



A panjabi-clad United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres and Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus pose for a photo during their visit to Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

PHOTO: CA PRESS WING

ROHINGYAS IN BANGLADESH UN calls for more int'l funding

Guterres says Rohingyas are on the verge of deep humanitarian crisis

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The Rohingyas are on the verge of a deep humanitarian crisis in the wake of cuts in aid, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned yesterday, calling for more funds from international donors.

"The international community has an obligation to invest now in that aid for people who have already suffered so much. There is no time to waste," he said.

Guterres, accompanied by Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, was addressing a large gathering of Rohingyas at a refugee camp in Ukhiya of Cox's Bazar.

Yunus pledged to put the government's efforts together with the United Nations so that the Rohingyas can celebrate their Eid next year back at their homes in Rakhine state.

In the Cox's Bazar camps, the life of the refugees has become more uncertain. The World Food Programme will be cutting monthly food rations from \$12.5 to \$6 per person from April, as the US has trimmed funds globally under the Donald Trump administration.

In 2024, donors provided only \$554

Ultimately the solution must be found in Myanmar. We will not give up until conditions allow for the voluntary, safe and sustainable return for the refugees here

ANTONIO GUTERRES,
UN secretary-general
Cox's Bazar

million, or 65 percent of the total requirement for the more than 1 million Rohingya refugees.

"We are on the verge of a deep humanitarian crisis. With the announced cuts in financial assistance, we are facing the dramatic risk of having only 40 percent in 2025 of the resources available for humanitarian aid in 2024," Guterres said at a recent press conference in Ukhiya.

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'We're here to support your reforms'

Guterres tells Yunus

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Visiting United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres yesterday expressed his full support for the reform process initiated by Bangladesh's interim government.

During a meeting with Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus at the latter's Tejgaon office, the UN chief also voiced concerns over the declining humanitarian aid for over a million Rohingyas living in Cox's Bazar refugee camps.

Guterres, who arrived in Dhaka on a four-day visit on Thursday, to express solidarity with Myanmar's forcibly displaced Rohingya people during Ramadan.

"I want to express our total commitment to the reform process. We are here to support your reforms. We wish you all the best. Whatever we can do, let us know," the UN chief told Yunus during the hour-long meeting, according to Chief Adviser's Press Wing.

He said he hopes that the reforms would lead to a free and fair election and a "real transformation" of the country. "I know the process of reforms can be complex."

In the meeting, Yunus briefed Guterres about the reform process, saying that around 10 political parties have already submitted their responses to the reports of the six reform commissions formed by the interim government.

Yunus said once the parties agree to the recommendations of the commissions, they would sign a "July Charter", which would be the blueprint for the

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

THE DISAPPEARED OF THE JULY UPRISING | PART 3

A systematic cover up of bodies

Seven months after the July uprising in Bangladesh, many protesters still remain missing. We investigated 31 cases: six were buried as unclaimed bodies at Rayerbazar graveyard; four were identified by families from among the charred bodies in Ashulia; two were handed over to families after DNA testing; and 19 are still unaccounted for. We found evidence of systematic government efforts to cover up medical records and bodies of the victims so they can never be found again. This four-part series also documents how families were denied time to collect the corpses from hospital morgues, and how they are now waiting for the bodies of their loved ones.

MASHFIQ MIZAN, KEERO ADHMAN AHMED and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

On the afternoon of August 5, 2024, word spread across the country that Sheikh Hasina fled to India. In Gazipur, like elsewhere in the country, thousands poured into the streets in celebration. But there was also anger.

A group of protesters started chanting slogans outside Konabari Police Station, and the police opened fire. The protesters dispersed, but the cops kept hunting them down in nearby alleys.

Md Ridoy, 20, a student and an autorickshaw driver, found himself

from where they were still firing at protesters. From there, three others, one in uniform and another in civilian clothing, dragged him towards an alley which leads straight to the Konabari Police Station. Ridoy is never seen again.

The International Truth and Justice Project, an organisation documenting crimes against humanity, has also investigated this incident.

"We went to the Konabari Police Station the next day. All we could find was the lungi Ridoy was wearing underneath a desk," said Md Ibrahim, Ridoy's brother-in-law.

This newspaper found another video from the night of August 5, 2024, which



Md Ridoy lies on the street after being shot at point-blank range by police on August 5.

trapped in one such alley. The cops cornered him, dragged him onto the main road, right in front of Shareef General Hospital, according to authenticated video footage seen by The Daily Star.

Six officers closed in—one raised a stick, another held onto his shirt so he could not escape. Meanwhile, a third, later identified as Constable Akram, slowly stepped behind him with a gun in hand, like a predator marking its prey. Another cop slapped him. Simultaneously, Akram put the gun in his back and then pulled the trigger!

Ridoy collapsed, but the 20-year old was still breathing. The cops walked away as Ridoy bled profusely.

Minutes later, three officers returned, and carried him behind the police lines

shows the inside of the Konabari Police Station. Some policemen were seen making preparations to leave. In the video was a man wearing a white sleeveless undershirt and a lungi. Ridoy's relatives and locals identified him as Abed Ali, a trader.

According to Ibrahim and five locals, Abed helped the cops in disposing of Ridoy's body. Abed Ali could not be reached for comment.

Seven months on, Ridoy's family does not know where his body is. His name is not on the list of July martyrs prepared by the government, and his family is yet to receive any compensation from the government, his sister Jesmin Akhter said.

Five policemen, including Constable

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BNP forms support cells for women, children

Party committed to safe, fair society for all: Tarique

STAR REPORT

BNP has formed two special support cells — "Legal Assistance Cell for Oppressed Women and Children" and "Health Support Cell for Oppressed Women and Children" — comprising party-affiliated lawyers and doctors.

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi announced the formation of these cells at a press conference at the party's Nayapalton central office yesterday, reports UNB.

He said these cells will gather information on incidents of violence, rape, and murder against women and children across the country.

Rizvi said similar cells have been set up in all 84 organisational districts of the BNP.

He said BNP's Law

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STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

The Buriganga river, once a vital lifeline for trade and transportation, now stands as a testament to the devastating consequences of mindless pollution, with its brackish waters bearing witness to years of pollution. Industrial discharge, sewage, and rampant plastic pollution have devastated aquatic biodiversity and the overall ecosystem. The lone heron carefully treading on floating debris highlights the relentless struggle of wildlife to survive in an increasingly uninhabitable environment. The photo taken recently underscores the urgent need for sustainable solutions to combat pollution and restore one of Bangladesh's most iconic rivers.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON



WFP to cut aid for one million people in Myanmar P6



Stop tiptoeing around women's safety P8

চট্টগ্রাম বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়
৫ম সমাবর্তন - ২০২৫

সংশ্লিষ্ট সকলের অবগতির জন্য জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, চট্টগ্রাম বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের ৫ম সমাবর্তন আগামী ১৪ মে ২০২৫ বুধবার অনুষ্ঠিত হবে। সমাবর্তনে ২০১১ থেকে ২০২৩ সাল পর্যন্ত উল্লেখ্য স্নাতক (সম্মান)/স্নাতকোত্তর এবং ২০১৪ থেকে ২০২৪ সাল পর্যন্ত অন্যান্য পরীক্ষায় ডিগ্রি অর্জনকারীদের সনদ ও চ্যালেঞ্জার স্বর্ণপদক প্রদান করা হবে। ১৫ মার্চ ২০২৫ থেকে ৩০ মার্চ ২০২৫ তারিখ পর্যন্ত শুধুমাত্র অনলাইনে আবেদন করা যাবে। সমাবর্তন সম্পর্কিত বিস্তারিত তথ্য চট্টগ্রাম বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় ওয়েবসাইট (<https://convocation.cu.ac.bd>) এ পাওয়া যাবে। এছাড়াও সমাবর্তন সম্পর্কিত যে কোন বিষয়ে প্রয়োজনীয় তথ্য পেতে ০১৭১৬-১২৫৬২০, ০১৮১২-৫১৭৫০১ ও ০১৭১৮-৩১২৩৫৩ নাম্বারে এবং cecuctg@cu.ac.bd ই-মেইলে যোগাযোগ করা যাবে।

(স্বাক্ষর)
১৩-৩-২০২৫
(প্রফেসর ড. মোহাম্মদ সাইফুল ইসলাম)
রেজিস্ট্রার (ভারপ্রাপ্ত)
চট্টগ্রাম বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়।



ABUL HOSSEN



TAMIM SIKDER



TANZIL AHMED SUJOY



BAYGID BOSTAME



SAZZAD HOSAIN SAJAL



MD SHAHADAT

A systematic cover up of bodies

FROM PAGE 1
Akram and former Gazipur Detective Branch inspector Mohammad Shafiqul Islam, have since been arrested over Ridoy's killing. The case now sits before the International Crimes Tribunal.

A MASSACRE
As Ridoy bled out in Gazipur, a massacre unfolded in Savar's Ashulia.

Since the morning of August 5, Sheikh Hasina's final day in power, police were shooting relentlessly, blocking protesters from marching to Dhaka. Bodies were dropping one after another, blood soaking the streets.

"We went to the Konabari Police Station the next day. All we could find was the lungi Ridoy was wearing underneath a desk,"

MD IBRAHIM
Ridoy's brother-in-law.

A video that later emerged shows six bodies, bloodstained and barely covered, lying stacked on a van in front of Ashulia Police Station. One man was still moving and breathing, his fingers twitching.

In the video, later authenticated by fact checkers, Dhaka District Detective Branch Inspector Arafat Hossain is seen walking past. Beside him stands Masudur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Ashulia Police Station.

Then—flames. The bodies burn. At least one of these victims, the

one who was still seen moving and breathing, was certainly burned alive. Their remains were subsequently dumped in Ambagan graveyard, next to the police station.

The next day, the graves were opened, and six charred bodies were pulled from the earth. Families identified four of them—Ash-Sabur, Sazzad Hossain Sajal, Tanzil Ahmed Sujoy, and Baygid Bostame. Their faces barely recognisable, some were identified only by their clothes and identity cards.

The remaining two bodies are completely unrecognisable and have been sent for DNA profiling after families contacted police, said Kamal Hossen, inspector (investigation) of Ashulia Police Station.

The International Crimes Tribunal is now investigating this case. DB Inspector Arafat Hossain and ex-additional SP of Dhaka Abdullahil Kafi have been arrested over this incident.

The attempted cover-up in Gazipur and Savar is only the tip of the iceberg.

The UN report on the July uprising says that there are cases where "police collected bodies of unidentified victims, and it is unclear to what extent the bodies were later handed over to morgues and duly reported to health authorities."

About the burning of bodies, the report says that police did so to "create the false impression that the victims had been killed by protesters."

Meanwhile, at least 5 protesters from Savar still remain missing. Tamim Sikder, Moniruzzaman Milon, Omor Faruk and Abul Hossen went missing on August 5 from near Ashulia police station. Shahadat Hossain, a day labourer, remains missing since August 4, fellow protesters and family members said.

FAMILIES DENIED TIME

TO FIND BODIES

Sohel Rana, 28, went missing on July 18 near Jatrabari. His younger brother, Md Nabil, stepped out the next morning to look for him but could not go far. Jatrabari was a warzone.

The government enforced a countrywide curfew that night, and the internet had been shut down.

Nabil still went out the next morning again to search for his brother, but got assaulted by the cops. He finally found his way inside Dhaka Medical College Hospital on July 21, risking his life amid curfew.

"There were bodies stacked on top of each other. Each freezer had two bodies in it," he said.

But he could not find his brother among so many bodies. Nabil returned to DMCH and visited Anjuman Mufidul Islam, a burial service, multiple times before August 5, but found no luck.

Sixteen days after Sheikh Hasina's fall and 34 days after Soheli disappeared, Nabil found his brother's photograph at DMCH on August 21. Later, he rushed to Anjuman only to find that his brother, along with eight others, was buried at an unmarked grave in Rayerbazar [Read more in

Part I] on July 24.

The Daily Star has tracked down the unnamed General Diary that Shabbagh police filed for Soheli. It states that Soheli was shot during protests in Jatrabari's Kajla area and died while



Police drag Ridoy, bottom left, through the streets towards Konabari Police Station after shooting him. On the right, several bodies are piled up on a pickup in Ashulia moments before police set them off fire.

receiving treatment at Dhaka Medical's emergency ward on July 18.

We also obtained Soheli Rana's inquest report. It says he died from multiple pellet wounds near the chest. Bruises on his back and other parts suggested possible torture before death.

From documents gathered from DMCH, we located a hijra community member who took Soheli to Dhaka Medical.

"Soheli was detained, beaten, and shot multiple times at point-blank range. When the police left, I saw he still had a pulse. I rushed him to

Dhaka Medical," the person said, requesting anonymity.

Meanwhile, Md Assadullah, a 30-year-old private car driver, left his Uttara home after lunch on July 19. He was shot on Road 2 of Uttara's



hit Assadullah, according to three protesters and the CCTV footage seen by The Daily Star.

Assadullah's family received a call from a protester that night saying he had been shot.

The curfew had already been announced. The next morning, his wife Farjana Akter went to Uttara Crescent Hospital and then DMCH to find him.

When she was looking for her husband in the morgue, emergency section, and other wards of DMCH, Assadullah was still alive. He was receiving treatment at the hospital's burn unit, according to CCTV footage seen by this newspaper.

There, lying in a bed, he took his last breath on July 22. Two days later, he was buried at Rayerbazar in an unmarked grave. Meanwhile, Farjana kept looking.

Sathil faces at least 11 cases over murder during the July uprising, locals and police sources said. Sathil and the rest of the AL activists seen in the video are now on the run, and could not be contacted for comment.

On July 19, the same day Assadullah was shot, Faisal vanished from Uttara, and Rafiqul from Gopibagh. They too, were buried in Rayerbazar on July 24 as unclaimed bodies.

A request for burial sent to Anjuman from Shabbagh police station, along with pictures of the bodies, writes, "As no one claimed these individuals, we are handing over the bodies to Anjuman Mufidul Islam for burial."

But the fact is, families were still looking for their loved ones—they only did not know where to find them.

[Our Savar Correspondent Aklakur Rahman Akash and Tangail Correspondent Mirza Shakil Contributed to this report]

Read part 4 tomorrow on the agonising wait of the families for the bodies of their relatives.

UN calls for more int'l funding

FROM PAGE 1
"That would be an unmitigated disaster. People will suffer and people will die."

Guterres, wearing a white panjabi, and Yunus had iftar with thousands of Rohingya and members of the host community in Cox's Bazar broke Ramadan fast.

The Rohingyas greeted the two by waving hands as they arrived at the Camp 20 Extension at 5:35pm. Later, they joined the Ramadan Solidarity Iftar with one lakh Rohingyas.

Many carried placards with slogans like "UN take us to our home back", "UN ensure our safe and dignified return", "We are Rohingya, not stateless" and "No more refugee life".

Over the last eight years, after the brutal Myanmar military crackdown in 2017, not a single Rohingya has volunteered to return to Rakhine State, arguing that there is no security, guarantee of citizenship and basic life. Their return has become more uncertain with military-rebel conflicts in Rakhine.

In his address to the Rohingyas, Yunus thanked the UN chief for coming to listen to the refugees so that a solution can be found. He

sought to work with Guterres to resolve the issue swiftly.

The Rohingyas who met the chief adviser told him they have land in Myanmar and could make a living there. "We came here because we were not allowed to stay in our own country. We do not want to be a burden to anyone," one of them said.

Guterres said all must recognise the enormous support of the Bangladeshi people sharing their land, forests, scarce water and meagre resources with the refugees.

Recalling his last visit to Cox's Bazar in 2018, Guterres said the camps had seen many improvements, but the challenges were still great.

"These camps — and the communities that host them — are on the frontlines of the climate crisis. Summers are scorching, and the chance of fires skyrocket. In the cyclone and monsoon seasons — floods and dangerous landslides destroy homes and lives."

Guterres said he spoke with many Rohingyas and was inspired by their courage and moved by their determination. Many shared harrowing accounts of their ordeals in Myanmar and their journeys here.

"They want to go home. Myanmar is their homeland. And returning in a safe, voluntary, and dignified manner is the primary solution to this crisis."

He urged all parties in Myanmar



Rohingya refugees gather to listen to United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres during his visit to a refugee camp in Cox's Bazar's Ukhiya yesterday.

to exercise maximum restraint, prioritise the protection of civilians in accordance with international

humanitarian law, and prevent further incitement of communal tension and violence in order to pave the way for democracy to take root.

"But the situation in Myanmar



PHOTO: AFP

remains dire, including in Rakhine State. Until the conflict and systematic persecution in Rakhine end, we must

support those who need protection."

In addition to food, the Rohingyas in Bangladesh are also hungry for education, skill-building, and opportunities for self-dependence. When prospects are limited, violence, crime, and other security issues naturally rise. Some Rohingya families feel they have no option but to risk everything on perilous sea journeys to reach wealthier countries, he said.

"So we have a special obligation to ensure the aid reaches Rohingya refugees, and show that the world hasn't forgotten them."

UN and other aid agencies are confronting the prospect of enormous funding cuts. This will have a direct and dire impact on people, and the entire refugee population depends on humanitarian aid, Guterres said.

"I repeat: Cox's Bazar is ground zero for the impact of budget cuts on people in desperate need."

"Here it is clear, budget reductions are not about numbers on a balance sheet. Funding cuts have dramatic human costs."

"Ultimately, the solution must be found in Myanmar. We will not give up until conditions allow for the

voluntary, safe and sustainable return for the refugees here. Until then, I urge the international community to step up."

Earlier in the afternoon, Guterres visited the Rohingya Cultural Centre in Camp 18 of Ukhiya, spoke to Rohingya women, saw the handicrafts made by the Rohingyas and appreciated their skills.

During an interaction, a Rohingya youth called for the UN to draw attention of the international community to come to their aid and protect them until they are able to return to Myanmar.

"We want a safe zone for us in Rakhine," he said.

As people were gathering for the iftar, a 43-year-old Rohingya man died and several others were injured during a stampede inside the camp, reports UNB.

Guterres arrived in Bangladesh on Thursday afternoon on a four-day visit. Today, he will be attending events with the youths and civil society members in Dhaka before attending an iftar party to be hosted by Yunus. The UN chief will fly back to New York on Sunday morning.

'We're here to support your reforms'

FROM PAGE 1
country's democratic transition and implementation of the political, judicial, electoral, administrative, anti-corruption, and police reforms.

He said that election could be held in December provided the political parties agree to "a short package" of reforms, but it will be held by June next year if the parties settle for "a larger package".

The chief adviser reaffirmed his commitment to holding "free, fair, and participatory elections".

Shedding light on the Rohingya issue, the UN chief said, "I've never seen a population so discriminated against. The international community is forgetting the Rohingya."

"[Aid] cuts are a crime," he said, adding that Western nations were now doubling up on defence spending while humanitarian aid is squeezed across the globe.

Guterres also expressed the UN's "enormous gratitude" to Bangladesh

for hosting the Rohingya refugees. "Bangladesh has been extremely generous to the Rohingya people."

"Rohingyas are a special case for me."

Yunus thanked the UN chief for visiting the country at such a crucial time.

"You couldn't come at a better time. Your visit is timely not only for the Rohingya people but also for Bangladesh," he said.

Yunus sought the support of the secretary general for the dignified return of the Rohingyas to their homeland in the western Rakhine state in Myanmar and in the meantime mobilising adequate food and humanitarian assistance for the 1.2 million refugees.

"We are trying to raise attention of the plight of the Rohingya people. The world should know how they are suffering. There is a feeling of frustration," he said.

The UN chief said he would do his

best to resolve the Rohingya crisis and would try to mobilise support for them with priority.

He also lauded the contribution of the Bangladesh peacekeeping forces in maintaining peace and stability in some of the troubled corners of the world.

"Bangladesh peacekeeping forces are very important for us," the UN chief said, adding that their engagements have been "extraordinary", and "Bangladesh acts in the frontline for a fairer world".

Yunus also praised the Bangladesh peacekeepers, saying that Bangladesh military gets unique exposure in these assignments. "The deployments mean a lot to us."

Geopolitics and the status of Saarc and Bangladesh's relationships with neighbours also featured in the talks with the chief adviser.

He said Bangladesh also wants to become a member of the ASEAN in efforts to boost trade and investment

with the Southeast Asian nations.

The chief adviser also highlighted his proposal to create a South Asia grid involving Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and India to for importing hydropower from the Himalayan nations.

He said Bangladesh is building a series of ports in the country's Chattogram region in a bid to transform the country into "an economic hub", connecting Bangladesh with the landlocked countries of Nepal and Bhutan and India's Northeastern region.

Yunus said the interim government has been fully supported by almost every country in the world, including the United States, European Union, China, and Japan.

About the state of the economy, the chief adviser said his government has inherited a ruined economy with a broken banking sector, dwindling reserves, and destroyed institutions.

"The economy has now been

solidified. Exports have been growing for months. Foreign exchange reserves are also better."

Yunus said Bangladesh economy has made a turnaround to an extent that the interim government has now decided the country would make graduation from LDC nation next year.

"We are taking full preparations for LDC graduation."

The chief adviser also outlined his government's efforts to bring back tens of billions of dollars stolen during the previous regime.

He said that around \$234 billion dollars have been siphoned off during the last 16 years.

"We are trying to get back the money. But this is a complex and lengthy process."

The UN chief said that it all reminded him of his time during the revolutionary days in 1974 in Portugal.

Yunus also thanked the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Volker Turk for the work of the UN Fact-Finding Mission, which documented atrocities and potential crimes against humanity committed by the Sheikh Hasina government.

"He did a fantastic work. They documented the crimes just right after the atrocities were committed. Let them come back again and do more work."

Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain, High Representative to the Chief Adviser of Bangladesh on Rohingya Issues and Priority Affairs Khalilur Rahman, and Senior Secretary Lamiya Morshed were present during the meeting.

UN Under Secretary General Rabab Fatima and UN Resident Coordinator to Bangladesh Gwyn Lewis were also there.

Before this meeting, the UN chief also met Towhid and Khalilur at a city hotel.

REFUGEE REHAB Yunus for transparency in Khurushkul project

STAR REPORT

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday emphasised a transparent listing process, proper distribution of responsibilities, and accountability regarding the Khurushkul Climate Refugee Rehabilitation Project.

"It must be ensured that those who are supposed to be rehabilitated are actually moving into the houses. We need to carefully monitor whether anyone else is occupying them unlawfully, bypassing regulations. Constructing buildings is just a matter of funding, but if we fail to achieve the intended purpose, the entire effort becomes meaningless," he said while visiting the project area in Cox's Bazar, reports UNB.

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Bangladesh Mahila Parishad yesterday held a rally in front of the Central Shaheed Minar in the capital. They pointed to the recent rise in incidents of rape and gender-based violence throughout the country, particularly the incidents of children being raped. Speakers at the protest demanded that the interim government take immediate action to bring this situation under control. Afterwards, they marched towards the Jatiya Press Club, before ending it at their Shegunbagicha office.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Former DU VC Arefin Siddique laid to rest

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique, former vice chancellor of Dhaka University, was laid to eternal rest at the Azimpur graveyard in the capital yesterday afternoon.

He was buried next to his parents' graves following a namaz-e-janaza at Dhanmondi Eidgah Mosque after Juma prayers.

The janaza was attended by his family members, DU teachers, his students, and a large number of admirers and well-wishers.

Earlier, his first namaz-e-janaza was held in front of Baitul Aksa Jame Mosque, near his residence on Green Road in the capital. DU Vice-Chancellor Prof Niaz Ahmed Khan was present at the janaza.

Speaking to reporters after the janaza, Prof Niaz said the janaza was held as per the decision of the family members, in consultation with the university authorities.

He added that the university authorities showed the respect to Prof Siddique that he deserved as a former VC of Dhaka University.

Saifullah Siddique, brother of Prof Arefin Siddique, told The Daily Star that they had learned from the media on Thursday night that it would be difficult for Dhaka University authorities to provide security for the janaza on the university campus.

Therefore, to avoid any unexpected incidents, they decided not to hold the funeral prayers on campus, he added.

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Workers' migration drops by 36pc in February

Says BMET monthly data

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The migration of Bangladeshi workers abroad for jobs declined by 36 percent last month compared to the previous month, with a sharp fall in migration to top destination Saudi Arabia, according to the latest data from the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET).

BMET's "Monthly Overseas Employment" data, recently published on its website, shows that 62,436 workers migrated abroad in February, down from 97,867 in January. This brings the total overseas employment for the first two months of this year to 1,60,303.

Last year, 10.11 lakh workers migrated abroad for jobs. Of them, 1,62,158 left in the first two months, including 74,306 in February.

Ali Haider Chowdhury, secretary general of the Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira), attributed last month's decline to several factors.

He said Saudi Arabia is currently the only large market open to Bangladeshi migrant workers, but job demand from the Gulf nation, including for female workers, has recently decreased.

Additionally, the Bangladesh government has tightened the attestation process for workers' documents required for Saudi Arabia, which has also impacted overall migration, he said.

Speaking to this newspaper recently, the Baira leader urged the government to handle issues related to the Saudi job market carefully, warning that

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Rohingya crisis at risk of being forgotten

Warn INGOs, demand bold, decisive actions for sustainable solutions

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

International NGOs operating in Bangladesh have made an urgent call for bold and decisive global action to secure a sustainable future for the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

"The world cannot afford to let one of the largest refugee crises of our time fade from global attention. It is time to secure a sustainable future where Rohingya refugees and host communities are not left in limbo, but empowered to reclaim their rights and dignity," they said in a joint statement yesterday.

The international NGOs – ACF, ActionAid, Cordaid, Concern Worldwide, DRC, Handicap International, International Rescue Committee, Islamic Relief, Oxfam, Plan International, Save the Children, and World Vision – made the statement.

The statement comes during UN Secretary-General António Guterres' visit to Bangladesh, hoping to help bring back global attention on the issue.

"With the humanitarian response to the Rohingya crisis facing severe funding shortages and shifting global priorities, the need for renewed and sustained international commitment has never been more urgent," the statement says.

They called for immediate and coordinated action to sustain life-saving assistance, innovative response strategies, and a dedicated mission that ensures stability and dignity for over one million Rohingya refugees and host

communities in Cox's Bazar.

Severe funding cuts have slashed rations by over half, which will be operational from April, worsening economic pressures and social tensions in host communities. Essential services – including food and nutrition, WASH, protection, shelter, and livelihoods – are critically affected.

"Without urgent reforms and a long-term strategy, this crisis risks becoming unsustainable and deeply entrenched. Now in its eighth year, the Rohingya crisis continues to strain Bangladesh's resources as donor commitments dwindle amid global crises," the statement added.

Signatories of the statement said addressing this crisis requires a high-level and regular dialogue among the UN, Bangladesh government, development partners, INGOs, local NGOs, and key international stakeholders.

"The current model of aid must evolve into a more sustainable, long-term, and resilience-based approach, integrating livelihoods, skills training, and economic opportunities for both Rohingya refugees and host communities," they added.

A Triple Nexus Approach, linking humanitarian relief, development, and peacebuilding, is crucial to reducing dependency and fostering self-reliance, they also said.

"The Rohingya crisis is not just a resource

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

The Rohingya crisis is not just a resource crisis, but a crisis of political will. The UN and international community must ensure sustained support and invest in long-term solutions.

HASINA RAHMAN
Country director,
International Rescue
Committee

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, CHILDREN Set up 200 more speedy trial tribunals Demand lower court judges

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Judicial Service Association (BJSJA), an organisation of lower court judges, has urged the authorities to immediately establish at least 200 more Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunals to ensure the speedy trial of cases related to violence, torture, and oppression against women and children across the country.

At the same time, BJSJA also called for the formation of separate Children's Courts and Human Trafficking Crime Prevention Tribunals. It suggested removing the additional responsibilities of these tribunals from the existing Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunals.

BJSJA President Md Amirul Islam and Secretary General Muhammad Mazharul Islam made the demand in a statement issued on Thursday.

"There are only 101 Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunals handling 1,51,317 pending cases nationwide. On average, each tribunal has about 1,500 pending cases," the statement said.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

JULY UPRISING Student leaders first reached out to Yunus on Aug 1 Asif Mahmud's book reveals the inside stories

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR and ASIFUR RAHMAN

Protesting students began reaching out to Nobel laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus as early as August 1, 2024, through his colleagues, at the peak of the mass uprising against the ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

A new book titled July: Matribhumi Othoba Mrityu, written by LGRD Adviser Asif Mahmud, provides fresh insights into these crucial days. Published by Prothoma Prokashan, the book is set to be officially launched today.

According to the book, two key leaders of the student-led mass uprising, Nahid Islam and Asif Mahmud, made two phone calls to Yunus on August 5, the day Hasina fled the country. They had lengthy discussions with him regarding the next steps for the country's leadership.

"I didn't know how to congratulate Nahid and Asif. These young men have completely mesmerised me," Yunus, now the Chief Adviser, wrote in the foreword of the book.

"I found no reason to remain steadfast in my previous decision. I thought, on the other end of the phone, across thousands of miles, these young people had sacrificed their lives to free the country from tyranny, and they have succeeded in making it free from autocracy. At this moment,

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

Prof Yunus was cautious that he would not take charge of a government that resembled the 'One-Eleven' situation. The government would have to run according to his vision.

Traffic chaos at JnU gate puts students at risk

RAKIB MADBBER

Jagannath University (JnU) students are facing severe traffic congestion while entering the campus due to an unauthorised bus and rickshaw stop on the road in front of the institution's main gate in Old Dhaka.

In the absence of a designated bus stand nearby, buses from various companies pick up and drop off passengers in front of the gate and surrounding areas, turning the space into a transport hub. Rickshaws and motorbikes also park haphazardly, worsening the congestion.

The bottleneck not only causes delays for students but also poses risks to both pedestrians and commuters.

The incessant honking and shouting of bus staffers create extreme noise pollution, disrupting the academic environment. Students allege that reckless driving and sudden manoeuvres lead to frequent accidents.

"It's a complete traffic nuisance. The bus drivers are completely ignorant of the fact that this is the main gate of a university. We endure a chaotic situation every day, but no one takes measures to solve it," said Jakir Hossain, a student of the Islamic History and Culture department.

"Sometimes we don't even get enough space to walk. We have complained to the authorities many times, but

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6



Spring has brought a delightful surprise to Jahangirnagar University -- hundreds of Lesser Whistling Ducks have returned to the Transport Lake. Thanks to an ecological restoration project that replenished their crucial food source, the lake is once again teeming with these migratory birds.

PHOTO: AURITRO SATTAR

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

REVIVAL OF HABITAT Lesser Whistling Duck population increases at JU

SAKIB AHMED

Winter has passed, and spring is in full bloom at Jahangirnagar University. However, the real surprise isn't the blooming flowers, but the return of hundreds of Lesser Whistling Ducks to the lake. After six years of early departures, with empty waters by late February, these migratory birds have finally made a comeback.

Traditionally, Lesser Whistling Ducks migrate to the "Transport Lake", located next to the transport yard in JU, from both abroad and various regions of the country, staying throughout the winter. However, in recent years, their numbers have been declining. Over the past six winters, many left earlier than usual, often by mid-February. This winter, an even more alarming trend emerged – while these migratory birds were first spotted at the lake next to the Al-Beruni Extension Hall on November 9, 2024, many disappeared as early as December. Transport Lake, once a thriving habitat, was nearly devoid of them.

"Waste accumulation and the disappearance of duckweed, a crucial food source for the birds, are the two

Set up 200

FROM PAGE 3

It also pointed out that the tribunals lack sufficient supporting staff, making it difficult for them to function effectively. "To ensure the safety of women and children and expedite case disposal, it is essential to establish more tribunals with adequate personnel. Given the backlog and urgency, BJSU urges the authorities to set up at least 200 more tribunals immediately," the statement added.

The BJSU leaders noted that the government enacted the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000, and formed special tribunals to prevent violence against women and ensure speedy trials.

"But even after 25 years, the law's objectives have not been fully realised. Several recent rape cases across the country have deeply shocked us. Conscious students and citizens have demanded maximum punishment for rapists. BJSU strongly condemns the recurrence of such heinous crimes," the statement said.



A local casts a net into the river to catch fish. Villagers near the Sundarbans rely on fishing for their livelihood, venturing out daily during high tide to catch fish, which they sell in local markets for Tk 250-400 per day. The photo was taken from the Kalabagi Sutarkhali River in Dakop upazila, Khulna yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Yunus

FROM PAGE 3

"For a long time, rampant corruption has taken place. Those who were supposed to benefit were deprived, while certain preferred individuals were given access. Financial transactions were also involved. But those who had rightful claims did not receive their due," he added.

"Proper oversight is necessary, and everyone's responsibilities must be clearly defined," he also said.

The chief adviser also exchanged views with locals at the BIAM auditorium in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

At the event, he said Bangladesh's people are lucky to be connected by the Bay, which helps promote trade with different countries. "The sea is very crucial for business," he said, reports BSS.

Student leaders first reached out to Yunus on Aug 1

FROM PAGE 3

what greater duty could I have than to stand beside them?" Yunus wrote, referring to his initial reluctance to take on a leadership role.

At the time, Yunus was in Paris, attending the 2024 Summer Olympics as a special guest on the invitation of the Olympic Committee. He later underwent a minor medical procedure in France.

Following their conversation with Yunus, Nahid Islam, alongside Asif, released a video message on Facebook at around 4:00am on August 6, declaring: "We have spoken with Dr Yunus, and he has agreed to take on this great responsibility at the call of the student community and to save the country... We urge the President to form the interim government as soon as possible."

In the forward, Yunus reflects on the events of

July and August 2024, saying, "The youth of Bangladesh have achieved an impossible feat for the country. When all hope of freeing the country from 16 years of autocracy was extinguished, they surprised everyone and liberated the nation completely."

He particularly praised the strategic planning of the student leaders. "They started the movement demanding quota reform but eventually brought down the dictator with their exceptional ability. Asif is one of those few youths who have brought the whole nation to the light of a new day with boundless courage."

Yunus revealed that Asif and other student leaders had persistently tried to contact him through various people, with the first attempts beginning on August 1. His colleagues kept him informed about

their proposals, but he initially expressed reluctance.

"The students had only one message—'Sir, we will surely ensure the fall of Hasina. But after that, you have to take responsibility,'" Yunus wrote.

In his book, Asif, also an adviser to the Youth and Sports ministry, wrote that the protesters established communication with Yunus through his team at the beginning of August.

By August 3, the protesters could not yet predict the government's imminent collapse, but they had begun drafting contingency plans, convinced that Hasina's downfall was inevitable.

"We need to have an emergency preparation keeping in mind the situation following the fall of Hasina. I informed Nahid Islam that communication with Yunus has been established," Asif wrote in

the book.

The first phone conversation between the student leaders and Yunus took place on the evening of August 5, just before Yunus was due to be taken into the operating room for surgery at a French hospital.

"We spoke to him with the phone on loudspeaker. He had his first talk with Nahid Islam that day. I said to Professor Yunus, 'Sir, the government has collapsed. Now is the time to make a decision.'"

Shojib and Nahid explained their vision of a national unity government, ensuring it would not resemble the military-backed interim administration of 2007-08.

"Professor Yunus was cautious that he would not take charge of a government that resembled the 'One-Eleven' situation. The government would

have to run according to his vision. If someone else ran the government, he would not stay in power. We told Professor Yunus we shared the same opinion -- we would not accept a military-backed government," Asif wrote.

Yunus advised the student leaders to discuss the matter with the army. According to Asif, Nahid responded, saying, "If we ask them not to intervene, it would expose our weakness. Instead, we could convey the idea of staying away from power while emphasising the unity of the uprising and the strength of the people in the field."

Following this discussion, Yunus agreed to take on the role, and the announcement was made through a video message on Facebook, confirming his acceptance as the Chief Adviser of the interim government.

Residents suffer

FROM PAGE 5

said Sabina, a resident of ward-3.

Echoing her, Monirul Haque of ward-7 said, "We never get clean water from the municipal supply. The water stinks and is unclean, and hence we can't use it for consumption."

Abd Ali, another resident, shared similar ordeal.

They demanded urgent intervention from the authorities concerned to resolve the crisis, and ensure stable supply of clean water to the residents through overhauling the existing infrastructure, including distribution network, and regular cleaning up of the water tanks.

Riyaz Sheikh, a junior worker at the Dashani Water Department, said the new water tank is not yet operational at present. Once it is functional, it could help mitigate the crisis, he added.

Contacted, TM Rezaul Haque Rizvi, assistant engineer of the municipality, acknowledged that the aging pipes have been

causing leakage and contamination, and said immediate action is taken to repair leaks whenever reported, but the problem remains unresolved.

He also informed that a Tk 40 crore project had been initiated to improve water supply and sanitation in the area. However, due to administrative delays, water from the proposed Panchadighi source has not yet been made available. As such, despite completion of the necessary infrastructure, water extraction has not commenced yet.

"The new water supply system includes around 45 kilometres of pipeline, five production tubewells, public toilets, a drainage system, a reservoir, a water treatment plant, an overhead reservoir, and three pump stations," he said.

Rizvi estimated that once the treatment plant becomes operational, daily water supply would increase by about 2 lakh gallons, benefiting a significant portion of the residents.

Buet students

FROM PAGE 5

accused, as they are influential individuals.

The protesters vowed to continue their movement until justice is served.

"Our peaceful protests and democratic programs will continue until the entire incident is thoroughly investigated and justice is ensured," said one of the protesting students.

Expressing frustration,

the deceased's father Masud Mia told The Daily Star, "My son was killed by a reckless, unlicensed driver while standing near the footpath. Section 302 should be included in the case."

Advocate Mohammad Noor Hossain echoed the sentiment, saying, "Sections 98, 99, and 105 have been applied, which is unexpected."

RMG workers

FROM PAGE 5

contact the factory owners, but was unsuccessful.

Overtime bill, maternity leave, night allowance of Tk 190, tiffin allowance,

dinner allowance, minimum salary of Tk 12,500, and cancellation of worker termination are among their 14-point demands.

Workers' migration drops

FROM PAGE 3

ineffective decisions could further slow the flow of workers to the country.

He also called on the government to work towards reopening major job markets like Malaysia, which are closed now, and exploring new opportunities.

According to BMET statistics, out of the total migration this year, 1,20,876 workers, or 75.4 percent, have gone to Saudi Arabia, which remains the primary destination for low-paid Bangladeshi workers.

However, migration to Saudi Arabia fell sharply in February, with only 44,258 workers heading there, compared to 76,618 in January.

Qatar was the second-highest destination for

Bangladeshi workers last month, with 7,150 migrating there, followed by Singapore (3,735), Kuwait (2,084), and Jordan (873).

Continued restrictions on hiring new workers from Bangladesh in key destinations like Oman and Malaysia also contributed to the overall decline in worker migration last month.

Oman has maintained restrictions on the migration of fresh low-paid workers from Bangladesh since October 2023, while Malaysia implemented a similar restriction on all labour-sourcing countries, including Bangladesh, in June last year.

However, BMET data shows that 301 workers migrated to Malaysia in February and 1,286 in January, as the country,

according to the Bangladesh government, has been hiring Bangladeshi workers only for its plantation sector in recent months.

Similarly, six workers migrated to Oman in February, following 18 in January.

According to government officials, Bangladesh sends workers to more than 160 countries worldwide. However, the majority migrate to a handful of destinations -- the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Although Bangladeshi workers migrate under various categories, such as professionals and skilled labourers, most seek employment as low-paid workers.

Tk 54cr road repair

FROM PAGE 5

In December last year, the Narayanganj RHD office attempted to stop movement of overloaded trucks with assistance from police, and tried to redirect them to another route or reduce the loads, but had to back down facing resistance from transport workers.

"This regional highway is not designed for overloaded heavy vehicles. We have repeatedly urged cement companies and transport associations to comply with weight limits, but they have ignored our requests," said an engineer of RHD in Narayanganj, wishing anonymity.

He said it is urgent to repair the road before monsoon, but warned that a mere asphalt overlay would not be enough.

"Unless a substantial budget is allocated, the road will return to its current state soon after repairs," he added.

Aslam Sarkar, president of Char Syedpur Transport Owners' Association, claimed they were not responsible for the problem.

"We only rent out the vehicles. Those who hire the vehicles run those overloaded across the country. Unless the government enforces strict rules, this practice will continue," he said.

"To mitigate transportation costs, we sometimes have to overload our trucks. It's a widespread practice across all industries. We know this road was not designed for such heavy loads, but we have no alternative route. Once the Panchaboti-Moktarpur road is completed, no heavy vehicles, including ours, will need to use this road," said Manir Uddin Ahmed, senior manager of road transport

operations at Shah Cement Industries Ltd.

He added that cement companies were willing to contribute to road repairs if necessary.

Contacted, Abdur Rahim, executive engineer at Narayanganj RHD office, admitted that the department was struggling to control movement of overloaded vehicles on the road.

"We are now considering interim repairs, but a long-term plan is necessary. A plan to expand the road to a six-lane highway was submitted to the ministry concerned during the previous government's tenure.

However, there hasn't been any progress under the new administration," he added.

Rohingya

FROM PAGE 3

crisis, but a crisis of political will. The UN and international community must ensure sustained support and invest in long-term solutions," said Hasina Rahman, country director of International Rescue Committee.

ActionAid Bangladesh Country Director Farah Kabir said, "Without immediate and decisive action, we risk allowing the Rohingya crisis to become a forgotten tragedy. A people-centred approach, ensuring livelihood, skills, and education opportunities, is the way forward."

Ashish Damle, country director of Oxfam in Bangladesh, said, "Given the prolonged nature of this crisis, we urge global stakeholders to consider a structured and dedicated mission to drive sustainable response."

Traffic chaos at JnU gate puts

FROM PAGE 3

they did nothing except giving assurances," he said.

Buses from several companies, including Azmeri Glory, Savar Paribahan, Bihanga, Victor Classic, and Bahadur Shah Paribahan, regularly stop near the main gate, bringing traffic to a standstill. For students commuting from distant areas, the congestion causes significant delays.

"Since I travel from Gazipur, these local buses make it difficult for me to reach classes on time. Sometimes, even when other roads are clear, this stretch alone can cause an hour-long delay," said Sumaiya Afrin, a student of the Mass Communication

and Journalism department.

"I have also been hit by rickshaws multiple times because of the traffic mess," she added.

Helal Uddin, a student of the Finance department, shared similar experiences. "We often struggle to reach our classes on time because of the severe congestion in front of the main gate. The noise from honking makes it difficult to concentrate in class," he said.

He said crossing the road, particularly in the afternoon, had become extremely difficult. "Getting bumped by vehicles is a common occurrence. The risk of accidents is always present."

A designated bus stand should be set up away from the entrance, he said.

JnU Vice-Chancellor Rezaul Karim said the administration was aware of the issue and had discussed it with the authorities. "Our priority is to ensure a safe and student-friendly campus. We are exploring possible solutions to regulate traffic in the area," he said.

Assistant Commissioner (Traffic) Pijush Dey of Kotwali Zone said, "We understand the students' complaints. The area has issues, and unauthorised bus and rickshaw stops worsen the problem. We are working on a long-term solution."

Lesser Whistling Duck

FROM PAGE 3

major reasons for their decline. Without duckweed, the lake lost its ability to sustain these migratory species," said Professor Jamal Uddin, chairman of JU's environmental science department.

To address this issue, Auritro Sattar, an Environmental Science major at JU, initiated an ecological restoration project in early February under Prof Jamal's guidance, with support from the JU administration. He collected duckweed from various locations and reintroduced it into Transport Lake.

"Duckweed grows rapidly, and within weeks, the lake became a rich feeding ground again. In addition to being a vital food source, duckweed acts as a natural filter, absorbing pollutants such as ammonium, nitrate, and phosphorus,

which contribute to water pollution and eutrophication. Once these pollutants were reduced, the lake became more habitable for migratory birds," Auritro explained.

The intervention yielded remarkable results. Within a month, on March 6, researchers using the point counting method observed around 280 Lesser Whistling Ducks at Transport Lake -- their first recorded visit this season after previously abandoning the site. Over the following days, their numbers grew to nearly 350. The birds gathered in areas rich with duckweed and water lilies, while some rested on bamboo platforms installed to attract them.

This conservation success underscores the potential of ecological interventions in restoring JU's lakes as thriving habitats for migratory birds. Auritro emphasised that continued restoration and pollution

control efforts are essential to ensuring these lakes remain safe stopovers for migratory species in the future.

Former DU

FROM PAGE 3

Prof Siddique, who served as the vice chancellor of DU for two consecutive terms, passed away at 10:45pm on Thursday at the Neuro-Intensive Care Unit of Ibrahim Cardiac Hospital. He was 72.

On March 6, Prof Siddique, also a former teacher of the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, suddenly collapsed at Dhaka Club and was hospitalised.

After initial treatment, he was moved to the ICU and placed on life support. Despite the doctors' best efforts, his condition remained unstable until his passing.

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EID JOURNEY

Locomotive crisis cuts special train number

SIFAYET ULLAH, Ctg

The number of special trains for Eid journey, operating from Chattogram to different destinations across the country, has been significantly reduced due to an acute shortage of locomotives (engines).

According to Bangladesh Railway, only one pair of Eid special trains will be available this time, which will operate between Chattogram and Chandpur.

There were four pairs of special trains were scheduled to accommodate the heavy demand during Eid journeys last year, one on the Chattogram-Mymensingh route, two on the Chattogram-Chandpur, and one on the Chattogram-Cox's Bazar route.

The limited train availability is likely to cause considerable inconvenience for the homebound people during Eid rush.

Syedul Alam, a regular passenger on the Chattogram-Chandpur route and a businessman from Riyazuddin Bazar, expressed concerns, saying, "This route typically experiences heavy passenger demand during Eid. Every year, the railway operates two pairs of trains on this route to accommodate the demand. However, I've heard that only one pair will be running this year. If that is the case, Eid home journeys will be much more difficult this time."

Officials from BR's transport department said they did not receive enough locomotives from the mechanical

department for the Eid schedule.

"We wrote to the mechanical department for allocating engines to run additional trains during Eid, but they failed to provide engines as per our demands," said Tarek Imran, deputy chief operating superintendent of BR.

"The shortage of engines will lead to a reduction in number of Eid special trains, which is likely to place additional pressure on existing trains," he added.

According to Sajid Hasan Nirjhor, divisional mechanical engineer of the BR (Chattogram), several locomotives from the 3000 series remain idle in workshop due to a lack of necessary parts for repairs.

While the department requires 65 locomotives daily to run scheduled trains, currently only 52.55 engines are available for operation, he added.

Asked why the store department failed to supply the necessary parts for engine repairs, Anwarul Islam, chief controller of BR's Eastern Zone store, explained that the department could not purchase crucial engine parts due to a shortage of funds.

"The finance ministry has yet to allocate the required budget in line with the BR's demand for repair work. As a result, the department has been unable to procure the necessary parts, which has significantly impacted the repair and maintenance of locomotives," he added.



A farmer sprays pesticide on watermelon plants to protect them from pests. As summer approaches, farmers in Khulna are busy cultivating watermelons. According to the Department of Agricultural Extension, watermelon is being grown on 8,100 hectares of land in Dakop upazila. The photo was taken at Kalinagar village yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

BAGERHAT MUNICIPALITY

Residents suffer as water crisis worsens

PARTHA CHAKRABORTTY, Bagerhat

The persistent crisis of water in Bagerhat Municipality has worsened in recent time, leaving the residents suffering immensely.

The municipal authorities have been unable to supply clean water adequately, prompting many residents to purchase bottled water for drinking and cooking.

According to municipal officials, Bagerhat town, with a population of nearly 1,25,000, requires approximately 8 lakh gallons of water daily. However, the daily supply has been only a little over 5 lakh gallons. As such, there has been a daily shortfall of nearly 3 lakh gallons, significantly impacting the daily lives of residents. Currently, only 60-65 percent of the town's population has access to municipal water supply. As the warmer days have arrived, the situation is likely to worsen further throughout the summer due to power outages.

Moreover, the crisis has been compounded by the town's poor water distribution network. The aging water pipes are riddled with leakages, allowing drain runoff to contaminate the water. As a result, the water supplied to households is often malodorous and unsafe for consumption, leaving many residents with no choice but to buy bottled water for drinking and cooking.

The town's water is sourced from a deep tubewell in Shatgambuj union, pumped into overhead tanks in Dashani and Basabati Padmapukur areas before it is distributed.

However, only 6,550 residents are connected to the municipal water system, and many of them have been experiencing inconsistent supply and poor water quality. Only a selected few, including 135 freedom fighters, receive municipal water free of charge.

"The supply to my house gets disconnected every other day, and the water smells awful. I have to buy water for cooking and drinking since the supplied water is

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

Daily shortfall is nearly 3 lakh gallons. Aging pipes and delays in a Tk 40 crore project worsen the situation, forcing many residents to buy bottled water. Authorities promise improvements, but urgent action is needed.

MODONPUR-MODONGANJ ROAD

Tk 54cr road repair fails in months

Overloaded vehicles to blame

SAURAV HOSSAIN SIAM, Narayanganj

Barely six months after repairs at a cost of Tk 54 crore, the 11-kilometre Modonpur-Modonganj road in Narayanganj has become dilapidated yet again.

During a recent visit, this correspondent observed large potholes at several spots, while asphalt surface was found worn off across vast stretches of the road. Despite the risky conditions, commuters have no choice but to continue using the road.

Persistent movement of overloaded trucks and lorries, particularly at night and often exceeding the weight limits, has been the primary cause of the road's rapid deterioration, according to the Roads and Highways Department.

Transport owners and officials of cement factories acknowledged the issue but argued that they have no alternative route.

The road was constructed around three decades ago over an abandoned, old railway track to facilitate commute for residents of Bandar upazila of Narayanganj. Initially, it was used mainly by lighter vehicles, including CNG-run auto-rickshaws.

However, after the third Shitalakshya Bridge was opened to traffic in October 2022, the road's importance grew significantly and became one of the busiest roads in Narayanganj, as it shortens travel distances to the southern regions via the Padma Bridge by at least 9



kilometres, while providing direct connectivity for the local industrial and commercial hubs.

RHD initiated a Tk 54.5 crore project to widen and repair the road, involving asphalt overlaying, construction of four culverts and a bridge, and completed it by the end of 2023.

However, within six months of the repairs, the road became almost impassable as the asphalt surface eroded and cracks, potholes developed, said locals and regular commuters.

Major cement manufacturers – including Shah, Premier, Crown, Metrocem, Akij, and Seven Rings – operate on both sides of the Shitalakshya and Dhaleshwari rivers in Narayanganj and Munshiganj. While their trucks usually travel via Moktarpur-Panchaboti road, ongoing construction work on that route forced them to divert through the Modonpur-Modonganj road in

recent times.

The road's repair work was poorly done using substandard materials, alleged Mohammad Baten, a local resident.

Accidents have now become common on the road, with vehicles often overturning due to potholes that turned the road into a death trap, said Md Shawon, another local resident who recently suffered a motorcycle accident on the road.

According to Bandar Police Station, at least five major accidents on the road were reported in last six months. However, locals claimed that the actual number is much higher.

"Day and night, heavily loaded lorries and trucks ply the road disregarding regulations. The road gave way as it simply cannot withstand such weight," said Bachchu Miah, a CNG-run auto-rickshaw driver.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

MOHTASSIM MURDER

Buet students protest bail of accused

DU CORRESPONDENT

A group of students from Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) protested on campus yesterday against the bail granted to three accused in the murder case of Mohtassim Masud.

Masud, a second-year student at Buet, was killed two and a half months ago when a private car hit a motorcycle on the 300-foot road in Narayanganj's Rugganj.

At a protest rally, the students, who have been demonstrating for several days, placed a six-point demand, including reconsideration of the bail granted to the accused.

Other demands include a comprehensive and impartial investigation and a travel ban on the

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

RMG workers block highway for Eid bonus

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Around three hundred workers of a ready made garment factory blocked the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway in Gazipur's Basan area yesterday morning to press home their 14-point demands, including Eid-ul-Fitr bonuses.

Gazipur Industrial Police Inspector Faruk Hossain told The Daily Star that the workers of the factory took position on the road at Telipara around 8:30am, halting vehicular movement in the area.

However, traffic movement returned to normal around noon following discussions between the factory owners, the police and workers, said Traffic Police Inspector Abdullah Al Mamun.

This correspondent made several attempts to

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7



Workers drop geo-bags filled with sand along the banks of the Kirtankhola river in Barishal. In preparation of the upcoming monsoon season, these bags will help prevent erosion at vulnerable points along the riverbank. The photo was taken in the city's DC Ghat area yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS



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DEADLY DRUG WAR Duterte attends ICC hearing by video link

AFP, The Hague

Former Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte failed to show up in person at the International Criminal Court yesterday at the opening of his crimes against humanity hearing over his deadly crackdown on narcotics.

The 79-year-old, the first ex-Asian head of state to face charges at the ICC, was following by videolink during a short hearing to inform him of the crimes he is alleged to have committed, as well as his rights as a defendant.

Sounding frail and wearing a blue suit and tie, he spoke briefly to confirm his name and date of birth. The presiding judge allowed him to follow proceedings in absentia due to his long flight to The Hague.

Duterte stands accused of the crime against humanity of murder over his years-long campaign against drug users and dealers that rights



groups said killed thousands.

In the prosecutor's application for his arrest, he said Duterte's alleged crimes were "part of a widespread and systematic attack directed against the civilian population in the Philippines."

"Potentially tens of thousands of killings were perpetrated," the prosecutor alleged of the campaign that targeted mostly poor men, often without proof they were linked to drugs.

Victims' families have welcomed the trial as a chance to get justice, while Duterte supporters believe he was "kidnapped" and sent to The Hague amid a spectacular fall-out with the ruling Marcos family.

As he landed in The Hague, the former leader appeared to accept responsibility for his actions, saying in a Facebook video: "I have been telling the police, the military, that it was my job and I am responsible."

In his application for arrest, the prosecutor quotes from some of Duterte's pronouncements when he was running for president.

He is cited as saying the number of criminal suspects killed "will become 100,000... I will kill all of you" and the fish in Manila Bay "will become fat because that's where I will throw you."



A general view shows the Ponte Vecchio and the high level of the Arno river in Florence during floods in Tuscany yesterday. Heavy rain swelled rivers and flooded streets in Florence yesterday, with authorities issuing a red weather alert for the historic Italian city and its surroundings, urging residents to stay indoors.

PHOTO: AFP

China urges end to 'illegal' sanctions on Iran

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday urged an end to "illegal" sanctions on Iran as it hosted Iranian and Russian diplomats for talks Beijing hopes will restart long stalled negotiations on Tehran's nuclear programme.

The United States withdrew from a landmark 2015 deal, which imposed curbs on Tehran's nuclear development in return for sanctions relief, during US President Donald Trump's first term.

The Republican president has called for a new nuclear deal with Iran since his return to the White House in January but Tehran says no such agreement is possible so long as sanctions remain in place.

The effort to secure a pact was given new urgency last month when the UN nuclear watchdog said Iran had significantly increased its stockpile of highly enriched uranium.

Beijing hosted Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov for talks yesterday it said it hoped would help "resume dialogue and negotiation at an early time".

Meeting the diplomats, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stressed "the comprehensive agreement on the Iranian nuclear issue is an important



achievement achieved through dialogue and negotiation".

"Now the situation has reached a critical juncture again. We must buy time for peace, resolve disputes through political and diplomatic means, and oppose the use of force and illegal sanctions," he said.

And the US should demonstrate "political sincerity and return to talks at an early date", said a statement from Beijing's foreign ministry, which outlined propositions from China on the Iranian nuclear issue.

"All parties should... refrain from actions that might escalate the situation," the statement added.

Gharibabadi, in turn, hailed the "constructive" talks in Beijing and said Iran's nuclear programme "is peaceful in nature".

"Our nuclear programme has never been diverted to non-peaceful purposes," Gharibabadi said.

"But unfortunately, some countries are trying to create an unnecessary crisis in this regard."

"The main root cause of the current situation is the unilateral withdrawal of the United States," Gharibabadi said.

The Russian and Iranian officials met China's Vice Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu earlier yesterday and "exchanged views on the Iran nuclear issue and other issues of common concern", Chinese state media said. Ma reiterated after that meeting China's support for "political and diplomatic engagement and dialogue based on mutual respect".

"We emphasised the necessity of ending all illegal, unilateral sanctions," Ma told reporters.

"The relevant parties should work to eliminate the root causes of the current situation and abandon sanctions, pressure, and threats of the use of force."

Trump has reinstated his "maximum pressure" policy of sanctions against Iran, mirroring his approach during his first term.

He sent a letter to Tehran this week urging nuclear talks and warning of possible military action if it refuses.

Funding cuts force WFP to stop food aid to 1m in Myanmar

AFP, Yangon

The World Food Programme will be forced to cut off one million people in war-torn Myanmar from its vital food aid because of "critical funding shortfalls", it said yesterday.

The United States provided the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) with \$4.4 billion of its \$9.7 billion budget in 2024 but Washington's international aid funding has been slashed under President Donald Trump.

The WFP says more than 15 million people in the country of 51 million are unable to meet their daily food needs, with more than two million "facing emergency levels of hunger".

"More than one million people in Myanmar will be cut off from WFP's lifesaving food assistance starting in April due to critical funding shortfalls," it said in a statement.

Without immediate new funding, the WFP said it will have to cut aid to vulnerable groups including children under five, pregnant and breastfeeding women and the disabled — assisting only 35,000 of them.

The UN warned last year that Rakhine state in Myanmar's west faces an "imminent threat of acute famine". WFP said the upcoming cuts would hit 100,000 internally displaced people in Rakhine — including members of the persecuted Rohingya minority — who will "have no access to food" without its assistance.

Lanka adjusts train timings to tackle elephant deaths

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's wildlife and railway authorities announced yesterday a series of low-tech measures, including adjusting timetables to reduce night-time train collisions, following the worst wildlife accident that killed seven elephants.

The measures came after seven elephants were run over on February 20 by an express train near a wildlife reserve in Habarana, some 180 kilometres east of the capital Colombo, making it the worst accident of its kind.

Authorities said they had identified vulnerable stretches of railway tracks in elephant-inhabited forest areas in the island's northern and eastern regions, and mitigation measures were already underway.

Authorities were deploying power-set trains, which have better braking power, to minimise collisions.

Wildlife Conservation Director Manjula Amarathna said 138 elephants had been killed by trains in the past 17 years since authorities began collecting data.

Two weeks ago, the government announced that 1,195 people and 3,484 animals had been killed in a decade due to the worsening human-elephant conflict on the island.

Killing or harming elephants is a criminal offence in Sri Lanka, which has an estimated 7,000 wild elephants, considered a national treasure partly due to their significance in Buddhist culture.

Intimidation, harassment for speaking up

FROM PAGE 14

"This relentless attack has left me traumatised."

Her family is terrified, forbidding her from protesting, and Shima is deeply concerned for her safety.

"The way I have been made recognisable is intended to get me killed," she said, while expressing a lack of faith in the country's legal system.

Adrita Roy, another JU student and activist under the "Bangladesh Against Rape and Abuse" platform, has faced harassment since protesting the home adviser's remarks on the Lalmatia mob violence.

Failing to come up with any counterargument to her activism, her critics have resorted to body-shaming her and labelling her a "Shahbagi", a slur for female activists.

"Just as people were once labelled Jamaat-e-Islami supporters, now they are tagged as 'Shahbagis' — the pattern remains unchanged," she added.

Farzana Sithi, a key figure in the

July uprising, has faced unimaginable levels of both online and offline harassment.

More than 250 fake accounts are spreading misinformation, trolling, often using AI-generated images and videos to tarnish her reputation.

"I did not receive any assistance from law enforcement. Some suggested private firms could disable fake accounts, but their services cost dollars — I can't afford that. I still use public transport. And is this even my responsibility?"

She says the situation now is even more dangerous than during the student protests in July last year, which forced her into hiding amid false cases and threats.

Recently, Farzana has also faced physical threats. "A group in Uttara called me an atheist and said I deserve to be slaughtered. I had to flee quickly, but why should I? Did I do anything wrong by speaking up?"

Despite everything, Farzana remains committed to her activism.

There is also a clear double standard in how harassment is handled. While men like Nahid Islam receive support when body-shamed, women like Umama Fatema face relentless bullying and threats with no solidarity.

"Harassment targeting women's appearance is deeply personal and abusive, yet when women report such incidents, the response is minimal. This shows a frustrating disparity where men are supported, but women are silenced and further victimized," said Umama.

Shireen Huq, the chief of the Women's Affairs Reforms Commission, called the incident "deeply upsetting".

"These women led the July movement and inspired us all but now they are facing harassment. It's depressing. But I urge you, don't back down. The space you've fought for belongs to you. Don't let fear take it away. Stand firm, because if we give in, we lose everything."

SpaceX hails govt move to cut red tape

FROM PAGE 14

"The fact that he will do everything to support the licensing of Starlink and has actually formed a team is a sign that he wanted to move quickly and the estimate is that they're looking to have it within 90 days in Bangladesh, which is extraordinarily fast," he said.

But the reality is, it may take a little longer. However, from start to finish of the process, Bangladesh may be the fastest country in the world, he said.

Numerous issues had previously hindered US businesses from entering Bangladesh. Thankfully, the landscape is changing, and many are now exploring opportunities in the country.

"I really believe that Bangladesh is a country that was not on the radar of the Americans and European [companies]. The new government coming in is very significant. He [Yunus] is a well-known international

figure, well-known economist, very famous for all the work he's done around the world, including in the US. And of course, we know Grameen US is a big entity."

He said another multi-billion dollar US firm would be coming to Bangladesh following Starlink.

"And you know, I have to tell you, Professor Yunus will see all of them. So he's not someone where there are layers of people between him and the government. He will see and support that.... The US relationship with Bangladesh is going to expand."

About Starlink's business model in Bangladesh, pricing strategy, the number of ground stations and gateways, and whether it would partner with mobile operators as it did in India, he said that other members of the Starlink team were handling these aspects and his role focused solely on high-level engagements.

"I think the first part is always that Starlink needs to work directly with

the government to get the spectrum and get the licensing. That's the first element. Once they have that, then they'll work with a multitude of local operators and there's an ecosystem that's created from that. Again, once you're licensed in the country, you'll see many. It's a very open model, so you'll see many businesses then able to cooperate with Starlink and SpaceX."

Richard believes Bangladesh should embrace the fact that the global community and Muhammad Yunus are engaging now.

"If you look at this incredible transition of power, it highlights what really Bangladesh is about — the acceptance of Muhammad Yunus coming in, the fact that the youth picked someone of his age — it shows that they weren't looking to run the government themselves. There was an awareness that they didn't have the experience. So who better than bringing in Muhammad Yunus?"

Govt to revoke

FROM PAGE 14

write-up titled "A Plea for Bangladesh—and for Myself: Bangladesh's Descent into Anarchy under Yunus—The World's Silence is Painful." In the write-up, Harun praised the "abusive fascist regime" and portrayed Bangladesh's situation under the interim government as a descent into anarchy.

The ministry condemned his statements, saying they misrepresented the realities under Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus. "It appears Mr Harun has a hidden agenda or ulterior motive," the ministry statement said.

Instead of returning, he moved to Canada and has been writing on Facebook, describing himself as a "persecuted diplomat," "exiled novelist," and "secular"—an apparent attempt to gain sympathy abroad, the statement said.

It added the ministry does not tolerate such actions from its officials and will take stern measures as necessary.

3 children raped, four suspects held

FROM PAGE 14

while the other two are juveniles, reports UNB.

The child's father filed a case with Shibganj Police Station accusing them, said Golam Kibria, officer-in-charge (OC) of Shibganj Police Station.

According to the case, the girl had offered Taraweesh prayers at a nearby mosque on Thursday night. On her way home after prayers, the accused took her to a nearby mango orchard and raped her in turns.

Later, she told her parents about the incident. The next morning, locals detained the perpetrators and handed them over to the police.

The child was admitted to the hospital for treatment, and the three accused were produced before the court in the afternoon, said the OC.

In Sirajganj, a case was filed on Thursday over the rape of a 9-year-old girl at the child care centre of a local NGO in Raiganj upazila on Sunday.

The accused is a 15-year-old teenager from Narua village. He has gone into hiding along with his family after the incident.

The victim is undergoing treatment at a hospital, Raiganj Police Station OC Md Asaduzzaman, reports our Pabna correspondent.

He said the child care centre of the NGO was being operated at the house of Abdul Alim and that the accused's mother was a teacher there.

According to the case statement, the accused took the victim to his room on Sunday morning during school hours and raped her. Afterwards, the victim became ill and was taken to the hospital.

BNP forms support cells

FROM PAGE 1

Affairs Secretary, Barrister Kaiser Kamal, and Health Affairs Secretary, Rafiqul Islam, will serve as the central coordinators of the cells.

Expressing concern over the rising incidents of violence against women and children, Rizvi particularly mentioned the case of the eight-year-old child from Magura.

"The nation cannot accept the brutal death of the girl from Magura after she was subjected to rape. People had expected the rule of law to be firmly established at the grassroots level. However, due to the slow and lenient actions of the administration, criminals are being encouraged in various ways."

The BNP leader demanded strict enforcement of the law to punish the perpetrators of such crimes and restore justice in society.

"The rule of law must be established immediately to ensure exemplary

punishment for real criminals. We strongly reiterate our demand for the swift and exemplary punishment of those responsible for the death of the eight-year-old child."

'COMMITTED TO LEADING CHARGE'

In a Facebook post yesterday, BNP acting chairperson Tarique Rahman said that the party is committed to leading the charge and creating a safe, equal, and fair society for all, irrespective of gender, creed, or political opinion.

"The tragic death of an eight-year-old child rape victim from Magura has left us all in shock, shame, and sorrow. Young children and women across the country should never face violence, assault, and harassment. We must look inwards as a nation, as a people, to ensure these injustices do not happen in a Bangladesh where everyone's liberties and rights are to be respected."

"I'm determined to do everything possible to support victims of such horrific crimes in their journey for justice. Our party, BNP, has formed two dedicated cells—one for medical support and the other for legal assistance. These cells, which include many women doctors and lawyers, will provide free, professional, and if necessary, discreet support to victims and their families."

"The interim government must take immediate action and significantly improve the law and order situation to safeguard every mother, sister, and daughter in every corner of Bangladesh. As the political party that pioneered women's empowerment in Bangladesh, BNP is committed to leading the charge again and creating a safe, equal, and fair society for all, irrespective of gender, creed, or political opinion."



Mark Carney sworn in as Canada PM

AFP, Ottawa

Mark Carney was sworn in as Canada's prime minister yesterday, taking charge of a country rattled by a breakdown in US relations since President Donald Trump's return to power.

The ruling Liberal Party overwhelmingly backed Carney to replace Justin Trudeau, betting his experience leading two central banks through historic crises will reassure Canadians facing a potentially devastating trade war.

Carney, who turns 60 on Sunday, is a political novice who has never won an elected public office but his campaign skills will be tested soon with Canada likely headed for a general election in weeks.

The threats posed by Trump are expected to dominate the vote.

The US president has sought to bludgeon Canada, imposing sweeping import tariffs and threatening further levies while claiming the country is not "viable" on its own and should be annexed by Washington.

Carney, who was sworn in as Canada's 24th prime minister at a ceremony in Ottawa, has described Trump's stance as the most serious challenge Canada has faced in a generation.

He was an investment banker at Goldman Sachs before serving as governor of the Bank of Canada during the 2008-2009 financial crisis.



Revellers smeared with gulal (colour powder) to celebrate Holi, the Hindu spring festival of colours, at a temple in India's Ahmedabad yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Russia 'committed crimes against humanity' in Ukraine: UN probe

AFP, Geneva

Russia has committed the crimes against humanity of enforced disappearances and torture in its war in Ukraine, a United Nations investigation concluded.

The crimes were perpetrated as part of a systematic, widespread attack against civilians, the UN's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine said in a new report to be formally presented next week.

"The commission has concluded that Russian authorities committed enforced disappearances and torture as crimes against humanity," the report said.

"Both were perpetrated as part of a widespread and systematic attack against the civilian population and pursuant to a

coordinated state policy," it added.

The categorical nature of that statement was unusual for UN investigators.

The report said large numbers of civilians were detained in areas that came under Russian control, and many of them were further transferred to detention facilities in occupied Ukraine or in Russia.

The Russian authorities "committed additional violations and crimes during these prolonged detentions. Many victims have been missing for months and years, and some died in captivity," it said.

Those authorities have systematically failed to provide information on the detainees' whereabouts, it added.

The report said Russia had acted with the intent to remove disappeared people from "the protection of the law".

Prisoners of war have also been victims of torture and of enforced disappearances, in violation of international humanitarian law, the commission added.

The inquiry said Russia had "systematically used torture against certain categories of detainees to extract information, coerce, and intimidate".

The most brutal forms were used during interrogations, while Russian authorities have also "systematically used sexual violence as a form of torture against male detainees".

The commission said it had also been studying a growing number of incidents concerning Russian troops killing or wounding captured or surrendering Ukrainian soldiers, which constitutes a war crime.

Trump takes US birthright citizenship issue to SC

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump took his contentious bid to end birthright citizenship in the United States to the Supreme Court on Thursday.

Trump's executive order seeking to end birthright citizenship, which he signed on his first day in office, was blocked by federal district courts in Maryland, Massachusetts and Washington state.

Birthright citizenship is enshrined in the 14th Amendment to the US Constitution, which decrees that anyone born on American soil is a citizen, and Trump's order seeks to end it for children whose parents are in the country illegally or on temporary student, work or tourist visas.

In an emergency application with the Supreme Court, the Justice Department sought to narrow the scope of the nationwide lower court injunctions to the individual plaintiffs in the three cases.

The department's acting solicitor general Sarah Harris described it as a "modest" request and she notably did not seek a ruling from the Supreme Court at this time as to whether eliminating birthright citizenship is constitutional or not.

"Those universal injunctions prohibit a Day 1 Executive Order from being enforced anywhere in the country," Harris wrote.

"While the parties litigate weighty merits questions, the Court should 'restrict the scope' of multiple preliminary injunctions that 'purport to cover every person in the country,' limiting those injunctions to parties actually within the courts' power," she said.

Trump has been facing legal pushback in courts across the country as he attempts to stem illegal immigration, slash the government budget and reduce the federal workforce.

In his latest setback, a district judge in California on Thursday ordered six federal agencies to rehire thousands of probationary workers who had been fired.

Harris, in her brief with the Supreme Court, also took issue with the number of injunctions on Trump administration moves being issued by district court judges.

"Universal injunctions have reached epidemic proportions," she said, and are preventing "the Executive Branch from performing its constitutional functions."



Stargazers marvel at 'Blood Moon'

AFP, Belo Horizonte

Stargazers across a swathe of the world marvelled at a dramatic red "Blood Moon" during a rare total lunar eclipse in the early hours of Friday morning.

The celestial spectacle was visible in the Americas and Pacific and Atlantic oceans, as well as in the westernmost parts of Europe and Africa.

The phenomenon happens when the Sun, Earth and Moon line up, causing our planet to cast a giant shadow across its satellite.

But as the Earth's shadow crept across the Moon, it did not entirely blot out its white glow -- instead the Moon glowed a reddish colour.

This is because the only sunlight that reaches the Moon is "bent and



scattered" as it goes through Earth's atmosphere, said Daniel Brown, an astronomer at Britain's Nottingham Trent University.

It is similar to how the light can become pink or red during sunrises or sunsets on Earth, he added.

The more clouds and dust there are in Earth's atmosphere, the redder the Moon appears.

Brown called the lunar eclipse,

which will last around six hours, "an amazing way to see the solar system in action".

The period when the Moon is completely in Earth's shadow -- called the totality -- lasts just over an hour.

This event has been dubbed the "Blood Worm Moon", after one of the names given to March full moons by some Native Americans.

It is the first total lunar eclipse since 2022, but there will be another one this September.

Thursday's event is a "Micromoon", meaning the Moon is the farthest away it gets from Earth, making it appear about seven percent smaller than normal, according to the website Earthsky. This is the opposite of a "Supermoon", as was seen during 2022's lunar eclipse.

France, UK, order more air defence missiles

AFP, Paris

Paris, Rome and London said Friday they had ordered new air defence missiles after a shock US policy shift in ties with Europe.

European governments are under pressure to step up on defence after US President Donald Trump questioned whether the United States -- the guarantor of Europe's security since World War II -- should continue its central role in Nato.

"France, Italy and United Kingdom, confirm the order of 218 additional Aster missiles and the acceleration of delivery of already ordered Aster missiles," the countries said in a joint statement.

The deal underscored "the unwavering commitment of France, Italy and United Kingdom to bolster their air defence capabilities," they said.

It would also ensure "speedier delivery, from 2025, of 134 missiles previously ordered" in December 2022, French Defence Minister Sebastien Lecornu said on X.

Aster 15 and 30 missiles are produced by pan-European manufacturer MBDA.

The order is for an unspecified number of new Aster 30 BL missiles, to enter into service next year, that are to be used in the future French and Italian SAMP/T land-to-air defence systems as well as the navy ships of the three nations.

They are to be capable of reaching a target flying at an altitude of 2,500 metres) within a range of 150 kilometres.

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Invitation for Tender

TENDER NOTICE NO: 03/EED/BAN/e-TENDER/2024-25 DATE: 13/03/2025

Sl. No	Lot No & Name of Works	Tender ID	Type Method	Last Date & Time of Selling Documents	Last Date & Time for Tender Security Submission	Last Date & Time of Submission Documents
01	xen/eed/bban/323-GS/03 Construction of 05 Storied Hostel Building with 05 storied foundation in/c. Sanitary, Water Supply & Electrification works at Bandarban Government High School, Sadar, Bandarban Hill district.	1086479	NCT, OTM	07-Apr-2025 16:00	08-Apr-2025 12:45	08-Apr-2025 13:00

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 of following Packages from the National e-GP System portal have to be deposited online through any registered banks' branches. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from GP GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

(Md. Mizanur Rahman)
Executive Engineer (c.c.)
Education Engineering Department
Bandarban District.

GD-664

Government of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh
National Housing Authority
Office of the Executive Engineers
Sylhet Division
471, Sadipur, Shibgonj, Sylhet.
Web site: www.nha.gov.bd

Memo No-25.38.9162.636.99.004.24-146 Date: 12-03-2025.

e-Tender Notice No-01/2024-2025

e-Tenderare hereby invited in the National e-GP Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) For the Procurement of the Works stated as below.

Sl No	Package No	Name of Works	Tender ID No	Method of Tender	Closing Date & Time
01	01	Land Developmen, Construction of Road, Drain, Culvert, Retaining wall, Site Office, Main Gate & Others works for site & Services Project at Sadar Upazilla, Habigonj District. Under Sylhet Division, National Housing Authority, Sylhet.	1086642	OTM	16-04-2025 14:00 PM

Note :

- This is an online Tender Notice, where only e-Tenders will be accepted in the National e-GP portal and on Offline /Hard copy will be accepted.
- To submit e-Tender(s), 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 Portal have to be deposited online at any branch of registered banks.

(Muhammad Delwar Hossain)
 Project Director
 Development of Site & Services at
 Sadar Upazilla, Habigonj District.
 &
 Executive Engineer
 Sylhet Division
 National Housing Authority, Sylhet.
 e-mail: nhasylhet@yahoo.com
 Phone no: 02997700706

GD-663

Form a commission on sexual crimes

Persistent violence against women calls for stern, proactive action

We are deeply troubled by the tragic death of the eight-year-old girl from Magura, whose six-day struggle for life ended at the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in Dhaka on Thursday despite the efforts of doctors. Her passing, after being allegedly raped and choked, is a heartbreaking reminder of how unsafe women and girls continue to be in a country grappling with widespread gender-based violence. While the outrage that has followed the news of the cruelty inflicted upon the third-grader by her sister's in-laws shows a broader sense of solidarity, it will mean little unless we channel this grief into meaningful action, challenging the deep-seated sociocultural biases against women and ensuring stronger protection for victims. Without such efforts, tragedies like this will continue to occur.

We have written on this issue several times in recent weeks amid disturbing revelations about sexual violence and harassment, domestic violence or abuse by husbands and relatives, child marriage, abuse of street children, and unrestricted circulation of misogynistic content online. These have prompted frequent protests across the country, leading the government to pledge swift justice, including by setting deadlines for rape investigation and trial. Bangladesh's abysmally low conviction rate in sexual violence cases is no secret. While the law adviser's statement that law enforcement agencies will have to complete rape investigation within 15 days, and the trial within 90 days, marks a step in shortening waiting periods for justice, this is neither enough nor a guarantee that justice will be served.

Experts say that the real challenge in such cases lies in ensuring thorough investigations, preventing interference or intimidation by influential quarters, addressing systemic flaws that allow perpetrators to escape accountability, and also tackling societal attitudes that perpetuate impunity. How can we ensure justice or prevent such crimes without addressing these challenges? Equally importantly, why does it always take a tragedy of this magnitude to pledge, or prompt, government action?

The truth is, mere pledges—or reactive policies—are not enough. We need stern, proactive action to tackle such crimes from the outset, not as an afterthought. We need regularly meted out punishment rather than exemplary punishment in the face of public outrage. The interim government, which emerged from a mass movement demanding accountability, has a particular responsibility in this regard. Given the level that gender-based harassment and violence has reached of late, we urge the government to establish a commission to look into such crimes and suggest comprehensive legal and administrative reforms so that no crime goes unreported and unpunished. Moreover, society, too, must confront the harmful cultural norms condoning or downplaying such violence.

End the crisis in kidney treatment

Awareness and affordable treatment options are vital

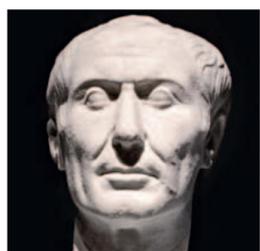
It is quite distressing to see the inadequacy of doctors and treatment facilities for kidney patients in a country where almost a quarter of the population suffers from renal diseases. Reportedly, there are only 350 specialists in Bangladesh, which amounts to just one per five lakh people. This gap may widen further in the coming days as, according to the Bangladesh Renal Association, the number of kidney disease patients is rising.

Cost is another major barrier to treatment for patients seeking dialysis. There are about 35 government hospitals that offer dialysis at a relatively lower cost of Tk 400 per session, while private facilities charge about 10 times more—sometimes even higher. Worse still, most hospitals providing kidney disease treatment are concentrated in cities, meaning increased associated expenses such as travel, food and accommodation for rural patients and their attendants.

According to a report in this daily, medication and transfusion-related costs further add to patients' out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure. For kidney dialysis patients, these costs are recurring, draining family savings and pushing many into financial debt. Unfortunately, the alternative treatment—kidney transplant—is not an option for most due to its high one-time cost and the shortage of donors. The current organ transplant law restricts the definition of donors, and cadaveric kidney donation, or deceased donor kidney transplantation—though legally permitted—has not gained traction due to social and religious beliefs.

Under these circumstances, we think that the health authorities in consultation with religious and community leaders should launch campaigns to raise awareness about the benefits of cadaveric organ transplants. Simultaneously, public awareness must be increased about kidney disease prevention, including its association with smoking. Since the disease often shows no early visible symptoms, physician recommended tests such as serum creatinine and the albumin-to-creatinine ratio for early detection must be made more accessible and affordable. Also, expanding dialysis facilities to every district has become essential. Finally, an overhaul of our healthcare system is necessary to relieve people, including kidney patients, from the crushing burden of out-of-pocket health expenditures.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY



Julius Caesar assassinated

On this day in 44 BCE (referred to as the Ides of March), Roman dictator Julius Caesar was launching a series of political and social reforms when he was assassinated by a group of nobles, among whom were Cassius and Brutus.

Stop tiptoeing around women's safety



MIND THE GAP
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NOSHIN NAWAL

In a country where women's safety is often treated as a footnote, the recent assault on two young women in Dhaka's Lalmatia area is a glaring indictment of our societal and legal failures. On March 1, 2025, these women were harassed, assaulted, and humiliated in broad daylight for the audacity of smoking in public—a choice that, while debatable health-wise, is hardly out of the ordinary. Let's break it down, shall we? The Smoking and Tobacco Products Usage (Control) Act bans smoking in specific public spaces, i.e. hospitals, educational institutions, government offices, transport hubs, etc. Nowhere does it say that a woman lighting a cigarette in an open space is committing a crime punishable by public flogging. Even if they did break the law (which they explicitly did not), the penalty would be a fine. Not mob justice. Not assault. Not the kind of humiliation that makes women think twice before stepping out of their homes.

The incident escalated from verbal abuse by a man in his 60s to physical assault. The man decided their choice to smoke in public was unacceptable. That was all it took. The message was clear: a woman doing something that men don't approve of is not just a woman making a choice. It's a provocation, a challenge, an invitation for society to collectively decide whether she deserves punishment. Because Bangladesh currently is united only in its hate for Hasina and misogyny.

The man in question has been taken into custody. Meanwhile, as rape cases continue to rise, anti-rape protests are shaking Dhaka to its core. In response, the government has decided that the best course of action is to shorten the period of investigation and expedite justice, because, clearly, efficiency is the missing piece in our broken system. But I have thoughts. Thoughts on how this isn't just about faster trials but about reforming laws that were drafted in a different century, by and for a different generation. Thoughts on why we need to go beyond just addressing rape and finally tackle the gaping holes

in our laws on sexual harassment.

The problem isn't just the assault, it's the fact that this is how the system is designed to work. The man who attacked them did it because he knew he could get away with it. Because this country has built a culture of impunity so strong that a woman being harassed in public is just part of the scenery. And when she dares to fight back? That's when the real outrage begins. Not over the fact that she was assaulted. No, the outrage comes from the fact that she didn't just quietly accept it. That she had the audacity to push back.



VISUAL: SHAIKH SULTANA JAHAN BADHON

Where was the law in all this? Oh, right. Nowhere. Because—and brace yourselves for this—Bangladesh does not have a law specifically criminalising sexual harassment.

Yes, that's right. A Law Commission draft for an anti-harassment law was submitted in 2010. It is now 2025. Still no law. Instead, we have a patchwork of outdated, vague provisions that do not go far enough. The Penal Code, 1860 criminalises "outraging a woman's modesty," as if we are delicate porcelain dolls who simply cannot bear the emotional trauma of some uncle making a lewd comment. The Prevention of Repression against Women and Children Act, 2000 deals

street harassment, no law that makes it a specific, punishable crime, no law that ensures immediate justice for the thousands of women who face this every single day. What we have instead is a system that tells women to just be careful. To be silent. To modify their behaviour, their movement, their clothing, their speech—anything to avoid attracting the kind of attention that men insist is inevitable. But it is not inevitable. It is allowed. And it is rewarded with the kind of casual indifference that makes incidents like Lalmatia possible.

What happened to those women is not an isolated event. Women are harassed on the streets, on public

Strategic choices in the new space race



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SAYEED AHMED

President Vladimir Putin had to complete one crucial task before ordering Russian forces to launch a massive multipronged assault on Ukraine on February 24, 2022. He ensured systematic disruption of Ukraine's terrestrial internet services, crippling communication vital for military and civilian planning and operations, illustrating the modern battlefield's dependence on digital infrastructure. Starlink, SpaceX's satellite-based internet service, quickly stepped in with satellite-based internet, providing a lifeline that propped up Kyiv's strategic and defence operations.

Starlink's high quality internet became a decisive factor in the war, and both Ukraine and Russia—bypassing US sanctions—used it to conduct drone and other tactical manoeuvres. And SpaceX became such an influential player that in September 2023, it could disallow Kyiv (by blocking internet service) to launch an attack on the Russian naval base at Sevastopol in Crimea, the Ukrainian territory that Russia illegally seized in 2014. It exposed the pitfalls of reliance on a single, albeit effective, service provider. Recently, under US President Donald Trump's major policy shift, Washington has threatened to suspend Starlink and other satellite-based services to Ukraine (to coerce Kyiv into signing the \$500 billion rare earth minerals deal),

raising questions about the reliability of such services during critical times such as conflicts or natural disasters. Sensing a business opportunity and strategic gap, Europe's EUTELSAT entered discussions with Kyiv, offering to replace Starlink, highlighting its desire to bolster position in the space industry. Meanwhile, Beijing is pressing ahead with developing its ambitious Qianfan (Thousand Sails) mega-constellation project as the China-US battle for tech and strategic supremacy rages on.

Washington's current dominance in the space industry extends beyond Starlink. Other US companies, like Amazon's Project Kuiper, are also developing their mega-constellations, promising to deliver high-speed, low-latency broadband internet globally. These ventures represent significant private sector investment and technological innovation, further solidifying the US position in the space-based services market. Several US companies, such as Blacksky and Boeing, offer high-resolution, real-time satellite imagery crucial for winning any modern-day war.

While facing economic and technological constraints, Russia has long maintained a strong presence in space. Though sanctions and the war have impacted its focus, it is committed to continuing its satellite navigation system (GLONASS), satellite communications, and remote

sensing capabilities. While its current endeavours may not match the scale of US or Chinese projects, it still boasts a formidable infrastructure and expertise. In November last year, Roscosmos sent 53 satellites into orbit, the highest number for the Russian space agency in a single launch.

All these drive home a critical truth: the space industry is undergoing a seismic shift, transforming from a technological marvel to a strategic battleground. The provision of global internet and satellite imagery, once considered niche applications, are now vital lifelines, shaping the very fabric of modern society and international relations. This emerging reality demands that nations make informed decisions to minimise commercial and strategic risks.

A global space race—ignited by the dangers of depending on single-source providers—has started with the US, China, and the EU vying for dominance. China's Qianfan is rapidly expanding, offering a comprehensive suite of space-based services to nations across the globe, particularly in the Global South. This trend will likely continue as Beijing aims to become a dominant space player and secure a strategic advantage over its rivals.

The EU is also accelerating the development of EUTELSAT, emphasising sovereignty and reliability. Last month, it announced the deployment of the world's first 5G non-terrestrial network connection, leveraging its OneWeb LEO (Low Earth Orbit) satellites. These developments signal a move from a US-centric model towards a more diversified and potentially fragmented market.

How can nations navigate this emerging industry, which might soon become an economic and strategic lifeline? Should they rely on established US-based providers, embrace Europe's or China's burgeoning offerings,

transport, in shopping malls, in universities, in workplaces, in their own neighbourhoods, in broad daylight, in the dead of night. Every single woman you know has a story (or more) of being grabbed, groped, something, anything. But what exactly is she supposed to do about it? File a police complaint so officers can smirk and ask if she "did something to provoke them"? Go to court and spend years trying to prove that, yes, she was harassed in public and no, it wasn't her fault? Wait for politicians to pretend to care for two days before they move on to something else? The public nature of the assault, the mob mentality, and the lacklustre response from the authorities highlight a systemic failure to protect women. The subsequent protests against the home minister's statements underscore people's frustration and demand for accountability. Every time something like this happens, there's a brief wave of outrage. And then, as always, it fades. The cycle repeats. And still, no law. No real change.

It's high time Bangladesh enacted a comprehensive anti-sexual harassment law that is actively enforced. Such legislation should clearly define sexual harassment and leave no room for ambiguity, covering verbal, non-verbal, and physical forms of harassment. The legislation needs to establish accountability mechanisms that mandate the formation of complaint committees in workplaces and educational institutions with the power to take decisive actions. A tribunal should be formed to ensure swift justice and implement fast-tracked courts to handle harassment cases, ensuring timely justice for victims. Meanwhile, nationwide campaigns should be promoted to educate the public about women's rights and the legal repercussions of harassment. This is a disease that needs to be uprooted and vaccinated.

The time for half-measures and lip service is over. Women in Bangladesh deserve more than token acknowledgments of their plight; they deserve concrete action. The Lalmatia incident should serve as a catalyst for change, propelling us towards a society where women can exercise their freedoms without fear of harassment or violence. Big words like feminism, patriarchy and empowerment need to be worth the ink used to write them. One legislation addressing the core issue of sexual harassment can make a statement bigger and better than a thousand wordy slogans and comments.

or invest in regional or national alternatives? The answer is not straightforward.

First, diversification is paramount. Nations must explore partnerships with multiple providers and invest in resilient, redundant infrastructure. Second, countries must actively participate in international forums to establish norms and standards for space activities. The lack of common protocols and standards could lead to technological fragmentation, hindering international cooperation in vital areas such as disaster response and environmental monitoring. Third, nations must invest in space capabilities, foster domestic innovation, and reduce reliance on external providers. This does not mean isolation but building a robust foundation for strategic partnerships and collaboration. Fourth, the commercial implications should be taken into account. The space-based services market is a multi-billion-dollar industry offering significant economic opportunities. Nations must create regulatory frameworks encouraging innovation and investment while protecting national security interests. Finally, the potential for militarisation of space must be addressed. As space-based assets become increasingly crucial for military operations, the risk of conflict in orbit intensifies. Nations must engage in diplomatic efforts to prevent an arms race in space and promote the peaceful use of this domain.

The emerging space race presents both challenges and opportunities. By making informed decisions, investing in resilient infrastructure, and fostering international cooperation, nations can navigate this orbital shift and minimise the associated risks, ensuring that space remains a domain for the benefit of all humanity.

We are Asiya: A battle lost, but the fight lives on



Sarzhah Yeasmin
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SARZAH YEASMIN

Asiya's sister cried, her voice shook as she spoke with a journalist, her sweet southwestern Bangla accent rang in my ears—a very familiar voice. It could have been my aunt, my grandmother, my cousin, someone very dear and beloved. I grew up with this warm accent wrapped around me. My family is from Jashore, and Magura is not too far. I have always identified with that place, and always will, even though I am not sure if I'll be able to bring myself to visit my real homeland again. I romanticise the idea that, perhaps one day, I'll be buried in my family graveyard there, and that'll be the next—and last—time I visit.

Injuries ran deep, the unthinkable cruelty shattered Asiya's tiny limbs and life. Asiya's sister said that even if she survived, she wouldn't have any value. Asiya didn't live to hear her sister's words, she didn't live to bear the burden of cruelty, but she fought valiantly. This is heartbreak upon heartbreak: even a child is not spared from having her value placed between her legs. Even Asiya's lonesome and gut-wrenching fight to return to this world alive was not enough to fulfil the measure of value placed on girls and women. Sexual harassment and trauma often ushers a girl child into "womanhood"—a painful, shocking and sometimes deadly experience is often the passage. Can we imagine the physical pain Asiya lived through during her last days? She lived through all of it, and it took three cardiac arrests to end her battle for life. It is a testament of her power and indomitable spirit, but why do we need our children to be so strong?

In this country, if a girl or a woman is not part of the rape statistics, she is lucky—at least, so far. It can happen to anyone, at any time, and can be done by anyone.

No one, and nothing, is off-limits. Family members, elders, significant others, people we have just met, strangers—the list is non-exhaustive. Who hasn't been shamed or looked at because of the slight growth on the chest, and shamed because it was too little or too much for the age? If we start collecting data on body shaming alone, we can build one of the largest psychological case studies in history—an undeniable dataset of humiliation and hatred. Asiya did not need to be yet another cautionary tale for this nation. She was supposed to spend some time with her sister and then go back home. She was supposed to be colouring the pictures in her picture book, and the only borders she should have known were the borders outlining the figures in that book. And yet, we sent her to fight on the border between life and death and now she has drawn her final line—one that will never be crossed again.

Being raped is a matter of chance—being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Think about all the times you could have been raped, but weren't. Think about all the times you could be raped in the future, and if you have been raped and still living with the experience, then you are forced into thinking all the things you could have done differently to avoid bringing the unfortunate event upon yourself: only if you didn't get out that day, only if you didn't stay home that day, only if you didn't catch the eye of that one relative who lured you with chocolates so that they could inappropriately touch you, only if you didn't say yes to the guy who called you pretty, only if you didn't say no to the advances of the popular neighbour guy who blocked your way, only if you didn't get late at work that day.

Now, since women have to take the



FILE ILLUSTRATION: NAHFIA JAHAN MONNI

responsibility of provoking men, there is always a "because," a rationale—she was loud, too out there, her clothes were tight, her breasts too voluptuous. And if she's a respectable woman, why was she out so late or so early? What was a child's responsibility here, and what was Asiya's sister's responsibility, who was forcefully sent back to live with abusive in-laws?

Women are expected to plan their lives

around the possibility of being assaulted/raped. Every step is a checkpoint. Shall we impart the same lesson to our children? We can teach them what's good touch and bad touch, we can teach them not to interact with strangers, we can teach them to say no to "friendly" offers, but what else? Who is responsible for making sure that no one strangles another Asiya, suffocates her, whisks her away in the middle of the night

from her sleep, cuts and penetrates through her, puts her lifeless body on life support and murders her? The real question is, what can we teach the perpetrators and potential perpetrators? What is the responsibility of the one with power? Has revenge, retaliation and the death penalty ever worked?

It's easy to capitalise on Asiya's unfathomable suffering and death. Many influential people will speak, as they should, but please, can we stop putting people on a pedestal just because they're doing the bare minimum? When we fail our women, we fail our children. We fail the next generation, and we fail the future even before it can happen.

I wanted Asiya to live against all odds, and I wish she knew that she is a warrior and carried all our fears and pain even when she had no means to bear the weight we put on her. The youngest of this country are fighting the hardest battles. We have turned children into child brides, malnourished mothers, sex slaves, beggars in the streets, sweatshop workers, cleaners in people's homes, victims and survivors on the edge of death, stopping their journey even before they could dream of having a life. Asiya's tiny hands will never hold the life and future that we ripped away from her.

They say the heaviest coffins are those of children. Our hearts break for Asiya, but are our hearts strong enough to stick around and fight, or will we catch the next flight and leave? Leaving the fight is a privilege, but I will not blame any woman who is exhausted and doesn't have it in her to fight. We don't have to do the heavy lifting today. It's okay to mourn, to rest; resting is resistance as well. But the next day, we must come back so that Asiya's legacy is stronger than ever. This should never have been her battle. She was meant to grow, to dream, to paint the world in whatever colours that gave her joy. We are not too far from Asiya; we were once like Asiya, we love someone like Asiya, we are Asiya. Could Asiya be our turning point, our guiding force directing us towards justice? Will this be the moment we finally act on our words, "Enough is enough?" The blood of our daughters will drown us if we don't fight back. We women, we as a nation, owe this fight to ourselves.

Will the UN chief's visit put the focus back on the Rohingya issue?



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

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SHAMSAD MORTUZA

UN Secretary-General António Guterres's ongoing visit to Bangladesh has given us an opportunity to explore international dimensions to our national crises. An editorial in this daily shared optimism over finding a lasting solution to the influx of more than 1.1 million Rohingya refugees into our country from Myanmar. Perhaps Friday's iftar with the refugees in the camps in Cox's Bazar would further compel the UN chief to resolve the crisis and reconsider their actions.

The Rohingya refugees in the Cox's Bazar camps are about to face a situation worse than they have been enduring. Funding shortfalls have prompted the UN World Food Programme (WFP) to halve monthly food rations for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh—from \$12.50 per person to just \$6—from next month. In real terms, \$6 a month is about Tk 24 a day—not even enough for a banana and

an egg. Bangladesh's recent economic health card is not promising enough to suggest that the host country can bear the burden of these stateless people for a long time without any international assistance. The funding cut is likely to lead to malnutrition, which carries far more dangerous implications. Rohingya leaders and aid workers have already voiced their concerns that the despair is likely to feed militancy.

We have already seen reports of thousands of refugees who, frustrated by poverty, idleness and insecurity, have become prone to armed struggle. A Reuters investigation last year revealed that the promise of income or purpose has drawn many disillusioned young men, leading to the recruitment of 3,000 to 5,000 Rohingya fighters from the refugee camps. Some even joined factions aligned with their former persecutors to fight ethnic

rebels, while others engaged in gang violence within the camps. Officials stationed at the Rohingya camps expressed their helplessness, as they know more than anyone the dire consequences of the fund cuts. It's uncertain whether the impact of hunger will soon transcend beyond health and affect stability and peace.

Any immediate solution to the Rohingya crisis is unlikely because of the slow nature of the judicial process. The Gambia, backed

legal delays. Substantive arguments began in late 2023 when several nations intervened as the idea of genocide concerned them. Bangladesh strategically refrained from any formal involvement, preferring diplomatic solutions through China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), for instance. The case is important to keep the global optics on the Rohingya crisis, and we will eventually need all the diplomatic efforts as well as action from the UN Security Council

any success. The lack of credibility and fund shortage will further exacerbate the situation on the Bangladesh side. This will only add to the security concerns mentioned earlier. A UK government report shows that many of the refugees have fallen prey to human trafficking as they try to leave the country, often using fake Bangladeshi IDs. The relaxation of police verification for obtaining national IDs has made it easier to abuse the system for the refugees. The identification may either help them assimilate into the mainstream Bangladeshi society or explore overseas travels through criminal syndicates. The lack of bare minimum food funds, if unchecked, can have a ripple effect.

We hope that the UN secretary-general's iftar at the Rohingya camps will help him adopt a balanced role, learning from the experience of fund and food shortages in Gaza and their domino effect. The UN must facilitate not only humanitarian aid but also seek sustainable solutions, ensuring refugee rights, upholding community concerns, and pressuring Myanmar for meaningful refugee repatriation. We expect the UN in a more balanced role to remain a credible actor in resolving one of the most prolonged refugee crises in recent history and their geopolitical atrocities.

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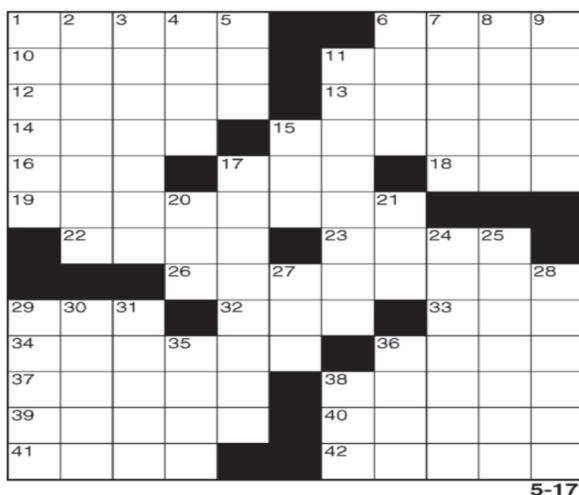
by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), filed the Rohingya genocide case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 2019, holding Myanmar accountable for the 2017 ethnic cleansing. The ICJ has imposed some provisional measures, but the progress has been painstakingly slow due to Myanmar's

for justice to be delivered. Without sustained international pressure, the Rohingya risk becoming a forgotten crisis, overshadowed by other global events.

The attempts of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for Rohingya repatriation have seen hardly

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Lab liquids
 - 6 Ernst's art
 - 10 Twangy
 - 11 Wise ones
 - 12 Creamy color
 - 13 Russian range
 - 14 Parcel (out)
 - 15 Petite
 - 16 Commotion
 - 17 Match part
 - 18 Put away
 - 19 Cosmetics counter buy
 - 22 At hand
 - 23 Melodies
 - 26 Oil-checking item
 - 29 Chemist's place
 - 32 Buck's mate
 - 33 Paint buy
 - 34 Eggy dish
 - 36 Titled woman
 - 37 Alarm sound
 - 38 "—Rae"
 - 39 Snowy wader
 - 40 Totaled
 - 41 Fly high
 - 42 Churlish fellows
- DOWN**
- 1 Zoo resident
 - 2 Yielded
 - 3 Uranium-235, for one
 - 4 Be bold
 - 5 Cunning
 - 6 Move quickly
 - 7 Banded rock
 - 8 Perry's assistant
 - 9 Useful skill
 - 11 Travel need
 - 15 Maui souvenir
 - 17 Vociferous
 - 20 Blue
 - 21 Model buy
 - 24 Last name for Lucy
 - 25 Fraud perpetrator
 - 27 Poker prize
 - 28 Massages
 - 29 Places last
 - 30 Barcelona buddy
 - 31 Hall of Fame catcher
 - 35 Lusty look
 - 36 Extinct bird
 - 38 Collar



WEDNESDAY'S ANSWERS





PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

The necessity of having mindful conversations with parents

OHONA ANJUM

Growing up in a household of nine, I often felt like my voice got lost in the daily chaos. My mother was always caught up in an endless cycle of chores, and my father, away for work, would return home too drained to engage in conversation. Eventually, I stopped trying. There were times I wished my parents would ask how school was, celebrate my small victories, or simply check in on how I was feeling. But their attention was always pulled elsewhere. Over the years, that silence became second nature. Now, even when I want to express myself, I hesitate, unsure of whether my words would truly reach them.

I soon realised that this wasn't something I experienced alone. My friends, cousins, and even acquaintances shared similar stories, narratives of feeling unheard, of conversations cut short, or of the fear

that their words would be dismissed. It became clear that the gap in communication between parents and children is not just a personal struggle but a widespread issue. Despite living under the same roof, many of us grow up feeling emotionally distant from our parents, unsure of how to bridge the divide.

Now that many of us stay away from our parents for university or work, the communication seems to be harder. Trina Talukdar, a student of Leading University in Sylhet, shares her relationship with her parents. "As the years passed, I found myself becoming more reserved. I started holding back, unsure of how to communicate certain emotions or problems. It's not that my parents became less approachable, but somewhere along the way, I developed a hesitation either out of fear of judgment and misunderstanding or simply the feeling that they might not fully grasp what I was going through."

The rarity of situations where both parents and children actively listen to each other forms the very foundation of the hesitation that exists between them. In many households, conversations are often one-sided — either dominated by parental authority or limited to surface-level exchanges. As a result, children grow up feeling unheard, while parents remain unaware of the emotional distance that gradually forms.

"One of the biggest issues is that young people feel neglected when meaningful communication is missing. The way parents interact with their children, both in terms of tone and engagement, has a lasting impact," says Mostak Ahamed Imran, a play therapist and educational psychologist. He adds, "In the first five years of a child's development, they need to be treated as individuals with emotions and thoughts of their own. Empathy plays a crucial role during this stage, as children are highly perceptive. They can

easily sense coldness in a parent's tone or lack of engagement, which may lead them to feel unheard or unimportant. If this pattern continues, it can shape how they express themselves in the future, making open conversations more difficult as they grow older."

As a result of this lack of open and vulnerable conversations with their parents, many teenagers and young adults struggle to navigate relationships outside their family as well. When meaningful dialogue and emotional expression are not encouraged at home, children grow up without the necessary experience to communicate their thoughts and feelings effectively. This not only affects their ability to form deep connections but also shapes the way they approach relationships, leading to the development of different attachment styles.

Aman Shahbaz, a student of Chhatak Govt. College, shares his struggle with expressing emotions, saying, "I

am willing to talk to people about my feelings, but I don't know how to. So, I end up not saying anything at all."

This sentiment speaks to the experience of many young individuals who, despite wanting to open up, find themselves unable to articulate their thoughts and emotions. The absence of early practice in meaningful conversations leads to hesitation and self-doubt, making it difficult to engage in honest discussions, even with close friends and family. Over time, this silence can create emotional barriers, reinforcing the cycle of isolation and unexpressed feelings.

To avoid the emotional exhaustion of unsurfaced emotions, it is necessary to create a space in each home where all members' opinions and say is equally heard and valued. Mostak Ahamed emphasises the importance of compassion in family interactions. He advises making mindful conversations, where each member of the family listens to others talk about their experiences without judgement, a daily practice that is free from distractions and built on genuine attentiveness.

"Being actively listened to boosts self-confidence. When individuals feel that their thoughts and emotions are valued, they develop a stronger sense of self-worth, making them more comfortable expressing themselves in different social settings. This, in turn, contributes to a more positive worldview, as they grow up believing that their opinions matter and that meaningful connections are built on mutual understanding," says Imran.

Tanbir Ahmed Mahin, a student of North South University, shares his positive experiences in this regard.

"Living alone can sometimes feel isolating, but having my parents to talk to makes a huge difference. They provide a sense of comfort and security that no one else can. Whether I'm struggling with personal issues, career decisions, or just everyday stress, opening up to them helps ease my worries. They don't judge me; instead, they listen, guide, and remind me of my strength."

He adds, "When I started to converse with my parents, it went better than I expected. I was hesitant but sometimes it only takes a little effort from both sides. Parents often understand more than we give them credit for."

At its core, having mindful conversations is about fostering a culture of mutual understanding and emotional depth. Whether it's a simple inquiry about one's day or a profound discussion on life's challenges, these moments of genuine connection strengthen relationships and contribute to the emotional well-being of all involved. Open and intentional communication nurtures trust, deepens empathy, and transforms familial bonds into sources of unwavering support. It is never too late to initiate these conversations because sometimes, all it takes is a single step to realise that understanding and connection have been within reach all along.

Ohona Anjum writes, rhymes, and studies English literature.

Keeping up with your vaccines

The immune system of children, while growing up, needs to be strengthened. The measles and rubella (MR) vaccine at nine months provides critical protection against these highly infectious diseases. A second dose of the measles vaccine at 15 months reinforces even greater and longer-lasting protection.

AHNAF TAHMEED PURNA

A world where polio, measles, and tuberculosis, once life-threatening illnesses, are just a distant memory is as near as it has ever been, thanks to vaccines. Vaccines are one of the greatest feats of modern medicine, preventing millions from disease, death, and devastation so that we, as humans, can lead healthier lifestyles. They work by basically "training" the immune system to recognise and eliminate dangerous pathogens, often even before we have been in contact with the pathogens. In Bangladesh, too, people are protected throughout their lives, from infancy to adulthood, by a well-organised and structured immunisation programme, protecting communities from outbreaks of fatal diseases.

Dr ASM Mahamuduzzanan, Assistant Professor of the Department of Pediatrics at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College and Hospital, states, "Now, vaccination coverage is so huge in Bangladesh that hardly anyone is at risk of vaccine preventable illnesses. Most kids are vaccinated now, very few are not and there should be even fewer. The vaccination rate in Bangladesh is very high now." Widespread vaccination has virtually eliminated these diseases, and vaccine-preventable diseases rarely cause severe illness compared to years past.

Vaccines are effective for a lifetime, starting from birth. The BCG vaccine against tuberculosis and the first dose of the oral polio vaccine (OPV) are administered to all newborns under the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI). These are important interventions that foster long-term immunity. The pentavalent

vaccine, which confers immunity against diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, hepatitis B, and Haemophilus influenzae type B, is administered at six weeks. There is a pneumonia vaccine called the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV) whose follow-ups are given at 10 and 14 weeks, primarily to enhance immunity.

The immune system of children, while growing up, needs to be strengthened. The measles and rubella (MR) vaccine at nine months provides critical protection against these highly infectious diseases. A second dose of the measles vaccine at 15 months reinforces even greater and longer-lasting protection. Vaccines like DPT and Td provide 100 percent protection against tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis whooping cough, with their booster shots given between one and five years.

Although our vaccination rates are high, vaccine preventable diseases do not disappear completely. While serious diseases are rare, Dr Mahamuduzzanan says, "The absence of vaccination results in hepatitis A, smallpox, typhoid, cholera, and rotaviral diarrhea. Those who have not kept up with their required immunisations are also at risk of hepatitis B, tetanus, and mumps."

This underlines the need for full immunisation and awareness programmes.

The HPV vaccine, offered to teenage girls by the government, is a potential game changer. This is a paradigm shift in the prevention of cervical cancer, soon to be available in Bangladesh, where cervical cancer is the second most common cancer and a leading cause of death in women. This one-time vaccine leads to thousands of



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

lives being saved by preventing cancers associated with human papillomavirus before we pass through the prime years of infection between the ages of 10 and 14. Older females should especially be encouraged to receive medical consultation for the HPV vaccine's alternative options.

Extra protection is necessary for women of childbearing age, especially when they are pregnant. The TT vaccine protects infants against potentially fatal neonatal tetanus and is given in five doses, often at wide intervals. The seasonal influenza vaccine should also be given to pregnant women to prevent flu-related complications that are particularly dangerous during pregnancy. But when people become adults, they still need vaccines to prevent disease.

Older adults and people with chronic diseases are at higher risk of serious complications from influenza and, therefore, as we said, each year they are strongly advised to receive a yearly flu vaccine. Depending on individual risk factors, travel, and occupation, cholera, typhoid, hepatitis A, meningococcal disease, and rabies vaccines are also recommended. Extra shots are given at very specific locations to help protect more carefully where the infection is most likely to spread. But vaccination is not just a matter of protecting oneself, it is a community effort.

Herd immunity is the result of a reduction in the spread of contagious disease when enough of a population is immune to the disease through vaccination. This is particularly important for individuals who are unable to get vaccinated due to medical conditions, so immunisation is everyone's responsibility.

The near elimination of some diseases is an indication of how effective vaccination is, according to Dr Mahamuduzzanan. "With timely vaccination, polio and smallpox are already essentially eliminated. The incidence of diphtheria, measles, and tuberculosis with severe symptoms has declined," he points out. These success stories show how immunisation has great short-term and long-term effects on public health.

Although lifesaving, vaccines have traditionally been greeted with scepticism due to misinformation. Misconceptions and myths can fuel vaccine hesitancy, putting individuals and communities at risk unnecessarily. It is important to be trusting of science and consult with healthcare professionals for accurate

information about vaccines.

Maintaining up-to-date vaccinations is vital for long-term immunity and preventing disease resurgence. While Bangladesh has high vaccination rates, gaps remain, particularly in influenza and hepatitis B coverage. A study found that only 66.6 percent of healthcare workers had received the hepatitis B vaccine, with coverage as low as 38.8 percent among cleaning staff, despite over a quarter experiencing needlestick injuries. Influenza vaccination rates are also low, even though 86.2 percent of healthcare workers expressed their willingness to get vaccinated.

The COVID-19 pandemic made us realise the importance of vaccination, with Bangladesh's coverage rising from less than 4 percent in mid-2021 to over 68 percent by mid-2022, yet sustaining immunity requires adherence to booster schedules and tackling vaccine hesitancy. To ensure long-term immunity and prevent disease resurgence, continuous efforts are necessary to close these gaps, particularly among healthcare workers.

A dividend from immunisation is a future free from the diseases that rob communities of health and well-being, a future free of these unwanted ailments. One cannot overlook the wonders vaccines can do. So, embrace them, trust them, and let them help you in protecting yourself and your loved ones.

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ILLUSTRATION: SHAMS RASHID TONMOY

How to make yourself seen by your manager

Don't underestimate the power of face-to-face (or virtual) check-ins, either. A quick chat during a coffee break or a brief Zoom call can go a long way in reinforcing your visibility.

SHAMS RASHID TONMOY

It can be disheartening when you're working hard, meeting deadlines, and even going the extra mile, only to feel like your efforts are going unnoticed. The key to being seen isn't being loud about your achievements—it's being strategic, authentic, and thoughtful in a way that aligns with your manager's priorities. Here are some steps you can take to make sure your contributions don't fade into your manager's background.

Step 1: Understand what your manager cares about

First and foremost, remember that your manager is human. They have their own goals, pressures, and priorities, so take the time to figure out what matters most to them. Are they focused on hitting quarterly targets? Boosting team morale? Streamlining processes? Once you know their priorities, you can align your efforts to support them.

For example, if your manager is stressed about a big client presentation, offering to help with research or proofreading slides shows initiative and support. A 2021 study published in the National Library of Medicine found that employees who align their efforts with managerial goals are more likely to exhibit proactive behaviour, thus significantly increasing their chances of being recognised for their work.

Step 2: Communicate proactively, but don't overdo it

If your manager doesn't know what you're working on, they can't appreciate your efforts. But that doesn't mean you should flood their inbox with constant updates. Instead, try sending a concise weekly summary highlighting your accomplishments,

challenges, and plans for the week ahead. This keeps your manager informed while showcasing your organisational skills and proactive mindset.

Don't underestimate the power of face-to-face (or virtual) check-ins, either. A quick chat during a coffee break or a brief Zoom call can go a long way in reinforcing your visibility. According to a recent article by Business Insider, regularly updating your manager on your progress ensures they are aware of your contributions—a practice that can prevent misunderstandings and highlight your achievements.

Step 3: Deliver results that speak for themselves

While communication is important, nothing gets you noticed like consistent, high-quality work. Treat every project as an opportunity to showcase your reliability and expertise. Whether it's finding ways to save time on repetitive tasks or suggesting improvements to existing processes, these efforts build a track record of excellence that naturally draws attention. A 2024 study by the American analytics company Gallup found that workplace recognition not only motivates employees but also provides a sense of accomplishment and makes them feel valued for their work.

Step 4: Build a genuine relationship

Developing a meaningful connection with your manager can make a big difference. Take the time to understand their leadership style and preferences. Do they prefer detailed reports or big-picture summaries? Are they morning people or afternoon thinkers? Adapting to their style shows emotional intelligence and makes their job easier.

Small gestures, like asking about their weekend or thanking them for their feedback,

can also humanise your interactions and build trust. Additionally, a 2024 article by The Financial Times states that fostering kindness in leadership contributes to psychological safety, enhancing productivity and creativity within teams.

Step 5: Be visible in team settings

Meetings, brainstorming sessions, and team events are perfect opportunities to highlight your value—as long as you don't dominate the conversation. Focus on contributing thoughtful questions or solutions to challenges. If you're working on a group project, volunteer to take the lead on a specific task or present the results. These moments not only showcase your skills but also demonstrate your commitment to the team's success. And don't forget to give credit to your teammates. Acknowledging their contributions shows that you're collaborative and confident—qualities every manager appreciates.

Step 6: Seek feedback and act on it

Showing a willingness to grow is a surefire way to get noticed. Ask for feedback regularly, whether during formal reviews or casual conversations. But don't just listen—take action. If your manager suggests improving your presentation skills, sign up for a workshop or practice with a colleague. Demonstrating that you value and act on feedback shows maturity and a commitment to self-improvement.

Step 7: Be patient and persistent

Building visibility takes time. There will be moments when it feels like your efforts are going unnoticed, but don't let that discourage you. Stay consistent, keep delivering quality work, and continue communicating effectively. Over time, your contributions will speak for themselves.

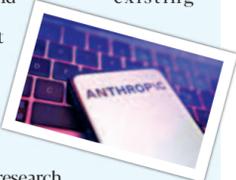
Anthropic raises \$3.5 bln in series E; valued at \$61.5 bln

NEXT STEP DESK

Anthropic, an American AI startup, has recently secured \$3.5 billion in a Series E funding round, bringing its post-money valuation to \$61.5 billion. The investment was led by Lightspeed Venture Partners, with additional participation from Bessemer Venture Partners, Cisco Investments, DI Capital Partners, Fidelity Management & Research Company, General Catalyst, Jane Street, Menlo Ventures, and Salesforce Ventures, among other new and existing investors.

With this latest funding, Anthropic plans to advance its development of next-generation AI systems, expand its compute capacity, and deepen its research in mechanistic interpretability and alignment. The company also intends to accelerate its international expansion as part of its broader strategy to develop AI systems capable of serving as true collaborators.

The recent announcement follows the recent launch of Claude 3.7 Sonnet and Claude Code. Claude 3.7 Sonnet has demonstrated significant improvements in coding capabilities, an area where the company aims to make further advancements in the coming months. Anthropic's AI models are being increasingly adopted across industries, with companies such as Zoom, Snowflake, Pfizer, Cursor, and Codeium integrating Claude to enhance their operations.



Top tips for effective workplace communication

SHAMS RASHID TONMOY

Whether you're navigating team meetings, drafting emails, or negotiating deadlines, how you communicate can make or break your professional relationships—and your reputation. But here's the thing: effective communication isn't just about 'what' you say. It's about 'how' you say it, 'when' you say it, and 'who' you're saying it to.

Master the art of active listening
Before you can communicate effectively, you need to listen effectively. And no, nodding while mentally drafting your grocery list doesn't count. Active listening means fully engaging with the speaker—maintaining eye contact, asking clarifying questions, and paraphrasing their points to confirm understanding. For example, try to show support like, "So, you're saying the project deadline moved up. How can I support the team to meet the new timeline?"

A 2024 study by Harvard Business Review outlines active listening behaviours as being positively linked to how employees perceive support from their managers, which, in turn, can lead to higher levels of job satisfaction and organisational commitment from employees.

Prioritise clarity and concision
Ever sat through a rambling email or meeting that left you

more confused than when you started? In a fast-paced work environment, clarity is king. Start with the bottom line—what's the key message or action item? Then, add context sparingly. For instance, instead of writing, "I've been reviewing the data and noticed some discrepancies that might impact the quarterly report," try: "The Q2 report has three data discrepancies. Let's fix them by Friday to avoid delays."

A 2024 finding by Australian software company Atlassian found that workers waste up to 40 hours a year due to confusing emails and chats. So, save everyone time (and sanity) by trimming the unnecessary fluff.

Adapt to your audience's communication style

Your CEO probably doesn't want a 10-slide deck on your lunch break ideas. Similarly, your detail-oriented teammate might panic if you gloss over specifics. Tailoring your message to your audience's preferences goes a long way. For example, when presenting to big-picture thinkers, lead with outcomes and strategic implications, and for data lovers, provide charts, timelines, and measurable results. Try to avoid mismatched communication styles, and save time in the process.

Choose the right medium for the message
Not every conversation needs



ILLUSTRATION: SHAMS RASHID TONMOY

an email. Not every problem needs a meeting. Choosing the wrong medium can derail even the simplest conversations. Use this rule of thumb: for complex or sensitive topics, discuss face-to-face (or via video call); for quick updates, use instant messaging (e.g. Slack or Teams); for documentation-heavy tasks, send an email with clear action steps.

Practise empathy and emotional intelligence

Workplace communication isn't just about facts—it's about people. If a colleague seems stressed, acknowledge it. If a team member shares an idea, validate their effort before offering feedback. Phrases like "I appreciate your perspective" or "This must feel frustrating" go a long way in building trust.

Psychologist Daniel Goleman, author of 'Emotional Intelligence', argues that empathy is the cornerstone of effective leadership. A 2024 research paper from the International Journal of Business and Management Innovation (IJBMI) backs this up, claiming that employees with higher emotional intelligence tend to report higher productivity.

Be open to feedback, and deliver it constructively

Feedback isn't just about annual reviews. It's a daily opportunity to grow. When receiving feedback, avoid becoming defensive. Instead, say, "Thank you for sharing that. Can you help me understand how I can improve?" When giving feedback, try using the 'Situation-Behaviour-Impact (SBI)' model:

JOBS SPOTLIGHT



World Food Programme

Communication Associate (Digital Media), GS6

Deadline: March 15

Eligibility:
• Bachelor's degree in Communication, Media, Journalism or other related functional areas.

Minimum experience: 6 years

UNDP

Regional Coordination Analyst

Deadline: March 19

Eligibility:
• Master's degree or equivalent in Social Sciences, Development Studies, International Development or other relevant field from any recognised university.

Minimum experience: 2 years



IDLC Finance PLC

Fraud Risk Analyst (Fraud Risk Desk), Enterprise Risk Management (ERM)

Deadline: March 27

Eligibility:
• MBA/BBA with a major in Finance or Accounting, or a Graduate/Postgraduate degree in Statistics, Data Science, Mathematics, Computer Science, or a related field from a reputed university

Minimum experience: 2-3 years



BRAC University

Lab Technical Officer (Software Labs), Department of CSE

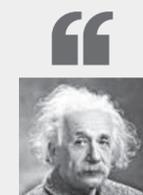
Deadline: March 25

Eligibility:
• Diploma in IT/ICT/Computer Science/Computer Science and Engineering or relevant subjects from a reputed university or polytechnic institute with excellent academic credentials.

Minimum experience: 4 years



FOR MORE DETAILS AND THE APPLICATION LINKS, SCAN THE QR CODE BELOW.

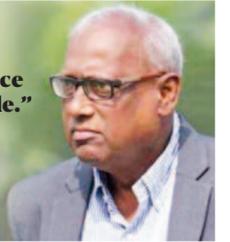


"A person who never made a mistake never tried anything new."

ALBERT EINSTEIN

"It is crucial that we take the right steps at the right time and give the newcomers opportunities. We need to instill confidence in them and establish that they are capable."

BCB cricket operations chairman Nazmul Abedeen Fahim said after the Bangladesh Sports Journalists Association's Iftar mahfil at the National Handball Stadium yesterday, indicating the need to give fresh faces a chance in the Bangladesh national team now that a number of seniors are no longer in the scene.



A step towards improving BATTING INTENT

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Beyond simply crowning a champion, any cricket tournament in Bangladesh must serve a greater purpose – developing players for the national team. This year, the Women's Dhaka Premier League (DPL), held from February 19 to March 13, was also a crucial platform for preparing and selecting the squad for the Women's ODI World Cup qualifiers in Pakistan in April.

Bangladesh's past performances in global events highlighted a lack of aggression necessary to compete at the highest level. Addressing this required structural improvements in domestic cricket.

Two years ago, an official pointed out that most batters lacked the intent to attack. Teams would often play out 50 overs without prioritising getting to a high total. In the 2022 season, only three teams surpassed the 250-run mark, and there was just one instance of a 300-plus total across 29 games. In 2023-24, the figures improved slightly, with eight 250-plus scores in 43 matches, including two 400-plus totals by Abahani and a 300-plus score by Mohammedan. This season, across 36 games, there were seven 250-plus scores and four instances of teams reaching 300.

"We have seen that the national team rely heavily on one or two players, such as Nigar Sultana Joty. We are trying to ensure that more players contribute consistently. This league has identified several dependable performers, and individual strike rates have also improved. We've realised that scoring 180-200 runs on average is not enough, so emphasis was placed on increasing the scoring rate," said Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, head of the



women's wing, in a recent BCB video.

The goal wasn't just to improve overall team scores but to enhance the depth of the national side. In that regard, several individuals stood out for their scoring rates this season. Shorna Akter, already in the national squad, scored 277 runs at a strike rate of 112.60 and an average of across six innings. Farzana Haque Pinky topped the charts with 507 runs, while players like Sharmin Supta, Sarmin Sultana, Ishma Tanjim, and Joty maintained strike rates close to or above 80.

Among players from outside the national team pool, U-19 captain Sumaiya Akter amassed 267 runs at a strike rate

above 80, averaging over 53. The Sheltech Cricket Academy cricketer played one of the tournament's standout innings – an 83 off 101 balls against Mohammedan in the opener.

"We need to prioritise matches between the more competitive teams to identify the best performers. Sumaiya played an extraordinary innings. Strike rate has been a longstanding issue, but instilling intent takes time. However, I have noticed improvements from individuals," noted a team official of one of the clubs.

Other notable performers included Farzana Yeasmin, a pace-bowling all-rounder who was named the tournament's emerging star, and Sadia Akter from

BKSP, both of whom impressed with their batting. Jannatul Ferdous took 21 wickets and earned a spot in the World Cup qualifiers squad, while pacer Fariha Trishna bagged 16 wickets at an average of 10 with an economy of 2.96. Fuara Begum played a key role in Sheltech's championship run, taking seven wickets at an economy of 2.40.

"I feel the standard has improved compared to last year. The top four or five teams were strong, while some were average, but overall, the level was better. We have moved away from a conservative approach in the Powerplay and are focusing on maximising the first 10 overs to ease the pressure on later batters. Players have absorbed this mindset and attempted to execute game plan – something they did not do in international matches," national women's team selector Sajjad Ahmed Shipon told The Daily Star.

Sajjad further emphasised the need to enhance the first division to match the premier league's level while continuing to develop U-19 and school-level cricket.

Some clubs have also improved payment structures, with sources indicating that Abahani, Sheltech, and Mohammedan offered better financial support this season. However, issues with pitch quality and ball standards remain. The CA ball used this season tended to move unpredictably, making stroke play challenging. Meanwhile, it goes without saying that better wickets would encourage more aggressive batting.

While there is still a long way to go for WDPL to match international standards, the BCB hopes that an expanded and improved player pool coming from the competition will be able to shape the national team's future.

Bashar confident about Tigresses' WC qualifiers chances

SPORTS REPORTER

Former Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) women's wing head Habibul Bashar feels that Bangladesh should finish in the top two of the upcoming qualifying event for the ICC Women's ODI World Cup in Pakistan, scheduled on April 9-19, and progress to the main event in India later this year.

"I think we are a good side in the one-day format. I think the West Indies will probably be our biggest opponent in the tournament. Pakistan also isn't a bad team. But I think we should beat Pakistan. I think Bangladesh should qualify," the former Bangladesh skipper, who recently joined BCB's game development unit, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) yesterday announced the fixture of the six-team event from which the top two sides will join hosts India and five other teams – Australia, England, New Zealand, Sri Lanka and South Africa – in the main event.

Bangladesh will begin their campaign against Thailand on April 10 before facing Ireland and Scotland on April 13 and 15 respectively. However, the

Tigresses' main challenge will be against West Indies and Pakistan whom they will face on April 17 and 19 respectively.

Bashar feels that handling pressure will be key for Bangladesh in the qualifying event.

"The team has been playing together for a long time. I don't think we should overthink and focus only on the tournament. How much we can handle the pressure will be crucial," he added.

The women's team will start their preparation for the qualifying event on March 22 in Mirpur. They will be leaving for Lahore on April 3 where they will also play two warm-up matches against Scotland and Ireland on April 5 and 7 respectively.



A LEGACY OF RETIREMENT LIMBO in Bangladesh cricket

ASHFAQ-UL-ALAM

Did you know that ChatGPT can come up with unique quotes on different topics?

For instance, "The peculiarities of a language are the peculiarities of its people," is a pretty sophisticated quote that ChatGPT came up with by itself, deriving from arguments made by linguists and philosophers that the idiosyncrasies of a language have some deep underlying relation with the culture of which the language belongs to.

Every language has some peculiar expressions that make perfect sense to native speakers but seem bizarre to non-natives. For example, a common idiosyncrasy in Bengali is how the natives use the word 'Ashi', which literally means coming, right before they leave.

The implication behind saying 'Ashi' before taking leave is that even though the person is going away right now, they intend to come back soon.

In other words, it's just a temporary goodbye, not a permanent one.

This reluctance to bid adieu in a straightforward manner may seem like an innocent peculiarity of the Bengali language.

But judging by how most Bangladesh cricket team stars have retired from the game over the years, the most recent retirees being Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah, maybe Bengalis are just inherently bad at goodbyes, as the temptation of lingering around just a bit longer is too much for them to ignore.

Retirements, reluctant retirements and non-retirements

"I have decided to quit cricket as a mark of protest against a group of people in the Bangladesh Cricket Board [BCB] who do not want to see me in the squad."

In a press conference during a home series against South Africa in 2008, Mohammad Rafique, regarded as one of the finest left-arm spinners ever produced in Bangladesh, said this, explaining why he had announced that series as his swansong with the Bangladesh team.

Rafique, who was 38 at the time, was well past his prime and the time was right for him to pass the baton to someone younger.

But judging by Rafique's statement, he



believed he had more to give to the national team even at that age but due to a rift with some board officials, decided it was better to step away.

And it's worth mentioning, Rafique said this right before the second and final Test and was not picked for the following ODI series against the Proteas.

Rafique's sulking retirement, however, is far from a one-off occurrence as in Bangladesh, most cricketers reluctantly retire, get unceremoniously dropped or never get to formally bid adieu.

Take Aminul Islam Bulbul for example. Bulbul, Bangladesh's first Test centurion, is regarded as one of the finest Bangladeshi batters of the 90s, who also captained Bangladesh in the 1999 ICC World Cup. But he never got to formally retire from the game.

Bulbul last played for Bangladesh in the Dhaka Test against West Indies in 2002, was then dropped from the squad and never brought back.

And then there is Javed Omar Belim, a steadfast opener from the 90s and noughties, who also got unceremoniously axed. He finally retired from the game in January 2014, almost seven years after he last appeared for the Tigers, with an exhibition match in Dhaka.

Rafique, Bulbul, and Javed are just the tip of the iceberg as other than former Bangladesh captain Khaled Mahmud, who

retired in 2006, no notable Bangladesh cricketer has ever gotten to retire from the national team from the field.

New names, new ways, same retirements
The erratic nature of players' retirements in the 2000s can be attributed to the fact that at that time Bangladesh cricket was in a transition mood.

From an associate nation with no real first-class structure, Bangladesh had become a Test-playing nation and many of the players who were pivotal in taking the Tigers to the Test arena were deemed not good enough to carry on at the highest level and were swapped out by younger players.

That logic is no longer applicable in the late 2010s and the 2020s but still, the nature of retirements have remained as erratic with a few changes.

The biggest change in terms of retirements from back then and now is how it is being announced.

Earlier, Bangladesh cricketers, those who at least retired, would usually call a press conference to announce that they are quitting the game. But now, a simple post on Facebook is doing the trick.

The recent retirements of Mahmudullah and Mushfiqur Rahim were announced on social media, and Tamim Iqbal, in January, announced his retirement the same way.

Tamim had actually tried to do it the old school way, by calling a press conference in Chattogram mid-series against Afghanistan in 2023, much akin to how his uncle Akram Khan called time on his career many years ago. But on that occasion, Tamim overturned his decision in less than 24 hours and was back in international cricket.

However, in the 16-or-so months since his un-retirement, Tamim played just two ODIs and batted only once for the Tigers before finally calling it quits.

Shakib Al Hasan also tried to do it a bit differently, announcing his retirement plans during Bangladesh's India tour last year, but those plans were disrupted as the all-rounder, who was part of the ousted Awami League government, has not returned to the country amid security concerns and right now, his international career seems to be in a limbo.

But the strangest case out of the 'Big Five' is former captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who backed out of his decision to retire at the 2019 World Cup at the last moment, stepped down from ODI captaincy in 2020, and has not been part of the team in five years but is yet to officially retire.

were quick to axe players in the past, they are more circumspect now, considering the contributions and popularity of the established stars, leaving the onus to them to decide when to move on.

And this has led to the unceremonious end of the famed 'Big Five' of Bangladesh cricket.

Mashrafe, Bangladesh's most successful captain ever, did not receive the grand goodbye he deserved as a cricketer while Tamim's international career stayed in limbo for some time before officially coming to an end off the field.

Meanwhile, Mushfiqur, who has been a bedrock of Bangladesh's white-ball setup for years, quit T20Is in 2022 amid pressure on social media and then bid adieu from ODIs under the same sort of pressure following an underwhelming ICC Champions Trophy.



No plans and the missing moment of clarity

Recognising the right time to move on is tough, not every cricketer gets it right. Some cricketers have it all planned out well in advance while some others get a moment of clarity and decide it's time to hang up the boots.

Adam Gilchrist realised that he needed to retire mid-Test after dropping a catch while someone like Sachin Tendulkar had an entire series dedicated to his retirement.

In Bangladesh, however, most cricketers usually adopt neither approaches. Instead, they hang onto their places in the side as long as possible, leaving it up to the management to kick them out of the team.

While the management in Bangladesh

Mahmudullah, too, called it time from all formats not amongst fanfare but amidst calls from all corners for him to move on.

The five pillars, one by one, have disappeared from the white-ball formats, with Mushfiqur the only one still active in Tests.

The five of them had the chance to be trend setters when it came to retirement, but eventually, their careers ended more or less the same way like their Bangladesh predecessors. One could call their retirements proof of how Bangladesh's cricketing culture has not really developed or even claim that this proves that Bengalis just don't know when to call it quits. Whichever one believes, one thing is for sure, the state of retirements in Bangladesh cricket is heartbreaking.

'I want to represent Bangladesh in ATP Tours'

Zarif Abrar, a 17-year-old teenager, has quickly emerged as the beacon of hope in Bangladesh tennis at a very young age. The Grade-11 student was recently crowned champion in the National Tennis Competition and has already represented Bangladesh at international meets in both junior and senior levels. The 17-year-old Zarif, who is now in Florida and training under renowned coach Ashley Hobson at the Hobson Performance Tennis Academy, talked to *The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman* recently about his current training, his journey in tennis and his future plans. Below are excerpts of the conversation:

The Daily Star (DS): You left to train in the USA right after becoming champion in the National Tennis Competition in Dhaka. How is the training going on?

Zarif Abrar (ZA): Training is always excellent here. It's a bit tougher, but I believe that's essential for my improvement. I'll be staying here for six months.

DS: You had trained at the same academy in two spells in 2023. Why did you choose this academy?

ZA: My father did extensive research before selecting coach Ashley Hobson for my training. He has an outstanding profile in the international tennis arena, making him the perfect coach to guide me.

DS: Can you share your ultimate goal in tennis?

ZA: My ultimate goal is to compete in the international professional circuit, the ATP Tours, and proudly represent Bangladesh on the global stage.

DS: How much does training under Ashley Hobson cost and how much has it improved your performance?

ZA: The training is quite expensive—it costs around USD 5,000 per month. So far, I have managed most of it through sponsorships, while my father, a retired army officer, has supported the rest. The facilities, technical expertise, and experience of coach Hobson have significantly elevated my game, allowing



me to win five championship titles in Florida.

DS: What made you interested in tennis?
ZA: My father, who was an excellent tennis player, inspired me. Watching him win numerous trophies sparked my passion for the sport. I started my tennis journey at the age of eight at Jashore Cantonment under coach Shariful Islam Tinku from BKSP.

DS: You became champion in various age-level national championships before winning the National Tennis Competition, which was held after a gap of 12 years. How did it feel to be crowned champion at only 17?

ZA: It was an incredible moment, and I feel truly honoured and delighted to receive the support of my family and well-wishers. I also want to thank the

Bangladesh Tennis Federation (BTF) for organising the National Competition after such a long gap.

DS: How do Bangladesh's domestic competitions compare to USTA events in Florida?

ZA: There is a lot of room for improvement in our domestic tournaments compared to USTA competitions. We need better training facilities and experienced coaches to bridge the gap.

DS: You have represented Bangladesh in the Davis Cup at both junior and senior levels. What was that experience like and how do Bangladeshi players compare with other countries?

ZA: Wearing the national jersey and representing Bangladesh at the international stage is always an incredible experience. However, our players struggle in areas like stamina, technique, mental game, and match temperament compared to international players.

DS: What is your strongest point, and what areas do you need to improve?

ZA: My strongest point is my mental side. I think I'm mentally strong and confident when I go out in a match no matter who I'm playing. I think that's what makes me less nervous. I need to work on lots of tactical and physical aspects.

DS: Who is your idol in tennis?

ZA: My idol is Novak Djokovic.

HAMILTON content with first Ferrari day

AFP, Melbourne



Lewis Hamilton said Friday his first competitive day in a Ferrari had been "completely different" but he is relishing trying to squeeze out more pace at the season-opening Australian Grand Prix.

The seven-time world champion officially began work at the Scuderia in January after his shock move from Mercedes after 12 years.

While he completed 162 laps of testing in Bahrain, the Briton was in the Ferrari cockpit for the first time at a grand prix, finishing fifth in second practice after coming 12th in the opening session.

"It's been a learning day as I continue to understand and get to grips with the new car," said the 40-year-old.

"Everything is so completely different from what I've been used to for so long, but that's the challenge and I'm embracing it."

Hamilton was 0.42 seconds behind teammate and pacesetter Charles Leclerc around Albert Park, but was satisfied that he was making progress.

"We were not completely satisfied with FP1 but we made some good progress in FP2 and got some solid longer runs in, which was important," he said.

"There's still balance work to do overnight, and we're missing a bit of pace, but that's expected."



Gavi out, Asencio in for Spain

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid defender Raul Asencio has earned his first call-up from Spain manager Luis de la Fuente on Friday for their two-leg Nations League quarter-final against the Netherlands.

The 22-year-old Real Madrid academy product has made 14 LaLiga and eight Champions League appearances this season. Barcelona defender Inigo Martinez returns after being left out of Spain's Euro 2024 winning squad.

Barcelona midfielder Gavi, who helped Spain in their 2023 Nations League win, was expected to return to the national squad after a 14-month absence due to an ACL injury, however, De la Fuente has not selected him.

Forward Marco Asencio, who has regained form scoring seven goals from eight appearances since joining Aston Villa on loan from Paris St Germain in the mid-season transfer window, was also left out. Spain face Ronald Koeman's Netherlands away on Thursday before returning home for the second-leg on March 23.



FERNANDES HITS HATTRICK, WILLIAMS BAGS A BRACE

Manchester United captain Bruno Fernandes netted his second hat-trick for the Red Devils to help them to a comfortable 4-1 win at home against Real Sociedad in the last-16 of the Europa League on Thursday. Courtesy of the hat-trick, the Portuguese midfielder has now been directly involved in more goals than any other player in Europa League history – 24 goals and 17 assists in 53 games. United, who drew the first leg 1-1 in Spain last week, thus cemented a spot in the quarterfinals of the competition. Meanwhile, Spanish winger Nico Williams scored a brace to spearhead an Athletic Bilbao comeback at home against Roma. Roma, who was 2-1 up in the first leg, were down to 10 men in the 11th minute after Mats Hummels saw red and were beaten 3-1 as Bilbao confirmed their qualification into the last eight.

PHOTO: MANCHESTER UNITED/REUTERS



Tuchel hopes to bring Premier League power to England reign

AFP, London

Thomas Tuchel said his England team must reflect the physicality of the Premier League as he hopes to inject more "intensity" into the Three Lions.

The German's appointment as the third foreign manager to take charge of England has raised the pressure on Tuchel to deliver a first major trophy since 1966 at next year's World Cup.

After consecutive European Championship final defeats under Gareth Southgate, plus semi-final and quarter-final exits at the past two World Cups, the English Football Association has invested heavily in Tuchel's track record as a serial winner.

The 51-year-old guided Chelsea to Champions League glory in 2021 and also won league titles at Bayern Munich and Paris Saint-Germain.

Tuchel, though, said he is hoping to deploy the pace and power of the Premier League, rather than a continental influence, as he looks to shape his England team.

"The Premier League is a very physically demanding league, is a very direct league and I think we should be brave enough to play like an England squad and should not try to copy other nations' styles too much," Tuchel said after naming his first squad on Friday for World Cup qualifiers against Albania and Latvia.

"I think it should reflect the values of the country and of the strongest league in the world,



"The Premier League is a very physically demanding league, is a very direct league and I think we should be brave enough to play like an England squad and should not try to copy other nations' styles too much,"

England manager
Thomas Tuchel

which is the Premier League.

"I think we need to increase the rhythm and intensity of our game compared to our last matches. This is where the focus is and then hopefully it's an exciting watch and we have the effect that we wish for."

Tuchel's contract only lasts until the end of

the 2026 World Cup and he is aware of the need to make an immediate impact.

Qualification should be a formality in a group also containing Serbia and Andorra.

But Tuchel is wary that his time with the players is limited in his first foray into international management.

"We are now consecutive in semi-finals and finals and the feeling is that it's just a little step to bring it over the line," he added.

"I am very convinced that if we want to be prepared to be in the next final and to make the last step we need to do it now in the first camp, as boring as it may sound for you.

"If you go on a journey, it starts with the first step. This journey starts clearly with the first camp.

"We only have six camps, we only have 60 days (together ahead of the World Cup), we need to take care of every single day and make sure that we are on point.

"If we do this, hopefully the last step takes care of itself."

Recalls for Marcus Rashford and Jordan Henderson were the headline news from Tuchel's first squad.

Arsenal defender Ben White has ended a self-imposed international exile that has lasted since the 2022 World Cup, but is not included due to a lack of match fitness.

Tuchel confirmed that Harry Kane, who he managed at Bayern, will be retained as England captain.



Following a nerve-racking win over city rivals Atletico Madrid in the Champions League last-16 tie last Wednesday, Real Madrid's Kylian Mbappe turns his focus onto their LaLiga game away to Villarreal tonight. A win would see Real go top of the standings, surpassing archrivals Barcelona, who have played a game less than Los Blancos and will be facing third-placed Atletico Madrid on Sunday night.

PHOTO: REAL MADRID

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SHAH CEMENT

BREACHING DISCIPLINE Govt to revoke passports of ex-envoy, family

DIPLMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The foreign ministry has initiated departmental action against Mohamud Harun Al Rashid, former Bangladesh ambassador to Morocco, for breaching discipline.



Harun Al Rashid

In a statement yesterday, the ministry said it also instructed the relevant authorities to revoke the passports of Harun and his family.

According to the statement, Harun was recalled on December 11, 2024, and ordered to report immediately.

However, citing multiple excuses, he delayed his return and formally relinquished his position on February 27. He has since reportedly moved from Rabat, Morocco, to Ottawa, Canada, the ministry said.

Harun was expected to return to Dhaka from Ottawa on March 6 but did not, the ministry added.

Yesterday, he posted on Facebook a

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4



Shoppers checking out clothes at a holiday market in front of Motijheel Ideal School in the capital. This market, which sits every Friday, is bustling with customers as Eid approaches. Prices of products are relatively low here. The photo was taken around 11:30am yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

'We are still in shock' Says sister of deceased Magura girl

STAR REPORT

The sister of the deceased eight-year-old Magura girl yesterday said the family wanted the highest punishment for the perpetrators.

"My family is still in shock, and we are still processing her death. My mother hasn't stopped crying yet," she told The Daily Star.

Her deceased sister, a third grader, was fatally injured when she was choked and allegedly raped. She died at the Combined Military Hospital in the capital on Thursday.

According to a case filed by her mother on March 8, the girl was raped while visiting her elder sister's house in Magura town.

Police arrested the sister's husband, his parents and brother.

Muhammad Alauddin, inspector of Magura Sadar Police Station, said police were waiting for the autopsy report.

He said the authorities assured him that the report would be released soon.

On Thursday, locals vandalised the house of the accused and set it on fire, said police.

Yesterday morning, angry locals threw stones at the burned down house in Magura town.

Protesters, mostly students, yesterday submitted a memorandum to the district administration, demanding prompt justice.

[Our correspondent in Benapole contributed to the report.]

Star INTERVIEW

SpaceX hails govt move to cut red tape Says high official of US company

MAHMUDUL HASAN



The interim government's push to promptly bring Starlink satellite internet to Bangladesh signals its commitment to eliminate bureaucratic hurdles and create a business-friendly environment, said a top official of SpaceX, the parent company of Elon Musk's satellite venture.

Referring to the Chief Adviser Prof Yunus' February 19 letter asking for SpaceX connectivity in 90 work days, Richard H Griffiths, a senior adviser at SpaceX, said, "It was a very good sign and a great signal of how this interim government is responding to business."

In an interview with The Daily Star, he said Prof Yunus made a very focused effort during a phone call to highlight the need for Starlink in Bangladesh.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

Intimidation, harassment for speaking up

Anti-rape female protesters allege non-cooperation of law enforcement

NILIMA JAHAN

Female activists leading the recent anti-rape protests and the July uprising are enduring continuous intimidation and harassment, both online and offline.

One such activist is Prapti Taposhi, a Jahangirnagar University student and a coordinator of the July Movement, who has been vocal in the ongoing anti-rape protests.

"Every day, I receive 10 to 12 rape threats on my profile. And it's not just me -- any woman who speaks out faces the same."

While digital harassment has existed for some time, it has escalated not just in numbers but in intensity since July last year, she said, adding that harassment has now become widespread.



"We are challenging extremists, Islamist factions, the government, its supporters and even pro-Awami League sympathisers. They all use social media to attack us -- because targeting women is the easiest way to silence dissent."

Prapti receives daily explicit threats, including messages such as: "I'll rape you to show you what freedom feels like!"

Videos of her have been circulated across social media, some manipulated into 'revenge porn'.

Despite not fearing the constant attacks, she feels helpless as law enforcement agencies are not taking any action to identify the perpetrators.

Her family, too, has been targeted, with rape and death threats and links to revenge porn, leaving her parents deeply concerned for her safety.

Shima Akhter, a vocal critic of the Awami League and a member of the Bangladesh Student Federation, is in the same boat.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1



A group of students celebrating Holi at Dhaka University's Jagannath Hall yesterday. The Hindu festival of colours signifies the victory of good over evil.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Back truce, or face sanctions

United G7 warns Russia, calls for permanent ceasefire in Gaza

AFP, Charlevoix

The Group of Seven powers yesterday warned Russia of new sanctions unless it accepts a ceasefire with Ukraine, in a forceful show of unity after President Donald Trump rattled the club of democracies.

Meeting at a rustic hotel in rural Quebec, G7 foreign ministers also backed Ukraine's fight for its "territorial integrity" and spoke of Russia's "aggression," terminology earlier eschewed by Trump as he reached out to Moscow.

The consensus on Ukraine came despite mounting tension within the G7 - Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States as Trump slaps

punishing tariffs on allies and questions the very sovereignty of host Canada.

A G7 statement backed a US-led call for a 30-day truce embraced by Ukraine and "called for Russia to reciprocate by agreeing to a ceasefire on equal terms and implementing it fully."

"They discussed imposing further costs on Russia in case such a ceasefire is not agreed, including through further sanctions, caps on oil prices, as well as additional support for Ukraine, and other means," such as using frozen Russian assets.

The Group of Seven also noted the "need for robust and credible security arrangements to ensure that

Ukraine can deter and defend against any renewed acts of aggression."

It did not elaborate further, and Trump has closed the door on admitting Ukraine into Nato, an idea loathed by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Trump since his return to power has stunned allies by reopening dialogue with Putin and briefly cutting off US aid and intelligence sharing that has been vital to Ukraine since Russia invaded three years ago.

But the diplomatic picture changed dramatically Tuesday when US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who participated in the G7 talks in Quebec, and Trump's national security advisor Mike Waltz met Ukrainian officials in Saudi Arabia.

3 children raped, four suspects held

STAR REPORT

Three cases were filed over the rape of a seven-year-old, an eight-year-old, and a nine-year-old in Lalmonirhat, Chapainawabganj, and Sirajganj, respectively, between Thursday night and yesterday morning.

In Lalmonirhat, a 22-year-old man was arrested in a case filed over the rape of a seven-year-old girl in Hatibandha upazila.

Jahurul Molla Sagar, 22, was arrested with the help of locals on Thursday night, said Hatibandha Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mahmudun Nabi, reports our local correspondent.

According to the case, the incident took place Thursday afternoon when Jahurul

was visiting the victim's house at Doani Pittifata village. He raped her there when he found the child alone.

He fled when the child's mother and locals rushed to the scene, hearing screams. They rescued the child and admitted her to the hospital.

The OC said based on the victim's medical report, a charge sheet would be prepared and submitted to the court.

In Chapainawabganj, three people were arrested yesterday in a case filed over the rape of an eight-year-old speech-impaired girl in Shibganj upazila.

One of the arrestees is Sakhawat Hossain, 19, SEE PAGE 6 COL 5

Prime Bank

PRAYER TIMING MARCH 15

Fajr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 4:52	12:45	4:30	6:08	7:45
JAMAAT 5:02	1:15	4:45	6:23	8:15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

SEHRI, IFTAR TIMING

RAMADAN	MARCH	SEHRI	IFTAR
14	15		6:08
15	16	4:50	6:08
16	17	4:49	6:09

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MARCH 2025
A Quarterly Publication of The Daily Star

NETRAKONA

a gateway to nature

Netrakona, located in northern Bangladesh, is a hidden gem renowned for its breathtaking natural beauty and vibrant cultural heritage. Famous for its waterfalls, kaolin (China clay) hills, serene rivers, tranquil canals, and vast haors, the district is a perfect vacation destination.

JAYADUL ISLAM

During the cooler months, Netrakona attracts tourists eager to explore its landscapes and immerse themselves in its rich cultural diversity.

If you plan to visit before the temperatures rise, here's a guide to some of the top attractions in Netrakona that you won't want to miss. From picturesque hills to historical landmarks, the district offers an unforgettable experience for nature lovers and cultural enthusiasts.

BIRISHIRI CULTURAL ACADEMY, DURGAPUR

Birishiri Cultural Academy, officially known as the Ethnic Cultural Academy, is an autonomous institution in Birishiri, Durgapur. Established to preserve and promote the rich cultural heritage of various small ethnic communities in the Greater Mymensingh region, the academy focuses on groups such as the Hajong, Koch, Dalu, Mandai, and Banai.

The academy serves as a vital centre for cultural and educational activities, showcasing traditional arts, crafts, music, and dance. It plays a crucial role in preserving languages, social customs, clothing, food habits, rituals, and other traditions integral to these communities' identities.

SOMESHWARI RIVER, DURGAPUR

Originating from the Garo Hills in Meghalaya, India, the Someshwari flows into Durgapur upazila in Netrakona. Renowned for its crystal-clear waters and lush green surroundings, the river offers breathtaking landscapes



Ganeshwari river in Kalmakanda.

PHOTO: JAYADUL ISLAM

vigorous flow that appeals to adventure enthusiasts.

RANIKHONG MISSION, DURGAPUR

Located near the Someshwari, Ranikhong Mission is a significant Christian missionary site known for its historical and cultural heritage. Situated near the Bangladesh-India border, it offers scenic views of the Indian hills. The mission's colonial-style architecture provides a glimpse into the past.

CHINA MATIR PAHAR, DURGAPUR

China Matir Pahar (Kaolin Hills) in Bijoypur, Durgapur, is a unique geological formation. Famous for its distinctive



formed in the former mining pits enhance Bijoypur's scenic beauty.

KOMOLA RANI DIGHI, DURGAPUR

Komola Rani Dighi, also known as Sagar Dighi, is a historic pond near the Birishiri Union Parishad, about three kilometres from Durgapur Sadar.

According to legend, in the late 15th century, King Janki Nath of Susong Durgapur married Komola Devi, and they had a son, Raghunath. To address water scarcity, the king dug a pond, but it remained dry. One night, he dreamed that if Queen Kamala Devi worshipped in the pond's centre, it would fill with water. When she performed the ritual, the water suddenly rose and drowned her.

Grieving, the king later dreamed that if he left infant Raghunath by the pond, Kamala Devi would return to breastfeed him—on the condition that he never touched her. Each night, she fed the child before vanishing. One night, the king tried to touch her, and she disappeared forever.

During Raghunath's reign, Susong Durgapur became a powerful pargana. He conquered Jangbari Fort and defeated zamindars Chand Roy and Kedar Roy, earning the title of Maharaja from the Mughals. Today, the Someshwari flows through Komola Rani Dighi, with its southern and western banks standing as silent witnesses to history.

white clay hills, the area is rich in minerals and has become a popular tourist destination.

The striking contrast between the white clay hills and the surrounding landscape makes this site a fascinating attraction. Additionally, the turquoise lakes

CHANDRADINGA WATERFALL, KALMAKANDA

Located in Panchgaon village, Kalmakanda upazila, Chandradinga Waterfall is a serene destination near the Bangladesh-India border. The soothing sound of cascading water and the lush green surroundings make it a perfect retreat for nature lovers.

GANESHWARI RIVER, KALMAKANDA

Flowing along the Garo Hills, the Ganeshwari river offers mesmerising views. To the northeast lies the India-Bangladesh border, lined with high, forested hills. The picturesque landscape is home to small ethnic communities.

DINGAPOTA HAOR, MOHANGANJ

Dingapota Haor in Mohanganj Upazila is one of Bangladesh's largest wetlands. Its beauty transforms with the seasons, offering distinct experiences year-round.

During the monsoon, the haor resembles a vast sea, with submerged hijal trees enhancing its charm. In the dry season, lush green fields and golden paddy crops replace the water, creating a stunning contrast.

UCHITPUR HAOR, MADAN

Located in Madan upazila, Uchitpur Haor is a wetland known for its natural beauty. During the monsoon, it is often called the "Mini Cox's Bazar" due to its vast sandy stretches, creating a beach-like ambience that captivates visitors.



PHOTO: JAYADUL ISLAM

Ranikhong mission in Durgapur

HOW TO GO THERE

BY BUS

BRTC and other private bus companies operate regular services from Mohakhali Bus Terminal to Netrakona. The journey is budget-friendly, with tickets costing around Tk 450.

BY TRAIN

For a more comfortable ride, take the Mohanganj Express or Haor Express from Kamalapur Railway Station or Airport Station.

WHERE TO STAY

Although Netrakona lacks luxury hotels, it offers several decent accommodations that are clean, affordable, and well-located. Netrakona Circuit House, Kachari Dak Bungalow, LGED Rest House, YMCA rest house in Durgapur are a few of them. Room rates range from Tk 1,000 to Tk 2,500 per night, ensuring a comfortable stay for tourists exploring Netrakona's serene beauty and rich cultural heritage.



PHOTO: JAYADUL ISLAM

Birishiri Cultural Academy in Durgapur



PHOTO: JAYADUL ISLAM

Chandradinga waterfall in Kalmakanda.



PHOTO: MD MAMUNUR RASHID

year-round.

The Someshwari's beauty changes with the seasons. In winter, the receding water reveals sandy banks ideal for leisurely walks, while during the monsoon, the river swells, displaying a



Someshwari river in Durgapur

PHOTO: MORSHED NEEL

LITERARY CURTAINS

'PAKHIDER BIDHANSHABHA'

A mesmerising theatrical odyssey



PHOTOS: NASEEF FARUQUE AMIN

NASEEF FARUQUE AMIN

On the evening of February 10 the curtain fell for the last time on a performance that, over the preceding days, had cast an enchanting spell upon its audience. From February 7 onward, the master's students of Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Dhaka summoned the winds of an ancient parable, carrying their audience through the mystical landscapes of Farid ud-Din Attar's *Mantiq-ut-Tayr* (1177)—*Pakhider Bidhanshabha* in Bangla, *The Conference of the Birds* in English. What unfurled was not mere theater but an invocation—a dreamscape woven with movement, music, and metaphor—an invitation to traverse the valleys of the soul.

Attar's 12th century Sufi allegory, masterfully adapted by writer and playwright Dr Shahman Moishan and directed by Dr Ahmedul Kabir, follows a gathering of birds who, led by the wise hoopoe, embark on a perilous journey to find their king, the Simurgh. They must cross seven valleys, each demanding the surrender of human frailty—Certainty, Love, Understanding, Detachment, Unity, Bewilderment, and finally, Self-Realisation. Many falter, overcome by fear or pride, but the few who reach the end discover an astonishing truth: the Simurgh is not a distant ruler but a reflection of themselves.

At its heart, *Pakhider Bidhanshabha* explores spiritual enlightenment—a voyage through doubt, suffering, and transcendence. But this adaptation has breathed new life into Attar's verses, injecting a visceral contemporary urgency into the age-old search for truth.

The hoopoe played with commanding presence, was no longer just a mystical guide but a figure reminiscent of political dissidents, spiritual visionaries, and lone voices of conscience in turbulent times. The birds, reflecting their human counterparts, wrestled with desires, distractions, and self-imposed limitations—echoing the struggles of modern existence, where the pursuit of meaning is

often stifled by materialism and fear.

This performance was not a relic of ancient Sufi thought but a living, breathing dialogue with today's world, asking: What illusions hold us back? How do we break free?

Pakhider Bidhanshabha exemplifies Brechtian techniques through its deliberate use of alienation to critique societal systems and provoke reflection. The performance dismantles traditional theatrical conventions by presenting its characters as symbolic representations of institutional power and corruption. These allegorical figures embody abstract ideas rather than individual personalities, compelling the audience to critically assess the broader societal dynamics at play.

To stage *Pakhider Bidhanshabha* is to dance on a tightrope—veer too far into abstraction, and you risk alienating your audience; lean too heavily on exposition, and you lose the mysticism. This production, however, achieved a delicate equilibrium, balancing poetry with raw theatricality.

The ensemble embodied the restlessness of the human condition, shifting between hypnotic unity and desperate individuality. Choreographed sequences fused elements of classical South Asian movement with experimental physical theater, making the birds' journey feel both celestial and achingly human.

The use of light and shadow was particularly striking. At

fusion of classical and avant-garde, mysticism and modernity. Director Kabir orchestrated a theatrical language that was at once ancient and immediate, refusing to be confined by time or tradition.

The costume design, led by Mohsina Akhter, was a symphony of textures—earthy tones for those tethered by worldly desires, while those who reached transcendence were enveloped in ethereal whites, bathed in the illusive shades of blue lights, and reflected in a stage of mirrors. Meanwhile, the set was minimal yet evocative—a shifting landscape of fabric, mirrors, and shadows that transformed seamlessly into deserts, mountains, and celestial realms.

Perhaps the most radical artistic decision was the treatment of Simurgh's revelation. Instead of a singular grand moment, the climax was fractured, splintering across multiple perspectives—some birds saw nothing, some saw themselves, and some glimpsed a cosmic void. It was a masterstroke that left the audience grappling with their own interpretations, refusing easy resolutions.

As the final echoes of the performance faded into the night, the audience sat, momentarily suspended—caught between the weight of the questions it had posed and the personal reckoning it demanded. *The Conference of the Birds* was never meant to be a passive experience, and this adaptation ensured it wasn't.

In a world teeming with distractions, where certainty is mistaken for truth and doubt for weakness, this production stood as an act of defiance—an invitation to embrace the unknown, to embark on a journey within. It did not offer answers, only a mirror, leaving the audience to confront the reflection they found there.

And that, perhaps, is the highest form of theater.

Naseef Faruque Amin is a writer, screenwriter, and creative professional.

The ensemble embodied the restlessness of the human condition, shifting between hypnotic unity and desperate individuality. Choreographed sequences fused elements of classical South Asian movement with experimental physical theater, making the birds' journey feel both celestial and achingly human.

The episodic structure of the play prevents emotional immersion, a hallmark of Brechtian theater. Each scene functions as a self-contained critique of a specific aspect of governance, such as manipulation, ethical dilemmas, or societal decay. This fragmented storytelling denies the audience the comfort of narrative continuity, forcing them to remain analytical throughout the performance.

The play's portrayal of philosophical debates, such as doubt and uncertainty, further distances the audience from passive engagement. Instead of inviting empathy, it challenges viewers to examine the contradictions inherent in institutional systems. For instance, moments of irony and absurdity in the dialogue and actions expose the hypocrisy and ineffectiveness of those in power, amplifying the critical distance between the audience and the narrative.

moments, the stage was drenched in golden hues, evoking the promise of enlightenment; at others, fragmented beams of light created the illusion of imprisonment—birds caged by their own fears. The crescendo of live music, interwoven with haunting vocal chants, transported the audience into a trance, mirroring the Sufi tradition of sama—a musical path to divine ecstasy. That elusive Sufi dance deepened the mystique, blurring the line between the corporeal and the divine.

However, the narrative structure was not without its flaws. There were moments when the poetic dialogue, though beautiful, risked becoming esoteric. Some of the more intricate Sufi metaphors might have benefited from visual storytelling rather than linguistic elaboration. That said, these minor lapses did not dull the brilliance of the overall execution.

What set this performance apart was its bold artistic choices—a



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

POETRY

The Birangona, un-buried

WAZIHA AZIZ

A ceaseless war is waged on our bodies to defend.
To conquer.
The Birangona weeps.
For life leveraged, and birth forsaken.
We are all born, sharee pooled at our feet.
When the Birangona ran from your war to defend.
To conquer.
We wept.
Her body, your battlefield.
Charge the filth that plagues you!
So glory may spring from death.
Whose death?
What matters when there's a Motherland to defend?
Our bodies, a shrine.
A symbol; your chastity, frozen in time.
Cast out your shame; our bodies, defiled.
For victory!
Whose victory?

Waziha Aziz is a poet based in Chattogram and a student of Asian University for Women.



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

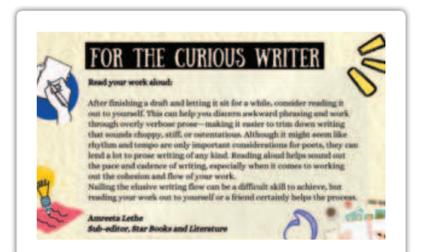
POETRY

Pardanasheen

TASHFIA AHMED

Tell me about this life you live behind the curtain...
What stories do your eyes write behind your curtain?
Sister, is this a vignette prowling in stealth or
A tragedy hemming life in behind the curtain?
Is it more freeing to watch life from the window than
The women you watch wandering outside the curtain?
Is this my emancipation, this life of grind that
Makes me batten strangers' pockets outside the curtain?
What eyes befall you, what tales go unheard, as you watch
Men dictate your experiences from the curtain?
Do you ever have to shed the skin that you wear
Or fend off eyes lurking, peeking through your curtain?

Tashfia Ahmed is a teacher at Scholastica and a contributor for Star Books and Literature. You can reach her at her Instagram, @tashfiarchy, or her email, finitestinfinities@gmail.com.



'Outsider' Rehan is now a major rising star



In 2017, when I first came to Dhaka, I was just another outsider trying to find a way in. I always wanted to work in the fashion industry, and one day, out of nowhere, I received an offer through social media. It felt almost unreal.

SHARMIN JOYA

Not everyone is lucky enough to make a mark in the industry as early in their career as Farrukh Ahmed Rehan has.

Starting out as a model, he made his acting debut in Vicky Zahed's *Ararat* (2024), playing the role of a *jinn*—a performance that caught the people's attention. His latest release, *Neel Shukh*, has taken him even further, proving that he's here to stay.

Hailing from Tangail, Rehan moved to Dhaka for his education. Like many newcomers to the city, he had to hustle—tutoring and working in restaurants to make ends meet.

"In 2017, when I first came to Dhaka, I was just another outsider trying to find a way in," Rehan shared. "I always wanted to work in the fashion industry, and one day, out of nowhere, I got an offer through social media. It felt almost unreal."

Just like that, his entry into acting was just as unexpected. "I got a call from Vicky *bhai's* team offering me a role in his web project. Honestly, I thought it was a prank. I mean, I was a fan of his work—why would he even know me? Then they called again and said that Vicky *bhai* wanted to meet me. Even then, I wasn't sure if it was real."

Rehan went on to work in Mizanur Rahman Aryan's *Jugol* (2024), a romantic fiction where he starred opposite Naznin Niha.

"I've been really lucky," he admitted. "As someone who's still learning, I got the chance to work with some of the best directors in the industry fairly early. I'd love to work with Ashfaq Nipun, Mostofa Sarwar Farooki, and emerging talents like Jahid Preetom in the future."

"When I got into acting, I knew I didn't want to take on just any project. I wanted to do something different, something that would stand out."

His debut role as a *jinn* was no easy task. "That character was tough to play, especially as my first role. But when people still recognise me for it, I feel like all the struggles were worth it. Vicky *bhai* believed in me at a time when I didn't even believe in myself, and I'll always be grateful for that."

Rehan's latest project, *Neel Shukh*, was another step in the right direction. "Vicky *bhai's* way of storytelling is different; he always pushes boundaries. This time, he

straight up told me, 'You're going to face challenges, so be ready for them!'"

This project gave him more screen time with Mehzabin Chowdhury, and he couldn't have asked for a better co-star. "She helped me a lot. We rehearsed together and built great synchronisation between our characters. She's an incredible co-actor, and the director told me something that really stuck with me—'When you have a strong co-actor, you have no choice but to give your best shot because the camera catches everything.'"

Currently pursuing an MBA at Dhaka University, Rehan is juggling academics, fashion collaborations, commercials, and acting.

"I don't want to rush into projects. As a newcomer, I've received so much love and support that I'm immensely grateful for it all."

However, I also know I make mistakes, and I'm trying to learn and improve with each opportunity," he said.

For the upcoming Eid, he's in talks for several projects, but is being careful about his choices. "I don't want to disappoint the audience. The next time they see me on screen, I want them to feel the same excitement they felt when they first saw me in *Ararat*, *Jugol* or *Neel Shukh*," concluded the actor.



PHOTO: SHEKH MEHEDI MORSHED

OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA



Photography Exhibition: 'Hajong'
March 14-18 | 4pm onwards
Alliance Française de Dhaka,
Dhanmondi



Theatre Performance: 'Song of Hawkers'
March 20-21 | 3:30-4:30pm
Experimental Theatre Hall,
Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy



Play: '12 Angry Men'
March 24 | 4-5:30pm and 7:15-8:45pm
Natmandal, Dhaka University

Netflix
The Electric State

Apple TV+
Dope Thief

Prime Video
Be Happy

Hulu
Good American Family

Chorki
Amalnama

WHAT'S ON THE GRAM

Madhuri Dixit

When it comes to timeless elegance and sartorial finesse, Madhuri Dixit never misses a beat. At the 2025 IIFA Awards, held in Jaipur on March 9, the Bollywood icon turned heads in a mesmerising off-the-shoulder red gown, proving once again why she remains a fashion force to be reckoned with.

Channelling her inner Disney princess, Madhuri graced the event in a custom Gauri & Nainika creation that exuded romance and regality. The striking ensemble featured a silhouette with a figure-hugging bodice that cascaded into a dramatic flare, delivering the perfect blend of sophistication and allure. A plunging neckline elevated the ensemble, while the sculpted fit accentuated her curves with effortless grace.

Keeping the spotlight on her statement-making attire, the diva opted for minimal yet opulent accessories—a dazzling diamond necklace and elegant studs that added just the right amount of sparkle.



1-MINUTE REVIEW

'Picture This' delivers laughter and love with a cultural spin



Prime Video's newly released romcom *Picture This*, leaning more towards the comedic genre, offers plenty of tender laughs and a standout lead performance from *Bridgerton* alum Simone Ashley.

In adapting the Australian romantic comedy *Five Blind Dates*, director Prarthana Mohan and writer Nikita Lalwani have added a cultural twist to the story of a woman in her thirties trying to fulfill both her and her grandmother's dream of running a portrait studio in London.

The film centres on Pia (Simone Ashley), who grapples with her desire for independence while her business faces

the urgent need for financial support. Her mother offers a safety box of jewels as an assured wedding gift, but Pia hadn't considered marriage as an option.

The clash between the practical and the traditional comes together when a sunny and quirky medium predicts that Pia will meet the love of her life during her next five dates.

Set against the backdrop of an elaborate Indian wedding, the film blends vibrant colours, relatable dialogues, and dazzling costumes. Like *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, its family dynamics have universal appeal, especially for South Asian audiences.

WHAT'S PLAYING

'Maand' by Bayaan, Hasan Raheem & Rovalio

A seamless blend of alternative rock, modern pop, and electronic influences, *Maand* is the latest sonic masterpiece by the rock band Bayaan, in collaboration with Hasan Raheem and Rovalio. The track fuses soulful melodies with introspective lyrics, creating an immersive listening experience that resonates with fans of contemporary South Asian music.

With Bayaan's signature poetic lyricism, Hasan Raheem's laid-back vocal delivery, and Rovalio's crisp production, *Maand* captures themes of nostalgia, longing, and self-discovery. The song's dreamy synths, rhythmic basslines, and melancholic undertones make it both hypnotic and deeply emotional.

The track has already garnered immense popularity, with its lyric video amassing over 6.7 million views on YouTube.

As *Maand* continues to gain traction across streaming platforms like Spotify and Apple Music, it highlights Bayaan's evolving musical identity and their ability to craft songs that strike a chord with a wide-ranging audience.





HOT OUT OF THE OVEN

The 'live bakery' boom in Dhaka

The rise of live bakeries isn't just changing how people buy bread - it's also creating new opportunities for entrepreneurs given the relatively low initial investment compared to traditional bakeries.

MAHMUDUL HASAN

If you stroll toward the Rupnagar residential area intersection from Bangladesh University of Business and Technology, you may be lured by the warm, comforting scent of freshly baked goods waiting from a corner shop.

In fact, if you begin to count the number of shops where baked goods are being prepared on-site, you will get up to at least five within a one-kilometre stretch - each having sprung up in the past year.

But these aren't your typical bakeries. Over the past two years, a new trend has taken the city by storm: live bakeries, where customers can witness bread and snacks being made from scratch right before their eyes.

This immersive experience has turned the simple act of buying bread into a sensory delight, and Dhaka's residents can't seem to get enough of it.

The concept is simple yet revolutionary.

Unlike traditional bakeries, where goods are pre-packaged and brought to stores, live bakeries offer a transparent and interactive experience.

Customers can witness every step of the baking process - from kneading the dough to pulling golden-brown loaves out of the oven. This transparency not only ensures freshness but also turns the simple chore of buying bread into an experience.

"I used to buy pre-packaged bread, but in recent months, I've started getting my bread from live bakeries," said Oliur Rahman, a Rupnagar resident.

"Now I can watch as the dough is kneaded, shaped, and baked in front of



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



10-12 people are required to manage operations. But at a live bakery, each shop requires only five people," Roney explains.

By selling directly to customers instead of relying on middlemen, live bakery owners like Roney can maintain quality control and keep costs lower, making it an attractive business model.

According to Roney, entrepreneurs can begin with a small set-up, and with the increasing affordability and efficiency of modern ovens, even small-scale operators can produce high-quality baked goods.

Although live bakeries may begin as small ventures, many entrepreneurs have scaled their businesses rapidly, thanks to the growing demand for fresh, on-site baked goods.

Affordability meets variety
Live bakeries also offer entrepreneurs a chance to distinguish themselves in a crowded food market. By allowing customers to watch the baking process in real time, these bakeries attract curious passersby, creating an engaging experience.

This concept offers an innovative twist to traditional bakery models, providing entrepreneurs with a competitive edge. Another significant edge enjoyed by live bakeries is their ability to offer a diverse selection of baked goods at affordable prices.

Unlike traditional bakeries that focus on a limited range of items, live bakeries also offer expansive menus, including but not limited to cakes, cookies, pastries, pizzas, sandwiches, muffins, plain cakes, various types of pies, chicken rolls, keema parathas, chicken singaras, different kinds of biscuits, and much more.

The beauty of a live bakery lies not only in the variety of its offerings but also in its pricing strategy. Thanks to modern ovens and efficient production methods, these bakeries can keep costs down while maintaining high quality. A fresh loaf

of bread can cost as little as Tk 20-Tk 30, making it accessible to students, office workers, and families alike.

A triumph of technology
At the heart of this transformation is technology. Modern electric ovens and equipment have made it possible to produce high quality baked goods quickly and efficiently.

Pacific Trading House, a leading importer of bakery equipment, has seen a surge in demand for these tools, with ovens ranging from Tk 1 lakh to Tk 5 lakh flying off the shelves.

Alongside ovens, equipment such as bread cutters and dough mixers, crucial

to the current economic challenges," he says.

Oversaturation leaves many gasping for air
For Eman Ali, the dream of running a successful live bakery began with hope and ambition.

Just three months ago, he and his partner opened Green Bakery on Green Road, a bustling area in the heart of Dhaka.

At first, the future seemed bright. Customers flocked to the shop, sales climbed steadily and Eman allowed himself to believe that his business would thrive.

But the optimism was short-lived. Within weeks, three more live bakeries opened within a 500-metre radius, saturating the market and turning his dream into a daily struggle.

"At first, everything was going well. Sales were rising, and we were hopeful," Eman recalls, his voice tinged with frustration. "But now, growth has stagnated. We are struggling to attract customers."

The challenges are relentless. The cost of raw materials has soared, squeezing profit margins. While he has worked hard to maintain the quality of his products, the increasing cost of raw materials and production has made it difficult to keep prices low.

"Customers have so many choices now, and price is the deciding factor for most of them," he says. "We try to maintain high standards, but it's becoming harder to balance quality and affordability."

Eman isn't alone in his struggles. Across Dhaka, small bakery owners are grappling with the same harsh realities. At least five other bakery owners or managers in Dhaka expressed frustration over the sudden surge of competitors.

What began as a promising venture for many has turned into a battle for survival.

"The market has become saturated too quickly," says an employee at a

bakery. For Eman, the future is uncertain. He's begun to explore alternative options, unsure if he can sustain his business in such a cutthroat environment.

The story of Green Bakery is a microcosm of a larger trend. While the live bakery model has brought innovation and opportunities to Dhaka's food scene, it has also created a fiercely competitive landscape where only the strongest can survive.

For every success story, there are countless tales of businesses teetering on the edge, dreams of growth overshadowed by the harsh realities of an overcrowded market.

The rise of live bakeries reflects a larger cultural shift in Dhaka's food scene. Consumers are increasingly prioritising freshness, transparency, and quality over convenience.

This trend mirrors a global movement toward boutique bakeries, which have long been popular in Europe, as opposed to the mass-produced model favoured in the US.

However, Towfiqul Islam Khan, senior research fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, highlighted that the issue extends beyond just consumer preference.

It is primarily about food safety concerns and assurances.

"There is a broader concern that we lack trust in the BSTI seal," he said, referring to the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution.

He also touched upon the cultural shift in consumer behaviour.

"As people's purchasing power grows, their tastes are evolving. Consumers are becoming more cautious and selective about their choices."

This shift reflects a rising demand for quality and authenticity, with buyers seeking greater transparency in food safety and production standards, he added.

For many, live bakeries offer more than just fresh bread - they provide a connection to the food they eat and the people who make it.

As the city continues to evolve, these bakeries are carving out a niche that combines tradition with innovation, proving that sometimes, the simplest ideas can have the most profound impact.



streamlining operations and ensuring uniform results, has also seen a rise in sales.

Bread cutters, priced between Tk 60,000 and Tk 1 lakh, are in high demand as are dough mixers, ranging from Tk 20,000 to Tk 50,000.

However, the recent economic downturn has slowed sales, according to Sheikh Nawazesh Ali Razib, CEO of Pacific Trading House. "Sales have dropped in the past three months due

me. It's truly a unique experience."

What sets live bakeries apart isn't just the novelty of watching bakers at work. It's a combination of freshness, variety, and affordability.

From butter buns and Danish pastries to savoury items like chicken rolls and keema parathas, these bakeries offer extensive menus. And with prices starting as low as Tk 20 for a loaf of bread, they've become a go-to for students, office workers, and families alike.

"I used to buy bread from supermarkets, but it never tasted this fresh," Rehnuma Khatun, a customer, remarked.

A new wave of entrepreneurship
The rise of live bakeries isn't just changing how people buy bread - it's also creating new opportunities for entrepreneurs given the relatively low initial investment compared to traditional bakeries.

The streamlined process, powered by modern ovens and equipment, has made it easier for small-scale entrepreneurs to enter the market with relatively low initial investments.

Omar Faruk Roney, whose family once ran a traditional bakery in Mirpur, saw the business shutter during the Covid-19 pandemic.

But with the live bakery model, he and his friends have opened two successful shops in the same area.

"Now, all I need is an oven, a bread cutter, and a dough mixer," he said.

"At a traditional bakery, at least

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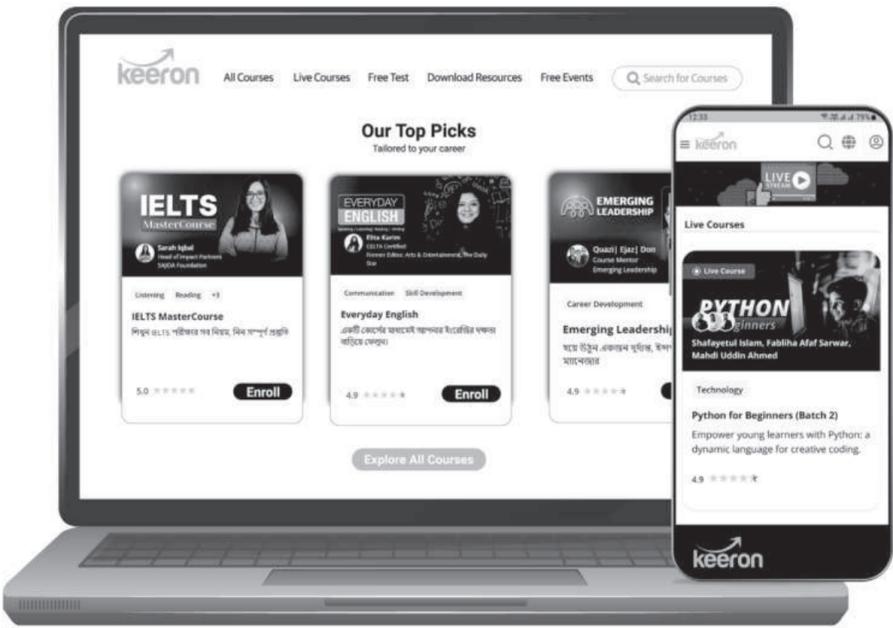
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