



## SHAKIL'S SEA TO SUMMIT EXPEDITION

# Being a part of history

HOMAED ISHAQUE

On February 25, 2025, Iqramul Hasan Shakil began his "Sea to Summit" expedition -- walking from Cox's Bazar to the summit of Mount Everest. Only one person, Tim Macartney-Snape, has attempted this before in 1990, walking 1,200 km before his Everest ascent. Shakil aims to complete roughly 1,300 km in 90 days, becoming the youngest and fastest to complete such a journey -- a feat that will be a remarkable milestone for the country too.

This isn't just an adventure. Carrying the message of reducing single-use plastic pollution and lowering carbon emissions, Shakil, sometimes joined by friends and fellow adventurers on the way, started his walk from Cox's Bazar on February 25 and reached Dhaka after 12 days.

On March 9, at a press conference in Dhaka, he detailed his plan and urged sponsors to come forward to fulfil his goal -- a costly adventure. The permit to climb Everest alone costs \$15,000.

After a few days of reorganising, Shakil resumed his walk in mid-March from Sayedabad, joined by fellow adventurers.

I joined the group in Kawran Bazar. That day's walk wrapped up in Pallabi, after passing through the heart of the city -- Farmgate, Agargaon, and Mirpur -- filled with conversations about Everest and past climbs.

I have finished Ironman70.3 and



crossed the Bangla Channel, but joining Shakil for a short time in his effort felt special. People often call us "crazy" for chasing these kinds of adventures. But not everyone is meant to do everything, and if a few so-called crazy ones end up setting world records, maybe being a little crazy isn't such a bad thing after all.

The next day, we covered 34.21km from Ashulia to Kaliakair. We were greeted by dust, honking, and the chaos of traffic. To escape the noise, we took an alternate path via Zirabu but eventually rejoined the main road. Since Shakil's ancestral home is nearby, we dropped by. His mother's blessings and home-cooked meal gave us a moment of comfort and a surge of strength for the road ahead.

On day three, we reached Tangail,

walking 37.97km. Walking amidst intense heat for long, straight stretches of highway with no shade wasn't easy. Shakil battled painful blisters, slowing our pace.

The next day, we set off early from the Tangail Circuit House. A pleasant breeze and vibrant green fields guided us through the countryside. At Baghil, we met friends who came to join us in swimming across the Jamuna. A drizzle fell as we approached the riverbanks, where the mighty Jamuna awaited.

First, we swam across the shallow Bangshi river without any support boat. Then, after a short walk along the embankment to Doliapara, we prepared for the real challenge. Swimmers geared up, drones flew overhead, and the river roared with wind and current. The first crossing took us through thick mud and

farming chars. Then came the real test.

The Jamuna current was brutal. Shakil, exhausted and not a confident swimmer, struggled with every stroke. Helal, one of the companions, cramped midway. I had to take hold of Shakil, pushing forward despite my own fatigue. It felt endless. But finally, we reached the other side, collapsing on the sand in relief.

Wrapped in dry clothes, Shakil shivered. Yet, he smiled through the tears. "Maybe Everest will be easier," he joked. "You were my river Sherpas today."

The sun dipped behind the Jamuna Bridge. After walking over 100 kilometres and crossing the 3-km-wide mighty Jamuna, we finally reached Sirajganj -- shaken but filled with an unforgettable sense of triumph.

I feel so proud to be a part of Shakil's journey. Though we parted ways at Sirajganj, Shakil continued as required by his mission. Walking through several districts, Shakil crossed into India through the Banglananda land port on March 29. After walking through West Bengal, he crossed into Nepal through the Panitanki Karabhatta border on March 31.

As of yesterday, Shakil was on his way to Everest Base Camp after acclimatising at the Kanchenjunga Base Camp.

This wasn't just Shakil's journey -- it became a shared story of courage, camaraderie, and resilience.

## Bangladesh demands

# No IMF deal yet, talks to continue

FROM PAGE 1

first half of the 2024-25 fiscal year, down from 5.1 percent a year earlier, while inflation stood at 9.4 percent in March, still well above Bangladesh Bank's 5.6 percent target.

"The Bangladeshi economy continues to face multiple challenges amidst elevated global uncertainty," Papageorgiou said in a statement yesterday.

At a media briefing in Dhaka, IMF Resident Representative Jayendu De confirmed that negotiations will resume in Washington next week.

"If all goes well, we expect to make a disbursement before the end of the fiscal year. So, by the end of June, we will try to complete the disbursement. That is our current baseline," he said.

Discussions are continuing with the objective of reaching a staff-level agreement in the near term -- including during the April 2025 IMF-World Bank Spring Meetings in Washington," Papageorgiou said. "We reaffirm our commitment to support Bangladesh and its people at this challenging period."

To tackle the growing external financing gap and bring inflation down further, the IMF said Bangladesh needs to tighten policies in the near term.

It urged the government to focus on tax reforms by removing widespread exemptions and simplifying the tax system.

The IMF also advised the central bank to avoid loosening monetary policy too soon, and called for a more flexible exchange rate to improve export competitiveness, rebuild reserves, and make the economy more resilient to external shocks.

"A comprehensive strategy to boost revenue and reform expenditures is crucial for supporting increased social spending and infrastructure investment," Papageorgiou said.

As Jashim briefed reporters, he was asked how the bilateral relations can be deepened while historical issues remain unresolved. He replied that Bangladesh told the Pakistan side that to establish a solid foundation for Bangladesh-Pakistan relations, the unresolved issues must be addressed.

Jashim said the Pakistan side assured that discussions would continue.

"In a meeting after 15 years, we do not expect immediate resolution. However, the willingness to engage in future discussions is a positive sign."

## REVENUE TARGET

The IMF has raised alarms over Bangladesh's stagnating revenue performance.

"Indeed, over the last year or so, we've seen that the revenue-to-GDP ratio has not performed very well, partly due to the continuous shocks that Bangladesh has endured," said SeokHyun Yoon, senior economist at the IMF.

"At the beginning, it was external shocks, then the uprising, and then the transition to where we are today."

"What I want to emphasise is that our assessment is not only for the present, which is very challenging, but also for the future."

Bangladesh is scheduled to graduate from the Least Developed Countries (LDC) status in November 2026. That ambition must be accompanied by higher revenue-to-GDP ratios, Yoon said.

He said Bangladesh's current ratio, hovering around 7.8 percent, is "extremely low" even by developing country standards.

"Just to give you a statistic: over the last 10 years, most developing economies have had ratios between 10 and 15 percent. With Bangladesh at 8 percent, we see a lot of value in making progress," Yoon said.

The IMF is working with authorities to build momentum for reform. "We try to create momentum and shift public mindset and community attitudes toward the need for a higher revenue-to-GDP ratio," Yoon said. "We are exploring different approaches."

## EXCHANGE RATE FLEXIBILITY

On the external side, the IMF acknowledged steps taken on exchange rate reform but called for further flexibility.

"Right now, we also see that the difference between the illegal exchange

rate and the official exchange rate is very small, and we praise the authorities for this," Papageorgiou said at the media briefing in Dhaka.

"There is, I think, an agreement between us and the government -- specifically the government and Bangladesh Bank -- on flexibility. There is no doubt that we all want to move in the same direction. We see more flexibility in the exchange rate regime in Bangladesh."

"From the IMF's perspective, and looking at the reform and its history, we have been discussing this crawling peg for at least one or two years. This is, in fact, the right time to move toward this flexibility. Again, this is not full flexibility; this is a crawling peg, which allows for some guidance around the band, but also allows for full flexibility in the future."

The IMF also pushed for legal and regulatory reforms in the financial sector.

It said the authorities must move quickly to operationalise new frameworks that enable orderly bank restructuring while protecting small depositors.

The lender called for improved asset quality reviews, risk-based supervision and stronger governance at Bangladesh Bank.

On structural reform, the IMF urged efforts to expand exports beyond garments, improve governance, and accelerate climate-related investment.

"Enhancing resilience to climate change is key for mitigating macroeconomic and fiscal risks," Papageorgiou said.

In Dhaka, the IMF delegation met Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed, Bangladesh Bank Governor Ahsan H Mansur, Finance Secretary Khairuzzaman Mozumder and NBR Chairman Abdur Rahman Khan.

## Take steps

FROM PAGE 1

Murshidabad

district during a

protest over the Waqf (Amendment) Act. The protests swept across Malda, Murshidabad, South 24 Parganas and Hooghly districts, leading to arson, stone pelting and road blockades, according to Indian media reports.

Preliminary investigations of the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs reportedly indicated the involvement of alleged Bangladeshi miscreants in the violence.

Murshidabad

district during a

protest over the Waqf (Amendment) Act. The protests swept across Malda, Murshidabad, South 24 Parganas and Hooghly districts, leading to arson, stone pelting and road blockades, according to Indian media reports.

Preliminary investigations of the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs reportedly indicated the involvement of alleged Bangladeshi miscreants in the violence.

Murshidabad

district during a

protest over the Waqf (Amendment) Act. The protests swept across Malda, Murshidabad, South 24 Parganas and Hooghly districts, leading to arson, stone pelting and road blockades, according to Indian media reports.

Preliminary investigations of the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs reportedly indicated the involvement of alleged Bangladeshi miscreants in the violence.

Murshidabad

district during a

protest over the Waqf (Amendment) Act. The protests swept across Malda, Murshidabad, South 24 Parganas and Hooghly districts, leading to arson, stone pelting and road blockades, according to Indian media reports.

Preliminary investigations of the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs reportedly indicated the involvement of alleged Bangladeshi miscreants in the violence.

Murshidabad

district during a

protest over the Waqf (Amendment) Act. The protests swept across Malda, Murshidabad, South 24 Parganas and Hooghly districts, leading to arson, stone pelting and road blockades, according to Indian media reports.

Preliminary investigations of the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs reportedly indicated the involvement of alleged Bangladeshi miscreants in the violence.

Murshidabad

district during a

protest over the Waqf (Amendment) Act. The protests swept across Malda, Murshidabad, South 24 Parganas and Hooghly districts, leading to arson, stone pelting and road blockades, according to Indian media reports.

Preliminary investigations of the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs reportedly indicated the involvement of alleged Bangladeshi miscreants in the violence.

Murshidabad

district during a

protest over the Waqf (Amendment) Act. The protests swept across Malda, Murshidabad, South 24 Parganas and Hooghly districts, leading to arson, stone pelting and road blockades, according to Indian media reports.

Preliminary investigations of the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs reportedly indicated the involvement of alleged Bangladeshi miscreants in the violence.

Murshidabad

district during a

protest over the Waqf (Amendment) Act. The protests swept across Malda, Murshidabad, South 24 Parganas and Hooghly districts, leading to arson, stone pelting and road blockades, according to Indian media reports.

Preliminary investigations of the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs reportedly indicated the involvement of alleged Bangladeshi miscreants in the violence.

Murshidabad

district during a

protest over the Waqf (Amendment) Act. The protests swept across Malda, Murshidabad, South 24 Parganas and Hooghly districts, leading to arson, stone pelting and road blockades, according to Indian media reports.

Preliminary investigations of the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs reportedly indicated the involvement of alleged Bangladeshi miscreants in the violence.

Murshidabad

district during a

protest over the Waqf (Amendment) Act. The protests swept across Malda, Murshidabad, South 24 Parganas and Hooghly districts, leading to arson, stone pelting and road blockades, according to Indian media reports.

Preliminary investigations of the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs reportedly indicated the involvement of alleged Bangladeshi miscreants in the violence.

Murshidabad

district during a

protest over the Waqf (Amendment) Act. The protests swept across Malda, Murshidabad, South 24 Parganas and Hooghly districts, leading to arson, stone pelting and road blockades, according to Indian media reports.

Preliminary investigations of the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs reportedly indicated the involvement of alleged Bangladeshi miscreants in the violence.

Murshidabad

district during a

protest over the Waqf (Amendment) Act. The protests swept across Malda, Murshidabad, South 24 Parganas and Hooghly districts, leading to arson, stone pelting and road blockades, according to Indian media reports.

Preliminary investigations of the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs reportedly indicated the involvement of alleged Bangladeshi miscreants in the violence.

Murshidabad

district during a

protest over the Waqf (Amendment) Act. The protests swept across Malda, Murshidabad, South 24 Parganas and Hooghly districts, leading to arson, stone pelting and road blockades, according to Indian media reports.

Preliminary investigations of the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs reportedly indicated the involvement of alleged Bangladeshi miscreants in the violence.

Murshidabad

district during a

protest over the Waqf (Amendment) Act. The protests swept across Malda, Murshidabad, South 24 Parganas and Hooghly districts, leading to arson, stone pelting and road blockades, according to Indian media reports.

Preliminary investigations of the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs reportedly indicated the involvement of alleged Bangladeshi miscreants in the violence.

Murshidabad

district during a

protest over the Waqf (Amendment) Act. The protests swept across Malda, Murshidabad, South 24 Parganas and Hooghly districts, leading to arson, stone pelting and