



"I ask if you can have mercy. It's good for you and good for the Palestinians. It's good for humanity."

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus begs Israel to show 'mercy' in Gaza

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SECOND EDITION

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Where  
Nazrul's  
flute still  
echoes  
WR1



Trapped  
within  
borders  
WR2



The Kajoli  
Model: Learning  
with laughter,  
growing with joy  
WR3



Iran, US hold  
new round of  
nuclear talks  
in Rome  
P5

NATIONAL BUDGET FY25-26

## Govt to recast social safety net schemes

Cut one-third of programmes but increase number of beneficiaries

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and WASIM BIN HABIB

The interim government is likely to introduce a transparent system for social safety net schemes in the upcoming budget, increasing the number of beneficiaries by around 10 lakh while slashing one-third of the existing programmes.

In the new system, there will be fewer than 100 schemes, down from the current 140. Thirty-eight of the schemes will be grouped as "pro-poor" as suggested by the European Union and other development partners.

Assistance under this section will be targeted at the extreme poor, finance ministry officials said.

Economists have for years pointed out that the budget allocation for the social safety net seemed larger than it actually was, because the allocation included funds for various programmes, including ones under the development budget.

The government intends to streamline the system by removing such programmes to reflect a more accurate picture, according to the officials.

The upcoming budget documents will detail the specific allocations for each of the social safety net schemes, they said.

For the social safety net schemes, the government is likely to set aside Tk 95,908 crore in the fiscal year (FY) 2025-26, accounting for 12.18 percent of the total outlay. In the current fiscal year, the allocation for these schemes was Tk 90,468 crore, which was 11.35 percent of the total budget.

The allocation for the existing 140 social safety net programmes was Tk 136,026 crore in the current budget. If these programmes were carried forward, the total allocation in FY26 would rise to Tk 144,655 crore.

Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modelling (SANEM), a think tank, said there had been a longstanding demand for streamlining the social protection schemes.

"I think it is good that the government intends to streamline the social safety net programmes, though I am not sure which programmes are being dropped," he told The Daily Star.

Social safety net programmes are designed for poor and marginalised families, but their allocation remains inadequate. "In terms of the GDP, Bangladesh spends the least in the world. We must see how these concerns are addressed in the next budget," he said.

### BOTH ALLOWANCE AND BENEFICIARIES TO RISE

Apart from the number of beneficiaries, the monthly allowance in core cash assistance programmes will increase by only Tk 50 to Tk 100 in the next fiscal year.

About the allowance, Selim said such an increase had been made in

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- Number of schemes likely to be reduced to around 100
- Allocation for the schemes to rise to Tk 95,908 crore
- 38 schemes to be grouped under a 'pro-poor' section
- Cash assistance to rise by Tk 50-100 per person
- Number of beneficiaries to rise by 10 lakh

A lush mango orchard is brimming with a dozen different varieties of mangoes, each carefully protected in paper bags. This method safeguards the fruit from pests and weather damage, leading to healthier harvests. The photo was taken in Rajshahi's Godagari upazila yesterday.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

## COMMENTARY

### Please don't resign An appeal to Prof Yunus

A captain cannot abandon ship, especially when the sea is turbulent

MAHFUZ ANAM



Every beat of my patriotic heart, every spark of my nation building energy, every iota of my common sense, every conclusion of my rational thinking compels me to most ardently, passionately and humbly appeal to Prof Yunus not to resign from the position of holding the helm of the nation at this crucial time. He may have all the frustrations in the world but his sense of responsibility as the head of the government must outweigh every other emotion, consideration and conclusion. We

know and believe that he loves Bangladesh in which case resignation is not his option but holding the helm is. Leading the country firmly, effectively and decisively till the next election is his only option and something for which people and this country will remain forever grateful to him. He must decide to stay the course and we, the media, will support him all the way. However independent media's form of support, which is its moral duty, is to present alternatives, multiple views and analyses, including

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**Govt firm on carrying out 3 responsibilities  
Plans to meet parties over reforms, trials and polls**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is considering engaging with political parties to signal that it expects no obstruction from them in fulfilling three of its key responsibilities.

These responsibilities include implementing ongoing reforms, conducting trials of Awami League leaders for their alleged role in mass killings during the July uprising, and holding the next general election between this December and next June.

Sources familiar with discussions held yesterday at the Chief Adviser's Office and his official residence, Jamuna, said various political parties have reached out to advisers and other officials since news broke that Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus is considering resignation.

The advisers are expected to sit within a day or two to deliberate on the government's message, with options on the table including possible dialogues with all the political parties, according to the sources.

A highly placed source said Prof Yunus remains firm on his position that he should step down if the current political tension does not ease.

The chief adviser insists on having full authority to make decisions -- authority he says was assured when he took charge, according to a highly placed source.

He has also questioned the emergence of obstacles, pointing out that his government had initially received a clear mandate to pursue reforms, try Awami League leaders, and hold the general election.

Frustrated by recent political tensions, the chief adviser, during an informal discussion at Thursday's advisory council meeting,

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Grief-stricken mourners weep as they attend the funeral of Palestinians killed in Israeli strikes at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, in the southern Gaza Strip, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Only election roadmap will ease tensions  
Say BNP leaders

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA and SAJJAD HOSSAIN

The BNP believes that only a clear roadmap for the election will be able to improve the present volatile situation in the country's politics.

BNP leaders said they believe the situation resulted from divisions among the political camps that supported the July uprising, particularly over issues like the timing of the election and the demand for the resignation of certain advisers.

The other contentious issues include a proposed humanitarian corridor to Myamar's war-torn Rakhine state and the government move to hand Chattogram port's management to a foreign company.

BNP leaders believe it is possible for the interim government to unveil the election roadmap by June. The sooner it is announced, the quicker the political atmosphere will be clarified, the party leaders said.

BNP leaders said they have been communicating with its allies over the past two days. A source said a formal meeting with the allies might take place in a day or two.

Meanwhile, the Ganosamhati Andolon also said an immediate announcement

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**NCP, IAB urge Yunus to stay, make good on reform promises**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Citizen Party yesterday urged Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus to resolve the problems while remaining at the helm, and the Islami Andolan Bangladesh requested him to make reforms, saying his loyalty should lie with the martyrs of July.

The parties are saying these amid reports that Yunus expressed his desire to resign on Thursday.

NCP Convener Nahid Islam wrote on Facebook last night that Prof Yunus must make good on his promises on reforms, justice, and voting rights.

"He must resolve all political problems while remaining in his position," Nahid wrote.

The election will be held within the timeframe given by the government, and the July Charter outlining the fundamental reforms would be drafted before the election, he wrote.

There must be visible justice for the July massacre before the election, and a roadmap to the trial must be announced, he added.

The elections to the Constituent Assembly and National Parliament must be held simultaneously, he added.

Nahid said the country had been repeatedly divided, national unity

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## A WALL'S EYE-VIEW diary of a neighbourhood

MANNAN MASHHUR ZARIF

Every locality in this city has stories, and none seem to speak louder than the anecdotes shared by walls! Case in point: Shantinagar! Having lived here for over four decades, I am no stranger to the tales they offer, and curiously, these narratives are ever-changing.

As a child, I witnessed the fall of the Ershad regime. Once the dictator was removed from power, the entire neighbourhood came alive with graffiti boldly championing change. The shift in the political landscape was evident simply by looking at the walls.

The area's status as an electoral hotspot meant its plastered boundaries remained a vibrant canvas for "chikamara" (the term locals used for graffiti) even after the downfall of autocracy.

With the advent of technology, these were replaced by posters, sometimes making their point in simple topography and, at times, with grotesque imageries of things done wrong to people with opposing views. [Of course, graffiti came in the limelight once again after the fall of the Hasina regime. The slogans this time were not just political, but at times, deeply personal, turning every brick into a bulletin board of public dissent.]

In my teens, I began to notice things more seriously. One of the more familiar sights back then was the crowd that gathered around walls with daily newspapers glued on the plaster. Here, you did not just read the headlines, you also got unsolicited commentary from



PHOTO: MD MONOWARUL KABIR MILON

the person beside you, and a regular dose of conspiracy theories from "analysts."

Now in my mid forties, I spot office-goers dressed in crisp shirts, pressed trousers, and formal shoes, pausing at the same corners jotting down bits of information. Fast forward to the 2020s, the walls have embraced new messages.

The newspaper section is gone and at every turn, you will find flyers offering seats for rent. No surprises there, but there's a catch!

The "to-let" notices rarely advertise full apartments anymore. Instead, they seek tenants for single rooms or shared mess seats at affordable prices. The ads are simple, no frills; just a brief line and a phone number. Some are "For men only," others "For females," and

every now and then, you come across a sign declaring "Only Family" with such urgency, it feels like the wall itself is shouting, "Bachelors not welcome!"

Amidst the sea lie the curious renegade; advertisements for the proverbial *ghotok* (matchmakers) and their modern-day competition, matrimonial websites. There is also the poster for the Kazi, government endorsed agents who scribes the marital document, the *kabin-nama*. I shudder at the thought of the "tantrik-sadhu" making his appearance, promising cure to marital discord and a lot of earthly problems!

Of course, there are also the run-of-the-mill advertisements of coaching centres. From offering to preparing students for madrasas and cadet

colleges to medical and university admissions, every inch of wall space seems to be taken.

Some promise miracle IELTS scores in just three months, results that seem achievable by none but the most proficient in English. Others promise you to teach Korean at Farmgate!

And then there are remnants of advertising trends that never caught on. The "Manobatar Dewal" initiative, launched during the pandemic, encouraged residents to hang their used clothes on the walls for the less fortunate to take. Now, only the words and hooks remain, reminding us that in a city that has now turned cold, humanity makes a comeback only in times of peril.

I have always believed that you can measure the economic condition of a neighbourhood by the stories its walls share. And in Shantinagar, it's clear that the hard realities of life are leaving its mark. After all, it is no longer an affluent part of the city, now mostly called home by the burgeoning middle-class.

The modest, time-worn walls call upon the residents of this locality to hear their stories, and while doing so, echo the voices of the very people that they themselves were built to guard.

PS: In a way, the walls have now moved online. Facebook groups and messenger threads dedicated to Shantinagar are now "plastered" with the same notices, tuition ads, lost and found announcements for cats, pest control, and coaching centre promotions! It's as if the walls have taken to the Internet, and still screaming just as loudly.

## Govt to recast social safety net schemes

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every budget, but the amount is insignificant. "Will they be able to buy anything additional with the increased sum?"

Finance ministry officials said revenue earnings of the government remained low, while it had to spend a large amount on interest payments, subsidies, and salaries and allowances. As a result, it is difficult to significantly increase the allowances under the safety net schemes.

The government is likely to allocate Tk 52,366 crore for 38 schemes meant for the extreme poor.

Of the schemes, the largest programme is the "Old Age Allowance", introduced in fiscal year 1997-98 to provide social security to the elderly people who are poor and unable to earn.

Under this scheme, the monthly allowance next year will be increased by Tk 50 to Tk 650. Earlier in 2023, the allowance was Tk 600 a month per person and it remained unchanged despite high inflation.

In the next budget, the government will raise the number of new beneficiaries under the Old Age Allowance programme by 100,000.

The number of beneficiaries of the programme was 60.01 lakh. In the current budget, Tk 4,350 crore has been allocated for the programme.

## Only election roadmap will ease tensions

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on a roadmap for justice, reforms, and polls is necessary to overcome the current uncertainty as quickly as possible and pave the way for a democratic transition.

"There is no alternative to achieving political consensus on this matter," Ganosamhati Andolok said in a statement last night.

It also said national unity is essential for a peaceful democratic transition following the July uprising. "Without it, the nation will lose its way."

The Ganosamhati Andolok, along with the BNP and several other parties, had participated in simultaneous demonstrations against the previous Awami League regime.

BNP leaders also had discussions with the Jamaat-e-Islami regarding the current situation.

According to the sources, the BNP had planned to meet Yunus last Wednesday following a decision taken by its National Standing Committee amid protests by BNP leader Ishraque Hossain's supporters, who demanded that he be sworn in as Dhaka South City Corporation mayor in line with a court order.

They wanted to discuss Ishraque's issue, along with other current

the number of beneficiaries will reach 17.71 lakh, up from the existing 16.50 lakh.

The government will provide rice to 55 lakh families at a low price under the "Food Friendly Programme", with 10 lakh tonnes of rice to be distributed in the next financial year.

For the current financial year, 760,000 tonnes of rice have been allocated for 50 lakh families.

The families would be able to buy 30 kg rice at low price for six months instead of five months.

Under the "Employment Generation Programme for the Poorest", the government now provides Tk 200 a day as wages to beneficiaries for a maximum of 40 days a year.

The daily wage will be increased to Tk 250, while the number of beneficiaries will reach 6 lakh, up from the existing 5.18 lakh.

Selim Raihan emphasised the need to increase per person allocations to ensure that social safety net assistance has a meaningful impact on beneficiaries' lives.

Extensive research has been conducted on the challenges facing our social safety net programmes and the measures required to address them. I hope the upcoming budget will reflect some of them and move in the right direction."

The monthly allowance under the "Mother and Child Benefit Programme" scheme, will also be increased by Tk 50 to Tk 850, while

ask for time. How much time? This December or June next year? This must be clarified."

The BNP had prepared a written statement to present at the planned meeting.

As the meeting did not take place, the BNP held a press conference at the party chairperson's Gulshan office on Thursday.

At the press conference, BNP Standing Committee member Khandaker Mosharrat Hossain reiterated the party's demand for an immediate announcement of a roadmap for a free, fair, and inclusive national election by December this year.

Otherwise, he added, it would be difficult for the BNP to continue its support for the interim government.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir also stated that the only way out of the current political crisis is to promptly declare an election roadmap, as further discussions are pointless. "Reform is a continuous process," he added.

Asked about the matter, a BNP Standing Committee member said, "We don't want to agitate against this government. But whenever we bring up the election issue, they

## Please don't resign

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the unpalatable ones.

His life-long service for the poor through microcredit -- a poverty alleviation idea that the world accepted and replicated -- which not only made "credit a right" but also opened up the possibility of unleashing the entrepreneurial urge of every human being and make them self employed;

his basic urge to build a less unequal society through social business and his dream of building a sustainable planet through implementing "Three Zeros" made him the darling of the world and an iconic figure of the future.

But none of the above -- along with the laurels, the large number of globally coveted medals, the plethora of the honorary "doctorates", the endless streams of accolades -- prepared him for even one day's running of the government.

Normally running a government is difficult. Running the government of a country like Bangladesh is even more so and running it after dismantling a government that destroyed literally every institution of governance -- parliament, judiciary, police, bureaucracy, intelligence agencies etc -- is almost absurdly difficult. It is at that moment Prof Yunus answered the call of the students which, in effect, represented the call of the whole nation. Thus, he was welcomed overwhelmingly especially because people wanted a way out from the dark abyss in which we appeared to have fallen with no end in sight.

Students dug the tunnel, political activists held the lamps, people joined in streams and gave their lives and we suddenly saw the dawn. It was at that moment that Prof Yunus appeared to steward our future.

Given his global standing and his personal acceptability he appeared as our saviour. But he should have set his "terms" as he accepted his insurmountable task. He should have demanded that while he would serve the "new generation" -- they are not all-knowing and all-wise as they later started to be -- and that they will also have to listen to him. As he stepped into the muddy waters of running a

government and murky environment of politics he lost touch with the world of reality and practically and became totally swayed and enamoured by those whom he called "his employers".

This is not the time to pass any judgement on Yunus's government but suffice it to say that 10 months is not a short time for a government whose very name, "interim", suggests the transitory nature of its tenure. He chose an inexperienced -- not all of them -- team and did not run it like a hands-on commander. Crucially, some of his advisers got too used to power and started focusing on extending its tenure rather than finishing the task in hand. An unnecessary dichotomy was created between "reforms" and "election" which this paper consistently stated that both were possible within the time frame of December '25.

As of now we have consensus between the major political parties on some major issues like independence of judiciary, bicameral legislature, reconfiguration of power of the PM and president, two consecutive terms for the PM, etc. These are not trivial reforms. To these, some can still be added and an impressive charter for July can be made.

Regrettably a serious gap has been created between the biggest existing party, BNP, and the interim government which should not be allowed to widen further. We believe that Prof Yunus -- unlike some of his advisers -- is fully committed to elections not beyond June. A discussion between him and the BNP leadership can bring the two sides closer. Widening this gap cannot be good for either side as other disruptive elements are waiting in the wings.

Outline below is what may be considered as some of the immediate steps:

-- Hold a meeting of major political parties and declare an election date. What has been said months ago -- Dec '25 to June '26 -- needs to be updated.

-- Reschedule and reorient the cabinet to deliver some specific goals within the time frame agreed to by political parties.

## NCP, IAB urge Yunus to stay

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officers and soldiers must be ready to disrupt, and efforts were on to protect sovereignty and Bangladesh," he wrote.

Meanwhile, Islami Andolok Bangladesh Amee Syed Muhammed Rezaul Karim in a statement said the mass uprising had given the nation an opportunity to rebuild the country through policy, legal, institutional, and administrative reforms.

"Patriotic, pro-Bangladesh, and religious students masses must remain united in favour of sovereignty, reform, and the July uprising. Patriotic military

## Robbers attack ambulance carrying body; 9 hurt

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

A group of armed robbers attacked an ambulance carrying a deceased cancer patient in Nasirnagar upazila of Brahmanbaria early yesterday.

Failing to extort their desired amount of money and valuables, the assailants attacked the family members with sharp weapons and even allegedly struck the corpse, leaving at least nine people, including the driver, injured.

According to police and victims, the incident occurred around 1:00am at Tilpara area under Burishwar union. The deceased, Sabdar Ali of Purbobagh union, died while taking treatment at Dhaka Ahsanah Mission Cancer Hospital.

Shortly after his death, his body was being transported home in an ambulance when the vehicle was intercepted by a gang of robbers.

The robbers had blocked the road by felling trees, forcing the ambulance to a halt. They then attacked the vehicle, vandalised it, and assaulted the passengers. The robbers looted nine mobile phones and around Tk 50,000 in cash from the grieving family members.

"The robbers were enraged as we couldn't give them more money," said one of the victims. "They even struck the body of our father with local weapons. It was inhuman."

Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Tapan Sarkar of the Sarail Circle said, "The area is considered high risk, and locals have been advised to inform police before travelling at night so that security protocol can be arranged. Several people were injured, and mobile phones were snatched. We are conducting drives to arrest those involved."

## Trump fires new tariff threats at Apple, EU

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump yesterday ratcheted up the US trade war, threatening to impose a new 25 percent levy against Apple, and a 50 percent tariff on the European Union.

Lamenting that negotiations with the EU "are going nowhere," Trump said on Truth Social that he is recommending "a straight 50% Tariff on the European Union, starting on June 1, 2025."

If the new duties come into effect, they would dramatically hike the current US baseline levy of 10 percent, and raise economic tensions between the world's biggest economy and its largest trading bloc.

In a separate message, the president said Apple had failed to move iPhone production to the United States despite his repeated requests, and he threatened new duties of "at least" 25 percent if they did not comply.

He said that political parties have their demands and interests, but they must refrain from exerting pressure on the interim government to reach their goals. He urged parties to shun the confrontational political culture.

The chief adviser must carry out the crucial task of reform to honour people's sacrifices, he wrote.

"Disregard any pressure, non-cooperation, or obstacles from any party or individual and remain steadfast in fulfilling the responsibilities..." he added.

# DHAKA

## AFTABNAGAR FIRE Four of 5 burn victims die

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A child, who was injured in a fire in Dhaka's Aftabnagar, died yesterday, bringing the death toll to four out of the five members of the same family who were burnt in the incident.

Mithila Akter, 7, succumbed to her injuries around 8:30pm at the National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery, said Dr Shawon Bin Rahman, residential surgeon at the institute.

"She had sustained 60 percent burns along with critical injuries to her airways. She was being treated in the High Dependency Unit [HDU], where she died," he said.

Earlier, her father Tofazzal Hossain, 32, mother Mansura Akter, 28, and younger sister Tanzila Akter, 4, died from their injuries.

The couple's eldest daughter, Tanisha, 11, is still undergoing treatment with 30 percent burns. Her condition is also critical, Dr Rahman added.

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## RU renames 12 structures

A section of students slams the move

RU CORRESPONDENT

The Rajshahi University (RU) administration has renamed at least 12 structures and buildings on campus.

The decision was made during the university's 539th syndicate meeting held on May 22, confirmed acting registrar Iftikhar Alam Masud.

However, the move has drawn criticism, as a section of students has claimed that most of the changes were unnecessary and politically motivated.

As per the changes, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Hall has been renamed Bijoy 24 Hall, while Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Hall is now July 36 Hall.

The Syed Nazrul Administration Building has been renamed Administration Building 1, and Syed Mansur Ali Administration Building is now Administration Building 2.

In addition, the Tajuddin Ahmad Senate Building is now the Senate Building, Sheikh Kamal Stadium is Rajshahi University Stadium, Dr Kudrat-e-Khuda Academic Building has been renamed Jabir Ibn Hayyan Building, and Dr Wazed Miah Academic Building is now Jamal Nazrul Building.

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PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

A man on crutches crosses a makeshift bridge placed over the Kajla Canal. The crossing is dangerous for everyone, but especially so for someone using crutches, and an accident could occur at any moment. The photo was taken in the capital's Jatrabari area yesterday.

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## Rain spurs fear of dengue surge

Experts warn of potential outbreak if immediate measures not taken

HELEMUL ALAM

With the monsoon rains arriving early this year, the number of dengue cases is increasing rapidly, raising concerns about a potential outbreak in the coming months.

Experts have warned that if immediate preventive measures are not taken, the number of dengue patients may surpass last year's total of 1,01,214 cases, which resulted in 575 deaths.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), as of yesterday morning, the total number of dengue cases reported this year has reached 3,767, with 23 deaths. In April alone, there were 701 cases, and 1,195 cases were reported in the first 23 days of May – indicating a clear upward trend.

Entomologist Prof Kabirul Bashar of Jahangirnagar University said the population of Aedes mosquitoes is increasing across the country and is likely to continue rising in the coming months.

"The dengue situation may become worse than last year if urgent action, particularly breeding source reduction activities, is not undertaken immediately," he said.

Bashar emphasised the critical role of the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives (LGRD) in issuing immediate directives

to combat the spread of Aedes mosquitoes.

"Breeding source management and larvae control must be top priorities. Authorities and residents alike must ensure there is no stagnant water in containers, construction sites, or other locations," he added.

Entomologist GM Saifur Rahman echoed these concerns, stating that the current rainfall pattern is conducive to Aedes breeding.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Act now to prevent outbreak
- Eliminate stagnant water
- Identify, destroy Aedes hotspots
- Issue urgent directives
- Make dengue a reportable disease



"Like last year, there is no active national control programme in place. Without immediate intervention, the disease will likely spread to new areas," he warned.

Rahman also highlighted the need for making dengue a reportable disease in Bangladesh, which would ensure proper data collection and a more effective response.

"A large number of cases remain

undocumented due to the lack of mandatory reporting. Surveillance and data collection must be prioritised so targeted control measures can be implemented," he said.

"Early detection of Aedes hotspots is vital. Immediate action after rainfall to eliminate breeding sites and larvae is key to preventing a major outbreak."

Common breeding sites for Aedes aegypti mosquitoes include plastic drums, mud pots,

tubs, discarded tyres, under-construction buildings, bird water containers, stagnant water areas, cattle troughs, leaking pipes, and flooded floors in construction sites.

HM Nazmul Ahsan, associate professor at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College and Hospital, said they are currently seeing a low number of dengue patients, but

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## Hefazat calls for unity, patience

Demands Women's Affairs Reform Commission's report be scrapped

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hefazat-e-Islam yesterday urged all parties involved in the July uprising to set aside internal disputes, exercise patience, and unite to resist conspiracies against the state and help move the country forward.

"Many mothers have lost their children. Their tears have not dried. The blood of the martyrs is still fresh. It is not right for us to engage in a power struggle," he said.

"You cannot let your emotions and grievances fade the dreams of 18 crore people," said Hefazat Joint Secretary General Mamunul Haque during a protest programme. He mentioned BNP, Jamaat, student leaders, and stakeholders of the interim government.

Over a thousand Hefazat leaders and activists staged a protest in front of Baitul Mukarram Mosque after Juma

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Abul Hayat is presented with the Lifetime Achievement Award by Dilara Zaman at the Meril-Prothom Alo Awards yesterday. Also on stage were actor Afzal Hossain and Anjan Chowdhury, managing director of Square Toiletries Ltd.

DHAKA SATURDAY MAY 24, 2025  
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The Daily Star 3

## Prices of eggs, spices go up Vegetable, chicken markets stable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

While prices of summer vegetables and broiler chicken remained stable in Dhaka's kitchen markets over the past week, the cost of beef, eggs, and several spices saw an up tick.

During visits to several wholesale and retail markets -- including Karwan Bazar, Farmgate, Ibrahimpur, Shewrapara, and Kazipara -- traders and consumers said ample supply has helped keep the prices of most vegetables in check.

Summer produce such as eggplants, gourds, pointed gourds, okra, long beans, tomatoes, bitter gourds, and ridge gourds were selling for Tk 30-70 per kg. Onion was priced at Tk 50-60 per kg, while potatoes were available at Tk 20-22 per kg.

Saifur Rahman Chowdhury Sujan, general secretary of the Karwan Bazar Brihattar Paikari Kacha Bazar Arot Byabasai Malik Samity, said, "The supply of vegetables is currently greater compared to the demand, contributing to the recent fall in prices."

Abu Raihan, a resident of Tejkunipara who was shopping for vegetables and groceries at Karwan Bazar yesterday, said vegetable prices have remained stable over the past few weeks. However, the prices of other essentials such as soybean oil, eggs, and certain spices have been on the rise.

He called for stricter market monitoring to keep prices in check.

The prices of sugar and lentils have also dropped slightly. Md Gofran, proprietor of Cumilla General Store, said sugar prices declined from Tk 120 to Tk 115 per kg, and local lentils are now selling for Tk 130 per kg, down from Tk 140 two weeks ago. Soybean oil prices, however, remained unchanged after a previous hike.

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## RECRUITMENT AT JNU Committee formed to probe 15 years of corruption

JNU CORRESPONDENT

Jagannath University (JNU) has formed an investigation committee to probe allegations of irregularities and corruption in the recruitment and promotion of teachers, officers, and staff from 2009 to August 2024.

Alongside this, a public notice has been issued seeking information and evidence related to such misconduct during the period.

According to a notice signed by Mohammad Moshiur Islam, deputy registrar (Administration I) and issued on Thursday, individuals with information on recruitment or promotion irregularities during the specified time frame have been requested to submit written complaints by June 30.

The complaints must be submitted in sealed envelopes, and the identities of informer will be kept confidential, according to the notice.

Prof Md Rais Uddin, the convener of the committee and general secretary of the teachers' association, said, "Over the past 15 years, many individuals have allegedly secured appointments and promotions through irregular and corrupt practices. Although complaints were made in the past, previous administrations did not take effective action. The current administration has taken a bold step to investigate these matters. Action will be taken against those found guilty after proper investigation."



## Meril-Prothom Alo Awards 2024 held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 26th edition of the Meril-Prothom Alo Awards was held at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in Agargaon yesterday. The annual event celebrates the past year's finest film, television, and OTT projects.

The programme kicked off at 6:00pm with a red carpet reception that welcomed icons like Afzal Hossain, Dilara Zaman, Bidya Sinha Mim, Tasnia Farin, and Mehazabien Chowdhury, alongside numerous other actors, directors, and cultural personalities. The event was hosted by Afran Nisho and Tasnia Farin.

The opening performance featured a group dance by Monderia Chakraborty, Ridz Sheikh, and Tama Mirza, before officially starting with a welcome speech from Anisul Hoque, managing editor of Prothom Alo, followed by remarks from Malik Mohammed Sayeed, CEO of Square Toiletries Ltd, the event's long-standing partner.

The night's highlight was the Lifetime Achievement Award presented to veteran actor Abul Hayat. A moving documentary paid tribute to his career that has spanned across decades. Actress Dilara Zaman presented the award, while Anjan Chowdhury, managing director of Square Toiletries Ltd, honoured him with

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6



After school, children rush to this waterbody to catch small fish using nets. Following heavy rainfall over the past few days, fresh water has entered the waterbody in Sylhet, making it easier for people to wade in and catch fish. The photo was taken at Shimukandi village of Sadar upazila yesterday.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

## RU renames 12 structures

FROM PAGE 3  
Other changes include renaming the Faculty of

Agriculture Building to Agriculture Building, Sheikh Russell Model School to Rajshahi University Model School, Kajla Gate to Shaheed Sakib Anjum Gate, and Binodpur Gate to Shaheed Ali Raihan Gate.

Asked about the relevance of the new names, the acting registrar said, "We have seen students demanding the renaming of the Mujib Hall. Although they didn't have the formal authority to make that decision, we tried to understand the pulse of the students. Since a male dormitory was renamed Bijoy-24, we named a female dormitory July-36 to maintain parity. As for the other changes, we prioritised universality."

However, several

students expressed dismay over the matter. Salihuddin Ammar, former coordinator of the Students Against Discrimination, said while the university requires structural and policy reforms, the administration seems preoccupied with renaming buildings.

He also said students were not consulted before taking the decision and added that the new names reflect "short-sightedness".

He added, "Are the university admins devaluing 1971? Tajuddin Ahmad and Syed Nazrul Islam -- they are the heroes of 1971. Generations should know about their contribution."

Wazed Shishir Ovi, a student and secretary of the RU Student Federation, said, "The decision to rename these places is concerning. While the administration fails to address pressing issues such as accommodation shortages, lack of classrooms, insufficient research, faculty

campus safety, and the absence of a democratic environment, they are instead focusing on controversial and unnecessary name changes."

On February 6, several students protesting the previous names dismantled the nameplates of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Hall, Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Hall, Sheikh Russell Model School, Sheikh Kamal Stadium, and the under-construction AHM Kamaruzzaman and

Sheikh Hasina Halls.

Following the incident, the RU administration formed a seven-member committee on March 6 for naming and renaming university structures.

**PRAYER TIMING**  
MAY 24

Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 4-05	12-45	5-00	6-40	8-00
JAMAAT 4-40	1-15	5-15	6-45	8-30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

## Four of 5 burn victims

FROM PAGE 3  
The fire broke out following a gas explosion on May 16 in the ground-floor flat of a three-storey building at South Anandnagar. Mansura, her husband Tofazzal, and their three daughters were burnt.

Mohammad Ripon, Mithila's brother-in-law, said gas was leaking from a nearby construction site where underground digging had damaged a pipeline. "We informed the landlord about the leak on

the morning of the incident, but no action was taken," he said. "That night, while lighting a mosquito coil, the explosion occurred, engulfing the family in flames."

Tofazzal, a day labourer by profession, was the father of four daughters. All three of his younger daughters and his wife were injured in the blast. Only his eldest daughter, who happened to be at her grandparents' house at the time, escaped unharmed.

## Prices of eggs

FROM PAGE 3  
Traders said broiler chicken was being sold at Tk 150-170 per kg yesterday. The price of Sonali chicken also remained unchanged at Tk 240-280 per kg since last week.

In contrast, beef and egg prices have gone up. Abdul Kader, a beef vendor in East Shewrapara, said he is now selling beef at Tk 800 per kg, up from Tk 780 last week. "With Eid approaching, the demand for cattle has increased, which in turn pushed up beef prices," he said.

Eggs are now being sold for Tk 125-140 per dozen, compared to Tk 120-135 a week ago.

Prices of key spices also rose this week. Cardamom is now Tk 5,000-6,000 per kg -- up by Tk 200 -- while cumin is priced at Tk 600-700 per kg, slightly higher than two weeks ago.

The cost of imported ginger rose to Tk 110-220 per kg, compared to Tk 110-200 last week. Both local and imported garlic saw a hike: local varieties are now Tk 110-160 per kg, up from Tk 100-150, while imported garlic is selling for Tk 185-240 per kg, up from Tk 170-240.

Rain spurs fear

FROM PAGE 3  
The number is likely to rise as the rainy season continues.

"We are currently managing dengue patients in general wards, but dedicated wards will be set up if the patient load increases," he said.

He advised that anyone diagnosed with fever should immediately consult a doctor and get a dengue test, following prescribed treatments. Keeping well-hydrated is crucial, with coconut water, saline, fruit juices, and homemade drinks recommended to maintain hydration and provide essential vitamins and minerals to aid recovery.

## Ishraque vows

FROM PAGE 3  
The formation of zonal monitoring teams involving former councillors and past election candidates. He also expressed willingness to personally join conservancy workers on the ground.

Earlier on Thursday, the High Court cleared the way for him to take oath as DSCC mayor.

The ruling, issued by Justice Md Akram Hossain Chowdhury and Justice Debasish Roy Chowdhury, rejected a writ petition seeking a stay on the Election Commission's decision to declare him as the mayor of DSCC.

On March 27, Ishraque was declared the winner in the 2020 mayoral election against Awami League candidate Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh by an election tribunal.

## Meril-Prothom Alo Awards 2024

FROM PAGE 3

Mosharrif Karim was

recognised as Best Actor in the web series category for "Adhunik Bangla Hotel", with Zinnat Ara taking Best Actress for "Sinpaa".

Jahid Preetom won Best Director for "Buk Pocket Golpo" under the limited-length fiction segment, while Subrata Sanjib won Best Screenplay for "Rod Brishtir Golpo".

Tasnia Farin's role in "Porospor" earned her the Best Actress award, while Khairul Basar took Best Actor for his performances in "Porospor" and "Rod Brishtir Golpo" in the same

category.

"Priyo Maloti" won three major accolades, claiming the awards for Best Feature Film, while its director Shangkha Dasgupta was honoured as Best Director and actress Mehazaben Chowdhury took home the Best Actress award. Mammun Hasan Emon claimed the Best Actor award in the same category for his role in "Maya".

A documentary titled "Megastar Shakib Khan", celebrating 25 years of Shakib Khan in cinema, was also screened at the event.

## Hefazat calls for unity, patience

FROM PAGE 3

prayers, demanding the dissolution of the Women's Affairs Reform Commission and cancellation of its report, which they claimed contained recommendations against

the Quran.



A Palestinian man displays the damage after an attack by Israeli settlers in Bruqin village near Salfit, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## GOLDEN DOME MISSILE DEFENCE SYSTEM Trump's plan could launch new era of weapons

REUTERS, Washington

US President Donald Trump's Golden Dome missile defence concept revives a controversial, decades-old initiative whose ambitious construction could upend norms in outer space and reshape relations between the world's top space powers.

The announcement of Golden Dome, a vast network of satellites and weapons in Earth's orbit set to cost \$175 billion, could sharply escalate the militarization of space, a trend that has intensified over the last decade, space analysts say.

While the world's biggest space powers - the US, Russia and China - have put military and intelligence



assets in orbit since the 1960s, they have done so mostly in secrecy.

Under former President Joe Biden, US Space Force officials had grown vocal about a need for greater offensive space capabilities due to space-based threats from Russia and China.

When Trump announced his

Golden Dome plan in January, it was a clear shift in strategy, one that emphasizes a bold move into space with expensive, untested technology that could be a financial boon to US defense contractors.

The concept includes space-based missiles that would launch from satellites in orbit to intercept conventional and nuclear missiles launched from Earth.

"I think it's opening a Pandora's box," said Victoria Samson, director of space security and stability at the Secure World Foundation think tank in Washington, referring to deploying missiles in space.

"We haven't truly thought about the long-term consequences for doing so," she added.

## Napoleon's sword sold at auction for 4.7m euros

AFP, Paris

A sword that belonged to Napoleon and was specially ordered for the personal use of the French emperor fetched almost 4.7 million euros at auction in Paris, many times the asking price and coming close to a new record price for a Napoleonic artefact, the auction house said.

The piece, which Napoleon ordered in 1802 and kept throughout his reign, was sold for 4.66 million euros late Thursday, said the Drouot auctioneers, on whose premises the auction organised by the Giquello auction firm took place.

The sword had been estimated to reach 700,000 to one million euros when it came under the hammer in Paris.

The final price nearly broke the auction record for a Napoleonic artefact, set in 2007 when a sword used by Napoleon at the 1800 Battle of Marengo sold for 4.8 million euros. "It joins the very select group of the most valuable Napoleonic artifacts ever sold at auction," the Drouot auction house said.

## Israeli air strike hits building in Lebanon

Army says Hezbollah fighter killed

AFP, Beirut

Lebanese state media said an Israeli air strike hit a building in southern Lebanon on Thursday after Israel's military warned residents to evacuate an area linked to Hezbollah militants.

Israel has kept up its air strikes in neighbouring Lebanon despite a November truce aimed at halting more than a year of hostilities with Hezbollah that included two months of full-blown war.

Without confirming the reported attack on the southern town of Toul, the Israeli military said its forces had carried out several strikes targeting Hezbollah sites and killed one militant.

Lebanon's official National News Agency (NNA) said that "the Israeli enemy" struck a building in Toul, where the army had warned residents to evacuate the area around a building it said was used by Hezbollah militants.

The "urgent warning" was accompanied by a map showing a structure and the 500-metre (0.3-mile) radius around it marked in red.

"You are located near facilities belonging to the terrorist (group) Hezbollah," the statement said in Arabic, urging people "to evacuate these buildings immediately and move away from them".

There were no immediate reports of casualties in Toul.

In a separate statement, the military said it had "struck and eliminated a Hezbollah Radwan Force terrorist in the area of Rab El Thalathine", about 17 kilometres (10 miles) to the southeast.

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Iran, US hold new round of nuclear talks in Rome

AFP, Rome

Iranian and US negotiators met in Rome yesterday for a fifth round of nuclear talks, after a public disagreement over Tehran's uranium enrichment.

The talks, which began in April, are the highest-level contact between the foes since the United States quit a landmark 2015 nuclear accord during President Donald Trump's first term.

Since returning to office, Trump has revived his "maximum pressure" campaign on Iran, backing talks but warning of military action if diplomacy fails. Iran wants a new deal that would ease sanctions which have battered its economy.

The fifth round of indirect talks between Iran and the United States, led by Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and US special envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff, began in Rome, with the mediation of Oman, Iran's Tasnim news agency reported.

Witkoff said Washington "could not authorise even one percent" enrichment - a position Tehran called a red line, citing its rights under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Ahead of yesterday's talks, Araghchi said "fundamental differences" remained with the United States, while adding that Tehran was open to its nuclear sites undergoing more inspections.

## Pak rubishes Modi's bid to link Islamabad with terrorism

India, Pak extend airspace ban on each other's flights

AGENCIES

Pakistan's Foreign Office yesterday categorically rejected the "baseless, provocative, and irresponsible allegations" made by the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who in a heated speech accused Pakistan of carrying out terrorist attacks in his country.

The military confrontation between New Delhi and Islamabad came as tensions over last month's Pahalgam attack continued to build up.

On Thursday, the Indian premier said that Pakistan would not get water from rivers over which India has rights, reports Dawn online.

Meanwhile, India and Pakistan have extended the closure of their airspace for Pakistani and Indian airlines, respectively, by a month to 5:29 am on June 24, 2025. Indian carriers' flights from north India, mainly Delhi, are taking a longer route to and from the west. The earlier notice to airmen issued by Pakistan was to expire on May 24, reports TOI.

According to a statement issued by the Pakistan Foreign Office (FO) on X yesterday, "Pakistan categorically rejects the baseless, provocative, and irresponsible allegations made by the Indian PM."



UK newspaper The Telegraph set for US ownership

AFP, London

British right-wing newspaper The Telegraph has agreed a takeover by US investment group RedBird Capital Partners, ending a two-year saga marked by UK government intervention over press freedoms.

RedBird has struck an "in-principle agreement" to purchase The Telegraph Media Group (TMG), which comprises the 170-year-old paper's print and online operations, for £500 million (\$670 million), the pair announced in a statement yesterday.

It concludes a protracted sale that involved an intervention by the previous Conservative government.

US-Emirati consortium RedBird IMI, comprising Redbird Capital, had already struck a deal for TMG in late 2023.

However, the previous UK government triggered a swift resale amid concern over the potential impact on freedom of speech given Abu Dhabi's press censorship record.

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Application Deadline: June 4, 2025

## This is not how a city can survive

Amid raging street chaos, we must ensure citizens' well-being

At a time when chaos and uncertainty are gripping the nation—thanks to wave after wave of protests, ever-widening political divides, and, to cap it all off, striking reports on a potential resignation by Dr Muhammad Yunus—it may be tempting to dismiss their cumulative effects on citizens as mere trivia in the bigger scheme of things. But this is precisely where we must turn our attention, for ultimately it is the only thing that truly matters. It is also the only reality that is clear amid the smog of confusion that now envelops us. True, we need to find a way to ensure that the aspirations of a new Bangladesh are preserved at all costs. But treating citizens' daily well-being as collateral damage in the pursuit of that future would not only be short-sighted, but also counterproductive.

This is what comes to mind after seeing Dhaka residents suffer through yet another agonising day on Thursday. From morning till late afternoon, large parts of the city including Shahbagh, Kakrail, Matsya Bhawan, Purana Paltan, Gulistan, Motijheel, Jatrabari, and other connected streets were choked with traffic, bringing life to a near standstill. This was reportedly largely due to various protests and political demonstrations, including by groups affiliated with BNP. The problem was further compounded by poor traffic management, waterlogging from scattered bouts of rainfall, dug up roads left unrepaired by utility agencies, VIP movements, etc. As traffic stood still for hours, thousands were forced to walk through sludge-filled roads and broken pavements. Some, while talking to this daily, described the situation as a "trap," with no way forward, backward, or out.

In recent days, the frequency of such protest-induced blockades at peak hours has left commuters quite exasperated, especially as rain and summer heat coalesced to increase their sufferings. The sufferings of the elderly and women, particularly those travelling alone or with children, have been even more severe. This situation can no longer be justified by paying homage to the right to protest, which, while an inalienable democratic right, cannot be allowed to infringe on the rights of so many others: the right to freedom of movement, right to access healthcare, right to work and livelihood, right to public safety, right to education, etc. Any protest, therefore, must be exercised responsibly, without turning citizens into hostages of political agendas and group interests.

After about nine months of living in such a charged atmosphere, the question is no longer how we in Dhaka got here, but how much longer this can continue. Clearly, citizens have had enough of such disruptions. They need a break from the continued street chaos. We urge the government, political parties, and all other stakeholders of the July uprising to urgently collaborate to ensure that basic civic life is not held hostage by the unchecked protest politics.

## Protect our hills from destruction

Don't let destroyers of Chattogram hills get away unpunished

A troubling development has recently come to light, highlighting the culture of impunity that flourished under the Awami League regime. According to a report by Prothom Alo, two contractors—Toma Construction and Messrs Hasan International—were fined Tk 50 crore by the Department of Environment (DoE) in early 2021 for illegally cutting hills in Chattogram during the construction of the Dohazari-Cox's Bazar railway project. However, the companies were exempted from paying the fine in June 2022 allegedly by the then secretary of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, who also chaired the ministry's appeal authority at the time. This points to a serious abuse of power, with strong indications that the waiver was due to the secretary's ties with the companies involved.

Reportedly, the above-mentioned companies excavated 2.22 crore cubic feet of earth from hills in the Rangapahar area of Lohagara upazila, far exceeding the approved limit. While the government authorised the excavation of 37 hills—an act that is itself questionable—the companies cut an additional 16 without permission. According to a DoE official, the environmental damage caused by Toma Construction alone was estimated at around Tk 2,000 crore. Because of the sheer scale of the damage, the matter was allegedly hushed up to avoid further scrutiny.

In November 2021—nine months after the levying of the initial fine of Tk 5 crore, which was later exempted—the Chattogram DoE filed a case against the two companies with the Environment Court, which delivered its verdict on February 26 last year. Messrs Hasan International reportedly admitted its offence and was fined Tk 120,000, while Toma Construction was fined only Tk 50,000. Such nominal penalties for such grave violations raise serious concerns about the effectiveness of our justice system and environmental safeguards.

Over the past decades, illegal hill-cutting has become rampant across the country despite being prohibited by law, precisely because of the complicity of relevant officials and the political connections of offenders. Chattogram city alone has lost 120 hills over the last 40 years to real estate developments, road construction, and other projects. Alarmingly, this destructive trend has continued even after the political transition in August last year. Given the aspirations of the new Bangladesh we are trying to build, the authorities must take decisive steps to halt further destruction of hills and hold all responsible parties—regardless of their connections or influence—fully accountable. Our environment cannot afford another chapter of negligence and impunity.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

### Israel ends occupation of southern Lebanon

On this day in 2000, Israel ended its 18-year occupation of southern Lebanon, withdrawing the last of its troops from its self-declared security zone.

## REVIVING BANGLADESH'S BANKING SECTOR

# A race against time for innovation and reform



**MAMUN RASHID**  
an economic analyst, is chairman at Financial Excellence Ltd and founding managing partner of PwC Bangladesh. He has served in senior roles at three global banks: ANZ, Standard Chartered, and Citibank, N.A.

Once a foundation of economic development, Bangladesh's banking industry is on the verge of becoming its Achilles heel. Crushing non-performing loans (NPLs), poor governance, and stagnant innovation undermine confidence, limit credit expansion, and threaten financial stability. If dramatic changes are not sought, the country may lose one of its main tools for maintaining long-term economic development.

Per the Bangladesh Bank data, NPLs constituted 20.20 percent of all outstanding loans by the end of 2024—well over the safe level of five percent, as advised by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). By June this year, the ratio is likely to rise to 30 percent, the central bank says. Although they own less than 30 percent of the banking assets, state-owned commercial banks are responsible for more than 42 percent of problematic loans. Unresolved vulnerabilities might reduce Bangladesh's GDP growth, compromising its aim for upper-middle-income status, according to the 2025 report of the World Bank.

Still, this approaching disaster is not unavoidable. It results from choices; better choices are still within reach if they are based on innovation and effective governance.

Bangladesh's banking system has historically depended on politically driven credit distribution and branch-based business lending. This model has now reached its limits. Less than 25 percent of Bangladeshi adults now have official credit access (The World Bank's Global Findex Database, 2021). As of December 2024, nearly 24 crore mobile financial service (MFS) accounts run outside the official banking network, according to the Bangladesh Bank.

The private sector, particularly SMEs, is hungry for reasonably priced capital. Stunting business and job growth, a 2023 IFC estimation projects a \$2.8 billion MSME finance shortfall in Bangladesh. Simultaneously, poor loan allocation to large but high-risk borrowers is ballooning NPLs and severely damaging the banks' balance sheets. Following business as usual in this environment is useless and harmful.

While Bangladesh's financial administration deteriorated, a worldwide technology revolution was underway. At an unprecedented pace, mobile banking, AI-driven lending, blockchain trade finance, and open banking ecosystems are transforming financial institutions.

Between 2018 and 2022, branchless banking projects provided financial access to 60 million additional clients in Indonesia (World Bank, 2023). Mobile-first microloans under M-PESA expanded SME lending by 24 percent in Kenya over four years (GSMA, 2022). Bangladesh lags in this regard, despite the GSMA's projection (2022) of 63 percent smartphone penetration by 2025. Should banks neglect to adapt, they risk becoming irrelevant to the next generation of companies and customers. The danger is not theoretical; fintech sites already help millions of people

who now find conventional banks sluggish, expensive, and inaccessible. Technology should help digitise current services and allow new goods to fit the changing market.

Three factors stand out as interesting:

\* Microloans coupled with mobile wallets serve the informal and low-income sectors now left out of official financing.

\* Supply chain financing helps SMEs, especially in the RMG and agricultural sectors, by unlocking liquidity for manufacturers and exporters.

\* Green finance products encourage the acceptance of renewable energy sources, whereby worldwide investors are progressively channelling funds.

Banks that entered digital microcredit, embedded finance, and green lending enjoyed double-digit asset growth and decreased default rates globally (McKinsey Banking Review, 2023). The first banks to aggressively enter these products might restore Bangladesh's importance and profitability.

Still, without a hard reset in governance, technology and goods alone cannot save the industry. The banking industry in Bangladesh is defined by weak risk controls, politicalised board nominations, and regulatory forbearance. These elements undermine depositors' trust, conceal big defaulters, and drive bad credit choices.

The reform package presented by the World Bank provides an unambiguous guide:

\* Bank resolution frameworks should be improved

\* Stiffer deposit protection should be enforced

\* Expert, non-political board appointments should be specified

\* Specialist asset management

companies (AMCs) should be launched to clean up NPLs methodically

\* Bankruptcy rules should be updated to hasten healing

Vietnam provides a clear lesson: It reduced its NPL levels within five years after robust banking reforms in 2011 and revived private sector credit growth. Bangladesh has to be similarly politically courageous. Without governance improvement, no amount of digital innovation can reestablish public confidence—the lifeblood of banking.

Policymakers must build a regulatory climate that speeds up financial innovation beyond their own reform. It could include:

\* Open banking in 24 months: letting clients safely communicate financial data encourages innovation and competitiveness.

\* Starting a national fintech sandbox: allowing deliberate exploration driven by controlled testing of new digital items.

Bangladeshi banks now spend less than 0.1 percent of their revenue on cybersecurity, exposing systematic vulnerabilities (Deloitte, 2023). Early adopters of these models, like Singapore, India, and the UK, now find better, more inclusive banking environments. Bangladesh must act now or risk always falling behind its neighbours. Inaction comes at a very high cost. Every year of delay risks compounding NPLs, reducing SME access to capital, and increasing economic marginalisation. The societal fallout from lost employment, failed enterprises, and dashed hopes will eventually overwhelm the obvious financial issues of today.

Still, the benefits of action are great. Modern, reliable, technologically advanced banks might be the engines for Bangladesh's next development boom, fuelling investment, increasing inclusivity, and enabling entrepreneurship. The route chart is straightforward. The technology is available here. The institutional changes have had results.

Only political will now separates Bangladesh's banking sector from renewal or irreversible decline. The time for hesitation is over.

## We must end corporal punishment of children



**LAILA KHONDKAR**  
is an international development worker.

Corporal punishment still remains the most common and socially accepted form of violence against children. According to UNICEF, 1.6 billion children (two in three) regularly face violent punishment at home worldwide; more than two-thirds are subjected to both physical punishment and psychological aggression.

In Bangladesh, the situation is alarming. The 2019 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, conducted jointly by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF, found that 88.8 percent of children aged 1-14 had experienced physical punishment in the month prior to the survey. Moreover, 35 percent of parents/caregivers believed that punishing children is necessary. While the Ministry of Education issued a circular in 2011 banning corporal punishment in educational institutions, children continue to face beatings and humiliation from teachers. Punishment also occurs at home, in institutions, and in workplaces.

Corporal punishment comprises any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light, as well as other non-physical forms of punishment that are also cruel and degrading. Corporal punishment violates children's human dignity and physical integrity, and is a blatant violation of their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The widespread social acceptance of corporal punishment reveals how violence has become normalised in child-rearing. It reinforces children's

subordinate status and paves the way for other forms of abuse. A 2021 report by the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children reviewed over 300 studies linking punishment to a host of adverse outcomes. Not a single study identified any benefits.

Daily acts of punishment cause thousands of injuries and deaths among children each year. Corporal punishment has been linked to numerous negative consequences, including harm to children's physical and mental health, lower cognitive development and academic achievement, and it also contributes to school drop-out.

Children who experience violent discipline are more likely to exhibit aggressive or bullying behaviour and may engage in criminal or anti-social behaviour later in life. Experiencing corporal punishment makes children sad, and it affects parent-child relationships.

Children place immense trust in their parents and teachers. When those in positions of trust resort to punishment, children begin to normalise violence in close relationships. This can lead to a cycle in which they grow up to either perpetrate or tolerate violence themselves.

Without ending the practice of punishing children, we cannot hope to break the broader cycle of violence in society.

Around 40 years ago, Sweden and Finland had laws banning corporal punishment of children. Today, 68 countries have enacted laws to prohibit it in all settings—home, school, childcare centres, and institutions—to uphold children's rights and protect

their dignity. Bangladesh is not yet on this list.

In my work on child rights across diverse contexts—including in Bangladesh, Papua New Guinea, and Liberia—I have repeatedly seen how efforts to legally prohibit corporal punishment are often met with resistance. Many parents, teachers, community leaders, and policymakers argue that physical discipline is part of long-standing cultural practices. But no tradition, however deeply rooted, can justify the infliction of harm on a child. Some keep making excuses that parents and teachers are under stress, and that is why they punish children. In many cases, parents and teachers do need more support, but that does not mean hitting or humiliating a child is justified. We never justify hitting an adult when we are stressed out. Why do we vent our frustrations on children?

Many parents and teachers in Bangladesh mistakenly believe that punishment helps children behave better. When adults hit or scold children in the name of teaching, the latter often learn only to avoid punishment, not to understand or internalise appropriate behaviour. This often leads to repetition of the same actions. Rather than resorting to punishment, parents should provide age-appropriate guidance rooted in care and compassion. This approach supports children's learning and development in meaningful ways. Educators, too, should adopt positive discipline strategies in their interactions with students.

People often stay silent even when witnessing a child being punished in public places, as it is socially accepted in Bangladesh. On social media, some parents even joke about punishing their children. People who are otherwise vocal about justice and human rights often remain indifferent when it comes to violence against children. Isn't this a serious contradiction?

However, legal reforms around the world have shown promise. Countries such as Sweden, Finland, Germany, New Zealand, Poland, and Romania have all seen a decline in public acceptance of corporal punishment following legislative action. The evidence is clear: we can shift societal attitudes and individual behaviours by enacting laws, promoting positive parenting, changing social norms, and ending violent discipline in schools.

Children have the same right as adults to be protected by law from violence. And this includes protection from violent punishment. In 2015, the world made a commitment to end violence against children by 2030. Every country signed up to SDG target 16.2, pledging to end exploitation, trafficking, torture, and all forms of violence against children.

We need urgent steps to fulfil this promise by 2030. Ending corporal punishment is essential in creating peaceful societies. In Bangladesh, it is vital to enact a new law that bans corporal punishment of children in all settings, including homes, schools, workplaces, and childcare institutions; to support the law through policies, programmes, and public awareness campaigns, and ensure its implementation is effectively monitored; to enforce and monitor the Ministry of Education's directive banning corporal punishment in educational institutions; to strengthen the capacity of parents and teachers to raise and guide children without using punishment; to include SDG indicator 16.2.1 at the national level to track progress; and to respect children's opinions and ensure their voices are heard in efforts to eliminate punishment.

When people and policymakers are discussing the reform agenda in various sectors, are we considering the legal reform required to ensure children are protected from violence? Are we ready to be child-sensitive and bring changes in our attitudes and behaviours towards them to ensure their growth and realise their full potential?

### Israel ends occupation of southern Lebanon

On this day in 2000, Israel ended its 18-year occupation of southern Lebanon, withdrawing the last of its troops from its self-declared security zone.



## BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza  
is professor of English at Dhaka University.

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

The government has formed a five-member search committee to identify candidates for the three top positions of public universities. The education adviser, two members of the University Grants Commission (UGC), and two senior professors will be responsible for shortlisting names for final appointment by the chancellor of universities, also the president of the country.

Similar ideas were floated in 2003 by the Moniruzzaman Miah Education Commission, which proposed appointing the chief justice or an elected judge as the head of the selection panel. The idea was not well received, especially by the faculty of the four public universities governed by the 1973 Act, who are particularly sensitive about their autonomy. The 2006 UGC report and the National Education Policy 2010 reiterated the idea of selection panels; these were also largely ignored. Central to the formation of the panel is the objective of minimising political interference in the selection of top university managers.

One may wonder though: why now, and why did such initiatives fail before? Critics have already pointed out that the top positions at 47 public universities have already been filled by the interim government. What positive outcomes will this proposed search committee produce?

The formation of a search committee is a welcome move in that it creates an opportunity to examine the deep-seated issues plaguing the hiring process of top management in the country's higher education system. The first challenge will be to streamline the two different pathways for appointing vice-chancellors: one under the University Act 1973, and the other under the Private University Act 2010. For universities

under the 1973 Act, a senate session must be held to select a panel of candidates, while others bypass this process and appoint vice-chancellors directly through recommendations from the UGC and the education ministry—or from the board of trustees, in the case of private universities. The final decision rests with the chancellor, making the process susceptible to political manipulation.

The challenge for the search committee is to reconcile these inconsistencies and establish a system that involves broader consultation, stakeholder support, or direct interviews. Vice-chancellors, ideally, must be more than competent teachers or researchers. They should be visionary administrators, balancing academic excellence with institutional governance. As heads of institutions, they must earn their colleagues' respect by demonstrating a deep understanding of the academic environment and the evolving landscape of higher education. A clear, forward-looking vision for the university should accompany their academic integrity. They must create an ecosystem where students and faculty can realise their potential. Furthermore, ideal candidates should possess the personal network and diplomatic acumen to communicate institutional needs while safeguarding the academic environment from external and political interference.

Vice-chancellors must recognise that their role entails enhancing the campus experience for students and staff alike. A safe and congenial academic atmosphere that fosters holistic development opportunities is essential. To achieve this, a vice-chancellor must exhibit strong administrative skills—managing finances, human resources, and

infrastructure efficiently—while upholding the highest ethical standards. In all respects, they should ensure clear communication, transparency, and a commitment to reducing systemic inequalities.

Unfortunately, we have seen many of our vice-chancellors fail to live up to these ideals. Several have faced forcible removal, siege, or even assault. One of the key issues the search committee must consider is

weakened, leading to instability.

The situation at Barishal University is relevant to this discussion. The assault on the National University vice-chancellor, following demands for an automatic pass scheme, highlights another disturbing trend. After the July uprising, many students feel empowered and entitled. They are increasingly asserting their authority over university leadership. These acts of

Given the evolving realities, the search committee could implement a transparent and functional system to nominate top officials, free from the complexities of local and short-term politics. It should also seek to reform the institutions for which they are selecting top management. Many academic leaders are unable to achieve excellence due to inherent institutional flaws. Regrettably, political motives have driven the establishment of many of our universities. A significant number of them still operate more like degree colleges. These institutions serve as political tools rather than centres of higher learning. This approach has prevented universities from maturing into autonomous, globally competitive institutions. Instead, they have become arenas for partisan conflict, frequently prioritising political considerations over academic ones.

The formation of the search committee is a step in the right direction towards comprehensive reform of university governance. I trust the committee will define the terms of reference for would-be VCs, in which political allegiances should be the least of concerns. First and foremost, we want accountability and transparency from our university administrators. Second, we want quality over quantity. If necessary, two or three universities can be merged to ensure sustainable resource management and growth of our higher education sector. Third, there should be no compromise on the rule of law. We must immediately put an end to the mob mentality of students demanding auto-passes or other undue privileges. Finally, a moratorium must be placed on party politics within universities. Career clubs can offer alternative platforms for students to exercise their freedom of thought and rights—but they should not have direct links to mainstream political parties.

The crisis in Bangladesh's higher education leadership is not merely about individual vice-chancellors or political factions. It also involves a systemic failure. The search for new leadership, if done right, can be a step towards resolving these issues.



Students of Barishal University stage a hunger strike demanding the vice-chancellor's resignation. The photo was taken on May 13, 2025. The government removed the VC, pro-VC, and treasurer of the university on the same day.

FILE PHOTO: TITU DAS

whether to appoint homegrown faculty to lead their respective universities or to select from a national pool of qualified academic administrators. Many vice-chancellors brought in from other institutions often lack a deep connection to the universities they are appointed to lead. This disconnect renders them vulnerable to opposition from local stakeholders who feel excluded from decision-making. When vice-chancellors are not rooted in their institutions and lack local support, their authority is inevitably

defiance point to a larger underlying issue: students no longer trust their leaders or are overambitious about their careers. The murder of a student leader in a park near the Dhaka University campus has raised another pressing concern: student safety. DU vice-chancellor is now facing protests for a crime committed outside the campus, with calls for his resignation. While speaking to students at one of the protests last week, he lost his temper, adding another layer to the crisis.

## Our farmers are leading the fight against climate change



Dr Shahrina Akhtar  
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SHAHRINA AKHTAR

In the heart of Bangladesh's rural belt, a silent revolution is underway. While global leaders debate climate action, 1.65 crore Bangladeshi farm households are already battling its impact in the forms of flash floods, prolonged droughts, salinisation, and invasive pests. Between 2000 and 2023, climate-related disasters caused over Tk 1,200 crore in agricultural losses. Yet, amid this turmoil, farmers are pioneering grassroots solutions: floating gardens in flood-prone haors; drought-resistant crops in Rajshahi; and saline-tolerant rice in coastal Satkhira. These innovations—low-cost, climate-smart, and scalable—are quietly transforming survival into resilience. Farmlands in this country are becoming global classrooms for adaptation in a warming world.

Climate volatility has transformed Bangladesh from a fertile delta to a battleground for survival. According to the World Bank's Groundswell Report (2021), nearly 1.33 crore Bangladeshis may be displaced by climate-induced stress by 2050, most of them in rural areas. Agriculture, which employs over 40 percent of the workforce and contributes 11.2 percent to GDP (BBS, 2023), bears the brunt.

Cyclones Sidr (2007), Aila (2009), and Amphan (2020) alone caused combined agricultural losses exceeding Tk 150 crore.

Salinity intrusion, now affecting over 10 lakh hectares in the coastal belt (Soil Resource Development Institute, 2022), is pushing farmers out of traditional rice production. In the northwestern Barind Tract, rainfall variability has reduced monsoon intensity, undermining rainfed farming.

**What Bangladesh's farmers are pioneering are not isolated tactics; they are scalable, cost-effective models for climate adaptation. Floating farms, saline-resistant crops, and community-based irrigation are being studied by global platforms like the CGIAR Initiative on Climate Resilience and FAO's Scaling Up Agroecology Initiative.**

Even more troubling is the collapse of seasonal predictability. Crop calendars that once guided sowing and harvesting have become irrelevant now, making traditional farming knowledge less reliable with each passing year.

Yet, this is not a tale of despair; it is one of ingenuity. Across Bangladesh, farmers are transforming adversity into opportunity through grassroots innovations. In Satkhira, Rahima Begum, once unable to grow rice due to salinity, now cultivates BRRI Dhan67, a salt-tolerant rice variety developed by the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI). This variety tolerates up to

eight dS/m salinity and yields 4.5 tonnes per hectare, a lifeline for over 250,000 coastal farmers (BRRI Annual Report, 2022).

In haor (wetland) areas of Kishoreganj and Sunamganj, floating agriculture is making a comeback. Revived with modern composting techniques, these bamboo-based dhap platforms, first documented in the 17th century, are enabling year-round vegetable cultivation on floodwaters. A pilot project by FAO in 2021 found that floating gardens increased household nutrition scores by 35 percent and provided women-led income streams.

In the dry zones of Rajshahi, alternate wetting and drying (AWD) methods, promoted by the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), are helping

conserve water by 25-30 percent while maintaining yield. In these drought-prone areas, where groundwater tables are falling by three to four centimetres annually (Barind Multipurpose Development Authority, 2023), AWD adoption is a game changer.

Similarly, farmers are switching to short-duration varieties like BINA Dhan 7 and BINA Dhan 17, which mature in 100-105 days, helping them harvest before floods. Integrated Pest Management (IPM), using pheromone traps and biopesticides, is reducing pesticide costs by 40 percent in pilot districts like Jashore and Natore

(Department of Agricultural Extension, 2022).

Women play a critical but under-recognised role in climate adaptation. According to a 2024 study by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), farms managed or co-managed by women in Bangladesh show 28 percent more crop diversity and 20 percent higher adoption of adaptive techniques.

In Khulna, Fatema Khatun and her group of 35 women farmers transitioned to saline-tolerant vegetables and crab-fattening units. In the north, women-led nurseries and vermicomposting units are diversifying household incomes and ensuring seed availability at local levels. These initiatives often outperform top-down interventions due to their contextual knowledge and community trust.

However, access barriers persist. Only 3.5 percent of women own agricultural land (BBS Gender Statistics, 2023), and fewer than 10 percent receive formal agricultural training. Addressing these gaps is essential to unlocking their full potential in climate resilience.

What Bangladesh's farmers are pioneering are not isolated tactics; they are scalable, cost-effective models for climate adaptation. Floating farms, saline-resistant crops, and community-based irrigation are being studied by global platforms like the CGIAR Initiative on Climate Resilience and FAO's Scaling Up Agroecology Initiative.

The IPCC Sixth Assessment Report 2022 cites Bangladesh's adaptive agricultural strategies as case studies in successful local adaptation. These strategies align with principles of agroecology, ecosystem-based adaptation, and low-emission development, all vital for meeting the Paris Agreement targets.

Bangladesh's updated National Adaptation Plan (NAP 2023-2050) recognises these innovations, calling for Tk 850 crore in investments in climate-resilient agriculture, research, and early warning systems. The roadmap exists. What's needed now is execution.

Three priority areas demand immediate action. First, climate finance must reach the grassroots, yet as of 2023, only eight percent of international climate funds in Bangladesh reached local communities, according to Climate Finance Transparency Initiative. Second, gender-responsive investments are critical: women farmers must gain access to land rights, finance, and training to scale their contributions. Finally, research and extension services need urgent revitalisation. Institutions like BRRI, Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture (BINA), and Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) require consistent investment to develop and deliver climate-smart technologies that can safeguard livelihoods and secure future harvests.

As the world waits for COP30 in November, Bangladesh offers not just dire warnings but grounded wisdom. Its farmers, living on the frontlines of climate disruption, are pioneering solutions that are shaping a new blueprint for survival. These innovations are not theories from labs, but tested tools from the soil: resilient, scalable, and deeply rooted in lived reality.

This is not a story of despair but of determination. Adaptation is already happening in fields, not forums. But to grow this momentum, global leaders must act where it matters most. Because the future of climate resilience won't be built in air-conditioned halls; it will be grown, seed by seed, in fields.

ACROSS  
1 Tibetan monks  
6 Sports data  
11 Dote on  
12 Subject  
13 Fighter of remote fires  
15 "My country – of thee"  
16 Supply voices for  
17 Wisdom bringer  
18 Poet Wallace  
20 Uncooked  
21 Hot blood  
22 Office note  
23 Is overly fond  
26 Wife of Menelaus  
27 Nights before  
28 So far  
29 Cariou of "Blue Bloods"

30 Left the group  
34 Stretch of years  
35 Purr producer  
36 Yale student  
37 Sociable diner  
40 TV's DeGeneres  
41 Avignon's river  
42 Wintry weather  
43 Indian lute  
  
DOWN  
1 Survives  
2 Concede  
3 Caribou's cousin  
4 Place of refuge  
5 Farmers, at times  
6 Ticket remnants  
7 Huck's pal

8 Duds  
9 Reason for overtime  
10 Attach, as a jar lid  
14 Flag Day month  
19 Competes  
22 Parcel (out)  
23 Takes out  
24 Comprehensive  
25 Easily defended  
26 Browbeats  
28 Casual assent  
30 Fragrance  
31 Bus terminal  
32 Kagan of the Supreme Court  
33 More dreadful  
38 Director Spike  
39 Fraternity letter



## YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

P	A	S	T	E	B	O	I	L	
A	R	I	E	S	U	L	N	A	
T	R	E	A	T	R	E	V	U	P
H	O	G	A	I	M	O	R	A	
S	W	E	T	T	A	L	K	E	R
D	O	L	E	S	P	A	S	S	E
E	R	I	C	A	I	R			
B	I	T	T	E	R	E	N	E	Y
A	G	E	A	M	P	L	I	E	
R	A	R	E	R	A	R	E	N	A
S	M	A	L	L	N	I	N	E	S
I	L	L	S	S	S	M	A	R	T

WRITE FOR US, SEND US YOUR  
OPINION PIECES TO  
dsopinion@gmail.com.

**SUBLINE SARIIKA**  
Since childhood, Sarika Sabah has immersed herself in the world of art, taking classical dance lessons and specialising in Kathak. Over time, her dedication to dance grew, yet a deeper desire began to burn within her—a dream to one day find her place among the stars. She began her journey in the entertainment industry with TVCs in 2019, while she was a second-year CSE student at North South University, and quickly rose to prominence, winning hearts with her portrayal of Jhumur in Mohammad Mostafa Kamal Raz's popular mega serial *Family Crisis*.

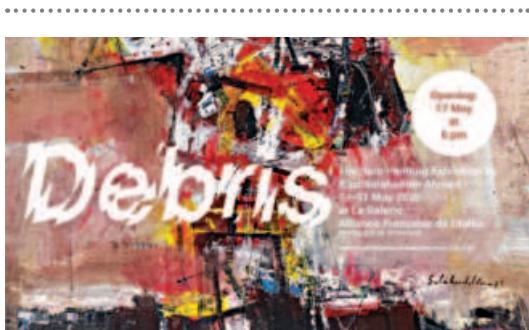


PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

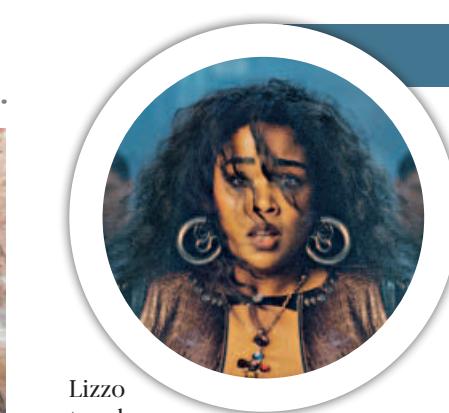
## OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA



## Nazrul Utsav

May 25-26 | 7-9:30 wwpmp  
Chhayanaut Shongshkriti-Bhobon'Antaranga Joler Gaan'  
May 30 | 6:30pm onwards  
Jatra Biroti, BananiExhibition: 'Debris'  
May 17-31 | 3-9pm

Alliance Française de Dhaka, Dhanmondi



Lizzo trades in glitter and gloss for grit and guitars on *Love in Real Life*, her first single in two years and a sharp pivot from the buoyant disco of *Special*. Anchored by jangly riffs and tight drums, the track channels

## SHARMIN JOYA

Now, Sarika has delivered yet another standout performance in Syed Ahmed Shawki's Chorki original web-series, *Gulmohor*, released on May 15.

"I dreamed of seeing myself on screen while growing up. As those dreams slowly began to take shape, I didn't want to let any opportunity slip by. So, when the chance came to do my first TVC, I said yes—just to give it a try. I was lucky enough that after my debut, I got to work with Adnan Al Rajeev in one of his commercials, and within the following month, more offers started coming my way," shared the actress.

Despite having no formal acting training, Sarika feels incredibly fortunate to be part of *Gulmohor*. "This experience has taught me so much—lessons I can carry into future projects. Without a background in theatre or formal acting studies, I've always thrived by learning from my co-actors and directors. I joined the team after an audition, and getting selected was just the beginning of an unforgettable journey. Although we shot in different locations, the shoot at Rajbari, where the house 'Gulmohor' is set, was something I'll always remember."

Reflecting on her time working with Shawki, Sarika said, "His expertise made the filming procedure a unique one. For instance, during shoot breaks, there was complete silence, allowing us to stay focused on our characters without being distracted. The team made sure we had everything we needed to give our best."

"After the shoot, it felt like we'd been on a trip because we enjoyed ourselves so much. However, I also learned a lot about discipline, which is essential for any artiste. I also gained valuable experience by working closely with Mostafizur Noor Imran."

She laughingly added, "Even the child actors in the series had more experience than I did!"

Sarika's portrayal of Jhumur was the turning point of her career—the role became so iconic that her name almost faded into the background. People on the streets wou

ld often call her Jhumur instead of Sarika.

"For any artiste, it's a surreal feeling to be recognised by their onscreen character. I'd always admired how director Mostafa Kamal Raz's characters felt so real, brought to life in a way that made them deeply relatable to the audience. So, when he approached me to play Jhumur, I was genuinely thrilled."

Having played the role for over three years, Sarika admits it became a part of her identity. "Sometimes I would forget my real name," she chuckled. "The entire *Family Crisis* team truly became like a real family. As for Jhumur, she's a character who's incredibly innocent. Despite enduring so much and facing constant taunts, she never complains. She also walks with a limp, which adds another layer to her vulnerability. Over time, I developed a deep emotional attachment to her, and this is one role that will always remain with me."

Besides the serial, Sarika also appeared in numerous television dramas, with her last small-screen role airing in 2023 during Eid. "I chose to lessen my appearance on the small screen since then due to a lack of variation in the characters I am offered to play," she divulged. In the meantime, she took a step back to focus on herself, losing 24 kilos over just seven months, as part of a personal commitment to fitness and well-being.

When asked if she transformed herself for a role, she replied, "Absolutely not! It was entirely a personal decision. Whenever I saw myself on screen, I felt I was overweight. I would also feel my energy levels dropping easily. That's when I knew I had to start this journey for myself."

Speaking about her transformative journey, Sarika emphasised that she reached her goal healthily. She intentionally took a seven-month break from work by choosing not to take on any new projects. "I stayed at home, ate homemade food, fresh fruits, and did zumba and yoga. It was easier to stick to a routine and maintain proper meal timings that way," she explained.

"When we're working, we often order unhealthy food, skip breakfast, or snack late at night. Staying at home allowed me to break those bad habits and focus on my well-being. Since I was also nearing the end of my degree, it was easier for me to step back from work."

## TRENDY STREAMS

Netflix  
SirensApple TV+  
MurderbotHBO Max  
And Just Like That...Hulu  
Nine Perfect StrangersChorki  
Gulmohor

## STYLE STATEMENT

## WES ANDERSON

Amid a cavalcade of black-tie uniformity, Wes Anderson delivered a quietly subversive twist at the ongoing Cannes Film Festival press call for *The Phoenician Scheme*. The auteur—ever the architect of cinematic symmetry, stepped out in an immaculate white suit that was anything but neutral.

Cut with the precision of a 1960s Riviera silhouette, the look spoke in hushed tones of rebellion: crisp lapels, tailored ease, and an assured absence of fuss. True to form, Anderson talking, anchoring the minimalist accents nonchalance. Paired calm composure, ensemble wasn't just a fashion statement; it was a subtle declaration of creative individuality.



## 1-MINUTE REVIEW

## 'Be Happy' shines with emotion despite familiar eats

*Be Happy*, directed by Remo D'Souza, is a heartwarming tale of a father daughter duo navigating dreams and grief through the lens of dance.

Young Dhara (Inayat Verma) is passionate about dancing, but her stern father Shiv (Abhishek Bachchan) wants her to focus on academics—until he finally supports her move to Mumbai to chase stardom.

Though the plot follows a familiar arc, the film's emotional resonance lies in its evolving father-daughter bond. Abhishek shines as the reserved dad who eventually dances for love, while Inayat charms with both wit and talent.

Actor Nassar brings comic flair as the cheeky grandfather, and Nora Fatehi adds grace as the dance mentor.

Though the pacing drags in the first half and the runtime feels long, strong performances, soulful music, and touching moments make it a warm family watch. At its core, *Be Happy* celebrates chasing dreams with the people who matter most.



## WHAT'S PLAYING

## 'LOVE IN REAL LIFE' by Lizzo

early-2000s indie sleaze with a radio polish—equal parts Strokes swagger and dance-floor defiance.

Produced by Blake Slatkin and Ricky Reed, the single arrives with a different kind of confidence: less affirmation, more assertion.

The music video, a surreal riff on thriller, imagines a nightife unbundled by algorithms—zombies, sequins, and all. It's a statement piece, both in sound and spirit, laying

the foundation for her forthcoming album of the same name.

*Love in Real Life* isn't a reinvention, it's a recalibration. Stripped of the sparkle but not the spirit, Lizzo re-emerges with a sound that's louder, and defiantly her own. The track garnered 520,000 streams on Spotify within its first full day of release, indicating a strong initial reception.

## Judge halts

FROM PAGE 12

The lawsuit called for a judge to "stop the government's arbitrary, capricious, unlawful, and unconstitutional action."

The loss of foreign nationals -- more than a quarter of its student body -- could prove costly to Harvard, which charges tens of thousands of dollars a year in tuition.

**'UNLAWFUL AND UNWARRANTED'** Harvard President Alan Garber said in a statement yesterday ahead of the temporary restraining order that "we condemn this unlawful and unwarranted action."

"It imperils the futures of thousands of students and scholars across Harvard and serves as a warning to countless others at colleges and universities throughout the country who have come to America to pursue their education and fulfil their dreams," he said.

Noem had said Thursday that "this administration is holding Harvard accountable for fostering violence, antisemitism, and coordinating with the Chinese Communist Party on its campus."

Chinese students make up more than a fifth of Harvard's international enrolment, according to university figures, and Beijing said the decision will "only harm the image and international standing of the United States."

"The Chinese side has consistently opposed the politicisation of educational cooperation," foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said.

## Six parties back

FROM PAGE 12

unanimously agreed to fully support the interim government led by Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus. They emphasised the need for urgent reforms that would pave the way for a free and fair national election under his leadership.

The party leaders also called for unity among all anti-fascist forces and said there were conspiracies against the country's sovereignty, independence, and stability, added the release.

They stressed the importance of collective and strategic efforts to restore peace and stability and to contribute to nation-building in the days ahead.

Those who attended the meeting include: Nurul Haque Nur of the Gono Odhikar Parishad; Yunus Ahmed, Prof Ashraf Ali Akon and Gazi Ataur Rahman of Islami Andolan; Asaduzzaman Fuad of AB Party; Maulana Jalal Uddin Ahmad of Khelafat Majlis; and Ariful Islam Adeeb and Sarwar Tushar of NCP.

## 'Major' Ukraine

FROM PAGE 12

Ukraine has intensified drone attacks on Russia in the past several days, forcing temporary shutdowns of Russian airports. On Thursday Russia said it had fired an Iskander-M missile at part of the city of Pokrov in Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk region.

Kyiv and Moscow have both accused each other of violating the Geneva Convention on the treatment of POWs, with the UN saying prisoners on both sides have been "subjected to torture and ill-treatment."

Russia regularly violates international norms by putting POWs on trial -- with allegations of torture widespread and several Ukrainian captives confirmed to have died in custody.

Moscow's forces are also believed to have taken an unknown number of Ukrainian civilians into Russia in three years of seizing Ukrainian towns and cities.

There have been several high-profile cases of Ukrainian civilian captives.



People and civil defence members gather near the site of an Israeli strike that occurred after Israel issued an evacuation warning in Toul, Nabatieh district, southern Lebanon, on Thursday night.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Boost national capacity

FROM PAGE 12

Criticising the government's policy on Chattogram Port, he said, "The chief adviser has announced that Chattogram Port must be handed over to foreign entities at any cost."

He suggested that instead of bringing in foreign companies, the government should address the existing weaknesses and institutional inefficiencies of the port.

He emphasised that professionals could be sent abroad for training if necessary since sustainable development can only be achieved by enhancing national expertise.

On energy issues, the economist highlighted that the government should have prioritised increasing national capacity for gas extraction.

"However, in the past nine months, no initiatives have been undertaken.

The upcoming budget must include efforts to utilise national resources domestically, which would lead to cheaper gas and electricity while

reducing import costs."

Prof Anu Muhammad further criticised energy sector subsidies, saying that they primarily benefit domestic and foreign companies through capacity charges.

"The government is providing subsidies by purchasing electricity at higher production costs, but budget allocations for capacity-building efforts in exploration and extraction remain significantly low. Increasing the budget in this area would automatically reduce subsidies, as lower production costs would make electricity cheaper."

Speaking on taxation, he urged the government to ensure that those with significant wealth pay taxes proportionately, rather than burdening low-income citizens.

He also pointed out inconsistencies in taxation policies, saying, "Machinery for coal-fired power plants is imported duty-free, while equipment for renewable

energy is taxed. The flawed policies of the previous government remain unchanged. This must be corrected in the upcoming budget."

Refuting claims of financial constraints, Anu Muhammad said, "There is no lack of wealth in the country. GDP is growing, and people are generating wealth. However, this wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few who are laundering money abroad. This issue has been exacerbated by excessive spending on public administration, subsidies, capacity charges, and banking sector mismanagement."

Among others, Gonotantrik Odhikar Committee members Harun Or Rashid, DU teacher Moshahida Sultana, Maha Mirza, Kallol Mustafa, Mahtab Uddin Ahmed, activist Marzia Prova, and Samajtantrik Chhatra Front President Salman Siddiqui spoke at the event was organised by a civic rights platform, Gonotantrik Odhikar Committee.

## Govt firm on carrying out

FROM PAGE 1

expressed his desire to resign and address the nation in a televised speech. He voiced worries over growing aspersions on his government's performance and duties.

He discussed matters related to frequent road blockades over myriad demands, reforms, and other issues.

Sources present at the meeting said that at one stage, the chief adviser suggested forming another interim government, as he wished to step down.

Yunus reiterated his government's commitment to holding what he described as the most credible election in the nation's history. However, he was concerned about the feasibility of ensuring a free and fair vote under the prevailing circumstances.

He also voiced concern that if the election were not conducted properly, the public would ultimately blame him for that.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, adviser to the environment, forest, and climate change ministry, yesterday confirmed that they had a lengthy discussion after the formal meeting of the advisory council.

Speaking to reporters after a programme at Dhaka University, she said that from the beginning, the chief adviser set a timeline -- elections will take place between December and June.

"There is no scope for any deviation from that schedule on our part.

Therefore, there should be no scope for having any kind of discussion on the matter. It has been repeatedly emphasised that a clear timeframe has already been given," she said.

Besides holding the election, she said, the government has the responsibility to carry out reforms and try AL leaders.

"We want to complete all these tasks through the correct process, and we seek everyone's cooperation," she said.

About the current situation, Rizwana said many groups have been blocking the streets of Dhaka for their demands every now and then since the interim government took charge.

"Part of our discussions was if we were able to address these deadlocks. This is our national duty. We have been saying for a long time that we just took charge, not the power.

It'll be possible for us to carry out these duties when we get everyone's cooperation," she said.

"We're thinking about whether we can tackle the challenges in performing the three key duties, and how; what'll happen if we can't?" the adviser said.

Asked whether they were under any pressure, Rizwana said, "For us, the only pressure is whether we are able to perform [these duties].

"If the chief adviser has anything to say regarding these matters -- whether about the elections or other responsibilities -- you will hear it directly from him."

"If we can fulfil our responsibilities, then being in charge will remain relevant," she added.

About trials of AL leaders, Rizwana said the government has expedited the process and set up a second International Crimes Tribunal. And formal trial proceedings will begin today.

The current situation started to develop as political tensions have been escalating, driven by protests, harsh rhetoric at rallies, and social media exchanges.

The BNP has long demanded elections by December. On Thursday, it also called for a downsized advisory council with advisers Mahfuj Alam, Asif Mahmud, and Yunus's National Security Adviser Khalilur Rahman removed.

Leaders of the National Citizen Party (NCP), protesting on Wednesday, said they would not join any election under the current Election Commission, which they said was biased towards the BNP. They demanded its reconstitution, along with the resignation of Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed, Law Adviser Asif Nazrul, and Planning Adviser Wahiduddin Mahmud.

The NCP and Jamaat-e-Islami want the election only after reforms are completed and trials of AL leaders are held.

Meanwhile, on Wednesday, Army Chief General Waker-Uz-Zaman said the election should take place by December. "Bangladesh needs political stability. This is only possible through an elected government, not by unelected decision-makers," he said, according to a source present at the Officers' Address.

## Polls by Dec, not CA's resignation'

FROM PAGE 12

now instead of announcing a specific electoral roadmap, "that is his personal matter."

Salahuddin, however, said they want the resignation of the national security adviser.

"We also demanded the resignation of two student representatives on the advisory council. Since their various activities are undermining the government's neutrality, we have called for their resignation," he added.

The BNP leader said the chief adviser once assured party leaders that the government was working to hold elections by December this year.

"But later, we observed various statements from his different advisers ... they either want to delay the elections or they don't [want to hold elections]. Some of their advisers have stated that they have already been elected by the people through a mass uprising, and they supposedly have authority over everything."

"The BNP does not think like that," he said, adding that the duty

of advisers in an interim government is to conduct a fair, orderly, and impartial election.

Meanwhile, BNP leader Zainul Abedin Farroque yesterday also urged the chief adviser to immediately ask three members of his advisory council to resign.

The BNP demands the removal of Information Adviser Mahfuj Alam, Local Government Adviser Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuiyan, and National Security Adviser Khalilur Rahman, arguing that this step is necessary to uphold the government's impartiality and image.

"Request them to step down on their own. You must drop the three," Farroque said while speaking at a protest rally in front of the Jatiya Press Club.

Farroque said it would be unfortunate if Yunus had to leave without holding an election.

"Let your [Yunus's] name be carved in golden letters in history by conducting a credible election and ensuring our right to vote."

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh  
Office of the Executive Engineer, RHD  
Munshiganj Road Division  
Dashkani, Panchasar (Mukterpur), Munshiganj.

Phone # 02-99847019  
E-mail: eemunrhd@gmail.com

Date: 22/05/2025

Memo No-35.01.5900.447.04.008-25-1434

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7. empa@du.ac.bd

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Department of Public Administration  
11th Floor, Faculty of Social Sciences Building  
University of Dhaka

Application Deadline: 17 July 2025

Admission Test: 25 July 2025





ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

## POETRY

# THREE SONGS: Kazi Nazrul Islam

### Tumi jokhon eshechile

I was still sleeping when you came, when you sought, flowers were yet to bloom. When my skies darkened, dawn broke at your end. A bright youth, when you came, my mind was yet to mellow; the window was closed, when the full moon peeped. Now in a dark room, I keep awake alone— when will you come again, the

moon? Nowadays I cannot sleep, flowers have bloomed in the garden, and with the garland you left, I've knotted my splendid plait. I was still sleeping when you came...

### Kaveri nadir jole kego balika

Who are you, O damsel, in Kaveri waters Absentmindedly floating magnolias and jasmines? Languidly coming to bathe in

the morning, She plays the pitcher with bangles; The wind plays with flowers in her plait. The sun rises in the horizon, The water implores empathy, By the bank of the Jhelum river,

The angel looks for you, The dark beauty of Karnataka.

### Rohi rohi keno shey mukh pore mone

Over and over why does the

face I ignored Heartlessly and pointlessly come to my mind? In a forlorn summer noon, The mind craves to fly far away. In the guise of a beggar, eyes wet with tears, He aroused empathy in the woods— His heart had thirst, my pitcher had water. Failing to get water, the thirsty singing bird Fell down fast at the early morn. I scattered flowers of his garland on dust

But can't let slip the agony from memory. Why does the one whom I didn't own forever Weep furtively in deep anguish from heart.

Translated by Mohammad Shafiqul Islam.

**Mohammad Shafiqul Islam**, a poet, translator, and academic, is Professor in the Department of English, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet. His third collection of poetry, *On the Other Side of Silence*, is forthcoming.

### POETRY

## The companion

SHIBLEE SHAHED

Here I see my shadow  
The only childhood companion of this life.  
As it happened at the spring fair—  
I walked, it walked; I walked not, it ceased to walk.  
All the letters that people wrote to me  
With the hue of thumping heart,  
My shadow would read them too,  
And say, "See, the unspoken words  
Only fit in letters."  
When I cried out in despair,  
Seeing the worries of people  
Heading to their destinations,  
It said, "You've brought a return ticket with you friend  
Remember, people are not meant to be held onto."  
I have lived by this truth, and etched it in my heart  
Thus, no friendships have ever bloomed  
With human souls.  
My shadow and I...  
After one sea-full moon,  
At long last my story will fade away.  
Sitting by my grave,  
My only childhood friend,  
With a hand on its cheek, will ponder—  
'Might such a bond ever form  
With anyone else in this world?  
Ever?'

**Dr Shiblee Shahed** is a public health specialist, essayist, poet, and translator. His debut poetry collection was published in 2013 by Shuddhashar Publications. His poems and articles have appeared in numerous national and international outlets. He is a regular contributor to The Daily Star, The Business Standard, and The Daily Observer.



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

### FICTION

# Vivisection of a cat

MOJAFFOR HOSSAIN

### Trigger warning: Animal abuse, violence

Our Ullash is quite the curious young boy, brimming with boundless energy and an insatiable thirst for discovery. We had always believed he was destined to become a great scientist, someone who would make groundbreaking contributions. Once, he caught hold of a cat and embarked on an experiment so peculiar, it left us speechless. And that wasn't the only time—his antics extended to countless other endeavours. If I were to recount just the cat episode in detail, you'd easily imagine the rest of his escapades. The cat was more than just a pet; it was part of our family. It had been with us since birth, growing up in this very house. With a quiet sense of duty, it took charge of the kitchen, ensuring no other feline dared to trespass while it stood guard. When Ullash decided to choose the cat for one of his experiments, our borobhabhi, Ullash's mother, didn't raise a single objection. She simply said, "Why not? It's been with us for so long. If it proves useful, let it be. But make sure no harm comes to it."

Our elder brother, full of pride in Ullash's inventive streak, promptly hired a carpenter to craft a sturdy cage. He couldn't contain his delight, often bragging to his friends, "You know, our Ullash is always up to something! He's done this, he's done that!" And as his uncle, I'm no less guilty of spinning tales of his ingenuity.

The cat was placed in a cage, and what followed was nothing short of royal treatment for an entire month. As per Ullash's instructions, we dutifully fetched all manner of delicacies from the market. Lounging in comfort, the cat grew so large and imposing, it began to resemble a miniature tiger. Inside the cage, it roared and raged as though the jungle itself trembled at its might.

One day, Ullash gathered us all and said, "Do you believe now that the cat is the tiger's little brother?" We'd always entertained the notion, but now, staring at this ferocious creature, it felt undeniably true. Hearing our awe, Ullash added with a sly grin, "But do you know the cat has a special connection with mice, too? I'll show you that next. For the coming month, it won't be fed."

Aghast, his mother cried out in a trembling voice, "What? It'll die!"

"Ma, if you don't understand something, don't bother speaking about it," Ullash declared sharply. None of us argued further; we each retreated to our own rooms in

silence. Meanwhile, he continued trying to convince our elder brother and sister-in-law. "Listen, nothing will happen to the cat. And even if it does—so what? Sacrifices like these are nothing new in the name of discovery. Haven't you heard the story of Laika? That dog was sent into space with just a week's worth of food. Yes, she died after a few days, but do you have any idea what her journey accomplished? Laika's name is now immortalised in the annals of history. Imagine that—immortality for a dog! Can you or I hope for such a legacy?" That's

own lives, Ullash with his. My Borobhai worked in customs, earning handsomely with both hands, so no one worried about Ullash's future. Now and then, when I had a free moment, I'd stop by Ullash's room. Sometimes, he'd greet me with, "Kaku, come in! I have something new to show you." Other times, he'd dismiss me with a wave, saying, "Kaku, not now—come back later."

A month later, he arranged to exhibit the cat. Just seeing it alive filled Borobhai with an almost boundless joy. But what sort of life was this? The cat's body had withered to

"Oh, stop babbling, ma. Just go. You've done your part."

One morning, about a week later, Bilur ma let out a shriek that could have brought the house down. When I rushed over, I found her wailing, hands on her head, her face a picture of despair. She had opened the deep freezer to move a packet of meat, only to discover the frozen, solid form of the cat—icy and unyielding, like a chunk of meat itself. Bhabhi immediately summoned Ullash. It turned out the cat had been trapped in the freezer for five days. Five whole days! What a disaster! Ullash,

The cat stared with a peculiar, piercing gaze. Its body was devoid of fur, resembling a plucked chicken. The scars crisscrossing its skin suggested it had undergone multiple surgeries. Without being told, one could hardly believe it was a creature of this planet. The shock on everyone's face wasn't merely due to its transformation, but because it had managed to survive at all.

With wide eyes, Bhabhi asked in astonishment, "You starved it for two months, froze it for five days, then roasted it on the stove for an hour—and it's still alive? What on earth is going on?"

"How could it die? This is my invention!"

We were all dumbfounded. What kind of hair-raising discovery was this? The room erupted in chaos, filled with a mix of awe and uproarious chatter. The cat's photo, alongside its newfound fame, was splashed across newspapers. It even had a new name now—Ulaika", a blend of Ullash and Laika. Ullash had become a celebrity, and so had the cat.

One day, we went to Ullash's room and asked, "What's the big secret? Come on, tell us. We swear we won't tell anyone outside."

Ullash thought for a moment, then burst out laughing and said, "Die? How could it die? It's already dead! I've been killing it, bit by bit, haven't I? Has Bilur ma died? You torment her much, though. Bilur baap beats him every day. Kaku, being drunk out of your mind, sometimes you...! And that day, I saw you too, baba!"

Bhabhi clamped her hand over his mouth. We slipped out of the room as quietly and quickly as thieves.

"Wait, don't you want to hear about my discovery?" Ullash shouted after us.

Translated from Bangla by Haroonuzzaman.

**Mojaffor Hossain** is a distinguished fiction writer within the realm of contemporary Bangla literature. He began his professional journey as a journalist and is currently employed as a translator at the Bangla Academy.

**Haroonuzzaman** is a translator, novelist, poet, researcher, and essayist. Besides teaching English in Libya and Qatar for about 12 years, he has had 20 years of teaching experience in English Language and Literature at Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB).



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

when our elder brother had a sudden flash of inspiration: the cat needed a fitting name. If Ullash truly achieved something remarkable, the cat's name would be celebrated alongside his, immortalised in the glory of his success.

"Tell me, won't Ullash grow up to be someone great?"

"Of course, no question about it," replied the elder brother, his deep voice affirming his wife's hopes and adding to her enthusiasm. Soon, the two drifted off to sleep, chatting happily about the future.

The rest of us remained busy with our

the point of resembling a stiff wooden frame. Its legs were as thin as a sparrow's, its skin barely clung to its protruding bones. Anyone unfamiliar with its earlier appearance would have mistaken it for a rat. Even its head drooped forward slightly, like a rodent's.

"Have you given it no food or water?" Bhabhi asked, her voice sharp with disbelief.

"The mouse experiment is over," he replied flatly. "For the next 15 days, it won't get a thing to eat. After that, I'll begin a new experiment with it."

"But will it survive?"

unfazed, pulled out the frozen cat and said, "Bilur ma, heat some water on the stove."

"What on earth are you planning to do?" Bhabhi asked, bewildered.

"It'll be fine with a little boiling. You'll see—it'll start moving again," Ullash replied, with a confidence no logic could penetrate.

He boiled it for about an hour and then set it out in the sun to dry.

By the afternoon, Ullash called everyone up to the rooftop, beaming with pride. "Look closely," he said, holding up the cat. "Can you recognise it now?"

### MSC celebrate title in style

SPORTS REPORTER

With the players and officials wearing special jerseys with the word 'champions' emblazoned alongside the years that the Black and Whites won the top-tier league titles in its 89 year journey, the crowd pulling Mohammedan Sporting Club celebrated with their first Bangladesh



Premier League trophy following a 3-3 draw in a trilling penultimate match in Cumilla yesterday.

The fading light of the sun at the Shaheed Dhirendranath Dutta Stadium turned the faces of the players and officials glow brighter as the Black and Whites ended a 23-year-wait for the top-tier title, winning their first ever league title in the professional era.

The celebration of the Motijheel-based outfit assumed more colour when the foreign players from Mali, Nigeria, Uzbekistan, Venezuela and Burkina Faso hung their respective national flags around their shoulders while Mohammedan ultras, a fan group of the club, made the moment more vibrant with smoke flares in the gallery, letting the players soak in the adoration of the fans.

Prior to the start of the match, Brothers Union players gave a 'guard of honour' to the Mohammedan players as well as their goalkeeper Ashraful Islam Rana, who called time on his 11-year top-tier career with the match against the club where he had started his top-tier journey.

Former national goalkeeper Rana played the first half before coming out and was greeted with garlands and crests by officials of Brothers, Mohammedan, Abahani, BFF, Cumilla DFA and many others.

However, the environment was totally different on the pitch as Brothers gave a tough time to their old rivals with a seventh-minute lead, with Mouhamed Beycye Diarra heading home a Jamal Bhuiyan chip from close range.

Mohammedan reorganised and hit back in the 25th minute with a powerful header from defender Mehedi Hasan and then captain Soleymane Diabate nodded a Muzaffar Muzaffarjon corner home in 38th minute. It was Diabate, who made it 3-1 in the 69th minute with a volley from inside the box. However, Mfon Udoh and Jewel Rana netted in the 71st and 88th minutes to force Mohammedan to settle for a 3-3 draw.

In the day's other match, Young Men's Fakirerpool Club confined Dhaka Wanderers to relegation with a 2-1 win, in the process themselves avoiding the drop.



PHOTO: BFF

Mohammedan players and officials celebrate their first Bangladesh Premier League title with the trophy following a 3-3 draw in their penultimate fixture against Brothers Union at the Shaheed Dhirendranath Dutta Stadium in Cumilla yesterday. (Inset) Brothers goalkeeper Ashraful Islam Rana is being given a guard of honour by his teammates prior to his last professional match.

### 'Players need to believe they are the main players'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's bitter defeat to the UAE, an associate nation, has opened up a Pandora's box on what will befall the national team and which cricketers can carry the baton in the near future. As much as results are expected, a team in transition cannot always deliver. However, an improvement curve needs to be seen, otherwise Bangladesh cricket risks falling into a loop of demoralising failures.

With many seniors already out of the national setup, realisation has come through that the current crop will have to take the responsibility of taking the team forward. Parvez Hossain Emon's century in the first match was perhaps the only impactful performance in the recent UAE series.

What can Bangladesh cricket do to help build the future from here? Hannan Sarkar, the Abahani head coach who has worked with Emon this DPL, feels that talent is there in players such as Emon.

"Emon always had that power-hitting ability, even when he was in U-15s. You have to develop your power-hitting ability with time and in the last three years, he played well in the DPL and knows the process of how to score his runs and that's why his confidence grew. For a player to become consistent, first they have to understand the process of how to score.

Many players know how to score runs but only against weak opponents. Since Emon has been scoring runs in domestic cricket, now he has to look to develop against international teams and quality bowlers," Hannan told The Daily Star.

International cricket has changed over the last two decades. When the likes of Shakib Al Hasan or Tamim Iqbal were



coming through, expectations were different. But more is expected now as Bangladesh as a team and players who are coming through. That means patience is important in building a side, and most crucially, keeping the players motivated.

"You have to make the players trust the fact that they are the main players and give them that confidence. You can't allow them to play with fear and uncertainty. This crop is only now feeling that they are the main players. You see that they are the future, so ultimately U-19 days are past them and with time they will have to get into the flow of taking that responsibility. International cricket isn't easy and they need time as well," the former Bangladesh player explained.

The batch which featured Tamim, Mushfiqur Rahim or Shakib Al Hasan had mentors and coaches that had built

them up in a batch together. For Hannan, the team management has to take the responsibility so that players keep growing.

"Those that are with the team such as (Mohammad) Salihuddin bhai, knows about their [players'] mentality and psychology. It's a positive thing and Salihuddin bhai is more experienced now. Players are expected to do more now and his feedback would be very important," Hannan feels.

For players like Emon, confidence can go a long way to becoming a settled player in the eleven. The Pakistani series would be tough but there will also be an opportunity to learn what areas to improve upon. "He has good confidence and he is on the right track. Of course he can fail but the way he is playing, especially since I have seen him play for Abahani, I feel he will continue," the former national selector hoped.

### Ancelotti wishes Alonso luck at Real Madrid

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti wished the man set to replace him, Xabi Alonso, "all the luck in the world" on Friday, before taking charge of his final game at the club.

Bayer Leverkusen coach Alonso is set to take over ahead of the Club World Cup although Madrid have not yet named him officially as their next coach.



Ancelotti spoke before Saturday's match at the Santiago Bernabeu against Real Sociedad in La Liga, his last game before taking the reins of the Brazil national team.

"I don't want to give advice because everyone has their own idea about football," Ancelotti told a news conference.

"Xabi is the first (to come after me), I wish him all the luck in the world, because he is a coach who has the characteristics to coach this club, this team -- enjoy it."

Former Real Madrid midfielder Alonso, 43, won the Bundesliga with Bayer Leverkusen in 2024 after a stunning unbeaten season, along with the German Cup.

Ancelotti said he expected his final match at the helm to be an emotional day.

The 65-year-old said he expected his final match at the helm to be an emotional day.

"I have it in my genetics that I get emotional very quickly, because my grandfather did that, and my father too, so it will be a very emotional day tomorrow,"

continued Ancelotti.

"I have no problem if I end up crying, no problem at all, I will not hide it in that sense. It will be a beautiful day."

Saturday will also be midfielder Luka Modric's last game at the Santiago

Bernabeu, with the Croatian to play in the Club World Cup in the United States before leaving Madrid.

"I'm sharing it with Luka," said Ancelotti.

"He has been a spectacular help in this era at Real Madrid, he is fantastic, a legend, and saying goodbye along with him seems nice to me."

The coach also posted an open letter on social media to say goodbye, saying his bond with Real Madrid was "eternal".



BKSP swimmer Monir Khan Tonmoy pumps his fists as he celebrates a record timing in the 100m freestyle event in the 37th National Age-group Swimming and Diving Competition at the National Swimming Complex in Mirpur yesterday. Tonmoy finished his dash at 55.21 seconds, shaving off 0.13 seconds from the previous record set by Mohammad Ismail of Gopalganj Swimming Club in 2021.

### Angelo Mathews to quit Tests

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's former skipper Angelo Mathews said on Friday he will retire from Test cricket after playing in the first match against Bangladesh next month but will continue white-ball cricket.



The 37-year-old veteran will leave the longest format of the game after a Test career of 16 years, which began with a match against Pakistan in July 2009 at the Galle stadium.

His final Test appearance, his 119th, will also be at the same venue from June 17.

However, he will not play in the second Test against Bangladesh.

"I stand grateful to the game and thankful to the thousands of Sri Lanka cricket fans who have been there for me throughout my career during my highest of highs and lowest of lows," he said in a statement.

"Now seems like the best time to make way for a younger player to take the mantle to shine for our nation."

There was no immediate comment from Sri Lanka Cricket.

A former captain in all three formats of the game, Mathews has been a mainstay in Sri Lanka's middle order.

He has scored 8,167 runs in the 118 Tests he has played so far. He has also taken 33 wickets, giving away 1,798 runs.

### SHORT CORNER

#### Neymar returns from injury in Santos defeat

Neymar returned to action on Thursday after more than a month on the sidelines due to a thigh injury but the Brazilian was unable to prevent Santos from exiting the Copa do Brasil after they lost 5-4 in a penalty shootout against CRB.

#### UEFA apologises for Europa League medal fiasco

UEFA has apologised for running out of winners medals during the Europa League final trophy ceremony on Wednesday after more Tottenham Hotspur players than expected lined up to receive their individual prizes.

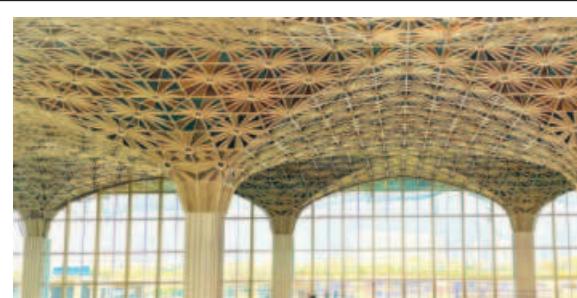
\*\*Read the full stories on The Daily Star's website



Novak Djokovic is presented with a birthday cake after winning his quarter final match against Italy's Matteo Arnaldi on Thursday. The Serbian marking his 38th birthday in style to reach the Geneva Open semifinals and continue his pursuit of a 100th career title.

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

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## Six parties back govt's reform-first polls plan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Six political parties, including National Citizen Party, Islami Andolan Bangladesh, and Jamaat-e-Islami, will support the interim government hold a national election after making the necessary reforms.

The five "anti-fascist" political parties held an emergency meeting on Thursday night at the office of Islami Andolan in the capital's Purana Paltan and reached a consensus on the matter, according to a press release.

The meeting was convened at the call of Islami Andolan leader Mufti Syed Mohammad Rezaul Karim, widely known as Charmonai Pir.

The three other parties are Gono Odhikar Parishad, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, and AB Party.

Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman attended the meeting over the phone while top leaders of the other parties were present in person.

During the discussions, the leaders

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

## Boost national capacity, don't rely on foreign experts

**Says Prof Anu Muhammad about Ctg port management**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Noted economist Prof Anu Muhammad stressed that the government's responsibility is to ensure Bangladesh moves toward an equitable society by strengthening national capacity, making necessary reforms in education and culture, and introducing structural changes in agriculture and industry.

He made the remarks while speaking as the chief guest at a discussion on the upcoming national budget at Jatiya Press Club in the capital yesterday.

The responsibility of the government was to set the direction for building an equitable Bangladesh. This is an interim government; it does not have a permanent mandate. Therefore, it cannot do everything. But reports from the reform commissions have been submitted, there are expectations for certain reforms, and there are tasks that can be carried out quite easily.

"For example, increasing the allocation to education and health sectors is a long standing and fundamental demand."

"Instead of addressing these critical concerns, the government is further complicating matters, which is not a sustainable solution to the country's problems."

The former economics professor also urged the interim government to focus on enhancing national capacity instead of relying on foreign experts to manage Chattogram Port and resolve other national issues.



SEE PAGE 9 COL 2

## Scientists create contact lenses that grant 'super-vision'

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Scientists have created contact lenses that enable wearers to see in the dark using infrared vision, an invention that could lead to advances in emergency and rescue operations.

Unlike traditional night vision goggles, these lenses don't require a power source and enable wearers to see infrared and visible light simultaneously, according to a new study published in the journal *Cell*.

"Our research opens up the potential for non-invasive wearable devices to give people super-vision," study senior author Tian Xue from the University of Science and Technology of China, said.

The lens uses tiny nanoparticles that absorb infrared light and convert it into wavelengths that are visible to mammalian eyes.

These particles specifically enable detection of "near-infrared light", which has a wavelength range of 800-1600 nanometres.

This is just beyond what mammals perceive, which is a fraction of the wavelengths corresponding to visible light, typically in the 400-700 nm range.



## 50 killed, missing after Israeli strike in Gaza

**WHO warns health system at a breaking point; a total of 107 aid trucks entered Gaza**

AGENCIES

More than 50 Palestinians were killed or remain missing after an Israeli air raid on a residential building in the Jabalia al-Balad area of northern Gaza, the civil defence said yesterday.

Civil defence crews described the scene as a "horrific massacre", reporting that they recovered the bodies of four victims and rescued six others from the rubble.

However, more than 50 people are still believed to be trapped under the debris of the four-storey building, reports Al Jazeera online.

The Israeli army said that over the past day, its forces had attacked "military compounds, weapons storage facilities and sniper posts" in Gaza.

"In addition, the (air force) struck over 75 terror targets throughout the Gaza Strip," it added.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organization (WHO) said that Gaza's health system is at a breaking point as Israel's intensified military operations continue, amidst worsening mass population displacement and acute shortages of basic necessities.

Four major hospitals in Gaza

have had to suspend medical services in the past week due to their proximity to incidents. WHO missions attempting to reach Al-Awda Hospital and the Indonesian Hospital were impeded, it said.

➤ Israeli air force strikes over 75 targets across Gaza

➤ Four major hospitals have had to suspend medical services

➤ Netanyahu accuses France, Britain, Canada of 'emboldening' Hamas

A few of the 90-odd UN trucks able to ferry humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip for the first time since March were "intercepted" by desperate residents, a United Nations spokesman said Thursday.

"We understand that a small number of trucks carrying flour were intercepted by residents and

their contents removed," said the spokesman, Stephane Dujarric.

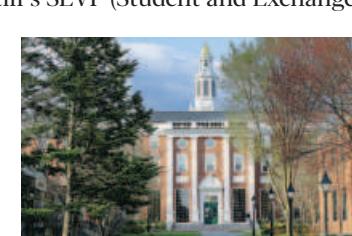
A total of 107 aid trucks belonging to the United Nations and other aid groups carrying flour, food, medical equipment and pharmaceutical drugs were transferred on Thursday into the Gaza Strip, the Israeli military said.

In a separate development, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused the leaders of France, Britain and Canada of wanting to help the Palestinian group Hamas after they threatened to take "concrete action" if Israel did not stop its latest offensive in Gaza, reports Reuters.

The criticism, echoing similar remarks from Foreign Minister Gideon Saar on Thursday, was part of a fightback by the Israeli government against the increasingly heavy international pressure on it over the war in Gaza.

Israel resumed major operations in Gaza on March 18, ending a two-month ceasefire.

On Thursday, Gaza's health ministry said at least 3,613 people had been killed in the territory since then, taking the war's overall toll to 53,762, mostly civilians.



## 'Major' Ukraine-Russia prisoner swap 'completed'

**Says Trump; Russia downs 112 Ukrainian drones**

REUTERS

US President Donald Trump said yesterday that a major prisoner swap was just completed between Russia and Ukraine.

"A major prisoners swap was just completed between Russia and Ukraine. It will go into effect shortly. Congratulations to both sides on this negotiation. This could lead to something big???" Trump said in a post on Truth Social.

Ukraine submitted a list of 1,000 prisoners of war to Russia in preparation for a major upcoming swap, an official at Ukrainian military intelligence said on Thursday.

An agreement to conduct such an exchange was reached earlier this month in Istanbul during the first direct talks between Russia and Ukraine in more than three years.

Meanwhile, Russia's defence ministry said yesterday its air defence systems had downed 112 Ukrainian drones overnight, including 24 over the Moscow region.

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The Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) has raised the prices of soybean oil, lentils, and sugar, distressing people who have lined up behind the TCB truck for essential commodities at subsidised rates. People from low-income groups rely on TCB products owing to soaring commodity prices. The photo was taken yesterday near Mohammadpur Town Hall.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

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Kabi Nazrul Smriti Kendra at Kazir Shimla in Trishal, Mymensingh.



A cot, once used by Kazi Nazrul Islam, is preserved at the Kabi Nazrul Smriti Kendra in Kazir Shimla, Trishal, Mymensingh.

# Where Nazrul's flute STILL ECHOES

Trishal remembers the national poet not just as a legend, but also as the boy who once walked its dusty paths with a flute in hand

Here, in this stretch of rural Bengal, Nazrul is not a distant national icon. He is still a neighbour, a schoolboy, a dreamer whose footsteps echo in the hearts of the people.



A statue of Kazi Nazrul Islam on the campus of Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University in Trishal, Mymensingh.

AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

In the quiet corners of Trishal, Mymensingh, the spirit of Kazi Nazrul Islam lingers -- not just in memory, but in rhythm of rustling leaves, in the dust-laden paths of Namapara and Kazir Shimla, and in the whispers of an old banyan tree beneath which a young boy once played his flute.

Here, in this stretch of rural Bengal, Nazrul is not a distant national icon. He is still a neighbour, a schoolboy, a dreamer whose footsteps echo in the hearts of the people.

It was June 1913. A 14-year-old boy from Churulia village in Burdwan, West Bengal, arrived at Kazir Shimla in Trishal. Taken in by police sub-inspector Kazi Rafizullah, the boy had no idea that his name -- Kazi Nazrul Islam -- would one day become synonymous with rebellion, resilience, and revolutionary verse in Bengal and beyond.

The memories of Nazrul are still alive among us. When we see the banyan tree on the Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University (JKKNIU) campus, we feel as if the boy is still there, playing his mesmerising flute," said Abdur Rahman, a resident of Namapara village, his eyes fixed on the leafy silhouette.

Though Nazrul stayed in Trishal for only about a year, his impact on the area has outlasted lifetimes. The local folklore around his time here has become part of the cultural identity of the region.

According to Rashedul Anam, a Nazrul researcher and additional director of the Institute of Nazrul Studies at JKKNIU, the poet was admitted to class VI at Darirampur High School, now known as Nazrul Academy, where Bipin Chandra Chakraborty served as headteacher.

Back then, the journey from Kazir Shimla to the school was long and unforgiving -- nearly six miles without any proper roads. Recognising the hardship, Nazrul moved to Namapara, nearer to his school, and stayed at the home of Bechutia Bepari. Several set out to find him, but Nazrul had already left. The letter, unfortunately, was never preserved.

"He would often stop under the banyan tree on his way to class and play his flute,"

said Anam. "That sound has become part of our collective imagination."

Nazrul's presence left an indelible impression on the villagers. He was widely known for his engaging "Punthi" recitations (a traditional form of poetic storytelling) and his remarkable command of the flute. His music would often drift through the village, making him a beloved figure even as a teenager.

In his book *Nazrul Jiboner Trishal Addhay*, Anam recounts how Nazrul's English teacher, Mohim Chandra Khasnabish, remembered him as "a quiet and absent-minded boy" -- a stark contrast to the charisma he displayed on stage during the school's cultural events. There, Nazrul would dazzle with dramatic recitations of Rabindranath Tagore's "Dui Bigha Jomi" and "Puratan Bhritya," earning awards for both.

left Trishal physically, but he never really left," said Nagarbashi Barman, head of the Fine Arts Department at JKKNIU. "His soul is in our soil."

That legacy would later take institutional form. In 2005, the foundation stone for the Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University was laid in Namapara, bringing the poet back, symbolically, to where his intellectual and emotional blossoming first began. The university officially began academic activities on June 3, 2007, with three departments under the Faculty of Arts -- Bangla Language and Literature, English Language and Literature, and Music -- and one under the Faculty of Science and Engineering.

Today, JKKNIU is the only public university named after the national poet. Located 22 kilometres from Mymensingh city, the institution now has 25 departments and 10,809

two Nazrul Smriti Kendras at Kazir Shimla and Namapara. Established in 2003 by the Department of Archaeology, the centres contain a modest but significant collection of memorabilia: handwritten manuscripts in Bengali, English, Hindi, and Urdu; rare photographs; a simple cot; and original gramophone records released by His Masters Voice.

However, the centres have not been updated in over two decades. As a result, the number of visitors has steadily declined. "It's monotonous to see the same items year after year," said Kazi Nayeem Ahmed, a recent visitor.

According to Kazi Abu Sayem, a local youth, only 15 to 20 people visit daily.

The accompanying libraries also show signs of neglect.

"Books by Nazrul are available, but we need more diversity -- other authors, perspectives, new scholarship," said Sahana Akter, a local college student.

Akhtaruzzaman Mondol, assistant director (in charge) of the centres, acknowledged the issue. "The National Museum and the Nazrul Institute in Dhaka have rich collections. If those were shared with us, we could improve the experience for visitors here."

Still, the centres serve as cultural anchors, hosting music courses and commemorating Nazrul's birth and death anniversaries, alongside other national days. These events rekindle public interest and keep Nazrul relevant for new generations.

The poet's birth anniversary today, for instance, is marked with three-day celebrations jointly organised by the Mymensingh District Administration, the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, and JKKNIU.

Seminars, cultural programmes, book fairs, a Nazrul Mela, and photo exhibitions create a vibrant tribute to the rebel poet. Darirampur and the JKKNIU campus come alive with music, verse, and memories.

The people of Kazir Shimla and Namapara still feel an intense pride in their connection with Nazrul. "We feel honoured that Nazrul first came to Bangladesh through our Kazir Shimla," said Kazi Abul Kashem, grandson of Rafizullah.

"His presence has glorified us," echoed Abu Yusuf Dulal, a fifth-generation descendant of Bechutia Bepari.

Both families have called on the government to take stronger measures to preserve the memories and physical traces of the poet's youth.

"There is a sense that Nazrul's flute never truly fell silent. Even now, when the wind brushes through the leaves of the banyan tree, some say they can hear a faint melody -- a reminder that the boy who once wandered through these fields with a head full of verses and a heart full of dreams never truly left," said Dulal.

Here in Trishal, Kazi Nazrul Islam lives on -- in the landscape, in the people, and in the lingering notes of a flute that still echoes through time.



The Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University (JKKNIU) campus at Namapara-Battala, Trishal, Mymensingh.



An iconic photo of Kazi Nazrul Islam playing his flute.



The Tinbigha Corridor — a narrow passage that connects the isolated enclave of Angorpota-Dahagram to mainland Bangladesh.

PHOTOS: S DILIP ROY

# Trapped Within BORDERS

## Life in Dahagram-Angorpota

S DILIP ROY

*The sun rises, but the light of life seems to be stuck at the gate of the Tinbigha Corridor.* This lament reflects the daily reality of the 23,000 people living in Dahagram-Angorpota—a Bangladeshi enclave surrounded by India's Cooch Behar district. Though it appears on Bangladesh's map, life here unfolds under the shadow of barriers, fear, and decades of state neglect.

Located in Patgram upazila of Lalmonirhat district, Dahagram-Angorpota spans 22.68 square kilometres and connects to the rest of Bangladesh through the Tinbigha Corridor—a 178-metre strip of Indian

kilometres to the mainland to sell their produce. As a result, they are regularly denied fair prices.

"To sell cows, we have to collect a token from the local union parishad," said 70-year-old farmer Badar Rahman. "Many times, tokens aren't available. We can't even go out with our own cows. We sell our products at 10–15 percent lower prices—and for cattle, up to 40 percent lower."

For people like Samiul Islam, who lives just 10 metres from the Indian border, danger is never far. The recent attempt by India's Border Security Force (BSF) to install barbed wire has intensified anxiety. "My land touches the border," said the 65-year-old. "When I go to work, I fear the BSF will take me. The BGB keeps watch, which helps, but now we farm in groups just to feel safer." His wife, Sabina Begum, added, "We didn't feel this scared before. Now, BSF patrols pass by our home day and night. We live in constant fear."

Beyond insecurity, essential services are severely lacking. Though the area has one hospital, there is rarely a doctor present, and no indoor treatment facilities. For proper care, residents must cross the corridor to reach Patgram Upazila Hospital.

"There are primary and secondary schools here, but no college, no technical institute, and no jobs for women,"



Farmers in Angorpota-Dahagram face difficulties working in croplands adjacent to the border, as Indian BSF frequently patrols along the zero line.

said 65-year-old retired teacher Reza Islam. "We must cross the corridor for everything—from healthcare to education. It's not just a gate we cross, it's a symbol of our constraints." He added, "The corridor may be open, but our lives aren't. Questions from guards, constant surveillance, and an invisible fear always surround us."

The Teesta River, which enters Bangladesh through this area, brings its own danger. Each year, erosion eats away farmland, pushing more people into poverty.

And yet, Dahagram-Angorpota is more than just a neglected outpost. With its unique geography, natural

beauty, and cultural richness, it holds potential for border tourism and agro-based industries.

"With proper planning, tourism, education, and small industries could transform this region," Reza suggested. "It would change not just our economy, but our lives."

For 21-year-old college student Maminul Islam, the struggle is especially personal. "I cross the Tinbigha Corridor every day to go to college," he said. "Despite completing training, I can't work online because BSF has blocked broadband internet cables from reaching our area. We're cut off from digital opportunities."

The Bangladesh Border Guard (BGB) says it is aware of the security concerns. Subedar Jamil Hossain, commander of Panbari BGB Company Camp, said, "We are educating farmers so that no one crosses the border illegally. We are monitoring the area to ensure farmers can work without hindrance."

Dahagram-Angorpota was declared a union in 1985, and the Union Parishad started functioning in 1989. In the early days, the Tinbigha Corridor was open for just one hour a day. Over time, the hours increased until round-the-clock access began on September 6, 2011. Yet bureaucratic hurdles remain.

Movement still depends on permits, and lives are often dictated by corridor rules. "We are citizens of Bangladesh," said one resident, "but we spend every day under a permit system." It's an irony for people who live within the nation's borders, yet remain apart from its everyday rights and services.

Movement depends on permits, and lives are ruled by corridor restrictions. "We are Bangladeshi," said one resident, "yet we live under a permit system." In Dahagram-Angorpota, the flag may fly, but freedom is rationed—life unfolds in a limbo shaped by history, politics, and broken promises.

S Dilip Roy is a journalist at The Daily Star

**For people like Samiul Islam, who lives just 10 metres from the Indian border, danger is never far. The recent attempt by India's Border Security Force (BSF) to install barbed wire has intensified anxiety.**

land. Opened 24 hours a day since 2011, the corridor was expected to change lives. But while the gate may stay open, opportunity often remains closed.

Most families here survive on farming and livestock. Cows roam nearly every yard, and fields are rich with crops. Yet due to the lack of local markets and traders, residents must travel about 20

# Verses from the ROHINGYA CAMP

**Mohammed Taher, a young Rohingya poet and teacher from the refugee camp in Ukhia, Cox's Bazar, uses education and writing as tools for change. A part-time Science and English teacher since the age of fifteen, he is now pursuing higher education through a Brac University-OSUN programme. His poetry, drawn from the struggles and hopes of his community, reflects a deep commitment to justice and storytelling. Actively involved in youth literary activities, Mohammed dreams of becoming an inspiring teacher—one who not only educates but also uplifts others through knowledge, empathy, and peaceful advocacy.**

### A Voice Unheard

I am a Rohingya youth,  
Living in a camp that never means to be  
home.  
Days pass slow and unchanging,  
Each one is blending into the next.

It is difficult here.  
The air is heavy while waiting,  
The roads are lined with uncertainty.  
Sometimes, it feels like the world has  
forgotten us.

I am a human too.  
I feel, I dream, I hope,  
Yet my rights remain distant.  
Like the sky, I can see but never touch.

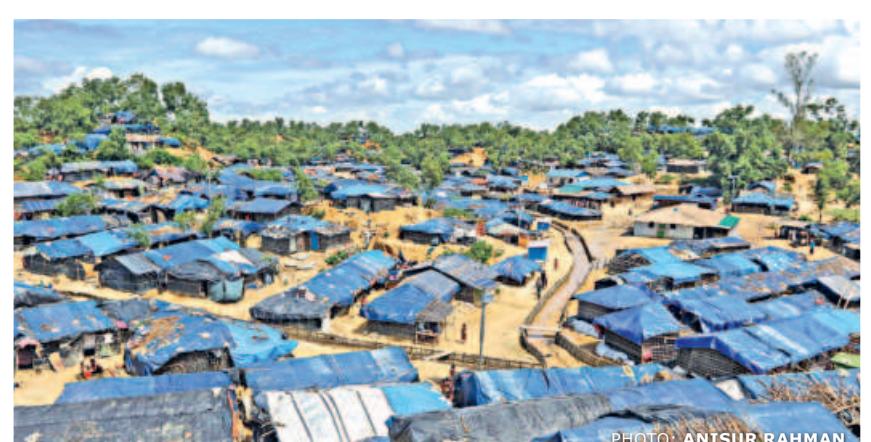


PHOTO: ANTSUR RAHMAN

Frustration grows within me,  
Not just from hardship, from silence.  
Why must I fight? For what others are  
given?  
Why is my voice unheard?

Still, I hold on.  
Not the reason for it is easy, I must.  
One day, I will step beyond these borders,  
No longer a Refugee but as a free person.

### Where is Humanity?

Gaza is burning. My people are crying.  
In Arakan too,  
We are slowly dying.  
The world is watching, and they are dying.

Where is the word "Humanity first"?  
We are Muslims, treated like dust.  
No food. No peace.  
No one to trust, children scream, mothers  
pray.

Fathers bleed day by day.  
Gaza and Arakan far but the same,  
Different places but the same pain.  
We did nothing, still we ran.

No homes, no rights, nowhere to belong.  
I ask the world, with a broken heart,  
Will you only care,  
After we are torn apart?



PHOTO: STAR

# THE KAJOLI MODEL

## Learning with Laughter, Growing with Joy

**What truly sustains the Kajoli Model over time is its deeply rooted, community-driven structure. These centres are not dependent on external aid; rather, they thrive on the collective efforts and commitment of the local community.**

WASIM BIN HABIB, back from Nilphamari

"Who will pick up the duck's photo?"

The moment Rafia Sonamoni posed the question to a group of 26 children, four eager hands shot up, accompanied by excited shouts of, "I will!"

Among them, Partha Roy was the most enthusiastic. He was chosen to pick the card with the duck's picture from a large board made of black cloth with pockets. Each pocket held a card – one side displaying a word and the other featuring an image of the word alongside the text.

Sprinting towards the board, the five-year-old scanned the cards quickly and selected the one with the duck's photo. Turning to his classmates, he stretched out his hand with the card and asked, "Friends, have I picked the duck's photo?"

"Yes!" the children chorused, clapping enthusiastically.

Rafia, smiling warmly, thanked Partha and then guided him towards the next challenge: assembling the word. She asked him to find and arrange the individual letter cards to spell "duck."

Partha turned back to the board and began searching another row of

why kids learn so fast."

The centre was set up on an open veranda at Rafia's home. She finds it rewarding when guardians express their happiness at seeing their children read and write so quickly.

"Most of the guardians are very enthusiastic about their children's education here. They are particularly amazed to see their kids learning Bangla and English without having any textbooks or khata," said Rafia, a first-year honours student at Nilphamari Government College.

The Daily Star recently visited eight such centres, popularly known as the "Kajoli Model", in Nilphamari and witnessed how a remarkable initiative is shaping early education and empowering young learners with essential literacy skills.

#### LEARNING THROUGH PLAY: THE KAJOLI MODEL

The journey of the Kajoli Early Childhood Learning Model, developed by RIB, began in 2002 following the successful completion of a unique action research project in Kajoli, a village in Sreepur Upazila of Magura district. In January of the following year, 10 centres were launched.

The main objective was to develop an early childhood model that makes education accessible and attractive to children from marginalised and disadvantaged communities in Bangladesh, ensuring pre-school education is available at very low or no cost.

"Many parents from disadvantaged families believe that education is difficult and expensive, and meant for wealthy families. We decided to break this misconception," Dr Shamsul Bari, Chairman of RIB, told The Daily Star.

Through RIB's research, he said, they decided to do away with traditional textbooks, paper, and pens in the Kajoli Model because these involve costs. "At the same time, we wanted to instil in children the idea that learning is fun," said Bari, who conceived the model through his extensive experience of teaching Bengali at several universities in the US.

Under the model, each learning centre has 26 children, a teacher, a

division – through visual and tactile learning.

By manipulating the beads, students develop an understanding of numbers and patterns. For example, they can physically group beads to see how multiplication works, or slide them apart to explore subtraction.

"All we wanted was to make education feel like fun. Children see the pocket board activities as fun and games and therefore do not lose interest in learning. This method fosters curiosity and builds confidence," said Dr Bari, a former top-ranking official of UNHCR.

"After attending classes for a year, students have a solid foundation and are fully prepared for primary education at local schools," he added.

Since its inception 23 years ago, nearly 99,000 children across the country have received pre-primary education through Kajoli Model centres. What started with just 10 centres grew to 200 over the years. However, the numbers declined due to the impact of Covid-19. Today, 87

Such a drill was witnessed at a centre in Ramnagar Bazar, Nilphamari Sadar.

Leading the exercise was Kotha, who guided her fellow students through the drill, encouraging them to follow her lead.

With expressive gestures, she pointed to her classmates and said, "I am," "You are," "He is," "She is." In perfect unison, her peers echoed her words.

Five-year-old Shartok then took the lead: "I am a boy," "You are a girl," "He is a boy," "She is a girl," with the class repeating each sentence after him in rhythm. The centre, set up in an unused room of a school abandoned a few years ago, resounded with the enthusiastic voices of the lively children.

Taking the floor next, Ferdousi Begum, the teacher of the centre, introduced a new set of phrases: "We are," "They are," "You are," "The boys are." She then said: "This is," "That is," "These are," "Those are." Her students followed along, their voices blending in a rhythmic chorus.

She then showed her students a pen.

Without the wholehearted support from the guardians, I would not have been able to run the centre," she said.

Ranjana Akter, a teacher who runs a centre on the veranda of her in-laws' home in Paschim Hazipara area, credits the collective efforts of the villagers, especially the mothers, for keeping her centre running successfully for the past five years.

"Without the wholehearted support from the guardians, I would not have been able to run the centre," she said.

Ranjana's father-in-law, Abdul Kader, believes there is nothing more noble than children learning, and he takes great pride in being part of this meaningful effort.

"We will keep our centre going," he said with conviction.



PHOTO: WASIM BIN HABIB

**In the courtyard of her home, Pravati Roy leads her students in a lively recitation of "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," guiding them with rhythmic hand gestures. The children follow eagerly, their voices rising in harmony as their mothers watch attentively. This vibrant centre is located in Babupara village, Ramnagar union, Nilphamari Sadar.**

The children said in unison: "I have a pen."

"Students at the centre learn faster thanks to the learning techniques," said Ferdousi, who has been teaching for the past four years.

She said the children's eagerness was unmistakable.

As a demonstration, she asked her students to write down their names. They excitedly grabbed chalk and rushed to the blackboard attached to the wall, putting their learning into action.

At a centre in Babupara of Ramnagar, children started offering salam as soon as this correspondent, along with a team of RIB members, arrived.

As their teacher, Pravati Roy, asked them to recite a rhyme, the children took no time to begin. "Twinkle, twinkle little star, how I wonder what you are..." they chorused, using hand motions along with the teacher.

The centres are set up in spaces offered by the community – whether

centres remain in operation – most of which are located in the northern districts, according to RIB.

#### COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP AT ITS CORE

What truly sustains the Kajoli Model over time is its deeply rooted, community-driven structure. These centres are not dependent on external aid; rather, they thrive on the collective efforts and commitment of the local community. RIB's research found that external aid, such as foreign donations, could create dependency on outside support and thereby undermine the model's sustainability.

From funding and management to physical labour for constructing the learning spaces, the responsibility of running and maintaining the centres rests entirely with the people, with mothers playing a pivotal role in this model.

The centres are set up in spaces offered by the community – whether

centres remain in operation – most of which are located in the northern districts, according to RIB.

#### CHAMPIONS, COMMITTEES, AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

Another major participant in the Kajoli Model is the 'champion'. The champions – many of them local representatives or enthusiastic youths – promote the cause of the centres to the local community. He or she secures the support of the community to ensure that the centre runs smoothly.

Nazrul Islam is one of them. He said he immediately agreed to be a champion after witnessing children confidently speaking English at a centre.

"What amazed me was how eager the children were to come to the centre. They learn together, share meals, and genuinely enjoy the day," said Nazrul, a resident of Paschim Hazipara in Ramnagar.

Nazrul, who is in his final year of honours at Nilphamari Government College, said, "It's a great cause. Children from poor families get the opportunity to acquire basic learning skills at no cost, with active involvement from their families and neighbours."

"Most importantly, we, as members of the community, play a role in this noble effort, ensuring its success."

All Kajoli Model centres are overseen by a dedicated committee that ensures their smooth operation, manages resources, and makes necessary arrangements to sustain the centre's activities. Each centre operates six days a week, conducting daily sessions for around four hours.

Girimla Rani Roy is the head of the committee at one centre in Ramnagar union.

Around two years ago, she said, a champion came to their home and requested them to open a centre. "After hearing everything, I agreed to run the centre at my home. One of my grandsons is a student here," she said.

The Kajoli Model stands as a testament to what is possible when education is driven by empathy, rooted in community, and shaped by the needs of the learners.

Dr Bari said, "The Kajoli Model thrives because it fosters a sense of ownership among the local people. When communities take charge of their children's education, the model remains resilient."

"If every village could have such a centre, millions of children would have begun schools not in fear, but with excitement and confidence," he said.

As Kajoli Model centres continue to grow organically without external funding, the need for a dedicated foundation has emerged to ensure their long-term sustainability.

"We've come this far through community ownership and personal contributions," said Dr Bari. "But to reach more children and sustain our momentum, we need a more structured foundation – one that can effectively oversee the centres and maintain coordination."

**Wasim Bin Habib** is the Planning Editor at The Daily Star



**After a joyful session of learning, children at a Kajoli Model Centre in Bahalipara village, Paschim Hajipara, Nilphamari Sadar, share a warm meal of khichuri, lovingly prepared by one of their mothers.**

large pocket board, pocket cards with pictures and letters (for Bangla and English), Ganitmala (for mathematics), a blackboard and chalks. The best feature is that the Kajoli Model is entirely run and managed by the local community.

Unlike the traditional system of memorising letters, the teachers first show the children pictures of different objects and animals with their names in Bangla and English on them, and the students have to match them with the corresponding pictures. They learn spelling, pronunciation, and make words by assembling separate cards (known as broken cards).

For mathematics, RIB developed Ganitmala, a hands-on learning tool designed to make foundational maths concepts engaging for young students.

Using a string of 100 beads, it helps children grasp essential arithmetic operations – counting, addition, subtraction, multiplication, and

it's a spare room in a home, a veranda, an unused space in local public buildings, or a hut built by the community. They arrange seating for children with floor mats and contribute their own money to ensure teachers receive an honorarium.

Teachers play a crucial role in translating the concept of 'learning through fun' into reality, and the community chooses someone who has affection and good rapport with the children. A woman or teenage girl from the locality with some basic education (reading, writing, and counting) is preferred to be the teacher.

#### DRILLS, DANCE AND SONGS: A SYMPHONY OF LEARNING

Apart from learning to read, write and count, the children learn to recite nursery rhymes and poems, dance, sing songs, and tell stories. RIB developed a set of English drills so that the students could speak in English through structured practice.

"We try our best to contribute. In the early days, each of us would give Tk 10 to Tk 15, as much as we could afford. Now, we have managed to increase it to Tk 20 to Tk 30," she said.

One of the most impactful features of the Kajoli Model centres is the mid-day meal, an initiative led entirely by the mothers. Mothers take turns cooking and serving khichuri, a nutritious dish made with rice, lentils, and vegetables, once a month for all the children.

With 26 students and typically 26 school days in a month, each mother is responsible for providing the meal once a month. Since this is equivalent to cooking daily for her own child, she is motivated to contribute, knowing that her child will receive a meal the rest of the month through this collective effort.

"Only one kg of rice, half a kg of lentils, and one kg of vegetables are enough to feed all the children each day. So, it's no burden. After all, we are feeding our own children," said Sumona Roy.

**Wasim Bin Habib** is the Planning Editor at The Daily Star



# FOOD, FAST

## Behind delivery boom lies a workforce without rights or recognition

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

**Platforms like Foodpanda, Pathao, Foodi and others offer flexible, part-time employment, and have become lifelines for students who need to earn without compromising their academic ambitions.**

### MD ABU TALHA SARKER

With a signature pink Foodpanda delivery bag slung across his shoulders, Abdul Kader pedals tirelessly through the congested and pothole-riddled roads of Dhaka. Whether it's a scorching summer afternoon, a drizzling evening or tempestuous night weather, he navigates the city's relentless traffic, weaving between rickshaws, buses, and motorbikes to deliver meals on time.

For thousands of customers, the knock on the door signifies convenience. But for Kader, a first-year undergraduate student at the National University, each delivery tells a story of resilience, ambition, and survival.

Kader's delivery zone stretches from Shewrapara through Kazipara to Mirpur 10 and Mirpur 11. It's a well-trodden path for him now, each alley and side road etched into his memory after months of experience.

The 22-year-old hails from Netrokona, far from the capital city of Dhaka. "I grew up in a farmer's family," he says softly.

"We don't own any land. My father cultivates other people's fields with help from my two elder brothers, who didn't get the chance to pursue education."

Kader is the youngest among his siblings and the only one studying at university. Determined not to let his dreams be buried under financial hardship, he moved to Dhaka and now lives in a small mess in Kazipara. The city may be expensive and unforgiving,

Still, Kader sees it as a stepping stone, not a destination.

"It's tough, yes. But it's helping me pay for my education, my living expenses, and a little bit I send home when I can," he says. "That means something."

Mehedi Hasan Babla's journey mirrors Kader's. Hailing from Northern Bangladesh district Nilphamari, Babla came to Dhaka with dreams of studying at Dhaka University. When admission to a public university slipped through his fingers, disappointed but undeterred, Babla enrolled at Titumir University College.

His limited savings, gathered by selling family belongings, quickly ran dry. "I had no choice but to find work," he said. "But how could I manage a job alongside my studies?"

"Finding tuition jobs without connections is hard," he says.

He tried restaurant work in Khilgaon, an area now brimming with over 500 food establishments, before joining Foodpanda as a delivery rider.

Speaking to The Daily Star from the flat he shares with two other students in Khilgaon, Babla recounts juggling studies and deliveries, earning weekly, plus small bonuses.

"I began working part-time for Foodpanda in December last year. I do the evening shift, 5 pm to 10 pm, and earn Tk 2,200-2,300 weekly, plus bonuses for completing all orders."

Reflecting on one experience, he said, "An order came in from outside my

first, which takes time," said Md Robin, a food delivery rider for Pathao.

"Some people understand, others don't. It's frustrating when we're abused despite doing our best," he added.

Originally from Barishal, Robin left school after SSC to support his family and worked at restaurants before joining Pathao two years ago. He operates in Tejgaon, Mohakhali, and Kakoli-Banani.

"This job suits me now," Mohammad Sagor Sarker, a third-year student at Titumir College, works evenings with Pathao.

"But it's not a long-term solution. When I have a family, this income won't be enough to meet needs and responsibilities."

The sector directly or indirectly employs between 250,000 and 300,000 people -- many of them

blame riders, even abuse them," he said. "Sometimes they withhold tips."

Another customer Abu Masum of the capital's Tejkunipara, warned against excessive commission fees set by the platform-based company. "If rates are too high, restaurants may choose to manage deliveries themselves."

### Gig workers lack formal recognition

Mohammed Abu Eusuf, executive director of Research and Policy Integration for Development (RAPID), said food delivery is expanding as the economy grows and household incomes rise.

"This trend is visible not only in the West but increasingly in South Asia too."

"Urban mobility is time-consuming, and renting space for restaurants is expensive. Hence, takeaway and delivery services have become increasingly popular worldwide."

From the consumer side, convenience plays a key role. "People prefer eating at home rather than commuting through congested cities," he added.

Eusuf added that food delivery and ride-sharing are becoming key employment avenues. However, he said the sector must be formally regulated. "There's a policy gap regarding food safety and service standards," he concluded.

Ananya Raihan, chief imaginator at DataSense and a member of the Labour Reform Commission formed by the interim government, said workers in the gig economy lack formal recognition as labourers.

"They are referred to as independent entrepreneurs. Consequently, they are remunerated only when they work. If they do not, they earn nothing. They often spend the entire day waiting for clients," he said.

Furthermore, he said there are gaps in the labour law that allow these individuals to slip through the cracks.

"Although the nature of their work closely resembles full-time employment, they are afforded no legal recognition under national labour laws. They are designated as independent contractors and, due to this legal void, are excluded from key protections."

"For example, they do not receive wages, overtime pay, insurance coverage, or maternity leave benefits that are available to formally recognised labourers."

He added that as riders are not salaried employees, they must often work in excess of 100 hours a week to meet the minimum wage benchmark -- more than two and a half times the standard working week. "This inevitably results in significant health risks."

Furthermore, the pressure to deliver timely, with many platforms requiring delivery within 30 minutes to secure bonuses, increases the likelihood of accidents. There is rarely any compensation offered in such cases, he says, adding that most platforms do not provide accident insurance to their workers.

"As these individuals are not legally recognised as labourers, entitlements such as pensions, gratuities, and other employment benefits are non-existent. Simply put, they are not receiving what they justly deserve due to the absence of legislative protections," he said.



but the opportunities it offers are vital. "I needed a job immediately after coming to Dhaka," he says. "A few friends suggested becoming a delivery rider. It was the most practical option for me."

Unlike traditional part-time jobs such as private tutoring, working as a food delivery rider offers something essential: flexibility.

"There are rigid requirements in most jobs - fixed hours, strict schedules. I needed something that allowed me to prioritise my classes and assignments," he explains. "This job gives me that. I can work in the evenings or during free hours between lectures."

But the work is far from easy. Riders like Kader often endure long hours, poor weather, and physical strain, all while racing against time. The pressure to meet customer expectations and avoid penalties for late deliveries adds another layer of stress.

zone. It was tough, but I didn't cancel. I delivered from Khilgaon to Titakuli in old Dhaka."

Their stories reflect a broader trend: thousands of young Bangladeshis from rural, low-income backgrounds are entering the gig economy to sustain their education.

Platforms like Foodpanda, Pathao, Foodi and others offer flexible, part-time employment, and have become lifelines for students who need to earn without compromising their academic ambitions.

While the work is taxing and the pay modest, the opportunity to balance study and survival makes food delivery a stepping stone for many.

Bangladesh's online food delivery market is expanding rapidly, driven by shifting consumer preferences, digital advancement, and a rising middle class. Industry estimates suggest daily transactions of Tk 6 crore.

Foodpanda alone works with over 100,000 delivery personnel, including 40,000 regular freelancers across all districts.

Ambareen Reza, managing director and co-founder of Foodpanda Bangladesh, attributed the growth to rising smartphone use and internet access, though she noted the market remains underdeveloped compared to neighbouring countries.

Challenges include poor supply chains, limited digital adoption, and sluggish expansion outside Dhaka, said the official of Foodpanda, a Singaporean platform owned by Berlin-based Delivery Hero, which operates in 14 countries, including Bangladesh.

Since its 2013 launch, Foodpanda has expanded to over 50 Bangladeshi cities, partnering with over 5,000 restaurants and capturing more than 50 percent of daily food delivery orders. It relies on aggressive discounts for customer growth and retention.

One of the biggest challenges in this industry is ensuring a steady supply of delivery riders. Rider availability is crucial," said Mashrur Hasan Mim, chief marketing officer of Foodi.

Based on an estimated monthly market volume of 70,000-80,000 orders, Foodie currently holds around 20 percent market share, he claimed.

He said one major reason is the cost of maintaining a reliable rider base. "This is why so many companies fail to survive," Mim said.

"Customers often rebuke us for delays, but they don't realise we must collect food from specific restaurants

hailing from Kapasia, Gazipur, he chose the platform for its flexibility and lack of upfront costs. He earns around Tk 15,000 monthly to support himself and send savings home.

He shares a room in West Rajabazar, paying Tk 3,500 in rent. His father is a rickshaw puller and his mother a homemaker.

An official of a restaurant chain Pizza Burg from its Khilgaon branch said the restaurant sector has grown significantly, largely fuelled by the rapid rise of digital delivery platforms.

Many outlets now rely heavily on these services, with online orders often compensating for low footfall.

Similarly, Rabmani Hotel and Restaurant in Mirpur 10 has also embraced food delivery. Anisur Rahman, a staff member, said growing demand frequently results in queues of riders, occasionally causing slight delays.

Fahim Ahmed, managing director of Pathao, said, "Pathao is actively working towards establishing a safe, robust, and efficient framework that facilitates income-generating opportunities for individuals of all genders."

### Customers' mixed reactions

Mirpur resident Saif Hasnat criticised poor packaging practices of some platforms.

"Items like rice and curry often arrive in polythene bags stapled shut - hardly hygienic or safe for hot, oily food."

Al Amin Hossain, a resident of the Mohammadpur area, expressed frustration with late deliveries.

"Riders blame traffic or restaurant delays, but the core issue seems to be platforms covering vast areas with too few riders. Customers then unfairly