

February Election will be like no other



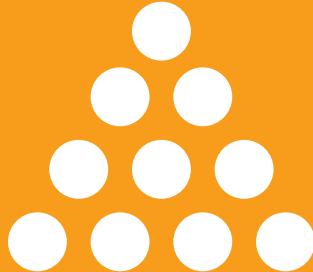
**Bangladesh's Flowers
Now a Tk20-Billion
Industry**

**Bangladesh's Recruitment
Industry: An Empire of
Licences**

**Khaleda Unites Bangladesh
Even in her Death**

**Enforced disappearances
must never recur**

**Why a good night's sleep
becoming a luxury**



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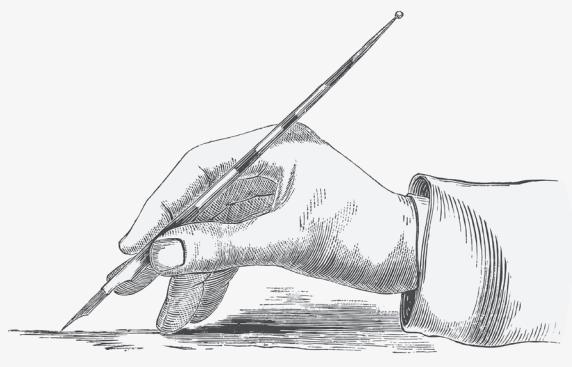
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February election & referendum must help reset democracy

After fifteen-plus years of authoritarian rule, mockery with elections, fundamental rights of the people, plunder of the economy and looting of Banks; the people of Bangladesh are going to polls on 12 February with the hope to restore democracy and give it permanence with some constitutional reforms that have been incorporated in the July Declaration adopted by the major political parties.

The July Declaration on which the referendum has been called is for redistribution of power among the three organs of the state to check the growth of authoritarian tendencies, limiting the office of the prime minister to two terms for an individual, softening the strangle-hold of Article 70 of the Constitution by allowing Members of Parliament vote freely except on finance bills and no-confidence motions in which cases they have to vote for their own parties.

More than the reforms, the important thing is to make up minds to start afresh to shun the mistakes of the past and help build an inclusive society based on honesty, rule of law, equitable distribution of wealth and absence of discrimination. To honour the sacrifices of the July uprising martyrs and heroes, every citizen should remain vigilant against violation of law and against treating some people as above the law. Only through such vigilance all people can protect their own rights. Over time this will create mutual respect for each other in the society and this will help build an atmosphere of peace and tranquility that we all long for.

Mostafa Kamal Majumder

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February Election will be like no other

Rafiqul Islam Azad

Bangladesh is approaching what many see as a defining moment in its political history as it prepares for the 13th general elections scheduled for February 12, 2026. Set against a backdrop of political upheaval, institutional reform, and renewed public expectations, the forthcoming election is widely regarded as fundamentally different in nature from the polls held over the past two decades.

This election is not only about electing a new parliament. For the first time in the country's history, voters will simultaneously take part in a constitutional referendum, deciding the fate of the July Charter and proposed amendments to the Constitution of Bangladesh. The referendum, born out of the July Mass Uprising, has elevated the election into a broader democratic exercise—one that seeks to redefine governance, accountability, and the rela-

tionship between the state and its citizens.

Observers argue that the convergence of a parliamentary election and a referendum has transformed February 12 polls into more than a polling day—it has become a national reckoning on the future direction of democracy in Bangladesh.

A Break from a Contested Electoral Past

For nearly two decades, elections in Bangladesh have been plagued by controversy. The caretaker government system, once introduced to ensure free and fair elections, was abolished through the 15th amendment of the Constitution during the Awami League's rule. And the country has experienced four successive elections marred by allegations of vote manipulation, lack of competition, and limited public participation.

These elections eroded public confidence and fostered political apathy among voters, particularly young people. Many

analysts describe the period as one in which elections existed in form but not in substance.

The upcoming polls, however, are being held under an interim government established following the July Mass Uprising. The political landscape has undergone a dramatic transformation, including the ban on political activities of the ousted Awami League and the emergence of new political parties, many led by younger leaders with reform-centric agendas.

Political analysts say this shift has opened political space unseen in recent memory, creating the possibility—though not a guarantee—of a genuinely competitive election.

The Referendum: A Constitutional Crossroads

At the core of this election lies the constitutional referendum, which voters will de-

cide alongside the parliamentary race. The referendum seeks public approval for provisions of the July Charter, a reform framework developed after the mass movement that toppled the government of Sheikh Hasina and her Awami League.

The proposed amendments aim to strengthen democratic institutions, ensure checks and balances, and prevent the consolidation of power that critics say enabled past authoritarian tendencies. Observers believe the referendum could mark a historic step toward institutionalising reforms demanded by the public.

However, holding the referendum on the same day as the election has drawn mixed reactions. While some view it as an efficient way to engage voters in democratic decision-making, others worry it could complicate the electoral process and dilute attention from parliamentary contests.

Despite differing views, most political actors agree that the referendum has added unprecedented weight to the election.

Surge of New Voters

Another defining feature of the upcoming polls is the massive influx of first-time voters. Nearly four crore citizens are expected

to vote for the first time, the largest addition to the electorate since the 2008 general election.

This surge is largely driven by young voters who came of age during years of political stagnation and disputed elections. Analysts say these voters are more likely to prioritise issues such as governance, corruption, economic opportunity, and rule of law over traditional party loyalties.

Many experts believe the youth vote could play a decisive role in shaping the outcome, potentially disrupting long-established political equations.

Election Commission's Pledge to Restore Credibility

The Election Commission (EC) has repeatedly emphasised its commitment to delivering a free, fair, and credible election. Addressing Deputy Commissioners and Superintendents of Police at a recent function in Dhaka, Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin said the commission was determined to erase what he described as the “legacy of flawed elections.”

“No offender should be spared. The law must apply equally to all,” the CEC said, directing field administration officials to en-

force electoral laws without fear or favour. He stressed that only a credible election could restore public trust in democratic institutions.

The EC's role has drawn particular scrutiny given its perceived weaknesses in past elections. This time, the commission has taken steps to strengthen procedural oversight, from nomination scrutiny to voter list updates.

Election Schedule and Nomination Process

The election schedule was officially announced on December 11, 2025. According to the timeline, nomination papers were submitted by December 29, followed by scrutiny from December 30 to January 4. Appeals against returning officers' decisions were heard between January 5 and January 9, with resolutions delivered by January 18.

Candidates were allowed to withdraw their nominations by January 20, after which final candidate lists and symbols were published on January 21. Campaigning began on January 22 and will continue until 7:30am on February 10. Voting for both the parliamentary election and the



referendum which will take place on February 12, 2026.

A total of 2,582 nomination papers were submitted across 300 constituencies. Following scrutiny, 1,842 candidates were declared valid, while 723 nominations were rejected on various grounds. As of January 13, more than 150 candidates regained eligibility through successful appeals, reflecting what EC officials describe as a rigorous but transparent verification process.

Parties, Candidates, and Voters

Out of 59 registered political parties, 51 are contesting the election, indicating broad participation despite political tensions. The EC published the final voter list on November 18, listing nearly 12.77 crore voters—including 64.81 million men, 62.87 million women, and 1,234 third-gender voters.

Voting will take place at 42,761 polling centres, with more than 261,000 rooms and over four lakh booths prepared nationwide.

Additionally, 717,217 voters have registered for postal voting, including expatriate Bangladeshis, election-duty officials, and government employees living outside their constituencies. The registrations were completed through the Postal Vote BD app, marking an expanded use of technology in the electoral process.

Political Parties React

Political parties have offered varied assessments of the election environment. Leaders of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) have expressed confidence that the country is ready for a credible election capable of restoring democratic order.

BNP Standing Committee member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury said he saw no major obstacles to holding the polls. “The country is heading towards the elections. I see no major problem. The people and political parties are ready,” he said.

Chowdhury noted that the political mindset has changed following the July upsurge and said the BNP has already embraced that shift by outlining its reform agenda. He also referred to party chairman Tarique Rahman’s vision for governance, expressing hope that the election would help fulfil people’s expectations for political and economic benefits.

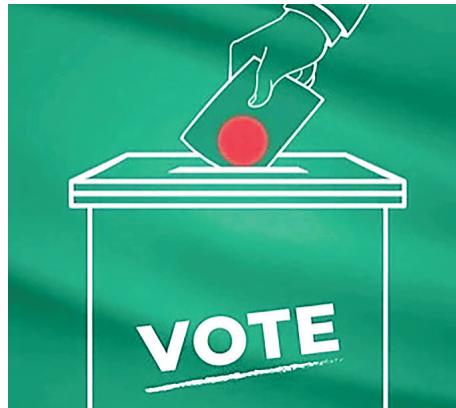
Leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami, however, voiced cautious optimism. Advocate Ahsanul Mahboob Zubair, the party’s Assistant Secretary General and head of publicity, alleged that the administration

appeared tilted toward a particular side, raising concerns about ensuring a level playing field.

He said both the government and the Election Commission must guarantee that voters can cast ballots without fear or anticipation. On the referendum, Zubair argued it might have been better held on a separate day but confirmed that Jamaat and its 11-party alliance would actively campaign in favour of the reform proposals from January 22.

Expert Analysis: Challenges and Expectations

Eminent political scientist Professor Dr Md Nurul Amin Bepari described the election as a critical step toward democratic restoration but cautioned against excessive optimism.



Four crore citizens are expected to vote for the first time, the largest addition to the electorate since the 2008 general election.

“Election is an integral part of democracy, but unfortunately no free and fair election has taken place in the last 17 to 18 years,” he said. Referring to the previous polls, he added, “The last three elections were not elections at all due to the absence of people’s participation.”

Prof Bepari stressed that elections are only the first step and that democratic institutions must be rebuilt afterward. He also warned of possible interference by external actors who benefited from the previous regime, suggesting that pressure could be applied to accommodate defeated political forces.

However, he noted a positive shift in international attitudes, particularly the

desire among global stakeholders for a credible election. He believes new voters will cast ballots in favour of restoring rule of law, rejecting corruption, and upholding the spirit of the 2024 mass movement.

On the referendum, Prof Bepari emphasised that all stakeholders—including political parties, the interim government, and civil society—must play active roles to ensure its success, warning that failure could push the country toward deeper instability.

Security, Campaigning, and Digital Politics

Security measures have been strengthened nationwide, with law enforcement agencies deployed in coordination with the EC and local administration. Authorities say special attention is being given to urban and semi-urban areas where first-time voters are concentrated.

Experts also highlight the growing influence of social media and digital campaigning, particularly among new and youth-led parties. Analysts believe online platforms could significantly shape voter sentiment, reflecting a broader transformation in political communication.

Despite preparations, challenges remain. Political violence, misinformation, intimidation, and sabotage are seen as persistent risks. EC officials maintain that strict enforcement of the law and transparent oversight will be crucial in countering these threats.

A Turning Point for Democracy

International observers are expected to closely monitor the election, viewing it as a test of Bangladesh’s democratic credibility in South Asia. A credible election could enhance the country’s global standing, while failure could deepen political uncertainty.

For ordinary citizens, the election represents more than a political contest. It is an opportunity to influence the future of governance, accountability, and constitutional reform. From cities to villages, voters are preparing to cast ballots that could shape the country’s trajectory for years to come.

As Bangladesh stands at this critical juncture, the nation waits—hopeful that February 12, 2026, will mark a genuine departure from a troubled past and signal the return of democratic legitimacy. This election is not just about choosing representatives; it is about reclaiming the integrity of democracy itself.



Bangladesh's Flowers Now a Tk20-Billion Industry

Rafiqul Islam Azad

From roadside stalls in Dhaka to vast, colourful fields stretching across Jashore, Jhenaidah and neighbouring districts, flowers have quietly emerged as one of Bangladesh's most dynamic agro-based industries. What began four decades ago as a hobby for a handful of enthusiasts has today evolved into a billion-taka domestic market—supporting thousands of farmers and sustaining the livelihoods of more than a million people over cultivation, transport, wholesale and retail trade.

Once seen as a luxury or decorative afterthought, flowers have become deeply woven into the country's social, cultural and economic fabric. Flowers now play a central role in everyday life—fuelling steady demand and turning floriculture into a promising growth sector.

From hobby to cash crop

Commercial flower cultivation in Bangladesh traces its roots to the early 1980s, when an enterprising farmer in Panisara village of Jhikargachha upazila in Jashore experimented with flowers on a small plot of land. At the time, flower cultivation was rare and largely confined to home gardens or ornamental spaces of affluent households.

Over the decades, that modest experiment has expanded into a nationwide industry. Farmers across the country now cultivate roses, marigolds, tuberose,

gladiolus, gerbera, chrysanthemum, China rose and several other varieties on a commercial scale. Alongside traditional blooms, newer and exotic varieties have also entered the market, driven by changing consumer tastes and growing exposure to global trends.

Flowers are no longer reserved for elite households or special ceremonies. They are sold year-round for weddings, birthdays, religious observances, political programmes and social gatherings. The rise of a middle-income population, expansion of corporate culture and the growing popularity of occasions such as Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Pohela Boishakh and Pohela Falgun, national days—including Ekushey February, Independence Day and Victory Day have significantly widened demand.

Size of the domestic market

Estimates from trade bodies and sector leaders suggest that the domestic flower and cut foliage market is currently valued between Tk 1,200 crore and Tk 1,500 crore annually, growing at an average rate of around 10 percent each year. When allied businesses—such as decoration services, event management, processing, packaging and transportation—are taken into account, the overall value of the sector is believed to be close to Tk 2,000 crore.

During peak seasons, particularly from December to April, flower trade surges sharply. Nearly half of the annual business

is conducted during these five months, driven by national observances, cultural festivals and international celebration days.

According to Md Abdur Rahim, former president of the Bangladesh Flower Society, the domestic flower market was worth around Tk 1,600 crore in the 2020-21 fiscal year. "This is a highly promising sector," he said, noting that flower cultivation now spans 5,000 to 6,000 acres of land across 25 districts and involves roughly 20,000 farmers directly.

Production and cultivation spread

Flowers are currently cultivated on more than 3,500 hectares of land across about 24 districts. Khulna division dominates production, accounting for nearly three-quarters of the total cultivated area. Dhaka and Chattogram divisions follow at a considerable distance.

Jashore, Jhenaidah, Chuadanga, Metherpur, Gazipur, Savar, Manikganj, Mymensingh, Bogura, Natore, Rangpur and Rangamati have emerged as major flower-producing districts, supplying blooms to markets across the country.

Government data show that more than 32,000 tonnes of flowers were produced nationwide in a recent year. While roses and marigolds still dominate in terms of volume and sales, farmers now cultivate 15 to 16 varieties of flowers—reflecting diversification, improved skills and growing technical knowledge.

Gadkhali: the flower capital

Nowhere is the transformation more visible than in Gadkhali-Panisara of Jashore. Known nationwide as the “flower capital” of Bangladesh, the region turns into a sea of colour during the peak season, with vast stretches of marigold, rose, gerbera, gladiolus, tuberose, chrysanthemum and sunflower fields.

More than 6,000 farmers cultivate flowers on around 2,000 hectares of land in this region alone. During the peak months, the Gadkhali wholesale market becomes a hub of activity. Farmers arrive before dawn with freshly harvested blooms, and most buying and selling is completed by mid-morning.

If weather and political conditions remain favourable, annual flower trade from this single region is estimated at Tk 4,000-5,000 crore, with about half generated between December and April. Prices vary widely depending on variety and season.

People behind the petals

An estimated 15,000 farmers are directly involved in flower cultivation nationwide, while at least 1.5 million people are engaged across production, marketing, transport, decoration and retail. The sector supports around seven lakh livelihoods on a regular basis, making it one of the most labour-intensive segments of horticulture.

Flower cultivation has also opened new opportunities for women and marginal farmers. According to sector insiders, women account for a majority of the workforce in flower cultivation and processing. “Female workers constitute around 60 to 70 percent of the workforce in the flower sector,” said Bappy Kumar Adhikari, Resource Efficient and Cleaner Production (RECP) Officer of the Rural Reconstruction Foundation (RRF).

Role of support organisations

RRF works for the sustainable development of flower growers by providing micro-

credit, training and quality flower plants. Adhikari said Bangladesh has huge prospects in the flower market, not only in fresh flowers but also in subsidiary industries producing essential oils, rose water, scents, soaps, agarbati and ornamental items.

“We are implementing a PKSF-supported project titled ‘Sustainable Microenterprise and Resilient Transformation’, financed by the World Bank,” he said. “Under this initiative, we provide various forms of support to flower growers in 17 union parishads under five upazilas of Jashore and Jhenaidah.”

He said RRF offers loans ranging from Tk 50,000 to Tk 1,000,000, along with training on flower packaging, climate vulnerability and environmental management, the supply of quality plant varieties, and assistance for exporting flowers abroad.

However, Adhikari pointed out several challenges facing the sector, including the shortage of quality planting materials, difficulties in exporting flowers, unchecked imports of plastic-made artificial flowers and the presence of syndicates that distort prices.

Wholesale and retail networks

Dhaka remains the largest consumption centre for flowers. Shahbagh is the capital’s historic flower market, supplying hundreds of retail shops across the city. An estimated 500 flower shops now operate in Dhaka alone, reflecting rising urban demand.

Md Lokman Hossain, a retail seller at Shahbagh flower market, said around 100 retail sellers operate there, serving more than 500 customers every day. However, he acknowledged long-standing structural problems.

“The market has grown on illegally occupied land,” he said, stressing the need for a legal and permanent

marketplace, given the scale the sector has already reached.

Infrastructure gaps and policy challenges

Despite its rapid growth, the flower industry faces persistent challenges. Lack of cold storage, inadequate transport facilities and limited access to affordable credit remain major constraints. Post-harvest losses are high due to poor handling and long travel times, while many farmers struggle to obtain quality seeds and modern training.

Former Bangladesh Flower Society president Md Abdur Rahim expressed frustration that the government-run wholesale flower market at Gabtoli—built with capacity for 300 shops—remains largely inoperative due to extortion and resistance from interest groups linked to retail markets at Shahbagh and Agargaon.

Export prospects and global opportunity

Bangladesh added flowers to its exportable products list in the early 1990s, but export performance remains modest. Current exports of cut flowers and related products amount to only tens of thousands of dollars annually—negligible compared to the global market.

Globally, the cut flower market is estimated at \$40-50 billion a year, dominated by Europe and North America. Industry experts believe Bangladesh, with its favourable climate, fertile land and low labour costs, could realistically target greater export earnings if quality standards, cold chain facilities and logistics are improved.

A sector in full bloom

Despite the challenges, the flower industry has firmly taken root in Bangladesh’s agricultural landscape. From rural fields to urban markets, flowers now generate income, create employment and add colour to everyday life.

With rising domestic demand and vast untapped export potential, stakeholders believe floriculture—if supported by coherent policies, modern infrastructure and market reforms—could emerge as one of Bangladesh’s most profitable and inclusive agro-industries in the years ahead.





Bangladesh's Recruitment Industry: An Empire of Licences

Special Correspondent

The humid air of Dhaka pressed down on Rahim as he stood in line at a crowded recruiting agency office, clutching a folder of documents and his mother's borrowed gold chain. The chain was not for adornment; it was collateral. The agency had demanded "security" before processing his application to work in Saudi Arabia. Around him, dozens of men and women waited, their faces etched with the same mixture of hope and fear.

Bangladesh has built an empire of recruitment agencies unlike any in South Asia. While India counts 192, Pakistan 464, Nepal 416, and Sri Lanka 248, Bangladesh towers above them all with 2,646 licensed agencies. What looks on paper like opportunity is, in reality, a sprawling network of patronage and profit. Licenses have multiplied not to serve workers but to serve power, often granted to the same families, sometimes even to Members of Parliament. For the millions of migrants

who line up at these offices, the empire is not a gateway to hope but a toll gate of corruption.

Tasneem Siddiqui, Acting Executive Director of the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), has explained at a press event that Bangladesh's agencies once numbered between 800 and 900. Then, during the Awami League government's tenure, the count surged to around 2,300. "The primary reason behind issuing such a large number of licences is corruption," she said. "There have been instances where multiple licences were issued to the same company or members of the same family." Her words cut through the polite applause of the press club. For many in the audience, the numbers were not abstract. They represented a system where power and profit were concentrated in the hands of a few, while ordinary migrants bore the costs.

In Dhaka's bustling recruitment district, entire families owned clusters of agencies. A single surname could dominate a

street of offices, each with its own glossy signboard but all funnelling money to the same household. Rahim noticed this when he visited two different agencies. Both demanded identical fees, both promised jobs in Saudi Arabia, and both were run by cousins from the same family. "It's like they own the road to our future," Rahim muttered. For families like his, the cost was crushing. Land was sold, jewellery pawned, debts incurred. Yet the agencies multiplied, their licenses stamped and approved, even when watchdog committees recommended restraint.

The corruption extended beyond families. Some Members of Parliament themselves held licenses, or their relatives did. The conflict of interest was glaring: lawmakers entrusted with regulating migration were profiting directly from it. Tasneem Siddiqui's report urged cancellation of such licenses, but enforcement was weak. The interim government suspended some agencies, cancelled others, yet approved hundreds more. The cycle continued.

Behind every license was a migrant like Rahim. He eventually secured a job in Saudi Arabia, but only after paying exorbitant fees. His cousin Shafiq, applying through another family-owned agency, was denied despite paying the same. The agencies operated like toll gates, extracting money at every step. Migrants were not customers; they were commodities.

The contrast with neighbouring countries was stark. India, with its vast population, had fewer than 200 agencies. Pakistan, less than 500. Nepal and Sri Lanka, both smaller nations, had fewer than 500 combined. Why did Bangladesh need more than 2,600? The answer lay not in demand but in politics. Licenses became instruments of patronage, distributed to allies, families, and power brokers.

Even after leaving Bangladesh, migrants faced corruption. Embassies abroad, as photojournalist Shahidul Alam observed, became centres of exploitation. Workers were forced to use back gates, brokers demanded bribes for basic services. The agencies at home and the embassies abroad formed two ends of the same chain, squeezing migrants between them.

For women, the risks were greater. Female migration had declined sharply, discouraged by workplace violence and insecurity. Yet agencies continued to issue licenses indiscriminately, chasing profit while ignoring safety. Salma, Rahim's sister, abandoned her dream of migrating after hearing of women beaten abroad. "If the agencies cared, they would protect us," she said. "But they only care for money."

Tasneem Siddiqui continued her campaign, proposing fines five times the excess fees charged, recommending reductions in licenses, and calling for suspensions of MPs' involvement. Her reports were detailed, her arguments clear. Yet the machinery of corruption was resilient. Each cancelled license was replaced by another. Each recommendation was diluted in bureaucracy.

According to RMMRU's report 'Trends and Dynamics of Labour Migration from Bangladesh 2025' released on January 7 last, a total of 1,130,757 Bangladeshi men and women migrated overseas for employment in 2025, up from 1,011,969 in 2024. Of the total migrants last year, 62,317 were women, accounting for 5.5 percent of overall overseas employment. The number of female migrants rose by 1.9 percent year-on-year, the report noted.

According to RMMRU data, annual female migration remained above 100,000

between 2016 and 2019, but fell below that mark during the two years of the Covid-19 pandemic. The figure rebounded in 2022 to 105,466 before declining again from 2023 onwards. Compared to 2022, female migration from Bangladesh dropped by 40.9 percent in 2025.

RMMRU observed that poor working conditions for women abroad, job insecurity and workplace violence are discouraging women from seeking overseas employment. Data from the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) showed that Bangladeshi workers migrated to 141 countries in 2025, with 90 percent going to just five destinations. Saudi Arabia absorbed the majority, followed by Qatar,

Saudi Arabia also hosted the highest number of female Bangladeshi workers, with 44,832 women migrating there in 2025. Jordan was the second-largest destination for female migrants with 10,525 workers.

Other destinations included Qatar, Brunei, the United Arab Emirates, South Korea, Kuwait, Hong Kong and Japan, though the number of women migrating to Hong Kong and Japan remained the lowest.

District-wise, Cumilla sent the highest number of migrants abroad in 2025, followed by Brahmanbaria, Dhaka, Tangail, Kishoreganj, Chandpur, Chattogram, Noakhali, Narsingdi and Mymensingh. At the divisional level, Dhaka division recorded the highest number of migrants, while Rangpur division sent the lowest.

While outbound migration data is available, RMMRU said it could not determine how many migrants returned home, making it difficult to estimate the total number of Bangladeshi workers currently living abroad.

The story of Bangladesh's recruitment industry was not just about migrants. For Rahim, it meant debt. For Tasneem, it meant resistance. For families owning multiple licenses, it meant profit.

The path forward was clear but difficult. Reduce the number of agencies. Cancel family-owned clusters. Suspend MPs' licenses. Impose heavy fines. But reform requires political will, and in a system where licenses were currency, will was scarce.

Bangladesh's empire of recruitment agencies stood as both a symbol of opportunity and a monument to corruption. While its neighbours managed with hundreds, Bangladesh drowned in thousands. For migrants like Rahim, the agencies were unavoidable gates to survival abroad. For researchers like Tasneem, they were evidence of systemic failure. For politicians and families, they were lucrative assets. The numbers spoke louder than words: 2,646 agencies, each a reminder that in Bangladesh, migration was not just a journey of hope, but a business of power.

This empire of licenses has become both symbol and symptom: a nation's ambition to send workers abroad, and its failure to protect them from exploitation. Each license is less a promise of opportunity than a reminder of how deeply corruption has taken root. Workers pay the price. Until the empire is dismantled – reduced, regulated, and stripped of political patronage – migration will remain less a journey of hope than a business of power.

The corruption extended beyond families. Some Members of Parliament themselves held licenses, or their relatives did. The conflict of interest was glaring: lawmakers entrusted with regulating migration were profiting directly from it.

Singapore, Kuwait, and the Maldives. But the sheer number of agencies did not translate into better outcomes. Instead, it meant more toll gates, more fees, more corruption.

In Saudi Arabia, Rahim laboured under the desert sun, building towers that would never bear his name. His wages were meagre, his hours long. He shared a cramped dormitory with ten other men, all from different districts of Bangladesh. At night, they spoke of home, of debts, of families waiting for remittances. Rahim sent money back each month, but most of it went to repay loans. His mother's health deteriorated, and his sister Salma abandoned her dream of migrating after hearing of another woman beaten abroad.



Khaleda Unites Bangladesh Even in her Death

LEGACY |

Mostafa Kamal Majumder

Khaleda Zia's death on 30 December 2025 marked the end of an era in Bangladesh's political history. At 80 years old, she left behind a legacy that was both celebrated and contested, but undeniably central to the nation's democratic journey. Her funeral in Dhaka the following day drew millions, transforming the capital into a sea of mourners who came not only to bid farewell but to honour a leader who had embodied resilience, defiance, and the uncompromising pursuit of democracy.

Born in 1945 in Dinajpur, Khaleda Zia's entry into politics was shaped by tragedy. The assassination of her husband, President Ziaur Rahman, in 1981 thrust her into public life. Initially reluctant, she soon became the face of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), leading it through turbulent times and eventually becoming the country's first female Prime Minister in 1991. Her rise was emblematic of Bangladesh's transition from military-backed rule to parliamentary democracy, and her victory was seen as a triumph of popular will. Party workers recall her late-night meetings during those tense days, urging them to keep faith in the people. When the

BNP won, many felt she had carried their voices into power, making democracy tangible for ordinary citizens.

Her first term as Prime Minister from 1991 to 1996 was marked by economic liberalization, infrastructure expansion, and reforms in education. She championed privatization and sought to modernize Bangladesh's economy, while strengthening ties with China and Middle Eastern nations. Yet her tenure was not without turbulence. Allegations of corruption, political violence, and confrontations with the Awami League marred her leadership. The rivalry with Sheikh Hasina, who would become her lifelong adversary, defined Bangladesh's political landscape for decades. Their confrontations spilled into the streets, with massive protests, strikes, and boycotts that often paralyzed the nation. This rivalry entrenched a two-party dominance in Bangladesh, polarizing society but also embedding democratic competition into the country's political culture.

Her return to office in 2001 was again seen as vindication of her resilience. Anecdotes from that period describe her as a leader who never lost touch with the grassroots. She would frequently visit rural areas, sometimes without prior notice, to speak di-

rectly with farmers, women, and students. One story recalls her telling a group of young women in Rajshahi that their education was the key to Bangladesh's future, inspiring many to pursue higher studies despite social obstacles. Such personal interactions reinforced her image as someone who believed democracy was not just about elections but about empowering individuals.

Her second term further deepened her imprint on the nation. Khaleda emphasized rural development, expanded infrastructure projects, and continued her push for privatization. However, her government faced allegations of corruption and sheltering Islamists. Her supporters viewed her as a defender of national sovereignty and a leader who gave voice to conservative and nationalist sentiments. Her ability to mobilize millions underscored her enduring influence.

Her unparalleled popularity among the people emanated from the fact that she helped rebuild the economy and put it on the highway of development with people not only earning more but also enjoying the right to enjoy the democratic rights of freedom speech and freedom of assembly and her total allegiance to the country's sovereignty. Also, her patriotism and re-

Khaleda Zia, from homemaker to three times Prime Minister of Bangladesh.



Millions give historic farewell to Khaleda Zia at the funeral at the Bangladesh National Parliament Complex on 31 December 2025.



fusal to leave the country despite strong pressure mounted on her that she won't face cases in she left. She was also threatened that her two sons might be picked up if she did not leave. But she repeatedly said, "I have no address outside Bangladesh. The people and the soil of this country are my everything."

Khaleda became a widow at an early age of 35. Her captors in 2007 also imprisoned and tortured her two sons Arafat Rahman and Tarique Rahman. Arafat never recovered from the illness he sustained from the torture and died. Tarique Rahman turned physically crippled and had to go to the United Kingdom for medical treatment and remain in exile for 17 years as her mother was jailed in a fabricated case. Tarique Rahman was similarly sued and given sentence in a money laundering case in which he was acquitted in the first judgment, but later convicted in a number of cases and was sued in a series of others.

Khaleda Zia also had to move from one court to another to defend herself in dozens of cases that included ones filed during the military backed caretaker government in 2007-2008. But cases filed against her political rival Sheikh Hasina and other Awami League leaders during those two years were withdrawn on the plea of their being political in nature.

The later years of her career were dominated by legal battles and declining health. In 2018, she was imprisoned on corruption charges, a move her supporters denounced as politically motivated. Her imprisonment symbolized the deep divisions in Bangladeshi politics, with the BNP weakened and the Awami League consolidating power under Sheikh Hasina. Khaleda's health struggles, including chronic illness, limited her political activity in her final years. Yet even in frailty, she remained a symbol of resistance for her party and its supporters, embodying the BNP's identity and its role as the principal opposition force.

The most dramatic chapter came in 2024, when Khaleda Zia, despite her advanced age and frail health, became the symbolic figurehead of a mass upsurge against what opposition leaders described as fifteen and a half years of authoritarian rule. This period, according to her allies, was marked by extrajudicial killings, thousands of enforced disappearances, fraudulent elections, suppression of dissent, and widespread corruption. Her movement tell of her quiet but firm encouragement to younger activists, even when she herself could not march in the streets. One story

often repeated is of her meeting a group of student leaders in her residence, where she told them: "Democracy is not given, it is taken back by those who refuse to surrender." That phrase became a rallying cry during the protests, painted on banners and shouted in slogans across Dhaka. Her presence, even from the sidelines, gave legitimacy and moral strength to the movement, which culminated in a dramatic shift in Bangladesh's political landscape.

Her death on 30 December was met with an outpouring of grief across Bangladesh. The following day, Dhaka witnessed a funeral of historic proportions. Her coffin, draped in the national flag, was carried to



Khaleda Zia will be remembered as a trailblazer who broke barriers for women in politics, a leader who mobilized millions, and a figure who embodied both the strengths and weaknesses of Bangladesh's democratic journey.

the parliament complex, where millions of mourners gathered to pay their respects. The sheer scale of the turnout made it one of the largest funerals in Bangladesh's history. Citizens from all walks of life—supporters, critics, and ordinary people—joined together in mourning, transcending political divides. International leaders, including India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, attended the funeral, while Prime Minister Narendra Modi issued condolences, recognizing her role in shaping

the region's politics. The United Nations expressed sympathy, noting her contributions to women's leadership in South Asia. Western diplomats in Dhaka remarked on the sheer scale of the funeral, calling it one of the largest public gatherings they had ever witnessed in the city.

Eyewitness accounts highlighted the atmosphere of unity. Despite decades of political polarization, mourners included supporters of rival parties, ordinary citizens, and even those who had once opposed her policies. Vendors distributed water and food to the crowds, while volunteers helped maintain order. The chants of "Democracy lives on" echoed through the streets, a reminder of her role as an uncompromising crusader for democratic ideals. Journalists covering the event noted that the funeral resembled a national referendum on her legacy, with millions affirming her place in Bangladesh's history. One elderly supporter was overheard telling his grandson, "I came to see her when she first became Prime Minister in 1991, and I will see her one last time today." Another young woman carried a banner reading, "You gave us courage in 1991, hope in 2001, and freedom in 2024." These personal tributes reinforced the sense that Khaleda Zia's legacy was not confined to political institutions but lived on in the hearts of ordinary citizens.

The international media framed the funeral as a historic moment. Headlines described it as "Bangladesh's farewell to its first female Prime Minister" and "A nation united in grief." Commentators emphasized that her passing marked the end of the two-leader era dominated by Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina. For many, the funeral was not just about mourning but about reflecting on the sacrifices made during years of political struggle, including the mass upsurge of 2024 that she had inspired. Her ability to galvanize people even in her final years was seen as proof of her enduring influence.

Khaleda Zia will be remembered as a trailblazer who broke barriers for women in politics, a leader who mobilized millions, and a figure who embodied both the strengths and weaknesses of Bangladesh's democratic journey. Her supporters saw her as a defender of democracy and national sovereignty. Her funeral underscored that her memory remains deeply embedded in the nation's collective identity. In death, as in life, she commanded attention, respect, and debate, ensuring that her story will continue to shape Bangladesh's political narrative for years to come.

Challenges Facing Tarique Rahman as Chairman of BNP

Mostafa Kamal Majumder

As Bangladesh approaches its 13th parliamentary election on February 12, 2026, the political spotlight has shifted decisively onto Tarique Rahman, the acting chairman of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). With the passing of his mother, Khaleda Zia, and his dramatic return from 17 years of exile, Tarique now stands as both the de facto and de jure leader of the BNP. If the party secures victory, he will not only inherit the mantle of opposition leadership but also the responsibility of steering a nation at a crossroads.

Tarique Rahman's challenge is not simply political—it is historical. He must live up to the towering legacies of both his parents. His father, Ziaur Rahman, was a freedom fighter who declared Bangladesh's independence in 1971 and embodied honesty, patriotism, simplicity, and love for the people. As President, Zia rebuilt the economy on sound footing, united the country through Bangladeshi nationalism (as distinct from Bengali nationalism), and reformed institutions through consensus. His crowning achievements include the 1979 parliamentary election that brought all parties into the democratic fold, and the launch of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which gave Bangladesh a regional voice. Khaleda Zia, as the country's first female Prime Minister, carried forward the project of national unity and economic rebuilding. In 1991, she introduced the parliamentary system of government with the consent of all parties, a landmark in Bangladesh's democratic evolution. Together, they left Tarique with a legacy of nationalism, reform, and consensus-building—a standard against which he will inevitably be measured.

Bangladesh's democratic institutions remain fragile after years of political turbulence. Tarique faces the dual task of rebuilding trust in governance while ensuring BNP's internal cohesion. BNP has long struggled with factionalism, and he must unify disparate voices under a coherent vision. With the referendum on the "July Charter" reforms running alongside the election, he must convince voters that



BNP can deliver both stability and reform. Given past allegations, Tarique must enforce strict party and administrative discipline to prove BNP can govern cleanly and credibly.

Bangladesh's strategic location makes it a focal point for regional powers, and Tarique will need to navigate a delicate balance between India, China, and Western allies. Relations with India have historically been tense under BNP leadership, and he must decide whether to recalibrate or continue the cautious distance. Economic ties with China are deepening, but reliance on Beijing should not risk debt dependency. Meanwhile, the United States and European Union will expect democratic reforms and anti-corruption measures as conditions for deeper engagement.

The July Charter referendum represents a rare opportunity to reshape governance. Tarique's challenge is to show that BNP can move beyond oppositional politics and deliver tangible reforms. Inflation, unemployment, and rural poverty demand urgent solutions. With half the population under 30, he must speak to aspirations of jobs, education, and digital opportunity. Fully restoring judicial independence and tackling corruption will be litmus tests of his credibility.

Ultimately, Tarique Rahman's greatest challenge is personal transformation. From an exiled heir to two national leaders, he must demonstrate maturity, resilience, and vision. Already, there are signs of this transformation. Like his father, he dislikes being pampered and prefers simplicity and modesty. His brevity in

delivering a restrained funeral speech for his mother reflected dignity rather than theatrics. He refused to be honoured by supporters touching his feet, signalling humility and a rejection of personality cults. These gestures, though symbolic, are powerful proofs of his maturity. If they translate into governance, the people can expect discipline, honesty, and great performance from him as a leader. His barefoot return to Dhaka was also symbolic, but symbolism alone will not suffice—what matters is whether these values of simplicity and modesty become the guiding principles of his leadership.

At the same time, Tarique must remain vigilant against the sycophants who have historically plagued Bangladesh's political culture. These individuals, often instrumental in creating dictatorships, have enjoyed political and economic power at the expense of the average citizen and the national interest. Both Ziaur Rahman and Khaleda Zia won the hearts of the people by proving their unfailing loyalty to the nation, its independence, and its sovereignty. Tarique must keep these lessons foremost in his mind, ensuring that his leadership remains rooted in service to the people rather than in the flattery of opportunists.

If BNP wins, Tarique will inherit a nation weary of political feuds and yearning for stability. The question is whether he can transcend the shadows of his past and rise as a statesman—or whether Bangladesh will see a continuation of its cyclical politics.

Bangladesh stands at a historic juncture. Tarique Rahman's leadership will determine whether the country enters a new era of democratic renewal or remains trapped in the old cycle of rivalry and mistrust. The election on February 12 is not just about seats in parliament—it is a referendum on whether Tarique can shoulder the weight of history, match the towering legacies of Ziaur Rahman and Khaleda Zia, and lead a nation forward with honesty, patriotism, discipline, and loyalty to its sovereignty.

(An experienced newspaper editor and researcher, the writer now edits the GreenWatch newsmagazine print edition and its online portal greenwatchbd.com)



Tarique Rahman: Triumphant Return from Exile to Leadership

Rafiqul Islam Azad

The return of Tarique Rahman to Bangladesh after nearly 17 years in enforced exile marks a defining chapter not only in his personal political journey but also in the broader trajectory of Bangladeshi politics. Long absent from the country yet deeply embedded in its political pulse, Tarique Rahman's evolution—from a rising political figure, to a symbol of repression under an extraordinary political regime, to a reform-minded leader poised at the helm of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)—reflects both endurance and transformation.

Today, as he formally assumes office as BNP chairman following the death of his mother and party icon Begum Khaleda Zia, Tarique Rahman stands before the nation as a leader tested by adversity, shaped by distance, and increasingly viewed by supporters as a statesman-in-the-making.

Early Political Roots and Rise

Born into a family that shaped modern

Bangladesh, Tarique Rahman's political identity was forged early. As the eldest son of late president Ziaur Rahman—who redefined Bangladeshi nationalism—and former prime minister Begum Khaleda Zia, he inherited not only a political legacy but also immense expectations.

Unlike many political heirs, Tarique Rahman began his career through organisational work rather than immediate parliamentary ambition. His rise within BNP was marked by grassroots mobilisation, organisational restructuring and a focus on strengthening party units at district and ward levels. By the early 2000s, he had become a central figure in party strategy, particularly during BNP's tenure in government.

However, his growing influence coincided with increasing political polarisation, setting the stage for one of the most turbulent periods in Bangladesh's democratic history.

The 1/11 Changeover and Forced Exile

The political crisis of 2006-07 culminated

in the January 11 changeover, ushering in an army-backed caretaker government that suspended normal democratic processes. During this period, Tarique Rahman was arrested, detained and subjected to what BNP leaders and independent observers later described as severe physical and psychological torture.

He was eventually sent to London in 2008 under the pretext of medical treatment. While officially framed as a health-related decision, the circumstances left little doubt in public perception. Few believed that Tarique Rahman voluntarily chose exile. Rather, it was widely understood that his removal was part of a broader effort to neutralise political leadership during an extraordinary period.

Former Indian president Pranab Mukherjee later acknowledged that the torture inflicted on Tarique Rahman was not “a usual incident,” lending credibility to claims that powerful quarters were involved and that serious threats loomed over him and his family.

Thus began a 17-year exile that would test his political resolve in unprecedented ways.

Leadership from Afar

Exile did not diminish Tarique Rahman's influence within BNP. From London, he continued to guide party strategy, maintain communication with senior leaders and shape political responses during some of the party's darkest years.

Despite geographic distance, he emerged as the party's de facto leader. BNP's organisational unity during prolonged repression is often attributed to his ability to maintain cohesion among senior leaders while also inspiring grassroots activists who viewed him as a symbol of resistance.

The Awami League-led government, wary of his influence, imposed restrictions on publishing or broadcasting his statements. Analysts noted that such measures reflected fear of his political messaging rather than its irrelevance. His speeches, statements and directives nonetheless circulated widely through digital platforms and party networks.

One of the most significant outcomes of his exile leadership was BNP's 31-point reform agenda. The document outlined a comprehensive roadmap for democratic restoration, electoral reform, judicial independence, decentralisation, economic equity and institutional accountability. Far from a rhetorical exercise, the proposal demonstrated a clear understanding of governance challenges and a willingness to articulate solutions.

Notably, after the Sheikh Hasina government was ousted following a mass upsurge, the interim administration incorporated several elements of the 31-point proposal into its reform framework—an implicit endorsement of Tarique Rahman's political foresight and policy maturity.

Return to a Changed Political Landscape

Tarique Rahman's return to Bangladesh came amid profound political transformation. Nobel Laureate Professor Dr Muhammad Yunus, leading the present government, publicly assured him of safety and cooperation, signalling a decisive break from the politics of persecution.

Yet his return was not free from controversy. A section of commentators speculated about international negotiations, even alleging Indian involvement. These claims echoed long-standing narratives surrounding the 1/11 changeover. BNP

leaders dismissed the speculation, asserting that Tarique Rahman returned not through compromise but through political change driven by public demand.

Soon after his return, the death of Begum Khaleda Zia reshaped BNP's internal dynamics. The party formally entrusted Tarique Rahman with full responsibility as chairman—a role he had effectively exercised for years, now legitimised by circumstance and consensus.

Leadership Style: Maturity and Discipline

What followed surprised even seasoned observers. Instead of adopting a confrontational tone, Tarique Rahman demonstrated restraint, inclusivity and strategic patience.

One of the most notable shifts has been the narrowing of the long-perceived gap between the party's top leadership and grassroots activists. Through organisational restructuring and renewed engagement, BNP insiders say morale has surged and internal discipline strengthened.

Tarique Rahman was arrested, detained and subjected to what BNP leaders and independent observers later described as severe physical and psychological torture.

His maiden public speech at July 36 Avenue was emblematic of his evolved leadership. Framed in moral and religious language, the speech called for unity beyond partisan blame and urged collective efforts to rebuild the nation. The tone was conciliatory yet firm—an approach that resonated across political divides.

The choice of language was also strategic. With Jamaat-e-Islami—a religious political party—now an opponent rather than an ally, Tarique Rahman's speech subtly appealed to religious sentiment while reinforcing BNP's nationalist and democratic identity.

His warning against corruption further underscored a desire to redefine political norms, signalling that accountability would be central to his leadership.

Symbolism and Public Sentiment

The emotional peak of his return came during the namaz-e-janaza of Begum

Khaleda Zia. Addressing hundreds of thousands of mourners, Tarique Rahman delivered a brief one-minute speech marked by restraint and dignity. The moment reinforced his connection with the public and underscored the weight of responsibility he now carries.

Public sentiment, according to political analysts, has shifted noticeably. Tarique Rahman's prolonged absence, once framed by critics as political abandonment, is now increasingly viewed as enforced sacrifice. His endurance through exile has enhanced his moral authority among supporters.

Leadership Potential and the Road Ahead

Supporters believe Tarique Rahman is uniquely positioned to uphold the ideological legacy of his parents while adapting it to contemporary realities. His emphasis on sovereignty, democratic pluralism, reform and unity aligns closely with the founding principles of BNP under Ziaur Rahman.

Analysts argue that exile has transformed him. Removed from immediate power, he had time to reflect, study global political trends and reassess strategies. His reform agenda, disciplined messaging and emphasis on institution-building suggest a shift toward statesmanship rather than street politics alone.

Yet challenges remain formidable. Bangladesh faces economic pressures, institutional fragility and deep political polarisation. Tarique Rahman must also confront scepticism surrounding dynastic politics and demonstrate that leadership is earned through performance, not inheritance.

A Defining Moment

As the nation prepares for future elections, expectations surrounding Tarique Rahman continue to rise. Many voters, weary of authoritarian tendencies and political instability, see in him the possibility of balanced, reform-oriented leadership.

Whether he can translate popular momentum into sustainable governance remains to be seen. But one reality is undeniable: Tarique Rahman's journey from exile to leadership has reshaped BNP and altered Bangladesh's political landscape.

In a country where history often repeats itself, Tarique Rahman now stands at a crossroads—carrying the weight of legacy, the lessons of exile and the hopes of millions seeking a leader capable of safeguarding Bangladesh's independence, sovereignty and democratic future.



CENTRAL BANK INTRODUCES RISK-BASED SUPERVISION OF BANKS

Skilled manpower gap raises questions

M Monirul Alam

Bangladesh Bank (BB) earlier this month activated risk-based supervision (RBS) of banks, deploying an early-warning mechanism to protect banks' financial health and unlock funds trapped in non-performing loans. The long-awaited initiative has finally been rolled out to tighten regulatory oversight and curb rising loan defaults, in line with International Monetary Fund (IMF) prescriptions and international banking best practices. The reform too includes abolishing department of Financial Integrity & Customer Services Department (FICSD). The duty of closed down FICSD will now onward will be carried out by the Department of Banking Supervision (DBS). The DBS is a key division within a cen-



tral bank responsible for overseeing and regulating banks to ensure their safety, soundness, and stability, preventing systemic risks, protecting depositors, and enforcing compliance with laws, often using

risk-based supervision and international standards like the Basel Accords. The BB also expands DBS to 12 from previous 8 in numbers in order to ensure enhanced capacity. The 12 departments are responsible for conducting on-site inspections and off-site analyses, monitoring capital adequacy and liquidity, and combating money laundering and terrorist financing.

Arif Hossain Khan, Executive Director and spokesperson of Bangladesh Bank, told GreenWatch that the reform has already begun, describing it as a fundamental shift in supervision. "Previously, the central bank's oversight was transaction-based. We have now moved to a risk-based system, where we will not only analyse data and daily reports but also

generate early-warning signals and forecasts of potential financial risks,” he said.

Experts, however, caution that the central bank’s new initiative may face serious challenges due to a shortage of skilled manpower.

Dr Md Ezazul Islam, Director General of the Bangladesh Bank Institute of Bank Management (BIBM), told GreenWatch that the central bank is relying on the same manpower that conducted supervision under the previous system to implement the new framework. “This is where the challenge lies. They are not trained to apply the new method. At present, they only have the written Basel framework on banking supervision. In reality, effective implementation requires practical experience, which they lack,” he said.

Dr Ezaz said the Bangladesh Bank governor has directed him to initiate adequate training programmes for both regulatory officials and bankers to equip them with the skills required to comply with the new supervision system.

“But there are shortages of trainers too,” he added.

The issue of launching the new supervision method aligned to international standards came following repeated exposure of default loan cases in media. IMF, country’s one of the major development partners, raised the issue before the Bangladesh authority and sought resolution to its end.

Meanwhile, rising default loans provoked criticism from among critics, economists, political opposition and civil society organizations. Amid pressures of mounting criticism, the central bank years back stepped towards reform in banking sector aimed to strengthen supervision so banks cannot approve and disburse forged loans. But oligarchs emerged in the banking sector and took out most of the private banking companies leading to a deterioration in governance, transparency, and accountability, which has created distrust among depositors.

The nexus among bankers, businesses, and government officials, resulted in a significant weakening of the banking sector, leaving ordinary people suffers. Critics say the financial oligarchy under crony capitalism was using banks as tools to fulfil their goals.

The term oligarch generally refers to small individuals who hold significant power and influence within a country or organisation. These oligarchs had strong political connections and could influence

government policies and decisions to protect and expand their interests.

Former Bangladesh Bank governor Mohammed Farashuddin has remarked recently that the interim government has identified dozens of oligarchs, of whom 10-12 are big including Beximco, Nabil Group, S Alam Group, Bismillah Group, Thermax Group, Nasa and Hallmark.

He said heads of these companies have

the biasness to businesses and politicos in this regard.

By this time, default loan rose to over 600,000 crore and the interim government is trying to close the door of further loan defaults. Some 22 banks have been suffering from liquidity crisis due to mounting bad loans and thriving to survive. The central bank has initiated closing down five Islamic sharia-based banks and run them



Amid pressures of mounting criticism, the central bank years back stepped towards reform in banking sector aimed to strengthen supervision so banks cannot approve and disburse forged loans.

looted money from banks in the name of borrowing and laundered the money outside country. He said the fusion of political and economic power gives rise to oligarchs.

Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) Executive Director Dr Fahmida Khatun often criticised the practice of issuing bank licences based on political considerations rather than thorough assessments. She also held the central bank responsible for

under one bank called united Islamic bank (Sammilito Islamic Bank) under the auspicious of the government supported liquidity. Other banks are still suffering from weak governance and financial crises.

Former chairman of Global Islamic Bank, Md Nurul Amin told GreenWatch that reform is a must and hailed the initiative of the central bank. “We have no way but reform. At the same time, we have to develop our skills to materialize the new journey,” he said.

BB spokesperson Arif said reforms are a dire need for bringing back the banks under regulatory watch. “We have been trying to strengthen supervision for years. But repeatedly we have backtracked due to political pressure. The incumbent governor has dared to do it.”

“We are optimistic about implementing the new method of bank supervision. It is needed to curb irregularities, false reporting and loan forgery,” he added.

Financial Sector Stability Achieved, But Hard Work Lies Ahead

GreenWatch Desk

Bangladesh's financial sector stands at a defining juncture at the end of the 2025, marked by cautious stabilisation efforts but weighed down by deep-rooted structural weaknesses.

While policymakers point to modest macroeconomic improvements and renewed discipline, restoring confidence, reviving private investment and repairing the financial system remain formidable challenges.

From a macroeconomic standpoint, 2025 was largely a year of consolidation rather than acceleration. Inflation stayed elevated for much of the year, compelling authorities to maintain a tight monetary stance.

Although inflationary pressures eased slightly towards year-end, the adjustment came at the cost of slower economic activity.

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the general point-to-point inflation rate stood at 8.29 percent in November 2025, marginally up from 8.17 percent in October.

Economic growth also fell short of earlier targets, reflecting subdued domestic demand and weak private sector investment.

Both the government and the central bank repeatedly argued that short-term pain was necessary to restore macroeconomic balance and credibility.

The financial sector—particularly the banking system—remained the most critical pressure point throughout the year.

Non-performing loans stayed stubbornly high, underscoring long-standing governance failures, weak credit appraisal and inef-

fective recovery mechanisms.

Despite repeated reform pledges, defaulted loans continued to erode bank balance sheets, limiting their ability to extend fresh credit.

Defaulted loans in the country's banking sector reached 34.6 percent of all disbursed credit till June this year, the highest level since 2000, exposing the fragile state of the banking system and renewing concerns about financial governance. Defaults surge to 34.6 percent of credit as Bad loans jump Tk 3,88,573 crore while Irregularities, weak oversight fuel crisis and the State banks hold 44.6 percent defaults.

For much of 2025, banks prioritised liquidity management and survival over risk-taking, further tightening credit conditions for businesses.

In a major intervention, Bangladesh Bank merged five struggling Islamic banks—First Security Islami Bank, Union Bank, Global Islami Bank, Social Islami Bank and EXIM Bank—into a new state-backed entity, tentatively named Sammilito Islami Bank (United Islamic Bank).

The central bank dissolved their boards, appointed administrators and injected government capital to protect depositors and restore confidence, aiming to create a unified and stronger Islamic bank by late 2025 or early 2026.

Private sector credit growth remained one of the weakest indicators in 2025, falling to a four-year low of around 6.23 percent by October, well below the central bank's target.



High interest rates, political uncertainty, power shortages and weak investor confidence discouraged borrowing, stalling new investment and business expansion despite export growth.

High lending rates—often 16-17 percent—combined with stricter collateral requirements, led many entrepreneurs to delay expansion or rely on internal funds. The slowdown in capital machinery imports for much of the year reflected this hesitation.

However, signs of cautious recovery emerged late in the year. Letters of Credit (LCs) for capital machinery rose by about 23 percent in the first quarter of FY2025-26, following three years of decline. During the July-September 2025 quarter, LCs climbed to \$471.7 million, up from \$383.9 million a year earlier, driven mainly by export-oriented sectors such as textiles, supported by improving foreign exchange stability.

Still, overall private investment remained subdued. Private investment as a share of GDP fell to 22.48 percent in FY2024-25, the lowest in five years, signalling waning confidence at a critical moment as Bangladesh prepares for graduation from Least Developed Country (LDC) status.

Investor sentiment in 2025 was shaped not only by financial conditions but also by broader governance concerns. Businesses frequently cited policy uncertainty, administrative delays and weak contract

enforcement as major deterrents. While several reform initiatives were announced, uneven implementation led many local investors to adopt a wait-and-see approach, while foreign investors remained cautious despite Bangladesh's large market and strategic location.

The capital market offered limited relief. Although there were brief rallies, overall performance failed to attract significant new investment. Volatility, governance issues and limited market depth continued to undermine the stock market's role as a source of long-term financing.

On the policy front, Bangladesh Bank emphasised stronger supervision, improved loan classification and better corporate governance. Discussions on bank consolidation and stricter fit-and-proper criteria for directors gained prominence, though scepticism persisted over whether entrenched interests would allow deep reforms to take root.

Meanwhile, the government continued to rely heavily on public investment to support economic activity. Large infrastructure projects played a stabilising role amid private sector hesitation, though economists warned that excessive dependence on public spending could crowd out private investment and raise concerns over efficiency, cost overruns and debt sustainability.

The external sector provided some relief. Remittance inflows remained strong, helping stabilise foreign exchange reserves, while export earnings showed resilience despite global uncertainties.

Bangladesh saw strong remittance inflows in 2025, crossing \$30 billion for the

fiscal year (FY25) and showing significant growth in the first half of FY26 (July-Dec 2025), reaching over \$15 billion with monthly figures like November's \$2.89 billion and a record \$3.29 billion in March, driven by a stable exchange rate and crackdowns on informal transfers, boosting the economy.

In the July-November period, remittance inflows reached approximately \$13.03 billion, a significant jump from \$11.13 billion the previous year. In November 2025, a robust \$2.89 billion, up over 31% from November 2024 while in March 2025, a record monthly inflow of \$3.29 billion.

Export receipts exceeded \$20 billion in the first half of FY2025-26, driven mainly by the apparel sector. For FY2024-25, total exports reached \$48.28 billion, with RMG earnings at \$39.34 billion.

As 2025 ends, there is cautious recognition that stabilisation has been achieved, but there is broad agreement that the hardest work lies ahead. Restoring trust in financial institutions, curbing loan defaults and ensuring predictable policy implementation are essential to unlocking private investment.

Without decisive reforms, growth is likely to remain below potential, limiting Bangladesh's ability to absorb its growing labour force—especially as concessional financing and trade preferences diminish after LDC graduation.

In that sense, 2025 may be remembered as a transitional year—highlighting both the resilience of Bangladesh's economy and the depth of its structural weaknesses.

Whether this adjustment phase evolves into a foundation for sustainable and inclusive growth will depend largely on how effectively financial sector reforms are implemented and private sector confidence is restored in the years ahead.



Enforced disappearance victims are remembered by their families every year on the Human Rights Day, December 10. - Human Rights Watch.

Enforced disappearances must never recur

Special Correspondent

Among the enforced disappearance victims who are still missing, 68 percent were leaders and activists of BNP and its affiliated organizations, and 22 percent were leaders and activists of Jamaat-Shibir the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances disclosed while submitting its final report to Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus on Saturday January 4.

According to the report, 75 percent of the victims who returned alive were leaders and activists of Jamaat-Shibir, while 22 percent were leaders and activists of BNP and its affiliated organizations.

The Commission stated that enforced disappearances in Bangladesh were largely politically motivated and carried out with involvement from the highest levels of the immediate past government.

Commission President Justice Moyeenul Islam Chowdhury, members Justice Md. Farid Ahmed Shibli, Md. Nur Khan, Dr. Nabila Idris and Md Sazzad Hussain were present. Their report "Unfolding the truth: A structural diagnosis of enforced disappearance in Bangladesh" was handed over at the State Guest House Jamuna.

Industries Adviser Adilur Rahman Khan and Principal Secretary to the Chief Adviser Siraz Uddin Mia were present.

Enforced disappearances became so much widespread during the nearly 16 years of autocratic rule that every year victims' families carrying their portraits used to gather near the National Press Club or the Shahbagh intersection to draw the attention of the authorities to their plight and urge their release. An organisation 'Maayer Daak' used to coordinate their activism.

To counter this campaign to get justice for the enforced disappearance victims, a rival organisation 'Maer Kanna' was floated by Awami League workers highlighting the plight of families and their children who were affected by execution of service people and others on the charge of sedition in the second half of the 1970s.

In one incident in 2022 members of this organisation crowded a house visited by former US ambassador Peter D. Haas who had to leave the place on security grounds.

The Voice of America reported, "The U.S. ambassador to Bangladesh cut short a meeting with some families of alleged victims of enforced disappearance in De-

cember 2022 because of pro-government protesters who tried to force their way into the meeting venue and surrounded his car, the embassy said.

"The incident occurred December 14, 2022 at a private residence in Dhaka, home to a co-founder of an organization called Maayer Daak, Bengali for Mothers Call. Ambassador Peter D. Haas was meeting there with several families who say their loved ones were abducted by government forces and have not been heard from since.

"Families of over a dozen victims of enforced disappearance assembled at our place to share their experiences with the ambassador," said meeting host Sanjida Islam Tulee, a coordinator at Maayer Daak. "But after the crowd of local Awami League supporters began swelling outside our house, for security reasons, he had to leave the meeting midway."

The U.S. embassy in Dhaka confirmed in a statement to VoA that the ambassador ended his meeting early "due to security concerns."

The VoA Report said, "Enforced disappearances are a long-standing issue in Bangladesh, especially under the current

Awami League administration of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. In a report last year, Human Rights Watch identified 86 victims who, it said, “were forcibly disappeared and who remain missing.”

“Awami League leadership and Bangladesh authorities mock victims and routinely obstruct investigations, making clear that the government has no intention of meaningfully addressing enforced disappearances by its security forces,” said Brad Adams, Asia director at HRW, in releasing the report.

The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances said, a total of 1,913 complaints were submitted to the Commission. After verification, 1,569 complaints were identified as enforced disappearances under the Commission’s definition. Of these, 287 cases fell into the category of “missing and dead.”

Commission member Nabila Idris said the actual number of enforced disappearances could be significantly higher. “The number of enforced disappearances could be four to six thousand,” she said, adding, “Contacting many of the victims of disappearances leads to the discovery of more victims who have not contacted us, do not know about us or have moved to other countries.”

There are many people with whom we contacted ourselves, but they did not agree to talk on the record.”

The Commission members stated that evidences collected during the investigation proved that enforced disappearances were mainly politically motivated crimes.

The report said evidences were found indicating direct involvement of the then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, her security and defence adviser Tarique Ahmed Siddique, and then Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan in high-profile disappearances.

Notable cases cited include BNP leaders Ilias Ali, Hummam Quader Chowdhury, Salahuddin Ahmed, Chowdhury Alam, former Brigadier General Abdullahil Amaan Azmi, Barrister Mir Ahmed Bin Quasem, and former Ambassador Maroof Zaman.

Commission members stated that in many cases the former Prime Minister herself was the direct order-giver behind disappearances.

They also said information obtained regarding the rendition of disappeared victims—secret transfers without legal process—to India indicated that these actions were carried out on orders from the highest levels of the government.

Commission members later said at a

meeting in Gulshan on January 5 that they recommended abolition of the Rapid Action Battalion which according to them was responsible for most of the enforced disappearance cases and used to maintain most of the detention centres to hold the victims. Police as well was involved in the atrocities, they said.

A commission member was of the view that the induction of members of the Armed Forces compromised the character of the RAB which was utilised to torture people and subject them to hoodwinking.

Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus thanked the Commission members for their work and described the report as historic. “On behalf of the nation, I thank all of this commission,” he said.

“The incident that you have described—the word used in Bengali is ‘paishachik’—these incidents can be described with that word. You have seen those atrocities through talking to those who have gone

dents.

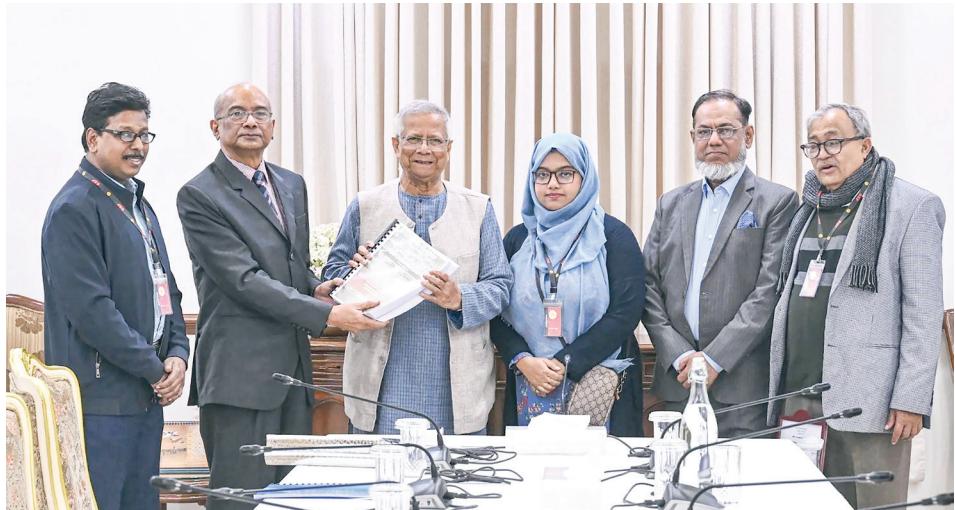
As a nation, we have to come out of such atrocities forever. We have to find a way to remedy this atrocity so that it does not return,” he added.

The Chief Adviser called for the report to be made available to the public in simple language and instructed the Commission to submit necessary recommendations and proposals for future action.

He also directed that locations of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances be mapped, in addition to the ‘Ay-naghar’ (Mirror House).

“We must find a way to remedy this injustice so that it does not return,” the Chief Adviser said, adding that the nation must ensure such atrocities never recur.

The Commission said its investigation found that the highest number of killings and disappearances occurred in the Baleshwar River in Barisal, where hundreds of victims were allegedly killed and dumped.



The Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances submitted its final report of Jan 4 to Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus at the State Guest House Jamuna in the afternoon.

through these atrocities, through their experiences. This work could not have been completed without strong morale.”

He said the report documents how institutions were distorted while maintaining the appearance of democracy.

“This report is a documentation of the kind of demonic behaviour that can be perpetrated on people by twisting all the institutions of Bangladesh and wearing the garb of democracy,” he said.

“It shows how low people can go down, how demonic and disgusting they can be. Those who committed these terrible incidents are human beings like us.

They are living a normal life in society after committing the most atrocious inci-

Evidences were also found of bodies being disposed of in the Buriganga River and in Munshiganj.

The members of the Commission expressed special thanks to the Chief Adviser, saying the work would not have been possible without his firm stance.

“We were able to do it because you were strong. You always gave us whatever support we needed. You strengthened our morale,” they added.

They also urged the Chief Adviser to reconstitute the National Human Rights Commission, continue the work initiated by the inquiry, and ensure protection and justice for the victims of enforced disappearances.



Cut the Black Hand of Poachers in the Sundarbans

Special Correspondent

Tiger and deer poachers still remain quite active in the Sundarbans. This has been revealed in early January 2026 when a tigress trapped in a snare set by poachers had to be rescued by the Forest Department officials. The incident occurred Sunday January 4 afternoon near Boiragi Bari along Sarkir canal in Mongla upazila of Bagerhat district.

The tigress was tranquilised and safely freed from the trap, Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of the Sundarbans East Division Md Rezaul Karim Chowdhury told journalists.

He said Forest Department personnel rushed to the spot after receiving information and cordoned off the area from Saturday January 3 evening. "The rescue operation began on Sunday and was completed in the same afternoon after continuous efforts." The tigress sustained a deep injury in its front left leg, he said.

Veterinary surgeon Dr Julkar Naeem who was hired from the Gazipur Safari Park used a tranquiliser gun to render the animal unconscious. Forest Department experts were present during the operation. Rezaul Karim Chowdhury said, it is believed the tigress was caught in the snare set by deer poachers three to four days earlier.

"The animal became weak due to prolonged entrapment and exposure to cold weather. The tigress was to be taken to the Wildlife Rescue Centre in Khulna for treatment. Once it recovers, it will be released back into the Sundarbans," he said.

A local fisherman first spotted the tiger in the trap around noon on Saturday January 3, about half a kilometre away from human habitation in the Sundarbans East Division and informed forest officials.

Upon receiving the information, members of the Forest Department rushed to the spot and cordoned off the area, said Dipan Chandra Das, Assistant Conservator of Forests of Chandpai Range under the Sundarbans East Division. Full-scale rescue efforts began from Sunday January 4 noon to free the tiger, he said.

Prof Mohammad Anwarul Islam, chief executive of Wild Team, said the tiger suffered severely since being trapped on Saturday especially amid cold condition.

"The rescue should have been conducted earlier. Due to the absence of a dedicated veterinary surgeon in the Sundarbans, the rescue was delayed until Sunday afternoon," he said, stressing the need for permanent veterinary surgeons in both the East and West divisions of the Sundarbans.

He also said the Forest Department lacks adequate preparedness for wildlife

emergencies. "The tiger struggled in the trap and had the danger of getting injured. After rescue, it required proper medical treatment," he said.

Members of the Village Tiger Response Team, along with Forest Department staff, remained on guard at the site from January 3 night.

Forest Department surveys show that the number of tigers in the Bangladesh part of the Sundarbans stood at 125 as of October 2024. The population was estimated at 114 in 2018 and 106 in 2015.

The Sundarbans covers a total area of 6,017 square kilometres, of which 4,143 square kilometres are land. More than half of the forest is currently designated as protected area. Each tiger typically occupies a home range of 14 to 16 square kilometres. Tigers in the Sundarbans remain under threat from poaching, climate change and rising salinity.

The Sundarbans Forest lies under two forest divisions, and four administrative ranges - Chandpai, Sarankhola, Khulna and Burigoalini and has 16 forest stations. It is further divided into 55 compartments and 9 blocks. The Sundarbans was declared a Reserve Forest in 1875. About 32,400 hectares of the Sundarbans have been declared as three wildlife sanctuaries, and came under the UNESCO World Heritage

Site in 1997. These wildlife sanctuaries were established in 1977 under the Bangladesh Wildlife (Preservation) (Amendment) Act, 1974. These are Sundarbans West (9,069 ha), Sundarbans South (17,878 ha), and Sundarbans East (5,439 ha).

The mangrove forest hosts a large variety of animals. It is the last stronghold of the Bengal tiger (*Panthera Tigris*). Within the forest habitats there are about 50 species of mammals, about 320 species of inland and migratory birds, about 50 species of reptiles, eight species of amphibians, and about 400 species of fish. Besides the spectacular Royal Bengal Tiger, the other notable mammalian fauna is Spotted deer (*Cervus axis*), Barking deer (*Muntiacus muntjak*), Rhesus macaque (*Macaca mulatta*), Jungle cat (*Felis chaus*), Leopard cat (*Prionailurus bengalensis*), the Indian porcupine (*Hystrix indica*), Otter (*Lutar perspicillata*), and wild boar (*Sus scrofa*). Deer and wild boar constitute the main prey for the tiger. Some species including the Bengal tiger are endangered.

Only a few people live permanently in or around the Sundarbans. They include the bawalis (collectors of golpata), mousals (honey collectors) and woodcutters. Their dwellings are usually at the edge of the forest and the houses are built on platforms supported on 3-5 m high poles of wood or bamboo. Some people, especially the bedyas (gypsies) live on boats.

Poaching is a significant and ongoing threat to the wildlife in the Sundarbans, with spotted deer (the primary prey for tigers) being the most commonly targeted, followed by the critically endangered Royal Bengal Tiger itself.

Poaching of spotted and barking deer is widespread and primarily driven by local demand for venison, which is sold in local and distant markets. Poachers use various methods, predominantly setting numerous nylon snares (sometimes hundreds at a time) and occasionally using firearms.

Tiger poaching is driven by the high demand for tiger parts (skins, bones, teeth, claws) in international black markets for use in traditional Asian medicine and as trophies. The primary method used by specialist poachers is poisoning a deer carcass with a highly toxic pesticide, such as Carbofuran, and placing it on a known tiger trail.

The Forest Department, Bangladesh Coast Guard, RAB, and BGB conduct regular patrols and operations to curb poaching.

However, challenges remain, including insufficient manpower, the vast and com-

plex terrain of the Sundarbans, the ready availability of poisons like Carbofuran in local markets, and a persistent market demand for wildlife products. Conservationists emphasize the need for a multi-pronged approach, including stricter enforcement, public awareness campaigns, and international cooperation to combat the illegal trade.

Tiger poaching in the Sundarbans remains a critical threat to the endangered Royal Bengal tiger population. Despite conservation efforts, traffickers actively target the area for tiger parts, including skins, bones, and teeth, which are in high demand in international black markets, particularly in China.

Research indicates that approximate-

skin can sell for up to \$17,450 USD. Tiger parts from the Sundarbans are trafficked to at least 15 countries.

Over the past 2.5 decades, at least 26 tigers were killed by traffickers in the Bangladesh part of the Sundarbans. Some experts estimate that up to 80% of poaching incidents go unreported.

As of October 2024, the tiger population in the Bangladesh Sundarbans was estimated at 125, an increase from 114 in 2018. However, poaching combined with habitat loss and prey scarcity threatens this recovery.

The illegal hunting of spotted deer—the primary food source for tigers—has risen, leading to a potential food crisis for the apex predators.



A tigress entrapped inside the Sundarbans being tranquilised before rescue on Saturday 4 January 2026. UNB

ly 32 tiger poaching gangs operate in the region, particularly after a crackdown on local pirates in 2016. These gangs often use poison (such as Furadan) to kill tigers, sometimes laced on deer or wild boar carcasses.

A study has identified a range of snaring methods used to catch prey and an approach to killing tigers by poisoning prey carcasses with a Carbofuran pesticide. It recorded six poisoned baits set to kill tigers and 1427 snare loops in 56 snare sets to kill tiger prey. Poachers select sites that tend to be away from guard posts, and close to river banks, but are not influenced by protected area status or distance to the forest boundary. The poaching pressure is likely to have contributed to a recent decline in relative tiger abundance.

Traffickers specifically target tigers for their bones, teeth, and skin. A single tiger

In response to rising deer poaching, the Forest Department has shifted from boat-based patrolling to foot patrols inside the forest to better detect traps.

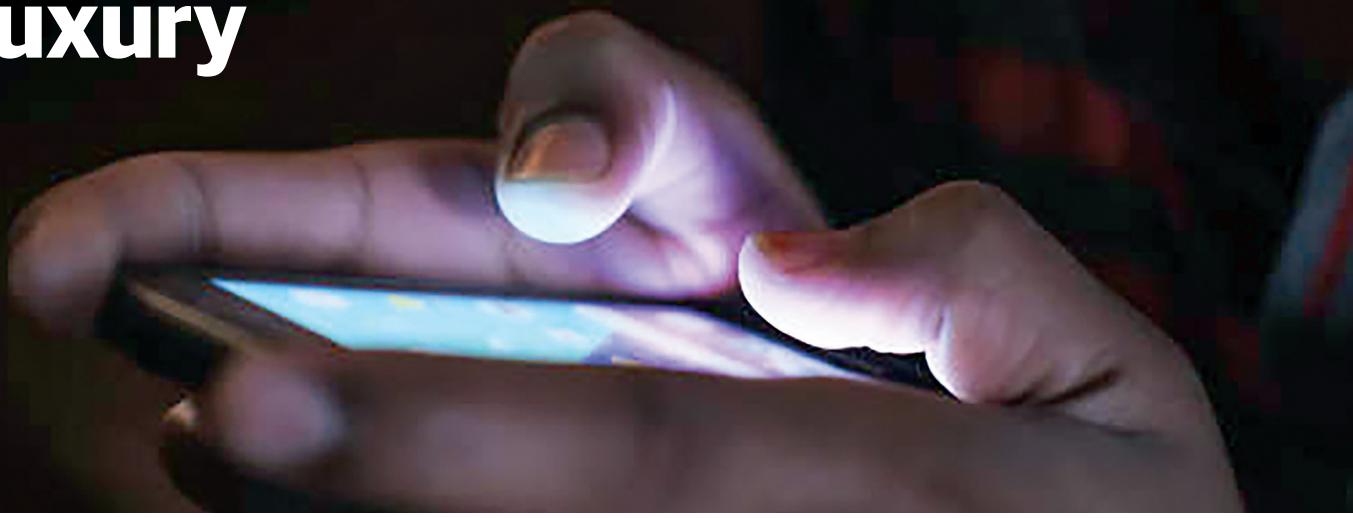
The use of "Smart Patrol" methods, drone cameras, and trap cameras is being implemented.

Despite the apprehension of suspects, many are released on bail and return to criminal activity. There are documented weaknesses in how the Forest Department prepares its cases, leading to low conviction rates.

Village Tiger Response Teams have been formed to raise awareness and help manage human-tiger conflict.

While the tiger population shows slight recovery in recent surveys, poachers continue to adapt, using more sophisticated methods and smuggling routes to evade authorities.

Why a good night's sleep becoming a luxury



Sadia Islam Raka

In many Bangladeshi homes today, midnight no longer signals the end of the day. Instead, it marks the peak of activity. Smartphone screens glow in darkened rooms, videos continue to autoplay, and notifications break the silence of the night. Sleep, once a natural and unquestioned necessity, is now delayed—often until the early hours of the morning.

This growing habit has quietly transformed everyday life. What was once seen as unhealthy or irresponsible has slowly become normal. More worryingly, the problem is no longer limited to young people or city dwellers. Children, adults, and even elderly people—across urban, semi-urban, and rural Bangladesh—are now trapped in a cycle of late nights and late mornings.

Sleep, it seems, has become a luxury few can afford.

A habit spreading across generations

For a long time, sleep deprivation was associated mainly with students cramming for exams or young professionals chasing deadlines. Today, the pattern has crossed generational boundaries. Schoolchildren lie awake watching cartoons or short videos. Teenagers scroll endlessly through social media. Parents remain busy

replying to work messages or browsing news feeds. Even elderly people spend hours on Facebook or YouTube before finally falling asleep.

In many households, it is now common for the entire family to go to bed after midnight. This shared habit has gradually reshaped daily routines. Morning alarms are ignored repeatedly. Children rush to school half-asleep. Adults begin their workday exhausted. Elderly family members sleep late into the morning, abandoning long-established habits of early rising.

Health experts say this shift is unprecedented. Unlike earlier generations, today's population carries constant stimulation in their pockets. Smartphones do not allow the mind to rest. The brain remains alert long after the body needs sleep.

Losing the early morning, losing balance

Perhaps the most profound impact of late nights is the gradual disappearance of early mornings. Rising before dawn—once deeply embedded in Bangladesh's cultural and religious life—is becoming increasingly difficult.

Many people now admit that they struggle to wake up for Fajr prayer. Reciting from the Holy Quran, spending quiet moments in reflection, or starting the day

with spiritual calm has been replaced by exhaustion and hurried routines. Parents complain that their children cannot wake up in time for school, while adults feel too tired to maintain regular prayer or religious discipline.

Religious scholars frequently emphasise the importance of early rising, linking it to both physical well-being and spiritual growth. Yet sleep deprivation has silently eroded this tradition. When nights stretch endlessly, mornings lose their meaning—and with them, a sense of balance in daily life.

For many families, this change is deeply troubling. They see their children growing up without the rhythm that once shaped discipline, faith, and focus.

Families together, but emotionally distant

Another quiet casualty of late-night phone use is family life. Evenings were once a time for shared meals, conversation, and storytelling. Today, those moments are increasingly fragmented.

Family members may sit in the same room, but each remains absorbed in a separate digital world. Dinner conversations are interrupted by notifications. Children retreat to their rooms with phones in hand. Parents scroll endlessly after long work-

days. Grandparents watch videos alone, waiting for someone to talk to.

Psychologists warn that reduced family interaction weakens emotional bonds. Children who grow up without meaningful daily conversations may struggle with emotional expression and social skills. Elderly family members, despite living in crowded households, often report feelings of neglect and loneliness.

Ironically, technology that promises connection is slowly disconnecting families from one another.

Late mornings and wasted days

Late nights naturally lead to late mornings. Increasingly, people are waking up at 9am or even 10am, especially on weekends or non-working days. By then, a significant portion of daylight—and productivity—is already lost.

Students miss valuable study hours. Office workers struggle to concentrate. Homemakers rush through responsibilities. Even those who work late into the night admit that fatigue prevents them from using the day effectively.

Doctors explain that irregular sleep cycles disrupt the body's natural rhythm. Over time, this leads to chronic tiredness, irritability, poor concentration, and declining motivation. Long-term sleep deprivation is also linked to obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and weakened immunity.

The problem is not merely sleeping late—it is the inability to live the day fully.

Reaching the remotest corners

Perhaps the most alarming aspect of this trend is its spread beyond major cities. Once, rural Bangladesh followed a predictable rhythm: early dinners, quiet evenings, and early mornings. That rhythm is now fading.

In villages and small towns, smartphones have transformed night-time habits. Teachers report students arriving at school sleepy and inattentive. Parents admit their children stay awake watching videos or playing online games. Elderly villagers scroll through social media long after nightfall.

Electricity, affordable smartphones, and mobile internet have brought many benefits—access to information, communication, and entertainment. But they have also extended nights unnaturally. The result is a nationwide lifestyle shift affecting every social class and age group.

This is no longer an urban problem; it is a national one.

The hidden mental health risk

Mental health professionals warn that chronic sleep deprivation carries serious psychological consequences. Anxiety, depression, mood swings, and emotional burnout are increasingly common, especially among young people.

Constant digital engagement overstimulates the brain. Even when people put their phones down, their minds remain restless. Without adequate sleep, emotional resilience weakens. People become impatient, easily frustrated, and socially withdrawn.

Children growing up without rest

Children are among the most affected. Many parents admit they struggle to control their children's screen time. Phones and tablets have become easy distractions, often used to keep children quiet.

But doctors warn that sleep deprivation in childhood affects growth, learning ability, emotional regulation, and behaviour. Children who sleep late struggle to focus in class and are more prone to irritability and anxiety.

Without guidance, children may grow up believing that constant screen use and

How people can reclaim healthy sleep

Health experts, psychologists, educators, and religious scholars suggest several practical steps

Set a digital curfew



Phones and tablets should be switched off at least one hour before bedtime. Keeping devices out of bedrooms helps the brain unwind naturally.



Reclaim early mornings

Align sleep schedules with prayer times, school routines, or work commitments. Early rising naturally encourages earlier sleep.



Rebuild family evenings

Introduce phone-free dinners or shared evening conversations. Even short daily interactions strengthen emotional bonds.



Lead by example



Parents must model healthy habits. Children follow what they see, not what they are told.



Teach purposeful use

Young people should be encouraged to use devices for education, creativity, and communication—not endless scrolling.



Create calming routines

Reading, prayer, light exercise, or reflection before bed helps signal the body that it is time to rest.

Choosing rest in a restless society

In today's Bangladesh, staying awake late has become normal—sometimes even admired. But rest is not laziness. It is essential for physical health, mental stability, spiritual growth, and social connection. A good night's sleep is no longer guaranteed; it must be protected. Choosing to sleep on time, wake early, pray, reflect, and engage with

family has become a conscious lifestyle decision.

In a world that never switches off, reclaiming sleep may be one of the most powerful acts of self-care—and a vital step towards a healthier, more connected society. Because without rest, even the brightest screens cannot guide us forward.

Loneliness is emerging as a particularly worrying outcome. Despite being constantly connected online, many individuals feel emotionally isolated. When real-life interactions shrink and sleep quality declines, mental well-being suffers.

Experts fear that if this pattern continues unchecked, Bangladesh could face a broader mental health crisis in the coming years—one rooted not in poverty or disaster, but in lifestyle choices.

late nights are normal—setting patterns that last a lifetime.

Can technology and discipline coexist?

Experts agree that technology itself is not the enemy. Smartphones, when used wisely, offer learning opportunities, connection, and convenience. The problem lies in uncontrolled and excessive use. The challenge is to restore discipline—not by rejecting technology, but by managing it responsibly.



Cricket, Politics and South Asia's Perpetual Dilemma

Shahidul Alam Swapan

In South Asia, cricket has always carried more than bat and ball. It bears the weight of history, partition, wars, fragile diplomacy and unfinished political arguments. Every boundary cheered is also a reminder of shared colonial pasts; every boycott echoes unresolved disputes. Yet even by these standards, the growing chill in cricketing ties between India and Bangladesh marks a disturbing turn, one that suggests New Delhi may be extending to Dhaka the same logic of exclusion it has long applied to Pakistan.

At its core, this episode is not simply about postponed tours or a foreign player being dropped from an IPL squad. It is about how politics, nationalism and power intersect in South Asia, and how sport once a rare arena for dialogue is increasingly becoming collateral damage.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI)'s decision to postpone the Indian team's tour of Bangladesh has already raised eyebrows. More unsettling, however, are reports that Kolkata Knight Riders have been instructed to move away from Bangladeshi pacer Mustafizur Rahman de-

spite having signed him at a high price for the 2026 season. No clear cricketing justification has been offered, leaving a vacuum that politics has rushed to fill.

In today's India, that vacuum is quickly occupied by Hindutva-driven narratives that frame regional relations through the lens of loyalty, ideology and identity. Institutions that once claimed autonomy increasingly appear responsive to street pressure and social media outrage. Cricket, given its emotional power and mass appeal, has become an easy instrument in this broader political project.

To understand why this matters, one must revisit South Asia's most enduring sporting fracture: India and Pakistan. For over a decade, bilateral cricket between the two has been suspended, not because of administrative impossibility or lack of public interest, but because politics has rendered engagement unacceptable. Matches now occur only in multilateral tournaments, on neutral soil, stripped of the intimacy and symbolism that bilateral series once carried.

This policy did not emerge overnight. It grew out of crises, terrorist attacks, media frenzy and hardened public opinion. Over

time, cricket became a proxy battlefield where refusing to play was presented as an act of national resolve. The result has been a permanent freeze that has neither softened political tensions nor created leverage for peace. Instead, it has entrenched mistrust and normalised hostility.

Bangladesh, until recently, existed outside this template. Despite periodic diplomatic tensions with India over water sharing, border incidents or domestic political rhetoric cricketing relations largely endured. Tours were conducted, players exchanged leagues, and contests were marketed as friendly rivalries rather than existential confrontations. That made Bangladesh an exception in an otherwise polarised regional landscape.

The fear now is that this exception is disappearing.

If India begins to treat Bangladesh through the same prism of suspicion and punitive disengagement reserved for Pakistan, it will mark a significant shift in regional dynamics. Unlike Pakistan, Bangladesh emerged in 1971 with India's military and diplomatic support. The relationship has always been layered and occasionally fraught, but it has rested on a foundation

of shared history and interdependence. Turning that relationship into another frozen rivalry would represent not strategic maturity but political short-sightedness.

Cricket, unfortunately, offers a convenient testing ground for such shifts. It is highly visible, emotionally charged and easy to politicise. When a Bangladeshi player like Mustafizur Rahman is sidelined under opaque circumstances, the message travels far beyond the IPL dressing room. It signals to Dhaka and to the wider region that political winds can override contracts, merit and professionalism.

Supporters of such measures argue that sport cannot be separated from national interest. But this argument raises a deeper South Asian dilemma: whose national interest, and defined by whom? In a region where states are still negotiating their post-colonial identities, nationalism often becomes a zero-sum game. Any engagement is portrayed as weakness; any accommodation as betrayal. Cricket administrators, instead of insulating the sport from these impulses, frequently succumb to them.

The IPL itself was once hailed as a globalised, commercial enterprise that transcended politics. Its success rested on attracting the best talent, regardless of nationality, and packaging cricket as entertainment rather than ideology. If political vetting now begins to dictate player participation, that model starts to crumble. Today it may be Bangladeshi players; tomorrow it could be others whose governments fall out of favour.

This creeping politicisation also reflects the broader crisis of institutional autonomy in South Asia. Cricket boards, like many other bodies, often insist on their independence while aligning conspicuously with ruling political narratives. In India's case, the BCCI's immense finan-

cial power has not translated into moral or administrative distance from the state. When its decisions echo the preferences of the political establishment, perceptions of a "deep state" influence whether accurate or not become hard to dismiss.

For Bangladesh, the implications are sobering. Cricket is not merely a sport there; it is a source of national pride and international visibility. Being gradually excluded from meaningful bilateral engagement with India would reinforce a sense of marginalisation and resentment. It could also push Dhaka to recalibrate its regional alignments in ways New Delhi may not welcome.

More broadly, the episode highlights South Asia's chronic inability to compartmentalise. Politics bleeds into culture; culture into sport; sport into personal identity. This fusion makes reconciliation extraordinarily difficult. Unlike Europe, where sporting ties often survived even during political crises, South Asia tends to weaponise sport precisely because it matters so deeply.

Yet history offers a cautionary tale. Cricket diplomacy, for all its limitations, has at times helped defuse tension. Tours between India and Pakistan in the past created moments of human connection that official dialogues could not. Fans crossed borders, stereotypes softened and possibilities however fragile emerged. Abandoning that legacy altogether impoverishes the region.

If India and Bangladesh are reduced to meeting only in ICC tournaments at neutral venues, South Asia will have lost another channel of engagement. Such encounters, stripped of bilateral context, lack the depth and continuity needed to build trust. They also reinforce the idea that politics must always come first, and people last.

The real dilemma, then, is not whether politics influences cricket that has always been true but whether South Asia is willing to let politics destroy one of its few shared cultural spaces. Nationalism may win applause in the short term, but it rarely delivers long-term stability or respect.

Cricket administrators still have a choice. They can reaffirm merit, contracts and professionalism, or they can allow the sport to become an extension of political rivalry. Governments, too, can decide whether they want cricket boards to function as diplomatic tools or as custodians of a game loved across borders.

If the lesson of India-Pakistan cricket is anything to go by, prolonged disengagement creates no winners. Extending that model to Bangladesh would only multiply the region's losses. South Asia already suffers from too few bridges; tearing down another especially one built on shared passion would be an act of collective self-harm.

Cricket cannot solve South Asia's political dilemmas. But it can, if protected from ideological excess, remind the region of what it shares rather than what divides it. Losing that reminder would be far more damaging than any postponed tour or dropped player.

(Shahidul Alam Swapan is Switzerland-based Private Banking Financial Crime Expert, Columnist and Poet. He could be reached at: shahidul.alam@bluewin.ch)



Can Bangladesh Turn Into a Global Traveller Hotspot

Special Correspondent:

Bangladesh's tourism sector stands at a critical juncture, showing signs of recovery from the pandemic slump while grappling with persistent challenges that hinder its full potential. With rare natural beauty, cultural richness and growing domestic travel demand, the tourism industry is emerging as an important economic driver – but much more remains to be done to attract and retain global visitors.

Tourism Rebounding After the Pandemic

The impact of COVID-19 saw international travel plunge worldwide, and Bangladesh was no exception. In 2020, just about 1.82 lakh foreign tourists arrived in the country, a steep decline from the 6.21 lakh visitors recorded in 2019, according to data from the Bangladesh Tourism Board (BTB). However, as restrictions were lifted and travel regained momentum, international visitor numbers rebounded significantly. In 2022, around 5.29 lakh foreign tourists visited Bangladesh, and in 2023, this figure rose to approximately 6.5 lakh – the highest since pre-pandemic years.

Despite these improvements, Bangladesh still lags behind its regional counterparts in drawing international tourists. For

example, neighbouring Sri Lanka and the Maldives each attracted over a million visitors in recent years, far surpassing Bangladesh's totals.

A key driver of recent growth has been improved mobility and an increase in business travel and visits from non-resident Bangladeshis. According to insiders, the number of true leisure tourists remains relatively low, with an estimated 25,000-30,000 holidaymakers traveling purely for leisure in every year.

Government Targets and Long-Term Vision

To harness Bangladesh's tourism potential, the government and the Bangladesh Tourism Board have crafted a comprehensive Master Plan with ambitious targets. The plan aims to attract 5.57 million foreign tourists annually by 2041 and create nearly 22 million jobs across the sector through an estimated \$1.08 billion in combined public and private investment.

Under this roadmap, infrastructural upgrades such as improved road connectivity, reliable electricity and enhanced security are planned, alongside incentives for private developers to build hotels, resorts and recreational facilities. Key tourism clusters are being identified in strategic locations including Tangar Haor, Nijhum

Dweep, Sompur Mahavihara and coastal areas near the Padma Bridge.

A top official of the Bangladesh Tourism Board, emphasised the plan's role in promoting economic growth and employment. "We will assess the tourism potential in Bangladesh and establish essential facilities for both tourists and investors," he told the local media.

Domestic Tourism Booms

While international arrivals grow moderately, domestic tourism is booming and injecting vitality into the economy. According to travel and hospitality sources, around 2 crore (20 million) local tourists travel annually for leisure and recreation within Bangladesh.

Popular destinations such as Cox's Bazar – home to the world's longest natural sea beach – Saint Martin's Island, Kuakata, the Sundarbans, Sylhet's tea hills, Rangamati and Sajek Valley are all experiencing high demand from local visitors. Some destinations like Sajek Valley alone see between 25,000 to 30,000 tourists monthly, generating significant local revenue.

Tourism currently contributes an estimated 4.4% to Bangladesh's national GDP, supporting more than 1.14 million jobs directly and indirectly.

Challenges Remain Significant

Despite this positive momentum, multiple structural barriers continue to restrict Bangladesh's attractiveness to international travellers. Poor infrastructure, complex visa procedures, limited flight connectivity, and insufficient promotion of tourism attractions are cited by experts and operators alike.

Visa issues, in particular, pose a challenge. Although Bangladesh recently introduced streamlined visa processes, industry players argue that further reforms – such as e-visas and visa-on-arrival for more countries – are essential to boost tourism competitiveness.

Additionally, tourism earnings have not kept pace with visitor numbers. While the number of foreign tourists increased, revenue from tourism services saw only modest growth, and Bangladesh ranked near the bottom in South Asia in terms of tourism revenue, far behind industry leaders like India and Sri Lanka.

Safety, entertainment options, and food adaptation also remain concerns for some foreign visitors, according to sector insiders.

Voices from Government and Industry

A highly placed source in the Tourism Ministry, acknowledged the challenges but remained optimistic. "The tourism sector is showing signs of recovery and with targeted branding and enhanced facilities, we can attract a greater number of foreign travellers," he said, pointing to the country's rich portfolio of unique attractions.

Professor Santus Kumar Deb, Chairman of the Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management at the University of Dhaka, emphasised the need for international marketing. "Bangladesh has the world's longest sea beach, sprawling mangrove forests, and scenic highlands. However, we have not effectively branded these attractions internationally," he noted.

Tour operators also stress the importance of integrated development. "Bangladesh has enormous potential, but without proper global visibility and improved services, we will continue to lose out to competitors," said a senior executive at a leading inbound tour operator.

Looking Ahead: Opportunities and Innovation

To unlock further growth, government and private stakeholders are exploring digital

solutions, enhanced hospitality training, and public-private partnerships to diversify tourism offerings. Eco-tourism, cultural circuits, river tourism and adventure travel are seen as promising sub-sectors.

Improved regional cooperation, especially with neighbouring tourism hubs, is also expected to help. For instance, initiatives to promote cross-border circuits with India and Nepal could open new avenues for shared itineraries, while Bangladesh's unique destinations like the Sundarbans and ancient heritage sites offer niche appeal for eco and cultural tourism segments.

A Sector at a Crossroads

Bangladesh's tourism sector is clearly on an upward trajectory, with robust domestic travel and recovering international arrivals. However, transforming its vast potential into a competitive global tourism economy will require strategic planning, infrastructure investment, policy reform, and sustained promotional efforts. With the new tourism Master Plan and a growing private sector, Bangladesh's journey toward becoming a key destination in South Asia has truly begun – but the road ahead demands persistent effort, innovation, and collaboration.





Challenges Facing the Growth of Health Professionals in BD



Dr Mohammad Mizanur Rahman

Bangladesh has made commendable progress in many areas of healthcare over the past decades. Expanded medical colleges, increased numbers of physicians, and improvements in primary healthcare indicators deserve recognition. Yet, behind this progress lies a less discussed but critical issue: the underdevelopment and underutilization of non-physician health professionals. A modern healthcare system does not survive on doctors alone. It functions through a coordinated ecosystem of diverse, skilled professionals, each with distinct roles, expertise, and value.

In Bangladesh, professions such as physiotherapists, audiologists, optometrists, speech and language therapists, psychologists, microbiologists, pathologists, nutritionists, health technologists, diploma medical professionals, practitioners of alternative medicine, acupuncture specialists, and graduates of foreign medical or allied health systems continue

to face structural, regulatory, and social barriers. These challenges are not a reflection of their competence or necessity, but rather of policy gaps and professional imbalance within the healthcare system.

Healthcare today extends far beyond diagnosis and prescription. Chronic diseases, disability, aging populations, mental health conditions, rehabilitation needs, and preventive care demand specialized expertise. Physiotherapists are essential for rehabilitation after orthopedic injuries, strokes, neurological disorders, and post-surgical recovery. Without them, patients face prolonged disability and reduced quality of life. Audiologists play a vital role in diagnosing and managing hearing loss, speech delay, and balance disorders—particularly important for children and the elderly. Optometrists are primary eye care professionals trained to detect refractive errors, binocular vision problems, and early signs of eye disease,

reducing avoidable visual impairment and blindness. Speech and Language Therapists support children with developmental delays, stroke survivors, and patients with neurological or voice disorders. Psychologists are indispensable in addressing mental health challenges, stress-related disorders, learning difficulties, and behavioural conditions—areas increasingly recognized as public health priorities. Microbiologists and Pathologists form the backbone of accurate diagnosis, disease surveillance, infection control, and laboratory-based decision-making. Nutritionists guide disease prevention and management through diet, addressing malnutrition, diabetes, obesity, and lifestyle-related illnesses. Health Technologists ensure accurate diagnostics through imaging, laboratory testing, and advanced medical technology. Diploma Medical Professionals play a crucial role in primary and rural healthcare delivery, often serving communities where physicians are scarce. Alternative medicine and acupuncture practitioners, when regulated and evidence-informed, can complement conventional care, especially in pain management and chronic conditions.

Each of these professions addresses a specific dimension of health. Excluding or minimizing them weakens the entire system.

Globally, healthcare delivery is team-based. No single profession dominates; instead, collaborative practice ensures efficiency, safety, and patient-centred care. In many European countries and in North America, dentists are not medical doctors, yet they are fully recognized, regulated, and respected as independent health professionals. Similarly, optometrists, physiotherapists, psychologists, and other allied health professionals function autonomously within defined scopes of practice, working alongside physicians rather than under them.

Bangladesh has accepted dentistry (BDS) as a parallel professional stream, which is a positive example. However, other health professions have not received similar recognition, despite comparable international standards of education and practice. This selective acceptance creates professional inequality and limits healthcare capacity.

A common but unspoken challenge is professional resistance rooted in misunderstanding. For example, some orthopedic specialists may view physiotherapists as competitors rather than collaborators. Some ophthalmologists may feel uncomfortable

with the independent role of optometrists. In reality, these professions do not replace doctors; they complement them.

Healthcare roles are naturally separate yet interconnected. An orthopedic surgeon performs surgery; a physiotherapist restores function. An ophthalmologist manages ocular disease; an optometrist provides primary vision care and early detection. Clear role delineation reduces workload on physicians and improves patient outcomes. The assumption that only MBBS graduates can manage the healthcare system is neither practical nor supported by global evidence.

First, policy recognition is essential. Clear regulatory frameworks, councils,

tients should understand whom to consult and why. Trust grows when roles are transparent and outcomes are visible.

In Europe and the United States, healthcare systems rely heavily on allied health professionals. Doctors focus on diagnosis and complex decision-making, while other professionals deliver specialized care efficiently. This division of responsibility improves access, reduces costs, and enhances quality.

Bangladesh does not need to invent a new model; it can adapt proven ones to local needs.

The healthcare system is like the human body. Doctors may be the heart, but all health professionals together are the oxy-



and scopes of practice must be established and enforced for all health professions.

Second, interprofessional collaboration should be integrated into education and hospital practice. When students of medicine, physiotherapy, optometry, nursing, and psychology learn to work together early, professional respect naturally develops.

Third, public sector employment and career pathways must be expanded for non-physician professionals. Many qualified graduates remain underemployed or migrate abroad due to lack of opportunities at home.

Fourth, public awareness is crucial. Pa-

gen that keeps it alive. Progress does not come from dominance of one profession, but from mutual respect and collaboration among many.

Recognizing and empowering all health professionals is not a threat to doctors; it is a strength for the nation. A balanced, inclusive healthcare system will better serve patients, reduce system overload, and move Bangladesh closer to equitable and sustainable health for all.

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Mughal river forts that once defended Dhaka

Adnan Hadi

The importance of river fortification system in this riverine Bangladesh has been immense since ancient period. When the Mughals first came to this region of Bengal, they had to face multifaceted problems. On one hand, there was the indomitable Baro-Bhuyans, on the other hand, there was the hostile nature and the famous monsoon of Bengal. Along with this, there were diseases. Another worrying factor was the continuous attack by Arakanese (mordan Barma) and Portuguese pirates, who used to attack from the Bay of Bengal through the large rivers (Meghna and Brahmaputra). The Mughals, who rode horses from Central Asia, realised that in order to cee their empire in Bengal, they had to first secure their waterways.

River piracy was a grim reality in Bengal during the 16th and 17th centuries. One of its most tragic victims was the great Bengali poet of the 17th century Syed Alaol, who lost his father in a pirate attack while traveling by

river from Chittagong to Arakan. Alaol himself was captured during the same raid—an incident that reflects the widespread insecurity of Bengal's river routes at the time.

To counter these constant threats, the Mughal administration took strategic defensive measures. Idrakpur Fort was built in 1660 during the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb to protect key riverine regions, including Dhaka and Narayanganj. The fort served as a crucial outpost against attacks by Mughal rebel pirates and Harmad (Arakanese) pirates, helping secure vital trade and communication routes.

For centuries, the rivers of Bengal were not only lifelines of trade and communication but also corridors of terror. Arakanese, Mughal renegades and Portuguese pirates once occupied Sandwip and unleashed relentless violence across riverine Bengal, robbing and plundering riverside settlements at will. Night after night, fear deprived the people of sleep as pirate boats moved silently along the waterways.

Surrounded by an intricate network of

rivers, Bengal was especially vulnerable. The pirates struck mainly during the monsoon, when swollen rivers allowed easy access deep into the countryside. Under the cover of darkness, they attacked sleeping villages along the riverbanks, looting valuables, torching homes and leaving entire settlements in ruins. Survivors—men, women and even children—were dragged onto boats and kept below deck in suffocating darkness for days, given little more than a handful of rice to survive. Those who lived were sold or forced into slavery; those who died were discarded without a second thought. This was the grim reality of Bengal's riverside villages in the 16th and 17th centuries.

In 1610, Subedar Islam Khan, upon his first arrival in Bengal, shifted the capital from Rajmahal to Dhaka and focused on building a strong fleet. He also appointed Mir Bahar (Naval Commander) in the army.

It is said that within a decade the Mughals had built three forts on the banks of the rivers surrounding the city at strategic locations to protect the capital. Although there is ongoing debate as to whether Islam Khan actually built any forts, he may have started small and later improved them. The three main forts of Bengal's water defences are referred to as the "Triangle of Waterforts" and consist of the forts of Idrakpur, Sonakanda and Hajiganj.

Most of the forts built around Dhaka during the Mughal period for military purposes. It was designed and planned with defence in mind. In addition to the strong structure, a number of defences were added to form a kind of impenetrable and defensive tactics in the forts. first of all, its strategic position was given priority. Strategical position their fort was highly important in this case the first choice of the ruler was rivers, high mountains, valleys.

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The establishment of the capital in Dhaka by the Mughal subahdar Islam Khan in 1608, the security of the newly established city of Dhaka made the Mughal rulers think Considering the geographical importance of protecting the city of Dhaka, three forts were built at different times. The three forts: Idrakpur, Hajiganj fort and Sona Kanda fort which had a high Strategic importance as it stood on the Conjunction of three rivers which formed outlets for the pirates.

Mir Jumla's significant role to protect Dhaka

A notable figure of the seventeenth century Mir Jumla Was born in 1591 A.D Ardishtan of Ispahan in Iran. He began his life as a clerk under the Mughal administration. He later established himself as one of the best generals and most capable governors of the Mughal Empire. Being a businessman himself, he was aware of the contribution of trade and commerce to the economy of the country. During his time, Portuguese business declined, but Dutch and English companies flourished. He assisted European and foreign merchants in taking advantage of the royal decree MirJumla's construction activities in Dhaka included rapid deployment of troops, deployment of equipment and ammunition, and the construction of two forts and bridges for public welfare, as well as a number of forts in need of strategic defence. Some of the roads and forts built by Mir Jumla still exist.

Mir Jumla is remembered in the History of Bangladesh for Construction for Idrakpur fort in Munshiganj and Hajiganj in Narayan-

ganj. Historians have mentioned two cannons placed by Mir Jumla on the banks of the Buriganga to protect Dhaka from the Mughal pirates he placed it on the Moghlai Char in the river Buriganga, south of SoariGhat. Robert Lindsay (1891-1855), an East India Company official, wrote in his memoirs about the famous geographer Rennell and his memoirs about Kale Khan Zamzam. Due to the negligence of the British rulers, Kale Khan Zamzam sank in the river Buriganga in 1870 AD. However, according to experts, there is still a possibility of recovery. On his way back from Assam, Mir Jumla died on 1663 A.D at the age of 71 in a boat near Khizirpur. He was buried on a high hill near Garopahar of Meghalaya in India.

Triangle of Water forts (Idrakpur, Hajiganj and Sona Kanda)

Idrakpur Fort was the first fort built in the "Triangle of Water forts". Idrakpur fort built during the Mughal period is still in existence in the town of Munsigonj on the right (south) bank of the river Ichhamati

now extinct and after being merged with the river Dhaleswari.

This fort is slightly smaller than the Sona Kanda fort of the Narayanganj district. The eastern part of this fort is semi-circular and the western part is rectangular. The surrounding walls are made of bricks and are quite low now-at places particularly in the north side it is about 1.21 metres (4') high only. Originally the walls including the north wall were quite high. But as the entire surrounding land due to the gradual process of silting up has risen high the wall have lost their original height.

There is a large circular drum having a diameter of about 26 meters (66') surrounded by very high walls most probably built for strengthening the construction of the fort. The circular drum was used as a bastion for placing large cannon with long ranges. The residential house of the Sub-divisional Officer was built during the British period.

The fort is known as Idrakpur. It is generally known to have been built by Mir



Jumla in the year 1660 A.D. This fort was for preventing the attack of the Arakanese and Portuguese pirates who used to commit atrocities on the people of Bengal. Excavations were carried out at the fort by the Department of Archaeology in the financial year 2015-16 excavations exposed platforms cooling jars, drainage ditches, arsenals and other artifacts.

Sonakanda fort which is located to the north-east and not far off from this fort was also built for this purpose along with many other forts in Bengal. Idrakpur fort has since been handed over to the Department of Archaeology

The fort has a quadrangular rampart wall with a central courtyard in the east and a raised artillery platform on the west overlooking the river shaped like a round drum with a considerably large diameter. Large cannons were mounted in this strategic position.

The quadrangular portion covers an area of 86.56m x 57.0m, and the only entrance is located to the north. The fort is built with brick and covered with plaster. The brick size is 19.05 x 9.89 x 3.81cm.

The entrance gateway is placed within a rectangular frame with rosette engraved spandrel and several plastered panels in its inner and outer walls.

Hajiganj Fort also known as Khizirpur Fort is situated at Hajiganj locality of Narayanganj on the western bank of the Sitalakshya River. It is a water fort and it was built just at the point where the old Buriganga discharged into the Sitalakshya. It may have been built soon after Subadar Islam Khan established the Mughal capital at Dhaka and it was intended to counter the raids of the Magh and Portuguese pirates.

The architectural design of the fort refers to the Muslim architectural design. It is quadrangular in size, consists of a pen-

tagonal curtain wall machicolated for muskets with rounded corner. On the inner side of the curtain wall there is 1.22m high rampart walkway from the base of the curtain wall which is itself pierced by several musketry holes.

This could have been a superb tourist spot for the local and international tourists. But our government is nonchalant about this spot like any other archaic edifices from Bangladesh. They have declared the custody of this fort on them, and that's it. After that, they didn't do anything for it. Due to the lack of proper care and maintenance, the fort is perishing day by day. Local boys play here at day time and at night the fort is occupied by the drug addicted and muggers.

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