

REGULAR  
NEWSPAPER  
INSIDE

# The Daily Star

YOUR  
RIGHT  
TO KNOW

SECOND EDITION

DHAKA SATURDAY MARCH 8, 2025

REGD. NO. DA 781

VOL. XXXV No. 53

FALGUN 23, 1431 BS

www.thedailystar.net

RAMADAN 7, 1446 HIJRI

20 PAGES : TK 15.00

INTERNATIONAL  
WOMEN'S DAY  
2025

## Accelerate Action

For all women and  
girls: rights. equality.  
empowerment

SAUDIA AFRIN

Women in Bangladesh have made significant strides in education, employment, and leadership, yet full equality remains out of reach. Despite progress, challenges such as wage disparities, underrepresentation in decision-making, and gender-based violence persist.

SEE PAGE J3

ILLUSTRATION: SOJIB ROY



## চুলের ভিটামিন জুই মাল্টি-ভিটামিন অয়েল

চুলের সব সমস্যার সমাধান

চুল পড়া কমায়  
মাল্টি-ভিটামিন  
কোকোনাট অয়েল

সুরভিত  
স্বাস্থ্যাজ্ঞুল চুল  
মাল্টি-ভিটামিন  
বেলি অয়েল

নতুন চুল গজায়  
মাল্টি-ভিটামিন  
অনিয়ন্ত্রিত অয়েল

স্বাক্ষর মণ্ড দেশের জন  
জ্ঞান প্রযোজন সমিতি

SUN/JUL/2025

## BANKING ON EQUALITY

# Women making their mark



PRIYAM PAUL

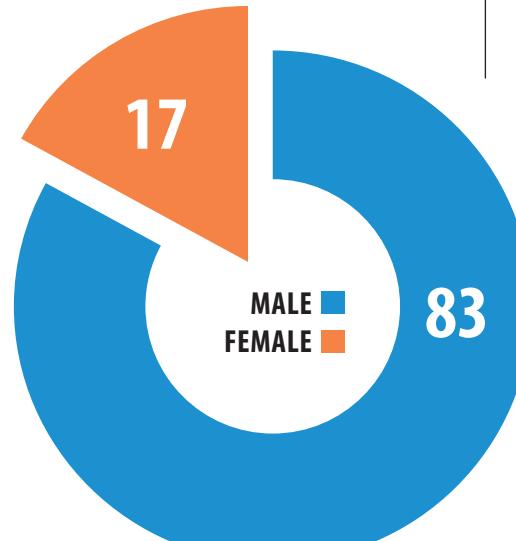
The gender gap in the banking sector has been a persistent challenge, but encouraging developments indicate a shift towards greater inclusivity. Women currently make up 16.53% of the banking workforce in Bangladesh, with a noticeable presence at entry and mid-level positions. However, their representation at leadership levels remains low. Despite this, banks are actively working to address these disparities and create a more gender-balanced industry.

A significant factor driving this change is the banking sector's commitment to gender-friendly policies. According to Bangladesh Bank's Gender Equality report (Jan-June 2024), most banks now offer maternity leave, sexual harassment prevention policies, and gender equality training. Additionally, over 65% of banks have daycare centers, and 85% provide transport facilities for female employees, ensuring a more supportive work environment.

The importance of increasing women's participation in banking extends beyond workforce inclusivity. Bank insiders emphasize that a higher representation of female staff can enhance financial inclusion, especially for women in rural and remote areas who feel more comfortable seeking assistance from female bankers.

"Women's presence at the entry level has increased, but their participation in decision-making roles remains minimal," notes Lila Rashid, former Executive Director of Bangladesh Bank. While women make up 17.19% of early-career positions, their numbers decline significantly at senior levels, with just 9.38% representation. Encouragingly, foreign banks have set a benchmark, employing 27.73% women, the highest proportion among all banking categories.

One major concern is the disconnect between university-level gender ratios and recruitment patterns in banking. Despite an almost equal male-to-female ratio in higher education, women constitute only 22% of annual entry-level hires in banks. Factors such as unconscious biases in

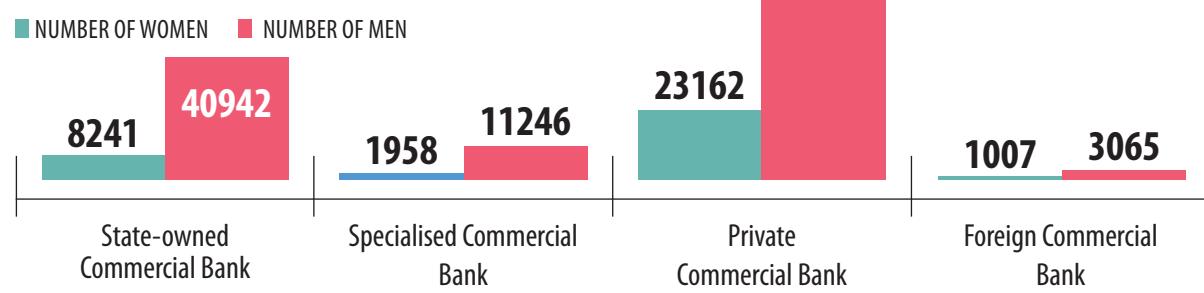


Male and Female Employee Ratio in Finance Companies in % (January-June 2024)

recruitment and limited postgraduate representation contribute to this disparity.

Fahria Haque, Head of Women Banking at City Bank, highlights this challenge: "Unconscious biases often limit women's entry into demanding roles. Many recruiters still question their ability to

## Comparison of Male and Female Employees in All Scheduled Banks (January–June 2024)



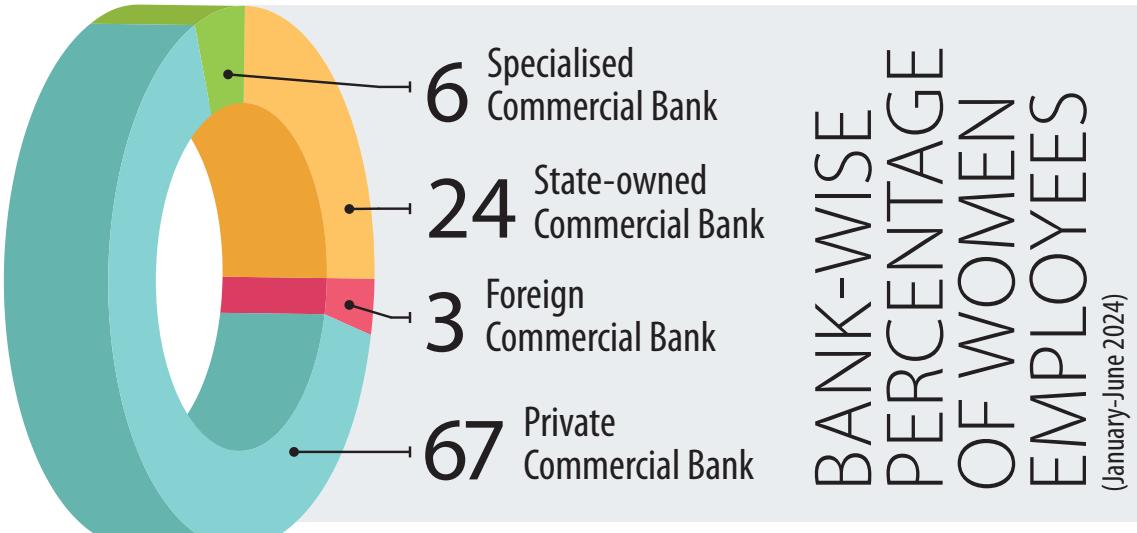
handle high-pressure positions."

Family responsibilities and organizational limitations also play a role in restricting women's career progression. Nighat Mumtaz, Senior Vice President and Head of Sustainable Banking at NCC Bank, explains, "Women are often perceived as unable to handle business-related roles requiring frequent travel. Additionally, a lack of family support forces many women to leave their jobs." She also points out the need for daycare facilities beyond head offices to support working mothers.

To foster lasting change, banking leaders emphasize the need for proactive gender-

inclusive policies. Lila Rashid suggests that banks must address why women stagnate in their careers and ensure policies supporting women's professional growth are actively implemented. Increasing female representation in decision-making roles will not only strengthen gender balance but also contribute to a more inclusive financial sector.

As the industry progresses, these steps indicate a promising future where women in banking can rise to leadership positions, breaking long-standing barriers and contributing significantly to the financial landscape of Bangladesh.



SOURCE: GENDER EQUALITY REPORT (JANUARY-JUNE 2024), BANGLADESH BANK

City Bank PLC | City Bank Center  
28 Gulshan Avenue, Gulshan-1, Dhaka  
16234 | citybankplc.com

**Her Comeback Story**  
begins here

A break isn't the end—it's a new beginning.

Whether you stepped away for family, motherhood, or a personal pause, your talent hasn't faded—it has evolved.

At City Bank, we believe in second beginnings. We welcome women returning from career breaks with equal opportunities to grow and thrive.

Your journey continues. Let's write the next chapter together.

City Bank | Empowering Comebacks

Scan to apply

FOOTER/25

**EBLWOMEN** BANKING | Eastern Bank PLC.

Celebrate the *Essence* of Womanhood with great offers on EBL Women Cards

Scan to Know More

QR Code

Eastern Bank PLC. Eastern Bank PLC. VISA

16230 | myebi.com.bd

# Empowering women, transforming Futures

**The Daily Star (TDS):** What is the current level of women's engagement as employees and customers in the banking sector?

**Ali Reza Iftekhar (ARI):** Women's participation in banking, both as employees and customers, is gradually increasing but remains lower than expected. According to EBL's Annual Report 2023, women represent 18.56% of the total workforce at the bank. On the customer side, EBL Women Banking has achieved a 15% growth in women's deposit portfolio and an 18% growth in women's retail loans. In 2023 alone, EBL disbursed BDT 947.37 million in loans to 265 women entrepreneurs. The introduction of agent banking services, digital banking platforms, and SME loans has contributed to increasing women's access to financial services.

**TDS:** What special banking features or tailored services does your bank offer for women?

**ARI:** EBL Women Banking provides a wide range of specialized financial products and services designed exclusively for women, including:

#### Deposit Products

EBL Women Savings Account - Special savings account with preferential rates.

EBL Women Millionaire DPS - Long-term savings plan to ensure financial security.

EBL Women Confidence DPS - Encourages disciplined savings.

EBL Oviashi Current Account - A business-focused current account designed for women entrepreneurs.

#### Loan Products

EBL Women's Loan - Collateral-free loans for personal needs.

EBL Mukti Loan - SME loans tailored for women

entrepreneurs.

EBL Home Loan, Home Credit & Auto Loan - Exclusive financing options for housing, renovation, and vehicles.

#### Women-Centric Cards

EBL Visa Women Platinum Debit & Credit Cards - Offering discounts and benefits at lifestyle stores.

EBL Women Signature Credit Card - Premium benefits for high-value customers.

#### Non-Financial Services

Women Banking Help Desk -



implemented:

1. Expanding Digital Banking Solutions: EBL's all-inclusive Women Banking Portal allows women to open accounts, apply for secured loans, and complete online business training from home. Increasing digital outreach can help rural women overcome mobility challenges.

2. Strengthening Agent Banking Networks: By deploying agent banking services in rural areas, EBL has provided banking access to underserved women. Strengthening these networks will help bring more women into the formal banking sector.

3. Providing Tailored Financial Literacy Programs: Many women entrepreneurs lack knowledge about managing business finances. EBL's financial

literacy workshops, business boot camps, and online learning resources help bridge this gap.

4. Offering More Collateral-Free Loans: Women often face challenges in securing loans due to a lack of assets. Expanding collateral-free loan programs such as EBL Mukti Loan can significantly improve financial accessibility.

5. Enhancing Workplace Gender Diversity: With only 18.56% female representation among employees, EBL can implement targeted hiring programs, leadership development initiatives, and workplace flexibility policies to encourage more women to join the banking workforce.

Dedicated service points across branches.

Entrepreneurial Training - Business and financial literacy programs in collaboration with 16 top women's associations.

Digital Marketing Support - Assistance in e-commerce, social media branding, and business growth.

**TDS:** How can women's access to banking services be increased?

**ARI:** To enhance financial inclusion for women, the following approaches can be

Mousumi also highlights the urgent need for security, emphasizing that law enforcement must take a stronger role in protecting women in public spaces.

#### Security and Social Barriers

Security concerns remain a major issue for women entrepreneurs. Waresa Prity, founder of Her-e-Tread, highlights how political instability and rising gender-based violence are forcing many women to shut down their physical shops.

"Women's contributions often go unrecognized because many run unregistered businesses without licenses or tax records. Continuous research and data collection are necessary to track their participation and ensure economic inclusion," says Sangita Ahmed, Senior Vice President of BWCCI.

Women also struggle to secure loans. Banks frequently reject women's applications without proper explanation, adding to the barriers. "For true financial inclusion, banks must document rejections, clarify requirements, and adopt a more supportive approach," Sangita adds.

To narrow the gap, Bangladesh Bank mandates that 10% of CMSME loan portfolios be allocated to women entrepreneurs, with plans to increase this to 15% by 2024. Additionally, the Small Enterprise Refinance Scheme has expanded from BDT 850 crore to BDT 1500 crore, offering collateral-free loans up to BDT 25 lakh for women-led businesses.

"Women Banking has created a financial ecosystem where women from all economic backgrounds can thrive as entrepreneurs, professionals, and financially independent individuals," says Ali Reza Iftekhar, Managing Director and CEO, Eastern Bank.

**Urban vs. Rural Disparities**  
Women's labor force participation is higher in rural areas than in urban centers, leading to higher unemployment and underemployment for urban women. Many are trapped in informal sectors with no job security, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and workplace violence.

"Expanding rural transportation, digital infrastructure, and communication networks can help women access broader markets. Establishing economic zones for women entrepreneurs and strengthening institutions like BSCIC and the SME Foundation are critical," says Mousumi Islam, President of AGWEB.

By implementing gender-sensitive policies, financial empowerment programs, and workplace safety measures, Bangladesh can ensure that gender equality is not just an aspiration, but a reality.

## Women lead, economy thrives

This year's International Women's Day theme, "For All Women and Girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment," highlights the urgency of inclusivity. Bangladesh has strengthened gender equality through commitments like CEDAW and the Beijing Declaration, alongside national policies such as the Perspective Plan (2021-2041) and the National Women's Development Policy (2011).

While Bangladesh ranks 59th in the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index (2023), it stands 139th out of 146 in women's economic participation, revealing barriers to financial inclusion and leadership. Bridging these gaps through policy reforms, financial access, and workplace inclusion is essential for ensuring sustainable empowerment for women in Bangladesh.

#### Breaking Barriers in Economic Participation

"Bangladesh has progressed in gender equality through policies and legislation, but their effectiveness remains limited. Women's participation in decision-making is minimal, widening the gap in social and economic status," says Professor Muhammad Shahadat Hossain Siddiquee, an Economics Professor at the University of Dhaka.

While women's workforce participation has grown from 4% in 1974 to 43% in 2023 (BSS), men's participation remains at 80%, creating a significant gender gap. Women make up 2.59 crore of Bangladesh's 7.34 crore workforce, playing key roles in the garment industry, microcredit programs, and rural development.

To overcome economic deprivation, women must engage in income-generating activities. Their participation is essential for empowerment, positioning them as decision-makers in society, ultimately benefiting the economy," says Professor Sanzida Akhter from the Department of Women and Gender Studies.

Prof. Sanzida's research highlights that women initiate businesses in times of crisis by taking loans, but control often shifts to male family members once businesses stabilize. Though women are the primary borrowers of microcredit, they often lack decision-making power over financial matters—yet remain responsible for repayment.

#### Financial Exclusion: The Biggest Hurdle

"Women's access to finance is crucial for economic growth. However, cultural traditions, gender barriers,

# Collaboration for women's financial inclusion

**The Daily Star (TDS):** What is the current level of women's engagement as employees and customers in the banking sector?

**Mashrur Arefin (MA):** Women's participation in Bangladesh's banking sector continues to rise, reflecting broader strides toward gender equality. At our bank, women constitute 18% of employees, with steady growth in leadership roles (3 out of 10 directors, and 11% of the senior management) driven by inclusive hiring, mentorship programs, and policies supporting work-life balance.

As customers, women are increasingly shaping financial trends, particularly in entrepreneurship and SME sectors.

Over 26% of our SME clients and 38% of the Agent Banking

products and offers business advisory support, literacy and capacity building training, and networking opportunities for women. We also offer:

a. Women Entrepreneurship Loans: with Lower interest rates, flexible repayment, and collateral-free options under government-backed refinancing schemes.

b. Digital Nano Loans: Instant, small-ticket loans via bkash, enabling rural women to address urgent financial needs.

c. Skill Development Programs:



Customers are women, mobilizing loans and deposits across the country.

**Mashrur Arefin,** Managing Director & CEO, City Bank

systems. A hyperlocal outreach, by setting up women-only kiosks, collaborations with NGOs and local leaders can foster trust and awareness in underserved regions. To foster women SMEs, expanding and promoting credit guarantee schemes would ease collateral requirements and encourage banks to prioritize women-centric loan products.

**TDS:** How can women's access to banking services be increased?

**MA:** Accelerating financial inclusion for women demands collaborative action. Financial literacy campaigns like grassroots workshops, mentorship networks, and community-led programs can demystify banking processes and credit

# ACCELERATING INCLUSION

Bank Asia has financially included over 6.8 million people, of which 4.4 million are women, reflecting its strong commitment towards driving inclusive banking and gender equality.



## Break barriers, ensure WASH access for women

**The Daily Star (TDS):** What are the key obstacles to achieving universal access to WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene)?

**Hasin Jahan (HJ):** Significant challenges remain in ensuring universal WASH access. In a recent project under RAJUK, we selected a mixed-income area—ranging from high-income residents to slum dwellers—as a pilot for scalable solutions.

A key challenge we identified is the disparity in water access. Previously, the lack of land ownership denied the poor access to water. Now, they can apply collectively based on human rights principles to secure access. While WASA has improved water distribution in slums, access remains uneven.

In NGO-supported areas, distribution is systematic, but in others, many rely on illegal sources, often at high costs. Some have organised informal water distribution networks, yet resources remain scarce—one tap serves 100 people across 30–35 families. A stark inequality is evident: slum dwellers survive on just 7.5 liters per person daily—below emergency standards—while households in Banani consume approximately 250 liters per person.

Sanitation is equally dire, with shared toilets used regardless of gender. Women and girls often shower in open spaces, facing severe dignity and safety concerns.

**TDS:** What additional barriers do marginalised people, especially women, girls, persons with disabilities, and indigenous communities, face in accessing WASH?

**HJ:** Marginalised communities face significant barriers to WASH access, primarily due to a lack of security, dignity, and recognition of their unique needs. While men also face security challenges, the issue is more severe for women.

Women's access is further hindered by stereotypes suggesting they do not deserve additional privileges, compromising their dignity in WASH provisions.

Persons with disabilities are often excluded from consideration when designing WASH facilities, reflecting a broader disregard for their dignity and needs. Similarly, women's specific requirements are frequently overlooked. For instance, while men may still use unclean toilets as they typically urinate while standing, these facilities are often entirely unusable for women due to biological and practical differences.



improve usability and generate revenue.

**TDS:** What roles should the government and private sector play in addressing these barriers?

**HJ:** The government alone cannot resolve all WASH challenges, given limited resources and tax evasion. To overcome these barriers, the government should focus on maximising available resources while encouraging private sector involvement.

For example, informal water distributors who charge for water access have successfully utilised government water connections to build small businesses. With financial and technical support, such entrepreneurs can expand their services by adding small

**Hasin Jahan,**  
Country Director,  
WaterAid  
Bangladesh

toilets and water stations, creating safe spaces for women.

Moreover, the government, alongside city corporations and other authorities, must ensure water access for vulnerable groups, such as street vendors and women working in public spaces.

To engage citizens in improving public toilet management, we propose a service-oriented leasing model driven by public feedback. Currently, leases are profit driven, leading to mismanagement. Instead, lease renewal should depend on user ratings, with higher scores—especially from women—ensuring priority for the next term.

Finally, to increase women's participation in the workforce and ensure economic growth, the government and private sector must create an enabling environment that includes reliable WASH access as a basic necessity.

**TDS:** What effective strategies can help overcome these barriers?

**HJ:** To address WASH barriers, existing resources must be optimised. Our analysis found 18 public toilets and two WASA ATMs in a selected area, but only three toilets were in good condition. Three were in moderate condition, while 12 were poorly maintained.

Using a mathematical model, we identified high-demand areas like bus stands requiring toilets within a 200-meter interval. Although 18 toilets existed, poor placement limited accessibility. Renovating six usable toilets and adding seven new ones would optimise resources. Additionally, poor management renders many toilets unusable. A sustainable model—charging fees while ensuring affordability—can

### WOMEN-LED VIRTUAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

## From Clicks to Commerce

**AYMAN ANIKA**

Digital connectivity has transformed entrepreneurship for women in Bangladesh. Once limited to physical marketplaces, women are now leveraging virtual platforms to establish businesses, access financial resources, and overcome socio-economic barriers. What started as simple networking spaces has evolved into thriving ecosystems for female entrepreneurs.

For Jannati Shahid Asha, an online clothing business owner from Sathkira, social media has been a crucial tool. "Facebook has been an incredible platform for small businesses like mine. It allows me to engage with customers

digital financial services, and business networks enable women to bypass traditional barriers. These platforms offer visibility, market access, and easier financial transactions. Additionally, digital training programs can equip women with the skills they need to thrive."

Arifa Malik Bristy, the founder of Cookie Craft BD, uses social media to grow her brand. "I focus on visually appealing content—high-quality images and videos of the baking process. Instagram and Facebook work best for engagement, but I'm still learning to optimise reach," she shares. "SEO-optimised captions, relevant hashtags, and reels help, but digital marketing is complex."

Beyond visibility, virtual platforms help women expand markets and boost sales. Waresa Khanam, a Prity of Her-e-Tread

Bangladesh Bank introduced the Small Enterprise Refinance Scheme for Women Entrepreneurs in 2023, offering loans at a 1% incentive rate with a 5% interest cap. While this initiative makes financing more accessible, it does not eliminate all challenges.

"The algorithm keeps changing, and paid promotions are expensive,"

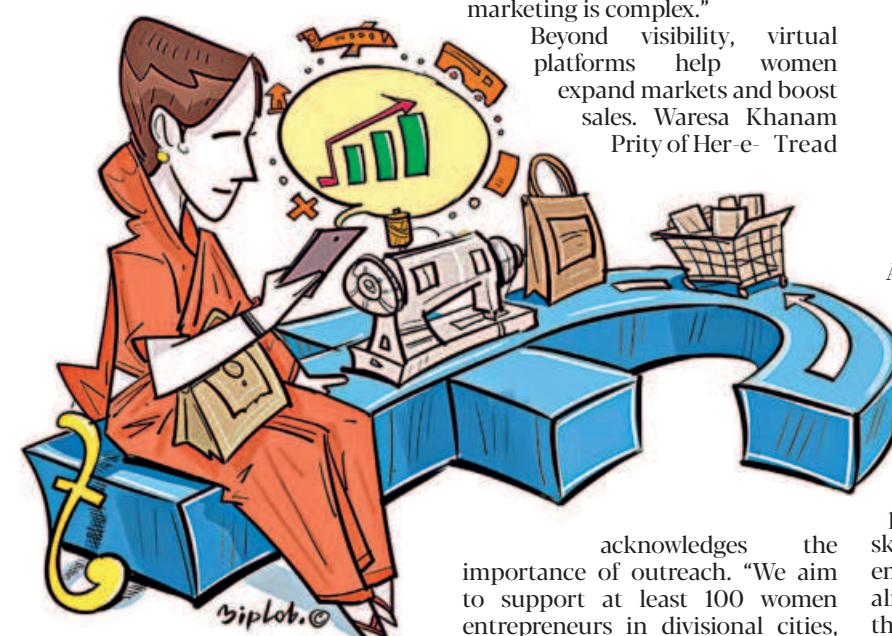
**Women still struggle to access business loans due to complex banking procedures and collateral requirements. Societal pressures further complicate matters.**

Asha points out. "Even if I have a good product, I must invest constantly in ads to stay visible. It's frustrating because not everyone can afford digital marketing."

For long-term success, systemic support is necessary. Ahmed stresses, "We need policy reforms, financial inclusion, skill development, and digital empowerment. If all these elements align, women-led businesses will thrive."

Advocacy groups are pushing for policies prioritising female entrepreneurs, streamlining loan access, and enhancing cybersecurity for digital businesses. More tailored workshops on branding, social media marketing, and e-commerce logistics are needed.

Government and private sector collaboration is crucial to providing low-interest loans and business grants, ensuring that women entrepreneurs continue to grow in Bangladesh's evolving digital economy.



acknowledges the importance of outreach. "We aim to support at least 100 women entrepreneurs in divisional cities, but quality control and sustainable business models remain key challenges," she notes.

However, barriers remain, especially in financing. Women still struggle to access business loans due to complex banking procedures and collateral requirements.

Societal pressures further complicate matters. "Families often question why women should step out for business, and mobility restrictions make things harder," Prity adds.

Recognising these hurdles,

**Prime Bank**

**Neera**

# Prime Bank Neera

*Empowering Your Steps*

Today's women are unstoppable—leading, innovating, and transforming the world in countless roles. As trailblazing professionals, visionary entrepreneurs, dedicated mothers, and impactful community leaders, their influence is boundless. Neera is here with tailored financial solutions, fueling their aspirations at every step.

Step forward with confidence. **Thrive with Neera** by your side.



Sign Language  
Video Call Service  
013 211 16218  
10 AM - 4 PM

24/7 Helpline  
**16218**  
primebank.com.bd

DHAKA SATURDAY MARCH 8, 2025

REGD. NO. DA 781

VOL. XXXV No. 53

FALGUN 23, 1431 BS

www.thedailystar.net

RAMADAN 7, 1446 HIJRI

20 PAGES: Tk 15.00



Footwork,  
fitness and  
fearlessness

WR1



Favorable  
weather boosts  
litchi yield  
hopes

P5



Trump writes to  
Iran, wants to  
negotiate nuke  
deal

P6



FIFA lifts  
restricted  
financing on  
BFF

P11

## ROOPPUR POWER PLANT Govt eyes quick completion

Project gets highest allocation in revised  
budget; MRT, Matarbari also on priority list

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant has seen the highest allocation for a single project in the revised Annual Development Plan as the interim government wants to make it operational as quickly as possible.

The government approved the Tk 2,16,000 crore revised ADP for FY25 last week, downsized by Tk 49,000 crore from the original one.

The Rooppur power station and related projects have been allocated Tk 11,899 crore, including Tk 9,454 crore for the power plant alone. The allocation for these projects was Tk 10,502 crore in the original ADP.

The total cost of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant project is Tk 1,14,225 crore, with the majority financed by Russia. Around Tk 75,000 crore was spent from the total cost as of June last year.

Five other projects related to the electricity line, high frequency telecommunications system, and water supply for the power plant received a combined allocation of Tk 2,424 crore in the revised ADP, up from the original allocation of Tk 2,226 crore.

The total cost of the five projects is Tk 17,471 crore, of which Tk 6,792 crore was spent as of June last year.

### REVISED FUND ALLOCATION FOR MAJOR PROJECTS

Project	Total cost (Tk in crore)	Spending till June 24 (Tk in crore)	Allocation in FY25 (Tk in crore)
Rooppur Power Plant	1,14,225	74,991	9,454
5 Rooppur related projects	17,471	6,792	2,445
3 MRT lines	1,28,687	30,719	4,552
4 Jica-funded projects in Matarbari	1,05,455	45,601	12,189
3 China-funded major projects	52,387	24,677	8,288

These include a Tk 10,981 crore power evacuation line funded under an Indian line of credit (LoC). As of June 2024, about Tk 5,242 crore was spent from the total cost. In the revised ADP, the project received Tk 648 crore against the original Tk 838 crore.

A joint India-Bangladesh review on Wednesday and Thursday found the implementation of the projects under the Indian lines of credit to be slow. However, the Rooppur power evacuation line project has seen fast implementation.

According to the original project proposal, unit-1 of the power plant was supposed to go into operation in December 2022, unit-2 in October 2023 and the entire project was scheduled for completion by December 31, 2025.

The construction of unit-1 formally started in November 2017 and unit-2 in July 2018.

However, implementation has been delayed due to several reasons and now the government is expecting to complete it by December 2027.

Project officials said they were planning to start the test run of the 1,200MW unit-1 by this year and go for commercial production in the first half of next year.

Russia's state corporation for nuclear energy Rosatom is implementing the Rooppur project.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

Protesters in front of the Sangsad Bhaban yesterday demand an end to violence against women. They also call for the home adviser's removal from office for what they say is the administration's failure to take effective steps to ensure women's safety. Story on page 3.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## NCP ready for polls at any time

Nahid says, but first wants  
July charter, progress in  
uprising killing trials

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Citizen Party is practically ready for elections at any time, its Convenor Nahid Islam said yesterday.

He, however, added that his party wants the "July Charter" in effect and visible progress towards justice for the July killings before the national election.

"We said we wanted to see a constituent assembly election in addition to the national parliament election. However, the election is not our only demand at this moment... We also want to see a visible trial process. We want the July Charter, which was supposed to be signed by all [parties], to be implemented before the election," Nahid told a press briefing.

The briefing was held at Banglamotor following the first general meeting of the NCP.

Nahid said the implementation of the July Charter will allow the general public to see which political parties are in favour of or against reforming the state.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Amligola is known for bangles, finely crafted by artisans at small factories in the Old Dhaka neighbourhood. Although business remains dull most of the time, the workers are currently busy ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr shopping season. This photo was taken yesterday.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

## 8-year-old struggles for life after 'rape' STAR REPORT

## The picture of violence against women is grim

Data show nearly 12,000 women  
and girls faced violence in last  
5yrs, over 6,000 raped

NILIMA JAHAN

While International Women's Day is a global celebration of women's rights, equality, and empowerment, the statistics from Bangladesh on violence against women paint a troubling and stark reality.

In the past five years from 2020-2024, at least 11,758 women and girls in Bangladesh have fallen victim to torture and violence, with 6,305 of them being raped, according to data from the Human Rights Support Society (HRSS).

What's even more alarming is that 3,471 of these rape victims were under the age of 18, making up over 55 percent of the total cases.

Additionally, 1,089 women and girls were gang-raped, and 207 were murdered following sexual assault, including 118 children.

Moreover, at least 50 victims took their own lives due to the trauma they endured.

Violence against women goes beyond rape.

In the last five years, a total of 2,624 women and girls have suffered sexual harassment.

At least 355 faced physical abuse for dowry in this period. Of them, 26 committed suicide, according to HRSS.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

## Fight to increase women's political participation

SHAVEENA ANAM

International Women's Day has its roots in political struggles for gender equality, yet its original essence has been diluted over time.

Women's political participation is a fundamental requirement for democracy, justice and effective governance. Studies conducted by the UN have consistently shown that when women hold leadership positions, societies benefit, particularly in areas of health, education and social welfare.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

Yet Bangladesh experiences a stark contradiction.

Since 1991, Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia have alternated in holding the highest office, but their leadership did not translate into meaningful structural change.

Critical sectors like health and education remain severely underfunded, while entrenched patriarchy and tokenism continue to marginalise women in politics.

Thanks to the July uprising, Bangladesh now has an opportunity to reshape this narrative. Can the country leverage its evolving political landscape to ensure greater female participation in governance?

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

## Star INTERVIEW

## Ensuring data interoperability a top priority

Says Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, Yunus's  
special assistant for ICT,  
posts and telecom

MAHMUDUL HASAN

Ensuring interoperability of data across all ministries will be a top priority for the government to deliver seamless public services, said Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, the newly appointed special assistant to chief adviser with executive authority over the ministry of posts, telecommunications and ICT.

"I have met the chief adviser and there is a clear directive from him to establish interoperability among ministries to streamline service delivery – achieving data interoperability is my foremost responsibility," he told The Daily Star on Wednesday.

To achieve this, he plans to engage with all ministries to explore digital transformation strategies and implement interoperability for more efficient services.

"I have worked with Muhammad Yunus for a few days now and found that his ideas are focused on simplifying systems to improve public services. I initially started



SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

## 14 SAD activists held for 'looting, vandalism' in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Joint forces yesterday detained 14 leaders and activists of Students Against Discrimination (SAD) of Kalabagan unit, including its convener Salauddin Salman, for attacking and looting the office of a construction firm in the capital's Kalabagan area.

They were handed over to Kalabagan Police Station, its Officer-in-Charge Muktaruzzaman told a press briefing at 11:30pm.

He said the detainees vandalised and looted the office of Kabico Ltd, owned by Sheikh Kabir, at Russell Square around 2:30pm, saying that it was an Awami League office.

The suspects took away Tk 3 lakh and four computers from the office, the OC said, quoting the firm owner.

Police went there upon getting a 999 call. Army personnel also went to the scene.

Police recovered Tk 31,000 from the detainees, the OC said, adding that a case was filed in this connection.

## NCP ready for polls at any time

FROM PAGE 1

The NCP wants to see the rapid implementation of a July Proclamation as well, Nahid said, adding that the charter and proclamation are two different things.

The proclamation was demanded by the students much earlier while the Charter was mentioned by the chief adviser.

Responding to a question, Nahid said it would be possible to hold both the constituent assembly and national parliament elections within the desired timeframe if political consensus could be reached.

"I do not think it's impossible to hold the polls in December even if it is an election to the constituent assembly. It primarily depends on political will and consensus."

Referring to an interview he gave to Reuters, Nahid said his statements were mistranslated by various media outlets on Thursday.

"I did not say that [holding] an election this year was not possible. I said given the current law and order situation and the weak state of police, holding elections would be extremely challenging."

Besides, the police officers lack recent experience in working while a fair election is held, he said.

From that standpoint, we said that the policing system and law and order situation must be improved before elections could be held. The government, political parties, and various social forces must come forward and cooperate to achieve that."

Nahid said the NCP leaders strongly condemned the incidents of rape, sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women.

"We call upon the interim government to take a firm stance to ensure women's safety. We demand that perpetrators be brought to justice."

He said the female members of the NCP and its student wing had been the target of cyberbullying by the Awami League activists.

### TRANSPARENCY IN FUNDING

"We want transparency in who is providing financial support [for a political party] and how it is being spent. This culture of accountability should be adopted by all political parties..."

But the NCP alone cannot develop a political culture, Nahid said.

"If we disclose the names of people who financially support us, the government must ensure that they will not face any harm. In reality, this culture of transparency has not yet been established in Bangladesh."

Nahid then sought support from honest individuals who wanted to rebuild the country.

As a people's party, the NCP will be run by people's money, he said.

"We formed a financial policy team, and are discussing with Bangladeshi economists at home and abroad to develop a political financial policy. We will present this policy to you in the future."

Responding to a question, he said, "It will take us more time to express our stance on forming alliances...."

### STUDENTS AGAINST DISCRIMINATION CEASED TO EXIST

"The Students Against Discrimination is no longer in its previous form. A student body has been formed, and a political party has emerged. We call upon the law enforcement agencies to take legal action against anyone who uses this identity for wrongdoing."

## 8-year-old

FROM PAGE 1

According to a family member, the child's condition was deteriorating, and as there were injuries to her throat, doctors say she could have been strangled too.

"We are waiting for her to regain consciousness. That's our only hope now," said her uncle.

Medical Officer Subash Ranjan Halder of Magura Sadar Hospital said the child was bleeding from her vagina, had an injury mark across her neck and scratches on several parts of her body.

Ayub Ali, officer-in-charge of Magura Sadar Police Station, said police were investigating the incident.

[Our Benapole correspondent contributed to this report]



Police use teargas to disperse a procession of banned militant outfit Hizb ut-Tahrir in front of Baitul Mukarram Masjid in the capital after Juma prayers yesterday. Law enforcers detained several men from the spot.

PHOTO: STAR

SEE PAGE 6 COL 6

## Govt eyes quick completion

FROM PAGE 1

In a meeting with Rosatom Director General Alexey Likhachev in Dhaka towards the end of last month, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus emphasised the timely completion of the project to meet Bangladesh's growing energy needs.

"We are looking forward to your support, which is very important to us," Prof Yunus told the Rosatom director general, according to a media statement from the Chief Adviser's Office.

Earlier in January, Finance and Science and Technology Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed told The Daily Star that the interim government was committed to completing the Rooppur power plant project. "We have been prioritising the project for its quick implementation," he said.

Rooppur is among the top 15 projects that received a total allocation of Tk 44,822 crore in the revised ADP.

Besides Rooppur, Matarbari coal-fired power plant project has seen a rise in allocation in the revised ADP, from Tk 6,105 crore to Tk 7,050 crore.

The total cost of the power plant project is Tk 56,693 crore, of which about Tk 44,000 crore was spent as of June last year.

"We call upon the interim government to take a firm stance to ensure women's safety. We demand that perpetrators be brought to justice."

From that standpoint, we said that the policing system and law and order situation must be improved before elections could be held. The government, political parties, and various social forces must come forward and cooperate to achieve that."

Nahid said the NCP leaders strongly condemned the incidents of rape, sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women.

"We want transparency in who is providing financial support [for a political party] and how it is being spent. This culture of accountability should be adopted by all political parties..."

But the NCP alone cannot develop a political culture, Nahid said.

"If we disclose the names of people who financially support us, the government must ensure that they will not face any harm. In reality, this culture of transparency has not yet been established in Bangladesh."

Nahid then sought support from honest individuals who wanted to rebuild the country.

As a people's party, the NCP will be run by people's money, he said.

"We formed a financial policy team, and are discussing with Bangladeshi economists at home and abroad to develop a political financial policy. We will present this policy to you in the future."

Responding to a question, he said, "It will take us more time to express our stance on forming alliances...."

### STUDENTS AGAINST DISCRIMINATION CEASED TO EXIST

"The Students Against Discrimination is no longer in its previous form. A student body has been formed, and a political party has emerged. We call upon the law enforcement agencies to take legal action against anyone who uses this identity for wrongdoing."

"We will focus on current projects that enhance data speed and will undertake new projects if necessary. The fibre network will be optimised by eliminating monopolistic control, unlocking economic potential and making data more affordable – something the public has long demanded."

When asked about steps to investigate allegations of massive corruption under the previous administration, Taiyeb revealed that a committee for a white paper on ICT has already been formed, involving ICT experts, legal professionals and journalists.

"They have already started their background work and an official gazette will soon be published to formalise the committee."

Discussions would take place with government advisers regarding the formation of a separate committee to investigate corruption in the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission and the Posts and Telecommunications Division.

"I want to see the BTRC as a capable and independent commission. However, an organisation only

allocations for most other projects have been cut as their implementation has been hampered due to political unrest in the country since the start of this fiscal year.

Three more projects currently underway at Matarbari in Maheshkhali for the development of a deep sea port have been allocated a total of Tk 5,139 crore in the revised ADP against the original allocation of Tk 8,758 crore.

Planning ministry officials said the fund cut for the three projects was high because of slow implementation. The total cost of the three projects approved in 2020 is Tk 48,762 crore, of which Tk 1,601 crore has been spent so far.

Three other Jica-funded projects on Dhaka's transport system have received large allocations in the revised ADP. They are MRT-6, MRT-1 and MRT-5 with a combined total cost of Tk 12,687 crore.

They have been allocated Tk 4,552 crore in the revised ADP against Tk 6,537 crore allocated in the original one.

MRT-6 has already been operational from Uttara to Motijheel, while the construction of its extension from Motijheel to Kamalapur is underway.

This project has been allocated Tk 1,641 crore in the revised ADP.

The estimated cost for MRT-1 is Tk 53,972 crore, and as of June last year, Tk 2,469 crore has been spent.

In the revised ADP, Tk 2,043 crore has been allocated for the project.

MRT-1 will run from Hazrat

Shahjalal International Airport to Kamalapur via Purbachal with parts of the line to be built underground.

MRT-5 northern route, which will connect Hemayetpur of Savar with Bhatara in the capital via Gabtoli, Mirpur, and Gulshan, will be implemented at a total cost of Tk 41,238 crore. So far, Tk 4,063 crore has been spent for the project.

In the revised ADP, MRT-5 has seen a slightly reduced allocation of Tk 8,686 crore from the original Tk 9,686 crore.

The allocation for Shahjalal airport's Jica-funded third terminal has remained unchanged at Tk 3,535 crore.

Another Jica-funded project, Jamuna Rail Bridge, has received Tk 2,337 crore in the revised ADP.

Three China-funded projects are also on the list of projects with large allocations in the revised ADP.

Of them, the Dhaka-Ashulia Elevated Expressway project saw a slight cut in allocation and received Tk 3,663 crore in the revised ADP.

Its total cost is Tk 17,553 crore, of which Tk 8,691 crore was spent as of June last year.

The two other China-funded projects, which are related to strengthening power lines, received Tk 4,625 crore combinedly in the revised ADP while the original allocation was Tk 7,039 crore.

The combined cost for the two projects is Tk 34,794 crore, of which Tk 15,986 crore was spent until June last year.

He explained that while more women seek education and work, it remains taboo in many areas, leading to discouragement and obstacles that marginalise them.

"Religious groups, through misinterpretations of religion, appear as barriers to women's development in social and political spheres. The lack of proper implementation of laws, police ignorance, and delays in the judicial system allow criminals to evade punishment," he added.

He also said social barriers often prevent women from seeking legal

domestic violence, while 20 took their own lives. One woman was killed in an acid attack.

HRSS executive director, Izazul Islam, highlighted several reasons behind the rising violence, discrimination, and misogyny against women in Bangladesh.

"Superstition and distorted religious interpretations regarding women's participation in education are significant factors," he said.

He explained that while more women seek education and work, it remains taboo in many areas, leading to discouragement and obstacles that marginalise them.

"Religious groups, through misinterpretations of religion, appear as barriers to women's development in social and political spheres. The lack of proper implementation of laws, police ignorance, and delays in the judicial system allow criminals to evade punishment," he added.

He also said social barriers often prevent women from seeking legal

domestic violence, while 20 took their own lives. One woman was killed in an acid attack.

HRSS executive director, Izazul Islam, highlighted several reasons behind the rising violence, discrimination, and misogyny against women in Bangladesh.

"Superstition and distorted religious interpretations regarding women's participation in education are significant factors," he said.

He explained that while more women seek education and work, it remains taboo in many areas, leading to discouragement and obstacles that marginalise them.

"Religious groups, through misinterpretations of religion, appear as barriers to women's development in social and political spheres. The lack of proper implementation of laws, police ignorance, and delays in the judicial system allow criminals to evade punishment," he added.

He also said social barriers often prevent women from seeking legal

domestic violence, while 20 took their own lives. One woman was killed in an acid attack.

HRSS executive director, Izazul Islam, highlighted several reasons behind the rising violence, discrimination, and misogyny against women in Bangladesh.

"Superstition and distorted religious interpretations regarding women's participation in education are significant factors," he said.

He explained that while more women seek education and work, it remains taboo in many areas, leading to discouragement and obstacles that marginalise them.

"Religious groups, through misinterpretations of religion, appear as barriers to women's development in social and political spheres. The lack of proper implementation of laws, police ignorance, and delays in the judicial system allow criminals to evade punishment," he added.

He also said social barriers often prevent women from seeking legal

domestic violence, while 20 took their own lives. One woman was killed in an acid attack.

HRSS executive director, Izazul Islam, highlighted several reasons behind the rising violence, discrimination, and misogyny against women in Bangladesh.

"Superstition and distorted religious interpretations regarding women's participation in education are significant factors," he said.

He explained that while more women seek education and work, it remains taboo in many areas, leading to discouragement and obstacles that marginalise them.

"Religious groups, through misinterpretations of religion, appear as barriers to women's development in social and political spheres. The lack of proper implementation of laws, police ignorance, and delays in the judicial system allow criminals to evade punishment," he added.

He also said social barriers often prevent women from seeking legal

domestic violence, while 20 took their own lives. One woman was killed in an acid attack.

HRSS executive director, Izazul Islam, highlighted several reasons behind the rising violence, discrimination, and misogyny against women in Bangladesh.

"Superstition and distorted religious interpretations regarding women's participation in education are significant factors," he said.

He explained that while more women seek education and work, it remains taboo in many areas, leading to discouragement and obstacles that marginalise them.

"Religious groups, through misinterpretations of religion, appear as barriers to women's development in social and political spheres. The lack of proper implementation of laws, police ignorance, and delays in the judicial system allow criminals to evade punishment," he added.

He also said social barriers often prevent women from seeking legal

domestic violence, while 20 took their own lives. One woman was killed in an acid attack.

HRSS executive director, Izazul Islam, highlighted several reasons behind the rising violence, discrimination, and misogyny against women in Bangladesh.

"Superstition and distorted religious interpretations regarding women's participation in education are significant factors," he said.

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Take stern action against abusers of women  
Fakhrul urges govt  
UNB, Dhaka

Voiceing "profound concern" over the growing incidents of harassment and abuse towards women, the BNP yesterday urged the government to take stern action against the perpetrators.

In a statement, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir strongly condemned and protested the violence against women, including various forms of harassment.

"I urge the government to establish justice and peace in the country by decisively addressing all anarchic situations, including violence against women," he said.

The BNP leader said women are playing a leading role alongside men

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2



Selina Begum uses a jute sack to spread water and soybean oil to this roller applying bitumen on the Barishal-Dhaka highway. After working from morning to evening, the 56-year-old earns only Tk 500 per day. The photo was taken at Gournadi, Barishal yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Recognise women participants in July uprising  
Demand 55 women's rights organisations

## KEY DEMANDS

- 1 Urgent action against violence against women
- 2 Curb fundamentalist, extremist cultures
- 3 Ensure women's participation in government, politics
- 4 Revise laws on rape, dowry, harassment, violence
- 5 Establish victim support centres, rehabilitation facilities
- 6 Promote gender-sensitive education

## STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A group of women activists staged a silent demonstration yesterday in front of the National Parliament Building on Manik Mia Avenue, protesting against recent attacks, intimidation, and violence against women.

The protesters held banners and placards demanding safety and expressing dissatisfaction with the current situation. Messages included "Stop violence against women," "No mob justice," and a call for the home adviser's resignation.

Besides, a group of female

**Women are not safe in Bangladesh. In recent months, incidents of harassment, abuse, rape, mob attacks, and cyberbullying have surged across the country, affecting women from all walks of life. These are not isolated cases but part of a persistent pattern of intimidation and violence against women.**



protesters staged a flash mob against rape, while several male protesters also joined the rally. The demonstration later moved towards Asad Gate, where protesters released a statement outlining their demands.

"Women are not safe in Bangladesh. In recent months, incidents of harassment, abuse, rape, mob attacks, and cyberbullying have surged across the country, affecting women from all walks of life. These are not isolated cases but part of a persistent pattern of intimidation and violence against women," the press release said.

The statement criticised the interim government, which was formed through a mass uprising with many women as leaders,

organisers, and participants and driven by demands for justice, freedom, and anti-discrimination, saying it has failed to uphold those promises.

"They have taken no meaningful action to address these crimes, effectively emboldening perpetrators," it read.

## FIVE-POINT DEMAND

The protesters put forward five key demands in the statement. They demanded the removal of the home adviser, saying his "confusing" and "irresponsible" remarks have caused the public to lose their trust.

They urged the interim government to fulfil its responsibilities and take immediate action to ensure all citizens' safety.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

## GAZIPUR DISTRICT JAIL

### The inhumane reality for female inmates

MONJURUL HAQUE

The last time Shanto and Suman saw their mother, she was shivering in the cold, wrapped in a tattered blanket that barely covered her frail frame.

Sitting on the pavement outside Gazipur District Jail, the two brothers clutched a small bundle of warm clothes they hoped to hand over to her.

"She says the blanket they gave her is so thin that it barely shields her from the cold," Shanto told this correspondent recently.

"She is suffering in there."

Gazipur District Jail has long been a place of misery for inmates. But for the women confined within its crumbling walls, the conditions verge on the unbearable. With an official capacity of just 10, the women's ward held 71 inmates as of January 21, according to prison sources.

This overpopulation has turned the jail into a suffocating maze of desperation, where food is scarce, medical care is inadequate, and basic hygiene is an afterthought.

**My wife told me they don't even get proper bedding. They just hand out sacks and expect them to sleep on the cold floor.**

HUSBAND OF AN INMATE

**If any inmate is deprived of basic needs like proper food, hygiene, and warm clothes, it is a direct violation of their human rights. The government must intervene.**

RIPAN ANSARI  
GS of National Human Rights Council

## A DAILY STRUGGLE FOR DIGNITY

Meals are often nothing more than rice and lentils, sometimes even less.

A young man from Bagerhat, whose sister is incarcerated in Gazipur, shared, "She told me she can't eat most of the food because it's either spoiled or cooked in an unhygienic way. Many times, they serve only rice and pulse -- no vegetables, no protein. She is getting sick."

For these women, nights are spent on coarse jute sacks in cramped rooms.

The husband of a 35-year-old woman who was released on bail after a year in confinement, said, "My wife told me they don't even get proper bedding. They just hand out sacks and expect them to sleep on the cold floor."

Toilets are limited, often clogged, and emit a stench that lingers through the overcrowded cells. Clean water is a luxury, forcing many inmates to ration what little they have for drinking, let alone personal hygiene.

## HEALTH IN DECLINE

The lack of adequate medical care means minor illnesses quickly escalate into chronic problems.

Son of one inmate shared, "My mother's health has deteriorated since she was jailed. She had no pre-existing health issues, but now she constantly suffers from stomach problems and body aches. The authorities don't provide proper treatment."

Prison authorities, however, insist that these claims are exaggerated.

"We provide improved food, sufficient blankets, and medical care to all inmates," said Mosfiqur Rahman, the jailer of Gazipur District Jail. Each inmate receives at least three to four blankets, he added.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

RMG worker found dead in N'ganj lake

OUR CORRESPONDENT,  
Narayanganj

Police have recovered the body of a young garment worker from a lake in Narayanganj's Siddhinganj yesterday morning, two days after he went missing.

Confirming the incident, Shahinur Alom, officer-in-charge of Siddhinganj Police Station, said that after recovering the body from Siddhinganj Lake, it was sent to Narayanganj General Hospital for autopsy.

The deceased was identified as Md Nayan, 20, son of Abdul Halim from Jamalpur. He was living in a rented house in the Dhankunda area of Siddhinganj, and worked at a local garment factory, said police.

Family members said Nayan had left his rented house on Wednesday evening and been missing since.

Locals spotted a body floating in Siddhinganj Lake around 8:00am

## Nahid aims to finish what July uprising began

AFP, Dhaka



Bangladeshi students who overthrew autocratic ex-premier Sheikh Hasina last year have formed a new political party to finish the work that began with her ouster, the group's leader told AFP.

Nahid Islam, 27, was one of the most visible faces of the youth-led protest campaign Students Against Discrimination, which brought down the curtain on Hasina's iron-fisted rule after 15 years.

The sociology graduate resigned last week from the interim administration that replaced her to lead the new National Citizens Party (NCP), arguing that Bangladesh's political establishment lacked the will for far-reaching reforms.

"They were not even interested in the reforms for which young people sacrificed their lives," Nahid told AFP.

"Because we have an obligation to implement what we pledged during the mass uprising and its aftermath, we decided to form a political party," he said.

More than 800 people were killed in last year's uprising, and Nahid was briefly detained alongside other student leaders in an unsuccessful effort to force them to call off the protests.

Family members said Nayan had left his rented house on Wednesday evening and been missing since.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6



Vendors set up numerous stalls outside Abahani Field in Dhanmondi, selling a vibrant array of flowers and plants. With the arrival of spring, blossoms are in full bloom, showcasing a stunning collection of local and exotic flowers in a spectrum of colours. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Want to live

FROM PAGE 3  
They also demanded accountability from the government and law enforcement for their failure to prevent rape, harassment, mob attacks, and targeted assaults against women and called for decisive action to stop those.

The media was urged to stop spreading misinformation and take responsibility for shaping public perception. Additionally, they called for effective measures to combat cyberbullying.

"We will not be silent. We will continue our protests until we can live freely, safely, and with dignity," the statement read.

UGC member Prof Mohammad Tanzimuddin Khan, Dhaka University teacher Dr Samina Luthfa, and women's rights activist Shireen Haque were among those present.

## The inhumane

FROM PAGE 3  
Legal experts and human rights advocates stressed that the conditions in Gazipur jail are a violation of fundamental rights.

Inmates in Gazipur jail are deprived of facilities because the number of prisoners is multiple times higher than its capacity," said Asadullah Badal, a senior lawyer in Gazipur. The authorities must take immediate action, he added.

Ripan Ansari, general secretary of the National Human Rights Council, said, "If any inmate is deprived of basic needs like proper food, hygiene, and warm clothes, it is a direct violation of their human rights. The government must intervene."

One of the key reasons cited for the dire conditions is budgetary allocation.

Supreintendnet Mohammad Rafiqul Quader explained, "The jail budget is adjusted based on the number of prisoners. For instance, if we have 71 inmates, we allocate money for 71 people."



A large queue has assembled behind this TCB truck in front of the Bangladesh Bank in Khulna city. With Ramadan underway, such facilities are the only hope for low-income groups to afford essential commodities

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

## Take stern action

FROM PAGE 3  
in all areas of the country's development and progress.

Fakhrul said women from various professions, including students and female workers, are being subjected to molestation and harassment in various places, including educational institutions.

"Women are being raped, tortured and killed. This has seen sharp increase since the fascist Awami League government came to power," he alleged.

The BNP leader criticised the Awami League government for failing to take strict action against violence towards women.

He claimed that perpetrators have become more emboldened and desperate due to the lack of justice and the prevailing culture of impunity.

"We are deeply concerned to see

the growing trend of harassment of women in various forms on the streets and in educational institutions. This trend is alarming," Fakhrul said.

He said the perpetrators are instigating anarchy and instability in the country through carrying out incidents.

"It is our moral responsibility to protect the dignity of women and safeguard their freedom, which is a constitutionally recognised right," the BNP leader said.

He noted that the people of the country are now deeply worried about the overall situation in the country, including violence against women.

"We strongly condemn and oppose this, and at the same time, we call upon everyone to play a responsible role," the BNP leader said.

He claimed that perpetrators have become more emboldened and desperate due to the lack of justice and the prevailing culture of impunity.

"We are deeply concerned to see

FROM PAGE 3  
Additionally, they urged authorities to take steps to prevent ethnic, gender-based, communal, and mass violence against women, girls, indigenous people, persons with disabilities, religious minorities, and gender-diverse communities.

They also stressed the need to curb fundamentalist and extremist cultures. The committee further demanded revisions and amendments to existing laws on rape, dowry, sexual harassment, and violence against women.

These legal changes, they said, should consider women's diverse lives and real-life experiences to ensure their rights and welfare.

The organisations also emphasised safeguarding the interests of indigenous women, religious minority women, women with disabilities, domestic workers, garment workers, women in the informal sector, and migrant women.

They called for

making public transport, education, healthcare, employment, and the justice system fully accessible to women with disabilities, with special assistance and protection.

The committee also demanded the establishment of victim support centres, women's assistance and investigation units, counselling services, cyber support, and rehabilitation facilities in every district.

They urged the government to enact and enforce strict cyber laws to prevent misogynistic activities and propaganda on social media and digital platforms.

Lastly, the organisations stressed the need to raise awareness about laws against violence against women, women's rights, and available support systems.

They also called for the incorporation of gender-sensitive education and comprehensive, along with age-appropriate sex education programmes, into the national curriculum.

## LAND FOR SALE

Purbachal Land  
In Sector 10 10 Katha Plot  
In Sector 7 a 8.5 Katha Plot  
New Town Residential Project Area  
Absolutely Unencumbered  
Please Call: 01873-387760

## FLAT FOR SALE

Size: 4381 sft  
Bardhara UN road D/A  
01844600353  
01844600351

LEGAL NOTICE  
IN THE SUPREME COURT OF BANGLADESH  
HIGH COURT DIVISION  
(STATUTORY ORIGINAL JURISDICTION)  
COMPANY MATTER NO. 288, OF 2025  
IN THE MATTER OF:

An application under Section 81 (2) (85(3) read with Section 396 of the Companies Act, 1994, IN THE MATTER OF: Mohammad Abdullahel Bakri, Managing Director, Shalbon Green Resort Ltd, B. K. Bari, Main Road, Rajendrapur Chowrasta, Police Station: Gazipur District: Gazipur, Petitioner-VERSUS-The Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms, 1, Kawran Bazar, 6th Floor, T.C.B. Bhaban, Dhaka. Respondents: Take notice that an application under Section 81 (2) (85(3) read with Section 396 of the Companies Act, 1994 was filed before the Hon'ble High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh on behalf of the petitioner for condonation of delay in holding Annual General Meeting of the Shalbon Green Resort Ltd, for the calendar year 2022, 2023 and 2024 Upon hearing the application on 18.02.2025, Hon'ble Company Judge Mr. Justice Ahmed Sohel was pleased to admit the application. Interested person may appear before the Honorable Court or before the date 10.03.2025 fixed for hearing of the matter. Copy of the application may be obtained from undersigned on payment of prescribed fees.Md. Masum Billia, Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh, Room No. 8049, 7th floor, Husain Shoheeb Shohrawardi Bhaban, Supreme Court Bar Association Bhaban, Shabag, Dhaka, 1000, Mob: 01712212995.

## Invitation for Tender (IFT) for the Cash Vault (Re-Tender).

Project Name: BRAC Finance & Accounts.  
Tender Name: Supply 248 Nos. Cash Vault.  
Invitation for Tender No. & Date: RE-BPD/2025/IFT-588, Date: 02-03-2025  
Tender Package No.: RE-BPD/2025/IFT-588  
Source of Fund: BRAC Own Fund  
Time of Delivery: As Per Tender Schedule.  
Price of Tender Schedule: BDT: 1,000 (Non-Refundable)  
Tender schedule fee to be paid through Bank Account Number: 1501100901911001, BRAC Bank, Gulshan Branch. (Also, send a picture of the deposit Slip to the following email address & what's up no. [rubel.a@brac.net](mailto:rubel.a@brac.net) & 01719252899).  
Tender Security: As Per Tender Schedule (Tk. 7,50,000/-).  
Pre-Bid Meeting Date, Date: 17/03/2025 at 11.00 AM.  
Time & Meeting Link: <https://tender.brac.net/>  
Tender Documents: Availability on e-tender platform & Tender Dropping (Online), Date & Time: <https://tender.brac.net/> From 10-03-2025 to 25-03-2025, 1:30 PM  
Tender Opening Place, Date & Time (Online Opening): Re-BPD/2025/IFT-588 From 25-03-2025, 2:00 PM through Google meet, link: [meet.google.com/vrq-jmgu-vpc](https://meet.google.com/vrq-jmgu-vpc)

BRAC Tower, 65, Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212  
Phone: 0222281265-72, Ext No. 5498 or Mob: 01708498574

## Nahid aims to finish

FROM PAGE 3  
After Hasina's toppling, he accepted an invitation to join an interim government led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus.

Nahid's decision to helm the NCP necessitated his departure from an administration expected to act as a politically neutral umpire while preparing Bangladesh for fresh elections.

"We are often accused of conspiring to delay the election, but that is not true," Nahid said.

Polls are due by March next year and are widely expected to be won by the BNP.

Nahid said that even if he and his followers could not form the next government, they had inaugurated a political force set to be influential for decades to come.

"Nobody knew that there would be an uprising, but it happened," he said.

"I sincerely hope and I believe that we are going to win this time. But this election is not the end of the world... Our target is to sustain this energy for another 50 or 100 or more years."

## 'BELIEVE IN INCLUSIVITY'

The NCP is at loggerheads with its main rival over when the next national election should be staged, with the BNP arguing that fresh polls should be staged as soon as possible to empower a government with a public mandate.

"We are often accused of conspiring to delay the election, but that is not true," Nahid said.

But he added that it was "not possible" to stage an election while the country still faced issues maintaining law and order.

His party are also campaigning for a simultaneous vote to establish a citizens' assembly, to be tasked with root and branch reform of Bangladesh's constitution aimed at ensuring a lasting democracy.

The NCP has sought to position itself as a big tent party, open to all people seeking to bring forward the spirit of last year's political tumult.

"We believe in inclusivity,

but there are certain boundaries set by religious and cultural norms," Nahid said, adding that the party still had an admirable record on diversity. "We have brought women to the forefront and included representatives from all castes and creeds," he said.

## Four SAD

FROM PAGE 5  
around with the victims, the abductors contacted Mamun's wife, Fatima Akhter Lily Begum, and demanded Tk 20 lakh as ransom. The family managed to gather Tk 5 lakh in cash and provided a bank cheque for the remaining Tk 15 lakh.

After receiving the ransom, the kidnappers released Mamun near Apollo Imperial Hospital and fled the scene.

Following a tip off, police from Pahartali Zone and the Intelligence Department conducted a joint operation and arrested the four. The team also rescued the abductees and the car.

"The family has no complaints regarding the death and wants the body to be handed over without an autopsy.

"The family has no complaints regarding the death and wants the body to be handed over without an autopsy. Legal procedures regarding this request are underway," said the OC.

## RMG worker found dead

FROM PAGE 3  
and informed the police. Police rushed to spot and recovered the body, OC Shahinur said.

"Initially, no injury marks have been found on the body of the deceased. Family members informed

us that Nayan suffered from epilepsy. The exact cause of death will be determined after an autopsy," the police official added.

However, the victim's family had requested to receive the body without an autopsy. Legal procedures regarding this request are underway," said the OC.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh  
Office of the Executive Engineer, RHD

Telephone: 02587742145  
Road Division, Nilphamari.

Email: [rhdnil@gmail.com](mailto:rhdnil@gmail.com)

Date: 06-03-2025

## e-Tender Notice: No. 34/2024-2025

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the following public procurement:

Sl. No	Tender ID No.	Name of work	Tender Document last selling/ downloading Date and Time	Tender Closing Date and Time
1.	1083989	Widening and surfacing of flexible pavement from Ch. 20+670 to Ch. 21+100 of Tazerhat - Lalighati - Taraganj-Kishoreganj Road (Z-5015) under Road Division, Nilphamari during the FY 2024-2025.	23 Mar-2025 17:00	24 Mar-2025 11:15

This is an online tender, where only e-Tenders will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal 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 Documents from the National e-GP system portal have to be deposited online through any registered Bank Branch up to particular date and time specified on the Tender Notice.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and also can be obtained from e-GP help desk ([helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd](mailto:helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd)). For more details please contact e-GP help desk contact numbers.

The Procuring Entity reserves the right to accept any or reject any or all tenders without assigning any reason whatsoever.

*Zahidur Islam  
06-03-2025  
(Md. Arif Zahan)  
Sub-Assistant Engineer, RHD  
Road Division, Nilphamari.*

*Mohammed Zahirul Islam  
ID No.601992  
Executive Engineer, RHD  
Road Division, Nilphamari.*

GD-597

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh  
Local Government Engineering Department  
Office of the Executive Engineer

District: Gopalganj

[www.lged.gov.bd](http://www.lged.gov.bd)

Date : 06.03.2025

## e-Tender Notice

(Notice Number: 39/2024-25)

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of

S. L. No.	ID/Reference No.	Procurement Method	Name of Works	Tender/Proposal Document last selling Date and Time
01	1082982	OTM	Construction of 22.00m Long Variable Girder Bridge on Gopalpur H/O Zabed member (UZR)-Soaraidanga Madrasa Road at Ch. 00m under Tungipara Upazila, District Gopalganj [Road ID No: 335914028] (Salvage Materials Cost Tk. 79,715.00), Package No. GDRIIP-2/Tungip/VR-SR24-25/13.	04.00 PM on 06/04/2025
02	1082983	OTM	Improvement of Gimadanga Azim Bazar BC Road-H/o Justice Huda via Liakat Ali Road by BC from Ch. 170-440m under Tungipara Upazila, District Gopalganj [Road ID No: 335914089], Package No. GDRIIP-2/Tungip/VR-BC24-25/14.	04.00 PM on 24/03/2025
03	1082984	OTM	Improvement of Gopalpur UNR to Rakhibari GPS via Beledanga GPS Road by BC from Ch. 190-300m under Tungipara Upazila, District Gopalganj [Road ID No: 335914014], Package No. GDRIIP-2/Tungip/VR-BC24-25/15.	04.00 PM on 24/03/2025
04	1082985	OTM		



Farmers clear weeds from their Boro paddy field. After sowing Boro seeds, if the weeds are regularly removed, it helps the plant grow faster and improves the yield. The photo was taken at Beel Pabla in Dumuria, Khulna recently.

## Miscreants cut Jubo Dal leader's tendons

OUR CORRESPONDENT,  
Benapole

Miscreants cut the tendons of hands and legs of a Jubo Dal leader in Abhaynagar, Jashore on Thursday night.

Enam Gazi, 27, from Ektar Pur, was seriously injured in the attack at Nawapara Kacha Bazar.

Locals said Enam went there to sell vegetables. The miscreants also stabbed him in the abdomen.

He was taken to a Khulna Hospital.

Abhaynagar BNP President Faraji Matiar Rahman said Enam, a joint convener of the Nawapara Municipal Jubo Dal, had an enmity with an opposing group.

Abhaynagar Police Station OC Mohammad Alim said legal action will be taken if a complaint is filed.

## CTG ABDUCTION Four SAD coordinator imposters arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT,  
Ctg

Police have arrested four persons -- who falsely identified themselves as coordinators of Students Against Discrimination (SAD) -- in connection with the kidnapping of Abedin Al Mamun, assistant general manager (AGM) of Pacific Jeans.

The arrestees are Nazmul Abedin, Naimul Amin Emon, 22, Arafat Hossain Fahim, 22, and Risthi Bin Yusuf, 23, said a press release of Chattogram Metropolitan Police.

Mamun was kidnapped from his residence in the Colonel Hat area on Thursday evening by some people who identified themselves as coordinators of SAD, said the release.

The kidnappers drove him to several locations using Mamun's car. His driver, Jewel, was also held hostage.

While moving

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8

## Favourable weather boosts lichi yield hopes

KONGKON KARMAKER, Dinajpur

Dinajpur, widely known as the "Land of Lichis", is experiencing a promising season, with thousands of trees across the district adorned in golden blossoms.

Farmers and agricultural officials are optimistic about a bumper harvest this year, thanks to favourable weather conditions and advanced cultivation practices.

Beyond Dinajpur, lichi is also cultivated in Thakurgaon, Panchagarh, and Rangpur districts, contributing significantly to the region's agricultural economy.

According to the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Dinajpur, the flowering season typically begins at the end of February. A timely shower during this period has been beneficial, though the rising temperature remains a concern for optimal fruit yield.

With spring in full bloom, the sweet aroma of lichi blossoms fills the air across Dinajpur's 5,418 orchards, spanning all 13 upazilas of the district. Most of them are located in Dinajpur Sadar, Chirirbandar, Khansama, and Birganj upazilas.

Popular varieties such as China-1, China-2, China-3, Bedana, Bombay, Madrazi, and Kathali dominate these orchards, showing healthy blossom retention. Farmers are investing in irrigation, pesticide application, and fertilisation to safeguard their crops.

Md Nuruzzaman, deputy director of Dinajpur's DAE, expressed confidence in this year's yield, saying, "The weather has been ideal so far. If no natural disasters strike in the coming days, we anticipate a record-breaking harvest."

The high demand for Dinajpur's lichis is already evident, with traders from Rajshahi, Rangpur, Chattogram, and Dhaka visiting orchards to book orders

in advance. Given the fruit's premium quality and popularity nationwide, early negotiations between farmers and buyers have begun.

Last year, lichi cultivation in Dinajpur covered 5,787 hectares, yielding approximately 42,000 metric tonnes of fruit worth over Tk 800 crore, according to DAE officials. This year, authorities are determined to surpass these figures by providing farmers with real-time guidance on pest control, irrigation, and climate-resilient practices.

Lichi remains one of Dinajpur's most lucrative seasonal cash crops, supplying markets across the country. While its exceptional sweetness has previously opened export opportunities -- once even reaching the Middle East -- the fruit's perishable nature and the lack of proper processing facilities have hindered sustained domestic and international trade.

Farmers are urging the government to establish cold storage and processing units to extend the fruit's shelf life and unlock global market potential.

Bablu Mia, a lichi grower from Chirirbandar upazila, emphasised the need for infrastructure, saying, "With cold storage and processing plants, we can produce value-added products like juices and preserves, making our lichis export-ready."

Last year, lichi prices ranged from Tk 3 to Tk 18 per piece, translating to Tk 300 to Tk 1,800 per 100-piece bunch. Farmers remain cautious about price fluctuations, as market conditions and transportation costs significantly impact their profitability.

"A single storm or pest outbreak can wipe out months of effort," said Abdur Razzak, a lichi farmer from Khansama upazila.



## EXPERIENCE THE ESSENCE OF EXCEPTIONAL REFINEMENT

### 3 Bedroom Apartments at Gulshan R/A

Within walking distance of Gulshan Avenue



By **ASSET**  
DEVELOPMENTS  
Asset Developments & Holdings Ltd  
91 Gulshan Avenue  
[www.asset.com.bd](http://www.asset.com.bd)

## Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Local Government Engineering Department  
Office of the Upazila Engineer  
Bagherpara, Jashore.  
[www.lged.gov.bd](http://www.lged.gov.bd)

Memo No. 46.02.4109.000.18.009.19.160

Date: 06-03-2025

### e-Tender Notice: 03/2024-2025

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for

Sl No	Package No.	Name of Scheme	e-TID No.
1.	ADP/JAS/BAG/2024-25/W.001	(a) Repair & Maintenance of Dormitory Bhaban under Bagherpara Upazila Parishad (b) Repair & Maintenance of Non Gazzeted Quarter under Bagherpara Upazila Parishad (c) Construction of RCC Road near Upazila Parishad Jame Mosque under Bagherpara Upazila Parishad, Upazila: Bagherpara, Dist: Jashore.	1082491
2.	ADP/JAS/BAG/2024-25/W.002	(a) Improvement of Brick Flat Soling Road (b) Construction of U-Culvert (c) Supplying Cement (d) Supplying Sewing Machine under Bagherpara Upazila, Jashore.	1082492

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP portal and no offline/ hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender Documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered Banks branches up to: **24 March '2025, Time: 12:30 PM**. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and also from E-mail: [ue.bagherpara@lged.gov.bd](mailto:ue.bagherpara@lged.gov.bd) or Call to 0247771941 For any queries interested Tenderers are requested to communicate with the undersigned during office hours.

Signed/-  
(Md. Abu Sufian)  
Upazila Engineer  
Bagherpara, Jashore.  
Tel.: 0247771941

E-mail: [ue.bagherpara@lged.gov.bd](mailto:ue.bagherpara@lged.gov.bd)

(Md. Zamil Akter Limon)  
ID No: 602346  
Executive Engineer (C.C.),  
RHD Road Division, Patuakhali.

## Trump sends letter to Iran to negotiate nuclear deal

REUTERS, Washington

US President Donald Trump said he wants to negotiate a nuclear deal with Iran and sent a letter to its leadership on Thursday saying he hoped they would agree to talk.

"I said I hope you're going to negotiate, because it's going to be a lot better for Iran," Trump said in the interview with Fox Business Network broadcast yesterday.

"I think they want to get that letter. The other alternative is we have to do something, because you can't let another nuclear weapon."

The letter appeared to have been addressed to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The White House did not immediately respond to a request about that.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov discussed international efforts to resolve the situation around Iran's nuclear program with Iranian ambassador Kazem Jalali, the Russian Foreign Ministry said yesterday.

### SLUM PROJECT

## India SC asks Adani to respond to allegations

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's Supreme Court yesterday asked Gautam Adani's conglomerate to respond to allegations of unfairly winning a bid to redevelop one of Asia's largest slums in Mumbai, with the competing Dubai-based consortium offering to raise its bid.

The legal battle focuses on whether SecLink Technologies was incorrectly excluded from the bidding process when the Indian billionaire won the Dharavi slum project with a \$619 million bid in 2023.

A Mumbai court disagreed with SecLink's position last year, landing the dispute at India's highest court. Adani and the government of Maharashtra, where the slum is located, have denied wrongdoing.

## ACC to probe SPs, DCs over 'midnight voting'

FROM PAGE 12  
as the investigation progresses," said the ACC DG.

Senior ACC officials confirmed that a list of suspects has already been compiled, verifying their current positions. Many of them have been found to have amassed significant wealth beyond their known sources of income.

According to various sources, Sheikh Hasina and her close associates -- including trusted senior party leaders and key administrative officials -- were behind the "nighttime voting".

Those directly involved at the district level included 57 deputy commissioners (DCs) and 64 superintendents of police (SPs).

On February 20, the government forcibly retired 22 DCs who had served as returning officers in the last three parliamentary elections.

Regarding this decision, Public Administration Secretary Mokhlesur Rahman said, "The government is making and implementing strong decisions in the interest of the people."

Among these 22 DCs, four had served as returning officers in the 2014 election. At the time of their retirement, three were secretaries, 17 were additional secretaries, one was a joint secretary, and one was a deputy secretary.

Mokhlesur Rahman further added, "Those accused of corruption or abusing their legal authorities are being punished according to service rules."

Regarding the latest national election, he said, "A list of officials involved in the 2024 election has been given to intelligence agencies."

"Officials with less than 25 years of service will be made OSD [Officer on Special Duty]. Officials with over 25 years of service will be forcibly retired," he added.

On February 21, the government announced that 33 DCs who had served as returning officers in the 11th parliamentary election would be made OSD.

Following the forced retirement



**Smoke rises while members of the Syrian forces ride on a vehicle as they battle against a nascent insurgency by fighters from ousted leader Bashar al-Assad's Alawite sect in Latakia, Syria, yesterday.**

PHOTO: REUTERS

### OCCUPIED WEST BANK

## Israel's ops aligns with annexation 'vision': UN

Hamas urges Trump to meet Palestinian prisoners

AFP, Ramallah

A major Israeli offensive which over several weeks has displaced tens of thousands of Palestinians and ravaged refugee camps increasingly appears to be aligned with the "vision of annexation" of the West Bank, a UN official told AFP.

Israeli forces carry out regular raids targeting Hamas members in the West Bank, occupied since 1967, but the ongoing operation since late January is already the longest in two decades, with dire effects on Palestinians.

"There are growing concerns that the reality being created on the ground aligns with the

vision of annexation of the West Bank," said Roland Friedrich, director of West Bank affairs for UNRWA, the UN agency supporting Palestinian refugees.

"It's an unprecedented situation, both from a humanitarian and wider political perspective," he said.

"We talk about 40,000 people that have been forcibly displaced from their homes" in the northern West Bank, mainly from three refugee camps where the operation had begun, said Friedrich.

"These camps are now largely empty," their residents unable to return and struggling to find shelter elsewhere, he said.

Inside the camps, the level

of destruction to "electricity, sewage and water, but also private houses" was "very concerning", Friedrich added.

Meanwhile, Hamas yesterday urged US President Donald Trump to meet with Palestinian prisoners freed during the ongoing truce in Gaza, following his meeting with released Israeli hostages the day before.

A high-level Hamas delegation was in Cairo yesterday to advance efforts to prolong a fragile ceasefire in Gaza, two senior Hamas officials said.

More than 9,500 Palestinian prisoners were currently being held in Israeli prisons, Friedrich said.

**EU saw record drop in births in 2023: data**

AFP, Brussels

The number of babies born in the EU was down 5.4 percent to 3.67 million in 2023, the largest drop in decades, official data showed yesterday, underscoring the bloc's demographic issues.

The fertility rate across the EU's 27 countries stood at 1.38 live births per woman, down from 1.46 in 2022 and well below the "replacement level" of 2.1, at which a population is stable.

"This is the largest annual decline recorded since 1961", the bloc's statistical agency, Eurostat, said.

## Police foil Hizb ut-Tahrir procession

FROM PAGE 2

Knowing about the incident, Asif went to the Detective Branch office,

secured his release, and took him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for treatment.

Talking to reporters, Asif said he secured Arman's release as he thought Arman was innocent.

Over the past few days, the banned outfit put up posters across the city, urging people to join the "March for Khilafat".

In response, Dhaka Metropolitan Police on Thursday, in a statement, said that any activities under the banner of the outfit are punishable under anti-terrorism laws.

The government

outlawed Hizb ut-Tahrir in 2009, considering it a threat to public security.

Under the Anti-Terrorism Act 2009, any form of gathering, procession, distribution of posters and leaflets, or promotional activities by banned outfits is a criminal offence.

If any banned organisation, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, attempts to hold meetings, rallies, or engage in any form of publicity, necessary legal action will be taken, the DMP said in the statement.

In another development, police detained three members of the outfit from the Uttara area yesterday, hours before the procession started.

## PGCB sends clarification

FROM PAGE 12

transmission lines, as was communicated to the authorities of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant on December 26 last year.

"It should be noted that the commissioning of the 230 kV GIS Substation and the 400/230 kV Transformer within the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant are the responsibilities of the plant authorities," it said.

However, since the commissioning of these substation and transformer has not been completed for the past two years, PGCB has been supplying auxiliary power through the "230 kV Baghbari-Rooppur Transmission Line" which was connected on an interim basis.

There is no remaining work by PGCB on the mentioned two projects which are fully prepared for power evacuation, the explanation said, adding that they have learnt that the substation and the transformer may not be completed before May 2025.

By that time, the explanation said, the PGCB will complete the construction of the Padma River Crossing section of the "Rooppur-Gopalganj 400 kV Transmission Line" and will be able to evacuate the electricity from Unit-1 through the three prepared transmission lines.

"Therefore, the news that the delay in the test operations of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant is due to unfinished transmission line work is not correct," the explanation added.

## Sri Lanka signs \$2.5bn debt deal with Japan

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka yesterday signed a deal with Japan to restructure \$2.5 billion in loans, marking the first agreement with bilateral creditors who had pledged debt relief to the cash-strapped nation last year.

Japan said it was granting concessions on a 369.45 billion yen (\$2.5 billion) loan under a comprehensive debt treatment plan, which the International Monetary Fund considers essential for Sri Lanka's economic recovery.

## Fight to increase women's political

FROM PAGE 1

Recently, the Electoral Reform Commission and the Constitution Reform Commission have proposed to increase the number of parliamentary seats reserved for women to 100 from 50 at present. The seats would be filled through direct elections.

Women's rights activists have largely welcomed the recommendation.

"We have always advocated for direct votes for women in parliament, and this reform aligns with our vision," Fauzia Moslem, president of the Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, told The Daily Star.

The Bangladesh Mahila Parishad though submitted a bill to the government to increase the reserved seats to 150, which would ensure 33 percent representation of women in parliament.

The Representation of the People Order (RPO) 1972 mandates that political parties allocate at least 33 percent of all committee positions to women. But major political parties have consistently failed to meet this requirement.

In the last national election, 128 female candidates ran for 99 seats, which is just 4.71 percent of the total 2,713 candidates who took part in the polls. Only 20 women were elected from a total of 300 general seats.

Introduced in 1972 with just 15 seats, the system of reservation was meant to encourage women's political participation. In practice, it has largely been used to keep existing power structures in place.

Instead of serving as a tool for meaningful inclusion, it has historically been politicised by ruling parties, essentially reducing women's roles in governance to tokenism.

This was evident during the Awami League's rule where female members of parliament were beholden to party loyalty rather than political capabilities, as reported by this newspaper in May 2024.

The absence of direct elections for the seats established a system of nepotism and cronyism, where personal connections outweighed merit.

As a result, capable female

politicians were denied genuine opportunities to emerge as strong and impactful leaders.

And even as women rise to leadership positions, they encounter obstacles that limit their ability to lead effectively.

One of the most significant barriers to women's participation has been the violent and exclusionary nature of political organising.

The intimidation and harassment women face, both online and offline, are deliberately designed to push them out of political spaces.

A study of Facebook content during Bangladesh's 12th national election revealed widespread gendered disinformation aimed at discrediting female politicians, journalists and analysts.

This trend continues today, where females who are engaging socially and politically are facing aggressive misogynistic bullying online.

In the wake of the July revolution, instances of moral policing, mob violence and sexual harassment in public places have surged, with weak response from the interim government. The atmosphere of lawlessness has left women particularly vulnerable.

Unchecked, this spread of gendered disinformation has the potential to discourage broader female political participation.

Amidst all these shifts, Bangladesh is looking at the newly formed, youth-led political party, the National Citizen Party (NCP), with cautious optimism.

Born from the July revolution, this new generation of leaders and activists has emerged with the demand for meaningful structural change.

At a rally in Shahbagh in February, the leaders of NCP publicly asserted that women must be actively involved in decision-making rather than being mere participants in politics.

The then convener, Nasiruddin Patwari, called for greater female participation in local government elections.

With its launch, NCP has since appointed three women out of the top ten members in their highest decision-making body: Samanta

## 1 dead, 180 missing after migrant boats sink off Yemen, Djibouti

AFP, Addis Ababa

Four boats carrying migrants have sunk off Djibouti and Yemen killing at least one person and leaving more than 180 missing, the International Organization for Migration told AFP yesterday.

The sinkings occurred late Thursday along a route that is increasingly used by Ethiopians hoping to find work in Gulf countries or escape conflict.

"Over 180 migrants are missing after four boats sank last night off the coasts of Djibouti and Yemen," the IOM said.

Two of the vessels, one believed to be carrying at least 30 people and the other roughly 150, were missing off the coast of Yemen, according to the IOM country chief of mission Abdusattar Esoev.

"We are talking about 186 people that may have unfortunately perished in the sea," he told AFP.

The majority of those onboard were believed to be Ethiopian migrants, he said, although five were thought to be Yemeni crew members. At least 57, from both boats, were women.

"We are working with authorities to see if we can find any survivors, but I'm afraid we may not have any," Esoev said. The other two vessels capsized due to strong winds off the coast of Djibouti, he said, based on information he had received.



## CHARTER OF DEMANDS

Commemorating the 30th anniversary of Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action



# INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2025

## For All Women And Girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment

Advancing Gender Equality in Bangladesh: A Call for Systemic Change

Despite decades of activism and progress, women in Bangladesh continue to face systemic barriers to equality, representation, and safety. From their historic role in nation-building to recent mass movements advocating for justice and inclusion, the fight for gender equity remains urgent. As discrimination against women sustains and gender-based violence rises, two Charter of Demands have been developed from the women's movement that were facilitated by women's rights organizations Bangladesh Mahila Parishad and Bonhishikha, and Naripokkho to push for transformative reforms. This article outlines their key priorities, from immediate legal protections to long-term structural changes, and highlights the need for sustained advocacy to ensure an inclusive, equitable future for all.

### Context

Women have long been central to social transformation in Bangladesh, playing pivotal roles in the liberation war, post-war reconstruction, resistance against autocratic regimes, and transnational solidarity movements. The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) reinforced commitment to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), spurring activism on gender-based violence, economic empowerment, political representation, and legal reforms. Despite progress, including women leaders serving as heads of state since 1991, gender inequality persists. The feminist movement saw historic surges, particularly in response to rising sexual violence

in 2020, culminating in a mass movement against rape and impunity. The recent 'Quota Reform Movement' highlighted systemic exclusion, with the removal of the 10% women's quota contradicting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and exacerbating vulnerabilities. Even after the anti-discrimination movement that led to regime change, women remain underrepresented in interim governance and reform

voice, uniting women from diverse backgrounds and generations who face intersecting challenges and are often deprived of equitable opportunities. An intersectional and intergenerational approach was adopted to frame the Charter, ensuring comprehensive engagement with a wide range of stakeholders at both national and grassroots levels.

This year's International Women's Day theme is 'For All

discrimination, and exploitation.

**2. Promote gender equality:**  
Address systemic barriers, dismantle patriarchy, transform entrenched inequities, and elevate the voices of marginalized women and girls, including young people, to ensure inclusivity and empowerment.

**3. Foster empowerment:**  
Redefine power structures by ensuring inclusive access to education, employment, leadership, and decision-making spaces. Prioritize opportunities for young women and girls to lead and innovate.

Post July, Naripokkho presented a charter to the interim government that highlights their demands in eight categories. Based on extensive consultation process Naripokkho suggested short term, mid-term and long-term steps for action. The eight categories include Women live free from violence. Women's economic rights; Women's Political rights, Women's Health Right; Women's Education, Climate and Environment justice, rights of marginalized women and communal harmony.

The Charter of Demands developed by Bangladesh Mahila Parishad and Bonhishikha focuses on six thematic areas: education, sexual and gender-based violence, health, law reformation and access to justice, women's participation, economic empowerment, decision-making and care work; gender budget and good governance. Under these, specific recommendations were put forward that needs attention to address critical issues affecting women and marginalized communities based on feasibility for short-term, mid-term and long-term reform initiatives.

### 1. Advance women's and girls' rights:

Fight relentlessly for women's and girls' full range of human rights, challenging all forms of violence, discrimination, and exploitation.



commissions, with young women particularly sidelined. In this time of unprecedented pushback against gender equality and women's rights, it is more critical than ever to push for gender equality, women's empowerment, and the elimination of violence against women and girls.

Recognizing the past successes of the women's movement in the country and striving for a more inclusive, gender-responsive, and equitable society, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad and Bonhishikha, with support from UN Women, jointly developed a Charter of Demands. Aiming to eliminate all forms of discrimination, the Charter represents a collective

women and girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment". Under the banner of UN Women's global campaign to mark the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, "For All Women and Girls", this year's International Women's Day is a rallying cry to take action in three key areas: Advance women's and girls' rights; Fight relentlessly for women's and girls' full range of human rights, challenging all forms of violence, discrimination, and exploitation.

**1. Advance women's and girls' rights:**  
Fight relentlessly for women's and girls' full range of human rights, challenging all forms of violence, discrimination, and exploitation.

### DEMANDS TO BE PRIORITISED FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION

#### These demands require urgent attention and should be implemented immediately-

- » Institutionalize safeguarding policies to address bullying and sexual harassment in any institution or organization. Enact a comprehensive 'Sexual Harassment Prevention and Protection Law'
- » Full ratification of CEDAW and withdraw reservation from Article 2 and Article 16(1)(c)
- » Eliminate the special provision of 'Child Marriage Restraint Act of 2017', which allows child marriage in "special cases"
- » Revise rape law to include all gender identities and expand the legal definition of rape to encompass all forms of non-consensual sexual acts, including rape within marriage.
- » Revise Section 146 (3) of the Evidence Act, 1872 (amended)
- » Enact a new Digital/Cyber Security Act that conforms to international human rights standards and also address tech/AI-based violence.
- » Amend the Constitution that ensures the separation of state affairs from religious influence.
- » Following Convention 107 of the 'Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention 1957', continue recognizing Indigenous communities as "adibashi" to uphold their land rights.
- » Revise the quota system published in July 2024 and reintroduce a separate quota for women; and untangle the quota for transgender individuals from that for people with disabilities. Establish a dedicated quota for gender-diverse individuals, as well as separate quotas for marginalized groups like Indigenous communities, Dalits, ethnic and religious minorities, and highly vulnerable groups such as the children of sex workers and tea garden workers.
- » Ratification of ILO's C190 convention on eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work.

### DEMANDS TO BE PRIORITISED FOR MID-TERM ACTION

#### These demands should be addressed in the medium term and require planning, capacity-building, and some systemic changes to ensure proper implementation

- » Recognize women farmers and fish farmers contribution in Bangladesh's GDP and agriculture through disaggregated data
- » Revisit the anti-discrimination bill to ensure no citizen in Bangladesh faces discrimination based on religion, language, race, caste, sex, or place of birth, granting marginalized communities' access to education, jobs, healthcare, and housing.
- » Full implementation of the Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy, 2015.
- » Ensure the registration of marriages of all religions and inter-religious partnerships.
- » Train law enforcement and legal professionals to effectively investigate and prosecute sexual assault cases.
- » Investigate Sexual and Gender Based Violence related to land grabbing, as urged by the CEDAW committee in 2016.
- » Establish district-level cyber security cells for faster response in tech-based violence and crimes.
- » Ensure that the electoral process is inclusive and representative through direct election of women to reserved seats ensuring at least 50% representation of women in parliament.
- » Reinforce the mandate to have at least 33% women in political parties' leadership roles.
- » Establish a climate and gender budget to advance community- and women-led solutions, especially for vulnerable groups
- » Institutionalize including a comprehensive range of gender options beyond "man" and "woman" in different forms and documents, to ensure inclusivity.
- » Recognize unpaid care work at the state level and increase investment in the care economy.

### DEMANDS TO BE PRIORITISED FOR LONG-TERM ACTIONS

#### These demands require systemic change, policy reforms, and structural improvements and should be integrated into long-term national strategies, operational and action plans.

- » Eliminate and update colonial laws that discriminate against women, gender diverse groups, focusing particularly on property rights, inheritance laws, and marital regulations.
- » Reform inheritance laws and implement a 'Uniform Family Code' to ensure equal rights in private laws for all.
- » Establish secondary schools near tea gardens and remote areas to reduce school dropouts from marginalized communities.
- » Promote STEM education for women and girls.
- » Ensure budget, space and resources to facilitate women's sports through educational institutions.
- » Ensure structural designs of public buildings are updated to make them accessible for people with disabilities.
- » Enforce Section 46 of the 'Bangladesh Labour Act' (2006) to grant mothers four months of maternity leave.
- » Integrate mental health services into primary healthcare system and provide free post-crisis mental health support caused by disasters.
- » Enforce non-discriminatory policies within healthcare services, including access to fertility treatments and SRHR services for all irrespective of marital status, age and gender.
- » Ensure equal representation of men and women, and the inclusion of local marginalized community representative in local administrative positions like chairperson, UP member.
- » Ensure rigorous survey of People with Disability to collect gender-segregated data and identify those in need of disability stipends while revising the amount to reflect current living costs.



**"Opportunities for women in leadership and participation in decision-making processes will increase through their political empowerment. It is important to remember that women's political empowerment is not solely a women's issue; rather, it should be integrated into mainstream politics as an essential component of national development."**

DR FAUZIA MOSLEM,  
President, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad



**"Since 1983, Naripakkho has been actively taking part in movements for positive changes in the status of women. We seek these changes in the family, society, and state laws. We demand equal rights in resources and children. Therefore, we strongly urge the government to withdraw the reservation of Article 2 and 16-1(c) of CEDAW. We want to see violence free lives of women. But to achieve this, it is of utmost importance that women are viewed as beings whose value lies beyond in their anatomical bodies. This necessitates cultural deconstruction. Naripakkho wants women to be recognized as citizens with rights and as dignified individuals in the family, the society, and the state. Our expectation is a worldly, secular state and society."**



**As long as every citizen of this country does not have equal rights, as mandated by the constitution, no reform, no matter how well-intentioned, will bring real change. Policies and laws matter, but without proper implementation, monitoring, and accountability, their impact remains limited. In its 54 years of independence, after fighting against dictatorship, corruption, and autocratic governments for citizen rights and democracy that were often led and participated by women and socially excluded communities, we should have built a more just and equitable society. Yet, selective amnesia allows people to forget about women once their own demands are met, and most of our male-counterparts are often unaware and overlook the specific needs of women. Change will not come until women are treated as equal citizens and human beings. Our demand is simple - equal rights, dignity, justice and equal representation in decision making."**

TASAFFY M HOSSAIN,  
Founder and Managing Director, Bonhishikha.

**"As we commemorate the historic 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, we must celebrate progress and recognize that the gains have been too slow, too fragile, too uneven. Women and girls continue to face significant barriers to equality, including political underrepresentation, violence, and entrenched social norms. We need freedom from poverty, an end to violence, equal decision-making power, peace, climate justice and a digital revolution. The upcoming Commission on the Status of Women session presents a critical opportunity to renew our commitment to substantive equality. 2025 is our turning point. Gender equality is the way forward—not just for women, not just for girls, but for the future of humanity."**

GITANJALI SINGH,  
Representative, UN Women

## Fix persistent crisis of medical teachers

Students must not suffer because of bureaucratic problems

A little over a year ago, we were alarmed to learn from the Directorate General of Medical Education (DGME) that 42 percent of faculty positions in the 37 government medical colleges were vacant. Now, according to a report by this daily, that number has increased to 43 percent, in a further blow to the education and professional prospects of medical students as well as the future of our healthcare system. It is a truism that good education requires good teachers. Students in many of these colleges, however, would settle for any teacher at all, regardless of their quality. For future healthcare professionals to be reduced to such desperation is neither fair nor conducive to our vision of a robust healthcare system that serves patients and reverses the trend of medical tourism.

The severity of this crisis is further underscored by the fact that a staggering 65 percent of professor posts in the medical colleges remain unfilled. At least four medical colleges have no professor at all, while 18 others are struggling with only one to five professors each. The shortage is particularly acute in the 23 newer colleges established during the Awami League's rule, where 75 percent of professor positions remain vacant. This critical gap at the top—depriving students of guidance from experienced mentors—is reflected down the ranks across all colleges, with 45 percent of associate professor posts and 51 percent of assistant professor posts also lying vacant.

According to insiders, this is mostly a result of bureaucratic inertia, including delays in promotions and complexities in determining seniority between cadre and non-cadre doctors, including medical teachers. Many were also sidelined as Officers on Special Duty (OSD) after the political changeover on August 5 last year, exacerbating the crisis. According to an estimate, some 7,500 doctors across different grades are awaiting promotions. The backlog has sparked protests by a platform of cadre doctors who, on February 25, announced a two-hour work abstention starting March 8 if promotions are not granted. They also threatened an indefinite strike from March 11 if their demands remain unmet. Students, too, have staged protests demanding a resolution. Clearly, this issue requires urgent and well-planned interventions, preferably by establishing a separate system for overseeing the recruitment and promotion of doctors, health officials, and medical teachers.

Teacher crisis is not the only problem plaguing public medical colleges. Some of them have no hospitals of their own, forcing students to travel elsewhere for practical lessons, resulting in a significant loss of study time. Many have attached hospitals, but those are also infested with problems including inadequate facilities, irregularities, mismanagement, poor sanitation, crisis of proper meals, etc. These issues must also be addressed with equal urgency. For now, however, fixing the public medical education sector should be a priority as its failure directly affects the long term future of healthcare in Bangladesh.

## Help factory workers facing job risk

Govt must prevent economic fallout from AL-linked factory closures

Although the country's economy has shown some positive gains in terms of export growth in recent times, the situation in other aspects, such as unemployment, remains concerning. The job uncertainty faced by nearly one lakh employees of factories and enterprises struggling to restart operations after the political changeover on August 5 last year adds to these worries. According to a Prothom Alo report, 95 factories in Gazipur, Savar, Narayanganj and Narasingdi have permanently shut down over the past seven months, while several others have temporarily ceased operations, resulting in 62,000 job losses so far.

Many of these factories, including those belonging to Beximco, Gazi and Bengal groups—whose owners were closely associated with the fallen Awami League regime—came under attack during and after the July mass uprising. These factories suffered heavy financial losses due to arson, vandalism, and looting. Subsequently, many failed to secure bank loans needed to resume operations. Some of the factories have substantial defaulted loans and are struggling to reschedule and repay these debts, with a number of owners either in jail or absconding fearing legal consequences for their past activities. Although the interim government has arranged to pay the arrears and service benefits of laid-off workers from Beximco, similar arrangements have not yet been made for workers of other closed factories. However, as we have previously noted in this column, paying workers' dues alone is not enough to address this crisis as it has broader economic repercussions.

The authorities, therefore, must step in and take all necessary measures to ensure employment for the factory workers and officials who are either at risk of being laid off or have already lost their jobs. A clear roadmap is needed to mitigate the losses faced by employees, creditors, and suppliers of these struggling businesses. A case-by-case assessment will be needed to restructure financial books, where possible, to facilitate factory operations. Even temporary nationalisation of some of the bigger enterprises, or a public-private partnership (PPP) initiative, could be considered. Whatever actions the government takes must happen urgently, as the jobs of thousands are at stake, along with valuable assets and machinery that risk going to waste. The employees of these factories must not bear the brunt of their owners' misdeeds and the instability caused by the uprising.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY



### Flight 370 disappears

On this day in 2014, during a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing, Malaysia Airlines flight 370 disappeared, prompting a massive search effort that was finally called off in early 2017.

# EDITORIAL

## Why Bangladeshis flee for treatment, and how to stop it



### BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza  
is professor of English at Dhaka University.

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

Exactly five years ago, on March 8, the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) announced that three patients had tested positive for COVID-19. Ten days later, the first official death was reported. Subsequently, we witnessed nightmarish lockdowns, frantic searches for ventilators and ICUs, bodies being dumped in the streets, eerie burials with no attendants, separation of families, oxygen shortages, and food crises. Government hospitals were overwhelmed, while private hospitals started charging exorbitant fees. We saw both the naked face of corruption and negligence, and the selfless service of some frontline fighters.

The pandemic, which now seems like a distant memory, exposed the fragility of our medical infrastructure. The experience should have served as a catalyst for reform and revitalisation of the sector. Instead, trust in local healthcare continued to wane, and the tendency to seek treatment abroad increased manifold. In 2023, there was a 48 percent spike in the number of outgoing Bangladeshi patients compared to the previous year. As many as eight lakh people are believed to travel abroad for medical purposes annually, spending almost \$5 billion. Both spectrums of patients—the affluent flying out to Singapore, Thailand, the UK, or the US for check-ups, and the desperate exhausting their resources to afford treatment in neighbouring countries—have contributed to outbound medical tourism.

This rise is both a symptom and a consequence of the authorities' failure to facilitate a decent healthcare system. Until recently, Bangladeshi patients comprised nearly half of India's medical tourists. Hospitals in Chennai, Kolkata, Bangkok, Singapore, and Kuala Lumpur have translators and dedicated help desks for Bangladeshi patients. The institutionalisation of services is evident in the aggressive marketing by the hospitals' local agents, who openly advertise packages that include visas, doctors' appointments, air ambulances, and even accommodations. Many of these agents direct patients to specific clinics not for medical suitability but because of profitable arrangements.

Since our hospitals already receive an overwhelming number of patients, they seem least bothered by this exodus. On the contrary, some even benefit from referral fees paid by their overseas counterparts.

The huge amounts of money spent in foreign currencies should have been enough incentive to streamline our healthcare infrastructure. But we failed. To rub salt in the wound, our once-friendly neighbour now appears to be weaponising its healthcare. Reports of visa restrictions, strict regulations, and an unspoken chill when dealing with travel requests have jeopardised the treatment of many patients. Our government's search for alternatives is evident in promoting Kunming, China as a medical destination. Malaysia is also becoming a popular destination. However, shifting dependence from one foreign country to another is far from an ideal solution.

Let's give credit where it is due. Many of our doctors are world-class,

**Public frustration deepens when they see their leaders continuing to seek treatment abroad. Political elites and business tycoons flaunt their medical trips, traveling overseas even for minor ailments. When ordinary citizens see their own leaders avoiding the system they govern, how can they be expected to trust it?**

holding international credentials and some even working in some of the best hospitals in the world. But those who have returned home are trapped in a system that discourages competence, professionalism, and ethics. Doctors are notorious for working inhumane hours, resulting in frequent fatal errors. The public sector is plagued by politicisation, where party allegiance

trumps merit, and doctors, too, often act as party cadres with ambitions that don't chime with their Hippocratic Oath. Then, there is this unholy nexus between doctors and diagnostic centres that exploits patients' vulnerability and ignorance. Bureaucratic policies have also deepened rifts within the healthcare system. The ongoing strike by diploma health technicians,

and develop domestic healthcare services must be held accountable. Modernising public hospitals should be a top priority. Perhaps funds recovered from corruption cases could be reinvested to purchase the latest medical equipment. Prevention and diagnostic care must be prioritised to prevent patients' conditions from worsening. Government tax relief



Many of our doctors are world-class, but they work within a system that discourages competence, professionalism, and ethics.

FILE PHOTO: STAR

demanding recognition as "diploma doctors," is yet another symptom of this convoluted bureaucracy. We live in a system where labels matter more than quality.

We are also living in a time when the centre cannot hold—things are falling apart. The post-July uprising sentiment is about redress, and long-repressed anger is now finding every possible outlet. In many cases, patients' families have translated their frustration with the healthcare system into attacks on doctors. The doctor-patient relationship is on the verge of collapse. Physicians are scared of retribution, while families mistrust medical services. With the system routinely failing both stakeholders, the blame remains justified.

Public frustration deepens when they see their leaders continuing to seek treatment abroad. Political elites and business tycoons flaunt their medical trips, traveling overseas even for minor ailments. When ordinary citizens see their own leaders avoiding the system they govern, how can they be expected to trust it? If a nation's rulers do not rely on local healthcare, why should its people?

We need radical reforms, beginning with a shift in mindset. Those responsible for failing to secure

should encourage philanthropic projects to build state-of-the-art facilities where top doctors choose to stay rather than migrate abroad. The Bangladeshi medical diaspora—comprising surgeons and specialists working in the Global North—can also be engaged in training local doctors, offering virtual consultations, and using AI to improve our medical standards. A tiered health financing system, where wealthier patients contribute more, could help subsidise care for the poor. Health insurance must be meaningful, not ornamental. And as a show of genuine reform, our leaders must develop the habit of seeking medical care locally.

As a country that has survived many challenges, resilience is our essential spirit. With so many brilliant doctors and medical professionals, defying the odds is not impossible. Identifying and removing the system's corrupt elements is crucial for meaningful change. We must hold our policymakers accountable and demand a healthcare system that does not force citizens to beg, borrow, or flee for medical care. Without timely intervention, we are likely to remain just as helpless as before during the next pandemic, or the next public health crisis.

## We need to learn from the Shenzhen innovation model



Dr Sayeed Ahmed  
is a consulting engineer and the CEO of BaySide Analytics, a technology-focused strategy and management consulting organisation.

SAYEED AHMED

You are walking down a hustling alleyway in Shenzhen, China's innovation hotspot in the south, just across Hong Kong. In Cantonese cuisine, dominant in this city, seafood hot pot is a luxurious and delicious dish with over 20 soup-base options. You can select your favourite seafood ingredients, like fish, shrimp or oysters, to customise your hot pot experience. Something quite similar goes with Shenzhen's innovation ecosystem.

The city's air hums with a different energy—not the sleek quiet of tech parks but a vibrant, bustling hum. Steaming tea scents the air, and voices rise and fall around low tables. Bent over workbenches, hands move with practised speed, soldering and assembling. Then, children burst in and drop school bags to join their parents in serving the incessant customer flow with food and drinks. All these make you salivate, but you also feel a different kind of innovation pulse.

You have come to this place seeking something, Silicon Valley, for all its fame, didn't fully offer: a place where hardware ideas could become real, fast and affordable. Your idea is to make a smart gadget. You need speed, efficiency, and a deep understanding

of manufacturing. Silicon Valley, the iconic hub, was the first thought. But high costs, long timelines, and a software-heavy focus made you hesitant. You need hardware expertise, agility, and a place where making things, not just coding them, is the priority. That's what has drawn you to this city that works with mind-boggling efficiency. What you have found is more than just factories; it is a unique innovation ecosystem, the "Shenzhen model," challenging Silicon Valley's dominance in ways the world must understand.

Shenzhen's rise is a modern miracle. From a small fishing village designated China's first Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in 1979 to a massive city today, it transformed at lightning speed. Initially, it was the world's factory floor, efficient and cheap, focused on processing and assembly for foreign companies. But within that intense manufacturing environment, something unexpected happened. Unlike Silicon Valley, which grew from universities and research, Shenzhen's innovation became market driven and pragmatic. By the late 1990s, Chinese companies, leveraging the now massive manufacturing base, started creating

their own products and brands. The Shenzhen model started taking shape.

The secret? Shenzhen's incredible ecosystem. Imagine a city as a giant, interconnected lab. Everything you need to create a product is within easy reach. Electronic parts? Huajiangbei, the world's biggest market for such things, is minutes away, offering endless components at wholesale prices. Prototypes? Workshops and factories are ready to create them in days, even hours, with breathtaking speed and efficiency.

Silicon Valley, in comparison, excels at deep tech and groundbreaking ideas, often from university labs. Venture capital fuels long-term, ambitious projects, focusing on disruptive, often software-based innovation. This has led to world-changing technologies, but it can be slower, pricier, and less suited for rapid hardware iteration and market shifts.

What are the reasons behind the Shenzhen model's runaway success? First, the lightning speed and agility. Design, manufacturing, and supply chains are all close. Products iterate and launch in months, not years, which is vital in today's fast-paced world. Second, it's a cost-effective powerhouse. A dense ecosystem and fierce competition drive costs down. Affordable parts and production make access to technology easy. Third, the innovation model is market-driven. It focuses on market needs and adapts quickly to solve problems. Pragmatism and market-readiness get priority over pure research. Fourth, it has the manufacturing muscle to provide unmatched production and scaling expertise.

Look at DJI, the global drone market leader. Shenzhen ecosystem enables rapid iteration, beating its competitors. BYD uses Shenzhen for supply chain control and tech integration. Huawei and Xiaomi benefit from Shenzhen's base and spread to the rest of China and the world.

The Shenzhen model inspires cities across China, like Hangzhou and Guangzhou, to build similar ecosystems. "Made in China 2025" aims to spread this model nationally for global innovation leadership.

However, Silicon Valley remains vital for deep tech breakthroughs. Shenzhen provides a complementary, increasingly important innovation path, especially for fast, affordable, and market-relevant tech. It proves innovation thrives in different forms. Understanding Shenzhen's approach is crucial for nations seeking tech and economic leadership.

The story isn't a simple race with a clear winner. Silicon Valley's strength in fundamental research and software remains unmatched. Shenzhen's model, while incredibly efficient for hardware and market-driven innovation, is still evolving. Perhaps the future of innovation isn't about choosing one model over the other, but understanding how they complement each other. Maybe the most innovative path forward involves blending the deep tech ambition of Silicon Valley with the pragmatic speed and efficiency of Shenzhen. The world might need both valleys and something entirely new inspired by their contrasting strengths to unlock the next era of technological progress.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY



### Flight 370 disappears

On this day in 2014, during a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing, Malaysia Airlines flight 370 disappeared, prompting a massive search effort that was finally called off in early 2017.

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

## The grim truth behind the Lalmatia GBV case

Mahiya Tabassum  
is a member of the editorial team at The Daily Star.

MAHIYA TABASSUM

On March 1, a man took offence to two women smoking at a tea stall in Dhaka's Lalmatia area. He allegedly verbally abused them, which duly offended the women, leading to an altercation followed by a crowd gathering at the scene and allegedly assaulting the women in public.

This incident, under the guise of moral policing, is yet another example of the deteriorating state of women's rights and safety in Bangladesh. What's more alarming is how the case was handled by the authorities, government representatives, and media, who repeatedly tried to water down the gravity of the incident.

While there have been several protests demanding the resignation of Home Affairs Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury for his failure to curb the rising violence, the incident in Lalmatia led to another one organised by the Bangladesh Against Rape and Abuse, a platform consisting of female

a man screaming and cursing at two women while a silent crowd watched. "I realised it was an act of moral policing and joined the women in protest, defending them against the man's baseless accusations of smoking 'weed' when they were simply having cigarettes and tea. The man continued his tirade, supported by a few bystanders who called him a 'murubbi.' At one point, after being subjected to relentless verbal abuse and intimidation, one of the victims threw tea at Rintu. He then physically attacked the woman, grabbing her by the hair, slapping and kicking her," he recounted.

As he stepped forward to stop the attack, his attempts to de-escalate the situation were met with further violence by Rintu and other people in the crowd, leaving him with visible injuries. "My face was bloodied, and my clothes were soon stained with it. I struggled to protect myself, but the blows kept coming," he recalled. The sheer brutality of the attack

**Such coerced compromises in gender-based violence (GBV) cases often serve to protect perpetrators rather than delivering justice. This is part of a larger pattern where the police actively discourage victims from filing cases to suppress crime statistics. The reluctance to hold perpetrators accountable only reinforces a culture of impunity, where women are expected to endure harassment and violence without any recourse to justice.**

activists and concerned citizens. Protesters burned an effigy of the home adviser, called for his resignation, and condemned the inaction against Golam Mostakim Rintu, the man who incited the assault on the women.

The first-hand account from an intervener, who was also assaulted by the crowd at the scene, paints a disturbing picture. Wishing to remain anonymous, the 25-year-old said he saw

left him shaken, yet his testimony remains a crucial piece of evidence exposing the savagery of mob justice.

In an 11-second video footage secured by this author, the female victims in Lalmatia are seen surrounded by a crowd consisting of at least 20-30 people beating them indiscriminately. Yet, the authorities' response to this incident have been shockingly inadequate. In fact, the

home adviser's response was not only tone-deal but legally and morally flawed. Instead of condemning the mob attack, he focused on the supposed offence of smoking in public spaces. However, according to the Smoking and Use of Tobacco Products (Control) Act, 2005, the location where the incident took place—a roadside tea stall—does not qualify as a designated non-smoking public place. His attempt to shift focus from the violence to the act of smoking is a blatant effort to justify

on grave provocation. However, despite the clear violations of sections 354, 509 and 504, no immediate legal action was taken against the perpetrators. Instead, the victims were allegedly pressured into signing an *aposhnama* (compromise agreement).

When contacted, the officer in-charge (OC) of Mohammadpur police station claimed that "people's faith in the police is shaken post-August 5 and they are being blamed for baseless reasons," and dismissed concerns

Such coerced compromises in gender-based violence (GBV) cases often serve to protect perpetrators rather than delivering justice. This is part of a larger pattern where the police actively discourage victims from filing cases to suppress crime statistics. The reluctance to hold perpetrators accountable only reinforces a culture of impunity, where women are expected to endure harassment and violence without any recourse to justice.

In a further display of the authorities' apathy, Environment Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan echoed the OC's stance in her recent press briefing, referring to the mob assault as a "heated argument" between the involved parties and distancing the government from any responsibility using the compromise agreement as a "final resolution"—an invalid document, according to experts.

It is equally troubling how certain media agencies played a role in downplaying the significance of a protest that took place on March 3, condemning this incident. Some of them published reports with misleading headlines that framed the demonstration as a protest against the government's decision to ban smoking in public places. One news channel went as far as linking the protest—which was held to raise voices against the ongoing trend of GBV and moral policing of women—to an "Indian conspiracy." This attempt to manipulate the narrative is clearly aimed at delegitimising the protest and silencing calls for action against GBV.

The Lalmatia incident serves as a stark reminder of the deep-rooted patriarchy that pervades every level of society in Bangladesh. From the case of being harassed for something as trivial as wearing a *tipi* to the recent rise in the cases of rape, sexual assault and digital harassment, it is clear that misogyny is deeply embedded in our social structures and collective psyche. It is not just the perpetrators of violence who must be held accountable; it is the entire ecosystem—spanning government officials, the media, law enforcement, and political parties—that continues to perpetuate this cycle of abuse. As the fight against GBV continues, it is critical that the public refuses to be silenced by social stigma and ostracism, disinformation and institutional biases, and stands firm against the structures that enable such violence.

The fight does not end with one protest. The resistance must not stop; for in every protest, every voice raised against injustice, lies the hope for a safer, more just future.



VISUAL: SHAIKH SULTANA JAHAN BADHON

the assault and absolve the perpetrators. By doing that, he bolstered the narrative of the alleged attacker who played the religious card to "justify" his moral policing of the women. Does this mean women are no longer entitled to safety and their basic human rights? More disturbingly, does this mean that the religious sensitivities of some people can now be used as an excuse for perpetrating gender-based violence? The home adviser's statement is dangerous as it attempts to legitimise moral policing and vigilante violence. Such rhetoric not only emboldens perpetrators but also implies that the state is unlikely to prioritise women's right to safety over hurting some people's religious sentiments.

The Bangladesh Penal Code of 1860 clearly criminalises the actions of Rintu and the mob under several sections, including Section 354 (criminal assault on a woman with intent to outrage her modesty), Section 509 (verbal abuse intended to insult a woman's modesty), Section 504 (intentional insult to provoke a breach of peace), and Section 352 (punishment for assault or criminal force otherwise than

about police inaction. He also emphasised that the victims' parents had signed a compromise agreement with the perpetrators, claiming that the issue had been "resolved."

The *aposhnama* signed between the victims' families and the perpetrators is legally invalid on multiple grounds, according to law experts. Firstly, under Bangladesh's criminal law, offences such as assault and harassment are non-compoundable, meaning they cannot be settled outside the court. Any attempt to bypass this process is a violation of due legal procedure. Secondly, the agreement was signed by the victims' parents rather than the victims themselves, undermining their autonomy and legal standing as adults. Furthermore, the agreement was allegedly signed under duress (being forced to act against your will through threats or pressure). According to one victim, someone identifying as a powerful individual called her father and coerced him into signing it. The fact that law enforcement facilitated this agreement instead of proceeding with legal action reflects a gross misuse of discretionary power.

## Have those in power failed Bangladesh's women?

Dr Samina Luthfa  
teaches at the Department of Sociology of Dhaka University.

SAMINA LUTHFA

The slogan of this year's International Women's Day is about ensuring rights, equality, and empowerment for all women and girls. It's an important and necessary call. However, as Bangladeshi, if we want to achieve this, a simple question must be asked: even though we have had women in the highest positions of political leadership in the country for decades, why are our women still facing oppression, violence, and discrimination?

The reality is that although women have held leadership positions for many years, their politics have not necessarily been for women. They participated in a political structure—built on aggression and the suppression of dissent—that is deeply patriarchal. The politics they have practised has not been about transforming these structures but rather operating within them, often in ways that reinforce the very systems that marginalise women. They have been assessed in relation to their male family members—father, husband or other male relatives in power once—rather than as independent political figures. Simply having a woman in the highest office does not automatically lead to gender equality, nor does it ensure the rights or empowerment of all women.

True empowerment requires a fundamental restructuring of power itself, where women can not only participate in politics but also assume decision-making roles that influence governance, policymaking, and the direction in which the country is heading. Participation alone is not enough. Women must have the authority to lead, make decisions, and shape the structures that govern society. Without that, their presence in leadership remains largely symbolic.

However, even before reaching those leadership roles, women in Bangladesh face deep structural barriers. Women who enter this space often find themselves forced to conform to the set rules, which are often imposed unofficially. And when they try to change them, they face backlash. The political system, despite having women at the top for many years, has remained male-dominated in its norms, expectations, and informal rules.

Economically too, women remain disadvantaged. A political career requires resources—money, network, influence. But women, even when they earn, often do not have

full control over their income. Their inheritance rights remain unequal and their financial dependency on male relatives limits their ability to operate independently in politics. In the Gender Parity Index of 2024, Bangladesh remains at a low rank in terms of economic equality. Women's participation in the workforce has either stagnated or declined, and the income gap between men and women has widened significantly. This economic disparity directly impacts political participation. If

**The reality is that although women have held leadership positions for many years, their politics have not necessarily been for women. They participated in a political structure that is deeply patriarchal. The politics they have practised has not been about transforming these structures but rather operating within them, often in ways that reinforce the very systems that marginalise women.**

women do not have financial independence, how can they sustain themselves in politics? How can they fund campaigns, build networks, or take leadership roles? Politics, at the end of the day, is about resources. And when resources are concentrated in the hands of men, so is power.

This brings us to the question of safety. Why, despite decades of women holding power, have we not been able to ensure basic security for women? The answer lies in the deeper cultural structures that shape our society. Women are still perceived through a patriarchal lens, either as possessions or as objects of desire. This creates two simultaneous realities: women are seen as something that belongs to men, much like a piece of land or property, and at the same time, they are objectified in a way that makes them vulnerable to violence. As a result, when a woman is sexually harassed or assaulted, the blame often falls on her rather than on the perpetrator. The system does not protect her and in many cases, actively works against her.

That is why gender-based violence never seems to decrease. It is not simply a matter of law enforcement or governance, but of how society constructs women's roles and rights.

women activists—is not random. It is a backlash. There is fear among those who have long controlled power, or are aspiring to get to power without affecting the status quo—fear that this new wave of women in leadership is not just symbolic, but real. That is why they are being targeted, both online and offline. And these attacks are coming from multiple directions, from groups with vested interests that will be destroyed if women vote en masse in elections. And that is because when women take power—not just as figureheads but with real agency—it threatens the very foundation of patriarchal control over politics.

Despite decades of so-called women leadership, real equality has remained out of our reach. That's because true equality can come only by dismantling the structures that keep women marginalised. It means economic independence, legal rights, safety, and a political culture that does not force women to conform to a system built by and for men. Until these changes happen, the struggle for women's rights and empowerment will continue, regardless of how many women occupy the highest offices in the country.

## CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH									
ACROSS							DOWN		
1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8	9
10						11			12
13						14			
15				16	17			18	
19			20				21		
			22				23		
24	25	26				27			
28				29					
30				31			32	33	34
35				36			37		
38		39			40	41			
42					43				
	44				45				

5-15

## YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

V	E	S	T		C	L	A	D	
M	O	N	T	H	L	O	V	E	R
A	L	G	A	E	A	B	A	S	E
N	A	I	R	O	B	I	T	I	P
U	R	N		M	M	B	A	S	A
P	E	E	V	E	S	A	R	T	Y
S	C	A	M		A	N	W	A	R
K	A	M	P	A	L	G	I	E	R
I	N	E		A	L	G	I	E	R
P	O	L	E	R	R	A	G	E	S
S	P	I	R	O	A	G	O	N	Y
Y	A	R	N		M	O	N	O	

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO  
dsopinion@gmail.com

# Accelerate Action: Women leading us into the future

In the ever-shifting corporate world, the call for gender equality has become louder than ever. The theme of International Women's Day 2025, 'Accelerate Action,' encourages businesses, governments, individuals, and communities to take valiant steps toward building an inclusive future. At BAT Bangladesh, creating an inclusive environment is no longer an aspiration; rather, it has become a reality. This transformation has been driven by the decisive leadership of women who have shattered barriers, redefined success, and set new benchmarks for excellence.

As we celebrate International Women's Day, we proudly highlight five remarkable women leading BAT Bangladesh into the future. Their journeys are a testament of ambition, resilience, and determination, inspiring people across all walks of life. Their stories convey a clear and strong message to all women: 'If we can do it, so can you.'

For years, women in leadership have battled systemic barriers like gender biases, work-life balance, and societal expectations. Overcoming these obstacles, a new wave of women leaders is proving that the future of leadership is diverse and inclusive. Through mentorship programmes, modern inclusive policies, and an organisational culture that promotes growth, BAT Bangladesh has been committed to accelerating gender parity. However, policies alone cannot create change—it is the people who make the difference. Through their relentless pursuit of excellence, these five women have established new benchmarks for leadership in the corporate world.

**Monisha Abraham, Managing Director**  
Joining BAT Group in December 2021 as a cross-industry hire, Monisha Abraham exemplifies the company's inclusive culture. From day one, BAT's welcoming and collaborative environment enabled her to integrate seamlessly and contribute meaningfully. The company values fresh perspectives, fostering a culture where innovation is encouraged and new ideas thrive.

Empowered to challenge the status quo, Monisha has driven impactful change within the organization. BAT's commitment to equal opportunity has been instrumental in her growth, allowing her to leverage diverse experiences and make a lasting impact.

She shares, "To thrive as a future woman leader in the corporate world, remember



In the image: From left: Ms. Armeen Rahman (Supply Chain Manager), Barrister Sabrina Zarin (Head of Litigation & Commercial), Ms. Monisha Abraham (Managing Director), Ms. Nirala Singh (Finance Director), and Ms. Nashva Hamid (Head of Corporate Finance) from BAT Bangladesh.

these key principles: Be authentic by embracing your unique qualities and being true to yourself, as authenticity builds trust and respect. Embrace flexibility by adapting to change, being open to new ideas, and adjusting to different cultures and working environments. Drive for inclusivity by creating an inclusive environment, welcoming diverse perspectives, and building alliances, as inclusivity enhances creativity and innovation. Be confident by believing in your abilities and supporting others; confidence should be paired with humility and a commitment to learning, and by paying it forward through mentoring and helping others on their journey. By following these principles, you can make a significant impact and contribute to a corporate world that values diversity, innovation, and mutual support."

**Nirala Singh, Finance Director**

Leadership for Nirala Singh is the courage to show up as the true and authentic self, and be true to oneself, while still driving business results. When her teams witness authenticity, both men and women

can experience diversity in leadership styles and also be allowed the space to shape their own professional careers and styles in a way in which they are comfortable.

She shares, "A large part of my professional success came because I had people around me to support, sponsor, and mentor me; hence, support my career journey. As women, we need to support each other at all levels to grow, develop, and shape the future generation of women leaders."

**Nashva Hamid, Area Head of Corporate Finance**

Nashva Hamid thrives at work because of an inclusive and empowering culture at BAT Bangladesh. She has received fair opportunities for growth, as well as open and honest feedback for development from leaders and mentors. Generally, inclusion thrives when there is acceptance of different perspectives and accommodation of different needs. Nashva Hamid feels lucky to have experienced all these at BAT Bangladesh.

She shares, "My professional journey was supported by my family as well as co-work-

ers and leaders who have shaped my growth as a leader. However, only a supportive and inclusive environment is not enough; individuals need to challenge their limits and push their boundaries to know what they are capable of. I think being an inspiring leader is about making people believe in themselves to bring out their best and encourage their growth."

**Barrister Sabrina Zarin, Head of Litigation & Commercial**

In the fast-paced BAT Bangladesh, Sabrina Zarin stands out as a leader whose boldness and courage inspire those around her. What truly sets Sabrina apart is her ability to see and appreciate every contribution, no matter how big or small. She ensures that every team member feels recognised and supported, motivating them to continuously strive for excellence. Sabrina doesn't just lead by words; she leads by example, consistently inspiring her colleagues through her actions and becoming a true role model for all who work with her.

Sabrina's message is clear and powerful for aspiring women leaders: "Be bold,

embrace challenges, and commit to your growth. True leadership is about inspiring others—recognising their potential, offering unwavering support, and leading with courage and compassion. My approach to leadership is a testament to the transformative power of believing in others, being humble and creating a space where everyone can excel."

**Armeen Rahman, Supply Chain Manager**

While leading a team, Armeen Rahman tends to follow the servant leadership model. It is really about the mindset of serving the people in her team. Armeen likes to lead by listening and coaching to drive people's development instead of being controlling with top-down decisions.

She shares, "Unfortunately, even today, one of the most common problems women face at work is a question mark for their success. I get asked a lot about how to handle that. My mantra and usual advice are nicely summed up in a movie quote by Emma Thompson: 'I mean, the point is, you're here. And if you want people to see you as something other than a diversity hire, you have to make them.' Please do not concentrate on the negativity; rather, focus on how to be your best self and build a trusting network among colleagues and seniors."

The company understands that gender equality is not just a moral imperative but a basic ingredient for the business. According to a McKinsey & Company study, organisations with diverse leadership tend to outperform those without it. When women lead, organisations benefit from a broader perspective, stronger financial performance, and better decision-making processes.

The stories of these five women leaders highlight the fact that gender is not a limitation; instead, it is the mindset. Success is not reserved for a select few—it's within reach of every woman who is willing to push the boundaries and challenge the status quo. However, an individual's ambition alone is not enough. Companies must take proactive steps to break systemic barriers and foster an inclusive environment where women can truly thrive.

The time for waiting is over. We must Accelerate Actions for women to lead the future.

To aspiring women: Your voice matters, your ambition is valid, and your leadership is needed.

## Banks must support and nurture female entrepreneurs

**The Daily Star (TDS):** What is the current level of women's engagement as employees and customers in the banking sector?

**SRKH: Regarding women's engagement in the banking sector—both as employees and customers—significant gaps persist. As of December 2023, women constituted only 16.37% of the total workforce in Bangladesh's banking sector. On the customer side, as of September 2024, female customers owned 37% of total deposit accounts and 19% of total loan accounts.**

To improve this situation, banks must foster an environment where women can participate on an equal footing with their male counterparts. While each gender has unique strengths, organizations must recognize these differences and implement policies that actively support women, such as anti-harassment policies and inclusive workplace initiatives.

Women make up 51% of Bangladesh's population, and failing to provide them with opportunities for professional and personal growth is not only inequitable but also economically unwise. Any organization committed to performance and meritocracy cannot afford to overlook such a significant segment of the workforce.

The same principle applies to women entrepreneurs. Banks have a responsibility to support and nurture female entrepreneurship. Those that actively develop programs for women entrepreneurs are not just contributing to economic progress but also expanding their own customer base, ensuring long-term business growth.

**TDS:** What special banking features or tailored services does your bank offer specifically for women?

**SRKH:** We have dedicated Women entrepreneur Development Unit (WEDU) under MSME banking that offers deposit, lending, training and advice to the female customers and entrepreneurs. The women customer can avail the services through 135 Bank Asia branches and the bank's expanded network of more than 5,000 agent points all over Bangladesh. We offer several tailored services for women which include:



**SOHAIR R K HUSSAIN**  
Managing Director  
Bank Asia

- Specially designed deposit products
- Working capital and fixed asset loans at lower rates under Bangladesh Bank's Women Entrepreneur Refinance Scheme and CMSME Pre-Finance Scheme.
- Incentives as declared and disbursed by Bangladesh Bank.
- Women-led enterprise cluster financing.
- Privilege Rate Loans under the SME Foundation's Credit Wholesaling Fund.
- Startup and handicraft training through the SME Foundation.
- Financial literacy training, awareness building and knowledge sharing seminars for women entrepreneurs.

**TDS:** How to increase women's access to banking services?

**SRKH:** Increasing women's access to banking services requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses financial, social, and technological barriers. Here are some key strategies:

- Promote digital and agent banking solutions to reach women in remote areas where traditional banks are not easily accessible.
- Simplify account opening processes using biometric identification and digital verification.
- Design savings and credit products tailored to women's needs, such as small business loans with flexible repayment options.

- Provide group lending options that allow women to access credit collectively.
- Use community outreach programs to educate women in rural areas about banking benefits.
- Encourage banks to recruit female staff to make women customers feel more comfortable.
- Offer business mentorship and training programs to help women grow their enterprises.
- Create women-focused banking desks or dedicated support lines for female business owners.

Implementing these strategies can significantly improve women's financial inclusion, leading to greater economic independence and overall economic growth.

## Real-time banking services bridging gap for unbanked women

**The Daily Star (TDS):** How have Bangladesh Bank's directives been instrumental in promoting financial literacy among women?

**Tamanna Quadry (TQ):** Prime Bank is committed to empowering women by promoting financial literacy in alignment with Bangladesh Bank's directives. Bangladesh Bank's directives have played a crucial role in advancing financial literacy among women, particularly by implementing initiatives such as collateral-free loans and low-interest credit for women entrepreneurs. These measures have cultivated an enabling environment for women to access credit and manage businesses effectively. Prime Bank has further aligned with this vision by offering women-centric banking products, such as the Prime Women's Savings Account and Hasanh Women's Savings Account, which feature health insurance benefits and interest rates of up to 5%. These tailored products are designed to promote savings, improve financial security, and foster long-term financial literacy for women across the country.

**TDS:** What training programs support women by leveraging local networks and interactive methods to address their unique challenges, equipping RMG workers, coastal communities, and indigenous groups with banking fundamentals for economic independence?

**TQ:** To empower women, various training programs leverage local networks and interactive methods to address their specific challenges. These initiatives, particularly targeted at RMG workers, coastal communities, and indigenous groups, focus on equipping women with essential banking and financial management skills. For instance, Prime Bank's Neera Service Corner brings banking services closer to women in remote areas, ensuring easy access to both services and support. In addition, Prime Bank has launched a free online learning platform, enabling women to enhance their financial skills through comprehensive training modules aimed at fostering economic independence. The bank also conducts nationwide financial literacy training sessions to elevate women's financial knowledge and support their autonomy. Complementing these efforts, Bangladesh Bank's microfinance sector, with women constituting 89.55% of MFI account holders, underscores the success of grassroots financial inclu-



**TAMANNA QUADRY**  
EVP and Head of Priority & Women Banking, Prime Bank

sion programs. Through these combined efforts, women are empowered with the tools and knowledge needed to achieve financial independence and economic empowerment.

**TDS:** How could the collaboration between FinTech and Mobile Financial Services (MFS), as adopted by you, elevate unbanked women?

**TQ:** The collaboration between FinTech and MFS offers a transformative solution for unbanked women, particularly those in remote and underserved areas. Prime Bank's digital platforms, MyPrime and Prime Pay, provide real-time banking services that allow women to perform transactions, send money, and manage their savings with ease, helping bridge the gap for unbanked women and promoting financial autonomy.

Recent data from 2023 reveals a growing trend, with 7.2% of women in Bangladesh now using mobile banking. In response to this surge, Prime Bank introduced MyPrime, which offers secure sign-ins, account snapshots, and easy access to a wide range of banking services. Additionally, Prime Agrim facilitates digital nano loan, which is enhancing women's ability to manage their finances seamlessly. These platforms are instrumental in empowering women to take control of their economic well-being, advancing financial inclusion, and ensuring equal access to banking services.

**TDS:** What tailored products do you offer for targeted women to enhance financial literacy and facilitate transactions?

**TQ:** To promote financial literacy and facilitate transactions for women, Prime Bank offers a range of tailored products that cater to their specific needs. These include the Prime Women's Savings Account, Prime Anchol Loan, and Hasanh Women's Savings Account, along with personal loans, bike loans, home loans, and credit cards. These products provide accessible savings options, health insurance coverage, and competitive interest rates of up to 5%, encouraging women to save and secure their financial future. For women entrepreneurs, Prime Anchol Loan offers flexible, low-interest loans, helping them overcome financial barriers and expand their businesses. These tailored banking solutions not only support women's financial inclusion but also empower them by making banking services more accessible, user-friendly, and aligned with their specific financial goals.

### STAR SPORTS SELECT

HD1

Premier League  
Nottingham Forest vs  
Man City  
Live from 6:30 pm  
Liverpool vs

Southampton  
Live from 9:00 pm  
Brentford vs Aston Villa  
Live from 11:30 pm  
Wolves vs Everton  
Live from 2:00 am  
(Saturday)



### Historic medal for women's kabaddi team

On the eve of the International Women's Day, Bangladesh women's kabaddi team brought good news from Iran, ensuring a first-ever bronze medal in the Asian Women's Kabaddi Championship. The Bangladesh team beat Thailand by 42-27 points in their last group stage match yesterday to confirm their last four berth, thereby ensuring a bronze medal. Although Bangladesh eventually lost the semifinal against favourites Iran by 41-18 points, the bronze medal was worth the celebration for the Bangladesh team.

PHOTO: BKF

BCB plans to be more selective in issuing NOCs

SPORTS REPORTER

Word around the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is that it will be more selective from now on in giving no objection certificates (NOC) to national team players and will do a "qualitative assessment" to ensure players don't compete in questionable leagues.

NOCs have been a tricky subject in Bangladesh cricket, with some players regularly getting those from the BCB while others having to pass up lucrative opportunities as the board does now allow them to compete.

Pacer Taskin Ahmed has been the biggest victim of the board's inconsistent NOC policy in the past.

Taskin was denied an NOC in 2023 for a stint with the Yorkshire County Cricket Club because the BCB wanted to keep him fresh ahead of the ODI World Cup.

Last year, Taskin and Shoriful Islam were denied NOCs for the IPL, however, pacer Mustafizur Rahman was allowed to compete in the same event.

Instead of the IPL, both Taskin and Shoriful played 50 over cricket for Abahani in the Dhaka Premier League in sweltering heat even as the T20 World Cup was on the horizon.

One source claimed that "the previous board president [Nazmul Hassan Papon] did not give NOC to Taskin to keep him for Abahani's matches."

During the board of directors meeting on Monday, the NOC issue was discussed and board members decided how they would go about the issue from now on.

"We will be more selective regarding NOCs moving forward. Rather than quantity, a qualitative assessment, as in how much the cricketer can gain in experience by playing in a certain league, will be prioritised," a BCB director, on conditions of anonymity, said.

The board is not in favour of giving NOCs without some assessment.

"We don't want to give out wholesale NOCs. For instance, T10 tournaments have been a stage of blatant corruption. The board will advise cricket operations on what to do about these tournaments," a source claimed.

Lanka T10 and Abu Dhabi T10 tournaments are part of those T10 tournaments that the BCB feels players can do without.

There are other tournaments such as Global T20 in Canada, for which the board may not give NOC to its best assets. In the past, Shakib Al Hasan and Liton Das played in this tournament.

"We will obviously encourage players who get opportunities in county cricket. There are proper T20 tournaments like IPL or CPL, and if the players are free, the board will be positive about those," a BCB official said.

Previously, the board had decided to allow two NOCs per year for players but this time it has not made any decision on number of NOCs yet. Given the international calendar and the fact that not many Bangladeshi players get opportunities to play in top foreign leagues, it remains to be seen whether the scenario improves if they do get lucrative opportunities in future.

## Factors that could decide CT final's fate

### AGENCIES



The stage is set for an exciting Champions Trophy final between India and New Zealand at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium on Sunday. With game-changers on both sides, the title clash is expected to be a battle of nerves and strategy. Here are five crucial factors that could determine the winner.

### Henry's Opening Burst

New Zealand are banking on pace bowler Matt Henry to recover from his shoulder injury, as coach Gary Stead remains optimistic about his availability. Henry injured his right shoulder while taking a catch in the semifinal against South Africa on Wednesday.

Henry has been instrumental in New Zealand's campaign, leading the bowling charts with 10 wickets.

His previous encounter with India saw him dismantle their top order, dismissing Shubman Gill and Virat Kohli early to leave India struggling at 30-3. Although his five-wicket haul (5-42) came in a losing effort, his ability to strike in the Powerplay could give New Zealand a strong edge.

### Chakravarthy's Mystery Spin

India's surprise weapon, wrist-spinner Varun Chakravarthy, has made a sensational impact since being added to the squad. His spell of 5-42 against New Zealand earlier in the tournament rattled the Black Caps, proving his effectiveness on the Dubai track.

Chakravarthy continued his good form in the semifinal against Australia, taking two key wickets. His unorthodox variations and ability to deceive batters could be crucial in restricting New Zealand's middle order. If India include him in the XI, he might be the game changer on a surface assisting spin.

"We will be more selective regarding NOCs moving forward. Rather than quantity, a qualitative assessment, as in how much the cricketer can gain in experience by playing in a certain league, will be prioritised," a BCB director, on conditions of anonymity, said.

The board is not in favour of giving NOCs without some assessment.

"We don't want to give out wholesale NOCs. For instance, T10 tournaments have been a stage of blatant corruption. The board will advise cricket operations on what to do about these tournaments," a source claimed.

Lanka T10 and Abu Dhabi T10 tournaments are part of those T10 tournaments that the BCB feels players can do without.

There are other tournaments such as Global T20 in Canada, for which the board may not give NOC to its best assets. In the past, Shakib Al Hasan and Liton Das played in this tournament.

"We will obviously encourage players who get opportunities in county cricket. There are proper T20 tournaments like IPL or CPL, and if the players are free, the board will be positive about those," a BCB official said.

Previously, the board had decided to allow two NOCs per year for players but this time it has not made any decision on number of NOCs yet. Given the international calendar and the fact that not many Bangladeshi players get opportunities to play in top foreign leagues, it remains to be seen whether the scenario improves if they do get lucrative opportunities in future.

### Ravindra and Williamson Threat

The combination of young sensation Rachin Ravindra and veteran Kane Williamson provides New Zealand with stability and firepower. The duo stitched together a 164-run stand in the semifinal against South Africa, with both scoring centuries.

Williamson's ability to anchor innings and Ravindra's aggressive stroke play make them a formidable challenge for India's spinners. Having already troubled India

consistency, head coach Gautam Gambhir emphasized Rohit's impact beyond just numbers. A solid start from Rohit in the final could set the tone for India's batting lineup and put pressure on New Zealand's bowlers.

### The Pitch Factor

The Dubai International Cricket Stadium has played host to all of India's matches due to political reasons, giving them an advantage in understanding the conditions. The pitch has been slow,



earlier in the tournament, their presence at the crease could be pivotal in determining New Zealand's fate in the final.

### Rohit's Start

Indian captain Rohit Sharma has struggled to convert his starts into big scores in the tournament, with a highest score of 41. However, his aggressive approach at the top has provided India with quick fire starts, allowing the middle order to build on the momentum.

While some have criticized his lack of

assisting spinners and making high scores difficult.

New Zealand, on the other hand, have played on high-scoring pitches in Pakistan, including their record-breaking 362-6 against South Africa. Their adaptability to Dubai's sluggish surface will be tested in the final. However, all-rounder Rachin Ravindra remains confident in their ability to adjust, stating, "We pride ourselves in adapting and playing the situation in front of us."



Yasir Ali stole the show in the Dhaka Premier League yesterday, smashing an unbeaten 121-ball 143 to help Dhanmondi Sports Club go top of the standings after beating Legends of Rupganj by 24 runs at BKSP-3. En route to his third List A ton, Yasir stitched a 146-run fifth-wicket stand with Moin Khan to propel Dhanmondi to 332 for seven in 50 overs. Rupganj, who lost a number of early wickets, could only manage 308 for nine.

**Congratulations**  
on your outstanding performance in  
JAGA Invitational Ryder Cup - 2025, Thailand

**40th**  
YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

SCAN HERE

**btj**  
SINCE 1984

Proud sponsor of  
BANGLADESH  
NATIONAL GOLF TEAM

## FIFA lifts restricted financing on BFF

SPORTS REPORTER

FIFA lifted restricted financing on Bangladesh Football Federation on Friday, six years after football's world governing body imposed the restrictions over lack of financial transparency and expenditure of FIFA money outside of specific sectors.

"After six years, the BFF has come out of the restricted financing from FIFA, which just informed us of the development today," BFF president Tabith Awal told The Daily Star.

"We have been able to do it in four months, something that was not done in past," said Tabith, who was elected as BFF president in October last year. After becoming the BFF president, Tabith met with FIFA president once and AFC president twice; he even visited FIFA and AFC headquarters to bring forward the visit of FIFA's audit team.

FIFA usually allocates US\$1.25 lakh per year to member nations in two or three instalments but it had allocated the same amount to BFF in 12 allotments each year over the last six years.

"Now BFF can apply for special projects to FIFA and run its activities smoothly," Tabith added.

## Booters 'excited' to face Chhetri again

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh head coach Javier Cabrera and the players have expressed their excitement rather than scare at the news of the retirement U-turn of Indian legend Sunil Chhetri for the March FIFA window.

The All India Football Federation (AIFF) on Thursday night announced that Chhetri had decided to return for national duty and then announced him as part of its 26-member squad for the FIFA window, which will feature a friendly against Maldives on March 19 before the Asian Cup Qualifiers fixture against Bangladesh on March 25.

According to a statement from the AIFF, India coach Manolo Marquez asked the forward to return, given the importance of the upcoming fixtures.

The 40-year-old forward, who had announced his retirement from international football in June last year, has scored six goals in six matches against Bangladesh.

However, Cabrera feels that the presence of Chhetri will instead motivate the Bangladesh players to give their best.

"Obviously all of us know Sunil (Chhetri). He's having a very good season with Bengaluru FC. So I think it's very normal that they have decided to call him back, but I think it's going to make the team more excited and motivated for the match," the Spaniard said in a video message from Taif, Saudi Arabia where the Bangladeshi team spent their second day of 11-day training camp yesterday.

Defender Saad Uddin, who had scored a famous goal in a 1-1 draw against India during a World Cup Qualifier in Kolkata in 2019, said it would be a good experience facing the Indian talisman again.

"He's a great player and it will be good for us facing him," said Saad.

Meanwhile, young forward Sheikh Morsalin, who could be playing against India for the first time, said: "I feel it's (Chhetri's return) good for us because there would have been something missing without him."

THE BEST QUALITY  
EVERY TIME GUARANTEED  
BSRM



## ROHINGYA REFUGEES

# WFP seeks urgent funding to avoid aid deficit

REUTERS, New Delhi

The UN World Food Programme (WFP) yesterday called for urgent funding for its Bangladesh operations, warning that a funding deficit would curb rations for the Rohingya in the world's largest refugee settlement.

Reuters reported on Wednesday that the United Nations would have to cut food rations to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh from \$12.50 to \$6 per month in April after failing to secure funding.

While the WFP has not specified whether the reduction was due to the Trump administration's decision to cut US foreign aid globally, an official has told Reuters it was likely as the United States had been the top donor in the Rohingya crisis.

"Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh remain entirely dependent on humanitarian assistance for their survival. Any reduction in food assistance will push them deeper into hunger and force them to resort to desperate measures just to survive," Dom Scalpelli, WFP Country Director in Bangladesh, said in a statement.

The WFP said it had already started communicating with the Rohingya community about the potential ration cuts.

Bangladesh is sheltering more than one million Rohingyas - members of a persecuted Muslim minority who fled violent purges in neighbouring Myanmar mainly

SEE PAGE 6 COL 2



A boy leaps over the construction trench in Ring Road in the capital's Mohammadpur. A part of this busy road has been dug for maintenance of utility lines, causing a bottleneck. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## ROOPPUR PLANT PGCB sends clarification on our story

Power Grid Bangladesh PLC (PGCB) has sent an explanation on the report published in The Daily Star on March 3 titled "Rooppur power plant: Incomplete power line delays test run", saying that the news incorrectly attributes the delay in the test operations solely to the unfinished transmission line work, which is inaccurate.

It said the construction work of "Rooppur Bogra 400 kV Single Circuit Transmission Line" and "Rooppur Baghbari 230 kV Double Circuit Transmission Line" has been completed in April 2024 and April 2022, respectively. Each of the transmission lines has a capacity to evacuate around 2,000 megawatts (MW) electricity, which was built for the testing and evacuation of the first unit of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant.

The explanation said it is possible to maintain the highest security of the national grid system and evacuate 600 MW of electricity from the first unit of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant through these

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

# Russia launches large-scale attack on Ukraine

Energy facilities hit; Zelensky renews call for air truce; Kremlin rules out ceasefire

AFP, Kyiv

Russia launched a "massive" drone and missile attack on Ukrainian energy facilities early yesterday, just days after President Volodymyr Zelensky and European allies proposed that Moscow and Kyiv halt strikes on critical infrastructure.

The Ukrainian air force said Russia had launched at least 58 missiles and nearly 200 drones, damaging energy facilities across the country from Kharkiv in the east to Ternopil in the west.

Firefighters were battling a blaze on streets lined with debris in the Kharkiv region, images released by the emergency services showed.

Zelensky yesterday called for a truce in the air and at sea, as well as additional pressure on Russia, after the massive attack.

"The first steps to establishing real peace should be forcing the sole source of this war, Russia, to stop such attacks," Zelensky said on the Telegram app.

The Kremlin had responded by ruling out any temporary ceasefire in Ukraine, and yesterday, its defence ministry confirmed it had carried out "precision" strikes on energy facilities, claiming they support the Ukrainian military.

Russia is "targeting facilities linked to Ukraine's military-industrial complex," Russian

President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

US President Donald Trump yesterday threatened new sanctions and tariffs on Russia over its bombardments of Ukraine.

The Ukrainian air force said it had deployed French Mirage fighter jets -- delivered to Ukraine last month -- for the first time to repel the aerial onslaught. The fighter jets along with air defence units shot down 34 missiles and 100 drones.

DETEK, the largest private energy supplier in Ukraine, said its facilities in the Black Sea region of Odesa were targeted for a fourth night in a row.

And it said that gas facilities in the central Poltava region had "ceased operations" after being struck in the overnight attack.

State gas company Naftogaz also said its production facilities were damaged, without giving details. Authorities in at least five Ukrainian regions said Russia had targeted energy facilities.

The latest Russian air assault came after EU leaders, shaken by the prospect of US disengagement, agreed to boost the European bloc's defences.

And Washington said talks with Kyiv were back on track to secure a ceasefire with Moscow -- after a public falling out between President Donald Trump and Zelensky.

- Trump threatens new sanctions on Russia over its bombardments of Ukraine
- Ukraine used French jets for first time to defend attack

production facilities were damaged, without giving details. Authorities in at least five Ukrainian regions said Russia had targeted energy facilities.

The latest Russian air assault came after EU leaders, shaken by the prospect of US disengagement, agreed to boost the European bloc's defences.

And Washington said talks with Kyiv were

back on track to secure a ceasefire with Moscow -- after a public falling out between President Donald Trump and Zelensky.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

## 2018 POLLS ACC to probe SPs, DCs over 'midnight voting'

DIPAN NANDY

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) will launch an investigation against former deputy commissioners (DCs) and superintendents of police (SPs) over their alleged irregularities during the 2018 national election.

Complaints have been filed with the ACC against them over nighttime voting, ballot fraud, falsely reporting voter turnout above 90 percent in certain centres, large-scale illegal financial transactions, and abuse of power to ensure the victory of specific candidates.

Based on these complaints, the ACC has started an investigation, which includes probing officials found to be involved in the irregularities committed during the 2018 election, ACC Director General Akhtar Hossain told The Daily Star.

"A five-member ACC team is conducting the investigation into allegations of abuse of power, criminal misconduct, forgery, midnight voting, and financial transactions to influence the 2018 parliamentary election."

To investigate these allegations, the ACC has already started analysing various videos, reports from domestic and international media, and election result sheets.

"They are also reviewing the income tax records of the officials and have already discovered significant illegal assets owned by many of them. More details will emerge

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

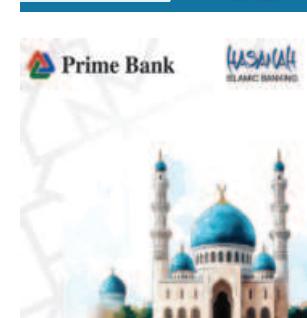


A heavy traffic in front of New Market in the capital yesterday as more people went shopping on the first weekend of Ramadan.



'Want to live  
freely, safely,  
and with dignity'  
Women stage  
silent protest

P3



**PRAYER TIMING**  
MARCH 8

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha  
AZAN 4:59 12:45 4:30 6:05 7:30

JAMAAT 5:09 1:15 4:45 6:20 8:00

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

**SEHRI, IFTAR TIMING**

RAMADAN MARCH SEHRI IFTAR

7 8 6:05

8 9 4:57 6:06

9 10 4:56 6:06

**Women should see fitness not as a luxury, but as a necessity. With pregnancy, hormonal changes, and constant shifts in the body, it's essential to first understand your body -- its strengths, limits, and endurance.**



# Footwork, fitness and FEARLESSNESS

**The unstoppable life of Bangladesh's first female karate black belt**



**Women in Bangladesh face very limited career opportunities in sports, leaving them with little to build on. There's no clear career path for them here. This is the most heartbreaking part of my journey -- seeing so many talented women with nowhere to go in the field they love.**

**For Tulee, often called "Wonder Woman" in the fitness community, carrying the Bangladeshi flag to global platforms has never been about fame. It's about her unwavering belief that every woman deserves strength, empowerment, and the freedom to live fearlessly.**

#### NILIMA JAHAN

There was a time when doctors told her there was no cure. A time when the world seemed to close in, whispering that this might be the end. But she refused to listen. She chose to fight -- not just with fists and footwork, but with the unyielding will of a warrior.

The story of Shamima Akhtar Tulee, Bangladesh's first female karate black belt and highest Dan, is more than just one of triumph. It is a testament to resilience, defiance, and sheer willpower -- qualities that made her not only a champion on the mat but a fighter against every obstacle life threw her way.

#### A DREAM BORN FROM A POSTER

The spark was lit in 1983 when a blood-streaked poster changed everything. Tulee's brother brought home an image of Bruce Lee, battered but unbreakable. "He fought a tiger -- and won," he said.

The words sent a jolt through her. "If a human could possess such power, then it wasn't just legend -- it was something to be learned, something to be mastered," she recalled.

Her world at the time was one of academics. Her siblings studied at prestigious medical and university institutions, and Tulee herself was expected to follow in their footsteps.

But the spark ignited by that Bruce Lee poster was more powerful than any academic expectation. Curiosity turned into obsession, and obsession gave way to history. With the fire of a true fighter burning within her, Tulee found a way to begin her journey.

When her family moved to Dhaka, Tulee secretly enrolled in a karate class in Bhuter Goli, knowing well that society would never accept girls practicing martial arts. Instead of attending the coaching her father had arranged, she joined the class

without his knowledge, bringing her sister along for support.

She was the only girl among 59 boys.

The trainer was hesitant, insisting she bring a guardian's permission. Undeterred, Tulee forged her father's signature and began attending classes, using her tiffin money to pay the fees. She trained in secrecy, and though the trainer was concerned for her safety, the 59 boys quickly became her protectors.

"After a month, my uniform smelled of sweat, but I couldn't wash it at home for fear of being caught. When my mentor suggested dry-cleaning, I couldn't afford it, so I washed it myself. That's when my sister found out," said Tulee.

Despite her family's disapproval, Tulee was unstoppable.

campaigns, selecting promising talents for advanced training at the center. Her skills and leadership earned her a place in the Bangladesh Ansar and Village Defence Party (VDP) team, where she was later appointed as a coach.

Despite her success, not everyone supported her. When she joined Dhaka University's English department, balancing academics and sports became a struggle. Critics questioned, "Why does she still fight?" Pressured to step aside for younger athletes, Tulee shifted focus to teaching, taking jobs at three English medium schools.

Yet, her passion for karate and fitness remained. Determined to build something of her own, she saved every penny and, in 2001, launched Combat Gym by

government support.

But the women came. One by one, they joined. Mothers, students, professionals -- women who had never stepped into a gym before. She was building a movement. And then -- just as she reached her peak -- life hit her with the hardest fight yet.

In 2003, when Tulee became a mother, she expected joy, not a battle for survival. But motherhood was soon overshadowed by a devastating diagnosis: Non-cirrhotic portal hypertension -- a rare, incurable genetic condition.

For years, she was hospitalised for months at a time, battling jaundice, melena, anaemia, and internal bleeding. Every two months, she needed a new stent. The medical costs drained her. She lost her savings. She sold everything. But it still wasn't enough.

Yet, following the famous Japanese proverb, "Fall down seven times, get up eight" -- she refused to surrender.

"My strength was fading, and the doctors had no cure. Sent home with no hope, I made a decision: I would rise. I would rebuild my body and mind, no matter the odds. I would never again be powerless. And so, I returned to meditation."

"I practiced exercise, lifted weights, and lifted myself up. I believed that one day, a great solution would come, and for that, I had to keep fighting."

And then, in March 2022, at the age of 49, Tulee defied every expectation. She became an international veteran champion at the Ozawa Cup International Karate Tournament in Las Vegas -- the first Bangladeshi woman to win a medal in the veteran category.

Over 900 karatekas from 30 countries participated in the tournament.

But this victory was even more special. Her son, Tahseen Shaan Leon, won two bronze medals alongside her. For the first time in Bangladesh's history, a mother and son stood together on the winners' podium.

"Despite being a five-time National Gold Medalist, I missed the World Karate Championship due to lack of funds, support, and sponsorship. Many golden opportunities slipped away, but after years of struggle, I was finally repaid -- along with my child", she said.

She was also one of five martial artists worldwide selected for the Fifth Martial Arts Research Initiative for Experts Programme 2022, organised by Unesco's International Centre of Martial Arts. She became the first athlete from Bangladesh to participate in this competitive and prestigious research programme.

Yet, just months later, her condition took a turn for the worse. By the end of 2022, she had been

admitted to four hospitals across three countries. Then came the final blow -- she needed Tk 30 lakh for urgent surgery in Delhi.

"As a single mother for the past 10 years, solely responsible for both my long-term treatment and family, it was impossible to afford such a large sum," she said.

Desperate, she reached out to the Bangladesh Karate Federation, wrote to the prime minister, and appealed to sports organisations but received no response. It was only her friends from Dhaka University's English department who, in the end, launched a campaign and raised the funds that ultimately saved her life.

"And throughout my difficult journey, my companion was always my son, Leon," she added.

"I've dedicated my life to sports, bringing pride to Bangladesh in international competitions. I have served the Karate Federation, Powerlifting Association, Bodybuilding, and Yoga whenever and however they needed me, but when I turned to my own country for support, I was met with nothing," she said.

"Women in Bangladesh face very limited career opportunities in sports, leaving them with little to build on. There's no clear career path for them here. This is the most heartbreaking part of my journey -- seeing so many talented women with nowhere to go in the field they love."

Reflecting on this, she advises, "While self-defense is crucial, education must come first. Finish your studies, understand your purpose, and become self-reliant. Without education and financial literacy, the world can be an incredibly tough place for women."

She further emphasised, "Moreover, women should see fitness not as a luxury, but as a necessity. With pregnancy, hormonal changes, and constant shifts in the body, it's essential to first understand your body -- its strengths, limits, and endurance."

As part of her ongoing journey, she recently launched LOIS CHLOE, the country's first and only vegan cosmetic brand.

For Tulee, often called "Wonder Woman" in the fitness community, carrying the Bangladeshi flag to global platforms has never been about fame. It's about her unwavering belief that every woman deserves strength, empowerment, and the freedom to live fearlessly. This is the message she hopes to impart through her book, "Sick to Strong", co-written with her son Leon.

Quoting her favourite words from Rumi, "You were born with wings, why prefer to crawl through life?" she urged every woman to rise, fight, and "be unstoppable."



#### BREAKING BARRIERS, BREAKING RECORDS

In 1989, at just 16 years old, Tulee became the first Bangladeshi woman to receive a black belt in Shotokan Karate. She was tested twice to silence any doubts about a female earning the title.

That same year, she won two gold medals in the National Karate Championship.

Her father, unaware of her karate involvement, first discovered her achievements on the evening news when he saw his daughter receiving gold medals from a minister. When Tulee returned home that night with a split lip and bruises, she braced herself for her father's reaction, but he said nothing.

Between 1989 and 1993, she cemented her place as one of Bangladesh's greatest martial artists, winning five consecutive national championships. But her impact went beyond personal victories -- she trained students in school

Tulee -- Bangladesh's first female-led combat gym focused on fitness, self-defence, and mental strength.

She trained internationally in Yoga, Pilates, Fitness Training, Stress Management, Krav Maga, and Shaolin Kung Fu, traveling across America, Australia, India, Thailand, Malaysia, and China, learning the most advanced techniques in each field.

But fitness training revealed a new reality. She met women struggling with obesity, infertility, and chronic illnesses -- women desperate to reclaim their health. She realised her mission was bigger than just combat training; it was about empowering women to take control of their bodies and their lives.

Since karate requires fundamental fitness, her gym became a hub for strength training, guiding over 10,000 people on their fitness journeys. She built it from the ground up -- handling training, finances, logistics -- without sponsors or

## THE SHELF

## Your guide to feminist resistance

**"What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable."**

## STAR LITERATURE DESK

This International Women's Day, Star Books and Literature brings to you a list of five books that delve into the history of feminist movements and feminist resistance. As women continue to face increasingly intolerant and indeed, violent attacks from different quarters in contemporary Bangladesh, it is essential that we turn towards our feminist foremothers—whose hard work helped pave the way for a more equitable society—and remember to remain cautious and alert about our hard-earned rights. For as history teaches us again and again, the struggle for women's rights is constant and ongoing. An even more important reminder is that rights, once won, are not permanent and can be taken away by forces that want to oppress and silence women.

*Feminism is for everybody*

bell hooks

Pluto Press, 2000

For many, feminist theory, and in turn feminism itself, can seem like a daunting undertaking. Because theoretical texts tend to be dense and difficult to make out, people often come to know about feminism "thirdhand", as hooks puts it, from the media and social circles they interact with. As such, feminism is easily and sometimes maliciously misconstrued, leading to women being labelled "feminazis" or, as is more commonplace on Bangladeshi social media, "neribadi". But feminism isn't "man hating", and men themselves are not free from patriarchal oppression. bell hooks' short but welcoming treatise on feminism—and its intersections with politics, class, and society at large—invites readers to close the distance and learn firsthand what feminism is, what it stands for, and how it advocates for all.

*Sisters in the Mirror: A History Of Muslim Women And The Global Politics Of Feminism*  
Elora Shehabuddin  
UPL, 2024

Challenging the western feminist preoccupation of rescuing "third-world Muslim women" from oppression and otherness, Shehabuddin's work presses against the monolithic categorisation of 'Muslim women' and takes a closer look at the construction and development of Bengali Muslim female identity from pre-colonial times to the post-Independence Bangladeshi



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

feminist landscape. The book's attempt to destigmatise the categories "Muslim" and "women" from the hegemonic, Eurowestern ideals intent on seeing them as separate and therefore, othered is significant. The "mirror" from the title is Shehabuddin drawing a parallel along the lines of empathy, camaraderie and solidarity between the west and the east and our collective feminist struggles.

*Women, Race, Class*  
Angela Davis  
Random House, 1981

A classic for a reason, Davis examines the American women's liberation movement and asserts the issue of blackness and femininity into mainstream feminist discourse. One of the earlier texts to incorporate the intersectional approach of race, gender, and class, Davis' text is foundational to our understanding of the role class plays in women's emancipation and access to quality life.

*The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*

Audre Lorde

Penguin UK, 2018

"What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable."

Whether oppressive systems can be transformed from within has long been a subject of discussion, with theorists such as Lorde concluding that, without a complete overhaul of such structures, it is impossible to effect meaningful change. In "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House", Lorde also criticises the feminisms of white and other "socially acceptable" women, who conveniently leave more marginalised out of their activism because it requires them to acknowledge their own privilege. In another essay from this collection, "The Uses of

Anger: Women Responding to Racism", Lorde highlights the importance of women holding on to the anger they feel at the constant barrage of injustices they are subjected to, and urges women to channel it constructively as a means of both taking up space and bringing about lasting change.

*Ekattorer Dinguli*

Jahanara Imam

Shandhani Prokashoni, 1986

Drawn from daily diary entries written during the 1971 war, Jahanara Imam's memoir *Ekattorer Dinguli* offers a powerful firsthand account of the country's nine-month struggle for freedom, weaving a personal story with the country's political fate. The book is a significant historical and literary work on the Liberation War, providing first-hand testimonies of violence within the larger framework of the independence struggle. To preserve authenticity, Imam thoroughly verified details, especially concerning guerrilla tactics.

by reviewing 80 audio recordings of interviews of surviving freedom fighters who fought alongside her son, Shafi Imam Rumi, and other witnesses of the war. In subsequent interviews, she revealed her awareness of the dangers associated with documenting sensitive information about guerrilla activities and explained the methods she employed to safeguard the journal's contents. Imam filled her journal with mundane details, creating the facade of a bored housewife's thoughts. While her longing for her son was central to her, as she waited for him every day of the war, she also used coded language, such as replacing "six rifles" with "six sarees," and employed pseudonyms to safeguard the identities of the soldiers. The book underscores women's active participation in the larger political struggles that have been foundational to the existence of Bangladesh as a country.

## FICTION

## Retribution

MOJAFFOR HOSSAIN

*Trigger warning: Rape*

Every day, five newspapers arrive at Mohsin's house. He is a retired college professor, and although he spent more than half his life teaching, his habit of reading newspapers hasn't grown old. For the past 10 years, he and his wife have been reading the papers together. One particular event drew them in, and since then, they've become addicted to the daily news. These five newspapers are among the most prominent in the country, and one of them is in English.

The newspapers arrive quite early in the morning. But the two of them—after finishing breakfast and bathing—sit down with it together. This ritual has become something sacred for them, almost like a prayer. They pore over each page, taking their time, carefully flipping back and forth. Since they have no children, there's no rush to do anything for anyone else. When every page has been thoroughly read, Mohsin's wife, Rabeya, brings the scissors. Mohsin hands her each news item he's marked in red ink, one by one. With great care, she cuts them out—if there's a picture, she includes it; if not, just the article itself. She's so meticulous, making sure nothing is misplaced. She takes her time, as if cutting quickly would drain the pleasure too soon. Far from feeling annoyed, Mohsin watches her with even more interest. In the shared quiet of their days, he has never looked at any other task of hers with such keen attention.

Every story of rape and every news report about such horrors, Mohsin would hand over to Rabeya, who would cut them out one by one. With each snip, her face would light up, a glint of satisfaction playing across her eyes. And as soon as Mohsin held each cutting, that same gleam would spark in his own eyes. The more reports of assault, the greater their delight. If a report described parents wandering from place to place for years, seeking justice for their violated daughter, Mohsin would burst into laughter, saying, "Justice for rape? Is that even a crime worthy of justice?"

Rabeya, laughing alongside him, would add, "People expect justice for rape these days? I'm speechless at their naïveté!"



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

They sort through the newspaper clippings. On one side, they place reports of recent assaults; on another, follow-ups on older cases; and on yet another, articles or surveys by NGOs or organisations on the topic. Their main interest, however, lies in the fresh incidents.

"How many today?" Mohsin asks, once they've sorted everything into categories.

"12," replies Rabeya. They only keep track of the new cases.

"That's two fewer than yesterday," Mohsin remarks, as if genuinely disappointed. He hadn't felt this let down even when Bangladesh narrowly lost a cricket match by two runs in Asia Cup.

"Not every piece of news makes it through, you know. So many stories get buried in the local pages. How can they possibly publish every incident of rape?" Rabeya speaks as if consoling her husband.

"True. And many don't even report such things for various reasons. They keep quiet. The actual number is surely much higher."

Mohsin now seems a bit reassured.

Setting aside the other papers, they begin sifting through the clippings of news about rapes. For a long time, their gaze lingers as if fixed on some uplifting piece of news. They looked at the paper with that same intensity when their daughter's scholarship award in the talent pool was published. And later, when she placed herself second in the university entrance exams, the coaching centre placed an ad with her photo—a display that her parents seemed to have framed in their minds 24/7. Professor Mohsin had one of his students laminate that clipping and handed it to his wife. He said, "Keep it with the scholarship news."

Today, once again, he gathers the newspaper clippings, hands them over to Rabeya, and says, "Place these with the others on the rape files." Even without his instruction, Rabeya would have done it anyway—that's what the clippings are for—but he had a habit of saying it out loud.

Rabeya would take the clippings to the

bedroom and would open the largest drawer of the almirah, one drawer nearly full and another on its way. Every day, when placing new clippings, she would go through the old ones. It had become a ritual for her, a habit. Mohsin would come up behind her, as he would do every day, watching. They both enjoyed this strange ritual. The drawer in their almirah was filling up with news of rapes.

Leaving the drawer open, Rabeya would stand there, pulling out more clippings from under the bed, old ones laminated from years ago. She would run her hand over the image of a young girl. A few more clippings would fall from the stack—about ten years old. In one of them, there was a photograph of Prof. Mohsin and Rabeya Khatun, standing alone, demanding justice, placards on their chests. Mohsin would pick up this clipping, chuckling, and show it to Rabeya. "Look at us," he'd say, adding, "Two fools on a mission. Is rape really a crime deserving justice? A pair of

idiots crying out for days and days. What nonsense!"

Rabeya would get angry but would laugh, too. Laughing, she'd reply in a raised voice, "Yes, of course, rape isn't a crime. Just a trivial incident."

When every household suffers a rape, the people of this country will surely understand. Mohsin will join in, laughing like a madman himself. This time, they both grab clippings of rape news from the open drawer, scattering them above their heads. The room fills up with the fragments—on the bed, in the corners of the mattress, under the bed, on the dressing table, the floor, near the chair legs. On the walls, hanging from the clock—rape news clippings are scattered everywhere. And their laughter doesn't stop. They keep laughing, deranged, even as they carefully, almost lovingly, begin gathering each piece, forgetting even their midday meal. Once they've collected all the clippings, Mohsin retrieves the iron from the top of the almirah. On a low heat, he irons each one and hands it over to Rabeya, who cradles it like a newborn, with the same tenderness. For a moment, she sees the face of a child she first laid eyes on years ago in a hospital bed. Rabeya breaks down, wailing.

Mohsin stops ironing and joins in her sobs.

Suddenly, as the night fades, light crosses their faces—they know the morning will bring fresh newspapers.

*Translated from Bangla by Haroonuzzaman.*

**Mojaffor Hossain** is a distinguished fiction writer within the realm of contemporary Bangla literature. He began his professional journey as a journalist and is currently employed as a translator at the Bangla Academy.

**Haroonuzzaman** is a translator, novelist, poet, researcher, and essayist. Besides teaching English in Libya and Qatar for about 12 years, he has had 20 years of teaching experience in English Language and Literature at Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB).

# Parsha wants to write her OWN DESTINY



**A new original song of mine will be released this Eid. As a solo artiste, it is difficult for me to take on the task of releasing music by myself, I would love it if my seniors in the industry helped me in this regard.**

PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

DOWEL BISWAS

Parsha Mahjabeen Purnee has two very distinct identities amongst her audiences, one is more intriguing than the other-- she is a musician and now an actor with her (groundbreaking) debut in Jahid Preem's *Ghum Pori*. A third-year university student who inspired millions through her song, *Cholo Bhule Jai*.

During the July movement, Parsha gets candid with The Daily Star about her journey, new-found fame and future aspirations.

**Tell us the story behind 'Cholo Bhule Jai'.**

The song actually mirrored my inner pain and frustration during that time. I was deeply affected by the oppression that we were experiencing, and as I couldn't personally join the movement, the song--which I wrote in only 10 minutes--became my voice and offering towards the protesters. I only wanted to do my part for my country.

**Pritom Hasan and you both have a well-grounded background in music. How was your experience of working with him?**

It doesn't need saying that I am a great admirer of Pritom Hasan. Pritom bhai helped me rehearse as much as I needed to, and was very kind to me. I am grateful to the entire crew.

**Only a few debutants get blessed with the fame and recognition you are getting.**

I always keep my expectations low. So, the fame and recognition I

am experiencing now seems pretty fascinating. However, it also makes me grounded, it demands better work and I am all up for it.

**To whom are you most thankful to for your success?**

Actually, I think my own contribution was more crucial behind my success in whatever I did, and I thank myself for pursuing what I believed in and most inclined to. My mother, who is a classical singer herself, did a lot for me and I am eternally grateful to her. However, the fact that I never compromised in pursuing my wishes and dreams makes me love and believe in myself more. I wanted to write my own destiny, and I consider myself brave.

**How was your experience performing at the UNESCO headquarters?**

I mostly sing to my YouTube audiences, and my first big concert was Darshan Rawal's, where I was the opening act alongside with two other singers. However, the experience at the UNESCO Headquarters was scintillating! Not only did I perform in front of an international audience, I represented my country and it made me feel proud to be Bangladeshi. I consider it to be the biggest achievement of my life.

**What are your current projects?**

A new original song of mine will be released this Eid. As a solo artiste, it is difficult for me to take on the task of releasing music by myself, I would love it if my seniors in the industry helped me in this regard.

**Can we expect more songs like 'Cholo Bhule Jai' from you?**

I think we became more divided in the current scenario of the country. When I wrote 'Cholo Bhule Jai', we were united. So, I think I need

time to understand the situation and my perspective regarding this. As soon as I can catch my thoughts on it, I will write a song and strike a chord with it.

**How would you evaluate yourself as a person?**

I think I am a very kind and empathetic person. I love a n i m a l s. One thing I am sure of, I don't want to be someone who is proud. I always want to be well grounded as a human being.



## STYLE STATEMENT

### Timothée Chalamet

Timothée Chalamet, who bagged his second Oscar nomination this year for his mesmerising performance in *A Complete Unknown*, illuminated the red carpet at the 97th Academy Awards held in Los Angeles last Sunday (March 3).

Chalamet donned a bespoke outfit by Givenchy, featuring a vibrant yellow suit with tapered, slightly relaxed trousers. He paired the suit with a matching button-up shirt that had a crisp, sharp collar.

The actor completed his ensemble with a double-breasted, long-sleeve jacket and black loafers. His stylish look was put together by stylist Taylor McNeill, with whom Chalamet has worked closely throughout the awards season and the promotional tour for *A Complete Unknown*.

The actor truly made his most pronounced fashion statement at the 2025 Oscars, which is widely regarded as the official conclusion of the Hollywood Awards season.



## TV TALKIES

### 'Running Point' heartily combines sports drama with family dynamics

In what can easily be reckoned as Netflix's answer to a blend of *Succession* and *Ted Lasso*, albeit far less cut-throat, *Running Point* is a delightful watch from the get go.

The 10-episode show follows Isla Gordon, played by Kate Hudson, who unexpectedly becomes president of the LA Waves, a family-run basketball franchise. With her best friend, Ali (Brenda Strong), Isla navigates the male-dominated sports world, aiming to break the glass ceiling.

Like *Succession*, Isla is the only daughter among her father's children, but unlike that show, her brothers are stock characters: Ness (Scott MacArthur) is a sweet but dumb former player-turned-GM, Sandy (Drew Tarver) is the uptight CFO, and Cam (Justin Theroux) is the eldest with a secret drug addiction, which leads him to offer Isla the Waves presidency while he's in rehab.

Jackie (Fabrizio Guido), who later discovers



that he shares a father with the siblings, helps humanise the self-involved family.

*Running Point* heartily explores Isla's impact on the Waves, focusing on subplots like a player's addiction and a rookie's free throw struggles, among other struggles.

## WHAT'S PLAYING

### 'Timeless' by The Weeknd (feat Playboi Carti)

The Weeknd and Playboi Carti joined forces on *Timeless*, a brooding yet elegant fusion of hip hop and R&B. The song, part of The Weeknd's *Hurry Up Tomorrow* album, carries a melancholic yet intoxicating energy built on pulsating beats, airy synths, and deep basslines.

Lyrically, *Timeless* reflects on the highs and lows of success, love, and the constant battle between ambition and vulnerability. Carti's verses are bold and self-assured, delivering sharp lines about the cost of fame, while The Weeknd's signature falsetto brings a sense of longing and emotional weight.

The accompanying music video enhances the song's themes, featuring sleek, cinematic visuals—neon cityscapes, slow-motion rain, and reflective moments of solitude—capturing the feeling of chasing something that's both fleeting and eternal.



## OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA

অ. SABYASACHI HAZRA Brahmi Bangla



Design and Typography by  
Sabyasachi Hazra  
April 5 | 10am onwards  
Alliance Française de Dhaka



Late Night Comedy Show  
March 14 | 11:59pm-1pm  
Naveed's Comedy Club,  
Gulshan-2



'Cartoon o Meme-er Rajniti'  
March 9 | 11am-3pm  
Zahir Raihan Auditorium,  
Jahangirnagar University

## TRENDY STREAMS

### HBO Max

When No One Sees Us



### Prime Video

The Wheel of Time



### Disney+

Daredevil: Born Again



### Hulu

Deli Boys



### Chorki

Amalnama



# The unpaid household labour GDP ignores

**A 2024 study by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) revealed that the economic value of women's unpaid household and caregiving work is estimated at Tk 5.3 trillion, equivalent to 14.8 percent of GDP in 2021. In contrast, men's unpaid contribution amounts to only 2.8 percent.**

NILIMA JAHAN and TAHIRA SHAMSI  
UTSA

At dawn, 45-year-old Yasmin Ara rises before the rest of her family.

She prepares breakfast, packs lunches for her three children, and ensures they are ready for their classes. Once they leave, her work continues—cleaning, doing laundry, planning the next meal, and caring for her elderly in-laws.

Her day becomes an unbroken cycle of caregiving, cooking, tutoring, and managing the household, all on her own. The skills she once honed at university have faded, replaced by expertise in managing domestic duties.

Despite staying up late and getting no rest, no salary, no promotion, no economic security, only exhaustion—she views her as an “unemployed housewife” who “does nothing.”

“Having a degree in Economics, I had dreams of working in a bank,

globally 16.4 billion hours are devoted to unpaid care work daily.

This is equivalent to 2 billion people working full-time without pay, or about 25 percent of the world's population.

If valued at an hourly minimum wage, this unpaid labour would constitute 9 percent of the global GDP, amounting to \$11 trillion.

A 2024 study by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) revealed that the economic value of women's unpaid household and caregiving work is estimated at Tk 5.3 trillion, equivalent to 14.8 percent of GDP in 2021. In contrast, men's unpaid contribution amounts to only 2.8 percent.

It found that women in Bangladesh spend seven times more time on unpaid household and caregiving work than men.

Women spend 4.6 hours daily on household tasks, while men spend only 0.6 hours. Similarly, women dedicate

However, this doesn't fully account for the value of household and caregiving work, which requires skills and emotional labour.

When adjusting for the skills and emotional factors involved in care work, such as knowledge of nutrition, medicine, and emotional intelligence, by increasing the reference wage for unskilled workers, the value of women's unpaid care work in Bangladesh is estimated to be 18.5 percent to 19.6 percent of the GDP.

In 2015, the Manusher Jonno Foundation commissioned the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) to research women's economic contributions and found that the value of women's unpaid household work was 76.8 percent of GDP in fiscal 2013-14 if additional women were hired to replace them.

If the woman in a family did the same work for pay in another family, the value would be equivalent to 87.2 percent of GDP.

As per the Labour Force Survey 2023, among the youth who are Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET), 61.7 percent are women, with family and household work serving as a significant setback to their employment opportunities, alongside institutional barriers that limit their labour market participation.

## DOUBLE SHIFT

Even for women with paid jobs, the burden of unpaid work never lifts. Without reliable childcare or flexible work policies, many working mothers are overwhelmed, torn between professional duties and family responsibilities.

Tilottoma, a 32-year-old private employee who returned to work when her baby was just five months old, feels the weight of juggling two full-time jobs. With no one in her nuclear family to help care for the baby, she struggles through each day in survival mode. Her husband, a banker, barely has time to share the load.

Unable to find affordable childcare, Tilottoma brings her baby to work, where her productivity suffers. Her workplace offers some flexibility, allowing her to work from home at times, but that only shifts the chaos.

“People think working from home means more time for family. In reality, it means cooking with a baby in my arms while taking office calls, or working on my laptop, sitting the baby in front of a TV, which is very age-inappropriate, yet I have no other options,” she said.

“There are often days when I break

down. I scream. I cry -- holding my child in my arms, knowing she needs me, especially when she is physically unwell, but I just can't give her my attention when I have deadlines to meet,” she added.

“And yet, quitting is not an option. My job is a financial necessity. It's soul-crushing. It feels like I have no life left at all,” she said.

Maisha Mubassara, a 29-year-old government teacher and mother of two, faces similar struggles. Despite spending nearly half her income on daycare and domestic help, there's no rest after work. The challenges don't stop when she gets home.

“When I come back, there's no time to breathe. I have to take care of the children, feed them, and put them to sleep. My work never really ends.”

## COUNTING WHAT COUNTS

Shaheen Anam, executive director of MJF, stressed that recognising unpaid care work is essential for social change.

“Women are primarily responsible for the health, hygiene, food security, and overall well-being of the family. By making their contributions visible and formally acknowledged, it will elevate their status within households and society. This recognition could also reduce discrimination, domestic violence, and early marriage,” she said.

Fahmida Khatun, executive director of CPD, echoed the same.

“When we dismiss this labour by saying ‘they don't do anything,’ it undermines their contributions. This attitude can escalate to mental and psychological abuse. Formal recognition would improve women's social, familial, and economic standing,” she added.

Farah Kabir, country director of ActionAid Bangladesh, asserted that recognising unpaid care work is not just a developing world issue—it is a global concern.

“Acknowledging this work is crucial to respecting and valuing women's strength and contributions. Without recognition, women's labour remains invisible.”

She further said, “At the family level, recognising unpaid care work encourages redistribution of responsibilities, increasing efficiency. At the societal level, it fosters respect for women and influences behavioural change.”

Kabir stressed that recognition must come through policy reforms, budgetary measures, and behavioural change, which will take time.

“Childcare support, for instance, is being discussed, but more work is needed at the policy and budget levels,” she said.

A 2024 UNDP report highlighted that integrating the care economy into social protection is key to equity, resilience, and inclusivity.

“By investing in policies that support women's participation in the economy, such as affordable childcare, paid parental leave, and flexible working arrangements, societies can harness the full productive capacity of women,” it mentioned.

## THE GDP GAP

Currently, the existing GDP framework, guided by the System of National Accounts (SNA), does not account for unpaid care work.

However, experts have long advocated for the inclusion of unpaid care work in an extended System of National Accounts (SNA) through a satellite accounts system rather than integrating it into the main GDP framework.

In line with that, in 2023, the then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina instructed the Planning Commission to explore ways of including unpaid care work in Bangladesh's GDP calculations.

Asma Akter, deputy director of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), said, “Since unpaid care work is not exchanged for money in the formal market, it falls outside the scope of GDP measurement. That is why an alternative method is needed.”

She added that efforts are underway to develop a new calculation model.

The newly formed Women's Affairs Commission Chief Shireen Huq confirmed that their reform proposals include recognising unpaid care and domestic work and assessing its monetary value in economic calculations.

Naila Kabeer, feminist economist and emeritus professor of Gender and Development, however, argued that GDP measurement is flawed as it ignores the billions of hours of unpaid care work mostly done by women.

GDP only counts goods and services that are bought and sold, failing to recognise essential activities like childcare, housework, and elder care.

As a result, nearly 90 billion hours of unpaid care work worldwide go unaccounted for, even though society would collapse without it, she mentioned in her paper “Radical Pathways Beyond GDP: Why and how we need to pursue feminist and decolonial alternatives urgently”, published by Oxfam.

Kabeer highlighted alternative ways to measure progress, focusing on well-being, social justice, and sustainability rather than just economic output.

## UNPAID CARE AND DOMESTIC WORK IN BANGLADESH

Women's unpaid work: 14.8% of GDP in 2021



Men's unpaid work: 2.8% of GDP in 2021



Women spend 7x more time on unpaid care than men

### DAILY TIME SPENT

Household work  
Women 4.6hrs  
Men 0.6hrs

Caregiving  
Women 1.2hrs  
Men 0.2hrs

Share of daily unpaid labour  
Women: 24.5%  
Men: 3.3%

Of the 61.7% women among NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) youth, a major portion is engaged in unpaid care and domestic responsibilities

SOURCE: BIDS, BBS

of being financially independent,” Yasmin recalled. “But every time I thought of stepping out, there was always something at home that needed me more.”

Yasmin represents the millions of women excluded from the labour force, who say that family and household work is a significant setback to their employment. With no affordable childcare options and deeply ingrained societal expectations, she made the difficult choice to become a full-time homemaker.

Yet, while her husband's 9 to 5 job is rewarded with a salary, hers remains invisible. If Yasmin were compensated for every task she performs daily, her earnings would exceed those of many professionals.

For example, a full-time house cook typically earns between Tk 5,000 and Tk 10,000 per month, while a domestic worker for cleaning and laundry is paid Tk 3,000 to Tk 5,000.

A tutor for a school-going child would cost Tk 5,000 to Tk 15,000, and an elderly caregiver might earn between Tk 12,000 and Tk 25,000. Additionally, a personal assistant for errands usually commands a salary of around Tk 7,000-15,000.

Outsourcing Yasmin's work would cost between Tk 32,000 and Tk 70,000 per month -- far surpassing the median salary of many middle-class professionals.

“If I were paid for everything I do, I'd probably earn more than my husband,” she laughed.

**THE HIDDEN WORKFORCE**  
The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated in 2018 that

1.2 hours per day to caregiving, while men spend just 0.2 hours.

While men dedicate only 3.3 percent of their time to these duties, women devote a staggering 24.5 percent of their daily hours to unpaid labour.

The study also shows that on average, women spend 1.2 hours on paid and self-employment, while men spend 0.1 hours.

This estimate used the daily wages of unskilled workers, like construction or day labourers. For rural women, it's Tk 37.5 per hour, and for urban women, it's Tk 43.5 per hour.

“People think working from home means more time for family. In reality, it means cooking with a baby in my arms while taking office calls, or working on my laptop, sitting the baby in front of a TV, which is very age-inappropriate, yet I have no other options,” she said.

“There are often days when I break

unable to find affordable childcare, Tilottoma brings her baby to work, where her productivity suffers. Her workplace offers some flexibility, allowing her to work from home at times, but that only shifts the chaos.

“People think working from home means more time for family. In reality, it means cooking with a baby in my arms while taking office calls, or working on my laptop, sitting the baby in front of a TV, which is very age-inappropriate, yet I have no other options,” she said.

“There are often days when I break

unable to find affordable childcare, Tilottoma brings her baby to work, where her productivity suffers. Her workplace offers some flexibility, allowing her to work from home at times, but that only shifts the chaos.

“People think working from home means more time for family. In reality, it means cooking with a baby in my arms while taking office calls, or working on my laptop, sitting the baby in front of a TV, which is very age-inappropriate, yet I have no other options,” she said.

“There are often days when I break

