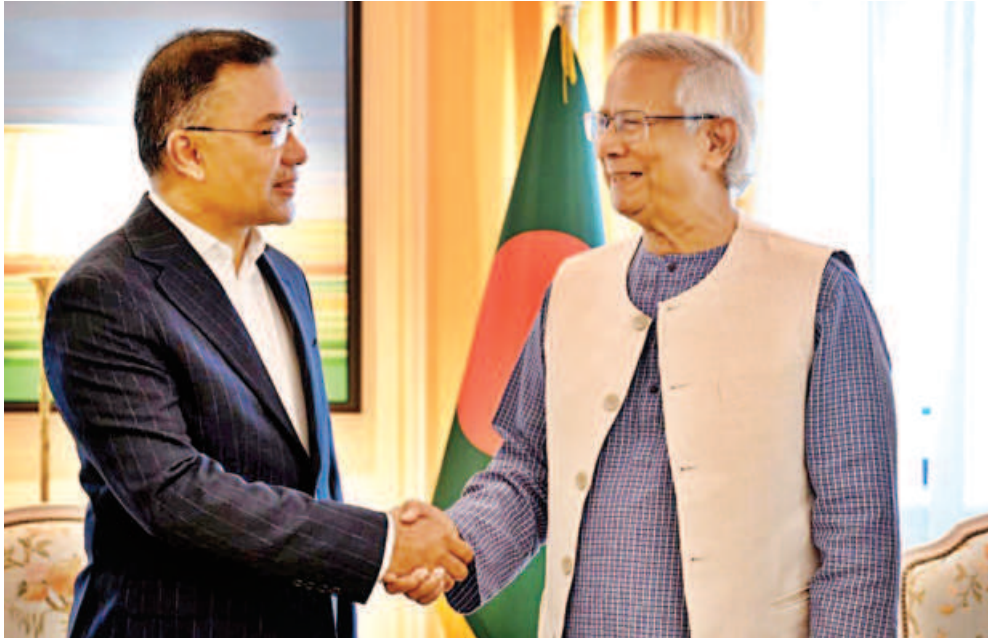




Polls could be held in mid-February

Sufficient progress in reforms, trials necessary before election, Yunus tells Tarique in London



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has said that the next general election could be held in the week before the start of Ramadan in 2026 if all preparations are completed.

He added that sufficient progress in reforms and the trials of perpetrators of killings in the July uprising would be necessary to bring the election date forward from April.

Yunus made the remarks when BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman, during a meeting with the chief adviser in London yesterday, suggested that the election take place before Ramadan.

The month of fasting will begin in the third week of February. After the end of Ramadan, Eid and Independence Day will be celebrated in March.

first half of April next year. If all preparations are completed, the election could be organised in the week before the start of Ramadan in 2026," the statement said.

It said Tarique welcomed the chief adviser's stance and expressed his gratitude on behalf of the party. The chief adviser also thanked Tarique for the fruitful discussion.

Both sides said they were satisfied with the outcome of the meeting at The Dorchester, the hotel where Yunus is staying during his four-day UK visit.

On multiple occasions, Yunus insisted that the polls would take place sometime between

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4



First responders gather outside a building hit by an Israeli strike in Tehran, Iran, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Israel launches biggest ever attack on Iran

Strikes nuclear, military sites for the second night; top generals, nuclear scientists among 78 killed; Middle East airspace shut

AGENCIES

Israel launched renewed attacks on Iran as evening fell yesterday, after its biggest ever attack against its longstanding foe blasted Iran's huge underground nuclear site and wiped out its entire top echelon of military commanders.

Iran said that in retaliation, "the gates of hell will open", while Israel said the strikes were only the start of "Operation Rising Lion". US President Donald Trump said it was not too late for Tehran to halt the bombing campaign by reaching a deal on its nuclear programme.

With this crime, the Zionist regime has set itself for a bitter and painful fate.

AYATOLLAH ALI KHAMENEI



This operation will continue for as many days as it takes to remove this threat.

BENJAMIN NETANYAHU

- Some 200 Israeli fighter jets hit over 100 targets in Iran
- Trump urges Iran to grab 'second chance' for a deal
- China, Russia slam strikes; world urges restraint
- Report says US moving military assets to Middle East

Iran's Nournews said 78 people had been killed and 329 injured in Israeli attacks on residential areas in Tehran.

As evening fell yesterday, Iranian media reported explosions on the northern and southern outskirts of Tehran and at Fordow, near the holy city of Qom, a second major nuclear site which had been spared in the first wave of attacks. Israel's military said it was striking Iranian missile and drone launching sites.

Air defences were activated across Tehran, and explosions could be heard in Isfahan.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Iran's options for retaliation are limited

Say analysts

AGENCIES

Israel's strikes on archfoe Iran exposed severe weaknesses for Tehran that have hampered its ability to respond militarily, analysts said.

Israel said it hit 100 targets, including Iranian nuclear and military sites in the attacks, killing senior figures, among them the armed forces' chief and top nuclear scientists.

Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei warned Israel it faces a "bitter and painful" fate over the attacks, but analysts say the Islamic republic's options are limited.

"This is an intelligence defeat of existential proportions for the Islamic Republic," said Ali Fathollah-Nejad, director of the Berlin-based Center for Middle East and Global Order (CMEGO) think tank.

"It exposes the vital vulnerability of the regime's military and security apparatus and its key infrastructures

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

Two die from Covid in 24hrs

15 new cases detected

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two women died from Covid-19 and 15 new cases of the disease were reported in the 24 hours preceding 8:00am yesterday, according to the health directorate.

One of the women died in Dhaka and the other in Chattogram, according to the health emergency operations centre and control room of the Directorate General of Health Services.

After a long gap, a coronavirus fatality was reported on June 5 this year.

With the latest fatalities and cases, the country's recorded death toll from the disease since March 18, 2020, stands at 29,502 and cases at 20,51800.

The recovery and death rates remained at 98.42 percent and 1.44 percent, respectively.

Amid rising numbers of cases in Bangladesh and neighbouring countries, the government is resuming coronavirus testing at four major hospitals in Dhaka and Chattogram from today.

The facilities are Dhaka Medical College Hospital, Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital, Mugda Medical College Hospital, Kurmitola General Hospital, and the DNCC Dedicated Covid-19 Hospital in the capital; and Chattogram Medical College Hospital in the port city.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



Relatives of victims who died in the Air India Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner crash during take-off mourn as they wait outside the post-mortem room at a hospital in Ahmedabad, India, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

AIR INDIA PLANE CRASH

Search on for missing people, clues

One of two black boxes found

REUTERS, Ahmedabad

Rescuers searched for missing people and aircraft debris in charred buildings in Ahmedabad yesterday after more than 260 people were killed in an Air India Boeing 787 crash, and local media reported that India may ground the airline's 787 fleet for safety checks.

The Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner with 242 people on board bound for Gatwick Airport south of London came down over a residential area of Ahmedabad moments after take-off and erupted in a huge fireball as it hit buildings below, CCTV footage showed.

Rescue workers had completed combing the crash site and were now searching for missing people and bodies in the buildings as well as for aircraft parts that could help explain why the plane crashed soon after taking off.

There was a strong stench of jet fuel in the air as cranes worked to remove chunks of burnt trees on the ground and a sniffer dog went through the debris.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

"It's time to strengthen national unity and move swiftly toward a fair election in mid-February," Fakhruel said, calling for renewed momentum for a transition to democracy.



Support us in enhancing maritime capabilities

Yunus urges UK

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has sought the UK's support in enhancing the country's maritime domain capabilities and exploring marine resources, as Bangladesh is purchasing a naval ship from the UK.

The request was made during a meeting in London yesterday between Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus and Lesley Craig, head of the South Asia Regional Department at the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO). Commodore Whalley also accompanied the UK delegation.

During the meeting, Craig briefed Prof Yunus on the HMS Enterprise, a multi-role hydrographic survey vessel designed

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7

Prime accused confesses to trafficking for Russia war

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Alomgir Hossain, a prime accused in a case filed over trafficking people to Russia for forced participation in the war, confessed to a magistrate yesterday.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate GM Farhan Ishtiaq recorded his confessional statement after Alomgir agreed to give it, said a court staffer.

After recording the statement, the magistrate sent him to jail.

Details of the confession could not be immediately known.

Earlier, on the night of February 5, a team from the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) arrested Fabia Zerin Tamanna, a partner at Dream Home Travels and Tours Ltd, at Dhaka airport while she was attempting to flee to Nepal.

According to CID, the trafficking ring lured victims with promises of high-paying jobs in Russia -- offering salaries

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

Two injured in mugging incidents in the capital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two people were injured in separate mugging incidents in the capital's Wari and Mohammadpur areas, where the muggers stabbed the victims and fled with cash.

One of the incidents took place around 5:00am yesterday in Wari's Tikatuli area, while the other occurred around 11:00pm on Thursday on Tajmahal Road in Mohammadpur.

In Wari, Sirajul Islam, 55, a poultry trader from Dholpur in Jatrabari, was heading to Kaptan Bazar by a CNG-run auto-rickshaw to buy chickens when three muggers stopped him near the Tikatuli rail gate, said his son Abu Bakar.

"They tried to snatch his money. When he resisted, they stabbed him in the hand and leg and fled with Tk 70,000," he told The Daily Star.

Sirajul was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) and later released after treatment.

In Mohammadpur, Mithu, 42, a battery-run rickshaw driver, was attacked while driving along Tajmahal Road.

Fakhruddin, a security guard who took Mithu to the hospital, said, "Three muggers tried to snatch his rickshaw. When he resisted, they stabbed him in the abdomen and leg. As he screamed, they fled with Tk 2,000."

Mithu was initially taken to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital and was later shifted to DMCH early yesterday due to the severity of his injuries. He is currently undergoing treatment there.

Inspector Md Farouk, in charge of the DMCH Police Outpost, confirmed that both victims were brought to the hospital after being stabbed by muggers.

VANISHING RIVERS of Patgram

Rampant illegal stone mining puts once-thriving waterways on deathbed; locals blame political influence, lack of action from authorities



S DILIP ROY and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN, back from Lalmonirhat

Abdus Salam, 55, was sifting stones from a dredger machine on Dharla riverbank in Kawamari area of Lalmonirhat's Patgram upazila.

The midday calm was being shattered by the grinding roar of numerous dredger machines scattered across the riverbank, with long iron pipes sucking up stone and sand from the riverbed, leaving craters in their wake, while dust clouds swirl over the surface of the river.

Piles of sediment rise along the banks, as evidence of the relentlessly destructive operation.

"I was once a farmer. I lost all six bighas of my land to river erosion. There's nowhere else to go. But I have to feed my family. So, I'm forced into this. What else can I do?" Salam asked. His voice ached with bitterness.

"It was the local political leaders who started the extraction. We protested. No one listened. Now we do it ourselves. There's nowhere else to go. The riverbed is our last resort," he also said.

Patgram is crisscrossed by three rivers -- the 31.5-kilometre-long Dharla, the 21-km Singimari, and the 4-km Saniajan -- all flowing in from India.

The rivers were once lifelines of the region for farming, irrigation, fisheries and water-based transport. Now they are left on verge of oblivion having suffered

years of rampant, illegal stone extraction. Reminiscing old days, locals describe the rivers as more than waterways.

These rivers are their past and future -- sources of food, identity, and community. Yet, while a handful profit from plundering them, entire villages are left to grieve and survive amid ecological collapse.

Bangkanda's Nazir Ali, 78, recalled a time when boats used to glide across the river. "Now it's

MINING PITTS OR DEATH TRAPS?

Day-labourer Surat Ali, 60, from Kawamari village, traced back to how the predicament unfolded since around 1991. "We used to collect stones with nets. Then politically influential people brought in dredgers to extract stones on a large scale. That was the beginning of the end," he said.

Over the years, the riverbeds became curved into deep pits that eventually turned into death traps, with at least 20 people -- including seven students, eight

Lalmonirhat's Patgram is crisscrossed by three rivers -- Dharla, Singimari, and Saniajan. The rivers were once lifelines of the region for irrigation, fisheries and water-based transport. Now they are left on verge of oblivion having suffered years of rampant stone extraction.

all sandbars. We get some water during the monsoon. The rest of the time, it's dead."

Nazrul Islam, 78, a freedom fighter from Rasulganj, "My 10 bighas of farmland beside the Dharla, as well as our family graveyard, are all lost to river erosion exacerbated by the rampant stone extraction."

Shamsher Ali, 65, a farmer from Bangkanda, said those who protested were rather harassed by the administration. "Now I can't even bear to look at the river," he added.

"It's like a festival sometimes -- 400 to 500 dredgers working day and night," said Mahtab Ali, 70, another farmer from Rasulganj. "These rivers are dead. The only solution is proper dredging, not looting,"

children, and five farmers or labourers -- drowned over the past two decades, accord

On July 25 last year, Miskat Hossain, 12, drowned in one such mining pit. His father, Nurul Islam Nuru of Bangkanda village, never recovered from the loss.

"The pain of losing my son engulfs me every single day. We protested repeatedly. Nobody cared," he lamented.

Iftekhar Ahmed, president of Patgram Press Club, said, "We've reported on these deaths, but the administration neither kept records nor took any measure. The illegal stone extraction just continues."

THE SYNDICATE

For decades, local politicians and their associates have been engaged in stone extraction, forming syndicates by exploiting their influence.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4



LAWACHARA NATIONAL PARK

Unregulated tourism threatens wildlife, disrupts ecosystem

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

An unregulated influx of tourists, especially during public holidays, is threatening the biodiversity and natural balance of Lawachara National Park in Moulvibazar's Kamalganj upazila, raising concerns among environmentalists and forest officials.

The 1,250-hectare park is home to 167 species of trees, 246 species of birds, 20 species of mammals, 59 species of reptiles, and 22 amphibians -- many of them rare or endangered.

There has been a surge in number of visitors to the park in recent years. However, this increase in footfall is disrupting the fragile forest ecosystem.

"The noise, littering, and intrusion caused by large crowds have led to visible discomfort among animals, with many seen hiding in the undergrowth during peak tourist hours," said Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, former divisional forest officer

of the Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Department in Sylhet.

A study in 2012 found that the park's maximum capacity is 400 tourists per day, he added.

"During holidays, the forest area becomes chaotic. Tourists

and breeding," said Saju Marchiang, an environmental activist and local eco-tour guide.

According to the Wildlife Management



shout, blow horns, and even try to lure animals with food. This disturbs their natural behavior and affects their diet

and Nature Conservation Department, a total of 3,946 tourists entered Lawachara National Park in the four days

picnic spot. It's unacceptable that people would enter their habitat and create such disturbances," said Sohel Shyam, founder

following Eid-ul-Azha, generating revenue of about Tk 4,50,000.

"The forest is primarily a sanctuary for wildlife, not a

of Stand for our Endangered Wildlife, a conservation group.

Sohel and other activists have long called for stricter regulation, including capping daily visitor numbers, mandatory eco-guides for all tourist groups, and penalties for those who flout environmental norms.

Jamil Mohammad Khan, assistant conservator of forests at the Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Department, admitted that tourist numbers rise during holidays, adding that they have verbally discouraged picnic activities.

"However, there is no official directive yet to regulate the number of visitors," he said, adding, "The forest and its wildlife are the park's main attractions. If they are destroyed, there will be nothing left for tourists to see."

There are no also proper parking facilities either, and drivers hardly maintain the

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

5 die of dengue in country

Four deaths recorded in Barguna alone

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least five dengue patients died in the last 24 hours -- the highest single day toll this year -- with four of the deaths reported from Barguna, currently the country's dengue hotspot.

With the latest fatalities, the total dengue death toll this year has risen to 28.

In addition, 159 new dengue patients have been hospitalised in the past 24 hours, 124 of whom are from the Barishal division, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

With the new admissions, the total number of dengue cases this year has climbed to 5,570, including 4,255 cases reported from outside Dhaka.

Currently, 531 dengue patients are undergoing treatment across the country, with 193 receiving care in Barguna.

To reduce dengue-related deaths, public health expert Mushtaq Hussain emphasised the need for a stronger primary healthcare system. "Many people avoid dengue testing due to limited access at local clinics, resulting in late diagnoses, especially in impoverished areas," he said.

"If testing is available nearby, people will seek help earlier. Currently, most avoid testing due to limited facilities," he added.

Hussain also recommended establishing more blood collection centres and secondary care facilities to ease the pressure on medical college hospitals. Critical patients could then be transferred from secondary facilities to tertiary hospitals as needed.

He further stressed the importance of year-round, community-driven cleaning efforts. "Right now, it's a routine exercise. We need continuous monitoring to control mosquito populations," he said.



No more residential gas connections Says energy adviser

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Energy Adviser Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan yesterday said the government will not provide residential gas connections, even in areas where gas is being extracted.

"Instead of pipeline gas, households in those areas where gas is being extracted will be supplied with LPG cylinders at a subsidised rate of 800 takas," he said while talking to reporters after visiting the Kailashtila MSTE plant in Golapganj upazila of Sylhet.

The adviser also visited the Kailashtila wells 7, 2, and other installations at the gas fields.

"Gas wastage in households is extremely high," he said.

The adviser said gas production in the country is declining by about 200 million cubic feet annually. As a result, the government has had to increase LNG imports to meet the shortfall.

The government efforts are underway to boost domestic production and reduce dependency on imports, he said.

Fouzul Kabir said the two operational wells at the Kailashtila gas field are currently contributing 16 million cubic feet of gas to the national grid.

The adviser said, "In the past, when gas was not widely used, residential connections were provided. Now LPG is available. We are working to reduce its price."

He also said next time, households will rely on LPG, while pipeline gas will be reserved for industries."

Man killed in road crash in Araihaazar

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Narayanganj

An elderly fish vendor died after a three-wheeler, locally called a Nosimon, veered off the road and fell into a roadside ditch in the Araihaazar upazila of Narayanganj.

The accident took place early yesterday on the Uchitpura-Ramchandradi road in the Gohordi area, said Khondaker Nasir Uddin, officer-in-charge of Araihaazar Police Station.

The deceased was identified as Ali Akbar, 65.

Quoting locals, police said Akbar hired a Nosimon along with his two sons to buy fish from the Bhulta area in Rupganj upazila.

On the way, the driver lost control of the vehicle in the Gohordi area, causing it to fall into a roadside ditch.

Akbar was seriously injured after being crushed under the overturned vehicle. He was rushed to the Araihaazar Upazila Health Complex, where doctors declared him dead.

Legal procedures are underway regarding the incident, the OC added.

Child drowns in river

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Netrokona

A five-year-old boy drowned in the Mangaleshwari river in Kalmakanda upazila of Netrokona yesterday.

The deceased is Mujahid, son of Sabbir Hossain of Dahapara village in Durgapur upazila of the same district.

According to family members and police, Mujahid, along with his parents, went to visit his aunt's house in Bishwanathpur-Nayapara village during the Eid vacation.

Around 2:30pm, he went to the nearby Mongolshwari river while playing in the area. At one point, he accidentally fell into the river.

As his family couldn't find him for a while, they began searching. With the help of locals, he was eventually rescued from the river and rushed to the Kalmakanda Upazila Health Complex.

Afroza Akter, the on-duty physician at the emergency department of the health complex, confirmed that the child was brought dead to the hospital.

Md Lutfor, officer-in-charge (investigation) of Kalmakanda Police Station, said following necessary legal procedures, the body was handed over to the family.



A street vendor sells face masks from a makeshift stall in Dhaka's Dhanmondi area, as demand rises amid renewed Covid-19 concerns. The Directorate General of Health Services already issued an 11-point advisory for the public and suspected patients following a spike in cases at home and in neighbouring countries. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Foreign mango varieties gain popularity in hill tracts

MD NAZRUL ISLAM, Ctg

Alongside local mango varieties, various foreign types of mangoes are now being cultivated in the three hill districts. The hilly orchards are currently adorned with colourful and flavourful mangoes. This year, the harvest has been abundant.

Last year, the three hill districts of the country produced over 200,000 tonnes of mangoes. This year, production is expected to be even higher, according to officials involved.

There was a time when people in the Chattogram region had to wait for mangoes from the northern parts of the country.

But that is no longer the case. The mangoes produced in the three hill districts are now meeting a significant portion of the demand in the Chattogram region and are also being supplied to other districts across the country.

According to the Department of Agricultural Extension, mangoes are being cultivated on 3,620 hectares of land in Rangamati district. In Bandarban, both local and foreign mango varieties are being grown on 10,239 hectares, and in Khagrachhari, mango cultivation covers 4,421 hectares.

Md Nasim Haider, Chief Agricultural Officer of the Department of Agricultural Extension in the three hill districts, said mango cultivation has increased in the hilly areas. Many hobbyist orchard owners are cultivating various foreign mango varieties out of passion and are getting good yields. However, these foreign mangoes have not yet reached full-scale commercial production, he said.

Orchard owners in the three hill districts report that mango cultivation is increasing day by day. Previously, only local varieties were grown, but now foreign varieties such as the Japanese 'Miyazaki', Thai 'Katimon',



"Red Palmer", "Banana mango", "Brunei King", "Kyojai", "Valencia Pride", and "Kensington Pride" are also being produced.

The orchard owners said these mangoes are attracting buyers due to their excellent taste and being free from formalin. They are also providing new income opportunities for local farmers.

Mohammad Rafique, a wholesale fruit trader from Bandarban, said both local and foreign mangoes are now reaching not only local markets but also Chattogram, Dhaka, and the tourist city of Cox's Bazar.

A visit to various hilly markets revealed that depending on size and variety, local mangoes such as "Rupali" (Amrapali) and "Rangwai" are being sold at prices ranging from Tk 60 to 100 per kg. Among the foreign varieties, "Red Palmer" is selling at Tk 300, "Banana" at Tk 200, "Kyojai" at Tk 180, and "Red Queen" at Tk 300 per kg.

In Sindukchhari, Khagrachhari, Lashi Mong Marma has cultivated various foreign mango varieties on 25 acres of hilly land. His

cultivation of the Japanese 'Miyazaki' mango in the hill tracts has created quite a stir.

Lashi Mong Marma said, "I'm cultivating many foreign mango varieties in my orchard. I've been maintaining mango orchards in the hills for about 10-12 years. I started growing foreign mangoes as a hobby, and I'm getting good yields. Many people come from far away to see these mangoes."

In Bandarban, Shahadat Hossain, a businessman from Chattogram, has established an orchard of foreign mangoes. "I started importing popular mango varieties from different countries and began setting up orchards around 8-10 years ago. Now the trees are bearing good fruit. These tasty mangoes are very enjoyable to eat and fetch good prices in the market."

Meanwhile, officials from the Department of Agricultural Extension in Bandarban reported that this year's mango harvest in the district has been abundant. About 60 percent of the yield is from the Rangwai variety, 30 percent from Amrapali, and 10 percent from other foreign varieties.

According to officials, training programmes for farmers are helping to expand mango cultivation in the region.

PABNA MUNICIPALITY Residents suffer due to sorry state of roads

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

More than 130 kilometres out of total 240-km road network in Pabna Municipality are in a dilapidated condition due to lack of repairs and maintenance for prolonged period.

As such, residents including students, office-goers, businessmen and vehicle drivers have been suffering immensely during their daily commute.

Visiting the roads in different areas of the municipality recently, this correspondent observed that bitumen surface has worn off and small and large potholes have developed everywhere, causing disruption to vehicular movement and severe congestion on the busiest roads. The situation exacerbates when roads become submerged after rainfall during monsoon.

"It is difficult to use Pabna Bus Terminal Road (Ataikula Road) and Pabna General Hospital Road at normal time as those are entirely damaged and unfit for vehicular movement," said Md Idris Ali, a local rickshaw puller.



"Just commuting from one corner to another within the municipality often becomes extremely difficult as the roads are utterly damaged and vehicles charge high fares to ply the roads," said Akhinur Islam, a resident of Eidgah area beside Ataikula road.

"One needs to spend a minimum of Tk 40-50 for travelling barely half kilometre distance in the town. When it rains, it becomes even more of an ordeal as vehicle drivers simply refuse to take passengers using the battered roads. Office-goers and students suffer the most," he added.

"At least 1-km stretch along this road has long been in a dilapidated condition, making it an arduous task to take patients to the hospital."

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7

Stepmother, grandmother killed 'by youth'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A 27-year-old man allegedly killed his stepmother and grandmother by slitting their throats with a machete in the Charabunia village under Madarbania union of Patuakhali Sadar upazila yesterday.

The deceased were identified as Shahida Begum, 48, and Kulsum Bibi, 125.

The alleged killer, Al Amin, fled the scene immediately after the incident, which took place around 1:00pm yesterday, said police.

Family members claimed Al Amin has been suffering from mental illness for over 5-6 years.

According to locals and police, Al Amin had gone missing several days ago. He was found three days back and brought back home by his family.

Yesterday around noon, his elder brother went to a local female union parishad member to collect documents needed for admitting Al Amin to the Pabna Mental Hospital. Their father, Abdur Razzak, was away for work at the time of the killing.

Seizing the opportunity, Al Amin allegedly hacked his stepmother in the yard and then entered the house and killed his grandmother.

Police rushed to the spot after being informed, but the accused had already fled the scene.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7

Erosion threatens new embankment in two villages

KM HABIBUR RAHMAN, Pirojpur

Around 3,000 residents of two villages under Pirojpur's Indurkani upazila have long endured immense suffering due to the absence of a protective embankment.

About seven years ago, an earthen embankment was constructed along the Kacha River in Togra village to replace the previous one, which had been washed away by the high tide caused by Cyclone Sidr in November 2007.

However, the new embankment also collapsed within a few months after being struck by tidal surges.

Finally, last year, a 1.5-kilometre embankment was constructed along Togra and Umedpur villages using geotextile and tube bags for added protection.

But according to locals, the embankment has already been damaged in several

places due to insufficient placement of the protective bags, significantly weakening its structure.

"During the high tide at the end of May this year, water levels rose and struck the embankment," said Kabir Howlader of Togra village. "That's when the geotextile bags were displaced."

He added that the bags did not cover the full height of the embankment, leaving it inadequately protected.

Another resident, Abdul Mannan Howlader, said they were initially hopeful after the new embankment was built.

"But now we fear it might collapse again during the upcoming rainy season, when flooding is most frequent," he said. "If concrete blocks were placed on the embankment, it could be properly protected."

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7



This high-voltage power box, connected to underground electrical lines, has been left exposed after its cover was broken. Nearby residents have used wood to create a temporary cover; however, it still poses a risk to passersby and anyone who comes into contact with it. Locals have alleged that, despite informing the authorities, no action has been taken to cover the exposed box. The photo was taken from Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, near the west side of the metro rail station yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

IMMIGRATION RAID

Democratic US Senator forced to ground

Appeals court allows Trump to keep National Guard in LA

REUTERS, Los Angeles

Democratic US Senator Alex Padilla was shoved, forced to the ground and handcuffed by security after attempting to ask a question at a press conference on Thursday held by Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem about immigration raids.

"I am Senator Alex Padilla. I have questions for the secretary," Padilla said during the press conference in Los Angeles, where Noem was discussing protests in the city over President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown. "Hands off," Padilla, 52, said to security agents before he was ushered out of the room.

Meanwhile, a US appeals court on



Thursday allowed Trump to maintain his deployment of National Guard troops in Los Angeles amid protests over stepped-up immigration enforcement, temporarily pausing a lower court ruling that blocked the mobilization.

The 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals' decision does not mean that the court will ultimately agree with Trump, but it does leave command of the Guard with the president for now.

Earlier on Thursday, San Francisco-based US District Judge Charles Breyer found that Trump's deployment of the Guard was unlawful. Breyer's 36-page ruling had ordered the National Guard to return to the control of California Governor Gavin Newsom, who had brought the case.

It was a short-lived victory for Newsom, as Breyer's order was paused about two and a half hours later.

Asked for a comment, Newsom's press office referred to the governor's statement after the initial ruling, and noted that the appeals court put a temporary pause on the ruling but did not reverse it.



People gather for a protest against Israel's wave of strikes on Iran in central Tehran yesterday. Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi condemned Israel's 'cowardly' attack on his country, in a phone call with his Kuwaiti counterpart. PHOTO: AFP

ISRAELI STRIKES ON IRANIAN NUKE SITES

Trump's 'peacemaker' pledge takes big hit

REUTERS, Washington

On the campaign trail, US President Donald Trump promised to end the world's hottest conflicts and usher in global peace, but nearly five months in, with Israel attacking Iran and bloodshed in Gaza and Ukraine unabated, those hopes are in shambles.

US ally Israel struck dozens of Iranian targets in a dramatic and multi-faceted attack on Thursday night that analysts say threatens to eventually spiral into an all-out regional war.

The strikes appear to be a snub to Trump, who had repeatedly pushed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu not to attack Iran, though the president himself had threatened to bomb the Gulf nation if nuclear talks failed.

"Trumpian diplomacy is one of the first casualties of these attacks," said Brett Bruen, a former foreign policy adviser to

Democratic President Barack Obama.

"He has struggled to even get close to a ceasefire (in Gaza), let alone peace in any major conflict. Iran was looking the most promising - and Netanyahu just spoiled it."

- US-backed peace talks deadlocked in Ukraine, Gaza, elsewhere
- Analysts say it is too soon to predict all-out regional conflict

The White House, the Israeli embassy in Washington and Iran's UN mission did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The strikes are also a rebuke of Steve Witkoff, Trump's Middle East envoy and close aide, who has been working intensively with Iranian negotiators

towards a diplomatic solution to curb its nuclear program.

Witkoff had sought unsuccessfully to persuade Netanyahu to remain patient while US-Iran negotiations proceeded. Those talks have been deadlocked.

Some Trump allies privately acknowledge that his diplomatic efforts had been faltering even before Israel's attack.

His second term in office started with what seemed like a foreign policy win. Shortly before Trump's inauguration, Witkoff worked with aides to then-President Joe Biden to secure a long-sought ceasefire in Gaza between Israel and Hamas militants. But that accord fell apart in weeks.

The US has also made little discernible progress toward a peace deal between Russia and Ukraine, whose conflict Trump vowed to end before even taking office.

Mossad smuggled weapons into Iran ahead of strikes

Says Israeli security official

CNN ONLINE

Israel's Mossad spy agency smuggled weapons into Iran ahead of yesterday's strikes that were used to target its defenses from within, according to an Israeli security official.

The official said that "a base for launching explosive drones was established inside Iran and that the drones were activated during Friday's attack to target missile launchers at a base near Tehran."

Israel had also "smuggled precision weapons into central Iran and positioned them near surface-to-air missile systems," the official said, adding that Israel also deployed strike systems on vehicles.

Israel struck at the heart of Iran's nuclear, missile and military complex early yesterday, in an unprecedented attack that killed several of Iran's most powerful figures and plunged the wider Middle East into dangerous new territory.

Not since the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s has Iran seen such a devastating series of strikes in a single day. The attacks surpass a series of historical flashpoints, and signal a new phase in a conflict between Israel and Iran that for decades was waged in the shadows, before exploding into real-world confrontation in the past two years.

AIR INDIA CRASH

A 10-minute delay saved her

NDTV ONLINE



For Bhoomi Chauhan, getting caught in terrible traffic on the roads of Ahmedabad on Thursday proved to be a blessing in disguise. The Bharuch resident was upset but escaped a terrifying near-death experience after she missed her crucial London-bound flight.

"I was getting ready to step out of the airport when I learnt about the crash. I began shivering. My legs started trembling," Bhoomi said after she missed the doomed flight.

Bhoomi was scheduled to board AI 171 to travel to London. "The flight was scheduled to take off at 1.10pm. The boarding procedure was over at 12.10pm and I reached at 12.20pm. I had reached the checking-in gate and requested them to allow me to board the flight. I told them I shall clear all the formalities quickly but they did not allow me to proceed," she said.

No communal, political motive behind

FROM PAGE 12

While the matter was still under investigation, locals organised a human chain on June 10 in support of Shahnewaz, demanding action against the accused officials, the statement said.

Following the demonstration, an agitated crowd reportedly entered the premises intending to assault staff members. Several employees were injured in the ensuing violence, the statement added.

In response, the district administration and the Department of Archaeology each formed an investigation

committee.

Both are expected to submit reports within five days.

According to the ministry's statement, the Department of Archaeology has filed a case, and police have arrested five individuals so far, with efforts underway to apprehend the rest.

Security at the Kachharibari has since been reinforced.

With support from the local administration and community, the site was reopened to visitors yesterday morning.

The ministry emphasised that no artifacts or relics associated with

Rabindranath Tagore's memory were harmed. "Nothing disrespectful or damaging to the honor of the poet has occurred," the statement read.

On Thursday, India condemned the "vandalism of the Rabindra Kachharibari" in Shahjadpur and urged Bangladesh's interim government to take strict action against the perpetrators.

Replying to a question at the weekly media briefing, Indian Ministry of External Affairs Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said, "We strongly condemn the despicable attack and the vandalism of the

ancestral home of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore by a mob."

"The violent act is a disgrace to the memory and the inclusive philosophy and the teachings that the Nobel laureate espoused in Bangladesh.

"The attack falls in the broad pattern of systematic attempts by extremists to raze the symbols of tolerance and eviscerate the syncretic culture and the cultural Legacy of Bangladesh. We urge the interim government [of Bangladesh] to rein in the terrorists and take strict action against the perpetrators..."

35 pushed in through

FROM PAGE 12

commanding officer of BGB-56 Battalion in Nilphamari, told our local correspondent over the phone.

Earlier, Indian police detained them from different locations in Mumbai and its adjoining areas and later handed them over to BSF-46 Battalion, who pushed them back into Bangladeshi territory, he said, quoting the returnees.

BGB has handed over the returnees to Panchagarh Sadar police for further action.

In Moulvibazar, 13 people, including women and children, were detained near the New Pallathal border in Barlekha upazila last morning.

"The detainees identified themselves as Rohingyas who had entered India illegally at different times. Their identities are being verified," said Lt Col Ariful Haque Chowdhury, commanding officer of BGB-52 Battalion.

Quoting the detainees, the officials said BSF pushed them back across the border.

[Our correspondent from Thakurgaon and Moulvibazar contributed to this report.]

Teen driver sued for Ctg hit-and-run

FROM PAGE 12

have yet to find any valid documents for the car. Residents of the area informed us that the suspect had a previous record of reckless driving."

He added that the victim's body was handed to the family without a postmortem.

Iran's options

FROM PAGE 1

-- including nuclear -- as well as its top political and military leadership," he told AFP.

"All this is meant, inter alia, to cripple Tehran's command and counter-strike capacities."

With the strikes, Israel has once again demonstrated that it is the pre-eminent military and intelligence power in the Middle East, and it does not depend on its allies.

Analysts say the overnight operation has the hallmarks of months or even years of preparation.

Iran is now left counting its far-reaching wounds. Images from across Tehran show apartment blocks hit, it seems, in specific rooms, suggesting the pinpoint targeting of individuals, likely through tracking cellphones. Iran has lost its top three active-duty commanders, as well as a leading voice in nuclear talks, overnight, but as the dust clears, it may emerge that more have been hit, and the survivors will likely be concerned they, too, could still be targeted.

Holidaymakers rush back

FROM PAGE 12

number of vehicles increased yesterday compared to the previous few days, causing slow movement along parts of the highway. He expects the rush of returnees to continue today.

Meanwhile, thousands returning to Dhaka and Chattogram after Eid are facing immense suffering due to a severe shortage of vessels at several southern river terminals, reports our Barishal correspondent.

Passengers were seen waiting six to eight hours in the scorching heat along the Meghna River, particularly at the Ilisha terminal in Bhola. Despite swelling crowds, a lack of sufficient launch services left many stranded.

From yesterday morning to afternoon, pressure from Dhaka- and Chattogram-bound passengers kept increasing. Many stood under the blazing sun, hoping to secure a spot on overcrowded vessels.

According to Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) officials, despite the expected rush of returnees, the number of operating launches remained far below demand.

Many passengers boarded overloaded vessels, ignoring repeated BIWTA warnings against doing so.

Asma Akter, a garment worker from Bhola Sadar, said around noon, "We've been waiting since 6:00am to go to Chattogram, but we still haven't managed to board a launch."


Mohammad Shamim, an EPZ worker in Chattogram, also failed to get on a vessel after waiting since 9:30am.

Bhola River Port official Riyadh Hossain said six vessels were operating from Ilisha terminal towards Lakshmipur and Chattogram, serving around 10,000 passengers. Fourteen launches were scheduled to head to Dhaka, expected to carry over 50,000 people.

"But due to overwhelming pressure, this still isn't enough," he admitted.

Launch owners said the Eid rush has brought a boost to business, with more people opting for river routes this year. They expect similar crowds in the coming days.

Sheikh Mohammad Selim Reza, deputy director of BIWTA's Safety and Traffic Management, said passenger numbers have



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Air India crash a wake-up call for all

It shows why aviation safety can never be compromised

We are shocked and saddened by the devastating crash of an Air India plane that went down moments after taking off from Ahmedabad, Gujarat on Thursday, in what is now the world's worst aviation disaster in a decade. Our deepest condolences go out to the families and loved ones of the victims. Air India confirmed on Friday that all but one of the 230 passengers and 12 crew members on board were killed. Among the dead were also eight local residents, including four medical students, as the aircraft—a Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner—crashed into the residential quarters of a medical college in the area. The death toll may rise further as more details emerge.

India's Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) is presently probing into what caused the crash, which could take some time, as such investigations involve multiple factors. Preliminary theories suggest that dual engine failure, bird strikes, or mechanical malfunction could be possible factors, with the aircraft failing to gain enough thrust after takeoff. After analysing footage of its crash, aerospace safety experts noted that the plane's landing gear was down at a phase of flight when it would typically be up, an anomaly that may have contributed to the loss of power. However, the recovery of black box data could provide definitive answers.

This tragedy must serve as a wake-up call for those in the aviation industry, including in Bangladesh. The crash has shown what can happen if safety protocols are compromised—a reality that Bangladesh, with its own history of aviation safety concerns and irregularities, can ill afford to ignore. Major stakeholders, including the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) and Biman Bangladesh Airlines, the national flag carrier, have long faced criticism for repeated incidents of negligence and corruption. Only recently, we were alarmed to learn of an investigation from CAAB itself that uncovered numerous irregularities in pilot licensing and training programmes. These included serious breaches such as flying schools recommending pilot licences without students completing mandatory solo flight hours, falsification of flight records, and the use of unauthorised software in written tests. Shockingly, one pilot even certified himself. Despite being aware of such practices, CAAB has failed to take action.

Unless these systemic and deep-rooted issues are addressed, Bangladesh's aviation sector will remain vulnerable to the kind of tragedy we mourn today. The lesson here is clear: aviation safety must never be taken lightly. From airworthiness of aircraft to pilot qualifications, from pre-flight inspections to regulatory vigilance—every step must be treated with utmost seriousness. We urge aviation regulators and airline/airport operators in Bangladesh to reassess their standards and practices. If a disaster can happen to a major carrier like Air India, how confident can we be about averting a similar tragedy?

Why is child marriage still so widespread?

Let our girls reach their full potential

We are alarmed by the continued prevalence of child marriage which no legal or institutional framework seems able to deter. According to a recent UN report, Bangladesh has the highest rate of child marriage in South Asia, with a staggering 51 percent of girls being married off before they turn 18. Unfortunately, while we are failing to stop this scourge, our neighbours are making significant progress in addressing it. For instance, only two percent of girls are married before 18 in the Maldives, 10 percent in Sri Lanka, 18 percent in Pakistan, and 23 percent in India. This stark contrast underscores the need to reassess whether our efforts are on the right track.

Needless to say, child marriage is at the root of many problems that girls and women face throughout their lives. It not only limits their opportunities in education and employment, but also enhances their risk of facing violence. Studies have found a significant connection between child marriage and gender-based violence. Child brides also face a heightened risk of childbirth-related deaths. Currently, the maternal mortality ratio in Bangladesh stands at 115 deaths per 100,000 live births. Preventing child marriage could help reduce this ratio considerably. We have ample laws and regulations in place to do so. Why, then, are we failing to do it?

To effectively combat this scourge, it is crucial to understand why parents choose to marry off their daughters at a young age. While poverty remains a major driver, lack of awareness and societal pressure also contribute to the prevalence of child marriage. Alarming, many parents secretly arrange these marriages despite being aware of the legal consequences. For instance, between July 2021 and June 2022, some 88 child marriages were stopped at the Tala upazila of Satkhira, but 65 of these later took place in secret. This highlights the immense challenges in stopping this trend.

Against this backdrop, there is no alternative to sustained action from the authorities. They must strictly enforce existing laws and expand awareness campaigns nationwide. The harmful effects of child marriage should also be integrated into school curriculum to educate students. It is equally important to create jobs and financially support marginalised communities so that families don't feel pressured to marry off their daughters early. Since 18 is the minimum legal age for marriage, the authorities must enforce this standard at any cost.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

First prisoners at Auschwitz



On this day in 1940, the first transport of Polish political prisoners arrived in Auschwitz, which became Nazi Germany's largest concentration, extermination, and slave-labour camp during World War II. More than one million people died in Auschwitz.



Barrister Khan Khalid Adnan
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KHAN KHALID ADNAN

On June 1, a historic moment unfolded in Bangladesh's justice system. For the first time, the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) allowed a live television broadcast of its proceedings, marking a bold step towards judicial transparency. The hearing involved the submission of formal charges against former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina over alleged crimes against humanity during the student-led mass uprising in July-August last year.

This development follows the recent insertion of Section 9A into the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973, which empowers the tribunal to record and broadcast its proceedings under conditions that safeguard the safety, dignity, and privacy of participants. While the move has been widely welcomed as a stride towards accountability, it also raises critical questions: can justice truly be served in front of a camera? Or does the lens risk turning legal proceedings into spectacles?

There is no doubt that transparency strengthens trust in the judiciary. Bangladesh's legal system, like many others, has often been accused of opacity, inefficiency, and undue influence. By allowing the public to witness courtroom proceedings, the ICT opens its doors to scrutiny and, potentially, greater legitimacy. For a country grappling with past atrocities and democratic backsliding, such openness can provide catharsis and help restore public confidence.

Moreover, Bangladesh joins a growing number of jurisdictions embracing camera access in courtrooms. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) set an early precedent by televising high-profile trials, most notably those of former leaders Slobodan Milosevic and Radovan Karadzic, both of whom were accused of human rights violations and war crimes. The goal was to educate the public, honour the victims, and demonstrate that no one is above the law.

However, the international experience also provides cautionary tales. In some cases, the courtroom turned into a stage. Milosevic used the broadcast to promote his political agenda, while Karadzic employed it

to question the tribunal's legitimacy. For some observers, the televised trial of Saddam Hussein in Iraq appeared more as a spectacle of humiliation than a genuine pursuit of justice. Egypt's decision to televise former President Hosni Mubarak's trial backfired, with the iconic image of him lying on a hospital gurney inside a cage overshadowing the legal substance of



This screengrab from a live broadcast shows International Crimes Tribunal Chief Prosecutor Tajul Islam reading out the charges against former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and others at the tribunal on June 1, 2025.

the proceedings. Consequently, the presiding judge reversed his decision to televise the proceedings after the first day, citing the need to protect the public interest.

The core problem lies in the performative risk of broadcasting. While the public has the right to observe justice being done, there is a danger that justice may be swayed—if not by the camera, then by its audience. Witnesses may feel intimidated or reluctant. Judges and lawyers may alter their demeanour, consciously or subconsciously. And worst of all, public perception may be shaped not by legal reasoning but by dramatic moments clipped, edited, and circulated in the media.

The media landscape of Bangladesh presents an added layer of complexity.

managed carefully. Such an approach safeguards the interests of victims and witnesses, avoids disruption, and provides the public with a coherent understanding of complex legal arguments.

The ICT in Bangladesh should consider developing detailed protocols for courtroom recording and media coverage taking guidance from the practice of international courts. These may include restrictions on camera angles, identity protection for vulnerable witnesses, and codes of conduct for journalists. The goal should not be to censor, but to ensure that courtroom decorum is maintained and that proceedings are not prejudiced by external pressures.

Another practical and meaningful reform would be the inclusion of English

a more informed, legally literate society.

As for the International Crimes Tribunal, the live-streamed hearing on June 1 was indeed a milestone. But whether this becomes a catalyst for enduring transparency or a cautionary tale of overexposure will depend on what follows. The tribunal should proceed with measured caution, learning from both global best practices and its own experience. The stakes are too high to risk turning justice into a performance.

Public trust in the judiciary cannot be manufactured through media optics alone. It must be earned through consistent fairness, rigorous legal reasoning, and above all, the assurance that justice is not only done, but done with dignity. Cameras may aid that mission, but only if guided by principles.

To be heard, workers need trade unions



Mahmudul Hasan
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MAHMUDUL HASAN

In a fast-changing economy like Bangladesh, the manufacturing sectors, especially RMG, underpin growth and integration into global value chains, playing a pivotal role. They employ millions, support rural-to-urban migration, and anchor the nation in global markets. Yet, beneath the clang of machines and the glow of economic progress lies a sobering reality: the persistent struggle of workers to have their voices heard and their rights protected.

Amid rising productivity and industrial expansion, many factory workers continue to operate in environments where fair wages, basic benefits, and workplace safety remain aspirations rather than realities.

They need functional trade unions, which, at their core, are instruments of collective bargaining. A properly operating trade union empowers workers to negotiate collectively for fair pay, reasonable working hours, and safer working conditions. When active and functional, unions play a transformative role, not only by improving individual livelihoods but also by fostering a more equitable and accountable labour market.

More than just wage negotiators, unions can influence workplace policies and secure non-wage benefits such as occupational safety, paid leave, access

to healthcare, and effective grievance mechanisms. At their best, they cultivate a culture of dialogue, ensuring that economic progress does not come at the cost of exploitation.

As a labour-abundant country that relies heavily on low-cost production, Bangladesh has specialised in labour-intensive manufactured exports, particularly RMG products. While globalisation and increased labour market flexibility have been expected to boost workers' agency, the reality has been more complex. Fragmented contracts, widespread subcontracting, and high rates of informal employment have diluted workers' ability to assert their rights. Informal employment, which dominates the Bangladeshi labour market, is typically linked with lower productivity, depressed wages, limited social protection, and heightened vulnerability to poverty.

The case for trade unions is not ideological, it is pragmatic. Global evidence shows that unionised workplaces not only deliver better economic outcomes but also create safer, more equitable environments by aligning practices with national and international labour standards. Unionised settings often offer fairer conditions—reasonable hours, anti-discrimination protections, and a voice in workplace decisions—ultimately

benefiting both workers and firms.

In Bangladesh, unions often advocate for a living wage that supports a decent standard of living, including food, housing, education, healthcare, transport, and savings for emergencies. Importantly, the benefits of union activity often extend beyond union members. Spillover effects help raise labour standards across the board, as non-unionised workers in the same factory, or firms in the same supply chain, benefit from improvements initiated through collective bargaining.

Union presence is generally higher in export-oriented industries than in domestic-facing sectors. While other export industries, such as leather, show relatively high union coverage, these are mostly combined unions rather than factory-level basic unions. Historically, RMG factory owners have resisted unionisation, slowing growth despite industry expansion. However, the Rana Plaza tragedy in 2013 catalysed change: international pressure spurred a sharp increase in union registrations, supported by legal reforms and advocacy led by development partners like the EU.

Still, the mere presence of trade unions does not guarantee effectiveness. Their impact depends on their ability to engage in genuine collective bargaining, enforce workers' rights, and ensure meaningful improvements in working conditions. In this regard, RMG unions are relatively more active, thanks to the sector's visibility, size, and global scrutiny.

Yet, significant challenges persist in Bangladesh's labour environment. Despite having legal tools like the Labour Act and Labour Rules, union registration remains cumbersome and politicised. Workers organising

unions frequently face intimidation, harassment, or even dismissal. In the informal sector, which encompasses the majority of employment, most workers are excluded from basic labour protection altogether.

Public discourse on labour rights often centres on the RMG sector—and understandably so, given its scale and international importance. But Bangladesh must now turn its attention to other rising industries: light engineering, electronics, plastic, furniture, food processing, and more. These sectors are expanding rapidly, yet labour representation remains weak or non-existent.

In these lesser-monitored sectors, workers are particularly vulnerable, subject to weaker enforcement, lower pay scales, and minimal protections. Without factory-level unions, most lack any structured mechanism to voice concerns or report exploitation. Stronger trade unions, paired with the enforcement of national and international labour standards, are vital for ensuring fair labour practices and sustainable industrial development.

As Bangladesh charts its path towards the upper-middle-income status, the voices of its workers must not be left unheard. Ensuring fair wages, safe working conditions, and meaningful representation is not only a question of rights, it is central to building a resilient, future-ready economy. Strengthening trade unionism across all manufacturing sectors requires decisive reforms, employer accountability, and international support. If Bangladesh is to achieve truly inclusive industrial progress, it must place workers' voice and dignity at the heart of its development agenda.



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza
is professor of English at Dhaka University.

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

We just came back from a trip to Lake Ohrid in North Macedonia. The boat driver was surprised by our over-insistence on wearing life jackets, despite the water appearing shallow and calm and the imported boat being highly reliable. We told him about the number of deaths by drowning over the last few days that had us concerned. The tragic end of two friends at a lake in Ontario, Canada, one being a seasoned pilot of a 787 Dreamliner in Bangladesh and the other a trailblazer in the sustainable textile industry, was fresh in our minds. Then there was the heartbreaking news of a father who died along with his teenage daughter while giving her swimming lessons in their village pond during the Eid holidays. And then there are people washed away by the treacherous waves at Cox's Bazar: six people in a day. Then came the big news of an Air India Boeing crashing in Ahmedabad soon after its takeoff. The plane slammed onto a medical hostel where some intern doctors were having lunch. Death visited them like a giant bird from the sky, carrying 242 passengers and crew with it.

Just when we thought a long holiday would give us a respite from everyday mayhem, sparing an opportunity for us to unwind and reconnect with our near and dear ones, these news reports of unrelated incidents reminded us of the dire threat of leisure turning lethal. With the benefits of hindsight, we can utter the ignored truth: some of these accidents were preventable.

The idea dawned on me while watching the disciplined driving during our trip to the Balkans. The number plates of the cars suggested that they have come from all over Europe. Yet, driving through the cliff-hugging narrow roads, they followed a particular protocol for overtaking. It was never like in our country, where a trail of vehicles are seen rushing together for lateral passing when there is no vehicle visible on the other side. The cars overtook one at a time, almost like the cyclists in the Tour de France. I think the combination of common

sense and rule-abiding reduces the chances of accidents. Applying the same principle to the recent deaths makes sense.

The death of six tourists in Cox's Bazar over the Eid holidays would have been a national scandal in another country. The beaches would have been marked unsafe, and visitors would have been instructed to stay ashore. Here, our lack of common sense and defiance against safety directives stall any such initiative. Indeed, the authorities have marked some areas of the beach as danger zones. However, while thousands of people congregate in Cox's Bazar to enjoy the seaside sands, only a small number of them heed the warning signs. The lifeguards are posted on the designated beaches, and they don't have the manpower to patrol the longest natural beach in the world. According to a *Prothom Alo* report, 25 lifeguards and 25 beach workers, along with 70-80 tourist police officers, are deployed to oversee 100,000 tourists on a daily basis. The lack of institutional safeguards is further evident in the incident where two parasailers fell as their belts got unfastened. There is a complete lack of supervision. Vacationers unaware of the tricky water currents, hidden channels, and quicksand of the sandy shore often get overly enthusiastic and adventurous. In the absence of proper directives, implementation of rules, and common sense, tourists are left to rely on instinct, or worse, luck.

The *Prothom Alo* reports 49 deaths in the past six years. The actual number of deaths may be higher as many such incidents go unreported. We lament these deaths only when they get a human face through media. How do we justify that there is no sea netting system to curate a safe zone for swimming? The billion-dollar industry is operating independently. There is no collective strategy for inarguably the most famous tourist spot in Bangladesh. For instance, unplanned growth is visible by the presence of hotels on the beach itself, in a flagrant violation of rules. When those responsible for enforcing the rules

violate them, we must be concerned about the general welfare of the location we wish to promote as a site of national significance. We can engage the hotel owners as stakeholders in the city's beautification and landscaping efforts. There are now 600 multistorey hotels and resorts that can share the cost of making the sea safe for their visitors.

The alarming number of deaths gives Cox's Bazar the bad press that no PR campaign can override. There is no comprehensive,

stakeholders. Local community members should be engaged for beach patrol and rescue efforts. Digital apps can be used to inform beachgoers of conditions in real time. The hotels need to establish their emergency protocols.

The entire system must prioritise safety. There has to be coordination between first responders and the hospitals. We need a trained workforce that knows what to do when things go wrong. This will require

Our policymakers must ensure a national audit of leisure-related deaths in the era of big data. The categories of location, activity and cause can help us determine the nature of an intervention and the requirements for tourist safety certification. Giving local leaders the autonomy to make decisions can streamline bureaucratic processes and bring decision-making closer to the issue at hand. The deaths of the father and daughter in Moulvibazar, for



Given the large number of tourists that visit the beaches in Cox's Bazar every year, treating beach safety as a national responsibility is crucial.

FILE PHOTO: STAR

Why we need more ‘angry’ Greta Thunbergs



Zeenat Khan
is a contributor to South Asia-based journals and magazines.

ZEENAT KHAN

The Western world, except for a few European countries, has largely been silent over the ongoing genocide in Gaza. Two million people are living under extreme duress, the majority of them camping under the open sky, in the Gaza Strip. Since March 2 this year, all aid has been blocked from entering Gaza. Hunger has been weaponised. Children are dying not only from bombs, but also from hunger. In the face of such a grave humanitarian crisis, a few brave pro-Palestinian protesters, such as 22-year-old Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, headed for Gaza on a civilian vessel with aid. US President Donald J Trump mocked this effort and labelled Thunberg as “strange” and “angry,” recommending “anger management” for her to learn techniques to change “unhelpful thoughts and behaviours.”

People who care about the planet, except for a handful of cynics, are familiar with what Greta Thunberg has been doing since she took up activism. People have been impressed by her gentle, no-nonsense demeanour and

concern for the planet. She has inspired millions to change their perspective beyond here and now, and onto the future. She challenged many big-name politicians to open their eyes to see how climate change poses a danger to our very existence. Her campaign against global warming resonates with how she wants the world to be: clean, safe, and hazard-free.

The same determination took Thunberg and a few more activists en route to Gaza to assist with much-needed aid. Her voyage on a boat called Madleen was being operated by the Freedom Flotilla coalition. But on June 10, the Israeli navy intercepted and seized their boat. All the activists on board were arrested. To make matters worse, the Israeli forces were sarcastically calling it a “celebrity selfie yacht.”

Thunberg and three other activists agreed to an immediate deportation. They were put on a plane to Paris. The rest of the members refused to sign the deportation papers and

were taken into custody. Upon arrival in Paris, Thunberg expressed great concern about the safety of her fellow activists in detention.

Before Thunberg's deportation, she was offered a sandwich wrapped in plastic by a soldier of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), an image of which went viral on social media. The activist dismissed it as a mere “publicity stunt” by the IDF.

When mass death from starvation looms in Gaza, mocking Thunberg will not solve anything. Being different most certainly doesn't mean one has to be characterised in derogatory terms. The world needs many more “strange” and “angry” Greta Thunbergs at this moment. Donald Trump here has an opportunity to be remembered on the pages of history books as a “do-gooder” if he can persuade Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to stop the genocide in Gaza. Otherwise, this systematic extermination of a nation will haunt us, our children, and grandchildren in the years that lie ahead.

I just keep on praying that the killing of children and their parents in Gaza will stop. I start each day with my morning prayers, finding a sense of purpose and connection to the divine. A few mornings ago, my attention was disrupted by notifications of multiple texts on my phone. The text messages came in all at once. Instantly, I knew it was one of my family members texting from the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. She knows this is when

I would be just about done with praying.

The text messages contained a series of thought-provoking questions about the starving children of Gaza. “What I don't understand is why God would let this happen. If he knows the suffering, why doesn't he stop it?” Read the first one. “Why would children die of starvation? This I cannot understand,” said the next. “Undoubtedly, this is the worst form of death,” was my instantaneous reply.

Then I added, “Thinking and rationalising that a human is less than a human does not justify all the murders of innocent people.”

By weaponising starvation, isn't Israel sending the wrong message to the world that the lives of the Palestinians do not matter? And they are not really people like you and me? Why doesn't the humanitarian law apply to the Palestinians? This dehumanisation is something we must refuse to accept.

Children are dying of hunger in Gaza. Their parents are getting killed by bombs and drones while trying to fetch food parcels for their malnourished and starving children.

The aid distribution centres have become death traps. Al Jazeera reported that an Israeli drone attack on the morning of June 11 killed 31 aid seekers near a food distribution point in central Gaza. Two hundred more were injured in the attack.

When mass death from starvation looms in Gaza, mocking Thunberg will not solve anything. Being different most certainly doesn't mean one has to be characterised in derogatory terms. The world needs many more “strange” and “angry” Greta Thunbergs at this moment. Donald Trump here has an opportunity to be remembered on the pages of history books as a “do-gooder” if he can persuade Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to stop the genocide in Gaza. Otherwise, this systematic extermination of a nation will haunt us, our children, and grandchildren in the years that lie ahead.

CROSSWORD BY
THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Light pastries

6 Jazz genre

11 Be in accord

12 Visibly shocked

13 Andean nation

14 Game piece

15 Otherwise

17 Wallet bills

18 Throws in

20 Greedy

22 Go bad

23 Understood

26 Tusk stuff

28 Chef's need

29 Bad point

31 Ball support

32 Bard's river

33 Hourglass fill

34 Cost of a hand

36 Granny, for one

38 Planet circlers

40 Bakery output

43 Final letter

44 Calliope need

45 Stopwatch button

46 Rash

DOWN

1 Ocean off Cal.

2 "That's gross!"

3 Southern dish

4 Chops down

5 Drops in on

6 Ball club

7 Selfish one

8 Steak sides, sometimes

9 Door sign

10 Signing needs

16 Corn helping

18 Parched

19 Pigeon's cousin

21 Expansive

23 Pita sandwich

24 Tied

25 Title page

27 Vindictive one's quest

30 Printing need

33 In a way, informally

34 Monet's "—and Psyche"

35 Iditarod end

37 Bygone auto

39 Got off one's feet

41 Porch item

42 Author Tan

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6-23

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

ACHE

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POPFLY

STEMWARE

PEAS

NAFTA

HALLS

STIRS

UTA

REPS

GOTAT

RISES

OPERA

ACT

ALPHABET

DOUBLE

RAVE

ARMIES

USES

DEPART

SENT

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dsopinion@gmail.com

SABILA DEBUTS, ‘Taandob’ ensues

I haven’t given it much thought, to be honest. Wherever I am today, it’s because of my years in television and YouTube, so it’s unlikely that I’ll ever be completely off it. However, I am looking to do more films with good scripts and messages for the audience.

SADI MOHAMMAD SHAHNEWAZ

Once a sweetheart of television, Sabila Nur has hit the bullseye with her silver-screen debut with a leading role opposite Shakib Khan in Taandob. The film will go down in Bangladesh’s cinematic history for being rife with action, twists, and cameos.

Big-screen Sabila has a ring to it. What kind of feedback are you getting from the audience? I am simply overwhelmed! As an overthinker, I was skeptical of how the audience would perceive me, especially while shooting Lichur Bagane. However, I was flabbergasted at how much love I have been receiving for the film. People loved my performance not only in multiplexes, but in single-screen halls as well. Starring opposite our megastar Shakib Khan is a dream for every actress, and I am glad to have lived it.

With so many stars cast in the film, and cameos only adding to the hype, did you ever feel overshadowed in the mix? Never. I was honestly stoked to work alongside the likes of Jaya Ahsan, Fazlur Rahman Babu, Shahiduzzaman Selim, and so many others in the film. When Raihan Rafi, brilliant director that he is, read me the script, I understood both the limitations and strengths of my role, and I believe we delivered the best possible portrayal. So I have no qualms about it.

What makes Raihan Rafi so successful, according to your experience shooting with him? He is just so calm and cool-headed on-set. Regardless of the situation, he knows what he wants, and there is no ruckus when shooting. You could say that he is a consummate professional.

Was it nerve-wracking to share the screen with Shakib Khan? Talk us through your first day of shooting. I remember it vividly – It was 5:30 in the morning at Rajshahi, and I was

worried that I hadn’t gotten enough sleep. My first shot was with Shakib Khan, so I was naturally anxious. However, every person on that set did their best to make me feel at home, and at no point did they treat me like I was an ‘outsider’. Shakib bhai has been super-kind to me. He is encouraging, warm, and professional. After that first shot, I was on my way and did not look back for the rest of the shots.

Now that you’ve debuted on the big screen, will it be difficult to go back to television?

I haven’t given it much thought, to be honest. Wherever I am today, it’s because of my years in television and YouTube, so it’s unlikely that I’ll ever be completely off it. However, I am looking to do more films with good scripts and messages for the audience.

There’s an unfortunate perception among the audience that actresses in commercial cinema are ‘showpieces’ in the film. Do you want to actively battle that notion? I do, but I don’t think about it that way. The talented women who paved the way have worked very hard to get where they are right now, so I have nothing but respect for them. However, rather than coming out to say that ‘we are much more,’ why don’t we just show them? That’s what I want to do.

OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA



Loud and Lethal: Reload
June 20 | 3pm
National Library Auditorium



Director’s Call
June 22- June 23 | 3pm
Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP)



SL x Folklore Expedition
Bangladesh present Bon Bibir
Jahuranama
June 28 | 4pm
Goethe-Institut Bangladesh

STYLE STATEMENT

Snoop Dogg

The red carpet suddenly resembled one fit for royalty as Snoop Dogg made his entrance at the BET Awards 2025, draped head-to-toe in a bold, electric blue ensemble that commanded attention. With a leather-panelled coat layered over a tonal shirt and matching trousers, the West Coast icon blended street sensibility with high fashion finesse. His structured silhouette and monochromatic palette are modern and fearless, mirroring Snoop’s decades-long reign over music and style. Paired with signature shades, diamond chains, and an effortless cool only he can carry, this was more than a look—it is yet another addition to the legacy of his style statements.



WHAT’S PLAYING

‘MANCHILD’ by Sabrina Carpenter



Pop’s sharpest raconteur, Sabrina Carpenter, returns with *Manchild*, a blisteringly catchy track that disguises its barbs beneath a sugar-coated veneer of synth-pop shimmer. Written alongside Amy Allen and Jack Antonoff on what Carpenter described as “the best random Tuesday of my life”—and it shows. There’s a spontaneous levity to the track, but also precision. Each line lands with the weight of someone who has been there, done that, and bought the ironic T-shirt.

Less a heartbreak anthem than a clever postmortem, *Manchild* captures the confusion, comedy, and occasional rage of twenty-something dating culture. Its lyrical tone—equal parts affectionate and exasperated; evoking the feeling of a summer road trip soundtrack by an emotional coming-of-age montage. The accompanying video, currently

trending globally, leans into playful absurdism. Carpenter parades through exaggerated set pieces—a courtroom, a beauty pageant, a flaming bedroom—with glossy detachment and enviable hair. *Manchild* has quickly climbed the charts, debuting in the top 5 of Spotify Global and peaking at number 2 on Apple Music’s Pop Chart within 48 hours of release.

1-MINUTE REVIEW

‘THUNDERBOLTS*’ When superpowers meet emotional scars

*Thunderbolts** stands out in the Marvel canon for placing mental health at the heart of its story. While past MCU entries touched on trauma, this film fully commits to exploring it, particularly through Florence Pugh’s emotionally raw portrayal of Yelena Belova. Alongside Lewis Pullman’s mysterious and deeply human Bob, the narrative focuses on healing through connection. Despite being a team-up movie, it’s Yelena and Bob’s journey that anchors the film, supported by solid performances from David Harbour and Wyatt Russell. Though

Bucky Barnes feels sidelined, the ensemble delivers humour and vulnerability in equal measure. Moreover, the action scenes are compelling, but they never eclipse the story’s emotional core. What makes *Thunderbolts** truly special is how it balances grief, humour, and redemption without ever undermining its themes. It may be rough around the edges, but it’s one of the MCU’s most emotionally resonant entries. In a post-*Endgame* era, it’s a messy, soulful, and surprisingly necessary addition to the franchise.



TRENDY STREAMS

Netflix
Ginny & Georgia

Amazon Prime
The Accountant 2

Hoichoi
Bohemian Ghora

HBO Max
The Gilded Age

Hulu
Nine Pfect Strangers

Teen dies from electrocution

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Netrokona

A teenage boy died after being electrocuted in the Khaliajuri upazila of Netrokona on Thursday night.

The incident occurred around 8:30pm in the West Para area of Mendipur village.

The deceased was identified as Sayid Hasan Naki, 17, son of Abul Bashar Talukder, a resident of the area.

According to Khaliajuri Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md Mokbul Hossain, Naki went to his father's grocery shop and was electrocuted when he flipped a switch to turn on a light.

Family members and locals immediately rescued him and took him to Khaliajuri Upazila Health Complex, where the doctors declared him dead.

The OC said the body was handed over to the family without autopsy.



Children beat the summer heat by wading in the cool waters of a pond near their home. Their ingenuity knows no bounds, as they have even made a makeshift raft using a banana tree. Following recent monsoons, temperatures across the country have spiked once again. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Accommodation crisis grips KMCH

DIPANKAR ROY, *Khulna*

Amid the ongoing intense heat wave gripping the region, Khulna Medical College Hospital is struggling to accommodate the rising daily influx of patients suffering from heat-related illnesses, overwhelming the hospital's capacity.

With no beds available, a significant number of patients, including the elderly and children, are being compelled to lie on the hospital floors, while the lack of functional ceiling fans or proper ventilation in many wards compounds their suffering.

In some areas, not even a single ceiling fan is available, leaving patients gasping for air as temperatures soar above 35 degrees Celsius.

Patients' families and attendants plead for immediate intervention from the authorities concerned to mitigate the suffering by providing at least temporary fans, extra beds, and emergency cooling measures.

Health experts have warned that prolonged exposure to such extreme conditions could worsen the health of many patients and

have urged the authorities to take immediate action.

Lima Debnath, a resident of Bajitpur village under Jashore's Monirampur upazila, was admitted to KMCH a few days ago after being diagnosed with typhoid. However, due



to a shortage of beds, Lima is being treated on the floor of the pathology department's corridor.

Her aunt, Shikha Debnath, said, "Lima's condition is very critical. She remains unconscious

most of the time. There is no vacant bed in the hospital now, so we are forced to keep her on the floor. The heat is unbearable, worsening her condition. There is no fan on this floor, so I have been trying to keep her cool using a hand fan."

"It's suffocating here amid this heat. I can hardly breathe," Taslima said.

"I purchased a table fan since there is no ceiling fan here, but I couldn't get it connected to any electrical outlet. Many others are facing similar issues. If the hospital authorities could install some ceiling fans, it would be a great relief to the patients," said Tofayel.

Hospital authorities admitted the crisis but said they are facing a shortage of resources.

Dr Sudipta Biswas, medical officer of Medicine Unit-3 at KMCH, said, "Due to a severe bed shortage, many are being treated in corridors, near the lifts, and other open spaces. The heat, coupled with poor ventilation, worsens conditions for patients with respiratory issues, strokes, heart attacks, and other critical illnesses. Children and the elderly are especially vulnerable."

"Despite the challenges, we are trying our best to provide treatment," he added.

He also advised patients to avoid eating food from outside during their hospital stay to prevent diarrhoea and other related complications.

Despite being a 500-bed facility, KMCH often has to accommodate three times more patients than its capacity. Around 1,400 to 1,500 admitted patients received treatment at the hospital daily in April and May.

There is also a shortage of doctors. At present, there are only 268 doctors serving at the hospital against 311 approved posts.

Dr Md Akhtaruzzaman, superintendent and deputy director of KMCH, said, "We are providing treatment amid severe limitations. Patients from 10 districts of the Khulna division and neighbouring areas come for treatment here, overwhelming the limited infrastructure."

"Despite a shortage of doctors and an overload of patients, we are doing our best to provide services with sincerity and dedication," he added.

Unregulated tourism threatens Vanishing rivers of Patgram

FROM PAGE 3
20-km/hr speed limit on the Sreemangal-Kamalganj road running through the park, he also said.

"Excessive tourist activities will never do any good for Lawachara; it will only cause serious damage to its endangered wildlife and natural forest ecosystem," said Muntasir Akash, assistant professor of Zoology at Dhaka University. "The Forest Department has put a cap on how many tourists will enter daily. Otherwise, one day there will be no wildlife in this forest," he added.

Satir Ali, a tourist from Dhaka, said, "I came to Lawachara with my family to see wildlife. However, we came out of the park soon after entering as it is too crowded noisy, so much so that it hardly seems a forest. If I had known about such

a situation beforehand, I would not have come."

"In almost every country in the world, even in our neighbouring India, Nepal, and Bhutan, the canning capacity -- the optimal number of tourists that can be allowed to a site daily -- is determined based on the size and importance of the national park. Based on the number determined, that many tourists have to book their entry in advance on a particular day," said Marjan Maria, a wildlife researcher and animal care co-ordinator at Plumploris e.V.

Echoing her, Hassan Al Razi, a Ph.D Fellow (wildlife research and conservation) at University of Western Australia, said no such system has been seen anywhere in Bangladesh.

"Higher tourist numbers mean higher revenue, which

is seen very positively in our country, even though it endangers our forests and wildlife. We need to determine the canning capacity of our forests to save the forests and wildlife from the pressure of tourism. A policy should be made so that tourists cannot go everywhere. Also, tourist guards should be trained to serve as forest and wildlife conservators," he added.

Contacted, Dr Md Jahangir Alam, divisional forest officer of the Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Department in Sylhet, admitted the crisis.

"A huge number of tourists visit the park almost every day during Eid holidays, threatening its biodiversity. We have discussed the matter in some meetings. Steps will be taken in this regard," he added.

Jhumur Akter, filed a case with Banani Police Station on February 4.

CID also discovered that another group of 10 victims is currently stranded in Saudi Arabia.

After learning about the forced recruitment, they refused to go to Russia. The traffickers then took away their passports, leaving them unable to work or return home.

CID said Fabia's brother, Tuhin -- now in Russia -- played a key role in persuading the victims to join the war.

CID is working with the government and NGOs to repatriate the victims, the official added.

FROM PAGE 3
According to insiders, syndicate members colluded with local authorities by paying the officials around 10 percent of their daily earnings from stone extraction operations.

On average, about 4,000 cubic feet of stones are lifted daily using dredgers, with each cft selling for Tk 60-70 at the extraction site, thereby producing a daily turnover of at least Tk 2.4 lakh. Of this, roughly Tk 24,000 is allegedly pocketed by local officials, according to political insiders and syndicate sources.

However, not all 400-500 dredgers in operation are paying the cut. In some areas, influential political leaders reportedly shield their favoured groups, allowing them to bypass such payments.

"Earlier, leaders from the then ruling Awami League controlled the business. Now, local BNP leaders have taken over," said a local source involved with the syndicate, requesting anonymity.

Rashedul Islam, general secretary of Patgram upazila Jubo League unit and former municipality mayor, was allegedly overseeing the syndicate's operations at one stage, the source claimed.

Rashedul could not be reached for comment, as his phone was found switched off.

Asked about BNP's alleged involvement, Shafikar Rahman, president of Patgram upazila BNP unit, refuted the allegation.

"None of our leaders are involved in this syndicate.

In fact, we have consistently urged the administration to take action against illegal stone lifting during law-and-order committee meetings. But the administration ignored our concerns and instead shifted the blame onto political leaders while continuing to receive a share of the profits from syndicate members," he claimed.

WHAT OFFICIALS SAY
Officials concerned of the government institutions admitted that the crisis is severe.

"The three rivers in Patgram are on the verge of death due to relentless, illegal stone lifting," said Shunil Kumar, executive engineer of Bangladesh Water Development Board in Lalmonirhat.

"A team from the environment ministry visited the rivers recently and saw the crisis firsthand. We expect restoration steps to follow," he added.

Patgram Upazila Nirbahi Officer Jillur Rahman said, "Stone lifting is officially banned. We act on every report and send out mobile courts. We've destroyed over 100 dredgers and fined many, even faced attacks. Still, some operations continue at night in remote areas."

The UNO also denied involvement of any local administration officials in the illegal trade. "Instead, we are vigilant and taking strict action against these syndicates," he said.

HM Rakib Hayder, deputy commissioner of Lalmonirhat, said, "We've marked a four-km stretch of the Dharla for dredging. The survey is complete.

Work will begin soon."

"No matter how powerful the syndicates are, we'll take firm action," he added.

LAWS, CONCERNS IGNORED

In Bangladesh, stone extraction without a license is a criminal offense as per the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1992.

The Water Act, 2013, also criminalises unapproved interference with waterbodies, while The River Protection Commission Act, 2013, bans unauthorised damage, pollution, and occupation of riverbeds.

Despite the legal framework, enforcement has remained sporadic and inconsistent, resulting in a slow collapse of rivers, livelihoods, and lives.

Between January to April this year, the local administration has filed six cases and arrested two over illegal stone mining.

The situation, however, hardly changed, as these actions appear to have little effect in preventing the mining.

"They still extract at night," said Moslem Uddin, 65, of Bangkanda.

"Sometimes it goes on all day -- with loud music and scenes like parties. These greedy men have ruined the rivers. The damage is evident -- in farming, nature, and even the climate."

Shafiqul Islam, president of Lalmonirhat River Rokkha Songram Parishad, echoed him.

"If urgent, sustained action is not taken, the rivers of Patgram may soon be beyond saving," he said.

Residents suffer

FROM PAGE 4
Sometimes, patient's condition worsens after such a bumpy ride," said Md Alomgir Hossain, a resident of Hospital Road.

Md Amirul Islam, a trader at Pabna BSIC, echoed him.

Roads in Radhanagar, Shalgaria, and Arilpur areas were also seen in deplorable state.

"Accidents regularly happen on the roads across the municipality as vehicles often overturn due to deep potholes. One needs to start keeping considerable time in hand to reach destination timely," said ABM Fazlur Rahman, president of Consumer Association of Bangladesh.

He urged the municipality authorities for prompt steps to repair the roads.

Md Obaidul Haque, assistant engineer of Pabna Municipality, said more than 130-km out of total 240-km roads within municipality area need urgent repairs.

"Due to the lack of fund, we are unable to conduct any repair work at this moment. We have already submitted a number of project proposals to repair and upgrade more than 100-km road at cost of Tk 100 crore. A few of those got approval. Once fund is allocated, we will begin tender process after June," he added.

Stepmother

FROM PAGE 4
Abdur Razzak told this correspondent that the family had tried various forms of treatment -- both medical and traditional -- but nothing had helped. "We were making arrangements to send him to Pabna today [yesterday]," he said.

Mostafizur Rahman, investigation officer of Patuakhali Sadar Police Station, said police recovered the bodies

and were preparing to send them to Patuakhali Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy. "Efforts are underway to arrest the accused. Legal action will be taken upon investigation," he said.

Superintendent of Police Anwar Zahid said, "The family has informed us that Al Amin had long-term mental health issues. We are investigating the matter and trying to bring the accused to justice."

Erosion threatens

FROM PAGE 4
Locals warned that without immediate protection measures, the embankment would not only fail to serve its purpose but would also result in a waste of government resources if damaged by future tidal waves.

Nusair Hossain, executive engineer of the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) in Pirojpur, acknowledged that the embankment lacks

sufficient protection due to a funding shortage.

"We have asked the contractor to replace the displaced geo bags," he said, adding that a proposal seeking Tk 24 crore has been sent to higher authorities for reinforcing the embankment with concrete blocks.

"If our proposal is approved, we'll be able to begin work to strengthen the embankment," he added.

Support us

FROM PAGE 3
for oceanographic and hydrographic data collection, which is being procured for the Bangladesh Navy.

The UK team explained the ship's capabilities and various operational roles. Prof Yunus expressed interest in how the vessel could strengthen Bangladesh's capacity to map, survey, and collect data from its waters to support science, research, and knowledge building.

He requested the UK's assistance in providing additional equipment that could enhance the country's capabilities and knowledge in areas such as maritime domain awareness, new resource exploration, climate change research, mangrove preservation, fisheries studies, and biodiversity research.

The chief adviser also stressed the importance of bilateral research collaboration between Bangladesh and the UK using this vessel, and particularly emphasised the need to involve young students in maritime education to fully benefit from this acquisition.

Prof Yunus said the vessel would help Bangladesh better understand its oceans and resources for the benefit of its people.

In 2021, Bangladesh agreed to purchase five naval ships from the UK as part of its Forces Goal 2030, which aims to modernise the armed forces in line with the country's goal to become a developed nation by 2041.

The then foreign minister AK Abdul Momen had said the purpose of the procurement was to help monitor and protect Bangladesh's vast maritime territory from foreign encroachment for fishing or other activities.

Meanwhile, Prof Yunus had a phone conversation yesterday with former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown.

Their discussion focused on Bangladesh's ongoing economic recovery and the urgent need to improve educational opportunities for Rohingya refugee children.

Gordon Brown, currently serving as the United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education, praised the chief adviser's leadership in managing the country's economic challenges and promoting inclusive growth.

Both leaders expressed deep concern over the educational plight of Rohingya children residing in Bangladesh's refugee camps. With more than half a million children lacking access to formal education, they stressed the importance of providing learning opportunities to prevent a "lost generation".

"We must ensure that Rohingya children grow up with hope and the tools to build a better future," said Prof Yunus, reiterating the government's commitment to supporting the Rohingya community.

Brown expressed interest in collaborating with Bangladesh to expand education programmes in the camps and said he hoped to visit Bangladesh in the coming months to assess the situation and explore ways to help.

The conversation also covered other topics of mutual interest, including the interim government's reform agenda and its role in ensuring a peaceful democratic transition.

Yesterday, Prof Yunus also attended an interactive session with students at his hotel in London.

He is scheduled to return home today after a four-day visit to the UK.

PRAYER TIMING JUNE 14					
Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha	
AZAN 4-05 12-45 5-00 6-50 8-15					
JAMAAT 4-40 1-15 5-15 6-55 8-45					
SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION					

CREATIVE NONFICTION

Nani’s salt



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

But even in her silence, she made a promise. Her daughters would not inherit this. They would not live with hearts clenched in smoky kitchens. They would not measure their worth in teaspoons of salt.

LAZEENA MUNA

“Amar moto sarata jibon ranna ghere katio na.” Her voice, thin as a whisper, sharp as a blade, sliced through the kitchen air thick with mustard oil and regret. The words echoed, bouncing off stained walls and copper pots that had borne witness to her life. My nani, Morium Nesa, stood stooped over a boiling pot of dal, her saree wrapped tightly around her frail 4-foot 8-inch frame. The smoke curled around her like a noose. But she kept stirring. Stirring was what she knew—what she had been taught to do. Stir the pot, smooth the tempers, swallow the rage. In the early days of her marriage, my nani held on to the fragile hope of a good life—stitched together with respect, perhaps a little love, maybe a few sweet words under the soft glow of an oil lamp. But promises, like salt in warm water, tend to disappear, leaving only a bitter aftertaste. The marriage wasn’t heaven. It wasn’t even earth. It was a battlefield. The daily routines—children, chores, the ceaseless labour of keeping a home—clashed with a sharp mind

that knew it was meant for more. But what wore her down was not the work. It was the anger, rage that sparked over trifles by her husband. The salt in the curry was never right. Too much. Or too little. On such days, her husband’s plates didn’t stay on the table. They flew crashing into gardens, walls, verandas, wherever the fury flung them. My grandmother, cheeks streaked with silent tears, would cradle her father’s photo, her last anchor to the idea of safety, and cry. Not loudly. Loudness was reserved for men. Her sorrow came quietly, slipping through the cracks of the house, curling into her daughters’ ears. Women’s grief, in her time, was meant to be swallowed. Like bitter medicine. Endured, not expressed. But even in her silence, she made a promise. Her daughters would not inherit this. They would not live with hearts clenched in smoky kitchens. They would not measure their worth in teaspoons of salt. “Not you,” she told them. “Not your lives. Not your world.” Her daughters didn’t just learn to read. They learned to unlearn. To unlearn the inherited

POETRY

Mosaicked wounds

OHONA ANJUM

This was the way it ended: not with fire, But carried quietly under sleep beds, Toward the rubble-heads, the hollow men’s republic. A vastness aches to be out Like a falcon stoop towards the ground For the first time in its life. Then, days spin across my oceans Sinking tiny bottles of time Lived, Loved, and Buried. Adieu! I said to them, For there is a long travel ahead. I gently push them down. For it is not a time to ponder, The falcon must not hit the ground, There is yet so much flying to do, There is yet so much dying to see. Let the tinted glasses, stack together In beloved red, black and green. They must not let go of their corks Of Sight, Sound, Touch they carry. These sealed-away wounds, cling better than the mosaicked walls, Must not be painted into my common breath. Until my ocean thickens to ink and acid rain, Until the bottles drift, drift and shatter, Until every shard becomes a lidless eye, And every eye a grave.

Ohona Anjum writes, rhymes, and studies English literature.

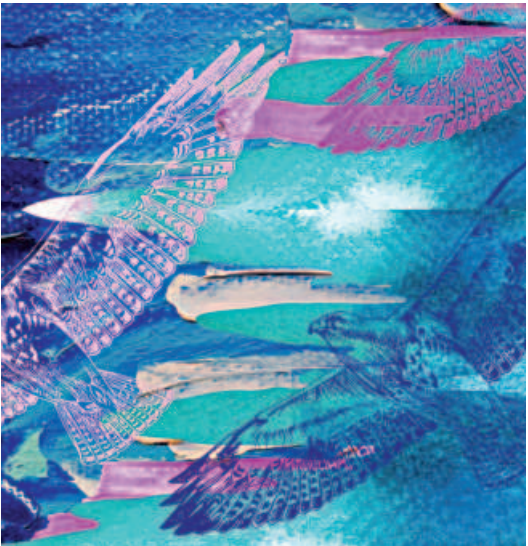


ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

POETRY

The people within me

ADIBA ASAD

I am not a single name. Not a single wound. Not a single sky. I am the echo of footsteps that left, and the silence that stayed behind. A mirror shattered by many suns—each shard a memory, still burning. They passed through me like wind through broken windows. Lovers, strangers, enemies, each carrying a piece of my face, and leaving a name I no longer speak. Even the ones who no longer write, who turned into stone in the garden of time—I carry them in the curve of my hand, in the way I fold my grief like an old letter. There was a version of me that loved them. And died with them.

And I do not bury the dead. I build my home from their shadows. I am not whole. I am the map of exile, drawn with fingers that trembled. A mosaic made of borrowed light, and forgotten prayers. Do not ask me who I am. Ask the wind. Ask the Bougainvillea that returns each spring to the window of someone who no longer waits. I am everyone I have ever loved, even for a heartbeat. Even in silence. Even in ruin.

Adiba Asad is a student at Viqarunnisa Noon College. She writes to explore the hidden architecture of grief, memory, and identity, believing poetry can hold what time cannot.



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE



PHOTO: COLLECTED

POETRY

FRAGMENTS

ZERTAB QUADERI

Grey chips of rough cement
Rust rubble all around,
Diamond patterns on a carpet
Edges frayed.
Half a tomato, wilted leafy greens on a
Broken plate.
The smile of a mother, front teeth

missing,
The stump of a father’s arm
Raised in prayer,
Beckon the three- and a-half children
Playing in the dirt without a care.

Zertab Quaderi is living her dream life: reading books, dabbling in art, spending me-time, and guzzling coffee.

FLASH FICTION

Polychrome

ATIQA TANJEEEM

I made my first kite out of white paper scraps; on my 16th birthday, it came to me that they needed a pop of color. I put five of the finest highlighters I owned between each finger and dragged the nibs aimlessly, tangling and untangling the swirls over and over again. Matted strands of hair slipped past my shoulders to fall over them, and the colors peddled back to whichever corner they could find, though some scurried closer and closer. The blues and whites crashed into each other at the ends of my hair, the pinks and reds fused into the afternoon sky, the browns seeped in under my nails. I held the kite up as high as my hands would reach, and saw bits of turquoise peeking out from the center. A tinge of silver tapped away at the corner of my eyes, its glint stewing in solitude at my parched lips. I saw them push and pull, pirouetting in an uncannily human routine. In unison, they whispered verses into my ears

The whispers froze, but I took solace in the fact that they are for me, and only me, to hear. Only I can decipher their language. Only I can press onto my palms the dewdrops they leave behind. Those edges can only taste my blood: rotten, blued or maroon. The copper on my tongue is borne of my own veins, the crescendos of magenta hum on my own vocal chords.



DESIGN: MAISHA SYEDA

in a language both alien and intimate. Pokémon card sets I had bought with my lunch money, the warbly Rabindra Sangeet from my mother’s old cassette tapes that used to lull me to sleep after school; stacks of Barbie CDs collecting dust beside my card sets; bootlegged Jane Austen paperbacks from the quaint bookshop near my school; a Deviser 4040 I never quite learned to strum—each syllable exploded into an erratic saffron alpona. Basalt braided through the curls falling upon my kameez—curls I once wished could have been sleek, satiny and of charcoal. Moonstones swayed in circles around unruly eyebrows, dotting the spot on my forehead where they melted into each other’s embrace. The kite broke into pieces, some tearing into my corneas with their

jagged edges as some glided up my bare skin with the caress of porcelain; then it all banded back together into a polychrome mosaic. The whispers froze, but I took solace in the fact that they are for me, and only me, to hear. Only I can decipher their language. Only I can press onto my palms the dewdrops they leave behind. Those edges can only taste my blood: rotten, blued or maroon. The copper on my tongue is borne of my own veins, the crescendos of magenta hum on my own vocal chords. The ghostly lime greens are mine, as much as the midnight blues are. They are my prison, and my home. Atiq Tanjeeem occasionally writes for Star Books and Literature.

Star SPORT

DHAKA SATURDAY JUNE 14, 2025, JAISHTHA 31, 1432 BS

Mixed reaction over 3-captain approach

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Bangladesh cricket entered a new era with the appointment of Mehidy Hasan Miraz as the new ODI skipper, resulting in three leaders in three different formats which generated mixed reactions from former players.

Bangladesh last endorsed three different captains back in 2022 when Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal and Mahmudullah were at the helm for Tests, ODIs and T20Is respectively.

The approach didn't bear fruit at that time and Bangladesh soon had to appoint Shakib as skipper for Tests and T20Is while Tamim retained ODI captaincy only until Shakib got it back in a dramatic fashion ahead of the ODI World Cup in India in 2023.

In February last year, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) handed Najmul Hossain Shanto captaincy in all three formats despite Shakib's interest to continue the role in ODI format. By that time, Shakib had already expressed his desire to quit Tests and T20Is.

However, after a few setbacks in the T20Is, Shanto expressed his reluctance in continuing with the duty in the shortest format in order to concentrate more on his batting, and the BCB opted to pick Litton Das as skipper until 2026 T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka.

Having different captains in different formats isn't completely new in world cricket as India recently opted for this approach.

“Three captains can have three different opinions and will try to form three different types of teams. But if someone leads in both limited overs teams, he can have his own assessment of players.”

Former Bangladesh captain
Rajin Saleh

However, other major teams like Australia, South Africa, England and New Zealand have two skippers, with most of these teams preferring one skipper for red ball format and another for white-ball format, something that Bangladesh could also go with, feels former skipper Rajin Saleh.

“I think it would be better if there were two captains in three formats,” Rajin told The Daily Star yesterday. “Looking into the kind of situation in Bangladesh cricket, there might be an ego problem among the captains.”

“Three captains can have three different opinions and will try to form three different types of teams. But if someone leads in both limited overs teams, he can have his own assessment of players,” Rajin added.

Meanwhile, Roquibul Hassan, another former skipper, feels that this is the way to go in modern cricket as there are so many international matches nowadays and having different captains can take pressure off of one individual, both physically and mentally.

“We have to play a lot of bilateral series and tournaments in different formats these days. Apart from that, the players also go to franchise leagues,” said Roquibul. “People not only get tired physically, they also get tired mentally. Since we are still an underdog, the pressure such on technical, mental and physical aspects of the game is immense.

“If the responsibility remains on one man's shoulder, it becomes difficult for him to cope with the situations,” opined Roquibul.

Liverpool agree British-record deal for Wirtz

AGENCIES

Liverpool have agreed a British-record deal worth up to £116.5 million to sign German attacking midfielder Florian Wirtz from Bayer Leverkusen, marking a bold statement of intent ahead of Arne Slot's second season in charge.

The 22-year-old, widely regarded as one of Europe's most exciting young talents, will join the Premier League champions after returning from holiday to complete his medical. The Reds will pay an initial £100 million, with £16.5 million in performance-related additions potentially making it the most expensive deal in British football history – surpassing Chelsea's fee for Moises Caicedo (£115 million to Brighton in 2023).

Wirtz's arrival follows that of former Leverkusen teammate Jeremie Frimpong, who signed earlier this summer for £29.5 million. Liverpool are also close to sealing a deal for Bournemouth left-back Milos Kerkez as Slot seeks to reinforce every area of the pitch.

After staying relatively quiet in the transfer market during his debut

campaign, Slot guided Liverpool to their 20th English top-flight title, equalling Manchester United's record. Now, the Dutch manager is focused on building a squad capable of defending the crown and also push for continental glory.

Liverpool left-back Andy Robertson had described Wirtz as an “exciting talent”.

Robertson played against Wirtz when Liverpool faced Leverkusen in the Champions League this past season, but says he realised the playmaker was headed for stardom when Germany beat Scotland 5-1 at Euro 2024.

“He was excellent against us,” Robertson told Sky Sports News at the AR26 annual Captain's Cup Golf Day fundraiser before the signing was confirmed. “That was enough for me to see he's going to be a top player. He will be an exciting talent.”

Wirtz scored 10 goals and provided 13 assists in 31 Bundesliga appearances last season and was crowned Bundesliga Player of the Year in 2023/24. His versatility gives Slot additional options in an already competitive forward line featuring Mohamed Salah, Luis Diaz, Cody Gakpo, Diogo Jota, and Darwin Nunez.



South Africa opener Aiden Markram scored a tremendous century -- an unbeaten 102 -- and put together an unbroken 143-run stand with skipper Temba Bavuma (65 not out) on Day 3 of the World Test Championship final against title-holders Australia at Lord's yesterday to propel the Proteas to the verge of claiming their first ICC title since 1998 when they won the ICC Knockout Trophy. South Africa finished the day at 213 for two, 69 runs shy of chasing down a 282-run target set by Australia.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Miraz's peculiar first day as ODI captain

SPORTS REPORTER

Less than 24 hours after Najmul Hossain Shanto had spoken about the importance of long-term captaincy during a press conference at the BCB headquarters, Mehidy Hasan Miraz on Friday sat in the same room for his first media interaction since replacing Shanto as skipper in ODIs.

The decision to appoint Miraz as captain was taken on Thursday evening after an emergency Zoom meeting between BCB board directors and the all-rounder will begin his year-long tenure with the three-match ODI series in Sri Lanka this month.

Shanto had reportedly been left in the dark about the development and was unaware that his ODI tenure would be coming to an end when he spoke to the media on Thursday as the Test skipper before the side's departure for Sri Lanka.

The left hander was reportedly in talks with head coach Phil Simmons on Thursday about the ODI series when he learnt he is not the captain anymore.

The unusual manner of Shanto losing his captaincy has roused more interest than who he has lost it to and it was reflected in Miraz's first press conference, as the new captain had to field more questions related to Shanto than what he intended to do as skipper in ODIs.

“He [Shanto] was the ODI captain for a term, which had ended [after the Champions Trophy]. They probably had conversations about the Test team. I am not sure if they spoke about the ODI



team,” Miraz said at the press conference yesterday about captaining a squad in Sri Lanka which was picked when Shanto was in charge.

“Fahim [Nazmul Abedeen] sir called me and said that they are going to give me the responsibility. He said that they don't have much time since we have to set up the ODI team quickly as the matches are not far away,” he added.

The board's heavy-handed handling of the matter risks ruining the dressing room environment. But Miraz negated that possibility.

“I don't think it will have an effect in the dressing room. We are all playing for the country. These things won't bother Shanto and me. I helped him a lot during his captaincy. He will do the same. He will help me. We want to take Bangladesh forward,” he said.

The captaincy change has laid bare that proper processes are not being followed in the board and is also a

reflection of the instability that has crept in everywhere in cricket.

But Miraz said he and the other players are now prepared for any eventuality and also corroborated what Shanto had said about long-term captaincy a day before.

“I don't know how [the captaincy] was decided. It is usually done in a board meeting. Nobody can decide on their own. I think all of us are usually prepared mentally for any situation we may have to face.

“Longer term captaincy is always ideal, but I think it is up to the board [whether or not to extend his tenure till 2027 World Cup].

The thinking is to get the team out of the current struggle,” he said in a peculiar first day as captain.

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Real sign River Plate starlet Mastantuono

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid have agreed a deal to sign teenage playmaker Franco Mastantuono from River Plate, the Spanish giants announced on Friday.

The 17-year-old attacking midfielder cost Madrid just over 63 million euros (\$72 million), according to a statement by River Plate.

Mastantuono will play in the Club World Cup in the United States this summer with the Argentine club before moving to the Spanish capital.

“Mastantuono will be a player at our club for the next six seasons, from 14 August 2025 to 30 June 2031,” said Los Blancos in a statement.

“At 17, he is also the youngest player to play an official match for the Argentina national team.”

He made his national team debut earlier this month against Chile in a World Cup 2026 qualifier.

“Mastantuono executed his release fee clause, along with Real Madrid,” explained River Plate, providing full financial details of the deal which earns them 45 million euros, with the rest of the money largely distributed on taxes.

“Thank you Franco for your performance and talent, it has been a pride to see you grow at the club,” the statement continued.

The midfielder came through the River academy and made his first team debut for the club in January 2024.

He is Real Madrid's third signing this summer behind Trent Alexander-Arnold from Liverpool and Dean Huijsen from Bournemouth.

Taskin uncertain for SL white-ball series

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh are unlikely to get the services of pacer Taskin Ahmed in the limited-over part of their upcoming full tour of Sri Lanka, as according to a Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) physician, the board will only review his case after this month.

Taskin, who has been out of competitive cricket since March, is currently undergoing conservative treatment during his rehab, after he had issues with his Achilles tendon, for which he also had gone to London to receive expert opinions.

Bangladesh are set to play three ODIs and as many T20Is following their two-match Test series against Sri Lanka. The ODIs will begin on July 2, and according to BCB's chief physician, Debashis Chowdhury, it might take longer than expected for his comeback.

“Taskin wasn't in a situation to play Tests,” Debashis told The Daily Star yesterday. “His rehab is ongoing. But we aren't sure whether he can make it to the side within this time. We will be assessing his rehab until the end of this month. Then we will review his case.”

Meanwhile, Debashis was confident about the recovery of the other two pacers – Shoriful Islam and Mustafizur Rahman –

before the series. While Shoriful missed the last T20I against Pakistan due to a muscle spasm he suffered in the previous game of the series last month, Mustafizur was sidelined for the entire three-match series due to a finger injury he picked up during his Indian Premier League stint.

“Shoriful has started bowling. There are no complaints about his injury,” Debashis said.

“Mustafizur would have taken 21 days to regain his fitness, and 15 days have already passed. So, we expect him to recover within the time frame,” he added.



Messi gears up for CWC opener

Egyptian Premier League champions Al Ahly head to the Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, Florida to face Major League Soccer side Inter Miami in the opening match of the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup. The match will be live telecast at 6:00 am on Sunday Bangladesh time. Lionel Messi-led Miami also stars big names like Luis Suarez, Sergio Busquets, and Jordi Alba but they face not only Egypt's finest but also the best side in the African continent.

🌟 **Messi will play in his fourth FIFA Club World Cup, including the previous format of the competition. He's won the trophy in all three of his previous participations (2009, 2011 and 2015), scoring five goals in five appearances, including goals in all three finals.**

🌟 **Al Ahly have won more Egyptian top-flight titles (44) and more CAF Champions League titles (12) than any other club.**

🌟 **Al Ahly's Hussein El Shahat holds the record for the most matches played under the previous format of the FIFA Club World Cup (17).**

🌟 **FIFA slashed ticket prices to encourage fans to come to the tournament opener after thousands of seats remained unsold last week, with prices being as low as \$4. Miami Dade College students have gotten offers for five seats to the opener for \$20, breaking down to just \$4 per ticket to see Messi's Inter Miami squad.**



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No communal, political motive behind attack on Kachharibari

Says cultural affairs ministry

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Ministry of Cultural Affairs yesterday said that there is “no communal or political motive behind the attack” at the Rabindra Kachharibari in Shahjadpur, Sirajganj, and that the incident stemmed from a personal conflict.

In an official statement, the ministry detailed the sequence of events surrounding the altercation that took place at the site on June 8.

According to the ministry, the dispute began with a misunderstanding that led to an argument and later a physical fight between an on-duty employee of the Kachharibari and a visitor named Shahnewaz.

Allegations were brought against custodian Habibur Rahman of the Department of Archaeology for allegedly assaulting and detaining the visitor.

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PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

Steering clear of the chaotic rush to board the train, a man places his child inside through an open window as they made their way back to the capital after celebrating Eid in their village home. The photo was taken yesterday at Rajshahi Railway Station.

Holidaymakers rush back to Dhaka after Eid

Heavy traffic at Dhaka entry points

STAR REPORT

As the Eid holidays draw to a close and offices are set to fully reopen tomorrow, people from around the country have started returning to Dhaka.

This year, all government and a number of private sector employees received an extended 10-day holiday. Meanwhile, many small and large factories in Gazipur and Savar are reopening from today.

As a result, the pressure of both passengers and vehicles at bus, train and launch terminals began to rise yesterday.

Large crowds of returnees were seen at major entry points to the capital, particularly in the Jatrabari, Kamalapur, Gabtoli, and Sayedabad areas. Passenger-packed buses from various districts continued to arrive one after another.

Heavy traffic on the Dhaka-Tangail highway resulted in a tailback lasting several hours near the Jamuna Bridge yesterday.

Many passengers said vehicles were moving slowly throughout the morning.

“We were stuck for over an hour before reaching the Jamuna Bridge,” said Rashed Hasan, who had set off from Gaibandha.

The congestion gradually eased by noon.

Elenga Highway Police In-Charge Md Sharif said the

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Archaeologists uncover fast food ancient Romans munched on

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Commoners in the Roman Empire frequently snacked on inexpensive fried songbirds at roadside shops, archaeologists said after analysing an ancient trash pit in Spain.

Such fast-food joints, known as popinae and tabernae, frequently served fried small thrushes, once considered a luxury dish, according to a new study published in the International Journal of Osteoarchaeology.

Researchers analysed animal bones found at a cesspit in the ancient Spanish city of Pollentia and dated to between the first century BC and the first century AD.

During this time, the ancient city expanded quickly to become an active port with a forum, temples, cemeteries, and several roadside shops called popina serving snacks and wine.

Archaeologists excavated a trash pit at a commercial area linked to a forum and a network of food shops via underground drainage.

The cesspit was found to include remains of mammals, fish, reptiles, and birds, of which thrushes were “most abundant”, researchers said.

They found 165 thrush bones, challenging the previous belief that such songbirds were mainly eaten by wealthier Romans.



Chhatra Dal leader stabbed to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A local Chhatra Dal leader was stabbed to death in Sohanati village of Gauripur upazila in Mymensingh yesterday.

Humayun Kabir, 21, was the joint general secretary of Chhatra Dal's Sohanati union unit.

Quoting locals, Gauripur Police Station Officer-in-Charge Didarul Islam said Humayun had reportedly warned a suspected drug dealer against selling narcotics. “This may have provoked a planned attack on him.”

Protesting the murder that took place around 5:45pm, a group of agitators set fire to several houses in the area.

Fire service personnel and police rushed to the scene and brought the situation under control.

Gauripur Upazila Chhatra Dal Member Secretary Md Moniruzzaman Manik said, “The murder happened over previous enmity.”

He called for the immediate arrest of those responsible.

OC Didarul said police are trying to arrest the perpetrators.

UNGA demands immediate truce in Gaza

US, Israel oppose; Israeli strikes kill 52 Palestinians

AGENCIES

Israeli attacks have killed at least 52 people across Gaza since dawn yesterday, medical sources told Al Jazeera, as the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) passed a resolution urging an unconditional ceasefire in the besieged enclave.

The 193-member General Assembly adopted a resolution that also demands the release of hostages held in Gaza by Hamas, the return of Palestinian prisoners detained by Israel and the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza.

The text garnered 149 votes in favor, while 19 countries abstained and the US, Israel and 10 others voted against, reports Reuters.

In Gaza, most of the people died in Israeli drone attacks while waiting for food and basic supplies being distributed by the controversial United States and Israel-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF).

Gaza civil defence official Mohammed el-Mougher told AFP news agency that al-Awda Hospital received at least 10 bodies and about dozens of others who were wounded “after Israeli drones dropped multiple bombs on gatherings of civilians near an aid distribution point around the Netzarim checkpoint in central Gaza”.

El-Mougher said that Gaza City's al-Shifa Hospital also received six bodies after Israeli

attacks on aid queues near Netzarim and in the as Sudaniya area in northwestern Gaza.

Since the GHF began its operation in Gaza in late May, dozens of Palestinians have been killed while trying to reach the aid distribution points, according to Gaza's civil defence agency.

GHF has been a failure from a humanitarian standpoint of view, the United Nations said yesterday.

“GHF, I think it's fair to say, has been, from a principled humanitarian standpoint, a failure,” Jens Laerke, spokesman for the UN humanitarian agency OCHA, told a press briefing in Geneva.

Separately, a medical source at al-Shifa Hospital told Al Jazeera that two Palestinians were killed as a result of Israeli shelling targeting the Bir an-Naaja area west of Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza.

Meanwhile, Hamas condemned what it described as an Israeli decision to cut off communication lines in Gaza, describing it as “a new aggressive step” in the country's “war of extermination”.

“We call on the international community to assume its responsibility to stop the aggression and ensure the protection of civilians and humanitarian and civilian facilities.”

The disruption of communications has resulted in the UNRWA losing contact with its colleagues in the agency in Gaza, the UN's main humanitarian provider in Gaza said.

- UNGA resolution also demands full withdrawal of Israeli forces
- Gaza Humanitarian Foundation failed in its mission: UN
- Hamas condemns Israeli decision to cut off communication lines in enclave

35 pushed in through three border districts

STAR REPORT

At least 35 people were pushed into Bangladesh from India through different border points in Dinajpur and Panchagarh in the early hours of yesterday.

In Dinajpur, 15 people, including three men, three women and nine children, were detained near the Achintapur border area in Birampur upazila around 6:30am.

After detaining them, the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB-29) members took them to the Achintapur Border Outpost (BOP), reports BSS.

India's Border Security Force (BSF) forcibly pushed them back into Bangladesh through border pillar 295/1-S on Thursday night, said Rafiqul Islam, commandant of Achintapur BOP, quoting the returnees.

“The process of handing over the arrestees to Birampur Police Station for further legal action is underway.”

In Panchagarh, seven individuals, including two men, three women, and two children, were detained near the Amarkhana border in Sadar upazila early yesterday.

Members of the Amarkhana BOP detained the individuals near pillar no.743/1-S after they were pushed across the border, Lt Col Sheikh Mohammad Bodruddoza,

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Teen driver sued for Ctg hit-and-run

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

An uncle of the boy who was run over and killed in Chattogram's Halishahar filed a case against the 19-year-old driver yesterday.

Tanim Hossain Rabbi, a student of Chattogram Government Commerce College, has been accused of reckless driving and killing a boy who was knocked off a bike in a hit-and-run.

Rabbi doesn't have a driver's licence and was driving his father's car on Wednesday afternoon when he hit the bike and tried to speed away, locals and police said.

Osman Gani Sakib, who worked as a caretaker of a residential building in the area, died on the spot.

“The victim's relative filed a case under Section 105 of the Road Transport Act 2018. Police sent the accused to the court and seized the vehicle,” said Mohammad Moniruzzaman, officer-in-charge of Halishahar Police Station.

Sub-Inspector Abu Sayeed, who is investigating the case, said, “We

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INDO-PAK TENSIONS Trump vows to bring rivals together

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump insisted Thursday he would bring India and Pakistan to the table together after recent fighting, saying he can “solve anything.”

US diplomacy last month helped bring a ceasefire that ended four days of fighting between the nuclear-armed adversaries triggered by an attack on civilians in the Indian part of divided Kashmir.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said in announcing the ceasefire that the two nations had agreed to “start talks on a broad set of issues at a neutral site.”

The statement was welcomed by Pakistan, which has long sought an international role over Kashmir, but India – which has a warm relationship with the United States – was more circumspect.

Asked whether there remained plans for talks between India and Pakistan a month after the ceasefire, Trump said: “We're going to get those two getting together, you know?”



Once a vital waterway, the Shubhadhya Canal in South Keraniganj has long struggled against pollution and encroachment. Despite repeated restoration pledges, including one last month by Environment Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan, waste continues to choke its waters. The photo was taken yesterday near the Purba Aganagar Jora Bridge.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN



Where birds still find REFUGE

Chasing hope through Bangladesh's vanishing wetlands

Across the country, from inland floodplains to coastal mudflats, these fragile ecosystems are being drained, encroached upon, or slowly suffocated by pollution. The quiet disappearance of its wetlands may be its most dangerous, yet least visible, crisis.

SAYAM U CHOWDHURY

The sky hung low over Dhaka, wrapped in winter smog that blurred the sun and muffled the city's sounds. A heavy silence lingered as we made our way through the chaos of Sadarghat, boarding an overnight ferry bound for the coast. We were escaping the choking haze in search of open skies and tidal wetlands -- places where migratory birds still gather each winter, undisturbed by the steel and concrete of city life.

As daylight faded, we climbed to the ferry's roof, eyes scanning the banks of the Buriganga. Life stirred along its edge -- dim, fleeting shapes, the kind you only catch at dusk. Gulls and kites circled overhead, graceful scavengers gliding through the gloom. They dipped low, feeding on whatever surfaced in the thick, murky water below.

The Buriganga moved sluggishly beneath us, more sludge than river. Plastic waste clung to its surface, forming dense patches that drifted like islands. The water, dark as oil, had long ceased to flow with vitality. Once the lifeline of Dhaka, the Buriganga was the city's main water source when the Mughals declared it their capital in 1610. Now, it felt more like a grave -- a slow-moving sarcophagus of a river.

I found myself wondering what, if anything, still lived beneath that opaque surface. The image brought to mind the poisoned rivers of

yet least visible, crisis.

The reasons are all too familiar: unplanned development, expansion of agriculture, the proliferation of shrimp farms, riverbank erosion, and overfishing. Even though wetlands support millions of livelihoods and offer natural buffers against flooding and climate disasters, they remain a low priority in national planning.

Among the most threatened are the seasonal riverine floodplain grasslands -- dense, grassy islands that emerge along the Padma and Jamuna rivers during dry months. These habitats are critically important, harbouring rare species like the Bristled Grassbird, a bird once thought extinct in Bangladesh until recently rediscovered.

Our recent research reveals that these areas are disappearing fast. Cultivation and overgrazing are eroding their ecological integrity, and protection remains minimal to non-existent. Ironically, these habitats may be some of Bangladesh's richest ecosystems, both biologically and culturally, and yet they are among the most neglected.

Where life still clings to the tide

We arrived in Hatia at dawn, stepping off the ferry into salt-laced air and open skies. The tide had just begun to retreat, peeling away from the shoreline like a curtain. Before us stretched the vast intertidal flats -- rippling

and refuel during their epic seasonal journeys. When we lose these stopovers, we don't just lose birds. We unravel entire migratory networks and the natural rhythms that bind us to them.

Degradation, pollution and coastal squeeze

While parts of the southern coast have recently come under marine protection, mounting pressures threaten to outpace conservation efforts. Tidal wetlands are being converted at alarming rates -- to shrimp enclosures, salt pans, or paddy fields. These transformations often ignore ecological value in favour of short-term economic gain.

Meanwhile, the country's most visited beaches, such as Cox's Bazar, are drowning in plastic waste. Discarded bottles, packets, and fishing gear are carried by rivers from inland cities, forming a relentless conveyor belt of pollution. This detritus spills directly into delicate coastal zones, embedding itself in sand and surf. Microplastics now lace the water column and shoreline, entering food chains in ways we barely understand.

One of the most insidious threats is ghost gear -- lost or abandoned fishing nets that drift silently through the water, tangling marine life in their invisible threads. Shorebirds are especially vulnerable. Their migratory nature brings them repeatedly to polluted coastlines, where plastic concentrations are highest. These environments, which once offered refuge, are now riddled with unseen dangers.

Coastal squeeze adds another layer to the crisis. As sea levels rise due to climate change, tidal wetlands should naturally migrate inland. But in many places, embankments, roads, and settlements block their path. With nowhere to go, these habitats are slowly being drowned. The result is a gradual suffocation -- too subtle for headlines, yet devastating in scale.

What we risk, what we can save

This is not just about birds, or about scenic beauty. This is about survival and resilience. Wetlands are Bangladesh's first line of defence against storm surges, flash floods, and rising seas. They absorb excess water, stabilise shorelines, and nourish biodiversity. Their loss endangers not just wildlife, but human communities.

It is time to place wetlands at the core of national environmental policy -- not as afterthoughts, but as critical infrastructure. This means protecting what remains, restoring what has been damaged, and recognising pollution as an environmental security threat rather than just an eyesore.

Wetland systems like Tanguar Haor must be revitalised. The grabbed lands around Sonadia Island, now converted to salt farms, need to be reclaimed and returned to nature. Emerging islands like Ganguirar Char, near Bhashan Char, must be brought under legal protection before they are lost to unregulated development. And the few remaining grasslands along the great rivers must be mapped, managed, and defended.

Bangladesh is a nation born of water. Its identity, economy, and culture are deeply entwined with its rivers and wetlands. To lose these spaces is to lose something fundamental.

We came to Hatia chasing birds, but what we found was something deeper: a glimpse of a fragile future -- still alive, still wild, and still worth saving.



Great Egret



Yellow-breasted Bunting



Common Coot



River Lapwing



An Asian Woollyneck (Stork)



Bar-tailed godwit



IN THE SILENCE BETWEEN THEM

What Jaya and Sharmin Says About Women, Labour, and Care



We speak of public leadership and representation, but rarely of domestic labour protections. We critique patriarchy, but seldom the hierarchies we replicate at home. Feminism, if it is to mean anything, must make room for the women who clean our floors and carry our fevers.

CYNTHIA FARID

Jaya and Sharmin—a film produced by Jaya Ahsan—is a quiet reminder of who we were and still are, five years after the pandemic struck. In this quiet, haunting two-woman film, the pandemic is never centerstage—rather the film avoids its dramatisation. There are no sirens, no scenes of hospital chaos, no feverish handheld camera work. Instead, the film offers what most pandemic stories avoid: the internal climate of a shared household. Time slows. Fear settles. News flits across the TV, unnoticed. Through understated rhythm, the film accomplishes something powerful—it keeps the focus on the emotional, relational toll of confinement, rather than its spectacle.

This is a film about what happens when two women—one a public figure, the other a domestic worker—are confined together by circumstances within a socially stratified structure. That this is a female-led production matters. It is unmistakably shaped by women's emotional intelligence and the directorial effort is worthy of praise. This is not a "strong women" story in the Marvel Universe sense. Rather, the film shows women absorbing, enduring, witnessing, and navigating unequal

relationships—not with men, but with each other.

The film unfolds within the walls of a single home in Dhaka. Jaya, a well-known actress, moves through her days in the slow drift familiar to many of us during lockdown. She types on an old typewriter once owned by her father. She listens to BBC radio and speaks wistfully of a time when people built their mornings around the news—often as a family, as opposed to the contemporary routine of solitary consumption of social media.

As these women navigate the Pandemic-induced confinement, their days repeat. So do their meals. Their silences through walks to the rooftop or looking out the verandah—spaces where the sky is the only reminder of an outside world—have been visualised by the Director with great affect.

Sharmin, the house help, cooks, cleans, answers the phone, and listens. She is, like so many domestic workers in South Asia, physically proximate but emotionally peripheral. The pandemic may have blurred class lines for some,

but not here. In this house, caregiving is constant and unequally valued.

The film resists melodrama. There are no monologues. No climaxes. Just accumulation—of days, gestures, absences, and unmet glances. Emotional tension builds not through confrontation but through withholding. This is a film that asks us to look not at what is said, but to comprehend the silences and emotions.

At its heart, the film showcases the asymmetries of care and vulnerabilities. Sharmin is expected to serve, absorb, and remain silent—even when the emotional temperature of the house spikes. At moments, Jaya reaches out—but her concern, though sincere, is shaped by the same structures that keep Sharmin at the margins. Even when care is offered, the terms are not equal.

There is a brief reversal when Sharmin becomes unwell, and Jaya takes on the caregiving role. But the structural lines never blur. Even in vulnerability, Sharmin insists on keeping her employer safe. It is a scene that reflects a deeper truth: domestic workers are expected to carry both emotional and physical labor.

One of the most powerful choices in the film is Sharmin's eventual exit (spoiler alert!). There is no confrontation, no moral arc, no sentimental music. She simply leaves—quietly, deliberately, without being told she is safe from the disease or asked to stay. In a film where movement is constrained, her departure becomes the only unscripted act—an assertion of dignity in a space where she was never fully seen.

This is where Jaya and Sharmin becomes a mirror—of our classed households, of the



emotional economies some women sustain without acknowledgement, of the silences that define both domestic work and middle-class fragility. In Bangladesh today, as debates are raging around women's rights, this film quietly but sharply re-centers a truth we often sidestep, that many "empowerment" narratives ignore social stratification. We speak of public leadership and representation, but rarely of domestic labour protections. We critique patriarchy, but seldom the hierarchies we replicate at home. Feminism, if it is to mean anything, must make room for the women who clean our floors and carry our fevers.

The film does not preach. It opens up space for reflection—on the inequalities inside our households, on the distance between care and recognition, and on the emotional toll of being near someone without ever being fully allowed to matter. The pandemic may have locked everyone in, but it did not flatten the hierarchy inside the house. At a moment when so much public discourse is being reduced to slogans, this film dares to say less—and in that restraint, it says everything.

Dr. Cynthia Farid is an Advocate of the Supreme Court and an Independent Researcher.

WHERE FOLK MEMORY LIVES

Inside Kurigram's Bhawaiya Museum



Bhupati Bhusan Barma, retired schoolteacher, renowned Bhawaiya singer and researcher, and founder of the Bhawaiya Academy in Ulipur.



Due to severe space constraints, Bhawaiya heritage items lie exposed and unprotected across the academy's verandas.

PHOTOS: S DILIP ROY

S DILIP ROY

In the lowlands of northern Bangladesh, where the Brahmaputra weaves its ancient path and songs echo across open fields, a quiet fight to preserve cultural memory is underway. Tucked inside a modest tin-roofed building in Kurigram's Ulipur upazila, the Bhawaiya Academy has been nurturing the roots of a rich musical and rural tradition for over three decades. What started as a community effort to teach folk music has grown into something far more ambitious: a museum of living memory.

Named after the legendary Bhawaiya singer who carried the songs of the north to global audiences, the museum now shelters nearly 2,000 artefacts that once defined agrarian life in Bengal. But far from a grand institution, the collection teeters under threat, crammed into overcrowded verandas and classrooms, slowly decaying from lack of space and funding. Still, from across the country, visitors come—drawn not just by nostalgia, but by a deep desire to connect with a vanishing way of life.

More than a hundred rare tools and instruments are on display: agricultural tools like wooden ploughs, yokes, and korsi (a farming implement), bull-driving sticks, korail kuralas (small axes), bakuas (bamboo shoulder poles), topas (bamboo hats worn by farmers), winnowing fans (kula and jhapi), and pestas—circular head supports used to carry heavy loads.

Traditional paddy processing items such as urun-gan and paat are exhibited alongside fishing gear like borsi, darki, deru, palo, and chak. Baskets for storing fish like khalai and jina, musical instruments like the dotara, sarinda, dhol, and banshi, and even

wooden sandals (kharam) are all preserved—many of which are mentioned by name in Bhawaiya songs, maintaining their original northern dialect.

At the heart of this endeavour is Bhupati Bhusan Barma, a retired schoolteacher from Duragpur High School in Ulipur and a celebrated Bhawaiya singer and researcher. Since 1993, Bhupati has single-handedly collected and preserved these relics of rural life. Having performed Bhawaiya across India and abroad, he envisioned a museum that would reconnect the modern generation with their roots—not just through music, but through the tangible heritage behind the melodies.

"These are not just items," he told The Daily Star. "They are reflections of our identity and history. People may hear the songs, but through these objects, they can see the life behind the lyrics."

Explaining the naming of the museum, he added, "We could do very little to honour Kasim Uddin during his lifetime. Naming the museum after him is our humble tribute to a man who gave Bhawaiya its rightful place on the world stage."

Yet despite its growing collection and cultural importance, the museum suffers from a critical limitation—lack of infrastructure. "We have no proper space," Bhupati lamented. "Artefacts are stored in classrooms and verandas. Many are damaged or at risk of being lost forever. We need a multi-storey building to preserve this heritage, but we simply don't have the funds," he said.

The Bhawaiya Academy's journey began in 1994, when then-chairman of Duragpur Union Parishad, Golep Uddin Sarkar, donated five decimals of land. With local and limited government support, a tin-roof structure was built and the academy began offering free training in five disciplines: Bhawaiya

vocals, dotara, sarinda, dhol, and bamboo flute. Bhupati and seven other volunteers conduct weekly classes every Thursday and Friday. Currently, around 40 students attend regularly, and over 2,500 have benefited from the academy over the years.

The Bhawaiya Academy has not only preserved artefacts and melodies—it has also transformed lives. Putul Rani, now a listed Bhawaiya singer with Bangladesh Television (BTV) and Bangladesh Betar, shared how the academy shaped her journey.

"The Bhawaiya Academy gave me a new life," she told The Daily Star. "Through the training I received here, I am now a performer on both television and radio. I'm regularly invited to sing on major stages across the country."

Putul also voiced concern over the preservation of the academy's collection:

"Bhawaiya is deeply intertwined with various traditions and objects that are now disappearing. Our mentor, Bhupati Bhusan Barma, has spent years collecting them. But due to lack of space, they're left on the academy's verandas. Proper preservation is urgently needed."

Jagatpati Barma, a music instructor at the academy, emphasised the passion driving their mission. "There are eight of us who teach music here—all on a voluntary basis. We train students in Bhawaiya singing and how to play traditional Bangla instruments. We are building artists with the hope of keeping Bhawaiya alive." He added, "But preserving the instruments and heritage linked to Bhawaiya also matters. And for that, we need patronage and support."

The museum now stands as a lone guardian of a fading legacy. If given proper support, it could become a cornerstone of northern Bangladesh's cultural preservation, inspiring future generations to take pride in their roots," he said.

Even the youngest learners understand the academy's impact. Prodipto Barma Tullo, a student in Class Eight, is already performing on stage. "I'm learning to play the dotara here. I've already been invited to perform at various events. I dream of becoming a renowned dotara player someday," he said, adding, "We don't have to pay any fees for training here. Many like me are learning free of cost."

Visitors to the Bhawaiya Academy often leave with a deep emotional impression—moved not just by the music, but by the cultural treasure trove that surrounds it. Shirin Khatun, a Bhawaiya singer visiting from Rangpur, was overwhelmed by what she witnessed. "I was deeply moved by the work being done at the Ulipur Bhawaiya Academy," she told The Daily Star. "The collection of heritage and traditional items here is truly historic. But it pains me to see them not properly preserved." She stressed the importance of protecting the legacy for future generations.

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STEREOTYPES, STRUGGLE, AND SURVIVAL

Reclaiming the Story Behind Mofiz

As busloads of labourers arrived in Dhaka, they were given chits stamped with Mofiz. As demand for workers grew, employers began saying, “I need a mofiz.” The chit signaled that once work was done, the labourer would be returned via the same bus. Over time, Mofiz became a label for char migrants as disposable labour.

SAAD QUASEM

For a long time, people have made the derogatory word *mofiz* synonymous with the residents of the Rangpur region. This indignity signifies an underrating of the people of Rangpur based on poverty and poor living conditions in the northern part of Bangladesh. Today, the mention of *mofiz* commonly implies a simpleton. This buzzword layers in nation-building history which brackets in the struggles to grapple with the shackles of poverty as endemic in the country. However, the prevalence of the word *mofiz* belittles someone and assures a stereotyping of the people of the northern region spurring no introspection into the history embedded in the term. This neglect then flattens out the historical conditions which have marred the Rangpur region prevalent today but ongoing since the colonial period.

Trivial usage of the loaded term even gravitated to leaders in the now fallen, then ruling party. Asaduzzaman Noor, in a public rally in 2023, lauded the wave of development under the Hasina regime, recalling the difference to shoddy infrastructure under other governments in Nilphamari and other northern areas. Noor called out Ehsanul Huq Milon, a former BNP Minister for labelling people from the north as *mofiz*. Noor took credit for his party's success in developing infrastructure in the north citing the daily eighteen flights Syedpur airport as a clear example. Rather, he labelled the BNP as the only remaining *mofiz* in the country.

seasonal flooding and erosion, forcing Chardwellers to constantly rebuild, often in new chars. This constant displacement disrupts income and keeps people stuck in poverty. In the monsoon, there's no work due to widespread flooding. Most income is earned between late October and early June, and that must stretch through the monsoon. The pre-harvest period brings *monga*, a seasonal famine. Living hand-to-mouth, savings run out fast, and every year the struggle starts over. The floodplains make it hard to generate stable income.

Political crises, alongside constant flooding and erosion, continue to push Chilmari's Chardwellers deeper into poverty. During the 1974 famine, they were among the hardest hit, with Basanti's image drawing global attention. In response, seasonal migration became a key coping mechanism. Since the 1970s, many men have travelled to Dhaka around October in search of short-term work. Economic growth in the capital created opportunities in sectors like garments, construction, and rickshaw pulling, despite the risks involved. These migrants typically return by early December, as Hemanta (late autumn) ends, and the agrarian season begins along the Brahmaputra's fertile banks.

Two narratives of the term *Mofiz* circulate in Chilmari and among the char

began to see Chardwellers as simple, unsophisticated, even backward. Over time, *Mofiz* became a stereotype, used to label incoming migrants as people unfit for the pace and complexity of city life. A name born from hardship turned into a slur that reduced survival into shame.

Colonial Roots of Otherisation

British colonial records painted the chars of Chilmari as volatile spaces rife with trouble. A 1907 report



described these areas as violent frontiers. Because of this, the chars became fixed in the colonial imagination as wild and dangerous lands. This perception did not disappear after colonial times but continues to affect how people view and treat Chilmari and its residents. The British often portrayed the locals as tricky or untrustworthy. For example, a settlement officer in Rangpur noted that when asked for directions, locals often replied, “Mui Chengra Manish Babu, Mui Ki Jannoo,” meaning “I am just a boy Sir, what do I know.” The respondent was confused because river routes were complex and giving wrong information could cause trouble. Yet colonial officials took this as proof of their unreliability. This kind of labeling entered official records and helped build the stereotype of *Mofiz* as backward and simple.

The colonial rulers wanted to incorporate these lands and people into their system in a way that allowed better control. They portrayed the Chardwellers as both helpless and violent, which pushed them out of the national picture. Whether in Dhaka or London, the mention of “Char” or “Chilmari” evokes predictable responses. Any time I mention research in Chilmari, I receive the response “Oh, *mofiz*,” which exemplifies the baggage attached to the place. Similarly, when I mention the chars, or the chars of Chilmari specifically, people often ask, “Do lathiyals still operate there?” Mining into the crevices of colonial history, one can trace a connection between the colonial history of land-making and the otherisation of char dwellers, namely from Chilmari.

Lathiyal (stickbearers) or lathiyal bahini (gangs of stickbearers) actively guarded char land. When land disappeared, everyone lost control, but once it re-emerged the landowners needed to regain it. Each large landlord patronised lathiyal bahini (battalion) who fought battles with others of the same occupation to take control over the newly emerged char. Though the prevalence of lathiyals faded in recent years, the legacy still remains as the mere mention of chars conjures images of stick-laden bloody brawls. One such depiction can be found in the Subarna Mustafa film *Gohin Baluchor* released in 2017.

Colonial documents also raised concerns about squatters and opium trafficking in the region. These squatters were mostly displaced farmers from nearby districts who lost land due to erosion. At the same time, industries in Assam required labour. The empty chars near the Brahmaputra became a stopping point for displaced people either moving on to Assam or trying to settle down. These migrants, known as *Bhatias*, challenged colonial authority. Zamindars' agents lent money to these settlers hoping to make them labourers and keep control. But many could not repay their debts, leading to conflicts and forcing them to move again. Officials labeled the *Bhatias* as unreliable and noted they preferred Assam's charlands because those areas had fewer land laws. This portrayal criminalised their mobility and linked char settlements with disorder. What was really happening was not just prejudice but colonial accumulation from unstable lands. The chars and their inhabitants were made to seem disposable and wild to justify continued colonial exploitation.

This long history of colonial othering still shapes how the state talks about the chars and influences public perception. Because of this, chars remain marginalised in the national imagination. The people of Chilmari and similar areas are still belittled or dismissed through terms like *Mofiz*, which have roots in colonial stereotypes. This legacy, born in colonial times, continues through modern governance, limiting how these communities are understood and treated, which becomes explicit in everyday language in the city.

Erasing Identity at Scale

It's not just the term *Mofiz* used in the city or the colonial enframing of chars as violent and criminal frontiers and people in the north as simple, Chilmari itself holds within it layers of differences amongst its residents in the chars and in *qayem* (stable, mainland). In Chilmari, locals distinguish between *Bangals*, who speak Rungpuriya, the dialect and *Bhatias*, who speak a mix of Mymensingh and Rajshahi dialects. Despite differences in identity, they intermarry, share daily life, and face the same instability shaped by erosion and state neglect. Over time, the informal line between *Bangal* and *Bhatia* has thinned, replaced by a shared sense of what it means to live in the chars.

But the same response does not measure up to the mainland view on chardwellers. Terms like *Bhatia* or *Charua* are used with judgment. “Oh the *Bhatia*, they eat too many

spices,” someone might say, as if the river gave them a different nature. They're called bold or too wild as shaped by the flow of the river unlike mainlanders, who, at least for now, are spared that chaos. Some even call them “Rohingya,” like they don't belong. “Everyone in Chilmari is a Rohingya then,” a Chardweller replies insisting that in the Bengal Delta, it is very much possible to lose all kinds of land in a go and therefore, everyone technically lives on chars and could face similar belittling someday, perhaps soon, perhaps intergenerationally later.

Everyday Language as a Barrier to the Way Forward

People living in the chars are not just geographically remote; they are continually made socially distant as well. Mainlanders and urban folk alike taunt them, often without reflection, for the very environment they are forced to adapt to. Both state and society treat the riverine lands as homes to the vulnerable who are also called “backward,” reinforcing a narrative of marginalisation.

The casual use of terms like *Mofiz* normalises exclusion. The name developed among migrants grappling with poverty, land loss, and state neglect. It once served as part of a survival vocabulary, a marker of resilience for those navigating erosion, displacement, and hardship. But over time, rather than representing struggle and endurance, *Mofiz* has become a shorthand for stereotyping entire communities.

When politicians use the term *Mofiz* to mock their opponents, the real issue lies in a collective language of humiliation. Geography and history are flattened into a slur, stripping people of their stories, respect, and context. Certainly, the cause for concern extends beyond a single word. Rather, the inability to keep up with differences layered in environmentally fragile areas causes worry. Soaring levels of climate-induced migration from low-lying regions like Chilmari have been predicted. If Bangladesh continues to turn ecological vulnerability into cultural inferiority, then future displacement will be met not with solidarity, but with more othering.

The plight of the displaced in adjusting to the new climates warrants critical attention. Readiness to address environmental issues requires awareness of the language used to describe populations. Perhaps practices of stereotyping threaten populations in need of a better environment more than the climate itself. Talking about *Mofiz* should not be confined to a side issue, but rather tells a worrying sign of institutional shortcomings where the usage of such terms is not discouraged.

The word *Mofiz* thus points to the bigger story of how Bangladesh still struggles to make space for its own diversity.

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Floodwaters surround the Patrakhata Feichka Government Primary School and nearby homesteads in the Putimari char area of Kurigram's Chilmari upazila, as the Brahmaputra continues to flow above danger levels. The photo was taken on July 10, 2024.

Identifying BNP as *mofiz* notes the party as simple in thought and slow in action. Such remarks to scorn the opposition fell in line with similar comments directed at slighting the opposition by the totalitarian party in power. Be it a political party that uses the term *mofiz* to describe political inaptitude, the quick usage of the term implies the quickness of politicians to use the jab. The term *mofiz* has entered the urban jingo to stereotype the people of the north. It is not politicians alone who use the term, but everyday users who repeat it and almost institutionalise the erasure of the plight of the people being described, let alone otherising the people of the north into a certain pejorative demeanour.

The Waterscape

Chilmari is one of the poorest parts of Bangladesh, with over 77% of people living below the poverty line. Sitting on the Brahmaputra floodplains, it's hit hard by

diaspora in Dhaka. One traces back to the late 1970s, when a direct bus service from Chilmari to Dhaka opened up seasonal labour opportunities in the capital. The service, launched by an entrepreneur named *Mofiz*, grew into a profitable business. As busloads of labourers arrived in Dhaka, they were given chits stamped with *Mofiz*. As demand for workers grew, employers began saying, “I need a *mofiz*.” The chit signaled that once work was done, the labourer would be returned via the same bus. Over time, *Mofiz* became a label for char migrants as disposable labour, tied to a bus route, and shaped by the state's neglect of river-induced hardship.

The other story tells of a man named *Mofiz* from Chilmari who arrived in Dhaka and struggled to navigate the unfamiliar city. Differences in language and behavior marked him and others like him as outsiders. Urban residents



PHOTO: S DILIP ROY



MANGO MOMENT

A sweet deal for Bangladesh

In a best-case scenario, mango-based export industries could bring about major socio-economic change through employment, rural development, and foreign exchange earnings.

SUKANTA HALDER and
JAGARAN CHAKMA

In late May, as mercury levels rise and monsoon clouds loom over the parched plains and verdant hills of Bangladesh, the mango harvest quietly gets underway, ushering in a season of sweetness just as the rains prepare to break.

Trucks groaning under crates of golden mangoes barrel down highways from Chapainawabganj and Rajshahi, the heartlands of Bangladesh's mango belt.

In markets from Dhaka to Chattogram, retailers jostle for prime spots while eager consumers queue for their first bite of the delectable local

seasonal traders have long found the mango business a profitable venture, the country has made little progress in turning it into a staple of its agro-industrial portfolio.

Industry insiders point to a missed opportunity. With the increasing import of foreign fruit juices, jams, and jellies, Bangladesh has both the need and potential to develop a mango-based value-added industry.

Even if international sales remain modest, substituting imports with local production could retain significant capital within the country.

In a best-case scenario, mango-based export industries could bring about major socio-economic change through employment, rural development, and foreign exchange earnings.

Since 1985, the government has launched several initiatives to expand mango production. Yet the fruit is still



Bangladesh produces 24 to 25 lakh tonnes of mangoes annually, according to Mohammad Arifur Rahman, project director of the Exportable Mango Production Project.

This fuels a domestic market worth around Tk 13,000 to Tk 14,000 crore.

However, barriers to export persist. While the flavour of Bangladeshi mangoes is often considered superior, their short shelf life and inconsistent appearance limit global competitiveness.

"The taste is unmatched, but our exports suffer due to issues with colour and perishability," Rahman noted.

Mango season is a boom time in districts like Naogaon, Rajshahi, and Chapainawabganj. Nearly the entire local population — students, hotel operators, truckers, and online sellers — gets involved. Among the most common varieties are Himsagar, Langra, Fazli, and Amrapali, while hybrid varieties like Kathimon are gaining ground due to their bi-seasonal availability.

In the CHT, where mango cultivation is growing, challenges are acute. While mangoes from three hill districts are of high quality, ecological complexity and

of 10 percent annually during the last five years. Across the country, around 80,000 people participate in the mango economy each season, from labourers and e-commerce operators to couriers and processors.

With 72 mango varieties in production and exports to 38 countries, Bangladesh's footprint is expanding. "At one time, quality was an issue. But now, farmers are producing export-standard mangoes with support from the government," Rahman said.

China, Japan, and Australia expressed interest in importing Bangladeshi mangoes this year. On this year's National Mango Launch Day alone (May 28), 10 tonnes were exported to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, England, and Germany.

This season, 153 tonnes have already been shipped to 13 countries.

Packing houses have been built in major production areas and farmers are being trained to follow Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) to ensure safety and quality.

Supermarkets in Switzerland and Sweden now stock Bangladeshi mangoes. The project also seeks to link farmers directly with exporters to reduce middlemen and ensure better prices for growers.

One of the industry's champions is Munjer Alam, an agripreneur from Chapainawabganj who left his corporate job in 2017.

He now manages a 135-bigha integrated farm, with 30 bighas under mango cultivation. "We're moving into dried mango, jam, powder, and juice. Processing gives us year-round income," Alam said.

He began exporting to the Maldives in 2023 and is now targeting Canada and the Middle East.

Alam estimates the mango sector's true value at Tk 30,000–35,000 crore, far above official figures.

"We need better post-harvest and quarantine infrastructure. If that's addressed, mangoes could become a billion-dollar export item," he said.

Another innovative voice is Abdun Nur Simul from Rajshahi, a seasonal orchard leaser and e-commerce mango trader. Simul has been in the mango business for four years.

"We lease high-yielding trees and oversee the entire process ourselves. Our mangoes go directly to customers via courier," Simul said.

Although the business is growing gradually, he said rising costs and erratic weather remain challenges.

His blend of traditional orchard leasing with modern logistics reflects a new frontier for mango marketing.

In the CHT, the mango revolution is reshaping lives. Historically self-reliant and ecologically balanced, the region is now becoming a fruit basket for the country, accounting for around 20 percent of national fruit production.

Debashish Chakma of Panchari, Khagrachhari, began farming on 15 acres in 2012 after leaving his job.

Today, he earns around Tk 25 lakh annually and employs 10 workers year-round. "More than 1,000 educated agribusiness entrepreneurs are active in Khagrachhari alone," he said. "We're laying the groundwork for an agro-processing boom."

One such visionary is Prasnata Chakma, a college lecturer-turned-agriculturist. "In 2022, I expanded from 60 to 1,500 trees. This year, I earned Tk 2.4 lakh," he said.

By 2030, he hopes to earn over Tk 50 lakh annually from mango and other fruits, including avocados, lemons, and wood apples.

Prasnata has already invested over Tk 14 lakh in his orchards over the past three years. His focus on pesticide-free, naturally grown mangoes has earned him a loyal customer base.

"The demand for clean, safe fruit is growing—and the hills are ideal for it," he added.

Currently, around 3,500 mango growers in Khagrachhari produce 60,000 tonnes annually, generating Tk 250 crore in revenue. With production growing by at least 10 percent yearly, the region's economic transformation is well underway.

The secret to their success? Purity. "We don't use harmful pesticides or toxic chemicals," Prasnata points out. "Our mangoes are naturally grown, and that's why consumers from the plains — and increasingly from beyond — are drawn to them."

Prasnata's story is more than just an individual success — it's a beacon of possibility for the entire CHT.

MA Sattar Mandal, professor emeritus at the Bangladesh Agricultural University in Mymensingh, said, "The time has come to unlock the full economic potential of mangoes — we urgently need a comprehensive national mango strategy."

Speaking to The Daily Star, Mandal, a leading voice in agricultural policy reform, outlined a vision that stretches far beyond seasonal harvests and roadside stalls.

He stressed the need for an integrated policy framework that nurtures the entire mango value chain — from varietal development and orchard management to advanced post-harvest handling, processing, and global marketing.

"To build a competitive mango economy, we must scale up research and development, provide soft loans to growers and exporters, and set up dedicated mango clusters with modern cold storage facilities, processing units, and transport networks," he said.

Mandal believes Bangladesh already holds many of the building blocks needed for success: fertile land, a favourable climate, rich varietal diversity, and a hardworking farming community. "What's missing," he argued, "is coordinated policy and institutional backing that would allow this sector to thrive both domestically and internationally."

He also called for a paradigm shift — from viewing mangoes as a seasonal harvest to recognising them as a core agro-industrial commodity.



missing from the national industrial strategy and is not treated as a strategic agro-processing product.

Currently, mangoes are cultivated across nearly 120,000 acres in Bangladesh, with key regions including Chapainawabganj, Rajshahi, Naogaon, and the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), according to the Exportable Mango Production Project under the agriculture ministry.

The mango's economic importance is reflected in the labour it employs. In Chapainawabganj alone, every 10-acre orchard hires six to seven workers for a month, generating seasonal employment for nearly 80,000 people. Globally, mangoes play a significant

varieties, especially Langra or Himsagar — sweet, fragrant, and fleeting.

In this flurry of trade and taste lies a paradox: Bangladesh grows some of the world's most delicious mangoes, yet has barely scratched the surface of its economic potential.

Despite producing over 20 lakh tonnes annually, mangoes remain a seasonal indulgence rather than a strategic industry. Processing remains minimal, exports are limited, and infrastructure is patchy.

According to the Agricultural Information Service, mangoes are not only the most widely grown and consumed fruit in the country but also among the most versatile in terms of use and nutrition.

Grown across all regions of Bangladesh, its rich aroma, sweet taste, and nutrient content have earned it the title of the "King of Fruits".

Yet, despite their popularity and widespread cultivation, mangoes remain undervalued as a formal industrial commodity.

While farmers, nursery owners, and



economic role in countries like the Philippines and India.

The Philippines employs spurring techniques for year-round production, while India has successfully positioned its mango industry as an agro-export powerhouse.

lack of consistent pest control hinder the residue-free certification needed for exports. "The quality is promising, but we still lack adequate assurance mechanisms," Rahman said.

Despite these hurdles, mango production has grown by an average