

“China played it wrong, they panicked – the one thing they cannot afford to do!”  
US President Donald Trump on China's reciprocal tariff

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YUNUS-MODI TALKS IN BANGKOK

## Dhaka, Delhi to take ties on the right track

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

In a thawing of relations, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a bilateral meeting yesterday, seeking to work together and set the relations on the right track.

“Bangladesh deeply values its relationship with India,” Prof Yunus told PM Modi during the 40-minute meeting, according to a statement from the Chief Adviser's Press Wing.

At the much-awaited meeting on the sidelines of the BIMSTEC Summit at Shangri-La Hotel in Bangkok, both of them expressed their commitment to maintain a good relationship and spoke of concerns over political and security matters.

“The deep-rooted friendship between our two countries is founded on intertwined histories, geographical proximity, and cultural affinity. We remain thankful for the unwavering support of the government and people of India during our most challenging time in 1971,” Prof Yunus was quoted as saying.

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- Yunus says Bangladesh deeply values its relationship with India
- Modi reiterates India's support for a democratic, stable, progressive and inclusive Bangladesh
- Yunus enquires about the status of extradition of Sheikh Hasina who is making inflammatory remarks from India
- Modi says India does not support any particular party in Bangladesh



Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi hold a meeting at Shangri-La Hotel in Bangkok on the sidelines of the 6th BIMSTEC Summit yesterday.

PHOTO: CA'S PRESS WING

## China retaliates over Trump tariffs

Stocks, oil plunge again amid fears of trade war, global recession

AGENCIES

China announced 34 percent tariffs on US imports yesterday, the first major economy to fire back against President Donald Trump's new levies in an escalating global trade war that sent markets deep into the red.

Asian and European stock markets added to their losses after a bloodbath on Thursday that sent New York's broad-based S&P 500 index down 4.8 percent, its biggest drop since the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.

China imposes additional 34% tariffs on all US goods effective April 10



Imposes export curbs on some rare earths effective April 4

Global brokerages raise recession odds; JP Morgan sees 60% chance

Countries and companies alike weighed their options, and the EU readied for talks with US officials. Potential responses could include retaliatory tariffs or other measures that could escalate a trade war that has raised fears of recession.

China – one of the United States's top trading partners – was first, announcing that tariffs of 34 percent on all American imports would come into effect from April 10 and saying it would file a suit at the World Trade Organization (WTO) over the tariffs.

It also said it would impose export controls on a number of rare earth elements used in medical technology and

In Europe, Frankfurt sank by five percent after midday on Friday while Paris shed more than four percent and London was down almost 3.8 percent.

Tokyo's Nikkei index closed 2.8 percent lower, with Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba describing Trump's tariffs as a “national crisis”.

Trump goaded a “panicked” China after China retaliated with additional tariffs.

“China played it wrong, they panicked – the one thing they cannot afford to do!” Trump posted on Truth Social, writing the message in his trademark all-caps.

On Thursday, Trump dismissed the

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## Exports to US face stiff challenges

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Bangladesh's garment industry, already under consistent pricing pressure from global clothing retailers and brands, now faces a fresh challenge due to new reciprocal tariff measures implemented by the Trump administration.

These tariffs that also target other major suppliers, such as China and Vietnam, are likely to provide international buyers with additional leverage to further suppress prices paid to Bangladeshi exporters.

Historically, international retailers and brands have paid lower prices for garments produced in Bangladesh compared to those made in countries like China and Vietnam.

For example, a T-shirt that fetches \$10 when manufactured in Vietnam or China often earns only \$6 to \$7 when sourced from Bangladesh. This disparity is often justified by buyers citing various perceived inefficiencies and risks in the Bangladeshi supply chain – ranging from delayed shipments and long lead times to poor port and logistics infrastructure, weak customs management, and a generally unfavourable image of the country and its garment sector.

These challenges – combined with intense price competition among local suppliers – have kept average unit prices low for Bangladeshi apparel, even as global demand remains robust. Now, the new US tariff policies may serve as yet another pretext for international buyers to seek additional discounts or impose price reductions.

Ironically, the relatively lower tariff burden on Bangladeshi garments compared to those from China and Vietnam could offer a competitive edge. In the American market, these two major suppliers are now facing higher tariffs, which may create an opportunity for Bangladeshi exporters to expand market share – albeit potentially at the cost of even lower unit prices.

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Former and current fine arts students of Dhaka University have prepared an array of masks with vibrant and colourful motifs for Mangal Shobhajatra, an integral part of the Pahela Baishakh celebrations. The photo was taken yesterday.

## Entire family perishes in Ctg crash

Death toll now 11

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

All five members of a family have died in the road crash that occurred in Lohagara, Chattogram on Wednesday.

Tasnia Islam Prema, 18, the last remaining member of the family, passed away at Chattogram Medical College Hospital yesterday.

Harun-ur-Rashid, in-charge of the ICU at the hospital, said Prema was put on life support after she was brought to the hospital, but her condition deteriorated. She was critically injured.

Her parents and two sisters had died soon after the crash on the Chattogram Cox's Bazar

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## ROHINGYA REPATRIATION

### Yunus calls for visible actions from BIMSTEC

#### Myanmar says 1.80 lakh identified for return

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday called on BIMSTEC member states to take steps to promote dialogue between conflicting parties in Myanmar and restore stability in its Rakhine State to facilitate the long-overdue repatriation of Rohingyas sheltered in Bangladesh.

“The protracted Rohingya crisis, if left unresolved, has the potential to create instability in the whole region,” Yunus said while addressing the 6th BIMSTEC summit in Bangkok.

Bangladesh shelters 1.2 million Rohingyas, most of whom fled the

crackdown in Rakhine State in 2017. After the military takeover in 2021, Myanmar witnessed a civil war, with the armed group Arakan Army in Rakhine eventually taking control of about 90 percent of Rakhine State.

Not a single Rohingya could be repatriated to Myanmar despite several attempts over the last eight years. Instead, about 100,000 Rohingyas have fled to Bangladesh since July last year as the conflicts between the Arakan Army and the Myanmar military junta led to a further displacement of hundreds of thousands of people in the state.

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Rokia Afzal Rahman  
1941-2023

## When Tomorrow Starts Without Me

And I'm not there to see;  
If the sun should rise  
and find your eyes  
All filled with tears for me;  
I know how much you love me,  
As much as I love you,  
And each time that you think of me,  
I know you'll miss me too  
So when tomorrow starts without me,  
Don't think we're far apart,  
For every time you think of me,  
I'm right here, in your heart.

-David Romano

## JAMUNA BOAT CAPSIZE Another body recovered, one still missing

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Jamalpur*

The body of a man who went missing after a boat capsized in the Jamuna River in Islampur upazila of Jamalpur was recovered yesterday.

Locals found the body of Selim Mia, 35, a local farmer, floating in the river near Belgachia area around 10:00am, about 2km from where the boat sank.

Family members went to the spot and recovered the body.

Early Thursday morning, an engine-run boat carrying farmers sank while crossing the river from Kulakandi Piling Ghat.

Three people had initially gone missing. So far, rescuers have recovered the bodies of Biled Ali, 45, and Selim Mia. Another farmer, Khabir Sheikh, 50, is still missing.

The boat had belonged to Abdur Rashid, a resident of Kauner Char village under Kulakandi union. Since the incident, he has been on the run, locals said.

Residents alleged that boats from Kulakandi Piling Ghat were being

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## Exports to US face stiff challenges

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For instance, in January 2025, while Bangladesh's apparel exports to the US rose by 45.93 percent year on year to \$799.65 million, the average unit price declined by 2.20 percent, according to data from the US Office of Textiles and Apparel (OTEXA). The export volume surged by 49.21 percent in that month, outpacing growth from Vietnam (17.05 percent), China (9.36 percent), and the global average (18.49 percent).

In the European Union, a similar trend persisted. Eurostat data indicates that in the twelve months through December 2024, the unit price of Bangladeshi garment exports to the EU dropped by 4.84 percent.

Local industry leaders have voiced concern over the growing pressure from buyers. Faruque Hassan, managing director of Giant Group, said some international retailers may demand discounts on goods already awaiting unloading at US ports. Facing tight liquidity and loan repayment schedules, many Bangladeshi suppliers may be forced to comply, even if such price concessions are unsustainable.

However, Hassan said local exporters should resist such demands, particularly when they're tied to the recent tariff measures by the Trump administration.

AKM Azad, managing director of major exporter Ha-Meem Group, said his buyers did not ask for price adjustment yet as they were observing the situation. They might start negotiation on pricing after



From left, Nepal Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, India Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Bangladesh Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, Thailand Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra, Bhutan Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay, Myanmar Chairman of the State Administration Council Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, and Sri Lanka Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya pose for a photo at the BIMSTEC Summit in Thailand.

PHOTO: CA'S PRESS WING

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## Exports to US face stiff challenges

April 9, when the new tariffs go into effect.

The new tariffs would obviously push garment prices up in the US, leading to a decline in demand and intensifying competition among American retailers and brands. Then they would again put pressure on the Bangladeshi exporters for price cuts, Azad added.

Syed M Tanvir, managing director of Pacific Jeans, said that while buyers would inevitably push for lower prices, it was too early to draw any conclusions. The full impact remains unclear, he added, as buyers' strategies are yet to unfold and the new tariff measures require further analysis.

Tanvir also said that buyers may seek discounts, but the burden of any price reduction should be shared across the supply chain, including fabric suppliers and other stakeholders. For instance, if a pair of denim pants is priced at \$5, about 70 percent of that amount is spent on fabric purchase, while manufacturers must cover wages, production expenses, and cutting and making charges from the remaining portion.

MA Jabbar, managing director of DBL Group, stressed the urgent need for collaboration between the private sector and the government to address the tariff issue with the US because it is the single largest export destination for Bangladesh.

Failure to act promptly, he warned, could not only affect pricing but also drive business to competing

countries—a risk Bangladesh cannot afford at this critical moment.

Miran Ali, Managing Director of Bitopi Group, described the situation as a wake-up call for Bangladesh, noting that buyers were still assessing the latest developments and could begin responding within the next two to three days.

However, he pointed out that this could also present an opportunity for Bangladesh if it can negotiate a better understanding with the US, since Bangladesh holds a relatively stronger position than countries like China and Vietnam.

"We have to be very proactive because there is a real possibility that US buyers will push for significantly lower prices on Bangladeshi goods."

AKM Saifur Rahman, vice president of Bangladesh Garment Buying House Association, said major garment-supplying nations like China and India are providing increased stimulus to their industries. Such government support, he warned, could influence global pricing dynamics and impact the actual price levels of garment products.

Bangladesh exported goods worth \$8.4 billion to the US in 2024. Ninety percent of the products were ready-made garments, according to data from the United States Trade Representative.

Bangladesh's market share of ready-made garment imports into the US hovered around 9 percent from 2022 to 2024, according to the International Trade Centre.

Yunus said he envisions a type of regional cooperation that is based on equity, mutual respect, mutuality of interests, and shared benefits.

Noting that energy security is fundamental to sustainable development and economic resilience, he said BIMSTEC must work together to harness the collective potential in renewable energy, cross-border electricity trade, and energy efficiency.

He said the BIMSTEC Agreement on Grid Interconnection signed in 2018 can act as a launching pad for cooperation in the field of energy.

To promote trade and investment, Yunus said facilitating the movement of skilled manpower within BIMSTEC is key to enhancing the wellbeing of the region.

Yunus urged all to materialise the implementation of the BIMSTEC Framework Agreement on a Free Trade Agreement signed in 2004.

He said the 5th BIMSTEC Summit adopted the BIMSTEC Master Plan on Transport Connectivity, whose timely implementation is crucial.

**POLLS TOP PRIORITY**

Prof Yunus also said holding the national elections at the earliest possible is at the top of his government's agenda.

"We need a shared sense of mutual confidence and mutuality of interests, rising above our differences and divergences. Whatever we undertake or do collectively, we need to be driven by impact and results."

BIMSTEC region hosts one fifth of the global population. Currently, intra-regional trade in BIMSTEC stands at just 5.9 percent, whereas it is 25 percent in ASEAN.

## Dhaka, Delhi to take ties on the right track

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PM Modi reiterated India's support for a democratic, stable, peaceful, progressive and inclusive Bangladesh and expressed his desire to forge a positive and constructive relationship with Bangladesh based on pragmatism.

At the meeting, Prof Yunus presented a photo to PM Modi. The photo is of PM Modi presenting a gold medal to Prof Yunus at the 102nd Indian Science Congress on January 3, 2015.

This is the first in-person meeting between the two leaders since the political changeover in Bangladesh in early August last year when Sheikh Hasina, the then prime minister, fled to India amid a mass uprising.

Over the months, India repeatedly expressed concerns, alleging that religious minorities had been attacked in Bangladesh. The interim government described India's concerns as interference in internal affairs and misrepresentations of isolated incidents.

In December 2024, Dhaka requested New Delhi to extradite the former PM, who faces charges of mass killings. New Delhi has not responded to the request.

India reduced the number of visas issued to Bangladeshis, citing staff shortages at the high commission.

Against this backdrop, the bilateral meeting may serve as a confidence-building measure, even as concerns remain on both sides, foreign policy analysts say.

At the meeting, Prof Yunus said Hasina had been making inflammatory remarks and trying to destabilise Bangladesh, which seemed to be an "abuse of the hospitality" India extended to her.

Prof Yunus requested PM Modi to take appropriate measures to prevent Hasina from making incendiary statements while "she remains in your country".

He also mentioned Dhaka's

extradition request.

Prof Yunus then referenced the UN Human Rights Office's Fact-Finding Report, which confirmed serious human rights violations and abuses committed by security forces and armed Awami League activists between July 15 and August 5, 2024.

He said the OHCHR report estimated that 1,400 protest-related deaths had occurred, with approximately 13 percent of the victims being children, and found reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity had been committed during the protests.

PM Modi blamed social media for the tensions caused by Hasina's remarks.

"Prime Minister [Modi] urged that rhetoric that vitiates the environment is best avoided," read a statement issued by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs [MEA].

The statement issued by the CA's Press Wing quoted PM Modi as saying that India did not support any particular party in Bangladesh. "Our relationship is people-to-people."

Prof Yunus stressed working together to reduce the number of fatalities at the India-Bangladesh border.

PM Modi replied that Indian border troops opened fire only in self defence and the fatalities occurred in Indian territories. The two leaders stressed the need to work together on this issue, according to a statement of the MEA.

"On the border, strict enforcement of the law and prevention of illegal border crossings, especially at night, are necessary for maintaining border security and stability. Bilateral mechanism could meet as appropriate to review and take forward our ties," it said.

According to the MEA statement, PM Modi said he expected the Bangladesh government to ensure the

safety of Hindus and the people of other minority communities and called for thorough investigation into the cases of atrocities committed against them.

"PM also underlined the need to ensure the safety & security of Hindus in Bangladesh and tackle growing extremism which is a threat to regional stability," Randhir Jaiswal, official spokesperson of the MEA, wrote on X.

In response, Prof Yunus said he instituted an effective system for monitoring every incident of religious and gender violence in Bangladesh and was taking serious actions to stop any occurrence of such incidents, according to the CA's Press Wing.

He also said the reports of attacks on the minorities were inflated and "the bulk of them were fake news".

The CA asked the Indian leader to send reporters to Bangladesh to investigate the alleged attacks themselves.

He called for discussions to renew the Ganges Water Treaty and to sign the Teesta Water Sharing Agreement.

Stating that the history of the two neighbours is intricately linked, the Indian prime minister said New Delhi has always attached "highest priority" to its relationship with Dhaka, highlighting that cooperation between the two countries brought tangible benefits to the people of both countries.

PM Modi congratulated Prof Yunus on his assumption of the BIMSTEC chairmanship and looked forward to advancing regional cooperation.

He expressed his conviction that all issues of mutual interest between the two countries would continue to be addressed and resolved bilaterally.

Foreign Adviser Tauhid Hossain, CA's High Representative Khalilur Rahman, Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, and Indian National Security Adviser Ajit Doval were present at the meeting.

## China retaliates over Trump tariffs

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pointing to data exchange and tax as levers that could be used.

In Tokyo, Ishiba called for a "calm-headed" approach to negotiations with Trump, who targeted Japanese products with a 24 percent levy.

Local media reported that Japanese officials were attempting to organise a call between Ishiba and Trump, who held apparently friendly talks at the White House in February.

The dollar was steadier against main rivals, having fallen sharply Thursday on fears of a recession in the United States.

But oil futures plummeted around seven percent, having already plunged some six to seven percent Thursday on the prospect of weaker demand.

News that OPEC+ had unexpectedly hiked crude supply more than planned added to the steep selling.

The price of traded copper -- a vital component for energy storage, electric vehicles, solar panels and wind turbines -- tumbled more than five percent.

Meanwhile, JP Morgan ratcheted up its odds for a US and global recession to 60%, as brokerages scrambled to revise their forecast models with tariff distress threatening to sap business confidence and slow down global growth.

"Disruptive US policies have been recognised as the biggest risk to the

global outlook all year," the brokerage said in a note on Thursday, adding that the country's trade policy has turned less business friendly than anticipated.

Separate tariffs of 25 percent on all foreign-made cars also went into effect this week, and Canada swiftly responded with a similar levy on US imports.

Stellantis -- the owner of Jeep, Chrysler and Fiat -- paused production at some Canadian and Mexican assembly plants.

Japanese carmaker Nissan yesterday said it would revise plans to reduce production in the United States.

The company also said it would stop selling two vehicle models in the US market that are made at a factory in Mexico.

Sweden's Volvo Cars, owned by China's Geely, said it would increase its production of vehicles in the United States and probably produce an additional model there.

Trump says he wants to make the United States free from reliance on foreign manufacturers, in a massive economic reshaping that he likened to a medical procedure.

Amid howls of protest abroad, and even from some of Trump's Republicans who fear price rises at home, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick urged patience.

## Entire family perishes in Ctg crash

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highway at Jangalia Majar Gate.

So far, the death toll from the crash

-- collision of a bus and a microbus -- stands at 11.

Meanwhile, eight year-old Aradhya Biswas, who lost her parents in the accident, was transferred yesterday from the Paediatric ICU at CMCH to the Square Hospital in the capital.

Aradhya is the only surviving member of the family.

CMCH Director Brig Gen Taslim Uddin said, "Square expressed interest in treating Aradhya. We decided to shift her there."

Dhiman Chowdhury, in-charge of Paediatric ICU at CMCH, said Aradhya's condition improved a little in the last two days, but she was "not out of danger" yet.

"At Square Hospital, where authorities can strictly restrict visitors, her health condition may improve quickly," said Dhiman.

Tapan Chowdhury, the managing director of Square Group, intends to take the responsibility of Aradhya's treatment, said Mostafa Kamal, regional sales manager of Square Pharmaceuticals.



Rokia Afzal  
Rahman's 2nd  
death anniv

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rokia Afzal Rahman, a visionary leader and inspiring mentor, left an indelible legacy in the fields of business, media, and social progress. Today marks the second death anniversary of the eminent entrepreneur, philanthropist, and trailblazer for women's empowerment.

Rokia Afzal Rahman passed away peacefully in her sleep on the morning of April 5, 2023, at the age of 82, at the Mt Elizabeth Novena Hospital in Singapore.

Her passing was mourned by her family -- including two daughters, a son, and five grandchildren -- and countless admirers, leaving behind a profound impact on all who knew her.

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## Two die as car hits bike on Kalshi flyover

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two persons died last night as the motorcycle they were on collided with a private car on the Kalshi flyover in the capital's Mirpur-12 area, said police.

Identities of the deceased, who were aged around 18 and 19, could not be known immediately.

The rider died on the spot while the pillion fell off the flyover following the collision and was found in a wounded state under the flyover, Md Rocky, a passerby who helped take the victims to the hospital, told this newspaper.

Both the deceased were declared dead at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) around 11:00pm, said Md Masud Alam of the DMCH police outpost.

He said the bodies have been kept at the hospital morgue.

Meanwhile, a woman died after being hit by a battery-run rickshaw while she was crossing the road in Maniknagar area on Thursday night.

The incident occurred around 9:30pm near Wasa Road, police and family members said.

The victim, Sumi Akter, SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

## Two held over rape of woman in Bagerhat

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

Police have arrested two men in Bagerhat Sadar upazila on charges of raping a woman and recording the incident.

The arrestees are Sajib Das, 19, and Likan Das, 20. Both are residents of Karori village under Rakhalgachi union in Bagerhat Sadar upazila, said police.

They were arrested on Thursday night in the C&B Bazar area, said Mahamudul Hasan, officer-in-charge of Bagerhat Sadar Police Station, yesterday.

The victim filed a case against three accused with the Sadar police yesterday.

According to the case statement, the victim, who works as a sales representative for a mobile operator, received a call on Thursday evening from a person expressing interest in purchasing a SIM card. The person asked her to go to the C&B Bazar area.

Around 8:00pm, the victim went to the location. Not finding the customer, she began walking back home. When she crossed a paved bridge on the Khulna-Bagerhat highway near the market, a man grabbed her and dragged her under the bridge, it said.

There, the two men raped her and filmed the incident on a phone and threatened her not to disclose it to anyone. They left her and fled the scene, SEE PAGE 4 COL 8

## REVIVING 4 DHAKA CANALS

# Tk 10cr for a food court; Tk 1cr for toilet!

DSCC revises Tk 900cr project amid cost controversy

DIPAN NANDY

The Dhaka South City Corporation has undertaken a nearly Tk 900 crore project to restore, renovate, and beautify four canals -- Shyampur, Jirani, Manda, and Kalunagar -- to mitigate waterlogging in Dhaka.

However, an analysis of the Development Project Proposal (DPP) has revealed unusually high expenditures. Following allegations of inflated costs, the approved DPP is now set to be revised, and the project director has been replaced.

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecen) approved the Tk 898.73 crore project on October 21, 2022. Under this initiative, four canals will be restored across 19.78km to alleviate waterlogging in Dhaka.

A breakdown of the DPP shows that the proposed food court for Kalunagar



Due to a thick layer of waste, water cannot flow through Kalunagar canal in Hazaribagh Sluice Gate area.

FILE PHOTO



With piled up garbage and illegally built structures, it's really hard to believe this is actually the Manda canal. The photo was taken in North Manda area.

FILE PHOTO

canal, spanning 906 square metres, has an estimated cost of Tk 10.34 crore, equating to Tk 1.14 lakh per square metre. Additionally, two public toilets in this area are budgeted at Tk 51.55 lakh each, with the 80-square-metre facilities costing Tk 32,218 per square metre.

In Jirani canal, two public toilets, covering 320 square metres, are set to cost Tk 2.06 crore, or Tk 32,187.50 per square metre. The project also includes four food courts and coffee shops at Jirani canal, budgeted at Tk 9.13 crore.

For Manda canal, five such establishments have been allocated Tk 11.42 crore, while four public toilets are estimated to cost Tk 2.06 crore.

Shyampur Canal's renovation includes the construction of two public toilets at Tk 51.55 lakh but

excludes food courts or coffee shops. DSCC sources revealed that suspicions of unusually high expenditures arose after the fall of the Awami League government on August 5 last year.

A DSCC engineer, requesting anonymity, said project costs were often inflated during the previous regime to benefit party leaders and activists. "The canal restoration project was not planned realistically. A single public toilet should never cost Tk 1 crore," the official said.

Following public scrutiny, project director Khairul Baker has been removed. He was responsible for preparing the DPP for the four-canal development project.

Regarding the high construction costs, Baker said the DPP allocated approximately Tk 5 crore for 10 toilets across the project, estimating expenses based on land



In many places, structures have been erected encroaching upon the Shyampur canal, further blocking its flow. The photo was taken in Zia Sarani area.

FILE PHOTO

development requirements. He said canal development costs were assessed based on necessity and that 60 feet of government land -- 30 feet on each side of the canal -- had been reclaimed under the Water Act for integrated development.

"The cost estimations were determined after surveys involving consultants and local citizens," he said.

New project director and DSCC superintendent engineer Mohammad Saifullah Siddique Bhuiyan said reports of unusually high costs prompted the revision of the DPP.

"We have a functional plan in place and expect to complete revisions within a month. Field-level work will commence immediately afterward," he said, adding that the revised plan might limit public toilets and food courts, with priority given to retaining walls, walkways, and waste removal.

Adil Mohammed Khan, president of Bangladesh Institute of Planners, said budget inflation had been a common practice in the previous regime.

"Why should there be a food court or unnecessary bridge in a canal development project? Budgets were inflated for corruption. I hope the new government will discard these unnecessary elements. Those involved in this crime, including bureaucrats, should be brought under the law," he said.

Adil Mohammed Khan, president of Bangladesh Institute of Planners, said budget inflation had been a common practice in the previous regime.

However, fundamental differences emerged between the two parties.

## NCP to push for reforms, ban on AL

Plans protests, stakeholder meetings this month

ASHIK ABDULLAH APU

The National Citizen Party (NCP) is set to launch a series of programmes this month, centring on three key demands -- the trial of the Awami League for the July killings, governance reforms, and an election to the constituent assembly, according to party insiders.

The newly formed youth-led party will also focus on establishing district and upazila-level organisational units and setting up a central office to meet the Election Commission's (EC) registration criteria ahead of the upcoming polls.

**MEMBERSHIP DRIVE AND POLITICAL STANCE**  
The NCP is expected to begin a membership collection drive in the second week of this month to form its district and upazila-level units.

The party leadership has expressed concern over the BNP's reluctance towards key reform proposals.

To address this, the NCP plans to hold discussions with various stakeholders this month.

The party is firmly opposed to allowing Awami League to engage in politics.

However, it insists on banning the party through judicial proceedings rather than executive orders.

Until a judicial verdict is reached, the NCP demands the immediate cancellation of the AL's registration and a ban on its political activities.

Several party leaders have indicated that this demand will be at the forefront of their agenda.

The NCP also plans to engage the families of the July uprising's martyrs, the injured, party leaders, and the general public in their programmes.

## OTHER AGENDAS

- Expand grassroots organisation
- Fulfil EC registration criteria
- Launch nationwide membership drive
- Engage victims of July uprising

## REFORM DISCUSSIONS

Both the BNP and NCP submitted their written opinions to the National Consensus Commission on March 23 regarding recommendations from five commissions, including the Constitution Reform Commission.

However, fundamental differences emerged between the two parties.

While BNP supports retaining the constitution's basic principles, NCP seeks amendments.

BNP favours a five-year parliamentary term, whereas the NCP supports reducing it to four years, in line with the Reform Commission's recommendations.

Additionally, while BNP opposes separating the leadership of political parties from parliamentary leadership, NCP supports this measure.

At a Chattogram event on March 28, BNP Standing Committee Member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury remarked, "Sorry, this [carrying out reforms] is not your responsibility. It will be the responsibility of those whom the people of Bangladesh elect."

NCP leaders fear that BNP's opposition could stall the reform process, preventing fundamental changes and weakening the July uprising's momentum.

However, the NCP does not want a direct confrontation with BNP and will instead prioritise dialogue.

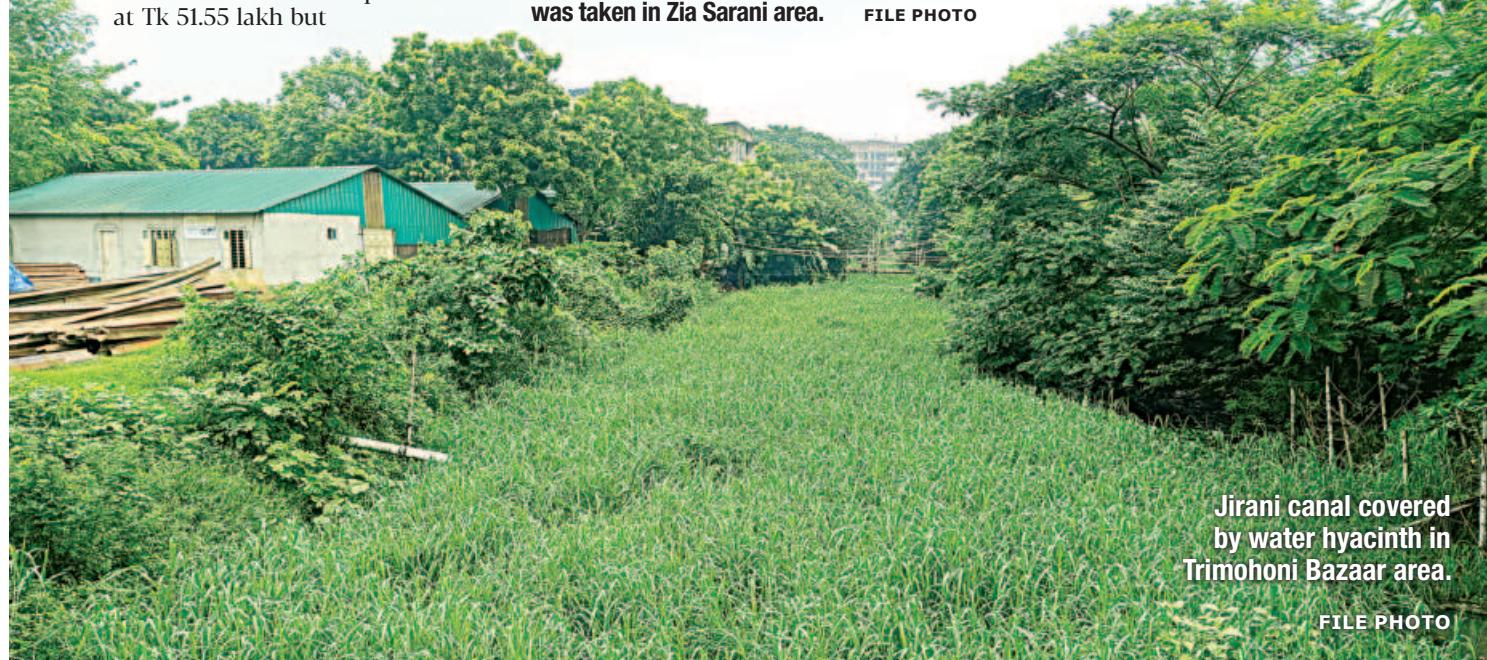
Two top leaders of the party confirmed that discussions on reforms with stakeholders would commence by mid-April.

"We will try to reach a consensus through dialogue. The party's reform coordination

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Jirani canal covered by water hyacinth in Trimohoni Bazaar area.

FILE PHOTO



An unauthorised makeshift amusement park, set up along the roadside for Eid celebrations, remains in place even after the festivities, causing traffic disruptions. The structures, including a large boat-shaped ride, continue to obstruct a busy thoroughfare, posing risks to both pedestrians and vehicles. The photo was taken in the Naya Bazar area of Old Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Freedom fighter's house vandalised in Cumilla

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cumilla

A group of alleged Jamaat Shibir members attacked and vandalised the house of freedom fighter Abdul Hai Kanu in Cumilla's Chaudhogram upazila early yesterday.

Hilal Uddin, officer-in-charge of Chaudhogram Police Station, confirmed the incident to The Daily Star.

He said he was informed of the attack shortly after it occurred and visited the victim's residence in Ludhia village with a police team, where they found evidence of vandalism.

"The attackers fled upon sensing our presence. However, no formal complaint or case has been filed regarding the incident," the OC added.

Freedom Fighter Kanu said, "Around 12:55am, a group of 20 to 25 Jamaat-Shibir cadres tried to storm my house. They attempted to break in using sharp weapons and detonated crude bombs. They damaged doors, windows, and the tin roof. They arrived on 10 to 12 motorcycles."

Contacted, Md Mahfuzur Rahman, chief of Jamaat's Chaudhogram upazila unit, said, "I heard about the incident, but we had no involvement. The allegations against us are untrue."

Earlier on December 22, a group of

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

## Two new apex court judges meet president

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Newly appointed Appellate Division judges, Justice AKM Asaduzzaman and Justice Farah Mahbub, paid a courtesy visit to President Mohammed Shahabuddin at Bangabhaban on Thursday evening.

During the meeting, the president congratulated them and urged them to uphold justice.

Following the Supreme Judicial Appointment Council's recommendation and in consultation with the chief justice, the president elevated the judges from the High Court Division to the Appellate Division on March 24.

They were sworn in by Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed on March 25, according to a Supreme Court press release.

## Man dies as train hits him in Narsingdi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

An unidentified man died after being hit by a freight train near Narsingdi Railway Station yesterday afternoon.

The incident occurred around 12:30pm in Baniarchal Battala area adjacent to the station, said Zahirul Islam, sub-inspector and in-charge of Narsingdi Railway Police Outpost.

Witnesses and police said the Chattogram-bound freight train hit the man, aged around 45-50, while crossing Narsingdi station, leaving him dead on the spot.

On information, police went to the spot and recovered the body. Efforts are underway to identify the deceased, SI Zahirul said.

## Fire guts 19 shops, 3 houses in Madaripur

UNB, Madaripur

At least 19 shops and three houses were gutted in a fire at a market in Madaripur Sadar upazila early yesterday.

Nur Mohammad, station officer of Madaripur fire service, said the fire originated from an electric short-circuit at a hardware shop in City Super Market in the early morning.

Being informed, six firefighting units from the district and nearby Sharatiapur rushed to the spot and brought the fire under control after three hours of efforts, he said.

The fire affected establishments include eight cosmetics shops, three hardware shops, three warehouses, one computer shop, other shops and three houses, the fire service official said.

## Beach

FROM PAGE 5

"Illegal structures like these not only destroy the natural beauty of Kuakata, but also endanger tourists," he added.

Contacted, Md Sajidul Islam asserted his claim over the land.

"This land belongs to me. A large portion of it lies within the sea. We've discussed this with the authorities before, and we will do so again. Also, the construction is not risky -- it's being done based on an engineer's advice," he said.

However, Yamin Sadek, administrator of Kuakata Municipality and also the assistant commissioner (land) of the upazila, dismissed the ownership claim.

"The beach is solely government property. No individual can claim ownership there," he said.

"There is already a court order restricting construction at the market. Once offices reopen after the Eid holidays, we will review all relevant documents and take necessary legal actions accordingly," he added.

## Rokia Afzal Rahman

FROM PAGE 3

Rokia was a pioneering entrepreneur who dedicated her life to advancing women's financial independence.

As the founding president of the Bangladesh Federation of Women Entrepreneurs and a key figure in establishing Women in Small Enterprises (WISE), her efforts opened the doors for countless women in business.

She also served as chairperson of Midas Financing Limited, which supported small-scale businesses in bypassing middlemen and reaching consumers directly.

Her influence extended well beyond the business world.

She held numerous leadership roles, including chairperson of Mediaworld Limited, the parent company of The Daily Star, and president of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

She also chaired the board of directors of the Asian University for Women Foundation,

served as an adviser to the 2001 caretaker government, and was a board member of various esteemed organisations, including the Central Bank of Bangladesh.

She played an instrumental role in advocating for free media and access to education.

Rokia's life was defined not only by her professional achievements but also by her elegance, warmth, and strength of character. She was a mentor and role model to many, known for her dignified demeanor and ability to inspire confidence in those around her.

From her beginnings as the first woman bank manager in Bangladesh to becoming a successful businesswoman and adviser to a caretaker government, Rokia's journey was marked by perseverance and unwavering dedication to her ideals. Despite challenges -- including threats from extortionists and resistance as a woman in a male-dominated field -- she never wavered from her path.

## Railway land up

FROM PAGE 5

Rokia's memory lives on through the countless lives she touched and the enduring impact of her work. On this solemn anniversary, her friends, family, and admirers reflect on her contributions to society and remember her as a beacon of hope and progress.

**Freedom**

FROM PAGE 3

people placed a garland of shoes around his neck and ordered him to leave the area by nightfall -- a video of which later went viral on social media. Around 10 to 12 local Jamaat men, led by Abul Hashem Majumder, were involved in the public humiliation.

Following the incident, he took refuge at his son's residence in Feni district.

Since the fall of the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government on August 5, Kanu's home has been attacked three times -- on August 16, September 20, and most recently on April 4.

OC Hilal Uddin added, "The individuals accused in the humiliation case have remained absconding. They don't stay at home but returned during the Eid holidays, carried out the attack, and went into hiding again."

Kanu had filed a case over the public humiliation, naming several local Jamaat-Shibir activists. Subsequently, two local Jamaat members, including Abul Hashem Majumder, were expelled from the party.

They

further stated that as the 25.75 acres were not demarcated, the municipality has since occupied nearly double the allocated area while ignoring railway estate department notices to clarify the boundary.

The probe report said the land grabbing occurred in violation of a court stay order.

It recommended departmental action against the divisional superintendent of Saidpur railway workshop, estate department officials, some members of the railway police, and railway security personnel for failing to protect railway property.

It also called for criminal cases against land grabbers and the appointment of skilled lawyers to handle court proceedings. However, none of the recommendations have been implemented.

Mazharul Anwar

Shamim, secretary of Sujan (Sushasoner Jonno Nagarik) in Saidpur, said, "The railway in Saidpur is on the verge of ruin. Implementing the probe body's 24 recommendations is the only way to save it."

Contacted, Railway

Ministry Secretary Md Fahimul Islam said, "We are sincere about recovering railway land and working to obtain magistracy powers for immediate action against encroachers."

He said notices had already been issued for the removal of illegal structures.

## Two die as car hits

FROM PAGE 3

25, sustained critical injuries in the accident. She was first taken to Mugda General Hospital and later shifted to the emergency department of DMCH, where doctors declared her dead around 1:30am yesterday.

Mezbabul Uddin, a neighbour of the victim, said Sumi was a homemaker and also gave private tuitions in the neighbourhood. She lived

with her husband, Mahfuz Rahman, in a rented house on Wasa Road.

"She was returning home after tutoring at a nearby house and was crossing the road just a short distance away from her residence when the accident happened," Mezbabul said.

Inspector Md Farouk, in-charge of DMCH police outpost, said the body has been kept at the hospital morgue for an autopsy.

## NCP to push

FROM PAGE 3

committee will lead the discussions," an NCP joint convener told The Daily Star.

### EC REGISTRATION CRITERIA

The EC issued a public notice on March 10, inviting applications for new party registrations by April 20.

However, Rastra Sanskar Andolan's Chief Coordinator Hasnat Qayyum filed a writ petition in the High Court on March 16, challenging the validity of the notice.

Having launched on February 28, the NCP must fulfil EC registration requirements, including establishing a central office with a central committee, district offices in at least one-third of administrative districts, and upazila or metropolitan thana offices in at least 100 locations, each with a minimum of 200 registered members.

The NCP has expressed reservations about the current registration criteria and intends to

formally request the EC to consider recommendations from the electoral reform commission.

Party leaders aim to complete the formation of their organisational structure within the next two months.

## Two held over

FROM PAGE 3

said the statement.

OC Mahamudul said, "Based on the victim's complaint, two individuals were detained and a case has been filed. The woman is currently in police custody for her safety. We are investigating whether others were involved."

Police are trying to arrest the other accused.

### PRAYER TIMING APRIL 5

Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrif	Esha
AZAN 4-40	12-45	4-45	6-21	7-45
JAMAT 5-15	1-15	5-00	6-24	8-15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION



PHOTO: MONIR UDDIN ANIK

Stranded at Ilisha Ferry Ghat in the Bhola district, hundreds of passengers wait for hours to return to Dhaka and Chattogram. Due to a severe shortage of vessels, many are forced to risk their lives by boarding unsafe trawlers and speedboats across the Meghna river. The delay has caused immense suffering, with passengers waiting up to five hours for a ferry. The photos were taken yesterday.



## BAROMASIA CANAL

### Mobile court snaps water pumps' lines, dismantles dams

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A mobile court yesterday disconnected the electricity supply to four pump machines used for illegal water extraction from the Baromasia canal in Fatiakchhari upazila of Chattogram.

The court, led by Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury, upazila nibabhi officer of Fatiakchhari, also destroyed the diversion dams built on the canal by the Halda Valley Tea Estate, which had altered the canal's course.

"During the drive, we found that the tea garden authorities had built dams at four points, changing the canal's course, and were using powerful pumps to extract water from the canal. We have destroyed the dams and cut the electricity connection to the pumps," said UNO Mozammel Hoque.

The drive was carried out with support from the Bangladesh Water Development Board, the Department of Agricultural Extension, and the police.

Sohag Talukder, sub-divisional engineer of BWDB, said all hindrances have been evicted from the canal.

"The UNO instructed us to take legal action if the tea estate authorities rebuild the dams or continue to extract water illegally," he added.

The Baromasia canal is a key source of irrigation water for over 3,000 local farmers. The activities of the Halda Valley Tea Estate nearly caused it to dry up by blocking the canal's flow completely, leaving farmers without access to irrigation water, especially during the dry season.

The canal, directly connected to the Halda river, channels freshwater from the hills and supports Bangladesh's only natural breeding ground for major carps.

It plays an important role in maintaining a healthy freshwater ecosystem and providing carps to fish farmers nationwide.

In 1980, BWDB built a water retention structure on the canal to irrigate more than 3,000 acres of land in two unions during the boro season.

Fazlul Karim, president of the Baromasia Canal Irrigation Project, said, "The water flow in the canal has resumed after the administration's action against the tea estate."

## Beach encroached for hotel project in Kuakata

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

What began as a makeshift market on the sands of Kuakata Sea Beach in Patuakhali, is now creeping illegally toward the shoreline to make way for a two-storey residential hotel and restaurant, alleges locals.

Known locally as the "Tiles Market," the structure -- made of corrugated iron sheets and wood -- was earlier declared risky by Kuakata Municipality authorities, who even put up warning signs.

Despite that, expansion has resumed under the alleged supervision of one Md Sajidul Islam Hiru Mia, said to be the market's owner.

According to residents, Hiru Mia has extended the market approximately 200 feet westward, pushing into the Zero Point of Kuakata beach.

The new development is being built on wooden stilts using iron sheets and concrete slabs -- part of a two-storey hotel-restaurant venture. Sand is reportedly being extracted from the shore to fill the construction area.

The second floor, now being cast in concrete, is rising without any supporting pillars -- posing serious risk to more than 50 traders who run businesses under the structure.

"This place gets hit by huge waves during the monsoon. Previously, it was

somewhat manageable, but now they're building a concrete second floor with no supporting pillars," said a shopkeeper, speaking anonymously.

"The entire structure could collapse any time. And if we raise our voices, the owner threatens to evict us. How can we run our businesses under such risk?" he questioned.

Municipal officials said the beach is government-owned, and no legal provision exists for constructing a market



or commercial building on the site.

KM Bacchu, president of the Kuakata Tour Guides' Association, said, "Due to the absence of a permanent market, this place has become a hub for selling cosmetic items and daily essentials to tourists. But the municipality has already declared it a risky zone, so expansion should not be allowed, especially not onto the beach itself."

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



During the extended Eid holidays, people from different parts of the country flock to Karamjal area of the Sundarbans to witness the mangrove's greenery and natural beauty. Several thousand people are visiting the site with their family and friends boarding small barges from Mongla. The photo was taken at Mongla ferry ghat in Khulna yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

## Mobile court halts child marriage

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

A 14-year-old student in Brahmanbaria was saved from being forced into child marriage, thanks to the intervention of Sadar upazila administration yesterday.

The incident occurred in the Nayanpur village.

According to locals and Brahmanbaria Sadar UNO office sources, the girl was set to be married off to Md Niloy, 20, of Bhadughar village in the upazila.

The marriage ceremony was supposed to be held yesterday afternoon. However, concerned locals informed the matter to the upazila administration.

In response, Sifat Md Ishtiaq Bhuiyan, upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) of Brahmanbaria Sadar, directed a mobile court to investigate the matter.

Mukta Goswami, executive magistrate and assistant commissioner (land) in the upazila, led the drive and went to the bride's home around 2:00pm where preparations for the wedding were underway. The official halted the event and declared the marriage illegal under existing laws.

"The girl is only 14 years old, clearly below the legal age for marriage," said Mukta Goswami, adding that both the girl's grandfather Ansar Ali and the groom's father Barkat Ali signed written undertakings, pledging not to proceed with or attempt such marriages in the future.

The groom's father was fined Tk 4,000 under of the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017. "With the help of vigilant citizens and our mobile court, we were able to prevent a child marriage," said UNO Sifat Bhuiyan.

## Railway land up for grabs

Ministry probe body says at least 350-acre land grabbed in Saidpur

ASADUZZAMAN TIPI, Nilphamari

Encroachment of railway land continues unabated in Saidpur upazila town of Nilphamari as authorities have yet to act on 24 recommendations made by a ministerial probe body in mid-2021.

The recommendations included recovering the occupied land and bringing those responsible, including corrupt railway officials, to book.

The probe body found that influential grabbers, with the backing of political leaders and railway officials, had illegally occupied 350 acres of railway land worth Tk 5,000 crore in Saidpur, home to the country's largest railway workshop.

It also revealed that 70 percent of the 2,488 railway quarters for staff and officers had been grabbed.

Railway authorities formed the probe body after journalist Motaleb Hossain lodged a complaint with the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) in late 2020, which was later forwarded to the railways ministry. However, despite the passage of nearly four years, no concrete action has been taken, and land grabbing continues openly, Hossain said.

As an example of fresh encroachment, he claimed that eight high-rise buildings have recently been constructed illegally on both sides of Shahid Dr Shamsul Huque Road and Shahid Zikrul Huque Road.

The probe report identified six political party offices, including those of BNP, Awami League, and Jatiyo Party, as being set up on occupied railway land.

Additionally, it found 36 multi-storey residential hotels, 16 commercial banks, 43 industries, 150 multi-storey business centres, and 5,000 shops built on the encroached land.

The report said Joinal demolished a railway food warehouse to construct a four-



Structures of various sorts, including high-rise buildings, political party offices, residential hotels, commercial banks, business centres, shops, and even educational institutions, have been illegally built upon encroached railway lands.

PHOTO: STAR

### KEY ISSUES

- 350 acres of railway land grabbed in Saidpur
- Encroached lands amount to Tk 5,000cr
- Probe body's 24 recommendations unheeded
- 70% of railway quarters illegally occupied

### REASONS

- Encroachment continues despite court order
- Corrupt officials, political leaders involved
- Municipality misinterprets land agreement, fuelling occupation
- Criminal cases recommended but no action taken

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Magistracy power for swift action
- Criminal cases against land grabbers
- Strengthen railway estate dept's monitoring system
- Hold corrupt officials, political leaders accountable

Among the key accused, the report named former upazila unit president of Awami League Moksedul Momin as the main grabber, alleging that he occupied vast amounts of railway land and constructed high-rise buildings for profit.

Other accused individuals include business leader Altaf Hossain, Jatiyo Party leader Joinal Abedin, and traders Babu Ali Dalmil, Nazrul Islam, and Atiquel Islam.

The report said Joinal demolished a railway food warehouse to construct a four-

storey market. Altaf reportedly built 12 multi-storey buildings, while upazila unit president of the Corruption Prevention Committee, Lion Nazrul Islam, constructed a multi-storey building for Lion School and College on encroached land.

Each of the accused denied the allegations when contacted.

Joinal refuted claims of demolishing the railway food warehouse, saying the British-era building had been in ruins long before he took a 99-year lease from the railway market committee in 1984.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

travel much easier." The bridge now serves over 5,000 people from three nearby villages, offering a year-round solution to a long-standing

transportation problem. "There is water in the Saniajan river throughout the year," said Moksed Ali, a 55-year-old businessman.

"During the rainy season, the river floods. But this floating bridge stays above the water, so we can use it at all times."

School student Shihab Hossain said it used to be difficult and frightening to cross the bamboo bridge. "Now we can walk across safely," he added.

Contacted, Patgram Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Jilur Rahman said he was not aware of the floating bridge. "I will visit the site and speak to the relevant authorities about this," he said.

Locals also urged the authorities to build a permanent concrete bridge. They said this temporary solution has helped, but a concrete bridge would bring long-term relief.

## A bridge built by the people, for the people

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

For years, residents of Baura in Lalmonirhat's Patgram upazila had to rely on a bamboo bridge to cross the Saniajan river -- a structure that was frequently damaged during the rainy season, forcing villagers to use boats or take long detours.

This year, the community came together to find a more durable solution.

With no external funding, villagers took the initiative to build a 200-foot-long floating bridge, using 100 plastic drums, over 300 bamboos, iron rods, and galvanised iron wire. The project cost around Tk 3 lakh, entirely raised through community contributions.

According to 60-year-old farmer Baktar Ali, 15 villagers



worked for seven days to complete the bridge. "Everyone helped. Some gave money; others gave time and labour," he said. "It has made our daily

## Man stabbed for protesting harassment of schoolgirl

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

Police yesterday arrested a man accused of stabbing another for protesting the harassment of a schoolgirl in Netrakona's Atpara upazila.

Shah Alam, 35, was apprehended from Dashbhagia village around 9:00am, said Atpara Police Station OC Md Ashrafulzaman.

According to police, Shah Alam had been harassing a ninth grader on her way to and from school. When Mosharraf, a local, protested, Shah Alam became enraged and threatened to kill him.

On Monday night, around 10:00pm, when Mosharraf went to a shop, Shah Alam attacked him and stabbed him in the neck with a knife before fleeing the scene.

Locals rescued Mosharraf and took him to Netrakona Sadar Hospital. As his condition worsened, he was transferred to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital, where he received 40 stitches and remains in critical condition.

Following the attack, Mosharraf's wife, Rima Akter, filed an attempted murder case against Shah Alam yesterday.

The father of the schoolgirl said, "Shah Alam even abused his own parents and drove them out of the house. He had been harassing my daughter for some time. When Mosharraf protested, he attacked him."

OC Ashrafulzaman said Shah Alam has been arrested and sent to jail via a court order.

## Ansar member run over by truck

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

An Ansar commander was killed after being run over by a soil-laden truck in Tangail's Delduar upazila yesterday.

The deceased has been identified as Shafiullah Miah, 47, of Moulvipara village in the sub-district.

He was serving as commander of the Ansar personnel assigned to the security detail of the Manoharganj UNO in Cumilla.

According to police, Shafiullah was out for a morning walk when the truck lost control and ran him over. He died on the spot.

On information, fire service and civil defense personnel rushed to the spot and recovered the body from under the truck.

Azizur Rahman Howlader, officer-in-charge (investigation) of Delduar Police Station, said the truck was seized but its driver managed to flee.

## 18-year-old's body recovered from Gorai

UNB, Magura

The body of an 18-year-old boy, who drowned while swimming in the Gorai river, was recovered yesterday morning after an overnight rescue operation.

The victim, Rahat, drowned on Thursday afternoon while swimming near the Kamarkhali Bridge in Majail Mandartola village under Nakol union of Sreepur upazila.

A diving team from Khulna conducted a rescue operation throughout the night and recovered his body in the morning. A case was filed with Sreepur Police Station regarding the matter, said OC Bisharul Islam of the police station.

According to locals, Rahat and his friends had gone to the river to bathe. While swimming, Rahat fell ill and drowned. Despite attempts by local fishermen and residents, he could not be rescued.

Rahat was a resident of Vita Sahr village in Magura and the son of Rakib Mollah.

# Myanmar death toll keeps rising

Junta chief faces protest in Thailand; thousands in desperate need for food, shelter

AFP, Bangkok

Protesters displayed a banner calling Myanmar's junta chief a "murderer" as he joined a regional summit in Bangkok yesterday, a week after a huge earthquake killed thousands and left desperate survivors pleading for food and shelter.

More than 3,000 people are confirmed dead after the 7.7-magnitude quake and the United Nations estimates that up to three million may have been affected in some way -- many left without shelter after their homes were destroyed.

Many nations have sent aid and rescue teams but there is little sign of Myanmar's ruling military helping survivors on the ground in some of the worst hit areas.

Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing held talks with leaders from Bay of Bengal littoral nations at a plush Bangkok hotel on Friday.

The decision to invite him drew criticism, and protesters outside the venue hung a banner from a bridge reading: "We do not welcome murderer Min Aung Hlaing."

The latest death toll in Myanmar stands at 3,145, with 4,589 injured and 221 missing, according to state media. In Bangkok, 22 people were killed, most of them crushed when a tower block under construction collapsed.

In Sagaing, the central Myanmar city close to the epicentre of last week's



People sleep in the open in Mandalay yesterday, following the March 28 earthquake.

quake and where an estimated 80 percent of buildings have been damaged, AFP journalists witnessed desperate scenes in recent days as hundreds of exhausted, hungry survivors scrambled for supplies.

Teams of citizen volunteers from around Myanmar piled into Sagaing in trucks laden with water, oil, rice and other basic necessities.

With so many homes in Sagaing and neighbouring Mandalay left uninhabitable by the quake, survivors have been sleeping in the streets for a week, and are badly in need of proper shelter.

A patch of land in Mandalay -- a dustbowl covered in trash -- has sprouted a tent city of people from ruined homes or others too scared to return because of

after shocks.

"There are many people who are in need," cab driver Hla Myint Po, 30, now living in tents with his family, told AFP.

"Sometimes when donors bring things it's chaos."

While the crisis rages in Myanmar, Min Aung Hlaing sat down Thursday night for a gala dinner with fellow leaders from the BIMSTEC group at the \$400 a night Shangri-La hotel in Bangkok.

The veteran general ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government in a 2021 coup, triggering a bloody civil war, and has been accused of war crimes and serious human rights abuses.

Min Aung Hlaing is under multiple global sanctions and the International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor has sought an arrest warrant for him for alleged crimes against humanity committed against Rohingya Muslims.

The junta has carried out dozens of attacks on its own people since the quake, the UN said, including more than 16 air strikes since the military joined rebel groups in declaring a temporary ceasefire to allow aid to get through.

However, the junta chief was given red carpet treatment by the Thai government as he arrived for the meeting with Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra and other leaders from Bay of Bengal nations.

## Bangladesh wants to be part of tri-nation highway project

FROM PAGE 2

The discussion also focused on investment, with Prof Yunus inviting Thai companies to join next week's investment summit in Dhaka.

He urged the Thai premier to ease visa procedures for Bangladeshis.

He said the Thai embassy in Dhaka does not have the capacity to process more visas, resulting in a long delay and a queue of Bangladeshi people willing to travel to Thailand, especially the ones seeking medical treatment.

Shinawatra assured the Bangladeshi leader that she would look into the matter.

Meanwhile, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) of Bangladesh and the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) of Thailand yesterday signed a Memorandum of Understanding for cooperation in preventing corruption.

ACC Chairman

Mohammad Abdul Momen and NACC President Suchart Trakulkasemsuk signed the MoU.

Momen said many Bangladeshi corruption suspects took shelter in some of the neighbouring countries and he believes the MoU will help track them down.

During a meeting with Sri Lankan Prime Minister Harini Amarasinha, Prof Yunus sought Sri Lankan support in the interim government's efforts to bring back money laundered abroad.

Harini mentioned her country's efforts to recover stolen money and said the Sri Lankan parliament ratified a new law to expedite the recovery process.

The two leaders discussed issues of mutual interest and vowed to expand trade and cooperation between the South Asian countries.

The chief adviser described the reform agenda of his government

and its plan to hold elections between this December and June next year.

During his meeting with Bhutanese Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay, Prof Yunus stressed increased trade and connectivity between the two countries.

He urged Tshering to send a delegation of Bhutanese businesses to the Investment Summit in Dhaka next week.

They also discussed the latest development regarding the dedicated economic zone Bangladesh has earmarked for Bhutan in the northern Kurigram district.

Tshering said Bhutanese entrepreneurs were interested in investing in fruit processing and other factories in the economic zone, and exporting the products to the countries in the region.

He also sought a dedicated fibre-optic internet connection from Bangladesh. The chief adviser assured all sorts of

cooperation in this regard. Prof Yunus said Dhaka was willing to provide more educational opportunities for Bhutanese students, especially for medical school graduates.

The Bhutanese leader hoped BIMSTEC would see

**Harini mentioned her country's efforts to recover stolen money and said the Sri Lankan parliament ratified a new law to expedite the recovery process.**

a new dynamism under the leadership of Bangladesh.

During his meeting with BIMSTEC Secretary General Indra Mani Pandey, the chief adviser asked the BIMSTEC secretariat

to take an initiative for a festival to increase engagement among the youth of member states.

Mani, a former Indian

diplomat, called on Prof Yunus at the end of the summit to discuss the future initiatives of the organisation.

The chief adviser also asked Mani to ensure a separate youth gathering when BIMSTEC holds its next summit in Dhaka two years later, CA's Deputy Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad Majumder told UNB.

Mani welcomed the ideas and pledged to work on those.

As Prof Yunus inquired about FTA negotiation status among the member states, the BIMSTEC secretary general said they were working to organise a meeting of commerce and trade ministers of the bloc, the first such meeting in 21 years.

The chief adviser also asked the BIMSTEC secretary general to prepare an annual calendar of meetings planned for a better outcome.

Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain, SDG Coordinator Lamiya Morshed and

# South Sudan clashes kill 30

AFP, Juba

At least 30 people were killed when a northern South Sudanese town was briefly overrun by an armed youth group, a local official said Thursday, following a cattle raid.

Clashes involving pastoralists and settled farming communities are common in the world's youngest country, but this incident comes as tensions rise over South Sudan's fragile political situation.

The attack in northern Ruweng Administrative Area began earlier in the week when a group of armed youth stole lambs before they were scared off by security forces, said Simon Chol Mialith, the local Minister of Information.

The following day, he told AFP, the group returned in greater numbers and attacked Abiemnom, and although "the youth and the security forces tried to defend the town, they were overrun by the Mayom armed youth".

On Wednesday the South Sudan People's Defence Force drove the group from the settlement, Mialith said, where calm has now been restored.

"The number has risen to 30 people confirmed dead and over 40 persons wounded," he said.

Local media reported that some of those killed were members of the armed groups, but AFP was unable to confirm this.

The incident comes as forces allied to President Salva Kiir and First Vice President Riek Machar clash across the country, sparking regional concern and threatening a fragile peace deal.

## Russell Brand charged with rape

AFP, London

London's Metropolitan Police yesterday said it had charged comedian and actor Russell Brand with rape and a number of other sexual offences.

Brand, 49, who became known internationally as the husband of pop star Katy Perry after forging a career as a stand-up comedian with risqué routines, was charged with one count of rape, indecent assault and oral rape as well as two counts of sexual assault, the force said.

The charges relate to offences alleged to have taken place between 1999 and 2005 involving four women.

Brand again denied the accusations, saying in a video posted on X that he had been an addict in the past "but what I never was a rapist".

Brand is charged with the rape of a woman in 1999 in the Bournemouth area on England's south coast and the oral rape and sexual assault of a woman in 2004 in the central Westminster area of London.

He has also been charged with indecently assaulting a woman in 2001 and sexually assaulting another woman between 2004 and 2005 -- both alleged to have taken place in Westminster.

## Unprepared Dhaka

FROM PAGE 12

on land-filled wetlands as major contributors to the city's seismic risk.

### IGNORING CONSTRUCTION STANDARDS

Dr Ansary said that in the event of a major earthquake, Dhaka would be a city of collapsed buildings, most constructed without adhering to the Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC).

Poor construction materials, flawed structural designs, and unregulated expansion are turning thousands of buildings in the city into death traps.

"If an earthquake of magnitude 7 or higher strikes Dhaka, many buildings will collapse instantly," he said. "Earthquakes do not kill people -- poorly built structures do."

The 2023 Turkey earthquake (magnitude 7.8) killed around 53,500 people, primarily due to building collapses.

In contrast, the 2010 Haiti earthquake (magnitude 7.0) caused nearly 230,000 deaths due to weak buildings, whereas the 2010 Chile earthquake (magnitude 8.8) killed only 280 people.

Despite releasing 800 times more energy than the Haiti earthquake, Chile's strong construction practices saved lives, he said.

Dhaka is following the same disastrous path as Haiti and Turkey. Unauthorised residential projects, particularly in Dhaka's eastern and western areas, have been built by filling floodplains, wetlands, and water bodies without proper piling to stabilise the soil. High-rise buildings continue to sprout on weak foundations, putting millions at risk, he added.

### FLAWED PLANNING AND A LACK OF OVERSIGHT

Adil Mohammed Khan, president of the Bangladesh Institute of Planners, describes Bangladesh's cities as completely unprepared for a major earthquake.

The recent Myanmar earthquake highlights our lack of preparedness. Construction continues without following building codes, master plans, or land-use zoning regulations," he said.

Although the Detailed Area Plan (DAP) suggests area-based variations in building size and height, recent

## Mob beats murder

FROM PAGE 12

He said that as Aminul tried to flee, locals chased him, making him take shelter in the house of Abdur Rashid in Ronshibari village.

The crowd surrounded the house. Upon receiving the news, police from Bagmara Police Station arrived at the scene and attempted to rescue him but failed due to resistance from the crowd.

The mob tried several times to break down the door and enter the house. They demanded that the accused be handed over to them and asked the police to leave," said Touhidul.

Police and locals said around 7:30pm the enraged crowd broke into the house.

When Sub Inspector Sadikul Islam and five other police personnel tried to intervene, they were assaulted and the mob forced their way inside. Aminul was then dragged out of the house and beaten severely, eventually leading to his death.

Two separate complaints were lodged with the Bagmara Police Station. An investigation is underway regarding the incident. No arrests were made yet as of filing this report," OC Touhidul Islam told The Daily Star.

This would allow authorities to prioritise retrofitting efforts.

He said a similar initiative has successfully strengthened nearly 500 garment industry buildings under the Ministry of Labour.

Furthermore, third-party engineering firms should oversee construction quality to ensure adherence to BIMSTEC guidelines.

City authorities such as Rajuk, CDA, KDA, and RDA must issue occupancy certificates only after independent verification, he said.

Dhaka's critical infrastructure -- electricity, gas, telecommunications, transport, and water supply -- must be reinforced against earthquakes, he added.

Experts also recommended a risk-sensitive map to guide construction and emergency shutdown protocols to prevent secondary disasters, such as gas explosions.

Md Nurul Islam, chief engineer (implementation) at Rajuk, said they have recently formed teams to monitor all the newly constructed buildings especially high-rise buildings.

They will follow whether the buildings are being constructed following the BIMSTEC standards and building construction rules, he added.

## Hope and fear in the haor

FROM PAGE 12

He quickly inundated the low-lying fields of Sylhet. Since 2017, flash floods have been a major threat to boro production. Last year, repeated floods caused significant damage.

To mitigate early flooding, the government constructs and repairs haor protection dykes in Sunamganj annually. However, the quality and progress of these projects often raise concerns.

This year, 593 kilometres of dykes are being built and repaired under 693 projects across 53 haors, costing Tk 128 crore, according to the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) in Sunamganj.

As per the Kajer Binimoye Taka (Kabita) Rules 2017, all dyke construction was to be completed by February 28, but even after an extended deadline, work remains unfinished. A visit to Korchar Haor on April 2 revealed incomplete dykes at Harimaner Bhanga in Raypur-Bhadarpur, with no workers in sight.

Police stopped due to Eid, and we don't know when it will resume. With recent rain, we fear the worst."

Bijon Sen Roy, general secretary of the Haor Bachao Andolon, strongly criticised the construction quality.

"This year's dyke construction is the worst in recent history. If heavy rains and flash floods come, most dykes will collapse, destroying the boro harvest."

However, BWDB officials downplayed the concerns.

Mamun Hawlader, the executive engineer of BWDB in Sunamganj

and the member secretary of the district committee for dyke construction, claimed, "All basic work was completed on time, and overall progress is at 97 percent. Only finishing touches remain, and the quality is good. This year, we reinforced key dykes in seven upazilas with blocks, ensuring long-term stability."

### PEST ATTACKS AND DISEASE OUTBREAKS

While the overall crop condition is promising, some farmers have reported damage due to pest attacks and an outbreak of blast disease, primarily triggered by the recent weather.

"The paddy looks great this year, but insect infestation is a growing concern due to the humid yet hot weather," said Mohammad Jahangir of Moulvibazar Sadar Upazila, right after he sprayed pesticides on five acres of farmland.

The lack of soil moisture has created drought-like conditions in some areas, making fields vulnerable to pest attacks and fungal infections.

However, recent rainfall in Sylhet, Sunamganj, and Moulvibazar has helped mitigate these threats.

"The rain came at the right time, ensuring a better yield," said Bimal Chandra Shome, additional director of DAE in the Sylhet division.

However, he warned that Habiganj remains at risk due to a lack of rainfall.

### LABOUR SHORTAGE AND MECHANISATION

“

I think it's better if we have direct talks. I think it goes faster, and you understand the other side a lot better than if you go through intermediaries.

DONALD TRUMP  
on talks with Iran over nuke deal



“

Trump is not going to fall into the trap of endless negotiations.... We will know soon enough, in a matter of weeks, not months, whether Russia is serious about peace or not.

MARCO RUBIO  
US secretary of state on Ukraine war



“

Future investments, investments announced in the last weeks, should be suspended for a time for as long as the situation with the US is not clarified.

EMMANUEL MACRON  
French president reacting to US tariff



A young boy looks on as Palestinians stand amid the devastation in the yard of a school yesterday, a day after it was hit by an Israeli strike, in the al-Tuffah neighbourhood of Gaza City.

PHOTO: AFP

## South Korea court ousts impeached president Yoon

AFP, Seoul

South Korea's Constitutional Court yesterday unanimously ruled to remove impeached president Yoon Suk Yeol from office over his disastrous martial law declaration, triggering fresh elections after months of political turmoil.

Yoon, 64, was suspended by lawmakers over his December 3 attempt to subvert civilian rule, which saw armed soldiers deployed to parliament. He was also arrested on insurrection charges as part of a separate criminal case.

Millions of Koreans watched the Constitutional Court hand down its verdict live on television, with the country's main messaging app KakaoTalk telling AFP that some users were experiencing delays due to a sudden surge in traffic.

"Given the serious negative impact and far-reaching consequences of the respondent's constitutional violations... (We) dismiss respondent President Yoon Suk Yeol," acting court President Moon Hyung-bae said while delivering the ruling.

Yoon's removal, which is effective immediately, triggers fresh presidential elections, which must be held within 60 days. Authorities will announce a date in the coming days.

Outside the court, AFP reporters heard Yoon supporters shouting threats that they wanted to kill the judges, who decided unanimously to uphold Yoon's impeachment and have been given additional security protection by police.

Yoon's actions "violate the core principles of the rule of law and democratic governance," the

judges said in their ruling.

Yoon sending armed soldiers to parliament in a bid to prevent lawmakers from voting down his decree "violated the political neutrality of the armed forces".

He deployed troops for "political purposes", the judges added.

"In the end, the respondent's

Ji Yeon Hong, a political science professor at University of Michigan, told AFP.

"He failed to grasp the magnitude of the power entrusted to him and showed a deeply biased understanding of democracy and political leadership."

Yoon is the second South Korean



unconstitutional and illegal acts are a betrayal of the people's trust and constitute a serious violation of the law that cannot be tolerated," they ruled.

Opposition party lawmakers clapped their hands as the verdict was announced, calling it "historic", while lawmakers from Yoon's party fled out of the courtroom.

Yoon apologised for failing to meet the people's "expectations" in a brief statement released after the verdict.

The dismissed president "will likely be remembered as a leader who was fundamentally unprepared -- and perhaps unqualified -- for the presidency," he

leader to be impeached by the court after Park Geun-hye in 2017.

After weeks of tense hearings, judges spent more than a month deliberating the case while public unrest swelled.

Police raised the security alert to the highest possible level yesterday. Officers encircled the courthouse with a ring of vehicles and stationed special operations teams in the vicinity.

Anti-Yoon protesters gathered outdoors to watch a live broadcast of the verdict, cheering and holding hands. When Yoon's removal was announced, they erupted into wild cheers, with some bursting into tears.

## Missile strike kills 14 in Ukraine

AFP, Kyiv

A Russian ballistic missile strike on Volodymyr Zelensky's home city of Kryvyi Rih killed 14 people yesterday, including six children, the Ukrainian leader said.

The missile struck a residential area near a children's playground and wounded more than 50 people, according to the head of the city's military administration.

Unverified videos on social media appeared to show bodies lying on a street, while another showed a plume of smoke rising into the evening sky.

"It was preliminarily a ballistic missile attack. As of now, 14 people have been killed, including six children," Zelensky said on Telegram.

The rescue operation was ongoing, he added.

"There is only one reason why this continues -- Russia does not want a ceasefire and we see it. The whole world sees it," he said.

"And only the world's pressure on Russia, all efforts to strengthen Ukraine, our air defence, our forces -- only this will determine when the war will end."

The Ukrainian leader was born in Kryvyi Rih, which had a pre-war population of around 600,000 people.

## Buy \$5m Trump card for US visa!

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump unveiled the first "gold card", a residency permit sold for \$5 million each, aboard Air Force One on Thursday.

Holding a prototype that bore his face and an inscription "The Trump Card", the Republican president told reporters that the special visa would probably be available "in less than two weeks".

"I'm the first buyer," he said. "Pretty exciting, huh?"

Trump previously said that sales of the new visa, a high-price version of the traditional green card, would bring in job creators and could be used to reduce the US national deficit.

The billionaire former real estate tycoon, who has made the deportation of millions of undocumented migrants a priority for his second term, said the new card would be a route to highly prized US citizenship.

He said in February that his administration hoped to sell "maybe a million" of the cards and did not rule out that Russian oligarchs may be eligible.

## TikTok given extra 75 days to find buyer

AFP, Miami

US President Donald Trump yesterday extended the deadline for TikTok to find a non-Chinese buyer or face a ban in the United States, allowing 75 more days to find a solution.

"My administration has been working very hard on a deal to save TikTok, and we have made tremendous progress," Trump said on Truth Social, just hours before the deadline was to expire.

"A transaction requires more work to ensure all necessary approvals are signed, which is why I am signing an Executive Order to keep TikTok up and running for an additional 75 days."

The hugely popular video-sharing app, which has more than 170 million American users, is under threat from a US law that passed overwhelmingly last year and orders TikTok to split from its Chinese owner ByteDance or get shut down in the United States.

Trump has insisted his administration is near a deal to find a buyer for TikTok and keep it from shutting down that would involve multiple investors but has given few details.

Motivated by national security fears and belief in Washington that TikTok is controlled by the Chinese government, the ban took effect on January 19, one day before Trump's inauguration.

In the hours before that deadline, TikTok temporarily shut down in the United States and disappeared from app stores, to the dismay of millions of users.

But the Republican president quickly announced an initial 75-day delay, and TikTok subsequently restored service to users, returning to the Apple and Google app stores in February.

The new 75-day delay pushes the deadline to June 19.

## Trump's tariff war reshapes how US treats allies

AFP, Washington

Japan and Taiwan promised billions in investment. Britain offered an invitation from the king.

In the end, even US allies failed to dissuade President Donald Trump from hitting them with tariffs, which threaten to remake not just the global economy but the foundations of US foreign policy.

Trump, in what he called "Liberation Day," on Wednesday unleashed across the board global tariffs on US friends and foes alike with some of the most punishing rates hitting longstanding US allies.

"This is a huge change in how we deal with the world," said Danielle Pletka of the conservative American Enterprise Institute.

Trump, seeing himself as a master dealmaker, believes he can gain leverage when effectively "you take exports hostage, and then you start negotiating the price of their release."

"That's not usually how America does business. Sometimes it will do business this way with our adversaries," she said. "It is very rarely how we do business with our allies."

Heather Hurlburt, who was chief of staff to the US trade representative during former president Joe Biden's administration, said the US has traditionally put security ties first.

"What you now have is the people around Trump saying we want to fix our economic relationships, and the security relationships

can follow where we approve of the economic relationships.

"That's a complete inversion in how US policy has worked," said Hurlburt, now an associate fellow at think tank Chatham House.

In his first term, Trump confounded US allies, but many found combinations of flattery and incentives to prevent drastic actions.

In his first term, leaders like late Japan PM Shinzo Abe and French President Emmanuel Macron could gain a little by building rapport with Trump.

In the White House Rose Garden on Wednesday, Trump instead basked in praise from a blue-collar worker who declared Trump the greatest president ever as he was invited to the podium.

**People around Trump saying we want to fix our economic ties, and the security ties can follow where we approve of the economic ties. That's a complete inversion in how US policy has worked.**



Ahead of the tariffs, some US partners tried to woo Trump with big announcements. Chipmaking giant TSMC of Taiwan, which counts on the US for security against China, said last month that it would invest \$100 billion in the US.

Trump acknowledged the investment in his remarks but said that Taiwan "took all of our computer chips and semiconductors" and announced 32 percent tariffs on its exports.

A Washington-based diplomat of one country hit by heavy tariffs said his government decided on a quiet approach, reaching out to Trump officials to plead for cooperation.

"It didn't work at all. The tariffs are much higher than anything we were expecting," he said on condition of anonymity.

Trump, in sharp contrast to Biden, has piled pressure on allies. He has demanded Europe spend more on its own defense and

take the lead in arming Ukraine.

Vice President JD Vance, in an interview with Breitbart News, said the US would no longer be the "piggy bank of the world" and drew a link between economic and security policies.

"In a word, it's nationalism," he told the right-wing outlet. "In our economic policy, we're going to fight back against ridiculous trade practices. In our foreign policy, we're going to stop starting stupid wars."

Trump has vowed to generate "trillions of dollars" from tariffs to reduce taxes and stimulate domestic manufacturing.

Most mainstream economists dismiss Trump's logic, noting that tariff costs will be passed on to consumers. Wall Street on Thursday suffered its worst fall in five years.

Hurlburt, the Chatham House expert, said that policymakers around Trump consider tariffs an "opening move" to reshape the economic order, with tariffs eventually stabilizing at a "reciprocal level" and a weaker dollar boosting US exports.

To achieve such a long-term transformation, she said, "you need at least some level of cooperation with other countries" -- which will need to be certain that they can make deals that the United States will honour.

"It's a little unclear that other countries will indeed conclude that negotiating with us is a good investment," she said.

## Take effective steps to reduce child mortality

### An equitable healthcare system can bring down stillbirths, under-five deaths

If there is one area of healthcare where Bangladesh made commendable progress over the last three decades, it is the decrease in maternal and child mortality rates. Yet, based on data published by two recent UN reports, this success is being eclipsed by the number of stillbirths and infant mortalities still occurring in the country. According to one report, 63,000 stillbirths are recorded in the country each year, which is equal to one stillborn for every 41 births—the highest among South Asian nations. The second report shows that in 2023, over 100,000 children died in Bangladesh before reaching their fifth birthday, while approximately 75,000 did not even survive the first month after birth.

The impacts of these deaths, which experts say are mostly preventable, are not just about lost human lives, but also about the psychological and emotional toll on the parents and families of these children. Sometimes, families in developing countries like ours also have to bear the financial and social burden of taboos associated with stillbirths and neonatal deaths. Unsurprisingly, the inefficiency and inadequacy of our healthcare system contribute to these preventable deaths and their impact on the families. Causes of the deaths include premature birth, complications during delivery, and infections like sepsis and pneumonia, which could be managed easily if expecting mothers across the country, irrespective of their economic condition and locality, could access well equipped and well maintained primary healthcare units, and avail neonatal and postnatal services as well as trained midwives in time.

Instead, home deliveries are still a reality in this country, accounting for 30 percent of all births. And how can families be blamed for choosing home deliveries when upazila and union healthcare facilities fail to provide 24/7 quality healthcare services? Even the private medical centres are no better. Despite charging exorbitant fees, their service qualities remain poor. In fact, one UN report highlights how unregulated private medical centres, through their inconsistent practices, are contributing to these preventable neonatal and under-five deaths.

We have repeatedly written about the need for an equitable healthcare system and the urgency of making primary healthcare affordable, accessible, and reliable in the country. While it is important to increase the number of community clinics and healthcare facilities at union and upazila levels, their accessibility should be prioritised too. Recruiting skilled manpower with good remuneration should be another priority to ensure quality primary care. This should include trained and certified midwives, birth attendants, and other community health workers. With just five years left to reach Sustainable Development Goals, we must not let the progress we have made so far go awry.

## Crisis in emergency care

### Eid holidays highlight systemic failures in our healthcare system

It is unacceptable that people suffering from various health issues were deprived of necessary treatment or had to endure long delays due to a shortage of doctors and nurses at hospitals around the country during the Eid-ul-Fitr holidays. As in previous years, major public hospitals were mostly operated by non-Muslim doctors and nurses. However, the number of patients in the emergency departments at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) and Pongu Hospital increased significantly during the holidays, causing immense suffering for those in need of urgent care.

A man named Riyad Hossain, who was allegedly beaten by a mob, died due to a lack of timely treatment caused by this shortage. Reportedly, police first took him to Kurmitola General Hospital, which refused to admit him and instead referred him to DMCH. However, the country's largest hospital also did not admit him. He was given some medication and the police were informed that his condition was stable. 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 alternatives, police had to keep him at the station. As his condition worsened, they took him back to Kurmitola General Hospital, but the hospital once again refused to admit him. Ultimately, he succumbed to his injuries at the hospital's emergency department—an avoidable tragedy.

A correspondent from this daily, upon visiting various hospitals, found that most were severely understaffed. At Pongu Hospital, a long list of patients waited at the emergency department, with only one doctor available to treat them. If an emergency department is so understaffed and struggling to cope, one can only imagine the plight of non-emergency patients. At DMCH, an average of 1,680 people visited the emergency department last week—higher than the usual 1,300-1,400 daily visits under normal circumstances, according to DMCH sources. The surge in emergency visits during Eid was attributed to many district, upazila level, and private hospitals either remaining closed or providing minimal services.

This clearly indicates a severe lack of planning at all levels before the Eid holidays. As a result, granting leave to too many doctors and hospital staff at the same time led to immense suffering for patients.

To prevent such crises in the future, hospitals should implement a rotational duty system for medical workers during major holidays, recognising that healthcare is an essential service. Additionally, district and upazila-level hospitals should establish contingency plans, including incentives for medical staff to work during holidays. Private hospitals must also be required to keep emergency services operational. Without these measures, the healthcare system will continue to fail those in need, particularly during national holidays.

# EDITORIAL

## Are we trading away our privacy for comfort?



H.M. Nazmul Alam  
is an academic, journalist, and political analyst. He  
can be reached at nazmulalam.rijohn@gmail.com.

H.M. NAZMUL ALAM

The revolution we once dreamt of is here. Once the stuff of science fiction, technology today pervades almost every corner of our lives. Smartphones that fit in our pockets now hold more computing power than NASA had during the Apollo moon missions. Artificial intelligence is writing poems, diagnosing diseases, and driving cars. Cloud computing, genetic databases, and the Internet of Things (IoT) have knitted themselves so seamlessly into our daily routine that we rarely stop to notice them anymore. Technology has gifted us with convenience beyond imagination.

But convenience comes with a cost. And perhaps the steepest cost of all is privacy.

In this age of hyper-connectivity, we need to ask ourselves a simple but profound question: does personal information even exist anymore? We unlock our phones with our faces, let Siri, Gemini, and Alexa answer our most personal questions, and eagerly pour the details of our lives onto social media platforms for a few fleeting moments of validation. Every click, every scroll, every heartbeat recorded by wearable tech is meticulously analysed and categorised—and often sold to the highest bidder.

An article in *The Guardian* published in 2018 revealed how Google collects various types of data about a user every day, including their precise location, browsing history, shopping preferences, social media habits, and even sleep patterns. Social psychologist Shoshana Zuboff, in her seminal book *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, warns of a dangerous new economic order where "human experience is claimed as free raw material for translation into behavioural data." Her conclusion is frightening: "If you're not paying for the product, you are the product."

Governments are not far behind in this data-driven pursuit. Take the Chinese government's social credit system, for example. Under this system, citizens are constantly monitored—both online and offline—and their actions are scored and ranked in a complex algorithm that

determines whether they can travel, what kind of jobs they can apply for, and even whom they can marry. A late payment on a loan, spending too much time playing video games, or voicing political dissent online can lower an individual's score, leading to severe restrictions in personal freedom.

The United States National Security Agency (NSA) has long been accused of mass data collection and wiretapping, as revealed by whistleblower Edward Snowden in 2013. Closer to home in Bangladesh,

This dystopian future was anticipated long ago. In 1984, George Orwell envisioned a world where Big Brother watched everyone, everywhere, all the time. But our reality is more complex. We have welcomed Big Brother into our homes



VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

questions around digital surveillance are becoming increasingly pressing. GPS tracking, biometric databases, facial recognition, and a growing network of CCTV cameras are becoming ubiquitous in cities like Dhaka and Chattogram. What began as tools to enhance efficiency, public safety, and security are inching ever closer to becoming tools of control.

This growing web of surveillance technology recalls philosopher Michel Foucault's concept of the Panopticon, a design for a prison where inmates never know whether they are being watched, so they behave as if they always are. Foucault argued that the mere possibility of surveillance leads people to regulate their behaviour voluntarily. "Visibility is a trap," he warned.

In the digital age, we may be constructing a new kind of

in the form of smart assistants and smart devices. In *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley warned that people wouldn't need to be oppressed by force, but would willingly surrender freedom in exchange for comfort and pleasure.

What does all of this mean for personal freedom? As Yuval Noah Harari observes in *Homo Deus*, "Once Big Data systems know me better than I know myself, the authority will shift from humans to algorithms." Already, algorithms determine what news we see, what ads we're shown, and what content gets prioritised on our feeds. The concern is that predictive analytics will not just predict our behaviour—but shape it.

If artificial intelligence can predict, with high accuracy, how we will vote, what we will buy, and even what we might be thinking, then how

free are we, really? Will our choices remain our own, or will they be subtly nudged and manipulated by forces beyond our understanding?

Consider behavioural economist Cass Sunstein's concept of the "nudge." Subtle changes in how choices are presented can significantly influence decisions. In a world where data allows personalised nudges, the potential for manipulation becomes dangerously powerful. Who controls the data controls the narrative—and, by extension, human behaviour.

Despite this dystopian trajectory, all is not lost. Movements advocating for digital rights and privacy are gaining momentum. The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) has become a global benchmark for privacy protection. It empowers individuals to know what data is collected about them, how it is used, and to demand its deletion. Organisations like the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) continue to fight for internet freedom and privacy rights. In countries like Bangladesh, the conversation around digital privacy and cybersecurity is slowly beginning, though much work remains.

Technologists and ethicists are also calling for a "Privacy by Design" approach in developing new technologies—embedding privacy considerations into the architecture of digital systems, rather than treating them as an afterthought.

Some thinkers, like Jaron Lanier, advocate for a complete rethinking of the data economy. In his book *Who Owns the Future?*, Lanier argues for a system where people are paid for the data they produce, creating a more equitable digital economy.

As we stand on the threshold of a new digital age, we face a critical choice. Will we drift further into a world where privacy is a relic of the past, or will we fight to reclaim our autonomy?

Perhaps the question is not whether we can live without privacy, but whether we are willing to. What does it mean to be human if our thoughts, desires, and actions are constantly predicted, categorised, and commodified?

The poet Rumi once said, "Don't you know yet? It is your Light that lights the world." In a world obsessed with data and control, we must remember our humanity—the inner light that technology can never fully quantify or predict.

The tools of surveillance are already here. Whether we wield them with wisdom and care, or let them wield us, remains to be seen.

## CAAB's monopoly is a barrier to aviation growth

Erfan Chowdhury  
is a US-based consultant working in the aerospace and defence industry.

### ERFAN CHOWDHURY

In Bangladesh, airlines are often the primary target of complaints about poor services, both from passengers and the media. While some of these grievances are justified, not all issues can be attributed solely to the airlines.

General passengers may not realise that nearly 30 years after airline privatisation, the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) still has a full monopoly on the country's airport and aviation infrastructure.

CAAB's bureaucrats, lacking accountability, have squandered crores in the name of airport development since the 1990s, seeking billions for unnecessary and wasteful projects. It submitted an exorbitant Tk 10,000 crore funding request to the government to extend Saidpur airport's runway from 6,000 feet to 10,000 feet in the name of regional connectivity. The question is: did CAAB conduct a business case with a detailed financial forecast to justify its funding request?

According to CAAB, the project will transform the Saidpur airport into an international one as well as a regional cargo hub. The extended runway would be able to accommodate larger aircraft carrying over 300 people, targeting passenger as well as cargo aircraft from Nepal, Bhutan, and

### India's Seven Sisters.

According to media reports, in 2019, Nepal expressed interest in enhancing regional connectivity by establishing direct flights between its small regional airports—Bhadrapur and Biratnagar—and Saidpur in Bangladesh. Both of the Nepali airports have a single 5,000-foot runway. Saidpur airport, with a lower altitude and longer runway (6,000 feet), can accommodate much larger aircraft than the Bhadrapur and Biratnagar airports. Meanwhile, Bhutan, due to its high altitude and mountainous terrain, does not have an airport capable of handling as large an aircraft as Saidpur can.

Moreover, Saidpur is the farthest Bangladeshi airport from the population centres in the Seven Sisters region. Bangladesh's three existing international airports—Dhaka, Chattogram, and Sylhet—despite being closer, have no direct air service with that region in India.

Even after spending billions of dollars on constructing three underutilised 10,000-foot runways outside Dhaka (Chattogram, Sylhet, and Cox's Bazar), CAAB continues to push the false narrative that an airport must have a 10,000-foot runway to operate international flights. In reality, the primary requirement for an airport to be designated "international" is the presence of a customs and immigration facility. To establish regional connectivity with Nepal and Bhutan, Saidpur simply requires a customs and immigration processing facility—not a costly, billion-dollar runway expansion. Its existing runway

is sufficient to accommodate flights from Bhadrapur and Biratnagar airports in Nepal and any airport in Bhutan.

Besides, one can take the Skiatos Alexandros Papadimitriou Airport in Greece as a case in point. It handled over 600,000 passengers across Europe in 2024 utilising a 5,341-foot runway.

The development of Bogura airport can also be presented as another example of rampant waste and incompetence.

In January 2025, CAAB announced that Bogura airport needed a 1,300-foot runway expansion, costing taxpayers Tk 1,200 crore. It would take two years to start commercial service, it said.

The existing runway and passenger processing facilities at Bogura airport may require some repairs and upgrades to initiate commercial operations, but not an expensive and prolonged runway expansion.

Despite receiving billions of dollars in taxpayer funding and benefiting from low labour costs, CAAB, which serves as the regulator, promoter, and sole provider of airports and air traffic control services, has yet to succeed in building a healthy aviation sector.

According to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the total economic impact of aviation in Bangladesh is only \$5.3 billion, compared to over \$17 billion in other similarly sized economies, such as Denmark and Vietnam. Vietnam's commercial jet fleet is nearly eight times larger than that in Bangladesh. Even

more concerning is that Bangladesh's aviation industry lacks the skilled workforce and infrastructure to effectively operate and maintain a fleet of only 25 commercial jets.

The civil aviation authority has also not been able to attract a single airline from regions outside the Asia Pacific and the Middle East to operate flights to Bangladesh. This has tremendously impacted the country's connectivity, trade, remittance flow, and overall economic growth.

Unless CAAB is restructured solely as a regulatory body and airport operations are spun off into separate entities, Bangladesh will keep facing challenges in building a globally competitive aviation industry.

To run the country's airports, Bangladesh could adopt the Canadian model, where each airport is leased to a non-profit organisation comprising local and national stakeholders. These organisations would compete with one another and take full responsibility for funding the operation and development of airports, operating independently without government or political interference. The government will be able to collect a substantial amount of revenue from the airports in the form of lease payments, VAT, and other passenger-specific taxes.

The July uprising has allowed us to question those in power. Now is the time to rein in CAAB's monopolisation over the country's airports, and ensure that they are run by competent, professional, and an accountable manpower.

# Rebuilding trust in global trade

## The case for multilateralism in the Trump era



Dr M Shawkat Alam is professor of international law at Macquarie University, Australia. He can be reached at [shawkat.alam@mq.edu.au](mailto:shawkat.alam@mq.edu.au).

M SHAWKAT ALAM

The global trading system, anchored by multilateralism and predictability for decades, has entered a phase of profound uncertainty. This crisis was hastened by the aggressive protectionist measures pursued under the administration of US President Donald Trump, which inflicted lasting damage on institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and undermined long-standing norms like non-discrimination and reciprocity. For developing countries and Least Developed Countries (LDCs), such as Bangladesh, the weakening of multilateral trade architecture presents deep structural challenges that threaten both economic security and development progress.

Trade liberalisation has been one of the defining achievements in the post-World War II era. Under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and later the WTO, countries committed to progressively reduce tariffs and remove trade barriers. Principles such as the most-favoured-nation (MFN) treatment and national treatment underpinned this cooperation, ensuring that countries treated all trade partners equally and foreign products no less favourably than domestic ones.

However, the Trump administration's unilateral tariffs on steel, aluminium, and Chinese goods marked a sharp departure, bypassing WTO mechanisms and challenging these foundational norms. Justified on national security grounds, the measures fuelled retaliatory responses and signalled a shift from multilateralism to power-driven bilateralism, disrupting global supply chains and undermining rule-based trade. The

implications have been global in scope, with spillover effects that have rippled across borders and disrupted integrated supply chains.

Bangladesh's export-led economy, particularly its \$40 billion ready-made garment (RMG) sector, has long benefited from multilateral trade rules and preferential schemes such as the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP). However, the recent wave of protectionism and unilateral tariffs exemplified by Trump's policies poses serious risks. Even if no direct tariffs on Bangladeshi goods were imposed, the country would still be vulnerable due to its deep integration in global value chains. For example, if Bangladesh exports fabric to a country assembling garments for the US, American tariffs on those final products can sharply reduce demand for Bangladeshi inputs. This exposure is heightened by the paralysis of the WTO dispute settlement system, leaving Bangladesh without effective legal recourse. Additionally, tariff escalation, where processed goods face higher duties than raw materials, discourages industrial upgrading and hinders diversification beyond low-skill manufacturing, limiting Bangladesh's ability to climb the value chain and sustain long-term development.

Trade is not only an economic tool; it is central to the realisation of sustainable development and the maintenance of global peace and security. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development underscores the transformative potential of trade in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specifically, trade contributes to SDG 1 (No

Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

Bangladesh's developmental success has been intricately tied to export-led growth. The disruption of multilateral trade norms and institutions, therefore, puts these hard-won gains at risk. Furthermore, there is a growing

threatening peace and stability at the national and international levels. As trade disruptions deepen disparities, the prospects for global peace and cooperation diminish. Reinigorating the multilateral trading system is thus not only about promoting commerce, but also about creating the conditions for durable peace.

The path forward must involve a reinvigoration of multilateralism. WTO

in international trade.

In parallel, the trade agenda must better integrate development priorities. Special and differential treatment for LDCs should be preserved and enhanced. This includes not just preferential tariffs, but also capacity-building, technical assistance, and flexible transition periods, especially for countries like Bangladesh that are on the cusp of LDC graduation.

Bangladesh must also adopt a forward-looking trade strategy that reduces overdependence on traditional markets. Regional cooperation through frameworks like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), and the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) could offer alternative avenues for market expansion.

Domestic reforms are equally crucial. Enhancing product quality standards, addressing non-tariff barriers, modernising customs procedures, and improving logistical infrastructure will make Bangladeshi exports more competitive. Furthermore, by investing in education and innovation, the country can develop the human capital needed for higher-value industries.

Finally, as a soon-to-graduate LDC, Bangladesh should play a proactive role in WTO negotiations. It should align with other developing nations to push for inclusive reforms that prioritise development over domination.

Trump's tariff policies exposed the fragility of the multilateral trading system, revealing how quickly established norms can be cast aside. But they also highlighted the enduring relevance of multilateralism as a safeguard for smaller and less powerful countries. For Bangladesh, the stakes are not abstract; they involve livelihoods, national development, and economic sovereignty.

The future of sustainable development and global peace depends on restoring trust in fair and equitable trade. Trade must be reclaimed not merely as a tool of economic exchange but as a foundation for a more just, prosperous, and peaceful world.



Regional cooperation through frameworks like the RCEP, BIMSTEC, and SAFTA could offer alternative avenues of market expansion for Bangladeshi products.

PHOTO: PID

consensus that sustainable development cannot thrive in an environment of trade unpredictability and economic nationalism. When markets close, global supply chains fracture, and LDCs lose access to opportunities for growth and diversification. The ripple effects are not limited to economic indicators; they affect food security, public health systems, education, and social cohesion.

In addition, economic marginalisation and systemic inequality fuel social unrest, extremism, and forced migration,

reform, particularly the restoration of its dispute settlement mechanism, is essential. Countries should work to depoliticise appointments to the Appellate Body and ensure that future trade disagreements can be resolved through law rather than power.

Reaffirming the principles of MFN and national treatment must also be a priority. The widespread disregard for these norms has allowed powerful states to extract concessions through bilateralism, often at the expense of smaller economies. Restoring these rules will be critical to re-establishing trust and fairness

# The pervasive curse of toxic masculinity



## BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza is professor of English at Dhaka University.

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

It all started with a subtle protest. A young man in his mid-20s was staring at a woman standing at a juice joint near her home. Her younger brother and a friend were with her when the woman noticed the man's constant staring at her. "Do I know you? Why are you looking at me?" was a hint for the man to leave them alone. Instead, the man retorted by asking, "What's wrong with staring?"

I read journalist Rafia Tamanna's account of the incident on social media, where she detailed how she and her brother were physically attacked and threatened by the man and his friends. Thanks to rapid police action, the attackers have been apprehended. However, I am intrigued by the apparently innocent question, "What's wrong with staring?" Surely, looks don't kill. We were not there to determine whether the gaze was flirtatious or toxic. But in any culture, prolonged staring is considered an invasion of privacy, a form of intimidation and aggression. Averted eye contact is perceived as a sign of modesty, especially when you are engaging with elders or the opposite gender. When you make eye contact with a stranger in public, the expected norm is to nod or smile to acknowledge the person and look away. Decency would have demanded the man feel slightly embarrassed and return to his own business after Rafia raised her discomfort. His resort to violence, assisted by his friends, signals a disturbingly common mindset that normalises the objectification of women and frames protest against such behaviour as transgression.

According to this mindset, out in the open, men have the right to look at any woman. If one wants to spare oneself from such stares, one is prescribed to wear veils. Otherwise, men reserve the right to treat women as "public property." They reserve the right to be oblivious to a woman's discomfort by defining such "staring"

as harassment but as harmless. Heaven forbid, if a woman protests, men will rewrite the moral script to blame the woman as the aggressor for her reaction. Such audacity will be met by public punishment, boosting male ego.

The real issue here is power and control over women's bodies and space. Even when a woman is escorted by a male in public, she is not safe. Think of the attack on a mother in

of sexual harassment, we find the majority of our men ready to scandalise the victim. Digital smearing, or slut-shaming for clothes or progressive outlook, is on the rise to suggest how toxic masculinity feeds on collective denial and hostility. It serves as a tool to silence women. Thankfully, Rafia did not remain silent. She posted a photo of herself in the dress she was wearing to write, "If I can join the street protests in July knowing that the next bullet could hit me, I might as well wait for the next slur."

I am sure many will interpret the gesture as a further provocation. Many will tighten their grips on the moral whips and lash at her with hormonal fury. Arresting three men is like a band-aid offered to a patient with internal haemorrhage. A new case will emerge to divert our attention.

Already, we have forgotten the



front of her teenage son following an altercation with a street vendor in Mirpur. These are textbook cases of toxic masculinity. The salesmen could not allow a woman to slight him in public. He beat up a middle-aged woman, old enough to be his mother, to assert that he is man enough to "teach the woman her proper place in the next one."

However, in advanced societies, they always find time to rethink these more profound issues. It occurred to me while watching a British parliamentarian asking the prime

minister whether his government was planning to use the Netflix miniseries Adolescence as an education tool to address toxic masculinity. I ended up watching the series featuring Jamie, a 13-year-old boy accused of murdering his classmate. As the plot unfolds, we realise how young boys today are exposed to extreme misogynistic content online. The frustration of a young boy to have a romantic relationship with a girl of his age is blamed on the supposed fact that 80 percent of the girls are attracted to 20 percent of the boys. This misunderstanding leads to the rise of incel (involuntary celibate) culture, where the male blames the women, and by extension society, for their lack of romantic success. By focusing on Jamie's journey, the series examines how his father's macho image, the school bullies, and the absence of a female voice in the household contributed to his radicalisation.

The underlying message of the series involves early intervention and open conversations about masculinity, mental health, and the influence of digital environments on youth development.

Could we not adopt a similar approach to our school curriculum? For a second, let's reverse the gaze and try to answer what was wrong with the staring that led to the assault of Rafia. Do you think, at the back of his mind, the perpetrator, like Jamie, felt jealous of two boys having glasses of juice in his locality? Who did he blame: his misfortune, his social status, or his upbringing? The 80/20 rule robs him of "human" relationships. So, when confronted, he decided to tap into his primitive energy to be a "man." He "manned up" to show the woman her "place" in society. As long as we men do not learn to become humans, we will have such issues in society.

Covering up the other in veils is not a solution. We need to create open space to discuss why men desire to be the masters and controllers of everything and everyone. Through this process of open dialogue, both the old and the young can start learning together about the evils of toxic masculinity.

## CROSSWORD

BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS	34 Blanched	9 Blue hue
1 Ready to hit	36 Rigging support	10 Water whirl
6 Espresso order	38 Wonderland guest	16 Carpet feature
11 Disreputable	40 Standard	18 Uses a needle
12 Was sore	43 Perfect	19 Advanced exam
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14 Sandwich start	45 Grating sounds	23 Bar mixer
15 Musk of Tesla	46 Fire product	24 Melt base
17 Sole		25 Milky stone
18 Cushy		27 Patella
20 "Fernando" group		30 USN rank
22 Important time		33 Lets up
23 Address		34 Skating group
26 Nutball		35 Emmy winner
28 Really dug		Alan
29 Thin		37 Mountain lion
31 Genetic stuff		39 Raised trains
32 Campus bigwig		41 Verb for you
33 Bibliography abbr.		42 — Angeles
DOWN		
1 Cart puller		
2 Belonging to thee		
3 Blatant fictions		
4 Ticket category		
5 Keyboard goof		
6 Research setting		
7 Circus star		
8 1990s Tea Leoni sitcom		



## YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

M	E	A	D		M	I	L	S	A	P
A	X	L	E		O	N	E	I	D	A
G	A	L	L		A	S	T	R	A	Y
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					G	A	P	T	U	C
B	O	A	S	T		S	P	R	E	E
A	N	T						O	N	E
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A	T	O	L	L	S		R	I	L	E
M	O	D	E	S			E	L	S	A

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Female drivers often become a spectacle, being at the receiving end of unwanted attention, commentary, and even intimidation. While the scenario is relatively better in certain affluent regions inside Dhaka, challenges are far more harrowing in other parts of the country.

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

## The challenges female drivers face in Bangladesh

**In addition to all these setbacks, female drivers are constantly required to be on guard for their safety. For instance, the absence of proper parking spaces often creates significant security concerns for female drivers. Many hesitate to park in isolated areas, fearing harassment or worse. A great number of female drivers also refrain from using ride-sharing services like Uber as a source of possible income.**

PUNOMI RAHMAN TITIR

Picture this: a woman steers her way through gridlocked Dhaka traffic as ripples of turning heads follow in her wake. Curious glances, some fleeting and others lingering, turn instinctively – a few drawn from admiration, others laced with scepticism. The hum of engines and the cacophony of honking horns momentarily seem to pause as passing drivers, pedestrians, and rickshaw pullers steal a glance, as though the sight of a woman in control of the wheel is something otherworldly, something to behold.

This is a stark reality that countless women in Bangladesh encounter every day. Despite an increasing number of female drivers gaining visibility over time, the streets still prevalently reflect a scene of male dominance. For many women, driving is not just about navigating the roads, but the need to overcome pervasive societal biases while grappling with safety concerns.

Bushra Tabassum, a senior HR executive at an IT firm, has been behind the wheel for the past seven years. She acknowledges the common assumption that female drivers are incompetent, which initially unsettled her. "People are adamant that women are bad drivers," she says. "But I've learned to disregard it. Even my own friends doubted my abilities before witnessing my driving firsthand."

Bushra recounts facing a constant barrage of unfair accusations on the road. "Accidents often result in immediate blame being directed towards me, regardless of culpability," she says. "But I always speak up and confront any attempt to shift responsibility, be it from a male driver or a rickshaw puller."

However, for many, such has not been the case.

Despite holding a driver's license since 2016, Rebeka Tanji Tania, Assistant Professor of Computer Science and Engineering at BGMEA University of Fashion & Technology (BUFT), still struggles to muster the confidence to drive on her own. "Navigating the roads alongside male drivers requires being loud, assertive, and ready to defend oneself against unwarranted blame. In our country, traffic regulations are loosely implemented, and everyone drives however they please. Male drivers can easily assert control on the streets by shouting or swearing to tackle directed accusations because people are so used to it. But for me, that isn't quite the option," she speculates on her hesitancy.

Female drivers often become a spectacle, being at the receiving end of unwanted attention, commentary, and even intimidation. While the scenario is relatively better in certain affluent regions inside Dhaka, challenges are far more harrowing in other parts of the country.

"While driving inside Cumilla district, I noticed that autorickshaw drivers would pause in the middle of the road, eventually leading to clogged traffic. They would blatantly stare at me in disbelief, that a woman is capable of steering the wheel, and even female passengers shared the same incredulous gaze. I have had similar experiences while driving in Mohammadpur as well," Mahamuda Peja, a former employee of BKash and British American Tobacco, shares.

In Bangladesh, the lack of road safety awareness poses risks to all drivers, but for women, the challenges are amplified. Women are generally considered safer drivers than men, based on the ratio of road accidents accounted for by either group. However, the constant scrutiny that they encounter from outsiders

plays as an external factor in interrupting their concentration while driving.

Sarmily Sarker, Professor of Fashion Design at BUFT, has been driving in Bangladesh and abroad for almost a decade. Her endeavour began with riding a bicycle, then switching to a scooter during her student years, before she eventually bought a car. Reflecting on the erratic nature of Dhaka's streets, she states, "People are remarkably unbothered about road safety. For instance, when I'm driving at high speed, pedestrians often raise a hand at the last moment and step onto the road, expecting traffic to pause instantaneously. It is incredibly difficult to halt on such short notice, and if an accident occurs, the blame inevitably falls on the driver. But people don't seem to realise the nuances."

In addition to all these setbacks, female drivers are constantly required to be on guard for their safety. For instance, the absence of proper parking spaces often creates significant security concerns for female drivers. Many hesitate to park in isolated areas, fearing harassment or worse. A great number of female drivers also refrain from using ride-sharing services like Uber as a source of possible income.

"Some areas are unsafe to go to alone, and people always try to create more problems for female drivers," Bushra laments. She recalls a distressing experience: "One day, I was driving amidst heavy rainfall, and a car in front of me suddenly hit brakes. A man stepped out of the vehicle and tried to get inside my car. Since I was alone, I didn't take any risks. He lingered outside for a while, but I quickly drove away."

Similarly, Peja also recounts having to endure several unfortunate occurrences where she was subjected to verbal persecution by the mass public. Remembering one such incident, she says, "While reversing out of a parking space, my car once crashed into another. Within minutes, a crowd gathered, and a group of bikers began insisting that the female driver's license be checked."

She continues, "As the damage was significant on both ends, the police soon intervened. I refused to resolve because I was not at fault and demanded compensation. What shocked me most was that the officer reviewed the man's driving license immediately upon arrival, yet before that, the mob had only pressured me to show mine. I stood my ground and made it clear that they had no authority to demand my license. If I had to show mine, then so should the other person."

The rise in mob violence and frequent attacks on women heightens fears for female drivers. While speaking to our respondents, we found some of them expressing grave concern over the worsening state of public security in the country. Following recent events, many women consider themselves prone to rising threats of violence, further marginalising them. On top of that, frequent incidents of mugging and robbery flag them as easy targets and further fuel their unease about driving alone.

Such concerns are not unfounded. Women on the road continue to face an uphill battle, from deep-seated negative mindsets to pressing security threats. While their presence behind the wheel is gradually increasing, the truth is that female drivers regularly continue to face a myriad of issues. Their experiences vastly differ from that of their male counterparts, and almost never in a positive way. Therefore, without improvised law and order and discernible changes in societal attitude, female drivers are constrained to battle against the challenges that continue to encumber them.

**Punomi Rahman Titir** is a contributor at The Daily Star. Reach her at [punomirahman@gmail.com](mailto:punomirahman@gmail.com)

## Nostalgia, memory, and the appeal of physical media in a digital world

OHONA ANJUM

When cleaning my room, I often find myself stumbling across little pieces of my childhood.

A dusty DVD, faded Eid card, old diaries filled with doodles and half-written thoughts, and a broken video game controller. Each one pulls me into a daydream. I get caught up going through them all, flipping through the pages of my diaries, reading old notes, and wondering where all the time went.

Back then, I loved collecting these things. Now, however, it feels like they have been quietly collecting pieces of me all these years.

I've been writing since I was a child, so naturally, my shelves and drawers became an archive of my past life, filled with friends, stories, and memories like nothing else. I didn't realise it at the time, but this personal collection became the driveway of my life. The place where I first understood that I wanted to be a writer. Every scrap of paper, every diary entry,

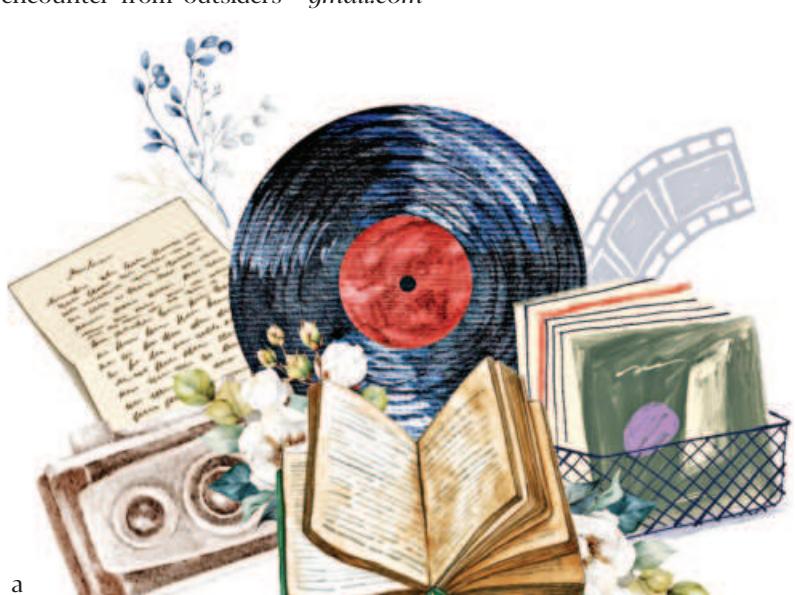
and every little keepsake was a reflection of how much I loved telling stories.

Looking back, it feels like those objects were not clutter but a foundation for the person I've grown into.

In an increasingly digital world, the tactile experience of holding a cherished piece of physical media is an art form in and of itself. There's something uniquely grounding about having an object in your hands that carries and tells a story – a piece of the past that feels alive. Decades ago, physical media was not an option; it was the heart of how people engaged with art, music, and literature.

Vinyl records were household staples during the 70s and 80s. Dropping the needle onto a record offered an experience – a moment of ritual that brought sound and soul together.

As time moved on, cassettes and CDs took over, filling shelves and car dashboards, making music portable and personal. Letters and



postcards, meanwhile, carried handwritten warmth, connecting hearts across distances in a way no text message ever could.

Growing up, I often stumbled across pieces of this world tucked away in the corners of my family's archives. Old CDs of Tagore's songs. Books from my uncles' childhoods, their pages filled with pencil marks. Letters were my favorites – carefully folded and yellowed with age, but bursting with the warmth from a time I had only heard about in stories.

These objects became bridges to a past I felt connected to, even if I hadn't lived it. Even films had a different magic back then. VHS tapes and DVDs became prized possessions, with carefully curated collections lining living rooms. Watching a movie was about choosing a beloved film from your collection, placing it in the player, and enjoying the experience with intention.

**Ohona Anjum** writes, rhymes, and studies English literature.

## Mindless littering and our inability to keep our streets clean

Teaching someone the collective responsibility of keeping a city clean feels like trying to empty the Buriganga with a teacup. The response is always the same, a phrase that makes me angry—Everyone else does it. As if filth were a democracy, as if participation were mandatory.

AZRA HUMAYRA

Stuck in traffic, my uncle—a brilliant doctor, whose mind expands well beyond my reach—recently returned from a medical course in Singapore and leaned back in his seat, speaking about the city-state's stringent laws. Singapore, he said, functioned like a well-oiled machine. No one littered there; the mere thought of tossing a wrapper on the ground came with the consequence of a thousand-dollar fine. He spoke with the kind of reverence usually reserved for holy sites. And then, mid-sentence, without so much as a pause, he rolled down the window and flung something out onto the Dhaka streets. I blinked. Had I imagined it? The irony hung between us. Perhaps it was habit, muscle memory, or the subconscious override of years spent knowing there was no price to pay for carelessness.

Such is the case with the people of Bangladesh. One afternoon on my university bus, I watched a girl unwrap a snack, eat it, then—without hesitation, without even a flicker of awareness—crumple the



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

empty packet and toss it out the window. The motion was instinctual, as if the streets of Dhaka were nothing more than an extension of the bin, she didn't feel the need to use. I couldn't help myself—I asked if she thought what she had just done was right. She looked startled, mumbled an apology, but I knew, with absolute certainty, that the city would see more litter from her hands. A good education, it turns out, does little to correct bad habits.

The streets would absorb it all, as they always did, as if this was simply how things were meant to be.

It's a subtle kind of disillusionment—watching children toss wrappers onto the street while their parents, unfazed, look straight ahead. There's no reprimand, no moment of correction, because, of course, the parents do the same. I try to be a nuisance about it, a small disruption in the rhythm of their indifference, but I rarely succeed. Teaching someone the collective responsibility of keeping a city clean feels like trying to empty the Buriganga with a teacup. The response is always the same, a phrase that makes me angry—Everyone else does it. As if filth were a democracy, as if participation were mandatory.

If everyone is complicit in turning the streets into a wasteland, why rush to add to the ruin? My bag, overstuffed with receipts, wrappers, and the occasional stray bottle cap, resents me for making it double as a dustbin. But I carry my trash like a quiet rebellion, a small defiance against the tide of indifference. At least the streets have no reason to curse my name.

"The people of this country will never change," someone declares, punctuating the thought with a spit onto the pavement. The irony is almost too perfect. It's astonishing—the ease with which people refuse to alter the smallest of habits while demanding transformation on a grand scale. Some, in a feat of mental gymnastics, even absolve themselves entirely saying, at least this gives the cleaners something to do. As if the dignity of labour must include scraping their discarded wrappers off the asphalt. As if cleaners have nothing more pressing to tend to than the trail of thoughtlessness left in their wake.

"Everyone else is doing it"—the easiest excuse for avoiding responsibility. It suggests that if enough people do something wrong, it somehow stops being wrong. But litter doesn't disappear just because many hands have thrown it; it piles up, choking drains, cluttering streets, and making the city harder to live in. If anything, seeing others litter should make us more determined not to. The excuse also shifts blame onto an invisible crowd, as if the problem exists in the abstract, never in the individual act of tossing a wrapper onto the pavement. Change has to start somewhere, and refusing to contribute to the mess is as good a place as any.

Before praising the spotless streets of some distant, developed nation, perhaps the better question would be to ask: What am I doing to keep my own streets clean? It's easy to admire discipline from afar, to romanticise the strict fines and civic responsibility of another country, but the real work begins with the smallest, most inconvenient choices. Even if your bag groans under the weight of stray wrappers and receipts, even if you become that insufferable person who points out every careless toss, it's worth it. My family rolls their eyes at me, sighs when I refuse to let things slide, but they litter less. And in a city where change feels impossible, even the smallest shift feels like a big win.

**Azra Humayra** is majoring in mass communication and journalism at the University of Dhaka. Find her at [azrahumayra123@gmail.com](mailto:azrahumayra123@gmail.com)

## Bangladesh not keen to experiment against Zimbabwe

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Cricketers began returning to Mirpur yesterday after the Eid holidays as teams started preparation for the resumption of the Dhaka Premier League (DPL) on Sunday.

However, the DPL teams will get the services of the Test team cricketers till April 9, as the national team's preparation camp ahead of the two-Test series against Zimbabwe is set to begin in Sylhet on either April 10 or 11.

The series, which will begin on April 20 at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium, will be the Tigers' first Test encounter against Zimbabwe since July 2021, which they won by 220 runs in Harare.

From then till now, the gulf between Bangladesh and Zimbabwe in Tests have seemingly widened further, with the Tigers experiencing more success than their African counterparts.

Since March 1, 2021, Bangladesh have won eight out of 29 Tests which included a historical Test win against New Zealand in Mount Maunganui, a maiden Test series win over Pakistan in Pakistan and a Test win over West Indies in the Caribbean after 15 years.

On the other hand, since their 10-wicket win over Afghanistan in Abu Dhabi in March 2021, Zimbabwe have lost seven out of their next nine Tests and have failed to register any victory in the last four years.

As Bangladesh will be playing at home against a



PHOTO: STAR

relatively weaker opposition and with a jam-packed schedule coming up where they will play at least 18 Tests in next two years, the question of whether the Tigers should test out some newcomers in the Zimbabwe series automatically rises.

However, selector Abdur Razzak ruled out any chances of experimentation, saying, "Actually, we need to form the team first. There is hardly any scope for experimentation."

Razzak pointed out the lack of experienced Test players as a reason for not wanting to test new players even though there are currently four cricketers in the team – Mushfiqur Rahim (94 Tests), Mominul Haque (69), Taijul Islam (51) and Mehedi Hasan Miraz (51) – who have played more than 50 Tests.

"We hardly have players who have played more than 20 Tests apart from Mushfiqur. So, we need to give the young players exposure in this series to prepare them well for the upcoming big series," Razzak told The Daily Star yesterday.

But former skipper and current Dhamondi Sports Club head coach Mohammad Ashraful felt Bangladesh can call up a few players who performed well in the National Cricket League (NCL) against an opposition like Zimbabwe.

"I think those who have done well in the NCL, they have to be given the opportunity here... I think we can afford to try out two to three players against a team like Zimbabwe," Ashraful told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, Razzak informed that they have almost finalised the squad for the Test series.

"We will submit the names within next one or two days. The board will then decide when they will announce the squad," he said.



## 'As long as I'm fit, I'll play Tests'

**Bangladesh's 22-year-old pace sensation Nahid Rana has sharply come into focus for his raw pace, which has availed him an opportunity to compete in the Pakistan Super League (PSL). The speedster has been given a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the cricket board for PSL after the first Test against Zimbabwe and while PSL beckons, Rana's ambition lay in Test cricket which he divulged during an interview with The Daily Star's Abdullah Al Mehdi yesterday. Here are the excerpts:**

**DS:** You have just come back after the Eid festivities. On social media, you had poked fun at Shoriful Islam's fishing technique during the Eid break, did you get to do the things you love during the vacation as well?

**NR:** My plan is that I will retire from all the other formats before I take my bow from Tests. It's the last format I want to retire from because if I can do that then my fitness would be good along with other aspects of my bowling. If I can play Test cricket for a long time, it would be good for me and for the country. Out of the three formats, it's the most prestigious. So, as long as I am fit and able to play, I will continue playing Tests.

**DS:** Has James Anderson or anyone else inspired you to think like this?

**NR:** Actually, my situation is not completely similar to Anderson's because the weather there is very different to ours. There will be many scenarios unfolding in future and I don't want to think too far ahead. Instead, I am staying in the present. For example, right now I am thinking about what I would do if I get to play against Zimbabwe and preparing accordingly.

**DS:** When you hit 152 kph at Rawalpindi, was it a surprise for

you? Is there a speed you aspire to hit?

**NR:** Pace is never a surprise for me because I have been working hard, maintaining myself and eating properly. Rather than being surprised, I feel that anything can happen at any time [pacewise].

I don't want to be like anyone else or break someone's record. What I want is to create my own records. As far as a wish or an aspiration goes, there is nothing bigger than winning a major trophy for the team.

**DS:** Is your run-up the key behind your pace?

**NR:** While growing up, I always felt I was quick. But I mostly played with taped tennis balls back then. When I started playing with a cricket ball near the end of 2019, slowly things started to improve. I was so excited when I got a cricket ball in my hand for the first time as before I had only seen it on TV. It was a little heavier. I feel the smooth run-up and the jump generates the pace for me and when those things click, my wrist position automatically zones in.

## LEWANDOWSKI, MBAPPE battle ignites La Liga title race

AGENCIES

As the 2025 La Liga season reaches its climax, an intense battle is unfolding on two fronts—at the top of the table and in the race for the Pichichi trophy. Barcelona leads Real Madrid by just three points, and their star striker, Robert Lewandowski, edges Madrid's Kylian Mbappe by three goals in the scoring charts.

The Catalans prepare to host sixth-placed Real Betis on Saturday, while Real Madrid welcomes relegation-threatened Valencia. With only a handful of matches left, every point and every goal could be decisive. Last weekend exemplified the relentless contest between the two forwards—Mbappe's brace secured a thrilling 3-2 win over Leganes, only for Lewandowski to respond with two goals of his own in a commanding 4-1 victory over Girona.



Lewandowski, 36, remains a relentless force, netting nine goals in his last nine league games. With 38 goals in 43 matches across all competitions, he continues to defy age-related doubts. "People talk about

my age, but I've worked hard for years to stay at this level. I feel just as strong as before," he stated confidently.

Barcelona manager Hansi Flick reaffirmed Lewandowski's commitment to team success. "He wants the Pichichi,

but the most important thing is the team. He understands that," said Flick.

On the other hand, Mbappe, at 26, is carving out his own legacy at Madrid. His 33 goals in 46 appearances this season have drawn comparisons to Cristiano Ronaldo's debut campaign at the club. "It's special to match Ronaldo's numbers," admitted the French forward. With 12 league goals in 2025—more than any other player—he is determined to keep scoring.

Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti believes Mbappe could follow in Ronaldo's footsteps. "He has the potential to be a legend," he remarked. And with Vinicius Junior promising to help his teammate claim the top scorer's crown, Madrid's attack will be relentless against a weakened Valencia side missing key defenders.

With only a few matches remaining, the race for both the title and the Pichichi remains wide open. Lewandowski and Mbappe will push each other to the limit, knowing that every goal could be the difference between glory and disappointment.

Tottenham Hotspur on Thursday, courtesy of a goal from Argentina's Enzo Fernández. The win boosted their hopes of a Champions League return, propelling them back into fourth place in the Premier League. Chelsea now sit one point ahead of Manchester City in fifth and two clear of Newcastle United in sixth—while also holding a game in hand—as the battle for Champions League qualification intensifies.

PHOTO: REUTERS



**STAR SPORTS SELECT HD1**  
Premier League  
Everton vs Arsenal  
Live from 4:00 pm  
Bundesliga  
Heidenheim vs Leverkusen  
Live from 7:30 pm

**SONY SPORTS 2**  
Bundesliga  
Heidenheim vs Leverkusen  
Live from 7:30 pm

Aston Villa vs Nottingham Forest  
Live from 10:30 pm

SONY SPORTS 2

Bundesliga  
Heidenheim vs Leverkusen  
Live from 7:30 pm

## SHORT CORNER

**Guardiola hails De Bruyne's greatness**



Pep Guardiola hailed Kevin De Bruyne as one of the Premier League's greatest midfielders after the Belgian announced his departure from Manchester City at season's end. "He is one of the greatest midfielders ever to play in this country and for this club – there is no doubt," Guardiola said. De Bruyne, 33, has been instrumental in City's success, with 106 goals and 174 assists in 413 appearances since 2015, helping secure 14 major trophies, including six Premier League titles and the 2023 Champions League. Despite injury setbacks, Guardiola praised his consistency and impact, suggesting De Bruyne deserves a statue like City legends Kompany, Silva, and Aguero.

**SAFF clears Salahuddin's path to re-election by scrapping age cap**

The SAFF Extraordinary Congress 2025 in Colombo today removed the 70-year age restriction for its presidency, ensuring that Kazi Salahuddin, who will be 72 in 2026, remains eligible for re-election. With continuity in store, Salahuddin pledged to expand competitions and improve governance to make South Asian football more competitive.

\*\*Read full stories on The Daily Star website.

\*Read full stories on The Daily Star website

**'Windies favourites, Bangladesh and others neck and neck'**

**SPORTS DESK**

Former Pakistan women's team captain Sana Mir named West Indies as favourites and said that the other five sides including Bangladesh are "neck-and-neck" in the upcoming ICC Women's World Cup Qualifier in Pakistan, set to begin on April 9.

"It will be a close tournament. West Indies are perhaps favourites but the rest are quite neck-and-neck," Sana told the ICC yesterday.

In the round-robin format tournament set to take place in Lahore, all six teams will face off against each other and the top two sides will qualify for the ODI World Cup, which will take place in India later this year.

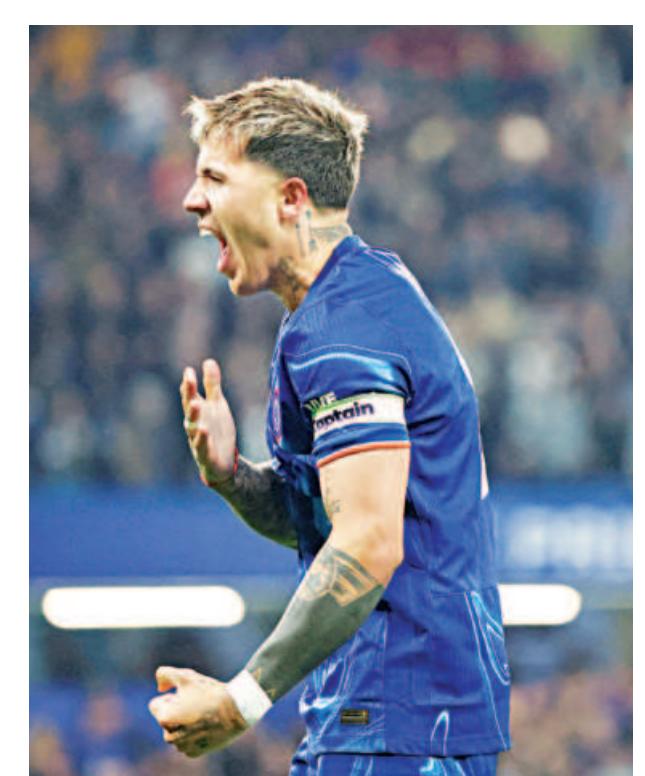
On paper, West Indies, Pakistan and Bangladesh are top contenders for the two available spots in the main event, however, Sana felt that the remaining three sides – Ireland, Scotland and Thailand – could also pose a threat.

"It will be a tough competition. West Indies have done brilliantly in the last couple of years, especially under Hayley Matthews. Bangladesh have done quite well in ODIs in the last couple of years, they have beaten India in an ODI and done well against South Africa and Ireland," said the former off-spinner.

"Ireland have looked good, they were able to beat England last year, Scotland have also played well under Kathryn Bryce, they have more international and league exposure than before.

"You can never write Thailand off with the work ethic they have, they put in so much hard work, and if more opportunities are given to Associate nations, they will rise up really quickly," she added.

Bangladesh will begin their campaign against Thailand on April 10. The Tigresses will face Pakistan in their final game on April 19, the same day the curtain will fall on the event.



**Chelsea secured a crucial 1-0 victory over London rivals Tottenham Hotspur on Thursday, courtesy of a goal from Argentina's Enzo Fernández. The win boosted their hopes of a Champions League return, propelling them back into fourth place in the Premier League. Chelsea now sit one point ahead of Manchester City in fifth and two clear of Newcastle United in sixth—while also holding a game in hand—as the battle for Champions League qualification intensifies.**

PHOTO: REUTERS

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## Hope and fear in the haor

Farmers expect good boro yield but apprehensive about flash floods, dyke quality

DWOHA CHOWDHURY and  
MINTU DESHWARA

As farmers across the Sylhet division prepare for the boro paddy harvest, they aim for a good yield due to favourable weather and increased cultivation.

However, fears of flash floods and concerns over the quality of haor protection dykes threaten to dampen these expectations. Additionally, heat waves have triggered pest attacks and neck blast infections in some areas, raising further concern.

Israil Miah from Biraimabad in Moulvibazar Sadar upazila expressed hope for a good harvest after the last harvest was devastated by floods. "The paddy looks promising. I cultivated BRRI 29 and BRRI 89 varieties on 10 acres, and I'm expecting a good yield," he said.

Farmers cultivated boro on 497,219 hectares across Sunamganj, Moulvibazar, Sylhet, and Habiganj districts, slightly

exceeding the target of 496,745 hectares. The Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) estimates a production of around 2,051,000 tonnes, valued at approximately Tk 10,250 crore.

The harvest will begin on a small scale from today, with full-scale harvesting commencing from April 15.

For many farmers in haor areas, boro is their only major crop, making this harvest crucial for their livelihood. Abdul Hossain, a farmer from Fulbari village in Sunamganj's Bishwambarpur upazila, said, "The sheaf of paddy has come out well due to the recent rainfall, but the threat of flash floods remains.

The dyke that is meant to protect my harvest is still under construction and I am worried."

The haor regions are particularly vulnerable to flash floods, which originate from upstream areas in India. Heavy rainfall in Meghalaya and Assam can

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

An excavator digs and loads soil into a dump truck, which then takes it to the brick kilns seen in the background. Even though extraction of fertile topsoil from agricultural land is prohibited, such acts continue unabated. The photo was taken in the Boliyapur area of Savar yesterday.



## Rat earns world record for sniffing landmines

AFP, Phnom Penh

A landmine-hunting rat in Cambodia has set a new world record by sniffing out more than 100 mines and pieces of unexploded ordnance, a charity said Friday.

Ronin, a giant African pouched rat, has tracked down 109 landmines and 15 other potentially deadly war remnants since his deployment to northern Preah Vihear province in August 2021, the Belgian charity APOPO said in a statement.

Five-year-old Ronin has been named the most successful Mine Detection Rat (MDR) in the organisation's history.

"His exceptional accomplishments have earned him the Guinness World Records title for most landmines detected by a rat, highlighting the critical role of HeroRats in humanitarian demining," APOPO said.

Ronin beat the previous record, held by hero Magawa who found 71 landmines and 38 UXOs during his five-year service before retirement in 2021.

Magawa, who was awarded a gold medal for heroism for clearing mines from about 225,000 square metres of land -- the equivalent of 42 football pitches -- died in 2022.

## EARTHQUAKE READINESS Unprepared Dhaka at grave risk

**ISSUES**

- Unregulated urbanisation
- Weak enforcement of building codes
- Rampant construction on fragile, land-filled wetlands
- Poor construction materials, designs
- Flawed planning, lack of oversight



**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Retrofit vulnerable buildings
- Enforce strict adherence to BNBC
- Engage third-party inspectors for oversight
- Strengthen critical infrastructure systems
- Establish emergency response protocols

**HELEMUL ALAM**

The recent 7.7-magnitude earthquake that struck Myanmar and parts of Thailand serves as yet another warning for Dhaka.

While Myanmar reels from the devastation, with over 3,000 lives lost and thousands injured, experts say Bangladesh remains frighteningly unprepared for a similar disaster.

Given its location in one of the world's most seismically active regions, Dhaka's vulnerability to a catastrophic earthquake is not a matter of if, but when.

According to the earthquake disaster

risk index, the capital tops the list of the 20 most vulnerable cities in the world.

A study by Rajuk estimates that a 6.9-magnitude earthquake along the Madhupur Fault Line could flatten over 850,000 buildings in the capital, causing over two lakh deaths and leaving another two lakh injured.

The survey was conducted for four years, from 2018 to 2022.

Financial losses could surpass \$25 billion, with an additional \$44 billion required for reconstruction.

The Comprehensive Disaster Management Plan (CDMP) identifies

five major fault zones in Bangladesh -- Madhupur Fault, Dauki Fault, Plate Boundary Fault-1, Plate Boundary Fault-2, and Plate Boundary Fault-3 -- each capable of generating earthquakes between magnitudes 7 and 8.5.

Despite these alarming projections, earthquake preparedness in Dhaka remains almost nonexistent, said Dr Mehedi Ahmed Ansary of the Department of Civil Engineering at Buet.

Experts point to unregulated urbanisation, weak enforcement of building codes, and rampant construction

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

**YUNUS-MODI MEET**

A ray of hope for Dhaka-Delhi ties: Fakhrul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The meeting between Chief Adviser Prof Muhammed Yunus and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has created a "ray of hope" for both countries, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said yesterday.

Fakhrul made the remarks while responding to journalists' questions at the BNP Chairperson's office in Gulshan, in reaction to the high-level talks between the two nations.

"A sideline meeting took place during BIMSTEC... It's a matter of joy. We believe that, given the current geopolitical and global political context -- as well as the regional dynamics between Bangladesh and India -- the meeting between our Chief Adviser Dr Yunus and Indian Prime Minister Modi has created a ray of hope for us," said Fakhrul.

Stating that there was some bitterness in Bangladesh-India relations, the BNP leader said the meeting holds the possibility of preventing further escalation or even curbing that bitterness.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

## Israel expands Gaza 'security zone'

Air strike on a school building sheltering displaced families kills at least 31

AFP, Gaza City

Israel announced the launch of a new ground offensive in Gaza City yesterday, with rescuers saying military operations had killed at least 30 people across the Palestinian territory since dawn.

Israel has pushed since the collapse of a short-lived truce in the war with Hamas to seize territory in Gaza in what it has called a strategy to force the militants to free hostages still in captivity.

Simultaneously, Israel has escalated attacks on Lebanon and Syria, with a strike in the south Lebanese city of Sidon killing a Hamas commander along with his son, who was also a member of the militant group's armed wing.

In Gaza City, the Israeli military said ground troops had begun conducting operations in the Shujaiya area "in order to expand the security zone".

Gaza's civil defence agency said that Israeli military operations had killed at least 30 people in the Palestinian territory since dawn.

A single Israeli strike on Khan Yunis killed at least 25 people, a



Palestinians carry the body of a victim after it was dug out from the rubble of a destroyed school yesterday, a day after it was hit by an Israeli strike, in the al-Tuffah neighbourhood of Gaza City.

PHOTO: AFP

## Mob beats murder suspect to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A man was stabbed to death inside a tea stall in Rajshahi Bazar in Jhikra union in Rajshahi's Bagmara upazila yesterday.

Following the incident, a mob beat the alleged attacker to death, defying police intervention. At least six policemen, including a sub-inspector, sustained injuries while trying to protect and detain the murder suspect.

Both the victim, Abdur Razzak, 35, and the murder suspect, Aminul Islam, 22, were residents of the Goalbari village of Naogaon's Atrai upazila, said Bagmara Police Station Officer-in-Charge Touhidul Islam.

"Razzak was stabbed by Aminul inside a local tea stall where the former was having tea in the afternoon. Witnesses said Aminul entered the shop and suddenly attacked Razzak with a knife, stabbing him multiple times. Razzak collapsed on the ground and died on the spot," OC Touhidul told The Daily Star.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3



Nujiang Vocational and Technical College.



The college campus surrounding by reforested mountains.



Students of the technical college perform a traditional Lisu dance.

# From struggle to success THE NUJIANG STORY



**As I left Nujiang, I couldn't shake the image of the little girl at the Harmony Community -- carefree, thriving, and unburdened by the struggles of the past. Perhaps, one day, children in Bangladesh's most disadvantaged regions will know that same sense of security and hope.**

NAZIBA BASHER, *back from China*

On March 12, the 10 member journalist delegation from Bangladesh, of which I was a part, held a seminar with academicians and professors at the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences in China's Kunming city.

Before departing, I had a private conversation with one of the female professors and mentioned our upcoming visit to Nujiang. She held my hand and said, "Nujiang is a miracle in poverty reduction! You must observe what they have achieved!"

A high-speed train ride to Dali and a four-and-a-half hour-long bus ride later, we arrived at the Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture, located near the Myanmar border.

And right from the moment of arrival, I watched, listened, and learned.

The Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture in northwestern Yunnan is renowned for its cultural diversity and stunning landscapes. It spans 14,589 square kilometres, with a population of around 5,34,337 as per the 2020 census.

Liukou Town, its capital, lies in Lushui City.

The region shares borders with Myanmar to the west and Tibet to the north, enriching its cultural fabric. The Nujiang river, known internationally as the Salween river, flows through the prefecture, enhancing its geographical significance.

The prefecture's dramatic landscapes form part of the "Three Parallel Rivers" UNESCO World Heritage Site, home to rich biodiversity.

Nujiang is home to several ethnic groups, with the Lisu people comprising 50.69 percent of the population. Other significant communities include the Bai (25 percent), Han (10.69 percent), Nu (5.79 percent), Pumi (3.16 percent), Yi (2.34 percent), and Dulong (1.09 percent), among others. This diversity is reflected in its languages, customs, and festivals, all of which we were about to discover.

After a night of rest and with much to look forward to, our first

short-term relief and long-term development strategies.

In addition to economic development, the centre emphasises social welfare initiatives, including the establishment of educational programmes and healthcare facilities, which are crucial for addressing the holistic needs of the population.

Historically, Nujiang faced severe poverty due to its remote location and challenging terrain. However, in 2020, China declared "absolute poverty" eradicated in the region,

medical care and welfare programmes for vulnerable groups.

To ensure sustainability, ecological protection initiatives encouraged locals to participate in reforestation and conservation efforts, while public-private partnerships drove investment in infrastructure and job creation.

In March 2023, Nujiang hosted an international forum on poverty reduction and global development, reaffirming its commitment to sustainable progress.

Following our visit to the Poverty

helping relocated communities become self-sufficient and economically stable.

#### EMPOWERING ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

Next, we visited the Nujiang Vocational and Technical College, mainly for students from the ethnic communities, including the Lisu, Nu, and Dulong. The college enhances human capital by offering courses in agriculture, technology, business, and hospitality.

economic development. Organic farming, agroforestry, and water management systems help reduce soil erosion and protect water sources, while eco-tourism allows local communities to benefit from tourism while preserving cultural heritage and natural landscapes.

Infrastructure projects focus on minimising environmental impact, such as road improvements and emission reductions. These efforts balance environmental conservation with socio-economic development.



Posing with performers in traditional garb.



Nursing students taking a class in a hospital ward-style classroom.



Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture.

PHOTO: STAR



Journalist delegation with students and officials of the technical college.

stop the next day (March 13) was the Nujiang Poverty Reduction Centre, a testament to the region's transformation, particularly for its ethnic communities.

#### A 'MIRACLE' IN POVERTY ALLEVIATION

The Poverty Reduction Centre in Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture is a key initiative aimed at addressing the region's development challenges and promoting sustainable poverty alleviation. It coordinates both

marking a milestone in its national efforts.

The Chinese government adopted a precision poverty alleviation model, identifying poor households and providing targeted support, including financial aid, job training, and relocation programmes.

Families from disaster-prone areas were moved to safer townships with access to education, healthcare, and essential services. Investments in road networks, electricity, and communication infrastructure improved connectivity for rural communities.

Economic development was crucial to poverty alleviation, and so, the government promoted eco-tourism, hydropower, and specialty agriculture to create sustainable income opportunities. Farmers received subsidies and technical support, while vocational training centres equipped residents with skills in various industries.

A key initiative was the "One Village One Preschool" project, launched in 2019, which established 35 preschools to enhance early childhood education.

Meanwhile, healthcare services expanded with free or subsidised

Reduction Centre, we explored the Lushui Harmony Community, a relocation project for the Lisu people.

Given Nujiang's mountainous terrain, landslides posed a significant risk, prompting the government to prioritise relocating affected families to safer areas with more than just basic amenities.

The Harmony Community offers modern housing, reliable utilities, healthcare, and education. Beyond infrastructure, it provides employment training, from child-rearing to baseball manufacturing for international sporting events.

A childcare centre accommodates every child in the community, while an elderly welfare centre offers music, language, and dance classes, along with mental wellbeing sessions, tailored to different age groups.

I connected with a young girl, barely four years old, who roamed freely and joyfully, as if the entire place were her home -- an image that has stayed with me.

This initiative ensures not just physical safety but also improved quality of life. The government supports vocational training, land for agriculture, and local industries,

Its campus, surrounded by mountains with clouds drifting between peaks, features real-world training environments -- healthcare students learn in hospital-style wards, while tourism students train in hotel-like settings.

By equipping students with practical skills, the college supports local industries and bridges the gap between rural and urban development.

Beyond vocational training, the institution prioritises accessibility for disadvantaged communities, fostering opportunities for upward mobility. Many graduates contribute to local industries, agriculture, and services, driving economic progress.

#### ENVIRONMENT A PRIORITY

Nujiang has also focused on protecting its rich biodiversity, particularly in the Nujiang Valley, home to various endemic and endangered species. Nature reserves and national parks, such as the Nujiang River Valley Nature Reserve, protect vast forests, river ecosystems, and wildlife habitats.

The region promotes sustainable agriculture and eco-tourism, essential for both conservation and

resilience, strategic policymaking, and an unwavering commitment to progress -- living proof that even the most challenging terrains can overcome poverty.

Its development efforts offer valuable insights for Bangladesh, particularly in addressing poverty and supporting ethnic minorities in regions like the Chittagong Hill Tracts and more, where rural and indigenous communities continue to struggle. Targeted relocation programmes, improved infrastructure, and industry-specific development were key to Nujiang's success -- Bangladesh can adopt similar strategies to uplift its underdeveloped rural areas.

The question now is: how willing are we to adapt, innovate, and invest in long-term solutions?

As I left Nujiang, I couldn't shake the image of the little girl at the Harmony Community -- carefree, thriving, and unburdened by the struggles of the past. Perhaps, one day, children in Bangladesh's most disadvantaged regions will know that same sense of security and hope.

But for that, we must take the first step.



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

## THE SHELF

## 6 literary characters we wish could join our Eid table

**Feluda would arrive sharply dressed and perfectly on time, his eyes scanning the room with effortless calm, already noting which cousin hadn't spoken to whom and who was piling onto their plate like they had something to prove.**

MAHMUDA EMDAD

What if our Eid table had a few extra chairs reserved not for guests from our world but from that of the books we've loved throughout our life? From classic Bangla novels to global favourites—from wizards to wanderers—what if our favourite literary characters showed up for Eid lunch or dinner? Here's what the celebration might look like if fiction stepped into our reality, softening the room, stirring the silence, and reminding us that stories, like Eid, are best when shared.

**Apu from Pather Panchali**  
Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay  
Ranjan Prakashalay, 1929

Apu would sit silently at first, absorbing every detail of the celebration with a gaze as wide as the world. He'd steal glances at the food, not from greed, but wonder, and you'd catch him smiling softly at a mother fussing over her children. As the meal continued, he'd listen more than speak, but when someone recited a poem, he'd quietly say, "This smells like monsoon mornings and my mother's hands." There would be something old and aching in his innocence—an Eid presence that reminded everyone of what they'd once yearned for.

**Laila from A Thousand Splendid Suns**  
Khaled Hosseini  
Riverhead Books, 2007

She'd arrive with grace, her hands full of gifts she insists aren't much, perhaps some sweets wrapped in cloth, or a dish passed down from her mother. You'd catch her tearing up during the prayer, and when you asked why, she'd simply say: "It's just been a long time since joy felt this free." The way she held a child,

passed a plate, or smiled at an elderly person would carry the quiet composure of someone who once had to be tough but now chooses tenderness. Eid, through her, would feel like a celebration not of ease, but of the strength it takes to keep choosing love.

**Feluda from Feluda Series**  
Satyajit Ray

Feluda would arrive sharply dressed and perfectly on time, his eyes scanning the room with effortless calm, already noting which cousin hadn't spoken to whom and who was piling onto their plate like they had something to prove. He'd greet the elders with deep respect and the children with clever wordplay, but when the food was served, he'd settle in with genuine pleasure, taking precise bites of kabab and appreciating the texture of paratha. He'd leave without dessert, claiming he was watching his sugar but you'd find a kalo jaam missing from the tray!

**Pi Patel from Life of Pi**  
Yann Martel  
Knopf Canada, 2001

Pi would arrive with gentle curiosity in his eyes, asking about every tradition, to not question but to understand. He'd marvel at the crescent moon, comparing it to a boat cradling the first breath of celebration, and asking why desserts like shemai were served warm. Over lunch, he'd share a story so surreal about hunger, storms, animals, and prayer that it would feel like a myth, until he looked at you and said, "There are many versions of truth. I believe them all a little." In his company, Eid would feel both vast and intimate, like the sea.

**Hermione Granger from the Harry Potter series**

**J.K. Rowling**

Hermione would arrive five minutes early, wearing something simple but thoughtfully chosen, with a carefully wrapped Eid gift—probably a translated collection of classical Muslim poetry or a handmade bookmark with gold ink calligraphy. She'd ask about every dish with genuine interest: how it's made, what it means, where the spices come from, and would make sure to compliment the chef in the most articulate way possible. Her presence would bring a sense of care and thoughtfulness to the table like everything was just a little more seen, and a little more loved.

**Himu from the Himu series**  
Humayun Ahmed

Himu might arrive late and unbothered but smiling, in his faded yellow panjabi that somehow looks more like a statement than an accident. He'd greet everyone with a wide, crooked grin, say something utterly ridiculous to an uncle that would earn him a frown, and then follow it up with a line so oddly wise that no one would be able to tell if he was joking or gently exposing the truth. But the grandmothers would adore him, slipping him extra kebabs and chicken roast while chuckling under their breath. People like Himu make space—for joy, for softness, for the kind of lightness that makes a day feel warmer, happier, more alive.

**Mahmuda Emdad** is a women and gender studies major with an endless interest in feminist writings, historical fiction, and pretty much everything else, all while questioning the world in the process. Reach her at [mahmudaemdad123@gmail.com](mailto:mahmudaemdad123@gmail.com).

## POETRY

## Making headlines

SUMMIT HASAN

You were written all over my face  
On the broad forehead  
With a pen permeating love, profoundly  
Fitting an array of stars in straight line  
With flying colours.  
Piercing the heart,  
Yet too bright for the rest to read.  
Too delicate to deliver in the news,  
But heavy enough for breaking hearts  
At the climax of a novel  
When the writer leaves  
And passes the baton  
To the reader and his imagination  
For building a home  
Where she witnesses  
Sunsets with him.  
To shift the paradigm to when  
The flowers in his garden bloom  
To garland her  
And the galaxy bows before her grace.  
In awe of her—the ethereal enigma  
We came to the conclusion  
No words can weigh in  
And carry her wonder  
We'll put up feigned politicians  
And their fake promises instead

**Summit Hasan** carries a torch for someone since childhood, which gets him carried away consistently. Bring him back to his senses at [muhammadsummithasan@gmail.com](mailto:muhammadsummithasan@gmail.com).



DESIGN: MAISHA SYEDA

## POETRY

## Bluebird's anthology

OHONA ANJUM

I can give myself a thousand labels, But none would hold the weight of my name. I step outside and fall on my knees, My soil does not ask where I have been. I rise from the same ashes That left history An open wound, A manuscript where sorrow inscribes itself With the ink of uprooted tongues. Yet, I have inhaled the misery of the land, Where the sun folds its wings at dusk And the olive trees bow without a voice. In the mellow wane of decay, The wind closes, cries out its lungs. Who do I tell, sir? The walls do not listen, The roads do not answer back. All I want is to find that which neither was nor will be, A dawn untouched by loud footsteps, By the echoes of soldiers pressing into the skin of morning. A sky that does not carry the weight of absence, Where birds do not vanish mid-flight. May the absence of labels will find me at last, Peeling away like old paint on my forgotten door. But what about the absence of home? The absence that tastes of brutal salt,



DESIGN: MAISHA SYEDA

That hums beneath my ribs like a ghost. Then the headlines speak of a lost world, My lost world. I can't help but look them in the eye and ask: Who killed the song?

**Ohona Anjum** occasionally writes for *Star Books and Literature*.

## CREATIVE NONFICTION

## The morgues are full

NAFISA AFREEN MEGHA

Another explosion rattles Gaza to its core. The air thick with stench of blood, grief and promises the world failed to keep. But other headlines hypnotise, luring us into familiar distractions—a shift in the stock market, a royal wedding, or an actor's bold choice of an outfit. Oh, the horror! Pick and choose your crisis of the day, sorrows and prayers included. The world's concern flows like a selective breeze, touching only the places where it's trendy and neat.

Our empathy is an empty canvas, painted only with tones we find fitting. We like it when our feeds are pretty, our outrage is tidy and the world's tragedies don't spill into our carefully curated, aesthetic timelines. It is almost too easy to scroll past the images of destruction, assuring ourselves that our silence is indifference—a "neutral act"—rather than acknowledging that saying nothing is, in itself, participation. Who gets to decide which suffering is unbearable and which is routine?

We see grief as a commodity, reduced to fragments of pain for easy digestion. We prefer the ones that fit seamlessly into our dinner conversations, the ones that don't challenge our sense of comfort or ask us to confront

our own complicity. A shift in the weather, a sports team's loss, a billionaire's latest venture. The world stirs, debates, fills comment sections with rage. We turn away from true devastation, the stories that demand more than just our passing attention because they ask too much of us: our consciousness, compassion, and commitment.

In Gaza, the names of the martyrs slip through silence, lost to a world too distracted to listen. We scroll down on our feed and the lives lost, names forgotten, remain buried under the rubble of a world



too busy to care. The air, saturated with blood, tells us a story we will never know. The headlines shift, racing past the truth in pursuit of the next spectacle. We stand at the edge of their despair but it is easier to look away, to lose ourselves in the illusion that our convenience is more valuable. The world weeps for some, but not for others. We light candles for the chosen, while darkness swallows those unseen.

But the morgues are full. The weight of loss isn't carried in the headlines but in the heavy silence that follows. We can continue to look the other way,

hoping that it fades away if we turn our gaze long enough and move on with our lives, distracted by the next trending news. And yet, the morgues will remain full—a haunting testament and a deafening echo of our silence.

**Nafisa Afreen Megha** is an inspiring writer from Dhaka, Bangladesh. Her work consists of her thoughts, carefully put into words and turned to poetry. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in English at North South University.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

# Elated about 'Chokkor 302' reception: Mosharraf Karim

“**It was my first time watching 'Chokkor 302' in its entirety, and I truly enjoyed it. The energy in the hall was incredible—I could feel how much the audience loved it. It was a fantastic experience.**

**It was my first time watching 'Chokkor 302' in its entirety, and I truly enjoyed it. The energy in the hall was incredible—I could feel how much the audience loved it. It was a fantastic experience.**



SHAH ALAM SHAZU

As Eid-ul-Fitr films continue to draw audiences to theatres, celebrities are actively promoting their movies. Among them is Mosharraf Karim, who, despite recently undergoing surgery to remove a tumour from his ankle, has been engaging with the media and interacting with audiences to support his latest film, *Chokkor 302*.

Directed by Saraf Ahmed Zibon, the film follows Moinul, a mysterious police officer portrayed by Mosharraf Karim. After the

movie's premiere, the actor attended a screening at Bashundhara's Star Cineplex, where he connected with the audience and gauged their reactions.

Expressing his excitement to The Daily Star, Mosharraf shared, "It feels great to see the audience watching the film. A good movie endures through the love of its viewers. The audience is the heart of cinema, and I am optimistic about *Chokkor 302*."

He also highlighted the festive atmosphere surrounding Eid film screenings, saying, "More and more people are watching local films in a

celebratory mood, which is a positive sign for our industry."

Reflecting on his experience at the premiere, he said, "It was my first time watching *Chokkor 302* in its entirety, and I truly enjoyed it. The energy in the theatre was incredible—I could feel how much the audience loved it. It was a fantastic experience."

He believes the film's strength lies in its compelling narrative.



PHOTOS: COLLECTED

"A great story always captivates the audience, and *Chokkor 302* delivers just that. The plot will keep viewers engaged and leave a lasting impact. This is a film for everyone."

Speaking about his character, he explained, "Moinul is a deeply layered character caught in a web of mystery, relationships, and suspense, making the story even more engaging."

"I thoroughly enjoyed playing the role. I fully immersed myself in Moinul's world, which made the journey even more fulfilling."

He urged audiences to support the film stating, "Many movies have been officially released this Eid, and *Chokkor 302* is one of them. Please watch it and continue supporting our local cinema."

This Eid, Mosharraf stayed in Dhaka, recovering from his surgery. Despite being at home for most of the time, he made an effort to attend the premiere and later visited Cineplex a day after the film's release.

Lastly, reminiscing about past Eid celebrations, he expressed, "As a child, I celebrated Eid in both Barishal and Dhaka. I may never relive the joy of those past Eids, but I truly miss them."

**WHAT'S THE HAPS?**



## 'Celebrating Bangladeshi'ness'

Gunoboti's first solo exhibition *Celebrating Bangladeshi'ness* at Alliance Française de Dhaka is a design-led movement aiming to revive Bangladesh's artisan heritage.

The three-day event will not only spotlight bamboo crafts, natural dyeing, and cultural conversations, but also feature hands-on workshops, panel discussions, and music—empowering rural artisans while promoting sustainable, tradition-rooted living.

**DATE: FRIDAY-SUNDAY | APRIL 11-13**

**TIME: 3PM-9PM**

**VENUE: ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE DE DHAKA, DHANMONDI**



## 'Wicked: For Good' first look teases a rift somewhere over the rainbow

The recently held Universal's CinemaCon presentation offered a first look at *Wicked: For Good*, the sequel to the blockbuster *Wicked*, set for release on November 21, 2025.

The footage teases rising tensions in Oz as Elphaba (Cynthia Erivo) is vilified and Glinda (Ariana Grande) is drawn into the political machinery of Madame Morrible (Michelle Yeoh) and the Wizard (Jeff Goldblum).

Additional scenes include Elphaba skywriting "The Wizard Lies," Glinda in her signature pink, Fiyero leading troops, and classic Wizard of Oz characters preparing to hunt the Wicked Witch. The sequel digs deeper into the origin stories behind *The Wizard of Oz*, including the "Tin Man," "Scarecrow," and "Dorothy"—whose roles will be expanded in the film.

## 'AVATAR: FIRE AND ASH' trailer debuts at CinemaCon



Acclaimed Hollywood director James Cameron's *Avatar: Fire and Ash*, the third film in the sci-fi saga *Avatar*, premiered its official trailer at CinemaCon on April 3.

Attendees experienced exclusive 3D footage showcasing Pandora's new tribes—the peaceful Wind Traders and the warlike Ash People—alongside returning characters Jake and Neytiri, still grieving their son Neteyam.

Set after *The Way of Water*, the story follows Jake Sully and Neytiri as they grieve the loss of their son and seek refuge with the oceanic Metkayina tribe. In a video message from New

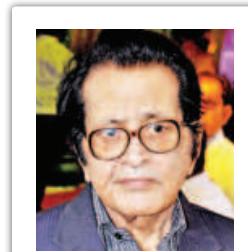
Zealand, Cameron expressed hopes that *Fire and Ash* would help reinvigorate cinema-going culture.

If successful, it could make Avatar the only franchise with three \$2 billion-grossing films.

Zoe Saldana unveiled the trailer in person at CinemaCon, while James Cameron, unable to attend as he was occupied with post-production in New Zealand, reaffirmed the film's scheduled release on December 19, this year.

Disney also previewed *Thunderbolts*, *Zootopia 2*, *Tron: Ares*, and other titles, reaffirming its commitment to theatrical releases.

## Veteran Indian icon Manoj Kumar passes away at 86



Legendary Bollywood actor and filmmaker Manoj Kumar passed away yesterday at Mumbai's Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital due to cardiogenic shock following a major heart attack. He was 86. Kumar had been suffering from advanced liver cirrhosis for months prior to his demise.

Fondly known as 'Bharat Kumar' for his patriotic films, Manoj Kumar was a towering figure in Indian cinema. In recognition of his remarkable contributions to Bollywood, he was honoured with the Padma Shri in 1992 and was later bestowed with the esteemed Dadasaheb Phalke Award in 2015.

Born as Harikrishnan Goswami on July 24, 1937, in Amritsar, Punjab, Manoj Kumar made an indelible mark on the film industry with classics such as *Shaheed*, *Hariyali Aur Rasta*, *Woh Kaun Thi?*, *Himalay Ki God Mein*, *Do Badan*, *Patthar Ke Sanam*, *Neel Kamal*, *Kranti*, *Upkar*, and *Roti Kapada Aur Makaan*. These films remain cherished as cinematic milestones.

In addition to his Padma Shri and Dadasaheb Phalke Awards, Manoj Kumar was recognised with numerous accolades throughout his career, including a National Film Award and seven Filmfare Awards across various categories.

His legacy as a filmmaker and actor continues to influence and inspire generations of cinephiles.

## Moscow Int'l Film Festival to screen two Bangladeshi films

Two Bangladeshi films—*Mastul* by Mohammad Nuruzzaman and *Noya Thikana* by Shamsuddin Ahmed Shiblu—have been officially selected to be screened at the 47th Moscow International Film Festival, marking the country's fourth consecutive presence at the event.

*Mastul*, competing in the Main Competition, explores the lives of sailors on an oil tanker and stars Fazlur

Rahman Babu. It recently received uncut clearance for local release.

*Noya Thikana*, selected in the Short Film category, highlights the impact of climate change in the Haor region.

Both directors expressed their delight and plan to attend the festival, running from April 17 to 24.

Previous Bangladeshi entries like *Adim* and *Nirvana* have earned international acclaim at MIFF.





# Apparel makers playing GRACEFUL GROCERS

Factories provide essentials at subsidised prices to win worker loyalty and orders

**The economic model of "Fair Price Shops" across apparel and leather units in the country's various industrial zones is simple yet effective: by cutting profit margins and covering operational costs, factories offer goods up to 10 percent cheaper than local market rates**

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Imagine a world where the simple act of buying rice rewrites the iron laws of the marketplace.

In that world, garment worker Jasmine Akter steps out of a supermarket on her factory's premises with a 25-kilogramme sack of rice. No cash changes hands, no wallet opens – she simply presents a small numbered token issued by her office.

The cashier nods, keys in the numbers, and lets her pass. By month's end, the debt will settle invisibly, deducted from her wages – but not at the inflated rates charged outside.

At Urmil Garments in Gazipur, essentials like rice, oil, sugar, lentils, and even coffee follow such a different arithmetic.

The factory cushions price shocks by subsidising the store's utility bills and partially covering essential goods, reducing Akter's monthly grocery bill by Tk 1,000. This small but vital reprieve comes in an economy where inflation has remained above 9 percent for over two years.

For Akter, a senior quality inspector, it means more than just spending less on essentials. It means time saved from crowded markets, energy preserved for the production line, and the quiet certainty that her kitchen will never run empty.

But what does the factory gain? Why would a profit-driven business play

grocer?

The answer comes from changes following tragedies in the local apparel business. First appearing in 2008, workers now call these outlets "Fair Price Shops." Today, 250 such shops – far more than the handful that existed five years ago – run across apparel and leather units in various industrial zones.

By helping workers save on food costs, these stores earn factories international praise. They convert worker welfare into global goodwill,

together claimed more than 1,000 workers' lives, forced manufacturers to completely rethink their approach to workplace safety.

These tragedies not only brought global attention to labour welfare issues but also dealt a severe blow to the country's ready-made garment exports, prompting urgent reforms.

In response, factory owners implemented sweeping compliance measures that went beyond basic safety requirements. Among these innovations, fair price shops emerged

impacts. The system now supports significant employment opportunities, facilitates the movement of millions of taka worth of goods, and has even begun influencing agricultural supply chains.

Most significantly, these worker-focused innovations have contributed to the rise in the global garment trade, where Bangladesh now ranks as the world's second-largest exporter with nearly 8 percent of total market share.

## THE SUBSIDY METRICS

To understand the real impact of these shops, consider the example of Jasmine Akter's rice purchase.

The 25 kg sack of rice that cost her Tk 1,850 at her factory's fair price shop would have set her back Tk 1,950 in local markets – a saving that makes a tangible difference.

"I save between 5-10 percent on nearly all my essentials," Akter said, elaborating on how these discounts help her manage household budgets amid stubbornly high inflation.

The financial mechanics behind these savings reveal careful planning.

Urmil Garments, where Akter works, operates its shop with a dedicated management team. "We sell at the cost price while absorbing 1 percent as our subsidy contribution," said managing director Asif Ashraf.

His factory's outlet serves nearly 15,000 workers, stocking over 500 items at below-market rates while ensuring strict quality control.

The model's success has attracted specialised vendors who now replicate it across multiple factories.

Tanvir Sifat, managing director of Amar Dokan, a leading fair price shop retail chain, said, "Our research shows workers who previously relied on credit for groceries paid interest rates up to 28 percent annually. Through our shops, they not only save 8-10 percent on purchases but avoid such borrowing entirely."

Sifat's operation currently serves a customer base of 80,000 workers across 12 garment and footwear factories through consignment arrangements with management.

These shops have recently evolved beyond basic necessities.

"We have expanded our offerings to include pricier products like extra virgin olive oil and coffee," said Ashraf of Urmil Garments. "This caters to our white-collar staff while maintaining the core mission of supporting all workers."

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF A FULL KITCHEN

The fair price shop phenomenon

has grown far beyond its original scope, with big conglomerates now participating.

At KSI Garments, a YoungOne Group unit at the Korean Export Processing unit in Chattogram, nearly 30,000 employees benefit from a shop run by PRAN-RFL Group.

"Our partnership creates unique value," said Mohammad Shamsur Rahman, KSI's head of administration. "PRAN-RFL provides the goods at a discount while we cover utilities. Together we ensure quality food reaches workers affordably."

The psychological impact may even outweigh the financial benefits.

A senior officer at Utah Group, which runs shops for 12,000 workers in Gazipur, said, "There is undeniable satisfaction when workers feel their management genuinely cares."

This sentiment echoes across factories implementing the model, with participation growing exponentially from just a few pilot locations five years ago to about 250 current outlets spanning garment and leather industries.

Sharif Zahir, managing director of Ananta Group, runs discounted shops across three factories, while Abdullah Hil Rakib of Team Group said his 23,000 workers each save around Tk 1,000 monthly.

"Apart from savings, we are teaching our workers financial management," Rakib commented. "Workers learn to budget with monthly repayment cycles, though we cap purchases to prevent overextension."

## PRIVATE SOLUTIONS PAVE WAY FOR GOVT ACTION

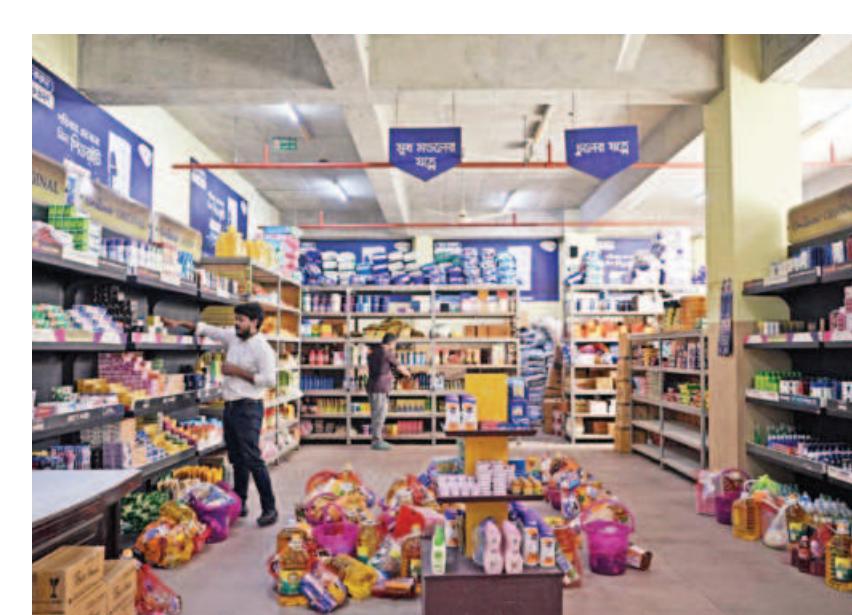
Although the private sector shows success in their fair price shops, worker advocates continue pushing for formalised support systems.

Md Towhidur Rahman, president of IndustriALL Bangladesh Council, said, "While fair price shops provide relief, we still need government ration cards to guarantee food security for workers."

AHM Shafiquzzaman, secretary to the Ministry of Labour and Employment, said his office has already sent a proposal to the finance ministry for introducing rations.

"We have submitted ration card proposals to the finance ministry, though implementation requires huge funding," he said.

Shafiquzzaman added that the factory-run shops represent an innovative private sector solution to systemic challenges. "The collaboration between manufacturers and retailers demonstrates what is possible."



transforming subsidised essentials into something far more valuable: the loyalty of Western buyers.

## TRAGEDY RESHAPED WORKER WELFARE

Fair price shops have been running across industrial belts for roughly 17 years.

The concept first took root in 2008 when DBL Group, one of the leading apparel exporters of Bangladesh, set up its discounted essential store.

"We recognised early that worker welfare directly impacts productivity," said Mohammed Zahidullah, chief sustainability officer of DBL Group.

Today, what began as a single experimental outlet has grown into a network of nine shops serving thousands of workers within their factories.

The initiative gained momentum following two industrial disasters that shook the local garment sector to its core.

The horrific Tazreen Fashions factory fire in 2012 and the deadly Rana Plaza collapse the following year, which

as both practical solutions and powerful symbols of change.

Their value became particularly evident during the Covid lockdowns, when regular markets became inaccessible.

"When production lines ground to a halt and movement restrictions made shopping impossible, our fair price shops became literal lifelines for workers," Zahidullah recalled.

Though not mandated by compliance standards, these discount stores have gained unexpected recognition from international clients.

"Major brands now view these initiatives as markers of ethical operations," said Zahidullah.

The economic model of these shops is simple yet effective: by cutting profit margins and covering operational costs, factories offer goods up to 10 percent cheaper than local market rates.

What began as discrete welfare projects in 2008 has gradually transformed into a sophisticated retail network with far-reaching economic

