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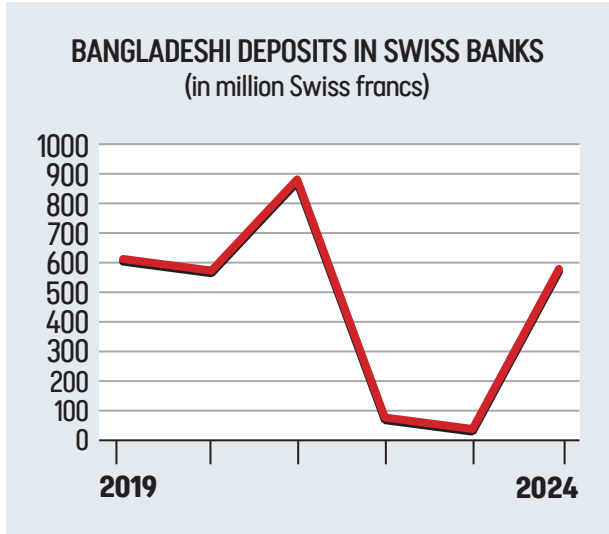
# SWISS BANKS Funds linked to Bangladesh hit 3-year high

Jumped to 589.5m francs in 2024  
from 17.7m the previous year

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Bangladeshi-linked funds parked in Swiss banks surged to 589.5 million Swiss francs, or about Tk 8,800 crore, in 2024, their highest level in three years, according to data released by the Swiss National Bank (SNB) yesterday.

The sharp rise, which marked a stark reversal after two years of steep decline, coincided with a tumultuous



political transition in Bangladesh last year. Analysts said the upheaval may have triggered a wave of capital outflows as politically connected individuals sought to stash their assets abroad.

This increase in offshore funds during a year of uprising raises questions about Bangladesh's ability to stem suspicious outflows.

"It's not just about Swiss banks any more. From Dubai

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A drone photo shows the damage at the impacted site following a missile attack from Iran on Israel's Holon yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## ‘Two weeks for diplomacy’

Trump says US to decide during this window on its involvement in the escalating Iran-Israel conflict

AGENCIES

US President Donald Trump yesterday said he will decide whether to attack Iran within the next two weeks due to a "substantial" chance of negotiations, as Israel and its regional rival traded fire for a seventh day.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt read out a message from Trump at a briefing, saying there had been "a lot of speculation" about whether the United States would be "directly involved."

"Based on the fact that there's a substantial chance of negotiations that may or may not take place with Iran in the near future, I will make my decision whether or not to go within the next two weeks," Leavitt quoted Trump as saying.

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- Israel says Khamenei 'cannot exist'
- Iranian missiles hit Israeli military sites, hospital
- Israel steps up attacks on Iranian defence, nuclear sites
- Iran FM to meet top European diplomats today
- Putin, Xi urge diplomatic solution to war

## EC drafts stricter electoral code

Adds provision to cancel candidacy for serious breach

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission is set to adopt a stricter electoral code of conduct with a provision to disqualify any candidate for serious breach of conduct.

The newly finalised draft also includes other stricter penalties for breaches of conduct.

The draft makes it mandatory for all political parties and candidates to formally commit in writing that they would follow the code.

There is a new provision for candidates to present their manifestos from a specific platform simultaneously.

Campaign posters will be prohibited in a bid to make the election environment friendly and disciplined.

Besides, members of the advisory council will not be able to participate in any election campaign as the

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## ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

### ‘Armed forces not involved but were aware’


Says inquiry commission

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Although not institutionally involved, the armed forces were aware of the enforced disappearances that took place during the 15-year Awami League regime, according to the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances.

"Institutionally, the Bangladesh Armed Forces were not involved in enforced disappearances. However, their officers who had been deputed to the Rab, DGFI, and NSI have been found to be complicit in the acts of enforced disappearances," Justice Moyeenul, chairman of the commission, told a press conference at the commission's Gulshan office yesterday.

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## গণবিজ্ঞপ্তি

### শিল্পকারখানা ও পয়ঃবর্জ্য দ্বারা খাল-বিল-নদ-নদী-জলাশয়-জলাভূমি দূষণ রোধে জরুরি নির্দেশনা

নদীমাতৃক বাংলাদেশের প্রাণ আমাদের খাল-বিল-নদ-নদী-জলাশয়-জলাভূমি-প্রাণভূমি আজ শিল্পকারখানার বর্জ্য এবং অপরিশোধিত পয়ঃবর্জ্যের কারণে মারাত্মকভাবে দূষিত হচ্ছে। এই দূষণ জনস্বাস্থ্য, মৎস্য সম্পদ, কৃষি এবং সামগ্রিক পরিবেশের ওপর ভয়াবহ নেতিবাচক প্রভাব ফেলছে। দেশের অর্থনীতি ও ভবিষ্যৎ প্রজন্মের সুস্থ জীবন নিশ্চিত করতে এই দূষণ রোধ করা অপরিহার্য।

পরিবেশ সংরক্ষণ আইন ১৯৯৫ (সংশোধিত ২০১০) এবং পরিবেশ সংরক্ষণ বিধিমালা ২০২৩ অনুযায়ী নিম্নলিখিত বিষয়গুলো কঠোরভাবে মেনে চলার নির্দেশনা দেওয়া হচ্ছে:

**শিল্পকারখানার মালিকদের প্রতি নির্দেশনা:**

- তরল বর্জ্য সৃষ্টিকারী সকল শিল্প কারখানায় আধুনিক তরল বর্জ্য পরিশোধনাগার(Effluent Treatment Plant-ETP) স্থাপন করতে হবে এবং সৃষ্ট তরল বর্জ্য শতভাগ পরিশোধন করে নির্গমন করতে হবে। খাল-বিল-নদ-নদী-জলাশয়-জলাভূমিতে অপরিশোধিত তরল বর্জ্য নির্গমন কঠোরভাবে নিষিদ্ধ;
- শিল্প কারখানায় স্থাপিত ইটিপি কার্যকারিতাবে চালু রাখার ব্যবস্থা নিশ্চিত করতে হবে। ইটিপি সঠিকভাবে কাজ না করলে বা বন্ধ রাখলে কঠোর আইনানুগ ব্যবস্থা গ্রহণ করা হবে;
- পরিবেশগত ছাড়পত্র ব্যতীত কোনো শিল্পকারখানা পরিচালনা করা যাবে না। ছাড়পত্রের শর্তাবলী যথাযথভাবে পরিপালন করতে হবে;
- বিষাক্ত রাসায়নিক ও ক্ষতিকর বর্জ্য কোনো অবস্থাতেই সরাসরি নদীতে বা উন্মুক্ত স্থানে ফেলা যাবে না। এগুলোর নিরাপদ সংগ্রহ, পরিবহন ও নিষ্পত্তির সুব্যবস্থা নিশ্চিত করতে হবে।

**পয়ঃবর্জ্য ব্যবস্থাপনার নির্দেশনা:**

- শহর ও জনবসতি এলাকার পয়ঃবর্জ্য সরাসরি কোনো জলাশয়ে, বিশেষত নদীতে, অপরিশোধিত অবস্থায় নিক্ষেপন করা যাবে না। সিটি কর্পোরেশন, পৌরসভা এবং সংশ্লিষ্ট কর্তৃপক্ষকে পয়ঃবর্জ্য পরিশোধনের জন্য পয়ঃবর্জ্য পরিশোধনাগার(Sewage Treatment Plant-STP) স্থাপন ও পরিচালনার ব্যবস্থা নিতে হবে;
- প্রতিটি বাসাবাড়ি, বাণিজ্যিক প্রতিষ্ঠান, হাসপাতাল ও অন্যান্য স্থাপনায় যথাযথ মানসম্পন্ন সেপটিক ট্যাঙ্ক এবং সোক পিট (Soak Pit) ব্যবহার করতে হবে;
- পয়ঃবর্জ্য ব্যবস্থাপনার জন্য উন্মুক্ত ডেন বা সরাসরি খাল-বিল-নদ-নদী-জলাশয়-জলাভূমির সাথে সংযোগ স্থাপন থেকে বিরত থাকুন। একটি সমন্বিত ও কার্যকর বর্জ্য ড্রেনেজ ব্যবস্থা নিশ্চিত করুন।

**আইন অমান্যকারীদের বিরুদ্ধে কঠোর ব্যবস্থা:**


উল্লিখিত নির্দেশনা অমান্যকারী ব্যক্তি বা প্রতিষ্ঠানের বিরুদ্ধে পরিবেশ সংরক্ষণ আইন ১৯৯৫ (সংশোধিত ২০১০) অনুযায়ী কঠোর ব্যবস্থা গ্রহণ করা হবে। এর মধ্যে রয়েছে ক্ষতিপূরণ ধার্য্য ও আদায়, শিল্পকারখানার সেবা সংযোগ বিচ্ছিন্নকরণ, অর্থদণ্ড বা কারাদণ্ড অথবা উভয়দণ্ডে দণ্ডিতকরণ।

আসুন, আমরা সকলে সচেতন হই এবং পরিবেশ দূষণ রোধে সরকারের এই প্রচেষ্টায় সহযোগিতা করি।

আমাদের ভবিষ্যৎ প্রজন্মের জন্য একটি সুস্থ ও পরিচ্ছন্ন পরিবেশ নিশ্চিত করা আমাদের সকলের সম্মিলিত দায়িত্ব।


মহাপরিচালক  
পরিবেশ অধিদপ্তর  
পরিবেশ, বন ও জলবায়ু পরিবর্তন মন্ত্রণালয়

GD-1429




### ‘Realistically, repatriation is not possible at this time’

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### Who bears responsibility for the diplomatic misstep?

P12




### India targeting Sikh movement in North America, says Canada

P7



## সুহর আল মুল্ক


[He] who created death and life to test you [as to] which of you is best in deed and He is the Exalted in Might, the Forgiving.  
Surah Al-Mulk – 67:2




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
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
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PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Children wade through water to reach this half dry patch of land to play football in Sunamganj's Chhatak upazila. The whole pitch is surrounded by arable land that has gone under water in recent heavy rains.

## 24 pushed in through Feni, Khagrachhari

STAR REPORT

At least 24 people were pushed into Bangladesh allegedly by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) through borders in Feni and Khagrachhari yesterday.

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) members detained 11 of them after they entered Bangladesh via Jashpur border in Feni's Chhagalnaiya upazila around 2:00am yesterday.

The detainees include a man, seven women, and three children, said Lt Col Mohammad Mosharraf Hossain, commander of BGB-4 Battalion in Feni.

During primary interrogation, the detainees said they are from Jashore, Narail, and Satkhira. They had entered India illegally to work there.

The detainees were handed over to Chhagalnaiya Police Station, said the BGB official.

In Khagrachhari, 13 people were pushed into Bangladesh allegedly by BSF through the Tanakkapara area in Matiranga upazila, reports Prothom Alo.

BGB members detained them, said Matiranga Upazila Nirbahi Officer Monjur Alam.

During primary interrogation, the detainees said they are residents of Narail. The process of verifying their identities was underway, the UNO added.

[A correspondent from Feni contributed to this report.]

## 3 teens run over by train in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Three teenagers were killed after being hit by a train on Dhaka-Chattogram railway lines in Mirsharai upazila of Chattogram last night.

The incident took place near Chinki Astana Railway Station around 8:00pm, said police.

The victims, aged around 18, were Arafat, Anis, and Riaz.

They were residents of Sonapahar under Jorarganj Police Station in Chattogram.

Quoting locals, Masuk Mia, additional superintendent of Chattogram Railway Police, said the three were standing near the railway lines and busy with their mobile phones when the Dhaka-bound Sonar Bangla Express was passing by. They were hit by the running train, leaving them critically injured.

Locals rushed the injured to the Mirsharai Upazila Health Complex, where on-duty doctors declared them dead, he added.

## 5 secretaries, a grade-1 official

FROM PAGE 16

According to the notifications, all six officials have completed 25 years in service, and the government has deemed their retirement necessary in public interest.

They will receive retirement benefits as per the rules, the ministry said.

Under the act, the government retains the authority to retire any government employee without justification, as long as the individual has completed 25 years of service.

In such cases, the employees are entitled to full retirement benefits along with other applicable entitlements.

## Funds linked to Bangladesh

FROM PAGE 1

to Ireland, new safe havens are emerging where you can buy properties, open accounts, and move money more discreetly," said Zahid Hussain, former lead economist at the World Bank's Dhaka office.

"The secrecy that once defined Swiss banking is no longer what it used to be," he told The Daily Star.

"A deposit in a Swiss bank coming from the UK may be legal, but that doesn't mean the money wasn't laundered earlier through under-invoicing in trade. And we can't rule out that these funds passed through legal channels before landing in Swiss banks, especially given how sophisticated illicit flows have become," said Hussain, who was part of a government-formed panel that authored a white paper on the state of Bangladesh's economy.

A total of \$234 billion was siphoned off from Bangladesh between 2009 and 2023, according to the white paper

## 'Two weeks for diplomacy'

FROM PAGE 1

Leavitt declined to say if Trump would seek congressional authorisation for any strikes on Iran.

The statement came as the week-old air war escalated with no sign yet of an off-ramp.

The statement from the White House came as Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said he is set to meet with top diplomats of Britain, France, Germany and the European Union today in Geneva.

He said the meeting had come at the request of the three European states.

On the ground, Israel yesterday bombed nuclear targets in Iran, and Iran fired missiles and drones at Israel. Israel said a strike on an Israeli hospital overnight injured at least 40 people.

Following the strike that damaged the Soroka medical centre in Israel's southern city of Beersheba, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Tehran's "tyrants" would pay the "full price".

Defence Minister Israel Katz said the military had been instructed to intensify strikes on strategic targets in Tehran in order to eliminate the threat to Israel and destabilise the "Ayatollah regime".

Katz also warned that Iran's supreme leader "can no longer be allowed to exist".

Iran said the attack was targeted at Israeli military and intelligence headquarters near the hospital. An Israeli military official denied there were military targets nearby.

The escalation and threats came as global powers urged the warring parties to find a diplomatic solution.

China's President Xi Jinping yesterday held a phone call with Russia's Vladimir Putin, and after that, urged a ceasefire between Iran and Israel.

"Parties to the conflict, especially Israel, should cease hostilities as soon as possible to prevent a cyclical escalation and resolutely avoid the spillover of the war," Xi said, according to Xinhua.

Earlier, Moscow reiterated its call for peace and warned the US not to take military action against Iran.

Moscow is one of Iran's most important allies, with the two deepening military cooperation and inking a strategic partnership agreement just months ago.

According to Israeli, Western and regional officials, Israel's sweeping campaign of airstrikes aims to do more than destroy Iran's nuclear centrifuges and missile capabilities.

published in December last year. As per the report, the laundered money was sent to or routed primarily through the UAE, the UK, Canada, the US, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and India, as well as a number of tax havens.

Deposits linked to Bangladeshi nationals and entities in Swiss banks jumped 33-fold in 2024 from the previous year, when holdings had dropped to a record low of just 17.7 million francs. The deposits declined sharply also in 2022, following a post-pandemic peak of 871 million francs in 2021 amid growing global scrutiny of illicit financial flows.

The SNB data, released annually, tracks funds held in all currencies by Bangladeshi nationals, residents, or corporate entities in Swiss banks under the category "Banks in Switzerland". It does not disaggregate by type of depositor or specific purpose of the funds.

Swiss banks have historically been associated with financial secrecy,

leading to concerns about their role in facilitating illicit money flows. While recent reforms have increased transparency and cooperation with international authorities, Swiss banks continue to be scrutinised for their handling of funds potentially linked to money laundering.

From 2015 to 2020, Bangladeshi deposits in Swiss banks typically ranged between 480 million and 660 million francs. The latest spike is expected to draw renewed scrutiny, particularly as Bangladesh's interim government has made financial transparency and asset recovery a core part of its reform agenda.

"Based on global experience, the recovery rate for illicit outflows is just around 1 percent," Hussain said. "To get the money back, you have to win legal cases in both countries -- where it originated and where it ended up. It's not just about knowing the money left illegally -- you have to prove it in court, twice."

developed bunker-busting bombs.

The Wall Street Journal reported that Trump had told aides on Tuesday he had approved attack plans but was holding off to see if Iran would give up its nuclear programme.

A week of Israeli air and missile strikes against its major rival has wiped out the top echelon of Iran's military command, damaged its nuclear capabilities and killed hundreds of people, while Iranian retaliatory strikes have killed at least two dozen civilians in Israel.

Iran has been weighing its options in responding to its biggest security challenge since the 1979 revolution. A member of the Iranian Parliament's National Security Committee Presidium, Behnam Saedi, told the semi-official Mehr news agency Iran could consider closing the Strait of Hormuz, through which 20 percent of daily global oil consumption passes.

Amid the raging conflict, countries around the world are taking measures to evacuate their citizens from Israel and Iran. The airspace in the region remains closed.

Israel, which has the most advanced military in the Middle East, has been fighting on several fronts since October 7, 2023, when it its Gaza offensive. Since then it has severely weakened Iran's regional allies, Hamas in Gaza and Lebanon's Hezbollah, and bombed Yemen's Houthis.

The extent of the damage inside Iran from the week-old bombing campaign has become more difficult to assess in recent days, with the authorities apparently seeking to prevent panic by limiting information.

Iran has stopped giving updates on the death toll, and state media have ceased showing widespread images of destruction. The internet has been almost completely shut down, and the public has been banned from filming.

Israel has issued evacuation orders for whole sections of Tehran, a city of 10 million. Thousands of residents have fled, said reports.

Inside Israel, the missile strikes over the past week are the first time a significant number of projectiles from Iran have pierced defences and killed Israelis in their homes.

According to Israeli newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth, thousands of people in Israel have become homeless as a result of Iran's retaliatory missile attacks.

The Israeli Ministry of Interior classified 5,110 people as homeless, including 907 from Tel Aviv, the report said.

## EC drafts stricter code

FROM PAGE 1

advisers, ministers and lawmakers are now in a category of "very important persons".

Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) Abul Fazal Sanaullah yesterday said the draft was finalised at a meeting of the election commissioners.

"The draft will be uploaded to the Election Commission website, and people will be invited to give their opinions on it," he said.

The provision to cancel the candidacy is being included for the first time, he said.

According to article 91 (1) of the draft, if the Election Commission (EC) receives information that a candidate, their agent, or someone acting on their behalf has committed a serious offence or violated election rules -- either directly or with their consent -- the EC can launch an investigation. The candidate will get a fair chance to respond to the allegation.

If the investigation finds the candidate guilty, the EC can cancel that individual's candidacy.

Certain restrictions have also been imposed on the use of government facilities like circuit houses, bungalows, and rest houses during campaigns, he said.

As of now, the highest punishment for violation of the electoral code of conduct was six months in prison and a fine of Tk 50,000. For a political party, the highest fine used to be Tk 50,000.

The provision for imprisonment remains unchanged, Sanaullah said, but the fine will be raised to Tk 1.5

lakh.

"This was one of the recommendations from the electoral reform commission," he said.

**NEW RULES**

Sanaullah said parties and candidates would be able to use billboards. "The proposal to ban the use of posters also came from the reform commission, and we agreed with it."

There is an emphasis on the use of eco-friendly materials on campaign trails.

"A decision has been made to introduce voter slips. The restrictions on T-shirts and jackets will be relaxed."

Individuals serving or nominated as chairpersons or members of the governing bodies of educational institutions will be required to resign from those positions once their candidacy is finalised, because teachers from these institutions often serve as presiding and polling officers, he said, adding that it was also recommended by the reform commission.

Restrictions on the participation of government employees and the use of state institutions, and properties will be stricter. No foreigner will be allowed to fund social media campaigns for a candidate, Sanaullah said.

Yesterday's EC meeting included two agenda: finalising the code of conduct, and discussing the redrawing of the boundaries of constituencies.

"Due to time constraints and the unavailability of some data, we could not discuss the delimitation of parliamentary constituencies. We expect to do it by next week."

## Parties split over

FROM PAGE 16

electd representatives from local government bodies alongside parliament members.

The AB Party, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, Khelafat Majlish, Nagorik Oikya, and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Bangladesh expressed support for an electoral college system.

Islami Andolan Bangladesh, Nizam-e-Islam, and the Bangladesh Labour Party want a direct presidential election.

Ali Riaz, vice president of the consensus commission, said Sunday's discussions would go back to unresolved issues such as the election system for the president, the prime minister's tenure, the mechanism for electing 100 reserved seats for women in parliament, and the proposed bicameral legislature.

Speaking to reporters, Riaz noted that most parties were in favour of a bicameral system with a 100-seat upper house, but added, "Further discussions are needed on several related matters."

He also acknowledged that full consensus may not be realistic under current circumstances, but stressed that both the commission and the parties were committed to reaching agreements on key reforms.

BNP Standing Committee Member Salahuddin Ahmed told reporters his party supported amending article 70 of the constitution to allow parliament members to vote independently, except on finance bills and no-confidence motions. He added that the BNP advocates a secret ballot in presidential elections to ensure transparency and neutrality.

On the question of a bicameral legislature, he argued that a proportional representation system for the upper house would be "illogical".

Jamaat-e-Islami's Nayebe Ameer Syed Abdullah Muhammad Taher said some progress had been made in the discussions regarding both the

presidential election and the PM's tenure. While most parties appeared to favour an electoral college involving lawmakers, he criticised the reform commission's proposal to expand it up to 70,000, including union council representatives.

"We believe some expansion is needed, but not on such a large scale. Covering district councils and municipalities should suffice," he said, adding that his party believes a prime minister should not serve more than two terms.

"Some parties, including the BNP, disagreed. They suggested a PM could return after a break following two consecutive terms. So, there is a slight difference of opinion. But most parties support a total two-term limit [whether consecutive or not]."

Bazlur Rashid Firoz, general secretary of the Socialist Party of Bangladesh, questioned why the PM's office should be exempt from a two-term limit if the presidency isn't.

AB Party Chairman Mojibur Rahman Monju and Gono Odhikar Parishad President Nurul Huq Nur echoed support for a two-term cap on the prime minister's tenure, citing democratic principles and national interest.

National Citizen Party Joint Convener Javed Rasin said his party supported involving local government in the presidential election process. "Presidential election shouldn't depend on the parliament alone. We agree with the concept of the local governments' involvement, which the [election reform] commission has proposed."

"We believe the president should be elected through votes from members at every union level ... so that the president is not subservient to any one party."

Around 30 political parties took part in the second phase of talks, which began on June 2, with the National Consensus Commission yesterday.



## SAD activists admit assaulting businessman

Claim it was a financial dispute, not extortion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A group from Students Against Discrimination (SAD) has admitted to assaulting a businessman after bringing him to their office, searching his phone, and demanding money.

However, the group claimed it was not extortion but a personal financial dispute over unpaid dues involving a relative of one of its members.

At a press briefing at Dhaka Reporters Unity yesterday, the platform's suspended Dhaka City unit Joint Convener Refatul Haque Shawon said Parvez, a member of the group, had sought help recovering nearly Tk 2 crore that his grandfather, Amzad, was allegedly owed by a contractor named Amirul Islam.

The dues were related to a 2023 road construction project in Rajbari that Amirul allegedly completed under a subcontract but failed to pay for, he claimed.

"For two years, Amirul used his political connections to avoid payment. Parvez's grandfather, who had taken loans to complete the work, was under pressure," Refatul said, reading from a press release. He claimed that they intervened as a personal favour, not on behalf of SAD.

Signed by joint conveners Sadman Sanjid and Refatul, the statement said both parties were invited to the SAD office for discussion. During the meeting, the group learned that Amirul was a distant relative of Jamil Taj, SAD's Pallabi unit convener. They advised both sides to settle the matter privately.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2



A three-day National Fruit Fair began in Dhaka yesterday, aiming to raise public interest in local fruits over imported ones. Located at Krishibid Institution Bangladesh premises in Khamarbari, the event featured a wide range of local fruits such as mango, jackfruit, litchi, dates, guava, star fruit, custard apple, pineapple, Burmese grape, wood apple, and dragon fruit, just to name a few.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## CONTEMPT CASE ICT appoints defence counsel for Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The International Crimes Tribunal-1 (ICT) yesterday appointed Senior Advocate Md Aminul Gani (Titto) as defence counsel for ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina in a contempt of court case filed against her.

The tribunal also appointed senior High Court lawyer AY Masihuzzaman as amicus curiae (friend of the court) in the same case.

The tribunal passed the order, as yesterday was scheduled for a hearing on the prosecution's petition seeking contempt proceedings against Hasina over remarks made in a leaked phone conversation with a party leader.

At the hearing, the prosecution updated the court on the case, after which the tribunal asked about the appointment of an amicus curiae.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

## Adviser Khalilur discusses tariff issue with US officials

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh National Security Adviser Dr Khalilur Rahman on Wednesday met with US Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau at the State Department in Washington, DC.

They discussed the Rohingya issue, ongoing tariff negotiations between Bangladesh and the US, developments in South Asia, and the democratic transition in Bangladesh, according to a statement from the Chief Adviser's Press Wing.

The US Deputy Secretary of State lauded the leadership of Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus at a critical juncture for Bangladesh and reiterated continued US support for Bangladesh.

Khalilur Rahman separately met Assistant US Trade Representative Brendan Lynch and had fruitful discussions on the agreement between the two countries on reciprocal tariffs.

## Former state minister Shamsul Alam arrested: DB

STAR REPORT

The Detective Branch (DB) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) on Wednesday arrested former state minister for planning Professor Shamsul Alam from the capital's Mohammadpur area.

Mohammad Talebur Rahman, deputy commissioner of DMP's Media and Public Relations Division, confirmed the arrest.

Further details regarding the arrest will be disclosed in due course, he said.



## Govt caps lifetime of buses at 20 years, trucks at 25

70,000 outdated vehicles to be phased out from July 1

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has fixed the economic life of buses and minibuses at 20 years, and goods-laden vehicles such as trucks and covered vans at 25 years.

The Roads Transport and Highways Division issued a circular in this regard yesterday. The order will come into effect on July 1.

The move comes nearly two years after the previous Awami League government put on hold a similar directive.

Over 70,000 outdated vehicles will come under this action starting July 1, a top official of the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority told The Daily Star last night.

Experts say old and unfit vehicles are a major cause of road accidents. In addition, older vehicles tend to emit more toxic gases due to incomplete fuel combustion, contributing significantly to air pollution.

The older the vehicle, the more pollution it causes, they said.

In 2010, the BRTA banned buses over 20 years old and trucks over 25 years old from operating in the capital. However, many of these old vehicles shifted to inter-district highways instead.

A special committee formed by the National Road Safety Council in March 2019 recommended setting a maximum usable life for commercial vehicles to reduce road crashes and bring discipline to the transport sector.

Thousands of unfit and rundown vehicles continue to operate across the country, raising concerns over frequent accidents and deaths.

In May 2023, the then government fixed the economic life of buses and minibuses at 20 years and trucks and covered vans at 25 years. But following pressure from transport associations, the then government backtracked from its decision and put the order on hold, allowing outdated vehicles to remain on the roads.

After the political changeover in August last year, the environment ministry, on October 6, requested the BRTA to remove buses and minibuses older than 20 years and trucks and covered vans older than 25 years from the roads.

As of October last year, 28,761 registered buses and minibuses were over 20 years old, while 46,481 registered trucks, lorries, and other heavy vehicles had exceeded the 25-year limit, according to BRTA.



**Experts say old and unfit vehicles are a major cause of road accidents. In addition, older vehicles tend to emit more toxic gases due to incomplete fuel combustion, contributing significantly to air pollution. The older the vehicle, the more pollution it causes.**

Following a meeting on October 24, the government gave a six-month deadline — until May 2024 — to remove all such outdated vehicles from Dhaka. However, no visible action was taken after the deadline passed.

"They avoided taking action during the Eid-ul-Azha travel rush. But enforcement will begin on July 1," said the BRTA official, requesting anonymity.

## Asad Alam Siam new foreign secretary

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Ambassador to the United States Asad Alam Siam has been appointed the new foreign secretary.

The ministry of foreign affairs issued a circular toward this end yesterday.

"Asad Alam Siam will join the office on Friday," a foreign ministry official said.

On May 22, Jashim Uddin stepped down from the post of foreign secretary following a social media campaign against him, which had created a sense of unease within the ministry, with some officials reportedly also aggrieved by him, ministry sources said.

Jashim, who has been on a 45-day leave, is likely to be appointed an ambassador to a North American country, said sources but could not confirm the country.

Meanwhile, Ruhul Alam Siddique, former ambassador to Pakistan, was made acting foreign secretary.

He goes on retirement today after handing over responsibility to Asad Alam Siam, foreign ministry sources said.

Asad Alam, who was appointed ambassador to the US on December 5, 2024, served as ambassador to Austria.



## Secretariat staffers threaten to besiege finance ministry

Issue 48hr ultimatum to scrap Public Service Ordinance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Secretariat employees have threatened to lay siege to the Ministry of Finance on Sunday if the Public Service (Amendment) Ordinance, 2025 is not scrapped within the next 48 hours.

The announcement came during a brief rally in front of Building-4 at the Secretariat yesterday, where leaders of the Bangladesh Secretariat Officers and Employees Unity Forum addressed protesters.

Badiul Kabir, co-chairman of the forum, declared the protest programme. Forum co-chairman Nurul Islam and co-general secretary Nazrul Islam were also present, along with other leaders and protesters.

"We will not accept any amendment to this ordinance. This is a black law and it must be repealed," Badiul Kabir said, warning that employees would stage a sit-in in front of the Finance Ministry on Sunday.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

## Dhaka ignored early warning on Rohingya influx

Former envoy tells seminar

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh had prior information about the Rohingya influx in 2017 as the Bangladesh embassy to Myanmar had written a letter to Dhaka, recommending strengthening border.

However, there was no national consensus achieved and the government made no firm decision regarding that, said Sufiur Rahman, the then Bangladesh ambassador to Myanmar.

He shared the information at a seminar titled "Rohingya, Rakhine, and the Context of Myanmar: Bangladesh's Risks", organised by the Neeti

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



On a scorching day, two children joyfully bathe in the cool waters of the Sholmari River in Batiaghata of Khulna -- their only escape from the sweltering heat. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

### Notice

**NAME →  
← CHANGE OF  
THREE BRANCHES OF  
Trust Bank PLC.**

Old Name	New Name
1. Bangabandhu Cantonment Branch, Tangail	1. Jamuna Cantonment Branch, Tangail
2. Sheikh Hasina Cantonment Branch, Barishal	2. Barishal Cantonment Branch, Barishal
3. Sheikh Russel Cantonment Branch, Shariatpur	3. Padma Cantonment Branch, Shariatpur

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## CONTRACT BREACH Arrest warrants issued against Bashundhara chairman, MD

OUR CORRESPONDENT,  
Sylhet

A Sylhet court yesterday issued arrest warrants against Bashundhara Group Chairman Ahmed Akbar Sobhan, Managing Director Sayem Sobhan Anvir, and four others in a case filed over breach of contract by former Sylhet bureau chief of Kaler Kantho.

Judge Mohammad Harun-or-Rashid of the Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court in Sylhet issued the warrants after the accused failed to appear in court despite being summoned.

Plaintiff Ahmed Noor, former Sylhet bureau chief of Kaler Kantho—a national daily under Bashundhara's East West Media Group—filed the case on December 5 last year.

His lawyer, Emad Ullah Shahidul Islam, confirmed the information.

The other accused in the case are Kaler Kantho publisher Moynal Hossain Chowdhury, current editor Hasan Hafiz, former editor and cheque signatory Shahed Muhammad Ali, and former Bangladesh Pratidin editor Naem Nizam. The newspaper Kaler Kantho has also been named institutionally in the lawsuit.

According to the case statement, Ahmed Noor worked as a senior staff reporter and Sylhet bureau chief from the newspaper's inception until September 2021.

He claimed the company delayed paying his service benefits as per the Wage Board. In January 2024, they issued 10 cheques after agreeing to pay the dues. Of these, only two were honoured, while eight bounced, totalling Tk 601,824.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



## HARIBHANGA DOMINATES mango markets in the north

S DILIP ROY

With the intense summer heat ripening fruits earlier than expected, the famed variety of Haribhanga mango from Rangpur has hit the markets five days ahead of schedule.

The seasonal mango trade officially began on June 15, and already over a dozen markets have sprung up across Mithapukur and Badarganj upazilas—Padaganj being the largest among them.

From early morning till evening, the marketplaces are abuzz with activity. Mango growers are bringing their harvests directly to buyers, while traders and customers from across the region, and even other districts, are flocking to secure their share of the beloved fruit.

From permanent fruit shops to makeshift roadside stalls, Haribhanga now dominates every corner of the local fruit scene. Its popularity is not limited to Rangpur alone—boxes are being couriered nationwide and even shipped abroad.

on 2,567 hectares of land across Rangpur, Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Gaibandha, and Nilphamari—an 11-hectare increase from last year.

Of this, 1,915 hectares are in Rangpur district alone, with 80 percent of production concentrated in Mithapukur and Badarganj upazilas.



The projected output for the current season stands at 39,006 tonnes, with an estimated market value exceeding Tk 140 crore.

"At least 400 tonnes of mangoes are bought and sold here every day," said Sumon Islam, a mango trader at Padaganj Bazar of Mithapukur.

"The market is now lined with temporary courier service booths through which buyers are sending mangoes to Dhaka and other districts," he shared.

He added that the market will run through July, and many wholesalers are purchasing mangoes here in bulk to distribute to smaller retail outlets across the country.

Meher Ali from Padaganj village said he has been cultivating Haribhanga on one hectare of land for the past six years, producing 14-15 tonnes annually.

"This year the fruit size is better. Despite some loss due to nor'westers, the overall quality is excellent. We are selling at Tk 27-33

per kg," he said adding, "Mango farming has made us self-reliant."

Ruhul Amin, a fruit trader from Lalmonirhat, said he buys mangoes directly from farmers every day at Padaganj and nearby markets, incurring a cost of Tk 30-35 per kg, including transportation. The same mangoes are sold in retail markets at Tk 45-50.

"Buyers now ask only for Haribhanga. There's no demand for other varieties," he said. "This is our most profitable season."

Sujon Saha, a buyer from Rangpur city, shared that he bought 10 maunds (approximately 400kg) of Haribhanga mangoes from Padaganj—keeping two maunds for his family and sending the rest to relatives in Dhaka via courier.

"I bought it at Tk 32 per kg here, while in the city's retail markets it costs around Tk 50. I'm very satisfied," he said.

DAE officials and locals said with its round-to-elongated shape, fibreless flesh, firm texture, and excellent shelf life, Haribhanga mango stands apart from other varieties. Thanks to its unique genetic traits, even wrinkled skins don't indicate spoilage. Its appeal is visual, nutritional, and gastronomic.

Last year, Haribhanga was granted Geographical Indication (GI) status.

Local orchard owners including Aminul Islam, Rafiqul Islam, Khurshed Alam and Moslem Uddin said they have already begun receiving export orders from Middle Eastern buyers this season.

Sirajul Islam, deputy director of the Rangpur DAE, said, "Although the official harvesting date was set for June 20, the early heat caused the mangoes to ripen faster. So, we approved harvests from June 15."

He added, "Haribhanga originated from Tekani village at Khoragachh union of Mithapukur upazila. Today, the mango is cultivated in over 80 villages across Mithapukur and Badarganj, transforming the lives of many farming families."

## BRUR teacher Mahmudul arrested in murder case

OUR CORRESPONDENT,  
Thakurgaon

Md

Mahmudul

Haque, an

assistant

professor of

the

Department

of Mass Communication

and Journalism at Begum

Rokeya University, Rangpur

(BRUR), was arrested in

the city in a murder case

yesterday.

A police team picked

him up from his residence

in Dhap area, said Md Abdul

Al Mamun Shah, officer-

in-charge of Hajirhat

Police Station and also the

investigation officer of the

case.

On August 2 last year, a

man named Samej Uddin

was killed during a mass

protest in front of his grocery

shop in Radha Krishnapur

Maulavipara area, the OC

cited the case statement.

The victim's wife filed

a case with the police

station on June 3, accusing

54 people. BRUR teacher

Mahmudul Haque was

listed as the last accused in

the case, said the OC.

Rangpur Metropolitan

Police Commissioner Md

Majid Ali said Mahmudul is

also an accused in another

case filed with Tajhat Police

Station, but declined to

provide further details.

Meanwhile, a Rangpur

court sent Mahmudul to

jail when he was produced

before it, said Shahin Alam,

court inspector of Rangpur

Metropolitan Court.

Following the arrest,

Mahmudul's wife wrote

from his Facebook account,

"My husband was not

involved in any such crime.

He is completely innocent.

This is a deliberately

fabricated false case."



SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

## From modest hobby to a thriving venture

Kamalganj artisan's bamboo furniture charms  
local and foreign buyers

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

Amir Hossain Siraj, a nursery business owner by profession and a bamboo craftsman by passion, began crafting bamboo décor for village weddings back in 2003 as a hobby.

Over the next two decades, his modest hobby evolved into a thriving bamboo furniture business, with demand reaching across Bangladesh and beyond.

Siraj began his workshop with an initial investment of only Tk 20,000 and employed one assistant in Baracheg village along the Shamsheernagar-Sreemangal regional highway in Moulvibazar's Kamalganj upazila.

His workshop has now become a hub for finely crafted bamboo furniture and decorative items

that compete with larger brands in terms of both quality and design.

"I began with no formal training initially. Later, I received training at the Forest Research Laboratory in Chattogram. The training helped me enhance my technique and improve the durability and finish of the products," he also said.

At present, Siraj employs some 10-15 workers to produce an array of items—sofa sets, beds, dining tables, doors, racks, flower tubs, lamps, and even full-scale home furnishings—all using bamboo collected from nearby hills.



Siraj's bamboo products neither emit the typical pungent odour associated with untreated bamboo nor are vulnerable to insect infestation. The furniture is

guaranteed to last at least 10 years, he claimed.

The prices of his products range from Tk 10,000 to Tk 28,000 for sofas and Tk 15,000 to Tk 17,000 for dining tables, among others, significantly more affordable in comparison to wooden or rattan alternatives.

Smaller items like racks and pen stands are also popular among tourists and hobbyists.

"Siraj gained popularity for his bamboo craftsmanship after he began decorating wedding venues. Over time, his initiative has grown into a thriving cottage industry with immense prospects. Tourists visiting Madhabkunda Waterfall, Kamalganj, Lawachhara, and Sreemangal often make a stop to purchase his pieces," said Sadequul Islam, a local resident.

The proximity to the major local tourist spots, such as Madhabkunda, has brought Siraj's furniture to the attention of



Finely crafted bamboo furniture items line the shop of Amir Hossain Siraj at Baracheg village in Kamalganj upazila, Moulvibazar.

PHOTO: MINTU DESHWARA

## 2 sisters among 3 killed in road accidents

STAR REPORT

At least three people died and three others were injured in separate road accidents across the country in the last two days, according to reports from our correspondents.

Two sisters were tragically killed after being run over by a speeding tractor while crossing the Kurigram-Rangpur regional highway on Wednesday night. The accident occurred in front of Kathalbari Degree College in Kurigram Sadar upazila around 9:00pm, said Officer-in-Charge Md Habibullah of Kurigram Sadar Police Station.

The deceased were identified as Rokeya Begum, 59, and Parveen Akhter, 49.

Locals and police said the sisters were attempting to cross the main road in front of the college when a tractor, moving at high speed towards Kathalbari, hit them and fled the scene immediately.

Locals rushed the injured women to Kurigram General Hospital, where doctors declared them dead upon arrival.

OC Habibullah said a general diary was filed in connection with the incident.

"As the victims' families did not lodge any complaint, the bodies were handed over to the relatives without an autopsy," he added.

Meanwhile, in Pabna, a man was killed and three

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

## Two arrested over rape in Dhaka

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday arrested two men accused of raping a woman in the capital's Khilkhet area.

"The victim was lured to a house on the pretext of lending money and was raped by two men," said Talebur Rahman, deputy commissioner (media) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

The incident occurred around 7:15pm on June 14.

The arrestees are Akkas Ali, 44, and Amanullah Bhuiyan, 45.

Quoting Khilkhet police, the DMP official said the woman had approached her neighbour Akkas Ali to borrow Tk 1,000. Akkas took her to the house of his acquaintance, Amanullah Bhuiyan, saying the money would be arranged there.

Once inside the house, the woman was asked to wait in a room while they claimed to arrange the rest of the money. When she entered, the two men allegedly locked the door and raped her.

Around 8:30pm, she managed to force open the door and return home, after which she fell ill.

The woman filed a case under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act with Khilkhet Police Station yesterday.

The two men were arrested from the Barua Parulia area of Khilkhet, the official added.


**ইস্টার্ন রিফাইনারী লিমিটেড**  
**Eastern Refinery Limited**  
 (A Subsidiary of Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation)


**e-TENDER Notice No: ER/TN/e-GP/C-18/2024-2025**

e-Tender has been invited in the National e-GP portal ([www.eprocure.gov.bd](http://www.eprocure.gov.bd)) for the procurement of work as stated below:

Sl. No.	Tender ID No.	Tender Package No. & Description	Tender Publication Date and Time	Tender Last Selling/Downloading Date and Time	Tender Closing & Opening Date and Time
01	1126325	ER/C-29/2024-2025 <b>RENOVATION OF STORE OPEN SHED</b>	19 June, 2025 15:00 Hrs	07 July, 2025 15:00 Hrs	08 July, 2025 12:00 Hrs

This is an online Tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender registration in the national e-GP system portal ([www.eprocure.gov.bd](http://www.eprocure.gov.bd)) is required.

GD-1431


**Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh**  
**Office of the Divisional Electrical Engineer**  
**Bangladesh Railway, Dhaka**

**Invitation for e-Tender**

e-Tender Notice No. 54.01.0000.212.07.267.24-25/10 Date: 19.06.2025

e-Tender is invited in National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of following works, details are given below:

SI No.	Tender ID	Package No.	Description of works	Tender document last selling date & time	Tender closing & opening date & time
1	1126207	eGP WR-43/24-25	Changing overhead line cable, pole with other ancillary works at SYT Padma-Jumuna Depot side under SSAE/E/SYT.	09-Jul-2025 10:00	09-Jul-2025 11:00
2	1126203	eGP WR-46/24-25	Supply & installation of different type of materials for vertical extension of 2 Nos. IGV lift 1000 KG capacity at Rail Bhaban under SSAE/E/DA.	09-Jul-2025 10:00	09-Jul-2025 11:00
3	1126199	eGP WR-47/24-25	Improvement of Lighting arrangement at near Bhairab Bazar Railway Station with other related works under SSAE/E/BCI.	09-Jul-2025 10:00	09-Jul-2025 11:00
4	1126189	eGP GR-24/24-25	Supply of different types of Submersible Pump Motor Set under Dhaka Division.	09-Jul-2025 10:00	09-Jul-2025 11:00
5	1126095	eGP WR-1/24-25	Supply & installation of 3 Nos. VCB for Railbhobon Sub-station with other ancillary works under SSAE/E/DA.	09-Jul-2025 10:00	09-Jul-2025 11:00
6	1123557	eGP WR-18/24-25	Repairing of different types of Transformer's with other related works under Dhaka Division.	09-Jul-2025 10:00	09-Jul-2025 11:00

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered banks branches up to one hour before tender last selling time. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk ([helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd](mailto:helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd)).

শ্রী (২৫) (৪২০)

**Shaker Ahmed**  
Divisional Electrical Engineer  
Bangladesh Railway, Dhaka

GD-1434



## ‘Balur Nagarite’ secures place at prestigious Czech festival

Bangladeshi filmmaker Mahde Hasan's debut feature **Balur Nagarite** (Sand City) has been selected for the prestigious Proxima Competition at the 59th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in the Czech Republic.

The film's actor Mostafa Monwar and sound designer Aranyak Prithivi were honoured by the Ministry of Culture on Wednesday, June 18, where Cultural Affairs Adviser Mostofa Sarwar Farooki welcomed the duo and presented them with flowers.

Describing the selection as “a moment of pride for our young filmmaker,” the ministry pledged to finance air travel for a member of the film delegation to Karlovy Vary.

Cultural Adviser Farooki emphasised that the ministry will continue to encourage Bangladeshi talents in music, cinema, photography, theatre, and architecture who gain international recognition.

Ahead of its premiere, Bangkok-based international sales company Diversion acquired global marketing rights for the film—excluding Bangladesh and Switzerland. **Balur Nagarite** was produced by Rubaiyat Hossain and Aadan Ahmed under the Khona Talkies banner, with support from Cinema Cocoon.

This follows the ministry's previous support for filmmaker Adnan Al Rajevy's **Ali**, who received flights to Paris after his film was selected at the Cannes Film Festival.



## I get teary-eyed when I receive love: Zahid Hasan

Veteran actor Zahid Hasan has made a powerful return to cinema with **Utshob**, a multi-starrer Eid release that has earned over Tk 1.14 crore in just 10 days.

Directed by Tanim Noor, the film co-stars Jaya Ahsan, Chanchal Chowdhury, Aupee Karim, and

Afsana Mimi. Hospitalised with pneumonia just before Eid, Zahid missed the promotional campaign but was deeply moved by audience response.

“Every time I receive love, it brings tears to my eyes,” he said. Zahid expressed gratitude to co-

stars, the press, and audiences for their support, adding that the film's success rekindled his commitment to meaningful cinema.

**Utshob** is now eyeing international release. He was last seen in Raihan Rafi's **Amalnama**.

## ‘Boistwami Rock Fest’ to make its return to Dhaka today



**Boistwami Rock Fest 2025** returns today at Sundari Cafe and Art Space, Purbachal New Town, from 5pm to 10pm.

Organised by Boistwami in partnership with Ishtishon Communications, the event features performances by Symphony, Mechanix, all-female band F Minor, and KHN with his Rock Wing.

CEO Ayesha Arin noted last year's disruptions due to political unrest but expressed optimism for this year's continuity. Upcoming concerts include a July 12 show with Vikings and Artcell, and a larger event on July 26.

Tickets are priced from Tk 500 to Tk 2,500, available via Get Set Rock and on-site. Venue preparations are overseen by Sundari Cafe, the event's sponsor.

## WHAT'S THE HAPS?

### ‘Kohey Facebook’

Aranyak Natyadal will stage their acclaimed production **Kohey Facebook** at the National Theatre Hall of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy today evening. Written and directed by Mamunur Rashid, the play explores the emotional consequences of the digital age, highlighting how virtual life, particularly through Facebook, impacts human relationships and social structures.

**Date:** Today | **June 20, 2025**

**Time:** 7-9pm

**Venue:** Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy



## Jeremy White portrays Bruce Springsteen in ‘Deliver Me From Nowhere’ trailer



Jeremy Allen White stars as Bruce Springsteen in **Deliver Me From Nowhere**, a biopic directed by Scott Cooper and set for release on October 24. Based on Warren Zanes' 2023 book, the film explores the making of Springsteen's 1982 album **Nebraska**, regarded as one of his most personal works.

White, known for **The Bear**, performs his own vocals, while Jeremy Strong plays Jon Landau, Springsteen's longtime manager. The film also features Stephen Graham, Odessa Young, and Marc Maron. Springsteen and Landau are involved in the project, with Dave Cobb overseeing music.

First shown at CinemaCon, the trailer captures Springsteen's raw artistry. White called the project a “dream come true,” noting they had Springsteen's full support.

# NEWS

## Almost 32% had to bribe

FROM PAGE 16

Over 47 percent received primary care at government healthcare facilities at least once in the 12 months preceding the day they were interviewed. Of them, 82.72 percent said the service was easily accessible and 89.34 percent said the services were affordable.

In the rural areas, 43.67 percent households have at least one child attending a public school and in the urban areas, 34.95 percent.

Regarding services such as identification or civil registration, 78.12 percent said these were accessible while 86.28 percent found these affordable.

In case of access to civil justice, 16.16 percent said they experienced at least one dispute in the last two years. Among them, 83.6 percent could access formal or informal dispute resolution mechanisms.

In the 12 months before the survey, 19.31 percent faced at least one form of discrimination or harassment. The breakdown is 19.62 percent for females and 18.97 percent for males.

Some 6.82 percent of the respondents said they faced discrimination for socio-economic status and 4.47 percent for gender.

Over 48 percent felt discriminated against in their own house, 31.3 percent in public transport or open

spaces, and 25.97 percent at work.

The country's local government system should be strengthened to empower the marginalised and low-income groups of people, Mahmud said.

Adviser Wahiduddin said it was “unacceptable in a civilised country” that all people do not feel safe at their own home after dark.

“If nearly 10 percent of people feel that they are not safe in their own homes, then it is very concerning,” he added.

The survey found that over 27 percent of the respondents believed they could freely express their views on what the government does.

## ADB, WB approve over \$1.5b

FROM PAGE 16

adaptation efforts in priority sectors and speed up actions to reduce climate impacts, he said.

Under CRDP, the Bangladesh Climate Development Partnership will be established to secure climate finance and help ministries develop, implement, monitor and evaluate climate projects more effectively.

As part of the CRDP, the government will also revise Dhaka's

Strategic Transport Masterplan (2025–2034) and monitor renewable energy targets set under the Integrated Energy and Power Master Plan to promote greener urban transport and power generation.

Bangladesh is one of the world's most climate-vulnerable nations.

Recent studies show that if high greenhouse gas emissions continue, the country could lose up to one-third of its GDP by 2070.

Tropical cyclones already cause about \$1 billion, or 0.7 percent of GDP, in damage each year, and severe flooding could shrink the economy by as much as 9 percent compared to expected growth by 2050.

By then, Bangladesh could lose 17 percent of its land and 30 percent of its food production, pushing food and nutrition security to a critical point.

## Army to carry out duties

FROM PAGE 16

firearms and 286,754 rounds of ammunition.

In the same period, 996 individuals involved in various criminal activities – including gang members, listed criminals, and drug traffickers – were arrested.

Since August last year, the army has arrested 15,262 suspects.

The army conducted a two-week-long special operation before and after Eid-ul-Azha to ensure smooth traffic flow and safety during holiday travel. Troops were deployed at key highways, terminals, and transport hubs, where they monitored speeding, prevented overcharging, and tackled ticket black marketing.

The army arrested 452 drug dealers in the last three weeks, bringing the total to 5,476 since August last year.

Following heavy rainfall in Anwara upazila, Chattogram, which damaged a key embankment, the army

immediately mobilised to repair it alongside locals, preventing flooding. In flood-hit Habiganj, troops from the 17th Infantry Division distributed food to marooned residents on Eid day.

Acting on information from mobile courts, the army shut down a chocolate factory in Mirpur and imposed a Tk 7 lakh fine over food safety violations.

The army continued its duties to maintain law and order in the Chattogram Hill Tracts and Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar. It also helped ensure security for foreign diplomats and missions, and during international events, such as the two recent football matches between Bangladesh and teams from Bhutan and Singapore held on June 4 and 10.

When asked about a recent incident in which a flag vendor was allegedly beaten by an army member during a football match, Col Shafiqul said, “It was an unfortunate and isolated

event. We have since apologised to the individual and provided him with Tk 1 lakh in support to continue his business.”

Regarding a report by the International Crisis Group that alleged Bangladesh security agencies were engaging with insurgent groups in the Rohingya camps, Col Shafiqul said, “We've seen the reports but do not have any further details to comment at this stage.”

Reaffirming the army's commitment to safeguarding the country's sovereignty and public safety, Col Shafiqul said troops are currently deployed in 62 districts, working in coordination with the interim government, local administration, and law enforcement agencies.

“Bangladesh Army will take firm action against any activities threatening public safety, including mob violence or attempts to destabilise peace,” he concluded.

## Israeli gunfire, strikes kill 72 across Gaza

FROM PAGE 12

“We couldn't help them or even escape ourselves,” he said.

At least 300 Palestinians have been killed in recent weeks while trying to reach aid distribution points in Gaza, which is suffering from famine-like conditions, the Hamas-run territory's health ministry has said.

Israeli restrictions on media in

the Gaza Strip and difficulties in accessing some areas mean AFP is unable to independently verify the tolls and details provided by rescuers and authorities in the Palestinian territory.

In early March, Israel imposed an aid blockade on Gaza amid a deadlock in truce negotiations, only partially easing restrictions in late May.

After Israel loosened its blockade, the privately run Gaza Humanitarian Foundation began distributing aid, but its operations have been marred by chaotic scenes.

UN agencies and major aid groups have refused to cooperate with the foundation – which has the support of Israel and its ally the United States – over concerns it was designed to cater to Israeli military objectives.

## ‘Armed forces not involved but were aware’

FROM PAGE 1

Moyeenul noted that the senior leadership at the Rab, DGFI, and NSI always came from the armed forces – army, navy, and air force – and that these agencies were directly answerable to the then prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

“There is, however, no scope for the armed forces to say they were not aware of what was happening,” Nur Khan Liton, a member of the commission, said at the press conference.

The commission chairman went on to allege that those who were directly involved in enforced disappearances, along with their associates, are still at the centre of state power and threatening key witnesses.

“In addition to destroying evidence and being uncooperative on an institutional level, they have created an atmosphere of fear by threatening key witnesses and victims,” said

Moyeenul.

Member Dr Nabila Idris told the press that the commission has obtained phone recordings of perpetrators threatening witnesses.

The commission says it has complete evidence on the enforced disappearances of 253 survivors, starting from the moment of their abduction, their period of stay and the circumstances under which they reappeared.

In addition, it has solved the cases of 12 people who have been permanently disappeared, with those who were involved in those disappearances identified.

“One of four outcomes usually awaited the victims [of enforced disappearance]. They were either killed, or they were branded as terrorists and then shown arrested in relevant cases, or they were pushed into Indian territory to be arrested

by foreign law enforcers, or in rare cases, they were released without being accused in a legal case,” said the chairman.

He stressed the fact that counter-terrorism laws have been used to persecute victims of enforced disappearance and recommended that these cases be disposed of quickly to minimise their harassment.

“Victims have all narrated the same experiences across the board. It's not possible that these were coincidental events. In fact, these are not cases of one or two careless officers conducting human rights violations while trying to counter terrorism. Rather, it was a politically motivated programme that used counter-terrorism as a shield.”

Commission members Justice Farid Ahmed Shibli and Sazzad Hussain were also present at the press conference.



SIGNALS JAMMED

## Oil tankers near Iran appear to be in rural Russia

REUTERS, London

The Front Tyne oil tanker was sailing through the Gulf between Iran and the United Arab Emirates when just past 9:40 am shiptracking data appeared to show the massive vessel in Russia, in fields better known for barley and sugar beets.

By 4:15 pm on Sunday, the ship's erratic signals indicated it was in southern Iran near the town of Bidkhun, before later placing it back and forth across the Gulf.

Mass interference since the start of the conflict between Israel and Iran has affected nearly 1,000 ships in the Gulf, according to Windward, a shipping analysis firm.

A collision involving tankers south of the Strait of Hormuz, a vital shipping lane for the world's oil, occurred on Tuesday with both vessels catching fire.

One of them, the Front Eagle, a sister ship of the Front Tyne, and like it, more than three football pitches long, appeared to be onshore in Iran on June 15, data from commodity data platform Kpler showed.

"There is usually no jamming in the Strait of Hormuz and now there is a lot," said Ami Daniel, chief executive of Windward. "The culmination of all that is higher risk. It's a hot area... if you don't geolocate, there's a bigger chance you'll have an accident."

Ships are required to indicate their location and are fitted with transmitters similar to GPS called an AIS, or Automatic Identification System, that send regular signals on location, speed and other data. Jamming disrupts these signals.



Pro-Palestinian demonstrators protest Israeli strikes on Iran and Gaza, as well as any potential US involvement in the conflict, during a 'No War on Iran' demonstration outside the White House in Washington, DC, on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Foreign students Trump admin tightens social media vetting

REUTERS, Washington

President Donald Trump's administration on Wednesday ordered the resumption of student visa appointments but will significantly tighten its social media vetting in a bid to identify any applicants who may be hostile towards the United States, according to an internal State Department cable.

US consular officers are now required to conduct a "comprehensive and thorough vetting" of all student and exchange visitor applicants to identify those who "bear hostile attitudes toward our citizens, culture, government, institutions, or founding principles," said the cable. On May 27, US administration ordered its missions abroad to stop scheduling new appointments for student and exchange visitor visa applicants.

## Trump hosts Pak army chief Disagrees with India over Indo-Pak war mediation

REUTERS, Washington

US President Donald Trump hosted Pakistan's army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir at the White House on Wednesday in an unprecedented meeting that risked worsening a disagreement with India over the president's claim that he stopped last month's conflict between the nuclear-armed South Asian foes.

The lunch meeting was the first time a US president had hosted the head of Pakistan's army, widely regarded as the most powerful figure in the country, at the White House unaccompanied by senior Pakistani civilian officials.

Trump said he was honoured to meet Munir and that they had discussed Iran, which he said Pakistan knew better than most. Trump told reporters he had thanked Munir for ending the war with India, for which he also praised Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who he spoke to on Tuesday night.

"Two very smart people decided not to keep going with that war; that could have been a nuclear war," Trump told reporters.

Pakistan's military said in a statement that the two discussed trade, economic development, and cryptocurrency during the two-hour meeting and also exchanged views on tensions between Israel and Iran.

"President Trump expressed keen interest in forging a mutually beneficial trade partnership with Pakistan based on long-term strategic convergence and shared interests," the army said.

Munir had been expected to press Trump not to enter Israel's war with Iran and seek a ceasefire, Pakistani officials and experts said. A section of Pakistan's embassy in Washington represents Iran's interests in the United States.

Pakistan has condemned Israel's airstrikes against Iran, saying they violate international law and threaten regional stability.

## US PLAN FOR POSSIBLE STRIKE ON IRAN Israel's assumption is being put to test

AGENCIES

Along the Ayalon highway, in Tel Aviv, two illuminated signs have appeared, portraying Donald Trump against a billowing stars-and-stripes backdrop and bearing the blunt appeal: "Mr President, finish the job!"

Israel's attack on Iran may have been carried out with Trump's approval, as government officials in Israel claim, but it appears to have been unleashed only in the expectation – rather than any certainty – that the US will ultimately be drawn into the war.

That assumption is now being put to the test as the US president weighs a decision on whether to join an assault he has increasingly



embraced in his public pronouncements, reports The Guardian.

In the Israeli version of events, an agreement in principle dates back to a letter Trump sent to Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in March, giving Iran 60 days to accept tight constraints on its nuclear programme. The clock started ticking on 12 April, the date of the first round of US-Iranian negotiations in Oman.

Netanyahu seems to have accepted the same 60-day window to hold off on military action and to give diplomacy a chance. He has said that Operation Rising Lion had originally been planned for April. It was postponed and last Thursday marked day 61 on Trump's

calendar. That night about 200 Israeli planes took off on their first sorties. As the deadline approached, the US withdrew non-essential personnel from embassies in the Middle East, but Trump appeared to discourage an Israeli attack, saying it might "blow" the chances for a sixth round of negotiations due on Sunday.

Once the operation had begun, Trump quickly swung his support behind it, noting on his Truth Social platform: "Two months ago I gave Iran a 60-day ultimatum to 'make a deal'. They should have done it! Today is day 61. I told them what to do, but they just couldn't get there. Now they have, perhaps, a second chance!"

As the war has progressed, so has the clamour in Israel for US involvement, along with uncertainty over whether Netanyahu has a plan B if Trump opts to watch from the sidelines.

Yesterday, Israel struck a key Iranian nuclear site and Iranian missiles hit an Israeli hospital, reports Reuters.

"We need to hope that this actually happens, and possibly very soon," the veteran commentator Ben Caspit wrote in Ma'ariv newspaper on Wednesday.

"Take all the credit, Donald. The important thing is that you ultimately decide to join," Caspit said.

## India has 'clear intent' to target Sikh movement in N America Says Canadian intelligence report

AFP, Ottawa

India has a "clear intent" to target members of a Sikh separatist movement in North America, a Canadian intelligence report said Wednesday after leaders of the two nations agreed to turn the page on a bitter spat over an assassination.

Prime Minister Mark Carney, who took office in March, welcomed his counterpart Narendra Modi to the Canadian Rockies as a guest at a summit of the Group of Seven major economies.

They agreed during talks on Tuesday to name new high commissioners in hopes of restoring normal operations for citizens and businesses.

A rift had emerged after Carney's predecessor Trudeau accused India of involvement in assassination of a Sikh separatist on Canadian soil and expelled Indian ambassador, triggering a reciprocal response from India.

In a report published on Wednesday, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service said the slaying of Hardeep Singh Nijjar near Vancouver signaled "a significant escalation in India's repression efforts against the Khalistan movement and a clear intent to target individuals in North America."

## Nato rearmament not a 'threat' to Russia: Putin

AFP, Saint Petersburg

Russian President Vladimir Putin said yesterday that Nato's push to ramp up defence spending was not a "threat" to Russia, days before the alliance was set to sign off on a plan to boost its military capacity across Europe.

In a late-night press conference, the Russian leader also said his troops would not stop pushing forward in Ukraine and sought to undermine his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky.

The Western military alliance will hold a crucial summit in The Hague next week to discuss increasing defence spending to five percent of GDP, under pressure from US President Donald Trump.

Putin has cast his offensive in Ukraine as part of a wider conflict between Russia and US-led Nato, which has been Ukraine's staunchest backer since Russia launched its offensive in February 2022.

"We do not consider any rearmament by Nato to be a threat to the Russian Federation, because we are self-sufficient in terms of ensuring our own security," Putin said at a televised press conference in Saint Petersburg.

Russia is "constantly modernising our armed forces and defensive capabilities," Putin said, adding that it made "no sense" for Nato to spend more money on arms.

Though he conceded higher spending by Nato would create some "specific" challenges for Russia, he brushed them off.

"We will counter all threats that arise. There is no doubt about that," Putin added.


Kyiv is seeking security guarantees from Nato as part of any deal to end the fighting, more than three years after Russia ordered its full-scale military offensive.

Moscow has shown little willingness to back down, with Putin saying yesterday that Russia had the "strategic advantage" on the battlefield.



Men stand next to the bodies of Palestinians killed in an Israeli strike at Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City yesterday. According to Gaza's civil defence agency, Israeli fire killed at least 72 people, including 21 who had gathered near an aid distribution site.

PHOTO: REUTERS



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e- tender is invited to the e-GP portal for following procurement. Interested tenderers are requested to visit (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) website for details

Sl. No	Tender ID	Types of Procurement, Name of the Procurement	Tender Publication Date	Tender Document Last selling date and time	Tender Opening Date and Time	Method
1.	1084716	Framework Agreement of Stationary Products of General Store for the Fiscal Year 2024-25	15-Jun-2025 18:30	29-Jun-2025 18:30	29-Jun-2025 19:00	OTM (Framework Agreement)
2.	1115448	Procurement of Computer & Accessories for the Fiscal Year 2024-25	15-Jun-2025 18:30	29-Jun-2025 18:30	29-Jun-2025 19:00	OTM
3.	1121735	Procurement of Office Equipment for the fiscal Year 2024-25	15-Jun-2025 18:30	29-Jun-2025 18:30	29-Jun-2025 19:00	OTM
4.	1084937 (Time extended)	Procurement of Electrical Item for the Fiscal Year 2024-25	02-Jun-2025 10:30	22-Jun-2025 15:00	22-Jun-2025 15:30	OTM

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# Child Nutrition in BANGLADESH



**icddr,b, in collaboration with The Daily Star, organised a roundtable titled “Child Nutrition in Bangladesh” on April 22, 2025. Below is a summary of the discussion.**



**Dr Tahmeed Ahmed,**  
*Executive Director,*  
*icddr,b*  
*(Keynote Presentation)*

Despite frequent discussions on climate change and development, we often overlook a pressing issue in Bangladesh and similar countries: nutrition. A recent visit to a wet kitchen market revealed soaring prices of protein staples such as tilapia, pangas fish, eggs, milk, and meat, highlighting concerns about childhood nutrition.

Stunting is a classic indicator of chronic undernutrition and is associated with increased vulnerability to infections such as diarrhoea and pneumonia, as well as a higher risk of mortality.

Stunted children also tend to respond poorly to oral vaccines, including those for cholera and rotavirus. Their brain development is also severely affected, leading to reduced cognitive ability and

productivity later in life. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 2—ending hunger and improving nutrition—requires addressing critical targets such as stunting, anaemia, low birth weight, breastfeeding, and wasting.

While Bangladesh’s exclusive breastfeeding rate is around 55%, indicating some progress, many infants still miss out on the vital nutrition that breast milk provides. The goal is to increase this rate by 50% in the first six months, which demands further efforts.

Stunting among children under five declined from 41% to 24% between 2011 and 2022, yet one in four children remains stunted. The target is to reduce this by 40%, although current trends suggest Bangladesh is unlikely to meet this goal.

Underweight rates fell from 36% to 22%, and wasting from 16% to 8%, although wasting rose again to 11% by 2022. Some studies suggest it could be as high as 18%, nearing emergency

thresholds set by WHO. These statistics underscore the urgency of addressing childhood malnutrition in Bangladesh.

While medical training traditionally taught that malnutrition begins after breastfeeding ends (around six months), a 2023 Nature study analysing data from 52,000 children across multiple countries, including Bangladesh, showed that the highest rates of stunting occur between birth and three months.

The study also demonstrated a link between national health expenditure and stunting: where only 1–3% of the health budget is allocated to nutrition, stunting rates can reach 35%. A decade ago, Bangladesh allocated only about 1% of GDP and 9–10% of its health budget to nutrition. Current figures are unavailable.

To understand stunting better, icddr,b collaborated with researchers from seven countries. Our analysis showed that birth size was the strongest predictor: low birth weight doubles the risk of stunting.

Maternal height—reflecting long-term maternal nutrition—was another key factor. Compromised maternal nutrition contributes to a two- to threefold increased risk of child malnutrition.

These findings emphasise the vital importance of the first 1,000 days—from conception to two years—for preventing malnutrition. Malnutrition during this period increases the risk of cognitive impairment.

Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) are also critical. In unsanitary environments, infants ingest harmful bacteria that colonise the small intestine, causing environmental enteric dysfunction (EED), which contributes to stunting and poor efficacy of oral vaccines.

Addressing childhood malnutrition requires a comprehensive, sustained approach. First, increasing budgetary allocation is essential; without it, efforts will remain ineffective. Strengthening grassroots community health workers, ensuring adolescent girls’ health and nutrition, promoting dietary diversity, and providing weekly iron and folic acid supplements are also vital.

Initiatives like mothers’ clubs can provide peer support on issues such as breastfeeding, complementary feeding, and maternal mental health—particularly important as maternal depression has been strongly linked to childhood malnutrition.



**Dr Md Mehedi Hasan,**  
*Assistant Director,*  
*Institute of Public Health Nutrition (IPHN)*

Exclusive breastfeeding from birth up to six months is crucial for child nutrition, as breast milk contains all the necessary nutrients. In Bangladesh, exclusive breastfeeding increased to 65% in 2017–18. The latest data from 2022 shows it declined to 53%.

Challenges arise as many new mothers are garment workers who, after two to three months, must switch to formula due to limited maternity leave. Misconceptions that breast milk is insufficient—fueled by advertising and peer influence—also lower exclusive breastfeeding rates.

Improper formula preparation further worsens nutrition. To address this, every mother visiting gynaecologists at primary and tertiary hospitals should receive counselling, alongside widespread awareness campaigns. Functional breastfeeding corners in garment factories must also be ensured.



**Prof Dr Chowdhury Ali**  
*Retired Professor of Paediatrics, Bangladesh Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU)*

Exclusive breastfeeding followed by complementary feeding are essential. Complementary feeding involves continuing breastfeeding while introducing additional foods, yet proper practices are often lacking.

One major gap is the insufficient use of oil. While vegetables and fruits are encouraged, the importance of adding enough oil for adequate caloric intake is often overlooked. Mothers may practise complementary feeding but add too little oil, leading to inadequate nutrition.

Another issue is feeding frequency. Often, complementary feeding unintentionally becomes replacement feeding, with mothers discontinuing breastfeeding after introducing solid foods. It is crucial to emphasise that breastfeeding must continue alongside complementary feeding for the practice to be effective.



**Dr Fahmida Sharmin Joty,**  
*Associate Professor, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Bangladesh Medical College*

Starting iron-folic acid supplementation for adolescent girls—similar to TT and MR vaccine campaigns—could significantly improve future maternal and child health. With high rates of underage marriage, strengthening girls’ nutrition early would lead to healthier pregnancies and babies.

Current advocacy around multiple micronutrient supplementation

(MMNS) highlights the need to begin interventions early to lower rates of low birth weight. Although 41% of the target population currently receives advice, many remain unreached.

Increasing the number of field workers and health assistants could help reduce stunting, preterm births, anaemia, and other related issues. Incorporating nutrition education into school and college curricula could create long-term change, promoting healthier mothers and babies for future generations.



**Dr Farzana Rahman,**  
*Deputy Director, Bangladesh National Nutrition Council (BNNC)*

BNNC is the highest authority for nutrition management, providing policy, technical, and administrative support across 22 ministries, with efforts underway to include more.

Childhood nutrition is a major focus in our national policies and BNNC is responsible for implementing these plans, especially during the first 1,000 days to prevent long-term malnutrition.

Recent initiatives include research in four coastal districts to develop child profile estimates and a costing model, surveying 934 mothers and caregivers. These tools will help expand interventions to other regions.



**A.T.M. Saiful Islam,**  
*Additional Secretary (Public Health Wing), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare*

Nutrition is fundamental to life and national development. A malnourished individual cannot contribute to growth or GDP, which is why the slogan “Enforce Nutrition for Growth” is significant.

Nutrition begins in the mother’s womb, influencing brain development and lifelong health. Without proper prenatal care, achieving national nutrition goals is impossible. Nutrition is a multi-dimensional, multi-sectoral issue, requiring collaboration across ministries.

In Bangladesh, 22 ministries and many agencies are involved in improving nutrition. Farmers play a key role—nutrition is affected at every stage, from land selection and cultivation to food processing and storage, where nutritional value can either improve or decline.

Water, sanitation, and hygiene are deeply intertwined with nutrition. Poor hygiene contributes to illnesses like diarrhoea, which drain essential nutrients from children’s bodies. Coordinated action between WASA

## RECOMMENDATIONS

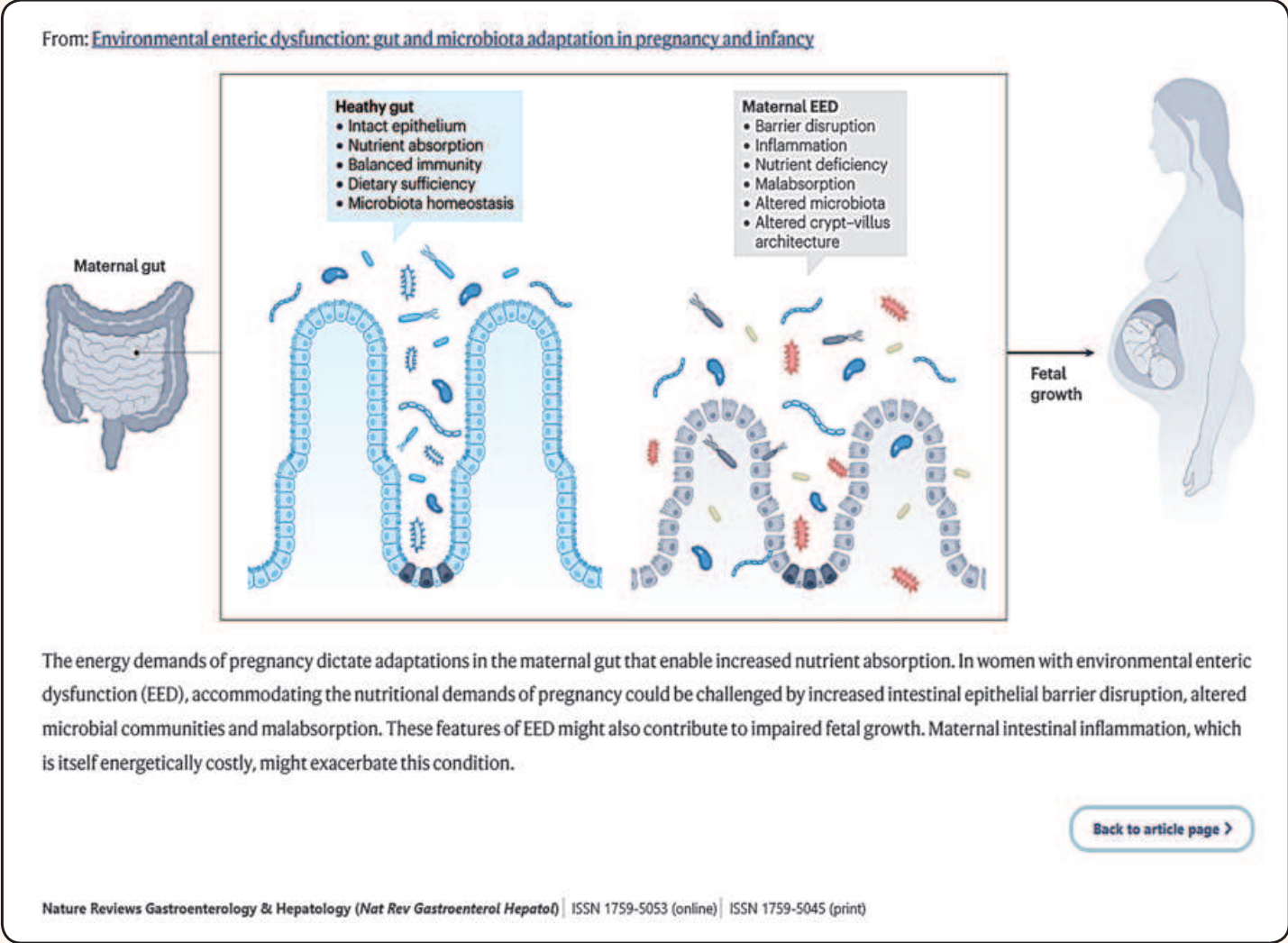
- » Increase national budget allocations for nutrition, prioritising SDG Goal 2 indicators—stunting, anaemia, low birth weight, breastfeeding, and wasting.
- » Promote exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months, and continue breastfeeding alongside complementary feeding thereafter.
- » Counsel mothers at every stage—from conception to post-delivery—on nutrition, breastfeeding techniques, and dietary practices.
- » Expand iron and folic acid supplementation for adolescent girls, similar to national vaccine campaigns, to improve future maternal and child health.
- » Integrate nutrition education into school and college curricula to encourage healthy dietary habits from an early age.
- » Establish and support mothers’ clubs to provide peer guidance on breastfeeding, complementary feeding, and maternal mental health.
- » Strengthen field-level health workforces, especially in underserved areas, by increasing the number of trained community health workers and assistants.
- » Ensure the availability of functional breastfeeding corners in garment factories and other workplaces employing large numbers of women.
- » Improve food safety monitoring by decentralising the Food Safety Authority and addressing contamination from pesticides, hormones, and heavy metals.

- » Enforce the Breastmilk Substitutes Act more rigorously, and regulate marketing practices that discourage breastfeeding.
- » Address environmental health threats like plastic ingestion, lead poisoning, and pesticide exposure that compromise maternal and child nutrition.
- » Enhance multi-sectoral coordination between ministries (Health, Food, Women and Children Affairs, Local Government, etc.) for holistic nutrition programming.
- » Strengthen WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) interventions, particularly in slums and camps, to prevent malnutrition caused by enteric infections.
- » Scale up Growth Monitoring and Promotion (GMP) sessions across health facilities and integrate overweight/obesity screening into routine services.
- » Reduce reliance on donor-funded nutrition programmes by incorporating nutrition into long-term national development and political economy strategies.
- » More grassroots-level community health workers are needed, who can assess children’s nutritional status, provide counseling to mothers and family members, and take necessary actions to improve nutrition when needed.
- » The habit of washing hands with soap needs to be improved, as it helps prevent enteropathy, which is directly linked to child undernutrition.
- » Community-based management of severe malnutrition should be ensured.



CHILD NUTRITION IN BANGLADESH

Nutrition is often overlooked in Bangladesh. A recent wet-kitchen visit reported soaring protein prices.



CURRENT MALNUTRITION BURDEN AT A GLANCE

(latest prevalence rates from BDHS 2022)

- Stunting: 24%, ↓ from 2014 (36%)
- Wasting: 11%, ↓ from 2014 (11%); but some suggest it to be 18%
- Underweight: 22%, ↓ from 2014 (33%)
- Severe acute malnutrition: ~2%

WHY NUTRITION MATTERS

- Impaired brain development
- Poor school performance
- Higher risk of death from infections
- Low adult productivity

FEEDING PRACTICES IN BANGLADESH

- GAINS**
- Exclusive breastfeeding rose to 53% in 2022 from 2007 (50%), but declined from 2017 (65%)
  - The goal is to increase this rate by 50% in the first six months
  - Complementary feeding is widely promoted
- GAPS**
- Low oil use in complementary feeding
  - Infrequent meals and food dilution
  - High reliance on formula
  - Minimum acceptable diet fell from 34% (2017-18) to 30% (2022)



GIRLS AND MATERNAL NUTRITION



Low birth weight doubles the risk of stunting, as evidenced by research in seven countries across South Asia, Africa and Latin America



South Asia—India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Afghanistan—reports the highest maternal and child malnutrition rates



Low adolescent nutrition = Low birth weight + Stunted child



Maternal undernutrition ↑ child stunting risk 2–3x

FIRST 1,000 DAYS = GOLDEN WINDOW

~80% of brain growth occurs

Highest vulnerability to stunting in the first 3 months, contradicting the belief that malnutrition begins after breastfeeding ends

Maternal height, birth weight, and early feeding determine outcomes

icddr,b is working in Mirpur, where, using MRI scans, the link between brain development and malnutrition is being investigated

SYSTEM GAPS

Budget affects nutrition

1-3% of health budget = ~35% stunting

3.5% budget = 20-25% stunting

BD spends 9-10% of the health budget on nutrition

WHAT WORKS: SOLUTIONS

A comprehensive, sustained approach is a must

Budget increase focusing on nutrition

Empowering grassroots community health workers

and the Ministry of Local Government is essential to overcome these pressing challenges.



Prof. Salahuddin Mahmud, Professor of Paediatric Gastroenterology, Bangladesh Shishu Hospital & Institute

I would like to present a commonly experienced scenario to illustrate child nutrition challenges in Bangladesh. Aizuddin's malnourished grandson, Karimuddin, was taken to Dhaka after local treatment failed. The mother, a teen garment worker, could not stay due to work.

Despite initial recovery, the child relapsed six months later due to poverty, maternal malnutrition, and a lack of family support. Though child nutrition corners exist locally, accessing them is difficult, with one nutrition worker responsible for 200 families.

Bangladesh has around 1.7 million moderate and 500,000 severe malnutrition cases. Without addressing poverty and family instability, children will continue to relapse. Exclusive breastfeeding for six months, followed by regular family meals, is vital.

Alarmingly, the rate of minimum acceptable diet has worsened, dropping from 31% in 2017 to 26% today. Similarly, the percentage of children meeting the minimum meal frequency has declined from 81% in 2017 to 61%. At the core, it is education and financial stability that make the most significant difference in addressing these issues.



Dr. Thaddaeus David May, Senior Director, Nutrition Research Division, icddr,b

It is crucial to highlight how children can remain happy, capable, and healthy with parental support, even in challenging conditions marked by low hygiene and inadequate nutrition. This

reality is, in many ways, encouraging. The progress made so far has been remarkable.

Encouragingly, Bangladesh has made notable strides in tackling child malnutrition. In 2014, moderate stunting affected 36% of children—just 2.5% of the global burden—while severe stunting stood at 12%, accounting for only 1% globally.

While a complete solution remains a distant goal, the most effective step we can take at this point is to focus seriously on preventing malnutrition.



Samina Israt, Programme Officer – Diet-related Risk Factors, World Health Organization

Addressing the triple burden of malnutrition—wasting, stunting, and micronutrient deficiencies—alongside emerging challenges such as obesity and non-communicable diseases (NCDs), is critical.

Rapid urbanisation and poor dietary habits are key contributors, particularly among children and adolescents. Two major concerns are the lack of proper family meals and the rising consumption of junk food.

Balanced family meals rich in vegetables and meat are vital for cognitive development, physical growth, and immunity. In contrast, junk food—high in salt, sugar, and trans fats—leads to obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular issues, and premature death.



Dr. Muhammad Habibur Rahman, Line Director, Community-Based Health Care (CBHC), Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS)

Despite efforts by over 20 ministries and many organisations working on nutrition, the BDHS report does not show significant improvement in overall health performance from 2009 to 2024.

Across Bangladesh, 14,350 community

clinics serve approximately 500,000 visitors daily, including over 100,000 children under five—constituting more than 20%. While we are committed to promoting health and nutrition, our facilities still offer only limited services.

The current three-month training period for service providers is inadequate to ensure quality care. To improve outreach and service delivery, we plan to expand our coverage to include all community clinics in the Sylhet and Chattogram divisions as a priority. Moreover, the work of the Food Safety Authority must be decentralised, particularly in light of findings of heavy metal contamination in food.



Prof. Dr. Anjuman Ara Sultana, Line Director, National Nutrition Services

To build a healthy nation, we must prioritise maternal and child nutrition, starting with adolescent girls at the SSC level. Since 2022, progress has stagnated, highlighting the need for increased budget allocations across all 64 districts.

Early child marriage, a major driver of poor maternal and child health, must be urgently addressed. Frequent childhood infections linked to underweight conditions reinforce the need for six months of exclusive breastfeeding.



Deepika Mehrish Sharma, Chief of Nutrition, UNICEF

The Rohingya crisis offers a stark example of the challenges in delivering health and nutrition services during humanitarian emergencies. Bangladesh faces a critical situation, with child wasting rates ranging from 11% to 18%, and conditions in the Rohingya camps are even more alarming.

Approximately 500,000 children under five reside in the camps, receiving basic health, nutrition, and education services.

Yet, between February 2024 and February 2025, severe wasting among these children rose by 27%, putting more lives at risk. Floods, diarrhoea, cholera outbreaks, and ration cuts have worsened their condition.

Addressing malnutrition requires a life-cycle approach that includes not only the health sector but also the private sector, policymakers, and ministries such as Public Health Engineering and Women and Children Affairs.



Dr. Rudaba Khondker, Country Director, Bangladesh, The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN)

As the proverb goes, "Give me a healthy mother, and I will give you a good and productive nation." This vision can only be realised by delivering comprehensive health and nutrition services to adolescents.

I would like to emphasise the urgent need to address affordability—specifically focusing on dietary diversity, dietary quality, and access to safe food. We must remain vigilant about what young people are consuming.

There is also growing discussion around establishing adolescent clubs, ensuring greater multi-sectoral involvement, and addressing household expenditure patterns. Scaling up evidence-based research is essential.



Dr. Abu Jamil Faisal, President-Elect, Public Health Association of Bangladesh

I would like to highlight several critical issues that directly affect the health and well-being of mothers and children.

Plastic consumption has become a growing concern. A recent Italian study revealed that individuals in South Asia consume an average of 11 kilograms of plastic annually, containing eight harmful

components. This exposure poses serious long-term risks to children's health and development.

Lead poisoning and exposure to heavy metals demand urgent attention. The widespread use of pesticides and harmful agricultural chemicals has led to a rise in respiratory issues among children, compounding their existing vulnerabilities.

Addressing these environmental and health threats is essential to ensuring a safer, healthier future for our mothers and children.



Mahfuz Anam, Editor & Publisher, The Daily Star

We are honoured to be here with icddr,b, yet deeply saddened by how little we knew about the severe food and nutrition challenges faced by mothers and children—issues that lead to stunting and long-term harm. We are failing to nourish our children properly, and even when we do, food contamination remains a grave concern. As a society, we must do better.

The Daily Star is committed to publishing further investigative reports, following up on these critical issues, and using our editorial platform to bring them the attention they deserve. We stand firmly in support of this cause.



Tanjim Ferdous, In-Charge, NGOs & Foreign Missions, Business Development Section, The Daily Star & Moderator of the Session

Despite progress in health indicators, child nutrition in Bangladesh remains critical. The BDHS 2022 reports that 24% of children under five are stunted, 12% are wasted, and 22% are underweight, with around 370,000 suffering from severe acute malnutrition. Inequalities in nutrition, healthcare, and essential services persist—especially in slums and rural areas.



THE SHELF

# To flee, to remember

Four books that trace the scars of displacement, from Palestine to Partition

MAHMUDA EMDAD, AMREETA LETHE

Every year, on June 20, World Refugee Day calls on us to remember and hold in our hearts the millions displaced by conflict, persecution, and political upheaval around the world. With global tensions and the numbers of refugees reaching unprecedented levels, literature forces us to pause and reflect on the stories of those forcibly displaced rather than viewing them as statistics on our screens—the latter offering a swift descent into abstraction and dehumanisation. The following books urge us to consider what it truly means to lose a home, a nation, or a future.

**Men in the Sun**  
Ghassan Kanafani, Hilary Kilpatrick (translator)  
Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998  
*Men in the Sun* follows three generations of displaced Palestinians—Abu Qais, an older man; Assad, a young revolutionary; and Marwan, a teenager—as they attempt to escape the despair and desperation of the refugee camps in Iraq and smuggle themselves

**The village, with its predominantly Sikh and Muslim populace, lays the backdrop for Khushwant Singh to weave a tale that views the horrors of Partition not in terms of numbers or sweeping political narratives, but rather through the lived experiences of ordinary people grappling with the collapse of humanity and the unraveling of long-standing communal harmony.**

into Kuwait. Several Palestinian symbols and stories that have become hauntingly familiar to us today, from uprooted olive trees to the horror of being pregnant and malnourished amid a genocide, and the unshakeable resolve to one day return to one's homeland, reiterate that the current genocide is but an extension of over 75 years of violent oppression and exile. Disquieting questions reverberate throughout *Men in the Sun*, asking,



“Would you have been willing to carry all your years on your shoulders and flee across the desert to Kuwait to find a crust of bread?” and echoing, “Have you forgotten?”

**On Juneteenth**  
Annette Gordon-Reed  
Liveright, 2021  
Annette Gordon-Reed's *On Juneteenth* is a powerful blend of memoir and historical reflection that interrogates Texas's fraught racial history through the lens of one of its most significant yet long-overlooked events. While centered on the delayed emancipation of enslaved people in 1865, the book's real weight lies in its exploration of displacement: of people, truths, and identity. Gordon-Reed traces how African-descended Texans, despite formal freedom, remained trapped in a legacy of racial violence, segregation, and historical erasure. Her reflections reveal how migration, both forced and chosen, shaped not

only physical movement but cultural and psychological dislocation. *On Juneteenth* is not just a reflection on the past, but a critique of the continued denial of full belonging to Black Americans.

**The Beekeeper of Aleppo**  
Christy Lefteri  
Ballantine Books, 2019  
*The Beekeeper of Aleppo* is a haunting yet tender portrayal of love, loss, and survival in the shadow of a war. Through the journey of Nuri and Afra—from the once vibrant streets of Aleppo to a refugee center in England—Christy Lefteri weaves a quiet, aching narrative about the emotional toll of displacement. Afra's blindness becomes a powerful metaphor for trauma, mirroring something that lingers long after borders are crossed, while Nuri clings to memories of bees and beauty amidst loss. In the midst of darkness, there are sunflowers, memories of bees, and

the fragile hope of healing. This novel aches with heartbreak but never lets go of hope. It reminds us that survival is not merely escape, but the struggle to rebuild in the face of ruin. A tender, unforgettable meditation on grief, resilience, and what endures.

**Train to Pakistan**  
Khushwant Singh  
Chatto & Windus, 1956  
Set during the Partition of 1947, *Train to Pakistan* takes place in the fictional village of Mano Majra, situated on the border of Pakistan and India. The village, with its predominantly Sikh and Muslim populace, lays the backdrop for Khushwant Singh to weave a tale that views the horrors of Partition not in terms of numbers or sweeping political narratives, but rather through the lived experiences of ordinary people grappling with the collapse of humanity and the unraveling of long-standing communal harmony. Of course, the initial sentiment among

the villagers who have lived side by side for generations is to resist such politically instigated disharmony, as Imam Baksh, one of many Muslims forced to flee to refugee camps in Pakistan, pleads, “What have we to do with Pakistan? We were born here. So were our ancestors. We have lived amongst [Sikhs] as brothers.” However, as trains filled with corpses cross the freshly dissected borders, and the pressures of political turmoil mount, even Mano Majra succumbs to the violent, seemingly inescapable cycles of fear and vengeance.

**Mahmuda Emdad** is a women and gender studies major with an endless interest in feminist writings, historical fiction, and pretty much everything else, all while questioning the world in the process. Reach her at mahmudaemdad123@gmail.com.

**Amreeta Lethe** is a writer and translator, and sub-editor at Star Books and Literature.

BOOK REVIEW: FICTION

# When the moon dances with elephants

Review of ‘Lakshmi’s Secret Diary’ (Columbia University Press, 2024) by Ari Gautier, translated by Sheela Mahadevan

NAMRATA

In *Lakshmi’s Secret Diary*, Ari Gautier crafts a dazzling, multi-layered narrative that is as whimsical as it is profound. Translated with lyrical grace by Sheela Mahadevan, this South Asian francophone novel reimagines the traditional animal fable, inviting readers into a surreal and poignant odyssey through the eyes of Lakshmi, a temple elephant yearning for freedom.

Set in the richly textured landscape of Pondicherry, once the colonial heart of French India, *Lakshmi’s Secret Diary* interweaves myth, satire, and philosophical inquiry into a compelling critique of South Asian society. At the heart of the novel lies a deceptively simple premise—an elephant escapes captivity. Yet Lakshmi’s journey quickly expands into a kaleidoscopic exploration of identity, oppression, and transcendence.

Rendered with remarkable sensitivity by Mahadevan, Gautier’s prose balances the surreal and the satirical, conjuring a world where animals voice existential dilemmas and the moon dances with elephants. The story’s cast is as imaginative as it is allegorical: Tripod Dog Baba, a three-legged sage; a flying fish named Alphonse; and a chameleon grappling with questions of being. Each encounter adds dimension to Lakshmi’s awakening, revealing both the absurdity and cruelty of hierarchical structures, from caste to speciesism.

**Gautier blends Sanskrit mythology, magical realism, and philosophical musing in a way that reflects the fragmented, surreal nature of modern life. The dancing moon, the existential chameleon, and the flying fish are not merely whimsical touches. They reflect a reality in which the mystical, the absurd, and the political coexist. This narrative style resonates in a world**



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

One of the novel's greatest strengths is its ability to toggle between the comic and the tragic without losing emotional depth. Gautier writes with a deep awareness of how animals are entangled in the spiritual and social fabric of India, simultaneously venerated, and violated, divine and disposable.

Beneath the fantastical veneer lies a trenchant social critique. Gautier does not shy away from exposing the contradictions of Indian society, particularly the caste system and its enduring legacy of violence and marginalisation. Yet his critique is couched in empathy, guided by the moral compass of his nonhuman narrators who, through their estrangement from the human world, offer fresh eyes on old injustices.

The novel also serves as an important intervention in South Asian literary discourse. As one of the few contemporary Indian

writers working in French, Gautier challenges linguistic hierarchies and expands the terrain of South Asian postcolonial literature. Mahadevan's afterword enriches the reading experience, situating the novel within broader conversations about reincarnation, translation, and Francophone literary traditions.

*Lakshmi’s Secret Diary* emerges as a highly relevant and timely work within multiple contemporary literary, cultural, and political contexts, both within India and in broader global discourses. Its significance lies not only in its themes and form but also in its linguistic and cultural positioning as a Francophone South Asian novel, a rare contribution to postcolonial literature.

As a novel originally written in French by a South Asian author from the former French colony of Pondicherry, *Lakshmi’s Secret Diary*

complicates the dominant Anglophone and regional language narratives in South Asian literature. It highlights the overlooked legacy of French colonialism in India, a history often eclipsed by the British Raj in public memory and literary production. Gautier uses this linguistic hybridity to explore layered colonial inheritances and question dominant cultural narratives.

By narrating the story through the eyes of Lakshmi, a temple elephant, and her animal companions, Gautier offers a fresh, defamiliarised perspective on human society. This device powerfully critiques caste hierarchies, religious hypocrisy, and speciesism, issues deeply ingrained in South Asian society.

In an era of increasing concern for animal rights, climate change, and inter-species ethics, the novel’s exploration of animal

consciousness and captivity feels especially prescient. It challenges anthropocentric worldviews and invites readers to reconsider the porous boundaries between species and the moral consequences of human dominion.

Themes of freedom, fate, and self-determination are woven throughout the novel, resonating with contemporary struggles for autonomy and dignity, whether in relation to caste, gender, colonial legacies, or even ecological survival. Lakshmi’s quest is as much internal as it is geographical. Her existential search echoes broader human concerns around purpose, memory, and liberation.

Gautier blends Sanskrit mythology, magical realism, and philosophical musing in a way that reflects the fragmented, surreal nature of modern life. The dancing moon, the existential chameleon, and the flying fish are not merely whimsical touches. They reflect a reality in which the mystical, the absurd, and the political coexist. This narrative style resonates in a world where traditional belief systems and rapid modernisation clash, and where storytelling becomes a means of making sense of cultural dislocation.

Finally, the novel’s form, fusing fable, satire, magical realism, and philosophical fiction, contributes to its relevance. It resists categorisation, much like the complex identities of its characters and the city it inhabits. For readers and scholars alike, *Lakshmi’s Secret Diary* expands the possibilities of what a South Asian novel can be, not just a realist portrait, but a deeply imaginative, subversive, and multilingual expression of contemporary life.

*Lakshmi’s Secret Diary* is a rare and remarkable achievement, a work that is at once poetic, political, whimsical, and weighty. It reminds us that stories told through the eyes of animals can often reveal more about human nature than those told by humans themselves. Through Lakshmi’s unforgettable journey, Gautier and Mahadevan offer a testament to the enduring power of storytelling to reimagine the world and to imagine freedom in its most expansive sense.

**Namrata** is the founder of Keemiya Creatives and Bookbots India, and editor of Kitaab. She hosts The Bookbot Theory podcast and writes on travel, gender, and culture.





# Accelerating Menstrual Health Initiatives in Bangladesh

UNICEF and WaterAid, in collaboration with The Daily Star, organised a roundtable on 27 May 2025 titled ‘Building Climate-Resilient and Inclusive WASH Infrastructure: Creating Period-Friendly Schools, Health Care Facilities and Workplaces.’ The discussion brought together experts and stakeholders to assess the current state of Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) in Bangladesh, address existing challenges, and explore inclusive, sustainable solutions across education, healthcare, and workplace settings. Below is a summary of the discussion and the key outcomes.



**Peter Maes**  
Chief, WASH Section, UNICEF

Menstruation is a natural part of life, yet millions globally including many in Bangladesh face stigma, misinformation, and limited access to safe menstrual products, sanitation facilities, and reliable information. According to UNICEF (2022), 500 million people worldwide lack adequate menstrual hygiene facilities. In Bangladesh, many adolescent girls miss school due to poor WASH infrastructure, unaffordable menstrual products, and persistent taboos.

This is not just a WASH issue it is about dignity, health, education, gender equality, and resilience. Inadequate menstrual health management affects school attendance, women’s participation in the workforce, and the delivery of healthcare, especially during climate-induced disasters such as floods and cyclones.

The 2018 National Hygiene Survey found that 35.1% of schoolgirls were absent during menstruation. Only 24% of schools had clean, functional toilets, and 22% had sanitary pad disposal bins. Healthcare facilities also lacked adequate water and sanitation services.

Bangladesh’s climate vulnerability exacerbates the crisis. During the 2022 Sylhet floods, women and girls faced severe shortages of sanitary products and lacked privacy in shelters.

We call on the government, NGOs, donors, and the private sector to invest in period-friendly, climate-resilient WASH infrastructure; implement the 2021 National MHM Strategy; support access to eco-friendly products; and prioritise the voices of girls and marginalised groups in all solutions.

**Partha Hefaz Shaikh**  
Director – Programmes and Policy Advocacy, WaterAid Bangladesh

When WaterAid conducted surveys in 2011–12 and again in 2018, we observed some improvements in menstrual hygiene management. For instance, the average number of school days missed by girls due to menstruation decreased slightly, from 2.9 to 2.5 days. This progress reflects efforts to create more women-friendly environment in schools, but there is still a long way to go.

The key now lies in strategy. While we have the National Menstrual Hygiene Management Strategy 2021, the focus must shift to its effective implementation. WaterAid has long advocated for improvements to school toilet facilities, including the provision of sanitary pads and hygiene materials. These interventions are already beginning to make a positive impact.

However, broader challenges such as climate resilience and water availability must be addressed. For example, we have introduced rainwater harvesting systems to help ensure reliable access to water. It is vital to consider the environmental effects of climate change, particularly in school settings. Special attention should be paid to regions such as South Bengal and the coastal areas, where the water crisis is especially acute.

Ultimately, our goal is to create inclusive, safe, and supportive spaces for all, especially for girls.

**Md Shofiqul Alam**  
WASH Specialist, UNICEF (Keynote Presentation)

Today’s goal is to promote policy dialogue and foster collaboration across the WASH, education, health, gender, and climate sectors. Menstrual health is integral to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those related to health, education, gender equality, and sanitation.

UNICEF’s Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHM) interventions focus on four core areas: social support, education, access to menstrual materials, and adequate facilities. Yet, significant challenges remain. Approximately, 54 million women and girls in Bangladesh menstruate, from which 14.4 million are adolescents. It is an alarming fact that, only 30 per cent knew about menstruation before their first period, and 68 per cent still rely on old clothes. While cloth is not inherently unsafe, it must be properly cleaned and dried. Many women prefer cloth for its availability and affordability. However, in slum areas, poor menstrual hygiene practices are leading to serious health issues, including infections and complications during pregnancy. In the ready-made garment (RMG) sector, women often wear the same pad throughout their shift, which poses serious risks to reproductive health.

The current status of Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) in institutions highlights multiple gaps, only 53 per cent of students receive adequate information before menarche, and 34 per cent of girls still depend on old clothes. The impact is stark where 30 per cent of schoolgirls miss two to three days of school each month due to menstruation, affecting their academic progress and increasing dropout rates.

This issue also affects workplaces. In the RMG sector, female workers reportedly miss an average of six workdays per month due to infections caused by poor menstrual hygiene. These are not merely hygiene concerns but are to critical public health risks with economic consequences.

Encouragingly, improvements are underway. Access to sanitary pads has been shown to significantly reduce infection rates. Bangladesh has taken meaningful steps: the National MHM Strategy (2021) is in place; gender-inclusive toilets are being introduced in schools; vending machines for sanitary pads have been piloted; and menstrual health education has been incorporated into school curricula.

Poor menstrual hygiene can lead to infections such as hepatitis B and thrush, and has lasting impacts on fertility and maternal health. Conversely, when girls have access to proper sanitary products, infection rates drop markedly.

As we mark Menstrual Hygiene Day 2025 under the theme “Together for a Period-Friendly World”, it is time to commit to action.

- KEY POINTS FROM THE PRESENTATION:**
- The National MHM Strategy was developed in 2021.
  - A yearly roadmap should be drafted to ensure that every girl and woman across Bangladesh can menstruate safely and with dignity.
  - MHM education has been incorporated into school curricula.
  - Gender-inclusive, friendly toilet facilities are being scaled across the country, particularly in schools.
  - Vending machines for sanitary pads have been introduced in selected public facilities and schools.
  - The WASH in Healthcare Facilities (HCF) Strategy is being revised for 2025–2030.
  - NGOs are actively promoting affordable and accessible sanitary products and menstrual cups.
  - The National MHM Coordination Committee has been established by the 2021 strategy, which needs to be functional.
  - The MHM platform plays the role in facilitating collaboration among organisations working on MHM, WASH, and SRHR.

**Fayazuddin Ahmad**  
Policy and Advocacy Lead, WaterAid Bangladesh

Do we truly understand the specific needs of women and girls, particularly those with disabilities and those living in hard-to-reach areas? Do policy-makers and implementers have a clear picture of how menstrual health and hygiene are managed across different regions of the country, and the barriers women must overcome to access menstrual products?

The 2021 National Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) Strategy must be implemented in a way that ensures inclusivity and leaves no one behind. Services must be accessible, affordable, and delivered with dignity, particularly for women and girls with disabilities. Adequate sanitation facilities must be made universally available. We must engage meaningfully and express, through action, that we care.

**Mushfiqua Zaman Satiar**  
Senior Policy Advisor – Gender and Civil Society, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Bangladesh

For many women, a period-friendly world remains a distant reality. True inclusivity must embrace not only women but also men and diverse communities where genuine, sustainable development begins.

The National MHM Strategy must be implemented effectively. Access to menstrual products and sanitation facilities needs to be expanded and normalised. Menstruation has long been treated as a taboo subject, but it is the responsibility of the next generation to confront and dismantle these harmful stigmas.

Moreover, people with disabilities and those in remote regions continue to be excluded. These gaps must be acknowledged and urgently addressed to ensure menstrual equity for all.

**Dr Jesmin Zaman**  
Head of Marketing, Square Toiletries Limited

The private sector is often expected to balance profit with public good in menstrual health. While accessibility and affordability are widely discussed, their deeper implications are frequently overlooked. An average Bangladeshi girl requires around seven pads per cycle, costing as little as Tk 50. Yet usage remains low. Why? Because we are failing to deliver true accessibility, awareness, and inclusivity.

Even in 2025, schoolgirls still face inadequate access, although schools should be prioritised. In Satkhira, some girls with disabilities reportedly take birth control pills to stop menstruation, which highlights dangerous alternatives. Additionally, the chemical fragrances in napkins raise health concerns. We must question whether we are harming girls in the name of hygiene. Genuine inclusivity across all levels is essential to drive meaningful change by 2030.

**Dr Muhammad Munir Hussain**  
Programme Analyst, UNFPA

Between knowledge and skills lies a crucial missing link-attitude. Bangladesh does not lack knowledgeable people, but there is a clear gap in awareness and mindset. Without a positive attitude, skill development cannot take place.

Take child marriage as an example. Everyone knows it is harmful, yet it remains widespread. Similarly, we continue to provide information on menstrual hygiene, but knowledge alone is not enough. Programmes must go beyond education and actively challenge taboos.

These taboos are rooted in harmful social norms. Changing them requires inclusive, community-led dialogues. Only through this process can we break the silence, dismantle stigma, and encourage the use of sanitary pads.

We must invest in interventions that tackle root causes. Although development funding is declining, this gap can be addressed through strategic investments and well-designed corporate social responsibility initiatives focused on inclusive and climate-resilient infrastructure.

**Shehrin Shaila Mahmood,**  
Associate Scientist, Health Systems and Population Studies Division, icddr,b

As a contributor to the National Menstrual Hygiene Management Strategy 2021, I observed that although the strategy is comprehensive and includes a costed action plan, final endorsement remains pending. During field visits, I noticed that while objectives are outlined, specific activities often lack clarity.

For instance, the government prioritises WASH blocks, yet menstrual hygiene integration is uncertain. There is limited focus and investment, particularly in hard-to-reach areas. A major concern is the unsafe disposal of menstrual products, which contributes to environmental pollution and public health risks.

In the context of climate change, access to products must be safe to use and dispose. We must promote biodegradable and reusable options rooted in community ownership to ensure sustainability.

Addressing this issue across all sectors now will reduce future health risks and economic costs through improved MHM practices.

**Nargis Akter**  
NPO, WASH and Environment, WHO Bangladesh

Menstrual hygiene must be recognised primarily as a health issue, not merely a hygiene concern. It encompasses physical, psychological, and social aspects. While there has been progress, many psychological barriers remain.

Women and girls must have access to accurate information, and menstrual products should be environmentally safe. Empathetic care and support from families are equally vital. Furthermore, school infrastructure, healthcare facilities, and workplaces should be gender-sensitive and regularly monitored to maintain safe and inclusive environments.

Ultimately, a comprehensive and multisectoral approach is essential to address all dimensions of menstrual health and ensure the dignity and well-being of all women and girls.

**Dr Md Monjur Hossain**  
Programme Manager (Adolescent & Reproductive Health), MCH-Services Unit

Menstrual health, hygiene, and management are interconnected. We are no longer focusing solely on hygiene but also emphasising health. Without proper menstrual hygiene, individuals risk reproductive tract infections, sexually transmitted infections, and infertility. These are the critical messages we continue to share. Menstruation is fundamental to human life and must be treated with dignity.

As service providers, we communicate these messages within the broader framework of Universal Health Coverage in Bangladesh. However, menstrual health cannot be addressed in isolation. It requires collaboration, cooperation, and ongoing dialogue across sectors.

User needs must be central to infrastructure planning. Menstrual health services must be inclusive, accessible, and user-friendly. We have received directives to ensure that all new infrastructure includes features such as ramps and lifts to support persons with disabilities.

While period poverty remains a challenge, we remain hopeful. Menstrual health must prioritise equity and well-being over commercial interests.

**Professor Dr AQM Shafiul Azam**  
Director (Planning and Development), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE)

Menstrual Health Management (MHM) is both a cross-sectoral development and rights issue. While it is easy to talk sincerely about mindset change, the process is far more complex. We have initiated coordination meetings to ensure facilities and essential materials are available in every school. These steps may seem small, but they mark significant progress for the entire community.

The National MHM Strategy 2021 provides a clear blueprint, yet we must constantly ask who the beneficiary is and how inclusive our efforts truly are. Current initiatives are often fragmented. Stronger collaboration, especially within schools, is urgently needed. Among the six key pillars of the strategy, intersectoral collaboration and evidence-based planning are especially critical.

Change cannot come from short awareness training alone. We must challenge entrenched beliefs and psychological barriers. School programmes should involve students from the beginning to understand their actual needs.

With good government intent and strategy, it is now time for united, well-coordinated, and respectful action.

**Tanjim Ferdous**  
In-Charge, NGO & Foreign Missions, The Daily Star (Moderator)

Although menstruation is a normal and natural process, it is still surrounded by various taboos and social stigmas in our country. Many schools, health centres, and workplaces have yet to develop a supportive and dignified environment where menstrual protection can be ensured, especially in areas vulnerable to climate change. We need to create climate-resilient, transitional, and period-friendly living facilities so that women and girls can live safely and with dignity.

S.M. Moniruzzaman, National Consultant, Policy Support Branch (PSB) at Local Government Division (LGD); Dina Afsana, Co-founder and COO of Vertical Innovations Ltd; Dr Sabrina Rafi, a Health Officer at UNICEF; Md. Shafiqul Islam, DGM of Development Programs at SAJIDA Foundation; Alauddin Ahmed, a Project Manager at ITN (International Training Network), BUET; and Mahnaz Worda Lithi, a Senior Officer of PIT at JAAGO Foundation, were attending speakers of this event.



## Are we looking at a triple health crisis?

### Chikungunya concerns add to coronavirus-dengue threats

It was only the other day that we commented on the simultaneous resurgence of coronavirus and dengue, warning how their potential outbreaks at the community level could have devastating effects. As our previous experience shows, Bangladesh is simply unable to handle the convergence of such infectious diseases due to poor public awareness as well as inadequate testing and treatment facilities. Against this backdrop, it is extremely concerning to learn of the resurgence of another infectious disease, chikungunya, which, like dengue, is also mosquito-borne. The emergence of these diseases in close succession threatens to overwhelm an already strained healthcare system, requiring proper interventions.

Chikungunya, however, has yet to reach the level of the other two diseases. According to a report citing data from the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), from January 1 to May 28, at least 337 suspected chikungunya cases were reported in Dhaka. As well as adding to the burden on the healthcare system, one additional problem with chikungunya is that it shares many clinical features with dengue, thus complicating or delaying diagnosis and treatment. Moreover, given the absence of a routine national surveillance system for chikungunya and limited diagnostic capacity in the country, the IEDCR has acknowledged that the numbers it reported may not convey the actual scale of infections.

Chikungunya still seems restricted to urban areas, particularly in Dhaka, but the current trend indicates it may increase in numbers and spread to other areas. This is partly because of the just-concluded Eid holiday during which millions of people travelled across the country, increasing the risks of a silent community transmission. To ensure the disease does not spread unchecked or undetected, it is vital that the authorities act swiftly. First, there must be an effective surveillance mechanism for chikungunya nationwide, especially in high-risk areas. Diagnostic facilities should also be made available beyond Dhaka so that cases can be identified early. Public health messaging—now focusing on Covid and dengue—should also include chikungunya, particularly its symptoms and preventive measures. As experts have told *The Daily Star*, forming a tiered system—comprising primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of care—is also essential to ensure the health system does not get too overwhelmed.

Our reactive approach to public health threats has cost us dearly in the past. With three viral diseases now emerging simultaneously, we can ill afford such an approach now. We, therefore, urge the authorities to treat the triple threat of Covid-19, dengue, and chikungunya as a single, interconnected health emergency and ensure prompt and coordinated interventions.

## Gulshan Lake in an alarming state

### Govt must act now to reverse this

It is disappointing that, like so many of our water bodies near urban centres, Gulshan Lake is also being destroyed by the relentless dumping of all forms of garbage and waste. According to a *Prothom Alo* report, waste in the lake accumulates mostly near its final stretch as one approaches Baridhara DOHS. There, a four-to-five-inch-thick layer of garbage has formed on the water's surface, emitting a strong foul odour. Because of the unbearable stench, no one wants to sit on the terraces or balconies of the buildings lining the lake. Residents on the second to fourth floors of these lake-facing buildings are even forced to keep their windows and doors shut just to keep the smell out.

Although such dumping has become a perennial problem, the situation has recently worsened due to the disposal of entrails and blood from sacrificial animals during Eid. Reportedly, no government workers have come to clean the area so far. A cleaner hired by a nursery owner said that, in addition to sacrificial waste, his cleaning tools have been pulling up all kinds of rubbish. A resident of a nearby building also stated that garbage is regularly dumped into the lake from buildings on both sides.

According to the president of the Gulshan Society, they have been cleaning floating waste from Gulshan Lake using their own funds; however, the larger issue is that all the sewage from Gulshan-Banani and Baridhara DOHS is reportedly being dumped into the lake. He further alleged that, despite repeated appeals to the authorities, no action has been taken. Residents in the area have also expressed frustration with Dhaka WASA, accusing it of allowing waste to be dumped. However, an official of WASA has denied this allegation.

An environmental expert who has conducted research on pollution in Gulshan Lake has revealed that the level of dissolved oxygen in the lake is less than half the required standard. For instance, the minimum amount of dissolved oxygen should be 5 milligrams per litre of water, but in Gulshan Lake it is only 2 milligrams. Additionally, the level of dissolved solids is twice the acceptable limit, which has severely damaged the lake's aquatic ecosystem, making fish deaths increasingly common.

The relevant authorities must explain why they have allowed the situation to deteriorate to this extent. That Gulshan Lake is in a terrible state is clear as daylight. And it is high time the government took action to reverse it. A regular cleaning mechanism must be established, and the government should work with experts to find a scientifically viable solution to the lake's pollution.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

### US-Soviet establish hotline

This day in 1963, the United States and the Soviet Union established a direct communications link, known as the "hotline," to reduce the risk of accidental nuclear war.

## YUNUS IN LONDON

# Who bears responsibility for the diplomatic misstep?



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KAMAL AHMED

When the BBC's Rajini Vaidyanathan asked Professor Muhammad Yunus—head of Bangladesh's interim government—during his recent visit to London why he was meeting the king but not the prime minister, it was an awkward moment for most. Yet, without hesitation or irritation, as clearly heard on the radio, Professor Yunus replied: "Well, we would be very happy to meet him. Somehow, probably he is busy or whatever. But that gives me a great opportunity too—now that he is busy, I invite him to come to Bangladesh." A witty remark, no doubt, though hardly a satisfying explanation.

Rajini followed up with a more pointed question: "What reason does Downing Street give you for not arranging the meeting?" To this, Professor Yunus replied: "I don't think we've received any explanation. Probably he is busy with other important things." This exchange highlighted the foreign ministry's failure to secure a key meeting during the chief adviser's visit to a country with which Bangladesh shares a special and historic relationship.

Bangladesh's ties with the UK extend beyond bilateral trade, finance, and its large diaspora; they are also rooted in colonial history. High-level political visits are not merely symbolic—they serve as essential diplomatic engagements. Planning such visits requires meticulous attention to detail: scheduling meetings, setting agendas, and managing protocol and cultural briefings. According to the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, preparations for a full state visit can take up to four years due to their complexity—though this was not a state visit but an official one.

Criticism of the interim government for this diplomatic lapse is not mere politicking. Rather, it reflects genuine concern over a missed opportunity to strengthen vital international relationships. Acting Foreign Secretary Md Ruhul Alam Siddique acknowledged this on Tuesday, stating the ministry bore some responsibility for the failure to arrange a meeting between Chief Adviser Yunus and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer. Responding to a journalist's question,



Neither the permanent foreign secretary nor even the acting foreign secretary was part of the delegation in Professor Yunus's London visit.

PHOTO: CA PRESS WING

Siddique said: "As it was our responsibility to organise the visit, we are to some extent responsible for the meeting not taking place, as was announced on our side at the beginning of his visit to the UK," according to a report by daily *New Age*.

However, this half-hearted admission leaves key questions unanswered. Was a meeting with the British prime minister ever confirmed or formally requested with an agenda? Was it expected to happen informally? Was the Bangladeshi side aware that Prime Minister Starmer would be occupied with the critical spending review in parliament—a period of intense political activity? Whoever within the foreign ministry approved the upgrade of this trip to an official visit without securing proper appointments must be held accountable for this national embarrassment.

Even more perplexing was the absence of the foreign adviser during

In her interview, Rajini also sought a comment from the chief adviser on MP Tulip Siddiq's reported request for a meeting to clear her name of corruption allegations that cost her ministerial post, which she described as a "politically motivated smear campaign." Professor Yunus declined to comment, citing the sub judice nature of the matter and the need to avoid interfering in the judicial process. Yet, in contrast, his interview with the *Financial Times* took a decidedly political tone, with the headline reading: "Keir Starmer declines to meet Bangladesh leader tracking down missing billions." In it, Yunus argued that the UK should feel "morally" obligated to support the recovery of funds allegedly siphoned off during Sheikh Hasina's tenure.

There is no doubt that Professor Muhammad Yunus, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, draws international attention wherever he goes. His London visit—to receive the King

it requires urgent reform to instil professionalism, leadership, and accountability.

While the visit may not have yielded substantial diplomatic achievements, it was politically significant on the domestic front. It helped clarify the interim government's position on a roadmap for restoring democratic governance through elections.

The political uncertainty surrounding this roadmap has been a persistent obstacle to the effective functioning of the non-partisan interim administration. Recently, this ambiguity had become a growing concern. In this context, the much-anticipated meeting in London between Professor Yunus and BNP Acting Chairman Tarique Rahman—long exiled—offered a rare and encouraging signal. Their reported agreement on moving forward with election plans was a welcome development for those seeking a peaceful political transition.

# A reflection on Eid, grief, and quiet compassion



Tasnuba Sinha is senior initiative manager at the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD).

TASNUBA SINHA

Eid-ul-Azha has passed. For many, it was a time of joy and ritual—of family, food, and faith. But for some of us, it was quieter. More reflective. More gentle.

Last Eid-ul-Fitr, I spent the day in a hospital, holding onto hope as my father recovered from a stroke. While the rest of the world celebrated, I was surrounded by beeping monitors, whispered prayers, and the unknown. There was no new outfit, no festive recipes, and no cheerful post on social media. Just survival, and the quiet strength it demanded.

This Eid felt different. Not because everything is perfect, but because healing has begun—slowly, quietly. My heart holds more now: both ache and gratitude. I've learned to carry them together. That softness stayed with me through Eid-ul-Azha and led me to ask myself, again, what this festival is really about.

Eid-ul-Azha is rooted in the story of Prophet Ibrahim's (PBUH) devotion. It is a story of trust, surrender, and ultimately, mercy. The act of sacrifice is not the point—it is the willingness

to submit to something higher, to let go of ego and entitlement, and to choose compassion. But in practice, we often lose that deeper meaning. We focus on the ritual, but overlook the values behind it. And in recent years, a troubling trend has grown more visible: the public sharing of graphic images of sacrificed animals.

**If your Eid was joyful, I'm truly happy for you. If it was quiet, painful, or full of tender contradictions, I hope you found moments of peace. And for all of us, I hope we walk away from this Eid with a little more softness. Because Eid-ul-Azha isn't just about sacrifice; it's about what we're willing to surrender for the sake of something greater—like our pride, our need to show off, or our numbness to pain.**

Every year, my timeline fills with such posts, sometimes even before the Eid day begins. They appear without context or care, and they stay long after the meat has been distributed. For some, these images are part of tradition. For others—children,

not in the act itself, but in how we speak about it, how we display it, and how we forget that mercy is the heart of the story.

I say this not to diminish the importance of Qurbani but to honour it. To ask, with care: could we carry out

this tradition in a way that upholds its spiritual weight? Could we move more mindfully? Could we share less, but feel more? Because not everyone's Eid looks the same. Some people are grieving. Some are recovering. Some, like I was last Eid, are simply holding on. And some feel deeply for the animals whose lives are part of this sacred offering.

What might it look like to include them in how we show up?

This Eid, I chose to move more slowly. I didn't post pictures. I watched more than I spoke. I held space for both joy and memory—for where I was last year, and where I am now. It made the day feel more honest. More whole.

If your Eid was joyful, I'm truly happy for you. If it was quiet, painful, or full of tender contradictions, I hope you found moments of peace. And for all of us, I hope we walk away from this Eid with a little more softness. Because Eid-ul-Azha isn't just about sacrifice; it's about what we're willing to surrender for the sake of something greater—like our pride, our need to show off, or our numbness to pain.

We often say "Eid Mubarak" without remembering what mubarak truly means—blessed, sacred, worthy. So maybe that's the question we carry forward: what would it mean to make this festival mubarak in spirit, not just in name?

Let it be marked not only by what we give, but how we give it. Not just in what we offer up—but in how we carry it through. With dignity. With humility. And always, with compassion.



WORLD REFUGEE DAY

# ‘Realistically, repatriation is not possible at this time’

*International Rescue Committee’s (IRC) country director in Bangladesh, Hasina Rahman, discusses the ongoing crises at Rohingya refugee camps, fund cuts and Bangladesh’s role in preserving their dignity and facilitating repatriation in a conversation with Tamanna Khan of The Daily Star.*

**What is IRC’s scope of work in Bangladesh?**

Before we get into what the International Rescue Committee (IRC) is doing in Bangladesh, here is a quick overview of who we are.

The IRC was founded in 1933 at the call of Albert Einstein to help people fleeing conflict and persecution. Today, we work in over 40 countries, responding to some of the world’s toughest crises. Whether conflict, disaster, or displacement, our mission is to help people survive, recover, and rebuild—with a strong focus on women and girls, who are often the hardest hit.

In Bangladesh, our story goes back to the 1971 Liberation War, when we supported Bangladeshi refugees in India with health and education programmes. We relaunched our country programme in 2017 in response to the Rohingya refugee crisis. Since then, we have been active across all Rohingya camps and in host communities in Cox’s Bazar and southern districts like Satkhira, Khulna, Barishal, Barguna, and Patuakhali.

Our work is locally led and designed to meet the full range of needs in crisis-affected communities. We provide health care, including reproductive health, education for children and youth, protection services for women and children, and support for people to develop skills that help them earn a living again. We also help communities prepare for future disasters, which are becoming more frequent due to climate change.

Everything we do is grounded in humanitarian principles and delivered in partnership with Bangladeshi NGOs and community-based groups. Our priority is to reach those most at risk: women, girls, children, persons with disabilities, and the elderly.

Since 2017, we have reached over 1.8 million people in Bangladesh with essential services that restore dignity, safety, and hope.

**What’s the situation right now in the Rohingya camps? Do they have what they need?**

Right now, over a million Rohingya refugees are living in what has become the world’s largest and most crowded refugee settlement in Cox’s Bazar. Conditions are getting tougher by the day, especially for women and children, who make up more than half the population.

The biggest challenge? Funding. The 2025 Joint Response Plan has appealed for over \$930 million, but so far, below 20 percent of that has been received. That means the response is

under enormous pressure, and humanitarian groups can focus only on the most life-saving services. Things like protection, education, and skills development are being pushed aside, not because they are not essential, but because there simply is not enough funding.

With the monsoon being active in full swing, the situation is even more difficult. Flooding and landslides are already affecting camps and surrounding host communities. Many shelters are not strong enough to withstand the weather, and basic infrastructure is fragile. Learning centres are shutting down due to a lack of funds, leaving nearly half a million children without access to education. Older youth have no formal education, no training, and no jobs, leaving them vulnerable to risky or harmful alternatives.

We are also seeing more dangerous trends. Desperate for safety, many refugees are turning to unsafe boat journeys, and tragically, some are losing their lives at sea. Women and girls face growing risks of gender-based violence, even while doing everyday things like collecting water or using toilets. Camp security is deteriorating, and there are alarming reports of forced recruitment by armed groups.

Mental health is another major concern. Many people are dealing with trauma, anxiety, and distress, but with limited funding, access to psychosocial support has become extremely difficult.

And on top of all this, over 1.5 lakh Rohingya refugees have newly arrived in recent months, fleeing fresh violence in Myanmar. Most remain unregistered and cannot access basic services or protection. Host communities, too, are under serious pressure, sharing limited resources while dealing with economic hardship and the growing impact of climate change.

In short, the situation is critical. Without immediate and sustained international support, we risk a total collapse of the humanitarian response, putting the lives and dignity of both Rohingya refugees and their Bangladeshi hosts at greater risk.

**How are funds cut by donors impacting IRC’s overall work? Would this fund cut push more Rohingya towards illegal activities and joining insurgent groups?**

The funding cuts have been incredibly tough. Like many organisations, the IRC has had to make some difficult choices about what we can and cannot continue. We are still delivering life-saving services, like health care, protection, and emergency support. However, critical programmes for longer-



Hasina Rahman with Rohingya children at a learning centre in a Cox’s Bazar camp.

term wellbeing, like those on mental health, education, and skill-building, have taken a hit. And when young people, especially adolescents, do not have access to learning or ways to earn a living, risks grow. We see more early marriages, child labour, and dangerous boat journeys driven by desperation, not choice.

There is no direct evidence linking funding cuts to people joining insurgent groups, but it is fair to say that the longer refugees live in limbo, without education, jobs, or even freedom of movement, the more hopeless and frustrated they will feel. That kind of frustration can lead to instability, not just in the camps, but in surrounding communities and regions too.

That said, it is important to recognise the strength and resilience of the Rohingya community. Most continue to live peacefully despite difficult conditions. But to reduce risks and support their dignity, we need to invest in comprehensive services, especially those that support youth and women. And for that, we need reliable, long-term funding.

**What steps can the Bangladesh government take to ensure that the Rohingya at least have the basic minimum welfare?**

First, it is important to acknowledge just how much the government and people of Bangladesh have already done. Hosting over a million refugees for nearly eight

years is no small task, and the generosity of communities in Cox’s Bazar is truly commendable.

That being said, as the crisis becomes more prolonged, we have to think about how to move beyond just survival and look toward dignity and stability. That starts with ensuring that the refugees have continued access to basic services such as health care, shelter, education, and skill development, and that they can live safely and with some predictability.

One key area is participation. The Rohingya refugees must have a voice in the decisions that shape their daily lives and futures. Whether it is services, safety, or potential repatriation, their perspectives on these matters. Supporting mechanisms that allow them to speak up—especially women, youth, and other marginalised groups—is critical. The Government of Bangladesh can play a leading role here by enabling safe and structured ways for Rohingya voices to be included in policy and programme decisions. Not only is it the right thing to do, but it also helps build trust and strengthens future solutions.

Women and children, in particular, need more protection and access to justice, especially when they face violence. Creating safer environments, including better lighting, secure facilities, and clear pathways for reporting abuse, makes a big difference.

There is also a real need to expand opportunities—formal education for

children, skills training for the youth, and income-generating options for adults. And safe, regulated freedom of movement would go a long way in helping people access these services and contribute more meaningfully to their communities.

Finally, none of this can happen in isolation. Continued engagement with international and regional partners—ASEAN, the UN, and donor countries—is key to keeping momentum and resources going. Long-term solutions will take time, but right now, we can focus on ensuring dignity, inclusion, and hope for the Rohingya people.

**During the UN secretary-general’s visit this year, he mentioned the safe repatriation of Rohingya refugees. What is its possibility in your view? What can Bangladesh do to expedite safe Rohingya repatriation?**

The UN secretary-general’s call for safe and voluntary repatriation was an important reminder that return is the ultimate goal, but it has to be the right kind of return. Right now, conditions in Myanmar are simply not safe. Violence in Rakhine State continues, and there are major political, security, and humanitarian issues. So realistically, repatriation is not possible at this time.

That is where Bangladesh’s role becomes vital. Continued diplomatic and international engagement with regional partners and platforms like ASEAN, the UN, donor countries, and even Myanmar needs to be pushed for the kind of changes that would make a return possible.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh can use its voice on global platforms to advocate for ongoing humanitarian support and push for complementary pathways, like third-country resettlement for the most at-risk refugees. These efforts are part of a broader, shared responsibility to ensure that Rohingya refugees do not remain stuck in limbo forever.

The upcoming UN high-level conference on the Rohingya in New York on September 30, 2025, is a critical opportunity to keep global attention on the crisis. We hope the conference will lead to renewed political commitment, increased funding for the humanitarian response, and a stronger push for complementary pathways, including safe, voluntary, and dignified return when conditions allow, and meaningful support for host communities.

With the right kind of collaboration and international pressure, we can work towards a future where a safe and dignified return is truly possible.

## From livestream genocide in Gaza to the war on Iran



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JAMAL KANJ

The Orwellian G7 statement described Israel’s military attacks on Iran as “self-defence.” By twisting language to fit political ends, the communiqué normalises aggression and offers diplomatic cover for Israel’s serial violations of international law. Rather than condemning Israel’s dangerous escalation, the G7 resorts to vague calls for “de-escalation,” effectively endorsing impunity under the guise of neutrality.

Conspicuously absent from the statement was any mention of Israel’s use of starvation as a weapon against 2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza, Israeli violation of the ceasefire agreement in Lebanon or its years-long bombing of Syria. In effect, the G7 has now aligned itself fully with Netanyahu’s open-ended wars.

The Iranian nuclear programme was recently confirmed by the head of the US intelligence community, in testimony to Congress, stating that Iran is not building a nuclear weapon. Yet the G7’s statement reflects not objective assessment, but political posturing—another expression of Western supremacy towards non-Western nations. Nowhere is this bias more dangerous than in Washington and Europe’s tacit endorsement of Israeli attacks on Iran’s civilian nuclear facilities—sites that are safeguarded under international treaties. Such actions constitute a blatant violation of Article 56 of the Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, which prohibits targeting nuclear power facilities.

Striking an operating enrichment

plant or spent fuel pool poses a grave danger. Such an act could release massive amounts of radiation, leading to civilian deaths and contaminating aquifers, farmland, and entire ecosystems for generations. The effect would be tantamount to a nuclear attack, regardless of the delivery method. Yet, Western capitals that rightly warn of similar dangers at Ukraine’s Zaporizhzhia plant paradoxically endorse Israeli raids under the euphemism of “self-defence.”

The spectre of a catastrophic leak is almost certainly why Israel has so far held back from bombing Iran’s deeply buried Fordow enrichment complex, where uranium is refined to 60 percent. The environmental, diplomatic, and regional fallout could be incalculable. While Netanyahu wants to see the facility destroyed, he prefers on delegating that risk to the US, betting that the Trump administration will be more willing to shoulder the consequences.

Targeting nuclear infrastructure—civilian or military—sets a dangerous precedent. It ignores lessons from Chernobyl and Fukushima, shatters the taboo against striking nuclear plants, and exposes the hypocrisy of Western states that decry proliferation while tolerating allies flirting with nuclear disaster.

That moral blindness is neither new nor accidental. It is rooted in the same imperial pedigree that nourished slave trade, annihilated Indigenous nations, engineered colonial famines, Holocaust, and

twice unleashed atomic bombs on civilian targets. It is the same so-called Western “civilisation” that supplies the weapons, satellite intelligence, and diplomatic cover enabling Israel to flirt with nuclear catastrophe in Iran and starve children in Gaza. This complicity was laid bare by German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, who openly admitted that Israel is doing

defence enough to make American involvement low-risk for US forces and interests in the region

Into this meticulously staged farce steps Netanyahu himself—a master manipulator who understands Trump’s psychological vulnerabilities better than Trump’s own advisers. All it takes is a single phone call, heavy with flattery and inflated visions

gullible US president with the fantasy that regime change in Iraq would ignite a wave of democracy across the Middle East. Over two decades later, the region—and to a significant extent, the US—is still paying the price for being dragged into a catastrophic foreign war built on lies, hubris, and blind loyalty to Israeli strategic interests.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Smoke rises following an Israeli attack in Tehran, Iran, June 18, 2025.

today “the dirty work for us.”

Prodding Washington to join a new, made-for-Israel American war, Netanyahu’s operatives in the US—driven by an “Israel first” agenda—are working overtime to convince Trump to complete the most difficult phase of Israel’s new Middle East demonic venture. Their argument? That Israel has already crippled Iran’s

of historic greatness. Appealing to Trump’s fragile ego—telling him he’ll be remembered as the “saviour of Israel”—could be enough to fling open the gates to a catastrophic military escalation.

Much like in 2003, when the “Israel First” Jewish neocons, including Netanyahu’s own lies before Congress in 2002, manipulated another

Predicting Trump’s decisions has always been notoriously difficult—not due to any strategic genius, but because of his combustible mix of grievance, ego, and impulsiveness. For example, his trade wars began with sweeping tariffs and unravelled into chaotic carve-outs; his hardline immigration policies crumbled into talks about exempting farm and

hospitality industries. The same erratic pattern defines his foreign policy: bombastic threats, sudden reversals, and renewed aggression whenever flattery intersects with cable news talking points. His unhinged posts and reckless declarations on Iran are no exception—they’re just the latest flare-ups in a long trail of incoherence.

This combustible mix—Israel’s ethically reckless strategy paired with a US president prone to impulsive decision-making—creates a disturbing path to escalation. It risks fulfilling Netanyahu’s ambition to “reshape the Middle East,” a slogan that already produced the 2003 Iraq war. Twenty years after Iraq still bears the scars of that made-for-Israel war; American involvement in a new war on Iran would begin yet another chapter of chaos in Netanyahu’s “new Middle East.”

Western leaders have failed to learn from their catastrophic lessons of history. Time and again, they repeat the same blunders born of arrogance of power—only this time, the stakes are even higher. By offering unconditional support to Israel, they are not merely turning a blind eye; they are actively underwriting Netanyahu’s genocidal policies, and Israeli Jewish supremacy.

Western leaders’ complicity is not passive. They have become enablers—co-authors in the unfolding genocide in Gaza and active sponsors of a potential nuclear catastrophe in Iran. Despite decades of evidence showing how imperial hubris breeds chaos and suffering—from Africa to Vietnam, from Iraq to Libya and beyond—these leaders continue to embrace the illusion that might makes right, enable today’s livestream genocide in Gaza, and pave the way to bring about a nuclear Holocaust in Iran.

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(From left) Lady on the Hill; a statue in the Pest district; Interior décor of the New York Café; entrance gate of Agricultural Museum; and the statue of Ferenc Deák

PHOTOS: ELIZA BINTE ELAHI

# The Kingdom of Magyars



ELIZA BINTE ELAHI

has so far visited more than 50 countries across the globe. Eliza, who teaches at the University of South Asia as an adjunct faculty, considers herself a history and heritage lover.

Want to share your travel experiences with us? Please send your stories to

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ELIZA BINTE ELAHI

Once the heart of a vast empire and now a crossroads between East and West, Hungary stands as a testament to Europe's layered history. At the centre of it lies Budapest — a city where Gothic grandeur meets post-imperial nostalgia, and the echoes of Roman legions, Ottoman rule, Habsburg royalty, and Soviet tanks still whisper through cobblestone streets.

My journey to this historic land began not just with a love for travel, but with a deep curiosity for the past. As a Bangladeshi educator pursuing higher studies in Europe, I often found myself poring over maps and old travel books between lectures. The Magyars — an ancient Finno-Ugric tribe who settled in the Carpathian Basin in the 9th century — have long fascinated me. Hungary, still calls itself Magyarország — the “Land of Magyars.”

It was during my summer break that I finally acted on that curiosity. With a 32-day

resilience, revolutions and rebirths. From Roman forts and medieval bastions to Ottoman baths, Baroque cathedrals, and 20th-century memorials, every corner of Budapest reveals a layer of civilisation.

This is not just a visit — it is a walk through time, a journey into the soul of a nation that, despite centuries of upheaval, still wears its heritage with quiet pride.

When I arrived in Budapest from Vienna by FlixBus, I followed directions on my phone to my accommodation in the Pest district. Known for its accessibility and vibrancy, this location made it easy to explore the city. Budapest's Metro, one of the oldest in the world, began operating in 1896 and added an extra layer of charm to my journey.

Growing up, I caught glimpses of distant lands in stamp collections, encyclopedias, and classic films. I remember spotting the Chain Bridge in the 1999 Bollywood film Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam, starring Aishwarya Rai and Salman Khan. It's no surprise that Budapest has also featured in films like Raabta and Roman Polanski's The Fearless Vampire Killers, earning it the nickname “City of Vampires.”

My first stop was the Hungarian Parliament Building. A majestic Gothic Revival structure designed by Imre Steindl, it took nearly 20 years to build and was completed in 1904. The parliament sits proudly along the Danube River and is the third-largest in the world. Inside, ornate woodwork, historic chambers, and a museum housing the Holy Crown of Hungary testify to a storied past. The Holy Crown, worn by over 50 Hungarian monarchs, last sat on the head of Charles IV before the Austro-Hungarian Empire dissolved.

Just outside, statues of ordinary workers ring the parliament complex — a symbolic reminder for politicians to never forget their roots. A helpful young woman at the hostel had arranged our entry tickets online in advance, a must for any visitor.

Walking along the Danube, the second-largest river in Europe after the Volga, I reached one of the city's most poignant memorials: the “Shoes on the Danube Bank.” This chilling tribute marks where Hungarian Jews were executed during the Holocaust. Forced to remove their shoes before being shot, their remains were carried away by the river — a painful yet powerful reminder of the city's darker chapters. Tourists stood silently, some leaving flowers in

the shoes as gestures of remembrance.

I crossed the Széchenyi Chain Bridge, Budapest's oldest over the Danube. It was built in 1840 based on a design by British engineer William Tierney Clark. The bridge is still used by all kinds of vehicles, while two narrow sidewalks brim with tourists taking in the spectacular views of the Danube.

Crossing the bridge, I entered the Buda side of the city. The name Buda is believed to have originated from its early inhabitants, possibly named after

masterpiece associated with King Matthias Corvinus. Its neighbour, the Fisherman's Bastion, is a fortress built by medieval fishermen to guard their market and honour the seven Magyar chieftains who founded Hungary in 896 AD. Fisherman's Bastion is one of the most famous fortresses in Hungary.

Buda Castle, once home to Hungarian royalty, now houses the country's president. Its grand, 850-year-old architecture looms over the city like a sentinel of time.

little longer.

Not far from the square lies the Hungarian Agricultural Museum, a hidden gem with no entrance fee and remarkable architecture. It's a fitting metaphor for Budapest itself: elegant and enduring.

Though Hungary's economy may not rival its Western neighbours, its cultural wealth is undeniable. This city, layered with the scars and splendours of time, captivates the soul.

I learned about the New York Café —



Statues of the seven Magyar chieftains on horseback at Heroes' Square

a Hunnic chieftain. The Huns were a nomadic people from Central Asia who migrated across the Caucasus into Eastern Europe. On the other side lies Pest, whose name is thought to derive from the Slavic word pešt, meaning “oven” or “furnace” — possibly referencing the area's thermal springs or underground caves.

From there, I ascended Gellért Hill, home to the Freedom Monument. This 14-metre-tall female figure holds a palm leaf in one hand and stands between two male statues representing peace, struggle, and progress. The view from the top was breathtaking: the Parliament, all eight Danube bridges, and a panoramic sweep of the city.

Nearby is Matthias Church, a Gothic

The next morning, I visited Heroes' Square, surrounded by museums and luxury shops along Andrássy Avenue. Built to celebrate Hungary's 1,000th anniversary, the square features two semicircular colonnades, each bearing statues of historic leaders. In the centre stands a towering column topped by Archangel Gabriel. The seven horseback figures on the column's pavement represent the Magyar tribal chieftains, who sealed their unity with a fabled Blood Oath — a defining moment in the formation of the Hungarian nation.

The architecture and artistry of the square are truly astonishing. I spent an hour and a half there and still felt like looking at the medieval marvels a

a literary hub frequented by poets and intellectuals. Though expensive, it has long served as a cradle of Hungarian literature and poetry.

This city is a museum for history lovers. The stamp of time is all over — in parks, homes, street corners, and stations. If you want, you can spend half an hour at the Budapest Castle Páláudvar International Railway Station, built in 1881.

I don't know how much of Budapest I truly absorbed — can a city with millennia of history be grasped in just a few days? But I do know this: part of me stayed behind. Perhaps I'll return someday to discover what I missed. For now, another journey awaits — the city of Oslo is calling.



The Danube runs in the middle of Pest and Buda areas





PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

# Champions crowned, future stars discovered

ANISUR RAHMAN

The National Stadium yesterday witnessed the jubilant celebrations of the Rajshahi Division girls, who emerged as champions in the National Gold Cup Football Tournament with an emphatic 3-0 win over the once-strong Mymensingh Division in the final.

While the girls' celebration was visible to those present, another occasion for celebration perhaps went unnoticed by the general eye.

National women's team assistant coach Mahabubur Rahman Litu, who watched the final, has already selected a few players from both teams for various age-group national teams – a milestone for those working to advance women's football in the country.

"Three players – one from Dhaka Division and two from Chattogram Division – have already joined the ongoing U-17 national camp.

We also saw promising players like Jannatul, Aleya, Saleha, and Sadia from Rajshahi Division. We will verify their ages before considering them for different age-group national camps," said Litu.

It was fitting that this group of girls is already dreaming of donning the national jersey in the future.

"It feels really good to be named the best player of the tournament – this is beyond my imagination. We also fulfilled our dream of becoming champions," said Rajshahi Division's Aleya, who expressed her desire to play for the national team.

Rajshahi Division also claimed three more individual accolades – best player of the final, top scorer, and best goalkeeper – as they made a strong statement in the fourth edition of the girls' U-17 tournament. Remarkably, coach Zahir Iqbal had only three days to prepare the team, which was composed of players from Chapainawabganj, Rajshahi, Natore, Sirajganj, and other areas of the division.

"We know each other very well and

had good coordination. That's why we became champions," said Jannatul Ferdous, the final's best player, adding that she was optimistic about receiving a national call-up.

"I'm really happy because I helped the team win by scoring a brace, and I feel proud," said top-scorer Mousumi Khatun, who scored three goals in the final round.

While Rajshahi celebrated their maiden final appearance with the title, it was a somber day for Mymensingh Division, who had reached the final in the previous edition, which was ultimately canceled.

Mymensingh, particularly through Kalshindhur Primary School in Dobaura Upazila, once produced several national players like Sanjida Akhter, Tahura Khatun, Maria Manda, Shamsunnahar Sr. and Shamsunnahar Jr. However, the talent pipeline has now shifted to Ishorganj Upazila, more specifically, the Ishorganj Football Academy.

Of the 18-member Mymensingh squad, nine players were from the Ishorganj Football Academy, run by local referee and coach Mithun Chandra Sen. Two players came from Dobaura Upazila, with the rest hailing from other districts.

"Kalshindhur Primary School once produced many players under Mofiz Bhui, but no such initiatives exist there now," said Mithun. He added that he has been running the academy since 2018 with financial support from Choroni Khola High School in Ishorganj.

"I'm hopeful that the players emerging from the Ishorganj Football Academy will get chances to play in different national teams. Litu Sir has already noted the names of three of our players – Muslima Akter, Rimi Akter, and another," Mithun said.

Meanwhile, Rangpur Division clinched the boys' title of the tournament, coming from two goals down to beat Mymensingh 4-3 in a penalty shootout at the same venue.



# No turn yet as bowlers pass tough day in Galle

SPORTS REPORTER

The Galle wicket remained batting friendly for the third successive day and the Sri Lankan batters made the most of it against a toothless Bangladeshi attack, reaching 368-4 at stumps to trail the visitors by just 127 runs at the end of the third day's play yesterday.

Opener Pathum Nissanka was the star of the day, smashing 187 off 256 balls, but missing out on a well-deserved double hundred after being dismissed by pacer Hasan Mahmud in the final half hour of the day.

Earlier, after resuming the day's play on 484-9, Bangladesh's innings survived only 16 balls on Day 3 before the side got bundled out for 494.

In their reply, the Sri Lankan batters scored at a much better rate than Bangladesh courtesy of Nissanka's top-class batting effort which was well supported by others.

Nissanka did not shy away from playing his shots and scored at a healthy strike-rate to keep the Bangladeshi bowlers at bay for majority of the day.



Dinesh Chandimal (54), Angelo Mathews (39) and Lahiru Udana (29) must be cursing themselves for not converting their starts into big scores but still, the hosts finished the day in a comfortable position.

Though Bangladeshi bowlers were at the receiving end

throughout the third day, their pace bowling coach Shaun Tait shielded his bowlers from criticism and the only thing he felt Bangladesh could have done better on the day was their bowling with the new ball.

"It's obviously a good batting wicket. It was a difficult condition

for fast bowlers today [Thursday]. They toiled hard and they gave effort," Tait said in the press conference after the end of the third day's play yesterday.

"We probably missed the trick with the new ball. It would have been nice to take a couple of wickets with the new ball. Apart from that, I'm not going to be negative. We batted for two days. You know it's a good batting wicket," said the former Aussie pacer.

Tait also heaped praises on the Sri Lankan batters for the way they batted and felt his side has a lot of hard work ahead of them in the next two days of the Test.

"They batted really well. Sri Lanka are no pushovers. This is the team which was competing to play in the World Test Championship final. So, they are no pushovers. They are a good side and they have some good batsmen," Tait said.

"I think people in general probably felt that the ball will start to turn from Day 3. But nothing significant happened and that's the way the game has been. Still a couple of days left in this match and Test cricket can turn very quickly," he added.



## GENTLEMEN'S GESTURE

In a touching moment at the Galle International Stadium, Bangladesh players accorded a guard of honour to Sri Lanka all-rounder Angelo Mathews as he walked out to bat in his 119th and final Test yesterday. It was during the second session of Day 3 of the first Test between Bangladesh and hosts Sri Lanka. The gesture stood in stark contrast to their fiery 2023 World Cup clash, in which Mathews became the first batter timed out in international cricket following Shakib Al Hasan's appeal. "I hold no grudges," Mathews had said before this game. With over 8,000 Test runs, he departs a Sri Lankan great-- honoured fittingly in the gentlemen's game.

PHOTO: SLC

# BPL probe drags on after 50 interviews in five months

SPORTS REPORTER

The independent inquiry committee, set up by Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) in February to assist its Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU) in investigating suspicious activities during the last Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) T20, will need another one-and-a-half to two months to finalise its report.

Former cricketer and committee member Shakil Kasem informed that they have already interviewed over 50 individuals, including players and others involved with the tournament.

"There are some suspicious activities in the betting market based on observations from foreign agencies, and we are looking into the matter," Kasem told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We are collecting a lot of information. It will take some more time. It's going to be a voluminous report.

"It will take around one-and-a-half to two months to submit our findings. We have spoken to over 50 people in different categories. Not all of them are cricketers -- there are others we've spoken to regarding the matter," he added.

Earlier reports suggested the ACU had identified eight matches as suspicious, potentially involving spot fixing and match-fixing, based on anonymous tips and media reports. Ten players and four franchises were reportedly under observation.

# Gill's new-look India face stern English test

AGENCIES

India's long wait for a Test series triumph in England enters a new chapter with a bold transition in leadership and identity.

When the five-match series begins at Headingley on Friday, all eyes will be on 25-year-old Shubman Gill, the newly appointed captain stepping into the roles vacated by legends Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli.

With Rohit retiring from Tests and Kohli also bowing out of the red-ball format, Gill not only inherits the captaincy but also the iconic number four batting slot-- once dominated by greats like Sachin Tendulkar and Kohli, who together amassed over 21,000 runs in that position.

Gill's own record, however, remains under scrutiny: an average of 35 from 32 Tests, dipping to 29 abroad and a concerning sub-15 mark in England.

Gill insists he's ready for the responsibility, saying recently, "I believe in leading by example-- not just in performance, but in discipline and hard work."

India's line-up is a mix of youthful



England and India greats James Anderson and Sachin Tendulkar have been honoured with a newly named trophy -- the Anderson-Tendulkar Trophy -- which will be contested in future Test series between the two nations, starting with this. ECB unveiled the new trophy on the eve of the first Test.

India have won only three Test series in England -- in 1971, 1986 and 2007.

Head-to-head record: Out of 136 Tests, England lead with 51 wins, while India have won 35.

At Leeds, the venue for the first Test, the two sides have met seven times -- England won four, India two, with one draw.

Their last five-Test series was in 2024, where India bounced back from 0-1 down to win 4-1 at home.

energy and untested promise. Rishabh Pant, back after a horrific car crash, will offer vice-captaincy support and middle-order steel, while young opener Yashasvi Jaiswal

is poised to make his mark. Yet the squad faces challenges beyond the batting order.

The bowling attack will be without Test greats Ravichandran

Ashwin and the still-recovering Mohammed Shami. Jasprit Bumrah is back but likely to be rotated due to the congested schedule.

With only limited preparation in English conditions, India's ability to take 20 wickets consistently will be tested.

Their opponents, England, aren't without concerns either. With pace legends James Anderson and Stuart Broad retired, the home side are banking on a relatively inexperienced attack. Injuries to Jofra Archer and Mark Wood have ruled them out of the opener, leaving Chris Woakes to lead a pace unit including debutant Brydon Carse.

Even Pant admitted England's absence of their veteran duo brings some relief, but warned: "They still have enough ammunition... We don't want to take anyone lightly."

This series marks the beginning of a new World Test Championship cycle, with both sides eager to reset after mixed recent fortunes. For India, the question is whether a new leader and a younger team can conquer the ghosts of the past and script a long-awaited series win in England-- their first since 2007.



Al Hilal goalkeeper Yassine Bounou celebrates with teammates after saving a stoppage-time penalty from Real Madrid's Federico Valverde, as the Spanish giants had to stay content with a 1-1 draw in their Club World Cup opener at Hard Rock stadium in Miami on Thursday night. Real Madrid had taken the lead through a Gonzalo Garcia strike in the 34th minute before Al Hilal's Ruben Neves earned and converted a penalty to level the score just before half-time, spoiling Xabi Alonso's debut as head coach of Real Madrid.

PHOTO: REUTERS





## August 5 to be Student-People Uprising Day, public holiday

BSS, Dhaka

The government has decided to declare August 5 a public holiday, to be observed as Student-People Uprising Day.

The day will be officially celebrated every year.

The decision was made at a meeting of the advisory council at the State Guest House Jamuna yesterday.

After the meeting, Cultural Affairs Adviser Mostofa Sarwar Farooki told reporters at the Foreign Service Academy that a preliminary decision had been made to celebrate August 5 as the Student-People Uprising Day.

The matter will be finalised next Sunday and a gazette notification may be issued the following day, he added.

August 5 is going to be a national day, so the Student People Uprising Day will be celebrated every year in the future, he said.

The Awami League regime fell on August 5 last year amid a mass uprising.

Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam was present at the press briefing.



Seventh grader Ibrahim rests his head on a bench as his mother wipes sweat from his forehead while they wait to get him tested for Covid-19 at DMCH yesterday. Running a fever for 17 days, Ibrahim earlier tested negative for chikungunya and dengue. Doctors then advised a coronavirus test as his symptoms began resembling those of Covid-19.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## Almost 32% had to bribe to get govt services

Finds BBS survey on 45,888 homes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

More than 31.67 percent of the people had to pay bribes to get government service in the last one year, according to a new Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics report.

Of those surveyed, 38.62 percent of the men and 22.71 women said they had to bribe, says the preliminary findings of Citizen Perception Survey 2025.

At the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority, 63.29 percent of the service seekers had to bribe officials. This was followed by 61.29 percent at law enforcement agencies and 54.92 percent at land registry offices.

The study was conducted across the country from February 6-23 at 45,888 households in rural and urban areas. The surveyors interviewed a woman and a man, both aged over 18, from each household.

The BBS released the report at its office in the capital yesterday.

Addressing the event as chief guest, Planning Adviser Wahiduddin Mahmud said those who paid bribes were mostly from middle-income groups because low-income people could hardly afford to pay bribes.

In other words, middle-income groups had to “buy a better service” in exchange for a bribe, he said, adding that this was a key problem.

It found 22 percent of the respondents – 26.55 percent men and 17.81 percent women – believing they could “influence politics”.

Nearly 85 percent – 85.30 percent in rural and 83.75 percent in urban settings – feel safe walking alone in their neighbourhoods after dark.

Nearly 93 percent rural and 91.88 percent urban people feel safe at home after dark. Over 93.35 men and 91.83 percent women expressed a similar view.

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## ASSISTING IN POLLS Army to carry out duties as per govt instructions

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Army said it has not yet received any official instructions from the government to assist in the upcoming election duties.

However, the force is prepared to act promptly if and when directed by the government.

“We have not received any formal instruction regarding election deployment yet. But the Bangladesh Army will carry out its responsibilities as per government orders,” said Colonel Mohammad Shafiqul Islam, colonel staff at the Army Headquarters, during a press briefing held at the Dhaka Cantonment yesterday.

The briefing focused on its recent nationwide operations, including anti-crime drives, Eid deployment, flood and disaster response, and law and order duties.

Over the past three weeks, the army recovered 56 illegal firearms and 990 rounds of ammunition, bringing the total (since August last year) to 9,667

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## BANKING REFORMS, TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE

# ADB, WB approve over \$1.5b

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Asian Development Bank has approved a \$900 million loan to help Bangladesh reform its banking sector and strengthen its resilience to the impacts of climate change.

Of the total, \$500 million will support efforts to stabilise and reform the country's banking sector, while the remaining \$400 million will promote climate-resilient and inclusive development initiatives.

The \$500 million policy-based loan aims to strengthen governance, asset quality and stability within Bangladesh's banking system, the ADB said in a statement yesterday.

Also yesterday, the World Bank approved \$640 million for two projects aimed at enhancing gas supply and improving air quality in Bangladesh.

With the ADB and WB approvals, Bangladesh is set to receive more than \$1.5 billion – a development that will ease the continued strain on its foreign currency reserves.

The ADB said the programme will improve the effectiveness of Bangladesh Bank's liquidity management, enhance supervision and introduce measures to address

the high volume of defaulted loans.

The key binding constraints in the banking sector include a lack of robust asset quality, tight liquidity and inadequate financial intermediation, leading to low rates of financial inclusion, said Sanjeev Kaushik, principal financial sector specialist at the Manila-based lender.

Separately, the ADB also approved a \$400 million loan for the second phase of the Climate-Resilient Inclusive Development Programme (CRIDP) aimed at supporting Bangladesh's efforts to adapt to climate change, cut emissions and foster inclusive economic growth.

The programme includes \$113 million in co-financing from Agence Française de Développement and another \$400 million from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

The programme will help Bangladesh achieve its climate goals more efficiently by bringing government agencies together and aligning their work with national policies, said Sameer Khatiwada, senior public sector economist at the ADB.

It will also remove obstacles to mobilising climate finance, reinforce

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## CONSENSUS COMMISSION Parties split over how to elect president

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Political parties remained poles apart over the presidential election process on the fourth day of the second round of talks with the National Consensus Commission yesterday.

The method of electing the president came up in discussion for the second time in this phase, and still no consensus could be reached.

The BNP rejected the proposal for electing the president through an electoral college comprising lawmakers and local government representatives. The Communist Party of Bangladesh and LDP too stood by the current system, where parliament alone elects the president.

Jamaat-e-Islami and the National Citizen Party, on the other hand, endorsed the idea of an electoral college.

With no agreement in sight yet, the commission will hold another round of discussions on Sunday.

Towards the end of yesterday's session, it also introduced the issue of the prime minister's tenure.

The Constitution Reform Commission proposes that the president be elected by a majority vote in an electoral college made up of: one vote per member of both houses of parliament; one collective vote for each district council (64 votes if there are 64 councils); and one collective vote for each city corporation.

The Election Reform Commission recommends a much larger electoral college, incorporating around 70,000

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## Israeli gunfire, strikes kill 72 across Gaza

21 of them gathered near aid distribution sites

AFP, Gaza City

Gaza's civil defence agency said Israeli forces killed at least 72 people yesterday, including 21 who had gathered near aid distribution sites as famine looms after more than 20 months of war.

Civil defence spokesman Mahmud Bassal told AFP that six people were killed while waiting for aid in the southern Gaza Strip and 15 others in a central area known as the Netzarim corridor, where thousands of Palestinians have gathered daily in the hope of receiving food rations.

The Israeli army told AFP that its troops in Netzarim corridor – a strip of land militarised by Israel that bisects the Palestinian territory – had fired “warning shots” at “suspects” approaching them, but that it was “not aware of any injured individuals”.

The army did not comment on the incident reported in the south.

In northern Gaza, Bassal said that nine separate Israeli strikes killed another 51 people, updating earlier tolls provided by his agency.

Bassam Abu Shaar, who witnessed the shooting incident in the Netzarim area, said thousands of people had gathered there overnight in the hope of receiving aid at the US- and Israeli-backed distribution site when it opened in the morning.

“Around 1:00 am (2200 GMT yesterday), they started shooting at us,” he told AFP by phone, reporting gunfire, tank shelling and bombs dropped by drones.

Abu Shaar said that the size of the crowd had made it impossible for people to escape, with casualties left lying on the ground within walking distance of the distribution point, which is run by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation.

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## 5 secretaries, a grade-1 official sent into forced retirement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday sent five secretaries and a grade-1 official (secretary status) into forced retirement.

The officials are Kazi Enamul Hassan, director general (secretary) of Bangladesh Karmachari Kallyan Board; Sukesh Kumar Sarker, director general (secretary) of the National Academy for Planning and Development; Mohammad Salah Uddin, secretary (OSD) at the public administration ministry; Muhammad Ibrahim, chairman (secretary) of the Land Appeal Board; and Md Shahid Ullah, rector (secretary) of the National Academy for Development Administration.

Citing section 45 of the Public Service Act-2018, the public administration ministry issued five separate gazette notifications in this regard.

In another gazette notification, Lipika Bhadra, chairman (grade-1) of the Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation, was sent into retirement.

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An olive ridley hatchling swims into the Bay of Bengal after hatching on the shores of Saint Martin's Island - one of the last remaining nesting grounds for marine turtles, particularly the endangered olive ridley, in Bangladesh. In typical turtle behaviour, mothers come ashore to lay their eggs in the sand, covering the nests before returning to sea. Weeks later, the hatchlings emerge and begin life entirely on their own. Each faces countless threats: predators, plastic pollution, fishing nets, and climate change. And yet, with flippers barely strong enough, they swim towards survival, driven by an ancient, undeterred instinct. For this little one, the journey has just begun.

PHOTO: SHARIF SARWAR

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