



**B1**  
Bangladesh's cotton import likely to drop



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Ukrainian orphans demand return of others held in Russia



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Shashwta breaks out from 'Bkasher Nahid' moniker



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A 'festival' of tree felling

## Cash-strapped Islami Bank lends to AnonTex

MD MEHEDI HASAN

Distressed Islami Bank has approved a Tk 700 crore loan to a concern of AnonTex Group, one of the five large borrowers of Janata Bank that has been enjoying undue facilities despite making negligible repayment in 13 years.

The loan was approved to the AnonTex concern Shob Meher Spinning Mills at the 1997th meeting of the executive committee of Islami Bank that was held on August 24, according to meeting minutes.

This comes after AnonTex, an export-oriented garment manufacturer founded in 2004, managed a major favour the previous month from Janata Bank -- a possibly unwitting move by the state lender that paved the way for this fresh loan from Islami.

In November last year, the Janata board extended a Tk 3,359.19 crore interest waiver to AnonTex on the condition that it pays back the principal amount within June 15 this year. Otherwise, the loans will be shown as classified.

At the end of 2022, AnonTex's liabilities to Janata stood at Tk 7,726 crore, which is 334 percent of the bank's paid-up capital -- and overshoots the state-owned commercial bank's single borrower exposure limit by a wide margin.

AnonTex, whose website boasts British brands Tesco and New Look and Spain's Zara as clients and \$150 million as annual turnover, failed to repay the sum.

The loans were not classified; rather, AnonTex was given until the end of the year to clear its liabilities to Janata -- while the loans remain unclassified.

As per the Bank Company (Amendment) Act 2023, an entity cannot get fresh credit if it has defaulted on its loans anywhere.

Shob Meher Spinning Mills has Tk 105 crore outstanding with Janata, according to Md Younus (Badal), managing director and chairman of AnonTex Group -- and is part of the amount due by December 31.

Previously, under the Bank Company Act 1991, default by any concern or director of a group would lead to the entire group becoming ineligible for fresh loan facilities. This was modified in the much-criticised Bank Company (Amendment) Act 2023 such that only the defaulting concern or the individual would be barred from getting fresh loans and not the entire group.

Asked why Islami agreed to fresh credit to a known problematic borrower when it is dealing with enormous problems of its own, Mohammed Monirul Moula, its managing director and chief executive officer, said: "The loan sanctioning is still in process, so I cannot share further details right now. But the company is absolutely eligible for the loan."

Documents show that Islami Bank's Foreign Exchange Corporate Branch at Dilkusha has already disbursed Tk 140 crore to Shob Meher Spinning Mills until September 7.

"I am not sure if [Islami] has approved the [Tk 700 crore] loan," the AnonTex MD Younus told The Daily Star yesterday.

The loan would serve as working capital for Shob Meher Spinning Mills, which was established in 2016, and was solicited a while back after Janata suspended working capital loans for AnonTex, he said.

"We have been banking with Islami Bank for Shob Meher Spinning Mills for a long time as Janata provided NOC (no-objection certificate) to us for doing business with another bank," Younus added.

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## WALKWAY TO STOP ENCROACHMENT DISAPPEARS

The two photos of the same place on the bank of the Turag next to Aminbazar Bridge on the edge of the capital were taken four years apart. The walkway on the bank seen in the 2019 photo has been wiped out as seen in the photo taken last week. Cargo vessels illegally using the place as a jetty and encroachment by traders are to blame for this, say locals.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

## Dhaka airport to finally get a second runway

Construction to begin next year

RASHIDUL HASAN

The government has plans to build a second runway at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport as air traffic is projected to increase after construction of the third terminal is done.

However, the runways will be very close to each other, due to space constraints, and two planes will not be able to land or take off simultaneously.

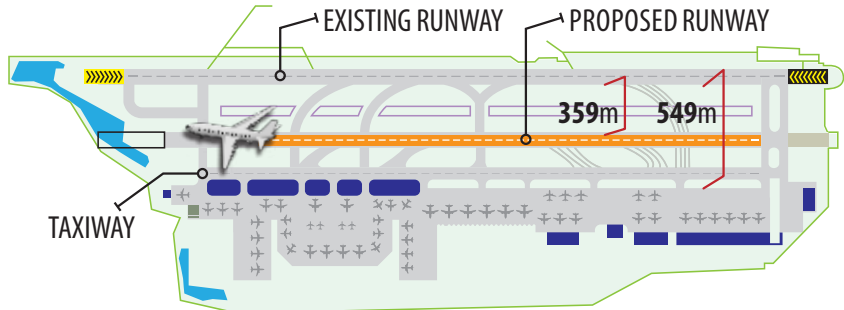
According to a top official of a foreign airlines, now planes often have to wait in queues on the taxiway for 30 to 40 minutes during take-offs. Landing also gets delayed sometimes because of air traffic at the HSLA.

"The long wait makes it hard for us to maintain flight schedules and it increases operational costs," says the official.

When the third terminal is opened,

the frequency of flights will increase, and the situation will worsen. "This is why Dhaka airport needs a second independent runway."

of Bangladesh (CAAB) has done a feasibility study on the second runway and presented its findings to the civil aviation ministry in July.



Aviation experts say the growing air traffic and the number of passengers can best be handled if both the runways could be used simultaneously.

The Civil Aviation Authority

Physical work on the second runway is likely to begin after construction of the third terminal is complete in May next year.

"Once the third terminal is in use,

passenger handling capacity will significantly rise, new airlines will begin operating here, and many more people will use the airport every day," says CAAB Chairman Air Vice Marshal M Mafidur Rahman.

At least 12 foreign airlines have sought permission to operate flights to and from Dhaka.

Besides, Emirates and Kuwait Airways have sent applications to CAAB for increasing their number of flights.

As to why a simultaneously usable runway is not being considered, Mafidur says there is not enough room at the HSLA.

Runways should be at least 1,035 metres apart for planes to take off or land simultaneously using Instrument Landing System (ILS), according to rules set by the International Civil Aviation Authority.

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## India's 8th or 7th for Sri Lanka?

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

India will have an eye on extending their record haul while Sri Lanka would want to get level with the Indians when they square off in the final of the Asia Cup in Colombo today.

The match is scheduled to kick off at the R Premadasa Stadium at 3:30pm Bangladesh time.

India, the record eight-time champions, had an unflustered run to the final of the competition before a reality check against Bangladesh in a largely inconsequential final Super Four match against Bangladesh on Friday.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5



Construction workers with no safety gear are building a footbridge over Dhaka-Aricha highway near Savar Bank Town. In the absence of regulation, such unnecessary risk-taking is all too common in Bangladesh.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## Road march will go on until the govt resigns Says Fakhrul in Rangpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir has said that the youth road march will continue until the government steps down.

He was speaking at a rally in front of the party office at Rangpur city's Grand Hotel intersection yesterday morning before the start of a road march to Dinajpur.

Three pro-BNP bodies -- Jubo Dal, Swachhchasebak Dal and Chhatra Dal -- organised the programme to press home the party's one point demand -- resignation of the government and general elections under a non-party interim government.

Fakhrul demanded parliamentary polls under a neutral interim government after the reformation of the Election Commission.

"People don't want to see any more elections like those of 2014 and 2018."

Accusing the Awami League of committing electoral irregularities, he said not only BNP but also the other political parties have said that no fair election is possible under the incumbent government.



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## UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY PM leaves for New York today

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will leave Dhaka for New York this morning to attend the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA 78).

A VVIP flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines carrying the PM and her entourage members is scheduled to depart Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport at 9:45am, said officials.

The flight is scheduled to touch down at the JFK International Airport at 10:50pm (New York time) on September 17 after a four-hour stopover at the Heathrow Airport in London.

Bangladesh Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN Muhammad Abdul Muhith and Bangladesh Ambassador to the US Muhammad Imran will receive the PM at the airport.

During her stay in New York from September 17-22, Hasina will attend the first day of the high-level general debate session of the UNGA 78 on September 19. She will address the General Assembly on September 22.

The PM has also been invited to join a dinner hosted by US President Joe Biden on September 19.

On the sidelines of the UNGA session, she will attend a number of high-level side events, including those on Rohingya and climate change, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), universal health, and finance.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen on Thursday said the PM in her address at the General Debate will highlight Bangladesh's inclusive economic progress, success in the health sector and issues like global peace, security, safe migration, Rohingya crisis and climate justice.

The world leaders will gather in New York to attend the UNGA 78.

Hasina is expected to deliver a keynote speech at a high-level conference titled "Thought for Food -- Collaborating for Food Supply Chain Innovation to Accelerate the SDGs" at Rockefeller Centre in New York on September 18.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 7



PHOTO: REUTERS

An aerial view of destroyed houses after a powerful storm and heavy rainfall hit Libya, in Derna, Libya September 16, 2023.

## Poland, Hungary, Slovakia keep bans on Ukraine grains

Russia denies losing front-line village to Kyiv forces

REUTERS, Brussels

Poland, Slovakia and Hungary will impose their own restrictions on Ukrainian grain imports, the governments said on Friday, after the European Commission decided not to extend a ban affecting Ukraine's five EU neighbours.

Restrictions imposed by the European Union in May allowed Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia to ban domestic sales of Ukrainian wheat, maize, rapeseed and sunflower seeds, while permitting transit of such cargoes for export elsewhere.

Meanwhile, Russia yesterday denied a Ukrainian claim to have recaptured the devastated eastern village of Andriivka, a stepping stone on the way to the town of Bakhmut.

"The enemy did not abandon plans to capture the city of Artyomovsk [Bakhmut] of the Donetsk People's Republic and continued to conduct assault operations ... unsuccessfully trying to oust Russian troops from the population centres of Klishchiivka and Andriivka," the Russian defence ministry said in its daily briefing.

Reuters was unable to verify the battlefield reports.

On Ukrainian grain, Polish PM Mateusz Morawiecki said "We will extend this ban despite their disagreement, despite the European Commission's disagreement,". "We will do it because it is in the interest of the Polish farmer."

**"We will extend this ban despite their disagreement, despite the European Commission's disagreement. We will do it because it is in the interest of the Polish farmer."**

— Polish PM Mateusz Morawiecki

Polish development minister Waldemar Buda said in a post on social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter, that he had signed the Polish ban regulation, which would run for an indefinite period of time from midnight.

Hungary imposed a national import ban on 24 Ukrainian agricultural products, including grains, vegetables, several meat products and honey, according to a government decree published on Friday.

Slovakia's agriculture minister followed

suit announcing its own grain ban. All three bans only apply to domestic imports and do not affect transit to onward markets.

EU Trade Commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis said on Friday countries should refrain from unilateral measures against imports of Ukrainian grain. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said it would respond in a "civilised fashion" if EU members break the rules.

The EU created alternative land routes, so-called Solidarity Lanes, for Ukraine to use to export its grains and oilseeds after Russia, which invaded in 2022, backed out of a UN-brokered Black Sea grain deal in July that allowed safe passage for the cargo ships.

The EU Commission said existing measures would expire as originally planned on Friday after Ukraine agreed to introduce any legal measures (including, for example, an export licensing system) within 30 days to avoid grain surges.

"It has concluded that thanks to the work of the Coordination Platform and to the temporary measures introduced on 2 May 2023, the market distortions in the 5 Member States bordering Ukraine have disappeared," the European Commission said in a statement.

## Dhaka airport

FROM PAGE 1

CAAB Chief Engineer Abdul Malek said the ILS – that help guide planes land on a runway – cannot be used on both runways simultaneously as they may interfere with each other. But a visual approach can be done.

Mafidur said the planned new runway's advantage is when one plane lands, another will be able to prepare for take off without delay.

Besides, if one runway is closed due to an emergency, the other will be available, explains the CAAB chairman.

The CAAB is also working to make optimum utilisation of the resources to handle the additional number of planes and passengers.

"When Dubai airport started operation, it handled 50 million flyers a year with a single runway. It was possible through efficient management. We handle only 8 million. If we can develop infrastructure and management, we will be able to serve many more passengers with the current runway.

"We have built two high-speed taxiways. We are setting up a highly sophisticated air traffic management system so that planes can go to the apron very quickly after landing and reduce the time the next plane has to wait to use the runway," says the CAAB chief, adding that the number of boarding bridges will also be increased.

With the third terminal, the annual passenger handling capacity of the HSI will reach 20 million.

Currently, 33 airlines operate 150 flights from the airport each day.

Aviation expert ATM Nazrul Islam says, "The airport should have had space for two independent runways. Not leaving the space was a big mistake."

NEW RUNWAY

Currently, the taxiway and the runway are separated by about 549 metres. The new runway will be between the runway and the taxiway. The two runways will be separated by about 359 metres, according to documents obtained by this paper.

The existing runway will also be extended to 3,692 metres – 400 metres to the south and 92 metres to the north.

The 2nd runway will be 3,292 metres long.

## Cash-strapped Islami Bank lends to AnonTex

FROM PAGE 1

Regardless, fresh loan facility to a known errant borrower of the banking sector raises questions about the lending discipline at Islami, which is mired in a liquidity crisis.

"This is simply a lack of due diligence by the bank," said Mohammed Nurul Amin, former chairman of the Association of Bankers, Bangladesh, a platform of bank MDs and CEOs.

When a bank is not maintaining due diligence while approving loans, it is safe to say that the corporate governance is very poor, he said.

"A bank cannot lend to a defaulted business group in any way. When it happens, it is a bad signal," said Amin, who previously served as the MD and CEO of Meghna Bank and NCC Bank.

What is more concerning is that the episode took place when Islami Bank already had a central bank-appointed observer since December last year following allegations of violation of banking rules in the

disbursement of large volumes of loans.

Md Sarwar Hossain, the central bank's current observer at Islami, declined to comment on the issue of loan approval to AnonTex.

So acute is the liquidity crisis that the bank, which is the country's largest private lender, failed to maintain the minimum levels of cash and liquidity for the most part in the first half of the year.

Subsequently, it was slapped with a fine of Tk 162 crore by the Bangladesh Bank. The strapped bank failed to pay. It has been given until September to furnish the sum.

Not only that, it has been taking liquidity support from the BB in the last several months. On December 29, the last working day of 2022, it took Tk 8,000 crore from the central bank under a special arrangement to meet its immediate liquidity needs.

Md Mezbaul Haque, the BB spokesman, could not be reached for comment.

## 12 foreign airlines want to serve HSI

FROM PAGE 1

Four Bangladeshi airlines and 28 foreign ones operate flights to and from Dhaka.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is scheduled to soft-launch the third terminal on October 7, CAAB Chairman Air Vice Marshal M Mafidur Rahman said.

The civil aviation ministry recently has initiated the signing of bilateral agreements with Mauritius, South Africa, the Czech Republic, Spain, Latvia, Cyprus, Guyana, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Kenya, Brunei, Seychelles, Lebanon, Turkmenistan, Algeria, and Switzerland.

The ministry has also upgraded agreements with Canada, Qatar, Libya, Azerbaijan, Germany, Malaysia, Iraq, Australia, Luxembourg,

Uzbekistan, Morocco, China, Indonesia, and Cambodia.

The CAAB chairman said the foreign airlines seeking to operate flights from Dhaka will be given permission in phases once the third terminal is fully opened.

The annual passenger handling capacity of the airport will reach two crore when the terminal is done.

HSIA can currently handle 80 lakh passengers a year. But the number of passengers is expected to reach 1.4 crore by 2025 and over 2.4 crore by 2035, according to experts.

On a typical day, around 30,000 passengers use the airport and around 130 flights are operated. More than one crore

## Road march

FROM PAGE 1

The BNP secretary general stressed the need for an independent and impartial EC to ensure the voting rights of the people.

He urged the people not to return home until their demand is met.

Talking about the treatment of ailing BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, Fakhrul said, "I visited Khaleda Zia Friday night. Her health is not well. She needs urgent treatment abroad."

He said though AL leaders have been going abroad for treatment time and again, the government is not allowing Khaleda to travel abroad for advanced treatment.

The BNP leader expressed concern over harassing party acting chairperson Tarique Rahman by bringing false allegations against him.

The 80km road march, led by Fakhrul, ended in Dinajpur truck terminal area after the road march reached there around 5:00pm.

On the way to Dinajpur, the convoy of the three organisations stopped in Saidpur bus terminal area where Fakhrul briefly addressed a rally.

Hundreds of people from the northern districts attended the road march.

## Lee weakens to post-tropical cyclone, nears Atlantic coast

REUTERS, Shelburne

The Lee storm system weakened into a post-tropical cyclone as it closed in on New England and Atlantic Canada yesterday, producing hurricane-force winds that knocked out power to more than 100,000 people.

The US National Hurricane Center (NHC) said in its latest advisory that Lee would make landfall on Saturday and was about 185 miles (365 km) south-southwest of Halifax Nova Scotia, with maximum sustained winds of 80 mph (130 km/h).

Strong winds, coastal flooding and heavy rains were already occurring in parts of New England and Atlantic Canada, it added.

In the Canadian province of Nova Scotia, more than 100,000 people were without power early on Saturday

after high winds brought down trees. In neighboring New Brunswick, 36,000 people had no electricity.

"Crews have been able to restore power to some customers ... however, conditions are getting worse. In many cases, especially when winds are above 80 km/h, it isn't safe for our crews," said Matt Drover of the Nova Scotia electric utility.

Winds have reached over 100 km/h in parts of the west and over 90 km/h in downtown Halifax, the largest city in the province, he said in a statement. Halifax airport was closed to all flights.

Earlier, the Canadian Hurricane Center projected Lee would make landfall in Nova Scotia some time after 3:00 pm ADT (1800 GMT) or later in New Brunswick with winds below hurricane force.

## India's 8th or 7th for Sri Lanka?

FROM PAGE 1

The six-run defeat, where India rested five of their key players against a Bangladesh team who themselves had rested a number of their regular starters, will provide food for thought to the team management regarding their bench strength. Apart from Shubman Gill, who scored a blazing century, Indian batting struggled against Bangladesh's pace and spin.

The injury to all-rounder Axar Patel would definitely add to their worries as the men in blue look to win the continental title for the first time since 2018 and get a boost for next month's World Cup.

Talking about injuries, no other team has been so beset by injuries to key players like Sri Lanka. The defending champions started the tournament without their four frontline bowlers, including the talismanic Hasaranga de Silva. Now on the eve of the final, they have lost their premier spinner in Maheesh Theekshana, but cricket followers

would know that the Lankans are at their best in the face of adversity.

Not many people would have bet for Sri Lanka getting into the final, but as has often happened in the past, the islanders seem to have punched above their weight this time too, winning the key moments in crunch situations.

This being the sixth match in nine days, the pitch might be on the slower side and offering turn to the spinners. However, overhead conditions might have a bigger say on the proceedings than the surface, with rain predicted for both Sunday and the reserve day, Monday, the second reserve day of the tournament after the one for the Super Four encounter between India and Pakistan.

While many would have liked to see India and Pakistan playing in the final of the Asia Cup for the first time, the India versus Sri Lanka contest should throw in an exciting contest too, especially given Sri Lanka's track record in this year's competition.



### REQUIREMENTS

YOUR NID

NOMINEE'S INFO

NOMINEE'S PHOTO

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ABUL MANSUR AHMAD

## A sentinel of free speech, change

Discussants say at an event marking his centenary of journalism

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A man of multiple talents, Abul Mansur Ahmad took up journalism to speak for the downtrodden, especially for the welfare of farmers. Transformation and welfare of the society was his main consideration, academics and journalists said yesterday.

With his unique sense of responsibility toward society, Mansur, a versatile genius, was a sentinel of freedom of speech and change, they said while speaking at a programme marking the centenary of journalism of Abul Mansur Ahmad, also an eminent litterateur and politician of his time.

The Abul Mansur Ahmad Smriti Parishad organised the programme “Centenary of Abul Mansur Ahmad’s Journalism and Essay Competition Awards” at Dhaka University’s Muzaffar Ahmed Chowdhury Auditorium.

Abul Mansur Ahmed started his

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Dhaka University Professor Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury (centre) with other discussants and the recipients of the “Centenary of Abul Mansur Ahmad’s Journalism and Essay Competition Awards”. The awards ceremony took place at the Muzaffar Ahmed Chowdhury Auditorium in the Faculty of Social Science Building at DU yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## JP will go to polls alone

Says GM Quader

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Jatiya Party Chairman yesterday said his party is taking preparation to contest the next polls, independently.

“JP has decided to nominate candidates for 300 seats in the upcoming national election. Nominations will be given to corruption free leaders,” he said while addressing the bi-annual conference of the Lalmonirhat District Jatiya Party at the Lalmonirhat Railway Officers Club.

Criticising the Digital Security Act, GM Quader said, “People have been deprived of their right to free thought because of this.”

“The present government is heading towards one-party rule in the country and killing democracy,” he added.

“Whoever has come to power since 1990 has conspired to destroy the Jatiya Party.” This administration is also attempting to weaken us. But no one could ever erase

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

## LEAD POISONING

# A threat to children’s cognitive abilities: WB study

Causes 140,000 cardiovascular disease-related deaths among adults

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Lead pollution is causing cognitive deficiency among children and fatal cardiovascular diseases among adults in Bangladesh, according to a World Bank report.

The report estimates that the level of harm due to lead exposure is far greater than previous estimations.

The Lancet Planetary Health journal on Tuesday published the World Bank’s study titled “Global health burden and cost of lead exposure in children and adults: a health impact and economic modeling analysis”.

According to the study, lead pollution in Bangladesh has serious implications for children below five years of age, causing a loss of over 20 million (20,596,306) IQ points, and a very high economic cost of \$10,897 million, which is 3.6 percent of the country’s annual GDP.

About 140,000 (138,054) cardiovascular disease (CVD) related deaths among adults aged 25 years or older due to lead exposure exceeded the previous estimation with a four times higher mortality rate.

The combined cost of these health effects was US\$ 28,633 million which is a loss of six to nine percent of the country’s GDP in 2019.



In Bangladesh, the major sources of lead exposure include used-lead acid battery recycling in informal settings, lead in paints, aluminium cookware, ceramic food ware, spices, toys, cosmetics, food, electronic waste, fertilisers, and cultured fish feed.

“We may not see it, taste it or smell it, and early symptoms may be hard to identify, but we know that exposure to lead can have devastating consequences on a child’s health, learning and development,” said Sheldon Yett, Unicef representative to Bangladesh.

“When children are not able to reach their full potential, this is a tragedy not only for these specific children but their entire communities,” she added.

She called for national-level surveillance

and assessments of possible contaminants in households to identify lead exposure.

“Decorative and industrial paints still contain high lead levels, while several national and multinational companies still do not meet the accepted standards,” said Dr Shahrar Hossain, Secretary General of Eco-Social Development Organization.

He said there is a lot to do to protect the future generation from the effects of lead poisoning.

He said the implementation of existing laws, and maintaining industrial paint standards are crucial in this regard. He also said implementing polluter-pay principles will help to curb industrial-level pollution.

Continuous advocacy and multi-sectoral actions involving various stakeholders are also needed,” he added.

Dr Md Mahbubur Rahman, project coordinator of WASH, Health System and Population Studies Division, International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr,b) said, “Our continuous research and accumulation of substantial evidence enabled us to realise the magnitude of the lead pollution in Bangladesh. It is high time to design interventions taking

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

## Three members of new militant outfit arrested

They planned terror attack in 2024, say cops

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police have arrested three members, including the chief, of a new militant outfit Tawhidul Uluhiyah (Al-Jihadi) from Dhaka and other parts of the country.

The arrestees – chief Jewel Molla, 29, members Rahul Hossain, 21, and Gaziul Islam, 40 – had a plan to carry out terror attacks in the country in 2024, according to the Anti-Terrorism Unit (ATU) of police.

They were arrested from Bagerhat, Joypurhat and Dhaka in separate drives conducted by ATU personnel in the last four days.

“The outfit started its activities two to three months ago. Their plan was to launch a major terror attack in the country in 2024,” Abdul Alim, deputy inspector general (operations) of ATU, said during a press briefing at the ATU headquarters in the capital’s Baridhara yesterday.

The ATU came to know that the outfit has so far collected around 80-90 members, he said.

“We have been getting information that some radical people including former members of militant outfits, who do not believe in the democratic system of the country, are regrouping over the past few months with a new goal.”

They were collecting new members through social media. The founder and chief leader of this outfit is Jewel, a former bakery worker who later

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## Social movement needed to ensure equal rights

Say speakers on minority issues

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A social movement is needed to combat communalism and fundamentalism in the country, said Hindu community leaders yesterday.

They also questioned as to how the country had become so communal, despite the fact that a pro-Liberation War government is in power.

They were addressing Jubo Karmashala, a workshop for Hindu youths, organised by Bangladesh Puja Udjapan Parishad, at the capital’s Dhakeshwari National Temple.

“Our struggle is not to survive as a minority community. Rather, we are striving to ensure equal rights and dignity,” said lawyer Rana Dasgupta, general secretary of Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Oikya Parishad.

He also questioned, “How many perpetrators, who were involved in attacking minorities, have so far been tried?”

Rana Dasgupta urged all the political parties not to conduct any political programmes during the five-day-long Durga Puja, the largest religious festival of the Hindu community to be celebrated next month.

Rana Dasgupta also called upon all the political parties not to use minorities as “chess pieces”.

Eminent economist Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya commented that Bangladesh’s constitution has been

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



It is a pleasant sight to see dinghies with colourful sails in the Buriganga, a river where engine-run boats have become a common phenomenon. The photo was taken at the Gudara Ghat in the capital’s Mill Barrack area.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## DU launches research fund

DU CORRESPONDENT

The authorities of Dhaka University yesterday launched “The Dhaka University Fund” to mobilise resources for its research and academic development.

On the first day, around Tk 1.11 crore was received by the DU authorities from four donors: DU Alumni Association, PHP Family, Universal Medical College and Popular Medical College Hospitals, said DU Vice-Chancellor Prof Md Akhtaruzzaman after inaugurating the initiative at a press conference.

Donations will be received from DU alumni, rich and well established individuals, renowned institutions, philanthropists, and education and research enthusiasts, said DU authorities.

Thanking the donors, the DU VC expressed optimism that it would be possible to increase this fund to at least Tk 1,000 crores if everyone comes forward.





Skating has become popular among the young people of Sylhet who are often seen enjoying the sport in groups, especially during weekends. However, due to a lack of facilities, skaters have to take to the streets among speeding vehicles which poses a serious risk of accidents. The photo was taken on the city's Airport Road recently.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

## 42,000

FROM PAGE 5  
of USDA's assistance, coinciding with the government's preparations for the upcoming national school feeding program, the press release added.

They visited several schools in Cox's Bazar and Ukhiya under the WFP programme, inspected the WFP warehouse in Chattogram, and toured a biscuit production facility in Khulna.

Dom Scalpelli, Country Director of WFP Bangladesh, emphasised the significance of school feeding, saying, school feeding is more than just filling the empty stomachs of hungry children.

It is a sound strategy to combat child hunger and poor nutrition, promoting good eating habits among children and improving livelihood opportunities for their communities, he added.

## JP will go

FROM PAGE 3  
the JP... the Langol symbol, from people's hearts," he noted.

Jatiya Party's Secretary General Mujibul Haque Chunnu Additional Secretary General Advocate Rezaul Islam Bhuiyan, Co-Chairman Syed Abu Hossain Babla MP, and other senior leaders also spoke at the event.

GM Quader's wife Sherifa Quader and d Jahid Hasan Limon were selected as the president and general secretary of Lalmonirhat District JP respectively.

**ফ্র্যাট বিক্রয়**  
গুলশান-২নং এ শাভা প্রপার্টিজের  
ভৈরী অভ্যাসনিক, লাক্সারিয়াস একদম  
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বিক্রয়। যোগাযোগ করুন ০১৭৯৮০০০০৭৭

## Three members

FROM PAGE 3  
joined militant outfit Ansarullah Bangla Team after being inspired by its leader Jasim Uddin Rahmani's speech.

Jewel was in prison for nine months after he was arrested by Rab. During this time, he planned on starting his own outfit.

Jewel also planned to free ABT leader Jasim, who is currently serving his sentence, from prison, the official said, adding that their financiers are yet to be known.

"We first arrested Jewel from Rampal in

Bagerhat. Later, based on information provided by him, the remaining two top leaders were arrested. During their detention, eight banners of this new outfit were seized."

The two other arrestees were previously members of militant outfit Hizbut Tawheed, he said.

Asked whether they had any plan to launch terror attack during upcoming national election, the DIG said, "We will question them in this regard. However, there is no information in this regard yet."

## Narsingdi road

FROM PAGE 5  
9:45pm on Friday, said Easin Ikbal, station officer of Fire Service and Civil Defence office in Belabo upazila.

The injured were taken to a local hospital and the bodies were sent to Narsingdi Sadar Hospital for autopsy, he told our Narsingdi correspondent.

The deceased were identified as Dolona

Begum,55, wife of Abul Kashem of Bakhornagar in Raipura and her grandsons Arian, 7, and Rana,18, who hailed from Belabo upazila.

All six victims were auto-rickshaw passengers, added the fire service official.

Safar Uddin, in charge of Bhairab Highway Police, said no one was arrested in this regard. The process to file a case against the alleged bus driver is underway.

## We believe in people

FROM PAGE 3  
He said various ill attempts are being made to halt the country's progress, adding that despite all odds, Bangladesh's economy has progressed a lot.

Highlighting the present government's endeavour to change the people's fate, he said: "When we assumed power, the poverty rate was 28 percent. Currently, it is 5 percent. Insha Allah, it will be zero in 2040. Significant success will be achieved in 2030. Literacy rate will be cent percent by 2040."

About the role of the

industrial police in the country, he said the industrial police has created a bridge between the owners and workers in the factory sector.

"The industrial police managed to convince the workers that these factories belonged to them. If the factory is damaged, it is also harmful to them. The idea of this industrial police came from the mind of the prime minister," he added.

Later, the home minister attended a rally of the Awami League at Railgate number-2 area of the city.

## A threat

FROM PAGE 3  
the evidence into account to mitigate the problem at the source."

Dr Mahfuzar Rahman, Bangladesh country director, Pure Earth, said preventing lead exposure has become a top priority considering its profound health and economic impact.

"Pure Earth's Rapid market analysis of about 200 items in three districts showed the widespread sources of lead in daily commodities such as metallic and ceramic food ware, paint, rice/starch, and toys, posing potentially serious health risks. Strict regulations and increased investment are imperative to further research and implement risk reduction strategies," he added.

The study recommended a 10-point action plan to address the lead pollution crisis, which includes analysing the lead sources and designing source-specific interventions, building blood lead level surveillance, taking multi-sectoral efforts, increasing monitoring, reviewing the existing policy and enforcing laws and regulations, remediating toxic sites, building capacity of the stakeholders to mitigate the issue, and raising awareness at the national level.

## Social

FROM PAGE 3  
"communalised" through different amendments.

Social movement must be launched and strengthened to restore the spirit of non-communalism in the country, he viewed.

S w a m i Purnatmanandaji Maharaj, principal of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission in Dhaka, said efforts are going on to make Bangladesh free from minorities.

Bangladesh Puja Uddjapan Parishad General Secretary Prof Chandranath Podder, and several other minority community leaders, among others, spoke at the event chaired by the parishad President JL Bhowmick.

Earlier on Friday night, in a separate programme, Rana Dasgupta had said the country's minority people play the role of catalyst in determining the electoral results in at least 100 constituencies in the national election, according to a press release.

Based on this calculation, the political parties should play their roles before polls, he said.

Rana Dasgupta came up with the statement while addressing a meeting of Dhaka city unit (north) of Hindu Buddhist Christian Oikya Parishad at Tejgaon Polytechnic Institute auditorium.

# Catimon mango brings year-round cultivation prospects

BSS, Rajshahi

"Catimon", a mango variety of Thailand, is creating a scope to produce mangoes throughout the year in Rajshahi region, including its vast Barind tract, breaking the existing record of around three and half months of harvesting season of the delicious fruit from May to mid-August.

Experts said the trees of this exotic variety contains mangoes and flowers or buddings simultaneously, producing yield three to four times in a year against the single yield from the conventional varieties.

Umme Salma, district training officer of Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), said Catimon mango is being cultivated on around 15 hectares of land in Rajshahi.

As a result of taking care of the trees regularly, there is an exceptional yield of the fruits and the mangoes are being sold at a high price. For this reason, more farmers are interested in cultivating the variety, she said.

Many growers have also raised nurseries alongside their orchards for selling Catimon saplings amid the increasing demand, she added.

This mango is not like the seasonal varieties of mango but it is tasty and sweet and has a high demand in the market compared to other varieties, the DAE official also said.

Normally, mango harvesting and marketing take place from mid-May to mid-August in the region.

However, the Catimon variety is still available in the local markets, and are being sold at Tk 8,000 per maund at present (Tk 200 per kg). One kilogramme contains four to five mangoes.

Dr Shafiqul Islam, principal scientific officer of Regional Fruit



Research Station, said they are conducting research on the Thai mango variety to assess its extent of disease infestation.

Local entrepreneurs brought Catimon mango to Bangladesh from Thailand about six years ago and it quickly acclimatised to the local climate.

Since then, entrepreneurs in Rajshahi and its neighbouring districts have been increasingly turning to Catimon cultivation with about 250 farmers now growing the fruit, creating a new dimension in the field of mango farming.

Over time, many high yielding mango varieties and modern technologies are coming and enriching the mango production sector in the country, gradually turning the region's economic sector vibrant.

Shakatwat Hossain Munshi, a mango farmer of Kanaiprara village under Puthia upazila, said almost every year new varieties of mangoes are being cultivated here through

testing their quality.

Rafiqul Islam of Maria village in Durgapur upazila has established an orchard of Catimon mango at his village, inspiring many other villagers to follow him.

Islam had collected 1,100 saplings of the variety at Tk 180 apiece from Dinajpur and planted those on 25 bighas of land three years ago. Flowers started appearing in the subsequent year.

Rafiqul Islam said the number of fruits was not satisfactory due to less weight and height of trees in the first year. He got three to five kilogrammes of yield from each tree during the last three consecutive seasons.

The Catimon trees were planted in rows of three alongside two rows of banana trees, and unlike traditional mango orchards, the trees were rarely higher than six feet.

The agricultural entrepreneur went on to expand his mango orchard on 200 bighas of leased land.

This year, he harvested mangoes worth Tk 3.5 lakh.



Boatmen paddle in full swing as they race against each other on the Suborno Khali River in Satpoa village of Jamalpur's Sharishabari yesterday.

PHOTO: SAHIDUL ISLAM NIRAB

## A sentinel of free speech, change

FROM PAGE 3  
journalism career in 1923. During his long career, he worked for seven organisations and edited two daily newspapers. He also was a "shadow" editor of another one.

Discussants at the event said the process of newspapers becoming an industry began during his editorship. He is one of those talented journalists who played a leading role in modernising the mechanisms of newspapers much of which is still followed by the industry, they added.

Dhaka University Professor Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury said though he had multiple identities -- politician, litterateur, journalist, lawyer -- Abul Mansur was an intellectual first and all the other professions added to his personality.

"His journalism is still relevant... His spirit still resonates with us. And for that, we still talk about freedom of speech and express our opinions. Still, we protest something like the Digital Security Act," said Serajul, also president of the parishad.

Mansur, about 100 years ago, pointed out the problems of farmers as the main problem of our society, he added. "He wanted a change in the society and for that, he worked as a politician, a journalist..."

Mansur knew for social change a cultural change was necessary. So, he laid

emphasis on language and the use of appropriate words that reflected the thinking of ordinary people. Through his works and writings, he promoted cultural advancement, he added.

"He had the exceptional capacity and vision to portray the society as it was through his writings... Unfortunately, we don't have that capacity," Serajul added.

Calling him a man of dignity, Serajul said Mansur used to call a spade a spade. "He always spoke and wrote what he considered right."

The New Age Editor Nurul Kabir said Abul Mansur considered journalism as a political activity, and journalism could be used for political and economic emancipation of the oppressed class of the society.

He said that Mansur stood beside Bangalee Muslims as 88 percent of them were peasants. However, he stood beside them, not on religious grounds. He did it because they were oppressed.

Mansur was the first among the journalists of his time who rightly figured out the importance of language in political discourse and addressed the issue.

Ali Ar Raji, assistant professor of communication and journalism at the University of Chittagong, said Mansur played a revolutionary role in establishing Bengali Muslim's own language

through his works and journalism.

Faruk Wasif, the planning editor of Bengali Daily Samakal, said that Abul Mansur was an extraordinarily patriotic and self-esteemed Bangalee and protested against the oppression of the Bangalee Muslims.

Researcher and journalist Kazal Rashid Shahin, in his keynote presentation, said that Abul Mansur played a significant role in establishing the philosophical foundation of Bangladesh's renaissance.

He said Abul Mansur set some of the conditions for a popular newspaper -- supporting a popular political ideology, well-edited stories and reports, quality paper and printing, a reader-friendly size, regular publishing and timely distribution -- through his work.

"His practices are still followed today and will be followed in the future. So, the relevance of Abul Mansur Ahmad's journalism, is still on".

The Daily Star's Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam welcomed all by joining the event virtually. Nine participants received awards in three categories at the event for writing essays on Abul Mansur Ahmad's journalism.

Abul Mansur started his journalism as assistant editor of the magazine "Sultan" in 1923.

He later worked in

different capacities in publications like the Mohammadi, and The Musulman, etc. He was the editor of the magazines Khadem, and Krishak.

He was also the shadow editor of Nabajug where Kazi Nazrul Islam was the editor.

The immensely popular the Daily Ittehad started its journey under his leadership.

## Defiance

FROM PAGE 5  
I think such training is necessary for them," he said.


Participants will learn eight self-defence techniques in four days under this initiative. The Youth and Sports secretary is scheduled to visit the village on September 20 and further decisions regarding the programme's expansion will be discussed with him, said Debashis Kumar Mondal, general secretary of the academy.

Mentionable, four footballers were attacked on July 29 for playing in jerseys and shorts.

The following day, player Sadia filed a case with Batiaghata Police Station, accusing four people.

Three of the accused threatened an acid attack on the girls if the case was not withdrawn, following which Sadia filed a general dairy on July 31 in this connection.

The accused are currently in jail.

<b>BIGM Bangladesh Institute of Governance and Management (BIGM)</b> Plot: E-33, Agargaon, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka Phone No. 880-2-223374040-44 (133)				
Memo No. BIGM/land/buildg.Maint/22/15/2/23-205		Dated: 16-09-2023		
<b>Invitation for Tender (IFT No. 03/2023-2024)</b>				
Sealed tenders are hereby invited from all eligible Suppliers in accordance with PPR-2008 (With all amendments) for the undermentioned work.				
1.	Agency	Bangladesh Institute of Governance and Management.		
2.	Procuring entity name	Additional Director (Strategic)		
3.	Procuring method	Open Tendering Method (OTM).		
4.	Invitation Ref No. & date	BIGM/land/buildg.Maint/22/15/2/23-205 and Dated: 16-09-2023		
5.	Last date & time for selling of tender	08-10-2023 up to office hours.		
6.	Last date & time for submission of tender	08-10-2023 up to 12.00 Noon.		
7.	Date & time for opening of tenders	09-10-2023 at 01.00pm		
8.	Selling, receiving & opening tender document	Office of the Additional Director (Strategic), BIGM.		
9.	Eligibility of tenderer	a) Reputed contractors/construction firms who have minimum 5(five) years of experience in steel structure works. b) Having experience in successful completion of at least 01 (one) contract of lift core with steel structure within the last 02 (two) years, with a value of at least Tk. 30 lacs. c) The minimum amount of Liquid assets or working capital or credit facilities of the tenderer shall be Tk.10.00 (ten) lacs only supported by bank certificate in the form of Form PW2a-3, should be counted 28 (twenty-eight) days before from the date of opening of tender. Original bank certificate must be enclosed along with the tender in the form of Form PW2a-3. Otherwise, the tender will be non-responsive. d) Up-to-date trade license, income tax clearance and VAT registration certificate, ABC category & supervisory license issued from Electrical Licensing Board, original money receipt, work certificates should be enclosed along with the tender. e) All other terms and conditions as per tender document.		
10.	Price of tender document (Tk.)	Tk. 2000/- (two thousand) only.		
11.	Name of work	Location	Tender security	Completion time
	Construction of lift core with steel structure including Civil, Electrical and other related works at Annex Building, BIGM, Dhaka.	BIGM, Agargaon	Tk. 1(one) lac only in favor of Director, Bangladesh Institute of Governance and Management, BIGM.	60 days
12.	<b>Special instruction:</b> i) This tender notice can be seen and downloaded from websites of <a href="http://www.bigm.edu.bd">www.bigm.edu.bd</a> ii) The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the tenders received without assigning any reason whatsoever. iii) Other detailed information has been attached to tender documents.			
<div> <b>Mohammad Al-Amin</b> Additional Director (Strategic) BIGM, Dhaka</div>				
GD-1422				





Workers with axes in their hands, relentlessly felling towering trees, as part of a Roads and Highway Department project to 'ensure highway safety'. The fallen giants, now lifeless logs, are then being transported away with trucks, an act that sparked widespread criticism from environmentalists and locals.

PHOTO: STAR



## Narsingdi road accidents kill 6

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

At least six people were killed and five others injured in separate road incidents in Narsingdi's Shibpur and Raipura on Friday night and early yesterday.

In Shibpur, three people died on the spot and two others sustained injuries when a truck rammed a microbus on Dhaka-Sylhet highway in Shripulia area around 2:00am, said Abdul Mannan Ansari, senior station master of Fire Service and Civil Defence office in Narsingdi.

The deceased are Eladul Haque, 50, and Md Mostakim, 17, of Chandpur and microbus driver Sagar Chandra, 32, of Narayanganj.

We recovered three bodies and rescued two injured people from the spot after receiving a phone call from the national emergency number about 2:00am, said Abdul Mannan.

The injured -- Hasina Begum, 39, and her daughter Sanjida Akter, 19-- were taken to Narsingdi 100-Bed Hospital for treatment and the bodies were sent to Narsingdi Sadar Hospital for autopsy, the fire service official added.

Abul Khayer, sub-inspector of Itkhola Highway Police Camp, said the accident happened when the victims on a microbus were returning to Dhaka last night after visiting different places in Sylhet.

In Raipura, three people were killed and another three were injured after a bus of 'Labiba Paribahan' hit a CNG-run auto-rickshaw from behind at Bhitmorjal round

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

## 5 Rohingyas arrested

UNB, Magura

Police arrested five Rohingya youths from a bus of 'New Green Express' of Wapada area in Magura's Shreepur upazila on Friday night.

The arrestees, aged between 22 and 25 years, used to live in Cox's Bazar Kutupalong's refugee camp, said Kanchon Kumar Ray, Officer-in-Charge of Shreepur Police Station.

Tipped off, they were arrested from the bus, he said, adding that after completing all legal procedures they will be sent back to the Cox's Bazar camp.

Bangladesh is home to around a million members of the stateless minority, most of whom fled the 2017 military crackdown in Myanmar, which is now subject to a genocide probe at the International Criminal Court.

They have been crammed into the camps in Cox's Bazar, the world's largest refugee settlement. Most fled the crackdown by Myanmar's military almost six years ago, although some have been there for longer.

Frustration is widespread over rampant lawlessness in the refugee settlements, along with cuts to international humanitarian aid and the lack of progress in a much-hyped repatriation deal.

**PRAYER  
TIMING**  
SEPTEMBER 17

Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 4-35	12-45	4-30	6-09	7-45
JAMAAT 5-10	1-15	4-45	6-12	8-15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

## PABNA-RAJSHAHI HIGHWAY

# A 'festival' of tree felling

RHD say they are axing only dead and risky ones, locals claim otherwise

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Logs from felled trees lined up on both sides of Pabna Rajshahi highway, this is what this correspondent observed during a recent visit to the place. Workers, armed with axes, were striking down the trees in the name of ensuring 'highway safety,' while their trucks were ferrying the fallen giants away.

The RHD has begun rampant tree felling on both sides of the highway, stretching from Pabna's Gaspara till Ishwardi's Muladuli, sparking criticism.

While RHD Rajshahi divisional office claimed 'a total 71 trees that are either dead or risky are being felled for ensuring safety on the highway', locals alleged that some healthy trees are also being cut down unnecessarily.

As per rules, the relevant authorities should take prior permission from the Department of Environment for felling any trees.

Contacted, Inspector of Pabna DoE GM Nazrul Islam said, "We were not officially informed about the highway tree felling."

"We do not permit unnecessary tree felling. If there is a need to cut down trees for any reason, a committee comprised of various government organisations makes the decision after assessing the needs," he explained.

The RHD Rajshahi divisional office recently held a tender for cutting down dead and risky trees beside highways in the division through six packages, of which Pabna belongs in the fifth package. The work to cut down 71 trees from Gaspara to Muladuli was awarded to 'Sagor Traders', a Bogura based company at cost of Tk 2.23 lakh in FY 2022-23, according to RHD

Pabna office.

"RHD had earlier identified the dead and risky trees on the highway and marked those with red colour. The men of contractors are cutting down trees according to the identification mark. This is a regular work of the RHD for safety measures," said Abul Monsur Ahmed, executive engineer of RHD in Pabna.

Visiting Gaspara to Muladuli recently, this correspondent, however, found dozens of healthy



trees being felled alongside dead ones at several points on the highway.

At Aitmail area of the highway, he found a large and healthy 'Koroi' tree was being cut down.

Similarly, dozens of healthy trees were seen being felled at Gaspara, Maligasa and few other points on the highway.

Md Abu Bakar, a wood trader and also representative of the contractor, said they were felling trees following the identification mark.

"These include a few dead trees as well as a few that are marked as risky," he said.

However, Arif Ahmed, a college teacher from Monohorpur area said, "Dozens of healthy trees have been marked as risky and are being cut down."

Echoing the same, Abdul Hamid Khan, a leading environment activist of Pabna, said, "In the name of cutting down dead trees, rampant felling of healthy trees is an old practice that must be stopped," said Abdul Hamid Khan, a leading environment activist of Pabna.

## USDA PROGRAM

# 42,000 students benefiting

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has been a steadfast partner in Bangladesh's national school feeding programmes for over 20 years, reads a press release of the organisation issued on Friday.

USDA's financial support and technical assistance have played a pivotal role in reshaping the educational and nutritional landscape for Bangladeshi students, it added.

Alongside the World Food Programme (WFP), USDA's financial support and technical assistance have played a pivotal role in reshaping the educational and nutritional landscape for Bangladeshi students, said in a press release dated on Friday.

Since the programme was initiated in 2010 through the McGovern-Dole Food for Education and Child Nutrition Programme, the country has witnessed a significant rise in school enrollment and attendance. Currently, USDA's support reaches approximately 42,000 students across 140 government primary schools in Cox's Bazar.

They receive nourishing fortified biscuits as morning snacks and other nutrition support.

A delegation of USDA experts, comprising Richard Higgins and Stephanie Gaffney, visited Bangladesh this week to observe the effects

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

## PADMA BRIDGE RAIL LINK

# BR conducts test run of goods train

UNB, Faridpur

A freight train of Bangladesh Railway successfully completed a test run between Bhanga and Mawa station via the Padma bridge yesterday.

The goods train left Faridpur's Bhanga station at 7:40am and reached Mawa, then again returned to Bhanga station, said Project Director of Faridpur Rail Project Brig General Syed Ahmed.

"Five bogies carried 350 tonnes of stone during the trial run and the speed limit was 80 kilometers per hour," he said.



President of Faridpur Chamber of Commerce Nazrul Islam said people would be able to transport their goods using the train service at a low cost.

Earlier, the test run of a passenger train from Dhaka's Kamalapur Railway Station to Faridpur's Bhanga Station was successfully completed on September 7. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will inaugurate the rail link on October 10.

## Quader off to Singapore for health check-up

BSS, Dhaka

Awami League (AL) General Secretary and Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader left Dhaka for Singapore yesterday to undergo his routine health check-up.

A Biman Bangladesh Airlines flight (BG 0584), carrying the minister, departed from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) at 8:30am, said an official release.

During his stay, Quader will undergo necessary medical examinations at the Mount Elizabeth Hospital in Singapore, the release added.

## ATTACK ON FEMALE FOOTBALLERS

# Defiance is their reply

DIPANKAR ROY, Khulna

Over a hundred children and teens eagerly waiting to learn self-defence tricks at the Tatultala Government Primary School grounds -- this is what this correspondent saw when he visited the place yesterday afternoon.

Leaving behind the horrors of a recent attack, the teenage players of Tatultala Super Queen Football Academy in Khulna's Batiaghata upazila have begun self-defence training as they no longer wish to experience such unpleasant ordeals.

Players Sadia Nasreen, Mongoli Bagchi, Hajera Khatun and Jui Mandal, who were victims of the attack, were among those who joined the training under the guidance of Sanjeeda Akhtar Mousumi, a black belt holder in martial arts.

Alongside the players, girls and boys from nearby villages were also seen participating in the initiative, facilitated by Unicef since Wednesday afternoon.

The attack left the players in a fix. Through this initiative, not just the players but interested girls and a few minor boys from nearby villages were also able to train, said Ritu Bairagi, captain of the academy's team.

"From now on, if anyone harasses us, we will prevent it. This training will boost our confidence both physically and mentally,"

she added.

The locals and people from all around the country supported the victims, but that only happened after the attack, not before, said Mongoli, a player who was severely beaten during the attack.

"I want to be prepared and also teach other village girls so that they can protect themselves from such incidents. After I complete this training, I look to teach others to save themselves from harassment," she added.



The recent attack has compelled many parents to worry over their children who are interested in joining sports, including Ranjit Bagchi, Mongoli's father.

"My daughter has been into sports since she was a kid, and we have always encouraged her. However, after the attack,

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8



An array of parked motorbikes on a footpath in front of Gazi Medical College and Hospital leads to pedestrians' woes, especially for patients. The photo was taken yesterday on Majid Sarani in Khulna city's Shonadanga area.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN



# Shashwta breaks out from ‘Bkasher Nahid’ moniker

On first glance, one might mistake him as the shady character of ‘Nahid’ from a popular commercial from a fintech company. ‘bKasher Nahid’ instantly became a synonymous with scammers everywhere. However, the actor behind the character is anything but.

SHARMIN JOYA

Kicking off his career with television commercials in 2010, Shashwta marked his acting debut with the tele-fiction *Kobi + Kusum*, directed by Shetu Arif, in 2021. Although his passion for acting made him wait for long, the actor got his deserving break this year with one of the projects from ‘Closeup Kachhe Ashar Ei Shomoyer Golpo’, *Shomoy Shob Jane*. Pairing with Tanjim Saiyara Totini in the Shakeeb Fahad directorial short film, was widely appreciated by the audience.

Shashwta is set to make his OTT debut in with Mizanur Rahman Aryan’s film, *Punormilone*. The project will start streaming from September 21. It also features Siam Ahmed and Tasnia Farin. “I am really excited about this project,” he said, adding that he got a call from the team only nine days before the shoots began. “I had to leave three television projects, to be a part of this film, and I am glad that Aryan *bhai* wanted me in this role.”

The actor had to go through a struggling period in the early years of his career broke his confidence, resulting in him willing to leave the industry several times and focus on another career. “My character in *Shomoy Shob Jane* changed everything, and the credit goes to Shakeeb *bhai*, for believing in me.”

“If it was due to not getting enough views, or something else, a few of my acted fictions were even brought down

from the production company’s YouTube channel,” shared the *Shoto Danar Projapoti* actor.

Earlier this year, he paired up with Tasnia Farin in the fiction *Nitur Jonno*, directed by Mostafa Kamal Raz, which earned him accolades.

The actor, who had a dream of becoming a cricketer, will be soon making his silver screen debut. The film will star Mosharraf Karim. “I cannot disclose much about the project, other than the fact that I have worked with Mosharraf *bhai* in it. It is surely an achievement to have the opportunity of sharing the screen with an actor like him.”

Moreover, his first full length feature film *Ismail er Ma*, directed by Ratan Paul, and produced by Bengal Creations, is yet to be released.

Shashwta is now busy in all mediums, a good problem to have. “I do not want to limit myself in any medium. I am grateful to the audience for accepting me,” he concluded. The actor will also be seen in Kajal Arefin Ome’s web film *Oshomoy*, a Bongo BD production.



PHOTOS: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

## Mostafa Kamal Raz signs Sariful Razz in ‘Omor’



After much speculation, filmmaker Mohammad Mostafa Kamal Raz has finally found his ‘Omor’ in Sariful Razz. The *Poran* actor will play the titular character. He has signed the official contract with the makers.

The director announced the news along with pictures yesterday.

“It’s a wonderful coincidence that *Omor* will be essayed by my namesake. I am confident that he will make the character ‘Omor’ (unkillable) with his outstanding acting,” said the director.

Earlier on, three powerful actors Fazlur Rahman Babu, Shahiduzzaman Selim and Nasir Uddin Khan, also signed up for the film in August.

## Drew Barrymore deletes emotional apology video after backlash



Drew Barrymore posted an emotional video where she discussed about the harsh criticism her programme on returning to television, amidst the SAG-AFTRA strike. Yesterday, the actress had to delete the video since it received severe social media backlash from her fellow members of the entertainment industry.

The Drew Barrymore Show, like the other productions mentioned, is under contract with the WGA, making it part of the strike.

This led fans to believe that it would also be cancelled, but the former child star decided to bring the show back which didn’t go well with the SAG-AFTRA organisation.

# COUNTRYWIDE

## Bagerhat TSC limps for shortage of staff

PARTHA CHAKRABORTTY

Bagerhat Government Technical School and College, the lone government technical school and college in the district, has been struggling to conduct its daily academic activities due to shortage of manpower.

Out of the total of 68 posts, at least 45 posts, including the principal, instructors, junior instructors, lab assistants and general teachers, have been lying vacant for long.

At present, the institution is running with only 23 staff, hampering its regular activities.

Moreover, several hundred students of the institution are also suffering from shortage of adequate classrooms and labs.

Besides, there is no canteen for more than seven hundred students and the college playground remains waterlogged for nearly four months of the year.

College authorities say that construction of a five-stored academic building is underway to meet the shortage of classrooms, accommodation and labs. Besides, the higher authorities have been informed about other crises.

The institution, formerly known as Vocational Training Institute (VTI), established on three and a half acres of land in 1965, introduced SSC (vocational) in 1995, and HSC (vocational) in 1997.

In 2003, it was renamed as Bagerhat

Government Technical School and College.

Currently, students are being enrolled under four separate trades—Computer and Information Technology, General Electrical Works, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning and Welding and Fabrication.

The institution started a four-year diploma course in Electrical In 2016, but closed the course in 2019 due to lack of manpower.

Shafayet Hossain, a 10th grader at electrical trade, said they are being deprived of playing any physical sport as the playground of the institution gets waterlogged even after a little rain.

Another student, seeking anonymity, said practical classes are basics of any technical education, but they are not getting such facilities due to lack of teachers.

Besides, if any lab instrument or material is broken or lost during the practical class, they all together have to pay for it, he added.

Contacted, Mohammad Badsha Mia, acting principal of the institution, said once the under-construction five-storey academic building is completed, classrooms, labs and other accommodation crisis will be solved.

They have informed the authorities concerned about the manpower crisis, but yet to get any reply in this regard, he added.

## Germany, France

FROM PAGE 12

Adilur Rahman Khan, on behalf of the human rights organisation Odhikar, was the 2017 recipient of the Franco-German Prize for Human Rights and the Rule of Law.

“A vibrant civil society is essential to the prosperity of every nation,” the statement concluded.

On Thursday, a Dhaka tribunal sentenced the two Odhikar officials to two years’ imprisonment each in an ICT Act case, which was filed for running “a distorted report and doctored images” about the May 5-6 2013 police action on a Hefajat e-Islam rally in the capital’s Motijheel.

## Patuakhali fishermen

FROM PAGE 12

awareness campaign to keep the sea and sea beach free from pollution,” said Sagarika.

As part of its awareness campaign, Ecofish has already distributed jute sacks among some fishermen.

“We have trained some 100 volunteers, including 20 women, to clean the Kuakata sea beach and to continue the awareness campaign,” she added.

Contacted, Nuru Majhi, president of Kalapara Upazila Trawler Majhi Samiti, said, “We have come to understand the adverse impact of dumping plastic bags, bottles, and polythene into the sea. Now, we have asked all fishermen in our area to refrain from this practice.”

Kazi Saifuddin, assistant director of the Department of Environment in Patuakhali, said, “We will take initiatives to make aware fishermen of not polluting the sea.”

## Govt needs to finetune it

FROM PAGE 12

of Hyundai Motors in Gazipur.

The plant at the Kaliakoir Bangabandhu Hi-Tech Park is a joint venture of Bangladeshi company Fair Technology and Korea’s Hyundai.

“Such a factory is very important for Bangladesh because it creates jobs for the local youths. It works as a way of technology transfer and you get brand new cars instead of second-hand cars, whose carbon emission is higher than new cars,” Park said while interacting with the members of the Diplomatic Correspondents Association Bangladesh (DCAB).

Manufacturing at the plant began early this year. At present, 150 cars are made per month, with plans to manufacture 6,000 cars by next year.

However, Bangladesh’s industrial policy is not adequately supporting the manufacturing sector, he said, adding that only 2 percent of the cars plying the roads in Bangladesh are locally assembled or manufactured.

“If at least 15 percent of the cars could be locally manufactured, it would create lots of jobs and help the local economy.”

Asked what are the challenges of local manufacturing and foreign direct investment, he said: “The investment environment needs to improve. Even my colleagues faced difficulties in getting visas or renewing visas. Not only Korean companies but also other foreign companies face difficulties in opening LCs [letters of credit].”

The taxation and

customs system are not always transparent.

“These basic aspects need to be improved before asking for foreign investments,” Park added.

Ruhul Alam Al Mahbub, chairman of Fair Group, said they have big plans for more value addition production of cars and other electronic products.

“But we need stronger policy support. It was unimaginable that we could set up a car manufacturing plant. We could do it because of the government support. Our next plan is to set up a much bigger plant than this one. We want to go for full body and parts manufacturing.”

The government needs to think about promoting locally manufactured cars and take a decisive policy towards this end, Alam added.

## Govt to sell potatoes

FROM PAGE 12

cold storages in Munshiganj, Shafikuzzaman told the meeting.

He advised grocers to contact the UNOs if they cannot buy potatoes for Tk 27 a kg. The administration will then buy potatoes from the storages and sell those at Tk 27.

Those who attended the discussion include Aslam Khan, superintendent of police in Munshiganj; Tauhid Elahi, additional district magistrate; six UNOs; Shahid e-Hasan Tuhin, president of Munshiganj Press Club; Jahangir Hossain, president of Consumer Association of Bangladesh; and Abuzafar Ripon, deputy commissioner.

## PM leaves

FROM PAGE 2

On the same day, she will address another conference titled “SDG Summit – Leaders’ Dialogue 4 (strengthening integrated policies and public institutions for achieving the SDGs) at the Trusteeship Council Chamber.

During the visit, the UN secretary-general, UN high commissioner for refugees, UN secretary-general’s genocide adviser, and directors general of International Organization for Migration, World Health Organization and International Atomic Energy Agency will pay courtesy calls on the PM.

Hasina is likely to hold bilateral meetings with Denmark Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen and Sri Lanka President Ranil Wickremesinghe at the Bilateral Booth of the UN headquarters.

The PM is expected to return home on October 4.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Most students at Bagerhat Government Technical School and College barely get the chance to practice their experiments due to shortage of adequate lab assistants.



MAHSA AMINI'S DEATH ANNIVERSARY

Security forces briefly detain Amini's father

US, UK, Canada issue new Iran sanctions

REUTERS

Iranian security forces briefly detained the father of Mahsa Amini yesterday and spread across mainly Kurdish areas of the country, a year after her death in police custody set off some of the biggest protests since the fall of the Shah in 1979.

State-affiliated media reported arrests of several "counter revolutionaries" and "terrorists" in different Iranian cities and said security forces had foiled plots to create disturbances around illegal demonstrations.

The death in custody of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish woman arrested by the morality police last year for allegedly flouting mandatory dress codes, triggered months of some of the biggest protests against the Islamic Republic's Shi'ite clerical rule ever seen and drew international condemnation.

Yesterday, the first anniversary of her death, a massive security force presence was deployed in Iran's mostly Kurdish areas in anticipation of unrest, according to human rights groups.

Mahsa's father, Amjad Amini, was warned against marking the anniversary of his daughter's death before being

released, the Kurdistan Human Rights Network said. Iran's official IRNA news agency denied that Amjad Amini was arrested, but it did not say if he was briefly detained or warned.

Earlier, social media and reports by rights groups spoke of security forces taking up positions around Amini's home in Saez, in western Iran.

In a statement on Friday, US President Joe Biden said: "Mahsa's story did not end with her brutal death. She inspired a historic movement — Woman, Life, Freedom — that has impacted Iran and influenced people across the globe."

Britain on Friday imposed sanctions on four Iranian officials and the United States said it was sanctioning more than two dozen individuals and entities connected to Iran's "violent suppression" of protests. Canada also announced multiple rounds of sanctions against Iran.

According to social media posts, Amini's parents had said in a statement earlier this week that, despite government warnings, they would hold a "traditional and religious anniversary ceremony" at their 22-year-old daughter's grave in Saez.

Widespread strikes were reported in multiple cities in Iran's Kurdistan region.



Activists take part in an anti-fossil fuel protest at Patan Durbar Square in Lalitpur, Nepal yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Kim inspects key Russian weapons

AFP, Moscow

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un met yesterday with the Russian defence minister in Vladivostok, where he inspected state-of-the-art weapons including a hypersonic missile system on the latest leg of a rare visit outside his country.

Upon arriving in Vladivostok, a Pacific port city near the Chinese and North Korean borders, Kim was greeted by Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and an honour guard.

The pair were seen smiling as they inspected some of Russia's nuclear bombers at an airfield before boarding a warship, a video released by the Russian defence ministry showed.

At the Knevichi airfield in Vladivostok yesterday, Kim was shown strategic Tu-160, Tu-95MS and Tu-22M3 bombers.

"These aircraft form the air component of Russia's strategic nuclear forces," the defence ministry said in a statement.

According to footage released by Moscow, Kim was shown carefully listening to senior representatives of the Russian military and inspecting the aircraft.

Russian officials also showed the reclusive leader a range of fighter jets as well as a hypersonic, air-launched Kinzhal missile system.

Kim and Shoigu then boarded the Marshal Shaposhnikov, an anti-submarine destroyer, where the head of the Russian navy, Admiral Nikolai Yevmenov, explained the characteristics of the warship and the weapons it carries including Kalibr cruise missiles. Russia uses Kinzhal and Kalibr missiles to assault Ukraine.

'Bring them back'

Ukrainian orphans demand return of children held in Russia

REUTERS, The Hague

Ukrainian orphans Ivan and Maksym, 17 and 16, escaped shelling and hunger in besieged Mariupol only to be captured and taken to the Russian-occupied city of Donetsk where they were held incommunicado for months with dozens of other children.

They are now among about 400 Ukrainian children to have returned from Russia or Russian-held territory since Moscow's full-scale invasion began in February, 2022 - a tiny fraction of the 20,000 children that Kyiv has identified as taken without the consent of family or guardians.

The boys and four other Ukrainian children told their stories in The Hague, where the campaign "Bring Kids Back UA" was launched this week by Netherlands-based NGO Orphans Feeding Foundation with the backing of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy.

The boys, students at the Mariupol Technical School of Building, were living in a dormitory when the area came under fierce bombardment by Russian forces. Food and water ran out, and they fled on foot in March to a nearby village.

"When we arrived, we went to the hospital, because there was nowhere else

to go. We said we were orphans, and they informed the Donetsk hospital. Then child protection services came and asked where our parents were. So, we were taken away," Maksym told Reuters.

Ivan said: "We didn't want to go there, but we didn't have a choice. We were fed four times a week. We spent time in our rooms and played on our phones. They let us go outside for one hour a day, and not every day. There was nothing for us to do."

He said 31 Ukrainian children ended up at Donetsk Hospital Nr. 5, and that most had taken up offers to go to Russia, where they were promised comfortable housing and other incentives.

Moscow has repeatedly denied forcibly taking Ukrainian children, saying it found only a small number of children in orphanages or without parental care, and tried to accommodate as many as possible with relatives in Russia.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant in March against Russian President Vladimir Putin, accusing him of the war crime of illegally deporting hundreds of children from Ukraine.

But Moscow's envoy to the United Nations in New York said shortly afterwards that Russia did not prevent



children contacting relatives and friends, wherever they lived, and that parents could apply for help with reunification.

A source has said talks are under way, mediated by Saudi Arabia and Turkey, on repatriating thousands of children.

Ivan, Maksym and others are sharing their experiences with senior officials from the Netherlands and Ukraine to spur international action.

"It's important to tell the world that the Russians are really stealing our children. We need to bring them back as quickly as possible," said Maksym after meeting Dutch Foreign Minister Hanke Bruins Slot, who vowed to raise the issue internationally.

"It is heartbreaking to hear their stories," Bruins Slot said, promising to provide Ukraine with rapid DNA kits to help match children and parents more quickly.

Just as the two boys were losing hope of making it back home, they were given SIM cards for their phones by the mayor of Donetsk, enabling them to contact their headmaster, Anton Bilai, who had been trying to locate them for weeks.

Bilai, their legal guardian under Ukrainian law, travelled for three days and more than 4,000 km (2,500 miles) from Kyiv to Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia and then back down through Russia to Donetsk.

"These were the first children returned from the occupied territory," he said. "Before the war ... they were orphans. All I can say is that now they are my children."

Ivan hardly remembers the moment Bilai arrived.

"I was barely awake so I didn't know what was going on ... He's my superhero. If it wasn't for him, I'd probably still be in occupied territory with other children."

Prosecutor seeks gag order on Trump

REUTERS

US Special Counsel Jack Smith is asking a judge to impose limits on statements from former President Donald Trump regarding a Washington, DC, court case over his attempt to overturn his 2020 election defeat, according to a court filing on Friday.

"The defendant has an established practice of issuing inflammatory public statements targeted at individuals or institutions that present an obstacle or challenge to him," Smith said in a filing in US District Court asking Judge Tanya Chutkan to impose some "narrow" limits on Trump's statements outside of court.

US women among NGO staff detained in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Afghanistan's Taliban authorities have arrested at least 18 staff of an international NGO, including an American woman, accusing them of carrying out Christian missionary work, the country's leaders said yesterday.

The International Assistance Mission (IAM) confirmed its staffers were picked up from its office in Ghor province, central Afghanistan, and taken to the capital Kabul. Security and intelligence forces had been observing the group for some time, Abdul Wahid Hamas Ghor, a government spokesman for the province, told AFP.

HERITAGE IN DANGER

UNESCO adds Ukraine's Kyiv, Lviv in list

AFP, Paris

The UN's cultural organisation on Friday placed World Heritage Sites in the Ukrainian cities of Kyiv and Lviv on its "in danger" list, saying they are at risk from the war sparked by Russia's invasion. The decision, taken at UNESCO's annual world heritage committee meeting in Riyadh, is a step towards better protection of the historic sites, the UN's cultural organisation said.

UNESCO said it had added Kyiv's Saint Sophia Cathedral and the medieval buildings of the city's Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra monastery site to the list "due to the threat of destruction the Russian offensive poses".

Migration pressure on Italy 'unsustainable'

Says PM Meloni

AFP, Rome

Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said Friday that the pressure of migrants arriving in the country was "unsustainable" and called on the European Union to intervene.

"The migratory pressure that Italy has been experiencing since the beginning of the year is unsustainable," she said in a video message broadcast by her office, adding that it sprang from the "difficult international situation" in Africa.



People watch drones creating a 3-D display outside the United Nations Headquarters calling attention to the Amazon rainforest and climate change in New York US, on Friday.

PHOTO: REUTERS



## Jailing rights defenders sends the wrong message

### Instead, investigate and stop human rights violators

A Dhaka tribunal has sentenced two top officials of rights body Odhikar to two years’ imprisonment each in a case under the ICT Act. The case was filed for a “distorted” report and “doctored” images about the May 5-6, 2013 police action on a Hefajat-e-Islam rally in Motijheel, Dhaka. Apparently, the report “tarnished” the image of the country, government, and law enforcement agencies, by claiming that 61 people had died that day – which was much higher than the official count. It can be mentioned that, at the time, there were discrepancies in the number of deaths reported by various organisations, while Hefajat itself alleged the deaths were in the thousands, a claim that was found to be completely false. But no cases were filed against it for this.

While we cannot comment on the merit of the recent verdict, we are concerned about the implications it will have on human rights defenders in general. Soon after the verdict, 48 eminent citizens of the country rightly demanded the immediate release of the two officials, stating that the incident would create obstacles to ensuring human rights and also prevent rights defenders from doing their jobs. Many abroad have also expressed similar concerns.

We cannot but feel a sense of unease at the timing of this verdict, coming as it does in an atmosphere of hostility towards dissenting voices. We have seen in the past the practice of politicising the legal system to harass and intimidate whoever the government of the day deemed an opponent. When governments changed, hundreds of cases filed by the previous administration disappeared because they were seen to be “politically motivated.”

Interestingly, in 2013, after their rally in Motijheel – which resulted in arson, vandalism and assault by Hefajat activists – at least 83 cases were filed against Hefajat, later accusing 3,416. Many senior Hefajat leaders went into hiding, fearing arrest. Only five years later, however, the government helped the same group to hold a rally in Dhaka; the mayhem caused during its last rally apparently forgotten. It should also be noted that the Human Rights Watch has pointed out that prosecutorial action on the Odhikar case did not take place until 2021 – after US sanctions were placed on Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) for its alleged involvement in enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings.

In this connection, we must add that the speed with which individuals have been arrested and sent to jail in recent years – first under Section 57 of the ICT Act, and then the Digital Security Act – has created a culture of fear among people critical of government activities. This contributes to the overall uncertainty faced by the more active citizens, including journalists and human rights defenders. This cannot continue indefinitely.

We urge the authorities concerned to review the Odhikar case. The government should focus more on investigating the allegations of human rights violations, rather than clamping down on those trying to report on these incidents. Jailing human rights defenders will not improve our image abroad. It is not in the best interests of our people either.

## Why set price caps if no one complies?

### Prices of onions, potatoes, and eggs continue to remain unstable

What's the point of setting price caps if the authorities cannot ensure compliance of said caps? The futility of such regulatory interventions, however well-intentioned, has once again been laid bare after the commerce ministry set the prices of three essential commodities – onions, potatoes, and eggs – on Thursday. According to media reports, the initiative hasn't had the desired impact as most traders, in the absence of effective monitoring and enforcement, were selling those at higher prices the next day. This happened not just in Dhaka but across the country, too.

In the capital, according to a report by this daily, most grocery shop owners were reluctant to comply with the price caps. For example, the government set the price of onions at Tk 64-65 per kilogram, but market prices ranged from Tk 70 to Tk 95. Similarly, the price of potatoes was capped at Tk 35-36 per kg, yet consumers had to pay Tk 45 to Tk 50. And even though some shops were seen adhering to the government-set price for eggs, most were demanding Tk 13.50 instead of the stipulated Tk 12 for each egg. The resistance from shopkeepers is mostly a result of their suppliers not lowering prices simultaneously. In other words, the lack of compliance was near-total, extending to even the wholesale and cold storage levels.

This is quite frustrating. It shows how powerful market forces continue to exert their influence, leaving consumers to bear the brunt. The Directorate of National Consumer Rights Protection did, however, fine 90 companies across the country for failing to adhere to the government-set prices. But it was nowhere near enough to translate the initiative into real relief for consumers. In the past, we have seen how similar caps were imposed on the prices of other commodities, including LPG gas, edible oil, and sugar, only for those to fall flat quickly.

What this shows is a glaring gap in our regulatory framework – the lack of an effective mechanism to ensure compliance with not just the government's price caps, which is a special measure, but even general rules and regulations governing the market. What, then, we need is not quick fixes, however appealing they might seem. The authorities must establish a functional monitoring and enforcement mechanism to ensure that unscrupulous traders and companies controlling the food supply chain cannot manipulate prices.

## Do we really need digital banks?



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MD MAIN UDDIN

The \$460 billion economy of Bangladesh is overburdened with 61 banks. While banks should be approved based on financial and economic viability, some were granted based on political consideration. Such a growth created unhealthy competition among banks.

Their asset management did not improve over time. The poor management of assets resulted in a huge rise of non-performing loans (NPLs), which stood at Tk 120,649 crore at the end of 2022. The central bank's Financial Stability Report 2022 showed that total risky loans stood at Tk 377,922 crore. Of course, the performance of the banking sector has declined tremendously. The growth of NPLs calls for increasing provisions, which a number of banks failed to maintain. As per Bangladesh Bank data, the amount of required provisions was Tk 86,270 crore in June 2022 against which Tk 73,050 crore was maintained. This produced a provision maintenance ratio of nearly 85 percent.

In addition, the fall of asset quality requires a corresponding increase in equity capital, as set by Basel Accords. While banks are required to keep at least 12.5 percent capital of their risk-weighted assets, as of June 2022, the capital adequacy ratio for all banks was 11.2 percent. Foreign commercial banks had a ratio of 26.4 percent, more than double the required. In contrast, state-owned commercial banks (SCBs) could maintain only 6.4 percent, half the required rate. But the worst situation was of specialised banks (SBs), which had a capital adequacy ratio of -35.8 percent.

Furthermore, non-performing assets also deteriorated bank profitability because provisions have to be maintained from profit. This decreased the amount of profit which eventually reduced the average return on assets (ROA) to only 0.5 percent and return on equity (ROE) to 9.4 percent, as per BB's June 2022 report. In comparison, the ROA and ROE of SCBs stood only at 0.2 percent and 5.4 percent, respectively. Even worse, the rates for SBs were -3.3 percent and -13.7 percent, respectively.

Some banks with high NPLs have also failed to attract new deposits. Consequently, at times, they could not even honour small denomination checks let alone sanction fresh loans, creating a credit crunch.

Instead of solving these problems, the country's banking sector brought



VISUAL: REHNUMA PROSHOON

considerable improvement in agent-banking operating in remote areas and mobile banking through apps. As such, BB recently invited applications for digital bank licences.

Digital banks, being convenient and efficient, primarily operate online through digital channels such as websites and mobile apps. It is argued that digital banks would bring financial services to a wide range of Bangladeshis by reducing the cost of banking and making banking services easily accessible. However, with limited digital infrastructure, low internet penetration, low financial literacy, lack of information technology (IT) awareness, and high cybersecurity threats, the potential may not be reaped fully. Rather digital banking may prove to be a disaster if cybersecurity cannot be maintained. Every system has its own weakness, which is not thought of during its development.

In February 2016, our own Bangladesh Bank came under the country's worst cyberattack, with tens of millions of dollars robbed and still remaining unrecovered. Many lessons may be learned from this. But what about the money lost? It is doubtful that it will ever be recovered.

is easily accessible to banks and difficult to access for hackers is a real challenge. Although app developers want to be one step ahead all the time, in reality, hackers are usually one step ahead of them instead.

The economic system of a country can be broken down by one cyberattack on its banking system. While there are dedicated hacktivists and cybercriminals for the sole purpose of robbing money, many of them engage in hacking not because they want to make money but because they see it as a challenge. But what is sport to hackers is certainly disastrous for customers of banks. Moreover, there is no guarantee that the app engineers themselves will not be involved in hacking.

Hence, digital banks must have strong encryption to protect information from internal and external threats. To this end, bankers should be trained on the workings of the system regularly. The security system of a digital bank has to be updated regularly. Customers must have some level of financial literacy and should be educated about the security features of digital banking. To provide flawless service, digital banks will have to work in cooperation with

of financial discipline. Long-standing poor governance is reflected in an increasing number of financial scams. Operational inefficiency is evident from a high expenditure-income ratio over the last decade. A few banks appear viable only on paper, with the NPL rates of several banks being more than 35 percent.

BB's priority should be to streamline the banking system by addressing these issues. Online banks in Bangladesh are fertile ground for looting money. And the approval of digital banks without proper preparation could be a step in the wrong direction for the entire banking sector. Any lack of awareness on any ground may create enormous security risks for digital banking. Weak security systems may turn digital banks into platforms for plundering the money of depositors – the weakest section of banks' stakeholders.

In order to approve a digital bank licence, Bangladesh Bank may use a benchmark for applicants that will improve the country's overall economic condition. For example, if the applicants are banks, their NPL rates (the benchmark) must be less than five percent and they should have decent online banking operations.

## Why do villagers bear the brunt of loadshedding?



Mostafa Shabuj  
is the Bogura correspondent for  
The Daily Star.

MOSTAFA SHABUJ

The country's people, regardless of where they live, are witnessing an unbearable summer this year. According to the Dhaka Met office, temperatures are an average 2-3 degrees Celsius higher than those of the past decades. Amid this situation, the government is not being able to provide the amount of uninterrupted electricity that people expected to escape from the heat. Those who live in rural areas are suffering the most, as they have no alternative electricity source at home like city dwellers do.

The dollar crisis has hindered the import of coal and gas. As a result, the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) and Rural Electrification Board (REB) carried out a lot of loadshedding in June and July this year. The REB is mainly responsible for supplying electricity to villages.

According to media reports, the REB had 30 percent less electricity than the demand, causing 8-10 hours

of loadshedding in a day, especially in rural areas, during the two months. This has greatly affected everyday life. Although the situation has improved a little, there are still a lot of power outages in the northern districts, especially at night.

Strangely enough, although the government is unable to meet power needs, it pays thousands of crores to government and private power plants as fixed charges or capacity charges every month with taxpayers' money.

On September 5, in response to a question in the parliament, State Minister for Power, Energy and Minerals Resources Nasrul Hamid said during the last 15 years (three terms of the Awami League government), the government paid over Tk 1.04 lakh crore as capacity charges to 82 private and 32 rental power plants.

Interestingly, the government seems to have enforced planned loadshedding in rural areas rather than in urban

ones, as large factories, important offices, specialised industrial zones, and, of course, VIPs are situated there. That is why electricity supply has been higher in urban areas. No matter how bad the loadshedding situation may be, none of the helpless people in rural can pressurise power stations to improve the situation; they can only wait and hope in silence.

As an alternative source of electricity, most houses, offices, industries, and residential areas in the cities have generators or IPS (instant power supply) devices. But village homes have no choice but to rely on the grid, as the residents cannot afford these alternative facilities.

In the last 20 years, rural areas have developed a lot. But due to the power crisis, residents cannot fully enjoy the benefits of this development. For example, most village homes have refrigerators now. In place of traditional clay stoves, people now use electric rice cookers. And light bulbs have now become ubiquitous. Irrigation systems were also not as dependent on electricity as they are now.

No electricity means disruption of sleep during the hot, humid summer. It means land cannot be irrigated, and students cannot study. When upazila towns don't have electricity, the health complexes cannot perform critical

surgeries.

On top of this, people have to deal with absurdly high electricity bills. For example, a farmer whose bill is usually Tk 300 to 400 per month suddenly receives a bill 10 to 20 times the regular amount. If they have three months of dues, their connection is cut off. Many influential people or government offices, however, don't bother paying the bills for years, and nothing happens to them. For example, Social Welfare Minister Nuruzzaman Ahmed, his son, brother, and late father did not pay their electricity bills – amounting to Tk 9 lakh – for the last few years. And yet, Northern Electricity Supply Company (Nesco) did not take any initiative to collect their dues.

However, every month, this very company warns residents of villages and upazila towns using loudspeakers, that those who have bills due for more than two months will have their supply disconnected. This is a clear abuse of power, the likes of which we see too often.

The bottom line is that the electricity boards are entrenched in malpractices and lack accountability, which lead to unbearable sufferings for citizens who pay to get electricity. The policies centring power production and distribution must be changed immediately to relieve people of this misery.





Schoolchildren walking past a couple of brick kilns in Naogaon district.

FILE PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUJ

# Air pollution is not for only one authority to tackle

*Md Ziaul Haque, the director of Air Quality Management at the Department of Environment, talks with Naznin Tithi of The Daily Star about the factors behind severe air pollution in the country and why concerted efforts are needed from all ministries and government agencies concerned to fight it.*

**A recent report revealed that the average life expectancy of Bangladeshis is being cut short by 6.8 years due to their continued exposure to polluted air. What steps has the government taken in all these years to prevent air pollution?**

Air pollution is a complex issue. When reports reveal that air pollution is increasing in the country, we must find out what factors are contributing to this. The last dry season was prolonged and did not end before May, and air quality deteriorated further because of this. The AQI index usually improves significantly during monsoon, as dust and PM2.5 levels decrease due to rainfall. We knew all along that emissions from brick kilns, fumes from vehicles, dust from construction sites and particular industries are the major sources of pollution in the country. But the recent study done by the World Bank has revealed that a major source of air pollution for Dhaka is the burning of coal, wood, agricultural residue and other biomass for cooking purposes in the surrounding districts. We will have to conduct our own study – we call it source apportionment study – to know more about this. We also came to know about transboundary air pollution recently, which is reportedly responsible for 30 to 40 percent of air pollution in Dhaka. So, we are responsible for the remaining 60-70 percent air pollution created domestically.

**But we are not always affected by transboundary air pollution, are we?**

Yes. Meteorological factors, particularly wind speed, wind direction, and precipitation, have huge impacts on transboundary air pollution. During the dry season, from October till April, wind blows from north to south, and in the absence of rain, highly polluted air (created in several provinces of India and a part of Pakistan, known as degraded airshed in Indo-Gangetic plain) enters Bangladesh through the west and north-west parts of the country and travels through several districts, down to the Bay of Bengal. During this time, our air quality is the worst. But during monsoon, good quality air comes from the south and flows in the northwestern direction. The severity of pollution decreases due to rainfall.

**Being the responsible authority, what is the Department of Environment (DoE) doing to reduce the pollution that originates from local sources?**

The environment ministry or the DoE alone cannot improve the situation. There are around 13 ministries/divisions and more than 20 departments/agencies involved here, all of whom should be proactive in fighting this menace. For instance, the Road Transport Act, 2018 has given BRTA the power to take steps against pollution from vehicles. Similarly, we are also empowered by the Bangladesh Environment Conservation Act, 1995 to take steps against vehicles emitting black smoke. The traffic wing of police also has specific responsibilities in this regard. But if we want to abate air pollution by enforcing laws and directives, we will need proper coordination and collaboration from all the ministries and agencies concerned, as well as from law enforcers. However, we are trying to play our part.

Last year, the government promulgated the Air Pollution (Control) Rules 2022, wherein we introduced a number of positive and effective provisions. As per the Rules, the DoE will come up with a national air quality management plan and implement it. In light of the Rules,



Md Ziaul Haque

the government has formed a high-powered committee, headed by the cabinet secretary, in which all the senior secretaries of relevant ministries, and the heads of DoE, BRTA, Roads and Highways Department (RHD), Rajuk, and the city corporations, among others, are members. As per the High Court's instruction, a committee headed by the secretary of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has already produced a comprehensive guideline in which all sources of air pollution, corresponding activities to reduce the pollution, and responsible authorities/organisations have been clearly mentioned. The guideline has been sent to all the ministries and line agencies concerned.

The DoE has taken steps to bring down the number of brick kilns, which is one of the major sources of air pollution in Dhaka. Currently, around 700-800 brick kilns are operating on the outskirts of the city. The topsoil that is used in these brick kilns is destroying our agricultural land. Every year, we are losing one to two percent of agricultural land – around 130 million tons of soil, annually – which has become a serious threat to our food security. In 2019, the government issued a gazette notification stating that all construction-related government projects/activities would gradually move away from using bricks, except for highway projects. Instead, they have to use non-fired concrete blocks which will not pollute the environment and will lessen topsoil loss. We have around 8,000 brick kilns in the country, more than 70 percent of which are now using a comparatively modern technology named "zigzag," which has reduced pollution to a considerable extent. But our ultimate target is to stop using fired clay bricks altogether and bring down the number of brick kilns to 1,000 within the next few years.

**Why don't you take similar action against unfit vehicles and construction companies, which are also polluting the environment? Are they beyond accountability?**

The DoE is not the only responsible authority here. The BRTA and the traffic police must play their parts. However, we are trying to put a system in place where the BRTA will have to conduct emission tests before giving fitness certificates to vehicles. It will have to maintain the national emission standards set by the Air Pollution (Control) Rules, 2022. The environment ministry has taken up a big project, with assistance from the World Bank, under which we will set up four automatic vehicular inspection centres in four divisions of the country. Vehicles will be checked automatically and fitness certificates will only be given to those that

pass the emission tests. We hope that we will be able to start operating these centres within the next two years. We are starting with four and the BRTA is trying to set up around 10 to 12 more centres.

**Black smoke-emitting vehicles are plying our streets right under the noses of authorities, but nothing is being done to stop them. Do you think these centres will actually be effective?**

As per the High Court directives and the Road Transport Act, 2018, the vehicles that are running past their economic life should be scrapped. A meeting was held this year, led by the cabinet secretary, in which the relevant ministry, the BRTA, and traffic police were directed to work on this.

**But didn't the Road Transport and Highways Division stay such an order recently, amid pressure from transport associations?**

Yes, I have also heard about this. But we all must take a coordinated decision that vehicles whose economic lives have expired should not be on the road.

**Has the DoE fined any vehicles for emitting black smoke in recent times?**

Well, it's true that the DoE and the BRTA have the authority to fine these vehicles. The rule is to fine them in the presence of a magistrate. But the number of unfit vehicles on our streets is so high that we cannot frequently stop them, given our limited workforce.

**How about holding the big construction firms accountable for their actions? Don't they have separate budgets for pollution management?**

You are correct. The big projects, such as the Dhaka metro rail, have separate budgets for environmental protection or for environmental compliance. But the contractors who are assigned by authorities in most cases avoid these responsibilities. We usually send letters to the authorities of these projects expressing our concerns, and finally impose fines. We fined the metro rail authorities for polluting the environment. Moreover, from November last year till April this year, we have fined many government and private construction companies.

**The DoE has undertaken several projects using foreign funds (including from the World Bank) over the past decade to improve air quality. But we are yet to see any results. Rather, the quality of air has deteriorated. Where did the money go?**

We have been able to increase our monitoring capabilities under these projects. We now have 31 air monitoring stations across the country – four of them being in Dhaka – from which we get data every 15 minutes. We now get to know of the air quality in all our big cities across the country. Soon, air quality data from these monitoring stations will be made available to the public. Within the next six months, you will be able to access data such as the AQI index as well as the concentration of PM2.5 in a given area on an hourly basis.

Based on these indices, under the Air Pollution (Control) Rules, 2022, we will be able to make informed decisions to improve the air quality of a certain area. For instance, if an area is found to have extremely degraded air, we can suspend the operations of the top polluting industries and brick kilns there, or reduce vehicular movement for a certain period, and even close down the schools in the area until the air quality improves.

# The major economic concerns ahead of the election

AN OPEN DIALOGUE

**Dr Abdullah Shibli**  
is an economist and works for Change Healthcare, Inc, an information technology company. He also serves as senior research fellow at the US-based International Sustainable Development Institute (ISDI).

ABDULLAH SHIBLI



Bangladesh's next national election is only a few months away, and the market is already very hot. By market, I mean the one comprising economic and political features. Between now and next January, things might change drastically, and there are a bunch of significant factors that could affect the outcome of the election. The state of the economy, the strength of political parties, the mood of the electorate, and the international geopolitical environment are just a few.

Obviously, these variables could change both in the short- and medium-term. Nonetheless, for the average citizen, nothing plays as big a role in shaping the popularity of a party as the well-being of the populace and the health of the economy.

As some readers might remember, during Bill Clinton's first presidential campaign decades ago, the quip, "It's the economy, stupid!" became the rave. The popular political slogan

party is in charge, they promote what it has done in the past and what it will deliver if reelected. On the other hand, the opposition parties don't have the same leverage and can emphasise two things on the economic front. First, the incumbent should've done better; that is, they imply that if it weren't for the misdeeds of the ruling party, things would have improved further. Second, that the opposition can offer a brighter future, with less corruption and whatnot.

At this point, the million-dollar question is: who will check the facts? How do you sort out the claims and counter-claims? How can the electorate decide which party or group to believe in?

In the case of Bangladesh, the ruling party has all the levers of power and access to the roads, media and, one could even say, the landscape. The ministers and the party cadre can list the highways and bridges they have built, talk about



One of the questions voters might be asking themselves is: 'Are we better off now than we were five years ago?'  
PHOTO: STAR

emphasised the importance of economic issues to voters. And I am sure the Bangladeshi people will also be considering, among other things, their pocketbook issues as they try to figure out which party to vote for.

One of the questions voters might be asking themselves is: "Are we better off now than we were five years ago?" A sizeable chunk of the population will respond in the affirmative. The ruling Awami League (AL) leaders have lost no time in showing off the economic benefits of the megaprojects completed over the last few years, and of those expected to be finished in the next few.

However, the answer to the question may not necessarily determine which party wins the election in 2024. The factors that shaped the outcome of the last two elections came from the books of Machiavelli rather than from Adam

**As seen across the globe, when an incumbent party is in charge, they promote what it has done in the past and what it will deliver if reelected. On the other hand, the opposition parties don't have the same leverage and can emphasise two things on the economic front.**

Smith. Muscle power could very well be more dominating than the rules of economics.

A recent survey conducted by the International Republican Institute (IRI) concluded that Bangladeshi citizens are pessimistic about the state of the economy and elections. The IRI is a US-based NGO that is funded and supported by the US federal government, and its survey found that economic issues have been driving the pessimism in Bangladesh; 51 percent of the respondents said that the economy was doing poorly.

It is worth mentioning that during national election in any country, stakeholders try to bring the bread-and-butter issues to the forefront to enhance their appeal to the electorate. In their economic manifesto, each party promises that, if they win, they will bring the fruits of the election to the doorsteps of the masses.

As seen across the globe, when an incumbent

power plants and tunnels in the works as well as the ones in the pipeline, not to mention the promise to reach middle-income status by 2031.

The opposition, unfortunately, has no such records up its sleeves, and has to count on the discontent among the masses and point to the wastage of public funds during megaprojects. That can be tough when you don't have the media backing or the liberty to hold demonstrations or meetings. So, the opposition has to harp on some well-known themes that have recently emerged. The Covid-19 pandemic and inflation have taken a big toll, according to various surveys. Not only the poor but the lower-middle-income households are also still bearing the brunt of the harsh economic conditions. There is also renewed fear of continued volatility in the grains and oil markets. Additionally, foreign governments have been constantly reminding the ruling party of the need for free and fair elections.

Bangladesh needs foreign investment, and the three rating agencies – Moody's, S&P Global Ratings, and Fitch – have singled out the institutional weaknesses, diminishing foreign exchange reserves, and constant political uncertainty, and have cautioned the government about the heightened external vulnerability and persistent liquidity risks.

At this point, what are the economic hazards facing the nation as we get closer to the election? Poor infrastructure, corruption, misappropriation of public resources, and illegal transfer of funds overseas could start the list. There is concern regarding the rising trajectory of the debt level and choice of sources of affordable energy. There's also the country's vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters. And international lending agencies have once again lent their voice to addressing infrastructural gaps, and urged the government to pivot towards green growth to boost support for sustainable development. In addition, net reserves are expected to be lower following Bangladesh Bank's commitment to the IMF to start reporting net reserves excluding the Export Development Fund (EDF), which has been inflating the reserve balance on paper. We can only wait to see what fate these factors will spell during the election.



## Prolonged use of acid reflux medication linked to higher dementia risk

Proton-pump inhibitors (PPIs), which are commonly prescribed to manage conditions like acid reflux and stomach ulcers, have been a subject of concern regarding their potential link to an increased risk of dementia. However, research on this topic has produced mixed results.

In a recent study published in the *Neurology* journal, scientists aimed to investigate whether the use of PPIs was associated with the development of dementia. The study began in 1987–1989 and tracked these individuals over time. Importantly, they only included participants who did not have dementia at a later stage of the study, which occurred between 2011 and 2013.

To determine PPI usage, the researchers relied on visual records and participants' reports of their medication history during phone calls. They also



considered the cumulative exposure to PPIs, which took into account the number of years a person had been using these medications before the later stage of the study. Incident dementia cases were identified through various means, such as in-person assessments, phone-based cognitive tests, hospital records, and death certificates.

The study involved 5,712 participants, with an average age of 75 years. After a follow-up period of six years, about 10% of them developed dementia. The analysis revealed that, overall, there was no significant difference in dementia risk between those who used PPIs and those who did not.

However, there was an interesting discovery: individuals who had been using PPIs for more than 4.4 years had a slightly higher risk of dementia (33% higher) compared to those who had not used PPIs. This suggests that long-term use of these medications might warrant closer monitoring and consideration of potential risks.

## Promoting patient engagement for safer healthcare

STAR HEALTH DESK

Patient and family engagement stands as a cornerstone strategy in the ongoing efforts to advance safety in healthcare. With their unique perspectives stemming from firsthand experiences throughout the entire patient journey, patients, families, and carers offer invaluable insights to enhance patient safety.

The impact of meaningful patient engagement is nothing short of remarkable, with studies indicating



a potential reduction in harm by up to 15%. This translates to saving countless lives and billions of dollars each year. Consequently, patient and family engagement has been firmly embedded as a fundamental principle in the World Health Assembly resolution (WHA72.6) on global action on patient safety and in the Global Patient Safety Action Plan 2021–2030.

September 17, 2023 is observed as World Patient Safety Day. This year's slogan *"Elevate the voice of patients"* highlights the theme of World Patient Safety Day 2023, which is *"Engaging patients for patient safety."* This annual event carries a significant message. It aims to influence a wide range of stakeholders, including patients, families, policymakers, healthcare leaders, health workers, and patient organisations, to collaboratively work towards co-designing healthcare policies and safety interventions that genuinely reflect the needs and preferences of patients. Ultimately, this endeavour aims to enhance healthcare safety on a global scale.

Evidence underscores the transformative impact of treating patients as active partners in their care. When patients are actively involved in decisions about their health, there are significant improvements in safety, patient

satisfaction, and health outcomes.

By assuming an active role within the healthcare team, patients can contribute not only to the safety of their own care but also to the overall safety of the healthcare system. Through the slogan *"Elevate the voice of patients!"*, the World Health Organisation (WHO) issues a compelling call to action. It urges all stakeholders to take essential steps to ensure patients' involvement in policy formulation, representation in governance structures, engagement in co-designing safety strategies, and active participation in their own care.

The World Patient Safety Day pursues several key objectives:

concerted efforts to engage patients and families in the formulation of policies and practices for safe healthcare.

3. Empower patients and families to take an active role in their healthcare and contribute to improving healthcare safety.

4. Advocate for urgent action on patient and family engagement in alignment with the Global Patient Safety Action Plan 2021–2030, involving all relevant partners.

The global campaign for World Patient Safety Day 2023 encompasses a diverse array of activities for all stakeholders, taking place on and



1. Raise global awareness regarding the imperative need for active engagement of patients, their families, and carers across all healthcare settings and at all levels to enhance patient safety.

2. Engage policy-makers, healthcare leaders, healthcare workers, patient organisations, civil society, and other stakeholders in

around September 17. These activities include national campaigns, policy forums, advocacy and technical events, capacity-building initiatives, and the iconic lighting up of monuments, landmarks, and public spaces in the signature colour orange, symbolising the campaign.

Source: World Health Organisation



HAVE A NICE DAY

## STOICISM

embracing kindness & compassion in a philosophy of virtue - Part I



DR RUBAIUL MURSHED

Stoicism teaches one to be altruistic, helping others without desire for personal gain or recognition. Since we were, in fact, created for it by nature, it is about doing it naturally. It is our function to benefit the species into which

we were born.

Stoicism advises us to be altruistic, acting in the service of others without desire for personal gain, recognition, or praise. Since we were, in fact, created for it by nature, it is about doing it naturally. It is our function to benefit the species into which we were born.

What do the Stoics say about kindness?

Showing kindness is not a weakness; it is a strength. In fact, being kind to another person is sometimes even more difficult than doing the opposite. Stoics believe that we should even show kindness to those who are rude to us or who we feel aversion towards.

A couple summers ago, I was reading Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* on a plane ride back from Africa.

"What are you reading?" said the man next to me.

"*Meditations* by Marcus Aurelius," I responded.

"Oh, that is neat. Do you like it? I am not really into all that meditation stuff."

I explained that it was a notebook of the Roman emperor's personal reflections as well as a foundational stoic text.

"Stoicism, huh? Isn't that like being very shut off emotionally?" He pointed to the cover, boasting a marble statue of Marcus Aurelius.

"I do not think I could be like that. Or I don't think I would want to. I have got too much heart."

"Too much heart?"

"Yeah, I am just a pretty caring person. I would not want to change that about myself." It is a philosophy of life that maximises positive emotions, reduces negative emotions, and helps individuals hone their virtues of character.

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## Prevention and control of NCDs mark the kick-off of the Global Week for Action

STAR HEALTH REPORT

On September 13, 2023, in Geneva, Switzerland, the World Health Organisation (WHO) announced the forthcoming launch of a significant report titled "Global mapping report on multisectoral action to strengthen the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases and mental health conditions." This report, showcasing experiences from various regions across the globe, will be officially unveiled during an online event co-organised by the World Diabetes Foundation (WDF) and the NCD Alliance (NCDA).

The release of the report coincides with the commencement of the Global week for action on noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), scheduled to begin on September 14. This global initiative aims to unite civil society organisations worldwide in a collective call to governments for the universal accessibility of high-quality healthcare, regardless of individuals' financial means, geographic location, or background. Central to this plea is comprehensive care for noncommunicable diseases (NCDs).

The report itself serves as an informative overview of the implementation of multisectoral actions designed to combat the burden of NCDs and mental health conditions. It sheds light on successful actions taken across various sectors and emphasises the need for the development and widespread implementation of additional initiatives. For those interested in delving deeper into these multisectoral efforts, an interactive repository is available on the WHO Knowledge Action Portal dedicated to NCDs.

Alarming statistics

underscore the urgency of this effort. More than 20 percent of the world's population, totaling eight billion people, lives with at least one NCD, which includes conditions like cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. Annually, NCDs are responsible for 41 million deaths and push millions of households into poverty. Projections indicate that by 2030, NCD-related deaths could surge to 52 million annually, placing a substantial burden on communities and healthcare systems. Factors such as unhealthy diets, tobacco use, alcohol consumption, and air pollution contribute to this escalating



crisis.

To explore the experiences of different countries highlighted in the report, an online event titled *"Towards achieving Universal Health Coverage: multistakeholder gathering on tackling noncommunicable diseases"* took place on September 14.

Presently, over half of the global population lacks full access to essential health services, with the majority residing in low- and middle-income countries. The urgency of addressing these disparities underscores the importance of the Global Week for Action on NCDs and the invaluable insights provided by the WHO's new report.



## Is back pain linked to mental health?

DR MOHAMMAD ALI

In the past, understanding that the mind could suffer like the body posed a challenge for society's common man. However, times have changed, and people are now giving due importance to mental health, ushering in a new era of effective mental illness treatment.

The human brain possesses a remarkable ability to remember the pain patterns associated with a back injury or disc prolapse. This memory is influenced by both natural and environmental factors. For instance, if someone harbours a particularly negative attitude towards back pain or if the individual with back pain faces stress due to socio-economic or familial factors, the combination of physical back pain and mental anguish can leave a lasting scar in the mind, influencing the perception of pain in the body for years. This type of back pain shares similarities with a condition known as fibromyalgia.

Undoubtedly, dispelling mental pain when it manifests in the body poses significant challenges. Firstly, patients of this kind must be provided with accurate information.

Secondly, they require targeted and specialised treatment, which could include therapeutic exercises, advice, or other interventions. The idea that Prolapsed Lumbar Intervertebral Disc (PLID) is the primary cause of back pain is widespread among patients.

However, this is largely untrue. Rigorous studies have demonstrated that thousands of healthy individuals have been diagnosed with PLID through MRI but do not experience back pain. Similarly, many low back pain patients exhibit normal MRIs. Therefore, the first step for patients is to seek correct information and treatment.

The writer is a lower back pain researcher at La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia. E-mail: hprc2005@live.com

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## Pakistan sweat on Naseem’s fitness

AFP, KARACHI

Pakistan fast bowler Naseem Shah is doubtful for next month’s World Cup due to a shoulder injury, with the PCB awaiting medical reports before making a final call on his fitness and participation.

Naseem was ruled out of the Asia Cup after suffering the injury



during a tournament match against India in Colombo last Sunday.

Pakistan’s local media reported initial scans of his right shoulder showed the injury was worse than expected but the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said Saturday that Naseem was still being monitored.

“The PCB medical team has been monitoring the status of Naseem’s shoulder injury,” the board said.

“Medical consultations with the experts are underway to provide the best possible care to Naseem. The medical panel will decide on fast bowler’s return to cricket based on further assessments.”

The 20-year-old has been part Pakistan’s pace trio along with Shaheen Shah Afridi and Haris Rauf.

Rauf also suffered injury to his flank and had to miss the Sri Lanka game in the Asia Cup.



## India, Sri Lanka eye Asian crown

AFP, Colombo

Rohit Sharma’s India face underdogs Sri Lanka in Sunday’s Asia Cup final, a crucial momentum-builder heading into next month’s ODI World Cup.

The cricketing giants have 13 Asian titles between them and Sri Lanka have a history of sneaking into the tournament’s final – to the consternation of fans keen for any showdown between arch-rivals India and Pakistan.

Bangladesh ended India’s unbeaten run in the 50-over tournament after edging them out by six runs in Friday’s last Super Four match.

Shubman Gill hit 121 but his knock went in vain after India faltered in their chase of 266 in Colombo, where Sunday’s final will also be held.

“I don’t think it has broken our momentum,” Gill told reporters after the narrow defeat.

“We have played good cricket. Sometimes it happens on these wickets. I was set and should have finished off the game.”

Gill said clinching India’s eighth Asia Cup title would give them “confidence” ahead of the World Cup starting back home on October 5.

India began with a washed-out match in Palallekele against Pakistan, whose fast bowlers rattled their top order and bowled

Sri Lanka hold a slim lead after 19 ODI Asia Cup matches, having won 10 of them.

The two long-standing rivals have met eight times in Asia Cup finals. India won five, while Sri Lanka won three in a row in 1997, 2004 and 2008.

In 37 games at Colombo’s R. Premadasa Stadium, India won 18 against Sri Lanka’s 16.

Their rivalry stretches back to the 1979 World Cup, when Sri Lanka defeated India by 47 runs in a 60-over match.

Overall, India won 97 of 166 ODIs. In the previous ten matches, the island nation had only won once.

them out for 266 in the only innings possible due to rain.

Big guns Virat Kohli and returning batsman KL Rahul hit back with centuries in their next outing against Babar Azam’s team to rack up 356-2 and crush Pakistan by 228 runs.

India then prevented a gutsy Sri Lankan chase to book their place in the final, but Gill said their opponents were still a threat.

“We will have to pull up our socks and be

at our 100 percent to beat them,” he said.

Sri Lanka, who won the previous edition of the Asia Cup played in the T20 format, came in as underdogs and snuck into the Super Fours with a dramatic win over Afghanistan.

They soon got into their groove on home soil and, despite going down to India, edged out Pakistan in a knockout match for their 11th Asia Cup final.

“We came without our key players, but still we managed to make the finals,” skipper Dasun Shanaka said.

Injuries sidelined Dushmantha Chameera and Wanindu Hasaranga, but others stood up at crucial junctures.

Kusal Mendis and Charith Asalanka both hit match-winning knocks to take the team over the line in a rain-shortened match and push a much-favoured Pakistan out of the tournament.

Up-and-coming fast bowler Matheesha Pathirana and left-arm spinner Dunith Wellalage have impressed and lead the tournament’s bowling chart with 11 and 10 wickets respectively.

Wellalage rattled India’s batting with five wickets including the prized scalps of Kohli and Rohit in their Super Four match.

Twice before in the Asia Cup Sri Lanka have lost to India in the Super Four stage only to beat them in the finals, in 2004 and 2008.

## U-19s hope to end SAFF duck

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh under-19 football team will leave for Kathmandu on Tuesday, hoping to lift the only South Asian trophy for the first time.

The SAFF Under-19 Championship, which has been held four times so far – changing age-groups from under-18 to under-20 level – will be held for the fifth time in the Nepalese capital from September 21 to September 30.

Bangladesh have participated in all four editions but failed to win any of those occasions, despite making the final on last three occasions – the only trophy missing from Bangladesh’s cabinet in South Asian football. The boys in red and green will have another opportunity to set the record straight as they leave for the Himalayan kingdom with high hopes. Bangladesh will play their first match against defending champions India on the opening day and play against Bhutan, the other team in Group B, two days later.

Bangladesh coach Rashed Ahmed Pappu, at a press conference at the BFF House yesterday, said all their focus is on the India match.

“The first match against India is obviously a very tough match. All of our focus is on that match. If we can win the match, we will clearly be in the semifinals. Even if we draw that game, we will have an advantage,” the coach opined.

Bangladesh captain Moinul Islam said that this tournament is an opportunity for the side to end their trophy drought.

Group A features hosts Nepal alongside Pakistan and Maldives. The top two teams from each group will play the semifinals and the final will be held on September 30.



Liverpool’s Andrew Robertson celebrates with Mohamed Salah after scoring his side’s second goal during a 3-1 comeback win against Wolves yesterday that put the Reds top of the table.



## Tamim, Mahmudullah return for NZ series

SPORTS REPORTER

Opener Tamim Iqbal and all-rounder Mahmudullah Riyad are set to return to international cricket as both veterans were included in the 15-member squad for the first two matches of the three-match ODI series against New Zealand in Mirpur, starting from September 21.

Tamim, the former Bangladesh skipper, recovered from his back injury to make a cut in the team ahead of the World Cup after he withdrew his decision to retire from international cricket in July following an intervention by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Mahmudullah also got his name in the list after all the

SQUAD

Liton Das (Captain), Tamim Iqbal, Soumya Sarkar, Anamul Haque Bijoy, Tawhid Hridoy, Mahmudullah Riyad, Nurul Hasan Sohan, Mahedi Hasan, Nasum Ahmed, Mustafizur Rahman, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, Tanzid Hasan Tamim, Zakir Hasan, Rishad Hossain, Khaled Ahmed.

discussion regarding his future.

The right hander was dropped following the ODIs against England at home in March due to poor performance and with his axing from the Asia Cup squad.

Liton Das will lead the team in the first two matches as regular skipper Shakib Al Hasan has been rested along with Mushfiqur Rahim, Mehedi Hasan Miraz, and the pace trio of Taskin Ahmed, Hasan Mahmud, and Shoriful Islam.

Nurul Hasan Sohan and Soumya Sarkar also returned to the side. The uncapped players in the squad are left-hander Zakir Hasan, pacer Khaled Ahmed, and leg-spinner Rishad Hossain.

The national selection panel chairman Minhajul Abedin Nannu said: “The decision to rest players was taken in consideration of the World Cup in India which will be a long tournament where ensuring the mental and physical fitness of the cricketers will be very important. The series against New Zealand provides us an opportunity to take a look at some other players as well ahead of this major event.”

The New Zealand team, which will largely feature a second-string side led by pacer Lockie Ferguson, have already started arriving in Bangladesh in separate contingents from last night.

The Bangladesh team will commence training on September 19 at the SBNCs in Mirpur, where the three matches will be played on September 21, 23 and 26.

## Of flickering flames and misleading hype

BISHWAJIT ROY

Prior to the 16th edition of Asia Cup, the continent’s biggest cricket event, there were high hopes surrounding three-time finalists Bangladesh. The Tigers, however, only returned home with a comprehensive victory over Afghanistan and a consolation win over India.

Yet, the latter came as more than a consolation to the team management as it gave Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan and coach Chandika Hathurusingha enough confidence to present an optimistic picture ahead of the World Cup.

While Shakib warned after India’s triumph that they will be “a dangerous side in the World Cup”, Chandika labelled it as “huge” boost for the Tigers heading into the showpiece event.

Bangladesh began their campaign with a demoralising loss against Sri Lanka, but bounced back strongly against Afghanistan to earn a Super Four spot. The ghost of their opening match’s batting debacle resurfaced in the first two Super Four matches against Pakistan and Sri Lanka, prompting Shakib to remark, “We really needed this reality check before the World Cup”.

It was undoubtedly refreshing as Shakib and co regained their confidence following a nail-biting six-run win against India, who rested important players such as Virat Kohli and pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah in the dead rubber.

A thrilling win against India is always pleasant, and it was great to see skipper Shakib finally leading from the front in the tournament, earning the player-of-the-match award in the process.

The most satisfying scene was the performance of a young pacer, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, in his maiden game. If his first spell suggests a promising future, his composure in the last over will be remembered for a long time.

Nothing was wrong with Hathurusingha heaping praise on

unlikely heroes in Mahedi Hasan and Nasum Ahmed, who stood up to give team management food for thought as they look to finalise World Cup squad by September 28.

Moreover, Shakib commended Towhid Hridoy the other day, and the batter deserved it. Another player worthy of praise is Mehedi Hasan Miraz who strengthened his reputation as a utility cricketer.

As a team, though, the Tigers fell short of their goals for the event. Their



performance did not live up to the claim, made by the head coach, of being “one of the best sides in its history”.

If we recall what Hathurusingha remarked to broadcasters earlier this year, we must conclude that the Tigers were underachievers.

“We have started the road map for the Asia Cup, Bangladesh’s side is among the best in its history. We have the best opportunity to do something that Bangladesh haven’t done before,” said the Bangladesh coach before the third day of play in the one-off Test between Bangladesh and Afghanistan in Mirpur in June.

But Bangladesh’s team resorted

to come up with a defence for their inconsistent show. Shakib stated after the India match, “Lots of injuries, and players coming in and out didn’t help during this Asia Cup.”

Injury setbacks, now a normal occurrence in world cricket, cannot be an excuse for a side who claimed to be one of the best sides in their history. A team cannot prosper in a global event unless it has a greater pool of players, as Sri Lanka does, contending for a spot in the eleven.

While speaking to local media prior to their departure to Sri Lanka, Shakib refused to correlate Asia Cup displays to the World Cup; although he did say that they may take confidence from excellent performances in the continental event.

The all-rounder also stated that they will not be discouraged if they do not perform well in the Asia Cup, adding, “Even if we do well, it does not mean our chances for the World Cup will improve.”

It is worth pointing out that a win against India may restore Bangladesh’s confidence to some extent, but it doesn’t imply that lingering batting problems, particularly in the top and death overs, will be forgotten.

## Murray dedicates Davis Cup win to late grandmother

REUTERS, MANCHESTER

A tearful Andy Murray dedicated his Davis Cup win on Friday to his grandmother after missing her funeral to play in the tie against Switzerland.

Murray battled hard to beat Leandro Riedi 6-7(7), 6-4, 6-4 and appeared to be good spirits during his on-court chat with former player Naomi Broady, talking about his reading interests and a fan in Manchester who had shown him a “magic trick”.

“I went to get a coffee the other morning and we were just sitting outside and a guy came up and started telling jokes. He asked if I wanted to see a magic trick and pulled an orange out of his underpants,” Murray said.

“I wasn’t expecting that, it was a first for me. It looked like a decent orange, but I passed. I let him have it.”

Broady then asked Murray if he had a present for a 90-year-old fan named “Grandma Pat” who was watching live tennis for the first time and the Scot joked about giving her his sweaty t-shirts as a gift before he began to choke up.

“Today’s a tough day for me. It’s actually my gran’s funeral today. I’m sorry to my family that I’m not able to be there, but yeah, gran, that one’s for you,” Murray said.

The three-times Grand Slam champion told reporters later that he had talked with his father ahead of the match.

“He said ‘she would want you to play’. He just said ‘make sure you win’ so I did,” Murray said.





## DENGUE OUTBREAK

# Fatalities cross 800

14 more deaths, 2,595 cases recorded

UNB, Dhaka

With 14 more deaths recorded yesterday, the total number of dengue fatalities has now crossed the 800 mark.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services, the number of deaths now stands at 804, while 2,595 more dengue patients were admitted to hospital in the last 24 hours till yesterday morning.

Of the new patients, 881 were admitted to hospitals in Dhaka and the rest outside the capital – indicating that the dengue situation is worsening across the country, the DGHS said.

At least 10,330 dengue patients, including 4,208 in the capital, are currently being treated in different hospitals.

From the beginning of September, 211 people have died while 40,754 were hospitalised with dengue, the DGHS added.



**A BRIDGE THAT CONNECTS NOTHING...** Built over a canal about seven years ago without an approach road, this bridge is of no use to the residents of Bakshalipur and Kazirkandi villages in Narsingdi Sadar upazila. The villagers still need to take a detour of five kilometres. This char land in the area remains under water during the monsoon every year. The photo was taken last week.

PHOTO: JAHIDUL ISLAM JOY

## Govt to sell potatoes at Tk 27 a kg if traders don't

Says DG of national consumer rights protection directorate

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

If wholesalers do not sell potatoes at Tk 27 a kg, the new price cap, the government will sell them, said AHM Shafikuzzaman, director general of the national consumer rights protection directorate, yesterday.

"From tomorrow, potatoes will be sold at Tk 27 a kg by the cold storage [owners]," he said during a discussion with leaders of the cold storage owners association in Munshiganj.

"If the government wants, it can sell potatoes by acquiring them. But the government does not want to flex its power. Therefore, I request all potato traders to sell at the wholesale price of Tk 27 and the retail price of Tk 35-36," he said.

The commerce ministry on Thursday announced a price cap on potatoes, onions and eggs.

There are 350,000 tonnes of potatoes in 60

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## PLASTICS IN THE BAY

# Patuakhali fishermen alone dump 15 tonnes a year: study

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Around 15 tonnes of non-biodegradable waste are dumped into the Bay of Bengal by fishermen of Patuakhali every year, says a study.

The waste includes plastic bags, bottles, polythene, wrappers of biscuits, and snacks that are used in fishing trawlers in the sea, according to the study of Ecofish, a non-government organisation.

The study was conducted in January this year on the fishermen of two fish landing stations – Alipur and Mohipur – adjacent to Kuakata sea beach, said officials of Ecofish working on the environment, fishermen, and the coast.

They recently shared the study findings with The Daily Star.

Fishermen can catch fish in the sea for around five months in a year as the government bans fishing in the remaining seven months of the year due to inclement weather and to ensure the smooth breeding of fish.

Around 400 trawlers go to the sea for fishing in phases during this five months. Each trawler can carry 12 to 20 fishermen and a trawler has to stay in the sea for around a week on each trip, says



the study report.

On average, a trawler can make 15 trips during this tenure. On each trip, fishermen of a trawler take with them plastic bags, bottles, polythene, wrappers of biscuits, and snacks weighing around 2.5kg, according to the study.

It added that the fishermen dump the non-biodegradable waste into the sea after use.

So, it can be estimated that fishermen of a trawler dump around 37.5kg of waste on its 15 trips throughout the year. So, fishermen of 400 trawlers throw non-biodegradable waste of around 15 tonnes in the sea every year, according to the study report.

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## Germany, France regret verdict against Adilur, Elan

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

France and Germany yesterday expressed regret over the imprisonment of Odhikar Secretary Adilur Rahman Khan and Director ASM Nasiruddin Elan.

Jan Janowski, deputy head of mission of the German Embassy in Bangladesh, posted a joint statement of the two countries on X, formerly known as Twitter.

"France and Germany are deeply attached to respect for the rule of law as well as to the democratic acquis in Bangladesh. They will continue to support defenders of human rights in Bangladesh, like throughout the world," the statement said.

"We regret the Bangladeshi court's decision regarding Adilur Rahman Khan and ASM Nasiruddin Elan. We have expressed our concern to the authorities on this situation and will maintain our dialogue with them on this case."

They recalled that

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## INDUSTRIALISATION POLICY

# Govt needs to finetune it

Says S Korean ambassador during visit to Hyundai car plant



DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

South Korea wants stronger policy support from the government to manufacture in Bangladesh, which, in turn, will create jobs at home and help achieve middle-income status, said its ambassador yesterday.

As Bangladesh graduates from the LDC bracket, its duty-free quota will be taken away and both the government and the private sector need to make extensive preparations for the competitive global market that awaits, said Park Young-sik, the South Korean ambassador to Bangladesh, during a visit to the manufacturing plant

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## LIBYA FLOOD

# Derna struggles to cope with so many corpses

REUTERS, Derna

Residents and rescue workers in the devastated Libyan city of Derna are struggling to cope with the thousands of corpses washing up or decaying under rubble, after a flood that smashed down buildings and swept people to sea.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) and other aid groups have urged the Libyan authorities to stop burying flood victims in mass graves, saying these could bring long-term mental distress to families or cause health risks if located near water.

A UN report said more than 1,000 people had so far been buried in that manner since Libya, a nation divided by a decade of conflict and political chaos, was hit on Sunday by torrential rain that caused two dams to burst.

Thousands were killed and thousands more are missing.

"Bodies are littering the streets, washing back on shore, and are buried under collapsed buildings and debris. In just two hours, one of my colleagues counted over 200 bodies on the beach near Derna," Bilal Sabloulh, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) forensics manager for Africa, told a briefing in Geneva.

Ibrahim al-Arabi, health minister in Libya's Tripoli-based government, told Reuters he was certain groundwater was polluted with water mixed up with corpses, dead animals, refuse and chemical substances.

"We urge people not to approach the wells in Derna," he said.

Mohammad al-Qabisi, head of Derna's Wahda Hospital, said a field hospital was treating people with chronic illnesses needing regular attention. He said there were

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## Abandoned Apollo 17 lunar lander module causing moonquakes

CNN



A spacecraft left behind by US astronauts on the lunar surface could be causing small tremors known as moonquakes, according to a new study.

Researchers revealed the previously unknown form of seismic activity on the moon for the first time through an analysis of Apollo-era data using modern algorithms.

Massive temperature swings that occur on the moon can cause human-made structures to expand and contract in a way that produces these vibrations, the report suggests.

The lunar surface is an extreme environment, oscillating between minus 208 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 133 degrees Celsius) in the dark and 250 degrees Fahrenheit (121 degrees Celsius) in direct sun, according to a news release about the study.

In fact, the entire surface of the moon expands and contracts in the cold and heat, noted the study published September 5 in the Journal of Geophysical Research: Planets.



**Patients are forced to lie on the floor of Pirojpur General Hospital as 281 were admitted to the medical facility yesterday morning against its bed capacity of 100. The situation worsened recently as the number of dengue patients surged.**

PHOTO: KM HABIBUR RAHMAN

## Man shot by 'plainclothes' police during raid in Demra

Cops give conflicting info

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A team of police allegedly in plainclothes shot a man in the leg while raiding a flat in Demra early yesterday.

Minhajin Abedin Fahim, 27, was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital with a bullet wound to his leg.

His wife Brishati Akhtar Sima said 10-12 men in civilian clothes and carrying firearms knocked on the door of their flat on Madbar Bari Road in Madbar area around 4:00am.

"Without identifying themselves, they persistently kept knocking and raising their voices. My husband thought that it was a gang of robbers. He and his younger brother Naeem tried to flee when

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