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We want no girl's dreams to be halted by financial constraints, insecurity or discrimination. It is the commitment of the present government to ensure that every girl child gets equal opportunities to develop her potential through education, skills and confidence.

PRIME MINISTER TARIQUE RAHMAN
in a message yesterday marking International Day of the Girl Child



PHOTO: STAR

Members of Bangladesh Udichi Shilpigoshthi perform songs outside Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy in the capital's Segunbagicha yesterday evening, protesting an attempt to deface a mural of Rabindranath Tagore the previous day. The mural is among portraits of 10 cultural figures commissioned by Dhaka South City Corporation after it cleared the adjoining footpath of encroachments on October 5.

IN FOCUS

Auto-rickshaw drivers' protest disrupts traffic

Commuters suffer as drivers block roads

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Battery-run auto-rickshaw drivers blocked roads in the capital's Mohammadpur and Hazaribagh areas yesterday, demanding an end to eviction drives and permission to operate on main roads.

The protests caused severe traffic congestion during the morning rush hour, while a shortage of auto-rickshaws in Dhanmondi, Mohammadpur, Basila and nearby areas left commuters struggling to reach their destinations.

An inspector of the traffic police's Mohammadpur-Basila zone told The Daily Star that drivers blocked Tin Rastar Mor, a key intersection connecting Gabtoli Road with Mohammadpur and Basila, from 9:30am to 11:40am.

Drivers also brought out a procession and blocked Beribadh Road in Hazaribagh and another road near Rayerbazar between 10:00am and 11:30am, said Mosharaf Hossain, officer-in-charge of Hazaribagh Police Station.

The protesters demanded an end to alleged police harassment, claiming their vehicles were being damaged or confiscated. They also sought permission to operate on all Dhaka roads.

Tabassum Mumu, a Dhanmondi resident, said she left home around 11:30am to take her daughter to school but could not find a rickshaw.



Auto-rickshaw drivers block Beribadh Road in the capital's Mohammadpur area during a protest yesterday. PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

"I walked to Anam Rangs Plaza, but there were no rickshaws there either. I saw many others on the footpath looking for rides. After spending around 45 minutes trying to find one, I returned home with my child," she said.

Another commuter, Sazid Mehrab, echoed her.

Officials at Mohammadpur, Hazaribagh and Dhanmondi police stations said no eviction drives were conducted in their areas yesterday.

However, police sources suspected the drivers had deliberately suspended services in an unannounced strike against recent traffic police crackdowns on main roads.

Dhaka North City Corporation Administrator Md Shafiqul Islam Khan yesterday said people no longer wanted auto-rickshaws on city streets as they were causing accidents daily. He said the government was working to address the issue.

Earlier, Road Transport Minister Shaikh Rabiul Alam said the government had begun work on a regulatory framework to restrict auto-rickshaw movement on main roads and in key areas.

MUGDHO KILLING

A step towards justice, but the pain remains

ICT frames charges against 26

SHARIFUL ISLAM *and* SIRAJUL ISLAM RUBEL

For the family of Mir Mahfuzur Rahman Mugdho, the young man shot dead while distributing water to protesters during the July uprising, birthdays are no longer occasions for celebration. They are painful reminders of a life cut short and a mother's grief that remains unbearable.

More than two years after his killing, the family saw renewed hope for justice yesterday as the International Crimes Tribunal-2 framed charges against 26 people over the killing of 11 people in Dhaka's Uttara on July 18 and 19, 2024.



MIR MUGDHO

But the development has done little to ease the pain of Mugdho's absence.

"Our last hope is to get justice for Mugdho's killing. We have been seeking it from the very beginning. This is not just our expectation; it is the expectation of every martyr's family," his brother, Mir Mahmudur Rahman Dipto, told The Daily Star.

"The tribunal framed charges against the accused yesterday. Through this step, we have moved forward towards justice," he said.

The family's grief was particularly painful two days ago, on the birthday of Mugdho and his twin brother Snigdho.

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EC to unveil UP polls roadmap today

AHMED DEEPTO

The Election Commission is set to announce a five-phase roadmap for union parishad elections today, with the first phase of polling likely in the second week of January next year.

The first two phases are planned for January and the third for the first week of February, ahead of Ramadan, while the commission aims to complete all five phases by June 6.

Election Commissioner Abdur Rahmanel Masud told The Daily Star yesterday that the roadmap would be announced following a commission meeting at its headquarters in Agargaon at 10:30am.

"We expect to complete all UP elections by June 6. A final decision will be taken tomorrow [today]," he said.

The commission plans to hold polls in 2,000 to 2,500 UPs during the first three phases, each covering more than 800 unions.

"The election schedule will be announced 32 to 35 days before polling day," he said.

The EC has decided to hold elections simultaneously in all unions within an upazila, excluding those whose terms have not expired. Any postponed polls will be held in subsequent phases.

- First phase likely in 2nd week of January
- First 3 phases planned before Ramadan
- 2,000–2,500 UPs to vote in first 3 phases
- EC aims to finish polls by June 6

The commission also plans to hold dialogues with registered political parties before announcing the election schedule.

"We are more likely to sit with political parties before announcing the election schedule. We will seek their cooperation," Masud said.

"We have informed the Local Government Division that the exact election dates will be determined by the Election Commission," he said.

Local government elections have not been held for more than two years, leaving the EC with a backlog as the terms of many bodies have expired.

Bangladesh has 4,580 Union Parishads, 330 municipalities, 503 Upazila Parishads and 13 city corporations.

EC data show that 3,975 of the 4,580 union councils will be eligible for elections by December.

According to Local Government Division data, 311 UPs became eligible for elections by July 30 this year.

On the eligibility of teachers to contest local polls, Masud said private MPO-listed teachers would remain eligible unless the law was amended, although the education ministry's

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Scrap unnecessary AL-era projects

Recommends JS body

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The parliamentary standing committee on the LGRD ministry yesterday recommended scrapping unnecessary projects allegedly undertaken for corruption during the ousted Awami League government's tenure and prioritising projects that serve the public interest.

The committee also called for investigations into alleged irregularities and corruption in unnecessary projects financed by domestic and foreign sources during the previous government's tenure.

Speaking to reporters afterwards, committee chairman AKM Selim Reza Habib said, "Projects that were unnecessary and undertaken for corruption during the previous fascist regime should be dropped, while new projects necessary for public welfare should be taken up and implemented. We have also emphasised promotions and postings on the basis of merit and competence."

The committee also called for ensuring the quality and durability of development works.

According to a Parliament Secretariat press release, the committee recommended requiring contractors to provide a three-year warranty deposit to ensure the quality, durability, transparency and accountability

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Why dengue cases remain low in Sylhet, Rangpur

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

While dengue cases have surged across much of the country this year, Sylhet and Rangpur divisions have remained relatively less affected, a trend epidemiologists and health officials attribute to environmental, demographic and urbanisation factors.

Once largely concentrated in Dhaka and other major cities, dengue has spread nationwide in recent years, with coastal divisions such as Khulna and Barishal reporting increasing cases.



Experts cite rainfall, lower urbanisation, fewer Aedes mosquitoes and limited population movement

However, Sylhet and Rangpur have consistently recorded fewer cases and deaths.

With the country's dengue caseload approaching one lakh and deaths exceeding 300 this year, Rangpur has reported 1,061 cases and no deaths, while Sylhet has recorded 426 cases and two deaths, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

In 2023, when Bangladesh recorded its highest-ever dengue caseload and death toll, with 3,21,179 cases and 1,705 deaths,

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People queue at an OMS point in the capital's Mohammadpur area yesterday to buy essential food items at subsidised prices. As the rising cost of living continues to strain household budgets, low-income families are finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet. PHOTO: PRABIR DAS