল।

সম্মানিত গ্রাহক, পৃষ্ঠপোষক ও শুভানুধ্যায়ীদের নতুন ঠিকানায় যোগাযোগ এবং ব্যাংকিং সেবা গ্রহণের জন্য অনুরোধ করা হলো।

US, Russia to re-establish high-level dialogue

Pentagon says after New START treaty expires

REUTERS

The US military said that Washington and Moscow yesterday agreed to reestablish high level military-to-military dialogue, following talks in Abu Dhabi, over four years after suspension.

"This channel of communication was suspended in the fall of 2021, just prior to the onset of the conflict," the United States European Command said in a statement, referring to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"The reestablishment follows meetings in the United Arab Emirates' capital between Gen Alexus G Grynkewich, Commander of US European Command, and senior Russian and Ukrainian military officials."

Residents queue to collect OSB boards to cover broken windows at their apartment building, damaged during a Russian overnight drone strike in Kyiv yesterday. Ukraine and Russia concluded a second day of US-brokered talks in Abu Dhabi, agreeing to a major prisoner swap — the first such exchange in five months, officials said. PHOTO: REUTERS

Xi calls for 'mutual respect' with Trump

Both leaders, in a phone call, discuss trade, Taiwan, Russia's war in Ukraine, Iran

AFP, *Beijing*

Chinese President Xi Jinping discussed Iran and other thorny subjects Wednesday with both US counterpart Donald Trump and Russia's Vladimir Putin, hailing tighter ties with Moscow and calling for "mutual respect" with Washington.

Trump and Putin both played up their nations' good relations with China after their respective calls with Xi, highlighting the Asian giant's centrality on the global stage.

But there were stark differences in the readouts of the two calls, with Xi warning Trump to proceed with "caution" on the touchy issue of Taiwan, shortly after he and Putin hailed the strengthening of bilateral ties in the face of a "turbulent" global situation.

Trump said his conversation with Xi was "excellent". "The relationship with China, and my personal relationship with President Xi, is an extremely good one, and we both realize how important it is to keep it that way," Trump posted on his Truth Social platform.

The Republican said he and Xi had discussed trade, Taiwan, Russia's war in Ukraine and Iran, as well as a planned trip to China, which he said "I very much look forward to".

FUNDING CRISIS

UN human rights agency in 'survival mode': Turk

AFP, *Geneva*

UN human rights chief Volker Turk said yesterday his agency was "in survival mode" due to funding shortfalls, as he launched a $400 million appeal to tackle global rights crises in 2026.

"Our reporting provides credible information on atrocities and human rights trends at a time when truth is being eroded by disinformation and censorship," Turk said.

"We are a lifeline for the abused, a megaphone for the silenced, and a steadfast ally to those who risk everything to defend the rights of others."

In 2025, the UN Human Rights Office's approved regular budget was $246 million, but it received only $191.5 million.

It also requested $500 million in voluntary contributions, of which it received around $260 million. "We are currently in survival mode, delivering under strain," said Turk.

Iran's Khamenei 'should be very worried'

Trump tells NBC News; Iran Guards seize two foreign-crewed tankers in Gulf

AGENCIES

US President Donald Trump said Wednesday that Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei should be "very worried," as Washington builds up its military forces in the region.

"I would say he should be very worried, yeah, he should be," Trump said in an interview with US broadcaster NBC News. "As you know, they are negotiating with us."

Trump's comments came as a report by the Axios news outlet said that US-Iran talks planned for today were "collapsing" after US officials declined to move the location of the talks or shift the format.

Trump has sent a US aircraft carrier to the region and has not ruled out new military action to follow the US attacks on Iranian nuclear sites during Israel's June war against the Islamic republic.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said nuclear talks were now "scheduled" for today in Muscat. "I'm grateful to our Omani brothers for making all necessary arrangements," he said on X. A White House official also confirmed to AFP that the meeting would happen in Oman today.

But there was no indication they had found common ground on the agenda. Iran has pushed to restrict the negotiations to discussing its long-running nuclear dispute with Western countries, reports Reuters.

- White House confirms US-Iran nuclear talks in Oman today
- Talks should include missile programme, other issues: Rubio
- Iran arrests foreign national, seizes weapons shipment

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio presented a different view on Wednesday. "If the Iranians want to meet, we're ready," Rubio told reporters. But he added that talks would have to include the range of Iran's ballistic missiles, its support for armed proxy groups around the Middle East and its treatment of its own people, besides nuclear issues.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards have seized two oil tankers with their foreign crews in Gulf waters for "smuggling fuel," the Tasnim news agency reported yesterday. It was not immediately clear what flags the tankers were carrying nor the nationalities of the crew.

Iranian authorities have arrested a foreign national and seized a shipment of hand-to-hand weapons in the country's northwest, state media reported on Wednesday.

"A 14-tonne shipment of various types of professional weapons and items that can be used in riots was discovered and seized upon entering Iran," the official IRNA news agency said.

"A foreign national was detained," it added, without specifying the individual's nationality. The shipment allegedly included stun guns, batons, knives and weapon accessories.

Pak military concludes ops against separatists

216 militants killed

REUTERS, *Karachi*

Pakistan's military said yesterday that it had concluded a week-long security operation against separatists in Balochistan, killing 216 militants in targeted offensives across the troubled southwestern province.

Balochistan, Pakistan's largest and poorest province, was brought to a virtual standstill on Saturday when the separatist Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) stormed schools, banks, markets and security installations across the region in one of their largest operations ever.

The military said 22 security personnel and 36 civilians were killed in the attacks. The BLA's coordinated strikes in over a dozen locations began after the military launched its "intelligence driven" Radd Al-Fitna 1 (countering chaos) operation, which the army said began on January 29.

MANDELSON APPOINTMENT

UK PM apologises to Epstein victims

REUTERS, *London*

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer yesterday apologised to the victims of Jeffrey Epstein and said he was sorry for having appointed Peter Mandelson as US ambassador, who was a close friend of the late sex offender.

Starmer said he had not known about the strength of the relationship between Mandelson and Epstein when he appointed him to the role in December, 2024.

Starmer has previously said he will release the vetting advice he was given when he selected Mandelson for the Washington role, but yesterday he said he also needed to abide by a police request not to release anything that could prejudice an investigation.

Meanwhile, the Kremlin said yesterday it did not want to waste time answering questions about unproven suggestions in Western media and by Poland's premier that Epstein may have been some sort of Russian intelligence asset.

Temporary police officers practice during training ahead of Nepal's parliamentary elections in Kathmandu yesterday. Former chief justice Sushila Karki is serving as interim prime minister until the vote on March 5. PHOTO: AFP

'Softer touch' needed on immigration: Trump

US to remove 700 agents from Minnesota

AFP, *Minneapolis*

US President Donald Trump suggested Wednesday that a "softer touch" may be needed on immigration, as his administration said 700 federal officers would be pulled from Minnesota but that mass deportations would not stop.

The fatal shootings of two protesters by federal officers in Minneapolis last month sparked widespread outrage in the United States and calls for an end to immigration raids in the Midwestern city, but Trump's administration has been reluctant to shift course.

"I learned that maybe we could use a little bit of a softer touch. But you still have to be tough," Trump said in an interview with NBC's "Nightly News" when asked what he had learned from Minneapolis.

Trump's border chief Tom Homan had earlier announced that 700 federal officers would be withdrawn from Minnesota, but said the contentious deployment would continue.

OIL SHORTAGE

UN warns of humanitarian 'collapse' in Cuba

AFP, *United Nations*

UN chief Antonio Guterres warned that Cuba risks humanitarian "collapse" if it is denied oil, his spokesman said Wednesday as the United States threatens to cut energy supplies as part of a pressure campaign.

"The secretary-general is extremely concerned about the humanitarian situation in Cuba, which will worsen, if not collapse, if its oil needs go unmet," spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

Communist Cuba has been under a US trade embargo for decades and relied on oil supplies from Venezuela until the American military ousted its socialist leader Nicolas Maduro last month.

President Donald Trump has since claimed he controls the country's oil and threatened to cut off Cuba, as well as impose tariffs on any other nation stepping in to help Havana.

He has said he wants to "make a deal" with Cuba's leadership. Trump said Monday that Mexico would stop sending oil to Cuba -- which he described as "a failed nation."

Bangladesh Parliament Secretariat
Administration Section
Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1225
www.parliament.gov.bd

Invitation for Tender

1.	Ministry/Division	Bangladesh Parliament Secretariat.
2.	Procuring entity name	Senior Assistant Secretary, Administration Section, Bangladesh Parliament Secretariat.
3	Invitation for	Supply of medical equipments.
4.	Invitation Ref. No.	11.00.0000.000.604.07.0139.25/73 Date: 05.02.2026
5.	Procurement method	Open Tendering Method (National)
6.	Budget and source of funds	Revenue Budget.
7.	Tender package name and short description of goods	Package 14 (Lot-4): Hematology Analyzer, Laboratory Centrifuge, Dental Unit, IRR, Micro Wave Diathermy, Tens+Ultra Sount, Slit Lamp, Auto Refractometer & Opthalmic Unit etc.
8.	Tender selling place	Reception Room (Inside Tunnel), Parliament Secretariat.
9.	Tender selling date	10/02/2026-25/02/2026 (Time: 10:00am-4:00pm).
10.	Tender submission date, time and place	Submission date: 26/02/2026, Time: 9:30am-12:00pm, Reception Room (Inside Tunnel), Parliament Secretariat.
11.	Tender opening date, time and place	Opening date: 26/02/2026, Opening Time: 12:05pm, Deputy Secretary (Admin-1), Level-7, Block-East, Room No. 7, (Lift-13, 14, 15 & 16).
12.	Brief eligibility and qualification of tenderer	Reputed Firms/Suppliers having valid trade license (2025-2026), income tax clearance certificate (2025-2026) (for company 2024-2025), BIN, experience certificate & original Manufacturer Authorization/Distributor Authorization/Reseller Authorization. (b) Detailed terms & conditions will be mentioned in tender schedule.
13.	Price of tender schedule	Price of schedule Tk. 5000/- (Five thousand) only (As mentioned in the schedule).
14.	Tender security & tender validity period	2,00,000/- (Two lac). Validity period: 120 days.
15.	Name, designation, address & phone number of official inviting tender	Md. Mohidul Haque, Senior Assistant Secretary (Administration), Block: North-East, Ground Floor, Room No. 131, Parliament Secretariat (Phone: 55029007).
16.	Special instructions	• The procuring entity reserves the right to reject all tenders or annul the tender proceedings. • Lot based lowest bidders will be selected.

05.02.26
Md. Mohidul Haque
Senior Assistant Secretary
Phone: 55029007

GD-266

The Daily Star
FOUNDER EDITOR: **LATE S. M. ALI**

Voters need assurance of safety, not denial of facts

Visible action needed to address electoral violence

With only a week left for the election, the collection and analysis of intelligence reports to identify vulnerable constituencies and polling centres have not only become crucial but urgent. Thirteen constituencies have already been identified as highly risky, and media reports suggest law enforcers are conducting similar exercises to identify high-risk polling centres across districts. As the police continue these drills and assess the broader security landscape, we must emphasise that deploying extra forces around polling centres solely on election day is insufficient.

Several incidents of political violence, which turned fatal, have occurred recently. Last week, a Jamaat activist from Sherpur succumbed to his injuries after clashes with BNP activists over as ordinary an issue as seating arrangement at a programme organised by the local administration. According to Human Rights Support Society (HRSS), between September 2024 and January 2026, at least 195 people were killed and 11,229 were injured due to political violence. Of these deaths, at least five occurred in election-related violence since the date of the 13th parliamentary election was announced on December 11, 2025. The report also documented 970 injuries from 162 election-violence-related incidents, including clashes, attacks, vandalism, and arson involving rival candidates and their supporters. A report published in this daily earlier this week quoted police headquarters reports about 57 clashes in 50 constituencies since the announcement of the polls schedule. Of these clashes, 25 occurred between the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami, eight within the BNP, another eight between the BNP and independent candidates, and three between the BNP and the National Citizen Party.

Besides, recent campaign rhetoric among the major political parties has taken on an increasingly hostile tone. Allegations of printing false seals, planning to "hijack people's votes" are also rife. Thus, the possibility of pre-election and election-day clashes cannot be ruled out. Furthermore, law enforcement agencies must also be prepared to manage post-election clashes. In the past, communities that voted for a particular party/candidate would often come under attack. This issue must be taken into special consideration this year so that the promise of a new pluralistic and democratic Bangladesh is not stained in the aftermath of this much-awaited national election.

In this context, the home adviser's claim that "there is no mob violence" and that "violence is impossible during the election" will do little to ease voters' apprehension about the February 12 polls. What is needed is visible action, not just by law enforcers, but also by the Election Commission. Monitoring and punitive action must be enforced uniformly against all parties for any violation, major or minor, to set a clear example. Political parties must also show restraint and rein in disruptive elements to ensure voters can exercise their choice freely and without fear. If this election is to be historic, the process and its aftermath both must be violence-free.

Policy consistency a must in primary education

There is no alternative to continuous assessment

The decision to reintroduce examinations in classes one and two, barely two years after they were scrapped under the new curriculum, once again exposes the lack of coherence and long-term thinking in our education policymaking. At a time when the focus should be on improving learning outcomes and strengthening classroom practices, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education has chosen to reverse its assessment policy, which will significantly impact young children.

Under the revised guidelines, exams will make up half of the assessment in class one and two for textbook-based subjects, alongside continuous assessment. This directly contradicts the reasoning behind scrapping exams in 2023, when policymakers acknowledged that exam-based learning places undue pressure on six- and seven-year-old children and does little to support meaningful learning. Changing that decision so quickly reflects the government's policy instability, which is an enduring problem in our education sector.

Educationists believe that there is no alternative to continuous assessment in primary education. Recent data on the quality of primary education reinforces their view. The National Student Assessment 2022 found that over 60 percent of third graders and 70 percent of fifth graders lack grade-level proficiency in mathematics. In Bangla, around half of the students in these grades are similarly behind. Experts attribute this to overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teaching methods, poor student-teacher interaction, and a shortage of resources. The findings emphasise that reintroducing examinations will not improve learning unless the fundamental weaknesses in teaching and classroom support are addressed.

At present, children are not being properly taught in classrooms, and continuous assessment is not being implemented effectively, according to experts. Many teachers are also unaware of how continuous assessment should be carried out. Yet, this failure is now being passed on to students in the name of terminal exams. Educationists argue that learning should be based on each child's ability, with a much stronger emphasis on continuous assessment.

Reintroducing exams in the earliest grades, without addressing systemic flaws, will only create confusion and undermine trust in reform efforts. What the sector needs is sustained investment in teacher training, smaller class sizes to allow meaningful student-teacher interaction, stronger classroom support, and careful monitoring of learning processes. Remedial assistance must be made available for struggling students, and assessment policies must be stable and evidence-based, focusing on foundational skills. Only with consistency, investment, and child-centred policies can we hope to improve our primary education.

Politicians must be open to accepting electoral defeats

Discard the mindset that 'the election is only fair if I win'

THE THIRD VIEW

Mahfuz Anam
is the editor and publisher of The Daily Star.

MAHFUZ ANAM

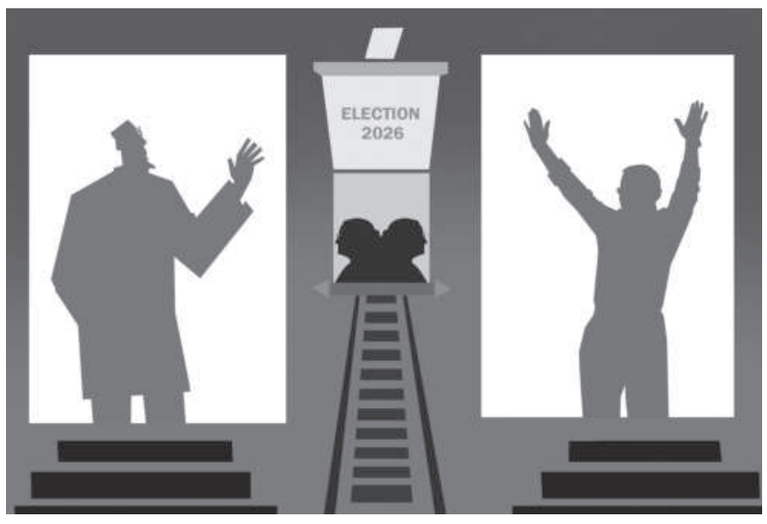
Three things mark the distinctiveness of the upcoming national election: the resurgence of Jamaat-e-Islami, the rise of Tarique Rahman as a central personality of present-day politics, and something that was unthinkable before August 2024—the sidelining of Awami League from the present election.

Ever since its role in our Liberation War, in which it opposed the birth of Bangladesh and assisted the Pakistan Army in committing genocide and al Badr and al Shams in killing our intellectuals, Jamaat's presence in the country's politics has been a deeply controversial matter. The fact that it never apologised for its role and never sought forgiveness from the people of Bangladesh remains something that made its acceptability nearly impossible. Its latest position, as expressed by its chief, Dr Shafiqur Rahman, is that "if we have committed any mistake since 1947 (the year of birth of Pakistan, which Jamaat, led by its founder Abul A'la Maududi, had opposed) till date, we apologise for it." The party's refusal to refer to the events of 1971 and apologise for opposing our independence struggle and acting against the ordinary and freedom-loving people remains most tragic.

However, in spite of its past, Jamaat today is a significant presence in the upcoming election. Opinion polls show that it is likely to emerge as the second biggest party in the next parliament. How did it navigate through such a shameful legacy and emerge with such a strength?

The most important reason is its use of the rising consciousness of Muslim identity among the majority of Bangladeshis, and Jamaat positioning itself to be the most authentic representative of that. The utter failure of the two centrist parties—Awami League (AL) in particular and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) to some extent—to make a deep, lasting impact of nationalistic and secular politics in voters' minds created the space for Jamaat's resurgence. Together, these two parties were in power since 1991, and their performance only distanced the people from them. The corrupt, exploitative, and oppressive role of the Awami League during its 15-plus years of rule that ended in August 2024—a party whose legitimacy and appeal centred around its role in 1971—greatly opened up further space for Jamaat to strengthen its position in our politics.

Jamaat's ideological consistency in the use of religion, its organisational ability, and the commitment of its grassroots workers have contributed immensely to its present strength. The way its student activists penetrated Chhatra League over the years, and assumed its second-tier leadership roles in some cases, shows the effectiveness of the party's long-term planning and organisational ability. Shibir's (Jamaat's student wing) victory in the student union elections at five public universities that took place recently is evidence of how successful their efforts have been. It is also reported that Jamaat's grassroots female members have been quite active and effective in their home-to-home campaigning for the party.



VISUAL: **BIPLOB CHAKROBORTY**

In this connection, Jamaat's electoral ally National Citizen Party (NCP) also deserves a mention. A party that emerged from the July uprising, NCP entered electoral politics with huge expectations but then found itself aligning with the Jamaat-led bloc in a decision that could be consequential for the party's future, both immediate and distant.

The second unique aspect of this election is the rise of Tarique Rahman. He was the heir apparent from the start, but his phenomenal rise is something quite stunning. The way he kept his party operational from London for so many years while his mother was incarcerated speaks volumes of his ability to use modern communication facilities to keep a political party motivated and, more importantly, disciplined. He was well-known for his connection with local-level leadership through mobile and internet, which young BNP activists at the district and upazila levels found to be a matter of pride. Numerous attempts by the AL to split the party or to lure some important leaders away from it were thwarted by Tarique Rahman's direct communication and persuasive abilities. Fifteen years is a long period in any country's politics, especially Bangladesh, and the fact that BNP was kept primarily intact (despite being relentlessly suppressed by the AL government) testifies to his organising capacity.

Many felt that he took too long to return to Bangladesh after the fall of the Awami League government, and that BNP would have been greatly strengthened if he had been here much earlier. Late as he might have come, his return electrified the party, energised the workers, and brought in a new confidence that was absent earlier. Warm acceptance by the public and the overall support exhibited by the huge gatherings in all his public appearances have made him a central factor in Bangladesh's current electoral politics. So far, he has conducted himself with dignity and maturity. His speeches have been restrained and future-oriented. His detailed enunciation of what he plans to do if elected to power contrasts well with the rhetorical speeches of others. Whether he has been able to organise his party well to campaign effectively or not will be clear after the polls. But so far, he has successfully filled in the shoes of his late mother, whose janaza stood out as the most striking evidence of the love and respect she enjoyed and the sympathy that he has the possibility of inheriting.

The third feature of the upcoming election is the prevention of Awami League from participating in it. The party has not been banned, but its activities are. How could a party that has played such an important role in the birth of Bangladesh and has been a part of it for the last 55 years become so vulnerable as to be sidelined in such a crucial political event as an election?

Awami League's present debacle has many contributing factors, including extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances, but mainly owes to its brutal killings in the streets of Dhaka and the rest of the country during the last six weeks of its rule. One incident illustrates it all. How could a young university student like Abu Sayed, completely unarmed, standing alone on a street away from other protesters, without posing any threat to anybody, let alone the police who were standing far away, be shot to death? Sheikh Hasina and her government lost everything—the people, credibility, and acceptability—and revealed the mindset of a vicious oppressor. This was further proven by the fact that instead of expressing regret and taking action against the perpetrators, the government fiddled, more than once, with the autopsy report and tried to justify its actions. Then followed the weeks of the killing of demonstrators, which created the ground for banning AL's activities.

Which party AL voters will tilt towards on February 12 will perhaps have a decisive impact on the outcome of the polls.

There is, of course, an additional feature of this election: the eclipsing of Jatiya Party, which dominated politics under Gen HM Ershad up to 1990, and had the third place in all the elections since then.

Elections are always central to a country's democratic march forward. But this year, the polls are far more crucial because Bangladesh urgently needs to restart its journey of stability, predictability, ending mobocracy, getting the direly needed investment, and public safety and security. All of these are expected to start with the installation of an elected parliament, accountable government, competent policymakers, and clarity of a vision as to where we are going.

We conclude with a warning drawn from history: that while we are highly enthusiastic about elections, we are terribly reluctant about accepting their results when we lose. The losers are of two categories: individuals who fail to win, and the party that fails to win enough parliamentary seats to form the next government. It is the last category that usually questions the polls and destabilises the transition. We have seen it in all past elections, even under the caretaker system. As we summarised the tendency in a previous article, an election is only free and fair if we win but rigged if we lose! This tendency is something we must move away from. It is our ardent hope and genuine expectation that the result will be accepted with grace and dignity. If there are fact-based grounds for questioning, do so as per the rules laid down by the Election Commission. Do not create unnecessary chaos and disruptions. The country needs to move on urgently and peacefully.

Here's to a free, fair, and peaceful election.

Can the next government tame the bureaucracy?

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SABBIR AHMAD

As Bangladesh approaches the pivotal February 12 election, a singular, urgent demand resonates from tea stalls to boardrooms: the dismantling of a bureaucratic apparatus that has strangled national progress for decades. The 2024 uprising was never merely about changing faces in parliament; it was also a revolt against a labyrinthine administrative system that treats citizens as supplicants rather than stakeholders.

In a recent address, Law, Justice and Parliamentary Adviser Asif Nazrul said that bureaucrats in Bangladesh are "inherently resistant to reform." Recently, a proposal was made to increase government employee compensation by over Tk 1 lakh crore. This comes at a time when the national budget sits below Tk 8 lakh crore, and the broader economy grapples with job losses, a banking crisis, and stagnant exports.

To honour the mandate of the people, the administration must move beyond "gradual" change. Reformers are calling for five systemic shifts. The Public Service (Amendment) Ordinance, 2025, must be enforced. Officials who obstruct service or solicit bribes should face summary removal rather than the departmental proceedings that historically act as a shield for corruption. The new government must establish citizen review boards with real power to terminate bureaucrats who fail performance standards.

Moreover, human gatekeepers are the primary source of "informal fees." While moving land registration, business licensing, tax filing, and permit approvals online are works in progress, the process must be adopted fully and flawlessly. When human interaction is unavoidable, it must be recorded and auditable.

Five-year renewable contracts should be introduced for all positions above the entry level, with renewal contingent on measurable performance metrics: processing times, citizen satisfaction scores, and audit results. Furthermore, a regular system for "lateral entry" from the private sector is essential to inject modern expertise into a closed system.

Starting a business currently requires a marathon through trade, environmental, fire, and tax departments, each guarded by separate departments that refuse coordination. A unified one-stop centre for some cases appears to be on the cards of the interim government; a legally mandated 15-day approval window is no longer a luxury—it is a necessity.

The upcoming government must establish sting operations and anonymous reporting systems with financial rewards for exposing bribery demands. More importantly, the need for bribes must be removed by setting clear, published timelines for every government process. If an application exceeds the timeline, automatic approval should be granted, and the responsible officials should be suspended pending investigation.

While external reserves reached a respectable $33.19 billion in December 2025, the real economic tragedy lies in the "unborn" businesses strangled by red tape. The banking sector, currently metastasising with non-performing loans, is a direct victim of bureaucratic capture. Experts argue that the Bangladesh Bank must gain total operational independence. Similarly, the energy sector's decision structures cost the nation billions in unnecessary capacity charges. Banking licenses should not be political favours, but merit-based awards evaluated by independent panels. The interim government was able to take some measures to prevent this sector from collapsing.

The public expects a lot from the next elected government, and they want it soon. These include the launch of online portals for the 20 most utilised government services, public announcement of performance metrics for all departments, with monthly reporting, the removal of counterproductive senior officials with documented records of incompetence, legislative passage of administrative reform with strict implementation timelines, and establishment of citizen oversight boards in all levels of local government.

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The quiet abandonment of potato farmers

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SUKANTA HALDER

When the interim government announced a plan in August 2025 to procure 50,000 tonnes of potatoes, it signalled an apparent concern for farmers facing a devastating price crash. Three months later, the plan was withdrawn. Instead, the government decided to provide cash incentives to the farmers to offset their losses. But that incentive has yet to come, even though harvesting of early varieties has begun.

This raises a fundamental question: does the government's handling of the potato crisis reveal systematic neglect of the farmers who produce one of the country's staple crops?

Bangladesh produced a record 1.15 crore tonnes of potatoes in the 2024-25 season, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, much higher than the annual demand of 90 lakh tonnes. When surplus production triggered a price collapse, farmers were left to absorb the losses. Many sold potatoes for Tk 11 per kg at the field level, well below the Department of Agricultural Extension's estimated production cost of Tk 14 per kg, and far below the Tk 20 per kg costs in the northern regions. Some farmers lost everything they had invested.

The government's response came late. Only after months of losses did the chief adviser form a review committee to examine the falling potato prices. On August 27, 2025, the agriculture ministry announced plans to purchase 50,000 tonnes of potatoes for cold storage and later sale, setting a minimum price of Tk 22 per kg at storage gates. By then, much of the damage had been done.

By November 20 last year, even this belated intervention was withdrawn. The reasons given for withdrawal reveal how disconnected policymakers are from the farmers' reality. A senior commerce ministry official, speaking anonymously, said direct procurement would primarily benefit cold storage owners and middlemen rather than farmers. Agriculture Secretary Mohammad Emdad Ullah Mian told *The Daily Star* at the time that potato prices had recovered to Tk 20-25 per kg. But this reasoning ignores the losses already incurred. Farmers who had sold potatoes at Tk 11 per kg could not reclaim that money even though prices recovered later. The minimum price policy of Tk 22 per kg, announced with such fanfare, was never enforced. For farmers, it became another empty promise.

Bangladesh appears to lack the institutional commitment to use price stabilisation and other similar tools effectively to provide support to potato farmers in times of crisis. FILE PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUJ

The pattern extends beyond this single crisis. State procurement and storage are recognised tools for price stabilisation in agricultural markets worldwide. Yet, Bangladesh appears to lack the institutional commitment to use these tools effectively for potato farmers. The government reacts only after crises fully unfold, then withdraws support before it can make a difference.

The cash incentive programme tells a similar story. In early December, the agriculture ministry decided to provide more than Tk 110 crore in cash incentives to potato farmers, in addition to the Tk 150 crore already allocated for subsidies this fiscal year. These incentives were meant to compensate farmers for losses incurred in the 2024-25 season. Yet, as the harvesting of early varieties has begun, the money has not reached farmers till date.

The delay raises troubling questions. If the government recognised potato farmers' losses to be severe enough to warrant Tk 110 crore in compensation, why has the disbursement been so slow? Farmers who sold potatoes at Tk 11 per kg last season needed this support months ago, when they were struggling to pay off debts and prepare for the next planting season. Incentives that arrive after a new harvest has begun do little to address the financial distress they were meant to relieve.

A disparity in treatment also arises when considering how different sectors receive government support. Speaking at a workshop in Dhaka on January 28, Agriculture Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury highlighted this imbalance directly, saying, "There are no barriers when incentives are given to big businessmen. But when it comes to providing incentives to farmers, many obstacles arise."

He pointed out that industry owners take loans from banks but often fail to repay them, while farmers struggle to access credit. At the same time, industrialists receive bank loans at an interest rate of only two percent and are granted waivers, along with various other incentives.

"These farmers are the backbone of the nation; we say this verbally, but it is not reflected in practice. Farmers do not receive fair prices for their produce," the adviser said, adding that when farmers fail to get fair prices, they are often forced to discard their crops. "We express sympathy for a few days, and journalists publish one or two reports. But when it comes to compensating farmers for their losses by providing incentives, we face obstacles."

The adviser's remarks capture precisely what the potato crisis demonstrates: a systematic pattern of obstacles that farmers face when other sectors receive swift, substantial support. Together, the withdrawn procurement plan and delayed incentives reveal a troubling pattern of initiatives that look promising on paper but fail in execution. Whether through reversal or delay, the result is the same: farmers left without the support they were promised.

Compare this to the government's treatment of rice farmers. Rice procurement programmes, though imperfect, operate with greater consistency and predictability, while potato farmers remain caught in an uncertain loop of announcements and reversals. The disparity suggests a hierarchy of agricultural priorities in which potato cultivation ranks lower, despite potatoes being a staple crop that millions depend on.

Are potato farmers being neglected? The evidence suggests they are. But neglect does not always mean deliberate indifference. It can manifest through delayed responses, withdrawn commitments, unenforced policies, and a lack of institutional mechanisms to protect farmers from predictable market volatility. By these measures, potato farmers have not received adequate attention from policymakers.

As a result, they lose money they cannot afford to lose. Some abandon potato cultivation entirely. Trust in government commitments erodes, making future interventions less effective. Agricultural markets require predictability, and farmers need to know the state will support them when crises occur and keep their word.

Procurement systems must be guided by clear production forecasts and price thresholds. Minimum price mechanisms must be enforced, not just declared. Incentives should be disbursed promptly and linked to documented losses. Most importantly, policymakers must treat potato farmers with the same seriousness they afford to other agricultural sectors.

What has Ducsu done so far?

Azra Humayra
is sub-editor at The Daily Star Campus.

AZRA HUMAYRA

My mother, an economics student at Dhaka University (DU) in the 1990s, filled my childhood with stories about the Dhaka University Central Students' Union (Ducsu). Years later, as a student at the same university, I encountered that inheritance in a far more prosaic setting: a voting booth.

I cast my vote for candidates who, in my judgement based on what they had done before and what they claimed they would do next, seemed capable of governing student affairs. Student politics matters here because DU remains one of the few institutional spaces where student voices can still be heard. Hence, after September last year, I have been keeping tabs on what Ducsu and the elected representatives of student voices have been up to.

Four months into its tenure, Ducsu presents a picture that is far from settled. There is a growing unease about how authority is being exercised on campus. Eviction drives against both hawkers and non-students have altered the texture of DU in ways that merit scrutiny. Long described as a people's campus and deeply entangled with the city around it, DU now risks becoming a more insulated space. These efforts, often justified in the name of security, recast ordinary people as threats rather than constituents of campus life. Order may be returning, but it comes at the cost of proximity, and with it a reshaping of the university's moral boundaries.

The discomfort deepens when placed against commitments articulated before the election. SM Farhad, the Ducsu general secretary (GS), was explicit in rejecting authoritarian politics, torture, violence, and guest-room practices. On multiple occasions, he drew clear lines against coercion and moral policing, insisting that no one should be compelled into conformity through fear, whether in matters of dress or conduct. However, those assurances sit uneasily beside the viral video of Ducsu Executive Member Sarba Mitra Chakma forcing boys to do squats at the central playground—a scene of public humiliation enacted in the name of discipline.

Sarba Mitra has since apologised, but the incident indicates more than an individual lapse. Regardless of the person in charge, corporal punishment follows the same logic of oppression. It creates a habit of following orders out of fear, which is the opposite of what is needed for a healthy democracy.

What is equally troubling is how slowly this behaviour was challenged. University authorities did not intervene. Student peers looked on. Condemnation followed only after public outrage erupted. A leadership that fundamentally claims to be opposed to torture and arbitrary force cannot afford such latency. In moments like these, silence functions as the green light to continue abuse.

However, the material conditions under which Ducsu assumed office are worth noting. Every academic session, each DU student pays Tk 60 to Ducsu and another Tk 60 to their hall union. By calculation, since the last Ducsu committee's term ended in 2020, at least Tk 90 lakh should have been accumulated for Ducsu, with another Tk 90 lakh for hall unions. The most striking fact about the new Ducsu committee is that it began its tenure broke, depleted by years of mismanagement and neglect, with no bank balance and no inherited funds. And yet, within four months, Ducsu leaders were standing before microphones listing renovations worth millions, alumni donations, and even a Chinese-backed hall project regained momentum.

After the July uprising, the DU campus was charged with expectations. The election of a new student union led by Vice-President Shadik Kayem and GS SM Farhad carried significance beyond the routine cycle of student politics. There have also been a series of tangible interventions. The medical centre has been upgraded with new equipment, including X-ray and ECG machines and an ambulance. Free sanitary napkins have been distributed in halls and academic buildings, a modest intervention with daily consequences. The central mosque has been renovated and air-conditioned. Plans have been announced for electric shuttles, expanded bus services, and improved transport routes. These are the basic mechanics of student welfare and dismissing them would be disingenuous. After years of being asked to wait while funds vanished into opaque systems, students are encountering visible outcomes.

The Ducsu leadership's silence reappeared when a Jamaat leader publicly described the university as a "den of drugs and prostitution," with particular hostility directed at female students. Protests erupted. Effigies were burnt. Yet, the absence of a clear and immediate response from male Ducsu representatives was conspicuous.

Kayem's insistence that the union did not "sit on the pretext of budget" marks a departure from a familiar culture of deferral. And yet, competence does not resolve deeper questions about power. The Ducsu leadership's silence reappeared when a Jamaat leader publicly described the university as a "den of drugs and prostitution," with particular hostility directed at female students. Protests erupted. Effigies were burnt. Yet, the absence of a clear and immediate response from male Ducsu representatives was conspicuous. Gendered vilification is neither incidental nor rare on campus, so the male leaders' reticence can resemble evasion. Their ability to distinguish right from wrong seems to vanish the moment they have to confront ideas that align with their own ideological circles or senior leadership.

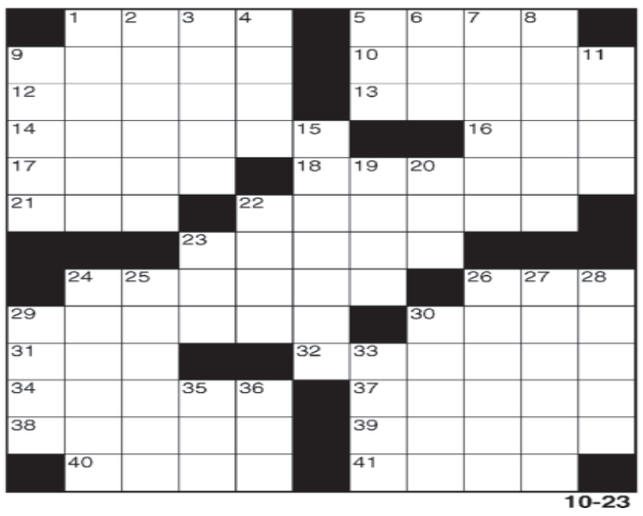
Four months is not a long time. No serious observer expects a student union to repair decades of institutional decay or to resolve entrenched ideological conflicts in a single semester. But it is long enough for patterns to emerge. The question emerging in many minds is whether Ducsu is cultivating a different political ethic or refining the operational efficiency of familiar hierarchies. Infrastructure can be upgraded relatively quickly. Democratic habits, however, take longer to develop, and they require a willingness to interrupt comfort, including one's own.

For those watching closely since September, the picture remains unresolved. The improvements are tangible. DU has a long history of confronting authoritarianism beyond its gates, yet it is a difficult task to prevent that impulse from reappearing, subtly and efficiently, within them.

CROSSWORD
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS
1 Surgery memento
5 Hound's hands
9 Berry of "X-Men"
10 Massage targets
12 Of service
13 "Keen!"
14 Warning
16 Overly
17 Cornfield bird
18 Unmoored
21 Egg layer
22 Back of the neck
23 Hymn of praise
24 Grant
26 Old horse
29 Charitable aid
30 String tie
31 FBI worker: Abbr.
32 Remote
34 Sculptor Henry
37 Mexican mother
38 Big dos
39 Lazy sort
40 Opponents
41 Not natural

DOWN
1 Mocking work
2 Tie type
3 Permit
4 Sailing hazard
5 Skillet
6 Star pitcher
7 Speculative question
8 Start a journey
9 Box for rabbits
11 Chimney grime
15 Hockey game start
19 Sketch
20 Use the track
22 Fill completely
23 Letter before omega
24 Ask out of
25 Matador's foe
26 Pasta bit
27 Bruce Wayne's butler
28 Errand runner
29 Hindu hero
30 Civil War photographer Mathew
33 Surrounded by
35 Fish eggs
36 Twisty letter



10-23

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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

Falgun-Valentine's Day special: Chorki brings 'Tiffin Box'

This Falgun and Valentine's Day, popular OTT platform Chorki will unveil its latest flash fiction content, ***Tiffin Box***, for viewers across the country.

The short-length film will be available from midnight on 9 February (10 February Bangladesh time). Written, scripted, and directed by Rakayet Rabby, the film stars Rukaiya Jahan Chamak and Prantar Dastider.

Apart from Prantar and Chamak, ***Tiffin Box*** also stars Sharmin Sultana Shormi and Tuntuni Sobhan in important roles. Produced under the Chorki Flash Fiction banner by Alpha-I and Chorki, the project brings a cinematic glimpse into fleeting yet meaningful moments of life, combining aesthetic storytelling with a "slice of life" approach.

Some stories leave scars, and this film does exactly that: JAYA AHSAN

PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Jaya Ahsan continues to command admiration on both sides of the border, with powerful performances that have resonated deeply with audiences in Bangladesh and India alike.

A multiple-time National Film Award winner at home and a frequent recipient of honours in India, Jaya now returns to the big screen with her latest film, ***OCD***, set for release on February 6.

The trailer, released recently, has already sparked widespread praise, drawing attention to the film's intense psychological depth and social relevance.

Speaking to The Daily Star from Kolkata, where she is currently busy with promotional activities, the actress opened up about the film, her character, and why ***OCD*** feels particularly urgent in today's time.

Directed by Soukarya Ghosal, this film marks Jaya's second collaboration with the filmmaker after ***Bhootpori***. In the film, she plays Shweta, a character she describes as deeply personal and profoundly meaningful.

"Shweta is a beautiful character—one I truly connected with," she says. "She stands up for children. There is a strong message at the heart of this story, and it's told very powerfully."

A psychological thriller at its core, ***OCD*** explores the long-term emotional consequences of childhood trauma. Jaya believes the film raises uncomfortable but necessary questions.

"If we fail to give children a healthy childhood, the damage can be immense," she explains. "That's what this film shows—how deeply such experiences can affect someone, even years later. It's a very strong story for this time."

In ***OCD***, Ahsan portrays a doctor grappling with unresolved emotional scars of her own. "The audience will slowly discover how layered Shweta's life is," she says. "There are dark clouds in her mind—marks that never quite fade."

The film also stars Fazlur Rahman Babu, whose performance she speaks of warmly. "Babu *bhai* has acted brilliantly in ***OCD***. The Indian actors were equally wonderful. Everyone has done such sincere work, and the director has handled the story beautifully."

Child artiste Arshiya Mukherjee, popularly known as ***Bhootu*** from television—plays the younger version of Ahsan's character. "She has performed exceptionally well," Jaya notes.

Reflecting on the trailer's reception, Jaya says she understands why it has struck a chord. "It clearly shows how bitter childhood experiences can shape, or even destroy, a person's future. That emotional impact is right there in the trailer."

Currently in Kolkata, Jaya is fully immersed in promoting the film. "The promotions are in full swing—newspapers, television, everything," she shares. "I truly believe this film will move audiences. I'm very hopeful."

Asked whether she misses Fazlur Rahman Babu during the promotions, she smiles and admits, "Of course, I miss him."

Beyond ***OCD***, Jaya recently received another accolade in Kolkata for her performance in ***Putulnacher Itikatha***. "Winning the award for the character Kusum means a great deal to me," she says. "Being able to portray such a role itself was special, and being recognised for it feels truly rewarding."

As she wraps up, Ahsan reflects once more on ***OCD***—a film she believes will linger in the minds of its viewers.

"This is one of my new films this year," she says. "I hope ***OCD*** leaves a mark on the audience—something that stays with them."

Nawba Tahiya bids farewell to showbiz

Bangladeshi actress Nawba Tahiya Hossain has announced her decision to leave the entertainment industry, bringing an unexpected end to a four-year acting career. She shared the news in a Facebook post on Wednesday, February 4, confirming that w w she will no longer take part in acting or media-related work.

Nawba Tahiya recently appeared in Anonno Proteek Chowdhuri's film ***Noya Note*** and built a steady presence through television dramas and digital projects. Her notable works include ***Chupi Chupi***, ***Mitthe Kabber Ful***, ***Amar Thikana Tumi***, and Mizanur Rahman Aryan's ***Punormilone***.

In her statement, she said she has found peace through faith, learning and self-reflection. She will now focus on her education and personal growth.

WHAT'S THE HAPS?

'Achalayatan'

Prachyanat revives Rabindranath Tagore's ***Achalayatan*** as a stark, contemporary meditation on obedience, fear, and education's moral cost. Directed by Azad Abul Kalam, the production strips symbolism to its bones, reimagining the institution as a women's space where ritual clashes with freedom, and conformity meets dissent.

DATE: TODAY (FRIDAY) | FEB 6, 2026
TIME: 7 PM
VENUE: NATIONAL THEATRE HALL, BSA

NEWS

Couple, 2 children found dead

FROM PAGE 12

Masum's younger brother, Md Afroz, said the family had been struggling for some time and added that Masum changed businesses several times, but the hardship did not go away.

"I cannot believe Masum would take his own life along with his family because of financial distress."

Masum's cousin Ansar Ahmed said Masum and Sumi once worked in the Benarasi trade and later married. After the marriage, Sumi became a homemaker and stopped working, while Masum continued working to support the family but wasn't earning enough.

"Masum later left the Benarasi work and tried different jobs, including selling clothes and vegetables on footpaths, before taking up work as an auto-rickshaw driver. Even then, he struggled to run the household and had been somewhat frustrated."

Ansar also said Masum had borrowed some money from his elder brother's wife and was repaying it in instalments.

According to family members, Masum's sister-in-law went to his room around 11:30am yesterday to collect an instalment when she discovered their bodies.

Locals said Masum was known in the area as a cheerful person, and no one suspected he could do something like this. Many were left shocked, questioning how such a tragedy could occur.

The bodies were sent to the morgue of Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital.

World watches Bangladesh

FROM PAGE 12

A change in Indian policy on Bangladesh is likely to affect Pakistan's influence in Bangladesh after the election, Khan said.

"Pakistan will be comfortable working with either of the parties -- BNP or Jamaat," he added.

Beyond the subcontinent, China, Bangladesh's largest trading partner, has maintained the strong relations it harvested with the Hasina regime with the interim government.

The interim government managed Chinese commitment of $2.1 billion in investments, loans and grants.

Throughout last year, China engaged with all the political parties and arranged visits to China.

"China has always wanted stability and wants the same now for protecting its trade and investments. They know they cannot go for long-term planning and implementation unless there is an elected government," said Kabir, the former ambassador.

The Western world too wants the election to bring stability to the country.

The US is unlikely to take a strong stand on the need for a free, fair, and credible election, even though it may state this publicly, according to Kugelman.

Its primary concern is overall stability and that the election will be peaceful, and that any election-related violence will be minimised.

"In particular, it seeks to ensure that such violence does not imperil US interests or assets in Bangladesh," he told The Daily Star.

The Trump administration will be perfectly comfortable with whoever leads the next government, so long as that government is willing to engage with Washington, do business, and -- most importantly from Washington's perspective -- discuss lowering tariffs and purchasing more American goods, Kugelman said.

On the perception that the US favours Jamaat for some reason, Kugelman said the American government does not favour any particular political party.

On US Ambassador Brent Christensen's remarks on reducing Chinese influence, Kugelman said the US wants Bangladesh to rely less on Chinese capital and infrastructure development.

"This may suggest a willingness to bring US investment, including potentially from DFC, into Bangladesh," he said.

China is a major source of funds for Bangladesh's infrastructure.

If other countries like the US come up with funding, Dhaka will definitely welcome that, Kabir said.

"Bangladesh's imports from the US are already increasing and the defence cooperation can also grow where feasible," he added.

The EU, the largest buyer of Bangladesh's products with annual imports worth $22 billion, along with the UK, Canada and Australia, have always promoted democracy, human rights, labour rights, gender equality and minority rights in Bangladesh.

"We want a free, fair and credible election and stability in Bangladesh. It has direct implications for Europe," a European diplomat told this correspondent.

He said they need a stable supply chain and prevention of irregular migration, and it will not be possible without stability here.

Even the CEC

FROM PAGE 12

I cannot give any final decision. However, we have two options before us: a person nominated by the president or the CEC if the three-day period lapses," he said.

However, the adviser stressed the government's preference for expedience.

"The problem with waiting for the chief election commissioner is that we would have to wait for three days. We actually do not want to wait. We want to arrange the oath-taking as soon as possible after the election," he said.

Asif Nazrul added that he would review the law and convey his final opinion to Chief Adviser Dr Muhammad Yunus.

Ensure safety

FROM PAGE 12

during the election period.

The statement was signed on behalf of the Editors' Council by its President Nurul Kabir, editor of New Age, and General Secretary Dewan Hanif Mahmud, editor and publisher of Bonik Barta.

Transfer of power

FROM PAGE 12

Ordinance, 2026," and "Forest Industry Development Corporation Ordinance, 2026".

The name of the "Bangabandhu National Agriculture Award Trust Act, 2016" was amended to the "National Agriculture Award Trust Ordinance, 2026."

Meanwhile, the Advisory Council approved the formation of the "Urban Safety and Resilience Institute" under the Ministry of Public Works.

Army assures all-out efforts for credible polls

FROM PAGE 12

alongside manning checkpoints, he said.

Explaining field operations, Monzur said the army has been supporting the civil administration in maintaining law and order for the past one and a half years and has had to perform policing tasks during that period.

"That is why we equipped our troops with non-lethal weapons and riot-control equipment," he said.

In the 14 days since January 20, forces recovered around 150 firearms -- "most of them locally made and some foreign pistols" -- along with ammunition and materials used to make cocktail bombs, he said.

Overall, the army has so far recovered 10,152 firearms and 291,000 rounds of ammunition, and detained 22,282 "identified terrorists and criminals", he added.

For remote and high-risk areas, Monzur said military helicopters and watercraft would be kept ready to transport election officials and materials if required. At risky polling centres, police will use body-worn cameras, while law enforcement agencies will deploy drones and other tools "so any situation can be handled quickly".

"The army is coordinating with district and upazila coordination cells and has set up a round-the-clock monitoring cell at Army Headquarters," he said.

Monzur identified misinformation as a major challenge during the election period, warning that the threat has intensified with advances in artificial intelligence.

"Social media is our biggest challenge this time," he said.

Asked how long troops would remain deployed after the election, he said it was "the government's decision".

"Just as we were deployed by government decision, our return to cantonments will also be decided by the government," he said.

Warning against mob violence, Monzur said the government, the Election Commission, civil administration, law enforcement agencies and the armed forces were determined to hold a credible election. "We will take every step that is required under the law."

Asked about threats linked to a political party whose activities have been banned and which is not participating in the election, he said he would not comment on political issues. However, he added that the armed forces, particularly the army, had completed preparations to prevent violence or sabotage.

Addressing allegations and doubts raised by rival parties about the election environment, Monzur said complaints among competing parties are common. However, he said the army will not intervene unless there is a risk to lives and property and until the civil administration request military support.

He said the army would operate with "full neutrality", as directed by the army chief, and would follow rules of engagement strictly within the law.

"If force becomes necessary, the army would follow the step-by-step escalation process set out in those rules," he said.

Asked about a recent Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) report citing more than 600 incidents of violence and over 100 deaths, Monzur said any violence or casualty was "unwanted".

"If we were not there, would it have increased or decreased? We need to understand the realities," he said. "Even after deploying one lakh troops, it is still insufficient in truth. There are remote areas and high-risk centres. We cannot be physically present everywhere. But there has been no lack of effort on our part."

He, however, noted that incidents of violence have declined since the deployment.

Before the briefing, Army Chief General Waker-Uz-Zaman visited the army camp at Dhaka's National Stadium in Gulistan and emphasised neutrality and professionalism in election duties.

According to a statement from the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the army chief also held a meeting at the venue with senior military officials and representatives of the Dhaka Metropolitan, divisional and district administrations, as well as law enforcement agencies.

The meeting focused on inter-agency coordination and overall security management to ensure the elections are conducted in a peaceful, neutral and fair manner.

The ISPR said the army chief has been holding similar coordination meetings since January 22 with senior military officials, civil administration officers from all divisions and districts, and law enforcement representatives. Such meetings have taken place in Dhaka, Chattogram, Cumilla, Rangpur, Bogura, Barishal, Jashore, Cox's Bazar, Sylhet, Ghatail and Savar.

BNP's vision is equal rights

FROM PAGE 2

nation should the BNP win the upcoming election.

He rejected the 80-plus cases previously filed against Tarique as "totally baseless" and "politically motivated", claiming the previous "fascist regime" failed to prove any allegations over 15 years.

Responding to a question on the upcoming election and exclusion of Awami League, Fakhrul said, "Now the question is when a political party or the leader of the political party has killed no less than 2,000 students and the agitators or the people who demonstrate against them... They involved themselves with and used the state apparatus, including the police and others, to kill those people. Naturally, there will be demand for those people to be tried, and so they were tried. It was the Awami League in general that was involved in these things. All the ministers and all the members of the party were involved."

He, however, expressed his personal opposition to banning political parties, including the Awami League or Jamaat-e-Islami.

"I personally don't support this sort of banning a political party," he said, suggesting that individuals responsible for "genocide" should be tried rather than the entire organisation.

On international ties, Fakhrul said the BNP would "diplomatically try" to repatriate Sheikh Hasina from India to face execution of her convictions.

He expressed hope that relations with New Delhi would improve, describing a recent letter of condolence from Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi following Khaleda Zia's death as a "very good gesture".

Indian forces kill 3 suspected rebels in J&K

AFP, *Srinagar*

Clashes between security forces and militants in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir killed three suspected rebel fighters on Wednesday, the army said.

An army statement said two fighters were killed following intermittent exchanges of fire with soldiers that began on Tuesday in Basantgarh, in the southern part of the disputed territory.

The militants had hidden inside a natural cave before soldiers used explosives to blow it up, a security official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Man found dead in Jhenaidah

OUR CORRESPONDENCE, *Jhenaidah*

Police recovered the body of a man from a cornfield at Tangrakhali village in Harinakundu upazila of Jhenaidah on Wednesday night.

The deceased -- Jasim Uddin, 30, from Daulatpur village -- used to run a tea stall beside his house and also worked in nearby fields.

Harinakundu Police Station Officer-in-Charge Golam Kibria Hasan said injury marks were visible on the neck and several other parts of the body.

Jasim's cousin Elias Hossain told The Daily Star that Jasim had left home in the morning to harvest grass for cattle but did not return. Family members later found his body in a cornfield. Another cousin, Rafikul Islam, said, "There are clear injury marks, but we don't know who killed him or why."

OC Golam Kibria said, "It initially appears to be a murder." The body was sent to Jhenaidah Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy, he added.

Two nosimons illegally ply the Khulna-Satkhira highway carrying excessive loads. The operation of such light vehicles on the busy road often leads to accidents. The photo was taken from the Kathaltala area yesterday. PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Prioritise rights

FROM PAGE 3

organised by DRW with support from Transparency International Bangladesh at its Dhanmondi office.

Disability inclusion expert Dr Nafeesur Rahman said the National Action Plan on Disability, adopted in 2019, remains unimplemented and there is no dedicated budget for the sector. Coordination committees mandated by law rarely meet, while monitoring and reporting mechanisms remain weak.

He criticised the government's Rules of Business for placing most disability-related responsibilities under the Ministry of Social Welfare, limiting the involvement of other ministries.

He called for structural reforms to engage the ministries of education, health, youth development, and women and children's affairs.

Speakers also said Bangladesh has fallen behind in fulfilling its international commitments under the CRPD, urging legal and policy reforms, strengthening the national monitoring committee, and preparing a roadmap to submit pending reports.

They noted that disability-related data are largely absent from the Sustainable Development Goals framework, calling for the inclusion of disability indicators in national surveys and priority datasets.

The organisations proposed reserved seats for persons with disabilities in parliament and local government bodies, improved accessibility in education, health, employment and transport, increased disability allowances, and stronger support for grassroots disability organisations.

They also urged the Election Commission to run a public awareness campaign on facilities for voters with disabilities.

TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman said a fair election is impossible without equal voting access for all citizens, particularly marginalised groups and persons with disabilities.

"An election cannot be truly fair if some voters cannot exercise their rights on equal terms," he said, stressing the need for safe transport and support for voters with disabilities.

"Even if postal or electronic voting is not possible, at a minimum, all voters with disabilities must be able to cast their ballots safely and independently."

He added that all political actors must advance disability rights before, during and after the election through action plans aligned with national and international commitments.

Amrita Rejina Rozario, country director of Sightsavers Bangladesh, highlighted the need for accessible polling stations, safe transport for wheelchair users, protection for women from harassment, and continued disability inclusion beyond the election.

She urged the incoming government to address the lack of parliamentary representation for persons with disabilities and take concrete steps to ensure their participation in governance.

DRW member Md Jahangir Alam said there is still no clarity on whether registered voters with disabilities can vote through postal ballots or electronic means.

He raised concerns about accessibility at polling stations, including the use of assistive devices, caregivers and interpreters.

DRW President Monsur Ahmed Chowdhury, Member Secretary Khandaker Zahurul Alam, disability youth activist Md Abdullah, and Access Bangladesh Foundation Chairperson Mohua Paul also spoke at the event.

Ongoing violence, state inaction

FROM PAGE 3

Anik Roy of the Network for People's Action (NPA) said the July uprising arose from deep insecurity in everyday life, not a single issue like quota reform. "The core demand was simple -- a secure life," he said.

Prof Layeqa Bashir said she lost her job at the University of Asia Pacific following online harassment over a Facebook post on public safety and face coverings.

She claimed the university yielded to mob pressure instead of ensuring due process.

Udichi Shilpigosthi General Secretary Jamshed Anwar Tapan said attacks on Udichi and Chhayanaut showed hostility toward cultural expression and warned that state inaction encouraged such attacks.

Labour leader Shahidul Islam recalled that workers faced violence before and after the July uprising, citing garment workers killed in Gazipur during wage protests.

Fahima Nasrin Munni, assistant international affairs secretary of BNP, linked election violence to years of flawed polls and democratic decline, highlighting the rising harassment of women.

"Bangladesh is not Afghanistan," she said.

Shafayet Hossain Chowdhury of Maizbhandar Darbar Sharif said attacks on media and cultural institutions were preceded by silence on earlier assaults on Sufi shrines.

Masud Rana, coordinator of Bangladesh Socialist Party (Marxist), said violence could be curbed if authorities were willing to act, citing past elections where strong measures reduced unrest.

Arup Rahee, convener of Lokayoto School, and Ibnul Syed Rana of Rashtra Sangskar Andolan said violence against minorities stems from systematic marginalisation embedded in state practices.

A keynote presentation showed that between September 2024 and January 2025, 413 incidents of mob violence left 259 people dead.

The programme was moderated by NPA leader Mir Hojaifa Al Mamduh.

Festivities meet chaos in narrow

FROM PAGE 3

to prioritise honesty and competence over money and muscle power.

BNP candidate Hamidur Rahman and Jamaat-e-Islami candidate Md Enayet Ullah are both well-known local businessmen.

"Our candidate has been doing business in Old Dhaka for 52 years," said Abdur Rahman, head of Jamaat's Dhaka-7 election management committee. "Voters see him as both a business leader and a religious figure, and have positive notions about him."

Enayet Ullah said business owners face discrimination.

"If elected, I will work to make VAT and income tax laws business-friendly," he said, pledging to eliminate extortion, drugs, and corruption, and resolve the gas crisis.

"I will work so that the Old Dhakaiyas do not face any discrimination."

Meanwhile, BNP candidate Hamidur Rahman expressed confidence in his victory, saying a festive and free voting environment has emerged after many years. "Voters will cast their ballots freely in a festive atmosphere," he told The Daily Star.

"I plan to open free computer and technical training centres in every ward to build a skilled youth force," he said, also pledging women's safety and zero tolerance for terrorism and extortion.

The members of the Hindu community in Old Dhaka are also looking forward to the February 12 election.

According to them, people have had to endure various problems, including a deteriorating law and order situation and rising commodity prices.

They hope these problems will be resolved to some extent after the election.

The Dhaka-7 constituency now has 4,79,376 voters, up from 3,43,089 in the previous election -- an increase of 1,36,287.

Other candidates include Md Abdur Rahman of Islami Andolan Bangladesh, Mohammad Saifuddin Ahmed Milan of Jatiya Party, Shafiqur Rahman of Bangladesh Republican Party, Md Habibullah of Bangladesh Khelafat Andolan, Md Shahidul Islam of Bangladesh Jatiya Party-BJP, Maksudur Rahman of Muktijote, Shahana Selim of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), and independent candidate Mohammad Ishaq Sarkar.

Bangabhaban staffer bailed

FROM PAGE 3

2:50pm under tight security. He stood silent at the dock when the prosecution and defence presented their arguments.

At one point, when the presiding judge allowed him to speak, Sarwar caterogically denied the allegations brought against him.

"I will retire next year. Why would I do such a thing and risk losing my pension and all benefits? I cannot even imagine it."

He also informed the court that he told the police that he would do whatever necessary to cooperate with the investigation. "I voluntarily handed over my mobile phone, laptop, and desktop. I am innocent."

On January 31, a post on Shafiqur's verified X handle claimed that women should not be in leadership positions and suggested that women working outside the home is "another form of prostitution".

Jamaat went on to claim the account had been compromised and later filed a general diary with Hatirjheel Police Station on February 1.

During a briefing, the party's IT cell had alleged the hack was facilitated through a government email address "assistantprogrammar@bangabhaban.gov.bd" which they linked to Sarwar.

On Wednesday, a team from the Detective Branch (DB) of police picked up Sarwar from Motijheel. After around 20 hours of detention, the DB chief told a press briefing that Sarwar was shown arrested in connection with the case filed with Hatirjheel Police Station.

Sources within the DB said several high-ranking officers initially opposed the arrest, arguing that Sarwar was innocent and that his own email account had been hacked previously.

"We opposed showing an innocent person arrested under political pressure," a deputy commissioner told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity.

Despite the internal objections, DB chief Shafiqul Islam remained firm on the arrest. The internal discord was further highlighted when several officials reportedly boycotted the press briefing held at the DMP Media Centre by the DB chief on Wednesday.

When questioned about the internal friction, Shafiqul dismissed the claim, stating that the arrest was a standard procedure following the filing of a case.

Political will key

FROM PAGE 4

delivery, and ensuring quality, equity and accountability to achieve the target.

Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairman of the PPRC and convener of the UHC Forum, said political leaders should not be solely blamed for health not being prioritised, calling it a failure of civil society to highlight its strategic importance.

He warned that neglecting health would deepen poverty, slow economic growth and widen inequality, and stressed the need to better sensitise political leaders.

He also emphasised social mobilisation and school health programmes, rather than project-based approaches, to strengthen primary healthcare as the main driver of UHC.

Zahirul Islam Shakil, secretary general of the pro-BNP Doctors Association of Bangladesh, said persistent implementation gaps and systemic constraints continue to affect the health sector.

He added that BNP has already outlined a health sector plan prioritising primary healthcare and will implement it if voted to power.

KM Waliullah, senior vice president of pro-Jamaat National Doctors Forum, stressed the importance of cross-party cooperation, legal reforms to support systemic change, good governance, and corruption-free leadership.

NDF, through several workshops, provided recommendations to the Jamaat, which were reflected in the party's health sector manifesto, he said.

Proteek Izaz, president of BHRF, urged doctors to view health from a humanitarian perspective rather than a political one.

Prof Mohsin Zillur Karim, family welfare affairs secretary of BNP, NDF Office Secretary AKM Ziaul Haque, Prof MA Faiz, former director general of the Directorate General of Health Services, among others, spoke.

Govt decides

FROM PAGE 3

prompting police to erect barricades and halt vehicular movement in the area.

Around 12:30am today, Abdullah Al Jaber, in front of Hotel InterContinental, said the government must take formal steps to investigate the assassination through the UN and inform the nation accordingly. "Our movement will continue today, and a new programme will be announced after Friday prayers," he said.

Ashraful Alam Hannan, an Inqilab Moncho activist, alleged that the accused in Hadi's killing remain at large and that the investigation has seen little progress.

Sharif Osman Hadi was shot in Dhaka's Paltan on December 12 last year and died in Singapore on December 18 while undergoing treatment.

On February 3, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police imposed a ban on rallies and gatherings around Jamuna.

DMP Assistant Commissioner (Ramna Zone) Mazharul Islam said protesters had split into two groups and that police were on alert.

Little buzz, high hopes

FROM PAGE 3

corruption, looting and syndicates, address mosquito control and gas shortages, and ensure playgrounds, parks, quality educational institutions and modern hospitals.

Furthermore, he vowed to conduct a "cleansing drive" across the entire area to build a society free from illegal occupation and terrorism.

Hinting at the BNP candidate, Kamal alleged that they are violating the electoral code of conduct, and formal complaints have been lodged with the administration. "People no longer want looters or occupiers in power," he said, expressing hope that voters would support Jamaat.

Meanwhile, BNP candidate Md Nabiullah Nabi called on rivals to engage in healthy politics free of hostility. "I am fully optimistic about victory and believe I will win by a large margin," he said.

A long-time resident of the area, Nabi said he has been involved in politics for 45 years and previously served as a commissioner. "I have always stood by the people and share a close bond with all generations," he said, urging voters to cast their ballots fearlessly for the "Sheaf of Paddy" for a beautiful Bangladesh. He identified waterlogging as the constituency's main problem, blaming housing companies for illegally filling water bodies.

If elected, he said he would work to recover occupied water bodies and eliminate drugs and terrorism.

According to him, people are eager to vote after years of misrule and see a fair electoral environment taking shape this time.

Other candidates in the race include Syed Mohammad Ibrahim of Gono Odhikar Parishad, Md Ibrahim of Islami Andolan Bangladesh, Tofazzal Hossain Mostafa of the Communist Party of Bangladesh, Md Taifur Rahman Rahi of Muktijote, Shahinur Akter Sumi of Socialist Party of Bangladesh (Marxist), Md Humayun Kabir of the LDP, Mir Abdus Sabur of Jatiya Party, Md Golam Azam of Bangladesh Labour Party, and Md Saiful Alam of Bangladesh Congress.

BEPZA

বাংলাদেশ রপ্তানী প্রক্রিয়াকরণ এলাকা কর্তৃপক্ষ
ঈশ্বরদী ইপিজেড মেডিকেল সেন্টার ট্রাস্টি বোর্ড
ঈশ্বরদী ইপিজেড, পাকশী, পাবনা।

EPZ HOSPITAL BEPZA

সূত্র নং ঃ ০৩.০৬.৭৬৩৯.৩৮২.০২৩.৭০.২০২৬-২৪২৮ তারিখ ঃ ২৯-০১-২০২৬

ঃ নিয়োগ বিজ্ঞপ্তি ঃ

ঈশ্বরদী ইপিজেড মেডিকেল সেন্টার ট্রাস্টি বোর্ডের অধীন ঈশ্বরদী ইপিজেড মেডিকেল সেন্টারে স্থায়ী পদের বিপরীতে নিম্নবর্ণিত শূন্য পদে ০১ জন মেডিকেল অফিসার, ০১ জন ডেন্টাল সার্জন (চুক্তিভিত্তিক) ও ০১ জন ডেন্টাল টেকনিশিয়ান (চুক্তিভিত্তিক) এবং স্থায়ী পদে ০১ জন গাড়ী চালক নিয়োগের লক্ষ্যে বাংলাদেশের প্রকৃত নাগরিকদের নিকট হতে দরখাস্ত আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে ঃ

ক্রঃ নং	পদের নাম ও বেতন গ্রেড	পদ সংখ্যা	বয়স (২৬/০২/২০২৬ পর্যন্ত)	শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা
০১.	মেডিকেল অফিসার-স্থায়ী গ্রেড-৯ম	০১ জন	অনূর্ধ্ব ৩২ বৎসর;	এমবিবিএস ডিগ্রী। প্রার্থীকে BMDC এর রেজিস্ট্রেশন প্রাপ্ত হতে হবে।
০২.	ডেন্টাল সার্জন (চুক্তিভিত্তিক) গ্রেড-৯ম (বেতন সর্বসাকুল্যে)	০১ জন	অনূর্ধ্ব ৩২ বৎসর	বি.ডি.এস ডিগ্রীধারী। প্রার্থীকে BMDC এর রেজিস্ট্রেশন প্রাপ্ত হতে হবে।
০৩.	ডেন্টাল টেকনিশিয়ান (চুক্তিভিত্তিক) গ্রেড-১১তম (বেতন সর্বসাকুল্যে)	০১ জন	অনূর্ধ্ব ৩২ বৎসর	সরকার কর্তৃক স্বীকৃতিপ্রাপ্ত প্রতিষ্ঠান হতে ০৩ (তিন) বছর মেয়াদী ডিপ্লোমা ইন মেডিকেল টেকনোলজি (ডেন্টাল)।
০৪.	গাড়ী চালক-স্থায়ী গ্রেড-১৬তম	০১ জন	অনূর্ধ্ব ৩২ বৎসর	অষ্টম শ্রেণী পাশ এবং সরকার কর্তৃক নির্ধারিত কর্তৃপক্ষ হতে গাড়ী চালনায় পেশাদার লাইসেন্স প্রাপ্ত।

শর্তাবলী ঃ

১. নির্ধারিত চাকুরীর আবেদন ফরমে দরখাস্ত আগামী ২৬/০২/২০২৬ তারিখের মধ্যে ডাক যোগে সদস্য সচিব, ঈশ্বরদী ইপিজেড মেডিকেল সেন্টার ট্রাষ্টি বোর্ড, ঈশ্বরদী ইপিজেড, পাকশী,পাবনা বরাবরে অফিস চলাকালীন সময়ের মধ্যে পৌঁছাতে হবে। অত্র অফিসে সরাসরি কোন দরখাস্ত গ্রহণ করা হবে না। উল্লেখিত তারিখের পর ডাক যোগে অথবা অন্য কোন উপায়ে প্রেরিত আবেদনপত্রসমূহ গ্রহন করা হবে না এবং আবেদনপত্র সমূহ বাতিল বলে গণ্য হবে। বয়স প্রমানের জন্য এফিডেভিড গ্রহণযোগ্য নয়। আবেদনপত্রের নমুনা বেপজা এর ওয়েবসাইট: www.bepza.gov.bd থেকে ডাউনলোড করা যাবে।

২. আবেদনপত্রের সাথে যে কোন তফসিলি ব্যাংক হতে IEPZ-MCTB পাকশী, ঈশ্বরদী, পাবনা এর অনুকূলে মেডিকেল অফিসার পদের জন্য ২০০/- (দুইশত) টাকা, ডেন্টাল সার্জন (চুক্তিভিত্তিক) পদের জন্য ২০০/- (দুইশত) টাকা, ডেন্টাল টেকনিশিয়ান (চুক্তিভিত্তিক) পদের জন্য ১৫০/- (একশত পঞ্চাশ) টাকা এবং গাড়ী চালক পদের জন্য ১০০/- (একশত) টাকার ব্যাংক ড্রাফট/পে-অর্ডার (অফেরতযোগ্য) সংযুক্ত করতে হবে। দরখাস্তের সাথে নিম্নলিখিত কাগজপত্র দাখিল করতে হবেঃ

ক. প্রথম শ্রেণীর গেজেটেড অফিসার কর্তৃক সত্যায়িত সকল শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতার সনদপত্র ও অভিজ্ঞতার সনদপত্র (যদি থাকে)।

খ. প্রথম শ্রেণীর গেজেটেড অফিসার কর্তৃক সত্যায়িত সদ্যতোলা ৩ (তিন) কপি পাসপোর্ট সাইজ রঙ্গিন ছবি।

গ. প্রথম শ্রেণীর গেজেটেড অফিসার কর্তৃক প্রদত্ত চারিত্রিক সনদপত্র।

ঘ. স্থানীয় ইউনিয়ন পরিষদের চেয়ারম্যান/সিটি কর্পোরেশনের ওয়ার্ড কাউন্সিলর/পৌরসভার পৌর মেয়র কর্তৃক প্রদত্ত নাগরিকত্ব সনদপত্র।

ঙ. প্রথম শ্রেণীর গেজেটেড অফিসার কর্তৃক সত্যায়িত জাতীয় পরিচয় পত্রের কপি (NID)।

৩. দরখাস্তের খামের উপরের মাঝখানে প্রার্থিত পদের নাম এবং নিজ জেলার নাম স্পষ্টাক্ষরে উল্লেখ করতে হবে;

৪. চাকরিরত প্রার্থীদের অবশ্যই যথাযথ কর্তৃপক্ষের মাধ্যমে আবেদন করতে হবে এবং মৌখিক পরীক্ষার বোর্ডে কর্তৃপক্ষের অনাপত্তিপত্র দাখিল করতে হবে;

৫. ত্রুটিপূর্ণ, অসম্পূর্ণ এবং বিলম্বে আবেদনপত্র কোন কারণ দর্শানো ব্যতিরেকেই বাতিল বলে গণ্য হবে;

৬. কর্তৃপক্ষ কোন কারণ দর্শানো ব্যতিরেকে যে কোন দরখাস্ত গ্রহণ বা বাতিলের ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করেন এবং এ নিয়োগ বিজ্ঞপ্তি প্রচারের কারনে কর্তৃপক্ষ নিয়োগ প্রদান করতে কিংবা লিখিত/মৌখিক পরীক্ষার কার্ড ইস্যু করতে বাধ্য থাকবে না। আবেদন পত্রের সাথে দাখিলকৃত কোন কাগজপত্র ফেরত প্রদান করা হবে না। নিয়োগের ক্ষেত্রে কর্তৃপক্ষের সিদ্ধান্ত চূড়ান্ত বলে গণ্য হবে;

৭. কোন তদবীর বা সুপারিশ প্রার্থীর অযোগ্যতা বলে বিবেচিত হবে। প্রার্থীকে লিখিত/মৌখিক পরীক্ষায় অংশগ্রহনের জন্য কোন টিএ/ডিএ প্রদান করা হবে না।

২৯/০১/২০২৬
(মুহাম্মদ নাজমুল আলম)
অতিঃ নির্বাহী পরিচালক (কঃ অঃ ও শিঃ সঃ)
ও
সদস্য সচিব
ঈশ্বরদী ইপিজেড মেডিকেল সেন্টার ট্রাস্টি বোর্ড।

GD-265

Six to hang for Ashulia killings

FROM PAGE 1

when they were deliberately targeted by armed political activists and law enforcement personnel.

"The deliberate targeting of such persons strikes at the very foundation of humanity and the rule of law," said tribunal member Judge Md Manjurul Basit.

Those sentenced to death are former Ashulia Awami League general secretary and former independent lawmaker Muhammad Saiful Islam; former Ashulia police station officer-in-charge AFM Sayed Rony; sub-inspector Abdul Malek; assistant sub-inspector Bishwajit Saha; constable Mukul Chokdar; and local Jubo League leader Rony Bhuiyan.

Seven police officials were sentenced to life imprisonment: former Dhaka Range deputy inspector general Syed Nurul Islam; former Dhaka superintendent of police Md Asaduzzaman Ripon; additional superintendents of police Abdullahel Kafi and Md Shahidul Islam; and inspectors Masudur Rahman, Nirmal Kumar Das and Arafat Hossain Arzu.

Sub-inspector Arafat Uddin and assistant sub-inspector Kamrul Hasan were sentenced to seven years' imprisonment, while Sheikh Abzalul Haque was acquitted after turning an approver.

Of the 16 accused, eight are currently in custody — additional SPs Shahidul Islam and Kafi, inspector Arzu, sub-inspectors Arafat Uddin, Abdul Malek and Abzalul Haque, assistant sub-inspector Kamrul Hasan, and constable Mukul Chokdar. The remaining eight are absconding.

Defence lawyers for four of the convicted said they would appeal to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court after receiving the full written judgment.

TRIBUNAL'S OBSERVATIONS

The tribunal said it imposed the death penalty "with the utmost restraint", concluding that the gravity of the crimes, the manner of their commission, and the absence of mitigating circumstances left no alternative consistent with justice.

It found the accused guilty of crimes against humanity "of the gravest character", committed as part of a "widespread and systematic attack" on civilians involving coordinated action by armed political cadres and state law enforcement officials, including senior officers.

Police personnel, legally bound to protect life, instead abused public trust, aggravating the crimes to the highest degree, the tribunal said, citing indiscriminate firing on protesters and a calculated disregard for human life.

The court found that five victims were killed and later burned, while another was injured but alive when set on fire along with the bodies. The victims were identified as Sazzad Hossain Sajal, As-Sabur, Tanjil Mahmud Sujoy, Bayezid Bostami, Abul Hossain, Omar Faruq and Mohammad Shahabul Islam.

"These crimes were intended not only to take life, but to terrorise a population, suppress dissent and establish domination through fear," the judgment said.

The tribunal ruled that no sentence short of death could reflect the gravity of the offences or restore public confidence in justice.

The case stems from violent attacks on protesters on August 4 and 5, 2024, in the industrial Ashulia area. Families searched for missing relatives before charred bodies were later discovered.

Tribunal Chair Justice Nozrul Islam Chowdhury said Saiful Islam was sentenced to death on seven counts of murder under charge 1 as crimes against humanity. He was also given multiple life sentences for other offences, including inhuman acts such as burning bodies, political persecution, abetment, complicity, command responsibility and conspiracy.

The court ordered confiscation of all of Saiful Islam's property, directing that the proceeds be distributed among the victims' families. It also imposed fines ranging from Tk 5,000 to Tk 100,000 on several convicts.

AFM Sayed Rony received the death sentence for his role in the killings, along with additional life terms for other inhuman acts. Jubo League leader Rony Bhuiyan was sentenced to death for killing the seven victims, while SI Malek, assistant SI Bishwajit and constable Mukul were sentenced to death for burning the bodies and to life imprisonment for their role in the killings.

REACTION

As the eight accused in custody were being escorted out of the courtroom after the verdict, Abdul Malek shouted that he had not received justice and briefly lost consciousness.

After regaining consciousness, he again shouted, "I am innocent."

His brother, Golam Hossain, said the real perpetrators who set the bodies ablaze were not made accused. "I took my brother away before the incident took place. We are deprived of justice," he said.

Mukul's wife, Soumaiya, said her husband was innocent and that she would not accept the verdict.

The wives of Shahidul Islam, Kafi, Arafat Uddin and Mukul broke down in tears inside the courtroom.

Defence counsels reiterated that they would challenge the verdict before the Appellate Division after receiving the full text of the judgment.

Killings

FROM PAGE 2

fortunes by siphoning off Bangladesh's money abroad."

Urging voters to reject what he termed old-style politics, he said, "The politics that kills people, builds secret torture cells, plunders the country's resources and turns politics into business, that politics will, In sha Allah, be shown the red card on February 12."

Again, pointing at rivals, he warned, "Don't lose your temper. If you want to do politics, come with a cool head. If you lose your temper, you lose."

He promised development projects for Rajshahi if the Jamaat comes to power, including establishing a dental college and reviving Rajshahi Sugar Mills by stopping theft.

The Jamaat chief also pledged to ensure that national resources benefit citizens and told party activists, "From now on, keep watch. No vote robber, vote thief, or vote engineer will be spared."

Earlier in Naogaon, the Jamaat leader assured protection for minorities.

"Why should non-Muslims live in a culture of fear? We want to dismantle that culture altogether.

"Those who talked about minority rights -- have you not seen what the former fascist government did to you in the Santal villages (Sahebganj, Gaibandha)? Are they not our brothers and sisters? Are they not citizens of this country? We promise that we will embrace everyone and move forward together."

Terming Naogaon the agricultural capital of northern Bangladesh, the Jamaat chief said nearly one-10th of the country's crops are produced there, but farmers still do not get fair prices.

He promised storage facilities, fruit-processing industries, road upgrades and tourism development through preservation of archaeological sites.

Addressing rallies in Chapainawabganj and Godagari, Shafiqur spoke of a nationwide momentum for change.

"From the banks of the Teesta to the sea ... There is now a mass surge in favour of freedom, justice, fairness, and a humane Bangladesh."

He also pledged mango-based industries and improved river-centred communication networks in Chapainawabganj.

In the evening, Shafiqur also joined a rally in Natore as the chief guest and introduced the alliance's candidates in the district's four constituencies.

The Jamaat ameer concluded the day's campaign in the capital's Shewrapara, which falls under his constituency (Dhaka-15).

Operations resume

FROM PAGE 1

or two. The adviser also assured them of meeting their other demands.

Given such assurances, they are postponing the strike for two days in consideration of the country's interest.

The indefinite strike would resume from Sunday if the government did not respond positively by Saturday, he added.

However, after the meeting, Sakhawat told reporters that the planned agreement with DP World to operate NCT would go ahead.

Although negotiations with DP World are yet to be settled, he said the government would not do anything that goes against the country's interest.

He asked the protestors to call off the work abstention, as it was inhumane to shut down the port ahead of Ramadan, which was causing immense suffering to the people.

Earlier in the morning, agitating employees staged demonstrations in front of Sakhawat as he arrived at the port to hold meetings with port officials, law enforcement agencies and protesting workers.

The demonstrators surrounded him, chanting slogans against DP World, the proposed agreement and senior officials of the Chittagong Port Authority, including its chairman.

Meanwhile, the High Court in its verdict on the writ petition filed against the deal justified the direct selection of the Dubai-based DP World to operate the NCT without an open public bidding process.

Such direct selection is permissible under the Public–Private Partnership (PPP) Act, the Government-to-Government (G2G) policy and the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between Bangladesh and Dubai.

On January 29, the HC bench on Justice Zafar Ahmed delivered the verdict rejecting a writ petition filed by Bangladesh Jubo Arthanitibid Forum that challenged the legality of the government's move to award a contract to DP World for container handling at NCT.

In the full text of the judgment, the HC bench rejected claims made by the petitioner's lawyer Ahsanul Karim that the interim government lacked authority under the PPP Act due to the absence of a prime minister or cabinet committee.

"Mr Karim's argument is not only fallacious but also absurd. An interesting aspect of this case is that the petitioner has no objection to other projects proposed to be undertaken by the DPW. Their only objection is against the NCT project at Chittagong Port, which raises eyebrows," the HC judge said in the full text of the verdict.

Bangladesh Jubo Arthanitibid Forum has filed a leave to appeal petition with the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court challenging the HC verdict and also seeking status quo in respect of the entire process of awarding a contract for NCT to DP World.

The Appellate Division is set to hold a hearing of the petition on February 9.

Meanwhile, in a joint statement, leaders of 10 major business chambers and trade bodies yesterday expressed deep concern over the deadlock at Chattogram port, terming it a "great disaster".

Due to the suspension of port activities, exportable goods could not be shipped and imported goods could not be released from vessels, making it difficult to meet strict delivery deadlines for international buyers, the statement said.

The economy suffers losses of several thousand crores of taka even from a single day's deadlock at the port.

The leaders warned that Bangladesh risks losing work orders if the crisis continues, as international buyers may shift to alternative sourcing countries.

If the stalemate is not resolved quickly, additional costs on imported goods may also affect the prices of essential commodities meant for Ramadan sales and any delay in releasing imported goods could disrupt timely supply to consumers and raise the price levels.

The stalemate, which started on January 31 with the partial suspension of port activities, severely disrupted operations, leaving more than 15,000 TEUs of export containers stranded at private off-docks as well as on board ships stuck at the jetties.

The number of container ships queued at the outer anchorage rose to ten yesterday, with most waiting idle at sea for two to five days.

As many as 13 vessels, including ten container ships, were stranded at the port jetties for four to six days due to the three-day stalemate until Monday and the complete suspension of vessel movement since Tuesday morning.

Expressing frustration, port users such as shipping agents said the crisis could have been avoided if the government had taken steps to resolve the issue much earlier.

Jamaat promises prosperity

FROM PAGE 1

For instance, foreign direct investment will be increased to $15 billion by 2030, or the provision of Tk 10,000 loan for 100,000 meritorious students for up to five years, or tripling the health budget in phases are so matter-of-factly mentioned that it is no more than scheduling the entry of trucks into Dhaka. Notably, however, the manifesto is completely silent about economic disparity. Other lofty pledges include $5 billion worth of exports and 2 million jobs in ICT sector by 2030, another five million jobs through government initiatives, 500 international standard athletes in five years, 1.5 million freelancers through e-hubs at upazilas and 500,000 new entrepreneurs within five years.

While there is no outright pledge to establish a theocratic state based on the shariah, the manifesto clearly announces that religious edicts will become more significant so far as finance and banking is concerned. It promises support for growth and success of Islamic banking and insurance, new laws and legal reforms to support Islamic insurance, and even shariah compliant financing mechanisms in agriculture.

Islamic shariah will play a significant role in personal law and family courts as the manifesto pledges to reform and preserve them in light of religion. Jamaat also pledges to bring significant reforms in education to regulate the different streams. The manifesto outlines four streams after the eighth grade—Islamic, science, general, and technical education through the higher secondary levels. There will also be funds and facilities, special institutes and sponsorships for Islamic scholarship.

The foreign policy section must be mentioned, even if passingly, because of its rather conspicuous omission of Pakistan. It pledges to build a peaceful, friendly, and cooperative relations with "neighbouring and nearby countries—including India, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Thailand—based on mutual respect and fairness". It is immediately followed by, "The strengthening of relations with countries of the Muslim world shall be a key foreign policy priority", which reads more like a compensatory afterthought.

Under labour and employment, the manifesto clarifies the five-hour workday issue that appears to be persistently hounding the Jamaat chief. The party pledges, "safe and dignified working environments for women" and adds, "During maternity, with the mother's consent, working hours will be reduced to five hours per day."

Although the Jamaat leader, Shafiqur Rahman, had told Al-Jazeera that a woman could never be the head of his part considering the social reality of Bangladesh, the manifesto pledges that women, ethnic minorities and religious minorities will have significant representation Jamaat's cabinet. That would be quite a tall order, since Jamaat has nominated no women, and one Hindu in the upcoming election.

The manifesto reiterates the party's pledge to protect women and ensure their safety. Towards the very end of the document, under the section "Inclusive state for all", it elaborates on this vision for "Women will move without fear." The measures—dedicated bus services, CCTV cameras, separate compartments in double-decker buses and emergency helpline numbers—suggest a tendency to further segregate women in the name of protection. It pledges "religious awareness initiatives" to ensure women's rights to property and VAT exemption from all children's food products.

Given Jamaat's history and controversial role in the liberation war, its pledge to adopt programmes to "firmly establish the ideals and objectives of the Great Liberation War—equality, human dignity, and social justice—within state and national life" does merit some scrutiny. Another pledge, which reads, "The accurate history of the Liberation War will be presented to students," appears to suggest that this was not the case till now and thus, that history might need some revisions if Jamaat comes to power.

Likely to focus on justice

FROM PAGE 1

and expanding old-age allowances.

The manifesto will also promise the formation of a media commission to ensure freedom of information and expression, as well as measures to ensure the independence of the Election Commission, transparent administration, and the creation of an anti-drug task force.

Party insiders said commitments will include faster police and security services through automation, instant and emergency ambulance services, and expanded healthcare access.

There will also be special focus on technology-based startups, freelancing and the creative economy through startup funds and IT training.

For women, the manifesto will pledge equal opportunities at workplaces, the establishment of a women entrepreneurs' fund, and an increase in maternity allowances.

It will also propose special tribunals to prevent the grabbing of minority properties, security cells, and strict programmes to prevent communal attacks.

The BNP plans to create employment for around 45 million youths aged between 18 and 33, introduce unemployment allowances, and provide free internet services at educational institutions and public spaces.

Within 180 days of forming the government, the party will launch a national e-wallet. Under the slogan "Sheaf of Paddy's pledge – transactions will be digital," the platform will integrate services such as PayPal, enabling payments for daily shopping, bills, fees and taxes.

Two standing committee members said the manifesto will commit to upholding the rule of law at every level and restoring human dignity and democratic values.

They said enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, mass murders and all forms of physical and psychological torture will come to a permanent end.

The party, they added, will prioritise national interest, sovereignty and security in all foreign relations.

The manifesto will highlight an eight-sector plan covering family welfare, agriculture, health, education, sports, environment, religious affairs and job creation. Under the Family Card scheme, the BNP will provide monthly assistance of Tk 2,000–2,500 or food support such as rice, lentils, oil, salt and other essentials to build self-reliant families.

Through the Farmer Card, farmers will receive fertiliser, seeds and pesticides at fair prices, along with government incentives, easy loans, insurance and other benefits.

Agricultural loans of up to Tk 10,000 will be waived with interest, and microloans taken from registered NGOs will be paid by the government if BNP comes to power.

In health, freeing the sector from corruption will be the party's top priority. The manifesto will promise the recruitment of around one lakh health workers -- 80 percent of them women -- who will visit homes across villages to detect diarrhoea, high blood pressure, diabetes, malnutrition and other conditions at an early stage.

On employment, the party aims to create opportunities for one crore youths. Short-term training in foreign languages and skills will be introduced, which the party estimates could generate jobs for around two million people.

Government recruitment will be ensured on a merit basis, free from discrimination, while low-interest loans will be provided to develop cottage industries and SMEs based on each district's traditional products.

In the IT sector, BNP plans to create new industries with the goal of generating two lakh direct jobs and eight lakh indirect jobs through freelancing. It will establish vocational institutes in every district and set up the country's first AI-driven data centre campus under a cloud-first strategy.

In education, primary and secondary teachers will be given tablet computers for modern training, and multimedia classrooms will be introduced. The "Learning with Happiness" course will be launched from Class Six, technical education will be made mandatory for all, and foreign languages will be introduced as third languages from the secondary level.

If elected, the BNP will work to establish sports as a profession. Sports will be made compulsory from Class Four, and sports teachers will be gradually appointed in every educational institution.

For environmental protection, the manifesto will pledge the excavation or re-excavation of at least 20,000 kilometres of canals and rivers to ensure water flow, alongside major projects such as Teesta Barrage modernisation and Padma Barrage-type initiatives. Around 250 million fruit and medicinal plants will be planted nationwide.

The party will also promise the development of Qawmi madrasas, the formation of an Islamic research fund, modernisation of religious education and ensuring a free environment for religious practice.

Monthly honorariums and festival allowances will be provided to khatibs, imams, muazzins and other religious leaders, along with financial support for renovating places of worship and strengthening the Imam-Muazzin Welfare Trust.

Thousands arbitrarily detained, denied bail

FROM PAGE 1

secret detentions declined following the fall of the Awami League government in 2024. However, it said arbitrary arrests have persisted, particularly after the interim government banned Awami League (AL) activities in May last year.

According to HRW, hundreds of AL leaders, activists and supporters remain in jail as murder suspects, with courts routinely rejecting bail petitions. The report cited the nationwide "Operation Devil Hunt", under which at least 8,600 people were arrested, while many others were detained under the Special Powers Act and anti-terrorism laws.

In July, clashes in Gopalganj between security forces and AL supporters left five people dead. Police detained hundreds and filed murder cases against more than 8,400 individuals, most of whom were unnamed. The government denied carrying out mass arrests.

HRW also highlighted a sharp rise in mob violence by political parties and non-state actors, including religious hardliners hostile to women's rights and to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Citing figures from Ain o Salish Kendra, the report said at least 124 people were killed in mob attacks between January and August last year.

Data from rights group Odhikar showed that since the interim government took office, at least 40 people have been killed by law enforcement agencies, including 14 allegedly due to torture. Political violence injured nearly 8,000 people and killed at least 81, the report added.

Freedom of expression and association remain restricted, HRW said, noting that the ban on AL activities has curtailed rallies, publications and online speech.

Journalists faced numerous attacks last year, largely by political activists and mobs, while writers were prosecuted under laws criminalising "hurting religious sentiment".

Although the interim government repealed nine controversial provisions of the Cyber Security Act in March, HRW said the law still falls short of international standards.

The International Crimes Tribunal, tasked with prosecuting abuses committed during the AL era, sentenced Hasina and former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal to death in absentia in November. Former police chief Chowdhury Abdullah Al Mamun, who testified for the prosecution, received a five-year prison term.

"The tribunal had been fraught with violations of fair trial standards, and while the interim government amended the law that establishes the court, introducing some improvements, it still lacks important due process protections and includes the death penalty, in violation of international human rights law. The interim government also gave the tribunal broad powers to prosecute and dismantle political organizations," the report says.

The interim government also formed a commission to investigate enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. By August last year, it had received more than 1,850 complaints, but HRW said officials obstructed investigations and destroyed evidence. In October, cases were filed against 28 suspects.

HRW further reported attacks on ethnic and religious minority communities, including mob violence against Hindu families in Rangpur in July and ongoing abuses in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

About violence against women, the report said, " Sexual and gender-based violence remained widespread, and women and girls had little recourse to seek protection or access justice. Women played a pivotal role in the 2024 uprising, but were not adequately represented in the interim government."

It mentioned that nearly 20,000 supporters of Hefazat-e-Islam rallied in Dhaka to oppose recommendations on women's rights soon after a commission formed by the government proposed criminalising marital rape, ensuring equal parental rights, reforming inheritance laws and increasing women's representation in parliament.

The report also mentioned that reform efforts have stalled, with recommendations from several government-appointed commissions yet to be implemented amid political divisions.

'Stand up against new oppressors'

FROM PAGE 2

Cox's Bazar-2 alone but was nationwide. The 11-party alliance, he added, has united to free Bangladesh from what he described as authoritarianism, fascism, corruption, and plunder.

Addressing the rally, Jamaat Nayeb-e-Ameer Syed Abdullah Mohammad Taher said Maheshkhali and Kutubdia hold immense economic, geographic, and strategic importance, which is why the 11-party alliance is giving special emphasis to the constituency. He said senior central leaders are visiting the area together to convey that message to voters.

Taher stressed that maritime connectivity and economic linkages are essential for modern development, adding that with long-term planning, Maheshkhali and Kutubdia could be developed into advanced economic zones similar to Singapore.

He added that if their combine forms the government, Hamidur Rahman would be able to play an important national role, and under his leadership. the identity of Maheshkhali and Kutubdia would gain recognition both nationally and internationally.

Referring to previous elections, the Jamaat leader said although changes in power and leadership had taken place, the fundamental needs of the people remained unmet. Identifying graft as one of Bangladesh's major problems, he said the combine is committed to eliminating corruption if elected to power.

JP looks to retain its northern strongholds

FROM PAGE 2

districts. Jatiya Party candidate for Lalmonirhat-1 Moshiur Rahman Ranga said, "My campaigners are being threatened."

Although Awami League supporters remain publicly silent, he said they are expected to vote for the plough symbol. "They will go to polling centres and vote for the plough," he added.

Jatiya Party candidate for Lalmonirhat-3 Jahid Hasan said intimidation has affected grassroots mobilisation. "My activists are being threatened in various ways. As a result, they are afraid to take part in campaigning. We are therefore suffering from a shortage of activists," he said.

Kurigram-2 candidate Panir Uddin Ahmed said the party was relying on quiet support. "We have many silent voters. If the election is held in a free and fair manner, we will get victory," he said.

Local observers, however, say voter behaviour remains uncertain. Sirajul Islam, a businessman from Rangpur city's Mulatol area, said it is commonly believed that elderly voters remain loyal to the Jatiya Party, while younger voters may swing.

Jatiya Party Chairman and Rangpur-3 candidate GM Quader said the region remains firmly under the party's influence. "Rangpur is still the stronghold of the plough. We are working to retain it," he said.

"No one will be able to break this stronghold as we do not support extortion, corruption, terrorism or politics of murder," he added.

Despite obstacles, he said party candidates were continuing their campaigns. "If the election is free, fair, neutral and peaceful, victory for the plough is assured."

Outside Rangpur, the party's campaign has faced mixed responses. In Mymensingh district, Jatiya Party candidates are contesting in six of the 12 constituencies.

Some voters say the party's presence there is weaker than that of its rivals. "Amid campaigns by BNP, Jamaat and their rebel candidates, the Jatiya Party's campaign has lost much of its charm among common voters," said Ashraf Ali, a businessman in the city.

However, Jatiya Party candidate for Mymensingh-8 Fakhrul Imam disputed that assessment. "We are working in the field round the clock and going door to door. We are getting very good response," he said.

In Barishal division, the Jatiya Party is contesting in one of the 21 constituencies. The party's Barishal-3 candidate Golam Kibria Tipu is currently in jail, with his daughter Habiba Kibria campaigning on his behalf.

One of her campaign slogans reads: "Your single vote can bring my father back from jail to serve you."

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

Star
DHAKA FRIDAY FEBRUARY 6, 2026, MAGH 23, 1432 BS

SPORT

What to WATCH

T Sports
Odommo T20
Dhumketu vs Durbar
Live from 6:00 pm

Star Sports
Select HD1
Premier League
Leeds vs Nottingham Forest
Live from 2:00 am (Saturday)

Offering an early glimpse of the 10th edition of the T20 World Cup, set to begin tomorrow in India and Sri Lanka, captains of the 20 participating teams gathered for a Captains' Carnival held simultaneously in Mumbai and Colombo yesterday. However, the picture -- a collage of images from the two events released by the International Cricket Council (ICC) -- may sting cricket-crazy fans in Bangladesh, as Tigers T20 skipper Litton Das would have been standing in place of Scotland captain Richie Berrington. Scotland replaced Bangladesh at the marquee event after the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) decided not to send the team to India due to security concerns, while the ICC declined their request to relocate the matches outside India. PHOTO: ICC

T20 World Cup Corner

FIVE BATTERS TO WATCH

The evolution of strategy in T20 cricket has transformed power-hitting and run-chase tactics, and the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 promises to showcase the game's latest trends. Co-hosts and defending champions India are expected to lead the charge, with stars like Abhishek Sharma, the tournament's top-ranked T20I batter, poised to dominate Powerplays. South Africa's prodigy Dewald Brevis, England's seasoned Jos Buttler, West Indies' composed Shai Hope, and Pakistan's versatile Salman Ali Agha add firepower and experience. With each bringing unique strengths, these five batters are set to define the tournament, making every innings a spectacle.

FEARLESS TALENT: FIVE YOUNG PLAYERS TO WATCH

The T20 World Cup kicks off Saturday in India and Sri Lanka, offering young stars a global stage. Keep an eye on five exciting talents: Australia's all-rounder Cooper Connolly, England's dynamic Jacob Bethell, South Africa's teenage pacer Kwena Maphaka, India's fearless left-hander Tilak Varma, and Afghanistan's spin sensation Noor Ahmad. Each has already impressed with standout performances and carries the potential to shine in this month-long, 20-team tournament, promising thrilling cricket and emerging heroes for fans to follow.

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

Not playing, but Bangladesh still in discussion

AGENCIES

The T20 World Cup 2026 is all set to begin tomorrow. Yet, instead of discussions about on-field affairs, the cricketing world has continued to buzz with politics, protest and uncertainty.

Bangladesh, though no longer part of the tournament, has stood at the centre of every conversation. Their removal from the competition sent shockwaves through the cricketing fraternity, triggering reactions that extended far beyond the boundary ropes. What was meant to be a celebration of cricket has turned into a debate over principle, protest and power.

The loudest storm, however, has revolved around India and Pakistan. Their much-anticipated clash on February 15 was thrown into doubt after Pakistan announced it would boycott the match. On Thursday, India captain Suryakumar Yadav addressed the issue directly, standing calm but firm before the media at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium.

"We haven't said no to playing them," he said. "They are the ones who have said no. Our flights are booked, and we are going to Colombo."

India has made it clear they will turn up at the stadium, ready to take the field, even if Pakistan chooses not to appear. The possibility of a forfeit win has only added to the tension surrounding the tournament's opening phase.

Pakistan captain Salman Agha, speaking from Colombo, struck a cautious tone. He explained that the decision was not solely in the team's hands. "If we meet India in the semifinal or final, we will go back to the government and act on their advice," he said, leaving the door slightly open for a potential showdown later in the tournament.

At the heart of the matter lies Bangladesh's exclusion. The Bangladesh team refused to travel to India, citing security concerns. The International Cricket Council responded by removing them from Group C and replacing them with Scotland. That decision triggered a wave of solidarity and backlash across the cricketing world.

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif publicly confirmed on Wednesday that his country's boycott of the India match was a protest against Bangladesh's removal. Addressing his federal cabinet, he declared: "We have taken a very clear stand... we should completely stand by Bangladesh, and I think this is a very appropriate decision."

It was the first official acknowledgment from Pakistan's government on the matter, giving political weight to what many had hoped would remain a sporting issue.

Youth and Sports Adviser Asif Nazrul responded with gratitude. "Thank you, Pakistan," he wrote on his official Facebook page.

Former cricketers also weighed in. Nasser Hussain, the former England captain turned commentator, voiced his support for Bangladesh's stance and praised Pakistan's show of solidarity.

"I actually quite like Bangladesh sticking to their guns. They stood up for their player, the Fizz [Mustafizur Rahman]. And I also quite like Pakistan sticking up for Bangladesh."

Brett Lee, Australia's former fast-bowling spearhead, took a different tone, urging cricket to rise above politics. "Let's get the politics out of it," he said on a podcast. "I really hope the match happens. The whole world watches when India and Pakistan play one another."

And that is the central dilemma: the world's most electrifying cricket rivalry is on hold, caught between diplomacy and sport. Fans, broadcasters and players alike feel the weight of what is being lost.

As the clock ticks toward the tournament's opening ball, a single question lingers in the air: will the action on the field finally bring relief after weeks of political posturing?

Only time will tell if cricket gets to reclaim the spotlight.

Named after Mashrafe, carving his own path

Inspired by Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's brilliant four-wicket haul against India at the 2007 ICC World Cup, a baby from Paba upazila in Rajshahi was named after the celebrated fast bowler. Years later, that boy chose football over cricket. Cut to present: now a Grade 12 student, **Masrafi Islam** lit up the recently concluded Senior Division Football League by finishing as the top scorer. In an interview, the Mohakhali Ekadosh forward spoke to **The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman** about his breakthrough season, ambitions and journey so far. Excerpts follow:

The Daily Star (DS): Mohakhali Ekadosh finished runners-up on goal difference, and you scored 18 of the team's 42 goals. Does scoring come naturally to you?

Masrafi Islam (MI): I actually played only 13 of the 16 matches due to injury. I managed three hattricks -- against Arambagh Football Academy, T&T Club Motijheel and Nababpur Krira Chakra -- and scored in eight of the 13 matches I played. You could say, scoring goals has always been a passion... During matches, I try to imagine myself playing on my village ground, which helps me stay relaxed and makes scoring feel easier.

DS: How did your football journey begin?

MI: My parents were initially against me playing football, but they changed their minds after I helped my school reach the district stage of the Bangabandhu Primary School Gold Cup from the upazila level, scoring six or seven goals and being named the best upazila footballer. Later, I joined Kishore Football Academy in Rajshahi under coach Jade bhai. Before moving to Dhaka football in 2025, I played in the Third Division League in Rajshahi, scoring three goals in three matches. I also represented Badda Jagorani Sangsad in last season's Senior Division League, which was abandoned after five matches due to the July uprising.

DS: You were named after Mashrafe Bin Mortaza. How did that come about?

MI: I was born just a few days before Bangladesh played India in the 2007 World Cup. My maternal uncle named me after Mashrafe, who, I heard, played brilliantly in that historic win. But football has always been my love. People often ask why I didn't choose cricket, and I tell them: one Mashrafe played cricket, another will play football.

DS: How competitive was the 17-team league, and what kind of support did you receive from your club?

MI: Four or five teams were in the title race, which shows how close it was. Mohakhali Ekadosh supported us well with food, accommodation and training facilities. The payment was modest, but I didn't need to spend anything extra because of the club's arrangements.

DS: What are your targets after this season?

MI: My ultimate dream is to play for the national team. For now, I'm hoping to get an opportunity in the Bangladesh Football League next season. If that doesn't happen, I'll aim for the Bangladesh Championship League. I'm continuing my training during the off-season to stay ready.

DS: You mentioned the national U-20 camp earlier. What happened there?

MI: I was expecting a call-up after my performance in the senior division, but it didn't come. Still, I'm not disappointed. I believe something better awaits me.

Bangladesh leg-spinner Rishad Hossain carried his Big Bash League form into the Odommo Bangladesh T20 Cup as he starred in Dhumketu XI's nine-wicket win over Duronto XI in the tournament opener at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium yesterday. Fresh from finishing as Hobart Hurricanes' leading wicket-taker with 15 scalps in the BBL, Rishad returned figures of 3-21 from four overs to bowl Duronto out for 143 in 19.5 overs, a target that Dhumketu chased down comfortably in 16.1 overs. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Manchester City set up League Cup final clash with Arsenal

Manchester City booked a League Cup final date with Arsenal at Wembley on March 22 after ending holders Newcastle's reign with a 3-1 win on Wednesday. Already 2-0 up from the first leg, Pep Guardiola's side completed the job in ruthless fashion at the Etihad Stadium as Omar Marmoush struck twice in the first half before Tijjani Reijnders sealed the tie. Anthony Elanga pulled one back after the break but City's 5-1 aggregate victory sent them back to the League Cup showpiece for the first time since 2021. PHOTO: REUTERS

Lahore Qalandars rope in Fizz

AGENCIES

Lahore Qalandars have announced the signing of Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman as a direct signing for the 11th season of the Pakistan Super League (PSL).

Mustafizur, who previously represented the franchise in 2016 and 2018, will once again wear the Qalandars' colours. The deal was finalised at PKR 6.44 crore (BDT 2.81 crore approximately).

"Once a Qalandar, always a Qalandar. Mustafizur is not just a player; he's a brother, a key part of our family who never left," said Lahore Qalandars owner Sameen Rana. "We are thrilled to welcome him back to our dressing room. His talent, experience, and dedication will be invaluable as we aim to defend our title and make a statement in PSL 11."

With this signing, Lahore Qalandars are aiming to continue their strong legacy in the PSL as they look to defend their title and deliver another memorable season for their fans.

The recent controversy surrounding the ICC T20 World Cup stemmed from Mustafizur being dropped by IPL franchise Kolkata Knight Riders on January 3 on instructions from the Board of Control for Cricket in India.

That decision triggered a series of events that eventually led to Bangladesh being excluded from the marquee T20 event and Pakistan boycotting their group game against India on February 15 in support of Bangladesh.

Army assures all-out efforts for credible polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Army will do everything required within the law to help ensure a free and fair election and referendum, Brigadier General Dewan Mohammad Monzur Hossain, director of the Military Operations Directorate at Army Headquarters, said yesterday.

Speaking at a press briefing at Gulistan's Roller Skating Complex on the army's "In Aid of Civil Power" operation, Monzur said troop deployment had been increased in phases to restore public confidence so voters can go to polling centres "without fear".

Deployment rose from 35,000 to 50,000 troops on January 10 and was further increased to 1,00,000 on January 20, he said.

Since January 20, troops have been conducting between 2,000 and 2,500 patrols daily, operating from 544 temporary camps set up across districts, upazilas and metropolitan areas. The army has also been running joint operations with the police, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB),

SEE PAGE 8 COL 4

Thousands of army troops stand in formation during a briefing at the National Stadium in Dhaka yesterday. They are among more than one lakh soldiers set to be deployed for the 13th national polls on February 12.

PHOTO: STAR

Couple, 2 children found dead in their Pallabi home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday recovered the bodies of a couple and their two children from their home at Wapda Bihari Camp in the capital's Pallabi.

The deceased were identified as Md Masum, 35; his wife, Fatema Akter Sumi, 32; and their two sons, three-and-a-half-year-old Minhaz and 18-month-old Asad.

Their eldest, 11-year-old daughter Mahfuza, was found sleeping next door with her grandmother.

The discovery was made around 11:30am when Masum's sister-in-law went to their room. Masum was found hanging from the ceiling, while Sumi and the two toddlers were lying motionless on the bed.

AKM Alamgir Jahan, officer-in-charge of Pallabi Police Station, said police were looking into how the deaths occurred.

"Preliminary findings suggest the parents were involved in the incident, but still we are investigating whether there was any third-party involvement."

The bodies would be sent for autopsy to determine the cause and time of death, he added.

Md Alauddin, a local resident, said people became concerned after getting no response from the house for several hours. "Suspecting something was wrong, they informed police after repeated attempts to contact the family failed."

Meanwhile, relatives spoke about financial stress in the household.

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Transfer of power by Feb 18: Shafiqul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The interim government will transfer power to the newly elected representatives within three to four days of the national election, according to Shafiqul Alam, press secretary to the chief adviser.

He assured that the handover would be completed swiftly, leaving no reason for doubt.

Speaking at a press briefing yesterday at the Foreign Service Academy, following the Advisory Council's weekly meeting, Shafiqul clarified that the interim government will have no role in the next administration, which will be formed by the newly elected members of parliament.

Once MPs are sworn in, the leader of the majority party will be invited to take oath as the new prime minister.

Shafiqul said the process could be completed by February 15 or 16, and not later than February 17 or 18.

Addressing rumours, Deputy Press Secretary Azad Majumder also dismissed claims of a possible delay.

On the issue of asset disclosures of Advisory Council members, Shafiqul said the details would be published soon, likely before the government's term ends.

Providing a performance update, Shafiqul reported that since taking office, the interim government has issued 116 ordinances and signed 14 bilateral treaties. Across 68 weekly Advisory Council meetings, 526 decisions were taken, of which 439 have been implemented, reflecting an 83% implementation rate, he said. Another 16 ordinances are currently being processed.

Among recent policy decisions, the Advisory Council approved a reduction in VAT on liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). The previous 7.5% VAT at production and business stages, along with a 2% advance tax on imports, will be removed. Instead, a 7.5% VAT will be imposed at the import stage.

Additionally, several ordinances received final approval, including "Domestic Violence Prevention Ordinance, 2026," "Sexual Harassment Prevention in Workplaces and Educational Institutions Ordinance, 2026," "Bangladesh Gas (Amendment) Ordinance, 2026," "Postal Service

SEE PAGE 8 COL 3

Ensure safety of journalists during polls

Editors' Council urges authorities, parties

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Editors' Council has called on authorities and political parties to ensure the safety of journalists covering the upcoming elections.

In a statement yesterday, the council said, "Journalists face various risks while carrying out their duties of collecting and disseminating news during elections, and ensuring the safety and security of journalists working in the field is a very important issue at this time."

It appealed to the government, the Election Commission, and relevant law enforcement agencies to provide adequate security for journalists during election coverage and also requested political parties to play an effective role in safeguarding reporters.

The Council further said it hoped all parties concerned would understand the importance of the issue and take effective measures to ensure journalists' safety

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World watches Bangladesh election showdown

PORIMOL PALMA

Global and regional powers are closely watching the upcoming election to see how participatory and fair it is, as well as from a geopolitical and economic lens.

The interest is reflected in the number of international observers dispatched: about 500 foreign observers from 16 countries and organisations are coming, with the EU alone sending about 200 observers, its full-fledged delegation since 2008.

Foreign policy analysts say this election has garnered closer global attention because any changes here have implications not only in the region but also beyond.

"The international community has collective support for the election-- they want Bangladesh to be a stable and moderate Muslim country," said M Humayun Kabir, a former ambassador and president of Bangladesh Enterprise Institute.

Closer to home, India is closely monitoring the situation, as bilateral ties have hit rock bottom following the ouster of the Awami League government and its sheltering of deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina and her party members.

Both countries have imposed restrictions on each other's exports, while India has drastically restricted visas for Bangladeshis.

India has security concerns for the Northeast region, while Pakistan's improving ties with Bangladesh under the interim government are another worry for New Delhi, said Shahab Enam Khan, a professor of international relations at Jahangirnagar University.

"Therefore, it is likely to engage with Bangladesh, sacrificing its ego after the polls," he said.

> **"The international community has collective support for the election-- they want Bangladesh to be a stable and moderate Muslim country."**
>
> **M Humayun Kabir,** former ambassador

India is likely to be concerned from political and security standpoints if Jamaat-e-Islami wins the election but would be comfortable with a BNP-led government, said Michael Kugelman, senior fellow for South Asia at the Washington-based think tank Atlantic Council.

The BNP has already expressed its interests about wanting to engage with India, he said.

However, Khan says Indian diplomats in Dhaka also met with Jamaat leaders, suggesting New Delhi is also ready to work with Jamaat if elected.

Meanwhile, Pakistan has boosted its relations with Bangladesh.

In February 2025, the two nations resumed direct trade for the first time since 1971, and recently resumed direct flights after 14 years. The two countries also held military and defence dialogues.

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Warfaze, nine individuals get Ekushey Padak

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday announced nine individuals and, for the first time, a rock band as recipients of the Ekushey Padak 2026, the country's second-highest civilian honour, recognising contributions across film, fine arts, architecture, music, dance, theatre, journalism, education and sculpture.

The list was disclosed at a press briefing at the Foreign Service Academy following an Advisory Council meeting.

The awardees include veteran actress Farida Akhtar Babita (film), Prof Md Abdus Sattar (fine arts), architect Marina Tabassum (architecture), late musician Ayub Bachchu (music), dance artiste Arthy Ahmed (dance), theatre personality Islam Uddin Palakar (theatre), journalist Shafik Rehman (journalism), Prof Dr Mahbubul Alam Majumdar (education), sculptor Tejosh Halder Josh (sculpture) and rock band Warfaze (music).

Warfaze's selection marks the first time a rock band has been chosen for a national award, according to the government briefing and media reports.

In film, Babita is widely known for her work in films such as "Ashani Sanket" and "Golapi Ekhon Traine" and has won multiple Bangladesh National Film Awards, including a Lifetime Achievement Award.

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Even the CEC can administer oath to new MPs

Says Asif Nazrul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Adviser Asif Nazrul yesterday detailed the constitutional procedures for administering oaths to newly elected members of parliament amid the absence of the speaker and deputy speaker.

"Under the constitution, MPs are required to take their oath administered by the speaker. If the speaker is unavailable, the deputy speaker assumes this responsibility. If neither is available, there are provisions for that as well," Asif Nazrul said while speaking to reporters at the Secretariat.

Noting that the current situation is exceptional, the law adviser said, "One of them is missing while the other is in jail, and both are facing serious cases. Under these circumstances, I do not see any scope for them to administer the oath," he said.

According to the law, if the speaker and deputy speaker are unable to conduct the oath-taking, a person nominated by the president on the advice of the chief adviser may administer it. That could, for example, be our chief justice," Asif Nazrul explained.

He added that if the oath is not administered within three days of election results, the chief election commissioner has the authority to administer oaths.

"Now, this is a policy-level decision of the government.

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PHOTO: MONJUR MORSHED

NATURE QUEST

A WATCHFUL GUARDIAN

A brown fish owl (Ketupa zeylonensis), photographed recently in Jhenaidah, fixes its piercing gaze on the camera as it perches quietly atop a high branch. This large nocturnal raptor, commonly found near rivers, canals, and wetlands, preys on fish and amphibians and plays a vital role in maintaining the ecological balance of Bangladesh's wetland ecosystems. Recognisable by its piercing yellow eyes and powerful build, the brown fish owl is found all across South and Southeast Asia and is currently listed as "Least Concern" on the IUCN Red List.

Government reconstitutes NHRC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has reconstituted the five-member National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), appointing former High Court justice Moyeenul Islam Chowdhury as the new chairman. He was previously the chief of the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances.

Two more members of the inquiry commission -- Md Nur Khan and Nabila Idris -- were also made NHRC commissioners, according to a notification issued by the law ministry last night with immediate effect.

The other new members of the NHRC are Dhaka University Prof Md Shariful Islam, who was a member of the National Independent Investigation Commission, formed to re-investigate the 2009 BDR massacre at Pilkhana, and rights activist Ilira Dewan.

The notification states that the president made these appointments following the recommendation of the selection committee.

The institution remained largely inactive since the previous chairman resigned in November 2024, following the July mass uprising.