



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 Zirabo 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 Banglanandha land port on March 29. After walking through West Bengal, he crossed into Nepal through the Panitanki-Karabhitta 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

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Minister Shehbaz Sharif met in New York in September 2024 and in Cairo in December 2024.

The two countries are normalising relations following the ouster of the Awami League government on August 5 last year, officials said.

Pakistan’s Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar is scheduled to visit Bangladesh on April 27-28 in the first ministerial visit in 12 years.

Direct shipping between Pakistan and Bangladesh has already begun while trade and visa are now easier, and the two countries are working to start direct flights.

At yesterday’s meeting, Dhaka also requested repatriation of stranded Pakistanis from Bangladesh.

The stranded Pakistanis who opted to stay in Bangladesh have been granted citizenship, but the number of those who wanted to return to Pakistan is 324,147, said the foreign secretary. They live in 79 camps across 14 districts of Bangladesh, he said. So far, 26,941 stranded Pakistanis have been repatriated.

Bangladesh made similar requests to Pakistan, but to no avail.

CALL ON CA

Prof Yunus told Amna that there were certain hurdles in the Bangladesh-Pakistan relations.

He emphasised on boosting mutual cooperation and exploring trade and business potentials.

Baloch said, “We have huge intra-regional markets on our own rights. We should use it.”

She said that there is a need for a regular business to business interaction between the private sectors of two countries.

Prof Yunus said he always preferred closer ties with neighboring countries, including Pakistan, in the framework of SAARC.

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.”

Take steps

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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.

No IMF deal yet, talks to continue

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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.

Bangladesh braces for tariff war fallout

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Bangladesh imported 2,515 items from the US last year, of which 2,218 items, worth \$2.9 billion, were subject to duties averaging 6.2 percent. However, after rebates, the weighted average import duty stood at just 2.2 percent.

On the other hand, Bangladeshi exports to the US faced an average duty of 15.1 percent. The US government collected \$1.27 billion in duties on goods from Bangladesh, while Bangladesh earned only \$180 million in duty revenue from American imports.

In total, Bangladesh exported 1,208 items to the US, of which 927 were taxed and 281 items were duty-free.

“What is bothersome in this situation is that we thought that we would get some advantage by writing

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.

is highly transactional in all its relationship is the political and strategic variable which will be introduced into the negotiation.”

Certainly, for the bigger partners this will be a relevant factor in terms of the concluding part of the negotiation and what type of tariff regime will prevail for them.

“So, this again is an unknown element in that negotiation. So, we are not just engaging in a simple bilateral business arithmetic set of transaction but with a set of high level of unknowns.”

All should be worried about as Bangladesh is trying to preserve \$8 billion worth of exports to the US.

“At the moment, our principal strategy is to initially try to raise the import from the US and then hope that the export volume that we have can be protected,” Sobhan added.

Cancellation of Transshipment due to ‘some developments’

Says Indian foreign ministry

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India yesterday said its withdrawal of transshipment facility to Bangladesh for third-country exports should be seen in the backdrop of “some of the developments” that preceded it.

Responding to media queries during the weekly press briefing, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said, “I would urge you to look at some of the developments that preceded it, so that you get the full perspective on the issue.”

Although Jaiswal did not elaborate on what those developments were, he reaffirmed India’s desire for a positive and constructive relationship with Bangladesh, emphasising New Delhi’s continued support for a “democratic and inclusive Bangladesh.”

Jaiswal further said that the withdrawal would not affect trade in South Asia, pointing out that Bangladesh can still trade with Nepal and Bhutan through India’s land ports.

He also said the move was prompted by cargo congestion at Indian airports, which had begun affecting Indian exporters.

However, sources in India familiar with the matter said that Bangladesh had earlier decided to close three land ports used for yarn imports from India, citing infrastructure constraints – a move made even before India revoked the transshipment facility.

Bangladesh’s commerce ministry’s recommendation in this regard came in March, added the sources.

They said the decision raised concerns in New Delhi, as yarn is a crucial raw material for Bangladesh’s garment industry. The shift to sea port only imports was perceived by some as a strategy to open the door for Pakistani suppliers, albeit at higher costs.

This decision by Dhaka did not go down well in New Delhi, they added.

When asked about the ongoing visit of Pakistan’s Foreign Secretary Amna Baloch to Bangladesh, first such visit in 15 years, Jaiswal responded briefly, saying, “We have taken note of it.”

During the briefing, Jaiswal also addressed Indian media reports alleging the involvement of Bangladeshi nationals in recent violent protests against the Wakf Amendment Act in West Bengal’s South 24 Parganas and Murshidabad districts. He said the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs would take appropriate action, and all Bangladeshis – whether staying in India legally or illegally – would be dealt with in accordance with Indian laws and regulations.

Asked about the Bangladesh Khilafat Majlis’s threat to march to the Indian High Commission in Dhaka on April 23 over the Wakf Amendment Act, Jaiswal said, “It is an internal issue of India.”

I’m being denied justice

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be allowed to have a lawyer. The issue is, my relationship is only with the ambassador Issa [Issa bin Youssef Al-Duhailan, Saudi Arabia’s ambassador to Bangladesh], no one else ...”

Denying the allegations brought against her, the Miss Bangladesh Foundation chairperson said she was falsely implicated in the case. She claimed that she did not know Dewan Samir, a businessman, who is also accused in the case. Ambassador Issa contacted her, she said.

Meghna also appealed to the court to reject the application filed for showing her arrested.

Omar Faruq Faruqi, public prosecutor of Dhaka Metropolitan, told The Daily Star that Meghna informed the court that the Saudi envoy made marriage proposal to her. She added that she never initiated contact with the diplomat, but he frequently called and texted her.

While being taken back to the lockup of the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate’s Court after hearing, the model also said she was being deprived of justice.

“I only had relationships with Issa – no one else. I’m not getting justice,” she said when a journalist asked her about the matter.

But police officers stopped her from speaking further.

In his application, investigator Md Akhtar Morshed, a DB inspector, said, “Meghna Alam, her close associate Dewan Samir, and two to three others were involved in luring foreign envoys into affairs with attractive girls.”

The accused conspired to extort \$5 million from a diplomat. Meghna needed to be shown arrested in the case for the sake of a fair probe, said the investigator.

Meanwhile, the court yesterday placed Samir on a five-day remand in the extortion case after he was produced before it with a seven-day remand prayer.

On April 15, Mohammad Abdul Alim, an inspector of Dhanmondi

Police Station, lodged the case against Meghna, Samir, and two to three unknown others.

According to the case statement, Meghna and Samir, along with two to three unidentified others, are allegedly active members of an “organised fraud ring”.

They reportedly used “attractive” women to lure foreign diplomats and representatives of foreign missions in Bangladesh, as well as local businessmen, into romantic and illicit relationships, and then applied various tactics to extort money by threatening to tarnish their reputation, the case statement said.

Samir is the CEO of a business organisation named KAWAI Group and owner of a manpower firm named Sanjana International. He also previously owned a company called MIRI International Event Management Ltd.

As part of a scheme to gain access to foreign diplomats and businessmen, Samir allegedly appointed attractive and smart women as brand ambassadors, including Meghna, in his companies to use them to blackmail envoys and extract large sums of money, the case statement said.

Samir, Meghna, and others also reportedly held a meeting on March 29 at a Japanese restaurant in Dhanmondi to demand \$5 million from the diplomat, the statement said. Meghna, the winner of Miss Earth Bangladesh 2020, was picked up from her flat in Bashundhara Residential Area in the capital on April 9.

The next day, a Dhaka court ordered Meghna to be kept in jail for 30 days under the Special Powers Act, 1974, following an application submitted by the detectives.

The High Court on April 13 issued a rule asking the government authorities concerned to explain in two weeks why Meghna’s arrest under the Special Powers Act should not be declared illegal.

Election only after reforms

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There must be visible, acceptable, and basic reforms before the election, he said.

“We all have reform proposals. We have 41, the BNP has 31, some others have 57 or 58. We are not asking for all these reforms. We are focusing on just five basic reforms.”

Parties that lose an election often call the polls unfair and the ones that win term it fair, he said, adding that this culture must end.

“We need a system that no one can question. More dialogues and discussions among political parties are necessary in this regard.”

The Jamaat is not setting any timeframe for the judiciary to complete the trials, he added.

He said that during his recent visit to Europe, he met BNP Chairperson

Khaleda Zia and acting Chairperson Tarique Rahman.

“We went there to inquire about the health condition of the BNP chairperson. We had discussions, but it was informal,” he said, adding that Khaleda Zia was mentally fine now.

“We didn’t ask when Tarique will return.”

During the visit, Jamaat leaders urged European countries to open embassies in Bangladesh to strengthen bilateral relations and sought collective cooperation to repatriate Rohingya refugees, he said.

He said, most of the EU countries conduct elections on proportionate representative methods and they learned how it applies and how they deal with national interest issues.