



"We are breaking the bodies and minds of the children of Gaza... We are complicit."

Michael Ryan
executive director
of the WHO Emergencies
Programmes

YOUR RIGHT
TO KNOW

SECOND EDITION



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WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY

266 journalists face criminal cases so far

The cases have been filed after August 5 last year

ZYMA ISLAM

The repression of journalists has taken a new form after August 5, 2024.

Fears for physical safety and instances of judicial harassment are still profoundly visible -- only the actors have changed.

The ghosts of the Digital Security Act hounding journalists have been replaced by more sinister murder and assault charges. Many are bearing the brunt of retaliation for the Awami League government's brutal response to the student-led July uprising.

Over the past few months, as journalists have been booked left and right in cases related to the deadly violence during the uprising, police sub-inspectors and regular criminal courts must deliberate on a question that even media experts struggle to answer: to what extent can journalism incite murder?

"At the former prime minister's press conference on July 26, some top journalists encouraged her to repress the student movement even harder. It is clear that they were not acting as journalists, but rather as political activists," said Kamal Ahmed, a journalist who had headed the Media Reform Commission. By July 26, scores of citizens, including children, had been killed indiscriminately by the law enforcers.

But the answer to whether journalism can be linked to murder becomes more tangled the further one descends the hierarchical ladder, the deeper one goes into the districts and upazilas where local correspondents work under duress.

To get a clear picture, The Daily Star compiled figures from Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and information from the newspaper's own network of local correspondents.

This newspaper has found that at least 266 journalists have been implicated in various cases related to the events of July and August last year.

The highest number of those cases has been filed in Dhaka -- 88. Sylhet and Chattogram come second and third, respectively, with 39 and 36 journalists prosecuted.

Savar, Narayanganj, Kushtia, Brahmanbaria and Bogura saw between 10 and 20 journalists prosecuted in each of these districts.

The other districts where journalists faced murder charges or cases filed over July-August violence include Cox's Bazar, Khulna, Lakshmpur, Barguna, Narail, Patuakhali, Thakurgaon, Barishal, Munshiganj, Bagerhat, Jashore, Pirojpur and Netrakona.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

NUMBER OF CASES

Dhaka	88
Sylhet	39
Chattogram	36
Bogura	18
Brahmanbaria	16
Kushtia	15
Narayanganj	11
Netrakona	8
Pirojpur	6
Patuakhali	6
Jashore	4
Bagerhat	4
Munshiganj	3
Barishal	3
Thakurgaon	2
Narail	2
Barguna	2
Lakshmpur	1
Khulna	1
Cox's Bazar	1
TOTAL	266

SOURCE: REPORTERS
WITHOUT BORDERS AND DS
CORRESPONDENTS

Patenga Sea Beach in Chattogram, a popular tourist destination known for its natural beauty, is slowly losing its appeal. Thanks to administrative neglect, several hundred shops and eateries have sprung up along the beach, spoiling its scenic ambience. Moreover, there haven't been any visible steps to improve the tourist spot despite assurances from relevant authorities in December last year. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

PRESS FREEDOM INDEX
Bangladesh up 16 notches
Ranks ahead of India, Pakistan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh's press freedom improved, climbing from 165 to 149 in the World Press Freedom Index, the latest release from Reporters Without Borders (RSF) assessed.

Despite this rise, the press freedom situation in Bangladesh is still classified as "very serious".

The report said today's news media are caught between preserving their editorial independence and ensuring their economic survival.

"At a time when press freedom is experiencing a worrying decline in many parts of the world, a major -- yet often underestimated -- factor is seriously weakening the media: economic pressure," said the report.

"Much of this is due to ownership concentration, pressure from advertisers and financial backers, and public aid that is restricted,

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No election before trial of AL: NCP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of the National Citizen Party (NCP) yesterday declared that elections would not take place in the country before the Awami League is tried as a party for committing mass killings during the July uprising. They also demanded a ban on the party's political activities until that trial concludes.

Criticising the remark of the chief adviser on AL contesting the next polls, they said the people of the country and the participants of the July uprising will decide whether the party should be banned or be allowed to contest the national election.

There is no room for debate over its [AL's] political legitimacy anymore. That is why we demand that its registration be cancelled and all organisational activities be suspended until the trial is concluded.

Nahid Islam, NCP convener

The NCP leaders made the announcement at a party rally held at the south gate of the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque in the capital's Gulistan area after Juma prayers.

Presiding over the event, Nahid Islam, party convener, said the AL is no longer a political party but has become a fascist and terrorist organisation.

"There is no room for debate over its [AL's] political legitimacy anymore. That is why we demand that its registration be cancelled and all organisational activities be suspended until the trial is concluded. But it's saddening that no visible progress has been made in holding trials even after nine months have passed."

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'Efforts on to criminalise call for polls' Says Tarique, demands roadmap for election

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday said that attempts are underway to create an atmosphere where demanding a national election seems like a crime.

Urging the interim government to clearly announce a roadmap for the polls, he said that doubts are growing among the public over why the government is taking so much time on reforms.

The BNP leader said that those who believe in democracy now want to know what steps the government has taken to make the fugitive autocrat's politics irrelevant in the future.

Tarique added that if local government elections are held first, it could create a scope for autocrats and their allies to rehabilitate.

"Political parties will naturally demand elections. It is a normal democratic practice, but we have noticed in recent days an attempt to create an atmosphere in the country where demanding an election seems like a crime," said Tarique.

He made the remarks while virtually addressing a discussion at the Jatiya Press Club, marking the 5th founding anniversary of Amar Bangladesh (AB) Party.

Derogatory comments about the national election only please the fugitive dictator and insult democracy-loving



SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

Khaleda to return home from London on Monday



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson and former prime minister Khaleda Zia is set to return home on Monday after four months of medical treatment in London. She will be accompanied by her daughters-in-law, Zubaida Rahman, and Syeda Sharmina Rahman.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir confirmed the development yesterday, saying, "Madam will return

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Farmers in Jhalakathi salvage ripe paddy that was fully submerged during the recent seasonal nor'wester. After three days of sun-drying, the paddy will now sell for only Tk 600 per maund (37.3242 kg) -- far less than the Tk 1,000 it would have fetched had it remained dry. The photo was taken in Nalchity upazila yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

PAKISTAN-CONTROLLED KASHMIR Residents ordered to stockpile food amid tensions Gunfire exchanges continue along the LoC

- US VP Vance calls on Pakistan to co-op with India in hunting down terrorists
- Pakistan opens Wagah border gate, takes back its stranded citizens
- PM Shehbaz thanks China for 'endorsing' Pakistan's proposal of neutral probe

AGENCIES

Pakistan-administered Kashmir yesterday called on residents near the de facto border with the Indian side of the region to stockpile food as tensions flare between the arch-rivals following a deadly attack last month.

India blames Pakistan for the attack by gunmen on civilians at the tourist site of Pahalgam in Indian-administered Kashmir on April 22 that killed 26 men. Islamabad has rejected the charge.

The two nuclear-armed countries have exchanged

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Australian PM says battle ahead to win election

AFP, Sydney

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese says he has a "mountain to climb" in elections today, despite leading the opinion polls, in a contest swayed by living costs and Trump tariffs.

Surveys give Albanese's left-leaning Labor Party a narrow lead over the conservative opposition on a two-party preferred basis.

If they are right, Albanese, 62, could lead his party to a majority in the 150-seat parliament.

"On polls there's a lot of undecided voters. We have a mountain to climb," Albanese said yesterday.

"My job is to maximise Labor's vote in the next 48 hours. That's what I'm intending to do."

Albanese has promised to embrace renewable energy, tackle a worsening housing crisis and pour money into a creaking healthcare system.

He warned of "cuts and chaos" under a right-leaning coalition led by former police officer Peter Dutton, 54, who wants to slash immigration, crack down on crime and ditch a longstanding ban on nuclear power.

Dutton, leader of the Liberal Party, has predicted "a lot of surprises, seat by seat" on tonight.

Khaleda to return home from London on Monday

FROM PAGE 1

on Monday morning. As far as we know, her two daughters-in-law, Tarique Rahman's wife Zubaida Rahman and Arafat Rahman's wife Syeda Shamila Rahman, are also expected to accompany her."

Zubaida has been in London since 2008, when she travelled there with her husband, Tarique, and their daughter, Zaima Rahman. She has not visited Bangladesh since. She will stay here for a few months before returning to London.

The BNP has written to the inspector general of police, requesting security measures, including a police escort, for Zubaida.

According to the letter, "There is a security threat to her life as a member of the Zia family and the wife of Tarique Rahman."

On January 8, Khaleda was flown to London on a special air ambulance sent by the Emir of Qatar for advanced treatment.

The 79-year-old former prime minister was admitted to the London Clinic, where she underwent 17 days of treatment.

Since January 25, she has been under continued care at Tarique's residence.

BNP sources said eight individuals will accompany her on her return journey from London. Apart from her daughters-in-law, her entourage includes personal physician AZM Zahid Hossain and advisers Aminul Haque Chowdhury and Masudur Rahman.

When asked about Khaleda's current condition, Fakhrul said, "Alhamdulillah, she is definitely better than before."

"The air ambulance provided by the Emir of Qatar is facing some technical delays. Therefore, Madam has decided that if the air ambulance is not available at the last moment, she will return on a Biman Bangladesh Airlines flight instead," he added.

"All arrangements have been made for her return. If she departs on Sunday [tomorrow], InshaAllah, she will arrive in the country around 11:00am on Monday morning," Fakhrul said.

Khaleda was imprisoned in 2018 under the then Sheikh Hasina-led government following a conviction in a corruption case filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission.

In March 2020, amid the pandemic, the government temporarily released her on an executive order, suspending her sentence on the condition that she remain at her Gulshan residence and not leave the country.

On August 6, 2023, Khaleda was fully freed by an order from President Mohammed Shahabuddin following the fall of the Awami League government.

Residents ordered to stockpile food amid tensions

FROM PAGE 1

gunfire for eight consecutive nights along the militarised Line of Control (LoC), the de facto border, according to the Indian army, and the uneasy neighbours have issued a raft of tit-for-tat punitive diplomatic measures, reports AFP.

"Instructions have been issued to stock food supplies for two months in the 13 constituencies along the Line of Control (LoC)," the prime minister of Pakistan-administered Kashmir, Chaudhry Anwar ul Haq, told the local assembly yesterday.

The regional government has also created an emergency fund of one billion rupees (\$3.5 million) to ensure



Leaders and activists of the National Citizen Party gather at the south gate of Baitul Mukarram Mosque yesterday afternoon to participate in a protest rally, demanding the trial of the Awami League for committing mass killings during the July uprising and a ban on the party's activities. The rally was organised by NCP's Dhaka metropolitan unit.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

266 journalists face criminal cases so far

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national election and battled the case for two years.

"In both regimes, I have become the victim of the abuse of political powers. I was named because I belong to the Federal Union of Journalists. I had contacted the father of Rakibul, and he said that he does not even know about the case. He said that three people came to his house and took his NID, claiming that they would get financial assistance from the government. He told me that he gave his signature to the men on a white paper," said Hedaia.

He was also named in another ICT complaint filed over a death in Ashulia that happened at the same time as Rakibul's death, even though Hedaia is from Khulna. "Strikingly, both complaints cited the same witness. How can one witness be both at Ashulia and Paikgachha at the same time?" he questioned.

At least 14 journalists have been arrested at various times, with 13 of them still in jail.

One of them, Monirul Islam, the Kuakata correspondent of GTV, was later released on bail. He explained how the case against him was fabricated.

"I was named in a case filed under the Explosives Act. The incident happened on August 4, when a few local boys allegedly threw cocktails at a shop in Kuakata. I was not even in that location, and I had all the proof. I was in Dhaka. I was so sure that it was a mistake that I went to the court and surrendered, but instead of taking my proof into cognisance, they threw me into jail," said Monirul. He spent 16 days behind bars.

Monirul is afraid of being too vocal about the case, fearing further persecution. "I need to stay in my district, because if I cannot, I will lose my job," he said.

Former reform commission chief Kamal said one of the reasons that journalists at the local level are being targeted is because many of them have side gigs like businesses. "Many have multiple identities, and these fake murder charges are a way of score-settling or a result of political rivalry," he said.

These cases need to be independently investigated to find out the underlying reasons behind them, and the police cannot be the ones to do it. But for sure, these reasons are not linked with the offences they are actually being prosecuted for," he said.

When asked why murder cases were being filed against journalists, Dhaka Metropolitan Public Prosecutor Omar Faruq Faruqi told The Daily Star, "They [journalists] might not be directly involved, but they aided and abetted through their speeches."

The question arises: how many of the prosecuted journalists, especially out of the capital, wielded the clout necessary to incite Awami League cadres or law enforcers to commit

murder?

Kamal Ahmed said these cases were unequivocally made on trumped-up charges and that the murder charges were all false.

"There is no specific law in Bangladesh that can prosecute a journalist for incitement of murder through journalism. There are laws that can be used against journalists for breaking down social harmony," he said.

In a report in January, Human Rights Watch called the wholesale prosecution of journalists a replication of the "familiar patterns of abuses from the Hasina administration".

"While it is critical that those who were involved in commanding, aiding, and abetting the grave crimes committed during the uprising are held to account, mass cases against journalists for not backing the protesters send a dangerous message for freedom of expression under the interim government," the report said.

Beyond judicial harassment, all the journalists The Daily Star spoke to said they were afraid of mob attacks that would "inevitably go unchecked".

At least 28 journalists were attacked in seven separate instances across Natore, Barishal, Patuakhali, Shariatpur and Dhaka.

Omar Faruk, who had formerly worked at Independent Television, was attacked while covering the demolition of the house of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on Dhamondi 32.

"I went live and was explaining to my audience that the authoritarian rule of Sheikh Hasina had led to intense public outrage. I used the word 'Bangabandhu' to refer to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. After all, even the museum located here was called the Bangabandhu Museum. A mob gathered around me because I used that word, and they beat me up," said Faruk.

Faruk said he filed a general diary with the local police station, but there was no update on the investigation.

"I have no hope for justice. Mobs know that they can attack journalists with impunity," he said.

Célia Mercier, head of the RSF South Asia Desk, said in a report on February 14 that there was a worrying surge in violence against the media.

She said, "While the interim government's takeover in August 2024 raised hopes for improvement, journalists' safety remains unprotected. They are being assaulted while reporting, subjected to physical retaliation for their articles, and their newsrooms are being stormed by protesters."

"RSF calls on the authorities to prosecute all those responsible for these attacks, to put an end to this intolerable cycle of violence, and to ensure the safety of media professionals."

[Our district correspondents contributed to this report.]

'Efforts on to criminalise call for polls'

FROM PAGE 1

people, he added.

"If a parliament and the government accountable to people are formed through the people's vote, the country's independence and sovereignty will remain strong."

"Although every political party supports reforms, questions are slowly growing in the people's mind about why the interim government is wasting so much time on reforms."

He added that if de-politicisation is encouraged by ignoring political parties and the people's verdict, it will ultimately put democracy at risk.

"But if political parties' demand for elections is ignored for the sake of ongoing reforms, then what is the significance of reforms? This is a question many people are asking today."

Tarique said that an ousted and fugitive autocrat who violated the constitution is trying to raise its ugly head again.

"But by violating the constitution, this fugitive autocrat illegally formed governments three times. The democratic people of Bangladesh now want to know what steps the interim government has taken or will take to make those accused of constitutional violations irrelevant in politics in the future."

"There is no way to evade responsibility through a blame game."

Tarique said that if this government fails to take action, he firmly believes that an elected government will ensure legal measures against those accused of violating the constitution.

He said, "Without taking action against the fugitive autocrat, those who have spoken for local government polls before the national election should know this -- I want to tell them that the accomplices of the fugitive autocrat will get the scope of rehabilitation."

"A local government election would be a golden opportunity for the fugitive autocrat to be rehabilitated. Perhaps those who have advocated for it have not considered this aspect. I urge them to reconsider it."

In another development, Sramik Dal, the BNP's labour wing, on Thursday held a large rally in front of the party's Nayapaltan central office

Trump signs order to cut NPR, PBS public funding

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump signed an executive order on Thursday to cut public funding for NPR and PBS, accusing the news outlets of being biased in his latest attack on traditional media.

Trump has long had an antagonistic relationship with most mainstream news media, previously describing them as the "enemy of the people."

A notable exception is the powerful conservative broadcaster Fox News, some of whose hosts have taken on major roles in his administration.

National Public Radio (NPR) and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) are only partly funded by US taxpayers through the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and rely heavily on private donations.

Trump in his executive order instructed the CPB Board of Directors and all executive departments and agencies "to cease Federal funding" for NPR and PBS.

He added that "neither entity presents a fair, accurate, or unbiased portrayal of current events to taxpaying citizens."

The CPB budget has already been approved by Congress through 2027, which raises questions about the scope of Trump's order.

Politico magazine described the order as "the White House's biggest escalation yet in its assault on the media" and said it would likely be challenged in court.

that the terrorists sometimes operating in their territory are hunted down and dealt with," Vance added.

US Vice President JD Vance said on Thursday Washington hoped Pakistan would cooperate with India to hunt down Pakistan-based militants, and that India's response to the recent militant attack in India-administered Kashmir does not lead to a broader regional conflict.

He also conveyed that India's "belligerent actions could distract Pakistan from its ongoing counterterrorism efforts" against the Islamic State Khorasan Province (IS-K), Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), who were "operating from inside Afghanistan".

The Index's survey shows that editorial interference is compounding the problem, with respondents reporting that media owners either "always" or "often" limited their outlet's editorial independence.

In the Asia Pacific region, the concentration of media ownership in the hands of political magnates threatens media plurality, said the report.

The report quoted Anne Bocandé, RSF editorial director, as saying, "Guaranteeing freedom, independence and plurality in today's media landscape requires stable and transparent financial conditions. Without economic independence,

to mark May Day.

Speaking as the chief guest, Tarique said, "... if the roadmap in the interim government's action plan is clear to the democracy-loving public, their doubts and suspicions will be dispelled.

"Our call to the interim government is to be cautious. A section of the interim government appears to be systematically trying to create a division among anti-fascist political parties by pitting reforms against elections..."

Opposing the government's move to provide a "humanitarian passage" for Myanmar's Rakhine state, the acting BNP chairman said only an elected parliament can make such a sensitive decision.

"The freedom loving people of the country believe that the decision on whether to grant a corridor must come from the people themselves, specifically, through their directly elected parliament.

"Our position is clear: the interim government must prioritise the interests of the people of Bangladesh above everything -- not act to safeguard the interests of foreign powers."

Addressing the gathering, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said, "I would like to ask the government: please do not sign any agreements, ignoring political parties and the people, that go against the interests of Bangladesh."

In a Facebook post last night, Tarique said, "On this World Press Freedom Day, let us unite to champion the independence of the press and the protection of journalists who report on the truth, with ethical integrity."

"Journalists serve as a vital pillar of democracy; their work must be protected and embraced, not attacked or censored. Yet in Bangladesh, we witnessed the systematic erosion of press freedom under state sponsored repression by the recently deposed authoritarian regime."

"Let us set aside all differences to build a Bangladesh where elected, accountable governments ensure the freedom of expression, human rights, and the rule of law for all, including that of the press."

Bangladesh up 16 notches

FROM PAGE 1

absent or allocated in an opaque manner," it added.

"The economic indicator on the RSF World Press Freedom Index now stands at an unprecedented, critical low as its decline continued in 2025. As a result, the global state of press freedom is now classified as a 'difficult situation' for the first time in the history of the Index," it continued.

Bangladesh's ranking is better than those of Pakistan and India, both of whom are several notches below, at 158 and 151 respectively.

The Index's survey shows that editorial interference is compounding the problem, with respondents reporting that media owners either "always" or "often" limited their outlet's editorial independence.

In the Asia Pacific region, the concentration of media ownership in the hands of political magnates threatens media plurality, said the report.

This score is calculated on the basis of a tally of abuses against media and journalists in connection with their work and a qualitative analysis of the situation in each country.

Bangladesh's score increased to 33.71 from last year's 27.64, while top-ranking Norway has scored 92.31 this year.

DHAKA

'Take action against those who incite hatred'

22 women professionals urge govt to stand firm on women's rights reforms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Twenty-two female professionals have demanded that the government investigate and take appropriate legal action against those who incite hatred and issue threats against the Women's Affairs Reform Commission.

In a joint statement issued yesterday, they said the state must publicly reaffirm that reforms regarding women's rights issues will continue, even in the face of extremist threats.

They also emphasised the need for both social and legal action against derogatory remarks about women.

The statement said it is natural and expected for the Women's Affairs Reform Commission to come up with women-friendly proposals.

"There is no reason to think that all proposals from the commission will be equally accepted by all. Debate and discussion on contested proposals are essential for the democratic development of Bangladesh," it said.

"But we are observing that whenever it comes to establishing women's rights, a group rises against it without any divine knowledge. Will they face difficulties if

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People gather in front of the BNP's central office in Nayapaltan to take part in the party's Labour Day rally on Thursday. Key BNP policymakers addressed the event where thousands joined from factories in Dhaka, Narayanganj, Gazipur, Narsingdi, Tangail, Manikganj, and Munshiganj.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

LABOUR RIGHTS
Star journo wins DIFE's best reporting award

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mohammad Jamil Khan, head of the crime desk at The Daily Star, won the best reporting award in print media category in a competition held by the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) for his report on labour rights.

Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus presented the award at an event held on Thursday at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Exhibition Centre, marking the historic May Day and National Occupational Health and Safety Day 2025.

Jamil secured first place in the print media category, while Kutub Uddin Mohammad Jasim of The Business Standard and Munira Munni of The Financial Express won second and third places respectively.

The award was introduced by DIFE to recognise excellence in labour reporting.

Labour and Employment Secretary AHM Shafiquzzaman chaired the event, while Labour and Employment Adviser Brig Gen (retd) Dr M Sakhawat Hussain, Labour Reform Commission Chairman

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Rain sparks fresh fear of dengue surge

Cases rise; preventive steps still lacking, say experts

HELEMUL ALAM

As the rainy season begins to set in, the risk of a surge in dengue cases is rising rapidly, with authorities yet to take adequate preventive measures across the country.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), 20 people have died from dengue so far this year, while 2,586 others have been hospitalised as of Friday morning.

Of the deaths, 10 occurred in January, three in February, and seven in April. In terms of hospitalisations, 1,161 cases were reported in January, 374 in February, 336 in March, 701 in April, and 39 till the second day of May.

The Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD) has forecast rain or thunderstorms accompanied by lightning and temporary gusty winds in parts of Chattogram, Mymensingh, Sylhet, Rangpur, Rajshahi, Dhaka, Khulna, and Barishal divisions in the next 24 hours starting from 9:00am yesterday.

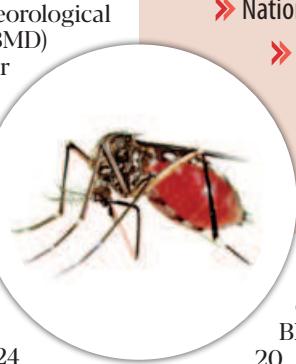
Entomologist Prof Kabirul Bashar of Jahangirnagar University expressed concern over the results of their ongoing surveys, noting a sharp rise in the Breteau Index (BI), a measure of Aedes mosquito density. "This year, we're already seeing BI values over 10 in April, compared to less than 10 on average last

DENGUE DEATHS and HOSPITALISATIONS 2025 (AS OF MAY 2)

Month	Deaths	Hospitalisations
Jan	10	1,161
Feb	3	374
Mar	0	336
Apr	7	701
May (2nd)	0	39
TOTAL	20	2,586

RECOMMENDATIONS

- » Nationwide mosquito control drives
- » Daily vector surveillance
- » Specialised dengue response unit
- » Public awareness through campaigns
- » Coordination among city corporations, health depts



year. If this trend continues, the BI could exceed 20 in June, which is alarming," he said.

Prof Bashir emphasised the urgent need for the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (LGRD) to issue directives to its departments to control the spread of Aedes mosquitoes.

"Breeding source management and larvae control should be the top priorities now. Both the authorities and city residents

must ensure there is no stagnant water in containers, construction sites, or other areas," he added.

Entomologist GM Saifur Rahman echoed similar concerns, warning that continued rain and thunderstorms in the coming months will further heighten dengue risks.

"Comprehensive and timely interventions are critical. Unfortunately, we haven't seen sufficient action yet," he said.

Rahman urged the government to establish dedicated mosquito

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'Govt didn't have any journo fired'
Says CA's press secy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT,
Ctg

The government had no involvement in the dismissal of any journalists, said the Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam yesterday.

Referring to the recent termination of three journalists, Shafiqul Alam said, "What is happening in the media is not driven by the government. The government hasn't instructed anyone to fire or replace anyone."

He added, "Over the past 15 years, journalists have said things which, in any other country, would have led to the shutdown of those media outlets after such a revolution. But the government didn't do that."

Speaking at the Chattogram Press Club, Shafiqul Alam said, "Thousands of people are speaking every day, even spreading falsehoods, yet the government has not shut down a single voice."

He claimed that journalists in Bangladesh are currently enjoying the highest level of freedom of speech in the country's history.

"Many speak irresponsibly; some even post fake news on Facebook. Still, we haven't blocked a single account, though we had enough reason to do so. But we didn't, because we believe in freedom of expression," he said.

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DHAKA SATURDAY MAY 3, 2025
BAISHAKH 20, 1432 BS
The Daily Star 3

Ensure safety and dignity for women workers

Seven organisations urge govt

RECOMMENDATIONS

- » Equality in wages, promotions, leave policies
- » Special cell under labour ministry
- » Safe resting rooms, hygienic toilets, maternity benefits
- » Safety, rights training for women migrants
- » Daycare centres at workplaces
- » Women support desks at all missions abroad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Marking International Labour Day, seven organisations working on women's rights yesterday urged the government to ensure protection and dignity for women workers.

In a media release, the organisations stated that although women's contribution to national economic development is recognised, they continue to face violence and discrimination in workplace environments.

They called for urgent and visible action from the government in this regard.

The organisations are Nari Unnayan Shakti, Young Women for Development Rights and Climate, Bangladeshi Ovhibashi Mohila Sramik Association, Forum for Culture and Human Development, Association of Voluntary Actions for Society, and Love Thy Neighbour.

They highlighted that both domestic and migrant women workers continue to face sexual harassment, insecurity, and labour discrimination on a regular basis,

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Veggie prices go up in Dhaka markets

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prices of most vegetables, except for potatoes, have increased by Tk 5 to Tk 10 per kilogramme over the past week in the capital's kitchen markets.

A kilogramme of green papaya was sold at Tk 80 yesterday, up from Tk 70 a week earlier.

Eggplants, pointed gourds, spiny gourds, okra, bulbous roots, long beans, and ridge gourds were selling for Tk 70 to Tk 120 per kg, showing an increase of about Tk 10 per kg.

The price of tomatoes also rose by Tk 10 per kg within a week. Meanwhile, onion prices reached Tk 55 to Tk 60 per kg, up from Tk 40 to Tk 45 about a couple of weeks ago.

However, potato prices remained unchanged, with five to six kilogrammes being sold at Tk 100 in different kitchen markets yesterday.

Jamal Hossain, a vegetable seller at Karwan Bazar kitchen market, yesterday said prices of many vegetables have risen by Tk 5 to Tk 10 per kilogram compared to last week.

Irfan Hossain Nayee, a private jobholder, visited the Ibrahimpur kitchen market in Kafrul yesterday to buy vegetables.

Speaking to this correspondent, Irfan said he could not find any vegetable item priced below Tk 80 per kg, except for potatoes and tomatoes.

"Even though the prices of vegetables were low during Ramadan and the entire winter season, they have increased now," he added.

Nayee said he had to buy fewer vegetables due to the high prices.

Md Ismail Hossain, a vendor who sells vegetables from a rickshaw van in East Shewrapara, said prices have been increasing over the last seven to eight days.

He said he buys vegetables from the Mirpur 1 wholesale market and sells them at retail in Shewrapara.

"Now, as prices go up, many of my regular customers even try to bargain, as they are

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

One killed, two injured in Banani road accident

STAR REPORT

A man was killed and two others were injured after a car hit a rickshaw van on the Airport Road in Dhaka's Banani area around midnight yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Hanif, 45, a van passenger, confirmed Jane Alam, duty officer of Banani Police Station.

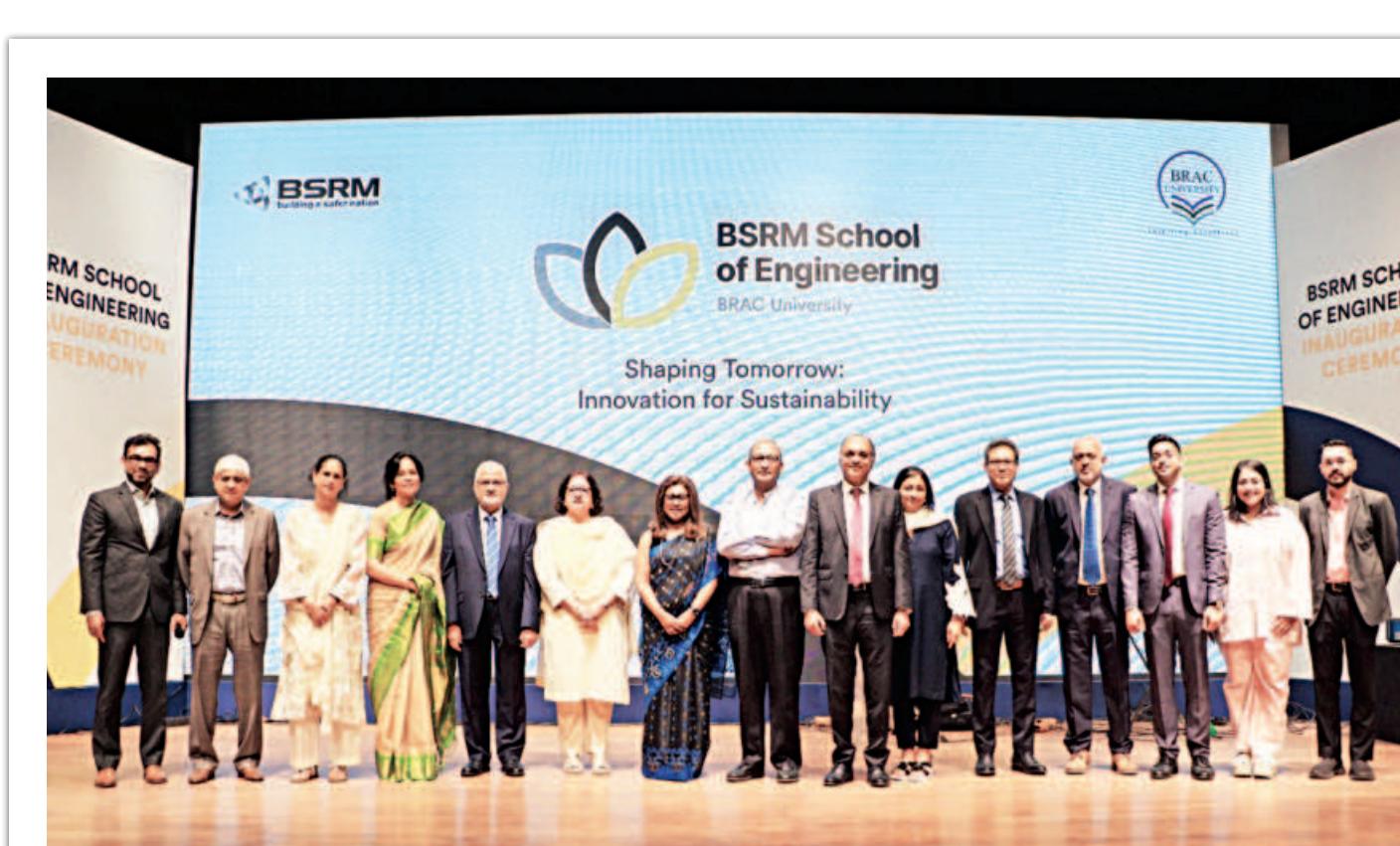
The incident took place near the Maarsanga Television office around 12:30am, he said.

The injured were first taken to Kurnitola General Hospital and later transferred to the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (NITOR), the police officer said.

According to the duty officer, the car driver sped up after hitting the rickshaw van.

Following the accident, a Facebook user shared a video claiming that a black Toyota was responsible for hitting the three victims and fleeing the scene.

Police are investigating the incident to find out the reason behind the accident.



Guests at the inaugural ceremony of the BSRM School of Engineering at BRAC University's Merul Badda campus on April 30.

Redefining engineering education

BRAC University, BSRM inaugurate BSRM School of Engineering

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BRAC University and the BSRM Group of Companies inaugurated the BSRM School of Engineering through a ceremony at the university's Merul Badda campus on April 30, alongside its theme "Shaping Tomorrow: Innovation for Sustainability", official logo, and website.

This first-of-a-kind collaboration between academia and industry is aimed at redefining engineering education in Bangladesh. The collaboration is set to embed innovation, ethics, and societal responsibility at its very core, preparing a new generation of engineers to build a future that is inclusive, sustainable, and humane.

Such academia-industry partnerships are

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

Veggie prices

FROM PAGE 3
uncomfortable with the price hike," he said. Saifur Rahman Chowdhury Sujan, general secretary of the Karwan Bazar Brihattar Paikari Kancha Bazar Arot Byabshayi Malik Samiti, said over the past seven to 10 days, the supply of vegetables to the capital's markets has slightly declined.

As a result, the prices of several items have increased over the week, he added.

He further said that during the winter, both production and supply of vegetables were sufficient, which kept prices at a tolerable level in the capital's markets.

Saifur also said the supply of potatoes to the capital's markets remains smooth, which has helped keep their prices low.

However, despite satisfactory onion production, many people are hoarding this essential cooking ingredient, which has reduced its supply compared to the demand in the markets, he also said.

As a result, onion prices have increased in the capital's markets, he added.

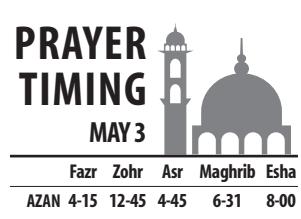
Water crisis

FROM PAGE 5
Tofazzal Sohel, general secretary of the Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon Habiganj unit, said deforestation is the main cause of water shortages.

He said during the last rainy season, large amounts of soil eroded and filled up the streams in the forest, drastically reducing their capacity for water retention.

Zahangir Alam, divisional forest officer in Sylhet, said not only wild boars, but also barking deer, monkeys, porcupines, and snakes, are coming to drink from the artificial reservoir.

"We are now taking swift steps to build a large pond in a quieter area inside the forest," he added.



SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION



Bangladesh's first MINISO Blind Box Store was launched at Ventura Mall in Gulshan-2 recently. The event drew fans of all ages, eager to explore surprise-packed collectibles featuring popular characters like Pokémon, Doraemon, and One Piece.

PHOTO: COURTESY

Farmers rush to harvest boro amid pest attack



A pest infested boro field in Kalmakanda upazila, Netrakona. PHOTO: STAR

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Netrakona

Boro rice fields in several areas of Kalmakanda upazila in Netrakona have been infested by brown planthoppers, locally known as "current polka", raising serious concerns among farmers over harvesting their ripened crops.

To limit losses, many farmers have started harvesting their paddy before it fully ripens, while others are applying pesticides as advised by the Department of Agricultural Extension.

During visits to various areas of Nazirpur and Lengura unions recently, half-ripe Boro paddy fields were seen swaying in the breeze, their stalks bent under the weight of the grain. In some patches, the plants had already withered. Several farmers were seen spraying pesticides.

According to the Kalmakanda Upazila Agriculture Office, Boro rice has been cultivated on 21,065 hectares of land this year, 4,630 hectares in haor (wetland) areas and 16,435 hectares in non-haor areas.

So far, 85 percent of the haor fields and 30 percent of the non-haor fields have been harvested.

Abdul Hakim, a farmer from Nazirpur, said he grew Boro rice on six acres of land this year. Planthoppers attacked two acres before the paddy fully ripened, forcing him to begin harvesting early.

He is now applying pesticides to the greener, less mature areas of his field.

Saiful Islam, upazila agriculture officer, said the pest generally targets fields with poor light and air circulation.

"At an early stage, the planthopper can be controlled by spraying insecticides," he mentioned.

Only a small portion of fields in the upazila have been affected so far, he added.

He said the agriculture office is continuing to guide farmers, and 45 percent of the total Boro crop in the upazila, both haor and non-haor, has already been harvested.

Farmers have been urged to harvest the remaining ripe crops without delay, he said.

Take action against

FROM PAGE 3
women's rights are ensured? Are they not part of this society?" the statement read.

"They want to abolish the entire commission without offering any argument. Why this evil conspiracy? Is it truly a reflection of religious belief? Not at all. All religions preach equality," the statement continued.

"We believe their hatred and violence toward women have become evident. By portraying women in a degrading manner through their speeches, they reveal their personal mindset, consciousness, and political narrowness. They even dream of running the state while holding such disrespectful views about women," said the signatories.

"They fail to realise how absurd it is to imagine governing a country while excluding or marginalising 51 percent of its population."

The women professionals added, "These individuals lack the wisdom, generosity, tolerance, and respect needed for political leadership. Shouting cannot make one acceptable to the people."

"If they have the courage, they should attend a dialogue with the women's commission and explain the

reasons for their objections and prove their capability," the statement said.

The 22 signatories are -- Syeda Ratna, environmental and cultural activist; Sultana Begum, garment workers' movement organiser; Ishrat Jahan Prachi, human rights activist and lawyer; Nazifa Tasnim Khanam Tisha, theatre activist; Layeka Bashir, teacher and cultural activist; anthropologist Dr Nasrin Siraj; Barrister Tabassum Mehnaz, lawyer and rights activist; journalist Syeda Gulruk; Hama Shams Ahmed, researcher and rights activist; anthropologist Nasrin Khandaker; photographer Jannatul Mawa; Adiba Raisa, development officer; Kavya Kritika, researcher and teacher; Syeda Noor-E-Raihan, independent contractor; Arunima Tahsin, researcher and activist; Amina Sultana Sonia, activist and development worker; artist Tarannum Nibir; Uzma Tashrian, rights activist; Barrister Nusrat Meraj; Trishia Nashtar, feminist organiser and futurist; Samina Luthfa, professor of Dhaka University; and Mirza Taslima Sultana, professor of anthropology at Jahangirnagar University.



IKRIMIKRI hosting 6-day exhibition

CITY DESK

IKRIMIKRI is hosting a six-day exhibition of picture-based books and illustrations at the Alliance Française gallery, said a press release.

Starting on May 2, the event will continue till May 7.

The event showcases a range of picture books published by IKRIMIKRI, highlighting their visual storytelling and handcrafted illustrations aimed at children and adults alike.

The exhibition features original artworks, alphabet displays, and photography exploring river themes.

Visitors can attend puppet shows, theater performances, storytelling sessions, and hands-on drawing activities. Interactive workshops will also be held for children, teenagers, and university students interested in illustration and book-making. IKRIMIKRI's team of writers, illustrators, and publishers aim to inspire creativity, curiosity, and a love for reading through their collaborative work. The exhibition celebrates the role of picture books in developing empathy, imagination, and early literacy skills.

Ensure safety

FROM PAGE 3

He also said the media in Bangladesh is operating with unprecedented freedom. "Media outlets are writing whatever they wish."

Addressing the Digital Security Act (DSA), he said, "Many spread false information through digital platforms, often targeting women and children. The previous government tried to gag the entire nation through the DSA under the guise of stopping such abuse."

Addressing the Digital Security Act (DSA), he said, "Many spread false information through digital platforms, often targeting women and children. The previous government tried to gag the entire nation through the DSA under the guise of stopping such abuse. We have scrapped that and are enacting a new law. I assure all of you that it will protect everyone's rights."

Shafiqul Alam also accused sections of the media of justifying enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings.

"We've seen how enforced disappearances

and killings have been justified. These are among the gravest crimes in the world," he said.

"When someone is abducted or killed in a so-called crossfire, others fall silent in fear. The purpose of disappearances is to envelop society in fear. Journalists have echoed the government's narrative on these issues," he also said.

Star journo

FROM PAGE 3

Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed, and International Labour Organization (ILO) Country Director in Bangladesh Tuomo Poutiainen spoke.

Sushanta Sinha of Ekator TV won the award in the electronic media category, while Md Imdad Ullah of Khoborpotro (Cumilla) won in the still photography category.

and other factories; and establish daycare centres at workplaces with 50 or more female employees.

In addition, they demanded the creation of a "Women Worker Protection and Response Cell" under the labour ministry and called for regular monitoring.

To the Expatriates' Welfare Ministry, the organisations demanded making it mandatory to formulate "self-guidelines" and establish "complaint committees" at every workplace.

They also urged the labour ministry to ensure gender equality in wages, promotions, and leave policies; ensure safe resting rooms, hygienic toilets, and maternity benefits for women workers; appoint welfare officers in garment

Rain sparks fresh

FROM PAGE 3
control units across the country and treat dengue as an endemic threat.

"A specialised department involving entomologists and epidemiologists must be formed without delay. Without proactive steps, the burden of dengue could soon become unbearable," he warned.

He also pointed out that while last year's mosquito control efforts by city corporations were poorly coordinated, there has been some improvement this year, though still far

Redefining engineering

FROM PAGE 3

when two strong, value-driven organisations come together," added Akberali. "We believe that this school and partnership will serve as a platform for nurturing the next generation of engineers - young minds who will be equipped not only with technical knowledge, but with strong moral values, a sense of responsibility, and a passion to serve the nation."

Tamara Hasan Abed, chairperson of the Board of Trustees, BRAC University, added, "Today, as we inaugurate the BSRM School of Engineering, we reaffirm that education must be a force for dignity, justice, and opportunity."

"We commit to fostering an environment where curiosity is celebrated, where diversity is cherished, and where every student believes they can be a driver of positive change," she said.

Professor Syed Ferhat Anwar, vice chancellor, BRAC University, said, "I believe that this partnership will ensure that knowledge of the industry is put together in a meaningful way by the academia and shared with the entire world."

"This partnership is an example for Bangladesh and, hopefully, for the global South," he added. "This is what the BRAC and BRAC University synergy is about, and it reflects how BSRM not only does business but also focuses on safety for humanity."

Following the speeches by the guests, an experience sharing session was held where alumni, faculty members, and students talked about their experiences at the School of Engineering.

"We hope that in this partnership between BRAC University and BSRM, you will see a powerful example of what becomes possible



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Two children killed, two hurt in Ctg landslide

STAFF CORRESPONDENT,
Ctg

Two 11 year old boys were killed and two others critically injured in a landslide inside the Korean Export Processing Zone (KEPZ) in Anwara upazila of Chattogram on Thursday.

The deceased were identified as Mohammad Rohan, son of Abdur Rahim, and Mohammad Misbah, son of Mohammad Imran. They were residents of Ward-8 in Bairag union, said Tayebur Rahman, inspector at Anwara Police Station.

The incident occurred around 10:00am in the Eidgah area of Paschimpara when a group of boys sought shade from the heat near a hill.

A portion of the slope suddenly collapsed, burying four children under the debris.

The injured children, both aged 12, were first taken to Anwara Upazila Health Complex and later transferred to Chattogram Medical College Hospital for advanced treatment.

Quoting locals, police said the boys had been playing in a nearby field inside the KEPZ before moving toward the hill for shelter. As they rested in a crevice, part of the hillside gave way.

Eye witness Mohammad Imran said, "They were sitting near the hill when it suddenly collapsed on them. Villagers rushed to the spot and rescued them."

Puja Mitra, doctor of Anwara Health Complex said the two children were already dead when they arrived. The others have been referred to CMCH, she added.



White herons try to catch fish in this waterbody in Rajshahi. Numerous canals and ponds in the district have dried up over the years, leaving very little fish for the birds to feed on. The photo was taken from the Chanduria area of Tanore upazila yesterday.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

TELMACHHARA FOREST

Water crisis drives wildlife to human settlements

MINTU DESHWARA

Facing an acute water shortage, wild animals in Telmachhara Forest, located in Madhabpur upazila of Habiganj, are flocking to artificial water reservoirs near human settlements.

Due to the ongoing dry season, animals are gathering at an artificial reservoir in front of the Telmachhara Forest Office. Some are even venturing into nearby localities in search of water, making them vulnerable to poachers.

Locals say many animals, driven by thirst, are taking significant risks to survive.

Telmachhara forest, adjacent to Satchari National Park, is home to a diverse range of wildlife, but the scarcity of natural water sources during the summer months poses a severe threat to their survival.

Mehedi Hasan, beat officer at the



Telmachhara Forest Office, said the forest spans 1,626 acres, most of which is high and hilly terrain.

As a result, water does not accumulate anywhere. In some areas, rainwater has mixed with soil and sand, filling natural depressions. This has worsened the crisis, as there is no water where it normally should be. Even

though there were a few days of rain recently, all the water has dried up," he added.

Md Anisur Rahman, in charge of the Sreemangal Meteorological Observatory, said the region usually receives 81mm of rain in April. While the tally for April this year has not been compiled, there has been less rain this year compared to previous years.

Sadiqur Rahman, a staff member at the Telmachhara office, said plans are underway to create a pond under the initiative of the divisional forest officer to solve the water crisis.

Contacted, Jamil Mohammad Khan, assistant conservator of forests for the Habiganj and Moulvibazar area, said they have received an application to build a pond for the animals. It has already been forwarded to higher authorities.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Breathing life into bamboo

Flute craft of Sreemoddi echoes through generations



MASUK HRIDOV, Brahmanbaria

In the village of Sreemoddi under Cumilla's Homna upazila, the melodious craft of making bamboo flutes has quietly persisted for generations.

It is estimated that at least one-third of all flutes produced in Bangladesh originate from this small village. Around 40 families are engaged in this time-honoured tradition.

Made entirely from natural materials, these flutes have earned both national admiration and international acclaim.

The roots of this tradition trace back nearly a century, when two individuals – Kokil Das Boiragi and Din Bandhu – migrated from India and introduced flute-making to the village. Initially, they produced 50 to 100 flutes by hand, selling them door-to-door, often playing the instruments themselves to attract buyers, according to locals.

Today, the tradition thrives with contributions from the elderly, women, and even school-going children. Women typically take part in designing, drilling, washing, drying and colouring the flutes.

The preferred material is "muli bamboo" (Melocanna baccifera), a tropical species native to the region.

Based on the harmonium scale, flutes are made in varying lengths, up to four tones (roughly 20 inches), and include three to seven holes. The village produces eight varieties of flutes, including the Tota, Aar, Been, Balloon,

Classical, Aristocratic, Mohan, and Natural flutes.

Jatindra Chandra Biswas and his wife Rina Biswas are widely regarded as the most skilled flute makers in the village.

Explaining the 13 to 14 stage process, Jatindra said the bamboo is first cut into shape and dried in the sun. The outer skin is removed (except in the case of the Aar flute) and patterns are etched into the surface using clay and fire. Holes are made using pointed iron rods and coal.



For Tota flutes, the mouthpiece is crafted from the wood of the Mandar tree. The final steps

include marking the holes, smoothing the surface with sandpaper, and cleaning and painting before packaging.

Flute maker Ratan Sarkar said the raw bamboo is typically sourced from Chattogram.

Sales peak in the Bangla month of Chaitra, with over one lakh flutes usually sold in Dhaka's Chawk Bazar alone.

Wholesalers from districts such as Chattogram, Mymensingh, and Khulna place orders through mail, and the flutes are then

delivered by steamer or train, said Rui Das, an elderly craftsman.

Sabita Rani Majumder, a local flute artisan, said the Tota and Aar flutes are typically sold wholesale for Tk 10-20 and Tk 20-50 each, respectively, while specialised flutes designed for professional musicians, which can be two inches to as long as four feet in length, can fetch anywhere between Tk 1,000-5,000 each, depending on their design and quality.

Decorative and novelty flutes like Mohan, Been, and Balloon flutes are priced between Tk 100 and over Tk 1,000 each.

"After covering all expenses, we make around Tk 20,000-25,000 monthly," she added.

Nihar Sarkar, a buyer from Gazipur who has sourced flutes from Sreemoddi for four decades, said children and young adults are the main customers. However, he noted a decline in demand due to the popularity of plastic toys and mobile games.

Ratan said due to a lack of capital, artisans are struggling to scale up production. With proper support, he believes this traditional craft could flourish further on the global stage.

Homna Upazila Nirbahi Officer Ksemalika Chakma said the craft of Sreemoddi's flute makers is a part of Bangladesh's cultural heritage and deserves support.

"If the craftsmen express interest, we are willing to offer loans on easy terms to help expand the industry," she said.

শেয়ার করবেন না

আপনার কার্ড সম্পর্কিত কোনো কোড,
সিরিয়াল নম্বর অথবা কার্ড পিন কখনোই
কারো সাথে শেয়ার করবেন না

Fight misinformation with greater urgency

Continued spread of misinformation highlights need for digital literacy

Quite in line with Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus's warning about rumours being "weaponised" to destabilise the country, we have seen how unrelenting, wide-ranging, and destabilising such rumours have been since the July uprising. This was fittingly reflected in the figures of 2024, which saw misinformation rise by 58 percent compared to 2023, and that momentum has continued into 2025. After detecting 268 instances of misinformation in February and 298 in March, Rumour Scanner, a fact-checking organisation, has now reported 296 cases in April. The persistent nature of those behind this campaign is deeply disturbing, as is the way they continue to find a fertile ground in post-uprising Bangladesh.

Like in previous months, April's misinformation was dominated by national and political themes, with 101 and 95 cases, respectively. Religious, international, and communal topics also featured prominently. Notably, 16 instances of communal misinformation were identified, some originating from Indian accounts, continuing a troubling trend of cross-border disinformation campaigns. Meanwhile, social media platforms remain the primary vectors for spreading such falsehoods. For example, Facebook, the favoured social media platform in Bangladesh, alone accounted for 276 cases, followed by YouTube (54), Instagram (48), X (formerly Twitter, 44), and TikTok (24). Alarming, even mainstream media outlets were implicated in 15 separate instances of disseminating misinformation.

Rumour Scanner has also shed light on the mediums being used for this purpose: 138 cases were text based, 105 involved videos, and 53 were image-centric. Among these, 179 were completely false, 66 misleading, and 48 distorted, but all generally constituting misinformation. Particularly concerning has been the targeting of key political and government figures, which aligns with what Prof Yunus has alluded to as the machinations of the "defeated side" intent on manipulating narratives and undermining trust in institutions. Yunus himself was the subject of 29 misinformation cases. Other advisers, including Asif Nazrul and Syeda Rizwana Hasan, were also targeted. Political parties and security forces were not spared either. Among the parties, BNP was the most affected, followed by Jamaat-e-Islami and National Citizen Party (NCP).

We don't need to remind anyone how hurtful this campaign has been, and it will only intensify as we approach the upcoming elections. This calls for heightened awareness and vigilance from the government and political institutions alike. The press, too, has a huge responsibility as it can stand guard against the circulation of doctored or misleading content by properly informing the citizens. But in the end, no initiative will be enough unless the citizens themselves become aware of the threat. This requires strengthening digital literacy across all demographics so that people can be empowered to critically assess the information they encounter online. There should be countrywide educational initiatives focusing on identifying credible sources and understanding the hallmarks of misinformation.

Revive Dinajpur's Shishu Academy

Proper workforce, facilities should be ensured

As the country's leading institution responsible for instilling and nurturing the creative spirit in children, it is concerning to see the Bangladesh Shishu Academy falter in this very mission. With establishments in different districts, the academy is struggling to operate smoothly due to a shortage of workers, lack of facilities, and inadequate finances. A prime example of this is its Dinajpur building, which has been receiving much lower footfall than expected. For the sake of our children, this cannot go unaddressed.

The five-storey building is situated near Dinajpur's Gor-e-Shahid Field, with only two floors of it being utilised while the others remain covered in dust, according to a report by Prothom Alo. The library and museum have been abandoned, and the toilets need a major overhaul. There is also a lack of cleaners and night guards, while the position of the district's child affairs officer remains vacant, further underscoring the academy's plight. Only 10 trainers are working on a contractual basis. Their frustration with the absence of proper initiatives to facilitate children's early development is one shared by many.

Many parents, therefore, are taking their children away from the academy. In 2017, around 250 children were enrolled in painting, recitation and presentation, music, dance, and handwriting classes; that number now stands at just 93. While COVID and the establishment's inconvenient location may have contributed to this decline in recent years, many other factors—such as the lack of fun events and toys—make it unattractive. For example, there are complaints that the institution only offers routine, low-budget activities when children need variety.

It must be acknowledged that the academy, even within its limited scope, has helped many children flourish. One mother recounted how her child became more social and happier after getting enrolled. This is the power—and responsibility—the establishment holds: inspiring our little ones. To be successful in this mission, an overhaul is necessary. Events like fairs, film screenings, tours, and competitions must be organised regularly, the academy's activities should be publicised at schools, and a dedicated, adequate workforce must be ensured, along with full utilisation of the building.

Reportedly, a proposal to address these issues has been placed, so we hope the relevant authorities will provide proper direction and a sufficient budget without delay. If all these are ensured, we just might see Dinajpur's children rushing back to the academy.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Margaret Thatcher elected British PM

On this day in 1979, Margaret Thatcher of the Conservative Party was elected the British prime minister, becoming the first woman in Europe to hold that post. She later became the longest continuously serving British premier since 1827.

EDITORIAL

The crisis of a fossilised education system



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza
is professor of English at Dhaka University.

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

I found it adorable when a visiting envoy fondly recalled that the Dhaka University campus reminded him of his home institution in the 1960s. There was another diplomat who mentioned to me that they were striving to preserve their old buildings, which resembled our administrative building, as heritage sites. A pattern of irony emerged. It is no coincidence that people think we are frozen in time.

Then there was this Facebook post of a recent graduate recounting his valid concerns of not getting an equivalence certificate in time to complement his application for higher studies abroad. The DU registrar's office, he claimed, was taking an eternity to send an email. What use is a certificate if it remains unendorsed when necessary? A section of the press picked up the news and published an opinion piece, spotlighting the required reforms. The writer shared his experience of missing two scholarship opportunities in the 90s due to DU's failure to mail the official transcripts.

Indeed, we seem to be stuck in the past. And it is no wonder that newer universities with a greater appetite to grow are outpacing us in ranking.

As a DU insider, I cannot shy away from my responsibilities. The frustrating pace at which things move at this university is as confusing as our



Students from polytechnic institutes are not only demanding proper recognition, but also a comprehensive overhaul of technical education in Bangladesh.

FILE PHOTO: STAR

the joke? I use the perspectives of our foreign friends to show how reality is often different from the situation we have become comfortably attached to.

The other day, an ongoing protest by the polytechnic institute's students delayed a delegation. What's wrong with these students? Why

In a country starved of mid-level technicians and vocational experts, this systemic neglect of technical graduates is paradoxical and shortsighted. The equivalence of their degree should be on par with global practices. Students should have the right to know the outcome of a degree before joining a programme. Encouraging students to fight for their rights once they are in the system is a sign of poor educational policy.

traffic signal. The rule is there is no rule, yet there is an abundance of it. To quote one of our Chinese friends about our traffic system, "You guys are so civilised that you don't need the traffic light. Meanwhile, we must maintain constant discipline." Why do we always have to be at the butt end of

do they seek to have their diplomas recognised as equivalent to a fully fledged engineering degree? Perhaps it's time to move past our initial reaction of "how dare they" and try to understand their concerns. The students from polytechnic institutes are not only demanding recognition

protest and managed to get a promise of a university of their own. At the heart of both protests lies the issue of dignity and progression. Even after pursuing a four-year programme, diploma graduates face stunted career growth and exclusion from higher education opportunities. It is the same time required for an engineering degree.

Unlike their peers in public or private universities, polytechnic students often come from rural or lower-middle-class backgrounds. Denying the legitimacy of their demands due to age-old prejudice would be unfortunate. In a country starved of mid-level technicians and vocational experts, this systemic neglect of technical graduates is paradoxical and shortsighted. The equivalence of their degree should be on par with global practices. Students should have the right to know the outcome of a degree before joining a programme. Encouraging students to fight for their rights once they are in the system is a sign of poor educational policy. We pay policymakers to ensure the economic mobility of our graduates. The anti-discriminatory spirit with which the July uprising brewed is at odds with

the inequality that persists and the way human capital is squandered, especially when Bangladesh should be harvesting its demographic dividend.

The much-talked about youth bulge, with over 47 percent of the population under the age of 25 years, will not yield any automatic result unless there are strategic policies to create a healthy, educated, and skilled workforce. Our students don't view their education as transformational. The view that education is just a degree affirms its transactional nature. The repeated demands for reforms highlight an institutional limbo in which our young generation is trapped.

Polytechnic graduates are recruited in government services with little scope for career progression, demonstrating an old mindset that wants to keep disparity intact. The same mindset favours placing faculty members at the bottom of the hierarchy. The inter-service friction within the government has exposed the tension. In the absence of incentives and in-service professional development, teachers and staff often remain underqualified and disengaged.

It will be a crime to miss the post-uprising zeitgeist and not to overhaul our educational sector. The interim government's failure to form an education reform commission is a mystery. Educational rupture often provides an opportunity to shake up the frozen system. Iran formed the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution after the 1979 revolution; South Africa created the National Commission on Higher Education in 1995 in the post-apartheid era; Rwanda prioritised overhauling its technical and vocational education and training (TVET) systems following the 1994 genocide. The interim government's handling of the educational stalemate will prove very costly.

Education is more than skills or jobs; it is about belonging, dignity, and the capacity to shape the future. But our systems, especially the public ones, remain fossilised. Our public system continues to ignore the aspirations of its youth. The controlled protests may alienate our youth. History reveals that alienation can transform into apathy or unrest, which can swiftly escalate beyond control. The state must choose. It can allow the public universities to be a site of nostalgia and reminiscence about previous glory. Or it can take bold action: go beyond simply managing the crisis and transform the system. The cost of inaction will be paid not just in student frustration, but in lost generations. And foreign friends will come and visit us with dreamy nostalgia.

Our current heat emergency and a roadmap to COP30

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NISHAT TASNIM and AFSARA BINTE MIRZA

As the climate crisis escalates, Bangladesh faces a critical challenge in tackling the intensifying heatwaves in urban, peri-urban and rural areas, undermining health, agricultural productivity, and economic stability. With the upcoming 30th UN Climate Change Conference (Conference of the Parties—COP30) scheduled to take place in November 2025 in Brazil, least developed countries (LDCs) like Bangladesh need to address this emerging heat emergency by taking pragmatic and quick climate actions.

The Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD) has predicted more frequent occurrences of heatwaves in the coming decade. The intertwined crisis of rising temperatures and poor living conditions is generating worse conditions and impacting individuals and families living below the poverty line. For instance, informal sector workers working in poor working conditions, such as less ventilation, inadequate water booths, and minimal bathroom breaks, face an ample amount of dissatisfaction, which undermines their well-being. In this case, the ready-made garment (RMG) sector workers, mainly working in small and medium-sized companies, face these devastating challenges.

Agriculture, one of the country's key economic sectors, also witnesses low rice yield due to extreme heat, resulting in a hike in food prices and a rise in poverty levels. Therefore, heat stress also undermines the economic viability and productivity of developing nations like Bangladesh.

The smallholder farmers of drought-prone areas working in scorching heat with less access to drinking water are also heavily impacted during heatwaves. Additionally, marginalised women bear the disproportionate burden of extreme heat conditions, which deteriorate their health and well-being and reduce productivity. A 2022 report published jointly by the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society and International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr,b) revealed that due to heat stress, an individual from low-income communities spends an additional Tk 516 on healthcare annually; due to the current inflationary pressure, the cost has gone up significantly. Additionally, the report further stated that during an episode of a heatwave, an individual loses 3.12 hours in productivity.

Agriculture, one of the country's key economic sectors, also witnesses low rice yield due to extreme heat, resulting in a hike in food prices and a rise in poverty levels. Therefore, heat stress also undermines the economic viability and productivity of developing nations like Bangladesh. While Bangladesh has made significant strides in climate policy,

heat stress remains critically overlooked in national adaptation strategies. Therefore, integrating heat resilience into the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) is now imperative. Rather than a setback, this presents an opportunity for Bangladesh, as the country can leverage international climate finance to drive transformative adaptation. Long-term heat resilience also demands infrastructure reforms, including revised building codes, heat-resistant design principles, and expanded green infrastructure. India's Ahmedabad Heat Action Plan, which reduced heat-related mortality by 88 percent, offers a model that Bangladesh can look into.

By integrating policy, mobilising finance, and strengthening cross-sector collaboration, Bangladesh can effectively combat its escalating heat crisis and build a more climate-resilient future. However, a multi-sectoral approach is still essential and demands fostering collaboration among government ministries and departments, international non-governmental organisations, doctors and healthcare providers, and research institutions to implement capacity-building programmes and awareness campaigns. Alongside, ensuring frontline preparedness is crucial: healthcare workers and emergency responders must be trained to manage heat-related illnesses. Additionally, a localised and continuously monitored early warning system is essential for delivering timely heatwave alerts to communities that are at risk.

Heatwaves don't respect borders, and South Asia must unite to form a regional heat resilience pact. Countries like India, Pakistan, Cambodia, Vietnam and Bangladesh often face higher degrees and intensities of heatwaves. A "South Asian Heat Resilience Pact" could facilitate collaboration on managing these risks, integrating early warning systems, harmonising heat resilience measures, and pooling resources for joint climate adaptation projects.

The Global Cooling Pledge (GCP), introduced at COP28, commits countries to reducing cooling-related emissions by 68 percent by 2050. For Bangladesh, this presents a crucial opportunity to access sustainable cooling technologies and secure climate finance strategically. Drawing lessons from countries like the UAE and Brazil, Bangladesh must develop a national sustainable cooling plan that prioritises vulnerable communities, promotes energy-efficient infrastructure, and integrates climate-smart agricultural practices.

Furthermore, the Global Stocktake (GST) provides a strategic framework for Bangladesh to enhance its climate policies in alignment with global objectives. By incorporating GST recommendations into its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), Bangladesh can ensure that heat resilience becomes a core component of its climate response. Inclusive policy development involving diverse stakeholders is essential to craft comprehensive and equitable climate adaptation measures.

By leveraging the GCP and acting on the GST's findings, Bangladesh can bolster its climate resilience towards the rising heatwaves.

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WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY



VISUAL: MONOROM POLOK

PRESS FREEDOM UNDER ATTACK

Global threats and local reforms

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KAMAL AHMED

As we mark World Press Freedom Day under the theme "Reporting in the Brave New World—The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Press Freedom and the Media," the sobering reality is that the world has already witnessed the deaths of 15 Palestinian journalists in the first quarter of this year alone. According to the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, the total number of journalists killed since October 7, 2023 has surpassed 200.

The most unsettling aspect of this tragedy is the deafening silence from global powers—those who often portray themselves as defenders of press freedom—regarding what appear to be deliberate and targeted killings of journalists by Israel. This silence extends not only to the journalists themselves but to their families and the broader Palestinian population, including women and children.

Even more alarming are credible allegations suggesting that many Israeli military operations have employed artificial intelligence developed and supplied by powerful Western nations. Any discussion of AI's impact on journalism that ignores its militarised use would be incomplete. Silencing Palestinian voices—through whom the world has come to understand the extent of atrocities and the gravity of the ongoing humanitarian crisis—has been central to this strategy. Israel's refusal to grant access to international journalists in Gaza, a standard practice in other global conflicts, further reinforces this concern. Meanwhile, major tech companies complicit in these developments continue to evade scrutiny.

While we explore the potential benefits of AI in journalism—such as improved data analysis and operational efficiency—it is critical to confront its darker uses, especially when they imperil press freedom and human lives.

Beyond the Middle East, the inauguration of Donald Trump as the 47th US president has heralded a troubling redefinition of press freedom in what has long been considered the "free world." In his first 100 days, Trump's administration has shut down state-funded broadcasters like Voice of America and NPR on ideological grounds, expelled correspondents from the White House press corps, and replaced mainstream media outlets with fringe media aligned with his MAGA agenda.

Trump, who infamously labelled the press as the "enemy of the people" during his first term, continues to wage an aggressive campaign against journalism. Disturbingly, this is no longer an aberration but part of a broader global trend towards authoritarianism. His actions embolden autocrats elsewhere, legitimising crackdowns on press freedom.

Had Bangladesh's former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina remained in office, it is not far-fetched to assume that she might have cited Trump's approach as justification for further suppressing dissent and controlling the media.

Tasked by the interim government, led

by Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, to recommend necessary reforms for making the media objective, strong, and independent, we in our recent exercise found that the previous regime established its control on the media in a planned and organised manner. Licences for setting up television channels were given strictly on the basis of the licensees' political identity and commitment, instead of experience and expertise in journalism and broadcasting. There was no oversight into whether investments came from legitimate, taxed income or were laundered through black money. This resulted in media becoming a tool for vested interests, used to shield business empires from scrutiny or extend influence over government affairs.

During consultations, high-ranking civil servants admitted their inability to resist pressure from media-owning business groups engaged in illegal activities, such as land-grabbing and river encroachment. Many called for stringent regulation of media licensing to prevent such abuse.

In the absence of any regulatory obligation regarding disclosure of the owners' interests, many of these owners use their media outlets to discredit, malign or undermine their business rivals or advance their cause. They suppress stories that go against their interests, manipulate narratives, and engage in smear campaigns against competitors.

Furthermore, many of these oligarchs employ monopolistic tactics, owning multiple media platforms across formats and languages, often through proxies. The content from these outlets is frequently duplicated, showing a clear intent to dominate rather than diversify the media landscape.

Globally, the question of "who owns our media" has now become an important issue, and it is being addressed through restrictions on cross ownership. Such restrictions mean a TV channel owner cannot own a newspaper or a newspaper proprietor is banned from owning a TV channel. Countries like the US, UK, Canada, and many in Europe have such regulations to preserve media plurality, which is crucial for a healthy democracy.

Since publication of the Media Reform Commission report in Bangladesh, a few critics have pointed out that India being the largest democracy in the world has not imposed any such restriction. But, India (151) is hardly an example of having a vibrant media, ranking below Bangladesh (149), Nepal (90), Sri Lanka (139) and Maldives (104) in the latest edition of World Press Freedom Index. Its media has earned the branding "Godi media" due to its alignment with the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It must be noted here that in India, too, a bill to restrict cross ownership is pending in parliament.

Some critics have said that the suggestions for transforming media companies into public limited companies, as part of democratisation or diffusion of sole ownership, is too idealistic and not

appropriate for our country as most of the media houses are losing concerns, thereby making them unattractive to investors. However, our review of audited financials showed that more than a dozen media houses are profitable, disproving the notion that such a transformation is economically unfeasible.

The real challenge lies in an oversaturated market filled with poorly managed, politically-backed media entities that engage in unethical competition by undercutting ad rates. These practices hurt the entire sector.

One contentious reform proposal is to introduce a national minimum wage for journalists, benchmarked against civil service salaries. Detractors argue that this is impractical in a financially struggling sector. Yet, had the eighth wage board for journalists (announced in 2014) been properly implemented (by awarding yearly increments), it would have already reached the level of a Grade 9 civil servant. Media owners opposing this reform appear more interested in exploiting loopholes to deny fair wages while benefiting from government advertising rates they don't truly qualify for.

A recurring theme in our consultations was the financial insecurity faced by both journalists and media houses, which often forces them into questionable alliances. Adequate compensation and policy support are essential for reducing dependency on political or corporate patronage.

The Media Reform Commission has recommended several fiscal incentives and tax reliefs aimed at ensuring long term financial viability without compromising editorial freedom.

While discussing the reform agenda for the media, it would be imprudent not to delve into the matter of the current environment, which is still chaotic and somehow intimidating for independent journalism. There's still some self-censorship; quite often, journalists are coming under attack both verbally and physically, a good number of media personalities are being implicated with fabricated charges and some are imprisoned, though largely due to their political activism in favour of the fallen dictator and her party, which is tantamount to inciting violence. Most of these attacks and self-censorship are due to online intimidation and mob violence, which the government needs to rein in with strong preventative actions.

The interim government has been asserting that, so far, it has not intervened or dictated any news media on their editorial decision-making process and news coverage, but such assertion is inadequate to allay the fear of mob and ensuring safety of journalists. The recent dismissal of three journalists working for three different entities following confrontational questioning of an adviser—done on the same day and without due process—has raised suspicion of coordinated retaliation, even if indirect.

These dismissals have sparked widespread debate online, but there is currently no institutional mechanism for arbitration or redress. Enacting the proposed journalist protection ordinance and establishing an independent media commission would help investigate such incidents and uphold press freedom. Hopefully, the interim government would take sincere initiatives to implement the much-needed reforms in the media sector soon.

Combating disinfo key to restoring trust in journalism

Saad Hammadi
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SAAD HAMMADI

We observe World Press Freedom Day at a time when the transformation of technology has severely disrupted the notion and purpose of many things, including the press. While many, including myself, find comfort in reading the hard copy of the newspaper in the morning, and enjoy the distinct scent of the paper fresh off the press, technology is progressively changing the course by shifting news from print to digital devices.

The dissemination of news has never been faster and more multi-modal than it is today. The content and reliability of news have also never been this questionable. Thanks to the advent of artificial intelligence and general-purpose technologies (GPT) as well as the range of platforms, the disruption of technology has blurred the lines of what constitutes press, and therefore press freedom.

We are seeing a surge of propaganda and information war on social media platforms. Since the assumption of the interim government, some Indian mainstream media, bots, influencers, and users on social media platforms have waged a concerted disinformation campaign against Bangladesh. This includes false information about Bangladesh's economy, military coup, atrocities against the Hindu religious minority. The CA Press Wing Facts, the fact-checking arm of the chief adviser's press wing, countered those narratives with facts on behalf of the government. Research by the Tech Global Institute finds that Google prioritised Indian sources on specific topics about Bangladesh, whereas credible reports from leading Bangladeshi media outlets were buried at least under a dozen pages. The algorithmic bias on social media platforms and search engines escalated those disinformation contents.

The Indian disinformation campaign undermines not only the journalistic integrity of that country's media, but also strains the relationship between the two countries by way of promoting hatred. This has serious implications on Bangladesh's national security as well.

This is where press freedom must be protected against the enablers of disinformation. We are in an era where the transformation of technology requires reimagination of governance frameworks. The dissemination of news has never been faster and more multi-modal than it is today. The content and reliability of news have also never been this questionable. Thanks to the advent of artificial intelligence and general-purpose technologies (GPT) as well as the range of platforms, the disruption of technology has blurred the lines of what constitutes press, and therefore press freedom.

and manipulative behaviour. The framework has four pillars: situational awareness; resilience building; disruption and regulation; and EU external action. Each of these pillars have a multi-layered approach.

At a time when Meta has decided to dismantle its fact-checking capability, and the company's founder Mark Zuckerberg admits that they "are going to catch less bad stuff," it is important that press freedom and the right to freedom of expression are not exploited to cater to disinformation.

The traditional approach to addressing disinformation has been robust dissemination of accurate information. But this approach faces a significant challenge when confronted against industrialised disinformation campaigns. Individuals and independent institutions don't have the resources and capacity alone to counter disinformation when produced at scale.

States, therefore, require a multi-pronged approach to assess threats and risks from disinformation, and to measure it against the international human rights law to ensure that any action initiated by the authorities are necessary, proportionate and legitimate, that all other means have been exhausted in a transparent and systematic manner, before any restrictive or punitive measures are applied.



A systematic approach to address and contain disinformation under the FIMI framework comprises open-source intelligence and impact assessment of the content as part of situational awareness. The content is then weighed against resilience-building measures such as fact-checking, capacity-building of institutions that can produce reliable news and counter false narratives, digital media and information literacy, and strategic communications.

A fundamental element of combating disinformation is having the right set of disruptive and regulatory framework that holds platforms accountable for the services they offer. Human rights groups welcomed the EU's Digital Services Act introduced last year to hold Big Tech accountable to protect human rights. These measures are critical to combat the industry-scale information operations or the disinformation machinery that some political parties and states patronise.

The EU's FIMI framework further consists of external actions that include restrictive measures, diplomatic responses, and multilateral cooperation, as well as the exercise of international norms and principles. At a recent discussion by an EU diplomat that I attended, I raised the question about how the EU draws distinction between combating disinformation and upholding media freedom. My takeaway from that discussion is that the laws such as the Digital Services Act and the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Act of the EU don't target what somebody says. Instead, they promote transparency. The AI Act, for example, divides services into four categories, starting from no-risk to high-risk. The high-risk services are considered unsuitable and therefore not allowed to operate. The risk-based approach does not put everybody under the same regulatory pressure.

Press freedom must be protected not only from repressive pieces of legislation, but also from the concerted disinformation that some platforms and actors patronise under the refuge of free speech.

200 killed in 243 Myanmar military attacks since quake: UN

AFP, Geneva

The United Nations yesterday decried continuing deadly attacks by Myanmar's military despite a ceasefire declared following a devastating earthquake that killed nearly 3,800 people.

"The unremitting violence inflicted on civilians, despite a ceasefire nominally declared in the wake of the devastating earthquake on 28 March, underscores the need for the parties to commit to, and implement, a genuine and permanent nationwide halt to hostilities and return to civilian rule," UN rights chief Volker Turk said.

Turk also said that since the quake and up to April 29, "the military has reportedly launched at least 243 attacks, including 171 air strikes, with over 200 civilians reportedly killed".

DRUZE VIOLENCE Israel strikes near Syrian presidential palace

REUTERS, Damascus

Israel bombed an area near the presidential palace in Damascus early yesterday in its clearest signal yet of hostility toward the Islamist-led Syrian authorities and a preparedness to ramp up military action in the name of Syria's Druze minority.

Israel has escalated operations in Syria since rebels ousted Bashar al-Assad in December, with bombings across the country and ground forces entering southwest, while calling for Syria to remain decentralised and isolated.

It has framed its stance around its suspicion toward interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa, who once headed a branch of al Qaeda, and the desire to protect the Druze, a minority sect that is an offshoot of Islam with followers in Syria, Lebanon and Israel.

Early yesterday, Israel's military said it struck an area "adjacent" to Sharaa's palace in Damascus, without further details on the target. There was no immediate comment from Syrian authorities, and no immediate reports of casualties. A Syrian official told Reuters the target was about 100 metres (330 feet) east of the palace's perimeter.

Trump ousts White House NSA Waltz Replaces him with Rubio

REUTERS, Washington

US President Donald Trump ousted his national security adviser Mike Waltz on Thursday and named Secretary of State Marco Rubio as his interim replacement in the first major shakeup of Trump's inner circle since he took office in January.

Rubio will be the first person since Henry Kissinger in the 1970s to hold the positions of secretary of state and national security adviser simultaneously.

Trump, in a social media post, said he would nominate Waltz to be the next US ambassador to the United Nations, adding that "he has worked hard to put our nation's interests first."

Earlier in the day, multiple sources said Trump had decided to remove Waltz from his national security post. The retired Army Green Beret and former Republican lawmaker from Florida had faced criticism inside the White House, particularly after he was caught up in a March scandal involving a Signal chat among top Trump national security aides.

"When I have a problem, I call up Marco. He gets it solved," Trump said at a White House event earlier on Thursday.

A person familiar with the matter said Trump wanted to get to the 100-day mark in his term before firing a cabinet-level official. News of the shakeup on Thursday was so abrupt that State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce learned about it from reporters at a briefing.

The national security adviser is a powerful role that does not require Senate confirmation. Trump had four national security advisers in his first term: Michael Flynn, H.R. McMaster, John Bolton and Robert O'Brien.



Pakistani citizen Ruwa Talib cries as her Indian husband, Mohamad Talib, reaches out to take their one-year-old child, Abdan, an Indian citizen, before she departs for Pakistan at the Attari-Wagah border crossing near Amritsar, India, yesterday. India has suspended visa services for Pakistani nationals with immediate effect following the Pahalgam attack in south Kashmir.

PHOTO: REUTERS

UN eyes major overhaul amid funding crisis

Reveals an internal memo prepared by senior officials

REUTERS, Geneva

The United Nations is considering a massive overhaul that would merge major departments and shift resources across the globe, according to an internal memo prepared by senior officials tasked with reforming the world body.

The high-level review comes as UN agencies scramble to cope with the fallout from US foreign aid cuts under President Donald Trump that have gutted humanitarian agencies.

The six-page document, marked "strictly confidential" and reviewed by Reuters, contains a list of what it terms "suggestions" that would consolidate dozens of UN agencies into four primary departments: peace and security, humanitarian affairs, sustainable development, and human rights.

Under one option, for example, operational aspects of the World Food Programme, the UN children's agency, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN refugee agency would be merged into a single humanitarian entity, it said.

The memo contains a range of suggestions, some large, some small, some speculative, which, if all adopted, would represent the most sweeping reforms in decades.

It suggests merging the UN AIDS agency into the WHO, and reducing the need for up to six translators at meetings. Another suggestion proposes merging the World Trade Organization -

- ➡ Global body roiled by cuts from donors, including US
- ➡ Task force suggests merging UN agencies to improve efficiency
- ➡ UN document refers to 'duplication', bloating of senior management

which is not a UN entity - with UN development agencies.

One official familiar with the memo called it a starting point.

But the language of the internal self-assessment appears to confirm what both supporters and critics of the global body have long said: that the UN needs streamlining. In a series of observations, the memo refers to "overlapping mandates", "inefficient use of resources", "fragmentation and duplication" and notes a bloating of senior positions.

It describes "systemic challenges" the UN faces, problems exacerbated as the General Assembly continues to add missions and programs. "Increased mandates, often without clear exit strategies, and complexities have led to significant overlaps, inefficiencies and increased costs," the document said.

The memo was prepared by a

task force appointed in March by Secretary General António Guterres, who said at the time the body needed to make itself more cost-effective.

The task force, considering long-term structural changes, is in addition to shorter-term cost-cutting efforts. Some diplomats have described the effort as a proactive step to help forestall deeper US cuts.

"The memo is the result of an exercise to generate ideas and thoughts from senior officials on how to achieve the Secretary General's vision," said Guterres' spokesman, Stéphane Dujarric.

During a meeting with Trump in 2017, the Guterres told the US President that the world body was saddled with "fragmented structures, byzantine procedures, endless red tape."

But it is now facing one of the greatest financial crises in its 80-year history. At the start of the year, the US was already about \$1.5 billion in arrears in mandatory payments for regular budget and \$1.2 billion in arrears for peacekeeping.

Since Trump took office in January, he has cut billions of dollars more in foreign assistance as part of his "America First" foreign policy.

The task force memo does not mention any country by name, but notes starkly that "geopolitical shifts and substantial reductions in foreign aid budget are challenging the legitimacy and effectiveness of the Organization."

Israel downs missiles fired from Yemen

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's army said yesterday it intercepted two missiles fired towards its territory from Yemen within 12 hours, with at least one attack claimed by the Arabian Peninsula country's Houthi rebels.

An explosion was heard over Jerusalem as the military said it was intercepting the second projectile.

"The (Israeli army) has identified the launch of a missile from Yemen toward Israeli territory, aerial defence systems are operating to intercept the threat," the military said about the second attack.

Israeli police reported a "rocket siren" was activated in northern and coastal districts and said they were searching for possible projectile or debris impact sites.

The military said the first missile had been shot down before it entered Israeli airspace.

The Houthi, who control large parts of Yemen, claimed responsibility for the first attack, saying they targeted an air base "east of the occupied area of Haifa" with a "hypersonic ballistic missile".

The group has launched dozens of missile and drone attacks on Israel since the war in Gaza erupted after Hamas's October 7 assault.

Pahalgam terrorists still in south Kashmir Say sources in the Indian probe agency

NDTV ONLINE

The four terrorists who shot and killed 26 people in Pahalgam in south Kashmir on April 22, and who have been on the run since - evading a massive manhunt involving the military and local police - are likely still in the area, sources in the National Investigation Agency (NIA) have told NDTV.

NIA sources said the terrorists may be "self-reliant", i.e., be carrying provisions, and therefore stay hidden in the dense forests, which could explain why they had avoided detection so far.

This would also obviate the need for external logistical support that would most likely be provided by Pakistan, which New Delhi has accused of involvement in the Pahalgam attack.

Anti-terror agency NIA has taken over the investigation into the worst terror attack in India in recent years, certainly since February 2019, when 40 soldiers were killed in J&K's Pulwama.

Initial inquiries indicate the terrorists were present in Baisaran Valley - a picturesque meadow and tourist hotspot near Pahalgam and where the attack took place - at least 48 hours earlier.

NIA sources said OGWS, or Over Ground Workers, or terrorist sympathisers, interrogated after the attack said they reced four other locations. These included the Aru and Betaab valleys.

Next round of Iran-US nuclear talks 'postponed' Oman cites 'logistical reasons' for the delay

AFP, Tehran

Iran said Thursday that the next round of nuclear talks with the United States has been postponed, after mediator Oman cited "logistical reasons" for the delay.

In Washington, State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce said a meeting in Rome on Saturday between the United States and Iran had never been confirmed.

"We expect another round of talks that will take place in the near future," Bruce said.

Both Iran and the United States had reported progress in three rounds of talks on consecutive Saturdays since April 12.

"The next round of indirect Iran-US talks, which were scheduled to be held in Rome on Saturday... has been postponed," foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said in a statement on Thursday.

He said the decision had been taken "based on the proposal of the Omani minister". Omani Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi cited "logistical reasons" for the delay.

For the US-Iran meeting provisionally planned for Saturday May 3. New dates will be announced when mutually agreed," he said on X.

Meanwhile, Iran said yesterday that continued US sanctions will not alter its policy, after President Donald Trump threatened to impose penalties on countries or individuals trading in Iranian oil. "The continuation of these illegal behaviours will not change Iran's logical, legitimate and international law-based positions," the foreign ministry said.



Rescuers evacuate a wounded resident from an apartment building damaged in a Russian drone strike in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, early yesterday.

Hard right wins local UK polls in blow to PM

AFP, Runcorn

Hard-right upstarts Reform UK snatched a parliamentary seat from Prime Minister Keir Starmer's Labour party yesterday in local elections that dealt a blow to Britain's two establishment parties.

Reform, led by anti-immigrant firebrand Nigel Farage, won the by-election in Runcorn and Helsby in northwest England by just six votes, as it picked up gains in other localities, including one mayoralty.

The group's strong showing -- overturning a huge Labour majority in one of the party's safest parliamentary seats -- continues momentum seen at last year's general election and appears to confirm a trend that the UK is entering an era of multi-party politics.

Reform also picked up dozens of council seats from both Labour and the Conservatives.

INTERNATIONAL

TikTok fined 530m euros in EU over data transfer

AFP, Dublin

TikTok was hit with a massive EU fine of 530 million euros (\$600 million) yesterday, accused of sending personal data of Europeans to China and failing to guarantee it was shielded from access by Chinese authorities.

The social media giant, which is also in the crosshairs of US, acknowledged during a probe that it has hosted European data in China, contrary to a previous denial, according to Ireland's data protection watchdog.

One of the largest fines ever imposed by the authority followed a probe into the lawfulness of data transfers by TikTok. In 2023 Ireland's Data Protection Commission (DPC) fined TikTok -- which has 1.5 billion users worldwide -- 345 million euros for breaches of European rules on processing child data.



Members of the Libyan Red Crescent place the body of a deceased migrant in a bag after it was found on the beach in Misrata, Libya, early yesterday. At least six migrant bodies were recovered after washing ashore near Misrata, a Red Crescent volunteer said.

PHOTO: REUTERS

China 'evaluating'

FROM PAGE 12

The tit-for-tat increases stand to make goods trade between the world's two largest economies impossible, analysts say, with import duties beyond about 35 percent potentially wiping out Chinese exporters' profit margins and making American products in China similarly exorbitant.

China has repeatedly denied it is seeking to

negotiate a way out of the tariffs with the United States, appearing instead to be betting that Washington makes the first move.

Trump's decision to single out Beijing for hefty import duties comes at a particularly difficult time for China, which is struggling with deflation due to sluggish economic growth and a prolonged property crisis. Beijing has expressed its

No election

FROM PAGE 1

He further said the state is failing to take responsibility for the families of the martyrs and the injured of the July movement.

Coming down heavily on a section of journalists, the NCP leader said, "Some journalists are questioning whether Sheikh Hasina truly carried out genocide. They claim it hasn't been proven yet. They are not journalists. They are accomplices of the fascist Awami League."

He said the UN reports have clearly stated that the July massacre was carried out at the instruction of Sheikh Hasina and planned by the Awami League.

The NCP leaders also said that while the interim government and political parties seem to be dilly-dallying about banning the Awami League, the people had already given their verdict on August 5 last year.

"We would like to remind the interim government -- you are a government born of a people's uprising. You assumed your advisory roles through the mandate of that uprising. So why are you unable to take action against a party responsible for mass killings? What is holding you back?" asked Akhter Hossen, NCP member secretary.

"The name of the Awami League should be erased from the registration list of political parties and instead listed among terrorist organisations. As long as the July generation lives,

the Awami League will never be allowed to remain relevant in this country. Anyone attempting to rehabilitate the party will face strong resistance from students and the general public."

Also speaking at the event, Senior Joint Member Secretary Dr Tasnim Zara asked, "How much more torture, how many more abductions and killings must take place before a party's registration is cancelled?"

Hasnat Abdullah, chief organiser (south) of the NCP, said, "Dr Muhammad Yunus, we put you in power at the cost of the martyrs' blood. We are not making a request or placing a demand -- we are letting all know a decision: the Awami League must be banned immediately. That has to be done without any ifs, buts, or conditions."

Senior Joint Convener of the NCP Samanta Shermeen said, "In this country, only the families of the martyrs and the wounded have the moral authority to speak on what kind of reform is needed. Today, standing with them, we declare that no election will be allowed before justice is served and reforms are implemented."

Sarjis Alam, chief organiser (North) of the party, said, "The people and youth of this country have declared the Awami League a party of murderers and they would not be allowed to do politics in this country."

NPCBL to finalise power purchase deal

FROM PAGE 12

"finalised," said Md Zahedul Hassan, project director of RNPP and also the managing director of NPCBL.

"Without completing the deal on the maintenance cost of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant with Russia, we are yet to confirm the total cost of the project. Hence, NPCBL is yet to fix the price of electricity from Rooppur project at the moment," he said.

RNPP is being implemented at a cost of \$1.25 billion for the installation of two reactors, each to produce 1200MW. The Russian state nuclear organisation ROSATOM has been implementing the project by using its

technology, while Russia is giving loans to bear 90 percent of the project's cost.

While the production of electricity from RNPP has already been delayed by two years, the incomplete grid line is expected to further delay supply from unit-1.

More than 94 percent of the unit's construction work has been completed, and production is likely to begin by the end of this year, according to project officials.

Citing the Nuclear Act, 2015, Zahedul said the charge of the plant -- entire responsibility and assets -- will be handed over to NPCBL after the completion of the construction.

President Gabriel Boric echoed the call for the "evacuation of the coastline throughout the Magallanes region" on his X account.

Govt plans to hire foreign firms

FROM PAGE 12

Outlining the government's long-term vision, Shafiqul said the combined container handling capacity of ports in and around Chattogram currently stands at 1.27 million TEUs (Twenty Foot Equivalent Unit). The government aims to raise this to 7.86 million TEUs by 2030.

One TEU is based on the volume of a standard 20-foot long intermodal container.

"To transform Bangladesh into an economic hub, port

capacity must be expanded," he said, noting that a comprehensive strategy is being developed, which includes the improvement of the Dhaka-Chattogram highway and related infrastructure.

He assured that only top-tier companies with unblemished reputations will be selected, and the process will be fully transparent.

"The agreements may be executed through open tenders or under a government-to-government (G2G) arrangement."

In response to a question about the establishment of a "humanitarian corridor" with Myanmar, the press secretary said, "I've already spoken on this matter clearly. We would consider a humanitarian corridor only if the United Nations takes the initiative.

"The entire matter would require discussions with both countries -- Myanmar and Bangladesh. The idea of a humanitarian corridor has come up because there is ongoing civil war in that region. I think it's premature. In our view, it's still a long way off."

GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH

Ministry of Finance,
Finance Division
National Pension Authority (NPA)
www.npa.gov.bd

No: 07.04.0000.001.12.001.25-263

Date: 30/04/2025

Invitation for Tenders: "Supply of laptop, desktop computers, printers, and computer accessories for National Pension Authority"

1	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Finance
2	Agency	Finance Division
3	Procuring Entity Name	National Pension Authority (NPA)
4	Procuring Entity Code	N/A
5	Procuring Entity District	Dhaka
6	Invitation for	Supply of laptop, desktop computers, printers, and computer accessories for National Pension Authority.
7	Invitation Ref No	Ref. No: 07.04.0000.001.12.001.25-263
8	Date	30.04.2025
KEY INFORMATION	Procurement Method	Open Tendering (National) for Goods
FUNDING INFORMATION	10 Budget and Source of Funds	The Government of Bangladesh and the NPA
11 Development Partners (if applicable)	11 Development Partners (if applicable)	N/A
PARTICULAR INFORMATION	12 Tender Package Name	Supply of laptop, desktop computers, printers, and computer accessories for National Pension Authority.
13 Tender Publication Date	03.05.2025	
14 Tender Last Selling Date	20.05.2025 up to 1.00 pm	
15 Tender Closing Date and Time	Date 20.05.2025	Time 2:00 p.m.
16 Tender Opening Date and Time	20.05.2025	3:00 p.m.
17 Name & Address of the office(s)	Address: National Pension Authority (NPA), 43, Kakrail, Dhaka-1000.	
18 Selling Tender Document	Agent's office Name: Attention: Alamgir Hossain, Accounts Officer Address: National Pension Authority (NPA) (1st floor) (For clarification of Tender purposes only) 43, Kakrail, Dhaka-1000. Telephone no: +8802226665573 E-mail address: accountant@npa.gov.bd	
19 NO CONDITIONS APPLY FOR SALE, PURCHASE OR DISTRIBUTION OF TENDER DOCUMENTS		
20 Receiving Tender Document	A Tender Box will be kept at NPA Premises	
21 Opening Tender Document	Executive Chairman's Room, NPA, 43 Kakrail, Dhaka-1000.	
INFORMATION FOR TENDERER		
22 Eligibility of Tenderer	Mentioned in the Tender Documents	
23 Brief Description of Goods or Works	Supply of laptop, desktop computers, printers, and computer accessories for National Pension Authority. (As specified in the tender document)	
24 Brief Description of services	N/A	
25 Price of Tender Document (Taka)	1000.00 (One thousand) Taka only (nonrefundable)	
26 Item No	Identification of item	Location
N/A	Supply of laptop, desktop computers, printers, and computer accessories for National Pension Authority. (As specified in the tender document)	Tender Security Amount (Tk)
		Completion Time in Weeks / Months/Days
		Within 02 weeks from the date of contract signing
27 Name of Official Inviting Tender	Md. Mahiuddin Khan	
28 Designation of Official Inviting Tender	Executive Chairman, NPA	
29 Address of Official Inviting Tender	NPA Office, 43, Kakrail, Dhaka-1000	
30 Contact details of Official Inviting Tender	+88022266655743, chairman@npa.gov.bd	
31 The Procuring Entity reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the Tender(s) without assigning any reason whatsoever		

Hefazat vows tougher

FROM PAGE 12

Junayed said people from across the country would join Saturday's rally. "Forty two buses are ready to come from Dinajpur, and around four to five thousand people are coming from Barishal by launch," he said.

Mahiuddin Rabbani, Hefazat's central nayeb e- amir, said the group would announce an ultimatum at today's rally. "If the cases

Minerals deal

FROM PAGE 12

against Hefazat leaders and ulamas are not withdrawn and the Women's Affairs Reform Commission is not dissolved, we will declare tougher programmes if necessary," he said.

Central NAYEB-e-Amir Sarwar Kamal Azizi warned, "Our demands are clear and must be met. This anti-Islamic commission must be abolished, and we will continue our struggle until it is done."

Junayed said the Women's Affairs Reform Commission is not dissolved, we will declare tougher programmes if necessary," he said.

Ukraine hopes the deal will pave the way for the United States to give security guarantees as it seeks to safeguard against future Russian attacks following Moscow's invasion.

The agreement still needs to be ratified by Ukraine's parliament.

Trump initially

described the arrangement as "money back" for the wartime aid Ukraine received under his predecessor Joe Biden.

Kyiv and Washington planned to sign the agreement in February, but a White House clash between US President Donald Trump and

Ukraine

says

the

Ukrainian



PHOTO: ZEUS CHIRAN

Artificial intelligence in creative spaces

Ethical dilemmas and the question of authorship and originality

PUNOMI RAHMAN TITIR

As AI takes bold steps into the creative world – generating art, writing poetry, composing music – it raises pressing ethical concerns. Can AI truly create, or is it merely repurposing human ingenuity?

This narrative essentially challenges the way we define creativity, and forwards the question of whether intentionality can exist outside the realm of human consciousness. That is, the creative process itself involves elements of individual expression, curated through emotions, lived experiences, and abstract thought – attributes that AI, as we currently acknowledge it, arguably lacks.

Instead, generative AI utilises neural networks to identify patterns and structures within mass datasets to generate outputs that resemble artistic creations. However, it does not do so out of thin air. There has to be an input for order for there to be an output.

AI generators have been accused of plagiarism by creative professionals on multiple occasions. Critics argue that large companies like OpenAI and others have trained their models on datasets consisting of copyrighted works of artists, and even images of real people scraped from the internet without permission from the owner.

Independent artists, freelancers, and salaried professionals are struggling to compete with the pace of AI generated content, which can be produced in seconds at a fraction of the cost. Besides, AI's ability to replicate the distinctive style of a referred artist and generate identical artworks catering to an individual's personal style puts the original artist at risk of potential accusations of imitation.

At the heart of the ethical dilemma lies the question of authorship and originality. When an AI system produces a compelling poem or an intricate digital artwork, who reserves the right to be credited? The company developing the software and the user responsible for the provided prompt are both involved in the process, yet neither holds definitive authorship. The use of copyrighted works to train AI models further complicates

The declining quality of our produce

The natural flavours of seasonal produce are difficult to replicate in off-season cultivation, despite modern farming techniques. Additionally, the heavy reliance on pesticides and chemical preservatives in large-scale agriculture has sparked concerns about food safety and nutritional value.

AHNAF TAHMEED PURNA

As spring arrives in full bloom, winter takes its leave, leaving behind the crisp air and the whisper of fallen leaves. For many, winter is more than just a season. It's a time of brisk mornings, comforting chills, and, notably, its vibrant assortment of fresh vegetables.

Tomatoes, cauliflower, broccoli, carrots, cabbage, and beans are just a few of the seasonal delights that flood local markets during winter. These vegetables not only add colour to our plates but also bring with them the rich flavours that make winter's bounty so special. However, with advancements in agriculture and food preservation, many of these vegetables are now available year-round. While this convenience is undeniable, it raises an important question: Do they retain the same quality, freshness, and taste?

The answer, unfortunately, is often no.

The natural flavours of seasonal produce are difficult to replicate in off-season cultivation, despite modern farming techniques. Additionally, the heavy reliance on pesticides and chemical preservatives in large-scale agriculture has sparked concerns about food safety and nutritional value.

A study on potato-growing farmers in Bangladesh found that 96 percent use pesticides, with 16.6 percent applying them over five times per season. Alarmingly, 47.7 percent of these were unregistered, and 1.9 percent were banned, posing severe health and environmental risks. Additionally, 5.6 percent of registered pesticides were classified as highly hazardous, 24.8 percent as moderately hazardous, and 6.2 percent as slightly hazardous by WHO standards.

Pesticide residues in vegetables have been linked to cancer, kidney disease, and hypertension, with children being especially vulnerable to developmental and cognitive impairments. Research in Keraniganj, Dhaka, revealed extreme overuse, with farmers applying 21,479.4 grams per acre, leading to increased costs and health issues like skin diseases, headaches, and eye irritation. Shockingly, 88.3 percent of farmers were unaware of pesticide risks, and 98.3 percent did

not use protective gear. Meanwhile, a Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) report found pesticide use tripled between 1997 and 2008, reaching 48,690 metric tons annually, contributing to declining vegetable exports and escalating health hazards.

Formaldehyde, calcium carbide, and sodium benzoate are among the most commonly used preservatives in Bangladesh, despite their known health risks. Experts advocate for safer alternatives like ethylene inhibitors and chitosan. Developed by Dr Mubarak Ahmad Khan of the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission, chitosan is a cost-effective preservative derived from shrimp and crab shells. It can be applied to fruits, vegetables, and fish, extending their shelf life while reducing reliance on harmful pesticides. Successful trials on mangoes and pineapples have shown that chitosan not only preserves freshness but also enhances production yields, making it a promising solution for safer food preservation.

Children are particularly vulnerable to pesticide exposure, which can disrupt organ development and weaken immunity. "Sustainable Development Goals include food safety to prevent malnutrition and foodborne diseases. Children's health is at risk from pesticide contamination," warns Dr Tanzana Noor, MD, Paediatrics. "Prolonged use of preservatives affects their central nervous system, liver, and kidneys."

She notes that while symptoms may not appear immediately, they can lead to gut infections, growth failure, and developmental issues. "Many farms are opting for organic farming, but parental awareness is key," she adds, advising proper washing, cooking, and choosing organic options.

Nutritionist Tarannum Tasnim mentions pesticide residues as a cause of oxidative stress, leading to neurological disorders, hormonal dysfunction, and cancer risks. "Washing, soaking in salt or vinegar, and proper cooking help reduce exposure," she suggests. To minimise pesticide use, she advocates for natural pest control and safer preservation methods like temperature control, curing,

and vinegar-based alternatives.

As consumers, we enjoy the convenience of having our favourite vegetables available year-round, but at what cost? The widespread use of chemicals to boost production and extend shelf life raises serious concerns about long-term health risks, particularly for children, who are more vulnerable to pesticide residues linked to developmental issues, cognitive impairments, and chronic illnesses.

To address these concerns, experts emphasise the need for safer agricultural practices such as Integrated Pest Management (IPM), organic farming, and the use of bio-based alternatives. Stricter regulations, farmer education, and increased consumer awareness can also help reduce harmful chemical exposure.

While science continues to expand food availability, prioritising sustainable and natural farming methods ensures that we protect both health and the environment, perhaps a reminder that nature's cycle is best enjoyed in its own time.

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the issue, raising concerns about whether original creators should receive royalties. There is no upholding of licensed authority, making AI-generated content a free-for-all in terms of ownership.

Such ambiguity has caused legal disputes, with several artists demanding rigid protection laws against AI companies accessing their works without consent.

What's more is that the limitations of AI put into question its ability to be accurate with citations, or just giving credit in general. The internet is now drowning under the weight of artificial data, a great deal of them existing without labels. This lack of transparency often leads to people being unaware that what they're consuming is AI-generated and not authentic.

Furthermore, several media platforms and businesses, including newspapers, publishing houses, and advertising agencies – both physical and online – are also leaning towards the use of generative AI to deliver creative content. Yet, despite their growing dependence on automation, very few media houses have declared clear, public policies regarding their AI practices.

This opacity not only creates a place of confusion but also allows the spread of misinformation among people who lack a comprehensive understanding of AI and its applications. In the absence of clear indicators or proper attribution, hyper-realistic AI-generated content can be mistaken for authentic human work, leading audiences to unknowingly consume and share material in a way that misrepresents its origin.

Therefore, collective platforms and individual creators who choose to integrate AI into their work must also learn to take responsibility and navigate these ethically grey areas. While the presence of generative AI in the creative field is unlikely to face decline anytime soon, the establishment of necessary regulations and ethical guidelines are both possible and imperative.

Technology will only continue to advance, but it should not come at the cost of rightful attribution and taking away opportunities from human creators. Creativity should be cherished not merely for its outcome but for the journey that shapes it. True creativity cannot be constricted to algorithms; it is, and always will, remain as the soul for human expression.

Are oarfish really harbingers of imminent disaster?

ADRIN SARWAR

On March 11, 2011, a magnitude 9.0 earthquake struck off the coast of Tohoku, Japan, experienced a devastating tsunami, taking nearly 20,000 lives. Towns were swallowed whole within minutes – cars, homes, schools, and people swept away by waves that reached over 40 meters in some areas. In Rikuzentakata – a city of nearly 24,000 – almost everything was flattened. The Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant system failure that followed resulted in a level-seven nuclear meltdown – the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl.

Disasters of such magnitude rarely offer a warning before they happen. Even the most advanced early warning systems fail to provide any clear prediction for an earthquake. Unlike cyclones that come with satellite-tracked wind patterns, earthquakes are notoriously unpredictable. Beneath Earth's surface, tectonic plates grind and shift in silence for years before releasing the energy that

reshapes landscapes and shatters lives in a matter of minutes.

In the case of the 2011 Japan earthquake, despite Japan's world-renowned earthquake preparedness and monitoring technology, the sheer scale of the disaster left everyone grappling with the aftermath. Even though all the scientific tools failed to warn of the upcoming disaster, Japan's coastal villagers had a hunch of what was coming months before the disaster struck.

According to Japanese legend, the sight of oarfish in shallow waters is an omen of earthquakes. The belief dates back to the 17th century when the ghostly fish was known as "ryugu no tsukai" or a "messenger from the sea god's palace". The myth says that the appearance of the oarfish, which live under the islands of Japan, nearshore is a sign of future natural disasters. People believed oarfish would come up from the deep to warn people when an earthquake was imminent. This myth received strong support in 2011 when several

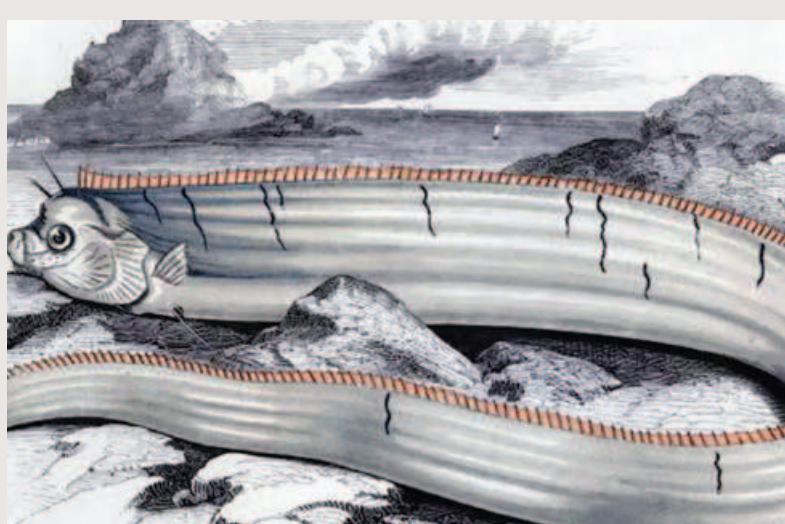


PHOTO: COLLECTED

oarfish washed up on beaches in Japan, only months before the destructive Tohoku earthquake and tsunami. This further reaffirmed the folklore of "doomsday fish". Oarfish are long, ribbon-like deep sea creatures. They are known for their silvery scales and striking red fins. Often called the "sea serpents" of folklore, they can

grow up to 36 feet in length. It is the longest bony fish in the ocean. Despite their size, they are elusive and rarely seen alive, as they usually dwell in deep waters up to 3,300 feet beneath the surface.

Although the link between oarfish and natural disasters might appear to be mythical, scientists have presented some theories to explain this phenomenon. According to some scientists, deep sea fish such as oarfish could be more sensitive to seismic activity underwater because they live near the fault lines. Such sensitivity might lead them to come to the surface before an earthquake. Another group of scientists believes that oarfish are more likely to be pushed to the surface because of the current or illness.

Conversely, some researchers believe that the appearance of oarfish near the surface may be due to changes in ocean temperature patterns, particularly during El Nino years. According to a bulletin from the California Academy of Sciences, El Nino events cause surface temperatures to rise by several degrees. On the other hand, deep waters remain cooler than usual. Deep sea creatures like oarfish feed on plankton and small fish. As a result of El Nino, plankton and other small fish tend to migrate upward toward the warmer surface. Following its food source, oarfish also migrate toward the surface, thus increasing the chances of

being spotted or stranded.

The belief that oarfish is a predictor of earthquakes is not only limited to Japan. In August 2017, two oarfish washed ashore in the Philippines, a day before a 6.6 magnitude earthquake hit the island of Luzon.

While the Oarfish's rare appearances continue to spark myth and speculation among the public, one thing is becoming increasingly clear – these deep-sea dwellers may or may not be rising to the surface to warn us of earthquakes but of global warming. Having evolved over thousands of years to survive in the cold, pressurised depths of the ocean, oarfish are now being forced out of their natural habitat by rising sea temperatures and shifting ecosystems. This sudden adaptation may not only endanger their survival but also hint at broader disruptions in our oceans. We must remember that the sea holds far more mysteries than we've yet to understand, and perhaps, it's already trying to tell us something.

Title now MSC's to lose

SPORTS REPORTER

Title aspirants Mohammedan Sporting Club took another giant step towards a maiden professional league title with a 3-1 win over Bangladesh Police in Cumilla as their nearest competitors Abahani fell to a 2-0 defeat against holders Bashundhara Kings in Dhaka yesterday.

The country's two traditional rivals -- Mohammedan and Abahani -- had only a four-point gap before the start of the 13th-round fixtures, but Mohammedan's lead has now increased to seven points with only five matches left. Mohammedan now have 34 points while Abahani remained second on 27 points.

Although the Motijheel-based outfit still need nine points to take an unassailable lead to confirm an elusive title that they have been searching for 17 years, any further slip up by archrivals Abahani will prompt an early celebration at the Black and Whites dugout.

At the Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium in Cumilla, Bangladesh Police gave a tough time to Mohammedan before conceding in 52nd minute, thanks to a powerful header from Nigerian forward Sunday Emmanuel.

However, Police bounced back to level the margin in the 63rd minute with Brazilian defender Danilo Augusto converting from the spot after Shakil Ahad



A high-voltage Bangladesh Premier League clash between Bashundhara Kings and Abahani at the Kings Arena yesterday turned out to be chaotic as the contest ended with three players being sent off. Sohel Rana's challenge on Abahani's Shahin Ahammad in stoppage time caused a scuffle, resulting in the referee brandishing straight reds to Kings' Saad Uddin, Rana, and Abahani's Shahin. However, the game was decided long before as Kings' Faisal Fahim scored a brace on either side of half-time to help his side to a 2-0 victory.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Jam-packed schedule puts selectors in a jam

SPORTS REPORTER

Selectors are currently passing a busy time over forming separate squads ahead of the national team's and its understudy team's jam-packed schedule in May with the main concern being picking the right player for the right team.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday confirmed that the national team will play two T20Is against UAE in Sharjah on May 17 and 19 respectively before heading to Pakistan for a five-match T20I series, scheduled to start in Faisalabad on May 25.

But in the same month, both Bangladesh 'A' and Emerging Team will play separate series at home.

New Zealand 'A' team arrived in Bangladesh yesterday for three one-dayers and two four-day matches against their Bangladeshi counterparts, scheduled on May 5-24 in Sylhet and Mirpur.

Meanwhile, South Africa Emerging Team is scheduled to arrive on May 7, and will play three one dayers in Rajshahi on May 12-16 and two four-day matches in Chattogram and Mirpur between May 20-30 against Bangladesh Emerging Team.

The selectors have already named a 15-member Emerging Team squad, led by Akbar Ali alongside youngsters like Jishan Alam, Rakibul Hasan and Ripon Mondol, and the squad for the first two one-dayers of the 'A' team's series which includes the likes of Parvez Hossain

Bangladesh tour of UAE, Pak

Practice camp: May 5; Team to depart for UAE: May 14

2 T20Is vs UAE: May 17-19

5 T20Is vs Pakistan: May 25 to June 3

Bangladesh 'A' team's home series against NZ

3 one-dayers: May 5-10

2 four-dayers: May 14-24

Bangladesh Emerging team's home series against SA

3 one-dayers: May 12-16

2 four-dayers: May 20-30

Emon, Shamim Hossain and Shoriful Islam.

Chief selector Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu admitted the challenge of forming three separate squads concurrently, and told The Daily Star, "There is a matter of fine tuning. We need to name a squad for the last one-dayer [against New Zealand A]. Then we need to take some players from there for the national team's T20I assignment. We also need to form a four-day squad for the red-ball series as well."

It is learnt that pacer Mustafizur Rahman, who was initially named in the

'A' team's squad, will be rested instead as the BCB wants to be extra cautious with him following Taskin Ahmed's injury and Nahid Rana's ongoing stint at the Pakistan Super League (PSL).

"The team management agreed to give Mustafizur a rest as he has already played four games in the PSL after coming back from rehab. He will be playing T20Is against UAE and Pakistan and we then also have a full-fledged white-ball series against Sri Lanka. We have picked Khaled [Ahmed] in Mustafizur's place," Lipu said.

The hectic cricket schedule increases the risk of players getting injured and as many of the national team cricketers play across all three formats, the chief selector felt an injury would make their job much more difficult.

"It's good if a player plays in all three formats, but it's also risky. When he is out of form or gets injured, we need to find three players to replace him. If one of my confirmed players gets injured in between, we need to find three players to replace him in the Sri Lanka series. Then the selection becomes very difficult."

The chief selector also said that in case of filing up a vacuum in the side, they would prefer picking someone with experience of playing international cricket.

"We have some players. But it's not like everyone is ready... When we find a vacuum in the team, we want to keep some players ready who also have experience of playing in international cricket."

T20 captaincy call after Liton's injury assessment

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is waiting on the injury assessment of Liton Das as the wicketkeeper-batter is the frontrunner to captain the Tigers in their upcoming T20I series against the UAE and Pakistan.

Bangladesh are slated to play two T20Is against UAE on May 17 and May 19 in Sharjah before the five-match T20I series in Pakistan from May 25 to June 3. BCB is expected to name the same side for both series.

Liton would undergo an X-ray on Saturday to assess the extent of the injury he suffered during a practice session in the Pakistan Super League (PSL) last month. Following a scan, it will be determined whether he can recover in time before the UAE series. The BCB is understood to be waiting on the captaincy call until Liton's development is assessed.

Meanwhile, Taskin Ahmed's Achilles injury, for which the pacer is currently in England to consult specialists, has made BCB's captaincy options limited. It was learned that Taskin would be rested for both series to allow him recovery time.

Liton had served as the captain in Bangladesh's last T20I assignment in the Caribbean in the absence of captain Najmul Hossain Shanto, who was out with injury. Shanto had discussed not continuing the T20 captaincy with the board.

SHORT CORNER

Stokes fit to captain England against Zimbabwe

Ben Stokes was given the all-clear to captain England in their one-off Test against Zimbabwe, set to be a four-day game, later this month as he was named in a 13-man squad announced Friday. The 33-year-old all-rounder has been recovering from hamstring surgery after breaking down in New Zealand in December, his second hamstring tear in five months.

Titas win maiden Premier Chess League title

Titas Club emerged champions in the Great Wall Ceramic Premier Division Chess League for the first time after beating Uttara Central Chess Club 4-0 in the ninth and final round held at the Bangladesh Chess Federation Hall Room yesterday. Titas secured 16 points from nine rounds, two more than Manha's Castle who finished runners-up ahead of Leonine Chess Club.

Problem No.9: A sobering sign of Bangladesh's striker shortage

After Bashundhara Kings lifted the Federation Cup, their captain Tapu Barman made an interesting claim to The Daily Star during an interview. He said things were "better than last year" because more local forwards had made their mark on the goal-scoring chart in the recently concluded tournament. On paper, it seems promising: seven players sharing the top spot. However, the reality isn't as rosy once the surface is scratched.

**Read full stories on The Daily Star's website

Bayern on cusp of Bundesliga title

AGENCIES

Bayern Munich coach Vincent Kompany is keeping talk of celebrations on ice as his team prepare for Saturday's Bundesliga clash at fifth-placed RB Leipzig where they can clinch a record-extending 34th German league title.

Kompany's side hold an eight-point lead over last season's champions Bayer Leverkusen, who are second on 67 points, with three games remaining.

A win on Saturday would clinch the title, but even matching Leverkusen's result at Freiburg on Sunday would be enough for Bayern to secure the title.

"We want to win tomorrow and be champions," Kompany told reporters on Friday. "That'd be nice. Tomorrow is a final for us. Hopefully, we do it. We're preparing as normal for Leipzig. I'm not preparing any celebrations. I'm preparing for the game."

"They have a lot of talent and quality, lots of good young players. They lost in Frankfurt (last week). I think they'll now play with full energy again, look to attack."

"Teams make radical decisions against Bayern ... I think we will get the best version of Leipzig as an opponent. It will be tough. We need to prepare for the game, not for a party."



Bayern's top scorer Harry Kane, looking to land a long-awaited first title of his career, is suspended, but Kompany said the striker would likely travel with the team.

"Harry is one of our best players mentally. He knows his moment is coming. He's exuding confidence," Kompany said.

Kane has scored 36 goals and registered 12 assists in 44 appearances in all competitions for Bayern this season.

"I have not seen anything in training that even hints he is not even playing on Saturday. He's trained well," said Kompany.

"Maybe some guys will come with us to Leipzig ... Harry probably won't pass up the opportunity to come."

Meanwhile, a 13th league title with Bayern would be a fitting farewell for the German, whose summer departure after 25 seasons at the club draws near.

Mueller, a one-club player, joined Bayern aged just 10 and played his 500th Bundesliga game last week. Mueller has amassed a remarkable 32 trophies with Bayern, including two Champions Leagues, but will leave at the end of the season after he was not offered a contract extension.

No player has ever won 13 Bundesliga titles, and only Manchester United's Ryan Giggs has hit that mark in any of Europe's top five leagues.



Both Manchester United and Tottenham put a foot in the Europa League final, with convincing wins on Thursday. All of United's goals came in a frenetic first half, with Bruno Fernandes scoring twice to help beat 10-man Athletic Bilbao 3-0 away at the San Mames stadium, the venue for the final. The fervent home fans were enraged when Athletic defender Daniel Vivian was sent off for pulling back Rasmus Hojlund, and Fernandes slotted home the resulting penalty, after Casemiro had opened the scoring against the run of play in the semifinal first leg. Fernandes rolled in a third before half-time. [Inset] Meanwhile, a second-half penalty from Dominic Solanke and strikes from Brennan Johnson and James Maddison in the first half helped Tottenham seal a 3-1 win at home against Bodo/Glimt. The Norwegian side, however, kept slim hopes of a turnaround alive, thanks to a late goal from Ulrik Saltnes.

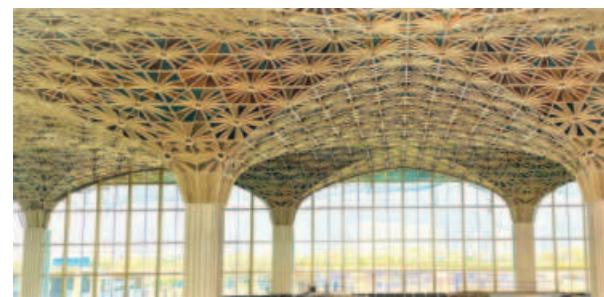
PHOTO: REUTERS

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ROOPPUR PLANT

NPCBL to finalise power purchase deal

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, *Pubna*

The Nuclear Power Plant Company of Bangladesh Limited (NPCBL) has been given the responsibility for finalising the power purchase agreement with the Power Development Board (PDB) for selling electricity from the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant.

The Ministry of Science and Technology on March 25 informed the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission (BAEC) about the government's decision on the PPA, sources at Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant and NPCBL told The Daily Star after a meeting yesterday.

The NPCBL organised the meeting at the Rooppur site office to discuss the PPA after getting the government's approval, the sources said.

"We have submitted the draft proposal and design of agreement to the Ministry of Science and Technology recently, but we did not finalise the price of electricity from the Rooppur project as the production cost has not been

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

Hefazat vows tougher action if its demands not met

To hold rally today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hefazat-e-Islam Bangladesh yesterday said they would go for a tougher programme if its key demands, including the dissolution of the Women's Affairs Reform Commission, the withdrawal of cases against its leaders, and a ban on the Awami League, are not met.

Junayed Al Habib, the organisation's central senior vice-president and president of its Dhaka city unit, issued the warning while addressing a rally in front of the capital's Baitul Mukarram National Mosque after Jumia prayers.

"If our demands are not fulfilled, Dhaka will come to a standstill tomorrow [today]," he said. "Hasina had to step down in the face of protests; you too will be forced out with just a gust of resistance... You have time until tomorrow [today]."

The rally was organised by Hefazat's Paltan zone to press forward their various demands.

Their other demands included ensuring justice for the killings at Shapla Chattar and other alleged crackdowns, and stopping "the genocide and persecution of Muslims in Palestine and India".

Hefazat will today hold a grand rally at Suhrawardy Udyana.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4

Australia launches 'world's largest' battery-powered ship

AFP, *Sydney*

An Australian boatbuilder launched what it described as the world's largest electric-powered ship yesterday, a 130-metre (426-feet) behemoth capable of carrying 2,100 passengers.

Identified by boatbuilder Incat as Hull 096, the aluminium catamaran is powered by more than 250 tonnes of batteries and was built for South American ferry operator Buquebus.

It was designed to carry passengers and up to 225 vehicles across the River Plate between Buenos Aires and Uruguay.

"Hull 096 proves that large-scale, low-emission transport solutions are not only possible, they are ready now," Incat CEO Stephen Casey said in a statement after the launch on Hobart's Derwent River in the island state of Tasmania.



Rain and a moderate nor'wester swept through various parts of Rajshahi district on Thursday, causing hundreds of maunds of mangoes to fall from the trees across several upazilas. Growers from the affected areas brought the fallen fruit to wholesale markets in Puthia upazila, and sold them to traders at a low price of Tk 5 per kg. Traders at the markets are now packing these mangoes in sacks to send to Dhaka, Chattogram, Sylhet, and other districts. The photo was taken yesterday. PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

Govt plans to hire foreign firms to operate Ctg Port

Says CA's press secretary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Ctg*

The government is considering appointing some of the world's most experienced port operators to manage Chattogram Port and other sea and land ports in the region, said Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam yesterday.

He expressed hope that the recruitment process would be completed by September this year.

Speaking at a press conference at the Chattogram Circuit House in the afternoon, Shafiqul addressed concerns regarding the rationale behind bringing in foreign operators instead of employing domestic ones.

"Chattogram Port is currently unable to handle cargo in line with the demands of today's global investors. Local operators, including Saif Powertec, are facing capacity limitations, which is a key reason behind the persistent container congestion at the port."

Shafiqul emphasised that the future trajectory of Bangladesh's economy hinges on the efficiency and capacity of Chattogram Port. "We have no alternative but to expand the capacity of the port, along with Patenga Terminal, Bay Terminal, and Matarbari Port."

"Chattogram and its surrounding areas are ideal for port-based development. We are in discussions with companies that have experience managing 50 to 100 ports globally."

SEE PAGE 9 COL 6

Drones hit aid boat heading for Gaza

Say activists, blame Israel; rescuers say 20 Palestinians killed in Israeli strikes

AFP, *Gaza*

A group of activists organising an aid boat for Gaza said yesterday it was attacked by drones in international waters off Malta as they headed towards the Palestinian territory, accusing Israel of attacking the vessel.

The Maltese government said it responded to a distress call from the vessel and offered immediate support. It said all crew members were safe, while making no mention of an alleged attack.

"At 00:23 Maltese time (2223 GMT on Thursday), the Conscience, a Freedom Flotilla Coalition ship came under direct attack in international waters," the activist group said in a statement.

"Armed drones attacked the front of an unarmed civilian vessel twice, causing a fire and a substantial breach in the hull," it added, blaming Israel.

"Israeli ambassadors must be summoned and answer to violations of international law, including the ongoing blockade and the bombing of our civilian vessel in international waters."

The Israeli military did not provide an immediate response when contacted by AFP.

Meanwhile, Gaza's civil defence agency said yesterday Israeli strikes killed at least 20 people in the Palestinian territory.

Civil defence official Mohammed al-Mughayir told AFP 20 people had been

killed since dawn, including nine following the Israeli bombardment of a home in Bureij camp in central Gaza.

The health ministry in Hamas run Gaza said that at least 2,326 people have been killed since Israel resumed strikes, bringing the overall death toll since the war broke out to 52,418.

➤ Gaza humanitarian work on 'verge of total collapse': Red Cross

➤ WFP sends out its "last remaining food stocks" to kitchens

➤ 2,326 Palestinians killed since Israel resumed strikes

The Red Cross warned yesterday that the humanitarian response in Gaza was on the "verge of total collapse" after two months of Israel blocking aid to the war-torn Palestinian territory.

"Without an immediate resumption of aid deliveries, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) will not have access to the food, medicines, and life-saving supplies needed to sustain many of its programmes in Gaza," it said

in a statement.

The UN's World Food Programme (WFP) said a week ago that it had sent out its "last remaining food stocks" to kitchens.

Israel strictly controls all inflows of international aid vital for the 2.4 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

It halted aid deliveries to Gaza on March 2, days before the collapse of a ceasefire that had significantly reduced hostilities after 15 months of war.

Since the start of the blockade, the United Nations has repeatedly warned of the humanitarian catastrophe on the ground, with famine again looming.

"Civilians in Gaza are facing an overwhelming daily struggle to survive the dangers of hostilities, cope with relentless displacement, and endure the consequences of being deprived of urgent humanitarian assistance," Pascal Hundt, ICRC Deputy Director of Operations said in yesterday's statement.

"This situation must not -- and cannot -- be allowed to escalate further."

ICRC stressed that under international humanitarian law, "Israel has an obligation to use all means available to ensure that the basic needs of the civilian population under its control are met".

"If the blockade continues, programmes such as the ICRC common kitchens -- which often provide the only meal people receive each day -- will only be able to operate for a few more weeks," it warned.

China 'evaluating' US offer to hold talks over tariffs

Says Beijing, warns against 'extortion'

REUTERS, *Beijing*

Beijing is "evaluating" an offer from Washington to hold talks over US President Donald Trump's 145 percent tariffs, China's Commerce Ministry said yesterday, although it warned the United States not to engage in "extortion and coercion."

Washington and Beijing have been locked in a cat-and-mouse game over tariffs, with both sides unwilling to be seen to back down in a trade war that has roiled global markets and upended supply chains.

The Commerce Ministry said the United States has approached China to seek talks over Trump's tariffs and Beijing's door was open for discussions, signalling a potential de-escalation in the trade war.

The statement comes a day after a social media account linked to Chinese state media said Washington had been seeking to start talks, and a week after Trump claimed discussions were already underway, which Beijing denied.

"The US has recently taken the initiative on many occasions to convey information to China through relevant parties, saying it hopes to talk with China," the statement said, adding that Beijing was "evaluating this".

"Attempting to use talks as a pretext to engage in coercion and extortion would not work," it said.

The US should be prepared to take action in "correcting erroneous practices" and cancel unilateral tariffs, the Commerce Ministry said, adding that Washington needed to show "sincerity" in negotiations.

The punishing US tariffs on many Chinese products saw Beijing respond in April with levies on imports of US goods of 125 percent, as Beijing labelled Trump's tariff strategy a "joke."

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

Minerals deal with US 'truly equal'

Says Zelensky; Russian strikes on Ukraine wound 31

AFP, *Kyiv*

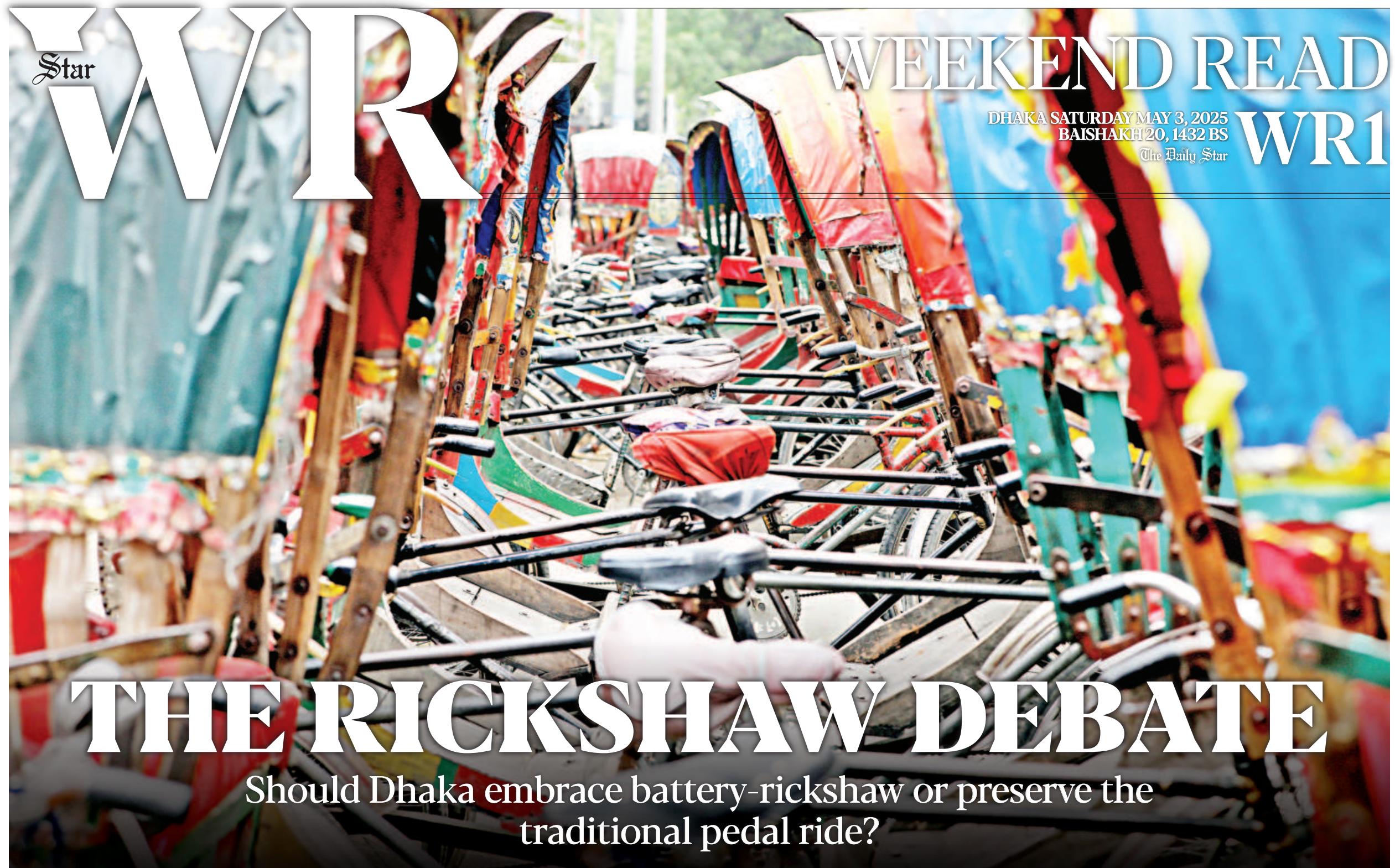
Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Thursday a landmark minerals deal with the United States offered "equal" benefits for both sides even though the accord offered no concrete security guarantees for Kyiv.

Russia later launched a large-scale drone attack on the central industrial city of Zaporizhzhia, ripping open a Soviet-era residential building and wounding 31 people after Zelensky urged allies to step up pressure on Moscow to end its invasion.

The agreement, which has taken months to negotiate, would see Washington and Kyiv jointly develop

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4





THE RICKSHAW DEBATE

Should Dhaka embrace battery-rickshaw or preserve the traditional pedal ride?

"There are few Bangla rickshaws on the road now as opposed to a hundred motorised ones. People who ride rickshaws prefer the faster ones because they think it saves them time," says Abdul Majid, a battery-rickshaw driver.

RAFFAT BINTE RASHID

The evolution of our humble rickshaw to the battery-driven ones is as colourful as this old mode of transport.

However, this change is facing teething issues. For one, we do not like the honking horns, and the reckless speed. While a few of us might confess to loving the speed and riding on a battery-run rickshaw after 10:00pm for the heck of it, the consensus is that we do not want such rickshaws plying our residential areas or major avenues.

There is a certain kitsch kind of outlandish charm in Dhaka's rickshaw, to the point that rickshaw art is synonymous with Dhaka and its souvenirs. Hand-pulled rickshaw and Dhakaites have a long history of togetherness.

If we step back to the seventies or eighties Dhaka, when the city was a quieter and greener place, and when its people had no clue what being stuck in traffic chaos meant; this human-powered carriage was our only vehicle, especially for the toiling middle-class and commoners.

There is not a single person in Dhaka who can say that they have not had the pleasure of riding a rickshaw; for that matter no one in the entire span of Bangladesh.

Dhaka's rickshaw is more than just a mode of transportation; it is

nostalgia for a Dhaka that once had more green spaces and quieter roads, a city that was more personal and intimate. Over the years, the rickshaw has withstood the test of time, making it not only a practical tool for getting around but also an enduring symbol of Dhaka's soul – its resilience, its charm, and its complexity.

My love for this hand-pulled carriage started from an early age.

My middle-class family's definition of weekend fun



There is not a single person in Dhaka who can say that they have not had the pleasure of riding a rickshaw; for that matter no one in the entire span of Bangladesh.

He raced with his fellow pullers, got us krishnochura branches standing on the seat of his tricycle, and showed off his antics of riding on just two wheels, and I grew a fondness for velocity and big thrills.

Having said so, I detest aggressive driving, harsh acceleration, sudden braking, hard cornering, and uncontrolled speed. And I find all these in our new "motorised nonsense" and it is a jarring experience for us passengers.

"Driving any motorised vehicle needs training because the riders need to learn to control the speed. It is essential for road safety. You cannot throw off your passenger with your hard brake misadventures," says an anonymous doctor, who deals with road mishap emergencies. He added that he gets a minimum of five to eight battery-driven rickshaw accident patients every day.

"I agree that many of us do not follow traffic rules, we are not allowed on main roads, yet we venture that way, we ride as if we are manoeuvring an aeroplane, (we do call ourselves 'pilots', though), if we can control our urges to speed, this motorised rickshaw is a better source of income than the ones pulled by body force," Majid's friend Hasan says.

The city authorities did permit a few, but with no one to monitor, the production doubled on the sly,

are convenient but come with risks. In some lanes, regular rickshaws aren't available, so we've had to rely on battery-powered ones to avoid switching vehicles multiple times during long commutes. While they've made travel easier and more affordable, the risks are undeniable," says Mehedi Hasan, a Mohammadpur resident.

Siraj Ahmed, a Dhaka University student, adds, "Battery-run rickshaws should only be allowed to operate after undergoing thorough technical inspections. Both the rickshaw and the driver must be licensed, and their numbers should be effectively regulated. Without such oversight, these vehicles will continue to pose a threat to road safety and disrupt civic order."

"Sometimes, I prefer the battery-powered ones because they're faster, have more seating space, and get me



Bangla rickshaw to Batteries
I miss the tinkling sound of cycle bells of the beautiful three-wheeler, the cramped hood space and all. Our humble hand-pulled "Bangla rickshaw", a term I heard for the first time in my rickshaw riding life, is now on the verge of extinction.

"There are few Bangla rickshaws on the road now as opposed to a hundred motorised ones. People who ride rickshaws prefer the faster ones because they think it saves them time," says Abdul Majid, a battery-rickshaw driver.

And he is right, I have hardly seen any old wooden frame ones recently. "The Bangla rickshaw is totally out of production because anything motorised involves speed and it

resulting in an influx of these battery rickshaws in the streets leading to frequent accidents.

Majid took out a loan and got himself a battery-driven rickshaw for Tk 70,000. "Our hardship has been cut down by three-fourths. We defied the weather to earn a few hundred, not to mention the dehydration, heat strokes, and catching a cold. If ploughing by cows, thrashing grains, and all such hard labour has been replaced by machines, then why not pulling a rickshaw," Majid debates his point in favour of battery-driven rickshaws.

Meanwhile, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police's traffic department has launched a series of drives against unauthorised battery-powered rickshaws in Dhaka, leading to protests and traffic anarchy.

The drafted policy to legalise the use of battery-powered rickshaws and easy bikes in 2021, is yet to be finalised, but in the meantime, they run illegally, without registration or proper safety checks. A ban was imposed on them in 2023 but had to be withdrawn for the sake of leaving many without a source of income.

The debate continues

Meanwhile, the debate over the rickshaw continues.

For some, these battery-run vehicles are a time-efficient and cost-effective blessing; for others, they are a dangerous disruption to the already precarious traffic system.

"These battery-run rickshaws

to my destination quickly," says Kaiser Ahmed, a banker. His colleague, Ridima Huq, takes a different view. "These rickshaws are too dangerous. Have you seen how they drive? It's just an accident waiting to happen," she responds.

The general opinion of pedal rickshaw lovers

Just because they have a motor they cannot get on flyovers and busy thoroughfares; they are not cars. Unfortunately, this transition was not done thoughtfully so there are almost no votes for Majid and his fellows. And we would like to stay true to our age-old Bangla rickshaw.

The drivers need training to properly control speed and learn to reason with the habit of rough driving.

Coming back to Abdul Bhai's rickshaw days, he too showed off his skills but hard cornering, sudden braking, and running into cars were never done. They knew their weight and their maximum speed. They acted accordingly, even in their heroic antics.

Passengers pressed for time disregard all the risks involved in riding a battery rickshaw. They fail to alert the puller to slow down or maintain traffic ethics. As a result, the passenger and the driver's tag team effort and lack of civic sense leave our traffic system in such doldrums.

Thus, I say let's get our Bangla rickshaws back on track.



an iconic symbol of the city's vibrant, chaotic, and colourful essence. Winding through the bustling streets, the hand-pulled rickshaw has become deeply embedded in the fabric of Dhaka's identity, offering a unique glimpse into the city's rich cultural landscape. The rickshaw's bright, intricate artwork captures the creative spirit of Dhaka's residents.

It represents a quieter, slower-paced era of the city, harking back to times when life was less hurried and traffic congestion was more manageable. For many, the rickshaw embodies

cycle, my first date, the rain-soaked trips to run errands, to hiring a fleet of rickshaws, and recklessly sitting on the open hood and singing our way to go to Swiss Bakery with our cousins, which was our only posh fast food joint at that time.

Abdul Bhai lived in our locality, and his self-righteousness earned him brownie points with my parents. He was sort of our taxi back at that time. He was assigned to drop and pick us up from school, and that was when I developed my fondness for rickshaw rides.

attracts overproduction," says Sohel Anwar, a garage owner.

"Garage and rickshaw owners are now repurposing the frames of old pedal rickshaws to fit the battery and motor. Many are getting the motors and controllers from China and assembling them locally. The physics of this remodel is faulty, making it risky. The traditional lightweight rickshaw frames and braking systems are not designed to control high speed, and they struggle to maintain balance," Anwar confesses, but chooses to ignore it.



PHOTO: JOHN DREW, ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

REFLECTIONS

A Bengali Buddha IN BLIGHTY

JOHN DREW

If Buddha represents the principle of absolute quiescence, sunyata or "emptiness", detachment from the desires of life, Shakti represents that of energy and life in all its fullness. The two are perfectly if paradoxically reconciled or fused in this Tantric image that, make of it what you will, is designed to expand the mind.

Pride of place above the fireplace in the sitting room of our little house in distant Blighty is a painting from North Bengal. It is of the Buddha, an image dating from before the time of the coming of Islam to Bengal when, during the Pala dynasty, great centres of Buddhist learning flourished at sites such as Paharpur, then Somapura.

Sitting on the mantelpiece below the Buddha are half a dozen ceramic monkeys sculpted by an artist from Madhubani schooled in Shantiniketan: arms outstretched, the *banana lok* are searching for the kidnapped Sita. To either side of this central fireplace are shelves stacked with books.

This library includes a huge family Bible, Marmaduke Pickthall's explanatory translation of the glorious *Qur'an* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. Beyond these sacred scriptures extend the profane, ranging from the seminal works of Sir William Jones (longtime resident of Bengal interred in Kolkata) to those of Kaiser Haq on the topicalities of Greenland and the streets of Dhaka.

As for art, besides the *thangka* of the Buddha and the glazed monkeys, there are colourful paintings and sculptures of the mischievous Krishna and several of my wife Rani's watercolours of idyllic Indian pastoral scenes. An assortment of easy chairs and much other bric à brac lend comfort to this cosy sitting-room.

Pleasant as this refuge may be, it begs the question of where in all these possessions the truth of life may lie. Does one need all these books? My father had few books: not many beyond Shakespeare, Dickens and Boswell's *Johnson*. My maternal grandmother's legacy was just that one big family *Bible*, names inscribed inside, together with an equally weighty copy of John Bunyan's allegorical guide on how to live a dutiful Christian life, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678).

How many books does anyone really need? Where is wisdom to be found? As the philosophers ask: Is the One to be found in the many or the many to be found in the One? The *Qur'an* would no doubt be "the one book" sufficient for many pious folk in Bangladesh as the *Bible* was for my grandmother.

Some have questioned what need there is for commentaries on such divinely-revealed texts? What need of commentators or interpreters: scholars, imams, priests? Others, going further, ask 'what need of any books at all, however sacred and seminal?' Is it not, as the practices of the Sufis and Vaishnava Bhaktins of Bengal have suggested, that truth is to be found, if not in the mind through meditation, in the depths of the human heart?

And as for books, so for images, whether paintings or sculptures, to say nothing of photographs and those selfies that epitomise the headlong rush into irrelevance of a consumer society. At various times in history the two later religions of the Book have both adopted the original Judaic prescription banning graven images.

Islam's traditional prohibition on representational art is well-known but a similar concern has also surfaced in Christianity. In 8th century Byzantium-later Constantinople and finally Istanbul-there was a mighty struggle between the Iconoclasts and the Iconodules of the Orthodox Church, those who would destroy sacred images as profane distractions and those who advocated their devotional value.

With the rise of Protestantism in 16th and 17th century England, the Puritans quite literally attacked Roman Catholic "idolatry", engaging in the systematic smashing of the stained-glass windows of churches and of any and all paintings and statues depicting religious figures. The windows they replaced, if at all, with clear glass. Some, abandoning chapels altogether, gathered to worship under yew and oak trees in the open fields.

So where does all this leave the Bengali painting of the Buddha above our fireplace? Years ago, on account of my wife being an exotic Indian visitor, it was given to her by a Dominican monk in a monastery in Avila in Spain, a city once under Muslim rule and later the home of the Christian mystic, Teresa. The iconic painting, though badly water stained, has materially survived its wanderings in various hands through various lands but what, if anything, has survived of its spiritual significance?

With one crucial difference, the painting resembles the many familiar images there are of the Buddha, the enlightened-or disillusioned-one, in a state of meditation or trance. The difference is that seated in the lap of this-indigo blue coloured-Buddha is the white image of a female Shakti in an apparently perfect position of or for sexual congress.

If Buddha represents the principle of absolute quiescence, sunyata or "emptiness", detachment from the desires of life, Shakti represents that of energy and life in all its fullness. The two are perfectly if paradoxically reconciled or fused in this Tantric image that, make of it what you will, is designed to expand the mind.

Meditate for a moment on this blissful image of the Bengali Buddha and it promises or threatens to transform or supplant the domestic scene over which it presides. If we had to imagine a close counterpart, even embodiment, in contemporary Bangladesh would it not be the figure of the baul, wandering the byways free of the desire for household possessions, the devotional songs he sings a manifestation of his inseparable Shakti?

John Drew is author of *India and the Romantic Imagination* (Oxford India). A selection of his contributions to the Literature page of The Daily Star has been published as *Bangla File* (ULAB Press).

POETRY

Not yet worthy

NAYER SULTANA

31 years old moss-covered headstone
"She was funny"; engraved in Times New Roman 79.

Why 79?
Perfectly functioning Brown eyes that flare in cold fluorescents.
Not Gray or green or hazel but why?
Half a dozen suitors who wouldn't ever stop wooing.

Isn't two enough?
One immortal Calico.
Has to be, IT HAS TO BE.

Three Pitbulls; eyes like green lanterns.
Lanterns—not fireflies though.

An almost-losing game turned into a win.
A game called everything and nothing and *Life after Death* and whatnot.
A brain without any traces of Ambien and Lamotrigine and Wellbutrin and more.
Can be considered...this!

A memory that remembers all the bad as good
No comment on this; just because....!!!
A brain caffeinated starting from Ante Meridian 8 to 11 PM
&

Right wrist without Carpal Tunnel Syndrome
(or a wrist brace would be okay as well)
A life without *what-ifs* and *butts* and *would've beens*
or that Headstone is acceptable for us too
Because compromise is in our blood.

A wedding that never existed then turned into a divorce.
We don't talk about that no more...a nightmare.
799 pages of constant dark humour
and self-roasting out of insecurities
which ends up in a best-selling memoir
still wouldn't be enough to remove our Imposter Syndrome

and we will write write write until we defeat it
and end up living 6ft under with a mossy headstone
"She lost but She was funny" engraved in Arial Narrow 70.
Skin just the way it is without those doodling of
self-harm
and memory of colorism in a country full of people
sharing the same skin color...at least 80% of them.
a soul that's one with the *one and only* omniscient
carrying memory full of peace and good sweet
nothing

but satisfaction and gratitude
"She lost but She was funny and She is Resting in
Peace"

Engraved in whatever fonts The Writer wants;
written with invisible ink.

Nayer Sultana connects bridges between poetry and prose. When she's not being her lecturer-self at North South University, she's stitching together a non-fiction memoir that refuses to stay in one genre. Her work wanders through belonging, becoming, and the shifting idea of home.



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

FICTION

FLEETING PANIC

IMRAN JAMAL

"I'm scared" a voice calls out.

You inhale slowly and rest the back of your head against the wall. The cool floor is a comforting distraction and you spread your legs forward out to maximise the feeling.

"I'm scared?" the voice repeats, this time with more urgency but unsure of itself. Unsure whether to be scared or not, seeking reassurance one way or the other. You look over and see him standing by the window but looking into the room, scanning the room. Maybe he will shut up soon you think and close your eyes, bringing your knees up to your chest to lean your head on them. No one has any energy to reply.

I place my hand on your shoulder and lightly push down, enough to wake you but hopefully not startle you. There is enough to be jumpy about and waking up from a nap doesn't need to be another one. I get no response. I move my hand on your cotton t-shirt,

just my fingertips making contact. You take in a sharp breath, I see your head move on your knees and you slowly move your head. I walk over to the window and find him lay on the ground, his t-shirt wrapped into a ball under his head. A smart makeshift pillow on this stone floor, actually doubly smart as it also increases the skin contact with the cool floor. I do the same thing I did to you and that is enough to startle him.

I sit against an empty wall. You break the silence with your observation that we should try to get out of this house as soon as possible. It didn't need to be said because we've all been thinking and saying it for half a day now. None of us know how to do what you suggested as we look at each other in silence once again.

You move your hand over the floor collecting the dirt between your fingertips and spread it across them making circular patterns. This ritual seems to be the most important thing

happening to all of us. You gaze past your fingers and the floor as you repeat the action. I look at you as you continue to do this. He is hovering against the window again but mesmerised by the movement of your right hand.

"What if we jump? It's only the first floor and I am sure we won't really be hurt? A few scrapes and cuts maybe but nothing broken...nothing serious...nothing compared to..." his voice trailed off, his eyes still fixed on your fingers.

You walk over to the window and open it all the way. It's one of those that open all the way so there is no need to break it and create a hazard in the landing area, finally some luck. He helps you onto the ledge as I ease myself up and walk towards you. You look at me before closely your eyes and letting out a sigh saying, "I fucking hate flying cockroaches" as you let go.

Imran Jamal is an organiser and researcher.



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

DOLA does it again

Some songs don't just trend—they take over. One such track is *Chand Mama*, from the film *Borbaad*, which didn't just climb the YouTube Music trending list once, but soared to the top twice and is still continuing to evoke emotions even after a month.



SHARMIN JOYA

With superstar Shakib Khan and Nusrat Jahan lighting up the screen, the infectious energy of *Chand Mama* comes from the creative mind of the multi-talented Pritom Hasan, who not only composed the track but also performed in it. Joining him in this high-energy number is the vibrant voice of Aditi Rahman Dola, whose performance has earned widespread praise and firmly placed her in the spotlight.

"The feeling is surreal! It's been a month now, and it's still trending. This is beyond a artiste can ask for, that people have been showering love upon us," shared that singer who is trained in semi-classical and belongs to a musical family.

A bona fide party anthem, the song became the soundtrack of Eid celebrations across the country, from rooftop parties to bustling streets. "Usually, a song trends for one day or max a week or two, but for over a month now, this is something huge!" shares an excited Dola.

"Interestingly, when the song first appeared on the top charts, I kept checking repeatedly out of excitement. Since many Eid songs were trending at the time, I was curious to check repeatedly. So once when I checked Pritom's channel, I saw our song was at number two and felt a bit disappointed. But then I checked which song was number one—and to my surprise, it was *Chand Mama* again, just uploaded from a different channel! It was an incredible feeling. It's very rare for the same song to trend from two different sources."

As Dola is also a lawyer and full-time HC practitioner, the excitement around her song extends well beyond the music scene. "I can't explain in words how exciting and amazing it is. Each time I meet a colleague—be it a lawyer, staff member, or even clients—they keep appreciating me for the song. The fun part is, once my opposition lawyer, after a hearing, came over and congratulated me and gave positive feedback. It was such a unique and wonderful experience!" she laughed.

She also mentioned that her colleagues had gone to the cinema to watch *Borbaad* because of her song.

"Every day, I'm having a new experience, and I'm enjoying every bit of it!"

While Dola and Pritom had previously collaborated on the romantic number *Jani Tumi Chhile* from the film *Mission Extreme*, which was composed by Adit Rahman, *Chand Mama* marked the first time she lent her voice to a composition by Pritom himself.

"We've known each other for a long time, and Pritom is like a little brother to me. Everyone knows there's only one Pritom Hasan and how talented he is. He told me this was the right time—he felt my voice would be the perfect fit for this song. He's very particular about what he wants, and gave me clear direction on how to deliver

it," she said.

"During the recording he gave me very specific guidance—it needed to be simple, but with a seductive edge—sharing that the song was for the film *Borbaad*, and that Shakib Khan and Nusrat Jahan would be featured on screen."

After recording the song, both Dola and Pritom had an instinctive feeling that they had created something special. "We both had that vibe even before it was mixed—that we'd made something that would really click." And their instincts proved right.

Sharing about other songs from Eid films that caught her ear, Dola said, "I really liked *Bondhugo Shono*, tuned by Prince Mahmud (voiced by Imran Mahmudul and Dilshad Nahar Kona). It's a beautiful song. I also loved *Nishash* (voiced and tuned by GM Ashraf), and *Didha* (voiced and tuned by Pritom Hasan)—the other tracks from *Borbaad*."

Referring to Shakib Khan as her lucky charm, Dola fondly recalled her playback debut in *Tumi Chara* from the film *Rajotto* (featuring Shakib Khan and Eamin Haque Bobby), released a decade ago. "For any artiste, Shakib Khan is a lucky charm," she shared. "People still remember me from that debut. And now, ten years later, to sing *Chand Mama*—again in one of his films—feels incredibly special. I feel so fortunate that I've had the chance to sing in his films."

As for what's next, Dola has an exciting lineup ahead, which includes collaborations with emerging artistes, new semi-classical experiments with the Aditarians, film songs in the next big Eid release.



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA



Play: Pronayaupakkhan
May 3 | 4:30 pm and 7pm
Bangladesh Shilpkala Academy



Stand-up Comedy: Beyond Magic
May 9 | 7:30pm onwards
Naveed's Comedy Club, Gulshan 2



Play: Komola Ronger Bodh
May 9-11 | 5pm and 7pm
Bangladesh Mohila Samity

TV TALKIES

'Karma' as an all-consuming mastery of a revenge cycle

The Netflix thriller, *Karma*, echoes a familiar theme often found in Korean dramas—financial hardship and debt driving people to extreme behaviours. Then again, the show abstains from passing judgment and focuses on revealing the imperfections of its main characters as their stories unravel across a non-linear timeline.

The story opens with a fire in an abandoned building, where Dr Ju-yeon (Shin Min-a) rescues a man severely burned in the flames. His name unsettles her, though his identity remains unknown.

Next comes a desperate factory worker (Lee Hee-joon), ruined by crypto and chased by a loan shark. To escape, he hires a mysterious man to kill his father for insurance money, but the plan unravels quickly.

Then there is Han Sang Hun (Lee Kwang-soo), who becomes infatuated with a woman and ends up in a drunk-driving accident. His attempts to cover it up lead to a confrontation with 'The Witness' (Park Hae-soo), who blackmails him as his life begins to crumble.

Set up with unexpected twists to keep viewers hooked at every plot point, director Il Hyeong Lee delivers an engaging narrative with skilled actors and brutally fast-paced action, making *Karma* a must-watch.



STYLE STATEMENT

Henry Golding

Effortlessly elegant, Henry Golding returns to the spotlight as Sean Townsend in *Another Simple Favour*, premiering this week on Amazon Prime. A perennial GQ favourite, Golding reaffirms his status as a modern style icon with a look that blends classic glamour and contemporary flair.

Draped in a powder blue velvet tuxedo with bold midnight lapels, he strikes the perfect balance between timeless and daring. The sharp tailoring and contrasting black pocket trim offer a touch of playful refinement, while the open-collared shirt brings a relaxed sophistication.

Framed against a rich orange backdrop, Golding's ensemble radiates old school charm with a bold, modern twist—an undeniable statement of charisma and confidence.



WHAT'S PLAYING

'Ordinary' by Alex Warren

Alex Warren leans into the feelings of vulnerability with *Ordinary*, a soaring pop ballad that strips back the gloss of fame to reveal the ache of self-doubt and longing. Anchored by Warren's raw vocals and a sweeping piano-led arrangement, the track reflects on his journey from sleeping in friends' cars to navigating the spotlight as a rising global star.

The official music video features Warren's wife, Kouvr Annon, and portrays a journey of love and connection. Set against diverse backdrops—a forest, beach, and desert—the narrative culminates in a symbolic ascent, with the couple levitating skyward, embodying the transcendence of their bond.

The song's emotional depth has propelled it to the top of charts worldwide, securing the number one spot in countries including the UK, Australia, and Norway, and reaching number three on the Billboard Hot 100.



From subsistence to COMMERCIAL FARMING

Farmers used to grow food for subsistence in the 1960s and 1970s. But their interest in cultivation gradually grew thanks to the introduction of improved seeds, the availability of subsidised fertilisers, agricultural extension services and policy support

SOHEL PARVEZ

On a Friday at a farmers' market in Dhaka, 23-year-old Moazzem Hossain was sitting behind a display of eggplants, pointed gourd, carrot, lettuce, Chinese cabbage and a bundle of celery, a lesser-known leaf among Bangladeshis.

If anyone inquired, he would answer politely and even say that celery is used to prepare juice and is becoming popular among middle-class people in the metropolis, the political and economic capital of the country.

Celery is the latest addition to the vegetables his father, Md Rafiz Uddin, grows on more than one acre of leased land at Moshurkhola, a village in Savar, more than 20 kilometres west of Dhaka.

Last winter, Rafiz and his son regularly brought beetroot, Chinese cabbage and red cabbage alongside popular vegetables like eggplant, green chilli and bottle gourd to the farmers' market every Friday to sell directly to customers.

Just beside Moazzem sat Nur Mohammad, another farmer who brings produce from Narsingdi every day. Meanwhile, some of their mates come from the Manikganj, Munshiganj and Sylhet districts to sell their fresh fruits and vegetables.

"All the vegetables I grow are for selling at the market," said the 78-year-old Rafiz.



It has been two and a half decades since the elderly farmer has been cultivating vegetables, mostly alien and high-value, to sell at the market and thereby make a living for his four-member family.

"I worked at a private real estate company. I left the job in 1997 and signed up for farming a year later. I began with broccoli by bringing seeds through a non-resident Bangladeshi who lives in the US," he said.

His inspiration came from Karwan Bazar, one of the largest wholesale and kitchen markets in Dhaka city, which is home to over one crore of the country's population, as per the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

In his own words, broccoli was selling at a high price, so he leased half a bigha of land in Savar and made a huge profit in the first year. At that time, broccoli was grown in Gazipur, but it was not of good quality.

As the broccoli grown in Savar got a good response from traders in Karwan Bazar, Rafiz expanded its cultivation to two bighas the next year, he said, while walking along the alleys of fields with diversified crops, ranging from paddy to various high-value crops planted to sell at the market.

The leased land of Rafiz bears lettuce, beetroot, celery, Chinese cabbage and Chinese onion alongside some popular and seasonal vegetables, such as eggplant and pumpkin.

At the turn of the year 2000, only a few farmers in his area



would cultivate vegetables to sell at the market, as most grew vegetables for their own consumption.

"Today, a lot of farmers cultivate vegetables to sell at markets in Dhaka," he said.

"You will see tonnes of vegetables are shipped daily from here to markets in Dhaka and other parts," Rafiz added.

However, Savar is not the only place where farmers are growing crops for commercial purposes.

Elsewhere in the country, from the north-western bordering district Panchagarh to the southern coastal district Patuakhali, farmers grow multiple crops to sell at markets, a trend which was not common in the 1960s and 1970s.

Farmers used to grow food for subsistence at that time. But their interest in cultivation gradually grew thanks to the introduction of improved seeds, namely high-yielding varieties, and the availability of subsidised fertilisers, agricultural extension services and policy support.

Besides, the steady economic growth and rising demand for food in cities due to rapid urbanisation, increasing agricultural processing, and the spread of cold storage facilities have given impetus to growers.

"The road communication infrastructure has increased alongside markets. Farmers are also producing surplus crops," said Abdul Bayes, a former professor of economics at Jahangirnagar University.

"Overall, we are moving towards commercial agriculture from subsistence farming," said the economist, also a former vice-chancellor at Jahangirnagar University.

M Asaduzzaman, a former research director at the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), supported this view.

"Once, people would collect water spinach from waterbodies such as ponds. Now it is grown commercially," he said. "You see, dragon fruit and broccoli are grown almost everywhere. A form of agricultural entrepreneurship has emerged."

Crops are not the only area where commercialisation -- selling of surplus produce to markets -- is taking place. Gone are the days when domestically reared livestock met demands for animal protein.

Commercially grown poultry meets most of the requirements for meat and eggs, while aquaculture accounts for nearly 60 percent of the locally produced fish, reflecting the demand for farmed fish.

Likewise, dairy farming to produce milk and beef is expanding.

Akther U Ahmed, country

representative for the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Bangladesh, said commercialisation of agriculture means shifting farming from mainly growing food for the farmer's own use to growing crops and raising livestock mainly for sale at markets.

"Agricultural commercialisation is measured by the marketed surplus rates for major crops. Marketed surplus refers to the share of a farmer's total production that is sold at markets," he added.

In Bangladesh, agriculture is becoming more commercialised, moving beyond traditional subsistence farming. Other than producing rice, farmers are now growing more cash crops like vegetables, fruits, flowers, and raising poultry and fish for commercial gain.

The IFPRI found that in the case of rice, the amount of marketed surplus is 56 percent while it is more than 80 percent for vegetables and fruits.

These findings come from estimates on the rates of agricultural commercialisation using data from the 2018-19 Bangladesh Integrated Household Survey, a national representative sample covering rural areas across the country.

"Before independence, most farmers grew fruits like mango for personal consumption. But commercial farming of fruits and vegetables has increased over time," Ahmed said.

The intensity of commercial and diversified farming is high in areas that have good market access and are in close proximity to big cities like Dhaka.

"If you go to Narsingdi, you will see trucks lined up at dawn loading fresh produce to transport to various other districts," he said. "If you go to north Bengal, you will find banana orchards."

The landscape changed after the construction of the Jamuna Bridge, which connects the north-west with Dhaka.

"The main driver is good roads and transportation. Before the Jamuna Bridge, there was not much commercial farming in the Bogura

regions. And after the construction of the Padma Bridge, commercial farming increased in southern and south-western regions," Ahmed added.

Analysts said commercial farming has increased farmers' incomes and helped many small growers come out of poverty. However, challenges remain.

A diagnostic study on Bangladesh agriculture co-authored by Mahabub Hossain, Abdul Bayes and Prof SM Fakhrul Islam identified a number of problems faced by the country's small and marginal farmers.

These include limited market access due to small production volumes, high post harvest losses, inadequate storage and transportation, lack of cold chain facilities, food quality and safety problems, and inadequate credit.

The working paper also identified a lack of processing facilities and low output prices.

"Marketing is the main problem. Fair prices for farm produce must be ensured," said former BIDS research director Asaduzzaman.

The salient features of agricultural product markets are poor infrastructure, with a lack of storage and processing facilities, poor roads and communication, and unfair practices of middlemen, according to a diagnostic study on domestic agriculture.

"Marginal and small farmers are often facing the problem of marketing their products and are not getting fair prices due to the existence of trade syndicates," it added.

The paper, published by the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), said that in Bangladesh, small farms account for 96 percent of operational holdings with a share of 69 percent of cultivated area.

"Most poor farmers are not linked to markets for a variety of reasons: remoteness, low production, low farmgate prices, and lack of information, to name a few," it added.

Bayes said small farmers are key players, and they are responding to market demand. So, their issues must be addressed.

FOOD SAFETY CONCERN

However, the growing commercialisation of farming has created concerns about food safety and quality. Post-harvest management and quality assurance are other issues to increase agricultural production.

The BIGD paper said horticultural crops in Bangladesh are prone to heavy doses of contamination with toxic chemicals, foodborne bacteria and pathogens due to exposure to indiscriminate spraying of chemicals.

"As high-value product value chains are more demanding in food safety and quality standards, greater attention is required for certification and quality enforcement for both inputs and outputs, and for adherence to quickly changing standards," it added.

IFPRI's Ahmed said small and fragmented landholdings limit farmers' ability to invest in modern technologies and achieve economies of scale.

Furthermore, limited access to affordable credit and insurance restricts farmers' capacity to take risks and adopt high-value crops or improved production practices.

Additionally, weak agricultural extension services and a lack of updated market information prevent farmers from making informed production and marketing decisions.

Despite these challenges, he said, there are significant opportunities for promoting commercialisation.

"Growing domestic demand for diversified and high-value food products, such as poultry, vegetables, fruits and flowers, creates strong market incentives," he said. "Advances in technology, including improved seed varieties, mechanisation, and digital platforms for market access, can enhance productivity and profitability."

The BIGD working paper said government initiatives and support will be required to develop marketplaces, market outlets and farmers' groups.

It highlighted that credit facilities would be required to promote private initiatives for small and medium-scale agribusinesses in processing and packaging.

"Formation of farmers' groups with enhanced access to credit will be needed to encourage their direct participation in marketing. A fair price for agricultural crops and products must be ensured," it added.

IFPRI's Ahmed said the increasing role of the private sector, including contract farming, input supply companies and agri-processing industries, offers pathways for integrating smallholders into modern value chains.

Also, strengthening farmer organisations and cooperatives can further improve their bargaining power and market access.

"Finally, Bangladesh's strategic geographic position offers opportunities for regional trade expansion, particularly in south and southeast Asia."

Rafiz said the cost of farming has increased over time.

"Farm labour is becoming scarce. The land lease cost has risen, too. When we go to Karwan Bazar to sell our produce, we have to spend extra on extortion. This must stop," he added.

PHOTOS: PALASH KHAN, RASHED SHUMON

