



"Cuba is willing to engage in dialogue with the United States, a dialogue on any topic... but without pressure or preconditions."
Cuban President Miguel Diaz Canel



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BNP promises a govt answerable directly to citizens

Party manifesto outlines 9 priority sectors, accountability, comprehensive reforms

SAJJAD HOSSAIN and MD ABBAS

BNP yesterday unveiled its election manifesto, pledging nine key commitments across critical sectors and vowing to establish an accountable, responsible, and a "just state" directly answerable to the people.

If voted to power, the party said it would build a sustainable democratic framework through constitutional and electoral reforms under the core principle "Bangladesh Before All."

The nine major commitments include family and farmers cards, a corruption-free and humane healthcare system, and an employment-oriented education system. Other pledges focus on youth job creation, technical and language skill development, environmental protection, climate resilience, excavation and re-excavation of 20,000 kilometres of rivers and canals, religious and social harmony, and expansion of the digital economy and global connectivity.

The manifesto was designed in line with former president Ziaur Rahman's 19-point programme, former prime minister Khaleda Zia's Vision-2030, and Chairman Tarique Rahman's 31-point agenda.

For the first time, the manifesto, which sets out 51 commitments under five broad sections, was presented by Tarique at the Sonargaon Hotel in

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Rows of campaign posters for MP candidates competing in the February 12 national election stretch endlessly over the Kalshi Road in the capital's Mirpur. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN



T20 World Cup begins amid political chaos

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 10th edition of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup begins today in India and Sri Lanka against the backdrop of a chaotic build-up dominated by political turmoil, which eventually saw Bangladesh replaced by Scotland and Pakistan boycotting their high-stakes group-stage fixture against arch-rivals India in solidarity with Bangladesh.

When the first ball is finally bowled after the turbulent lead-in, Pakistan will open the tournament against the Netherlands in Colombo in the morning.

Scotland, called up at the 11th hour to replace Bangladesh, will take guard on the opening day when they face the West Indies in Kolkata in the afternoon.

Meanwhile, defending champions and tournament favourites India will make their tournament bow in the night match on day one against the USA in Mumbai, carrying the hopes of more

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KEY PLEDGES

Balance of power between PM, president

100-member upper chamber

Formation of 'truth and healing' commission

Reform charter, justice system

One trillion dollar economy by 2034

Insaaf-based Bangladesh

Foreign policy based on national interest

Allocation of 5% GDP each to edn, health

Family, farmers cards

Independent media regulator, review of DSA

Expansion of digital economy, connectivity

Guarantee religious freedom

Restoration of interim govt system

Curb graft, improve law, order

Self-reliant "Made in Bangladesh" defence industry

Shafiqur vows to uproot graft, restore justice

STAR REPORT

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman yesterday said his party has never been involved in extortion and will not allow anyone to do so if it comes to power.

"We have not engaged in extortion, land grabbing, or trade over false cases. After August 5 [2024], we stood as protectors of people's lives, property, and dignity, while others focused on making themselves rich," he told an election rally in Barishal's Mehendiganj upazila in the morning.

He added that politics should be about serving people, not personal gain. "The July martyrs sacrificed their lives to create this environment. They wanted a Bangladesh free from discrimination."

Referring to the upcoming elections, he said if the IJ party alliance wins with people's votes, the country will win. "We will establish justice in the country."

Highlighting Jamaat's stance against corruption, he said strict action would be taken if the party gets the opportunity to run the country. "We will not just cut the branches of corruption; we will uproot it."

The Jamaat ameer also criticised the selective enforcement of law, saying it is



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5 DAYS TO VOTE

Young candidates dominate race

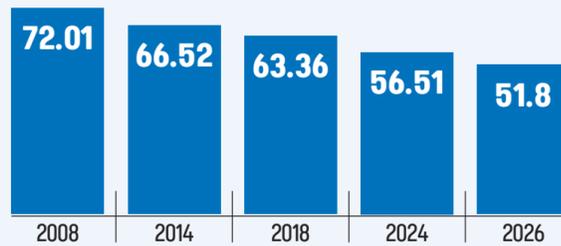
MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR and DIPAN NANDY

The student-led uprising that toppled the Awami League government not only reopened the path to competitive elections and a democratic transition, but also reshaped the slate of candidates aspiring to become

International Bangladesh's (TIB) Know Your Candidate portal, 27.56 percent of the candidates in the upcoming polls are aged between 25 and 44.

Candidates aged 25-34 account for 9.41 percent of the aspirants this year. This marks a significant jump from 3.96 percent in 2024; 0.16 percent in 2018; and zero in the 2014 election.

AVERAGE AGE OF CANDIDATES



parliamentarians.

For the first time in decades, Bangladesh's ballot papers are no longer dominated solely by elderly politicians. Young aspirants – many of whom were on the streets during the 2024 mass uprising – have entered the electoral race in greater numbers.

According to Transparency

Under the National Youth Policy 2017, citizens aged between 18 and 35 are classified as youths.

The proportion of candidates above 65 has also fallen sharply this time to 17.35 percent from 66.39 percent in 2014. Moreover, 1,518 candidates – nearly three-fourths of the total

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Star evacuates office over security concerns

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Daily Star evacuated its office on Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue in Dhaka yesterday evening following information from Tejaon police about a potential threat of mob attack.

Acting on the information, Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam of the newspaper visited the office and instructed an immediate evacuation of the premises, and journalists and staff left the office around 5:30pm.

Shortly afterwards, additional police personnel were deployed at the office to prevent any untoward incidents, while security remained on high alert for several hours.

Around 10:00pm, police informed the newspaper that the threat subsided and there was no immediate risk.

The Daily Star is publishing today's issue from outside its office.

JUSTICE FOR HADI At least 70 hurt as cops, protesters clash in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 70 people were injured yesterday as police and protesters clashed for hours near Hotel InterContinental and the Shabbagh intersection in the capital during demonstrations demanding justice for slain Inqilab Moncho leader Sharif Osman Bin Hadi.

The clashes unfolded in two major phases in the afternoon and evening, turning one of Dhaka's busiest corridors into a battlefield as police used sound grenades, tear gas and water cannons to disperse demonstrators.

The first major confrontation erupted around 4:30pm in front of the Hotel InterContinental, leaving several activists injured, including Inqilab Moncho Member Secretary Abdullah Al Jaber, the platform's Dhaka University

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Inqilab Moncho activists come face-to-face with police after being stopped from marching towards the chief adviser's residence, Jamuna. The protesters demand a UN-led neutral investigation into the killing of former Inqilab Moncho spokesperson Sharif Osman Bin Hadi. The photo was taken yesterday afternoon in front of the InterContinental hotel.

PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

In the run-up to February 12 polls, Shakeel Anwar goes on the road for STAR to hear directly from voters about their hopes, demands and expectations.

At a tea stall, the meaning of an election in hills

SHAKEEL ANWAR, from Bandarban

In Bandarban, one of the country's three hill districts, politics intertwines deeply with memory, land, and security.

My first stop was Hangsama village, around eight miles from Bandarban town, reached via a narrow road winding through forested hills. The village unfolds quietly along



a slope, with most houses raised on wooden stilts, their walls woven from bamboo and their roofs patched with tin. At the entrance is a small tea shop built on a bamboo platform, part meeting place, part lookout, where villagers gather to talk and watch the outside world pass by.

It was here I met Omenu Marma, a middle-aged Marma woman who runs the tea stall. She knew an election was approaching and said she would vote. "There will be a new

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Shafiqur invites Tarique to live public debate

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman yesterday invited BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman to take part in a live public discussion to present their respective political visions and election manifestos before the nation.

In a post on his verified Facebook page around 8:00pm, Shafiqur said political legitimacy in Bangladesh could only be secured through a free and fair election.

"Legitimacy comes only from a free and fair election. Without fairness and trust, no outcome can win the people's confidence.

"After the July uprising, we owe it to our young people to show that politics can be civil and non-confrontational," the post said.

The Jamaat ameer proposed that both leaders appear together before the media and the public to demonstrate a style of politics that is open to criticism, accountable, and transparent.

Citing Tarique's recently unveiled political plan, he invited the BNP chairman to share a public platform for a live discussion where both sides would present their election manifestos and allow citizens to make their own judgment.

"Let us begin a new chapter for Bangladesh, where we all commit to respecting the will of the people," Shafiqur said. BNP has yet to respond publicly to the proposal.



An Inqilab Moncho activist holds up a sign demanding a UN-led neutral investigation into the killing of former spokesperson Sharif Osman Bin Hadi. The demand sparked clashes yesterday when protesters staging a sit-in on Minto Road tried to break through a police barricade and march towards the chief adviser's residence, Jamuna.

PHOTOS: MEHEDI HASAN

IAB chief vows minority safety

BSS, Dhaka

Islami Andolan Bangladesh (IAB) Ameer Mufti Syed Muhammad Rezaul Karim, also known as Charmonai Pir, yesterday said his party has been working to ensure the safety of minority communities across the country following the August 5 uprising.

Addressing an election rally in Barguna's Amtali municipality, he called on voters to support his party's "Hat Pakha" (hand fan) electoral symbol in the February 12 elections.

"Many have spoken of building a golden Bangladesh, green Bangladesh or digital Bangladesh. Without such slogans, we will work to bring smiles to the faces of 18 crore people. In Sha Allah."

Expressing optimism about the electoral prospects in Barguna-1, the IAB leader said his confidence grew through discussions with locals, party leaders and activists.

He urged party activists to continue election activities peacefully and cautioned against any attempt to create violence or disrupt the polling process.

Reiterating his party's stance, he assured minority communities, including Hindus, Christians, and Buddhists, that they remain safe under his party's leadership in Charmonai.

Speaking at the rally, IAB's Barguna-1 candidate Maulana Mahmudul Hossain Waliullah said he aims to serve the people, not rule them. He pledged to prioritise sustainable development, education, employment, healthcare, and management of flooding and river erosion in the district.

The rally was attended by senior IAB leaders, including presidium members Prof Ashraf Ali Akon, Prof Mahbubur Rahman, and Central Assistant Publicity and Dawah Secretary Maulana KM Shariatullah and other local leaders.

BNP promises a govt answerable directly to citizens

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Dhaka. In previous elections – the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth – manifestos were announced by Khaleda Zia.

Presided over by Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, the event was attended by representatives of 38 countries, teachers, senior journalists, and civil society members.

"This manifesto is not merely an electoral pledge; it is a declaration of a new social and state contract with the citizens of Bangladesh," Tarique said after a nearly two-hour presentation, six days before the national election.

He said BNP's governance philosophy will centre on upholding the fundamental mottoes of the Liberation War: equality, human dignity, and social justice.

"The BNP believes not in revenge, but in a politics of justice and humanity. The rights of the people, not power, are at the core of our politics. Production, not plunder; rights, not fear; fairness, not discrimination – these are the principles that will guide the governance of the state," he added. Tarique said, "All the plans and programmes I have presented today will not be possible unless we address three issues – corruption, rule of law, and accountability. Whoever forms the government, if these three issues are not addressed, we will never succeed." He added that BNP, if elected, would give the highest priority to these issues.

The manifesto stressed human values and dignity. "No form of black law in the name of rule of law will be acceptable. The Special Powers Act of 1974 will be repealed," it said. It also committed to justice for crimes against humanity during the fascist era, including the July uprising.

According to the manifesto, a list of martyrs of the Liberation War, the 1990 movement, and the 2024 mass uprising will be compiled under state initiative and accorded proper recognition. Freedom fighter allowances will be increased in line with inflation. A Truth and Healing Commission will focus on victims of human rights violations, ensuring compensation and bringing perpetrators to justice.

It pledged to implement the July National Charter signed on October 17, 2025 with highest priority.

The party also committed to create the post of vice president, balance power between the president and prime minister, and ensure judicial independence.

"My family, my mother, and I were the worst victims of the judiciary during the fascist regime. Having experienced it personally, if BNP is voted to power, I will ensure judicial independence," Tarique said, adding that a Judicial Reform Commission will be formed to reform the justice system.

According to the manifesto, a person may serve as prime minister for a maximum of 10 years, regardless of previous terms. A PM may also serve as party chief.

It also pledged to introduce a 100-member upper chamber in parliament to assist governance while keeping the Constitution unitary. Of the two deputy speakers in both chambers, one will be nominated by members outside the ruling party.

It promised to reform the Constitution and pledged to re-establish a neutral caretaker government during elections.

Under the constitutional reform, article 70 of the constitution will be amended to ensure MPs can express their opinions freely on all matters, except votes of confidence, money bills, and others national security

issues.

The manifesto said BNP's goal is to transform Bangladesh into a modern, democratic, upper middle-income country, where a one trillion dollar annual national GDP economy will be built by 2034. Efforts will be made to raise foreign direct investment from 0.45 percent to 2.5 percent of GDP.

The party also pledged that national interest and state security will be the highest priority in concluding international treaties.

According to the manifesto, BNP will take strict measures to curb corruption and improve law and order. An independent inquiry commission will investigate officials accused of state-sponsored terror during the July uprising and probe vote-rigging and corruption.

Guided by faith in Almighty Allah and the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) model of just governance, BNP's guiding principle will be justice, it said, adding that the party will work to build a Bangladesh based on fairness ("insaf").

In ensuring religious freedom and harmony, BNP said that based on the fundamental principle "religion is personal, the state is for all," every religious person will enjoy full rights to practise their own religion.

"No one will be allowed to hurt any citizen's religious beliefs. People of different religions and every group, clan, and community in the country will celebrate their respective religions and religious festivals without hindrance or worry," it said.

In foreign policy, BNP will treat other nations as friends, not masters, prioritising sovereignty, national interests, security, and the welfare of its people. Bilateral and multilateral relations will be based on equality, fairness, pragmatism, and mutual interest.

Tarique pledged to keep the armed forces out of political controversies to protect their integrity.

"Defence is part of foreign policy. We want the armed forces free from all controversies and politicisation," he said, adding that BNP plans to build a self-reliant "Made in Bangladesh" defence industry to meet their needs.

He also reiterated the party's commitment to the One Rank, One Pension (OROP) policy for retired military personnel, aiming to enhance veterans' welfare.

"If entrusted with responsibility by the people, BNP will build a Bangladesh where the dignity of the vote is upheld, no one is above the law, and every citizen can proudly say – Bangladesh before all," he said.

The "Family Card" will provide Tk 2,500 monthly in cash or essential commodities to low-income families. The "Farmer's Card" will ensure fair prices, subsidies, loans, insurance, and state-managed markets.

Healthcare reforms include the recruitment of 100,000 health workers nationwide. It promised to increase health sector funding to 5 percent of GDP and introduce an E-health card to reduce unnecessary costs.

It also pledged to form an education reform commission, allocate 5 percent of GDP to education, provide free school uniforms, introduce skill- and value-based education with technology support, and implement a midday meal programme.

To build a service-oriented civil administration, BNP will form an Administrative Reform Commission and swiftly appoint over five lakh government employees.

Environmental commitments include excavating and re-excavating 20,000 km of rivers and canals, planting 250 million trees over five years, and introducing modern waste

management through public-private partnerships.

BNP plans to expand the digital economy and global connectivity via international payment systems, regional e-commerce hubs, and promoting exports of "Made in Bangladesh" products.

According to the manifesto, the party aims to create 200,000 jobs in five key areas – cybersecurity, BPO, AI data, semiconductors and Industry 4.0 – by rapidly activating the ICT sector and indirectly create another 800,000 jobs through freelancing and content creators.

By strongly promoting innovation and ICT service exports, the contribution of the ICT sector to the country's GDP will be raised to 5-10 percent, it read.

Major reforms in revenue mobilisation aim to raise the tax-to-GDP ratio to 15 percent by 2035.

Rail will be revitalised as the backbone of national transport through electrification, double tracks, and an integrated network including metro, elevated, and commuter lines. High-speed trains will link Dhaka to major cities.

Regional connectivity will be strengthened through Myanmar and the Dhaka-Kunming route with public-private partnerships and smart monitoring. By 2034, Bangladesh will be transformed into one of the leading aviation hubs in South and Southeast Asia, according to the manifesto.

BNP also pledged to improve Dhaka's traffic management, transport systems, air quality, and women's safety. The manifesto includes satellite towns, a monorail alongside the metro, ring roads and waterways, electric vehicles, regulated rickshaws, shared parking, women-only buses, smart traffic systems, expanded CCTV coverage, and a Metropolitan Transport Authority.

BNP will make the Securities and Exchange Commission independent, form a Capital Market Reform Commission, and investigate 15 years of share market irregularities. In banking, it pledged to return depositors' money from liquidated Islamic banks and establish an Economic Reform Commission for financial stability and economic justice.

The party, in the manifesto, said that it aims to develop the creative economy to 1.5 percent of GDP, creating 500,000 jobs; prioritise the blue economy; and ensure fast, reliable internet nationwide.

To promote arts, culture, media, and social harmony, BNP pledged to discourage anti-national cultural practices, promote democratic values, restore morality through education, religion, and social movements, and reform curricula and media to build a humane and inclusive society.

Press freedom will be ensured by reviewing the Digital Security Act, preventing attacks on media outlets, withdrawing politically motivated cases, ensuring justice for tortured and murdered journalists, and establishing an independent media regulator similar to the UK's Ofcom. Measures will be taken to curb fake news and hate speech, protect journalists' welfare, and end political bias in advertisement allocation.

BNP also pledged to protect ethnic and cultural diversity, reassess the 1997 Peace Accord, and strengthen religious freedom and welfare for all faiths.

As per the manifesto, power generation capacity is targeted to reach 35,000 MW by 2030 with transparent contracts.

At a bamboo tea stall

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minister, so I will vote," she said, likely referring to a new member of parliament for the district.

When I asked what she wanted from the new leader, she struggled to find the words in Bangla. After a long pause, she said softly, "We want to live in safety and security." I asked whether she felt unsafe now. "Yes, but..." she hesitated.

She referred to an incident less than a year ago when influential Bangalee traders attempted to take control of a large stretch of forest land belonging to their village, known locally as a para. The dispute escalated before being defused, but the fear remains. "We want to live in peace," she said, repeating the phrase.

The anxiety Omenu struggled to articulate stems from a longer, bloodier history that continues to shape life in the hills. For residents of Bandarban, security is not an abstract concept, but a daily presence, embodied in checkpoints, patrols, and the unspoken rules of movement.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts were engulfed in armed conflict for nearly two decades before a peace accord was signed in 1997, formally ending hostilities between the state and indigenous insurgent groups. The accord raised hopes of demilitarisation and political autonomy, but these expectations were only partially met. Credible estimates suggest that between 35,000 and 40,000 army personnel remain stationed across the three hill districts, alongside thousands of auxiliary force members.

While large-scale insurgency has subsided, violence has never disappeared entirely. In Bandarban, the brief emergence of the Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF) in 2022 – marked by armed attacks and extortion – rekindled long-suppressed fears of instability. Although the authorities say the situation is under control, the episode prompted renewed security operations and restrictions on movement in remote upazilas such as Thanchi, Ruma, and Alikadam, reinforcing the sense that peace in the hills remains conditional.

It is against this backdrop that hill communities are approaching the February 12 election, cautiously, with

limited expectations of transformation.

Inside Hangsama village, I spoke with Nisemo Marma, the village head, known locally as the karbari, and Saimung Marma, a young resident. Nisemo's three children are educated; two now work in government service, including one in the police. When I raised sensitive issues such as relations with settlers, the security force's presence, and freedom of movement, he responded with care.

"We want to live in peace and prosperity," the soft-spoken elderly man said. While he did not complain about daily life, he spoke emotionally about restrictions. "There are checks," he said. "We want total equality."

Security checks apply to everyone, especially in remote, security-sensitive areas. On my way from Cox's Bazar to Bandarban town, my vehicle was stopped at a checkpoint, where soldiers asked who I was and why I was travelling to the hills. Such stops are routine, revealing how deeply a security presence has become part of everyday life.

Politically, Bandarban has long been dominated by the Awami League's Bir Bahadur Singh, who has won nearly every election since 1991. With the Awami League absent from this election, many hill residents appear to be shifting their support to BNP candidate Sachin Pru. Saimung Marma told me he was working for the BNP campaign.

When I asked what he hoped would change if his party won, he said he wanted a government "that ensures there is no disparity between people in the hills and the plains." Pressed on where he saw disparity, he paused. "Maybe my village is okay," he said, "but there are worries – camps, oppression, rape. These must stop."

My next stop was Lulain Headman Para, another Marma village. Near a primary school established in 1959, I spoke at a tea stall with Monjur-e-Marma, a jhum farmer. He was candid about the election. "No matter who comes to power, I don't care if they give us anything or not," he said. "We just want to live a normal and peaceful life in the hills."

Others sitting nearby nodded in agreement. When I asked whether they were not living in peace now, he replied, "We are okay now. We can do jhum, but

we want it to sustain. We don't know how BNP or Jamaat will rule. I am not sure."

Joining us was Chin Shimo Marma, a Union Parishad member and jhum farmer who also owns a mango orchard. He told me about his efforts to explain the July charter and referendum issues to villagers in the Marma language. Party politics, he said, has limited traction here. "What we want is a guarantee that what we grow here, we can take our produce to Bandarban town and sell it safely and securely."

No one at the tea stall contradicted him.

Anxieties in Bandarban are not confined to Indigenous communities alone. For many Bangalee settlers – now the demographic majority in the district – the hills also represent a place of constraint and uncertainty.

In Notun Para, a Bangalee settler neighbourhood near the Sangu River, I met Ali Hossain, who arrived in Bandarban as a child in 1988, at the height of the insurgency. His family had migrated from the coastal district of Patuakhali, driven by poverty and river erosion.

"It was about survival," he said. "There was no work back home." Today, he said, life is more stable and relations with Indigenous neighbours are generally calm. Still, he spoke of inequality. "In the plains, we can buy land freely," he said. "Here we need certificates from the raja. Is that equality?"

Hossain plans to vote on February 12, but his expectations are low. "What can you expect from politicians?" he asked. "Whoever comes to power becomes selfish. Nothing really changes for common people."

In Bandarban, the election is less about promises than about unresolved histories – of land taken and land restricted, of security imposed and security denied. Indigenous villagers speak of peace with caution, shaped by memories of violence and displacement. Bangalee settlers express their own sense of inequality and political fatigue.

For many here, voting is not an act of faith in politics, but a quiet assertion of presence – an insistence that life in the hills, with all its anxieties and aspirations, still deserves to be counted.

Young candidates

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number – are contesting the national election for the first time.

"The July uprising was led mainly by youths, who proved that they could indeed take charge. Many youths have received party tickets, as their contributions were recognised," said election expert Abdul Alim, also a member of the now-defunct Electoral Reform Commission.

The data show that the average age of candidates has also dropped significantly since 2008 – a period when the political arena was dominated by senior and veteran figures. The average age now stands at 51.8 years, compared with 72.01 years in the 2008 election.

Among the new parties, the National Citizen Party (NCP), formed by frontline organisers of the July uprising, is taking part in a national election for the first time.

The party has nominated 32 candidates, and 19 of them are aged between 25 and 34, accounting for nearly 60 percent of its slate. Seven more NCP candidates are between 35 and 44, and only two are above 45.

Similarly, Gono Odhikar Parishad, founded by former Ducusu vice president Nurul Huq Nur, is contesting 90 seats for the first time. Of its candidates, 32 are aged between 25 and 34 (35.5 percent) and 28 are aged 35-44 (31.1 percent).

These figures stand in sharp contrast

percent).

The Jatiya Party fielded 192 candidates, of whom six are aged 25-34 and 26 are aged 35-44.

Referring to the mass uprising, Sk Tawfique M Haque, a professor at North South University, said that youths stepped in when the country's conventional political leadership failed to bring about change.

"Political parties seem to have taken this into consideration. This is reflected in the growing focus on young leadership in Bangladesh," said Tawfique, also the director of the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance.

With around four crore young voters in Bangladesh, many believe that their votes will be a decisive factor, he said.

PARTY	AGE-WISE NUMBER OF CANDIDATES				
	25-34 YEARS	35-44 YEARS	45-54 YEARS	55-65 YEARS	65+ YEARS
BNP	2	10	51	115	108
Jamaat	3	29	70	67	50
Islami Andolan Bangladesh	23	69	93	36	20
Jatiya Party	6	26	55	62	30
National Citizen Party (NCP)	19	7	1	1	0
Gono Odhikar Parishad	32	28	14	7	4

There has also been a remarkable demographic shift in terms of voters, with youths accounting for more than 42 percent of the total electorate. They will cast their ballots for the first time in a competitive election since 2008.

Amid this transformation, a big difference between the old political parties and the newly formed ones stands out – the old parties continue to rely heavily on older, seasoned candidates, while the new ones are banking on youths to project an image of change.

to those of the old parties.

Data from the Election Commission and the IIB show that the BNP has fielded 288 candidates, but only two of them are aged 25-34 (0.7 percent), while 10 fall within the 35-44 age group (3.5 percent).

Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami nominated 224 candidates, of whom only three are aged 25-34 (1.3 percent) and 29 are aged 35-44 (12.9 percent).

Islami Andolon Bangladesh named 253 candidates, with 23 aged 25-34 (9.1 percent) and 69 aged 35-44 (27.3

"Especially in urban areas, young voters may prefer candidates closer to their own age, perhaps five or 10 years older. That will matter, but it won't be the sole determining factor.

"In my view, young candidates are more likely to win in cities because the movement was urban-centric, and many of those activists are now voters."

Tawfique also pointed out that large parties cannot change their existing dynamics overnight.

Prioritise balanced development

IPD urges political parties in 'People's Manifesto'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Institute for Planning and Development (IPD) yesterday unveiled its People's Manifesto, urging political parties to prioritise balanced and equitable development, inclusive planning, and environmental sustainability to turn Bangladesh into a welfare state.

The manifesto was presented at an online discussion organised by IPD, where speakers stressed the need to move away from Dhaka-centric development and increase investment and employment opportunities at district and upazila levels through comprehensive national and regional planning.

IPD said the next government must ensure regionally inclusive development free from discrimination, adopt inclusive urban and rural planning, and pursue sustainable economic growth while protecting the environment.

It highlighted poor civic services in rural areas and called for urgent measures to reduce urban-rural disparities.

The manifesto emphasised affordable housing for low-income groups through

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Police use water cannons, tear gas, and sound grenades to disperse government employees as they attempt to march towards the chief adviser's official residence, Jamuna, demanding implementation of the ninth pay scale yesterday. PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

NINTH PAY SCALE

Police use water cannon, tear gas to disperse protesters

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday used water cannon, tear gas, and sound grenades to disperse government employees marching towards the chief adviser's official residence, Jamuna, demanding implementation of the ninth pay scale.

The protest began around 10:30am at Dhaka's Shahbagh, with demonstrators attempting to march towards Jamuna.

Police blocked them at several points, but as protesters tried to push past barricades, security forces fired water cannons and sound grenades.

Despite resistance, the demonstrators advanced and briefly reached near Jamuna after 11:00am, before police intensified their action to clear the area.

Ziaur Rahman, a college teacher from Rajshahi, said the protesters had only one demand – implementation of the ninth pay scale. "Our demonstration will continue until this demand is met," he told The Daily Star.

He added that police initially showed restraint, but later used hot water cannons and sound grenades against the marchers.

By 1:00pm, protesters were seen regrouping at a distance, while leaders and activists of the Inqilab Moncho positioned themselves in front of the InterContinental hotel, continuing their protest.

Police maintained heavy deployment along the road connecting the hotel to Jamuna. At around 1:15pm, Inspector General of Police Baharul Alam arrived at the scene. He was joined by DMP Commissioner Sheikh Md Sajjat Ali and other senior officials, who were already present to oversee the situation.

KUSHTIA-3 CONSTITUENCY

Rumpa seeks change, women empowerment



ANIS MONDOL

As dusk falls, a woman and a man move from one tea-and-snack stall to another, asking for votes. Some accept the posters they offer; others walk away without a glance. Undeterred, the woman keeps extending her hand. Beside her, the man announces through a handheld microphone: "Please vote, brothers. Please vote. Vote for the Elephant symbol."

She is Rumpa Khatun, the only female candidate among Kushtia's four parliamentary constituencies, who has been campaigning in the Bottoil Mor area of Kushtia Sadar upazila.

Rumpa is contesting from the Kushtia-3 (Sadar) constituency with the Elephant symbol after securing the Bangladesh Republican Party's nomination. With no party workers or visible supporters, she campaigns accompanied only by her husband, Abdul Halim.

A parliamentary candidate canvassing alone has sparked curiosity among local residents. Explaining the situation, Rumpa said many of her relatives were pressured by major political parties to take oaths to support them. "They tell me they will vote for me later, but cannot do so this time," she said.

"That does not unsettle me," she added. "I want to walk towards my dreams following the principle of 'Ekla Cholo' – whether or not anyone responds to my call."

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2



FEBRUARY 12 ELECTION | DHAKA-1

Communal harmony and unmet civic needs take focus

SADI MUHAMMAD ALOK and SHARIF M SHAFIQUE

In Hasnabad village of Bandura in Nawabganj, Teresa Hilda Gomes and her family live beside the Holy Rosary Church. Though interested in the upcoming election, she has yet to meet any candidate and has seen little campaigning in her area.

Hubert Joseph Gomes, headmaster of St Joseph Tutorial near the church, told The Daily Star that around 1,500 Christian families live across Dohar and Nawabganj, including about 350 in Hasnabad alone.

With the February 12 election approaching, these families have been actively discussing who to vote for to ensure the development of their community and the region.

Hubert said Muslims, Hindus and Christians in the area share a harmonious relationship, but stressed the urgent need for better roads and communication.

A few kilometres away in Raipara village under Dohar upazila, the steady rhythm of handlooms fills the air.

Badshah Mia, 72, has spent his life in weaving – a trade passed down through three generations. Six weavers now work under him from dawn to dusk, producing lungis for local wholesalers.

Badshah considers voting a civic duty. "I always vote. Even if it doesn't benefit us directly, it is our responsibility," he said. "Our life is simple – we just want to survive through hard work."

He said around 100 families in the area remain involved in weaving. Though they once produced sarees and lungis, they now focus solely on lungis.

Like many others, Badshah hopes the country's overall situation will improve after the election.

Many residents of Dohar-Nawabganj echoed a familiar sentiment: voting is a right, but elected representatives often forget voters once the polls end.



Khandaker Abu Ashfaq
BNP



Mohammad Nazrul Islam
Jamaat

The Dhaka-1 constituency, comprising Dohar and Nawabganj upazilas and the Ichhamoti river flowing through it, is largely sustained by remittances.

Many residents work in the Middle East, Europe, America and elsewhere, while agriculture and business remain key sources of income.

Residents say Nawabganj and Dohar are relatively peaceful, with fewer incidents of terrorism, illegal occupation or clashes than in other regions.

However, civic woes persist. Despite being only 25-30 kilometres from Dhaka, the area lacks gas connections.

Their primary demands remain gas connections and well-equipped government hospitals – promises they say past representatives failed to fulfil.

Candidates contesting the seat include Khandaker Abu Ashfaq (BNP), Mohammad Nazrul Islam (Jamaat-e-Islami), Nasir Uddin Molla (Jatiya Party), Nurul Islam (Islami Andolan Bangladesh), Sheikh Md Ali (Bangladesh Labour Party), and independent candidate Antara Selima Huda.

Voters said the main contest is shaping up between BNP's Abu Ashfaq, the district BNP president, and Jamaat candidate Mohammad Nazrul Islam, a former general secretary of Islami Chhatra Shibir.

Antara Selima Huda, daughter of the late former minister Barrister Nazmul Huda, is also seen as a popular contender.

Meem Hajera, 45, from Kumarbarila village in Nawabganj, knows most of the candidates. The only hijra voter in her village, she said she plans to vote for her preferred candidate. "We survive by seeking help from people. We go to both the good and the bad – so everyone is good to us," she told The Daily Star.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

Patwary pledges to become a 'people's MP'

Unveils 8-point manifesto for Dhaka-8

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nasiruddin Patwary, candidate of Jamaat-e-Islami-led 11-party alliance for Dhaka-8 constituency, yesterday unveiled his eight-point electoral manifesto.

In the manifesto, unveiled in front of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) office at Dhaka's Segunbagicha around 4:00pm, Patwary, also chief coordinator of National Citizen Party (NCP), pledged to ensure justice for the killing of Inqilab Moncho spokesperson Sharif Osman bin Hadi as his central objective.

He also pledged to freeing Dhaka-8 from extortion, drugs and terrorism, and building it in an environmentally friendly and liveable manner, alongside ensuring universal healthcare, a non-discriminatory and modern education system, employment generation, easing traffic congestion and civic sufferings, and direct services to the citizens. Patwary also promised to become a "people's MP and people's servant", if elected.

He stressed that issues such as poor waste management, lack of parks, utilities supply shortages, and lack of high-speed in different areas within the constituency will be addressed.

"This manifesto has been prepared based on the real issues of Dhaka-8. If elected, I will try to implement these through laws in parliament. And even if I am not elected, respecting the people's verdict, I will continue to work for freedom, staying connected with the people and fighting to liberate them from civic oppression," Nasiruddin said.

"This struggle will continue for a lifetime, until Bangladesh becomes a beautiful, sovereign country free from domination, imperialism and fascism," he added.

After hearing about the clashes centring an Inqilab Moncho sit-in at Shahbagh, he shortened his speech and joined a protest march.



He talks about a plan but knows nothing about Bangladesh: Nahid

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Savar

Without mentioning any name, National Citizen Party (NCP) Convener Nahid Islam yesterday said people of the country have understood the plans of those who have "no idea about the country, who have lived abroad for 16-17 years and remain detached from the people".

Addressing an election rally at the Matribagan Jame Mosque in Savar's Shahbagh area in the morning, he said they have observed that a dominant party in an alliance had absorbed many others, undermining multi-party democracy.

"The party's leaders and activists are moving around, issuing threats," he alleged.

He further said when the leader of that party returned to the country and spoke of having a "plan", they had welcomed it.

However, the leader lacked knowledge about the country's basic realities, the NCP leader said.

"He does not know where the sugar mills are located, where the EPZs are, which city is the commercial capital, or where soybeans or corn are cultivated. He knows nothing about the country," Nahid added.

"Do not make any plans that would push Bangladesh

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2



Winners of a photography competition and exhibition "Echoes of the Earth: Photography for the Planet" among guests at the award distribution ceremony at Jatiya Press Club in Dhaka yesterday. In the fuel category, first prize went to Muhammad Mostafizur Rahman of BDNews24, second to Habibur Rahman of The Daily Star, and third to Minhaj Uddin of The Business Standard. In the environment category, Mamunur Rashid of Dainik Samakal won first prize, followed by Mehedi Hasan of Ajker Patrika in second place and Sheikh Nasir of The Daily Star in third. The event was organised by Dhoritri Rokhaya Amra (DHORA) and Bangladesh Photojournalist Association.

PHOTO: STAR

Leasing out Ctg port terminal goes against public interest

Says Farhad Mazhar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Chattogram

Poet and columnist Farhad Mazhar yesterday said leasing out the New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT) of the Chattogram port without informing the public goes against public interest.

He stressed that such decisions must be made through transparent consultations with workers, business communities, and other stakeholders.

He made the remarks while speaking as the chief guest at a discussion titled "Port Protection versus the Politics of Port Paralysis" at the Chattogram Press Club. The event was organised by the Port Protection Committee.

Mazhar criticised the use of non-disclosure clauses to keep the public

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan's death anniversary observed

CITY DESK

The sixth death anniversary of

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan, a longtime weekly columnist for The Daily Star and the publisher and editor of the now-defunct weekly magazine, First News, was observed yesterday, said a press release.

He also had a long career with Standard Chartered Bank, serving in both Dhaka and Dubai. A passionate writer, he left banking career to launch First News in 2010, the country's first and only news magazine.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan, the inimitable weekly author of Cross Talk in The Daily Star, began writing his column in 2000. He also authored several books, including Grameen Bank and Muhammad Yunus, In Search of a Nation, and Tales from the Heart, published by Mowla Brothers.

His other works, such as A Good Man in the Woods and Other Essays, Crosstalk Essays, and The Parallax View, were published by The University Press Limited. His relatives, friends, and well-wishers are requested to pray for the salvation of the departed soul.

Ctg port staff resume strike from tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Employees of Chattogram port yesterday announced they will resume indefinite work stoppage from tomorrow, accusing the Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) of backtracking on dialogue by seeking travel bans and asset probes against protest leaders.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the Chattogram Bandar Rokkha Sangram Parishad held at a club near Port Colony in the evening.

Following the meeting, agitating employees marched onto the road near Port Colony and burned an effigy of the CPA chairman at around 8:00pm.

"Workers had postponed their earlier strike after the shipping adviser assured them after a meeting that their demands would be addressed. For the sake of the country, the port and the business community, and considering people's suffering ahead of Ramadan, we halted the strike," Chattogram Bandar Rokkha Sangram Coordinator Md Ibrahim Khokan told The Daily Star.

"We trusted that the government would respond positively so that we would not have to go for tougher movements again. However, within hours of the meeting, CPA issued a letter to several government agencies, including the Anti-Corruption Commission, seeking to impose overseas travel bans and launch asset probes against 15 protesters, branding them as anti-state and criminals. By issuing such a letter immediately after negotiations, CPA Chairman M Moniruzzaman has instigated and sparked fresh anger among port employees," he said.

Under such circumstances, the workers saw no alternative but to resume the indefinite work stoppage from tomorrow, Khokan added.

The port had remained tense throughout the day as employees awaited the outcome of talks, while port users and businesses expressed concern over possible disruptions if operations are halted again.

FEBRUARY 12 ELECTION

BNP, Jamaat campaign heats up in Ctg-9

Both focus on waterlogging, civic services, minority outreach



ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

With less than a week to go before polling, electioneering has intensified in Chattogram-9 (Kotwali), as candidates from the BNP and Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami and stepped up mass contacts in the port city.

BNP candidate Mohammad Abu Sufian conducted campaign activities in the same constituency earlier this week, beginning from the Cheragi Pahar intersection in Ward-32 (Anderkilla).

Moving through Rajapur Lane, Hazari Gali and Teribazar, he met traders and pedestrians and said voters in Chattogram-9 were eager for change.

"The people want to reclaim their voting rights after a long time," he told reporters.

Abu Sufian said his priorities, if elected, would include resolving waterlogging, ensuring security for traders and improving civic services.

Addressing a street rally, he said he had

entered politics to represent ordinary people and urged voters to cast their ballots freely on February 12, pledging to work for a liveable and peaceful Chattogram.

Meanwhile, Jamaat candidate Dr AKM Fazlul Hoque began campaigning in the Ishaker Pool area, engaging residents from different professions, including rickshaw pullers, shopkeepers and small traders.

He urged voters to support the Scales symbol and vote "yes" in the referendum.

Asked by a local rickshaw-puller what voters would gain by electing him, Dr Fazlul outlined a set of development pledges, including addressing chronic waterlogging and poor road conditions through coordination with the Chattogram City Corporation and the Chattogram Development Authority.

He also promised primary healthcare facilities in every ward and proposed developing a tourism zone along the Bakolia embankment.

Later, at Kalamia Bazar, he continued

door-to-door campaigning and addressed a street rally, where he spoke of a political change following the February 12 election.

"We want to build a Bangladesh based on insaf [justice], where people of all religions – Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and Muslims – can live with dignity," he said.

A 'BELLWETHER' CONSTITUENCY Chattogram-9, which houses key government offices, including the divisional commissioner's office and the court building, is considered a "bellwether" seat. Historically, the party winning this constituency has gone on to form the government, as seen in the elections of 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2008.

The constituency has 4,12,538 voters, with religious minorities forming a significant portion of the electorate in areas such as Jamal Khan, Patharghata and Anderkilla.

Acknowledging this, both candidates have recently reached out to minority communities, pledging security and equal rights for citizens of all faiths.



He talks about a plan but knows

FROM PAGE 3
backward again," he said. "We will not allow any attempt to rehabilitate fascists or re-establish hegemonic politics. We are prepared to resist such plans at any cost."

"Some speak of experience in running the country. But people of Bangladesh have seen that experience, and it was not a

good one," he said.

He urged voters to go to polling stations without fear on February 12 and warned that anyone attempting vote-rigging or occupying polling centres would face consequences similar to those faced by "fascists".

He criticised the interim government for failing to ensure the trial of Inqilab Moncho spokesperson

Sharif Osman Hadi and for not arresting those responsible in the killing. Among those present at the rally included 11-party alliance candidate for the Dhaka-19 constituency, Dilshana Parul; Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami Dhaka district Ameer Maulana Delwar Hossain, and Secretary Maulana Afzal Hossain.

Rumpa seeks change

FROM PAGE 3
Rumpa completed her EMBA from Islamic University. She and her husband, a businessman by profession, have set up a garment factory in Patikabari of Kushtia Sadar upazila. Previously based in Dhaka, the couple now plans to settle permanently in their home area.

She claimed many voters have privately expressed interest in supporting her, with some promising to vote secretly. However, she said pressure from major parties prevents them from supporting her.

"Voters worry that if we fail to come to power, they may face problems or be deprived of benefits," she said. "But I am receiving a strong response from

women. They want a woman to represent them in parliament."

Asked whether she faces obstacles as a female candidate, Rumpa said reactions are mixed. "Some support me because I am a woman. Others use abusive language because they fear I might split votes from their preferred candidates."

Calling for political change, she argued that election funds should be used to create entrepreneurs rather than be wasted. She questioned how parties are managing to spend lakhs of taka for elections despite declaring recent financial struggles.

Her vision, she claimed, is to create entrepreneurs in every household, drawing inspiration from China.

"People from villages often have to travel to cities for training. I want teachers to go to villages and train people to become entrepreneurs," she said. "China once went through a difficult economic phase, but entrepreneurs transformed the country. Now they have entrepreneurs in every household, while we are still running after jobs."

She also pledged to work on curbing environmental pollution and reopening Kushtia Sugar Mill and Mohini Mill.

Standing tirelessly beside her on the campaign trail, Abdul Halim said his wife has always wanted to serve people. "If she can work for even one person," he said, "that will be our greatest achievement."

Communal harmony and unmet

FROM PAGE 3
BNP candidate Abu Ashfaq said people are eager to vote after being unable to do so freely in the past three elections.

"Having served as upazila chairman for a long time, I have strong ties with people of all walks of life, especially the youth," he said, adding that his plans would reflect their opinions.

If elected, he pledged to eliminate terrorism, extortion and drugs, and to improve security and infrastructure.

Claiming strong support from women voters, he urged people to vote "for the force of independence".

Jamaat candidate Nazrul Islam said voters were ready to reject old leadership in favour of change. "If the election is free and fair, I am optimistic about victory," he said.

Nazrul Islam added, "The youth are working closely with me, carrying the spirit of the July uprising. Besides, my opponents also know that a large portion

of women voters will vote for me."

If elected, he promised improvements in roads, communication, and government hospitals, as well as the establishment of modern IT institutes to train local youth.

Both the candidates pledged to maintain peace and public safety.

The constituency has 545,140 voters – 276,050 men, 269,085 women and five hijra voters. In the previous election, the voter count stood at 513,609.

Leasing out Ctg port terminal

FROM PAGE 3
uninformed, calling it dangerous to justify handing over the port to foreign companies by citing local inefficiency.

He questioned whether the state would be able to take sovereign decisions during times of crisis if key infrastructure is

outsourced. Expressing concern over popular sovereignty, he said ports and sovereignty are inseparable, and bureaucrats cannot take unilateral decisions in the name of the state.

Speakers at the event alleged that projects built with port funds are being

handed over to foreign companies, threatening jobs and national interest.

They claimed that leasing the NCT could put around 800 employees at risk and demanded full disclosure and an investigation into the proposed agreements, citing concerns over transparency and national security.

Prioritise balanced

FROM PAGE 3
land allocation, financial support, and expanded public-private partnerships.

It also called for stronger social protection and healthcare coverage for poor and marginalised communities through social security and health cards, alongside agricultural cards.

According to IPD, the manifesto aims to establish a welfare state by reducing social and economic inequalities, ensuring transparent and accountable use of state resources, and integrating marginalised groups into the development process.

On environment and infrastructure, IPD demanded mandatory planning, environmental, and social impact assessments for all mega projects, along with stricter punishment for land grabbing and environmental pollution.

It also recommended increased investment in renewable energy and the development of a multimodal public transport system, including rail, waterways, and mass transit.

The manifesto called for planned industrial and economic zones with worker-friendly housing, transport, and healthcare facilities, as well as special development plans for haor, char, hill, coastal, and

river erosion-prone areas.

It also stressed empowering local governments and establishing planning courts to enforce environmental and land-use laws.

Speaking at the event, Bangladesh Institute of Planners President Dr Mohammad Ariful Islam said development planning in Bangladesh remains fragmented, weakening the implementation of political commitments.

IPD adviser Prof Akhtar Mahmud highlighted the importance of inclusive planning and effective implementation to reduce development inequality, noting that optimal land use is critical in a densely populated country like Bangladesh.

Other speakers stressed the need for legal action against environmental offenders, climate-resilient agriculture, improved health and education services, bureaucratic reform, and data-driven, technology-based planning to ensure sustainable development.

PRAYER TIMING	
FEBRUARY 7	
Fajr	Zohr
5:30	12:45
Asr	Maghrib
4:15	5:52
Esha	JAMAAT
6:05	1:15
4:30	5:56
7:45	7:45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

BNP campaigning for Gono Odhikar Parishad candidate in Debidwar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cumilla

Leaders and activists of the BNP are campaigning in Debidwar of Cumilla in support of the Gono Odhikar Parishad candidate.

After losing the allocation of the BNP's traditional symbol, the sheaf of paddy, for the Cumilla-4 constituency, BNP leaders and activists are now campaigning for the Gono Odhikar Parishad candidate in line with a central party decision.

Earlier, Chhatra Dal General Secretary Nasir Uddin Nasir publicly announced BNP alliance support for Gono Odhikar Parishad candidate Jasim Uddin, who is contesting with the Truck symbol.

Following the cancellation of BNP candidate Manzurul Ahsan Munshi's nomination, the BNP instructed local leaders and activists to take to the field in support of Jasim Uddin and his Truck symbol. As part of this directive, campaigning began from yesterday morning.

In this constituency, Hasnat Abdullah, chief coordinator for the southern region of the National Citizen Party (NCP) and the candidate of the Jamaat-e-Islami-led 11-party alliance, is contesting with the Shapla Koli (water lily bud) symbol.

With BNP absent from the race, the seat is expected to be relatively easy for Hasnat Abdullah, according to local observers.

However, many voters believe that the Truck symbol candidate will be his main rival.

Cumilla North District BNP Member Secretary FM Tarek Munshi told The Daily Star that BNP has officially extended its support to Gono Odhikar Parishad candidate Jasim Uddin.

Yesterday morning, Hasnat Abdullah conducted door-to-door campaigning at Tebaria village in Bhani union. At the same time, Jasim Uddin, along with FM Tarek Munshi, campaigned at Mashikara village of Gunai Ghar Union.

Speaking during his campaign for the Shapla Kali symbol, Hasnat Abdullah said, "Loan defaulters who have embezzled public money should not be allowed to contest elections. There are no extortionists or profiteers with me, so I have nothing to hide."

Meanwhile, during his campaign in Mashikara, Jasim Uddin said, "BNP has supported me. If they stay with me until the end, I will be victorious. The truth of who is qualified and who is not will be proven on polling day, the 12th. I am receiving a very positive response from voters."

According to local sources, the supporters of Manzurul Ahsan Munshi have taken the matter as a prestige issue after his candidacy was cancelled on loan default grounds following an appeal filed by Hasnat Abdullah and the subsequent defeat in the High Court and Supreme Court, where lawyers supportive of Hasnat played an active role.

As a result, Munshi's supporters are now positioning themselves firmly against Jamaat alliance-backed Hasnat Abdullah.

Youth shot dead in Khulna

UNB, Khulna

A youth was shot dead by unidentified assailants in Khulna town early Thursday, police said.

The victim was identified as Rakib Hossain, 23, the son of Anwar Hossain from the Ashbigha area under Labanchara Police Station.

Quoting locals, police said Rakib was staying at a nearby salon in the town's West Tutpara area when two youths arrived and forcibly dragged him outside.

The attackers then shot him twice in the head before fleeing the scene.

Rakib was taken to Khulna Medical College Hospital by police and locals, where doctors declared him dead.

Deputy Commissioner (South) of Khulna Metropolitan Police, Mohammad Tajul Islam, said law enforcers from Sadar and Labanchara police stations went to the scene and recovered two bullets.

Police are investigating the motive behind the killing, he added.

Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB)

IRESPPW-2nd PHASE

Palli Bhaban, 5 Kawranbazar, Dhaka-1215.

Memo No:47.62.0000.966.07.022.25-70

Date: 05/02/2026

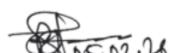
e-Tender Notice Open Tendering Method (OTM)

e-Tenders are invited in the e-GP portal (www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of below mentioned works.

SL No	Tender ID	Name of Work	Online Tender Publication Date & Time	Tender last selling and closing Date and Time
1	Tender ID : 1218581	Printing & binding of different type of register & others	08/02/2026; 15:00	24/02/2026; 16:30 25/02/2026; 14:00

The interested persons/firms may visit the web site www.eprocure.gov.bd to get the details of the tender.

This is an online tender, where only e-Tenders will be accepted in the National e-GP portal and no offline/hard copy will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, please register on e-GP System (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>). Further Information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP system portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).


Mohammad Reshedul Alam
Project Director

Top Russian general shot, hospitalised

Lavrov points finger at Ukraine

AFP, Moscow

A top Russian military intelligence general was shot in a Moscow apartment building yesterday and hospitalised, Moscow said, in what it said was an assassination attempt orchestrated by Ukraine.

There was no comment from Kyiv. Russian investigators said Vladimir Alekseyev – the deputy head of Moscow's GRU military intelligence, sanctioned in the West for his alleged role in cyberattacks and charges that he organised a nerve agent attack on a Russian defector in Britain – was shot by an "unidentified individual".

It said the suspect fled the scene and the general was admitted to hospital. In televised comments, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov accused Ukraine of being behind the "terrorist act".



A displaced Palestinian man and woman retrieve a blanket from the rubble after Israeli aircraft targeted a five-storey house in Khan Yunis, southern Gaza Strip, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Willing to talk to US, 'without pressure'

Cuba president responds to Trump's oil threat

AFP, Havana

Cuba is prepared to hold dialogue with the United States but not under pressure, President Miguel Diaz-Canel insisted Thursday after months of threats from US President Donald Trump.

Trump has vowed to cut off Cuba's access to oil and stated the communist island was "ready to fall" as he warned it to "make a deal" with Washington "BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE."

The Republican did not say what kind of a deal he was after, but has repeatedly stated the two countries were in negotiations, which Havana has denied.

"Cuba is willing to engage in dialogue with the United States, a dialogue on any topic... but without pressure or preconditions," Diaz-Canel said on state TV and radio.

He said any talks must take place "from a position of equals, with respect for our sovereignty, our independence and our self-determination" and without "interference in our internal affairs."

Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio have made no secret of their desire to bring about regime change in Havana.

NEW LIMITS ON NUKE WEAPONS

US seeks three-way deal with Russia, China

AFP, Geneva

The United States yesterday urged three-way talks with Russia and China to set new limits on nuclear weapons, after the last treaty between top nuclear powers Washington and Moscow expired.

Thomas DiNanno, the under secretary of state for arms control, told the UN Conference on Disarmament that the New START treaty, which was allowed to lapse on Thursday, had "fundamental flaws".

Top US official says New START treaty had 'fundamental flaws'

China publicly rejected joining disarmament negotiations

Russia envoy insists new nuclear talks include France, Britain

"Serial Russian violations, growth of more worldwide stockpiles and flaws in New START's design and implementation gives the United States a clear imperative to call for a new architecture that addresses the threats of today, not those of a bygone era," he told the conference at the United Nations' European headquarters in Geneva.

"As we sit here today, China's entire nuclear arsenal has no



limits, no transparency, no declarations, had no controls," he lamented.

He added that "the next era of arms control can and should continue with clear focus, but it will require the participation of more than just Russia at the negotiating table."

The expiration of New START, which restricted the United States and Russia to deploying 1,550 nuclear warheads each, marks the first time in decades that the world finds itself without a treaty to curb the positioning of the planet's most destructive weapons, sparking fears of a fresh arms race.

US President Donald Trump did not accept a proposal from Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to keep New START's restrictions in place for another year, and called Thursday for a "new, improved and modernised treaty".

"New START does not allow the

United States to credibly uphold both our strategic deterrence commitments to the American people and our extended deterrence commitments to our allies," DiNanno insisted.

"We aim to improve upon New START in order to achieve a new, better strategic stability and arms control architecture that makes the world safer and more secure," he said.

China has already publicly rejected joining disarmament negotiations, noting that its arsenal is much smaller.

Russia's ambassador Gennady Gatilov meanwhile insisted that any new nuclear talks should also include other nuclear-armed states such as France and Britain.

Russia "would be involved in such a process if the UK and France are also involved, who are military allies of the United States in Nato," he told the conference.

EASTERN PACIFIC

US strike on 'drug-smuggling' boat kills two

AFP, Washington

The US military Thursday said it killed two alleged drug traffickers in a strike on a boat in the eastern Pacific, bringing the death toll from Washington's campaign to at least 128.

"Intelligence confirmed the vessel was transiting along known narco-trafficking routes in the Eastern Pacific and was engaged in narco-trafficking operations," the US Southern Command said in a post on X, adding "no US military forces were harmed" in the operation.

President Donald Trump's administration began targeting alleged smuggling boats in early September, insisting it is effectively at war with alleged "narco-terrorists" operating out of Venezuela.

But it has provided no definitive evidence that the vessels are involved in drug trafficking, prompting heated debate about the legality of the operations, which have expanded from the Caribbean to the Pacific.

Last month, the US military carried out another strike in the eastern Pacific, killing two alleged drug traffickers. Last week, relatives of two Trinidadian men killed in a strike on a boat the military said was carrying drugs.

ISRAELI-HELD SOUTH GAZA

UAE plans to build compound for Palestinians

REUTERS, Jerusalem

The United Arab Emirates has drafted plans to build a compound to house thousands of displaced Palestinians in a part of south Gaza under Israeli military control, according to a map seen by Reuters and people briefed on the plans.

The planning map shows where the "UAE Temporary Emirates Housing Complex" would be constructed near Rafah, once a city of a quarter of a million people but now almost completely destroyed and depopulated by Israeli forces.

Rafah, near the Egypt border, is where reconstruction of Gaza is expected to start under US President Donald Trump's plan for a durable peace in the densely populated coastal enclave after two years of devastating war.

Donors have been reluctant to commit funds to the plan, worried that disagreements over disarming Hamas could lead the parties back to full scale conflict. However, there are doubts about the political viability of the Emirati project, as most Palestinians could balk at being housed in an Israeli-controlled zone while the vast majority of civilians live in Hamas-run areas of Gaza, diplomats said.

Trump's plan saw the establishment of a US-led, multinational mission for Gaza based in southern Israel, where Emirati officials have shared details of their plans to build temporary housing.

JAILED PROTESTERS

Venezuela amnesty law passes first vote

REUTERS

An amnesty law being considered in Venezuela's legislature that would grant immediate clemency to people jailed for participating in political protests or critiquing public figures won initial lawmaker approval on Thursday.

According to a draft seen by Reuters, the bill would also return assets of those detained and cancel Interpol and other international measures previously issued by the government, allowing opposition figures in exile to return home.

The bill passed unanimously in the first of two necessary votes at the National Assembly, which is controlled by the socialist ruling party. The date for a second session to debate the matter has not yet been set.

The amnesty law, announced last week by interim President Rodriguez, would lead to hundreds of people being released if it were to be passed in its current form and would likely please the Trump administration, which has hailed prisoner releases.

Rodriguez's brother Jorge Rodriguez, the head of the assembly, described the law as a difficult but necessary step. "The path of this law is going to be full of obstacles, full of bitter moments ... we're not only going to have to swallow hard ... but also swallow frogs," he said. "We ask for forgiveness and we also have to forgive."

Venezuela's opposition and rights groups have said for years the government has used detentions to stamp out dissent by politicians, members of the security services, journalists and activists, charging them arbitrarily with crimes.



MANIPUR VIOLENCE

Kuki-Zo tribal bodies enforce shutdown

Oppose MLA's role in govt formation

NDTV ONLINE

A total shutdown was imposed in the areas where clashes took place between youth protesters and security forces on Thursday night in the Indian state of Manipur's Churachandpur district.

Kuki-Zo tribal groups have declared a social boycott of Kuki-Zo legislators who have joined the newly formed Manipur government led by Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh.

The boycott and a dawn-to-dusk "total shutdown" across the hills inhabited by the Kuki-Zo people – to protest the "betrayal" by these MLAs – were enforced hours before the seventh session of the 12th Manipur Assembly began with an address by Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla.

According to sources, around two people were injured while another five were detained. Throughout the night, there was tear gas shelling on the mob.

The clashes started at the Tuibong Forest gate area, initially with mobs pelting stones at security forces, forcing the forces to backtrack. However, the security forces took up positions at a location along the road after retreating.

The protesters then regrouped and launched another round of attacks on the security forces, which continued until 3:00 am yesterday morning, sources added.

Kuki Women Organisation for Human Rights (KWCHR) also announced that it will organise a mass public rally to oppose the participation of Kuki-Zo MLAs in the formation of the government.



Observers film ICE agents holding a perimeter after one of their vehicles got a flat tire on Penn Avenue in Minneapolis, Minnesota, US, on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

Tunisia detains MP critical of president

AFP, Tunis

A Tunisian court yesterday ordered the detention of a lawmaker accused of criticising President Kais Saied following recent floods, his lawyer told AFP.

Ahmed Saidani was taken into custody on Wednesday for "harming others via social media", lawyer Houssein Eddine Ben Attia said.

Ben Attia said his client faced up to two years in prison under a telecommunications law, with his trial due to start on February 12.

Saidani posted on social media on Tuesday about Saied's visits to areas affected by floods, calling him the "supreme commander of sanitation and stormwater drainage".

At least five people died and others were still missing after Tunisia saw its heaviest rainfall in over 70 years last month.

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

Next govt must prioritise health

Do what is needed to achieve Universal Health Coverage

Despite repeated promises of reform, poor governance, inadequate financing, and weak leadership continue to undermine progress in the health sector. A recent policy dialogue on Universal Health Coverage (UHC) has once again highlighted the deep structural weaknesses that have persisted in our healthcare system for decades. Experts have stressed that meeting the target of achieving UHC by 2030 will require strong political will from the next government.

According to the data presented, Bangladesh's service coverage index stands at 54 out of 100, well below the global average of 71 and ahead of only Pakistan and Afghanistan in South Asia. This is a reminder that without comprehensive reform measures, millions will continue to be deprived from access to essential healthcare, while high out-of-pocket expenditure will continue to push families further into poverty. As reported before, primary care, long recognised as the most cost-effective and equitable pathway to UHC, remains weak, underfunded, and unevenly distributed in the country, especially in urban areas. At a time when non-communicable diseases are rising sharply, this imbalance is particularly concerning. Strengthening primary healthcare, therefore, must be at the centre of the reform efforts.

Thailand's Universal Coverage Scheme provides an important lesson for us. It started in 2002 and has continued because of the strong political commitment behind it. The programme reduced out-of-pocket health spending from about 50 percent to almost 10 percent. We also need such long-term political commitment that goes beyond elections and party politics. Financing remains a major challenge, though. Experts have repeatedly called for increasing health expenditure to at least 15 percent of the national budget or around five percent of GDP, which is needed for real progress towards achieving UHC. However, higher allocations alone will not deliver results unless accompanied by efficient utilisation, transparency, and accountability.

In this context, the recommendations of the Health Sector Reform Commission deserve renewed and serious attention. Proposals such as making primary healthcare a constitutional obligation, reorganising governance structures, decentralising service delivery, and establishing independent oversight bodies provide a credible roadmap for reform. Equally important is addressing chronic weaknesses in leadership, manpower planning, and regulation.

As experts have pointed out, health has not been sufficiently framed as a strategic national priority, despite its profound implications on poverty reduction, economic growth, and social equity. While many of our political parties have outlined health sector plans in their manifestos, the real test will be in their implementation. The next government must demonstrate genuine commitment to prioritising health sector reforms, otherwise the 2030 UHC target will remain out of reach.

Ensure enactment of tobacco control law

The government has no reason not to stamp down on tobacco use

The unceasing prevalence of tobacco-related cancer in the country should be of deep concern to us all. Reportedly, 46 percent of the cancer patients in Hossainpur upazila of Kishoreganj suffer from tobacco-related cancers. This number emerges from a study conducted by Bangladesh Medical University (BMU) on 245 cancer patients in Hossainpur, which has found that around 73 percent of male cancer patients there have a history of smoking, while about 60 percent of female patients have a history of using smokeless tobacco. To add to this, tobacco consumption prevalence among people aged 15 and above in Bangladesh stood at 31.4 percent last year, according to the WHO. This is higher than both the global and Southeast Asian averages.

Beyond these numbers, what is most troubling is the insidious stronghold of tobacco companies in our surroundings and even within the government. According to a study by the Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC), an average of 5.5 tobacco points-of-sale (POS) were found within 100 metres of 121 schools, with nearly 70 percent advertising tobacco products. Meanwhile, the government remains actively and passively responsible for the dismal regulation of tobacco companies. This is evident in the government's holding shares in tobacco companies and in Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority giving approval to Philip Morris Bangladesh for setting up a factory in Narayanganj to produce nicotine pouches last year.

The recently approved Smoking and Tobacco Products Usage (Control) (Amendment) Ordinance, 2025 provides hope to anti-tobacco advocates. Among other commendable provisions, the new law bans the production, import, sale and use of electronic nicotine delivery systems like e-cigarettes and vapes, as well as banning the sale of tobacco products within a 100-metre radius of educational institutions, hospitals, playgrounds, and children's parks. But the success of this ordinance will depend on the next government enacting it into a law and implementing it rigorously.

WHO cites tobacco use as the single most preventable cause of death globally. Yet, at least 1.6 lakh people die in Bangladesh each year due to tobacco use. The newest ordinance can be crucial for controlling tobacco use across the country. Most importantly, it is up to the government officials to address the severe threat that tobacco use poses to public health by employing the relevant legal and policy measures.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

'British Invasion' begins in the US

On this day in 1964, the musical British Invasion began when the Beatles landed in New York, and two nights later, as Beatlemania stormed the US, their performance on The Ed Sullivan Show was watched by 73 million viewers.

Truth, power, and the strained teacher-student dynamics



BLOWN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza
is professor of English at Dhaka University.

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

When asked to comment on the recent trend of teacher harassment and forced resignation across university campuses, the University Grants Commission (UGC) chair and former vice-chancellor of Dhaka University, Prof SMA Faiz, observed that rules alone could not ensure healthy teacher-student ties. "The relationship falters when teachers don't view students as their own children, and vice versa," he said.

The idea of viewing the campus through a familial lens is an insufficient evaluation of the strained relationship between two key stakeholders at our universities. The spectacle of students chasing teachers, drafting resignation letters for deans, and making arbitrary lists of "fascist enablers" is politically charged. It exudes power as memories are conveniently selected and weaponised to "ban" or "blacklist" teachers—not as guardians of the students but as ideological entities. This crisis is not moral or generational but political and biopolitical, marked by a collapse of institutional authority, unilateral punishment, and the weaponisation of memory intensified by electoral calculations. The display of power to control and regulate our campus life can even be explained through Michel Foucault's concept of biopower. Some of the student leaders, emboldened by their win in the recent student union elections, which may have some impact on the national election come February 12, are not simply repressing a section of teachers, but working together with other technologies of power.

On the surface, the student leaders present themselves as the voice of resistance, assuming ethical singularity by daring to speak truth to power. They would like to claim the fourth category of truth-tellers, the *parrhesiastes* (fearless public speakers). According to Foucault, the prophets are the first category of truth-tellers, revealing their arcane knowledge of the truth of destiny. The second category involves the sage who unwillingly shares their understanding of the essential truth of our being. Teachers belong to the third category with the professional obligation to



FILE ILLUSTRATION: BIPOB CHAKROBORTY

perpetuate the truth they inherit. Foucault distinguishes the teacher, who reproduces inherited truth, from the parrhesiast, who risks everything to speak it. What we see on campuses today is neither.

Teachers hold institutional positions for which they remain both publicly visible and individually accountable while structurally tied to continuity. Their role is to reproduce knowledge and institutional order, not to mobilise crowds or wage moral crusades. Salahuddin Ammar, general secretary of Rajshahi University Central Students' Union, is currently confronting some of these teachers as a self-appointed daring truth-teller. He is committed to "disciplining" the teachers accused of their purported involvement or silence during the fascist regime. But this "truth-telling" probably falls short of the Foucauldian fourth category. Socrates is a prime example of Foucault's courageous parrhesiast, willing to risk both his reputation and his life. Today's campus "truth" is spoken under the protection of numbers and political patronage.

Student leaders justify their actions by accusing the targeted teachers of their "fascist" past, silence or engagement with violence during the July uprising. These accusations are criminal in nature, warranting an independent investigation and potential punishment if proven guilty. Instead, we are seeing teachers being

dragged, manhandled, named, and humiliated.

To return to the family metaphor used by the UGC chair, I cannot help recalling William Wordsworth's axiom, "The child is the father of the man." It seems the inherent paradox captures our campus plight with uncomfortable precision. What we are witnessing resembles an Oedipal impulse

Nazism and Stalinism, relies on collective belief and consent. Once authority fails to command obedience, violence erupts. The July uprising is an example. But in the last one and a half years, we have not seen any solidifying of power. The scenes playing out on the campuses suggest not an abundance of student power, but its fragility. What sustains it is coercion: the so-called mobocracy. Education Adviser CR Abrar's admission in *The Daily Star* report—"I am walking a very thin line"—confirms a similar fragility. It signals a state unwilling or unable to intervene, citing the autonomy of the universities while condemning assault. This hesitation allows intimidation through normalised governance. And the "governmentality" of the students before the national election exhibits a desire to prove ideological dominance with far-reaching impact. What works inside the university may later be exported beyond it. The election results across campuses overwhelmingly in favour of one party have excited such a possibility.

The narrative controlled by the students gets further established in the absence or the weakness of teachers' associations. Teachers are fragmented and politicised, and they cannot collectively respond to their professional humiliation. There is no countervailing force to the coercion, no institutional buffer between accusation and punishment. Accountability becomes unilateral.

The call for mutual respect invoked by the UGC chair, although noble in its intent, is impossible in the present context. Respect is a reciprocal relationship. Prof Faiz understands this concept well, as he adds "vice versa" while using the parent-child metaphor. But how can we consider our campuses to be a family where justice is equated with humiliation and legitimacy with dominance? The long-term damage extends beyond the election cycle. Universities that cannot protect their staff or students cannot safeguard academic freedom. Students trained to equate political agency with coercion will struggle to practise democratic restraint. True, rules alone may not ensure healthy relationships. But without enforceable rules, ethical limits, and institutional courage, universities don't become moral families; they turn into arenas where power is practised prematurely. Students exercise authority even before they have a real-life job. If universities are reduced to rehearsal spaces for domination, they will cease to function as institutions of learning long before they produce employable graduates or democratic citizens.

Bangladesh needs more than just a 'free and fair' election



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JEFFREY NOEL VANNESS

Bangladeshis deserve a government and an opposition willing and able to work together to address the problems of greatest concern to the country. A free and fair election should be a first step towards that result, but it's a mistake to think that a credible, competitive, peaceful and participatory election automatically guarantees a well-functioning government. In fact, history shows us the opposite.

No election can be perfect, but international and domestic election observers awarded high marks to Bangladesh's ninth parliamentary election in December 2008. Voters expressed overwhelming satisfaction with the process in public opinion surveys conducted before, on and after election day. Whether you consider the 2008 election the best in the country's history, or just its most recent credible election, it provides a cautionary tale for citizens today.

In that election, the Awami League won a majority of seats large enough to amend the constitution at the direction of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The BNP-led parliamentary opposition chose to boycott their seats soon after the Jatiya Sangsad convened

in 2009. To be fair, the parliamentary opposition would not have been able to block the passage of any laws or constitutional amendments had opposition MPs been present, but their willful absence from the legislature began the period of de facto one-party rule in Bangladesh.

Many sacrificed their lives to end the abuses of that one-party regime in 2024, but with a new elected government to be chosen in just a few days, Bangladesh is in danger of looping back into that downward spiral. We shouldn't confuse a legitimately elected ruling party delivering the candidates that voters pick with a legitimately performing ruling party delivering the results that voters seek. The speed with which the country raced from a highly credible election to the consolidation of power under an authoritarian system is shocking when we look back.

Hopes are high for the rapidly approaching 13th parliamentary election and referendum on the July National Charter. A survey by Innovation last month found that 72 percent of Bangladeshis expect the interim government to administer the election impartially, and 82 percent

feel they can safely cast their ballots. In fact, in a survey by the International Republic Institute conducted in September-October 2025, citizens named "ensuring free and fair elections" as the top reform they wanted from the interim government.

It's natural to want to over-emphasise the quality of the election process itself, especially when the

offices they campaigned for, use their voice and votes in parliament and its committee rooms to advance the promises made in their electoral manifestos, cooperate with like-minded individuals for common cause regardless of party affiliation, and keep working to improve the lives of Bangladeshis for the duration of their terms.

A free and fair election does have intrinsic value because it honours people's rights. But it's just the starting point. More weight must be placed on how the winners of the February 12 election work together when the next parliament convenes, and throughout their five-year terms thereafter. Using that metric to assess the quality of an election won't be popular with the winning or losing political parties because it is performance-based. It won't be popular with journalists hounding observers to announce if the election was "free and fair" as quickly as possible. For the same reasons that all reputable professional election observation organisations have quietly discarded that hollow phrase, we need a better results-based way to assess whether an election has "worked."

Elections aren't held for the benefit of the political parties. They allow voters to assign responsibility for solving problems through good governance, meaningful allocation of public resources, safeguarding people's rights, and ensuring the rule of law. Don't assume that a free and fair election makes that automatic. For that, we require a government and an opposition willing to work on the issues people care about most.

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context is novel and the stakes are high. A free and fair election is important for the country at this time, but it's not the only important thing. Bangladesh's 12.77 crore registered voters deserve to hear from the candidates openly, make their decisions free of pressure, and cast their ballots in safety knowing that they will be counted accurately. But the same voters also deserve to know that the men and women they choose to run the government will serve in

I can manage myself just fine, thanks

The only thing getting 'hacked' here is a woman's agency



Iqra L Qamari is a writer and a policy and partnership consultant.

IQRA L QAMARI

I felt the first premonition on the night of "July 36." In a post-rebellion Dhaka, festive streets, no certainty of what lay beyond that night—but hope permeated the air that perhaps we could finally recalibrate and aim for a dignified future. My partner and I were on a celebratory rickshaw ride when another rickshaw puller beside us, still elated and reeling from the uprising, announced loudly, "Finally, the country has gotten rid of the two prostitutes. Now a man will come to power and show how things are run." Not willing to dampen my spirits, I ignored it. I was well-versed in such run-of-the-mill rhetoric in Bangladesh. A woman accused of wrongdoing has her body and character put on trial before her competence and motives are questioned. Before calling her corrupt or inept, you attack her character, you say something anatomical, something sexually profane. In a passing moment of naivete, I told myself all that was about to change.

But here we are, less than a week from an election, watching that same logic harden into political doctrine. Let's cut to the chase here. The ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami, in a recent interview with Al Jazeera, admitted that no woman can lead his party, justifying it with religion and her childbearing capacity. Talk about the ultimate political paradox: the capacity to create life makes one unfit to govern. Let's unpack the ridiculousness a little. Women can support the party and campaign for it, but leadership is to remain within a men-only lounge. Instead, Jamaat is poised to knight women as *Rotnogorva*, jewel-bearing citizens, for their ability to conceive and raise children. Motherhood is to be declared sacred and a national service, while simultaneously being used as evidence of political incompetence. A woman is celebrated for her biology only until she somehow threatens male authority.

Let's not forget that this is a country that has spent most of its political life under the authority of women prime ministers. Jamaat's sudden discovery that Islam forbids female



VISUAL: ALIZA RAHMAN

leadership sounds more than just an oversight on their part. Jamaat formed strategic alliances with Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government in 1996 and, again, formally joined the BNP-led coalition government under Khaleda Zia in 2001. In both cases, Jamaat functioned within a political system headed by a woman, without any divine wrath befalling the country. It seems that religious objections are being raised only now, when female leadership no longer needs to be accommodated or, rather, exploited.

In the context of the Muslim world, this argument sounds increasingly parochial. Indonesia, home to the world's largest Muslim

population, has previously elected a woman president and continues to place women in senior political and administrative roles. In Malaysia, even Islamist parties operating within a conservative framework have accommodated women's participation in parliament, cabinet, and public life, rather than declaring it divinely impermissible. And Pakistan—riven by religious politics and contradiction—has produced women

is safest inside her home—the place where not only labour remains disproportionate and unpaid, but also where, statistically, women are susceptible to extreme domestic violence. Isn't it even more ironic that women are having to be protected from the very species that have assigned themselves as protectors?

Jamaat's solution to women's insecurity is simply confinement. Over time, this produces something resembling "political Stockholm

pink. This is straight out of the patriarchal playbook, where one woman is lauded for her passive acceptance of suffering through her loyalty to male authority figures, while another who seeks to better her lot through self-assertion and the pursuit of ambitions is vilified as a nefarious agitator, or simply a prostitute.

In a now-deleted post on the X handle of the Jamaat ameer, all working women were compared to prostitutes, prompting widespread criticism and outrage before he claimed the social media account had been hacked. The controversy took a striking turn when the Detective Branch (DB) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police detained an assistant programmer from the ICT section of Banglabhaban in connection with the incident, saying they were investigating. However, without getting into much technicalities about how the account was retrieved so quickly or why they had to wait for the public backlash before announcing that the account had been compromised, the whole debacle was a stark reminder their official rhetoric remains pretty much the same. A woman who leaves home to work is hovering around moral bankruptcy. Except that the whole country's economy is propped up against the backs of women who bleed, give birth, and then return to factories that run on 14-hour shifts. What an arresting notion that their vulnerable bodies do not disqualify them from endless labour, just power!

I am always either a mother or a sister, but never an individual with equal opportunities and rights. My worth is derived from the sum of all my relational values or my capacity to procreate. This reminds me of last year's moral panic and mayhem when the Women's Affairs Reform Commission submitted its reform proposals. Demanding equal rights was equated to an "attack on Islam" and "family values" by the Islamist parties, followed by vitriolic attacks and threats of nationwide protests.

There is, in fact, a running joke among historians that masculinity is always in crisis; it looks like it is under threat once more, but this time with religious gravity. If going out to work to earn my bread, ensure my financial security, and practise my own agency challenges a male chauvinistic worldview, then so be it. I will get ready for work every morning and venture out. I will make sure to do my bit to be worthy of the great terror my autonomous existence inspires and wear these insults as a badge of honour.

prime ministers, parliamentarians, judges, and activists without imposing a blanket theological ban on women's authority. Islam, in these societies, has not collapsed under the presence of female leadership. Religion is not the factor here; the point of contention is the political will to loosen control over women's lives.

Instead, it was proposed to truncate eight hours of work to five (and promises were made to pay for the three hours they would lose), as if that was ever the problem, not the unpaid eternal shift waiting at home. The household does not close at noon, nor do children clock out. Let's not forget their claim that a woman

syndrome." A woman is taught to identify with the very doctrine that suppresses her. This is the logic now being echoed by the party's women members. When they say they have made peace with men being "managers" of women, they mean they are okay with men supervising, evaluating and disciplining women and their way of life. A manager is necessary only if the one being "managed" cannot be trusted with self-rule.

Jamaat-e-Islami has been trying to push its women empowerment policies, but so far, the well-marketed package has simply been a lazy copout. This handbook has men becoming managers, women becoming wards, and toilets

Can Jahanara's story be a turning point for women's sports?



Badrul Hassan is development and humanitarian practitioner and UN professional. He can be reached at badrulsocial@gmail.com.

BADRUL HASSAN

On February 2, the High Court issued an order asking the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) to explain how it handled sexual harassment allegations raised by former women's national team captain Jahanara Alam. The court directed the board to submit a report within four weeks. The ruling was issued following a writ petition filed in public interest by sport shooter Sabrina Sultana, who argued that repeated failures to address sexual harassment in sports reflect a deeper institutional problem.

The High Court's intervention is a reminder that safeguarding cannot remain a policy slogan. By asking the BCB to explain, the court has drawn a clear line: institutions need to be judged by the efficacy of their actions rather than the existence of their

protocols. This is a warning that failure to provide a safe, gender-sensitive environment for women athletes may itself be unlawful. By questioning why action was not taken earlier and directing the board to properly implement harassment prevention measures, the court has made it clear that ignoring complaints is not a neutral act. This matters because it shifts attention from personalities to systems. It asks a simple question: can women athletes in Bangladesh expect safety, fairness and dignity from the institutions that control their careers?

Jahanara Alam is not an ordinary cricketer. She is one of the most recognisable faces of women's cricket in Bangladesh and a former captain who represented the country for years. When someone of her standing says

she submitted written complaints against the chief selector of the women's national cricket team, Monjurul Islam, and others as early as in 2022 and received no meaningful response, it forces us to face an uncomfortable reality. If this can happen to a national icon, what protection does a younger, lesser-known player really have?

What makes the story even more painful is where Jahanara is today. Out of frustration and deep disillusionment with cricket in Bangladesh, she has stepped away from the game and is now living in Australia. This is not a professional break or a sporting opportunity. It feels like self-exile, driven by a loss of trust in a system she once served with pride.

When a national team captain says she complained and was not heard, parents lose confidence. Young girls watching from schools and local clubs begin to doubt whether talent and hard work are enough. Many decide that staying quiet is safer than risking their future. Over time, women's sports will weaken not because women lack ability, but because the environment feels unsafe and unpredictable.

At this point, we must ask what standards already exist and why they have not worked. Cricket does not run in isolation. Global

cricket expects member boards to maintain safe environments, enforce codes of conduct and clear behaviour rules, provide trusted reporting mechanisms and channels, and ensure protection for those who speak up. Safeguarding is meant to work before harm occurs, not only after a crisis becomes public.

There is also a broader global principle: Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA). The logic is simple: when someone has power over another person's career or opportunities, that power must never be misused. Organisations also have a duty to make reporting safe and to respond quickly and fairly when concerns are raised. This applies whether the setting is humanitarian work, education or sport, because the risk is the same: people stay silent when they fear consequences.

The timing of the High Court's intervention is also significant. On January 29, 2026, the government gave final approval to the draft Prevention of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace and Educational Institutions Ordinance, 2026, alongside the Domestic Violence Prevention Ordinance, 2026, signalling that protection from harassment and abuse is now treated as a clear legal obligation, not a moral appeal.

The global safeguarding expectations,

PSEA principles, and Bangladesh's law all point in the same direction. Yet, Jahanara's experience suggests that, in practice, these protections were either weak, unclear, or not enough to work. That is why the High Court's recent intervention matters so much. They turn what could have remained a sports controversy into a test of governance and duty of care.

So, the way forward must focus on rebuilding trust, not just completing a process. BCB needs to clearly explain how players can report complaints safely and independently, without fear that doing so will harm their careers. It must demonstrate through action, not just words. And it must be honest about what changes it is making so that similar situations do not arise again.

Women's cricket in Bangladesh has come too far to be pushed back by fear and silence. Progress is fragile. It depends not only on coaching and performance, but on confidence that institutions will stand with those who speak the truth. Jahanara's story should not be remembered only as a controversy, but as a warning and, hopefully, as a turning point. Because a country cannot build women's sport on courage alone, it must be built on protection from sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment.

CROSSWORD
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS
1 Rap sheet name
6 Michael of "A Fish Called Wanda"
11 Bond portrayer Roger
12 Dodge
13 Car stoppers
15 Pampering place
16 Energy
17 Have something
18 Bona fide
20 Used a crowbar
23 Dinner setting
27 Mystique
28 Inside picture
29 Walker's line
31 Stop
32 Continental coins
34 Dude's address
37 Knight's title
38 Couple
41 Workday intermissions
44 When expected
45 Disney's mermaid
46 Sugar source
47 Rodeo rope
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1 Band boosters

- 2 Velcro feature
3 Corn Belt state
4 "Roses - red"
5 Did restaurant work
6 Sanction
7 In the manner of
8 Leia's brother
9 Concept
10 High home
14 Massive
18 Renter's paper
19 Price add-ons
20 Buddy
21 Regret
22 S&L offering
24 Lingerie item
25 Vegas
26 Retina setting
30 Silences
31 Ranch pen
33 Vault part
34 Amorphous mass
35 Celtic letter
36 In the past
38 Speaker's stand
39 Luau instruments
40 European capital
42 Director's cry
43 Geological period

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10-24

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

CREATIVE NONFICTION

From autumn to winter in the northeast England

I always get back home from the university before it gets dark. But sometimes due to socialisation, seminars, and workshops, it becomes late. Sometimes, when I walk back from the library to home after it gets dark, I look at the same ancient trees with huge trunks standing tall without a single leaf. They look naked.

FAHMID AL ZAID

There are a few old trees with wide trunks—I do not know their names—just beside my library. I never forget to have a quick look at the leaves during coming and going to the library. Changes in the colour of the leaves help me to read the seasonal changes here. Nature teaches me how to read nature, especially the transitional moment. I look for the fallen leaves. Sometimes I stop and stare at the fallen leaves—not because I never saw leaves before—but because these fallen leaves signal a promise to me, the arrival of winter very soon. Within weeks, the trunk of the tree is covered with more fallen leaves, creating a soft, carpet-like bed. During that time, the different colour of the fallen leaves reminds me of an Albert Camus quote: “Autumn is a second spring when every leaf is a flower”. Camus does not want to forget the spring. But I feel for the leaves, the fallen leaves. After another few weeks, I saw only a few leaves on the trees, waiting to be fallen at any time. These “waiting to be fallen” leaves remind me of O. Henry’s “The Last Leaf.” I sincerely feel for the last leaves of autumn.

While the meteorologists consider December 1 as the start of winter, the astronomical winter starts on December 21. I don’t have any interest in their

friendly quarrels. I have prepared myself to embrace winter with all my sensory experiences. The cold has already begun to settle in this small city of northeast England. The temperature is dropping drastically without mercy. This little city had a long history of becoming one of the centres of the coal mining industry which fed the great Industrial Revolution. Though the last coal mine in Durham closed in the early 1990s, its reminiscence is still alive in the form of heritage and culture among the working class of this region. The coal died but its culture is alive here. Even one day, I got excited when I found the name Durham and neighbouring region Cambria as a supplier of coals in Friedrich Engels’ *The Condition of the Working Class in England*.

Even during such big wounds inflicted on earth by the coal miners, northeast England began to attract several bird species during the winter from the Arctic. Mines that were abandoned sometimes created wetlands for many birds. Besides, the creation of mining villages and human wastes, some bird species like startling, boomed because they lived around human settlement and livestock. Through steam engines, coke ovens, and methane fires from spoil heaps created a warmer atmosphere during the harsh winter which invited many migratory birds for a better survival.

I do not know why snow reminds me of our childhood memory of reading Robert Frost’s poem “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” in high school. I still remember when I first spread my palm under the sky, a feather-like snowflake landed so gently and peacefully in 2020. It melted quickly, leaving a watery print on my thumb.

Snow appears and disappears. I wake up with an expectation to see a white world in the morning. Looking at the snow falling through the glass window is more beautiful than anything else. I am aware that snow has two faces. After two days of snowfall, when the temperature rises a bit, the road, once covered with white snow, turns into hard ice. The whiteness of the ice disappears, leaving the human shoe prints on it.

When I was preparing to go out after two days of self-imposed lockdowns at home, my English housemate came up with the most valuable advice: “Be careful when you step on the hard ice. Walk like a penguin and don’t put your hand into your pockets.” His grandfather went to Iceland before World War I and wrote this technique of walking on hard ice in his personal diary. It might be true that ancient humans learnt how to walk on ice from penguins! The Wright brothers also got the idea of wing-warping of the plane by looking at the flying birds in the open sky. It is not difficult to

prove that natural history and human history are entangled.

I always get back home from the university before it gets dark. But sometimes due to socialisation, seminars, and workshops, it becomes late. Sometimes, when I walk back from the library to home after it gets dark, I look at the same ancient trees with huge trunks standing tall without a single leaf. They look naked. I feel sad for them. A tree without leaves looks like a bird without wings. But they endure it without complaints because they know after a few months, new leaves would appear.

The winter will deepen in the coming days. It slows me down. The day shrinks and the night stretches. Here, the winter feels heavier, wetter.

Sometimes, breathing tells you the difference. Now, I spend more time on the weather app; winter has already domesticated me. I check the sunrise and sunset time in the weather app but hardly see the actual sun in the sky. Before closing my eyes in bed, I scroll through the app again, simply to know that tomorrow will not be colder than today.

Fahmid Al Zaid is Associate Professor in the Department of Anthropology, University of Dhaka, and a PhD candidate at Durham University, UK. He can be reached at fahmidshaon@du.ac.bd.

POETRY

Flipkart

MD MUJIB ULLAH

Using a hashtag is activism
In a world of literature.
The dress code is a passage
From your home to the workplace.
Inserting a card
Is a personal territory.
Beauty is an open book
After an authentic sign,
Let’s move on.
You see
I don’t count
Your numerical data
Rather I notice
Your charming smile.
Besides you, I am your policy,
An inevitable diffusion,
A simple togetherness
That is shining.

Md Mujib Ullah reads, thinks, and writes. His recently published poems are included in *Prachya Review*, *Text*, and *Journal of Poetry Therapy*.



ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

I, a woman



ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

JANNATUL NAEEM TASMIAH

My brittle nails become the sharpest knife
Under the light of obscure scrutiny
When the night falls
I tear my skin apart
In bits and pieces
I am a cannibal.
With crimson ocean running through my veins
I have been to countless places.
I have lived in my mother’s dreams,
In her rage
In her struggles
In her prayers
In her hope
In her bangles
In her teep.
I pranced in her dreary eyes,
Where love rested.
I nestled in her smile,
Like bright orange paint drying on a white wall.
For I, her little girl
Have always existed
In my mother’s tear-stained cheeks
Like a bright pearl shining inside the sea.
I am my mother’s rage.
Her despair
Her desire
For I, a woman
Have always existed,
In her sweaty forehead
Glistening like a star on a clear night sky.

Jannatul Naeem Tasmiah is a student of English Literature at Jahangirnagar University.

FOR THE CURIOUS WRITER

Write through it!

Often I feel stuck or uninspired or just generally negative about something I’m writing—particularly about the topic or theme or some such—to the effect of “why am I even writing this?”. In times like these, something that helps me tremendously is this quote from the late great James Baldwin: “You read something which you thought only happened to you, and you discover that it happened 100 years ago to Dostoyevsky. This is a very great liberation for the suffering, struggling person, who always thinks that he is alone. This is why art is important.”

So no matter how silly or simple or menial or mundane a piece seems to you, write it anyway. Be it a poem about your favorite soup or an essay about essays, make it exist; because someone somewhere (maybe even a future version of you) may read it, and it will matter to them because they will be less alone.

Arwin Shams Siddiquee
Intern, Star Books and Literature



Shafiqur vows to uproot graft

FROM PAGE 1

unjust to punish petty criminals while allowing major corrupt individuals to remain above the law.

Referring to graft and money laundering during the previous government, the Jamaat chief alleged that about Tk 28 lakh crore was siphoned off abroad over the last 15 and a half years through banks, insurance companies, and mega projects. "This amount equals four national budgets and belongs to the country's 18 crore people. We will fight to bring this money back."

Shafiqur also spoke about repression against Jamaat leaders and activists, saying that the party has been the most persecuted political organisation in the country. "Eleven top leaders were killed through extrajudicial actions and thousands of activists were killed or permanently disabled."

"Jamaat offices were shut for years and the party's registration and electoral symbol were unjustly withdrawn."

Regarding the post-August 5 situation, he said Jamaat would not engage in revenge politics after any change in government. "However, the families of martyrs and victims have the right to justice and would be provided legal support."

Addressing river erosion in the Barishal region, he said river restoration is more important than temporary river control measures. "If proper embankments and river restoration are implemented, the region's situation can change within a decade."

Emphasising equality, the Jamaat

chief said his party prioritises people's victory over party victory. "From the president to ordinary people, everyone will be equal before the law."

Urging people to vote in favour of change, he said, "This Bangladesh will remain, but its character will change -- it will become a Bangladesh of the masses."

At the rally, Jamaat introduced its candidates for different constituencies in the Barishal region. Central and local party leaders were present at the event.

At another event, Shafiqur said the aspirations of people have not been fulfilled through the last 12 national elections held in Bangladesh.

"The upcoming February 12 elections would not be like the previous 12 polls. This election is completely different," he said while addressing a gathering at the Pirojpur Government High School ground.

He added that if Jamaat is voted to power, the party would ensure employment opportunities for all on the basis of merit, regardless of religion, ethnicity, gender, or class.

Claiming that Delwar Hossain Sayedee, who was convicted for crimes against humanity during the Awami League regime, was killed, Shafiqur said a single vote and a single seat are extremely valuable to ensure justice for this killing.

At another rally in Narail yesterday afternoon, Shafiqur urged people to remain alert so that no one can snatch away even a single vote.

"Everyone must ensure that no black vulture can snatch even one person's vote. If any

miscreant stretches a hand towards another citizen's vote or tries to do engineering, we will not spare anyone," he told the gathering at Narail Government High School ground.

"We don't want only Jamaat or Daripalla [balancing scale] to win; we want victory for 18 crore people. Those who consider politics a business commodity can never build the country. We don't want to return to old politics."

At a campaign rally at Faridpur's Boalmari Stadium in the evening, Shafiqur said he did not want a government run by any single party, family or group.

"I want a government of the people, a united Bangladesh," he said, adding that no one would be allowed to divide the country along religious, ethnic or communal lines.

He alleged that attempts could be made to snatch votes and urged people to seek protection from such threats.

Calling for a fresh start, the Jamaat chief said the country's map would not change, but its character must. "We no longer want a Bangladesh where people are killed, disappeared, sent to secret detention or harassed with false cases simply for being political opponents."

He added that he did not want a Bangladesh where minority communities are attacked, where thousands of educated youths remain unemployed, or where justice is sold for money.

[Our Barishal, Pirojpur, Bagerhat, and Faridpur correspondents contributed to this report.]

Dhaka signs historic EPA with Tokyo

FROM PAGE 12

of both countries. This is the first-ever EPA signed by Bangladesh, although the country has had a preferential trade agreement with Bhutan since December 2020.

The EPA process began in 2022, and formal negotiations were launched in March 2024 following recommendations of a Joint Study Group report released in December 2023. The Advisory Council approved the agreement on January 22 this year to secure tariff benefits after LDC graduation.

Japan currently provides duty-free market access to LDCs, including Bangladesh, on 97.9 percent of tariff lines, according to Bangladesh Customs.

Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), said the EPA is a positive step covering trade in goods and services, investment and technology. He said it may also open opportunities for sending skilled workers, including trained nurses, from Bangladesh to Japan.

"This is important for addressing export challenges in the post-LDC period, amid a weakening multilateral trading system and the weaponisation of trade," he said.

Rahman added that the deal is favourable for Bangladesh as full reciprocity was not required, which is standard practice between developed countries and LDCs. Bangladesh offered market access for over 1,000 products, while Japan offered more than 7,000.

"This will improve Bangladesh's global connectivity in trade and investment," he said.

Mohammad Abdur Razzaque, economist and chairman of Research and Policy Integration for Development (RAPID), said the agreement is a timely and strategically important step as Bangladesh moves towards LDC graduation.

"It signals a shift towards rules-based, reciprocal trade arrangements with advanced economies and shows Bangladesh is ready to anchor its future market access in predictable, negotiated frameworks rather than temporary preference schemes," he said.

Razzaque added that with Bangladesh securing duty-free access

for nearly 7,400 products while offering such access to about 1,039 Japanese products, the agreement sets a precedent of calibrated, less-than-equal reciprocity, giving Bangladesh policy space to build competitiveness gradually.

He also said the EPA dispels the notion that Bangladesh lacks negotiating capacity, demonstrating that favourable deals can be secured with focused engagement.

"I see the Japan-Bangladesh EPA as a historic step forward," said Tareq Rafi Bhuiyan (Jun), president of the Japan Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JBCCI).

"This EPA is not merely about tariffs; it establishes a long-term, rules-based framework for trade, investment and technology transfer," he said, adding that it provides predictability and investor confidence at a critical moment for Bangladesh's post-LDC transition.

"JBCCI strongly believes this EPA will catalyse Japanese investment, diversify Bangladesh's economy, and deepen our strategic economic partnership for decades," Jun said.

JBCCI Secretary General Maria Howlader said the agreement marks a significant milestone in long-term cooperation between the two countries.

"The creation of 100 percent duty-free access to the Japanese market for about 7,379 Bangladeshi products sends a strong positive signal for our export sector," she said, adding that it would expand opportunities for Bangladeshi professionals in RMG, IT, engineering, caregiving, nursing and other services.

Md Saiful Islam, former president of the Leathergoods and Footwear Manufacturers & Exporters Association of Bangladesh (LFMEAB), said the EPA would open new export windows for garments, leather and leather goods, jute and jute products, benefiting especially small and medium enterprises.

However, he stressed that Bangladesh should prioritise attracting Japanese investment under the deal, as Japanese firms are diversifying their destinations under the "China plus one" policy. He also cited the Japanese Special Economic Zone as a key initiative to draw more investment.

Syed M Tanvir, managing director of Pacific Jeans, said the EPA would help him export denim products to Japan in the post-LDC period.

Saiful said the agreement would also ease Bangladesh's path towards trade deals with other countries, while Tanvir said it would support the hiring of Bangladeshi skilled workers by Japanese companies.

Showkat Aziz Russell, president of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association, welcomed the EPA and said similar agreements should be signed with other partners, including the European Union.

Faisal Samad, director of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, called the EPA a landmark achievement and said it should serve as a guideline for future trade agreements.

The EPA will give Bangladeshi exporters immediate duty-free access to 97 percent of their export basket, including ready-made garments and nearly 7,379 other products.

However, automobiles from Japan -- home to brands such as Toyota, Honda and Subaru -- will not enjoy duty-free entry. Mahburur Rahman said the move was deliberate to encourage Japanese investment in Bangladesh's vehicle sector, potentially reshaping the domestic automotive industry.

Japan is Bangladesh's second-largest export destination in Asia. Exports reached \$1.33 billion in FY2024-25, posting 8.2 percent year-on-year growth, according to Bangladesh Bank.

Major export items include ready-made garments, fish, shrimp and prawns, home textiles, jute manufactures, leather and leather goods, raw jute and handicrafts.

Bangladesh imported \$1.87 billion worth of goods from Japan in FY25, resulting in a trade balance in Japan's favour. More than 60 percent of imports comprised iron and steel; vehicles and parts; ships and boats; and machinery and mechanical appliances, Bangladesh Bank data showed.

Bangladesh is currently negotiating similar agreements with nearly a dozen partners, including the European Union, ASEAN, RCEP, India, Nepal, Malaysia, South Korea and the UAE.

At least 70 hurt as cops

FROM PAGE 1

unit spokesperson Fatima Tasnim Zuma, and Rajshahi University Central Students' Union (Rucus) General Secretary Salahuddin Ammar.

Several journalists were also hurt, while some policemen were attacked, witnesses said.

Tensions had already been simmering since 3:40pm, when Dhaka University student Reyadul Islam Zubah alleged that he and several female activists were beaten by police in front of Jamuna, the chief adviser's residence.

Shortly after, protesters attempted to break through police barricades to reach the residence, prompting a baton charge, water cannons and sound grenades. Brick chunks were thrown from both sides as loud blasts echoed through the area.

The situation deteriorated again around 7:35pm, when a second round of clashes began at Shahbagh, where protesters had regrouped after being pushed back from the InterContinental earlier in the day.

Witnesses said tension flared when a police team moved from near BIRDEM Hospital towards the InterContinental intersection around 7:30pm. Protesters chanted "bhua bhua" and a section chased the police. Reinforcements soon arrived from the InterContinental side, firing sound grenades and tear gas.

The protesters responded by hurling brick chunks, scattering into roads leading to Dhaka University, Matsya Bhaban and Katabon. Intermittent skirmishes continued for over an hour.

By 8:45pm, police withdrew from Shahbagh, allowing protesters to reoccupy the intersection. Demonstrators set tyres on fire and continued chanting slogans late into the night, while several Dhaka University Central Students' Union (Ducus) leaders addressed the gathering. The protesters eventually left the area around 10:30pm.

The violence left many bystanders

caught in the crossfire. Marufa Maya, a middle-aged woman at the scene, was seen frantically searching for her eight-year-old son who went missing during the evening clash.

"After the clashes began, I can no longer find him," she said.

Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) Director Brigadier General Md Asaduzzaman said the hospital had received around 60 injured patients by 8:30pm.

"We haven't found any patients with bullet injuries," he said, adding that most injuries were cuts, blunt-force wounds and breathing problems caused by tear gas. "Many have already left after receiving primary treatment."

The protest had begun on Thursday afternoon and later split into two groups. One group, led by Hadi's wife Rabeya Islam Shompa, staged a sit-in in front of Jamuna. The other occupied the intersection in front of Hotel InterContinental. Both groups stayed overnight at their respective locations.

By 2:00pm yesterday, the InterContinental group formally began a sit-in, demanding a UN-led investigation into Hadi's death and exemplary punishment for those responsible.

In a Facebook post last night, Inqilab Moncho claimed, "League activists have become active and are blending in with the public to steer the situation in another direction. There are attempts to derail the election and obstruct justice for the killing of Shaheed Osman Hadi. Everyone is requested to move to a safe place."

The interim government, in a statement yesterday evening, denied that law enforcers had fired any bullets. It said protesters had ignored a ban on demonstrations in the area and escalated the situation by climbing onto a water cannon and breaking through barricades.

"The government remains committed to ensuring justice for Hadi's killing," the statement said,

adding that a formal letter would be sent to the relevant UN agency on Sunday, February 8, seeking an investigation.

Urging restraint ahead of the February 12 national election, the government said the period was politically sensitive and that around 180 million people were awaiting the polls under intense international scrutiny.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police, in a separate press release, described reports of gunfire as "false and misleading" and said the dispersal was carried out in a "fully lawful" manner. It added that several police members were also injured.

In a Facebook Live session, Abdullah Al Jaber urged people to stay calm until Sunday but demanded that the government show them the draft of the UN letter.

"No deceptive letter can be sent without showing us," he said, alleging that some police officers involved were masked and not wearing nameplates, and questioning whether "Hasina's police league" was still active. He also claimed that a section of the advisory council was involved in Hadi's killing.

Referring to the February 12 election, Jaber said issues of independence, sovereignty and security were at stake. "For that reason, the election must be held on the 12th. Those who attacked us to thwart it -- we must show their blueprint the thumbs down and realise our people's rights," he said.

July uprising frontliner Hadi was shot in the capital on December 12 last year as he was preparing to run for the Dhaka-8 constituency. He died at a Singapore hospital on December 18.

Although the Detective Branch submitted a charge sheet naming 17 accused on January 6, protesters rejected the findings. A court later ordered the Criminal Investigation Department to conduct a fresh probe, but the agency has yet to submit its report.

15 in Colombo. Pakistan players also stated that they would seek government clearance if they come across India in the knockout stage, which remains a possibility.

However, India captain Suryakumar Yadav said on Thursday that his team would show up in Colombo for the group-stage clash against Pakistan, stating: "We haven't said no to playing them (Pakistan)."

Meanwhile, Scotland, despite being a last-hour replacement, remain determined to prove they belong on the marquee T20 stage.

"I mean, firstly, we're very sympathetic towards Bangladeshi players, but we still massively believe that we should be here," veteran Scotland left-arm spinner Mark Watt said yesterday.

"We believe that we can beat teams higher ranked than us. So there's no second guess in our invite into this tournament. We're all ready to go."

Scotland will make their fifth consecutive appearance at the T20 World Cup, while Bangladesh will miss out on the tournament for the first time since its inception in 2007.

For Bangladesh, the absence is a bitter blow. Yet, by standing by their player and raising concerns over safety, the Tigers have made a statement that goes beyond cricket -- one that underscores their willingness to challenge the status quo, even at the cost of a World Cup berth.

Voting for Jamaat 'not permissible' for Muslims

FROM PAGE 12

candidate but was using him as a means to "fight" Jamaat-e-Islami.

"I do not understand election and selection. This is jihad (holy war) against them," he said in the video.

Babunagari also claimed that if Jamaat came to power in Bangladesh, it would harm Islam and Muslims.

"If they come to power, they will uproot Islam and destroy the very foundation of Muslims. They are a group that cuts people's throats," he said.

Five shot by pellets during BNP campaign

FROM PAGE 12

They were initially taken to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital. Later, Nusrat and Shahab were transferred to Chattogram Medical College Hospital for advanced treatment. Nusrat was shot in the back, while Shahab suffered injuries to his waist.

Witnesses said the BNP campaign team had gathered about two dozen supporters on the roadside, dancing and chanting slogans ahead of the 13th parliamentary election in the Cox's Bazar-4 constituency. As onlookers gathered, shots were fired, causing panic and a stampede.

Nusrat's mother, Samira Begum, said she had been standing with her daughter in front of a house by the roadside, watching the campaign performance in support of the paddy sheaf symbol, when pellets struck her daughter's back.

Bacha Mia, who was shot in the hand, said some people were singing and dancing in support of the paddy sheaf campaign when gunshots rang out. "Panic broke out as people began to run. Before I could grasp what was happening, pellets suddenly struck my hand."

Abdur Rahman, who was shot

in the left leg, said he collapsed at a roadside shop after gunfire erupted shortly after evening prayers.

OC Saiful said although gunfire occurred during the campaign for the BNP, there was no political involvement behind it.

"Preliminary investigation suggests that a local criminal, identified as Jalal, fired several rounds from a firearm while intoxicated."

He added that an operation is currently underway to arrest the suspect.

However, as of last night at 9:00pm, there were no arrests over the incident.

A graft-free Bangladesh grounded

FROM PAGE 12

and self-respecting Bangladesh rooted in Islamic values.

According to the manifesto, people, employment, and human security will be at the centre of its development agenda, rather than the interests of a small group.

It said the Quran and Sunnah would serve as the supreme guiding principles of state governance. The Qadiani and Ahmadiyya communities would be declared non-Muslim by the state. The ideals of the Sahaba would be adopted as a foundation of state policy, and an interest-free Islamic economic system would be introduced.

The manifesto also proposes bringing the entire education system under a universal national curriculum. Equal importance would be given to Quran and Hadith-based moral education alongside science, technology, English, and IT. An autonomous grants commission would be formed for the development of Qawmi madrasas. Freedom of religion for all citizens would be

ensured.

It further pledges to simplify the process of delivering agricultural produce directly from farmers to consumers and to take effective measures to curb the dominance of middlemen. Ensuring women's dignity and security in line with Islamic values is also among the commitments. The party promised quality, accessible, and humane healthcare for all citizens.

The manifesto promises speedy trials in cases of journalist killings and an end to false cases and harassment. For expatriates, it proposes special interest-free loan facilities and zero tolerance for harassment at all stages, including at airports. A special task force would be formed to curb extortion.

Bribery, corruption, and waste would be treated as serious offences. Tender manipulation, armed party cadres, and terrorist politics would be considered anti-state crimes. Special monitoring cells and skilled investigation units would be formed to prevent

enforced disappearances, killings, and abductions.

The party also pledged to set up special tribunals to ensure swift trials in cases of rape and violence against women and children. Strict legal action would be taken against willful loan defaulters and money launderers.

The manifesto unveiling event was conducted by Maulana Yusuf Ashraf, party's senior nayeb-e-ameer and convener of the election management committee.

Talks with US

FROM PAGE 12

states fear a breakdown in the negotiations would lead to another conflict between the US and Iran which could spill over to the rest of the oil-rich region.

Iran has vowed a harsh response to any military strike and has cautioned neighbouring Gulf Arab countries hosting US bases in the oil-rich region that they could be in the firing line if they were involved in an attack.

have fanned smouldering tensions between the nuclear-powered neighbours who engaged in their worst conflict in decades in May.

New Delhi has denied any involvement in the violence in Balochistan where Pakistan's military has battled a decades-long insurgency.

That region was brought to a standstill after separatist militants stormed government buildings, hospitals and markets in a coordinated attack, killing 58 civilians and security officials. The military said it killed 216 militants in targeted offensives across the province.

Irfan Memon, said in a statement.

The capital was already on high alert yesterday for the visiting President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, with roads around the capital blocked by checkpoints and security forces posted across the city.

"We are giving every possible help to the families of those killed and those injured," Pakistan's parliamentary affairs minister Tariq Fazal said after visiting the wounded at Islamabad's Polyclinic hospital.

Pakistan has also blamed India for assaults by militants in the restive Balochistan province over the weekend, accusations that

SPORT



“When you’re playing at home there is always an added pressure. I’m not running away from the fact. To be honest, there will be nerves, there will be pressure, but if you see the positive side of it, there’ll be a lot of cheer around.”



India captain Suryakumar Yadav ahead of their T20 World Cup opener against USA

The price of BELLING THE CAT

ASHEAQ UL-ALAM

Politics has always been an inseparable part of cricket. It has been so since the days of the Imperial Cricket Council – the previous name of the International Cricket Council – when being a member of the Commonwealth was one of the prerequisites for becoming a Test nation. In the modern age, money has been added to the unholy cocktail of politics and cricket, creating a concoction that is gradually choking the life out of the sport. In the last one-and-a-half years, governments of three separate countries have openly imposed their will on their national teams’

participation in two global cricketing events. First came India, informing the ICC in November 2024 that it would not travel to Pakistan for the following year’s ICC Champions Trophy under its government’s order. A little over a year later, Bangladesh, also under government directives and amid security concerns, said it did not want to travel to India for the ICC T20 World Cup, beginning today. Then, on February 1, the Pakistan government announced that its national team would not take part in the highly anticipated group-stage clash against India in Colombo on February 15. In all three instances, the ICC reacted differently – going to

great lengths to accommodate India’s request, outright rejecting Bangladesh’s relocation plea, and asking Pakistan to reconsider its stance. Many, mostly from India, have argued that India’s situation was different from Bangladesh’s, as it had announced its decision not to travel months in advance. But what they forgot to consider was that the situation which started it all – dropping Mustafizur Rahman from Indian Premier League (IPL) franchise Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) on instructions from the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) – was a move made by India. And it was done just over a month before the World Cup, meaning Bangladesh’s security concerns about travelling to a country that could not provide safety to one player were raised only a few days before the marquee event, invalidating the whole debate about requesting the ICC sooner for relocation of World Cup games. However, the difference in the ICC’s response in Bangladesh’s and Pakistan’s cases gives an intriguing and rather unflattering insight into how the ICC actually works.

It took the ICC nearly three weeks before officially responding to Bangladesh’s relocation request through a media release.

It took the ICC nearly three weeks before officially responding to Bangladesh’s relocation request through a media release, in which it brazenly refused the plea in a tone that felt less like an address to a member nation and more like an admonishment dealt to a pupil by the headmaster. But that same headmaster became

almost apologetic towards Pakistan, officially responding within hours and requesting reconsideration. The reason for this polar-opposite reaction, unsurprisingly, is money. If the India-Pakistan clash does not happen, the ICC will reportedly miss out on a \$250 million payday. Meanwhile, Indian analysts and former players, who were dismissive of rumours of a Pakistan boycott, are now clutching their pearls in outrage after, for once, being at the receiving end of the cricketing cold war with Pakistan they have long fuelled. When the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) requested relocation of their World Cup matches from the ICC, it indirectly challenged India’s unmitigated influence over world cricket. Although the BCB displayed diplomatic naivety in some regards, and Bangladesh were eventually replaced by the World Cup, their simple act of standing their ground has seemingly emboldened others to speak up. Many former Pakistani players have been critical of the double standards shown by the ICC. Former Australia pacer Jason Gillespie spoke about the same on X and then self-admittedly had to take the post down owing to online abuse from Indians. Former England captain Nasser Hussain openly applauded Bangladesh and Pakistan for their stances, saying, “I actually quite like Bangladesh sticking to their guns. They stood up for their player, the Fizz. And I also quite like Pakistan – I know it’s political – but I like Pakistan sticking up for Bangladesh.” For belling the cat that runs world cricket, Bangladesh will miss out on a World Cup for the first time since 1999. However, whenever historians regale the story of the 2026 T20 World Cup, Bangladesh’s name will inevitably come up.

Associate nations carry momentum and hope

STAR SPORTS REPORT

The ICC Men’s T20 World Cup has long been a proving ground for associate nations, a place where emerging teams test their growth against the game’s elite. The 10th edition brings together a familiar cast of associates alongside one notable newcomer, with Italy set to make their World Cup debut after a historic qualification campaign. Italy’s arrival is symbolic of cricket’s expanding footprint. Led by Wayne Madsen and ranked 27th, the Italians remain outsiders on paper, having played only six T20s since the 2024 World Cup, winning three. Yet qualification alone represents a significant achievement for a nation where the sport operates on the fringes. For Italy, this tournament is less about immediate results and more about establishing credibility at the highest level. Several associate sides, however, arrive with stronger recent form and growing expectations. Nepal, captained by Rohit Paudel, have quietly built one of the most impressive records among associates. Ranked 16th, they have won 16 of their last 24 matches since 2024. Despite never progressing beyond the first round, Nepal’s consistency suggests a side edging closer to a breakthrough.



Canada have followed a similar upward curve. Under Dilpreet Bajwa, they have claimed 17 wins from 25 matches since their 2024 debut, reflecting a team learning quickly at international level. The United States, meanwhile, continue to ride the confidence gained from their surprise Super 8 finish in 2024, winning 12 of 20 matches under Monank Patel and proving they are no longer mere pushovers. Experience remains a key asset for others. The Netherlands and Namibia, both Super 12 participants in 2021, bring tactical discipline and tournament know-how, even if their recent records suggest tighter contests against improving rivals. UAE, one of the busiest associate sides, have played 41 matches since 2024, maintaining steady results under Muhammad Waseem. For Ireland, Scotland and Oman, the challenge is rediscovering momentum after mixed runs, while continuing to nurture depth at international level. For all these teams, the T20 World Cup is about more than qualification or rankings. It is about progress, visibility and belief. And for Italy, simply walking out for their first World Cup match will mark the start of a new chapter – one written on cricket’s biggest stage.

T20 WORLD CUP FIXTURES

- GROUPS**
- Group A**
India, Pakistan, United States, Netherlands, Namibia
- Group B**
Australia, Sri Lanka, Ireland, Zimbabwe, Oman
- Group C**
England, West Indies, Scotland, Nepal, Italy
- Group D**
New Zealand, South Africa, Afghanistan, Canada, United Arab Emirates

7 FEBRUARY: Pakistan v Netherlands (Colombo SSC, 11:30 am), West Indies v Scotland (Kolkata, 3:30 pm), India v USA (Mumbai, 7:30 pm)

8 FEBRUARY: New Zealand v Afghanistan (Chennai, 11:30 am), England v Nepal (Mumbai, 3:30 pm), Sri Lanka v Ireland (Colombo RPS, 7:30 pm)

9 FEBRUARY: Scotland v Italy (Kolkata, 11:30 am), Zimbabwe v Oman (Colombo SSC, 3:30 pm), South Africa v Canada (Ahmedabad, 7:30 pm)

10 FEBRUARY: Netherlands v Namibia (Delhi, 11:30 am), New Zealand v UAE (Chennai, 3:30 pm), Pakistan v USA (Colombo SSC, 7:30 pm)

11 FEBRUARY: South Africa v Afghanistan (Ahmedabad, 11:30 am), Australia v Ireland (Colombo RPS, 3:30 pm), England v West

Indies (Mumbai, 7:30 pm)

12 FEBRUARY: Sri Lanka v Oman (Pallekele, 11:30 am), Nepal v Italy (Mumbai, 3:30 pm), India v Namibia (Delhi, 7:30 pm)

13 FEBRUARY: Australia v Zimbabwe (Colombo RPS, 11:30 am), Canada v UAE (Delhi, 3:30 pm), USA v Netherlands (Chennai, 7:30 pm)

14 FEBRUARY: Ireland v Oman (Colombo SSC, 11:30 am), England v Scotland (Kolkata, 3:30 pm), New Zealand v South Africa (Ahmedabad, 7:30 pm)

15 FEBRUARY: West Indies v Nepal (Mumbai, 11:30 am), USA v Namibia (Chennai, 3:30 pm), India v Pakistan (Colombo RPS, 7:30 pm)

16 FEBRUARY: Afghanistan v UAE (Delhi, 11:30 am), England v Italy (Kolkata, 3:30 pm), Australia

v Sri Lanka (Pallekele, 7:30 pm)

17 FEBRUARY: New Zealand v Canada (Chennai, 5:30), Ireland v Zimbabwe (Pallekele, 9:30), Scotland v Nepal (Mumbai, 13:30)

18 FEBRUARY: South Africa v UAE (Delhi, 11:30 am), Pakistan v Namibia (Colombo SSC, 3:30 pm), India v Netherlands (Ahmedabad, 7:30 pm)

19 FEBRUARY: West Indies v Italy (Kolkata, 11:30 am), Sri Lanka v Zimbabwe (Colombo RPS, 3:30 pm), Afghanistan v Canada (Chennai, 7:30 pm)

20 FEBRUARY: Australia v Oman (Pallekele, 7:30 pm)

21 FEBRUARY: Y2 v Y3 (Colombo RPS, 7:30 pm)

22 FEBRUARY: Y1 v Y4 (Pallekele, 3:30 pm), X1 v X4 (Ahmedabad, 7:30)

23 FEBRUARY: X2 v X3 (Mumbai 7:30 pm)

24 FEBRUARY: Y1 v Y3 (Pallekele, 7:30 pm)

25 FEBRUARY: Y2 v Y4 (Colombo RPS, 7:30 pm)

26 FEBRUARY: X3 v X4 (Ahmedabad, 3:30 pm), X1 v X2 (Chennai, 7:30 pm)

27 FEBRUARY: Y1 v Y2 (Colombo RPS, 7:30 pm)

28 FEBRUARY: Y3 v Y4 (Pallekele, 7:30 pm)

1 MARCH: X2 v X4 (Delhi, 3:30 pm), X1 v X3 (Kolkata, 7:30 pm)

4 MARCH: Semi-final 1 (Kolkata or Colombo, 7:30 pm)

5 MARCH: Semi-final 2 (Mumbai, 7:30 pm)

8 MARCH: Final (Ahmedabad or Colombo, 7:30 pm)



PRE-DETERMINED SEEDING FOR THE SUPER 8 STAGE

X GROUP
India (X1), Australia (X2), West Indies (X3), South Africa (X4)

Y GROUP
England (Y1), New Zealand (Y2), Pakistan (Y3), Sri Lanka (Y4)

Reading a 19-year landscape

EKUSH TAPADER

Cricket in the subcontinent carries an intensity that extends beyond the field. The game is shaped by conditions, crowd pressure and context, all of which influence how tournaments unfold. As the ICC Men's T20 World Cup approaches its tenth edition, the contrast between events staged in Asia and those held elsewhere remains a recurring point of analysis.

With India and Sri Lanka set to co-host the 2026 edition, that contrast is back in focus.

Since its launch in 2007, the T20 World Cup has become a fixed part of the global calendar. Unlike the ODI World Cup's four-year cycle, the shortest format's flagship event has appeared as often as two years, reflecting its adaptability and commercial reach.

Across nine editions, hosting duties have been shared almost evenly. Five tournaments have been staged outside Asia and four within it. When the 2026 edition begins, that balance will be level.

While T20 cricket was initially viewed as a novelty — entertaining, but secondary — its rapid professionalisation has



reshaped the sport's priorities. The subcontinent, in particular, has emerged as a central hub for the format's growth.

Conditions and adaptation

For years, the distinction between Asian and non-Asian venues appeared clear. Slower pitches and spin-friendly surfaces in the subcontinent contrasted with pace and bounce elsewhere. Modern T20 cricket

has narrowed that gap.

The expansion of franchise leagues has produced players accustomed to varied conditions. Batters now prepare for both grip and bounce, while bowlers rely increasingly on variations rather than surface assistance. As a result, traditional assumptions about home advantage have weakened.

Tournament results underline

this shift. Of the four T20 World Cups held in Asia, only one was won by an Asian team — Sri Lanka in Bangladesh in 2014. India's titles in 2007 and 2024 both came away from home, while Pakistan lifted the trophy in England in 2009.

Non-Asian teams have also adapted effectively in Asia. West Indies and Australia have won titles by leaning on pace options, athletic fielding and aggressive batting, rather than attempting to replicate traditional tactics.

Patterns under pressure

Asian teams have won four of the nine T20 World Cups to date, with non-Asian sides claiming the remaining five. On the surface, the split suggests balance. Over time, however, a different pattern emerges.

Following Sri Lanka's 2014 triumph, Asian teams endured a lengthy title drought despite regularly advancing deep into tournaments. Knockout matches often highlighted familiar issues: cautious decision-making, reliance on top order batting and limited flexibility under pressure.

By contrast, teams such as England, Australia and West Indies have consistently shown greater adaptability in high-

stakes matches. Defined roles, deeper bowling resources and sharper fielding units have repeatedly proved decisive in tournaments held outside the subcontinent.

In a format decided by narrow margins, execution under pressure has mattered as much as conditions.

Context beyond the field

The most visible contrast between Asian and non-Asian tournaments often lies off the pitch. World Cups staged in England, Australia or South Africa tend to progress with limited administrative noise. In the subcontinent, major events are frequently accompanied by political and logistical debates that shape the build-up.

Cricket in South Asia remains closely tied to national identity, and scheduling or venue decisions can dominate pre-tournament narratives. Once the tournament begins, however, those factors usually fade.

History suggests that success in the T20 World Cup is determined less by location than by preparation, adaptability and composure. In 2026, amid the intensity that defines cricket in Asia, those qualities are likely to remain decisive.

ROLL OF HONOUR

Year	Host	Winner	Runner-up
2024	USA & Windies	India	South Africa
2022	Australia	England	Pakistan
2021	UAE & Oman	Australia	New Zealand
2016	India	Windies	England
2014	Bangladesh	Sri Lanka	India
2012	Sri Lanka	Windies	Sri Lanka
2010	Windies	England	Australia
2009	England	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
2007	South Africa	India	Pakistan

T20 WORLD CUP STATS

OVERALL

** Bangladesh will miss the T20 World Cup for the first time since the tournament began in 2007.

** No team has ever successfully defended a T20 World Cup title.

** No host nation has won the T20 World Cup; Sri Lanka came closest in 2012, losing the final to the West Indies.

** Sri Lanka and India share the record for most final appearances (three each). Sri Lanka reached finals in 2009, 2012 and 2014, winning in 2014. India made finals in 2007, 2014 and 2024, winning in 2007 and 2024.

** Italy will make their T20 World Cup debut in this edition, the tournament's only new team.

TEAM

** Sri Lanka hold the highest team total record with 260/6 against Kenya in 2007; their 172-run win in the same match remains the largest victory margin by runs.

** The lowest team total is shared by the Netherlands (39 vs Sri Lanka, 2014) and Uganda (39 vs West Indies, 2024).

** The highest match aggregate came in 2016 in Mumbai, when South Africa and England combined for 459 runs.

** The lowest match aggregate occurred in 2014 in Chittagong, with just 79 runs in the Netherlands-Sri Lanka match.

** England recorded the highest successful chase in 2016, scoring 230/8 to overhaul South Africa's 229/4 at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium.

BATTING

** India's Virat Kohli leads all-time run-scoring with 1,292 runs in 35 matches, including 15 fifties, from 2012 to 2024.

** Kohli also holds the single-edition record with 319 runs in 2014.

** New Zealand's Brendon McCullum has the highest individual score: 123 vs Bangladesh in 2012.

** West Indies great Chris Gayle holds the record for most centuries (two).

** Gayle also tops the sixes chart with 63 in 33 matches between 2007 and 2021.

** He also owns the record for most sixes in an innings, hitting 11 during his unbeaten 48-ball 100 against England at Wankhede in 2016.

** The highest partnership remains the 170-run stand between England's Jos Buttler and Alex Hales against India at Adelaide in 2022.

BOWLING

** Bangladesh's Shakib Al Hasan is the leading wicket-taker with 50 wickets in 43 matches from 2007 to 2024.

** Afghanistan's Fazalhaq Farooqi and India's Arshdeep Singh share the record for most wickets in a single edition, with 17 each in 2024.

** Sri Lanka's Ajantha Mendis holds the best bowling figures: 6 for 8 against Zimbabwe at Hambantota in 2012.

When politics and security kept teams away from ICC events

STAR SPORTS DESK

International cricket tournaments have often been disrupted by political tensions and security fears, leading teams to refuse travel to host nations. From 1996 ICC World Cup to 2026 ICC T20 World Cup, many teams have refused to travel to host countries, citing different reasons that resulted in walkovers and replacements. There is also an instance of introducing a hybrid model when India refused to travel to Pakistan in the 2025 Champions Trophy. The instances are given below:

1996 ODI World Cup

Sri Lanka co-hosted the 1996 World Cup during a period of civil conflict, and a bomb blast in Colombo just weeks before the tournament intensified safety fears. Australia and West Indies refused to play their group matches there. Both teams forfeited those games, handing Sri Lanka crucial points. Sri Lanka, Australia, and West Indies still advanced to the knockouts, and Sri Lanka ultimately defeated Australia in the final in Lahore.

2003 ODI World Cup

The first African World Cup, co-hosted by South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Kenya, also faced disruption. England declined to play Zimbabwe in Harare due to the UK government's political stance against Robert Mugabe's regime. Meanwhile,



Kenya players in a relaxed mood after being awarded four points following the refusal of New Zealand to honour their matches in Nairobi during the 2003 ODI World Cup.

PHOTO: AFP

New Zealand refused to travel to Nairobi for a match against Kenya following a recent bombing in Mombasa. Requests to relocate the matches were denied by the ICC, and walkovers were awarded to Zimbabwe and Kenya. England were eliminated in the first round, while Kenya rode the awarded points all the way to a historic semifinal appearance.

2009 T20 World Cup

Tensions between Zimbabwe and the UK

resurfaced ahead of the 2009 T20 World Cup in England. Concerns over visa issues and diplomatic friction led to uncertainty about Zimbabwe's participation. Eventually, Zimbabwe withdrew from the tournament, although they received their participation fee. Scotland replaced them in the tournament.

2016 Under-19 World Cup

Australia pulled out of the 2016 U-19 World Cup in Bangladesh, citing persistent security threats. Ireland

stepped in as Australia's replacement.

2025 Champions Trophy

Pakistan was set to host its first ICC event in nearly three decades, but India declined to travel, citing lack of government clearance. A hybrid system was introduced, ensuring that India's matches were played at a neutral venue, Dubai. India went on to win the tournament.

2026 T20 World Cup

On January 3, Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman was dropped by the Kolkata Knight Riders under directives from the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). On the following day, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) wrote to the ICC, refusing to travel to India, citing security concerns and the government's directive. After a series of discussions between two parties, the ICC had formally rejected the BCB's request to relocate Bangladesh's matches from India to Sri Lanka. A vote was held during the ICC Board meeting, where only the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) supported Bangladesh's stance, while the remaining members voted to retain the original schedule. On January 24, ICC confirmed Scotland as Bangladesh's replacement for the tournament that cost Bangladesh their place at the World Cup. Pakistan later boycotted their February 15 group fixture against India to show solidarity with Bangladesh.

SAFF U-19 WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL

Girls seek repeat win over India

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh are approaching today's SAFF U-19 Women's Championship final at Pokhara Stadium in Nepal with caution, aiming to stay focused and avoid overconfidence.

Head coach Peter Butler has stressed the importance of a positive mindset as his five-time champions prepare to face India once more in the four-team competition, having beaten their familiar cross-border rivals 2-0 in the round robin phase.

"I have a fair indication of how they are going to play," Butler said in a video message sent by the Bangladesh Football Federation, urging his players to perform at their best to overcome India again.

"They [India] have some good players, and we will need to be on top of our game, fresh, and ready to play them again — and more importantly, beat them again.

"What is gone is gone; we have to put that behind us and approach this game with a positive mindset without being overconfident."

In their last group match against Nepal, Butler rested seven to eight regular starters, but Bangladesh faced little trouble in downing the hosts 4-0. He is expected to field his



full-strength side to bring another laurel to the country.

Training ahead of the final has been limited due to concerns over poor field conditions and potential injuries, though Butler has ensured his players study video footage of the opposition thoroughly.

"We have tried to limit training as much as we possibly can because the training field is not suitable.

Unfortunately, we have picked up a number of injuries, and my foremost objective is to ensure we have a healthy group of players on the pitch, as their welfare is of paramount importance."

The English coach also indicated that the final will help him assess which players are ready for the upcoming AFC Women's Asian Cup in Australia.



India's teenage sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi conjured up a storm in the ICC U-19 World Cup final in Harare, smashing a thunderous 80-ball 175 to power his side to a 100-run win over England and a record-extending sixth title. The 14-year-old struck 15 fours and 15 sixes, bringing up his century in just 55 balls as India posted 411-9. England's Caleb Falconer responded with a 67-ball 115 but the chase proved too steep as they were bundled out for 311 in 40.2 overs. Sooryavanshi's 175 is the highest individual score in a Youth ODI final or knockout match, surpassing Sameer Minhas's 172 against India in the 2025 Asia Cup final. It is also the highest score by any batter in an ICC tournament final, at either Under-19 or senior level, eclipsing Alyssa Healy's 170 against England in the 2022 Women's ODI World Cup final.

PHOTO: ICC



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Five shot by pellets during BNP campaign in Teknaf

Victims include children, Rohingya refugees

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

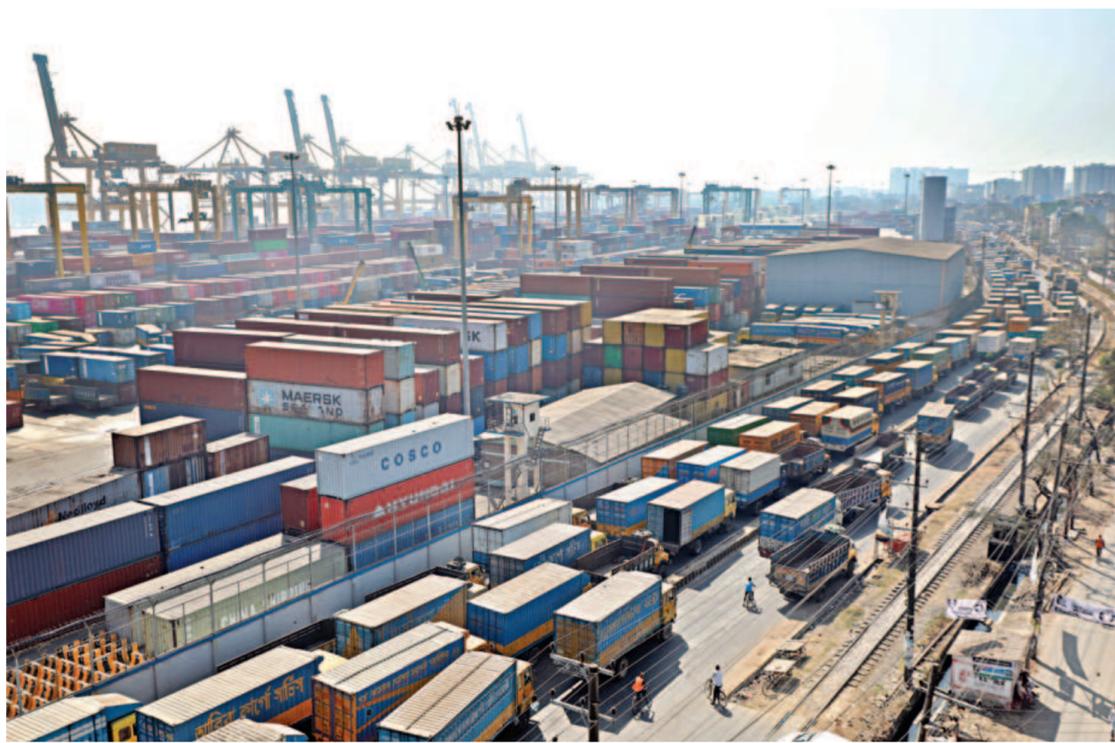
At least five people, including three children and two Rohingya refugees, were injured in a shooting incident during an election campaign for the BNP-nominated candidate in Teknaf, Cox's Bazar, on Thursday night.

The incident took place around 8:00pm near a market adjacent to the Alikhali Rohingya refugee camp under Hnila union.

Among the injured are three residents of Hnila union: Bacha Mia, 45, of Mosni village; Shahab Uddin, 11, son of Nurul Islam of Alikhali village; and 18-month-old Nusrat Jannat, daughter of Abdul Jalil of the same area.

The two others are Alikhali Rohingya camp residents: Abdur Rahman, 37, of Block D/5 in Camp 25, and Md Jisan, 13, son of Nurul Haque of Block D/4.

Teknaf Model Police Station Officer-in-Charge Saiful Islam said all five victims sustained pellet injuries.
SEE PAGE 9 COL 4



A long tailback of trucks stretched along the approach to Chattogram port yesterday as operations resumed the day before following a six-day strike. The strike, which had brought port activities to a halt, left shipments piled up and transport schedules disrupted, leading to the heavy rush once work restarted.
PHOTOS: RAJIB RAIHAN

'A graft-free Bangladesh grounded in Islamic values'

Khelafat Majlis unveils 22-point manifesto

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ahead of the 13th parliamentary election, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, a partner of the 11-party electoral alliance, has unveiled its 22-point election manifesto aimed at building what it calls a "just, corruption-free and humane Islamic system of governance."

The manifesto was unveiled yesterday by party Ameer Mamunul Haque at the party's central office in Purana Paltan.

It identifies six priority areas: balanced development and citizens' fundamental rights; good governance and a corruption-free state system; a strong defence framework and national security; an independent, dignified, and interest-based foreign policy; a universal, unified, and ethical education system; and employment generation with a focus on youth.

The party, which is contesting 28 constituencies, said the six priorities are complementary and together form a practical roadmap for building a just
SEE PAGE 9 COL 4

Suicide blast at Islamabad mosque claims 31 lives

Over 170 injured; Pakistan police say attacker was stopped at the Shia mosque gates

REUTERS, Islamabad

An attacker opened fire at the gates of a Shia mosque in Islamabad yesterday before setting off a suicide bomb and killing at least 31 people, in the deadliest attack of its kind in Pakistan's capital in over a decade.

More than 170 others were wounded in the explosion, detonated after guards challenged the attacker as he made his way into the Khadija Tul Kubra Imambargah compound on the outskirts of the city, officials said.

Images from the site showed bloodied bodies lying on the carpeted mosque floor surrounded by shards of glass, debris and panicked worshippers. Dozens more wounded were lying in the gardens of the compound as people called for help.

The man blew "himself up in the last row of worshippers," Defence Minister Khawaja Asif wrote on X.

He said the bomber had a history of travelling to Afghanistan and blamed neighbouring India for sponsoring the assault, without providing evidence.

There was no immediate response from New Delhi, which has dismissed Pakistan's accusations of backing militants in the past.

The attack was the deadliest suicide bombing in Islamabad in more than a decade, according to conflict monitor ACLED, which said it "bears
SEE PAGE 9 COL 4

- Bombing targeted Shia Muslim minority
- Deadliest suicide attack in Pak capital in over a decade
- Pakistan blames India for sponsoring the assault

Talks with US in Oman 'a good start'

Says Iranian FM, agrees to 'proceed with negotiations'

REUTERS, Muscat

Nuclear talks between Iran and the United States held in Oman yesterday were a good beginning and will continue, Iran's foreign minister said, after growing concerns that a failure in the high-stakes negotiations could set off another Middle East war.

"It was a good start to the negotiations. And there is an understanding on continuing the talks. Coordination on how to proceed will be decided in the capitals," the minister, Abbas Araqchi, told Iranian state TV.

"If this process continues, I think we will reach a good framework for an understanding."

Officials from both sides, who held indirect talks through Omani mediation in Oman's capital Muscat, will return home for consultations, Araqchi said.

The US announced new sanctions to curb Iran's oil exports, including 14 vessels, moments after talks ended.

While both sides have indicated readiness to revive diplomacy over Tehran's long-running nuclear dispute with the West, Washington wanted to expand the talks to cover Iran's ballistic missiles, support for armed groups around
and pressure", adding that Tehran "only discusses its nuclear issue. We do not discuss any other issue with the US."

the region and "treatment of their own people", US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Wednesday.

Araqchi told Iran's state news agency IRNA that "any dialogue requires refraining from threats

Tehran's clerical leadership remains deeply worried that Trump may still carry out his threats to strike Iran after a military buildup by the US Navy near Iran.

"The lack of trust is a huge challenge during the talks and it should be overcome," Araqchi said.

The US Virtual Embassy in Iran issued a security alert earlier in the day urging American citizens to "leave Iran now" and prepare departure plans that don't rely on US government assistance.

In June, the US struck Iranian nuclear targets, joining in the final stages of a 12-day Israeli bombing campaign. Tehran has since said its uranium enrichment work has stopped.

The US naval buildup, which Trump has called a massive "armada", has followed a bloody government crackdown on nationwide protests in Iran last month, heightening tensions between Washington and Tehran.

Trump has warned that "bad things" would probably happen if a deal could not be reached, ratcheting up pressure on the Islamic Republic in a standoff that has led to mutual threats of air strikes.
World powers and regional
SEE PAGE 9 COL 6

- US has significant naval buildup in the region
- Ballistic missile programme non-negotiable: Iran
- US imposes new sanctions on Iran oil exports

Dhaka signs historic EPA with Tokyo

It is Bangladesh's first such deal with a developed nation

REFAYAT ULLAH MIRDHA

Bangladesh and Japan yesterday signed a historic Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) in Tokyo, aimed at attracting Japanese investment and retaining preferential trade benefits after Bangladesh graduates from the least developed country (LDC) category in November this year.

Commerce Adviser Sk Bashir Uddin and Japan's State Minister for Foreign Affairs HORII Iwao signed the agreement at 3:00pm Japan Standard Time, Commerce Secretary Mahbubur Rahman told The Daily Star over the phone from Tokyo.

"The EPA will come into force once a notification is published. We are returning to Dhaka tomorrow [Saturday] and will issue the notification the same day," Mahbubur said.

He added that the agreement would significantly widen Bangladesh's market access to Japan. "This is a unique achievement for Bangladesh as it is our first full-fledged EPA with a developed country. Attracting Japanese investment is our main target. This is also Japan's first EPA with any LDC," he said.

Mahbubur also said the 1,500-page agreement was finalised after lengthy negotiations between leaders and officials
SEE PAGE 9 COL 4

Voting for Jamaat 'not permissible' for Muslims

Says Hefazat ameer

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Hefazat-e-Islam Ameer Muhibullah Babunagari has said it is "not permissible" for Muslims to vote for Jamaat-e-Islami.

He made the remarks on Thursday night while addressing a programme at Kajir Hat Boro Madrasa in Fatikhkhari upazila of Chattogram.

During his speech, the Hefazat leader also expressed conditional support for BNP-nominated candidate Sarwar Alamgir in the Chattogram-2 (Fatikhkhari) constituency.

A video of the speech has gone viral on social media.

In the video, speaking in Chattogram's dialect, the Islamic scholar is heard saying that Jamaat-e-Islami is not Islam and that Muslims should be told voting for Jamaat is "haram" (not permissible).

Pointing to Sarwar Alamgir, who was seated nearby, Babunagari said Hefazat was not directly supporting the BNP
SEE PAGE 9 COL 3



A man reacts while being comforted after a deadly explosion at a Shia mosque in Islamabad, Pakistan, yesterday.
PHOTO: REUTERS

Michelangelo's foot sketch fetches record \$27.2m

AFP, New York

A newly discovered Michelangelo drawing of a foot sold for \$27.2 million at a US auction Thursday, a new record for any work created by the Renaissance master.

The tiny, red-chalk sketch is one of around 50 studies Michelangelo made for the Sistine Chapel, among his most famed works alongside sculptures David and Pieta.

New York-based Christie's said the drawing sold for almost 20 times its low estimate after a 45-minute bidding war. It did not share the buyer's identity.

Only around 10 Michelangelo drawings are known to be in private hands. Christie's identified the sketch as an original by Michelangelo after the owner sent a photograph to its online auction estimate request portal.

An expert established that it represented the right foot of the figure of the Libyan Sibyl, at the far east end of the Sistine ceiling.

"This was an exceptional piece with a wonderful story," Andrew Fletcher, global head of the Old Masters Department at Christie's, said in a statement.





The hidden canyons of SREEMANGAL

Ancient gorges emerging as new eco-tourism draw

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

Tucked away in the serene hills of Sreemangal, a natural wonder has begun to draw in nature lovers and thrill-seeking tourists. The region's ancient canyons, Nisvarga Girikhat, Ulka Girikhat, and Baykul Girikhat, some of which are thought to be thousands of years old, are emerging as a significant new tourist destination.

Surrounded by lush forests, towering mountains, and gushing waterfalls, the canyons offer a rare chance to experience the untouched beauty of Bangladesh's natural landscape. In recent years, they have gained prominence not only for their awe-inspiring vistas but also for their ecological significance.

The area's dramatic geography and distinctive biodiversity make it a hidden gem, now increasingly explored by adventurers, environmentalists, and those eager to witness unspoiled nature.

The canyons of Sreemangal stand out as some of the most visually striking and mysterious natural formations in the country. The Khasi language has a word, Lasuban, that aptly describes the landscape. It means hilly flower or wild flower, a fitting reference to the abundance of lush greenery and colourful, diverse flora surrounding these gorges.

A gorge is a narrow, steep-sided valley, often with a river or stream running along its base, typically formed by geological erosion.

But these are no ordinary ravines. Their story has been shaped over millennia by the steady, insistent force of water and erosion. Deep, rocky and shadowed, the gorges are as compelling as they are beautiful, carrying environmental value that extends beyond their striking appearance. The natural features of the area, including its diverse plant and animal life, make it an important site for conservation efforts and scientific study.

Philah Pothmi, headman of Lawachhara punjee, said the gorges are very long, so in the Khasi language they were called Krem Kru and Krem Ulka, which means they

look like long trains.

"We were worshippers of nature. Because nature can keep people well. We live with various resources of nature. That is why no one ever thought of destroying nature. That is why these gorges are still the same as they were, without any change." Saju Marchiang, a local, said the gorges are about 25 kilometres from Sreemangal town. They are in the hilly forests of the punjee area, next to the Nahar tea gardens in Sindurkhan Union.

Md Tazul Islam Zaved, Sreemangal's upazila coordinator for Minority

first came across these hidden gems. The moment I saw the gorges, I knew I had stumbled upon something special. The natural beauty was unlike anything I had seen before. Despite the area's profound beauty, it remained largely under the radar due to its remote location and challenging terrain," Zaved recalls.

At the time of his discovery, the canyons were completely inaccessible to outsiders. The hilly roads leading to the area were treacherous, making it nearly impossible for visitors to explore. The surrounding forests

over rocky terrain, and navigate through dense jungles. It was an exhausting, yet exhilarating journey," he says.

Along with a small group of local guides, Zaved traversed the dangerous path and, as he walked deeper into the forest, the sense of awe grew stronger.

"The canyons themselves reveal the true power of nature's sculpting forces. The stone walls of the canyons have been carved over centuries, creating narrow pathways through which the waters flow. The gorges are alive with sound, the rushing of water,

endlessly, and the water running through the bottom appeared almost like a silver ribbon in the dim light.

Despite the beauty, there were dangers. At one point, Zaved and his team had to climb over a slippery forest hill. "The ground was wet from the rain, and vines covered the path. It felt as though the mountain itself was trying to stop us," he recalls.

But the desire to witness the canyon in its full glory kept the team going. "After overcoming the challenges, we reached the base of the gorge, where we were greeted by a stunning sight:

aquatic life, and the surrounding forest is teeming with birds, insects, and plants that thrive in the rich, humid environment.

Because of the canyons' natural beauty and ecological significance, they have become an area of interest for environmentalists and conservationists. The region's untouched wilderness makes it an important site for research, offering valuable insights into biodiversity and the environmental challenges it faces. The forest around the gorges is also home to Khasi communities, who have lived in harmony with the land for centuries.

In recent years, efforts have been made to improve accessibility to these remote gorges as more people discover their beauty. The administration has started constructing roads and bridges that will make it easier for tourists to visit. However, Sreemangal's rugged terrain and the challenges of building infrastructure in a remote, hilly area have made these efforts slow-going.

Former Moulvibazar Deputy Commissioner Israel Hossain said the road construction is underway but cautioned that visitors should not attempt to visit the area without an experienced guide. "It's still a very remote area. Tourists should go with a guide who knows the area well, as the terrain can be dangerous."

The construction of infrastructure will undoubtedly increase tourist traffic, but local officials have emphasised the importance of sustainable development. The area's delicate ecosystem must be protected, and careful planning is needed to ensure the natural beauty of the gorges is not marred by over-tourism, they added.

For those who venture to Sreemangal, the journey is as much about the experience as it is about the destination. The winding mountain roads, the cool, misty mornings, and the allure of the unknown draw travellers in. As one local hilly resident, Edison Tariang said, "These gorges are like another world, a place where nature's power is on full display. It's a place of peace, but also of great adventure."

The canyons of Sreemangal stand out as some of the most visually striking and mysterious natural formations in the country. The Khasi language has a word, Lasuban, that aptly describes the landscape. It means hilly flower or wild flower, a fitting reference to the abundance of lush greenery and colourful, diverse flora surrounding these gorges.

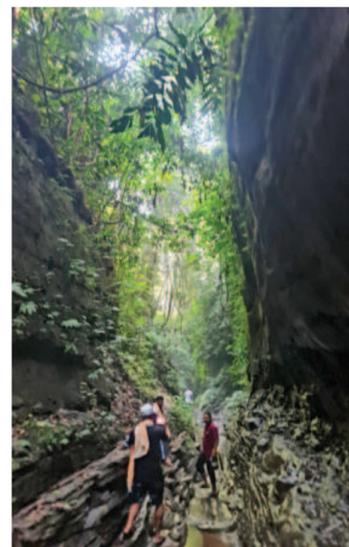


PHOTO: MINTU DESHWARA

Affairs, is credited with discovering these canyons in 2000 while researching the lifestyle of the region's minority ethnic groups. His interest in the area led him into the remote, deep forests of Sreemangal, where he found the gorges and their surrounding beauty. At the time, the landscape was almost completely unknown to outsiders, and few had ventured into the rugged terrain.

"I was working with the local communities of Sreemangal when I

were thick with foliage, and the risk of encountering dangerous wildlife, including snakes and other creatures, made it a daunting venture.

In 2021, the pandemic led to even stricter travel restrictions, and the canyons became even more isolated. Yet despite these challenges, the area has slowly started to gain attention, largely due to Zaved's initial discovery and his determination to share the beauty of Sreemangal with the world. "We had to cross steep hills, climb

the calls of birds, and the rustling of leaves in the wind. The stark contrast between the deep green foliage and the grey stone walls of the canyons is mesmerising."

For Zaved and his team, the moment of discovery came after crossing a particularly difficult ridge. "When we reached the top and looked down, our eyes widened with astonishment. The gorge below was unlike anything I had ever seen," he adds. The steep, jagged cliffs on either side seemed to stretch

large stones shaped by centuries of water flow, and a dim, almost mystical light that filtered through the dense canopy of trees above."

The canyons of Sreemangal are not just tourist attractions, they are also sites of immense ecological importance. The region is home to a diverse array of flora and fauna, and the gorges provide shelter for many species that are rare or endangered. The clear waters flowing through them sustain small fish and other

BAIKKA BEEL'S SILENT COLLAPSE

Declared protected, left defenceless

MINTU DESHWARA

Baikka Beel, a wetland now facing a deepening crisis of protection, was officially closed to public access a year ago. On paper, the site enjoys sanctuary status. On the ground, however, the reality tells a very different story. Picnicking, birdwatching, bird hunting, fishing, and indiscriminate littering continue openly inside the protected area, with little evidence of effective monitoring or enforcement.

Local residents describe Baikka Beel as a wetland of roughly 100 hectares, situated east of Hail Haor in Srimangal Upazila of Moulvibazar district. Each year, migratory birds arrive from their wintering grounds, usually towards the end of the monsoon and before the onset of winter, and remain until late March. Over time, some species have even taken up permanent residence in the beel. Yet this ecological richness is steadily eroding. Nearly one-third of the wetland has already been lost to siltation, while poaching has caused a sharp and sustained decline in migratory bird populations.

Experts note that Baikka Beel was declared a bird sanctuary in 2003, covering an area of 100 hectares. In the years immediately following this declaration, bird numbers showed a noticeable increase. That initial success,



Despite a complete ban, fishing continues openly inside the Baikka Beel sanctuary.

PHOTOS: MINTU DESHWARA

constant human disturbance, and increasingly adverse environmental conditions are forcing migratory birds to abandon the area altogether.

ASM Saleh Sohel, Moulvibazar coordinator of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolan (BAPA), said that although laws exist to prevent bird hunting, enforcement remains weak. The forest department, he noted, frequently cites shortages of manpower, severely limiting its capacity to act. A lack of public awareness has compounded the problem, while deforestation and excessive human control over haors and beels continue to deepen food and habitat crises for wildlife. "If we are not aware now," he warned, "the future will not forgive us."

Baikka Beel has also been designated a fish sanctuary, yet fish theft has become rampant. In an effort to safeguard the sanctuary, the government formed the Baragangina Resource Management

Committee, tasked with conserving the biodiversity of Baikka Beel as a permanent fish sanctuary. Despite these institutional measures, the absence of robust enforcement and sustained public awareness campaigns has left the wetland's future deeply uncertain.

Locals say that in a sanctuary of this size, fish should be easily visible. Instead, fish stocks have declined sharply, further reducing bird presence. Night-time fishing continues unchecked, inflicting lasting damage on the beel's broader biodiversity.

Tanvir Ahmed, a guard at Baikka Beel, said groups of 15 to 20 people are frequently seen entering the beel to steal fish, often carrying weapons. When guards try to intervene, clashes are common.

Bajlu Mia, general secretary of the Baikka Beel Baragangina Resource Management Committee, said that only four guards are currently responsible for protecting the vast wetland, which spans

roughly 100 acres.

Following a visit by Farida Akhtar, adviser to the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, on February 25 last year, public access to Baikka Beel was officially restricted in order to protect fish and birds, and picnics were banned. Locals, however, say the directive has not been effectively enforced.

Srimangal Upazila Fisheries Senior Officer Joy Banik said raids are conducted at different times to curb illegal fishing and that the administration will continue to provide maximum support.

Nurul Muhaimin Milton, general secretary of the Moulvibazar Environmental Journalists' Association, said birds captured in remote haors and beels are often sold secretly. Many villagers, he added, remain unaware that bird hunting is illegal, making stronger law enforcement, sustained public awareness campaigns, and regular raids essential.

Under the Bangladesh Wildlife (Conservation and Security) Act 2012, killing, capturing, selling, buying, or keeping wild birds is punishable by up to one year's imprisonment, a fine, or

both, with harsher penalties for repeat offences. Yet, Milton observed, the law remains weakly implemented.

Abul Kalam, Sylhet Divisional Forest Officer of the Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Department, said regular raids are carried out in markets, during which birds are rescued and released. "We respond quickly when we receive information, and raids are conducted across the region. However, due to manpower shortages, it is not possible to completely stop hunting," he said.

Dr Mohammad Abdul Aziz, Professor of Zoology at Jahangirnagar University, pointed to a significant coordination gap between the Fisheries Department and the Forest Department, which has undermined conservation efforts. He noted that development planning is often driven by economic priorities, with ecological concerns pushed aside. As a result, issues relating to birds and forests are frequently excluded from broader development strategies.

Mintu Deshwara is a journalist at The Daily Star.



A notice has been issued prohibiting tourist entry.

however, proved short-lived. Persistent poaching and unregulated landfilling have repeatedly disrupted migratory patterns. An analysis of bird censuses conducted since 2008 reveals a clear and worrying decline in the average number of species recorded at the site.

Environmental activists warn that poaching is intensifying, while mounting human pressure on the haor ecosystem is accelerating biodiversity loss. Habitat degradation, food scarcity,



When infrastructure fails women

The reality of shared toilets in informal settlements

FABI HUDA

Every year, during the month of October, UN-Habitat encourages us to engage in Urban October—a time for reflection and conversation about the challenges and opportunities created by the rapid pace of change in our cities and towns. Bangladesh has showcased exceptional improvements in infrastructural development with the help of numerous international partners and donors—but gaps persist in the equitable distribution of benefits from these developments.

Sitting in a barely lit room, I interviewed a young girl. She was about sixteen years old and lived in Kallyanpur Pora Bosti within that one tiny room with her father, mother, and younger sister. She spoke with great enthusiasm while recounting her experience at school and the dreams she holds for the future—but when we approached the topic of menstrual hygiene, she became uneasy. When asked why she did not use disposable sanitary napkins, despite knowing their benefits, her answer was simple: "Where do you expect me to dispose of them? I share this bedroom with my father... Am I supposed to change my pad in front of him?"

Just a couple of feet away from the room was a row of four toilets (without access to running water) assigned to almost 60 households within that block. The four toilets were allocated to 10–12 families each, with each family having between three and five members. She explained that for a woman, it was almost impossible to find enough time to change disposable pads in those toilets, as there was always someone waiting. Rather than enduring a constant barrage of knocks and remarks from outside, she felt it was



VISUAL: ALIZA RAHMAN

best to use reusable cloth pads, which she could change in the shower area.

This is a common story for many girls in informal settlements, who hide reusable cloth pads behind doors, hoping they will dry out in the dark room in time for reuse. Some remain inside their dwellings, deciding not to go to school and withdrawing from public spaces and male family members who share the same living area. They do not feel safe using shared toilets to manage menstrual hygiene—facilities that often lack running water and adequate privacy.

Sanitation plays a significant role in quality of life, individual health, and overall public health in such a densely populated country as ours. Improved sanitation facilities are now found in 59% of all households—an impressive 15% increase from 2017–18. While this progress reflects the dedication of development agencies, a closer look reveals a pro-rich pattern, suggesting that higher

socio-economic groups, due to increased disposable income, are more likely to access improved sanitation.

SHARED SANITATION FACILITIES

Even in the most developed city, such as Dhaka, many people live in conditions that make it difficult to maintain a healthy and safe hygiene routine. Around 40.2% of Dhaka's population—almost four million people—live in urban informal settlements characterised by inadequate sanitation, overcrowding, and poor housing. Most households in these settlements are recognised as having unimproved sanitation, as the JMP defines "improved" facilities as those not shared with another household. Yet overcrowding often means that five to ten families share a single toilet, resulting in long waits and conflicts during peak hours.

THE HEALTH TOLL: A CASCADE OF CONSEQUENCES

The health consequences of inadequate

sanitation are well documented. Living in informal settlements increases the risk of waterborne diseases, reproductive tract infections, and parasitic infestations. Women are three times more likely than men to develop these conditions, according to a 2025 study across two urban municipalities. Evidence also links WASH insecurity with mental health disorders among women, particularly depression and anxiety.

Health impacts extend beyond illness. Women bear the burden of caring for sick family members, spending prolonged periods in close contact with those requiring care. This responsibility disproportionately falls on women, alongside managing households.

BARRIERS BEYOND INFRASTRUCTURE:

CULTURE, ECONOMICS, AND EXCLUSION

Entrenched gender roles assign WASH-related burdens to women while excluding them from decision-making on facility design and management. Lack of privacy in shared toilets forces unsafe menstrual hygiene practices, despite women's awareness of healthier alternatives. Many wear pads



A makeshift latrine built from crumpled corrugated tin sheets, highlighting the harsh sanitation realities of informal settlements.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUNON

for longer than recommended or rely on reusable pads to avoid disposal. Regardless of choice, lack of privacy often leads to reusing inadequately sanitised cloth pads, increasing health risks.

During morning routines, while men queue to leave for work, women often avoid toilets to escape rude remarks. Even when they gain access, constant knocking makes proper hygiene difficult. From a gendered perspective, shared toilets are often unhygienic, poorly lit, and far from home, exposing women to harassment or assault, particularly at night. To avoid these risks, many restrict food and water intake, leading to dehydration and further health complications. The lack of safe, private, and accessible sanitation is not merely inconvenient—it directly threatens women's safety and dignity.

The struggle for safe and dignified sanitation in Bangladesh's informal settlements is not only an infrastructural issue, but one of gender equity, public health, and basic human rights. While the nation celebrates progress in sanitation coverage, gains remain uneven, leaving women and girls to bear a disproportionate burden. Addressing these challenges requires more than technical fixes; it demands a holistic approach that tackles cultural taboos, empowers women in decision-making, and ensures equitable access to dignified WASH facilities. Until then, the safety, dignity, and well-being of millions of women and girls remain overlooked in Bangladesh's development legacy.

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BEYOND ACCESS

Building the foundations of Bangladesh's next education reform

Without a strong early childhood foundation, efforts to improve secondary schooling, reduce dropouts, and enhance employment outcomes will remain incomplete. Universal, high-quality early childhood education—adapted to local realities and grounded in evidence—offers a path forward.

ASAD ISLAM

From access to outcomes

Over the past few decades, Bangladesh has made significant progress in expanding access to education, moving from a setting where schooling was a privilege to one where it is both a legal obligation and a widely accepted social norm. Beginning in the 1980s, compulsory primary education, food- and cash-based incentives, and targeted support for girls collectively transformed enrolment patterns and narrowed long-standing gender gaps.

However, as Bangladesh stands on the precipice of a new political era in 2026, it must confront a sobering reality: the tools that delivered access are no longer sufficient. While classrooms are now largely full, the education system is struggling to fulfil the promise of learning and opportunity. High dropout rates—around 14–16 percent at the primary level in recent years—persist, secondary and higher secondary completion remains fragile, and the labour market has been unable to absorb a growing pool of educated youth.

This gap between schooling and opportunity has become increasingly visible, most starkly during the July 2024 student movement. While the immediate trigger was the quota system in public sector recruitment, the movement reflected something deeper: the frustration of a generation that followed the prescribed path—years of schooling and credential accumulation—only to find that education no longer guaranteed meaningful employment or fair access to opportunity.

This article reflects on Bangladesh's education journey through the lens of my own research, beginning with the Female Secondary School Stipend Program (FSSSP), one of the country's most celebrated policy innovations. I argue that the lesson from this success—and from today's emerging crisis—is clear: to address persistent dropouts, weak learning outcomes, and frustrated employment prospects, Bangladesh must invest earlier and more decisively. The next frontier of reform lies in building a universal, high-quality early childhood education system, particularly for rural and underprivileged communities.

The female secondary school stipend program: A quiet revolution

Among Bangladesh's education reforms, the Female Secondary School Stipend Program stands out not only as a success, but as a global example of how targeted incentives can reshape social norms and long-term outcomes. Launched nationally in 1994, following



FILE PHOTO: STAR

In related work, I document an important but often overlooked mechanism through which the program operated. Educating one adolescent girl altered how families viewed education more broadly. Younger siblings—particularly younger sisters—completed more schooling despite never being directly eligible for the stipend. These spillover effects reflect shifts in parental aspirations and household norms, rather than income alone.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that the FSSSP was never simply an education subsidy. It was a policy that worked through households and social norms, setting in motion changes that extended well beyond the original beneficiaries.

Complementary policies

The success of the FSSSP was reinforced by a broader policy environment committed to expanding access. Compulsory primary education, the elimination of school fees, free textbook distribution, and primary-level stipends

schooling. Economic pressures, early marriage, poor teacher and school quality, and limited perceived returns to education all play a role. For many families—especially in rural areas—the opportunity cost of continued schooling rises quickly once children reach adolescence.

Equally troubling is the state of learning itself. National and international assessments consistently show that many students complete primary and even secondary school without mastering basic literacy, numeracy, or problem-solving skills. An education system heavily oriented toward rote learning and high-stakes examinations has struggled to equip students with capabilities demanded by a changing economy.

These weaknesses translate directly into poor labour-market outcomes. A growing number of young people—armed with certificates but lacking relevant skills—struggle to find decent jobs.

This disconnect between education and employment crystallised during the July 2024 student movement. While the quota system triggered the protests, the deeper grievance lay in an education model that prioritised credentials over capabilities. Years of exam-driven schooling produced graduates who were neither well matched to private-sector needs nor confident in their own employability. The protests were therefore not simply political; they were a verdict on an education system that expanded rapidly but failed to evolve alongside the economy.

Why early childhood education matters

The experience of the stipend program offers a powerful and applicable lesson for today's policymakers. If investing in one adolescent girl could raise schooling outcomes for her younger siblings, the compounded return from investing even earlier in life is likely to be far greater.

Decades of global research show that cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional skills formed in early childhood shape learning trajectories, school retention, and adult productivity. Children who enter primary school without these foundations are far more likely to fall behind and eventually drop out.

Bangladesh has taken a step in this direction by introducing one year of pre-primary education attached to government primary schools. While this is a welcome first step, it falls short of what is needed. Pre-primary classrooms often operate in overcrowded schools, with limited space, poorly trained teachers, and curricula that resemble watered-down primary schooling rather than developmentally appropriate early childhood education.

True early childhood education is not about introducing children early to letters and numbers. It is about structured play, social interaction, emotional development, and engaging caregivers in the learning process—elements largely missing from the current model.

Evidence from rural and displaced communities

My recent research on early childhood development in rural Bangladesh, supported by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), demonstrates what can be achieved—even with modest resources—when programmes are designed appropriately and implemented at scale. Working across more than 220 villages, we used existing community infrastructure and locally recruited women to deliver a play-based early childhood intervention combined with structured parental engagement.

The findings were clear and encouraging. Children exposed to the programme showed substantial improvements in cognitive and socio-emotional development, measured using internationally validated tools. Importantly, these gains extended beyond the targeted child: siblings within the household also benefited, pointing to strong spillover effects and shifts in household learning environments. A consistent insight from this work is that early childhood programmes are most effective when parents—especially mothers—are treated not as passive recipients, but as central agents of change.

Similar principles have proven effective even in humanitarian settings. In joint work with BRAC in the Rohingya refugee camps, supported by the LEGO Foundation, we evaluated a large-scale play-based early childhood programme designed for displaced children facing trauma, instability, and severe resource constraints. Implemented through BRAC's Humanitarian Play Lab model, the programme reached tens of thousands of children and led to improvements in language, cognitive, and motor development, alongside reductions in behavioural distress and improvements in nutritional outcomes.

Centre-based provision, however, cannot reach every child—particularly in geographically dispersed or mobility-constrained settings. In parallel work supported by the World Bank, we evaluated a large-scale remote early childhood intervention delivered through basic mobile phones across roughly 300 villages. The programme provided parents with structured guidance, mentoring, and psychosocial support during children's most formative years.

Despite its low cost and minimal technological requirements, the intervention delivered meaningful improvements in early learning outcomes and maternal well-being. These findings underscore an important lesson for policy: remote and low-tech approaches are not substitutes for high-quality centres, but powerful complements. When designed around behavioural insights and caregiver engagement, they can extend reach, reduce costs, and ensure that no child is left entirely unsupported during the most critical years of development.

Taken together, evidence from rural villages, refugee camps, and remote delivery platforms points to a common conclusion. Bangladesh does not

lack viable early childhood models. It already has several—proven at scale, adaptable to context, and grounded in evidence. The challenge ahead is not invention, but integration.

A new opportunity: Education and rural employment

Investing in early childhood education also creates new employment opportunities—especially for women. The cohorts of girls who benefited from the FSSSP and other education programmes are now adults, many living in rural areas with limited job prospects. With appropriate training, these women could serve as early childhood educators, mentors, and community facilitators.

Such a model would create a virtuous cycle: educated women gain meaningful local employment, young children receive high-quality early learning, and communities benefit from stronger human-capital foundations.

The policy moment ahead

As Bangladesh enters a new political chapter, there is an opportunity to rethink education priorities. The country has already demonstrated that bold, well-designed policies can transform outcomes. The challenge now is to move beyond access and focus squarely on quality—starting from the earliest years.

This will require not only reallocating resources toward early childhood education, but also a fundamental shift in recognising that investments made before age five yield some of the highest social and economic returns. Improving training and support for educators, strengthening community-based delivery, and integrating parental engagement into program design must all be part of this effort.

Urban and affluent families have already internalised this logic. The risk is that inequality will widen if public policy does not ensure similar opportunities for rural and underprivileged children.

Building the foundation

Bangladesh's education story is rightly celebrated for its achievements in expanding access and promoting gender equality. Programmes such as the Female Secondary School Stipend Programme reshaped norms and demonstrated the power of evidence-driven policy.

But the next phase of reform must begin earlier. Without a strong early childhood foundation, efforts to improve secondary schooling, reduce dropouts, and enhance employment outcomes will remain incomplete. Universal, high-quality early childhood education—adapted to local realities and grounded in evidence—offers a path forward.

The question is no longer whether Bangladesh can deliver transformative education policies—it has already done so. The question is whether it will now choose to take the next, and perhaps most important, step.

Asad Islam is a Professor of Economics at Monash Business School, Australia.



FILE VISUAL: MONOROM POLOK

pilots in the 1980s, the program provided cash stipends to girls enrolled in secondary school, conditional on 'regular' attendance, and remaining unmarried until completion.

The program emerged from early experiments designed to offset the direct and opportunity costs of schooling for girls. These pilots showed immediate promise: families responded quickly, enrolment rose, and dropout rates fell. Scaling the program nationwide placed Bangladesh among the first countries to implement a large-scale, conditional stipend program for female education.

My research on the FSSSP goes beyond enrolment numbers. In joint work with colleagues, I show that sustained exposure to the program significantly increased girls' completed years of schooling, delayed marriage, and reduced fertility. The program also reshaped the marriage market: educated women were more likely to marry better-educated partners, reinforcing longer-term investments in children's health and schooling.

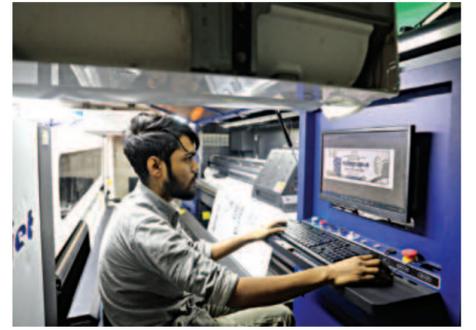
collectively reduced barriers to school entry. At the same time, NGO-led initiatives—ranging from non-formal primary schools to adult literacy programs—filled gaps in hard-to-reach communities.

Together, these efforts brought nearly all children into school and narrowed gender gaps that once seemed intractable. By the early 2000s, female enrolment at the secondary level matched—and in some cases exceeded—that of boys. Bangladesh achieved what many low-income countries struggled to do: ensuring that girls were not left behind.

Yet access alone could not guarantee learning or long-term success. As larger cohorts progressed through the system, weaknesses in learning quality and relevance became increasingly apparent.

The emerging crisis: Dropouts, quality, and employment

Despite high enrolment at the primary level, dropout rates spike sharply during secondary and higher secondary



ECONOMICS OF ELECTION

Election season generates short-lived money circulation, stretching from street corner tea stalls to the factories of large conglomerates

In a country where some 2,000 candidates from roughly 50 political parties are competing for seats, the campaign season has become its own micro-economy, a temporary boom that enriched some and bypassed others.

JAGARAN CHAKMA, SAJJAD HOSSAIN and SUKANTA HALDER

On the morning of January 29th, before the sun had fully risen over Rajshahi, food vendors began arriving at a local Madrasa field.

They came with carts and baskets, setting up their makeshift stalls with practised efficiency.

By the time the first group of political supporters started trickling in, the field was ringed with small shops selling bottled water, peanuts and pickles, sugarcane juice, yoghurt, and other local snacks.

Tarique Rahman, chairman of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), was scheduled to speak that afternoon. And the vendors knew what that meant: thousands of people, many of whom had travelled for hours, all of them hungry and thirsty.

National flags and party banners fluttered overhead as vendors moved through the crowd selling caps and badges, T-shirts printed with the faces of BNP icons.

The hotels nearby had been booked full. Many activists had arrived the night before and stayed in city lodgings. Others had set out before dawn, riding in hired buses or packed into CNG auto-rickshaws.

Loudspeakers were set up across the field and nearby areas, while digital screens were installed so everyone could see the programme clearly.

Within hours, stalls at the ground ran out of bottled water. Throughout the day, the scene repeated itself — tea vendors pouring cup after cup, snack sellers scooping puffed rice into paper cones — the whole enterprise humming with energy.

This was not unique to Rajshahi. Across the country's divisional cities, similar scenes unfolded in the fortnight leading up to the February 12 parliamentary election.

Banners hung over the streets. Rickshaws with loudspeakers moved through neighbourhoods,

per sound system, including the microphone, a motorised rickshaw and an announcer.

There are roughly 100 microphone service providers in Ahmed's district, and all of them are fully booked throughout the campaign season.

Tea vendors have also felt the election warmth. Political conversations take centre stage at tea stalls even in regular times. But during campaign season, it booms.

People gather at stalls not just to drink but to argue and debate the merits of candidates and parties.

For tea stall owners like Pataukhali's Badal Hossain, it means longer hours and bigger profits.

Tea is the most popular beverage in Bangladesh. The country consumes nearly 9.5 crore kilogrammes of tea

national elections.

"This year, we have witnessed increased demand, especially for sugar. This may be because of the ensuing Ramadan and the election," he said.

Meanwhile, restrictions on plastic banners and the emphasis on digital campaigning have shifted money elsewhere — to Facebook and YouTube advertisements, to TikTok promotions, to the kind of virtual presence that leaves no physical trace.

Many candidates have hired photographers, videographers and social media content creators, while supporters broadcast events live.

Money flows to hotels and transport operators too.

WHEN REGULATIONS CUT DEMAND

But not all businesses are benefiting. Paper makers and printers are



is believed to be much higher. TIB found that during the previous parliamentary election in January 2024, the average expenditure per candidate from the pre-announcement of the schedule to election day was Tk 1.56 crore, six times more than the Tk 25 lakh limit imposed by the Election Commission.

"The major items of expenditure are posters, election camps, public meetings and expenditure on workers," it said, adding that "violation of the election expenditure limit has increased significantly."

Nurul Huda Sakib, a professor of government and politics at Jahangirnagar University, said election expenditure in Bangladesh remains effectively unlimited despite formal spending caps.

Although visible campaign costs have declined this year because of stricter regulations and a shorter campaign period, the bulk of election spending lies elsewhere and remains largely unaccounted for, he said.

"Transport, costs for campaigners and supporters, processions and rallies are difficult to calculate precisely," Sakib said. "More importantly, the biggest expenditure comes from the use of money and muscle power."

Sakib, who has studied political financing, said estimating election costs at Tk 20 crore per candidate would not be excessive. On election day, costs rise sharply for mobilising people, influencing polling centres and paying polling agents.

"There is no fixed calculation," he said. "Someone may provide Tk 500, another Tk 5,000. In some areas during past elections, candidates went door to door and handed out Tk 500 to Tk 1,000 per person."

His assessment aligns with a February 2025 report by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, which found that candidates often spend between Tk 3 crore and Tk 5 crore for campaigns, depending on the constituency, reinforcing a wealth-driven political system.

A TEMPORARY BOOST
Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), said election spending creates short-term economic activity and provides increased income opportunities for small businesses.

"For many local businesses — printers, decorators, sound system providers, food vendors — this period offered a rare economic opportunity," he said. "Even a small rally needs mikes, tea, food, bamboo and cloth. That brings a temporary buzz to the local economy."

He emphasised that even with fewer courtyard meetings and reduced campaign scale, the impact on micro-businesses was tangible, if short-lived.

However, questions of transparency in spending remain. With a spending cap of Tk 25 lakh per candidate and little oversight, untraceable money flows into campaigns under the guise of social events.

"This is someone's cost, but another's income," Moazzem said. "It's a real but fleeting boost, and one we still fail to regulate properly."

[Our Pataukhali Correspondent Sohrab Hossain and Cox's Bazar Correspondent Mokammel Shuvo contributed to the report]

PHOTOS: ANISUR RAHMAN, AMRAN HOSSAIN, PALASH KHAN, RASHED SHUMON, PRABIR DAS, TITU DAS



experiencing a sharp downturn because the Election Commission banned large posters for this election.

MM Nurun Nabi, executive director of Partex Paper Mills Ltd, said paper millers who registered increased business in the past elections see almost no spike in demand this year. Only leaflets are being printed.

"There had been a lot of activities in the past election. None of that is visible this time," he said.

Md Anwar Hossain, vice chairman of Bangladesh Mudran Shilpa Samity, an association for local printers, said changes in campaign regulations and restrictions have sharply reduced demand for printed materials.

Candidates are spending only Tk 5 lakh to Tk 6 lakh on leaflets, about one-eighth of what was spent in previous elections, when candidates usually spent Tk 12 lakh to Tk 25 lakh on posters alone, he said.

"The printing industry might make Tk 100 crore this year, compared to at least Tk 800 crore in past elections," Hossain said, adding that just 50 printers out of 5,500 might be engaged in election-related work.

Samir Dewan, an independent candidate from Khagrachhari, initially printed 2 lakh leaflets along with his election manifesto, spending only Tk 1.8 lakh. He plans to print an additional 4 lakh leaflets by the time the campaign ends.

Following the commission's guidelines discouraging plastic materials, he opted for 20 banners made of cotton cloth.

In Cox's Bazar, traders who rent out sound systems and run printing presses say election season has brought little business so far.

Dipu Das, who owns Art and Graphs, said past polls used to guarantee a steady stream of orders. His shop regularly designed and printed posters, handbills and leaflets as campaigns gathered pace. This year, he said, the presses have stayed silent.

He pointed to Election Commission restrictions and said many of the candidates are sourcing cloth banners themselves from Chattogram instead of placing local orders. As a result, Das said, the printing sector has seen little sign of an election boost.

Nurul Islam, owner of Cox's Bazar Mic Service, said candidates have also reduced the use of loudspeakers.

In earlier elections, he said, a single candidate would often rent around 15 mikes for campaigning. This time, the activity has been muted. In the Cox's Bazar-3 constituency, two candidates hired three mikes each, while the other two took just one apiece.

THE INVISIBLE SPENDING

While some campaign costs are visible — transport to ferry supporters, loudspeakers at rallies, election camps — much remains invisible and unreported.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), in its study on the previous parliamentary election, provided a list of items on which candidates spent beyond visible costs.

This includes payments to activists, spending on food, donations to religious institutions and clubs, the cost of securing nominations in some parties and mobile messages.

According to candidates' affidavits, the combined total expenditures declared for this parliamentary election are roughly Tk 400 crore. But including invisible or underhanded transactions, actual spending by candidates, especially from major political parties,

