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LDC GRADUATION

Government asks UN for three-year deferment

REJAUL KARIM BYRON *and* AHSAN HABIB

The government, on its first full day in office, formally sought a three-year deferral of Bangladesh's graduation from the least developed country (LDC) category.

On behalf of the government, Shahriar Kader Siddiky, secretary of the Economic Relations Division, sent a letter on Wednesday to José Antonio Ocampo, chair of the UN Committee for Development Policy (UN CDP), requesting that the preparatory period be extended until November 24, 2029.

Bangladesh is currently scheduled to graduate on November 24 this year, with a third review underway ahead of the final transition.

Following calls from the leaders of top business chambers and trade bodies, and some economists, the interim government had earlier recommended coordinating with fellow graduating countries such as Nepal and Lao PDR to pursue a deferral until 2030, but left the final decision to the elected government.

It also advised that an application be submitted before the UN CDP's annual plenary on February

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- 3rd review underway for transition
- Extension sought to stabilise macroeconomy, consolidate reforms
- Case for deferral hinges on arguments about vulnerabilities
- UN vote requires 51% support

'SUBSTANTIAL GAPS' FOUND IN LDC READINESS -- B1

Sutor Golpo: A fair for local brands

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AI can't be left to 'whims of a few billionaires'

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Booters brace for big debut

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Family card project to pilot before Eid

Tarique also directs ministers to begin tree plantation, waterways excavation

SAJJAD HOSSAIN *and* BAHARAM KHAN

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman yesterday issued directives to immediately begin work on three key election pledges of his party.

On his second day in office, Tarique instructed the concerned ministers to ensure swift and effective implementation of the pledges -- the Family Card programme, the nationwide tree plantation drive, and the excavation and re-excavation of canals.

He urged them to set clear timelines, establish accountability mechanisms, and maintain transparency to fulfil the key commitments outlined in the BNP's election manifesto, ensuring the initiatives do not generate controversy or negative public perception.

The directives were issued during

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US president, UK premier congratulate Tarique

Trump urges decisive action on defence deals

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

US President Donald Trump has congratulated Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, hoping that the PM will help him maintain the "tremendous momentum" in US-Bangladesh trade relationship.

He also hoped that Tarique will take decisive

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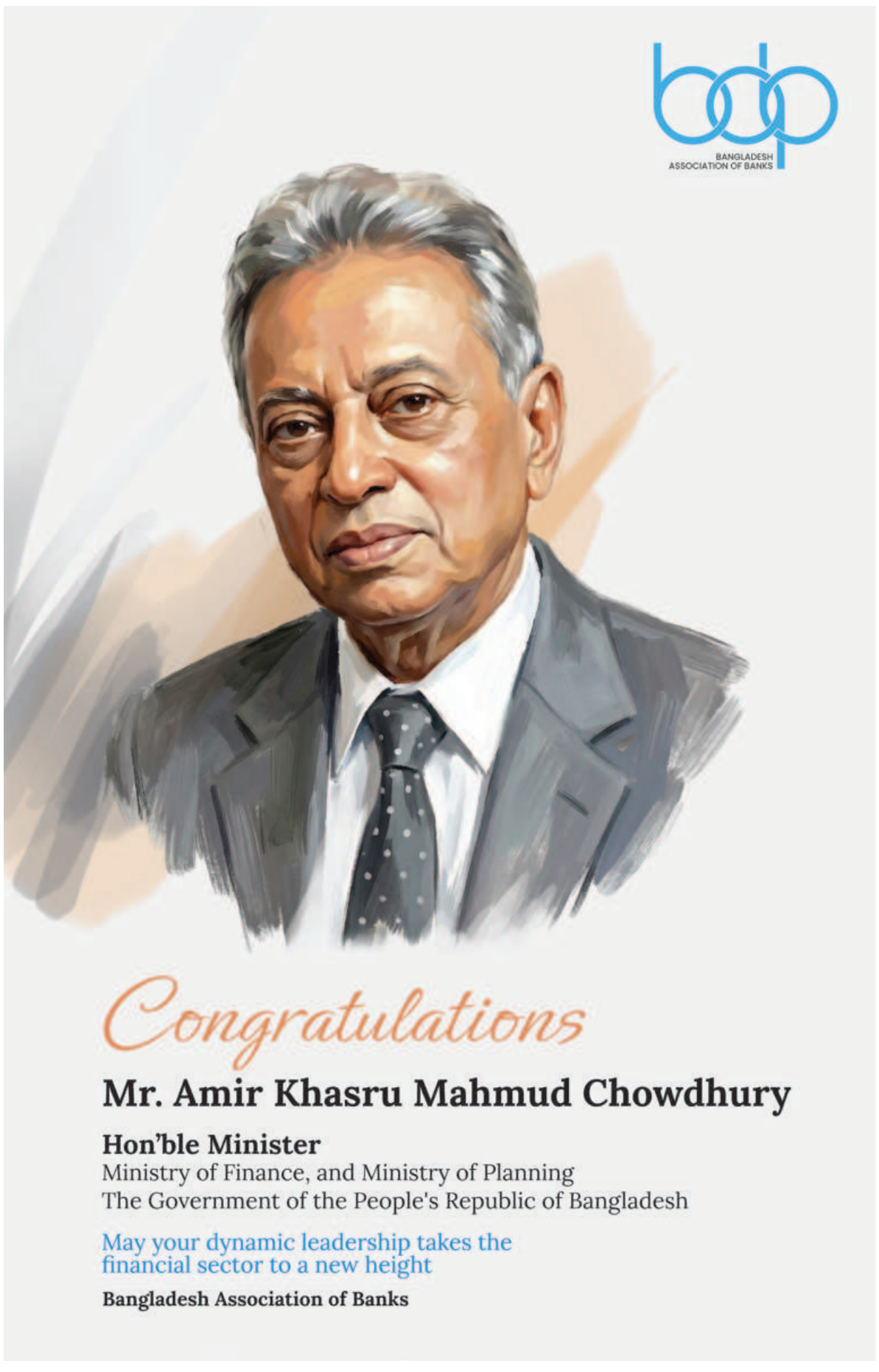

Chiefs of 3 services call on PM Tarique

UNB, *Dhaka*

The chiefs of the three services paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Tarique Rahman at the Secretariat yesterday.

Chief of Army Staff General Waker-Uz-Zaman, Chief of Naval Staff Admiral M Nazmul Hassan, and Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Hasan Mahmood Khan met the prime minister at his Cabinet Division office, said Atiqur Rahman Rumon, the prime minister's additional press secretary. Prime Minister's Adviser Brig Gen (retd) Dr AKM Shamsul Islam was also present.

The PM also held separate meetings with the directors general of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) and the National Security Intelligence (NSI).

Tarique attended office at the Secretariat for the second consecutive day, travelling from his Gulshan Avenue residence while complying with regular traffic signals. The journey took around 41 minutes, said Atiqur Rahman.

Cabinet Secretary Dr Nasimul Ghani and Principal Secretary ABM Abdus Sattar received the prime minister at the Secretariat.

The chiefs of the three services -- Chief of Army Staff General Waker-Uz-Zaman, Chief of Naval Staff Admiral M Nazmul Hassan, and Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Hasan Mahmood Khan -- pay a courtesy call on Prime Minister Tarique Rahman at the Secretariat in Dhaka yesterday. PHOTO: PID

AL leader dies a day after release on bail

Family alleges negligence by prison authorities

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Thakurgaon*

Akram Ali

A local Awami League leader died at a Dhaka hospital on Wednesday night, a day after being released on bail in what his family described as a critical condition.

Akram Ali, 50, was vice-president of the Baliadangi upazila unit of the Awami League and former chairman of Barabari Union Parishad, a position he had held for four consecutive terms.

Family members alleged that

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'Consequences are not good'

Russian FM warns US on Iran strike; White House tells Tehran to make deal

AGENCIES

- US military poised for strike; Trump yet to decide: report
- US-Iran talks 'don't have much time': IAEA chief
- Iran expected to table written plan to end standoff

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, in an interview made public on Wednesday, said that any new US strike on Iran would have serious consequences and called for restraint to find a solution to enable Iran to pursue a peaceful nuclear programme.

Lavrov's interview with Saudi Arabia's Al-Arabiya television was aired a day after US and Iranian negotiators held indirect talks in Geneva to head off a new mounting crisis between Washington and Tehran.

"The consequences are not good. There have already been strikes on Iran on nuclear sites under the control of the International Atomic Energy Agency. From what we can judge there were real risks of a nuclear incident," Lavrov said in the interview, which was posted on his ministry's website.

"I am carefully watching reactions in the region from Arab countries, Gulf monarchies. No one wants an increase in tension. Everyone understands this is playing with fire."

Boosting tensions, he said, could undo the positive steps of recent years, including improved relations between Iran and nearby countries, notably Saudi Arabia.

The White House warned on Wednesday that Iran would be "wise" to do a deal with the United States.

The US military is prepared to strike Iran as early as this weekend, though President Trump has yet to make a final decision on whether he'll authorize such actions, sources familiar with the matter told CNN.

UN nuclear watchdog chief Rafael Grossi said there was a "step forward" in talks between Iran and the United States in Geneva but warned "we don't have much time", reports AFP.

A senior US official told Reuters on Wednesday that Iran was expected to submit a written proposal on how to resolve its standoff with the United States after the talks in Geneva, reports Reuters.

US national security advisers met in the White House on Wednesday and were told all US military forces deployed to the region should be in place by mid-March, the official said.

The United States wants Iran to give up its nuclear programme, and Iran has adamantly refused and denied it is trying to develop an atomic weapon.

India to gradually restore all visa services

Says India's assistant high commissioner

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Sylhet*

All categories of Indian visas will gradually return to normal processing levels, said Aniruddha Das, assistant high commissioner of the Assistant High Commission of India in Sylhet.

"At present, medical and double-entry visas are being issued, and initiatives have been taken to resume travel visas and other categories," he said while exchanging views with journalists at the Sylhet Zilla Press Club on Wednesday.

He assured full cooperation in visa issuance, emphasising its importance in reinforcing ties between the neighbouring countries.

India-Bangladesh relations rest on mutual respect and shared interests, he said, underscoring the role of citizens as central stakeholders in sustaining long-term cooperation.

"The people of both countries will be the principal stakeholders in a stable, positive, constructive, long-term, and mutually beneficial relationship," said Aniruddha.

He also stressed the importance of leveraging geographic proximity, cultural affinities, and economic potential to unlock new opportunities.

"We should transform our geographical and cultural proximity, growing economic capacity and aspirations for the future into new opportunities through mutual cooperation," he added.

Sylhet Zilla Press Club President Moin Uddin presided over the discussion and General Secretary Mohammad Nasir Uddin conducted it. Journalists from various news organisations attended the event.

US to withdraw all troops from Syria: reports

AFP, *Washington*

The United States is planning to withdraw all of its 1,000 troops from Syria over the next two months, according to US media reports.

Washington will end its presence in the country after the Syrian government extended its control over the country and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces once key to fighting Islamic State (IS) pledged to integrate into the state, the Wall Street Journal reported.

Television network CBS also reported on the plan, citing unnammed US officials.

The decision comes after US forces recently withdrew from some bases in Syria including Al-Tanf and Al-Shadadi, which were used in the US-led international coalition's fight against IS.

Washington has drawn close to Syria's new authorities since the fall of Bashar al-Assad in late 2024, and has transferred thousands of IS fighters from prisons to secure facilities in Iraq.

Government asks UN

FROM PAGE 1

24–27 and that the permanent representative of Bangladesh's mission in New York be instructed by February 23 to present the matter.

The newly formed government, in the letter, argued that an extension would provide vital policy space to stabilise the macroeconomy, consolidate reforms, and complete priority actions under the Smooth Transition Strategy (STS).

It said the five-year preparatory period had been "severely disrupted by a succession of overlapping external and domestic shocks".

These included the lingering effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, sluggish global recovery, the Russia-Ukraine war and its impact on energy and food markets, tightening global financial conditions, delays in trade recovery, instability in the Middle East, and growing uncertainty in the global trade regime.

Domestically, the letter cited irregularities in the financial sector, the July 2024 uprising that led to a change in government, and the unresolved repatriation of the Rohingyas to Myanmar, which required significant budgetary allocations.

According to the government, these shocks triggered macroeconomic instability, slower GDP growth, elevated inflation, declining private and public investment, a falling tax-GDP ratio, pressure on foreign exchange reserves, reduced imports of capital machinery and raw materials, and weak job creation.

The banking sector and capital markets also faced serious governance and macroeconomic challenges, contributing to a reversal in poverty reduction gains.

As a result, policy focus shifted to short-term stabilisation and crisis management: safeguarding macroeconomic stability, protecting livelihoods, ensuring food and energy security, and managing balance-of-payments pressures.

This shift left limited fiscal, institutional and political space for graduation-related reforms, the government said. The preparatory period, it said, has therefore not been spent as intended.

The letter further warned of deepening uncertainty over post-LDC trade arrangements.

Concerns include Bangladesh's likely ineligibility for the European Union's GSP+ facility for the ready-made garments sector, the imposition of reciprocal tariffs by the US, evolving bilateral trade arrangements, and new free trade agreements by competing economies.

With exports already showing a downward trend and the country heavily reliant on garments amid persistent energy and infrastructure constraints, premature preference erosion could weaken competitiveness and development momentum, the letter said.

While structural priorities such as customs modernisation, energy reforms, export diversification, compliance infrastructure and operationalisation of key industrial facilities are progressing, they remain behind schedule due to cumulative shocks and the shift in policy, the government noted.

In this context, the government attached particular importance to findings from an independent Graduation Readiness Assessment commissioned by the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UNOHRLLS) at the government's request.

The assessment found the preparatory period had been "severely disrupted" by cumulative shocks and political upheaval, and raised serious concerns over whether graduation in November 2026 would align with the core UN principle that graduation should not disrupt development progress.

The assessment further indicates that Bangladesh may consider approaching the UN for an extension under the crisis-response provision of the Enhanced Monitoring Mechanism (EMM).

In light of the above considerations, the government said it is of the view that proceeding with graduation under the existing timeline could entail significant risks to macroeconomic stability, export performance, employment, and poverty reduction, thereby undermining the sustainability and irreversibility of graduation.

Responding to whether Bangladesh has the scope to defer graduation, CPD Distinguished Fellow Mustafizur Rahman said the country already meets all three graduation criteria: per capita gross national income (GNI), the Human Asset Index (HAI), and the Economic Vulnerability Index (EVI).

An LDC must meet at least two of the three thresholds -- GNI per capita of $1,306 or above, HAI of 66 or above, and EVI of 32 or below.

Bangladesh first met all three in 2018 and maintained the trend in 2021, when GNI per capita stood at $1,827, HAI at 75.4, and EVI at 27. In 2024, GNI per capita reached $2,820.

"There is no question regarding the criteria," Mustafizur said.

Any case for deferral would have to rest on arguments about structural vulnerabilities, he added.

He also noted that a vote would be required at the UN level, and Bangladesh would need the support of at least 51 percent of member states.

US president, UK premier congratulate Tarique

FROM PAGE 1

action to complete the routine defence agreements that would finally give Bangladesh's military access to high-end, American-made equipment.

On February 9, Bangladesh and US signed an agreement on reciprocal trade, while Washington has been seeking to sign two defence agreements with Dhaka -- General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) and the Acquisition Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) -- to strengthen defence relationship.

In his letter signed on February 18, Trump said on behalf of the American people, he congratulates Tarique on his historic election and wishes him a successful term as the premier of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh's Ministry of Foreign Affairs shared the letter on X yesterday.

"The partnership between our countries is based on mutual respect and a shared interest in fostering a free and open Indo-Pacific where strong, sovereign nations can prosper," Trump wrote.

He said as Tarique begins his term, he hopes the PM will help him maintain the "tremendous momentum" in US-Bangladesh trade relationship through the implementation of the Agreement on Reciprocal Trade, which benefits farmers and workers in both of the countries.

Trump looks forward to working with Tarique to make the relationship between the two countries stronger than ever before.

"My Ambassador to Bangladesh, Brent Christensen, has my full confidence. Together, we have an opportunity to make both of our nations more prosperous and secure."

Meanwhile, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer has congratulated Tarique on his election victory and becoming the premier, while seeking cooperation to tackle illegal migration, combat the effects of climate change, and strengthen the long-standing defence and security ties.

Stating that the UK and Bangladesh share a close and long-standing relationship, he wrote to Tarique on February 17, "I am confident that under your leadership our collaboration will only grow, building on our shared values and rich history."

The British PM said he looks forward to working closely with Tarique to strengthen the bilateral partnership and advance shared priorities.

"As one of the largest foreign investors in Bangladesh, we hope to continue to grow our trade and investment relationship."

Starmer said the UK will also continue to support Bangladesh that generously hosts over 1.2 million Rohingyas. "I look forward to this next chapter in the partnership between our two countries."

In another development, Switzerland President Guy Parmelin also wrote a congratulatory letter to Tarique, wishing him a successful term in office.

"Your appointment marks an important moment for Bangladesh, and I am confident that your leadership will contribute to the continued progress and development of the country," he wrote.

Parmelin said he looks forward to the prospect of further strengthening the longstanding and constructive relations between the two countries, and to deepening the cooperation across areas of mutual interest.

Family card project to pilot before Eid

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two inter-ministerial meetings held at the Secretariat yesterday.

On the family card initiative, the government plans to target 5 crore families, with priority given to women. The programme will be launched on a pilot basis in eight upazilas, one in each division, before Eid-ul-Fitr, sources said.

To oversee implementation, the Cabinet Division formed a 15-member body, the "Cabinet Committee on the Provision of the Family Card," led by Finance Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury. The committee, comprising ministers, advisers, and secretaries, has been tasked with finalising the selection process, identifying eligible beneficiaries, and ensuring proper rollout. The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs will provide secretarial support.

The committee will select the upazilas for the pilot phase, prioritising marginalised and low-income families, sources added. The initiative aims to integrate and streamline existing social safety net programmes.

A preliminary report is expected by February 24, they added.

According to the committee's terms of reference, its responsibilities include designing a framework for family card management, finalising beneficiary selection, arranging the pilot launch in one upazila per division, reviewing whether existing women's cards can be used as a base, and developing a digital MIS linked to the National ID and National Household Database.

A committee member, speaking anonymously, said global best practices would be reviewed before implementation. "Inclusion errors, exclusion errors, and politically motivated distortions from the past will be addressed to ensure an optimal system," he told this newspaper.

After the meeting, Women and Children Affairs Minister AZM Zahid Hossain said the family card would offer more than double the benefits currently available under existing allowance schemes. "It will be given on a priority basis to women. It will start before Eid. Within six months, we hope coverage will reach 50 percent," he said.

He added that the cards will be delivered directly to recipients using IT-based mechanisms to prevent pilferage.

On the tree plantation drive, the government plans to plant 25 crore trees over the next five years, beginning in May. Sources said this year's target may fall short due to sapling shortages, and officials from the agriculture and forest departments are assessing available stocks.

"If the 5-crore target cannot be met this year, it will be adjusted next year," Environment, Forest and Climate Change Minister Abdul Awal Mintoo told reporters. Trees will be planted in char areas, along riverbanks, on embankments, in hill tracts, and in the Sundarbans, sources added.

The government also plans to excavate and re-excavate 20,000 kilometres of canals, rivers, and water bodies nationwide. The initial phase is expected to begin in Dhaka, with implementation jointly overseen by the Ministry of Water Resources, the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief.

Earlier in the morning, the prime minister left his Gulshan residence at 8:34am in his personal vehicle. On his way to the Secretariat, his vehicle stopped at four traffic signals like others, where pedestrians applauded and greeted him, prompting the prime minister to wave in response.

Upon arriving at the Secretariat, he inquired which ministers, secretaries, and officials were present at their offices, sources said.

'JS without reform council holds no value'

FROM PAGE 12

and undermined the referendum's mandate.

Nahid urged ruling party members to immediately take the oath as members of the Constitution Reform Council and fulfil their constitutional responsibility.

Criticising the new cabinet formed under BNP leadership, Nahid said it lacks inclusivity and fails to reflect the participation of youth, women, or minority groups.

Highlighting that the average age of the new ministers is 60, he said, "We envisioned a youth-driven Bangladesh, and in July it was the strength of youth that guided the nation. But we do not see that reflection in this cabinet."

He also pointed out that nearly 62 percent of ministers and state ministers are businessmen, calling the figure "deeply alarming".

"Being a businessman is not a crime, but representation should be diverse; politicians and people from different professions should be included. When you appoint over 62 percent businessmen as ministers, they will inevitably protect business interests."

Without naming anyone, Nahid said, "The ministry with the largest budget has been assigned to someone who is a real estate businessman and an accused in a murder case. He was given that ministry purely for financial, business, and corrupt reasons."

Nahid also said that the cabinet is not fully consistent with the expectations of change and reform. "We do not think that this cabinet will be able to prevent corruption. Rather, we think it has been formed with members of a mafia syndicate."

Citing Transparency International Bangladesh, Nahid said 62 percent of BNP MPs are loan defaulters, with outstanding loans amounting to Tk 18,868 crore.

"Prime Minister Tarique Rahman speaks of taking a tough stance against corruption, but when will his own cabinet members and MPs repay their massive debts? The people of Bangladesh want to know."

On Khalilur Rahman's appointment as foreign minister, he said, "It is good to draw on the expertise of professionals, but such decisions should be based on consensus. People want to know why someone whose resignation the BNP had earlier demanded is now being brought into the cabinet."

He alleged that attempts were being made to open Awami League offices in various locations, which he said would not be possible without the tacit support of the administration. He urged the administration to intervene and halt such initiatives.

Expressing concern over press freedom, Nahid said that since the formation of the new government there have been signs of pressure and interference on the media, mirroring patterns seen during Sheikh Hasina's tenure. He called for ensuring an environment where dissent can be expressed freely.

The NCP convener also urged the government to take effective measures to control prices ahead of Ramadan, stressing that it is the state's responsibility to keep essential commodities within the reach of the public.

Salehuddin Ahmed passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Salehuddin Ahmed, former executive director of BRAC and former pro vice-chancellor of BRAC University, has passed away in the United States while undergoing treatment. He was 79.

He breathed his last at 11:00am yesterday (Bangladesh time).

He is survived by his wife, two daughters, and a host of well-wishers.

Salehuddin was also a former managing editor of The Daily Star.

In 1978, after completing his PhD in Ukraine, he returned to Bangladesh and began working as a research officer at the Planning Commission.

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People throng Chawkbazar to buy iftar items yesterday. Many travel from different parts of the city, and beyond, to sample the market's traditional offerings. The centuries-old Ramadan hub comes alive each afternoon with makeshift stalls selling kebabs, roasts and sweets, drawing both first-time visitors and regulars.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Chawkbazar: where tradition meets taste

HELEMUL ALAM

Rokshana Akhtar, a resident of Narayanganj, came to Chawkbazar with her son, Fuad Al-Fida, who recently passed his HSC examination, to enjoy the traditional iftar items at the historic market.

Although the market is far from their home, they decided to visit after hearing about it through friends and social media.

"My son had long desired to have iftar from here, so I came for the first time to fulfil his wish," said Rokshana. She reached the market at 1:00pm and planned to return home after purchasing all their desired items.

"I have already purchased Shahi Jalebi, quail roast, Suti Kebab, Boro Baper Polay Khay, goat leg roast, apples, and dates. I will return after buying a few more items," she added.

Asked whether they would visit again, she said if they find the food delicious, they plan to return later this year.

Like Rokshana, Md Rejuanul Islam, a resident of Central Road in Dhanmondi, visited the market for the first time yesterday.

"I have already purchased Suti Kebab, Boro Baper Polay Khay, goat leg pieces, and Shahi Jalebi. I will share these traditional items with my mother, wife, son, and daughters," said Islam.

The centuries-old Chawkbazar iftar market, the largest in the capital, attracts hundreds of visitors from across the country during Ramadan. The market comes alive with several hundred makeshift shops selling a wide array

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Dhaka to pursue 'Bangladesh first' policy

Says Shama Obaed about diplomacy

BSS, *Dhaka*

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shama Obaed Islam yesterday said Bangladesh, as a democratic state with a renewed mandate, would maintain communication and friendship with all countries while upholding dignity and mutual respect.

"For a long time, our backbone was not straight. Now we have come with the people's mandate, and we will move forward with confidence," she said.

Briefing reporters at the foreign ministry, the state minister said the government's diplomacy would be guided by the principle of "Bangladesh first," placing national interests and citizens' welfare at the centre of all foreign engagements.

She said the newly formed government is committed to implementing the election manifesto through coordinated diplomatic efforts, with the foreign ministry playing a pivotal role.

On visa restrictions imposed by several

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

487 killed in road crashes in January

Says Road Safety Foundation report

- 1,194 hurt in 559 road accidents in January
- 196 deaths in 208 motorcycle crashes
- 68 women, 57 children among the dead
- Dhaka division saw highest 143 crashes, 119 deaths
- 6 killed in 4 waterway accidents; 32 killed in 41 railway accidents

UNB, *Dhaka*

At least 487 people were killed and 1,194 injured in 559 road accidents across Bangladesh in January this year, according to a report released by the Road Safety Foundation.

Among the deceased were 68 women and 57 children, the report said.

Motorcycle accidents accounted for the highest number of deaths, with 196 people killed in 208 incidents. This represents 40.24 percent of total fatalities and 37.20 percent of all accidents.

Also, 132 pedestrians (27.10 percent of the deaths) and 67 drivers and helpers (13.75 percent) died. Passengers of three-wheelers such as easy bikes, CNG-run auto-rickshaws and auto-vans accounted for 77 deaths (15.81 percent).

Bus passengers died in 21 cases, while 28 deaths involved truck, covered van, pickup and tractor occupants. Nine people were killed in private car, microbus, ambulance and jeep crashes, 13 died while travelling in locally made human hauliers, and 11 cyclists were also killed.

During the same period, four accidents on waterways left six people dead and seven others injured, while 32 died and 17 were injured in 41 railway accidents.

The report was prepared based on information from nine national dailies, seven online news portals, electronic media reports and the foundation's own data.

The analysis showed that 27.90 percent of the crashes occurred on national highways, 37.03 percent on regional roads, 15.20 percent on rural roads, 18.42 percent on city streets, and the remaining accidents took place in other locations.

In terms of accident type, 37.38 percent were caused by loss of control, 24.15 percent by head-on collisions, 24.50 percent by vehicles hitting pedestrians and 12.88 percent by rear-end collisions.

Heavy vehicles, including trucks, covered vans and tankers, were involved in 28.58 percent of the crashes, followed by motorcycles at 24.51 percent, three-wheelers at 18.53 percent, and passenger buses at 12.20 percent.

Division-wise, Dhaka recorded the highest number of accidents and fatalities, with 143 crashes killing 119 people. Sylhet Division had the lowest toll, with 18 deaths from 24 accidents.

In the capital, 26 accidents killed 18 people and injured 41 others.

Based on media reports, the victims included 57 students, as well as policemen,

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

There will be no more 'auto pass'

Says education minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Education Minister ANM Ehsanul Hoque Milon yesterday ruled out the possibility of cancelling examinations or granting "auto pass" in the face of mob pressure, saying such decisions were never desirable and will not be repeated.

"Cancelling examinations in the face of a mob and allowing auto-pass to students -- these were never desirable."

"Many things happened in the past that should not have happened. Cancelling examinations in the face of a mob and allowing auto-pass to students -- these were never desirable," Milon said at a press conference at the Secretariat on his second day in the office.

He said the government will move forward in line with its election manifesto to make the education system time-appropriate.

Referring to teachers' participation in political programmes during office hours, Milon said, "You will teach in

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'Prepare 6-month action plan for health services'

Health minister directs ministry officials

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The newly appointed health minister and state minister have issued several directives to ministry officials, including preparing a six-month action plan to make health services more effective and people-oriented.

At a meeting yesterday, they asked officials to take steps to fill vacancies in field administration, where around one-third of posts remain vacant, meeting sources said.

They also directed officials to build a health

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'Tribunal to run uninterrupted'

Tajul says govt gave 'positive signal'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Proceedings at the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) will continue at their normal pace despite the recent change in government, Chief Prosecutor Tajul Islam said yesterday, expressing confidence that the prosecution team would be allowed to carry on its work without interference.

Talking to journalists at the ICT premises, Tajul said the government had given a "positive signal" that the tribunal's activities would proceed uninterrupted, though no formal directive had yet been issued.

"Although we have not received any formal message, we have been informally told that the law will continue to take its own course. The

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43 MPs currently face murder charges

Shows Shujan analysis

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 43 MPs elected in the 13th National Parliamentary Election are currently facing murder charges under Section 302, according to an analysis by Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan).

Moreover, 42 members of parliament faced such cases previously, and 12 have both past and present cases.

Among major parties, BNP MPs have the highest share of current cases at 50.24 percent, followed by Jamaat-e-Islami at 47.07 percent.

Overall, 142 MPs currently face legal cases, while 185 faced cases in the past. Ninety-five have cases both in the past and at present.

Compared to the 12th election, legal involvement among winners has increased.

As per the analysis, the proportion of highly educated winners in this election is lower than in the 12th election.

Among the 297 elected MPs, eight hold PhD degrees.

A total of 138 have postgraduate degrees, while 93 are graduates. Twenty completed Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC), and 17 completed Secondary School Certificate (SSC).

AT A GLANCE

- 142 MPs currently face legal cases
- 8 of 297 hold PhD degrees
- 138 have postgraduate degrees; 93 are graduates
- 147 are loan borrowers
- 36 have loans over Tk 5cr

Dilip Kumar Sarkar, chief coordinator of Shujan, presented the findings at a press conference titled "Analysis of the Affidavit Information of the Newly Elected Members of Parliament" at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

According to the analysis, the February 12 election and referendum were mostly peaceful, despite a few isolated incidents.

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German football star and 2014 World Cup winner Mesut Ozil shakes hands with Rohingya youths before taking part in an exhibition match at a refugee camp in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Ozil visits Rohingya camps

Erdogan's son Bilal accompanies him

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Cox's Bazar*

German football star and 2014 World Cup-winner Mesut Ozil, along with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's son Necmettin Bilal Erdogan, visited Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar on a one-day official tour yesterday.

They arrived at Cox's Bazar Airport around 10:45am on a special flight from Dhaka, accompanied by an 11-member delegation that included Abdullah Eren, president of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), Turkish Ambassador to Bangladesh Ramis Sen, and officials, business representatives and media personnel.

Cox's Bazar Deputy Commissioner Abdul Mannan and Superintendent of Police

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Ctg to have 2.2km cycling track on the Airport Road

ARUN BIKASH DEY, *Ctg*

In a first for the port city, Chattogram City Corporation (CCC) has initiated construction of a dedicated cycling track along the scenic Airport Road.

The 2.2-kilometre track will stretch from the West Point turning to the Butterfly Park near Patenga beach.

The project is part of a broader Tk 24 crore infrastructure and beautification scheme in the port city, which began in October last year.

CCC Executive Engineer Ashikul Islam said that, alongside the cycling lane, the project involves development of the entire road, including a median with kerbstones, aesthetic footpaths on both sides and a landscaped walkway.

"The cycling track will be separated from the main road by kerbstone dividers," he added.

CCC Mayor Shahadat Hossain said the project aligns with a long-term vision of developing Chattogram into a commercial capital with international-standard infrastructure for domestic and foreign investors.

"The airport area is a critical gateway used by numerous international and domestic passengers daily. It is essential to build aesthetic, well-planned and sustainable infrastructure here," he said.

Shahadat said a safe cycling lane would allow visitors to explore the Patenga coastline comfortably, while reducing traffic congestion, curbing pollution and encouraging a health-conscious lifestyle.

The city's younger residents and fitness enthusiasts welcomed the initiative.

Suchana Chowdhury, a university student living in Patenga, said the track would provide a safe space for her afternoon cycling.

Minhaj Uddin Mahmud, a resident of Lalkhan Bazar, said such infrastructure would encourage young people to visit tourist areas more frequently while reducing reliance on motorised vehicles.

Barun Mali, a 43-year-old trader, walks through the weekly rural market selling cattle bells. He earns a profit of Tk 700 on sales worth Tk 2,000. The photo was taken in the Charmonai area of Barishal Sadar upazila yesterday. PHOTO: TITU DAS

Man recounts son, niece's deaths at ICT

SHARIFUL ISLAM

A father yesterday broke down before the International Crimes Tribunal-2 as he recounted how he lost both his son and niece during the July 2024 uprising, tragedies that shattered his family beyond repair.

Testifying in a crimes against humanity case against Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader and six other party leaders and affiliates, Mohammad Faruk Khan described the final moments of his 28-year-old son, Akram Khan Rabbi, and his 22-year-old niece, Meherun Nesa Tanha, a college student.

"My son joined the student-led protest in Mirpur-10 area after Jumah prayers on July 19 in 2024. By afternoon, I received a call saying he had been shot," Faruk told the three-member tribunal. He said he rushed from one hospital to another, only to find Rabbi dead at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Still in shock, Faruk said police clearance was required to release the body. With no other option, the family paid Tk 5,000 to keep the body in a deep freezer. But the next day, they could not find it there. "Later, we discovered his body stacked with several others in the morgue," he said.

Rabbi was laid to rest on July 21 at the East Baishtaki graveyard in Mirpur, Faruk said.

On August 5, the day former prime minister Sheikh Hasina fled the country amid a mass uprising, Tanha joined a victory procession to the Gono Bhaban, the witness said. She returned home in Mirpur-13 in the evening, carrying flowers. Moments later, sporadic gunfire erupted in

SEE PAGE 9 COL 6

BSS MD MAHBUB
Committee to probe graft allegations

UNB, *Dhaka*

The information ministry formed a four-member committee to investigate corruption allegations against Mahbub Morshed, managing director and chief editor of Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS), said an order issued by the ministry yesterday.

An additional secretary (Grade-1) of the ministry will lead the committee.

The other members are the chief information officer of the Department of Information, the director general of the Mass Communication Department, and a senior assistant secretary (Press-1) of the ministry.

The committee has been asked to submit a full report by February 25.

Shafiqur calls for political culture that welcomes dissent

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Shafiqur Rahman, leader of the opposition in parliament and ameer of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, has said the July mass uprising took place to ensure freedom of expression and called for building a new political culture that welcomes dissenting views.

He made the call in a post on his verified Facebook page yesterday.

"During the 17 years of fascism, both the current ruling party and we were subjected to repression in terms of freedom of expression. We do not want to return to that dark period," he wrote.

Saying "media freedom is the first condition of a healthy democracy", the Jamaat ameer wrote, "Instead of suppressing dissent, welcoming it should define the new political culture."

On the same day, ahead of International Mother Language Day, the Jamaat ameer said in a statement sent to the media, "February 21 is now recognised as International Mother Language Day. It symbolises global respect and recognition for the language martyrs."

He said to establish Bangla in its rightful status, its use must be ensured at all levels of state and social life.

CJ sets up HC bench to settle polls irregularities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Justice Zubayer Rahman Chowdhury has constituted a High Court bench to dispose of the election petitions challenging electoral irregularities.

Justice Md Zakir Hossain has been assigned to oversee the process.

The chief justice issued a directive to this effect on February 17 saying that the HC bench will settle the election petitions filed under the Representation of the People Order, 1972, as amended by the Representation of the People (Amendment) Order, 2001; and other relevant matters.

On February 12, voting was held in 299 out of 300 constituencies in the 13th national election.

On February 13, the Election Commission issued a gazette notification declaring 297 candidates elected to the parliament in the election, alongside the official results of the referendum held on the same day.

Chawkbazar: where tradition

FROM PAGE 3

of delicacies made from meat, vegetables, sweets, milk, and spices, some recipes dating back to the Mughal era.

The most sought-after item remains Boro Baper Polay Khay, a rich mixture of chickpeas, minced meat, potatoes, brain, flattened rice, eggs, chicken, spices, ghee, and other ingredients.

Amir Hossain Juwell, a trader at the market, said his family has been running this business at Chawkbazar since his grandfather's time.

"My grandfather used to sell Boro Baper Polay Khay, which is the most attractive item in this iftar market. People from different areas, even outside the capital, come here every year for it," he said.

"We usually run other businesses during the rest of the year. However, during Ramadan we sell this traditional item along with beef, chicken, quail and duck roasts, and goat leg pieces," Amir added.

Other favourites at the market include beef and chicken roasts, mutton and chicken cutlets, keema rolls, keema parathas, Dudh Nun, Badami Nun, borhani, and kebabs such as Suti, Jali, Irani, and Tikka. Sweet treats include malai cups, firni, namak para, doi bora, falooda, beef pickle, chicken pickle, Mohabbati sherbet, Pestabadam sherbet, different types of fruits, and bakery items.

This correspondent also saw two siblings from Khilgaon, Makbul Hossain and Rani Akhtar, who came to the market around 2:00pm.

"We have purchased quail roast, but if we find anything suitable, we will buy more," said Rani.

"This market is a tradition for the people of Old Dhaka. We purchase iftar items from here every day to maintain the tradition," said Md Ruhul Amin, a resident of Lalbagh.

43 MPs currently

FROM PAGE 3

Of the 297 constituencies, 79 candidates were from religious and ethnic minority communities, and four were elected.

Business remains the dominant profession among MPs. Of the 297 members of parliament, 182 are involved in business, down from 66.89 percent in the previous polls.

Thirty-six MPs are lawyers, 22 teachers, 13 agriculturists and eight identified politics as their profession. Five are service holders and 27 come from other professions.

In terms of income, 33 MPs earn less than Tk 5 lakh annually. A total of 138 earn from Tk 5-25 lakh, 45 from Tk 25-50 lakh, and 29 from Tk 50 lakh to Tk 1 crore. Forty-six members earn over Tk 1 crore annually -- 43 from BNP, one from Jamaat and two independents.

Asset declarations show that 271 MPs have assets exceeding Tk 1 crore, and 187 have assets above Tk 5 crore.

Of BNP's 209 MPs, 201 have assets over Tk 1 crore, while 52 of Jamaat's 68 MPs cross that threshold.

Although 55.63 percent of candidates were millionaires, the proportion is higher among elected MPs.

Loan data shows that 147 MPs are borrowers, including 36 with loans exceeding Tk 5 crore. Of the borrowers, 126 are affiliated with BNP. The share of loan borrowers has risen from 44.81 percent in the 12th election.

Dhaka to pursue 'Bangladesh

FROM PAGE 3

countries, Shama said the ministry is aware of the challenges and is actively working to resolve them through diplomatic channels.

Responding to a query about ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina's stay in India and related diplomatic correspondence, she said the matter remains under process and will be reviewed by the ministry.

"It is only the second day of our responsibilities. The process is ongoing and will continue," she added.

Asked about the interim government's reported policy position regarding deployment of Bangladeshi troops to Gaza, she said the issue has not yet been discussed at the political level.

"Such political decisions will be discussed and taken in due course," she said.

On relations with India, China and the United States, Shama said Bangladesh has issues and challenges with all countries and would address them through both bilateral and multilateral engagements.

Ozil visits

FROM PAGE 3

Sajedur Rahman received them at the airport.

The delegation later visited the office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) in Cox's Bazar and held meetings with relevant government officials and representatives of Turkish organisations working in the camps.

Speaking to the journalists after the meeting at RRRC office, Bilal Erdogan said, "Repatriation is obviously very crucial. We want people to be able to go back to their homes, which is their humanitarian right -- very basic right, and international law mandates refugees to be able to go back to their homes."

Bilal thanked Ozil for joining him, noting that the footballer star chose to spend his first iftar of Ramadan with the Rohingya refugees.

The delegation also visited the Turkish Field Hospital and the education and cultural centre operated by TIKA at Balukhali Camp-9 in Ukhiya.

Ozil later took part in an exhibition football match with Rohingya refugees later, before the delegation members joined the refugees for iftar.

The delegation returned to Dhaka later in the evening.

Tribunal to run

FROM PAGE 3

law minister has also stated that the tribunal's activities will continue in the normal course. We therefore expect that justice will proceed properly," he said.

Meanwhile, National Citizen Party (NCP) Member Secretary Akhter Hossen yesterday urged the newly elected government to ensure speedy trials, execute verdicts, and bring back fugitive convicts, including former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, to face justice for crimes against humanity.

Speaking to journalists after visiting the tribunal to seek updates on two cases in which he is a prosecution witness, Akhter warned against any slowdown in the judicial process.

According to updates Akhter received at the tribunal, formal charges have so far been submitted in 24 cases, trials are ongoing in 21, and verdicts have been delivered in three. However, none of the verdicts has yet been executed.

He said 457 people are accused in the ongoing ICT cases, of whom 161 are in custody, while 293 remain absconding.

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Bangladesh Retired Government Employees Welfare Association
House: 75/A, Road: 5/A, Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka-1209.
Phone: 48122987, 222240189
E-mail: brgewa@gmail.com
www.brgewa.com

INVITATION FOR TENDER (IFT)

IFT No.: MED123/2025.120 Date: 19/02/2026

Sealed Tenders are invited from eligible authorised local representatives/genuine suppliers/importers for the **Supply, Installation, Testing and Commissioning of Microwave Diathermy (MWD) Machine with Standard Accessories** for the Physiotherapy Department of the Medical Centre of **Bangladesh Retired Government Employees Welfare Association (BRGEWA)**.

- **Source of Fund:** Ministry of Public Administration.
- **Last Date and Time for Sale of Tender Document:** 05 March 2026, before 3:00 pm
- **Last Date and Time for Submission of Tender:** 08 March 2026, before 12:00 pm
- **Date and Time of Opening of Tenders:** 08 March 2026, at 12:15 pm
- **Price of Tender Document:** BDT 1,500/- (One thousand & five hundred)

The detailed Tender Notice is available on the website of the Bangladesh Retired Government Employees Welfare Association (BRGEWA).
Website: **www.brgewa.com**

Administrator
BRGEWA

D-12

Request for Quotation: High-Performance NVMe Storage

BRAC Bank PLC. delivers a full array of banking services to individuals and businesses through a network of 194 Branches, 116 Sub-branches, 330 ATMs, 446 SME Unit Offices and 1,120 Agent Banking Outlets across the country. The bank is currently seeking potential vendor(s) to provide High Performance NVMe Storage.

A Technical Request for Quotation (RFQ) is hereby issued for this purpose. The RFQ, along with details of the bidding process, can be found on the bank's website: **https://www.bracbank.com/en/page/e-tender**

Interested eligible bidders are requested to submit their technical offers as per Instruction to Bidder (ITB) outlined in the bidding process.

BRAC BANK
আস্থা অবিচল

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Works Manager (Construction)
Bangladesh Railway, Pahartali, Chattogram-4202
E-mail: wmcpht@railway.gov.bd

No. WM/C/e-GP Notice/2025 Date: 18/02/2026

e-Tender Notice
Notice No. 2025-26/08

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) by Works Manger (Construction), Bangladesh Railway, Pahartali, Chattogram for the Procurement of Goods as stated below:

Sl No.	Tender/ Proposal ID	Tender/Proposal Package No. and Description	Procurement nature type & method	Tender/proposal closing date & time
1	1195036	54.01.1500.552.05.057.25-26-GR-92-WF 1. Purchase of M.S Pin Size 65x25 mm (as per sample) 2. Purchase of M.S Pin Size 85x25 mm (as per sample) 3. Purchase of M.S Pin Size 75x25 mm (as per sample) etc.	Goods NCT OTM	05-March-2026 12:10:00
2	1216975	54.01.1500.552.05.057.25-26-GR-144-WELD Purchase of Electrodes Class H stainless steel No. 12 swg Size: 2.5 mm	Goods NCT OTM	05-March-2026 12:15:00
3	1217841	54.01.1500.552.05.057.25-26-GR-82-MW Purchase of Miro Lube Grease Oil for CNC Machine	Goods NCT OTM	05-March-2026 12:20:00
4	1222455	54.01.1500.552.05.057.25-26-GR-124-WH 1) Purchase of Sealing Strip (Felfa), Size- 12 x 10 x 265 mm 2) Purchase of Sealing Strip (Felfa), Size-13 x 10 x 265mm 3) Purchase of Sealing Strip Felfa, Size 13x 12x 560mm etc.	Goods NCT OTM	05-March-2026 12:25:00

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted.

To submit e-Tender registration in the National e-GP System Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents for the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online branches of any registered bank branches.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

এস (২৬)(১৮৭) 18/02/26

GD-353

Rajib Kumar Debnath
Works Manager (Construction)

AI can't be left to 'whims of a few billionaires'

UN chief tells global AI summit in India

AFP, *New Delhi*

UN chief Antonio Guterres yesterday warned technology leaders of the risks of artificial intelligence, saying its future cannot be left to "the whims of a few billionaires".

Speaking at a global AI summit in India, the UN chief called on tech tycoons to support a $3 billion global fund to ensure open access to the fast-advancing technology for all. "AI must belong to everyone," he said.

"The future of AI cannot be decided by a handful of countries -- or left to the whims of a few billionaires," he added, warning the world risked deepening inequality unless urgent steps were taken.

"Done right, AI can...

accelerate breakthroughs in medicine, expand learning opportunities, strengthen food security, bolster climate action and disaster preparedness and improve access to vital public services," he said.

"But it can also deepen inequality, amplify bias and fuel harm."

The UN has set up an AI scientific advisory body to help countries make decisions about the revolutionary technology.

Guterres warned that people must be protected from exploitation, and that "no child should be a test subject for unregulated AI".

He pressed for global guardrails to ensure oversight and accountability, and the creation of "Global Fund on AI" to build basic capacity.

"Our target is $3 billion," he told the conference, which includes national leaders as well as tech CEOs, including Sam Altman of OpenAI and Google's Sundar Pichai.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Members of the Iranian Army take part in a joint naval exercise with Russia in southern Iran, in this handout image released yesterday. Germany's military has "temporarily" moved some troops out of Erbil in northern Iraq because of escalating tensions in the Middle East.

GAZA STRIP, WEST BANK

Israeli actions raising 'ethnic cleansing' fears

Says UN report; Trump kicks off his 'Board of Peace'

AGENCIES

Israel's increased attacks and forcible transfers of Palestinians "raise concerns over ethnic cleansing" in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, the United Nations said yesterday.

The UN human rights office said the cumulative impact of Israel's military conduct during the offensive in Gaza, plus its blockade of the territory, had inflicted living conditions "increasingly incompatible with Palestinians' continued existence as a group in Gaza".

"Intensified attacks, the methodical destruction of entire neighbourhoods and the denial of humanitarian assistance appeared to aim at a permanent demographic shift in Gaza", the office said in a report.

The report looked at November 1, 2024 to October 31, 2025.

Meanwhile, Hamas is cementing its hold over Gaza by placing loyalists in key government roles, collecting taxes and paying salaries, according to an Israeli military assessment seen by Reuters and sources in the Palestinian enclave.

Hamas' continuing influence over key Gaza power structures has fuelled widespread scepticism about the prospects of US President Donald Trump's peace plan, which requires the group to give up its weapons in exchange for an Israeli military withdrawal from the territory.

Trump's international Board of Peace, which is meant to supervise Gaza's transitional governance, was due to hold its inaugural meeting in Washington yesterday.

Instead of his cabinet officials, however, he will be joined by representatives from countries like Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Hungary and even Belarus, which is a member of the board despite being under US and European sanctions for supporting Russia's war against Ukraine. However, several key allies are still staying away from membership.

The United States says that the plan has now entered its second phase with a focus on disarming Hamas.

At the "Board of Peace" meeting, Trump is expected to detail pledges of more than $5 billion for Gaza, where the vast majority of buildings lie in rubble and the property-mogul-turned-president has improbably suggested developing resorts.

Russia 'always' stands by Cuba: Putin

Slams US sanctions

AFP, *Moscow*

Moscow will "always" stand by Cuba, Russian President Vladimir Putin told Havana's Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez in Moscow on Wednesday, reiterating support for the Caribbean island struggling against sweeping US sanctions.

Rodriguez travelled to traditional ally Russia seeking help as his country reels from a severe fuel crisis, intensified by Washington's de facto oil blockade.

US President Donald Trump cut off key supplies of Venezuelan oil to Cuba after ousting Venezuela's Nicolas Maduro and has threatened sanctions on states that sell oil to Havana.

"We have always stood by Cuba in its struggle for independence and the right to follow its own path," said Putin, receiving Rodriguez in the Kremlin.

Do not give away Diego Garcia

Trump tells UK in fresh attack on Chagos deal

REUTERS, *Washington*

US President Donald Trump said on Wednesday that British Prime Minister Keir Starmer was making a big mistake by entering into a lease on the Indian Ocean Chagos archipelago that hosts the US-UK Diego Garcia air base.

Under a 2025 agreement, Britain will transfer sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius while retaining control of the strategically important Diego Garcia base under a 99-year lease.

"DO NOT GIVE AWAY DIEGO GARCIA!" Trump wrote in a post on Truth Social, saying the base could be called upon in any future military operation to "eradicate a potential attack" from Iran.

"I have been telling Prime Minister Keir Starmer, of the United Kingdom, that Leases are no good when it comes to Countries, and that he is making a big mistake by entering a 100 Year Lease with whoever it is that is 'claiming' Right, Title, and Interest to Diego Garcia," he added.

Responding to Trump's latest remarks, a British foreign office spokesperson said the deal was "crucial to the security of the UK and our key allies".

"The agreement we have reached is the only way to guarantee the long-term future of this vital military base," the statement added.

Trump's comments mark the latest in an Anglo-American diplomatic rollercoaster over the deal.

2024 INSURRECTION

Ex-South Korea president Yoon gets life in prison

REUTERS, *Seoul*

A South Korean court sentenced former president Yoon Suk Yeol to life in prison yesterday, after finding him guilty of masterminding an insurrection linked to his December 2024 attempt to impose martial law.

Prosecutors had sought the death penalty in the case, closely watched in a deeply divided country. It is the most consequential of a series of trials for the ousted leader, whose bid triggered a national political crisis and tested democratic resilience.

Yoon conspired with his then-defence minister, Kim Yong-hyun, to subvert the constitutional order by deploying troops to parliament, intending to paralyse its functions, Judge Jee Kui-youn told a packed courtroom.

"It is the court's judgment that sending armed troops to parliament ... and using equipment to try to make arrests all constitute acts of insurrection," he said, speaking for the panel of three judges.

Yoon led a number of officials and troops in criminal activities on December 3, 2024, Jee said.

It's not extortion, it's agreed upon

FROM PAGE 12

mutual agreement, sometimes influenced by powerful owners or political groups.

"The workers' organisation of the party in power usually has dominance. But we cannot view those as extortion because they are doing it on the basis of mutual understanding," Rabiul said.

Slamming the minister's remarks, Transparency International Bangladesh Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said, "His interpretation of extortion is directly contradictory to the pledges against corruption strongly announced by nearly every minister, including himself, the ruling party's election manifesto, as well as the head of the government's address to the nation less than 48 hours earlier."

He said irrespective of the way the minister has tried to defend extortion, he has clearly failed to consider that he is also justifying the passing of burden of such extortion and collusive corruption on the people.

"Unless the government wants this to be taken as a blatant example of how the ruling party may turn its anti-corruption pledges into eyewash, the minister must withdraw his statement immediately, and he should be held to account.

"It also confirms that a topmost priority of the ruling party is to urgently determine how it can reform and cleanse itself in order to prevent normalisation of corruption from which people who voted them to power have suffered for too long."

Prof Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (Sanem), said the minister's statement is deeply questionable. "The reality is that the payment of such kind in the sector is often not voluntary but a result of structural pressure, organisational dominance, and power-related influence."

Even the minister himself admitted that the labour wing of the ruling party maintains dominance and that there is debate regarding how much of the collected money is actually spent on welfare, which proves that it is not a competitive and transparent welfare fund, rather a reflection of political and organisational power, he added.

Prof Raihan also observed that when informal additional payments effectively become mandatory for entering, operating, or conducting business in a sector, it is not negotiation, but a systemic institutional failure.

Consequently, transport costs rise, which ultimately puts a burden on both goods and passengers, damaging overall economic efficiency. Even more alarming is that if the government hints at legitimising or accepting such informal collections, it weakens the foundations of the rule of law and accountability, he added.

> **Unless the government wants this to be taken as a blatant example of how the ruling party may turn its anti-corruption pledges into eyewash, the minister must withdraw his statement immediately, and he should be held to account.**
>
> Iftekharuzzaman, TIB executive director

Former UK prince Andrew

FROM PAGE 12

"We understand the significant public interest in this case, and we will provide updates at the appropriate time."

The former prince, the second son of the late Queen Elizabeth, who is in police custody, has always denied any wrongdoing in relation to Epstein, and said he regrets their friendship.

But he has not responded to requests for comment since the latest mass release of documents by the US government. Mountbatten-Windsor's office did not respond to a request for comment.

He becomes the first senior royal to have been arrested in this manner, and presents his elder brother with the biggest scandal of his reign.

"I have learned with the deepest concern the news about Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor and suspicion of misconduct in public office," King Charles said in a statement, adding the authorities had the royals' "full and wholehearted support and cooperation".

"Let me state clearly: the law must take its course. As this process continues, it would not be right for me to comment further on this matter. Meanwhile, my family and I will continue in our duty and service to you all."

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Bangladesh Climate Change Trust
Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
Old Ban Bhaban, 101, Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212.

Memo No-22.06.0000.120.14.093.2026- Date: 16/02/2026

Invitation for e-GP Tender Notice (OTM)

Tender is invited under "Improving public health of coastal communities through supplying safe drinking water by smart water quality monitoring and purification systems to address the impact of climate change" in the National e-GP system portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of Goods and related service under following Tender ID:

Tender ID	Package Description	Publication Date and Time	Last selling Date and Time	Closing/Opening date and time
1217467	Wroks, Artificial Intelligence (AI) & IoT Sensors based Community, Level (4 nos) & Household Level (20 nos) water purification system with solar power and re-excavation of (4 nos) Pond at Kayra, Khulna & patharghata, Barguna.	16/02/2026 9:00 AM	15/03/2026 16:00	16/03/2026 15:00

There are online Tender where only e-Tender will be accepted in e-GP protal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender please register on e-GP system portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd). Further information and guidelines are available in the national e-GP system portal and from e-GP (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

(Md. Mostafa Kamal)
Assistant Director (Mitigation)
Bangladesh Climate Change Trust
Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
Old Ban Bhaban, 101, Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212.

GD-345

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

New govt faces tough economic tests

It must resist the temptation of populism

The new government faces a gauntlet of critical economic tests, beginning with the immediate goal of taming rampant food inflation during the Ramadan period. With overall inflation elevated at 8.58 percent in January—and food inflation accelerating to 8.29 percent—the political honeymoon for the new administration may be exceptionally brief. In most countries, public faith in the government's economic management rises and falls with food prices.

Besides, the new government inherited an economy tethered to external lifelines and suffering from deep structural decay. Since entering an IMF rescue programme in early 2023 following a severe balance-of-payments crisis, Bangladesh has staggered from one review to the next. When an IMF mission arrives in Dhaka next month, it will bring with it the cold calculus of fiscal discipline and monetary tightening. Stabilising the foreign exchange reserves has offered a semblance of stability, but in the meantime, investment has stalled, imports have shrunk, and credit growth in the banking sector has plummeted to historic lows. Should the government succeed in reigniting growth, the demand for foreign currency will swiftly return, putting pressure on the reserve buffer.

If the external picture is precarious, the domestic fiscal ledger is dismal. Total public debt has surged by roughly 60 percent over the past three years, reaching Tk 21.5 lakh crore by September 2025. The state's growing reliance on the banking sector to finance its deficit has a side-effect: it absorbs liquidity through treasury bonds and crowds out the private enterprise needed to drive recovery. Worse still, a colossal fiscal burden looms on the horizon due to the Pay Commission's proposal to raise civil service salaries. Implementing the raise would require a recurrent amount of Tk 1 lakh crore on top of the Tk 1.31 lakh crore spent on salaries and pensions for government employees a year.

The administration's energy must be directed towards revenue mobilisation. Bangladesh remains chronically under-taxed. The value-added tax (VAT) system is plagued by open-secret leakages. Modernising VAT collection and combating evasion require political courage, but they are the only sustainable alternatives to endless borrowing. Long-promised structural reforms, including granting genuine autonomy to the central bank and overhauling the National Board of Revenue, are urgently required. Finally, there is the ticking clock of global trade. Although the government's request for a three-year delay to the planned exit from Least Developed Country (LDC) status may be a pragmatic step, a delay is not a strategy. It merely buys time that must be used to diversify exports and improve competitiveness.

For Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's government, the temptation to build early popularity through subsidies, salary hikes, and delayed reforms will be immense. But yielding to it would be a wrong step. The authorities must use their first months in office to communicate hard truths, enforce fiscal discipline, and dismantle the cronyism choking the banking sector.

Strict action must follow strong words

Govt must curb mob tendencies, check disturbances by party activists

The new home minister's statement on his first day in office about ending mob culture—a tactic increasingly used by various quarters in the recent past—is encouraging. However, strong words must be followed by firm action, because the mob mentality does not appear to have shifted much even though the interim government, during whose tenure mobs almost enjoyed free rein, has departed. Some groups continue to display mob or violent behaviour, imposing decisions on others while disregarding rules and due process.

While we appreciate that maintaining law and order has been included in the government's 180-day priority plan, it must ensure that respect for rules and procedures is continuously upheld, and that no unruly conduct is tolerated even when carried out by those claiming genuine grievances. In fact, the new BNP government must be particularly vigilant to ensure that it does not condone such behaviour by its own party activists and supporters. It will be worthwhile to remember the words Prime Minister Tarique Rahman uttered in his first official address about "operating according to established laws and regulations" and without any "partisan influence or coercion." Enforcing this pledge will be a considerable challenge for his team, but they must not falter in this commitment.

We must also remind BNP that, historically in our country, supporters of winning parties often display a retaliatory impulse post-poll. Indeed, according to data from the Human Rights Support Society (HRSS), three people were killed and over 300 injured in more than 200 clashes on February 13 and 14, after the poll results were announced. The clashes involved supporters of BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, and NCP. The opposition alliance has made several claims of retaliatory attacks by BNP supporters. These allegations should be taken seriously, investigated thoroughly, and the perpetrators, regardless of their party affiliation, must be brought to justice.

Furthermore, the government should be wary of certain social media influencers whose hateful rhetoric was instrumental in inciting mob violence in the past. Intelligence agencies must be adequately equipped to identify such disruptive elements online and take appropriate action. Habitual instigators will receive a clear message about the government's intolerance of mob violence when past incidents are investigated and those responsible are held accountable. Monitoring and curbing online hate speech, misinformation, and disinformation—without infringing upon people's freedom of speech, of course—is essential to maintaining law and order. The challenges facing the government are formidable, so it must be both resolute and prudent as it navigates this difficult path.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Ireland allows sale of contraceptives

On this day in 1985, in a highly controversial vote, the Irish government defied the powerful Catholic Church and approved the sale of contraceptives.

A 10-point roadmap for logistics transformation

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AHAMEDUL KARIM CHOWDHURY

With a fresh public mandate in hand, the new administration enters office at a pivotal moment, ready to convert the prime minister's pre-election pledges into a concrete roadmap for economic transformation. Among the many priorities demanding attention, logistics reform stands out as a foundational lever—capable of accelerating trade competitiveness, stabilising markets, attracting investment, and strengthening national resilience.

Bangladesh has invested significantly in physical infrastructure over the past decade. Yet infrastructure without governance coherence, regulatory modernisation, and digital integration cannot deliver competitiveness. Logistics today is not a single-sector concern; it is an interconnected ecosystem involving more than 20 agencies under different ministries. Without unified institutional authority and coordinated implementation, systemic efficiency will remain constrained. If the government seeks a time-bound fast-track reform agenda, logistics offers one of the highest-impact starting points.

First, establish a statutory national logistics commission under the Prime Minister's Office with a full legal mandate to implement the National Logistics Policy 2025. The commission must function as the apex body for arbitration, dispute settlement, grievance redress, tariff oversight, performance monitoring, and multimodal coordination. It should serve not merely as an advisory entity but as a regulatory commission with enforcement authority.

Second, vest the standardisation and licensing authority for all logistics service providers under the commission. Seaports, terminals, inland container depots, off-docks, freight forwarders, trucking operators, rail freight operators, warehouse operators, air freight stations, and multimodal operators should operate under harmonised national standards. Fragmented licensing regimes create uneven compliance and operational inefficiencies. Regulatory coherence is essential for building trust and accountability.

Third, launch a nationwide, interoperable, blockchain-enabled port community system as the digital twin of the commission. This platform must integrate all seaports, inland ports, river terminals, off-docks, Bangladesh Railway, the National Board of Revenue (NBR), Bangladesh Bank and commercial banks, airlines, freight forwarders, and transport operators through secure API-triggered data exchange. Blockchain architecture can eliminate interagency trust deficits by creating tamper-proof documentation and transaction trails. Real-time cargo visibility, electronic bills of lading, automated customs clearance, and digital payment integration will reduce dwell time, eliminate duplication, and curb discretionary practices. Governance reform without digital integration will remain incomplete.

FILE PHOTO: **RAJIB RAIHAN**

A competition-based legal framework to appoint global terminal operators at Chittagong Port Authority would ensure productivity and public interest.

Fourth, operationalise direct mother vessel services from Matarbari Deep Sea Port. The deep-sea port represents a generational opportunity to reduce transhipment dependency, shorten lead times, and integrate Bangladesh into primary global shipping routes. Competitive tariff frameworks, coordinated hinterland connectivity, and proactive engagement with global carrier alliances must be prioritised. Direct services will enhance export competitiveness and strengthen Bangladesh's maritime standing.

Fifth, amend the Railway Act to open national rail tracks to licensed private freight operators under regulated track-access charges. The persistent crisis of locomotive shortages and limited locomotive capacity within Bangladesh Railway cannot be resolved solely through public recruitment or procurement. A network-access model—where the state owns the infrastructure but permits regulated private freight operations—would unlock private capital, modern rolling stock, and service efficiency. Rail liberalisation will also reduce road congestion, lower fuel imports, and promote environmental sustainability.

Sixth, develop rail-based Inland Container Depots (ICDs) either in Pubail or Dhirasram to serve the greater Dhaka industrial belt, and another in Nilphamari to connect Uttara Export Processing Zones (EPZ) efficiently to seaports. Container consolidation must shift away from congested urban corridors towards rail-linked hubs. Dedicated ICDs will decentralise cargo flows, enhance multimodal integration, and significantly reduce logistics costs.

Seventh, enact a competition-based legal framework for appointing global terminal operators at entities such as Chittagong Port Authority. Transparent international bidding, performance-based concessions, and anti-monopoly safeguards are essential to prevent concentration of private market power. Privatisation without regulatory discipline risks replacing public inefficiency with private dominance. Structured competition ensures both productivity and public interest.

Eighth, introduce comprehensive trucking sector legislation. Road freight carries the majority of domestic cargo, yet regulatory fragmentation persists. Modern laws should define licencing requirements, fleet standards, digital consignment documentation, safety compliance, tariff transparency, and enforcement against cartelisation. Predictable regulation will protect legitimate operators and cargo owners alike while improving efficiency across supply chains.

Ninth, move cargo beyond the airport fence by delivering licensed Air Freight Stations (AFS) through credible public-private partnership models. Despite modernisation at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, cargo congestion within the airport perimeter constrains throughput. Under a decentralised AFS model, cargo consolidation, palletisation, screening, and documentation would occur off-airport, digitally linked to customs, airlines, and banks through the national port community system. Only sealed and pre-cleared shipments would enter the airside terminal. This reform would reduce dwell time, enhance airline confidence, and strengthen Bangladesh's competitiveness in time-sensitive exports.

Tenth, empower the national logistics commission as a circulation authority to regulate lighter vessels, barges, and floating warehouses operating in inland and coastal waterways. Unregulated floating storage and speculative holding practices can distort supply-demand balance and create artificial market volatility. Oversight of cargo circulation is therefore not merely an operational issue but a matter of economic stability. Transparent monitoring mechanisms under the national logistics commission will ensure that logistics practices do not contribute to price distortions.

Taken together, these ten priorities form an integrated fast-track reform agenda. The establishment of a powerful national logistics commission ensures governance coherence. The blockchain-enabled port community system delivers digital transparency. Direct deep-sea connectivity, rail liberalisation, ICD development, and structured port competition expand capacity and efficiency. Trucking reform and air cargo decentralisation modernise operational flows and circulation oversight safeguards market stability.

Infrastructure builds physical capacity, but governance builds credibility. Digital systems build transparency, while competition builds efficiency. Without institutional reform, even world-class infrastructure cannot deliver world-class logistics performance.

The opportunity now is not an incremental adjustment, but a structural transformation. Logistics reform offers the government a chance to translate its pre-election plan into visible, measurable execution—swiftly and decisively.

WORLD DAY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

How multispecies justice supports social justice

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MARZANA TASNIM

"Multispecies justice"—quite a mouthful, I know. I remember the first time I heard about it: I was freezing, sitting in my 19th-century classroom, which always managed to maintain a subzero temperature no matter the season. When this phrase reached my ears, I was instantly fascinated. Having my higher education broadly focus on human justice, the fact that justice could transcend beyond humans still wasn't something I was deeply aware of. And ever since that class, I have carried around the idea of multispecies justice quite closely. So, what exactly does "multispecies justice" mean, and how does it relate to social justice?

Multispecies justice is a concept that rejects human exceptionalism and recognises the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman lives. It challenges the historical and contemporary idea of justice that has largely been reserved for humans. It is an emerging idea in the field of social and ecological justice that can be best understood by taking the polycrisis of the 21st century into account and by rejecting the notion that humans are at the top of the non-existent social and ecological pyramid; by actively moving away from anthropomorphism that evaluates nonhumans through a purely human-centric lens; and by acknowledging that injustice, even across species, often follows a core logic rooted in exploitation and indifference.

In layman's terms, multispecies justice is a lens that enables us to see ourselves as part of the wider natural world and to realise that all networks of violence and destruction might have their roots in extraction-focused, profit-oriented ideas pushed by colonialism and capitalism. And by shedding light on that very problem, it offers us a way out: by rethinking how we engage with the world around us and by demanding an inclusive, thoughtful, and kinder approach in our everyday interactions with *life* that's all around us; and that's exactly where its goals align with those of social justice.

Social justice is about ensuring humans, regardless of gender, class, or sexual orientation, have fair and equitable access to rights, resources, and opportunities that allow them to have dignity and unobstructed participation in social, economic, and political life. Now, when we normalise harm committed against nonhumans, it has a way of affecting humans too, especially those living on the peripheries of society. For example, as we approach summer, we are increasingly dreading the unforgiving sun and the inevitable sweaty, sticky inconvenience it will turn us into. While the heat affects everyone, people working in informal sectors–day labourers, rickshaw-pullers, street vendors–whose livelihoods depends on being outside and who cannot retreat indoors the way more privileged people can, suffer disproportionately more.

When streets are waterlogged, or monsoon floods arrive, the most affected are those who live on the streets without shelter–both humans and our nonhuman neighbours. When industrialisation takes over habitats, it deprives animals of their homes, and they are often forced to relocate to heavily urban areas where conflict between humans and nonhumans ensues. And, even when affluent human neighbourhoods can afford to drive those they deem "others" away, marginalised neighbourhoods are often left to grapple with a conflict not of their choosing. Even our most shared resource, the air, is heavy with pollution and refuses to acknowledge class boundaries, as we see increasing headlines of an ever-deteriorating, hazardous quality of air, children with asthma, and adults with persistent respiratory diseases.

When all this translates into headlines of increasing mental health issues, suicide rates, and crimes, one argument that becomes difficult to ignore is this: if we had just built our cities to be inclusive of more than just one species, could we have been slightly better off?

Imagine a city with more trees to provide us essential shade that supports biodiversity, unencroached water bodies to protect us from floods, and buildings built following proper codes that allow airflow and reduce disaster risks. Imagine open spaces and bluer skies, and room to take a nature walk with those we love, a city with limited light, noise, and air pollution where birds don't have their routines disturbed by impatient horns and rampant fireworks, where trees are allowed to live out their full, uninterrupted lives, where crows don't disappear, and where policymaking begins with kindness and understanding. So, maybe, if cities were built for more-than-human needs in mind, we wouldn't have to be trapped in an urban jungle in a constant state of crisis, trying to masquerade everything as "normal".

Multispecies justice, then, is not abstract but a very practical way of achieving many of the outcomes promised by social justice: a society with fairer distribution of resources, safety, liveability, and dignity. And Dhaka is the perfect playground to test this inclusive approach as a dense, diverse, and young city constantly improvising to survive, care, and perhaps even thrive. And at a moment when our democratic rights and scope for accountability are back on the table, and a younger generation of lawmakers signals the possibility of different priorities, it is worth redefining our idea of what justice includes and whom it is for.

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Refusing constitution assembly oath defies people's verdict

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SHARIF BHUIYAN

The newly elected BNP representatives' refusal to take the oath as members of the Constitution Reform Assembly (CRA) on February 17 prevented what might have been a more meaningful new beginning for both the party and the country. BNP's reason for not taking the oath—that the constitution does not provide for the CRA or the oath—is constitutionally unfounded. This is because the people are supreme, even above the constitution itself. Article 7 of the constitution recognises this principle, stating that all powers in the republic belong to the people. Accordingly, it is not tenable to argue the absence of constitutional provisions regarding something that the people have overwhelmingly approved in a referendum.

Furthermore, if we are to speak of the absence of provisions in the existing constitution, many actions taken since August 5, 2024, including the parliamentary election of February 12, are not covered by the constitution's provisions. BNP does not appear to have any objection to most of those.

By refusing to take the oath, the ruling party has disregarded the people's verdict in two ways.

First, more than two-thirds of the participants voted "Yes" in the referendum. Among the questions in the referendum was whether the people approved the July National Charter (Constitution Reform) Implementation Order, 2025. Since "Yes" received an overwhelming majority in the referendum, the constitution reform order gained the people's approval. Among other matters, the formation and functions of the Constitution Reform Assembly (CRA) are significant parts of this order. Even the requirement to take an oath as a member of the CRA is included in the order, and the form of the oath is also provided for in the order. Since the order received public approval through the referendum, these provisions likewise have the people's consent.

VISUAL: **SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR**

Second, there are strong grounds to say that the BNP is disregarding the people's mandate because, before the election, BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman clearly called on the public to vote "Yes" on the election day. Just like BNP's other electoral promises—such as the family card and agriculture card—its position in favour of "Yes" in the referendum was also an election pledge.

Therefore, it is reasonable to ask: if BNP had taken a position in favour of "No" instead of "Yes," would it have been able to achieve the electoral success it did? It is quite possible that, had the BNP supported "No," its performance in the election might not have been as strong. However, the situation that would have arisen if the referendum result had been "No" is now effectively what the nation is facing due to BNP's refusal to take the oath. In other words, the party's current position regarding the oath could have been justified only if the referendum result had been "No," whereas in its election pledges, the BNP took a position in favour of "Yes."

Thus, by disregarding the referendum outcome and by stepping back from its own electoral promise, the BNP has ignored the people's mandate.

As a result, the process envisaged for implementing the constitutional reform has faced an initial setback. In this process, the first step was the issuance of the constitution reform order, the second step was the referendum, and the third step was the Constitution Reform Assembly. While the first two steps have been carried out, the third step remains pending.

But it can still be hoped that BNP representatives will take the oath. The party would face no disadvantage in doing so, as it will hold a two-thirds majority in the CRA.

If it is not possible to form the reform assembly, then constitutional reform will have to be implemented through the amendment of the constitution under Article 142. However, the problem of doing so is that the power to amend the constitution under Article 142 is limited, and it is not possible to alter the fundamental features of the constitution through it. This limitation arises from the basic structure doctrine which is a part of our constitutional law.

The basic structure doctrine is grounded in the idea that legislative power under the constitution is limited. Legislative power is derived from the constitution and must operate within its framework. In contrast, constituent power refers to the authority to create or fundamentally alter a constitution. This power resides with the people themselves, and the people have already exercised this power in the February 12 referendum.

Under Article 142 of the constitution, the parliament holds the power to amend the constitution. However, this is a derivative power and therefore subordinate to the constitution. As such, it cannot be used to alter the basic structure, which constitutes the inviolable core of the constitution.

In the past, amendments to the constitution have been declared unconstitutional by the courts by applying the basic structure doctrine. For example, the Eighth Amendment concerning the decentralisation of the High Court and the 13th Amendment concerning the caretaker government system were later declared unconstitutional.

It is worth noting that the court's annulment of the 13th Amendment made the establishment of an authoritarian system in the country possible.

Therefore, implementing the extensive and fundamental reforms of the July charter through Article 142 procedure may not be the most sustainable approach.

As noted earlier, it is still possible for the BNP to take the oath, which could lead to a satisfactory resolution of the entire matter.

Reading the new PM's first speech

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S.M. REZWAN-UL-ALAM

Through the general election on February 12, Bangladesh has entered a new political reality. After years of political conflicts, street-based movements, and institutional tensions, this transfer of power is not only a change of government but also a turning point for the project of rebuilding the country. At the centre of this stands Tarique Rahman, who has taken office as the country's 11th prime minister after being an opposition politician living in exile for 17 years.

Along with this transfer of power, his political language also seems to be changing. Earlier, he was the voice of resistance, and more recently, before the election, of promised reform, reconstruction, and revenge-free politics. But in his first speech as the prime minister, his tone was different. There, priority was given to stability, administrative discipline, and handling immediate crises.

The background of the 2026 election was full of instability. The student-led mass uprising of 2024 brought an end to Sheikh Hasina's long rule. Through loss of lives, institutional breakdown, and deep political division, the nation passed through an uncertain period. In this context, the interim administration formed under the leadership of Prof Muhammad Yunus stabilised the state, and through political consensus the July National Charter was formulated, where commitments to future constitutional reforms were included.

Before the election, the mark of this revolutionary context was clear in Tarique's speeches. He spoke about rebuilding the country, restoring democracy, and rebuilding public trust. One of his most discussed ideas was the "rainbow nation"—a Bangladesh where diversity of opinion, path, religion, and identity would coexist. Against divided politics, this was the language of reconciliation. He promised reconciliation instead of revenge, and proposed forming commissions to heal political wounds. He also pledged to protect the rights of minorities and women. At the same time, he gave warning messages about the influence of extremist religious politics, which made him acceptable to urban youth and women voters as well.

Talking about the economy, too, his language was ambitious. Family Cards, Farmer Cards, cash assistance, massive employment, development of small entrepreneurs—together, he presented a welfare-oriented state outline. He also raised the dream of a trillion-dollar economy in the long run. In other words, before the election, his speeches were a blueprint for repairing the state.

After coming to power, however, the practical form of that language has begun to change.

In his first speech as the prime minister on February 18, his tone was far more administrative. He gave the highest priority to the rule of law. He spoke about controlling disorder to bring back discipline. He clearly said state governance would not be run by party influence, but by the rule of law. This was a significant message to the administration and party activists.

Another noticeable matter in his speech was the emphasis on inclusion. He said those who did not vote for him were also citizens with equal rights. In this, there is an assurance of revenge-free governance. Perhaps he is interested in stepping into the role of a state guardian from a leader of resistance. However, some gaps between electoral promises and governing reality have become clear, especially in the economy.

Before the election, promises of direct cash assistance like Family Cards and Farmer Cards created a strong response. But after coming to power, the government has begun speaking about a "fragile economy" and a "realistic time frame." Controlling commodity prices, ensuring electricity supply, and stabilising law and order, especially during Ramadan, have emerged as initial priorities.

This is the natural tension between promise and capacity. But if this gap cannot be explained, there may be misunderstanding and frustration.

The same reality exists in the issue of constitutional reform. Although the July charter spoke of major reforms, the government seems more focused on handling immediate governance crises. As a result, a silent shift in priority is visible between long-term reform and short-term stability.

International messaging is also clear in Tarique Rahman's speeches. Transparency, accountability, digital transformation, investment-friendly environment—through the use of these words, there is an effort to rebuild global confidence. In regional diplomacy, too, his language has been coordinated and inclusive.

A continuous element in his speeches is the remembrance of martyrs. By linking the Liberation War of 1971 and the mass uprising of 2024 in the same line, he has tried to construct a continuous history of resistance across two generations. But at the same time, he has spoken about controlling "mob culture," which signals a transition from revolutionary politics to institutional governance.

Before the election, his speeches held dreams of a trillion-dollar economy, large infrastructure, and investment flows. Now his language has given more space to commodity markets, electricity, and administrative discipline. This is not retreat, rather a reprioritisation.

The government is speaking about a 180-day action plan. This period will be the most important test. If people see improvement in market prices, electricity, and law and order, then confidence in long-term reforms will grow.

This evolution in Tarique's political language reflects the transformation of his leadership. In opposition politics, the strength of protest is important, but in governing the state, patience, coordination, and institutional dependence are necessary.

Bangladesh now stands at a sensitive crossroads. Maintaining balance between revolutionary expectations and administrative reality will determine the success of this chapter. The countdown of the first 180 days has already begun. Within this period, the budget will also have to be presented.

There is only one question: can the promises of resistance turn into responsible governance?

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS
1 Deck of fortunes
6 Origami need
11 Love, in Lille
12 Full of energy
13 Tool with a bubble
15 Annex
16 Be a contender
17 Mine yield
18 Take back
20 Finger count
21 Bowler, for one
22 Swift
23 Olympics award
26 Sailors
27 Made fun of
28 Use a needle
29 Zero
30 Apparition
34 Court worker: Abbr.
35 Feel poorly
36 Dr.'s org.
37 Extremely hot garden item
40 Spine-tingling
41 On the way out
42 Halts
43 Good judgment

DOWN
1 Perp zapper
2 Plentiful
3 Stirs up
4 Owned by us
5 Far from important
6 Showed fear
7 Hoppy brew
8 Crucial
9 Highest peak
10 Lets up
14 Colour
19 Niger neighbour
22 Forest youngster
23 Oversees
24 Nickname
25 "Nightmare Alley" director Guillermo
26 Sailor's balance
28 Fleet unit
30 Party spreads
31 Short putt
32 Troubling signs
33 Homer's wife
38 Tentative taste
39 "The Raven" writer

10-31

WEDNESDAY'S ANSWERS

S	P	A	D	E		P	E	C	S	
W	A	G	O	N		A	G	A	P	E
A	D	I	E	T		G	O	F	A	R
R	U	N		I	R	E		E	R	A
M	A	G	I	C	T	R	I	C	K	S
			C	E	E		M	A	L	E
M	A	R	I	S		W	A	R	E	S
E	D	E	N		S	A	G			
D	O	G	G	Y	T	R	E	A	T	S
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M	E	T	A	L		C	U	T	E	R
	D	A	M	S		K	E	E	N	S

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গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
নারী ও শিশু নির্যাতন প্রতিকার ও প্রতিরোধে সমন্বিত
সেবা জোরদারকরণ এবং কুইক রেসপন্স টিমের কার্যক্রম
নারী ও শিশু মন্ত্রণালয়
মহিলা বিষয়ক অধিদপ্তর

স্মারক নং: নাশিম/মবিঅ/নাশিনিপ্রসসেজোকুরেটিকা/০২/২০২৬-১২৭

তারিখ: ০৫ ফাল্গুন ১৪৩২
১৮ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০২৬

আউটসোর্সিং পদ্ধতিতে জনবল সরবরাহের দরপত্র সংশোধনী বিজ্ঞপ্তি

মহিলা ও শিশু বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয়ের আওতাধীন মহিলা বিষয়ক অধিদপ্তর কর্তৃক বাস্তবায়নাধীন "নারী ও শিশু নির্যাতন প্রতিকার ও প্রতিরোধে সমন্বিত সেবা জোরদারকরণ এবং কুইক রেসপন্স টিমের কার্যক্রম" শীর্ষক প্রকল্পের বিভিন্ন কার্যক্রম পরিচালনার লক্ষ্যে মাসিক সেবামূল্যে আউটসোর্সিং পদ্ধতিতে জনবল সরবরাহের জন্য ২১ জানুয়ারি ২০২৬/০৭ মাঘ ১৪৩২ এ স্মারক নং- ৩২.০০.০০০০.০৫৭.০১৮.০৪.২৫-৯৮ মূলে প্রকাশিত দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তিতে নিম্নবর্ণিত সংশোধনী আনা হ'ল-

ক্রম	পূর্বের শর্ত		সংশোধিত শর্ত
১০	আউটসোসিং পদ্ধতিতে জনবল সরবরাহ বিভিন্ন বিশেষ ক্যাটাগরির মোট ৫৪৭ জন	:	আউটসোসিং পদ্ধতিতে জনবল সরবরাহের জন্য বিভিন্ন বিশেষ ক্যাটাগরির মোট ৪৬৯ জন (দরপত্র ডকুমেন্ট অনুরূপভাবে সংশোধিত হবে)
১১	দরপত্র বিক্রয়ের সময়সীমা ২৩ জানুয়ারি ২০২৬ হতে ২৪ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০২৬ তারিখ প্রতিদিন সকাল ৯:০০ টা হতে বিকাল ৫:০০ টা পর্যন্ত	:	দরপত্র বিক্রয় ৯ মার্চ ২০২৬ পর্যন্ত প্রতিদিন ৯:০০ টা হতে বিকাল ৫:০০ টা পর্যন্ত
১২	(ক) দরপত্র দাখিলের সর্বশেষ সময়সীমা: ২৫ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০২৬ খ্রি. দুপুর: ১২:০০ টা (খ) দরপত্র বাক্স খোলার তারিখ ও সময়: ২৫ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০২৬, সময়: দুপুর ১:০১ টা	:	(ক) দরপত্র দাখিলের সর্বশেষ সময়সীমা: ১০ মার্চ ২০২৬, দুপুর ১২:০০ টা পর্যন্ত (খ) দরপত্র বাক্স খোলার তারিখ ও সময়: ১০ মার্চ ২০২৬, দুপুর ১:০১ টা
১৭	দরপত্র নিরাপত্তা জামানত: ৪৬,০০,০০০/-(ছিচল্লিশ লক্ষ টাকা)	:	দরপত্র নিরাপত্তা জামানত: ৩০,০০,০০০/- (ত্রিশ লক্ষ টাকা)

18/02/2026
মোহাম্মদ ইফতেখার হোসেন
প্রকল্প পরিচালক

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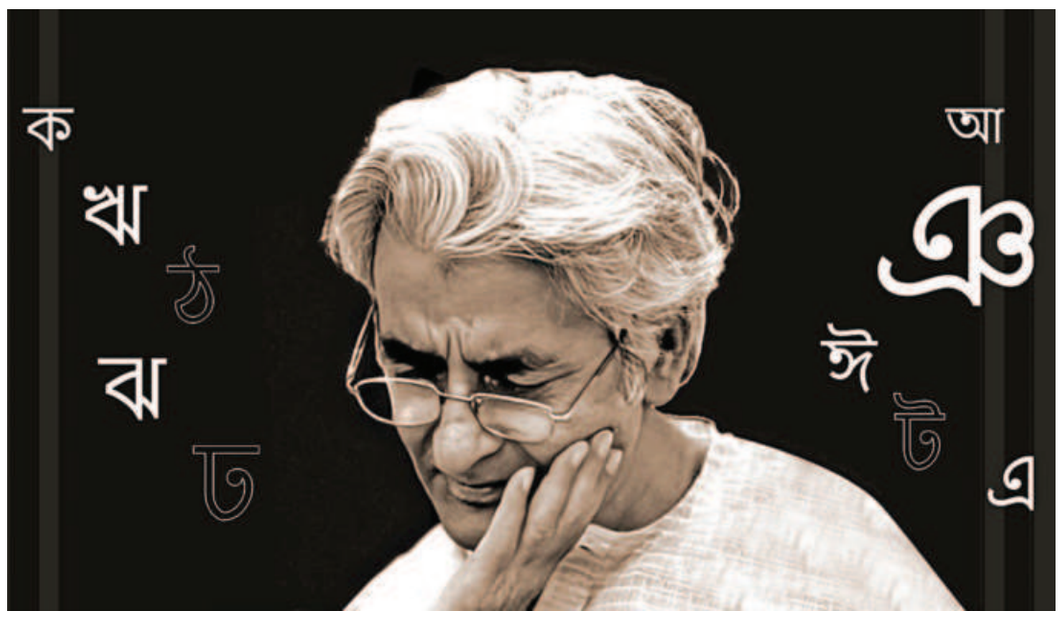
ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

PRATUL MUKHOPADHYAY,
a personification of Ekushey February's spirit

Bengali stage music had rarely been so singular. In the Gananatya and Ganasangeet tradition, songs relied on collective harmony, choirs channeled the pulse of social movements, labour struggles, and dreams of justice. Mukhopadhyay, however, charted a different path. As a lifelong activist, he barely needed to carry instruments on stage, in streets, in marketplaces.

DOWEL BISWAS



Ami Banglay gaan gai
Ami Banglar gaan gai
Ami amar amike chirodin ei
Banglay khuje pai

These verses, simple and intimate, were still being sung by Pratul Mukhopadhyay from his hospital bed days before his death on February 15, 2025. Visitors recall him smiling, stretching the final notes, heedless of frailty: "Ah, kicchhu hobena" (nothing will happen) he told a nurse, as if the act of singing itself could ward off mortality. In that moment, music and identity converged—Bangla was not just a language, it was resistance, ancestral pride, and life itself.

Bengali stage music had rarely been so singular. In the Gananatya and Ganasangeet tradition, songs relied on collective harmony, choirs channeled the pulse of social movements, labour struggles, and dreams of justice. Mukhopadhyay, however, charted a different path. As a lifelong activist, he barely needed to carry instruments on stage, in streets, in marketplaces.

Born in Barishal in 1942, Mukhopadhyay lived through the fractures of partition, the uncertainties of migration, and the routines of middle-class survival. Politics was inherited consciousness, not a slogan. Songwriting became a ledger of conscience: a daily reckoning with history, place, and identity. His voice quivered at the edges, not from lack of technique, but from the weight of feeling itself. Being Bengali was not taught; it had to be experienced.

By the 1990s, Bengali music was shifting. Solo singer-songwriters like Kabir Suman and bands such as Mohiner Ghoraguli challenged norms, but Mukhopadhyay remained unique. His first album, ***Jete Hobe*** (1994), offered a new sonic terrain: instruments existed, but the voice took precedence. Interludes were sparse, carrying only him. His phrasing, tremor, and human imperfection became markers of authenticity. In a mainstream of polished, sugary tones, his voice was a deliberate rupture.

His songs were not just music—they were acts of social consciousness. ***Dinga Bhasao Sagore*** and ***Februaryr Ekush Tarikh*** circulated in college canteens, book fairs, and protests. His phrasing—"Bangla is the water that quenches my thirst, the final, satisfying sip."—was revolutionary, audacious even to 1990s poets. He translated and set to music poems by other Indian-language poets, and adapted Charlie Chaplin's Limelight Theme, turning private devotion into playful, universal affection.

His follow-up album, ***Otho Hey***, urged listeners to rise with time. On stage, theatricality was inseparable from song: gaze, expression, gesture, and voice worked in concert. Songs like ***Saper Mathay Pa Diye Se Nache*** or ***Nakosi Skele Africa*** showcased a presence that was both political and intimate. Arun Mitra's prose poem ***Ami Eto Boyoshe*** gained windswept desolation and raw lyricism under his musical translation. His music was constructed, deliberate, yet alive—never sentimental, always precise.

Mukhopadhyay also extended this care to children. ***Kuttus Kattas*** carried tenderness in nearly every track, nurturing young listeners toward maturity, following a legacy begun by Salil Chowdhury and extended by Sumon, Nachiketa, and Anjan Dutt.

He had no formal training. "I learned by listening, by striking and striking again," he said. Audiences initially stumbled over the integrity of a single, unpolished voice. For a generation navigating stagnant politics and pervasive "feel-good" culture, Mukhopadhyay shattered stillness. He sang truth to power, often in marketplaces and streets, bringing the language of art to those whose lives were too often overlooked:

"Born, we must die, everyone knows
Yet even in death, there is a difference, brother—
Not all death is the same."

His reflections on partition carried both irony and grief:

"Dujonei Bangali chhilam dekho, dekhi kaandokhan
You are now Bangladeshi, I am called Indian!
—Learning, even while giving slogans, who is brother, who is enemy."

Pratul Mukhopadhyay's songs do not end with the last note, nor with the closing line of a lyric. They live in the pauses between breaths, in the quiet insistence of memory, in the insistence to see, again and again, the face of Bengal. His music asks questions rather than giving answers: What does it mean to belong? How does a language shape a people? How can art persist beyond mortality, beyond stage and record, beyond the limits of a single life?

Ami Banglay Gaan Gai—and in that singing, the work is never truly done.

WHAT'S THE HAPS?

'MATRIKA'

To honour the sacrifices of language martyrs and celebrate the beauty, diversity, and significance of the mother tongue, Students' Community is set to host the second edition of ***MATRIKA***. Marking the spirit of February 21, the event will feature a range of competitions, including painting, solo singing, solo dance, poetry recitation, Bangla spelling, Bangla quiz, wall magazine based on the Bangla language, and a photography segment themed around July 2024.

Date: Saturday | Feb 21
Time: 10 am
Venue: T A Ganguli Community Centre

National Film Awards must be transparent: **Shakib Khan**

In a recent interview, National Film Award-winning actor Shakib Khan outlined his expectations from the new government, calling for transparency, accountability and structural reform in the film sector. He urged that the National Film Awards' judging process be made fully transparent and free from political influence or favouritism, with clear evaluation criteria and strict safeguards against external interference.

Addressing government film grants, he proposed transparent committees, online scoring systems and public reports to curb bias and support genuine talent. Shakib also highlighted the decline of cinema halls, recommending renovation initiatives, tax incentives and public-private partnerships to build modern multiplexes and mini theatres. He further stressed the need for a professional, safe and hassle-free working environment for industry stakeholders.

NEWS

Prices of Ramadan essentials jump

FROM PAGE 12

while the high-end dates have seen a Tk 100 increase per kg, he said, adding that prices of premium dates like Ajwa and Mariyam ranged from Tk 1,000 to Tk 1,400 per kg.

The other fruits also saw similar price jumps.

Sagar bananas were selling for Tk 180 to Tk 200 per dozen, while apples and oranges retailed between Tk 350 and Tk 380 per kg, up from Tk 320 just a week ago.

Papaya prices also climbed, with Thai varieties selling for up to Tk 200 per kg.

In the protein segment, the price of beef remained steady but high at Tk 780 to Tk 800 per kg, while a kg of mutton costs Tk 1,300. However, the prices of fish, particularly of indigenous species like koi and catfish, rose by approximately Tk 100 per kg.

Despite the hike in perishables, the grocery and poultry sections provided some relief to consumers.

The prices for sugar, oil, lentils and salt remained unchanged, said Md Gofran, proprietor of Cumilla General Store in Kawran Bazar.

"These items haven't seen a pre-Ramadan hike this time," he said.

Poultry prices actually eased slightly due to lower-than-expected demand.

Broiler chicken was selling at Tk 190 per kg, down from Tk 200 two days ago, while Sonali chicken prices dropped by Tk 20 to retail at Tk 300 per kg.

Rice prices also stayed stable, with wholesalers attributing the steady trend to a slight dip in demand during the fasting month.

In Rajshahi's Shaheb Bazar, lemon and lime that sold for Tk 20-25 per four pieces just days ago are now selling for Tk 50-60.

The price of cucumbers also jumped from Tk 60 to Tk 90 per kg, reports our Rajshahi correspondent.

"Like clockwork, the prices go up during Ramadan every year -- this is not unexpected," said Monirul Islam, a buyer in Rajshahi.

Bipul Biswas, assistant director of the National Consumer Rights Protection Directorate in Rajshahi, said they are conducting regular drives to curb irregularities.

The situation was similar in Shariatpur's Palong Madhya Bazar, where four pieces of lemon or lime are selling for Tk 60-100 on Thursday morning, reports our Shariatpur correspondent.

Meanwhile, in Chattogram, broiler chicken prices hit Tk 200-220 per kg, while eggplant and cucumber prices rose by Tk 20 per kg. Vendors in the port city blamed limited supply and high demand for the sudden hike.

AL leader dies a day after release on bail

FROM PAGE 2

he suffered a cardiac arrest at Thakurgaon Jail on January 24 but did not receive proper treatment.

Rejecting the allegations of negligence, Md Abu Salam Talukdar, jailer of Thakurgaon Jail, said over the phone that Akram was shifted to Rangpur for better treatment on January 25 after falling ill.

The family claimed adequate medical attention was still not provided in Rangpur.

After being released on bail from the High Court on Tuesday, Akram was taken to Dhaka by his relatives on Wednesday morning for advanced treatment.

A family member, requesting anonymity, said Akram's condition had already deteriorated significantly by then. He died later that night.

Quamrul Huda, senior jail superintendent in Rangpur, told this newspaper that Akram was admitted to Rangpur Medical College Hospital immediately after he was transferred from Thakurgaon.

He was receiving treatment there under the prison authorities until his release, Quamrul said.

"There's no scope of alleging negligence in his treatment," he added.

Bulbul Islam, officer-in-charge of Baliadangi Police Station, told The Daily Star that Akram had been arrested on December 11 last year in connection with an explosives case filed earlier with the station, in which he was initially listed as an unidentified accused. A Thakurgaon court later sent him to jail.

Akram was laid to rest at his family graveyard in Barabari Union yesterday afternoon. Several thousand people attended his namaz-e-janaza and burial, witnesses said.

Raped, tortured and jailed

FROM PAGE 12

woman for whom she works as domestic help.

After arriving in Saudi Arabia with two other women, she was kept in an office for three days without proper food before being sent to a household.

"They locked the fridge. Even rice was under lock and key. They gave me one piece of flatbread and an egg for the whole day. I worked 24 hours," she said.

When she asked to return to the office, her employer allegedly told her they had paid 10,000 riyals to "buy" her and would not let her go.

After months of abuse, Rima fled to Madinah and later to Makkah, hoping to surrender to the police and be deported.

She was detained briefly but released. Later, she said, she was deceived again by a Bangladeshi woman who promised her work but forced her into prostitution without pay.

"When I refused to continue prostitution and wanted the money, they locked me in a room and tortured and raped me," she said.

She also alleged that a driver associated with her employer raped her before handing her over to the police.

Rima was later jailed for five months on theft charges filed by her employer.

"In jail, they beat me and gave me electric shocks. I kept saying I stole nothing," she said, showing marks on her arms. During detention, medical tests revealed she was pregnant.

"I have no parents. I grew up in an orphanage. Where will I go now?" she asked. "I survived to return home. But how will I live with this child? Who will accept me?"

With no family to receive her at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, she sought help from the Armed Police Battalion and was referred to Brac.

According to Brac Migration Programme data, at least six women have returned from Saudi Arabia while pregnant after facing abuse.

Separate data show that at least 157 migrant workers returned to Bangladesh over the past six years after experiencing sexual or physical assault abroad.

Shariful Hasan, associate director at the Brac Migration Programme and the Brac Youth Platform, said the actual number of survivors may be higher, as many do not report abuse due to fear and social stigma.

Referring to Rima's case, Shairful questioned the role of the Bangladesh embassy in Saudi Arabia.

"She went with hope. She wanted to live a little better. Instead, she was raped and tortured in her employer's house," he said.

Shairful said the embassy should have taken stronger action before issuing her travel pass.

"Before giving her a travel pass, the embassy heard her story. Why did they not request the Saudi authorities to investigate? Why was the employer not summoned? Why was enforcement not involved?" he asked.

He also questioned whether the incident was reported to the relevant ministry and what steps were taken.

"They go because they are vulnerable. Once there, they become even more vulnerable. And yet we do not see the state fighting for them from the embassy level," Shariful said.

Criticising what he described as a tendency to quietly send abused women home, he added, "When crimes go unpunished, the abuse continues. Another woman becomes a victim."

"We often reduce it to numbers... But this is not about numbers. Human rights violations cannot be measured statistically. Each case is a life," he said.

He urged the government to investigate the case thoroughly, including the roles of recruitment agencies and embassy officials, and to adopt a clear standard operating procedure to protect migrant workers.

"If one woman is tortured in Saudi Arabia, it is an injury to all of Bangladesh. Justice must be visible. Accountability must be real," he added.

Pearu Sardar and Dhaka's first Shaheed Minar

FROM PAGE 12

construction materials from outside.

At the time, expansion work was underway at Dhaka Medical College campus, and construction workers had piled up bricks and sand in front of the hostel. While the students could gather bricks and sand from there, they were unable to get cement.

At that point, they learned that the contractor had stored a sufficient supply of cement in a nearby warehouse beside the hostel. The students then began searching for the contractor.

When the students discovered that the contractor overseeing the construction was none other than the local community leader, Pearu Sardar, evening was approaching. A few students went to his house under the cover of darkness.

The designer of the first Shaheed Minar, Saeed Haider, wrote in his article "Tomar Amar Ar Pearu Sardarer Prothom Shaheed Minar", upon hearing from the students about their plan to build a memorial, Pearu said, "Take the key. Take as much as you need and get to work. Just remember to return the key to me in the morning."

At the time, the students were unaware that on February 21, when protesters had tried to shield themselves from tear gas, the drums of water they used to wash their eyes and faces had been placed there on Pearu's instructions.

Pearu did not stop at providing construction materials for the memorial. He also summoned two masons and instructed them to assist the students.

On the night of February 23, Dhaka's first Shaheed Minar was built on Dhaka Medical College campus. It was informally inaugurated the next morning by Mahbubur Rahman, father of martyr Shafiur Rahman, and formally on February 26 by Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, editor of The Azad.

According to "Prothom Shaheed Minar O Pearu Sardar", Pearu helped build the students at great risk. As a government contractor, he could have lost his payments, licence, or even been blacklisted if his support for the students became known.

In 1956, when the first official Shaheed Minar was built with funding from the provincial government, Pearu Sardar was again involved as a contractor. On the night of March 25, 1971, the monument was demolished by the Pakistani army with artillery shelling.

Pearu Sardar's role extended beyond building the Shaheed Minar; students fleeing police often sought refuge in his neighbourhood.

Language activist Abdul Matin wrote in his article, "Pearu Sardar's neighbourhood was a safe haven for language activists." Whenever clashes erupted at the university, students would cross the railway tracks and feel safe in the Hossaini Dalan neighbourhood under the protection of Pearu Sardar.

He effectively oversaw the security of the area, personally preventing police raids and calming tense situations. During the regimes of Ayub Khan and Monem Khan, members of the National Students' Federation (NSF) did not dare to enter his neighbourhood to intimidate university students.

According to "Prothom Shaheed Minar O Pearu Sardar", he was the leader of several key neighbourhoods in Dhaka. Through his philanthropy, he helped establish orphanages, mosques, and schools in Old Dhaka.

Though he began as a contractor during the British period, his reputation grew in the Pakistan era, and he was involved in major projects such as Dhaka Stadium, the Institution of Engineers, Adamjee Jute Mills, Asad Gate, and Dhaka Medical College's nursing hostel.

Pearu Sardar was born in 1893. His father, Munna Sardar, was also an influential figure of Old Dhaka. Pearu passed away on October 5, 1961. His descendants' firm, Pearu Sardar & Sons Decorator, still handles the arrangements for the annual Eid prayers at the National Eidgah.

In 2015, the government of Bangladesh posthumously awarded Pearu Sarder the Ekushey Padak (second-highest civilian award) in recognition of his contributions to the 1952 Language Movement.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Mahbubur Rashid, grandson of Pearu Sardar, said his grandfather's role in the Language Movement, particularly in the construction of the first Shaheed Minar, remains a source of immense pride and inspiration for the family. "We grew up hearing from elders and neighbours not only about his contribution to the movement but also about his generosity."

Mahbubur noted that the government has already honoured Pearu Sardar by naming a school and a road after him. "Although we have not yet taken any initiative at the personal level, we hope to launch welfare activities in his name in the future."

Rough English translation of Syed Shamsul Haque's poem cited at the beginning:

["Our tear-soaked first Shaheed Minar—
Though it no longer stands today,
Its memory lives in the present monument,
And in that memory, Pearu Sardar still remains!"]

Three killed in road accidents

STAR REPORT

Three people were killed and at least six others injured in two separate road accidents on expressways in Shariatpur and Munshiganj yesterday, according to reports from our correspondents.

In Shariatpur, two transport workers were killed and at least five passengers injured when a Gopalganj-bound Kotalipara Star Express bus rammed a stationary Khan Paribahan coach around 4:00pm at Jamaddar intersection on the Dhaka-Bhanga Expressway near the South Plaza of the Padma Bridge.

Akash Sardar, 31, a bus helper from Gopalganj Sadar, died on the spot, and supervisor Yunus Mollah, 40, died after being taken to a hospital.

Sub-Inspector Md Abdus Salam of Shibchar Highway Police Station said the Star Express hit the parked bus from behind and mounted the divider. Traffic was disrupted briefly. Police seized the buses.

In Munshiganj, Shawkat Bepari, 23, a helper of a trucker of Jazira upazila in Shariatpur, was killed after a Mawa-bound truck hit a broken-down vehicle around 6:00am near Srinagar Ferry Ghat underpass on the Dhaka-Mawa Expressway.

Another helper, Md Imran Mondal, 24, was injured and referred to Dhaka for treatment, fire service officials said.

A damaged bus from the collision at Jamaddar intersection near the Padma Bridge yesterday, where two transport workers were killed and at least five passengers injured. PHOTO: STAR

CCC launches drive against illegal billboards

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Chattogram*

Chattogram City Corporation Mayor Shahadat Hossain has announced a zero-tolerance policy against illegal billboards and unauthorised advertisements to turn the port city into a planned, clean, and aesthetic metropolis.

Following his directive, a large-scale eviction drive began yesterday to remove banners, posters and hoardings that have long cluttered the city's skyline.

The operation started in the Kazir Dewri area, led by a CCC executive magistrate in coordination with the engineering and conservancy departments, with support from law enforcement agencies.

During the drive, several large billboards and numerous unauthorised banners and posters -- many occupying public spaces for years without approval -- were removed.

Country's first election lab opened at SUST

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Sylhet*

The country's first dedicated election lab has been inaugurated at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST), aiming to institutionalise election-focused research.

Vice-Chancellor Prof AM Sarwaruddin Chowdhury formally opened the lab yesterday at the Social Science Building on the campus.

The lab has been established by the Department of Political Studies to conduct methodological and empirical research on elections, voting behaviour, and electoral processes.

The initiative seeks to create a specialised academic platform for collecting and analysing data on electoral dynamics in Bangladesh.

Prof Md Shahabul Haque, director of the Election Lab, said the lab aims to present reliable research findings through scientific analysis of election-related data and to contribute to strengthening democratic practices.

Prof Ashraful Rahman, head of the Department of Political Studies, described the lab as a groundbreaking initiative for the department, adding that it would help students enhance their research and analytical skills.

Speaking at the inauguration event, the VC said teachers and students will benefit from collecting and analysing election data.

"This year's election was comparatively better than previous ones. I hope this lab will contribute to improving future elections in the country," said Prof Sarwaruddin.

University Treasurer Prof Md Ismail Hossain attended the programme as a special guest.

Following the inauguration, a seminar titled "Analysis of the Results of the 13th National Parliamentary Election" was held. Faculty members and students discussed the election results, voting trends, political significance and overall impact of the polls.

Prepare 6-month action plan

FROM PAGE 3

administration "free from corruption, nepotism and syndicates," the sources added.

Health Minister Sardar Md Sakhawat Husain and State Minister for Health MA Muhit gave the directives at their first meeting with ministry officials and heads of its agencies at the secretariat.

After an introduction session, Health Secretary Saidur Rahman presented an overview of the ministry's jurisdiction, activities and challenges.

When the issue of vacant posts was raised, MA Muhit instructed that the positions be filled as soon as possible, sources said.

The health minister also directed officials to prepare a 180-day action plan in line with the BNP's manifesto on the health sector, an official present at the meeting said.

He instructed officials to ensure punctuality and expedite file processing, said another official.

He also warned that surprise visits would be conducted at health facilities to ensure the timely attendance of doctors and employees, the official added.

The minister also emphasised improving the quality of medical education.

Among those present at the meeting were Prof Abu Zafor, director general of the Directorate General of Health Services, and Prof Nazmul Islam, director general of the Directorate General of Medical Education.

An economics graduate of Dhaka University, Sakhawat was elected from Narasingdi-4 and took charge of the health ministry on Tuesday.

MA Muhit, an ophthalmologist elected from Sirajganj-6, also joined the ministry the same day. His father, MA Matin, served as deputy prime minister and health minister in the 1980s.

Man recounts son, niece's deaths at ICT

FROM PAGE 4

the area, and a bullet pierced her chest as she stood near a window.

"She collapsed in a pool of blood. We carried her in our arms to the hospital, but doctors declared her dead within minutes," Faruk told the court.

Tanha's father, Md Mosharraf Hossain, also testified, saying his only daughter was speaking to her brother over the phone when she was shot. "He heard her scream, and then the line went dead," he said.

Rabbi and Tanha lived in the same building and were buried in the same graveyard.

During the hearing, video footage of the killings was played in the courtroom.

Both witnesses accused senior AL leaders, including Quader, of instigating violence. They said they had seen and heard orders to open fire and submitted video evidence of the shootings to investigators.

"My wife is still traumatised. She cried for our son throughout last night," Faruk said. "We want exemplary punishment for all those responsible."

Apart from Quader, the other accused are AFM Bahauddin Nasim, former state minister Mohammad Ali Arafat, Jubo League President Sheikh Fazle Shams Parash, its General Secretary Moinul Hossain Khan Nikhil, and Chhatra League President and General Secretary Saddam Hussain and Sheikh Wali Asif Inan.

487 killed in road crashes

FROM PAGE 3

teachers, doctors, journalists, lawyers, bank and insurance employees, NGO workers, political activists, businesspeople, sales representatives, garment and construction workers, and people with disabilities.

The foundation identified defective vehicles and roads, over-speeding, reckless driving, unfit drivers, lack of fixed wages and working hours for drivers, slow-moving vehicles on highways, risky motorcycle riding by youths, lack of traffic law awareness, poor traffic management and traffic law enforcement, capacity constraints at Bangladesh Road Transport Authority, and extortion in the public transport sector as the main causes of road accidents.

There will be no more 'auto pass'

FROM PAGE 3

the classroom. You cannot leave the classroom and engage in agitation."

He assured that teachers' demands will be addressed through proper channels. "We will address them. There is no need to occupy the streets to realise demands," he said.

The minister also said English-medium institutions will be brought under government rules.

He expressed concern over unauthorised institutions operating in unsafe premises. "You cannot run a school in a garage. Fire exits and security must be ensured. These are our children," he added.

Milon also warned against corruption in the education sector.

Addressing the same briefing, state minister for education Bobby Hajjaj said the government will no longer treat the education budget as a cost but as an investment.

"Education will be the state's first investment, the core factory of human resources, and the principal project of nation-building," he said.

Unveiling a 12-point policy agenda, he said the government is committed to fulfilling the electoral pledge of raising education allocation to 5 percent of GDP.

The education and finance ministries will work to prepare a three-year fiscal uplift plan, focusing not only on total allocations but also on equity and learning outcomes, he also said.

Hajjaj outlined a three-phase timeline, including a diagnostic review of budget implementation before Eid-ul-Fitr and a national education roadmap with measurable indicators.

The government will also strengthen teachers' training institutions, upgrade laboratories, libraries and language labs, expand digital content and assessment capacity, improve school infrastructure, particularly water, sanitation and safety, and implement pledges such as midday meals, clean toilets and health support for female students, he added.

Schools will introduce compulsory digital literacy, AI awareness and cyber safety, and gradually incorporate listening and speaking skills into assessments as curricula shift from rote learning to reasoning-based evaluation, he said.

The ministry will publish monthly public dashboards on project progress, training, textbook distribution and class hours, and introduce school-level report cards covering attendance and contact hours to strengthen accountability, he also said.

Salehuddin Ahmed passes away

FROM PAGE 3

On April 4, 1979, he joined BRAC as an executive assistant and remained associated with the organisation's journey until 2004. Later, from 2005 to 2009, he served as the pro vice-chancellor of BRAC University and also contributed as a member of BRAC's General Body.

BRAC has expressed deep shock at the demise of Salehuddin.

"In this difficult time, we extend our deepest condolences to his family, colleagues, and well-wishers," the organisation said in a post on its Facebook page.

It said Salehuddin's long career in development thinking, poverty alleviation, and the expansion of education has made a significant contribution to Bangladesh's development landscape. "His long and close professional association with founder Fazle Hasan Abed greatly enriched BRAC's journey," reads the post.

বাংলাদেশ অভ্যন্তরীণ নৌ-পরিবহন কর্তৃপক্ষ
Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority
Website: www.biwta.gov.bd/Facebook Page: www.facebook.com/biwta1958
বিআইডব্লিউটিএ ভবন, ১৪১-১৪৩, মতিঝিল বাণিজ্যিক এলাকা, পোস্ট বক্স নং-৭৬, ঢাকা-১০০০, বাংলাদেশ
BIWTA Bhaban, 141-143, Motiheel C/A, Post Box 76, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh
Fax No: 0-2-9551072
Grams: AUTHORITY
Phones: 9556151-55, 95554070, 9552039, 9552027

নং-১৮.১১.০০.০০.০৩৬.০৭.১৪৭.২২/৩০৫ তারিখঃ ১৯/০২/২০২৬খ্রিঃ

অকেজো গাড়ী বিক্রয়ের বিজ্ঞপ্তি

বিআইডব্লিউটিএ'র অচল ঘোষিত রাজস্ব খাতের ০১ (এক)টি 'জীপ' গাড়ী, ০১ (এক)টি 'মাইক্রোবাস' এবং ০২(দুই)টি 'কার' গাড়ী বিক্রয়ের লক্ষ্যে আগ্রহী ক্রেতা/প্রতিষ্ঠানের নিকট হতে সীলমোহরযুক্ত দরপত্র আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে। দরপত্র আগামী ০৫/০৩/২০২৬ইং তারিখ সকাল ০৯.৩০ ঘটিকা হতে বেলা ২.০০ ঘটিকার মধ্যে নিম্নস্বাক্ষরকারীর দপ্তরে স্থাপিত টেন্ডার বাক্সে দাখিল করতে হবে এবং একই দিন বেলা ১৫.০০ ঘটিকায় উপস্থিত দরদাতাগণের সম্মুখে (যদি কেহ উপস্থিত থাকেন) খোলা হবে। গাড়ীটির জন্য সাদা কাগজে/লেটারহেড প্যাডে (প্রতিষ্ঠান) আবেদনপত্রে দর উল্লেখ করতে হবে। গাড়ীটির বিবরণ নিম্নরূপঃ

ক্রঃ নং	গাড়ীর রেজিঃ নং	গাড়ীর ধরণ	মডেল	প্রস্তুতকারী কোম্পানী	ইঞ্জিনের ধরণ	বর্তমান অবস্থান
০১	ঢাঃ-মেঃ-ঘ-০২-১৮৩০	জীপ	১৯৯২	টয়োটা জীপ	পেট্রোল	আরিচা
০২	ঢাঃ-মেঃ-চ-৫৩-৫২২৯	মাইক্রোবাস	২০১০	নিশান মাইক্রোবাস	সিএনজি/অকটেন	পূলভূক্ত
০৩	ঢাঃ-মেঃ-গ-৩৫-২৩৭৮	কার	২০১২	ফোর্ড কার	পেট্রোল	পূলভূক্ত
০৪	ঢাঃ-মেঃ-গ-৩৫-২৩১৬	কার	২০১২	ফোর্ড কার	পেট্রোল	পূলভূক্ত

০২। আগ্রহী ক্রেতা/প্রতিষ্ঠানসমূহকে বিআইডব্লিউটিএ'র অনুকূলে যে কোন তফসীলভূক্ত ব্যাংক হতে পে-অর্ডার/ব্যাংক ড্রাফট আকারে প্রতিটি গাড়ীর জন্য উদ্ধৃত মূল্যের ২৫% (শতকরা পঁচিশ ভাগ) হারে (ফেরতযোগ্য) আর্নেষ্টমানি দরপত্রের সাথে দাখিল করতে হবে। কর্তৃপক্ষের অনুমোদন সাপেক্ষে মনোনীত দরদাতাকে ১৫ (পনের) দিনের মধ্যে দরপত্রের সম্পূর্ণ টাকা পরিশোধকরতঃ গাড়ীর ডেলিভারী গ্রহণ করতে হবে। অন্যথায় আর্নেষ্টমানির টাকা বাজেয়াপ্ত হবে। সফল দরদাতাকে উদ্ধৃত মূল্যের ওপর অতিরিক্ত সরকারী বিধি মোতাবেক ভ্যাট ও আয়করসহ পে-অর্ডার/ব্যাংক ড্রাফট বিআইডব্লিউটিএ'র অনুকূলে প্রদান করতে হবে।

০৩। উল্লেখিত ক্রমিক নং-০১ এর গাড়ীটি অফিস চলাকালীন সময়ে আরিচা দপ্তরে এবং ক্রমিক-০২, ০৩ ও ০৪ এর উল্লেখিত গাড়ীগুলো কর্তৃপক্ষের বেইজমেন্টে পরিদর্শন করা যাবে এবং বিস্তারিত তথ্য সহকারী প্রকৌশলী (যাঃ), যানবাহন শাখা, প্রশাসন ও মানব সম্পদ বিভাগ, বিআইডব্লিউটিএ, ঢাকা অথবা মটর মেকানিক, যানবাহন শাখা, প্রশাসন ও মানব সম্পদ বিভাগ, বিআইডব্লিউটিএ ভবন (বেইজমেন্ট), ১৪১-১৪৩, মতিঝিল বাণিজ্যিক এলাকা, ঢাকা এর সাথে ০৪/০৩/২০২৬ইং তারিখ পর্যন্ত যোগাযোগ করা যাবে।

০৪। দরপত্রে অংশগ্রহণকারী দরদাতা অবশ্যই হালনাগাদ ট্যাক্স, ভ্যাট, ট্রেড লাইসেন্স এবং ব্যাংক সলভেন্সী সার্টিফিকেট জমা প্রদান করিবেন।

০৫। নির্ধারিত সময়ের পর কোন দরপত্র গ্রহণ করা হবে না।

০৬। কর্তৃপক্ষ কোন কারণ প্রদর্শন ব্যতিরেকে যে কোন দরপত্র গ্রহণ অথবা যে কোন বা সকল দরপত্র বাতিল করার ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করে।

১৯/০২/২৬
মোঃ আব্দুর রাজ্জাক
উপ-পরিচালক (প্রশাসন)
বিআইডব্লিউটিএ, ঢাকা

জিডি-৩৪৮

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Superintending Engineer
Bridge Construction & Maintenance Circle
Sarak Bhaban, Tejgaon, Dhaka.
Phone: 02-8879337, 01730-782559
E-mail- sebmc.rhd@gmail.com, sebmc@rhd.gov.bd

Memo No:35.01.0000.152.07.035.26.85 Date: 17.02.2026

2nd Amendment of e-GP Tender Notice

Package Title: Sub-soil Investigation of Mongla Bridge over the Mongla River at Daulatdia-Faridpur-Magura-Jhenaidah-Jashore-Khulna-Mongla (Digraj) National Highway (N7) at Bagerhat District during the year 2025-26
Package No: PSN/e-PPS3/BCMC/01/2025-26
Name of Procuring Entity: Superintending Engineer, Bridge Construction and Maintenance Circle, RHD

Reference	Existing Provision	Amended Provision
Tender ID: 1223797 Tender Notice: Particular Information	Closing Date & Time: 22-February-2026 15:00 Opening Date &Time: 22-February-2026 15:00 Last Date & Time for Tender/Proposal Security Submission: 22-February-2026 14:00	Closing Date & Time: 25-February-2026 14:00 Opening Date &Time: 25-February-2026 14:00 Last Date & Time for Tender/Proposal Security Submission: 25-February-2026 12:30
Tender Notice: Information for Tender/Consultant: Tender/Proposal Security valid up to: Tender/Proposal valid up to:	 20-Jul-2026 22-Jun-2026	 23-Jul-2026 25-Jun-2026
Tender Notice: Brief Description of Assignment	The assignment involves carrying out detailed ground investigation works for the proposed Mongla Bridge project. The scope includes borehole drilling up to 110 m depths ***(offshore)***, Standard Penetration Tests (SPT), Cone Penetration Tests (CPT), Seismic Down-Hole Tests (SDHT), collection of soil samples, laboratory testing including physical properties, index properties, engineering properties, geo-chemical tests, and preparation of a geotechnical investigation factual report.	The assignment involves carrying out detailed ground investigation works for the proposed Mongla Bridge project. The scope includes borehole drilling up to 110 m depths**(on land)**, Standard Penetration Tests (SPT), Cone Penetration Tests (CPT), Seismic Down-Hole Tests (SDHT), collection of soil samples, laboratory testing including physical properties, index properties, engineering properties, geo-chemical tests, and preparation of a geotechnical investigation factual report.
ITT Clause 13.1a	The Average Annual Turnover of the tender shall be at least of the amount of BDT 70,00,000.00 over the last three financial years.	The Average Annual Turnover of the tender shall be at least of the amount of BDT 70,00,000.00 over the last five financial years.

Other texts, terms and conditions of the tender document and the tender notice will remain unchanged.

17.02.2026
(Abdur Rahman Kaoser)
(ID No. 601960)
Superintending Engineer, RHD (C.C)
Bridge Construction and Maintenance Circle
Sarak Bhaban, Tejgaon, Dhaka

GD-344

বাংলাদেশ বিদ্যুৎ উন্নয়ন বোর্ড
BANGLADESH POWER DEVELOPMENT BOARD
সিস্টেম এনালিস্ট এর দপ্তর
চট্টগ্রাম কম্পিউটার কেন্দ্র
বিউবো, বিদ্যুৎ ভবন,
আগ্রাবাদ, চট্টগ্রাম।
ফোন ঃ ৭১৬২১৮,০১৭৫৫৬০৭৯৭০
ই-মেইলঃ ctg_com_bpdb@yahoo.com

Ref. No.27.11.1500.717.01.022.26.157 Date: 18/02/2026

e-Tender Notice

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

Serial No.	e-Tender ID	Package No.	Description of Goods	Tender Document Last Selling/ Downloading Date and Time	Tender / Proposal Closing & Opening Date and Time	Publication Date and Time
1	1232107	GR-3	Supply of Pre-Printed LT(Single Register) bill form (Size: 15" X 11")	02-03-2026 13:00	03-03-2026 12:30	18-02-2026 13:00

This is an online Tender, where only e-Tenders will be accepted in e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copy will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, please register on e-GP System Portal (www.eprocure.gov.bd). Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and form e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd / Contract Number: 01762625528-31).

বিদ্যুৎ/জন-৭৫৫(২)/১৯/০২/২৬

18.02.26
(Engr. Nilufarin Akter)
ID No.1-01898
System Analyst
Chattogram Computer Centre
BPDB, Chattogram.

Am I turning into my mother?

ZARA ZUBAYER

My mother used to ruin most of my school events by drawing eyeliner under my eyes. In every childhood photo taken on her digital camera, you'd see a little girl with dramatic kohl-stained tear cheeks, wrapped in one of her sarees, which she had tailored to my size. At 20 years of age, I wear my eyeliner dark and bold, something my angsty younger self would probably never have predicted. I obsess over every little detail of my life and get overly emotional over World War II films. More shockingly, I find myself saying, "that's too sweet" on the first bite of a dessert. Eventually, in moments of eerie silence, the realisation comes quite dauntingly that I'm turning into my mother.

The paradox of turning into the very woman you spent your teenage years resisting can be quite an unsettling feeling, one you can't easily make peace with. The epitome of teen angst is the arguments over clothes, slammed doors, and dramatic meltdowns. Much of adolescence becomes a tug-of-war between who we think we are and who our mothers expect us to be. Rebellion becomes instinctive, whether in style, opinions, or emotions. And then, somewhere in your late teens, you suddenly find yourself voluntarily mirroring her habits; getting anxious over the most trivial matters, consuming bottomless cups of tea as a magical fix to all your problems, and, in my case, inheriting her fear of fast-moving buses on Dhaka's main roads.

As you grow older, the lens through which you saw her slowly begins to shift. The tables turn, and suddenly you feel anxious when she is outside and not picking up your calls. You're the one reminding her to take her medication and watch her health. You begin to understand that you haven't just adopted her habits, you have inherited her nervous system. Many of us carry our mother's anger, the sharpness of her irritation, or her ability to leave a room thunderstruck by rage. Others call their mothers "overbearing", only to realise they've developed the same perfectionistic urge to control every detail. And some of us receive the best parts: her empathy, her endurance, and her capacity to love.

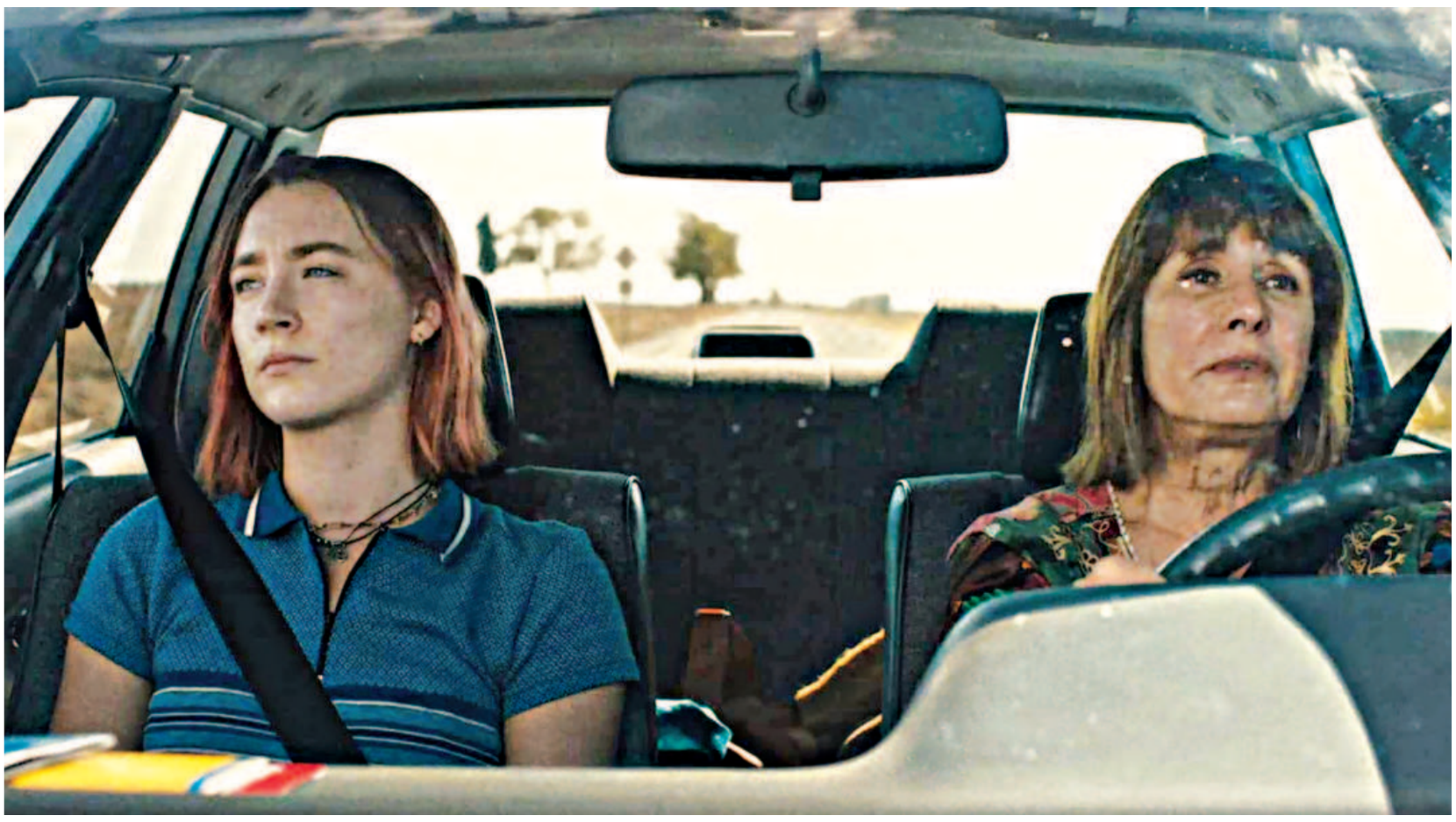
The complexity of it becomes more visible over time. Her work ethic is revealed through your inability to rest until the task at hand is completed. The way you enter a room and immediately read the emotional temperature might be an echo of her compassion and selflessness. It's not just quirks, but her characteristics that your younger self probably ridiculed at some point. I used to wonder why my mother refused to sit down before everyone had eaten until the first time I cooked for a group of people. Between analysing whose plate needs a refilling and whether there'll be enough for everyone, my appetite became secondary, like hers.

Of course, the transformation isn't comforting for everyone. Many people have rather complicated relationships with their mothers, which can evoke a sense of discomfort when they see someone with a conventional, healthy dynamic. You're not used to letting your guard down around her, let alone finding similarities that you were adamant to accept. And when you do see the parallels, it's hard to name the emotions that you never learned how to describe or share, only feel. I've seen the women in my life express different forms of maternal warmth, and it's fascinating to see how their own histories shape their instinct to nurture.

There is also the idea of epigenetics, that some emotional responses are shaped by the experiences of the women before us. Our personalities are not entirely shaped by our mothers, but there are certain emotions that often feel like they've lived in us long before we could name them. It becomes a concept of generational pattern, something epigenetics explores for those interested in the science behind our emotional inheritance.

Despite the dynamic we have with our mothers, these suddenly evoked feelings of becoming her make you see her through a lens of identity, not duty. The first person I ever critiqued was her, holding her accountable for her words, choices, and actions. Little by little, through smudged eyeliner and the sarees borrowed from her, my scrutiny turned into understanding. Becoming even a fraction of her made me realise that resemblance doesn't have to be a warning, but it can be its own subtle form of reconciliation.

Zara Zubayer *is a half-pianist, occasional grandma (she knits), and collector of instruments she never learns. Suggest a new hobby she won't commit to at zarazubayer1@gmail.com*



How much reliance on AI is too much?

TAASEEN MOHAMMED ISLAM

In 2026, generative AI models aren't just virtual assistants – they are collaborators, coworkers, and drivers of productivity. From content generation to simply helping you make the right choice, there's nothing LLMs can't help you with to ensure you are as efficient as possible. As such, the pressure to become AI literate is also higher than ever, with students, job seekers, and even regular internet users now expected to simultaneously wield the power of different agents, much like Thanos with his Infinity Stones.

I recently came across an ad for an AI transcription tool that made me think we've lost the plot. The transcription tool claimed that popular AI chatbots perform best with detailed instructions, and it was this tool which was the most efficient way to prompt chatbots without lifting a finger. Call me old-fashioned, but whatever happened to typing? Or even voice transcriptions? Why am I being nudged to use AI so that I can use AI better?

There are definitely great uses for AI – be it in business, education, or just making life easier. But when tech giants themselves are helping accelerate the production of AI-generated content, which in itself is starting to encroach into dangerous territory, I start to think that we have a problem.

Rampant AI usage has rendered authenticity invalid; everyone has the same essays, opinions, and syntax on social media like LinkedIn. Similarly, unchecked AI usage in academia is leading to papers with fake citations, half-baked arguments, and overall unethical conduct – compromising research integrity. The implications of AI go beyond the classroom. People are becoming less creative. Critical thinking, too, is on the decline.

What should be acknowledged is that it isn't only the proliferation of AI that is contributing to these phenomena. But it would not be entirely wrong to claim that it is exacerbating these issues. For instance, a creator I follow incessantly features a popular LLM as a tool that she can't live without. It is something she uses to brain dump and plan content. While it may be great from a scheduling perspective, we may be left to wonder what happened to good old-fashioned creativity. It's not normal to outsource brain functions like decision-making or thinking to someone else, so why is it okay to rely on a bunch of code for the same thing?

I am by no means trying to reduce the decision of whether one should use AI down to a litmus test. I, too, have fallen victim to outsourcing tasks like drafting emails or coming up with ideas to chatbots. But in an economy where entry-level roles are already being replaced by AI, it's important that we don't rely too much on LLMs in order to stay competitive in an already brutal job market. The push for AI usage in everyday work and life is something that we can't escape, but we can try our best not to develop an overdependence on a system, causing unchecked socio-economic and environmental harm.

Taaseen Islam did not use AI to write this article, reach him at taaseen.2001@gmail.com

Looking into the ethos of self-help books

NUZHAT TAHIYA

Walk into any bookshop, and you'll encounter the same promise repeated in different fonts: your life can be optimised, streamlined, or upgraded. All it takes is the right book. Titles like *Atomic Habits, Rich Dad Poor Dad, Ikigai, Steal Like an Artist*, or *Surrounded by Idiots* assure us that fulfilment, wealth, creativity, or clarity are just a framework away.

Life is messy, contradictory, and often unfair. Self-help books offer order, breaking down living into systems, habits, and rules. In a world that feels overwhelming, this reduction can bring a sense of relief. However, in these books, complexity is flattened, structural realities are obscured, and human experience is reduced to tidy formulas. Much of what passes for insight is common sense: get more sleep, move your body, set boundaries, focus on what you can control, and be kinder to yourself.

To stretch these truisms into 300 pages, they are padded with rebranded concepts, anecdotes, and motivational fluff. Habits are not formed in a vacuum; they are shaped by class, disability, trauma, culture, and chance. Yet many self-help texts speak as if everyone starts from the same baseline and has the same margin for error. When success is framed as the inevitable outcome of the "right" mindset or routine, failure becomes a personal moral flaw.

If the system didn't work, you likely followed it incorrectly.

This reflects something broader about our cultural shift. Self-help literature is the perfect product for late capitalism. Feeling anxious? That's a personal failing requiring better habits, not a reasonable response to economic precarity, the climate crisis, or social fragmentation. Can't find purpose? Buy a book about Japanese philosophy; don't question whether your job is meaningless or your community has dissolved. The genre takes problems that might demand collective action or structural change and redirects them inward, toward personal responsibility and self-management.

We live in a fast, individualised, solution-orientated world, where problems are expected to be fixable. Self-help literature mirrors this logic of productivity culture, treating the self as a project to be optimised and measured. You are encouraged to audit your time, your thoughts, your relationships, and your emotions.

This is not to say self-help is useless or malicious by default. Many readers genuinely find comfort, motivation, or a sense of agency in these books. For someone emerging from chaos, a checklist can be a lifeline, offering structure and stability. The problem arises when these tools are mistaken for universal truths, or when personal optimisation is treated as a substitute for social change.

So how might we engage more healthily with self-help literature? First, recognise it for what it is: not an instruction manual for living. Extract what resonates, discard what doesn't, and don't let any author convince you they've decoded human existence. It also helps to read laterally. Pair self-help with other forms of reading: history, sociology, fiction, philosophy – literature that explores ambiguity, provides context, and sits with difficult questions rather than rushing to answers.

Most importantly, resist the idea that a good life can be fully systematised. Human beings are inconsistent, relational, and embedded in worlds they did not choose. You cannot checklist your way out of grief, audit yourself into authentic relationships, or optimise your path to meaning. These books sell the fantasy that life's complexities can be solved through individual willpower and the right mental models, as if we're all just poorly programmed machines awaiting the correct software update. But sometimes, wisdom lies in sitting with ambiguity, sharing burdens, and accepting that being human is not a productivity problem to be solved.

Perhaps the most honest self-help book would be one that admits life is complicated, change is hard, there are no universal answers, and that's okay. It would be a short book. It probably wouldn't sell.

Nuzhat *is a compulsive doodler and connoisseur of bad early aughts television. Send her recommendations at nuzhat.tahiya@gmail.com*

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Star
DHAKA FRIDAY FEBRUARY 20, 2026, FALGUN 7, 1432 BS

SPORT

What to WATCH | **T SPORTS**
T20 World Cup
Australia vs Oman
Live from 7:30 pm

Lack of top-tier stars laid bare

SPORTS REPORTER

In a recent interview with The Daily Star, England's World Cup-winning all-rounder Moeen Ali had said that while Bangladesh currently have several good cricketers, the country is lacking genuine top-tier performers.

Interestingly, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) appeared to have echoed the same sentiment on Thursday, when it announced a 28-member national players' contract list for 2026 but left the highest Grade, A+, vacant.

Last year, Taskin Ahmed was the sole cricketer in the top bracket, earning Tk 10 lakh per month. However, he is now believed to be unavailable across all formats due to fitness issues and thus, has been moved down to Grade A this year alongside the captains in three formats -- Litton Das, Mehidy Hasan Miraz and Najmul Hossain Shanto.

Former Bangladesh skipper and current national batting coach Mohammad Ashraful believed the absence of multi-format regulars may have influenced the BCB's decision to leave the A+ category vacant.

"To be in A+, you have to be the best performer across all formats, right? At the moment, none of our players are playing all formats regularly. Litton is not consistent in ODIs, Shanto is not in T20Is, and Miraz is also out of T20Is. Similarly, Taskin is not currently part of the Test side," he said.

In the heydays of the 'Fab Five' in Bangladesh cricket, the Tigers had a core set of players who would feature across formats.

Three of the five have already retired. All-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, who has shown interest to return but his future with the Bangladesh team is still clouded with uncertainty, has been left out of the national contract for the second consecutive year.

Mushfiqur Rahim -- who now only plays Tests -- is the only one of the 'Fab Five' to get a deal in the latest contracts, being placed in Grade B alongside 10 others.

The 2026 national contract is another reflection of how the current crop of players have thus far failed to ascend to the levels of Shakib or Tamim Iqbal, something Moeen had spoken about at length in his interview in January.

"Initially, I saw Bangladesh evolving nicely with players like Tamim and Shakib, but I also feel it has not improved enough recently. While there are many good players now, there are no top players," Moeen told The Daily Star during his stint with the Sylhet Titans in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL).

"The current players seem to be struggling, perhaps due to coaching, facilities, or the system. In the BPL, some of the shot selection is very poor. The problem is that people have become used to seeing the same mistakes repeatedly. I have been here for a few seasons and I still see the same errors. It feels like the players are slow at learning," he added.

National Players' Contract 2026

GRADE A (TK 8 LAKH)
Najmul Hossain Shanto, Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Litton Das, and Taskin Ahmed

GRADE B (TK 6 LAKH)
Mushfiqur Rahim, Mominul Haque, Taijul Islam, Mustafizur Rahman, Tawhid Hridoy, Shadman Islam, Tanzid Hasan Tamim, Rishad Hossain, Mahedi Hasan, Hasan Mahmud, and Nahid Rana

GRADE C (TK 4 LAKH)
Soumya Sarkar, Jaker Ali Anik, Shoriful Islam, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, Nasum Ahmed, and Syed Khaled Ahmed

GRADE D (TK 2 LAKH)
Saif Hassan, Parvez Hossain Emon, Tanvir Islam, Nayeem Hasan, Hasan Murad, Shamim Hossain, and Nurul Hasan Sohan

** All Grade D players are new inclusions this year.
** No players were included in the A+ category, which stipulates a monthly salary of Tk 10 lakh.

AFC WOMEN'S ASIAN CUP

'Playing catch-up', booters brace for big debut

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh have been thrown into a challenging debut at the AFC Women's Asian Cup, with substandard preparation leaving coach Peter Butler warning against suffering a "cricket-score" margin against powerhouses China and North Korea.

The women in red and green, who were scheduled to leave for Sydney in the wee hours today, have a golden opportunity to secure direct qualification for the 2027 FIFA Women's World Cup with a top-six finish among the 12 participants, split into three groups, while seventh or eighth place would earn a play-off berth. A top-eight finish would also advance them to the 2028 Summer Olympics qualifiers.

SQUAD

Rupna Chakma, Mile Akter, Swarna Rani Mandal, Afeida Khandokar, Kohati Kisku, Nabiran Khatun, Sheuli Azim, Shamsunnar Sr, Halima Khatun, Surovi Akter Afrin, Sapna Rani, Munki Akter, Airin Khatun, Shaheda Akter Ripa, Umehla Marma, Ritu Porna Chakma, Monika Chakma, Maria Manda, Anika Rania Siddiique, Unnoti Khatun, Alpi Akter, Saurvai Akanda Prity, Most Sultana, Tohura Khatun, Most Sagorika, Shamsunnahar Jr

"Anyone who thinks we are currently qualifying for World Cups needs to wake up and smell the roses," Butler said at a crowded press conference yesterday at BFF House, where he announced a 26-member squad -- featuring new faces Alpi Akter, Surovi Akter Afrin, and Sweden-based Anika Rania Siddiqui.

"While I don't mind answering questions, the truth is that we haven't had the best preparation," added the former Liberia and Botswana coach.

After qualifying for Asia's top-flight competition in July last year, Bangladesh Football Federation had planned six international matches and an overseas camp, but the buoyant booters ended up playing only four matches -- against Thailand, Malaysia and Azerbaijan -- relying on intensive training at KEPZ in Chattogram instead. The players also got a maximum 10-match experience in the month-long Women's Football League.

"I am not pointing fingers, but we came in with a plan that has not worked, and we are now playing catch-up... Sometimes reality smacks you in the face. The fact of the matter is that we didn't properly anticipate or invest in the necessary fixtures and camps," Butler reiterated.

Bangladesh now gear up for six days of training, including a practice match against Australian side Western Sydney Wanderers on February 26 before the Asian Cup proper.

The Bangladesh coach warned that even the group's least stronger opposition Uzbekistan, who have previously played the Asian Cup five times, are "technically and physically far superior.

"Let's take it one step at a time rather than having visions of grandeur."

When sport opens the classroom door

ANISUR RAHMAN

"If I hadn't played table tennis, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to graduate from a private university."

Refat Mahmud Sabbir says it without embellishment. Years of training in a sport that offers little financial certainty have brought him to the verge of something far more lasting than a medal. A South Asian Games bronze medallist, he is now close to completing his Media and Communication degree at Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB), on a full scholarship earned through performances on the table.

"If IUB did not provide the full scholarship, maybe I could not complete my graduation," he said. "Because of table tennis, I got the opportunity to study, and now I hope I can find a job after finishing."

His journey reflects the reality for many athletes in Bangladesh outside cricket and football. They represent the country with dedication, yet financial stability remains uncertain. Education becomes the bridge to a future beyond competition.

Ramhim Lian Bawm knows that path well. The men's number two is studying Anthropology at the same university, also on a full scholarship.

"If I can graduate, I hope to stay in sports, even as a sports teacher," Ramhim said, stressing the challenge of managing tuition fees that can reach around Tk 10 lakh.

Recently, Sabbir and Ramhim helped their university win the men's team title at the inaugural Inter-University Table Tennis Fest at Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Indoor Stadium. The tournament brought together national players and student-athletes, many balancing

ambition with uncertainty. Among them were the country's top-ranked male player Muhtasin Ahmed Ridoy, national runner-up Sadia Rahman Mou, and ninth-ranked Samantha Hossen Tushi, all representing Dhaka University.

Mou, who studies Nutrition and Food Science, went on to win the women's singles title. Her priorities extend beyond results on the table.

"A sports career can end at any time. With education, we have something to rely on," she said.

Across Bangladesh, universities have increasingly stepped forward to support athletes through scholarships and quota-based admissions. Private institutions such as IUB, Daffodil International University, American International University-Bangladesh, and Northern University have offered financial assistance, while public universities including Dhaka University, Jahangirnagar University, and the University of Chittagong have provided opportunities through players' quotas.

For Sabbir, graduation is now within reach. The medals remain as milestones, but the education they helped unlock has become the foundation for everything that comes next.

PHOTO: X

Zimbabwe stun SL to top group

Skipper Sikandar Raza and opener Brian Bennett shared a brisk 69-run third-wicket stand to propel Zimbabwe to a convincing six-wicket win over co-hosts Sri Lanka in Colombo yesterday, finishing as Group B toppers in the T20 World Cup. Having restricted Sri Lanka to 178/7, Zimbabwe got over the line in 19.3 overs, with Raza smashing a whirlwind 26-ball 45 and Bennett remaining unbeaten on 63 off 48 deliveries, sealing their maiden win over Sri Lanka in T20 World Cups. The Chevrons, who could not qualify for the tournament's last edition in 2024, made heads turn this year -- beating and eventually knocking out the mighty Australians earlier. They also defeated Oman and saw their match against Ireland washed out due to rain.

Can Arsenal hold nerves to avoid familiar fate?

AGENCIES

The question refuses to go away: do Arsenal have the mental fortitude to cross the final hurdle?

Mikel Arteta admitted his side deserve criticism for the self-inflicted wounds threatening to derail their Premier League title bid after the leaders squandered a two-goal advantage in Wednesday's 2-2 draw at Wolverhampton Wanderers, handing second-placed Manchester City renewed belief in the race.

For the second successive league match, the Gunners failed to protect a lead, having been held to a 1-1 draw by Brentford last Thursday.

City sit five points behind Arsenal with a game in hand, and they still have a home fixture against the Gunners in April -- a clash that could prove decisive.

The warning signs are unmistakable. Arsenal's players look tense. The pressure is etched across their performances, and even the coaching staff appear to feel the weight of expectation. They have finished as runners-up three times before, each time falling short when it mattered most.

This campaign had felt different. Pep Guardiola's City have not seemed as imperious as in previous years. Defensive vulnerabilities have surfaced, and their attack has not always displayed its usual ruthlessness. Yet Guardiola remains -- and that alone shifts the balance. He is relentless. Winning, for him, never loses its appeal.

On paper, Arsenal boast the squad depth and quality required to lift the title. Their first half of the season was impressive. But the Premier League is a marathon, not a sprint -- it rewards those who finish strongest. If they falter again, the narrative will harden, and rival fans will not be kind. That looming fear of ridicule may already be creeping into performances. Winning a league demands more than talent; it requires formidable mental resilience.

The north London side have dropped 11 points in eight league matches in 2026.

They grew increasingly anxious as the clock wound down against Wolves, a clear indication that the strain of pursuing a first English title since 2004 is mounting.

Now they must regroup quickly before Sunday's north London derby against Tottenham Hotspur, followed by a pivotal home encounter with Chelsea on March 1.

Arsenal have 58 points from 27 matches -- five more than Manchester City, having played a game more. Wolves have just 10 points from 27 games, one short of Derby County's record-low total of 11.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Champions League debutants Bodo/Glimt continued their dream run by adding Inter to their growing list of heavyweight casualties -- including Manchester City and Atletico Madrid -- with a stunning 3-1 home victory in the first leg of their knockout play-off yesterday. Norwegian forward Kasper Hogh was the architect of the upset, delivering two assists and scoring once as the hosts put one foot in the last 16. Meanwhile, Newcastle United all but booked their place in the last 16 with a crushing 6-1 demolition of Qarabag away. Winger Anthony Gordon struck four times in the first-half to take his Champions League tally to 10 this season -- more than Harry Kane (8) and Erling Haaland (7), with only Kylian Mbappe (13) ahead of him.

COLLECTIONS FROM TRANSPORT

It's not extortion, it's agreed upon

Says Roads Minister Rabiul, draws flak

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Minister for Road Transport and Bridges Shaikh Rabiul Alam yesterday said the money collected from transport operators through mutual agreement should not be considered extortion.

He made the remark while responding to questions from journalists at a press briefing at his Secretariat office.

"What is described as extortion on the roads, I don't see it that way. There are owners' associations and workers' associations, and they spend it for their welfare. It is like an unwritten rule. I would call it extortion when someone doesn't want to pay or is forced to pay."

The minister explained that owners' associations often collect money at fixed rates to support the welfare of vehicle owners. "There may be debate over how much of it is actually used. But they do it based on mutual understanding."

He added that several organisations, including the Workers' Welfare Federation, also collect funds based on

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NATURE QUEST

BASHANTA'S BRILLIANCE ... Perched amid blazing palash flowers, also known as the flame of the forest, a rose-ringed parakeet surveys spring in full bloom in the Chattogram Naval Area. At this time of year, the birds turn especially vocal and restless; pairs form, males show off their rose collar, bow repeatedly, and offer bits of food to win over a partner. Tree hollows become precious real estate as they prepare to nest, often reusing the same cavity season after season. While sipping nectar and nibbling tender buds, the parakeet dusts itself with pollen, helping flowering trees reproduce throughout the season. However, despite their abundance, old trees and trapping pressure still matter for their future. PHOTO: KOMOL DAS

Raped, tortured and jailed

Bangladeshi migrant returns from Saudi Arabia pregnant

MD ABBAS

When Rima, not her real name, left for Saudi Arabia ahead of Eid-ul-Azha last year, she believed she had secured a company job with a monthly salary of 1,000 riyals, with food and accommodation included.

Instead, she says she was sold, starved, raped, and jailed.

Now six months pregnant, the 32-year-old returned to Bangladesh on February 9 and is staying at the Brac Migration Programme's learning centre at Ashkona Hajj Camp in Uttara after seeking help from airport authorities.

"I did not go abroad for money. I had no debt. I just wanted a decent job," Rima told The Daily Star.

"If they could not give me work, they could have sent me back. Why did they destroy my life?"

Rima said a local broker in Dhaka arranged her visa, promising a company job.

She does not know how much was paid for her recruitment, as all the costs were borne by the Bangladeshi

SEE PAGE 8 COL 1

'JS without reform council holds no value'

Says Nahid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

NCP Convener and opposition chief whip Nahid Islam yesterday termed the Constitution Reform Council essential, saying, "without it, this parliament holds no value".

"The reform council is integral to the legitimacy and function of this parliament," he said at a press conference at the party's Banglamotor office.

Nahid, the member of parliament (MP) from Dhaka-11, said that despite raising allegations of election rigging, his party had accepted the results in the interest of democracy and national stability.

"We have taken an oath to fulfil our duties in parliament and in the Constitution Reform Council."

Referring to ruling party MPs not taking the oath as members of the Constitution Reform Council, Nahid said, "This was a betrayal of the people who voted in favour of reforms in the referendum."

He warned that such actions disregarded the public's aspirations for a "new Bangladesh"

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Prices of Ramadan essentials jump on first day

SHAHEEN MOLLAH *and* MUNTAKIM SAAD

The prices of key Ramadan items edged up yesterday, the first day of the fasting month, with those of lemon and cucumber spiralling to a level that many consumers termed irrational.

- Lemon, cucumber, date prices soar
- Fruits also dearer
- Beef, mutton, chicken prices hold steady
- Rice prices remain unchanged

In Dhaka's kitchen markets, one had to shell out Tk 150 to Tk 200 to get four pieces of normal-sized lemons or limes; even the smallest-sized ones were priced at no less than Tk 40.

Fazlul Huq, who has been trading limes and lemons at Kawran Bazar for 42 years, however, pinned the price rise on the citrus fruits being out of season.

"While the fruit is grown year-round, the peak season only begins with the monsoon -- the months of January and February typically see a supply squeeze," he said, adding that the wholesale prices have jumped by Tk 20 to Tk 30 per four pieces in just two weeks.

The price of cucumber, an iftaar staple, followed a similar trajectory, reaching as high as Tk 160 per kg for local varieties.

At Kawran Bazar and Mohammadpur Geneva Camp market, hybrid cucumbers were retailing between Tk 100 and Tk 120 per kg, but the preference for the local variety pushed its price to nearly double that of the hybrid ones.

Date, the most essential item for breaking the fast, saw a price hike of Tk 20 to Tk 50 per kg in just one day.

The most significant increase was observed in the case of the Zahidi variety, which is popular among low- and middle-income groups.

Zahidi dates that sold for Tk 280–300 per kg on Wednesday morning were retailing for Tk 350 by Thursday.

The better-quality Zahidi dates were selling for as high as Tk 500, almost double the price during Ramadan last year.

The premium varieties have also become dearer, said Abul Hossain, a date trader in Kawran Bazar.

The varieties that sold for Tk 440 last year are now Tk 500,

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EPSTEIN SCANDAL

Former UK prince Andrew arrested

King says 'law must take its course'

REUTERS, *London*

King Charles' younger brother Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor was arrested yesterday on suspicion of misconduct in public office over allegations he sent confidential government documents to Jeffrey Epstein.

Mountbatten-Windsor, celebrating his 66th birthday yesterday, was arrested and questioned by detectives from Thames Valley Police, which this month said it was looking into allegations that he had passed documents to the late convicted sex offender while working as a trade envoy.

"Following a thorough assessment, we have now opened an investigation into this allegation of misconduct in public office," Thames Valley's Assistant Chief Constable Oliver Wright said in a statement.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

AMAR EKUSHEY

Pearu Sardar and Dhaka's first Shaheed Minar

AHMAD ISTIAK

ÒAkÖæ‡gkvAvgv‡`i†mBc^a_gkwn`wgbvi—hw`I AvR `vuwo‡q †bB Avi, eZ©gv‡bi wgbv‡iB †Zv i‡q‡Q¯§„wZ Zvi, Avi¯§„wZ‡Z AvRI Av‡Qb wcqviæmi`vi!Ó

These immortal lines from "Pearu Sardar Shorone" were penned by noted litterateur Syed Shamsul Haque as a tribute to Pearu Sardar -- the influential leader from Old Dhaka, who played a key role behind the construction of the first Shaheed Minar in Dhaka during the Language Movement in 1952.

According to the book "Prothom Shaheed Minar O Pearu Sardar" and the essay "Shaheed Minar O Pearu Sardar" by Anisuzzaman, after police killed several language activists on February 21, 1952, students of Dhaka Medical College decided on February 23 to construct a memorial in their honour.

However, there was a curfew in force, and the army was patrolling the streets at all times. As a result, students were unable to procure

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How much reliance on AI is too much?

P10

HASANAH
ISLAMI BANKING
البنكية الاسلامي
Prime Bank

PRAYER TIMING
FEBRUARY 20

	Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN	5-14	12-30	4-30	5-58	7-30
JAMAAT	5-24	1-15	4-45	6-08	8-00

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

SEHRI, IFTAR TIMING

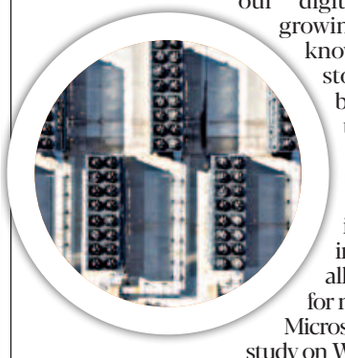
RAMADAN	FEB	SEHRI	IFTAR
2	20		5:58
3	21	5:11	5:59
4	22	5:10	5:59

Since independence, Rajshahi city never had a central Shaheed Minar. Recently, the authorities built one in the Sonadighi area. At the first hour tomorrow, February 21, residents of Rajshahi will gather at the memorial to lay flowers and honour the martyrs who made the ultimate sacrifice during the Language Movement of 1952. The photo was taken yesterday. PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

Laser-written glass can store data for millennia

Microsoft says

AFP, *Paris*



Thousands of years from now, what will remain of our digital era? The ever-growing vastness of human knowledge is no longer stored in libraries, but on hard drives that struggle to last decades, let alone millennia.

However, information written into glass by lasers could allow data to be preserved for more than 10,000 years, Microsoft announced in a study on Wednesday.

Since 2019, Microsoft's Silica project has been trying to encode data on glass plates, in a throwback to the early days of photography, when negatives were also stored on glass.

The system uses silica glass, a common material that is resistant to changes in temperature, moisture and electromagnetic interference.

In the journal Nature, Microsoft's research arm said Silica was the first glass storage technology that had been demonstrated to be reliable for writing, reading and decoding data.