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Israel shatters truce, kills 413 Gazans

Issues fresh evacuation orders; 'shocked' world condemns attack

AGENCIES

Israeli airstrikes yesterday killed more than 400 people in Gaza, shattering a fragile ceasefire and drawing global condemnation.

However, the United States yesterday said that Hamas bore full blame for Israel's massive deadly airstrikes, saying the militants could have accepted a ceasefire extension proposal by US special envoy Steve Witkoff.

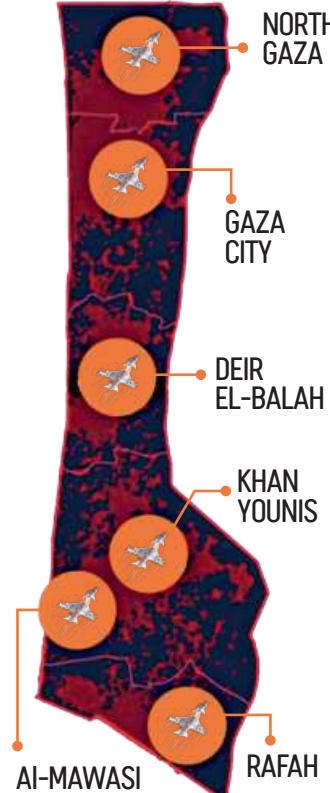
Hamas, the Palestinian group that rules Gaza, said the US "bears full responsibility for the massacres" in Gaza after the White House confirmed Israel had consulted the Trump administration before it carried out the overnight airstrikes.

The strikes, by far the deadliest since a truce took effect in January, also injured more than 550 more people, according to the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza.

War monitors said the airstrikes were the deadliest since the first months of the conflict which started in October 2023. The breach of the ceasefire, which broadly held since January, offered respite from

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

LOCATIONS OF ATTACKS



ISRAEL'S WAR ON GAZA

48,577
killed since Oct 7, 2023

17,500
children among the dead

11,160
remain missing

US blames Hamas, says Israel 'consulted' before strikes

Israel to continue offensive 'as long as necessary'

Kremlin warns on 'spiral of escalation' in Gaza

Turkey, Iran slam 'continuation of genocide'



A Palestinian man holding the body of a child, killed in an Israeli strike, on the premises of a hospital in Gaza City yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

JULY UPRISING JU suspends 289 BCL activists, nine teachers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, JU

Jahangirnagar University has suspended 289 activists of banned Chhatra League for their alleged involvement in attacks on protesting students during the July uprising.

Nine teachers have also been suspended for allegedly abetting the violence.

JU Vice-Chancellor Prof Mohammad Kamrul Ahsan confirmed the decisions

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Dhaka to get semi-auto signals to tackle jam

The system is likely to be installed soon at several points on Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue

HELEMUL ALAM and MUNTAKIM SAAD

The government is likely to introduce a semi-automatic system of traffic lights at 22 busy intersections between Kadam Foara and Abdullahpur in the capital to reduce congestion and reliance on traffic police.

The initial plan was to introduce the system at four intersections on March 16, but it was deferred by a week due to the visit by the UN secretary-general, says

Neelima Akhter, executive director of Dhaka Transport Coordination Authority (DTCA), which leads the initiative.

"Traffic management should not be left to police officers waving their hands at intersections," she says, underscoring the necessity of transitioning to an automated system.

The system will cost between Tk 10 crore and Tk 12 crore, according to officials at Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC).

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Tk 119cr spent in 2 decades to modernise Dhaka's traffic signals

New project to install semi-automated signals at 22 points

Estimated cost Tk 10-12cr



ICT CASES AGAINST HASINA

'Strong evidence found to prove the charges'

Say investigators; report likely next month

SHARIFUL ISLAM and SIRAJUL ISLAM RUBEL

Deposed premier Sheikh Hasina will be charged with murder, abduction, enforced disappearance, and arson at the International Crimes Tribunal.

Investigators say they have found strong evidence to charge her with command responsibility for executions, burning bodies, enforced disappearance, and confinement.

The probe report on Hasina's alleged crimes against humanity is likely to be submitted to the tribunal next month, making it the first to reach that stage since the court was reconstituted on October 14.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5



Hundreds of workers sit on the ground in front of Shonest Apparels, demanding festival bonuses before Eid, which is less than two weeks away. The photo was taken at Mohammadpur Beribandh in the capital yesterday morning.

BUSINESS

Bad loans at scam-hit banks surge

Bad loans soared to alarming levels at over a dozen banks that were mired in loan irregularities and major scams under the previous regime, as large businesses with ties to the former government defaulted heavily following the political changeover.

At the end of last year, defaulted loans in the banking sector stood at Tk 345,765 crore, with the state-run and private commercial banks holding the majority.

ARSA chief, 10 others held, placed on remand

The armed Rohingya group leader is blamed for criminal activities in camps

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Rab has arrested Ataullah Abu Ammar Jununi, known as the commander-in-chief of the ARSA, and 10 others, conducting special drives in Narayanganj and Mymensingh.

Law enforcers yesterday produced Ataullah, 48, and six others before the Senior Judicial Magistrate Court of Narayanganj, seeking 10 day remand in two separate cases: one for illegal entry and another for criminal activities.

After the hearing, the court granted 10 day remand for interrogation, five days in each case, said Kayum Khan, Narayanganj court police inspector.

The five other arrestees are identified as Mostak Ahmed, 66; Salimullah, 27; Asmatullah, 24; Md Hasan, 43; and Moniruzzaman, 26.

Rab also arrested three women and a child along with the six. The four were

also shown arrested in the two cases and the court sent the arrestees to jail.

Based on intelligence, a team of Rab-II conducted a drive at the Siddhiganj area of Narayanganj, and Natun Bazar area of Mymensingh on March 16 and arrested the ten, said AHM Sazzad Hossain, the commanding officer of Rab-II.

According to the first information report filed with Siddhiganj police station, the arrestees have gathered in the districts and have held secret meetings to conduct subversive activities and grievous crimes.

Rab seized Tk 21.39 lakh in cash, a knife, a sharp steel chain and four wristwatches from their possessions, said Shahinur Alam, the officer-in-charge of Siddhiganj Police Station.

Ataullah and the armed group



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Mr. Riaz Uddin, Project Coordinator, The Daily Star for registration

STORY ON B1

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

HC asks DC, SP to protect Barguna child rape victim

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed the Barguna deputy commissioner and its superintendent of police to provide protection to the child rape victim, whose father was found dead a day after he filed a case in that regard, and her family.

It also ordered the government to assign a social welfare officer to take necessary measures for the welfare of the child, a fifth grader.

At the same time, the HC asked the authorities concerned of the government to ensure the security of the family of Magura's child rape victim, who died at Dhaka Combined Military Hospital (CMH) on March 13 and to take necessary care of her elder sister.

The HC bench of Justice Farah Mahbub and Justice Debasish Roy Chowdhury issued the orders

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4



A woman cries while sitting on the rubble of her house, destroyed in an Israeli strike, in the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza Strip yesterday; Palestinians ride on a truck as they flee their already destroyed homes in northern Gaza after the Israeli army issued fresh evacuation orders; and people search for items to salvage in a building destroyed in Israeli strikes.

PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

JU suspends

FROM PAGE 1

at a press briefing yesterday, following a syndicate meeting held on the previous day at the university's new administrative building.

Prof Kamrul, who presided over the meeting, said the university formed a high-level committee to further probe the incidents.

Among the suspended BCL activists, those who have already graduated will have their academic certificates withheld, while those who have completed their exams and viva will have their results withheld.

The VC added, "Nine teachers have been suspended for their alleged role in abetting the attacks. A committee has been formed to gather further evidence against other teachers who may have been involved."

Besides, former JU VC Prof Md Nurul Alam and former registrar Abu Hasan, who have retired, will have their pension benefits suspended due to their alleged complicity, the VC added.

The nine suspended teachers are former Pro-VC (Academic) Prof Mohammed Mostafa Feeroz, ex-proctor Prof Mohammad Alamgir Kabir, Prof Esrafil Ahmed, Associate Prof Mehedi Iqbal, former dean of Faculty of Social Sciences Prof Bashir Ahmed, Associate Prof ASM Firoz ul Hasan, Associate Prof Hosne Ara, Associate Prof Nazmul Hassan Talukdar, and Prof Tajuddin Shikdar.

Meanwhile, JU pro-VC (administration) Prof Sohel Ahmed, also a syndicate member, told this correspondent that the six-month suspension of six students for their alleged involvement in the killing of BCL leader Shamim Mollah will end on March 19.

Shamim was beaten to death on the university campus on September 18 and the suspension was imposed the following day.

Besides, the withholding of academic certificates for six months of two students allegedly involved in the murder will expire on March 19.

In another major decision, the university syndicate has decided to rename the dormitories named after the family members of deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina. A committee has been formed to oversee the renaming process, said JU Registrar ABM Azizur Rahman.

Meanwhile, July 15 has been officially declared as Black Night at JU to observe the violent attack on students, the registrar added.

Dhaka to get semi-auto signals to tackle jam

FROM PAGE 1

The move follows a two-decade-long struggle to implement an efficient system of traffic management. Over the years, the authorities spent over Tk 119 crore on modernising the equipment, but Dhaka traffic is mostly managed manually.

Under the new initiative, DNCC will oversee 14 intersections and Dhaka South City Corporation eight.

In the beginning, DSCC will install lights at the intersections near InterContinental hotel and Banglamotor, and DNCC at Saarc Foara roundabout and Farmgate.

Whether more places will see the change will depend on the outcome of the lights at the four intersections, officials say.

There will be a switch at the traffic police booths, allowing officers to toggle between automatic and manual modes. Cameras and loudspeakers will be installed for better enforcement, they add.

ENDLESS TAILBACKS

On a recent afternoon at the Sergeant Ahad Police Box in Gulistan, one of

against Hamas with increasing military strength," the statement said.

US National Security Council spokesman Brian Hughes blamed Hamas, saying it "could have released hostages to extend the ceasefire but instead chose refusal and war".

Hamas said Israel had "decided to overturn the ceasefire agreement", calling it "a decision to sacrifice the occupation's prisoners and impose a death sentence on them".

Hamas also accused Israel of attacking "defenceless civilians" and urged mediators to hold the Netanyahu administration "fully responsible" for "violating and overturning" the ceasefire.

Hamas said the head of its government in Gaza, Ezzam al Dalis, was among several officials killed.

In the southern Gaza Strip, AFP footage showed people rushing stretchers with wounded people, including young children, to hospital. Bodies covered with white sheets were also taken to the hospital's mortuary.

Mohammed Jarghoun, 36, was sleeping in a tent near his destroyed house in Khan Yunis when he was awoken by huge blasts.

"I thought they were dreams and nightmares, but I saw a fire in my relatives' house. More than 20 martyrs and wounded, most of them children and women."

Ramez al-Amarin, 25, described carrying children to a hospital southeast of Gaza City.

"They unleashed the fire of hell again on Gaza," he said of Israel.

The health ministry in Hamas run Gaza said the bodies of 413 people had been received by Gaza hospitals, adding "a number of victims are still under the rubble".

A spokesman for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said at a briefing in Geneva "that many medical facilities are literally overwhelmed across Gaza".

UN chief Antonio Guterres was "shocked" by the renewed strikes, a spokesperson said, while UN rights chief Volker Turk said he was "horrified".

Meanwhile, Tom Fletcher, head of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, yesterday said the Israeli strikes have plunged residents of Gaza into "abject fear" once again.

"Overnight our worst fears materialized. Airstrikes resumed across the entire Gaza Strip," he told the UN Security Council in a video

"Israel will, from now on, act

meeting.

The council meeting was called -- prior to the air strikes -- by several member states to discuss the humanitarian situation as Israel has blocked aid into Gaza Strip since March 2.

Britain and France both called for the renewed hostilities to end.

Hamas backer Iran denounced the wave of attacks as a "continuation of the genocide and ethnic cleansing" in the Palestinian territories.

Russia and China warned against an escalation, while Egypt, Qatar, Jordan and Turkey condemned the violence.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi said in a statement that the strikes were part of "deliberate efforts to make the Gaza Strip uninhabitable and force the Palestinians into displacement".

Trump has floated a proposal to move Palestinians out of Gaza, suggesting that Egypt or Jordan could take them in.

Both countries have rejected the notion, but some right-wing politicians in Israel have embraced it.

Netanyahu's Likud movement yesterday said that the far-right Otzma Yehudit party would rejoin the government, having withdrawn in January in protest of the truce.

Brokered by Qatar, Egypt and the United States, the ceasefire took effect on January 19, largely halting the war triggered by Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel.

That first phase of the deal ended in early March, and the two sides have been unable to agree on the next steps.

During the first phase, Hamas released 33 hostages, including eight deceased, in exchange for Israel freeing around 1,800 Palestinian detainees.

Hamas has consistently demanded negotiations for the second phase, which should lead to a lasting ceasefire. Israel had sought to extend the first phase until mid-April, cutting off aid and electricity to Gaza over the deadlock.

Critics of Netanyahu said the Israeli PM, in the first place, had any intention of moving to the second phase of the ceasefire, which would have meant Israeli forces withdrawing from Gaza, in effect leaving Hamas as its de facto ruler.

Since October 7, 2023, the Israeli offensive in Gaza has killed at least 48,577 people, also mostly civilians, according to figures from the two sides.

Meanwhile, Tom Fletcher, head of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, yesterday said the Israeli strikes have plunged residents of Gaza into "abject fear" once again.

"Overnight our worst fears materialized. Airstrikes resumed across the entire Gaza Strip," he told the UN Security Council in a video

"Israel will, from now on, act

semi-automatic systems will fail," he says.

For traffic lights to work, there must be enough pedestrian infrastructure like footpaths, and BRTA, the road transport authority, must regulate the number of vehicles, he adds.

The junctions at Gulshan 2, Hatirjheel, and Dhaka Cantonment seem orderly because of strict enforcement, he says.

"In Gulshan, there are no rickshaws, easy bikes, or erratic buses."

EARLIER ATTEMPTS

In the last 20 years, the authorities installed automatic lights, countdown timers, digital displays, and even AI-aided systems at major intersections spending over Tk 119 crore. But nothing reduced the length of tailbacks.

Automatic traffic lights installed between 2001 and 2005 went out of order allegedly because of poor maintenance.

In 2012 and 2013, DSCC revived the system, but it barely lasted a month.

At one point, police used remote controls to operate the lights. But that

BRTA's poor regulatory oversight needs to change too, he says.

At the junctions at Gulshan 2, Hatirjheel, and Dhaka Cantonment seem orderly because of strict enforcement, he says.

Prof Shamsul says without trained personnel and a fundamental shift in discipline, future projects are likely to meet the same fate as previous ones.

The cantonment area can be a model because traffic lights have functioned effectively for over two decades, he says.

"The number of vehicles must be proportionate to road space. The government should discourage car ownership and invest in better public transport."

BRTA's poor regulatory oversight needs to change too, he says.

Contractor shot dead in Jashore over 'extortion'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

A contractor was shot dead by assailants in the Rail Bazar area of Jashore town last night for allegedly refusing to pay extortion money.

The victim is Mir Sadiq, 35, of the Rail Gate Pangu Hospital area.

Extortionists had been demanding money from him for long which was refusing to pay, his family said.

Talking to media, police and witnesses said Sadiq was returning home on a motorcycle when he was attacked near the Pangu Hospital.

A local criminal named Sumon, also known as Tattoo Sumon, shot Sadiq five to six times in the chest and fled, said Jashore Kotwali Police Station acting officer in charge Kazi Babul Hasan quoting family and witnesses.

"Sadiq, a contractor of buildings and roads, taken to Jashore General Hospital in a critical condition. As his condition deteriorated, he was referred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. However, he died in the ambulance on the way around 12:30am," the OC added.

Strong evidence found

FROM PAGE 1

However, the trial is expected to begin after a few other cases.

The probe report will be submitted on time, but the trial may commence in the second or third stage, said the tribunal's Chief Prosecutor Md Tajul Islam.

This was because his team wanted to test the waters with the other smaller cases.

It would help the prosecution identify the weaknesses they might have in putting together the case against the former prime minister.

"The case filed over the killing and burning of six bodies in Ashulia or the case filed over the killings and crimes against humanity in Chankharpool are likely to kick off the trials as these are straightforward."

Although the prosecution toiled day and night, they still need more time to investigate the atrocities of Jatrabari, Uttra, and Badda as these places had a high number of casualties, Tajul said.

However, the final report will be ready any time now. "We have already received a draft report on the Ashulia incident. All cases are in their final stages."

The tribunal's investigation agency, however, is yet to submit a probe report in any of the 23 cases, three of which charge Hasina with crimes against humanity for her command responsibility, said an investigator preferring anonymity.

As many as 143 others, including former ministers, Awami League leaders, and law enforcers, are also accused in the cases.

Hasina would be charged with all elements of crimes against humanity for ordering systematic and widespread killings, said an investigator preferring anonymity.

The investigation agency has already gathered concrete evidence to charge the former premier, currently sheltered in India, with command responsibility.

Her crimes include murders, burning bodies, enforced

ARSA chief, 10 others held

FROM PAGE 1

ARSA came to light after the attacks on around 30 police and army posts in the early hours of August 25, 2017, triggering a ruthless military counter-attack that has driven around 740,000 Rohingya into Bangladesh.

After the persecuted Rohingyas took shelter in the squalid camps of Ukhia and Teknaf, ARSA members have been continuing their targeted killing missions in the camp directed by its commander.

Hundreds of Rohingyas were killed by ARSA members over the years after the exodus in 2017.

ARSA was found to be involved in criminal activities including murder, smuggling, abduction, trafficking and extortion in the camps.

Many activities of the militant group were against the Rohingya's repatriation process to Myanmar.

ARSA's activities came to discussion broadly after Rohingya rights activist and leader Mohib Ullah was killed at the Kutupalong camp.

Mohib Ullah, the chairman of the Arakan Rohingya Society for Peace and Human Rights, who advocated for repatriation, was shot dead on September 29, 2022.

Soon after the murder, Mohib's brother Habib Ullah claimed that ARSA, locally known as Al-Yakini, was behind the assassination.

Although ARSA leader Ataullah denied the armed group's involvement in the killing, a former high-ranking ARSA commander, however, informed that ARSA leaders

had discussed the assassination of Mohib Ullah, according to a report of the rights group Fortify Rights, launched yesterday.

"Bangladesh should cooperate with the International Crimes Tribunal and hand Ataullah over to the court to be investigated and held accountable for international crimes," John Quinley, Director of Fortify Rights, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Ataullah is a scourge on the Rohingya community.

"He is responsible for overseeing widespread violations against civilians. Bangladesh did the right thing in arresting Ataullah. This is an important day for Rohingya refugees in Myanmar Bangladesh," he added.

Besides on November 23, 2022, the ARSA's commander-in-chief Ataullah was named as the prime accused along with 65 others in the case filed over the murder of a DGFI officer near the Tumbru border in Bandarban's Naikhangchhari on November 14 of the year.

Bangladesh Air Force Squadron Leader Rizwan Rushdie, who was serving in DGFI, was killed and Rab official Sohel Barua was injured as drug smugglers opened fire during a clash near the Tumbru border.

Later, Mohammad Anwar Hossain, a DGFI field officer in Cox's Bazar, filed the case with Naikhangchhari Police Station.

[Our Narayanganj and Cox's Bazar Correspondent also contributed to this report]

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Minority attacks were political, not religious

Yunus tells US Senator Peters

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday said the attacks on minorities, particularly Hindus, following August 5 last year were politically, not religiously, motivated.

However, his government has taken swift action against the perpetrators, he said during a meeting with US Senator Gary Peters at the State Guest House Jamuna in Dhaka.

He made the remarks after Senator Peters noted that Bangladeshi-origin people in the US have expressed concerns over recent attacks on minorities.

Peter, however, said there has been a lot of misinformation surrounding these incidents, which has heightened public concerns.

In response, Prof Yunus urged the US senator, alongside other US political leaders, journalists, and activists, to visit Bangladesh and observe the country's religious harmony firsthand.

The chief adviser reaffirmed his government's commitment to protecting the rights of all citizens, regardless of gender, race, and religion.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



PHOTO: AMIRAN HOSSAIN, TITU DAS

With Eid right around the corner, people across the country are busy shopping in preparation for the festival. Some have flocked to the markets to buy new dresses for their loved ones, while tailors are engaged in round-the-clock shifts making clothes for their customers, inset. The photos were taken from the New Market area in the capital and Barishal city, respectively, yesterday.

Consensus commission to begin talks with parties tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Consensus Commission (NCC) is set to begin separate discussions with political parties to form a national consensus on state reforms tomorrow.

The first meeting in this series will be held with the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) at 3:00pm in the LD Hall of the National Parliament.

According to an NCC press release, schedules for discussions with other parties will be announced gradually.

Sources said the commission plans to continue its dialogue with political parties until March 24, before Eid. As per this schedule, the commission may hold discussions with two more parties next week.

As of yesterday, 15 out of 38 political parties have submitted their opinions to the NCC. The Jatiya Gono Front and Jatiya Samantantri Dal (JSD) submitted their opinions yesterday.

The commission also noted that 14 other parties, including BNP, Jamaat, and the National Citizen Party, are expected to submit their opinions in the coming days.

On March 6, the NCC sent spreadsheets with key recommendations from various reform commissions to 37 political parties. These parties were asked to respond by March 13.

Mother, daughter found hanging dead in Dinajpur Five detained in five districts over rape, molestation

STAR REPORT

Police recovered the hanging bodies of a woman and her six-year-old daughter yesterday in Dinajpur.

The deceased were identified as Lucky Akter, 28, and her daughter Morium Akter of Lichupara village.

Police suspect that Lucky may have died by suicide, fearing humiliation over allegations of an extramarital affair.

According to locals and police, some villagers on Monday accused Lucky of having an extramarital affair. A social arbitration was scheduled for yesterday to determine a penalty for her.

However, a group of people suddenly attacked Lucky's husband, Mohorom Ali, near their home yesterday afternoon.

"Seeing the attack, Lucky broke down emotionally, fearing public humiliation during the arbitration," said Saidul Islam, a member of the local union parishad.

Shortly afterwards, Lucky and her daughter were found hanging from the ceiling of their residence.

Police recovered the bodies around 5:30pm, said Abdullah Al Mamun, inspector of Phulbari Police Station.

"The husband has been detained for investigation. Efforts are underway to arrest those responsible for instigating her," the inspector added.

Meanwhile, a man was sent to jail yesterday for allegedly

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8



This road in the Khilgaon area was cut by Titas Gas to set up gas lines in the area. As a result, pedestrians or speeding vehicles could fall into this gap at any time. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

DETAILED AREA PLAN Stop promoting business interests in amendments Urban planners urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government must take responsibility if the Detailed Area Plan and building regulations are amended in favour of business groups ignoring citizens' interests, said urban planning experts yesterday.

The amendment to DAP, which is underway, should immediately be stopped as it aims to serve business interests, they said at a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club.

Any revision to DAP and building regulations must involve citizens, professionals, and community organisations to ensure overall public welfare and liveability of the city, they said.

They demanded that the interim government publishes a white paper after a thorough investigation into past amendments made to the DAP and other urban plans under business influence.

Several civil society, professional organisations and advocacy groups, including Bangladesh Institute of Planners, Center for Atmospheric Pollution Studies, Work for Better Bangladesh Trust, Bangladesh Urban Forum, Center for Housing and Building Research, and the Institute for Planning and Development, jointly organised the event.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

Bangladeshis can still obtain Umrah visas: adviser

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Saudi Arabia has not suspended Umrah visas for Bangladeshi citizens, said Religious Affairs Adviser AFM Khalid Hossain yesterday.

He said the Saudi ambassador in Dhaka had confirmed this to the religious affairs secretary.

The Saudi ambassador advised Bangladeshi agencies to contact the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah through authorised Saudi Umrah companies or agents, submitting the necessary documents, including air tickets and hotel

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

Resign from govt within 15 days

Gono Odhikar Parishad calls upon advisers Asif, Mahfuj

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Gono Odhikar Parishad yesterday called for the resignation of interim government advisers Asif Mahmud Shobij Bhuiyan and Mahfuj Alam within 15 days, accusing them of compromising the government's neutrality.

They made the demand at a press conference held at the party's Bijoynagar office.

At the press conference, Faruk Hasan, vice

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Govt employees to get extended Eid holidays

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Government employees are set to enjoy a prolonged holiday during Eid-ul-Fitr, with at least six consecutive days off, according to the public administration.

The official Eid holiday is from March 29 to April 2, with March 31 likely to be the Eid day, subject to moon sighting. The break includes the two days before and two days after Eid, declared as government holidays by executive order.

Additionally, March 28 marks Shab-e-Qadr, a public holiday, and is a Friday -- a weekend day in Bangladesh. Earlier, March 26 is a public holiday for Independence Day, making March 27 the only working day before the extended Eid holiday. Offices will reopen on April 3 (Thursday) but close again for the weekend on April 4 and 5.

This results in government offices remaining open for just two days -- March 27 and April 3 -- between March 26 and April 5, effectively creating an 11-day span with minimal working days.

A source from the cabinet division said a summary regarding the holiday extension might be presented at the next Advisory Council meeting. If approved, the Ministry of Public Administration will issue a notification.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

Resign from govt

FROM PAGE 3
president of the party, said to maintain neutrality, the two advisers, who were former student leaders, must step down immediately.

"If they do not resign, we will announce a strict programme in coordination with other political parties and pro revolution forces," he declared.

He criticised the interim government for what he called an imbalance in representation, saying, "This is a people's government, yet instead of fulfilling public aspirations, it is favouring a particular political party. This raises doubts and suspicions."

He warned that if the government fails to meet public expectations, people will stand against it as well.

The party also criticised the remarks made by US Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, who, during a media interview in Delhi, said the Trump administration is "deeply concerned" about the situation in

Minority

FROM PAGE 3

Bangladesh, particularly regarding Islamic terrorism and the persecution of minorities.

Gono Odhikar Parishad dismissed these claims, asserting that no such

issues exist in the country.

Calling for meaningful reforms, the party emphasised the need to restructure the Advisory Council under the chief adviser's leadership, as it currently includes controversial figures. They cited a High Court ruling, stressing that elections must be held under a caretaker government to ensure fairness.

The group reiterated its demands for trials for genocide, state reforms, and a clear roadmap forward.

"We agree with the chief adviser's statement that state reforms are needed before the December elections. However, achieving this requires national consensus. Unfortunately, the advisers' statements are only deepening national divisions," they said.

The US Senator also called on Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain at the State Guest House Padma yesterday, where both sides emphasised the need to further strengthen trade relations and security cooperation between the two nations.

Govt employees

FROM PAGE 3

An additional secretary from the ministry said extended holidays help ease travel challenges for people returning to their hometowns for Eid. If April 3 is declared a holiday, employees could potentially enjoy a nine-day break from March 28 to April 5.

Government officials may not take casual leave between holidays, as it would be considered an extension of the break, but they can apply for earned leave.

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Should DC offices stay? Stop promoting

FROM PAGE 3

non-partisan manner, what will be the role of a shadow council leader? Will it merely be a symbolic opposition post?" he asked.

A significant point of contention was whether local government members would be willing to serve without remuneration.

"When elected representatives at all levels demand increased allowances, would anyone be interested in contesting elections without payment?" questioned Samor Roy, executive director of Media Professional Group.

The debate over maintaining deputy commissioner offices also gained momentum, with governance experts arguing that fully empowered district councils could eliminate the need for separate deputy commissioner offices.

"Rather than maintaining redundant administrative structures, district councils could be transformed into district-based economic hubs," suggested Mohammad Mahbub Alam Firoz, executive director of SHIELD.

Speakers also stressed the need for an inclusive governance system, with Raushan Ara from Naripokkho emphasising the importance of diverse representation across gender, profession, age, and ethnicity in local government committees.

Responding to journalists' questions, the Governance Advocacy Forum acknowledged the role of political parties in implementing these reforms.

They urged the government to engage with political parties more effectively and reduce dependence on bureaucracy to accelerate reform decisions.

"Decentralisation will only work if elected representatives are genuinely empowered to make decisions and implement policies," they

added.

The event, moderated by Kaniz Fatema, deputy executive director of WAVE Foundation, was attended by experts including Firoz Nurun Nabi Jugol, programme director of Democracywatch, Mohammad Mohsin Kabir, programme manager of Manusher Jonno Foundation, as well as representatives from the media, civil society, youth groups, and marginalised communities.

Enact practical

FROM PAGE 3

It also recommended increasing fines and compensation mentioned in Section 250.

Furthermore, the Supreme Court could issue a practice direction under Chapter IIIB of the High Court Division Rules.

If a complaint is brought before a Magistrate's Court under Section 200 of the CrPC, in which the majority of the accused individuals are not explicitly linked to the alleged incident, the magistrate should ensure a proper investigation before taking cognisance of the case.

To prevent real culprits from being spared due to collusion with the police, the commission proposed forming a high-powered task force in every division to oversee such matters.

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representatives are genuinely empowered to make decisions and implement policies," they

added.

Khalid shared this information during a press briefing at the conference room of the ministry.

Regarding the refund of air ticket costs for Umrah pilgrims, the adviser said Biman is refunding ticketed pilgrims who are unable to travel due to visa issues as per regulations. Other airlines, including Saudia, have also been requested to refund fares to those affected.

He further informed that the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah has assigned over 400 Saudi Umrah companies to coordinate Umrah operations with agencies from various countries. Each company has a specific quota for Umrah pilgrims annually. Once a company reaches its quota, visa issuance through that company is temporarily halted.

Khalid said that upon learning about the visa issue, the ministry promptly contacted the Saudi Embassy in Dhaka. Initially, a verbal request was made to maintain the visa issuance process, followed by a formal letter (DO letter) urging the continuation of Umrah visa issuance.

He added that Bangladesh's Hajj counsellor in Jeddah is in regular communication with relevant officials of the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah to ensure that ticketed pilgrims can perform Umrah during Ramadan.

According to the EC

law, a political party must have committees in at

Stop promoting

FROM PAGE 3

Speakers called upon government agencies like Rajuk and city corporations to swiftly implement area-based action plans for establishing essential civic facilities such as schools, hospitals, parks, and playgrounds as outlined in the DAP.

Professor Adil Mohammed Khan, president of BIP, said while significant constitutional reforms took place following the July Uprising, no substantial reforms have been made to urban planning, construction laws, or environmental policies to ensure sustainable and inclusive development.

"Instead, vested groups have persistently spread misinformation about the DAP," he said.

The review committees formed after previous DAP ultimately weakened their

implementation, prioritising business interests over the public good, he alleged.

Prof Khan highlighted that the uncertainty with DAP has discouraged property owners from constructing buildings, as professionals in the sector advised clients against proceeding with designs aligned with the new regulations.

He also pointed out the alarming modifications in the proposed building

regulations, including a drastic increase to the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) for residential buildings in Dhaka, placing excessive pressure on an already overburdened city.

Increasing population density in certain areas without enhanced infrastructure and civic amenities would severely impact Dhaka's liveability, he said.

Sheikh Muhammad Mehedi Ahsan, general secretary of BIP, said instead of prioritising effective building regulations, public health, and welfare, the recent

amendments appear to be driven by business interests.

Prof Shayer Gafur of architecture department at Buet said increasing building heights and FAR indiscriminately is exacerbating congestion and environmental degradation.

Engineer Abu Sadeq, executive director of Center for Housing and Building Research, urged Rajuk and relevant ministries to involve all stakeholders, including professionals and citizens in the urban policy amendment process.

Locals rescued the girl as she screamed, but Yasin managed to flee.

Later, her father filed a case, leading to Yasin's arrest, said Mohammad Anwar Alam, OC of Gazaria Police Station.

In Gazipur, Shankar Chandra Shil, 50, a salon owner, was accused of molesting an eight-year-old girl in Pubail.

The child's mother later filed a case, and police arrested Shankar the same night, said SM Amirul Islam, OC of Pubail Police Station.

Mother

FROM PAGE 3

raping his 12-year-old granddaughter in Jashore's Manirampur upazila.

The accused is Lutfar Rahman Gazi, 60.

Police said Lutfar first raped the girl around a month ago. Then he raped her again on Monday.

Later, the victim shared the incident with her family members.

A case was filed by the victim's aunt, said OC

Noor Mohammad Gazi of Manirampur Police Station.

In Panchgrah, a local court sent a madrasa teacher to jail yesterday for sodoming his student.

Rezwan Parvez, 22, sodomised the 11-year-old student early Sunday, according to case statement.

Later, police arrested the accused following a case filed by the victim's father, said OC Sohel Rana of Debiganj Police Station.

In Kurigram, police yesterday detained a man for raping a 50-year-old intellectually disabled woman in Nageshwari area.

The accused, Babar Ali, 30, raped the woman when she went to the riverbank yesterday afternoon.

The process of filing a case was ongoing, said Nageshwari Police Station's OC Rezaul Karim Reza last night.

Furthermore, two men were sent to jail yesterday in Munshiganj and Gazipur on charges of molesting two children.

In Munshiganj, Md Yasin, 45, allegedly molested a six-year-old girl near her home in Gazaria upazila on Monday.

Locals rescued the girl as she screamed, but Yasin managed to flee.

Later, her father filed a case, leading to Yasin's arrest, said Mohammad Anwar Alam, OC of Gazaria Police Station.

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law, a political party must have committees in at

HC questions legality

FROM PAGE 3

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According to the EC

law, a political party must have committees in at

least 22 districts and 100 upazilas for registration. However, the three hill districts have only 20 upazilas, preventing hill communities from forming political or regional parties despite their interest.

As a result, the current law, under which the notification was issued, deprives the hill population of the right to establish political parties, the lawyer added.

Deputy Attorney General Golam Rahman Bhuiyan represented the state during the hearing.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) invites Expression of Interest (EOI) along with financial offers from the TV Broadcasters or Marketing Agents for acquiring the following Media Rights of Zimbabwe Team's Tour of Bangladesh 2025 comprising of 02 Tests to be held from 20th of April 2025 to 2nd of May 2025.

1. Satellite TV Channel Rights.

2. Digital OTT (Over-the-Top) Rights.

3. DTH (Direct-to-Home) Rights.

Area of Rights :

A detailed EOI document has been developed incorporating all necessary EOI details and documents for acquiring the above-mentioned Media Rights of Zimbabwe Team's Tour of Bangladesh 2025 involving Bangladesh National Cricket Team (Men).

Eligibility Criteria:

a) Companies related to Tobacco, Alcohol (surrogated and non-surrogated), Betting, Online Betting shall not be eligible to participate in the EOI process.

b) Any person(s) or entities with an existing unresolved dispute (i.e. Financial, Disciplinary and any other) with BCB or ICC on a point of law or fact shall be ineligible to acquire the aforementioned rights or to participate in the EOI Process.

c) The Broadcaster/ TV Channel must be in operation (on air) for at least 03 (Three) years.

d) Marketing agents must have the capability and reasonable experience in marketing of Worldwide Media Rights.

EOI Document Purchasing Procedure :

a) Interested parties need to obtain a copy of the EOI Document from BCB Management Office (Marketing & Commercial Department) on payment of the Non-Refundable fees of BDT 50,000 (Fifty Thousand Taka Only) in the form of Pay-Order/ Bank Draft/ Cash or for the Overseas participants USD 500 (Five Hundred US Dollar only) to be remitted to BCB (Account No. 01-7537131-01, Account Name : Bangladesh Cricket Board, Bank : Standard Chartered Bank, Dhaka, Bangladesh, SWIFT : SCBLBDDX). Please send your request for the EOI Document (Soft copy or printed version) along with the evidence of Bank Transfer / Payment receipt referred to above at the following email address: sponsorship.rights@bcb-cricket.com.

b) The details of the EOI process, Tentative Tour Itinerary, Bank Guarantee Format etc. are set out in the EOI Document. EOI document will be available from 20th of March 2025 to 06th of April 2025 during working hours (10.00 AM to 5.00 PM except Friday & Public Holidays in Bangladesh).

EOI Submission Procedure :

The EOI along with financial offer (prepared in accordance with the EOI Document) must be submitted at the BCB Management Office at Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Mirpur-2, Dhaka 1216, Bangladesh by 7th of April 2025 during office hours (between BST 1000 to BST 1700) and should be in a sealed envelope to be addressed to: Chief Executive Officer, Bangladesh Cricket Board.

The EOI needs to be accompanied with the following documents:

1. Company Profile and Individual Directors' / Owners' Profile.

2. Updated auditor's report on financial statements (In case of consortium, each party's auditor's report needs to be submitted individually).

3. Bank Solvency Certificate along with bank Statement.

4. Certified copy of Memorandum and Articles of Association along with certificate of Incorporation or similar constitutional documents.

5. Updated VAT Registration Certificate, Trade License and Tax Identification Number (TIN) Certificate or similar documents.

6. In case of Consortium, notarized consortium Agreement.

The BCB reserves the right to

Shafik Rehman regains control of Jai Jai Din

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Shafik Rehman, founding editor of the Daily Jai Jai Din, has regained control of the Bangla newspaper after 18 years.

Shafik received the official declaration from Dhaka District Administration Office yesterday.

He later visited the Jai Jai Din Mediaplex on Love Road in Tejgaon and met the jubilant journalists, officials, and employees.

Earlier, the government had revoked the newspaper's declaration following an application by Shafik Rehman, citing violations in publication process.

As per official order, the newspaper was not being printed at the designated press.

Shafik Rehman was forced to leave his post during the military-backed caretaker government in 2007.

TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION It's in high demand in Bangladesh

Says British Council report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transnational education (TNE) is proving to be in high demand in Bangladesh, with law being a particularly popular subject, according to a report launched by the British Council yesterday.

The demand for TNE placements typically comes from students who lack the resources to study abroad but wish to pursue higher education at reputed international institutions.

TNE refers to higher education programmes -- delivered through online learning, overseas branch campuses, or partnerships with academic institutions -- where students study in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based.

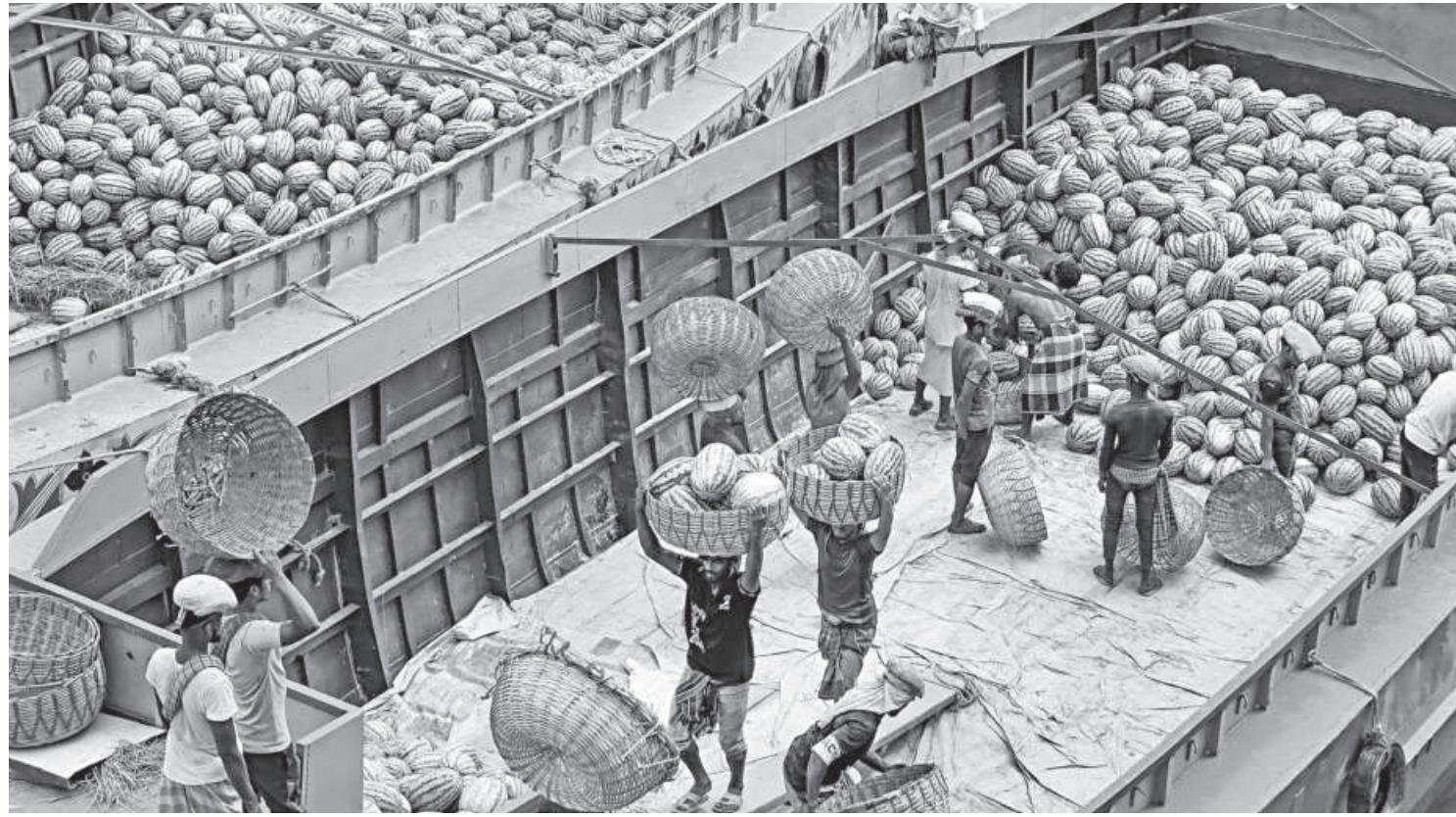
British High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Sarah Cooke, said TNE plays a crucial role in expanding access to world-class education, allowing students to earn international qualifications while remaining in Bangladesh.

Stephen Forbes, country director for the British Council in Bangladesh, said TNE can play a significant role in shaping the future of higher education in the country.

"TNE can bridge the gap in higher education access and drive economic growth for the country. We look forward to working with our partners in Bangladesh to implement the recommendations from the report," he said.

University Grants Commission Chairman Prof SMA Faiz praised the British Council's commitment to fostering collaboration between universities in Bangladesh and the UK. He noted that such efforts create opportunities for academic excellence and institutional capacity-building.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5



Workers unload watermelons brought by boats from Bhola to Khulna. During Ramadan, the demand for watermelons remains high. So, traders bring large quantities through river routes and sell them at a wholesale rate of Tk 6,000-Tk 25,000 per 100 pieces, depending on the size. The photo was taken from the No-4 Rocket Ghat in Khulna's Boro Bazar area recently.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

DHAKA WEDNESDAY MARCH 19, 2025

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The Daily Star

5

'Freeze accounts of Nayeemul, family' Court orders ACC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

ADhaka court yesterday ordered the Anti-Corruption Commission to freeze 163 bank accounts belonging to Nayeemul Islam Khan, a senior journalist and former press secretary to ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina, and his four family members, over allegations of amassing wealth illegally.

The four others are Nayeemul's wife Nasima Khan Monti, and their three daughters -- Lubiba Nayeem Khan, Zulika Nayeem Khan, and Adiva Nayeem Khan.

They allegedly deposited Tk 6,25,49,944 in these accounts, said a court staffer.

Judge Md Zakir Hossain of the Dhaka Metropolitan Senior Special Judge's Court passed the order after ACC Deputy Director Afroza Haque Khan submitted an application.

ACC public prosecutor Mahmud Hossain moved the application on behalf of the anti-graft body.

According to the application, ACC investigations found allegations of suspicious transactions involving deposits of around Tk 386 crore and withdrawals of around Tk 379 crore using the 163 bank accounts.

"ACC came to know from credible sources that the couple and their daughters were attempting to transfer the money elsewhere. So, an order is

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Our father was a man of integrity, kindness, and grace. His warmth and generosity touched the lives of everyone who knew him. Whether through quiet acts of goodwill, heartfelt advice, or a well-timed joke, he had a unique way of uplifting those around him. His love for our family was boundless, and his devotion to our country was a testament to the strength of his heart.

We salute him for his profound patriotism and the sacrifices he made for the country as the organizer of the Language Movement. He served as President of the Supreme Court Bar Association and Chief of the Political Research Council. His contributions to the nation's progress will always be remembered.

Though nineteen years have passed since his physical departure, his spirit remains ever-present. The values he instilled in us - compassion, integrity, and service - continue to guide our lives.

To honor his memory, a milad mahfil and prayer congregation will be held in Dhaka and at his birthplace, Gournadi, Barisal.

- Family Members

Should DC offices stay?

Experts debate local government reforms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As Bangladesh moves towards strengthening local government, questions have emerged over the need to maintain separate offices for deputy commissioners if all tiers of local governance adopt a uniform structure.

This issue was a focal point at a press conference, titled "Democratic Decentralisation and Local Government Reforms in Light of Public Aspirations," held yesterday at the Jatiya Press Club.

Jointly organised by the Governance Advocacy Forum and UNDP, with support from the Embassy of Switzerland in Bangladesh, the event aimed to discuss reforms in local governance.

Mohsin Ali, coordinator of the Governance Advocacy Forum and executive director of WAVE Foundation, outlined six significant challenges facing Bangladesh's local governance -- institutional weaknesses, excessive centralisation of power, financial limitations, lack of transparency and accountability, political interference, and inadequate gender and social inclusion.

To address these issues, he proposed several reforms, including the abolition of MPs' advisory roles in upazila parishads, the conversion of deputy commissioner offices into district council offices, the introduction of a local government cadre service, and direct elections for regional and district

councils.

The event also considered the feasibility of restructuring local government to mirror a parliamentary system. The proposed model includes an executive council, a chairperson similar to a speaker, and a shadow council leader akin to an opposition leader.

However, concerns were raised about the practicality of such a system. "Is this structure realistic in Bangladesh's

CHALLENGES IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

- Institutional weaknesses
- Excessive centralisation of power
- Financial limitations
- Lack of transparency, accountability
- Political interference
- Inadequate gender and social inclusion

context? Will it lead to internal factions and a fragile council prone to vote-buying?" questioned Mohsin Ali.

Abdul Awal, executive director of NRDS, cautioned against electing council leaders following ward-based councillor elections, suggesting it could result in party-like divisions and hinder effective governance.

"If council members are elected in a

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Prevent illegal sand extraction from Padma

HC directs authorities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed the authorities concerned of the government to immediately stop illegal sand extraction from the Padma river between Rajbari's Goalanda and Pabna's Pakshi Channel.

The court also ordered the authorities to take legal action against those involved in illegal sand extraction.

The HC bench of Justice Md Iqbal Kabir Lytton and Justice Md Riaz Uddin Khan passed the directive and the order following a writ petition filed as public interest litigation by five Supreme Court lawyers, including Farid Hasan Mehedi and Rasheduzzaman Rana, in 2022 seeking necessary directives to protect the Padma River and its environment.

The HC said the provisions of the relevant Sand Quarry and Soil Management Act, 2010 must be strictly followed in issuing the lease of any sand quarry.

The Padma river channel, its environment, and important structures on the river's banks must be protected through hydrographic survey for declaring any sand quarry within the river, the court observed.

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TENDER NOTICE

Sealed tenders are hereby invited from bonafide Distributors/Suppliers of home and abroad for supplying of **Med and Surgical Equipment (Cochlear Implant Devices With Accessories & Audiology Equipment)** to CMH Chattogram. Tender documents will be sought from admin office CMH Chattogram from 21 Mar 2025 to 21 April 2025 during office hours on non-refundable payment of tk 8,000/- (Eight thousand only). Distributors/Suppliers should submit certificate of experience as wholesaler /Suppliers/Distributors of mother company but experience of supplying above mentioned Electro Medical Equipments & Devices will be given priority. Submitted tender will be opened at 1330 pm on 21 April 2025 in the office of the undersigned in presence of tenders if any. To ensure timely & proper supply of above mentioned Electro Medical Equipments & Devices the selected company will deposit 10% estimated value of particular Electro medical Equipments in favour of CMH Chattogram for security purpose. Tender will be cancelled for providing any wrong or false statement. Authority reserves the right to accept or reject any or all tenders without assigning any reason whatsoever.

আই এস পি আর/সেনা/২১১

Commandant
CMH Chattogram
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GD-700

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

বাংলাদেশ পুলিশ

পরিচালক (ডিআইজি) এর কার্যালয়

কেন্দ্রীয় পুলিশ হাসপাতাল

রাজারবাগ, ঢাকা

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পাবলিক প্রক্রিয়েমেট রুলস/০৮ (সর্বশেষ সংশোধনী) মোতাবেক চলতি ২০২৪-২০২৫ অর্থ বছরে কেন্দ্রীয় পুলিশ হাসপাতাল, রাজারবাগ, ঢাকায় Digital Mammography Machine ক্রয়ের লক্ষ্যে স্মারক নং-কেঠ ৪৩ হাঁ/দরপার/৩৭-২০২৪-২০২৫/১৩১৫, তারিখঃ ০৪/০৩/২০২৫়টি মূলের প্রকাশিত বিজ্ঞপ্তি নিম্নরূপভাবে সংশোধন করা হল।

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সর্বশেষ তারিখ ও সময়	১২.০০ ঘণ্টিকা	০২.০০ ঘণ্টিকা

দরপত্র নোটিশ ও সিডিউলের অন্যান্য শর্তবিলী অপরিবর্তিত থাকবে।

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পক্ষে-পরিচালক (ডিআইজি)

বাংলাদেশ পুলিশ

কেন্দ্রীয় পুলিশ হাসপাতাল, ঢাকা

ফোনঃ ৮৮৩২২৪০০/৯৪৩৪৪১৩



PHOTO: COLLECTED

A busy Eid for Totini

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Tanjim Saiara Totini is one of the most popular contemporary artistes in the entertainment arena. With Eid just around the corner, she is travelling to different locations almost every day to participate in scheduled Eid special drama shoots. This routine will continue for her until just before Eid day.

Then again, the actress told The Daily Star that she is enjoying this hectic schedule. "I truly enjoy being busy. In fact, I don't feel good when I have no work. The crew members of the set have become a family to me."

Totini is currently filming an Eid drama directed by Rafat Mozumder Rinku, whose title is yet to be finalised. In this project, she will be seen opposite Yash Rohan.

She has also wrapped up filming a one-hour drama titled *Bouyer Biye*, opposite Yash Rohan, directed

by Rubel Hasan. "This drama has a unique storyline. I believe the audience will enjoy it," she said, adding that she found great joy in playing her role.

Adding to the list, she mentioned that she has already completed several projects and will be delivering fresh content for the Eid lineup. She will also share the screen with Tawsif Mahbub and Farhan Ahmed Jovan. "Most of the dramas I'm shooting now are for Eid. This year, viewers will get to watch several quality productions. I'm feeling quite optimistic about them."

Another drama, *Tomader Golpo*, directed by Mohammad Mostafa Kamal Raz, features Totini opposite Jovan once again. This project has been produced under the Cinemawala banner. Under the same banner, she has also completed filming for *Agnishikha*, another Eid special.

Regarding her experience, she added, "I've worked on very different stories this time, with roles that are distinct from one another. In Mostafa Kamal Raz bhai's drama, I play a lively village girl - a challenging character. Viewers will get to see a new side of my performance."

She further revealed, "In another drama, I am again playing a village girl. However, it's a role completely different from who I am in real life."

After closing out her packed Eid schedule, Totini plans to visit Barishal, her hometown, just a day before Eid. She last visited in 2018. Excitedly, the actress shared, "I'm really looking forward to going home this Eid after so long. Visiting my hometown brings immense joy. My paternal and maternal grandparents' houses are there, and I spent some of the golden moments of my life in Barishal."

2025 iHeartRadio Music Awards: Lady Gaga secures top honour

The 2025 iHeartRadio Music Awards lit up Los Angeles' Dolby Theatre last Monday (March 17), delivering a night of star-studded celebrations and major honours.

Lady Gaga was recognised with the prestigious iHeartRadio Innovator Award for her groundbreaking contributions to music and performance, while the legendary Mariah Carey, the best-selling female artiste in history, was celebrated with the iHeartRadio Icon Award.

Taylor Swift led the nominations, sweeping multiple fan-voted categories, while Morgan Wallen followed closely with 10 nominations.

The night also celebrated Billie Eilish, Doja Cat, Post Malone, Sabrina Carpenter, Kendrick Lamar, Chappell Roan, Tate McRae, SZA, Muni Long, Usher, and Chris Brown, among others, all of whom earned major nods.



Mou, Tisha, and Bubly to light up BTV's Eid 'Anondomela'

Bangladesh Television (BTV) is set to air its annual Eid special programme *Anondomela*, a long-standing favourite among viewers.

This year's edition will feature dance performances by celebrated dancer Sadia Islam Mou, actress Nusrat Imroz Tisha,

and film star Shobnom Bubly, confirmed BTV sources.

While Tisha and Bubly's choreography is being directed by Ivan Shahriar Sohag, Mou will present a performance choreographed by herself.

The show, hosted by Masuma Rahman Nabila and Emon, is

scheduled to be filmed at BTV's auditorium in Rampura, with rehearsals commencing on March 21.

Produced by Md Hasan Riyad, Mohammad Monirul Hasan, and Mahbuba Ferdous, the 50-minute programme will air on Eid night.

WHAT'S THE HAPS?

'Song of Hawkers'

Alliance Française de Dhaka presents *Song of Hawkers*, a three-part comedy play directed by French playwright Zazie Hayoum. The performance centres on the vibrant lives of Dhaka's hawkers through three light-hearted stories—*The Secret*, *The Thief Rewarded*, and *The Competition*—using the Grand Guignol theatre style. Interested attendees can join the event for free by signing up online.

Date: Thursday - Friday | March 20-21

Time: 3:30pm onwards

Venue: Experimental Theater Hall, Bangladesh Shilpkala Academy



Lively and Baldoni's legal dispute to be featured in new documentary

ITN Productions' latest documentary, *He Said, She Said: Blake Lively vs Justin Baldoni*, explores the highly publicised legal battle between the *It Ends With Us* co-stars. Set to premiere on Channel 5 in the UK and stream on Max and Discovery+ in the US, the film investigates Lively's allegations of sexual misconduct against Baldoni and claims that he orchestrated an online smear campaign against her. In response, Baldoni has denied the accusations and filed a \$400 million defamation countersuit. With the trial set for March 2026, the documentary presents key evidence, legal arguments, and social media reactions, reflecting the deep division among fans. Baldoni's legal team has also accused Lively's publicist of spreading misinformation.



NEWS

AL govt downplayed

FROM PAGE 12

There were only 15 incidents of gunshots in 2022, which jumped to 149 in 2023 and 257 in 2024.

HASINA'S REGIME BLAMED

In the report, the rights body claimed that under the government of the now-deposed Sheikh Hasina, impunity prevailed in the camps, partly due to the government's prolonged denial of Rohingya militants' presence.

It added that this refusal to admit their existence contributed to deteriorating security conditions, with militant groups allegedly carrying out killings, abductions, and acts of torture against Rohingyas.

The report highlighted that the authorities have also been responsible for human rights violations against the refugees, further exacerbating security concerns.

For years, the Bangladeshi government refused to acknowledge the activities of Rohingya militant groups publicly. As a result, the authorities failed to take meaningful action, even as these groups carried

out attacks on the Rohingyas.

"Rohingya armed groups are wreaking havoc in Bangladesh and Myanmar with near complete impunity," said John Quinley, director of Fortify Rights.

"War crimes are usually committed within the immediate theater of armed conflict, but in this case, crimes in Bangladesh are directly connected to the war in Myanmar. Bangladesh's interim government should cooperate with international justice mechanisms to bring perpetrators to justice."

The recent US government funding cuts are creating more space for Rohingya militants in the camps, worsening security conditions for refugees, Fortify Rights warned.

HUMANITARIAN CORRIDOR

Speaking as a panellist at the report launch, Patrick Phongsthorn, senior advocacy specialist at the rights body, stressed the need for a humanitarian corridor to break the "siege-like" conditions Rohingya refugees face.

He called for a structured mechanism to ensure the free movement of aid and essential goods.

He warned that "safe zones," often proposed as alternatives, have historically failed, making a humanitarian corridor a more viable solution for sustaining refugee safety and access to resources.

Patrick calls on Bangladeshi authorities and international justice bodies to investigate potential human rights violations in refugee camps, particularly those involving non-state actors.

He stressed the importance of investigating these crimes, particularly those involving killings, torture, and abductions, and holding perpetrators accountable.

Responding to a query from a journalist, rights body director John Quinley said a ceasefire was brokered in November 2023, leading to a decrease in killings, but there is growing concern about a rise in abductions and coercion into militant activities.

Court orders freeze on 31 accounts

FROM PAGE 12

Ambassador to Bangladesh SAIDA Shinichi and JICA Director General for South Asia Ito Teruyuki were present at the programme.

Bangladesh Railway Director General Afzal Hossain presided over the event, while Project Director Aal Fattah Md Masudur Rahman delivered the welcome speech.

Following the inauguration, a six-coach special train carrying guests and officials departed from Ibrahimabad Station at 12:09 pm and arrived at Sayedabad Railway Station in Sirajganj at 12:19 pm.

After a press conference at Sayedabad, the train returned to Ibrahimabad Rail Station with the guests.

The east and west zones of Bangladesh Railway were first connected with the opening of the Jamuna Bridge in June 1998, featuring a single railway track alongside a four-lane road.

However, nearly a decade after its inauguration, a crack appeared on the bridge, prompting authorities to impose both load and speed restrictions on railway operations. As a result, freight trains were not allowed on the bridge and the speed

limit for passenger trains was limited to 20 km/h.

In December 2016, the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council approved the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Rahman Railway Bridge project with an initial budget of Tk 9,734 crore, aiming for completion by December 2023.

After the political change over in August last year, the interim government renamed the bridge as Jamuna Railway Bridge. The project was completed in December 2024.

After the detailed design was finalised in September 2018, the costs of two major work packages increased significantly. Additional expenses for land acquisition, land lease, and the construction of a museum were also incorporated, raising the total project cost to Tk 16,781 crore.

Japan provided 72 percent of the funding through soft loans, and two Japanese joint-venture firms were involved in the bridge's construction.

Physical work on the project began in August 2020 and was completed in four and a half years, employing over 7,000 workers from Japan, Vietnam, Nepal, Australia, the Philippines, and Bangladesh.

against Hasina and Joy over allegations of laundering \$300 million to the United States.

On March 10 this year, the ACC approved the charge sheets against Hasina, Rehana, and four of their family members in six cases filed against them over the alleged misuse of power to obtain plots under the Purbachal New Town Project.

On March 11, the court also ordered the confiscation of Sudha Sadan, a property registered to Sheikh Hasina's children, and the immovable assets of Sheikh Rehana and Radwan Mujib Siddiqi.

The bridge is constructed on 50 pillars with 49 spans. Located 300 meters upstream of the existing Jamuna Bridge, the new railway bridge will accommodate up to 88 trains daily.

Tanvirul Islam, the project's chief engineer, told reporters that Japanese-made rail tracks have been installed on the bridge. "As a result, trains will in theory be able to reach a speed of up to 120 km/h. However, the operation speed limit has been set at 100 km/h."

On February 12, BR started operating passenger trains through the newly built bridge on a trial basis, using one of the two lanes of the bridge.

From today, both lines will be open for operation.

Train fares for routes using the bridge will rise from today, due to the increased portage charge, a toll levied for the construction and maintenance of a bridge.

For instance, the fare on the Dhaka-Rajshahi route will rise for a non-AC chair seat by Tk 45, an AC chair by Tk 80, an AC seat by Tk 95, and an AC berth by Tk 140, officials said.

[Our correspondent from Tangail also contributed the report.]

Russia to halt attacks on energy sites

FROM PAGE 12

But the Kremlin statement said a "key condition" for peace would be ending Western military and intelligence support to Ukraine's embattled military -- a position that will alarm Kyiv and European capitals that have already accused Putin of stalling.

Trump had already made clear before the call that he was ready to discuss "dividing up certain assets" -- what parts of occupied Ukraine that Russia would be allowed to keep.

The US president had said on his Truth Social network on the eve of the call that "many elements of a final agreement have been agreed to, but much remains" to be settled.

US allies, alarmed by Trump's recent pivot towards Russia, fear the Republican will give too much ground to the Russian president, a leader for whom he has repeatedly expressed admiration.

Kyiv had already agreed to the US proposal to halt fighting for 30 days. It said on Tuesday before the call that it expected Moscow to "unconditionally" accept to the ceasefire.

"It is time for Russia to show whether it really wants peace," Ukraine's

Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiga said.

But Putin has repeatedly said that there were further issues that needed discussion, which yesterday's call apparently failed to fully resolve.

Putin gave a hardline anti-Western speech Tuesday before the call, saying the West would still try to undermine Russia even if it lifted sanctions imposed over its invasion of Ukraine.

He mocked the G7 group of rich democracies -- from which Russia was expelled in 2018 -- to wild applause from the audience, saying it was too small to "see on a map."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has warned Putin does not want peace and is trying to achieve a better position militarily ahead of any halt in fighting.

Russia has attacked Ukraine with near-daily barrages of drones and missiles for more than three years, occupying some 20 percent southern and eastern Ukraine and pressing a grinding advance in recent months.

As Trump upended years of US policy he then had a televised shouting match with Zelensky in the Oval Office on February 28, which led to the United States temporarily suspending

its billions of dollars in military aid to Kyiv.

On Sunday Trump said he would discuss issues of "land" and "power plants" with Putin -- a likely reference to the Moscow-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant.

Trump is however intent on delivering on an election pledge to end fighting in Ukraine, blaming his predecessor Joe Biden's policy on Russia for fueling the war.

"It must end NOW," he said on Truth Social.

Woman gang-raped

FROM PAGE 12

8:00am after hearing her screams and took her to Cantonment Police Station. The accused, however, fled by that time, he said.

Locals caught two caretakers Enamul Haque, 38, and Hamidur Rahman, 53, of the building and handed them over to Cantonment Police Station.

The cantonment police then sent the two arrestees to Pallabi police, the OC said.

HC asks DC, SP

FROM PAGE 2

associates of the rape accused, who is now in jail.

The deceased worked at a poultry shop in the town. His daughter was raped allegedly by one of their neighbours on March 7.

The next day, the victim's father filed a case against Shibu Das, 30, and other unnamed individuals accusing them of aiding Shibu in the crime.

Police arrested Shibu on March 8, and he was sent to jail by a court, police said.

Deputy Attorney General Tanim Khan represented the state during hearing.

'Desperate and scared'

Palestinians react as entire families wiped out in strikes

AL JAZEERA

Palestinians in Gaza were woken up by Israel unleashing a new wave of attacks on Gaza which killed at least 404 people and wounded 562.

The attacks on Tuesday not only shattered a period of relative calm in Gaza during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan but also the fragile ceasefire deal Israel had with Hamas.

Palestinians who had returned to their damaged and destroyed homes after the ceasefire came into effect were also targeted by Israel's relentless bombing as entire families were wiped out in seconds.

"We were shocked late at night to see strikes and attacks on Gaza like in the early days of the war," Momen Qoreiqeh, who lost 26 members of his family in the attacks, told Al Jazeera.

"I was with my family and suddenly there was a huge attack on our residential block. The attack killed so many people from my family, some of them we still



haven't recovered from under the rubble."

Ahmed Abu Rizq, a teacher, recounted the initial hours of the Israeli attacks, which added to the state of sheer horror and panic being witnessed at the hospitals.

"We woke up frightened, hearing Israeli strikes everywhere in Gaza. If you're now in one of Gaza's hospitals, you will see blood everywhere," said Abu Rizq, adding that he had seen families arriving at hospital with the "remains of their children" in their hands.

Reporting from Gaza City, Al Jazeera's Hani Mahmoud said that Israel's strikes had once again turned Gaza into a "killing box".

"Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza City is overwhelmed with the number of mass casualties arriving," said Mahmoud. "We've seen entire families [killed] brought here, including a family of 26, with women, children and elderly. We've seen a mother here, crying over the bodies of her two daughters."

Why has Israel resumed large-scale strikes on Gaza?

AGENCIES

Israel has resumed large-scale attacks in Gaza with a wave of airstrikes and artillery fire against targets throughout the devastated territory. More than 400 have been killed and hundreds more injured, according to Palestinian authorities.

The casualties include some high-ranking Hamas officials and many civilians, including women and children. Hospitals and civil defence teams say they have been overwhelmed.

Israel has also issued evacuation orders for parts of northern and central Gaza close to the perimeter, suggesting that some kind of attack involving troops on the ground is imminent. Hundreds, possibly thousands, of Palestinians in the territory who have only recently returned to their homes, often in ruins, are on the move again.

WHY IS IT HAPPENING NOW?

The Israeli government has been threatening to launch an offensive for weeks. Israeli officials say targeting the Hamas leadership, which has re-emerged in recent weeks to again take control of Gaza, will bring about the release of more hostages. Many hostage families in Israel dispute this.

More practically, Israel now has capabilities it lacked six weeks ago. Ammunition stocks have been replenished – partly due to US deliveries – and new potential targets among Hamas' leaders identified. Planes and other equipment have been repaired. Troops have been rested.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CEASEFIRE?

The new offensive comes 16 days after the first of three phases of a ceasefire agreed in January ended. The three phases were supposed to lead to a definitive end to the war, a total Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the release of all remaining Israeli hostages held by Hamas.

Indirect talks to prevent a return to violence have stalled. Israel has



Injured Palestinians mourn beside the body of a baby, who was killed in an Israeli strike, at the Indonesian Hospital in Beit Lahia, in the northern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

proposed extending the first phase of the ceasefire by 30 to 60 days to allow for the release of more hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners. Hamas has refused this.

WHAT REASONS ARE BEING CITED FOR THE NEW STRIKES?

Critics say Netanyahu never had any intention of moving to the second phase of the ceasefire, which would have meant Israeli forces withdrawing from Gaza, in effect leaving Hamas as its de facto ruler. Hamas has reasserted its control in recent weeks, humanitarian officials there say, with civilian officials returning to previous posts and the battered military wing finding thousands of new recruits.

A second reason cited is that Israel had the full backing of the Trump administration for renewed attacks against Hamas.

Then there are the domestic political factors. Netanyahu needs support from rightwing allies to win crucial votes in Israel's parliament in coming days and weeks, and to maintain his grip on power. These allies have fiercely opposed a permanent end to hostilities in Gaza, with one resigning from

his ministerial post in protest at the January ceasefire. This vital support is now assured – at least in the short term.

Netanyahu is also on trial for corruption. If found guilty, he could face prison. On Tuesday, a court approved Netanyahu's request not to appear at a hearing on Tuesday "due to the renewal of the war", Israeli media reported.

WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN NEXT?

The grim reality is that the fragile two-month pause in hostilities between Israel and Hamas is now over. Israeli officials have made clear that the strikes are merely the beginning of a potentially much broader offensive that will continue until Hamas releases the 59 Israeli hostages still held in Gaza.

However, the move will not be welcomed by Egypt, which played a key role in the ceasefire negotiations, as well as Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

"The entire region is on the brink of something," said an Al Jazeera correspondent. "Clearly, this humiliation of [Egyptian] President [Abdel Fattah] el-Sisi cannot go by with total impunity."

West will try to undermine us Says Putin ahead of talks with Trump on Ukraine

AFP, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday said the West would try to undermine Russia regardless of whether it lifted sanctions, telling business leaders in Moscow they should look elsewhere to invest.

Delivering a broadly anti-Western speech ahead of a crunch phone call with US counterpart Donald Trump, Putin said the G7 group was too small to see "on a map" and that Western dominance was "slipping away".

Western countries introduced sweeping sanctions on Russia in response to its full-scale military offensive against Ukraine in February 2022, restrictions that the Kremlin has called an "illegal" attempt to destroy its economy.

"Even if there is a gesture from the other side, like they suggest lifting or easing something, you can expect they will find another way of pressing down, to throw a spanner in the works,"

Putin told business leaders at an event in Moscow.

"You should invest where it is profitable for you and Russia, where profits are high and investments are reliably protected. There are many such regions of the world," the Russian leader said.

Dozens of Western companies pulled out of Russia in the wake of its conflict in Ukraine, while some of those that remained were seized by the Russian government.

While the Russian economy has overcome the initial shock of sanctions and found domestic alternatives to most Western brands, it wants the West to lift them as part of any Ukraine peace deal.

The Trump administration has declined to say whether it will ease sanctions on Moscow, saying only that both sides will need to make "concessions" for peace.

Washington and Moscow have expressed optimism about recent talks but it remains to be seen if Trump can convince Putin to agree to a US-proposed 30 day ceasefire, more than three years into Russia's invasion.

Kyiv has agreed to halting fighting, but Putin instead set a string of conditions, with European countries criticising him for not committing to an immediate ceasefire.

ILLEGAL SETTLEMENT IN WEST BANK

Israel's policy 'a war crime': UN

AFP, Geneva

Israel must evacuate all settlers from the West Bank and make reparations for decades of illegal settlement, the UN rights chief said yesterday, describing the policy as "a war crime".

"The transfer by Israel of parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies amounts to a war crime," Volker Turk said in a statement.

"Israel must immediately and completely cease all settlement activities and evacuate all settlers, stop the forcible transfer of the Palestinian population, and prevent and punish attacks by its security forces and settlers."

Violence in the West Bank, which has been occupied by Israel since 1967, has escalated since the start of the war in Gaza.

"Israel's settlement policy, its acts of annexation, and related discriminatory legislation and measures are in breach

of international law, as the International Court of Justice has confirmed, and violate Palestinians' right to self-determination," Turk said.

His comments came as his office released a new report on the situation in the West Bank between October 2023 and last November.

That timeline coincides with the Israeli military began conducting a sweeping offensive across multiple areas of the West Bank on January 21, two days after a fragile ceasefire took effect in the Gaza Strip, largely halting 15 months of war there.

The operation, dubbed "Iron Wall", has resulted in dozens of deaths, including Palestinian children and Israeli soldiers,

according to the UN.

Before that operation began, the UN rights office found that a total of 612 Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces and settlers in the West Bank during the period covered by its report, amid "a climate of revenge".

During the same period, 24 Israelis were also killed in alleged attacks or clashes with Palestinians, it found.

The Palestinian health ministry in Ramallah has put the number of Palestinians killed in the West Bank between October 7, 2023 and March 14 at 911.

Meanwhile, at least 32 Israelis, including soldiers, have been killed in that period in Palestinian attacks or during military operations, according to official Israeli figures.



Dhaka South City Corporation

Office Of Superintending Engineer
Traffic Engineering Circle

Ref No: 46.207.000.09.27.000.2025/883

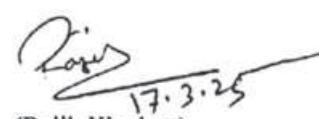
Dated: 17/03/2025

e-Tender Notice

e-Tenders are invited through e-GP portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) by Superintending Engineer, Traffic Engineering Circle, Dhaka South City Corporation for the procurement of following packages, which will be available at e-GP website from 17/03/2025 at 17:00

S.L No	Tender ID, Ref No & package No	Name of works	Last Selling date and Time	Tender Closing date & Time
01	Tender ID- 1084803 Ref No: 46.207.000.09.27.754.2025 Date: 26/01/2025 Package No-egp/dsc/TEC/PS01	Construction and Repairing work of Bus stoppage in Dhaka South City Corporation Area.	09-Apr-2025 12:00	09-Apr-2025 12:30

This is an online Tender, where only e-Tenders will be accepted in e-GP portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, please register on e-GP system portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>).


(Rajib Khadem)
Superintending Engineer
Traffic Engineering Circle
Dhaka South City Corporation

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Chief Adviser's Office

Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority

Mongla Export Processing Zone

Mongla, Bagerhat-9351

(www.bepza.gov.bd)

বিনিয়োগ অর্থাধিকার



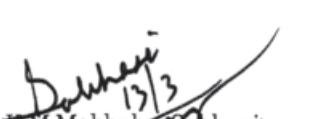
Date: 13 March 2025

Auction Notice (4th Call)

Sealed auctions are hereby invited from the interested National/Foreign Buyers/companies in order to sell Inventoried & Valuated Machinery, Equipment & other Assets by auction "as and where basis" of terminated industry named M/s. Rich Time Enterprise Ltd, Mongla EPZ (All goods are stored in a shed located inside Mongla EPZ). To participate in the auction the terms & conditions are stated below:

Terms & Conditions:

1. Interested Persons/Organizations/Existing enterprises of EPZ(s) (Local/Joint Venture/Foreign) or any other interested persons/organizations from outside EPZ can take part in this auction who are interested to purchase the Machinery, Equipment & other Assets "as and where basis" of the company by observing the existing rules and regulations in this regard;
2. Successful bidder will have to pay VAT, TAX and other payable fees as per custom rules for the duty free imported Assets of existing Assets of industry to be taken out to the Domestic Tariff Area (DTA);
3. Auction documents attached with a single pay order/bank draft/FDD from any schedule bank of an amount of 15% as earnest money (non-refundable for successful bidder & refundable for unsuccessful bidder) must be submitted in favour of BEPZA. Auction documents without earnest money will be treated as rejected;
4. Inventoried Machineries, Equipment & other Assets under the inventory list may be seen on 16-17 April 2025 from 10.00 am to 3.00 pm. Information regarding the visit and the list of Assets may be collected by contacting with the Executive Director, Mongla EPZ directly;
5. If the auction is accepted by the Authority, the successful bidder will have to pay the remaining 85% amount of the quoted price along with applicable TAX & VAT within 15 days to BEPZA through Pay Order/Bank Draft/FDD. Accordingly, the delivery of Machinery, Equipment & other Assets will have to be taken as per Customs & BEPZA rules;
6. Auction Schedule may be bought by paying Tk. 5,000.00 (non-refundable) within 17 April 2025 during office hours from the Accounts Department of Mongla-EPZ, Dhaka-EPZ, Chattogram EPZ, Adamjee-EPZ, Cumilla-EPZ, Karnaphuli EPZ, Ishwardi EPZ, Uttara EPZ & Accounts Department, BEPZA Executive Office, Dhaka;
7. Auction schedule may be dropped into the auction box kept at the office of Executive Director, Mongla EPZ on 24 April 2025 from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm and Submitted Auction documents will be opened in the same date at 12:30 pm at the office of Executive Director, Mongla EPZ in presence of the bidders (if any). Updated copy of VAT, TIN and Trade License shall have to be attached with the Auction schedule;
8. The Authority reserves the right to accept any auction or reject any or all of the submitted auctions without showing any reason. The Authority also reserves the right to cancel the Auction and accordingly take next action if the desired rates are not obtained.


(K M Mahbubul Ahsan)
Executive Director
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E-mail: ed.mepz@bepza.gov.bd

A message to US officials

Verify Bangladesh's ground realities before making sweeping comments

We are disappointed by US intelligence chief Tulsi Gabbard's remarks regarding the alleged persecution, killing, and abuse of minorities in Bangladesh. In an interview with India's NDTV, Gabbard suggested that this issue has been longstanding and that the "threat of Islamic terrorists" in the country is "rooted" in the "ideology and objective" to "rule and govern with an Islamist caliphate." When did all this happen, if at all? Under Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh was seen as India's best friend. Were we trying to establish an "Islamist caliphate" at that time? At a time when the interim government has been actively engaging with the new US administration, such a statement—unsupported by facts or substance—is deeply regrettable.

After years of authoritarian rule, Bangladesh has reembarked on the path to restoring democracy. It is true that, following the fall of the Awami League regime, some attacks against minorities did occur. However, most of these incidents took place when the country lacked a functioning law enforcement system in the immediate aftermath of the August 5 changeover. Moreover, many of the attacks were politically motivated rather than communally driven. Regardless, the interim government has categorically condemned all such incidents and undertaken legal actions. It has even invited journalists from around the world to visit and witness the situation firsthand. Despite these efforts, segments of the Indian media and political class have repeatedly misrepresented Bangladesh—often with completely fabricated reports.

We urge Tulsi Gabbard and other US government officials to independently examine all available evidence before making sweeping statements that unjustly link an entire country to global terrorism. Bangladesh has never been part of any global extremist movement. In fact, the only major instance of terrorism on its soil—the 2016 Holey Artisan attack—had Bangladesh as a victim rather than a perpetrator. Bangladesh has consistently been an ally in global counterterrorism efforts, including those led by the US, and remains committed to this cause. Given this reality, we hope that responsible officials, particularly in the US, will take care not to reinforce harmful stereotypes that misrepresent Bangladesh.

The people of Bangladesh have unequivocally expressed their desire for democracy by overthrowing the former authoritarian regime through great sacrifice. To ignore this and broadly suggest that Bangladeshi's wish to establish an Islamist caliphate undermines their struggle and sacrifices. If anything, Bangladesh has been one of the least communalistic countries in the region, particularly compared to its neighbours. Our chief adviser, a Nobel laureate, has clearly stated that Bangladeshi's of all backgrounds belong to the same "family."

Bangladesh seeks to build a stronger relationship with the US, one that requires deep mutual understanding. To achieve this, we urge the US administration to rely on firsthand information gathered through its local embassy rather than external sources. The US is also welcome to send its own journalists or fact-finding missions to assess the ground reality and engage directly with the Bangladeshi people.

Enforce ceasefire in Gaza by any means

World leaders must take action against Israel's renewed offensive

Israel has turned the word "ceasefire" into a farce through its renewed airstrikes on Gaza on Tuesday, killing at least 330 Palestinians, most of them women, children, and the elderly. Its offensive, with a green light from the US, has literally buried the three-phased ceasefire truce announced on January 15 under piles of dead bodies across Gaza.

It is evident now that Israel never intended to honour the truce between itself and Hamas, negotiated by the US, Qatar, and Egypt in May 2024. The first phase of the truce, which began on January 19, ended on March 1. During these 42 days, Hamas released 25 living and eight deceased Israeli hostages, while Israel released about 1,900 Palestinian prisoners and detainees and allowed aid trucks into Gaza. However, Israel then refused to proceed to the second phase that called for a permanent ceasefire, a complete withdrawal of Israeli troops, and the return of all remaining hostages by Hamas. Instead, it came up with a new plan. Reportedly, White House envoy Steve Witkoff advanced Israel's proposal to Hamas, offering to extend the first phase of the truce—requiring Hamas to release the remaining hostages—without any promise of Israeli troop withdrawal or a permanent ceasefire agreement.

This raises serious questions about Israel's intentions in ending the conflict, especially given its backtracking from the original agreement and its support for President Donald Trump's absurd plan to build a "Middle Eastern Riviera" in Gaza. What Israel is doing amounts to ethnic cleansing—a genocidal plan to create a Gaza without Gazans. After 15 months of relentless strikes that killed more than 48,000 Palestinians, Gazans returned to the rubble of their homes in mid-January, only to face even deadlier attacks now. And by giving Israel the nod for Tuesday's assault, the US has discarded whatever veil of humanitarian standards it once pretended to uphold.

Under these circumstances, countries that still believe in justice and humanity must not only condemn Israel's crimes but also take action to prevent further loss of lives, using whatever means necessary. Meanwhile, the UN Security Council must wake up and fulfil its mandate to maintain international peace—not as mere observers of an ongoing genocide, but by actively enforcing measures to stop it. We cannot allow a rogue state's refusal to honour a ceasefire agreement to become a death sentence for the Palestinians.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Iraq War begins

On this day in 2003, US President George W Bush ordered air strikes on Baghdad, thus launching the Iraq War to oust dictator Saddam Hussein, who was believed (wrongly) to be manufacturing weapons of mass destruction.

EDITORIAL

Rethinking char development in Bangladesh



Dr Mohammad Zaman
is an international development and resettlement specialist. He has lived and worked in Kāzipur Serajganj chars on the Jamuna River for research and consulting work. His most recent edited book (co-edited with Mustafa Alami) is titled 'Living on the Edge: Char Dwellers in Bangladesh' (Springer 2021).

MOHAMMAD ZAMAN

Recently, I read with great interest the editorial in *The Daily Star* on the plight of char dwellers, who have been long neglected and denied the basic necessities in life. The editorial highlighted the "dire living" conditions in chars and the struggle to earn a living in the face of year-round flood, drought and erosion disasters in the floodplain. Finally, it recommended a "bottom-up" approach to address the struggles towards improving the conditions of char dwellers in the country.

As I recall, in 2015, the First National Char Convention, attended by government officials, politicians, academics, local and international NGOs, and some vocal representatives from char areas, clearly recognised the need for assistance to alleviate poverty in chars with a longer term sustainable development strategy for inclusive development and a better governance structure. But then, between 2015 and 2025, nothing tangible happened in terms of policy, legal reforms with regard to charland tenure/ownership and administration and other institutional and governance issues.

Why this inaction when it comes to chars and char dwellers? In fact, there has not been any attention to char development in post-independence Bangladesh except for some amendments in the legislations related to charlands. For instance, the Agricultural Khas Land Settlement Policy, 1997 calls for redistribution of new khas land in char areas to the landless on long-term lease agreements. However, that, too, has been abused by the locally powerful and politically connected leaders, making the entire process of khas land distribution futile.

There are compelling evidence that the old systems and the alluvial and diluvian land laws derived from the colonial period have not worked for the benefit of the char people in Bangladesh. In effect, char dwellers have very little control over the chars. The current legislations as practised today favour the powerful landowners from the mainland and breed malpractices in leasing and redistribution of khas land. The sociopolitical dynamics are against the

poor and the marginalised, who are victims of quiet violence in the chars in the country.

In the past, I have written extensively on the Jamuna chars and char life dynamics. Char land constitutes nearly eight percent of the total land area in the country, with an estimated two crore people living on the chars of major river systems and in the coastal regions. These chars are pockets of poverty, particularly those in the northern districts; people living there

government to address the problem with new approaches, policies, and institutions. There are strong reasons for rethinking char development issues that can benefit the char dwellers. Based on my three decades of work on flood/erosion disasters, displacement, migration, and resettlement of char people, I propose a set of measures to draw attention of the relevant government departments and agencies. These measures will require paradigmatic shifts from current policies and practices in order to realise the potentials of development in the char lands of the country.

First, no national figures are currently available on the extent of displacement caused by erosion. Millions have already been displaced over the past decades, a large number of them taking refuge in the chars. Furthermore, there is no reliable data on the number of char people in the country. Estimates vary from one to

(e.g. Char Livelihoods Programme, Char Development and Settlement Programme, Sandbar Technology for Agriculture in Gaibandha, etc), focusing on health, housing, income, education, women's empowerment, and social protection, may help design future char development programmes in a more holistic manner.

Fourth, a Char Development Policy (CDP) and a dedicated agency such as Char Development Authority (CDA) are the only means towards the goal of better char administration.

Fifth, a bottom-up governance with devolution of power and participation of the char people is required to replace the current dysfunctional char land administration.

Sixth, any fundamental changes in the chars would require leadership at the community and local/national levels and a sense of purpose (i.e. equity, justice, and ethics) among the policymakers and programme



The chars of Bangladesh are pockets of poverty, particularly those in the northern districts.

PHOTO: MOSTAFA SABUJ

are by and large poor, isolated and highly vulnerable, both physically and socially, without land rights and sustained sources of living. Don't these people deserve any attention from the policymakers and planners? What kind of reforms and changes can we suggest for any "bottom-up" planning, development and administration of the char areas?

We must keep the focus on the plight of char people alive and draw attention of the current interim

two crore people.

Second, a new and more appropriate land law should be formulated to replace the existing laws on char lands, ensuring the rights of the displaced and the char dwellers. Also, local economic diversification would be essential for the welfare of char communities. This was also strongly voiced by the char people at the First National Char Convention in 2015.

Third, lessons from char development experiences in the past

administrators. Therefore, advocacy by NGOs and civil society organisations should be taken into account in future char development programmes.

Clearly, the chars represent a unique environment demanding unique solutions. Ensuring land rights for char people and introducing a decentralised and democratic system of governance for them are vital for achieving char development. All these call towards rethinking char development in Bangladesh.

It's time we built our own global brand

Dr Muhammad Ismail Hossain and Dr Nasrin Akter are professors in the Department of Marketing at the University of Dhaka.

MUHAMMAD ISMAIL HOSSAIN and NASRIN AKTER

Several years ago, while preparing for one of our brand management classes at Dhaka University, we searched for a suitable example of a brand that significantly contributes to a country's GDP. We found a few well-known brands from the US, such as Coca-Cola, Google, and Amazon. However, their contributions to GDP were not substantial, given the vast size of the American economy. One brand that caught our attention in Asia was Samsung, which seemed to have a significant impact on South Korea's GDP. According to a 2015 article published in *The New York Times*, the Samsung brand accounted for one-fifth of South Korea's exports and contributed approximately 17 percent of its GDP. Reflecting on the considerable impact of a single brand on a country's economy, we began to contemplate Bangladesh's RMG industry. The RMG industry contributed about 82 percent of total exports and 12.69 percent of our GDP in FY2015-16. We tried to identify notable brands from the sector, but could not find any. Consequently, we intended to raise this point during the next brand management class discussion, but unfortunately, it was unsuccessful.

After further investigation, we realised that Bangladesh primarily manufactures products for others,

concentrating significantly on lower-value-added goods. While the sector does produce some higher-value-added products for major brands, the quantities are relatively small. Further analysis indicated that we have substantial expertise in both lower- and higher-value-added manufacturing, as the sector has been operating for over 35 years, and we possess the necessary hard and soft resources to produce all types of RMG products. This encouraging discovery led to some questions: when we are highly equipped, why do we only produce for others? Why can't Bangladesh have its own global brand? We only get paid for stitching; the company that owns the brand enjoys the major share of the pie.

In 2017, Dhaka University hosted a seminar outlining the roadmap for Bangladesh to achieve its \$50 billion target for the RMG sector by 2021. We posed a question to the chief guest, who was both an RMG businessman and the state minister of an important ministry. We asked how realistic and sustainable the roadmap could be without our own Bangladeshi brand.

He replied that we are not yet at a stage where we can have our own brand. This made me wonder why, despite having a mature industry and exceptional expertise in both hard and soft resources, we do not recognise the significance and necessity of establishing Bangladeshi RMG brands for the international market. Later, while conducting an ILO funded research in the RMG sector, we asked the same question to several decision-makers from major RMG firms in Bangladesh. Most of their responses were along the line of "creating a brand is expensive and demands a

significant time commitment. It also entails considerable risks, as we are collaborating with big brands. We certainly want to avoid threatening our existing business."

The insights they shared are indeed true. However, Bangladesh has a comparative advantage over other nations from both the supply and demand sides. We have the necessary infrastructure, manufacturing efficiency, and the presence of feeder industries; thus, the upstream value chain is mostly well-established, except for occasional vulnerabilities in yarn supply. Additionally, Bangladesh is familiar with the downstream value chain as it effectively utilises it for its buyers. Consequently, establishing this chain would be less challenging, aside from the need for acceptance from independent international retailers and their willingness to feature Bangladeshi brands on their shelves, as well as consumer preference for these brands.

Bangladesh is strongly positioned to gain preference from both retailers and consumers. This is because these key downstream actors recognise that Bangladesh can produce high-quality products as a country of origin. Bangladesh has been manufacturing top-notch clothing for brands like Tommy Hilfiger, Giorgio Armani, Hugo Boss, Zara, and H&M, with "Made in Bangladesh" tags on the clothing that customers see. Therefore, the country-of-origin-based points of differentiation are already acknowledged by both retailers and end customers. If customers encounter a new brand that is of good quality and carries a "Made in Bangladesh" tag, they are unlikely to dismiss the brand outright.

Besides those who are hardcore loyal to a particular brand, many customers will certainly be interested in trying the new brand from Bangladesh.

According to Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), our apparel exports worldwide reached \$38.48 billion in 2024. Although we still have considerable progress to make to achieve the previously set \$50 billion target, there are ample opportunities to extend this goal within the \$1.84 trillion global market. Unfortunately, without owning brands and benefiting from the premiums that established brands command in the value chain, it will be challenging for Bangladesh to capitalise on the available opportunities in the global clothing market. Creating and sustaining a brand in the international market is an expensive endeavour. However, a few companies have the financial capacity to do so. If it seems too costly and risky for major RMG players, a consortium could be established to create and develop a Bangladeshi apparel brand, allowing for shared risks. BGMEA could lead this initiative.

Let us conclude with the Samsung story. Samsung has inspired other South Korean brands like SK, Hyundai, and LG, and nearly half of South Korea's GDP comes from Samsung and its success-inspired brands. These companies compete globally—most are going head-to-head and succeeding in their respective industries. They are sometimes viewed as the frontrunners of innovation in their fields. When will Bangladesh witness a day when it can proudly say our apparel brands are the market leaders and innovators in the global apparel industry?



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

The dragon and the delta

A new chapter in Bangladesh-China relations



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BOBBY HAJJAJ

There are rivers, and then there are currents. The rivers of Bangladesh—Padma, Meghna, Jamuna—run deep, shaping land, destiny and commerce. But currents, the unseen forces that dictate the flow of history, are harder to chart.

The tides of geopolitics, the undercurrents of trade wars, the ripples of power shifts—all dictate the future of nations. In this interplay, Bangladesh and China are not merely drifting neighbours; they are architects of a shared destiny, bound by history, ambition and a blueprint for the future.

Recent events have added urgency to this discourse. A 21-member delegation, of which I was a part, embarked on a journey to Beijing, not as idle emissaries but as active negotiators of Bangladesh's place in the unfolding Asian century. In meetings with high-ranking officials of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) and the foreign ministry, we presented a vision for an elevated partnership. The response? Enthusiastic endorsement.

What followed was not mere diplomatic pleasantries but a recognition: Bangladesh is ready to be more than a recipient of Chinese investments; it is ready to be a strategic collaborator, a manufacturing force, and a regional stabiliser.

Bengal's entanglement with China predates modern geopolitics. In the fourth century, Fa-hsien chronicled the culture of the Gangetic delta, and in the seventh century, Huien Tsang met King Harshavardhana, bearing testimony to ancient ties of scholarship and trade. Fifteenth century navigator Ma Huan, who sailed under Admiral Zheng He, described Bengal's bustling ports, its Muslim rulers, and the mercantile energy that linked it to the Chinese court.

In matters of spirit, even the revered Shah Jalal of Sylhet found a place in Chinese records, further cementing centuries old exchanges.

These were not just transactions; they were threads in a grander fabric, one that today unfolds in the shape of economic corridors, industrial parks, and transcontinental supply chains.

As China ascends to the heights of artificial intelligence and high-tech industries, it leaves behind a vacancy—a space for manufacturing to migrate. Vietnam has seized the opportunity. So has Indonesia. Why not Bangladesh?

DeepSeek, China's latest foray into AI, signals shift, one where China will export not just goods but knowledge while relocating its traditional industries elsewhere. Bangladesh, with its labour force, its strategic location, and its deepening ties through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), must make the case for itself.

traditional industries elsewhere. Bangladesh, with its labour force, its strategic location, and its deepening ties through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), must make the case for itself. The investments that were put on hold due to political uncertainties must be rekindled, and Bangladesh should position itself as the next re-export hub for Chinese goods, optimising trade routes, reducing costs, and sustaining China's access to global markets.

Of all the shadows looming over Bangladesh, none is darker than the crisis in Myanmar. The Rohingya crisis is not just a humanitarian catastrophe; it is a geopolitical fault line. Without stability in Myanmar, Bangladesh's security remains fragile.

China's influence in Naypyidaw is undeniable. Yet, for too long, Bangladesh has been a passive observer, waiting for Beijing to pressure the Myanmar junta into action. The delegation pressed the case: China must do more. The repatriation of the Rohingya, the

stabilisation of Rakhine state, and the assurance that Myanmar does not descend into prolonged chaos are matters that Beijing cannot afford to ignore. The response? A willingness to engage, to mediate, and to ensure that the next Bangladesh government finds a stable eastern frontier.

The world is in flux. The US, China and India form a triad of competing interests in South Asia. Bangladesh's geography has placed it at the crossroads of this rivalry, but geography is not destiny—policy is. Rather than picking sides, Bangladesh can be a bridge between these global powers, leveraging its historical closeness with India, its growing ties with China, and its strategic importance to the US.

This is not about neutrality but about active diplomacy—playing the role of mediator, connector, and stabiliser in an increasingly multipolar world.

The meetings in China were not just about rhetoric. They were about plans, commitments, and structured collaboration. The 11-point charter, adopted by the delegation and welcomed by the CPC, outlines the next steps: strategic alignment for regional stability; positioning Bangladesh in global trade shifts; strengthening logistics and trade routes; advancing technological partnerships; expanding trade and cultural exchange; building a sustainable industrial base; expanding military manufacturing ties; leveraging China's diplomatic influence for Rohingya repatriation; Teesta River water management; accelerating investment in transport and communications; and developing banking and financial collaboration.

The enthusiasm from China's leadership was not just symbolic. These initiatives are actionable, transformative, and most importantly, mutually beneficial.

The rivers in Bangladesh will always flow towards the sea, but the currents of history can be steered. The Bangladesh-China relations have entered a new era, one where Bangladesh is not just a recipient of investment but a co-creator of the future. The foundation has been laid; the agreements have been acknowledged. The challenge, now, is execution. Will Bangladesh rise to claim its place as a hub of manufacturing, defence co-production, and geopolitical mediation? Or will it allow others to dictate the terms of engagement? The moment demands action, vision, and leadership.

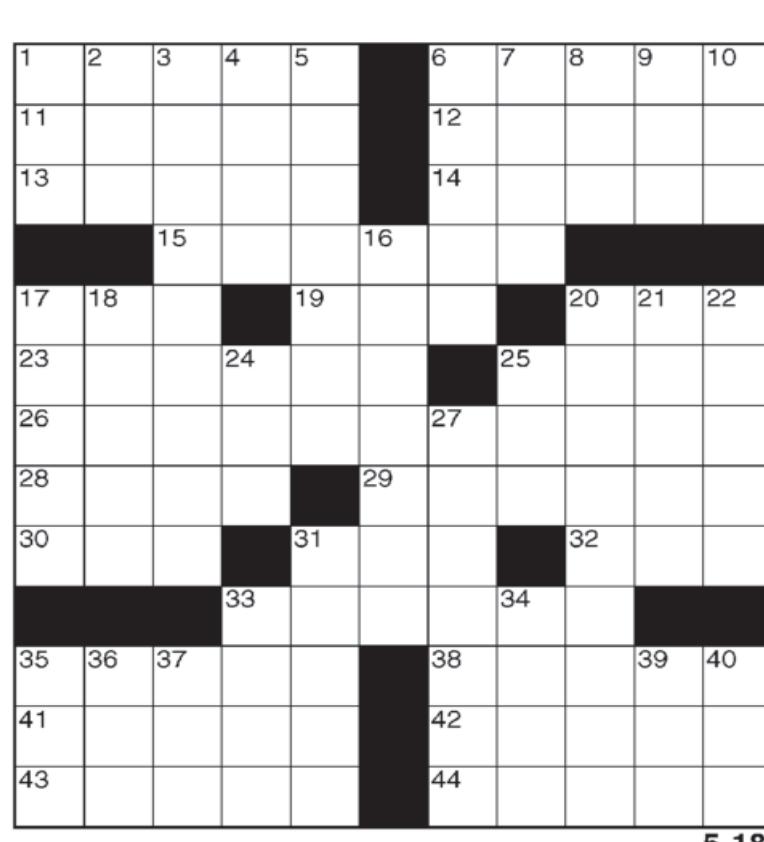
The tide is rising. Bangladesh must set sail.

ACROSS

- 1 Impromptu
- 6 Biased fellow
- 11 Singer Bryson
- 12 Find darling
- 13 Caruso, for one
- 14 Geography class aid
- 15 Friend of Jerry and Elaine
- 17 Track act
- 19 Dissenter's vote
- 20 Cook's measure
- 23 Out of bed
- 25 Project Artemis org.
- 26 Red eye, e.g.
- 28 Needing aspirin
- 29 Mumbai money
- 30 Back muscle
- 31 Heir, often
- 32 Make tempura
- 33 Spicy Korean side dish
- 35 November birthstone
- 38 Dutch capital, with "The"
- 41 Furious
- 42 Cultural, in combinations
- 43 Gives over
- 44 Writer Ernest

DOWN

- 1 Fitting
- 2 Ruby of films
- 3 "Just hold on"
- 4 Bassoon's kin
- 5 Prince topper
- 6 Like some jeans
- 7 Not active
- 8 Sticky gunk
- 9 Ball
- 10 Summer shirt
- 16 Fled
- 17 Inspid
- 18 Writer Jong
- 20 Mixed martial arts bout
- 21 Theater worker
- 22 Fall guy
- 24 Bashful
- 25 Tiny taste
- 27 Midday meals
- 31 Tag numbers
- 33 Petruchio's love
- 34 Despise
- 35 Peculiarity
- 36 Refinery need
- 37 Knee protector
- 39 Dos preceder
- 40 Long, long time



Trump, trade wars, tariffs, and a new world order



ZILLUR RAHMAN
is executive director at the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS) and a television talk show host. His X handle is @zillur.

ZILLUR RAHMAN

Recently, we've seen many news headlines regarding US President Donald Trump's plans to reduce the federal government and eliminate funding for organisations like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), leading to massive job losses. But geopolitical analysts are another surprising profession impacted by Trump's leadership.

The explanation is straightforward: nobody can say what the US government will do next. As nations that have historically depended on the US for economic and security support have come to realise that they need to become more independent, this uncertainty generates profound changes in global geopolitics.

The Trump administration has undoubtedly brought about a significant shift in the world order. Over the past few decades, the US has contributed to developing a liberal, rules-based international system, but it seems less interested in continuing to hold this position. A new multipolar global order is thus taking shape, with regional actors like Japan and India and superpowers like China, Russia, and the European Union vying for influence on

handle major global issues like climate change and refugee crises, like Bangladesh's own Rohingya situation.

The Trump-led Republican Party's political approach mirrors a more significant rightward movement in US and international politics, and holds the key to the solution. Western proponents of globalisation have neglected the plight of blue-collar workers for far too long. These workers fear losing their jobs to AI and cheap foreign labour. These worries have contributed to a rise in anti-immigration sentiment in wealthy countries. The political growth of the Global South or European security are far flung concerns for many American workers. The main problem of the locals is the effects of foreign variables on local labour markets.

This stance, which attracted supporters of Trump's "America First" foreign policy, including many Bangladeshi expats in the US, was a significant factor in the Republican Party's electoral success.

The administration has made this requirement a top priority. The pace and character of US disengagement, rather than Trump's policy views, are the genuine global threat. The administration seems intent on

its reputation. Since the Budapest Memorandum was signed in 1994, Ukraine and the US have maintained a close partnership. Ukraine then had the third largest arsenal of nuclear weapons from the Soviet era, which it gave to Russia in return for security assurances from Russia and the US. The 2014 annexation of Crimea by Russia was a breach of that agreement. By negotiating with Russia and putting pressure on Ukraine to give up territory that it has forcibly seized, the US is now also breaking its promises. Additionally, in exchange for the military assistance it has given Ukraine, Washington has asked Kiev to share its minerals.

This judgement arrived like a wrecking ball and further upended the delicate international order. Taiwan and other US allies dependent on American security guarantees are now highly alarmed. Canada and Europe are the most outspoken opponents of the Trump administration's policies. Singapore's defence minister compared the US to a landlord requesting rent, while the newly former Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau publicly denounced the trade war as dangerous. Furthermore, some NATO countries have said they can no longer depend on American defence.

The old order is disintegrating, whether we like it or not. Even with a lot of uncertainty, one thing is sure: waiting for the past to return is no longer an option. This is the time for those who care about international collaboration, climate change, and human rights. People must not waver, even if governments do. Alternative channels must be used if official



FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

The way that US President Donald Trump has handled Ukraine is a significant shift in US foreign policy.

their national agendas.

Even though the Trump administration's actions can occasionally appear arbitrary, the president's overarching policy has not altered since his first term; it has just gotten more intense. Fundamentally, this approach gives the US financial interests precedence in international politics. The US has retained substantial international debt since the dollar is still the world's reserve currency. It also has a trade imbalance with its main allies. Regardless of the repercussions, the president has made fixing these problems his top priority.

One may wonder: when something is not broken, why strive to fix it? The US-led rules-based international order has cultivated one of the most prolonged periods of world peace and cooperation in history since the end of the Cold War. Furthermore, concerted international action is needed to

pushing international boundaries to see how much the country can get away with. It is currently testing reciprocal tariffs on major trading partners to stop US companies from offshoring jobs. However, the aggressive strategy is like attempting to squeeze a square peg into a round hole.

The ongoing trade battle with essential allies like Canada and Mexico has recently caused a steep drop in the US stock market. This compelled Trump to halt the tariffs and re-evaluate his strategy. However, there are growing worries that he would eventually implement protectionist measures, even if doing so puts the economy at risk of experiencing another recession.

The way that Trump has handled Ukraine is a significant shift in US foreign policy. How a country handles its allies is frequently used to assess

diplomatic channels are unsuccessful. Track 2 diplomacy and collaboration between academic institutions, industry leaders, civic society, and think tanks will be more critical than ever in maintaining global connectivity. We need to build bridges where governments are burning them at a time when established power structures are changing.

So be it, if the globe is turning into a multipolar place. We need to organise, adjust, and go forward. A broken world doesn't need to be broken. Those who continue to support international cooperation must build new partnerships, never give up on finding answers, and make sure that political shortsightedness does not sabotage global advancement. Indecision is not tolerated by history. The struggle for an equitable, sustainable, and peaceful world must continue, irrespective of how the map is altered.

SATURDAY'S ANSWERS



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dsopinion@gmail.com

Barriers to Ensuring Women's Land Rights and the Way Forward

The Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD), in collaboration with The Daily Star, organised a roundtable titled "Barriers to Ensuring Women's Land Rights and the Way Forward" on January 30, 2025. Below is a summary of the discussion.

Rowshan Jahan Moni,
Deputy Executive
Director, ALRD

Today's event is part of ALRD's ongoing advocacy for women's land rights. Over nearly four decades, ALRD has achieved significant milestones, though policy advocacy has faced challenges over the past 15 years. Despite these difficulties, the current landscape presents a unique opportunity.

The Women's Reform Commission has demonstrated a strong commitment, as evidenced by a recent meeting where CSOs, including ALRD, submitted written recommendations. Immediate action could accelerate progress, and ALRD aims to leverage this momentum by organising follow-up meetings with the commission and relevant ministries, engaging key women activists.

ALRD's advocacy aligns with global initiatives such as CEDAW and the Generation Equality movement, particularly the Women's Economic Empowerment Action Coalition. In Bangladesh and across Asia, we are committed to land-based empowerment through the "Stand for Her Land" campaign, led by Khushi Apa, working in tandem with frameworks like Beijing+30.

While inheritance rights remain a crucial issue, women's access to public land is a broader concern, with over 60% of the population landless. Bangladesh's vast khas land remains ineffectively distributed,

2019 World Bank report indicates that only 13% of agricultural land-owning households have land solely or jointly owned by women. The 1997 Khas Land Management Policy must be revised to remove provisions that prioritise widowed and women abandoned by husband having abled bodied son for applying for the khas land.

While women's participation in agriculture is increasing, with 58% of agricultural workers being women and 74% of all working women engaged in the sector (BBS Survey 2022), their contributions remain unrecognised. Policies such as the National Agriculture Policy 2018 and the National Women Development Policy (NWDP) 2011 classify women as agricultural labourers rather than farmers. Institutional neglect and patriarchal control limit women's access to government services and agricultural loans. Women's contributions must be formally acknowledged, and their access to markets and marketing support for their produce guaranteed.

Similarly, women in fisheries must be recognised as fisherwomen, included in updated official lists, and provided with fishers' cards. A cooperative system should facilitate their leasing of Jalmahal—government-owned wetlands. In coastal and haor areas, women actively participate in fishing but lack formal recognition, and many suffer from health issues due to poor working conditions. Without official recognition, fisherwomen are excluded from social safety nets. The Jalmahal Management Policy must be reformed to ensure equitable leasing access for those dependent on fishing for their livelihoods.

Wage discrimination is another critical issue. Women in agriculture earn significantly less than men, with male farmers earning BDT 400-500 per day compared to women's BDT



we had assumed that owning 2 decimals for housing was sufficient. This realisation means our entire indigenous community qualifies as landless. Acknowledging this, we obtained landless certificates and submitted them to the union land office. However, despite repeated visits, progress has stalled due to the office's inactivity, which must be resumed immediately.

Housing alone is not enough—ensuring access to agricultural khas land is crucial for sustainable livelihoods. Authorities claim that land allotments are on hold, yet influential individuals continue to exploit these lands.

Most. Momtaz Begum, General Secretary, Karnaphuli Nari Cooperative, Mymensingh
As female farmers, we cultivate our own produce, yet at the market, we are forced to sell at lower prices than male farmers. Despite our labour, wholesale traders reap the profits. Immediate action is needed to ensure fair pricing for female farmers. Establishing a dedicated women's market within every wet market would help address this inequality. Government buildings and khas land could be repurposed to create such spaces, expanding opportunities for women in agriculture.

I want to highlight the challenges in obtaining government seeds. A Field Agriculture Officer offered me watermelon seeds and BDT 1,000, as cauliflower seeds were out of stock. Since my 30-member team couldn't grow watermelon, she suggested alternatives. After negotiation, she agreed to provide cauliflower seeds, but a political leader intervened and cancelled the order. These leaders often take exhibition seeds for personal use. I filed a complaint, but the officer claimed helplessness. Exhibition seeds must be reserved for real farmers.

Md. Syful Islam, Animator, SpeedTrust
I have been actively working with the people of the char areas in Patuakhali's Bauphal Upazila, where

15 chars remain isolated by rivers, with no direct access to the mainland. As a result, government officers rarely visit, and residents are unable to travel to the Upazila, depriving them of essential services.

These chars contain 4,000 acres of official khas land and an additional 20,000 acres along a canal. Despite 5,000 landless individuals residing here, influential political figures have seized much of this land. A Prothom Alo report from December 13 last year revealed that 500 acres in Bauphal were reclaimed from illegal occupation.

With ALRD's support, we have organised landless individuals to raise awareness about land rights, engaging multiple times with the government officers. However, they have refused to take action or even officially register landless individuals. The outdated system currently allows only male heads of households to be listed, thereby excluding women. Additionally, 400 houses were allocated through political favouritism, with many recipients not genuinely landless.

Afzal Hossain, Executive Director, Rural Underprivileged & Landless Farmers Organization (RULFAO), Rajshahi
In regions like Varendra, where urban migration depletes the male workforce, the burden of farming falls largely on village women. Without proper recognition, their opportunities in agriculture will continue to shrink. Beyond acknowledgment, women need access to bank loans to sustain and expand their agricultural activities.

With the mechanisation of agriculture, women must be empowered to operate farming equipment—why should a woman not drive a tractor? Outdated inheritance

I want to emphasise two key points: First, we should establish centres similar to the Narikendra in Mymensingh, which have played

laws restricting women's land rights must be abolished. NGOs have long championed the causes of khas land distribution and women's land ownership, yet government support remains inadequate.

Social norms continue to obstruct women's empowerment. Despite often caring for their ageing parents, women are denied their rightful share of land. Wage disparities persist in agriculture, discouraging women from remaining in rural areas. Standardising wages could curb rural-to-urban migration and alleviate pressure on cities.

To build an equitable society, we must strengthen rural agriculture, formally recognise women as farmers, and promote cooperatives. Cultural shifts are essential to foster respect for women in workplaces and communities. In the Varendra region, irrigation operators are frequently appointed through political influence and often demand money for water. Appointing women and indigenous individuals as irrigation operators could introduce greater honesty and efficiency into the system.

In the garment industry, women frequently lose their jobs. By expanding agricultural opportunities and implementing land and agricultural reforms, many displaced women could be reintegrated into rural economies, reinforcing both agriculture and women's roles within it.

Ferdousi Sultana, Member, Women Affairs Reform Commission & Former Senior Social Development Advisor, Asian Development Bank

While my fellow speakers have addressed the challenges of khas land distribution, I want to highlight the issue of wage discrimination faced by female farmers. Despite the formation of commissions such as the Wage Reform Commission and the Labour Commission, little attention has been given to women in agriculture. Reviewing and revising policies on women's development and empowerment is long overdue.

Additionally, the concerns of Adivasi women regarding forestry, forest regulations, and CEDAW must be prioritised. The persistent belief that a woman must be aided by an able male child continues to undermine women's agency and must be actively challenged.

It is also important to address the longstanding misconception that Adivasi communities were reluctant to participate in crop diversification programmes. While their involvement has increased, it is deeply concerning that officials are now barring them from these initiatives. This exclusion is not only unfair but also unjust.

Dr Fauzia Moslem, President, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP)
Women's land rights remain a pressing issue in our society. Discrimination and

hostility towards women continue to manifest in various ways—recent incidents such as the banning of female players from matches and the policing of their lifestyles under the pretext of religiosity exemplify this trend. The Women's Reform Commission must take decisive action to address these challenges comprehensively and effectively.

The Krishak Card must be upheld as a crucial tool for empowering women in agriculture. Additionally, a Uniform Family Code guaranteeing equal inheritance rights for women is essential, particularly given the disparities between the plains and hill Adivasi communities. Updating this code is imperative to ensuring fairness and equality.

The relationship between climate change and land rights is often overlooked and must be integrated into policy discussions. Understanding the ratio of landless men to women is also critical for developing targeted solutions to land-related inequalities.

I want to emphasise two key points: First, we should establish centres similar to the Narikendra in Mymensingh, which have played

inheritance and marriage matters. Past reforms, such as Ayub Khan's 1961 amendments, faced significant resistance, and any attempt to review or reform women's development policies is often met with protests from religious groups, as witnessed in 2008 near Baitul Mukarram.

Additionally, the term "abandoned wife", which carries a derogatory connotation, must be removed from all official documents. Another imposed condition—the requirement of a "able bodied male child"—also demands immediate attention.



Krishnapada Munda, Executive Director, Sundarbans Adivasi Munda Sangstha (SAMS), Shyamnagar, Sakhira

I represent the Sundarbans region and want to highlight several pressing concerns. Women here play a crucial role in agriculture and other livelihood activities, yet their efforts are being undermined by the rapid expansion of shrimp farming, which is causing severe water salinisation and reducing cultivable land. This environmental shift is making traditional farming increasingly difficult, adding to the burdens on women. Additionally, the rising incidence of polygamy, possibly linked to these economic pressures, is contributing to greater vulnerability for women. Frequent cyclones and natural disasters further exacerbate these challenges, leaving the region in a state of constant instability.



Paramita Chakma, Programme Officer, Bolipara Nari Kallyan Samiti (BNKS), Bandarban

There are 13 Adivasi communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), particularly in Bandarban. It is deeply ironic that, while Marma women are entitled to inherit one third of the land, Chakma women have no formal inheritance rights and can only receive land if their parents choose to grant it. I strongly urge the enforcement of a law to protect the land rights of indigenous women.



A N M Fazlul Hadi Sabir, Executive Director, Beneficiary's Friendship Forum (BFF), Faridpur

Persistent male chauvinism continues to act as a significant barrier to women's empowerment. To address this, it is crucial to implement existing laws effectively. In this regard, I propose the following recommendations:

• Simplify Land Registration: The registration process should be streamlined, and registration fees for women should be reduced.

• Ensure Grassroots Participation: With the interim government establishing the Women's Reform Commission, active involvement from grassroots communities must be guaranteed.

• Engage Dissenting Voices: Despite opposition from some men regarding women's land rights, it is important to engage with their perspectives to better understand and address the challenges women face.



Shantona Rani Roy, Village Facilitator, Community Development Association (CDA), Dinajpur

It is deeply concerning that Adivasi women are often excluded from the Pusti Bagan (nutrition garden) project by government officials, based on the false assumption that they lack the necessary skills to handle seeds and vegetables. To rectify this injustice, these women must be granted access to Krishak Cards and be provided with training opportunities to enhance their agricultural skills.



Sumaiya Islam, Member, Women's Reform Commission

I respectfully request that any reports, databases, case studies, or secondary resources relevant to the Women's Reform Commission's agenda be sent to womanreformcommission@gmail.com. We have already conducted discussions in Rangpur, Rangamati, Mymensingh, Khulna, and Chittagong.

A key insight from these discussions is that collective action among women is essential to effectively combat and dismantle various forms of discrimination, particularly those stemming from male chauvinism.



Nasrin Begum, Deputy Director, Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha (BNPS)

Following 1971 discussions on various rights began, but CEDAW provisions—particularly Article 2, which addresses conflicts between domestic laws and women's equality, and Article 16.1(C), which covers marriage, divorce, and guardianship—have seen little to no updates due to concerns over religious backlash.

In the CHT, marriage registration remains a challenge due to conflicting customary laws and prolonged negotiations with village headmen, highlighting the urgent need for a Uniform Family Code. While British civil law is generally followed, religious laws continue to dominate



Shireen Parveen Haq, Head, Women Reform Commission and Founding Member, Naripokkho

As the head of the Women's Reform Commission, my primary objective is to address all forms of discrimination and violence against women, not only within legal frameworks but also across institutional structures. We are currently reviewing the challenges women face under existing policies. Our constitution mandates special measures for women, recognising their historical marginalisation. Similarly, Article 4 of CEDAW calls for such measures to address gender disparities.

Today's discussions have generated key recommendations, focusing on Jalmahal, khas land, and closing the gender gap. I propose three specific approaches for implementation:

• Short-term actions: Under the interim government, we must identify the most immediate steps that can be taken within the shortest possible timeframe.

• Mid-term recommendations: Addressing these issues requires sustained commitment while considering the political dynamics of the incoming government. If the new administration fails to act on our demands, we must apply pressure to ensure accountability.

• Long-term vision: The long-standing demands of the women's movement must be integrated into public discourse. Our charter should move beyond aspiration and be actively realised through sustained efforts and strategic action.



Shamsul Huda, Executive Director, ALRD

Women's rights span a broad spectrum, with land rights being a vital component. While we cannot cover every aspect today, our focus is on key issues requiring urgent attention to support agriculture, the economy, women's empowerment, and national development.

I want to highlight two critical points. First, I stress the significance of ILO Convention 141, which protects labour and agricultural female workers and enables them to form trade unions. Second, ILO Convention 169, which upholds the rights of Adivasi communities, must be incorporated into policy discussions. I strongly urge the Women's Reform Commission to integrate these issues into its broader agenda.



Tanjim Ferdous, In-Charge, NGOs & Foreign Missions, Business Development Team, The Daily Star & Moderator of the Session

Land is not just an economic asset; it is fundamental to women's empowerment, security, and quality of life. Despite constitutional guarantees of equal rights, women continue to face discrimination in inheritance, ownership of agricultural khas land, and land management. Addressing these challenges requires collective action.



TRUMP-PUTIN TALKS ON UKRAINE

Russia to halt attacks on energy sites

Leaders settle for more talks instead of 30-day truce

AFP, Washington

Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin yesterday agreed on a halt in Russian attacks against Ukrainian energy targets -- but fell far short of securing a full ceasefire in a highly anticipated phone call.

The US and Russian leaders spoke for more than an hour and a half and both expressed hopes for repairing relations between the countries.

However, there was no agreement from the Russian president for Washington's proposed full 30 day ceasefire in Russia's invasion of its pro-Western neighbour.

The Kremlin said Putin agreed to pause strikes on Ukraine energy targets for 30 days and that Putin had already given the order to his military. The White House said separately that the "leaders agreed that the movement to peace will begin with an energy and infrastructure ceasefire."

Russia has launched a series of devastating attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure throughout the three-year-old war. According to the Kremlin statement, Ukraine -- which has bombed multiple Russian oil installations -- had also agreed to the truce on energy targets, although Kyiv had yet to comment.

The two leaders agreed that broader truce talks would "begin immediately in the Middle East," the White House said in its statement, also citing a "huge upside" if Russia and the United States improve their relations.

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A dream comes true as Jamuna Rail Bridge opens

Country's longest rail bridge to boost Dhaka's connectivity with the north

STAR REPORT

The much-awaited Jamuna Rail Bridge, the longest dedicated railway bridge in the country, was formally inaugurated yesterday.

The 4.8 kilometre dual gauge double-track bridge, replacing the existing road-rail bridge over the Jamuna River, is expected to improve railway connectivity between Dhaka and the northwestern region.

The new bridge will allow trains to travel across the river in less than three minutes. In comparison, it took trains 30 minutes to cross the old road-rail bridge.

However, because the new double-track bridge is currently connected to single-line tracks on both sides, trains will still have to wait for crossings.

This will be the case until two crucial projects are completed, which is unlikely before 2030. One involves the construction of a double line from Joydebpur to Ishwardi, while the other is for a direct railway link between Sirajganj and Bogra.

Unlike the grand inaugurations of similar mega projects under the previous government, the bridge -- built at a cost of Tk 16,781 crore -- was opened without much fanfare.

Railways Secretary Fahimul Islam inaugurated the bridge at Ibrahimabad Rail Station in Tangail. Japanese

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A man, his wife, and their daughter fall off a motorbike on Sadar Road in Barishal city, as a police officer rushes to help the family. Neither the woman nor the child was wearing a helmet at the time of the accident yesterday morning. Thankfully, they escaped with minor injuries.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

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HASINA, FAMILY Court orders freeze on 31 accounts

Nearly Tk 400cr was deposited in them

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday ordered the Anti Corruption Commission (ACC) to freeze 31 bank accounts of ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina, her sister Sheikh Rehana, her nephew Radwan Mujib Siddiqi Bobby, and their affiliated organisations in connection to corruption allegations against them.

The affiliated organisations include Bangladesh Awami League and Jatir Janak Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Trust.

They deposited Tk 394,60,72,805.71 in these bank accounts.

Judge Md Zakir Hossain of Dhaka Metropolitan Senior Special Judge's Court passed the order after ACC Deputy Director Md Monirul Islam, who is leading the inquiry team, submitted an application in this regard.

In the application, the ACC said Hasina and others were trying to

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INSURGENCY IN ROHINGYA CAMPS

AL govt downplayed the problem for years

Says Fortify Rights; blames Rohingya armed-groups for repeated violence there

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Despite the rising violence in the Rohingya camps of Cox's Bazar over the years, the Bangladesh authorities have repeatedly downplayed or denied the presence of Rohingya militant groups, allowing them to operate unchecked.

Refugees and rights groups have long raised concerns over killings, abductions, and torture carried out by armed factions, but official inaction has left vulnerable communities unprotected, said

a report by Fortify Rights launched at Dhaka Reporters Unity yesterday.

The report, titled "May Be Killed at Any Moment" -- Killing, Abduction, Torture and Other Serious Violations by Rohingya Militant Groups in Bangladesh -- accuses the authorities of failing to admit the existence of these groups, contributing to a worsening security crisis in the camps.

According to the report, Rohingya refugees

have suffered years of violence at the hands of militant groups. The number of killings by camp-based militants was 22 in 2021, 42 in 2022, 90 in 2023, and at least 65 in 2024.

According to the findings of the rights body, the camps were under the control of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) till January 2023.

But after that, the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO) emerged and started taking control of the camps.

Soon after the conflicts began between the two armed groups of the refugees, abduction, extortion, and gunshot incidents in the camps jumped a couple of times higher compared with 2022.

The report mentioned that there were 91 abductions in the camps by the Rohingya militants and criminal groups in 2022, but it rose to 384 in 2023, and 446 in 2024. Similarly, there were only 26 extortion incidents in 2022, which jumped to 149 in 2023, and 136 in 2024.

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YEAR	KILLINGS	ABDUCTIONS	EXTORTION
2022	42	91	26
2023	90	384	149
2024	65	446	136

Woman gang-raped in city, two held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A woman was allegedly gang-raped in the capital's Pallabi area on Monday night.

The victim, a reporter of an online portal, was admitted to a One Stop Crisis Centre yesterday evening.

She filed a case with Pallabi Police Station, accusing eight named and another eight unnamed persons.

Talking to The Daily Star before her hospital admission, the victim, aged over 40, alleged that she went to UCB Chittagong in the Matikata area around 11:00pm on Monday from Turag area after hearing that a woman was being sexually harassed there.

As she reached there, a group of people forcibly took her to an under-construction building of a housing project in the Barontek area. Then 15 people raped her, she alleged.

Nazrul Islam, officer-in-charge of Pallabi Police Station, said locals rescued the victim around

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2 NGO workers abducted, tortured in Cumilla

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cumilla

Two NGO workers, including a woman, were abducted, tortured, and extorted by four men in Cumilla's Chandina upazila on Monday night, police said.

The men of Tulatoli village allegedly electrocuted the male victim after tying him to a tree and stripped the female victim naked on camera.

They also used the footage to blackmail her family into giving them Tk 20,000.

Locals heard the victims' screams and rescued them around 11:00pm. They were later taken to the Chandina Upazila Health Complex.

A case was filed at Chandina Police Station yesterday, accusing four men of extortion, said Nazmul Huda, officer-in-charge of the police station.

The accused are on the run, he said without revealing their identities.



A six-coach special train carrying guests and officials crosses the 4.8km Jamuna Rail Bridge that was formally inaugurated yesterday. The train departed from Ibrahimabad Station in Tangail and reached Sayedabad Railway Station in Sirajganj. The new bridge will allow trains to cross it in less than three minutes. In comparison, it took trains 30 minutes to cross the old road-rail bridge.

PHOTO: STAR

Stranded astronauts finally head home after nine-month

AFP, Washington



A pair of astronauts stranded in space for more than nine months were finally headed home yesterday after their capsule undocked from the International Space Station.

The SpaceX craft carrying Butch Wilmore and Sunita Williams detached from the orbital outpost at 0505 GMT, ending their prolonged mission that has captivated global attention.

The NASA duo are joined onboard by American Nick Hague and Russian cosmonaut Aleksandr Gorbovnik.

The crew are now settling in for the 17-hour journey back to Earth, and were given permission to change from their space suits into more comfortable clothes.

If all goes smoothly, the capsule will deploy its parachutes off the coast of Florida for an ocean splashdown around 2157 GMT Tuesday, when a recovery vessel will retrieve the crew.

ROUNDTABLE: Barriers to ensuring women's land rights and the way forward

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Prime Bank ISLAMIC BANK



PRAYER TIMING MARCH 19

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 4:48 12:45 4:30 6:10 7:45
JAMAT 4:58 1:15 4:45 6:25 8:15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

SEHRI, IFTAR TIMING

RAMADAN	MARCH	SEHRI	IFTAR
18	19	4:10	
19	20	4:46	6:10
20	21	4:45	6:10