They say that they want to do everything by June.

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY
Ukrainian president, on US efforts to end war in Ukraine

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4 DAYS TO VOTE

BNP, Jamaat gunning for AL strongholds

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The upcoming election offers the BNP and the Jamaat-e-Islami-led alliances a rare opportunity to make inroads into constituencies long dominated by the Awami League, which has been barred from the contest.

Political analysts say that the AL not only stands to lose its traditional strongholds but also faces an increasingly uncertain political future.

For decades, the BNP and the AL managed to defend their bases. Following the restoration of democracy in 1991, power alternated between the two parties every five years, maintaining a kind of balance.

The Awami League won 22 constituencies in every general election since 1991 (except for the February 1996 election, which it boycotted). They include Gopalganj-1, 2, and 3; Madaripur-1 and 2; Shariatpur-2 and 3; Patuakhali-3 and 4; Bagerhat-1; Khulna-1; Faridpur-1; Sunamganj-3; Moulvibazar-4; Dinajpur-5 and Sirajganj-1.

That pendulum eventually swung towards the AL, which claimed victory in the last three highly controversial elections. The elections in 2014 and 2024 were mostly uncontested, while

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

A worker unloads ballot boxes from a truck at the District Commissioner's office in Narayanganj Sadar yesterday, ahead of their scheduled transport to the upazila headquarters for the February 12 elections. PHOTO: SAURAV HOSSAIN SIAM

'Next week crucial for a flawless election'

Yunus says polls prep satisfactory

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday expressed satisfaction with the ongoing election preparations, calling the coming week "crucial" to ensuring a flawless voting process on February 12.

While chairing a high-level meeting on election preparations at Jamuna,

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

BNP's trillion-dollar ambition. Is the path slippery?

AHSAN HABIB

The economic goals outlined in the BNP's election manifesto read like a calculated challenge. It presents the coming decade as a stark choice: evolve or fall behind. At the centre of this vision is a pledge to build a $1 trillion economy by 2034, which would require the country's GDP to double within that timeframe.

NEWS ANALYSIS

This ambition, however lofty, aligns broadly with external projections. The Boston Consulting Group, for example, estimates Bangladesh could reach the same milestone by 2040, propelled by a growing middle- and affluent-class, an expanding private sector, and strong consumer confidence.

Achieving the BNP's accelerated timeline, however, would require sustained annual GDP growth of roughly 10 percent -- far exceeding the country's historical average. Such growth would demand a dramatic increase in private investment, from about 23 percent of GDP today to at least 35 percent. Even with significantly higher

SEE PAGE 8 COL 1

Tarique rules out govt with Jamaat

In an interview with Reuters, he says his party confident of securing enough seats

REUTERS, *Dhaka*

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman has rejected a Jamaat-e-Islami suggestion to form a unity government after next week's election, saying his party expects to secure a mandate on its own.

"How can I form a government with my political opponents, and then who would be in the opposition?" he told Reuters in an interview at his party office.

"I don't know what their seat number will be, but if they are in the opposition, I hope to have them as a good opposition," he said about Jamaat, the BNP's main rival in the February 12 election.

Tarique, 60, returned home in December after nearly two decades in exile in London following a youth-led uprising that toppled long-time leader Sheikh Hasina on August 5, 2024. An interim government headed by Professor Muhammad Yunus took office after Hasina fled to long-time ally India, where she remains.

The BNP and Jamaat previously governed together between 2001 and 2006. Jamaat has indicated it is open to renewing that partnership or forming a unity government to help stabilise the country after months of political turmoil in 2024.

Tarique's aides told Reuters that the BNP is confident of winning more than two-thirds

SEE PAGE 2 COL 7

Ctg port workers resume indefinite strike today

Businesses fear missing deadlines

DWAIPAYAN BARUA *and* REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Chattogram port workers and employees have called another round of indefinite strike from today, adopting a more hardline approach this time as they threatened to halt cargo handling at the outer anchorage, which remained out of the purview of last week's six-day work abstention.

The protesters postponed the work stoppage for two days on Thursday afternoon.

WORKERS' KEY DEMANDS

- Call off planned leasing out of NCT to DP World
- Dismiss CPA Chairman Moniruzzaman
- Withdraw punitive actions against 15 employees

Following a meeting with Shipping Adviser M Sakhawat Hossain on Thursday, the protesters paused their indefinite strike for two days as they were assured that two of their demands would be met, including the withdrawal of punitive transfers and other actions taken by the port authority against the 15 protesting employees.

But later that day, the Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) issued a letter

SEE PAGE 8 COL 4

PHOTO: AFP

Romario Shepherd celebrates his hattrick during West Indies' 35-run victory against Scotland in a Group C match of the T20 WC in Kolkata yesterday.

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চার পদ্ধতিতে ভোটারগণ জানতে পারবেন ভোটকেন্দ্রের তথ্য

আসন্ন গণভোট ও জাতীয় সংসদ নির্বাচনে ভোটারগণের ভোটপ্রদানের সুবিধার্থে ভোটার নম্বর ও ভোটকেন্দ্রের তথ্য জানার জন্য চারটি সহজ পদ্ধতি চালু করেছে বাংলাদেশ নির্বাচন কমিশন। এসব পদ্ধতির মাধ্যমে ভোটারগণ দ্রুত ও নির্ভুলভাবে ভোটার নম্বর এবং ভোটকেন্দ্রের তথ্য জানতে পারবেন।

পদ্ধতি-১ (Smart Election Management BD অ্যাপ)

ভোটারগণ Smart Election Management BD অ্যাপের মাধ্যমে ভোটার নম্বর ও ভোটকেন্দ্রের তথ্য জানতে পারবেন। এজন্য ভোটারকে Play Store বা App Store থেকে Smart Election Management BD অ্যাপ ডাউনলোড করে ইনস্টল করতে হবে। অ্যাপটি ইনস্টলের পর ড্যাশবোর্ড থেকে 'ত্রয়োদশ জাতীয় সংসদ নির্বাচন' সিলেক্ট করে 'ভোট কেন্দ্র খুঁজুন' অপশনে ক্লিক করতে হবে। এরপর এনআইডি নম্বর ও জন্ম তারিখ ইনপুট দিয়ে অনুসন্ধান করলে ভোটার নম্বর, ভোটার ক্রমিক নম্বর, ভোটকেন্দ্রের নাম ও কেন্দ্রের ঠিকানা প্রদর্শিত হবে।

পদ্ধতি-২ (হটলাইন নম্বর ১০৫)

ভোটার নম্বর ও ভোটকেন্দ্রের তথ্য জানার জন্য বাংলাদেশের যে-কোনো ভোটার হটলাইন নম্বর ১০৫-এ কল করতে পারবেন। এজন্য হটলাইন নম্বর ১০৫-এ কল করার পর অপারেটরের সঙ্গে কথা বলতে ৯ প্রেস করতে হবে। এ পদ্ধতিতে তথ্য জানতে ভোটারের এনআইডি নম্বর ও জন্ম তারিখ প্রয়োজন। এজন্য এসব তথ্য হাতে নিয়ে হটলাইন নম্বর ১০৫-এ কল করতে হবে। প্রতিদিন ভোর ৬টা থেকে রাত ১২টা পর্যন্ত এ সেবা চালু থাকবে।

পদ্ধতি-৩ (১০৫-এ এসএমএস-এর মাধ্যমে)

এসএমএস-এর মাধ্যমে ভোটার নম্বর ও ভোটকেন্দ্রের তথ্য জানতে মোবাইলের মেসেজ অপশনে গিয়ে PC NID লিখে ১০৫ নম্বরে মেসেজ পাঠাতে হবে। ফিরতি এসএমএস-এর মাধ্যমে ভোটার নম্বর ও ভোটকেন্দ্রের তথ্য জানিয়ে দেওয়া হবে।

পদ্ধতি-৪ (নির্বাচন কমিশনের ওয়েবসাইটের মাধ্যমে)

নির্বাচন কমিশনের ওয়েবসাইট ব্যবহার করেও ভোটার নম্বর ও ভোটকেন্দ্রের তথ্য জানা যাবে। এ জন্য ল্যাপটপ, ডেস্কটপ কম্পিউটার বা মোবাইলের যে-কোনো ব্রাউজার থেকে ecs.gov.bd ওয়েবসাইটে প্রবেশ করতে হবে। এরপর ওয়েবসাইটের 'ভোটকেন্দ্র' মেনুতে ক্লিক করলেই ভোটকেন্দ্র অনুসন্ধানের অপশন পাওয়া যাবে। ওয়েবসাইটে দুটি উপায়ে ভোটকেন্দ্র খোঁজা যাবে। প্রথমত, নির্বাচনি এলাকা, উপজেলা/থানা নির্বাচন করে সংশ্লিষ্ট কেন্দ্রের তালিকা দেখা যাবে। দ্বিতীয়ত, এনআইডি নম্বর ও জন্ম তারিখ দিয়ে অনুসন্ধান করলে ভোটার নম্বর ও ভোটকেন্দ্রের তথ্য জানা যাবে। এছাড়া ওয়েবসাইটে ভোটকেন্দ্রের অবস্থান সরাসরি গুগল ম্যাপে দেখার সুবিধা রয়েছে। গুগল ম্যাপের মাধ্যমে ভোটকেন্দ্রের দূরত্ব এবং যাওয়ার পথ সম্পর্কেও বিস্তারিত জানা যাবে।

Addressing a rally at Thakurgaon Government Boys' High School, BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman pledged to establish agro-based industries in the country's northern region to create employment opportunities for locals. *Right*, Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman, speaking at a rally at the Nabin Chandra grounds in Kulaura, Moulvibazar, said he would upgrade the Sylhet Osmani International Airport. Both photos were taken yesterday. PHOTOS: STAR

Planning agro industries for north

Tarique says the polls are about rebuilding country

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Thakurgaon*

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday pledged to establish agro-based industries in the country's northern region, including Thakurgaon, Panchagarh and Dinajpur, to create employment opportunities for locals.

He made the remarks while addressing an election rally at Thakurgaon Government Boys' High School ground.

Tarique noted that the northern region -- particularly Thakurgaon, Panchagarh and Dinajpur -- is predominantly agricultural.

"We want to ensure employment for the people of this region so that they can live comfortably through decent jobs," he said.

To this end, he said, the party has decided not only to stand beside farmers and waive agricultural loans but also to promote agro-based industries in the area.

"All industries related to agriculture, including mills and factories, will be established across the northern region so that sustainable employment can be created for the local population."

He said there is a large number of educated youths in the region who remain unemployed, and the party has therefore decided to provide them with training.

"The training may be in agriculture, machinery, or other trades. Our aim is to equip young people with skills and turn them into a competent workforce so that they can secure employment either in their localities or abroad."

Expressing his vision for rebuilding the country, Tarique said, "We have carried out movements and struggles, and now we want to rebuild the nation by taking all people along."

He said the goal is to make the country self-sufficient in food, create employment for the unemployed, and ensure that women are not only educated but also economically empowered.

Addressing the audience, he said these goals can only be achieved with the support of the people, whom he described as the true owners of the country.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4

54 years on, foreign hands still pull strings

Says IAB ameer

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Patuakhali*

Ameer of Islami Andolan Bangladesh and Charmonai Pir, Syed Muhammad Rezaul Karim, said even after 54 years of independence, foreign agendas were governing the country.

He made the remarks while addressing an election rally of IAB-backed candidate for Patuakhali-1 constituency, Maulana Abul Hasan Bukhari, at Alauddin Shishu Park in Patuakhali town around 11am yesterday.

"The country gained independence 54 years ago through the sacrifices of millions. Many became

SEE PAGE 9 COL 2

Will focus only on reforms, not revenge

Shafiqur tells campaign rally

STAR REPORT

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman yesterday said his party does not believe in revenge politics and pledged to focus on regional development if elected to power.

He made the remarks during rallies in Habiganj, Moulvibazar, and Sylhet held as part of his electoral campaign in the region ahead of the national election scheduled for February 12.

At the Sylhet rally in the Alia Madrasa ground in the afternoon, Shafiqur said Jamaat did not celebrate the fall of the Awami League regime on August 5, 2024, but responded with gratitude towards the almighty.

"In exchange for the freedom, we declared not to take revenge, and we kept our word while many others did not. People will judge them in the court of conscience."

The Jamaat chief said if his party assumes power, it would not tolerate injustices anywhere in the country.

"If we can stop corruption and extortion at the root, it is possible to change the face of the country within five years."

Referring to Sylhet airport, Shafiqur said while the world is advancing, Bangladesh has been lagging behind.

"Sylhet has an international airport, but only in name, not in function. Considering the role of the expatriates, we will transform it into a true international airport, resuming all suspended routes and introducing new international routes."

Shafiqur also pledged to protect the region's rivers -- the Surma and the Kushiyara -- which he said are being choked by sediment, polluted with garbage, and encroached upon by grabbers.

"A large portion of the country's food comes from Sunamganj's haor areas. Yet these areas are neglected. Embankments collapse, and crops are destroyed. Those rats [corrupt officials] who swallow embankment funds will no longer get the chance," he said.

Earlier in the morning, the Jamaat ameer addressed the day's first rally at New Field in Habiganj.

At the rally, Shafiqur pledged to modernise tea gardens and

SEE PAGE 9 COL 3

Govt steadies ship, fails to steer change

Say speakers at policy dialogue about steps taken on economy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The interim government succeeded in preventing a deeper economic and geopolitical slide during a highly volatile period, but failed to translate that stability into meaningful institutional reform, transparency and inclusive governance, said speakers at a policy dialogue yesterday.

Economic analyst Mamun Rashid argued that although the interim government inherited an economy on the brink, particularly after the July 2024 uprising, its most visible achievement was halting further deterioration rather than delivering a decisive turnaround.

"The fall was stopped, not reversed," said former banker Mamun Rashid at a virtual discussion titled "Interim Balance-Sheet", organised by the Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC).

The economy in early 2024 was "going nowhere", with macroeconomic indicators under severe stress. The period following the political transition marked a shift from decline to stabilisation, particularly in foreign exchange reserves, remittance inflows and banking discipline.

Reforms in the banking sector such as reconstituting bank boards and initiating forensic audits, particularly in troubled Islamic banks, were the most visible actions of the interim government.

Still, these measures largely reflected "business-as-usual" governance rather than a deeper transformation.

"We did not see the kind of modernisation in economic management that many expected after the movement," he said, adding that conflicts of interest, bureaucratic dominance, and informal influence networks remained largely intact.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 5

BNP, Jamaat gunning for AL strongholds

FROM PAGE 1

the 2018 polls were marred by widespread allegations of ballot-stuffing on the eve of polling day.

Those manipulations left the BNP virtually sidelined. But with the AL off the ballot this time, constituencies once considered its strongholds are suddenly up for grabs, analysts said.

The BNP's main rival now appears to be the Jamaat-led 11-party alliance, said Al Masud Hasanuzzaman, professor of Government and Politics at Jahangirnagar University.

"There is scope for the BNP to win constituencies beyond its traditional bastions. However, its campaign strategies, the personal qualities of its candidates, and the party's overall conduct will be crucial factors. Young voters are expected to play a significant role," he told this newspaper.

The AL traditionally drew roughly 30 percent of the vote in past competitive elections. The big question now is what role its loyal supporters will play. "This remains a subject of speculation," he added.

In May last year, the interim government banned all activities of the AL and its associated organisations over allegations of killings, crimes against humanity, and other grave offences during the July uprising. Consequently, the Election Commission suspended the party's registration.

Bangladesh saw 12 national elections between 1973 and 2024. The AL didn't participate in the lopsided elections of 1988 and February 1996, while the BNP abstained from the one-sided contests of 1986, 1988, 2014, and 2024. Though the BNP contested the 2018 polls, it alleged that the vote was heavily rigged.

An analysis of data from the Parliament Secretariat and the Election Commission shows that in general elections since 1991, the AL won at least four times in 62 constituencies mainly in Faridpur, Shariatpur, Gopalganj, Bagerhat, Khulna, Bhola, Barishal, Dinajpur, and Mymensingh.

The AL's strongest support base consists of 22 constituencies, which the party won in every general election since 1991 (except for the 1996 election it boycotted).

They include Gopalganj-1, 2, and 3; Madaripur-1 and 2; Shariatpur-2 and 3; Patuakhali-3 and 4; Bagerhat-1; Khulna-1; Faridpur-1; Sunamganj-3; Moulvibazar-4; Dinajpur-5; Sirajganj-1; Jamalpur-3; Kishoreganj-5; Tangail-1; Mymensingh-10; Gazipur-1; and Bandarban.

On the other hand, the BNP won four times or more in at least 33 constituencies (except in the elections it boycotted). Among them are Bogura-6 and 7; Chapainawabganj-1 and 2; Feni-1; Noakhali-1; Naogaon-6; Natore-1; Bhola-3; Chattogram-6; Munshiganj-4; Manikganj-1; and Dhaka-7.

Election expert Badiul Alam Majumdar said the AL finds itself in a precarious situation for several reasons, primarily because of its shift towards autocracy and kleptocracy.

"They denied people their constitutional and political rights, as well as voting rights," said Badiul, also secretary of Sushashoner Jonno Nagorik.

Hasanuzzaman said the political outlook for the AL looks grim at this moment. "The party's future will depend on the stance of those who will form the government."

WHAT BNP, JAMAAT SAY

Leaders from both parties said they have drawn up plans to win the once AL-dominated constituencies.

BNP insiders said that in addition to their regular campaign activities in the AL strongholds, the party will intensify its door-to-door campaign there.

They noted that voter turnout would be a key factor in these constituencies.

Underscoring the need for a secure and peaceful voting environment, Emran Saleh Prince, senior joint secretary general of the BNP, said, "We will call for strict enforcement of law and order in these constituencies. The administration must act so that voters can cast ballots freely and without obstacles."

When contacted, Jamaat Assistant Secretary General Ahsanul Mahboob Zubair said the alliance candidates are working to win voter trust by tailoring their campaigns to local realities across Bangladesh.

SITUATION ON THE GROUND

All candidates, especially from the BNP and the Jamaat, in Mymensingh-10 (Gafargaon upazila), are trying to woo voters who have traditionally supported the AL in elections.

BNP candidate Mohammad Akhtaruzzaman said they are giving speeches, focusing on harmony, security, and justice to draw the attention of AL voters.

"Since the August 5 changeover, I have been working to restore peace and security in our area. This has had a positive impact on voters..."

He also said that organisational action was taken against some party activists for their alleged involvement in attacks on AL supporters. Those activists have been kept out of the election campaign.

Asked about Jamaat's strategy, Ariful Haque, finance secretary of Jamaat's Gafargaon upazila unit and a member of the election organising body, said, "We hope that AL supporters will cast ballots in our favour... There has been no instance of Jamaat's involvement in attacks on Awami League activists, the filing of cases, or land grabbing."

In Madaripur-1 (Shibchar upazila), Nadira Akter, the BNP candidate, has been holding courtyard meetings with AL leaders, many of whom pledged their support for her in the upcoming polls, said party sources.

At one of the recent meetings, she said, "We must move forward unitedly for Shibchar. Victory for the BNP can be achieved only through unity... In the future, there will be no false cases against anyone in Shibchar. After the election, Awami League leaders and activists will not face harassment."

In the nearby constituency of Madaripur-2, the BNP candidate, Jahandar Ali Mia, is paying visits to union parishad chairmen and members known as AL supporters to gain their backing, while followers of the Jamaat-led alliance candidate, Maulana Abdus Sobhan from Khilafat Majlis, are meeting AL leaders, according to local sources.

Jahandar said that honest AL activists are going through a difficult time, facing oppression, harassment, and arrests.

"Those AL leaders and activists who practised clean politics deserve protection, and it is our responsibility to stand by them...," he told this newspaper.

When contacted, Sobhan said he has been seeking votes from those AL leaders he considers trustworthy.

In the traditional AL stronghold of Gopalganj-1, the BNP candidate, Selimuzzaman Selim, is encouraging AL supporters to overcome their fears and vote for him, while the Jamaat candidate, Muhammad Abdul Hamid Molla, is assuring AL activists that they won't face harassment solely based on their political identity.

In Gopalganj-3, MM Rezaul Karim, the Jamaat-led alliance candidate, said, "Our efforts are focused on remote areas, villages, and wards, where face-to-face interactions with ordinary citizens are helping build interest in the election."

Meanwhile, the BNP and the Jamaat have adopted varied strategies to win over AL supporters in Faridpur.

BNP campaigners are emphasising that the party is pro-liberation and therefore deserves the backing of all pro-liberation forces. The Jamaat, on the other hand, is insisting that it neither filed cases against AL activists nor harassed them since the mass uprising.

Several voters said many local AL leaders joined the election campaigns of either the BNP or the Jamaat, citing personal security and political considerations.

This, they said, created confusion among grassroots AL supporters, many of whom now feel that it is better to stay away from polling centres.

Seeking anonymity, a voter from Bhanga upazila said, "Usually, whoever gets the votes of AL supporters wins Faridpur-4. Now that many local [AL] leaders are joining different parties, grassroots supporters may vote at their own discretion."

Election expert Abdul Alim said the AL's influence in its strongholds has weakened but a segment of voters is still loyal to the party.

"That percentage may have declined, but it is undeniably there," he told The Daily Star.

He said the AL voters are likely to be split into several groups. One group may shift towards the parties contesting the polls. Another group -- mainly consisting of hardline supporters -- may refuse to vote.

A third group may look for a "No Vote" option. When they find it absent on the ballot at polling centres, they may stamp multiple boxes to spoil ballots, he added.

Tarique rules out govt with Jamaat

FROM PAGE 1

of the 300 parliamentary seats. The party is contesting 292 constituencies, while its allies are fielding candidates in the remaining seats.

Although Tarique declined to predict a specific figure, he said, "We are confident that we'll have enough to form a government."

Opinion polls have forecast a BNP victory but also suggested a strong challenge from the Jamaat-led alliance, which includes the National Citizen Party, a "Generation Z" party emerging from "youth-led anti-Hasina protests".

New Delhi's decision to shelter Hasina, whom a Dhaka court last year sentenced to death over her role in the crackdown, has strained Bangladesh-India relations and created an opportunity for China to expand its investment and political engagement in the country, according to Reuters.

Asked whether he would shift Dhaka's foreign policy focus from India towards China if elected, Tarique said Bangladesh would prioritise economic growth and employment.

"If we are in government, we need to provide jobs for young people. We need to bring businesses into the country so that jobs can be created and people can have a better life," he told Reuters.

"So, whoever, while protecting the interests and sovereignty of Bangladesh, offers what is suitable for my people and my country, we will have friendship with them, not with any particular country."

On Hasina's presence in India, Tarique said: "She did commit a crime in the eyes of the law in Bangladesh in 2024. A judgment has been passed, so she must be brought to justice."

On whether Hasina's children would be free to return and participate in politics, he said political engagement should depend on public acceptance.

"If someone is accepted by the people, if people welcome them, then anyone has the right to do politics," he said.

Bangladesh hosts nearly 1.2 million Rohingya Muslim refugees who fled crackdowns in neighbouring Myanmar.

The interim government said last year that it lacked the capacity to allocate additional resources for the refugees, given multiple domestic challenges, and urged the international community to support their repatriation.

Tarique said he supported the return of the Rohingya, but only when conditions in Myanmar were safe.

"We will try to work on the issue so that these people can go back to their own land," he told Reuters. "The situation has to be safe for them to go back there. As long as it is not safe, they are very welcome to stay here."

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

Colonialism shaped linguistic struggles of Bangalee Muslims

Speakers reflect on historical impact at Star Itihas Adda

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The relationship between Bangalee Muslims and the Bangla language during the British colonial period was not just a simple connection to a mother tongue. Instead, it was a complex and often "fractured" bond involving identity, religion and colonial power, speakers said yesterday.

They made these observations at the 11th session of The Daily Star's Itihas Adda, titled "The Language Question of Bangalee Muslims: British Period", held at The Daily Star Centre in the capital.

Speakers discussed how colonial interventions, religious revivalism, and the search for political identity shaped the region's linguistic history.

Linguist Prof Monsur Musa said while history often focuses on collective identities like "Bangalee Muslim", language is actually unique to every individual. "We often talk about the language of Bangalee Muslims, but if we look closely, we see that language is personal.

National Prof Abdur Razzaq and writer Abul Mansur Ahmad were both Bangalee Muslims from this region, yet their spoken languages were distinct," he said.

He challenged the simplistic binary that Sanskrit-derived words are inherently "Hindu" and Arabic-Persian words are "Muslim".

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Speakers at the 11th session of The Daily Star's Itihas Adda, titled "The Language Question of Bangalee Muslims: British Period," held at The Daily Star Centre in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

'Army to stay free from influence if BNP forms govt'

Says Tarique Rahman

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday said if his party comes to power, the army will remain free from political influence and its dignity will be upheld.

"If the BNP is able to form the government through the people's mandate, the army will under no circumstances be allowed to be used for political interests," he said at a programme at a city hotel last night.

He added, "I do not wish to say that the army's lost glory will simply be restored. Glory cannot be handed back; it must be earned and upheld. The responsibility of preserving the army's honour lies with the army itself. The army must remain vigilant and conscious of its own dignity and prestige."

Tarique made the remarks at a meeting with retired military personnel and families of victims of the 2009 Pilkhana massacre.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

49% candidates businesspeople

Shows Shujan data

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Almost half of the candidates contesting the 13th National Parliamentary Election come from business backgrounds, according to data released by Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan).

Of the 2,026 nominees -- both party-backed and independents -- 998 are businesspeople, accounting for 49.26 percent of the total.

Compared with the previous election, where nearly 59 percent of nominees were from business backgrounds, the share of business candidates has declined significantly.

The findings were disclosed yesterday at a press conference organised by Shujan at Jatiya Press Club.

Presented by Shujan Central Coordinator Dilip Kumar Sarkar, the data showed that business remains the most common occupation among candidates, particularly within the BNP.

Of the party's 290 nominees, 209 are businesspeople -- the highest number in absolute terms.

The Jatiya Party has 129 business candidates among 195 nominees, while Jamaat-e-Islami has 74 businesspeople out of 227 candidates. In the National Citizen Party, 12 of its 32 nominees are from business backgrounds.

AT A GLANCE

- 554 candidates have assets over Tk 5 crore
- 41% earn less than Tk 5 lakh annually
- 95 earn over Tk 1 crore annually
- 70% hold undergrad, postgrad or PhD degrees
- 75 have debts exceeding Tk 5 crore

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7

FEB 12 ELECTION | DHAKA-2

Pollution, traffic woes top local concerns

SHARIF M SHAFIQUE *and* SADI MUHAMMAD ALOK

Md Abul Kalam, a resident of the BSCIC area in Rohitpur, Keraniganj, is waiting for the election with cautious hope.

While he has no complaints about the overall local environment, he is worried about the economy and the rising prices of daily essentials.

"Overall, the situation here is peaceful, but many people are economically fragile," the Dhaka-2 voter told The Daily Star. "I hope things will improve at least after the election."

Anwar Bhuiyan from Atibazar echoed similar sentiments. Describing himself as a politically conscious citizen, he said the election could bring some relief, though he remained sceptical.

"Politics in our country is very vindictive," he said. "If political conflict stops, many problems will start resolving on their own."

The Dhaka-2 constituency includes Hazratpur, Kalatia, Taranagar, Shakta, Rohitpur, Basta and Kalindi unions of Keraniganj upazila, along with Aminbazar, Tetuljhora and Bhakurta unions of Savar upazila.

According to locals, environmental pollution is the region's most pressing issue. Parts of the constituency border the Buriganga river, exposing residents to severe river and air pollution.

Traffic congestion is another major concern, particularly along the Dhaka–Aricha highway in Aminbazar and Hemayetpur. Unplanned urbanisation has also reduced playgrounds and open spaces across the area.

Now, with the election approaching, campaigning has picked up pace in the constituency.

Aman Ullah Aman
BNP

Md Abdul Haq
Jamaat

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

Withdraw initiatives to amend labour act

Demands Chevron Bangladesh Employees' Union

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Chevron Bangladesh Employees' Union has demanded the withdrawal of all initiatives to amend the Labour Act, which seeks to exempt foreign-invested energy companies from the statutory obligation to provide a 5 percent Workers' Profit Participation Fund (WPPF).

The union also called for an immediate halt to any attempts to amend the labour law on matters currently sub judice, labelling such moves -- particularly ahead of the national election -- as entirely unjustified.

The demands were made at a press conference held yesterday at the Dhaka Reporters Unity.

In a written statement, Mohammed Nur-e-Alam Siddiquee, general

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Pabna races heat up as BNP, Jamaat lock horns

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, *Pabna*

Ahead of the upcoming 13th National Parliamentary Election, the five constituencies in Pabna district are witnessing intense contests between the candidates of the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami.

While the district has traditionally been a BNP stronghold, internal divisions and rebel candidates have weakened the party's position in several seats. Jamaat, meanwhile, sees the changed political landscape as a rare opportunity to secure its best electoral performance in decades.

Internal BNP strife and rebel candidates weaken its stronghold, giving Jamaat an opening. Outcomes may hinge on 'silent' Awami League voters.

In Pabna-1, Jamaat has nominated Barrister Nazibur Rahman Momen, son of executed Jamaat leader Motiur Rahman Nizami, while the BNP has fielded local leader Shamsur Rahman. After former Awami League state minister Prof Abu Sayeed joined the BNP on January 21, pro-liberation voters rallied behind the party. Momen, however, criticised Sayeed, accusing him of trying to "revive fascism".

Pabna-2 remains BNP's safest seat, with its candidate Advocate Selim Reza Habib facing no major challengers.

In Pabna-3 and Pabna-4, BNP's internal rifts pose the biggest challenge. In Pabna-3, BNP

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Feb 12 polls vital to state integrity

Speakers tell RAWA seminar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Securing the upcoming 2026 national election is not only about conducting fair polls but also about protecting the very integrity of the state itself, said experts at a seminar yesterday.

Addressing the legacy of the July uprising ahead of the 2026 national election, they emphasised the need for patriotic leadership and a crackdown on corruption.

They warned that the July uprising was not merely an emotional protest but a historic reaction to the breakdown of the social contract, urging that the aspirations of the youth and the sacrifices of martyrs be integrated into state policy.

The seminar, titled

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

Activists under the banner of 'July Oikya' march on the Dhaka University campus yesterday, demanding justice for Sharif Osman Hadi. The Inqilab Moncho spokesperson died on December 18, six days after being shot in the capital.

PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

Authorities failed to act on 47% of polls violence cases

Says Odhikar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The authorities have failed to take action in nearly half of the incidents of electoral violence recorded ahead of the February 12 polls, according to a field monitoring report released by human rights organisation Odhikar yesterday.

The report found that supporters of the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami were predominantly involved in the documented incidents, most of which occurred in rural areas.

Odhikar presented its findings at a press briefing titled "Electoral Violence in the Pre-Election Period: Evidence from Field Monitoring" at a hotel in Gulshan.

The monitoring covered the period from January 18 to February 5 across 50 constituencies in 22 districts. The initiative was supported by the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD).

Odhikar officials said they documented 30 incidents of violence in 14 districts during the period.

"In 47 percent of cases, authorities took no action. Investigations or protective measures were rare, reinforcing perceptions of impunity," the report stated.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Army to stay free from influence

FROM PAGE 3

The BNP chief said the army should remain aware of politics but must not become absorbed into it. "Every officer and member of the army must be vigilant so that their professionalism is not overshadowed by politics."

He stressed that the glory of the army has never been tarnished by the BNP -- neither in the past nor present -- and will not be in the future.

"...When the BNP is strong in the political arena, the independence and sovereignty of Bangladesh remain strong, and the glory and dignity of the army are preserved."

Tarique also announced that if the BNP comes to power, it would reinstate the name of the BDR (Bangladesh Rifles) to preserve its link to the Liberation War.

"After the 2009 massacre of army officers at Pilkhana, the fascist forces changed the name of the BDR, an institution steeped in the memory of the Liberation War. Even their uniforms were altered.

"I wish to share a personal sentiment with you: if the BNP is entrusted with governing the state through the people's mandate, we will seek to reinstate the historic name of the BDR, tied to the memory of the Liberation War."

He further said that after the Pilkhana massacre, the army was either unable or not permitted to properly observe the day and shared that the BNP plans to declare it a national day of mourning.

Tarique noted that he had received several recommendations from retired officers, including the formation of a National Security Council and revisions to certain provisions of military law.

"I personally consider these recommendations important. If the BNP wins the upcoming election, we plan to form a committee comprising both former and current army officers to implement these proposals," said Tarique

The BNP chief concluded by addressing a demand raised by former army officers and members: the implementation of "One Rank, One Pay".

"I'm delighted to inform you that we have already included this in our party manifesto and publicly announced our commitment to implement it. God willing, if the BNP forms government after the February 12 election, we will move to implement this policy as swiftly as possible," he said.

Authorities failed

FROM PAGE 3

It added that nearly two-thirds of the incidents either discouraged or prevented voters and candidates from participating in the electoral process.

According to the findings, affiliates of the BNP were implicated in the highest number of cases, followed by Jamaat-e-Islami.

Chattogram and Cox's Bazar were identified as the main hotspots, with seven and four incidents recorded respectively.

The report said intimidation was the most common tactic used during the pre-election period.

Threats and harassment accounted for 33 percent of the incidents, followed by property damage (20 percent), clashes (17 percent), and obstruction of the electoral process (17 percent).

"Two-thirds of the incidents occurred in union parishads, and half took place in public spaces such as streets and marketplaces," it added.

Speakers at the briefing urged the Election Commission and law enforcement agencies to strengthen their presence in rural constituencies and ensure impartial enforcement of the law.

"With only five days remaining before the election, we hope the authorities will take appropriate measures to ensure that women and minority communities are not affected, as was observed in previous elections," said Taskin Fahmina, advocacy director of Odhikar.

She also called on political parties to issue strict instructions from their central leadership to grassroots activists to refrain from engaging in violence.

The report recommended extending the deployment of security forces in critical constituencies beyond the planned three-day post-election period.

Odhikar's Programme Coordinator Korban Ali, Admin Director Nasiruddin Elan, and former member of the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances Sazzad Hussain also spoke at the event.

Feb 12 polls vital

FROM PAGE 3

"Election-2026: National Unity and Expectation," was jointly organised by the Retired Armed Forces Officers' Welfare Association (RAWA) and the RAWA Research and Study Forum at the RAWA Club in Mohakhali, Dhaka.

Col (retd) Harun-Or-Rashid Khan presided over the seminar.

He highlighted the launch of the RAWA Research and Strategic Forum, aimed at bridging the gap between academic theory and operational realism in national security. "Our members haven't just studied national security; we have secured it," he stated.

The forum's goals include keeping national security above politics, strengthening civil-military ties, and guiding future generations while representing Bangladesh's interests on the global stage.

Brig Gen (retd) Nasimul Gani stressed the need for capable, honest, and patriotic leadership that serves the public interest rather than personal or group gain.

"Protecting the vote now means protecting the state, not just winning an election," he said.

He called for a transparent investigation into past political violence, disappearances, and killings, asserting that impunity weakens the state, while justice strengthens it.

Dilara Chowdhury, a former professor at Jahangirnagar University, said, "A neighbouring country wants to sabotage our election and create chaos here. They want to cause instability, as it would benefit them. Therefore, holding a free and fair election is crucial, despite the challenges ahead."

Maj (retd) Niaz Ahmed Jaber raised alarms about foreign interference aimed at destabilising the election, citing reports of an embassy declaring "non-family stations" and alleged manipulation of political events through AI-generated rumours.

He warned that failing to hold a fair election would equate to a defeat for the legacy of the July uprising.

Lt Col (retd) Modasser Hossain said, "We fought for freedom not just for political reasons, but as a nation in 1971." Bangladeshis are capable of defending their land from any foreign threat, he added.

During the question-and-answer session, speakers collectively called for a united stand against a "kleptocracy" and "mafiacracy", demanding that loan defaulters and money launderers be barred from participating in politics to ensure quality leadership in parliament.

EC suspends observer card distribution for Habiganj-based NGO

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission has suspended distribution of observer cards for the People's Association for Social Advancement (PASA) that had received approval to appoint 10,000 election observers.

An inquiry into the Habiganj-based NGO is still underway, and the EC is expected to make a decision today.

The Chief Adviser's Press Wing disclosed the development to journalists last night at Jamuna, the Chief Adviser's residence.

Deputy Press Secretary Muhammad Abul Kalam Azad Majumder told journalists that the EC secretary briefed yesterday's meeting on the matter. He stated that media reports had indicated the NGO's plan to deploy 10,000 observers, but the EC was not satisfied with its capacity after an initial review.

"For this reason, distribution of observer cards to PASA has been suspended," Azad Majumder said.

He added that while no political affiliation has been found so far, investigations into the NGO are still ongoing.

Withdraw initiatives to amend

FROM PAGE 3

secretary of the Chevron Bangladesh Employees' Union, said workers of Chevron Bangladesh had filed a petition with the High Court in 2022 due to the company's continued failure to pay dividends owed to them from 2013 onwards.

Following hearings, the HC ruled in favour of the workers on December 10, 2024, directing Chevron Bangladesh to establish the required fund and pay 5 percent of the company's net profit to the WPPF within three months of receiving the verdict. The court also instructed the Ministry of Labour to take necessary steps to ensure the ruling's implementation.

"Chevron filed an appeal against the verdict with the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court. After a hearing on October 28 last year, the chamber court of the Appellate Division referred the appeal for regular hearing without issuing any stay on the High Court verdict. Since the civil petition is currently pending before the Appellate Division, any attempt at this stage to amend the labour rules would amount to direct interference in a sub judice matter and constitute contempt of court," he added.

The statement said the union had met with Labour and Employment Adviser M Sakhawat Hossain on January 6 to formally convey their concerns.

"Considering the sensitivity and fragility of the energy sector, we urge the government to act responsibly. If our demands are not met at the earliest, we will be compelled to move towards tougher programmes," the statement warned.

During the press conference, the union's president, Mostafa Sohel Iqbal, vice-president SM Shahriar Abedin, and general secretary of the Tullow Bangladesh Employees' Union, Md Harun Al Rashid, were present, among others.

The two companies are currently operating in gas fields in Jalalabad, Bibiyana, Bangura, and Moulvibazar, which together account for more than 55 percent of the country's total local gas production.

Colonialism shaped

FROM PAGE 3

"Just as English uses Latin terms for medical science, Bangla uses Sanskrit words as the 'bricks' of the language. To view these merely through a religious lens is to oversimplify language based on prejudice," Musa added.

Highlighting the anthropological depth of early colonial scholars like William Carey, Musa said, "Carey's book Kathopakathan documented even the colloquial quarrels of women in slums ('maiya kondol'). He grasped the living language in a way that many of us today do not."

Emphasising the power and responsibility inherent in language, Musa said, "Language is an astonishing human asset. The more refined, sharp, and meaningful it is made, the more beautiful life becomes. One of the main reasons for the current political and social danger in our society is the lack of a sense of proportion (matra-gyan) in our use and application of words."

Researcher Md Chengish Khan spoke about the historical "displacement" of the language. He said that the Sanskrit-heavy Bangla prose made popular in the 19th century was deliberately created at Fort William College, marginalising the existing language of the common people.

He said William Carey and his pundits purged Arabic and Persian words from the prose, words which had previously been markers of the "Khandani" or elite class.

Chengis explained that a "100-year gap" followed the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny, during which Muslims withdrew from British education. This absence allowed the Sanskritised prose style to become the standard.

He highlighted the counter-narrative that emerged in the 1940s through the East Pakistan Renaissance Society, particularly the vision of Abul Mansur Ahmad.

Abul Mansur Ahmad envisioned a "Dhakaiya Bangla" standard that would reflect the reality of East Bengal's Muslim majority, distinct from the Calcutta standard. He said just as Assamese developed as a separate language, East Bengal's language had its own distinct character.

Researcher Tahmidal Zami described the bond between Bangalee Muslims and their language as historically "fractured". Tracing this tension to the pre-colonial era, he said early poets like Shah Muhammad Sagir had to explicitly justify writing in Bangla, validating it against religious expectations.

Zami said the colonial census helped solidify a distinct "Bangalee-Muslim" identity. This created a dilemma where the community felt torn between their "mother tongue" (Bangla) and a desire for a "national language" (Urdu or Arabic).

He said for a significant period, many educated Muslims believed that while Bangla was spoken at home, their cultural and national identity was tied to Urdu.

This sentiment only began to shift with the rise of the "Anglo-Sanskritic" reality of the colonial state. Zami also challenged the idea that "Musalmani Bangla" was a universal dialect, suggesting it was likely a mixed language born of trade in specific regions like Hooghly.

The session was moderated by The Daily Star journalist Emran Mahfuz, with a welcome speech delivered by another journalist, Shamsuddoza Sajen.

Pabna races heat up as BNP

FROM PAGE 3

candidate Hasan Zafir Tuhin faces a challenge from independent aspirant KM Anwarul Islam, also a former BNP lawmaker. This, in turn, has boosted the prospects of Jamaat candidate Moulana Ali Asgar.

Similarly, in Pabna-4, BNP candidate Habibur Rahman Habib is challenged by the party's rebel Jakaria Pintu, prompting Jamaat's Abu Taleb Mondol to express confidence in victory.

In Pabna-5, the contest pits BNP candidate Advocate Shamsur Rahman Shimul Bishwas against Jamaat's Principal Iqbal Hossain.

Analysts have opined that "silent" Awami League voters could determine outcomes, depending on whether they boycott or tactically support candidates.

"People were deprived of their voting rights during the fascist regime. BNP has been fighting for democracy for a long time. Voters will make the right decision," said BNP's Habibur Rahman Habib. He expressed hope of garnering support from AL voters.

Jamaat's Abu Taleb Mondol said, "People do not want to see the extortionists, criminals return to power. People are united for a change. We expect to win all seats." He added that security concerns remain due to threats and attacks.

Citing fears over security, Abdul Matin Khan, president of the Pabna district unit of Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan), said ensuring voters' safe access to polling centres would be the main challenge.

PRAYER TIMING
FEBRUARY 8

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

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Invitation for Tender Supplying Pitch Soil

Bangladesh Cricket Board

Ref No.: BCB/Grounds/ T&P / Pitch Soil / 2026/93

Date: 08th February 2026

Sealed Tenders are hereby invited from the experienced & bonafide Authorized Contractor/ Organization/Firm for supplying Pitch Soil Approx. 3.10 Lac cft as per terms and conditions stated in the Tender Schedule:

1	Organization	Bangladesh Cricket Board
2	Procuring Entity Name	Chief Executive Officer, BCB
3	Invitation for	Supply of Pitch Soil (Brown Soil 2.90 Lac cft and Black Soil 20 thousand cft) approx. 3.10 Lac cft for Cricket Pitches.
4	Procuring Entity District	BCB designated venues across Bangladesh (List attached with schedule)
5	Invitation Ref:	BCB/ Grounds/T&P/ Pitch Soil /2026/93
6	Procurement Method	Open Tendering Method (OTM).
7	Budget and source of Fund	Bangladesh Cricket Board
8	Tender Publication Date	08/02/2026
9	Tender Last Selling Date	24/02/2026
10	Tender Closing date and time	24/02/2026 at 12.30 pm
11	Tender Opening date and time	24/02/2026 at 1.00 pm
12	Name and address of the selling tender	Finance & Accounts Department of Bangladesh Cricket Board at Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Mirpur-2, Dhaka 1216, Bangladesh.
13	Place of receiving & Opening tender	Management Office of Bangladesh Cricket Board at Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Mirpur-2, Dhaka 1216, Bangladesh.
14	Place / Date / Time of Pre-Tender meeting (Optional)	To be notified.
15	Scope of Supply	The following is the scope of supply that the tenderers must adhere to and ensure: i) Supply of Brown Soil and Black Soil suitable for cricket pitch preparation. ii) Soil must be free from stones, roots, debris, organic matter, and foreign materials. iii) Clay content must align with the percentage as prescribed. iv) Transportation and delivery to be made at the designated venues as instructed by the BCB from time to time. v) Quantity may vary depending on requirements for respective venues.
16	Eligibility and Qualification of Tenderers	The tenderers must meet the following criteria to be eligible: i) Minimum 3 (three) years of experience in supplying soil or similar materials. ii) Prior experience in supplying materials for sports grounds /cricket grounds (preferred). iii) Possess the capability to deliver the requisite quantity and meet the delivery time-frame. iv) Possess valid business legal documents, i.e., Updated Trade License, valid TIN Certificate, VAT/BIN Registration Certificate and Latest Tax Return Certificate.
17	Price & Payment method of Tender Document (BDT)	BDT 5,000/- (Five Thousand) Each Schedule non-refundable. Tender Document can be purchased upon cash payment.

18	Particulars	Location	Tender Security	Completion/ Delivery Time in Week / Month
	Supply of Pitch Soil (Brown Soil 2.90 Lac cft and Black Soil 20 thousand cft) approx. 3.10 Lac cft for Cricket Pitches.	Different Venues across Bangladesh (Venue / Stadium List is attached in the schedule)	BDT 10% of the Quoted Value.	Total 6 (Six) weeks (First 2 (Two) weeks-40%, Second 2 (Two) weeks-30% and third 2 (two) weeks-30%).

19	Address of the Official Inviting Tender	Bangladesh Cricket Board, Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Mirpur-2, Dhaka 1216. Phone # +88 028031001-4.
20	The BCB reserves the right to accept or reject any or all tenders without assigning any reason. Further, BCB also reserves the right to cancel the entire tender process and / or modify, add or alter the terms of the document and/ or the conditions for Tender by issuing an addendum(s) at any time prior to the submission of the Tender.	

Chief Executive Officer
Bangladesh Cricket Board
Management Office: Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Mirpur-2, Dhaka 1216
Tel: +880 2 8031001-4, Fax: 803 1199

MAMATA Since 1983

Tender Notice

Sealed Tender are hereby invited from consulting firm, NGO or specialized mapping agency/entity for GPS technology and satellite imagery assisted comprehensive mapping and listing exercise to create accurate base map and GIS and target group data base for the project titled "Health System Resilience for Improved SRHR in Bangladesh" in Chattogram City Corporation Area with a particular focus on Slum Areas.

Please visit the link to view the full TOR(Terms of Reference):

• Terms of Reference (ToR) for GPS Technology-Assisted Mapping and Listing Exercise

Last date for submission of the tender is 19.02.2026. All documents in support of the legal status of the Consulting firm/NGO/Agency/Entity should be enclosed with the tender along with a signed copy of the ToR (in all pages).

BIGM বাংলাদেশ ইন্সটিটিউট অব্ গভর্নেন্স এন্ড ম্যানেজমেন্ট (BIGM)
(ঢাকা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় অধিভুক্ত)
এবং
স্কিলস্ ফর ইন্ডাস্ট্রি কম্পিটিটিভনেস এন্ড ইনোভেশন প্রোগ্রাম (SICIP)
অর্থ বিভাগ, অর্থ মন্ত্রণালয়, গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার।

'স্ট্র্যাটিজিক ম্যানেজমেন্ট' শীর্ষক প্রশিক্ষণ কোর্স - ৩য় (সামগ্রিকভাবে ৮ম) ব্যাচ

অর্থ মন্ত্রণালয়ের অর্থ বিভাগের অর্থায়নে SICIP প্রকল্পের আওতায় BIGM উচ্চ ও মধ্যম পর্যায়ের সরকারি ও বেসরকারি কর্মকর্তাদের স্ব-স্ব প্রতিষ্ঠানের মধ্য ও দীর্ঘ-মেয়াদি লক্ষ্য অর্জনের জন্য স্ট্র্যাটিজি বা কৌশল প্রণয়ন, বাস্তবায়ন এবং মূল্যায়ন দক্ষতা বৃদ্ধির লক্ষ্যে ৩ সপ্তাহ মেয়াদী 'স্ট্র্যাটিজিক ম্যানেজমেন্ট' শীর্ষক বিশেষ প্রশিক্ষণের আয়োজন করছে। SEIP/SICIP-এর আওতায় বিভিন্ন Industry Association (IAs)-এর অধীনে একটি শর্ট কোর্স অথবা SEIP/SICIP-এর আওতায় BIGM-এ অনুষ্ঠিত কেবলমাত্র একটি কোর্সে অংশগ্রহণকারী প্রশিক্ষণার্থীগণ আবেদন করতে পারবেন। তবে SEIP/SICIP-এর আওতায় Executive Development Center (EDC)-এর অধীন কোন কোর্সে অংশগ্রহণকারী প্রশিক্ষণার্থীর আবেদন করার প্রয়োজন নাই।

সরকারি কর্মকর্তাদের জনপ্রশাসন মন্ত্রণালয়ের (www.mopa.gov.bd) ওয়েবসাইটে "সর্বশেষ খবর" শিরোনামের অধীন গত ২৬ জানুয়ারি ২০২৬ তারিখে প্রকাশিত বিজ্ঞপ্তি অনুসরণক্রমে আবেদন করতে হবে। বেসরকারি কর্মকর্তাদের আবেদনের নির্দেশনা নিম্নরূপঃ

কোর্স সংক্রান্ত তথ্য
- মোট ৩০ টি আসন
- বেসরকারি কর্মকর্তাদের জন্য ৩০ শতাংশ আসন
- নারী প্রশিক্ষণার্থীদের অগ্রাধিকার প্রদান
- শনিবার হতে বুধবার পর্যন্ত সেশন পরিচালনা (সকাল ৯:০০ টা হতে বিকাল ০৫:০০ টা)
- যাতায়াত ভাতা বাবদ প্রতিদিন ৬০০ টাকা বরাদ্দ, দুপুরের খাবার ও চা-চক্রের ব্যবস্থা
- প্রশিক্ষণার্থীকে বা তাঁর প্রতিষ্ঠানকে কোন কোর্স ফি দিতে হবে না
- কোর্স শুরুর তারিখ: ৪ এপ্রিল ২০২৬

আবেদনকারীর যোগ্যতা
- উচ্চ বা মধ্যম পর্যায়ের চাকুরিতে কমপক্ষে ৫ বছরের অভিজ্ঞতা
- ন্যূনতম স্নাতকোত্তর। অন্তত ২য় শ্রেণীতে উত্তীর্ণ
- বয়সসীমা ৩০ থেকে ৫২ বছর পর্যন্ত।

আবেদনের নিয়ম
- প্রশিক্ষণার্থীকে তাঁর নিয়ন্ত্রণকারী কর্তৃপক্ষের অনুমতি গ্রহণক্রমে আবেদন করতে হবে এবং প্রশিক্ষণে যোগদানের পূর্বে এ সংক্রান্ত অনুমতি পত্র দাখিল করতে হবে
- ২ কপি পাসপোর্ট সাইজ ছবি, স্নাতকোত্তর সনদ ও জাতীয় পরিচয়পত্রের অনুলিপি দাখিল করতে হবে
- BIGM-এর ওয়েবসাইট-এ News Update অপশনে গিয়ে Strategic Management-এর আবেদন ফরম Download করে পূরণ করতে হবে। পূরণকৃত ফরম উল্লিখিত সংযুক্তিসহ scan করে bigm.sicip@bigm.edu.bd-এই ই-মেইলে পাঠিয়ে দিতে হবে
- BIGM-এ ব্যক্তিগতভাবে উপস্থিত হয়েও আবেদন করা যাবে
- বেসরকারি কর্মকর্তাদের আবেদনের শেষ তারিখ ঃ ৩ মার্চ ২০২৬

ই-৩৩, সৈয়দ মাহবুব মোর্শেদ সরণী, আগারগাঁও, শের-ই-বাংলা নগর, ঢাকা- ১২০৭. www.bigm.edu.bd
ফোন : +৮৮-০২-২২৩৩৭৪০৪০-৪৪ এক্সটেনশন : ১২৭, ১৩০, ১৪১, ১৫৯; মোবাইল : ০১৯৩২ ৬৯৮৪৭২, ০১৭৩২ ২৯১৭৫২

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
বেসরকারি শিক্ষক নিবন্ধন ও প্রত্যয়ন কর্তৃপক্ষ (NTRCA)

স্মারক নংঃ ৩৭.০৫.০০০০.০০০.০১১.৩১.০০০১.২৫-৫৪

তারিখঃ ২৪ মাঘ ১৪৩২ বঙ্গাব্দ
০৭ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০২৬ খ্রিষ্টাব্দ

বিজ্ঞপ্তি

বিষয়ঃ এমপিওভুক্ত শিক্ষাপ্রতিষ্ঠানের নতুন ই-রেজিস্ট্রেশন ও বিদ্যমান ই-রেজিস্ট্রেশন হালনাগাদকরণ

এতদ্বারা জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, এমপিওভুক্ত শিক্ষাপ্রতিষ্ঠানের (স্কুল, কলেজ, মাদ্রাসা ও কারিগরি) শিক্ষকের শূন্যপদ সংক্রান্ত তথ্য অনলাইনে সংগ্রহের উদ্দেশ্যে এনটিআরসিএ কর্তৃক প্রতিষ্ঠানসমূহের ই-রেজিস্ট্রেশন কার্যক্রম আগামী ০৯ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০২৬ তারিখ থেকে ২২ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০২৬ তারিখ পর্যন্ত সময়ের মধ্যে সম্পন্ন করা হবে। এ সংক্রান্ত বিস্তারিত তথ্য এনটিআরসিএ-এর ওয়েবসাইটে (www.ntrca.gov.bd) "ই-রেজিস্ট্রেশন" সেবাবক্সের ই-রেজিস্ট্রেশন নির্দেশিকা মেন্যুতে পাওয়া যাবে।

২। **উল্লেখ্য "এনটিআরসিএ এর আইন ২০০৫ এবং পরিপত্র অনুসারে এমপিওভুক্ত শূন্যপদের ক্ষেত্রে ই-রেজিস্ট্রেশন এবং ই-রিকুইজিশন করা বাধ্যতামূলক। অন্যথায় প্রতিষ্ঠান প্রধান ও প্রতিষ্ঠানের এমপিও বাতিলকরণসহ আইনানুগ ব্যবস্থা গ্রহণা করা হবে"।**

৩। এমতাবস্থায়, সংশ্লিষ্ট শিক্ষাপ্রতিষ্ঠান প্রধান ও উপজেলা মাধ্যমিক শিক্ষা অফিসারগণকে উপরোল্লিখিত নির্দেশিকা অনুসরণে নির্ধারিত সময়ের মধ্যে ই-রেজিস্ট্রেশন কার্যক্রম সম্পন্ন করার জন্য নির্দেশক্রমে অনুরোধ করা হলো। **উল্লেখ্য, ই-রেজিস্ট্রেশন ব্যতীত কোন শিক্ষাপ্রতিষ্ঠান কর্তৃক শূন্যপদের চাহিদা এনটিআরসিএ-তে প্রেরণের সুযোগ নেই।**

তাসনিম জেবিন বিনতে শেখ
পরিচালক (শিক্ষাতত্ত্ব ও শিক্ষামান)
ফোনঃ ০২-৪১০৩০১২৪
ই-মেইলঃ director_exam@ntrca.gov.bd

জিডি-২৭৪

US pressing rivals to end war by June

Says Zelensky

AFP, *Kyiv*

The United States wants Ukraine and Russia to end their nearly four-year war by June, and has offered to host talks between the two sides in Florida next week, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said.

US-led efforts to end Europe's deadliest conflict since World War II have stepped up a gear in recent weeks, but Moscow and Kyiv remain at odds over the key issue of territory.

Russia, which occupies around 20 percent of its neighbour, is pushing for full control of Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region as part of any deal and has threatened to take it by force if talks fail.

But Ukraine says ceding ground will embolden Moscow, and so it will not sign an agreement that fails to deter Russia from invading again.

"The United States has proposed for the first time that the two negotiating teams -- Ukraine and Russia -- meet in the United States, probably in Miami, in a week's time," Zelensky told reporters in comments made public early yesterday.

"They say that they want to do everything by June," he added.

The US has mediated two rounds of negotiations between the two sides in Abu Dhabi since January, brokering a major prisoner exchange but failing to reach a breakthrough on territory.

Both Moscow and Kyiv said talks have been difficult.

Zelensky has repeatedly expressed frustration that his country is being asked to make disproportionate compromises compared to Russia.

Ukraine has proposed freezing the conflict along the current front lines.

Russia has rejected this and Washington has instead pushed for Kyiv to convert the land it currently controls in the Donetsk region into a "free economic zone" where neither side has military control.

Members of the Canadian diaspora gather in front of the Canadian consulate after its official opening, in Nuuk, Greenland, yesterday. Canada and France, which both oppose US President Donald Trump's claim to Greenland, open consulates in the Danish autonomous territory's capital on Friday, in a strong show of support for the local government.

PHOTO: AFP

Iran nods to more nuclear talks, sets redlines

FM says missile programme 'non-negotiable', warns attacks on US bases if hit

AFP, *Paris*

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi yesterday said he hoped talks with the United States would resume soon, while reiterating Tehran's red lines and warning against any American attack.

According to excerpts published on his official Telegram channel during an interview with the Al Jazeera network, Araghchi said that Iran's missile programme was "never negotiable" in Friday's talks in Oman.

He warned that Tehran would target US bases in the region if the US attacked Iranian territory. However, Araghchi also said that despite the talks in Muscat being indirect, "an opportunity arose to shake hands with the American delegation".

He called the talks "a good start", but added that building trust would take time. He said the talks would resume "soon".

US President Donald Trump on Friday called the talks "very good" and pledged another round of negotiations next week.

Despite this, he signed an executive order effective from Saturday that called for the "imposition of tariffs" on countries still doing

business with Iran.

The United States also announced new sanctions against numerous shipping entities and vessels, aimed at curbing Iran's oil exports.

More than a quarter of Iran's trade is with China, with $18 billion in imports and $14.5 billion in exports in 2024, according to World Trade Organization data.

Araghchi told Al Jazeera that nuclear enrichment was Iran's "inalienable right and must continue".

"We are ready to reach a reassuring agreement on enrichment," he said.

"The Iranian nuclear case will only be resolved through negotiations."

He also said Iran's missile programme was "never negotiable" because it relates to a "defence issue".

Washington has sought to address Iran's ballistic missile programme and its support for militant groups in the region -- issues which Israel has pushed to include in the talks, according to media reports.

Tehran has repeatedly rejected expanding the scope of the negotiations beyond the nuclear issue.

Friday's unprecedented talks between the two arch enemies came amid a major US military buildup in the region in the wake of Iran's crackdown on protests that began in late December, driven by economic grievances.

The negotiations were the first since nuclear talks between Iran and the US collapsed last year following Israel's unprecedented bombing campaign against Iran, which triggered a 12-day war.

During the war US warplanes bombed Iranian nuclear sites.

RUSSIA OIL DEAL

US lifts 25% tariff on Indian goods

AFP, *Washington*

US President Donald Trump moved Friday to lift an additional 25 percent tariff he imposed on goods from India over its purchases of Russian oil -- a step to implement a trade deal announced this week.

"India has committed to stop directly or indirectly importing Russian Federation oil," according to an executive order Trump signed.

New Delhi has also said that it will purchase US energy products, "and has recently committed to a framework with the United States to expand defense cooperation over the next 10 years," the order said.

The additional 25 percent US duty will be removed at 12:01 am Eastern Time on Saturday.

The executive order comes days after Trump announced a trade deal to reduce tariffs on India, saying that Indian PM had promised to stop buying Russian oil over the war in Ukraine.

The pact would also see Washington cutting so-called "reciprocal" levies on Indian products to 18 percent, down from a 25-percent level.

The rollout of this reduction is still to come.

Other terms of the agreement include the removal of tariffs on certain aircraft and parts, according to a separate joint statement released Friday by the White House.

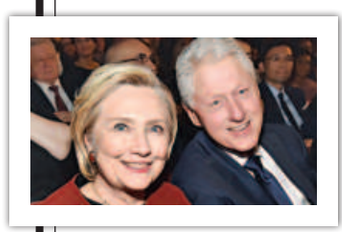
The statement added that India intends to purchase $500 billion of US energy products, aircraft and parts, precious metals, tech products and coking coal over the next five years.

Make our Epstein testimony public

Demand Clintons

AFP, *Washington*

Former US president Bill Clinton and former secretary of state Hillary Clinton are calling for their congressional testimony on ties to convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein to be held publicly to prevent Republicans from politicising the issue.



The couple had been ordered to give closed-door depositions before the House Oversight Committee, which is probing the deceased financier's connections to powerful figures and how information about his crimes was handled.

Hillary Clinton will appear for her deposition on February 26, while Bill Clinton will appear on February 27.

House Republicans had previously threatened a contempt vote if the Democratic power couple did not show up to testify.

But holding the deposition behind closed doors, Bill Clinton said Friday, would be akin to being tried at a "kangaroo court."

"Let's stop the games & do this the right way: in a public hearing," the former Democratic president said on X.

Palestinians struggle to receive food at a community kitchen in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. A US-backed plan to end the war in Gaza entered its second phase last month despite unresolved disputes between Israel and Hamas over alleged ceasefire violations and issues unaddressed in the first stage. Gaza, whose borders and access points remain under Israeli control, continues to face severe shortages of food, clean water, medicine and fuel.

PHOTO: AFP

'Next week crucial for a flawless election'

FROM PAGE 1

the chief adviser's official residence, last night, he said the election campaign so far has been marked by nationwide enthusiasm and conducted in a peaceful and cordial atmosphere.

"Candidates are not using abusive language against one another, nor is there any unruly behaviour, which is a very positive change for our political history and culture," Yunus said.

Referring to polling-day preparations, he said the work so far has been completed "very well," adding, "We are satisfied... we are very happy."

The chief adviser said the main challenge now is "to make it perfect" so that voting is conducted flawlessly, with women participating confidently and families joining the election "festival" together, making it an event remembered in the country's history.

Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam briefed the media after the meeting.

He said the meeting first discussed the deployment of body-worn cameras for police. Of around 43,000 polling centres nationwide, 25,700 are being brought under the programme.

A live demonstration was held at the start of the meeting to show how the audio-video cameras work. During the demonstration, Yunus spoke with personnel carrying the cameras at five randomly selected locations, including Tetulia and Khagrachhari, Shafiqul said.

The meeting also discussed the "Election Security App," which Shafiqul said is now fully operational. If any disturbance or violence occurs in or around a polling station, alerts will be sent simultaneously to security forces, the returning officer, and the Election Commission, enabling rapid intervention.

He noted that a similar app was used during this year's Durga Puja, when about 32,000 mandaps were brought under coverage, describing it as tested and effective.

On security deployment, Shafiqul said around 900,000 personnel will be engaged in election duties. Of them, 108,885 members of the Army, Navy, and Air Force have already been deployed. In addition, 37,453 Border Guard Bangladesh members have been deployed in 1,210 platoons.

The Coast Guard has deployed 3,585 members across 10 districts in 17 constituencies, covering 69 unions in coastal upazilas.

Police deployment will begin on the morning of February 11, with 157,000 personnel to be engaged, he said.

Ansar deployment involving 567,866 members will start tomorrow and is expected to be completed the following day. RAB has completed preparatory work and will begin deployment on time, he added.

On technical preparations, Shafiqul said 80 percent of CCTV cameras have already been installed.

Election Commission Secretary Akhtar Hossain told the meeting that voting will be held in 299 constituencies, as Sherpur-3 has been postponed following the death of a candidate.

He said a total of 2,029 candidates are contesting the election -- 1,755 from political parties and 274 independents. Of them, 83 are women -- 63 party-backed and 20 independents -- while the remaining 1,946 are men.

Akhtar said the total number of voters stands at 127,711,193, including 64,825,361 men, 62,885,200 women, and 1,232 voters from the hijra community. There will be around 42,790 polling centres.

On postal voting, Shafiqul said ballots for 422,960 overseas voters have already reached Bangladesh, and returning officers have processed 270,038 ballots so far. Of overseas postal voters, 94 percent are men and 6 percent women.

He said postal ballots were sent to voters in 124 countries.

Shafiqul added that around 400 foreign observers and about 500 local observers will monitor the election, while an estimated 120 foreign journalists are expected to cover it.

He also said hotline 333 has been integrated for election-related complaints, alerts, allegations, or information, and that necessary action will be taken based on calls.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Bangladesh Police
Police Telecommunication Organization
Police Telecom Bhaban, Rajarbag, Dhaka
Web: telecom.police.gov.bd

Invitation for e-Tender

Memo No. 44.01.0000.057.11.045.25/1360/Betar Date: 05-02-2026

For the financial year 2025-2026 e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of the following items.

Sl	Description	e-Tender ID	Procurement method	Online tender publication date & time	Online tender closing date & time
1.	Designing, Supplying and Installing of 150-feet 3-Leg Self-Supported Tower.	1223557	OSTETM (One Stage Two Envelope Tendering Method)	08 Feb 2026 16:30	02 Mar 2026 12:30

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

The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject all Tenders.
If the fund is insufficient/unavailable in that case the tender will be cancelled.

Shahriar Bin Saleh
BP 7810126915
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GD-271

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

Crisis at Chattogram port must end

Let the elected government decide on new deal

We cannot emphasise enough the punitive impact of the stalemate at Chattogram port, with protesting employees announcing an indefinite resumption of their strike from Sunday after a two-day break. The strike, which began on February 3, was triggered by the interim government's decision to hand over the port's management to DP World, paralysing export and import activities. Losses to traders are expected to run into millions.

The RMG sector being the most vulnerable, businesspeople are justifiably worried. Bangladesh competes with Vietnam and India in this sector and without a functional port, we lose our competitive edge. Besides, continued stalemate will also lead to higher consumer prices due to import bottlenecks. As things stand, the lack of transparency surrounding the deal with DP World, a hardline stance towards workers, and delayed negotiations have brought operations at one of the country's most vital economic hubs to a complete halt.

During the first 28 hours of the strike, cargo delivery from yards, vessel movement to and from the port, and loading and unloading at the jetties remained suspended. Workers had earlier postponed their strike after assurances from the shipping adviser that their demands would be addressed. Later, instead of easing tensions through dialogue, the government moved to clamp down on employees, seeking travel bans and asset probes against protest leaders. This only worsened the situation, leading to the declaration of an indefinite strike at the time of writing this column.

Leasing a terminal is standard global practice and does not amount to selling the country. However, a deal of this magnitude must be transparent and concluded after consulting stakeholders. That this apparently did not occur has led to a predictable crisis. The Supreme Court has observed that the government cannot proceed with signing the contract until an appeal against the High Court verdict is filed. A coordinator representing the striking employees has also alleged that senior government officials "forcefully" obtained signatures from port officials who are members of the contract negotiation committee.

The shipping adviser has assured that no jobs will be lost and that recruitment will be done locally, with no foreign workers brought in. This only strengthens the case for making the contract public to allay workers' fears. The adviser has also stated that, contrary to prevailing perceptions, the deal was not rushed and was based on a project dating back to 2022. Negotiations, he said, had been ongoing for the past three months and were interrupted midway due to a High Court case. A Supreme Court hearing on the deal is scheduled for February 9.

With the election only days away and mounting losses from the strike, prudence demands that the government leave the decision to the next elected administration. The deadlock at Chattogram port must be resolved.

A rights record that weakens confidence

Govt must acknowledge, address violations outlined in HRW report

The annual Human Rights Watch (HRW) report on Bangladesh, released last week, provides a rundown of the various forms of human rights abuses that took place within the country throughout 2025. It gives us a stark picture of how poorly the interim government performed in delivering sustained justice and reforms during its nearly ended tenure. This may likely erode trust in institutions, and, most relevantly, weaken confidence in security preparedness ahead of Thursday's election. Taken together, the HRW report demands scrutiny and answers.

The interim government's most glaring failure in separating itself from the last regime's operations is the stacks of arbitrary cases and arrests it has allowed to take place, unchallenged. As the HRW report states, hundreds of Awami League leaders, activists, and supporters remain in jail, with courts routinely rejecting bail petitions. Under the so-called Operation Devil Hunt, headed by the home affairs adviser, at least 8,600 people were arrested last year, while many others were detained using the Special Powers Act and Anti-Terrorism Act, the report reads. Additionally, restrictions on freedom of expression and association remained in 2025. Numerous attacks were carried out on journalists, often by non-state actors such as political party members and violent mobs, and a "temporary" ban was imposed on the Awami League's activities, going so far as prohibiting online speech in support of the party.

The HRW report also highlighted instances of violence against religious and ethnic minorities, and the continued plight of Rohingya refugees, many of whom reported a near total lack of access to protection, legal assistance, and medical care. Global cuts to foreign aid and the influx of new arrivals exacerbated these threats to the Rohingyas' livelihoods. The report cited a damning statistic since the interim government took charge in August 2024: at least 40 people killed by law enforcement, including 14 who allegedly died due to torture. During the last year, around 8,000 people had also been injured due to political violence, while 81 were killed, the report adds. When the interim government was formed, we hoped for a fair and accountable administration. But as months passed, we observed with disappointment a general attitude of denial and situational unawareness among multiple advisers and representatives of the government. With the country's most-awaited national election just days away, we urge that the interim government realises its role in maintaining law and order and actively ensures the safety of all stakeholders, including voters, candidates, polling officers, and journalists. Conflict surrounding such a high-stakes election may seem inevitable, but the government must fulfil its utmost obligation to prevent bloodshed and foster a democratic environment on Thursday.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Mary, Queen of Scots, beheaded

On this day in 1587, after 19 years of imprisonment, Mary, Queen of Scots, was beheaded at Fotheringhay Castle in England for her involvement in a plot against Queen Elizabeth I.

The interim's last-minute deals and the economic perils ahead

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BIRUPAKSHA PAUL

Many of my high school teachers in Nalitabari, Sherpur used to say that good students never burn the midnight oil on the eve of an exam. Serious students distribute their efforts evenly and consistently throughout the term, so they feel confident about their results without needing last-minute cramming. However, the interim government, despite being teamed with a group of well-known experts and economists, seems to be behaving like a group of poor students frantically trying to study the whole book overnight just before the test (read: election). That rarely produces good results, nor is it practicable.

The government, crowned with no less than a Nobel laureate, raised massive hopes among the public following the student-led uprising in August 2024. Most expectations regarding reforms, justice, and economic upliftment have since nosedived, while social peace and sense of security have eroded sharply. Not only did the government fail on most economic fronts, but it also escalated risks and fear among depositors, investors, and low-income groups, thus throwing banks, capital markets, and investments in the doldrums.

While the interim failed to create new jobs for the youth who fought for change, the rate of job losses due to the closures of many factories over the past 18 months has been particularly precipitous. Still, people chose to downgrade their expectations and wait for the election before things could hopefully improve. But the interim's sudden rush to ink new deals just before its transfer of power has not only created valid concerns for the next elected government but also raised questions about how a non-elected government can so hurriedly seal or pursue multiple strategic deals with foreign counterparts.

Foremost among these is a prospective deal with UAE-based DP World to manage cargo operations at the New Mooring Container Terminal in Chattogram Port, an endeavour that has ignited protests including an indefinite strike by port employees scheduled to start today. Earlier, in November 2025, the authorities decided to grant Denmark's APM Terminals a 33-year concession to build and operate the $550 million Laldia Container Terminal. Additionally, Switzerland's Medlog SA has been allowed to run Pangaon River Port under a 22-year contract.

FILE ILLUSTRATION: **BIPLOB CHAKROBORTY**

These deals engage the long-term interests of the nation, and thus deserve to be scrutinised and debated in parliament before approval. The interim, which took an oath to usher in civilised avenues of democracy, is clearly downplaying the role of democratic discussion and civic engagement. Its last-minute moves seem not only impulsive, but also largely designed to misrepresent the economic future of the nation. Thus, the interim is making the incoming government's journey treacherous, toying with the nation's sensitive, long-term interests without demonstrating adequate legitimacy and transparency.

There are other examples. Take Bangladesh Biman. Like many other public enterprises, it is also deeply troubled by inefficiency and corruption. One may recall that there was a clamour of disapproval from domestic passengers and concerned groups when Biman was given the task to manage luggage handling at the third terminal, reflecting how people largely withdrew trust from this carrier. But the interim has now reportedly fast-tracked a highly expensive procurement of 14 Boeing aircraft for Biman without any research, needs assessment, feasibility study, cost-benefit analysis, or stakeholder discussion. By doing so, it is effectively prioritising a foreign company's interests while depleting national coffers.

The interim government has entered another sensitive arena by approving a defence industrial zone in Chattogram's Mirsarai, an area previously designated for the Indian Economic Zone, which was cancelled last year. There are two anti-economic signals in this decision. First, the interim is fanning anti-India sentiment without doing justice to Bangladesh's economic gains from manufacturing and trade. Second, it is diverting our developmental path towards a military-focused model akin to some other countries, a model where military might and economic growth could move in opposite directions.

Bangladesh has allowed countries like China, Japan, South Korea, and India to build economic zones on its soil, assessing that they are mutually beneficial. More importantly, they contribute to Bangladesh's employment, knowledge, technology, productivity, and growth. The selection of which countries should be allowed to build economic zones entails Bangladesh's largest trade partners, and India qualifies in that regard.

The drastic fall in Bangladesh-India relations may be a reason why India lost the zone in Bangladesh, but it could have been granted to smaller trading partners like Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, or Cambodia. The interim's sudden leap into establishing a defence industrial zone instead is both absurd and contradictory to what Bangladesh needs now: employment generation and recovery from economic downturn.

The interim is thus not only attempting to alter Bangladesh's character but is also behaving anti-economically. While people jocularly say that six economists will generate seven opinions, there is consensus among economists that increasing military spending is discouraged for countries aspiring to rapid poverty alleviation, respectable growth, and faster development. As Noam Chomsky asserts, "If you're worried about the deficit, pay attention to the fact that it's almost all attributable to military spending and the totally dysfunctional health program."

Finally, the interim's handling of the public-sector pay hike issue is a poorly timed disaster. It may act as a landmine for the next elected government, which will neither be able to avoid it nor totally afford it given the revenue situation that was worsened by the interim itself. High inflation has certainly eroded public servants' purchasing power, but the issue could have been deferred to the incoming government.

Such last-minute deals, along with high-impact administrative initiatives reported by the media recently, are poised to do more harm than good. They are socially divisive, politically inappropriate for the present, and economically perilous for the next government.

Election season and the strain on urban environment

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SHAIKH AFNAN BIRAHIM

Election season in Bangladesh has a recognisable soundtrack and palette: loudspeakers, processions, and streets dressed in political colours. But it also has a less discussed footprint: plastic flex, laminated posters, strings, tapes, and broken frames that quietly outlast the speeches and slogans. What begins as "visibility" often ends up as waste, and that waste travels down to gutters, roadside drains, canal edges, and culvert mouths. Then, even modest rainfall can result in avoidable waterlogging. The election ends in a day, but the mess lingers for months.

The rules for this upcoming election are, on paper, stricter than before. The Election Commission has banned electioneering posters and tightened controls on banners in its code of conduct, with campaigning set to end 48 hours before polling. There have even been directives telling printing presses not to print election posters. Yet the hard truth is, rules alone do not keep drains clear; operational discipline does.

In the months leading up to an election, campaign materials—designed to withstand the weather—mushroom rapidly. Plastic-coated surfaces and flex banners endure rain and remain readable, which is precisely why they become dangerous once obsolete. Instead of breaking down, they fragment and move with the wind. Environmental experts have long warned that plastic-based campaign materials clog drains and waterways, becoming an environmental hazard.

In Dhaka, posters and flyers have continued to appear even as restrictions were strengthened. When enforcement is inconsistent, the cost of non-compliance feels low in the moment, and the volume of material grows. This matters because "a little extra" clutter refuses to stay as an aesthetic problem; it also becomes a source of blockages in drains and pipes.

The removal phase is also poorly enforced as urgency fades after the polling day. As the materials are often installed without clear responsibility for their removal, the city corporations inherit the burden while citizens inherit the inconvenience.

Urban flooding is usually a choreography of small failures—blocked grates, narrowed culverts, silt, and unmanaged solid waste. When campaign debris enters the system, it behaves like a net. It catches other garbage, slows flow, and creates chokepoints precisely where water needs to escape. The World Bank has noted how mismanaged plastic waste clogs drains and contributes to urban flooding. This is why election-season waterlogging can occur even without heavy rain: the blockage builds up out of sight and flooding suddenly appears at intersections and culvert mouths.

A report on post-election poster waste described how large volumes end up in landfills and are sometimes burned, polluting surrounding areas. Burning plastic clears drains but pollutes the air, and careless dumping just moves the waste from streets to rivers and landfills.

So, what can realistically be done this election season without turning the issue into a political fight?

The starting point is simple: drain protection must be treated as an essential service during polls. City corporations and local administration should identify high-risk drainage hotspots such as major intersections, low-lying wards, culvert mouths, and canal edges and carry out extensive clearing drives during and after election week. The aim is to prevent chokepoints from turning minor rainfall into flooding.

This effort should be paired with a strict enforcement of "no-material zones." Sewers, canal edges, culvert mouths, bridge underpasses, and median gaps should be treated as zero-tolerance areas, not for political reasons, but because these are precisely the locations where a single torn banner can trigger a chain reaction of blockages.

Temporary waste collection points should also be established in densely populated areas. Election waste spikes at predictable locations such as meeting venues, busy intersections, and main corridors. Simple bins or collection cages, cleared out daily, are low-cost but effective measures to prevent loose campaign materials from being swept into gutters.

Planning for the aftermath is equally important. A post-election clean-up calendar should be announced in advance. Authorities should specify a short window for removal, identify the lead agency, and provide a clear channel for reporting problem areas.

Finally, disposal practices must be addressed. Collected campaign plastics should be transported to approved sites rather than burned in open spaces. Alongside this, communication should be treated as infrastructure: short, repeated messages such as "Do not block drains" and "Remove materials after polling" can meaningfully influence behaviour.

Bangladesh has an opportunity this election season to prevent waste-related plights for citizens. The poster ban, directives to printing presses, and tighter code-of-conduct provisions show that policymakers recognise the civic cost of campaign clutter. What remains to be seen is execution on the ground: keeping drains clear, enforcing smart no-go zones, and cleaning up promptly after polling day.

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Eight reasons that explain Jamaat's rise

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Perhaps the most striking, and largely unforeseen, consequence of the fall of the Hasina government has been the surge in support for Jamaat-e-Islami over the past 18 months. The Islamist party's rise has been so dramatic that, although recent polling suggests the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) is likely to secure a majority in the February 12 election, some commentators argue that the Jamaat-led alliance could still emerge victorious.

The scale of this shift should not be underestimated. During Awami League's final years in power, Jamaat was so marginalised and repressed that it could barely function as a political organisation: many of its senior leaders were imprisoned, and the party operated under severe constraints, effectively in secret. Historically, Jamaat had never been a mass electoral force. In the series of elections following the fall of General Ershad, its vote share never exceeded 12 percent, with its high-water mark coming in 1991. Layered on top of this was the heavy stigma attached to Jamaat since Bangladesh's founding, owing to its association with forces that supported the Pakistani military during the 1971 war of independence and allegations of serious international crimes.

Against this backdrop, Jamaat's current momentum is remarkable. So, without suggesting that the party should be supported—or overlooking the legitimate criticisms one may have of Jamaat—how can one explain its meteoric rise? Below are eight possible factors, presented in no particular order:

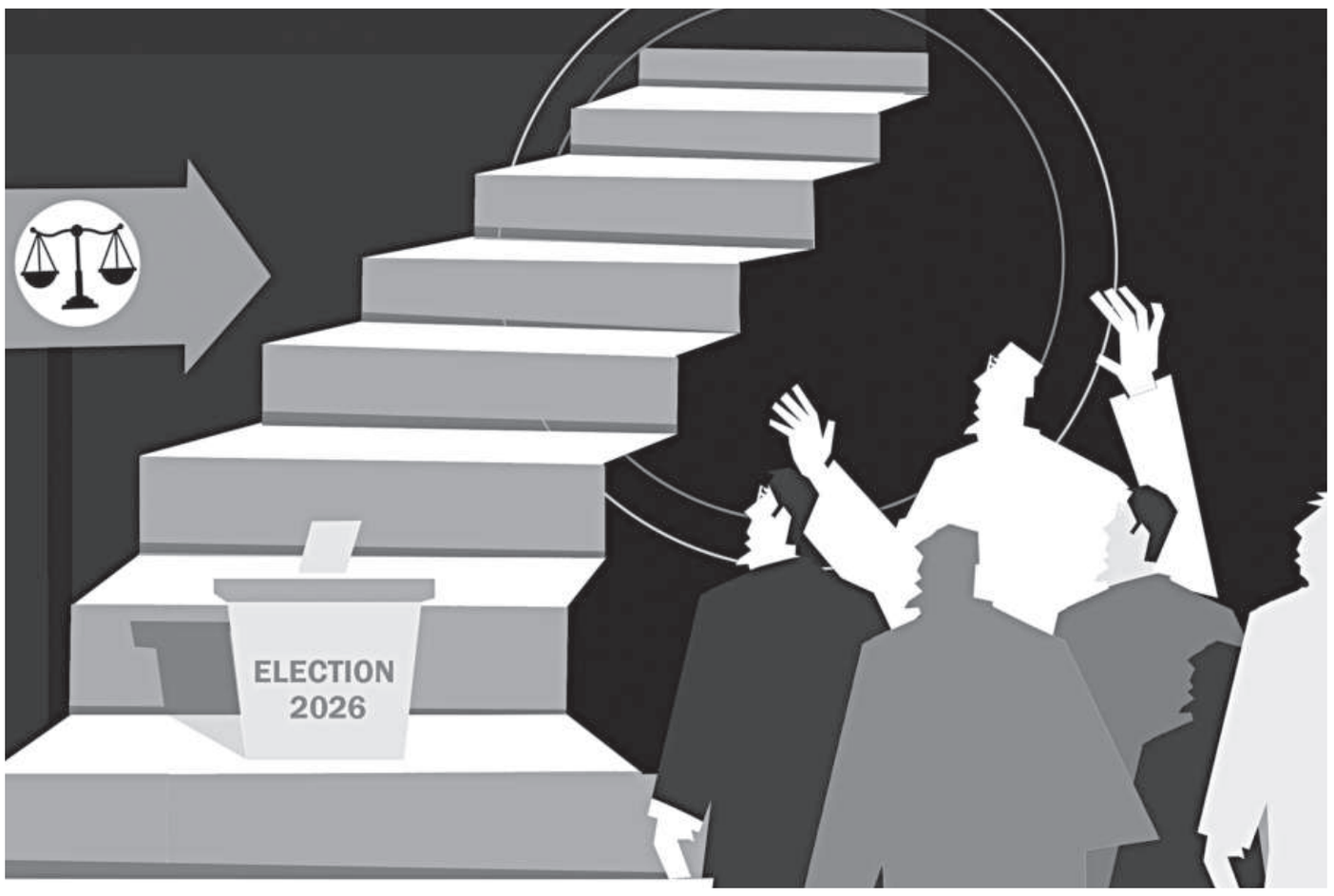

ILLUSTRATION: **BIPLOB CHAKROBORTY**

The weakening of the 1971 stigma
Jamaat has not entirely escaped its past. It is still, at times, forced to defend its position regarding 1971, and rival parties continue to invoke the issue. Yet there is little doubt that, for a large portion of the electorate, Jamaat's role during the Liberation War is no longer politically disqualifying.

Several factors may help explain this shift. First, the senior Jamaat figures accused of involvement in 1971-era crimes were convicted and executed during Awami League's time in office, leaving the current leadership without direct links to those events. Second, the collapse of Awami League has significantly weakened the potency of its long-standing political narratives, one of which centred on repeatedly invoking Jamaat's alleged war-crimes legacy. Third, for a growing and increasingly influential younger demographic, 1971 feels distant, abstract, and less relevant to their immediate political and economic concerns.

Jamaat's reputation for probity in contrast to BNP
Perhaps the most commonly cited explanation for Jamaat's growing appeal is its perceived distance from corruption. When the Hasina government fell, many Bangladeshis hoped this would mark the end of systematic extortion and rent-seeking by ruling-party activists at the local level. Yet since August 2024, many of the extortion networks previously controlled by Awami League cadres were quickly taken over by BNP-aligned groups. For a section of voters seeking genuine change, this reinforced the belief that BNP was, in practice, little different from its predecessor.

Jamaat, to them, stood apart. There were no widespread reports of Jamaat-run extortion rackets or organised corruption at the grassroots. This distinction, in their mind, reflects a deeper structural difference. Many local BNP activists apparently support the party in the expectation that access to power will bring financial opportunity. Jamaat activists, by contrast, apparently contribute money to the party rather than extracting it. Their political participation is not framed as a route to personal enrichment, and this perceived difference may have resonated powerfully with some disillusioned voters.

Welfare politics
Following the fall of Awami League, hundreds of families were grieving lost relatives, and thousands more were caring for those seriously injured. Jamaat mobilised systematically to identify these families and, where possible, provide direct assistance—reportedly giving at least Tk 100,000 to each bereaved household and financial support to many of the injured, often through hospital visits.

While individual BNP politicians did offer aid in some cases, their efforts were neither as extensive nor as coordinated. Jamaat's response reinforced its image as a disciplined organisation capable of translating its resources into tangible support. This form of welfare politics—charitable, visible, and organised—has long been a cornerstone of Jamaat's strategy, and it continues to generate significant political goodwill.

Organisational discipline
Jamaat has benefited from its organisational strength. Almost immediately after the fall of Awami League, it began preparing in earnest for elections. Its disciplined internal structure has translated into more effective campaigning, particularly at the local level. Jamaat has invested heavily in face-to-face voter engagement, including extensive door-to-door outreach in rural areas—an approach that may well be more persuasive than large rallies or media-driven campaigns.

Presenting a moderate, flexible position
Jamaat-e-Islami is, at its core, an Islamist party committed to the long-term goal of introducing Islamic law in Bangladesh. In recent years, however, the party has deliberately sought to project a more moderate and centrist image. Rather than foregrounding its religious agenda, it has emphasised practical reforms, particularly anti-corruption measures, institutional accountability, and improvements in governance.

A striking illustration of this repositioning was provided by a speech delivered by the party's leader, Shafiqur Rahman, at its Policy Summit in January 2026, titled "Aspiring Bangladesh." Notably, the speech did not reference religion at all. Instead, Rahman described Jamaat as representing "mainstream Muslim democrats," framing the party in terms that stress democratic legitimacy rather than theological ambition.

While the address may have been crafted partly with an international audience in mind, including foreign diplomats, it also reflects a broader strategic shift in how Jamaat presents itself domestically. Whether or not one finds this rebranding fully credible, it has undoubtedly helped the party broaden its appeal, particularly among urban and younger voters who might otherwise be instinctively wary of supporting a religious party.

Non-participation of Awami League
The decision by the interim government and the Election Commission to bar Awami League from participating in the election may have also worked in Jamaat's favour. Historically, when Awami League is on the ballot, Jamaat either contests independently or forms an alliance with BNP. If it runs separately, most of the anti-Awami League vote consolidates behind BNP. If it allies with BNP, Jamaat typically contests only a limited number of seats.

In the absence of Awami League, however, the dynamics change significantly. Voters who previously supported BNP primarily to prevent an Awami League victory may now feel freer to support Jamaat, without concern that their vote could inadvertently help bring Awami League back to power.

Anti-Indian sentiment
During Awami League's time in office, anti-Indian sentiment grew steadily in Bangladesh. This was driven by several factors, including border killings, inflammatory rhetoric from Indian political figures about Bangladeshis, and the perception that the Indian government strongly supported Awami League. When the Awami League government fell in 2024 and Sheikh Hasina departed for India, public anger towards perceived Indian "hegemony" intensified, with many people feeling more able to express such views openly.

In this context, Jamaat is likely to be viewed by some voters as a more credible force in resisting perceived Indian influence than BNP, which is often regarded as more pragmatic in its approach to India and less instinctively confrontational. As a result, Jamaat may attract additional support from those for whom opposition to Indian influence has become a central political concern.

Jamaat as the party of 'change'
Following the fall of Awami League, there was a widespread public desire for change—change from autocracy, entrenched corruption, and what many described as the country's "tired old politics." In a political contest between BNP and Jamaat, it is Jamaat that, for some voters, is likely to more convincingly embody that sense of renewal.

Jamaat is often viewed as an outsider party, not deeply embedded in the patronage and corruption networks that many believe dominate the political system. Its leadership is not drawn from a dynastic political lineage, which further reinforces its image as distinct from the established political elite. And unlike BNP, which has a prior record in government that many voters may recall negatively, Jamaat does not carry the same burden of incumbency. These factors work to Jamaat's advantage among voters seeking a decisive break from the past.

Moreover, Jamaat has taken a more enthusiastic stance towards the July National Charter's reform proposals, while BNP has generally adopted a more cautious and conservative position. Jamaat's recent alliance with the National Citizen Party (NCP) has also likely strengthened its association with reform and political change, further consolidating its appeal among those prioritising transformation.

Fixing a broken education system

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ZIA HAIDER RAHMAN

As well as a moral duty to provide a decent education to its children, Bangladesh faces an urgent economic imperative to do so. The nation currently enjoys a "demographic dividend"—a large working-age population relative to dependents—creating a window for economic growth. But with falling fertility and mortality rates, that window is about to close. Unless education reform is placed centre stage, within a decade, Bangladesh will be locked in with a woefully undereducated workforce for years to come.

Last week saw the publication of a report on education reform that, if implemented, could transform the future of Bangladesh. Chaired by Abed Chaudhury and commissioned by the education adviser, the drafting committee included Mushtaque Khan, Erum Mariam, Sabina Yasmin, Ananta Neelim, and others.

An excellent presentation outlined the report. But in the ensuing discussion, almost to a person, the 50-odd attendees focused on matters such as curriculum content, teachers' conditions, textbooks, and so on, apparently failing to grasp the significance of the report. I presume that the 50-odd attendees from government and civil society had not had the benefit, as I had had, of reading the report in advance. Without an advance copy, it is quite possible I too would have failed to appreciate fully that such matters as curriculum content were not at all the focus of the committee's work.

A metaphor is useful here to draw the distinction between what this remarkable report is about and what it is not about.

In choosing a car, we might look at the size of its engine, the colour, whether it has automatic or manual transmission, whether it has powered steering, whether it is a saloon or an SUV, and so on. This is an apt metaphor if we think of education as the car, we acquire at the outset of this, the journey of our lives. After all, it determines the speed and distance we can travel and underwrites our resilience when we navigate difficult terrain. The attributes of a car may be likened to curriculum content, or class size, or teacher training, all the things that the attendees wanted to discuss.

But the report was not so much about the attributes of a car as it was about how to make a good car manufacturing plant.

By taking this approach, the committee was able to identify the fundamental shortfalls of the education system and why they persist. Moreover, the report sets out how to assess any reform proposal, how to implement it, and, where a reform delivers, how to make it stick.

The substance of their approach is grounded in the powerful field of systems analysis. Rather than serving a menu of policy initiatives, the committee examines the systems-failure of educational governance. Rather than itemising every detail of a new curriculum, the committee explains how reform has invariably been thwarted by adverse incentives or signals within the system and the responses to those signals.

To elucidate this idea, consider exams and what the report identifies as the catastrophic failure of exams to prioritise competence or mastery over formal coverage of curriculum. Independent learning assessments show a widening gap between exam performance and actual competence. Achieving good grades in exams has ceased to signal mastery of skills. Students progress from one year without having acquired the necessary skills for achieving competence in the next.

In a systems failure, venality and incompetence are not the issue. A teacher is doing exactly what the system signals are telling the teacher to do. Exam results are the signal and the teacher's mode of teaching is the response. Teachers teach to curriculum coverage and not mastery.

In fact, the response from every level of governance has all too often been to lower standards so as to maintain an illusion that mastery is being achieved.

In place of mastery of primary skills, such as linguistic and mathematical skills, Bangladesh's secondary education system has prioritised things inimical to mastery, such as rote learning. Never in the history of homo sapiens has memorisation been the means of acquiring a *skill*.

A curriculum bloated by layers and layers of material, piled on by numerous actors without co-ordination, has undermined focus on mastery. But the issue with the curriculum is not so much excessive breadth as a "mismatch between expected learning outcomes, available instructional time, pacing assumptions embedded in curriculum documents and textbooks, and assessment signals that prioritise coverage over mastery."

The committee based its emphasis on a very strong research-backed trend favouring depth and mastery over breadth and coverage at the secondary level. That emphasis must be reflected in Bangladesh's education system.

Reform will be painful and while some reforms may be phased in, the committee stresses that others must be instituted more quickly. When exams properly assess pupil competence, grades act as a critical signalling function in every quarter of the education system. Poor grades demand reform of curriculum, teaching and textbooks.

The committee sets out several "non-negotiables," conditions that must dominate all reform. For example, new initiatives may only be introduced where they "replace, consolidate, or retire existing activity." The endless layering of initiatives must stop.

Perhaps chief among the non-negotiables is that everyone must know in advance who is responsible for each system signal. The proliferation of burdensome and interminable pilot programmes, for instance, will continue so long as ownership of response is not clear.

While generally refraining from prescription of curriculum content, the committee does identify two subjects as crucial to any curriculum. (In my view, a third subject is omitted. I will come to that.) The first subject is Bangla language learning, the importance of which is self-evident. The second is mathematics.

Mathematical education has been central to any notion of a decent education for centuries, even when education was the province of the idle aristocracy. Today, throughout the world, secondary school students learn about quadratic equations and trigonometric identities, when virtually none of them will ever return to such things once they leave school. But there is a good reason so many children in so many societies and for so long are required to study such things.

I am embarrassingly fond of saying that mathematics is an education in thinking without the encumbrance of facts, something said to me by a court of appeal judge in England, upon hearing that I, like him, had studied mathematics as an undergraduate. No other subject offers as efficient a way to help young people learn how to reason. Every other subject involves learning a lot of facts before reasoning can get a look in.

Here, the tendency towards rote learning is most visibly destructive. Examinations that test for a pupil's knowledge of the quadratic formula reward rote learning. But the pupil who merely memorises the formula has gained nothing that the pupil who has learned how to reason and *derive* the formula has gained. The latter has learned how to think, even if she forgets what a quadratic equation is in years to come.

I come now to the subject that the committee omitted to identify as a priority.

A few years ago, I visited Amsterdam. I arrived at the city's airport, jumped in a cab and asked the driver, "I'm sorry, I don't speak Dutch, but do you speak English?"

The driver flashed me a vicious scowl before answering my question.

Later that day, I mentioned the episode to friends, who offered a fascinating explanation of that scowl. Asking the driver if he spoke English, they said, could be viewed as asking if he was illiterate or of the lowest class. Almost everyone spoke English.

After World War II, when the Netherlands was occupied by Germany, this small country, surrounded by neighbours speaking languages other than Dutch, decided that children would learn two other languages. The same holds for most of Northern Europe.

The academic literature is clear: in the young, learning another language has distinct cognitive benefits going beyond the acquisition of another language, improving even spatial reasoning.

The economic benefit is plain. One language is the currency of business and that language, above all others, is also the repository of what we collectively as a species have learned. The modern economy is all about that knowledge.

I suspect the committee refrained from stating that English should be a priority for fear of arousing linguistic nationalism and jeopardising reception of the whole report. For historical, understandable but unhelpful reasons, a monster of emotions is aroused by any discussion of language.

Bangladeshi elites, with their money, have liberated themselves from the inadequacies of the state's secondary schooling system. Since elites largely determine policy agendas, reform of public education has taken a back seat for years.

What becomes of this outstanding report depends on the next government, civil society, and the people. It is hard to be optimistic whenever reliance on government or civil society seems necessary. Some hope might yet be derived from the fact that the July uprising showed that the people still wield some power.

8 DHAKA SUNDAY FEBRUARY 8, 2026
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NEWS

Nipah virus claims first life this year

FROM PAGE 12

weakness, and vomiting, followed by hypersalivation, disorientation, and convulsions.

After six days, she lost consciousness and was referred by a local physician to a tertiary hospital. On January 28, she was admitted to hospital, and the Nipah surveillance team collected throat swabs and blood samples.

She died the same day.

The patient had reported repeated consumption of raw date palm sap between January 5 and 20.

Shamin said, following the confirmed diagnosis, an outbreak investigation team began investigations on January 30, and a total of 35 persons she had come into contact with have been identified. All of them tested negative but are being kept under observation.

Since 2001, Bangladesh has documented 348 NiV cases, including 250 deaths, corresponding to an overall case fatality rate of 72 percent, according to WHO.

Nearly half of these were primary cases with a confirmed history of consuming raw date palm sap, or "tari" (fermented date palm sap), while 29 percent resulted from direct contact transmission.

Most cases in Bangladesh are reported from December to April, suggesting a seasonal pattern.

According to IEDCR data, five people were infected in 2024 -- all of whom died. In 2023, 13 people were infected; ten of them died.

According to WHO, Nipah virus is a zoonotic pathogen with a high death rate and no licensed vaccine or treatment, though early supportive treatment can save lives. It is transmitted to humans through infected animals such as bats, or via food contaminated with saliva, urine, or excreta of infected animals. It can also be transmitted directly from person to person through close contact with an infected individual. Fruit bats, also known as flying foxes, are the natural reservoir of the virus.

LPG supply crunch lingers

FROM PAGE 12

26,000 tonnes were imported."

He added that consignments of large-scale importers such as Meghna Fresh LPG, Omera LPG, and United Aygaz LPG are expected to increase this month. "The issue is related to business entities, but we still hope that the market will be stable before Ramadan."

This correspondent spoke to eight retail shops owners in the capital's Banasree, Mirpur, Tejgaon, and Dhanmondi areas over the past three days, and found that a 12-kg LPG cylinder was being sold at between Tk 1,800 and Tk 2,000. BERC fixed the rate at Tk 1,356 per cylinder for February -- Tk 50 higher than last month.

However, the scarcity was less severe than in January, as none of the retailers refused to sell LPG cylinders yesterday, which had been a common scenario throughout the previous month.

To ease the situation, the government had taken several initiatives, such as reducing value-added tax at different stages of LPG importing and bottling, as well as exempting advance income tax.

Moreover, the government announced it would facilitate LPG imports by easing the process of opening letters of credit (LCs) and withdrawing the import cap for companies.

An importer, wishing to remain anonymous, told this newspaper that the situation became complicated after the energy division allowed the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) to import LPG on its own last month.

He added that the state-owned company has no distribution mechanism and was supposed to distribute the imported LPG through private entities. "As a result, some companies waited for BPC's consignments, and this discouraged them from importing."

However, BPC is yet to begin imports.

Its officials said they have received approval for imports but are now trying to procure LPG and have contacted different global suppliers. After receiving price quotations, it will take more time to negotiate and complete the imports.

"We are trying our best to increase imports, and the situation may ease before Ramadan if the crisis in the Middle East is resolved," said Mohammed Amirul Haque, president of the LPG Operators Association of Bangladesh.

He refused to comment on the increased prices, saying that the operators had not raised prices. "It's the law enforcement agencies who can easily identify who have increased prices. We urge them to intervene."

Subrata Bain's aide held

FROM PAGE 12

yesterday, confirmed Sub-Inspector Sumon Mia, the investigation officer.

According to the first information report, the arrestee admitted during primary interrogation to his involvement in the illegal arms trade in the Badda and Bhatara areas.

The FIR adds that in addition to the arms and ammunition, the joint forces recovered a broken van from a nearby rickshaw garage.

The seized weapons include 11 foreign-made sophisticated firearms -- revolvers and pistols manufactured in the USA, China, Turkey, and Germany; an automatic .22 calibre AK rifle; and two air guns.

Law enforcers also recovered 394 rounds of ammunition, including shotgun cartridges and bullets for .22 bore, 7.65mm, and 9mm weapons.

Other items seized include three Chinese axes, a large knife, two walkie-talkies, a pair of binoculars, and electronic devices.

According to police, Dipu is accused in multiple cases filed with Badda and Hatirjheel police stations in 2019 and 2024, on charges of murder, extortion, and unlawful assembly.

Meanwhile, the Bosila Army Camp arrested Md Jahirul Islam, 44, with two firearms in the capital's Mohammadpur area early yesterday.

Two USA-made 7.65mm pistols, six bullets, and two magazines were recovered from his residence and office.

BNP's trillion-dollar ambition

FROM PAGE 1

investment, the necessary economic transformation would be a long-haul journey.

Another key pledge is to double the tax-to-GDP ratio to 15 percent -- a goal that has eluded previous governments. Currently, Bangladesh's ratio languishes below 7 percent, one of the lowest in the world. Achieving such an increase would require profound reforms in tax policy, compliance, and administrative capacity, raising the question of whether the BNP, if elected, could succeed where others have not.

The manifesto coincides with Bangladesh's impending graduation from least developed country (LDC) status in November. This milestone means the nation will soon lose the duty-free market access and concessional loans that have long buoyed its economy. The aim is to transform these fading external privileges into permanent domestic strength by forging an industrial base robust enough to survive in the open global competition even without LDC benefits. This involves a suite of policies designed to overhaul the export sector by enforcing rigorous quality controls and developing new products for diversified markets.

A powerful political message runs through the manifesto: the "democratisation of the economy." The party frames this as the key to unlocking the productivity needed for faster economic growth. It promises a shift away from an economy shaped by "special privileges for specific groups" -- a direct criticism of the current crony-capitalist structure -- toward a system powered by ordinary citizens.

The manifesto assumes that dismantling "oligarchic" structures and creating a more level playing field would unleash entrepreneurship and innovation, widen the tax base, and produce a more resilient and diversified economy. It is an attempt to merge fairness with efficiency, suggesting that economic justice and growth can go hand in hand.

Yet this argument has a core vulnerability. These powerful groups control significant portions of capital. A sudden or aggressive restructuring could trigger capital flight and tighten credit, undermining the manifesto's parallel goal of boosting private investment and sustaining high growth.

Notably, the party intends to shift the economic model from debt-driven growth to investment-led expansion, where private investment would become the main engine of employment and wealth creation.

The strategy clearly depends on attracting strong foreign direct investment to finance major infrastructure expansion -- including energy projects, transport networks, and potentially high-speed rail. "Efforts will be made to raise foreign direct investment from 0.45 percent to 2.5 percent of GDP," the BNP said.

"The main problem is financing and implementation," said Professor Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

SUSTAINING BALANCE

The BNP promises to create 10 million new jobs, including one million in the ICT sector, particularly in fields such as artificial intelligence and cybersecurity. The plan for technology jobs signals a determination to move beyond labour-intensive garment manufacturing.

"Prioritising job creation and e-commerce is a sound approach," said M Masrur Reaz, chairman and CEO of Policy Exchange Bangladesh.

The party proposes to take combined allocations for health and education to 10 percent of GDP from 2.5 percent now, alongside expanded welfare programmes, including direct cash transfers. While socially appealing, these commitments raise concerns about fiscal sustainability. Without rapid growth in revenue, there is a risk of widening deficits and fiscal stress.

Masrur Reaz said that the plan acknowledges Bangladesh's current economic vulnerabilities, but does not clearly explain how it will address key macroeconomic challenges, particularly high inflation, a fragile balance of payments, and foreign exchange pressures.

The manifesto also sketches a cautious geopolitical vision. It highlights the development of a "Blue Economy" and expanded regional connectivity, alongside ambitions to position Bangladesh as an aviation hub for South and Southeast Asia. For that ambition, the BNP will confront current infrastructure limitations, including congestion at the country's main airport.

What the BNP has successfully done is shift political debate from street politics to spreadsheets. The manifesto offers a sharp critique of the present and a bold -- though at times internally strained -- outline of an alternative future. It correctly identifies a structural turning point Bangladesh faces as it exits the least developed country status.

The challenge for the BNP is not in defining ambition, but in sustaining balance. If the party can expand investment, grow revenues, and deliver social equity without triggering fiscal stress, the transformation could be significant. But if these competing pressures collide, the trillion-dollar dream will be overwhelmed by economic strain. The ambition has been declared. If entrusted with power this week, the BNP will have to ensure that the vision survives the weight of its own promises.

Ultimately, without adequate financing, the entire vision will prove fragile. The promise of a "just state" and a "trillion-dollar economy" is presented as mutually reinforcing, yet the two goals could strain the same fiscal space. As Prof Mustafizur observed, success will depend on whether the party has fully prepared the detailed framework needed to implement such reforms.

Takaichi talks tough on immigration on eve of vote

AFP, *Tokyo*

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi yesterday pledged to make Japan "more prosperous and safer", including through tougher immigration screening, in a final appeal to voters on the eve of snap elections.

Opinion polls suggest that Takaichi's ruling bloc, led by the Liberal Democratic Party, could romp home in Sunday's vote and secure a two-thirds majority in the powerful lower house.

"Pushing the button for growth is the Takaichi cabinet's job. Japan will become more and more prosperous and safer," Takaichi, 64, told a campaign rally attended by thousands in Tokyo.

"This is the year in which we want to turn the anxieties people feel about their lives today and about the future into hope," she said.

The arch-conservative Takaichi, a heavy metal drummer in her youth and an admirer of Margaret Thatcher, became Japan's fifth premier in as many years in October.

This followed a string of calamitous elections for the once-mighty Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), leaving it short of a majority in both houses of parliament.

With ordinary Japanese, especially younger ones, Takaichi has enjoyed sky-high popularity ratings, becoming something of a fashion icon and a hit on social media.

Ctg port workers resume indefinite strike

FROM PAGE 1

requesting the authorities, including the Anti-Corruption Commission, to investigate the assets of the 15 employees and impose a travel ban on them as they have indulged in anti-state acts like creating chaos at the port in the name of movement.

By issuing the letter, CPA Chairman M Moniruzzaman had provoked the protesters again, said leaders of the Chattogram Bandar Rakkha Parishad at a press conference yesterday.

"We believe that this Moniruzzaman, left behind by the ousted Awami League government, wants to create instability at the port at this critical juncture of the country in an attempt to put the state and the government in a difficult position and thereby sabotage the upcoming elections," said Parishad Coordinator Md Humayun Kabir while reading out a written statement.

Terming the port chairman a close aide of the AL leader Mahbubul Hoque Hanif and former prime minister Sheikh Hasina's son Sajeeb Wazed Joy, he demanded an investigation into the Tk 500 crore corruption allegations in ship procurement during Moniruzzaman's tenure as the managing director of the Bangladesh Shipping Corporation.

He also expressed frustration that the shipping adviser did not take any steps despite assuring them that he would discuss the New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT) deal issue with the government's higher authorities and get back to them by Saturday.

In this situation, he vowed to enforce an all-out indefinite strike at the port until their four demands are met, including the cancellation of the proposed deal with the UAE-based DP World over the lease of NCT.

Their other demands include dismissal of the port chairman, withdrawal of punitive actions against the 15 employees and reinstating them in their previous posts, and assurance that no legal steps would be taken against them.

Moniruzzaman and Sakhawat could not be reached for comment despite several attempts.

Meanwhile, CPA called an emergency meeting with employees and workers from different departments at 9:30am today.

According to an official letter signed by the CPA secretary, the heads of different departments were asked to ensure the presence of around 200 officials and staff at the meeting, while the chief welfare officer was asked to ensure the presence of 100 port enlisted workers from various categories.

However, leaders of different employees and workers' organisations expressed unwillingness to attend the meeting.

The authority's recent actions have eroded trust and now it is inviting selective employees and workers in a bid to create division among the protesters, Humayun said.

Mentioning that they have declined to attend the meeting, he said they urged all the workers and employees not to attend.

"The CPA should stop the harassment and retract the move to lease out NCT to a foreign operator -- only then would we attend any meeting," said Ibrahim Khokan, general secretary of Bandar Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal and a leader of Parishad.

Port's busiest weekends

Following the postponement of the work stoppage on Thursday afternoon, the port faced huge workloads as businesses rushed for quick clearance of imports and export shipments.

A record 26 inbound and outgoing vessels took berths and sailed out on a single day. In the last two days, the private off-docks (ICDs) transferred around 5,000 TEUs of export containers to the port and brought more than 1,000 TEUs of imports from the port.

The ICDs were still lying with a huge pile up of more than 13,000 TEUs of exports until yesterday evening.

The direct and indirect damage caused by the port problem is significant and it cannot be allowed to continue for long, said Showkat Aziz Russell, president of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association.

The government should take immediate action to resolve the impasse in the port, he said, adding that one of his buyers suspended his scheduled visit to Bangladesh because of the current situation of the country.

The international clothing retailers and brands that source garment items from Bangladesh are very concerned as they are worried about the timely delivery due to the Chattogram port impasse, said Faisal Samad, director of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

Lives hang in balance when inmates fall ill

FROM PAGE 12

more died in custody in January this year, according to media reports.

In 2023, during Awami League rule, 290 inmate deaths were recorded, with 187 dying during treatment, 101 on the way to hospital, and two by suicide.

Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, said torture, deprivation of rights, and deaths in custody had taken an extreme form over the past 15 years.

"There had been an expectation of improvement after the fall of the previous government, but the situation continues."

He attributed this to a long-standing practice that persists even when individuals change, and to the link between custodial deaths and justice and state reform, which he described as a core responsibility of the post-fall government, alongside justice and elections.

"Questions have arisen over how much justice is being delivered and how much is being driven by vengeance, which is reflected in the deaths in custody."

'NEGLIGENCE'

Babul Hossain, an elected member of Ward-3 of Garpara Union in Manikganj Sadar upazila, died at Manikganj Sadar Hospital while undergoing treatment on July 23 last year.

At the time, Sadar Police Station Officer-in-Charge SM Aman Ullah said Babul was an accused in a case over the burning of artist Manabendra Ghosh's house in Garpara and had been in Manikganj district jail for four months.

Speaking to The Daily Star on January 25, Babul's brother-in-law Md Nazrul Islam claimed that "some anti-Awami League people" took Babul, general secretary of the AL ward unit, and handed him over to the police.

Nazrul alleged that Babul, who regularly took heart medication and suffered from other illnesses, did not receive proper treatment in jail.

He said they had secured bail three days earlier, but Babul was not released as the bail papers did not arrive. Nazrul also said the family was not informed that Babul had been sent to the district hospital, and that if there had been separate medical arrangements inside the jail, he would have survived.

Manikganj Jail Superintendent Mohammad Humayun Kabir Khan rejected the allegations of negligence, saying anyone who falls ill is first treated at the jail hospital and, if their condition worsens, taken to the district hospital. "The same happened in Babul Hossain's case," he said.

In Riazul's case, Siddik said police went to his house in Brahamgaon village of Purbabirgaon union and took him to the police station, although there was no specific allegations against him at the time. He said Riazul was later shown to be arrested in a case over setting fire to a tyre and was sent to jail through the court on Eid day.

The family was informed two days later that Riazul had fallen ill and been admitted to hospital, Siddik said.

Deaths in prison custody are often attributed to "illness" or "natural causes", but the absence of independent investigations and autopsies can leave the real reasons unclear, and those responsible rarely face effective action.

An official at the Department of Prisons, requesting anonymity, said doctors are not available in prisons at night and some jails do not have ambulances, making it difficult to transfer critically ill inmates quickly. In some cases, inmates die on the way.

Out of the 75 prisons across the country, only Manikganj jail and the Rajshahi training centre have round-the-clock doctors, while the remaining 73 are served by part-time physicians from civil surgeon offices, prison authorities said.

Jail officials said nurses are available at 60 prisons. In the remaining jails, guards trained in medical care perform nursing duties.

Although all prisons are supposed to have ambulances, only 27 do. In other prisons, sick inmates are taken to hospital in hired vehicles.

Nur Khan Liton, a human rights activist, said he learned of extremely inadequate facilities inside prisons -- particularly in medical care -- after speaking to several individuals recently released from jail.

He also cited poor-quality food, overcrowding, and allegations that many detainees are beaten at the time of arrest, saying the situation is deteriorating and the death rate is gradually increasing.

"The state must ensure detainees receive the services they are entitled to," he said.

Brig Gen Syed Md Motaher Hossain, inspector general of the Prisons Directorate, told The Daily Star on January 26 that no death in custody is acceptable or desirable, and that authorities investigate every custodial death to determine the cause and punish negligence.

He said 270 deaths in prison in a year is a "large number", but a significant portion occurred while inmates were under treatment, meaning they were taken to hospitals and received medical care.

He acknowledged shortages of doctors and ambulances and said such limitations affect the level of support prisons can provide, but authorities offer as much assistance as possible.

Asked about examples of punishment, he cited disciplinary action against a diploma nurse who arrived 10 to 15 minutes late during a late-night incident. The nurse was dismissed, a departmental case was filed, and the punishment process is ongoing.

He also said post-mortems are conducted and the reports clearly state the causes of death.

Trump refuses to apologise

FROM PAGE 12

video promoting conspiracies about Republican Trump's 2020 election loss to Joe Biden, the Obamas were shown with their faces on the bodies of monkeys for about one second.

The video, uploaded late Thursday amid a flurry of other posts, repeated false allegations that ballot-counting company Dominion Voting Systems helped steal the election from Trump.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt initially played down the row, saying the images were "from an internet meme video depicting President Trump as the King of the Jungle and Democrats as characters from The Lion King."

"Please stop the fake outrage and report on something today that actually matters to the American public," Leavitt said in a statement to AFP.

But almost exactly 12 hours after the post appeared on Trump's account there was an unusual concession from an administration that normally refuses to admit the slightest mistake.

"A White House staffer erroneously made the post. It has been taken down," a White House official told AFP.

Speaking to reporters on board Air Force One on Friday, Trump stood by the thrust of the video's claims about election fraud, but said he had not seen the offensive clip.

"I just looked at the first part... and I didn't see the whole thing," Trump said, adding that he "gave it" to staffers to post and they also didn't watch the full video.

There was no immediate comment from the Obamas.

Polls results unlikely

FROM PAGE 12

Meanwhile, Mohammad Aslam Molla, Kishoreganj returning officer (RO) and deputy commissioner, through a circular on February 5 requested the contesting candidates and their agents for six constituencies be present at 10:00am on February 13 for the announcement of election results.

Later that day, he issued a revised circular asking candidates and agents to be present at his office as soon as the unofficial results are available, without mentioning any specific time.

Election Commission's Senior Secretary Akhtar Ahmed had earlier flagged the issue of delays in ballot counting.

On average, one polling centre will serve around 3,000 voters.

Even after the counting is completed at the centre level, the final tabulation at the returning officer's office could take longer.

"In some centres, voters from five or six areas will cast ballots together. If a returning officer oversees multiple constituencies, delays may increase further," Akhtar said.

Asked how much time the process might take, he said: "It depends on how many ballots are returned. Predicting in advance is very difficult."

A total of 2,017 candidates are contesting across 300 constituencies for the February 12 polls. The number of registered voters stands at 127.7 million.

On January 28, the EC added 18 polling centres, raising the total to 2,779. It also increased the number of polling booths by 2,743, bringing the figure to 247,482.

Ex-minister

FROM PAGE 12

son, who is currently on the run after the political changeover.

During his cremation yesterday, Anjali performed the ritual of lighting the funeral pyre.

The Daily Star spoke to two relatives of Ramesh by phone yesterday. Seeking anonymity, both alleged he was arrested in false and fabricated cases and died due to a lack of proper medical treatment.

They also claimed that close family members were not allowed to meet him in jail.

When contacted, Forhad denied the allegations, telling The Daily Star that relatives had visited Ramesh as per jail code and that treatment was provided by the jail physician.

Replying to a query, he said he joined the jail last November and, since then, had not received any medical advice indicating that Ramesh required specialised treatment, although he acknowledged that Ramesh had been suffering from various ailments, including renal complications.

Pollution, traffic woes

FROM PAGE 3

Candidates are holding street meetings, meeting voters and promising development.

Amir Hossain, a resident of Bhakurta union, told The Daily Star, "Processions are held on the streets; candidates are asking for votes. Previously, supporters would visit homes to seek votes on behalf of the candidates. This time, no one has come to our houses yet."

He added that voters appear enthusiastic. "BNP, Jamaat and Islami Andolan -- everyone is campaigning in their own way. So far, I haven't heard of any clashes or violence over the election."

Three candidates are contesting the Dhaka-2 seat: Aman Ullah Aman of BNP, Md Abdul Haq of Jamaat-e-Islami, and Md Johirul Islam of Islami Andolan Bangladesh.

Jamaat candidate Abdul Haq said public frustration with corruption, extortion, drug trade and abuse of power has created space for an alternative.

"People are fed up with the misdeeds of one party," he said. "That's why support for Jamaat-e-Islami is growing."

If elected, he pledged to focus on five priorities: stopping corruption and extortion, eliminating the drug trade, ending political harassment and false cases, fostering social harmony beyond political or religious divisions, and ensuring a modern education system.

Raising allegations of threats against BNP activists, he called upon voters to remain vigilant and vote against injustice.

Md Johirul Islam, contesting with the "Hatpakha" symbol of IAB, claimed he is getting an overwhelming public response during his campaigns.

"People want healthy, new politics instead of long-standing tainted politics," he said.

He added that Islami Andolan's message of equality and dignity has resonated strongly with women voters, and that the party has Shariah-based modern plans for youth employment and women's development.

He also alleged intimidation by BNP activists.

BNP candidate Aman Ullah Aman, a former student leader, has been elected four times from this constituency.

He said development work carried out during his previous terms has created a strong wave for BNP and the "Sheaf of Paddy" symbol.

If elected again, he promised to turn Dhaka-2 into a modern, planned city.

"I have five main promises -- making the area free from crime, extortion, and illegal occupation; improving connectivity with Dhaka; building a modern drainage system to prevent waterlogging; ensuring fast gas connections to areas that still lack them; and launching a modern water and sewerage system through Wasa," Aman Ullah Aman told The Daily Star.

Responding to allegations from his rivals, Aman dismissed the claims.

"I have been contesting elections here since 1991. I have never threatened or criticised any opponent," he said. "My campaign is being conducted in line with the code of conduct."

He urged voters to go to polling centres without fear on February 12 and vote for BNP to build a peaceful and planned Keraniganj.

Following boundary redrawing, the constituency now has 4,19,215 voters -- 2,17,908 men, 2,01,298 women, and nine hijra voters. In the previous election, the voter count stood at 5,58,954.

Will focus only on

FROM PAGE 2

improve the living standards of workers, saying that they live in inhumane conditions without adequate access to education and healthcare.

Addressing tea workers, he said, "You cannot look at the faces of these people without pain. Men and women do backbreaking work. Yet they lack education and healthcare. The state must take responsibility for them." "No child in tea estates would be deprived of education if Jamaat comes to power," he added.

He also said Jamaat lawmakers would not accept tax-free vehicles or subsidised flats. "If necessary, we will ride rickshaws."

"The income and expenditure statements of Jamaat's elected representatives and their family members will be made public," he added. "No one will be spared if they misuse public wealth."

Referring to the Liberation War, he said people sacrificed their lives for a discrimination-free country, but inequality has persisted under dishonest politics.

He also stressed religious harmony, saying Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Christians have lived together in the country for generations and that Bangladesh must not be divided again.

Later in the afternoon, he addressed a rally in Moulvibazar's Kulaura upazila, his birthplace.

At the rally, he said, "This vote reflects the aspirations of the fighters of 24 [July uprising]. People from Teknaf to Tetulia want change. There will be no corruption or extortion in the Bangladesh we envision."

Shafiqur said the country should be entrusted to the youth, crediting them for creating political space during the July movement.

"Before August 5, we had no opportunity to hold meetings or express our views. It was the youth who created that space," he said, recalling martyrs Abu Sayed and Sharif Osman Bin Hadi.

He said he had been requested to contest from Kulaura but could not due to party policy.

[Our correspondents from Sylhet and Moulvibazar contributed to the report.]

Govt steadies ship

FROM PAGE 2

Private sector growth had slowed to 6.2 percent, while implementation of the annual development programme stood at just 17.28 percent in six months, said Anwar-Ul-Alam Chowdhury (Parvez), president of the Bangladesh Chamber of Industries.

He alleged that advisers relied excessively on bureaucrats, often without understanding the real-world impact of policy decisions.

"They thought they knew everything," he said, adding that access to decision-makers was limited and engagement with businesses remained weak.

Public expectations after August 2024 were that social polarisation would decline and that a culture of open debate would emerge, said Rounaq Jahan, a political scientist.

"That did not happen," she said.

While people are now speaking more openly, they are increasingly being labelled or targeted, creating a climate of fear.

She cited attacks on cultural and media institutions such as Prothom Alo, The Daily Star, Udichi and Chhayanaut as examples of shrinking civic safety.

Jahan criticised the interim government for attempting too many ambitious reforms without sufficient consensus, particularly constitutional changes, while neglecting electoral preparation.

"Given the history of controversial elections, ensuring a credible next election should have been the priority," she said.

The interim period coincided with rising regional and global instability, including uncertainties over water sharing with India and trade disruptions under the Trump administration in the US, said M Humayun Kabir, president of the Bangladesh Enterprise Institute.

While political parties mentioned geopolitics in their manifestos, concrete strategies were lacking.

Kabir welcomed Bangladesh's economic partnership agreement with Japan, calling it a "bold step", but criticised the interim government for failing to build strong institutional coordination across foreign affairs and commerce ministries.

The interim government managed two critical challenges: halting macroeconomic decline and navigating a sensitive geopolitical environment, said Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairman of PPRC, who moderated the dialogue.

However, he warned that stability without transparency and social accountability could not deliver lasting change.

"The bureaucracy has further strengthened its grip over society, reflecting a continuation of colonial mindsets," he said.

Rahman stressed that elections alone would not resolve systemic problems but could serve as a catalyst for rebuilding political dialogue and trust between parties and citizens.

49% candidates

FROM PAGE 3

Proportionally, business candidates make up 60 percent of Gono Odhikar Parishad nominees, 46 percent of Insaniyat Bangladesh, 44 percent of Khelafat Majlish, 43 percent of Islami Andolon Bangladesh (IAB), and 30 percent of Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) candidates.

Outside business, teachers form the next largest professional group, with 240 candidates, followed by lawyers (229) and salaried employees (133).

Thirteen homemakers are also contesting the election.

The data show a high concentration of wealth among candidates.

Shujan reported that 554 candidates have assets exceeding Tk 50 million, while 1,127 have declared assets worth more than Tk 10 million.

The BNP leads with 276 millionaire candidates, followed by Jamaat with 178.

Income figures showed that nearly half of all candidates are low earners.

A total of 832 candidates (41 percent) reported annual incomes below Tk 5,00,000.

Another 741 earn between Tk 5,00,000 and Tk 2.5 million, 132 between Tk 2.5 million and Tk 5 million, and 71 between Tk 5 million and Tk 10 million.

At the top end, 95 candidates earn more than Tk 10 million annually. BNP candidates dominate this group with 51, followed by 25 independents and five Jatiya Party nominees.

Compared with the previous election, the proportion of candidates earning over Tk 10 million and under Tk 5,00,000 has declined slightly -- from 8.77 percent and 45 percent to 4.59 percent and 41 percent, respectively.

Addressing the press conference, Shujan Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar said analyses of winners from the last three national elections and several local government polls show a consistent trend: those who gain power experience sharp rises in income and assets, while those who lose or remain outside power see stagnation or decline. "Political power functions like a magic wand," he said, adding that politics has increasingly become a business.

Debt levels among candidates are also notable. Of the 2,026 candidates, 519 have outstanding loans, with 75 owing more than Tk 50 million. The BNP has the highest number of indebted candidates -- 167 in total, 44 of whom owe over Tk 50 million.

IAB has 40 indebted candidates, three of whom owe over Tk 50 million; Jamaat has 54, including four above that threshold; and the NCP has seven.

Education levels among candidates have risen. This year, 70 percent hold undergraduate, postgraduate, or PhD degrees, up from just over 59 percent in the 12th election. Highly educated candidates account for 77.58 percent of BNP nominees, 89.43 percent of Jamaat, 71.48 percent of IAB, and 84.39 percent of the NCP.

Age-wise, most candidates fall between 50 and 70 years (45 percent). Those aged 35–50 make up 34.4 percent, under-35s account for 8 percent, and candidates over 70 comprise 7 percent.

Shujan noted that younger candidates are more common in the NCP, Insaniyat Biplob Bangladesh, and Gono Odhikar Parishad, while the BNP and Jamaat tend to nominate older candidates.

54 years on, foreign

FROM PAGE 2

disabled. Our hope, goal and objective were to establish equality, human dignity and justice. But due to corruption by those who ruled the country over the years, we were branded as thieves five times," he said.

He alleged that foreign agendas had been implemented in an independent country and questioned what steps could be taken to change the situation.

Referring to the July uprising, he said they had wanted to turn the country into a "golden land" through the movement.

Presiding over the rally, Bukhari said efforts must be made to protect people from being deceived by foreigners and free the society from extortion.

The Charmonai Pir said Islam would stand strong and proud in a country where children wake up to the sound of the azaan, adding that the present time was a great opportunity.

Speaking about alliances with Islamic parties, he said a group of people with vested interests and power-hungry people had started working under different blueprints to destroy their hopes and goals. Later, they announced that the state would not be run under Islamic rules but under the existing laws.

"If the country continues to be governed under the existing laws, what new gift can those who ruled for 54 years offer us now?" he questioned.

"We are not alone. Allah is with us and the ulema are in front of us," he further added.

After the programme, he left Patuakhali for Baufal, Dashmina, Galachipa, Rangabali and Kalapara to attend more campaign rallies.

Planning agro

FROM PAGE 2

"We seek your cooperation and support, and we ask for your votes for the sheaf of paddy."

He added that public support is essential to implement the plans presented before the audience for the welfare of the country and its citizens.

Tarique also pledged the introduction of a family card and the waiver of agricultural loans of up to Tk 10,000 and said the government would repay small loans on behalf of borrowers if it comes to power.

He further assured the modernisation of Thakurgaon Sugar Mill and the reopening of Panchagarh Sugar Mill, alongside the establishment of a medical college and a public university in Thakurgaon.

Reiterating that the election is not merely about electing public representatives, he said it is an election to restore the rights lost by the people over the past decade and to rebuild the country.

The rally, presided over by Thakurgaon district BNP President Mirza Faisal Amin, was also addressed by BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and BNP Rangpur divisional Organising Secretary Asadul Habib Dulu, among others.

Earlier, Tarique left Dhaka for Saidpur on a Biman Bangladesh Airlines flight at 10:05am and later travelled to Thakurgaon by helicopter.

Following the rally at Thakurgaon, he flew to Nilphamari to address another programme.

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
সড়ক পরিবহন ও মহাসড়ক বিভাগ
ঢাকা ম্যাস ট্রানজিট কোম্পানি লিমিটেড
(মার্কেটিং শাখা)
মেট্রোরেল ভবন, এমআরটি লাইন-৬ ডিপো
সোনারগাঁও জনপথ, সেক্টর: ১৫-১৬, দিয়াবাড়ি, উত্তরা, ঢাকা-১২৩০
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স্মারক নং: ৩৫.০৫.০০০০.০০০.০৪০.১৮.০০২৯.২৫-৫৪ তারিখ: ২২ মাঘ ১৪৩২ বঙ্গাব্দ / ০৫ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০২৬ খ্রিস্টাব্দ

ঢাকা ম্যাস ট্রানজিট কোম্পানি লিমিটেড (ডিএমটিসিএল)-এর আওতায় পরিচালনা ও রক্ষণাবেক্ষণাধীন এমআরটি লাইন-৬ এর উত্তরা উত্তর, উত্তরা সেন্টার ও উত্তরা দক্ষিণ মেট্রোরেল স্টেশনের গ্রাউন্ড লেভেলে ডিএমটিসিএল-এর নিজস্ব জমিতে কার/মোটরসাইকেল/বাইসাইকেল পার্কিং স্ট্যান্ড স্থাপনের জন্য ভাড়া/ইজারা বিজ্ঞপ্তির বিপরীতে আবেদনপত্র সংগ্রহ, দাখিল ও উন্মুক্তকরণের সময়সীমা বৃদ্ধি

ঢাকা ম্যাস ট্রানজিট কোম্পানি লিমিটেড (ডিএমটিসিএল)-এর আওতায় পরিচালনা ও রক্ষণাবেক্ষণাধীন এমআরটি লাইন-৬ এর উত্তরা উত্তর, উত্তরা সেন্টার ও উত্তরা দক্ষিণ মেট্রোরেল স্টেশনের গ্রাউন্ড লেভেলে ডিএমটিসিএল এর নিজস্ব জমিতে কার/মোটরসাইকেল/বাইসাইকেল পার্কিং স্ট্যান্ড স্থাপনের জন্য নির্ধারিত স্পেস **"ঢাকা ম্যাস ট্রানজিট কোম্পানি লিমিটেড (ডিএমটিসিএল)-এর বাণিজ্যিক স্পেস ভাড়া/ইজারা নীতিমালা ২০২৩ (১ম সংশোধনীসহ)"** অনুযায়ী ভাড়া/ইজারা প্রদানের লক্ষ্যে ০৭ জানুয়ারি ২০২৬ তারিখের স্মারক নং: ৩৫.০৫.০০০০.০০০.০৪০.১৮.০০২৯.২৫-১১২ সংখ্যক স্মারকে ০৮ জানুয়ারি ২০২৬ তারিখে দৈনিক বাংলাদেশ প্রতিদিন ও The Daily Star পত্রিকা এবং ঢাকা ম্যাস ট্রানজিট কোম্পানি লিমিটেড (ডিএমটিসিএল)-এর ওয়েবসাইটে ভাড়া বিজ্ঞপ্তি প্রকাশিত হয়। গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকারের নির্বাহী আদেশে আগামী ১১ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০২৬ তারিখ বিশেষ ছুটি ঘোষণা এবং ১২ ফেব্রুয়ারি তারিখে আসন্ন ত্রয়োদশ জাতীয় সংসদ নির্বাচন অনুষ্ঠিত হওয়ায় পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে আবেদনপত্র সংগ্রহের সময়সীমা ১০ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০২৬ তারিখের পরিবর্তে ২৪ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০২৬ তারিখ এবং আবেদনপত্র দাখিল ও উন্মুক্তকরণের সময়সীমা ১১ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০২৬ তারিখের পরিবর্তে ২৫ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০২৬ তারিখ নির্ধারণপূর্বক বর্ধিত করা হলো।

(এ, কে, এম, খায়রুল আলম)
পরিচালক (প্রশাসন)
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GD-273

বাংলাদেশ চিকিৎসা গবেষণা পরিষদ (বিএমআরসি)
বিএমআরসি ভবন, মহাখালী, ঢাকা-১২১২

স্মারক নং-বিএমআরসি/নিয়োগ/২০২৬/৬১৯ তারিখঃ ০৫/০২/২০২৬ইং

নিয়োগ বিজ্ঞপ্তি

বাংলাদেশ চিকিৎসা গবেষণা পরিষদ (বিএমআরসি)-এর নিম্নবর্নিত শূন্য পদ সমূহে লোক নিয়োগের লক্ষ্যে বাংলাদেশের প্রকৃত নাগরিকদের নিকট হতে দরখাস্ত আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে।

ক্রমিক নং	পদের নাম	পদের সংখ্যা	বেতনস্কেল (জাতীয় বেতনস্কেল-২০১৫)	বয়স (১২/০৩/২৬ইং)	শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা ও অভিজ্ঞতা
(১)	(২)	(৩)	(৪)	(৫)	(৬)
১।	বৈজ্ঞানিক কর্মকর্তা	০২ (দুই) টি	২২০০০-৫৩০৬০/- (গ্রেড-০৯)	অনূর্ধ্ব ৩২ বৎসর	(ক) বাংলাদেশ মেডিকেল এন্ড ডেন্টাল কাউন্সিল কর্তৃক স্বীকৃত এবং অনুমোদিত শিক্ষা প্রতিষ্ঠান হতে এমবিবিএস বা বিডিএস ডিগ্রী অথবা (খ) কোন স্বীকৃত বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় হতে বায়োলজিক্যাল সাইন্স/পরিসংখ্যানে স্নাতকোত্তর ডিগ্রী। (গ) এমপিএইচ অথবা গবেষণা কাজে ন্যূনতম ৩ বৎসরের কাজের অভিজ্ঞতাসম্পন্ন ব্যক্তিদের অগ্রাধিকার দেওয়া হবে।

প্রার্থীদের জন্য পালনীয় শর্তাবলী ও জ্ঞাতব্য বিষয় সমূহঃ

১। উল্লিখিত পদে আবেদনকারীগণকে সাদা কাগজে **"পরিচালক (ভারপ্রাপ্ত), বাংলাদেশ চিকিৎসা গবেষণা পরিষদ (বিএমআরসি), বিএমআরসি ভবন, মহাখালী, ঢাকা-১২১২"** বরাবর আবেদন করতে হবে।

২। আবেদনপত্রে আবেদনকারীর পূর্ণ জীবন বৃত্তান্ত যথাঃ (ক) প্রার্থীর পূর্ণ নাম বাংলায় ও ইংরেজীতে (Capital Letter), (খ) পিতা/স্বামীর নাম, (গ) মাতার নাম, (ঘ) পদের নাম, (ঙ) স্থায়ী ঠিকানা, (চ) বর্তমান ঠিকানা, (ছ) জন্ম তারিখ, (জ) ১২/০৩/২০২৬ইং তারিখে বয়স, (ঝ) ধর্ম, (ঞ) জাতীয়তা, (ট) শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা, (ঠ) অভিজ্ঞতার বিবরণ, (ড) জাতীয় পরিচয় পত্রের নম্বর, (ঢ) ব্যাংক ড্রাফট/পে-অর্ডার নম্বর এবং (ণ) ই-মেইল এড্রেস ও মোবাইল/ফোন নম্বর উল্লেখ করতে হবে। আবেদনপত্রে অবশ্যই প্রার্থীর স্বাক্ষর থাকতে হবে এবং প্রত্যেকটি ছবির পেছনে প্রার্থীর নাম থাকা আবশ্যক।

৩। প্রার্থীগণকে আবেদনপত্রের সাথে (ক) প্রথম শ্রেণীর গেজেটেড কর্মকর্তা কর্তৃক শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা ও অভিজ্ঞতার সকল সনদপত্রের সত্যায়িত অনুলিপি, (খ) প্রথম শ্রেণীর গেজেটেড কর্মকর্তা কর্তৃক প্রদত্ত চারিত্রিক সনদপত্র, (গ) ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ চেয়ারম্যান/পৌরসভার চেয়ারম্যান/ওয়ার্ড কাউন্সিলরের নিকট হতে নাগরিকত্বের সনদপত্র, (ঘ) প্রথম শ্রেণীর গেজেটেড কর্মকর্তা কর্তৃক সত্যায়িত সদ্য তোলা ০৩ (তিন) কপি পাসপোর্ট সাইজের রঙিন ছবি এবং জাতীয় পরিচয় পত্রের সত্যায়িত অনুলিপি সংযুক্ত করতে হবে।

৪। কোন বোর্ড বা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের অধীন কোন পরীক্ষায় ৩য় বিভাগ/শ্রেণি বা সমমানের গ্রেড প্রাপ্ত আবেদনকারীর আবেদন গ্রহণযোগ্য নয়।

৫। শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা থাকার ক্ষেত্রে সংশ্লিষ্ট পরীক্ষায় অ্যাপিয়ার্ড প্রার্থীগণের আবেদন বিবেচনা করা হবে না।

৬। চাকুরীতে নিয়োজিত অথবা বিভাগীয় প্রার্থীদেরকে অবশ্যই স্ব স্ব নিয়োগকারী কর্তৃপক্ষের মাধ্যমে আবেদন করতে হবে। আবেদনপত্রের কোন অগ্রিম কপি গ্রহণযোগ্য হবে না।

৭। আবেদনকারীকে খামের উপর পদের নাম ও নিজ জেলার নাম অবশ্যই উল্লেখ করতে হবে।

৮। কোটার সমর্থনে মুক্তিযোদ্ধা, শহিদ মুক্তিযোদ্ধা ও বীরঙ্গনার সন্তান, ক্ষুদ্র নৃ-গোষ্ঠী এবং শারীরিক প্রতিবন্ধী ও তৃতীয় লিঙ্গের প্রার্থীদের সর্বশেষ সরকারি নীতিমালা অনুযায়ী উপযুক্ত কর্তৃপক্ষ কর্তৃক প্রদত্ত সনদপত্রের সত্যায়িত কপি আবেদনপত্রের সাথে জমা দিতে হবে।

৯। এসএসসি বা সমমানের পরীক্ষার সনদের ভিত্তিতে প্রার্থীর বয়সসীমা নির্ধারিত হবে।

১০। নিয়োগকৃত কর্মকর্তা-কর্মচারী বাংলাদেশ চিকিৎসা গবেষণা পরিষদ (বিএমআরসি) এর কর্মচারী চাকরি প্রবিধানমালা অনুযায়ী নিয়ন্ত্রিত হবেন।

১১। "বাংলাদেশ চিকিৎসা গবেষণা পরিষদ"-এর অনুকূলে জনতা ব্যাংকের যে কোন শাখা হতে উক্ত পদের জন্য ১০০০/- টাকার (অফেরৎযোগ্য) ব্যাংক ড্রাফট/পে-অর্ডার দরখাস্তের সঙ্গে সংযুক্ত করতে হবে।

১২। প্রার্থীর আবেদনপত্র খাম বন্ধ অবস্থায় অবশ্যই রেজিষ্ট্রি ডাকযোগে/কুরিয়ার সার্ভিসে অথবা ব্যক্তিগতভাবে সরাসরি নিম্নস্বাক্ষরকারীর দপ্তরে আগামী ১২/০৩/২০২৬ইং তারিখ বিকাল ০৫:০০ ঘটিকার মধ্যে পৌছাতে হবে। উক্ত তারিখ বা সময়ের পরে ডাকযোগে বা অন্য কোন উপায়ে প্রেরিত আবেদনপত্র গ্রহণযোগ্য হবে না।

১৩। প্রাপ্ত আবেদনপত্রসমূহ প্রাথমিক বাছাইয়ের পর কেবলমাত্র যোগ্য প্রার্থীদেরকে পরীক্ষার জন্য ডাকা হবে। অসত্য/ভূয়া তথ্য সম্বলিত/অসম্পূর্ণ/ত্রুটিপূর্ণভাবে পূরণকৃত আবেদনপত্র কোন কারণ দর্শানো ব্যতিরেকেই বাতিল করা যাবে। আবেদনপত্র যাচাই-বাছাইয়ের ক্ষেত্রে কর্তৃপক্ষের সিদ্ধান্ত চূড়ান্ত বলে গণ্য হবে।

১৪। সম্পূর্ণরূপে যোগ্যতা, নিরপেক্ষতা ও স্বচ্ছতার মাধ্যমে নিয়োগ প্রক্রিয়া সম্পন্ন হবে। যেকোন ব্যক্তিগত যোগাযোগ ও তদবির প্রার্থীর অযোগ্যতা হিসেবে গণ্য হবে।

১৫। কোন কারণ দর্শানো ব্যতিরেকে কর্তৃপক্ষ এ নিয়োগ বিজ্ঞপ্তি বাতিল করার অধিকার সংরক্ষণ করে।

পরিচালক (ভারপ্রাপ্ত)
বাংলাদেশ চিকিৎসা গবেষণা পরিষদ

GD- 270

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Bangladesh Police
Police Telecommunication Organization
Police Telecom Bhaban, Rajarbag, Dhaka
Web: telecom.police.gov.bd

Invitation for e-Tender

Memo No. 44.01.0000.057.11.042.25/1359/Betar Date: 05-02-2026

For the financial year 2025-2026 e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of the following items.

Sl	Description	e-Tender ID	Procurement method	Online tender publication date & time	Online tender closing date & time
1.	Designing, Supplying and Installing of 250 & 150-feet 3-Leg Self-Supported Tower.	1223556	OSTETM (One Stage Two Envelope Tendering Method)	08 Feb 2026 16:30	23 Feb 2026 12:30

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) is required.
The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank branches.
Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (http://www.helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).
The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject all Tenders.
If the fund is insufficient/unavailable in that case the tender will be cancelled.

05/02/2026
Shahriar Bin Saleh
BP 7810126915
SP (Logistics)
Police Telecommunication Organization
Rajarbag, Dhaka
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E-mail: splog.telecom@police.gov.bd

GD-272

US withdrawal from WHO raises fears for global health security

The United States has formally notified the World Health Organisation of its withdrawal, prompting serious concerns over the future of global health security. As a founding member, the US has historically contributed to some of WHO's greatest achievements, including the eradication of smallpox and progress against polio, HIV, Ebola, malaria, tuberculosis, and neglected tropical diseases.

In response, WHO expressed deep regret over the decision, warning that it makes both Americans and the world less safe. The organisation firmly rejected US claims that it is politicised, lacks independence, or mishandled the COVID-19 pandemic. WHO stated that it acted rapidly and transparently throughout the crisis, alerting the world as early as January 2020 and providing guidance based on the best scientific evidence. At no stage did WHO recommend lockdowns, vaccine mandates, or mask mandates, leaving decisions to national governments.

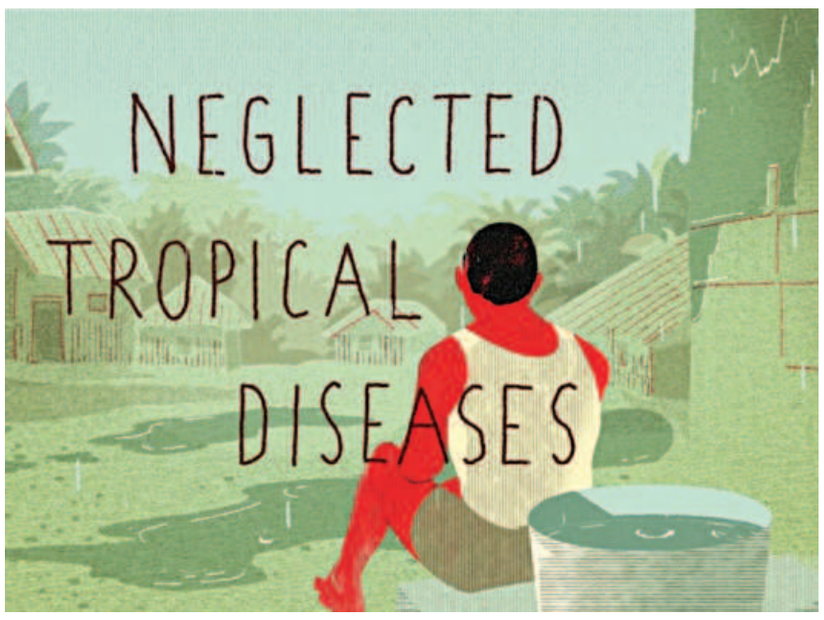
Experts warn that the withdrawal could slow progress on global health initiatives and weaken pandemic preparedness. WHO highlighted that ongoing reforms, including the newly adopted WHO Pandemic Agreement, are crucial for fair access to vaccines, diagnostics, and treatments worldwide.

Despite the US exit, WHO reaffirmed its commitment to all Member States, emphasising that health security is a shared responsibility and a fundamental human right. The agency hopes for the eventual return of the United States and stressed that global cooperation remains essential to tackle major health threats, both communicable and non-communicable, and to prevent future pandemics.

SOURCE: **WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION**

UNITE, ACT, ELIMINATE

Why world neglected tropical diseases day matters more than ever!



STAR HEALTH REPORT

World Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) Day, observed every year on 30 January, shines a spotlight on a group of preventable and treatable diseases that continue to affect the world's most vulnerable people. Despite major progress over the past decade, neglected tropical diseases still impact around one billion people globally, largely in underserved communities where poverty, limited healthcare access and poor living conditions persist.

NTDs include a wide range of conditions such as lymphatic filariasis, river blindness, schistosomiasis and leprosy. While diverse, they share a common feature: they thrive where health systems are weakest. The good news is that these diseases can be controlled, eliminated and, in some cases, eradicated. In 2024, around 1.4 billion people required interventions against NTDs, representing a 36 per cent reduction since 2010. This progress shows that sustained investment and coordinated action work.

As of early 2026, 58 countries have successfully eliminated at least one neglected tropical disease. This is a major milestone on the road to the World Health Organisation's ambitious target of 100 countries achieving elimination by 2030. Country-led programmes, supported by international partners, have proven that elimination is achievable even in low-resource settings.

However, this hard-won progress is now under serious threat.The recent withdrawal of United States funding from neglected tropical disease programmes jeopardises nearly two decades of global investment. Between 2018 and 2023, aid for NTDs declined by 41%, making them one of the most underfunded areas in global health. This funding gap directly affects communities, delaying treatment, increasing disability and prolonging cycles of poverty.

Early reports shared with the WHO show that funding cuts have already delayed 47 mass treatment campaigns, preventing 143 million people from receiving medicines that would protect them from NTDs. Abrupt reductions in official development assistance have also halted critical research into new treatments, diagnostics and surveillance systems, undermining long-term global health security. WHO has warned that more than 70% of its country offices have reported health service disruptions linked to sudden funding suspensions, with NTD programmes among the most severely affected.

The challenge is not a lack of solutions. Proven, low-cost tools already exist. Preventive chemotherapy, which involves the regular distribution of safe medicines, delivers an estimated 25 dollars in economic benefits for every dollar invested. Investments in diagnostics, surveillance and integrated health systems further strengthen the impact. What is needed now is political commitment, sustainable financing and stronger partnerships.

On World NTD Day 2026, the call to action is clear: unite, act and eliminate. Countries are urged to invest in domestically owned and financed NTD programmes that can be sustained over the long term. Development partners are encouraged to honour existing commitments, protect past achievements, unlock innovative financing and adopt new approaches that accelerate progress.

The World Health Organisation plays a central role in this effort by setting global strategies, coordinating partners, monitoring progress and supporting Member States in overcoming technical and operational challenges. With continued leadership and resources, NTD elimination remains one of the most achievable and equitable goals in global health.

SOURCE: **WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION**

Adolescent health at a tipping point!

The health and wellbeing of the world's adolescents are at a critical turning point, according to a major new analysis published by The Lancet. Without urgent and targeted action, more than one billion young people aged 10 to 24 will still be living by 2030 in countries where preventable and treatable health problems threaten their futures.

The second Lancet Commission on adolescent health and wellbeing finds that progress over the past decade has been uneven. Encouragingly, global rates of smoking and alcohol use among adolescents have declined, and participation in education, particularly among young women, has increased. However, these gains are being overshadowed by rising mental health disorders and a sharp increase in overweight and obesity across all regions.

Mental health is a growing concern. By 2030, an estimated 42 million years of healthy life could be lost globally due to mental disorders and suicide among adolescents. At the same time, nearly one-third of adolescents in high-income regions, Latin America and the Middle East are expected to be overweight or obese, increasing the risk of long-term health problems.

The Commission highlights that today's adolescents are the first generation to grow up facing harsher climate conditions and constant exposure to digital technologies. Climate change, conflict and rapid digital transformation are creating new and complex threats to young people's physical and mental wellbeing.

Despite representing one quarter of the global population and carrying over 9% of the global disease burden, adolescents receive just 2.4% of global development aid. The Lancet calls for urgent investment, stronger leadership and meaningful youth participation, stressing that investing in adolescent health is essential for a healthier, more equitable and sustainable future.

Leprosy in Bangladesh's tea gardens – the highest in the world

FAHMIDA RAHMAN

Rupan Bhumij (54), a tea-leaf plucker at Patrokhola Tea Garden in Kamalganj upazila of Moulvibazar district, was diagnosed with leprosy around 2020. Her symptoms began with white patches and small bumps on her face, which she assumed were boils or insect bites from working in the tea garden. The areas were neither itchy nor painful, so she did not initially suspect a serious illness. After about a week, she sought help from HEED Bangladesh, an organisation working on leprosy control in the Sylhet region. Medical tests confirmed leprosy, and with HEED's assistance she was admitted to Sylhet Leprosy Hospital, where she received inpatient treatment for over a month before continuing medication at home. Rupan's case was severe. Painful sores developed on her feet and soles, requiring special footwear. Even after treatment, she continues to suffer complications in both feet and her right hand. Loss of sensation means she cannot feel injuries to her feet, even when pierced by thorns, and winter worsens her condition. Persistent pain in her hand has forced her to stop plucking tea leaves altogether.

Another patient, Purnima Almik (13), daughter of a tea plantation worker at the same garden, noticed a small patch on her face nearly two years ago. Her family believed it was a birthmark. The patch slowly grew larger with no pain or itching. She was later diagnosed with leprosy at HEED Bangladesh.

Experts identify several factors behind the unusually high prevalence of leprosy in tea gardens: lack of awareness, delayed diagnosis, poor adherence to long-term medication, and deep-rooted poverty. Even after diagnosis, many patients fail to complete treatment.

Rupan still needs to continue medication for another year, but financial hardship prevents her from collecting free medicine from Sylhet Leprosy Hospital. She cannot travel alone and would need someone to accompany her. A round trip to Sylhet for two people costs at least 2,000 taka—far beyond her means. Purnima Almik's case illustrates this problem. After HEED identified her as a leprosy suspect, she was prescribed medication. When the facial patch began fading after a month, her family discouraged her from continuing treatment. Once she stopped, the disease progressed and the patch widened, forcing her to return for care.

Leprosy is not hereditary. It is caused by the bacterium Mycobacterium leprae, which primarily affects peripheral nerves. While it rarely causes death, delayed treatment can lead to lifelong disability. Early symptoms usually appear on the skin, making it easy to mistake leprosy for a harmless skin condition. Doctors note that leprosy and tuberculosis belong to the same bacterial family and spread through droplets from coughing or sneezing. Unlike tuberculosis, however, leprosy may take years to manifest symptoms.

Philip Gain, researcher and director of the Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD), emphasises that tea workers are among the most economically deprived communities in Bangladesh. Low wages, overcrowded housing, malnutrition, lack of quality healthcare, and limited awareness allow leprosy bacteria to spread undetected. He stresses that improving livelihoods—through fair wages, nutrition, medical services, and decent housing—is essential to controlling the disease in tea gardens.

The writer is a researcher at the Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD).

Early detection breakthrough for women with dense breast tissue

Women with dense breast tissue face a higher risk of breast cancer and may not get full protection from standard mammograms, a new study shows. Dense breasts, which have relatively low levels of fatty tissue, can make it harder for x-rays to detect small tumours, meaning early-stage cancers may go unnoticed.

Researchers have long explored supplementary imaging methods such as ultrasound and MRI to improve cancer

detection in women with dense breasts. Now, a large trial in the UK has directly compared these approaches with contrast mammography in women whose regular mammograms showed no signs of cancer.

The phase 3 randomised controlled trial included over 9,000 women with dense breasts and negative mammograms.

The findings revealed that fast MRI and contrast mammography detected cancers in 1.7% and 1.9% of cases, respectively, while ultrasound detected only 0.4%. The study shows that these additional scans are more effective in spotting early-stage cancers that might otherwise be missed. Lead author Professor Fiona Gilbert from the University of Cambridge said the results could have implications beyond the UK for all countries using breast cancer screening.

SOURCE: **THE LANCET**

Wearable tech revolution: Track your health 24/7

Accessing health metrics around the clock is becoming the new normal as wearable technology gains traction and becomes increasingly widespread. According to IDTechEx, continuous health data tracking is now a realistic possibility thanks to innovations in devices like smartwatches, smart rings, and skin patches.

Wearables are transforming how people monitor key biometrics. Heart rate, blood pressure, respiratory rate, blood oxygen, glucose, and motion are among the main measurements these devices can capture. Optical sensors, for example, detect heart rate and blood oxygen by measuring light absorption in blood, providing valuable cardiovascular data. Electrodes measure electrical activity from muscles and the brain through the skin, offering insights into both neurological and muscular health.

Continuity is a key advantage of wearables. Unlike traditional medical devices, wearables sit close to the body, allowing constant monitoring. This real-time data can be stored in smartphone apps, enabling users and healthcare providers to track trends over long periods for more accurate and contextualised readings. Remote patient monitoring is becoming increasingly common, promising 24/7 tracking rather than intermittent check-ups.

Smartwatches stand out for their communication capabilities. Connected to smartphones, they can deliver health updates, notifications, and reminders hands-free. For people managing conditions such as diabetes, skin patches equipped with tiny needles can measure blood sugar and alert users when insulin is needed. These tools offer a practical way to integrate health monitoring into daily life while reducing dependence on clinic visits.

Wearable technology is also expanding into new frontiers, including smart glasses and brain-computer interfaces. Smart glasses can provide real-time translations, visual narration, and directions, helping users navigate cities and communicate more easily. Meanwhile, magnetoencephalography helmets are being developed to measure brain activity outside of traditional scanning labs, potentially bringing neural insights to wearable, mobile forms.

The rise of wearable health technology promises not only convenience but also a shift in how healthcare is delivered. By continuously tracking vital signs and linking data to smartphones and

cloud systems, wearables give users a deeper understanding of their bodies while supporting healthcare providers in making informed decisions.

As IDTechEx reports, the wearable sensors market is set to grow rapidly between 2025 and 2035, driven by advances in sensing technologies, digital health integration, and artificial intelligence. With devices becoming smarter, more accurate, and increasingly connected, wearable technology is reshaping health management and empowering people to take control of their wellbeing.

From monitoring heart rates to interpreting neural signals, wearables are no longer just gadgets—they are tools that could redefine the future of personalised healthcare.

ROCK OUT TO STAY YOUNG

Music protects aging brains

Long-term musical training may help older adults overcome age-related difficulties in understanding speech, according to a study published in PLOS Biology. Researchers found that older musicians perform better in noisy environments than their non-musician peers, thanks to enhanced cognitive reserve.

Normal ageing often reduces sensory and cognitive function, leading the brain to recruit additional neural activity to compensate. However, positive lifestyle factors—like musical training, higher education, and bilingualism—can build cognitive reserve, allowing the brain to maintain more youthful patterns of activity.

In the study, 25 older musicians, 25 older non-musicians, and 24 young non-musicians

underwent fMRI scans while identifying syllables masked by noise. Older non-musicians showed the typical age-related increase in connectivity across auditory brain networks, a compensatory response to declining processing. By contrast, older musicians displayed connectivity patterns resembling those of young adults, particularly in the right auditory dorsal stream, which correlated with better speech-in-noise perception.

The findings support the "Hold-Back Upregulation" hypothesis: cognitive reserve built through musical training preserves the brain's functional networks, reducing the need for overexertion and improving behavioural outcomes.

These results suggest that engaging in music may be a practical way to maintain communication skills and cognitive health into later life.

Star
DHAKA SUNDAY FEBRUARY 8, 2026, MAGH 25, 1432 BS

SPORT

What to WATCH

T SPORTS
T20 World Cup
Afghanistan vs
New Zealand
Live from 11:30 am
England vs Nepal
Live from 3:30 pm

Sri Lanka vs Ireland
Live from 7:30 pm

STAR SPORTS SELECT 1 HD
Brighton vs Crystal Palace
Live from 8:00 pm
Liverpool vs Man City
Live from 10:30 pm

FAHEEM SCRIPTS FAMILIAR PAKISTAN TALE

Digging their own grave and then emerging from it against the odds by capitalising on a slice of luck, Pakistan on Saturday revisited the pages of their cricketing playbook that has long earned them the tag of an "unpredictable team" as they began their T20 World Cup 2026 campaign in Colombo. The Salman Ali Agha-led side beat the Netherlands by three wickets with just three balls to spare, but only after turning it into a thriller of their own making. Chasing a target of 148, Pakistan looked comfortable even halfway through the innings before suddenly slumping to seven down and finding themselves needing 29 off the final two overs, with momentum on the Dutch side. Faheem Ashraf kick-started the penultimate over by hitting pacer Logan van Beek for a maximum, raising hopes of a late resurgence. But making it look smooth is not the Pakistan way. Faheem was dropped at long-on by Max O'Dowd off the very next ball before smashing two sixes and two fours over the next seven deliveries, eventually taking the 2009 champions over the line with an unbeaten 29 off 11 balls.

PHOTO: AFP

Too much interference, says Butler after chastening defeat

SPORTS REPORTER

Peter Butler's Bangladesh were given a reality check with a crushing 4-0 defeat to India in the final of the SAFF Under-19 Women's Championship at the Pokhara Rangasala in Nepal yesterday.

The five-time champions had gone into the final as overwhelming favourites, having won all three of their round-robin matches with an imposing 18-0 goal difference, including a 2-0 victory over the same opponents. However, in the title decider, Bangladesh were outplayed and punished for a series of defensive and goalkeeping lapses. The deadlock was broken in the 41st minute before the floodgates opened following the break, with the defending champions conceding three more.

India, coached by former Italy international Pamela Conti, neutralised Bangladesh's creativity in the midfield and blocked passing lanes into the attacking third. The holders appeared to lack direction for much of the contest, with Butler visibly frustrated on the touchline.

Bangladesh have dominated women's football in South Asia in recent years, and Butler had previously downplayed the importance of regional silverware, stressing that his main objective was identifying players for the upcoming Women's Asian Cup and Women's U-20 Asian Cup campaigns. However, this heavy defeat -- Bangladesh's biggest loss in a SAFF a age-level match -- could carry serious repercussions, especially with Bangladesh Football Federation women's wing chairman Mahfuza Akter Kiron present at the venue.

When contacted after the match, the English coach declined to go into detail, stating only that there was "too much interference," before adding: "Very worrying, I've no control." He did not, however, elaborate whether the interference was from the BFF high-ups or from anyone else.

There, however, was a silver lining for Bangladesh as striker Alpi Akter was named the competition's best player and top scorer, having netted seven goals.

ICC in talks to revive India-Pakistan clash

AFP, *New Delhi*

The International Cricket Council (ICC) is in talks with the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) to resolve the boycott of its T20 World Cup match against India on February 15, AFP learnt yesterday.

The fixture was thrown into doubt after Pakistan's government ordered the team not to play the match in Colombo. PCB reached out to ICC after a formal communication from the cricket's world body, a source close to the developments told AFP. The ICC was seeking a resolution through dialogue and not confrontation, the source added.

Bangladesh were replaced by Scotland after their plea to relocate their matches were rejected by ICC. As a protest, Pakistan refused to face co-hosts India in their Group A fixture.

SKY LEADS INDIA TO OPENING WIN

India captain Suryakumar Yadav raises his bat to celebrate his half-century against USA in their opening Group A match of the T20 World Cup at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday. India were in trouble at 77-6 before Suryakumar took them to a competitive 161-9 with an unbeaten 84 off 49 deliveries. Late call-up Mohammad Siraj then picked up three wickets as the defending champions won by 29 runs by restricting USA to 132-8.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'Winning WC will come down to individual moments'

*New Zealand open their T20 World Cup campaign today in Chennai against Afghanistan in a tough Group D, also including South Africa, UAE, and Canada. Even though the Black Caps are yet to lift a World Cup in any format, arrive in the tournament on the back of a 4-1 T20I series defeat against hosts India, and with woes of exiting before the Super 8 stage in the tournament's last edition in 2024, writing off New Zealand has never been wise. The squad boasts a mix of established stars and versatile all-rounders, one of whom is experienced all-rounder **James Neesham**. The 35-year-old, during his recent stint with the Rajshahi Warriors in the Bangladesh Premier League, spoke to **The Daily Star's Samsul Arefin Khan** about New Zealand's chances in the tournament, the team's past World Cup heartbreaks, and the belief that still drives the side forward. The excerpts are as follows:*

The Daily Star (DS): How do you see your side doing in the tournament?

James Neesham (JN): We have a strong team. Obviously, anything can happen in a world tournament. We will be looking at that first game against Afghanistan. We will try to take each game as it comes. Hopefully, we can make it to that next stage.

DS: Do you think seasoned spinners like Mitchell Santner and Ish Sodhi will help you do well in the tournament being held in the subcontinent?

JN: I think every team has good spinners; Afghanistan obviously have good spinners, and South Africa have a couple of spin options as well. Spin will likely be the theme of the tournament, especially for games in Chennai. Hopefully, we can perform well with spin and, more importantly, play spin well to get a few wins.

DS: How do you see your team's growth since the last T20 World Cup?

JN: Obviously, we were a little bit underdone going into the 2024 tournament. But this can happen. We had a five-game series against India, which I thought was very good for us to get ready.

DS: How do you see the chances of winning your first World Cup this time?

JN: Our chances are as good as anyone's. It is hard to win world tournaments, and there are probably seven or eight teams that have a legitimate chance to win the trophy. It will come down to individual moments; hopefully, we can get on the right side of those moments, go through to the knockouts, and then anything can happen.

DS: Does the 2019 ODI World Cup final defeat to England still hurt?

JN: It was obviously tough at the time, but it was seven years ago now. I am pretty much over it and just looking forward to the tournament coming up; hopefully, we can go one step better in this T20 World Cup.

THE ABSENT ROAR

RAMIN TALUKDER

On a bright evening at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata yesterday, Scotland took the field against the West Indies to begin their campaign in the ICC T20 World Cup -- a stage that was originally meant for Bangladesh, not the Scots.

The gallery looked bare, there was no sea of green, no red-and-green flags rippling in the stands, no thunderous chants of "Bangladesh, Bangladesh" that accompany the Tigers everywhere they play.

At the same hour, a few hundred kilometres away at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur, Bangladesh's legendary band Miles stepped onto the stage as a different sort of spectacle commenced -- one not born out of joy, but of repair.

After deciding not to take part in the T20 World Cup, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) knew it would leave behind a vacuum -- a mix of disappointment, resentment and heartbreak among fans.

To fill that emptiness, a tournament -- Odommo Bangladesh T20 Cup -- was hastily assembled, a three-team event featuring national team players and up-and-coming cricketers.

The idea was simple -- matches

during the day, crowds returning to the stands, songs rising into the evening air. Reality, however, had other plans.

The Mirpur stadium is known for its thunderous roar. It thrives on chants, on collective breath, on the restless pulse of packed galleries. Silence here is unsettling.

Yesterday, in a stadium built for 25,000 voices, silence became the dominant presence. Empty rows of seats waited like abandoned promises. A scattering of spectators, a few journalists, the players on the field -- that was all.

The lights were flawless, the arrangements immaculate. Yet the stadium felt hollow as meaning comes from the heart -- and the heart was still longing for the World Cup.

Into this quiet, Miles took stage. Since the 1990s, the band has slipped into the bloodstream of the city, carrying the sound of a generation across cassettes, CDs, radios and, eventually, screens. Their popularity has never needed proving. What unfolded in Mirpur, therefore, was not a rejection of Miles. It was something more unsettling -- a moment when popularity and attendance parted ways.

Haste played a major role in creating

this gap. The tournament was put together at short notice. There was little time for promotion, limited scope for planning. It failed to create anticipation. Looming over everything was the lingering pain of missing the World Cup. Unable to set that aside, people could not give themselves over to another celebration.

The emptiness was not confined to a single night. The five-day tournament had begun on Thursday and on earlier evenings, the pattern had already been set. Voices that had shaped the 90s and the generations after like Warfaze, who recently became the first rock band to be nominated for the Ekushey Padak, and popular singer Mila had taken the stage. But the stands remained unchanged.

The apathy of the fans carried an unspoken message: this event cannot replace the World Cup.

For Miles, playing to such an empty gallery must have been an unusual experience. As the songs ended, applause followed -- but it did not spread. There was no surge of shared emotion, no moment of release. Only a band playing, and a stadium listening. In that image lay the harshness of the moment: sometimes, even enduring popularity leaves an artiste powerless in the face of circumstance.

Yesterday night in Mirpur was not the story of a failed concert, it was the story of a failed consolation. The BCB tried to cover up the void left by the missed World Cup with music and a domestic tournament, but the audience did not accept the offering. The hollowness of a missed World Cup is still keenly felt by the country's cricket lovers. And an emotion like that cannot simply be ignored and turned into a festival.

Opener Mahmudul Hasan Joy struck 59 off 51 balls to help Durbar XI beat Duronto XI by seven wickets in the last league match to qualify for the final of the Odommo Bangladesh T20 Cup at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur on Saturday. Chasing 146, Joy and Habibur Rahman Sohan (39 off 17 balls) put up 61 runs within the powerplay, setting up an easy win for Durbar. Earlier, Khaled Ahmed finished with 4-23 to bowl Duronto out for 145 in 19.5 overs. Durbar will now take on Dhumketu XI in the final of the three-team tournament at the same venue on Monday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Subrata Bain's aide held with cache of arms, ammunition

Court places him on 5-day remand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday placed Mehedi Hasan alias Dipu, a close associate of top criminal Subrata Bain, on a five-day remand after a team of joint forces arrested him and recovered a large cache of firearms and ammunition in the capital's Middle Badda area on Friday.

Acting on a tip-off, a team from the Gulshan Army Camp and Badda Police raided a five-storey building at Post Office Goli in the capital's Beparipara area around 8:30am on Friday.

Police said Dipu, 40, owned the building and lived with his family in a flat on the third floor.

A case was filed against him under the Arms Act with Badda Police Station

SEE PAGE 8 COL 1

Braving the morning fog and cold, farmers set up a floating vegetable market on the banks of the Surma River near Purba Bazar ferry ghat in Sylhet's Kanaighat upazila yesterday. This market serves as a major source of winter vegetables for the region until the monsoon, when trading shifts to the Kanaighat Bazar.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Polls results unlikely before next morning

EC cites two ballots, possible high turnout

AHMED DEEPTO

Ballot counting for the 13th parliamentary election may take longer than usual, with the unofficial results expected not before the following morning.

In the last three elections, the unofficial poll results were announced between 3:00am and 4:00am. In the 2008 election, it came at 6:00am the following day.

The delay this time stems from the need to count two sets of ballot papers (the regular white paper and a pink one for the referendum), a higher number of candidates and voters, and the inclusion of postal ballots, The Daily Star has learned from Election Commission officials involved with the proceedings.

In the previous elections, one polling booth was set up for every 500 men and 400 women, said Ruhul Amin Mollik, EC director for public relations. This time, one booth has been designated for every 600 men and 500 women.

"It saves money but reduces the number of booths. Since the same person will have to count two ballots, it will take more time," he said.

Asked how much longer it might take, Mollik said the process could take one and a half times longer than usual.

SEE PAGE 8 COL 4

LPG supply crunch lingers ahead of Ramadan

BERC hopeful Feb shipments will stabilise market

ASIFUR RAHMAN

Despite repeated assurances and initiatives by the government and operators ahead of Ramadan, the shortage of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), widely used as cooking fuel, is unlikely to ease anytime soon.

Importers, meanwhile, have also failed to meet the January target, indicating a worsening of the crisis.

Amid the supply shortage since November, the government aimed to have around 167,600 tonnes of LPG

in January from at least 12 private importers. But data from the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) shows imports stood at 105,000 tonnes -- lower than the previous month's 126,000 tonnes, when the crisis spiked and a 12-kg LPG cylinder was selling for more than Tk 2,200 at retail shops in parts of Dhaka city.

However, LPG operators and BERC still expect to meet the import target of 184,100 tonnes for February.

Contacted by The Daily Star, BERC Chairman Jalal Ahmed said, "Although imports dropped in January, we found that within the first two days of February, a total of

SEE PAGE 8 COL 1

Nipah virus claims first life this year

Patient developed symptoms on January 21, died a week later

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh recorded its first Nipah virus (NiV) death this year when a woman from Naogaon died on January 28 with symptoms of the virus, according to the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research.

Contacted yesterday, Shamin Sultana, senior scientific officer of the IEDCR, said, "Tests were conducted after the woman was admitted to hospital with Nipah virus symptoms, confirming she died of the virus."

She said this was the first Nipah-related death in the country this year, following four deaths reported until August last year.

According to the World Health Organisation's Disease Outbreak News released on Friday, the patient was a woman aged between 40 and 50, and a resident of Naogaon.

On January 21, the patient developed symptoms consistent with NiV infection, including fever, headache, muscle cramps, loss of appetite,

SEE PAGE 8 COL 1

DEATHS IN PRISON CUSTODY

Lives hang in balance when inmates fall ill

Of 270 deaths last year, 111 occurred on way to hospitals

TOUSIF KAIUM

Riazul Islam Rizul, president of the Purbabirgaon Union Awami League in Sunamganj, was arrested at his home on March 30 last year during Operation Devil Hunt, a joint forces drive launched to maintain law and order across the country.

Eleven days later, on April 9, he died while receiving treatment at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital under prison custody.

Riazul had pre-existing health conditions, but the post-mortem report mentioned marks of injury on his head, according to his nephew Abu Bakkar Siddik.

"There had been no incident that could have caused such head injuries. He must have been beaten," Siddik said, adding that the family had prepared all necessary documents and would file a case when the situation became "favourable".

Sunamganj Jail Superintendent Md Main Uddin Bhuiyan said he would need to check the documents as he could not recall Riazul's case. With many inmates arriving each month, it was not possible to remember every incident, he added.

While the circumstances surrounding Riazul's death remain contested, rights defenders say deaths in custody remain a persistent human rights concern even after the 2024 political changeover, with allegations of ill-treatment and denial of care continuing to surface.

According to the Prisons Directorate, 270 inmates died last year. Of them, 155 died while undergoing treatment at hospitals, 111 died on the way to hospital, and four died by suicide.

Analysing newspaper reports, The Daily Star found that 21 of the deceased were leaders and activists of the Awami League, the party whose activities are now banned.

At least 16 inmates who died in custody were accused in narcotics cases, two in war crimes cases, and four in murder cases. For the rest, media reports could not provide details. Even the jail authorities do not maintain a separate database of inmates' identities.

> **Questions have arisen over how much justice is being delivered and how much is being driven by vengeance, which is reflected in the deaths in custody.**
>
> **IFTEKHARUZZAMAN,** executive director of TIB

In 2024, 261 inmates died, including 140 who died while receiving treatment at hospitals, 120 on the way to hospital, and one by suicide, official data show.

This newspaper also found that at least six individuals linked to the Awami League and its associate organisations died in jail custody in the last four months of 2024. Four

SEE PAGE 8 COL 4

Ex-minister Ramesh dies in jail custody

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Thakurgaon*

Ramesh Chandra Sen, former Awami League MP from Thakurgaon-1 and water resources minister, died yesterday morning after falling ill at Dinajpur District Jail.

Ramesh, 84, became unwell at the jail in the morning and was taken to Dinajpur Medical College Hospital, where the on-duty doctor declared him dead on arrival around 9:30am.

Forhad Sorkar, acting jailer of Dinajpur District Jail, said Ramesh was sent to the facility on August 17, 2024, a day after he was arrested from his ancestral home in Ruhia Ramnath following the July uprising.

Ramesh was accused in three cases, including murder.

He was a division-prisoner inmate at the jail and had been suffering from illness, Forhad said.

"His condition suddenly worsened around 9:00am. He was then taken to Dinajpur Medical College Hospital, from where we later received news of his death," he added.

Ramesh was an adviser to the central Awami League and served as water resources minister from 2009 to 2014.

He was first elected as a lawmaker from Thakurgaon-1 in a by-election on February 18, 1997, and was later elected in the 2008, 2014, 2018, and 2024 general elections.

Ramesh is survived by his wife, Anjali Sen. They had no children but adopted a

SEE PAGE 8 COL 6

Crypto firm sends $40b in bitcoin to users, mistakenly

AFP, *Seoul*

A South Korean cryptocurrency exchange apologised yesterday after mistakenly transferring more than $40 billion worth of bitcoin to users, which briefly prompted a selloff on the platform.

Bithumb said it accidentally sent 620,000 bitcoins, currently worth more than $40 billion, and blocked trading and withdrawals for the 695 affected users within 35 minutes after the error occurred on Friday.

According to local reports, Bithumb was meant to send about 2,000 won ($1.37) to each customer as part of a promotion, but mistakenly transferred roughly 2,000 bitcoins per user.

"We sincerely apologise for the inconvenience caused to our customers due to the confusion that occurred during the distribution process of this (promotional) event," Bithumb said in a statement.

Traffic police seized these battery-run rickshaws for operating on Mirpur Road in Dhaka's Shyamoli area yesterday. They were later transported to a temporary impound site in Bosila. The photo was taken near Asad Gate.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Trump refuses to apologise for racist clip of Obamas

AFP, *Washington*

President Donald Trump refused to apologise Friday for a video posted on his social media account depicting Barack and Michelle Obama as monkeys, though he said he condemned the post as the White House shifted the blame to staff.

The video shared on Trump's Truth Social account late Thursday night sparked censure across the US political spectrum, with the White House initially rejecting "fake outrage" only to then blame the post on an error by a staff member.

"I didn't make a mistake," Trump said on Air Force One late Friday when asked if he would apologize for the post.

Asked if he condemns the racist imagery in the video, Trump replied: "Of course I do."

Democrats slammed Trump as "vile" over the clip of the Obamas -- the first Black president and first lady in US history -- while a senior Republican senator said the video was blatantly racist.

Near the end of the one-minute-long

SEE PAGE 8 COL 4