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## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2026



**PM vows equal rights for men and women**

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman yesterday said the government wants to build a Bangladesh where men and women will enjoy equal rights and women will work in the family, state and society with respect, dignity and security.

"In our society, let equality be a promise, dignity a reality, and empowerment the foundation of development," he said in a message marking International Women's Day to be observed today (March 8).

The day will be observed this year with the theme -- "Today's steps, tomorrow's justice: Protect the rights of women and girls."

The premier said sustainable development of a country is possible only when women's rights, SEE PAGE 10 COL 1

## Workplaces to Himalayas, women keep facing barriers

Say speakers at event organised by Prothom Alo at Chhayanaut

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Women in Bangladesh continue to face an "extra mile" of institutional resistance despite proving their abilities in fields ranging from journalism and forensic medicine to sports and politics, speakers said at an event yesterday.

Marking International Women's Day 2026, the event -- organised by Prothom Alo and supported by City Alo -- was held at the Chhayanaut Auditorium in the capital.

At the event, speakers highlighted the administrative and social barriers that still hinder women's progress in Bangladesh.

Dr Mumtaz Ara, associate professor of forensic medicine at Dhaka Medical College, pointed to the critical shortage of female forensic experts.

Having conducted more than 1,000 autopsies, she said the lack of female doctors in medico-legal examinations, particularly in rape cases, directly obstructs the judicial process.

"When conducting examinations for rape victims, female doctors are required. There is even a High Court order regarding this. Yet the number of female physicians specialising in this field remains very low," she said.

Dr Ara said increasing female participation in forensic medicine could significantly speed up the judicial process.

Responding to a question about pressure to alter reports in sensitive cases, she said, "You

**“We are still asked how five women can travel to the Himalayas 'alone'. Since we do not have a male companion with us, society assumes we are alone.”**

**Yasmin Lisa**  
Member of an expedition of team comprising five women

have to conquer both greed and fear. If you can overcome these two things, you can survive. I do not know what destiny holds next, but I remain steadfast."

Zyma Islam, senior reporter at The Daily Star, reflected on her 14-year career in investigative journalism, where women remain under-represented.

"Throughout this entire time, I held on to my position by gritting my teeth," she said. "I did this because I knew that if I left, my place would likely be filled by ten men standing in line, and there might not be a single woman to replace me."

She said newsroom diversity is essential for comprehensive and inclusive storytelling.

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## Ensure greater participation of women in JS

Demand rights activists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Women's rights activists yesterday expressed concern over the low participation of women in the recent parliamentary election, saying political parties nominated very few female candidates and only a small number won in direct contests.

They made the remarks at a programme organised by the International Women's Day Committee at Manik Mia Avenue, titled "The 13th National Parliament Election: Women's Representation in Parliament -- Reality and Expectations".

Tamanna Khan Popi, coordinator of the protest and a member of Naripokkho, said women's participation in direct parliamentary seats had generally increased over the years, with a few exceptions. However, the latest election saw a significant drop in both nominations and victories for women, she added.

Organisers said women received only a small share

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## From ridicule to resilience

Asma overcomes obstacles to becoming a changemaker

JAHID HASAN, Shariatpur

Asma Akter, 38, a woman with disability from Shariatpur, has overcome myriad obstacles to eventually become a changemaker by lifting other women through her entrepreneurial venture.

Asma, who has dwarfism, had faced widespread ridicule in earlier years but remained steadfast in her aim of making a difference.

In 2014, she started Alpana Ladies' Corner, a block boutique production unit in the Palong Middle Bazar area



of Shariatpur Sadar upazila with an initial capital of Tk 1 lakh. Alongside this, she provided training on block boutique printing to 400 women free of charge. Some of the trainees later began working at Asma's production unit upon completion of training.

Over the past 12 years, Asma has expanded her work further into jute-

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Speakers at the 14th session of The Daily Star Itihias Adda, titled 'Religion-governed state or state-governed religion?', held in memory of Abul Mansur Ahmad at The Daily Star Centre in the capital yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

## Misuse of religion in politics fuels conflict in South Asia

Say speakers at Star Itihias Adda

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Attempts to use religion to consolidate political power have repeatedly led to conflict, deprivation, and crisis in South Asia, speakers said at a discussion yesterday.

Recalling the ideas of renowned journalist, politician and litterateur Abul Mansur Ahmad, they said the use of religion as a political tool ultimately harms both faith and the state.

They made the remarks at the 14th session of The Daily Star Itihias Adda, titled "Religion-governed state or state-governed religion?", held in memory of Abul Mansur Ahmad at The Daily Star Centre in the capital.

Researcher on South-East Asian history Altaf Parvez said Abul Mansur Ahmad was not only a commentator on political history but also someone directly involved in shaping it.

Referring to Mansur Ahmad's essay on whether religion should govern the state or the state should govern religion, Altaf said the writer had argued that a religion-governed state was neither possible nor beneficial.

He said Mansur Ahmad explained that religion belongs to the realm of human conscience, while the state operates in the political sphere where people relate to it as citizens.

"But when the two are brought together, serious disasters occur," Altaf said.

He said the consequences of such an approach became clear in 1971, when Pakistan attempted to hold together deep injustice and deprivation through religion.

Altaf said Pakistan continues to follow a similar approach in Balochistan. The region holds some of South Asia's largest reserves of copper and gold, yet the opinions of local people are often ignored by the Islamabad-centred ruling establishment despite ongoing extraction of resources.

According to him, the crisis in Pakistan stems from the failure to recognise that a state created solely on the basis of religion cannot sustain itself.

"To sustain a state, there must be good governance, fair distribution of

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Scuffle at Shahbagh over playing March 7 speech

Seven detained from Dhaka

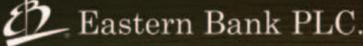
DU CORRESPONDENT

A scuffle broke out in front of Shahbagh Police Station last night over the playing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's historic March 7 speech, during which a Dhaka University student was beaten after being accused of being affiliated with the banned Chhatra League.

The tension began after police detained Asif Ahmed, a former DU student and a BCL leader, for playing the March 7 speech on a loudspeaker at the Chankharupul intersection earlier in the evening.

Ramna Division Deputy Commissioner Masud Alam said police had received information in the afternoon that a DU unit BCL leader was

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