BNP backtracking on July charter pledges: NCP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP betrayed the nation by forming a special parliamentary committee to amend the constitution instead of implementing the July charter, alleged National Citizen Party (NCP) Secretary Akhter Hossen yesterday.

Speaking at an event marking the first anniversary of the charter's signing at the NCP office in the capital, he said the committee undermined the referendum verdict and would not resolve the constitutional crisis.

Akhter alleged that the BNP was backtracking on agreements reached during the National Consensus Commission talks.

He cited the repeal of the interim government's ordinance on the Supreme Court Secretariat and the failure to give opposition lawmakers chairmanships of parliamentary standing committees.

He said political parties had agreed to form a Constitution Reform Council to ensure lasting constitutional changes and prevent legal challenges.

Meanwhile, at a separate programme, Revolutionary Workers Party General Secretary Saiful Haque said the BNP had a major responsibility to implement the charter fully.

At another event, Rastro Songskar Andolon President Hasnat Quaiyum called for a united political movement to implement the July charter and uphold the referendum verdict.

Another beef feast at JnU

FROM PAGE 3

"misleading information", had created a negative impression of the university.

"Bangladesh Khelafat Chhatra Majlis organised this harmony feast to maintain goodwill and harmony among students of all religions and beliefs at the university," he said.

Obaidul also described the event as a protest against what he called a communal decision imposed by the university administration.

University Proctor Prof Azam Khan said students had organised a beef feast on Friday as well, which took place peacefully despite objections from the administration.

"The Khelafat Chhatra Majlis also wanted to organise a beef feast. We initially did not want to grant permission. However, a leader of the organisation called the vice-chancellor and requested permission. It was later granted subject to certain conditions," he said.

The back-to-back feasts followed a dispute over restrictions on cooking beef khichuri on campus. On Friday, leaders of the Shibir-dominated Jagannath University Central Students' Union (JnUCSU) and several other student organisations slaughtered a cow and distributed beef and khichuri in protest against the university's restrictions.

The dispute began on the night of October 12, when students of the 2021-22 academic session of the Department of Islamic History and Culture arranged to cook near the campus open stage to celebrate completing their honours degrees.

As the site was close to the university's central temple, several Hindu students objected. Allegations also emerged that bricks from the temple had been used to build the cooking stove.

The organisers later removed the bricks, built an alternative stove and apologised for the "unintended mistake". The incident nevertheless prompted protests by Hindu students.

On October 14, the proctor's office issued a notice directing students not to slaughter animals on campus, citing public health, cleanliness and the need to maintain a hygienic environment.

In protest, JnUCSU leaders and other students held a procession and rally that night. The following day, the university administration said students could organise activities on campus as long as they did not disrupt others' activities.

Judge Farrukh Ahmad by his poetry, not politics

FROM PAGE 3

Wahiduzzaman urged readers to study the memoirs of Farrukh's colleagues to understand his character and called for his works to be included in school, college and university curricula.

Journalist Shamsuddoza Sajen said a broader assessment of the poet's literature, ideas and personality is needed.

Born in 1918, Farrukh Ahmad is known in Bangla literature as the "poet of the Muslim Renaissance".

Alongside Muslim heritage and Arabic-Persian influences, his poetry explored exploitation, poverty and the aspiration for human liberation. He died in 1974.

The discussion was moderated by Emran Mahfuz.

Dhaka seeks details from Riyadh

FROM PAGE 2

violated its obligations under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations by failing to notify Bangladesh before the trial, Shama said the government had yet to receive a full account of the incident.

"Our mission was not informed of when or how the incident occurred. I do not wish to comment at this stage on why the mission was not notified, as the Saudi government has not yet provided us with complete details.

"Once we receive the full information, I will be able to explain the matter more clearly."

Shama said Bangladesh learned about the executions on October 14 -- the day the two were executed.

As neither the foreign ministry nor the Bangladesh mission in Saudi Arabia had been informed beforehand, Dhaka sought details from Riyadh.

"We have not yet received detailed official information from the Saudi government. We will have to wait a little longer."

She said Saudi Arabia had its own legal framework under which punishments for serious offences were carried out. However, she stressed that Bangladesh needed a full account from Saudi authorities before commenting further, adding that the incident should serve as a lesson.

Citing a message from the labour welfare wing of the Bangladesh mission, Shama said the two Bangladeshis were allegedly involved in adultery inside a mosque in Mecca, an act that could be considered a grave offence under Saudi law.

The identities of the two Bangladeshis and further details of the case were not immediately available.

Asked about the repatriation of their bodies, the state minister said both countries were processing the necessary formalities.

"Only after receiving a clear picture from the Saudi government of what actually happened can we discuss the next steps, including how and when to bring their bodies back."

Trump waives key sanctions, tariffs

FROM PAGE 12

face increased costs largely attributed to the US-Israeli war on Iran, analysts have said.

The legislation, whose primary backer in Congress was the late Senator Lindsey Graham, a South Carolina Republican, would have imposed tariffs of up to 100% within 30 days on all goods brought into the US from the five largest importers of Russian crude oil or gas, as well as any country that knowingly bought oil or gas 30 days after the law was enacted or was among the top five countries helping Russia evade sanctions.

The order said the waiver will remain in effect until Trump or his top officials determine that "further action is appropriate."

Trump signed the Lindsey O Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026 in mid-September.

"I have submitted to the Congress a certification that the issuance of such a waiver at this time is in the national interests of the United States," Trump said in the order.

Countries such as China and India, which are among the biggest buyers of Russian oil, have raised concerns about the Russia sanctions bill.

Beijing has said it "consistently opposed long-arm jurisdiction that lacks a basis in international law" while India warned Washington that new tariffs could impact bilateral ties.

The law allows the president to waive sanctions simply by informing Congress that he has determined that they are not in the national interest.

US Representative Don Beyer, a Virginia Democrat, blasted Trump for the waiver, saying he was giving in to Putin.

"Trump's latest surrender to Putin again betrays our Ukrainian partners and defies clear congressional intent of legislation designed to punish Russia for its illegal war of aggression," Beyer said in a statement.

Trump had also faced criticism from several US senators, including some Republicans, over a recent diesel deal with Russia in which Trump agreed to lift sanctions on Russian exports and Russia agreed to supply diesel to global markets in an effort to lower fuel prices. The lawmakers who criticized the deal said it would help fund Russia's war efforts.

Putin's investment envoy, Kirill Dmitriev, called Trump's waiver "a truly historic moment," posting on X that the legislation could have effectively brought all economic cooperation between Russia and the US to a halt.

Oct 31 deadline looms over 1,800

FROM PAGE 12

32 Bangladeshis at Phnom Penh airport as they attempted to leave after allegedly being exploited in online scam centres.

Sources said they were detained over irregular immigration status and other complications during immigration checks.

Two of them were released earlier, while the remaining 30 were held at an immigration detention centre until Friday evening following prolonged diplomatic negotiations.

The 30 people are expected to return in the next couple of days, Zahir Imam, first secretary (labour) at the Bangladesh Embassy in Thailand, told The Daily Star. Sources said they would pay for their own tickets.

However, the fate of hundreds of others remains uncertain, including those unable to afford tickets home.

Bangladesh has no embassy in Cambodia, and its Bangkok mission handles consular affairs there.

Imam said the mission had received requests concerning 1,796 Bangladeshis stranded in Cambodia through phone calls, emails, direct applications and community contacts.

Around 350 to 400 have returned since July, but the mission could not independently verify all the names or establish the current whereabouts and circumstances of everyone on its list, he said.

Cambodian authorities had interviewed Bangladeshis seeking repatriation to determine whether they were trafficking victims or linked to scam centres and trafficking networks. Those verified as victims were allowed to return, Imam said.

The process has temporarily stopped, and the Bangladesh mission has requested its resumption.

Anirban Survivor Voice Foundation estimates that more than 2,000 Bangladeshis remain stranded, with around 1,800 facing uncertainty over the October 31 deadline under an arrangement concerning immigration overstay penalties. Its president and co-founder, Al Amin Nayon, said the organisation had sought clarification on the arrangement's conditions, eligibility criteria and provisions for waiving fines.

Nayon said the foundation would submit a memorandum to the expatriates' welfare and overseas employment minister today, with copies to the foreign affairs and home ministries. It is demanding urgent repatriation, individual screening to identify trafficking victims, protection from punishment for crimes committed under coercion, rehabilitation and action against trafficking networks.

FAMILIES IN DEBT

Kabir Hossain said he had spent around Tk 13 lakh supporting his 24-year-old son Shawon since he travelled to Cambodia nearly one and a half years ago.

Shawon was promised a computer-related job paying around Tk 1.5 lakh a month. His family borrowed much of the Tk 6 lakh needed for his journey, but he could not send money home. Instead, Kabir repeatedly sent money for his son's food, accommodation and other expenses.

"Now I don't know how I will repay these debts," Kabir, who works for a private company, told The Daily Star.

He said he had lost money on two attempts to arrange his son's return and was preparing to buy another ticket, hoping Shawon could return on October 19 or 20.

QUESTIONS OVER OVERSIGHT

Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) records show that 15,963 Bangladeshis received employment clearance for Cambodia between January 1, 2025, and September 30, 2026.

Shariful Hasan, associate director of BRAC's Migration Programme and Youth Platform, questioned the lack of effective monitoring of workers' employers, working conditions and whereabouts despite the clearances.

"We have sent around 16,000 people there with BMET clearance, yet we do not have a mechanism to find out where they are or what they are doing," he told The Daily Star.

He cited allegations of harassment and torture against Bangladeshis trying to leave Cambodia. Survivors have described being lured by promises of legitimate jobs and then forced into cyber scam operations. Some said their passports were confiscated and they faced threats and extortion.

On October 8, the bodies of three Bangladeshis were brought home from Cambodia, including 23-year-old Sohag Ahmed of Jhenaidah, who allegedly became trapped in a scam compound after travelling with BMET clearance.

Shariful said the government must identify those stranded, establish their circumstances and ensure their safe return.

17 killed in Kolkata Durga Puja stampede

FROM PAGE 12

and safety lapses.

Last year, a stampede at India's Kumbh Mela religious fair killed 30 people and injured several others, and 11 fans were crushed to death in Bengaluru during celebrations for the local cricket team's first Indian Premier League title.

The same year, 36 people were killed after a stampede broke out at a campaign rally of a popular actor-turned-politician in southern Tamil Nadu state.

In 2024, 121 people were killed in northern Uttar Pradesh state during a Hindu religious gathering.

Arms-brandishing Ishraque's anti-drug drive stirs outrage

FROM PAGE 1

At one point, Ishraque was heard shouting "halt" while communicating over a walkie-talkie. He also said any discussion would take place only after police arrived.

A man wearing jeans and a shirt was seen pointing a firearm at several people at the scene and kicking an unidentified individual.

Sources identified him as one of the minister's guards. Several members of the entourage were also seen apprehending at least three people.

The minister was accompanied by two privately appointed bodyguards, Tofazzal Hossain and Lavlu, as well as a government-appointed security guard, according to sources.

His privately appointed guards were also carrying firearms, while the government-appointed guard was seen pointing a firearm at people at the scene.

Another video showed police officers handcuffing several people and taking them away.

According to Ishraque's Facebook post, the operation targeted drug dens near the Gandaria railway line.

Gandaria Police Station Officer-in-Charge Moniruzzaman Khan told The Daily Star that the minister's security guard had informed police around 3:30pm that several suspected drug users had been detained.

"A patrol team was sent to the spot, and six people were detained," he said.

Asked whether police personnel at the scene had seen the minister carrying a firearm, the OC said he had questioned those present, but they told him they had not seen a weapon in the minister's hand.

"However, I have also seen the weapon in his hand in the video," he added.

Repeated attempts by The Daily Star to contact Ishraque, also the MP for Dhaka-6, for comment were unsuccessful.

However, speaking to Prothom Alo, the minister said the firearm he was carrying was licensed, and he obtained it after Inqilab Mancha leader Sharif Osman Bin Hadi was shot on December 12, 2025. As he acquired the firearm after that date, he could not include it in his election nomination papers, he said.

The deadline for submitting nomination papers was December 29, 2025, and Ishraque submitted his papers on December 28.

Explaining why he carried the firearm during the operation, Ishraque said residents of the area around Dayaganj Ghuntighar, adjacent to Gandaria railway station, had repeatedly complained about the drug trade.

"I have held meetings with the police at least 30 to 40 times. They give different explanations each time, saying they lack manpower and vehicles," he said.

He also claimed that several police personnel had been shot while conducting raids in the area.

The minister said police had yet to recover fully from the aftermath of the July uprising and that drug traders sometimes fired at law enforcers from a distance. This, he said, was why he carried a firearm during the operation.

"I did not fire it, nor did I use it to intimidate anyone. Yes, we conducted the operation, and we are building a social resistance [against drugs]," he said.

Former inspector general of police Baharul Alam said firearms could be used only when there was a threat to life or public safety. Displaying a firearm in a manner that caused fear or discomfort to others was prohibited, he said.

Under the Firearms Licence, Renewal and Use Policy 2025, a licence holder may carry or use a licensed firearm for self-defence but cannot display it in a way that causes fear or discomfort to others.

The policy also states that guards at financial institutions and other establishments cannot display firearms in public without wearing uniforms.

It further prohibits licence holders from being employed as armed guards to protect other people or their property, warning that such employment could lead to immediate revocation of the licence.

Dr Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, said a firearms licence was issued for personal protection, not to apprehend or punish suspected offenders.

"Taking the law into one's own hands is an offence for any citizen. When an elected representative and a minister does so, it is even more serious," he told The Daily Star.

He said such actions amounted to an abuse of power and sent the wrong message that anyone could take the law into their own hands.

"It also demonstrates a lack of confidence in the police on the part of the government. If a minister takes such action, what is the role of the police?" he asked.

Islami Andolan Bangladesh "vehemently rejected" such actions by Ishraque. "Through this reprehensible act, he has effectively promoted terrorism," the party said in a statement.

Bangladesh economy caught in 'structural trap'

FROM PAGE 3

employment opportunities and underemployment were growing concerns.

More than half of households also had at least one member with a chronic illness, exposing them to repeated healthcare expenses, he added.

He identified stagnant investment and sluggish growth as the second dimension of the structural trap.

"There are countries where households face economic hardship, but investment continues to grow. In our case, however, household distress is accompanied by stagnant or declining investment and sluggish growth," he said.

The third dimension, he said, is political economy and governance, which determine the country's ability to address household distress and lack of economic dynamism.

Zillur called for a comprehensive transition compact built around five pillars: economic democracy, new growth drivers, quality education and skills, productive transformation, and faster governance.

"Bangladesh needs new growth drivers," he said, urging diversification beyond garments and remittances, greater support for promising sectors such as pharmaceuticals, and faster, evidence-based decision-making.

At the event, Prof Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, warned that poverty and inequality could be higher than estimated if poverty lines were not adequately adjusted for inflation.

He called for higher revenue collection to expand public spending, along with improved agricultural productivity and stronger links between farmers, industry and global markets.

Describing quality education as the country's biggest challenge, he called for greater investment in technical education, digital skills, high-speed internet and emerging sectors to create jobs and improve competitiveness.

Jean Pesme, World Bank country director for Bangladesh and Bhutan, said the economy needs urgent structural transformation in trade, public finance and energy efficiency.

He also stressed the need to align education and skills with private-sector needs to restore confidence and create jobs.

Fazlul Hoque, administrator of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, said no sector beyond garments had taken off in the past two decades, leaving the economy increasingly dependent on RMG exports.

He added that degrees no longer guarantee jobs and criticised bureaucratic delays, saying young people will not tolerate visiting government offices 30-40 times to obtain routine permits.

Farah Kabir, country director of ActionAid Bangladesh, said informal workers are struggling with rising food prices and the lack of minimum wage guarantees.

As female employment in the RMG sector declined, she called for alternative jobs in agro-ecology, childcare centres and gender-sensitive investment.

Nearly half of families in debt

FROM PAGE 1

In contrast, the 2022 Household Income and Expenditure Survey found the national average household income to be Tk 32,422 and the national average expenses Tk 31,500.

The commission ordered the special survey to aid in its recommendation for salary hike under the ninth pay scale.

The survey, which was conducted from September 14 to September 18 last year, gathered data using tablet devices and digital Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing across 150 primary sampling units, interviewing 3,000 households across rural, urban and city corporation areas.

The latest survey findings serve as a mirror image of the weak macroeconomic environment Bangladesh has experienced since the pandemic, said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

There has been a steady decline in economic growth in recent years alongside high single-digit or double-digit inflation that is showing no signs of abating. At the same time, employment has remained stagnant while real wages have steadily fallen, he said.

Inflation has outpaced wage growth for 56 consecutive months in September, government data show.

In September, wage growth fell to 7.9 percent from 8.05 percent the previous month, according to the BBS's Wage Rate Index, which tracks monthly wages of low-paid skilled and unskilled workers across 63 occupations in agriculture, industry and services.

"Under these circumstances, asking any family about their situation yields the expected answer that incomes are dropping while costs are climbing, leaving many with no choice but to take on debt," Zahid said.

He stressed that the surge in expenses is not driven by an improved quality of life, but rather by the rising cost of living.

Explaining why rural debt is higher than urban debt, he pointed out that income stagnation is far more pronounced in villages, whereas cities offer relatively more economic opportunities.

While remittance income serves as a positive factor in rural areas, its benefits reach no more than 7 to 8 percent of the rural population. Consequently, a large portion of the population is now surviving by depleting savings built up in earlier years, he said.

"This survey data confirms the WB's macroeconomic projections that poverty rates are on the rise," Zahid added.

A prolonged slowdown is eroding household welfare through weak labour demand and persistent inflation, pushing national poverty to an estimated 22.5 percent in 2026 from 18.7 percent in 2022, according to the WB's latest Bangladesh Development Update, released on October 6.

Extreme poverty, measured at the $3-a-day international line, rose from 5.9 percent to an estimated 10.1 percent over the same period.

The economic strain is largely driven by a four-year inflationary surge that has systematically squeezed household purchasing power.

This is compounded by acute energy shortages that have curtailed business operating hours, forced factory closures, and stalled job creation, particularly within the country's industrial sectors, the WB report added.

The beating heart of Durga Puja

FROM PAGE 12

I expected more," Binoy admits candidly. "I had a better offer in Cumilla, but I didn't go out of loyalty to this mandir."

"It's devotion to my craft and to Goddess Durga that has kept me going for more than a decade," Binoy says, his eyes lighting up as the evening prayers begin. "The feeling I get when I play in front of Durga is otherworldly."

Across the city at the Dhakeshwari National Temple, the epicentre of the country's celebrations, a different group of dhakis speak of similar devotion.

Leading the temple's drummers is Shanti Ranjan Das, 70. He is the senior-most dhaki, having slung the heavy wooden instrument over his shoulder for 45 years. Alongside him are Tapan Chandra Das, 47, and Ripon Chandra Das, 42, both permanent employees at the temple.

Ripon takes home a fixed monthly salary of Tk 8,000.

"I learned the craft from my father at the age of 17," Ripon says.

To supplement his income, he manages a local "band party" that performs on demand at weddings and household pujas.

"My devotion to the craft and to Goddess Durga, and my wish to uphold my father's legacy, have been my guiding forces all these years."

But that legacy may stop with him. His 21-year-old son, Shaon Chandra Das, watched his father struggle and chose a different path. He now works as a journalist at a local newspaper.

The younger generation's reluctance to inherit the drumsticks is compounded by a shift in the seasonal migration of artists across the country. Historically, the capital has been the destination of choice for seasonal performers during Durga Puja.

"There was once a time when dhakis from all over the country would come to Dhaka during Durga Puja in search of work and stay until Kali Puja," Ripon recalls. "There was better pay here than in the suburbs and villages."

Now, a reverse seasonal migration is occurring as urban expenses rise. "Nowadays, they're reluctant to come to Dhaka because the costs outweigh the pay," Ripon explains. "There are better opportunities in suburban towns where puja organisers backed by wealthy donors offer better pay to employ local dhakis."

The financial anxieties of the drummers stand in sharp contrast to the festival's global profile.

In 2021, UNESCO inscribed Durga Puja on its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, recognising the festival's extraordinary cultural value and the many traditional art forms that sustain it.

Heritage, however prestigious, cannot guarantee livelihoods.

As the nights of Durga Puja unfold across Dhaka, the city's temples continue to pulse with the familiar rhythms of the dhak. Worshippers sway to its cadence. Priests move in step with its tempo. Children watch in fascination.

Few pause to consider the uncertain future of the men producing those sounds.

For now, the beat endures.

For five autumn days, the dhakis will breathe life into the festival, sustaining a tradition that has endured for generations, even as the heartbeat of their own profession grows fainter with each passing year.