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## USAID FUND CUT Job losses shock development workers

PORIMOL PALMA

Saiful Alam (not his real name) built his career in the development sector, working in the finance departments of foreign-funded projects in Dhaka for over 15 years.

But now, at 47, he faces a harsh reality he never anticipated -- abrupt unemployment. With no other income, he and his family may soon be forced to leave the capital, where his two children are enrolled in a reputed school.

He is losing his job as the US Agency for International Development (USAID) has already issued a termination letter for the project he has been working on for the last three years.

"I am currently closing the accounts and preparing final paperwork for submission to the USAID in Washington," Saiful told The Daily Star yesterday. "After that, I'll give myself a month to find another job. If nothing comes up, I'll have no choice but to return to my village."

With more than a decade of experience in development finance, Saiful

**I don't think I'll find another position in the development sector. And why would a private company hire me at a senior level?**

Says an NGO professional who is losing his job

fears that opportunities in the shrinking sector are scarce.

My entire career has been in development projects, but the industry is now imploding.

"I don't think I'll find another position in the development sector. And why would a private company hire me at a senior level?" he said.

The prospect of relocating to his village is very real. "It will be extremely difficult for me, my family, and my children to adjust. I have no idea what I will do for a living or where my children will go to school. It's frustrating."

Saiful's plight reflects the broader crisis in the sector. With funding drying up and livelihoods at stake, the future of many in the sector remains uncertain.

He is just one of tens of thousands of development professionals facing joblessness following USAID's decision to cancel the majority of its nearly 100 projects in Bangladesh. These projects, implemented by around 400

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**TEARS OF JOY, RELIEF**  
Overwhelmed with emotion, teachers celebrate the Supreme Court's ruling that cleared the way for the appointments of 6,531 assistant teachers in government primary schools. On February 6, the High Court ruled in favour of a writ petition that challenged their appointments based on the previous quota system. The photo was taken yesterday afternoon outside the National Museum in Shahbagh. Story on page 12.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## Caught between tide and torture

Freed fishermen share tales of captivity under the Arakan Army

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN,  
back from Cox's Bazar

For 17 days, Mahmudul Hasan, a 35-year-old Bangladeshi fisherman, was held captive in a remote camp controlled by the Arakan Army in Myanmar's Rakhine State.

He had spent two decades fishing, navigating the delicate maritime boundaries between Bangladesh and Myanmar.

On February 11, Mahmudul and his

three-member crew unknowingly drifted past the maritime border into Myanmar waters, as the rising tide had pushed their nets farther than expected.

As the fishermen attempted to reel in their nets, a boat carrying seven men, two of whom were armed, approached them. Before they could react, the armed group surrounded them, leaving them no chance to escape.

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## EMBARGOES AGAINST RUSSIA

White House  
'making plans to ease sanctions'

REUTERS

The United States is drawing up a plan to potentially give Russia sanctions relief as President Donald Trump seeks to restore ties with Moscow and stop the war in Ukraine, a US official and another person familiar with the matter told Reuters.

The White House has asked the State and Treasury departments to draft a list of sanctions that could be eased for US officials to discuss with Russian representatives in the coming days as part of the administration's broad talks with Moscow on improving diplomatic and economic relations, the sources said.

The sanctions offices are now drawing up a proposal

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Firefighters inspect the charred debris inside a building in Gulshan's Shahjadpur area. Four people were killed in the fire that started at a beauty parlour on the first floor of the six-storey building around 12:30pm yesterday. Two fire engines brought the blaze under control around 1:00pm.

PHOTO: STAR

Father cried  
for help, yet  
son could do  
nothing

4 killed in city hotel fire

SHAIHEEN MOLLAH and MUNTAKIM SAAD

Monim Jamaddar's phone rang amidst the chaos in front of the hotel in flames. His father Miron's panicked voice on the other end said, "I'm trapped inside. Smoke is everywhere. I can't find a way out."

Monim then asked his father to go to the roof but then the line went dead.

A short while later, firefighters recovered Miron's body from the third floor of Saudia Residential Hotel in Gulshan's Shahjadpur yesterday.

The fire spread through the multi-storey hotel, killing four people, said Monir Hossain, senior station officer of Baridhara Fire Service.

Firefighters recovered a body from a bathroom on the third floor and three others from the fifth floor near the staircase leading to the roof.

"It is assumed that the three victims on the fifth floor tried to reach the roof

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## Zika cluster detected in Mohakhali

- Local transmission confirmed in Mohakhali, Dhaka
- First recorded zika-dengue co-infection
- Experts call for nationwide screening



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has detected a cluster of Zika virus cases for the first time, in a worrying development in a country that is already struggling to contain the Aedes mosquito-borne dengue virus.

Although Zika virus infection is rarely fatal in healthy individuals, it poses a significant threat to pregnant women, as it can cause severe fetal complications such as microcephaly, leading to an increased risk of infant mortality and intellectual disability in the infant.

Not only through mosquitoes, the disease can also spread via sexual intercourse, blood transfusion, mother-to-child transmission, and non-sexual physical contact.

As many as five Zika positive patients were identified by icddr,b scientists from 152 samples collected from the capital's Mohakhali area in 2023.

The presence of Zika virus infection in five of these samples suggests that a larger, nationwide screening is necessary to quantify

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