

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

We must uphold the spirit of Eid-ul-Azha

Let safety, empathy, and civic duty mark this extended holiday

As Muslims around the world prepare to celebrate Eid-ul-Azha, it is a time to reflect on the values of sacrifice and gratitude that this festival embodies. These principles resonate deeply especially when millions in Gaza are facing hunger and death under Israeli attacks, and hundreds of Rohingya children are being denied their right to education. Closer to home, some workers are returning to their villages without receiving salaries or bonuses. Then there are the road accidents that have become a tragic routine during every Eid, as a large number of people travel from cities to spend the holidays with loved ones.

Although, like the Eid-ul-Fitr earlier in the year, media reports suggest that bus, train, and launch journeys have so far been relatively smooth, several road accidents and at least one robbery on the highway have already occurred, despite increased patrols by law enforcement. However, the responsibility of ensuring safety on highways and river routes does not rest solely with the authorities—it is shared by passengers, transport owners, and drivers alike. Passengers, too, must avoid overcrowded or unfit vehicles, while owners and drivers must prioritise safety over profit, avoiding reckless driving. Law enforcement officials must also remain vigilant.

Another critical aspect that calls for both responsible behaviour and proper planning is the sacrifice of animals. As we celebrate this act of devotion, we must not lose sight of our duty to show kindness to all living beings. Sacrificial animals should not be subjected to unnecessary cruelty. In cities and municipalities, we must ensure that animal waste and other refuse from our households and neighbourhoods are properly disposed of, and that streets, footpaths, and house premises where animals are kept or sacrificed are thoroughly cleaned.

This Eid-ul-Azha marks the first in which municipal and city corporations are being overseen by administrators rather than elected representatives. Many of these administrators are also juggling responsibilities in other government departments. However, this must not be used as an excuse for delays in post-Eid cleanliness drives. On the contrary, swift waste disposal should be treated as a top priority, especially as monsoon rains could worsen the stench and spread of blood, creating ideal conditions for the breeding of dengue mosquitoes. We also hope that the efforts of Dhaka South City Corporation will not be disrupted, as they were for 21 days when supporters of BNP leader Ishraque Hossain staged protests at Nagar Bhaban.

We wish everyone a safe and joyful Eid.

How is this a priority for the government?

Ordinance on freedom fighters creates confusion, controversy

We are surprised to learn of the promulgation of the National Freedom Fighters Council (Amendment) Ordinance 2025 that replaces the National Freedom Fighters Council Act 2022, redefining some key aspects related to the Liberation War. At a time when the nation is navigating an extremely fragile transition to democracy, this adds yet another element of confusion and controversy that we could do without at this moment. Codifying a more restrictive, combat-oriented definition of freedom fighters (FFs) and the war itself might seem justified by the history of political exploitations under Awami League. But it also reflects a potential reframing of national memory that no bureaucracy should be entrusted with.

It's true that much of the initial confusion about the ordinance stemmed from flawed reporting, particularly claims about the "revocation" of the recognition of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Tajuddin Ahmad, and other national heroes as freedom fighters. But partly responsible for it is the redefinition of a "freedom fighter" and the introduction of three new categories, including that of an "associate of the Liberation War"—thus dividing all previously recognised under the broad term of freedom fighters into distinct groups. For example, all Members of the National Assembly (MNAs) and Members of the Provincial Assembly (MPAs) who were aligned with the wartime provisional government and later became members of the Constituent Assembly will now be considered "associates," whereas those who led the provisional government will continue to be recognised as FFs. These categories overlap in some cases, and exclude in others, creating ambiguities and confusion.

While the reclassification may not affect the benefits received by freedom fighters or their families—as later clarified by the adviser to the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs—the real question is: was this reframing, and the symbolic rollback of recognition for some, necessary at all? If there are concerns about "fake" freedom fighters, this approach will certainly not help. On the contrary, it piles on existing bureaucratic workload by necessitating fresh examinations of status. By defining a "freedom fighter's family" strictly as their spouse, son, daughter, father, or mother, the ordinance appears to align with the post-uprising restructuring of job quotas that no longer extend to their grandchildren. But again, these objectives could have been pursued without wading into what some perceive as a revisionist attempt. At the very least, the government could have consulted with political parties to generate consensuses on such a divisive issue.

The interim government has interfered in such historical matters in the past as well. Instead of doing what is ideally the responsibility of historians or society at large, we feel it should focus on more urgent and present-day reforms that the nation is eagerly waiting to see. But whatever it does, it should stop bringing a top-down approach to critical reforms.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Robert F Kennedy fatally shot



On this day in 1968, US lawmaker, Robert F Kennedy was fatally shot by Sirhan Sirhan at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles. He died the following day.

The budget was a missed chance to honour the revolution

Nahid Islam
is convener of the National Citizen Party (NCP).
Khaled Saifullah
is joint convener of NCP.

NAHID ISLAM and
KHALED SAIFULLAH

The proposed national budget for FY2025-26 was presented not merely at the end of a fiscal cycle, but at the end of an era—one marked by systemic corruption, institutional degradation, and a profound alienation of citizens from their state. That this interim government had to prepare the budget within the skeletal framework left behind by the fallen regime is not in question. Nor is it fair to ignore the administrative and financial constraints they inherited. But while constraints explain limitations, they do not absolve responsibility. This budget was a historic opportunity to redefine the role of the state, to mark a definitive departure from the logic of managed inequality and patronage. It did not take that opportunity.

Instead, the budget keeps within the grooves of a model we have already rejected. It repeats the structural imbalance that has long tilted our economy away from justice. It does not lay the foundation for an economic settlement that would decisively confront the legacy of discrimination, exclusion, and wealth concentration among the elites.

The central failure is not one of omission, but of orientation. The budget keeps intact the asymmetry between direct and indirect taxation. The wealthiest citizens, those with the means to conceal income and relocate capital, remain under-regulated. It is a missed opportunity to introduce new instruments or institutional strategies to identify and tax high-net-worth individuals or large corporate actors. A more progressive tax policy could also alleviate the burden on the middle class and ensure that those with the broadest shoulders carry a greater share of the responsibility. In contrast, VAT and other regressive levies remain the primary engines of revenue. It is a choice that perpetuates the transfer of burden from the powerful to the vulnerable.

The same misalignment is visible in the area of employment. The budget contains no coherent national employment strategy, no public works programme, and no shift towards labour-intensive infrastructure development. This could have been an opportunity to introduce a national minimum wage for people in precarious work, such as day labourers and transport workers. The scattered measures for youth loans, freelancing, and training are not wrong in themselves, but they are no substitute for structural planning. A budget is not a collection of gestures. It is a statement of direction. And this one shows no solution when it comes to the country's largest crisis.

Allocations for health, education, and science and technology have increased ever so slightly. These are numerical adjustments within inherited systems, not transformative moves. The health system still remains urban-centric and underfunded at the community level. The education system lags far behind global competition and remains without a vision for transformation. And the science and technology programmes remain concentrated in a few institutions, detached from a national innovation ecosystem. A revolutionary moment demands transformation, not an incremental shift.

One of the clearest examples of the budget's failure to break with the old order is in agriculture. Although

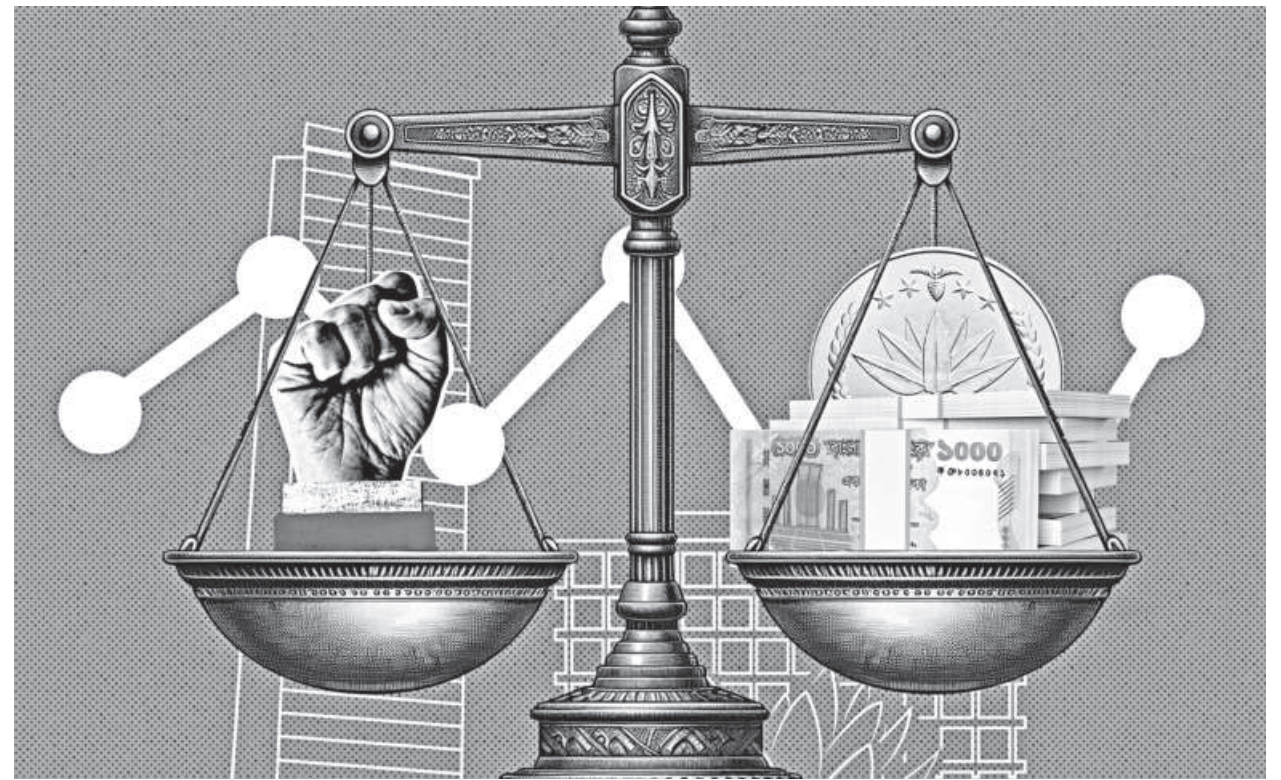
But a state that benefits from their labour abroad continues to neglect their rights at home. There is still no coordinated plan to train outgoing workers in higher-value skills, nor a serious reintegration effort through employment or entrepreneurship. Diversifying the labour force requires preparation, such as language instruction, sector-specific training, and legal support abroad. None of this has been prioritised. And so, the country remains content to export vulnerability rather than skill.

A similar stagnation marks the treatment of small and medium enterprises. SMEs are widely acknowledged as the backbone of the economy. But there is no targeted credit guarantee mechanism, no

for girls' education is welcome. But these are not systemic answers. The structural exclusion of women from the formal economy, the absence of protections for care work, and the failure to address gendered insecurity in public space remain untouched. We cannot close the gender gap with minor transfers. We must redesign the system.

We welcome the government's allocation of Tk 405 crore for the July warriors and green initiatives. However, it is concerning that the budget lacks any specific measures to reduce non-performing loans or to support the much-needed banking sector reforms through budgetary provisions.

The budget was an opportunity to



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

headline figures on fertiliser subsidies, cold storage concessions, and mechanisation incentives provide the appearance of support, these measures do little to transform the lives of marginal farmers. There is no plan for land tenure reform or tenant protections, even though 40 percent of farm households are "pure" tenants; these cultivators cannot secure formal credit or move into non-farm employment to diversify incomes. The continued emphasis on blanket subsidies, rather than targeted credit or loss buffer schemes, benefits larger landholders who already access informal loans, while smallholders still struggle to finance their operations. By offering handouts in place of reform, the budget reinforces inequality rather than making agriculture a genuine engine of rural prosperity.

Alongside farmers and small producers, another pillar of our economy, migrant workers, remains structurally overlooked. Every year, our workers remit billions of dollars to the country, often at a great personal cost.

robust infrastructure to integrate women-led or rural SMEs into the national economy. To make matters worse, the government has proposed tripling the VAT on online product sales commissions, from 5 percent to 15 percent. This single policy will disproportionately impact exactly the kinds of digital micro-entrepreneurs the state claims to support.

Most troubling of all is the continuation of the provision for whitening black money. We have seen, repeatedly, that such measures neither curb corruption nor generate sustainable revenue. They reward evasion and insult compliance. When a government invites money launderers to return with impunity, it sends a message that integrity is negotiable. We have reached a point in our political transition where we must abandon the fiction that informal economic amnesties are necessary or effective.

On the question of gender justice, the budget again stops short of structural intent. The increase in allowances for widows or stipends

express, through fiscal architecture, a break from the political and moral logic of the past. It could have been the moment that moved the country closer to a government that serves all, not just the organised, the connected, or the comfortable. That it did not do so is a missed opportunity. No revolution endures without reform. No reform endures without redistribution. And no redistribution is possible without the courage to change course.

The National Citizen Party remains committed to a vision of government that begins with recognising obligations to the young, the women, the working, the poor, the returning migrants, and the voiceless. It is only in fulfilling those obligations that we will honour the meaning of the revolution and build a Bangladesh that is for the many, not the few.

The authors recognise the contributions of Ehtasham Haque, Islamul Haque, Istiak Akib, and Faisal Abdullah to this article.

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

A story of memory and nature



Raida A. K. Reza
is doctoral researcher at United Nations University's Institute for Integrated Management of Material Fluxes and of Resources (UNU-FLORES), Leibniz Institute of Ecological Urban and Regional Development (IOER), and Technische Universität Dresden. She is the founder of Zero Waste Bangladesh (ZWBD).

RAIDA A. K. REZA

I want to share a story about a little girl and a tree. A beautiful krishnachura tree, reaching the fourth floor balcony of a house and hiding it away from the urban sprawl, but not enough that moonlight couldn't peek through. A tree that was a friend to that little girl living on that balcony. In spring, the blooms would set ablaze in red in that little corner, and summers would be kinder to the girl as the shade of green would protect the space from the scorching sun. For years, that tree was a friend to her. The passing of the seasons and the changes in foliage were a part of her life, and they were friends—they both knew it.

And one day, just like that, the tree was gone. Cut down to make space for growth. More than a decade of kinship, torn apart in the span of a week.

It's the kind of loss that lingers with you. It's the kind of loss that is hard to explain to a child but must be understood by an adult. The numbness that comes up to cope with this loss is something that is reflected in all of us,

wouldn't you say? Living in a concrete jungle that is Dhaka, I wonder: when did we stop caring for the small things that make life, life? When did we stop romanticising the rain? Was it when the entire city got flooded and the day was ruined on a monsoon day? When did we stop listening to the birds? Was it when they stopped coming to us, to an almost uninhabitable city? When did we stop caring for the soil we walk on? Was it when it started being covered in asphalt for so long that we forgot what lies beneath?

Amid all this, a story that sticks with me is a memory. A memory of Amena apa, whom I met in Noakhali a few years back. She invited my family for lunch, and I remember looking at her old glass jars of jams and jellies filled with seeds—some small, some big, but all sitting in airtight containers. She told me about how she stores seeds so that she does not forget how things are meant to taste. It was very normal for her community to store seeds. They would keep them as a contingency for

when floods hit. Some would call this a resilience model, but to her it is just how things are.

"We look out for each other," she said. This is something I could never relate to. When I moved away from my maternal home, the houses I lived in, I never knew who my neighbours were. We sometimes met while getting out of our doors, in the garage, maybe



FILE PHOTO: STAR

I want to share a story about a little girl and a tree. A beautiful krishnachura tree, reaching the fourth-floor balcony of a house and hiding it away from the urban sprawl.

sometimes walking on the road, but we never spoke. We never had that community feeling. It is also just how things are for most of us living in Dhaka.

Most things in Dhaka have little meaning to us. There are no parks to walk in, no water bodies to sit beside

and forget our worries. No open space for children to learn about the birds that come in winter, no connection of the spirit to the earth. Our days are spent thinking about the next traffic jam, even thinking about how to survive the next day. Living in such fight-or-flight mode brings out apathy in us even more strongly.

Today is World Environment Day, a day that holds a reminder of all these thoughts. But it's also a day when I am reminded that, despite mass apathy towards the environment, there are still people who care.

There are people who protect our little spaces so that they can be green again, people who remember to be mindful enough to care. Their actions lie in quiet choices, in how we walk through the world, and with the world.

Those people remember the smell of wet earth after the first rain, how it makes them stop, just for a moment. They remember the silence that hung after a storm passed, when even the birds paused to breathe. They remember the thrill of picking a mango, sticky-handed, from a tree that had stood there longer than them. They let their memories be an anchor, and remind them of who they were, and who they still could be. They care, because they remember. They remember how the environment matters, and how we matter within it.

Now the question is, do you remember?