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## Dhaka getting HOTTER

Rising temperature in the city rings alarm

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Dhaka is now one of the fastest-warming cities in the world, as it has seen a staggering 97 percent rise in the number of days with temperature above 35 degrees Celsius over the last three decades.

It ranks fifth on the list of hottest cities, trailing behind Delhi, Bangkok, Tehran, and Cairo, according to the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED).

The UK-based independent policy research institute detected the trend after analysing temperatures in 20 of the most populous capitals for the last 30 years. The findings are yet to be made public.

"Bangladesh is experiencing more and more days of extreme heat because of climate change. This is having a major impact on the health, wellbeing, and productivity of all citizens, but

especially those living in low income and informal communities," IIED Principal Researcher Anna Walnycki wrote in an email to this correspondent.

Experts also blame high population density, unplanned urbanisation, lack of green spaces, and global warming for the rapid rise in temperature.

"It is a result of local climatic change fueled by break-neck population growth. More people require more basic amenities, which lead to the degradation of the natural environment," said Ashraf Dewan, who teaches at the School of Earth and Planetary Sciences of Curtin University in Australia.

Building materials such as bricks used in cities for housing, particularly in developing countries, are not

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### HOW DHAKA TEMPERATURE ROSE IN LAST 3 DECADES

Number of days with above 35° C

1994-2003

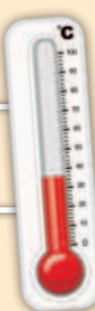
283 DAYS

2004-2013

442 DAYS

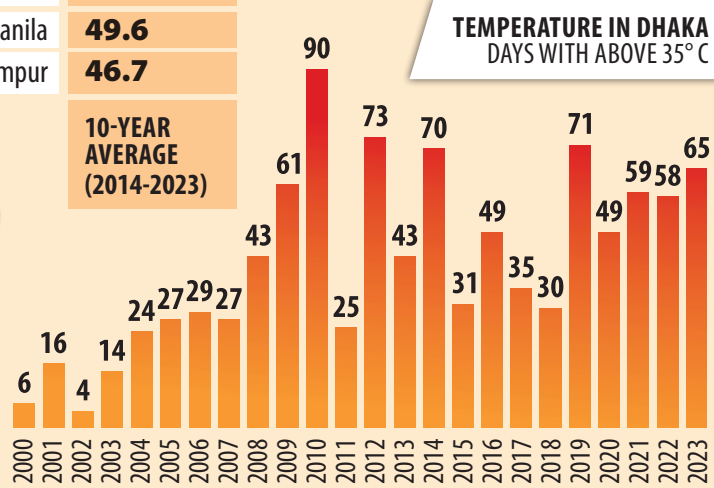
2014-2023

517 DAYS



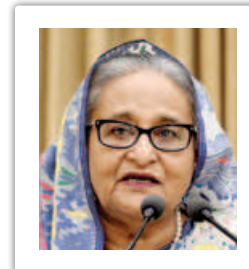
| CITY         | HOTTER DAYS |
|--------------|-------------|
| Delhi        | 159.1       |
| Bangkok      | 107         |
| Cairo        | 82.3        |
| Tehran       | 77          |
| Dhaka        | 51.7        |
| Manila       | 49.6        |
| Kuala Lumpur | 46.7        |

10-YEAR AVERAGE (2014-2023)



**"Bangladesh is experiencing more and more days of extreme heat because of climate change. This is having a major impact on the health, wellbeing, and productivity of all citizens..."**

ANNA WALNYCKI  
IIED Principal Researcher



**'Advice from foreigners won't bear fruit here'**

PM tells economists about devising plans

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked the economists to devise their policies, plans, and programmes by taking into account the local realities as advice from foreigners in this regard would not be fruitful.

The premier was speaking at a programme marking the inauguration

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## THE CHILD BRIDES of Rasulpur

Poverty, lack of security force parents to marry off their daughters at early age



Holding her son, 16-year-old Lamia cooking rice in her family's yard in Rasulpur Char.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

**Sixteen-year-old Lamia Akter Meem was cooking rice in her family's yard, using an earthen stove. The sun hovered high in the sky, indicating it was nearing midday at the Rasulpur Char along the Kirtankhola in Barishal. Within a few minutes, Meem's 19-month-old baby boy ran to her crying for attention. Meem scooped him up and swayed him in her arms to soothe him.**

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN, back from Barishal

As Meem tended to the child, a group of girls around her age strolled past the yard. They invited Meem to join them in a game called Chhi-Buri, a traditional village game. Without hesitation, Lamia passed the baby to her mother inside the house and eagerly joined her friends.

Her enjoyment was, however short lived, as the baby's cries

soon prompted Meem to return to his side. "I enjoy playing with my friends, but my father disapproves," Meem said wistfully looking at the field.

Meem was only 14 when she was married off. Within a year, she became a mother. Her husband got a job abroad two years ago, leaving Meem to live with her parents.

Her husband no longer wants to reunite with her as he is now more affluent and his status in society is much "higher" than Meem's family.

Meem's story mirrors that of hundreds of other girls living in Rasulpur Char.

Married off between the ages of 13 and 15, they are thrust into the responsibilities of adulthood far too early in life.

During a recent visit to the Char, this correspondent found numerous young girls burdened with the duties of motherhood.

Many grapples with illness, and tragically, around six months ago, one young victim of child marriage succumbed to pregnancy-related complications.

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## Veggies too pricey to afford for many

Green papaya now Tk 100 a kg; prices of other vegetables rise up to 20pc

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MD ABBAS

Homemaker Nurunnahar Begum could not believe her ears yesterday when a trader asked for Tk 100 for a kilogram of green papaya at the capital's Kachukhet kitchen market.

"How can a kg of green papaya cost Tk 100? The price has soared by Tk 30 only within a week," said the 60-year-old woman from Mirpur-11. Traders and consumers said this might be highest price of green papaya in recent times.

Nurunnahar said the vegetable, which is available almost round the year, usually costs Tk 40 to Tk 50 a kg, but the price has now gone beyond their reach.

"How will the low- and fixed-income people buy vegetables?" she asked. The prices of some other vegetables, including pointed gourd and aubergine, have also shot up at Kachukhet, Shevrapara, Ibrahimpur, and Karwan Bazar kitchen markets over the last few days.

Yesterday, green chillies were sold for Tk 160-200 a kg, up from Tk 120-160 a week ago.

Traders blamed shortages in supply for the increased prices of green papayas and green chillies. They attributed the shortages in supply to damage of crops by the recent heatwave.

The prices of many other vegetables have soared by up to 20 percent within a week.

Pointed gourd was sold for Tk 60-100 per kg yesterday against the previous week's price of Tk 50-80.

The price of long tubular aubergine went up to Tk 80-120 per kg yesterday from Tk 60-100 a week ago, while round aubergine was being sold for Tk 60-80 a kg, up from Tk 50-60.

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## Heatwave to continue till tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A mild to moderate heatwave is sweeping over eight divisions across the country and it may continue till tomorrow, according to the Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD).

The divisions are Rangpur, Rajshahi, Mymensingh, Dhaka, Khulna, Barishal, Chattogram, and Sylhet divisions.

Md Omar Faruq, a meteorologist at BMD, said there was a chance of rain between the late hours of last night and early hours of this morning.

"Rain accompanied by temporary gusty/squally wind is likely to occur at a few places over Chattogram and Sylhet divisions and one or two places in Dhaka, Mymensingh, Barishal and Rangpur divisions due to the influence of a nor'wester in the next 24 hours commencing at 6:00pm on Friday."

According to Omar, a

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## Failed Bangladeshi asylum seekers to be deported from UK

Two countries sign deal

AGENCIES

Failed Bangladeshi asylum seekers in the United Kingdom will be deported under a fast-track returns deal between the two countries.

The two countries have held their first ever joint working group meeting on home affairs in London at the British Home Office and signed the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) on returns.

British Minister for Countering Illegal Migration James Tomlinson-Mynors KC, and Bangladesh High Commissioner in the UK Saida Muna Tasneem opened the meeting on Thursday and witnessed the signing of the SOPs between the two countries, reports UNB.

The Bangladesh-UK SOPs on returns is a successor to the earlier signed Bangladesh-EU SOPs of 2017, the procedure that used to be followed before the UK's exit from the EU for returning Bangladeshi overstayers from the UK, said a press release yesterday.

Nearly 11,000 Bangladeshis entered Britain on visas last year only to lodge asylum claims within 12 months in an

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## IT'S LITCHI TIME!

A fruit seller displaying litchis in Dhaka's Karwan Bazar yesterday. The season's first batches of litchi, collected from Pabna's Ishwardi and Narayanganji's Sonargaon, was sold for Tk 300 to Tk 350 each 100 pieces.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

MY DHAKA



PHOTO: SHADAB SHAHROKH HAI

MIRPUR BERIBADH

A soothing escape in Dhaka

ASHIF AHMED RUDRO

Dhaka residents often complain that there is no escape from the loud and congested city. While open space here is very limited indeed, there are a few places in Dhaka where one can still take a soothing walk, enjoy a quiet sunset, or take a boat ride to rejuvenate themselves.

Mirpur Beribadh is one of those few places.

Where is it?

Mirpur Beribadh stands on the bank of the river Turag, which is still very much alive and flowing. It's on your left as you approach the Botanical Garden. Getting to the Beribadh is quite easy. One can ride a bus, hire a CNG or even get on a rickshaw from Mirpur-1 and in less than half an hour you can be at the Beribadh.

The Walk

The Beribadh offers quite a few interesting activities but the tranquil walk is probably the one to appreciate the most. It is recommended that you arrive at the Beribadh before sunset to

revel in the cool afternoon breeze and a great view on your walk.

A footbridge expands along the riverside. It's close enough to the water, giving you the illusion that you are walking on water. Roughly two kilometres long, the footbridge offers an amazing view of the river along with the opportunity to walk.

The sights around, above and under you are truly something else. On one side there's the river, which becomes progressively enchanting as the sun drives its chariot beyond the horizon. On the other side, foliage creates a green wall. Underneath the bridge, sometimes water, sometimes a little bit of dry land and sometimes a couple of haystacks really make you feel like you are in a distant village.

Standing here, you can get a view of

Dhaka in the distance and be amazed at the contrast created by nature.

The River

Albeit a small one, Turag still paints a scenic view. In the late afternoon, the river is far from tranquil. The ebb tides make sure the water is flowing and present you with a spectacular sunset.

Water hyacinths floating with the tide, the reed and aquatic weeds on the banks of the river create a verdant carpet on both sides of the river.

There are large boats in the river and people on their decks are well occupied with their daily jobs. It's a reminder of aquatic life, a divergent lifestyle and almost a forgotten one. Smaller boats are running up and down and if you feel like indulging yourself, you can get on a boat and get to know the river from

up close.

An hour's ride on a boat will cost you around Tk 500 but make sure you haggle. You can ride until darkness falls.

For the spectators

There are several private parks on the edge of the Beribadh. Tamanna World Family Park, Fairy Land, and Neverland are a few to name. One can find sitting arrangements with views of the river here, along with snacks and fast food. Some of these parks even have rides like merry-go-round, making them interesting for the children. There's an entry fee starting from Tk 20 into these parks but if you are visiting with your family, the accommodating arrangements will make the visit more comfortable for you.

While the Beribadh will certainly offer you an escape from the cruel grasp of Dhaka, the small river will also remind you that our rivers are dying out and make you wonder if this place will remain the same after a decade. Nevertheless, we should cherish it while it lasts and work to protect our nature.



The child brides of Rasulpur

FROM PAGE 1

Despite these hardships, the cycle of child marriage persists.

Locals acknowledge the dangers but feel compelled to marry off their minor daughters because of insecurity - the fear created by threats from miscreants and addicts to their unmarried teenage girls as well as the sheer worry of another mouth to feed.

RISE OF THE CHAR

In the 1980s, Rasulpur Char was built from the dredging soil of the Kirtankhola over 23 acres of land. But due to gradual filling with soil, the boundary of this char is now 50 acres.

Over the years, influential people became owners of the Char's land. Many of them rent or sell the Char's land by issuing cards. These influential first proved them as landless, and then the land was allocated against their names from the government. Later, they again sell that land to actual landless people in exchange for money. They complete the process of handing over the land by giving a piece of paper, which is locally known as the "card".

The Char came under the jurisdiction of Ward-9 of the Barishal city. Although there are 1,496 voters on the land, six to seven thousand floating people now live here for work.

Locals said the number of children in the char was more than a thousand. Although closest to Barishal city, this area has no civic amenities, no health-sports or cultural activities. Despite the area being under the city corporation area, there is no piped drinking water system here. There are only 10 deep tubewells.

The Char has four non-formal schools - Chandradip Shishu Surokha Community Hub, Totini Community Hub, Chand Hashi Community Hub, and Avijatri Community Hub.

Around 500 students study in these schools. Children are made aware of the ill effects of child marriage, but this has not reduced the number of child marriages by any means.

Out of thousands of girls in the char, half of them were victims of child marriage, according to these school and awareness centres.

STORY OF CHILD BRIDES

Being married so early, Meem was not able to pass all subjects in the SSC exam. She is now preparing to take the exam again.

"I missed my old days. I stood first in the weight-ball throwing game in class eight. I may not be able to go back to those days but I do want to take the exam," she said.

Meem's mother Jhumi Begum explained that her husband is a vegetable seller and they couldn't meet

the expenses of all three children, so they had to marry off their daughter.

Sharmin Begum, now 20 years old, lived next to Jhumi's house with her rickshaw-puller husband Mehedi Hasan, and three daughters - Mithila, 6, and twin daughters Fariha and Fahima, both 18 months old.

She got married at 13 when she was in class five. Sharmin looked undernourished and fatigued.

"My father Hemayet Fakir is a day labourer, and my mother Niru Begum, is a homemaker. They forced me to get married as local addicts used to disturb us coming to our home," said Sharmin.



PHOTO: TITU DAS

Teenagers themselves, these young mothers of Rasulpur Char crave what anyone at their age would want -- playing with friends. Married off between the ages of 13 and 15, they are, however, thrust into the responsibilities of adulthood far too early in life.

Niru Begum said, "When the girls become a little older, the evil eyes of the local unruly youths fall on them. We have to shut off the doors and windows after sunset. They throw bricks at our house. We did not even get any remedy after complaining to the police. Marriage remains the only option for us to save the girls."

Like Sharmin, another young girl Nasrin Akther Happy, now 22 years old, got married at the age of 13. She got divorced as her husband married for a second time.

Happy's eight-year-old daughter Israt Jahan Akhi now lives with her husband, and Happy survives by working in different homes as a domestic help.

to create awareness about child marriage, nothing is being done. At the ages of 14 and 15, girls are more likely to be child brides. The problems arise later, as we often heard that these girls were tortured by their husbands," Tanzila said.

In 2022, Asika Akter, 13, was married to a hawker named Mizanur Rahman at the Char. Within a year, she gave birth to a child but had to be admitted to a hospital as she fell sick. After undergoing treatment at different hospitals for six months, she died of complications.

A DISMAL STATE OF HEALTHCARE

Sumon Chandra Shikar, who runs a

medicine shop at the Char, said there are no doctors or community clinics in Rasulpur.

"For any complications, one has to visit city hospitals by crossing the Kirtankhola to get a doctor's consultation. Irregular menstruation, headache, allergy, and stomach upset are major complaints we receive daily from people in this Char," he said.

Mizanur Rahman, a local visiting doctor, told this newspaper, "Majority of the girls in the Char are facing physical complications from pregnancies at such an early age."

A CHAR TURNED INTO

A DRUG DEN

During the visit, this correspondent found garbage strewn here and there. There was no amusement park anywhere in the area. Youths were seen playing carrom board, and cards on the banks of the river during the day.

But after dusk, the Char becomes a haven for all kinds of drugs, according

to some locals.

Tanzila Akter, the community mobiliser of the area, said, "It becomes difficult to leave the house because of the addicts. If anyone tries to raise their voice they attack them. No one can do anything. Even telling the police does not help."

Locals claimed a former councillor of ward-9 Harun Or Rashid had a strong influence on the narcotics trade. A police source named Kulsum also has control of the narcotics market.

Harun, however, denied the claim and said he is not involved with any such activities and does not have any idea who is responsible for it.

Kulsum also denied her involvement with the drug trade.

Syed Human Kabir Linku, the incumbent councillor of ward-9, said, "I do not want to name those who are involved in the narcotics trade. But some of them are working in the lower tier of the police, and some are journalists. The area has become drug prone and has spread to every corner."

"We are trying our best to make the area drug free," he added.

Arichul Haque, officer-in-charge of Kotowali Police Station, however, denied the allegations of police officials' involvement with the narcotics trade.

"We often conduct drives and recover drugs based on specific information," he said.

Enayet Hossain, assistant director of the Department of Narcotics Control of Barishal Division, told this newspaper that a total of 60 narcotics cases were filed last year. "In these cases, 97,806 pieces of yaba, and 292-kilogramme marijuana were recovered. We have come to know a majority of these drugs came from the Rasulpur Char," he added.

CHILD MARRIAGE IN BARISHAL

There were no statistics on the number of child marriages in official records. However, the District Women's Affairs Officer's office gave the number of early marriages they stopped.

The data showed the department received news of 29 child marriages between January 2022 and January 2023, out of which, they managed to prevent 18.

District Women's Affairs Officer Meherun Nahar Munni said child marriage increased during the Covid period in 2020-21.

"Child marriage is especially rampant in slum areas," she said. "People in areas like Rasulpur do not give us information about child marriages. But we are alert and whenever we get the information, we stop such practices with the help

2 fishermen found dead next to shrimp enclosure

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Police yesterday recovered the bodies of two fishermen on the bank of a shrimp enclosure in the Khurushkul area of Cox's Bazar Sadar upazila.

The deceased were identified as local residents Abdul Khalek, 25, and Yasin Arafat, 23, said Khurushkul Union Parishad Chairman Shahajan Siddiqui.

Locals said that the bodies bore marks of electric shocks.

The relatives of the victims said the men were killed on allegations of stealing shrimp from the enclosure by its owners.

The UP chairman said, "Immediately after locals found their bodies abandoned next to the shrimp enclosure, the police were informed."

"Two days ago, they returned from the sea. But I can't say how they died. The police will be able to tell after the post-mortem", he added.

Cox's Bazar Sadar Model Police Station Officer-in-Charge (OC) Rakibuzzaman said the police were investigating the incident.

School headmaster beaten to death over land dispute

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A school headmaster was beaten to death allegedly over a land dispute in Mymensingh's Phulpur last morning.

Sajjad Hossain Kamal, 55, was the headmaster of Goatola Raghurampur Govt Primary School in Dhobaura upazila.

Sajjad of Phulpur's Boula Puran Nagor village had a long-standing feud over a piece of land with his cousin Zakaria, said Mahbubur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Phulpur Police Station, quoting family members and locals.

Sajjad and Zakaria got into a fight over a pond on the disputed land around 10:00am yesterday, and at one point Zakaria and his men beat Sajjad with sticks, leaving him injured critically.

He was taken to the Phulpur Upazila Health Complex, where the doctors declared him dead. On information, police recovered his body and sent it to the Mymensingh Medical College Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

Police detained Zakaria, 30, his brother Muhibullah, 18, and their mother, Afia Khatun, 45. They were being interrogated at the police station, said the OC.

'Advice from foreigners won't bear fruit here'

FROM PAGE 1

of the 22nd Biennial Conference-2024 of Bangladesh Economic Association at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh, in the capital's Ramna area.

Hasina said if any plan is devised focusing on local realities and public welfare, it would be effective.

"If someone [a foreigner] comes here for a day or two and leaves after giving us advice, it would not be useful."

The PM said Bangladeshi experts of course can learn from abroad but they would work here keeping the country, its people and resources in mind.

Mentioning that making Bangladesh a developed country is her goal, she said Bangladesh has already achieved significant progress.

"Insha Allah, we will continue moving forward like we are doing now. We will be able to overcome all the obstacles, no matter how many they are," said Hasina.

The premier asked the economists to work on plans to boost the country's exports and strengthen its

**The PM said Bangladeshi experts of course can learn from abroad but they would work here keeping the country, its people and resources in mind.**

rural economy.

"We need to produce export-oriented goods on a larger scale and diversify our exports... I would like to see our economists working on identifying products that can be added to our export basket."

Hasina said her government will place the proposed national budget for the fiscal 2024-2025 in parliament on June 6. She expressed optimism that the budget will be implemented.

She said her government is focusing on boosting agricultural production based on cooperatives.

The PM described different measures taken by her government to strengthen the rural economy, self-employment, expand the coverage of social safety net and utilise marine resources.

Hasina also highlighted various programmes like "My Village-My Township", "My House My Farm", and self-employment loan scheme.

"All our policies have been adopted targeting the grassroots people," she said.

Heatwave to continue till tomorrow

FROM PAGE 1

low-pressure system could form in the Bay of Bengal on May 22 or 23.

Yesterday, the country's highest temperature was recorded at 39.6 degrees Celsius in Chuadanga while it was 37.7 degrees Celsius in Dhaka.

According to the forecast of BMD for 24 hours commencing at 9:00am on Saturday, rain/thunder showers accompanied by temporary gusty/squally wind are likely to occur at many places over Rangpur, Rajshahi, Dhaka, Mymensingh, Chattogram, and Sylhet divisions, and at a few places over Khulna and Barishal divisions with hails at isolated places. And at one or two places over Mymensingh, Dhaka and Khulna divisions with hails at isolated places.

## AL is the strongest party in Bangladesh

Says Hasina

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said her party – Awami League is the strongest, largest and the most credible political party in the country now.

Hasina, also the AL president, made the remark when her party leaders and activists came to Gono Bhaban to greet her on her Homecoming Day.

Recalling her election as the president of AL in her absence before her return to home on May 17, 1981, the PM said she had no experience to lead a big party like AL at that time. It was definitely a big responsibility for her to lead AL, she added.

She said the party has overcome conspiracies on many occasions.

Recollecting the day she had returned home

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



Senior Awami League leaders greet party president and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina with flowers at Gono Bhaban yesterday, marking her 44th homecoming day. PHOTO: PID



## Spice prices shoot up by 20 percent

Syndicates allegedly using dollar rate hike as excuse

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and ARAFAT RAHAMAN

Wholesale prices of most imported spices have surged approximately by 20 percent in the markets of the capital, shortly after a Tk 7 increase in the dollar exchange rate.

Importers and traders claim the abrupt spike is a direct result of the recent uptick in the dollar's value, which is impacting market prices.

On May 8, Bangladesh Bank raised the dollar exchange rate to Tk 117 from Tk 110.

During visits to Karwan Bazar, Kochukhet, and Moulvibazar markets in the capital, this newspaper observed that prices of most imported spices have surged.

Currently, cumin is priced at Tk 680 per kg, up from Tk 570, while the lowest wholesale price for cardamom has risen to Tk 3,200 from Tk 2,800. Another type of cardamom that was previously priced at Tk 3,200 is now being sold at Tk 3,500.

Additionally, wholesale price of white pepper has risen to Tk 1,200 from Tk 1,000. Cashew nuts are now selling at Tk 1,300, compared to Tk 1,200 earlier, while chickpeas have seen an increase from Tk 102 to Tk 108 per kg.

Riaz Hossain from Nur Traders in Karwan Bazar, who used to procure spices twice a week from the Moulvi Bazar wholesale market in Old Dhaka, expressed dismay at the recent price surge.

"Just a week ago, I purchased cumin at Tk 570-580 per kg, but now I'm having to pay Tk 700, although these spices were imported well before the new dollar rate came into effect," he said. "It

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## Barishal museum fails to attract visitors

Lack of funds, manpower, initiatives key challenges

SUSHANTA GHOSH

The Barishal Divisional Museum is losing its attraction amid a dire lack of initiatives over the years.

The museum was established on June 8, 2015 with 23 rooms in Barishal Collectorate Building, displaying 146 archaeological specimens.

Since the museum's inception, there has been no survey and excavation work from it for the Department of Archaeology.

The museum officials said the museum is managed under the Khulna Divisional Museum. As such, for any activity the decision is made by their authorities. Also, the museum lacks sufficient funds for activities including survey, excavation and programmes.

At present, Barishal Divisional Museum is being run by 12 staffers under an assistant custodian.

During a recent visit to the museum, this correspondent saw various pottery items, recovered ancient idols, inscriptions, furniture, and coins on display.

According to officials, no more than 60 to 70

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Established on June 8, 2015 with 23 rooms in Barishal Collectorate Building, the divisional museum is losing its attraction amid a dire lack of initiatives over the years. The photo was taken on Thursday. PHOTO: TITU DAS

## Formulate pro-people budget

Urge speakers at event

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The bureaucratic system in the country needs to be dismantled, and the people need to be empowered to prepare a people-friendly budget, said speakers at a seminar yesterday.

The seminar, titled "Budget and Thoughts of Youth Society," was organised by Bangladesh Jubo Union at Jatiya Press Club.

"The syndicate of dishonest bureaucrats, politicians, and businessmen must be dismantled. For this purpose, the leftist forces must be united," said economist Prof MM Akash.

Prof Akash, also a teacher of Economics Department at Dhaka University, said, "There is a need for public involvement in this movement. Only then, we can have a pro-people budget."

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## Female RMG workers deserve better: speakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sultana Kamal, an RMG worker, used to endure abuse from her drug-addict husband before she relocated to Dhaka six years ago.

Previously, she used to work at a tannery for Tk 930 per month, but now, with her earnings, she manages to bear the educational expenses of her two sons.

"My sons are doing great at school, and now I dream of a better future with my family," said the 30-year-old mother while sharing her story during a day-long cultural programme at the Liberation War Museum yesterday.

The event, titled "Healthy Workers, Pleasant Working Environment, Productive Bangladesh – Garment Workers Star Fair," was organised by Karmajibi Nari, alongside Safety and Rights.

Around 350 RMG and tannery workers, along with their children, participated in the event by engaging in different activities, including dancing, singing, and a raffle draw.

At the programme, Sharmin Kabir, general secretary of Karmajibi Nari, said, "These women spend the entire day working outside and then have to return home to care for their families and children. When and where will they hang out and develop their minds? So, this star fair should be organised every year. It will help foster their economic, mental, and cultural development."

Md Tarikul Alam, director general of Bangladesh's Department of Labour, stressed the need to implement labour regulations.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

# RECOGNISE 1971 genocide

Speakers urge the youth to be aware of history, Genocide Museum marks 10th anniversary

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The anti-liberation forces oppose preserving Liberation War memorials and genocide relics, but it's crucial for the younger generation to understand their roots, said speakers at an event yesterday.

They also called for the international recognition of the 1971 genocide. They said a vested quarter is trying to distort the country's history and urged the youth to remain aware of that.

The event marked the 10th anniversary of Genocide Museum.

Khulna City Corporation Mayor Talukder Abdul Khaleque inaugurated the programme at the museum in the morning.

Presiding over the event, Prof Muntassir Mamoon, chairman of the museum, expressed concern that those who don't believe in the country's liberation are being allowed to engage in politics. He shared how people endured brutal atrocities during the nine-month-long Liberation War in 1971.

Trustee Tariq Sujat, while delivering a commemorative speech, highlighted the lack of precise statistics on the massacres during the 1971 war. He blamed lack of collaborative research efforts for this. He shed light on the 10 year dedication of the museum to this end.

State Minister for Culture Naheed Zaher Khan said it's important for



Prof Muntassir Mamoon speaks at an event marking the 10th anniversary of Genocide Museum in Khulna yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

the younger generation to know the history of the war.

"Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is playing a key role in running the museum and the cultural ministry is helping in its operations," she added.

Poonam Mukherjee, PhD researcher of Calcutta University, and Sagar Tarang Mandal, assistant professor of Kalyani University of West Bengal, presented papers at the event.

Dr Chowdhury Shahid Quader, trustee secretary of genocide museum, conducted the programme.

The museum began its journey on May 17, 2014. Initially set up at a rented house in the city's Moilapota area, the museum relocated to its permanent place at South Central Road on February 26 this year on 21-decimal land allotted by the prime minister.

According to the museum authority, its archive has recorded over 18,481 mass killing spots where killings took place, 888 mass-killing grounds, 1,313 mass graves and 1,174 torture cells in 42 districts.

Besides, 192 types of evidence,

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

## Ansar-VDP eyes to provide security services abroad

Letter sent to home ministry for permission

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN

The Bangladesh Ansar and Village Defense Party (VDP) has expressed its intention to provide security for foreign establishments and protection of VVIPs abroad "to contribute to the country's economy and image", similar to their role in Bangladesh.

The Ansar-VDP stated that its members are now capable of providing security in various countries in the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia.

According to sources, the move came following a recent meeting between Bangladesh's Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan and Saudi Deputy Interior Minister Nasser bin Abdulaziz Al-Daoud.

On May 13, a letter was sent from the Ansar-VDP headquarters to the senior secretary of the home ministry's Public Security Division seeking permission in this regard.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5



## CURBING DENGUE

# DNCC to import pesticides directly from now on

DIPAN NANDY

Dhaka North City Corporation has recently got the government's permission to reimport a pesticide directly from the mother company in Singapore in a bid to curb the spread of dengue fever.

The pesticide, *Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis* (Bti) is a group of bacteria used as biological control agents for larvae stages of different pests, including mosquitoes.

Upon the government's approval, DNCC is gearing up to import Bti worth Tk 20 crore in three forms – liquid, tablet, and powder – from Best Chemical Company Limited in Singapore. It also has permission to bring the pesticide in granule form.

According to the DNCC's health department, taking lessons from the fraudulence involving the certificate of import and the product last year, this time DNCC itself is bringing this organic pesticide directly from Singapore.

The certificate of import of four



DNCC will import Bti worth Tk 20 crore in three forms -- liquid, tablet, and powder -- from Best Chemical Company Limited in Singapore. REPRESENTATIONAL PHOTO

types of Bti has been obtained from the Plant Protection Wing. DNCC is also in constant contact with the Singaporean company regarding the import of the pesticide.

Apart from DNCC, seven other companies have so far gotten permission to bring different types of Bti to the country.

The DNCC had applied to the ministry concerned to purchase and import mosquito insecticides without an open tender and got approval in principle on May 9 from the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs.

"The CCEA approved in principle the proposal to purchase or import insecticides through a

direct purchase system to ensure uninterrupted mosquito control activities," Mahmudul Hossain Khan, coordination and reform secretary of the Cabinet Division, said after the CCEA meeting.

DNCC Mayor Atiqul Islam said, "Bti is the best solution among biological methods of controlling mosquito populations. We have already worked on it. The process of importing Bti directly from Singapore is underway. We got approval from the government. Now we will bring it by air very soon."

"We learned a lesson from buying Bti last time. This time, it will not be brought through any contractor. DNCC will bring Bti directly from those who produce it," he added.

Johnny Wong, managing director of Best Chemicals, told The Daily Star, "DNCC has been in direct contact with BestChem regarding the possibilities of importing Bti. Due to confidentiality, we are unable to share any additional information at this time."

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

**4kg crystal meth seized in Cox's Bazar**

UNB, Cox's Bazar

Members of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) seized 4.025 kilogrammes of crystal methamphetamine and detained a man during separate drives in Teknaf and Ramu upazilas of Cox's Bazar on Thursday night.

The detainee is Md Nur Mohammad, 39, of Paschim Paglir Beel area of Ukhiya upazila of the district.

Lt Col Md Mohiuddin, commander of the BGB-2 in Teknaf, said they conducted a drive in Lambori Ghat area adjacent to Teknaf-Cox's Bazar Marine Drive Road, after being tipped-off that a haul of drugs would be smuggled from neighbouring country Myanmar via waterway.

As a man was spotted coming to the Marine Drive Road from the Ghat with a bag, the frontier forces signalled him to halt. The suspect then fled towards a forest, leaving the bag, said the BGB official.

A total of 2.045 kg drugs was recovered from it. Efforts were on to find the drug dealer.

BGB's Ramu zone commander Lt Col Syed Wahiduzzaman said they also conducted a drive in the Goalia Link Road around 11:00pm.

They intercepted a Cox's Bazar-bound bus and recovered 1.980kg of crystal meth from a shopping bag belonging to passenger Nur Mohammad. The detainee was handed over to Ukhiya Police Station after filing a case, he added.

**EC seeks action**

FROM PAGE 5

The letter said the EC has directed to take action against the official concerned, mentioning that the action of Moniruzzaman is a violation of the Government Servants (Conduct) Rules, 1979.

It also requested the home ministry to inform the EC about the action taken, including the departmental proceedings against Moniruzzaman.

Wearing his official uniform, Moniruzzaman went to the Awami League office on April 29 and submitted his brother's party nomination paper.

His brother, Shaillkupa AL General Secretary Wahiduzzaman, was the AL candidate in the Jhenaidah-1 by-election.

**AL is the strongest**

FROM PAGE 3

ending six years of forced exile, the AL president said she had been welcomed by hundreds of thousands of people defying the storm and rain on that day.

She said when she returned to Bangladesh in 1981, the country was then run by war criminals and the killers of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman along with most of his family members.

The prime minister said she returned to the country despite knowing she might have been killed as she had

**AMTALI OF BARGUNA**  
**18 years on, no dedicated building for police outpost**

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

There is no dedicated building for the Gazipur Bazaar police outpost in Amtali upazila of Barguna for 18 years.

The police outpost was set up on October 19, 2006 at Gazipur Bazaar, about is 10 kilometres east of Amtali town, considering the security of the traders and local residents.

The 18 police personnel -- including two police inspectors, three assistant police inspectors and 13 constables -- posted to this outpost have been using an old, abandoned warehouse to set up the office as well as their accommodation since then.

Visiting the place recently, this correspondent saw the warehouse does not have proper ventilation due to inadequate doors and windows, causing much sufferings to the policemen amid the heat. The two doors of the warehouse on both sides are damaged and cannot be closed, thereby posing a security risk. Therefore, the policemen sleep with the lights on at night. A few makeshift beds can be seen inside, which are being used by the staff to sleep, while the office is set up in one corner.

"Without necessary accommodation, alongside insufficient light and ventilation,



we are living an inhumane life in this abandoned warehouse," said a policeman wishing anonymity.

Another policeman echoed him, saying they can hardly sleep at night due to the heat after toiling for work all day long.

Both of them urged the authorities concerned to ensure them proper accommodation.

Inspector Dibakar Chandra, officer-in-charge of the outpost, said, "We are having a lot of trouble living and working in this way. A new building for the outpost is needed to solve this problem."

Contacted, Md Mozammel Hossain Reza, additional superintendent of police in Barguna, said the Police Headquarters has been informed of the matter.

"A new building will be constructed if funds are available," he added.

**Barishal museum fails to attract Ansar-VDP eyes**

FROM PAGE 3

individuals visit the museum daily.

Arif Ur Rahman, assistant custodian of the museum, said the lack of funds prevented them from undertaking any significant initiative aimed at preserving the antiquities in the region.

"There is not even a separate office for the museum at the divisional level," he said.

"There are at least 25 archaeological sites in Barishal division, including Tagore estate of Barishal Sadar, Mallikpur Mosque in Nalchhity upazila, Sikdar Bari Mosque in Kathalia upazila, Kalsakathi Zamindar Palace in Bakerganj upazila and Sher-e Bangla AK Fazlul Haque's ancestral home. Of those, only two structures could be brought under conservation scope," he said.

Arif informed that a museum was established in 1978 in a part of the ancestral residence of Sher-e

Bangla on 27 decimals of land in Chakhar union under Banaripara upazila.

However, a bungalow used by Sher-e-Bangla there, as well as a "kachhari ghar" owned by Sher-e-Bangla in Jhalakathi, were not placed under the museum, he added.

"There are 75 pictures, 30 handwritten letters, other documents, and furniture on display here," said Balram Das, in-charge of the Sher-e-Bangla Museum in Chakhar.

"Due to a lack of initiatives to make the museum attractive, people are losing interest in knowing more about our heritage," said Md Ziaul Hasan, principal of Fazlul Haque Institution. Shah Sajeda, an educationist, echoed him.

Contacted, Lovely Yeasmin, regional director of Barishal and Khulna divisional museum, said, "The scope of conducting renovation works for heritage sites under the Barishal Divisional

Museum is vast, but this cannot be done with general budget. We have submitted a separate proposal in this regard."

"We will also present our plans to expand activities of the museum to the authorities concerned soon," she added.

According to the letter, the combined force of the Ansar-VDP is approximately 6.1 million.

The letter also added that 54,224 embodied Ansar members deployed under 5,679 guard units are guarding various government and private establishments across the country. These members have also received special training on ensuring security, mob control and disaster management.

The letter stated that the members of the Ansar Battalions and the active Ansar members are ready to take on significant responsibilities both in Bangladesh and internationally.

It requested the ministry, if an opportunity arises, to

take necessary measures to deploy members of the force to countries in the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, for security purposes.

Deputy Director General Fakhru Alam told The Daily Star that the process is in an initial stage.

"During the recent visit of the deputy foreign minister of Saudi Arabia, the issue was discussed with the home minister. In light of that discussion, we sent a letter saying that our members are ready to serve in foreign countries."

"We requested the ministry to consider Ansar-VDP as a top priority if a window of opportunity opens," he added.

"The deployment will be different than police or other forces who are serving abroad. And this will not impact the service we are providing within the country," he added.

**Recognise 1971**

FROM PAGE 3

over 10,000 pictures, 10,300 books on the war, and 2,000 videos are kept here, while 65 memorial plaques on spots of killing and torture have already been set up in and around Khulna city. The museum has also published 148 booklets and 130 genocide torture indexes focused on the killing grounds.

A six-storey building for the museum is being constructed by the Public Works Department in Khulna, under supervision of the Bangladesh National Museum, at a cost of Tk 32.22 crore.

**Spice prices shoot up**

FROM PAGE 3

appears to be the work of a syndicate," he added.

A staffer at another store said, "Just six months ago, cardamom was priced at Tk 1,700-1,800 per kg, but now it's selling for Tk 3,200-3,300. Clearly, a syndicate is controlling the spice trade."

A spice wholesaler at Moulvi Bazar wholesale market said, "Certain importers in our market have instructed us to raise prices in line with the increased dollar rate, despite our procurement costs remaining the same."

"We have no choice but to comply with their pricing directives," he added.

Md Gofran from Cumilla General Store at Karwan Bazar said, "The price hike effects are currently limited to the wholesale market. But it will soon affect retail

prices, especially with Eid-ul-Azha approaching."

Contacted, SM Nazer Hossain, vice president of Consumers Rights Association of Bangladesh, said, "They increased the price as the dollar rate was raised. But do they reduce the price when the dollar rate is reduced?"

Contacted, Helal Uddin, president of Bangladesh Shop Owners Association, said, "It's normal that the prices of commodities have surged due to an increase in dollar rates. However, I call upon traders to not increase the prices too much."

**DNCC**

FROM PAGE 3

Last year, DNCC gave a tender to Marshall Agrovet to import Bti. Accordingly, five tonnes of Bti were handed over to DNCC. The importing contractor claimed that the pesticide was produced by Best Chemical Company Limited of Singapore, but the Singaporean company refuted the claim and issued a warning in this regard on its Facebook page. After this, the order to Marshall Agrovet was cancelled and DNCC blacklisted the company.

**Govt, NGO officials**

FROM PAGE 5

region and shared their experiences from the project titled "Introducing Efficient Technologies".

She also called for reducing the water-requiring rice cultivation in the region, saying rice fields are emitting methane, accelerating global warming.

Following her presentation, the minister asked agricultural officials what they have been doing regarding the rice cultivation issue.

He also asked why they cannot perform like NGOs.

In response, Dr Fazlul Haque, head of Rajshahi regional office of Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI), said the idea of reducing rice production in Barind would be fatal for the country.

Moreover, a BRRI research disagreed with the concept of rice fields harming the environment by generating methane, he added.

Barind region has contributed to the country's food safety by

producing 6 crore tonnes of rice annually, Haque said, adding, "Research proved the rice fields in the tonnes absorb 38 million tonnes of carbon dioxide."

Md Abdur Rouf, programme development lead of Syngenta Foundation, said BRRI's calculation might be wrong as methane emissions are globally acknowledged.

Meanwhile, Abdur Rashid, executive director of Barind Multipurpose Development Authority, said they reduced 2 percent of water use by introducing pre-paid meters and Alternate Wetting and Drying (AWD) projects.

On the other hand, Dr Md Shakhawat Hossain, senior scientific officer of On-Farm Research Division of BARI, said they identified that AWD projects will not be successful without precision land levelling.

Then the minister asked the officials not to argue with each other and to work together instead.

He also directed agricultural officials to ensure proper extension of agriculture in the country.

**Female RMG**

FROM PAGE 3

Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmmed, executive director of Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies, said, "Female industrial workers are increasingly empowering themselves to support their partners and kids. We are steadily making progress in the RMG sector."

Zakir Hossain, chief executive of Nagorik Uddyog, said, "The economy of Bangladesh is heavily dependent on garments and migrant workers.

**Formulate pro-people**

FROM PAGE 3

Towfiqul Islam Khan, a senior research fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the government cannot meet many deficits in the budget, as the taxes paid by the people do not largely reach the government.

It is important to find out how much of the expenditure is being used for the people, he added.

Monowar Mostafa, general secretary of Democratic Budget Movement, said there was no scope for democratic

speech in the budget. "This is done in such secrecy that there is no involvement of the common people," he added.

The speakers emphasised the necessity of formulating a pro-people and work-oriented budget to create self-employment for the youth.

They noted that the National Youth Policy 2017 has not given enough attention to youth employment generation and called for training for human resource development.

**Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh**  
Office of the Executive Engineer, RHD,  
Patuakhali Road Division,  
Patuakhali.  
Phone : 0441-62216 Fax : 0441-65108  
email : [eeapat@rhd.gov.bd](mailto:eeapat@rhd.gov.bd)

Memo No. 35.01.7895.461.07.001.21-836 Dated: 16/05/2024

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| Sl. No. | Tender ID No. | Tender Reference No.   | Name of works   | Invitation Date & Time | Last Selling/Downloading Date & Time | Tender Closing/Opening Date & Time |
|---------|---------------|------------------------|---|------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1       | 985207        | 46e-GP/PATRD/2023-2024 | Maintenance of Existing pavement with Aggregate Base Type - II, Permex Bituminous Carpeting, Seal Coat and other congenial work at 66th (Sheikh Razel Bridge) km of R-881 and Flexible pavement respective Bridges under Road Division Patuakhali During the Financial year 2023-2024                         | 15-May-2024 12:00      | 29-May-2024 16:00                    | 30-May-2024 12:10                  |
| 2       | 985208        | 47e-GP/PATRD/2023-2024 | Maintenance of Existing pavement with Aggregate Base Type - II, Permex Bituminous Carpeting, Seal Coat and other congenial work at 49th (Sheikh Kamal Bridge) & (Sheikh Jamal Bridge) km of R-881 and Flexible pavement respective Bridges under Road Division Patuakhali During the Financial year 2023-2024 | 15-May-2024 12:00      | 29-May-2024 F16:00                   | 30-May-2024 12:00                  |

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যোগাযোগ: ০১৭০৮-০০৯০০০

**Invitation to submit proposals for two Request for Proposals (RFPs) issued by UNICEF Bangladesh**  
RFP No. LRPS-9190106 for Spot Check on behalf of UNICEF Bangladesh Country Office and other UN agencies under Long-Term Arrangement (LTA) for a period of 24 months with a possible extension for another 24 months.  
RFP No. LRPS-9190107 for Micro assessment of the partner's financial and operational management capacity under Long-Term Arrangement (LTA) for a period of 24 months with possible extension for another 24 months.  
UNICEF Bangladesh is inviting interested companies with a strong track record and professional credibility of providing the above-required services under the contract. To receive the detailed scope of work and procedure to submit the bid response, please email to [supplybangladesh@unicef.org](mailto:supplybangladesh@unicef.org)  
The pre-bid meeting schedule and bid submissions deadlines are mentioned in the respective bid document.  
Please note UNICEF does not charge any fee at any stage of the solicitation process.  
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**PRAYER TIMING**  
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AZAN 4-10 12-45 5-00 6-36 8-00  
JAMAAT 4-45 1-15 5-15 6-40 8-30  
SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

(Md. Juwel Hossain)  
Assistant Engineer (A.C), RHD  
Road Division, Patuakhali.  
(A.M. Azizque Ullah)  
ID No. 602311  
Executive Engineer (C.C.), RHD  
Road Division, Patuakhali.  
GD-804

## EC seeks action against addl DIG

He collected his brother's nomination in uniform for Jhenidah by-polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission has directed the home ministry to take action against Additional Deputy Inspector General of Police Md Moniruzzaman for participating in election activities on behalf of his younger brother.

The EC sent a letter to the senior secretary of public security division of the ministry on May 13 in this regard.

EC Deputy Secretary Md Mizanur Rahman signed the letter, saying Moniruzzaman was present in uniform while collecting nomination papers for an aspirant candidate from the office of a political party for Jhenidah-1 by-election, according to reports published in media.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

## FARMING IN BARIND Govt, NGO officials at odds

Minister calls for collaboration

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

An altercation between NGO officials and government agricultural scientists broke out at a workshop in Rajshahi Circuit House yesterday, which was attended by Agriculture Minister Md Abdus Shahid.

The workshop was jointly organised by DASCOH, World Bank's 2030 Water Resources Group (2030 WRG), and Coca Cola Bangladesh Limited.

During the workshop, the minister asked the government agriculturists what they have been doing, when NGOs are pointing out and solving different issues, which resulted in the altercation.

Syeda Sitwat Shahed, consultant of Agricultural Water of 2030 WRG, presented a multimedia presentation at the beginning of the programme, where she described the necessity for adopting climate-smart technologies in Barind

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

# Hope to revive a forest dashed

## Shipbreaking yard given permission to resume activities on forest land in Chattogram

SIFAYET ULLAH

As many as 5,000 trees weren't spared the axe in a five-acre forest area in Tulatoli of Chattogram. This lush-green forest was turned into a shipbreaking yard.

The Forest Department, however, wasn't about to go down without a fight. They challenged the legality of the land lease agreement signed in February 2022 between the district administration and Kohinoor Steel, the owner firm of the yard.

The land used to be a "notified" forest area according to Section 4 of the Forest Act-1986, meaning the district authorities could not lease it out to a private entity without consulting the Forest Department first, it claimed.

The place was part of a 400-acre mangrove forest developed by the Coastal Forest Division in 1983-1984 to protect the locality from natural disasters, the officials added.

The Forest Department also challenged the yard authorities and filed three cases against them for felling trees without permission.

Felling trees without permission from the Forest Department is illegal under the Forest Products Transit Rules 2011.

Responding to the call of the Forest Department, the district administration, by the order of the deputy commissioner, cancelled the lease agreement in 2023 and sealed off the yard.

A glimmer of hope for the forest's revival was seen. But that hope has been short-lived.

The divisional commissioner has overruled the order last month, reinstating the lease agreement and paving the way for the shipbreaking yard to move full steam ahead.

This decision deals a devastating blow to efforts to restore the lost forest, according to the forest department and environmentalists.

Visiting the area recently, this correspondent found that the yard authorities cordoned off a large area with wire fencing, while some workers were

constructing a brick wall.

"The district administration cancelled the lease illegally. Later, we appealed to the higher authorities and they ordered the district administration to reinstate the lease," said Abul Kashem alias Raja Kashem, owner of Kohinoor Steel.

Contacted, Tofayel Ahmed, divisional commissioner of Chattogram, confirmed that they ordered to reinstate the lease after inspecting related documents.

"We found proper grounds for ordering to reinstate the lease contract after inspecting all the relevant documents. The decision was made after holding a hearing in presence of both parties," Tofayel said.

Shahadat Hossain, the then Sitakunda upazila nirbahi officer who had signed the lease agreement on behalf of the district administration, claimed that the land to be recorded under the district administration.

"We informed the Forest Department before leasing out the land, but they didn't respond," he said.

Abdur Rahman, the then divisional forest officer of Chattogram Coastal Forest Division, however, said, "The district administration leased out the forest land to Kohinoor Steel without informing us."

Belayet Hossain, incumbent divisional forest officer of Chattogram Coastal

Forest Division, said, "No one can lease out notified forest without obtaining permission from the Forest Department."

He informed them that they formed a committee to take the matter to court.

Yard owner Abul Kashem stressed that no one can hinder his business.

"I have already invested several crores of taka to build the shipbreaking yard. I am trying to bring a scrap vessel to the yard soon for dismantling," he added.

**THE ENVIRONMENTAL COSTS**  
If the yard becomes fully functional, felling of 5,000 trees won't be the last of the environmental harm.

Shipbreaking, particularly when conducted on tidal mudflats in South Asia, causes severe environmental pollution and health hazards for workers, according to NGO Shipbreaking Platform.

Toxic spills from shipbreaking operations contaminate coastal ecosystems and devastate local communities dependent on them, it added.

Lack of proper waste management results in hazardous materials being dumped on beaches, leading to soil contamination and metal accumulation. Besides, pollutants spread through currents and tides, harming marine biodiversity, destroying fishing livelihoods, and endangering mangrove ecosystems.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

## They appear amid heatwave and disappear after rain

### Mealybug infestation causes fear in Ctg's Boalkhali

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN

Residents in Boalkhali upazila of Chattogram are in a state of panic following giant mealybug infestation in the area for the past several days.

The pest, originating in Africa, is a small, oval-shaped insect that attacks trees and feeds on tree-sap during warm weather, said experts.

The recent heatwave triggered the mealybug attack, affecting a large number of trees in wards 8 and 9 under Boalkhali Municipality, Pachim Gomdandi, Gulzarpara, Samdar Talukdar Bari, Char Khidirpur, and Bande Ali Masjid areas, according to upazila agriculture officials.

This year, the bugs are considerably larger than previous year, said the officials, suggesting people to use pesticides to kill the bugs.

Locals said the bugs were also seen crawling up houses, shops and even Gulzarpara Government Primary School building.

"The affected areas have a previous record of giant mealybug infestation. Due to the heatwave, the bugs come out in large numbers, and disperse away after rainfall," said Durga Pada Deb, deputy agriculture officer in the upazila.



"This year, we have noticed that the bugs are bigger than the previous year and have infested big trees including those on the roadsides. At night, it releases a kind of fluid from its body that can cause itching to human skin. We have already told people to use pesticides to kill the bugs," he also said.

"However, individual effort cannot curb the pests. We need collaboration. We have informed our senior officers and mayor in this regard. Research should be done to prevent further attack of the pests," he added.

Earlier, giant mealybugs were reported to be found in Dhaka's Cantonment, Farmgate and Khamarbari areas and in some places in Panchagarh, Thakurgaon and Dinajpur districts during a survey in 2011. It made newspaper headlines again in 2014 following an outbreak at Home Economics College in the capital.

"After the rains on Sunday, the bugs disappeared. We are spreading pesticide to prevent further attack. We have already informed the UNO, agriculture and district livestock departments," said Md Jahurul Islam, mayor of Boalkhali municipality.

Contacted, Dr Md Shahidul Islam Khan, chief scientific officer of Regional Agricultural Research Station, said they were unaware about the matter.

"If we are informed, we will send our team to research," he added.

# Buri Teesta to get a new life

S DILIP ROY, from Kurigram

To rejuvenate the Buri Teesta river in Kurigram and save the riverside people from bearing the brunt of extensive floods during monsoon, the Barendra Multipurpose Development Authorities have begun excavation work in the river.

The 76-kilometre-long river was once part of the main Teesta river channel but gradually became a tributary, as Teesta changed its course over time, according to the Bangladesh Water Development Board.

The river has long been on its deathbed due to rampant encroachment and siltation, causing inundation of croplands on both its

banks during the monsoon, thereby damaging Aman paddy cultivation.

Now, BMDA will dredge a 9-km stretch of the river between Nazimkhan union under Rajarhat upazila and Thetrai union under Ulipur upazila. The excavation will be completed in 15 phases at a cost of Tk 3,73,88,700, said BMDA officials.

In each phase, 590 metres of the river will be dug to a depth of 12 feet at a cost of Tk 24.92 lakh over a period of three months.

"The excavation work began with an allocation from the Ministry of Agriculture. We are monitoring that the excavation is completed on schedule. The first phase started in Nazimkhan union in March and will end in May. The second phase

will begin after the monsoon," said Mostafizur Rahman, executive engineer of BMDA in Kurigram.

The Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation earlier started dredging a 20-km stretch of Buri Teesta river from Itakuri area of Rajarhat upazila to Thetrai Union in 2021 and finished two kilometres before local grabbers lodged cases to put an end to the initiative in 2022, according to locals.

Abdullah Al Mamun, deputy director of the Department of Agricultural Extension in Kurigram, said, "The government has allocated funds for dredging the river. After completion, farmers will be able to produce Aman paddy on 2,500 hectares of land on the river bank."



PHOTO: STAR

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## US sanctions undermine confidence in dollar Says Putin in China

AGENCIES

President Vladimir Putin yesterday said that US sanctions policy was undermining confidence in the dollar and that Russia and China would find a way to stop the threat of measures against Chinese banks from disrupting their burgeoning trade.

Washington has hit Russia with waves of Ukraine-related sanctions and threatened secondary sanctions on foreign banks aiding transactions with Moscow. That has prompted some Chinese banks to limit dealings with Russian companies.

In televised comments during a visit to China, Putin said such sanctions were illegitimate unless approved by the UN Security Council. He said they were also counter-productive for the United States and demonstrated its "stupidity".

"They are completely devoid of common sense," Putin told reporters.

He said the United States was "sawing the branch they are sitting on" because its actions were undermining confidence in the dollar and causing countries to reduce the share of dollars in their reserves.

Putin said a solution was possible to the difficulties in Russian-Chinese payment settlements but did not say what it would entail.

Putin arrived Thursday on his first trip abroad since his March re-election, meeting President Xi Jinping for talks in which the leaders framed their nations' ties as a stabilising force in a chaotic world.

China and Russia's strategic partnership has only grown closer since the invasion of Ukraine, and Beijing has rebuffed Western claims that it is aiding Moscow's war effort.

China has also offered a critical lifeline to Russia's isolated economy, with trade booming since the invasion and hitting \$240 billion in 2023, according to Chinese customs figures.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of a Russia-China trade expo yesterday, Putin hailed energy ties between the two countries.

"Russia is ready and able to continuously power the Chinese economy, businesses, cities and towns with affordable and environmentally clean energy," he said.



This handout photograph, taken and released by Ukrainian Emergency Service yesterday, shows rescuers evacuating civilians from Russian shelling in Kharkiv region, Ukraine.

PHOTO: AFP

## UKRAINE'S KHARKIV REGION

# Russia carving out buffer zone

Says Putin; Kyiv launches a wave of drones at Russia, Crimea

AGENCIES

President Vladimir Putin said yesterday that Russian forces advancing in Ukraine's northeast were carving out a buffer zone to protect Russia from attacks and said the West was "sick in the head" if it thought it could dictate terms to Moscow.

Speaking to reporters on a state visit to China after discussing Ukraine during talks with Xi Jinping, Putin said that Russian troops were advancing to plan after repeated deadly Ukrainian strikes on the Belgorod region of Russia, reports Reuters.

"As for what is happening in the Kharkiv direction. This is their (Ukraine's) fault because they shelled and continue, unfortunately, to shell residential neighbourhoods in the border areas, including Belgorod," Putin said.

"Civilians are dying there. It's obvious. They are shooting directly at the city centre, at residential areas. And I said publicly that if this continues, we will be forced to create a security zone, a buffer

zone. That is what we are doing."

When asked if Russian forces planned to take control of nearby Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-biggest city, Putin said: "As for Kharkiv, there are no such plans as of today."

Meanwhile, Ukraine launched a wave of drones at Russia and annexed Crimea

as Kyiv struggles with ammunition and manpower shortages, reports AFP.

The Russian military said it had neutralised or downed more than 100 Ukrainian drones in the south of the country, annexed Crimea and Black Sea. "Fifty-one UAVs were destroyed and intercepted over Crimea, 44 over the Krasnodar region, six over the Belgorod region and one over the Kursk region", it said, adding naval forces destroyed six drone boats. One drone struck a family driving near the border in Belgorod region, killing a mother and her four-year-old son, region's governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said. "The child was in a critical condition. Doctors did everything possible to save him. (But) to much grief, the four-year-old died in hospital," he said.

The father was injured but "is in shock" and refused medical help, while the driver of the car was treated for shrapnel wounds to his hands, he added.

Another drone attack caused a brief fire at a gas station in the border village of Bessonovka, he said.

**Russian military neutralised or downed more than 100 Ukrainian drones in the south of the country.**

overnight, killing two people including a child and setting an oil refinery ablaze, officials said yesterday.

The attack was Ukraine's largest aerial offensive in weeks and comes as Russian forces advance along the frontline, making their biggest territorial gains in 18 months

## Slovak PM has new surgery

Deputy PM says his condition 'still very serious'

AFP, Bratislava

Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico's condition was "still very serious" two days after an attempted assassination, his deputy and close ally said yesterday, as police raided the suspect's home.

Fico was hospitalised after the shooting on Wednesday, which happened as the 59-year-old leader was speaking to members of the public after a meeting in the central town of Handlova.

"He was operated on again, he had an almost two-hour-long operation," deputy prime minister Robert Kalinak told reporters outside the hospital in Banska Bystrica. Fico had previously undergone a five-hour-long surgery, shortly after being airlifted from the scene of attack on Wednesday.

"His state is still very serious. I think it would take a couple of days to see the course of the development of his state," Kalinak added yesterday.

The Banska Bystrica hospital director said Fico remained "conscious" despite being in a "serious" condition. Earlier yesterday, local media reported that Slovak police had searched the home of the man charged with the shooting.

Officers brought along the alleged gunman to the apartment he shared with his wife in the western town of Levice, TV footage showed.

## SAFETY CONCERNS

# Nepal latest to ban Indian spice brands

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal has become the latest jurisdiction to ban the import and sale of two popular Indian spice brands after reports that some of their products contained a cancer-causing pesticide, officials said yesterday.

Hong Kong and Singapore last month banned products from Everest and MDH – two brands popular in India and exported worldwide – after tests detected the presence of ethylene oxide, according to media reports.

Besides its use as a pesticide, ethylene oxide is used to sterilise medical equipment and as a sterilising agent in spices to prevent illnesses caused by salmonella and E. Coli bacteria.

Regular exposure to the colourless and odourless compound increases the "risk of cancers of the white blood cells", according to the US Environmental Protection Agency.

Matina Joshi Vaidya, chief of Nepal's Department of Food Technology and Quality Control, told AFP that the Himalayan country had also decided to halt the sale of the spice blends.

## Firearms, ammo, explosives seized

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providing the training," CTTC officials added.

The CTTC chief further said that they got information about Sharqiya's training, source of arms and ammunition, and financing from Shamin Mahfuz, the mastermind and head of the banned militant outfit, who was arrested in June last year.

They also gathered information from Shamin Mahfuz's close aide Md Yashin and arms supplier Kabir, who were arrested on January 8 of the same year, he added.

Rahim is accused in at least 12 cases filed on various charges, including possessing illegal weapons, robbery, kidnapping, and destruction of forest land with Naikhongchhari and Ramu police stations, he added.

The CTTC chief said Shamin Mahfuz, the chief of the group who was arrested earlier, had given money to Rahim and Kabir to provide firearms.

When the law enforcers began a crackdown in the CHT in September 2022, members of the militant outfit and arms suppliers, including Rahim, went into hiding.

Most of the top leaders and activists of the militant group have been arrested by the Rapid Action Battalion and other police units since the crackdown started.

Rahim first arrived in Dhaka and started staying in Gazipur after changing his whereabouts multiple times, CTTC officials said.

## Teenage girl

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threatened her parents that they would be killed if they disclose the abuse to others.

Contacted, local Ward Councillor Momenul Haque said the victim's house is near the bank of a river and the area is a haven for drug traders and druggies. They might be involved in the incident.

OC Ahsan Ullah said as the victim could not identify the accused as she is a newcomer to the area. But police were trying to identify and arrest the accused.

The victim will be sent to a hospital for medical tests and treatment, he added.

## N Korea fires ballistic missiles, denies Russia arms transfers

AFP, Seoul

North Korea fired multiple suspected short-range ballistic missiles yesterday, Seoul said, hours after leader Kim Jong Un's powerful sister denied widespread allegations that Pyongyang is shipping weapons to Russia.

The launches are the latest in a string of ever more sophisticated tests by North Korea, which has fired off cruise missiles, tactical rockets and hypersonic weapons in recent months, in what the nuclear-armed country says is a drive to upgrade its defences.

Seoul and Washington have accused North Korea of sending arms to Russia, which would violate raft of UN sanctions on both countries, with experts saying the recent spate of testing may be of weapons destined for use on battlefields in Ukraine.

Seoul's military said yesterday it had detected the launch of what it described as "several flying objects presumed to be short-range ballistic missiles" from North Korea's eastern Wonsan area into waters off its coast.

The missiles travelled around 300 kilometres (186 miles), the Joint Chiefs of Staff said, adding that the military had "strengthened vigilance and surveillance in preparation for additional launches" and was sharing information with allies Washington and Tokyo.

The launches came just hours after Kim's sister Kim Yo Jong accused

## US sanctions

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which is independent and separate from the White House and the State Department. They work independently," Salman F Rahman added.

"The issue is moving through a process," Salman said after his discussion over dinner with US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu who was on a three-day visit to Dhaka last week.

Seoul and Washington of "misleading the public opinion" on the issue with their repeated accusations that Pyongyang is sending weapons to Moscow for use in Ukraine.

They also came as Russian leader Vladimir Putin was in China yesterday, the final day of a visit aiming to promote crucial trade with Beijing – North Korea's most important ally – and win greater support for his war effort in Ukraine.

The tests also came a day after advanced South Korean and US stealth fighters, including Washington's F-22 Raptors, staged joint air combat drills.

Such exercises typically infuriate Pyongyang, which views them as rehearsals for invasion.

## 3 workers

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The deaths have pushed the victims' families into deep trouble.

Altafur's wife Afroza Akter said her husband spent around Tk 6 lakh to go to Saudi Arabia over 10 years ago, but failed. A major portion of the money was borrowed from relatives.

The couple then moved to Dhaka from Jamalpur and Altafur started working as a mason. To support him, Afroza started working as domestic help.

"We were working hard for a better future... But the hopes have been destroyed," Afroza told The Daily Star.

To minimise their living costs in Dhaka, the couple has kept their two children – Bonya, 15, a class-seven student, and Ananda, 13, a fifth grader, – with their grandparents in their village home.

"Over the last couple of years, he could repay a portion of the money that he borrowed. How will I support my family now?" she said.

The wife of Antar, of Mymensingh, is a four-month pregnant, said his cousin Uzzal Hossain.

## Dhaka getting hotter

FROM PAGE 1

climate-sensitive. Hollow bricks do not retain heat while solid ones make dwellings hotter due to their high heat conductivity, the professor pointed out.

He further said local climate is impacted by different elements in a city. For example, the speed of wind that takes away heat is seriously lowered by buildings of various heights. Heat gets trapped and causes temperatures to rise.

According to Bangladesh Forest Department, 14 percent area of the country and only 9 percent of Dhaka city are covered in trees.

But according to Global Forest Watch, a mere 5.9 percent of the city is green.

In April, Bangladesh experienced the longest heatwave ever, and a mild to moderate heatwave is sweeping the country now.

Data from Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD) shows that the average maximum temperature throughout April was 36.2 degrees Celsius. With an average rainfall of just 1mm, the month was

also the driest in 43 years.

"Responding to climate change is an unprecedented challenge for cities, especially in Bangladesh where extreme heat is becoming more common," Anna said.

"Extreme heat has a disproportionate impact on vulnerable people including the elderly and the young. Just last month, we saw another real-world example of this with the closure of schools."

Last month, the government kept the primary and secondary schools, colleges, and madrasas closed for days as certain regions saw temperatures of 40C or more.

Anna noted, "Low-income households have limited capacity to adapt to extreme heat because they have limited resources and inadequate building design and poor access to water and electricity."

"It is going to require bold action from policymakers, particularly when it comes to helping local communities adapt to this new reality."

According to the health directorate, at least 15 people died

from heatstroke in April. However, the actual number could be higher as the directorate started keeping records from April 22, twenty days after the heatwave began searing the country.

Talking to this newspaper, Saber Hossain Chowdhury, minister of environment, said, "Over the years, Dhaka has witnessed a significant loss of green spaces and waterbodies. We must not only retain what we have, but also act now to increase these. Dhaka urgently needs to heal and also be made resilient to inevitable higher levels of warming in the future as this is the new normal."

"The city has formidable challenges – growing population, high density thereof, vibrant growth of the economy and global warming. We need coordinated action involving a number of agencies and ministries. The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change is taking the initiative to convene a meeting in this regard. Our ministry wants to invest in urban forestry leveraging satellite mapping."

## UN denounces 'harassment' of lawyers in Tunisia

AFP, Geneva

The United Nations yesterday denounced recent arrests of lawyers in Tunisia, saying the detentions, which have also included journalists and political commentators, undermined the rule of law in the North Africa country.

"Reported raids in the past week on the Tunisia Bar Association undermine the rule of law and violate international standards on the protection of the independence and function of lawyers," Ravina Shamdasani, spokeswoman for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), told reporters in Geneva.

"Such actions constitute forms of intimidation and harassment."

"UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk urges the authorities to respect and safeguard freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly", she said.

## Veggies too pricey to afford for many

FROM PAGE 1

However, the prices of almost all types of fish remained unchanged yesterday compared to a week ago. The prices of broiler and sonali chickens have dropped by Tk 10-30 a kg.

Shafiqul Islam, a private firm employee who went to Shevrapara kitchen market yesterday to buy essentials, said the skyrocketing prices of essentials do not surprise him anymore.

"In the absence of market monitoring by the government, prices of commodities can be increased by anyone with any excuse," he said.

Helal Uddin, a green chilli wholesaler at Karwan Bazar, said they brought green chillies from Dinajpur, Thakurgaon, and Pabna.

"The prices of green chillies have increased by Tk 50 a kg in those districts over the last two days. So, we have no option but to hike the prices," he said.

The trader said there is a shortage in supply of vegetables.

Akib Islam, proprietor of Rakib Vegetables at Ibrahimpur kitchen market, said their sales have halved as customers cut their purchases due to high prices of vegetables.

"Many customers think we make hefty profits by increasing the prices. But the fact is we buy fresh vegetables at high prices and that's why we need to sell those at high prices," he said.

Ghulam Rahman, president of the Consumers Association of Bangladesh, said when the price of a commodity soars in the country, the prices of other essentials also go up.

"Traders make lame excuses for hiking the prices," he said.

The CAB chief said the government should have a proper plan to control the market. If this cannot be done, the prices of essentials will continue to go beyond the reach of the ordinary people, he added.

Arab League calls for UN peacekeepers in Palestinian territories

AFP, Manama

The Arab League on Thursday called for a UN peacekeeping force in the Palestinian territories and an international peace conference at a summit dominated by the Israeli offensive in Gaza.

In a concluding statement following a meeting in Manama, the 22-member grouping called for "international protection and peacekeeping forces of the United Nations in the occupied Palestinian territories" until a two-state solution is implemented.

It also adopted calls by host Bahrain's King Hamad and Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas to "convene an international conference under the auspices of the United Nations, to resolve Palestinian issue on basis of the two-state solution".



Palestinians react to flyers dropped by the Israeli military over Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday, amid ongoing battles between Israel and Hamas. Humanitarian workers already face a slew of challenges getting aid to civilians in the besieged Gaza Strip, and fear that as the Israelis offensive in the enclave rages on they may be forced to halt operations.

PHOTO: AFP

Israeli strikes on Lebanon kill three Says source close to Hezbollah

AFP, Beirut

Israeli air strikes yesterday hit an area of southern Lebanon far from the border, with Hezbollah announcing one dead fighter and official media saying two Syrian children were killed.

Hezbollah, a Hamas ally, has traded cross-border fire with Israeli forces almost daily since the Israeli offensive in Gaza began on October 7.

The Iran-backed Lebanese movement has intensified its attacks in recent days, including using new weapons.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency said "Israeli strikes targeted Najariyeh and Adousiyeh, two adjacent villages just south of the coastal city of Sidon, about 30 kilometres (19 miles) from the Israeli border."

The Israeli military said in a statement that its air force "struck terrorist infrastructure" where Hezbollah fighters operated in the Najariyeh area.

The "infrastructure contained several compounds used by Hezbollah's aerial defence array and posed a threat to Israeli aircraft", it added.

Hezbollah announced a fighter from Najariyeh had died.

'Our supply won't last'

Warns doctor at Gaza trauma centre; Hamas says over 100 academics killed in Israeli offensive

AFP, Jerusalem

At a field hospital that has become one of Gaza's main trauma centres, a doctor who has worked in a dozen war zones described the situation as the most "catastrophic" he had ever seen.

"It is devastating," said Javed Ali, International Medical Corps's head of emergency response in Gaza. Speaking to AFP this week from a field hospital northwest of the areas of Rafah ordered evacuated by Israel, he said the situation around the far-southern city was "dire".

Those arriving were "exhausted, they are scared, they don't have resources".

The hospital, in the coastal area of Al-Mawasi which Israel has designated a "humanitarian zone", has swelled in a matter of months into a more than 150-bed facility made up of numerous white tents and shipping containers.

Since the first evacuation orders for Rafah were issued on May 6, ahead of a long-feared ground invasion of the southernmost part of Gaza, nearly half of the 1.4 million people who had been sheltering there have left, according to UN agencies.

"There has been a massive movement of population," Ali said, adding that most had avoided Al-Mawasi, which was



already dramatically overcrowded, heading instead for the war-scarred city of Khan Yunis, which was a battleground until just last month.

Those arriving were "exhausted, they are scared, they don't have resources", Ali said, adding that many patients were asking for "money, support ... so they can move their families to safety".

"It's getting totally out of hand," he said. "Our supplies will not last."

Meanwhile, Gaza authorities released a list on Thursday of more than 100 academics and researchers they say have been killed by Israeli forces since offensive began over seven months ago.

"We strongly condemn the occupation's assassination of scientists, academics, university professors and researchers, who are a distinguished group in the Palestinian society in the Gaza Strip," the Hamas government's media office said in a statement.

"This sends a clear message that

they aim to completely eliminate scientists and researchers in the educational sector," it added.

Among those on the list of 104 names is Sufyan Tayeh, who was the president of the Islamic University and a leading researcher in physics and applied mathematics. Top surgeon and professor of medicine Adnan al-Barsh was also listed.

According to the Palestinian Prisoners Club, Barsh, 50, died in Israeli custody on April 19 after being detained with other doctors at Al-Awda Hospital in northern Gaza last December.

Asked at the time about his reported death in custody, the Israeli army said it was "currently not aware of such (an) incident."

The Hamas government called on the "free countries of the world and higher education worldwide to condemn this historical crime and to pressure the occupation to stop the genocidal war."

PRO-GAZA PROTEST Belgium's Ghent univ severs ties with 3 Israeli institutions

REUTERS, Brussels

Belgium's University of Ghent (UGent) is severing ties with three Israeli educational or research institutions which it says no longer align with UGent's human rights policy, its rector said.

Pro-Palestinian protesters in Ghent have been protesting against Israel's military offensive in Gaza and have been occupying parts of the university since early this month.

The university's rector, Rik Van de Walle, said that ties were being cut with Holon Institute of Technology, MIGAL Galilee Research Institute, and the Volcani Center.

"We currently assess these three partners as (very) problematic according to the Ghent University human rights test, in contrast to the positive evaluation we gave these partners at the start of our collaboration," Van de Walle said.

Partnerships with MIGAL Galilee Research Institute and the Volcani Centre "were no longer desirable" due to their affiliation with Israeli ministries, an investigation by the university found.

DELHI LIQUOR POLICY CASE AAP named as accused by India probe agency

NDTV ONLINE

Opening a new chapter in India's jurisprudence, the Enforcement Directorate, for the first time, yesterday named a political party as an accused in a case.

In a supplementary charge sheet filed in the Rouse Avenue court in the alleged liquor policy scam, the Enforcement Directorate has named the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) - a national political party - and its national convener, Arvind Kejriwal, who is out on interim bail in the case.

The agency is probing the money laundering angle of the alleged scam and this is the eighth charge-sheet it has filed in the case, but the first in which the Delhi chief minister has been named.

Kejriwal was arrested on March 21, becoming the third senior AAP leader to be taken into custody in the alleged scam, after his former deputy Manish Sisodia and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh.

Sources said the decision to name the AAP as an accused can have major repercussions for the party.

The Enforcement Directorate, they said, now has the option of writing to the Election Commission of India and requesting them to begin the process of derecognising the Aam Aadmi Party.

It can also attach the party's assets, including its headquarters in Delhi.

Congress aiming to win 50 seats to save its honour Modi tells polls rally in UP

THE ECONOMIC TIMES ONLINE

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday took a jibe at the Congress saying its aim is to win just 50 seats so that it could save its "honour", and he also mocked Rahul Gandhi for contesting the Lok Sabha polls from Rae Bareilly instead of Amethi which he lost to the BJP's Smriti Irani in 2019.



Addressing an election rally in Fatehpur of Uttar Pradesh, the prime minister also claimed that INIDA bloc has been defeated in the first four phases of elections itself and its "disappointed" workers have now stopped leaving their homes for polls-related activities.

Modi said he had predicted that Rahul Gandhi would not dare to contest from Amethi and this has turned out to be true.

"The further news is that to save its honour, the Congress has now launched Mission 50. The target of the Congress is to get 50 seats in the entire country by any means," he said.

Taking a swipe at the SP and the Congress, Modi said, "The dreams of 'panja' (Congress's poll symbol) and 'cycle' (SP's poll symbol) have shattered 'khata-khat, khata-khat'. Now they are planning for post-June 4 as to who should be blamed for the defeat 'khata-khat, khata-khat'. And, someone was telling me that tickets for foreign trips have also been booked 'khata-khat, khata-khat'."

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has used the phrase "Khata-khat khata-khat" to claim that a fixed stipend would flow into the accounts of poor women if his party comes to power.

Failed Bangladeshi

FROM PAGE 1

attempt to stay permanently, reports The Telegraph, a UK-based newspaper.

The migrants came on international student, worker or visitor visas in the year to March last year in an attempt to exploit a "back door" to Britain by claiming asylum. Just 5 percent of Bangladeshis' initial asylum claims are successful, according to the report published on Thursday.

The newspaper said Tomlinson signed a fast-track returns deal with Bangladesh to streamline the deportation of not only failed asylum seekers but also foreign national offenders and individuals who have overstayed their visas.

The returns agreement will streamline the returns process by removing a mandatory interview for cases where there is good supporting evidence for removal.

However, both countries committed to strengthening their partnership and intensifying cooperation on economic, cultural, and

social issues.

Visas grant permission to stay in the UK for a set period - usually just a few months. But by claiming asylum applicants are highly likely to remain here indefinitely because the Home Office faces huge obstacles to deporting them, including human rights laws.

Official documents, leaked last month and covering the year to March 2023, show a record 21,525 asylum claims were made by visa holders, a 154 percent annual rise.

It means one in every 140 people who entered on a visa went on to claim asylum. During the past decade, more than 102,000 applied to stay after being allowed in only temporarily.

Pakistan was the largest nationality among claimants, with nearly 17,400 cases, followed by Bangladesh at 11,000, India (7,400), Nigeria (6,600), and Afghanistan (6,000).

Last year, 26,000 people who had no right to be in the UK were returned to their home countries, 74 percent more than in 2022.



Migrants from Jordan, China, Egypt and Colombia surrender to a border patrol agent after crossing into the US from Mexico in Jacumba Hot Springs, California, US. The photo was taken on Thursday and released yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Iran arrests 250 in raid on 'satanist network'

AFP, Tehran

Iranian police announced yesterday that they arrested more than 250 people including three foreigners over promoting "satanism" west of capital Tehran, state media reported.

"The Police Information Center announced the identification, dismantling, and widespread arrest of members of the satanist network," IRNA state news agency reported, citing a police statement.

Police arrested "146 men and 115 women" who "were in an undesirable and obscene condition with emblems, signs, and symbols of satanism on their clothes, head, face, and hair," the statement said.

"Three European citizens" were also arrested during the police operation in Shahryar city, west of Tehran on Thursday night. Raids on "satanist" gatherings are not uncommon in Iran.

## Even basic items are getting out of reach

### Govt must address the rising food prices immediately

Despite the government's repeated declarations of tackling food insecurity, citizens have not felt any relief from the burn of rising food prices. According to a report of the UN World Food Programme (WFP), in 2022, the cost of buying food for people living below the poverty line was Tk 1,851 per capita per month. Due to rampant food inflation, the amount increased to Tk 2,923—a staggering 58 percent rise—in February 2024. This illustrates that the authorities' actions are simply not bearing fruit, with people continuing to struggle for the most basic necessity—a meal.

Over the last two years, inflation has hovered around 10 percent, leading to basic food items such as rice, flour, meat and vegetables getting increasingly expensive. According to another WFP report, 17 percent of people were facing food insecurity in February, 68 percent reduced their expenses to make ends meet, 43 percent were borrowing food, and 22 percent reduced medical expenses. After taking office, the new government decided to make coordinated efforts to curb inflation, and yet, food inflation was 10.22 percent last month.

Experts suggest that despite improvements in the supply chain, a group of influentials are destabilising the market. Instead of tackling this group, the government has been busy fixing prices of produce, which historically has not worked. When the source of the problem is right in front of them, why are authorities still latching on to ineffective methods? Time and again, questions have been raised about the identities of these influentials and whether the administration is feigning ignorance due to the power they hold. It's time for the government to address these questions and root out the perpetrators—immediately.

Bangladesh has been affected by a number of global events that led to depreciation of the taka, dwindling foreign exchange reserves, etc. However, while the world has been recovering, our country continues to struggle. This is evident by the fact that, despite the price of wheat continuously declining over the past six months, the local price has not fallen. All of this is nothing but the result of policy failure.

The government must now formulate a robust plan of action, which must address import issues, market manipulation, and valuation of currency. Additionally, it must bring more vulnerable people under social safety net programmes in the next fiscal year, and increase the allowances through higher budget allocation. Ad hoc and ineffective measures like price-fixing and sporadic raids cannot address the looming crisis of food insecurity among a significant portion of our population.

## Spare us from road-digging in monsoon

### City corporations, utility agencies must strictly adhere to the rules

It is unfortunate that Dhaka residents continue to suffer from the torments of excavated roads and alleys in different parts of the city during the rainy season, despite clear guidelines to the contrary. The guidelines were issued in 2019 and one-stop cells at both city corporations were assigned to coordinate the construction, repair and other development work by various agencies. However, a recent report by a Bangla daily highlights how road digging is very likely to continue at several places even into the rainy season, thus increasing the risk of accidents, waterlogging, insufferable traffic, and dengue.

According to the report, officials of the city corporations claimed late submission of project proposals by different agencies as one of the reasons for project work to spill into the monsoon season, which is typically from May to September. While proposals are accepted by city corporations between October and April, the officials claimed that many agencies submit project proposals in late March. The report added that even the city corporations' projects sometimes run into the rainy season. Although there are penalties for breaking the rules, we wonder to whom the two city corporations answer when they carry out road excavation between May and September.

While road excavation work is necessary for the development and maintenance of various utility services required by millions of residents in Dhaka, it should not come at the cost of their physical and mental well-being. Construction that makes a road unusable for half the year, without options for alternative routes, or creates gridlocks around the city, is not just taxing on the patience of commuters, but also impacts the economy by increasing unproductive work hours.

The two city corporations should set examples by following the guidelines and encourage other government agencies to do the same. The one-stop cell at each city corporation must work with the agencies to make sure that their projects are completed within the stipulated time. Exemplary action should be taken against the actors who fail to abide by the stipulations to end the menace of unfinished excavation work that holds Dhaka dwellers hostage come every monsoon.

### THIS DAY IN HISTORY

## India joins the nuclear club

This day in 1974 marks the first successful detonation of a nuclear fission bomb in Pokhran, India. India commenced work on developing nuclear weapons in the early 1970s amid a time of rising tensions with neighbouring China and Pakistan. Through the testing, India became the world's sixth nuclear power. The resumption of nuclear testing by India in 1998 led Pakistan to drop its first nuclear bomb the same month.

SOURCE: HISTORY.COM

# An invisible killer on the loose

## Dhaka's never-ending air pollution woes



### A CLOSER LOOK

Tasneem Tayeb  
is a columnist for The Daily Star.  
Her X-handle is @tasneem\_tayeb

#### TASNEEM TAYEB

Imagine an invisible serial killer lurking around the corner, waiting to suck the life out of you with its all-consuming, toxic embrace. This is what Dhaka's air has become. Every day, we breathe in and breathe out toxic air, full of pollutants and carcinogenic heavy metals and chemical elements like arsenic, lead, cobalt and cadmium. According to a report published in this daily, the concentrations of these elements are almost double the permissible limits set by the World Health Organization (WHO). The report also added that among the 27 locations that have been studied, Dhaka is the only one where the combined carcinogenic risk "exceeds the benchmark for both adults and children."

These are alarming facts without a doubt, but having breathed this toxic air over the years, are we surprised? I certainly am not.

Commenting on the overall deteriorating air quality, the environment minister told this daily recently, "We all know how grave and critical the air quality situation is and we did not get here in one day. There can be no overnight fixes but now that we have identified the sources of the pollution, have acknowledged the problem, and have been honest and upfront about it, I think we are now headed in the right direction."

If anything, the minister is right. We have not come to this overnight and there is no instant solution to it. What is not clear to me is where the "right direction" is, and who is going to guide us there.

Some of the key reasons why Dhaka's air is so toxic is because we allow unfit vehicles to ply the roads. We have enabled an entire e-waste recycling industry to flourish without proper environmental impact assessment and without developing an e-waste management system. Under the very noses of the authorities, coal-

fired brick kilns are operating in full swing in and around the capital, and trees are being felled by the authorities who should have been guarding them in the first place.

A 2021 study by the Centre for Atmospheric Pollution Study (CAPS) revealed that 15 percent of the air pollution in Dhaka is caused by unfit vehicles. The study also found that unplanned and uncontrolled construction and road work lead to about 30 percent air pollution



Smoke rises from the chimneys of a brick kiln on the outskirts of Dhaka, Bangladesh on March 17, 2024.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

in the capital. Pollution caused by industries and brick kilns stands around 29 percent, irresponsible waste incineration causes seven percent, transboundary air pollution around 10 percent, and nine percent from cooking stoves. Many of these parameters impact the level of carcinogens in the air.

But what is the gain in reflecting on our past failures? It is time we looked forward and identified areas of improvement. Instead of diverting

our focus from real issues at home to transboundary air pollution—over which we have little control—we should look at what we can do to gradually improve the situation, and there are at least four major areas that we should work on.

Unfit vehicles come first. Of the 60 lakh registered vehicles in the country, about 6.17 lakh run with no or expired fitness certificates, according to the BRTA. In July 2019, the High Court banned unfit vehicles from plying the roads, later HC banned fuel sale to unfit vehicles and finally it directed the authorities to form a nationwide task force to take unfit vehicles off the roads. Nothing seems to have come out of these directives. In addition to turbocharging air pollution, unfit vehicles are a major cause behind road accidents, resulting in the killing of thousands. It has become imperative for us to prioritise national interest above vested interests and take

the circuit boards. Burning this waste releases harmful toxins in the air, posing a significant public health hazard. Being an informal sector, there is little control over its operations. Although the e-waste management rules were published in 2021, the government has not been able to implement it due to resistance from various quarters and an obvious lack of political will. It must push the implementation of the e-waste management rules, which have set clear limits on the usage of heavy metals. At the same time, a conducive ecosystem and required infrastructures should be ensured so that those involved in e-waste recycling can work in conditions that are not hazardous for them and the environment.

Illegal brick kilns come next. In 12 towns surrounding Dhaka, there are around 1,246 illegal brick kilns. In Dhaka and five of its adjacent districts, there are about 559 illegal brick kilns. These need to be shut down permanently and immediately. In the recent past, 737 brick kilns have been shut down. The current environment minister has taken legal action against 458 brick kilns, 209 of which have been shut down across the country. But then there remain the others that need to be taken care of as well and soon.

Finally, we should prevent felling of trees and focus on organised urbanisation of Dhaka. Trees not only give us fresh air to breathe, but also remove pollutants from air. In the name of development and beautification, the city corporations and other authorities, including the BIWTA, have felled hundreds of trees across the capital, which has taken its toll on air quality. BIWTA has promised to plant 1,620 trees, and DNCC and DSCC are taking initiatives to plant new trees, but these are only piecemeal measures. The sustainable approach would be organised and green urbanisation of the capital, which should be the focus of all relevant bodies.

As citizens, we can do our part to improve air quality by making responsible choices: from not using unfit vehicles, to responsible disposal of e-waste, and planting more trees in our surroundings. However, at the national level, the onus is on the government to chalk out and implement watertight measures to curb air pollution. The question is, do they have the political will? Only time will tell.

### PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

## Protests of despair



Slavoj Žižek,  
professor of philosophy at the European  
Graduate School, is international  
director of the Birkbeck Institute for the  
Humanities at the University of London.

#### SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK

These are crazy times. Biblical disturbances in nature, such as the repeated torrential rain in Dubai or the mass fish die-off in Vietnam's overheated reservoir, seem to mirror our overheated politics and social environment.

At such moments, it is crucial to keep a cool head and analyse all the weird phenomena as closely, objectively, and dispassionately as possible. And few phenomena nowadays are weirder than the protests surrounding Israel's bombardment and invasion of Gaza in response to Hamas's terrorist attack in October last year.

We should acknowledge the rhetoric from some politicised Muslims, such as those who recently demonstrated in Hamburg, Germany, chanting "Kalifat ist die Lösung" ("Caliphate is the solution"). And we should concede that, despite the massive presence of Jews among the protesters, there are at least a few true antisemites among them, just as there are some genocidal maniacs in Israel.

While many commentators have noted the parallel between today's pro-Palestinian demonstrations and the 1968 student protests against the Vietnam War, Italian philosopher Franco Berardi points to an important difference. Rhetorically, at least, the 1968 protesters explicitly identified with the anti-imperialist Viet Cong position and a broader, positive socialist project, whereas today's protesters very rarely identify with Hamas, and instead are "identifying with despair."

As Berardi puts it, "Despair is the psychological and also cultural trait that explains the wide identification of

young people with the Palestinians. I think that the majority of the students today are consciously or unconsciously expecting the irreversible worsening of the conditions of life, irreversible climate change, a long-lasting period of war, and the looming danger of a nuclear precipitation of the conflicts that are underway in many points of the geopolitical map."

It would be difficult to explain the situation any better than that. The authorities' obscenely repressive response to the protests supports Berardi's hypothesis. The harsh crackdowns are not motivated by any fear that the protests will launch a new political movement; rather, they are expressions of panic—a futile refusal to confront the despair that pervades our societies.

Signs of this panic are everywhere, so allow me to offer just two examples. First, late last month, 12 US senators sent a letter to the International Criminal Court threatening it with sanctions should it decide to issue an arrest warrant against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Although this was strictly a Republican undertaking, President Joe Biden's administration also has pressured the ICC not to charge Israeli officials over war crimes committed in Gaza. Such threats signal nothing less than the demise of shared global values. Though this ideal was always somewhat hypocritical (the United States, for example, has refused to join the ICC), governments at least upheld it in spirit.

The second recent example supports the same conclusion. On May 4, France (complying with a German-issued visa ban) denied entry to Ghassan Abu-Sitta,

a British-Palestinian surgeon who was scheduled to provide testimony to the French Senate on what he had witnessed while treating victims of the war in Gaza. With such crude acts of censorship and marginalisation happening before our eyes, it is no longer an exaggeration to say that our democracies are crumbling.

Everyone knows that the situation

**After the October 7 attacks, Israel emphasised the raw realities of what Hamas had done. Let the images speak for themselves, Israeli authorities said. The brutal killings and rapes had been recorded by the perpetrators and were there for everyone to see. There was no need for complex contextualisation. Can we not now say the same about the Palestinian suffering in Gaza?**

in Gaza is unacceptable. But a great deal of energy has been devoted to postponing the kind of intervention that the crisis requires.

One way to help break the impasse is to offer public support for the student protests. As US Senator Bernie Sanders put it on April 28, "What Netanyahu's right-wing, extremist, and racist government is doing is unprecedented in the modern history of warfare... Right now, we are looking at the possibility of mass starvation and famine in Gaza. When you make those charges, that is not antisemitic. That is a reality."

After the October 7 attacks, Israel emphasised the raw realities of what Hamas had done. Let the images speak

for themselves, Israeli authorities said. The brutal killings and rapes had been recorded by the perpetrators and were there for everyone to see. There was no need for complex contextualisation.

Can we not now say the same about the Palestinian suffering in Gaza? Let the images speak for themselves. See the starving people in packed improvised tents, the children slowly dying as Israeli missile and drone strikes continue to reduce buildings to ruins, then to rubble, and then to dust. I am reminded of what Michael Ignatieff (then a journalist) wrote in 2003 about the US invasion of Iraq. "For me, the key issue is what would be the best result for the Iraqi people—what is most likely to improve the human rights of 26 million Iraqis? What always drove me crazy about the opposition [to war] was that it was never about Iraq. It was a referendum on American power."

The same point does not apply to today's anti-war protests. Far from a referendum on Palestinian, Israeli, or American power, they are driven primarily by a desperate plea simply to stop the killing of Palestinians in Gaza.

So, what should the Biden administration do? For starters, the US can join the global initiative to recognise Palestine as a state. Far from being an obstacle to peace in the Middle East, Palestinian statehood is a precondition for any serious negotiations between the two sides. By contrast, rejecting (or endlessly postponing) such recognition will inevitably support the fatalistic conclusion that war is the only option.

Strange as it may sound, we are witnessing one of the downsides of the US's loss of hegemonic power (as was also the case with the US withdrawal from northern Syria and then Afghanistan). Ideally, the US would simply invade Gaza from the sea, re-establish peace and order, and provide the population with humanitarian assistance. But don't count on it. One can always rely on the US to miss an opportunity to deploy its remaining imperial power for a good cause.



BEYOND APPROPRIATION AND COMMODIFICATION

# The making of Coke Studio Bangla's complex subjects



**Nafisa Nipun Tanjeem**  
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NAFISA NIPUN TANJEEM

I am neither a musician nor a music critic. Nor am I trained in assessing the technicality of a music performance. However, as a trained feminist anthropologist, I love to follow—borrowing Arjun Appadurai's phrase—the social life of things. Since Coke Studio Bangla launched in Bangladesh in 2022, it has been fascinating to follow its social life. There are some interesting and complex dynamics of how people—both in Bangladesh and abroad—have consumed, cherished, and criticised its productions.

Critiques coming from the leftist and progressive sides have been debating the politics of imperial appropriation and commodification of folk music by Coke Studio Bangla. Questions have been raised as to who has the authority to curate music, what kind of agency local, grassroots artists performing in Coke Studio Bangla have (or don't have), whether Coke Studio Bangla is creating a hegemony in Bangladesh's music tradition, and whether folk music cultures and traditions can be effectively revived through profit-driven corporate sponsorships.

We must keep discussing, debating, and exploring all these questions in detail to understand how Coke Studio is shaping the landscape of music in Bangladesh. However, the avid critiques, which tackle critical questions of appropriation and commodification of folk music by Coke Studio Bangla or the way Coke Studio Bangla promotes a middle-class neo-imperialist imagination of "folk" and "fusion," often miss an empathetic understanding of individual actors within the Coke Studio landscape—actors that include both the audiences and the performers. The critiques sometimes miss a vital point that these actors are not mere puppets of an imperialist-corporate-capitalist machine. They live complex lives within the landscape of Coke Studio Bangla and beyond, and they go through complicated, multi-layered decision-making processes regarding their engagement with Coke Studio Bangla.

Let's think about the generation hooked on Coke Studio Bangla's magic. People who write on social media about how they were touched by the latest releases or who post reaction videos or dance covers mostly come from educated, urban or semi-urban, and middle- and upper-middle-class



VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRIYAR

backgrounds. They have smartphones, know how to navigate social media, and have a working knowledge of English.

Most of them heard about the Dewan dynasty and its tremendous contribution to Bangla folk music for the first time from Coke Studio Bangla. They did not grow up listening to Gonjer Ali's Taat songs or reading Ali's book on the collection of local Taat songs from North Bengal. They got introduced to Hason Raja's music through Humayun Ahmed's dramas and cinemas, but most of them were not familiar with the incredible work of Hason Raja devotee Hamida Banu, who was featured in the last song in season two of Coke Studio Bangla, titled "Dilaram."

How many of us know that Hamida Banu lost her father at the age of 15, faced backlash from the local community for singing as a young woman, had to endure a child marriage, and migrated to India as an undocumented immigrant? How many of us know that Banu was in prison in India for three years for crossing the

border without proper documents, and also worked as a housekeeper in the Hason Raja Bari? Jahura Baul from "Bonobibi" or Islam Uddin Palakar and Fajlu Majhi from "Deora" also have intriguing stories, which were largely unheard of before this hooked-on-Coke-Studio generation got introduced to their work through this platform. Suddenly, previously uploaded videos of the performers on YouTube saw a massive hike

In a country where a journalist was jailed for pointing out the necessity of "machh, mangsho ar chailer shadhinota," the song "Bazar Gorom" can be interpreted as a strong critique of the Bangladesh government's failure to address inflation, the government taking loans from the central bank, the central bank printing a considerable amount of currency for the government, or the devaluation of the Bangladeshi taka against

means for ensuring a sustainable livelihood.

It is important to dive deeper into Coke Studio Bangla's involvement with "supply chain capitalism," a term borrowed from Anna Tsing (2009), which examines both the massive border-crossing scale and the diversity of global capitalism. I would argue it is inadequate to develop an oversimplified criticism of Coke Studio Bangla, exclusively focusing on the appropriation of Bangla folk songs or the commodification of the performances of folk singers. The debates around the authenticity of local music also become futile without paying attention to the complex landscape of Coke Studio Bangla's various structures that uniquely mobilise capital, labour, bodies, and resources.

We need to dive deeper into how and why folk artistes, such as the Chhad Petano team, Hamida Banu, Islam Uddin Palakar or Aleya Begum, decided to comply with the hegemonic terms and conditions of Coke Studio Bangla. Are there any viable means to produce and circulate folk music that can operate without powerful corporate sponsorship, gain significant circulation, and ensure sustainable living for the local artistes and performers?

How do emerging artistes from marginalised and minoritised communities, such as Animes Roy or Daughter of Coastal, negotiate their complex positionalities within Coke Studio Bangla and beyond? What does it mean for many of these artistes to openly express their deepest gratitude for inclusion in Coke Studio Bangla in the "Behind the Magic" interviews? How do they navigate mainstream, male-stream, and nationalist expectations of an audience who would appreciate the performances only if these are packaged in a way that appeals to their taste?

Why do we see that the composers and producers are not bringing major changes in the structure and format of Rabindra Sangeet and Nazrul Sangeet, but they feel comfortable enough to modify tunes, words or formats of folk songs? Why do we see women performing on stage and following instructions of the music directors, but they are almost totally absent in music production? What does it mean for the liberal-progressive audience to cherish Coke Studio Bangla productions, but then call for a boycott of Coca Cola to express solidarity with Palestine?

Oversimplified critiques of authenticity, appropriation, and commodification of Coke Studio Bangla, which do not dive deeper into the complex decision-making processes of its audiences as well as performers, would only construe these subjects as passive, voiceless, compliant victims. A holistic critique needs to examine how Coke Studio Bangla operates within diverse structures of supply chain capitalism, making it almost inevitable for its actors to comply with the hegemonic norms.

in the number of views.

Many of this generation appreciate Coke Studio Bangla because they love the "feel-good" story of this platform amplifying the voice of grassroots—and often marginalised—artistes and giving them a powerful platform. Little do they think about how these actors negotiate their everyday lives. Take rapper Aly Hasan, for example. Hasan does not come from any Chhayanaut-trained, educated, culturally elite background. In his quest for performers from the margin, Coke Studio Bangla recognised Hasan's work and gave him a spotlight in the latest song "Ma Lo Ma."

Hasan spent three years of his life as a migrant worker. After returning to Bangladesh, he took over the small business of his father, who got sick. Hasan's small hardware shop failed to generate profit in the current economic situation, and he had to close it down due to financial losses. His "Bebshar Poristhiti" is a rap based on his everyday struggles. Similarly, his "Bazar Gorom" is a bold statement against the extreme price hike of everyday necessities.

the US dollars, further exacerbating the situation.

But hold on. No, Aly Hasan—even though his work represents working-class struggles—is not your dream-leftist-working-class staunch critic of the establishment. Right before the election, he worked as part of a team that released a music video called "Unnoyoner Shopnojatra" ("The Dream Journey to Development"). Aly Hasan was one of the people who wrote the lyrics and composed and sang it. The video talks about how "Gram hochchhe shohor aar egjibe jacche desh" ("Villages are turning into cities, and the country is moving forward"). It uncritically provided an extensive list of all the major development projects undertaken by the ruling government despite some of their negative impacts on the environment and the community. In the song, Hasan repeatedly urged people to vote for the ruling party that has been in power since 2009. Hasan also had to sell his music productions to G Series as the commercial distribution of his production was probably the only viable

## THE AURORA ENIGMA

# What we understand and what remains a mystery



**BLOWN' IN THE WIND**

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SHAMSAD MORTUZA

Last week, our Facebook walls got painted purple, crimson and green. Netizens looked up and saw the colourful sky through their camera lenses. Those close to the North Pole started sharing images of the Northern Lights (aurora borealis) that they captured during their nightly adventures. Our friends from the Southern Hemisphere followed suit, sharing their experiences of the Southern Lights (aurora australis). These images were much more intense than the typical Northern Lights seen in polar proximity.

The timing aligned with a solar storm that resulted from the reversal of the Sun's magnetic poles during its 11-year cycle. The coronal mass ejections caused magnetic waves that leapt through space at a speed of one million miles per hour. People near the two poles witnessed a surreal, ethereal light show as charged particles clashed with air molecules in the atmosphere as our own magnetic force fields deflected most of the solar wind. The burnt-out oxygen molecules emit green or yellow lights, while the nitrogen is responsible for the purple or crimson lights. For millennia, these unearthly images from outer space have ignited human imaginations as they tried to come up with an explanation of the supernatural activity.

The phenomenon is named after Aurora (Eos in Greek mythology), the Roman goddess of dawn. Her travels between her siblings Helios (the Sun) and Selene (the

Moon) were once thought to be the cause of the nightly change of colours. Galileo, in the 17th century, named it *aurora borealis* (literally, sunrise wind). The ancient Chinese called this vista the "five-coloured sky." The Scandinavians thought of it as fox fire, thinking the mythical fox spirits brush their tails against the mountains to cause various sparks to light up the winter sky. The Inuit people in Alaska imagined the event as a dance of the spirits. In 922, the Persian scholar Ahmad Ibn Fadlan accompanied the Vikings in an expedition, fictionalised in the movie *The 13th Warrior*, during which he saw the Northern Lights, only to learn that "they are the believing and the unbelieving Jinn. They fight every evening and have not failed to do so every night since they were first created."

Today, we have the privilege of understanding the science behind the aurora, a phenomenon that has captivated the imagination of various cultures worldwide. In Norse mythology, the aurora is the most prominent. The Vikings interpreted the lights as a manifestation of their chief god, Odin. The light glow comes from the Valkyries—female armed warriors on horseback—who would take the valiant heroes who had fallen during battles to Valhalla. The light celebrates their heroism. The Algonquin tribes in Canada and northern Michigan believed that the creator, Nanabozho, used these lights to signal to

his people that he was thinking about his creation from his faraway abode. The aurora was a reflection of his fire. For the Sámi, the Indigenous people of northern Scandinavia, the lights are far from heroism and bravery. They are the harbinger of bad omens.

Interestingly, historical events such as the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871), the American Civil War (1861-1865), the French Revolution (1789-1799), and the Greater

Northern Hemisphere represent an evil omen, a portent of war, or other dangers. This connection underscores the human tendency to find meaning in natural events, especially during times of crisis and uncertainty.

Could it be a coincidence that the aurora sighting coincided with one of the most brutal massacres of innocent people in Gaza? The fear that Israel might use nuclear

confluence of shock and awe that our ancestors felt, later clarified by scientists, inspired me to delve into the realm of the known and the unknown. The images showering our walls are part of a larger story, i.e. history. The nightly sky's beauty and wonder belie the ionic wind that could have swept away our planet. The geomagnetic field that funnels away the jet stream can still damage our electronic signals and GPS systems, causing havoc. We are oblivious to the danger because we remain unaware or half-aware of it. The interplay between myths and scientific explanations of auroras illustrates the broader spectrum of human imagination and its capacity to find meaning in the natural world. By the same token, our complicity in near and far crimes can thus have far-reaching consequences.

Auroras, as a lens on human imagination, serve as a powerful example of how humans use imagination to bridge the gap between the known and the unknown. However, we humans invented a much more effective and powerful lens and sent it across the galaxy to capture images of a time that is not yet here. Earlier, Nasa's James Webb Space Telescope captured distant images of creation pillars where stars are born. Such images give an eerie feeling of our minuscule status in the vast expanse of creation. The chronicle of a foretold galactic death resonates with us. There seems to be some sort of connection between stories and history—between the micro and the macro, the mundane and the divine. Religious zealots, striving to hasten the emergence of a messiah and usher in the apocalypse, are enacting a drama within the crimson curtain, manipulating the events in the sky. The problem is that the forbidden fruit of knowledge corrupts our innocent imagination. There seems to be no escape from reality, even if we pretend not to see it. By not being a party to the inevitable, we can at least limit our damage to the world and its inhabitants.



The aurora borealis, also known as the Northern Lights, are seen over The Roaches near Leek, Staffordshire, Britain on May 10, 2024.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

Wrath in Finland (1714-1721) witnessed auroras. Their timing and dramatic appearance in the skies led people of that time to interpret them as reflections or omens of the conflicts and bloodshed they were experiencing. For the locals, the crimson streaks of the aurora in the

bombs to solve the Palestine question once and for all adds one more layer to the aurora sighting. An apocalyptic narrative permeates the Zionist project of building the third temple.

Perhaps there is no room for such superstition in science. However, the

# SPORT

## What to WATCH

**T SPORTS**  
IPL  
Bengaluru vs Chennai  
Live from 8:00 pm  
**SONY SPORTS 1**  
Bundesliga

Leverkusen vs  
Augsburg  
Live from 7:30 pm  
**SONY SPORTS 2**  
Hoffenheim vs Bayern  
Live from 7:30 pm

Shakib does not have any fifties in his last 10 T20Is. His highest score was an unbeaten 38 off 24 deliveries that helped the Tigers post their second 200-plus total during this period in a 77-run win over Ireland in March 2023 in Chattogram.

Shakib has batted in the middle order (from wickets 4-7) in nine of his last 10 T20I innings. However, the one time he batted at number three was in that game against Ireland in which he scored his highest during this period.

He has five unbeaten scores in his last 10 matches in the shortest format, seeing through Bangladesh complete a chase successfully on each occasion.

Shakib's batting average in his last 10 T20Is is 32.20, much higher than his career average of 23.56. His strike rate of almost 130 during

this period is also more than his career strike rate of 122.27.

Shakib is set to play his ninth T20 World Cup, the most by any player alongside India skipper Rohit Sharma who has also featured in all the editions of the tournament.

The star all-rounder already leads the all-time wicket-taker's charts in T20 World Cups, with 47 scalps, and is only three away from reaching 50.

Shakib tallied his personal best of 186 runs (in seven matches) with the bat in the 2014 edition in which he also bagged eight wickets.

### SHAKIB IN T20 WORLD CUPS

| Year         | Matches   | Runs       | Wickets   |
|--------------|-----------|------------|-----------|
| 2007         | 5         | 67         | 6         |
| 2009         | 2         | 15         | 2         |
| 2010         | 2         | 75         | 4         |
| 2012         | 2         | 95         | 0         |
| 2014         | 7         | 186        | 8         |
| 2016         | 7         | 129        | 10        |
| 2021         | 6         | 131        | 11        |
| 2022         | 5         | 44         | 6         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>36</b> | <b>742</b> | <b>47</b> |

# 'Big stage brings the best out of SHAKIB'

ABDULLAH AL MEHEDI

Bangladesh ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan is going into the upcoming T20 World Cup as Tigers' key player in what could be his final bow in T20's showpiece event.

Shakib, who holds the record of the longest career in T20Is, evolved with the times and found new avenues to keep making his mark in the T20 format.

In recent years, he has added a new ability to eclipse his past skill sets by enriching his range-hitting. Even at 37, the former T20I captain can make the Tigers' day with the bat while his bowling appears to be as good as ever.

Shakib's batting did not shine in his recent two outings against Zimbabwe. He had played 50-over matches at the Dhaka Premier League to regain some rhythm but struggled to connect the ball with the sweet spot of his bat against Zimbabwe and could not assert his dominance.

His preparation heading to a big event, however, may not have been ideal, felt his mentor Nazmul Abedeen Fahim.

"The buildup is certainly not ideal. If he had started playing matches a little earlier, it would have served his match fitness better. The smarter you are, the quicker you can return. But if he had returned to T20 cricket a little earlier and played the Zimbabwe series from the beginning, it would have been better," Fahim said.

But even while not at his best, his mindset can make up for the lack of game time, said Fahim.

"He didn't look at his best [batting wise in Zimbabwe series]. Had he played the first few games, he would have regained his game. His preparation could have been better but since he is Shakib Al Hasan, with the little time he has and the matches remaining, he would be pretty close to his best," Fahim felt.

Players like England's Moeen Ali

and India's Ravindra Jadeja are key all-rounders for their respective sides, however, none of them are as important to their team's prospects in the World Cup as Shakib is for Bangladesh.

Shakib's struggles with the bat may not have gone away following his return to the T20I setup after 10 months but he can turn the tide very quickly in his favour, believes Fahim.

"I think he is at his best in terms of bowling and since bowlers have a certain degree of control, we can expect him to do well with the ball."

"If he can play positively [in batting] in the remaining games, he might get something in return. He belongs at that level, which also brings out the best from players like him," Fahim said about Shakib turning up to assert his position as Tigers' key player.

Sources in the team have hinted that Shakib may bat at No.3 in this World Cup. Skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto did not rule out that

possibility either.

In the last BPL, Shakib had struggled with an eye problem and didn't score many runs in the beginning, but came into his own later on, often batting at number three, where he took advantage of the Powerplay.

"He played at three in the BPL and did well. The teams we are targeting to win against, if he does well against those sides, we will win. His aggressive nature suits T20 cricket," Fahim opined.

Shakib and India's Rohit Sharma are the only players set to take part in all nine editions of the T20 World Cup.

Whether or not this will be Shakib's final T20 World Cup, Fahim felt it did not matter to the player himself.

"I don't think he thinks like us on whether or not this would be his last World Cup. If he did, his preparation maybe would have been different. He is still casual like he always is, which I feel is his natural way."

### SHORT CORNER

#### Abahani-Mohammedan tussle for 2nd place intensifies

Abahani Limited caught up with archrivals Mohammedan in points in the Bangladesh Premier League with a massive 7-1 win over Brothers Union after the Black and Whites surrendered a two-goal lead to play out an exciting 3-3 draw against Rahmatganj MFS on Friday.

#### Brazil to host 2027 Women's World Cup

Brazil was chosen to host the 2027 Women's World Cup on Friday, beating a joint Belgium-Netherlands-Germany bid at a FIFA congress marked by debate about the war in Gaza. After the success of the 2023 edition in Australia and New Zealand, which earned a record \$570 million in commercial revenue, FIFA chose to continue its push to expand women's football by taking the tournament to South America for the first time.

#### Barca coach Xavi set to be sacked: reports

Barcelona are poised to sack coach Xavi Hernandez just weeks after he made a U-turn and decided to stay at the club, Spanish media reported Friday. Catalan radio station RAC-1 said president Joan Laporta had decided to sack Xavi, with daily newspaper Sport confirming the news, while AS said Barcelona were already deciding who would replace the coach.

#### Tuchel confirms Bayern exit

Bayern Munich coach Thomas Tuchel confirmed on Friday he will leave the club at the end of the season, saying he "couldn't agree on terms" to stay on. Bayern and Tuchel agreed to part ways in February after the club lost three matches in a row and fell eight points behind eventual champions Bayer Leverkusen.

#### Slot confirms Liverpool job

Feyenoord coach Arne Slot confirmed on Friday that he would take the Liverpool job next season after Juergen Klopp leaves the Premier League club at the end of the campaign. "I can confirm that I will become the trainer there next year," Slot told a news conference, according to ESPN.

Read full stories on The Daily Star website



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Mohammedan's Indian opener Jasia Akhtar hogged the limelight on the opening day of the Dhaka Premier Division Women's Cricket League at the BKSP Ground 1 yesterday when she smashed a 69-ball 102 laced with 16 fours and three sixes to power her side to a 254-run win over Jabid Ahsan Cricket Club. Her century propelled Mohammedan to 305 for eight after which Sabekun Nahar picked up a five-wicket haul to bundle out Jabid Ahsan CC for 51.

## Leverkusen eye 'immortality'

AGENCIES

Ninety minutes away from completing an unprecedented unbeaten Bundesliga season, Bayer Leverkusen host Augsburg at the BayArena in Saturday's closing act.

Chasing "immortality", Xabi Alonso's Leverkusen can become the first team in Bundesliga history to go through a campaign unbeaten by avoiding defeat against Augsburg.

Not even the greatest Bayern Munich sides have managed an invincible season.

That Alonso's men have done it without losing in any competition -- a European record 50-game streak which includes runs to next week's German Cup and Europa League finals -- shows how incredible they have been.

A win against Augsburg would net Leverkusen 90 points from 34 games -- the equal second-highest tally in German football history.

Records have been sent tumbling month after month during Leverkusen's historic 2023-24 campaign, which is just three games away from finishing with the Bundesliga champions suffering a grand total of zero defeats in every single

competition.

Leverkusen striker Patrik Schick said the match was "like a final", while captain Lukas Hradecky said his team had "immortality" in sight.

Regardless of the result, Leverkusen will hoist the Bundesliga shield on



Saturday and Hradecky said he would "be careful" not to hold it upside down, like Stuttgart captain Fernando Meira did in 2007.

"To stay unbeaten in the Bundesliga -- we'll be the first team and we'll be a part of history," coach Alonso said on Friday. Leverkusen will be presented with the

Bundesliga trophy for the first time in their history after Saturday's match.

Long derided as "Neverkusen" for often finishing second and never winning a top-flight crown, Leverkusen are close to a remarkable treble.

Alonso's men face Atalanta in the Europa League final in Dublin on Wednesday, followed by the German Cup final against second-division Kaiserslautern three days later.

"Tomorrow is our first final," coach Alonso said on Friday. "We can achieve something historic."

"(We are) not thinking about Wednesday (Europa League final) -- we're thinking about tomorrow and about Augsburg," Alonso insisted.

The Spaniard, who is in his first full season as a head coach, said his players "don't have time" to celebrate "too much" on Saturday. "We can celebrate with our fans, but from Monday we need to be fully focused on our final week."

"They're professional and I don't need to tell them. We need to be intelligent."

Alonso said star midfielder Florian Wirtz, who has not started in the league for five games, had overcome a leg injury and "can start" against Augsburg.

"There are no limitations for tomorrow. He feels much better and doesn't have any pain."



Bangladesh batter Mahmudullah Riyad comes down from the team bus after the Tigers landed at the George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston, USA to gear up for their three-match T20I series, starting on May 21, against the USA, co-hosts of the upcoming T20 World Cup. The Tigers will also play two warm-up matches against the USA and India on May 28 and June 1 to complete their build-up to the tournament.

PHOTO: BCB

# SPORTS



## One step in right direction, but still a long way to go



**We don't have any link with the Dhaka clubs to push players to the next level. I think the Academy Cup will give us that link to communicate with the Dhaka clubs.**

**ANISUR RAHMAN**

Poor technique and insufficient knowledge of footballers have often been blamed for poor results of the national team over the years. At times, even foreign coaches seemed bothered to have been working with such footballers.

However, hardly any initiatives have been taken to mitigate this deficiency of footballers' technique, skills, and knowledge of the game at the grassroots so far.

Unlike the heydays of the country's football, when most footballers would come through the ranks all the way up to the national team having been trained under some dedicated local coaches most of whom did not even possess any coaching certification, footballers now usually begin their journey at an academy.

However, the burning question has been whether those academies are run in a proper way, possessing the right training module, and appropriate facilities to hone the basic skills of budding footballers.

As the number of dedicated and

to get accreditation. The local game's governing body had earlier conducted two talent hunt campaigns with the involvement of those academies but the introduction of the BFF Academy Championship, involving 4800 budding footballers from 168 academies of 48 districts, has raised new hopes of helping the next generation footballers develop better techniques and skills as they make their way through the ranks. A total of 35 budding footballers have been picked for BFF Elite Academy from this programme.

Mosarrof Hossain mentioned how the BFF Academy Championship could help the academies bring the best out of the footballers.

"We need Tk 4000 to Tk 5000 to arrange a friendly match in order to judge the development of the footballers. However, most of the academies don't have the financial solvency. So, the BFF Academy Championship will act as a good platform to measure the improvement of our players each year," said Firoz.

Rajshahi's Bhabaniganj FAi secretary

there is no further platform for them to continue playing competitive matches. However, making district football leagues, which once acted as a rich pipeline for players to come through, regular once again could be an easy solution in this regard. Out of 64 districts, less than 20 held district football leagues last season.

As the guardian of the country's football, BFF can provide some financial assistance to the district football associations or convince them to revive district football leagues, so

is a norm in Europe, Bangladesh are yet to see any of their Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) and Bangladesh Championship League (BCL) clubs run and maintain a full-fledged youth development programme.

The clubs often state their limitations in providing proper accommodation for youth players as the main reason behind not even trying to build a development project. Addressing this issue, the BFF could help create a bridge between a few of the local academies and the top BPL and BCL clubs. The clubs could offer lump-sum financial assistance to the academies, who in turn will prioritise the specific clubs when it comes to providing youth talents during the BFF-sanctioned age-group championships.

This will not only help the BPL and BCL clubs erase their ill-reputation of not having a youth development programme but also help them scout better talents at the grassroots.

### ENSURE A PATHWAY FOR COACHES

Though having a grassroots coach and an AFC C licence holder coach is mandatory for an academy to get accreditation from the BFF, the irony is that even the coaches of the champions and runner-up academies of the latest BFF Academy Championship are still aspiring to complete the BFF-arranged coaches' courses.

Bangladesh has approximately 1200 coaches, including 423 grassroots and 512 AFC C licence coaches, with most of them sitting idle due to fewer competitions in the periphery. The only way to put to use all these local coaches is by ensuring more local competitions across the country which would generate a need for academies to hire certified local coaches.

However, being part of an academy does not guarantee becoming a footballer. But the ever-growing football academies across the country are believed to be a step in the right direction that could lead towards the development of the country's football and the BFF should find a convenient way of getting the maximum out of these academies, so that they can produce the future stars of the country.



### A COMPETITIVE PLATFORM AT LAST

Even though the country saw the initiation of a professional football league 16 years ago, none of the top-flight clubs possess fully functioning youth development programmes or youth academies in the true sense. Most of the football academies across the country have been formed voluntarily. These academies conduct training for three to six days a week but the budding footballers hardly get any opportunity to gauge their improvement due to a lack of competitive matches.

"I want to thank BFF for taking such initiative that would give our footballers a platform to compete against other academies," said Chattogram's Rampur Football Academy secretary-cum-coach Mohammad Farid, who has over 100 players in his academy that was formed some seven to eight months ago.

Firoz Kamal FA chairman Advocate

Asaduzzaman said, "We don't have any link with the Dhaka clubs to push players to the next level. I think the Academy Cup will give us that link to communicate with the Dhaka clubs."

Rangpur's Santos FA director and coach Shamim Khan Miskin thought it would be beneficial to have separate tournaments for different age groups.

"As the academies have different age-group teams, it would have been fantastic to get two to three more age-group tournaments under the Academy Accreditation Scheme," Shamim said.

### BUT WHAT'S NEXT?

As the BFF Academy Championship is a tournament for the U-15 boys, it can be pegged as a stepping stone for footballers at the primary school level who usually take part in the country-wide Bangabandhu Gold Cup primary school football tournament.

But what's the next step? Apparently,

that the academy players can easily enter into this competition and earn valuable experience before heading to tournaments and leagues held in Dhaka.

### A UNIFIED TRAINING APPROACH

For football to grow in the country, a level of standard needs to be maintained when it comes to operating the numerous football academies. In that regard, the BFF may as well take the initiative to formulate an exclusive and unified training module for all accredited academies, so that all academies can deliver the same training in a particular pattern in a bid to help the young footballers on the right trajectory by teaching them basic skills and knowledge about the game.

### TAG THE BPL AND BCL OUTFITS WITH THE ACADEMIES

While players being scouted at the academy level and signed by big clubs



passionate football coaches decreased across the country, the concept of residential and non-residential football academies has gained traction, especially after the Bangladesh Football Federation's (BFF) initiative of BFF Academy Accreditation Scheme that started in 2020.

Under the BFF Academy Accreditation Scheme, there are 186 residential and non-residential academies including 14 women's football academies, all of which had to meet around 40 criteria

## 'Tournament should continue with more incentive provided to academies'

Among 168 teams, Firoz Kamal Football Academy of Brahmanbaria emerged champions in the recently introduced and FIFA-financed BFF Academy Championship. Despite being the chairman of the academy, advocate Mosarrof Hossain acted as the manager of the team during the tournament. The lawyer talked to The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman to share the academy's experience, limitations, prospects and other issues.

**The Daily Star (DS): How did your academy become BFF's Academy Championship winners after being in operation for only over a year?**

**Mosarrof Hossain (MH):** We formed this academy in 2022, after a team from our area became runners-up in the under-14 tournament organised by the Bangladesh Football Federation. We have received a one-star certificate from the BFF.

We started preparing for the Academy Championship three months before the start of the tournament. We formed a strong squad through a day-long trail of nearly 300 budding footballers. We also provided good facilities to the players under good local coaches and that is the secret to our success.

**DS: How was the experience, starting from the zonal phase to the final phase in Dhaka?**

**MH:** We played seven matches in total. We accommodated the players in four rooms of our house in Ashuganj for three months. The preparation was really good under local coaches. We did not face any on-or-off-field difficulties and everyone was excited over playing their first competitive tournament under BFF.

**DS: Has there been any impact on the region following your academy's success in the BFF tournament?**

**MH:** There has been a good response in Ashuganj, which has a heritage of football. Former national striker Saifur Rahman Moni is also from our area, and is seen as an inspiration by the next generations. There are other academies in our area. The biggest impact, I think, has been the fact that coaches of professional clubs like



Bashundhara Kings, Abahani and Fortis FC are communicating with us to take players for their age-level teams. I think the federation should continue to host this tournament every year.

**DS: Despite being a lawyer, you are running a football academy. What drove this idea?**

**MH:** Ashuganj has produced a few national team players in the past, but it is difficult to go to the top level

without proper football knowledge and training. This issue gave me the idea to start an academy so that the budding players can learn the basic skills and then we can sell these players to top clubs in future.

**DS: How do you provide for the expenses of the academy?**

**MH:** There are currently 194 footballers under three categories – under-12, under-13 and under-16. We provide skill training from Mondays to Thursdays and hold matches on Fridays and Saturdays. Sundays are off. I myself provide token monthly salaries worth Tk 15,000 to three coaches. But we are planning to introduce a Tk 50-100 fee for each footballer to give the academy a sustainable model.

**DS: Do you face any problems to run the academy?**

**MH:** As I am from a political family, I do not face any issues regarding training grounds. The only problem that I face is financial backing as no-one wants to sponsor football. We received a little help from others during the BFF Academy Championship. We need Tk 4000 to 5000 to play matches, so we struggle to arrange competitive matches to hone the skills of the players.

**DS: Does your academy receive any support from the BFF Academy Scheme?**

**MH:** The scheme started only two years ago. It would be better if we get financial support from the BFF. I think the scheme will benefit if the federation provides free football, training materials, etc and provides a discount on fees for coaches' courses.

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### US sanctions against Rab to stay Says state dept

UNB, Dhaka

The United States has said the sanctions imposed against Bangladesh's elite force Rab are not being withdrawn.

"Those claims are false. The US is not withdrawing sanctions against the Rab," said Principal Deputy Spokesperson at the US Department of State Vedant Patel.

In a regular briefing at the US Department of State, he said sanctions are intended to change "behaviour and promote accountability".

On Tuesday night, PM's Private Industry and Investment Adviser Salman Fazlur Rahman told reporters that the White House and the US Department of State are in favour of lifting sanctions on the Rab, but it depends on the Department of Justice.

"The issue is with the US Department of Justice, SEE PAGE 6 COL 2



Workers separating spoiled grains from Boro paddy with traditional winnowing fans in Bil Pabla area of Khulna's Dumuria upazila. The grains would be used as cattle feed. Farmers are happy with a good yield this season. The photo was taken on Wednesday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

### 3 workers fall to their death from high-rise

#### They were not provided with any safety gears by building contractor

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three construction workers died after falling off an under-construction building in the capital's Sababo area yesterday morning.

Locals said the workers did not have any safety gear.

The victims are Altafur Rahman, 45, Antar, 25, and Mofizul Islam, 20.

The three were working standing on a scaffolding on the top floor of the 10-storey building at Mayakanan. They fell when the rope snapped around 9:45am and sustained critical injuries, said Anwar Hossain, a sub-inspector of Sabujbagh Police Station.

They were rushed to the Mugda Medical College Hospital where doctors declared Altafur and Antar dead. Mofizul died at the intensive care unit around 2:00pm, Anwar said.

Locals blamed the deaths on the building owners and the contractor as they did not ensure any safety measures for the workers.

Pralay Kumar Saha, officer-in-charge of Sabujbagh Police Station, said they were conducting drives to arrest those responsible.

Hayatul Islam Khan, deputy commissioner of Motijheel division police, said they would take legal action if the allegation of not ensuring safety measures is found to be true.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

### Firearms, ammo, explosives seized in dense forest

#### Those were meant for militant outfit, says CTTC unit; 'arms supplier' held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Counterterrorism officials have recovered 10 firearms, a large cache of ammunition, and explosives in Bandarban's Naikhongchhari, intended for supply to the banned militant outfit Jama'atul Ansar Fil Hindal Sharqiya.

Earlier on Wednesday, a team of the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of the DMP arrested Abdur Rahim, 32, a key firearms supplier to the banned militant outfit, from Gazipur's Kaliakair.

Based on his information, the team carried out a drive in a dense forest in Naikhongchhari on Thursday and recovered the arms and ammo, CTTC chief Md Asaduzzaman told a press briefing at the DMP media centre yesterday.

The seized items include a foreign pistol, nine locally-made firearms, 16 bullets, 11 cartridges, 24 shotgun shells, two binoculars, one gas mask, one mobile signal booster, two walkie-talkies, six litres of "acid-like" liquid, 60 feet of electric wire, and one wire antenna. These items were kept hidden underground.

The CTTC chief said Rahim was leading the "Rahim Dakat (robbery gang)" and perpetrating criminal activities in Cox's Bazar's Ramu upazila and Bandarban's Naikhongchhari upazila in 2019. "He kept these weapons hidden underground in the dense forest to supply Jamaatul Ansar Fil Hindal Sharqiya."

"Apart from the Kukri-Chin National Front (KNF), the banned militant outfit was buying firearms from Rahim and one Kabir Ahmed for the military training of the outfit's members in the remote hilly areas of Chittagong Hill Tracts. Under an agreement between Sharqiya leaders and KNF, the KNF, an armed group in the CHT, was

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

### Teenage girl raped in Narayanganj

#### Case filed against 6

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

A teenage girl in Narayanganj yesterday filed a case against five to six unidentified people over raping her.

The 17-year-old girl was picked up at knife-point by the accused from her house early on Thursday. She was taken to a nearby area and raped, said the case statement.

Ahsan Ullah, officer-in-charge of Araihaazar Police Station, said the case was lodged under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act.

The victim's family used to live in Munshiganj. But they recently moved to their newly built house in Araihaazar upazila.

Around 2:30am on Thursday, five to six people broke open the door of the victim's room.

They took the girl to a nearby empty house and raped her after wrapping a scarf around her mouth, according to the case statement.

Later, they dropped the girl at her house and

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

### Comply with international law in Gaza

#### Western nations urge Israel as fighting rages in northern Gaza; 31 more Palestinians killed

REUTERS, Rome

Israel must comply with international law in Gaza and address the devastating humanitarian crisis in the Palestinian enclave, a group of Western nations wrote in a letter to the Israeli government seen by Reuters yesterday.

All countries belonging to the Group of Seven (G7) major democracies, apart from the United States, signed the letter, along with Australia, South Korea, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and Finland.

The five-page letter comes as Israeli forces bear down on the southern Gaza city of Rafah as part of its drive to eradicate Hamas, despite warnings this could result in mass casualties in an area where displaced civilians have found shelter.

"In exerting its right to defend itself, Israel must fully comply with international humanitarian law," the letter said.

Meanwhile, Israeli forces battled Hamas fighters in the narrow alleyways of Jabalia in northern Gaza yesterday in some of the fiercest engagements since they returned to the area a week ago, while in the south Hamas members attacked tanks massing

- S Africa case at ICJ 'totally divorced' from facts: Israel
- Aid trucks begin moving ashore via Gaza pier: US
- Death toll in enclave rises to 35,303

around Rafah.

Residents said Israeli armour had thrust as far as the market at the heart of Jabalia, the largest of Gaza's eight historic refugee camps, and that bulldozers were demolishing homes and shops in the path of the advance.

As fighting raged in the north and south of the territory, the US military

operation in Rafah.

"There is a tragic war going on but there is no genocide," its lawyer Gilad Noam told the International Court of Justice, arguing the accusations are "completely divorced from the facts".

At least 35,303 Palestinians have been killed and 79,261 have been wounded in Israel's military offensive on Gaza since October 7, the Gaza health ministry said in a statement yesterday. The toll includes at least 31 deaths over the past 24 hours, it said.

Israeli tanks and warplanes bombarded parts of Rafah yesterday, while the armed wings of Hamas and Islamic Jihad said they were firing anti-tank missiles and mortars at forces massing to the east, southeast and inside the Rafah border crossing with Egypt.

The UNRWA, the main UN aid agency for Palestinians, said that since the military offensive on Rafah started on May 6, more than 630,000 people have been forced to flee Rafah.

"Many have sought refuge in Deir al-Balah, which is now unbearably overcrowded with dire conditions," it added. Deir al-Balah, up the coast from Rafah to the north, is the only other city in Gaza yet to be assaulted by Israeli forces.

### Five lives lost as bus overturns in Cumilla

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cumilla

Five people were killed and 10 others injured as a bus overturned on the Dhaka-Chattogram highway at Batisha Basantapur of Cumilla's Chaudhagram upazila last morning.

Biplob Kumar Nath, station officer at Chaudhagram Fire Service Station, confirmed the incident to this newspaper.

Two of the deceased were identified as Badrul Hasan Riyad, 26, of Chattogram and Mohammad Hossain, 30, of Cox's Bazar. The identities of other deceased could not be known immediately.

SM Lokman Hossain, in charge of Miarbaxar Highway Police Outpost, said that a team of highway police recovered the bodies.

According to the passengers of the bus, the accident took place when the driver lost control of the steering and the vehicle overturned on the road.

The injured passengers were taken to the local upazila health complex.

### Pyramids in Egypt built along long-lost river

AFP, Paris



Scientists have discovered a long-buried branch of the Nile river that once flowed alongside more than 30 pyramids in Egypt, potentially solving the mystery of how ancient Egyptians transported the massive stone blocks to build the famous monuments.

The 64-kilometre-long river branch, which ran by the iconic Giza pyramid complex among other wonders, was hidden under desert and farmland for millennia, according to a study revealing the find on Thursday.

The existence of the river would explain why the 31 pyramids were built in a chain along a now inhospitable desert strip in the Nile Valley between 4,700 and 3,700 years ago.

The strip near the ancient Egyptian capital of Memphis includes the Great Pyramid of Giza -- the only surviving structure of the seven wonders of the ancient world -- as well as the Khafre, Cheops and Mykerinos pyramids.



Displaced Palestinians queue to buy water from a water truck next to their temporary camp in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

### China 'can't have it both ways' with Russia, West Says US

AFP, Washington

The United States has said Chinese President Xi Jinping cannot both improve ties with the West and support Russia after he vowed to boost relations with his counterpart Vladimir Putin.

"The People's Republic of China can't have its cake and eat it too," State Department spokesman Vedant Patel told reporters on Thursday.

"It can't have it both ways and want to have (better) relationships with Europe and other countries while simultaneously continuing to fuel the biggest threat to European security in a long time," Patel said, referring to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The United States has charged that China, while not directly sending weapons to Russia, has supported Moscow's largest defense industry expansion since Soviet times, a concern raised by Secretary of State Antony Blinken on a visit to Beijing last month.



The global esports industry has grown exponentially over the past decade. In 2023, the market was valued at over US \$1.1 billion, with projections suggesting it will surpass US \$1.6 billion by 2025.

## RISE OF ESPORTS IN BANGLADESH

# From fringe hobby to

# NATIONAL PRIDE



**I believe the potential of esports in Bangladesh is currently at its highest, with a lot of opportunities coming up. I believe our country can be the hub of esports events for the entire South Asia region.**

ZARIF FAIAZ and SHAMS RASHID TONMOY

For years, gaming in Bangladesh was seen as a waste of time -- often dismissed as a frivolous activity or a distraction from more "serious" pursuits. Traditional societal norms placed little value on gaming, perceiving it as an endeavour devoid of any real-world benefits.

However, this narrative is rapidly changing as esports gains momentum around the world, pushing the boundaries of how gaming is perceived and valued in the country.

The global esports industry has grown exponentially over the past decade. In 2023, the market was valued at over US \$1.1 billion, with projections suggesting it will surpass US \$1.6 billion by 2025.

Major esports tournaments attract millions of viewers worldwide, and professional players earn lucrative incomes through sponsorships, streaming, and competition winnings.

Even traditionally conservative countries have recognised the economic potential of esports and are investing heavily in the industry. For instance, the Saudi Arabian government has pledged to invest US \$38 billion in the gaming industry, including US \$13 billion earmarked for acquiring a leading game publisher. The country also hosted the Gamers8 festival, which featured a US \$45 million prize pool, one of the largest in esports history.

### Emerging talent and recognition

Banladesh's journey into the world of esports has been marked by significant milestones and

mechanics for competitive play."

Anik's success in the South Asian regional finals against competitors from Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and India earned him a spot to represent Bangladesh on the global platform. Anik initially started playing video games in local arcades in 2013 and has since become an avid fan of fighting games such as Street Fighter and The King of Fighters.

In the same vein, Farid Islam has made headlines by securing a position in the Global Esports Games Riyadh 2023 for the Street Fighter V tournament.

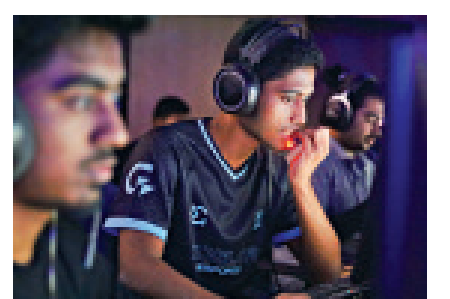
Moreover, all-female teams such as Team Hexagon and Team Celestials have qualified for the South Asian round of the VCT Game Changers tournament, an official Valorant competition hosted by Riot Games -- the game's developer. Their exceptional performance against teams from Pakistan, Nepal, India, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka is a testament to their hard work and determination. Team Hexagon, led by Noxiana, showcased impressive coordination and tactical prowess, while Team Celestials, captained by Rimsha Iqbal, displayed remarkable

rise of female gamers. In 2022, for the first time in the country's history, an all-female team represented Bangladesh in an official, international esports competition: the Global Esports Games 2022, competing at Dota 2. "Team Mayhem", consisting of A-level completing students to university graduates, had to win an audition to receive this unique opportunity, in an event held jointly by the Global Esports Federation and the BYDESA.

In an earlier conversation with The Daily Star, the gamers of Team Mayhem pointed out how, despite making names

Moreover, all-female teams such as Team Hexagon and Team Celestials have qualified for the South Asian round of the VCT Game Changers tournament, an official Valorant competition hosted by Riot Games -- the game's developer.

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**Bangladeshi teams are also making strides in international esports competitions.**

teams needed to reach the finals of the MCB S3 tournament, which ran from April 18 to May 11 this year, with Crisis Requitul ending up as the champion of the official Bangladeshi tournament.

Similarly, teams like Hellbent OPx and MLT CR went for the Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB) M5 Wildcard Qualifier in Nepal last year, to secure a spot in the previous MLBB M5 World Championship. Hellbent OPx, the reigning champion of Bangladesh, is known for its exceptional coordination and strategic gameplay, while Team MLT CR demonstrated consistent performance throughout the regular season. These teams represent the growing competitive spirit and skill level within the Bangladeshi esports community.

### Breaking stereotypes, embracing the future

The success of Bangladeshi esports players is changing how people view gaming in the country. Gaming is no longer just a hobby -- it's a potential career path. The growing involvement of women in esports is also particularly noteworthy, as it not only breaks gender stereotypes, but also paves the way for greater inclusivity in the gaming community.

The achievements of female gamers are inspiring more young women to pursue their passion for esports, further diversifying the talent pool.

The rise of Bangladeshi esports isn't just about trophies and prize money; it's about changing perceptions. Parents who once saw gaming as a hindrance are now witnessing their children blossom into skilled athletes, capable of competing on the international stage and bringing national recognition. Esports is opening doors to lucrative careers, with sponsorships, streaming revenue, and competition winnings becoming increasingly viable sources of income.

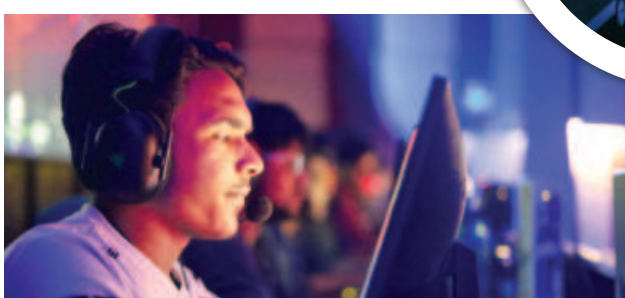
The esports revolution in Bangladesh is just getting started. With each local tournament, and each international victory, the country is etching its name onto the global gaming map. From the dimly lit arcades where dreams were born to the brightly lit stages of international competition, Bangladeshi gamers are proving their mettle.

The future of esports in Bangladesh gleams with promise, and there is no doubt that with the right support and infrastructure, the nation is poised to become a force to be reckoned with in the ever-evolving world of competitive gaming.



**Team Celestials emerged victorious in this landmark event in the video game Valorant at an esports competition. The achievements of female gamers are inspiring more young women to pursue their passion for esports, further diversifying the talent pool.**

PHOTO: COURTESY



**The success of Bangladeshi esports players is changing how people view gaming in the country. Gaming is no longer just a hobby -- it's a potential career path.**

achievements, showcasing the country's growing prowess on the international stage. One of the notable figures is M Saiful Islam Anik, who qualified for the main stage of the Capcom Cup X, the official Street Fighter tournament hosted by Capcom.

"The potential of fighting games in the local esports scene is quite significant," says Anik, "Unlike some other genres, fighting games can be relatively easy for newcomers to pick up and play, while still offering deep

Farid's journey began with a local qualifier tournament hosted by the Bangladesh Youth Development & Electronic Sports Association (BYDESA), where he triumphed over competitors from India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and the Maldives to qualify for the global event.

When asked about his thoughts on the local esports scene, Farid says, "I believe the potential of esports in Bangladesh is currently at its highest, with a lot of opportunities coming up. I believe our country can be the hub of esports events for the entire South Asia region."

During our conversation, Farid, a student at Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology studying Electrical and Electronics Engineering, emphasised that despite fighting games like Street Fighter 6 usually not being included in the line-up of big local tournaments, the community of this genre of games, despite being relatively niche, is growing with a lot of young talents on the rise.

### More women in esports now

A significant and inspiring development in the Bangladeshi esports scene is the

in the international gaming scene, struggles remained in being recognised as a female esports player in a scene primarily dominated by men.

"Almost all of us have been told at different times and places -- why should women play competitive video games?" stated one of the members, with the team sharing stories of how they faced obstacles due to parents, family members, and society as a whole.

Since then, all-female esports teams have seen a notable rise in Bangladesh. In 2023, the country witnessed its first women-only esports competition, organised by the Bangladesh Association of Software & Information Services (BASIS).

The tournament, held during BASIS's flagship three-day exhibition SoftExpo 2023, featured eight teams with a total of 48 female participants.

Team Celestials emerged victorious in this landmark event in the video game Valorant, with Team Wasabi Sirens and Team Zetsubo securing the second and third positions, respectively. This event not only highlighted the growing interest in esports among women but also provided a platform for female gamers to showcase their skills.

resilience and skill. These achievements are breaking gender stereotypes and inspiring more young women to pursue their passion for esports.

### Local tournaments and international aspirations

Local esports tournaments in Bangladesh are gaining popularity, drawing in hundreds of participants and showcasing the country's burgeoning talent. The Discovery One Cup Season 2, for example, featured over 100 teams competing in games like Valorant, Mobile Legends: Bang Bang, and Counter-Strike: Global Offensive.

The event, held at the International Convention City Bashundhara, was supported by sponsors like bKash, Mountain Dew, Paramount Venture Capital, and Savoy.

Teams like MLT Esports, Kral's Council, and Red Viperz emerged as champions in their respective games, securing significant cash prizes and earning recognition.

Bangladeshi teams are also making strides in international competitions.

Recently, two local esports teams -- Crisis Requitul and Kral's Council -- qualified for the MLBB World Cup South Asia tournament. To qualify, both



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

FICTION

# Hair cream

SHAHRIAR SHAAMS

“Speaking of the devil, where is our muezzin? Can someone call Rashed and ask if he is really coming? We have waited enough already. Or do we need to mic him over now?”

The mosque committee was quite displeased with Rashed, their young muezzin. They feared he embarrassed them a bit too much these days. He was not even present at the meeting today on time. “I’m on my way,” he had said on the phone, assuring them that they could start in his absence. But they waited anyway. Tardiness was only one in a long list of their complaints about Rashed.

“We cannot fault him for running a business,” one of the grandees, Shafik Islam, said as they waited, “I’ve seen many of you lot do that. It is just the things he does for a little bit of cash...”

“What is he up to now?”  
“Selling hair cream!” The Imam said, appearing exasperated.

“What, for hair growth?” asked the grandee.  
“Well, I suppose that would be of help to you, Imam shaheb.”

The Imam stuttered, said, “I am happy with the way I look, Shafik bhai. It is all Allah’s wish. Unlike our Jomir bhai here. I saw him buy one of the bottles from Rashed just yesterday.”

The Imam’s sudden finger-pointing at the man stunted the latter’s plan to remain invisible in the meeting. Jomir was a quiet man by nature, rarely speaking and only nodding away to anything that was being agreed upon.

Shafik asked, “Did you buy the ones for hair or for something down there, Jomir?”

They did not wait for the man’s mumbling defense. The snickering filled the small room. They were seated on plastic chairs, holding their cups of tea in their hands in the absence of a table.

Jomir put his cup down on the floor. “I only bought it to be polite,” he said, “He had caught me at a bad time, had me cornered...”

The men shrugged. “That happens with him around,” one of them said. “I once got cajoled into buying his jinn-repellent water! He even soft-soaped me into believing he had recited the entirety of Surah Al-Baqarah before blowing twice into the water.”

“And how did our young Rashed’s spit taste, my dear fellow?”

The man shut up, fearing he had overshared.

“Why does he do this, really? It is bad enough in a climate like this,” the Imam said, sounding hurt. “No one gives us any respect

these days. They see him doing this nonsense and the repercussions fall on us!”

He was agitated, and his face turned pinkish as he furiously thumbed over his prayer beads.

“Calm down, Imam shaheb,” Shafik said. “It wasn’t that long ago you were selling jinn-sponsored tabizes...we all make mistakes.”

Jomir sprang up to deal a blow, “I remember that quite well, Imam shaheb, I had to fork out a fair amount of money to buy that. You had promised that if I put it over my daughter she would stop thinking about going to Canada!”

give him any ideas. I already suffer enough when he calls everyone for prayer with that raspy, horrid voice. Imagine if he starts using the mosque’s microphone to sell his cream!”

As if to deny his seniors any further consternation, Rashed arrived at last. He bore an embarrassed face, “Apologies! I got caught up a bit on my way here.”

The Imam would not look him in the face. “Why, Rashed? Got busy selling some of your hair cream?”

Rashed smiled, saying, “We must survive



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

“You can’t blame me for that. The tabiz would never work once she’d already gone to Canada. It’s too far!”

One of the men interrupted to say, “I believe the jinn couldn’t get a visa to pursue her and work his magic,” only for the Imam to glare at him.

“This is no joking matter,” he was told, “I am seeing that the devil has begun to infiltrate our gathering...”

“Speaking of the devil, where is our muezzin? Can someone call Rashed and ask if he is really coming? We have waited enough already. Or do we need to mic him over now?”

The Imam said, “Let’s not go that far. Don’t

somehow, shouldn’t we?” he said.

“But there is a limit,” the Imam said, “We can’t exactly be swindling, can we?”

Rashed kept smiling, opting to weather the snark.

“Tell us, young man, does the hair cream even work?” they asked, “Are there sightings of a full harvest?”

“Too early to tell, you know,” he said, taking off his skullcap to reveal a shining, barren dome, “I’m trying to figure it out myself.”

Shahriar Shaams has written for Dhaka Tribune, The Business Standard, and The Daily Star. Find him on X: @shahriarshaams.

POETRY

# How to exist

RAIAN ABEDIN

When there’s a lull in the air, I get the feeling that I’ve scraped the bottom of my fleshy insides. I’ve decided to stop looking at how sweat curls over and around my skin, I think this is all there is. But then I look at my neck and I’m no longer a person. My mother tells me, over and over again, that my posture is because I never sit right. I am too uncomfortable in my own skin. I am not even a person when I talk because I break things when I speak. Sometimes, through my words, I try to be like you who is not phased by this. A person, I could carve my face to resemble you and use

**But I think the wind will come and it will carry some more of my meaninglessness away and into the sky that now looks a little pink and there they might even grow and start their own lives. I think I will become the sky, and the concrete, and then my father will enter my room to tell me something but I won’t hear him.**



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

the light to hide the parts that don’t need seeing. But at night I forget and my shape resembles a child. You know how to love and keep your back straight—I think all of me tends to break every now and then.

But I think the wind will come and it will carry some more of my meaninglessness away and into the sky that now looks a little pink and there they might even grow and start their own lives. I think I will become the sky, and the concrete, and then my father will enter my room to tell me something but I won’t hear him. We have the same ears, you see. I will wait for him to leave before I tell him whatever I want to, I will wait for him to stop looking at me because I cannot learn how his love works any more than I can learn how my own does. What do I do with these? Someone in the streets keeps telling me to carry an umbrella, he spends his evenings bathing in sun and dust—and he allows himself to smile between every word and every beam of light. And he allows his silence to grow to hold on to him, at times he looks like the sun. *Where will you go if it rains?* My mouth wants to open but I think I know the answer.

Raian Abedin is a poet, a student of Biochemistry, and a contributor for The Daily Star.

**Khero Khata**

Welcome to Khero Khata, Star Books and Literature’s writing corner. In the first week of every month, we will post a prompt soliciting submissions in the form of flash fiction and poetry. Selected pieces will be published in print and/or online.

**This month’s prompt: Heat**

Email us your submissions (500-words) at [dsliteditor@gmail.com](mailto:dsliteditor@gmail.com) by 25 May, 2024.

POETRY

# A childhood memory

NAWAL NAZ TAREQUE

Dust patterns have gathered around my landline phone, huddling around the maroon. my fingerprints take some dust off of it, and they rejoice. it is 7:34 pm now, which means your tutor has just left, after leaving her half-finished cup of tea and double finished plate of biscuits on your desk. I press the buttons quickly, your landline a series of 7s and 4s and 0s and 1s away from me. *please pick up*, I whisper. you do—oh wait it’s your maid, no wait it’s your grandmother, and she asks me how I am today. I lie easily, a fearless teenager, and ask her how she is today. she lies casually, a war veteran, and



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

calls you from afar. i can hear your brother’s breath from the other side, still a beginner at eavesdropping, your penguin steps ring in my ear from afar, and here you are, sitting beside

the phone, its springy wires extending needlessly. i switch to the cordless phone, black in ecstasy, taking three strides to my room and closing the door behind me. *jaanish ajke*

*ki hoise?* I exclaim, and tell you about my day. *bol bol*, you reply, and begin to hear my tales. both of our telephone bills skyrocket, hearts and ears in sync. in time, I learn to listen and she begins to weave her tales.

the phone numbers have changed, the people have relocated. i have yet to pay my telephone bills. i remain a shaking urn, spilling out stories from spotlights in separation.

Nawal Naz Tareque, based in Connecticut, the United States, is a computer science major by day and a (growing) poet by night. She wonders about the mundane too often and can often be found cracking terrible jokes when she returns home.

# Coming of age for IRFAN SAJJAD

**In 'Ali', I play the titular role, who is a specially-abled person. I had to learn sign language and throughout the film, there was a professional instructor who supervised my work**

SHARMIN JOYA

A journey that commenced with modeling a decade ago has taken Irfan Sajjad to immense popularity. The actor has managed to make his way to the OTT with several projects, such as *Koli 2.0*, *Dour* and *Baba Someone's Following Me*, amongst others.

Irfan is now busy working on the small screen projects, while also working on big screen projects, simultaneously. Three films featuring this sensational actor have been announced already. The actor visited The Daily Star for an exclusive photo shoot and during intervals, over coffee and snacks, he discussed his upcoming projects, life, and more.

**After a hiatus of nearly two years, you have returned to the industry. What changes did you observe?**

A significant change that caught my attention was that the audience now demands story-driven plots. It is a positive change, since we know how small-screen projects mostly depend on views, and it is an undeniable fact. Thus, to grab the attention of the audience, contents were either made with trendy plots or something light-hearted. I am not against this, however, after a

development should be slowed down, so that the audience can get breathing space for a mental adjustment as well.

**Amongst recent female artistes, who do you think is doing well?**

Sadya Ayman, Aisha Khan, Tanjim Saiyara Totini—these three actresses are shining at the moment. I believe they have a long way to go.

**Most of the directors you collaborated with are not regular in direction. Who do you miss working with the most?**

I miss working with Ashfaque Nipun and Shafayet Mansoor Rana. Also, I have a wish to work with Mostofa Sarwar Farooki, as we never collaborated.

**You're working on three big screen projects. What updates can you provide at the moment?**

I have completed working on two projects—*Ali* and *Bhoyal*—with the same director, Biplob Haidar. If everything goes well, we will go for the release after Eid-ul-Azha. In *Ali*, I play the titular role, who is a specially-abled person. I had to learn sign language and throughout the film, there was a professional instructor who supervised my work. It was the toughest role I have played in my entire career so far. *Bhoyal* also has a thoughtful plot. This film is based on a village in Khasia, Sreemangal, Sylhet. With director Sohel Arman, I am shooting for *Sangbad*.

**On a lighter note, does Irfan Sajjad have more male or female fans? Could you share a memorable moment with fans?**

I believe I have more female fans! It flatters me when I pass by someone, mostly female, and within a few seconds, they approach me, expressing their admiration. Additionally, there's one particular fan who frequently sends me gifts. Not only does she write beautifully, but she also crafts poetry inspired by the titles of my fiction works, which always touches me deeply. I believe I am blessed with all their love and support.

certain time, it becomes repetitive.

**You were praised for your role in 'Baba Someone's Following Me'. What are your plans on OTT?**

I am trying to focus on big screen projects now. I feel that at this point in my career, I should explore various roles. As for OTT platforms, I have recently worked on some projects, and I look forward to working on more. I look for stories that are more relatable to the audience. Although our audience consumes global content, they are not prepared to take heavy content when it is produced locally. When something intellectual is produced in Bengali OTT content, people start comparing it with the international ones. Thus, the process of this



WARDROBE: RAVARI  
PHOTOS: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED



## TRENDY STREAMS

Netflix  
Bridgerton Season 3



HBO Max  
Home Sweet Home



Apple TV Plus  
Sugar



Paramount Plus  
Young Sheldon



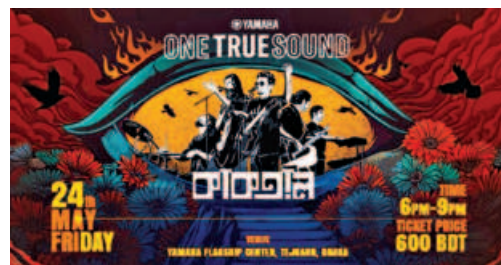
Hoichoi  
Chalchitra Ekhon



## OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA



**Concert Shurjodoy**  
May 25 | 1 pm - 8 pm  
Liberation War Museum, Dhaka



**One True Sound- Kaaktaal**  
May 24 | 6 pm  
Yamaha Flagship Centre, Dhaka



**Leading The Times: Midas Touch**  
May 24 | 7 pm  
Aloki, Dhaka



## WHAT'S PLAYING

# CHAN KITHAN

Released half a decade ago, Ali Sethi's *Chan Kithan* is a hauntingly beautiful exploration of Punjabi gothic music. Blending the melancholic ethos of the Saraiki language with contemporary urban longing, the song narrates a Cinderella tale set in the modern age.

With portentously gloomy or broody essence, the lyrics convey a lonely maiden's half-tender, half-threatening interrogation of her elusive 'chan' or beloved.

Sethi's vocal performance, combined with the unique mix of traditional and modern musical elements, creates a deeply atmospheric experience. As for the video, it features Ali Sethi walking through the streets of Lahore, Pakistan, while enhancing the gothic ambience with its striking visuals and fashion.

*Chan Kithan* stands out as an innovative experiment, resonating with anyone who has experienced the ache of longing for an unfulfilled love.

## TV TALKIES

# Sanjay Leela Bhansali's opulent saga of power, patriarchy, and patriotism



Director Sanjay Leela Bhansali, who is known for creating larger-than-life productions, has concocted his debut series, *Heeramandi*, and it was recently announced that the show has successfully become the most-watched Indian show on Netflix.

The story of the *tawaifs* (courtesans) of Heeramandi initially begins on the note of a turf war between the reigning Mallika jaan (Manisha Koirala) and the prodigal Fareedan (Sonakshi Sinha), who was sold off as a mere child by the former. It then transforms its course into becoming a more collective

patriotic act, with the timeline of the story taking place during pre-independent India.

Studded with mostly stellar performers, the show narrates the stories of several courtesans, either suffering under the ruthless regime of Mallika jaan or plotting for her downfall. The power play of the British police in that era, along with that of the *nawabs*, play a pivotal role in the construction of decisions made by the said characters.

Swathed in splendour and the classic Sanjay Leela Bhansali aesthetics, the show is surely an alluring watch, if not much else.

## WHAT'S ON THE GRAM

# ASHNA HABIB BHABNA

The stunning actress Bhabna has recently made her debut on the red carpet of the 77th Cannes Film Festival in a striking midnight blue halter-neck dress adorned with a flowery cape.

Designed by Zoan Ash, the dress intricately features floral designs that exude elegance. The dancer-turned-actress styled her hair in a deliberate messy high bun and opted for an overall nude makeup look—allowing the dress to shine on the red carpet.

The outfit beautifully accentuated her curves as she posed for the cameras. With the festival continuing until May 25, we anticipate seeing more gorgeous looks from the actress.





PHOTO: TITU DAS

## Homegrown apps fail to take off

MAHMUDUL HASAN

While it is not an uncommon sight to see people typing messages in Bangla on their smartphones, the familiar colours and user interface make it obvious that they are not using communication apps belonging to local companies.

While mobile financial service providers and nearly all banks have gained traction in digital services in Bangladesh, the same cannot be said of communications apps built by the government or private entities.

In early 2020, a homegrown mobile application with capability to send messages and make voice calls was launched in Bangladesh. At the inauguration ceremony of the app, named 'Kotha', Zunaid Ahmed Palak, state minister for ICT, said it would be Bangladesh's Facebook, PayPal, Netflix, Twitter, and WhatsApp.

But now, almost none remembers the app. Although Kotha has good ratings on Google's Play Store, it has less than 2 lakh downloads.

However, Mahboob Zaman, chairman of Kotha Technologies, said the growth of the app is somewhat steady given their strategy. "We were trying to do organic marketing. Besides, research and development requires huge investment. We are trying to find an investor."

So far, the app has 4 lakh registered users, according to the company.

Sumon Ahmed Sabir, a technology expert, said copying something that has numerous versions, which local apps tend to do, is unlikely to lead to popularity. "Popular apps come with diversity, flexibility, efficiency and global expectancy that cannot be replicated."

"Besides, local apps cannot compete with these platforms due to the scale of their research and investment. Once a sector is monopolistic, it's not easy to break."

The government has also taken the initiative making communication apps at the cost of hundreds of crores, but all of them failed to attract audiences.

The government-funded app 'Baithak', a video-conferencing platform enabling virtual meetings and webinars similar to Zoom, was designed for government officials, but got very little response.

'Alapon', a Viber-like app developed by the government's ICT Division with the aim to streamline messaging and file exchange processes for government officials, was launched in 2016. Eight years later, the app no longer exists.

"Privacy is definitely a concern, if not a major one," Sabir added.

Meanwhile, the use of social media platforms and communication apps in Bangladesh developed by the global tech giants boomed in the past decade and made it one of the largest markets for them in terms of audiences. The top communication apps in terms of users are WhatsApp, Messenger, and Imo.

Facebook has a huge chunk of the audience, with nearly 53 million users in the country, which places Bangladesh among the top 10 Facebook-crazed nations as of January 2024, according to Statista, a German online platform that specialises in data gathering and visualisation.

Facebook also offers Messenger, integrating it as a standalone app for messaging, voice calls, and video chats.

There were more than 6.3 crore Facebook users in Bangladesh in February 2024 that has a population of about 17 crore, according to management and analytics platform NapoleonCat. It put the number of Messenger users at 5.7 crore.

When asked how many people in Bangladesh use WhatsApp, Meta, the parent company of WhatsApp, Facebook and Messenger, said it is unable to share the country-specific data.

Imo is also popular in rural Bangladesh due to low data usage, simplicity, and free voice and video calls. In 2023, a staggering 4 million new users from the country were integrated into Imo's network, the company said.

That took its monthly users in Bangladesh to 50 million, accounting for a quarter of its 200 million total users. Imo users in the country made 91.6 billion audio and video calls in 2023, among which 35.8 billion calls were international.

Bangladeshi users also made 676 million group calls last year through the app. The top five destinations for international calls were Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Oman, Malaysia, and Qatar.

# Desire for mobile data trumps all else

**According to BTRC data, there were 10.05 crore people using 4G SIMs as of November 2023. That means 55 percent of mobile users are now using 4G, showcasing a positive trend in the adoption of high-speed mobile internet**

MAHMUDUL HASAN and SAMAMA RAHMAN

As one strolls along Green Road or ventures into the depths of Karwan Bazar, he or she may come across a raucous circle formed by labourers, rickshaw-pullers, and street vendors.

All of these individuals have taken time away from their laborious tasks to encircle small screens, usually placed on a mat in the centre of the huddle.

As curiosity drives one close enough to see what exactly they are up to, vibrant colours reflect from the screens onto their transfixed faces, deepening the mystery.

But upon closer inspection, it becomes crystal clear: these men are engaged in one of the oldest and most popular board games in Bangladesh: ludo.

But instead of a board, one dice and the colourful rounded tokens that fans of the games are familiar with, all that is required to play now are smartphones connected to internet.

While that may only be a simple means to unwind at the end of a day of arduous labour, the bustling circle of ludo enthusiasts show how much access to the internet has become a part of daily life.

There are hundreds of such little examples littering the day to day lives of the crores residing in Dhaka, all feeding a surge in demand for mobile data.

According to data from the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), there were 10.05 crore people using 4G SIMs as of November 2023. That means 55 percent of mobile users are now using 4G, showcasing a positive trend in the adoption of high-speed mobile internet.

This corresponds to the growing number of internet users in Bangladesh, which has grown exponentially over the past 15 years. There were only 36 lakh internet users in Bangladesh in 2008, but that number ballooned to six crore by 2018. At the end of 2023, the number

technology in Bangladesh for the rise, warning: "When 5G will be rolled out, the number of traditional calls will hit rock bottom."

The changing behaviour presents both an opportunity and a challenge to telecom operators. For example, Grameenphone, the largest mobile operator in Bangladesh, saw its data revenue surge 13-fold to Tk 4,542 crore in 2023 from Tk 317 crore in 2013.

Last year, data revenue accounted for 28.6 percent of GP's revenue compared to 19.2 percent in 2018. The revenue for bundle packages, offering data and minutes, stood at Tk 1,920 crore.

Data revenue is even higher for Robi Axiata, which leads the market in the 4G subscriber segment. The second-largest operator's data revenue surged to 40.1 percent of revenues in 2023 from 24.8 percent in 2018.

incurred charges for calls. Subsequently, the caller bore the cost of Tk 10 per minute," said Nishat Ali Khan, who started working at BTL as a sales executive in 1991.

In 1993, the company was sold and renamed Pacific Bangladesh Telecom Limited (PBT). It rolled out the brand CityCell Digital to market its products.

The entry of Grameenphone, Robi, and Sheba brought down the per minute price of



In the first three quarters of 2023, data revenue contributed 35.1 percent to Banglalink's revenue. In 2018, the third-largest operator's income from the segment was 16 percent.

However, according to officials of the operators, the growth in data revenue is not satisfactory compared to the usage. Mobile data consumption skyrocketed 150-fold between 2015 and 2023 whereas data revenue climbed 10-fold.

They said meeting the rising demand for data requires substantial investment in network infrastructure and this investment can strain operators' financial resources, especially if revenue growth from data services does not keep pace. Besides, acquiring and maintaining spectrum licences for data services is expensive.

The operators had to spend more than \$2.15 billion for spectrum in 1,800 band, 2,100 band, 2,300 band, 2,600 band - that are mainly used for delivering data services - in 2021 and 2022.

### The gradual decline of call rates

Those now in their fifties can vividly remember a few individuals carrying peculiar devices with antennas, narrow displays, and considerable size.

In the early 1990s, when BTL collaborated with Hong Kong-based mobile operator Hutchison to introduce telecommunications services in Bangladesh, the per minute cost for call was staggering.

"Initially, both callers and receivers

phone calls to Tk 7. When Banglalink made its foray into the market in the early 2000s, competition intensified and the expansion of mobile network drove down the price.

Today, a one-minute voice call is priced less than Tk 2, and if a customer buys a monthly plan, the cost falls further.

Industry people say traditional voice calls persist in Bangladesh due to the low smartphone penetration, especially in rural areas, where widespread reliance on feature phones and limited internet access ensure their continued relevance.

Although smartphone penetration is witnessing incremental gains, overall, it is still low.

Shahed Alam, head of regulatory affairs at Robi Axiata, said one key reason for the low smartphone penetration is operators are not being allowed to sell phones with their plans.

"Once the government gave us permission to market SIMs, we delivered SIMs to everyone. If we get the consent to distribute smartphones, more people will be able to use such devices."

Yasir Azman, chief executive officer of Grameenphone, in a recent interview, said it is crucial for Bangladesh to boost smartphone penetration.

Nishat Ali Khan pointed out that communicating through mobile phones will never be free.

"Yes, you can talk about tariffs using these apps. Still, you must purchase internet packages for that."



of internet users nearly doubled to 11.85 crore.

However, the ease of access to the internet also means that people are abandoning traditional voice calls made through telecommunication networks, which incur charges based on minutes, in favour of making calls or video calls through apps.

Even Mustafa Jabbar, a former minister for ICT and telecom, says most of his conversations and messages are made through apps. "A majority of people opt for internet-based calls nowadays. Traditional voice calls only come from those who do not have other means."

He credited the introduction of 4G

