Samanta Shermeen quits NCP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



National Citizen Party (NCP) Joint Convener Samanta Shermeen has resigned from the party, citing its alliance with Jamaat-e-Islami, the marginalisation of women leaders and concerns over internal democracy.

She confirmed her resignation in a statement issued last night.

Samanta said she had spent nearly a year raising objections and submitting proposals to the party leadership regarding its political direction.

"Despite repeated calls to reconsider these issues, NCP has shown no interest in changing its course. I am therefore resigning from the National Citizen Party," she wrote.

She said she had opposed the party's alliance with Jamaat from the

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1



Prime Minister Tarique Rahman waves to people as he travels by bus in Bagerhat yesterday. Large crowds lined both sides of the road to catch a glimpse of him and exchange greetings during his daylong Khulna-Bagerhat visit. PHOTO: PMO

Garment unrest eases as workers return to work

STAR REPORT

After four days of labour unrest, the situation appeared to ease yesterday, with workers returning to garment factories and production resuming across industrial belts.

While normalcy largely returned to Gazipur, Narayanganj and Mirpur, tensions persisted in parts of Ashulia and Savar, where demonstrations continued and some factories remained closed as a precaution.

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) has begun using drones for real-time surveillance in industrial areas of Dhaka and neighbouring districts.

According to a BGB press release, the force has deployed three platoons in Mirpur, 11 in Savar and Ashulia, 12 in Gazipur and seven in Narayanganj.

Production resumed at nearly all garment factories in Gazipur yesterday morning, including those that had earlier declared sudden holidays.

During visits to Bhogra, Naojor, Board Bazar and Signboard, workers were seen queuing outside factories, while production activities continued as usual.

An apparel worker said employees had learned about the latest developments regarding the wage board and saw no reason to continue the protests.

Gazipur Industrial Police Superintendent Amjad Hossain said "99.99 percent" of garment factories in the district were operating yesterday, and traffic movement had returned to normal.

In Narayanganj, factory operations and traffic also resumed as usual. Security was tightened at Chashara, a key intersection in the city.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

The poison is in the pot

FROM PAGE 1

The study, published on October 25 in the Journal of Exposure Science & Environmental Epidemiology, also found that the way people clean their cooking pots could make the problem worse.

Scrubbing the pots with rough cleaning pads caused them to release more lead.

In a separate test using an acidic liquid, pots that had been scrubbed released about five times as much lead as pots that had not been scrubbed.

New pots released the most lead. The amount fell with repeated use, but lead continued to enter food even after the pots had been used several times.

Stirring with a metal spatula also increased lead release in similar tests.

The researchers examined 20 new pots purchased from a supplier in Bangladesh and seven used pots collected from households.

Rice cooked in six out of seven used pots also contained detectable lead.

Scrap metal used to manufacture inexpensive cooking pots was a major source of concern, Mahbubur Rahman, a researcher at icddr,b and co-author of the study, told The Daily Star.

The study says handmade aluminium pots are often produced by melting down discarded engine parts, radiators, computer components and cans.

Such materials can introduce lead into the finished cookware. However, the researchers did not establish the original sources of the scrap used in the particular pots tested.

The amount of lead entering food depended partly on what was being cooked, with acidic foods drawing more lead out of contaminated pots, Mahbubur said.

Using earlier research on rice consumption in rural Bangladesh, the researchers estimated that children eating rice cooked in the tested pots after three uses could take in about 13 to 19 micrograms of lead a day.

That is roughly six to nine times the US Food and Drug Administration's interim reference level for children's daily lead intake. These were estimates based on assumed rice consumption.

The findings are particularly concerning in Bangladesh, where 38.4 percent of children aged 12 to 59 months and 7.5 percent of pregnant women had elevated blood lead levels, according to UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2025.

Earlier studies in Bangladesh have also found lead in turmeric, ceramic utensils, toys and other household products.

A 2019 study led by Stanford University researchers identified turmeric adulterated with lead-containing yellow pigment as a likely source of lead exposure among pregnant women in rural Bangladesh.

A 2023 study by Pure Earth also found high lead levels in samples of ceramic utensils and children's toys.

The country has previously managed to reduce lead contamination in turmeric. A study published in 2023 found that turmeric samples containing detectable lead fell from 47 percent in 2019 to none in 2021 in the markets examined.

Researchers linked the improvement to public awareness campaigns, work with traders and enforcement against the use of lead-containing colouring.

"Simply asking families to stop using aluminium cookware would not solve the problem. Such utensils are inexpensive and widely used, making replacement difficult for many households," Mahbubur said.

Instead, the government needed to prevent contaminated scrap metal from being used to manufacture cooking utensils.

Researchers had discussed the issue with the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) and cookware manufacturers. They also held a workshop with BSTI.

But Mahbubur said they faced difficulties gaining access to manufacturers and finding out where the materials used to make the pots came from.

His team has collected more cookware samples from Dhaka and other parts of Bangladesh for further testing.

In a written response to The Daily Star, BSTI said the government had made certification mandatory for aluminium cooking utensils in January this year.

It is collecting samples from factories and markets for testing and taking steps to bring manufacturers under its licensing system.

Under BDS 1110:2025, aluminium utensils must meet prescribed limits for lead and other toxic metals.

BSTI cited a maximum limit of 0.05 percent under the standard but did not specify in its response which metals the figure applies to.

Non-compliant manufacturers would be denied licences and face legal action, while regular mobile court drives would be conducted to prevent the sale of such products, it said.

Md Safiqul Islam, chairman of Bangladesh Food Safety Authority, told The Daily Star that the authority was using training, workshops and awareness campaigns to inform people about the risk of lead contamination and discourage the use of aluminium cookware.

He acknowledged that scrubbing could increase contamination and advised households to avoid aluminium cooking utensils as much as possible.

In August, the government approved a draft national action plan to reduce lead exposure by 2035, including stronger monitoring, regulation and enforcement.

Further government intervention was needed to control the materials used in cookware production and ensure researchers and regulators could examine the manufacturing supply chain, Mahbubur said.

The government needed to address contamination at its source, rather than expecting families to replace cooking utensils they could barely afford, he added.

The researchers have also called for testing finished cookware to determine how much lead enters food during cooking. BSTI's response did not specify whether its certification tests include such measurements.

Mongla port to drive regional growth: PM

FROM PAGE 1

as part of his daylong visit to Bagerhat and Khulna.

He said modernising Mongla Port was part of the government's efforts to build a trillion-dollar economy, stressing the need to ensure navigability, reliable navigation channels, safe vessel movement and competitive port services.

He said the development and operation of Khan Jahan Ali Airport were also among the government's priorities.

"The initiative will help strengthen the country's industry, trade and economic security. In particular, it will create sustainable socio-economic value by generating employment for the younger generation, boosting investors' confidence and ensuring balanced regional development," he added.

Thanking the Chinese government for its continued support for Bangladesh's infrastructure and trade development, Tarique said the modernisation project would include a modern container terminal, yards and cargo-handling facilities.

He said the success of the project would not depend solely on completing construction work but also on improving port services, reducing cargo handling time and costs, increasing investment and employment, and protecting the environment.

Tarique also called for making the port more attractive to international shipping companies and developing it as a first-call port under appropriate commercial and operational conditions.

He said the government would move quickly to build the necessary infrastructure to ensure an adequate supply of power and gas to boost economic activities from Mongla to the country's northern region.

Tarique made the remarks after attending the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Invest Bangladesh and China Railway Construction Corporation (CRCC) on economic and infrastructure cooperation in Mongla.

Under the MoU, the two sides will explore investment opportunities in key sectors, including energy, industrial infrastructure, green infrastructure, transport, logistics and human resource development.

During talks with a high-level Chinese delegation led by CRCC Chairman Dai Hegen, Tarique also called for increased Chinese investment in Bangladesh, particularly in Mongla, to expand industrialisation and strengthen economic and infrastructure cooperation between the two countries.

Speaking at a rally in Khulna later in the day, Tarique said there was a conspiracy to damage the country's industries, adding that people would unite to foil any such attempts, just as they did during the 2024 mass uprising.

"We will stand against the conspirators with all our strength, together with the people of the country, the working people and our brothers and sisters among the workers."

He was addressing a roadside meeting at the Katakhali intersection on the Khulna-Mongla highway in the afternoon.

The government wants to restore Khulna's status as an industrial hub and expand industrial development across Khulna, Bagerhat, Chuadanga and other underserved regions, the prime minister said.

Tarique addressed the rally while travelling by road from Mongla to Khulna after attending programmes at Mongla Port.

After the Katakhali rally, he visited the shrine of Hazrat Khan Jahan Ali (R) in Bagerhat and offered fateha and joined prayers.

This was Tarique's first visit to the shrine since taking office as prime minister.

225 individuals, firms under NBR scanner

FROM PAGE 1

accounts. Generally, we avoid taking such action against companies to ensure that their business operations continue uninterrupted and workers' salaries are not affected," he said.

Most of the individuals are linked to the ousted Awami League government.

The list includes former ministers, lawmakers and influential businesspeople, some of whom are in jail while others are reportedly on the run. Family members of some of them have also been brought under the initiative.

Those named include Tipu Munshi, former commerce minister; Abdus Salam Murshedy, former lawmaker and owner of Envoy Group; Shahriar Alam, former state minister for foreign affairs; Nasrul Hamid, former state minister for power and energy; Tajul Islam, former local government minister; and SM Mannan Kochi, former president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

The companies on the list include Renaissance Group, Well Group, Nipa Group, Standard Group, Sadma Group, and Tusuka Group.

Contacted, Shehrin Salam Oishee, daughter of Salam Murshedy and director of Envoy Group, said their personal bank accounts had not been frozen, although the authorities had frozen their fixed deposit receipts (FDRs) and sought information about their other accounts.

"The authorities have sought information about the financial activities and expenditures of individuals classified as politically exposed persons (PEPs). We have no problem with the intelligence agencies investigating the matter," she said.

"My father has been in jail for more than two years. Even getting a document signed by him takes five to six months, as the paperwork has to go through the relevant authorities," she said.

"Information has also been sought about our other accounts, which are all business accounts. Freezing business accounts would affect business operations and, in turn, the country's economy," she added.

Md Nasir Uddin, managing director of Sadma Fashion Wear Limited, denied the allegation of financing the unrest as "completely false and fabricated".

"I have been working in the garment sector for the last 26 years. The garment industry is like my own child. Why would I get involved in such a heinous act?" he added.

The Daily Star tried to reach most of the other owners, but could not as some are in prison and some are allegedly abroad.

Govt aims to deliver all textbooks by Nov

FROM PAGE 1

DELIVERY

The NCTB plans to print more than 30 crore textbooks for nearly four crore students at pre-primary, primary, secondary, and equivalent levels.

The allocation includes 7.61 crore books for classes 1 to 5, 17.95 crore for classes 6 to 10, 4.16 crore for Ebtedayee students, and 57.31 lakh for pre-primary children, besides books for other streams.

Based on the allocation for classes 6 to 10, an estimated 11.34 crore books have been supplied to upazilas, leaving around 6.61 crore outstanding.

According to NCTB member Prof Tuku, all pre-primary textbooks have reached upazilas, while delivery for classes 1 to 3 has exceeded 97 percent.

The figures stand at 95.93 percent for class 4 and 90.76 percent for class 5. Pre-delivery inspection, which checks textbook quality before dispatch, has been completed for 97.53 percent of primary books.

The situation differs at the secondary level, where textbook delivery varies significantly across classes.

Around 87.61 percent of class 6 and 88.79 percent of class 7 textbooks have been distributed to upazilas. Delivery for class 8 stands at 52.38 percent, while fewer than one in five class 9 books have arrived.

Overall, 63.33 percent of secondary books have undergone pre-delivery inspection, while 88.20 percent of Ebtedayee books have been delivered.

DELAYS

The November deadline is not new. The NCTB had set similar targets in earlier years, but deliveries often continued to December or beyond.

A review of available published reports found no confirmed instance of the entire nationwide supply reaching upazilas by the end of November.

Under the Awami League government, most textbooks reached upazilas before the academic year began in several years. For the 2015 academic year, around 95 percent of primary and 99 percent of secondary books reached upazilas by December 29, 2014. For 2020, 98 percent of the 35.39 crore textbooks were supplied to upazilas by early December 2019.

But delays became frequent in subsequent years. The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted textbook printing and distribution for 2021. In 2022, 2023, and 2024, the AL government failed to deliver more than 3 crore textbooks for classes 8 and 9 on time, leaving students waiting until March for complete sets.

The problem persisted under the interim government, which took office after the fall of AL government in August 2024. By January 1, 2025, only around six crore of the required 40.15 crore textbooks had been delivered.

The authorities missed successive deadlines amid textbook revisions, late tendering, paper shortages, and printing delays. Many students were still without complete sets in March, and supply continued to April.

The following year saw some improvement. The NCTB said it completed the supply for the 2026 academic year on February 7, claiming that it was the earliest finish in five years.

The BNP government, which took office later that month, is now aiming to complete the 2027 supply before December.

PRINTING

Meeting the November 30 deadline, however, remains a challenge, particularly for secondary textbooks.

Under the printing contracts, at least half of the books for class 8 and classes 9-10 were supposed to reach upazilas by November 3.

The NCTB has served show-cause notices on 32 printing presses over slow progress, particularly in printing books for the higher classes.

It has also warned that contracts with the underperforming presses could be cancelled and their work reassigned.

According to NCTB officials, printing for the 2027 academic year began about a month earlier than it did for 2026.

Sources at the NCTB said many printing presses secured contracts for both primary and secondary textbooks. They completed primary textbook orders before shifting to secondary book printing.

NCTB Research Officer Md Rakibur Rahman told this newspaper that printing could now pick up pace as many secondary textbooks have black-and-white pages. Work on several lots that had to be retendered was also underway, he said.

Rakibur, who also serves as the NCTB's public relations officer, said four new textbooks for classes 4 and 6, approved by the National Curriculum Coordination Committee on October 25 subject to revisions, had yet to go to press.

The books are Culture of Bangladesh and Sports for class 4, and Learning with Happiness and My Technical Education for class 6. The edited digital files were ready and printing would begin shortly, he added.

Meanwhile, the NCTB is correcting around 38 lakh copies of the class 6 Information and Communication Technology textbook following an error in an illustration. The books already dispatched to district and upazila offices are being recalled for correction.

NCTB Chairman Prof Mawla earlier said the printing presses would bear the additional costs. Officials expect the corrected copies to reach upazilas by November 30.

The board has also rejected around 9.5 lakh substandard printed forms and 12,000 finished books. Fifty-three monitoring teams are overseeing the printing quality.

World relieved but cautious

FROM PAGE 1

"It happened in Brazil. It just happened in the US. And it will happen soon in Spain," wrote Sánchez, who faces an election November 29.

Norwegian Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide said the majority of Americans had sent a clear message that "they have had enough of MAGA and now want a different course. Enough of polarization."

British Prime Minister Andy Burnham expressed hope the election results would focus minds in Washington and other capitals on ending the Iran war, which has sent fuel prices soaring — a major source of frustration for voters.

"The world has an opportunity now to unite around the issue that is affecting us all, and that's the cost of living," Burnham said during a visit to the Commonwealth summit in Antigua. "But I can't get people's cost of living pressures down until the conflict in the Middle East is resolved."

That and "the conflict in Ukraine started by Russia. These are the things we have to focus on now."

But others in Europe cautioned that, with Trump in power for two more years, there would be no quick change to American foreign policy, which has strained defense, economic and diplomatic alliances.

The president has berated European leaders over everything from immigration to wind farms, roiled their economies with tariffs, threatened to pull the US out of Nato ally Denmark, reports AP.

Austrian Foreign Minister Beate Meinl-Reisinger said that "independently of the election outcome, our security and prosperity in Austria and Europe must not depend on how people in Kansas or Iowa vote. That's why we are strengthening our own defense capability and our own competitiveness."

The United States' immediate neighbors reserved judgment on whether the Republican defeat would smooth rocky relations with Washington. "We must wait and see," said Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum.

Canadian Trade Minister Dominic LeBlanc said it was unclear whether the election would strengthen Canada's hand in negotiations to end its bitter trade war. "Well, I guess we'll see in a few weeks," LeBlanc said.

He noted that the new Congress would not take office until January and that Canada would continue negotiating with Trump's administration.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Wednesday that Russia hoped Trump "will continue his peacemaking efforts" regardless of the election outcome.

A prominent German lawmaker urged Republicans to see the result in part as voters' verdict on Trump's "wrong foreign policy."

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, who has been a target of Trump's baseless claims that his government discriminates against the country's white minority, said the Democrats taking control of both houses of Congress would "introduce a new era in world relations."

Ronaldo bids farewell to Portugal

FROM PAGE 1

He apologised and it was rumoured he intended to return to the international fold, but on Thursday the five-time winner of the Ballon d'Or released a video on his Instagram account in which he said he had played his last match for Portugal.

"To the Portuguese people, the day has come for me to hand back the number seven shirt of our national team," Ronaldo said, as images of his career were played.

"A journey that began in August 2003 and changed my life forever has come to an end," he added.

The Portuguese Football Federation said it would organise a "fitting tribute" to Ronaldo's "immense career".

Ronaldo will continue to play for his current club in Saudi Arabia, Al-Nassr, where he is under contract until June 2027.

In the highlight of his international career, Ronaldo won the European Championship with Portugal in 2016 in France, although he had to leave the field during the final with an injury.

At this year's World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico, he scored three goals but Portugal were knocked out in the last 16 by eventual winners Spain.

In a notorious moment at a previous World Cup, a 21-year-old Ronaldo was caught by TV cameras winking at his bench after appearing to exhort the referee to send off his then Manchester United teammate Wayne Rooney as Portugal faced England in the 2006 quarter-finals in Germany.