

IMF to crank up pressure to boost tax collection

Move comes as govt consistently failing to meet revenue target

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The International Monetary Fund is set to tighten the noose on the Bangladesh government over its dismal revenue mobilisation by making the remaining fund disbursement under a \$4.7 billion loan conditional on meeting the tax collection target.

Until now, the tax collection target has not been a Quantitative Performance Criteria (QPC), mandatory benchmarks that the country must meet to unlock instalments under the loan programme.

The IMF staff mission on their last visit to Dhaka indicated that they would make tax collection target a QPC. The Daily Star has learnt from finance ministry officials involved with the negotiations.

The staff mission was in Dhaka last month to assess the country's performance before the release of the fourth tranche of the loan.

"Bangladesh's low tax-to-GDP ratio calls for urgent tax reforms to establish a fairer, more transparent system and sustainably increase revenue, focusing on rationalising exemptions, improving compliance and separating tax policy from administration," said the staff mission on the conclusion of the visit.

The IMF's emphasis on ramping up tax collection comes after recommendations for measures to boost revenue were not reflected in the budget for fiscal 2024-25.

The measures include scaling back corporate income tax exemptions and depletion allowances, raising previously reduced VAT rates on several products to the full 15 percent statutory rate, introducing an additional personal income tax bracket for high-income earners and increasing the tax rates on tobacco and select products.



A DISMAL TAX SCENARIO

IMF's tax collection target for FY25: Tk **478,050cr**

29pc growth needed from FY24 collections

IMF's half-year target: Tk **215,120cr**

Collection in five months: Tk **130,185cr**

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Mirpur Diabari Agricultural Product Market remains mostly empty since its construction in 2019 as traders say the market is located far from the city centre, while there are other markets in the area. Locals allege the empty sheds are often used for criminal activities. This photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

VAT, SD hike 'suicidal' for economy

Says DCCI; Nagorik Committee urges govt to withdraw decision

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The decision to hike value added tax (VAT), corporate tax and supplementary duty (SD) midway through the fiscal year would be 'suicidal' for the economy amid an ongoing economic slowdown, said the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry yesterday.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

Airborne superbugs lurk in Dhaka hospitals

Finds study published in the science journal Nature

MOHAMMAD MASUM MOLLA

Amid the bustling corridors of Dhaka's hospitals, an invisible danger wafts silently through the air -- drug-resistant bacteria.

A recent study, published in the renowned British weekly scientific journal "Nature", has uncovered alarming levels of multidrug-resistant microorganisms in the air of several hospitals in greater Dhaka,

exposing the dangers in healthcare settings.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Abdus Salam, lead researcher of the study, said, "This is very alarming. The bacteria in the air could infect both patients and staffers, leading to hospital-acquired infections (HAIs). It's especially concerning because these infections are harder to treat with antibiotics."

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Won't stand communal attacks: govt

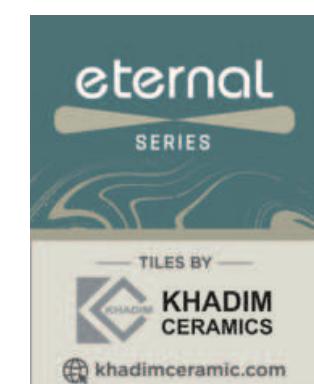
UNB, Dhaka

The interim government yesterday reiterated its zero-tolerance policy towards communal attacks, stressing that the police have been ordered to arrest culprits responsible for these incidents.

"The government has also announced that it would compensate the victims [of communal attacks]. The interim government attaches the highest importance to the establishment of human rights irrespective of creed, colour, ethnicity, sex, or gender," said Chief Adviser's Deputy Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad Majumder while sharing a police report.

Police have set up a WhatsApp group to receive allegations of communal violence, he said, adding that they maintain continuous contact with the minority community leaders.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4



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Tarique, Fakhrul, Khasru invited to prayer breakfast in the US

Says BNP media cell

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman, Secretary General Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and standing committee member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury have been invited to attend the National Prayer Breakfast in the US, the BNP media cell said in a statement yesterday.

The National Prayer Breakfast Foundation facilitates and executes the event under the leadership of the US Congress. President Donald Trump will attend the event in Washington, DC, on February 5.

The BNP secretary general has received the invitation in a letter signed by Representatives Ben Cline, Zach Wanip, Tom Suozzi and James Slattery, said the BNP media cell.

Some 3,500 guests, including international invitees from over 100 countries, attend the event that comprises of a series of meetings, luncheons, and dinners and has taken place since 1953.

It is designed to be a forum for the political, social, and business elite to assemble and pray together.

4 killed in speedboat accident on Meghna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

Four people were killed in a collision between two speedboats on the Meghna in Gazaria upazila of Munshiganj around 9:30pm on Friday, said police.

They are Ashraf Uddin Adud, 36, of Gazaria upazila; Mahmud Gazi, 40, and Babul Sarkar, 48, of Munshiganj Sadar, and Md Naeem, 30, of Chandpur.

The victims are known criminals who used speedboats to oversee and

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Smoke rises over the hills from the Palisades Fire near Santa Monica, Los Angeles County, California, US, on Friday. Story on page 12.

32 killed in 48 hours in Gaza

AFP, Jerusalem

information was incomplete.

A source in the ministry's data collection department told AFP that all the 499 additional deaths were from the past several months.

Meanwhile, Gaza's civil defence agency said an Israeli air strike on a school-turned-shelter yesterday killed eight people, including two children, while the Israeli military said it targeted Hamas militants.

Agency spokesman Mahmud Bassal confirmed eight people, including two children and two women, were killed by Israeli shelling on the Halwa school in the

northern Gaza city of Jabalia.

The attack was the latest in a series of Israeli strikes on school buildings housing displaced people in Gaza, where fighting has raged for more than 14 months.

The number of dead in Gaza has become a matter of bitter debate since Israel launched its military campaign against Hamas in response to the Palestinian militant group's unprecedented attack last year.

Israeli authorities have repeatedly questioned the credibility of the Gaza health ministry's figures.

IMF to crank up pressure to boost tax collection

FROM PAGE 1

As per the IMF's estimates, the tax measures will bump up Bangladesh's tax-to-GDP ratio by 0.5 percentage points this fiscal year.

Bangladesh failed to meet the tax revenue collection targets so far under the programme, which began in January 2023.

It is unlikely that the country would be able to meet the target set for this fiscal year either, given that tax collection in the first five months of the fiscal year was down 2.62 percent year-on-year to Tk 13,018 crore.

The tax revenue collection target set by the IMF for the first half of the fiscal year is Tk 21,512 crore. And for the entire fiscal year, the target is Tk 47,050 crore.

To achieve the full-year target, the government has to increase its tax revenue collection by 29 percent from fiscal 2023-24's receipts.

The staff mission suggested the Bangladeshi authorities take several prior actions, including a number of measures in the revenue sector to demonstrate its commitment to

the programme, before it places the proposal for the release of the fourth tranche before the IMF board next month.

In this context, the NBR on Thursday went ahead with its bid to hike the value-added tax and supplementary duty on nearly 100 goods and services, an unusual policy measure in the middle of a fiscal year.

As a result, consumers will be required to pay up to 15 percent VAT or SD, up from as low as 5 percent previously, for the goods and services.

Such an unpopular decision was taken hurriedly at a time when the country's overall inflation continuously hit double-digit, said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

Inflation averaged 10.87 percent in the first half of fiscal 2024-25, shows data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

"Most probably, the IMF will include the tax revenue collection target under QPC, which is why the government suddenly imposed the tax measures."

It is a bad time for Bangladesh to

see the tax revenue collection target be converted into a QPC, he said, adding that the sudden tax measures, including a hike in VAT and SD on several products, will definitely put more pressure on common people.

The government should negotiate with the IMF so that the multilateral lender does not include the tax revenue collection target under QPC at this moment, Hussain added.

Talks are ongoing to revise down the tax collection target given the July uprising, which hampered revenue mobilisation and economic activities, finance ministry officials said.

Under the existing loan programme for Bangladesh, the IMF has set three QPCs: minimum net international reserves (NIR) and ceilings for budget deficits and accumulation of external payments arrears.

Besides, there are four indicative targets (ITs), which, although not mandatory, carry considerable weight in assessing performance under the programme.

Tax collection is an IT for Bangladesh under the programme so far.

Won't stand communal attacks: govt

FROM PAGE 1

National Emergency Services 999 connects a focal point from police headquarters whenever an allegation of communal violence is reported to the helpline.

Police attach the highest importance to addressing all allegations, Azad said.

The Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council has said that a total of 1,769 communal attacks and acts of vandalism took place against minorities in Bangladesh.

The council said those attacks, acts of vandalism, and incidents of looting included 2,010 incidents on the lives, properties, and places of worship of the minority community.

Police have collected the list of allegations prepared by the council.

They have visited every location, establishment, and individual mentioned in the council's report.

All the aggrieved persons have

been requested to lodge complaints with the police. Proper security of the aggrieved people has been ensured.

Regular cases, general diaries, and other appropriate lawful measures have been taken according to the findings of the investigations.

Of the 1,769 allegations, police have so far registered 62 cases based on the merits of the claims, according to the police report on communal attacks since August 4, 2024.

At least 35 culprits have been arrested based on the findings of the investigations, it said.

It was found that in the majority of the cases, the attacks were not communally motivated – rather, they were political in nature, the report said.

Investigation revealed that 1,234 incidents were political in nature and 20 were communal, according to the police report.

At least 161 claims were found to be

VAT, SD hike 'suicidal' for economy

FROM PAGE 1

"This decision will fuel inflation and adversely impact the general public – we do not support this move," said Taskin Ahmed, the newly elected president of the DCCI, at a press briefing at the chamber's office in Motijheel.

The government did not hold any discussion with the stakeholders before taking any of the contentious decisions.

"It would be a suicidal step for the economy given the wide-ranging economic implications."

Bangladesh is currently going through a critical moment and economic challenges mainly due to limited foreign exchange reserves, rising import costs, high energy costs, elevated inflation, high interest rates along with low access to credit.

Increasing VAT on more than 100 products, raising the income tax on a few industries and planned doubling of gas price tariff for industrials and captive users is a "catastrophic decision for our business, trade and investment as well as for the overall economy", Ahmed said.

"We have already shared our official reaction. We will meet with government officials, including the governor and the commerce secretary, to convey our concerns."

To meet the budget deficit and lessen the pressure on the economy, he suggested the government to take austerity measures in government expenditures.

At the same time, he also urged the government not to take unnecessary projects and to heighten monitoring so that the projects under the annual development programme are completed on time.

He urged the government to cut unnecessary expenditures instead of burdening businesses.

"A 20 percent reduction in government spending could save at least Tk 50,000 crore, which could then be used to meet budgetary needs."

Ahmed also criticised the recent announcement of the doubling of the corporate income tax rate to 20 percent for manufacturers of freezers, refrigerators, motorcycles, air conditioners and compressors in the middle of the fiscal year.

"This will not only put the businessmen in danger but also tarnish the image of the country."

Policy continuity is important for entrepreneurs, said Ahmed, also a vice-chairman of IFAD Group.

"Entrepreneurs are encouraged to invest subject to obtaining a long-term supportive tax structure. So a sudden decision to increase tax or duties in the middle of the year is not desirable at all."

Subsequently, both local and foreign investment may be hindered.

"This will not bring any good for the economy," he said, adding that the price of motorcycles may increase by 10-15 percent in the next three months due to the sudden increase in corporate income tax.

In a separate event, the Jatiya Nogorik Committee also demanded immediate withdrawal of the ordinance issued by the interim government to hike VAT and SD on nearly a hundred goods and services.

"This move will increase inflation and business costs, affecting the quality of life of ordinary people. While it is a normal process for the government to expand its revenue base, it must ensure that the living standards of ordinary people do not dip and their sufferings do not aggravate further," Akhtar Hossain, the platform's member secretary.

Hossain said the country's economy has become fragile, and foreign exchange reserves are at their lowest due to rampant corruption and money laundering by the previous illegitimate government.

"Against that backdrop, the previous government had decided

Time will tell if AL can join polls: CEC

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin yesterday said time will determine whether Awami League can retain its registration and participate in the upcoming national election.

He made the remark while speaking to journalists during a views exchange programme regarding the updating of voter lists and preparations for the national polls at the Sylhet Circuit House.

Asked if AL can participate in the next election, he said, "Time will tell."

About the registration of political parties, the CEC said the decision will be taken after the election reform commission submits its report.

Speaking about local government elections, he said, "Local government elections require multi-layered steps and are very tough to implement before the national election."

Nasir Uddin further said, "The Election Commission is working as per the roadmap given by the chief adviser."

He also addressed issues surrounding voter list updates, saying, "Those who were previously involved in corruption while updating voter lists will be brought to justice."

He added that all non-residential Bangladeshis will be included in the voter list periodically.

Engage in politics of host nations Touhid urges expats

BSS, Dhaka

Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain yesterday urged Bangladeshi expatriates to engage in the politics of their host countries instead of the politics back home.

"This is our path, if we want to be influential globally," he said while inaugurating an NRB [non-resident Bangladeshi] conference on Bangladesh branding at a hotel in the capital.

"If NRBs hold important positions in their host countries, it will create a strong brand image for Bangladesh worldwide," he added.

Citing the example of the Indian diaspora, Touhid said, Indians achieved significant global influence by securing crucial positions in governments and political bodies in different countries, especially in Western ones.

The foreign adviser remarked that Bangladesh's political parties are among the largest in the world, with widespread branches across numerous countries.

"Have you seen people from any other country gathering at airports in foreign lands to chant slogans against someone?" he asked rhetorically.

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Airborne superbugs lurk in Dhaka hospitals

FROM PAGE 1

The study -- "Antibiotic resistance of bioaerosols in particulate matter from indoor environments of the hospitals in Dhaka, Bangladesh" -- was conducted in four hospitals and two ambient locations. It revealed that the particulate matter (PM) -- tiny particles in the air -- carried harmful bacteria that were resistant to several antibiotics.

Samples were collected from Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital, Khwaja Badrudduza Modern Hospital, Dhaka Medical College Hospital, and Monno Medical College Hospital. The data was collected from February to June 2023.

Antibiotic resistance, or antimicrobial resistance (AMR), occurs when a pathogen -- such as a bacterium, parasite, or fungus -- becomes resistant to a specific medication, rendering that treatment ineffective in combating the infection.

The levels of fine particulate matter (PM2.5) at the hospital sites were found to exceed the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for Bangladesh.

Ultra fine particles (such as PM10) has the ability to extend the penetration up to the bloodstream through alveoli (air sacs in the lung), capturing the whole body.

The study showed that the PM concentrations at these hospitals were not only higher than national standards but also exceeded the World Health Organization's recommended limits for PM2.5 and PM10 (15 µg/m³). The highest amounts of PM10 and PM2.5 were found at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (80.46 ± 11.32 µg/m³; 220.60 ± 16.52 µg/m³), while the highest PM10 concentration was 145.21 ± 189.78 µg/m³ for sampling point of DMCH. PM2.5 and PM10 can

also enter and affect the lungs.

Among the 11 types of bacteria found in the air, including *Staphylococcus aureus* (Staph), *Escherichia coli* (E. coli), and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* (Pa), many are known to cause serious HALS like pneumonia, and urinary tract and blood infections.

Alarmingly, most of the bacteria were found to be resistant to multiple antibiotics, making them much harder to treat, the study said.

Various global studies showed that antibiotic resistance has become a significant problem around the world, accelerating at what some scientists say is an "alarming rate", causing an estimated 800,000 additional deaths each year.

"This study provides critical aspects of AMR's airborne presence in hospital environment, shedding light on a previously unexplored dimension of the problem."

Khan said they are undertaking various activities based on the National Action Plan. "Currently, we are conducting antimicrobial resistance surveillance in the human and animal health sectors. We are in the preliminary stages of developing environmental AMR surveillance."

To overcome the challenge, he suggested the strengthening of infection prevention control and enforcement of antimicrobial stewardship and good clinical practices in all hospitals.

Ampicillin, azithromycin, erythromycin, and cefixime showed the highest resistance rates, ranging from 81-90 percent.

Health experts warn that for hospital patients, especially those with weakened immune systems, this

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There's no rift between BNP, Jamaat
Says Jamaat nayeeb-e-ameer

UNB, Chandpur

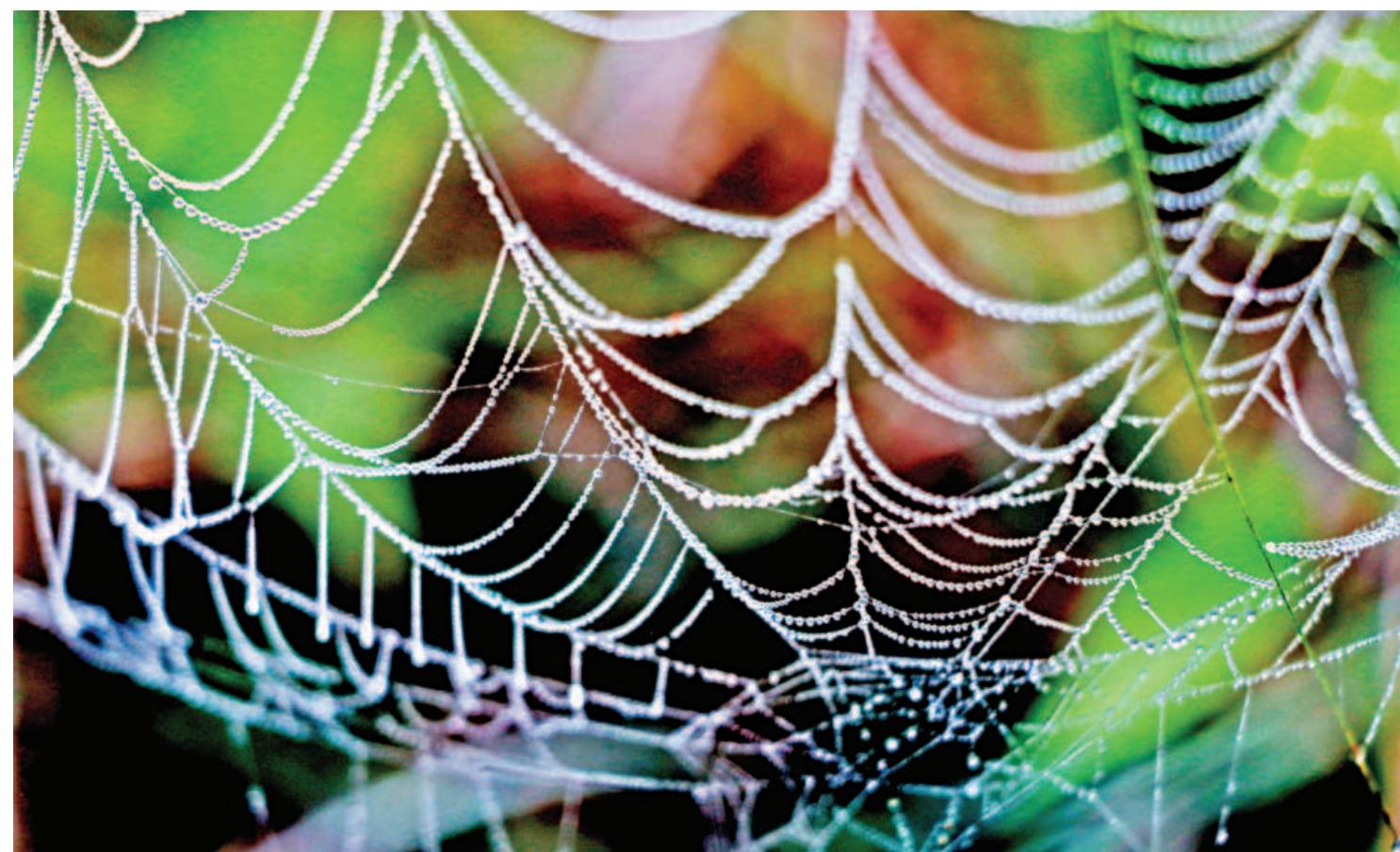
Syed Abdullah Muhammad Taher, nayeeb-e-ameer (deputy ameer) of Jamaat-e-Islami, yesterday claimed there is no distance between BNP and Jamaat.

"In fact, we have a good relationship, and I believe BNP is right in saying that they have no conflict with Jamaat," Taher said while speaking at a workers' conference in Shahristi upazila of Chandpur.

"We aim to maintain good relations with all parties, including Islamic and other political groups, by keeping communication channels open," he added.

Regarding the election reform issue, Taher described the benefits of the Proportional Representation (PR) system, saying it will offer a

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7



Dew drops nestled within a spider's web glisten like pearls on a chilly winter morning in Bilpabla village, Khulna. As the droplets accumulate on the vines and leaves, they create the illusion of a delicate pearl necklace. Each sparkling drop by the roadside enhances the natural beauty of the scene, capturing the enchanting essence of winter. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Preserve history of July uprising

Shafiqul Alam tells event

JNU CORRESPONDENT

Comprehensive information about the July mass uprising should be preserved for authentic history, said Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam yesterday.

Speaking at a programme organised by the Jagannath University Journalist Association on the media's role during the uprising, Shafiqul said the lack of documentation on the Liberation War had allowed for distortion of its history.

"A moment as noble as the July uprising has never come to the nation before. Every second of this historic event should be documented to prevent future distortions," he said.

"I do not know how much of the 1971 war our journalists witnessed. Ten million of our people became refugees, but very little has been written about their suffering," he added.

He criticised certain media outlets during the uprising for portraying protesters as "enemies of the nation," even relaying messages to suppress them.

"If the fascist forces had triumphed, two lakh people would have been imprisoned, and the narrative would have labelled protesters as miscreants," he said.

Shafiqul also accused the Awami League government of kleptocracy and claimed public funds were siphoned abroad, with laundered money now being used to spread propaganda.

Press Institute of Bangladesh Director General Faruk Wasif compared fascism to feudalism, calling for an end to domination in favour of national and public interests.

The event was chaired by Journalist Association President Imran Hossain and moderated by General Secretary Mahtab Hossain.

SC upholds HC dismissal of five cases against Yunus

UNB, Dhaka

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court has upheld the High Court's decision to dismiss five labour law cases against Chief Adviser Dr Muhammad Yunus.

A three-judge bench, led by Justice Md Ashfaqul Islam, issued the ruling, rejecting the state's appeal for permission to challenge the HC verdict.

During the proceedings, Additional Attorney General Mohammad Aneek Rushd Haque represented the state, while Senior Advocate Mustafizur Rahman Khan represented Dr Yunus.

The Appellate Division's full order states that there were no legal errors in the HC decision, which led to the dismissal of the state's appeal.

The cases, filed in SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

Interim government admits failure to curb road crashes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The interim government has admitted its failure to reduce road crashes and deaths last year, said Road Transport and Bridges Ministry Adviser Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan yesterday.

The ministry will take several steps to curb the road crashes and death, he told reporters after attending two meetings in this regard at the headquarters of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA).

The adviser shared that the Road Safety Foundation recently gave them data that 7,294 people were killed and over 12,000 were injured in road crashes last year. The number of deaths was 12 percent more than in 2023.

"We, the interim government, are taking responsibility for it, that we could not reduce the number of road crashes and deaths. Rather it increased," he said.

In particular, BRTA and police are taking the responsibility for it, he added.

The interim government took charge on August 8, 2024 last year after the fall of the Awami League government following a student-led people's uprising.

The adviser also said they have taken a decision to hand over compensation for the treatment of the injured as soon as possible following the relevant laws. Additionally, BRTA officials will be made directly responsible for road crashes that occurred due to lack of a vehicle's fitness and license issues of a driver.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



Workers dredging a canal using excavators near the Madani Avenue area yesterday. Under the supervision of Bangladesh Water Development Board, work is ongoing to restore navigability of this waterbody. Constant dumping of waste and poor management over the years have left many canals in the capital in such a sorry state.

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We're not desperate for polls: Fakhrul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday refuted claims that the BNP is desperate for national elections.

He labelled the allegation as "false" and accused certain factions of attempting to create divisions in national unity.

Speaking at the AB Party's council at Suhrawardy Udyan, Fakhrul emphasised the BNP's commitment to reforms and national cohesion.

"We have already spoken about reforms. Once again, we say we want reforms. Some people are trying to create a false narrative that we [BNP] want elections before reform and we are desperate for elections. But that is not true. We want elections quickly because elections will strengthen the nation," he said.

"A functioning government and parliament will make us stronger and resolve the ongoing crises," Fakhrul said, adding that a unified national government will help address the country's challenges collaboratively.

"We want to solve the country's problems together. Those who belong to other parties or political parties, think about this and share their opinions," he added.

"We want to return to a democratic system, eliminate inequality, and build a new Bangladesh with the youth. Unfortunately, some individuals are trying to create a rift in unity, but I am confident their efforts will not succeed," Fakhrul said. Calling for collective efforts, he said, "Together, with unity, we can achieve our desired goals."

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

Efforts on to recover laundered money Says Bangladesh Bank governor

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh Bank Governor Ahsan H Mansur yesterday revealed that a Chittagong-based entity illegally transferred \$20 billion abroad, marking one of the country's largest money laundering cases.

Speaking at the Branding Bangladesh event in the capital, he highlighted efforts to recover the funds and improve economic governance.

Governor Mansur said while better governance has reduced capital flight, recovering the stolen money remains a top priority.

"We are working with international authorities to retrieve the siphoned funds. Discussions with the FBI and other foreign agencies are ongoing," he said.

To expedite the process, Bangladesh is also engaging foreign legal experts to tackle the complexities of international law, he also said.

Governor Ahsan H Mansur acknowledged the challenges of tackling money laundering and stressed the need for global cooperation. "Foreign organisations are willing to help us recover the stolen money," he said.

The governor linked financial crimes like money laundering to economic issues such as exchange rate manipulation.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7



3-day harmony festival kicks off in Sylhet
OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Moulvibazar

A three-day Harmony Festival began on Friday at the Kakiachhara Tea Garden grounds in Sreemangal, Moulvibazar, celebrating the vibrant culture of the indigenous communities of the plains.

The festival, which will run until Sunday, aims to introduce visitors to the lifestyles, agriculture, and rich traditions of Bangladesh's indigenous peoples, with a focus on showcasing their unique foods and crops.

Organised by the Bangladesh Tourism Board in collaboration with the local upazila administration, the festival brings together representatives from 26 indigenous communities across the country. The festival also features live demonstrations of traditional crafts, including betel and bamboo items made by the Khasi community, traditional waist looms from the Tripura people, handlooms from the Manipuri people, and processes related to tea and rubber production.

Over 50

FROM PAGE 5
"Workers of Merim Co. Ltd started the clash by pelting stones at our factory," said Maksudur Rahman, an injured worker of JMS Garments Ltd.

Rafiqul Islam, an injured worker of Merim Co. Ltd, said workers of JMS Garments ensued the clash by throwing brickbats at them.

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Encroachment, pollution choke Bhola canal

Once a lifeline, the waterbody now in its deathbed



PHOTO: MONIR UDDIN ANIK

SUSHANTA GHOSH

The 11-kilometre-long Bhola canal, once a vital waterway for trade and irrigation, has become a source of distress for Bhola city and district due to rampant encroachment and pollution.

Bhola municipality authorities said the canal, which previously facilitated goods transport by boat, has lost its flow over the past six years. Waste accumulation and narrowing from encroachment have rendered it unusable, affecting thousands of residents.

Farmer Hanif Sharif from Bhola Sadar upazila said, "The

canal once provided water for irrigation, but now it holds only one to two feet of water."

This has left about 2,000 hectares of farmland in Sadar upazila without sufficient irrigation.

The Water Development Board said the canal's main section spans 11 kilometres, with an additional 40-45 kilometres of branches connecting the Tetulia and Meghna rivers. The last excavation was carried out in 1980.

Encroachment and indiscriminate waste dumping have drastically reduced the canal's width, which was once

over 50 feet but now measures just 10-20 feet in some areas. Waste from slaughterhouses, vegetable markets, hospitals, and restaurants has worsened the canal's condition.

Local businesses are also affected. Grocer Md Babul said, "We now spend an extra Tk 50-60 on each sack of goods as traders can no longer transport them by boat."

Rice trader Erfanur Rahman added, "Transporting rice through the canal now takes seven days instead of two."

Bhola municipality administrator Md Mizanur

Rahman said a survey by the Upazila Land Office identified 140 encroachers. "We asked them to vacate voluntarily by January 7, but no action was taken. A crash programme to evict them is underway," he said.

Rahman said efforts are being coordinated with the WDB and district administration to restore the canal's flow.

WDB Superintendent Engineer Md Hasanuzzaman said a design proposal will be sent to the Ministry of Water Resources once encroachments are cleared.

Excavation work will begin after approval, he added.

SC upholds Snatched Jubo Dal

FROM PAGE 3

2019, accused Dr Yunus of wrongful dismissal linked to the formation of a proposed trade union during his tenure as chairman of Grameen Telecommunications. In 2020, Dr Yunus petitioned the HC to cancel the cases.

The HC issued a rule and, after a final hearing, cancelled all five cases in its verdict on October 24, 2024.

The state sought permission to appeal to the Supreme Court dismissed the application on December 8.

committee, confirmed the expulsion.

The action was taken against him for obstructing law enforcers in discharging duties through undue influence, the release said.

The release further said the youth wing of the BNP will not be held responsible for any misdeeds of the expelled leader.

District Jubo Dal member secretary Md Masud Rana said, "Our party won't tolerate any injustice."

238 officials punished

FROM PAGE 3

after the 2007-2008 political transition, prompting the adoption of a separate service regulation in 2008. This regulation allowed for disciplinary measures against internal misconduct.

Since then, 238 employees have faced penalties, including 34 dismissals, with others receiving punishments such as forced retirement, demotions, or salary reductions. Offenders ranged from peons and drivers to directors and deputy directors.

Despite protests and legal challenges -- such as those following the dismissal of Deputy Director Sharif Uddin in Chattogram -- the ACC has upheld most disciplinary actions, said the commission. Currently, 13 departmental cases and two criminal investigations are underway, alongside the evaluation of 25 new allegations.

to surface, though not all have been substantiated.

The ACC has faced public scandals, such as the dismissal and criminal sentencing of Director Enamul Basir, who accepted a Tk 25 lakh bribe in 2019 from DIG

Mizanur Rahman to drop a corruption case. Basir was dismissed and sentenced to eight years in prison.

Despite protests and legal challenges -- such as those following the dismissal of Deputy Director Sharif Uddin in Chattogram -- the ACC has upheld most disciplinary actions, said the commission. Currently, 13 departmental cases and two criminal investigations are underway, alongside the evaluation of 25 new allegations.

Interim government

FROM PAGE 3

be revoked.

"In December, we gave BRTA one month to improve their services or face action. They have improved a little bit, but not to a satisfactory level yet," he remarked.

"We will shut BRTA down if it fails to improve its services," he added.

Chiefs of various government agencies, leaders of transport organisations, road safety campaigners, and police officials all took part in the meetings.

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D-02

The people's Republic of Bangladesh

National board of Revenue

Bangladesh Regional Connectivity project 1:

National Single Window Implementation and strengthening Customs Modernization

IDEB Bhaban (10th floor), 160/A, Kakrail, Dhaka

Date: 09.01.2025

Subject: Addendum to bidding document for supply and Installation of Hardware and Infrastructure (network, communication, cabling etc.) and standard software for NSW solution; other network, communication equipment, structure, Hardware and cabling: Server & Storage and Network & Security components for NSW Server Room & DR. Bangladesh Regional Connectivity project 1: Request for Bids (RFB) No. NBR-GD2A.1.

Addendum No. 8

This is for the information of all Bidders concerned that the following amendments have been made for the procurement mentioned in the subject above;

Ref	Existing Entry	Amended entry
SI No. of 6, SPN ITP-23.1 & 26.1	The deadline for Bid Submission is: Date: January 13, 2025, Time : 14.00 hours.	The deadline for Bid Submission is: Date: March 13, 2025, Time : 14.00 hours.
	Date & Time for Bid Opening January 13, 2025, Time : 14:30 hours	Date & Time for Bid Opening March 13, 2025, Time : 14:30 hours

All the terms and conditions of bidding Documents (RFB) NBR-GD2A.1 shall remain unchanged. This Addendum No. 8 shall be considered an integral part of the Bidding Documents and shall be binding on all Bidders who have obtained or will obtain the Bidding Documents from the Purchaser.

Pramila Sarker

(Pramila Sarker)

Deputy Project Director

Bangladesh Regional Connectivity project 1:

National Single Window Implementation and strengthening Customs Modernization

Email: pdnsw.nbr@gmail.com

Efforts on to recover

FROM PAGE 3

He cited concerns about certain entities in Dubai exploiting the remittance process to influence currency rates.

"This manipulation is harmful to our economy and needs to be addressed with strict oversight," he warned.

The governor praised

the 2.5 percent incentive on remittances sent through banking channels, which has boosted remittance inflows despite political uncertainties.

He also emphasised the need for transparency in financial systems and the fight against money laundering to support economic growth.

We're not desperate

FROM PAGE 3

council, Mojibur Rahman Monju was elected chairman of the party, while Barrister Asaduzzaman Fuad was elected its general secretary.

The election results were announced by the party's internal election commission, Akhtarul Alam, during the National Council session yesterday afternoon.

There's no rift

FROM PAGE 3

that the issue could be considered if all parties agreed.

Responding to questions about Jamaat's foreign policy, Taher said, "Our foreign policy is clear -- we seek good relations based on equality, rights, and the recognition of sovereignty."

He also said Jamaat is committed to a positive change in Bangladesh's political landscape.

Dry fish processing

FROM PAGE 5

condition," said Swapna Rani Das, a worker in Daspara.

According to

Mohammad Shahidul Islam, the district fisheries officer in Kishoreganj, dry fish production in the region has been increasing annually.

"Last season, the district

produced around 1,650 tonnes of dry fish. This year, we expect the figure to rise to about 2,000 tonnes," he said.

Shahidul Islam said.

Family members

FROM PAGE 5

received threats, Badsha said. "A councillor's decisions make some people happy and others unhappy. Those who are unhappy can hold grudges and turn into enemies."

>Contacted, Mir Atahar Ali, officer-in-charge of Daulatpur Police Station, refuted allegations of negligence.

"We ensured that no

disturbances happened during funeral of the deceased. Moreover, no one from the deceased's family has approached us to report any insecurity," he said.

Meanwhile, Tipu's body

was taken to his ancestral home in Deyana Uppara in Khulna in an ambulance yesterday morning, and was later buried in the local graveyard after janaza.

নেতৃত্ব দ্রুতিন অ্যান্ড ডক্ট্রিন কমান্ড (ন্যাটডক)
কলাপাড়া, পুরুষাখানা-৮৬৫০

দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি

১। নেতৃত্ব দ্রুতিন কমান্ড (ন্যাটডক) এর প্রতিক্রিয়া কার্যক্রমের জন্ম ২০২৪-২০২৫ অর্থ বছরের প্রতিক্রিয়া সময়ী (ন্যাটডকেম) এবং এই দ্রুতিন কেন্দ্রীয় প্রতিক্রিয়া নির্বাচিত হচ্ছে সুন্দরগুড় সদরগুড় আবাদন করা যাবে।

Application in English with complete "Curriculum Vitae" with two copies of recent passport size photographs, photocopies of all certificates and other documents (education, experiences, trainings, NID, etc.) should be submitted to Director, SAARC Agriculture Centre, BARC Complex, Farmgate, Dhaka - 1215 within 2nd February 2025.

Canvassing of any form will disqualify the candidate.

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Director, SAC

GD- 114

নেতৃত্ব দ্রুতিন কমান্ড কর্মসূচি
কলাপাড়া, পুরুষাখানা-৮৬৫০

দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি

১। নেতৃত্ব দ্রুতিন কমান্ড (ন্যাটডক) এর প্রতিক্রিয়া কার্যক্রমের জন্ম ২০২৪-২০২৫ অর্থ বছরের প্রতিক্রিয়া সময়ী (ন

Snatched Jubo Dal leader arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

Police yesterday arrested a Jubo Dal leader in Munshiganj, a day after he was snatched by his supporters from Sreenagar Police Station.

Additional Superintendent of Police Anisur Rahman confirmed last night that Tariqul Islam was arrested at Deulbhog in Sreenagar.

Three more Jubo Dal leaders were also arrested in this connection and Sreenagar Police Station OC Qaiyum Uddin Chowdhury was withdrawn and attached to the district police lines, police said.

The development came after some members of Anti-Discrimination Student Movement blocked the Dhaka-Mawa Expressway yesterday, demanding the arrest of those involved in the snatching incident.

They demonstrated near the Dhaleshwari Toll Plaza in South Keraniganj around 12:00pm, chanting slogans and demanding the arrest of those involved, said Hasara Highway Police Station Officer-in-Charge Abdul Quader

Jilani.

The hour-long blockade caused a long tailback on the expressway, leading to significant public suffering.

Sazzadur Rahman, a resident of the Luhajang area traveling from Dhaka, said, "My elderly mother is sick at my village home. I'm going there to take her to Dhaka for admission to a hospital. But I've been stuck in traffic congestion for a long time."

A bus driver of Ilish Paribahan said, "What is our fault? Hundreds of passengers and transport operators are trapped here for hours..." After about an hour, the students cleared the expressway following assurances from senior police officers that immediate legal action would be taken against the perpetrators. Tariqul was arrested on Friday evening on charges of assaulting a person in the area. Around

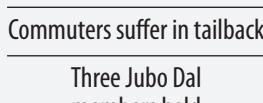
four hours after his arrest, some 200 Jubo Dal and Chhatra Dal activists stormed the police station and snatched him away.

Police yesterday filed a case against 31

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



Students block highway demanding arrest



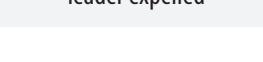
Commuters suffer in tailback



Three Jubo Dal members held



Sreenagar OC withdrawn



Accused Jubo Dal leader expelled



In the Kazirbazar area of Sylhet city, the Surma river is facing severe pollution due to the dumping of waste and garbage. Local businesses and households are contributing to this problem by discarding their waste into the river. As a result, the river's water quality has deteriorated significantly, with plastic and polythene waste causing artificial shoals to form and disrupting the natural flow of the Surma. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Two killed in Habiganj road accident

UNB, Habiganj

Two workers of a garment factory died and three others were injured after a truck collided with a battery-run autorickshaw in Habiganj yesterday.

The accident happened around 8:00am in the Dargah Gate area of the highway, said Mahmudul Haque, officer-in-charge (OC) of Shaistaganj Highway Police.

The identities of the deceased are yet to be confirmed, he said.

The deceased worked at the Pioneer Denim Factory of Badsha Group, said police.

Meanwhile, following the accident, the agitated factory workers blocked the road in protest against the death of the two RMG workers.

Later, police went to the spot and brought the situation under control.

"The workers locked in the

clash over a trifling matter and hurled brickbats and stones at each other, leaving over 50 injured. They also caused damages to the three factories' facilities. On information, police and army personnel came to the spot and brought the situation under control around 12:30pm," said Mohammad Solaiman,

superintendent of Industrial Police in Chattogram.

Workers of several garment factories in CEPZ have been demonstrating over different demands including increase in wage since January 4, until most factory owners eventually fulfilled their demands.

"During an agitation on January 8, workers of JMS Garments Limited kept the CEPZ's main gate

closed till afternoon. This angered workers of a Korean factory Merim Co. Ltd as they remained stuck inside after working hours," said CEPZ Executive Director Md Abdus Sobhan.

The two groups engaged in an altercation, before Merim Co. Ltd's workers forcibly opened the gate and left the CEPZ premises. Infuriated workers of JMS Garments hurled brick chips at Merim Co. Ltd and vandalised windowpanes.

"Yesterday, the workers of the two factories clashed over this issue around 9:00am, hurling brickbats and making chases and counter-chases, turning the area into a warzone and causing injuries and vandalism," said Abdus Sobhan.

Workers of Merimo Ltd, a sister concern of Merim Co. Ltd, also joined the clash.

Workers of the two factories, however, blamed each other for the clash.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



Belayet Hossain, 65, cleans and then trims a date palm tree to collect the juice in a jar that he attaches to the tree. After working for 8-10 hours, Belayet is able to collect around 3.5 litres of juice, which he sells for Tk 250 in the local market. The photo was taken from the Dogolchira village in Jhalakathi recently.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Dry fish processing, a booming industry in Kishoreganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

The processing and trading of dry fish have emerged as a profitable industry for thousands of people living in the haor (wetland) areas of Kishoreganj district.

Around 600 families along the Kali river in Kuliarchar upazila are engaged in dry fish production, which sustains them throughout the year.

"It has become a reliable source of income for families here," said Mahadev Chandra Das, a local dry fish trader.

Harimon Chandra Das, a producer, said rising dry fish prices,

driven by strong demand across the country, have boosted earnings in recent years.



The process begins in September when indigenous fish varieties like boal, ayre (catfish varieties), and gajar (snakehead) are harvested

from open water bodies and dried in the sun.

"These fish are then sold to traders after processing," said Md Masud Rana, senior fisheries officer in Kuliarchar upazila.

Producers also source fish from other haor regions, including Sunamganj and Narayanganj, to meet growing demand, he added.

The industry provides significant opportunities for women, with many engaged in fish cleaning and cutting.

I earn around Tk 50,000-60,000 every season, which has improved my family's financial

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

Man injured in BSF firing

UNB, Dhaka

A Bangladeshi man was injured in firing by Indian BSF on Azmatpur border in Chapainawabganj's Shibganj upazila early yesterday.

The injured, Shahidul Islam, 25, of Bagichapara of the upazila, was part of a group of six alleged smugglers returning to Bangladesh from India with a consignment of Phensedyl, said Lt Col Golam Kibria, commander of the Border Guard Bangladesh 59th Battalion.

The incident occurred when the group was around 130 yards inside Indian territory, he said.

BSF from a nearby camp opened fire, injuring Shahidul, he added.

One more death was reported from dengue in 24 hours till yesterday morning, raising the number of fatalities from the mosquito-borne disease in Bangladesh to four this year.

The death was reported in the Mymensingh division (outside the city corporations), according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

During the period, 45 more patients were hospitalised with the viral fever, it added.

Of them, nine dengue patients were admitted to a hospital under Dhaka North City Corporation while 15 were hospitalised in Dhaka South City Corporation.

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e-Tenders have been invited in the national e-GP Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for procurement of the following Goods.

LOT NO.	e-Tender ID	Description	Last Date & Time for Submission Through Web	Date & Time for Tender Opening
Single Lot	1060569	Renewal of License/Subscription/Support (including Spare Parts Replacement) and AMC (Annual Maintenance Contract) for Cyber Security Devices/Solutions at Bangladesh Development Bank PLC's Data Center (DC) & Disaster Recovery Site (DRS) for a contract duration of three (3) years.	03/02/2025 3:30 P.M.	03/02/2025 3:30 P.M.

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender document from the National e-GP System portal must be deposited online through any registered bank branch by 3:00 PM on 03/02/2025.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (<http://helpdesk.eprocure.gov.bd>) (01762625528-31). (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>)

Sabrina Chowdhury Dooty
Assistant General Manager
Head, IT Security Unit

GD- 116



Adviser Nahid Islam speaks at the opening ceremony of the 23rd Dhaka International Film Festival.



HE Yao Wen, ambassador of the People's Republic of China in Bangladesh speaks at the event.



PHOTOS: THABIT AL BASHAR

23rd DIFF commences, imbued with the spirit of July

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

The essence of the July movement was at the heart of the 23rd Dhaka International Film Festival (DIFF) yesterday, which officially kicked off at the National Museum's main auditorium.

This year, in honour of the martyrs of July, seven short films will be screened during the festival run across the Sufia Kamal Auditorium of the National Museum, the National Art Gallery of the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, the North South University (NSU) Auditorium, and the Green University of Bangladesh (GUB) Auditorium.

The festival kicked off with a melodious performance by Joler Gaan, whose music showcased a vivid portrait of Bangladesh's rich culture. They performed their famous songs *Pakhir Gaan*, *Pitha-Pulir Gaan*, *Emon Jodi Hoto*, and *Bokul Phool*, to which the crowd vibed delightfully.

A minute of silence was observed to remember the martyrs of the anti-fascist movement in July.

Information Adviser Nahid Islam served as the chief guest, with Jalal Ahmed, chairman of the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission, presiding over the event. HE Yao Wen, ambassador of the People's Republic of China in Bangladesh and Xu Yang, director of the International Department of the China



HE Yao Wen, ambassador of the People's Republic of China in Bangladesh and noted actor Ilias Kanchan enjoying the programme.

Film Administration, were present as special guests. Ilias Kanchan, who serves as a juror in the Asian Film Competition section of DIFF, was also present at the programme.

"This is not just a film festival; it serves

as a platform to connect Bangladesh with global cinema, highlighting our culture, creativity, and artistic achievements. Out of the 220 films being showcased, 44 are from Bangladesh, reflecting the growth and talent

of our film industry," stated Nahid Islam.

The information adviser also encouraged young filmmakers to use their art to promote the history of the July Revolution.

"I urge our filmmakers to create films about the historic student and public uprising of the July-August Movement, which played a pivotal role in restoring democracy in our country. This movement exposed the flaws in our political system through the awareness and active participation of the youth, paving the way for democratic structures. I encourage filmmakers to document these events and present them on both national and international platforms. I wish this festival great success and hereby declare the inauguration of the festival," the adviser concluded.

Chinese Ambassador Yao Wen said, "Film is an art form which transcends language and culture barriers. It presents human emotions, dreams and stories in a unique way. This year marks the 50th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic ties between China and Bangladesh. The year also commemorates the 120th anniversary of Chinese cinema."

Ambassador Yao expressed his joy in announcing that the opening ceremony marks the official inauguration of both the diplomatic anniversary celebrations and the Chinese Film Week.

He added, "From today, 20 outstanding

Chinese films will be screened at the Dhaka International Film Festival. 15 Chinese film professionals will engage in in-depth interactions with Bangladeshi audiences."

Xu Yang stated, "We aim to deepen cooperation between the film industries of both countries through film exhibitions."

He expressed gratitude to the Dhaka Film Festival and the Chinese Embassy in Bangladesh for organising this year's China Film Week, where popular Chinese films will be showcased.

"The filmmakers who came to Dhaka will also interact and communicate with the audience after the film screening. I sincerely hope that through this medium the people of China and Bangladesh can enhance mutual understanding," he stated.

China is the country of focus this year, and the inaugural ceremony featured a screening of the Chinese film *Moon Man* (directed by Zhang Chiyu) at 7:00pm. This 2022 sci-fi comedy tells the story of the "last human in the universe" stranded on the moon after an asteroid destroys life on Earth.

The festival, which will run until January 19, will host screenings at various venues, including the National Museum, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, Alliance Francaise de Dhaka, Green University of Bangladesh Auditorium, and North South University.

Bidhan Rebeiro to represent Bangladesh as Berlinale jury member

The 75th Berlin International Film Festival is set to begin in the second week of February, with Bangladeshi film critic Bidhan Rebeiro serving as a Fipresci jury member in the Panorama section.

The Bangladeshi film critic confirmed the news to The Daily Star himself, stating that he is scheduled to leave Dhaka on February 9 for the festival.

Speaking about the importance of such events, Bidhan remarked, "Major festivals showcase the first screenings of new films from renowned directors and classics. As a jury member, I get the opportunity to watch these films before anyone else."

"Attending a festival of this scale is not just a personal achievement; it also serves as a representation of Bangladesh. Since I have an infinite passion for cinema, this opportunity brings me a sense of fulfilment," the film critic concluded.



Disney pledges \$15m for LA wildfire relief

As devastating wildfires sweep through Los Angeles County, destroying over 10,000 buildings and causing damages exceeding \$100 billion, major film studios are stepping up to aid relief efforts.

Disney announced a US \$15 million donation to support organisations like the American Red Cross, Los Angeles Fire Department Foundation, and Los Angeles Regional Food Bank. The establishment's CEO Bob Iger stated, "The Walt Disney Company is dedicated to helping our community recover and rebuild."

Paramount Global is also contributing £800,000, with CBS fundraising for the Red Cross and donating meals to first responders.

With fires burning over 34,000 acres, federal aid is underway after President Biden declared a major disaster on January 8, following Governor Gavin Newsom's state of emergency declaration. FEMA is providing support to affected residents.



After a three-year ban, Anonno Mamun's film 'Makeup' finally hit cinemas last Friday. The Film Certification Board granted it a 'U' rating, making it suitable for audiences of all ages. The movie opened in 23 theatres nationwide. It features Nipa Ahmed Realy and Ziaul Roshan in the lead roles, while veteran actor Tariq Anam Khan also delivers a compelling performance. A day after its release, Realy, who made her silver screen debut with this project shares insights in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star.

ZAHID AKBAR

Congratulations on making your silver screen debut. How has the response of the film since so far?

Thank you so much! I feel ecstatic that so many people complimented my work. Many also shared that my performance didn't feel like it was from someone acting in their first film. Even Tariq Anam Khan sir praised my acting. He spoke about it in front of journalists and the media, which is a huge honour for me. Several directors called to congratulate me, and I received bouquets from many people I didn't even know. It has truly been overwhelming.

The film was banned for a long time. Did that upset you?

Of course, it was very upsetting to know that the film was stuck for such a long time. However, as a part of the film, we always knew there was nothing in the story that warranted such a ban. Now that audiences are watching it, they're realising the same thing. The story never had anything controversial to justify being held up like that.

What reactions have you encountered since 'Makeup' was finally released?

Some of my acquaintances went to

watch the film, and they later told me that initially, they had assumed there might be some scenes in the movie that led to its ban. But by the end of the film, they couldn't find anything of the sort. As soon as they came out of theatres, many commented that there was no reason to put a ban on this project for such a long time. However, everyone appreciated the story and the character I portrayed.

Why do you think you were chosen as the lead actress for this film?

The director wanted a fresh face for this story. After auditioning along with many other talented candidates, I was selected. I really wanted to do this role as the story intrigued me, and I was lucky enough that it all happened.

What does the film offer?

It's a romantic story that follows the journey of an ordinary girl who becomes a superstar, with a series of challenges and incidents along the way. The story also shows how she works hard to maintain her stardom. I feel like I've learned a lot from this character's journey. There might even be some parallels with the real-life film industry. My co-actors, Tariq Anam Khan and Ziaul Roshan, have delivered outstanding performances in their roles too.

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7

GAZA TRUCE TALKS

Qatar briefs Trump envoy

Israel strikes Yemeni Huthis, warns it will 'hunt' its leaders

AFP, Doha

Mediator Qatar said it briefed US President-elect Donald Trump's Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff on Friday about Gaza ceasefire talks it has been brokering alongside Egypt and the United States.

In their meeting in Doha, Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani discussed with Witkoff "the latest developments in the region, especially the efforts aimed at reaching a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip", the Qatari foreign ministry said.

Earlier this month, the mediators launched a new push to end the Gaza war and secure the release of dozens of Israeli hostages still held captive in the Palestinian territory.

Diplomatic sources have indicated mounting international pressure on Hamas and Israel to strike a deal in their indirect negotiations.

US President Joe Biden said on Thursday that there had been "real progress" in the talks.

Trump has warned Hamas of "hell to pay" if it does not free the remaining captives before his inauguration on January 20. But several analysts believe that Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu prefers a deal to be finalised under Trump's presidency rather than in the final days of Joe Biden's administration.

"I cannot foresee significant progress until President Trump assumes office," Kobi Michael, a senior researcher at Israeli think tank the Misgav Institute for National Security and Zionist Strategy, told AFP earlier this week.

On Friday, Israel struck Houthi targets in Yemen, including a power station and coastal ports, in response to missile and drone launches, as it warned it would hunt down the group's leaders.

Israel's latest strikes came after the military intercepted two drones believed to have been launched from Yemen on Thursday.

"A short while ago... fighter jets struck military targets belonging to the Houthi terrorist regime on the western coast and inland Yemen," the Israeli military said in a statement.

Draft law will enable cops

FROM PAGE 12

Presiding over the programme, Shahidul Alam, photographer and co-convenor of Voice for Reform, criticised the government for drafting the new ordinance "without prioritising public interest or human rights".

"In the past, we witnessed law enforcers repressing citizens, shooting civilians from helicopters, and even burning students alive. Despite these heinous examples, the proposed cyber security ordinance appears to grant more power to them."

He added that the interim government came to power with the support of the public. "We expect them to view issues through the lens of the public. If they approach it with the mindset of a fascist government, then we would say that we are still not truly independent."

Journalist Kamal Ahmed, also the head of the Media Reform Commission, said, "There is a loophole in the law [Cyber Protection Ordinance 2024]. It doesn't define whose protection it aims to ensure. If the law doesn't clearly define and explain its provisions, it will inevitably create opportunities for misuse."

He also said dialogue with citizens is essential when preparing a draft of the ordinance. "Such a draft can't be finalised arbitrarily. Since it hasn't yet



Mourners and colleagues hold a prayer over the body of Palestinian freelance cameraman Saeed Abu Nabhan, a day after Israeli forces killed him in the Nuseirat camp in the central Gaza Strip. Nabhan worked for Turkish Anadolu news agency. At least 162 journalists and media workers have been killed since the conflict started on October 7, 2023.

PHOTO: AFP

RUSSIA ENERGY SECTOR

US, UK slap sanctions

AFP, Washington

The United States and Britain on Friday announced sanctions against Russia's energy sector, including oil giant Gazprom Neft, just days before outgoing President Joe Biden leaves office.

The US Treasury Department said it was designating more than 180 ships as well as Russian oil majors Gazprom Neft and Surgutneftegas, fulfilling "the G7 commitment to reduce Russian revenues from energy."

At the same time, the UK government announced sanctions against the two companies, saying their profits were "lining (Russian President Vladimir) Putin's war chest and facilitating the war" in Ukraine.

"Taking on Russian oil companies will drain Russia's war chest -- and every ruble we take from Putin's hands helps save Ukrainian lives," UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy said in a statement.

"Putin is in tough shape right now, and I think it's really important that he

not have any breathing room to continue to do the god-awful things he continues to do," Biden told reporters Friday at the White House.

Gazprom Neft slammed the sanctions as "baseless" and "illegitimate," Russian state news agencies reported.



"Gazprom Neft considers the decision to include its assets on the sanctions list as baseless, illegitimate and contrary to the principles of free competition," Russian state news agencies quoted a company

representative as saying.

Oil prices rose on the news, with a barrel of Brent North Sea crude oil for delivery in March up 3.6 percent at \$79.68 at around 4:45 pm in Washington (2145 GMT).

Asked about gasoline prices, Biden conceded costs could rise "as much as three, four cents a gallon," but stressed that sanctions would have a "more profound impact" on Russia.

Even before the sanctions were officially announced, rumors of fresh designations sparked condemnation from Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, who told reporters that the Biden administration was trying to leave incoming US President Donald Trump "as heavy a legacy as possible."

In total, the United States announced sanctions against almost 400 people and entities.

These include 183 oil-carrying vessels, along with Russian oil traders and oilfield providers, the two Russian oil majors, and more than two dozen of their subsidiaries, according to the Treasury Department.

Two computer traders

FROM PAGE 12

Elephant Road Computer Baboshayee Kallyan Samity, Ehtesamul Haque, general secretary of Multiplan Shop Owners Association, was injured in the attack.

Wahedul said he and Ehteshamul cried for help as the place was full of pedestrians and vehicles. A police outpost and a traffic police box were also nearby, but no one came forward. A video of the incident has gone viral on social media.

Wahedul told The Daily Star yesterday that the attackers stopped their car and shattered the windscreen with machetes before swooping down on them.

Police said that Ehtesamul was

undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Dhaka.

Tariq Latif, assistant commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said some of the attackers had been identified, and police were looking for them.

Police earlier received complaints regarding disputes among groups of businessmen, he said, adding that officers were also investigating if business disputes or extortion was the motive behind the attack.

The shop owners of Elephant Road held a human chain yesterday afternoon, demanding immediate arrest and exemplary punishment of the attackers.

LA wildfires

FROM PAGE 12

"completely let us down."

"I don't think the officials were prepared at all," said James Brown, a 65 year old retired lawyer across the city in Altadena.

California Governor Gavin Newsom on Friday ordered a "full independent review," describing the lack of water supplies during the initial fires as "deeply troubling."

"We need answers to how that happened," he wrote in an open letter.

As reports of looting grew, a sunset-to-sunrise curfew was imposed in evacuated areas.

Around two dozen arrests have already been made across Los Angeles, where some residents have organized street patrols and kept armed watch over their own houses.

The National Guard has been deployed to bolster law enforcement.

Five separate fires have so far burned more than 37,000 acres (15,000 hectares), destroying around 12,000 buildings, California's fire agency reported.

The Los Angeles County medical examiner's office confirmed an additional fatality on Friday, bringing the overall death toll so far to 11, though the figure is expected to rise.

4 killed

FROM PAGE 2

facilitate illegal sand extraction from sand quarries at night, according to local sources.

Speaking on the matter, Md Alamin, assistant sub-inspector of Gazaria Naval Police Outpost, said, "The speedboat was not plying on any particular route. Usually, those who go out on the river at night in these speedboats are involved in various illegal activities. However, we're investigating the incident to find out what exactly happened."

Meanwhile, Abul Hossain Gazi, father of the deceased Mahmud Gazi, said the victims had gone out in a speedboat at night to attend a social occasion.

"My son was previously an expatriate who worked abroad. Currently, he is unemployed. He did not do any sand lifting."

The bodies of the victims have been sent to Munshiganj General Hospital for autopsies.

Police said they will file a case over this incident.

US, India want

FROM PAGE 12

reports Indian newspaper The Telegraph.

He said they discussed how the US and India could best help Bangladesh and how Bangladesh could hold elections as soon as possible.

"... we all want to see a stable, prosperous, and tolerant Bangladesh," Garcetti said.

Speaking about Bangladesh, he also said both Biden and the incoming Trump administrations have expressed the importance of protecting minority rights.

Meanwhile, at an event in Washington, DC on Friday, Sullivan described perceptions and allegations of America's role behind the street protests and regime change in

Bangladesh as "preposterous".

He also claimed that senior Indian officials did not believe that the US was behind events in Dhaka either.

Bangladesh's mass uprising in July-August led to the fall of the Awami League regime, which was in power for 15 years.

The US was critical of alleged election irregularities in Bangladesh in 2014, 2018 and 2024, as well as reports of gross human rights violations.

In 2021, the US imposed sanctions against the Rapid Action Battalion. It also announced a visa policy for those undermining democratic elections in Bangladesh in 2023.

Khaleda

FROM PAGE 12

in a corruption case.

In April 2019, Khaleda's health deteriorated due to inadequate medical treatment. On March 26, 2020, amid the Covid-19 pandemic, she was released from prison after 776 days.

The government temporarily released her on an executive order, suspending her sentence on the condition that she remain at her Gulshan residence and not leave the country. The term of her release had been extended several times.

In April 2021, she contracted Covid-19 and recovered while under treatment at home. However, as the other health complications surfaced, she was admitted to Evercare Hospital several times.

The foreign adviser urged NRBS to counter false propaganda against Bangladesh in the international arena especially in Indian media, particularly narratives suggesting a war-like situation or minority-targeted violence in the country.

"Some incidents have occurred, but they were not aimed at minorities due to their religious identity. If 10 houses were attacked, eight of them were owned by Muslims."

He called on expatriates to actively combat misinformation and disinformation about Bangladesh.

Touhid also stressed the importance of reducing migration costs and improving the skills of Bangladeshi workers, including language proficiency.

"We can double our remittance, if we make our workforce more skilled."

He assured that the interim

US FACT-CHECKING

Biden blasts Meta decision

AFP, Washington

US President Joe Biden blasted Meta Friday for scrapping fact-checking on Facebook and Instagram in the United States, calling the move "really shameful" after a global network warned of real-world harm if the tech giant expands its decision to other countries.

Meta chief Mark Zuckerberg triggered alarm Tuesday when he announced the Palo Alto company was ditching third-party fact-checking in the US and turning over the task of debunking falsehoods to ordinary users under a model known as "Community Notes," popularised by X.

The decision was widely seen as an attempt to appease president-elect Donald Trump, whose conservative support base has long complained that fact-checking on tech platforms was a way to curtail free speech and censor right-wing content.

The International Fact-Checking Network has warned of devastating consequences if Meta broadens its policy shift beyond US borders to the company's programs covering more than 100 countries.

The UN rights chief insisted that regulating hate speech and harmful content online "is not censorship". "Allowing hate speech and harmful content online has real world consequences. Regulating such content is not censorship," Volker Turk said on X.

PRESIDENT'S RESIGNATION

Thousands protest in South Korea

AFP, Seoul

Thousands of South Koreans gathered for rival demonstrations in the capital yesterday, as investigators prepare another attempt to arrest suspended President Yoon Suk Yeol over his short-lived martial law decree.

Yoon resisted arrest in a standoff between his guards and investigators last week after his failed December 3 power grab plunged South Korea into its worst political crisis in decades.

The country has bristled with tension for weeks after Yoon directed soldiers to storm parliament, where they unsuccessfully tried to prevent lawmakers from voting down martial law. Since being impeached, Yoon has battened down the hatches.

Separate from the insurrection probe, Yoon also faces ongoing impeachment proceedings. Lawmakers have already suspended him, but the Constitutional Court will decide whether to uphold this decision or restore him to office.

The court has slated January 14 for the start of Yoon's impeachment trial, which would proceed even in his absence.

Is the quota for wards really necessary?

Any quota system must be reformed, streamlined across public universities

Five months after the July uprising that championed a society free of discrimination and inequality, it is unfortunate that many of our public universities still have different types of quotas for enrolment. Among these, the ward or dependent quota, which grants preferential admission to the children of university staff and teachers, has sparked significant debate and protests of late. While students in some of the universities have called for the abolition of this quota, many staff members and teachers have voiced their support for its continuation. The question is, should such quotas persist in our universities? Do they align with the spirit of the July uprising?

A *Prothom Alo* report has identified 11 types of quotas across eight major public universities, including Dhaka University, Jahangirnagar University (JU), Rajshahi University (RU), and Chittagong University. Among them, Bangladesh Agricultural University does not have a ward quota, while RU abolished it recently following protests. However, six other universities still retain this practice. Beyond the ward quota, other reserved categories include quotas for individuals with disabilities, children and grandchildren of freedom fighters, athletes, underprivileged ethnic minorities, non-indigenous people (Bangalees) living in hilly areas, foreign students, Dalits, tea workers, and students from BKSP (Bangladesh Krira Shiksha Protishtan). While many support the quota system for underprivileged communities, others argue that some categories, including the ward quota, are outdated and warrant abolition or rational reform.

The system at JU, in particular, has drawn criticism for its lack of fairness. It reserves seats for the children, spouses, and even siblings of teachers, officers, and staff. Admission seekers under this quota are only required to pass the admission test to secure a seat. Even though the JU administration has capped the number of admissions under this quota to four students per department, it still appears inequitable when general candidates must compete with thousands for a single seat. Other public universities also have more or less seats reserved for the dependents, which undermine the principle of meritocracy. Surprisingly, JU even had a "vice-chancellor's quota," allowing the admission of 20 students at the VC's discretion—a practice recently abolished after student protests.

While the complete removal of the ward quota seems ideal in principle, we recognise the concerns of staff members advocating for its retention. University authorities, therefore, must navigate these conflicting demands through dialogue and consensus. Any decisions regarding quotas must be uniform across public universities and, above all, consistent with the ideals of equality and fairness championed during the July uprising.

We stand firmly with the protesting students and urge public universities to reform their quota systems. The admission process must be free from discrimination and designed to uphold merit and fairness. Only then can our higher education system reflect the values of an equitable society.

A public cancer hospital in crisis

Prolonged equipment failure at NICRH is unacceptable

It is deeply concerning that the National Institute of Cancer Research and Hospital (NICRH)—the country's premier public facility for cancer care—is failing to provide radiotherapy treatment due to prolonged equipment failure. For over 19 days, according to a report, all six radiotherapy machines at the hospital have been out of service, forcing cancer patients to delay their treatment at the risk of their conditions worsening or spreading.

NICRH is not just another healthcare facility; it is a lifeline for many patients, especially those from poor backgrounds, who rely on its subsidised services. For such a vital institution to go even a single day without functioning radiotherapy machines is thus unacceptable. That the current paralysis has dragged on for nearly three weeks only shows the gravity of the situation. In fact, the equipment failure has been a persistent problem for NICRH: one of the machines has been out of order for two years, and another for over a year. How has such a critical problem been allowed to continue unchecked for so long?

Reports of similar incidents paint a grim picture of recurring dysfunction at NICRH. Last year, *Prothom Alo* reported that all of the hospital's radiotherapy machines had malfunctioned. At that time, even the X-ray machine was out of order for two weeks. These repeated breakdowns are symptomatic of a broader systemic failure in public healthcare, at the core of which lies a disturbing culture of indifference and irregularities. Instead of prioritising urgent repairs or replacing outdated equipment, hospital authorities have shown a complacent attitude, waiting for external interventions that rarely come in time.

For many cancer patients, seeking treatment at private clinics is not an option due to the exorbitant costs involved. They rely on NICRH for affordable care. When that care is delayed, they face harrowing choices—some borrow or exhaust their life savings to seek private treatment, while others are left with no option but to wait, risking their lives as cancer progresses.

We urge the health authorities to address this crisis immediately. The radiotherapy machines at NICRH must be repaired or replaced immediately, and measures must be taken to prevent such prolonged disruptions in the future. The possibility that certain vested quarters may be deliberately sabotaging these machines to drive patients towards private facilities must also be thoroughly investigated. The health directorate's long-standing failure to properly oversee public hospitals like NICRH also must be rectified.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Haiti Earthquake

On this day in 2010, a magnitude-7.0 earthquake devastated Haiti, especially Port-au-Prince, killing more than 200,000 people and leaving more than 1,000,000 homeless.

EDITORIAL

Is this the right time for tax hikes?



Selim Jahan
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and lead author of the Human Development Report.

SELIM JAHAN

It is not the best of times—it is the worst of times! Recently, the value-added tax (VAT) and supplementary duty (SD) have been increased on nearly one hundred products and services. The list of such products and services ranges from sweets to clothes, from restaurants to motorcycle imports, from mobile phones to internet, and the tax and duty hikes range from 15 percent to 100 percent. And this has been done by a presidential ordinance, in the middle of the current financial year, ahead of the next national budget in June. Most importantly, the tax hikes have taken place at a time when the country has been experiencing persistent double-digit inflation, with its economic growth being less than two percent. All these beg three fundamental questions. First, what prompted the decision to increase VAT and SD on more than 90 products and services? Second, would such tax increases not make the persistently high inflation even worse and the current low economic growth of the country more depressed? And finally, were there no other options and alternatives to reduce the budget deficits of the country?

First, it is well-known that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has put pressure on Bangladesh to increase taxes, in order to meet conditionalities set by the organisation. Under the existing credit programme of \$4.7 billion, Bangladesh is supposed to increase its tax/GDP ratio by another 0.2 percent in FY2025-26. It means that in absolute terms, the country has to mobilise Tk 1200 crore in additional taxes. Such conditionalities by the IMF are not anything new. In the decade of 1980s, under its Structural Adjustment Facility (SAF) and the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF), the international lender has imposed various conditionalities upon the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. As a result, budgets were balanced by unbalancing the lives of the people. In 1980s, in the process of financial sector reforms, the IMF imposed a set of conditionalities on Bangladesh as well.

Second, concerns are being raised

in many quarters as to whether the tax increases on nearly 100 commodities and services would exacerbate the current level of high inflation, resulting in further increases in prices. Government officials confidently maintain that this would not happen. They have put forward two arguments. First, the goods and services that are subject to tax hikes are not part of the



FILE ILLUSTRATION: SADATUDDIN AHMED AMIL

Consumer Price Index (CPI) basket. So, the increased taxes on those products and services will not impact the CPI and consequently, inflation will not be raised. This is, in fact, a mechanical argument, devoid of realities. For instance, people from all walks of life buy clothes—the richer section may buy clothes worth Tk 50,000 and the common people may buy clothes worth Tk 5,000—but the increase in VAT on clothes from 7.5 to 15 percent will increase the economic burden of common people, whether it is reflected in the CPI or not. Similarly, people buy sweets for various social functions and events. With a VAT increase again from 7.5 to 15 percent, it will pinch the pockets of people on the streets. Irrespective of whether such increases are captured in the mathematical equation of inflation, they will reduce the purchasing power of the consumers and increase the economic woes of the people.

Along with the effects on the

revenue increases, would such hikes be consistent with the objective of accelerated economic growth in the country?

In reply to the reactions by businesses, it has been maintained that with tax hikes, the duties on essential products, including rice, onion, and potatoes were slashed, some even to zero. So, it is argued that as the prices of those products with zero duties are reduced, the impacts of tax hikes will be negated. As a result, there will not be any further inflation. But the point is that even with zero duties, the prices of those commodities have not come down. Furthermore, the sale of food items from the trucks have been discontinued and about 43 lakh family cards have been made void. This will increase economic pressure on low-income families. We should be mindful that Ramadan is coming up and historically, in Bangladesh, people experience price hikes for many products during Ramadan.

It is expected that the prices of a series of products and services will go up further, the purchasing power of common people will be reduced and the business community will be adversely affected.

We all want the revenue income of the government to increase. But are the indirect taxes the most effective means to achieve that objective? Everyone is of the opinion that the direct tax base of Bangladesh must be expanded. The tax/GDP ratio in Bangladesh is only about eight percent, while in neighbouring countries like India, it is 12 percent and in Nepal, it is 17 percent. Our tax/GDP ratio is way below the average tax-to-GDP ratio in the Asia and the Pacific region, which is 19 percent and that of the developing world, which is 25 percent. So, Bangladesh must increase its tax/GDP ratio and that must be done through increasing the coverage and the amount of direct taxes. About 68 percent of people in the country do not pay income tax. These people must be brought under the income tax net.

There is another important dimension to direct tax. In the past, revenues were mobilised through indirect taxes and duties on poor people, rather than income taxes on the rich. It goes without saying that through this process, the economic disparities in the society have been enhanced. Today, when Bangladesh is set to achieve an equitable society, it is essential to change this structure, which is unfriendly to common people. It should be kept in mind that while in a country like India, nearly 60 percent of tax revenue comes from direct taxes, in Bangladesh, nearly 65 percent of taxes come from taxes and duties on essential commodities, which are paid mainly by poorer people. Revenue income can also be increased through tackling tax evasion and improvements in the tax administration. Because of tax evasion in different sectors of the economy, the Bangladesh government loses tax revenues ranging from Tk 56,000 crore to Tk 300,000 crore. Such evasion can be stopped through the use of different information and communication technologies.

The tax increases on nearly 100 products and services will increase economic pressure on common people and reduce their purchasing power. There will be adverse impacts on the business community. In order to overcome these woes, it is essential to reform the tax structure and the tax collection systems. There are no alternative options to enhance economic growth and reduce disparities in our society.

We must focus on improving early childhood education



Maisha Khan
is a Teach For Bangladesh fellow.

MAISHA KHAN

Bangladesh has made considerable progress in early childhood development (ECD) but various challenges remain, especially in rural and disadvantaged areas. It's worth recalling that the authorities, through the National Children Policy 2011, set their sights on improving ECD programmes for children from birth to 8 years old. The aim is to lay a strong foundation for children's cerebral, emotional, and social development while setting the stage for the nation's socio-economic growth.

The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs and the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education are at the helm of these affairs. However, while pre-primary education (PPE) enrolment has improved, it continues to lag in rural and marginalised areas. Enrolment in pre-primary programmes in rural areas is drastically lower than urban centres like Dhaka, underscoring the disparity that impacts children's readiness for primary school and their future learning outcomes.

Bangladesh's ECD landscape is one of collective efforts. While the government plays a central role, organisations like UNICEF, Save the Children, and local NGOs provide technical support, funding, and on-the-ground services. These groups

often target the gaps in coverage, particularly in remote areas where access is limited. Despite these collaborative efforts, substantial gaps remain. For example, community-based early childhood centres, known as Shishu Bikash Kendra, are a crucial

state initiative aimed at bringing education closer to home. However, their success depends heavily on active community involvement, which remains inconsistent due to resource limitations. In many cases, these centres operate without adequate infrastructure or teaching materials, hampering their ability to deliver meaningful educational outcomes.

Parents and communities are also essential to making ECD programmes work, but the backbone of these efforts

lies in the hands of teachers and caregivers, many of whom lack formal training and ongoing professional development. In rural areas, teachers are often underpaid, overworked, and under-supported. This not only affects the children directly but also undermines the long-term sustainability of ECD programmes.

While increasing enrolment is crucial, the quality of early childhood education is where we must focus. And currently, it leaves much to be desired. Most programmes lack standardised curricula and materials. Without proper training, teachers struggle to deliver a consistent standard of education, particularly in rural areas.

Government ministries, international organisations, and NGOs often work in silos, leading to uneven service delivery. Some regions receive adequate support, while others are left behind. Adding to the problem is the absence of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system, making it difficult to assess the impact of ECD programmes and allocate resources effectively.

The absence of adequate facilities and educational aids further compounds this problem, leaving children at a disadvantage compared to their urban peers.

Another significant challenge is the lack of coordination between stakeholders. Government ministries, international organisations, and NGOs often work in silos, leading to uneven service delivery. Some regions receive adequate support, while others are left behind. Adding to the problem

is the absence of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system, making it difficult to assess the impact of ECD programmes and allocate resources effectively. A unified strategy that aligns the efforts of all stakeholders is urgently needed to bridge these gaps.

The stakes couldn't be higher. With 28.61 percent of its population under the age of 14, Bangladesh has a young and promising future. However, without urgent investment in early childhood education, this demographic dividend could turn into a missed opportunity. Studies have shown that quality early childhood education can reduce poverty, boost academic performance, and improve socio-economic mobility.

The first few years of life are particularly critical for brain development, with 90 percent of a child's brain growth occurring by age 5. Evidence-based ECD programmes have the potential to set children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, up for success from the very beginning. If Bangladesh wants to meet its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and achieve long-term development, the focus must shift to ensuring all children have access to quality early childhood education.

Therefore, the current gap in access and quality needs immediate attention. The government, along with its international partners, must act swiftly to ensure that every child has the opportunity to start their educational journey on the right foot. High-quality early childhood education isn't just an investment in individual children; it's an investment in the future of the nation.

Bangladesh's strategic crossroads in 2025 and beyond



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IFTEKHAR UL KARIM

Amid global geopolitical shifts, there is a fascinating parallel between modern developments and ancient end-time prophecies. Islamic eschatology—which foresees an alliance between the Muslim world and the Roman Empire (current Christian world or its subset) against a common adversary—offers a thought-provoking lens through which we can look at the shifting alliances between East and West today. Whether this ally or adversary is symbolised by Orthodox Russia or the Catholic/Protestant West (EU/US), the essence of these historical and eschatological narratives alludes to a deep, enduring alliance between Muslims and Eastern/Western powers. As power dynamics in the global arena continue to evolve, Bangladesh stands at a crucial juncture in the emerging contest between the US/EU-led West and the Russia/China-led East, as both vie for closer ties with the Islamic world. In this new geopolitical order, Bangladesh, with its rising economic clout, strategic location, and cultural connections, is uniquely positioned to play an important role both as a leader in the Muslim-majority world and as a mediator between East and West.

This potential harks back to the transformation seen in the US-Japan relationship following World War II. Once bitter enemies—marked by Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor and the US's atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—the two nations forged one of the strongest alliances of the 20th century. This remarkable reconciliation was driven by mutual recognition of shared interests and pragmatic cooperation, particularly in the areas of economic growth and security. The US-Japan alliance thus emerged as a cornerstone of stability in the Indo-Pacific. Similarly, Bangladesh, despite its historical tensions with Pakistan and regional challenges, has the opportunity to transcend past conflicts and build new alliances that emphasise mutual benefits, particularly in trade, security, and energy. Just as the US and Japan rose from the ashes of war to become strong allies, Bangladesh, along with its promising neighbours, could forge partnerships that not only promote regional stability but also enhance the country's global standing.

To that end, Bangladesh's policy in

2025 and beyond must be one of strategic pragmatism, recalibrating alliances to safeguard its interests and promote long-term prosperity. It should engage in a multi-faceted approach, strengthening its relationships with regional neighbours like Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. These countries, often overlooked in traditional discussions on South Asia's geopolitical landscape, hold immense potential for mutually beneficial partnerships that can enhance Bangladesh's regional influence.

For example, Nepal and Bhutan offer untapped opportunities in the energy sector. With Bhutan's vast hydropower resources and Nepal's potential for renewable energy, Bangladesh can diversify its energy sources through collaborative initiatives that provide sustainable solutions for all parties. Already, Bangladesh's role in providing educational opportunities to Nepali students, particularly in medicine, has quietly fostered deeper ties, with these graduates addressing healthcare shortages in Nepal and serving as cultural and professional bridges between the two countries, thereby strengthening Bangladesh's soft power and bilateral relations.

Similarly, Bangladesh's relationship with Pakistan, despite historical tensions stemming

Bangladesh's relationship with Pakistan, despite historical tensions stemming from the 1971 war, holds significant promise for future cooperation. While these two nations have long been relatively estranged, focusing on shared interests such as trade, infrastructure development, and climate resilience could serve as the foundation for a renewed relationship.

from the 1971 war, holds significant promise for future cooperation. While these two nations have long been relatively estranged, focusing on shared interests such as trade, infrastructure development, and climate resilience could serve as the foundation for a renewed relationship. Pakistan's nuclear expertise, for instance, could help Bangladesh expand its energy portfolio through civilian nuclear cooperation, enhancing energy

regional stability in South Asia.

Moreover, Bangladesh has a unique opportunity to strengthen diplomatic ties with smaller neighbours like Sri Lanka and the Maldives by offering expertise in areas such as disaster management and climate change adaptation. Leveraging its experiences in managing the Rohingya crisis and the Delta Plan, Bangladesh can solidify its role as a regional strategic leader.

potential while safeguarding its sovereignty.

Beyond global partnerships, Bangladesh's role as a mediator between other regional powers could become one of its most significant geopolitical assets. Positioned as a neutral party, Bangladesh can facilitate dialogue between Saudi Arabia and Iran, two rivals whose tensions have long destabilised the Middle East. As a moderate and the third largest Muslim country in the world, Bangladesh can



VISUAL: MONOROM POLOK

security within the framework of international regulations much like the collaborations seen between historically adversarial states like India and the US in their landmark 2008 nuclear deal.

At the same time, Bangladesh's relationship with India, its largest and most influential neighbour, remains pivotal in shaping its regional strategy. Although this relationship has faced challenges following the fall of Awami League in August, the two countries share common security concerns and economic interests that necessitate collaboration. Longstanding issues over water sharing, border disputes, and trade imbalances should be addressed through sustained diplomatic engagement. As I have noted in a recent column, India cannot afford to undermine Bangladesh. Fostering a balanced partnership is vital not only for our bilateral well-being but also for broader

On the global stage, Bangladesh must maintain and even expand its relationships with powers such as the US, EU, Russia, and China while avoiding over-reliance on any single power or market. The US and EU remain vital trade partners, especially for Bangladesh's garment industry, with the EU's GSP facility playing a crucial role in its growth. However, as global competition for influence intensifies, Bangladesh must diversify its diplomatic and economic ties, engaging with both Western and Eastern blocs while preserving its autonomy and flexibility. While China's investments through the BRI initiative are significant, Bangladesh must learn from the experiences of other countries burdened by Chinese debt and avoid excessive dependence. A balanced approach to these relationships will enable Bangladesh to navigate its way through an increasingly complex geopolitical environment, and maximise its economic

leverage its diplomatic relationships with both nations to foster greater unity in the Muslim world, thus positioning itself as a unifying force. Through active participation in organisations like the OIC and the D-8, Bangladesh can also advocate for greater economic cooperation, climate resilience, and solidarity on issues such as Palestine, enhancing its influence within the Islamic world and beyond.

This realignment would elevate Bangladesh's standing in global discussions on justice, peace, and sustainable development. As both the West and East seek closer ties with the Islamic world, Bangladesh, with its growing influence and strategic importance, stands at the crossroads of this emerging shift. By positioning itself as a diplomatic bridge between the Islamic world and both Western and Eastern blocs, it can catalyse cooperation and assert its influence in shaping the evolving global order.

BEYOND GREEN FACTORIES

Prioritising worker well-being in a climate crisis



Adiba Afros is an independent researcher/consultant focusing on gender and labour rights in garment value chains.

ADIBA AFROS



FILE PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Heat stress due to climate change can lead to increased absences and lower productivity, as workers may have to cut down their working hours.

Bangladesh has the world's highest number of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified "green" factories. While this may attract foreign buyers, does this pathway safeguard the health and well-being of Bangladeshi workers confronting the climate crisis?

The International Labour Organization recently reported that 71 percent of the global workforce is exposed to excessive heat due to climate change, resulting in 22.85 million occupational injuries and 18,970 deaths annually. This is not a distant, dystopian future—it is happening now.

In Bangladesh, one of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world, people are grappling with record-breaking temperatures exceeding 40 degrees Celsius, longer periods of warmer months and unprecedented flooding that threatened the livelihoods of nearly six million in 2024.

Combination of extreme heat and humidity can cause dehydration, heat stroke, and even death. It increases the risks of reproductive complications, organ damage and other chronic health issues. This translates to increased absences, lower productivity, fewer working hours—even during peak production months—and an estimated loss of \$26.5 billion in potential garment export earnings by 2030.

As a country still heavily reliant on the RMG sector, climate change poses serious challenges to the country's prospects unless adequate measures are taken to adapt to, and mitigate against, climate risks.

A great deal of the initiative in this direction comes from outside. There is increasing pressure on garment manufacturers to meet the recently legislated human rights and

cannot ensure the health and well-being of workers.

LEED certification primarily focuses on energy and water efficiency and waste management. It does not require measures to address extreme heat stress such as providing frequent cooling and water breaks during heatwaves and maintaining adequate workplace temperatures. Nor can LEED certification address workers' health, if they

certified factories, show that international brands continue to capture the largest share of profits from garment value chains and refuse to acknowledge the true cost of their business practices. And of course, their exploitative practices are abetted locally by the fact that Bangladesh has one of the lowest minimum wages for garment workers (Tk 12,500, around \$105), lower than key competitors like Cambodia, India, Pakistan and Vietnam.

When I asked Kalpona Akter, former child worker and the executive director of the Bangladesh Center for Workers Solidarity, about the most important priority of workers in light of climate crisis, her response was simple: *"Living wages."* There is an abundance of evidence that the recently increased minimum wage falls far short of meeting workers' basic needs, let alone paying for the additional climate-related health and livelihood risks that endanger workers as well as their children and families. These people are the least responsible for climate change yet they face its worst consequences.

The short- and long-term consequences of climate risks represent not only an occupational health and safety concern but also a public health crisis for Bangladesh. It is necessary to widen the focus beyond a handful of garment factories that can afford LEED certifications. The Global North has to wake up to the fact that its prosperity has been built on a long history of extracting value from the people and environment of the world's poorer countries. Climate justice demands that it assumes responsibility for the costs of reparation that is proportionate to the loss and damage it has inflicted.

But we should not wait for them to wake up. We can also take responsibility ourselves. We can mount a concerted effort to pool resources and expertise to ensure that existing labour protection policies and frameworks prioritise workers' well-being as part of a just transition to environmentally and socially equitable alternatives.

Moreover, implementation of worker protection beyond the RMG sector needs to be prioritised. While the RMG sector contributes the largest share of export earnings, it employs only a fraction of the country's

approximately 71 million-strong labour force. Over 80 percent of the workforce is engaged in highly vulnerable informal work, such as agriculture, where many workers are self-employed women in low-paid seasonal jobs.

A risk-based evaluation of key employment sectors, and jobs within those sectors at high risk from climate change, is essential. Establishing sectoral funds to assist with evidence-based adaptation and mitigation efforts that are cost-effective and locally tailored is equally important. Workers and their communities should be empowered through collective forms of representation and grievance channels to foster institutional accountability.

Lessons learned from successful community-based climate adaptation solutions such as BRAC's community health clinic model, could support preventative measures and awareness-raising campaigns. Such initiatives could effectively reach vulnerable groups, particularly women, whose double burden of work and household duties leaves little time to recover from extreme heat stress.

A recently drafted white paper prepared by a committee of eminent local scholars, also warns against over-reliance on LEED certification as an industry strategy. Instead, it recommends developing a local framework and certification alternatives to build local capacity, save foreign exchange and create jobs.

Under the current interim government, a labour reform commission has been tasked with proposing reforms to ensure labour rights and improve worker welfare. This presents an opportunity to innovate and imagine beyond "green" certifications and GDP growth at the expense of our people and the environment.

After all, ensuring dignified livelihoods for all citizens is fundamental to upholding the values of "anti-discrimination" that inspired the students and workers who led the July uprising. It is also enshrined in our founding constitution. We must strive towards this aim, even though the scale of compounding challenges is colossal. And we must start with vulnerable sections of the country's working people.

environmental due diligence requirements such as the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) required by the European Union (EU), which is the largest destination for Bangladeshi textiles and garments, and also a key destination for footwear, plastics and shrimp exports.

While due diligence legislations are an important step towards ensuring greater transparency and responsibility of business operations across global supply chains, the sharing of costs remains, as in the past, a contentious issue, and workers' engagement in these discussions remains tokenistic, especially at the international level. Cutthroat purchasing prices, even at LEED-

have to endure sleepless nights in low-income housing that lacks uninterrupted electricity and water.

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How living at high altitude affects patients with COPD

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is challenging to manage, and high altitude living adds another layer of complexity. At high altitudes, the reduced oxygen levels trigger physiological changes, but their impact on COPD patients remains uncertain.

Researchers analysed data from a multicenter cohort study, comparing about 1,400 COPD patients living below 1,000 feet with approximately 300 residing above 4,000 feet, mainly in cities like Denver and Salt Lake City. Most participants had lived at their respective altitudes for over a decade, according to the research study published in the American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine.

The findings revealed that COPD patients at higher altitudes walked an average of 100 feet less in a six-minute test and were significantly more likely to use supplemental oxygen. Despite these challenges, both groups reported similar symptom burdens, and lung function—measured by the rate of decline in forced expiratory volume in one second—was comparable during the three-year follow-up.

Interestingly, high altitude residents had a 25% higher risk of death over an 11-year period. However, this association disappeared after adjusting for air pollution, suggesting air quality may play a more critical role than altitude itself in influencing outcomes for COPD patients.

For COPD patients considering a move to lower altitudes, these results provide a nuanced perspective. While high altitude may necessitate more oxygen support and reduce exercise capacity, it does not appear to worsen symptoms or long-term lung function. Addressing air pollution may be equally, if not more, important for improving outcomes.



Does drinking tea cause kidney stones? An informative analysis

RAISA MEHZABEEN

Tea is cherished globally for its comforting qualities and potential health benefits. However, questions about its connection to kidney stone formation persist. Is tea a risk factor for kidney stones, or is this a misunderstanding? Let us explore the facts.

Understanding kidney stones

Kidney stones are solid deposits of minerals and salts that form when urine becomes overly concentrated. These stones can vary in composition:

1. *Calcium oxalate stones*: The most common type, formed when calcium binds with oxalate.

2. *Uric acid stones*: Often linked to high-protein diets.

3. *Struvite stones*: Associated with urinary tract infections.

4. *Cystine stones*: A rare type resulting from genetic conditions.

Symptoms often include severe pain in the back or sides, blood in the urine, and frequent urination.

Tea and oxalates: a connection?

Tea, particularly black tea, contains oxalates—compounds naturally present in many plants. When consumed excessively, these oxalates can bind with calcium in the urine, potentially forming calcium oxalate stones.

Oxalate levels in different teas

Black tea: High in oxalates; excessive consumption poses a greater risk.

Green tea: Contains significantly lower oxalate levels, making it a safer option.

Herbal teas: Often oxalate-free, but individual ingredients should be verified.

What does the research say?

Scientific studies reveal mixed findings about tea and kidney stones:

Risk with black tea: Research in the Clinical Journal of the American Society of Nephrology suggests that excessive black tea intake could increase oxalate levels, raising the risk of stones.

Green tea benefits: Its lower oxalate content and antioxidant properties may reduce stone risk.

Iced tea caution: Iced tea, due to its concentrated nature, contains higher oxalate levels, potentially heightening the risk for stone formation.

Practical tips for tea lovers

Tea enthusiasts can enjoy their favourite beverage while minimising risks by adopting these practices:

1. *Moderate consumption*: Limit black tea intake to 1-2 cups daily.

2. *Hydration*: Drink ample water to dilute oxalates and reduce the likelihood of stone formation.

3. *Choose green or herbal teas*: These alternatives are generally safer and still provide health benefits.

4. *Pair tea with calcium-rich foods*: Calcium in foods like milk or yoghurt binds with oxalates in the gut, reducing absorption.

5. *Skip the sugar*: Over-sweetened teas may increase the risk of uric acid stones.

For most people, moderate tea consumption is unlikely to cause kidney stones. However, those prone to stone formation or with certain health conditions should exercise caution. Opting for green tea or herbal blends offers a flavourful way to enjoy tea without the associated risks. Tea is a delightful and largely safe beverage—just enjoy it wisely!

The writer is a student in the Department of Food and Nutrition at the Government College of Applied Human Science. Email: raisamch20@gmail.com

WATER: an essential fuel for your brain

DR AMIT SARKER

What can you do to improve your overall brain health? The simple solution is to drink plenty of water. The human body comprises 45 to 75 percent water, and that water is particularly vital for the brain, as it accounts for 73 to 75 percent of brain mass. Unlike other parts of the body, the brain is unable to store water. Therefore, it is highly important to ensure you are drinking adequate water throughout the day to keep your brain hydrated.

The U.S. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine recommend that an adequate daily water consumption for males is 3.7 L and for females is 2.7 L. Keep in mind that a number of factors, such as temperature, humidity, medications, physical activities, and other health conditions, may influence your daily water needs. The more fluid you lose, the more you need to take in.

The function of your brain is strongly influenced by your level of hydration. There can be serious consequences when you neglect to give your brain the water it needs. There are a variety of studies that report the link between dehydration and mood disturbance. Several studies have reported that mild dehydration (loss of 1-3% of body weight) following exercises or high heat can negatively impact the mood and concentration.

Mild fluid loss can be one of the major reasons to impair brain performance, such as losing working memory, feeling less alert, feeling irritable or tense, and increasing the feelings of anxiety and fatigue.

However, prolonged dehydration can have more severe effects, such as hallucinations and unconsciousness. Consumption of adequate water is needed to manufacture happy hormones (dopamine and serotonin) that regulate our positive mood. Researchers have found that consumption of sufficient volume of water can elevate your positive mood, even improve the short-term memory.

Dehydration also can enhance the frequency of



headaches. In some individuals, dehydration can trigger headaches and migraines. It has been reported that headache is one of the most common symptoms of dehydration, and drinking plenty of water can relieve or significantly reduce headaches of those individuals who experience frequent headaches.

On the other hand, some people have experienced dehydration migraine headaches, which means the severity of migraine symptoms is triggered by dehydration. It has been found that the severity of migraine pain is significantly lower in those people who drink an adequate volume of water each day.

Overall, drinking plenty of fresh water is, of course, one of the simplest ways to stay hydrated. Drinking adequate water can improve one's brain health by simply increasing blood flow, minerals, and oxygen to the brain, which, in turn, enhances cognition and helps balance moods and emotions, reducing stress and headaches.

To ensure you remain hydrated throughout the day, keep a reusable water bottle with you. If you dislike drinking water, you can use combinations of fruits and herb infusions (e.g., lime and mint leaves) to add flavours. This can provide extra benefits such as antioxidants, which help to prevent oxidative stress in the brain.

You can use apps that remind you to drink water regularly throughout the day if you are the type of person who forgets to drink fluids.

Additionally, eating fruits with a high-water content, such as tomatoes, watermelon, or cucumber (which contains over 90% water), can also help you to stay more hydrated. So, drink plenty of fresh and purified water and stay healthy.

The writer is the assistant research fellow at the School of Biomedical Sciences, University of Otago, New Zealand.

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NEW PERSPECTIVE ON OBESITY

Global commission proposes updated diagnostic framework

A landmark report published in *The Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology* introduces a redefined approach to diagnosing obesity, aiming to address the limitations of traditional methods and ensure appropriate care for over one billion individuals living with obesity worldwide. Endorsed by more than 75 medical organisations, this global initiative emphasises a nuanced framework for identifying and managing obesity as a chronic condition when warranted.

The Commission highlights the shortcomings of relying solely on body mass index (BMI), which, while useful as a screening tool, does not directly measure fat distribution or account for individual health variations. To enhance diagnostic accuracy, the report proposes using additional measures such as waist-to-hip ratios, body fat scans, or functional health assessments alongside BMI.

A critical advancement in the framework is the classification of obesity into two categories: clinical obesity, marked by signs of reduced organ function or impaired daily activities caused by excess fat, and preclinical obesity, where individuals have increased health risks but no current illness. This approach facilitates personalised care, guiding timely treatment for those with clinical obesity and risk-reduction strategies for others.

The Commission underscores the need to combat weight stigma and advocates for better training for healthcare workers to ensure compassionate, evidence-based care. By prioritising individualised assessments, this initiative aspires to reshape global healthcare practices, offering hope for millions while conserving resources by reducing overdiagnosis and unnecessary interventions.



E-cigarettes: The hidden dangers behind the vape craze

ABEDA SULTANA & DR ABU JAMIL FAISEL

An electronic cigarette (e-cigarette) is a device that ejects vaporised solution for inhalation. It usually contains nicotine, the addictive substance in regular cigarettes, along with other flavouring agents and chemicals, including heavy metals like nickel, tin, and lead. While e-cigarettes could potentially help adults quit smoking, they are not safe for youth, pregnant women, or non-smokers. Despite being marketed as a safer alternative, e-cigarettes have been misrepresented, leading to increased usage among young adults.

Waste management has become a critical global issue. The increasing use of e-cigarettes has introduced a new form of waste, consisting of e-liquid containers, cartridges with nicotine, and devices containing lithium-ion batteries. A 2017 study in Bangladesh reported a 0.2% prevalence of e-cigarette use, while a 2020 survey indicated that 31.27% of university students had tried e-cigarettes.

The popularity of vaping is growing in Bangladesh—according to Mr Schumann Zaman, president of the Bangladesh Electronic Nicotine Delivery System Traders Association (BENDSTA). He cited a study by Public Health England (PHE) claiming that



was 95% safer than smoking traditional cigarettes. However, this claim remains controversial.

E-cigarettes generally have three main components: a lithium-ion battery, a heating element, and a nicotine liquid cartridge, often flavoured. They come in reusable and disposable forms, with approximately 53% of vapes sold being disposable.

Disposable vapes, which are single-use, contribute significantly to waste as they are discarded once depleted. Concentrated nicotine is harmful if ingested or absorbed through the skin, and these devices often end up in landfills, where their components can release toxic substances such as heavy metals into the environment.

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Landfills, especially older ones, may not contain these toxins properly, leading to contamination of soil and water. Leachate, formed when rainwater filters through e-waste, can pollute underground water sources, harming both health and agriculture. Lithium-ion batteries, commonly found in rechargeable e-cigarettes, also pose significant disposal challenges due to their potential to catch fire and explode.

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shedding occurs then. It is usually self-limiting; hospitalisation is low. It spreads by droplets, aerosol, and close contact. One should maintain at least a distance of 6 feet to avoid contamination.

Diagnosis is done by RT-PCR and multiplex PCR from nasopharyngeal swabs or aspirates. Treatment is supportive, as with other viruses. There is no specific vaccine. Management is supportive, like hydration and antipyretics for fever. Oxygen therapy for hypoxia, mechanical ventilation in severe cases. Inhaled bronchodilators or corticosteroids may be considered for wheezing, though their effectiveness is inconsistent.

Good hand hygiene is essential. Avoiding close contact with infected individuals and disinfecting surfaces

The disposal of e-cigarette waste is further complicated by the fact that newer models often come with built-in batteries, making proper recycling difficult. Incineration is the most common disposal method, but it releases harmful emissions and further harms the environment.

In the UK, research by Material Focus found that a third of the almost half a billion vapes purchased annually end up in landfills, contributing to significant environmental damage. Disposable vapes, in particular, are a major problem, with millions discarded each week.

In Bangladesh, e-waste recycling often occurs informally, exposing workers to harmful substances. Toxins from e-waste contaminate the land, and the health risks related to this informal recycling process are a growing concern.

To manage e-cigarette waste effectively, Bangladesh must implement regulations to control the production, sale, and disposal of e-cigarettes. The government should amend tobacco control laws to prohibit e-cigarettes, ensuring the protection of public health and the environment. This measure is necessary to safeguard future generations from the harmful effects of e-cigarettes and vaping.

The writers are MPH students at American International University Bangladesh (AIUB) and adjunct faculty, respectively.

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DR ZUBAIR KHALED HUQ

Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) is an RNA virus. Belongs to the paramyxoviridae family, similar to RSV. It occurs in late winter and spring. Reinfection can occur throughout life. First detected in 2001, it has been there for more than 60 years. It is a respiratory virus. It affects children less than 5 years of age, older people, and those who are immunocompromised, asthmatics, and those on immunosuppressive drugs.

Main symptoms are respiratory complications, fever, common cold, mucus hyperproduction, and epithelial hyperresponsiveness. Clinical manifestations are rhinitis, cough, fever, and wheezing. The incubation period is 5 to 7 days; virus

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Good hand hygiene is essential. Avoiding close contact with infected individuals and disinfecting surfaces

The writer is a gerontologist and a public health specialist. Email: zubaikhaledjoy@gmail.com



Tigers look ahead to life without Tamim, Shakib

SPORTS REPORTER from Sylhet

With Tamim Iqbal retiring from international cricket and Shakib Al Hasan yet to reverse his bowling ban, Bangladesh are preparing for the fast-approaching ICC Champions Trophy without two of their biggest stars.

For the mega event -- scheduled to be held in Pakistan and the UAE from February 19 -- the selectors will announce a 15-member squad today.

Speculation about the inclusion of Tamim and Shakib had been building in recent weeks, especially after Bangladesh Cricket Board president Faruque Ahmed expressed interest in having Shakib in the team. Selectors also met Tamim in Sylhet to discuss a possible return.

The fact remains that neither has played an ODI since late 2023, and while skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto was open to their inclusion, Tamim's retirement announcement has now shifted focus towards Shakib. However, as it appears, Shakib's recent struggles as a batter, compounded by his failed bowling action test in Chennai, have all but ruled out his return for the event.

With the question of the duo's selection seemingly resolved, the selectors can now focus on forming a younger squad, making some last-minute adjustments to a few positions. Most of the players from the recent tour to the West Indies are likely to be retained.

Skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto, Mushfiqur Rahim, Towhid Hridoy, and Mustafizur



Rahman are all set to return after missing the West Indies tour for various reasons. However, Parvez Hossain Emon, Afif Hossain, Hasan Mahmud, and Shariful Islam might lose their places in the Champions Trophy squad.

The selectors will also monitor Soumya Sarkar's recovery from a finger injury before deciding whether to include him as one of three opening options alongside Liton Das and Tanzid Hasan. In the spin department, left arm spinner Nasum Ahmed is a likely choice in Shakib's absence, while spin bowling all-rounder Mehedi Hasan Miraz and leg spinner Rishad Hossain remain automatic choices.

Off spinner Mahedi Hasan, who has been absent from the ODI setup since the 2023 World Cup, could make a surprise return due to his recent T20 performances.

As Bangladesh are set to play their Group A matches in Dubai and Rawalpindi, they are likely to opt for a four-man pace attack featuring Mustafizur, Taskin Ahmed, Nahid Rana, and Tanzim Hasan Sakib. Meanwhile, the inclusion of Jaker Ali Anik and Mahmudullah Riyad as finishers is expected.

Real look to avenge Barca thrashing in Super Cup

AGENCIES

Real Madrid's humiliating 4-0 home loss to Barcelona in October still haunts the club as the rivals prepare for their second Clasico of the season in the Spanish Super Cup final on Sunday.

LaLiga leaders Real recovered from that setback and are on a five-match winning streak ahead of defending the Super Cup in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, but coach Carlo Ancelotti is cautious.

"We have to think about what happened in the first game because they beat us (in LaLiga)," Ancelotti told reporters on Saturday as he looked forward to Real's second cup final in a month, having won the Intercontinental Cup in December.

Ancelotti said his players could avenge their thrashing earlier this season by Barcelona, if they avoided making the same mistakes.

"We've made a pretty clear assessment, so we'll have to repeat the good things we did and avoid the mistakes. A Clasico is always a Clasico, but a final puts a bit more pressure on you," Ancelotti added.

Ancelotti has all the players who



If Real Madrid are able to defend the Spanish Super Cup against archrivals Barcelona on Sunday night, they will equal the Catalans' record of winning the title 14 times.

However, since the tournament changed to a four-team format since 2020, Real have won three (in 2020, 2022, and 2024) out of the five times. Athletic Bilbao (2021) and

Barcelona (2023) won it once each.

Real also have a better record against Barcelona in the Spanish Super Cup – Los Blancos have won seven times while Barca won twice in the seven occasions they went up against each other in the final.

The Super Cup offers Hansi Flick's first chance of winning a silverware since arriving at Barcelona.

travelled available for the final including England midfielder Jude Bellingham, who experienced some muscle issues during the semifinal where he scored the first goal in a 3-0 win over Mallorca.

The coach said the Super Cup was an important title, and statistically Real had a good season every time they won it.

"When we haven't won it, it hasn't gone well. It's a competition that gives you a lot more motivation," said Ancelotti, whose last two Champions League trophies with Real have coincided with Super Cup wins.

Meanwhile, Barcelona midfielder Dani Olmo will be able to play after the Catalans were controversially granted a temporary licence for him by Spain's national sports council (CSD).

Barcelona coach Hansi Flick said Olmo was ready to play but suggested he might not start after Gavi shone in the semifinal against Athletic Bilbao in the attacking midfield role.

"Gavi had a great performance against Athletic, he's got confidence... I think he's going to play, but I am not 100 percent sure of who will play," said Flick.

what to WATCH

TSPORTS

BPL

Sylhet vs Khulna
Live from 1:30 pm
Dhaka vs Rajshahi
Live from 6:30 pm

STAR SPORTS 2

SA20
Pretoria Capitals vs Durban's Super Giants
Live from 9:30 pm
Big Bash
Melbourne

Renegades vs Melbourne Stars
Live from 2:15 pm
SONY SPORTS 2
FA Cup
Arsenal vs Man Utd
Live from 9:00 pm

Butler to return in Feb for women's camp

SPORTS REPORTER



SAFF Championship winning coach Peter Butler will stay on, for the time being, as the head coach of Bangladesh national women's football team, confirmed Bangladesh Football Federation's (BFF) women's wing chairman Mahfuza Akter Kiron.

The Englishman, who arrived in Bangladesh as coach of BFF Elite Academy before taking over as women's team coach in March last year, saw his contract run out at the end of last year. Butler had been embroiled in controversy during the triumphant SAFF campaign in October last year over his prejudice against senior players.

Butler, who left for England following the tournament, had said he was open to talks over contract extension but Kiron had maintained that she wanted to keep the Englishman in charge, reportedly against the wish of a majority of the players.

While there has been no official contract extension with the federation as yet, Kiron informed that Butler will stay on as the coach of the team and will return to Bangladesh in February.

"Peter Butler will stay on as our head coach. He will join the team's training camp in February," Kiron told reporters at the BFF House on Saturday.

The women's wing chairman further informed that the players will return to the camp on January 15 for the Asian Cup Qualifiers in June.

"The national women's team's camp will resume on January 15... They would start the camp with the March window in sight. We also have AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers in June," Kiron added.

Ibrahim on a roll as Abahani move second

SPORTS REPORTER

In-form forward Mohammad Ibrahim scored twice as Abahani moved into second position of the Bangladesh Premier League with a 4-0 thrashing of basement club Chittagong Abahani at the Shaheed Rafique Uddin Bhuiyan Stadium in Mymensingh on Saturday.

Ibrahim, who scored the all-important goal in their Federation Cup fixture against archrivals Mohammedan on Tuesday, opened the scoring with a clinical finish from the spot in the 42nd minute after his darting run was cut short just inside the box by Chittagong Abahani midfielder Fazlay Rabbi.

Enamul Gazi, who missed a glorious opportunity early in the first half, doubled Abahani's lead six minutes after restart when he poked home a low cross following a driving run down the right flank by the tireless Shahriar Emon.

Emon set up the third goal for Ibrahim in the 66th minute with a defence-splitting through-ball, which the latter finished off with a placing shot.

Substitute midfielder Asadul Molla put the icing on Abahani's cake with a fourth goal five minutes later with his first touch of the match following a corner as the Sky Blues took their goals tally in the league to 10 from seven games.

The win lifted Abahani to second position on 16 points from seven matches, one ahead of third-placed Rahmatganj MFS and five behind league leaders Mohammedan.

Ziska Pharmaceuticals Warns Against Counterfeit Tizaro

Ziska Pharmaceuticals, a global leader in healthcare innovation, has recently identified a concerning issue regarding counterfeit versions of our newly launched weight-reducing medicine, Tizaro.

These fake products, originating from unauthorized sources, pose significant health risks to patients and compromise the trust of our valued customers.

The counterfeit medicines are being distributed by certain individuals who have created fraudulent websites, including www.ziskapharma.cn and www.ziska-pharma.com, to mimic Ziska's official platform (www.ziskapharma.com). These websites have illegally cloned the content of our official website and generated fake codes for product verification, deceiving consumers into believing they are purchasing genuine Tizaro products.

Ziska Pharmaceuticals emphasizes that it has no affiliation with these fake websites or their counterfeit products, and we cannot be held responsible for any adverse effects caused by these fraudulent medicines. The health and safety of our customers are our utmost priorities, and we strongly urge everyone to exercise caution.

To ensure the authenticity of Tizaro:

1. Always purchase Tizaro from authorized pharmacies or distributors.
2. Verify the unique product code exclusively on www.ziskapharma.com.
3. Report any suspicious websites or products to Ziska Pharmaceuticals immediately.

We are actively working with legal authorities and cybersecurity experts to take down these fraudulent websites and hold the responsible parties accountable. Additionally, we are implementing stricter measures to protect our customers from counterfeit products.

Ziska Pharmaceuticals remains committed to delivering safe, effective, and high-quality healthcare solutions. If you have any doubts or concerns, please contact our customer care team.

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BSRM
building a safer nation

Khaleda now undergoing a series of tests

Happy to be around family

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, who has been undergoing advanced medical treatment at a clinic in London for the past three days, is currently in a stable condition.

The 79-year-old former prime minister has long battled various ailments, including liver cirrhosis, arthritis, diabetes, and issues related to the kidney, lung, heart, and eyes.

According to her doctors, she is undergoing a series of medical tests that are expected to be completed within days.

A medical team comprising British and Bangladeshi doctors is closely monitoring her health, under the supervision of Patrick Kennedy, a consultant gastroenterologist and hepatologist.

Khaleda reached London on Wednesday on an air ambulance sent by the Emir of Qatar.

There, she is very happy to be surrounded by her family after so many years, said party sources.

Her son Tarique Rahman, his wife Zubaida Rahman, their daughter Zaima Rahman, and Sharmila Rahman, the widow of Khaleda's late son Aralat Rahman Koko, are all attending to her needs, said Mohammed Malique, an adviser to the BNP chairperson and president of BNP's UK chapter.

Tarique has been residing in London with his family since 2008. Khaleda's younger son Koko died in Malaysia in 2015.

On February 8, 2018, Khaleda was jailed



SEE PAGE 7 COL. 3



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Over 50 people were injured in a clash between workers of ready-made garment manufacturers Merimo Ltd and JMS Ltd in Chattogram Export Processing Zone yesterday. This photo of a vandalised portion of JMS Ltd's factory was taken in the afternoon.

AFP, Los Angeles

The largest of the Los Angeles' fires spread toward previously untouched neighborhoods yesterday, forcing new evacuations and dimming hopes that the disaster was coming under control.

Across the city, at least 11 people have died as multiple fires have ripped through residential areas since Tuesday, razing thousands of homes in destruction that US President Joe Biden likened to a "war scene."

Despite huge firefighting efforts, the Palisades fire's expansion prompted evacuation orders in ritzy

neighborhoods along its eastern flank, which include the famous Getty Center art museum.

Winds were forecast to pick up again on Saturday after a brief lull, posing the risk of new fires as embers are blown into dry brush.

Los Angeles residents have increasingly demanded to know who is at fault for the disaster as they grapple with the ruin and local anger rises over officials' preparedness and response.

Residents like Nicole Perri, whose home in the upscale Pacific Palisades burnt down, told AFP that officials

SEE PAGE 7 COL. 6

LA wildfires spread

Death toll now 11; 12,000 buildings destroyed

SEE PAGE 7 COL. 6

Two computer traders hacked on city road

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two computer shop owners were hacked by a group of around 20 assailants armed with machetes on the capital's Elephant Road.

Some of the attackers wore masks while others had helmets during the one-and-a-half-minute attack in front of Multiplan Centre around 10:40pm on Friday, said one of the victims, Wahedul Hasan Dipu.

Besides Wahedul, president of

SEE PAGE 7 COL. 4

CYBER PROTECTION Draft law will enable cops to harass people

Speakers say at event

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The draft of the Cyber Protection Ordinance-2024 does not prioritise human rights and will empower law enforcers to harass the public, speakers said at an event yesterday.

They also criticised the government's failure to abolish the Cyber Security Act and its lack of action on dismissing cases filed under it, despite earlier promises.

At a dialogue titled "Cyber Security Ordinance: Sustaining State Repression and Voices of Victims", they called for an immediate revision of the new ordinance, after consulting with relevant stakeholders.

The event was jointly organised by two platforms -- Voice for Reform and the DSA Victims Network -- at the Dhaka Reporters Unity.

SEE PAGE 7 COL. 1

US, India want a stable Bangladesh Says US envoy in New Delhi

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Both the US and India want to see a stable, prosperous, and tolerant Bangladesh, US Ambassador to India Eric Garcetti has said.

Bangladesh featured prominently in a meeting between US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and his Indian counterpart Ajit Doval in New Delhi on January 6, Garcetti said.

"I was a part of that [meeting] and Bangladesh was a big part of that conversation," he said during a media interaction at the American Center in Kolkata on Friday,

SEE PAGE 7 COL. 1

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