

Bureaucracy falters without clear direction

BAHARAM KHAN

More than seven months have passed since the interim government took charge, yet the civil service is steeped in a sense of inertia.

While expectations were high for dynamic governance under this government, the bureaucracy is badly in need of vital changes that remain stalled.

Career civil servants say that a gap has grown between them and Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus over the months, leaving the administration adrift.

They say that retirees who are leading crucial ministries on contract have little accountability or motivation for change, as they do not have incentives such as promotions. Also, they have long been out of service. As a result, critical reforms that require only administrative directives are in limbo.

Top civil servants, however, either declined to comment on the matter or denied allegations of a gap.

Cabinet Secretary Sheikh Abdur Rashid, who is the first in the country's history to hold the post on a contract basis, dismissed allegations of a gap between the administration and the chief adviser.

"This is not true; this is not a fact. There is no such thing



A SHADOW OF ITS FORMER SELF ... The state of the Shibsa river in Khulna's Paikgachha continues to deteriorate. Sedimentation and obstruction to upstream flow have been choking the once-mighty waterway. Related story on page 12.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN



"The kind of leadership required in the post-uprising period is missing among many top officials. Young officers are left without proper guidance, and in such a situation, it is natural that they will not take the initiative for reforms."

AKM Abdul Awal Mazumder, former secretary

as isolation. Everyone maintains professional relationships with each other," he told The Daily Star last night.

This correspondent spoke to a dozen bureaucrats, ranging from deputy secretary to secretary in five ministries, who acknowledged that routine changes in the civil service are stuck.

They pointed out that there are no representatives from the civil administration in the chief adviser's personal wing.

As a result, regular bureaucrats feel isolated and without effective leadership from the chief adviser. Many of them have adopted a passive approach, merely counting down until the next elected government takes over.

Senior bureaucrats argue that certain internal reforms should have already been carried out, as they require only administrative orders rather than major policy overhauls.

For example, an additional secretary of the Cabinet Division said, the advisory council instructed the ministry to conduct a necessary review regarding quotas on January 30. But no proposal on the review has been

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Tarique warns of extremists, fascists waiting to pounce

Says secularism, democracy will be priority of BNP

UNB, Dhaka
Warning that extremists and fascists could again bury democracy in Bangladesh, BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday said his party, along with other democratic parties, will prioritise

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

970 killed in Gaza in 48 hours

Shows health ministry data as Israel continues to pound enclave amid global outrage

AGENCIES

At least 970 Gazans have been killed in the span of 48 hours, according to Gaza's health ministry, as Israel continued its renewed bombardment of the territory for a second day, despite a chorus of calls from foreign governments to uphold a fragile January ceasefire.

Long lines of fleeing civilians filled the roads of the tiny, war-ravaged Palestinian territory as the Israeli army yesterday dropped leaflets in the northern and southern Gaza Strip, ordering residents to evacuate their homes, warning they were in "dangerous combat zones".

The war death toll, updated daily by the

At least 183 children among the dead

Thousands flee after new evacuation order

Hamas says 'not closed the door' on talks

health ministry in the Hamas-run territory, showed an increase of 970 in the span of 48 hours, though AFP could not confirm how many of them were recorded as casualties from the strikes. The ministry said 183 children were among the dead.

As of yesterday, the ministry reported a death toll of 49,547 since Israel launched its offensive in Gaza on October 7, 2023. Just a day earlier, on Tuesday, the toll stood at 48,577.

Israel and Hamas accuse each other of breaching the truce, which had offered a respite for Gaza's 2.3 million residents after 17

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4

Tension in camps after arrest of ARSA chief

MOKAMEL SHUVO and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

A sense of unease prevails in the Rohingya camps following the arrest of ARSA Commander-in-Chief Ataullah Abu Ammar Jununi.

Many Rohingyas, especially those who have spoken out against the armed group, are worried about possible violence, while law enforcement agencies have intensified security measures to prevent any untoward incidents.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, John Quinley, director of Fortify Rights, said, "Bangladesh authorities must ensure Rohingyas who speak out against ARSA crimes are not targeted. They must make it clear that targeting dissent is unacceptable."

"Many Rohingyas are at risk and need protection. Bangladesh authorities must work with UNHCR to provide safety."

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

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HOW DHAKA'S TAILORS bring Eid dreams to life amid Ramadan rush

RBR

Tailors typically enjoy star status at this time of the year. Besides your regular tailor, who takes your bespoke orders for dresses; there are tailors for upholstery work, who are no less busy and sought after now. And an honourable mention must be given to tailors sitting under a tree with a sewing machine to do your odd tailoring jobs – they too are in the limelight at present.

Come Ramadan, your toxic relationship with your favourite year-round tailor reaches an all-time high. The first day of Ramadan is too late for any order, whether for dressmaking, curtains, or sofa fittings. Your dearest tailor, who is always on your speed dial, will refuse to acknowledge you, ditching you without



thinking twice.

Such is my case now. Even though I have a "Mr Fixit" for all kinds of jobs – be it electricians, plumbers, fishmongers, locksmiths, blacksmiths, painters, or carpenters to make sure I am never in a fix – so naturally, I have seamstresses for all sorts of tailoring tasks in this list. But they are all unreachable, out of network coverage, or cannot hear me for "poor



reception reasons".

All this, because I took a courageous trip to Islampur for furnishing shopping, just a dawn before Ramadan. That experience is another story all together. Giving myself all the credit for being on time this year, I called my furniture upholsterers – Rokon Uddin, my curtain maker; Golam Mostafa, who is for sofa covers; and Masud, for beddings, to place a few orders before Eid.

Rokon, the otherwise gentle lad, told me flatly that I would get my order after Eid. I knew he was kidding, but when he showed me his order list, and that the curtain makers in his factory were doing double shifts, I was scared. I eventually bullied him into accepting and stuck a deal that I would wait till Chand Raat, which is the eve of Eid day and is almost 28 days away, he kind of agreed, saying "Please do not be offended if I fail", leaving my nerves in

tatters.

Rokon's cart near Lalmatia is

rolling year-round. He sells readymade

curtains from Tk 250 to Tk 700 per

piece, depending on the quality of the

fabric provided, which he avails from

places like Gazipur, Tongi, etc.

Golam Mostafa, on the other hand, says his orders have decreased in number due to people ordering online, but he has fixed clients, like me, who give customised orders.

"But this time of the year, I have one or two made-to-order jobs in a week," Mostafa says.

Masud Miah, who has a sewing machine on the roadside near Jasim Uddin in Utara, has young girls coming in for their dress alter orders, petticoats, burqa, or blouse making. I humoured him for my pants and pj length shortening, cutting off the sleeves of something or the other, and then making personalised tea cozies, shopping bags, and quilted potholders with those rags. There is reason for him



PHOTO: STAR

to shun me, especially now, when his otherwise dull trade is on demand.

Every trade in Dhaka is now geared towards Eid showdown, and all of us who fancy home décor ensure that our houses too, look impeccable and inviting for the festival. New linings and paddings, cushion covers, plants, etc – every minute detail is taken care of, and all these planning and prepping begin as early as the first day of Ramadan.

Dhaka's narrow alleys and posh thoroughfares see peaking activities now, the small-time local garment businesses and furniture furnishings shops give out subcontracts to tailoring sweatshops and embroiderers on the outskirts of the city like Kerniganj, Badda, Tongi, Uttara, Mirpur, to meet the demands for Eid sales.

For the festival razzmatazz to shine these tailors are like the shoemaker's elves, toiling through late nights to make your festival a happy one. Kindly give them their due regard this time around.

Bureaucracy falters without clear direction

FROM PAGE 1
presented to the cabinet in the past month and a half.

Frequent transfers have also made such reforms difficult to implement, according to officials. The head of the public administration ministry's reform and research wing was transferred a few months after his appointment.

At least four additional secretaries have been appointed to the regulation wing, responsible for regulatory reforms, since August 5, but they too were soon transferred.

Mokhles Ur Rahman, senior secretary to the public administration ministry, would not comment on the matter when approached on Wednesday.

A secretary, speaking on the condition of anonymity, pointed to the Rules of Business, a key document for running the government. He said while the other rules outline proper procedures for governance, rule 33 allows the prime minister to overturn any decision, creating scopes for authoritarian decision-making.

But neither the Cabinet Division nor the public administration ministry has taken any initiative to amend this provision.

Additionally, the secretary said, the Land Registration Office is currently under the law ministry, but if it were transferred to the land ministry, land-related services would become more efficient.

Tension in camps after arrest of ARSA chief

FROM PAGE 1
Police, however, said that they are not considering the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) as a security threat in the camps.

"The militant group [ARSA] has no such strength to carry out any large-scale criminal activities in the camps now or take revenge for the arrest of its chief," Mohammad Siraj Amin, additional deputy inspector general, also the commander of 14 Armed Police Battalion, told this newspaper.

He, however, said, "We are on alert to ensure security in the camps."

Sources at the camps said a group of ARSA members are campaigning on social media that its chief is innocent.

On different pages and in social media groups, they are making posts portraying ARSA chief Ataullah as the leader of freedom fighters of Rohingyas fighting for their homeland against the genocide and persecution of Rohingyas.

They also demand the immediate release of the ARSA chief and other members.

At the same time, the contractual officials constantly make disparaging comments about regular officials which are affecting the administration, senior bureaucrats say.

Former secretary AKM Abdul Awal Mazumder, a public administration expert, told The Daily Star that a lack of coordination in the administration is evident.

"The kind of leadership required in a post-uprising period is missing among many top officials. Young officers are left without proper directions, and so it's only natural they will not take the initiative for reforms."

Awal said there were opportunities in the post-August 5 period for administrative actions that did not require legal reforms. "However, ministries are not undertaking such initiatives," he added. "It is the responsibility of the Cabinet Division and the public administration ministry to ascertain why no steps are being taken for reforms."

Out of the 81 secretaries, 25 were appointed during the previous government while 56 by the current administration, including 17 on contract. However, this overhaul has not helped the civil administration which had retired long ago. There are allegations that these retired officials hold a "dismissive view" of the regular officers of the current administration.

Serving bureaucrats say their promotions remain stalled due to these contractual appointments.

According to Rohingya leaders, ARSA had full control over the refugee camps since 2018.

However, the group faced criticism and lost the support of the refugees after its name was linked to the killing of Rohingya leader Muhib Ullah.

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

The victim's brother Habib Ullah claimed that ARSA, locally known as Al-Yakin, 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, according to a report of the rights group Fortify Rights launched on Tuesday.

Rohingyas believe that ARSA killed Muhib to hinder Rohingya repatriation process.

The ARSA members are broadly accused of threatening the Rohingya youths, who are active and speak up

for their rights and repatriation.

A Rohingya youth seeking anonymity said, "As he started speaking on different platforms, meetings, and rallies regarding the rights of Rohingyas and their repatriation, some people known as the members of Al-Yakin confined me."

"They asked me to join their group. But when they realised that I would not join ARSA, they started threatening me. I had to take shelter in a safe place for many days due to their threat."

Another Rohingya youth said after the arrest of ARSA chief Ataullah, the dominance of ARSA in the camps would diminish.

However, the Rohingya youth feared that some random attacks by ARSA could take place on their opponents or ordinary Rohingyas as the key associates of the ARSA chief.

Rohingyas believe that ARSA killed Muhib to hinder Rohingya repatriation process.

ARSA members are broadly accused of threatening the Rohingya youths, who are active and speak up

key positions for a long time. So it is natural that they lack the necessary network. The administration is like a machine that needs to be kept running. It cannot be suddenly activated."

When asked about ways to improve administrative efficiency, a joint secretary of the Cabinet Division said, "Since taking office, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has held only one secretarial-level meeting on September 3. He visited the Secretariat only once, on November 20. Following the mass uprising, he should have visited each ministry in turn and conducted at least one secretarial-level meeting every two months to infuse the administration with dynamism and energy."

"If he was unable to make time, he could have delegated the task to an adviser. At the very least, the cabinet secretary could have held monthly meetings with all the secretaries to oversee internal reforms and monitor regular activities. Unfortunately, none of that is happening."

Government insiders acknowledge the sense of stagnation within the bureaucracy. Lately, the chief adviser's press secretary, Shafiqul Alam conceded that the administration was unable to function at the desired pace. "There is now a perception that efficiency is secondary, while political favouritism is the priority. Unfortunately, this is the reality," he said in an interview with a private TV station on March 12.

"We believe that if secondary issues are prioritised under the guise of a new political settlement, instead of honouring public expectations, it will send the wrong message to the people. Such a situation will ultimately pave the way for the resurgence of fugitive mafia regime associates."

Tarique expressed the public

Tulip slams 'false' graft allegations

STAR DESK

Former Labour minister Tulip Siddiq has accused the Bangladeshi authorities of mounting a "targeted and baseless" campaign against her, BBC reported yesterday.

In a letter to Bangladesh's Anti-Corruption Commission, the MP's lawyers say allegations of corruption are "false and vexatious" and have never been formally put to her by investigators, despite being briefed to the media, the British public service broadcaster added.

Tulip stepped down from her role as economic secretary to the treasury, where she was tasked with addressing corruption in the UK's financial markets, in January.

The Hampstead and Highgate MP insisted at the time that she had done nothing wrong but chose to resign to avoid being a "distraction" to the government.

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, a close ally and representative of a nearby North London constituency, accepted her resignation in a letter, assuring her that the "door remains open" for her return.

When the corruption allegations emerged in January, Tulip referred herself to the PM's ethics adviser, Sir Laurie Magnus.

Sir Laurie said in his report that he had "not identified evidence of improprieties".

However, he expressed that it was "regrettable" that Tulip had not been more mindful of the "potential reputational risks" associated with her connection to her aunt, Sheikh Hasina, the now deposed prime minister of Bangladesh.

The ACC is now looking into allegations that Hasina and her family embezzled up to £3.9bn from infrastructure spending in Bangladesh.

The investigation stems from a series of accusations brought forward by Bobby Hajaj, a political rival of Sheikh Hasina.

According to court documents reviewed by the BBC, Hajaj has alleged that Tulip helped broker a 2013 deal with Russia, which significantly inflated the cost of constructing a new nuclear power plant in Bangladesh.

In its letter to the ACC, Tulip's lawyers, Stephenson Harwood, repeat her claim that she was not involved in the nuclear plant deal in any way, despite being pictured at a signing ceremony in the Kremlin in 2013, with Sheikh Hasina and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"It is not uncommon for family members to be invited to accompany Heads of State on state visits," the letter says, adding that she did not know about any alleged financial irregularities.

It asserts that allegations suggesting a £700,000 flat in London King's Cross, gifted to Tulip in 2004, was "the fruits of embezzlement" are "absurd" and "impossible," as the gift preceded the nuclear deal by 10 years.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4



Tarique warns of extremists

FROM PAGE 1

maintaining the country's secular character and strengthening democracy.

"We would like to draw the attention of the interim government that if it fails to control the evil activities of religious extremists and their radicalism, extremist groups and defeated fascist forces will once again bury democracy in the country," he told at an iftar party via videoconference.

If that were to happen, Bangladesh could have an image crisis, Tarique said while addressing the iftar party at the Ladies Club organised to honour political leaders.

"To uphold the country's secular character, the democratic forces will pursue a political settlement that strengthens Bangladesh's democratic system. This includes bringing the fleeing mafia clique, responsible for massacres, to justice at any cost, while resolutely opposing extremism and religious fundamentalism," said Tarique.

Tarique also urged the government to provide the public with a clear understanding of its action plan to maintain confidence among people. "If the outline of the interim government's activities or action plan were made clearer and more specific to the people, all doubts and hesitations in their minds would be removed."

The BNP leader said it is true that the Awami League government was not overthrown merely to arrange a national election. "But it is even truer that the mafia regime collapsed due to the failure to hold a fair election. So, there is no room to consider any election simply as a matter of whether a political party can come to power or not," he said.

Tarique also expressed concern about some advisers of the government and even one or two political parties speaking in a slightly different tone regarding the next election.

"We believe that if secondary issues are prioritised under the guise of a new political settlement, instead of honouring public expectations, it will send the wrong message to the people. Such a situation will ultimately pave the way for the resurgence of fugitive mafia regime associates."

Tarique expressed the public

expectation that the interim government will give the highest priority to elections, paving the way for the formation of a "democratic government".

He reiterated that if BNP is entrusted with the responsibility of governing the country in the upcoming national elections, the party will form a national government, consisting of representatives from pro-democratic political parties and elected public representatives.

Tarique expressed concern over the alarming increase in incidents of violence against women, children, and rape.

Noting that women make up half of the country's population, he said that without ensuring their safety, it is impossible to move the country forward.

"There is a need to deeply consider whether the security of our mothers, sisters, and daughters is in danger due to the government, administration, and law enforcement agencies being overly focused on creating new political settlements or any other tasks," the BNP leader said.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said although the country has been freed from fascism, democracy is still elusive. "A democratic Bangladesh remains the main aspiration of the people."

Emphasising the need for unity, he said it is crucial to resolve issues relating to reforms through dialogue.

National Citizen Party (NCP) Convener Nahid Islam urged political parties to reach a political consensus so that there would be no room for "Mujibbadi" politics in the election and politics of future Bangladesh.

He said there are political parties to make the next election inclusive. "We believe that we bear the spirit of the struggle and the mass uprising that took place against Mujibbadi [Mujibism]," he said.

Nahid hoped that a political unity would be there.

Jamaat Nayeb-e-Ameer Syed Abdullah Muhammed Taher said on behalf of his party requested all to forge a national unity on four points – the independence and sovereignty of Bangladesh, a sustainable democracy, a fair election and a corruption-free Bangladesh.

2 girls raped in Rangpur

FROM PAGE 16

In Patuakhali's Dumki upazila, a 12th grader was allegedly gang raped on Tuesday evening.

The 18-year-old was the daughter of a man killed in police firing during the July uprising. A case was filed in this regard with Dumki Police Station yesterday.

According to the details of the case, the victim was on her way to her maternal grandparents' house after visiting her father's grave when she was attacked near the Munshibari area.



Chief of Army Staff General Waker-Uz-Zaman yesterday called on Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus at the state guest house Jamuna. During the meeting, the army chief briefed the chief adviser on the overall security situation in the country and the army's current operations.

PHOTO: ISPR

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, CHILDREN Prioritise prudence over populism in legal reforms

Experts urge government

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The interim government must prioritise prudence over populism before finalising the reforms they are planning for the existing Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 2000, urged legal experts at an event yesterday.

They stressed the importance of a fair and effective judicial process, calling for broader consultation with legal experts and women's rights activists, instead of hastily imposing harsher punishments.

Titled "Rape and Abuse: Legal Safeguards and Way Forward," the event was organised at the Jatiya Press Club by Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), which serves as the secretariat of the Rape Law Reform Coalition (RLRC) - a platform of 17 women's and human rights, legal, and development organisations.

Maheen Sultan, member of the Women's Rights Reform Commission,

Harsh punishments alone do not guarantee justice, as stricter laws often result in lower conviction rates, allowing perpetrators to evade punishment. We need a system that ensures thorough investigations and fair trials so that every rape case leads to justice and accountability.

MAHEEN SULTAN
Member of the Women's Rights Reform Commission

advocated for a shift in societal attitudes towards gender, relationships, and consent.

Acknowledging the interim government's recent initiatives, she said, "Harsh punishments alone do not guarantee justice, as stricter laws often result in lower conviction rates, allowing perpetrators to evade punishment. We need a system that ensures thorough investigations and fair trials so that every rape case leads

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Expand definition of rape to include all genders
- Broaden the interpretation of 'penetration' in legal terms
- Set a specific age threshold for sexual consent
- Determine fines based on the severity of offence
- Prohibit disclosure of identities, photos, videos of victims
- Establish state-run compensation fund for victims

to justice and accountability."

She also recommended identifying the key barriers to justice, including why survivors hesitate to file cases, why investigations are inadequate, and why many cases collapse in court.

Criticising the interim government, she pointed out that RLRC has long been advocating for necessary reforms, but has not been consulted.

She also expressed concern over the government's rush to finalise these changes within a few days.

"This is a national issue, not just a matter of the interim government alone. It should not be about making a quick statement for the sake of appearances," she added.

Advocate Salma Ali, president of Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association, emphasised that swift justice is possible with the government's sincere intention and efficient trials.

Citing examples where verdicts in rape cases were delivered in just four days, she stressed that proper coordination between the police and judiciary ensures efficiency.

"However, legal reforms alone are

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8

CSOs condemn abduction, abuse of 2 NGO workers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Civil Society Organisation (CSO) Alliance has strongly condemned the abduction, brutal torture, and sexual harassment of two NGO workers in Cumilla's Chandina.

Expressing grave concern over the incident, the alliance has called for the immediate arrest and prosecution of the perpetrators.

The CSO Alliance - a coalition of over 300 NGOs, youth platforms, women's rights organisations, environmental groups, human rights organisations, social entrepreneurs, and researchers working in Bangladesh -- made this call in a press statement issued yesterday.

The statement was signed by prominent civil society leaders, including Rasheda K Choudhury, executive director of Campaign for Popular Education; Dr Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh; Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation; author Maleka Begum; Asif Saleh, executive director of BRAC; and Farah Kabir, country director of ActionAid Bangladesh, among others.

Expressing outrage over this horrific violation of human rights, the signatories raised concerns about whether legal loopholes are being exploited to shield the perpetrators from justice.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5



Pedestrians walk past fumes rising from a pile of burning garbage. Waste collectors are supposed to transport the trash from this area to a designated dumping site, but they often neglect this duty and burn the waste on-site instead, causing air pollution. The photo was taken in the Imamganj Ghat area of the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

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TONU MURDER

9 years without closure

KHALID BIN NAZRUL

It has been nine long years since the rape and murder of Sohagi Jahan Tonu, yet the case remains unresolved.

Despite six officers from four agencies investigating the case during this time, no probe report has been submitted so far, and law enforcement agencies have failed to make a single arrest in the 3,287 days since the murder.

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) previously claimed to have interrogated around 200 individuals, including army personnel, but no significant progress was made.

Meanwhile, Inspector Tariqul Islam took charge of the case as the latest investigation officer in October last



year after being appointed by the Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) in Dhaka.

Tonu, a student of Cumilla Victoria College's history department and also a theatre activist, was raped and murdered inside Cumilla Cantonment on March 20, 2016.

The incident triggered nationwide protests and garnered widespread media attention, both locally and internationally. However, no trial has taken place in the nine years since.

Even after two autopsies at Cumilla Medical College Hospital, the cause of death could not be determined.

The only confirmed development in the case was through DNA tests, which proved that Tonu had been raped before her murder.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

EID VACATION

DGHS issues 16 directives for health services

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Director General of Health Services on Tuesday issued a 16-point directive to ensure uninterrupted healthcare services across the country during the upcoming Eid-ul-Fitr holidays.

According to the directives, the presence of doctors must be ensured round the clock in the emergency department. The emergency department, labour room, emergency operation theatre, and laboratory must remain operational at all times.

To ensure adequate manpower and medical services at the workplace, staffers may be granted leave in phases before and after Eid through proper coordination, it said.

The head of the institution will grant leave, prioritising uninterrupted emergency medical services and public interest, it added.

The heads of the hospital's indoor units must monitor their departmental activities daily. Emergency labs and x-ray services must be operational round the clock at medical college hospitals, specialised hospitals, district hospitals, and upazila health complexes, the directives read.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

HC acquits Babar in arms case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday acquitted former BNP state minister for home affairs Lutfuzzaman Babar in an arms case, overturning a trial court's 17-year prison sentence handed down during the military-backed caretaker government.

The HC also scrapped the trial court verdict that convicted Babar in the case filed in 2007. He was released from jail on January 16 after spending 17 years in prison.

The court observed that filing the first information report five days after Babar's arrest was unconstitutional and legally flawed.

The bench of Justice Mustafa Zaman Islam and Justice Nasreen Akhter

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

Seven killed in road crashes in 3 districts

STAR REPORT

At least seven people were killed and eight others injured in separate road accidents in Jashore, Joypurhat, and Thakurgaon districts yesterday and on Tuesday, respectively.

In Jashore, three people died and two others were injured as an ambulance and an engine-driven van collided head-on on the Benapole-Jashore Highway in Nabin Nagar area of Jhikargachha upazila yesterday.

The deceased were Nazma Khatun, 51, Ratna Khatun, 12, and Bablu Hossain, 52. The injured have been admitted to Jashore General Hospital. Jhikargachha Police Station OC Bablu Rahman Khan confirmed the matter.

In Joypurhat, a private car collided with a battery-run van coming from opposite direction in Kalai upazila yesterday, leaving two persons dead on the spot and two others injured.

The deceased were identified as Mofazzal Hossain Mondal 40, and Idris Ali 60, of Kalai upazila, both passengers of the van.

Locals rescued the injured and took them to Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital in Bogura for treatment.

"Police went to the spot and recovered the bodies. Further legal action will be taken after preliminary inquiry," said Zahid Hossain, OC of Kalai Police Station.

In Thakurgaon, a diesel-run three-wheeler and a potato-laden truck collided head-on on Thakurgaon-Baliadangi Road in Sadar upazila on Tuesday night, leaving two persons dead and four others injured. The deceased were Arfan, 23, and Joyanta Roy, 29, of Baliadangi upazila.

Joyanta died on the spot while Arfan succumbed to his injuries after locals rushed the injured to Thakurgaon 250 bed Modern Hospital, said Md Babul, sub-inspector of Thakurgaon Sadar Police Station.

Three of the injured were shifted to Rangpur Medical College Hospital as their condition deteriorated.

Police seized the truck, but its driver and his assistant managed to flee, said SI Babul, adding that a case was filed in connection with the incident.



Electricians repair table and ceiling fans at their shop. With temperatures already hitting summer-level highs, people rely on these fans for relief amid the rising heat. These electricians earn between Tk 500 and Tk 2,000 daily for their work. The photo was taken yesterday on Katpatti Road in Barishal city.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

EID JOURNEY TO NORTH

Gridlock concern looms amid ongoing construction works

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, back from Sirajganj

The joy of holidaymakers is often dampened by severe gridlocks during Eid journey, and with ongoing construction in Sirajganj, concerns over traffic congestion loom for those heading north.

The 22-kilometre stretch of highway between Sayedabad and Hatikumrul Intersection -- located on the western end of the Jamuna Bridge -- houses seven bridges and flyovers.

However, currently construction work is ongoing at Sayedabad Bridge, Jhaoil Bridge, Hatikumrul Intersection, and Konabari Intersection, raising concerns about gridlocks.

Among these, Hatikumrul Intersection is the busiest, serving as a crucial junction for vehicles heading toward various northern districts. As such, smooth vehicular movement remains a big concern due to the ongoing construction work.

Additionally, due to construction work on the Jhaoil Bridge and at the Konabari Intersection, the highway there has turned to a single-lane, disrupting smooth movement of vehicles.

On regular days, around 18,000 to 20,000 vehicles cross the Jamuna Bridge. However, during Eid, this

number surges to nearly 40,000 to 50,000, often leading to long tailbacks on both ends of the bridge.

"Four-lane construction on the east side of the Jamuna Bridge in Tangail is complete, so we expect full-fledged four-lane service there from the start of the Eid rush," said Ahsanul Kabir Pavel, executive engineer of the Jamuna Bridge.



"Although construction is still ongoing on the west side in Sirajganj, there is enough road space to maintain four-lane traffic," he said.

However, an on-site visit to the west end of the Jamuna Bridge revealed that multiple construction zones occupy a significant portion of the highway.

"It becomes difficult to maintain normal speed after crossing the bridge," said Md Abdul Aziz, a bus driver.

"At Sayedabad Bridge, two-thirds of

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

2 held over mob attack on rape accused

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday arrested two persons for a mob attack on a teenage boy over rape allegations in Dhaka's Khilkhet area on Tuesday night.

The incident injured the 16-year-old boy and seven police officials.

Mobarak Hossain Sajib and Yousuf Ali were arrested in case filed earlier for attacking police personnel, said OC Kamal Hossain of Khilkhet Police Station.

Police are trying to arrest others, he said.

Police were taking the boy into custody over an allegation of raping a six-year-old girl when over 100 men attacked them at Khilkhet Bazar around 11:00pm on Tuesday. A police van was also vandalised.

Meanwhile, father of the girl filed a case against the teenager, OC Kamal said.

The girl was sent for tests and treatment.

Meanwhile, the teenage boy was undergoing treatment at DMCH under police custody, the OC said.

Shishir Kumar Ghosh, medical officer of the casualty ward at DMCH, said the boy has injuries on the head and different parts of the body and is under observation.

His condition is stable, Shishir added.

Consensus commission to begin talks with parties today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Consensus Commission (NCC) will begin its second round of discussions with political parties today to review key proposals from various reform commissions. The meetings will take place individually, in phases.

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.

On March 22, the commission will meet with Khelafat Majlis and the Bangladesh Labour Party, said Prof Ali Riaz, vice president of the commission.

The commission will also hold talks with Rastrosangskar Andolan the following day, he added.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

ACC sues former AL MP Golap over illegal assets

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission has sued Abdus Sobhan Mia Golap, a former Awami League lawmaker and former special assistant to ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina, on charges of illegally acquiring wealth beyond known income sources, and assets in the United States through money laundering.

ACC Director General Md Akhter Hossain disclosed this information at the commission's regular briefing yesterday.

Akhter Hossain said Golap, as a public servant and lawmaker, misused his power, engaged in irregularities and corruption, and laundered money to purchase nine flats and houses in Queens, New York, in the US. The properties are valued at Tk 32 crore.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8

Janata Bank PLC.

Head Office
IT Procurement, Security, Compliance and Maintenance Department
110, Motijheel C/A, Dhaka-1000
Tel: +02223356514, Fax: 88-02-9546444, Telex: 675840 JBD BJ
Website: www.jb.com.bd

Invitation for e-Tender

e-Tenders are invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of following goods:

Sl. No.	Tender ID	Invitation Reference No.	Tender Description	Tender Closing Date & Time
01	1088648	JB/IT-Proc-30/OTM/Firewall-License/2025	Tender for Procurement of Subscription of License for Firewall (Supply, Installation & Commissioning) for Janata Bank PLC.	16/04/2025 02:00 PM
02	1088768	JB/IT/PS/Proc-27/OTM/Desktop-Monitor/2025	Tender for Procurement of Desktop Computer (Without Monitor) and Monitor (Supply, Installation & Commissioning) for Janata Bank PLC. following Open Tendering Method.	16/04/2025 12:30 PM

This is an online Tender, where only e-Tenders will be accepted in the national e-GP portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted.

To submit e-Tender, registration in the national e-GP System portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. Further information and guidelines are available in the national e-GP portal and e-GP Help Desk (Email: helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

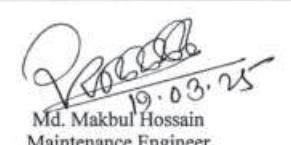

(Mohammad Shakhawat Hossain)
Deputy General Manager



GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH
BANGLADESH TELEVISION
CHATTOGRAM CENTER
CHATTOGRAM
www.btv.gov.bd

Invitation for National Tender

01.	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Information and Broadcasting	
02.	Agency	Bangladesh Television	
03.	Procuring Entity Name	General Manager, Bangladesh Television, Chattogram Center, 669/A, Zakir Hossain Road, Khulshi, Chattogram.	
04.	Procuring Entity District	Chattogram	
05.	Invitation for	"Supply of Studio equipment, Other equipment & related Accessories for BTV Chattogram Center"	
06.	Invitation ref no.	15.54.1543.023.07.078.25.153	
07.	Procurement Method	Open Tendering Method (OTM) National Competitive Tender (NCT)	
FUNDING INFORMATION			
08.	Budget and Source of Funds	GOB, Annual revenue budget of BTV Chattogram	
09.	Tender Package No.	Single	
10.	Tender Publication Date	20/03/2025	
11.	Tender Last selling Date	09/04/2025 (During office Hours)	
12.	Tender Closing Date and Time	10/04/2025 12:00 hrs BST	
13.	Tender Opening Date and Time	10/04/2025 12:10 hrs BST	
14.	Name & Address of the Selling of Tender Document	Office of the Assistant Director (Finance) Room No-101, Bangladesh Television, Chattogram Center, 669/A, Zakir Hossain Road, khulshi, Chattogram.(During office Hours)	
15.	Receiving Tender Document & Opening Tender Document	Conference Room (3 rd floor), Bangladesh Television, Chattogram Center, 669/A, Zakir Hossain Road, khulshi, Chattogram.	
INFORMATION FOR TENDERER			
16.	Eligibility of Tenderer	As per TDS	
17.	Brief Description of Goods & Related service	"Supply of Studio equipment, Other equipment & related Accessories for BTV Chattogram Center"	
18.	Price of Tender Document (Tk.)	Tk. 1000.00 (One Thousand) Only	
19.	Lot No	Identification of Lot	Location
		Tender Security Amount (Tk) in the form of Pay Order/Bank Draft	Completion Time in Days/Weeks/Months
	01	"Supply of Studio equipment, Other equipment & related Accessories for BTV Chattogram Center"	Tk. 20,000.00 (Twenty Thousand) Taka Only in favor of Drawing & Disbursing Officer, Bangladesh Television, Chattogram.
			60 days
PURCHASER DETAILS			
20.	Name of official inviting Tender	Md. Makbul Hossain	
21.	Designation of official Inviting Tender	Maintenance Engineer	
22.	Address of official Inviting Tender	Bangladesh Television, Chattogram Center, 669/A, Zakir Hossain Road, Khulshi, Chattogram.	
23.	Contact details of official Inviting Tender	Tel: 02333379309	
24.	The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject any or all tenders.		


Md. Makbul Hossain
Maintenance Engineer
Bangladesh Television, Chattogram Center
On behalf of General Manager
mhossain2580@gmail.com

GD-714

GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLES REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH
BANGLADESH TELEVISION
CHATTOGRAM CENTRE
CHATTOGRAM

Invitation for Open Tender Method (OTM) (Re-Tender Notice)

1.	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Information
2.	Agency	Bangladesh Television
3.	Procuring Entity Name	General Manager
4.	Procuring Entity Code	GOB

Xefer is Allen Swapan's new 'Boiyam Pakhi'

After teasing audiences for weeks about Allen Swapan's new *Boiyam Pakhi*, Chorki has finally unveiled its latest rendition, *Boiyam Pakhi 2.0*, from *Myself Allen Swapan 2*, featuring Xefer Rahman as the newest addition to the series.

Not only has she lent her voice to the track, but she performs in it. Xefer, previously seen in the Chorki Original film *Monogamy*, will also star in a Chorki Original series for the first time.

Xefer was already familiar with the *Allen Swapan* series and character. When director Shihab Shaheen offered her a role, she didn't have to think twice about it.

According to Xefer, "If the character is interesting, I am definitely willing to act." However, since music is her primary passion, she couldn't leave it behind and she lent her voice.

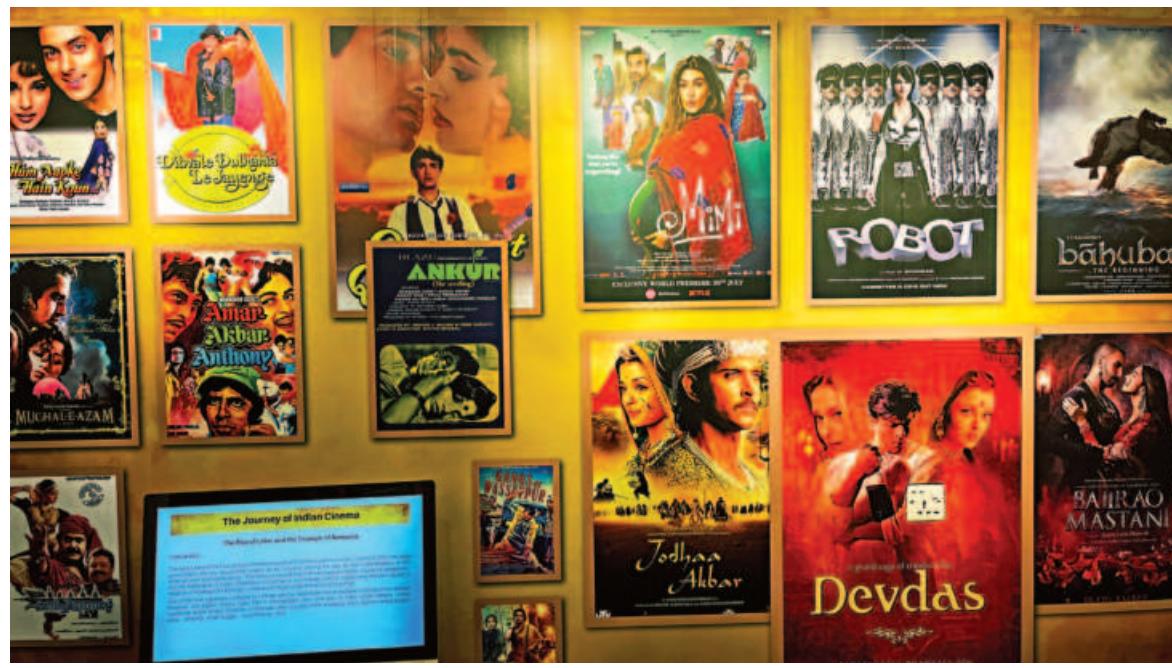


PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSVED

WHAT'S THE HAPS?

'Late Night Comedy Show'

Naveed's Comedy Club (NCC) announces *The Late Night Comedy Show 1* to celebrate its 15th anniversary. Comedians Shayar, Toru, Sami Doha, Rizvi, Ashir, Ayon, Forhad, and Rafsan will perform. Registration requires a Tk 350 fee. The event aligns with Ramadan's late-night Sehri hours, offering an engaging experience for guests.

Date: Friday | March 21, 2025

Time: 11:59pm

Venue: Naveed's Comedy Club, Gulshan-2



SHARMIN JOYA

The World Audio-Visual & Entertainment Summit (WAVES) is a global initiative designed to bring together creative minds from across the Media and Entertainment (M&E) industry under one platform. Hosted by India, the summit will take place from May 1 to 4 at Mumbai's Jio World Convention Centre and Jio World Garden.

WAVES aims to foster collaboration, showcase talent, and facilitate networking opportunities for professionals in television, radio, news media, music, advertising, animation, visual effects, gaming, comics, social media, online content creation, artificial intelligence, film, OTT platforms, and exhibition sectors.

The summit was officially announced in Bangladesh at a launch event held at the Indian Cultural Centre in Dhaka, yesterday, alongside a discussion

celebrating 111 years of Indian cinema. The event, organised by the High Commission of India in Dhaka, highlighted the objectives and potential global impact of WAVES.

Ann Mary George, First Secretary (Culture) at the High Commission of India, shared the vision for WAVES, stating, "We aim to make this an annual event, much like the World Economic Summit in Davos or the Raisina Dialogue for foreign policy. This will be a landmark platform for media and entertainment."

The four-day programme will feature high profile events, including the Global Media Dialogue, where ministers and policymakers will engage in discussions, and the M&E CEO Roundtable, bringing together industry leaders to strategise on the future of media and entertainment. The WAVES Awards will celebrate excellence in various fields, recognising outstanding

contributions with accolades.

Referring to this as the beginning of a revolutionary idea, Ann Mary George mentioned that competitions have been open to participants from across the globe. There are 22 challenges for international participants, including the radio content challenge, Ustad for classical music, Battle of Bands, Medium for electronic music, an animation contest, the Young Filmmaker Challenge, and the Film Poster Designer Challenge. Some of these competitions have already concluded, while others are ongoing. Details can be found on their website.

A total of 31 awards will be announced on the concluding day of the festival.

This initiative brings together arts, music, culture, media, and entertainment from around the world, fostering global exchange and embracing diversity.

David Steven Cohen, 'Courage the Cowardly Dog' writer, dies at 58

David Steven Cohen, known for his work as the head writer of *Courage the Cowardly Dog*, has passed away at 58, as reported by animation historian Jerry Beck. He revealed on Facebook that Cohen succumbed to cancer.

Cohen was instrumental in shaping the eerie and surreal narrative style that defined *Courage the Cowardly Dog*, a Cartoon Network series known for its unsettling yet captivating

storytelling.

Although the show was created by John R Dilworth, Cohen joined as a writer in the first season and later became head writer.

He helped create many of the show's most memorable episodes in seasons two to four, with his final contribution being the second-to-last episode before the series ended in 2002.

Deepto TV unveils special Eid lineup



Deepto TV has announced a week-long special programme to commemorate Eid-ul-Fitr, featuring a lineup of Bengali films, including three world premieres.

The Fuad Chowdhury directorial *Meghna Konnya* will premiere on Eid day at 9am.

Toofan, directed by Raihan Rafi, will air on the second day of Eid at 1pm, while *Omar*, directed by Mohammad Mostafa Kamal Raz, will be broadcast at 9am on the same

day.

Other film highlights throughout the Eid holidays include *Shikari*, *Nolok*, *Antarjal*, *Nawab*, *Prohelia*, *Bir*, *Mukhosh*, *Mon Jekhane*, *Hridoy Sekhane*, and *Poison*.

The channel will feature *Bhalobaslei Ghor Bandha Jay Na* at 1pm on the final day.

The film lineup promises a mix of thrillers, action, and drama, catering to a wide range of audiences.

NEWS

1 killed in Jubo Dal factional clash

FROM PAGE 16

said Babu.

The injured, Rasel, 30, and Bashar, 32, both residents of Chonpara, were receiving treatment at DMCH, said Md Faruk, in-charge of the hospital's police outpost.

Mehedi Islam, senior assistant superintendent of police in Narayanganj, confirmed that the clash broke out over establishing supremacy in the area infamous for its drug trade.

The police and the Rapid Action Battalion conducted a joint operation yesterday morning, but could not make any arrests in connection with the clash.

Additional law enforcement personnel were deployed to maintain law and order in the area, Mehedi said.

No case was filed in this connection, said Salah Uddin Kader, inspector (investigation) of Rupganj Police Station.

According to police and local eyewitnesses, the conflict began

around 10:30pm on Tuesday night after Taraweeh prayers when a group of followers of Monir Dewan, president of Jubo Dal's Chonpara unit, detained a known drug dealer named Robin and took him to the local Jubo Dal office.

A scuffle broke out when Abdul Karim, organising secretary of Jubo Dal's Chonpara unit and Golam Rabbani, president of Jubo Dal's Chonpara ward-2 unit, arrived at the office to secure Robin's release.

After the scuffle, members of both factions, armed with firearms, harpoons, iron rods, and sharp weapons, clashed intermittently until dawn, leaving multiple individuals injured from both sides, said locals.

Contacted, Jubo Dal leader Monir denied any involvement in controlling the drug trade.

He claimed that Rabbani, Karim and their supporters attacked Monir's men in an attempt to release a drug trader detained by Monir's followers.

"We only acted for self-defence, but we did not use any firearms," Monir claimed.

He alleged that his opponents collaborated with an "armed terrorist group" affiliated with the Awami League to attack them.

Efforts to contact Karim and Rabbani for their statements were unsuccessful, as they had reportedly fled the area following the incident. Their mobile phones were also found switched off.

A BNP leader from Chonpara, who wished to be anonymous, said supporters of former AL MP Golam Dastagir Gazi controlled the drug trade before year's mass uprising.

"During the Awami League's tenure, Chonpara became a safe haven for drugs and crime. However, following the government's fall in August last year, some BNP leaders have been sheltering drug traders and asserting dominance in the area, leading to internal conflicts within BNP ranks."

Start taking steps now for holding peaceful polls

FROM PAGE 16

The others are procuring 364 new pickups, 140 prison vans for police, releasing funds for ongoing construction projects for police that are less than 70 percent complete, allocating funds for acquiring land for 65 police stations currently operating in rented buildings, and considering interest-free loans for purchasing motorcycles for sub-inspectors and assistant sub-inspectors.

He further said allowances in the government's social security programmes are very low, suggesting increasing the allowances to at least Tk 3,000 per month.

Shawkat Hossain, online editor at the daily Prothom Alo, emphasised that job creation should be a major focus of this budget.

He also suggested shortening the budget speech.

In response, the finance adviser agreed to reduce its length to 50-60 pages.

Mizanur Rahman, head of operations at The Daily Star, stressed the need to incorporate automation into the operations of the National Board of Revenue in the next budget to enhance its efficiency.

Mostafa Kamal, editor of Daily Khabarer Kagoj, and Syed Shahnewaz Karim, acting editor of Daily Shomoyer Alo, also spoke at the meeting.

Officials who attended the meeting later shared the updates with this newspaper.

The officials also demanded a rise in the travel and daily allowances, higher allowances for investigating general diaries, daycare centres, and washroom and water facilities for traffic police.

Speaking to The Daily Star, he said, "No student is safe here."

NBR suspects foul play

FROM PAGE 16

They added that due to his close ties with high-ranking officials of the previous Awami League government, Hasan used his influence to secure illegal tax benefits with the assistance of some tax officials.

Meanwhile, Hasan, the founding president of the Awami League's Ontario unit, dismissed the allegation, saying that his income was transferred to Bangladesh in full compliance of the law.

The money was legally earned abroad, and taxes were already deducted there. Bangladesh and China have a Double Taxation Agreement (DTA), which prevents a person from being taxed in both countries," he told The Daily Star over the phone yesterday.

"The money was transferred through a legal banking channel," added Hasan, who is currently in Germany.

When asked about the type of consultancy he provided to Chinese companies, Hasan said he offered full logistical support.

"Since I own a hotel, I arrange their accommodation, manage their travel, and organise their meetings at various locations. I also handle their official correspondence — receiving and delivering letters for meetings. I did it both from Bangladesh and China," he claimed.

"Because of my services, they paid me a consultancy fee."

However, a top official of the Income Tax Intelligence Unit, said, "We have got some vital clues regarding Hasan's income, which he did not mention on his tax file."

"Besides, we are investigating the NBR officials who were involved in the process."

Next budget

FROM PAGE 16

inflation could be brought down to 8 percent by June this year.

During the meeting, editors suggested several measures, including steps to control inflation, expanding the social safety net programmes, raising the tax-free income limit to at least Tk 5 lakh, and increasing allocations for health and education sectors.

The editors and senior journalists also mentioned various challenges faced by the media, including high taxes levied on the newspaper industry.

In response, the finance adviser assured them that challenges faced by newspapers, television, and online platforms would be taken into consideration in the budget.

The finance adviser emphasised that allowances under social safety net programmes would be increased, but the extent would depend on the availability of resources.

Financial Express Editor Shamsul Haque Zahid suggested that the interim government, which will present the budget in June, should formulate a budget that the next government can implement, especially considering the possibility of elections later this year.

He also recommended a realistic approach to budgeting given low

2 PUST students suspended

FROM PAGE 16

began protesting, claiming the post hurt their religious sentiments and demanded punishment of both students.

Following demonstrations, PUST authorities suspended the duo on March 16.

The Daily Star has seen copies of their suspension orders.

Speaking to this correspondent, Pronoy claimed his post contained nothing that would hurt religious sentiments.

"Nevertheless, I removed my post a day later [March 14]...The university authorities issued me a show-cause notice. I explained everything in my response, but they still suspended me and my friend."

Meanwhile, some students discussed the issue in a closed Facebook Messenger group, "Sonaton Chhatra Shangha." The contents of the group were later leaked.

On March 16, protesters then demanded punishment of seven students of the university's pharmacy department who were members of the messenger group.

The university's proctorial body, led by student adviser Rashedul Haque, held discussions with the demonstrators regarding the issue that day.

Speaking to The Daily Star, he said, "No student is safe here."

Rashedul said, "The students [demonstrators] got angry and attacked us. The university's assistant proctor and I were physically assaulted."

That same day, the university authorities issued show-cause notices to the seven pharmacy students.

One of the students, speaking on condition of anonymity, said, "We are now living in fear. We left campus on March 14, fearing that protesters would attack us if we returned."

Meanwhile, another group of students yesterday protested the attack on university officials, demanding punishment of the attackers.

A civil engineering student, also preferring anonymity, said, "Some people are trying to create communal unrest on campus. We shouldn't allow this. We want those who attacked our teachers to be punished."

PUST authorities have formed two probe committees — one to investigate the allegations against the seven pharmacy students and another to look into the attack on proctorial body members.

PUST Proctor Md Kamruzzaman told The Daily Star yesterday, "The probe bodies are working separately. We are trying to restore calm on campus."

On the fears of the seven students, he said, "No student is safe here."

Charred from withstanding scorching temperatures of 3,500 degrees Fahrenheit (2,000 degrees Celsius) during re-entry, bobbed steadily on the waves beneath a clear, sunny sky.

"What a ride — I see a capsule full of grins," said Hague.

As fast boats raced to the capsule for initial safety checks — an unlikely escort arrived in the form of a playful pod of dolphins.

Soon after, a larger recovery vessel hoisted Freedom aboard. Teams opened the hatch, and one by one, the astronauts were helped out onto mobility aids, waving and flashing thumbs-up signs.

Next, they will be flown by helicopter to Houston, where they will be able to meet their families in another day or two, and begin a physical rehabilitation program.

"PROMISE MADE, PROMISE KEPT," the White House posted on X, repeating a contentious claim that President Donald Trump's administration had accelerated the recovery timeline.

The quartet left the International Space Station early Sunday, beginning their 17-hour journey home after final farewells and hugs with the remaining crew.

Wilmore and Williams, both ex-Navy pilots and veterans of two prior space missions, flew to the orbital lab in June last year, on what was supposed to be a day-long roundtrip to test out Boeing's Starliner on its first crewed flight.

RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

Rivals report attacks amid US peace push

AGENCIES

Russia and Ukraine yesterday accused each other of violating a new agreement to refrain from attacks on energy targets, with scores of drone strikes launched hours after US President Donald Trump spoke by phone to Russia's Vladimir Putin.

In the phone call between the US and Russian leaders on Tuesday, Putin rejected a proposed full 30 day ceasefire, which had been sought by Trump and previously accepted by Ukraine.

Putin said he would agree only to pause attacks on energy infrastructure, a proposal that was swiftly accepted by Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky, who nevertheless denounced Moscow for rejecting a more comprehensive truce.

But even that narrow pause appeared in doubt yesterday. Moscow said Ukraine hit an oil pumping station in southern Russia, while Kyiv said Russia had struck hospitals and homes, and knocked out power to some of its railways.

Zelensky said that the continued attacks showed Moscow's words were not aligned with its actions, and that Russia was still not ready for peace.

He said the United States should be put in charge of monitoring any ceasefire.

Zelensky also warned against heeding a Kremlin call to halt military aid for his country and announced he would speak with Trump later within hours.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Putin and Trump understand each other well and were determined to restore badly damaged ties.

Russia and the United States will decide on dates for future talks in the coming days, the Kremlin said.

"Both today and tomorrow, there will be additional agreements on the exact, precise dates," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters when asked about future talks with the US.

Some European leaders said Putin's rejection of Trump's proposed full truce was proof Moscow not seeking peace. The offer to temporarily stop attacking Ukrainian energy facilities counted for "nothing" and Trump would have to win greater concessions, Germany's defence minister said.

European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said that Moscow cannot be trusted.



A relative mourns next to the body of a Palestinian killed in Israeli strikes, at Al-Ahli Arab Baptist hospital, in Gaza City yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

USAID fund cuts likely unconstitutional

Says judge, blocks Musk from making more cuts

REUTERS

A federal judge on Tuesday blocked billionaire Elon Musk and the Department of Government Efficiency from taking any more steps to shut down the US Agency for International Development, saying their efforts to close the foreign aid agency likely violated the US Constitution.

In a preliminary ruling, US District Judge Theodore Chuang in Maryland ordered Musk, a key adviser to President Donald Trump, and the agency Musk spearheads to restore access to USAID's computer systems for its direct and contract employees, including thousands who were placed on leave. The ruling came in response to a lawsuit by current and former USAID employees, one of several currently pending over the rapid dismantling of Washington's primary humanitarian aid agency.

"Today's decision is an important victory against Elon Musk and his DOGE

attack on USAID, the US government and the Constitution," said Norm Eisen, executive chair of State Democracy Defenders Fund, a lawyer representing the 26 anonymous plaintiffs in the case.

Trump told Fox News his administration would appeal the ruling.

"I guarantee you we will be appealing it. We have rogue judges that are destroying our country," Trump said on "The Ingraham Angle."

Trump, a Republican, on his first day back in the White House ordered a 90-day freeze of all US foreign aid and a review of whether aid programs were aligned with his administration's policy.

Soon after that, Musk and DOGE gained access to USAID's payment and email systems, froze many of its payments and told much of its staff they were being placed on leave. On February 3, Musk wrote on X that he had "spent the weekend feeding USAID into the wood chipper."



"Naturally, Russia's neighbours are most concerned by Russia -- that goes without saying. But what is essential is for everyone to understand that this is a collective threat... Defending Ukraine is the front line of our own defence."

Antonio Costa
European Council President

REUTERS



Accelerating Gender-Inclusive Urban WASH A Call for Action

In collaboration with The Daily Star, WaterAid organised a roundtable on March 11, 2025, titled 'Accelerating Gender-Inclusive Urban WASH: A Call for Action.' The roundtable aimed to bring together experts, practitioners, and stakeholders to discuss the challenges and proposed solutions for gender-inclusive WASH in Dhaka. Below is a summary of the discussion along with key recommendations.

Hasin Jahan
Country Director, WaterAid Bangladesh
(Keynote Presentation)

The situation of Dhaka's WASH facilities is dire, especially for vulnerable groups. Consider the plight of flower sellers, beggars, female traffic police officers, or female construction workers who spend 10-12 hours outside daily. How do they access WASH facilities? And what about the 300,000 street vendors in Dhaka who need clean water and toilets while serving food? These pressing concerns demand immediate attention.

The city sees approximately 400,000 daily commuters, while over four million LIC dwellers live in 5,000 LICs—half of them women. Yet, there are only 641 public toilets, with just 116 managed by the city corporation. Some areas have water ATMs, but access remains insufficient. While Dhaka WASA supplies legal water connections to these areas through its Low-Income Community (LIC) unit for community-based organisations (CBOs) formed by LIC dwellers, there is no systematic toilet infrastructure. NGOs attempt to fill this gap, but coverage remains limited to 400-500 LICs, even with joint efforts.

To tackle this issue, we, a group of experts and practitioners, are developing a set of planning principles for an action plan to ensure WASH facilities in public spaces and low-income communities (LICs). We initiated a WASH plan for Ward 20, Zone 3, of the Dhaka North City Corporation, which includes Sattala LIC. Despite having 18 public toilets and two WASA water ATMs, only six toilets are functional. Our analysis revealed that 13 toilets would be sufficient, yet 18 exist in ineffective locations. Since six toilets are already functional, we need seven new ones to address this. However, restoring all 18 toilets could be a practical solution. With limited government resources and tax constraints, optimising their use is crucial for maximum impact.

To achieve this, we recommend that city corporations adopt four key steps. First, they should set minimum standards for public WASH facilities, ensuring they are clean, functional, safe and accessible. Second, implementing a management model with tariffs and a safety net for low-income users would help sustain operations while maintaining affordability. Existing models by WaterAid and Bhumijo provide successful examples of efficient operation and maintenance, ensuring proper management that can be replicated.

Public engagement is not just crucial, it's a game-changer. Introducing a user rating system for lease renewals, focusing mainly on women's feedback, would encourage better service quality and accountability among facility operators. Lastly, utilising existing spaces, such as mosques and fuel stations, to develop gender-inclusive toilet facilities under proper management would create safe and accessible sanitation options for all users.

We propose several key initiatives that have the potential to significantly transform the WASH situation in Dhaka. By installing water ATMs in LICs, we can provide residents with reliable access to clean water, reducing dependency on unsafe sources. Creating a low-cost blue-pink toilet model for both men and women would ensure safe sanitation, particularly for women and girls, while also serving as an alternative to open bathing. Lastly, encouraging corporate investment in sanitation infrastructure could significantly improve living conditions in LICs while enhancing corporate branding. These initiatives offer a beacon of hope for a better future.

A unified strategy among all authorities and institutions is not just important; it's crucial. Additionally, interim WASH solutions should be ensured for LIC dwellers until long-term housing plans are implemented. Ward 20 can serve as a scalable model, demonstrating that only through coordinated efforts can clean water and sanitation be established as universal rights.



RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PRESENTATION

1. Set minimum standards for public WASH facilities, including those in markets, fuel stations, mosques, and other public spaces, to ensure they are clean, functional, safe, and accessible.
2. Implement a management model with tariffs and a safety net for low-income users to sustain operations and maintenance while retaining affordability.
3. Introduce a user rating system for lease renewals of public toilets, prioritising women's and other marginalised people's feedback to improve service quality and accountability among facility operators.
4. Utilise existing spaces such as markets, mosques and fuel stations to develop gender-inclusive toilet facilities under proper management, ensuring wider accessibility.
5. Expand access to water in LICs by installing water ATMs. This will provide residents with a reliable and affordable supply, reducing dependency on unsafe sources.
6. Encourage corporate investment in sanitation infrastructure to improve living conditions in LICs and enhance corporate social responsibility and brand image.
7. Ensure coordination among institutions by aligning RAJUK's DAP and Dhaka WASA's master plan while implementing interim WASH solutions for LIC dwellers until long-term housing plans are in place.

Farhana Rashid
Chief Executive Officer, Bhumijo



When Bhumijo began working on public sanitation in 2016, we approached the Nur Mansion section of Gawsia Market, a women-centric space. We

proposed to the market committee that we renovate and manage an existing toilet, choosing Gawsia for its significance to women.

Despite data showing 40 female salespersons and up to 400,000 female visitors daily during Eid, the committee initially claimed that no women used the facilities. After negotiations, we were given 15 days for renovation and another 15 days for operation. If no women used the facility, we would restore it to its original state. However within months, the same committee requested upgrades for the men's toilets.

Policymakers must take sanitation seriously. Government institutions often resist opening facilities to the public. Additionally, we are not just service providers—we are deeply committed to a customer-centric approach. At the same time, we prioritise affordability and leverage digital collaboration to enhance accessibility and efficiency. Those of us on the ground will continue pushing for change, but policymakers must engage to make public sanitation genuinely inclusive.

Shamim Ara Shammi
Programme Manager, Operations,
Ultra-Poor Graduation Programme, BRAC



Over the past three months, a recurring issue in urban LIC community meetings has been the frequent damage of water and sanitation lines. As a result, residents often receive contaminated water instead of safe drinking water. Last month, I visited a LIC behind Pangu Hospital, which houses around 400 households. The water there had a foul odour, and many residents suffered from diarrhoea and other diseases.

Essential services are often taken for granted, but LIC residents—who sell vegetables, work in homes, and provide critical services—are deprived of basic needs. LICs exist within affluent areas like Banani and Dhanmondi, yet their residents remain invisible in policy and infrastructure planning. Our policies, infrastructure strategies, and review mechanisms must be more practical and inclusive.

Alauddin Ahmed
Project Manager, International Training Network
at Bangladesh University of Engineering & Technology (ITN-BUET)



In Bangladesh, 18% of women fetch water, compared to only 4-5% of men, highlighting an apparent gender disparity. Similarly, sanitation responsibilities disproportionately fall on women, who are also concentrated in lower-paying sanitation jobs, while higher-paid roles remain male-dominated.

True gender inclusivity means equal decision-making and access to resources. Yet, how often are women consulted when designing sanitation facilities? Their voices remain secondary at both institutional and household levels. Without addressing these disparities, discussions on gender-friendly policies remain empty promises.

Gender safety in WASH has two key dimensions: technological aspects such as functional toilet locks and broader community WASH initiatives. Sustainable and inclusive solutions require active involvement from all stakeholders.

Falguni Tripura
Member, Bangladesh Adivasi Forum



Urban sanitation challenges in Dhaka and beyond must address accessibility for marginalised communities, including indigenous women, trans-

gender individuals, and hijra communities. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, water scarcity worsens due to climate change, and inadequate school facilities often force young girls to skip school during menstruation. Poor housing designs further fail to consider hygiene needs.

Public sanitation remains inaccessible mainly to marginalised groups, such as disabled women and street vendors, who struggle to find WASH facilities. Beyond access, the lack of proper sanitation leads to violence—many indigenous women face assault simply while trying to use a toilet. This is not just a policy failure but a failure of social justice.

Fatema Begum
General Secretary, Nagar Daridra Basteebashir
Unnayan Sangstha (NDBUS)



During menstruation, inadequate sanitation exacerbates the situation, with makeshift toilets offering no privacy, exposing women to further danger. Teenage girls are often forced to bathe in semi-open spaces, making them vulnerable to harassment or worse. Victims are usually blamed, while perpetrators evade accountability.

As a representative of the Korail LIC, I am committed to securing legal water access for disadvantaged groups. With 80% of the poor suffering from water-borne diseases, we need well-planned, sustained strategies to address these challenges.

Salma Mahbub
General Secretary & Executive Director,
Bangladesh Society for the Change and
Advocacy Nexus (B-SCAN)



Since 2009, we have worked to improve sanitation facilities in key locations such as the National Museum, Dhaka University, and Mirpur Cricket Stadium. Since 2011, our collaboration with WaterAid has prioritised accessibility in public toilets, yet the broader issue remains largely unaddressed. Many public toilets fail to meet the needs of disabled individuals, despite policies mandating universal accessibility.

Inconsistent standards across authorities and a lack of enforcement further hinder progress. Authorities and NGOs must involve us early to ensure public toilets are accessible. The Ministry of Social Welfare and other relevant ministries should also lead in this area.

Md. Fazlul Hoque
Deputy Chief Executive Officer,
Sajida Foundation



City corporations are responsible for sanitation, yet there is no clear accountability when restaurants, fuel stations, or workplaces fail to provide usable toilets. Although the High Court recently ruled that individuals must receive at least 7.5 litres of water daily in emergencies, enforcement remains challenging. Financial institutions can play a role by incorporating sanitation compliance into financing agreements for entrepreneurs, especially in the restaurant and street food sectors. Ensuring access to sanitation requires urgent, multi-sector collaboration. Our microfinance institution (MFI) focuses on inclusive WASH, with plans to bring at least 1,000 restaurants into the sanitation programme for sustained hygiene and public health improvements.

Partha Shankar Saha
Assistant News Editor,
Prothom Alo



When we discuss urban issues, our focus is often disproportionately centred on Dhaka. However, new cities are emerging across Bangladesh. Are we considering sanitation and hygiene challenges in these newly developing urban centres?

From a media perspective, I have noticed that discussions on gender-inclusive sanitation tend to peak around specific occasions, such as International Women's Day or World Water Day. Why do we only highlight these problems on special days? Do people not need clean water and sanitation every day? This raises a significant concern.

Mostafizur Rahman
National Programme Officer - Climate and
Environment, Embassy of Sweden



The term 'accelerating' implies that we need to intensify our efforts. However, we need to examine the existing gaps before focusing on acceleration. The fact that we still have to advocate for these basic facilities demonstrates that gender and inclusivity are not yet embedded in urban planning.

Water and sanitation are not just women's issues—they affect everyone. WaterAid conducted a study revealing that women face significant harassment and violence when trying to access WASH facilities. Yet, these concerns are consistently overlooked. When sanitation facilities are designed, little thought is given to whether they will be genuinely accessible. We continue to design facilities without fully considering the diverse needs of all users.

We must assess whether existing policies truly serve everyone and require a fundamental shift in mindset. Gender inclusivity cannot be an isolated discussion—it must be part of a broader, more holistic approach to urban planning and public service design.

Meaningful private sector engagement depends on recognising how WASH aligns with business models. We are committed to reviewing existing laws and ensuring proper budget allocation to support this mission.

Sumaiya T. Ahmed
Head of Sustainability,
PRAN-RFL Group



The private sector can tailor market policies to address fundamental challenges by analysing local needs. We seek your input to understand the situation on the ground. We continuously invest in innovation, keeping consumers at the centre.

We are eager to collaborate with WASH and hygiene projects to drive meaningful impact. Achieving more requires collaboration, not individual effort, and I commit to being a partner in developing innovative, gender-inclusive WASH facilities.

Peter Maes
Chief of WASH,
UNICEF Bangladesh



It is crucial to recognise that one-third of children in urban LICs lack access to a proper water supply, and half do not have adequate sanitation facilities. Children living in LICs face a 30% higher health risk than their peers.

These issues are deeply interconnected—when a child contracts diseases like diarrhoea, their nutritional intake suffers, leading to stunted growth and impaired cognitive development. This, in turn, affects their education, future economic prospects, and, ultimately, the nation's overall development.

Additionally, poor WASH conditions contribute to anxiety, stress, and increased risks of gender-based violence. Young girls are particularly vulnerable, as many toilets lack menstrual hygiene facilities, making it difficult for them to attend school regularly. Studies have shown that improving WASH infrastructure can reduce school absenteeism by up to 15%, which is a significant impact.

Md. Manir Hossain
Additional Director (Deputy Secretary),
Department of Women Affairs, Ministry of
Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA)



The Department of Women's Affairs, operating under MoWCA, is key in providing programmes and facilities for women nationwide. The draft action plan for WASH, currently focused on Dhaka's two city corporations, should be expanded to all city corporations and pourashavas.

Public sanitation facilities are inadequate, and expanding them requires public-private collaboration. Infrastructure development alone is not enough; participation from local governments, city corporations, and stakeholders is essential, ideally through public-private partnerships.

Partha Hefaz Shaikh
Director – Programmes and Policy Advocacy,
WaterAid Bangladesh



In 2003, we launched a sanitation movement. After that, the government and local authorities took ownership of the programme, engaging with NGOs and the private sector. While NGOs and private entities are still involved, ensuring that the government leads the programme with strong political will and prioritises awareness is crucial.

The government must actively participate as a key player in executing these programmes in coordination with the local government institutions. At the same time, NGOs and the private sector should also contribute significantly to accelerating gender-inclusive urban WASH initiatives. We must reconsider how to make community engagement more meaningful and effective.

Dr. Mohammed Helal Uddin
Executive Vice Chairman, Microcredit
Regulatory Authority (MRA)



In Dhaka, rickshaw pullers and other disadvantaged groups lack access to proper toilets, highlighting a significant gap in development.

ment efforts. Similar challenges extend beyond the two city corporations to poverty-stricken areas nationwide.

Beyond WASH, women's safety remains a critical concern. Introducing facilities such as ATM-style water dispensers and community bathing spaces for women, managed by the community with private sector support, could improve access, hygiene, and income generation.

We must adopt innovative strategies to ensure the safety of women and children accessing WASH facilities. Regarding financing, our Microfinance Institution (MFI) window has the potential to offer subsidised loans for this purpose. However, despite the availability of funds, investments in WASH remain limited due to a lack of clear policy direction.

Upon receiving initial reports from MFIs, I thoroughly assess the necessary funding and its intended use before granting final approval. I am committed to approving funding requests for WASH facilities, provided that MFIs submit formal proposals. Therefore, the demand must come from the MFIs to facilitate resource allocation for WASH.

Rasheda K. Chowdhury
Charge of Coordination, CSO Alliance



The issue of WASH facilities must be continuously advocated as the current situation remains unsatisfactory, despite the efforts of numerous organisations over the years. WASH is not just a gender issue but a fundamental development priority.

Several successful models of inclusive WASH exist in Dhaka and should be replicated in all LIC areas. We need robust, evidence-based data to guide policy to achieve sustainable solutions. I urge ITN-BUET to provide scientific research on this issue. Additionally, collaborative efforts must be leveraged to scale up these solutions.

Due to the vulnerability and mobility of LIC dwellers, many initiatives fail to reach their full potential. Influential platforms like The Daily Star can play a crucial role by highlighting and disseminating stories of successful WASH models. Like stories of a village boy excelling in cricket inspire people, similar narratives about effective WASH models in LICs could create a widespread impact. Social media and e-papers offer tremendous potential to amplify these stories.

Shireen Pervin Huq
Chief, Women's Affairs Reform Commission



The WASH programme must extend beyond urban centres to suburban areas. In cities like Dhaka, RAJUK should mandate that public buildings make their toilet facilities accessible to everyone. Gonoshasthaya Nagar Hospital, a non-profit institution, provides toilet facilities for nearby traffic police on its first floor. Under its management, the hospital built two public toilets, setting an example for profit-driven hospitals, particularly in Dhammachi and other urban centres. These institutions should be required to adopt similar gender-inclusive WASH initiatives to benefit urban communities.

Beyond sanitation, access to clean water must also be a priority. In Gulshan, I observed a household placing jars and mugs outside their home for rickshaw pullers and passersby to drink from—a simple yet impactful initiative that should be replicated in other areas.

City Corporations and other authorities, especially RAJUK and WASA, must adopt a practical, results-driven approach to urban planning and WASH solutions. These authorities must make commitments and ensure these commitments translate into tangible initiatives, directly improving the living conditions of residents, particularly in underserved communities.

Tanjim Ferdous
In-Charge, NGO & Foreign Missions,
Business Development Team,
The Daily Star (Moderator)



Despite progress, women and marginalised groups face barriers. Gender-sensitive WASH solutions improve health, dignity, and economic opportunities, requiring collaboration, innovation, and strong policies to ensure inclusive, accessible, and sustainable services for all.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Implement gender sensitive and inclusive WASH programmes with genuine political commitment by integrating sanitation into national policies and practices.

Enforce mandatory public access to sanitation facilities in all public buildings, hospitals, markets and other spaces, ensuring they provide and manage well-maintained, accessible toilets for everyone.

Implement gender-sensitive infrastructure, including separate, safe and well-maintained toilets in public spaces, to ensure women's safety and health security in sanitation facilities.

Scale up successful inclusive WASH models from Dhaka to all LIC areas, adapting them to local needs for broader accessibility and impact.

Enact necessary policy and legal reforms to establish WASH as a fundamental right and hold authorities accountable for its provision and accessibility.

Ensure sanitation for marginalised communities by addressing the needs of disabled individuals, indigenous communities and transgender people in WASH planning and infrastructure.

Prioritise affordability and utilise digital collaboration to enhance WASH access and service efficiency. Invest in space-efficient innovations like basement toilets to address congestion in urban areas.

Scale up successful inclusive WASH models from Dhaka to all LIC areas, adapting them to local needs for broader accessibility and impact.

Enact necessary policy and legal reforms to establish WASH as a fundamental right and hold authorities accountable for its provision and accessibility.

NEWS

79 rivers dead or on deathbed

FROM PAGE 16
The study further states that as dams and water diversions upstream have altered the natural flow of rivers, millions of Bangladeshis are finding it increasingly difficult to fish, farm, and transport goods. Furthermore, as the availability of water in these rivers have become unpredictable, livelihoods are at risk, while entire communities dependent on them are struggling to survive.

Apart from people, wildlife in these regions is also being affected due to habitat destruction, which is disrupting the balance of nature, the study noted.

With regard to saving the dying rivers or reviving the dead ones, the report states, "We need to take better care by reducing pollution, preventing erosion, and restoring ecosystems. But Bangladesh cannot solve this problem alone. Since these rivers flow through multiple countries, cooperation with upstream neighbours is essential."

Azaz, who is also chairman of DRDC and administrator of Dhaka North City Corporation, said, "The government must pay immediate attention to these rivers and promote water transportation. If we do not use water transportation in all navigable rivers, we will not be able to save them." Using river transportation will require regular dredging, which will in turn help maintain navigability.

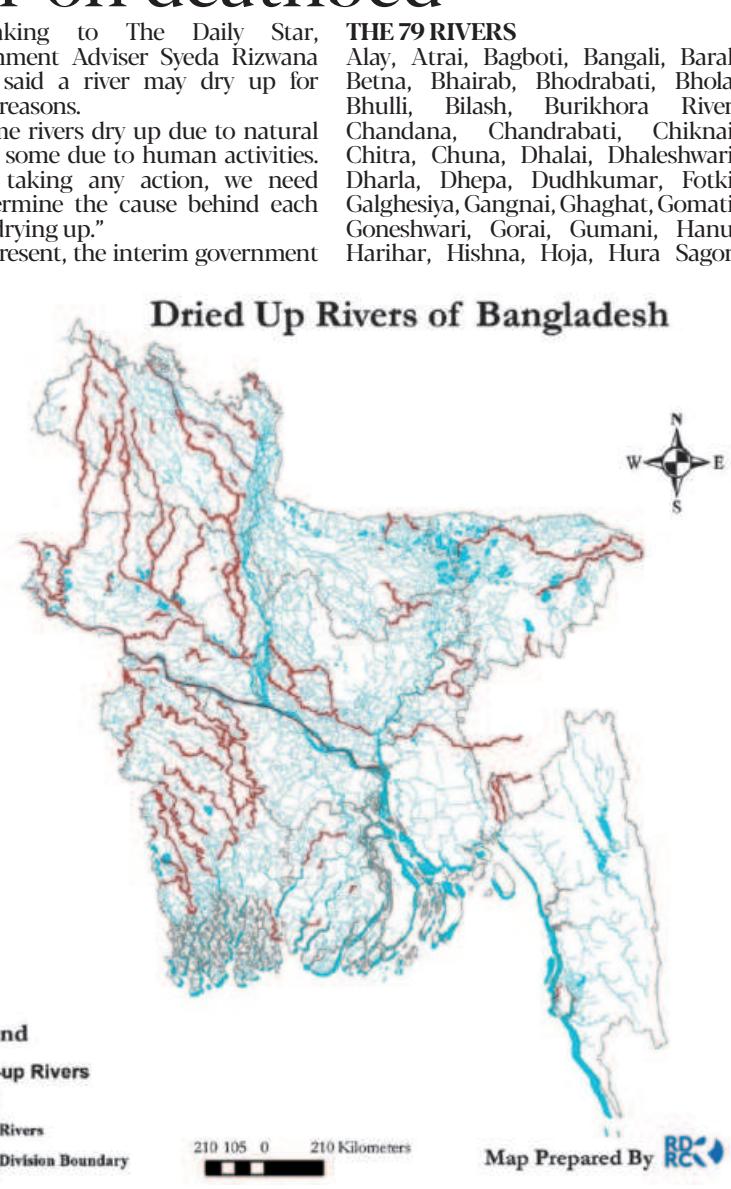
According to the study, waterways are the most economical means of transportation, as rivers and canals make up 24,000km of the country.

Using roadways costs Tk 2.81-3.51 per tonne per km, railways Tk 1.96 per tonne per km, while waterways cost only Tk 1.12 per tonne per km.

During the monsoon, approximately 6,000km of these waterways are navigable, while this reduces to around 3,800km in the dry season.

The Bangladesh Inland Waterway Transport Authorities should launch more riverine routes and encourage people to use them, the study suggested.

The previous government had introduced a master plan to excavate 53 inland waterways. The first phase aimed to restore 10,000km of 24 waterways by 2025. However, even after excavation, many waterways remained abandoned due to a lack of proper dredging and silt removal.



is focusing on reviving selected rivers—four in the capital and one in each division, she added.

Earlier, on 13 February 2012, former water resources minister Ramesh Chandra Sen told Parliament that about one-third of the country's rivers were almost dead. In response to lawmakers' queries in Parliament, he said 97 rivers were drying up. He also stated that 212 rivers remained navigable.

Ichamoti, Kauha, Kakshiali, Kaliganga, Kalpani, Karatoya, Katakhali, Khakdon, Kholpetua, Kohelia, Kopotakkho, Kulik, Kumar, Kushiyara, Mahananda, Manash, Mathavanga, Mohishaban, Morichap, Moyur, Muhiuri, Muradiya, Nabaganga, Nagar, Narod, Norosunda, Pagla, Punarbhaba, Sandha, Selonia, Shagorkhale, Shalikha, Shib, Sholmari, Shuk, Someshwari, Sonai, Sukhdah, Surma, Tangon, Teesta, Titash, Tulsi Ganga, Lenga.

970 killed in Gaza in 48 hours

FROM PAGE 1
months of war that has reduced the enclave to rubble and forced most of its population to evacuate multiple times.

A Hamas official said the group was open to talks on getting the ceasefire back on track but rejected Israeli demands to renegotiate the three-stage deal agreed with Egyptian, Qatari and US mediators.

"Hamas has not closed the door on negotiations but we insist there is no need for new agreements," Taher al-Nunu told AFP.

"We have no conditions, but we demand that the occupation be compelled to immediately halt its aggression and war of extermination, and begin the second phase of negotiations."

The renewed bloodshed followed one of the deadliest days so far in the Israeli assault on the Palestinian territory with Israeli airstrikes killing more than 430 people on Tuesday, according to Palestinian health authorities.

Negotiations have stalled over how to proceed with a ceasefire whose first phase expired in early March, with Israel and Hamas disagreeing on whether to move to a new phase intended to bring the war to an end.

Israel and the United States have sought to change the terms of the deal by extending stage one.

That would delay the start of phase two, which was meant to establish a lasting ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, and was swiftly rejected by Hamas, which demanded full implementation of the original deal.

Israel and the US have portrayed Hamas's rejection of an extended stage

one as a refusal to release more Israeli hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners.

Netanyahu's office said he ordered the renewed strikes on Gaza after "Hamas's repeated refusal to release our hostages".

In a televised address late Tuesday, the premier said, "Hamas has already felt the strength of our arm in the past 24 hours. And I want to promise you -- and them -- this is only the beginning."

The White House said Israel consulted US President Donald Trump's administration before launching the strikes.

The intense Israeli bombardment sent a stream of new casualties to the few hospitals still functioning in Gaza and triggered fears of a return to full blown war after two months of relative calm.

Two people, including a United Nations employee, were killed when a UN building in Deir el-Balah, in the central Gaza Strip, was hit, according to a UN source.

Jorge Moreira da Silva, executive director of the UN office for Project Services, said: "Israel knew that this was a UN premises, that people were living, staying and working there, it is a compound. It is a very well-known place.

An explosive device was dropped or fired on the premises, he told a press conference in Brussels.

"This was not an accident," he said. "What's happening in Gaza is unconscionable."

However, the Israeli military denied that it struck the UN facility.

DAHKA JOINS GLOBAL CALL FOR PEACE

Bangladesh yesterday joined governments in the Middle East, Europe and beyond and called for the renewed hostilities to end.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in a statement expressed, its "strongest condemnation and profound concerns" over the resumption of Israeli military aggression on the Gaza Strip.

It said the renewed cycle of violence represents a blatant violation of international humanitarian law and a grievous disregard for established ceasefire agreements.

"Bangladesh unequivocally denounces the Israeli occupation forces' continued indiscriminate airstrikes on densely populated civilian areas," it said, urging Israel to immediately cease all military operations.

Bangladesh further called upon the international community, particularly the United Nations, to take urgent and decisive measures to ensure the cessation of hostilities, protect civilian lives, and facilitate the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance to the besieged people of Gaza.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said Israel's raids on Gaza "are shattering the tangible hopes of so many Israelis and Palestinians of an end to suffering on all sides".

European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said she told her Israeli counterpart Gideon Saar that the new strikes on Gaza were "unacceptable".

Both Egypt and Qatar, which brokered the Gaza ceasefire alongside the United States, condemned Israel's resort to military action.

Tulip slams 'false' graft allegations

FROM PAGE 2
In his investigation into the allegations, Sir Laurie Magnus said that "over an extended period, she was unaware of the origins of her ownership of her flat in Kings Cross, despite having signed a Land Registry transfer form relating to the gift at the time".

She "remained under the impression that her parents had bought the property for her", Sir Laurie added, but had to correct the record when she became a government minister.

He describes this as an "unfortunate misunderstanding" which meant the public had been "inadvertently misled about the identity of the donor of this gift".

In their letter to the ACC, Tulip's lawyers confirm that the King's Cross flat was given to her by Abdul Motalif, who is described as "an iman and a very close family friend, akin to Ms [Tulip] Siddiq's godfather".

The letter also contains a detailed rebuttal of allegations made by the ACC to the media that Tulip was involved in the appropriation of land in Dhaka.

It describes ACC briefings to the media as an "unacceptable attempt to interfere with UK politics".

"At no point have any allegations been put to her fairly, properly and transparently, or indeed at all, by the ACC or anyone else with proper authority on behalf of the Bangladeshi government,"

the letter says.

"We require that you immediately stop manufacturing false and vexatious allegations against Ms [Tulip] Siddiq and further media briefings and public comments designed to harm her reputation."

The letter says the ACC must put questions to Siddiq "promptly" and "in any event by no later than 25 March 2025" or "we shall presume that there are no legitimate questions to answer".

The ACC's chairman, Mohammad Abdul Momen, told The Times: "All allegations raised against Ms Siddiq will be proven in any court, including the ones in the United Kingdom."



ILLUSTRATION: ZARIF FAIAZ

THE CULTURE CURE

How to build a positive work culture in your office

Recognising and rewarding achievements cannot be overstated. Employees who receive regular recognition for their efforts are less likely to seek other jobs, as validation meets emotional needs beyond financial compensation. This highlights the importance of appreciation in boosting employee morale.

ZARIF FAIAZ

In today's competitive business landscape, fostering a positive work culture, boosting employee morale, and enhancing team cohesion are not just desirable—they are essential for organisational success. Companies that prioritise these elements often experience increased productivity, reduced turnover, and a more engaged workforce.

The importance of an encouraging culture

A positive work culture is characterised by shared values, beliefs, and behaviours that create a supportive environment for employees. Such a culture not only attracts top talent but also retains it. According to a report by Hays, globally, 47% of employees leave their positions due to poor company culture, underscoring the critical role of a supportive work environment in employee retention.

Strategies to build a positive work culture

Promoting work-life balance is crucial. The Financial Times highlights that flexibility in work arrangements plays a significant role, with a notable number of workers willing to trade salary for

remote work options. Companies like Saga and JL emphasise hybrid models to balance employee freedom and career growth.

Fostering open communication is another vital strategy. A study published in the Journal of Organizational Behavior found that psychological safety—a climate where individuals feel safe to take interpersonal risks—is linked to improved team innovation performance. This environment encourages employees to share ideas without fear of negative consequences, thereby enhancing collaboration and creativity.

Recognising and rewarding achievements cannot be overstated. Employees who receive regular recognition for their efforts are less likely to seek other jobs, as validation meets emotional needs beyond financial compensation. This highlights the importance of appreciation in boosting employee morale.

Enhancing team building

Effective team-building initiatives are instrumental in fostering collaboration and trust among employees. A significant 73% of employees express the desire for their company to increase its investment in team building,

according to data from flair.hr. This sentiment reflects the value employees place on activities that strengthen team bonds.

Organising regular team-building activities can strengthen bonds and improve collaboration. Encouraging cross-functional projects allows employees from different departments to work together, fostering a broader understanding of the organisation and enhancing teamwork. Providing platforms for social interaction creates opportunities for employees to interact informally, building stronger relationships and a sense of community.

Boosting employee morale

High employee morale is linked to increased engagement, productivity, and retention. Conversely, low morale can lead to higher turnover rates and decreased performance. A study published in the International Journal of Organizational Analysis found that a positive organisational culture positively impacts employee performance, leading to increased productivity, efficiency, and quality of work.

Ensuring fair compensation and benefits is fundamental to employee satisfaction. Creating a safe and inclusive environment

where employees feel safe to express their ideas without fear of judgment is essential. Empowering employees by giving them autonomy in their roles and involving them in decision-making processes can enhance their sense of ownership and satisfaction.

The role of leadership

Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping work culture, morale, and team dynamics. Leaders who demonstrate empathy, transparency, and support can significantly influence positive outcomes. Leading by example, providing regular feedback, and supporting work-life balance are crucial leadership strategies. For instance, some companies have implemented four-day workweeks to promote employee well-being, leading to increased motivation and job satisfaction.

Building a positive work culture, boosting employee morale, and enhancing team building are interconnected endeavours that require deliberate strategies and committed leadership. By implementing the approaches outlined above, organisations can create an environment where employees thrive, leading to sustained success and growth.

Pokémon Go sold to Saudi-owned company for \$3.5 billion

NEXT STEP DESK

Niantic Labs, the US tech company behind the global phenomenon Pokémon Go, has agreed to sell its gaming division to Saudi Arabia-owned Scopely for \$3.5 billion. Pokémon Go became a cultural sensation upon its 2016 launch, blending augmented reality (AR) with real-world exploration. Players roam streets to catch virtual Pokémon like Pikachu, battling others and teaming up at landmarks. The mobile game became the fastest of its kind to earn \$100 million and the most downloaded in its first month of release.

Niantic faced turbulence after Go's initial success.



alongside titles and 'Monster Hunter Now'. The original development team, led by Ed Wu, will stay on. Scopely also owns other games, such as Monopoly Go!, Stumble Guys, Yahtzee with Buddies, Star Trek Fleet Command, Marvel's Strike Force, WWE Champions, Scrabble Go, etc.

Bangladesh has an active Pokémon Go community, with players regularly submitting landmarks called 'PokéStops' and 'Gyms' in various locations across Dhaka and other divisions since the game's launch in 2016. According to the Bangladeshi community, there are around 1,000 active players in the country, with 300-400 regulars in Dhaka alone. Local players also frequently attend community-hosted in-person events, with over 100 players participating in the Go Fest event at Ramna Park, Dhaka, in July 2024.

Chip startup Celestial AI raises \$250 million

NEXT STEP DESK

Celestial AI, a Silicon Valley startup developing technology to speed up artificial intelligence (AI) systems, has recently raised an additional \$250 million in venture capital, bringing the company's total funding to \$515 million.

According to Celestial AI, it aims to tackle one of the biggest challenges in AI: the speed of data transfer between computing and memory chips. The startup is leveraging photonics, a technology that uses light instead of electrical signals, to create high-speed connections between chips.

This technology, according to the company's official website, addresses a critical bottleneck in AI systems known as memory bandwidth, which determines how quickly data can move between components. Memory bandwidth is so crucial that it influences whether chips are subject to US export controls, such as those limiting China's access to advanced AI technology, explains a Reuters report.

Currently, Nvidia dominates this space with its proprietary NVLink and NVSwitch technologies. However, Celestial AI is developing a "photonic fabric" that acts as a bridge between chips, offering faster data transfer while saving space and power, says the report. CEO Dave Lazovsky explained that the technology provides similar performance to Nvidia's solutions but with greater energy efficiency and lower latency.

Intel appoints new CEO, industry veteran Lip-Bu Tan; to receive \$1 mln salary

NEXT STEP DESK

Intel has recently named industry veteran Lip-Bu Tan as its new CEO, effective March 18, tasking him with reviving the struggling chipmaker amid fierce competition and declining market share. Tan, 65, will receive a \$1 million annual salary and up to \$2 million in bonuses, but the bulk of his compensation—\$66 million in stock options and grants—hangs on his ability to steer Intel's turnaround.

The Malaysian-born executive, who previously led Cadence Design Systems and chairs venture capital firm Walden International, takes the helm at a critical juncture. Intel's stock plummeted 60% in 2024, and its ambitious plan to expand as a contract chip manufacturer under ousted CEO Pat Gelsinger failed to reassure investors. Tan's appointment has already sparked optimism, with Intel shares rising nearly 20% in 2025, largely driven by his hiring.

Compensation tied to performance

Tan's compensation package includes \$14.4 million in stock units and a \$17 million performance grant, both vesting over five years. He will forfeit these shares if Intel's stock price declines over the next three years but could earn more if it outperforms the market. Additionally, he receives a \$9.6 million stock option package

and a \$25 million new-hire grant.

In a show of commitment, Tan has agreed to personally purchase \$25 million in Intel shares and hold them to qualify for the awards. His contract also includes a "change in control" clause, allowing him to retain two-thirds of his stock awards if Intel undergoes a major ownership shift within 18 months—a provision absent in Gelsinger's agreement.

Challenges ahead

Tan, who resigned from Intel's board in 2024 over disagreements about the company's strategy, now faces the daunting task of balancing Intel's dual roles as a chip designer and contract manufacturer. In a letter to employees, he ruled out splitting the two divisions, instead pledging to strengthen both while addressing concerns about bloated costs and a risk-averse culture.

Analysts have welcomed his appointment, citing his deep industry expertise and investor savvy. However, challenges loom: competitors like Nvidia dominate the AI chip boom, while Intel's costly push into contract manufacturing strains cash flow. Political uncertainty adds another

layer, as President Donald Trump threatens to revoke subsidies under a 2022 law that granted Intel funding to bolster U.S. chip production.

A veteran's bet

Tan's background blends technical prowess—degrees in physics, nuclear engineering, and an MBA—with decades of leadership in semiconductor design and venture capital. At Cadence, he oversaw a surge in revenue and stock value. His continued involvement with startups via Walden International signals a focus on innovation, though Intel clarified his contract requires him to devote "necessary time" to CEO duties, unlike Gelsinger's "full-time" mandate.

Intel described Tan's compensation as "market competitive", emphasising that equity awards align with long-term shareholder value. For now, investors seem cautiously optimistic. As Tan prepares to take charge, the pressure is on to prove his \$66 million gamble can reignite Intel's fading dominance in the chip industry.

JOBS SPOTLIGHT

United Commercial Bank PLC.



Legal Officer

Deadline: March 27

Eligibility:

• Bachelor of Law (LL.B) and Master of Law (LL.M) from a recognised university, with prior experience in a bank, financial institution, or law firm.

Minimum experience: 2 years

MJL



Bangladesh Mobil PLC.

Senior Sales Engineer

Deadline: March 30

Eligibility:

• BSC in Mechanical Engineering from any reputed university.

Minimum experience: 5-6 years

Eskayef Pharmaceuticals



Ltd.

Executive, MIS

Deadline: March 22

Eligibility:

• BSc/MSc in Computer Science or CSE from any reputed university with prior experience in data warehouse, business analysis, system analysis, DBA, software implementation, cloud platform, etc.

Minimum experience: 1-2 years

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)



Admin & HR Assistant

Deadline: March 27

Eligibility:

• Bachelor's degree in Human Resources, Business Administration, or related field. A diploma in administration will be an added advantage.

Minimum experience: N/A

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



"You may have to fight a battle more than once to win it."



MARGARET THATCHER

Take steps to improve
Rohingya securityARSA chief's arrest highlights
militant threats in camps

The recent arrest of Ataullah Abu Ammar Jununi, commander-in-chief of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), along with 10 others, has once again highlighted the militant threats long plaguing the refugee camps in Bangladesh. On Tuesday, Ataullah and six others were placed on remand while the rest were sent to jail. Earlier, Rab made the arrests after conducting special drives in Narayanganj and Mymensingh. According to case filings cited by Prothom Alo, all the arrestees except one hailed from Myanmar's Rakhine State, likely arriving in Bangladesh sometime after the mass exodus of Rohingya in 2017. This development is significant given how militant groups like ARSA have terrorised the Rohingya camps for years, engaging in targeted killings, abductions, trafficking, extortion, and such crimes.

Ataullah and his group first gained prominence after they carried out an attack on Myanmar's border posts in Rakhine in October 2016, resulting in the deaths of several officers. They gained wider notice following their August 25, 2017 attacks on around 30 police and army posts that led to the ruthless military crackdown that drove around 740,000 Rohingya into Bangladesh. Since then, ARSA has continued its activities within the refugee settlements. Hundreds of Rohingya are believed to have been killed by ARSA members. The group has also been accused of targeting Rohingya leaders advocating for repatriation, including the 2022 assassination of Mohib Ullah, chairman of the Arakan Rohingya Society for Peace and Human Rights. ARSA has also been linked to the killing of a DGFI officer near the Tumbru border, showing how militant threats within the camps spilled onto nearby territories, threatening our internal security.

For years, however, the Awami League government refused to acknowledge the activities of Rohingya militant groups. This not only provided cover for their operations but also created an environment of impunity that allowed them to expand their criminal networks. Even though ARSA appeared to have lost ground to its rival Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) since 2023, the relative security vacuum has led to an exponential rise in violence—with murders, abductions, and extortion skyrocketing between 2022 and 2024, according to a recent report by Fortify Rights.

Against this backdrop, the government must take stern action to dismantle these militant groups. While it is true that they may try to exploit the vulnerabilities caused by the recent cuts in US funding for Rohingya refugees—with fewer resources now available for them—there is no alternative to strengthening internal security measures. The government should launch a comprehensive crackdown on all armed groups operating within the camps. Moreover, it must ensure that captured militants face justice, whether through domestic legal proceedings or through international mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court, as the director of Fortify Rights has recommended. While the wait for repatriation prolongs, we cannot sit back and delay action on these threats anymore.

Don't sacrifice haors
for developmentRoad construction through Sunamganj
haor destroying cropland, harvest

We are alarmed to learn of the impact the ongoing road construction project through the Sanghaj Haor in Sunamganj is having on the surrounding cropland and paddy harvest. According to a recent report by Prothom Alo, under a special project of the disaster management and relief ministry, a four-kilometre road is being constructed through the haor by digging up soil from surrounding paddy fields. In doing so, saplings of Boro paddy—the harvest of which is due in Baishakh (April–May)—are being destroyed. This is not only harming the haor and its ecosystem, but also affecting the people whose livelihoods depend on this wetland.

According to the report, this project was of special interest to former Planning Minister MA Mannan, whose home village is supposed to be connected by this road. When the works began last year, farmers protested the destruction of their cropland. After that, Mannan apparently instructed the project contractor to provide financial compensation to the affected farmers. However, not only have the farmers not received any compensation to date, but they have not even been informed about the extent of losses they are to suffer.

Meanwhile, even though Mannan and his party are no longer in the picture, others with vested interests have taken over to support the project, with soil being excavated from arable land at present. Farmers are naturally frustrated by this state of affairs. One of them said he had already lost one-fourth of the cropland he owned in the area. Another lamented that his livelihood is at risk because the road is being constructed on the cropland. What's more, such infrastructure will obstruct the natural water flow of the haor, which may lead to large-scale flooding during the monsoon season.

We fail to comprehend how the authorities, despite such harmful impacts of the project, are still allowing the construction work to continue, especially when farmers and environmentalists have been vocal about its risks. At the least, they should suspend the construction work immediately and reassess the entire project plan. In the changed reality of this new Bangladesh, acting responsibly to protect the delicate ecosystem of a haor and the people who depend on it for their livelihoods should not be difficult. We urge the relevant government offices, especially the Sunamganj district administration, to look into the matter and stop all activities that are harmful to the haor and its people.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Operation Searchlight approved

On this day in 1971, General Abdul Hamid Khan and Lt Gen Tikka Khan at the flagstaff house in Dhaka Cantonment reviewed, amended and approved the hand-written Operation Searchlight, which initiated the Bangladesh genocide on March 25.

We must create an
equitable tax systemMamun Rashid
is an economic analyst and chairman at
Financial Excellence Ltd.

MAMUN RASHID

In Bangladesh, nearly 70 percent of total tax revenue comes from indirect taxes, meaning whether one is a rickshaw puller or a corporate executive, they need to pay the same rate of value added tax (VAT) on essential goods. Consequently, the less financially privileged contribute a larger share of their income to the state than the wealthy. For years, the gap between the ultra-rich and the working class has widened, fuelled, in part, by a tax system that rewards wealth accumulation while punishing spending. It is a well-documented fact that countries that rely heavily on indirect taxation tend to have higher income inequality, and Bangladesh is no exception. The reliance on VAT, excise duties, and other consumption-based levies disproportionately affects lower-income groups, keeping them locked in a cycle of financial insecurity.

Meanwhile, a significant portion of high-net-worth individuals remain outside the formal tax net, either due to loopholes or sheer administrative inefficiency. Broadening the tax base is not about extracting more from those who are already struggling; rather, it's about ensuring that those who can contribute more do so. The informal sector, which comprises nearly 85 percent of Bangladesh's workforce, remains largely untapped in terms of direct taxation. It is because the system was never designed with them in mind. Small traders, street vendors, and gig workers are often wary of formalising their businesses due to bureaucratic red tape and fears of arbitrary harassment from tax officials. However, there are models in countries like Indonesia and Mexico, where simplified tax regimes for small enterprises have resulted in higher voluntary compliance and increased revenue collection without undue burden. For example, Indonesia introduced a fixed income tax on micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) at a flat rate of 0.5 percent of turnover, significantly reducing compliance burdens while increasing participation. Similarly, Mexico has boosted tax compliance among small enterprises through the Régimen de Incorporación Fiscal (RIF), integrating informal businesses into the tax system with lower rates initially and

done correctly, can significantly reduce tax evasion and increase revenue without raising tax rates. Bangladesh needs a similar push; one that is not limited to urban corporations but extends to small businesses, rural entrepreneurs, and even individual professionals. For instance, adopting a flat tax rate or turnover tax could make the process less daunting for small entrepreneurs who may lack the resources to navigate complex tax regulations. Furthermore, fostering partnerships with intermediaries can help bridge the gap between the government and informal workers, promoting awareness of tax obligations while providing essential support.

However, the political will to reform tax structures has always been met

with resistance from vested interests. Beneficiaries of the status quo, whether powerful business groups or political elites, will always argue that reforming the tax code would stifle investment or place an unfair burden on businesses. However, no country has achieved sustainable development without ensuring that the wealthiest contribute their fair share. Even in the United States, the Tax Reform Act of 1986 eliminated many loopholes and ensured higher earners paid a fairer share, leading to increased compliance and economic growth. Similarly, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) in the US has demonstrated how tax structures can promote both equity and economic participation. In the Caribbean, the introduction of VAT has shown potential for boosting revenues, yet its effectiveness is hindered by complex design features and inadequate administration reforms. By simplifying the VAT structure and ensuring broad-based application with limited exemptions, countries could enhance revenue generation

firms to comply with tax regulations. Additionally, implementing a rules-based regime with minimal ministerial discretion can enhance transparency and consistency in tax administration, hence reducing opportunities for profit shifting and tax avoidance schemes.

Furthermore, investing in technology is crucial because leveraging advancements in data analytics can improve the government's ability to monitor compliance effectively. This could include automating filing processes and providing online platforms where taxpayers can easily access information and submit their taxes. Clear communication about the purpose of taxes, along with how they contribute to national development, can foster a sense of civic responsibility and encourage greater voluntary compliance from corporations.

Moreover, promoting a culture of accountability within tax administration is vital. Training tax officials to engage positively with taxpayers and address grievances promptly can significantly reduce harassment issues. Participatory budgeting models, where communities have a say in how local tax revenues are spent, have worked wonders in places like Porto Alegre, Brazil, where citizens directly influence municipal spending, and Quezon City, Philippines, where participatory processes improved local tax collection and service delivery. If Bangladesh wants its citizens to comply voluntarily, it needs to foster trust by demonstrating that tax money is being used effectively, whether through improved healthcare, better infrastructure, or more accessible education.

Loopholes and exemptions further complicate matters. Large corporations often exploit tax holidays, incentives, and strategic accounting to minimise their contributions. While some incentives are necessary to attract investment, the excessive use of tax breaks means that multinational corporations contribute far less to Bangladesh's economy than they should.

For too long, discussions on tax reform in Bangladesh have been trapped in theoretical debates and political grandstanding. Without immediate action, we risk deepening economic divides and stalling our progress towards becoming a middle-income country. This is not just about revenue but about fairness, sustainability, and ensuring that the economic burdens of the future do not continue to fall on those who can least afford them. If we want a Bangladesh that thrives, then it is time to stop treating taxation as a mere administrative function and start seeing it for what it truly is: the foundation of an equitable society.



FILE ILLUSTRATION: BIPLOB CHAKROBORTY

Reconstructing society: Lessons
from a cybercrime caseTaslima Tinni
is a human rights activist.

TASLIMA TINNI

Two months back, I was drawn into a traumatic cybercrime case that highlighted the depth of societal issues we face today. The ordeal began when the family of a young adolescent girl reached out to me to help uncover the identity of someone harassing their daughter through a fake messenger account. Shockingly, the perpetrator had used AI technology to create explicit videos of the girl by superimposing her face onto pornographic footage. They then demanded money, threatening to either share the videos with a wider audience or resort to an even more horrific act: throwing acid at her. These crimes not only gravely violate personal dignity but frighteningly misuse emerging technology. With the support of law enforcement, journalists, development workers, lawyers, and activists, I joined the family in their pursuit of justice. Together, we embarked on a relentless 15-day journey to identify the perpetrator. When the truth finally came to light, I was stunned to discover that the person responsible was a 15-year-old girl and that she had targeted multiple

girls with the same malicious actions. I was shaken to my core, not just because of the unexpected identity of the perpetrator, but because of the deeper implications it holds for our society.

As I reflect on this experience, I find myself deeply questioning the foundational structures of our society, the role of families, the effectiveness of the educational system, and the values implanted in children. These questions weigh heavily on my heart, leaving me grappling with the unsettling reality of the societal trajectory. What makes this even more alarming is that the girl's parents are both teachers—individuals entrusted with shaping the minds and values of countless children in our society. It highlights the shortcomings of our social institutions, and the need for increased empathy, respect, and understanding of the consequences of our actions.

Family is essential for teaching empathy, discipline, and morals. Rigid control can promote negative views and criminal behaviour, further warping children's moral compass, while neglectful circumstances can

cause them to seek authority or recognition. In the context of this case, one could wonder: what unmet emotional needs or lack of guidance led the perpetrator to such an act? Families need to be more aware of the emotional and psychological needs of their children, teaching them the importance of respect, self-awareness, and ethical behaviour.

The educational system often prioritises academic achievement over emotional and social development, neglecting digital literacy, ethics, and interpersonal skills. To create emotionally intelligent citizens, schools should focus on empathy and responsibility. They should help students evolve to create a meticulous understanding of the impact of their actions on others.

The rise of social media has influenced young minds, leading to a culture of validation and attention-seeking. It's crucial to create safe spaces for young people to express themselves without resorting to harmful or unethical means. Why a person might find such criminal acts tempting requires delving into the psychosocial factors at play. Adolescents are naturally curious and impressionable. When combined with easy access to advanced technology, curiosity can lead to dangerous experimentation. The perpetrator in this case likely did not fully understand the harm and long-term consequences of her actions. For some individuals, committing such acts provides a sense of control or power. Insecure

adolescents, for instance, may resort to harmful behaviours as a way to assert dominance or gain social validation. A lack of emotional intelligence and coping mechanisms can lead to destructive actions. Adolescents often struggle with managing emotions such as anger, jealousy, or insecurity, and without proper guidance, they may channel these feelings in the wrong way. Families must deliberately foster open communication, emotional intelligence, and respect. The education system must be restructured to create platforms for students to share their experiences and concerns without fear of judgment. Communities need to foster inclusivity and provide support for local initiatives, youth clubs, and safe digital platforms as outlets for adolescents to express themselves and build a sense of belonging. Modernising religious and ethical organisations is necessary to meet today's issues of empathy and social responsibility.

This incident has been a painful wake-up call but also reinforced my commitment to advocating for change. We cannot move forward by clinging to outdated mindsets or ignoring the pressing need for reform. Instead, we must create a society where inclusivity, empathy, and mutual understanding are valued above all else. Reconstruction begins with each of us. By addressing the gaps in our social institutions and understanding the psychosocial dimensions of behaviour, we can pave the way for a brighter, more compassionate future.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF HAPPINESS

Happiness? In this economy?



MIND THE GAP

Barrister Noshin Nawal is an activist, feminist, and a columnist for The Daily Star. She can be reached at nawalnoshint@gmail.com.

NOSHIN NAWAL

Today is the International Day of Happiness, a delightful concept for those who don't live in Bangladesh. Somewhere in Scandinavia, a group of people are probably celebrating by sipping honey oat milk lattes in their efficiently designed apartments, basking in their government-mandated work-life balance. Meanwhile, in Bangladesh, we celebrate happiness the way we celebrate rain—by watching it happen somewhere outside.

Let's start with the obvious question: who exactly in Bangladesh is happy? Is it the rickshaw puller who wakes up at dawn, dodges death at every intersection, and earns just enough to afford a packet of puffed rice and some existential dread? Or is it the corporate employee stuck in an overpriced Uber, scrolling LinkedIn, while wondering if selling kidneys is still a viable business

involves either leaving the country or mastering the art of brown-nosing someone in power.

Ah, the *hope for happiness*—the one thing that encourages us to set aside our inflation-induced anxiety, and chronic disillusionment with governance to embrace *positivity*. This day, when Instagram talks about gratitude, well-being, and mental

their own zip codes.

But let's be fair—happiness is a complicated thing. It's not about having a perfect life or a flawless country (if that were the case, no one on this planet would be happy). It's about resilience, adaptability, and the ability to laugh at absurdity even when it's all you have left. And if there's one thing Bangladeshis have mastered, it's the art of finding joy in chaos.

Take traffic, for instance. Objectively speaking, it's a waking nightmare, an urban purgatory where cars, rickshaws, and pedestrians battle for dominance in a never-ending game of "Who gets to move first?" But within that madness, there is something oddly unifying. Strangers stuck in the same jam exchange knowing glances, vendors weave through the gridlock selling everything from guavas to phone chargers, and somewhere, someone is making a TikTok about it. And doesn't that count for something? The ability to turn misery into content, suffering into shared experience?

And then there's our legendary air pollution—where stepping outside feels like lighting a cigarette but without the pleasure of actually smoking it. The way we collectively hack, cough, and pretend this is fine

would make even the most hardened satirist weep. But here's the thing: we still show up. Students still make it to class, workers still report for duty, and dreamers still dare to imagine a Dhaka where the sky isn't an ominous shade of grey. If that isn't hope, what is?

Our economy—now that's a fun one. Officially, it's *booming*. In reality,

a trip to the grocery store requires financial planning that would make an accountant sweat. But amidst the absurdity, people find ways to adapt. Small businesses are still hustling, garment workers are still keeping the country's biggest industry alive, and young entrepreneurs are creating digital startups that defy the odds. It's almost as if Bangladeshis refuse to be beaten down, no matter how much the system tries.

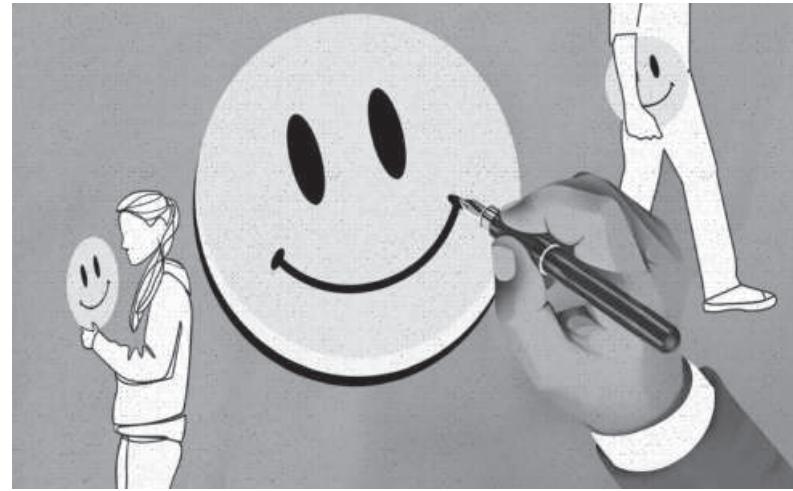
And then there's our *so-called* democracy. Yes, elections here are more predictable than BTV's programming lineup, but political engagement is at an all-time high. Students took to the streets demanding justice and have now moved on to politics. People are talking about accountability. And no matter how many laws are passed to keep opinions in check, people still find ways to say what they mean. If there's a silver lining, it's that the thirst for real change has never

been stronger. The need for brighter futures is being thrived towards.

Despite everything—the air, the traffic, the economy, the politics—there is something about this country that refuses to be defeated. You see it in the way strangers help push a broken-down bus, in the laughter that echoes from roadside tea stalls, in the warmth of communities that come together in times of crisis. We complain, we rant, we memo our way through misery, but we never really stop hoping. We find small moments of joy in sipping coconut water on the side of the occasional fuchkajamuri breaks from the hustle of corporate life.

And maybe that's what happiness looks like for us—not the absence of struggle, but the determination to find light even in the thickest of smog. A belief that things *can* get better. Because if there's one thing Bangladesh has proven over and over again, it's that no matter how many times we are knocked down, we always—*always*—get back up.

So, on this International Day of Happiness, let's celebrate the resilience, the stubborn optimism, and the relentless spirit that keeps this country going. If we can laugh through it all, maybe, just maybe, we'll be the ones who get the last laugh.



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

model? Perhaps it's the youth, those poor, unemployed souls who spent years getting degrees only to realise that their best shot at success

peace, those of us in Bangladesh stare at our egg prices like stock market traders and navigate potholes deep enough to warrant

What should be discussed at the international Rohingya conference



Laetitia van den Assum is a former diplomat, a member of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine state, and a fellow with the Centre for Peace and Justice at BRAC University. Views expressed in this article are the author's own.

LAETITIA VAN DEN ASSUM

Since taking office in August 2024, Bangladesh's interim government has sought to mobilise international support for a solution to the Rohingya crisis. In November 2024, the interim government's determined lobbying resulted in a UN General Assembly resolution calling for a "high-level conference" in the second half of 2025 which would contribute to a comprehensive, innovative, concrete and time-bound plan for the sustainable resolution of the crisis, including the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Rohingya Muslims to Myanmar." The UN conference is an opportunity to draw attention to the wider issues that should be tackled, including the underlying causes of the Rohingya crisis.

A recent report titled "Behind the Wire" from Doctors Without Borders estimates there are 2.8 million Rohingya around the world, of whom just 23 percent remain in Myanmar—a vivid reminder of the brutal effectiveness of decades of

who fled within the past five years want to return to Myanmar but only 28 percent of those who left more than 20 years ago want to do the same. This suggests that solutions should be tailor made and guided by the objectives of the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees, including easing pressure on host countries, enhancing refugee self-reliance, expanding access to third-country solutions, and supporting conditions in Myanmar for voluntary return in safety and dignity.

Given the number of Rohingya in Bangladesh, it makes sense for Dhaka to make repatriation to Rakhine one of the conference's major issues. However, experience has shown that pressure to move fast risks continuing the "revolving door" phenomenon seen since the 1970s, in which flight from Myanmar has been followed by return from Bangladesh, before the cycle begins again. If the underlying causes of the Rohingya crisis are not addressed, much-needed progress and stability will

tolerance in host countries appears to be slipping.

These issues belong on the international conference agenda. Countries in the region should be encouraged to consider how the living conditions of refugees might be improved. In the case of Bangladesh, this could include accepting the use of sturdier

government donors make it difficult to address even the basic needs of refugees. If well prepared, the international conference could also serve as a major fundraising effort.

Engaging the Arakan Army (AA)

Rebuilding Rakhine state from the ravages of war will be a major challenge. While it has long been one of Myanmar's poorest states,

will remain illusory. More pragmatic approaches are needed. For the Rohingya conference organisers, this means contacting the AA and finding ways to include it in the conference. However, Bangladesh seems to still have some hesitancy about engaging a non-state actor, even when it clearly has de facto authority.

report speaks of two million people at risk of starvation due to conflict, trade blockades, cratering incomes and indiscriminate air strikes by Myanmar's military. It will take years to rebuild Rakhine state. A comprehensive long term recovery plan and roadmap are needed to capture the monumental task ahead. The voluntary, secure and dignified return of Rohingya refugees should be part of such a plan.

One of the most complex and pressing questions will be strengthening the cohesion of the state's diverse ethnic and religious communities, particularly the Rakhine and the Rohingya. Both sides continue to harbour deep fears of each other. Some Rakhine saw their fears corroborated when they witnessed the recent fighting by many Rohingya on the side of the military forces of Myanmar's regime and against the AA.

The past few years were characterised by a fog of war that shrouded much of northern Rakhine state and the Rohingya camps near Cox's Bazar. The fighting in northern Rakhine, the lack of free access by independent observers and the State Administration Council's blocking of regular communications made it difficult to verify reports about what was happening in Maungdaw district. As rumours and disinformation abound, it has been difficult to separate truth from falsehoods. The same applies to the situation in the camps in Bangladesh where news about growing insecurity and the growing role of armed Rohingya militias has alerted many but full information remains elusive.

To make progress, along with reconciliation, independent assessments are needed to guide preparations for the conference. It will also be important to recognise what the different ethnic communities in Rakhine state have been going through. Over the past five years, the Myanmar military intensified its abuses against all communities in Rakhine state, not just the Rohingya. They tortured, killed and maimed people, destroyed livelihoods, burned down homes, hospitals, schools, markets and prayer houses, blocked the transport of basic goods and cut essential services. All the people of Rakhine are victims now.

If the conference wants to make a meaningful contribution to the resolution of the crisis, it must not only deal with the plight of the Rohingya but help *all* people in Rakhine rebuild their state together. This approach should be at the heart of a transitional justice programme with an emphasis on institutional reforms, truth, justice, reparations and memorialisation.



FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

Rohingya refugees arriving in Bangladesh near at Shah Porir Dwip in Cox's Bazar on November 9, 2017.

building materials in camps, wider access to education for all children and young people as well as permitting paid employment of refugees.

Bangladesh should also address the growing insecurity in the refugee camps. Armed Rohingya militias have been operating openly. They have been instrumental in the recruitment of young men for their own forces and for Myanmar's military. In November 2024, Reuters reported that between 3,000 and 5,000 Rohingya had been taken across the border into northern Rakhine state, many against their will. It is hard to imagine that the departure of such large numbers escaped the attention of Bangladesh's authorities.

Moreover, the arrival of large numbers of new recruits in Rakhine state further destabilised the border areas which, in turn, led to the flight of some 80,000 Rohingya from Myanmar to Bangladesh over the past few months. The insecurity has also eroded the already fragile trust between the Rakhine and the Rohingya communities. Therefore, the conference's key issues should address the urgency of restoring stability along the borders as well as security in the refugee camps.

While more must be done, resources are finite. The unexpected halting of USAID support as well as major budget decreases by other

much of its economic and social infrastructure has been destroyed, including roads, bridges, health facilities, schools, markets and prayer houses.

The UN resolution on the conference reflects a traditional state-centric approach. It assumes that Myanmar's central government can shape political life in all its component parts. Multiple references to "Myanmar" appear to refer exclusively to the military regime that has lost control of much of the country. In Rakhine, it barely retains a toehold: following recent heavy losses, its authority is limited to the state capital Sittwe, the island of Manau, and small sections of Kyaukpyu.

Even before the AA's emergence as a major power, this state-centric approach had already failed. Since 2017, China made several attempts to mediate the start of Rohingya repatriation between Bangladesh and Myanmar's central government. The attempts failed, in large part because both the Rakhine and the Rohingya, the state's two largest communities, were excluded from the deliberations. Efforts to resume repatriation after the 2021 military coup were even less successful.

If the de facto territorial control of the AA is not acknowledged, progress on repatriation and other urgent issues related to Rakhine

While full recognition of the AA may be some way off, it is in the interest of both sides to cooperate on areas of mutual interest. These could include establishing a humanitarian corridor into Rakhine to deliver assistance to all communities in need; resuming bilateral trade; and countering cross-border crime. In this, Dhaka could draw lessons from how Myanmar's other neighbours, particularly China and Thailand, interact with non-state groups along their borders with Myanmar.

Emphasising win-win opportunities rather than potential difficulties should be the way forward.

For now, it is unclear what kind of state will emerge in Rakhine to replace the former regime. The AA rejects the recent political past with its centralisation of power in Myanmar's capital Nay Pyi Taw, and has occasionally suggested a confederate structure, but it has not excluded other options. Over the past few years, the United League of Arakan, the AA's civilian wing, has expanded administrative and judicial services in parts of Rakhine, and started training more civilian personnel. This, however, is only the starting point for building greater autonomy.

Conditions in Rakhine have worsened since late 2018, when violent conflict between the military and the AA intensified. A recent UN

oppression and discrimination. Only one percent of Rohingya managed to obtain a passport, citizenship, or resettlement in a country where they have no fear of arrest, extortion, or abuse for identifying as Rohingya.

Aside from Myanmar, the countries with the largest Rohingya populations are Bangladesh with 1.1 million, Pakistan with 400,000, Saudi Arabia with 340,000 and Malaysia with 210,000. The situation of the Rohingya differs between these countries.

In Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, for example, most Rohingya arrived decades ago, and their children have never seen their homeland. According to the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR, of the Rohingya living abroad 76 percent of those

remain out of reach, with growing impacts for the entire region.

Many Rohingya continue to flee from Bangladesh and Myanmar. In the current dry season, several thousand have fled by land and by sea, arriving in Malaysia, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. According to UNHCR, the increase in numbers is driven by continued instability in Myanmar; lack of progress in addressing the root causes of Rohingya displacement; growing insecurity and declining humanitarian assistance in the camps in Bangladesh; more active smuggling networks and a decrease in the cost of sea journeys. Tragically, over 1,000 Rohingya travelling by boat perished or went missing at sea in 2022 and 2023 (UNHCR report, May 2024). At the same time,

BOOK REVIEW: NONFICTION

The making of Bangladesh in the global sixties

Review of 'Intimation of Revolution: Global Sixties and the Making of Bangladesh' (Cambridge University Press, 2023) by Subho Basu

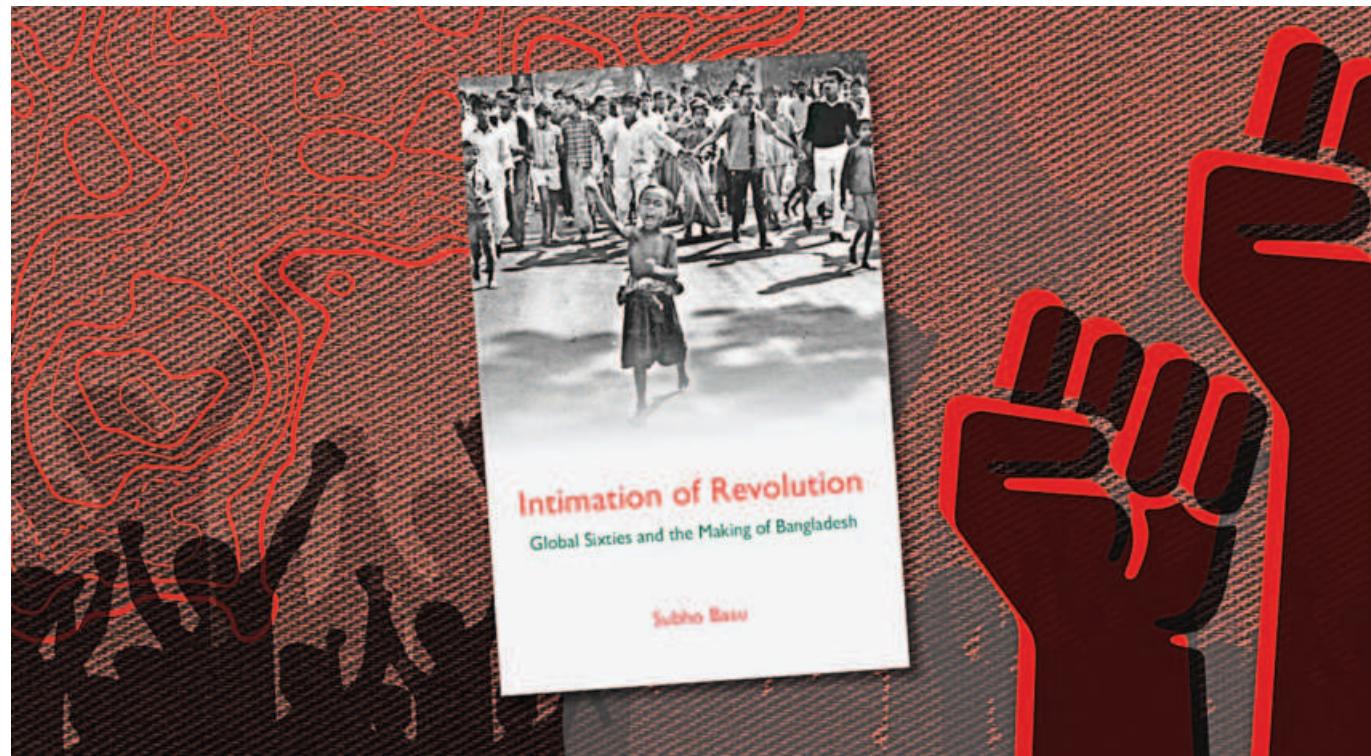


ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

ANISUR RAHMAN

The development of the military establishment, suggests Basu, was directly sponsored by Western super powers, such as the UK or the US, who wanted Pakistan to be their client state.

"Mr Speaker Sir, what did Bangalee intend to achieve? What rights did Bangalee want to possess? We do not need to discuss and decide on them now [after independence]. [We] tried to press our demands after the so called 1947 independence. Each of our days and years with Pakistan was an episode of bloodied history; a record of struggle for our rights," said Tajuddin Ahmad on October 30, 1972 in the Constituent Assembly. He commented on the proposed draft constitution for Bangladesh, which was adopted on November 4, 1972.

How did that struggle—which culminated in the creation of Bangladesh—shape a new nation state in the Global South? Who took it forward and in which way? How was it informed by events of the global sixties? Subho Basu's *Intimation of*

Revolution: Global Sixties and the Making of Bangladesh maps out this fantastic history of the making of Bangladesh.

Basu begins with two important post-1947 developments that brought about frustration among Muslims of then-East Bengal: the disintegration of the economy and lack of political representation. While the former led to an economic crisis, the second resulted in the development of a nationalist politics which was informed by Bangali nationalism. For Basu, the latter was a reactionary political doctrine developed out of a religio-political culture that considered the Muslims of East Bengal an "Other". As a result, a mass social movement was in embryo against that oppressive state in East Pakistan. He then explored the emergence of a colonial administrative state in Pakistan, which would be run by a military-bureaucratic government,

depriving East Pakistanis of their desire for a state run by elected representatives.

As a result, they were against strengthening military establishments. The development of the military establishment, suggests Basu, was directly sponsored by Western super powers, such as the UK or the US, who wanted Pakistan to be their client state. In return, the military-bureaucratic regime received foreign aid to be used for development purposes. However, as the military establishment was grounded mostly in West Pakistan, the foreign aid was used there, depriving the East Pakistani masses of their economic prosperity. Consequently, nationalist politicians, such as Maulana Bhashani, opposed the Baghdad Pact—a military coalition led by the UK and USA. The skirmish between Bhashani and other Awami League leaders over the Baghdad Pact ended with the birth of a new political party, the NAP. Therefore, the political change or power sharing with the military establishment in East Pakistan was, Basu highlights, connected to global Cold War politics.

Basu eloquently details the emergence of a linguistic nationalism in East Pakistan in the third chapter. He attributes it to the Bangali poets and literati, through whose writings the idea of Bangali nationalism came about. In the high sixties, the ensuing "Bangali Renaissance", following a debate over the Bangla language, writing scripts, and state-sponsored ban on the songs of Rabindranath Tagore, inspired Bangali literati to write nationalist songs, poems, stories, novels, and drama that culminated in the emergence of a cultural identity of the Bangali speaking Muslims in Pakistan. Having been conscious about the Calcutta-based cultural domination, they used Arabic, Urdu, and Persian words in their new literature in order to craft a cultural tradition which would be different from both the North Indian Muslim and Calcutta-based Hindu traditions. In contrast, Pakistan witnessed the emergence of a garrisoned Islamic state under the patronage of the US during the military-bureaucratic regime of Ayub Khan. Basu highlights three developments during this regime: first, inequality in resource sharing and income gap between the two wings of Pakistan made the eastern part a colony of West Pakistani industrialists. Secondly, the introduction of basic democracy undermined all democratic processes,

including the making of the constitution. Finally, there were state-sponsored programs to develop an Islamic nationalism that identified Pakistan a Muslim nation.

The three above-mentioned dimensions of the military-bureaucratic regime of Ayub Khan directed political courses in East Pakistan later, which Basu wonderfully narrates in the last two chapters of his monograph. Students were the vanguard of those exciting political upheavals. The students' movements, Basu emphasises, were informed by global anti-colonial and anti-imperial movements. He has highlighted the way in which iconic figures, such as Che Guevara, inspired students to take to the streets against the military regime. These two chapters are important to understand the diverse political strategies adopted by different political parties and the ways they were influenced by global Cold War politics. Basu has pointedly stated that although Bhashani initially called for an autonomy of East Pakistan, the six points demand of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman added a new vigour to that autonomy movement. The acceptance of the six points by students determined the courses of both the movements. Finally, the general election following the fall of Ayub Khan, the overwhelming victory of Awami League in the National and Provincial Assemblies, the failure of the military junta to transfer power to the elected representatives, and Mujib's firm determination toward autonomy accelerated the liberation of East Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh.

This book is an important contribution to the political history of South Asia, which connected the birth of Bangladesh to global Cold War policies. Particularly, this book is an excellent read to understand the way in which global or regional events in the high sixties informed political courses in Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh. Moreover, it is an amazing work, which has connected local events to global and regional political developments and, therefore, will be useful for future historians to study the July 2024 uprising and the fall of the 'fascist' regime of Sheikh Hasina.

Anisur Rahman is a legal historian at Independent University, Bangladesh.

BOOK REVIEW: FICTION

An outlandish jumble of cults, cannibalism, and colonial violence

Review of Melissa Lozada-Oliva's 'Candelaria' (Astra House, 2023)

NAWSHIN FLORA

Melissa Lozada-Oliva takes us on a bumpy apocalyptic horror ride in her debut novel *Candelaria*. Spanning across three generations of women, the novel ushers together an unsettled past and an even more bizarre present. Candelaria is the titular character in this story—there are two of them and they have more similarities than just their shared name.

The novel initially appears to be dealing with abuse and generational trauma. But slowly, it emerges as an apocalyptic horror story filled with giants, dead people and a certain stone. The plot is more than a little nebulous. Cultish incidents happen after Candy aka Candelaria, the youngest granddaughter becoming pregnant after a one-night stand with Fernando, Bianca's ex-boyfriend who may or may not have been dead at that moment. While being pregnant, Candy starts engaging in strange activities such as eating her co-worker Jennie and boyfriend, Garfield.

There are striking parallels between the ongoing political topography and the themes explored in *Candelaria*. Lozada-Oliva beautifully uses cannibalism as an



Guatemala. But what's interesting is the Spanish influence in Guatemala is due to Spanish invasion in the early 16th century and if Bianca were to feel more like a native there through only speaking Spanish, she would still be talking in a coloniser's language. Hence, it tells us that colonialism can be reproduced and it can be sustained through a language.

These narratives, whilst carefully crafted, still failed to make me interested in the tumultuous lives of the characters. The prose seemed amateurish and leaves a lot to be desired. The real conflict in the book was the family dynamics and how trauma transcends through generations but it was poorly done and was disconnected with the rest of the plot. The novel doesn't shy away from concocting a complex world but falls massively short in the execution of it. My biggest criticism is that the author failed to make the genre of the book clear to the audience. The conversations between the characters, especially the three sisters, felt inauthentic, as though they were talking to different people altogether, immersed in wholly different conversations; the author also failed to make me care for them as a reader.

The ending especially fell flat considering the amount of buildup regarding the apocalyptic events. At the end we see, their grandmother, Candelaria, being spun around by a "giant wheel with eyes", but Lucia and her daughters seem absolutely unbothered by it and rather talk about whether Zoe will raise Candy's baby. The lack of coherence in the story made for a poor reading experience. Besides, the supernatural and horror parts of the story did not seem to fit into the story seamlessly and had me confused. Whilst it could have been a great addition to the historical horror fiction genre, the book jumped through multiple themes and subplots and ended up being a mess.

Nawshin Flora is a writer and poet based in Dhaka.

Ursula K. Le Guin in her utopian science fiction *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* (originally published in 1974) reflects on the nature of the relationship between a foetus and the mother. In the book, Takver, the protagonist Shevek's partner, says that pregnant women are "possessed" by their foetuses and it alters their brain chemistry.

artistic motif here. "This world has made it so that we are terminally the consumer, and without thinking, all of a sudden, we have become the consumed." This comes across as a translucent critique of late stage capitalism. The cult's obsession with Candy's pregnancy and inhibiting her from getting an abortion is a sharp parallel to the political rhetoric of recent anti-abortion laws in the US. The writer cleverly compared the cult with the conservative politics regarding women's bodily rights. It would not be too radical to imply that motherhood can also be a cult. And the pro-life rhetoric of the right reflects specially in the activities of the cult leader, Maria. In the novel, it talks of a stone called "The Mother". And according

to Maria, the order of nature can only be restored by birthing babies. In the aftermath of Carmen's (another pregnant woman in the cult) delivery, she is murdered. So would have been Candy's fate if she hadn't managed to escape. The activities and core beliefs of the cult is very much analogous to anthropomorphising nature as women and mothers. And Carmen's death only enforces the rhetoric of pro-life politics.

Ursula K. Le Guin in her utopian science fiction *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* (originally published in 1974) reflects on the nature of the relationship between a foetus and the mother. In the book, Takver, the protagonist Shevek's partner, says that pregnant women are "possessed"

by their foetuses and it alters their brain chemistry. The use of the word "possessed" here indicates something demonic which we also notice in Candy transforming to a cannibal when she is with child. She says it is the child who is harboring cannibalistic cravings, making her do such things. It is very much telling how the state and society in general cares more about a fetus than the life of the mother. Candy here, seen as a baby producing machine, very much symbolises the picture of the "mother goddess" who is young, promiscuous, and fecund.

The consumer versus consumed is also a critique of the continued colonisation of Guatemala. Bianca's lack of fluency in Spanish gives her an outsider status in



Hamza Choudhury, the biggest name in Bangladesh football, goes for a trademark tackle during his first practice session with the national team at the Bashundhara Kings Arena last night.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'It feels like our Messi is here'

Hamza's arrival brings fresh belief

SPORTS REPORTER

As Bangladesh gear up for their crucial Asian Cup Qualifiers fixture against India, captain Jamal Bhuiyan likened the excitement surrounding Hamza Choudhury's homecoming to that of a global superstar.

In yesterday's press conference at Hotel InterContinental, all eyes were on Hamza, who is set to make his highly anticipated debut for Bangladesh in Shillong on March 25. Yet, captain Jamal, the first expatriate footballer to represent Bangladesh at the international level, also drew considerable media attention.

"It feels like our [Lionel] Messi is here," Jamal said, emphasising the significance of the Premier League midfielder's inclusion in the squad -- set to leave for India this morning.

Having Hamza as the latest foreign-



"We are a great nation. We can achieve anything if we put in the hard work and respect the process."

Bangladesh footballer
HAMZA CHAUDHURY

"The way everyone is welcoming Hamza is incredible. It will inspire others around the world."

Bangladesh captain
JAMAL BHUIYAN

"Now, to me, it is about getting ready and working on the mentality of how to beat them [India]."

Bangladesh coach
JAVIER CABRERA

himself to his teammates, attending the official photoshoot and press conference, sharing moments with school footballers, and meeting the youth and sports adviser before taking part in team training in the evening.

At the Crystal Ballroom, packed an hour before the press conference, Hamza wore a smile throughout the press meet. While embracing the enthusiasm surrounding him, the Sheffield United player remained focused on the bigger picture.

"We are a great nation. We can achieve anything if we put in the hard work and respect the process. There's no rush -- we have time, Inshallah. I'll be playing for Bangladesh for years," he said when asked about his ambitions for the team.

"I come from a different league and style of play, but these players -- like Jamal -- have far more international experience.

for us."

Since arriving from England, Hamza has had a whirlwind introduction -- reuniting with family before diving into team activities.

After spending a busy couple of days, the 27-year old also experienced a packed schedule yesterday, introducing

That counts for a lot. I'm here to learn from them too. Inshallah, we will succeed, taking one step at a time," Hamza added.

Jamal believes Hamza's inclusion significantly strengthens their chances against India. Reflecting on his own debut, he predicts Hamza will experience a powerful moment when the national anthem plays.

"The way everyone is welcoming Hamza is incredible. It will inspire others around the world. On March 25, I'm sure when he hears the anthem, he'll get goosebumps," Jamal said.

With Hamza making himself available for Bangladesh, India, meanwhile, have welcomed back their legendary striker Sunil Chhetri from retirement at the age of 40. When asked who the better player is between Chhetri and Hamza, Jamal dismissed comparisons between the two.

"You can't compare Sunil Chhetri to Hamza. Sunil has done great things for India, but let's be honest -- Hamza is a Premier League player," he stated confidently, adding that Bangladesh are determined to beat India this time.

Head coach Javier Cabrera acknowledged Hamza's impact but stressed that mindset would be key.

"Now, to me, it is about getting ready and working on the mentality of how to beat them [India]. That is our eagerness, our meetings, the intensity of our practices, how much we demand of ourselves to reach the peak level and making sure we convince ourselves that we can make history on Indian soil," Cabrera said.

With Hamza's arrival injecting fresh confidence into the squad, Bangladesh are set to approach their India clash with renewed ambition.

quoted as saying in a youth and sports ministry press release.

"There is no crisis, we have not left out Fahamedul. He is talented, but we want to give him more time. The Bangladesh team has matches coming up in June at home, maybe we will see him on the field very soon. All I want to say to the supporters is that there is no need to be disappointed," he added.

Coach Javier Cabrera, who had said that 18-year-old Fahamedul needed more time, stood firm in his stance in front of the media.

"I knew [Fahamedul] very well before calling him. When he arrived, he had been with us for one week and had the chance to train with the national team and we were able to meet him and know him better. But the conclusion I made is he still needs more time and that's all."

Majid's last-ball heroics secure Rupganj's first win

SPORTS REPORTER

Rupganj Tigers Cricket Club won a thrilling contest against Partex Sporting Club at BKSP Ground 3 yesterday thanks to Abdul Majid's heroic ton that culminated with a last-ball boundary which saw Rupganj win their first game in this year's Dhaka Premier League (DPL).

Partex openers Joyraj Sheikh (54 off 71 balls) and Rubel Mia (52 off 89) hit fifties but Mahmudul Hasan and Mohammad Al Amin Jr. took three wickets each to bowl them out for 223.

In reply, Majid carried Rupganj's hope, stitching together 107 runs for the third wicket with Asadullah Al Galib, who made 50 off 80. But Ahrar Amin then gave two quick breakthroughs to Partex as Rupganj slumped to 137 for four.

Rupganj needed 67 in the final 10 overs and lost two more wickets before reaching the last over with 10 runs needed. It boiled down to Majid needing three off the last delivery to win the game and four to complete his ton and he ticked both boxes, hitting a four to secure the win and completing a 123-ball ton.

Meanwhile, Gulshan Cricket Club won a tight contest by two wickets against Brothers Union at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur. Bishal Chowdhury's 75 ball 83 and Aich Mollah's 61 ball 65 helped Brothers to 290 for 9.

In reply, despite fifties from Elias Sunny (53 off 62) and Naeem Islam (50 off 60), Gulshan had slumped to 237 for 8.

With 47 needed in seven overs, Farhad Reza hit an unbeaten 36 ball 47 and Mehedi Hasan made an 18-ball 32, to take Gulshan across the line.

At BKSP Ground 4, Imrul Kayes hit an 85-ball 86 to help Agrani Bank to 294 for 7 against Shinepukur Cricket Club. In reply, Rayan Rafsan hit a 130-ball 106 but Shinepukur could only reach 248 for 5 as Agrani notched up a 46-run win.

Blockbuster matches in Nations League tonight

STAR SPORTS DESK

Europe will witness four big mouthwatering battles tonight as eight of the best teams from the continent go head-to-head to stake places in the final four of the UEFA Nations League.

Some of these ties will not only shape up the final four spots in the competition but will also have repercussions on the European qualifying places for the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

The Azzurri had something to prove. After a disappointing UEFA EURO 2024 campaign, Italy had begun to show positive signs under Luciano Spalletti. However, the road to the final four had become treacherous with the last-minute injury of Serie A's top scorer, Mateo Retegui. Adding to their woes, influential wing-back Federico Di Marco was also ruled out. Yet, Moise Kean's resurgence at Fiorentina offered a beacon of hope. With Sandro Tonali returning to reinforce the midfield, Italy believed they could make it three consecutive appearances in the semi-finals.

Spalletti's words ahead of their clash with Germany at San Siro set the tone. "Fear is just an emotion. Danger is different -- it happens at a specific moment."

Germany, though, were not without their own struggles. Coach Julian



Nagelsmann had to contend with the absences of Florian Wirtz, Kai Havertz, and Niclas Füllkrug. Despite the setbacks, the young manager remained confident. "We still have a very good squad. This quarterfinal is crucial, and we must play it with the right mindset."

Meanwhile, in Rotterdam, the Netherlands braced for a battle against the defending champions, Spain. Luis de la Fuente, Spain's mastermind behind their Nations League triumph two years ago and their EURO 2024 victory, was under no illusions. "The Netherlands are one of the best teams in Europe. We must be at our highest level."

Ronald Koeman, knowing the weight of history between the two teams, embraced the challenge. "This is a big game. Both

sides love to play attacking football, so expect two fantastic clashes."

Further south, at Stadion Poljud in Split, a rematch loaded with emotion was set between Croatia and France. Croatia's painful memories of the 2018 World Cup final loss to Les Bleus had been somewhat avenged by their historic 1-0 victory in Paris during the 2022 Nations League qualifiers. Zlatko Dalic's men were ready for another battle, while France, despite missing Marcus Thuram, remained formidable.

At Parken in Copenhagen, the night's final encounter saw Portugal face Denmark. Though perhaps less glamorous, Portugal's presence -- led by the ageless Cristiano Ronaldo -- ensured that this clash could steal the show.

Raphinha ready to shine as Brazil gears up for Colombia clash



Raphinha was all smiles during Brazil's training session in Brasilia as the Selecao prepares for a crucial FIFA World Cup 2026 qualifier against Colombia tomorrow morning (6:45 AM Bangladeshi time). With Neymar ruled out due to injury, all eyes will be on the Barcelona star, whose dazzling form has put him in Ballon d'Or conversations. A victory would be vital for fifth-placed Brazil, especially with a high-stakes encounter against Argentina looming next week.

PHOTO: AFP

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Next budget to focus on curbing inflation

Finance adviser tells senior journos

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed yesterday said the interim government will not incorporate any mega projects that cost billions of dollars in the next budget for FY2025-26.

"We will not undertake monumental projects costing \$10-\$12 billion in the upcoming budget. Instead, we will take projects that create employment."

He made the remarks during a pre-budget meeting with editors and senior journalists from print, online, and electronic media held at his office at the Secretariat in the capital.

He said the next budget will be realistic and people-centric.

"We will not formulate a budget that an elected government would throw away," said the finance adviser, adding that the upcoming budget will mainly focus on controlling inflation, not driving economic growth.

Finance Secretary Khairuzzaman Mozumder expressed optimism that

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

2 girls raped in Rangpur, Patuakhali

Three held, one of them for attempted rape

STAR REPORT

Police detained three suspects on charges of raping or attempting to rape three girls in different districts.

In Gazipur's Sreepur, the detainee was identified as Moslem Uddin, 60, while the victim was an 8-year-old child.

Moslem, a neighbour of the child, was caught red-handed by locals when he attempted to rape the girl in the Satkamair area of Barmi union, said ASI Mizanur Rahman of Sreepur Police Station.

They beat Moslem up before handing him over to the police. He was later admitted to Sreepur Upazila Health Complex. The child was still with the family.

Legal action would be taken over the matter, said ASI Mizanur.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5



After two wagons of a freight train from Chattogram derailed at the entrance to the capital's Kamalapur Railway Station at 11:30am yesterday, trains travelling to and from Dhaka were delayed by up to four hours, causing immense suffering to passengers. Trains were running late even late at night yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

79 rivers dead or on deathbed

Reveals RDRC study

PINAKI ROY

At least 79 of the government-listed 1,156 rivers flowing through the country have dried up or are in the process of drying up in recent times, threatening livelihoods, agriculture, and local biodiversity, a recent study has revealed.

All of these rivers are heavily silted and either completely or partially dry up during the lean period, mainly due to water diversion upstream. Meanwhile, large portions of some rivers have disappeared in recent years due to encroachment, according to the study published yesterday.

The Rivers and Delta Research Centre (RDRC) conducted the study based on government data, various academic papers, and newspaper reports published from January 2023 to December 2024.

The study, titled "Dried Up Rivers of Bangladesh", was based on data from a new list of rivers prepared by the government,

which used information from all deputy commissioners in the country, said Khalid Saifullah, one of the researchers from RDRC.

The study's lead researcher, Mohammad Azaz, said, "We found at least 79 rivers are either drying up or have already dried up."

Of these, 25 are in Khulna division, 19 in Rajshahi, 14 in Rangpur, six in Chattogram, five in Mymensingh, four in Dhaka, and three each in Barishal and Sylhet divisions. Most are located in Khulna, Satkhira, Rajshahi, and Kushtia regions, where sedimentation and rapid urbanisation have severely disrupted the natural flow of water.

The rivers classified as dead or heavily dried up include the well-known Atrai, Barai, Bhairab, Bhola, Chitra, Dhaleshwari, Dharla, Dudhkumar, Gomati, Gorai, Ichamoti, Kaliganga, Karatoya, Kholpetua, Kopotakkha, Kushtia, Mahananda, Matabhanga, Muhuri, Nabaganga, Teesta, Surma, and Titash.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

1 killed in Jubo Dal factional clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

A young man was killed and two others injured after being shot during clashes between two factions of Jubo Dal for "control over the drug trade" in Chonpara of Narayanganj's Rupganj early yesterday.

The deceased has been identified as Md Hasib, 28, younger brother of local Jubo Dal activist Md Babu.

He said Hasib was shot around 2:00am. He was announced dead an hour later when he was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Hasib had previously worked as a battery-run autorickshaw driver but was recently unemployed,

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

TK 721CR REMITTANCE NBR suspects foul play

Businessman, officials being probed for money laundering

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A businessman, who brought Tk 721 crore into the country claiming it as remittances, utilised the tax-exemption facility to repatriate funds that were earlier laundered abroad, tax officials believe.

Shown as earnings from several Chinese companies, SM Faruqi Hasan brought the funds in phases since the 2012-13 fiscal year.

Of the amount, Tk 500 crore was shown as having been brought from abroad between fiscal 2020-21 and 2021-22.

Hasan claimed tax exemptions on the income but did not submit valid proof supporting this claim, tax officials said.

The field office, Tax Zone 5, reopened his case for audit in 2021 on the grounds that Hasan was residing in Bangladesh when he received the money.

However, without providing any explanation, tax officials at the time settled the case by accepting just Tk 15,543 as tax, according to findings from the Income Tax Intelligence Unit of the National Board of Revenue (NBR).

"If the NBR were to impose the tax accurately, it would amount to at least Tk 181 crore. The tax amount may rise

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

Astronauts return home after being 'stranded' in space for 9 months

AFP, Washington

Home at last: After an unexpected nine-month stay in space, a pair of NASA astronauts finally returned to Earth on Tuesday, concluding a mission that captured global attention and became a political flashpoint.

A SpaceX Crew Dragon spaceship carrying Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams – alongside fellow American Nick Hague and Russian cosmonaut Aleksandr Gorbovov – streaked through the atmosphere before deploying parachutes for a gentle splashdown off the Florida coast at 5:57pm (2157 GMT).

Ground teams erupted in cheers as the gumdrop-shaped spacecraft named Freedom,

SEE PAGE 6 COL 6

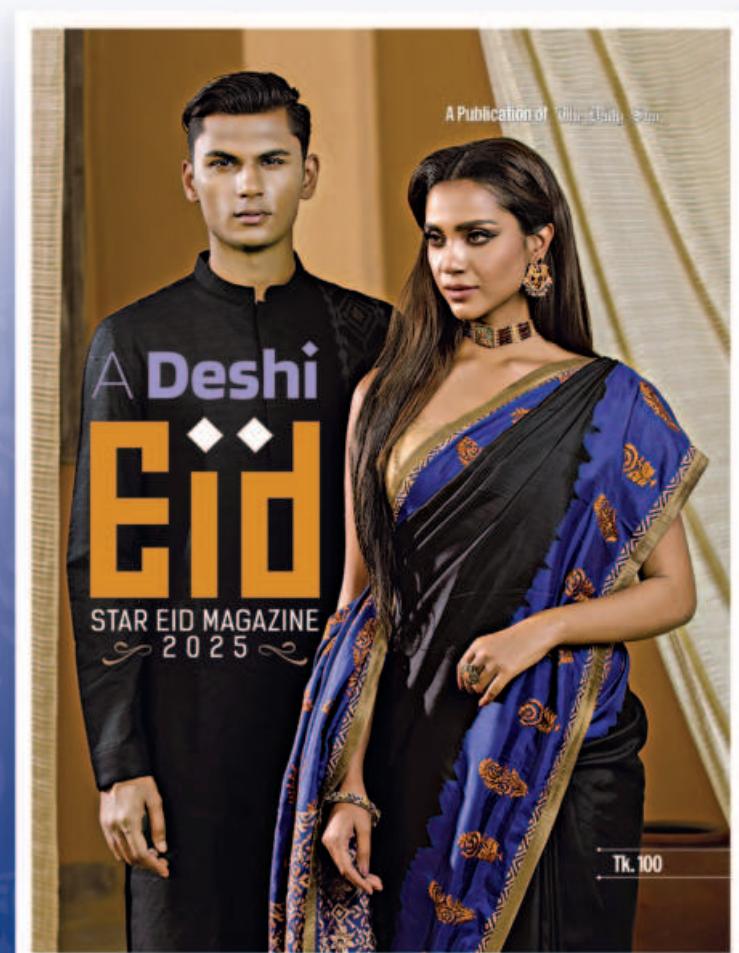


Addressing the high demand for subsidised essential commodities, TCB trucks now carry double the previous supply, sufficient for 400 people. As a result, men and women are seen forming orderly queues, a significant improvement from several weeks ago when limited supplies caused pushing, shoving, and even fights to break out in the middle of the queues. Every day, people from low-income groups, who are unable to keep up with the soaring market prices of essentials, wait for hours for TCB trucks at various locations around the capital. This photo was taken in the capital's Dhanmondi area.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

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Start taking steps now for holding peaceful polls

Yunus tells police force

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has directed the police force to take initiatives now on planning the measures needed for ensuring a peaceful election.

He said that after categorising the district police based on their performances, initiatives will have to be taken to enhance the skills of the underperformers, said a statement from the chief adviser's press wing yesterday.

The chief adviser said this during a meeting between him, the home adviser, and the officials concerned.

There, Prof Yunus also instructed the authorities to take several prompt measures for the welfare of field-level police personnel, which include considering withdrawal of existing ceiling on risk allowances.

2 PUST students suspended over Facebook post 7 others avoiding campus in fear of attacks

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Two students of Pabna University of Science and Technology (PUST) have been suspended over social media post that allegedly hurt religious sentiments.

Seven others have been avoiding campus fearing that they would be attacked by protesters.

Suspended students Pronoy Kundu and Bikorno Das Dibbo are of urban and regional planning department.

According to university sources, Pronoy made a Facebook post on March 13, which was "liked" by Bikorno. A day later, a group of students

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

Prime Bank ISLAMIC BANKING



**PRAYER
TIMING**
MARCH 20

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha

AZAN 4:47 12:45 4:45 6:10 7:45

JAMAT 4:57 1:15 5:00 6:25 8:15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

SEHRI, IFTAR TIMING

RAMADAN | MARCH | SEHRI | IFTAR

19 20 4:45 6:10

20 21 4:45 6:10

21 22 4:44 6:11

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3