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## METERED CNG FARES BRTA revokes 'ill-planned' directive Decision follows drivers' protests

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) was compelled to withdraw its directive to Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) to take legal action against CNG-run auto-rickshaws for disregarding government set metered fares.

The decision came after many auto-rickshaw drivers abstained from work and blocked city streets for several hours since yesterday morning, causing immense sufferings to thousands of commuters.

In a hasty and poorly planned move, the BRTA attempted to enforce the fare system for CNG-run auto-rickshaws that was set nine years ago, without any review or necessary consultation with stakeholders.

In its immediate response, Bangladesh Jati Kalyan Samity, a passenger welfare platform, issued a statement saying, "By withdrawing the directive, BRTA has effectively left helpless passengers at the mercy of rampaging CNG drivers across the city."

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**BATTLING FOR BREAD ...** A woman struggles as chaos breaks out in front of a TCB truck on the capital's Abdul Gani Road as scores of people scramble to buy kitchen essentials at subsidised prices yesterday. As food cost continues to soar, the desperation among low-income families grows by the day.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## NGO FUNDING Bangladesh needs to look for new sources

PORIMOL PALMA

Bangladesh needs to look for alternative funding sources to keep the activities of NGOs that support the marginalised communities as foreign aid for the development sector continues to shrink, experts said.

In 2020, the country received close to a billion dollars but the receipts have progressively shrunk. Last year, it received \$655 million in foreign aid for non-governmental organisations, down 11.6 percent year-on-year, according to the NGO Affairs Bureau, the government wing that regulates NGOs.

The need for alternative funding sources to continue with the development activities has taken on fresh urgency given Bangladesh's forthcoming graduation from the least-developed country bracket next year, the new Trump administration's move to suspend USAID programmes; and Switzerland's announcement of phasing out funding to Bangladesh after 2028.

The Trump administration's move had an immediate impact in Bangladesh, which received \$450 million for nearly 100 projects. Overnight, thousands of development professionals were staring at an uncertain future and millions were cut off from essential services.

For instance, icddr,b has sacked more than 1,000 of its staff, while all services save for emergency food supplies provided by US-funded NGOs in

Rohingya camps were suspended.

"The abrupt fund suspension is a serious concern," said AKM Jashim Uddin, director at the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh, the apex body of NGOs.

As of February 2, there are 2,498 registered NGOs, with 240 being foreign and the remainder domestic, according to the NGO Affairs Bureau. However, other estimates suggest 27,000 NGOs operate here.

"The NGOs work in the areas where the government has little intervention. In that way, the NGOs complement the government and play a vital role in the country's socioeconomic development," Jashim Uddin said.

Any government can change its policy on foreign aid.

"Our government needs to negotiate with the major development partners for more funding given the rising needs, but at the same time, it also should find alternative avenues of funding for the NGOs and help them become sustainable," he added.

Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, executive director of COAST Foundation, an NGO that works in Bangladesh's coastal districts, suggested shifting to microfinance and enterprises for sustainability, citing the cases of BRAC and Grameen Bank.

BRAC has 13 commercial enterprises and Grameen Bank has at least 10 social

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**US cuts 17  
more projects  
worldwide  
\$29m Bangladesh  
scheme among them**

STAR REPORT

The Elon Musk-led US Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) has announced that it has taken new measures to save US taxpayers money by cancelling a slew of projects abroad, including one in Bangladesh.

In a bid to cut US government spending, the DOGE on X, also owned by Musk, on Saturday said it is cancelling a \$29 million funding intended for "strengthening the political landscape in Bangladesh".

In its latest bid to cut spending, DOGE cut funding to 17 projects, including the Bangladeshi one.

The DOGE announced that it has halted funding for 17 projects, worth millions of dollars, across various international aid programs and initiatives in countries including Bangladesh, Nepal, and India.

DOGE also cancelled project funding to other countries, including \$22 million intended for

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## Israel praises Trump's Gaza 'bold vision'

Threatens to resume fighting if all hostages not returned; Israeli strike kills 3 Palestinian cops

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel and the United States have a common approach to Gaza, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said yesterday, praising President Donald Trump's "bold vision" for the territory after talks with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

Washington's top diplomat is on his first visit to the Middle East, a trip that comes after Trump made a widely-condemned proposal to take control of Gaza and relocate its more than two million residents.

"We discussed Trump's bold vision for Gaza's future and will work to ensure that vision becomes a reality," Netanyahu told reporters after their meeting, adding that the two leaders had a "common strategy" for the future of the war-ravaged Palestinian territory.

The scheme that Trump outlined earlier this month, while Netanyahu visited Washington, lacked details. Trump said Palestinians had "lived a miserable existence" in Gaza and suggested the coastal territory could become the "Riviera of the Middle East", following redevelopment after more than 15 months of war.

Though Netanyahu welcomed the idea, foreign leaders have largely rejected it.

Netanyahu warned Israel would "open the gates of hell" in Gaza unless all hostages were returned, echoing Trump.

who said "hell" would break out if Hamas failed to release them.

Meanwhile, Hamas said yesterday an Israeli air strike killed three police officers near south Gaza's Rafah. Israel said it struck "several armed individuals" in south Gaza. It is at least the second Israeli air strike in Gaza since the ceasefire began.

**"We discussed  
Trump's bold  
vision for Gaza's  
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Benjamin Netanyahu  
Israeli Prime Minister

Rubio arrived hours after Hamas freed three Israeli hostages in Gaza in exchange for 369 Palestinian prisoners - the sixth swap under a fragile ceasefire which the United States helped mediate along with Qatar and Egypt.

Speaking alongside Netanyahu yesterday, he said: "Hamas cannot continue as a military or a government force... they must be eliminated." He is due to also visit Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.



## 31-point BNP charter will rebuild nation Says Tarique

STAR REPORT

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman has said if the party is voted to power, it will start implementing its 31-point charter to rebuild the country.

"Awami League suppressed the country's people for 16 years, and I believe that the real revenge against this suppression could be possible through implementing our 31-point charter," BSS reports quoting him.

Addressing the biennial council of Narail BNP yesterday, Tarique accused the Awami League government of damaging the country's economy, development, and electoral system.

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## 2nd phase of Ijtema ends

STAR REPORT

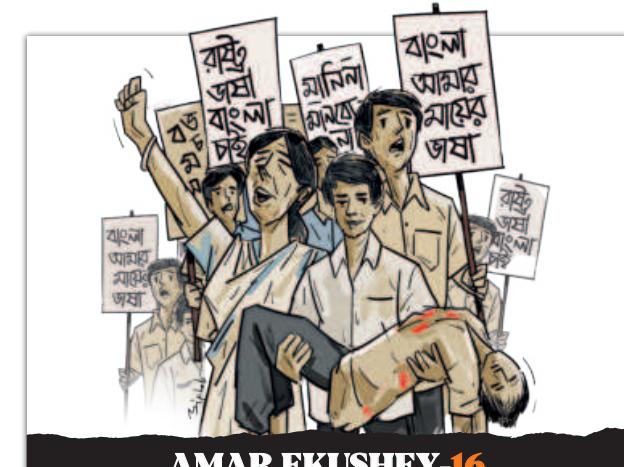
The second phase of Biswa Ijtema, one of the largest congregations of Muslims, concluded yesterday with Akheri Munajat (final prayers) on the banks of the Turag River in Tongi.

A large number of devotees from home and abroad raised their hands in unison, seeking world peace, divine blessings, and forgiveness for all of humanity, especially for the Muslim Ummah.

The three-day congregation, which began on February 14, was attended by followers of Maulana Saad Kandhalvi. The 30-minute Akheri Munajat, led by Maulana Yusuf bin Saad, commenced at 12:37pm and ended at 1:07pm.

Earlier in the day, after Fajr prayers, Maulana Morsalin delivered a sermon.

The first phase of the six-day Ijtema was held from January 31 to February 5, with two Akheri Munajats on February 2 and 5. Followers of Maulana Zubair Ahmed took part in that phase.



### AMAR EKUSHEY-16

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### Dinajpur stands up to tough resistance

AHMAD ISTIAK

The arrival of approximately 50,000 Urdu-speaking Biharis in Dinajpur, Parbatipur and Syedpur after the 1947 Partition created a new social dynamic.

When the student community in Dinajpur vehemently protested the Pakistan government's declaration that Urdu would be the state language, they faced opposition from the Bihari community and reactionary elements in the Muslim League.

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Thousands of Muslim devotees raise their hands during the Akheri Munajat, or final prayers, seeking divine blessings for peace and prosperity for mankind as the second phase of Biswa Ijtema concluded yesterday on the banks of the Turag River in Tongi.

PHOTO: STAR