



An environmentalist's quest to grow a MINI CLOUD FOREST

AYMAN ANIKA

In Dhaka, it is rare to find a green escape that makes you forget the chaos of this bustling metropolitan city. Yet, thanks to the relentless dedication of MK Alam, a serene mini cloud forest thrives in the heart of Dhanmondi Lake – offering a peaceful refuge for both residents, and numerous visiting birds.

For those unfamiliar with the concept of mini cloud forests, it is a condensed version of the larger cloud forests, typically found in mountainous regions with consistent cloud cover. These ecosystems are known for their immense biodiversity and dense vegetation, which create a unique microclimate that is cooler and more humid than the surrounding areas.

A retired banker and philanthropist by nature, Alam took the initiative to establish this mini cloud forest many years ago.

He explains, "Roughly in 1990, with my little knowledge and understanding, I dared to establish a mini cloud forest at Dhanmondi Lake. I started with planting trees here and there. But many people took this as a nuisance rather than supporting me. They said the trees would create a breeding ground for mosquitoes."

"However, I didn't pay heed and continued to do what I believed in – planting trees and caring for them."

In an urban setting like Dhaka, a mini cloud forest can serve as a vital ecological sanctuary that would support local wildlife, while also improving air quality and moderating city temperatures.

"Over the years, I've introduced a variety of plants, particularly



PHOTO: STAR

medicinal ones like the Horitoki tree. The forest has also attracted rarely seen birds, such as the Indian Pond Heron, although their numbers have recently dwindled due to increased fishing activities in the lake," Alam notes.

Despite its beauty and ecological importance, the forest's journey is fraught with challenges. "Every year, especially in June, we plant numerous trees. Sadly, within a few months, they are often neglected," Alam shares, highlighting the dire need for continuous care and community engagement.

"It's overwhelming to face these challenges alone. I yearn for support, not necessarily from the government, but at least from local communities and organisations who share a similar vision," he urges.

We need to understand that

urban green spaces like this forest are not just aesthetic enhancements, but functional necessities that contribute to the health and well-being of the population.

Drawing parallels with global standards, Alam points out, "Look at Singapore, a city-state that champions public health by integrating vast green spaces into its urban planning. They understand that investing in greenery is not just about beautification – it's about the health of their people."

The path Alam has chosen is lonely and fraught with obstacles, but he is determined to take care of the trees for as long as he can. His environmental advocacy extends beyond the forest. In Satkhira, he established Fatic Khira S A Girls High School, providing free

education and championing the inclusion of nature conservation in the curriculum.

"Our educational systems need to instil a sense of responsibility towards nature. We need to engage students and teachers alike in nurturing our environment as part of their learning," he insists.

As Alam contemplates his retirement, his commitment remains unwavering. "What is my retirement plan? To continue championing the environment. This work gives my life purpose and grounds my identity in the collective conscience of those around me, known and unknown," he said.



Ultimately, the mini cloud forest is not just Alam's legacy – it is an invitation to every city dweller to reconsider their relationship with nature. It challenges Dhaka and cities worldwide to not only coexist with nature, but to embrace it as a fundamental aspect of urban life, ensuring that cities can breathe, flourish, and sustain themselves for generations to come.

Army chief leaves for US, Canada

UNB, Dhaka



Chief of Army Staff General Waker-Uz-Zaman yesterday departed for an official visit to the United States and Canada, according to Inter Services Public Relation Directorate (ISPR).

During the visit, General Waker-Uz-Zaman will participate in discussions with senior military and civilian officials at the United Nations headquarters, the US, and Canada.

The discussions will focus on issues related to UN peacekeeping missions, enhancing the capabilities of the Bangladesh Army, strengthening bilateral relations, and outlining future strategies for cooperation.

The army chief will return home on October 25.

'Criminals being given indemnity'

AL slams govt decision to shield protesters from cases

STAR CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League yesterday criticised the home ministry for "protecting from prosecution those involved in crimes committed during the Anti-discrimination Student Movement".

In its verified Facebook page, the AL said the move means those involved in the killings of police personnel, party leaders and activists, and injuring many people and damaging public properties cannot be sued or arrested.

Earlier on Monday, the home ministry said the students and people who actively took part in the mass uprising of July-August will not be arrested.

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43rd BCS results published

2,064 appointed, 99 put on hold

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The results of the 43rd Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) final recruitment result have been published.

Currently, 2,064 candidates have been appointed, while the results of 99 candidates are on hold, the public administration ministry said in a notification yesterday.

The Public Service Commission (PSC) had recommended 2,163 candidates for cadre posts.

When contacted for comments on why the results of 99 candidates were withheld, no officials

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HSC pass rate drops

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8, rescheduled the remaining exams for September 11.

However, on August 20, a group of HSC candidates forced their way into the Secretariat building in the capital and locked the gates to pressure the authorities into cancelling the rest of the exams.

This year's HSC candidates were SSC candidates in 2022. That year, the exams were held under an abridged syllabus and the students had to sit for a total of seven exams, including the three mandatory ones (Bangla, English and mathematics), said Tapan, also chairman of the Dhaka Education Board.

About the drop in the pass rate, he said, "The HSC pass rate mainly depends on the candidates' performances in English and Information and Technology [ICT]. In many places, the performances were poor in these subjects."

one of the factors behind the increase in GPA 5 achievers.

In terms of pass rate in HSC, girls outperformed the boys for the 15th straight year, while they outperformed the boys in GPA 5 achievement for the fourth straight year, board officials said.

The pass rate for girls was 78.27 percent, while it was 72.55 percent for the boys, a total of 72,788 girls achieved GPA 5 while 58,588 boys did the same.

In 65 educational institutions across the country, no students passed. Last year, the number was 42.

Tapan urged the authorities concerned to take steps in improving the academic standard of the institutions in which no students passed. "If they [the institutions] can't improve their standard, we'll take action against them. We'll follow the due process."

Meanwhile, the number of institutions with a 100 percent pass rate

BOARD	PASS RATE	GPA-5
Dhaka	79.21	48,548
Rajshahi	81.24	24,902
Cumilla	71.15	7,922
Jashore	64.29	9,749
Chattogram	70.32	10,269
Barishal	81.85	4,167
Sylhet	85.39	6,698
Dinajpur	77.56	14,295
Mymensingh	63.22	4,826
OVERALL	75.56	1,31,376

Board sources said that 69 percent of the examinees passed the English exam in the Jashore and Chattogram education boards, while 74 percent of the students in the Mymensingh education board and 76 percent in the Dinajpur education boards passed in the ICT subjects.

Tapan unveiled the detailed results in front of journalists at the Dhaka Education Board office yesterday morning.

He said 13,31,058 students sat for the HSC and equivalent exams, and of them, 10,35,309 passed the exams.

With the SSC exams under nine general education boards, Alim exams under the madrasa board and HSC vocational tests under the technical board, the combined pass rate was 77.78 percent – a slight drop from last year's 78.64 percent.

Meanwhile, 1,45,911 students under those boards combined got a grade point average of five (GPA-5) – 53,316 more than last year's 92,595.

Tapan said that the results prepared based on the SSC exam has worked as

jumped to 1,388 this year, compared to 2023's 953.

Among the nine general education boards, the highest pass rate – 85.39 percent – was seen in Sylhet. Mymensingh saw the lowest at 63.22 percent.

In Barishal, it was 81.85 percent, 81.24 in Rajshahi, 79.21 in Dhaka, 77.56 in Dinajpur, 71.15 in Cumilla, 70.32 in Chattogram and 64.29 in Jashore.

Dhaka had the highest number of GPA-5 achievers – 48,548 examinees. Barishal saw the lowest number in this regard at 4,167.

A total of 282 students took the exams from eight overseas exam centres and 95.39 percent of them passed.

This is the first time since 2002 that the HSC results were not handed over to the head of the government and there was no official press conference for the unveiling of the results.

"This was done in line with the current government's decision," Tapan said.

Extreme weather events threatening food security

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upazila of Feni, said Aman on his four acres was destroyed.

"Later, I could plant late Aman variety only on 66 decimals of land. Allah knows how I am going to run my family this year," he said.

According to an assessment by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), the damage by the eastern flood amounts to at least Tk 14,421.46 crore. The agriculture and forestry sector suffered the highest damage, amounting to Tk 5,169.71 crore.

The DAE data says heavy rains and gusty winds due to Cyclone Remal on May 26 and 27 this year damaged four percent of all crops including Aus, Aman seedlings, maize, jute, sesame, mungdaal, peanuts, vegetables, fruits, and spices in 50 districts.

From June 19 to June 23 this year, flood affected seven districts in Sylhet and Rangpur divisions that damaged 14 percent crops, including Aus, Aman seedlings, and vegetables.

Just seven days later, another flood hit 14 districts in the north, northeast, and southeastern parts of the country, damaging 13 percent of all crops.

In August, another bout of floods

and heavy rains affected 23 districts in the northeast, south, southwest and southeast regions and damaged 15 percent of all crops.

Then, heavy rains on September 12-19 affected 16 districts and damaged around one percent of all crops.

The total damages to crops by floods and Cyclone Remal in 2024 amounts to Tk 6,968.95 crore, according to the DAE.

Bangladesh's demand for rice was 3.70 crore tonnes last year and the production was 3.91 crore tonnes. But by August end this year, the US Department of Agriculture said Aus and Aman rice acreage and production in Bangladesh might decline because of the floods, particularly in the eastern part.

Estimates by the DAE suggests Aman acreage slightly declined to 57.35 lakh hectares this season from 57.5 lakh hectares previously.

The government has set a target of 1.78 crore tonnes of Aman this year, but experts fear the target could be missed, leading to a cascading effect that would threaten food security.

Niaz Md Farhat Rahman, principal scientific officer at the Agriculture Statistics Division of Bangladesh Rice

Research Institute (BRRI), said the government provided the farmers with Aman seedlings after the floods in the eastern region, but the target may not be achieved.

"Sowing late Aman [varieties] may affect the next rice season of Boro too," he said.

Shahidul Islam, an agro-meteorologist at Bangladesh Meteorological Department, said crop production may be affected by the changing weather patterns.

This year so far has been very wet with heavy rains until the second week of October, he told The Daily Star.

He said over the last two decades, the years 2003, 2006, 2018 and 2022 were very dry while 2004, 2007, 2017, 2020 and 2024 were very wet.

"Crop production is hampered in very dry or very wet years," he said.

Shahidul said the ideal temperature for growth and flowering of Aman paddy [which is now being grown] is 20-36 degrees Celsius during the daytime and 20-23 degrees during nighttime.

Even though the daytime temperature last week was within this range, the nighttime temperature

was between 23.9 and 25.7 degrees Celsius, he said.

BRRI's Niaz said, "It will be difficult for us to have a stable production of food unless we are capable of coping with the changes in weather and climate patterns."

He said strengthening early warning system was important so that advanced measures could be taken to protect crops.

The Department of Meteorology, Water Development Board, the DAE, and other agriculture research organisations need to collaborate closely, he said.

CPD Research Fellow Muntaseer Kamal said the damage to agriculture could have a significant impact on food security and inflation. He recommended that the government facilitate easy access to agricultural loans for farmers and ensure supply of seeds and other farm inputs for increasing food production.

He recommended that the government take immediate steps for rice imports and reduce import duties on agricultural inputs and commodities.

Weak policing, polls uncertainty

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police force is fully operational. This can have an impact on the recovery of economic activities."

The lender also considered the absence of a clear timeline yet for the democratic transition of power as a major downside risk.

"The timing of the next election is uncertain. Disagreements between political parties and the interim government over the election date could heighten political tensions in the future," it said.

While the financial sector reforms are underway, the sector remains quite vulnerable to shocks, the WB said.

The unforeseen natural disasters have the potential to disrupt food production and escalate food inflation, thus keeping inflation higher than projected in the medium term.

But time and again, Bangladesh has shown extraordinary resilience and determination in the face of adversity, said Abdoulaye Seck, the WB country director for Bangladesh and Bhutan, at the launch of the report.

Seck joined in the programme held at the WB's office in Dhaka virtually from Washington DC.

"I am confident that with urgent and bold reforms to enhance economic and financial governance and improve the business environment, Bangladesh can return to a strong and inclusive growth path, with millions of jobs for its youth," Seck added.

The WB projected the GDP growth in Bangladesh will moderate this fiscal year to 4 percent, which is the lowest since the pandemic, before accelerating to 5.5 percent in fiscal 2025-26.

The wide range of the projection reflects the significant uncertainties on the outlook, it said.

On the demand side, the deceleration in growth will be driven by a slowdown in private consumption, investment and exports, amid high inflationary pressures, tight financing conditions and supply disruptions in fiscal 2024-25.

On the supply side, the uncertainties are expected to keep industrial growth subdued in the short term and the recent floods are expected to moderate agriculture growth.

Inflation is projected to decline marginally but remain elevated this fiscal year: it is expected to moderate

from 9.7 percent last fiscal year to 9 percent this year.

High food and import prices exacerbated by supply disruptions are expected to keep headline inflation elevated during the forecast period.

The inflation trajectory will also depend on the effective transmission of the central bank's monetary policy and the government's fiscal policy stance.

The adoption of the crawling peg will help stabilise the exchange rate and foreign exchange reserves.

Given that Bangladesh is an oil importer, there are significant downside risks stemming from higher-than-anticipated global energy prices driven by geopolitical tensions.

To face the challenges, the WB recommended five major reform priorities.

Improving governance in the public sector and the corporate sector is crucial for restoring trust in public institutions and protecting consumers, the WB said.

This will require reforms to enhance transparency and accountability and reduce corruption.

Bangladesh needs to raise more public revenue to adequately meet its

development financing needs.

The tax-to-GDP ratio of 7.4 percent in fiscal 2023-24 is woefully insufficient to meet the country's critical development financing needs.

Priority reforms include the separation of tax policymaking and administration, rationalisation of tax expenditures, moving to a uniform VAT rate and reducing tariffs and non-tariff barriers in line with the National Tariff Policy.

Reforming the financial sector is urgently needed to ensure financial stability and bolster private sector investment.

It is critical to strengthen the enforcement of banking regulations, including the prompt corrective action framework for weak and stressed banks, to prevent further deterioration of the banks' balance sheets.

Bangladesh needs to create more jobs. For that, a comprehensive and coordinated policy approach that addresses the demand and supply constraints for jobs is needed.

The business climate needs to be strengthened to promote private investments and foreign direct investment, which will create more jobs, the WB said.