

“There must be an independent, prompt and thorough investigation into the incident and those responsible... must be held to account.”

UN rights chief Volker Turk condemns killing of Gaza aid workers by Israeli army

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Next budget aims for 6% GDP growth

Budget size likely to be around Tk 8,00,000 crore, 7.5% higher than revised budget

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The interim government aims to balance macroeconomic stability, inflation control, and 6 percent GDP growth in the next fiscal year's budget, when the 13th parliamentary election is expected.

The 2025-26 budget is likely to be around Tk 8,00,000 crore – more or less the same as the original budget for the current year and about 7.5 percent higher than the revised budget, finance ministry officials told The Daily Star.

The development budget will likely be in the neighbourhood of Tk 2,30,000 crore to Tk 2,40,000 crore, up slightly from this fiscal year's revised allocation of Tk 2,16,000 crore.

The budget numbers will be discussed at the fiscal coordination council meeting scheduled for April 9. However, the final numbers will be locked in after consultations with the International Monetary Fund mission, which will be in Dhaka for two weeks starting April 6.

As part of the \$4.5 billion loan programme, the IMF is insisting on high revenue mobilisation and other measures to address Bangladesh's persistently low tax-to-GDP ratio.

The tax reforms to be adopted are likely to be agreed upon during the IMF mission's visit.

For now, the finance ministry is considering a revenue target of Tk 5,85,000 crore – up about 13 percent from the revised budget – which would leave a budget deficit of Tk 2,15,000 crore.

Of the revenue target, the National Board of Revenue is likely to be tasked with collecting Tk 5,21,000 crore, up 12.4 percent from this fiscal year's revised target.

This will be enough to achieve the GDP growth target and rein in inflation within a 6.5 percent mark, according to ministry estimates. Inflation averaged 10.56 percent in the first eight months of the fiscal year.

“A 6 percent GDP growth is very high in any condition and in comparison to global economic growth or the South Asian growth average,” said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

Earlier in December last year, the IMF projected Bangladesh's real GDP growth to slow to 3.8 percent this fiscal year but rebound to 6.7 percent next fiscal year.

For 6 percent growth to materialise, both investment and exports must increase significantly, Hussain said.

Letters of credit (LC) opening data for capital machinery imports indicate investment trends. This indicator dropped 30.1 percent year-on-year in the first eight months of fiscal 2024-25, while LC settlements were down 25.2 percent, according to the Bangladesh Bank.

Exports increased 10.5 percent year-on-year in the July-February period of this fiscal year to \$32.9 billion, SEE PAGE 2 COL 2



People return to Dhaka after celebrating Eid with their loved ones back in their hometowns or villages. The photo was taken at Kamalapur Railway Station yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Dhaka hopeful of Yunus-Modi meeting

CA flies to Bangkok today for BIMSTEC

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The much-expected meeting between Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely on the sidelines of the BIMSTEC summit in Bangkok tomorrow.

“There are enough possibilities for the meeting,” said Khalilur Rahman, chief adviser's high representative for the Rohingya issue and other priorities, at a press briefing yesterday.

Yunus will leave Dhaka this morning for the 6th BIMSTEC summit, which will be attended by the heads of the member states – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

Thailand, the current chair of BIMSTEC, will hand over the chairmanship to Bangladesh tomorrow.

“As Bangladesh will be the next chair of BIMSTEC, we are expecting all leaders of member states to take the opportunity to discuss BIMSTEC activities for the future with Yunus. It is normal. So, the possibility of a meeting [with Modi] is high,” Rahman said.

The Daily Star has learnt from foreign ministry officials involved with the proceedings that the meeting has been confirmed, and the details were being worked out.

The meeting may not be structured as a bilateral one but a courtesy one, said another diplomatic source in New Delhi.

Bangladesh earlier sent a letter to India seeking a meeting between the two leaders, Rahman said.

A meeting between the two leaders could not be held in New York in September last year as the schedule did not overlap.

However, Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain sat with Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar at the 79th UN General Assembly there.

In February, Hossain and Jaishankar met on the sidelines of the Indian Ocean Conference in Oman.

The two countries also held official-level meetings on bilateral relations, water sharing and border cooperation.

In response to a question on any implications of Yunus's China visit on Dhaka- SEE PAGE 2 COL 2



Trump all set to unleash 'Liberation Day' tariffs

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump was poised to unveil sweeping new “Liberation Day” tariffs yesterday, but kept the world guessing until the last minute about the scope of an onslaught that could spark a global trade war.

Trump was set to roll out the measures flanked by cabinet members in the Rose Garden of the White House at 4:00 pm (2000 GMT) – after Wall Street markets close – promising that they will stop America being “ripped off” and will deliver a new “golden age” of US industry.

But while Trump insisted he had decided on the reciprocal tariffs hitting countries that have targeted the United States, the White House admitted he was still ironing out the details with less than 24 hours to go.

The Republican billionaire has had a long love affair with tariffs, insisting in SEE PAGE 2 COL 5



Holiday trip turns tragic

10 of a family killed in crash on a dangerous 2km stretch of Ctg-Cox's Bazar highway where 28 died this yr

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN

Lying on a hospital bed at Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH), seven-year-old Araddhya was looking for her parents.

As the little girl writhed in pain due to severe head injuries, she could only manage a few inaudible mumbling sounds.

But no one, including the medical staff, had the heart to tell her that she would not see her parents again. They had died in a road accident earlier in the day.

They were among the 10 people who died in a head-on collision between a microbus and a bus on the Chattogram-Cox's Bazar highway in the Jangalia area of Lohagara's Chunati union. Araddhya and another woman were seriously injured in the accident.

“All the deceased and injured were heading to Cox's Bazar for holiday on the microbus,” said Shuvo Ranjan Chakma, officer-in-charge of Dohazari Highway Police Station. “The victims were travelling from Kustia.”

The victims included Araddhya's father, Dilip Biswas, her mother, Sadhana Biswas, and her maternal uncle, Asish Mandal. The identities of the other victims had yet to be confirmed.

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ROAD CRASHES KILL 41 IN 3 DAYS (PAGE-3)

Israel seizing more of Gaza to free hostages

Says its PM; 34 more Palestinians killed in strikes

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday said that the military was “dissecting” the Gaza Strip and seizing territory to pressure Hamas into freeing hostages still held in the territory.

It came as rescuers said 34 people were killed in continued Israeli strikes on the territory, including on a UN building.

The military is “dissecting the (Gaza) Strip and increasing the pressure step by step so that (Hamas) will return our hostages”, Netanyahu said in a statement, adding that Israel “is seizing territory, striking terrorists, and destroying infrastructure”.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5



People mourn over the shrouded bodies of loved ones at the Indonesian Hospital in Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip yesterday. At least 19 people, including nine children, were killed in an Israeli strike targeting a UN clinic in the Jabalia camp for Palestinian refugees in Gaza.

PHOTO: AFP

No room for extremism

Say govt advisers while responding to NYT article

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Government advisers have reiterated their commitment to combatting religious extremism and insisted that militancy is not on the rise.

Their remarks came in response to an article by The New York Times titled “As Bangladesh Reinvents Itself, Islamist Hard-Liners See an Opening”.

The NYT article said Islamist extremism surged in Bangladesh following the fall of Sheikh Hasina's government, with fundamentalists imposing restrictions on women, persecuting minorities, and pushing for a more religiously conservative state.

The Times said that the interim government was reluctant to crack down on fundamentalist forces, allowing them to gain public space.

While talking to journalists after visiting the family and grave of a July martyr yesterday, Information and Broadcasting Adviser Mahfuj Alam said there would be no place for extremism on Bangladesh's soil.

“Our government maintains a strict stance on this issue and will continue to do so in the future. If discussions and warnings are not enough, tougher measures will be taken,” he said.

He further said, “The efforts to establish Bangladesh as a democratic state under the leadership of Prof Muhammad Yunus will continue. No extremist group will be allowed to take advantage of the situation.

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NOTICE

Business pages have not come out today as economic activities have not gained momentum after Eid-ul-Fitr holidays. Star Business will be available from Friday.



A worker removing a mural of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Lalmonirhat's Liberation War Memorial, top, on Sunday. The original state of the murals, bottom left, and the murals covered with a cloth on Independence Day (March 26), bottom right.



PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

LIBERATION WAR MEMORIAL 3 murals of Sheikh Mujib demolished in Lalmonirhat

S DILIP ROY

Three murals of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the Liberation War Memorial in Lalmonirhat were demolished on Sunday afternoon.

The demolition work was carried out by two workers, who, seeking anonymity, told journalists at the scene that the action was taken on the instruction of the District Council authorities.

However, Rajib Ahsan, chief executive deputy director (additional charge) of Lalmonirhat District Council, told The Daily Star, “I’m not aware of any decision to demolish the murals at the Liberation War Memorial.” He declined to provide further details.

The Liberation War Memorial, constructed in 2015, is located in front of the BGB camp on College Road in Lalmonirhat. It was built by the Lalmonirhat District Council at a cost of Tk 32.75 lakh.

The memorial features murals of or related to the 1952 Language Movement, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s March 7 speech, the formation of the Mujibnagar government, the reading of the Liberation War declaration, a rising sun, the 1971 genocide, commander-in-chief of the Mukti Bahini MAG Osmani, freedom fighters celebrating after the war, people holding the Bangladesh flag, the Seven Birshresthos, and the surrender of the Pakistani army.

On last year’s Victory Day (December 16) and this year’s Independence Day (March 26), the district administration covered the murals with a piece of cloth. According to it, this was done following demands of the July

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Holiday trip

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“Eight people died on the spot, while two others succumbed to their injuries at CMCH,” added the officer.

“The microbus driver was killed instantly, while the bus driver fled the scene. What caused the accident remains unclear. However, initial investigations suggest that the road was slippery due to saltwater sipping out from salt-laden trucks, which may have caused the microbus to lose control,” he said.

The incident was part of a larger tragedy unfolding on the highway during the Eid holidays. Within just 48 hours, three accidents in the Chunarj Jangalia area claimed the lives of 15 people and left at least 30 others injured, raising urgent safety concerns.

Drivers, police officers, firefighters, and locals attested to the treacherous nature of the hilly and slippery road due to salt transportation in the area. During the Eid holiday season, many drivers from outside the region, unfamiliar with these narrow and winding routes, fall victim to such fatal accidents.

According to Roads and Highways Department (RHD) officials, the 2-kilometre stretch from Lohagara Mazar Gate to Chundi Bazar has emerged as the most accident-prone section of the Chattogram-Cox’s Bazar highway.

At least 28 people have been killed in road crashes along this stretch since January this year, according to the Dohazari Highway Police Station.

“The road is sloped and uneven, causing an imbalance while driving, which often results in accidents,” said OC Shuvo Chakma.

Additionally, the transport of salt and fish makes the road slippery, further increasing the risk of accidents. Over-speeding is another major factor behind frequent crashes, he added.

According to him, the Jangalia, Jangalia Forest Gate, and Mazar Gate areas are particularly risky.

In terms of fatalities, six people were killed in January, three in February, eight in March, and 11 in the first two days of this month, he said.

The police have already sent letters seeking intervention from the Highway Police headquarters and the local RHD and Road Transport and Highways Division, he added.

Rokan Uddin Khaled Chowdhury, executive engineer and in-charge of the Chattogram South Road Division of the RHD, acknowledged the risks.

He said the 40-45 kilometres segment, from Chakaria to Patia’s Indrapur, was marked risky a long time ago, and RHD put adequate roadside warning signs for drivers.

“The road at the accident site is only 22 feet wide and is surrounded by dense greenery. Salt-laden trucks travelling from Cox’s Bazar spill saltwater onto the road, making it slippery, especially in the early hours. When vehicles travel at high speed, their brakes often fail to function properly, leading to such crashes,” he said.

He said they have already engaged district administration officials and salt transportation workers regarding the issue.

“As a temporary solution, we are installing rumble strips to help control vehicle speed,” he said.

“We are considering risk mitigation plans, as we cannot stop the transportation of salt. It’s a big industry. However, measures can be implemented so that the workers maintain proper guidelines during transporting salt,” he said, adding that workers often flout rules and do not use plastic wrapping to stop salt from spilling on the roads.

Next budget aims for 6% GDP growth

FROM PAGE 1

according to the Export Promotion Bureau.

“Political uncertainty is the main reason behind sluggish investment. It is highly unlikely that investment will see a turnaround soon, so to assume that would be impractical,” Hussain said.

The surge in remittances since the political changeover on August 5 last year is unlikely to compensate for the private sector’s declining appetite for investment.

Remittance inflow increased by nearly 28.5 percent to \$21.43 billion in the July to March 26 period of the current fiscal year, compared to the

same period in the previous fiscal year, according to Bangladesh Bank data.

“Remittance makes an indirect contribution to GDP,” said Hussain, who was part of the 12-member committee that prepared a white paper on the state of the Bangladesh economy.

The IMF projects inflation to decline to 5 percent next fiscal year.

However, the 6.5 percent inflation target is achievable if the budget deficit remains below Tk 2,20,000 crore next fiscal year, according to Hussain.

Prof Selim Raihan, executive

director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modelling, rued the “missed opportunity to prepare a realistic budget”.

The budget should be drafted on realistic figures. Since this is not a political government, there was no need to impress with numbers.”

The size of the budget is not too important in the Bangladesh context, said Raihan, also a teacher at the University of Dhaka’s economics department.

“We lack the capacity to fully implement the budget, so the government should have focused more on improving execution.”

No room for extremism

FROM PAGE 1

“We firmly declare that the government will play a strong role in safeguarding Bangladesh’s democratic system. No extremist activities will be allowed to rise.”

Home Adviser Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury yesterday claimed that there was no rise in militancy across the country since the interim government took office. He was speaking to reporters after inspecting several police stations.

“Since we assumed responsibility, there has been no resurgence of militancy. We will work together with the people to resolve any issues that arise,” the home adviser said.

The Chief Adviser’s Press Wing lambasted the NYT article by calling it “oversimplified” and “misleading”.

On its CA Press Wing Facts Facebook page, it said, “The New York Times article paints a troubling and one-sided view of Bangladesh, suggesting that the country is on the brink of being overtaken by religious extremism. This portrayal not only oversimplifies the political and social dynamics of the country but also

risks unfairly smearing an entire nation of 180 million people.”

“It is crucial to acknowledge the progress Bangladesh has made over the last year and the complexity of the situation, rather than relying on selective, incendiary examples that paint an inaccurate picture,” it said.

The press wing said that it was “unconscionable to define the entire country by a few isolated events”.

It maintained that many attacks on minority groups were politically driven, not religious violence.

“Many of the clashes between different groups in the wake of Hasina’s ouster have been misrepresented as sectarian violence, when in reality, they were largely political in nature. Political factions often use religion to galvanise support, which complicates the issue and risks conflating political unrest with religious persecution. It is misleading to frame the entire situation as a sectarian conflict, as it ignores the true political and socio-economic factors at play,” it said.

The press wing also said the government was committed to protecting all minority communities.

Dhaka hopeful of Yunus-Modi meeting

FROM PAGE 1

Delhi relations, Rahman said: “This is not a zero-sum game. We will try our best to engage all where and when we can. We want to go ahead with all, not excluding anyone.”

About the summit, Rahman said that though the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) was not able to achieve much over the last 25 years, Dhaka was expecting to boost regional connectivity and economic collaboration under the leadership of Bangladesh.

Apart from attending the summit on April 4, Yunus will deliver a keynote at the BIMSTEC Young Generation’s Forum. He will be returning to Dhaka that evening.

The last summit was held three years ago, virtually in Colombo on March 30, 2022.

The theme of the 6th Summit is “Prosperous, Resilient, and Open BIMSTEC”.

It aims to foster collaboration among the member states to address the shared security and developmental challenges and realise the goal of a prosperous, resilient and open BIMSTEC.

The summit agenda includes the adoption of the Declaration of the 6th BIMSTEC Summit; Bangkok Vision 2030; Rules of Procedure for the BIMSTEC Mechanisms; and Report of Eminent Persons Group on the Future Direction.

The agenda also includes signing of the Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation, which aims at expanding maritime transport in Bay of Bengal with a view to enhancing transport of cargo as well as people to enable more trade and travel among the member states, and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) between BIMSTEC and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), and BIMSTEC and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, according to the BIMSTEC headquarters in Dhaka.

Bangladesh and Thailand will also sign a bilateral deal on preventing and fighting corruption.

This is the first time some focused areas of cooperation have been identified for the BIMSTEC region, and Bangladesh hopes for practical initiatives to be taken, Rahman said.

“We hope for the return of peace in Myanmar, and we can do a lot through regional cooperation,” he said, noting that in the wake of global economic issues, the smaller countries need to collaborate for their own interests.

Asked if the Rohingya crisis would be discussed, Rahman said it was not supposed to be discussed in BIMSTEC as per its charter.

“That does not mean we will remain fully silent. We will try to engage various parties. I keep engaged with them. Rohingya repatriation is the ultimate solution. Our goal will be to make progress in this effort,” he

added.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh has called upon BIMSTEC member states to extend full cooperation in ensuring the timely finalisation of six key constituent agreements on trade in goods under the Framework Agreement.

The agreements are on the rules of origin, assistance in customs matters, dispute settlement procedures and mechanisms, trade facilitation, investment, and trade in services.

Foreign Secretary Jashim Uddin made the call while leading a five-member Bangladesh delegation to the 25th session of the BIMSTEC Senior Officials’ Meeting in Bangkok yesterday.

Senior officials finalised the draft Provisional Agenda and draft Report of the 20th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting, which is set to take place today. Additionally, they completed the drafts of the provisional agenda and declaration for the Sixth BIMSTEC Summit.

Jashim Uddin highlighted the progress made in the sector of “Trade, Investment, and Development, including Blue Economy”, for which Bangladesh serves as the Lead Country.

Stressing the significance of a BIMSTEC Free Trade Area, he said its realisation was crucial for the collective economic progress of the region.

Trump all set to unleash ‘Liberation Day’ tariffs

FROM PAGE 1

the face of economic experts that they are a cure-all that will tackle America’s trade imbalances with friends and foes alike.

Critics say that not only will US consumers bear the brunt as importers pass on the cost, but that they could increase the risk of a damaging recession at home and abroad.

Global markets have been jittery for days ahead of Trump’s announcement, while the countries most likely in the crosshairs have called for talks – even as they ready retaliatory measures.

The move also underscores the growing and profound gulf between Trump’s America and many of its closest allies, not only on trade but on security, defense and almost everything else.

But in typically unpredictable fashion, the 78-year-old US president is keeping the details close to his chest.

Trump has trailed the measures for weeks, initially suggesting that the

tariffs would simply match whatever levies other countries impose.

On Monday, he merely said that he would be “very kind” – but gave little away.

As the deadline drew near, US media reported that he had also been considering blanket 20 percent tariffs – and then that he was looking at a third option where some countries would get preferential treatment.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said Trump was meeting his top advisors on the eve of the announcement, “perfecting it to make sure this is a perfect deal.”

The tariffs would come into effect “immediately” after yesterday’s roll-out, she added – effectively ruling out any delays for negotiations with other countries.

Trump has wobbled on several other tariff announcements since returning to office in January, blinking at the last minute with allies such as Canada and Mexico.

Israel seizing more of Gaza

FROM PAGE 1

He added that the army is “taking control of the ‘Morag Axis’”, a strip of land that is expected to run between the southern governorates of Khan Yunis and Rafah.

The name of the axis refers to a former Israeli settlement that was evacuated when Israel unilaterally pulled out of Gaza in 2005.

Defence Minister Israel Katz earlier said Israel would bolster its military presence in the Palestinian territory to “destroy and clear the area of terrorists and terrorist infrastructure”.

The operation would “seize large areas that will be incorporated into Israeli security zones”, he said in a statement, without specifying how much territory.

Gaza’s civil defence agency said an Israeli strike that targeted a UN building “housing a medical clinic in Jabalia refugee camp” killed at least 19 people, including nine children.

The Israeli army said it struck Hamas members “inside a command and control centre” in north Gaza’s Jabalia. It was separately confirmed by AFP that the building housed a UN clinic.

The Palestinian foreign ministry, based in the occupied West Bank, condemned the “massacre” at the clinic run by UNRWA, the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees, and called for “serious international pressure” to halt Israel’s widening offensive.

Israel has, on several occasions, conducted strikes on UNRWA buildings housing displaced people in Gaza, where fighting has raged for

most of the past 18 months.

The Israeli military accuses Hamas of hiding in school buildings where thousands of Gazans have sought shelter – a charge denied by the Palestinian group.

Israel also carried out deadly air strikes in southern and central Gaza yesterday. The civil defence said dawn strikes killed at least 13 people in Khan Yunis and two in Nuseirat refugee camp.

In February, Katz announced plans for an agency to oversee the “voluntary departure” of Palestinians from the territory.

That followed Israel’s backing of a proposal from US President Donald Trump for the United States to take over the territory after relocating its 2.4 million Palestinian inhabitants. The proposal outraged Gazans and drew widespread international condemnation.

Israel resumed intense bombing of Gaza on March 18 before launching a new ground offensive, ending a nearly two-month ceasefire.

At least 1,066 people have been killed in Gaza since Israel resumed military operations, the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory said. That took the overall toll to at least 50,423 since the Israel began its offensive on Gaza on October 7, 2023.

Hunger loomed in Gaza City as bakeries closed due to worsening shortages of flour and sugar since Israel blocked the entry of supplies from March 2.

“I’ve been going from bakery to bakery all morning, but none of them are operating, they’re all closed,” Amina al-Sayed told AFP.

BNP ‘failing to control its grassroots’

FROM PAGE 12

severe injuries in the attack during a clash between local factions of Chhatra Dal and Swechchhasebak Dal on March 30 at Ramganj upzila in Lakshmipur, the statement said.

In another attack on March 24 in Noakhali’s Hatia, some BNP activists attacked NCP Joint Chief Coordinator Abdul Hannan Masud during a public meeting, the statement said.

The NCP alleged that BNP leaders and activists in various places across the country were regularly intimidating NCP activists with threats of “taking revenge after seven or eight months”.

“It is unclear to the NCP what kind of reality will be created by local BNP men after seven or eight months that will allow them to take revenge,” the statement said.



Yunus calls for unity to build a new Bangladesh

Modi, Shehbaz Sharif greet CA on Eid

BSS, Dhaka

Extending greetings to the countrymen on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr, Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus, on March 31, urged all to nurture closeness and unity with each other to build a new Bangladesh.

"We will, of course, implement the dream of those who sacrificed their lives and were injured during the July uprising to build a new Bangladesh," he said.

"Despite various hurdles, we will overcome the challenges that will come

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



People from different walks of life joined the DNCC-organised Eid procession, carrying placards with greetings and awareness messages. The vibrant march featured a marching band and replicas of elephants, unicorns, and characters integral to Arabian folklore. Meanwhile, families flocked with their kids to the revamped DNCC Wonderland Park in Shyamoli to enjoy their holidays. A girl finds joy in playing with her balloon at the National Zoo in Mirpur, which is still a favourite Eid destination for Dhaka residents. The photos were taken during the Eid holidays.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN, PRABIR DAS

Trump admin to stay in touch with interim govt

US deputy nat'l security adviser calls CA's high rep

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The new US administration has discussed a broad range of matters of mutual interest with Dhaka, while agreeing to stay in touch.

US Deputy National Security Advisor Alex N Wong yesterday held a teleconference with Dr Khalilur Rahman, the chief adviser's high representative on the Rohingya issue.

"The two officials discussed a broad range of matters of mutual interest and agreed to remain in contact," said a statement from Chief Adviser's Press Wing. This marks the highest-level engagement between the new US administration and the interim government so far.

Recently, the US government confirmed US \$73 million in new financial aid for Rohingyas. This comes at a time when the Trump administration has significantly reduced USAID funding worldwide.

Govt will not make decision to ban AL alone: Mahfuj

BSS, Dhaka

Information Adviser Mahfuj Alam yesterday said the government will not make any unilateral decision regarding the ban on the Awami League; rather, the decision will be taken following consultation with political parties, development partners, and other stakeholders.

"The government believes it cannot make the decision alone to ban the AL without consulting other political parties, as well as our local and foreign partners and stakeholders," he said.

Although the country's people have repeatedly demanded the banning of the AL, the adviser said, "We believe the government will make this decision after consultation and a thorough review of the matter involving all parties."

Mahfuj made these comments in response to a query from a journalist after visiting the Purbha Narayanpur Islamia Junior Dakhil Madrasa in the Isapur Union of Ramganj upazila in the afternoon.

Earlier, he arrived at his

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Patients suffer at understaffed Dhaka hospitals amid Eid

'Mob beating' victim denied treatment at hospitals before death, family alleges

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Riyad Hossain, who sustained severe injuries in an alleged mob beating, was taken to Kurmitola General Hospital by law enforcers on Sunday morning.

However, the hospital did not admit him and referred him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) instead.

Around 11:30am, he was taken to DMCH's emergency department, but the country's largest hospital also did not admit him. Instead, they provided some medication, stating that his condition was stable.

Later, Pallabi police took him back to their station.



Asma waits in front of Nitor's emergency OT.

When Riyad's condition deteriorated, police took him to a nearby private hospital, but he was denied admission due to the unavailability of doctors.

With no alternative, police kept him at the station. As his condition worsened, they took



Emergency department at Nitor on Eid day.

PHOTO: STAR

him back to Kurmitola General Hospital, but the hospital once again refused to admit him.

Riyad succumbed to his injuries at the hospital's emergency department early Monday. "My husband died because he was not given proper treatment at any hospital," Riyad's wife, Farzana Akter, told The Daily Star.

Like Riyad, many patients were deprived of necessary treatment or suffered due to long delays in receiving care, as most doctors and nurses in major public hospitals went on leave during the Eid vacation.

Like the previous years, major public hospitals were mostly run by non-Muslim doctors and nurses. However, the number of patients in the emergency departments at DMCH and Pongu Hospital saw a rise during the Eid vacation, causing suffering for those seeking services.

These correspondents visited DMCH, the National Institute of Traumatology and

Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (NITOR), also known as Pongu Hospital, the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (NICVD), and Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday.

Riyad, 34, a resident of Pallabi, picked up a passenger in his car from Mirpur 12 in the early hours of Sunday. While picking up the passenger, another private car hit Riyad's vehicle from behind, causing damage to his car, said Riyad's wife Farzana Akter, citing locals.

In an attempt to claim compensation, Riyad blocked the other car and got out to speak to the driver.

However, the passengers of the private car started shouting that Riyad was a "mugger." Hearing this, locals apprehended Riyad and began beating him before handing him over to law enforcement.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

41 lives lost on roads during Eid holidays

STAR REPORT

Road accidents claimed at least 41 lives and injured numerous others across the country during the Eid holidays since Monday.

However, the actual number of deaths could be higher, as many incidents are likely yet to be reported.

YESTERDAY

Yesterday morning, an unidentified person died on the spot as a truck hit his motorcycle in Khatapara area on Lalmonirhat-Burimari Highway in Lalmonirhat's Aditmari upazila, said police.

In Rangpur, two motorcyclists died while racing each other on Badarganj Parbatipur road in Badarganj upazila at around 2:00pm yesterday.

One of the deceased has been identified as Ashiq, 14, of Dhantala village under the upazila.

In Dhaka's Motijheel, Ruhul Amin Sheikh, 55, a security guard, was killed in a road accident in the afternoon.

In Kurigram, a farmer Abdur Rahman, 55, died after being hit by an easybike in Dhamshreni area of Ulipur upazila.

TUESDAY

In Lalmonirhat, Faridul Islam, 24, of Nabinagar village in Patgram upazila, died on the spot as his motorcycle hit a roadside tree in the village.

In Kushtia, Rahat Islam Palash, 30, and his nephew Fahim Onik, 23, were killed and Tanvir Gani, 23, was injured as a private car hit their motorcycle at around 1:30am on Tuesday, said

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8

The actual number of deaths could be higher, as many incidents are likely yet to be reported.

NCP gears up for EC registration

Aims to form district, upazila-level units to meet polls criteria

ASHIK ABDULLAH APU

The National Citizen Party (NCP) is now taking preparations to form district and upazila-level organisational units to meet the Election Commission's registration criteria ahead of the upcoming polls.

As the party aims to field candidates in all constituencies, its primary focus is now on fulfilling the EC registration requirements.

Party insiders say the NCP is prepared to comply with both existing regulations and any eased conditions if introduced.

NCP leaders have already begun groundwork at the grassroots to form the required number of committees after Eid. The party is also expected to finalise its charter, electoral symbol, goals, objectives, slogan, and core principles, along with setting up its central office.

The NCP, which emerged from the student-led July uprising, officially launched on February 28. Shortly after, the EC issued a public notice inviting applications from new parties for registration, with a submission deadline of April 20.

Under current EC regulations, the NCP must submit key documents, including its constitution, election manifesto, party logo, executive committee list, and financial details, along with proof of securing at least five percent of the vote in any constituency. The party must also establish a central office, district offices in

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one-third of administrative districts, and offices in 100 upazilas or metropolitan precincts with at least 200 registered supporters in each.

However, the Election System Reform Commission has proposed easing these conditions. The suggested reforms would

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



Very few vehicles ply this road in the Farmgate area of the capital; the footpath is also surprisingly empty, in stark contrast to how the area normally appears throughout the year. As many were able to capitalise on a nine-day Eid vacation this year, Dhaka has been emptier than usual. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



Shops have been set up by filling sand into the river, obstructing the water flow of the vital Mayur River, which was dredged recently. The reduced navigability of the river is now causing waterlogging in various areas of the city during the monsoon. The photo was taken in Khulna's Gallamari area.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

‘Tal-pakha’ artisans struggling to survive

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

Before electricity reached this region, and even afterwards when load shedding was a daily occurrence, traditional palm leaf hand-held fans were a common item in every household. Especially in rural areas, this handmade item, locally known as “tal-pakha,” is still widely used, particularly during the sweltering heat of summer days.

Chadshi village, under Barishal’s Gournadi upazila, is locally known as “pakhar gram” (village of fan craftsmen), with around 200 artisans engaged in making these hand fans from palmyra palm leaves as their primary livelihood for generations.

With the onset of summer, artisans in Chadshi village were seen working tirelessly to meet the rising demand for palm leaf fans. Many were busy collecting and processing palm leaves. Women were observed cutting, shaping, and stitching the leaves into the traditional fan shape, binding them with bamboo sticks, and



adding colours for the final touch.

Located about 44km from Barishal city, the village is renowned for this traditional handicraft.

“We have been making palm leaf fans for many years,” said Khadeza Begum, a craftswoman.

Al Amin, 70, a craftsman, stated, “Last year, we sold 10,000 hand-fans at different village fairs. This year, we are preparing for the same, but there’s uncertainty

whether the village fairs will be held this year.” The artisans mentioned they produce 100 fans at a cost of Tk 1,000 and sell them at a wholesale rate of Tk 2,000. Each fan retails for Tk 30 in the market. On average, an artisan can make 30-35 fans in a day, depending on the type.

However, the growing scarcity of raw materials and dwindling demand due to modern alternatives pose major challenges

for the artisans to thrive.

“Many palmyra palm trees in the local areas have been felled without any new ones being planted. As such, we often face an acute shortage of palm leaves and have to source them from other areas at high prices, raising our cost of production while demand has been decreasing over the years,” said Ibrahim Khalifa, an artisan.

Rehana Begum, another craftswoman, added that despite being a traditional handicraft, this trade receives little to no government support.

Many artisans are forced to take high-interest loans from wholesalers or NGOs to sustain their businesses. “We need government assistance and training to thrive,” she said.

Md Nazrul Islam, deputy general manager of Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation in Barishal, said, “We have opportunities to support artisans of such traditional handicrafts. If they seek assistance, we can arrange skill development projects.”

Patients suffer

FROM PAGE 3

She alleged that her husband died without proper treatment. “I found Riyad’s body lying in the [Kurmitola] hospital corridor,” she said.

Contacted, Nazrul Islam, officer-in-charge of Pallabi Police Station, said around 2:30am on Sunday, army personnel handed Riyad over to them. He was beaten on suspicion of being a mugger, the OC said.

But Farzana said Riyad had purchased a private car a few months ago for Tk 16 lakh. His only source of income was through ride-sharing.

“My husband was killed over false allegations of mugging. No mugger buys a car for Tk 16 lakh,” she said.

However, OC Nazrul said, “We are not yet certain if the car belongs to him. This will be confirmed after the investigation. Riyad’s car has been seized. Cash and a women’s handbag were found inside, which suggests the car might have been used for muggings.”

Asked about the allegation of not providing treatment, OC Nazrul said, “We are not responsible for him not receiving medical treatment. We sent him to several hospitals. We even took him to a private hospital, but we couldn’t save him.”

He said Riyad’s body has been sent to the Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College morgue for an autopsy.

According to morgue sources, injuries were found on the lower part of the deceased’s body, from the waist down. It is suspected that he may have died due to restricted blood circulation.

NITOR One of the correspondents visited Pongu Hospital on Sunday and Monday.

The hospital treats patients from across the country who come to receive care for fractured body parts. During a three-hour visit from 7:00pm on Eid day, this correspondent found 18 patients on the waiting list at the emergency department, with most of them coming from outside the city.

Only one doctor was seen giving treatment there, assisted by a few nurses and ward boys. Patients had to wait up to two hours to receive treatment.

The correspondent found around 20 patients waiting in front of the emergency operation theatre.

Asma Begum, 47, who was suffering from gangrene, said the doctor advised her to take an injection three times a day before a second operation.

“Each of the injections costs Tk 800. But it is not possible for us to bear the cost, so we stopped taking the injection. We came here to consult with the doctor, but we are not finding him. Doctors at the emergency department could not advise us and asked us to wait for the particular doctor,” Asma’s brother, Aslam Hawlader, said.

However, she underwent surgery on Tuesday.

Prof Abul Kenan, director of the hospital, said like previous years, they assigned mostly non-Muslim doctors and nurses, who accounted for 20 percent of the total doctors and nurses, to run the hospital during the Eid vacation.

Asked about the number of patients, he said the number was higher than usual. Over 200 people came to the emergency department daily during normal times, while 331 visited the department on Monday and 245 on Tuesday, he said.

“We tried our best to provide service with the limited manpower,” he added.

DMCH Around 1,680 people on average visited the emergency department of DMCH per day from Sunday to Tuesday, according to

DMCH sources.

This number is higher than usual, as 1,300 to 1,400 patients typically visit the emergency department daily under normal circumstances, and they said.

The surge in emergency visits during the Eid vacation was attributed to many district, upazila-level, and private hospitals either remaining closed or providing minimal services.

Despite the increase in emergency cases, the number of hospital admissions declined during the holiday period. On average, 270 patients were admitted daily over these three days, compared to more than 300 during normal times, sources said.

They added that the total number of admitted patients stood at 2,280 yesterday. The number was around 2,050 during the vacation, they said.

Under normal conditions, between 3,400 and 4,000 patients receive treatment at this 2,600-bed hospital. However, the patient count dropped significantly ahead of Eid to ease pressure on the reduced medical staff.

Sources said most of the doctors and nurses were from non-Muslim communities.

DMCH Director Brig Gen Md Asaduzzaman said around 500 nurses, out of 2,500 nurses, were on duty during the Eid holidays. He, however, did not mention the number of doctors who worked.

“We deployed more doctors and nurses than last year,” he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Asked about the denial of admission for Riyad, he said this should not have happened. “We will investigate the matter,” he added.

Abu Hussain Md Moinul Ahsan, director (hospitals and clinics) at Director General of Health Services, could not be reached for comments.

Govt will not

FROM PAGE 3

village home and met with family members. Mahfuj also offered prayers at his paternal grandparents’ graves.

Speaking on the next general elections, the adviser said the chief adviser had said elections would be held between December of this year and June 2026.

“It will depend on how much reform takes place and how these will be implemented. We should keep the elections limited to this period. The government has no ambition beyond that,” Mahfuj said.

Noting that there is no ambiguity regarding the elections, he categorically stated that the polls will definitely be held.

“There are two timelines – December or June – and the election will take place within this timeframe. The government may not go beyond these timelines. Political parties should prepare. The election will happen,” he added.

Regarding the Media Reform Commission, Mahfuj said the recommendations of the commission will be reviewed with the involvement of all stakeholders.

“We will reform as much as we can during the current interim government’s tenure. Specifically, the issue of media workers’ wages and benefits is a top priority. The issue of ownership is also under review,” he added.

2 die while making

FROM PAGE 5

According to railway police, the four men were recording TikTok videos while sitting on the train’s roof as it was crossing the Gangasagar bridge. At one stage, they got entangled with overhead dish wires and fell off.

Abdul Kaiyum died on the spot, while the three injured

41 lives lost

FROM PAGE 3

Mosharrat Hossain, officer-in-charge of Kushtia Model Police Station.

In Meherpur town, three people, including a child, were killed as a motorcycle collided with a microbus and a rickshaw van on Tuesday, said Meherpur Sadar OC Sheikh Mesbah Uddin.

The deceased are Aktaruzzaman Shovon, 29, Al Imran, 28, and Zubayer Hossain, 8.

In Madaripur, four people – Ramzan Sardar, 21; Oli Khan, 22; Mithu Talukder, 25; and Hridoy Dhali – were killed and two others injured in a collision involving three motorcycles on Babukhar Bridge in Shibchar upazila around 1:00pm.

A constable of Gazipur Metropolitan Police, Roni Sikder, 26, died after an auto-rickshaw hit his motorcycle in Kaliakair upazila.

Abdul Hakim, 32, an auto-van driver was killed as his van lost control in Kutubpur area under Bogura’s Sariakandi upazila at around 2:00pm, said Sariakandi OC Jamirul Islam.

In Cumilla, three people died and at least 25 were injured as a passenger bus veered off the road and crashed into an electric pole and a tree in Chandina upazila on Dhaka-Chattogram Highway in the evening.

MONDAY

In Chattogram, at least five people were killed and 10 others injured in a head-on collision between two passenger buses of Saudia and Eagle Paribahan at Jangalia Major Gate on Chattogram-Cox’s Bazar Highway in Lohagara upazila at around 7:25am on Monday.

The deceased are Md Rifat, Md Arafat, Md Nazim, and Md Gias, from Lohagara upazila, and Md Siddique from Satkania upazila.

In Bogura, at least four people were killed and several other injured in three separate road accidents on Monday.

Shariful Islam, 32, and his daughter Seida, 3, died as a motorcycle hit them and then a passenger bus ran them over while they were crossing the road, said Inspector Azizul Haque, in charge of Sherpur Highway Police Outpost.

In another incident, Alok Sarkar, 20, died while his friends were injured as their motorcycle lost control and hit a roadside tree in Sherpur upazila.

In Faridpur, Surya Begum, 55, died after being hit by a motorcycle in Nagarkanda upazila while walking in front of her house at around 4:00pm.

In Kishoreganj, Shamim Mia, 25, Al Amin, 27, died as their motorcycles collided head-on in Lakshipur Madhyapara area of Kuliarchar upazila around 3:00pm.

In Bandarban, Md Mizan Rahman died and three others were injured in separate road accidents on Lama-Alikadam road on Monday afternoon.

In Gazipur, two unidentified passengers of a CNG-run auto-rickshaw died on the spot as a passenger bus lost control and hit the three-wheeler.

In Brahmanbaria, two people were killed and two others injured as a bus hit a CNG-run auto-rickshaw in Ashuganj upazila. One of the deceased has been identified as Din Islam of Kishoreganj.

In Mymensingh, Kulsuma Khatun, 95, Dilruba Khatun, 40, Riti Akter, 14, and Priti Aktar, 7, died as a truck hit their battery-run auto-rickshaw in Sreerampur area of Gouripur upazila.

Yunus calls for unity

FROM PAGE 3

before us; we will build this new Bangladesh as a united nation, Insha Allah,” he added.

The chief adviser made these remarks in his brief speech prior to offering prayers at the Eid Jamaat at the Jatiya Eidgah ground on the morning of March 31.

Prof Yunus noted that Eid-ul-Fitr was being celebrated in every part of the country, stating that Eid is an occasion for minimising distance with others and establishing closeness.

“This message must reach everyone: Eid should be celebrated with deep love,” the chief adviser said.

He prayed for the eternal peace of the departed souls of those who were martyred in the July uprising and sought the early recovery of the injured.

Meanwhile, India Prime Minister Narendra Modi conveyed Eid greetings to Prof Yunus and the people of Bangladesh through an official message.

“As the blessed month of Ramadan comes to a close, I take this moment to extend warm greetings and felicitations to you and the people of Bangladesh on the joyous occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr,” he wrote in a message sent to Yunus.

The message was received on March 31.

Modi mentioned that during the holy month, 200 million Indians of the Islamic faith joined their brothers and sisters across the world in spending pious time in fasting and prayers.

The joyous occasion

of Eid-ul-Fitr is a time of celebration, reflection, gratitude, and unity, he said.

“It reminds us of the values of compassion, generosity, and solidarity that bind us together as nations and as members of the global community,” the message read.

On this auspicious occasion, Modi wished for peace, harmony, good health, and happiness for people across the world.

“May the bonds of friendship among our countries grow stronger,” he added.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister of Pakistan Shehbaz Sharif also called the chief adviser over the phone to exchange Eid greetings.

Sharif greeted the people of Bangladesh.

He also invited Prof Yunus to visit Pakistan at a convenient time in the coming months, the Chief Adviser’s Press Wing confirmed.

Prof Yunus also congratulated the people of Pakistan on the occasion of Eid.

Sharif mentioned that Deputy Prime Minister of Pakistan Ishaq Dar, who is also the foreign minister of the Islamic Republic, would visit Bangladesh in April to discuss issues of mutual interest.

The leaders of two of the largest Muslim majority nations had previously met in Cairo during the D-8 Summit in December and during the United Nations General Assembly in New York in September last year.

Woman raped

FROM PAGE 5

OC Habibullah said the victim has filed a case against Hakim Mia with the police station. An operation is underway to arrest Hakim.

Meanwhile, a teenager was sued yesterday for attempting to rape a third-grader in Thakurgaon’s Baliadangi upazila on Tuesday afternoon.

The victim’s father filed the case accusing a 17-year-old boy who lives in the same village, said Baliadangi Police Station acting OC Dibakar Odhikari.

The accused allegedly stabbed the victim’s throat during the incident. She is currently undergoing treatment at a hospital.

The father of the victim told The Daily Star that the accused, also their neighbour, brought her to a field in at Managaon Sardarpara village around 4:00pm. At one stage, he attempted to rape her at knifepoint. As the girl resisted, he stabbed her in the throat.

When the girl screamed for help, the villagers rescued and brought her to the hospital.

Rokibul Alam, resident medical officer, said three stitches were needed on the girl’s throat, but she is not in critical condition. Police said efforts are underway to arrest the accused.

PRAYER TIMING		APRIL 3			
Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha	
AZAN 4-40	12-45	4-45	6-21	7-45	
JAMAAT 5-15	1-15	5-00	6-24	8-15	
SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION					

NCP gears up for EC

FROM PAGE 3

reduce the office requirement to one-tenth of districts and five percent of upazilas, along with a minimum of 5,000 registered supporters nationwide – significantly lowering the existing 21-district and 100-upazila threshold.

According to the party sources, the NCP is confident it can meet both the existing and proposed registration conditions within the stipulated time.

Speaking to The Daily Star, NCP Senior Joint Convener Ariful Islam Adib called the current criteria an “obstacle” for new parties.

“For a party that just launched, meeting all the requirements within one and a half months is difficult. We recommend amending the RPO as per the Electoral Reform Commission’s recommendations before initiating the registration process,” Adib said.

Despite the challenge, party insiders claim that over 450 committees of the Nagorik Committee already exist nationwide. Simply converting these into NCP committees would be enough to meet the registration requirements.

Establishing the necessary district and upazila offices would not be a major hurdle, they added.

Meanwhile, a senior NCP leader confirmed that many existing Nagorik Committee offices will be converted into NCP offices.

“A significant number of Nagorik Committee members will be incorporated into the NCP,” said Alauddin Mohammad, joint member secretary of the NCP.

Besides, members of Students Against Discrimination and those who uphold the spirit of the July uprising will be prioritised,” Alauddin added.

He said discussions are ongoing with leaders of other political parties and senior citizens to bring them into the NCP fold.

SAD leader

FROM PAGE 5

Rabiul Islam Robin, organiser of the Kurigram district unit SAD, said Mehedi Hasan is a SAD leader.

It was not right of him to stop the couple’s rickshaw, he added.

“However, the allegations made against him are not correct. An attempt has been made to make a big deal out of the matter,” Robin added.

“There was no incident of attempted kidnapping or molestation. There was only an argument. But without any investigation, the police registered the case and arrested Mehedi,” he said.

SI Atiquzzaman Atiq said efforts are underway to arrest others involved in the incident.

The case will be investigated properly and a charge sheet will be prepared, he added.

Tidal surge floods farmland in Patuakhali

Farmers devastated as saltwater destroys crops, fish enclosures

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Patuakhali*

A tidal surge inundated around 100 acres of farmland in Itbaria village of Patuakhali's Kalapara upazila, destroying winter crops and washing away fish from at least 10 ponds.

The flood occurred on Tuesday as seawater entered the fields through a worn-out, single-gate sluice connected to the Tiakhali River.

Local farmers reported that the area is cultivated year-round, with Aman paddy grown during the monsoon, followed by winter crops like pulses, sunflowers, and maize.

Just two days before Eid, the fields were dry and cracked, but now saltwater has submerged everything. Due to the new moon, an unusually high tide overflowed local canals and spread into the fields.

Along with the crops, many farmers' fish enclosures were also flooded, and saltwater entered household ponds, creating a crisis for daily use and livestock drinking water.

Farmer Mahtab Hossain said, "Suddenly, saltwater entered and flooded the fields.

The pulse plants, which were about to be harvested in two weeks, will now rot. It is heartbreaking to see our hard-earned crops being destroyed."

Another farmer, Delwar Talukdar, said the old, deteriorated sluice gate had long lost its effectiveness.

"Water used to flow in and out unchecked. But this time, due to the intense tidal pressure from the new moon, the entire canal overflowed and submerged the fields. My four-bigha winter crop field is now filled with saline water, and everything is rotting. This is a disaster for all farmers here."

He said fresh water from ponds and canals was used for cooking and daily needs, but now, due to the saline intrusion, people are facing an acute water crisis.

The executive engineer of the Water Development Board in Kalapara could not be reached for comment as the office was closed.

Kalapara Upazila Nirbahi Officer Md Rabiul Islam said necessary measures would be taken to resolve the issue after Eid.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

A line of rickshaws lay parked side-to-side on the capital's Green Road yesterday. On the third day of Eid, with many Dhaka-dwellers still outside the city for the holidays, rickshaw-pullers could not find enough passengers. As such, they parked their vehicles while they waited.

SAD leader arrested over sexual assault charges

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Lalmonirhat*

A man has been arrested and sent to jail on charges of sexually assaulting and attempting to abduct a woman at Char Rajibpur upazila of Kurigram.

The arrestee is Mehedi Hasan, 22, a Students Against Discrimination (SAD) leader from the Marichakandi area of Rajibpur Sadar union.

The incident reportedly took place on a bridge at Marichakandi at 9:00pm on Monday night, the day of Eid.

The father of the victim filed a case with Rajibpur Police Station against four named and 4-5 unnamed people, alleging sexual assault and attempted abduction of his daughter.

Mehedi was sent to jail through the court on Tuesday, said Rajibpur Police Station's Sub-inspector Atiquzzaman Atiq.

Police said that the victim and her husband were going to their home by autorickshaw from her father's house at 9:00pm on Monday night. When they reached the bridge at Marichakandi village, Mehedi and his men blocked their way. At that time, they tried to sexually assault the woman and abduct her.

When the locals rushed to the spot after hearing their screams, Mehedi and his men fled. A case was filed at the police station on Monday night and police arrested Mehedi.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

Canal runs dry as tea estate 'diverts' water flow

Over 3,000 farmers in peril

SIFAYET ULLAH, *Ctg*

The Baromasia canal in Chattogram's Fatikchhari upazila is on the brink of drying up after the Halda Valley Tea Estate altered its course at several points to facilitate irrigation for its tea garden.

The modifications have completely halted the canal's water flow, severely impacting over 3,000 farmers who rely on it for irrigation, especially during the dry season.

Connected directly to the Halda river, the Baromasia canal channels freshwater from hilly areas, supporting Bangladesh's only natural breeding ground for major carps. It plays a crucial role in sustaining a healthy freshwater ecosystem and supplying carp fries to fish cultivators nationwide.

However, the extensive diversion of the canal has triggered a severe irrigation crisis, threatening both local livelihoods and the environment.

The Halda Valley Tea Estate is currently extracting water at three separate points using heavy pumps -- an act that violates the Water Act 2013 and is punishable under the law.

"The Tea Estate has been extracting water from the canal since 2007. Now, they have altered its course at multiple points," said Sohag Talukder, sub-divisional engineer of the Water Development Board (WDB) in Chattogram.



two kilometers of the canal -- stretching from Joy Nagar to Edilpur -- had dried up, leaving several paddy fields parched due to the lack of water.

In 1980, the WDB built a water retention structure on the canal to irrigate over 3,000 acres of land across two unions during the Boro season.

This enabled farmers to grow three crops a year instead of just

one, benefiting nearly 10,000 people and increasing paddy production by 7,000 tonnes annually.

That initiative is now on the verge of collapse. Due to the water crisis, cultivation has ceased on at least 2,500 acres of land.

Fatikchhari Upazila Agriculture Officer Hasanuzzaman said due to insufficient irrigation, farmers

haven't been able to grow Boro paddy due to the irrigation crisis," said Mohammad Musa, a farmer from Edilpur village, who now works in brick kilns as a day labourer.

Fayezur Rahman, another farmer from Mirzahat, said, "I used to cultivate paddy on two acres of land, but now my fields are dry. We are helpless as the canal has no water."

To prevent further water extraction, the WDB sent a notice to the Halda Valley Tea Estate on March 13. The Daily Star obtained a copy of the notice.

Fazlul Karim, president of the Baromasia Canal Irrigation Project, said, "We are not against the tea garden, but the canal is dying due to their unplanned activities."

Sovkat Ibne Sahid, executive engineer of the WDB in Chattogram, said, "We sought help from the upazila administration to take action against the tea estate to stop the destructive activities."

Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury, upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) of Fatikchhari, said, "If the Halda Valley Tea Estate is found to have violated the law, legal action will be taken against them."

Contacted, Nader Khan, owner of the Halda Valley Tea Estate, denied the allegations of altering the canal's course.

"We need water to operate the tea gardens, but the claim of extracting water unilaterally is completely false," he said.

However, he added, "Since a complaint has been made, I will advise the garden's manager to extract water only after discussing it with the farmers."

have only been able to cultivate Boro on 500 acres.

"With the dry season setting in, the tea garden authorities altered the canal's course, causing rice seedlings to die from lack of water," he added.

For generations, farmers have cultivated three crops annually along the fertile land surrounding the canal. Now, they can barely grow one.

Many have been forced to seek alternative livelihoods, such as daily labour.

"For the past few years, we

Fire guts 11 shops in Kurigram

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Lalmonirhat*

A fire gutted at least 11 shops at Shiberdangi Bazar in Char Rajibpur upazila of Kurigram yesterday.

The fire broke out at dawn. Locals said they noticed the fire after leaving the mosque and saw a vegetable shop engulfed in flames.

Before firefighters could reach the scene, the fire spread, destroying grocery stores, a shoe shop, a cow fodder shop, and a vegetable warehouse.

There were no casualties as the shops were unoccupied at the time.

Three firefighting units took around two hours to bring the blaze under control, said Abu Hanif, in-charge of Char Rajibpur Fire Service Station.



Children slide down this slope and into the Rajarbar canal, where they then bathe. The children first made the slope slippery by adding water to the soil, making their own custom slide. The photo was taken from the Badla village in Babuganj upazila of Barishal recently.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Man hacked to death in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Ctg*

A man was hacked to death over a family feud allegedly by his step brothers at his ancestral home in Haldia village under Raozan upazila of Chattogram on Tuesday afternoon.

The deceased is Shah Alam Bakul, 40. He was an engineer by profession. Bakul and two of his step brothers locked into an altercation over ownership of family properties at their village home around 2:30pm.

At one stage, his step brothers hacked Bakul with machetes and fled the scene, leaving him critically injured, said Monirul Islam Bhuiyan, officer-in-charge of Raozan Police Station. Locals rushed him to Raozan Upazila Health Complex, where on-duty doctors declared him dead, the OC said.

Woman raped at knife point in Kishoreganj

Teen sued for attempting to rape a third grader

STAR REPORT

A woman was raped at knife point in Katiadi of Kishoreganj on Monday.

The victim filed a rape case with Katiadi Model Police Station the next day, said its Officer-in-Charge Habibullah Khan.

The accused is Hakim Mia, 25, of the upazila. The incident took place at her house in the village. The victim is a mother of three children.

According to the case statement, the victim's husband is a tea stall shopkeeper and a night guard at a local market. When the woman was sleeping at her house with her children on Monday night, Hakim entered the house and raped the victim at knife point.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

2 die while making TikTok videos on train roof

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Brahmanbaria*

Two men died after falling from the roof of a moving train in Brahmanbaria's Akhaura upazila yesterday.

According to railway police, the two were shooting TikTok videos on their phone when the accident took place.

Two others have sustained severe injuries as well.

The accident occurred around 12:00pm at the Gangasagar railway bridge in Mogra union of the upazila, confirmed Jasim Uddin Khandaker, officer-in-charge of Akhaura Railway Police Station.

The victims fell from the roof of the Sylhet-bound Paharika Express train, which had departed from Chattogram, the police official said.

The deceased are Abdul Kaiyum, from Debidwar upazila in Cumilla, and Tarek, from Guruhit village in Kasba municipality of Brahmanbaria.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

Man sets mother-in-law on fire

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Dinaipur*

A man allegedly set his mother-in-law on fire by pouring petrol over her in public in Dinaipur's Birampur upazila yesterday morning.

The victim, Bully Begum, 55, is in critical condition at Rangpur Medical College Hospital, said Ataur Rahman, officer-in-charge (Investigation) of Birampur Police Station.

The accused, Mehedul, 40, is on the run, and police have launched an operation to arrest him.

According to family sources, Mehedul married Bully Begum's daughter, Shilpi Begum, around ten years ago. The couple has three children.

Mehedul, an auto-rickshaw driver, used a vehicle rented from his brother-in-law. Recently, the vehicle was damaged and left at his in-laws' house. When his brother-in-law repaired it and rented it to another driver, Mehedul allegedly became enraged, leading to the attack.

At around 7:30am, Mehedul called Bully Begum outside to the main road via mobile phone. As soon as she arrived, he poured petrol over her and set her on fire before escaping, the OC said, quoting locals and family members.

Most of her body was severely burned.

A police operation is underway to arrest the accused, the OC said.

Over \$8 bn of Russian central bank assets held in Switzerland

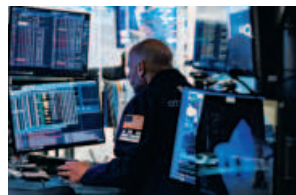
AFP, Geneva

The value of Russian assets frozen in Switzerland since the start of Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has risen by nearly \$2 billion in the past year to over \$8 billion, the government said Tuesday.

Traditionally neutral Switzerland decided four days after Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022, to align itself with the neighbouring European Union's sanctions against Moscow, obliging banks to pass on information on clients or firms targeted.

As of March 31, the Russian assets frozen in the wealthy Alpine nation were valued at 7.4 billion francs (\$8.4 billion), the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) said.

That represents a hike of 1.6 billion francs (\$1.8 billion) compared to a year ago, it said, adding that the increase was due to the fact that additional assets had been identified and frozen.



In addition, "14 real estate assets belonging to individuals, companies, or entities subject to sanctions" have been identified, it said.

Sports and luxury cars, aircraft, artworks, furniture, and instruments belonging to individuals, companies, or entities subject to sanctions also remain frozen in Switzerland, it added.

The sanctions against Russia also include several measures in the financial, trade and energy sectors, as well as various restrictions in the services and air transport sectors.

SECO stressed that the sanctions imposed by Switzerland were "identical" to those imposed by the EU.

Last week, European countries agreed at a summit in Paris to ramp up sanctions on Russia.

A bipartisan group of US senators has proposed legislation that would slap sanctions on countries friendly to Russia if Moscow disrupts ongoing negotiations to end the Ukraine war.

US President Donald Trump is trying to broker a ceasefire between Ukraine and its Russian invader, but his administration has failed to reach a breakthrough despite talks with both sides.



Smoke billows on the horizon east of the Bureij camp for Palestinian refugees in the central Gaza Strip following Israeli bombardment yesterday. Israel's defence minister has announced a major expansion of military operations in the Hamas-run Gaza, saying the army would seize "large areas" of the Palestinian territory.

PHOTO: AFP

BREACHES OF ENERGY CEASEFIRE Russia, Ukraine trade new accusations

No plans for Putin-Trump meeting in KSA: Kremlin

REUTERS, Moscow

Russia and Ukraine yesterday accused each other of launching new attacks against each other's energy facilities, in violation of a US brokered moratorium.

Both sides said they were providing details of the alleged violations to the United States, which got Moscow and Kyiv to agree the limited truce last month as a hoped-for stepping stone towards a full ceasefire.

Russia's defence ministry said Ukraine had conducted drone and shelling attacks in the western Kursk region that cut off power to over 1,500 households.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said a Russian drone hit an energy substation in Sumy region and artillery fire damaged a power line in Dnipropetrovsk, cutting off electricity to nearly 4,000 consumers. The administration of US President Donald Trump is impatient with both sides to move faster towards ending the three-year war.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the fact that President Vladimir Putin had agreed the energy truce was evidence he was serious about engaging in a peace process - something that Kyiv and some of its European allies dispute.

Peskov said that Moscow would keep working with the Americans despite what he called daily Ukrainian strikes on Russian energy infrastructure.

Zelensky said on Tuesday that



Russia was breaking the energy truce and called on the US to boost sanctions against Moscow, as Trump has threatened to do, reports Reuters.

Ukraine said last month it was willing to accept a full 30-day ceasefire but Putin declined to agree to that, raising a series of questions about how it would be monitored and concerns that Ukraine would use the breathing space to mobilise more soldiers and acquire more weapons from the West.

Meanwhile, the Kremlin yesterday said that President Vladimir Putin has no plans to visit Saudi Arabia, where US leader Donald Trump is due in the coming weeks, dismissing speculation the pair could meet there.

Trump and Putin have held two

known phone calls since February but have not met in person, while their officials have held talks in Riyadh. Trump on Monday said that he could visit Saudi Arabia as early as next month, reports AFP.

"These are purely the plans of the US head of state, in no way related to Putin," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in a daily briefing with reporters.

"Putin, so far, has no plans like that," he added, saying that there was no concrete date or place for a "possible meeting" between Putin and Trump.

Trump is pushing for an end to the conflict in Ukraine, but has recently expressed anger at both Putin and Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky, with little progress made.

US airstrikes in Yemen kill 4 people

Say Houthi rebels

AFP, Sanaa

Yemen's Houthi rebels said yesterday that overnight air strikes on Hodeida province killed four people in an attack they blamed on the United States.

"The casualty toll of the American aggression targeting the Water Management building in... Hodeida governorate... rose to four martyrs and three wounded," said Houthi health ministry spokesman Anees Alasbahi, updating an earlier toll of three dead.

Houthi media had reported US strikes on areas controlled by the Iran-backed rebels, including water infrastructure in Hodeida and three strikes in Hajjah.

Strikes also hit the group's northern stronghold of Saada. The US has not confirmed it carried out these strikes.

But US President Donald Trump has vowed that attacks on Yemen's Houthis would continue until they are no longer a threat to shipping.

Early yesterday, Houthi military spokesman Yahya Saree said the group targeted US aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman for "the third time in 24 hours".

His statement came just as Washington said it was increasing the number of aircraft carriers deployed in the Middle East to two.

ANTI-GOVT PROTESTS Turkey fines Meta for refusing to suspend accounts

AFP, Washington

Facebook parent Meta on Tuesday said it was fined a "substantial amount" in Turkey for failing to comply with government orders to suspend accounts linked to widespread protests following the detention of the opposition mayor of Istanbul.

"We believe freedom of expression is a fundamental right and that our platforms should be a place where users around the world can exercise this right," a Meta spokesperson said in a statement.

"Government requests to restrict speech online alongside threats to shut down online services are severe and have a chilling effect on people's ability to express themselves," it added.

Meta declined to give the exact amount of the fine.

Elon Musk-owned X has also received orders to suspend hundreds of accounts, which the company has largely complied with as it fights the demands in courts.

According to Politico, most of the X accounts belonged to university-linked activists sharing protest information and were suspended in Turkey only.

Since March 19, Turkey has been gripped by massive anti government protests following the arrest of Istanbul's opposition mayor, Ekrem Imamoglu, the biggest political rival of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

France's Le Pen eyes 2027 vote

Says swift appeal 'good news'

AFP, Paris

French far-right leader Marine Le Pen said in an interview published yesterday that she would use all possible legal avenues to stand in 2027 elections despite a criminal conviction, hailing a promise to hear her appeal quickly as "very good news".

Le Pen told Le Parisien she would use "all avenues" of appeal to ensure she can stand, including France's Constitutional Court and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) as well as the regular Paris court of appeal.

Le Pen was on Monday given a partly suspended jail term and a fine but, above all, an immediate ban from taking part in elections for five years after being convicted for a scheme at the EU parliament where assistants were actually working for her party.

If it stands, the conviction would eliminate Le Pen from the 2027 election. According to current polling she would easily win the first round and describes herself as the "favourite" to succeed Emmanuel Macron.

The news sparked shockwaves in France but also in certain quarters around the world, with the likes of President Donald Trump, his billionaire adviser Elon Musk and the Kremlin expressing concern.

The RN is also planning to hold a major protest on Sunday to protest against the verdict, with Le Pen saying she is innocent of all the charges.

But in a huge boost to Le Pen, the Paris appeals court said on Tuesday it would examine the case within a timeframe that could potentially allow her to contest the poll if her conviction is overturned or sentence changed.



US senator smashes record with 25-hr anti-Trump speech

AFP, Washington

A Democratic US lawmaker shattered a record for the longest speech in Senate history Tuesday, staying on his feet for more than 25 hours to deliver a fiery protest against President Donald Trump's "unconstitutional" actions.

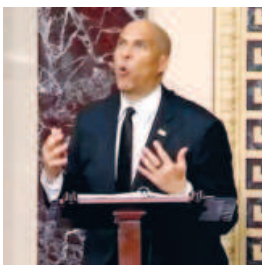
Senator Cory Booker's display of endurance -- to hold the floor he had to remain standing and could not even go to the bathroom -- recalled the famous scene in Frank Capra's 1939 film classic "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington."

The longest Senate speech on record before Tuesday was delivered by South Carolina's Strom Thurmond, who filibustered for 24 hours and 18 minutes against the Civil Rights Act of 1957.

Booker, only the fourth Black senator to be popularly elected to the body, blew past that deadline, his voice still strong but emotional as he topped out at 25 hours and five minutes.

"Strom Thurmond's record always... really irked me," he later told broadcaster MSNBC.

"That the longest speech on our great Senate floor was someone who was trying to stop people like me from being in the Senate."



A masked protester performs during a demonstration against impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol in Seoul yesterday. South Korea's Constitutional Court is set to issue its long-awaited ruling on President Yoon's impeachment tomorrow, months after his suspension for declaring martial law.

PHOTO: AFP

Nobel-winning ex-president of Costa Rica loses US visa

AFP, San José

Former Costa Rican president and Nobel Peace laureate Oscar Arias said he was stripped of his US visa, prompting him to brand the country under Donald Trump an autocracy.

The two-time president won the Nobel in 1987 for his efforts to end civil wars in Central America.

The former president said he was notified via email on Tuesday morning of the cancellation of his tourist and business visa.

The reason was not fully clear, but Arias has been an outspoken critic of Trump's migrant deportation policies and tariff wars.

He has also criticised the current Costa Rican president, Rodrigo Chaves, who has close ties with the Trump administration and whom Arias accuses of taking orders from Washington.

MYANMAR QUAKE

26-year-old worker rescued after 5 days

AFP, Mandalay

Rescuers yesterday pulled a man alive from the rubble five days after Myanmar's devastating earthquake, as calls grew for the junta to allow more aid in and halt attacks on rebels.

Hopes of finding more survivors are fading, but there was a moment of joy as a man was pulled alive from the ruins of a hotel in the capital Naypyidaw.

The 26-year-old hotel worker was extracted by a joint Myanmar-Turkish team shortly after midnight, the fire service and junta said.

Dazed and dusty but conscious, the man was pulled through a hole in the rubble and put on a stretcher, video posted on Facebook by Fire Services Department showed.

The World Health Organization (WHO) reported severe damage in



the city of Sagaing, citing local rescuers saying one in three houses there have collapsed.

Healthcare facilities, damaged by the quake and with limited capacity, are "overwhelmed by a large number of patients", while supplies of food, water and medicine are running low, WHO said in an update.

Sagaing has seen some of the heaviest fighting in Myanmar's civil war, and AFP journalists have not been able to reach the area.

Relief groups say the overall quake response has been hindered by continued fighting between the junta and the complex patchwork of armed groups opposed to its rule, which began in a 2021 coup.

Mohammed Riyas, Myanmar Director of the International Red Cross, said humanitarian needs were staggering with hospitals overwhelmed, medicine in short supply and risks of water-borne diseases growing.

"It may be weeks before we understand the full extent of destruction caused by this earthquake as communication network lines are down and transport is disrupted," he told Reuters.

"People require urgent medical care, clean drinking water, tents, food and other basic necessities. Providing life-saving health services is critical."

IRAN TENSIONS

US military moves warplanes to reinforce ME

REUTERS, Washington

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth has reinforced US military capability in the Middle East with more warplanes, the Pentagon said on Tuesday, amid a more than two-week-old US bombing campaign in Yemen and mounting tensions with Iran.

The Pentagon's brief statement did not specify which aircraft were being deployed or where precisely they were sent.

However, as many as six B-2 bombers have relocated in the past week or so to a US-British military base on the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia, according to US officials, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Experts say that puts the B-2s, which have stealth technology and are equipped to carry the heaviest US bombs and nuclear weapons, in an ideal position to operate in the Middle East.

"Should Iran or its proxies threaten American personnel and interests in the region, the United States will take decisive action to defend our people," Pentagon spokesperson Sean Parnell said in a statement.

The US military's Strategic Command has declined to say how many B-2s have reached Diego Garcia and noted that it does not comment on exercises or operations involving the B-2.

There is already considerable firepower in the Middle East and the US military will soon have two aircraft carriers in the region.



People line up for food aid distributed in Sagaing yesterday, five days after a major earthquake struck central Myanmar. The 7.7 magnitude quake, one of the strongest to hit Myanmar in a century, jolted a region that is home to 28 million people, toppling buildings, flattening communities and leaving many without food, water and shelter.

PHOTO: AFP

Israel kills Hezbollah official in Beirut airstrike

Three more civilians killed; Hezbollah calls attack severe aggression, urges diplomatic solutions

REUTERS, Beirut

An Israeli airstrike killed four people including a Hezbollah official in Beirut's southern suburbs on Tuesday, a Lebanese security source said, further testing a shaky ceasefire between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah.

The Israeli military said the official - Hassan Bdeir - was a member of a Hezbollah unit and Iran's Quds Force, and he had assisted the Palestinian group Hamas in planning a "significant and imminent terror attack against Israeli civilians".

Hezbollah confirmed that Bdeir had been killed along with his son, who was also a member of the group. The Lebanese security source said Bdeir was a mid-ranking commander whose responsibilities included the Palestinian file.

The Lebanese health ministry said the strike killed four people - including a woman - and wounded seven others.

It marked Israel's second airstrike in the Hezbollah-controlled suburb of Beirut in five days, adding to strains on the US-brokered ceasefire that ended last year's devastating conflict.

The attacks on Beirut's southern suburbs have resumed at a time of broader escalation in the region, with Israel having restarted Gaza strikes after a two-month truce and the United States hitting the Iran-aligned Houthis of Yemen in

a bid to get them to stop attacking Red Sea shipping.

Hezbollah lawmaker Ibrahim Moussawi said the Israeli attack amounted to "a major and severe aggression that has escalated the situation to an entirely different level".

Hezbollah in the war, killing thousands of its fighters, destroying much of its arsenal and eliminating its top leadership, including Hassan Nasrallah.

Hezbollah has denied any role in recent rocket attacks from Lebanon towards Israel, including



Speaking in a televised statement after visiting the building that was struck, he called on the Lebanese state to "activate the highest level of diplomacy to find solutions".

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar said the eliminated Hezbollah operative posed "a real and immediate threat". "We expect Lebanon to take action to uproot terrorist organizations acting within its borders against Israel," he said.

Israel dealt severe blows to one that prompted Israel to carry out an airstrike on the southern suburbs last Friday.

Tuesday's strike in the early hours appeared to have damaged the upper three floors of a building, a Reuters reporter at the scene said, with the balconies of those floors blown out.

The glass on the floors below was intact, indicating a targeted strike. Ambulances were at the scene as families fled to other parts of Beirut.

WISCONSIN STATE

Trump faces first electoral setback after SC vote

AFP, Washington

Donald Trump's second presidency was dealt a spinning blow by voters in Wisconsin Tuesday as they elected a liberal judge to the state's Supreme Court, despite his powerful advisor Elon Musk pouring millions into the race to sway the polls.

Two months into his barnstorming return to the White House, Trump celebrated victory in a pair of House races in Florida which remained in Republican hands.

But in the first real electoral test of his polarizing presidency, his all-out effort to lodge a new Republican on the Wisconsin Supreme Court fell flat, as liberal judge Susan Crawford came out ahead of Trump-backed Brad Schimel, according to US media.

Trump appeared to ignore the results on social media, highlighting a separate Wisconsin ballot initiative requiring voters to present photo identification to cast a ballot.

"Voter ID just approved in Wisconsin election...this is a big win for Republicans, maybe the biggest win of the night," he posted on TruthSocial late Tuesday.

INDIAN PARLIAMENT

New bill proposes to revamp Muslim land management

REUTERS, New Delhi

The Indian government yesterday presented a bill in parliament that plans sweeping changes in the management of vast tracts of land set aside solely for Muslim use, potentially stoking tensions between the government and minority Muslims.

The land and properties fall under the "waqf" category, which means "to stay" in Arabic, and are endowed by a Muslim for religious, educational or charitable purposes. Such land cannot be transferred or sold.

Government and Muslim organisations estimate that over 25 waqf boards hold nearly 85,153 properties and 900,000 acres of land, putting them among the top three landowners in India.

The Waqf (Amendment) Bill, tabled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, proposes inclusion of non-Muslim members in the central Waqf Council and waqf boards and will enable the government to determine ownership of disputed waqf properties.

Opposition lawmakers and Islamic groups see the bill as a plan to secure assets owned by Muslims and to weaken their property rights under the Indian constitution.

Minister of Minority Affairs Kiren Rijiju, who tabled the bill, said it would end corruption, mismanagement and examine ownership rules largely controlled by some Muslim families and elite groups.

TAIWAN DRILLS

China practises hitting key ports, energy sites

REUTERS, Taipei

China's military yesterday said it had completed two days of exercises that included "live-fire" drills and simulated strikes on key ports and energy sites aimed at Taiwan, the democratic island it claims as its own.

The surprise manoeuvres were condemned by Taiwan, while Washington criticised it as "intimidation tactics".

They came less than a month after Taiwan President Lai Ching-te called China a "foreign hostile force".

Named "Strait Thunder-2025A", the drills were in the middle and southern parts of the Taiwan Strait as well as the East China Sea, the military said.

By yesterday evening, a People's Liberation Army spokesman Shi Yi said "the Eastern Theater Command has completed all designated tasks of the joint exercises carried out from April 1 to 2".

Earlier, he said that yesterday's exercises were meant to "test the troops' capabilities" in areas such as "blockade and control, and precision strikes on key targets".

The military also said it had held "long-range live-fire drills" and practised hitting "simulated targets of key ports and energy facilities".

AFP journalists saw fighter jets circling over the island Pingtan, the closest point on the mainland to Taiwan and where there is a military base.

China's Shandong aircraft carrier was also carrying out drills testing the ability to "blockade" Taiwan, the Eastern Theater Command said.



Venezuelan migrants and deportees gather outside their embassy, seeking help to return to Venezuela in Mexico City, Mexico, on Tuesday. Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro last week spoke to the United Nations' Secretary General Antonio Guterres and High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk to urge UN support for the release of hundreds of Venezuelan migrants deported by the United States to a notorious El Salvador prison.

PHOTO: REUTERS

UK drawing up new action plan to tackle rising TB

AFP, London

Britain yesterday urged health experts and sufferers of tuberculosis (TB) to come forward to help draw up a new five-year action plan as it deals with record rises in the disease.

In 2023, England recorded its largest annual increase (11 percent) in cases since enhanced surveillance began in 2000.

Provisional figures for 2024 indicate a further 13-percent annual rise to 5,480 cases, reflecting a similar global trend.

The government is in the preliminary stages of preparing its new National Action Plan (2026-2031), which aims to improve the prevention, detection and control of TB in England.

It called for academic, health and social care professionals, public health experts, data scientists and those with lived experience of tuberculosis to share their insights.

Dhaka-Beijing ties are looking up

Bangladesh must work to ensure higher volume of export to China

The Bangladesh-China bilateral relationship is taking a new turn following the recent visit by our chief adviser to the world's second largest economy. The visit is being hailed as successful by experts as it opens up the potential to improve and expand the trade and cultural ties between the two countries. We agree with the experts, and believe we have a great opportunity—one we must fully utilise—in order to make the Dhaka-Beijing ties more economically relevant.

During his four-day official visit from March 26 to March 29, Bangladesh Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus had a bilateral meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping, as well as meetings with the Chinese vice-president, vice-premier, water resources minister, and other dignitaries. The focus of this visit was set on fostering commitments and exploring various opportunities for trade, economic and cultural collaboration. The highlight of the visit was the Chinese government and businesses pledge to lend, invest and provide grants worth \$2.1 billion. Around 30 Chinese companies committed to investing nearly \$1 billion to establish a Chinese Industrial Economic Zone in Chattogram. Funds have been committed for the modernisation of Mongla port.

The Chinese government promised to urge Chinese firms to relocate their manufacturing plants in Bangladesh in order to diversify production destinations. Two other issues of importance to Bangladesh that were discussed were water resource management and resolution of the Rohingya crisis. On both fronts, China reassured Bangladesh of providing support. The necessity of initiating negotiations on a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) and optimising the investment agreement was acknowledged by both parties with due seriousness.

These are, indeed, signs of a bilateral relationship turning a new leaf. And if Bangladesh plays its cards right, it can be immensely beneficial for the country's economic and trade interests. Bringing in Chinese investment will surely boost our economy and help create many jobs. However, there are issues that need to be sorted out on the Bangladesh side. For one, despite zero-duty trade benefits offered by China, Bangladesh has failed to make proper utilisation of those benefits to expand its presence in the Chinese market, with shipments from Bangladesh hardly crossing the \$1-billion mark annually. Meanwhile, over the years, the volume of Chinese imports has steadily risen in Bangladesh. Bangladesh must rectify this imbalance and take full advantage of the zero-duty system to expand its product base in China.

Overall, we feel optimistic about this visit's outcomes and believe new opportunities have opened up to build and strengthen a thriving bilateral relationship between Bangladesh and China. What the Bangladesh side needs to do is be prudent, pragmatic and diligent in designing and finalising the pledges so that our own interests are protected. As the chief adviser said, the Dhaka-Beijing ties are ready for the next stage; we just have to make sure that it's done on an even footing.

Dhaka's dug-up roads need quick fixes

City authorities must enforce excavation guidelines properly

It is frustrating that many streets in Dhaka remain in a state of disrepair even months after being dug up by different utility service providers. The ubiquity of the problem is evident across the city, with our correspondents reporting unfinished trenches and piles of debris in many areas. These roads have become quite treacherous, with rickshaw wheels getting stuck and pedestrians tripping over loose soil and rubble. Many people, while talking to this daily, have complained about facing various problems. As well as risks of accidents, unrepaired roads are causing air pollution, traffic congestion, losses for businesses, and even forced relocation.

A glaring example is a kilometre-long stretch of Falpatti Road in West Senpara, where trenches dug nearly a year ago to upgrade Dhaka Wasa's supply line remain unrepaired. Not far away, a trench dug by Dhaka Electric Supply Company Ltd (Desco) along the western lane of Begum Rokeya Sarani connecting Kazipara to Mirpur-10 has been left half-finished. A similar situation, this time involving Dhaka Power Distribution Company Ltd (DPDC), is also unfolding on the road from Sipahibagh to Khilgaon Chowrasta. Documents show that in November last year, Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) approved road-cutting permits for 19 individuals and nine service-providing organisations in 44 areas. Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) also granted road excavation permissions for around 10 locations in February.

The question is, why are roads being dug without following guidelines or left without repairs? The 2019 Road Excavation Policy is quite clear in this regard: excavation should be done in only small sections at a time, with all work to be completed within 15 days, and roads promptly reinforced with sand and bricks. Additionally, debris should be cleared within 24 hours. Further provisions require that both the excavated road and its surface drains be thoroughly cleaned after completion. In reality, these guidelines are seldom enforced. Apparently, road repairs are the responsibility of city corporations. Utility service providers claim that they pay advance fees before obtaining permission to dig, and once their work is completed, corporations are supposed to handle the repairs.

Be that as it may, contractors and utility service providers cannot evade responsibility for violating multiple aspects of the excavation policy. While talking to this daily, the DNCC chief engineer said that preparations are underway to repair all dug-up roads by April 14. But given city corporations' track records, we remain sceptical. We urge the authorities to ensure no further delays so that the public can travel hassle-free. Non-compliant contractors must also be held accountable through fines and blacklisting.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

First call made from a handheld mobile phone



On this day in 1973, a Motorola engineer made the first known call from a handheld mobile phone. The 2.2-pound brick-size device, called the DynaTAC, wouldn't become commercially available for another decade, when it carried a price tag of about \$4,000.

A legal roadmap to recovering stolen assets



Mamun Rashid
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Financial Excellence Ltd.

MAMUN RASHID

With our central bank governor urging UK officials to help freeze large assets held there by erstwhile Bangladeshi political leaders, development partners agreeing to assist Bangladesh in building capacity to trace and recover siphoned or stolen assets, and global litigation funders trying to figure out what's going on in Bangladesh, one could easily conclude that Bangladesh is quite serious about reclaiming its illegally transferred assets.

The global movement of stolen public funds is not merely a financial issue. It is a legal battlefield involving jurisdictional complexities, procedural innovation, and an evolving interpretation of state responsibility. For Bangladesh, where estimates of laundered assets run into the billions, the need to go beyond surface-level investigations and into a rigorous legal strategy has never been more pressing.

Asset recovery begins not with courtroom drama but with detection. Stolen asset detection is not simply about spotting suspicious bank transactions. Rather, it requires building a credible, legally admissible chain of evidence that links illicit funds to a predicate offense such as fraud, embezzlement, or corruption. At this stage, states often rely on Suspicious Transaction Reports (STRs) flagged by financial institutions, along with cooperation from foreign jurisdictions under instruments like the Common Reporting Standard (CRS). However, Bangladesh must go further. The introduction of a robust Unexplained Wealth Order (UWO) framework, as seen in the UK under the Criminal Finances Act 2017, would allow courts to compel individuals to justify assets inconsistent with their known income. This reverses the evidentiary burden—a powerful tool when dealing with politically exposed persons who often hide behind opaque corporate structures.

Once assets are located, a state must determine whether to pursue a criminal suit, a civil suit, or both.

In many jurisdictions, including Bangladesh, criminal prosecution is the default route. But this strategy is slow and often ineffective when the accused resides abroad or when dual criminality is a challenge—where the foreign state does not recognise the offense as a crime under its own laws or when the money is easily embedded into the banking system. In such scenarios, civil recovery or non-conviction based forfeiture may offer more flexibility. These legal processes do not require a criminal conviction and are based on the “balance of



FILE VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

probabilities” standard rather than “beyond a reasonable doubt.” Several countries, including Kenya and Colombia, have successfully used civil recovery to reclaim funds without waiting for lengthy criminal trials.

When litigation begins, freezing the asset becomes the most urgent priority. Without it, the stolen funds may shift again, disappearing behind new layers of legal cover-up. Asset freezing typically occurs through mutual legal assistance (MLA) requests, which are formal legal petitions submitted from one country to another. However, MLA frameworks are only as good as the treaties supporting them. Bangladesh, despite signing the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), has yet to establish bilateral Mutual Legal

Assistance Treaties (MLATs) with many key destination countries, including Switzerland, Australia, and Canada. This procedural gap severely limits its ability to act quickly. Beyond MLATs, Bangladesh should consider model provisions from the OECD's Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters, which facilitate real-time data sharing and can trigger provisional measures such as injunctions and restraining orders.

Legal theory alone is not enough. The recovery process is political. If the requesting state does not show political will—demonstrated by consistent court action, ministerial coordination, and diplomatic engagement—destination states are unlikely to cooperate. Even worse, inconsistent messaging at home undermines the credibility of recovery efforts abroad. Bangladesh must therefore institutionalise asset recovery as a long-term policy objective rather than an episodic political reaction. The creation of an independent Asset Recovery Authority



with legal autonomy and transnational reach would serve this purpose.

International cooperation remains a double-edged sword. While organisations like the World Bank's Stolen Asset Recovery Initiative (StAR) and Interpol's Anti-Corruption Coordination Centre offer technical support, actual enforcement depends on domestic capacity. Take, for example, the concept of Deferred Prosecution Agreements (DPAs), which are legally binding settlements where a company admits wrongdoing, pays restitution, and avoids conviction. Countries like the US and France have used DPAs to recover billions in corruption-related penalties, much of which can be repatriated to the affected country. Bangladesh has yet to explore this instrument in serious

We must adopt climate-smart urea management



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MOHAMMAD KAMRUZZAMAN MILON

Bangladesh is one of the world's largest rice-producing countries, where rice is not just a staple food but also the backbone of the agricultural economy. Farmers across the country rely heavily on urea fertiliser, with approximately 2.7 million tonnes applied annually to boost productivity. However, conventional fertilisation methods, particularly surface broadcasting, have long been inefficient. A significant portion—65 to 70 percent—of the applied nitrogen is lost due to volatilisation, leaching, and runoff, which limits its effectiveness in supporting plant growth.

The economic consequences of this loss are staggering. With urea priced at \$359.33 per tonne, Bangladesh spends about Tk 10,000 crore (\$776 million) annually on fertiliser for rice cultivation. Since up to 70 percent of this fertiliser is wasted, the country incurs a financial loss of approximately Tk 6,500-7,000 crore every year. This waste not only increases production costs for farmers but also puts immense strain on government subsidies.

Moreover, nitrogen runoff from excessive urea application contributes to water pollution and eutrophication, a process that disrupts aquatic ecosystems by reducing oxygen levels in water bodies. Additionally, urea application releases nitrous oxide (N₂O), a greenhouse gas 300 times more potent than carbon dioxide, further exacerbating climate change. As Bangladesh grapples with food security challenges and environmental

degradation, it is crucial to adopt efficient, climate-smart agricultural practices to ensure long-term sustainability.

A climate-smart solution In response to these challenges, the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) has developed the BRRI Prilled Urea Applicator, a device that optimises urea use through urea deep placement (UDP). Unlike conventional surface broadcasting, UDP involves placing urea 7 to 10 centimetres below the soil surface, ensuring that more nitrogen is available for plant uptake while minimising losses.

Field trials in Gazipur, Rajbari, and Madaripur, during the 2024 T-Aman cultivation season, confirmed the applicator's effectiveness. Farmers who used the device reduced their urea use by 30 percent, leading to significant cost savings. This reduction meant that farmers who previously applied 24 kilograms of urea per bigha could now achieve the same or better results with just 16 kilograms per bigha, cutting down unnecessary expenses.

At a national level, if Bangladesh reduces urea use by 30 percent, this translates to an annual savings of Tk 3,000 crore, a financial relief that benefits both individual farmers and the government. These trials also revealed a six to 10 percent increase in rice yields, showing that better nitrogen management leads to higher productivity. Farmers not only spend less on fertiliser but also gain higher returns from their crops,

strengthening their financial security. Economic and environmental benefits

The BRRI Prilled Urea Applicator significantly lowers production costs by reducing fertiliser use without sacrificing yield. This makes rice farming more profitable and sustainable, particularly for smallholder farmers who struggle with high production costs.

Moreover, the BRRI Prilled Urea Applicator minimises nitrogen losses, ensuring that less urea escapes into the atmosphere and surrounding ecosystems including rivers and lakes. The field trials showed a 12 to 13 percent reduction in methane emissions and a 21 to 25 percent decrease in nitrous oxide emissions, making rice farming more environmentally responsible.

Adopting the BRRI Prilled Urea Applicator on a large scale aligns perfectly with Bangladesh's commitment to reducing its agricultural carbon footprint under the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) 2023-2050. It will also help Bangladesh transition to a more climate-resilient agricultural system by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving fertiliser efficiency.

Overcoming challenges to wider adoption

Despite its clear benefits, scaling up the adoption of the BRRI Prilled Urea Applicator has been a challenge. Many farmers are unfamiliar with UDP and may hesitate to switch from their traditional fertilisation methods. Without proper understanding, they might view the transition as unnecessary or difficult.

To address this, agricultural extension services must play a more active role in educating farmers. Training programmes, field demonstrations, and farmer cooperatives can help build confidence in using the BRRI Prilled Urea Applicator. The Department of

negotiations with foreign enforcement bodies.

Sanctions are often misunderstood as foreign policy tools, but in asset recovery, they can play a preventative role. Targeted sanctions, when imposed on individuals or enablers such as lawyers, bankers, and company formation agents, disrupt the infrastructure that supports laundering. The European Union's Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime and the US Magnitsky Act both offer pathways to impose such measures, but they require credible dossiers and sustained lobbying. If Bangladesh seeks this route, it must be prepared to present strong prima facie evidence to foreign regulators and build partnerships with civil society watchdogs abroad.

Critically, the source of the laundered funds should inform recovery tactics. Funds embezzled from bank loans often leave a paper trail through domestic institutions and may be easier to pursue via banking regulators or bankruptcy courts. In contrast, funds skimmed from infrastructure project payouts—especially via inflated contracts, offshore intermediaries, or mispriced goods—require forensic contract audits and international procurement expertise. Each source demands a tailored legal approach. A one-size-fits-all model will not work.

Finally, asset recovery does not end with repatriation. Misuse of recovered funds remains a major problem worldwide. In response, international best practices now demand post-recovery transparency frameworks. Nigeria's agreement with the World Bank to monitor repatriated Abacha funds is one such model. Bangladesh would do well to adopt similar commitments, not only to ensure proper utilisation but also to build public confidence in the legal process.

While the articles circulating in the national press have done well to raise public awareness, the legal architecture behind asset recovery demands far deeper engagement. Bangladesh now stands at a crossroads. If it is to recover what was stolen and prevent future loss, it must elevate asset recovery from political rhetoric to institutional strategy—supported by law, driven by evidence, and protected by international collaboration. The legal tools exist. The question is whether the state is ready to use them.

Are we ready to heed Mother Nature’s warning in time?



MIND THE GAP

Barrister Noshin Nawal
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NOSHIN NAWAL

Well, well, well—Mother Nature is shaking things up again. Literally. Myanmar had an earthquake, and suddenly, everyone in Dhaka is pretending they always cared about tectonic plates and fault lines. WhatsApp aunties are forwarding voice notes about “cosmic alignment,” and your office uncle is now a self-declared seismologist because he once watched a National Geographic documentary.

As an environmental specialist, I’ve spent years trying to get people to care about things like wetlands, building codes, and the inconvenient truth that concrete doesn’t grow on trees (but, ironically, trees do get murdered to make way for it). I’ve made presentations with graphs, citations, and colour-coded disaster maps. I’ve begged policymakers to look beyond the next election cycle. But it literally needed an earthquake to devastate Myanmar and Thailand for everyone to suddenly lose their collective minds and go, “Wait, are we safe?”

Let me answer that for you. No. We are not. The recent earthquake in our neighbourhood could be only a knock on the door from Mother Nature—before she inevitably kicks the door in. You see, Mother Nature has been remarkably patient. She gave us gentle reminders in the form of rising sea levels, flash floods, droughts, dengue explosions, and air pollution so thick it

could be sold as soup. But did we listen? No. We paved wetlands, built 20-storey towers on marshland, and called it “Eco City.” We responded to climate reports with the same energy we give to traffic rules—mild concern followed by complete disregard.

So now, she’s moving on to phase two of her rampage: earthquakes. And when—not if—it happens in Dhaka, we’ll be collapsing faster than our broadband on a rainy day. Because let’s be honest, Dhaka is one firm tectonic nudge away from becoming a very dusty pancake.

Most of our buildings were not built with earthquakes in mind. The Bangladesh National Building Code exists in theory—somewhere between fairy tales and science fiction. If an earthquake similar to the recent one happened in Dhaka, it wouldn’t just shake the ground. It would collapse our entire coping mechanism. We’re not prepared. We know we’re not prepared. Our buildings are held up by bribes, prayers, and leftover rickshaw parts. Half of Dhaka’s high-rises were built during Mercury retrograde by someone’s *chacha*, who once “helped with cement mixing” and now claims to be a structural engineer.

Earthquake-resistant design is a punchline here, not a practice.

Our city planners have treated Dhaka like a game of Tetris, stacking buildings wherever



Rescue workers walk past construction site debris after a building collapsed in Bangkok on March 28, 2025, following a 7.7-magnitude quake northwest of the central Myanmar city of Sagaing.

PHOTO: AFP

they can squeeze them in, with zero regard for soil stability, open spaces, or the basic concept of ventilation. Emergency exits are blocked by flowerpots or that one guy who refuses to move his chair. Stairwells double as storage units. Lifts operate on the power of sheer optimism. If a real quake hits, most people won’t be able to leave the building, let alone survive it.

There are countries that hold nationwide earthquake drills, where children are taught how to duck, cover, and evacuate calmly. Bangladesh? Our version of disaster preparedness does not acknowledge the very

real geological threats beneath our feet.

The environmental consequences of our negligence are piling up. We’ve drained wetlands that could absorb seismic shockwaves. We’ve built on riverbeds, hill slopes, and anywhere else we thought we could squeeze in a duplex. We’ve chopped down every tree that ever stood in the way of a shopping mall. Dhaka’s natural buffers are gone, replaced with concrete jungles that were not only poorly designed but proudly advertised with names like “Green View,” even when the only green thing within five kilometres is a dying pothos on someone’s

balcony.

What’s worse is that we could do something about it. We have brilliant engineers, passionate urban planners, and environmentalists who’ve been screaming into the void for decades. We have access to global research, regional data, and countless examples of cities that actually learned from natural disasters. But what do we do instead? Host a few workshops. Post a few press releases. Cut a cake for Earth Day and then go back to approving another glass-box monstrosity on reclaimed land.

The Myanmar-Thailand quake was a warning. But if we continue to treat environmental negligence as a lifestyle choice, Mother Nature won’t send another tremor—she’ll send a full-blown slap. And we won’t be posting cheeky “Did you feel that?” stories on Instagram. We’ll be standing in the rubble, wondering why we never took the warnings seriously.

We need to retrofit our infrastructure, enforce our building codes, protect our wetlands, and actually read the reports that land on the desks of government officials. We need to prepare our emergency services and teach the public what to do when the earth starts to shake—because, spoiler alert: standing in the doorway holding your laptop isn’t going to save you.

So, here’s a humble suggestion: let’s panic now. Let’s panic while we still have time. Because the only thing worse than an earthquake is realising it could’ve been survivable if we’d done something when we were merely warned. Your move, Dhaka. Earthquake drills or earthquake thrills—pick one.

And to Mother Nature—if you’re reading this—please give us a little more time. We’re slow learners. But some of us are trying.

Nation branding can bring out Bangladesh’s global potential



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T.I.M. NURUL KABIR

In today’s globalised world, country brands tell a powerful story, in a minimal gesture, to promote a unique positive image of a country to achieve certain beneficial goals. It is a comprehensive undertaking to represent an appropriate national identity that conveys distinct economic, cultural and social features of a country to the broader global community.

Nation branding is a multi-stakeholder undertaking across economic, social, cultural, academic, legal and political spheres. It is not an exercise of just coining a catchy phrase and a graphic image to tell a compelling story. Rather, country branding is an undertaking of elaborately scrutinising factual grounds in multiple arenas to express precisely what a country’s national identity stands for, and what the attitudes and aspirations of its people are. Based on those, country branding requires appropriate regulatory framework and political steps that would convey those attributes to the broader global community.

In an interconnected and disruptive global economic landscape, Bangladesh needs to undertake a country branding master plan focused on national identity to promote collective self-esteem and a positive image to the outside world. A well-scrutinised country brand should carry the message of a prospective economy, resilient people ready to assimilate new ideas and skills, abundant workforce and a vast pool of talented youths. A strong country brand can give a positive signal to stimulate investor confidence. A successful country brand may become an express avenue of nation building efforts.

The economy of Bangladesh at its birth

as an independent nation in 1971 was in a shattered state. An estimated 15 lakh homes had been destroyed during the Liberation War. Hundreds of thousands of people had been displaced and many farm families were reportedly left without tools or animals to work their lands. Transportation and communication systems were miserably disrupted, with roads damaged and bridges destroyed.

The economy began to gain some ground as some readymade garments (RMG) factories were able to export apparels to certain developed countries from the mid-80s. The economic scenario changed in the mid-90s, boosted by the success of the export-oriented RMG industry. Inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI) increased, mainly in RMG alongside the power and energy sector.

With increased availability of employment opportunities, domestic consumption increased, boosting growth of various industries targeting the domestic consumer market. Remittances from migrant workers helped to reduce household poverty and became a major source of foreign exchange earnings.

Bangladesh began to show outstanding economic performance in the 2000s, with a growing domestic market and favourable access to world markets. FDI further surged in telecommunication, banking and the RMG and textile sectors.

The resilient people of Bangladesh have the determination to stand up for national aspirations and keep on struggling for material betterment. Despite political disruption from time to time, and major

setbacks from natural disasters such as floods and cyclones, Bangladesh has made significant strides in economic development over the years. Significant achievements have been made in several of the human development indices. Over the decades, the country has emerged as one of the largest apparel producing countries in the world, second only to China. Plus, it has promising prospects in several sectors, including IT,

and unique, which strongly draws attention to the premium but affordable hospitality it offers.

“Incredible India” is an international tourism campaign launched by the country’s government to promote tourism. By drawing attention to the unique history and culture, such as yoga and spirituality, the “Incredible India” campaign has successfully positioned India as the fastest-growing market in the

sustainability through targeted investments and its brand campaign.

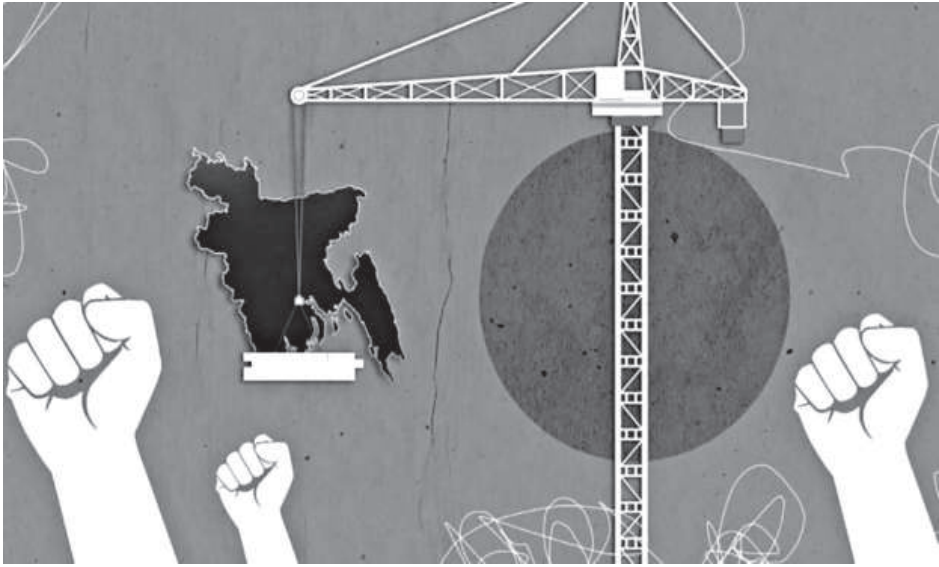
Investors usually assess an investment destination in terms of consistency in policy framework, political stability, productivity and sustainability. Bangladesh has exhibited economic resilience and dynamism amid global crises such as Covid pandemic and the war in Ukraine. On the cultural stage, the country has a strong heritage of resistance and resilience. The International Mother Language Day, celebrated worldwide, is a testimony of resistance and uprightness to stand up for people’s rights. People in Bangladesh have stood up time and again to protest against oppression and injustice.

Although Bangladesh has established proficiency in high quality industrial production other than apparel, such as pharmaceuticals, footwear etc, it is still primarily perceived as a destination for cheap labour. This narrow perception has been a limiting factor for Bangladesh in terms of availing high-end production opportunities.

Rising geopolitical tension, protectionism and policy emphasis on economic resilience are realigning global supply chains. At the same time social and environmental concerns are redefining consumer preference. A growing majority of young consumers are seriously concerned with social and environmental causes. They progressively back their beliefs with their consumption habits, and only favour brands that are aligned with their values.

Nation branding is a powerful strategy for harnessing untapped potentials in an interconnected disruptive economic landscape. A well-focused nation branding strategy has to take into consideration the size of the country, geographic location, economic resources, domestic history and culture as well as historic global role.

A strong country brand also has to reflect the identity of its people, history, heritage, culture, values, actions and behaviours that influence the perception of international stakeholders, and thus the way they engage with the country.



FILE VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

semiconductor, light-engineering and others.

A good country branding strategy results in an unshakeable association with a certain identity, features and prospects. A country brand draws attention of its own citizens, foreign stakeholders and the global customers to some stimulating feature or some distinctive quality.

“Malaysia Truly Asia” is a powerful destination brand, designed primarily to attract more tourist interest. A multicultural country, Malaysia is home to people from major civilisations of Asia. “Malaysia Truly Asia” from that context is factual, convincing

Asia-Pacific region, in terms of international tourist spending.

However, it is to be noted that the scope of nation branding goes beyond the tourist campaign. The example of Singapore demonstrates the success of a long term and clear plan in nation branding. “Passion Made Possible” is the destination brand of Singapore, launched in 2017. The brand draws attention to a shift from an investment-driven economy to an economy led by innovation. Singapore has established itself as a leading regional hub in high-growth areas such as financial services, technology and

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**

1 Long skirt

5 Mensa entrance requirement

11 Pastoral poem

12 Swain

13 Cry out

14 Feeling friendless

15 Moody music

16 “West Side Story” gang

17 Full moon, for one

19 Texas’s Houston

22 Detest

24 Comet’s place
- 26 Steel ingredient

27 Way to go

28 Skating sites

30 Eggs on

31 Look upon

32 Keep busy

34 Lively quality

35 Question of method

38 Fled

41 Valentine word

42 Peter of “Troy”

43 Till section

44 More heartfelt

45 Campout sight

- DOWN**

1 Cats’ quarries

2 Cain’s father

3 Marimba’s kin

4 Suffering

5 Archipelago makeup

6 Brokers’ numbers

7 Sardine holders

8 Summer in Lyons

9 Costa del —

10 Take a stab at

16 Pickle purchase

18 Gaggle sound

19 Jazz instrument

20 Litmus reddener
- 21 Citi Field team

22 Melodies

23 Goopy cheese

25 Andean nation

29 Suppress

30 Coat rack part

33 Surmise

34 Tear along

36 Roasting spot

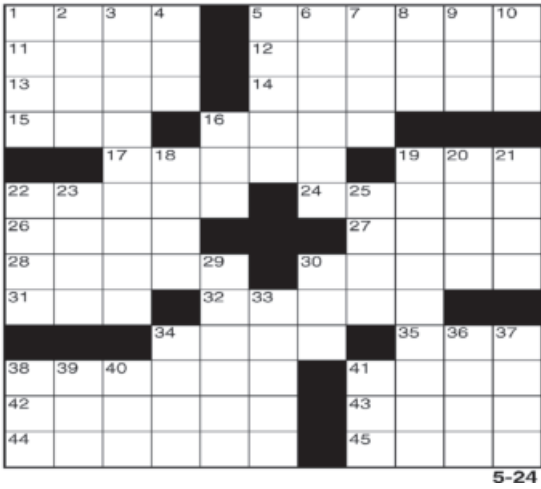
37 Sunset site

38 Join the crew

39 One — time

40 Neither follower

41 Auction buy



SUNDAY’S ANSWERS

E	W	E	S			O	C	T	A	L
D	A	L	E	S		B	U	R	R	O
G	R	A	C	E	P	E	R	I	O	D
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S	E	E	P	S			C	O	D	Y



‘Borbaad’ leads, ‘Daagi’ leaves a mark

SHARMIN JOYA

As the film industry gears up for festival seasons, cinema hall owners eagerly anticipate the most hyped time of the year. This Eid-ul-Fitr, six films hit the silver screen: **Borbaad**, **Daagi**, **Jongli**, **Chokkor 302**, **Jinn 3**, and **Antaratma**.

To gauge their performances, The Daily Star reached out to cinema halls nationwide as the four-day screening period continues.

At Star Cineplex, both **Borbaad**, starring Shakib Khan, and **Daagi**, featuring Afran Nisho, received equal screen allocations. Star Cineplex's Senior Manager of Media & Marketing, Mesbah Uddin Ahmed, stated, "It's too early to determine a clear winner as audiences are still on vacation. However, both films have received positive responses. Once the holidays end, we can be sure about it. Also, the word of mouth will significantly impact their success, much like **Toofan** and **Priyotoma**. We're already seeing a buzz around **Borbaad**. The songs and dialogues play a great role as well."

At Jamuna Blockbuster, **Borbaad** leads

with six shows, while **Daagi** follows with four. Md Mahbubur Rahman, Assistant Manager of Marketing, confirmed, "All screenings of **Borbaad** and **Daagi** are running housefull. Additionally, **Jongli**, starring Siam Ahmed, has been well received in daytime slots, though morning shows remain underwhelming."

Meanwhile, **Chokkor 302**, featuring Mosharraf Karim, has only two screenings. **Jinn 3**, initially delayed due to content availability issues, is set to release on Friday, March 4. However, **Antaratma** has struggled due to inadequate promotional efforts, according to Mahbubur.



Screening of "Borbaad" at Grand Sylhet Cineplex.



Afran Nisho graces the screening of "Daagi".



Siam Ahmed at the screening of "Jongli".

Mirza Abdul Khaleque, Managing Director of Lion Cinemas, reported that **Borbaad** currently runs seven shows, with plans to increase by two, while **Daagi** has three, set to rise to four.

"These two films have clearly stood out, while others are performing at an average level. **Jinn 3** attracts its loyal franchise audience, however, **Chokkor 302** has fared poorly, with only two ticket sales for one of its screenings."

Single-screen theatres reflect a similar trend. Modhumita Hall, a long-standing theatre in Dhaka, is exclusively showing **Borbaad** with four housefull screenings daily. Managing Director Iftekhar Uddin Naushad expressed satisfaction, stating, "Shakib Khan's films have a distinct appeal, and **Borbaad** has outshone all other Eid releases. Depending on the demand, we will introduce **Daagi** and other films."

Beyond the capital, Cinemascope in Narayanganj, a 35-seat single-screen hall, is running four housefull shows of **Borbaad** daily. Executive Director Robi affirmed, "The response is excellent. We will continue screening **Borbaad** as long as demand remains before considering other films."

Grand Sylhet Cineplex, located in a five-star hotel in Sylhet, has been screening **Borbaad** three times daily since Eid. Robin Saha from the cineplex said, "Daytime shows are doing well. Given the increasing demand, we plan to add a late-night screening and may also introduce **Daagi** and **Jongli** based on audience preferences."

As the Eid 2025 film season unfolds, **Borbaad** remains the clear frontrunner, while **Daagi** emerges as a strong contender. **Jongli** and **Jinn 3** are performing moderately, whereas **Chokkor 302** and **Antaratma** struggle to compete. The coming weeks will determine how these films sustain their momentum in the ever-competitive box office race.

Val Kilmer, star of 'Batman' and 'Top Gun', dies



Veteran Hollywood actor Val Kilmer has passed away at 65 after a prolonged battle with throat cancer. The New York Times confirmed his death on Wednesday, April 1.

Kilmer gained fame as Iceman in **Top Gun** (1986) and later played Batman in **Batman Forever** (1995). His acclaimed roles included Jim Morrison in **The Doors**, Doc Holliday in **Tombstone**, and key performances in **Heat** and **The Prince of Egypt**.

His final on-screen appearance was in **Top Gun: Maverick** (2022), which incorporated his illness into the storyline. The 2021 documentary **Val**, narrated by his son, chronicled his life and career. Over the course of his career, Kilmer's films earned more than \$3.5 billion globally.



Sam Mendes to release four Beatles biopics in 2028

Acclaimed Hollywood director Sam Mendes is set to release four separate Beatles biopics in April 2028, each focusing on a different band member.

Titled **The Beatles – A Four-Film Cinematic Event**, the films will star Paul Mescal as Paul McCartney, Joseph Quinn as George Harrison, Barry Keoghan as Ringo Starr, and Harris Dickinson as John Lennon.

Mendes, calling it the "first binge-able theatrical experience," aims to present the band's story through four unique perspectives. This marks the first narrative film granted full rights to the Beatles' music catalog.

Sony Pictures Chairman Tom Rothman compared the project's scale to **Avatar**, highlighting its cinematic ambition. The year-long production is expected to be one of the industry's most significant undertakings.

NEWS

Certain groups misrepresenting BNP's stance on

FROM PAGE 12
"The current demand for reforms was originally put forward by the BNP," he claimed. "The proposals submitted by the reform commissions are not different from the BNP's 31-point outline."

"We have clearly stated our stance on constitutional reforms. There are certain issues that have already been settled, and we do not wish to interfere with them."

The BNP leader also dismissed Indian media reports about minority persecution in Bangladesh, calling them outright falsehoods.

"You all know well that initially, some injustices against minority communities were reported in Thakurgaon. But what has happened in the last few months? Yet, if you look at the Indian media's narrative, you'll see that they portray severe injustices against the minorities in Bangladesh," he said.

On law and order, Fakhrul said that the situation across the country remains largely the same.

"A new government came to power after a mass uprising. Under the previous government, the police

administration was completely subservient to the Awami League. They did whatever the ruling party instructed, and as a result, the confidence of the police declined. In many places, they are unable to take necessary actions accordingly," he said.

Regarding actions against party members accused of various crimes, Fakhrul asserted that the BNP does not condone such activities.

"Some party members have engaged in wrongdoing, and we have already taken action against them. In some cases, we have dissolved committees and expelled the leaders involved in such incidents," he said.

Fakhrul dismissed concerns about the possibility of a conflict between political parties regarding trials of people from the previous regime, reforms, and the election.

"There is no fear of conflict due to differing opinions. The beauty of democracy is the diversity of thought. Where will democracy be if all political parties share the same views? Different parties will have different opinions, and the people will decide which is the best for

them," he said.

Fakhrul pointed out the global rise of right-wing movements and their impact on democracy.

"Even the UN secretary-general, during his visit to Bangladesh, stated that democracy is facing a crisis. Right-wing and authoritarian forces are on the rise worldwide, and democracy is in decline. But despite these challenges, democracy remains the best system for governance and good administration," he added.

Addressing concerns over the return of authoritarian rule, Fakhrul said, "If that happens, it will create a situation similar to what the Awami League experienced. When a party becomes autocratic, the people ultimately overthrow it. So, it is not democracy that is at fault."

He reiterated BNP's stance on the caretaker government system, saying that it is the best mechanism to conduct elections considering Bangladesh's reality and political culture. "Without this system, authoritarianism and fascism – similar to that under the Awami League – will prevail."

A different kind of Eid for party leaders

FROM PAGE 12
A BNP policymaker revealed that nationwide iftar gatherings were held during Ramadan to strengthen intra-party ties, anticipating greater political challenges ahead.

Many BNP leaders celebrated Eid in their constituencies, conducted mass outreach, and sent Eid gifts to injured protesters of the uprising, families of those killed, and victims of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman also distributed gifts through the Ziaur Rahman Foundation.

In Khulna, BNP's Central Student Affairs Secretary and potential Khulna-3 candidate, Rakibul Islam Bakul, distributed Eid gifts to the underprivileged, visited multiple wards, exchanged greetings, and urged supporters to stay active for the

elections.

Jamaat leaders, emerging from nearly 15 years of political exile, were particularly active during the Ramadan and Eid holidays. They conducted regular public interaction events.

Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman said that the nation was finally free from oppression.

Jamaat seems to be campaigning for polls. It organised iftar gatherings, distributing Eid gifts to poor and underprivileged, and meeting people.

Many Jamaat leaders celebrated Eid in their constituencies, while others performed Umrh in Saudi Arabia.

To boost visibility, its potential candidates for the next national polls engaged in public outreach by putting up posters, banners, and festoons. In constituencies where the leaders were less known, they made

extra efforts to connect with the electorate.

Even in constituencies of prominent party leaders, campaign materials such as banners and posters were widely displayed.

Nearly all key leaders of the NCP celebrated Eid in their ancestral home, utilising the holidays to connect with the people.

NCP Chief Organiser (North) Sarjis Alam's grand motorcade entry into Panchagarh on March 24 sparked widespread criticism.

Member Secretary Akhter Hossen led a procession of 200 rickshaw vans in Rangpur on March 27.

The leaders of the newly-formed party also visited families of injured and martyred protesters of the July uprising, distributed gifts, and strengthened grassroots connections in apparent preparation for the upcoming elections.

‘Made with honest intention’

FROM PAGE 12
"We can bring it to our purpose for setting up factories and so on. From Bangladesh, you can go anywhere you want. The ocean is in our backyard. So, this is the opportunity that you want to take," he said.

A number of Indian leaders, however, reacted sharply to Yunus's comments.

In a statement posted on X on Tuesday, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the remarks by Yunus were "offensive" and highlighted the ongoing vulnerability associated with India's strategic "Chicken's Neck" corridor.

He focused on developing more robust railway and road networks both underneath and around the Chicken's Neck corridor, warning that Yunus's remarks reflected broader geopolitical ambitions that India could not ignore.

Pradyot Manikya, chief of the Tipra Motha Party and titular King from Tripura, urged India to consider securing its access to the sea by pursuing a more forceful approach, controversially suggesting that India contemplate breaking up Bangladesh in order to access the sea directly.

He suggested that the indigenous communities in Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh, including the Tripuri, Garo, Khasi and Chakma people, should be supported in the quest for a strategic sea route for India, reports India TV.

Some Indian scholars said the remarks by Yunus were provocative.

Asked about Bangladesh's position on Indian leaders' reactions, Rahman said Yunus had not made this comment for the first time; he made similar comments in 2012.

He also referred to the then-Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, who in 2023 had spoken of a vision of creating an industrial value chain connecting Bangladesh and Northeast India, which was known as BIG-B or the Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt.

"I had earlier said connectivity can unleash the potentials of the region, especially for those who find it difficult to have access to the sea. We will not impose connectivity on anyone. We are not in that position. If anybody accepts, well. What can we do if it is not accepted? We have nothing to do. We can only say that we are willing to provide connectivity for the equitable benefit of all."

Three killed in mob beatings

FROM PAGE 12
Pallabi Police Station Officer-in-Charge Nazrul Islam said the army handed Riyad over to police around 2:30am after he was beaten on suspicion of being a mugger. "I told them [army members] to file a case, but they did not."

Asked who assaulted Riyad, he said, "The public."

An autopsy conducted at the Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital revealed numerous marks from his waist to his legs, morgue sources said.

Meanwhile, Pallabi police have filed a case against unidentified individuals.

In Narsingdi, two brothers were killed by a mob beating in the Ghorashal municipal area on Monday night.

The victims were Rakib, 25, and Sakib, 20, from Palash upazila, reports our local correspondent.

According to police and locals, one Himel, 23, was beaten earlier in the day for allegedly attempting to steal an autorickshaw battery in the Kuruitoli area of Bhagdi. He was later released.

In the afternoon, the brothers confronted the autorickshaw drivers for beating Himel, leading to an altercation.

When they returned to the spot in the evening, locals apprehended and beat them up. Their parents were also assaulted when they tried to intervene.

The victims were taken to Narsingdi Sadar Hospital, where doctors declared Sakib dead. Rakib was referred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for better treatment but died on the way.

The brothers' aunt, Hajera Begum, said, "Some criminals had been trying to extort money from us for a long time. Since we refused to pay, they brutally killed Rakib and Sakib on Eid day. We demand justice."

Sudip Kumar Saha, a physician at the Narsingdi Sadar Hospital's emergency department, said, "The victims sustained severe injuries to their heads and bodies."

Their mother, Rabeya Begum, filed a case with Palash Police Station against 25 individuals yesterday. So far, police have arrested three people in this connection.

smoking in public, reports our local correspondent.

The victim, Roman Howlader, 42, was from the Goidya area of Bhedarganj Municipality. He was assaulted in front of the office of the assistant superintendent of police (Bhedarganj Circle).

He was later taken to Bhedarganj Upazila Health Complex, where doctors declared him dead.

Police have arrested suspects Monir Hossain Mollah, 25, and his brother Kabir Hossain Mollah, 23, residents of Sakhipur upazila.

Bhedarganj Police Station OC Parvez Hasan Selim said Roman was attacked following an altercation.

According to locals, after Roman confronted the two men about smoking in front of the police office, a heated argument ensued, leading to the attack.

Roman's uncle, Shamsul Alam, who was nearby at the time, said, "I heard shouting and rushed over to find Roman lying in a shop. Later, I learnt that he had been beaten. We demand justice and the highest punishment for the culprits."

3 murals

FROM PAGE 2
uprising activists and because the murals were deemed "incompatible with the July uprising".

When news of the murals being covered was reported, Transparency International Bangladesh and the Conscious Citizens Committee protested the act. Additionally, the Students Against Discrimination (SAD) and National Citizen Party had scheduled press conferences on March 29 to also protest the covering of the murals.

The NCP's press conference was later postponed.

At SAD's press conference, held at the Liberation War Memorial, Hamidur Rahman, member secretary of the platform's Lalmonirhat unit, stated, "We didn't demand the covering of any mural on Independence Day." However, he then called for the removal of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's murals, arguing, "The murals at the memorial were created with discrimination. There should be no mural of a dictator in this memorial."

The following day, the workers were seen demolishing three murals of Sheikh Mujib. No representatives from the Zila Parishad or SAD were present at the scene.

Tigresses hope to enhance brand of cricket

The final two spots in the upcoming ICC Women's Cricket World Cup in India are up for grabs as six teams – Bangladesh, Pakistan, Thailand, Ireland, Scotland, and West Indies – will fight it out in the Qualifiers to join Australia, England, New Zealand, South Africa, Sri Lanka and the hosts in the main event later this year.

The two venues selected for the Qualifier are the iconic Gaddafi Stadium Lahore (GSL) and Lahore City Cricket Association (LCCA). The latter will host international women's cricket for the first time.

Each team will face each other once in a round-robin format. At the end of the 15 matches, the top two teams will progress to the Women's Cricket World Cup.

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's cricket team are set to depart for Pakistan on Thursday to feature in the six-team ICC ODI World Cup Qualifiers, scheduled to begin on April 9. Skipper Nigar Sultana Joty remains hopeful that the team can bounce back from recent disappointments in ICC events and strengthen their resolve moving forward with a change in the brand of cricket they play.

The Tigresses secured a place in the last edition of the World Cup after finishing among the top three in the qualifiers. This time, however, only two teams will progress, with formidable opponents like the West Indies and hosts Pakistan in contention.

Following a steady rise in performances against India and Pakistan in 2023, Bangladesh have struggled to maintain consistency. Their historic Asia Cup triumph in 2018 raised expectations, but subsequent ICC events have exposed key shortcomings. When asked whether the team had improved as expected since that victory, Joty was blunt in her response.

"No," she said, offering no sugarcoating. "When we won the Asia Cup, there was a revolution, and we were doing well. But then, due to COVID, we had fewer matches over two years, which was a huge setback. We had momentum after 2018, with increasing media attention and growing inspiration among players. If we had played more tournaments and maintained continuity, our cricket would have progressed further," she explained, stressing the need for more game time to aid development.

In recent years, the Tigresses' approach has become less effective as teams have found ways to increase their scoring rates. Joty acknowledged the need for a shift in playing style to match the pace of modern



Bangladesh players pose for a photograph at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium yesterday ahead of today's departure for Pakistan where they will be involved in a six-team qualifying campaign for the remaining two spots in the 2026 ICC Women's World Cup.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

cricket. "Having qualified after playing India and Pakistan under the FTP last time, we stagnated again. It's on us to get out of this situation. At home, we play a certain way, but when we face better surfaces abroad, we struggle. To move forward, individuals need to step out of their comfort zones, adapt to different styles, and play different brands of cricket. In modern cricket, expecting to score 200 and defend it is really difficult on good wickets," she said. Joty also highlighted the influence of new batting coach David Hemp, who has been working to bring clarity to players' roles ahead of major tournaments. Improving batting intent was a focal point in the recently concluded Women's Dhaka Premier League (WDPL), serving as crucial preparation before the World Cup Qualifiers camp that followed the WDPL and continued even during Eid-ul-Fitr. "The new coaching staff emphasises having a clear mindset before a tournament. That's why the squad was finalised early, allowing players to focus on their roles rather than worrying about selection or performing in practice matches," she explained. Recognising the significance of the qualifiers, Joty reiterated the team's commitment, emphasising that ICC events present valuable opportunities, including more frequent international fixtures. "We skipped Eid celebrations with our families to train because we understand how important this tournament is. When a team competes in an ICC event, it garners attention differently. Playing in the ODI World Cup brings additional opportunities from the ICC, and we know how crucial this is for our careers. The last time we played in the ODI World Cup, we got to play more regularly," she added.

'I will not have time, I have to get it right, fast'

REUTERS, Nottingham

Ruben Amorim insisted he will not be given much time to turn things around as Manchester United manager, as his team slumped to another defeat at Nottingham Forest on Tuesday.

Former United forward Anthony Elanga's fine early goal earned Forest a comfortable win at the City Ground, with the visitors slipping to their 13th defeat of the season in the Premier League.

Tuesday's loss takes United to within one of their record of 14 Premier League defeats in the 2023-24 season, leaving them languishing down in 13th in the table as Amorim struggles to instigate any real change.

"In Manchester United, you don't have the time," Amorim said. "I will not have the time. We have to get it right fast."

"In here, the pressure is too big sometimes. We start the game suffering a goal and put Nottingham in the place they want to be – defending with lots of men – then they have really fast players to make transitions."

"Even with that, we controlled the game quite well, especially in the second half. We push forward but again, in the final third, we were not good enough."

Alejandro Garnacho was especially wasteful in attack for United, finishing the match having had six of United's 24 shots at goal, without really testing Forest goalkeeper Matz Sels.

Amorim has defended the young Argentine in the past, and again insisted Garnacho's overall efforts are of the standard required.

"He is making everything," Amorim added. "He's trying. Sometimes you have one day that you are doing the right things, but in the final third, you are not that good, that can happen."

"The most important thing for me is that when he needs to run back, he is running back. Of course we want a player that has one against one. Sometimes he is trying too much."

"I think he wants to help the team to do his best, sometimes he doesn't make the best choice, but you cannot point to any player today."



New Zealand batter Mitchell Hay bludgeons one through the mid-off region during the second ODI against Pakistan at Seddon Park in Hamilton yesterday. The middle-order batter's unbeaten 99 off 78 deliveries helped the Kiwis to an 84-run victory and an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series. It was only the second time in ODI cricket that a New Zealand batter was stranded unbeaten on 99.

PHOTO: AFP

'Qualifying tournaments are always challenging'

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Bangladesh women's cricket team's batting coach David Hemp was cautiously optimistic about his side's chances in the forthcoming ICC Women's World Cup Qualifiers despite the team's lengthy preparation given the "challenging" nature of the competition.

The Tigresses are set to depart for Lahore, Pakistan today to feature in the six-team tournament comprising hosts Pakistan, West Indies, Ireland, Scotland and Thailand, scheduled on April 9-19.

The women's team will face Thailand in their tournament opener on April 10 before they face the other four teams in the competition. The top two sides in the round-robin tournament will join six other teams in the main event in India later this year.

Ahead of the tournament, the women's team had a training camp in Mirpur which began on March 22 and ran till yesterday, with the girls sacrificing celebrating Eid with their families to prepare for the tournament.

"The last 10 days have been very good. Some of the meetings we had and the feedback the players have been given, they have been very honest. They have



been told where they are at the moment and what they need to do to be successful in Pakistan," Hemp told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Overall, the coaching staff is pleased with the preparation. We want to qualify for the World Cup and that's why it's a very important tournament. Any team would want to play in a major competition and Bangladesh is also no different."

"There are six very good teams going to it and only two will qualify. So, it's not going to be an easy tournament. Qualifying tournaments like these are

always challenging," he added.

Hemp is working with the women's team only for the qualifiers and afterwards will join High Performance Unit as their head coach.

Presumably Hemp's experience as the head coach of the Pakistan women's team from 2020 to 2022 prompted the board to bring him in ahead of the qualifiers.

However, the 54-year-old former Bermudian batter, said they would have to assess the conditions as a team after landing in Pakistan and highlighted the importance of all the players stepping up in their roles to attain success.

"About the wickets, we have to wait before we get there. We actually have to gain the understanding of the situation... Obviously, I was the head coach of the Pakistan team so I do know some of the players. I have come in contact with them before."

"I think there are some good young talents coming through [in Bangladesh] but also you got some very good and experienced players. In major tournaments, you need everybody to stand up and manage their particular roles within the team. I'm looking forward to the tournament and see what this group of players can actually achieve."

ARMINIA BIELEFELD'S stunning turnaround

REUTERS

Arminia Bielefeld captain Mael Corboz said his team's recent struggles have hardened their self-belief after the third-tier side beat holders Bayer Leverkusen 2-1 on Tuesday to reach their first German Cup final following a relegation battle last season.

Bielefeld have sent four Bundesliga teams spinning out of the competition in consecutive rounds to become the fourth third-tier side to reach the final.

Visitors Leverkusen led in the 17th minute through Jonathan Tah but Marius Woerl equalised three minutes later and Maximilian Grosser scored the winner on the stroke of halftime.

"Every round was surreal. I could not really believe it," American midfielder

Corboz told reporters after his side had earlier eliminated Union Berlin, Freiburg and Werder Bremen.

Arminia flirted with relegation from 3. Liga last season, finishing six points above the drop zone.

They are fourth in the current campaign, six points behind leaders Dynamo Dresden.

"It was the worst case scenario to concede under the first 20 minutes but we have been through so much this year and last year. In a relegation battle in the third division and one year later we are in the DFB Pokal final," said Corboz.

Bielefeld will face the winner of Wednesday's semi-final between VfB Stuttgart and RB Leipzig in the final at Berlin's Olympiastadion on May 24.

"The fans had been saying we are going to Berlin since January," added Corboz.



Real Madrid defender Antonio Rudiger celebrates scoring their fourth goal with forward Arda Gular during their semifinal second leg of Copa del Rey against Real Sociedad at the Santiago Bernabeu on Tuesday. A pulsating second leg ending 4-4 after extra time following a 115th minute header from Rudiger saw Los blancos secure a 5-4 aggregate victory, setting up a final clash against either Barcelona or Atletico Madrid.

PHOTO: REUTERS

LaLiga lowers Barca's wage cap

REUTERS, Madrid

LaLiga lowered Barcelona's wage cap on Wednesday after it said the club's recently revised accounts do not match the end-of-year figures from its previous auditor which included a 100 million euros (\$108.15 million) transaction.

The previous accounts included proceeds from the sale of VIP seats in the renovated Camp Nou which allowed Barca to comply with LaLiga's Financial Fair Play rules and extend the registration of players Dani Olmo and Pau Victor.

LaLiga said in a statement it will file a complaint against Barcelona's previous auditors who approved the club's accounts as the new auditors disagreed with the criteria used to include the transaction.

According to LaLiga, new auditors Crowe Spain concluded that the 100 million euros should not be fully accounted for in this season's finances because the asset – new VIP seats – does not yet exist and cannot yet be considered as income for the club.

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Certain groups misrepresenting BNP’s stance on reforms: Fakhrul

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Thakurgaon*

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir accused certain groups of misrepresenting the party’s stance on reforms on social media.



“There is a deliberate campaign that the BNP wants the election before reforms, or the BNP is against reforms. This is misleading the public. We have always advocated reforms,” he said.

“Many are misunderstanding our stance. We never said the election should come first, and then reforms. We have always maintained that a minimum level of reform is necessary to ensure a free and fair election.”

While responding to a question during a meeting with local journalists at his residence in the Kalibari area of Thakurgaon town yesterday, Fakhrul emphasised three key areas for reforms: the electoral system, law enforcement, and the judiciary.

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Empty boats are moored along the banks of the Buriganga in Keraniganj, as boatmen and their passengers, many of whom cross the river to go to work in the city, are enjoying the ongoing Eid holidays. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Three killed in mob beatings

STAR REPORT

At least three people were killed in mob beatings in the capital and Narsingdi between Sunday and Eid day.

In Dhaka, an Uber driver was killed on suspicion of being a mugger early Sunday.

The victim was identified as Riyad.

According to his wife Farzana Akter, Riyad was taking a passenger from Pallabi around 2:00am on Sunday when another car hit his vehicle from behind.

As he got out of the car to seek compensation for the damage to his vehicle, the passengers of the other car shouted “mugger”, prompting locals to beat him up. She claimed that police took Riyad to several hospitals, but due to the holidays, he was not given proper treatment. He was eventually taken to Kurmitola General Hospital, where he was declared dead. Farzana was with the police throughout the ordeal.

“My husband was not a mugger. He bought his car for Tk 16 lakh just a couple of months ago... But they beat him to death [on suspicion of being a mugger]. Would a mugger buy a car for Tk 16 lakh?” she asked.

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In Shariatpur, a man was allegedly beaten to death in Bhedarganj upazila on Sunday night for asking two youths to stop smoking in public.

A different kind of Eid for party leaders

Those of BNP, Jamaat, NCP in polls mode; AL men absent

STAR REPORT

This year’s Eid-ul-Fitr saw a major political shift, with BNP and Jamaat leaders celebrating freely for the first time in 16 years, while those of the Awami League were not seen.

BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami leaders seized the Eid holidays to reconnect with voters and to organise mass-contact events.

Meanwhile, the newly formed National Citizen Party (NCP) made its presence felt as key leaders travelled to their regions to engage with the public. During the holidays, NCP leaders hosted iftar parties, visited local communities, and intensified outreach efforts.

The Awami League leaders, who had dominated these events for the past 16 years, were mostly in hiding or imprisoned following the July uprising that led to their government’s ousting.

For example, former AL lawmaker and whip Iqbalur Rahim was a prominent figure at Dinajpur’s largest Eidgah, Gor-e-Shaheed Boromoydan. This year, however, he remained in hiding, a fate shared by many in the party, from central leadership to grassroots. On the other hand, BNP leaders said they could finally return to their constituencies and celebrate Eid freely, without the threat of arrests and attacks.

BNP Joint Secretary General Shahid Uddin Chowdhury Annie, after Eid prayers at Laxmipur Sonamiya Eidgah Jame Masjid, told journalists: “For 17 years under the autocratic rule of Sheikh Hasina, we could not celebrate Eid in peace. Now, with the people’s support, we can finally do so.

“I hope that through unity, we will be able to maintain this peaceful environment in the coming days,” he said.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1

BNP ‘failing to control its grassroots’ Says NCP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Citizen Party yesterday criticised the BNP for “failing to control its grassroots”, resulting in factional clashes and attacks carried out on its rivals.

“We have been noticing that the BNP central leadership has no control at the local level,” the NCP said in a statement.

“It’s right that the central leaders frequently speak out against attacks for political reasons and expel disobedient and criminal activists, but violent activities continue.

“This is making the country’s political situation confusing and unstable,” said the NCP, urging the BNP central leaders to take effective measures against crime, extortion, and illegal grabbing.

The statement, signed by NCP Joint Member Secretary Saleh Uddin Sifat, came in the wake of an attack on Azizur Rahman Bachchu Mollah, the father of NCP Central Joint Convenor Mahbub Alam Mahir.

Azizur’s hand was broken and he suffered

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

Aid groups seek access to quake victims

Myanmar junta fires warning shots at aid convoy; death toll rises to 2,886

REUTERS, *Bangkok*

Myanmar’s junta said yesterday its troops fired warning shots at a Chinese Red Cross aid convoy, underlining the challenge of delivering relief amid a civil war as aid groups called for better access to help survivors of a devastating earthquake.

The military has struggled to run Myanmar following its coup against the elected civilian government of Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi in 2021, reducing the economy and basic services including healthcare to tatters after civil war broke out.

Junta spokesperson Zaw Min Tun said the Chinese Red Cross had not informed authorities it was in a conflict zone on Tuesday night, and a security team fired shots in the air after the convoy, which included local vehicles, failed to stop.

A Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson said the aid team and supplies were safe, and called on all parties in Myanmar to ensure the safety of rescuers.

“It’s necessary to keep transportation routes for relief efforts open and unobstructed,” Guo Jiakun told a press conference.

The firing came as the death toll from Friday’s 7.7-magnitude quake rose to 2,886, with 4,639 injured, Myanmar state media said.

Meanwhile, the military has announced a temporary ceasefire in operations against armed opponents effective April 2 to April 22 following the earthquake, state-run MRTV said yesterday.

In neighbouring Thailand, the death toll from the quake rose to 21, with hundreds of buildings damaged. Rescuers kept searching for life in the rubble of a collapsed skyscraper under construction in the capital Bangkok, but acknowledged time was against them.

United Nations officials who surveyed earthquake damage in Myanmar urged the global community on Tuesday to ramp up aid before the looming monsoon season worsens already catastrophic conditions.

The rural parts of hard-hit Sagaing region were mostly under the control of armed resistance groups fighting the military government, the International Crisis Group said.

“They will be among the most challenging for aid agencies to reach, given regime restrictions, a complex configuration of local administrations and control by armed resistance groups, and the persistent conflict,” it added in a statement.

Even before the quake, the ICG said, information had been hard to gather from such areas, because of a junta blackout of internet and mobile phone networks as part of the conflict.

UN urges aid to survivors before monsoon hits

Death toll rises to 21 in Thailand

Junta announces temporary ceasefire

Kazakhstan finds its ‘largest’ rare earths deposit



AFP, *Almaty*

Kazakhstan discovered its largest deposit of rare earth metals, containing around one million tonnes of the elements that are seen as vital for the future economy, the Central Asian country said yesterday.

Rare earths comprise 17 raw materials that are essential for the green energy transition and highly sought by the likes of China, Russia, the United States and Europe.

“As of today, this is the largest rare earths deposit” in Kazakhstan, a spokesperson for the industry ministry told AFP.

The deposit – in central Kazakhstan’s Karaganda region – contains cerium, lanthanum, neodymium, and yttrium, they said.

The announcement of the find comes on the eve of the first EU-Central Asia summit, kicking off in Uzbekistan.



Workers wearing hazmat suits spray disinfectant to sterilise the rubble of a collapsed building in Mandalay yesterday, five days after a major earthquake struck central Myanmar.

PHOTO: AFP

Houses of ex-AL MP, Sylhet mayor vandalised

UNB, *Sylhet*

The residences of former Sylhet City Corporation (SCC) Mayor Anwaruzzaman Chowdhury and former Awami League MP for Moulvibazar-2 (Kulaura) Shafiul Alam Chowdhury Nadel were attacked and vandalised yesterday.

Syed Anisur Rahman, officer-in-charge (OC) of Sylhet Airport Police Station, said a group of students and members of the public carried out the attack on Nadel’s residence, causing minor damage.

“Police have visited the scene,” he added.

According to locals, a group of people took out a procession and arrived at Nadel’s residence in the Housing Estate area after sunset. They stormed the house, damaging CCTV cameras and a laptop.

Meanwhile, around 7:30pm, another attack took place at Anwaruzzaman Chowdhury’s house in the Pathantula area, where attackers vandalised furniture and other household items.

Jalalabad Police Station OC Harunur Rashid said police responded quickly to reach the scene.

“A group of enraged students and members of the public carried out the attack,” he added.