

UN stands ready to aid reforms, transition

Guterres tells Bangladesh, hears from parties about reforms, election timing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said the UN stands ready to assist Bangladesh in fostering peace, national dialogue, trust and healing as the country undergoes important reforms and transitions.

"You can count on the UN to be your steadfast partner, working alongside the people of Bangladesh to help build a sustainable and equitable future for all," he said at a joint press briefing with Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain at a city hotel yesterday.

The UN chief said the international community must play its part in supporting Bangladesh in this pivotal moment as the country works to achieve a just, inclusive, and prosperous future.

"I am particularly pleased to be in Bangladesh at this important

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

ROHINGYA REPATRIATION Aid to Rakhine via Bangladesh can help

Says UN chief, as conflict across
the border rages on

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and Bangladesh authorities yesterday discussed whether it would be possible to deliver humanitarian aid inside Myanmar through Bangladesh, so that the Rohingyas could return to their homeland.

Signified repatriation of Rohingyas would be extremely difficult at the moment, given the ongoing conflicts between the Myanmar military and Arakan Army in Rakhine, he said.

That's why it is essential to mobilise the international community, especially the countries neighbouring Myanmar, to put pressure on it to find a solution, he said.

Ending the violence and creating the mechanisms of dialogue leading to a true democratic solution in Myanmar would naturally facilitate the return of the Rohingya refugees, he said.

At the same time, it is important to intensify humanitarian aid inside Myanmar to create the conditions for the return to be successful.

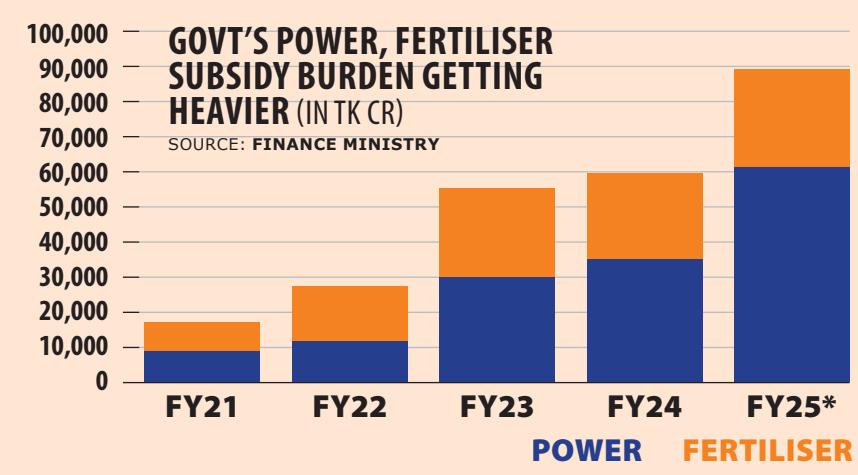
"And that is the reason why one of the discussions we had was about the possibility, if the circumstances allow, to have also humanitarian aid channelled from Bangladesh. But that is, obviously, a matter that would require the authorisation and the cooperation of the parties to the conflict," Guterres said.

Guterres arrived in Bangladesh on March 13 on a four-day visit.

Bangladesh has been facing the enormous challenge of providing

SEE PAGE 7 COL 1

REVISED BUDGET FOR FY25 Power, fertiliser subsidies to balloon



REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The government's subsidy burden for power and fertiliser is set to increase by 57.9 percent to Tk 90,000 crore in the revised budget for this fiscal year as it looks to keep energy and agricultural inputs affordable amid high inflation.

Fertiliser subsidy will increase to Tk

28,000 crore in the revised budget, up by 64.7 percent from the original. Power subsidy will rise by 55 percent to Tk 62,000 crore. The subsidy for liquefied natural gas (LNG) will remain unchanged at Tk 6,000 crore.

"The subsidy burden has grown heavier this year as the government refrained

SEE PAGE 7 COL 1

THE DISAPPEARED OF THE JULY UPRISING ■ PART 4

Families want closure, however painful

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. This is the fourth and the last part of the series.

MASHFIQ MIZAN, KEERO ADHNAN
AHMED and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

When we first started visiting Dhaka Medical College Hospital in January for this story, there were seven protest-related unclaimed bodies freezing in its morguaries. One of them, Md Hasan, a teenage trader from Gulistan, was handed over to his family on February 14 after DNA tests. The remaining six are still stored at DMCH morgue, growing colder.

Hasan's father, Md Monir Hossain, had searched for his son everywhere -- hospitals, clinics, cemeteries, and even Anjuman Mufidul Islam since his son went missing on August 5, 2024, the day Sheikh Hasina fell and fled the country.

"After four months, student leaders told me about the seven bodies at Dhaka Medical. I identified my son from his clothing. He always wore white."

Md Sogir from Sylhet believes his son, Md Waliullah, 25, a trader from Elephant Road in the capital, is also among the bullet-ridden bodies in the DMCH mortuary.

"My son went missing in July. I

looked for him for five months. The bodies are barely recognisable, but I identified my son through an old surgery mark on his right leg."

Sogir has given his DNA sample to the Criminal Investigation Department of police and is awaiting confirmation.

A SYSTEM FAILING THE VICTIMS

If the sample does not match and if no one comes looking for the rest of the bodies still freezing at DMCH, these men, who were once

someone's family, will likely be buried as "nobodies" in unmarked graves like many others (read more in Part 1).

On January 25, 2025, former information adviser Nahid Islam visited the Rayerbazar graveyard to pay tribute to the unidentified martyrs of the July uprising. There, Nahid, currently the leader of National Citizen Party, assured the families of these victims that efforts to identify those buried in unmarked

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



BURNING BLIGHT
Plumes of smoke rise from burning garbage at the Aminbazar landfill, enveloping the surroundings in toxic fumes. Though the site is on the outskirts of Dhaka, people living as far as in Mohammadpur often complain about the persistent stench and hazardous air. Experts stress the urgency for authorities to adopt environmentally friendly waste management systems to improve Dhaka's air quality, which remains among the worst in the world.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Shady firm took Tk 950cr from Islami Bank

A Nabil Group employee and a relative of its chairman own the firm

MD MEHEDI HASAN

It happened in just two days. A company that existed only on paper walked away with Tk 950 crore from Islami Bank Bangladesh.

The company, Market Master Analyzer Ltd, managed to secure the disbursement of Tk 450 crore on August 10, 2022, and Tk 500 crore the following day, according to documents reviewed by The Daily Star.

The bank's Gulshan-1 branch disbursed the funds by blatantly ignoring fundamental banking regulations. The total outstanding loan amount has now grown to Tk 1,054 crore.

Market Master Analyzer secured this massive loan just a month after it was registered with the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms (RJSC) on July 6, 2022, and despite having an authorised capital of only Tk 5 crore.

The company's address was Banani, Dhaka on RJSC records. However, when this journalist visited the location, no such company was found—only an office of Nabil Group was located nearby.

Market Master Analyzer is owned by two individuals: Chairman Md Shariful Islam and Managing Director Md Sha Alam.

An investigation revealed that Shariful is a close relative of Md Aminul Islam, the founder and managing director of Nabil Group.

Sha Alam works as a junior officer at Nabil Group's Rajshahi

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4



PHOTO: STAR

Rasheda Begum wants to know where her son was buried.



INVESTIGATION

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FROM PANCHAGARH



ASIF HOSSEN
WENT MISSING ON AUG 4
FROM SIRAJGANJ



ISHTIAK HASAN
WENT MISSING ON AUG 4
FROM BOGURA



MONIR HOSAIN
WENT MISSING IN AUG
FROM GAZIPUR



NUR ISLAM
WENT MISSING IN JULY
FROM SHAHID MINAR



RUBEL AHMED
WENT MISSING ON AUG 5
FROM DHAKA



MONIRUZZAMAN
WENT MISSING ON AUG 5
FROM SAVAR

Families want closure, however painful

FROM PAGE 1

graves had begun.

Nahid along with other student leaders visited the graveyard again on March 4 after the launch of the new party, and reiterated their commitment to identifying the graves of the unclaimed bodies.

In reality, however, the process remains stuck in red tape.

In November last year, the July Uprising Cell under the health ministry gave families only a 12-day window to report missing persons, posting an obscure notice on a barely visible website. The Cell claims it did not receive any missing reports yet.

However, not a single of the 31 families we spoke to knew about this notice or the newspaper advertisements published by the cell. They don't even know where the office is.

Mahbub Ullah Mazumder, senior assistant secretary of July Foundation, has made a list of the six that this investigation confirmed to have been buried in Rayerbazar and one missing protester from Anjuman documents. After Mahbub shared the list with the cell, it only sent a letter to relevant ministries for actions.

Three government officials working on the July Uprising Cell said the health ministry is working to identify the missing bodies "very seriously" and asked The Daily Star to call health Secretary Md Saidur Rahman, who in turn advised us

either," Tanvir added.

As the process remains stuck in the labyrinth of paper works involving a complex network of multiple government agencies, families of Sohel Rana, Faisal Sarker, Md Assadullah, Rafiqul Islam, Mahin Mia, Ahmed Jilani, and many other victims of the July massacre who remain missing, continue to look for answers.

They want to know where exactly their loved ones lie among the 114 buried in Block 4 of Rayerbazar. These graves, each marked solely by a bamboo pole, leave the families with

unclaimed bodies are found, detection of the graves is challenging because they were buried collectively. There's no way of knowing who was buried where," said Kamrul Ahmed, head of Anjuman Mufidul Islam's burial service, who oversaw the burial of many July massacre victims.

Prof Kamrul Islam Sardar, who served as a forensic head at some of the top hospitals, said even if DNA samples were collected from every unclaimed body, they are now useless since the graves are unmarked.

"All the bodies would need to

Anjuman Mufidul or Rayerbazar exist. They tried to rely on the police, who, in many cases, offered little help.

Ahmad Ferdous, head of CID's Forensic DNA Laboratory, said they completed 11 DNA profiling of as many victims related to the uprising. Of them, five bodies have been handed over to family members after the samples matched. The rest six remain unidentified as there are no claims for these bodies.

DNA profiling for 10 more bodies connected to the uprising is currently underway, Ferdous added.



To exhume bodies from graves, the request needs to come from the relevant police stations based on cases filed in connection to the incidents. We did not receive any such request from the police stations either."

TANVIR AHMED, DC, Dhaka

"Even if the identities of the unclaimed bodies are found, detection of the graves is challenging because they were buried collectively. There's no way of knowing who was buried where."

KAMRUL AHMED, head of Anjuman Mufidul Islam's burial service



Sohel Rana's mother Rasheda Begum at Rayerbazar graveyard with July uprising leader Nahid Islam. A banner, top, placed in the cemetery demands that all unnamed victims buried there be identified.

PHOTO: STAR

no way of knowing that. Meanwhile, rain has flattened the graves, and the bamboo markers are rotting.

If a GD number, a photo, a birthmark, age, clothing or any previous injury marks had been placed on the bamboo pole before burying the unclaimed bodies, identifying them would have been easier. Now, if any relative claims a body, all the corpses would need to be exhumed for DNA profiling.

"Even if the identities of the

be exhumed for new DNA samples, and this would then need to be matched with relatives. This is a very complicated process which might take years if effective steps are not taken by the government to expedite the process," he added.

Only six families among the many families know that their kin have been buried in Rayerbazar.

One reason behind this is that many of the families we spoke to do not even know that places like

Meanwhile, many families continue to gather at Dhaka Medical College morgue every day to find their fathers, sons, brothers or husbands among the six uprising-linked bodies still lying unclaimed there.

Rasheda Begum, mother of Sohel Rana who was killed in police shooting and buried at Rayerbazar as an unclaimed body, keeps visiting Block 4 of the cemetery with teary eyes.

"Which one is my son's grave?" she asks anyone who would listen.

The families of Ridoy, Miraj, Maruf and many others want to know if they are dead or alive.

For these families, uncertainty overshadows the agony of their loss. They now want closure, however painful.

Assadullah's widow Farjana Akter is tormented every day as she cannot console her two children, aged ten and four.

"My children keep asking where their father's grave is. Since I cannot bring their father back alive, I at least want to show them where he rests, so they can have a place to grieve and remember him."

Our correspondents from Gazipur, Bogura, Pabna and Thakurgaon contributed to this story.

to contact Joint Secretary Dr SM Mustafizur Rahman.

The joint secretary said the ministry sent a letter to the deputy commissioner's office to take action. Dhaka DC Tanvir Ahmed said they did not receive the letter yet.

"To exhume bodies from graves, the request needs to come from the relevant police stations based on cases filed in connection with the incidents. We did not receive any such request from the police stations

possible."

In response to a question, Fakhrul said the UN secretary-general did not comment on the reforms, as it is an internal matter of Bangladesh.

Fakhrul also said he "could not understand" the purpose of organising this meeting.

When asked whether a timeframe for the election was discussed, the BNP leader said, "There is no need for us to mention any timeframe. Reform is our internal matter. We are in communication with the reform commissions and are providing them with whatever they need. We have already held a meeting with them."

BNP Standing Committee member Salauddin Ahmed, who also attended the meeting, said, "The United Nations has suggested that we sit together, decide on the necessary reforms, and hold an election that aligns with the expectations of the people... They [UN] hope to see a strong democratic government in power in Bangladesh."

The UN was optimistic that the next election would set an example for the world, he added.

NCP Convener Nahid Islam said all political parties must reach a consensus by signing the July Charter.

During the meeting, the party said reforms must be carried out through a constituent assembly. "Otherwise,

constitutional amendments made by parliament will not hold up. This is evident from Bangladesh's history," Nahid said.

"The interim government must carry out the fundamental reforms as elections will not work without reforms. We view elections as a part of the reform process. Elections without reforms will not be effective. Other political parties also agree with this," he said.

"We have emphasised the need for the swift implementation of the July Charter to fulfil our commitment to reforms and to ensure the continuity of the reform process for the people."

Asked if they sought any assistance from the UN, Nahid said, "We have requested comprehensive support from them on justice and reform issues."

He also said Guterres urged the political parties and the government to reach a mutual understanding. "If we can achieve that, they [UN] will provide support from their end."

Jamaat Nayeb-e-Ameer Syed Abdullah Mohammad Taher told the media, "We have talked about reforms, a free and fair national election, sustainable democracy, and national unity."

The Jamaat leader said Guterres hoped the next election would be free and fair.

Ganoshamati Andolon Chief

Coordinator Zonayed Saki emphasised the importance of reforms. He demanded that international standards and transparency be maintained in ensuring justice for the killings during the July uprising. Saki hoped the UN would stand by Bangladesh's side in this regard.

Asaduzzaman Fuad, secretary general of the AB Party, urged the UN to reconsider the appointments of three members of ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina's family who are currently working in three UN agencies.

Communist Party of Bangladesh General Secretary Ruhin Hossain Prince and Nagorik Oikya President Mahmudur Rahman Manna also attended the meeting.

The UN secretary-general held a separate meeting with youths and civil society members. Earlier in the morning, he visited the newly established UN Common Premises in Gulshan, where he viewed a photo exhibition marking the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh-UN relations. He also participated in the official UN flag-raising ceremony.

In the evening, he joined an iftar party hosted by Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus. He will fly back to New York this morning, wrapping up his four-day visit.

Ganoshamati Andolon Chief

WHERE ARE THEY?



SOHEL SHEIKH
A VEGETABLE TRADER
FROM TONGI

him.

Her initial attempt to file a case was also stalled by officers. Uttara East police eventually recorded a missing diary instead of a case and told her to omit that her husband was shot. Ayesha has no updates about the investigation.

"I abandoned all hopes. I took out loans to stay in Dhaka and find him. No one helped me. I now live in Pirojpur with my in-laws," Ayesha said.

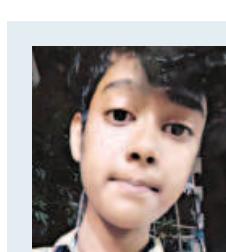
The Daily Star spoke to the person who called Ayesha on August 5. He and multiple witnesses said Sohel Sheikh was shot. No one knows what happened next.



SHAHIDUL ISLAM MIRAJ
A TRADER FROM
KAPTAN BAZAR

At least five protesters said they saw him at Jatrabari Police Station on August 5, but we could not independently verify this. That day, Jatrabari police killed protesters one after another like targets in a video game.

For six months, Mithil looked for his brother in morgues, police stations, Anjuman Mufidul Islam and Rayerbazar graveyard. He just wants to know whether his brother is dead or alive.



MD MARUF
A STUDENT FROM
MIRPUR

When his mother demanded an update, officers told her that her son committed suicide. But there is no corpse.

When we asked Investigating Officer Ibrahim of Mirpur Police Station on what basis he claims that Maruf died by suicide, he shrugged. "I don't even know who Maruf is."

Suspect in rape attempt case killed in mob beating

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

at 6:15pm. There, he died around 8:00pm. Kotwali Police Station Officer in-charge Mizanur Rahman said the mother of the child filed an attempt to rape case against Sujan with the police station on Friday.

According to the case statement, the man lives next to the victim's house. When he was watching TV with his door open on the ground floor, the girl went to watch TV with him. Sujan then closed the door and tried to rape her.

Hearing screams, locals rescued the child. Sujan managed to flee.

According to police, locals spotted him in the area yesterday and beat him up.

Guterres hails army's role in UN peacekeeping efforts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief of Army Staff General Waker-Uz-Zaman yesterday paid a courtesy call on UN Secretary-General António Guterres, who is visiting Bangladesh.

During the cordial meeting, they exchanged greetings, said a press release issued by ISPR.

Additionally, the UN Secretary-General praised the professionalism and competence of the Bangladesh Armed Forces in UN peacekeeping missions.

He also expressed his sincere gratitude for the significant contributions of the peacekeepers of Bangladesh.

Guterres arrived in Dhaka Thursday on a four-day visit. The UN chief is visiting Bangladesh to express his solidarity with both the Bangladeshi people and the Rohingya refugees who have found shelter in the country.

This is his first visit after the political changeover in Bangladesh in August last year. He is scheduled to leave Dhaka this morning.

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Π

No arrests yet over killing of rape victim's father

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Four days after the killing of a rape victim's father in Barguna, police were yet to arrest the perpetrators as of yesterday.

Family members said with each day that goes by without an arrest, their sense of insecurity grows.

Meanwhile, locals have taken to social media, demanding swift justice.

Barguna Deputy Commissioner Md Shafiqul Alam visited the victim's family yesterday and assured them of justice while handing over financial assistance.

On Thursday, Barguna Superintendent of Police Md Ibrahim Khalil also visited the victim's home, promising to bring the killers to justice.

Following the murder on March 11, the victim's wife filed a case with Barguna Sadar Police Station against unidentified assailants the next day.

Earlier on March 7, the man filed a case with the same police station over the rape of his schoolgoing daughter.

According to the case statement, a neighbour, Sajeeb Das, 25, abducted the seventh-grader on her way back to school. He then raped her and later

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6



United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres visited the newly established UN Common Premises in Gulshan yesterday morning, where he viewed a photo exhibition marking the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh-UN relations.

PHOTO: PID

Interim govt's performance key to voter turnout Speakers tell discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The successes and failures of the current interim government are crucial ahead of the upcoming election, said Dhaka University teacher Samina Luthfa yesterday.

Given the current state of law and order, marginalised people might feel fearful or hesitant about voting, she said, adding that this issue requires serious attention.

She made these remarks while attending a roundtable discussion virtually at the BDBL building in Karwan Bazar of the capital.

The event, titled "People's Election Pulse: Feb-March 2025," was organised by the citizen's platform "Voice for Reform," consulting firm Innovision, and the Bangladesh Research Analysis and Information Network (BRAIN).

"If the interim government fails, voter turnout may decrease. However, if it succeeds, the election dynamics will change significantly. If the government is only partially successful, the public may lean towards the party that has demonstrated some level of success and effectiveness," said Samina Luthfa.

Activist Sayed Abdullah said young voters, particularly those who belong to Gen Z, tend to change their decisions quickly. Their voting preferences are more individual-centric rather than party-based. In the past, young voters showed reluctance to participate in elections. In 2024, a dummy election was held, but young voters did not participate at all.

He added that young people have been disengaged from voting for a long time, developing a sense of detachment from the political landscape. They want to

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8

DNCC to revoke licence if businesses occupy footpaths

Says administrator

UNB, Dhaka

Dhaka North City Corporation Administrator Mohammad Azad yesterday said trade licences will be revoked if any businessman operates their business by occupying footpaths.

"After Eid, we will conduct a drive. Trade licences of businesses that encroach on footpaths will be cancelled, and their shops will be sealed," he said while talking to reporters after visiting the ongoing development work of Mirpur 60-feet road.

The administrator said many garage owners are using footpaths and roads to wash motorcycles and cars, while many shopkeepers are doing business using footpaths.

He also said they are facing problems with the development work.

"At eight points on the 60 feet road, house owners are preventing us from building sidewalks. They are not allowing our workers to construct and are threatening the court's verdict. They're also not cooperating and have set up illegal shops and dumped garbage," he said.

"We aim to facilitate public movement, but if anyone illegally obstructs government work, strict action will be taken," he added.

He also mentioned that they are examining the properties of those hindering the work to see if they are illegally using residential buildings for commercial purposes.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

Release full text of SC verdicts in 6 months

Proposes Judiciary Reform Commission

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

The Judiciary Reform Commission has proposed new provisions requiring the full text verdict of Supreme Court judgements to be signed and released within six months of the delivery of a verdict.

It also recommends barring judges from signing verdicts or orders after retirement.

Currently, there is no such provision. This led to controversies, such as former Chief Justice ABM Khairul Haque and his colleagues signing the judgement on the caretaker government case 16 months after its delivery, in September 2012, after his retirement.

Similarly, in February 2016, former Justice AHM Shamsuddin Choudhury Manik, now in jail, submitted 65 judgements and orders written after his retirement as an Appellate Division judge, sparking widespread debate.

The commission's 351-page final report, submitted to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus on February 5, says, "A Supreme

Court judgement must be signed and published within six months of its announcement. Judges must finalise and sign all orders and judgements before retirement. No judge, including the chief justice,

The judiciary reform body also suggests decentralising the judiciary by establishing permanent HC benches in divisional cities and courts at the upazila level, limiting the president's power to pardon convicts, restricting mobile courts to imposing only financial penalties, and creating an independent criminal investigation agency.

should sign any judgement or order after retirement. If these time limits are not met, the judge will be held accountable by the Supreme Judicial Council."

The commission proposes

amending High Court rules to ensure that initial orders in any case of the High Court Division must be signed and published within five working days after the declaration. It also proposed that interim orders must be signed and published within 10 working days after the announcement.

The judiciary reform body in its report also suggested decentralising the judiciary by establishing permanent HC benches in divisional cities and courts at the upazila level, limiting the president's power to pardon convicts, restricting mobile courts to imposing only financial penalties, and creating an independent criminal investigation agency.

Other significant proposals include appointing the most senior Appellate Division judge as chief justice, fixing the number of Supreme Court judges at seven, raising the retirement age of judges to 70, and requiring judges to disclose their property details online every three years to ensure transparency.



Participants of Socio Biz 2024, a social business idea competition for university students, with the judges at the Grand Finale event held at The Daily Star Centre yesterday. The Daily Star, in collaboration with Grameen Danone Foods Limited, concluded its social business idea competition for university students, Socio Biz 2024, with Keeron and Campus as partners.

Withdraw 'false case' against protesters Demand eminent citizens, condemn recent police attack

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 210 eminent citizens yesterday condemned the recent police attack on demonstrators protesting rising attacks on women, escalating mob violence, and the deteriorating law and order situation in the country.

In a joint statement, they denounced the "false case" filed against the protesters and demanded its immediate withdrawal, along with the prosecution of police officers responsible for the attacks.

"We are outraged by the brutal police assault on peaceful demonstrators, the lodging of fabricated cases against them, and the increasing violent and hate-driven activities of certain groups. This is happening while attacks on women and mob violence continue to rise," the statement said.

According to the statement, on March 11, a rally was organised under the banner "Bangladesh Against Rape and Impunity," with nine demands.

Despite the absence of female police officers at the scene, police allegedly attacked female participants, who were marching towards the Chief Adviser's Office for submitting a memorandum.

The following day, police filed a case naming 12 individuals and listing 70 to 80 unnamed protesters.

Among the accused was Mashirul Rahman Richard, president of Bangladesh Chhatra Federation, who, according to the signatories, was not even present at the protest site, the statement added.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

July uprising a combo of planning and spontaneity Says Nahid at launch of Asif Mahmud's book

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The July uprising was a combination of both planning and spontaneous participation of people from all walks of life, said Nahid Islam, convener of the National Citizen Party.

Speaking at the launch of the book July: Matribhumi Othoba Mrityu by LGRD Adviser Asif Mahmud at the National Museum yesterday, Nahid said history takes shape when people share their experiences and grassroots voices emerge.

Reflecting on his role in the uprising, he said, "A question has been raised – was the movement pre-planned or spontaneous? My answer is both. It was our early decision that it should be a spontaneous movement. The decision to say goodbye to Hasina had to come from the people. We just conveyed their messages from time to time."

Nahid, a key coordinator of the uprising, explained that the term "coordinator" was coined to describe representatives of the student movement, as their role was not to lead but to coordinate. "That doesn't mean political figures didn't join, but leadership was shaped largely by non-political individuals," he said.

The one-point demand for Sheikh Hasina's



SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

Socio Biz 2024 grand finale held

STAR REPORT

The Daily Star, in collaboration with Grameen Danone Foods Limited, yesterday concluded its social business idea competition for university students, Socio Biz 2024, with Keeron and Campus as partners.

The champion title was awarded to Team Middrop from the Islamic University of Technology (IUT), while Team Pritilata from Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (Sust) was recognised as the runner-up.

The primary goal of this competition was to inspire young innovators to create and launch social enterprises that extend beyond the traditional profit-centric business approaches.

More than 250 teams from 69 universities across



SEE PAGE 4 COL 8

ABRAR MURDER
HC verdict today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court is set to deliver its verdict today on the death references and appeals of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) student Abrar Fahad murder case.



The death references and appeals have been included as item No. 1 in today's cause list of the HC bench of Justice AKM Asaduzzaman and Justice Syed Enayet Hossain for judgement.

On October 7, 2019, Abrar, a second-year student, was beaten to death by a group of Chhatra League activists in a dormitory.

A Dhaka court on December 8, 2021, sentenced 20 Buet students to death for their direct involvement in the murder.

The court also sentenced five other students to life imprisonment in the case. The documents of the case reached the HC on January 6, 2022, as death reference to examine the lower court's verdict. The HC bench began the hearing on the case on November 28 last year. Attorney General Md Asaduzzaman, Deputy Attorney Generals Jasim Sarker, Khandaker Bahar Rumi, Nur Muhammad Azmi and Rasel Ahmed, and Assistant Attorney Generals Abdul Jabbar Jewel, Laboni Akhter, Tanvir Prodhan and Sumaiya Binte Aziz appeared for the state while lawyers SM Shahjahan, Azizur Rahman Dul, Masud Hasan Chowdhury and Mohammad Shishir Manir argued for the accused during hearing on the death reference and appeals.

5 snatcher suspects arrested in Dhaka: DMP

UNB, Dhaka

The Traffic Division of Dhaka Metropolitan Police has arrested five suspects while they were allegedly attempting snatching in different areas of the capital.

The arrestees were identified as Md Sajat Hossain, alias Sagar, 42, Md Wasim Akram, 35, Md Suman, 30, Md Sultan Mahmud Khan, 45, and Mohammad Shanto, 29, according to a DMP statement yesterday.

They were arrested on Friday in Tejgaon, Mirpur, and Uttara House Building areas, it said.

পুট বিক্রয়
সাতারুল "ইউনিটেড সিটি",
সেক্টর-২ এ নিষ্কট ক কাঠার
পুট বিক্রয়।
যোগাযোগ: ০১৭৪৭-৬২৪৬৬৮

STATUTORY NOTICE

SUPREME COURT OF BANGLADESH
HIGH COURT DIVISION
(STATUTORY ORIGINAL JURISDICTION)
Company Matter No. 354 of 2025

Sheikh Akhter Uddin Ahmed

..... Petitioner

The Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms & another
..... Respondents

Please take notice that an application under sections 81(2) and 85(3) read with section 396 of the Companies Act, 1994 for condonation of delay in holding AGM for the calendar year 2024 has been filed before the Hon'ble High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh. Upon hearing his Lordship Justice Mr. Ahmed Sohel was pleased to admit the application on 2nd March, 2025 and directed to file an affidavit-in-compliance on or before 21st April, 2025.

Any person interested in the matter may appear before the Hon'ble Court on the date of hearing either personally or through duly appointed advocate.

Advocate A.R.M. Kamruzzaman Kakon
Supreme Court of Bangladesh, Chamber: Prime Tower (8th Floor),
180-181, Shahid Sayed Nazrul Islam Sarani, Bijoynagar, Dhaka-1000.
Mobile: 01953773937

বাংলাদেশ মুক্তিযোৱা কল্যাণ ট্রাস্ট

বাণিজ্য ও উন্নয়ন শাখা

শাহীনগঠ ভবন, বাঁচি, মুক্তিযোৱা এলাকা, ঢাকা-১০০০

দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি

সম্প্রতি বাবুদার অভিযোগ মুক্তিযোৱা নিকট হতে সিলানোৰ পথে সত্ত্বে আবদ্ধন কৰা যাবে। বিজ্ঞাপন কৰাৰ সম্পত্তি সিলানোৰ দেখা হৈবলৈ।

১ মুক্তিযোৱা বিজ্ঞপ্তি
২ সংস্থা
৩ মুক্তিযোৱা বিক্রয়

৪ মুক্তিযোৱা কানার নথি
৫ কার্যক্রম
৬ ট্রেডার সিলিঙ্কুরি

৭ মুক্তিযোৱা মুক্তিযোৱা কানার নথি
৮ মুক্তিযোৱা বিক্রয়

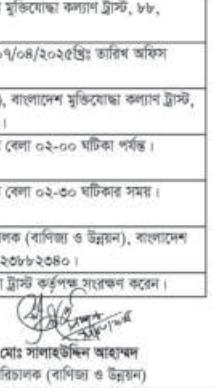
৯ মুক্তিযোৱা কানার নথি
১০ মুক্তিযোৱা কানার নথি

১১ মুক্তিযোৱা কানার নথি
১২ মুক্তিযোৱা কানার নথি

১৩ মুক্তিযোৱা কানার নথি

১৪ মুক্তিযোৱা কানার নথি

১৫ মুক্তিযোৱা কানার নথি



GD-666



Sixty-five-year-old Lila Halder sewing traditional kantha on the yard of her home at Mollapara in Agoijhara of Barishal yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Renovation of 11 roads in Jashore stalled for 4 yrs

MOHSIN MILON, Benapole

The renovation work of 11 roads under the Local Government Engineering Department in Jashore has remained suspended for around four years, causing immense sufferings to local residents.

After the roadwork began four years back, the contractors completed around 40-50 percent work before halting the projects.

Following prolonged delay in resuming the renovation work, the roads have become dilapidated, with numerous potholes having formed after the unpaved surface wore off over time.

As such, commute has not only become risky on these roads, but also inconvenient due to the dust produced from the road surfaces.

Locals urged LGED authorities to take immediate measures to complete renovation work of the 11 roads.

According to sources at LGED office in Jashore, a contractor Shariful Islam was awarded the work of 3.71-km stretch of the Oilcup Bazar road from Kashimpur to Dighirpar areas under Sadar upazila. Only 60 percent of the work has been completed while the deadline expired on June 16, 2020.

Similarly, work on 1.76-km stretch of the road from Hudar Mor (intersection) to Hapania via Phulbari Police Camp in Sadar upazila was awarded to contractor Hanif Trading and Steel House. Only 60 percent work has been completed while deadline expired in November 2021.

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Contractor firm Nahid Enterprise was awarded the work for 1.70-km Sharshnadar-Bhabanipur road with a deadline till June 2024. Only 40 percent of the work has been completed.

Meanwhile, contractor firm Renu Enterprise could complete 60 percent of the work for 1.70-km Manoharpur Yojipara-Osmanpur road while the deadline expired in September 2024.

Similarly, roadwork remains incomplete

at different places along the Notunhat-Datapara road, Baladanga-Mathurapur road, the road stretching from Malanchi Cold Store to Arabpur union parishad, and the road from Basundia union parishad to Sebanandpur Kheyaghat.

Anand Biswas, owner of Renu Enterprise, said he expects to complete the work before upcoming Eid.

Abdur Rouf, owner of Nahid Enterprise, claimed that the work got suspended after political goons demanded extortion from him during the then Awami League government's tenure. He expressed hope to complete the work soon.

Chowdhury Mohammad Asif Reza, LGED engineer in Sadar upazila, blamed the contractors for their negligence in completing the work on the rural roads on time.

Contacted, Ahmed Mahbubur Rahman, executive engineer of LGED in Jashore, said they have already reached out to the concerned contractors and instructed them to complete their assigned work promptly within the current fiscal year.

"If these contractors do not resume the roadworks soon, their work orders will be cancelled and new tenders will be invited," he added.

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Contacted, Md Shihab Raihan, administrator of Tangail Municipality and also deputy director of the local government department in the district, said they are looking for a suitable place to construct a modern animal slaughterhouse. "I hope the municipality residents will be screened for health

history. "The people were the real heroes. We still don't fully know how places like Cumilla and Rangpur mobilised. Their version will complete the history," he said.

At the event, Law Adviser Asif Nazrul said the sacrifices of young activists had brought a unique opportunity for state reform.

"Such a moment may not come again in 50 years. The leaders of the uprising should now focus on restructuring the state," he added.

Book author Asif Mahmud urged for grassroots narratives to be included in documenting

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NEWS



Activists held a rally at Central Shaheed Minar in Dhaka yesterday, demanding a stop to violence against women and children across the country.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

A move to protect endangered wildlife

Satchhari National Park in Habiganj to be expanded by 600 hectares

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

A proposal to expand Satchhari National Park in Chunрагhat upazila of Habiganj by 600 hectares has been approved recently.

At present, the park covers a forest area of just 243 hectares, making it the smallest reserve forest in Bangladesh.

With the expansion, the park will have a total area of 843 hectares, allowing protection and preservation of its diverse ecosystem and some of the country's most critically endangered wildlife species, including bears, wild dogs, and different birds and other mammals.

According to the Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Department, the proposal was submitted by the Satchhari Co Management Committee, in collaboration with the Forest Department, and was recently approved by the Ministry of Forest, Environment, and Climate Change after extensive consultations with experts and a review of the park's current wildlife management needs.

"Located along the border with India's Tripura state, Satchhari National Park is a mixed evergreen forest surrounded by seven hillocks, with nine tea gardens nearby, including Satchhari Tea Garden to the west and Chaklapunji Tea Garden to the east. It is home to an impressive array of wildlife species, including nearly 200 avian species within a one-kilometre radius," said

Satchhari range officer Abdullah Al Mamun.

"The forest also shelters some of Bangladesh's most endangered species, including northern pig-tailed macaque, western hoolock gibbon, Phayre's langur, and barking deer, among others," he added.

Muntasir Akash, a zoologist and an assistant professor of Dhaka University, opined that the park's expansion is a critical move to

added.

The park is also home to around 28 species of reptiles and 10 species of amphibians, including the green pit viper, king cobra, python, and different species of frog. It also boasts a colourful array of 190 species of butterflies.

"Satchhari's current area is insufficient for wildlife management. Its expansion is expected to improve habitat quality, provide better food



protect the endangered species by allowing more available space for them while enhancing their conservation prospects.

Dr Inam Al Haque, founder of the Bangladesh Bird Club, said the forest is the only place in the country where such a high number of bird species can be found within a small area.

"As the forest grows, food sources will become more available, benefiting the bird population," he

sources, and ensure more secure movement for its wildlife," said Dr Jahangir Alam, divisional forest officer in Sylhet.

Tofazzal Sohel, general secretary of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolok's Habiganj unit, welcomed the decision, saying it will help protect the forest area, providing a safer environment for the animals' reproduction and movement, which is crucial for maintaining its rich biodiversity.

Teacher recruitment process to begin soon

Says adviser to Ministry of Primary and Mass Education
OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

The recruitment process for vacant teacher and officer positions in the primary education sector will begin soon, said Prof Bidhan Ranjan Roy Poddar, adviser to the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education.

He was inaugurating a training programme organised by the Directorate of Primary Education at the conference room of the Patuakhali Deputy Commissioner's (DC) office.

Teachers and officials must always remember that everything we do is aimed at ensuring quality education for children," the adviser said.

Regarding the transfer and posting of primary education teachers, he noted, "The government is working to make the teacher transfer process more transparent. The system has already been brought online to ensure fairness."

The event was presided

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

TANGAIL MUNICIPALITY Lack of animal screening threaten public health

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

Public health in Tangail is threatened due to a lack of screening of livestock and the absence of any dedicated slaughterhouse in the kitchen markets of the town.

Since the municipality and livestock department authorities have no effective mechanism of supervision, meat traders have been slaughtering animals unhygienically in the open, often on the roadsides in front of their shops.

There used to be a shed for slaughtering animals near Tangail stadium, which was abandoned following complaints by locals in 1988.

Tangail Municipality later built a smaller shed at the town's Park Bazar (market) for this purpose. However, when they started developing it further in 2012, the work had to be suspended over a land dispute between the municipality and the upazila Land Office.

Since then, animal slaughtering is being done by butchers at any place they consider convenient for them, ignoring concerns for public health.

According to rules, veterinary doctors from the Department of Livestock and inspectors from the municipality's sanitation department are supposed to inspect and issue health certification for all animals

before those are slaughtered.

The livestock department in Tangail said they do not have necessary personnel for the job, while the Tangail municipality authorities claimed their inspectors screen animals at the town markets every day.

"I inspect the animals at the markets daily to ensure that meat traders do not slaughter sick animals. However, it is a visual inspection since we do not have the necessary tools for the purpose," said Sohel Hossain Raju, butcher shop inspector of Tangail municipality.

Several meat traders at Park Market, however, said they never saw any inspectors where they slaughter animals.

A team of local journalists during a recent visit to different kitchen markets in Tangail town observed animals being slaughtered in front of the butchers' shops at the markets and on adjacent roads. "Without any dedicated

slaughterhouse or proper inspection of animals, consumers have no way of knowing what kind of meat they are buying or whether it is safe for consumption," said Rubel Hossain, a resident of Adalat Para.

"Besides not maintaining hygiene while slaughtering animals, the meat traders often display and sell mutton and beef side by side," said Sanjoy Saha, a shopper at Park Bazar.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

PROTEST AGAINST MISLEADING NEWS ABOUT MAX GROUP

Recently it has been noticed that misleading news are being published in several newspapers about the MAX Group. Reading these news stories filled with misinformation, it may seem that some domestic/foreign groups are involved in a conspiracy to unjustly destroy a successful local company like MAX. As a result of these misleading news, on the one hand, the business reputation of MAX Group has been tarnished while on the other hand, the people of the country have also been misled.

In this context, MAX Group strongly protests all news that is not factually accurate and truthful, and humbly submits actual, truthful and objective opinions for publication in the newspaper.

It is worth noting that MAX Group is a non-political commercial and professional organization. Since its establishment in 1984, MAX Group has been working consistently with hard work, dedication, and quality. All relevant domestic and foreign business organizations, international development partners, banking institutions, and relevant engineers are aware of this fact.

MAX Group established its first industrial plant in Manikganj in 1985 by setting up a factory to manufacture automobile parts (leaf springs). In 1990, it started manufacturing various fittings used in the construction of rail track lines in Noakhali. In 1997, engaged by the French company TSO-France as a subcontractor for the Jamuna Rail Bridge project, MAX began its journey of track construction work on the Jamuna Bridge. TSO of France played a key role in transforming MAX into a capable rail track construction company through its transfer of technology process and subsequently when TSO left the country, it sold all its specialized equipment to MAX back in year 2005.

Subsequently, by 2003, MAX Group was able to establish itself as an international standard rail track installation company by successfully executing two railway projects in Sylhet - Akhaura, awarded through International Competitive Bidding, in a joint venture with TSO-France.

During 2003-2005, MAX, engaged solely through International Competitive Bidding, executed the Laksam-Noakhali Railway Track Reconstruction, with a Contract value of Tk 72 crore, which was the first turnkey project tendered by the Bangladesh Railways and it was completed successfully.

In 2009, MAX established a state-of-the-art concrete sleeper manufacturing factory in Panchagarh, thereby gaining further qualification. By manufacturing various rail track fittings, steel bridge girders, and concrete sleepers in its own multiple factories, MAX emerged as a competitive bidder in any international tender for railway works.

Construction of any infrastructure, especially rail track construction, is a specialized sector, where to survive, a contractor has to work for a long time and gain competence, which is not possible in 2-5 years. Due to lack of adequate experience and qualifications, and due to lack of their own specialized construction equipment, many of the country's renowned companies have failed after facing losses when they came to work in mega infrastructure projects. But due to its extensive experience, specialized equipment and necessary qualifications, such did not happen in MAX's case, but rather its experience and qualifications increased day by day. MAX did not get any work without qualifications.

MAX not only specializes in track fitting, sleepers, wagons, ballast wagons and track construction works, but also possesses a working train with rail locomotive, that is essential for executing rail works. Additionally, it possesses specialized and expensive equipment, used only in rail works, such as tamping machine, flash butt welding machine, gang car etc. which are not available with most local companies and also not with many foreign companies as well. Accordingly, MAX has not become successful in the rail sector overnight but such success has come through long term planning, prudent investments in factories and equipment and dedicated work. Presently, MAX is not only the leading construction company in the railways sector but also has significant involvement and success in other infrastructure sectors of the country.

But, both publicly and privately, many people have been spreading baseless misinformation and rumors against MAX for a long time, which is why the news media is being misled.

MAX, both individually and in joint ventures with local and foreign companies, having been selected through international competitive bidding, based on its decades of hard-earned experience and qualifications, has successfully executed some of the most significant railway projects in the country. If the value of completed and ongoing projects of Bangladesh Railways from 2008 to 2024, executed by MAX solely/ as a joint venture/ as a local representative of a foreign company, is calculated, it can be seen that the total value of all such projects including the share of partners is approximately Tk 10,513 crore, out of which share of MAX is approximately Tk 6,378 crore. Therefore, the information that MAX has received work worth Tk 30,000 crore in the railways sector is completely wrong. Similarly, the information that MAX has received work worth Tk 60,000 crore in the development sector is also completely wrong and misleading.

Most of the projects awarded to MAX are projects mainly funded by internationally recognized development partners, where contractors are engaged through a legal international competitive bidding process, only after thorough evaluation of bidder qualifications are conducted jointly by the employer, development partner and highly technical and nationally and internationally acknowledged impartial consultancy firm. There is no scope for any influence or fraud in this complex process. In this context, all the allegations against MAX of getting work unethically, getting work despite not being qualified, or getting work through fraudulent practice or by dint of political assistance etc. are completely baseless.

In the last 25 years, the volume of work done by MAX in the railways sector has approximately been less than 15% of the total work in the railways sector, of which the foreign partners had the majority of the shares of work in the mega projects. It is worth noting that all these works were won by MAX through competitive tenders. Therefore, the information that MAX has done or won 90% of the work of the railways as mentioned in some media is completely wrong.

Regarding the news of the Tk 18,000 crore railways project from Dohazari in Chittagong to Cox's Bazar, in the project, excluding land acquisition and other costs, the construction work was carried out by two joint ventures of four companies, two Chinese and two local, namely CREC-Toma JV (Lot 1) and CCECC-MAX JV (Lot 2), through two separate contracts, with a total construction cost of approximately Tk 7,000 crore, out of which the value of work of MAX is estimated to be only Tk 2,000 crore. The information that the total Tk 18,000 crore value of the project has been executed by MAX is completely wrong.

MAX's name is being baselessly linked to some politically controversial individuals, which is completely false. MAX never had any business connection with them, but they have regularly harassed MAX in various ways. Due to the influence of these individuals and their associates in the last 10-15 years, despite being evaluated and approved as the lowest bidder by Technical Evaluation Committees, MAX was not awarded many projects worth an estimated Tk 4,000 crore. Thus, MAX has been subjected to political discrimination at every level, as a result of which, MAX has not been awarded any projects of Bangladesh Railways in the last five years, apart from one project worth Tk 50 crore.

The issue of experience and certificate of the Laksam-Chinki Astana project are being discussed in the wrong way. In compliance with Joint and Several Liability provisions and rules and regulations of the internationally recognized FIDIC contract and maintaining all process, 100% of the Laksam-Chinki Astana project was successfully completed by MAX, after thorough verification by Bangladesh Railway, international consultants and engineers at every step, and accordingly MAX acquired work-related experience and certifications with the full knowledge and acceptance of international development partners. MAX has, in its possession, written approval and declaration of acceptance, following the investigation of the international development partner in this regard.

Attainment of capability of Bangladeshi companies in executing government mega projects currently, including in the railways sector, instead of relying on foreign companies, should be applauded. However, instead, MAX's hard-earned certificate as a domestic contractor, which was completed 100% successfully, is being purposefully tarnished, which is both wrong and an obstacle to the development of domestic companies. If MAX was not capable enough, these projects would have been carried out by foreign companies in which case Bangladeshi manpower would have missed many domestic job opportunities and Bangladesh would have lost considerable GDP growth and government would have lost significant crones of money because of higher price.

Other countries have various mechanisms to protect and support their own country's contractors to increase their local capabilities. But today, after many years of sacrifice, struggle, skill and successful work, when MAX has established itself as a capable and strong contractor in the railways sector of Bangladesh, the success of MAX as a domestic company has become a cause of resentment for many, and they are spreading lies in the name of MAX, which at the end harms the country itself.

As of today, MAX has not defaulted on any loans and has no record of abandoning or unsuccessfully leaving any project incomplete. If a domestic company does significant work in the country's infrastructure sector, works competently, works successfully, and contributes to the livelihoods of thousands of families, facilitates the country's economic growth, keeps the country's money in the country, and provides employment for local engineers and other qualified professionals, ensures sustainable use of local technology, breaks free from dependency on foreigners and serves the country by increasing its own capabilities - upstanding citizens of the country should introspect deeply on whether such a company should be supported, or be maligned with false, fabricated and provocative propaganda to hinder its growth.

MAX Group Chairman, Engineer Golam Mohammad Alamgir, graduated from BUET in Mechanical Engineering in 1978 and has been working tirelessly for the past 45 years, gaining experience in jobs and business both at home and abroad. He has built one of the most renowned construction companies of the country and an industrial and diversified group, employing more than 400 engineers and almost 10,000 officials and employees, directly and indirectly. By the grace of Allah, the livelihood of about fifty thousand people, including their families, is being supported through the Max Group.

On the other hand, MAX Group is making a significant contribution to the state treasury by paying an estimated Tk 300-400 crore in VAT and taxes annually.

By not supporting such a successful local company and spreading lies against it, nothing good will be achieved for the country. We are saddened today, but we have not lost hope. We dream of a Bangladesh where everyone is busy in activities that are good for the country, beneficial for the people of the country, and necessary for the country's economic growth.

In conclusion, MAX denies all rumors and misinformation published in its name and strongly protests all misleading news being published. At the same time, MAX is humbly requesting all media outlets to refrain from publishing false news and any information that has not been independently verified.

MAX GROUP

The audience is in for a lot of surprises in 'Jinn 3': SHAJAL NOOR

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

After filming for 25 days across various locations, including Dhaka and several spots beyond the capital, Shajal Noor headed to Khulna on March 4 to wrap up the final phase of *Jinn 3*.

The actor shared that he had been suffering from a high fever, yet he joined the team because the film needs to be completed soon. "The shoot needs to be finished on time since our team is dedicated to getting the film released this upcoming Eid-ul-Fitr."

This Kamruzzaman Roman directorial project is the third instalment in the *Jinn* franchise, produced by Jaaz Multimedia. Although Shajal Noor appeared in the first film of the franchise, he did not appear in the second film. However, the actor will be seen leading this third instalment.

"I can assure the audience that they will be amazed by the film. It may primarily belong to the horror genre, but it is absolutely entertaining. This time

around, the story also includes a blend of action and romance," he added.

Shajal, moreover, explained that during their 25 day shoot schedule, every member of the unit began working at six in the morning and continued working long hours. "Everyone is putting a lot of effort into this project for long hours, but we are thoroughly enjoying it," shared the actor.

Commenting on his role in *Jinn 3*, Shajal said, "Portraying this character has been quite demanding, particularly during the horror sequences, which proved to be especially difficult to shoot. Having said that, the audience will be in for a lot of surprises in this film."

Nusraat Faria will star opposite Shajal in this film. Speaking about his co-star, he stated, "I am truly stunned by her commitment and perseverance in this project. She is a highly supportive co-star."



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSED

Nidra and Prantar to reunite on screen with 'Opekkha'



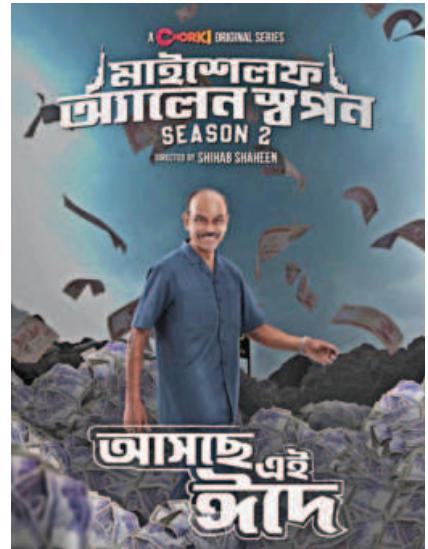
Following a significant break from collaborating, Nidra Neha and Prantar Dastidar are set to share the screen once again in *Opekkha*, a drama directed by Preety Dutta. The film is set to premiere on March 26 on the Purnota E-Tainment YouTube channel.

The duo first garnered attention with Goutam Koiri's *Antonagar*, a Chorki original that marked their acting debuts and sparked a real-life connection. Just months after the series premiered in June 2023, the duo tied the knot.

Since then, they've worked on ads but not in dramas or series. *Opekkha* marks their on-screen reunion.

In *Opekkha*, Prantar portrays a first-year university student who is exceptionally compassionate to others. In the process of helping someone, he encounters a girl, and their connection gradually strengthens.

Allen Swapan to return in new season



Shihab Shaheen's much-awaited series *Myself Allen Swapan 2* will be releasing this Eid ul-Fitr on Chorki.

The announcement video shows Allen Swapan in his signature safari suit, smiling amid scattered cash. Referring to the Tk 400 crore mystery from the first season, a voice in the Chittagonian dialect then demands, "Where is my 400 crore taka?" to which he replies, "Because of you all, I had to come out. I am Shamsur Rahman Swapan, aka Allen Swapan."

The first season of *Myself Allen Swapan* revolves around Swapan's transformation from a drug dealer in Chattogram to a key figure in money laundering.

In the upcoming season, his operations are likely to expand, and his methods may evolve as well.

WHAT'S THE HAPS?

'Late Night Comedy Show 5'

Get ready for a night of laughter as Naveed's Comedy Club presents *Late Night Comedy Show 5*. Featuring some of Dhaka's finest comedians—Shawon Mujumdar, Tareq Mahmud, Riaz Uddin, Bipro, Tahsin Khan, Yamin Khan, Alamin, and Tonoy—this special late-night show promises non-stop hilarity. Audiences can enjoy a stand-up comedy experience like no other, with food and soft beverages available on-site.

DATE: THURSDAY | MARCH 20

TIME: 11:59PM

VENUE: NAVEED'S COMEDY CLUB, HOUSE 2, ROAD 90, GULSHAN-2



Alia Bhatt to make her Cannes debut this year



Alia Bhatt has attained global attention with her striking appearances at the Met Gala. In 2024, she made her first-ever appearance at Paris Fashion Week. Now, the actress is set to debut at another prestigious event—the Cannes Film Festival.

During a recent press conference, Alia said she would attend the Cannes Film Festival this year and shared her excitement. However, she kept her response brief, stating, "I am looking forward to it."

The 78th Cannes International Film Festival is scheduled to be held from May 13 to 24, 2025.

Notable Indian celebrities who have been regular attendees include Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, Sonam Kapoor, and Deepika Padukone.

NEWS

HELP app to fight

FROM PAGE 12

"I strongly dislike the word 'rape'. I request you not to use it. Instead, use 'violence against women' or 'repression of women'. Even the law is called the 'Women and Children Repression [Prevention] Act'. Let's avoid words that sound unpleasant," he said.

He also urged the media to broadcast such incidents in a 'reasonable' way and refrain from repeatedly highlighting these to avoid creating panic or fear among the public.

Sajjad expressed concern over the rising incidents of harassment against women in the country.

"However, the number of cases reported in the media is only a fraction of what actually happens. Many cases go unreported due to social and familial pressures," he said.

"Domestic workers also face various forms of abuse, but 95 percent of these incidents go unreported," he added.

He suggested that if the app could directly report incidents to police stations, it could serve as a First Information Report (FIR), enabling law enforcement to take legal action and initiate investigations.

Sajjad also stressed the need to expand the initiative beyond the capital, assuring the project of DMP's support if required.

Speaking at the launch, Fawzia

Moslem, president of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, emphasised the need to highlight gender discrimination and harassment issues.

"To eliminate rape and violence, community involvement is essential. This app can play a significant role, and Mahila Parishad will extend its support," she said.

"In the media, women should be portrayed as human beings, not just as only women or victims," she added.

Mainul Ahsan Faisal, executive director of Switch Bangladesh, said that community awareness is a key part of the initiative, with school and college students being engaged to support the cause.

As part of the project, QR codes will be installed in buses on the Mohammadpur-Sayedabad route, allowing women to quickly access help. Discussions with transport owners are also underway to ensure the app's effectiveness.

BJC Member Secretary Elias Hossain said, "The alarming rise in sexual harassment incidents is concerning. Besides voicing protests, we have sought to offer a solution through the HELP app."

The event was presided over by BJC Chairman Rezwon Haque and moderated by BJC Executive Coordinator Shahnaz Sharmin.

CPB raises black flag

FROM PAGE 12

The activists gathered near Central Shaheed Minar in the morning and were about to begin the march.

Around the same time, activists of Inquilab Mancha, an organisation formed after the fall of Sheikh Hasina regime, gathered near Shahbagh and began marching towards Shaheed Minar, but were stopped by police.

Eventually both parties relented.

The leftist student organisations held a brief rally at the Shaheed Minar.

Raihan Uddin, general secretary of Bangladesh Samajtantrik Chhatra Front, demanded removal of the home adviser, justice for the July-August killings, and punishment to people who attacked mosques, temples, and shrines.

Mahir Shahriar Reza, president of a faction of Chhatra Union, said, "Although we gathered here for a pre-

announced programme, we decided to call it off considering the law and order situation.... We faced threats, attacks, and abductions in the last 16 years. We are not afraid of threats. We cancelled our event because many of the groups that collaborated with the Awami League are now trying to deteriorate the law and order situation."

On the other hand, Sharif Osman Bin Hadi, convener of Inquilab Mancha, said, "It is evident that the [other] gathering is part of a conspiracy."

Abdullah Al Jaber, member secretary of Inquilab Mancha, said, "Those who gathered at the Shaheed Minar today had not done so in the last 16 years."

In the name of demonstrations against rape, they intend to undermine Bangladesh's image at a time when the UN secretary general is in town, he told The Daily Star.

4 more land in jail over rape, rape attempt

STAR REPORT

At least four people were sent to jail, one was arrested, and two others were sued on rape and attempted rape charges in seven districts yesterday.

In Meherpur, a 45-year-old man was sent to jail yesterday in a case filed over the rape of his 20-year-old daughter in Gangni upazila.

The incident took place in the early hours of March 4, according to the case filed by the victim on March 15.

Her father was arrested on Friday night, said Bani Israel, officer-in-charge of Gangni Police Station.

In Bogura, a man was sued yesterday for raping two six-year-old girls in Kahaloo upazila.

According to the statement, the accused is Noor Islam, 40, and the victims are his neighbours living in a government's shelter project.

On March 12 morning, Noor lured the girls to his home and raped them there. The girls fell sick after returning home.

One of the victims' mothers filed a case yesterday morning, said Mahbubur Rahman, inspector (investigation) of Kahaloo Police Station.

Police are trying to arrest the accused, who went into hiding after the incident.

The girls are now undergoing treatment at a hospital.

In a separate incident, a court in Bogura sent a 33-year-old man to jail on Friday in a case filed over the rape of his 28-year-old niece at Shahjahanpur upazila, said Shahjahanpur Police Station OC Wadud Alam.

In Munshiganj, a man was sent to jail yesterday for stabbing a woman after failing to rape her.

Accused gives

FROM PAGE 12

condition and was later transferred to Faridpur Medical College Hospital.

On March 6, she was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital in an unconscious state. She was put on life support the next night.

When her condition deteriorated further, the child was transferred to the Combined Military Hospital in the capital March 8 afternoon where she died on March 13.

Putin will have to 'come to table'

FROM PAGE 12

Rubio said Friday he was "cautiously optimistic" about reaching a truce, but acknowledged there was "a lot of work that remains to be done".

The French president also demanded that Moscow stop its "acts of violence" in Ukraine.

Germany on Friday likewise criticised Putin's response to the US-proposed ceasefire in Ukraine as "at best a delaying tactic".

US Secretary of State Marco

Rubio said Friday he was "cautiously optimistic" about reaching a truce, but acknowledged there was "a lot of work that remains to be done".

Starmer has said he welcomes any offer of support for the coalition, raising the prospect that some countries could contribute logistics or surveillance.

But Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni reiterated after the call, which she joined, that Italy's "participation in a possible military force on the

ground is not envisaged".

British Commonwealth partners Canada, Australia and New Zealand have been involved in early talks and dialled into the summit.

Nato chief Mark Rutte and European Union chiefs von der Leyen and Antonio Costa also took part, along with the leaders of Germany, Spain, Portugal, Latvia, Romania, Turkey and the Czech Republic among others.

Shady firm took Tk 950cr from Islami Bank

FROM PAGE 1

office. When approached, he refused to provide any details about the company's operations or how it had managed to secure such a large loan.

Aminul denied any connection with Market Master Analyzer, saying if any of Nabil Group's 13,000 employees or one of his relatives takes a loan, it is not his responsibility. He asked the reporter to speak to the bank about the matter.

BANK OFFICIALS' ROLES

Islami Bank has become a glaring example of how a once-reputed financial institution was systematically exploited by influential groups.

A recent central bank inspection report reveals that S Alam Group and its close business associate, Nabil Group, took out a staggering 87 percent of the total loans from Islami Bank.

Most of these funds were allegedly siphoned through more than 100 shadow companies.

Central bank officials said if proper due diligence had been conducted, Market Master Analyzer would never have qualified for such a loan.

Mohammad Mozahidul Islam, the executive vice president of Islami Bank, was heading the Gulshan-1 branch when the loans were disbursed. He has since been transferred to the Foreign Exchange Corporate Branch in Dilkusha.

The other accused included former Islami Bank chairman

When contacted, he said he had just followed the bank management's instructions and declined to comment further.

Three senior Islami Bank officials agreed to speak to The Daily Star on the condition of anonymity. They said Islami Bank's managing director, Mohammed Monirul Moula, personally instructed the branch manager over the phone to approve the loan immediately. As a result, the loan was processed hastily, bypassing standard verification procedures.

The Daily Star attempted to contact Monirul multiple times via phone and WhatsApp messages, but he did not respond.

This correspondent also visited Islami Bank's head office in Motijheel several times over the past month to meet Monirul but was unsuccessful.

Nazrul Islam, head of brand and communication at Islami Bank, was asked to facilitate an appointment with the managing director for comment. The spokesman said the managing director had not met with the media since the political changeover in August last year.

Monirul was among 58 people prosecuted by the Anti-Corruption Commission in December last year for allegedly embezzling Tk 1,092 crore through fraudulent loan schemes.

The other accused included former Islami Bank chairman

Ahsanul Alam and members of the S Alam family.

Meanwhile, Nabil Group is among 10 leading business groups under investigation by a joint task force.

The Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit has frozen the bank accounts of Nabil Group's Aminul and his family members as part of the investigation.

Hours after detention

FROM PAGE 12

handed him over to us on March 11 as his name was found in a murder case. We produced him before the court the same day, but he got bail."

The suspect was undergoing treatment at a hospital, from where a DB team detained him, he told this paper.

Contacted, the Inter Services Public Relations Directorate (ISPR) said, "It is not our issue as he was detained by an army team a long time ago, handed over to the police, and subsequently granted bail."

A local trader from Mohammadpur area said Ezaz was a close associate of top criminal Emon and was involved in different criminal activities.

Victim's father, Shah Alam, refuted this. "My

'Surrender'

Putin tells Ukraine troops; Zelensky denies troops surrounded in Kursk

AGENCIES

President Vladimir Putin has called for beleaguered Ukrainian troops in the Russian region of Kursk to "surrender" as Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky accused the Russian leader of seeking to sabotage a ceasefire initiative.

US President Donald Trump urged Putin to spare the lives of the Ukrainian troops as he said his envoy had held "productive" talks with Russia's leader on a proposed 30-day ceasefire.

Russia has mounted a rapid counteroffensive in the western border region of Kursk over the past week, recapturing much of the territory Ukraine seized in a shock incursion last August.

Defeat in Kursk would be a major blow to Ukraine's plans to use its hold on the region as a bargaining chip in peace talks for the three-year-old war.

"We are sympathetic to President Trump's call," Putin said in remarks broadcast on Russian television.

"If they lay down their arms and surrender, they will be guaranteed life and dignified treatment," Putin said.

Trump said "thousands" of Ukrainian troops were "completely surrounded by the Russian military, and in a very bad and vulnerable position".

However, Zelensky yesterday denied his troops were encircled in Russia's Kursk region, where Moscow has regained swathes of land this week.

Zelensky has acknowledged that the situation in the Kursk area is "very difficult" for Ukraine, but contradicted Trump's comments.

"There is no encirclement of our troops," he said on social media, adding that: "Our troops continue to hold back Russian and North Korean groupings in the Kursk region."

Kyiv had hoped to use the Russian territories as a bargaining chip in any negotiations to end the more than three-year conflict.

The UK yesterday hosted a virtual summit on how to protect any



ceasefire in Ukraine, but Zelensky warned that Moscow was intent on "prolonging the war" and "ignoring diplomacy."

He also accused Moscow of amassing troops on the border with "an intention to attack our Sumy region" -- attacked by Moscow at the start of its 2022 invasion but since spared the worst of the fighting seen in other eastern regions.

Putin had this week not committed to an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine proposed by the US, instead putting forward conditions and raising "serious questions" about the idea.

The Kremlin has hailed its troops ousting Ukrainian forces from swathes of the Kursk region, with Moscow yesterday releasing images of a destroyed centre in Sudzha -- the main town occupied by Ukrainian forces for months.

The Russian defence ministry said troops took control over the villages of Zaoleshenka and Rubanshchina -- north and west of Sudzha.

Sudzha was home to around 6,000 people before fighting began and Ukraine had set up a military administration there after its shock August 2024 incursion.

The Russian defence ministry's footage showed heavily destroyed houses and shops, with rubble and broken glass on the streets, and some Russian flags flying.

The acting governor of the Kursk region, Alexander Khinstein, said Russia had evacuated 275 civilians from areas it had regained since Wednesday.

Russia had also deployed almost 200 firefighters to help put out a fire at an oil depot caused by a Ukraine drone strike in the southern Krasnodar region, authorities said.

The governor of the Krasnodar region Veniamin Kondratyev said in the early hours of Saturday that a petrol reserve station in the Black Sea city of Tuapse was "attacked by the Kyiv regime."

Elsewhere on the front, Zelensky claimed the situation around the eastern city of Pokrovsk -- which Russian troops have tried to capture for months -- had "stabilised."

Ukrainian officials also said the number of wounded from a Russian strike a day earlier on Zelensky's hometown Kryvyi Rih rose to 14.

Power, fertiliser subsidies to balloon

FROM PAGE 1
from raising power prices while also dealing with large arrears carried over from Sheikh Hasina's administration," said a finance ministry official informed with the proceedings.

At the end of last year, the power and fertiliser arrears hit Tk 49,128 crore, requiring the government to issue special bonds to clear the dues. The interim government has so

far cleared Tk 12,542 crore in arrears through special bonds.

The interim government that took over in August last year refrained from raising power prices due to high inflation, which has remained above 9 percent since March 2023.

The previous government had planned to adjust electricity prices three to four times a year as part of its strategy to reduce subsidies,

but eventually backed off amid concerns among the people and industry owners.

Officials of the current government have indicated that if inflation drops below 6.5 percent, they may begin gradual price adjustments to reduce the subsidy burden.

Additionally, the government is expanding the production-sharing contract framework to attract investment in oil and gas

exploration.

Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modelling (SANEM), said the government should find ways to make power production more cost-effective and remove the fuel tax to reduce the subsidy burden.

Power generation in Bangladesh is significantly costlier than in other countries in the region,

making subsidy reductions difficult without addressing inefficiencies in the sector, said Raihan, also a professor at Dhaka University's economics department.

Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said, "There were many reasons the subsidy rose. One of them is rising import costs and another is institutional inefficiency."

In the power sector, the government estimates that it can save as much as Tk 11,444 crore in the current fiscal year by reducing production costs by 10 percent.

Bangladesh aims to shift from oil-based to gas-based electricity generation, a move expected to cut production costs and reduce dependency on subsidies in the long run.

Aid to Rakhine via Bangladesh can help

FROM PAGE 1
humanitarian assistance to more than a million Rohingyas sheltered in Cox's Bazar. Most of them fled violence in Myanmar in 2017.

Not a single Rohingya volunteered to return to Rakhine since then. Amid recent escalation of conflicts between the Myanmar military and Arakan Army, nearly one lakh more Rohingyas arrived in Bangladesh.

The crisis has deepened with the WFP reducing monthly food aid from \$12.5 to \$6 starting next month as the USAID has drastically reduced the funding globally under the Trump administration.

Just on Saturday, WFP warned that 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.

The cuts will also impact almost 100,000 internally displaced people, including Rohingyas, in central Rakhine who will have no access to food without WFP assistance, reports AFP.

According to diplomatic sources, the UN has been seeking to send humanitarian aid to Rakhine through Bangladesh amid a fear of famine-like situation there as was reported by the UNDP in November last year.

The report titled "Rakhine: A Famine in the Making" said Rakhine is on the verge of an unprecedented disaster due to a combination of interlinked issues.

"Restrictions

goods entering Rakhine, both internationally and domestically, have led to a severe lack of income, hyperinflation, and significantly reduced domestic food production.

Essential services and a social safety net are almost non-existent, leaving an already vulnerable population at risk of collapse in the coming months," it read.

The report said Rakhine's economy has almost stopped functioning. Critical sectors such as trade, agriculture, and construction are at a standstill. Export-oriented, agro-based livelihoods are disappearing as markets become inaccessible due to blockades.

Predictions indicate that by

food production will only cover 20 percent of the needs. Combined with the near-total halt of trade, over 2 million people are at risk of starvation.

Against this backdrop, the UN, at the request of Bangladesh, is going to hold a high-level meeting on the Rohingya issue later this year, considering that the Rohingya had become a forgotten crisis.

Asked about the possibility of a humanitarian corridor through Bangladesh, Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain said, "This is more of an operational matter which we will of course deal with the local [UN] offices."

About the role of the Arakan Army in Rakhine repatriation, Guterres said,

"We know that in the past, the relations between the

Rakhine and the Rohingya communities were not easy, and so, I think it's important to engage the Arakan Army in order for the full respect of the rights of the Rohingya population in Rakhine."

He added that sanctions are a possible instrument against Myanmar, but it is difficult to obtain a UN Security Council approval for sanctions in relation to Myanmar.

Chief Adviser's Press Secretary in a Facebook post on March 13 said in light of the dire humanitarian situation in Rakhine State, Bangladesh will positively consider supporting UN-led humanitarian assistance to the state.

About the matter, Prof Sk Tawfiq M Haque,

Institute of Policy and Governance at North South University, said any such humanitarian corridor will need approval from the UN Security Council.

"The challenge here is to have the approval from there, because China, as a veto power, may not want this because it does not want a multilateral involvement in Myanmar," he said.

Besides, a ceasefire between the Myanmar military and Arakan Army is needed, he said.

"At the same time, who will ensure security of the humanitarian corridor is a major question. If all these issues are addressed, there can definitely be such a corridor, not otherwise," he added.



This photo taken yesterday shows an injured civilian being carried following aerial bombardments by Myanmar's military in Singu Township in central Myanmar's Mandalay Region. Myanmar has been gripped by civil war following a 2021 military coup, plunging it into what the United Nations describes as a "polycrisis" of mutually compounding conflict, poverty and instability.

PHOTO: AFP

Israeli strikes kill 9 in northern Gaza

Journalists among dead; Hamas slams 'blatant violation' of ceasefire

AFP, Gaza City

Gaza's civil defence agency said nine people including journalists were killed in Israeli strikes in the north yesterday, an attack Hamas denounced as a "blatant violation" of the fragile ceasefire.

"Nine martyrs have been transferred (to hospital), including several journalists and a number of workers from the Al-Khair Charitable Organisation, as a result of the occupation targeting a vehicle with a drone in the town of Beit Lahia, coinciding with artillery shelling on the same area," civil defence spokesman Mahmoud Bassal told AFP.

The health ministry in the Hamas run Palestinian territory reported that "nine martyrs and several injured, including critical cases, have arrived at the Indonesian Hospital in northern Gaza Strip, due to the ongoing Israeli aggression".

In a statement, the Israeli military said it struck "two terrorists... operating a drone that posed a threat to IDF troops in the area of Beit Lahia".

"Later, a number of additional terrorists collected the drone operating equipment and entered a vehicle. The IDF struck the terrorists," it added.

After the strikes, Hamas accused Israel of violating the Gaza truce deal.

"The occupation (Israel) has committed a horrific massacre in the northern Gaza Strip by targeting a group of journalists and humanitarian workers, in a blatant violation of the ceasefire agreement," Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said in a statement.



The director of Hamas affiliated media in Gaza, Ismail Thawabteh, told AFP that local photo journalists were killed while "using a drone to capture images of a Ramadan dining table in Beit Lahia".

He said they were "directly targeted by the occupation in two air strikes, despite their work being clear".

Israel has carried out near-daily air strikes in Gaza since early March, often targeting what the military said were militants planting explosive devices.

The truce in Israel's war with Hamas, in effect since January 19, has largely held despite the attacks and with no agreement yet on extending the ceasefire.

The first phase of the truce ended on March 1, but both Israel and Hamas have refrained from returning to all-out war.

Hamas yesterday said that "the ball is in Israel's court" after offering to release an Israeli-US hostage and return the bodies of four others as part of Gaza truce talks.

Canada will never be part of US: PM

AFP, Ottawa

Canada's new Prime Minister Mark Carney on Friday launched his term in office with a whole-hearted rejection of US President Donald Trump's repeated threats to annex his northern neighbor.

Shortly after he was sworn in as Canada's 24th prime minister, replacing Justin Trudeau who has been in office since 2015, Carney said confronting Trump's tariffs would be a top priority.

Canada "will never, ever, in any way, shape or form, be part of the United States," he added, while voicing hope his government could one-day work together with Washington to advance both countries' interests.

Officials said they were looking to set up a call between Trump and Carney in the coming days.

Ottawa has been rattled by collapsing cross-border relations since Trump returned to power in January, launching a trade war and demanding that Canada surrender its independence to become the 51st US state.

Ottawa has retaliated against Trump's tariffs, while Canadian public opinion has been outraged as the US president insists the border separating the countries should be erased.

Carney has characterized the Trump administration as the greatest challenge Canada has faced in a generation, and US tariffs on Canadian goods unjustified. He became prime minister after overwhelmingly winning a Liberal Party vote to replace Trudeau as leader.

US expels 'Trump-hater' S African ambassador

AFP, Washington

The US decision to expel South Africa's ambassador was "regrettable," the office of the South African president said yesterday, after Washington's top diplomat accused the envoy of hating America and President Donald Trump.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Friday that South Africa's ambassador, Ibrahim Rasool, was "no longer welcome" in the United States.

Rasool is "a race-baiting politician who hates America and hates @POTUS," Rubio posted on X, referring to Trump by his White House X account handle.

"We have nothing to discuss with him and so he is considered PERSONA NON GRATA."

The expulsion of the ambassador -- a very rare move by the United States -- is the latest development in rising tensions between Washington and Pretoria. Trump in February froze US aid to South Africa, citing a law in the country that he alleges allows land to be seized from white farmers.

Ph.D. Degree Awarded



Mohammad Abdul Aziz has been awarded Ph.D. degree from the University of Dhaka. The Syndicate meeting held in 25.02.2025 decided to award this degree to Mr Aziz. The title of his thesis was "Budgetary Process and Control in Bangladesh Police". He joined in this program at 24.12.2018 bearing registration number 15/2018-2019 under the supervision of Dr. Riazur Rahman Chowdhury, Professor of Accounting & Information Systems department. He belongs to 24th BCS (Police) batch. He is working at Police Headquarters as Assistant Inspector General (AIG) now Additional DIG of Bangladesh Police. He has the experience of working at United Nations Peace Keeping Missions for two times as Police Advisor and formed police unit at Darfur, Sudan. Besides, he did post-graduation on Business and Financial Economics from the University of Greenwich at London in the United Kingdom. His wife Amina Afroz Jami is a banker and they have one daughter Areeba Adreeta, and son Areeq Ahyam. He hailed from the village Fulbaria under sadar upazila of Brahmanbaria district.

World must not forget the Rohingya

UN chief's call to the international community is heartening

We welcome the UN Secretary-General António Guterres' call to the international community to increase funding for the Rohingya living in refugee camps in Bangladesh. Mentioning that the Rohingya are on the verge of a deep humanitarian crisis caused by global aid cuts, the UN chief rightly emphasised the international community's obligation to support them. As the UN chief and Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus addressed a large gathering of Rohingya refugees at a camp in Cox's Bazar's Ukhia on Friday and shared iftar with them, he also expressed hope for the safe and dignified return of over one million Rohingya currently stranded in Bangladesh.

The Rohingya refugees living in camps face growing uncertainty as their food rations are being cut due to global funding shortages. The World Food Programme is reportedly reducing its monthly rations from \$12.5 to \$6 per person starting in April 2025. In 2024, only \$554 million—65 percent of the required funds—was provided for these over one million refugees. With the announced cuts in financial assistance, the situation will become even more dire this year. A previous round of ration cuts in 2023, which reduced food rations to \$8 per month, led to a sharp increase in hunger and malnutrition. Hence, if monthly food rations are further reduced to \$6—approximately Tk 24 per day—it could push the Rohingya refugees to the brink of starvation and even death. Reportedly, nearly 50 percent of the total humanitarian assistance for the Rohingya comes from the US government. Therefore, cuts in US funding will have disastrous consequences for them.

Bangladesh has generously shared its land, forests, limited water, and scarce resources with the refugees. However, it largely depends on humanitarian aid to meet their basic needs, including food, education, and healthcare. If these fundamental rights for the Rohingya population cannot be guaranteed due to funding shortages, tensions within the camps are likely to escalate, potentially leading to increased violence, criminal activity, drug trafficking, and other issues. Therefore, we hope the UN chief's call to increase funding for the Rohingya will awaken the global conscience.

The Rohingya refugees cannot remain stuck in limbo forever. Bold and decisive global action is needed to secure a sustainable future for them. To ensure this, the UN and the global community must prioritise the Rohingya issue. They must put pressure on Myanmar to create conditions for the voluntary, safe, and sustainable return of the Rohingya. Until that can be ensured, the international community must step forward with financial assistance. Bangladesh, despite facing many challenges, has done everything in its capacity to support the Rohingyas. It's time for the world to do its part.

Properly implement rape trial reforms

Special tribunals need supporting components to deliver timely justice

As protests demanding justice for the rape and murder of an eight-year-old girl in Magura continue, discussions to expedite rape trials have duly been on the table. Last week, the law adviser mentioned cutting the investigation and trial procedure time by half. Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Judicial Service Association (BJS) has called for the establishment of 200 more Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunals. Currently, 101 Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunals are handling cases of violence against women and children across the country, with each one having, on average, around 1,500 cases pending.

Twenty-five years ago, under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000, authorities began setting up special tribunals to ensure speedy trials—to be completed within six months. Yet, more than 33,000 cases have been pending in these tribunals for over five years because there is often a lack of a support system to ensure the completion of trials within the stipulated time. As mentioned in this column before, challenges lie in several areas, including the thorough investigation of rape and other cases of violence against women (VAW), the availability of dedicated and well-equipped investigation cells, female police personnel in every police station to handle VAW cases, and inadequate forensic laboratories. In addition, interference or intimidation by influential quarters and the lack of proper incentives for police, prosecutors, and others involved in the legal process hinder the timely completion of trials.

Setting up 200 more tribunals would undoubtedly help ease the pressure, but an in-depth assessment of the current tribunals is required to identify the loopholes that cause bottlenecks in pending cases. Additionally, the digitalisation of the entire procedure—from case filing to evidence gathering to trial—must be implemented to ensure transparency and empower the complainant/victim to track the status of the case, understand reasons for any delays, and demand remedies if necessary. A commission is also needed to probe sexual harassment and physical and sexual violence against women and children, along with policies to reintegrate and rehabilitate survivors and ensure their protection through the establishment of more victim shelters. Finally, we need to address the social, cultural, and other traditional excuses that are used to condone such violence and eradicate toxic patriarchal norms that enable perpetrators.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

US commits May Lai Massacre



On this day in 1968, during the Vietnam War, US soldiers killed as many as 500 unarmed villagers in a Vietnamese village My Lai, which they considered to be a stronghold of the Viet Cong.

EDITORIAL

RTI Act is on life support

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Right to Information (RTI) Act in Bangladesh is in danger. We have had no information commissioner to implement the RTI Act for six months. Now, another ominous development looms large—the suspension and likely termination of US government-funded projects in the country following executive orders of US President Donald Trump. RTI projects are included.

However, this allows the nation to reflect on and act upon open governance, the main objective of RTI law. This is of such tremendous national importance that its advancement should not depend upon foreign funding. As the prime movers of the law, citizens of the country have kept it alive since its adoption 16 years ago. Alternative arrangements must be found for them to continue this important task.

Our youth who spearheaded the July 2024 uprising in the country, bringing new hope for the people, can use RTI to further their objectives. The formation of the new National Citizens Party (NCP) by them raises hope. Their commitment to the law may inspire other political parties—which have shown little or no interest so far—to follow suit.

Transparency in public officials' work and responsiveness towards citizens, which enhances their accountability and acceptance, are essential features of good governance. Let us discuss some ways RTI empowers citizens to seek relevant information from public officials, strengthening our democracy.

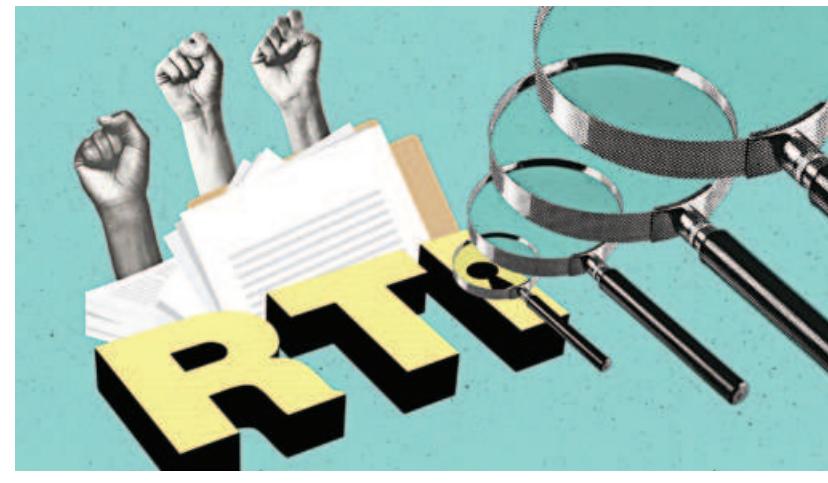
RTI and people's participation in governance

The basic premise of democratic governance is citizens' participation in its various processes. In representative democracy, citizens choose their representatives every four to five years through the election process. After that, they have little say in their representatives' responsibilities. The RTI Act allows them to engage in the governance process on a day-to-day basis, thereby allowing them to participate in governance matters. They use the law to monitor the activities of public officials and check if they are performing their duties

with honesty and due diligence. The law obliges the latter to be responsive to citizens' requests for information. Election law and the RTI law are thus the two main pillars of democracy complementing each other.

RTI enhances people's access to governance mechanisms

Citizens' participation in the governance process is best served by their easy access to public offices, and RTI ensures such access. Using this law, citizens obtain information related to government documents,



FILE VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

services, policies, financial activities, legal rights, schemes related to governance, etc. The knowledge they receive provides a basis for participating in governance matters.

RTI and transparency

Transparency in government work, a key objective of the RTI Act 2009, is also an essential feature of good governance. RTI ensures that public authorities operate more openly by granting citizens the legal right to seek information from them and serve as watchdogs. Citizens have used the law to uncover discrepancies in school management and many infrastructure projects where funds were allocated but not appropriately utilised. Many local communities have held school administrations accountable by obtaining budget reports, expenditure details, and the functioning of school managing committees.

their constitutionally recognised ownership of all powers of the land. They can make informed decisions on governance matters by utilising relevant information, including accurate data.

RTI and combatting corruption

A particular goal of the RTI Act is to deter corruption by exposing malfeasance. It serves as a tool to uncover and reveal information on corruption, which is the first step to fighting it and building an accountable system. In 2019, a farmer from Dinajpur sought information on government agricultural subsidies after he failed to access them despite repeated efforts. His RTI application revealed that the subsidies were diverted to non-farmers with political connections. The exposure led to corrective measures.

RTI and equality

Non-discrimination, equality, and inclusiveness are critical to establishing

good governance and strengthening democracy. The RTI Act gives every citizen an equal opportunity to use the law and participate in the government's decision-making process. One of the most successful beneficiary groups of the RTI Act in the country is marginalised communities, who have used the law to obtain their rightful entitlements from the various safety net programmes of the country.

RTI and gender

The RTI Act has played an essential role in empowering citizens, especially women, to challenge systemic gender disparities and foster gender equality. After a media report in 2023 disclosed that pregnant and married female students were barred from staying in student dormitories, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) filed RTI requests to 38 public universities seeking their policies on such students. This revealed inconsistencies and discriminatory practices against female students. Based on this, BLAST filed a public interest litigation to the High Court. The court questioned the legitimacy of such discriminatory policies and directed universities to reconsider their regulations.

RTI and journalism

Journalists worldwide regularly use RTI as an investigative tool to access crucial information from public development projects. In one such example from Bangladesh, a journalist from Dinajpur utilised the RTI Act to uncover a counterfeiting scheme involving fake stamps. His efforts led to the revocation of licenses of fraudulent vendors and implementation of a strict monitoring system, thereby safeguarding government revenue and public trust.

Much of the last 16 years since the passing of the RTI law has been spent under autocratic rule. This is one reason citizens lacked trust in the government's commitment to the law. Under the changed circumstances now, we hope the law will receive the attention and support of the interim government and the governments to come to play an essential role in strengthening democracy and people's participation in governance. Given the tremendous value of the law in promoting these objectives, the interim government would do well by setting a precedent of engaging citizen groups, including NGOs, in implementing the RTI Act. However, the first thing to do is fill the three information commissioners' posts without further delay.

Global aid cuts must not hinder women's empowerment



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SM FARIDUL HAQUE

As the world prepares to celebrate International Women's Day (IWD) 2025, a looming crisis threatens to stall progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment. The recent decision by USAID to halt funding for global development interventions, coupled with significant cuts in development cooperation budgets by governments of Switzerland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, poses a severe challenge to countries like Bangladesh, where external funding has played a critical role in advancing women's rights, economic inclusion, and social mobility.

These funding reductions come at a time when Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in gender parity. However, this progress is fragile, and without sustained financial support, many of the initiatives that have driven these achievements could face setbacks.

Historically, Bangladesh has benefited from international donor support for women's empowerment programmes in areas such as education, health, economic participation, and political representation. Initiatives like USAID's Women's Global Development and Prosperity Initiative (W-GDP), UK Aid's Girls' Education Challenge, and the Netherlands' support for sexual and reproductive health programmes have been instrumental in reducing gender disparities. The sudden withdrawal or reduction of these funds raises several concerns:

Challenges in combating gender-based violence

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 52 percent of ever-married women have experienced some form of domestic violence. Programmes providing legal aid, safe shelters, and awareness campaigns—many of which depend on donor support—may struggle to sustain their services. This could lead to increased vulnerability for women facing abuse.

Health and reproductive rights under threat

Maternal mortality in Bangladesh has significantly declined, from 574

deaths per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 163 in 2020 (UNICEF, 2023). Donor-supported interventions, including reproductive health services, access to contraceptives, and maternal care, have been key contributors. With reduced funding, access to these life-saving services could be compromised, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

Given these challenges, Bangladesh must find alternative ways to sustain and accelerate progress in women's empowerment. The following strategies could help mitigate the impact of funding cuts:

Strengthening domestic resource mobilisation

The government must increase its budget allocation for gender-responsive programmes. Currently, only 29 percent of the national budget directly contributes to gender equality initiatives (Ministry of Finance, 2023). This needs to be expanded.

Encouraging private sector and philanthropic contributions

Bangladesh's private sector, particularly the garment industry, contributes 84 percent of total export earnings and employs nearly four million women. Companies can play a greater role in funding women's empowerment programmes, such as workplace childcare facilities, maternity benefits, and leadership training for female workers. Additionally, engaging philanthropic organisations and local businesses in corporate social responsibility initiatives can help bridge funding gaps.

Expanding microfinance and social enterprises

Microfinance institutions have empowered millions of women entrepreneurs. Scaling up such initiatives, alongside government-backed financial inclusion programmes, can provide alternative pathways for women's economic independence. Digital financial services also offer

new opportunities to expand access to credit and savings for women in remote areas.

Leveraging technology and innovation

E-learning platforms, mobile health services, and digital marketplaces can help sustain education, health, and economic participation for women. For example, Aponjon, a mobile-based maternal health service, has reached millions of women with vital pregnancy and postnatal care information.

Strengthening South-South cooperation

Bangladesh can collaborate with other Global South nations to share best practices, expertise, and resources in gender-responsive policies. Partnerships with regional organisations such as SAARC, ASEAN, and BRICS could open avenues for funding and technical assistance beyond traditional Western donors.

The funding cuts by USAID and other donors signal a worrying trend that could impact gender equality efforts worldwide. The UN estimates that achieving gender equality by 2030 requires an annual investment of \$360 billion—a goal that seems increasingly difficult without sustained global financing. Low- and middle-income countries, including Bangladesh, may face setbacks in their efforts to close the gender gap if alternative funding strategies are not pursued.

However, this crisis also presents an opportunity for countries to become more self-reliant and innovative in addressing gender disparities. While external funding has played a vital role, true gender equality must be driven by national commitment, local ownership, and sustainable financing mechanisms.

The road ahead may be challenging, but with strategic action and collective efforts, Bangladesh can ensure that its women's empowerment agenda remains unwavering, resilient, and forward-looking—regardless of global financial fluctuations.

How Bangladesh can recover its stolen assets



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Bangladesh is now in the midst of a major push to recover assets stolen and "smuggled" out of the country. Estimates vary, but there is clear evidence that political operatives and their cronies have in the last quarter of a century pocketed money illegally from government projects, foreign investment, government deals, and export-import business.

Prof Yunus, the chief adviser of the interim government (IG) in Bangladesh, has prioritised the recovery of assets stolen by the previous regime. During a recent meeting, he sought the assistance of attorney Toby Cadman, an internationally known criminal lawyer, in the investigation and pursuance of asset recovery. *The Daily Star* reported on their recent discussions: "Another major point of discussion was the seizure of stolen assets by the previous regime, and the legal and procedural measures needed to recover and repatriate these assets."

While the exact magnitude is still to be verified, knowledgeable sources have provided detailed accounts of the key personalities involved in what may be characterised as robbery.

The Bangladesh Bank governor confirmed recently that the government is on track to bring back money that was laundered from Bangladesh. All assets of the S Alami Group have already been seized to recover the money stolen from the banks. The governor also said 12 oligarchs who looted money from banks have been identified. These include the Hallmark Group, Destiny Group, Bismillah Group, AnnonTex, Regent Hospital, NRB Global Bank, and Beximco.

"We are taking the help of foreign experts to find out how they took the money. Efforts are being made to bring back the laundered money in accordance with international protocols," the governor added.

How do we recover this money, and how many years would that take? The IG has set up a task force chaired by the Bangladesh Bank governor. The White Paper on the economy

offers a short list of policy measures. First, the government must act immediately to have agreements with the UAE, India, China, EU, US, and Singapore to deal with Trade-Based Money Laundering. Secondly, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) was advised to seek support from overseas legal experts and firms specialising in stolen asset recovery to support reforms and capacity building of Bangladesh's relevant institutions such as ACC, Financial Intelligence Unit, Criminal Investigation Department, National Board of Revenue, and the Attorney General's Office.

Independent research by Transparency International shows that most entities and personalities involved in the "megasteal" are affiliated with former AL and BNP governments. The major megasteal cases are the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, Karnaphuli Tunnel, and the Padma Bridge Rail Link. Add to that the six other communications and infrastructure projects identified by a task force that studied megaprojects and uncovered embezzlement, bribery, false declarations and mispricing, including land speculation relating to extensive borrowing from commercial banks.

The IG and the stakeholders all have acknowledged that the timeline for the asset recovery will be lengthy and require the tenacity of Sherlock Holmes. One of the more successful international cases of asset recovery in recent times is the Malaysian IMDB scandal. The IMDB scandal was initially covered up by the Malaysian government. The lessons and pointers that we can take away from the IMDB case are:

- 1) Public disclosure
- 2) International cooperation
- 3) Better enforcement
- 4) Due diligence and proactive implementation of comprehensive anti-money laundering (AML) compliance frameworks

In the past decade, the value of "public disclosure" or transparency has been amply

illustrated by the Panama Papers, Pandora Papers, and Paradise Papers leaks. In these instances, documents exposed offshore financial dealings of wealthy and influential people. The money stolen from Bangladesh and laundered abroad has been moved to different countries under different names and invested in innumerable accounts. However, the key to recovering these assets is due diligence and perseverance.

any other professional enabler in the EU.

In addition, as I already mentioned earlier, resources of the EU, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the World Bank's Star initiative, Financial Action Task Force, and the US Justice Department must be utilised ("The path to recovering our stolen assets," *The Daily Star*, December 22, 2024).

Finally, the IG must frequently update the list. Every day, new details emerge on

her son Sajeeb Wazed Joy, and niece Tulip Siddiq in financial crimes through various offshore bank accounts in Malaysia. They were also involved in an elaborate scheme to launder money that involved her paternal uncle Tarique Ahmed Siddique. "Tulip Siddiq and her family members are stakeholders in a company named Prochchaya which along with another entity Destiny Group had laundered \$900 million," as reported in the



FILE VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

Indian daily, *The Hindu*.

The Bangladesh experience underscores the pressing need for unwavering diligence and proactive implementation of comprehensive AML compliance frameworks, particularly robust AML compliance programmes, to safeguard the integrity of our financial system. The history of Bangladesh stands as a testament to the pivotal role AML compliance programmes play in fortifying financial institutions against the insidious threat of money laundering.

The government has already identified the key culprits and initiated considerable initiatives to track down the money and manage the recovery: track, freeze, seize, and recover these assets or TFSR. According to *The Sunday Times*, the National Crime Agency, Britain's equivalent to the USFBI, has indicated its willingness to help Bangladesh recover certain assets. The IG must push the EU to impose sanctions against those who have enabled any misappropriation of assets from Bangladesh, whether this be lawyers or

the various financial deals carried out by the former prime minister and her family.

Former UK minister Tulip Siddiq faces fresh

questions after videos emerged of her with an official delegation from Bangladesh at the

signing of a billion-dollar arms deal and the

Rooppur Power Plant. The Bangladeshi High

Court heard claims that the British minister

may have helped Hasina "broker" the mega-

billion dollar deal for Rooppur by the Russian

state-backed company, Rosatom.

Another report implicates the former PM,

Professor Yunus's government: Are we blaming the victim?



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gripped the whole country, especially following February 17, when a bus traveling from Dhaka to Rajshahi faced robbery, followed by the alleged rape of at least one woman, on the Dhaka-Tangail highway. As the news surfaced on electronic and print portals, the nation cringed in fear and repulsion. BBC (Bangla) followed up on the news immediately, as it

with misleading and sensational headlines even from frontline news portals, have also been alarmingly on the rise recently. What gets printed and telecast contributes to manufacturing consent. Some news portals, for example, have already attempted to prove that Professor Yunus's government is Islamist, so the frequency of attacks on the people of

he claims. This government is not complicit in minority repression whatsoever, but the governments that preceded it were.

Any attempt to whitewash a government, including Professor Yunus's government, is infantile—angels and prophets have never run a government. Blaming the government for everything is impulsive, too. This government is the outcome of a revolution. Following a revolution, as history teaches us, people's expectations soar. Chaos erupts. Uncertainties loom. Pessimism grips. And a post-revolution government totters. Professor Yunus's government has been through this typical phase. It's not a weak government, as it is popularly dubbed. Its strength is fortitude. Its skill is negotiation. Almost everyone seems to have a demand following Hasina's departure (I have a demand, too. Where is a commission on education, Professor Yunus?), and they want their demand fulfilled immediately. They reach the government following protests and road blockades. The government negotiates and settles. However disruptive the hundreds of protests the government has had to face already, this is democracy in action. Suppressing it is fascist. Attendant chaos towards democracy is inevitable, as Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci famously said, "The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: Now is the time of monsters." If we are frightened by the monsters around us, it's not pathological. Most of them are, however, the harbingers of hope and healing for the reformed Bangladesh in the times ahead.

Some of these monsters are not agents of hope and healing, unfortunately. Dictators depart and die, but their legacy lingers. The more chronic a dictatorship is, the more expansive and intractable it is. Having ruled for 15 years, Hasina left the country upended. Hasina was psychologically deranged. Leading a country was not her call. In the worst-case scenario, someone of Hasina's class and calibre could have been someone else's personal problem. She must never have been allowed to become a national problem. Because she was, the crisis is intergenerational and transnational. A family, for example, that lost someone or had someone with life-altering injuries in

the July Revolution (approximately 1,400 people were killed and thousands were injured, the UN Fact-Finding Report, published in February 2025, confirmed) will have to endure the loss for generations. Our relationship with India is a political bloody shirt that triggers statements and actions from both sides as if we are eternal enemies. It's apparently clear that our ties with India during Hasina's regime were lopsided and unexamined to create an impression that Bangladesh was India's vassal state. Some monsters use these fault lines to destabilise Bangladesh, which is not yet on an even keel since Hasina's departure. False flag movements and mobs are Hasina's ghost re-surfaced. Professor Yunus's government is more helpless than responsible in such situations.

Bangladesh has been through a phase of transition, so the situations are often volatile—sometimes, even dispiriting. Frustrated, we forget that Professor Yunus's government has been through hell already, but it's still active and advancing. He is focused on his agendas, mainly the reforms. His clean-up crew (who we euphemistically call the advisers) are honest and diligent. I'm not convinced we would run from this crisis to a catastrophe. What distracts me is that some zombie politicians remind us—every day, after every nanosecond—that this is not an elected government. It is! The uprising was the election. Blood was the vote. Thinking otherwise is suicidal, for it undermines the government and belies the spirit of the uprising, along with causing tensions for the people to own the government and the government to own the people. This is NOT a placeholder government. It is a government as independent and empowered as any elected government is. While nitpicking on Professor Yunus's government is rational, cooperating with it is ethical and patriotic. His faults and failures are often not the results of his decisions and actions. He is a victim, as we all are—we're because of the buggers and muggers Hasina left the country with.

Believing in Professor Yunus's abilities, therefore, seems sensible. That's what Professor Amartya Sen reminds us in his recent interview with the PTI, "I have great confidence in Yunus's abilities." So do we!



Muhammad Yunus, chief adviser of Bangladesh interim government, gestures to the Rohingya people as he attends Ramadan Solidarity Iftar with them at the Rohingya refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, March 14, 2025.

Under such circumstances, Professor Yunus's government faced logistical nightmares in establishing discipline, as it took over on August 8, 2024. The context that has created the current disorder is more complex than a leadership failure of a government having inherited a failing state.

Responsibility yet rested on the current government to restore law and order destroyed by the dictatorship of 15 years. The army swung into action with magistracy. Police and paramilitary joined hands as they gained confidence and credibility. Crime and violence didn't disappear altogether, as they never did in any functional society. Bangladesh suddenly didn't shift from a safety haven to a brutal hell, either. Yet panic and paranoia seemed to have

claimed that no one saw anyone being raped. A passenger onboard the bus informed BBC that a woman may have been raped, as they heard her screaming. *Prothom Alo* published an investigative report on the news on February 27, having talked to the lady, who was apparently the rape victim. She was not raped on the bus that night, she confirmed. She blamed the media for spreading false news. The government had to bear the brunt of carefully crafted propaganda, anyway. Why did our media go gaga on this piece of news, when they knew that misinformation from and beyond Bangladesh by the agents of the fallen regime smacked of the renewal of fascism? Our press apparently seems free following the ouster of Sheikh Hasina. Unfiltered news, along

the minority has increased during his tenure.

Subho Basu, an associate professor of History and Classical Studies at McGill University, discredited such a complaint upfront, as he claimed in his interview with *The New Yorker* in August 2024, "he [Professor Yunus] had nothing to do with Islamism." He further claimed that minorities are always targeted in South Asia, when there is upheaval. Because the Sheikh Hasina regime was identified with India, and a significant percentage of the minority are the supporters of the fallen regime that also had leaders at the local levels from the minority community, targeting supporters and leaders of the fallen regime has gained a communal slant, which some right-wing media in India have magnified,

The hidden crisis: Exclusion of women from wellness spaces in Bangladesh

SHAZIA OMAR

A woman's self-actualisation, growth, and productivity are directly tied to her well-being. When women are deprived of holistic wellness, it affects families, communities, and the entire nation. In Bangladesh, systemic barriers continue to exclude women from spaces that promote physical and mental well-being.

Barriers to women's wellness

From a young age, girls in Bangladesh are sidelined from sports and recreational spaces. Cricket fields, football grounds, and beaches remain male-dominated. While some trailblazing girls have entered these arenas, they face resistance and harassment.

Child marriage further compounds the issue. According to the World Bank, women who marry as children have, on average, 1.11 more live births than those who marry as adults, increasing risks to their



physical and mental health.

Mental health remains a crisis. Women are twice as likely as men to experience depression and anxiety, yet less than 0.11% of the population has access to free psychotropic medications. Nutritional disparity also persists with men and boys often prioritised in food distribution. Meanwhile, 89% of women face intimate partner violence, making wellness a distant reality.

Dhaka Flow's response

Dhaka Flow promotes self-care through festivals, workshops, and corporate wellness programs. The upcoming Heal Dhaka program, launching April 19, will provide access to yoga, dance, kickboxing, art healing, and meditation.

The path forward

For true change, Bangladesh must: #Promote gender equality in sports.

- Enforce child marriage laws.
- Invest in mental health services.
- Ensure equitable nutrition.
- Strengthen protections against domestic violence.

Women's wellness is not a luxury—it is a necessity.

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How chronic pain and mental health are connected

Chronic pain is more than just a physical condition—it affects mental well-being and overall quality of life. A study published in *Arquivos de Neuro-Psiquiatria* highlights how individuals suffering from chronic pain often experience mental health challenges, particularly depression and anxiety.

A study, conducted at a pain clinic in Brazil, found that a significant number of chronic pain patients also struggled with psychological distress. The persistent discomfort not only limited their daily activities but also contributed to emotional suffering, making it harder to manage their pain effectively. This creates a cycle where pain worsens mental health, and poor mental health, in turn, amplifies the perception of pain.

Understanding this connection is crucial for improving patient care. Traditional pain treatments often focus solely on physical symptoms, but this study emphasises the need for a more holistic approach. Effective management should include mental health support, such as counselling, stress reduction techniques, and medications when necessary.

Raising awareness about the link between chronic pain and mental health can also help reduce stigma. Many patients hesitate to discuss their emotional struggles, fearing judgement. However, recognising and addressing mental health as part of pain management can lead to better outcomes.

This research reinforces the importance of integrated healthcare approaches, where medical professionals collaborate to treat both physical pain and psychological distress. By adopting a comprehensive treatment strategy, healthcare providers can help patients regain control over their lives and improve their well-being.

A new standard for medical malpractice

Medical malpractice laws are changing, and that could benefit both patients and doctors. Traditionally, courts have judged malpractice based on whether a doctor followed the "customary" practices of their profession. But a recent change by the American Law Institute (ALI) shifts the standard from "customary" to "reasonable" care.

This means that instead of simply doing what most other doctors do, physicians will be expected to follow modern, evidence-based medical guidelines. A recent *JAMA* article explains that this shift acknowledges the role of legitimate



authoritative guidelines in defining competent medical care. This could help ensure that outdated or ineffective treatments are phased out, making medical care safer and more reliable for patients.

For patients, this change is important because it encourages doctors to rely on the best available science rather than outdated habits. It also means that a doctor cannot be sued simply for following legitimate medical guidelines—something that has happened in the past. A case discussed in *JAMA* in 2004 highlighted how a

doctor was sued for following evidence-based recommendations, a scenario that is now less likely under the new legal framework.

For doctors, this could reduce the pressure to practice "defensive medicine," where unnecessary tests and procedures are ordered just to avoid lawsuits. Instead, they can focus on providing the best care based on current medical knowledge.

While changes in malpractice law take time to be fully implemented, this is a step toward a system that prioritises both patient safety and fair legal standards for healthcare providers.



DR NUR A SAFRINA RAHMAN

Ramadan bazaars are a cherished part of the fasting month, offering a variety of meals for iftar. However, rising temperatures due to climate change are increasing food safety risks, making it challenging for vendors to maintain hygiene and prevent foodborne illnesses.

Food safety challenges in ramadan bazaars: Extreme heat accelerates food spoilage, creating ideal conditions for bacterial growth. Vendors preparing food in open-air markets often lack refrigeration, making perishable items like meat, dairy, and seafood vulnerable to contamination. Harmful bacteria such as *Salmonella* and *E. coli* multiply rapidly in warm temperatures, posing health risks to consumers.

High temperatures also increase the risk of cross-contamination. Food handlers working in the heat may sweat excessively, and improper hygiene practices—such as infrequent handwashing or using contaminated utensils—can further heighten foodborne illness risks.

Additionally, storing cooked food at unsafe temperatures for extended periods allows bacteria to thrive.

Health risks for consumers: Foodborne illnesses peak during warmer months, and crowded Ramadan bazaars amplify the risk of outbreaks. Contaminated food can cause gastrointestinal issues like

diarrhoea and vomiting, which are particularly dangerous for children, the elderly, and immunocompromised individuals.

Dehydration worsens food poisoning symptoms, making food safety precautions even more critical. Fasting individuals, already at risk of dehydration due to prolonged hours without water, may experience severe effects if they consume spoilt food.

Implementing adaptation strategies for vendors: To combat high temperatures, vendors must take proactive food safety measures. Proper temperature control is essential—portable refrigeration units, insulated storage containers, and ice packs should be used to keep perishable ingredients fresh. Placing storage in shaded areas or using reflective materials can further reduce heat exposure.

Hygiene practices must be strictly followed. Vendors should wash hands frequently with soap and water or use alcohol-based sanitisers if running water is unavailable. Disposable gloves should be changed regularly, and food preparation surfaces must be sanitised after each use. Wearing caps and aprons prevents sweat from contaminating food.

Menu adjustments can also improve food safety. Vendors should incorporate heat-resistant ingredients like dried legumes and grains while limiting perishable items. Fresh produce should be stored in cool,

ventilated spaces, and cooked meals must be served promptly or kept above 60°C to prevent bacterial growth.

Local authorities play a crucial role in supporting vendors. Mandatory food safety training before Ramadan can help vendors understand safe food handling. Providing shared refrigeration units, cooling stations, and shaded canopies can mitigate the effects of extreme heat. Regular health inspections should enforce compliance with food safety regulations.

By systematically implementing these strategies, vendors can reduce foodborne risks and ensure consumers have access to safe, hygienic meals throughout Ramadan.

Ensuring safe and enjoyable iftar meals: As climate change intensifies heatwaves, safeguarding food safety in Ramadan bazaars is more urgent than ever. Consumers can also protect themselves by choosing freshly prepared meals, observing hygiene practices, and buying from vendors who maintain cleanliness.

With vendor adaptations, regulatory support, and consumer awareness, Ramadan bazaars can remain a beloved tradition while ensuring public health. Addressing high-temperature challenges will help create a safer food environment, allowing families to enjoy their iftar meals with peace of mind.

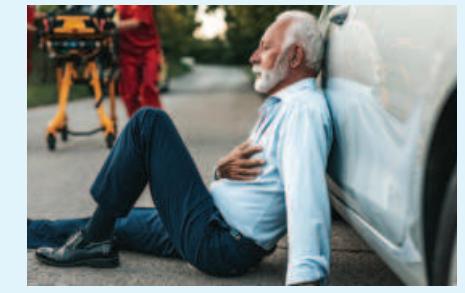
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NEW GUIDELINES

When can you drive after a heart attack?

A heart attack is a life-changing event, and recovery involves more than just medical treatment—it also includes knowing when it is safe to resume daily activities like driving. While many people feel eager to regain independence, getting behind the wheel too soon could pose serious risks.

Different countries have varying guidelines on driving after a heart attack. European recommendations suggest waiting 1 to 4 weeks, depending on complications, while Canadian guidelines base restrictions on heart



function. However, there are no official US recommendations.

Recent research suggests that the highest risk for another cardiac event, such as a heart attack, fainting, or stroke, is within the first 15 days after a severe heart attack. Older individuals are especially vulnerable, which is why experts recommend that those over 65 wait at least a month before driving again. Younger patients, on the other hand, may not need any driving restrictions.

These findings can help patients and doctors make informed decisions about when it is safe to drive. Returning to the road too soon could put both the driver and others at risk. By following recommended waiting periods, patients can improve their recovery while ensuring road safety.

If you or a loved one has had a heart attack, talk to your doctor about when it is safe to drive. Taking a little extra time to heal can make a big difference in long-term health and safety.

Source: *Circulation*

The hidden toll of COVID-19: years of life lost beyond the virus



The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected millions worldwide, but its impact extends far beyond the lives directly lost to the virus. A new study published in *PLOS Medicine* reveals the broader consequences of the pandemic, particularly the years of life lost due to both direct and indirect effects. By analysing health data from 18 European countries, researchers found that over 16 million years of life were lost between 2020 and 2022, many of which would have been lived without disability.

Understanding the loss:

Most discussions about COVID-19 focus on the number of deaths, but this study looked deeper. It examined not only lives lost but also the years of healthy, disability-free life that people missed out on due to the pandemic. Many individuals who died from COVID-19 could have lived longer, healthier lives if the pandemic had not occurred. The study found that more than half of the lost years were years that could have been lived independently and without major illness.

The impact was not only due to COVID-19 itself. Many deaths resulted from disruptions in healthcare services, delayed treatments, and the worsening of other conditions such as heart disease and dementia. While deaths directly caused by COVID-19 declined after 2021 due to vaccination efforts, deaths from other causes continued to rise in many countries, adding to the overall burden of lost years of life.

Why this matters to everyone: This study highlights a crucial aspect of the pandemic's impact: the indirect toll on health systems and the long-term effects on people's lives. It also reveals that countries with lower economic resources experienced greater losses per person, widening existing health inequalities. The pandemic disproportionately affected vulnerable populations, including the elderly, people with preexisting conditions, and those in lower income regions.

Lessons for the future: The findings emphasise the need for comprehensive pandemic preparedness. While vaccination efforts significantly reduced COVID-19 deaths, the rise in non-COVID-related deaths suggests that healthcare disruptions had severe consequences. Stronger healthcare infrastructure, better access to medical care, and proactive policies could mitigate such losses in future global health emergencies.

What can we do? For individuals, prioritising preventive healthcare—such as regular checkups and timely medical care—remains essential. On a broader scale, supporting policies that improve healthcare access and strengthen emergency response systems can ensure that future crises are managed more effectively.

The COVID-19 pandemic was more than a global health crisis; it reshaped lives in profound ways, many of which are only now being fully understood. By learning from these lessons, we can build a healthier, more resilient society that is better prepared for the future.

With Hamza onboard, BFF gets men's team sponsor

SPORTS REPORTER

With the imminent arrival of Hamza Choudhury and an air of expectation following the swearing in of a new governing body a few months ago, Bangladesh Football Federation has snapped up a long-term sponsor for the men's senior national team.

United Commercial Bank, a first-generation private commercial bank of the country, has come forward to sponsor the men's team for the next five years, confirmed Bangladesh Football Federation's vice-president Fahad Karim.

"There is a positivity from the sponsors regarding football these days. I won't say they are very excited, but when we approach sponsors, we get a positive response. I think Hamza Choudhury is definitely a factor in this, plus the overall expectation regarding football is much higher nowadays," Karim told The Daily Star, informing that the deal would be part-cash-part-kind.

A memorandum of understanding in this regard between the two parties will be signed at the bank's head office today.

Meanwhile, the BFF vice-president elaborated on the schedule of Hamza's visit to Bangladesh for the AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers fixture against India.

The 27-year-old, who will be making his debut for Bangladesh against India in Shillong on March 25, will arrive on the morning of March 17 and spend the next two days in his ancestral home, informed Karim.

"Hamza Choudhury will land in Sylhet at 11:40am on March 17 on a Biman flight from Manchester. He will be accompanied by nine people – his family members including his mother, his wife and his three kids. Four or five of our executive committee members will be there to receive him. We will have a vehicle arranged for him; he and his entourage will travel from there to Habiganj, which is his ancestral home. He will spend the night there and also the entire day of March 18 there, which will be a completely private affair," Karim said.

The BFF vice-president said that Hamza and coach Javier Cabrera will face the media on March 19 afternoon ahead of the team's departure the following day.

"Hamza will come to Dhaka either on the night of 18th or the morning of 19th, and will join the camp straightaway. Then there will be a team photoshoot followed by a press meet, where Hamza and coach Javier Cabrera will face the media," Karim said, adding that due to the tight schedule in Dhaka, there will not be any special public appearance for Hamza.



Mehedi Hasan Miraz displayed all-round performance as Mohammedian notched their fourth successive win in the Dhaka Premier League, following a first-match defeat, during a 94-run win over Legends of Rupganj in a high-voltage clash in Mirpur yesterday. The all-rounder scored 25 runs before taking four wickets for 38 in a man-of-the-match display during the match, which also marked the return of Taskin Ahmed. The pacer, who missed the opening four rounds, registered figures of three for 33. In the day's other matches, Abahani beat Brother Union by 80 runs at the BKSP-3 while Gazi Group Cricketers registered a 94-run win over Prime Bank Cricket Club at BKSP-4.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



'It's our turn to take Tigers to the next level'

SPORTS REPORTER

The recent retirements of stalwarts Mashfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad from the white-ball formats have left a giant vacuum in the national team as it is officially without any of their five senior cricketers, all known together as the 'Big Five'.

The other three names in this group – Mashrafe bin Mortaza, Tamim Iqbal and Shakib Al Hasan – are no longer active in the national team. Although of the three, only Tamim has officially retired, chances of the other two representing Bangladesh in the future seem next to nil.

Although these five cricketers demonstrated individual brilliances in many games for Bangladesh and helped them win many matches but when it came to winning a global tournament, they always fell short.

On Saturday, all-rounder Mehedi Hasan Miraz insisted that it's now the turn of the next generation to take Bangladesh cricket to the next level and that they will aim to bring home a trophy from a major event, something their predecessor could never achieve.

"Everyone has to leave at some point. They had a big contribution in taking Bangladesh cricket to a level. Now it's our turn to take it to the next level," Miraz told reporters in Mirpur after delivering a match-winning all-round performance of 25 runs and four wickets for Mohammedian Sporting Club against Legends of Rupganj.

"We are yet to win a trophy. Our target will be to win a big tournament which I

think will be good for our generation," he added.

Miraz also said there are many players in the current side who have considerable experience in the international scene and they must take up the responsibility now.

"Those of us who are in the team now, it's crucial that we all perform. Many of us have also played 7-8 years in international cricket. There are 6-7 players who have

need of giving extended opportunities to the current cricketers keeping the 2027 ICC World Cup in mind.

"If you want to establish someone, you need to give them opportunities. We have to give them opportunities in the ODIs we have left before the World Cup. We need to take long term preparation. If we start our preparations just two to three months before the World Cup, it will be difficult.

May 2025: 3 ODIs against Pakistan (away)

June-July 2025: 3 ODIs against Sri Lanka (away)

July-August 2025: 3 ODIs against Pakistan (home, proposed)

August 2025: 3 ODIs against India (home)

October 2025: 3 ODIs against West Indies (home)

November-December 2025: 3 ODIs against Ireland (home)

March-April 2026: 3 ODIs against Pakistan (home)

April 2026: 3 ODIs against New Zealand (home)

June 2026: 3 ODIs against Australia (home)

July 2026: 5 ODIs against Zimbabwe (away)

August 2026: 3 ODIs against Ireland (away)

November-December 2026: 3 ODIs against South Africa (away)

played international cricket for 6-7 or even 10 years. You can't say that everyone in the team is new in international cricket.

"I feel there is enough experience in the team, we have played international cricket together for many years. Now it's very important for us to deliver using our experience," said Miraz, who expressed the

"We have around two and a half years left before the World Cup. We need to decide what will be the team's setup from now on. We need to start our preparations considering who will be playing in which position. Players need to be given opportunities and everyone must back each other," he concluded.

Serie A title race heats up as Inter clash with Atalanta

AGENCIES

With just ten rounds remaining in a thrilling Serie A season, leaders Inter Milan prepare for a high-stakes clash against third-placed Atalanta on Sunday.

A mere three points separate the sides, setting up a crucial encounter in Bergamo that could redefine the title race.

Inter sit atop the table with 61 points, just one ahead of reigning champions Napoli, who will be keen to capitalise when they visit relegation-threatened Venezia.

Simone Inzaghi's men, despite their European exploits, have struggled for consistency in the league, winning only three of their last seven matches.

Their latest league outing saw them scrape past bottom club Monza 3-2, but a commanding Champions League victory over Feyenoord should provide much-needed confidence.

"It's true that our Champions League numbers look different from our league form," admitted Inzaghi after his 200th game in charge. "But we're still in the mix, and we'll fight on all fronts."

Inter also have a Coppa Italia semifinal against city rivals Milan to contend with, making squad rotation a crucial factor in the coming weeks.

Meanwhile, Atalanta, who exited both the Champions League and Coppa Italia last month, are solely focused on Serie A glory. Gian Piero Gasperini's side boast the joint-best attack in the league alongside Inter, having netted 63 goals, but their form has dipped. After an incredible 11-match winning streak between October and December, La Dea have won only four of their last 11 games.

Napoli, lurking in second place, ended a five-game winless run with a crucial 2-1 victory over

Florentina. They could leapfrog Inter with a win at Venezia, should the Nerazzurri falter in Bergamo.

Juventus, currently fourth with 52 points, were humiliated 4-0 by Atalanta last weekend but remain in contention for a top-four finish. They travel to eighth-placed Fiorentina, aiming to bounce back and stay ahead of Lazio, who sit just one point behind them.

Further down the table, Milan—now nine points off the top four—host Como, knowing anything less than three points will likely seal their fate outside of next season's Champions League.

As Serie A enters its final phase, every match takes on added significance. For Inter, Atalanta, and Napoli, the margin for error is razor-thin, making Sunday's showdown a true title decider.

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RAPE INCIDENTS CPB raises black flag in protest

Army, cops guard party office after calls online to take it over

STAR REPORT

The Communist Party of Bangladesh raised a black flag at its central office in the capital yesterday, protesting a surge in rape incidents and demanding punishment to the perpetrators.

The event took place amid tensions over calls online to take over the CPB headquarters. However, nothing untoward happened as police and army personnel guarded the facility.

In the presence of police and army men, CPB leaders raised a black flag at 10:40am.

Earlier in the day, CPB leaders and activists gathered at the office to protect the building. Some had stayed overnight to ensure its safety.

Meanwhile, several left-leaning student bodies cancelled their anti-rape march, fearing chaos on Dhaka University campus.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

Hours after detention, suspect dies at hospital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A murder suspect died while under treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday, hours after detectives detained and took him to the hospital, family members have said.

They said DB officials picked up Ezaz Bin Alam around 3:00am yesterday from a hospital in the capital's Saat Masjid Road, where he was already taking treatment.

He died at the dialysis centre of DMCH around 6:08pm, police said.

According to the DMCH register, Sub Inspector Mahfuz of the DB police admitted Ezaz to the hospital.

DB chief Rezaul Karim Mallick denied that the man died in their custody.

"A team detained him at a city hospital and found him sick. We then immediately took him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, where he died while undergoing treatment. We did not take him into our custody," said Rezaul, an additional commissioner (Detective Branch) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

Hafizur Rahman, inspector (investigation) of Mohammadpur Police Station, said Ezaz was wanted in a murder case.

Victim's father Shah Alam said his son was picked up by a joint forces team from Mohammadpur's Baroikhali area on March 10.

"He was then taken to a nearby camp. At the camp, he was tortured severely and then handed over to Mohammadpur police early on the morning of March 11."

He added that Mohammadpur police then produced Ezaz before a Dhaka court, which granted him bail.

"Once he got bail, we admitted him to the hospital as he was sick. But again, he was picked up by the DB police," Alam told The Daily Star.

Itfekhar Hasan, officer-in-charge of Mohammadpur Police Station, said, "An army team arrested Ezaz and then



Policemen stand guard outside the Communist Party of Bangladesh office on Topkhana Road in the capital yesterday as security measures were heightened in response to calls online to take over the party office.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

MAGURA RAPE Accused gives confessional statement

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Bengaluru

The prime accused in the sensational rape and murder case of an eight-year-old child in Magura yesterday gave a confessional statement before a court.

Magura Senior Judicial Magistrate Sabysachi Roy recorded the deposition this evening, confirmed Shahed Hasan Tagor, a panel lawyer for the plaintiff.

He said the accused confessed to the rape.

The accused said he raped the child when he found her alone in an empty room, he added.

A d i t i o n a l Superintendent of Police of Magura Mirajul Islam said the prime accused was produced in the court in the afternoon.

The accused's wife and two sons are currently on remand.

The eight-year-old child was choked and raped late at night while visiting her sister's house in Magura on March 5.

She was initially admitted to Magura Sadar Hospital in a serious

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

Putin will have to 'come to table'

UK PM says hosting coalition call

AFP, London

UK premier Keir Starmer yesterday said the "ball was in Russia's court" and that President Vladimir Putin would "sooner or later" have to "come to the table," after a virtual summit to drum up support for a coalition willing to protect any eventual ceasefire in Ukraine.

The British prime minister told some 26

fellow leaders as they joined the group call hosted by Downing Street that they should focus on how to strengthen Ukraine, protect any ceasefire and keep up the pressure on Moscow.

While Ukraine had shown it was the "party of peace" by agreeing to a 30 day unconditional ceasefire, "Putin is the one trying to delay," he said.

"If Putin is serious about peace, I think it's very simple, he has to stop his barbaric attacks on Ukraine and agree to a ceasefire, and the world is watching," he added.

Military chiefs will now meet again on Thursday in the UK as the coalition moves into "the operational phase," Starmer said after the talks.

"The group that met this morning is a bigger group than we had two weeks ago, there is a stronger collective resolve and new commitments were put on the table this

morning," he added.

EU chief European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said in a message on X that Russia has to show "it is willing to support a ceasefire leading to a just and lasting peace".

And Dutch Prime Minister Dick Schoof also said on X it was "now important to continue to exert pressure on Russia to come to the negotiating table."

Overnight fighting continued in the relentless three-year war, with Russia saying it had taken two more villages in its Kursk border region where it has launched an offensive to wrest back seized territory.

Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron have been leading efforts to assemble a so-called "coalition of the willing" ever since Trump opened direct negotiations with Moscow last month.

They say the group is necessary -- along with US support -- to provide Ukraine with security guarantees by deterring Putin from violating any ceasefire.

Starmer and Macron have said they are willing to put British and French troops on the ground in Ukraine but it is not clear if other countries are keen on doing the same.

Macron also called on Russia late Friday to

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

US mulling travel ban affecting 43 countries

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump's administration is mulling a new travel ban that would affect citizens from dozens of countries to varying degrees, the New York Times reported Friday.

Citing anonymous officials, it said the draft list featured 43 countries, divided into three categories of travel restrictions.

The red category of countries whose citizens would be completely barred from entering the United States includes Afghanistan, Bhutan, Cuba, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Venezuela and Yemen.

Another 10 countries in the orange category -- Belarus, Eritrea, Haiti, Laos, Myanmar, Pakistan, Russia, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and Turkmenistan -- would see their visas sharply restricted.

"In those cases, affluent business travellers might be allowed to enter, but not people travelling on immigrant or tourist visas," the New York Times said.

Citizens from countries on the orange list would also have to undergo in-person interviews to receive a visa.

Another 22 countries on a yellow list would have 60 days to address US concerns or risk being moved up to one of the more stringent categories.

"The officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive internal deliberations, cautioned that the list had been developed by the State Department several weeks ago, and that changes were likely by the time it reached the White House," the New York Times said.

As one of his first acts in office, Trump froze the United States' refugee admission program and almost all foreign aid.

Falling SME sales shake economic backbone

B1

Prime Bank

ISLAMIC BANK



PRAYER
TIMING
MARCH 16



Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha

AZAN 4:51 12:45 4:30 6:08 7:45

JAMAAT 5:01 1:15 4:45 6:23 8:15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

SEHRI,IFTAR TIMING

RAMADAN MARCH SEHRI IFTAR

15 16 6:08

16 17 4:49 6:09

17 18 4:48 6:09



Since January last year, the Dhaka Elevated Expressway project has been plagued by slow progress and work stoppages. The setbacks stem from various issues, such as ownership disputes among the private partners and protests by environmentalists against the construction of a ramp at Panthakunja Park. The photo was taken yesterday near the capital's Hatirjheel area.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN