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DEMAND FOR REFORMS 11-party to stage protest tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jamaat-led 11-party alliance yesterday announced a protest programme demanding constitutional reform in line with a referendum verdict.

The programme is scheduled to be held at the north gate of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque at 5:00pm tomorrow.

"Alongside the programme, the opposition would seek to build public opinion through outreach and leaflet distribution to press home the demand," Hamidur Rahman Azad, Jamaat assistant secretary general, told reporters following a liaison committee meeting of the combine in the capital's Gulshan area.

He added that seminars and symposiums would also be organised on the implementation of the referendum and the July charter.

"Opposition would be compelled to announce tougher programmes if the government continues to ignore public opinion. The next course of action will be decided at a meeting of the alliance's top leaders on April 7," said the Jamaat leader.

However, the government believes the opposition is trying to put pressure on it mainly through street protests, with the demand for implementing the July charter as a part of its strategy, said a top BNP leader requesting not to be named.

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Once crowded with makeshift hawkers' stalls, Shaheed Abrar Fahad Avenue -- formerly Bangabandhu Avenue -- in the capital's Gulistan now appears relatively empty. Law enforcers had warned of an ongoing eviction drive by the DSCC to reclaim encroached footpaths and roads, prompting hawkers to voluntarily close their shops and leave the area. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Myanmar House to elect new president today

AFP, Naypyidaw

Myanmar lawmakers will elect a new president today, the parliamentary speaker said, with junta leader Min Aung Hlaing one of three candidates for the post.

The former commander in chief has led Myanmar since 2021, when he ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi and triggered a civil war.

He was one of three vice presidents elected by lawmakers on Tuesday, receiving 247 of 260 votes in the lower house.

"Among the three vice presidents... (members of parliament) have to vote to select and elect the one vice president they prefer as the President," parliamentary speaker Aung Lin Dwe said yesterday, adding the vote will be held at 10:00 am (0330 GMT).

The other two vice presidents are Nan Ni Ni

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31% more March rain costs Tk 83cr in crop losses 2 lakh tonnes of diesel saved

MOSTAFA SHABUJ

Bangladesh received 31 percent more rainfall than the seasonal average this March, a development that caused crop damage worth Tk 83.39 crore across 16 northern districts, but also provided water for Boro cultivation, saving approximately 2 lakh tonnes of diesel.

Last month, the country received 62 millimetres (mm) of rainfall, exceeding the average of 47 mm, according to the Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD).

Sylhet recorded the highest volume of rainfall: 240 mm, which is more than double the average.

It was followed by Rangpur (123 mm -- more than four times the seasonal norm for the division), Mymensingh (116 mm -- more than triple the average), Dhaka (68 mm -- 45.9 percent above the average) and Rajshahi (54 mm -- 89.6 percent above average).

In contrast, Chattogram, Khulna and Barishal divisions experienced below average rainfall -- 44.4, 7.9, and 48.6 percent short respectively.

The average national temperature in March was 0.3°C above normal.

Crops on 2,131 hectares were completely destroyed, with potatoes bearing the heaviest damage on 916 hectares.

The other losses included 229 hectares of banana plantations, 78 hectares of vegetables, 628 hectares of maize, 102 hectares of wheat, 10 hectares of sunflower, 7 hectares of onion seeds and 9 hectares of chilli alongside various seasonal crops.

Despite the damage, the excess rainfall proved a boon for Boro paddy farmers, particularly amid the ongoing global energy crisis.

The rain helped save around 2 lakh tonnes of diesel, said Md. Rowshan Alam, additional director (inputs, field wing) of the Department of Agricultural Extension -- an unlikely boon given the ongoing fuel shortage arising from the US-Israeli war on Iran.

Tk 14,179cr sought for Family Card rollout, slum housing

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The social welfare ministry has sought Tk 14,179 crore in the next budget to implement five programmes outlined in the BNP's electoral manifesto, including an expansion of the Family Card scheme and housing for floating and displaced people living in Dhaka's slums.

Of the amount, Tk 13,000 crore has been proposed to bring 40 lakh families under the Family Card programme, while Tk 735 crore has been sought to build 500-square-foot flats for around 5,000 marginalised people, particularly residents of Korail and other slums in the capital, ministry officials said.

The ministry also sought Tk 100 crore for a "Special Children Welfare Fund" aimed at ensuring free education for disadvantaged and orphaned children, alongside creating pathways for their employment, another commitment outlined in the electoral manifesto of BNP.

Social Welfare Minister AZM Zahid Hossain placed the proposals in a demi-official (DO) letter to Finance Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury on March 31.

Finance ministry officials said

the budget for the next fiscal year is being tentatively set at around Tk 9 lakh crore. A high-level meeting, to be chaired by the finance minister, will be held soon to finalise the

The Family Card programme was piloted in March of the current fiscal year, covering 37,814 individuals across 15 wards of 13 upazilas. Each beneficiary household is receiving Tk 2,500 per month in cash support.

allocations.

They said the ministry has been holding inter-ministerial consultations since last month, which are likely to conclude this week. Subsidies for fuel, power, and fertiliser are expected to rise amid the ongoing Middle East crisis, they added.

A finance ministry official, requesting anonymity, said priority would be given to implementing the government's electoral pledges, with possible adjustments to existing social safety net programmes.

"The final decisions, however, will be made after detailed discussions at a cabinet committee meeting on social safety nets, to be chaired by the finance minister," said the official.

The Family Card programme was piloted in March of the current fiscal year, covering 37,814 individuals across 15 wards of 13 upazilas. Each beneficiary household is receiving Tk 2,500 per month in cash support.

Full-scale implementation of the scheme will begin in the next fiscal year.

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman recently told parliament that an additional 30,000 families will be brought under the scheme this year, with a target to cover four crore families gradually nationwide within four years.

If this BNP's major electoral promise is fully implemented, the programme would require around Tk 5,000 crore per month, or Tk 60,000 crore annually -- equivalent to about 12 percent of the current fiscal year's revenue target. This could make it the largest social protection expenditure in the country's history.

According to the ministry's 2026 guideline, the Family Card is

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Brazil approves law allowing shared pet custody

AFP, Brasilia

No more arguments over who gets the dog: A law passed by the Brazilian Congress will allow separating couples to share custody of their pets.

The measure, approved by lawmakers on Tuesday, is viewed as reflecting the importance Brazilians place on their pets.



The new law stipulates that if a couple separates without reaching an agreement regarding their pet, "a judge will determine the shared custody arrangement and the equitable distribution of the animal's maintenance expenses between the parties," according to the text of the law.

To qualify, the animal must have spent the majority of its life with the couple. Shared custody will not be granted in cases of prior criminal records or a history of risk of domestic violence.

Lawmakers pointed to an increase in pet custody disputes in courts, but also said the law responds to "changes that have occurred in Brazilian society in recent decades," according to a statement accompanying the law.

FACEBOOK POSTS US man arrested for threat to kill Trump

AFP, New York

An American man has been arrested for allegedly threatening to kill Donald Trump, federal officials said Wednesday, outlining a series of Facebook posts targeting the US president.

Andrew Emerald, 45, is said to have written eight messages on the social media platform last year in which he threatened to injure and kill Trump, who was grazed by a would-be assassin's bullet in 2024 as he campaigned for the presidency.

"Either Trump is dead and in the ground by 2026 or I am hunting him down and putting him there," Emerald allegedly wrote in one post in May 2025, according to a Department of Justice press release.

In another expletive-laden post later that month, he apparently threatened to attack Trump's resort in Florida.



A FLASH OF GOLD

A golden jackal, lean-bodied and alert, moves through the green hush of Chattogram's Anowara KPZ. Native across parts of South Asia, Southeast Europe, the Middle East and beyond, the golden jackal is the only jackal species found in Bangladesh, where it occurs in forests, grasslands and even along village edges. An opportunistic omnivore, it thrives where food and cover are within easy reach. Golden jackals are known for their synchronised pair bonds and haunting choral howls. Though the species is listed as "Least Concern" by the IUCN, habitat contraction, persecution, poisoning, roadkill incidents and conflict with humans continue to threaten populations in parts of its range.

PHOTO: KAMOL DAS

HIGH ENERGY COST Malaysian govt employees to work from home

AGENCIES

Malaysian government workers will begin working from home this month as the country seeks to bring down energy costs amid soaring fuel prices due to the conflict in the Middle East, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said.

- Chinese airlines to raise fuel surcharges on domestic flights
- Himalayan kingdom Bhutan hikes fuel prices
- Nepal nearly doubles jet fuel prices

The policy will take effect from April 15 and will affect workers at ministries, government agencies and state-linked companies. "The aim is to reduce fuel consumption and ensure the sustainability of energy supply," Anwar said in a statement late Wednesday.

Further details on the policy will be announced later, Anwar said, adding that efforts by state oil firm Petronas and others were underway to secure fuel and power supplies.

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