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3 DAYS TO VOTE



Tarique pledges real change

Campaigns in Dhaka constituencies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday urged people to be vigilant about protecting their voting rights from “a group that is using religion to mislead the public and carry out plans to manipulate the electoral process”.

“We have already seen their party members caught while trying to make fake seals. We have seen them taking bKash numbers and national IDs from mothers and sisters to confuse them,” Tarique said at an election rally in the capital’s Mirpur-2 in the afternoon.

“During the 1990 movement, they participated in elections with the dictatorship, leaving the people behind,” he added.

Calling on citizens to safeguard their voting rights, Tarique said, “No one should be able to trap your vote in a ‘dummy’ election and lock it in the box. Stay alert so no one can change the results through conspiracies.”

The rally was organised at the National Bangla High School ground organised in support of BNP’s Dhaka-14 candidate Sanjida Islam Tulee.

PROMISES FOR DHAKA

- » Transform Dhaka into a safer city
- » Set up 40 playgrounds
- » Evict occupiers of canals
- » Put an end to waterlogging
- » Build hospital in Mirpur
- » Widen street from ECB Chattar to Jashimuddin Road
- » Resume construction of 100-foot-wide road in Mirpur

Referring to Tulee’s struggle for the return of her brother Sajedul Islam Sumon, who was a BNP leader, and other victims of enforced disappearances, Tarique said she symbolised years of suffering under authoritarian rule.

“For 16 years, we have lost many beloved ones in the struggle for democracy. Can we

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Army personnel check the belongings of a passerby near the Deputy Commissioner’s Office in the capital’s Old Dhaka yesterday. Nearly 10 lakh security personnel from various agencies have been deployed nationwide to maintain law and order ahead of the 13th national election and referendum on February 12.

PHOTO: STAR

No DP World deal during this govt’s tenure

Says Ashik Chowdhury as the UAE company seeks time; strike at Ctg port suspended till Feb 15

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The much-talked about concession agreement between DP World and Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) regarding the operation of the port’s New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT) will not be signed within the current government’s tenure, as the UAE-based port operator has sought more time.

DP World needs more time to complete the internal review of the draft agreement, said Ashik Chowdhury, chief executive officer of the Public-Private Partnership Authority (PPPA), at a media briefing yesterday.

“Only two working days remain, and realistically, it will be difficult to complete our own cabinet approval process and formal signing in this term.”

The project started in 2019; the final phase of understanding began over the past month and is still ongoing.

Officials at various levels of the government are continuing discussions with them, which will remain ongoing.

He also dismissed reports that a fixed signing date was set for February 1, calling it a “rumour” and reiterating that no deal should be rushed at the cost of national interest.

Subsequently, the port workers and employees under the platform of Chattogram Bandar Rokkha Sangram Parishad have put a pause on their indefinite strike

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

Govt to buy 14 Boeings for up to Tk 35,000cr

US may cut tariff for Bangladesh to 18% under a trade agreement to be signed today, a high official says

RASHIDUL HASAN and REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

The government is set to sign a deal with Boeing to buy 14 planes valued between Tk 30,000 crore and Tk 35,000 crore for Biman as part of the country’s efforts to reduce the trade gap with the US, and in return have the tariff on Bangladeshi products cut.

“A techno-financial analysis has been completed based on the proposals received from Airbus and Boeing. A negotiation team led by Adviser Wahiduddin Mahmud negotiated the price with Boeing,” Commerce and Civil Aviation Adviser Sk Bashir Uddin said at a press conference at his office yesterday.

“This negotiation is still ongoing. If we complete this process, Alhamdulillah, but if not, unfortunately, we won’t be able to complete our procurement,” the adviser said.

“The aircraft buying proposal that we are making may be valued between Tk 30,000 crore and Tk 35,000 crore. We will have to pay this amount over 10 years. In fact, it may take even longer than that, because the payment schedule is very long-term. It may take as much as 20 years to complete the payment. So, if you consider this, we may have to pay around Tk 1,500 crore to Tk 2,000 crore per year,” he added.

According to sources, Biman will buy eight 787-10s, two 787-9s, and four 737 MAX 8s from Boeing.

Meanwhile, a senior commerce ministry official, requesting anonymity, told The Daily Star

yesterday that the Trump administration may reduce the reciprocal tariff rate for Bangladesh to 18 percent from the current 20 percent after the signing of a trade agreement following Dhaka’s negotiations with Washington.

The signing ceremony is scheduled to be held in a hybrid format today. Adviser Bashir Uddin and Commerce Secretary Mahbubur Rahman



will attend virtually, while some senior officials of the ministry have travelled to Washington to take part in person alongside their American counterparts.

During the negotiations, Bangladesh has promised to increase imports of American goods and reduce the bilateral trade gap.

In exchange, the US will not levy tariffs on garment items made from American raw

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1

Guard polling stations to protect July

Says Jamaat ameer while campaigning for Nahid in Dhaka

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman yesterday urged leaders, activists, and supporters of the 11-party electoral alliance to guard polling stations on February 12 to protect the spirit of the July uprising.

“No miscreant should dare to tamper with your votes. Just as you guarded July bravely, you must guard in the same way on the 12th to make July successful,” he said while addressing an election rally of Nahid Islam, the 11-party alliance candidate for Dhaka-11 and convener of the National Citizen Party (NCP), at the DIT Project playground in Merul Badda.

Stressing that every vote and every parliamentary seat is crucial, he urged them to guard their votes until they are cast into the ballot box.

Referring to young leaders like Nahid, Shafiqur said they would sit as pilots and captains of the “aircraft named Bangladesh” in the future, while the current leaders would sit as passengers. “We believe they will take Bangladesh to the right destination. Insha’Allah,” he said.

The Jamaat chief said Nahid would “definitely” be made a minister if the alliance wins.

He also expressed hope that voters would reject the corrupt, extortionists, “case traders”, and land grabbers in the election.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4

- » Vows to transform country in 5 years, if elected
- » Young leaders to steer the country, old guards to take backseat
- » Nahid to be made a minister if the alliance wins
- » Terms BNP’s family and farmers’ cards ‘false promises’

Army officers returned from Rab as ‘killers’

Ex-army chief Iqbal Karim Bhuiyan tells ICT-1

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Testifying before the International Crimes Tribunal-1 yesterday, former army chief General (ret’d) Iqbal Karim Bhuiyan said his greatest distress was seeing professional army officers return from the Rapid Action Battalion postings transformed into what he described as professional killers.



He also told the tribunal that ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina, acting through her relative Maj Gen (ret’d) Tarique Ahmed Siddique, exploited state security agencies to tighten control over the armed forces, suppress political opponents, and channel widespread corruption through national projects.

Iqbal, the first prosecution witness in a crimes against humanity case against Major General (relieved) Ziaul Ahsan, also

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1



Women from all walks of life, including activists, students, and job holders, took part in the fifth edition of the ‘Shekol Bhagar Jatra’ (March to Break the Shackles) last night, marching from Shahbagh to Kalabagan via Manik Mia Avenue to protest what they described as misogynistic politics and hate speech. The photo was taken in the capital’s Dhanmondi at 1:09am.

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

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

In haors, vote and hope tied to embankment safety

SHAKEEL ANWAR, from Tahirpur, Sunamganj

Driving through the haors – vast, bowl-shaped freshwater wetlands – in Sunamganj, one grasps what immensity and remoteness truly mean.

Shanir Haor in Tahirpur upazila felt exactly like that to me. In February’s dry season, the wetland stretches out as a sea of deep-green young rice plants,



deceptively calm at this stage of the agricultural cycle. It is planting time. Farmers are busy lifting young saplings from densely grown seedbeds and replanting them in neat rows, spacing each by careful measure. Crossing a narrow clay ridge, I reached a group absorbed in the work – Abdul Wahid, Zahed Ali and Rahim Ali, all

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4



(From left, clockwise) BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman addresses a rally in the ECB Chatter area of capital's Cantonment Thana; Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman presents the Shapla Koli (water lily bud), the electoral symbol of the National Citizen Party, to NCP Convener Nahid Islam, the 11-party alliance candidate for Dhaka-11, at a rally at the DIT Project playground in Merul Badda; and Islami Andolan Bangladesh's Senior Nayeb-e-Ameer Mufti Syed Muhammad Faizul Karim, the party's candidate for Barishal-5, speaks at a campaign rally in front of the Central Shaheed Minar in Barishal city. Photos were taken yesterday.

PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN, TITU DAS, BNP MEDIA CELL

Voting a matter of afterlife too

Says IAB chief in televised address to nation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Islami Andolan Bangladesh (IAB) Ameer Mufti Syed Muhammad Rezaul Karim, widely known as the Charmonai Pir, urged people to vote for honest and competent candidates, saying that voting concerns not only this life but the afterlife as well.

"Even without engaging in corruption, criminal activities or money laundering, the sin of corruption and crime could be added to your Amolnama (record of deeds) simply for voting in the wrong place," said the IAB chief in his address to the nation, aired on BTB yesterday evening as part of the Election Commission's initiative to broadcast speeches by party chiefs ahead of the 13th parliamentary election.

During his 22-minute speech, Mufti Rezaul said the party vowed to uphold Islam as the fundamental principle of governance, which, he said, has been practised by the people of this land in their faith and way of life for a thousand years.

"If Islam is implemented as the guiding principle of state governance, Bangladesh will, In Sha Allah, attain the prosperity and goals it aspires to achieve."

He added that such principles in state governance include justice, fairness, sensitivity to citizens' interests, accountability, social security, the rule of law, and ensuring the right of people of all religions to

SEE PAGE 10 COL 3

NCP vows country free of inequality and corruption

Nahid urges votes for 11-party alliance in televised address

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

National Citizen Party Convener Nahid Islam yesterday vowed to build a Bangladesh free from structural inequality, systemic corruption, and foreign dominance, singling out India's influence over the country's politics and economy.

In a televised address on Bangladesh Television ahead of the February 12 elections, he unveiled a 17-point manifesto focused on judicial reform, reclaiming national sovereignty, and dismantling "fascist-era" exploitation.

He framed the upcoming election as a decisive moment to reclaim the country from fascist forces and external pressure, emphasising a future grounded in justice and equality.

In a sharp assessment of the current political climate, the NCP chief said that while the fall of the "murderer Hasina" led to a government without political party leaders, [the state machinery remained vulnerable to exploitation].

He alleged that leaders and activists of a "predatory party" took control of the state apparatus, using it for extortion, occupation, false cases, and the "buying and

SEE PAGE 6 COL 5

FEB 12 POLLS

Nearly 10 lakh security agency members deployed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nearly 10 lakh security personnel from various agencies have been deployed across the country to maintain law and order ahead of the 13th national election and referendum on February 12.

The second phase of the nationwide security deployment began yesterday and will remain in force until February 14, covering the period before, during and after polling.

The personnel include members of the army, navy, air force, police, BGB, Rapid Rab, Ansar and VDP, coast guard and other auxiliary forces.

According to the Election Commission (EC), a total of 9,70,948 security personnel were to be engaged in election duty starting yesterday.

The contingent includes 1,00,003 army personnel, 5,000 navy personnel, 3,730 air force personnel, 37,453 BGB troops, 3,585 coast guard members, 1,87,603 police members, 9,349 Rab personnel, 5,76,483 Ansar and VDP members, 1,922 BNCC cadets and 45,820 chowkidar and dafadar.

In addition, 1,051 executive magistrates have been mobilised and will remain in the field until February 14 to oversee law and order and electoral compliance.

From guarding polling centres to operating mobile

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4

39 hurt in pre-polls violence in 2 dists

STAR REPORT

At least 39 people were injured in polls-related violence in Noakhali and Patuakhali yesterday. In Noakhali 2, a clash broke out between supporters of BNP candidate Zainul Abidin Farooque and independent contender Kazi Mofizur Rahman at Senbagh Bazar around 7:00pm, leaving at least 13 people injured, said police.

Mofizur, also a former member of the BNP's National Executive Committee, alleged that supporters of the BNP candidate attacked his vehicle. Denying the claim, Farooque said Mofizur's supporters vandalised his car.

In Patuakhali's Baulal, at least 26 people, including three women, were hurt in a clash between BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami activists.

Witnesses said a group of Jamaat's female activists was campaigning at Bhandaria Bazar around 12:30pm for their party's Patuakhali-2 nominee Shafiqur Islam Masud.

At that time, some BNP activists intercepted them, alleging that the female group was distributing money to buy votes.

Hearing of the incident, some Jamaat men rushed there, triggering altercation between the two groups. At one point, the groups were locked in a clash.

The injured were admitted to Baulal Upazila Health Complex. Three of them were women, said Abdur Rouf, upazila health and family planning officer.

One of them was sent to the Barishal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College as his condition was critical, he added.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4

Tarique pledges real change

FROM PAGE 1

let their sacrifices go in vain? The right to vote must be firmly established."

He said there had been no accountability for 16 years and that people's rights had been forcibly taken away. "In the future, we must ensure economic independence by establishing democracy," he added.

He reiterated the call on voters to remain alert at another rally at Sun Valley ground in Dhaka-11 constituency at 11:00pm.

"You must stay alert. In every area, in every neighborhood, you must keep an eye on things so that these covert forces cannot mislead the people. Will you be able to do that?"

At this, the crowd shouted, "Yes." "...We must stay vigilant to ensure that no one can enter [voting centres] with fake seals in their pockets."

"Go to the polling stations and vote according to the law of the country, but just voting and leaving won't be enough. You must understand the vote count and then return home."

"We have an opportunity on the 12th, and we should not let this opportunity slip away," he added.

'NO UNREALISTIC PROMISES' Throughout the day, Tarique campaigned in major parts of

northern Dhaka, placing a series of pledges to build a safer, livable city.

At a rally at Adarsha High School ground in Mirpur-10 in support of BNP's Dhaka-15 candidate Shafiqur Islam Khan Milton, Tarique said the party would not make unrealistic promises.

"BNP believes people are the true source of power. We do not want to make promises that go against public interest or cannot be fulfilled," he said, calling the February 12 election "an election for rebuilding the nation and changing people's lives."

Outlining key points of the party's manifesto, he said it focused on women, students, unemployed youth, healthcare and economic development.

On women's empowerment, he recalled free education for girls from class one to 12 during Khaleda Zia's tenure and reiterated the pledge for Family Cards for homemakers to ensure direct government support.

On employment, he said the BNP plans to establish vocational institutes in every area to provide language and technical skills, while low-interest loans would help young people work abroad without selling family land.

Speaking about farmers, he said

Farmers Cards would provide seeds and fertiliser directly, and farm loans of up to Tk 10,000 would be waived if BNP forms the government.

On healthcare, he said mobile health workers would serve villages, and a hospital would be built in Dhaka-15.

He also said work would resume on the long-delayed 100-foot-wide road project in Mirpur that began during Khaleda Zia's government.

Milton, the candidate for the constituency, later told The Daily Star that the project would connect Kachukhet with the Mirpur Government Bangla College area via 60-foot Road.

At another rally at Lal Math in Pallabi Ward-2, Tarique said attacking opponents would bring no benefits. "I can talk about our political opponents, but what benefit will that bring to the people?" he asked.

He said February 12 offers citizens a chance to form a people's government after years of struggle. Criticising the past 16 years, he said, "There were mega projects, but no mega change in people's lives. Instead, there was mega corruption."

Referring to the July uprising, he said about 1,400 people were killed and 20,000 injured. "Their blood

must not go in vain," he said.

He alleged that about \$16 billion was sent abroad every year during the previous government's tenure.

"No development plan can succeed unless we control corruption."

PLEDGES FOR DHAKA

At ECB Chatter in Dhaka-17, Tarique called himself a "son of the area" and sought votes for the party symbol "Sheaf of Paddy".

"If the BNP is elected, we will transform Dhaka into a safe city, In sha Allah, where mothers and sisters can walk without fear, and people can live and work safely," he said.

He promised to build at least 40 playgrounds across Dhaka city and pledged to widen the street from ECB Chatter to Jashimuddin Road in Uttara to improve mobility and livability.

At Shyamali Club Ground, during another campaign in support of Dhaka-13 candidate Bobby Hajjaj, Tarique said canal encroachers would be evicted regardless of their political identity.

He said the occupation of canals disrupts movement and causes waterlogging, and resolving the problem would be a top priority if BNP comes to power.

allocated the seat to Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam Bangladesh. However, expelled BNP leader Rummeen Farhana is contesting from the seat independently.

In Dhaka-12, the BNP left the seat for Biplobi Workers Party General Secretary Saiful Haque. Former convener of the Dhaka North City BNP unit, Saiful Alam Nirab, was expelled and is contesting the polls.

In Patuakhali-3, BNP leader Hasan Mamun is contesting despite the party's decision to leave the seat for Gono Odhikar Parishad President Nurul Haque Nur.

Rebels haunt BNP in four dozen seats

FROM PAGE 12

In Cumilla-2, BNP nominee Selim Bhuiyan is locked in a tough race with expelled rebel Abdul Motin Khan, a former APS-2 to the late Khaleda Zia.

In Mymensingh-10, BNP candidate Akhtaruzzaman Bachchu is competing closely with Abu Bakar Siddiqur Rahman, with the contest expected to be a close one.

In Sunamganj-3, BNP nominee Kaisar Ahmed is contesting against independent candidate Anwar Hossain, a former district BNP vice-president. In Sunamganj-4, BNP candidate Nurul Islam is facing Dewan Zainul Zakerin, another

former district BNP vice-president.

Rebel candidates are in strong positions in several constituencies, including Narayanganj-2 and 3, Tangail-3 and 5, Munshiganj-1, Manikganj-1, Madaripur-1, Gopalganj-2, Rajbari-2, Kishoreganj-1, Dinajpur-2 and 5, Naogaon-1, 3 and 6, Pabna-3, Mymensingh-2, 6, 7 and 9, Chattogram-16, Khagrachhari, Noakhali-2, Chandpur-4, Brahmanbaria-5, Barishal-1, Narail-1, Jhenaidah-4, Satkhira-3, Jashore-5, Sylhet-5, Habiganj-1, Panchagarh-2 and Rangpur-3.

Despite repeated warnings, negotiations and expulsions, rebel

candidates remain in the race in more than five dozen constituencies.

Even after BNP Chairperson Tarique Rahman intervened and the party expelled over 200 grassroots leaders supporting rebel candidates, the measures have had little impact.

Earlier, BNP expelled 72 rebel candidates for defying party instructions to contest the polls, though around a dozen later withdrew.

Rebel candidates are also causing discomfort for BNP's allies, particularly in seats where the party has not fielded its own nominees.

In Brahmanbaria-2, the BNP

No DP World deal

FROM PAGE 1

starting 8:00am today until February 15, its coordinator Ibrahim Khokon told The Daily Star.

The decision was taken keeping in mind the national election and the release of Ramadan cargo and despite the punitive measures taken by the CPA against 16 employee-leaders yesterday, he said.

The CPA took steps, one after another, against the 15 protesting leaders, like harassment and arrests.

For instance, it issued an order to cancel the housing allotments of the 15 protesting employees who were earlier transferred to Mongla and Payra ports but did not join in disregard of the order.

In a video message yesterday morning, Parishad Coordinator Ibrahim said: "The port chairman has been using the police, army, coast guard, SB and DB since yesterday to harass our leaders and activists. Several protesters were arrested."

Abdur Rahim, the officer-in-charge of Bandar Police Station, confirmed that five CPA employees were detained while the filing of cases against them by the CPA was underway.

Parishad's indefinite strike to place their five-point demand, including cancellation of the move to lease NCT to DP World, dismissal of the port chairman and withdrawal of punitive actions against 16 protesting employees, severely disrupted the Chattogram port's operational activities.

Though the port authority took several attempts to resume different operations with the help of police and Army members inside the port yards, the situation did not improve much until evening.

Cargo and container handling at eight jetties at the port's oldest terminal GCB remained completely shut while loading and unloading at six jetties under CCT and NCT terminals, run by Bangladesh Navy's CDDL, went on in slow pace, said shipping agents.

Cargo delivery from almost 60

mother vessels at the port's outer anchorage remained suspended due to the strike, said Sarwar Sagar, chairman of the ship handling operators' association.

Cargo delivery from the port remained stopped.

No import or export containers could be transported between the port and 19 private ICDS, said Bangladesh Inland Container Depots Association officials.

As many as 17 vessels were moved to and from the port yesterday by CPA pilots without logistics support as protesters did not allow operations of enough tugboats and pilot boats.

In a press briefing yesterday afternoon, CPA Chairman M Moniruzzaman claimed that the activities at the port remain operational and warned that the law enforcement agencies would take action if anyone tries to disrupt activities.

"Though any deal is yet to be signed, a group of misguided employees has chosen this path [strike] through spreading misinformation and by holding the port and the people hostage."

He termed the movement as an ill attempt to sabotage the deal signing process in advance or at a premature stage.

Conservative PM

FROM PAGE 12

sovereignty," said Yuernyong Loonboot, 64, the first voter to cast his ballot at a polling station in Buriram, Anutin's hometown.

"Living here, the border conflict has made me anxious. War was never something we used to think about."

Soon after taking office, Anutin authorised the armed forces to take whatever action they saw fit on the border, without referring to the government first.

Thailand's military took control of some disputed areas in the latest fighting in December, and a ceasefire is now in place.

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Argentine
ambassador
condemns
attack on *Star*DIPLOMATIC
CORRESPONDENT

Argentine Ambassador to Bangladesh Marcelo Carlos Cesa yesterday condemned the arson attacks on The Daily Star building and expressed hope that such attacks on the media would never happen again.

During a visit to the newspaper office, he expressed his solidarity with The Daily Star employees who had to endure the traumatic incident in the early hours of December 19.

"I express hope that soon we will see a new Bangladesh where such things won't happen again," he said.

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



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Argentine Ambassador to Bangladesh Marcelo Carlos Cesa visited The Daily Star Centre yesterday to express solidarity with the newspaper. The office building of the national daily had been vandalised, looted, and set on fire in the early hours of December 19.

Adopt a code of
conduct to protect
women in politics

Speakers urge parties at discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Political parties must adopt a binding code of conduct to protect female leaders from harassment and cyberbullying, speakers said yesterday.

Otherwise, women will be systematically pushed out of national politics, they warned.

Addressing a discussion in the capital organised by Women in Democracy (WIND), rights activists, political leaders, and journalists said a "feudal" mindset and a broken leadership pipeline are undermining the democratic aspirations of the July uprising.

Zaima Rahman, daughter of BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman, said political parties must take full responsibility for the safety of their members through a formal legal framework.

"If a female leader or student leader faces any issue -- whether

cyberbullying or physical threats -- the party must stand by her and ensure her protection through this code," she said.

Describing the transition from student politics to local government as "fundamentally broken", Zaima said a structured pipeline must be created and sustained.

"If we do not repair this path, we will fail to create opportunities for talented leaders," she said.

Supreme Court lawyer Sara Hossain said the 1972 Constitution's guarantee of non-discrimination is a "settled achievement" of the Liberation War, leaving no room for fresh debate.

"We hear talk of constitutional repair, but there is no clear commitment to strengthening equality. Instead, we see a weaponisation of religious

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

Minority issues
must be treated
as nat'l concerns
Speakers tell CGS report launch

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Minority concerns must be treated as national issues to sustain democracy in Bangladesh, speakers said at the launch of a Center for Governance Studies (CGS) report in the capital yesterday.

They also said the rule of law has been undermined by mob pressure and that election manifestos hold little value without accountability. Gaps in oversight, enforcement, and institutional independence have created widespread doubts about election management, they observed.

CGS launched the report titled "From Pledges to Practice: Political Inclusion & Democratic Accountability -- Bangladesh's Polls 2026," at a city hotel.

Research findings and recommendations were presented on ensuring an inclusive, safe, and reliable election for minority and marginalised communities as the country approaches the national polls.

The discussion highlighted electoral realities and obstacles faced by religious minorities, ethnic groups, and gender-diverse populations, as well as the implementation of constitutional pledges on equality and non-discrimination.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

The only thing they [interim] can now do is hold a good election. Their scope for reforms, space to carry out reforms, and room to ensure justice has run out -- they have run out of steam.

DEBAPRIYA BHATTACHARYA



FEBRUARY 12 ELECTION | DHAKA-3

Civic amenities top
voter demands

SADI MUHAMMAD ALOK and SHARIF M SHAFIQUE

Sinthia Akter runs a beauty parlour in Rahmatpur, Jinjira, along the banks of the Buriganga river. She has lived in the area since childhood.

While she has grown accustomed to the congested surroundings, Sinthia deeply worries about her children's upbringing and education.

The entrepreneur is cautiously optimistic about the country's political transition and the upcoming election.

"If a qualified candidate is elected, things will be better in future," she told The Daily Star.

"Women must receive immediate administrative support whenever they face trouble," she said.

The electoral atmosphere is vibrant in the Dhaka-3 constituency, which includes five unions of Keraniganj upazila -- Jinjira, Aganagar, Teghoria, Konda and Shubhadya.

Sinthia, though she is not well-versed in individual candidates, said the election buzz is palpable in the area. As a conscious citizen, she plans to vote and hopes the polls will bring overall improvements.

Campaigning continues throughout the day in areas such as Adarshanagar, Jhilmil Residential Area,

Babubazar Bridge, Hasnabad, Bashundhara Riverview, Pangaon Container Depot, the Jagannath University new campus and Ekuria.

The Mawa Expressway and Padma Rail Link also pass through the constituency.

Jinjira and Aganagar are densely populated commercial hubs marked by narrow roads and heavy traffic. Hundreds of small-scale factories operate here, discharging toxic waste directly into the Buriganga river.

Traffic congestion remains severe from Babubazar Bridge to Kadamtali and the Jinjira Ferry Ghat. The Shubhadya Canal is clogged with garbage, effectively turning the area into a dumping ground.

Residents say rapid urbanisation here has not been matched with increased civic facilities.

There are no parks or adequate playgrounds, while land filling for housing projects has destroyed natural water bodies. Locals also report a recent rise in drug use and the activities of teen gangs.

Gas shortages have added to public frustration. "The entire area has no gas connection," said Paul Babu, a private-sector employee from Konda area.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 5

Gayeshwar Roy
BNPMd Shahinur Islam
JamaatEC yet to begin
social media
monitoring

Only 3 days left before election

Parties yet to submit social
media details to ROsFailure to submit could lead
to legal action, EC saysEC monitoring content for
fake posts, despite delays

AHMED DEEPTO

The Election Commission had claimed that it would monitor the campaigns of political parties and candidates on social media ahead of the 13th National Parliamentary Election and referendum scheduled for February 12.

However, with just three days remaining before the election and referendum, the EC said it could not begin the monitoring as it has yet to receive the list of social media accounts from the parties and candidates.

The commission, however, said the time for monitoring social media accounts of parties and candidates has not yet run out, adding that it has been observing election campaigns on social media platforms, and checking posts to determine whether they are genuine or fake.

A total of 52 political parties are registered with the EC, and 2,017 candidates are contesting the polls. The list of

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

RANGPUR-4 CONSTITUENCY
Farmers' rights,
Pragati's key focus

S DILIP ROY

In an election season dominated by blaring loudspeakers and long motorcades, Rangpur-4 candidate Pragati Barman Toma is taking a different approach: a quiet, door-to-door campaign, focused entirely on a manifesto centred on farmers' rights, women's dignity and basic public services.

The 33-year-old candidate of Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (Marxist) says her constituency -- covering Pargachha and Kaunia, two major potato-growing areas -- cannot progress unless agriculture survives.

Her pledges reflect that focus.

Pragati's manifesto includes subsidies for potato farmers, fair prices for all crops including rice and potatoes, government-run cold storage with fees fixed at Tk 100 per sack, lower fertiliser, seed



and pesticide costs, and interest-free agricultural loans.

The manifesto further emphasises rights for marginalised communities, including Dalits and Harijans, recovery of khas land and rehabilitation of the landless, establishment of agro-based

industries, and measures to prevent the spread of drugs.

"My constituency is agriculture-based. If farmers do not survive, development of this region is impossible," she said. "That is why agriculture comes first in my manifesto."

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

POLLS MANIFESTOS

Health gets
priority, many
plans unrealistic

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

When major political parties highlighted health issues prominently in their election manifestos, many of their plans lacked clarity in terms of implementation, with some pledges appearing highly ambitious, experts said.

Although reform measures in the health sector featured in their future agendas, none of the parties addressed the core reform proposals -- such as the formation of a separate health commission and a separate health service -- as recommended by the Health Sector Service Commission, said Prof Syed Abdul Hamid of the Institute of Health Economics at Dhaka University.

The party that assumes power after the January 12 elections, in consultation with stakeholders, should formulate a pragmatic plan backed by an adequate budget, ensuring corruption-free and effective service management to gradually improve health services, said Prof Be-Nazir Ahmed, former director of Disease Control at Director General of Health Services.

The country is headed to the polls at a time when

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1



Rezia Ahmed passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rezia Ahmed, wife of late Zamiruddin Ahmed, a Supreme Court lawyer and former ambassador to Malaysia, Libya, and Tunisia, passed away on Saturday night. She was 90.

She had been suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Rezia left behind four children and a host of relatives and well-wishers to mourn her death. She was buried at Banani graveyard next to her husband and daughter yesterday.

A doa mahfil will be held at her Dhanmondi residence after Maghrib prayers tomorrow. Her family sought prayers for the eternal peace of the departed soul.



Two artisans weave shitalpati mats from murta canes in Sylhet's Balaganj, a region once famed for the craft. Now, only a few families keep the tradition alive, struggling with declining demand, and scarce raw materials. The mats sell for Tk 1,000-7,000 per piece. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

EC yet to begin social media

FROM PAGE 3

Their social media accounts used in campaigns is meant to be submitted to the 67 returning officers across the country's 300 constituencies.

On November 10 last year, the EC finalised and gazetted the Code of Conduct 2025 for political parties and candidates.

Clause 16 of the code states that before starting electioneering, a candidate, their election agent, or the party concerned must submit to the returning officer the names of social media platforms, account IDs, email IDs, and other identifying information related to their campaign.

While electioneering began nationwide on January 22, the EC has yet to receive the list of social media accounts.

On February 3, the commission issued a directive asking ROs nationwide to centrally submit links of election campaigns on social media. EC officials said the ROs have yet to submit the links.

The letter also stated

that in the case of social media campaigning, all expenses — including content creation, advertisements, boosting, and sponsorships — must be submitted to the EC as part of the overall election expenditure.

Contacted, Election Commissioner Anwarul Islam Sarkar said, "The time has not ended yet... either today or tomorrow we will sit and get an overall idea of the matter."

Referring to the fact that even the EC itself does not know how many accounts have been submitted, he said, "I cannot give the exact number right now. If the parties and candidates fail to submit the account names and other necessary details, they will come under the purview of the law for violating the code of conduct."

He further said the EC's fact-finding cell is working on the matter, adding, "For each area, we have officials and technical experts monitoring the campaigns across electronic, print, and social media."

The election commissioner also said, "Effective measures are being taken in cases whenever the content is found to be fake... Many issues are appearing on social media in exaggerated or false ways. We are recording these and taking legal action through our channels."

Contacted, EC Director (Public Relations) Ruhul Amin Mollik said no RO had submitted the links of social media accounts being used in election campaigns to the commission.

"There is no problem with that. We will monitor it after the election. If any irregularities are found then, action will be taken against the parties and candidates concerned," he added.

PRAYER TIMING
FEBRUARY 9

Fajr	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

Integrate urban

FROM PAGE 3

Presenting the keynote paper, BIP President Dr Muhammad Ariful Islam said the July uprising had created a new opportunity to strengthen the foundations of social, economic, and urban development.

Referring to the February 12 elections, he said BIP welcomes the fact that political parties had increasingly acknowledged planning related issues such as urbanisation, infrastructure, housing, and transport in their manifestos.

He stressed the involvement of professional planners in translating manifesto commitments into action. Ariful also highlighted decentralisation as a key pathway to transforming Bangladesh into a developed country and expressed BIP's readiness to support the next government in the national interest.

Former BIP president Prof Adil Muhammad Khan said that despite planning being given more prominence in manifestos than previously, there remained a lack of clarity regarding sustainable development and decentralisation, as well as an absence of clear roadmaps for district-based budget allocation and development of regions that

are lagging behind.

Adil stressed the need for concrete implementation plans for public transport targets, control of private vehicles, and mandatory effluent treatment plants (ETPs) to curb industrial pollution, warning against keeping such commitments limited to paper.

BIP adviser Salma A Shafi noted that while nearly all parties attempted to address urban planning concerns, the issues varied across manifestos.

Dr Farhana Ahmed, BIP vice president-2, said greater emphasis should have been placed in manifestos on spatial and region-based planning and linking economic strategies with development plans.

BIP presented 10 key recommendations, including: preparing national and regional spatial plans; protecting agricultural land; affordable housing; improving public transport systems; restoring rivers and waterbodies; strengthening local government institutions; and ensuring social justice and inclusion.

The organisation also called for evidence-based, data-driven planning led by professional planners rather than ad hoc political promises.

Minority issues must

FROM PAGE 3

Speaking at the event, distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) Debapriya Bhattacharya said the interim government's capacity and potential have reached their limit.

"The only thing they [interim] can now do is hold a good election. Their scope for reforms, space to carry out reforms, and room to ensure justice has run out — they have run out of steam," he added.

"Without ensuring the safety of marginalised communities before and after elections, the democratic process will remain fragile," Debapriya said.

He further stated that if the interim government succeeds in delivering a free and credible election at the end of its tenure, that achievement will be remembered in history.

The event saw the release of a CGS survey conducted among 505 people from minority communities. The findings revealed a grim picture of electoral participation, with over 50 percent of respondents expressing anxiety about voting and 25 percent stating they feel unsafe or extremely unsafe.

Debapriya pointed out disconnect between the chief adviser's rhetoric and the reality on the ground. He recalled the head of government's promise that all citizens, regardless of faith or ethnicity, would be protected under one umbrella.

"But the umbrella was never opened, and the rain pours down," he told the audience.

"To sustain democracy,

minority issues must be treated as national issues and never be trivialised or politicised," he said, adding that without accountability, even the most progressive political manifestos remain worthless.

At the beginning of the event, CGS President Zillur Rahman said the report, though prepared with the upcoming national election in mind, goes beyond a single electoral cycle and reflects a long-standing democratic crisis and structural inequalities.

Recalling the 1971 pledge to build an egalitarian society, he said that promise remains unfulfilled and added, "Today, inequality persists across Bangladesh — between men and women, across religions and identities, and between the centre and the periphery."

Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik Secretary Dr Badiul Alam Majumdar said there has been no meaningful improvement in the conditions of marginalised communities over the years and that serious doubts remain about whether the upcoming election will be genuinely free, fair, and inclusive.

Economist Dr Selim Jahan said repeated questions about how inclusive elections truly are point to deep institutional failure, as constitutional commitments have been violated and minority rights and security have not been adequately protected or prioritised.

Politicians, teachers, economists, civil society members, media professionals, and representatives from minority communities attended the event.

Farmers' rights Adopt a code

FROM PAGE 3

However, without funds to hire workers or organise rallies, Pragati campaigns mostly alone. Each morning she sets out on foot with leaflets bearing her election symbol (scissors) and walks from village to village, stopping in fields and courtyards to speak with voters.

In Hatiram village, 36-year-old Sandhya Rani said she was impressed by Pragati's clarity. "Pragati Barman Toma clearly highlights women's problems. If a woman like her goes to parliament, women's welfare will be ensured," she said.

Farmers, too, say they value her willingness to listen. Afzal Hossain, 60, recalled her visiting the fields to discuss crop prices and irrigation costs. "She understands our problems. The way she thinks about farmers really appealed to us," he said.

A former Bangla student at Dhaka University and once general secretary of the Socialist Students' Front's campus unit, Pragati now earns a living through private tutoring.

Her father, Pijush Kanti Barman, a retired schoolteacher, says he is surprised by her stamina; her mother, Molina Roy, says women voters respond warmly.

Still, the path is not easy. She is the only female candidate among nine contenders in a constituency with more than half a million voters. She says the election lacks a "level playing field", arguing that money-driven politics sidelines smaller candidates.

"When politics is dominated by money, inequality is inevitable," she said. "People should decide based on morality and competence."

FROM PAGE 3

sentiment, where women are judged by their clothing rather than their competence," she said.

She urged the interim government to release women detained on politically motivated charges to avoid leaving a "stain" on its tenure.

Farah Kabir, country director of ActionAid Bangladesh, warned that "money and muscle power" have caused politics to be framed as a "dirty game", further excluding women and threatening an economy reliant on female labour.

"You cannot build a sustainable democracy while excluding the very people who power your economy," she added.

Jahangirnagar University Prof Nahrin I Khan called for a shift in how women are portrayed in the national narrative. "We must celebrate the 'revolutionary mother' who inspires political change, not the 'household mother' praised only for domestic roles," she said.

Another JU academic, Prof Mirza Taslima Sultana, said the state's failure to ensure inclusive education has pushed low-income women into the madrasa system.

She called for a context-based interpretation of rights that addresses both class and gender.

Taslima Akhter Lima of Ganosamhati Andolon said women are often framed only as "victims" or "warriors", rather than "citizens".

She warned that populist promises, such as reduced working hours, often ignore economic realities.

Labour activist Kalpona Akter echoed this concern, calling such promises a trap to push women out of the workforce.

Zina Tasreen, senior

journalist at The Daily Star, said rights remain meaningless without financial independence.

"As long as a woman depends on her father or husband for survival, she cannot make independent decisions," she said.

She proposed mandating female representation on corporate boards and offering incentives such as tax rebates to companies that promote women. Investigative journalist Zyma Islam of The Daily Star said religion is frequently weaponised to silence logical debate.

"It is a weapon that shuts down every argument. It starts with saying women cannot be the prime minister and ends with saying they cannot play football," she said.

Umama Fatema, former spokesperson of Students Against Discrimination, said women who led the uprising are now being pushed back.

"Our struggle should be about research and education, but instead we are forced to debate how a woman should dress," she said.

Sports advocate Sarwat Siraj Shukla said rising conservatism and the closure of historic clubs have made sports spaces increasingly hostile for women, forcing female athletes to prioritise self-defence over professional training.

Liberation War veteran Lutfa Haseen Rosy, Prof Shamima Sultana Lucky, labour rights advocate Nazma Akter, researcher Mumia Amin, lawyer Samira Chowdhury, Ducusu research secretary Sanjida Ahmed Tonni, and Ducusu member Hema Chakma also spoke at the programme, which was moderated by journalist Kazi Jesin, convener of WIND.

INDEPENDENT UNIVERSITY, BANGLADESH (IUB)
VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

School of Business & Entrepreneurship
Department of Marketing

- Assistant Professor
- Lecturer B

Application Deadline
Sunday, February 22, 2026

For detailed information and to apply, please visit:
<http://iub.ac.bd/news-and-events/jobs-at-iub> or scan the QR code

EAST WEST UNIVERSITY
Progoti Foundation for Education and Development
Permanent Sanad Holder

INVITATION OF TENDER

East West University (EWU) is inviting Tender from the bonafide/intending suppliers/firms for the following items:

- Supply and Installation of Network Switches for East West University.
- Engagement of outsourced printing services for East West University.
- Procurement of 39 sets Computer and 39 units Monitor (Two Types) for Cloud Computing Lab, Department of CSE, East West University.
- Different types of works at 20 katha land of East West University.
- Printing of 162,000 units Exam Script (General, to be used by various departments) and 42,000 units Exam Script with OBE Based cover sheet (to be used by the department of English) for Spring, Summer and Fall Semester 2026 of East West University

The schedule of the above-mentioned tender items with terms and conditions can be obtained from the Finance & Accounts Department (1st floor) of the University until 02.03.2026 during office hours (until 03:00 p.m.) on working days. The schedule of item # 3 will also be available in the e-tendering process (<http://etender.ewubd.edu>). The price of the tender schedule (non-refundable) is Tk.500/- (Taka Five Hundred) only.

The interested bidders are requested to submit the tender by 03.03.2026 by 11:00 A.M. through hard copy or e-tender process (as mentioned in the schedule). The tender (hard copy) must be dropped in the tender box kept at the 2nd floor of the office of the Treasurer (Room No-316) of the University. The tender(s) submitted within the deadline will be opened on the same day (03.03.2026) at 11:30 A.M. in the Conference Room (4th floor) of East West University in the presence of the representatives of the bidders.

The bidders must mention the "name of the item" at the top of envelope. Otherwise, the bid document will be treated as cancelled.

East West University authority reserves the right to accept any tender in full or part of it or reject all tenders without mentioning any reason thereof.

Chief of HR & Logistics

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
জেলা প্রশাসকের কার্যালয়, ঢাকা
(নেজারত শাখা)
www.dhaka.gov.bd

তারিখ: ২৫ মাঘ ১৪৩২
০৮ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০২৬

"জ্বরির দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি নং-০২/২০২৫-২০২৬"

এত্রয়ার ঢাকা জেলা প্রশাসনের জনা টেলিযোগাযোগ সরঞ্জামাদি, বৈদ্যুতিক সরঞ্জামাদি এবং অফিস সরঞ্জামাদি সরবরাহের জন্য আবেদী প্রতিষ্ঠানের নিকট হইতে নিম্নবর্ণিত শর্ত সাপেক্ষে দরপত্র আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে।

ক্রম নং	কাজের নাম	দরপত্র দলিলাদির মূল্য (টাকায়)	টেন্ডার সিকিউরিটির টাকার পরিমাণ (টাকায়)	কাজ সম্পাদনের কার্যকাল (অর্ব্বহরে)
০১	জেলা প্রশাসকের কার্যালয়ে টেলিযোগাযোগ সরঞ্জামাদি (অর্ব্বৈনতিক কোড নং: ৪১১২২০৪) সরবরাহ	৫০০/-	১০,০০০/-	২০২৫-২০২৬
০২	জেলা প্রশাসকের কার্যালয়ে বৈদ্যুতিক সরঞ্জামাদি (অর্ব্বৈনতিক কোড নং: ৪১১২৩০৩ সরবরাহ)	৫০০/-	১০,০০০/-	২০২৫-২০২৬
০৩	জেলা প্রশাসকের কার্যালয়ে অফিস সরঞ্জামাদি (অর্ব্বৈনতিক কোড নং: ৪১১২৩১০ সরবরাহ)	৫০০/-	১০,০০০/-	২০২৫-২০২৬

০৫: দরপত্রসমূহ আহ্বানের সূত্র ও তারিখ : বাৎসরিক বাজেট
০৬: দরপত্রসমূহ সংগ্রহ পদ্ধতি : উন্মুক্ত দরপত্র পদ্ধতি
০৭: অর্থ প্রাক্তির উৎস : জনস্বাস্থ্য মন্ত্রণালয় হতে ২০২৫-২৬ অর্ব্বহরে গ্রাহ্য বাজেট অনুমোদিত
০৮: দরপত্র দলিলাদির মূল্য/ টেন্ডার সিকিউরিটির টাকার পরিমাণ : জেলা প্রশাসকের কার্যালয়, ঢাকা (নেজারত শাখা)
০৯: দরপত্রসমূহ বিক্রয়ের শেষ তারিখ : ২০.০৩.২০২৬ খ্রি., বিকাল: ৩:০০ ঘটিকা
১০: দরপত্রসমূহ দাখিলের তারিখ, সময় ও টিকানা : ০৩.০৩.২০২৬ খ্রি., সময় কোথা: ১০:০০ হতে দুপুর: ১২:০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত নেজারত ডেপুটি কমিশনার (এনটিসি), জেলা প্রশাসকের কার্যালয়, ঢাকা এর কক্ষে সর্বমুহে বন্ধিত টেন্ডার বক্সে দরপত্র গ্রহণ করা হবে (কক্ষ নং-১০১)
১১: দরপত্রসমূহ খোলার তারিখ : ০৩.০৩.২০২৬ খ্রি., সময় কোথা: ১০:০০ ঘটিকায়। (দরপত্র যাচাই উপস্থিত থাকলে তাদের উপস্থিতিতে বক্স খোলা হবে)
১২: দরপত্রগ্রহণযোগ্যতা (Eligibility) : ব্যবসায়িক ট্রেড লাইসেন্স (হাল সন পর্যন্ত নবায়নকৃত), বাণিজ্যিক ব্যাংক হতে অর্থিক যত্নসহকারী সনদপত্র, আয়কর সনদপত্র, জাতীয় পরিচয়পত্রের সত্যায়িত ফটোকপি, যে কোন সরকারি, আধা সরকারি এবং স্বায়ত্বশাসিত প্রতিষ্ঠানের পূর্বে অত্র ০৩(তিন)দিনের টিকাদার হিসেবে সন্তোষজনকভাবে মাসামাল সরবরাহ করেছেন মার্চ-প্রত্যাহারপত্র।
১৩: দরপত্রসমূহ আহ্বানকারী কর্মকর্তার নাম, পদবী ও টিকানা : **জনাব মোঃ রেজাউল করিম**
জেলা প্রশাসক
জেলা প্রশাসকের কার্যালয়
১৬, জনসন রোড, ঢাকা।
১৪: দরপত্র জেলা প্রশাসক, ঢাকা এর অনুমোদিত =১০,০০০/- (দশ হাজার) টাকা কেবলত যোগ্য টেন্ডার সিকিউরিটি যে কোন সিডিউল ব্যাংকের ব্যাংক ড্রাকট/৭৮-অর্ডার আকারে দরপত্রের সাথে দাখিল করিতে হবে।
১৫: বিশেষ নির্দেশাবলী : দরপত্রের সকল কার্যক্রম "পাবলিক প্রকিউরিটমেন্ট আইন, ২০০৬ ও পাবলিক প্রকিউরিটমেন্ট বিধিমালা-২০০৮" মোতাবেক পরিচালিত হবে। কোন কারণ দর্শনা ব্যতিরেকে যে কোন দরপত্র গ্রহণ বা বাতিল করার ক্ষমতা দরপত্র আহ্বানকারী সংরক্ষণ করেন।
১৬: এ বিজ্ঞপ্তি সংক্রান্ত অন্যান্য শর্তাবলী : সরবরাহকৃত মাসামালের বিল হতে চিফ একাউন্টস এন্ড ফিন্যান্স অফিসার এর কার্যালয়, সিভিল হিঙ্গা ভবন, জনস্বাস্থ্য মন্ত্রণালয়, সেতুনবাগিচা, ঢাকা কর্তৃক সরকারের প্রদত্ত বিধি মোতাবেক ভাট ও আয়কর কর্তন করা হবে।

মোঃ রেজাউল করিম
জেলা প্রশাসক
ঢাকা
ফোন: ০২-২২০৩৮৯৮৬
E-mail: dcdhakar@dmopa.gov.bd

GD-281

Govt recommends withdrawal of 24,000 politically motivated cases

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The interim government has recommended the withdrawal of 23,865 cases it identified as politically motivated and filed during the tenure of the Awami League government, paving the way for relief to nearly five lakh people.

The cases were lodged between January 6, 2009, and August 5, 2024, against leaders and activists of various political parties, including the BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, Hefazat-e-Islam and Gano Odhikar Parishad, according to a law ministry press release.

In order to facilitate the withdrawal process, the interim government on September 22, 2024, formed district-level committees

led by deputy commissioners, alongside an inter-ministerial committee headed by Law Adviser Asif Nazrul.

The inter-ministerial committee invited applications from political parties seeking withdrawal of what they described as harassment cases filed by the previous government.

Based on applications submitted by the affected parties, the committee scrutinised the cases through 39 meetings held at different times.

Following the review, the committee recommended the withdrawal of 23,865 cases, the press release said, adding that the process of reviewing applications and recommending further withdrawals is still ongoing.



Farmers transplant IRRI and Boro paddy seedlings in Rajshahi's Rajabari area. The cultivation of these varieties is in full swing across the northern Barind region. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

Sultan Ara Khan's death anniversary today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The eighth death anniversary of Sultan Ara Khan, wife of Shafiqul Alam Khan, a retired employee of Karnaphuli Paper Mills Ltd in Chattogram, will be observed today.

Sultan Ara passed away at a hospital in Dhaka on February 9, 2018.

A milad mahfil and Qurankhwan will be held today at Khurshid and Associates, chamber of her eldest son senior lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan, at 204 Bijoyagar in Dhaka.

Woman found murdered at home

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Police recovered a throat-slit body of a woman from her residence in Bhaluka upazila of Mymensingh on Saturday night.

The deceased was identified as Rahima Khatun, 38, wife of Billal Hossain, a quilt and mattress trader of Gangatia Madhyapara area.

Quoting locals, Bhaluka Model Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mohammad Jahidul Islam said Rahima put her two children to bed after dinner on Saturday and went to sleep in her room, leaving the door unlocked as her husband usually returned home late.

"Around 10:00pm, unidentified assailants entered the house and killed her by slitting her throat with a sharp weapon," the OC said.

Police recovered the body and sent it to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.

An additional Superintendent of Police Abdullah Al Mamun said, "Those responsible will be brought to justice."

No case was filed till last evening.

Health gets priority, many plans unrealistic Civic amenities top voter demands

FROM PAGE 3

the health sector faces major challenges, including inadequate funding, shortages of health workers, high out-of-pocket expenses, unequal access to services and weak governance.

As thousands of people continue to be deprived of quality treatment, the rise in the total fertility rate for the first time in 50 years has fuelled fresh concerns, as failure to control population growth may undermine other policy efforts.

Against the backdrop, major political parties – including BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Andolan Bangladesh (IAB), National Citizen Party (NCP) – brought the health issues in their manifestos prominently.

BNP projected 22 health agendas, including raising health expenditure to five percent of GDP, issuing e-health cards to everyone, ensuring free and quality primary healthcare, recruiting one lakh health workers, and initiating public-private partnerships to tackle the rising burden of non-communicable diseases.

Jamaat proposed 37 health agendas, including providing free treatment for people under five and those over 60; ensuring

optimum use of the existing capacity of health facilities within one year of forming the government; gradually tripling the health budget; and banning partisan politics in medical colleges and hospitals.

IAB outlined 13 points, including transforming all government hospitals into world-class facilities, making union and upazila health complexes self-sufficient, and strictly enforcing measures to curb irregularities in the private healthcare sector.

NCP proposed three agendas, including the creation of specialised healthcare zones in the northern and southern regions, and a GPS-tracked National Ambulance and Pre-Hospital Emergency Care System.

"It is good to see that health has received prominence in the political parties' manifestos," said Prof Hamid.

"But some of the pledges are very challenging to achieve, and some are highly ambitious," he said.

BNP rightly emphasised primary healthcare and promised to issue e-health cards, which would store all health records of an individual and help solve certain problems, he added.

Besides, it also promised to prevent corruption in the

health sector, introduce a national ambulance pool and emergency services, and establish an accreditation council to ensure the quality of health facilities, which are all positive measures, he added.

He said Jamaat has promised to gradually triple the health budget, fill all vacant posts at health facilities, and enhance the capacities of upazila and district hospitals to reduce pressure on facilities in Dhaka, which he described as commendable.

It also pledged to stop prescribing unnecessary tests and medicines and ensure timely promotion of health workers, he added.

However, the manifestos of both parties lack details on the programmes they would implement to fulfil their promises, he noted.

He said BNP's promise to raise health expenditure to five percent of GDP is "unrealistic".

In the current fiscal year, Tk 41,908 crore has been allocated to the health ministry, which is 5.3 percent of the total budget and only 0.67 percent of GDP.

"If the health budget were to increase to five percent of GDP, it would have to account for more than 30 percent of the total budget, which is not

feasible," he said.

He said health authorities even struggle to fully utilise the existing allocation, he added. So, any increase should be gradual to ensure the allocation can be properly spent, and the health budget should ideally be 12 to 15 percent of the total budget, he said.

Prof Hamid termed Jamaat's promise to provide free treatment for people under five and those over 60 as unrealistic.

"A major overhaul of the system and significant investment would be required to implement such a programme, which is not feasible given the current health structure and funding," he added.

Prof Be-Nazir also said that the promises of these two parties regarding health sector financing are not realistic.

"Besides, their promises regarding services are not target-oriented, but rather based on populist rhetoric," he told this correspondent.

For example, they have promised quality services, which involve several elements such as quality medical education, accurate testing, and adequate health workers, but their manifestos lack clarity on these points, he added.

FROM PAGE 3

"There are also problems with theft and drugs. Roads exist, but most need renovation. I hope things will improve after the election."

Ten candidates are contesting the Dhaka-3 seat. Since the campaign began, candidates and their supporters have been visiting neighbourhoods door to door, seeking votes and promising regional development.

Talking to The Daily Star, Jamaat-e-Islami candidate Md Shahinur Islam said he is receiving a strong voter response.

"I will ensure that the meritorious people get jobs without bribes. If qualified people get opportunities, students' trust in meritocracy will increase. Also, technical and business training will be arranged. To make trained youth self-reliant, government-sponsored interest-free loans will be provided," he said.

"If elected, I will make the area livable by addressing dust, waste and environmental

degradation," he said. "Illegal gas lines will be removed, syndicates dismantled, and roads and drainage improved."

Addressing voters, he said, "Vote for whoever you consider qualified to protect people's rights. Ignore fear and intimidation so that an equitable society can be built."

BNP candidate Gayeshwar Chandra Roy, also a Standing Committee member of the party, said he is confident of victory.

"There is a wave for the sheaf of paddy," he said, alleging Jamaat's campaign is being conducted secretly, primarily through female members.

"If there is no election engineering, I am optimistic," Gayeshwar said he plans to formulate a "Master Plan" for the overall development of Keraniganj, envisioning wider roads, playgrounds, improved schools, and a medical college and hospital.

He mentioned that he is already monitoring the connectivity roads and

infrastructure of the new Jagannath University campus to ensure they are far-reaching.

He also pledged to work on mitigating the gas crisis and waterlogging in the area. "Recovering natural canals is more important than the drainage system," he said.

Addressing voters, Gayeshwar said, "You must establish your voting rights at the polling centres. Vote for the one whose election will lead to a better future for yourself and the area."

Other candidates include Md Sultan Ahmed Khan (Islami Andolan Bangladesh), Md Sajjad (Gono Odhikar Parishad), Mohammad Jafar (Bangladesh Congress), Md Bachchu Bhuiyan (Ganosamhati Andolon), Mujibur Hawlader (BSD), Muhammad Raushan Yazdani (Gonoforum), Md Faruk (Jatiya Party), and independent candidate Md Monir Hossain.

The constituency has 3,62,159 voters – 1,84,971 men, 1,77,184 women and four hijra voters.

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
মহাপরিচালকের কার্যালয়
বাংলাদেশ রেলওয়ে
রেলভবন, ঢাকা

বিজ্ঞপ্তি

বাংলাদেশ রেলওয়ের "ট্রেড এ্যাপ্রেন্টিস" পদে মৌখিক পরীক্ষা গ্রহণের সময়সূচী প্রকাশিত হয়েছে। প্রকাশিত মৌখিক পরীক্ষার সময়সূচী বাংলাদেশ রেলওয়ের ওয়েবসাইট (www.railway.gov.bd) থেকে সজ্ঞাহ করা যাবে।

(Signature)
এ এম সালাহ উদ্দীন
মুগ্ধ-পরিচালক (উন্নয়ন-ট্রাফিক)
বাংলাদেশ রেলওয়ে, রেলভবন, ঢাকা
ও
আস্থায়ক
বিভাগীয় নির্বাচন কমিটি

জিডি-২৮৪

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office Of The Principle
Sher-E-Bangla Regional Cooperative Institute
Kashipur, Barishal.

Reference No: 4761.0000.491.000.07.0004.20. 88 Date: 05 February 2026

e-Tender Notice 01/2025-2026 (OTM)

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for procurement of the following packages:

Sl No.	Tender ID	Package No.	Description of Goods	Last Selling Date and Time	Closing and Opening Date and Time
1	1222302	2025-26_GRI	Computer and Display Monitor	22/02/2026 15:00	22/02/2026 17:00

This is online tender, where only e-Tenders will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copy will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP 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 Banks Branches. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP Held Desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

(Signature)
Mohammad Khorshed Alam
Principle
Sher-E-Bangla Regional Cooperative Institute
Kashipur, Barishal.

GD-283

বাংলাদেশ কৃষি গবেষণা ইনস্টিটিউট
Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute
সংগ্রহ ও ভান্ডার শাখা
গাজীপুর-১৭০১

কৃষিই সমৃদ্ধি
Email: dd.procure@bari.gov.bd
Younusali.bari@gmail.com
Phone: 50350, 49270140

Memo No. 12.21.0000.000.007.01.2093.25.2824 Date: 01 February, 2026

e-GP Tender Notice No. 20 (2025-2026)

e-Tender is invited in the e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of the following goods. Details are given below:

Sl No.	Package No.	Tender ID & Ref No.	Description of goods	Tender documents last selling (date & time)	Tender closing date & time	Tender opening date & time
01.	PN-GD-08	1222846 & IRN: 0293	Laboratory Equipment 05 (Five) Items.	16.02.2026 11:00	16.02.2026 12:00	16.02.2026 12:00

The interested persons/firm may visit the website www.eprocure.gov.bd to get the details of the tender. This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copy will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal is required. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

Budget Type: Research Development and Extension of Cashew Nut & Coffee Project.

(Signature)
Md. Younus Ali
(BARI-0663)
Deputy Director (In-Charge)
On behalf of Director General

GD-277

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Department of Fire Service & Civil Defence
38-46, Kazi Alauddin Road, Dhaka.

Memo No. 58.03.0000.017.07.040.25.1612 Date:- 05/02/2026

Invitation For e-Tender Notice No: FS&CD (Foreign Procurement Section): 06/2025-2026

e-Tender is invited in the National e-Gp-system Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of goods as mentioned in the following table:

SL. No.	e-Tender ID No.	Name of the Equipment's & Quantity	e-Tender Publishing Date & Time	Last Selling Date & Time	Closing & Opening Date & Time
1	1207801	Fire Rescue Tender (Full Intensive)-12 Nos.	08.02.2026 at 09.00 AM	08.03.2026 at 12.00 PM	08.03.2026 at 15.00 PM

This is an online Tender where only e-Tenders will be accepted in the national e-Gp portal & 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. For more details please contact help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

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.

Note:
(I) Quantity of equipment may be increased or decreased due to budget reductions and increases without showing any reason.
(II) The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject any or all e-Tenders without showing any reason at any time of the procuring process.
(III) Tender notice will also be published in FS&CD website: www.fireservice.gov.bd

(Signature)
05.02.2026
Md. Shahid Atahar Hossain
Director (Admin & Finance)

GD-278

Hamas leader vows no arms handover

Rejects 'foreign rule' in Gaza; US-led peace board to meet Feb 19

AGENCIES

A senior Hamas leader said yesterday that the Palestinian Islamist movement would not surrender its weapons nor accept foreign intervention in Gaza, pushing back against US and Israeli demands.

"Criminalising the resistance, its weapons, and those who carried it out is something we should not accept," Khaled Meshal said at a conference in Doha.

"As long as there is occupation, there is resistance. Resistance is a right of peoples under occupation ... something nations take pride in," said Meshal, who previously headed the group.

A US brokered ceasefire in Gaza is in its second phase, which foresees



A resident stands near apartment buildings damaged by a Russian air strike in Kramatorsk, Donetsk region, Ukraine yesterday. Kyiv's foreign minister has said the Ukrainian and Russian leaders need to meet in person to hash out the hardest remaining issues in peace talks, and that only US President Donald Trump has the power to bring about an agreement. PHOTO: REUTERS

Iran defies US threats

FM insists on right to enrich uranium

AFP, Tehran

that demilitarisation of the territory -- including the disarmament of Hamas -- along with a gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces, reports AFP.

Hamas has repeatedly said that disarmament is a red line, although it has indicated it could consider handing over its weapons to a future Palestinian governing authority.

Meanwhile, the Board of Peace touted by US President Donald Trump will hold its first leaders meeting on February 19, a US government official confirmed on Saturday, without offering further details.

The planned meeting was first reported by Axios, which said the gathering would also serve as a fundraising conference for the reconstruction of Gaza.

"We can confirm the Board of Peace meeting is scheduled on February 19th," the official said.

Iran will never surrender the right to enrich uranium, even if war "is imposed on us", its foreign minister said yesterday, defying pressure from Washington.

"Iran has paid a very heavy price for its peaceful nuclear programme and for uranium enrichment," Abbas Araghchi told a forum in Tehran.

"Why do we insist so much on enrichment and refuse to give it up even if a war is imposed on us? Because no one has the right to dictate our behaviour," he said, two days after he met US envoy Steve Witkoff in Oman.

Araghchi said Washington's continuation of sanctions on Iran and its recent military deployments "raise doubts about the other party's seriousness and readiness to engage in genuine negotiations."

"We are closely monitoring the situation, assessing all the signals, and will decide

Iran not intimidated by US naval deployment in Gulf

Top Trump negotiators visit US aircraft carrier in ME

Iran arrests another activist over critical statement

whether to continue the negotiations," he said. "Their military deployment in the region does not scare us," Abbas Araghchi said.

Trump's lead Iran negotiators Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner on Saturday visited the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier in the Arabian Sea, the US military said, with Washington and Tehran due to hold further talks soon.

The US military's Central Command (CENTCOM) said the two top officials visited the nuclear-powered vessel in a post

on social media.

In his own social media post, Witkoff said the aircraft carrier and its strike group was "keeping us safe and upholding President Trump's message of peace through strength."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will meet Trump in Washington on Wednesday to "discuss with him the negotiations with Iran", the premier's office said.

Netanyahu "believes any negotiations must include limitations on ballistic missiles and a halting of the support for the Iranian axis", his office said in a statement on Saturday, referring to Iran's allies in the region.

Meanwhile, prominent Iranian activist Ghorban Behzadian-Nejad was arrested for his contribution to a statement critical of Iran's authorities, written in the wake of their deadly crackdown on protests, the reformist daily Shargh reported on Saturday.

Women's rights activists slam Jamaat

FROM PAGE 12

in misogynistic speech or behaviour and demanded an end to the use of religion in politics.

The protest was organised by the International Women's Day Celebration Committee, a platform of 61 women's and human rights organisations, in front of the National Press Club in Dhaka.

Similar demonstrations under the same banner took place simultaneously in 50 districts outside the capital, organised by Durbar Network and local partner organisations.

The protest aimed to reject misogyny and the misuse of religion in politics and to demand an equal, democratic Bangladesh for women, men and people of the third gender.

Bangladesh has 23.7 million working women employed across agriculture, education, health, nursing, services, industry including the garment sector, office and clerical work, banking, retail and hotel businesses and domestic labour.

The Jamaat leader's remarks amounted to obscene and demeaning attacks on nearly 25 million working women, Manisha said.

The keynote also referred to an interview given by Shafiqur to Al Jazeera, in which he stated that no woman could ever become the ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami, citing inherent differences between men and women. Speakers pointed out that Bangladesh has been governed by women prime ministers for more than three decades and that Jamaat-e-Islami had previously been a partner in governments led by women.

Protesters further criticised Jamaat for failing to nominate any women candidates in parliamentary elections despite agreeing to a proposal to allocate at least 5 percent of nominations to women.

While Jamaat's constitution does not explicitly bar women from becoming party leaders, the party enforces exclusionary practices in reality.

The statement also cited remarks by Jamaat leader Md Shamim Ahsan at an election rally in Barguna-2, in which he described the Dhaka University Central Students' Union as a "drug den and brothel", and verbal abuse of women and the Women's Reform Commission by Hefazat-

e-Islam leaders at a rally at Dhaka University's TSC last year.

They also referred to events at Dhaka University involving the promotion of an "ideal woman" narrative and the public defence of individuals accused of harassing women over their clothing.

"We have seen in the manifesto of one political party that all the provisions and benefits for women are framed in terms of their children or childcare, with no mention of their workplace rights or other entitlements -- the focus is entirely on mothers and children, implying that a woman exists only for reproduction," said Kazi Gulshan-Ara Dipa of Karmojibi Nari.

Women make up more than half of the country's population, and if this half remains confined to the home, the economy cannot function.

"Therefore, women must be recognised as full human beings. No discriminatory or hateful remarks against women should ever be tolerated," she added.

Also yesterday, another group of 11 women's and human rights activists submitted a memorandum to the Chief Election Commissioner demanding the withdrawal of the remarks, an unconditional public apology to working women and the cancellation of the Jamaat leader's candidacy under the EC's code of conduct.

In the memorandum, the signatories expressed deep concern over a statement posted from Shafiqur Rahman's verified X account, rejecting the party's claim that the post was the result of hacking.

They noted that no official statement, credible evidence or transparent investigation had been made public.

Media reports regarding the alleged hacking, including contradictory statements from law enforcement and the absence of concrete proof, were cited as further grounds for questioning the claim.

The memorandum noted that for decades, working women in Bangladesh, including those in the garment industry and other sectors, have made vital contributions to their families, society and the national economy through their hard work. Publicly demeaning these

contributions is directly opposed to constitutionally guaranteed equality, human rights, women's dignity and social justice.

Such statements foster a culture of hatred, discrimination, and violence against women, putting the safety, dignity and work environment of women workers at risk.

Remarks of this irresponsible nature from someone in a political leadership position are entirely unacceptable, it added.

The memorandum was sent by a group of women's and human rights activists, including Moshrefa Mishu, general secretary of the Democratic Revolutionary Party; Samina Luthfa, a professor at Dhaka University; Shabnam Hafiz, president of the Garment Workers' Liberation Movement; Ferdous Ara Rumi, spokesperson of National People's Alliance; Nafisa Raihana, organiser of the Women's Political Rights Forum; Zakiya Shishir, women's affairs secretary of the State Reform Movement; Tabassum Mehanaz Mimi, lawyer and rights activist; Sultana Begum, president of the Green Bangla Garment Workers' Federation; Shamim Ara Neepa, central member of Jonobhashya; Marzia Prabha, member of the Democratic Rights Committee; and the organisation Naripokkho.

Dhaka seeks UN help for probe

FROM PAGE 12

On Thursday, Inqilab Moncho staged a sit-in near the chief adviser's official residence, Jamuna, demanding an impartial investigation under United Nations supervision into the killing of Hadi, who was its spokesperson.

Hadi was shot in Dhaka on December 12 last year as he was preparing to run as an independent candidate from the Dhaka-8 constituency. He died at a Singapore hospital on December 18.

Following his death, a case was filed over attempted murder with Paltan Police Station on December 14, which was later converted into a murder case.

The case was subsequently transferred to the DB.

Army picking up Bangladesh Times staffers

FROM PAGE 12

Times office set a troubling precedent. "I strongly protest and express deep concern. Taking away employees of an institution at night without any specific allegation is completely unacceptable.... Whatever the justification, this is an extremely negative and violent precedent for Bangladesh's free journalism."

He added that if there were objections to any news report, there were appropriate legal and institutional mechanisms to address them.

"But picking up people in such an authoritarian manner, even if they were later returned, has sent a very harsh message -- not only for that particular institution; it has created an intense climate of fear across the entire media in Bangladesh."

Referring to recent attacks, vandalism, looting, and arson at the offices of The Daily Star and Prothom Alo, he said the role of law enforcement agencies, including the army, was

questionable.

"Only two days ago, the army at a press conference described the media as 'the mirror of the nation'. It was very pleasing to hear. The spokesperson also said the media should be able to report without fear. But is this [incident at Bangladesh Times] an example of what happens after fearless reporting?"

"I want to ask -- without approval from the highest authority, can any army officers undertake such an action? If that is possible, then where does command and control exist within the army?"

Iftekharruzaman urged the army and all institutions to refrain from such activities and stressed the need to find ways to address the growing pressure on free media in Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Journalists in International Media (BJIM), in a statement yesterday, also expressed serious concern over the incident at the Bangladesh Times office.

"BJIM is closely monitoring the evolving situation surrounding Bangladesh Times and is deeply concerned by allegations that members of the Bangladesh Army entered the newsroom, took several journalists to an army camp for questioning, and later released them," it said.

Condemning the incident, which included claims by the journalists during a Facebook Live broadcast that they were pressured to remove content or issue clarifications while at the camp, the organisation called for an immediate, transparent explanation from the authorities and stressed the importance of ensuring the safety of journalists while protecting editorial independence from intimidation or interference.

Regarding the army drive, the Inter-Services Public Relations yesterday stated that the journalists of Bangladesh Times were "invited for a discussion on two to three news-related matters", and that the issue was later resolved.

Polls code violations rampant

FROM PAGE 12

generated photos and video clips, the TIB report said.

The study found the state-run media to give more coverage on one political party and its leader. It was also true for private media.

For example, between October 1 and December 11 last year, BTV broadcast news for 144 minutes 19 seconds for a party, and 27 minutes and 2 seconds for another party, TIB said.

However, the graft watchdog did not name the parties.

Influential parties continued campaigns after 12:00am, but the EC was indifferent in taking actions. However, in the cases of individual candidates, it took strong actions, including issuing show causes and imposing fines, it added.

Many of the campaigns also targeted women and opposition candidates, and used religious and sexual slurs, but the EC has not taken adequate measures to stop them, the study said.

The parties allegedly nominated candidates without considering their qualifications and popularity, which is why those who contributed more to the parties were deprived of nominations, it added.

Influential political parties allegedly paid cash to voters as well as to presiding officers and assistant presiding officers, and even allegedly threatened them for influencing the polls.

The TIB report said the EC has not

NCP vows country

FROM PAGE 2

selling of judicial verdicts" during the 18-month tenure of the interim government led by Dr Muhammad Yunus. He warned that if that party takes power, it will "tear Bangladesh apart".

ACCOUNTABILITY AND JUSTICE

Nahid promised that an NCP-led government would prosecute all individuals responsible for enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and torture during the previous administration.

He said various state agencies were complicit in these crimes and vowed to identify and bring to justice all "criminals hiding within" the forces.

He criticised the interim government's "Operation Devil Hunt" for failing to produce significant results in apprehending criminals or recovering weapons.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Highlighting economic crimes, he cited a white paper revealing that \$234 billion was siphoned abroad during the fascist regime. He pledged comprehensive legal measures to repatriate the laundered wealth and create a public trust, to be managed by international professionals, to oversee recovered assets.

The NCP leader vowed to end "capacity charges" in the power sector, which force the government to pay companies like Adani, Summit, and S Alam even when electricity is not produced. "We will not pay another taka to these enemies of the people."

On commodity prices, he promised to dismantle syndicates of businesspersons, politicians, and bureaucrats who create artificial market crises, pledging fast-track trials and heavy penalties for market manipulators.

FOREIGN POLICY SHIFT

On foreign policy, Nahid vowed to break the "subservient policy framework" toward India, prioritise national self-respect, revive SAARC, and address the silence over killings by India's Border Security Force at the border.

He proposed transforming the military into a high-tech force rather

than expanding personnel numbers and called for mandatory military training for citizens aged 18 and above to establish a mass defence system.

GOVERNANCE REFORMS

The NCP convened detailed radical administrative shifts, including decentralisation of education, health, and infrastructure to upazila level. He pledged to increase the education budget to five percent of GDP while implementing strict teacher accountability.

On law enforcement, he proposed renaming and restructuring the police force with equal male and female recruitment, adding, "Every police officer involved in killings, torture, and extortion will be brought to justice."

His healthcare reforms include banning private practice for government doctors and ensuring specialists serve designated hours in public hospitals.

SOCIAL ISSUES

Regarding women's rights, Nahid said there would be no state-imposed dress code, ensuring women are not forced to wear hijabs or prevented from wearing sarees. He committed to ending the "culture of harassment" and creating safe environments for women.

On minority rights, he emphasised that all religious and ethnic groups should be treated equally under the law.

Rejecting comparisons to Afghanistan, he proposed a governance model balancing religious observance with liberal values, citing Malaysia and Turkey as examples.

On public services, Nahid proposed an overhaul of the transport system, ensuring no roads are closed for VIPs and requiring ministers to use public transport at least once a week.

He declared zero tolerance for food adulteration, promising mobile testing labs and licence cancellation for proven offenders.

The NCP chief urged voters to support the 11-party alliance to liberate the country from Indian domination, fascist forces, and extortion culture on February 12.



Why is 9 February another day to celebrate chocolate?

The world's official Chocolate Day is 7 July, often linked to chocolate's arrival in Europe in the 16th century. It is marked globally as a tribute to one of history's most loved indulgences.

So why 9 February? In many cultures, the days leading up to Valentine's Day have evolved into a "love week," and chocolate naturally takes the lead. Before romance reaches its peak on the 14th, chocolate becomes the first gesture: a symbol of affection, friendship, comfort and shared joy. And really, it turns out you can never have enough chocolate.



Chocolates and your health

Dark chocolate is a healthier alternative to milk chocolate. Dark chocolate with 70-85% cocoa solids is a nutrient-dense food. A standard 101g bar typically contains minerals, fibre, and antioxidants. You can enjoy chocolate as a treat with your loved ones, but at a moderate level.

ALL THINGS GOOD IN CHOCOLATE

Dark chocolate may lower the risk of heart disease by improving blood flow and reducing blood pressure.

Regular consumption can help lower "bad" LDL cholesterol while increasing "good" HDL levels.

Dark chocolate improves how the body processes insulin, which may help prevent diabetes.

The flavanols, an antioxidant compound of dark chocolate, in cocoa enhance blood flow to the brain and may improve memory and mood.

For healthy consumption, adults can regularly enjoy 4-6 bites of dark chocolate, while children can have 2-3 bites of 60-70% dark or low-sugar milk chocolate. Those with type 2 diabetes should limit intake to 2-4 bites of sugar-free 85% dark chocolate on an occasional basis. So, chocolate isn't bad for your health as long as you take it moderately.

THINGS TO LOOK AFTER

Chocolate is high in fat and sugar. Eating them in large amounts can lead to weight gain. While lower than milk chocolate, dark chocolate still contains sugar. It also contains small amounts of caffeine and theobromine, which may affect people sensitive to stimulants.

LOVE AND CASH ENTANGLED SINCE AGES

From 300 AD to the 15th century, the Maya and Aztec civilisations used cacao beans as currency. Since romance needs funding, they proved that both money and love really do grow on trees!



The World's Most Delicious Destinations

From streetlights shaped like kisses in "the Chocolate town" Hershey, Pennsylvania, to the high-fashion cocoa runways of Paris's Salon du Chocolat, these global hubs prove that life is simply better when cocoa-coated.



Rocking Beats and cavity treats

The Beatles released "Savoy Truffle" in 1968, where George Harrison was actually warning Eric Clapton about tooth decay as he knew about his immense obsession with chocolates. So indulge your partner with a sweet tooth, but ensure your love is the only thing that is truly permanent!



A New Standard for CHOCOLATE DAY

TAGABUN TAHARIM TITUN

There is a timeless English proverb that suggests we should "say it with something sweet." When words fall short, a piece of chocolate often serves as the perfect messenger of affection. This tradition has made February 9th, known globally as Chocolate Day, a significant highlight of the Valentine's season. While the history of chocolate stretches back over two thousand years to the Mayan and Aztec civilisations, its power to connect people remains as potent as ever. In Bangladesh, gifting chocolate has become a cherished ritual for expressing love and appreciation.

BRIDGING THE QUALITY GAP

Despite the growing popularity of chocolates in Bangladesh, the market has long been divided between two extremes: expensive imported brands and low-quality local alternatives. Many local commercial chocolates often prioritise cost-cutting by using palm oil or dalda instead of real cocoa butter. This results in a product that lacks the signature melt-in-the-mouth texture and authentic flavour of real chocolate. For health-conscious consumers and true chocolate enthusiasts, finding a high-quality, locally available option has historically been a challenge.

PREMIUM EUROPEAN STANDARDS LOCALLY

Akij Bakers Limited has stepped in to redefine these expectations. By launching brands like "Hi5 Fondalo," "Hi5 Amora," "Hi5 Dimbo," they have successfully captured the trust of Bangladeshi consumers. Specially Hi5 Fondalo has become an immensely popular brand in the Bangladeshi chocolate market in a very short time. A significant craze for it has been observed among chocolate lovers.

On the other hand, ChocoTreeUK is a UK-based chocolate and bakery company

focused on delivering authentic, high-quality chocolate experiences rooted in European standards. Built around expertise in chocolate formulation, quality control, and product development, ChocoTreeUK emphasises real cocoa ingredients, balanced flavour profiles, and smooth texture—hallmarks of premium chocolate.

In Bangladesh, ChocoTreeUK plays a guiding and supervisory role behind Elano Tempt chocolate. The company provides end-to-end guidance covering formulation,

production processes, quality assurance, and brand standards. This ensures that the Elano Tempt chocolate meets UK-level manufacturing and quality benchmarks while remaining affordable and accessible to local consumers.

By combining international know-how with local production efficiency, ChocoTreeUK by launching Elano Tempt, helps bridge the gap between imported premium chocolates and everyday indulgence. The result is Elano Tempt chocolate that feels international in quality yet familiar in taste—premium, trustworthy, and suited to the purchasing power and preferences of Bangladeshi consumers.

Unlike many local variants, Elano Tempt is produced using high-quality raw materials,

including genuine cocoa powder and cocoa mass. This ensures a smooth, velvety texture and a balanced flavour profile that rivals international competitors, bringing a true European chocolate experience to the local market. In addition to these, their product lineup features widely acclaimed chocolate products

such as "Elano Cremelle," "Elano Dipstik," and "Elano C&N."

LUXURY NOW WITHIN REACH

Traditionally, "real" chocolate was considered a luxury due to the high price of imports. For instance, while a 55g international brand bar may cost upwards of BDT 240, Elano Tempt offers a similar 55g premium experience for just BDT 120. Furthermore, their 110g unit is priced at only BDT 200, making it a budget-friendly yet sophisticated choice for students and young professionals looking to celebrate Chocolate Day without compromise.

CELEBRATING WITH REAL TASTE

"Shafiqul Islam Tushar, Executive Director (Marketing) of Akij Bakers Ltd., said, 'There

was a lack of adequate supply of premium chocolates that met the tastes and demands of people in our country. We wanted to give consumers the best chocolate

experience.' He further confirmed that, to provide the taste of European chocolate within the reach of Bangladeshi consumers, they are marketing Elano Tempt on behalf of ChocotreeUK, which has already created a great stir among chocolate lovers."

ChocoTreeUK Chocolate & Bakery Ltd is transforming the Bangladeshi chocolate landscape this Chocolate Day by introducing "Elano Tempt," a premium chocolate crafted with European standards that offers authentic cocoa richness at an affordable price.



Reform key to curbing custodial deaths

Ensuring proper care, addressing overcrowding must be a priority

Official figures on deaths in prison custody over the last three years reveal the deplorable state of our jails. As per data from the Prisons Directorate, 270 inmates died in 2025, 261 in 2024, and 290 in 2023. The majority of these deaths occurred while inmates were receiving treatment at hospitals, but a significant number also died en route to hospitals—111 in 2025, 120 in 2024, and 101 in 2023. In addition, deaths by suicide over these three years numbered four, one, and two, respectively.

These statistics clearly indicate that whether under a politically elected government that turned authoritarian or a non-political interim administration, no meaningful reforms have been carried out to reduce deaths in prison custody. A report published in this daily points at the shortage of round-the-clock doctors and nurses. Of the 75 prisons across the country, only two have full-time doctors, while most are served by part-time doctors from the civil surgeons' office. At least 15 prisons do not even have nurses; trained guards perform that role instead. Moreover, only 27 prisons have ambulances, which explains the high number of inmate deaths occurring en route to medical facilities with doctors.

Former Water Resources Minister and Awami League MP, Ramesh Chandra Sen, 84, died under similar circumstances this Saturday. He was at Dinajpur District Jail when he fell ill, and by the time he was taken to Dinajpur Medical College Hospital, about seven kilometres away, the attending doctors declared him dead. His relatives alleged that he had not received proper treatment during his detention at the facility since August 17, 2024. Similar allegations were raised by the relatives of Awami League leaders and activists in the past. In fact, after the fall of Sheikh Hasina on August 5, 2024, at least 31 AL men died in prison custody, according to data collected by *The Daily Star*.

The prisons have been overcrowded for quite some time now. The Operation Devil Hunt, launched on February 8, 2025, alone led to at least 86,000 arrests, as per a recent Human Rights Watch report. The large-scale arrests have only worsened the already overcrowded conditions in our prisons. The situation has been compounded by the low-quality food often provided there. What's more, autopsies are sometimes not carried out following inmate deaths, and investigations are rarely initiated, even when demanded. For example, last year rights activists called for a judicial probe into the deaths of three Bawm men at Chattogram Central Jail, but to date, the government has taken no action.

No large-scale changes from the interim government can be expected at this stage, with only a few days remaining in its tenure. However, the next government has the opportunity and responsibility to implement genuine prison reform, including making prisons more humane, being transparent and accountable regarding custodial deaths, and putting an end to arbitrary arrests and prolonged detention without trial.

Save Baikka Beel before it is too late

Sanctuary status means little without enforcement

The steady degradation of Baikka Beel, despite its designation as a protected sanctuary, is deeply frustrating. Although the wetland was declared off-limits to the public a year ago to allow it to recover, picnicking, fishing, bird hunting, and littering continue almost unabated. Situated in Sreemangal's Hail Haor region, the beel has long been recognised for its ecological importance. Each year, migratory birds arrive before winter and remain until late March, with some species reportedly making it their permanent home. Yet, the wetland is quietly slipping towards ecological collapse.

Nearly a third of the wetland has already been lost to siltation, while persistent poaching and habitat degradation have caused a sharp decline in bird populations. Bird census data since 2008 show how a once-successful conservation effort has fallen into neglect. Fish theft has also become rampant in this designated fish sanctuary. Night-time fishing continues, often by large armed groups, outnumbering the few guards tasked with protecting the wetland. With fish stocks dwindling, birds are losing a vital food source.

While legal and institutional frameworks exist, they are rarely enforced. Bird hunting, for example, is a punishable offence under the Wildlife (Conservation and Security) Act, yet enforcement remains weak. The management committee formed to protect the beel also lacks manpower, limiting its effectiveness. On top of this, the absence of sustained public awareness has allowed illegal practices to continue with little resistance.

The situation in Baikka Beel is not an isolated incident. Across the country, forests, wetlands, hills, and rivers are facing alarming environmental degradation. Rapid urbanisation, unplanned infrastructure projects, illegal logging, hill cutting, and overfishing are destroying ecosystems that once supported rich biodiversity. Wetlands and haors are shrinking. Deforestation and habitat loss are forcing wildlife into human settlements, threatening species survival. As in Baikka Beel, weak enforcement of existing laws, poor coordination among agencies, and growing human pressure continue to accelerate ecological decline nationwide. This must stop.

We hope the next government will show a genuine commitment to protecting our environment. Baikka Beel, Hakaluki Haor, and all such wetlands must be safeguarded from constant human greed. To preserve Baikka Beel, authorities must immediately strengthen law enforcement, increase manpower, ensure better coordination between relevant agencies, and invest in community awareness programmes. Without decisive action, Baikka Beel could join the long list of natural habitats we have failed to protect over the years.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

First Black man walks in space

On this day in 1995, Nasa astronaut Bernard Harris became the first Black man to walk in space. His mission contributed to a burgeoning collaboration between the US and Russia in space exploration.

Will this election pass the minority protection test?



A CLOSER LOOK

Tasneem Tayeb is a columnist for *The Daily Star*. Her X handle is @tasneem_tayeb.

TASNEEM TAYEB

In late December, several houses of minority communities in Raozan and Rangunia upazilas of Chattogram were padlocked from outside and set on fire, forcing families to cut their way out to safety. A citizen delegation that inspected the Raozan site on February 1 said the attack was meant to create fear among religious minorities ahead of the election. The visiting team leader also underscored a deeper question: "When elections come around, we talk about a level playing field for candidates [equal opportunity for all]. But we don't talk about a level playing field for voters. Can all voters exercise their right to vote by going to polling centres without fear?"

In other words, can the minority voters go to the polls without fear or intimidation, like everyone else? For many, such attacks are not just isolated crimes. They serve as a signal. After all, elections in this country have a way of reigniting unpalatable memories. Long before the first ballot is cast, fear begins to circulate: not as rumour, but as recognition of times past. For religious minorities, election cycles have historically coincided with heightened vulnerability—threats, intimidation, attacks on homes and places of worship, and the cautious calculation of when to stay indoors. It has been repeated enough to become part of how elections are anticipated, not just experienced.

That anticipation matters politically, because fear that is predictable is rarely irrational.

Civil society organisations have often attempted to document this vulnerability, though not without controversy. Recently, the Bangladesh Hindu Buddha Christian Oikya Parishad reported 42 incidents of communal violence in January alone, including attacks on homes, land, and places of worship. Such reporting, especially the characterisation of crimes, should be treated with caution, but the recurrence of these incidents during election periods is not new.

The government, for its part, rejects

claims of widespread communal violence. According to official numbers, 645 incidents were recorded in 2025 involving members of minority communities. Of these, officials say only 71 contained what they called "communal elements," while the rest were categorised as general criminal acts. The state argues that these numbers demonstrate the importance of distinguishing religiously motivated violence from broader law-and-order challenges.

This distinction deserves to be acknowledged. Accuracy matters



FILE VISUAL: STAR

in public debate, and conflating all crimes involving minorities with communal violence risks distortion. However, it does not resolve the deeper democratic question. Even a single incident rooted in communal targeting is not acceptable in a democracy that claims equal citizenship. Violence and intimidation tend to cluster when political stakes are high and accountability is diffuse, usually before votes are cast, and sometimes after results are declared.

This is not so much an aberration of democratic life as a pattern that institutions have learned to manage rather than dismantle. Their response thus feels almost routine:

condemnations are issued, assurances are offered, and additional security is deployed around polling stations and other sensitive sites.

These measures are not meaningless, but they are temporary. They address the visibility of risk, not its persistence. Protection intensifies when legitimacy is publicly at stake, then recedes once attention moves on, while accountability—thorough investigations, consistent prosecutions, visible consequences—remains elusive. The harder question is not whether the state can anticipate risk, but why minority insecurity remains so foreseeable and yet so episodic in its protection.

Political theory offers a useful perspective here. Political scientist Guillermo O'Donnell once warned that electoral democracy can coexist with what he described as "low-intensity citizenship"—systems in which rights do exist but the state's protective reach is uneven. Some citizens experience the

A vote cast under such conditions may still be counted, but it is not cast on equal footing.

If minority security is to be taken seriously, it cannot be treated as an election-management exercise. Protection must be anticipatory rather than reactive, accountability must extend beyond moments of public attention, and investigations must proceed with the same urgency once political incentives have faded. These are not exceptional demands. They are the minimum conditions of equal citizenship in a functioning democracy.

The period after elections is often the most revealing. It is then that political attention shifts, security deployments thin, and cases stall. Communities are left to wonder what the state's silence or inaction means. The message they get is that protection was temporary, extended when political legitimacy was visible, and withdrawn when it was no longer urgent. So, if the upcoming election is to be understood as a democratic reset, it cannot be judged solely by the calm of polling day; it must be assessed by what follows.

A democracy is not measured only by how it administers choice but also by how it distributes security. Bangladesh is not alone in confronting this tension. But election periods do sharpen the contradiction. The incidents of recent months should therefore be acknowledged not as aberrations, but as ground realities, and these are part of a legacy pattern that must be dismantled. But for that, acceptance of the risk is the first step. After all, democracies mature not by denying their fault lines, but by confronting them institutionally. The standard expected here is the predictability of protection. Citizens, including minorities, must be able to assume that their safety does not depend on electoral attention, media coverage, or political convenience.

This election arrives with a set of expectations that have been absent in recent years. It is being framed, domestically and internationally, as more competitive, more open, and more credible than the last three national polls. But this also raises the threshold by which democratic performance will be judged. A democracy that secures its minorities only when it is being watched has not yet resolved the question of equal citizenship.

Women voters are not undecided — they are unconvinced



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TASMIAH T RAHMAN

At the moment when women have become the most invoked voters of the upcoming election—celebrated or disrespected in speeches, targeted through promises, and framed as the moral centre—it is worth pausing to ask: what if women are unconvinced?

This question emerged during Round 3 of the People's Election Pulse Survey (PEPS) by Innovision Consulting, an initiative tracking shifts in voter sentiment over time. This round was a panel survey of electoral attitudes as the election approached. As part of the survey unit, I personally spoke with women who had identified themselves as "undecided."

One of the most striking findings from this round is the persistent gender gap in political disclosure. Across all three rounds of PEPS, women remained significantly less likely than men to say they decided whom to vote for. In Round 3, around 23 percent of female respondents reported being undecided, compared to 16 percent of men, while a substantially higher proportion of women chose "I don't want to say." This consistency suggests that what we are seeing is not momentary hesitation, but something more fundamental: women's political preferences are more constrained, more private, and harder to articulate in both public and survey settings.

To understand what lies beneath this silence, I wanted to speak to these women, selected at random from the list of undecided voters. Of the 30 women called, 10 picked up; the rest were either uninterested in speaking further or did not answer. What emerged from these conversations is far more complicated than the assumption that undecided voters are simply confused or waiting for better information.

Instead, many women were remarkably clear about their priorities: reasonable price of essentials, law and order, safety, better education for children, employment opportunities, and peace. However, they were deeply uncertain that electoral politics would meaningfully respond to them.

"I will vote because I have to," many women said across districts and age groups, often immediately followed by "but nothing will change." This resignation was striking. It did not sound like apathy, but like experience.

For working-class and economically vulnerable women—domestic workers, day labourers, etc.—political disengagement was shaped by immediacy. Rising prices, healthcare costs, housing insecurity, and unsafe public spaces left little room for political optimism. Several women described voting decisions as something men make or something families decide collectively. Their

exclusion was not dramatic or enforced; it was normalised.

Lower-middle and middle-income homemakers expressed a different kind of disengagement: fatigue. These women were not disconnected from public life. They followed the news, discussed elections occasionally, and were aware of party promises. But trust was absent. Politicians were

The persistence of women's undecided status across several rounds of the survey suggests something structural. It points to a political system that has not earned women's confidence, even when it seeks their votes. More rallies, louder slogans or gender-specific promises will not bridge this gap.

described as corrupt, interchangeable and distant. Electoral competition appeared repetitive rather than responsive. For these women, withholding a voting preference was less about indecision and more about disbelief.

Among Gen Z women, disengagement took its most explicit form. Many openly questioned whether elections had any bearing on their future, particularly on employment prospects and personal safety. Party assurances, including women-focused welfare schemes or symbolic concessions, failed to persuade. For younger women, scepticism was not inherited; it was learnt.

What connects these experiences across class and generation seems like a collapse of expectation. Women are struggling to locate themselves within electoral politics as agents of meaningful change. Their reluctance to declare a preference is a response to repeated disappointments.

This matters because women are not a peripheral voting bloc. They are central to household economies, care work, community stability, and social reproduction. Yet, the issues they consistently prioritise—price stability, safety in public spaces, accessible healthcare, quality education, and dignified employment—remain chronically under-delivered. Whether this election and the government that follows will succeed in addressing these concerns in credible ways remains to be seen. The disengagement seemed like a rational choice at the moment for some.

The persistence of women's undecided status across several rounds of the survey suggests something structural. It points to a political system that has not earned women's confidence, even when it seeks their votes. More rallies, louder slogans or gender-specific promises will not bridge this gap.

For the next government, regardless of who forms it, this should serve as a warning. A democracy in which women do not have faith is not a stable one. If political parties want women's trust, they must move beyond symbolic inclusion and demonstrate through governance: that politics can tangibly improve everyday life by controlling prices, ensuring safety, delivering education, and healthcare, and reducing corruption in ways that are visible and felt. Until that changes, many women will remain absent from ballot boxes and political beliefs.

'The US will work with whoever forms the next government'

The world is closely watching as Bangladesh heads towards a defining election on February 12 amid global geopolitical shift. How are global and regional actors such as the US, China, India and Pakistan looking at it? What is going to change for Bangladesh? Michael Kugelman, senior fellow for South Asia at the Washington-based think tank Atlantic Council, shares his views in an email interview with Porimol Palma, diplomatic correspondent at The Daily Star.

How is the Trump administration looking at the upcoming election in Bangladesh? The Trump administration, unlike the Biden administration, does not view foreign policy through a values-based lens. This means issues such as democracy and human rights are not likely to drive this administration's foreign policy thinking. As a result, when it comes to an election in Bangladesh, the administration is unlikely to take a strong stand on the need for a free, fair and credible election, even though it may state this publicly since such a position is not controversial and generally aligns with what much of the Bangladeshi population would want to see. The Trump administration will be keen to work with whatever government emerges victorious from the election.

For the Trump administration, the primary concern is overall stability. It hopes that the election will be peaceful, or at least relatively peaceful, and that any election-related violence—whether before the election, on election day, or afterwards—will be minimised. In particular, it seeks to ensure that such violence does not imperil US interests or assets in Bangladesh.

What are the US's key priorities then?

Ultimately, the US wants to work with Bangladesh on a number of issues, many of them trade-related. The bottom line is that the Trump administration will be perfectly comfortable with whoever leads the next government, so long as that government is willing to engage with Washington, do business with Washington, and—most importantly from Washington's perspective—discuss lowering tariffs and purchasing more American goods. This reflects the administration's highly commercial and transactional approach to



Michael Kugelman

foreign policy.

There are perceptions that the US favours Jamaat-e-Islami. Is it true?

It is true that there have been perceptions that the US is, for some reason, favouring Jamaat, perhaps due to reports such as one *Washington Post* story. However, the bottom line is that the US government does not favour any particular political party. It will work with whichever party emerges victorious from the election.

A core part of US diplomacy is engagement with all key actors and stakeholders. This is why senior US diplomats meet with leaders from different political parties. It should not

be surprising that US diplomatic officials have engaged with Jamaat leaders, as Washington recognises—correctly—that Jamaat has political clout and electoral potential. It is a party capable of securing a significant number of votes, and US diplomats acknowledge this reality.

Accordingly, Washington seeks to keep channels of engagement open with Jamaat so that, if Jamaat were to emerge victorious or even assume a key role in the opposition, the US would be able to engage effectively. However, engagement with a particular political party should not be mistaken for endorsement. This is simply how US diplomacy operates: it engages with all key stakeholders.

The Bangladesh-India relations have been strained since the July uprising. What should it look like in the future?

India suffered a significant strategic loss when Sheikh Hasina was ousted. It has been very

be influenced by the types of actors that India feels could threaten its interests.

Does India favour any political party?

India is likely to be concerned from political and security standpoints if Jamaat-e-Islami wins the election, but would be comfortable with a BNP-led government. The BNP no longer has an alliance with Jamaat, and the party has expressed its interests about wanting to engage with India.

How would the India-Bangladesh relations be in the coming days?

I think India will be ready to pick up the pieces of what has been a shattered relationship with Bangladesh. New Delhi obviously would have preferred the Awami League to be leading the next government. However, it also recognises that the Awami League is not going to be in the political scene in Bangladesh for quite some time. Thus, it is not going to try to push for

main parties coming to power, but a Jamaat victory would be ideal for it. Pakistan would clearly be the only regional player that would most prefer a Jamaat government. However, it would be okay for Pakistan if there is a BNP-led government, but it would be eager to ensure that BNP does not try to patch Bangladesh's ties with India because it may diminish Islamabad's recent efforts to work towards a better relationship with Dhaka.

What about China? How is it looking at the election?

China will watch the election closely as it views Bangladesh as a key trade and investment partner. For Beijing, political stability in Dhaka is key due to its investments in the region. Beijing wants to ensure that the law and order challenges and other security concerns in Bangladesh would not impact Chinese interests on the ground.

The newly-appointed US ambassador to Bangladesh, Brent Christensen, recently said he would work to reduce Chinese influence in Bangladesh. What does that mean?

I think it means that the US wants Bangladesh to rely less on Chinese capital and infrastructure development. This may suggest a willingness to bring US investment, including potentially from the US International Development Finance Corporation, into Bangladesh. There may also be a suggestion that the US will want to continue to push to complete a Boeing aircraft deal with Dhaka.

The bottom line is that the Trump administration will be perfectly comfortable with whoever leads the next government, so long as that government is willing to engage with Washington, do business with Washington, and—most importantly from Washington's perspective—discuss lowering tariffs and purchasing more American goods. This reflects the administration's highly commercial and transactional approach to foreign policy.

uncomfortable with the interim government. India felt Bangladesh was heavily influenced by Jamaat and other religious actors that, in India's view, threaten its interests. Now, it hopes the election will produce a government that is willing to engage with India and will not

ways to bring the party back. It would accept a government led by the BNP and would be willing to work with it.

What about Pakistan?

Pakistan will be happy with either of the two

New energy policy, same challenges

Bangladesh needs an inclusive approach



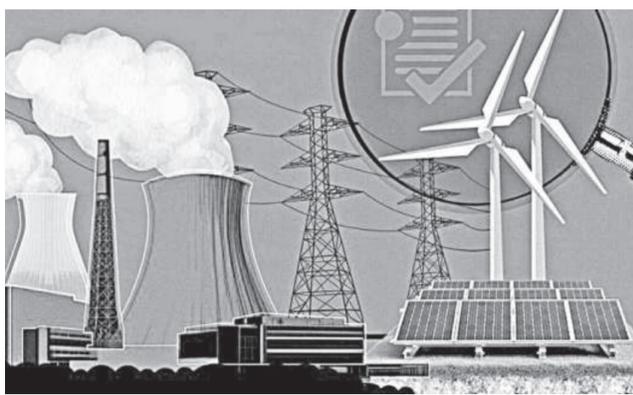
Shafiqul Alam is lead energy analyst for Bangladesh at the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA).

SHAFIQU ALAM

To ensure energy security and boost economic growth while reducing emissions by 2050, the Bangladesh government devised an Integrated Energy and Power Master Plan in 2023 (IEPMP 2023). The IEPMP 2023 immediately drew criticism for its inflated power demand projections, a highly import-dependent fossil fuel pathway, and a limited role for renewable energy. Stakeholders also raised concerns over the government's significant reliance on foreign consultants in drafting the IEPMP 2023 rather than incorporating the suggestions of local experts. Previous power master plans approved between 2010 and 2018 have received similar criticism and ultimately contributed to persistent structural weaknesses in the country's energy and power sectors.

The interim government of Bangladesh, factoring in these concerns, decided to revisit the IEPMP 2023 and draft a blueprint for the energy and power sectors to place them on a more sustainable path. However, the announcement of the draft Energy and Power System Master Plan 2025 (EPSMP 2025) on January 7, 2026, with limited consultations, confused stakeholders and experts. While the draft EPSMP 2025 seeks to significantly increase renewable energy capacity, its challenges remain largely similar to those of previous master plans, which prioritised liquefied natural gas (LNG) and coal. The reliance on carbon capture and storage (CCS) also poses significant technological and financial risks.

The interim government organised a meeting with selected stakeholders to discuss the draft EPSMP 2025 on February 8. However, this does not guarantee that all key experts' and important stakeholders' suggestions will be reflected in the final version. A hasty approval of the plan risks the need for a revision in a few years, delaying the country's energy transition. Therefore, the next government should draw upon local technical expertise and key stakeholder inputs through an inclusive



FILE VISUAL: STAR

consultation process before finalising the EPSMP 2025.

A decade and a half of costly dependence on imported fossil fuels

Bangladesh's high demand for natural gas, combined with a perceived decline in local supply, pushed the government to approve a new Power System Master Plan 2010 (PSMP 2010), with the objective of diversifying fuels in its energy mix. While the PSMP 2010 was built on three core objectives—economic development, energy security and environmental safeguards—it ultimately set the course for a fragile, import-dependent and carbon-intensive power system through 2030 (coal: 50 percent [import 20 percent]; gas: 25 percent; oil: five percent; nuclear, renewable energy and cross-border import: 20 percent). The PSMP 2010 also laid the foundation for an accelerated power system capacity expansion.

Subsequent master plans, such as PSMP 2016, the revised PSMP 2016, and the IEPMP 2023, again failed to meet expectations. A closer inspection shows that these master plans, also formulated without sufficient consultations, raised the power sector's import dependence

from about five percent in fiscal year (FY) 2009–10 to around 65 percent in FY2024–25 (based on shares of imported electricity, coal, LNG and fuel oil). At the same time, the power generation cost increased more than fourfold. Amid the persistent framing of renewable energy as an expensive option in master plans, the country only added renewable energy capacity of 1,694.5 megawatts (MW),

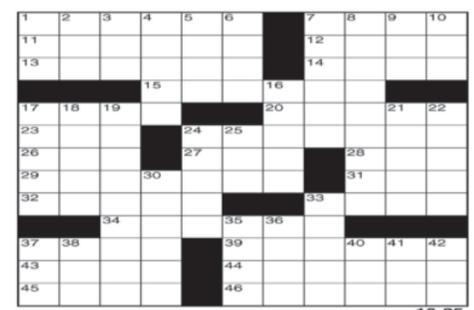
730Bcf per annum, raising energy security and financial risks. The EPSMP 2025 envisages that the country's primary fuel imports will fall below 50 percent, based on the assumption that Bangladesh will produce around 24 million tonnes of domestic coal in 2050, ramping up current local production of around 0.6 million tonnes per annum by 40 times. Given the limited availability of global financing for coal mining, setting up new power plants reliant on local coal could increase import dependence.

The draft EPSMP 2025, like the IEPMP 2023, plans to deploy CCS as an advanced decarbonisation technology that, despite demonstration efforts across the globe, is yet to reach maturity. IEEFA's detailed assessment shows that CCS projects consistently underperform, intensifying financial risks. IEEFA also concludes that the International Energy Agency has downgraded the role of carbon capture in its net zero emissions 2050 scenario as renewables, energy efficiency, electrification, and fuel switching are likely to reduce emissions by more than 82 percent. This indicates that Bangladesh should avoid financially risky technologies like CCS and advance renewables and energy efficiency instead.

Given the limited success of previous master plans in improving energy security and accelerating renewable energy, it is imperative for Bangladesh to design an inclusive policy formulation process. This should involve local experts and key stakeholders to bring forth solution-centric and effective ideas. For instance, the government should engage with industries that struggle to operate at optimal capacity due to energy supply shortages and come up with sustainable solutions. In addition, industries and corporates face the pressure of decarbonisation, which requires strategic policy attention. Likewise, people affected by climate change, for example in the southern districts of Bangladesh, or women burdened with the responsibility of arranging firewood for cooking, have different types of energy needs. Unless Bangladesh incorporates rigorous consultations with stakeholders and draws on expert input throughout the formulation of its energy master plan, a lack of ownership and consensus will slow the energy transition. The next government must reform the policy-making process to avoid the high social and economic costs of delay in the energy transition.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
1 Wheelde
7 Has debts
11 Maine national park
12 Infamous emperor
13 Little devils
14 Delighted
15 Modernize, as a factory
17 Shop tools
20 Nest builders
23 Uno plus due
24 "I couldn't have said it better!"
26 Motor need
27 Heady brew
28 Mess up
29 Not too dark
31 Role for Keanu
32 New York's - Island
33 Dance bit
34 Cornell's home
37 High noble
39 Ordinary
43 Manual reader
44 Hire
45 June honorees
46 Did garden work
- DOWN**
1 Scoundrel
2 Perfect serve
3 Toast spread
4 Smells
5 Script unit
6 Sunrise site
7 Like accurate soccer shots
8 Like time used productively
9 Memorable time
10 Lawn starter
16 Little hooter
17 Vermont resort
18 "The Tempest" sprite
19 Popular
21 Blender speed
22 Razor sharpener
24 Joe of The Eagles
25 Quarterback Manning
30 Cola buys
33 Private's boss
35 Over again
36 Volcano shape
37 Bad bomb
38 Much of N. Amer.
40 Ticked off
41 Long time
42 Was ahead



SATURDAY'S ANSWERS



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

Army officers returned

FROM PAGE 1
talked about the cultural shifts within the military and their increased political involvement.

Ziaul stands accused of orchestrating the enforced disappearance and murder of 104 people between 2010 and 2013.

The former army chief said posting soldiers trained under the “one bullet, one enemy” doctrine to Rab was a disastrous decision.

“Soldiers are trained to dehumanise and gradually view humans as targets, preparing them to kill without hesitation. Their training was ill suited for Rab appointments. Mixing army personnel with civil police was unwise. But that’s exactly what happened after Rab was formed.”

Iqbal recalled extrajudicial killings during Operation Clean Heart (2002–2003), noting the army had officially attributed 12 deaths to heart attacks while Human Rights Watch estimated the number of deaths at 60.

“Later, soldiers who participated in the operation were granted indemnity.”

Iqbal termed this indemnity a “licence to kill”.

Detailing his repeated attempts to rein in Rab abuses, he said, “I had summoned the then Rab additional director general, Col Mujib, and ordered him to halt crossfire killings and control then Rab intelligence chief Lt Col Ziaul Ahsan.”

Though reports of killings had briefly disappeared from newspapers, Iqbal later realised they were being concealed. The situation, Iqbal said, had worsened when Benazir Ahmed became Rab director general and Ziaul Ahsan was promoted to additional director general.

“At that point, I had asked the Director of Military Intelligence [DMI] Brig Gen Jaglul Ahsan and Commanding Officer of the Army Security Unit Brig Gen Fazal, now an election commissioner, to speak to Ziaul Ahsan.

“Jaglut said he spoke to Ziaul but received no promise. Brig Gen Fazal said that there was no point talking to Ziaul and that his head was filled with bricks and stones.”

Fazal further informed Iqbal that Ziaul had kept weapons, armed guards, and CCTV cameras inside his residence – all violations of military rules.

“Ziaul openly defied army command, refusing to release two officers for disciplinary action. I barred Ziaul from entering the cantonment and ordered then Logistic Area Commander Maj Gen Mizan to enforce it,” said Iqbal.

This move had provoked intervention from then prime minister Sheikh Hasina through her military secretary Maj Gen Mia Zainul Abedin, he added.

Despite intense pressure, Iqbal had refused to rescind the ban for two days before withdrawing it to avoid internal conflict.

‘ACT OF COWARDICE’

Speaking before the tribunal, Iqbal said he had urged officers to reject killing missions during their time with Rab,

telling them that it was cowardly to execute a defenceless prisoner.

“I had decided that any officer posted to Rab, DGFI, or BGB must come to me for an interview before and after their posting. Those going to Rab, I would tell them: ‘to kill a person with their hands and feet bound is an act of cowardice.’”

Despite these efforts, Brig Gen Jaglut later told Iqbal that officers were being demoralised once they joined Rab.

“Listening to the horrifying accounts of killings from those who returned, I became deeply worried about the future of the army.”

He told the tribunal that he had raised the issue with the then prime minister and appealed for the army officers serving in Rab to be brought back into the army.

“She admitted that Rab was worse than the Rakhi Bahini, but she gave no assurances and later took no further action on the matter.”

He said he later encouraged officers who came for interviews to contact him if they were ever ordered to carry out a killing mission and added that at least two later refused such missions and were rehabilitated in the army with honour.

“In the meantime, Brig Jaglut fell out of favour with Col Ziaul Ahsan. He was removed from the DMI post by Maj Gen Tarique Siddique. Normally, the DMI is chosen by the army chief. But in this case, he was transferred against my wishes, which was an extreme humiliation for me as army chief.”

However, he added that he had been successful in thwarting a later attempt to transfer Brig Gen Fazal.

‘POLITICAL INFLUENCE’

The former army chief said that from 2007 to 2009, following a state of emergency triggered by attempts to extend the chief justice’s retirement age, the DGFI became Bangladesh’s main power centre.

During this period, many political figures, including BNP leader Tarique Rahman, were abducted, detained, and tortured, normalising secret detentions and impunity, he added.

“Picking up civilians and keeping them in cells became a routine practice... They came to believe that no matter what they did, they would ultimately get away with it.”

At that time, the military, according to Iqbal, underwent cultural shifts: increased political involvement, a sense of dominance, senior-junior divisions, a cash-driven culture, and unquestioning obedience grew among army personnel.

‘HASINA WANTED CORRUPT ARMY’
In his testimony, Iqbal said that following the 2009 BDR mutiny, which left 57 army officers and 17 civilians dead, around 50 BDR personnel died due to torture at Pilkhana during interrogation by Rab and army personnel, according to Human Rights Watch.

“After the BDR mutiny, hostility toward India and the Awami League intensified among army officers. Divisions between senior and junior officers deepened, professional officers were sidelined in favour of loyalists, and

by engaging the army in various national projects, the force was made corrupt.”

“A corrupt army, Sheikh Hasina believed, would be safer for her,” Iqbal told the tribunal.

At that time, Hasina appointed her relative Maj Gen (ret’d) Tarique Ahmed Siddique as her security adviser and sought to control the armed forces through him.

“Siddique soon established himself as a ‘super chief’ over the three service chiefs. He brought various institutions, including DGFI, NSI, Rab, NTMC, Ansar, and BGB, under his control.”

Soon, Iqbal said, four networks emerged. The first was the crime network, which Siddique operated using DGFI, NSI, Rab, and NTMC to “suppress the political opponents through repression, killings, and enforced disappearances”.

The second was the deep state, which Siddique managed through the military secretary to the prime minister, DGFI, and NSI, “taking all policy decisions regarding the three services – often conflicting with the service chiefs”.

The third was the procurement network, involving the PSO, Armed Forces Division, DGDP, and service chiefs, through which Siddique “exerted influence over purchases”.

The fourth was the military engineering network. As an officer of the engineering corps, Siddique built a separate circle with senior engineering officers, using them to “expand his influence over national projects”.

“This became the principal source of illicit funds,” said Iqbal.

‘CULTURE OF KILLING’

Recounting his experiences as the chief of army staff from June 15, 2012, to June 24, 2015, Iqbal described how a “culture of enforced disappearance and killing” gradually took root within the army.

He said the army has had a long-standing culture of killing, which predates 2008 and began shortly after independence. Enforced disappearances emerged later.

While army deployments outside cantonments for law and order sometimes led to torture and deaths, such cases were limited and later regulated through inquiries and legal action. Military operations, such as those in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, also resulted in deaths, with perpetrators punished when identified, he added.

Saying the army’s primary role is national defence, he noted its deployment to support law enforcement during crises, manage disasters, and oversee elections, where its presence has come to be seen as a guarantee of fairness.

Speaking with journalists, Chief Prosecutor Tajul Islam said, “This is an extremely important day in Bangladesh’s judicial history. For the first time, the trial of a person accused of killing the highest number of people extrajudicially is underway at this tribunal. A former army chief is testifying as a prosecution witness in this case.”

The tribunal is scheduled to resume recording Iqbal’s testimony today.

were trying to see how much further it could be reduced. At this moment, I do not want to say, nor am I able to tell you, how much it will be reduced. We will see based on the discussions,” he added.

He said the government’s effort was not only focused on reducing the overall tariff, but also on ensuring that the tariff on Bangladesh’s main product, garments, becomes zero. “We are continuing that effort.”

“In this context, our existing export volume of Tk 1 lakh crore holds the potential to increase significantly. Our objective is to utilise this potential,” he added.

Voting a matter

FROM PAGE 2
practise their faith and enjoy equal dignity.

In this election, IAB candidates are contesting in 258 constituencies under the party’s electoral symbol, Hatpakha (hand fan).

Urging voters to elect his party’s candidates, the IAB ameer said, “If you recommend a good policy and a good person through your vote, you will earn rewards for the good deeds done under that policy and by that person. But if you recommend a bad policy or person, the sins of their wrongdoings will also be added to your record of deeds.”

Throughout his speech, he outlined his party’s commitments for the upcoming polls, its vision for state formation and reform, as well as key aspects of its manifesto and special programmes.

In the concluding part of his address, the IAB chief called on young voters to cast their first votes in favour of Islam and change.

“I promise you that Islami Andolan Bangladesh will not use your votes for its own gains. Instead, we will introduce improved, science-based moral education, create job opportunities, eliminate unemployment, and build a peaceful and prosperous country together with you.”

He also urged voters to vote “yes” in the referendum.

“Remember, a single vote does not make anyone rich or poor. But a single vote shapes the destiny of the country and your own future. So, cast your votes for Hatpakha, the symbol of long-tested, honest, competent, and God-fearing people.”

He also called on those involved in the election process to rise above fear and inducements and work in the interest of the state and the people.

Nearly 10 lakh security agency members deployed

FROM PAGE 2
and striking forces, the dispatched personnel will work under the authority of the respective returning officers.

Members of the armed forces have also been placed under the “in aid to civil power” provision to assist local administrations in maintaining security.

Election Commissioner Abdur Rahmani Masud told reporters on Saturday that the army had already begun deployment and more troops would join from yesterday.

“They will be on the field for seven days before and after the polls,” he said.

He added that all security personnel would work in coordination with the returning

officers, while the EC’s central coordination cell would monitor the situation nationwide.

The commission will also receive real time updates through its security application.

“All necessary measures have been taken to ensure a peaceful and uninterrupted voting atmosphere,” EC Masud said, adding that ballot boxes had already been sent to the districts and received by returning officers.

“Everyone is now busy with election preparations. We are prepared, and voters too are ready for a festive election after the campaign. The commission believes the electoral environment is fully conducive, with law and order under control,” he said.

39 hurt in pre-polls violence in 2 dists

FROM PAGE 2
Protesting the incident, Jamaat activists brought out a procession in the upazila headquarters around 3:30pm.

When the procession reached near the upazila health complex, a chase and counter-chase took place between BNP and Jamaat activists, said witnesses.

Later, Jamaat activists blocked the Barishal Baufal road in front of Baufal Police Station for around two hours till 6:30pm and demanded transfer of its OC, claiming that the police officer was biased towards the BNP.

Contacted, Khalidur Rahman, secretary of Jamaat’s upazila unit, alleged that BNP men carried out attacks on Jamaat activists, and the OC was playing a role in favour of the BNP.

Upazila unit BNP Convener Taslim Talukder denied the allegation and

said Jamaat men attacked their activists.

OC Siddiqur Rahman of Baufal Police Station dismissed the allegation of bias and said, “I am performing my duties with complete neutrality. The overall law and order situation in the area is under control.”

Baufal UNO Saleh Ahmed, also assistant returning officer, told The Daily Star that legal action would be taken upon investigation.

In another development, independent candidate Ataur Rahman Angur, also former BNP lawmaker, alleged that his motorcade came under attack and several vehicles were vandalised in Narayanganj’s Araihaazar upazila yesterday night.

Speaking at a press conference at his Elumdi’s house around 8:30pm, Ataur, who is contesting with “Kolosh” (pitcher) symbol, claimed that supporters of BNP contender

Guard polling stations to protect July

FROM PAGE 1
In an apparent reference to BNP leaders and activists, he said, “We humbly requested them that if you were oppressed, do not become oppressors. You should understand the suffering of the oppressed. Why are you now causing suffering to people? We observed reckless extortion, land grabbing, and case trading beginning from the morning of August 6 [2024].”

He further alleged that some individuals who had left the country over the past 15 and a half years and taken shelter abroad had returned and were now engaged in “case trading”, an abuse of criminal cases as a tool of extortion, coercion, or political pressure.

Pointing fingers at his main polls rival, the Jamaat leader also questioned the nomination of loan defaulters, asking why 59 “notorious loan defaulters and bank looters” had

been given party nominations. “You are sheltering them and making them MPs to curb corruption? Even owls would laugh hearing this,” he said.

Describing February 12 as the day to repay the “debt of blood” of those who sacrificed their lives during the 2024 mass uprising, he warned that history would not forgive those who betray that sacrifice.

Criticising the BNP’s pledges to introduce family and farmers’ cards if voted to power, he said, “Just as their promise of rice at Tk 10 was false, these cards are false too. On February 12, people will show these fake cards a red card, Insha’Allah.”

The Jamaat ameer said five years would be enough to transform the country’s fate, adding that Bangladesh would then find its path and move forward along that highway.

He also vowed to ensure social justice if Jamaat comes to power. “Justice will not vary from person to

Earlier, on January 7, the Ministry of Home Affairs issued a circular stating that police, BGB, Ansar and VDP and the coast guard would be deployed to ensure a free, fair and peaceful election.

The circular also confirmed the deployment of armed forces under the “in aid to civil power” framework. According to the directive, 16–17 security personnel will be stationed at each general polling centre outside metropolitan areas, while 17–18 will be deployed at centres identified as vulnerable.

In metropolitan areas, 16 personnel will guard general centres, and 17 will be posted at vulnerable ones.

In designated remote areas across 25 districts, 16–18 members will be deployed at each polling centre.

Nazrul Islam Azad carried out the attack in the Tingaon area.

“I informed the law enforcement agencies immediately after the incident. They assured me of conducting a fair investigation. I urged the administration to ensure a level playing field so that voters can cast their ballots without fear.”

Rejecting the allegation, Araihaazar BNP President Yusuf Ali Bhuiyan said none of the party leaders or activists were involved in the incident.

Contacted, Md Alauddin, officer-in-charge of Araihaazar Police Station, said police rushed to the spot after getting a verbal complaint. “We heard that two to three people sustained minor injuries. No written complaint has been filed yet. We are looking into the matter.”

[Our correspondents in Noakhali, Patuakhali, and Narayanganj contributed to this report.]

Govt to buy 14 Boeings

FROM PAGE 1
materials such as cotton, according to Secretary Rahman.

Asked about the trade deal with the US, Bashir Uddin sounded optimistic, noting that the 37 percent tariff initially imposed on Bangladesh was negotiated down to 20 percent.

“Unfortunately, we were embarrassed there. We are the only country in the world from which the terms of this agreement were made public globally. Even then, we have significantly brought the tariff down to 20 percent compared to our competitor countries.

“If this agreement had not been

made public, I firmly believe that we would have secured a rate even lower than 20 percent,” he said.

“We promised to buy 25 aircraft... But whenever any agreement is in the early stages, there is always a Non-Disclosure Agreement. This Non-Disclosure Agreement means that if anyone wants to buy property or enter into any bilateral contract, there is a non-disclosure clause until the contract is executed. Once the contract is signed, the agreement will certainly be disclosed. I don’t see any issue with the disclosure.”

“We are hopeful that under the agreement scheduled for the 9th... We

Adviser Bashir dismisses conflict of interest

Accuses Star of running smear campaign against him

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rejecting criticism, Civil Aviation and Tourism Adviser Sk Bashir Uddin yesterday defended holding both his positions as adviser and chairman of Biman Bangladesh Airlines, saying he saw no conflict of interest in serving in both roles.

Speaking at a press conference at his ministry on Sunday, attended by senior officials including the ministry secretary, he also accused The Daily Star of running a smear campaign against him, claiming that despite working in the interest of the state, he has become a victim of misinformation.

On February 6, The Daily Star published a report titled “Lord of the Wings” on Bashir, highlighting the conflict of interest that arose after he assumed the posts. According to the report, Bashir is also pursuing a commercial helicopter licence.

The adviser argued that no law barred him from serving as Biman chairman and pointed to achievements under his tenure, including a drop in airfares by more than 50 percent.

Detailing Biman’s successes, Bashir claimed that Tk 60,000–70,000 crore previously flowed out of the country due to high airfares, and those who lost out

because of his reforms are now plotting against him.

“Because of their anger, I am being accused of shameless nepotism and called the ‘Lord of the Wings,’ even though my helicopters have no wings,” he said, referring to The Daily Star report.

“You cannot manage everything within a legal framework. Morality is necessary too. I am the adviser to the jute ministry and also the largest jute trader in Bangladesh, so there could be a conflict of interest. But ask all the jute traders in Bangladesh – has any conflict of interest arisen?” he asked.

He added, “You cannot manage your bedroom with laws. You cannot manage your family with laws.”

Bashir noted that 22 ministers and advisers, including a former prime minister, had previously served at the helm of Biman.

Asked whether it was appropriate to accuse a newspaper without sending a formal protest letter, he replied, “Okay, I got your point; we will send a formal protest.”

Rejecting allegations of nepotism, the adviser added that 39 people had been barred from travelling abroad under government initiatives, including someone close to his family.

that’s on them.”

This time, some in Shanir Haor are cautiously backing a BNP candidate who, they said, stood with them during the 2017 floods, working alongside villagers to shore up embankments.

In Tahirpur town, however, others questioned his record as upazila chairman, suggesting hope remains fragile.

That mix of expectation and distrust followed me to Bardal, a more remote village by the Matian Haor. During the monsoon, boats are the only link to Tahirpur town, five kilometres away. In the dry months, makeshift stalls line the narrow road cutting through the wetland. The village itself sits clustered on raised ground, typical of haor settlements.

At a tea stall, I met Saifur Rahman, a final-year honours student of Islamic Studies at MC College in Sylhet, home for the election. Enthusiasm for voting, he said, was high.

“This election comes after a successful movement that pushed out authoritarian rule,” he said. “People believe something better might happen.”

Had life or governance improved over the past year and a half? Saifur paused. “There are problems, unfortunately,” he admitted. But he argued politicians would now think twice before repeating old habits.

“They’ve seen the consequences of ignoring people,” he said. “No one should assume villagers here don’t know their rights – or won’t raise their voices.”

The men listening – a member of the local gram (village) police, a farmer, and the stall owner – watched their college educated neighbour closely. Their faces suggested less certainty.

For them, politics still boils down to a narrow set of demands: embankments that hold, protection for a single vital crop, and reliable communication with the outside world in a region submerged for half the year.

In the haors of Sunamganj, the ballot is cast with hope – but anchored firmly to the embankment.



work through sand extraction once harvesting ends in May.

“What do the candidates say?” I asked.

“They say they will do everything,” Rahim Ali replied, a note of suspicion in his smile.

“Do you believe them?” No one did. “They come, they promise, then they disappear,” Rahim said. “I’ve seen it all my life.”

Yet the farmers of Shanir Haor are keen to vote on February 12.

Why vote when trust is so thin? The answer, repeated in different ways, was that voting itself is seen as a duty – a way of staying part of the community and visible to power. Abstention, they felt, meant exclusion.

“We do our duty by voting,” Rahim said in parting. “If they don’t do theirs,

SPORT

What to WATCH

T Sports and Nagorik TV
T20 World Cup
Italy vs Scotland
Live from 11:30 am
Oman vs Zimbabwe
Live from 3:30 pm

Canada vs South Africa
Live from 7:30 pm
BTV
Odommo T20
Final
Live from 6:00 pm



Opener Tim Seifert struck a blistering 65 off 42 balls, ensuring that history didn't repeat for New Zealand in the T20 World Cup on Sunday. The five-wicket win over Afghanistan marked the start of their campaign against a side who had knocked them out early in the previous edition in 2024. Seifert's innings, supported by 42 from Glenn Phillips, propelled New Zealand to their highest-ever run chase in a T20 World Cup, successfully chasing Afghanistan's total of 182-6 with 13 balls to spare in Chennai. New Zealand's previous best chase in the tournament was 167 against England in the 2021 semifinal.

PHOTO: FACEBOOK

Not here 'just to participate'

NABID YEASIN

England took their time. Sam Curran, entrusted with the crucial final over with 10 runs to defend, first consulted skipper Harry Brook before conferring with the experienced wicketkeeper Jos Buttler.

Few would have predicted such scenes – that the two-time champions would be forced into a mid-over huddle during their T20 World Cup 2026 clash against Nepal at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday. Nepal eventually lost by just four runs, but the message of the tournament so far has been clear: neither Nepal nor any of the other eight associate nations are at the 20-team marquee event merely to make up the numbers.

"I think full credit to Nepal. They were absolutely brilliant. We saw that it was tricky when we batted, but they played against us really well and took us right to the edge. They played brilliantly," player-of-the-match Wil Jacks said, relief evident in his voice.

Even Jacks realised the tournament, which is yet to see an upset but already bore witness to the heavyweights being pushed to the brink a few times only on the second matchday, is only going to test England's mettle even more in the coming days.

"They've obviously pushed us right to the edge there. If the surfaces continue to behave like that, it's going to be crucial going forward [in this tournament]," Jacks added.

On the opening day of the 10th edition of the T20 World Cup, the Netherlands first gave 2010 champions Pakistan a massive scare in Colombo before the USA stretched defending champions and co-hosts India.

Scepticism was rife when the ICC expanded



the tournament to 20 teams two years ago to give associate nations a greater platform. But the signs were already there then – co-hosts USA beat Pakistan to reach the Super Eights, while Nepal came agonisingly close to defeating a full member nation, falling short by just one run in the group stage.

It was once again a close-margin agony for Nepal, but more than being heartbroken, they seem adamant to be closing the gap.

Chasing England's 184 for seven always looked daunting, but Jofra Archer conceding 22 runs in the 18th over swung momentum back Nepal's way and fuelled belief among a nation backed by a cricket-crazy fanbase.

Lokesh Bam struck two sixes and Aarif Sheikh added another in that over, each blow greeted by a sea of red and blue in the stands that roared every run and wicket.

"The whole of Kathmandu, Nepal came here to support us. I think all of Nepal will be proud of us," skipper Rohit Paudel said.

Paudel's words also carried a warning for the established powers.

"We had belief when we came to this World Cup. We didn't come here just to participate," he said, adding that Nepal will only "improve from here".

And judging by how close they pushed England, that promise no longer feels distant.

Markram banks on WTC boost

AGENCIES

South Africa captain Aiden Markram said on Sunday that his team enters the T20 World Cup with renewed confidence, buoyed by their historic World Test Championship (WTC) triumph last year.

Runners-up in 2024, the Proteas will kick off their campaign against Canada on Monday at Ahmedabad's iconic Narendra Modi Stadium, the world's largest cricket venue.

South Africa shed their "chokers" tag in June 2025 when they beat Australia in the WTC final, claiming their first major ICC trophy. That victory, Markram said, has had a lasting impact on the team's mindset.

"The belief, confidence, monkey off the back – all of that plays a role in the language and behaviour within the camp," he told reporters. "It definitely helps. But we know we still have to be at our best."

Drawn in Group D with New Zealand, Afghanistan, UAE, and Canada, the Proteas aim to turn last year's heartbreak in the T20 final against India into a championship journey.



Football-mad Italy make historic cricket World Cup debut

AGENCIES

There are three fixtures in today's T20 World Cup: Italy face Scotland, Zimbabwe meet Oman, and South Africa take on Canada. But among them, Italy's match deserves special attention.

While Italy are four-time football World Cup champions, in cricket they are minnows, making a historic debut among the game's elite. The Italians play Scotland at Kolkata's famous Eden Gardens on Monday and will be the lowest-ranked team in the competition.

"How did we get to the World Cup? In Italy we say 'miracolo Italiano', an 'Italian miracle'," said Riccardo Maggio, development officer with the Italian Cricket Federation. Maggio has spent a lifetime helping cricket grow on the fringes of the football-obsessed nation.

"We're coming to the World Cup, and believe me, we're not coming just once for appearance," he said. "Passion and the Italian way of doing things make us the miracle that we are."

Italy beat Scotland in the qualifiers, and facing them again would be a "huge honour," said skipper Wayne Madsen. "Captaining Italy is not something I take lightly," the South Africa-born Madsen, 42, who has played English county cricket, told AFP. Italy are in Group C and also face England, the West Indies and Nepal.

The challenge is huge, but Maggio has faith. The 56-year-old played for Italy in a

six-wicket victory over an England Cricket Board XI in 1998, a match that the ICC said "shocked" cricket. "I was on the field that day and we had to play out of our skins," he said, voice trembling. "And now we're playing England at the World Cup. I'm sorry, but I'm going to cry."

Italy's federation says it has about 1,800 players and around 100 clubs. "Football will always be huge in Italy, that's just the reality," Madsen said, adding that playing in the World Cup will be a "massive" boost. "When people see Italy competing on a global stage, it sparks interest and belief."

Cricket actually has a long history in Italy. In 1793, English naval hero Horatio

Nelson organised the first recorded game in Naples. An English-born colonel, Francis Maceroni, later introduced the game there in the 1810s. The Genoa Cricket and Athletic Club was founded in 1893, and AC Milan began as the "Milan Football and Cricket Club" in 1899.

Today's squad is diverse, featuring players from Australia, South Africa, and the Asian-Italian community. Madsen himself once played field hockey for South Africa, while former Proteas T20 player JJ Smuts now represents Italy. "What matters most," Madsen said, "isn't where you were born, but how much it means to you to wear this badge."



Kamindu's late blitz powers Sri Lanka past Ireland

Sri Lanka's 11th-hour decision to draft in Kamindu Mendis proved a masterstroke as the left-hander produced a match-turning cameo to set up a 20-run win over Ireland in their T20 World Cup opener at Colombo's R. Premadasa Stadium yesterday. Kamindu's blistering 44 off 19 balls, featuring four fours and two sixes, provided the late surge Sri Lanka desperately needed to post 163-6. The hosts had slumped to 86-4 in 13.5 overs before a rapid 67-run stand between Kusal Mendis (56 off 43 balls) and Kamindu carried them past the 150 mark. The spin trio of Maheesh Theekshana (3-23), Wanindu Hasaranga (3-25) and Dunith Wellalage (1-28) then ran through the Irish middle order, combining for seven wickets to seal a comfortable victory.

PHOTO: AFP



City beat Liverpool 2-1 to rekindle title hopes

Erling Haaland's stoppage-time penalty handed Manchester City a dramatic 2-1 victory over Liverpool at Anfield on Sunday, cutting Arsenal's lead at the top of the Premier League back to six points. City appeared destined for defeat with six minutes remaining before Bernardo Silva cancelled out Dominik Szoboszlai's stunning free-kick to ignite a breathless finale. Haaland then converted from the spot to put City ahead, and the visitors thought they had added another before it was ruled out. In the same passage of play, Szoboszlai was sent off following a VAR review.

PHOTO: FACEBOOK

Hair we go! One win away from the barber

STAR SPORTS DESK

Frank Ilett's mop of hair has lasted longer than a Manchester United rebuild, a couple of managers and most people's New Year's resolutions.

But after 491 days of unchecked growth, the scissors are finally circling.

The 29-year-old, Oxford-born United diehard who lives in Spain swore back on October 5, 2024 that he would not cut his hair until his troubled team managed five wins in a row. At the time Erik ten Hag was still in charge. Days later, he wasn't.

What followed was a managerial merry-go-round and a lot of conditioner.

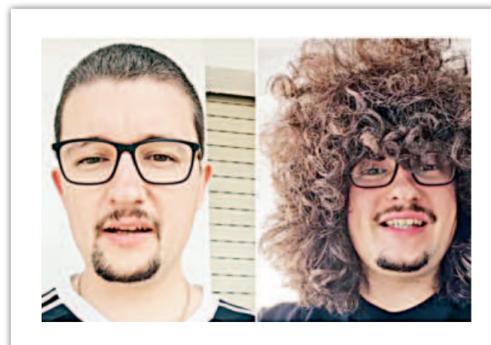
Ruben Amorim came and went without ever stringing more than three victories together – a feat he managed just once. Meanwhile Frank's locks went viral, helping him rocket past one million followers on Instagram.

Now, thanks to interim boss Michael Carrick, the miracle of basic grooming is within touching distance. The scissors are in sight.

United have rattled off four straight wins – against Manchester City, Arsenal,

Fulham and, most recently, a 2-0 victory over Tottenham Hotspur at Old Trafford on Saturday. Only West Ham and 90 minutes on Tuesday stand between Frank and a long-awaited reunion with a barber.

After beating Spurs, he could barely contain himself.



"This hair is going soon. Four out of five done. This is the first time it's been four in a row since I started the challenge. This time, it is happening. Thank you so much to Carrick," he said.

"Carrick is at the wheel, this hair is going

soon, West Ham next, four out of five done – this is the first time it's been four in a row since I started the challenge.

"This time it's happening! Thank you so much to Carrick – thank you, thank you, thank you.

"There will be a watchalong for the fifth game against West Ham. Some exciting plans coming up – more details to come."

If United oblige against the relegation-threatened East London side, Frank has promised to donate his flowing tribute to the Little Princess Trust, the UK charity that provides wigs for children who lose their hair through illness.

Meanwhile, Saturday's result ended a six-game league winless run against Tottenham, pushed United to 44 points from 25 games – four clear of Chelsea in fifth – and left Spurs 14th on 29.

It is also United's best winning streak since February 2024 under Ten Hag, and eight league games unbeaten, their finest such sequence since Ralf Rangnick managed the same in February 2022.

So, one more victory and Carrick gets the praise, Fernandes gets the numbers, and Frank finally gets... a haircut.



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নির্মাণে আঁধার

Women's rights activists slam Jamaat over misogyny

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Women's and human rights groups at a protest yesterday condemned what they described as misogynistic politics and hate speech by Jamaat-e-Islami leaders, accusing the party of openly degrading working women and promoting discrimination under the cover of religion.

In a keynote statement read out by Manisha Majumder, a member of Naripokkho, she referred to recent remarks by Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman, who described working women as equivalent to "prostitutes".

She also cited an earlier statement in which he called working women "kamla" at a public gathering and told young men not to bring "labourers' home but to bring "queens".

With the parliamentary election only days away, the organisations criticised what they described as the government's and the Election Commission's silence on misogynistic statements and conduct during election campaigning.

The group called for immediate action against any candidate or party engaging

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1



Dredging is underway in the Harihar River near Khulna's Sholgotia Bridge to ease chronic waterlogging, caused by silt accumulation and illegal encroachment that had obstructed the river's natural flow. The initiative was taken due to heightened flooding risks in nearby villages, including Bhabadah, during the monsoon and affected agriculture and fisheries.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Rebels haunt BNP in four dozen seats

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

BNP-nominated candidates are facing strong competition from rebel party candidates in around four dozen constituencies, according to the party's internal findings.

Party insiders said rebel candidates have become increasingly active, with grassroots leaders openly engaging with them. These candidates enjoy strong local support and benefit from their geographical roots in the constituencies they are contesting.

Over the past ten days, BNP internal teams have gathered updates from grassroots units across all 300 seats, closely tracking the growing influence of rebel candidates.

For instance, in Munshiganj-3, BNP nominee Quamruzzaman Ratan is facing a tough contest against expelled rebel candidate Md Mohiuddin.

After the party expelled around a dozen leaders for engaging with rebels in these constituencies, over 100 grassroots leaders resigned from their posts to back Mohiuddin.

In Bagerhat-1 and Bagerhat-2, former lawmaker and BNP rebel candidate MAH Selim is contesting against party-nominated candidates, posing strong challenges.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Conservative PM claims election win in Thailand

Nearest rival concedes defeat

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's conservative prime minister claimed victory in the country's general election yesterday, after television stations projected his party would be by far the largest in parliament after riding a wave of nationalism.

"We are likely to take first place in the election," Anutin Charnvirakul told reporters at his party headquarters in Bangkok.

"The victory today belongs to all Thais, no matter whether you voted for us or not."

His Bhumjaithai party was forecast to win nearly 200 seats by Channel 3 on the basis of results from the parties. The progressive People's Party trailed far behind, just above 100 seats, ahead of jailed former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra's Pheu Thai party in third.

It would be a stunning turnaround for Anutin, whose party came third at the last election and who was only installed as prime minister by parliament in September, after two predecessors from Pheu Thai were ousted by the courts.

Conceding defeat, People's Party leader Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut told reporters in Bangkok that "we stand by our principle of respecting the party that finishes first and its right to form the government".

Foremost on many voters' minds was a longstanding border dispute with Cambodia that erupted into deadly fighting twice last year.

"We need a strong leader who can protect our



SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

Army picking up Bangladesh Times staffers 'unacceptable'

Says TIB; BJIM seeks explanation from authorities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transparency International Bangladesh has expressed concern after 21 employees were picked up from a media outlet's office on Saturday night, describing the incident as a move to create an atmosphere of fear for the press.

Around 9:30pm on Saturday, army personnel entered the office of online news portal Bangladesh Times in Dhaka's Nikunja and picked up the staffers and took them to the army camp.

At around 11:30pm, a live video streamed on the Bangladesh Times Facebook page showed that the 21 employees were released and returned to their office.

Speaking at an event at TIB's office at the MIDAS Centre in Dhanmondi yesterday, TIB Executive Director Dr Ittekkharuzzaman said the incident at the Bangladesh

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

'Polls code violations rampant, yet EC largely silent'

TIB study also says a third of the runners exceeded spending limits

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A study by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) found widespread violations of the electoral code of conduct and a lack of strong action by the authorities to ensure a level playing field for the February 12 elections.

It said though campaign began with a comparatively positive attitude, eventually the political parties and candidates maintained the old political culture of conflicts and violence within the parties and alliance partners.

"There are risks of instability because of election-related violence and the anti-voting campaign by the fallen authoritarian forces," TIB Executive Director Ittekkharuzzaman said while revealing the study findings at the TIB office in the capital yesterday.

He, along with TIB researcher Mahfuzul Haque, presented the findings of the study titled "Pre-election and Referendum situation: TIB's Observation".

VIOLATIONS
The TIB study said political parties and candidates began campaigns well before announcement of the election schedule and violated provisions of the Wall Writing and Posters (Control) Act, 2012, by displaying promotional materials on walls, pillars, vehicles, and other structures.

At least 33.8 percent of candidates exceeded the election expenditure limit, spending an average of Tk 1.19 crore between December 4, 2025, and February 1, 2026, said TIB researcher Mahfuzul.

Despite directives from the Election Commission instructing candidates to remove campaign materials, 81.3 percent

"Candidates spent high amounts on social media and used it to create instability, confuse the voters, and influence them through AI-generated photos and video clips."

failed to comply, he added.

Under the EC framework, a candidate in each constituency is allowed to spend either Tk 25 lakh or Tk 10 per voter, depending on the number of voters, he said.

Candidates spent high amounts on social media and used it to create instability, confuse the voters, and influence them through AI-

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

Dhaka seeks UN help for probe into Hadi killing

Move follows demands for a UN-supervised investigation

UNB, Dhaka

The interim government has formally asked the United Nations to support a fair, transparent, and swift investigation into the assassination of Sharif Osman Bin Hadi, a frontliner of the July uprising.

On instructions from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Bangladesh mission in Geneva sent a "Note Verbale" to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) there on Friday, formally requesting assistance in the investigation, as per a communication from the mission yesterday.

The mission will inform the ministry as soon as it receives a response from the OHCHR, added the letter sent to the foreign ministry by Bangladesh Ambassador in Geneva, Nahida Sobhan.

OHCHR is the principal UN entity dedicated to promoting and protecting all human rights. It works to strengthen international rights, supports treaty bodies, and conducts field operations to monitor and report on human rights.

On Friday, Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shaiful Alam said the interim government remains steadfast in its commitment to ensuring justice in this case and will extend all possible cooperation to such an investigation.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

Archaeologists revive ancient Egyptian perfumes

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Scientists have developed new methods to recreate perfumes used during the ancient Egyptian mummification process, an advance that could lead to multisensory museum experiences in the future.

Developments in archaeology have led to advanced methods for studying ancient DNA, proteins and other molecules, revealing insights into past diets, diseases and ritual practices.

In recent times, researchers have developed improved tools to study a category of molecules called volatile organic compounds (VOCs), which have the potential to reveal secrets of ancient fragrances.

Recreating ancient VOCs can provide unprecedented insight into perfumery, medicine, ritual, and daily life of the past, scientists from the Max Planck Institute in Germany said.

"Biomolecular data provide essential clues but the perfumer must translate chemical information into a complete and coherent olfactory experience that evokes the complexity of the original material rather than just its individual components," archaeochemist Barbara Huber from the University of Tübingen said.



Nepal batter Lokesh Bam (R) is on his haunches as England all-rounder Sam Curran celebrates a thrilling four-run victory in a Group C encounter of the T20 World Cup at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday. Bam took Nepal close to the victory target of 185 with an unbeaten 39 off 20 deliveries but a terrific final over bowled by Curran -- conceding only five runs -- saw the ICC associate nation fall agonisingly short.

PHOTO: REUTERS

51 kidnapped, 3 killed in Nigeria attacks

AFP, Kano

At least 51 people have been kidnapped and three killed in attacks over the past three days in four different villages in Nigeria's northern Kaduna State, security forces said Saturday.

The attacks were in the southern part of the state, which is majority Christian and where more than 180 people were seized in January during raids on churches.

On Saturday, armed men abducted 11 people, including a priest, in the Kajuru Local Government Area, security sources told AFP.

A nearby attack on Saturday left three people dead and 38 kidnapped, including a local imam and four members of his congregation.

The day before, two people were kidnapped on the road to Maro, also in Kajuru. Assailants destroyed houses in Maro on Thursday, but the number of victims has not been released.