



"The time has come for real and effective international action to stop this historic injustice and ongoing tragedy which has become a disgrace to humanity."

Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas urges action on Gaza

YOUR RIGHT
TO KNOW

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জগদুর স্বৈর সম্ভাব্য

আমরা কৃতজ্ঞ, আমরা পরিচিত
সমৃদ্ধি ও সম্ভাবনার মধ্যে একসাথে পেরিয়েছি ৩২ বছর! আশ্চর্য ও ভরসায় আমরা
ছিলাম আপনার পাশে, সবসময়।
আগমনী দিনগুলোতেও আধুনিক ব্যাংকিং সেবায় পাশে থাকার প্রতিশ্রুতি নিয়ে
আমরা আছি, থাকবো, সেই একই ভরসায়।

AC COMM/2025

Private airlines caught in a bind

10 pvt carriers operated over the past 3 decades, now only 2 running

RASHIDUL HASAN

Bangladesh's private airline industry is struggling to stay afloat, hobbled by soaring fuel prices, punitive surcharges, and what operators describe as unfavourable policies.

Of the 10 private carriers that have entered the market over the past three decades, only two – US Bangla Airlines and Air Astra – remain in operation.

Novoair, which plans to resume flights on May 21 after weeks of suspension, stares into financial distress, underscoring the perilous state of the sector.

Industry insiders say the sector is being systematically undermined by outdated rules, excessive fees, and a lack of government support, even as international carriers tighten their grip on the market. Foreign airlines now control roughly 75 percent of passenger traffic, leaving local operators to battle for a shrinking share.

"Foreign carriers are thriving in Bangladesh's aviation market while the local ones are in a sorry state. This is mainly because the country's aviation policy is not conducive to the industry's growth," said Kazi Wahidul Alam, an aviation analyst.

REASONS FOR LOCAL AIRLINES' FAILURE

- Exorbitant fees, surcharges
- High jet fuel prices
- Shortage of skilled manpower
- Poor planning, flawed marketing policy
- Wrong selection of aircraft, routes

Currently, 39 foreign carriers operate flights to and from Dhaka, compared to only three Bangladeshi airlines, including Biman. A total of 1.24 crore passengers travelled from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport last year, compared to 1.16 crore in 2023, shows CAAB data.

Asked why local

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2



AIRLINE

NUMBER OF AIRCRAFT | YEARS IN OPERATION

AIRLINE	NUMBER OF AIRCRAFT	YEARS IN OPERATION
Aero Bengal	2	1997-1998
Air Parabat	3	1998-2000
GMG Airlines	8	1998-2012
Royal Bengal Airlines	1	2007-2008
United Airways	11	2007-2016
Best Air	2	2008-2009
Regent Airways	6	2010-2020
Novoair	5	2013-May, 2025 (SUSPENDED)

SHAMMO KILLING
DU students
want arrest of
'real killers',
safe campus

Issue 48-hour
ultimatum

DU CORRESPONDENT

Protesting students at Dhaka University yesterday issued a 48-hour ultimatum for the arrest of the "real perpetrators" behind the murder of fellow student and Chhatra Dal leader Shahriar Alam Shammo, as demonstrations continued for a third straight day.

They also demanded justice for Shammo, a fair trial, and a safe campus.

Around 11:00am yesterday, the agitated students gathered at the base of the Raju Sculpture and staged a protest where they made the announcement.

Under the banner of "General Student Community of Bangladesh", approximately 200-300 students marched towards Shahbagh Police Station.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Jagannath University students stage a hunger strike yesterday afternoon at Kakrail intersection, on the third day of their demonstration, to press home their four-point demand. Inset, JNU VC Prof Rezaul Karim gives water to students who broke their hunger strike last night after it was announced that the government has agreed to meet their demands.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON, RAKIB MADBER



Thousands thronged the capital's Manik Mia Avenue yesterday to show solidarity with the 'Narir Dake Moitree Jatra' programme, which called for unity, vigilance, and collective resistance in the face of injustices against women everywhere.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

'Will not back down on our rights'

Thousands of women march for equality, justice

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Several thousand women marched in the capital yesterday, demanding that the government act against the threats women and minority communities face and a misinformation campaign against the Women's Affairs Reform Commission.

The government must also take steps against the use of religious values to instil fear, they said.

The demonstrators gathered in front of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban on Manik Mia Avenue in the afternoon and then began the "Women's March for Solidarity".

Garment workers, house staff, indigenous and Dalit women, students, teachers, sex workers, and members of the hijra and gender-diverse communities united in their call for justice, dignity, and equality.



The demonstrators demanded that political parties clearly state their policies on the rights of women, workers, and minority communities.

Among their key demands was a mandatory 33 percent representation of women in upcoming elections.

They also urged that the interim government take immediate steps to empower women and marginalised communities through education, healthcare, and economic initiatives.

The declaration was read out by Sharmin Akter, wife of July uprising martyr Mamun Mia; Shamsi Ara Zaman, mother of slain journalist Tahir Zaman Priyo; and Jayanti Chakma, an indigenous community representative.

"Rights are not granted; they must be claimed -- and we are not afraid to claim them," read the

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

Country heading in right direction

Yunus tells The Economist

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh is moving in the right direction despite the challenges created by the disruptive rule of the Awami League-led regime, which was ousted last year in a popular uprising, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus told The Economist.



The interim government, which took charge after the fall of the regime, is trying to "fix everything that has been destroyed" during the 16-year-long autocratic rule of Sheikh Hasina, said the report published Thursday.

According to the report, Yunus likened the Awami League rule to a continuous "earthquake".

"We're moving in the right direction, and the people are with us. We are hopeful," he was quoted in the report,

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

JNU protests called off

Govt assures students, teachers of meeting their demands

JNU CORRESPONDENT

Students and teachers of Jagannath University called off their protest last night after receiving assurances from the government that their demands would be met.

Prof Rais Uddin, general secretary of JNU Teachers' Association, made the announcement at Kakrail intersection, the protest site, in the capital around 8:30pm, three days after the start of the demonstrations.

All the activities of the university will resume tomorrow, he said moments after University Grants Commission Chairman Prof SMA Fair visited the site and said the government accepted their demands.

The development came hours after the students began a mass hunger strike at 3:30pm to press home their four-point demand. The students and teachers have been protesting since Wednesday.

Sources in the teacher and student protesters said the government has decided to increase the budget allocation for Jagannath University to Tk 251 crore and has sanctioned an additional Tk 20 crore for the construction of a temporary residential hall. It also assured that the construction of a second campus would be prioritised under a fast-track project.

The UGC chairman, along with Jagannath University Vice Chancellor Prof Rezaul Karim, ended the students' hunger strike by offering them water.

The protesters said they would hold a press briefing soon to give their reaction.

Talking to the protesters in Kakrail, the UGC chairman said the commission worked tirelessly throughout the day to address the students' concerns.

SEE PAGE 12 COL 4



SHAMBHU ACHARYA'S SOLO EXHIBITION

Art that carries years of legacy

REHNUMA SHAHREEN

Though the first thing you notice right after entering might be the colours, since they are vibrant, generous, full of life, but there is something more, the scent of something older might carry you away.

Not incense, not paint, but time.

Time cooked down into lines and pigment, and tradition passed through generations. At Galleri Kaya, the solo exhibition of Shambhu Acharya, a name well known in the world of patachitra, surrounds you with artworks that seem to make you forget you're standing in a contemporary space and not a room pulled out of Bengal's own memory.

Patachitra, literally meaning "cloth painting", is a traditional art form rooted in folklore, mythology, and rural life. While many artists practice the form today, what makes Acharya's work feel different is not just the technique but the reverence. Even calling him an artist feels slightly off, it's like calling a monk a craftsman. The process, for him, seems almost like prayer, and that devotion translates into the emotion and storytelling of each work.

It's in the way the colours are made from scratch, pigments ground from brick, seeds, stone, sometimes even riverbed soil. The thickening agent? Extracted from tamarind seeds. The brushes? Made of goat's hair. "Some strokes in these paintings are not possible without these special brushes," Acharya said simply.

Among the vibrant narratives of patachitra, a quiet form of storytelling stood apart, kushthichitra, the artist shifts into monochrome, abandoning the vivid palette for earthier, ink-based minimal tones. One visitor said, "The reason why I like patachitra is these are done using a technique which is our very own traditional technique, using



PHOTO: COURTESY

all natural and handmade colours. Another intriguing thing about this exhibition was kushthichitra, I have never seen these artworks before."

Drawn at the time of a child's birth, especially in Hindu families, a kushthi records more than just name and lineage. It maps the planets, stars, and

celestial alignments at the moment of arrival, a visual document of fate. "Just like we keep records of land or property, a kushthi is the document of a person's life," said Acharya. "It tells the story from birth to midlife to death, following the astrology we've had for generations." If the newborn is a girl, she appears in the

painting; if a boy, then he. The kushthi scroll, though visually simpler than the patachitra, carries a quiet weight, attempting to tell a life before it even unfolds.

Acharya belongs to a legacy more than 450 years old, making him the ninth generation in a family of traditional artists. He didn't so much choose this path as he was born into it, long before he even learned to write the alphabets. As a child, he would drag leaves across walls and scratch bricks onto floors just to see the trace they left. The fascination with colour, its possibility and presence was always there.

That same respect for process runs through the entire exhibition, each on display paints vivid scenes from folklores, mythology and rural life, bride carried on a boat, women fetching water from river, two friends braiding each other's hair, a flute player casting a glance toward a woman and many more.

One of the visitors, Abdullah Bin Amir summed it up, "I really liked the idea about doing artworks on our folktales. It's rare to see. I personally like folklore and tales, and how the artist represented mythical characters in a traditional form, it was more than amazing. Not modernised, not abstract, just raw and true to the tradition".

These days when art is often rushed, modernised and soaked in factory made colours, Acharya's work stands a part with his honesty, devotion and tradition it carries. Both his son and daughter are picking it up slowly, the strokes, the stories, the little rituals that shaped him. And maybe that's what stays with you the most, not just that this art has lasted nine generations, but that it's still alive, still breathing, and still being passed gently, hand to hand.

DU students want

Private airlines caught in a bind

FROM PAGE 1

Taking position outside the station premises, demanded the immediate arrest of all those involved in the murder case, a fair trial, and a safe campus.

During this time, police were on alert in front of Shahbagh Police Station.

Mashirul Rahman Shuvo, a postgraduate student of the Institute of Education and Research, said that if the real perpetrators are not arrested within 48 hours, they will announce their next course of action on Sunday.

According to the students, a delegation of teachers, including Muhammad Abdus Salam, Asim Das, and Sirajul Islam from the Institute of Education and Research department, along with four student representatives, entered the station for discussions.

One of the protesters, Ibrahim Munshi, told The Daily Star, "This is a non-partisan banner. Various political parties are now politicising Shammo's death. But our main demand is justice for Shammo's murder."

When contacted, Shahbagh Police Station Officer in Charge (OC) Khalid Mansur told The Daily Star, "A delegation of teachers and students came to speak with us. ADC Mir Asaduzzaman of our Ramna Zone spoke with them."

The teachers and students have presented their demands. We informed them that we have arrested three individuals. They will be brought on remand. The investigation is ongoing, and operations are underway. All those involved in the murder will be arrested soon."

Around 1:30pm, the students left the police station area.

Shahriar Alam Shammo, 25, was stabbed to death on Tuesday night near Sutrawardy Udyan. The protests began on DU campus after the killing.

A group of DU students, including leaders and activists of JCD and left-leaning student organisations, under the banner of Students Against Terrorism, have been protesting over the killing.

Shammo was the literature and publication affairs secretary of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal's Sir AF Rahman Hall unit and a student of the 2018-19 session at the Institute of Education and Research.

The victim's brother has filed a case with Shahbagh Police Station. The DU administration has formed an investigation committee regarding the murder.

So far, police have arrested three outsiders in connection with the case. They have been sent to jail via a court order.

Shahbagh Police Station Sub-Inspector Tawfique Hasan said case investigators would seek a 10 day remand of the three arrestees.

HIGH FEES, SURCHARGES

Surcharges on outstanding fees for local airlines can accumulate up to 72 percent a year, said aviation experts.

In India, the annual surcharge is between 12 and 18 percent; in Pakistan, it's only 2 percent; in Singapore 8 percent; and in Oman 10 percent.

AOAB has been demanding that the government fix the surcharge at a reasonable rate, scrapping the monthly rate of 6 percent.

"Once you fall into the surcharge trap, it becomes nearly impossible to turn things around," said Kamrul Islam, spokesperson for US Bangla Airlines.

In recent years, GMG Airlines, United Airways and Regent Airways grounded their fleet as surcharge dues kept mounting.

Regent Airways, the latest private airline to cease operations in 2020, owes Tk 283 crore in surcharge; United Airways Tk 355 crore; and GMG Airlines Tk 368 crore, shows CAAB data.

Aircraft landing and parking fees here are also significantly higher than that in many other countries.

Giving an example, Kamrul said the landing fee for a Boeing plane is Tk 15,000 at Kuala Lumpur airport. But if

the same plane lands at Dhaka airport, the charge is Tk 2.50 lakh.

HIGH JET FUEL PRICE

Since jet fuel accounts for 40-50 percent of an airline's operational costs, high fuel prices render commercial operations of local airlines uncompetitive, said aviation industry insiders.

In Bangladesh, jet fuel price stood at \$0.76 per litre in the second week of May, while it was \$0.49 in Singapore; \$0.50 in Malaysia; \$0.51 in Qatar and Thailand; \$0.53 in Oman; and \$0.58 in China.

"Major carriers like Emirates and Singapore Airlines that operate long-range aircraft don't refuel at Bangladeshi airports because of high fuel prices. Local airlines, on the other hand, have no option but to buy fuel at prices 20-30 percent higher than that in the global market," Imran noted.

Jet fuel prices here are not determined by free market dynamics or best practices, such as assessments by independent price reporting agencies, which help prevent arbitrary pricing, he added.

Moreover, local airlines pay a 42.62 percent duty to buy jet fuel for domestic flights whereas the duty is below 4

percent in India, said Mofizur.

LACK OF SKILLED MANPOWER, WRONG STRATEGY

Local private airlines largely rely on former employees of Biman and Bangladesh Air Force to build their workforce as the country still lacks infrastructure to train and produce skilled aviation professionals.

These ex-employees constitute the majority of the local airlines' workforce, including pilots, technicians and engineers, said Imran.

"The current situation is far from favourable for the aviation industry. A strong, competitive aviation sector cannot be built without state-backed training facilities," he added.

ATM Nazrul Islam, an aviation expert who worked for several private airlines, said the now-defunct airlines pursued flawed marketing strategies, and most of them chose unsuitable aircraft and also wrong routes.

To support his argument, he cited the GMG Airlines' purchase of a 540-seater Boeing 747 for operating flights on Dhaka-Dubai route which proved commercially unviable.

No Bangladeshi airline will survive beyond a certain period unless it pays

attention to proper planning and market analysis, he noted.

WHAT THE REGULATOR SAYS

CAAB Chairman Air Vice Marshal Md Monjur Kabir Bhuiyan said the fees for local airlines have not been increased in recent years.

Asked about high surcharge, he said it becomes applicable only when an airline doesn't pay fees.

"The civil aviation ministry fixes surcharge. We just follow it. As far as I know, they are considering reducing surcharges. Besides, we have taken steps to cut various types of fees, including landing and cargo charges. The ministry will make the final decision."

About the claim that the regulator's policy is unfavourable to private airlines, Kabir said that there are no rules or regulations that go against private carriers.

Referring to high jet fuel prices, he said CAAB has already conveyed the matter to the government agencies concerned.

"We have made every effort to help the aviation sector thrive... If any airline cannot survive due to administrative problems or financial difficulties, there is nothing we can do," he added.

Country heading in right direction

FROM PAGE 1

which tried to paint a picture of the current situation in Bangladesh.

Noting that optimism is necessary, the report, however, highlighted the "tricky" situation the interim government is facing in implementing the reforms that stakeholders of the uprising agreed upon.

Since Sheikh Hasina's ousting, allegations of widespread corruption and abuse have surfaced, including claims that \$16 billion was siphoned annually and serious charges like murder and genocide, all of which the ex-PM denies.

While political parties are united in demanding democratic reforms to prevent such abuses from recurring, the report said bringing out "big changes" and the political consensus needed for those have proved challenging for the Yunus-led government.

The report said reform efforts began soon after Sheikh Hasina fled to India. In September, Yunus formed several commissions, staffed by civil society and academic experts, to propose changes in areas like elections, the judiciary, and the constitution.

To coordinate the reforms, the government also set up a national consensus commission, which compiled 166 recommendations so far, with input from at least 35 political parties, said the report.

The goal is to produce a "July Charter" that would enable elections and mark the start of a "new Bangladesh", Yunus was quoted in the report.

But consensus is hard to build, the report said, noting differences among

the stakeholders about the scope and priority of these commissions.

"The biggest controversy has been sparked by a commission that was formed belatedly on women's reform. Its recommendations included changes to Islamic inheritance law that give women greater rights and have sparked mass protests by Islamist parties," the report said.

However, progress has been made, claimed some in the government.

Quoting Ali Riaz, vice chair of the consensus commission, the report said an independent process for appointing judges to the High Court has been set in motion.

Ali Riaz said the second round of dialogue with political parties will begin after May 15th, and a final charter is expected by August.

If that happens, elections could be held as early as December, said the report. Yunus has pledged to hold polls no later than June 2026 and says he won't take part in it.

Yet, the delay is taking a toll, The Economist said. The interim regime has steadied prices and the banks, but growth remains weak, it added.

"And the political situation is fragile. According to one survey, nearly 60 percent of those polled believe that law and order have not improved since the regime change. Protests on the street have become routine," the report read.

Heeding demands from various stakeholders of the uprising, the election commission has suspended Awami League's registration on May 12, banning it from contesting any elections.

Ukraine reports loss of another F-16 fighter jet

AFP, Kyiv

Ukraine's air force said yesterday it lost another US-made F-16 fighter jet, a significant blow as the aircraft have provided precious help to Ukrainian forces fighting Russia's invasion.

Kyiv has not said how many of the warplanes it has received, but this is at least the second confirmed loss of the Western-supplied jets.

The air force said it lost contact with the F-16 early yesterday during a manoeuvre to repel a Russian attack.

"The pilot ejected safely, the air force said, adding it appointed a commission to investigate.

In August 2024, Kyiv said that an F-16 had crashed while repelling a Russian missile attack, killing its pilot.

In April 2025, Russia said it downed an F-16. Ukraine did not confirm, but said pilot Pavlo Ivanov was killed during a combat mission.

This is a setback for Ukraine, which has counted on F-16s to intercept missiles and target Russian warplanes.

UN 'alarmed' by new Tripoli violence

AFP, Tripoli

The United Nations expressed deep concern Thursday over new unrest in Libya's capital, warning the clashes risk mass displacement and endangered civilians.

Heavy gunfire and explosions in Tripoli late Monday killed at least six people, according to authorities. Clashes flared again Wednesday in key areas including Tripoli's port, in what a security source called "urban warfare".

Fears of more violence lingered Thursday.

The International Organization for Migration called for a halt to hostilities.

The UN body said it was "alarmed by the recent escalation of violence", highlighting the "severe risk of mass displacement and danger to civilians".

Turkey, which backs the Tripoli-based government, said it was evacuating its nationals from the North African country.

Libya has remained deeply divided since the 2011 Nato-backed revolt that toppled and killed longtime leader Moamer Gaddafi.

The country is split between a UN-recognised government in Tripoli, led by Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah, and a rival administration in the east controlled by the Haftar family.

DHAKA



Govt sincere in developing telecom, IT sectors: CA

BSS, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus yesterday said the interim government is sincere in developing country's telecommunication and information technology (IT) sectors and it has ensured transparency and accountability in all the activities of these sectors.

The chief adviser made the comments in his message given on the eve of World Telecommunication and Information Society Day, which is to be celebrated in the country

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

Prices of rice, veggies drop in Dhaka markets

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prices of several rice varieties, summer vegetables, and broiler chicken have fallen over the past week in kitchen markets across the capital, while onion prices remained steady and potatoes saw a slight increase.

During visits to wholesale and retail markets in Karwan Bazar, Farmgate, Ibrahimpur, Shewarpara, Kazipara and Mirpur-II yesterday, traders and consumers witnessed the downward trend in prices.

Kamal Hossain, proprietor of Mokbul Rice Agency in Mirpur-II, said the fall in rice prices is due to the arrival of new harvests. "Last week, minikit rice of different brands was sold at Tk 75-90 per kg. Yesterday, I sold them at Tk 72-85," he said.

He said BR-28 and BR-29 varieties dropped to Tk 58-60 per kg from Tk 62-64 last week. However, the price of Nazirshail and coarse rice remained unchanged, retailing at Tk 75-92 and Tk 54-56 per kg respectively.

Summer vegetables, including eggplants, gourds, pointed gourds, okra, long beans, tomatoes, bitter gourds, and ridge gourds, are now selling at Tk 30-70 per kg.

Mozammel Hossain, a vegetable trader at Karwan Bazar, said prices dropped by up to Tk 10 per kg in a week, largely due to an abundant supply.

Sazzad Hossain, a shopper at the same market, said he bought a small sized gourd at Tk 30, down from Tk 40 the previous week. "I also bought other vegetables and a 2kg broiler chicken. Prices seemed slightly lower overall," he added.

Traders said broiler chicken was being sold at Tk 150-170 per kg yesterday, down by Tk 10 from last week. The price of Sonali chicken, however, remained unchanged at Tk 240-280 per kg.

Meanwhile, onion prices held steady, with local varieties selling at Tk 55-60 per kg at retail and Tk 48-52

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6



200 held in joint operations

Says ISPR

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 200 people were arrested across the country during joint force operations over seven days between May 8 and May 14, the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement yesterday.

In coordination with other law enforcement agencies, Bangladesh Army carried out operations in Dhaka and other parts of the country as part of efforts to maintain law and order situation.

Among those arrested were murder suspects, illegal arms holders, listed criminals, smugglers, members of juvenile gangs, illegal sand extractors, tree cutters, drug dealers and addicts, and brokers involved in illicit activities, the release said.

Ten illegal firearms, 87 rounds of ammunition, 11 bombs, narcotics, locally made weapons,



Students take position in front of the Shahbagh Police Station yesterday, demanding immediate arrest of all those involved in the murder of Dhaka University student Shahriar Alam Shammo, a fair trial, and a safe campus.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

A move to mitigate waterlogging in Ctg

Illegal CCC building on Chaktai Canal demolished

SIFAYET ULLAH, Ctg

A four-storey building illegally constructed by the Chattogram City Corporation (CCC) on occupied land of the Chaktai Canal in Bahaddarhat has been demolished, marking a significant step towards restoring the port city's natural waterways.

The move is expected to help ease long standing waterlogging in the area and aid in returning the canal to its original state.

As part of the ongoing waterlogging mitigation project being implemented by the Chattogram Development Authority (CDA), the building was recently demolished, project officials confirmed.

The CCC had built the 793 square-foot structure – used as the revenue office of circle 2 – right in the middle of Chaktai Canal, one of the key drainage channels of the port city for over two decades, without obtaining clearance from the CDA.

A 2016 report by the Chattogram District Administration identified the CCC as one of the entities encroaching on the canal.

The report, obtained by The Daily Star, stated that around 48 illegal structures, including residential flats, tin-shed houses, business establishments, and warehouses, were constructed on approximately 20,000 square feet of canal land, severely choking the waterway.

The 6.9km-long Chaktai, starting from the Bahaddarhat point of the city and spanning to the Karnaphuli river, has shrivelled up noticeably due to rampant

encroachment over the years.

According to the RS survey, the width of the canal used to be about 65 feet, while the BS survey mentioned it to be 61 feet. But only 10 to 30 feet can be seen now, according to the DC office report.

During a recent visit to Bahaddarhat, this correspondent observed that debris from the demolished building, including concrete and bricks, still remains at the site.

Meanwhile, the contractor of the

Kamrul Islam Chowdhury, estate officer of the CCC, confirmed that the CDA carried out the demolition. "But we did not receive any compensation for this building as it was built on canal land," he added.

The construction work for the waterlogging mitigation project is being implemented by the 34th Engineer Construction Brigade of the Bangladesh Army.

Lt Col Md Ferdous Ahmed, the project director, said, "We have already removed the structure



waterlogging mitigation project titled "Re-excavation, Expansion, Renovation, and Development of Canals to Alleviate Waterlogging in the City," has installed steel pilings along the canal bank to construct a protective retaining wall.

"Due to the construction of the building, the canal had turned into a narrow drain, and for years, even light rainfall would cause waterlogging in the area as proper drainage through the canal was obstructed," said local businessman Abir Ahmed.

from the canal. Since it was built on illegally encroached land, we were not required to provide any compensation to the CCC."

The other structures built on the canal will be demolished also as part of the drive to free up the waterbody, said officials.

The CDA is implementing the project to address the city's waterlogging, involving the excavation and renovation of 36 canals.

Election likely between Dec and June

Says CA's press secretary

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam yesterday said the next general election is likely to be held between December and June.

"All advisers, including the chief adviser, are working towards that goal," he said.

While speaking to journalists during a visit to the Magura Press Club, the press secretary also said the people of the country have expressed satisfaction in the decision related to Awami League, noting that the public's expectations regarding the party have been met.

"The country is on the right track. Law and order has improved... it's better than before," Shafiqul added.

He said reform efforts are underway in sectors where necessary. "Major reforms have already been introduced in the economy, with more to come," he noted.

Regarding political reforms, Shafiqul said the consensus commission held several meetings, concluding its work on May 15.

"Some are becoming impatient, but we believe our work remains focused and is progressing at the right pace in the right direction," the press secretary added.

Regarding media freedom, Shafiqul said the government is not only advocating for freedom of speech but also working to ensure a dignified life for those working to uphold press freedom.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7



Women take part in a performance art to raise awareness about the various challenges and injustices girls and women face in the country. This was part of the 'Narir Dake Moitree Jatra' programme that took place on Manik Mia Avenue yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

DEATH IN RAB CUSTODY

2 years on, no justice for Sultana Jasmine

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

due to torture in Rab custody," he alleged.

Jasmine had no criminal cases against her at the time of her detention. However, she was sued under the controversial Digital Security Act a day after being

detained by Rab over two years ago.

No criminal case has been filed over her death, and a High Court rule questioning the legality of Jasmine's detention by Rab remains unresolved.

The delay in settling the legality of the detention stems from the reconstitution of the hearing jurisdiction of the HC bench that issued the rule, followed by the refusal of two other benches to proceed with the hearing.

Jasmine was picked up and detained by Rab on March 22, 2023, and died two days later at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital while still in Rab's custody.

picked up allegedly for "siphoning off money from job seekers through a Facebook account".

On April 5, 2023, following a petition filed by Supreme Court lawyer Manoj Kumar Bhowmick, the HC bench of Justice Farah

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

Verdict in Magura rape case today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The verdict in a case filed over the rape and murder of an eight-year old girl from Magura is set to be delivered today.

Judge M Zahid Hasan of the Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal in Magura is scheduled to announce the judgement around 9:30am, said Public Prosecutor Monirul Islam Mukul.

The court set the date on May 13 after hearing arguments from the prosecution and the defence, he added.

The four accused are Hitu Sheikh, the father in law of the victim's sister; his wife, Jaheda Begum; their son, Sajib Sheikh, who is the victim's brother-in-law; and Sajib's brother, Ratul Sheikh.

Hitu was charged with rape and murder, Sajib and Ratul were charged with criminal

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

Those opposing polls by Dec must explain why Says BNP leader Nazrul Islam

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Those who want to delay the next parliamentary polls must explain the rationale behind their decision, said BNP standing committee member Nazrul Islam Khan yesterday.

"Why postpone the people's right to vote? If some parties need time to organise or build alliances, that should not hinder the election," he said at a discussion organised by the Bangladesh Labour Party at Jatiya Press Club.

Citing the Labour Party's call for a December election, Nazrul said BNP supported the same timeline. "Those opposing this must clearly explain why the election cannot be held by December. The

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

EID-UL-AZHA

19 cattle markets to be allowed in Dhaka

BSS, Dhaka

Authorities yesterday said they are set to allow 19 makeshift cattle markets within the purviews of Dhaka north and south city corporations on the occasion of the upcoming Eid-ul-Azha.

According to officials concerned, 10 of the cattle trading stations would be set up within the purview of Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) and nine others under the range of Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC).

The DNCC and DSCC officials said they have floated open tenders to allocate the space for the cattle markets under lease agreements for five days.

They said the city corporations will not allow any makeshift cattle market outside the designated places.

"We have [so far] received bidders' responses for setting up seven makeshift cattle markets under our jurisdiction," said DSCC Chief Executive Officer Dr M Zillur Rahman.

The officials said due to a court directive, the popular markets at Aftabnagar and Meradia would not be allowed this year.



A group of youths jumps off an anchored cargo ship and dives into the Kirtankhola River. Amid rising temperatures, swimming in natural water bodies like rivers and ponds is the only way for many to beat the heat. The photo was taken in the Band Road area of Barishal city yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Touchstone statue recovered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Rab recovered a Vishnu idol made of touchstone at a house at Dandapal Matiapara village in Panchagarh's Debiganj upazila on Thursday.

In this connection, Rab arrested a man named Abu Bakar Siddique, 29, of Pamuli Madarerjhar village under the upazila.

According to a Rab press release, the idol is 32 inches tall, 13.5 inches wide, weighs 13.5kg, and is valued around Tk 1.5 crore.

A case was filed with Debiganj Police Station against Abu Bakar, said Inspector (Investigation) Probir Sarker.

Rain, labour

FROM PAGE 5

Extension, said Boro paddy was cultivated on 185,460 hectares in the district this season, and around 90 percent of it has already been harvested.

"The rest could have been harvested quickly, but due to rain and lightning, there has been some delay," he said.

He said out of 1,004 harvester machines in the district, 734 are currently operational. However, with fewer crops left in

the fields, many machines have moved to nearby upland areas. As a result, farmers are having to rely on labourers, who are now demanding higher wages.

Netrokona has set a paddy production target of 1,262 million tonnes this season, with an estimated market value of over Tk 4,543 crore. However, due to natural disasters and a shortage of machinery, around 15 percent of the district's farmers may face financial losses.

Take steps to stop

FROM PAGE 5

ensured for people involved in cattle trading, along with measures to facilitate their safe movement.

Farida also criticised the imposition of commercial electricity tariffs on the fisheries and livestock sectors. Unlike agriculture, these sectors do not benefit from equivalent subsidies, causing hardship for small-scale farmers. She said she had already sent a demis-official (DO) letter to the Ministry of Finance urging

address. Additionally, she announced plans to introduce development projects specifically targeting women who rear livestock, aiming to promote inclusive economic growth.

Dhaka North City Corporation Administrator Mohammad Azaz and Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB) Director General Faruk Wasif were among those present at the meeting.

Incorporate the youth in policymaking

Speakers tell event

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Youths should be included in the state's policymaking process to ensure sustainable development across all sectors, said speakers at a seminar in Khulna yesterday.

They noted that the July uprising was led by youths, whose talents, knowledge, and spirit have yet to be fully utilised.

The seminar, titled "The Future Thoughts of Youths, The Future Bangladesh," was organised by Jubo Dal, Swchchabeshab Dal, and Chhatria Dal at the Khulna Press Club.

Speaking as the chief guest, BNP Standing Committee Member Salahuddin Ahmed called for a "need-based education policy" to improve the skills and knowledge of young people.

He also said the implementation of BNP's 31-point state reform proposal is essential for the country's overall progress.

Barrister Andaleeb Rahman Partha, chairman of Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP), said the responsibility of upholding citizens' fundamental

rights lies with politicians.

"If we have good people as politicians, we will enjoy those rights -- just like you can have good food if you have a good cook," he said.

Fahim Mashroor, founder of BDJobs, said third-language education should be made compulsory at the college level to prepare students for the international job market.

"Along with Bengali and English, students should learn an additional language of their choice," he added.

Dr Sayem Mohammad, senior consultant at AMZ Hospital; Dr Azizul Haque, associate professor at the Medical University of South Carolina, USA; Dr Maruf Mallik, political analyst and lecturer at DW Akademie, Germany; Rezaul Karim Rony, editor of Jaban; Dr Shamima Sultana, professor at Jahangirnagar University; and Dr Toufique Jowardar, associate professor at the National University of Singapore, also spoke.

Mahdi Amin, adviser to BNP acting chairperson Tarique Rahman, moderated the event.

Two killed in lightning strikes in two districts

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Two persons were killed in lightning strikes in Lalmonirhat and Kurigram yesterday morning.

The deceased are Safiari Rahman, 58, a betel trader of Patgram upazila; and Chameli Rani, 42, a farmer of Ulipur upazila.

Patgram Police Station's Officer-in-charge Swapna Kumar Sarkar said Safiari was struck by the lightning while he was on way to his shop from his house. He died on the spot.

Meanwhile, Ulipur Police Station's OC Zillur Rahman said Chameli went to bring her cows from the field as it was raining in the morning.

But she died when lightning hit the area at that time.

6 killed, 40 injured

FROM PAGE 5

Banani Police Station Sub-inspector Md Sohel said the incident occurred around 2:30am in front of the Naval Headquarters.

The woman suffered critical injuries and was found lying on the road.

On information, police rescued her and took her to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) around 4:00am, where doctors declared her dead.

The body was kept at the hospital morgue for an autopsy, confirmed DMCH police camp in-charge Inspector Md Faruk.

Police said efforts are underway to identify the deceased. The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) has been informed, and fingerprint analysis is being conducted to help confirm her identity.

Authorities are also reviewing CCTV footage from the area to trace the vehicle responsible for the accident, said SI Sohel.

In Gopalganj, two people were killed and at least 20 injured in a road accident on the Dhaka-Kulna highway in Sadar Dakshin upazila of Cumilla on Thursday night.

The identity of the deceased could not be

Govt sincere

FROM PAGE 3

today with the theme "Gender Equality in Digital Transformation", an official release said.

"I am delighted to learn that World Telecommunication and Information Society Day is going to be celebrated on May 17 in Bangladesh like elsewhere in the world," he added.

The chief adviser said, "Equal participation of men

confirmed immediately.

Following the crash around 9:00pm, vehicular movement on both sides of the busy highway came to a halt until 10:45pm. Traffic resumed afterwards.

Quoting locals, Kashiani Police Station OC Khondokar Hafizur Rahman said the accident took place when a Dhaka-bound truck collided head on with a New Baleswar Paribahan bus coming from Khulna.

Police and firefighters sent the injured to Kashiani Upazila Health Complex and Gopalganj 250-bed General Hospital, he added.

In Cumilla, two motorcycle riders were killed as an unidentified vehicle hit their bike on the Dhaka-Chattogram highway in Sadar Dakshin upazila of Cumilla on Thursday night.

The deceased were identified as Shakil Hossain, 22, son of Md Salam from Mohammadpur in Dhaka; and Saeed Shimul, 24, son of Peyer Ahmed from Chhagalnaiya upazila in Feni. Both riders died on the spot, said Mainamati Crossing Highway Police Station OC Iqbal Bahar.

The incident took place in Jor Kanon area around 10:15pm, he said.

200 held in joint

FROM PAGE 3

stolen mobile phones and passports, smuggled sugar and spices, unauthorised medicines, and cash were recovered during the operations.

They were handed over to local police stations for

and women in all the sectors of digital transformation and utilisation of telecommunication service and IT, is a prerequisite for building a discrimination-free and modern society."

Yunus said the interim government is committed to ensure equal opportunities and rights for men and women in all the segments of digital transformation by upholding the spirit of July mass uprising.

2 years on, no justice

FROM PAGE 3

Mahbub, who is now elevated to the Appellate Division, and Justice Muhammad Mahbub Ul Islam issued a rule.

The court

asked the

authorities concerned to explain why Jasmine's detention without any prior case should not be declared illegal.

The HC also asked them to show causes as to why they should not be directed to take action against the Rab members

who had detained her.

It also directed the cabinet

secretary to form a high-

powered probe committee.

Rab's then director general M Khurshid Hossain told the parliamentary standing committee on April 5, 2023, that Jasmine's "murder" had "tarnished the image of the country, Rab, and the government," acknowledging the involvement of the local Rab camp.

Contacted, Md Nazmul Haque Mantu, maternal uncle of Jasmine, said over the phone that no one was held accountable and put on trial over Jasmine's death in Rab's custody.

He said Jasmine had no charges against her before she was picked up.

"I didn't file any case over her custodial death because the High Court had already issued a rule," he said.

LEGAL NOTICE

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF BANGLADESH, HIGH COURT DIVISION
(STATUTORY ORIGINAL JURISDICTION)

COMPANY MATTER NO. 646 OF 2025

IN THE MATTER OF:

An application under Section 81(2) read with Section 85(3) & Section 396 of the Companies Act, 1994.

AND

IN THE MATTER OF:

Md. Shawkat Hossain, son of Late Mohabbat Ali, Shareholder and Managing Director of Maple Leaf Hotel & Resorts Ltd., registered address at Plot-01, Rad-01, Uttara-01, Dhaka.

—VERSUS—

The Registrar, Joint Stock Companies and Firms, TCB Bhaban (6th Floor), Kawran Bazar, Dhaka-1215 and another.

—RESPONDENTS—

The Registrar, Joint Stock Companies and Firms, 1, Kawran Bazar, 6th Floor, TCB Bhaban, Dhaka-1215.

Notice is hereby given that an application under Section 81(2) read with Section 85(3) and Section 396 of the Companies Act, 1994 was filed before the Hon'ble High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh by the petitioner for permission of the said Hon'ble Court to hold Annual General Meeting for the year 2021, 2022, 2023 & 2024 of Maple Leaf Hotel & Resorts Ltd., registered address at Plot-01, Rad-01, Uttara-01, Dhaka, incorporated on 04/08/2013, upon closure of the financial year 2020.

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6 killed, 40 injured in road accidents

STAR REPORT

Six people were killed and 40 others injured in four districts during the last two days, according to reports from our correspondents and a news agency.

In Bandarban, a man was killed and at least 20 others were injured after a car plunged into a ravine in Alikadam upazila yesterday morning.

The accident occurred around 11:00am near Jobiram Para in the Kolarjhiri area of the upazila, said police.

The deceased was identified as Thoingya Mro, 25. All passengers onboard the vehicle were members of the Mro community and residents of the same village.

At least 20 others were injured in the accident, 10 of whom sustained critical injuries. They were sent to Cox's Bazar Christian Memorial Hospital for advanced treatment. The remaining injured are undergoing treatment at the Alikadam Upazila Health Complex, confirmed Mirza Zahid Uddin, officer-in-charge of Alikadam Police Station.

"The B-70 jeep [the car] lost control and fell about 50 feet down the hill... Police and fire service personnel reached the scene, and further details are being gathered," the OC added.

According to eyewitness, Menwai Mro, who was also attending the wedding, the car was en route to a wedding ceremony in Menpa Mro Para of Kolarjhiri from Tongpong Mro Para.

The vehicle was carrying 34 people, most of them women and children, which was far beyond its capacity.

In Dhaka, an unidentified woman was killed after being hit by a vehicle in the capital's Banani early yesterday, reports UNB.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

BNP's politics now runs on AL money

Says Hasnat Abdullah

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cumilla

Hasnat Abdullah, chief organiser (South) of the National Citizen Party (NCP), yesterday claimed that the politics of the BNP is now being funded by the Awami League.

"We have managed to ban the activities of the Awami League, but their financial network is still out of reach," he said as chief guest at an event held in Cumilla, in honour of injured and martyred of the anti-discrimination student movement.

Hasnat said, "Just as the politics of many upazilas in Cumilla is run by Awami League money, similarly, BNP's politics is also now financed by the Awami League. Those who are BNP leaders here, please don't consider us your enemies. I'm saying this for your own good. There are many upazilas in Cumilla where the politics of all parties has now been sold out to Awami League's money."

Pointing at Law Adviser Asif Nazrul, he said, "Those involved in the murders are out on bail, walking beside the families of martyrs. This is not only the government's failure but also the failure of Sir Asif Nazrul."

Hasnat said, "If the interim government thinks there are bigger reforms than the trials of the killers and the Awami League, they are mistaken. Justice for the killers is the first and foremost reform of this interim government." The event was organised by the District and Metropolitan Students Against Discrimination and was attended by leaders from various political parties, including NCP, BNP, Khelafat Majlis, Islami Andolon Bangladesh, and the AB Party.

MAHESHKHALI CHANNEL

LGED building jetty without BIWTA approval



MOKAMMEL SHUVO

Ignoring objections, the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) in Cox's Bazar is constructing a jetty in and on the foreshore of the Maheshkhali Channel, the most important waterway in South Chattogram that flows into the Bay of Bengal.

The unauthorised structure, built without a proper feasibility study, has raised serious concerns over siltation that may eventually fill up the channel.

For the project, LGED felled thousands of mangrove trees along the channel's bank.

Brig Gen (retd) M Sakhawat Hossain, adviser to the Ministry of Shipping and Labour, expressed dissatisfaction during a visit to Cox's Bazar on April 24, noting that the jetty was erected without approval from the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) and involved illegal tree felling.

Nayan Shil, deputy director (Port) of BIWTA, said the Maheshkhali Channel plays a critical role in draining water from South

Chattogram to the Bay of Bengal and is now at risk of sedimentation due to LGED's unauthorised construction.

"We had sent them a letter to stop the work when it started. But the government body didn't pay heed to our objection," said Nayan, who was earlier posted in Cox's Bazar. He said a new letter is being prepared to halt the construction.

"If anyone wants to construct anything on a river, water channel or its foreshore, they must take approval from BIWTA. LGED didn't take our permission. They violated the rules," he said.

A recent visit to the site revealed ongoing piling work in the channel and foreshore, with thousands of mangrove trees already cut at Gorokhata area of Maheshkhali upazila.

Though LGED is building the jetty in the main channel, there is an older jetty about 300 metres inside the Gorokhata canal, connected to the channel and close to the new construction site.

Mohammad Boni Amin, upazila engineer of LGED in Maheshkhali, said the under-construction jetty is 700 metres long and 7.3 metres wide, with a 300-metre connecting road. The Tk 36.48 crore project began in April 2023.

"The foundation work has been completed. The old jetty is only 10 feet wide while ours is 24 feet. This project is for the public interest of the area," Boni Amin said.

The mangrove trees were planted during the 2003-04 fiscal year to form a natural coastal protection barrier. On July 31, 2023, the Coastal Afforestation Division, Chattogram, sent an objection letter to the LGED office in Cox's Bazar stating that prior approval from the environment ministry is mandatory for cutting such trees.

Mamun Khan, executive engineer of Cox's Bazar LGED, said they took permission from the Forest Department but not from BIWTA. He also claimed the jetty would not cause sedimentation in the channel.

The engineer could not confirm whether a feasibility study was conducted before starting the jetty's construction.

Mohammad Boni Amin, upazila engineer of LGED in Maheshkhali, said the under-construction jetty is 700 metres long and 7.3 metres wide, with a 300-metre connecting road. The Tk 36.48 crore project began in April 2023.



A local fisherman collects shrimp fry using a net in a river adjacent to the Sundarbans in Khulna. Each day during high tide, he sets up the net and lifts it just before low tide to gather the shrimp fry. He collects around 600 to 800 fry daily and sells each bundle of 1,000 fry for Tk 2,200-2,500. The photo was taken from the Sutarkhali River in Kalabagi, Dacope upazila recently.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

NETROKONA'S UPLANDS

Rain, labour shortage delay paddy harvest

JAYDUL ISLAM

While paddy harvesting in the haor regions of Netrokona has been completed, farmers in the district's non-haor areas are still facing severe difficulties due to equipment shortages, natural disasters, and lack of labour.

The non-haor regions, make up of roughly 144,385 hectares of cultivated land.

Many farmers from villages in Sadar, Barhatta, and Purbadhalia upazilas expressed concern to this newspaper during a visit on Thursday.

Fazlul Haque, a farmer from Uradighi village in Barhatta upazila, said the persistent rain had disrupted his harvest.

"Because of the rain, I couldn't harvest all my paddy. It's all ripe now. But there's a shortage of harvester machines. We can't find labourers either, and the few that



are available are charging very high wages," he said.

Md Sekandar Ali, a farmer from Khatib Nagua village in Netrokona Sadar upazila, said two boys from their village were struck by lightning while fishing in the rain.

"Now the workers are afraid to

go into the fields. And the rain just won't stop. Most of the harvesters have also moved to other areas," he added.

Mohammad Nuruzzaman, deputy director of the Netrokona District Department of Agricultural

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Man held with 2,820 yaba pills at Dhaka airport

UNB, Dhaka

A man was arrested with 2,820 pieces of yaba tablets hidden in his stomach at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, said Airport Armed Police Battalion yesterday.

A case has been filed under the Narcotics Control Act with the Airport police in this connection.

On information, the arrestee, Hossain Ahmed, 60, was detained near the northern side of the airport's Balaka building after arriving in Dhaka from Cox's Bazar on Biman Bangladesh domestic flight BS 152 on Wednesday.

Upon questioning, Hossain admitted to carrying yaba pills inside his stomach.

He was taken to the airport medical unit, where an X-ray revealed 30 capsule-shaped objects in his abdomen.

He was later transferred to Kurmitola General Hospital, where, under medical supervision, he expelled 30 tape-wrapped packets through natural means. Inside the packets, a total of 2,820 yaba tablets were found.

Police said Hossain had long been involved in drug trafficking.

Airport Armed Police said over 16,000 yaba pills were recovered in separate recent drives, which led to the arrest of five other drug traffickers.



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Global acute hunger hits new high

UN-backed report says 2025 outlook 'bleak' as humanitarian aid falters

AFP, Paris

More than 295 million people faced acute hunger last year, a new high driven by conflict as well as other crises -- and the outlook is "bleak" for 2025 as humanitarian aid falters, a UN-backed report said yesterday.

It was the sixth consecutive annual increase in the number of people hit with acute food insecurity, according to the Global Report on Food Crises.

A total of 295.3 million people endured "high levels" of acute food insecurity last year in 53 of the 65 countries analysed for the report.

"From Gaza and Sudan, to Yemen and Mali, catastrophic hunger driven by conflict and other factors is hitting record highs, pushing households to the edge of starvation," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in the report.



"The message is stark. Hunger and malnutrition are spreading faster than our ability to respond, yet globally, a third of all food produced is lost or wasted," he said.

Conflict and violence were the primary drivers in 20 countries and territories, where 140 million people faced acute hunger, the report found.

Extreme weather was to blame in 18 countries and "economic shocks" in 15 nations, together affecting a total of 155 million people.

The report warned that the outlook was "bleak" for 2025 as major donor countries have substantially reduced humanitarian funding.

"This is more than a failure of systems – it is a failure of humanity," Guterres said.

"Hunger in the 21st century is indefensible. We cannot respond to empty stomachs with empty hands and turned backs," he said.



Democratic Alliance (AD) party leader and Portuguese Prime Minister Luis Montenegro gestures as he takes part in a street rally in Lisbon yesterday, on the last day of the electoral campaign ahead of the snap elections tomorrow.

PHOTO: AFP

Gaza suffering from a 'deliberate starvation'

Says Council of Europe, warns Israel sowing 'seeds for next Hamas' in the territory

AFP, Strasbourg

The Council of Europe yesterday said Gaza was suffering from a "deliberate starvation", and warned that Israel was sowing "the seeds for the next Hamas" in the territory.

"The time for a moral reckoning over the treatment of Palestinians has come – and it is long overdue," said Dora Bakoyannis, rapporteur for the Middle East at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

The 46-member Council of Europe works to safeguard human rights and democracy.

"No cause, no matter how just or pure, can ever justify every means," Bakoyannis said in a statement.

"The mass killing of children and unarmed civilians, the deliberate starvation, and the relentless pain and humiliation inflicted upon Palestinians in Gaza must end."

Since March 2, Israeli forces have blocked all humanitarian aid entering Gaza for its 2.4 million inhabitants, now threatened with famine, according to several NGOs.

US President Donald Trump said earlier yesterday that "a lot of people are starving" in the besieged territory.

Bakoyannis said that "it takes a smart and brave nation to recognise when its actions are causing more harm than good. What is unfolding in Gaza helps no one".

Breaking a two-month ceasefire, Israel resumed its offensive on March 18, with the declared goal of obtaining the release of all hostages still held in Gaza.

Israeli retaliation for Hamas' attack on October 7, 2023, has resulted in the death of 1,218 people on the Israeli side, mostly civilians, according to AFP data based on official figures.

UN rights office in 'very serious' financial situation

AFP, Geneva

The UN rights office based in Geneva says it is facing a dire financial situation amid deep US funding cuts, but its chief insisted there is no "panic".

News reports this week suggested that the funding chaos gripping the United Nations had left its human rights agency panicked over a dramatic budget shortfall.

"I have seen and read all sorts of unfounded rumours: that we are all moving to Vienna, that 70 percent of staff will move to the field except management," UN rights chief Volker Turk told a town hall meeting with staff on Thursday, according to excerpts seen by AFP.

"None of this is true."

Swiss daily Le Temps reported on Thursday that "a wind of panic" was sweeping over the agency, suggesting it was considering relocating away from pricy Geneva to Vienna, Nairobi and other sites.

Reports of mass layoffs and cuts to operations have become commonplace at UN agencies since US President Donald Trump's return to power in January.

Thai tycoon surrenders over skyscraper collapse

AFP, Bangkok

A Thai construction tycoon turned himself in yesterday to face charges of alleged negligence over the collapse of a skyscraper that killed dozens of people in a powerful earthquake, police said.

The 30-storey Bangkok tower crumbled in seconds, killing 89 people, mostly construction workers, when a magnitude-7.7 tremor hit neighbouring Myanmar on March 28.

The building being constructed to house the State Audit Office was the only structure to collapse in the Thai capital, raising serious concerns about safety standards and oversight.

A Thai court on Thursday issued arrest warrants for 17 people on charges of "professional negligence causing death".



A man holds placards as he yells toward a patrol car near a burning barricade during a protest against gang-related violence and to demand the resignation of Haiti's transitional presidential council, in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on Thursday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Repeal 'draconian decree' dissolving political parties

UN rights chief urges Mali

AFP, Geneva

The UN rights chief yesterday called on Mali to immediately repeal a decree dissolving political parties and to "fully restore political rights in the country".

The military government on Tuesday dissolved the west African country's political parties, according to a presidency decree, the latest attempt to clamp down on the opposition.

Opposition parties had feared the move for weeks, banding together into a hundred-party coalition to demonstrate in a rare act of open defiance since back-to-back coups in 2020 and 2021 brought the army to power.

"The Transitional President should repeal this draconian decree," UN rights chief Volker Turk said in a statement.

"Any restrictions of political participation must be consistent with

Mali's international human rights law obligations."

The UN rights office pointed to the arrests of at least three members of the opposition following protests sparked by the planned dissolution of political parties.

"Their whereabouts are currently unknown, the latest victims in a pattern of enforced disappearances that dates back to at least 2021," the statement said.

Turk called on "the transitional authorities to release those who have been arrested on politically motivated grounds and to fully restore political rights in the country".

"They must protect civic space and ensure an environment in which all people can enjoy all their rights, including the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly."

Two climbers die on Everest

REUTERS, Kathmandu

An Indian climber and another from the Philippines became the first mountaineers to die on Mount Everest in the current March-May climbing season of the world's highest peak, hiking officials said yesterday.

Subrata Ghosh, 45, from India, died on Thursday below the Hillary Step while returning after reaching the 8,849 metre peak.

"He refused to descend from below the Hillary Step," said Bodhrat Bhandari of Nepal's Snowy Horizon Treks and Expedition organising company. No other details were available.

The Hillary Step is located in the 'death zone', an area between 8,000-metre (26,250 ft) high South Col and the summit where the level of natural oxygen is inadequate for survival.

On behalf of Pidilite

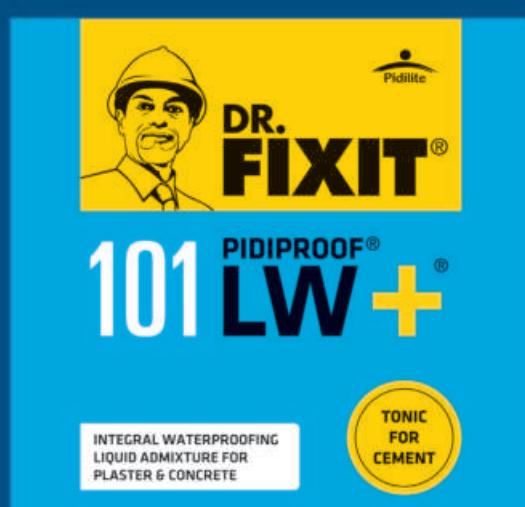
Mahdin Choudhury

Barrister-at-Law, Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh
Partner, Eden Chambers, 28/A (3rd Floor), Shegunbagicha, Dhaka-1000

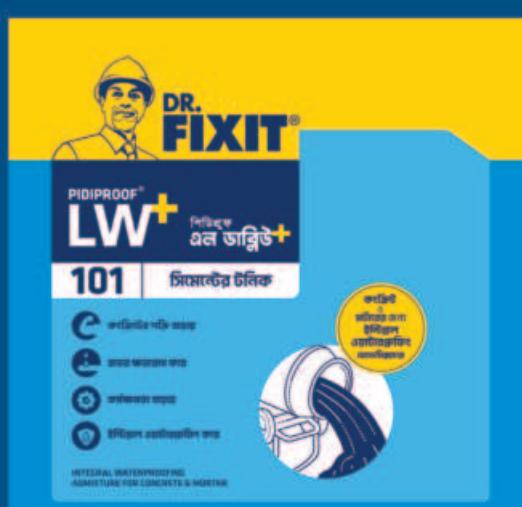


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On behalf of Pidilite

Mahdin Choudhury

Barrister-at-Law, Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh
Partner, Eden Chambers, 28/A (3rd Floor), Shegunbagicha, Dhaka-1000



SPYING ALLEGATION

Swedish envoy found dead in Stockholm

AFP, Stockholm

A Swedish diplomat arrested over the weekend in Stockholm on charges of spying and released days later has been found dead, media reported yesterday, with the foreign ministry confirming an employee had died.

The Swedish Security Service (Sapo) on Monday announced the arrest, but gave no details about the case or the suspect's identity. The following day, broadcaster SVT said the man arrested was a top diplomat.

On Wednesday, prosecutors released him from custody but said that he was still a suspect.

"We regret to confirm that a member of the foreign service has died. Out of consideration for the next of kin, we will not go into further details," the foreign ministry said in a statement to AFP yesterday.

Newspaper Expressen meanwhile reported that the man who had been found dead overnight was the one detained suspected of spying.



Palestinian men check burnt out vehicles in the Barkan Industrial area, near Salfit in the occupied West Bank, yesterday, after more than 17 Palestinian workers' cars were reportedly set on fire by Israeli settlers the night before.

PHOTO: AFP

Make a quick decision on American proposal

Trump urges Iran on nuclear deal, warns 'something bad will happen' otherwise

AFP, Abu Dhabi

US President Donald Trump said on Friday that Iran should make a quick decision on an American proposal for a nuclear deal or "something bad will happen".

Speaking in Abu Dhabi as he capped a Gulf tour, Trump said his administration had handed Iran a proposal for a deal, adding that "they know they have to move quickly or something bad is going to happen".

Meanwhile, Iranian senior diplomat Kazem Gharibabadi said yesterday that the latest status of the Iran-US negotiations was discussed during talks with European powers in Istanbul.

"We exchanged views and discussed the latest state of the indirect nuclear negotiations and the lifting of sanctions," said deputy foreign minister Gharibabadi in a post on X, adding that "if necessary, we will meet again to continue the talks."



On Thursday, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said that Tehran has no objection to US companies operating in the country, including in the oil and gas sector. "We have no ban on the economic presence of American companies in Iran," Araghchi said, attributing the lack of US business activity to primary sanctions imposed by Washington.

"This ban has been imposed by the United States itself," he said.

"If American companies wish to invest in Iran's economy, the US must lift its own primary sanctions." His remarks come after President Donald Trump said Washington was "getting close" to a new nuclear deal with Tehran to replace the one he abandoned during his first term in 2018.

The longtime foes have held four rounds of Omani-brokered negotiations since April 12 in their highest level of engagement since Trump's walkout effectively scuppered the 2015 deal.

Polio outbreak declared in PNG

AFP, Sydney

A polio outbreak has been declared in Papua New Guinea, sparking concern about the disease's spread in a country with low vaccination rates, health officials said.

Poliovirus, most often spread through sewage and contaminated water, is highly infectious and potentially fatal.

It can cause deformities and paralysis and mainly affects children under five years old.

The virus was detected in wastewater and environmental samples in the nation's capital Port Moresby and second largest city Lae, the World Health Organization (WHO) said.

'Concerned' over challenges to global trade: APEC

AFP, Jeju

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) group said yesterday that it was "concerned" over the challenges to global trade, as ministers from APEC countries met in South Korea in the shadow of growing woes from US tariffs.

Trade ministers from the top economies that make up APEC are meeting on South Korea's Jeju Island amid concerns for the global trading system since US President Donald Trump unveiled bombshell levies on most partners.

The United States is a key APEC member and was represented by Trade Representative Jamieson Greer, who held a series of bilateral meetings with nations eager to soften the blow of Washington's tariffs. "We are concerned with the fundamental challenges faced by the global trading system," trade ministers from the 21-member group, which includes China, said in a joint statement.

They urged greater cooperation, saying they "remain committed" to APEC as a means of "bringing us together to address the economic challenges facing our region".

South Korea's Minister for Trade, Cheong In-Kyo, said the joint statement was hard won, with "significant differences" in positions clear early on in the talks.

World Press Photo suspends credit for 'Napalm Girl' picture

AFP, Amsterdam

World Press Photo yesterday suspended the credit for who took one of the most iconic pictures in history, the Vietnam War image "Napalm Girl", after doubts were raised over the photograph's authorship.



The organisation, which awards one of the world's most prestigious photojournalism prizes, said it carried out its own investigation into the haunting 1972 photo -- which shows a nine-year-old girl fleeing naked from a napalm strike -- after the premiere of the film "The Stringer".

The documentary chronicles an investigation into rumours that the image, which helped change global perceptions of the US war in Vietnam, was taken by a little-known local freelancer, not the Associated Press (AP) staff photographer Nick Ut, who won a Pulitzer Prize for the photo.

Israel intercepts missile from Yemen

AFP, Jerusalem

The Israeli military said it intercepted a missile fired from Yemen on Thursday evening and air raid sirens sounded in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

The attack was claimed by Yemen's Houthi rebels. It was the third time in as many days that Israel's air defences intercepted a missile that the military said was fired from Yemen.

The Iran-backed Houthis said in a statement that they had targeted Tel Aviv's international airport. "Following the sirens that sounded a short while ago in several areas in Israel, a missile that was launched from Yemen was intercepted," an Israeli military statement said.



Campaigners for a change in the law on assisted dying hold placards outside The Palace of Westminster, home to the Houses of Parliament in central London, yesterday, as amendments to the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill are due to be debated in the House of Commons.

DETAINED PEOPLE France sues Iran at top UN court

AFP, Paris

Paris has filed a case against Tehran at the top UN court over two French citizens who have been held in Iran for three years, the French foreign minister said yesterday.

The announcement comes as Iranian negotiators met with their counterparts from the UK, France, and Germany in Turkey.

Cecile Kohler, a 40-year-old literature teacher from eastern France and her partner Jacques Paris, in his 70s, were arrested on May 7, 2022, on the last day of a tourist trip to Iran.

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Russia deliberately hit journos' hotels in Ukraine: NGOs

AFP, Paris

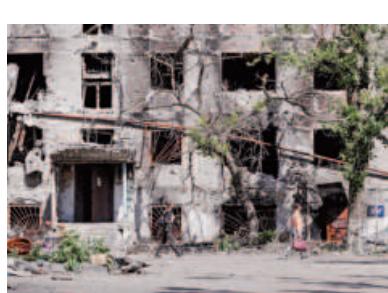
Russia has deliberately targeted hotels used by journalists covering its war on Ukraine, the NGOs Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and Truth Hounds said yesterday, calling the strikes "war crimes".

At least 31 Russian strikes hit 25 hotels from the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022 to mid-March 2025, the two organisations said in a report.

One attack in August 2024 in the eastern city of Kramatorsk killed a safety adviser working with international news agency Reuters, Ryan Evans.

The hotels hit were mostly located near the front lines, the organisations said.

Just one was being used for



been injured," they said.

At least 15 of the strikes were carried out with high precision Iskander 9K720 missiles, they said, condemning "methodical and coordinated targeting".

"The Russian strikes against hotels hosting journalists in Ukraine are neither accidental nor random," Pauline Maufrais, RSF regional officer for Ukraine, said in a statement.

"These attacks are part of a larger strategy to sow terror and seek to reduce coverage of the war. By targeting civilian infrastructure, they violate international humanitarian law and constitute war crimes."

RSF says 13 journalists have been killed covering Russia's invasion, 12 of them on Ukrainian territory.



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Better protections for migrant workers vital

HRW report on migrant deaths in KSA raises fresh alarm

Only the other day, we ran an editorial on the stream of coffins carrying migrant workers home. Activists have long questioned the official narrative that most of these deaths resulted from "natural causes"—stroke, brain haemorrhage, heart attack, etc—highlighting that the deceased were often not old enough to have had serious pre-existing health issues. According to one estimate, 4,813 bodies of migrant workers were brought back in 2024 alone. Unfortunately, these bodies are not re-autopsied upon arrival, leaving question marks about the true causes of death, especially amid allegations of abuse and exploitation in a number of destination countries, especially in the Middle East.

Now, an investigation by Human Rights Watch (HRW) has added fresh urgency to these concerns, revealing that migrant workers from Bangladesh, India and Nepal died in gruesome yet preventable workplace-related accidents in Saudi Arabia. It has also confirmed the suspicion that many such deaths are classified as "natural," and are neither investigated nor compensated as employers often evade their obligation under Saudi law that requires them to bear the costs of repatriation of the remains. For instance, HRW has found that the "No Objection Certificate" given to a Bangladeshi worker who died of "electrocution" marked the possibility of compensation as "no," with the cause of death as "not available." His son revealed that his employer had said that they would get compensation if they agreed on a burial on Saudi soil, which they rejected, and therefore had to pay more than Tk 5 lakh to repatriate the body, leaving them in debt.

Similarly, the families of nine deceased Bangladeshi workers have told HRW that their employers offered lump sum payments or coverage of monthly expenses provided that the dead are buried in Saudi Arabia, which most rejected despite their dire economic conditions. It goes without saying that the circumstances surrounding such deaths and the cruelties of employers or Kafils (sponsors) only add to the agony of surviving family members. The accounts provided by HRW also offer horrifying details about the deceased. Some died after falling from buildings due to lack of safety gear; some were crushed under heavy machinery or concrete blocks; others were electrocuted or fatally injured while operating unfamiliar equipment. In one case, a worker was decapitated when a machine was accidentally turned on. These are not isolated tragedies but symptoms of a systemic failure to ensure even the most basic protections for workers.

Saudi Arabia's General Organization for Social Insurance—funded not less by a two percent salary contribution—provides mandatory coverage for work-related injuries and deaths. But the families HRW spoke to said that accessing this was a long, uphill battle and often tied to local burials. Moreover, employers often do not pay overdue wages and end-of-service benefits. This state of affairs is totally unacceptable. We urge the government to take the HRW report with the seriousness it deserves. It must engage with Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, to ensure proper compliance of their own laws as well as better safety protections and social security for our workers. These rights violations cannot go on indefinitely.

Stern actions needed to save our ECAs

Protect Sonadia Island from the encroachment of shrimp enclosures

Despite being declared an Ecologically Critical Area (ECA) in 2006, the Sonadia Island in Cox's Bazar continues to suffer massive environmental destruction. Clearly, the existing High Court orders and government directives to protect the area have gone unheeded as local land grabbers, backed by political actors emerging after the 2024 mass uprising, continue to destroy the island's mangrove forests for shrimp farming.

The nine-sq-km island hosts a rich ecosystem, including endangered green turtles, red crabs, 250 fish species, 170 bird species, dolphins, foxes, monitor lizards, fishing cats, and a wide variety of plant species. However, a recent *Prothom Alo* report revealed that over 1,000 acres of mangrove forest on the island—including around one lakh *keora* and *bain* trees—were burnt overnight using petrol to build seven new shrimp enclosures.

This continues a long and troubling legacy of shrimp-related encroachments in Sonadia. During the Awami League's rule, more than 3,000 acres were cleared for 37 shrimp farms. While AL leaders were accused of enabling the deforestation before the party's fall in August, locals now blame Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leaders for the recent clearing. But if you ask, leaders of both parties would deny any involvement. What's worse, the state itself has also been complicit. In 2017, the then government leased over 8,000 acres of forestland and 2,700 acres of ECA to the Bangladesh Economic Zone Authority (BEZA) for a supposed eco-tourism project. To date, no eco-tourism facilities exist. In November 2024, the High Court stayed the lease and ordered the local administration to stop tree felling and shrimp farming on the island.

Despite this, the number of shrimp farms now stands at 44. In April, two interim government advisers, during their visit to the area, instructed local authorities to evict illegal enclosures, yet no action followed. Forest officials cite a lack of manpower and the threat posed by armed guards hired by shrimp enclosure owners. Local environmentalists allege that vested interests across the board are benefiting from the farms and thus resist enforcement. Under these circumstances, issuing orders is not enough. The government must take firm action to ensure compliance. It must empower the Forest Department with adequate staffing, resources, and financial incentives, and engage local communities in the process of protecting biodiversity. We cannot lose an ecologically delicate and biodiverse island to the monoculture of shrimp farming.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

School segregation outlawed in US

On this day in 1954, lawyer Thurgood Marshall scored a landmark victory as the US Supreme Court unanimously ruled in *Brown vs Board of Education of Topeka* that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional.

EDITORIAL

Time to forge a strategic consensus on national interests



Dr Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir is professor in the Department of Development Studies at the University of Dhaka.

RASHED AL MAHMUD TITUMIR

The mass uprising of 2024 marked a pivotal moment for us to forge a lasting consensus on national interest and security. Yet, this imperative remains marginal in public discourse, despite its foundational importance in today's shifting global and regional contexts. Throughout history, nations that have charted sustainable paths have done so by cultivating a strategic culture. In its absence, stability and developmental progress risk faltering.

Bangladesh has already missed at least two critical junctures to build such a consensus. The first came after the 1971 Liberation War, when the powerful unity of the time could have been harnessed to establish a robust national security framework grounded in the principles of sovereignty, equality, and justice. The second opportunity came in 1991, after the fall of dictatorship, when this crucial task was left unfinished despite the restoration of democracy.

Now, a third window of opportunity has opened. It is incumbent upon our political parties to embrace and work on this vital agenda, grounding their approach in the principles of *strategic autonomy* (the capacity to make independent decisions) and *developmental deterrence* (the assurance of peace, stability, and rights) as the bedrock of progress.

The July Charter, therefore, must incorporate a clear commitment that, following the elections, all political parties will work collaboratively towards establishing a national consensus on our core interests, national security policies, and the institutional frameworks needed to uphold them—including the formation of a National Security Council. Consensus on national interests cannot remain abstract; it must be institutionalised through a strategic culture.

Strategic culture
Strategic cultures are not born of inertia. They are forged in moments

of crisis, conflict, or transformation. After its 1962 defeat to China, India reorganised its defence posture, moving beyond a purely Gandhian ethos to a deterrence-based policy grounded in self-reliance. China, over decades, has defined its core interests with clarity: supremacy of the Communist Party, territorial integrity, sovereignty, and developmental continuity.

Across the Atlantic, the United States has consistently framed its national interest through strategic doctrines—from Monroe to Truman—tying economic prosperity to geopolitical dominance. After the trauma of 1940, France reasserted its sovereignty under de Gaulle, withdrawing from NATO's military command in 1966 while acquiring independent nuclear capability.

Post Meiji Japan prioritised industrialisation and national consolidation. Vietnam, emerging from colonialism and war, placed reunification and socialist reconstruction at the heart of its strategic identity. Indonesia rooted its national security in the Pancasila, an indigenous philosophy integrating moral and ideological values.

These cases affirm that it is often

moments of rupture that compel nations to define their interests, and that strategic culture must extend far beyond military doctrine, encompassing education, diplomacy, and development planning.

Strategic autonomy and developmental deterrence

For Bangladesh, the path forward lies in building a national security

advantages but risks subordinating Bangladesh's long-term interests to the strategic calculus of a more powerful partner. Such an approach can quickly erode autonomy, especially if regional priorities shift or diverge.

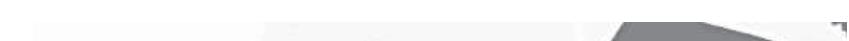
The second—leaning towards a superpower—offers the allure of economic or security dividends but can entangle Bangladesh in geopolitical rivalries, compromising its ability to pursue independent goals.

The third—a balancing act—seeks to navigate among competing powers to extract benefits while avoiding full alignment. Though seemingly pragmatic, this approach requires agile and nuanced diplomacy. Without a coherent domestic strategic framework, it risks becoming reactive and inconsistent.

The fourth and most sustainable path is an independent, mutually inclusive strategy, one anchored in national priorities and the aspirations of the people. This approach fosters equitable, respectful relations with all nations while upholding sovereignty in domestic and foreign policies. It demands strong political consensus, normative legitimacy rooted in the ideals of the Liberation War, and a clearly articulated vision of Bangladesh's role in the world. A coherent framework could guide our actions in multilateral forums, trade negotiations, climate diplomacy, and global development partnerships, thus projecting a distinctive strategic identity.

Institutionalising national security
The July uprising reaffirmed the nation's agency, and to honour this moment, all political parties must commit, through the July Charter, to defining and institutionalising national interests. By doing so, Bangladesh can reconcile its past, stabilise its present, and secure its future.

History offers a compelling lesson: nations that clearly define their fundamental interests are more likely to survive and thrive; those that effectively institutionalise these interests are better positioned for sustained prosperity and global influence. A cohesive and inclusive national security framework, built on consensus and a clear understanding of our strategic destiny, is undoubtedly the way forward for Bangladesh.



VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

architecture grounded in strategic autonomy and developmental deterrence. This is not deterrence in the classical, militaristic sense, but a strategic doctrine that ensures stable conditions for unimpeded development.

Singapore's modernisation of its defence capabilities—not for aggression, but to safeguard its economic trajectory—offers a telling example.

Bangladesh must capitalise on its demographic dividend and strategic location in the Bay of Bengal. A peaceful and prosperous Bay—the largest in the world—should be central to its foreign policy vision, while defence policy must ensure credible deterrence. Amid Indo-Pacific rivalries and regional instability (e.g. conflicts in Myanmar), strategic autonomy will help Bangladesh navigate such complexities without entanglement.

Four scenarios of engagement
Imagine four scenarios of engagement: aligning with a neighbour; leaning towards a superpower; pursuing a balancing act; and adopting an independent, mutually inclusive strategy.

The first—aligning with a neighbour—may bring tactical

Underinvestment threatens our demographic dividend



Shafa Tasneem is research associate at the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM). She can be reached at shafa.tasneem211@gmail.com

SHAFIA TASNEEM

Bangladesh has roughly 15 years left to enjoy its first demographic dividend. But have we been able to connect all the necessary dots of developing our human capital to harness the benefits of this unique opportunity? According to the Human Capital Index by the World Bank, if a child is born in Bangladesh, they will be 46 percent productive even if they grow up enjoying complete education and full health. This percentage is lower than the South Asian and Lower Middle Income Countries' (LMIC) average of 48 percent. The youth employment scenario is not satisfactory either. According to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey 2022, around 22 percent of the youth in Bangladesh are not in education, employment or training (NEET). The crisis is more pronounced among the female youth as they comprise 65.5 percent of the total unemployed population.

The major challenge lies in prioritisation of the policies and the lack of consistent follow-up mechanisms. It is seen that while Bangladesh could make some notable achievements by focusing on the "low-hanging fruits," we could not harvest our "high-hanging fruits" much.

In the education sector, the country has attained notable success in primary school enrolment rate, achieving gender parity at the primary and secondary levels and distributing free textbooks countrywide. According to the Annual Primary School Census 2021, the net enrolment rate in primary education is 97.42 percent, with girls comprising 49.54 percent of the total enrolled. Targeted interventions like the

1993 Compulsory Primary Education Act, Food for Education, Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP) and stipend programmes contributed to this success. Along with the government interventions, a major role in this success was played by the

immunisation, reducing maternal mortality through initiatives like the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI). The initiatives were largely supported by external funding and targeted, vertical programmes. However, core systemic issues persist. We have high out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure, a critical shortage of skilled healthcare professionals, urban-rural disparities, and a growing burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Bangladesh has only 0.7 physicians per 1,000 people, which is lower than WHO's recommended minimum of 1:1000. Combined with the lowest health

Bangladesh needs to spend more on capacity-building to improve human capital, like training, research, and hiring more skilled professionals, rather than heavily investing in building infrastructure. Rather than focusing on achieving quick wins, we need to undertake structural, high-impact reforms to avoid stagnation despite early successes.

development partners and NGOs.

On the other hand, due to a lack of timely and long-term planning, the quality of the education system has not improved much. The Human Capital Index found that the learning outcomes are severely low, especially in rural areas, reflected by 51 percent of the children not being able to read and understand a simple text by age 10. This results from a lack of deeper, systematic investment and reforms. Lack of investment is evident from the national budget. Bangladesh's education budget as a percentage of GDP has consistently hovered around or below two percent over the last 15 years, significantly falling short of UNESCO's recommended minimum investment of six percent of total GDP.

The healthcare sector shows a similar pattern. Bangladesh has had significant achievements in child

spending among 45 Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in 2021, this limits the country's ability to effectively tackle critical issues like malnutrition, urban health, NCDs, and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH). To fully benefit from its demographic window, Bangladesh must ensure a healthy, skilled, and productive population through stronger, sustained investments in healthcare systems, cross-sectoral collaboration, and long-term strategic planning, which currently lack adequate prioritisation and follow-through.

In an attempt to find the impact of government prioritisation in human capital, we conducted a study titled "Impact of Government Investment in Human Capital on Harnessing Bangladesh's Demographic Dividend." Considering employment growth

as an indicator for demographic dividend, the study attempted to find out whether government spending on human capital influences employment growth both in the short and long terms for Bangladesh. In the short run, increasing government spending on education leads to a significant immediate boost. For every unit increase in education spending, there is a 5.39 unit improvement, while in the long run, the impact is slightly smaller (0.24 units increase). Similarly, a one unit rise in healthcare spending results in a 10.38 unit rise in employment growth. However, there is a negative long-run effect of healthcare spending (-6.28 units).

The study result echoes the existing literature highlighting that while education and health spending yield quick returns in employment, sustaining that impact over time may require deeper structural reforms and higher investments. Without well-targeted planning, the long-term impact on employment growth will be diminishing. To improve education quality in Bangladesh, it is essential to increase national budget allocations for teacher training, curriculum update, and enhancement of employability of graduates from both tertiary and technical and vocational education systems. For health, increasing the budget in public healthcare services, hiring more nurses and doctors, emphasising nutrition for children, etc needs a much bigger focus.

Overall, Bangladesh needs to spend more on capacity-building to improve human capital, like training, research, and hiring more skilled professionals, rather than heavily investing in building infrastructure. Rather than focusing on achieving quick wins, we need to undertake structural, high-impact reforms to avoid stagnation despite early successes. A clear roadmap, political commitment, and evidence-based policymaking, along with higher public spending, are essential to translate short-term gains into sustainable development.

Men's fear and women's 'just rights'



Anu Muhammad
is former professor of economics at
Jahangirnagar University.

ANU MUHAMMAD

"Whenever the question of women's rights arises, excuses like religion or culture are used to stop it. Why?" This question was asked by a young woman from a Catholic family in Argentina. On another occasion, the same question came from a Sudanese Muslim woman. I am sure the same question exists in the minds of countless women in Bangladesh, too.

Everywhere—in homes, on the streets, in religious places—a number of men are eager to bring up religion whenever a women's issue comes up. Often, we come across many men who are not religious themselves but try to use religion or culture to oppose women's choices of clothing, lifestyle, occupations, etc. Regardless of their connection to religion, most men's justifications tend to converge when it comes to women. This is evident across various faith systems not just in Bangladesh but across the world.

In the current Muslim inheritance law, the person who seems disadvantaged when a woman gains equal rights is the man, primarily the brother(s). If there is no brother, then the uncle(s) and their sons on the father's side get a portion of the father's property instead of the daughter(s) getting all of it. But were all those who started the panic over equal property rights just these brothers and uncles? It doesn't seem so. Many in those crowds have daughters of their own. If their daughters get equal rights, what is their problem? Not many who protested equal inheritance rights have much property. What is this constant fear about, then, when it comes to women's rights? Or are they being used as pawns by interest groups?

In Muslim family law, the reason for a woman's smaller share of property has been that the man or men in the family would bear her full responsibility. But if this assumption no longer holds true, why won't today's religious scholars be open to updating the interpretations? In several countries—Turkey, Iraq, Tunisia, Morocco—religious scholars have taken steps to revise the law.

In Hindu and Buddhist societies, the tradition used to be giving a woman wealth or dowry during marriage. Sons inherited the father's property, daughters didn't get any share. Now, in India, equal inheritance rights for women and men have been provided legally. But in Hindu-Buddhist minority families in

Bangladesh, girls are still deprived, which is justified using religion.

In Bangladesh, the number of families where men provide for women is rapidly decreasing. In fact, among the poor, a significant number of households are run by women. In middle- and upper-class families, more and more women are working. Many women now carry the responsibility of financially supporting their families. Some argue that since women get a share from both their father's and husband's properties, they already receive more. However, after receiving a large share of inheritance from his father, doesn't a man also keep an eye on his wife's property?

It's often assumed that all adult women are married, that their marriages are stable, and that they receive all their legal rights. But, research, field observations, and lived experiences show none of these are fully true. Unmarried, divorced or widowed women are excluded from these considerations.

There has been many cases where the inheritance that married women receive from their fathers exists only on paper. Most women still lack a stable place of their own. In some cases, their husbands pressure them to bring property from their fathers, while their brothers pressure them not to take it. If a woman takes her full share, she risks losing her connection with her natal family—the right to return, visit, or be loved.

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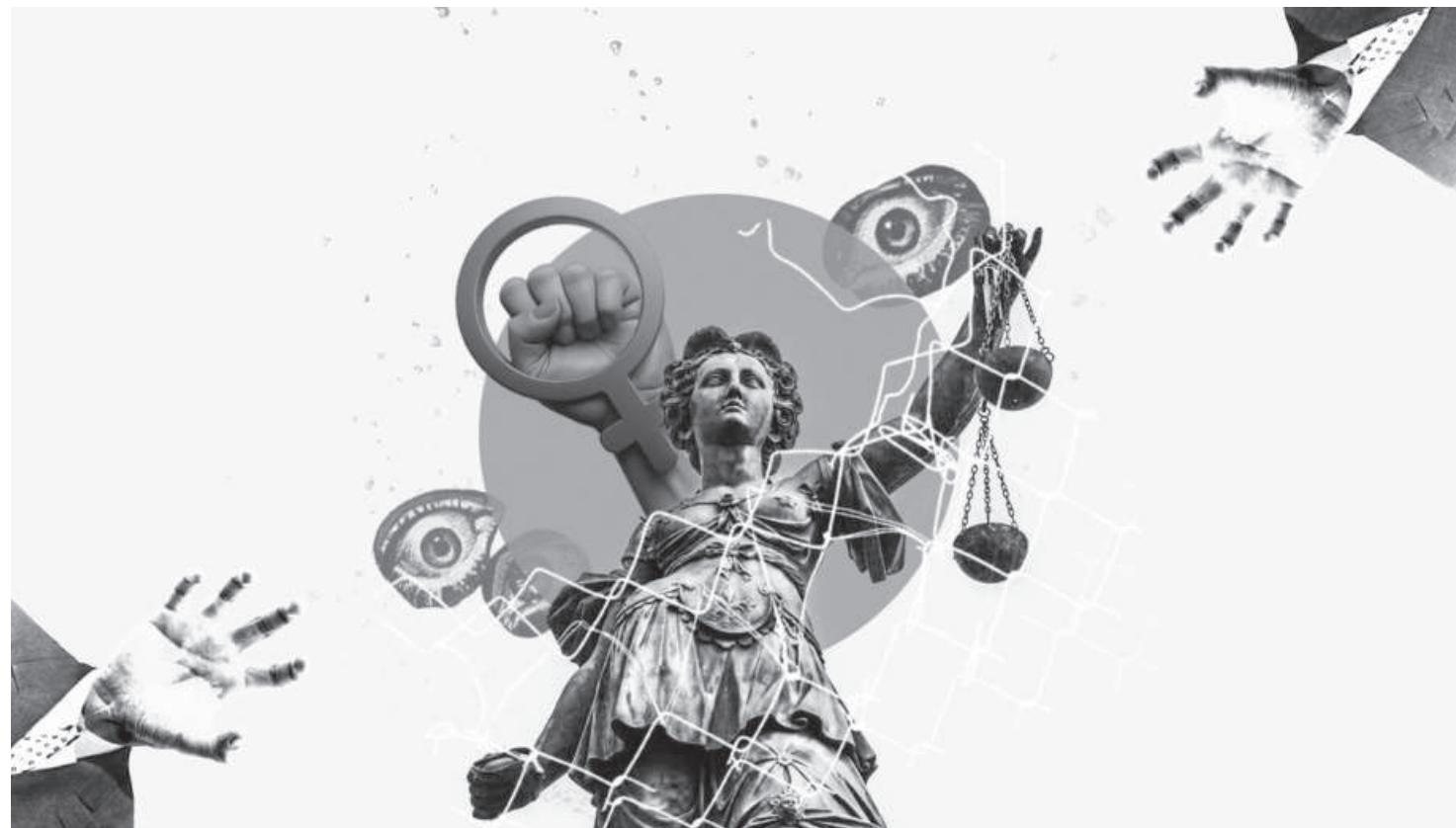
A woman's right to her husband's property is negligible, and often more theoretical than real. In both villages and cities, there are painful stories of cruelty and deprivation. Research shows that in rural farmers' families, a woman's working hours exceed those of men when counting all agricultural tasks, livestock care, and household work. Yet, her rights over property, maintaining which she has spent countless hours, remain uncertain. If she

one room structure on someone else's land. She lives there with her sick mother, caring for and working hard to provide food for her. Her father had a small piece of land; her only brother took almost all of it, saying her share was spent on her dowry during her wedding. That marriage didn't last. She returned home. The brother didn't take her or their mother in. He says he can't afford to feed them.

So now, women of two generations—

she has no daughter to look after her.

Inside and outside the home, many women in Bangladesh go through painful struggles. There are countless teenage girls whose lives are at risk of turning out like those of Yasmin, Tonu, and Munia. And those who survive such odds still face harassment every day. It is hard to find a girl or a woman who has not been teased or attacked by unruly males or thugs while walking on the street. Lately, my



VISUAL: SHAIKH SULTANA JAHAN BADHON

manages the household with her husband, she might retain use of the property, but not ownership. If that partnership breaks down, everything—land, house, animals, crops—can disappear overnight. And if she also has no inheritance from her parents to fall back on, she is left with nothing. She may have to survive under the care of her son(s). But what if the sons refuse to do so? We often hear that sons take responsibility for ageing parents and therefore deserve a larger share of property than their sisters. But that is not always the reality. There have been countless cases where sons were found not caring for their elderly parents. Daughters, on the other hand, have been often found to have taken on that responsibility.

Let me give you an example. In my maternal grandmother's village lives a girl named Pemi, who has speech impairment. Her hut is a

one denied property, the other with poor, uncertain income—live in a hut. Pemi tries to find work day and night to keep her mother alive. Sometimes she requests a local *hujur* for the treatment of her mother's unknown illness. Sometimes, mother and daughter cry together—not a normal sob, but a terrifying, heart-wrenching wailing. The villagers understand: Pemi couldn't bring along her child. Her former husband, backed by law, custom and patriarchal power, kept the child with him. Thinking about the child might be the one thing that breaks this hardworking girl's resilience.

In Dhaka city, in our neighbourhood, I recently heard of a bitter quarrel among brothers who own a building. None of them wants to take care of their mother. They calculate the cost of her stay, food, everything. This mother's misfortune is greater because

students—current and former—tell me of a newer kind of harassment: men standing in front of them and threatening them for not wearing a burqa, using obscene language. These men want women to be submissive and/or send them back indoors. And wearing a burqa doesn't provide much safety either. I've heard of bitter experiences suffered by my students who wear it.

People in Bangladesh live under a net of oppression and discrimination. For women, this net is even more complex. If men's groups see the woman who gave birth to them as inferior, what does that say about them? These people sometimes insist on giving women "just rights" instead of "equal rights." But if rights are to be truly just—based on labour, contribution, hard work, and roles—then women should receive more than men. Will they accept that?

JnU crisis exposes the rot in higher education



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza
is professor of English at Dhaka University.

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

When demonstrators were allowed to stage a protest in front of the Jamuna state guest house—now the official residence of the chief adviser—demanding a ban on Awami League as a party, Section 144 was paused. But it came into effect when another group of protesters attempted to use the same location to press their demands. At least 50 students and teachers of Jagannath University (JnU) were injured by police action when they attempted to reach the venue. Leaders of the National Citizen Party (NCP), who convened the first protest, argued that theirs was a national cause of larger significance, not an institutional one.

If anyone is in doubt, the misty shower sprayed by city corporation water cannons during the heatwave symbolically depicted the blessings that the first protest received. In contrast, the JnU protesters' demands were considered unworthy of disturbing the sanctity of Jamuna. Yet, only months ago, these student bodies acted together to oust an autocratic regime. The preferential treatment of one group over another is adding to a growing resentment that allows us to rewrite the Orwellian maxim: "some students" are "more students" than others.

Fortunately, the University Grants Commission (UGC) chairman announced last evening that the government had accepted the JnU students' demands—hours after the protesters launched a hunger strike to make their collective voice heard.

But this situation demanded intervention much earlier since the proposal to solve the JnU crisis has been with the government for a considerable time. Students are frustrated by the delay in rebuilding a second campus including housing options. The army was given verbal instructions to conduct a feasibility

faction for publicly humiliating him. Prof Md Rois Uddin, general secretary of the JnU Teachers' Association, who was present during the parley, later told the press, "You can't even take the hit of a water bottle, yet baton charge our students and break their limbs. If any bullets are fired here, let the first bullet hit me in the chest."

The pronouncement of solidarity

that used to offer degree courses before Dhaka University came into being was upgraded to a university in 2005. The upgrade was superficial, as it did not involve any significant infrastructural investment. The government wanted the university to raise its revenue through tuition fees. Later, it was brought under the same financial arrangement as other

be addressed in the next annual budget. They didn't want any budget cuts, which may deter the army from engaging in construction work. They wanted ECNEC to approve their proposal. And they urged the government to offer a housing stipend for 70 percent of their students until there are proper residential facilities. Following the police action, they further demanded a thorough investigation to ensure punishment of the perpetrators. These demands are far from sudden. Years of neglect have formed the foundation of these demands.

Then again, public sentiment has been quickly shifting. The widespread sympathy that the students garnered started to lose ground fast due to the prolonged roadblocks, traffic paralysis, and media coverage. As commuters remained stuck in gridlock, businesses suffer, and patients are barred from going to hospitals because of the protests, the moral high ground of the protesters is on the verge of ruin.

The dwindling public empathy put the interim government at risk, too. As a by-product of student activism, the government can hardly afford to alienate the next generation. Then there are the ever-nagging conspiracy concerns: is the government using this crisis as a smokescreen to divert attention from other issues? A dirty laundry

After receiving assurance from the UGC chairman that all their demands would be met, students and teachers of JnU called off their protest and said all activities of the university would resume today. However, that does not mean the underlying problem is solved. We must use the JnU crisis as a catalyst for reform. For that, dialogue-based conflict resolution mechanisms are needed. The government must listen. The protest around Jamuna was not an isolated disturbance. The noise

geopolitical drama, the JnU protest offered a more manageable crisis. But if this is a diversion, it is a costly one. The government has yet to declare any reform commission for education. It seems to be ignoring the sector, which is evident from the number of campus closures, clashes, and the removal of vice-chancellors (VCs). The firefighting mode of the government may sound like an empty excuse. The proxy solutions are far from effective. The government needs to cure the illness affecting our higher education sector. Our universities lack funding for research and development. The abuse of autonomy needs to be checked, and transparency in hiring and accountability across the board are a must. There should be an end to politically appointed leadership. Focus should be on updated curricula to prepare students for an international job market.

Following the police action, they further demanded a thorough investigation to ensure punishment of the perpetrators. These demands are far from sudden. Years of neglect have formed the foundation of these demands. The protesting students wanted to make sure that their cause would be addressed in the next annual budget. They wanted ECNEC to approve their proposal. And they urged the government to offer a housing stipend for 70 percent of their students until there are proper residential facilities. Following the police action, they further demanded a thorough investigation to ensure punishment of the perpetrators. These demands are far from sudden. Years of neglect have formed the foundation of these demands. The protesting students wanted to make sure that their cause would be addressed in the next annual budget. They wanted ECNEC to approve their proposal. And they urged the government to offer a housing stipend for 70 percent of their students until there are proper residential facilities. The list has been aired: the Chattogram port's access and management, the UGC's proposal for a humanitarian corridor to Rakhine state through Bangladesh, the unresolved Rohingya crisis, and informal "push-in" tactics by India. The list is serious and, quite frankly, puts our national security and regional diplomacy at risk.

Central to the JnU crisis is a list of broken promises. An institution



At least 50 students and teachers of Jagannath University (JnU) were injured by police action when they attempted to reach the chief adviser's official residence on May 14, 2025.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

study without any formal work order or budget allocation. The NCP protest's success probably gave the JnU protesters (and other groups) the wrong signal that the only way to solve a crisis is to reach the shore of Jamuna. They discovered the truth the hard way.

An attempt by Mahfuj Alam, the information and broadcasting adviser, to disperse the protesters from in front of Jamuna was met with hostility and derision. The adviser, an exponent of the student-led mass uprising and an ally of the student cause, was struck on the head by a water bottle thrown by a protester. He later blamed a specific political

by teachers and the lukewarm attempt by the adviser to pacify the protesters, with the rehearsed advice to stay away from provocation, exposed a systemic dysfunction. It revealed a significant trust deficit between marginalised student groups and their national leadership. The spirit of July, informed by an innate desire for an end to all forms of discrimination, gets defeated when members of perceived "elite" institutions or parties are treated with greater leniency. The rift has reinforced class and institutional divides.

Central to the JnU crisis is a list of broken promises. An institution

state-run universities. The university planned to relocate from its current location in Old Dhaka to a second campus. In 2016, the government allocated 200 acres in Keraniganj and a development budget of Tk 1,734 crore. The project got stalled due to bureaucratic inertia. The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) found the development project proposal (DPP) faulty and refused to approve it. As a result, over 20,000 students continue to attend classes on a congested campus in Old Dhaka without dormitories or decent facilities.

The protesting students wanted to make sure that their cause would be addressed in the next annual budget. They wanted ECNEC to approve their proposal. And they urged the government to offer a housing stipend for 70 percent of their students until there are proper residential facilities.

was produced by a failing system; the slogans shouted were cries for dignity, fairness, and a future worth studying for. Something is rotten in our higher education system. Today, JnU is showing signs of illness. Tomorrow, it could be some other institution pushing beyond tolerance. Let's not wait for the rot to spread. Let's listen before we act.

Jaya and Sharmin TAKE OVER



I want to help drive positive change in our film industry. We're witnessing a shift in Bangladeshi cinema—even Hollywood films are being replaced at Star Cineplex to make way for local productions. Despite limited resources, our directors are doing amazing work.

PHOTO:
SHEIKH MEHEDI
MORSHE

SADI MOHAMMAD SHAHNEWAZ

The stench of hexisol and death surrounds the gloomy capital. Formerly known as the hub of Bangladesh, Dhaka resides in an eerie, desolate moment in history – the Covid-19 pandemic. An unlikely pairing of a middle-class woman and her house help, in spite of all social barriers, make an unlikely bonding that

defies convention and become each other's crutch for survival in the soul-cleansing flick that is Piplu R Khan's *Jaya aar Sharmin*.

As Jaya Ahsan and Mohsina Akhter, the two leads of the film, take sips of black coffee and *rong cha* respectively at The Daily Star's studio, the excitement levels vary among the illustrious mega star and respected theatre practitioner. "We learned nothing from the pandemic," Jaya Ahsan sighed at one point in the interview. "We should have taken that as a warning that it is unwise to go against nature, to learn empathy and tolerance, but many, including myself, have forgotten." The National Award-winning actress further

emphasised that going back to the pandemic days, in an earthly story about two wandering souls, would rekindle the comradery and the sense of community that was built then. "However, it is indeed heartening to see the reaction that the film got, I was taken aback by the kind messages that people sent, and the reviews on social media," said Jaya.

For Mohsina Akhter, it is a breakout role in films, especially after travelling all over the world as a renowned theatre artist. "It was a scintillating experience, especially because the freedom that I was given by Piplu *bhai* – at first, I genuinely thought that he would not let me improvise as I do on the stage, but I was taken aback when he told me to 'go for it'."

Evidently, Mohsina's performance as the layered Sharmin evokes a range of emotions for the viewer. These emotions in front of the camera had an unintended spill over effect. The director had staged the set in a way that the cameras were not as visible, and the suspension of disbelief was at its peak. "Regardless of if the cameras were rolling, we were simply Jaya and Sharmin – the characters – going about their day. We were not in character, we simply were. This is why the audience will find it easy to connect with us," said Jaya Ahsan.

The artistes reminisce fondly of a time when they had to maintain an unscrupulous amount of distancing, when they were forced to shoot the film with severe limitations, which includes the lack of a supporting technical crew, including a makeup artist. "I do feel that it was charming, eye-opening even, that we went through that," echoed the actresses.

Jaya aar Sharmin comes at a time that cultural personalities, and progressives in general, are under attack by right-wingers. In response to my curious query of how it affects them and how the artistes have decided to fight the 'cultural' war, Mohsina's answer is simple: "We have to resist. Through our art, through social discourse, through simply being more humane, we have to resist, and promote tolerance, there are no two ways about it."

On the other hand, Jaya Ahsan has been fighting another fight for years – that of promoting awareness on violence against animals. "I believe that I get much more credit for that than I should," she states ever-so-humbly. "There are actual heroes out there who have dedicated their lives to those who cannot speak." As Eid-ul-Azha looms around the corner, the actress has but one request for her fellow countrymen: "In the season of sacrifice, please make sure to be humane towards the animals that we will sacrifice. Let's not hurt them unnecessarily, and keep them comfortable before the sacrifice is made, that is the true spirit of this season."

As *Jaya aar Sharmin*, jointly produced by C te Cinema and Applebox films, continues to receive praise for cinemagoers, the actresses believe that the movie, surpassing its box-office legacy, will leave a humane mark on the viewer unparalleled to any other experience that they've had.



STYLE STATEMENT

CARLOS SAINZ

The flashbulbs erupted as Carlos Sainz, the matador of motorsport, traded racing leathers for red carpet elegance at the Cannes Film Festival 2025. Dressed in a classic black tuxedo with a crisp white shirt and a faultless bow tie, Sainz redefined suave with every step.

The ensemble, sharp in silhouette and rich in detail, featured a perfectly tailored jacket, satin lapels, and a cummerbund that nodded to timeless Hollywood glamour. With a calm confidence honed on the Grand Prix grid, he brought a polished charisma to the La Croisette—and Cannes couldn't look away.



WHAT'S PLAYING 'PRETTY LITTLE BABY' by Connie Francis

Connie Francis's 1962 track *Pretty Little Baby* is enjoying a viral resurgence across social media. Anchored by Francis's tender vocals and a dreamy, doo-wop-inspired arrangement, the song captures the ache of reconciliation—pleading for a second chance at love with soft, melodic longing.

Though recorded more than six decades ago, *Pretty Little Baby* has found new life through thousands of TikTok videos, where users pair



its romantic lyrics with slow-motion visuals, nostalgic fashion, and sepia-toned filters.

The absence of an official music video has inspired a wave of creative reinterpretations—from grainy homemade montages to lip-sync performances.

The song's emotional warmth and timeless quality have propelled it up TikTok's Viral 50 chart, cracking the top 10 in multiple countries.

TV TALKIES

'YOU' SEASON 5 Joe's final reckoning

Season 5 of You offers a final, haunting mirror—less about Joe Goldberg (played infamously by Penn Badgley) and more about us. While previous seasons flirted with romanticised danger, this one pulls no punches. Joe's mask slips entirely, revealing not genius, but entitlement wrapped in cultural immunity.

The show forces us to confront why we sympathised with a killer in the first place, and how easily society forgives violent men. The new character Louise's arc delivers a wake-up call.

Joe once again beguiles this woman, even when she is vaguely aware of his previous murderous actions. He furthermore ruins another family to somehow also get a grasp on his withering married life.

Joe might have brought his son back

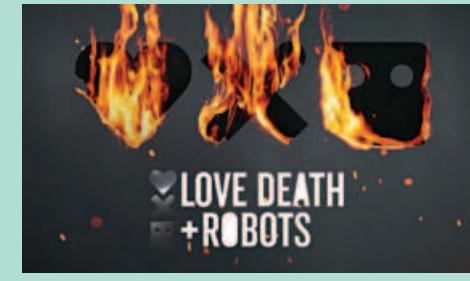
into his life to use him as an excuse for wrongdoings, but Joe receives a reality check on his monstrous self. It's not Joe's charisma that protects him—it's the world we live in.

In the end, *You* isn't just a thriller—it's a lesson in unlearning toxic love, reclaiming self-worth, and breaking cycles. A fitting, if unsettling, finale to a story that was always about more than murder.



TRENDY STREAMS

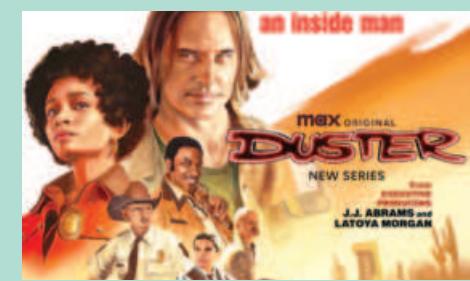
Netflix
Love Death + Robots



Apple TV+:
Murderbot



HBO Max
Duster



Prime Video
Overcompensating



Hulu
Nine Perfect Strangers



OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA



Play: Pakhider Bidhansabha
May 22-23 | 4:30pm and 7:30pm
Bangladesh Shilpkala Academy



Weekend Kick-Off Show
May 22-23 | 8pm-9:30pm
Naveed's Comedy Club, Gulshan 2



Musical Evening: Sinpat Jomjomat
May 23 | 6pm onwards
Jatra Biroti



বিশ্ব টেলিযোগাযোগ ও তথ্য সংঘ দিবস ২০২৫

୧୭ ମେ, ୨୦୨୫

ডিজিটাল রূপান্তরে নারী-পুরুষের সমতায়ন



Political consensus a must on aid corridor

FROM PAGE 16

Akhter said that the country is at a critical juncture after the spontaneous participation of students and people ensured the success of the July uprising.

"Yet, some domestic quarters and foreign actors are struggling to accept the decisions taken by the interim government, including the banning of the Awami League's activities," he said.

Akhter called on the Indian government "to sever ties" with the Awami League, calling the party "autocratic, fascist, dictatorial, mass killer, and anti humanitarian criminal".

"India must build relationships with the people of this country," he added.

NCP Chief Coordinator Nasir Uddin Patwary also spoke at the event.

Supreme Court lawyer Tariqul Islam has been appointed as the convenor of the 131-member convening committee of Jatiya



Juboshokti.

Physician Zahedul Islam has been named member secretary. Engineer Farhad Sohel has been selected as the chief organiser.

Tuhin Mahmud has been made senior joint convenor, while Dyuti

Arannya Chowdhury and Nahida Bushra will serve as senior joint member secretaries.

Zahedul said the names of the remaining members of the convening committee would be announced through a press release soon.

A top company official sent to jail

FROM PAGE 16

Multi Steel Company Limited are currently awaiting release at the Chattogram Port. The accused, Mohammad Foyez, along with two to three unidentified accomplices, attempted to fraudulently obtain a 60% waiver on port storage charges payable to the Chattogram Port Authority (CPA).

Foyez is accused of sending a forged ministry letter, bearing a forged signature of Nazrul Islam Azad, a senior official, using a mobile number belonging to Enamul Karim, Director (Transport), to mislead CPA officials. It was later confirmed by the Ministry of Shipping that no such letter had been issued.

Earlier on Thursday evening, plainclothes police detained Foyez while boarding a domestic flight, airport intelligence sources said.

Soon after his arrest, Chattogram Metropolitan Police Commissioner Hasib Aziz told The Daily Star, "Having forged the seal and signature [of the ministry official], he [the suspect] tried to release a consignment from the port yard. Following the incident, he was held from the Chattogram Airport."

Contacted, MM Jasim Uddin, chief operating officer, Brand and Marketing, Bashundhara Group, said "It is highly unlikely for a corporate entity to be involved in such forgery. However, I am not sure what has happened here."

He added that the company remained closed during the weekly holidays, so he could not communicate with the higher

authorities regarding the matter. "I expect to have more details within the next couple of days."

According to a press release issued by the Chattogram Port Authority after the arrest on Thursday night, "Bashundhara Multi Steel imported capital machinery in 204 TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units) between June 12, 2024, and January 2, 2025. But the company failed to take timely delivery of the containers."

The releases added, "As of May 15, the outstanding storage charges owed by Bashundhara Multi Steel stood at about Tk 72 crore. The forged letter sought to illegally waive nearly Tk 50 crore of that amount.

The company submitted a letter to the Chattogram Port Authority chairman on May 12, requesting a waiver of storage rent for imported goods. The letter, purportedly signed by the deputy secretary of the shipping ministry, Nazrul Islam Azad, claimed that 60% of the storage charges for the goods had been waived."

The release added that the port officials found inconsistencies in the letter and contacted the ministry to verify its authenticity.

In a written response on May 14, Nazrul Islam Azad stated that no such letter had been issued by his office," the release said.

Upon review, discrepancies were found in the language of the forged letter, along with mismatches in the signature and contact information of the ministry official provided.

Shipping ministry Deputy Secretary Nazrul Islam Azad, whose

signature was allegedly forged, told The Daily Star on Thursday night, "When information about a fake office order was brought to our attention, the ministry issued a directive regarding the issue. The authorities are taking appropriate legal action against those involved in the issuance of the fake order."

When a consignment arrives, Chattogram Port Authority collects only storage rent of the imported goods while the Chattogram Custom House collects import duties upon examination and assessment reports.

The port authorities have yet to disclose the total value of the goods imported by Bashundhara Multi Steel between June 12, 2024, and January 2, 2025 that are still at the port yard.

Under the Chattogram Port Act 2022, partial or full waivers of storage charges may be granted, but must follow due procedures.

Chattogram Customs data show that at least 28,900 tonnes of goods imported by Bashundhara Multi Steel company are currently awaiting unloading. Of these, the company has so far submitted a bill of entry for only 240 tonnes of goods in eight containers.

According to the port rules, no storage rent is charged for the first four days after a container is unloaded from a vessel.

For a 20-foot loaded container, the port charges \$6 per day for the first seven days after the free period, \$12 per day from the 12th to the 20th day and \$24 per day from the 21st day onward.

For a 40-foot container, the charges double at each stage.

Australian soldier loses war crimes defamation appeal

AFP, Sydney

One of Australia's most decorated soldiers yesterday lost a legal bid to overturn bombshell court findings that implicated him in war crimes while serving in Afghanistan.

Former SAS commando Ben Roberts-Smith has been fighting to salvage his tattered reputation since 2018, when newspapers unearthed allegations he took part in the murder of unarmed Afghan prisoners.

Besides, BGB members detained five Rohingyas at Bhurungamari border in Kurigram on May 7 after they were pushed into Bangladesh from India. UNHCR cards, issued in India, were recovered from them.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh has called on India to immediately stop the recent push in of people across the border, warning that such actions pose risks to security and undermine mutual understanding.

The 46-year-old suffered another setback yesterday, when Australia's Federal Court dismissed his appeal.

BGB, locals step up vigil

FROM PAGE 16

No infiltration has occurred so far along the border, but the situation remains under close observation, he said.

According to BGB sources, a group of people gathered near Agartala airport in Tripura, close to the Bangladesh border, on Thursday night.

Acting on intelligence, BGB enforced a threefold increase in security measures and conducted overnight patrols.

Several residents of Noabadi said panic spread in the village as BGB activities intensified. Local mosques then used loudspeakers to advise people to stay cautious.

Following recent incidents of push-ins through various borders, BGB has stepped up surveillance and patrols in other parts of the country as well.

On Thursday, BSF pushed 14 people into Bangladesh through the Muraichhara border in Kulaura upazila of Moulvibazar. A patrol team

of BGB from the Muraichhara BOP camp detained them.

Between May 4 and 15, at least 318 people, including Rohingyas, were pushed back Bangladesh through remote border points in five districts.

Of them, 10 entered through Meherpur on May 4; 66 and 78 through Khagrachari and Satkhira respectively on May 7; 148 through Moulvibazar on May 7, 8, 14, and 15; and 16 through Syllhet on May 14, according to media reports.

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Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh Office of the Executive Engineer (RHD), Tangail Road Division,

ফোন: 0921-64043

E-mail : eetan@rhd.gov.bd/ee.rhd.tangail@gmail.com

Memo No:35.01.9395.474.07.001.25-2022

Date: 15.05.2025

e-Tender Notice- Corrigendum

This is to notify for all concern that e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP system Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of the following Package.

Tender ID No.	Name of works/Package description	Tender Method	Last Selling & Closing date
1105573	Topography Survey of Madhupur (Kakrail)-Garobazar-Sagardighi- Sakhipur (Z-4014) Road under Tangail Road Division during the year 2024-2025.	OTM	14-May-2025 17:00 & 20-May-2025 12:15

This is an online Tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted.

To submit e-Tender registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd) (01715-777778, 017625528-31)

Dr Shintia Azmeri Khan
ID No- 602214
Executive Engineer, RHD
Road Division Tangail.

GD-1175

JnU protests called off

FROM PAGE 1

"Our only aim was to ensure that our students are not left out on the streets," he said. "I can assure you that the UGC and university authorities will move forward as a family."

Expressing optimism, he added, "If we stay united, inshallah, we will be able to resolve all the ongoing issues. If we cannot solve the crisis ourselves, no one from outside will be able to do it."

He also said they worked in coordination with Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, Education Adviser CR Abrar, Finance Adviser

Salehuddin Ahmed and others to find a solution.

On Wednesday afternoon, violence broke out when police intercepted the students' "Long March to Jamuna" from the university's Shahe Minar. Around 12:40pm, police charged baton and lobbed tear gas shells near Kakrail as protesters attempted to breach barricades.

Over 50 people, including teachers, students, and journalists, were injured. At least 38 individuals were taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for treatment.

Following the incident, protesters

staged a sit in in Kakrail, blocking nearby roads. JnU VC Prof Rezaul and other teachers later joined the demonstration.

The four demands of the students are the introduction of a housing allowance for 70 percent of students from the 2025-26 fiscal year until residential facilities are ensured, approval of JnU's proposed FY26 budget without cuts, approval of the construction of a second campus at the next ECNEC meeting as a priority project, and the punishment of police personnel who attacked students and teachers on Wednesday.

If the other wheel on the left side was damaged, it could cause more trouble for the pilot to land the aircraft safely, he added.

The senior pilot said such incidents are not rare in aviation, and the pilot in command of the flight was able to properly assess the situation and land the aircraft safely.

Biman authorities said the aircraft has been taken to a hanger and the airline's engineering department started investigating the cause of the wheel.

Chattogram bureau in-charge Hamid Ullah also said they were not present on the spot on that day.

The other journalists accused in the case include CUJ Joint Secretary Omar Faruk, Jugantor's Chattogram Bureau Chief Shahidullah Shahriar, Kalbelia's Chattogram Bureau Chief Saidul Islam, and Prothom Alo photojournalist Jewel Shil.

When asked about the allegation that a crude bomb was hurled at Rezaul and Kotwali Police Station's Officer-in-Charge Abdul Karim said, "No such incident was reported in the area under my jurisdiction. We heard about a scuffle where some people snatched keys from a bus driver and one journalist lodged a written complaint detailing the incident on May 1 night."

Khulshi Police Station OC Aftab Hossain said police took Rezaul and another person to the police station, where Rezaul introduced himself as a lawyer and claimed he was beaten up by a mob.

"But he did not mention who beat him at that time and why. Later, we released him for treatment at the hospital," OC Aftab said.

Contacted via phone on Wednesday, Rezaul hung up after saying, "I'm with the doctor and not feeling well. I will talk to you later."

He did not respond to calls later. Multiple attempts to contact Imtiaz Reza Chowdhury, the lawyer for Rezaul, were unsuccessful.

Case was filed to harass us'

FROM PAGE 16

He also alleged that the accused hurled a crude bomb at him with the intention to kill, injuring his eye. The accused then tried to abduct him by forcing him into a microbus. However, they fled when pedestrians came to his aid upon hearing his screams for help and the sound of the explosion, the lawyer said in the case statement.

Police later took him to Chattogram Medical College Hospital for treatment.

Rezaul also identified himself in the case statement as a member of the BNP's Legal Committee for Chattogram Uttar, Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal and United Lawyers' Front.

Chattogram Union of Journalists (CUJ) protested against the case and demanded a fair investigation.

In a statement, CUJ President Reaz Hayder and General Secretary Sabur Shuvo said that Rezaul, in a Facebook post on April 30, threatened to foil a picnic event organised under the banner of "Karmoroto Sangbadik" on May 1. Both Reaz and Shuvo are among the journalists accused in the case.

Jai Jai Din reporter Khorshed Alam Shamim, another accused, told this newspaper that a group of eight to nine people, including Rezaul, approached the picnic bus near Premier University and took away the keys from the driver as some of the picnic participants were waiting for

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

স্থানীয় সরকার প্রকৌশল অধিদপ্তর

উপজেলা প্রকৌশলীর কার্যালয়

উত্তিরা, কক্সবাজার।

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তারিখ: ১৫/০৫/২০২৫ খ্রি।

দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি নং-০৪/২০২৪-২০২৫ (OTM)

এতোরা স্থানীয় সরকার প্রকৌশল অধিদপ্তরে তালিকাভুক্ত সকল প্রেসির ঠিকাদারী প্রতিষ্ঠান সমূহের নিকট হতে (হল নাগাদ লাইসেন্স নথিবন্ধকৃত) ২০২৪-২০২৫ অর্থ বছরের বার্ষিক উন্নয়ন সহায়তা" থেকে বাসারের আওতায় The Public Procurement Rule-2008 এবং পারালিক প্রক্রিয়ামন্ত (২য় সংশোধনী) আইন/২০০৯ এর ধারা সমূহের অন্তর্ভুক্ত থামে দরবার আবাবন করা যাচ্ছে। দরপত্রের সাথে প্রযোজনীয় দরবার আবাবনত যে কোন তফশীলভূক্ত ব্যাংক হতে বিভিন্ন/প

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (UN-AUDITED)

FOR THE 1st QUARTER ENDED 31 March 2025



CONSOLIDATED BALANCE SHEET

As at 31 March 2025

Particulars	31 Mar 2025	31 Dec 2024	Amount in Taka
PROPERTY AND ASSETS			
Cash	25,893,884,806	23,988,516,011	
In hand (including foreign currencies)	4,691,364,355	4,571,787,155	
Balance with Bangladesh Bank and its agent bank (including foreign currencies)	21,202,520,451	19,416,728,856	
Balance with other banks and financial institutions	15,087,926,264	16,146,171,433	
In Bangladesh	4,743,492,793	5,603,874,673	
Outside Bangladesh	10,344,433,471	10,542,296,760	
Money at call and on short notice			
Investments	211,891,427,478	177,935,396,486	
Government	200,831,340,399	167,143,008,408	
Others	11,060,087,079	10,792,388,078	
Loans and advances/investments	286,479,692,902	296,533,717,659	
Loans, cash credits, overdrafts, etc/investments	267,621,422,724	281,966,741,409	
Bills purchased and discounted	18,858,270,178	14,566,976,250	
Fixed assets including premises, furniture and fixtures	5,113,250,949	5,289,381,960	
Other assets	17,651,796,809	15,419,013,621	
Non - banking assets			
Total assets	562,117,979,208	535,312,197,170	
LIABILITIES AND CAPITAL			
Liabilities			
Borrowings from other banks, financial institutions and agents	21,163,052,804	18,114,043,540	
Subordinated non-convertible and perpetual bonds	7,680,250,000	7,680,250,000	
Deposits and other accounts	433,271,976,694	416,727,954,479	
Current/AI-wadeeah current accounts and other accounts	71,270,426,109	74,238,891,195	
Bills payable	3,299,837,027	3,075,190,059	
Savings bank/Mudaraba savings bank deposits	90,496,869,098	90,330,134,211	
Fixed deposits/Mudaraba fixed deposits	236,993,985,321	222,238,007,353	
Special notice deposit	31,210,859,139	26,845,731,661	
Bearer certificates of deposit	-	-	
Other deposits	-	-	
Other liabilities	65,796,188,766	60,982,059,182	
Total liabilities	527,911,468,264	503,504,307,201	
Capital/shareholders' equity			
Total shareholders' equity	34,206,510,944	31,807,889,969	
Paid-up capital	11,659,068,600	11,659,068,600	
Statutory reserve	11,750,000,000	11,750,000,000	
General and other reserve	11,242,024	10,640,687	
Revaluation reserve	5,042,087,241	4,300,808,341	
Retained earnings	5,810,526,678	4,150,895,777	
Foreign currency translation reserve	(66,423,934)	(63,533,766)	
Non-controlling interest	10,335	10,330	
Total liabilities and shareholders' equity	562,117,979,208	535,312,197,170	
OFF-BALANCE SHEET ITEMS			
Contingent liabilities			
Acceptances and endorsements	134,039,327,761	130,037,883,477	
Letters of guarantee	49,006,527,015	44,821,140,940	
Irrevocable letters of credit	27,235,322,855	26,869,526,977	
Bills for collection	39,641,105,387	39,630,946,979	
Other contingent liabilities	18,156,372,504	18,716,268,581	
Other commitments			
Forward assets purchased and forward deposits placed	21,479,945,286	9,916,466,548	
Total off-balance sheet items including contingent liabilities	155,519,273,047	139,954,350,025	

CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN EQUITY

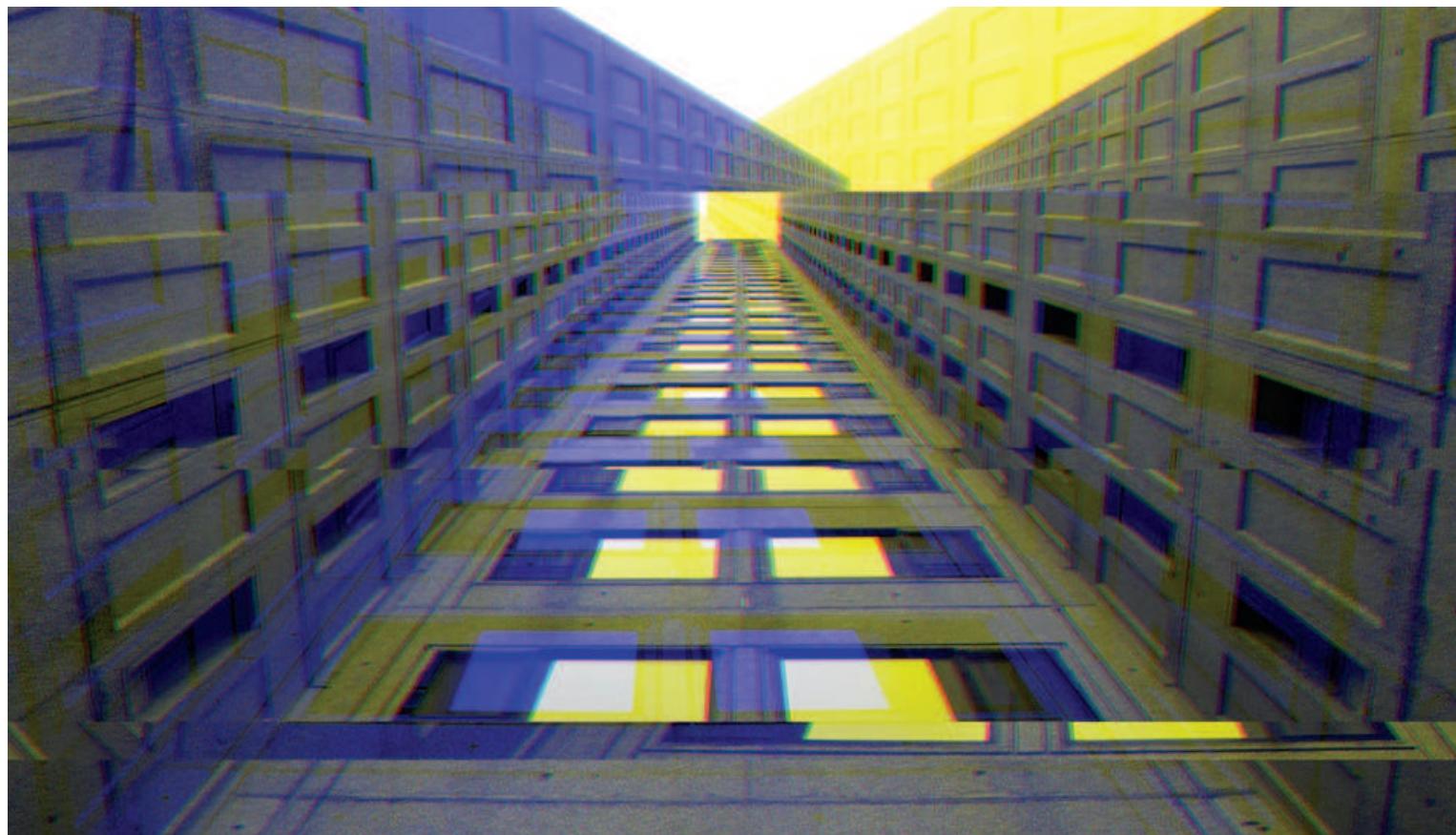
For the period ended 31 March 2025

Particulars	Paid-up capital	Statutory reserve	Revaluation reserve	General reserve	Foreign Currency translation reserve	Retained earnings	Total	Non-controlling interest	Total equity	Amount in Taka
Balance as at 01 January 2024	11,659,068,600	11,750,000,000	2,685,555,009	10,257,013	(52,606,167)	3,350,452,926	29,402,727,380	10,297	29,402,737,678	
Adjustment on revaluation of fixed assets and other investment	-	-	(14,477,653)	-	-	-	(14,477,653)	-	(14,477,653)	
Foreign currency translation for the period	-	-	-	-	1,241,639	-	1,241,639	-	1,241,639	
Transferred to General and other reserve	-	-	-	383,674	-	(383,674)	-	-	-	
Coupon/dividend on perpetual bond	-	-	-	-	(25,068,493)	(25,068,493)	-	-	(25,068,493)	
Net profit for the period	-	-	-	-	778,821,513	778,821,513	10	778,821,523	778,821,523	
Balance as at 31 March 2024	11,659,068,600	11,750,000,000	2,671,077,356	10,640,687	(51,364,528)	4,103,822,272	30,143,244,386	10,307	30,143,254,694	
Adjustment on revaluation of fixed assets and other investment	-	-	1,683,446,237	-	-	-	1,683,446,237	-	1,683,446,237	
Transferred to retained earnings	-	-	(53,715,252)	-	-	53,715,252	-	-	-	
Foreign currency translation for the period	-	-	-	-	(12,169,238)	-	(12,169,238)	-	(12,169,238)	
Transferred to interest suspense	-	-	-	-	(3,330,727)	(3,330,727)	-	-	(3,330,727)	
Cash dividend paid	-	-	-	-	(1,748,860,290)	(1,748,860,290)	-	-	(1,748,860,290)	
Coupon/dividend on perpetual bond	-	-	-	-	(343,545,616)	(343,545,616)	-	-	(343,545,616)	
Net profit for the period	-	-	-	-	2,089,094,886	2,089,094,886	23	2,089,094,909	2,089,094,909	
Balance as at 31 December 2024	11,659,068,600	11,750,000,000	4,300,808,341	10,640,687	(63,533,766)	4,150,895,777	31,807,879,638	10,330	31,807,889,969	
Adjustment on revaluation of fixed assets and other investment	-	-	741,278,900	-	-	-	741,278,900	-	741,278,900	
Foreign currency translation for the period	-	-	-	-	(2,890,168)	-	(2,890,168)	-	(2,890,168)	
Transferred to General and other reserve	-	-	-	601,337	-	(601,337)	-	-	-	
Net profit for the period	-	-	-	-	1,660,232,238	1,660,232,238	5	1,660,232,243	1,660,232,243	
Balance as at 31 March 2025	11,659,068,600	11,750,000,000	5,042,087,241	11,242,024	(66,423,934)	5,810,526,678	34,206,500,608	10,335	34,206,510,944	

SELECTED EXPLANATORY NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the period ended 31 March 2025

1.1	Accounting policies in this Financial Statements are same as that applied in its last Annual Financial Statements of December 31, 2024. Consolidated financial Statements include position of Bank Asia PLC., Bank Asia Securities Limited, BA Exchange Company (UK) Limited and BA Express USA Inc.	2.2	Net Assets Value per Share (NAV)	31 Mar 2025	31 Mar 2024	2.6	Reconciliation of net profit with cash flows from operating activities	31 Mar 2025	31 Mar 2024	
1.2	Provision for income tax has been shown @ 37.50 % as prescribed in Finance Act, 2024 of the accounting profit made by the Bank after considering some of the taxable add backs of income and expenditures including provision for loans.	2.3	Earnings per share (EPS)	1,660,232,243	778,821,523	2.7	As per Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission's directive no. BSEC/CMRRCD/2021-386/03 dated January 14, 2021 unclaimed stock dividend and right share is 4,808,038 no. of shares and unclaimed cash dividend is Tk. 50,473,786.21 out of which Tk. 5,673,678.81 has been transferred to "Capital Market Stabilization Fund".	10,054,024,757	1,961,070,083	
1.3	Cash Flow Statement Cash Flow Statement is prepared in accordance with International Accounting Standard (IAS) 7 'Cash Flow Statement' and under the guideline of Bangladesh Bank BPRD Circular no. 14 dated 25 June 2003 which is the mixture of direct and indirect method.	2.4	Net Operating Cash Flows per Share (NOCFPS)	34,117,864,688	20,337,749,470	2.8	The Board of Directors in its 552nd meeting held on April 30, 2025 has recommended 20% dividend (10% cash dividend and 10% stock dividend) subject to the approval of the share holders at the next Annual General Meeting. As per directive of Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission, dated January 14, 2021 cash dividend amounting Taka 1,165,906,860 has been transferred to a separate bank account from Retained Earnings.	1,702,019,545	1,620,782,650	
2.0	Significant Notes (Consolidated)	2.5	Reconciliation of effective tax rate	31 Mar 2025	%	2.9	General: a) Figures appearing in these financial statements have been rounded off to the nearest Taka. b) Figures of previous period have been rearranged wherever necessary to conform to current period's presentation.	1,702,019,545	1,620,782,650	
2.1	Composition of Shareholders' Equity	31 Mar 2025	31 Mar 2024	Profit before provision	4,783,328,388	30,077,307,087	3.0	General: a) Figures appearing in these financial statements have been rounded off to the nearest Taka. b) Figures of previous period have been rearranged wherever necessary to conform to current period's presentation.	1,702,019,545	1,620,782,650
				Income Tax as per applicable tax rate	37.50%	1,013,229,389				
				Tax exempted income (on govt. treasury securities)	-18.16%	726,191,489				
		</td								



DESIGN: AMREETA LETHE

FICTION

The importance of BEING IMPERFECT

During the mandated tea break, Rahim finds himself in the company lounge. On the screen, Janatar Alo plays: a polished newsreel showing smiling farmers, record yields, children learning under solar-powered domes.

The Prime Minister's face hovers above it all, benevolent and unblinking.

HAROUNUZZAMAN

Stillness hangs in the air, manufactured and complete. Then it comes—the synchronised azzan, a digital decree broadcast from unseen speakers across Sonali Prantor, a gated community funded by the government for senior administrators. It reverberates through Rahim's chest like a low-frequency hum, too commanding to be sacred.

He stands at the window, gazing at the pale sky, its glow filtered and artificial under the city's light pollution shields. The dawn outside looks more like a simulation than a morning. He inhales deeply. The recycled air carries that familiar metallic tang, faint yet always present.

"Another day," he says aloud, though no one hears him. The walls, perfectly soundproofed, absorb his voice. "Another brick in the edifice of stability."

At his minimalist desk, his fingers trace the smooth surface—uniform, unblemished. A government-issued datapad lights up with precision. Today's schedule reads: Design Review—Housing Block 7B. Ensure adherence to National Aesthetic Standard—Form 3.

No deviation. No curve. No joy.

His mind slips—just for a second—to the rickshaw rides of his youth in Old Dhaka: the clanging bells, the scent of jasmine fighting through diesel fumes, the vibrant noise of human life, spilling and spontaneous.

Now, an automated metro-rail glides silently through the city. Conversations have become clipped, calculated. Efficiency replaces spontaneity.

They call it peace. Rahim calls it absence.

Inside The Walls of Conformity, the architectural firm where he works, the air is clean, temperature-regulated. The only sounds: the low hum of ventilation and the quiet tapping of compliant keystrokes. Sunlight filters through anti-glare windows, leaving pale, sterile shadows on the floors.

Farzana leans over his shoulder. Her voice, like everything else here, is careful: "Rahim bhai, the community center revisions must comply with the 'Unity in Structure' clause. No curved lines. The Minister was specific."

Rahim nods, eyes locked on the blueprint—another rigid, rectangular design he has drawn a hundred times before: "Of course," he says. "Unity." Farzana hovers a second, unsure whether to say more. She doesn't. She walks away, and Rahim stares at the screen.

"Why does unity always have to be so... straight?" he murmurs.

The thought feels dangerous, rebellious. He lets it live for a few seconds longer. He almost sees it—the elegant arc he once dreamed of, a line that reached out and invited connection. He had sketched it once, years ago, before the guidelines tightened like a noose.

That curve belongs now to the graveyard of unsanctioned ideas.

During the mandated tea break, Rahim finds himself in the company lounge. On the screen, Janatar Alo plays: a polished newsreel showing smiling farmers, record yields, children learning under solar-powered domes. The Prime Minister's face hovers above it all, benevolent and unblinking.

"Such progress," says Mr. Kamal, the senior partner, his tone laced with government-certified admiration. "Truly, we're living in golden times."

Rahim sips his tea. It's too sweet. Manufactured sweet. The aftertaste clings like something he didn't consent to. His eyes drift to a tiny crack running along the pristine white wall. Just a hairline fracture, almost invisible. But it's there—a reminder that even perfection has seams.

At lunch, Rahim doesn't eat. Instead, he walks. Past the manicured courtyards, past the motion-sensing security drones, until he reaches the edge of the administrative complex—and then, beyond it.

There, hidden and overlooked, lies an overgrown patch of earth. Wild grasses. Discarded leaves. Disorder.

And a banyan tree.

The aerial roots reach down like fingers remembering the soil. The leaves rustle in a breeze that feels unapproved, natural. Rahim places his palm on the bark. It's rough, ridged with time, unapologetic. He closes his eyes and breathes in. The scent of damp soil fills his lungs—a memory more than a smell, a touch of something ungoverned.

He stays still until a sudden sound cuts through—laughter. A boy, no older than seven, darts through the undergrowth chasing a butterfly. His arms flail. His smile is crooked and wide. His joy is unscripted. Rahim watches him go, and a quiet smile finds its way to his face. Not the kind he wears in meetings. A real one. Unpractised. Soft.

Later, he enters the old data archive. It is cool, dim, and nearly forgotten—a room preserved for the sake of memory, not function. The air smells of dust and magnetised plastic. He scans the interface and types: Artistic Expression—Unregulated Era.

The screen blossoms with chaos. Murals spilling off concrete walls, barefoot dancers leaping mid-spin, poets reciting verses into crackling microphones. Unfiltered faces. Raw emotion. Rahim slows the recording. A poet reads with fire in his voice, metaphors rising like steam from boiling water. The cadence of resistance, not yet drowned by compromise.

"To feel so deeply..." Rahim murmurs, eyes locked on the screen. "To express without fear... what was that like?"

A quiet voice replies behind him: "It was volatile. But it was alive."

He turns. An elderly librarian stands nearby. Her sari is faded but neatly pinned, her eyes gentle and sharp at once.

"Alive," Rahim repeats, as though testing the taste of the word.

She nods. "Stability asks a price, Architect. We pay with our color, our chaos, our contradictions."

For a moment, they simply look at one another. Then she walks away.

At night, the government news beams across his wall screen—record highs, perfect cities, seamless unity. Rahim doesn't watch. He opens a drawer and takes out a sketchbook. Not a tablet. Not a sanctioned file. Paper. Rough around the edges, the cover curling with age. Inside are sketches from another version of himself: bold arches, scattered balconies, rooftops that curve like waves. Illicit lines. Human lines.

He picks up a charcoal pencil. His hand trembles—not with fear, but with something older. Something that remembers. In the darkness behind his eyelids, he begins to draw: the banyan, the boy, the poet's face mid-verse. He draws not with permission but with memory. With hunger. The pages will remain hidden, unseen by the officials or committees. But within this secret act of creation, Rahim breathes.

Outside, Sonali Prantor stays silent and flawless.

But inside—inside him—something imperfect begins to stir.

HAROUNUZZAMAN is a Bangladeshi translator, novelist, poet, researcher, and essayist. He has amassed over three decades of teaching experience both domestically and internationally, including positions in Libya and Qatar. For two decades, he served as a faculty member of English Language and Literature at Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB).

POETRY

The moon is a cheeseball and we are effervescent

AYRA GAHAR

The moon is a cheeseball,
Cratered, yellow, and huge like your eyeballs
my eyes haven't quite opened yet
and in a million years you'll be something
and I'll be deep in the lithosphere
Waiting,

Waiting to grow legs
Waiting to learn about gravity and the moon and
forget about it and learn about gravity and forget
about it
and—

The supernovae make the earth look like a giant
strawberry cake pop And I want to take a bite out
of it but all of my teeth fell out when we got on the
Ferris wheel maybe because of gravity
We're stuck at the top of the Ferris wheel and
you're trying to explain something about physics and
gravity,

But I keep remembering you as a carboniferous
fern

You take my hands then,
I've grown into them you say
The ferris wheel is an incredulous feat of gravity,
an unending wheel of cheese and centripetal force
and you look at me and tell me my eyes look like
the moon
and there we are effervescent.

Ayra Gahar occasionally contributes to Star Books and Literature.



PHOTO: MAISHA SYEDA

POETRY

déjà vu

SUMMIT HASAN

In the shadows of stillness
Where time freezes
And bounds me
To tread on a trackless road
Weaved with wonders.
I seek no solace,
Share to no one
The strong infusion
Of our soft love
Or the stories of suffering
That follows it.
That is only ours forever.
Amidst the scorching heat
Stranded with your favourite flowers,
Moving mindlessly and
Etching every alley along the way
With verses devoted to you.
Until the flowers wilted
And my pen
Ran out of ink.
Then I had to call it a day.
Finding myself again
At the edge of a circle
Whose centre is you

Summit Hasan is only rotating around and not reaching the centre thanks to centripetal force. Join him in prayers that some supernatural force is discovered that offers a one-way ticket to the centre.



PHOTO: MAISHA SYEDA

FLASH FICTION

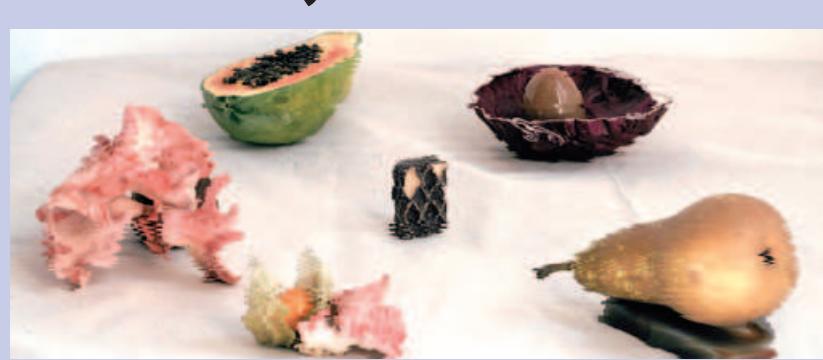
Wash your fruits

OHONA ANJUM

The fruits rot on the table, a still life of my neglect. It's a familiar scene between me and my unwashed teacups. But today, I wash the fruits. It is one of those days when exhaustion outweighs hunger, when the thought of speaking to the delivery man feels like an unbearable intimacy.

I come out of my room, a ghost in my own home, searching for any leftover that I might have forgotten about. Only two bananas and an apple remain in the glass bowl my mother gave me hoping that I might care for myself as much as I do for the aesthetics of this empty house. She sends me curry in ice cream tubs, fruits in shopping bags. Love in disposable containers.

I take the apple to the kitchen, turn the faucet. Nothing. I twist harder, my fingers white with urgency. There is no



DESIGN: AMREETA LETHE

water. I must have forgotten to fill the tank again.

I am terrible at this, I whisper to no one.

Back at the dining table, I sink into one of the eight chairs, too many for a woman who eats alone. The apple can't be that dirty. I rub it against my sleeve, a pathetic baptism. The first

bite is crisp, then, Iron. Blood. There is blood. Whose? Mine? The apple's? My mother's?

I rush to the mirror. My gums are pristine, no wound, no sin. But when I look back at the fruit, the truth reveals itself: the flesh is blackened, writhing with tiny, hungry mouths. The rot has teeth.

How do I stop the disgust? The punishment of nature for suspension. For all the things I have left undone, unloved, uneaten? The very act of preservation feels like betrayal.

And suddenly the room exhales winter. The floors are coated in dust, the teacups cradle curdled milk at their bottoms. And then I see her.

My mother stands in the doorway, her mouth sewn shut with coarse black thread. In her hands, a new bowl of fruit, fresh, glistening, perfect. She places it on the table. The threads in her mouth loosen, drip honey.

"You let everything spoil," she hums, though her lips never part.

The apple in my hand pulses, a second heartbeat. I press it to my ear. I hear it's weeping.

Ohona Anjum writes, rhymes, and studies English literature.



YAMAL

The jewel in Barca's Liga CROWN

Barcelona scored at least four goals in 23 matches across all competitions this season, including in three Clasicos against Madrid.

It was the first time Barcelona won every Clasico in a season that had at least three matches between the rivals.

"In January, some people were saying we would fight to be third [in LaLiga]. We had confidence in ourselves. That's the key."

Barcelona forward Raphinha.

AFP, Barcelona

At just 17 years old, Lamine Yamal now has two LaLiga titles to his name -- the same as Cristiano Ronaldo managed in nine years at Real Madrid.

While his participation in the first was limited to a single brief cameo as a record breaking 15-year-old debutant, the winger has been a chief architect of Barcelona's success this season.

It was fitting he should make the

breakthrough against Espanyol on Thursday with a sensational curling effort as Barca clinched the title.

Yamal's breathtaking displays have brought a vibrancy and life back to Barcelona that had been lacking since the club's biggest icon, Lionel Messi, departed in 2021.

Former Barca coach Xavi Hernandez brought Yamal on for the final seven minutes of a win over Real Betis in April 2023 at the Camp Nou, as the Catalans went on to win the league for the first time since 2019.

But Barca could not win any trophy that year, precipitating Xavi's exit, and Real Madrid's LaLiga and Champions League double left Barcelona soul-searching, with Yamal's growth the only bright spot.

By early 2024, the fast dribbling, immensely skillful winger had emerged as the team's key attacker -- albeit one still lacking in consistency.

A good omen then for incoming Barca coach Hansi Flick, whose free-flowing attacking style clicked with Yamal, as well as veteran striker Robert Lewandowski and Raphinha on the left flank.

With 13 assists, Yamal has the most in LaLiga, and is the top dribbler, with nearly double the amount of his closest contender, Sevilla's Dodi Lukebakio.

Yamal's irrepressible teen spirit is a big factor, with the youngster undaunted when Barcelona fall behind.

He thrived in all four Clasicos this season, as Barca triumphed each time.

They won the Copa del Rey and Spanish Super Cup by beating Real in finals earlier in 2025, before completing a domestic treble with LaLiga.

IPL, PSL resume today

STAR SPORTS DESK

The Indian Premier League (IPL) cricket tournament, suspended for a week amid fighting between India and Pakistan, will resume today, with some new foreign stars joining while some others staying away.

The IPL governing council took the decision to suspend the tournament on May 9 after consulting franchises and players as India and Pakistan extended their worst fighting in nearly three decades.

The IPL still has 12 group matches left, which will be played in the cities of Bengaluru, Jaipur, Delhi, Lucknow, Mumbai and Ahmedabad.

"A total of 17 matches will be played across 6 venues, starting May 17, 2025, and culminating in the final on June 3, 2025. The revised schedule includes two double-headers, which will be played on two Sundays," India's cricket board (BCCI) said in a statement.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Super League, too, will resume today. The May 8 match between Peshawar Zalmi and Karachi Kings was postponed after a drone attack hit a street adjacent to Rawalpindi Stadium.

The final of the tournament will take place on May 25. The four remaining group games will take place at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, with the playoffs and final in Lahore.

Mohammedan one win away from maiden BPL title

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan SC are just one win away from the coveted title of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), as the popular Black and Whites handed an emphatic 4-1 defeat to bottom-placed Chittagong Abahani at Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium in Cumilla yesterday.

Since the professional football league in Bangladesh was introduced back in 2007, Mohammedan have never won the top-tier title.

With their 12th win in 15 matches, Mohammedan are now very close to tasting their maiden professional football league title, requiring only one win from their remaining three matches.

The Motijheel based outfit secured 38 points from 15 matches -- 10 points more than second-placed Abahani, who have played one match fewer than Mohammedan.

However, Mohammedan could celebrate their maiden title triumph today, subject to Abahani's defeat to Fortis FC in today's match.

In Cumilla, although hosts Mohammedan came into the match on the back of a hard-

Tigers begin T20 tune-up under Liton in Sharjah

SPORTS REPORTER

Five months following a three-match T20I series clean sweep win in the West Indies, Bangladesh are back in the shortest format as they take on hosts UAE in the first of two T20Is at the Sharjah Cricket Stadium today.

While the series may appear to be just a warm-up ahead of a packed T20 calendar -- featuring bilateral series with Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India, and major tournaments like the Asia Cup and T20 World Cup -- it holds real value.

With a five-T20I tour of Pakistan to follow, and the Asia Cup likely to be staged in the UAE, these games offer a timely opportunity to assess conditions and sharpen plans.

This series also marks a new chapter for Bangladesh, as Liton Das begins his tenure as full-time captain in the shortest format. Though he previously led the team on an interim basis, this is his first full-time appointment in the format, lasting through to the next year's T20 World Cup. The team will be hoping Liton can inspire a more aggressive and exciting style of cricket.

Liton has led Bangladesh to some notable results across formats, including a home ODI series win over India and a T20 series victory in the West Indies. But with the captaincy now confirmed, there's also hope that he can regain form with the bat. In 2024, he managed only one fifty in 20 T20I innings, averaging just 16.26.

Beyond Liton, the focus will also be on Bangladesh's ability to get their



team balance right -- a necessity ahead of tougher assignments. Tactical calls may be required, such as whether to accommodate former captain Najmul Hossain Shanto, and if so, how to structure the starting line up without compromising bowling options.

Spin remains a strength, led by Mahedi Hasan and Rishad Hossain, while the pace arsenal -- featuring Hasan Mahmud, Nahid Rana, Mustafizur Rahman, Shoriful Islam and Tanzim Hasan Sakib -- offers the kind of variety that can trouble even elite batting line-ups.

Meanwhile, the UAE have left out many of their top cricketers for the series against Bangladesh and named a relatively inexperienced side, led by opening batter Muhammad Waseem -- the highest run-getter in T20Is in the world since his debut in 2021.

As the sun sets over Sharjah, Bangladesh embark on more than just another T20 assignment. This is a moment of recalibration -- a chance to not only tune up combinations and strategies, but to redefine how they approach this format under a fresh leader.

Will Liton's leadership spark a shift in the Tigers' T20 identity? Can the team find fluency, intent and balance before the heavyweight challenges ahead?

The answers may begin to unfold tonight -- under lights, under scrutiny, and under new leadership.

Regarding the head-to-head results, the Tigers are still unbeaten against the UAE in this format, having won all three games. But in 2022, when both sides last played in Dubai during a two-match series, the hosts gave the Tigers decent challenges in both losing affairs.

As the sun sets over Sharjah, Bangladesh embark on more than just another T20 assignment. This is a moment of recalibration -- a chance to not only tune up combinations and strategies, but to redefine how they approach this format under a fresh leader.

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Captain Nazmul inspires U-19s to SAFF final

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh overcame a nervy first half to earn a gritty 2-1 victory over Nepal in a semifinal fixture of SAFF U-19 Championship in India's Arunachal Pradesh yesterday.

Captain Nazmul Huda Faisal led from the front after assisting the first goal for Ashikur Rahman before tapping in the second within a span of seven minutes in the second half to ensure Bangladesh's final berth, though Nepal tried to bite back with a late goal from Sujan Dangol.

Bangladesh, who became champions in the SAFF U-20 Championship last year, will now take on the winners of yesterday's second semifinal between Maldives and India.

At Golden Jubilee Stadium, both teams fought equally, as expected. Bangladesh enjoyed a lion's share of possession and created more chances, but it was Nepal who came close to breaking the deadlock after 15 minutes. However, goalkeeper Ismail Hossain Mahin denied the Nepalese forwards, while Nepal were also thwarted by the woodwork on the half-hour mark.

Bangladesh squandered two chances afterwards before Nepal defender Madan



Paudel made a goalline save, thwarting a goal-bound header 10 minutes into the second half.

After surviving a fumble from goalkeeper Mahin, Bangladesh broke the deadlock in the 74th minute, with Ashikur nodding in a well-judged corner from Nazmul, who then doubled the lead with a tap-in after substitute Mohammad Manik brilliantly snatched the ball from a Nepalese defender and squared it for Nazmul inside the box in the 81st minute.

Nepal bit back to pull one back in the 87th minute, with Sujan side-volleying a low cut back into the net, giving goalkeeper Mahin no chance to react.

What to WATCH	SPORTS	STAR SPORTS 1
	Bangladesh vs UAE	IPL
	First T20I	
	Live from 9:00 pm	
	NAGORIK TV	
	PSL	
	Peshawar vs Karachi	
	Live from 9:30 pm	
	SONY TEN2	
	FA Cup	
	Crystal Palace vs Man City	
	Live from 9:00 pm	

Live from 9:00 pm

SONY TEN2

FA Cup

Crystal Palace vs

Man City

Live from 9:30 pm

SHORT CORNER

Rakibul, Mahfuzur shine in Emerging Team's series win over SA

Rakibul Hasan and Mahfuzur Rahman Rabby's all-round brilliance helped Bangladesh Emerging Team clinch a 34-run win in the series-deciding third and final one-dayer to complete a 2-1 series victory over their South African counterparts in Rajshahi on Friday.

BFF slaps six-month ban on Saad

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) disciplinary committee has handed down a series of sanctions to Bashundhara Kings and their personnel following incidents of misconduct during a recent Bangladesh Premier League fixture against Abahani. Kings defender Saad Uddin has been banned for six months and fined Tk 50,000 for physically assaulting match commissioner Sujit Banerjee.

CR7 tops Forbes' list of highest-paid athletes for third year in a row

Cristiano Ronaldo topped Forbes' list of the world's highest-paid athletes for the third consecutive year and the fifth time in his career. Following his move to Saudi Arabian club Al-Nassr, Ronaldo's estimated total earnings are around \$275 million.

**Read full stories on The Daily Star website.

Palace eye FA Cup glory as City seek salvation

AFP, London

History beckons for Crystal Palace at Wembley in Saturday's FA Cup final as Manchester City have one final shot at avoiding a rare trophyless season under Pep Guardiola.

Twice FA Cup runners-up, Palace have never won a major trophy in their 119 year history. The Eagles sense this may finally be their time up against a City side far from their former glories of Guardiola's trophy-laden reign.

Palace warmed up for the Wembley showpiece by cruising to a 2-0 win at Tottenham last weekend to equal their record of 49 Premier League points with two games of the season to spare.

Victory would secure entry to one of Europe's major club competitions for the first time in Palace's history with a place in the Europa League at stake.

City's laboured display in drawing a blank at bottom of the table Southampton last weekend gave Palace even more reason to believe.

However, Guardiola's men are unbeaten in 10 games, including a 5-2 demolition of Palace in the Premier League last month despite falling 2-0 behind.

City's fightback at the Etihad Stadium that day was sparked by Kevin De Bruyne rolling back the years.

The Belgian has just three games left as a City player after a glorious decade in Manchester and will be aiming to add one more to his 14 major honours with the club.

After an unprecedented four consecutive English top flight titles, City find themselves battling just to secure a top-five Premier League finish and a place in next season's Champions League. Anything other than victory would cap what Haaland described as a "horrendous" campaign for a squad of serial winners.

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Biman flight lands safely after losing wheel mid-air

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Biman Bangladesh Airlines flight landed safely in Dhaka yesterday despite losing a wheel from its left side main landing gear shortly after take-off from Cox's Bazar.

The incident occurred moments after flight BG 436 took off from Cox's Bazar Airport at 2:19pm en route to Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, said ABM Rawshan Kabir, general manager (public relations) of Biman.

The aircraft was carrying 71 passengers at the time.

"Biman's engineering department and the airport authorities had taken all preparations at the airport for the landing of the aircraft without one of the left wheels of the main landing gear. The passengers and the aircraft are safe," Rawshan told The Daily Star.

The flight landed at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport at 2:20pm without any incident, he added.

Biman authorities said the

SEE PAGE 12 COL 4



A mourner reacts during the funeral of Palestinians killed in Israeli strikes, at the Indonesian hospital in Beit Lahia, in the northern Gaza Strip, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'Case was filed to harass us'

Ctg journos allege it was the complainant who attacked them

FM MIZANUR RAHMAN

Many of the 26 journalists accused in an attempted murder case filed by a pro-BNP lawyer in Chattogram have alleged that the charges were based on distorted facts.

Rezaul Islam, a member of the Jatiyatabadi Ainjibi Forum's Chattogram unit, lodged the case with a Chattogram court on May 13.

The court directed the Police Bureau of Investigation to probe the case against 37 individuals, including the journalists, on charges of an assault on Rezaul on May 1, 2025. Rezaul also alleged that the accused had abducted and mugged him.

Among the 11 other accused, six were labelled in the case statement as "Awami terrorists". Rezaul said in the case statement that all the accused are affiliated with the Awami League, Juba League, and their associated organisations. They were involved in extortion, murder, and other criminal activities, and they attacked protesters during the July uprising, he alleged.

The accused had repeatedly threatened him to withdraw the cases he filed on behalf of the families of some of the victims of the July atrocities, Rezaul said.

Describing the alleged attack on him in the case statement, Rezaul said he was on his way to a Sramik Dal programme when he saw the accused were assaulting a member of the organisation near the Jamiatul Falah Mosque gate.

When he approached the scene, the accused questioned him about filing the July killing cases, attacked him, and snatched Tk 30,000 and a mobile phone from him, he wrote in the case statement.

SEE PAGE 12 COL 4

A pro-BNP lawyer filed the attempted murder case against 37 people, including 26 journalists, on May 13.

Political consensus a must on aid corridor: NCP

The party launches youth front

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government must hold discussions with the political parties before finalising any decision on the proposed humanitarian channel to send aid to Myanmar's Rakhine, National Citizen Party Member Secretary Akhter Hossain said yesterday.

"Whether a humanitarian corridor is needed, who will control that corridor, and what kind of movement will take place through it -- all these issues must be discussed with political parties before any decision is made," he said.

Akhter made the comments while addressing the inaugural ceremony of NCP's youth wing, Jatiya Juboshakti, at Abrar Fahad Avenue in the capital's Gulistan area.

"Because it is the people of Bangladesh who will determine the country's future. No foreign lords will be allowed to interfere in our politics," he said.

He called upon the government to ensure that decisions related to Bangladesh's independence, sovereignty, and national security are taken in consultation with all political parties.

The NCP leader also urged anti-fascist forces to continue their fight against fascism, oppression, and authoritarianism despite their ideological differences. "The people do not wish to rehabilitate the Awami League."

SEE PAGE 12 COL 1

A top company official sent to jail for 'forging' ministry letter

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A Chattogram court yesterday sent a Bashundhara Group official to jail in a case over an alleged attempt to evade over Tk 50 crore of port charges by submitting a forged letter from the shipping ministry.

Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Sarkar Hasan Shahriar gave the order in the afternoon after police produced him before the court in connection with the case filed by the port authorities on Thursday night.

Suspect Md Foyezur Rahman, 42, is a senior general manager at Bashundhara Group, according to the First Information Report filed by Mohammad Rafiqul Islam, chief assistant of the Traffic Department at Chattogram Port.

The court ordered the police to produce the suspect before the court on June 19, 2025.

According to the case statement, "109 containers (equivalent to 214 TEUs) imported by Bashundhara

SEE PAGE 12 COL 1

A

Many in Gaza 'starving'

Says Trump, Palestinian rescuers report over 74 deaths in Israeli air strikes; dozens injured

AFP, Gaza City

US President Donald Trump said yesterday "a lot of people are starving" in the besieged Gaza Strip, where rescuers reported more than 74 deaths in Israeli air strikes since

midnight.

Trump's brief comments on Gaza came as he capped the first foreign tour of his second term that saw him visit several Gulf countries but excluded key ally Israel.

A two-month ceasefire between Israel and Hamas collapsed in March, shortly after Israel reimposed a total blockade on Gaza that aid agencies say has sparked critical food shortages.

Yesterday, Gaza's civil defence agency said that 56 people had been killed in Israeli strikes since midnight, with medics reporting dozens more injured. When asked by AFP, the Israeli army made no comment on the strikes.

"We're looking at Gaza. And we're going to get that taken care of. A lot of people are starving," Trump told reporters in Abu Dhabi.

➤ Hamas official says Gaza not 'for sale'

➤ Entry of aid 'minimum requirement' for talks: Hamas

➤ WHO says Gaza's last cancer hospital stops working

Israel cut off aid to Gaza on March 2, a tactic it has said is intended to force concessions from Hamas, which is still holding dozens of Israeli hostages it seized in October 2023.

Hamas insisted on Thursday night that the restoration of humanitarian assistance to the war-ravaged territory was "the minimum requirement" for talks.

It also warned that Gaza was not "for sale" hours after Trump again floated taking over the territory and turning it into a "freedom zone".

The World Health Organization said that the last hospital in Gaza providing cancer and cardiac care had stopped functioning after an Israeli attack.

The UN health agency chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on X that an attack on Tuesday left the European Hospital in Khan Yunis "severely damaged and inaccessible".

It is "no longer functional", he said, adding that a WHO team had evacuated emergency medical staff who had worked through the attacks.

"A strike hit nearby just before the mission," Tedros said, adding that the staff had been taken to the Nasser Medical Complex.

Two stabbed to death in the capital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two men were stabbed to death in separate incidents in the capital's Shankar and Jigatala areas last night.

The deceased Nure Islam, 26, a freelance photographer, was a resident of Shankar Bus Stand area, while Samiur Rahman, 23, a student of Dr Maleka University College, lived near Hazaribagh BDR Gate.

Nure Islam's elder brother, Usman Gani, said muggers stabbed his brother and took his two cameras. When he was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, doctors declared him dead around 9:30pm.

Meanwhile, around 7:30pm, Samiur was stabbed by unidentified assailants near Jigatala Bus Stand area.

Locals rescued him and took him to Japan Friendship Hospital. Later, when he was transferred to DMCH, where doctors declared him dead at 9:00pm, said his friend Tanvir Hossain.

Hazaribagh Police Station Officer-in-Charge (OC) Saiful Islam said, "Some 15 assailants armed with sharp weapons attacked Samiur and several others. Samiur died while at least three others were injured."

The OC added preliminary information suggests a previous dispute resulted in the attack.

Inspector Md Faruk, in charge of the police outpost at DMCH, said the bodies have been kept in the hospital morgue.

BGB, locals step up vigil amid push-in fears

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

To resist any attempted push-in of people from India, Border Guard Bangladesh intensified patrols and heightened vigilance in the bordering villages of Brahmanbaria's Bijoynagar upazila.

Amid the situation, residents of Nalgarhia and Noabadi also joined the efforts on Thursday night, according to local government officials and villagers.

Around 11:00pm, announcements from mosques urged residents to stay alert, locals said.

Sadhana Tripura, upazila nirkabi officer of Bijoynagar, said, "Locals stood by the BGB to resist any attempted push in. Everyone in the border areas remains alert. The situation is now under control."

Lt Col Jabber Ahmed, commanding officer of BGB Battalion-25, told The Daily Star, "Given the overall situation in the country, we are maintaining maximum alert along the border. Anticipating a possible push-in, we have taken advance preparations and strengthened patrols in the area."



Rows of CNG-run autorickshaws and makeshift stalls illegally occupying the majority of the road near the capital's Jurain rail crossing area leave little room for other vehicles, which causes severe congestion frequently throughout the day. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

SEE PAGE 12 COL 1



THE ORGANIC shift

Inside Bangladesh's growing appetite for clean eating



AYMAN ANIKA

When Farzana Karim, a Dhaka-based HR professional, developed chronic acidity, she tried everything from antacids to Ayurvedic concoctions.

Nothing worked until she made a switch in her diet.

"I started buying fish, fresh fruits, and selected dairy products from an online page that primarily sells organic foods," Farzana says.

"I didn't expect miracles, but within weeks, I felt a difference," she adds.

Farzana isn't alone. A growing number of Bangladeshis are reassessing their food choices – not out of luxury, but necessity.

The last few years have witnessed a noticeable shift in consumer food behaviour in urban Bangladesh. From regular rice to pesticide-free parboiled varieties, from chemically ripened bananas to heirloom

Ashna Ahmed, founder of Prakriti Farming, points out that fruits and vegetables are always top of the list, especially during seasonal periods.

"People always look for them, mangoes, lychees, leafy vegetables, and grains like black cumin or brown rice. Also, free-range chicken and pure cow's milk, ghee, mustard oil – these are among the most popular organic items that people order."

Consumers in this space are no longer passive. They research, compare, and often rely on social media and trusted networks to validate the sources of their food.

One of the biggest hurdles for any organic food seller in Bangladesh is navigating a saturated and unregulated market. With few official certification systems, anyone can claim their products are "organic", and many do.

The last few years have witnessed a noticeable shift in consumer food behaviour in urban Bangladesh. From regular rice to pesticide-free parboiled varieties, from chemically ripened bananas to heirloom papayas – people are not just looking for food but food they can trust.

papayas – people are not just looking for food but food they can trust.

This movement toward organic and whole foods may still be modest in scale, but it's gaining ground steadily, one market shelf and home kitchen at a time.

WHAT'S ON THE ORGANIC PLATE?

While "organic" can be a vague term, in the Bangladeshi context, it often refers to food grown without synthetic pesticides, preservatives, or artificial hormones – and more recently, food produced in closed-loop, environmentally conscious systems.

"Our most in-demand products are hydroponic vegetables: multi-coloured capsicum, cherry tomatoes, eggplants, even honeydew melons," explains Abdullah Al Hussain, head of E-commerce and Digital Marketing at Paramount Agro Limited. "All are grown in temperature-controlled greenhouses using clean water-based nutrition."

Launched first for in-house consumption within the Paramount Group, the company's clean food initiative quickly expanded into a commercial venture.

ONatural now supplies hydroponically grown produce, raw honey, and preservative-free sweets – all produced in controlled environments and delivered fresh.

"We started this journey not for business, but for our consumption," Hussain adds. "Later, seeing the potential, we went commercial. But even now, we stick to the core idea, offering clean, daily-produced food without preservatives."

For consumers like Mehjabin Islam, a 32-year-old working professional in Dhaka, that trust develops over time.

"I started small... just tried a few vegetables from an organic vendor a friend recommended. But over time, I noticed the taste, the freshness, and how I felt after eating them," she shares. "Now I regularly buy from two sellers I trust. It's not cheap, but I know I'm paying for real food, not marketing."



In a space where anyone can claim "organic," brands that provide visible proof – photos of their farms, detailed sourcing info, or consistent product quality – build a loyal customer base. Without institutional safeguards, this kind of accountability remains the only currency that works.

DEMAND IS RISING, BUT SO ARE THE QUESTIONS

The demand for organic food is definitely

increasing," says Hussain. "Compared to when we first started, the difference is huge. Now we can't even meet the production capacity according to demand," he adds.

Yet, with this rising interest comes scepticism. Not every label that claims to be organic truly meets the standards. Without regulatory certification, the market has become cluttered with sellers making unverified claims, and customers are left trying to decipher which sources to trust.

"Customers are interested, yes, but they're also cautious. They often ask, 'How do I know this is really organic?' That's where transparency comes in. We try to answer with honesty and show them what goes into the process, from seed to delivery. The trust must be earned every time," she elaborates.

The result is a dual challenge for ethical producers: not only do they have to ensure quality, but they must also constantly educate, convince, and retain a customer base that's more informed, yet wary. As the market expands, this question of authenticity will only grow louder, pushing sellers to be more transparent and urging policymakers to step in with standardisation.

She emphasises that if clean food is to reach more people, not just Dhaka's middle or upper class, then affordability and infrastructure must be addressed.

AWARENESS AS THE TIPPING POINT

In terms of growth, both sellers are cautiously optimistic.

"This market may dip when people realise not all 'organic' is genuine," Hussain admits. "But in the long run, awareness will grow. People are becoming more conscious, and that will create a stronger, more honest organic food market."

Afroze agrees. "In Bangladesh, the demand



THE COST OF STAYING CLEAN

But good food doesn't come cheap, especially when grown ethically. Both Afroze and Hussain agree that cost is a defining challenge in sustaining and scaling clean food production.

"True organic farming, especially greenhouse-based, has high production costs," says Hussain. "But the market is flooded with cheaper products that claim to be organic without actually being so. Our prices don't match those, but our practices are real."

Afroze echoes this concern. She says, "To minimise this cost, I'm not sure if it's possible right now. We are losing a lot of people because of that. Maybe public or private sector help can bridge that gap."

for organic food has increased significantly, especially in urban places like Dhaka and Chittagong. I think the adulteration in food has pushed this kind of shift."

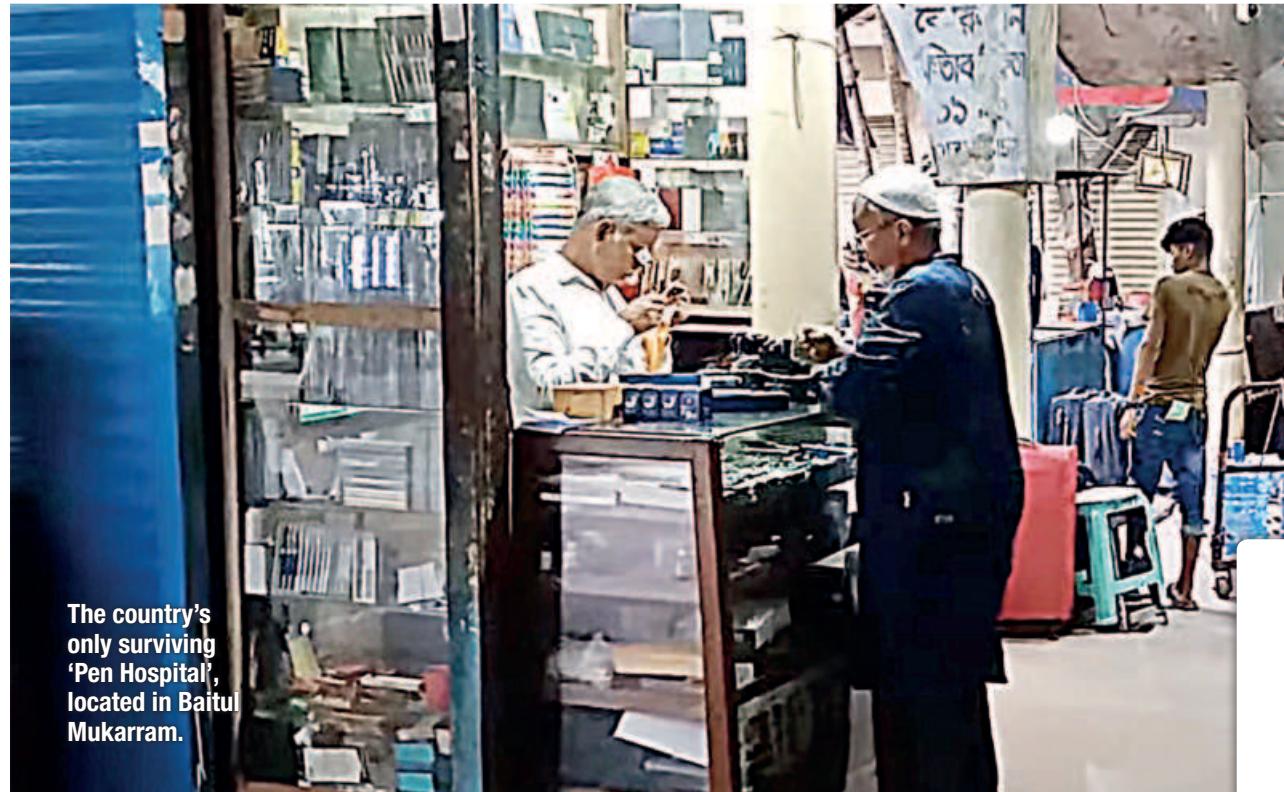
In short, the organic food movement in Bangladesh is still young and fragmented, but undeniably growing. It's not driven by luxury, but rather by the fundamental right to eat clean, safe food.

From farm-to-table startups to hydroponic pioneers, from subscription vegetable boxes to preservative-free sweets, the industry is finding its footing, often without institutional help. What sustains it is trust, education, and a growing public consciousness about what's at stake.

As urban Bangladesh wakes up to the reality of what's on its plate, the organic shift may be more than a trend – it may be the beginning of a food culture that values integrity over illusion, and quality over quantity.

Vanishing Livelihoods

The Pen Engravers and Repairmen of Bangladesh



The country's only surviving 'Pen Hospital', located in Baitul Mukarram.

AMAIN BABU

There was a time when pens had "health issues" and needed to be taken to the "Pen Hospital." These were makeshift roadside stalls or small shops where skilled artisans—pen repairmen and engravers—restored broken nibs, leaky reservoirs, and cracked barrels with careful precision. Especially in Dhaka during the 1970s and '80s, these craftsmen were a common sight.

The popularity of fountain pens, dip pens, and felt-tip pens gave rise to this craft. Repairmen sat near busy areas like Chawk Bazar, Baitul Mukarram, Patuatuli, and the courts, armed with wooden boxes or briefcases filled with tools. Using discarded or broken pen parts, they could assemble a new pen—often from scratch. Yet, despite their skill, these artisans never gained formal

recognition as a distinct profession.

In Europe, the equivalent was known as a "pen maker and engraver." While South Asia lacked such a title, the roles were similar. Some repairmen specialised in polishing or engraving names on pen bodies, watches, and even bicycles. Young students, eager to mark their belongings, would get their names engraved—paying a modest fee per letter. These artisans were affectionately called "pen doctors" or "pen engineers."

In cities like Dhaka, Rajshahi, Pabna, and Rangpur, pen hospitals often emerged near major colleges. Many repairmen also ran small shops selling pens and ink. Others were itinerant, visiting schools and offices in search of work. One would hear school caretakers call out, "Kids, the name-writer is here!" Middle-aged men with dusty briefcases

would set up just outside school gates, offering engraving and minor repairs.

The most artistic part of their work was name engraving. Using tools like miniature chisels and handheld hammers, they would etch names

into plastic or metal pen surfaces with astonishing accuracy. Some even offered engraving in Bengali, English, Urdu, or Arabic. The tools they used resembled thin pens, each suited for different materials—watches, nameplates, or pen bodies.

With the spread of ballpoint pens in the mid-1990s, demand plummeted. School corridors that once bustled with children queuing to engrave their names on fountain pens fell silent. Still, a few continued to adapt. Mohammad Shahab Uddin Mir of Kishoreganj, now in his late 60s, began in 1982 under the guidance of his uncle. Today, he etches names onto mobile phone covers and motorcycles instead.

to refer to such artisans as "nokkashi" or "nakashi"—terms not widely used elsewhere.

There's evidence that similar "pen hospitals" existed outside Dhaka. In 1962, one such shop opened in Pabna's Indrapatti area, near Edward College, and continued operating until 2005. Students not only bought new pens there but also repaired their old ones.

While engraving was beautiful and affordable, pen repair was often costlier and more time-consuming. In the 1980s, engraving might cost Tk 2, but repairing a fountain pen could cost anywhere between Tk 5 and Tk 40. Curious schoolboys would often gather for hours just to watch the intricate work.

Pen engravers and repairmen gradually disappeared with the rise of mass-produced plastic pens and digital writing. However, a few names still persist—Abdul Quddus and Mohabbat Mostafa in Dhaka, and Imtiaz Ali and Dilip Basak in Kolkata. They are among the last to carry the legacy of this profession, holding onto their craft despite minimal demand.

There were always two kinds of craftsmen—those who could engrave and those who could repair. But the few who mastered both were rare and revered.

Today, pen repair may be obsolete, but engraving survives in fragmented form. Fountain pens still exist as luxury items, and some enthusiasts continue to seek out these artisans. Government offices and courts once had regular ink and pen vendors who often doubled as repairmen. In Dhaka's New Market or Gulistan, names like Khokon, Kalam, and Shafique were once well-known.

As digital communication dominates and handwritten letters fade away, the memory of these pen artists—engravers and repairers alike—deserves to be preserved. They were more than craftsmen. They were the guardians of tools that shaped ideas, carried knowledge, and recorded history.

Amain Babu is a journalist and researcher.



Dhaka's legendary repairman, Mohabbat Mostafa (L), with his mentor, Abdul Quddus (R).

Left in the DARK

Eye Victims of the July Uprising



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

MIFTAHL JANNAT

Nine months have passed since the July Uprising, yet its human toll continues to surface—survivors left scarred, jobless, and crushed by mounting debt. Among the most visible yet overlooked are those who lost their eyesight—many now living with permanent disability and fading hope.

Their stories go beyond physical injury. They reveal gaps in state support, bureaucratic delays, and a deeply unjust aftermath.

Visible Wounds, Invisible Burdens
Md Shahinur Miah was shot in both eyes during the uprising. Even after seven surgeries, one eye is completely damaged, and the other has only blurry vision. Formerly an auto-rickshaw driver and the sole breadwinner of his family, Shahinur now lives in darkness—both literally and economically. He sold his vehicle to keep his family afloat. "Sometimes, I feel like a burden," he said. "There are nights I think of ending it all."

He isn't alone. Md Mijanur Rahman Badol has undergone multiple operations and is burdened by growing debt, despite receiving some grants from the government and civil society. These funds are fragmented, delayed, and often inaccessible without relentless follow-up. Despite his growing debt, he still has to spend thousands just to reach Dhaka for treatment.

Another victim, Syed Hasibun Nabi Raju, Savar correspondent for Maarsanga Television, sustained gunshot injuries while covering the events of 5 August. He still has 92 pellets lodged in various parts of his body, including his eyes.

"I'm surviving with my left eye. My right eye is completely gone. Even with the left, I can only make out outlines—I can't recognise faces," he said.

Dr Khair Ahamed Choudhury, Director of the National Institute of

Ophthalmology & Hospital (NIOH), explains: "Pellet or gunshot wounds to the eye often cause irreversible damage on the very first day. Recovery is slow and staged—many cannot expect full restoration."

Prof Dr Md Shafi Khan, Cornea Specialist and Phaco Surgeon at Bangladesh Eye Hospital & Institute, adds: "If the damage is minimal, vision may be recoverable—sometimes with a cornea transplant. But if internal structures are severely harmed, treatment is much more difficult and full recovery unlikely."

Caught in Bureaucratic Limbo

Many victims report not receiving promised hospital bill reimbursements, despite commitments made in February. One-time grants and monthly stipends were also announced, but as of May, remain only partially implemented.

Victims were categorised by injury severity to guide relief efforts, yet many remain misclassified and denied appropriate support.

Md Shahinur, who lost one eye and has blurred vision in the other, was placed in Category B. He continues to petition for reclassification to Category A, but the process is slow and marked by poor coordination and limited empathy.

Others, like Ashraful Islam, have paid out of pocket for their treatment and weren't even aware of the promised aid. "I was ill and couldn't collect the information about the disbursement. Others got it, I didn't," he said.

This raises a crucial question: should victims, already suffering physically and mentally, be expected to chase down financial aid?

Where Is the System?
Md Faruk Hossain, Joint Secretary and

In-Charge of the July Mass Uprising Cell at the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs, stated, "One-time allowances of BDT 2 lakh, out of the approved BDT 5 lakh, have already been disbursed to Category A and B victims in most divisions—except Chattogram and Rangpur."

He added that disbursement in those two divisions would begin the following week. "Monthly stipends will commence in July," he said.

For those with urgent needs, such delays only deepen their suffering.

"Frequent queries, incomplete victim information, and the absence of a streamlined system have caused delays—despite our best efforts," he noted. "In many cases, victims cannot be reached even after multiple attempts. Limited formal education among some also complicates communication."

The Dignity They Deserve
Every victim interviewed expressed the same needs: a monthly stipend, lifelong free treatment, and recognition. What they've received instead are fragmented support measures and delayed promises.

Md Mijanur now depends on loans from relatives. His most urgent need? A proper house. "I had to stop construction after losing my job. If the promised funds were released, I could have finished it."

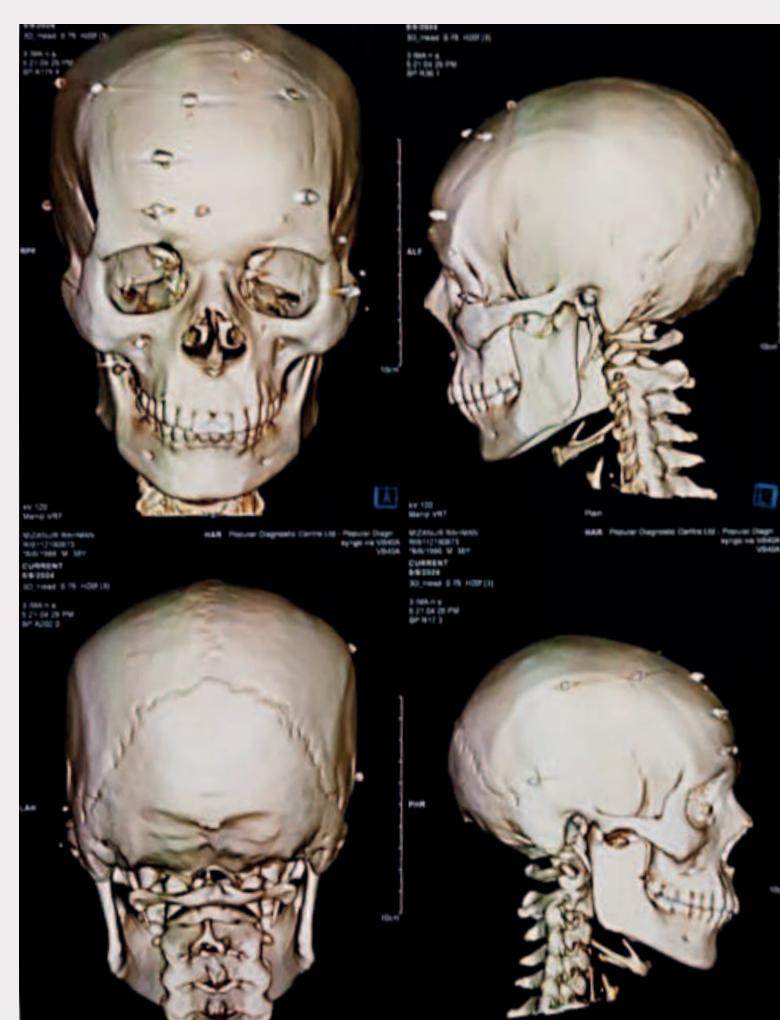
Others, like Shahinur, are still fighting for basic dignity. "Correct my category. Give me the allowance. I'm not asking for luxury—just survival," he said.

The Time for Action Is Now
As the dust of political change settles, these victims remain caught in a humanitarian vacuum. A centralised rehabilitation programme, coordinated across ministries and grounded in transparency, is urgently needed.

While efforts may be present, the ongoing delays continue to compound the challenges. "Many issues have emerged now—Injured victims are protesting, some getting aggressive," says Nusrat Jahan, student representative at CMH appointed by the Health Ministry. "This could have been avoided had prompt action been taken from the beginning."

Dr Choudhury echoes the call for long-term support: "These patients require lifelong care—treatment may continue for years."

Miftahul Jannat is a journalist at The Daily Star



COURTESY: MD MIJANUR RAHMAN BADOL
A CT scan reveals the silent agony—like many other victims, Md Mijanur Rahman Badol still has gun pellets lodged in his face and skull.

Beyond development paradox & UNNAYAN WITHOUT DEMOCRACY

Why institutional reform must begin with the right narrative

The reform initiative must shift the focus from process to outcomes. Too often, institutional success is measured by whether a circular has been issued, not whether a problem has been solved. How results are meaningfully achieved must become the central concern of reform thinking. Such a mindset shift is long overdue.

HOSSAIN ZILLUR RAHMAN

As Bangladesh seeks to recalibrate its path in the aftermath of recent upheavals, the time is ripe to revisit an oft invoked but under-examined agenda: institutional reform. Institutions are crucial to understand, as they are foundational for governance, transformation, and economic development. It is tempting to dive straight into prescriptions—restructure this ministry, decentralise that department—but such surface-level enthusiasm risks masking deeper, structural blind spots unless we first confront a fundamental challenge: our burden of flawed narratives. Reform narratives orient us to focus on certain aspects of institutions while overlooking others—ultimately shaping which policy actions are prioritised.

In the 1990s, a popular intellectual shorthand coined by some economists described Bangladesh's experience as "development paradox"—growth without governance. When governance was said to be absent, the empirical focus was largely on corruption—primarily measured through

indicators like Transparency International's rankings, which listed Bangladesh among the most corrupt countries. The phrase caught on, reinforced by these international rankings of corruption and governance deficits. Yet this narrative glossed over key institutional breakthroughs during that same period, which

was also marked by competitive politics. Private banking and private universities emerged in the early 1990s, marking major institutional expansion in the finance and education sectors. The period also

saw the transformative spread of mobile telephony and the institutionalisation of social protection programmes such as the old age allowance and stipends for primary and girls' education.

These were not anomalies; they were significant governance reforms that underpinned growth and social development. Corruption was certainly a reality in that period, but the narrative framing was flawed because it overlooked major governance reforms in banking, education, and telecommunications. To reduce the decade to a 'growth without governance' paradox was to obscure the very institutional drivers that enabled growth. This is why I want to emphasise that, when engaging with institutional reform, it is essential that the narrative is not built on a selective reading of the empirical record.

The misalignment between narrative and empirical reality was not unique to the 1990s. Fast forward to the period of the fallen regime from 2009 to 2024. We again witnessed the re-emergence of a similar paradoxical narrative. This time, the dominant discourse was 'unnayan without democracy'. While apologists for the autocratic regime promoted the idea that development did not need democracy and growth must be pursued at any cost, this too was a flawed narrative. Beneath the surface, competitiveness declined, the employment elasticity of growth sharply dropped, and inequalities reached alarming levels. Economic and political governance—particularly of the transformative kind—retreated.

The cost of flawed narratives is not merely semantic. They orient our gaze towards certain institutions while rendering others invisible. Consider two broad types of institutions: watchdog bodies and grooming institutions. Watchdogs are designed to monitor and enforce accountability—catching

corruption, ensuring

compliance. Grooming institutions, on the other hand, do not punish but instead focus on nurturing and building capacity, developing people, and strengthening systems. Unfortunately, due to dominant but flawed narratives, our reform efforts have historically leaned too heavily towards watchdog type institutions. As a result, we tend to overinvest in bodies tasked with punishing deviation, while neglecting institutions designed to nurture competence and initiative. The Anti-Corruption Commission or consumer rights bodies may attract media attention, but where are the institutions that build the next generation of public health professionals or local administrators?

The second point I want to raise is about clarity of purpose. We often talk about restructuring institutions—how a bank should be managed, or how a ministry or an agency could be reorganised. But before institutional reform can be meaningfully undertaken, we must ask: what are the end goals we seek to achieve? What is it we want these institutional reforms to deliver? Otherwise, institutional reform risks being driven by narrow bureaucratic interests. For example, a ministry might push for changes that serve its internal concerns, rather than broader national priorities—better service delivery, greater equity, faster justice, enhanced preparedness, or stronger accountability.

What are the end goals of reforming



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

workers find pathways to formal protection, and that domestic investors are not crowded out by headline-grabbing FDI summits. It is about ensuring that the benefits of reform are not monopolised by a few but reach the many.

Reimagining the economic role of the state is also critical to getting the reform narrative right. Today, as the stability of the global trading system comes under strain, economic nationalism has once again emerged as a significant idea. However, neither market fundamentalism nor the command economy concept of an earlier era is particularly useful here—nor is a bureaucratic dominance that is red tape-friendly and hoirani-prone. Institutional reform needs to strengthen that part of the economic role of the state that catalyses innovation and long-term resilience.

Looking at Bangladesh—and indeed, South Asia more broadly—there is a particular character to the way economic transformation happens, quite different from East Asia. Much

institutions are often headed by generalist administrators, their leadership determined less by expertise and more by bureaucratic convenience. Reform agendas become vehicles for career placements rather than systemic transformation. The

result is institutional mimicry—reform in form, not substance.

The reform narratives have also been overly supply-driven. Demand-side inputs, especially from SMEs, youth, women, and local actors, remain weak or co-opted. During a recent dialogue with small business owners, one entrepreneur lamented: "We are asked for feedback but never see it reflected in the final policy." FBCCI and other chambers were meant to be demand-side vehicles—but are they truly voicing the policy and reform needs of the community? Similarly, SMEs lack organisational channels to push for reforms that would benefit them. Other countries, like Turkey, have successfully set up such vehicles, allowing both large and small businesses to shape meaningful reforms.

Some imperatives are now clear. First, we need a personnel policy that prizes merit and nurtures professional specialisation. Second, we must empower local institutions—not simply decentralise for form's sake. Third, we need a "redundancy audit" of outdated regulations. One such regulation is the requirement for police verification for jobs—a colonial relic that served little purpose other than delay and rent-seeking. It took years to roll back something that had long outlived its usefulness.

Think of the proverbial machhimara kerani—the office clerk who, having once killed a fly with a file, now repeats the ritual endlessly because it has become 'procedure'. Institutional reform must also address a cancer institutionalised by the autocratic regime: the mainstreaming of rampant conflicts of interest in economic governance.

Finally, the reform initiative must shift the focus from process to outcomes. Too often, institutional success is measured by whether a circular has been issued, not whether a problem has been solved. How results are meaningfully achieved must become the central concern of reform thinking. Such a mindset shift is long overdue.

Institutional reform, in its true sense, must go beyond merely creating new agencies or laws. At a deeper level, we also need to address the issue of

policy sovereignty—which is not just about political independence but also about ensuring that the policies and reforms we adopt are genuinely suited to our needs and not overly influenced by external experts or agencies. To do that, we must first unburden ourselves of flawed narratives and rediscover the empirical truths and aspirations that truly define our national journey.

This speech was delivered by Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman, Chairman, Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC), at the 6th Bangladesh Economics Summit 2025, organised by the Economics Study Centre, University of Dhaka. The Daily Star team and Namira Shameem of PPRC assisted with the transcription of the recorded speech.



of the transformation in Bangladesh has been initiative-driven rather than policy-led. In many cases, progress occurred not because there was a clear policy, but because someone took initiative—within or outside government. For example, farmers began experimenting with solar irrigation techniques on their own, and over time, this reshaped the agricultural landscape. So, when we talk about institutional reform, we must ensure that new regulatory burdens do not close down these spaces for individual or collective initiative. Over-regulation can end up stifling this vital source of innovation.

Yet even where reform initiatives have been launched, many have ended in dead ends. We have created institutions without staffing them properly. We have built infrastructure without equipping it with the necessary personnel or decision-making power. Consider BARD in Cumilla, once envisioned as a global centre of excellence, now faded from prominence—not for lack of vision, but because human resources and autonomy never caught up with infrastructure.

Not filling sanctioned posts at operational levels year after year is an institutional disease across the gamut of the public sector. Service delivery institutions—hospitals and ports, to name just a few—lack critical financial and administrative autonomy. Specialised





Four large steel plants of leading business groups --
Abul Khair Group, BSRM Group, GPH Group Steel Mills and KSRM -- and around 30 traditional and semi-automated mills are located in Sitakunda, meeting nearly 50 percent of the nation's total demand for steel

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Ctg

Picture a crowded harbour where the salty seabreeze carries whispers of far-off lands, where merchants of all creed and caste haggle over silks and spices, and where towering ships of all varieties – Chinese junks, Arab dhows, and Portuguese caravels – sway gently in the waters of the Bay of Bengal.

One of the most famous harbours in ancient times, the port in Chattogram has been the ultimate pit stop for traders, explorers, and fortune-seekers for over 2,000 years.

Thanks to its strategic geographic location as a natural sea harbour that offers access to vast plainlands but remains surrounded by hillocks, the anchorage in Chattogram has featured in some of the richest chapters of history.

The maritime Silk Road – the ocean-based sibling of the famous caravan trails – ran straight through the Bay of Bengal, with the jetties in Chattogram being the star player.

All the way back in the 4th century BC, sailors were dropping anchor here, turning the Bay of Bengal into a buzzing hub of commerce.

By the 2nd century AD, the legendary geographer Claudius Ptolemy had inked the location onto his world map, mentioning it as one of the finest ports in the Eastern World.

Five centuries later, Chinese traveller Xuanzang declared it “a misty beauty emerging out of the misty water”, as mentioned in Routledge’s International Dictionary of Historic Places. Much later, even Marco Polo was said to be left in awe of the lush landscape that provided the backdrop for the harbour.

Throughout chapters of chaos, conquest and colonisation, the port of Chittagong always emerged as a thriving commercial hub, whether it was when Arab merchants dominated in the 9th century or under Portuguese hold in the 1500s.

WHERE PIONEERING INDUSTRIES FOUND THEIR FEET

Since days of yore, the bustling landscape of trade and commerce due to the proximity to the port, in combination with hinterland connectivity, has seen the Chittagong region rise to the top as the go-to spot for export-oriented industries.

For example, although Sylhet dominates the scene now, tea production in Bangladesh started in a hilly area of Chattogram in 1843.

The region also sparked the boom in export-oriented readymade garments, which now account for over 80 percent of the country's export basket, in 1977, when the nation's first RMG unit was built in Kalurghat industrial area.

Furthermore, the oldest and most historic tea trading hub in the country was established in the region in 1949, followed shortly after by the country's pioneering steel re-rolling company, which found a home in the region's

How Chattogram built its economic legacy

Nasirabad industrial area in 1952.

Additionally, the country's only state-owned fuel oil refinery, Eastern Refinery Limited (ERL), was established in the region in 1968. Currently, a subsidiary of the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC), which is also headquartered in the division, ERL has a refining capacity of 1.5 million tonnes.

Likewise, state-owned Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Limited (CUFL), along with its two associated units, Diammonium Phosphate Fertiliser Company Ltd and local multinational joint venture plant Karnaphuli Fertilizer Company Limited, are located on the southern bank of the Karnaphuli river, with jetty facilities near the port.

Playing host to the country's premier seaport also made Chattogram the ideal venue to host the nation's first export-processing zone, which was developed in South Halishahar in 1983.

SITAKUNDA: A STORY OF TRANSFORMATION

The numbers, provided by the Department of Inspections for Factories and Establishments (DIFE), show that there are a total of 4,007 registered manufacturing industrial units in greater Chattogram, from Feni to Cox's Bazar, excluding those in export processing zones. Of these, around 2,500 are now operational.

Data from Industrial Police shows that around 1,650 small, medium and heavy industrial units are now

GPH Group Steel Mills and KSRM – and around 30 traditional and semi-automated mills are located in Sitakunda, meeting nearly 50 percent of the nation's total demand for steel.

Four out of the five major CI sheet-making plants are also set up in the sub-district, meeting 70 percent of the country's total demand. These four plants are owned by Abul Khair Group, PHP Family, KDS Group and TK Group.

Despite the massive scale of operations there, Sitakunda remains just a small glimpse into the overall scenario in recent times.

Looking back at history, the Chattogram region's impact on key domestic industries becomes undeniable.

THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE STEEL SECTOR

There was no steel plant on Bangladeshi soil until 1952. That year, a few merchants hailing from Gujarat took separate initiatives, setting up three or four small manual rod-making plants in Chattogram.

While the other initiatives did not progress well, Akberali Africawala's family, the founders of the first plant under what is now the BSRM Group, found success.

The country's first billet-making plant, the state-owned Chittagong Steel Mills, was also founded here in 1967 before being shuttered 39 years later, paving the way for private initiatives in the sector to flourish.

Although there are around 42 steelmakers in Bangladesh, the

account for around 62 percent of total steel-melting capacity.

BSRM Managing Director Aameer Alihussain said Chattogram has become the place to be for all heavy industries, not only the steel sector, mainly due to its proximity to the port.

Since the steel industry is highly dependent on imports for raw materials, Alihussain said the advantage of being as close to the port as possible comes in the form of low transport costs.

If you set up a factory anywhere else, such as Dhaka, you need to transport raw materials all the way to Dhaka, and then the finished products need to be brought here again for sale. That makes transport costs very high," he said.

No steel factory located in Dhaka sells its products in the Chattogram market since it is unviable, he added, saying that heavy industry must be set up in Chattogram.

HUB FOR CI SHEET INDUSTRY

Another pioneering moment came with the establishment of the state-owned Chittagong Steel Mill in 1967, signalling the beginning of domestic production of corrugated iron (CI) sheets used widely for housing and factory roofing.

However, this factory proved inadequate to meet domestic demand. So, the private sector stepped up in the mid-80s, with some Chattogram-based businesses initiating CI sheet production by importing intermediate raw materials.

this particular segment is also higher than Dhaka's. Out of the 44 ships exported from Bangladesh so far, 34 were built by Western Marine.

The country's first export processing zone was set up in Chattogram in 1983. However, although it offered a sprawling 453 acres of land, only a few industrial units called it home.

In the 42 years since, the number has climbed to 144, including 78 RMG factories.

Since all 501 industrial plots in the zone were allocated around 15 years ago, currently, the factories here are expanding vertically.

The factories at the Chittagong Export Processing Zone exported goods worth \$1.8 billion in the first nine months of this fiscal year.

The largest privately-owned EPZ, the Korean Export Processing Zone (KEPZ), was also set up in Chattogram's Anwara upazila in 1999.

A subsidiary of the South Korean Youngone Corporation, the KEPZ currently hosts 48 industrial units, largely under the ownership of Youngone.

Presently, KEPZ factories export goods worth approximately \$400 million each year.

Another state-run EPZ, named the Karnaphuli EPZ, was set up in 2006. It now has 48 industrial units, including 23 RMG factories, employing over 77,000 individuals.

'COMMERCIAL CAPITAL' IN NAME ONLY

Although the country's second-most populous city is often termed the commercial capital in modern day, many believe it remains a mere political slogan in light of the challenges that the city and the region as a whole still face.

A lack of proper infrastructural development and policy support, courtesy of the negligence of policymakers, forced many entrepreneurs to gradually shift their businesses to Dhaka.

Yet, the region remains at the heart of the country's economy, and the reason for that is simple.

The Chattogram port is the premier driver of the country's economic engine, facilitating 92 percent of Bangladesh's seaborne trade while handling 98 percent of the country's total containerised goods transport.

However, its immense economic potential is stifled by challenges brought on by inadequate infrastructure development and a heavy reliance on Dhaka for crucial regulatory support for business.

Congestion at the Chattogram Port, higher cargo handling costs, higher logistics and transport costs, and inadequate transportation networks hinder the city's economic growth.

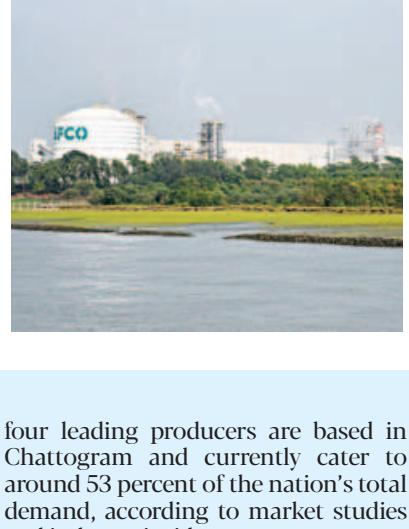
Satyajit Barman, head of grain in TK Group, said almost 85 percent of the food grain trading business, once based in Khatunganj, has shifted to Dhaka due to exorbitant cargo handling and transport costs.

Bad management of warehouses and illogical weight limits on carrying cargo transport along the Dhaka-Chattogram highway have also had an impact.

Most businesses stressed the need to address these issues to help Chattogram realise its full potential.

From its golden days to its pivotal role in Bangladesh's industrial rise, Chattogram has always thrived at the intersection of history and opportunity.

Yet, for all its past glory and present potential, the city's future now depends on overcoming infrastructural bottlenecks and policy neglect.



operational in Chattogram.

To take a closer look, one must journey to this south-eastern part of the country. And among stories of industrial development, the Sitakunda upazila is a standout.

Before the Dhaka-Chattogram highway, widely considered the country's economic lifeline, reaches the port city, it traverses through this upazila.

This twist of fate has turned the nearly 500 square kilometre sub-district into a bustling industrial hub, with over 200 industrial units springing up.

On one side of the highway, along the sandy beach on the Bay of Bengal, you will find the world's largest ship-breaking industry by volume, handling around half of the world's discarded ships.

On the other side, one can witness various industrial units ranging from steel re-rolling plants, corrugated iron (CI) sheet manufacturing units, cement factories, glass factories, jute mills, textile mills, vehicle assembling units and even container depots.

Four large steel plants of leading business groups

– Abul Khair Group, BSRM Group,

four leading producers are based in Chattogram and currently cater to around 53 percent of the nation's total demand, according to market studies and industry insiders.

These four major steelmakers are: Bangladesh Steel Re-Rolling Mills (BSRM), Abul Khair Steel (AKS), GPH Ispat and Kabir Steel Re-Rolling Mills (KSRM).

According to BigMint, a platform for commodity price reporting, market intelligence and consulting, BSRM caters to around 25 percent of domestic demand while AKS contributes 14 percent, GPH 8 percent and KSRM 6 percent.

At present, the country's steelmakers have a combined capacity of 90 lakh tonnes each year against an annual requirement of around 70 lakh tonnes. A BigMint study shows that steel factories in Chattogram

Between 1998 and 2004, five Chattogram-based industrial groups, namely Abul Khair, PIP, TK, KDS and S Alam Group, set up large factories to manufacture raw materials such as cold rolled coils to produce CI sheets.

At present, these five manufacturers control 99 percent of the CI sheet market.

These factories have also invested in producing more durable and multi-dimensional CI sheet products.

SHINING BRIGHTEST IN SHIP BUILDING

Around 200 registered shipbuilding yards are active across the country, most of which are located in the Narayanganj area.

However, these are mostly conventional operations making commodity and passenger vessels for domestic use.

In the past 25 years, at least 20 shipyards have been modernised and are now capable of building international standard vessels upon extensive modification.

Two out of these 20 shipyards, namely Chattogram-based Western Marine Shipyard and Dhaka-based Ananda Shipyard and Slipways Limited, have set a new benchmark by building and exporting a total of 44 ocean-going vessels since 2007.

Chattogram's stake in

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

