



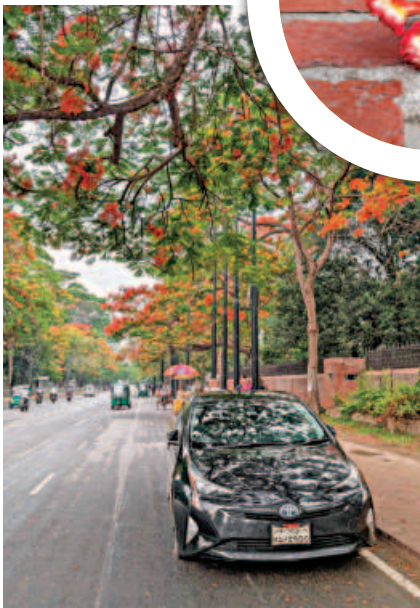
Beneath the grey sky, the red tree sings

If I could describe Dhaka in my sketchbook using one colour each day, most of the pages would probably be grey. Dusty roads, concrete buildings, tired mornings, and hurried lives that carry that dull shade. But there would be a few grey pages where I'd reach for the red and orange, making a few bold, scattered strokes across the corners. Those are the days when the Krishnachura blooms.

JAWWAD SAMI NEOGI

The royal Poinciana may be native to Madagascar, but it feels like it has belonged to us for years. We call it by our own beautiful name -- Krishnachura -- as if it knows Dhaka's summers by heart and waits all year just to remind us that Dhaka is still beautiful. Even in the middle of chaos and concrete, it gives us a quiet moment that makes the heart feel a little lighter.

So vibrant, so sudden, so poetic -- that's Krishnachura. One morning, I look up and suddenly the sky seems to be on fire. The trees I passed every day without noticing have exploded into the shades of red. They wait quietly through the seasons, but when summer arrives, the branches burst into flames of red and orange. It's as if the Krishnachura tree has remembered a forgotten poem and started to recite it out loud.



In a city that's always moving, always rushing, I spot it -- sometimes from a rickshaw, sometimes through the window of a crowded bus, or while walking down the street. The tree stands still, and I pause for a second, maybe a few minutes. I reach into my pocket for my phone, trying to capture the moment, because I know it won't last. Soon, the petals will fall, and I won't even realise how much I'll miss them.

It had just rained, light and sudden. The wet petals on the ground remind me it's all temporary. I look around and see lovers taking photos, framing the flowers in the background. I notice tired passersby looking up at the tree, quietly admiring it under its shade.

The flowers may not last long, but they stay in your memory forever. You remember that one tree near the tea stall, or the big one that scatters red petals like confetti onto a quiet footpath when a soft wind passes through. You remember how, even in the extreme heat of summer, something as simple as a flower surprises you.

There's something special about its timing, too. It shows up when the heat has made everything heavy, when people are most tired. It may not offer shade, but it offers hope -- it offers wonder!

Every year, when the Krishnachura comes back, it whispers: Some things exist just to be seen, just to be loved for a moment.

And in a city full of grey days, it gives me a reason to colour the page differently.

PHOTO: JAWWAD SAMI NEOGI

Japan to provide \$1b in budget support

FROM PAGE 1

He said what happened in the country in the past 16 years left nothing in shape, and in this situation, Japan came up as a good friend.

"I came here to thank you and design the next step," he said. "We want to show the history that it was done, done in a perfect way. We have kind of tightened our belt and say here we are to work. With your support, it is doable."

"Let's put our hands together and execute it It's not about making money. It's about changing people's lives," he said.

Speakers at the event included Shinji Takeuchi, Japan's parliamentary vice-minister of economy, trade and industry; Norihiko Ishiguro, chairman and CEO of JETRO; and Fumiya Kokubu, chair of the Japan-Bangladesh Committee for Commercial and Economic Cooperation.

On Thursday, both nations inked MoUs on training and employing Bangladeshi skilled workers, with projections that Japan may hire up to 100,000 workers from Bangladesh over the next five years amid a growing labour shortage.

During the bilateral talks, Yunus and Ishiba emphasised the need to conclude the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) soon, with expectations that it will enhance investment and trade and secure duty- and quota-free access for Bangladeshi products after LDC graduation, a foreign ministry official said.

Current bilateral trade stands at around \$4 billion. Since Bangladesh's independence, Japan has provided more than \$24 billion in loans and grants. A foreign ministry official noted, "Bangladesh can get a lot of Japanese investments if we can truly improve our business environment."

Election future uncertain

FROM PAGE 1

Mirza Abbas claimed that it was Prof Yunus who mentioned holding polls by December.

"BNP has always wanted elections by December. It was Dr Yunus who first mentioned December, not us. Later, he shifted the timeline to June. If he talks about holding the election by June, it will never happen in Bangladesh," Abbas told the reporters.

Mirza Abbas said Ziaur Rahman carried out many reforms without bringing in any foreign consultants.

"Ziaur Rahman undertook various reforms such as canal re-excavation programs, the garments industry, and women's education. But this government, in the name of reforms, has reached a point where they no longer want to hold an election."

Abbas further criticised the interim government for "importing people from abroad" to carry out reforms.

"These people are not citizens, they don't love the country, and lack commitment to Bangladesh. How

The two countries reaffirmed their political and security cooperation, including the early delivery of five patrol boats to the Bangladesh Navy under Japan's Official Security Assistance. They also agreed in principle to the Agreement Concerning the Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology, hoping for its early signing.

Both leaders reiterated their commitment to the strategic partnership and a shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific, grounded in peace, stability, rule of law, and multilateralism.

Yunus expressed gratitude for Japan's sustained development support, particularly under the Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt (BIG-B) initiative. Ishiba lauded Bangladesh's efforts in temporarily sheltering the Rohingya refugees.

Both sides agreed that the ultimate resolution of the Rohingya crisis lies in their safe, voluntary, and dignified return to Myanmar, and emphasised the need for sincere dialogue among all stakeholders.

Ishiba described Bangladesh as a "long-standing friend" and pledged Tokyo's continued support during the country's democratic transition. "Bangladesh plays a critical role in regional stability," he said, highlighting its importance in ensuring peace across the Indo-Pacific, according to the CA's Press Wing.

He paid tribute to Yunus, expressing confidence that Bangladesh would usher in a new era under his leadership. "Japanese people have profound respect for you," Ishiba added.

Yunus thanked Japan for its "unwavering support" over the past 10 months, noting the difficult inheritance left by the previous regime.

He emphasised Bangladesh's

commitment to a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific, and expressed readiness to work with Japan on maritime security, sustainable marine resource management, enhanced connectivity, and the fight against transnational crimes.

The chief adviser outlined a series of infrastructure and trade proposals, seeking Japanese support for a land-based LNG terminal at Matarbari and an import-based LPG terminal at Moheshkhali.

He also sought support for duty- and quota-free access for Bangladeshi exports for at least three years after LDC graduation in 2026; soft loans to upgrade the Dhaka-Chattogram highway into a six-lane access-controlled expressway; upgradation of the Chattagram-Cox's Bazar highway; and a new four-lane bridge over the Meghna Gomti river.

He invited Japanese investment in sectors such as automobiles, electric vehicles, light machinery, high-tech electronics, and solar energy, proposing integration into Japan's industrial value chains.

Yunus urged Tokyo to launch a skilled workforce partnership programme, saying it could help fill Japan's labour shortages and open opportunities for "hundreds of thousands" of Bangladeshi workers.

Additionally, he requested an increase in scholarships and opportunities for Bangladeshi students and vocational training instructors to study in Japan.

Ishiba assured that Tokyo would continue to assist Bangladesh in overcoming its current challenges. He recalled his own visit to Bangladesh 38 years ago for the inauguration of the Japan-funded Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge, and expressed his intention to visit Bangladesh at a mutually convenient time.

elections for restoring democracy, and the interim government must ensure polls are held on time. He noted the government's promise to restore people's rights remains unfulfilled.

At an event in Banani, Abdul Moyeen Khan questioned why the interim government fears elections. "You know that the people do not like you. Are you afraid you won't remain in power if a fair and neutral election is held? Why don't you openly admit it?" BNP and its affiliated organisations observed the death anniversary of Ziaur Rahman nationwide, with key programmes including wreath-laying at his grave, Quran recitation, special prayers, food distribution, and discussions.

The party also held a doa mahfil at the chairperson's office in Gulshan, virtually attended by acting chairman Tarique Rahman.

Daylong events, including food and clothing distribution, took place at 26 locations in the capital.

Health ministry puts up poor show again

FROM PAGE 1

Domestic Product (GDP) -- was allocated to health sector, the lowest among South Asian countries, according to the report.

The commission, which submitted its report to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus on May 5, recommended allocating 15 percent of the national budget or 5 percent of the GDP to the health sector.

CRUCIAL PROJECTS DELAYED

The rollout of crucial health projects faces significant delays due to the implementing authorities' failure to utilise ADP allocations efficiently, making people in urgent need of medical care wait longer.

One such project was taken up to establish full-fledged treatment centres at eight divisional headquarters for cancer, heart and kidney patients.

Approved in July 2019, it was initially designed to build eight cancer treatment centres by June 2022. Later, facilities for treating heart and kidney patients were included in the project involving Tk2,388.40 crore.

The initiative was taken amid a rise in non-communicable diseases, including heart-related illness, which account for around 70 percent deaths in the country.

But the project authority couldn't complete construction of the health facilities over the last eight years, let alone procure medical equipment and recruit health workers.

"We have sought an extension of the project deadline till June next year and also a revision of costs," said Project Director Towfique Hasan Firoz.

Asked whether it would be possible to finish all the work within the new time frame, he said, "We will try."

Most other projects involved

infrastructure development for hospitals, medical colleges, universities, diagnostic facilities, and medical research centres, and also procurement of medical equipment.

REASONS FOR POOR SHOW

Among the 57 ministries, divisions, and constitutional or statutory bodies, only the Anti-Corruption Commission, with an ADP utilisation rate of just 1.29 percent, performed worse than the Medical Education Division, shows the IMED document.

Only four ministries, divisions, and constitutional or statutory bodies lag behind the Health Services Division in terms of ADP implementation.

Prof Shafiqul Nahin Shimul, a teacher at the Institute of Health Economics under Dhaka University, said government agencies lack the necessary managerial and administrative capacity, and experience to implement projects in the health sector.

In many cases, implementing agencies don't have financial autonomy, which forces them to seek the ministry's intervention -- a lengthy and bureaucratic process, he said.

"For decades, the budgeting pattern has remained largely unchanged, failing to reflect sector-specific needs. Some sectors require more allocations, while others are unable to utilise funds effectively. The budget should be reallocated based on necessity. But that doesn't happen, resulting in poor implementation."

For instance, more funds are needed for medicine and the repair of medical equipment. "But there is a mismatch in allocations here," he noted.

Following the July mass uprising last year, different agencies and projects saw changes in their top leadership,

which might be a reason behind the poor ADP implementation this fiscal year, he said.

"However, there have been some positive developments, such as reduction in unnecessary procurement. Previously, major contractors, often in collusion with one another, were involved in equipment procurement in the health sector. That practice has now been curbed," he added.

The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) is implementing 14 out of 19 projects under the Health Services Division.

Asked about the slow pace of ADP implementation, Afreena Mahmood, director (planning and research) of DGHS, said the PWD, responsible for infrastructure development in the projects, has made little progress, making it difficult for other agencies to proceed with their work.

She further said that several posts of project director remained vacant for a long time, hampering project implementation. Besides, the interim government adopted a "go slow" policy for some projects.

"The vacant posts have been filled. We hope to see major progress in the next fiscal year."

The Directorate General of Medical Education (DGME) is implementing the other four projects.

Contacted, DGME Director General Nazmul Hosain said they lack the capacity to handle the procurement process, budget implementation, and other related issues.

To address this, a panel of experts comprising senior and mid-level doctors has been formed to provide training on budget implementation, procurement, and store management, he added.

Help us build 'New Bangladesh'

FROM PAGE 1

said, "A good friend comes out in hard times, and that friend is Japan. I came here to thank you."

Prof Yunus said millions of Bangladeshi youths need cooperation to turn their dreams into reality. The interim government accepts responsibility for making the impossible possible, and Japan is Bangladesh's partner and friend in that effort.

"Together, our task is to create a new Bangladesh. With your support, it is very much doable, and we have already laid the foundation."

Expressing his gratitude to Japan for its support in developing Matarbari Deep Sea Port, Yunus said now Nepal, Bhutan and the seven sisters of India can access the rest of the world through Matarbari.

"Matarbari is the doorway to the rest of the world... we will keep the door open for all."

Shinji Takeuchi, Japan's parliamentary vice-minister of economy, trade and industry, said Bangladesh is a strategic point connecting Asia and has been playing an important role in developing the

region.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations, Japan has continued to support Bangladesh in its development, he said.

Shinji said the Japanese government is trying to enhance its strategic partnership with Bangladesh under the leadership of Prof Yunus.

He also said the Japanese government is encouraging Japanese companies to invest in South Asia, including Bangladesh.

Currently, there are about 350 Japanese companies operating in Bangladesh. More Japanese companies are eager to invest.

Prof Yunus said Japanese companies can help Bangladesh achieve sustainable growth by strengthening cooperation in various fields, utilising the investment-friendly atmosphere.

Stating that Japan's bilateral trade ties with Bangladesh are mainly centred on the textile industry, he called for diversification into a wide range of fields.

JETRO Chairman and CEO Norihiko Ishiguro said Bangladesh has seen remarkable growth and

China sets up int'l mediation body in Hong Kong

REUTERS, Hong Kong

China yesterday signed a convention setting up an international organisation for mediation in Hong Kong that Beijing hopes will be on par with the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and bolster the city's international credentials.

The move comes amid growing geopolitical tensions that have been exacerbated by US President Donald Trump's global trade war and fuelled risks of a sharp worldwide economic downturn.

The mediation body aims to cement Hong Kong's presence as a top centre to resolve disputes between countries, leader John Lee said earlier this week, adding that it's status would be on par with the International Court of Justice and the Permanent Court of Arbitration of the United Nations in The Hague.

Indonesia, Pakistan, Laos, Cambodia and Serbia were among the countries attending the signing ceremony. Representatives from 20 international bodies including the United Nations were also expected to join, public broadcaster RTHK said.

A video shown at the signing, which was presided by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, said the scope of cases that would be handled include disputes between countries, between a country and nationals of another country and between private international entities.

The mediation group could advance China's influence internationally and promote a more assertive role for the world's second-largest economy in global governance, some analysts said although its success remains to be seen.

Alicia Garcia-Herre, chief Asia Pacific economist at Natixis, said the move was good news for Hong Kong, however she cited arbitration centres in Chinese cities Xian and Shenzhen which had not worked well.

"Hong Kong has been offered as an alternative but I still think that borrowers, especially borrowers or anybody with a Belt and Road contract (BRI) related or with a Chinese leg will feel less protected nowadays," she said.

Hong Kong tied with Singapore for second place, behind London, as the top choice for a seat of arbitration in 2025, according to the 2025 International Arbitration Survey conducted by Queen Mary University of London.