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PATENT WAIVER TILL NOV 2026 Local pharmas may miss window for 15 costly drugs

More than 600 applications pending with govt body for registration for over a year

JAGARAN CHAKMA and TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Bangladesh's pharmaceutical companies risk losing the chance to produce at least 15 costly biologic drugs royalty-free, as registration applications for more than 600 new medicines remain stalled for over a year due to regulatory hurdles, say industry leaders.

Around 50 pharmaceutical firms have applied to the Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA) for registering 617 new medicines that include biologic drugs used for treating cancer and chronic diseases.

The companies are set to lose patent protection ensured by a waiver under the WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) in November 2026, when Bangladesh transitions to a developing country, say industry insiders.

"If we can't secure registration soon, we'll miss the opportunity to manufacture these drugs royalty-free once Bangladesh graduates from Least Developed Country [LDC] status next year," Abdul Muktadir, president of Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceutical Industries, told The Daily Star.

If we can't secure registration soon, we'll miss the opportunity to manufacture these drugs royalty-free once Bangladesh graduates from Least Developed Country [LDC] status next year.

ABDUL MUKTADIR, president of Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceutical Industries



In March this year, the interim government decided to proceed with the country's scheduled transition from a LDC to a developing nation on November 24, 2026.

Patent protection typically lasts 20 years from the date of a drug's development. Five to 10 years have already passed since the development of some of the 15 drugs, leaving Bangladesh with a 10 to 15 year window for royalty-free production, Muktadir said.

"This window is critical. If we miss it, we must pay royalties to patent holders, meaning patients will have to shoulder the burden of inflated prices for these life-saving medicines," he added.

The Drug Control Committee, which gives final approval for new medicines, hasn't convened for the last two years -- the primary cause of the backlog. No steps have been taken yet to reconstitute the committee since the fall of the Awami League government, said several officials at DGDA and health ministry.

The registration process for a new medicine begins with a review by a technical sub committee, chaired by the DGDA director general.

If the sub-committee recommends approval, the proposal is forwarded to the health secretary-led Drug Control Committee comprising government officials, experts, and industry representatives.

The sub-committee last held its meeting in March 2024, said DGDA officials.

Contacted, Prof Sayedur Rahman, special assistant to the chief adviser for the health ministry, said the previous committees required reconstitution due to their shortcomings. But that didn't happen, halting the drug registration process.

He maintained that the suspension has not created any crisis or deprived people of essential medicines.

"The committees will be reconstituted soon and hold meetings to decide on pending applications," he told The Daily Star recently.

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SAD leaders among 5 held on extortion charges

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Five people, including leaders of Students Against Discrimination, were arrested on extortion charges in the capital yesterday.

They are Ibrahim Hossain Munna, 24, SAD's Dhaka city unit convener; Abdur Razzaq Riyad, 25, acting convener at the central committee of SAD's combined private university unit; SAD members Sakadoun Siam, 22, and Sadab, 21; and one Amirul.

They were apprehended from a flat on Road 83 in Gulshan -- the residence of former Awami League lawmaker Shammie Ahmed.

Gulshan Police Station's Officer-in-Charge Hafizur Rahman confirmed this to The Daily Star.

Identifying themselves as members of Students Against Discrimination, the five went to Shammie Ahmed's residence and demanded Tk 50 lakh on July 17. As she was not home at the time, they made the demand to her husband," said the OC.

That day, the group left after taking Tk 10 lakh. Yesterday evening, they returned to collect the remaining Tk 40 lakh, he added.

"Alerted by the family members, we rushed to the scene and detained all five."

The OC said Shammie's husband Abu Zafar will file an extortion case in this regard.

Meanwhile, SAD expelled Ibrahim Munna, Sakadoun and Sadab from the organisation for violating discipline.

New flashpoints emerge in Thai-Cambodian conflict Death toll 33; Malaysia urges ceasefire



People rest in a temporary shelter in Thailand's Srisaket province yesterday, following a third consecutive day of heavy artillery exchanges between Thailand and Cambodia.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Fighting on the Thai-Cambodian border extended into a third day and new flashpoints emerged yesterday as both sides said they had acted in self-defence in the border dispute and called on the other to cease fighting and start negotiations.

At least 33 people have been killed and more than 138,000 people displaced in the worst fighting between the Southeast Asian neighbours in 13 years.

There were clashes early yesterday, both sides said, in the neighbouring Thai coastal province of Trat and Cambodia's Pursat Province early, a new front more than 100 km (60 miles) from other conflict points along the long-contested border.

The two countries have faced off since the killing of a Cambodian soldier late in May during a brief skirmish. Troops on both sides of the border were reinforced amid a full-blown diplomatic crisis that

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



After five days of treatment, 12-year-old Ayan Khan, one of the survivors of last week's jet crash, is going home with his grandmother after he was discharged from the National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery yesterday. He was one of two Milestone school students released from the hospital yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

You can't run
the state with
hired people

Says Fakhrul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday said Bangladesh is yet to see good governance and the police force are not showing signs of improvement.

He made the comment after a businessman complained that he had to pay more bribes now to get things done.

"If you had to pay Tk 1 lakh in bribes previously, now it's Tk 5 lakh," he said while speaking at the launch of a book titled "Economy, Governance, and Power: A Portrait of Everyday Life", written by economist Hossain Zillur Rahman, also a former adviser to a caretaker government.

Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed also attended the event held at the CIRDAP auditorium.

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Govt aide pushes 5G project amid graft probe

Activities of Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, special assistant to chief adviser, raise concerns over conflict of interest, executive overreach and violations of procurement rules

MAHMUDUL HASAN



A special assistant to the chief adviser is pressing for a controversial 5G infrastructure project, despite an active investigation by the Anti-Corruption Commission into alleged legal violations in the tender process.

Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, who took charge on March 5 with executive powers over the telecom ministry, requested the ACC to facilitate the project and asked the state-owned BTCL -- the implementing agency -- to proceed with equipment purchase, according to documents seen by The Daily Star.

This intervention has sparked concerns over conflict of interest, disregard for procurement law, and a revival of past practices of executive interference in state contracts.

In the letter dated June 22, 2025, Taiyeb told the ACC chairman, "It is

imperative to continue the activities of the project titled 'Development of Optical Fiber Transmission Network of BTCL for 5G Readiness' in national interest, and also to prevent delays in 5G readiness, avert technological setbacks for BTCL, ensure ADP implementation rate, and operationalise equipment installed under a related BTCL project."

He further argued that Huawei, the supplier of 5G equipment, is among the world's leading companies in the sector, and private transmission companies in Bangladesh are already using these devices.

Taiyeb's meddling in the BTCL project goes against Rule 11 of the Public Procurement Rules 2008, which says the company's board is the highest authority to make decisions on contract-related issues.

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CA to unveil
election date
within 4 to 5 days
Says Mostofa Jamal after
Yunus met 11 parties

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has sought cooperation from all political parties for holding a free and fair election, and assured them of announcing the date of the next parliamentary polls within four to five days.

In a meeting with 11 parties and one alliance yesterday, he also warned that "defeated forces are trying to disrupt the election process by creating unrest".

Yunus emphasised that all anti-fascist forces must unite to resist these attempts.

Mostofa Jamal Haider, leader of the 12-Party Alliance and chairman of Jatiya Party (Kazi Zafar), said, "The chief adviser categorically said he would announce a specific timeline and date of the election within the next four to five days."

"There can be no better news than this," Haider said while talking with reporters after the meeting at the chief adviser's official residence Jamuna.

Haider said holding a national election

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MILESTONE TRAGEDY 2 more die of burn injuries

Two students discharged
from burn institute

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two more victims who suffered severe burn injuries in last week's jet crash on the Milestone School and College campus in Uttara's Diabari died yesterday while undergoing treatment at the National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery.

The deceased are Jarif Farhan, 13, a seventh-grade student of the school's English version section, and Masuma, 38, a school staff member who worked as an assistant.

Including the latest fatalities, the total number of deaths from the jet crash now stands at 35, according to the health ministry.

Meanwhile, two injured students were discharged from the hospital yesterday as their condition improved, Prof Nasir Uddin, director of the burn institute, told reporters.

Ayan Khan and Rafsi, both 12-year-olds, are the first Milestone school students to be released from the burn institute.

After the deaths and discharge, a total of 46 crash victims are now undergoing treatment at four hospitals, including 36 at the burn institute.

Of the 36 patients, the conditions of four were stated to be critical and nine severe. Prof Nasir hoped that 10 more patients would be discharged this week.

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Immigration
'killing' Europe,
says Trump

P5



Why can't we
prevent drowning
fatalities

P6



Bangladesh in
the age of global
economic flux

P7



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বিগত দিন জাতীয় সংসদ নির্বাচনের পূর্বে নির্বাচন পর্যবেক্ষক সংস্থা নির্বাচন পর্যবেক্ষণ নীতিমালা ২০২৫" এর ধারা ১৬ মোতাবেক স্বয়ংক্রিয়ভাবে বাতিল হয়েছে।

"নির্বাচন পর্যবেক্ষণ নীতিমালা ২০২৫" অনুসারে "পর্যবেক্ষক সংস্থা" হিসেবে নির্বাচনে আগ্রহী যোগ্যতাসম্পন্ন বেসরকারি সংস্থাসমূহের কাছ থেকে দরখাস্ত আহ্বান করা হচ্ছে। নির্বাচনে আগ্রহী যোগ্যতাসম্পন্ন বেসরকারি সংস্থাসমূহের কাছ থেকে দরখাস্ত আহ্বান করা হচ্ছে। নির্বাচন পর্যবেক্ষণ নীতিমালা ২০২৫, নির্বাচন পর্যবেক্ষক সংস্থা নির্বাচন পর্যবেক্ষক এবং আবেদন ফরম (EO-1) নির্বাচন কমিশন সচিবালয়ের জনসংযোগ শাখায় (কক্ষ নং-১০৫) এবং নির্বাচন কমিশনের ওয়েবসাইট www.ecs.gov.bd তে পোওয়া যাবে।

সিনিয়র সচিব
নির্বাচন কমিশন সচিবালয়

Mass arrests and block raids fuel fear

SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN

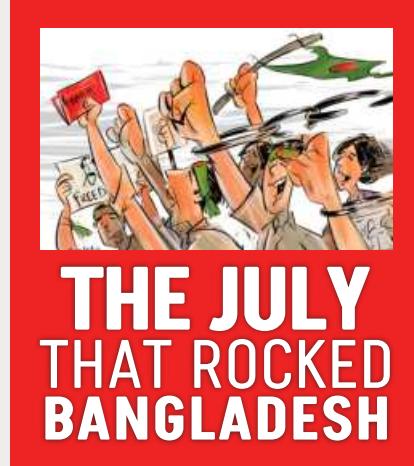
City residents, still reeling from the trauma of deaths and destruction during the quota reform protests, felt a renewed wave of fear. Each day, particularly after sundown, convoys of vehicles carrying law enforcers reached neighbourhoods across Dhaka. Members of different security forces disembarked swiftly, cordoned off streets, and took positions at key points. With their left hands gripping the barrels and right index fingers resting on the triggers, they made their presence felt.

A loud announcement via megaphone reverberated through alleyways and buildings: "Go inside your home. Don't try to come out." Panic stricken residents complied. What followed was a now-familiar routine—block raids. Internet connections at targeted homes were cut, and one by one streetlights went dark. The only illumination came from the searchlights mounted on the law enforcers' vehicles.

Residents from at least nine areas—Mataiul, Shanir Akhra, Jatrabari, Kajla, Bashundhara, Shahinbagh, Mirpur DOHS, ECB Chattar, and Matikata—shared similar accounts. During these raids, police reportedly knocked on doors, entered homes, and detained individuals suspected of involvement in the protests or of having contact with alleged agitators. Joint forces were also deployed outside Dhaka as part of the ongoing nationwide operation.

In the 36 hours leading up to 6:00 pm on July 27, law enforcers arrested at least 726 more people in Dhaka and other districts. In the 10 days prior to July 27, over 8,000 people had been arrested in 553 cases filed across 42 districts. Of them, 5,514 were detained outside the capital.

Two more people who had been injured in recent clashes died on July



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27. Yeamin Chowdhury, a 19-year-old garment worker, succumbed to his injuries at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Abdul Majeed, a 20-year-old transport worker, died at Chattogram Medical College Hospital. With their deaths, the official death toll stood at 162 since July 16.

Meanwhile, two more organisers of the quota reform movement—Sarjis Alam and Hasnat Abdullah—were taken into custody by the Detective Branch (DB). On the previous night, three other key organisers—Nahid Islam, Asif Mahmud, and Abu Baker Majumder—had also been detained.

Human Rights Forum Bangladesh (HRFB) condemned the arbitrary arrests and demanded the immediate release and protection of all detained students. The forum urged authorities to exercise the highest caution and ensure no student faced harassment.

In a joint letter to Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud, 14 foreign missions—including those of the US, UK, France, Germany, Canada, and the EU—called



Women under the banner of "Chhatra Janatar Pashey Nari Samaj" rallied in Purana Paltan on July 27, 2024, condemning arbitrary killings and arrests of students, and demanding the resignation of then prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

FILE PHOTO

for the protection of human rights and fair trials for those arrested. They expressed deep concern over the casualties and the destruction of public property during the protests.

Adding to international pressure, more than 140 scholars, writers, and public intellectuals from around the world urged the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to press for an independent investigation into the brutal crackdown on students and protesters. In an open letter, they described the attacks as a violation of democratic rights and a mockery of the constitutional right to life.

At noon, women from various backgrounds gathered in Purana Paltan under the banner "Chhatra Janatar Pashey Nari Samaj." They demanded to know under what law the police fired bullets at students and civilians, and called for prime minister Sheikh Hasina's resignation. The protest condemned arbitrary killings, assaults, mass arrests, and the suppression of dissent.

In a joint letter to Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud, 14 foreign missions—including those of the US, UK, France, Germany, Canada, and the EU—called

Then prime minister Sheikh Hasina visited the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (Nitor), where she blamed the violence on a conspiracy aimed at reducing Bangladesh to a nation of beggars by crippling its economy.

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader, in a press statement, accused BNP of trying to form a "union of anti-state forces."

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, in a statement, accused prime minister Hasina of shedding "crocodile tears" during her hospital visits. He condemned the detention of student leaders from hospitals and warned that such actions would only deepen the crisis. He called for the resignation of the government and accused it of clinging to power through repression, communication shutdowns, and curfews.

The government extended the daily curfew pause and adjusted office hours for three more days starting from July 28. Offices were to open from 9:00 am.

Thailand, Cambodian clash

FROM PAGE 1
brought Thailand's fragile coalition government to the brink of collapse.

As of yesterday, Thailand said seven soldiers and 13 civilians had been killed in the clashes, while in Cambodia five soldiers and eight civilians had been killed, said Defence Ministry spokesperson Malay Socheata.

In the Thai border province of Sisaket, a university compound has been converted into temporary accommodation, where a volunteer said more than 5,000 people were staying.

Samrong Khamduang said she left her farm, about 10 km from the border, when fighting broke out on Thursday. The 51-year-old's husband stayed behind to look after livestock.

"We got so scared with the sound of artillery," she said. "But my husband stayed back and now we lost the connection. I couldn't call him. I don't know what

Local pharma may miss window

FROM PAGE 1

According to DGDA officials, restructuring both committees became necessary due to leadership changes in various medical associations and institutions following the July mass uprising, as many of their representatives in the committees had affiliations with the AL.

WHY BIOLOGICS ARE CRUCIAL

Many of the biologic medicines, typically expensive in most countries, are being produced locally and sold at prices significantly lower than the global average.

Giving an example, Muktadir said an imported pre-filled syringe of Adalimumab, prescribed for rheumatoid arthritis and psoriasis, once cost Tk 1.65 lakh to Tk 3.6 lakh. Local production has reduced its price to as low as Tk 15,000.

Similarly, a cancer patient can now buy locally

produced Filgrastim—used for boosting immunity—for Tk 7,000-8,000 per pre-filled syringe, while an imported one would cost Tk 85,000-95,000, he mentioned.

Unlike traditional drugs that are generally made from chemical ingredients, biologic medicines are derived from living organisms, including animals, microorganisms such as bacteria and yeast, or other living sources.

Monjurul Alam Monju, CEO of Beacon Medicare, said that once chemical drugs were the cornerstone of treatment, but now biologic medicines are transforming treatment for cancer, diabetes, arthritis, asthma, obesity and high cholesterol, offering more effective and targeted therapies with fewer side effects.

He said Bangladesh faces hurdles in adapting to this shift, as a sluggish

regulatory process delays the introduction of new drugs.

Referring to regulatory complexities, Zahangir Alam, chief financial officer of Square Pharmaceuticals Ltd, said, "We believe the approval process could be more rationalised and better aligned with the needs of the pharmaceutical industry."

Md Morsaline Billah, professor of Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering at Khulna University, said Bangladesh's pharmaceutical sector has managed to keep prices of biologic medicines 30-40 percent lower than the global average. This affordability has been vital for patients here.

"But this advantage is at risk. With Bangladesh set to graduate from LDC status in 2026, full compliance with TRIPS will be required. Companies will need to pay high royalties or invest

heavily in securing patents—both of which are difficult and costly," he told this newspaper recently.

Local firms could face lawsuits and trade penalties if they produce these drugs without permission from patent holders, said Billah.

He warned that delays in regulatory approvals and outdated patent laws could undermine years of progress. "Drug prices may rise 25-30 percent, pushing essential medicines out of reach for many."

Billah suggested that the government negotiate transitional flexibilities with WTO members and reform the existing patent law.

Stressing the need for public-private partnership for technology transfer, he said, "Inaction is not an option... We must act now to protect access, sustain our industry, and seize global market opportunities."

You can't run

FROM PAGE 1

At the event, the BNP secretary general said reforms cannot be implemented overnight and that they take time. Democratic practices should not be delayed for the sake of reforms, and reforms should not be imposed forcibly.

"We must move swiftly towards a democratic process. Reforms must be made by people's representatives elected through a democratic process."

At another programme, Fakhrul said it is not possible to run the country by hiring a few people from home and abroad.

"Can a country be run by hiring a few people from home and abroad? No, it cannot. This simple fact we need to understand."

Speaking at a discussion titled "July Uprising: Expectation and Achievement" at the Jatiya Press Club, organised by Zia Parishad, the BNP leader said if the government thinks the police will stop taking bribes from tomorrow, it will not happen. "You have to build a system where bribery is discouraged."

Fakhrul also blamed the existing bureaucracy for holding back the country's development.

"Our bureaucracy is a major obstacle to development. It is a negative bureaucracy and must be turned into a positive one. To do that, we mainly

need to involve the people in the process."

Referring to the criticism BNP faces for demanding polls, Fakhrul said, "As soon as we started talking about the election, they began saying BNP only wants polls. But has anyone thought about why we want the election?"

Without polls, he said true public representatives cannot be chosen. "And without representatives, how can they go to parliament? And if there is no elected parliament, how can people's rule be established?"

Regarding the proportional representation (PR) system, the BNP leader said some political parties have started talking about it in different ways. "But this has no connection with Bangladesh. They are loudly calling for elections under the PR system. But what is a proportional election? The ordinary people simply don't understand it."

Fakhrul mentioned that there is currently a kind of confusion in the country regarding the PR system, as some parties are strongly promoting it and speaking in favour of it.

He said the Awami League is a fascist force, and the damage it has done to the country will not be easy to fix. "They have destroyed all the institutions—not only the judiciary, administration, health sector and universities, but also the political parties."

2 more die of burn injuries

FROM PAGE 1

Earlier in the day, Jarif died around 9:15 am in the burn institute's Intensive Care Unit (ICU), said Shawon Bin Rahman, residential surgeon of the burn institute.

"He had suffered 40 percent burns," he said.

Shortly after, around 10:15 am, Masuma succumbed to her injuries.

"She had burns over 90 percent of her body, including damage to her respiratory tract. She was on life support," Shawon added.

Jarif's father, Habibur Rahman, said Jarif was the younger of two siblings. His family is from Rajbari but currently resides in Uttara's Sector 12.

Masuma's husband, Md Selim, said his wife had worked at the school for several years. The family, originally from Bhola, lived in the Shukrapur area of Turag's Nayanagar with their son and daughter.

Meanwhile, academic activities at Milestone School and College's main and Diabari campuses will remain suspended till Monday, as the authority has extended the extra leave for two more days.

The Chinese Embassy in Dhaka said, "The doctors and nurses offered advice to the Bangladeshi doctors about preventing wound infection and the methods of routine care for the injured, checked the patients' conditions, offered assistance on cleaning the wounds and changing the dressings, assisted in arterial punctures, and provided guidance for the surgery."

Meanwhile, Chinese Ambassador Yao Wen yesterday visited the burn institute and handed over medicines to the hospital authority, said the health ministry.

Apart from India and China, a medical team from Singapore is also working with the hospital.

Yunus visits burn institute to inquire about injured

FROM PAGE 12

nearby hospitals where swift preliminary care was administered. Most were then transferred to the burn institute and Combined Military Hospital.

He noted that the ministry had immediately alerted the burn institute to prepare, enabling doctors, nurses, and emergency teams to treat nearly 30 patients upon arrival.

Confusion over casualty numbers arose initially due to swift transfers across more than 10 medical facilities. Several victims required DNA profiling for identification, delaying the final figures.

Refined also briefed on a critical gap in ambulance availability, exposing limitations within the country's emergency health infrastructure.

In response, Yunus instructed that specific recommendations be submitted promptly to improve readiness. He assured that these would be addressed with urgency.

Govt aide pushes 5G project amid graft probe

FROM PAGE 1

Asked, Taiyeb said, "We didn't give any instruction or directive to the ACC. Since Tk 290 crore had already been spent during the past government's tenure through an irrevocable LC [letter of credit], and given the low possibility of recovering the funds through a legal battle with a Chinese tech giant, we are trying to move forward with the project."

He further said it was necessary to act, as another BTCL project, linked to the procurement of 5G equipment, has become non-functional due to the delay. Moreover, the US dollar appreciated by 40 percent against the taka.

"ACC verbally requested written communication. Based on that, we sent a letter stating that the funds had already been spent and that the corruption allegations originated during the previous administration.

"We urged the ACC to investigate and take appropriate action against those involved in graft during that period. We also requested delivery of the equipment for which payment had already been made," Taiyeb said in a voice message to The Daily Star.

He also said the ongoing probe into the allegations against a former secretary

and the then minister—particularly their attempts to influence the tender process—must continue under the legal framework.

"Our initiative is aimed at saving a state-owned company and ensuring that the funds disbursed from its accounts are effectively utilised. There is no other motive behind this."

Approved by ECNEC in February 2022, the Tk 1,059-crore project aims to prepare the country for a 5G rollout. Of the total budget, Tk 463 crore was allocated for buying equipment. In November 2023, Chinese telecom giant Huawei was awarded the controversial tender as the lowest bidder at Tk 326 crore.

The original controversy was that the project's technical evaluation committee declared all bidders as qualified, even though none met the full technical specifications required by the tender.

According to the public procurement rules, any bid that is not fully compliant must be rejected before financial offers are considered.

Bidders, as The Daily Star previously reported on December 3, 2023, were given less than 48 hours' notice before financial offers were opened, a deviation from the standard seven-day notice period

required by the tender's "Instructions to Tenderers". This prevented at least one bidder from having its authorised representative present.

And the notification of award was issued to Huawei with unusual speed amid allegations of interference from high-level officials at the Posts and Telecommunications Division.

Following the Awami League government's fall, ACC launched a probe into alleged irregularities and found primary evidence of violations of public procurement law.

In a letter dated June 18, the ACC conveyed its concerns to the telecom ministry and Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Limited (BTCL).

The ACC investigation team has already found preliminary evidence of violations/breaches of Public Procurement Act (PPA) 2006 and Public Procurement Rules (PPR) 2008 in the procurement process under discussion," said the letter signed by the then ACC secretary Khorshedha Yasmeen.

"Under such circumstances, proceeding with the remaining procurement activities may constitute a legal violation, and the related expenditure is likely to be deemed

unlawful," it read.

Despite the ACC's objections, Taiyeb, who holds the rank of state minister, sought the commission's cooperation to allow the project to proceed. He had earlier visited the ACC office on April 13.

In the June 22 letter to the ACC chief, Taiyeb said it was not possible to conduct the Factory Pre-Acceptance Test (FPAT)—a mandatory step to ensure that the procured devices meet technical specifications before shipment—as the Chief Adviser's Office issued a circular on March 23, prohibiting foreign visits funded by suppliers or contractors.

However, the circular in question was a continuation of a previous one dated December 9, 2024, which said relevant technical experts may travel abroad for procurement purposes, including FPAT and pre-shipment inspections.

What Taiyeb's letter didn't mention was that the telecom ministry did try to obtain the Chief Adviser's Office's approval for FPAT but its proposal was rejected, according to a telecom ministry letter sent to BTCL on May 13.

Meanwhile, the telecom ministry wrote to BTCL on May 25, referring to Taiyeb's directives regarding the ACC's tender process. Later, the committee submitted the report, identifying a host of anomalies and recommending a further probe by the appropriate authority.

The BTCL board on January 6 decided to forward the report to the ACC but it was not immediately dispatched.

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ইসলামী ব্যাংকিং সেবা প্রদানে 'ইসলামী ব্যাংকিং কর্ণার' পূবালী ব্যাংকের প্রায় সকল শাখা এবং উপশাখায়



A SILHOUETTE IN STILLNESS. Against the fiery canvas of sunset, a lone fisherman rows gently through the golden waters of a haor, his dinghy gliding over reflections of fading light. The photo was taken recently in Kochuakhola area of Bajitpur, Kishoreganj.

PHOTO: TAFSILUL AZIZ

Only literature can safeguard humanity

Says Professor Serajul Islam Choudhury; Kali O Kalam awards 5 emerging literary voices



PHOTO: COLLECTED

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The quality of Bangla literature is declining. The language is being distorted, and its standard is falling. Young writers must raise the standard of both the language and literature to a higher level.

Dhaka University Emeritus Professor Serajul Islam Choudhury made the remarks at a ceremony yesterday.

With an aim to inspire and accelerate literary practices among the country's youth, reputed literary magazine Kali O Kalam recognised five young wordsmiths with the "Young Poet and Writer Award 2024".

The winners are Ostrick Rishi (in the poetry category) for the book Shatitalay, Shazed Ul Hoq Abir for

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

3 more die of dengue, 331 get hospitalised

UNB, Dhaka

Three more people died of dengue in the 24 hours till yesterday morning, raising this year's official death toll from the mosquito-borne disease to 73, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The latest fatalities were reported from areas under the Chattogram division (outside city corporation) and Dhaka South City Corporation.

During this period, 331 new dengue patients were hospitalised across the country, taking the total number of cases to 19,120 so far this year.

In comparison, last year saw a much higher toll, with 575 dengue-related deaths. The total number of cases reached 1,01,214, while 1,00,040 patients recovered, according to DGHS data.

At least 31 dengue patients have died in the first 26 days of July, including 11 in last six days, highlighting the alarming trajectory of this year's dengue outbreak.

According to data from DGHS, dengue-related deaths stood at 19 in June, 3 in May, 7 in April, 3 in February, and 10 in January.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1



This road in East Mothertek of the capital's Basabo area has been in disrepair for months. Recent monsoon rains have worsened the condition, filling large potholes with water and turning the road muddy and nearly impassable. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

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Without reforms, future govts may become autocratic

Say speakers at SHUJAN event

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Without fundamental reforms, any future government in Bangladesh risks becoming autocratic, said Badiul Alam Majumdar, a member of the National Consensus Commission, yesterday.

"Although Sheikh Hasina has fled, she left behind an autocratic system. Without reforming this system, there is a chance that any party forming the government in the future might also become autocratic," he added.

He was speaking at a forum titled "Citizens' Thoughts on the Proposed National Charter," organised by SHUJAN (Citizens for Good Governance) at the Krishibid Institution Bangladesh in the capital.

The event brought together a cross-section of political and civil society figures to discuss the future of the nation's governance.

"We have categorised reforms into two parts,"

SEE PAGE 9 COL 3

- Establish checks and balances on PM's power
- Ensure transparent appointments
- Prioritise local govt polls
- Address discrimination against women
- Move beyond partisan politics

Institutional reforms a must to ensure rights

Law adviser tells conference

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law adviser Prof Asif Nazrul yesterday said protecting human rights in Bangladesh is not possible without reforming the state's three foundational institutions – the executive, legislature, and judiciary.

He said simply passing laws does not ensure human rights, which require honest and capable institutions and a willingness to change ourselves.

"We need to cultivate a culture that upholds

When a party no longer fears losing power, it turns into a monster -- something we have seen during the past Awami League regime.

Prof Asif Nazrul

human dignity," he said while attending the 11th Human Rights Conference organised by the Human Rights Support Society (HRSS) at Dhaka University.

The adviser said after strengthening the three foundational institutions, others like the Human Rights Commission and the Information Commission should function more effectively.

He also said fair elections matter, noting that the elections from 1991 to 2012 had set the country on a progressive path.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 3

New univ teachers' platform launched

DU CORRESPONDENT

A new teacher's platform was launched at Dhaka University yesterday with the aim of bringing together university teachers from diverse ideological backgrounds.

The platform, named University Teachers Link (UTL), draws inspiration from the spirit of the July uprising, and was formally introduced during an event at the Teacher-Student Centre (TSC) cafeteria yesterday.

Abdur Rahman, father of martyr Osman who was killed during last year's July uprising, inaugurated the event and formally announced the name of the platform.

Md Ataur Rahman Biswas, chairman of the Islamic History and Culture Department at DU, has been named the convener of UTL.

A 53-member convening committee was also announced at the event. The committee includes seven joint conveners, five joint member secretaries, and 38 members.

Mohammad Bilal Hossain of the history department at Jagannath University has been announced as the member secretary, while Md Mosharraf Hossain of the Finance Department at Dhaka University will serve as treasurer.

Immigration 'killing' Europe
Says Trump, calls on nations to 'stop horrible invasion'
AGENCIES

US President Donald Trump on Friday said that Europe needs to "get its act together" in terms of immigration, claiming the continent would not exist "anymore" if this "invasion" goes unchecked.

Talking to reporters after landing at Scotland's Prestwick airport in Ayrshire, Trump said that he had a couple of things to say to the leaders and people of Europe, the most pressing issue being immigration.

He is in Scotland for a weekend trip, where he was set to meet UK PM Keir Starmer yesterday.

During his five-day visit, Trump will play golf at two golf resorts he owns — one in the small village of Turnberry in South Ayrshire on Scotland's southwest coast and the other in



Menie in Aberdeenshire, reports DW online.

"There are a couple of things I could say, but on immigration, you've got to get your act together. You won't have Europe anymore," he said.

Immigration, he claimed, was an "invasion" that was "killing Europe."

Trump went on to claim that nobody entered the United States last month. The US president once again derided his predecessor, Joe Biden, for "allowing" people into the country.

Meanwhile, anti-Trump demonstrators gathered during a rally organised by the campaign group Stop Trump Coalition, protesting the visit of Trump, in Edinburgh.

While immigration is one of Trump's biggest campaign promises, it is also a major issue in Europe. In May, UK PM Keir Starmer said the country risked becoming "an island of strangers".

Earlier this month, Starmer and Emmanuel Macron announced a reciprocal migrant returns deal that the UK Prime Minister and French President hope will reduce the number of small boat crossings in the English Channel.



Malaysia's former prime minister, Mahathir Mohamad, speaks during a protest against Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. Several thousand Malaysians flooded the capital's streets to voice growing public frustration over rising living costs and a perceived lack of reform by Ibrahim's unity government.

PHOTO: AFP

'No one has been spared' in Gaza Strip

Says UNRWA amid unabated Israeli bombing; 25 more Palestinians, including 13 aid seekers, killed

AGENCIES

The UN's agency for Palestinian refugees yesterday called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza as starvation grips the enclave amid unabated Israeli attacks.

"People are once again forced to be displaced in Gaza by Israeli authorities' orders," the UNRWA said on X. "They have nowhere to go. No one is safe in Gaza. Not aid workers, not medical workers, not UN staff."

"No one has been spared. People have endured over 650 days of relentless, endless killings, destruction, and despair," it added.

At least 25 people have been killed in Israeli attacks on Gaza since dawn yesterday, including 13 aid seekers, health officials said.

Two infants have become the latest Palestinian children to die from malnutrition, as the total number of starvation deaths in the territory rises to more than 120, including more than 80 children.

Almost a third of people in Gaza are "not eating for days", the United Nations food aid agency told AFP, saying the crisis has reached "new and astonishing levels of desperation".

The Rome-based World Food Programme (WFP) had previously warned of a "critical risk of famine" in war-raged Gaza, over which

international condemnation of Israel's actions has been growing.

"Nearly one person in three is not eating for days. Malnutrition is surging with 90,000 women and children in urgent need of treatment," a WFP statement said.

It said that 470,000 people are expected to face "catastrophic hunger" — the most critical category under the UN's Integrated Food Security Phase classification — between May and September

Almost a third of Palestinians 'not eating for days': WFP

Total number of starvation deaths rises to over 120

Britain 'taking forward' food airdrop plan: PM Starmer's office

this year.

US President Donald Trump accused Hamas on Friday of not wanting to reach a ceasefire deal as Israel said it would explore "alternative options" to rescue hostages after negotiations collapsed.

Meanwhile, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer has called for

immediate action to end the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, in a newspaper column outlining efforts by the UK to help.

In a column in the Daily Mirror newspaper, the UK leader wrote that the "images of starvation and desperation in Gaza are utterly horrifying".

A worker with Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) said air dropping supplies by air into Gaza "might help" but would still be "insufficient" to address surges in malnutrition.

Starmer also wrote that the government was "already working urgently with the Jordanian authorities to get British aid onto planes and into Gaza".

The UK has also previously sent planes to directly drop aid, with UK forces having completed 11 airdrops into Gaza to deliver 110 tonnes of relief items as part of a Jordanian-led international air coalition.

In a separate development, Hamas officials yesterday expressed surprise at Trump's accusation that the group "didn't really want" a ceasefire and hostage release deal for Gaza.

"Trump's remarks are particularly surprising, especially as they come at a time when progress had been made on some of the negotiation files," Hamas official Taha al-Nunu told AFP.



"It's been three years, what have the people got? I think he (Anwar) enjoys seeing us suffer. Enough, please, step down."

Malaysia's former PM MAHATHIR MOHAMAD tells a rally over rising costs, lack of reform under PM Anwar's unity government

652 malnourished children die in six months in Nigeria

Says MSF, blames funding cuts by international donors

REUTERS, Abuja

At least 652 children died from malnutrition in the Nigerian state of Katsina in the first six months of 2025, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) said on Friday, an outcome it said it was due to funding cuts by international donors.

Katsina, in the north of the country, is plagued by insecurity.

"We are currently witnessing massive budget cuts, particularly from the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union, which are having real impact on the treatment of malnourished children," said MSF, also known as Doctors Without Borders.



On Wednesday, the United Nations food agency said it will be forced to suspend food and nutrition aid for 1.3 million people in Nigeria's insurgency-hit northeast at the end of July because stocks have run out.

Nigeria has budgeted 200 billion naira (\$130 million) this year to cushion the shortfall from the withdrawal of funding to the health sector by the US.

MSF said the number of children in Katsina with the most severe form of malnutrition has risen by about 208 percent this year compared with the same period last year and "unfortunately 652 children have already died in our facilities since the beginning of 2025".

Banditry is rife in Katsina where insecurity has displaced many people, forcing them to abandon their farms.

The government, alongside local civilian vigilante groups, has struggled to contain the activities of bandits.

Pregnant and breastfeeding women have not been spared, as an MSF survey on 750 mothers showed that more than half of them were "acutely malnourished, including 13 percent with severe acute malnutrition".

Across the country a record nearly 31 million people face acute hunger, according to David Stevenson, chief of the UN's food agency (WFP) in Nigeria.

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Memo No: 25.36.6100.110.00.000.25-150

Date : 23-07-2025

A e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP system portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the Procurement of the following Construction Work.

Sl No	Tender ID	Name of work	Tender Last Selling	Tender Opening
01	1133668	Establishment of complete Cancer, Kidney and Heart treatment center in eight divisional city titled project (1st Revised). Sub-Head: Construction of Sewerage Treatment Plant (STP) at Mymensingh.	24-Aug-2025 17:00	25-Aug-2025 12:30

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. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).


(Md. Mubarak Hossain)
Executive Engineer
Mymensingh PW Division
Mymensingh.

CA to unveil election date within 4 to 5 days

FROM PAGE 1

is the only practical way to resolve the current political turmoil in the country. "Many problems will be addressed through the election. It will help bring an end to the ongoing unrest," he said.

On July 9, Yunus ordered the authorities concerned to complete, by December, the preparations for the upcoming national election.

The polls are likely to take place in February or April, he told a meeting with law enforcers.

Yunus on June 13 said that the next general election could be held in the week before the start of Ramadan in 2026 if all preparations are completed.

Yunus made the remarks when BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman, during a meeting with the chief adviser in London, suggested that the election take place before Ramadan. The month of fasting will begin in the third week of February.

At yesterday's meeting, Yunus told the political parties that if all forces of the July uprising fail to

come together to hold a fair election, "we will miss this great opportunity", according to a statement from the Chief Adviser's Press Wing.

Yunus added that whenever the defeated forces get a chance, they create disturbances that severely hinder the country's normal progress.

"Whenever we move forward with election preparations, new conspiracies emerge. But the reality is that no conspiracy can obstruct the democratic journey. Because, on the question of fascism, the unity of all democratic forces is clear," said the chief adviser.

He expressed hope for cooperation from all political parties to ensure a fair election.

The leaders who attended the meeting also assured the chief adviser of their full support, said the statement.

Leaders of Jatiya Ganfront, Nizam-e-Islam Party, Khelafat Majlis, National People's Party, Bangladesh JASAD, Nationalist Democratic Movement, Islami Oikya Jote, Bhashani Janoshatki

Party, Bangladesh Labour Party, Socialist Party of Bangladesh (Marxist), and Jamiat Ulama e Islam attended the meeting.

The meeting began with a minute of silence and prayer in memory of those who died in the plane crash at Milestone School & College on July 21.

During the meeting, leaders from all political parties criticised the government's failure to maintain law and order, calling for stricter measures.

They expressed concern that defeated forces might exploit the situation to create unrest.

They also demanded removal of "inactive advisers" and replacement of "fascist collaborators" in the administration and law enforcement with competent individuals.

Some of them also criticised the government's decision to allow the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to set up a mission in Dhaka.

The chief adviser launched the ongoing talks with parties after the jet crash at Milestone and subsequent protests. As part of his efforts to engage

with the parties, he met with the leaders of the BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Andolan Bangladesh, and National Citizen Party (NCP) on July 22.

The next day, he held discussions with leaders from 13 other political parties.

After yesterday's meeting with the political parties, Yunus also met leaders of Hefazat-e-Islam.

They discussed arrangements for compensation for victims of the crackdown on protesters at Shapla Chhatar in 2013, as well as the collection and preservation of all related data and evidence.

They also discussed necessary steps to initiate an investigation through the United Nations into the attack on Hefazat's rally, the Chief Adviser's Press Wing said.

Hefazat Joint General Secretary Azizul Haque Islamabadi, who attended the meeting, told The Daily Star that they also objected to the government's decision to allow the UN rights office in Dhaka.

With the parties, he met

with the leaders of the BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Andolan Bangladesh, and National Citizen Party (NCP) on July 22.

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BNP,

Jamaat-e-

Islam,

Islami

Andolan

Bangladesh,

and

National

Citizen

Gopalganj victims deserve justice

Hold an independent probe into the violence

We are deeply concerned by the findings of Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), which indicate that grave human rights violations took place on July 16 in Gopalganj during the political rally of the National Citizen Party (NCP). In its report, ASK stated that excessive force was used, innocent civilians were harassed, mass arrests were carried out, and alleged unlawful killings took place on that day. However, the district's superintendent of police claimed that security forces exercised "maximum restraint" and did not use lethal weapons, contradicting ASK's findings. The report highlighted the involvement of multiple law enforcement agencies in the clashes, which led to the deaths of five civilians and injuries to dozens. Reportedly, hundreds of people were arrested later, and thousands were accused in cases filed in connection with the deadly violence. Among those detained were individuals and minors who reportedly had no link to the events. This type of behaviour by law enforcement makes us wonder whether anything has changed since the July uprising last year.

Eyewitnesses told ASK that while attackers used stones and crude weapons, no firearms were visible, yet law enforcers fired live bullets indiscriminately. Families of the deceased alleged that hospital authorities rushed the handing over of bodies, pressuring them to proceed with burial or cremation without post-mortem examinations. Except for Ramzan Munshi, none of the victims initially underwent autopsy. One victim, Imon—a crockery shop worker with no political ties—was reportedly beaten severely, including being stomped on the face by security forces. Following much public outcry, the bodies of three individuals were exhumed five days after burial for post-mortem exams upon a court order, causing further distress to their families. The wholesale filing of cases—including three under the Anti-Terrorism Act, one under the Special Powers Act of 1974, and the rest under various sections of the penal code—has also spread fear among local residents.

Eyewitness accounts present a troubling picture of law enforcement's handling of the Gopalganj incident, which is strikingly reminiscent of the tactics used under the autocratic regime of Sheikh Hasina. Their response appears to follow a familiar formula seen during the Awami League's tenure: use of excessive force, mass arrests, indiscriminate case filings, among others. Alarmingly, even children have reportedly been charged under the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2009, raising serious human rights concerns.

We urge the government to hold an independent investigation into the Gopalganj violence and ensure justice for the victims. While those responsible for the attacks on the NCP must be brought to justice, those accountable for the loss of lives must also face consequences. Last but not least, the system that continues to permit law enforcers and security forces to use excessive force and lethal weapons, and act with such brutality, must be urgently reformed.

Get Rajuk's online services running again

Find the hackers, clamp down on corruption

The hacking of the Electronic Construction Permitting System (ECP), a server of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk), to illegally obtain approval for a building is quite concerning. It has led to Rajuk suspending all activities of the ECP for the last two months, depriving people of all kinds of services such as design approvals and land use clearance. It is baffling that a server that holds such sensitive documents and provides such essential services is not properly protected against possible hacking. Equally baffling is the fact that it is taking so long for Rajuk to fix this problem.

According to a report in this paper, Rajuk authorities have claimed they have sought help from the Bangladesh Computer Council to fix the server errors, but the latter has not yet responded. Does this mean Rajuk officials will just fold their arms and wait until they do? If there was any urgency in the matter, which does not seem to be the case, at least as far as Rajuk is concerned, the logical step would be to look for other computer experts to fix the problem.

Online services were introduced to increase the efficiency and accountability of Rajuk. Allegations of bribery of officials to get files moved within Rajuk were aplenty during the previous government's rule, especially during the days when all services were manual. But even with an online system, there have been long delays. According to reports, land developers have not been able to get the required permits for months, even after applying online and even during this government's tenure. Lack of manpower and an inefficient system have been reportedly causing these delays. One cannot rule out deliberate delays and intentional glitches in the software if remnants of the corrupt system continue to exist.

If the government is serious about its commitment to remove corruption from all its institutions, it must ensure that these online services are provided efficiently by competent, honest officials. Irregularities within Rajuk have been an open secret for many decades and have manifested in the indiscriminate urbanisation of Dhaka that has led to congestion, pollution and public health hazards. Merely having an online service is not enough to improve public services. There must be government oversight to ensure that the systems are working without glitches, genuine or deliberately created, and that they are fully secure. This requires qualified teams that can take prompt action in the case of cyberattacks or technical malfunction. Most importantly, the government must take appropriate measures to completely root out corrupt practices in institutions like Rajuk, which provide such crucial public services.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY



Terrorist attack at Atlanta Olympics

On this day in 1996, a pipe bomb exploded in Olympic Centennial Park in Atlanta, Georgia, in the US. One person was killed and 11 were injured in the terrorist attack.

EDITORIAL

Why can't we prevent drowning fatalities?



Sifat Afrin Shams
is a member of the editorial
team at The Daily Star.

SIFAT AFRIN SHAMS

Annually, approximately 19,000 people of all ages lose their lives to drowning in Bangladesh. And while adults—particularly those aged 60 or older—face substantial risk of drowning, children are its primary victims. In fact, drowning is the leading cause of death among children aged 1-4 years. They are three times more likely to drown than those aged 10-17 years.

The prevalence of this crisis in our country is not random; it is shaped by a confluence of demographic, environmental, socioeconomic, and behavioural factors. Geographically and environmentally, Bangladesh's landscape—characterised by vast floodplains and water bodies—presents inherent risks. The majority of drownings, approximately 80 percent, occur in ponds, channels, buckets, drains, and ditches located within 20 metres of a child's home. Rural areas, particularly those prone to yearly floods and waterlogging, present a higher risk. A critical observation is that the very practice of constructing homes on elevated land to mitigate flooding often results in excavated pits that transform into accessible ditches and ponds adjacent to residences, inadvertently creating immediate hazards. Paradoxically, in such cases, the most dangerous water bodies are not distant rivers or oceans, but rather the seemingly innocuous water sources right next to homes.

Most drowning incidents (95 percent) occur between 9 am and 3 pm, especially during the monsoon. This critical six-hour window often coincides with peak hours when parents and caregivers are busy with household chores or agricultural work, resulting in insufficient supervision of young children.

Drowning deaths are disproportionately higher among the poorest and least educated populations in rural settings. Low economic status often compels parents to work long hours, leading to lack of consistent adult supervision for their children. Parental illiteracy, particularly among mothers, is strongly associated with a significantly higher risk of both fatal and non-fatal drowning, as it correlates with poorer water safety awareness and limited access to prevention knowledge. This suggests that the high drowning

rates are not merely an issue of water exposure, but are symptomatic of broader socioeconomic vulnerabilities and a lack of access to resources that could ensure child safety.

Behavioural factors also play a critical role. A staggering 97 percent of child drowning victims did not know how to swim. Furthermore, some communities hold fatalistic beliefs, attributing drowning to divine will, which can inadvertently foster passive attitudes

to drowning prevention.

The SwimSafe programme targets older children, typically aged 6-10 years, teaching them essential survival swimming skills. This intervention has



FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

Drowning prevention necessitates a coordinated effort involving various government ministries, NGOs, community groups, and international partners.

towards proactive prevention efforts.

The true scale of the drowning crisis in Bangladesh is likely even higher than reported. There is currently no official, comprehensive system to track drowning cases nationwide. NGOs often compile drowning data based on media reports, but this method captures only a fraction of actual incidents, as most cases go unnoticed and unreported. Additionally, nationwide surveys on drowning incidents are not conducted regularly, leading to potential underestimation and challenges in precise policy planning and resource allocation.

Despite the formidable scale of this crisis, Bangladesh has been leading efforts to develop and implement evidence-based strategies that offer significant hope. The Centre for Injury Prevention and Research, Bangladesh (CIPRB), in collaboration with international partners such as

been shown to reduce the chances of drowning by an impressive 90 percent.

A major turning point in Bangladesh's fight against drowning occurred in February 2022, when the government approved a substantial \$32 million, three-year "Integrated Community Based Centre for Childcare and Protection, Women Enlightenment and Swim-Safe Facilities Project". This ambitious project aims to establish 8,000 community-based childcare centres to enrol 200,000 children aged 1-5 years and teach survival swimming skills to 360,000 children aged 6-10 years between 2022 and 2024.

The government's commitment extends to transitioning responsibility for existing crèches (2,198 centres) to the Bangladesh Shishu Academy, the lead agency for this project.

Despite the significant strides made and the proven effectiveness of interventions, several challenges persist

Micromanaging should not be the central bank's job



Mamun Rashid,
an economic analyst, is chairman at
Financial Excellence Ltd and founding
managing partner of PwC Bangladesh.

MAMUN RASHID

Over the last three decades, Bangladesh Bank (BB) has become an increasingly operational regulator. Today, it reviews foreign loan approvals, dollar deposit flows, and large ticket transactions on a case-by-case basis, making BB's role more cautious yet reactive, instead of strategic. A developing economy that wants to be a middle-income nation, such micromanagement is no longer tenable.

Globally, modern central banks focus on frameworks, not transactions. The Federal Reserve sets macro-prudential tools—capital adequacy norms, systemic liquidity thresholds, and risk-weighted asset requirements—without intervening in individual deals. The European Central Bank supervises systemic institutions but delegates day-to-day approvals to the banking layer. Even the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), long criticised for micromanagement, has shifted toward a supervisory approach that enables self-regulation through compliance-based incentives.

BB's current role in vetting each dollar deposit linked to external commercial borrowing illustrates the core issue. Instead of setting clear rules of eligibility, compliance documentation, and risk-based pricing bands, it approves every inflow manually. This adds friction, delays, and promotes opacity. According to

data from the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA), average approval cycles for foreign loans exceed 30-45 days, undermining competitiveness in global capital markets.

Besides, the strict enforcement of the Internal Credit Risk Rating System (ICRRS) has had unintended consequences. While aiming to protect banks from poor credit exposures, it disproportionately blocks smaller borrowers from credit. Large political borrowers, often backed by implicit guarantees, face no such friction. This skewed outcome has starved innovation and enterprise finance and failed to stop the trillions of fraudulent loans in the country.

Banks, in this regime, have stopped asking fundamental questions such as how ICRR ties into forward cash flow predictability or sector-specific volatility. Instead, a compliance mindset has emerged: "Bangladesh Bank required it." Over time, such an attitude has eroded institutional thinking capacity, making banks passive executors rather than strategic financiers. That is perhaps the most damaging long-term cost—when a regulatory environment encourages blind compliance over judgment.

A forward-looking central bank must enable rather than control by defining boundaries, building

ecosystems, and letting licensed banks operate with autonomy within those boundaries. This requires: i) shifting from transactional approval to risk-based frameworks; ii) institutionalising supervisory sandboxes and early-warning systems; and iii) enabling ecosystem development instead of direct regulation.

BB should replace transactional oversight with sectoral risk frameworks. This includes pre-approved External Commercial Borrowing (ECB) routes for eligible companies with audited financials; risk-weighted credit windows for banks based on their capital base and non-performing loan (NPL) history; dynamic asset-liability matching rules that incentivise long-term lending; and launching multiple sandboxes to test the regulation and policies.

Countries like Malaysia have implemented credit guarantee schemes and sandbox-based regulations that allow rapid experimentation under controlled exposure. According to reports from Bank Negara Malaysia, their innovation sandbox approved 38 new financial products in 24 months with less than one percent regulatory breaches.

BB must also institutionalise a proactive supervision model rather than waiting for banks to default or misreport by building an AI-backed credit risk surveillance tool that flags high-risk portfolios; conducting quarterly asset quality reviews for banks above a certain asset threshold; integrating non-banking datasets (e.g., utility payments, tax records) into borrower scoring; and moving away from collateral-backed lending, and acknowledging other forms of assets.

The Reserve Bank of India introduced a Central Repository of

Information on Large Credits (CRILC), mandating banks to report exposures above 50 million Indian rupees. This has significantly improved stress recognition timelines.

BB should catalyse markets, not dominate them. This means licensing independent credit rating agencies and asset reconstruction companies; opening up private distressed asset markets; and facilitating interbank repo and derivative markets to improve price discovery.

Vietnam and Indonesia have liberalised their NPL disposal process, resulting in a 30-40 percent recovery improvement within two years of implementation. According to the World Bank, NPL resolution in Indonesia improved from 22 percent to 63 percent post-reform between 2016 and 2019.

These steps require BB to fundamentally redesign its identity from an enforcer to an ecosystem architect. It must trust its licensed entities to operate under risk-based guardrails and reserve interventions only for systemic risks.

The banking reforms recently outlined with support from the IMF, Asian Development Bank, and World Bank offer a unique opportunity. The Distressed Asset Management Act, the Bank Resolution Ordinance, and the proposed deposit protection enhancements are foundational shifts. However, their success will depend on execution and mindset change.

More critically, Bangladesh Bank must invest in building human capital—regulators who understand structured finance, international bond markets, and fintech-led credit models. Otherwise, BB will continue to regulate yesterday's risks with today's tools, while tomorrow's markets go ungoverned.

Bangladesh in the age of global economic flux

AN OPEN DIALOGUE

Dr Abdullah Shibli
is an economist and employed at a nonprofit financial intermediary in the US. He previously worked for the World Bank and Harvard University.

ABDULLAH SHIBLI



Any casual observer of the recent global scenario can see a constant shift in global crosscurrents. Experts have characterised the present situation as a "state of flux." It would not be too much to assert that in the coming years, we will witness a shift in geopolitical norms and alignments, and may even see a decline in Western economic hegemony. The US and its allies will make way for the rise of China and India, which may foster growth and influence in the Third World. Bangladesh needs to gear up for this new world and be ever vigilant for new possibilities, and claim its share in this new economic order.

So, one may ask, what do I mean when I say that we are in a "state of flux"? First of all, I am referring to the state of affairs in the domestic and international milieu, where things are constantly changing and unstable. Domestically, Bangladesh has managed to transform its political and economic landscape after a decade and a half of semi-autocracy, kleptocracy, and crony capitalism, to one where free elections, the rule of law, and free markets are within reach. Unfortunately, events of this month also suggest that things are not yet settled and are still in the process of reaching the goals set by the democratic movement.

Secondly, in the international arena, there is a lack of certainty, and economically, we have entered a period of transition, marked by the ongoing tariff war and superpower rivalry for control of supply chain relationships following the Covid pandemic and the Ukraine war. Donald Trump and his administration have seized the moment and managed to stir up issues in the financial and commercial sphere, which portends a major global realignment.

It is legitimate to ask: what does Bangladesh need to do to stay ahead in this environment? One lesson from recent experience: our leaders and economic policymakers must remain vigilant and be prepared for the twists and turns that may come in the future, steering the course to avoid the maelstrom



FILE PHOTO: AFP

For developing countries like Bangladesh, policymakers and market participants need to recognise that we have entered a new phase.

and face the headwinds we will encounter in the coming months. It is encouraging to note that our media and thought leaders are right on the money, reminding the government of its failures and the necessity of being proactive. We understand that the interim government (IG) has too much on its plate. Nonetheless, it has also demonstrated a lack of concrete plans, preparedness, and a consistent, long-term commitment in some areas. Tariff negotiations, asset recovery initiatives, and civil disorders are just a few of

reminders to avoid a bureaucratic mindset, while sounding a warning against the laissez-faire mode that appears to be settling in.

Bangladesh is facing some uncertain times ahead. The reason for this enhanced state of instability is the political situation in the country, global economic uncertainty, and the environment that is being created due to the economic policies of the US government. There are other sources of uncertainty, including the realignment of geopolitical forces, the role of China, and the settlement of

Queens' College, University of Cambridge, and Renee Kerns Professor of Practice at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. In an article titled, "Is America Breaking the Global Economy? What an Age of Economic Uncertainty Will Mean for the World," El-Erian writes about the deep uncertainty in the outcome for the future of the global economy. He offers two possible scenarios in the current issue of *Foreign Affairs*. In the optimistic view, he foresees an economic restructuring similar to that which

took place about four decades ago during the Reagan-Thatcher era. In the less rosy picture, the US and the global economy could experience stagflation or recession, but also encounter pronounced financial instability.

Mohammed El-Erian offers some insights on navigating these uncharted waters. With little prospect for stability, governments, companies, and investors will need to do more to insure themselves against potential damage. They must be agile and flexible. They need capital and human resilience, so they can absorb setbacks and fund new initiatives. And they need to be open to fresh ways of thinking and behaving. "If these actors can become more nimble, they will survive the volatility—and perhaps emerge better for it. But if they freeze up, they will undermine the well-being of both the world's current generations and its future ones," he says.

The International Economic Association (IEA) has convened a multinational working group named the "Working Group on Reconstructing the World Economic Order" to discuss a framework for countries with conflicting interests to negotiate with each other. Scholars from prestigious academic institutions including Harvard University, the London School of Economics, Tsinghua University, the National University of Singapore, the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA), and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences are members of this group.

Since relations among states and other actors are more likely to be regulated by a complex, partial, sometimes inconsistent, and ever changing set of rules, norms, and procedures, the IEA seeks to develop a framework to provide the procedures and standards for countries to negotiate their bilateral or multilateral relationships and avoid the conflicts that we see today.

For developing small countries like Bangladesh, policymakers and market participants need to recognise that we have entered a new phase known as the "vigilant economy." This term refers to an economic state where elected leaders take initiatives to monitor economic indicators and potential risks closely, and are prepared to adjust policies or strategies as needed. It implies a cautious approach, acknowledging progress in some areas but remaining alert to factors that could derail that progress or create new challenges. Concerns about persistent inflation, potential economic slowdowns, or geopolitical uncertainties will drive this vigilance.

ORDEALS OF A JULY UPRISING WARRIOR

'Protesters are not given medical care here'



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MD MAHMUDUL HASAN

Sinthia Mehrin Sokal hails from a rural area in Sunamganj. She passed all pre university exams with flying colours and began majoring in Criminology at Dhaka University (DU) in the 2020-21 academic year. For years, she was the only student from her village to qualify to study at this university.

Sokal had no political party affiliation. However, soon after coming to DU and becoming a resident student of Ruqayyah Hall, she started feeling the heat of the political crises that gripped Bangladesh and its universities during Sheikh Hasina's misrule.

In university dormitories, students were forced to endure Chhatra League's mistreatment. Predicaments of resident female students were much worse, which remained largely underreported. Sokal came to know about female students who were sexually abused by Chhatra League members.

The reinstatement of the quota system in government jobs in June 2024 rang the death knell for Sokal's future. She became active in the Students Against Discrimination movement.

On July 14, 2024, Sokal joined students' protest march to Bangabhaban to press home their demand that 95 percent of jobs be awarded based on merit. On that day, Sheikh Hasina had the audacity to use the pejorative term "razakar" to discredit the student movement. Immediately, students around the country burst into anger and took to the streets. That night, Sokal and other students broke the locks of the main gate and marched out of Ruqayyah Hall to demonstrate.

On July 15, 2024, Sokal took to the streets with her friends. When their procession came to the university's VC Chattor (square), Chhatra League hooligans and hired miscreants swooped down on it and started attacking protesters with iron rods, machetes, hockey sticks, and other weapons. One thug hit Sokal very hard and wedged a dent on her head. She fell on the ground and remained unconscious for the next two and a half hours of which she has no memory at all. She was taken to Dhaka Medical College



On July 15, 2024, Chhatra League hooligans and hired miscreants swooped down on protesters with iron rods, machetes, hockey sticks, and other weapons at the Dhaka University campus, injuring many, including Sokal.

FILE PHOTO: RASHED SUMON

Hospital (DMCH).

Chhatra League ruffians made several attempts to enter DMCH to attack injured protesters, but each time were resisted by brave healthcare providers. Then they pretended to be injured patients and thus entered DMCH and brutally assaulted the protesters taking medical care.

Feeling vulnerable to further attacks, Sokal left DMCH with the help of a relative but without proper treatment. On the way to Universal Medical College and Hospital in Mohakhali, she kept vomiting and had a near-death experience. The doctor recommended CT scan and hospital admission, which

a curfew in the city.

Sokal's sister managed to take her to the city's Impulse Hospital. As she had not received proper early intervention, her infections spread and she was operated on immediately. It took two hours for the doctors to clean the infections and dress her head. Each episode of dressing caused her excruciating pain.

That was not the end of Sokal's ordeal.

The Hasina government shut down the Internet. From her sister's house, Sokal heard sounds of shootings and airstrikes from helicopters that killed many young people. The police were conducting block raids and

for her mother's treatment. The situation in Mymensingh was also very precarious. The police were herding students like felons and sending them to jail.

While Sokal was running here and there for her mother's treatment with her visible head injury, she kept being asked: "Did you participate in the movement?" Unbearable pain, anxiety about her mother's condition and the fear of being arrested by the police—all these made Sokal's life in Mymensingh intolerable.

On July 27, 2024, one day before the scheduled date of her head dressing, Sokal went to a hospital in Mymensingh for a

doctor's consultation hoping that her head wound would be dressed the next day. The doctor wanted to know the reason for her medical condition. She bluntly said, "I participated in the quota reform movement."

The doctor made a sharp reply: "Protesters are not given medical care here." Sokal left the hospital stunned and dumbfounded. She dreaded that many other July warriors might have faced similar cruelty and embraced martyrdom due to lack of medical care.

The next day, Sokal had her head wound dressed at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital, where the duty doctor whispered to her: "Don't tell anyone that you are a protester." Once she was discharged and the effect of anaesthesia had worn off, she started experiencing acute, paroxysmal pain.

On August 1, 2024, Sokal went to her village in Dharmapasha, Sunamganj, with her mother and faced hostility from Awami League-leaning villagers. Using sexist terms, they called her names for her involvement in demonstrations.

But Sokal was unstoppable.

Mobilising and organising other students, she planned a rally in the village on August 4, 2024. Local Awami League affiliates passed their details to the police and started threatening them. Fear gripped Sokal, as she was having terrible pain in her head, her father had a heart condition, and her mother had undergone an operation only two days ago. What would happen to her parents if she were arrested?

Then came August 5, 2024, and the news of Hasina's fall and flight to India. People around the country took to the streets and joined spontaneous processions of joy, sharing sweetmeats with each other. Sokal participated in a similar procession in her village and felt gratified that her suffering and the lives and blood of thousands of young people didn't go in vain. The country became free from Hasina's mafia-style autocracy.

But Sokal's ordeal continues. She still suffers from occasional short-term memory loss and has to have regular medical check-ups. She has to move and walk carefully. But she is grateful to the Almighty for giving her an extra life.

She is a living martyr.

There are many more Sokals, and we owe them a debt of gratitude.

This article is based on Sinthia Sokal's address at a webinar organised by Forum for Bangladesh Studies on Nov 2, 2024 and the author's subsequent conversations with her.



Surge in diphtheria infections raises alarms across European health systems

Health officials are raising concerns after a major increase in diphtheria cases across the European Union (EU). Between 2016 and 2021, the EU reported an average of just 27 cases per year. But in 2022, that number suddenly jumped to 362 cases, prompting detailed investigations.

The majority of those affected were young men (98% male), with 96% being recent migrants. Unfortunately, vaccination status was unknown in 80% of the cases, making it hard to assess their protection against the disease.

Diphtheria is a serious bacterial infection, best known for affecting the throat, but it can also cause skin sores. In this outbreak, 78% of patients had skin-related (cutaneous) diphtheria, 15% had respiratory symptoms—including 3% with severe throat infections known as pseudomembranous disease—and 3% had both forms. There were 17 hospitalisations and one death.

Further testing revealed that 30 patients were also infected with *Streptococcus pyogenes*, a bacterium that can cause strep throat, and 15 had methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), which is hard to treat.

Fortunately, most of the *Corynebacterium diphtheriae* bacteria (the cause of diphtheria) were still treatable with common antibiotics—98% were susceptible to penicillin and 94% to erythromycin. Genetic analysis showed that most infections came from three unrelated bacterial strains, suggesting people were infected during their migration journey or in overcrowded centres.

Health authorities stress the importance of early detection, hygiene, and vaccination to prevent further spread.

SOURCE: NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF MEDICINE

Whispers of sleep: finding balance through rest

STAR HEALTH DESK

Sleep is essential for good health, and how much you need varies by age. Newborns may need up to 17 hours daily, while adults generally require 7 to 9 hours. Older adults do well with 7-8 hours, while teens need closer to 8-10. Pregnant women often need additional rest, especially in the first trimester.

Not getting enough rest can lead to "sleep debt," which builds up over time and impacts your brain, mood, and body. You might not even realise you are sleep-deprived until signs like grogginess, poor focus, or falling asleep easily during the day appear.

Sleep happens in stages, with deep sleep helping the body heal and recharge. REM sleep, which begins about 90 minutes after falling asleep, is when most dreaming occurs and plays a key role in memory and learning.

Sleep deprivation does not just leave you tired—it can affect your immune system, mental health, weight, and even your ability to drive safely. In fact, studies show that drowsy driving can be as dangerous as drunk driving.

To sleep better, set a regular bedtime, keep your sleep environment quiet and cool, avoid screens before bed, and skip caffeine and heavy meals in the evening. If you struggle with persistent sleep issues, it may be time to consult a healthcare professional.

Ultimately, if you are constantly relying on caffeine, waking up tired, or dozing off during the day, your body is telling you one thing: it needs more sleep.



WORLD DROWNING PREVENTION DAY 2025

Sharing stories, saving lives

STAR HEALTH DESK

Each year, more than 300,000 people worldwide lose their lives to drowning—over 80,000 of them in the World Health Organisation (WHO) South-East Asia Region alone. To shine a light on this preventable tragedy, World Drowning Prevention Day is observed every 25 July. This year's theme, "Your story can save a life—Drowning prevention through shared experiences," underscores the importance of learning from lived realities.

Drowning is a silent epidemic, and children are its most vulnerable victims. Globally, it ranks among the top three causes of death for children aged 1-14. Yet, despite its magnitude, drowning prevention has long remained under-prioritised in health and development agendas.

In Southeast Asia, focused advocacy and community-driven interventions have led to real change. Since 2000, the region has achieved a 48% reduction in drowning death rates—surpassing the global average of 38%. The key has been context-specific, inclusive programs that prioritise at-risk populations.

In Bangladesh, the challenges

are acute. Rural areas are dotted with open water bodies—ponds, canals, and ditches—that pose daily risks to children. For years, parents, especially mothers, were faced with an impossible choice: leave young children unsupervised or forego livelihoods.

Recognising this dilemma, Bangladesh pioneered a powerful local solution: the Anchal model. These are rural day care centres where trained carers supervise children aged 1-5 during the hours when drownings most commonly occur. Older children transition into SwimSafe, a program that teaches lifesaving water survival skills in just two weeks. So far, over 700,000 Bangladeshi children have been trained, with studies showing that the risk of drowning drops significantly for children who participate.

Bangladesh's model has drawn international attention, offering a template for other low- and middle-income countries. Its success lies in community ownership, low-cost scalability, and clear impact.

Elsewhere in the region, similar innovations are saving lives. In Sri Lanka, a voice

alert system called Sayuru now delivers real-time weather updates to over 100,000 fishers, slashing storm-related fishing deaths by more than 70%. In Thailand, the Merit Maker program turned a safety campaign into a nationwide movement, cutting child drowning deaths by 57%.

In Nepal, where rivers and lakes present persistent risk, WHO and the Ministry of Health are partnering to conduct rapid community assessments and build local awareness.

These examples show that interventions work—when they are tailored to communities' lived experiences. But more investment is needed, particularly in inclusive strategies that reach children with disabilities and marginalised groups.

On this World Drowning Prevention Day, WHO urges all member states to integrate drowning prevention into national health and development plans. It is not just about numbers—it is about people. Stories of survival, resilience, and innovation deserve to be heard and shared.

Because your story—your experience, your solution—can save a life.



Cross-border care for Milestone tragedy victims

Singapore medical team extends lifesaving support to the victims of fighter jet crash in Dhaka

STAR HEALTH REPORT

In the aftermath of the tragic fighter plane crash that severely injured many students from Milestone School and College, a team of specialised medical professionals from Singapore immediately arrived in Dhaka to provide critical care support. The mission, driven by humanitarian urgency, was swiftly mobilised in response to calls from the Government of Bangladesh and the National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery.

"We are here to support—not to take over," said Dr Jolin Wong from Singapore General Hospital, one of the team members deployed in this emergency initiative. "Our primary role has been to assess critical cases in the ICU and high-dependency units, offering expert guidance to the local medical teams who have already done a commendable job."

The Singaporean team includes intensivists, nurses, and infection control experts, many of whom have long-standing professional relationships with the Bangladeshi medical community. They have not performed any invasive procedures but are offering consultation support to ensure the highest quality of care is maintained for patients, most of whom are children.

According to the visiting doctors, more than 50 per cent injured patients are expected to recover and walk out of



Doctors from Singapore at the National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery in Bangladesh.

the hospital—a significant improvement compared to past burn incidents in the country. "Ten years ago, such survival rates would have been unimaginable," said Dr Chong Si Jack, Senior Consultant, and Burns Specialist, emphasising the impact of training and collaborative efforts over the years.

The support mission was initiated through rapid coordination between the Singaporean Ministry of Health, SingHealth Group, and the Bangladesh Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The team praised the seamless collaboration with the Bangladesh High Commission in Singapore and the local authorities for facilitating their quick deployment, including logistics, travel, and customs

clearance of essential wound care supplies.

While commending the surgical capabilities of the Burn Institute, the team highlighted critical gaps in intensive care services. "Bangladesh has made significant progress, but ICU management remains an area that needs further investment—especially in trained intensivists, infection control protocols, and real-time patient monitoring," said one of the team leaders.

They also pointed out the need for better infrastructure around the burn institute to avoid logistical delays in future emergencies. "In mass casualty situations, minutes can save lives. Having just one narrow entry point for ambulances is a bottleneck that needs urgent attention."

Infectious disease control remains

another concern. Cultural practices such as bringing home-cooked meals to hospitals and the presence of large crowds of visitors can introduce harmful bacteria to already vulnerable patients. "We understand these are deeply ingrained habits, but in ICU settings, stricter protocols could help save more lives," noted a member of the infection control team.

Despite speculations in the media, the team clarified that there is no current plan to transfer patients to Singapore. "Our goal is to support local care. The decision to treat patients here was both scientific and compassionate. The Burn Institute is well-equipped, and the staff is highly trained," affirmed Dr Chong.

Looking ahead, both Bangladeshi and Singaporean teams see this crisis as a catalyst for long-term collaboration. "This isn't just a one-time intervention. It's about strengthening systems, building capacities, and sharing knowledge—so that we can all be better prepared for the future," said Ms Vijaya Rao, Senior Director, International Collaboration Office, SingHealth.

The visiting team also commended the spirit of the Bangladeshi doctors and nurses. "Working with them feels like working from the heart," one nurse remarked. "This partnership is built on trust, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to saving lives."

WORLD HEPATITIS DAY 2025:

Hepatitis—let us break it down

World Hepatitis Day is observed annually on 28 July to raise awareness of viral hepatitis, an inflammation of the liver that causes severe liver disease and liver cancer.

The 2025 theme, "Hepatitis: Let us break it down," calls for urgent action to dismantle financial, social, and systemic barriers—including stigma—that hinder hepatitis elimination and liver cancer prevention.

Key messages

1. Hepatitis is a leading cause of liver cancer—and a growing killer. Chronic viral hepatitis causes 1.3 million deaths annually, mostly from liver cancer and cirrhosis—that is, 3,500 deaths per day, similar to tuberculosis. Hepatitis B and C spread silently, with 6,000 new infections daily. Despite being preventable and treatable, the disease burden rises, especially in regions with limited access to care.

2. Knowing your status stops liver



cancer. Most people with hepatitis do not know they are infected. Early diagnosis leads to life-saving treatment and cancer prevention. Testing—especially in endemic regions or among high-risk groups—is vital to ending hepatitis.

3. We can prevent 2.8 million deaths by 2030—if countries act now. Elimination is possible. Vaccines, curative therapies, and

proven tools exist to stop transmission. But most cases are diagnosed too late. Achieving elimination requires national commitment, strategic investment, and public health systems that embed hepatitis services in primary care. Early diagnosis and integrated, people-centred care will save lives and prevent liver cancer.

Call to action: eliminate hepatitis to prevent deaths and cancer

- Get tested for hepatitis B and C.
- Ensure newborns receive the hepatitis B vaccine within 24 hours of birth.
- Learn the facts; talk to a healthcare provider about early testing and treatment.
- Help end stigma by sharing accurate information.
- Lead and fund awareness campaigns linking hepatitis care to liver cancer prevention.
- Expand hepatitis B birth-dose

vaccination, safe blood/injection practices, and harm reduction.

- Scale up affordable, decentralised testing and treatment through primary care, including HIV, NCDs, cancer control, and maternal/child health platforms.
- Embed hepatitis services into universal health coverage and national insurance schemes.
- Engage stakeholders and invest in strong data systems for accountability.
- Prioritise early diagnosis and treatment, especially in high-burden and underserved areas.
- Decentralise services to primary and district health centres.
- Integrate hepatitis prevention into maternal and child health programmes.
- Ensure free or universal access to testing and treatment.
- Mobilise sustainable funding and use data to track progress.

HEALTH

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Your daily walk might be the best medicine you are ignoring!

RAISA MEHZABEEN

Every step you take might just be a step away from disease, decline, or even death. That is the compelling message emerging from a landmark study published in *The Lancet Public Health*. Forget the intimidating 10,000 step myth. As few as 7,000 steps a day can significantly cut your risk of dying early, developing heart disease, diabetes, dementia, or suffering from depression.

Researchers found that benefits from walking do not demand athletic stamina. In fact, most health gains start showing around 4,000 steps—a mere 30 to 40 minutes of daily activity. But 7,000 steps seems to be the sweet spot, dramatically lowering the risk of cardiovascular incidents by 25% and heart-related deaths by a staggering 47%.

Interestingly, the rate of walking (pace) also mattered to some extent. Faster walking for just 30 minutes a day showed additional mortality risk reduction, though the link was not uniform across all health outcomes.

For countries like Bangladesh—where urban congestion, rising non-communicable diseases (NCDs), and sedentary lifestyles are taking a heavy toll—this research should ring alarm bells. It is time for city planners, employers, and health policymakers to stop ignoring walkability. Investing in safe footpaths, green walking trails, and awareness campaigns around walking could pay back in public health dividends.

Each step you take is not just a move forward—it is a move toward a healthier, longer life.

The writer is the founder & CEO of Nutrition For Change. E-mail: raisameh20@gmail.com

'Modern football demands athletes'

Outspoken, stubborn, successful. That is probably the best way to describe Peter Butler, the coach of Bangladesh national women's football team. He may have ruffled a few feathers in several quarters since taking charge of the team in March 2024, but the Englishman has delivered success, and more importantly, he has shown the pathway to the football federation how to keep growing and achieving bigger targets. In a freewheeling interview with *The Daily Star's* Atique Anam at the team hotel in Dhaka, the former West Ham United midfielder opened up about his football methodology, plans for the future, the shortcomings of the federation, men's football, and the controversies he has found himself in. Following is the first part of the two-part interview:

The Daily Star (DS): SAFF Championship 2024, Asian Cup Qualifiers, and SAFF U-20 Championship -- three tournaments, three trophies. Can we expect two more in the next two months?

Peter Butler (PB): I would say that more than the trophies, the most important thing I've tried to instil is a competitive environment. The team needed a shake-up. For too long, it had been a copy paste selection approach, with players almost picking themselves. That's not a knock on them -- it's just that things had become stagnant. I wanted to bring in new faces and make players fight for their places again. It's about getting them out of their comfort zone.

DS: But the team did win the SAFF Championship in 2022, and won by playing good football.

PB: They did, but if you look at what happened after that, it was a disaster. The team suffered heavy defeats and lacked a clear plan. For nearly a year, things were going nowhere. When I did my research before taking this job, I noticed massive cracks in the system. Some players had reached the end of their cycle. That doesn't mean they had no value, but there's a difference between being a focal player and being an impact player. My philosophy is simple: create competition, play high tempo, high intensity football. But that demands fitness. And many of the players were struggling with that.

DS: You've emphasised on fitness and food since the very beginning. What exactly did you do in those areas?

PB: I never imposed a strict diet. What I did was introduce responsibility -- weight management and portion control. For instance, instead of having rice three times a day, maybe cut it down to once or smaller portions twice. It was about being aware, I gave advice, not rules. If you're ordering takeaway pizza at 10pm, that's not the behaviour of a professional athlete. I paid attention to these things because they influenced selection. If someone can't last 90 minutes, that becomes a factor -- especially at the international level,

where you're facing teams ranked in the top 50. Modern football demands athletes. If you're not one, you can't compete.

DS: Paul Smalley reportedly introduced proper diet charts for the players before you came.

PB: Well I don't know. I don't want to comment on Smalley, but Smalley basically got a lot of things wrong. I'm sure he did many things right, but when it comes down to diet, when it comes down to the food they were eating, it was atrocious. Not nutritious at all. It's improved a bit now, thanks to the president.

If you ask me, fish is great -- high in protein. Bread and roti in large quantities? Not so much. Steamed rice in moderation? Better. Lean meats, less fat, less fried food. That's the core message. It's about making small, sensible changes. You can still eat the local diet -- just do it with awareness.

DS: What about the living conditions?

PB: The living conditions are still atrocious. I've never seen a football team kept in such poor facilities. It's not humane.

DS: But when the media write exactly what you're saying, they vilify the BFF.

PB: That's the truth, though. And thankfully, the president agrees with me. Things are slowly improving. For example, the president has approved hotel stays for camps so the girls don't have to go back to the BFF dorms. But some people still want to keep the old system because it suits them. That's wrong. I'll keep pushing for change -- not just for the women's team, but also for places like Kamalapur Elite Academy -- the boys' academy -- which is also in bad shape.

DS: With 'Mission Australia' in focus, You've submitted a plan to the president, Tabith Awal. What are the key aspects of that proposal?

PB: The most important thing is to continue actively with the under-20 programmes. Over 50% of our group are under-20s, and that won't change. I won't tinker with it. My rotation was geared toward AFC qualification.

SAFF was always going to be a rotational



project. AFC (Asian Cup) is a great opportunity for the girls to get three competitive games under their belt. Keep in mind, there's no FIFA window in February -- only in March. But I told the president I'll never turn down a game, even outside the window.

DS: Have you submitted any requests for specific support staff -- physiotherapists, coaches, etc?

PB: I'm quite loyal -- maybe too loyal. I back people who back me. The program is geared toward the 29th of July -- when the draw happens. Then we'll know where we'll be.

I've done my research. I know Australia well -- I lived there for two years... So it's about developing camps -- maybe in the Middle East -- where we can get games. We need to play teams like UAE or Myanmar -- ranked 55. I think we're better than Myanmar. Can we reach 55? Yes, but it's about managing squad selection, camps, and FIFA windows.

DS: You're having to work with three teams simultaneously: seniors, U-20s and U-17s. With the groups overlapping, does it make

your work a bit easier, in as much as having a better idea about the pool of players?

PB: No, it's really difficult. It's draining. That's why I look knackered -- lack of sleep. It's really challenging. But I knew I could make it work. The ultimate prize was qualification for the AFC, so I used the Under-20s wisely.

In fact, some of the girls going to Bhutan actually helped me because it opened up opportunities for other players like Oyeshi Khatun, Ayonto Bala, Trishna Rani, who haven't been utilised much. I strongly believe we've got the nucleus of a really outstanding group of young players coming through. Shanti Mardi will only get better, and Umehla Marma too. But we've got to keep getting them on the training ground -- drill them, organise them.

I don't believe in philosophies. I believe in methodology. I believe in good, solid principles. What I believe in are fundamentals, principles, and creating a clear playing identity -- a DNA.

Bangladesh football never had a DNA

before I came. The DNA was: smash it down the pitch, fight for second balls, and the ball comes straight back. My DNA has always been: we look to play, we press, we play with intensity, we get the ball down, and we pass with a clear identity. I'm trying to build that for the federation.

DS: You recently said that Ritu Porna deserves to be playing in a better league, like the UAE.

PB: She should be. And Monika as well. But Monika has to be careful about her fitness. My biggest concern with the players going to Bhutan is the fitness levels, the training intensity, and the lifestyle. They don't play enough games.

I strongly believe we have a group of players who, in my personal opinion, can go on and play in stronger leagues. But the problem is breaking the myth. Immediately, when people hear "Bangladesh," the reaction is: "No league." That works against them. And then there's the FIFA ranking -- we've got to improve that to gain credibility.

DS: Have you spoken to the president or the women's wing chairman about the women's league?

PB: Yes, I have. My view is plain and simple. I've put it forward: a six-team league, under-23s only, with three overage players allowed. If you're over 30, you can't play. That's my honest opinion.

You've got to develop a league that gives young players game time. You can't have teams loaded with senior national team players like before -- like when Nasrin Academy and others were stacked with them. That doesn't work.

DS: Any restriction on how many national players can be in one team?

PB: I believe in a quota system. You shouldn't be allowed to have more than five national players on the field at one time. And if you're playing an under-20 on the bench, you must replace them with another under-20. I've put those ideas forward to Fahad Karim and (Mahfuz Aker) Kiron. Now it's up to them to consider implementation.

'Amateur' off the banner, still in the manner

RAMIN TALUKDER

Sometimes, a name is more than just a name -- it's a reflection of identity.

The Bangladesh Amateur Boxing Federation recently rebranded itself by dropping the word "Amateur," but the reality, as revealed in the lead-up to the National Women's Boxing Championship, tells a different story.

On Saturday, the federation organised a press conference to announce the championship -- the first in over six years. The invitation mentioned the press room of the National Stadium as the venue, scheduled for noon. However, when journalists arrived, they found no arrangements there. An elderly man informed them of a last-minute venue change -- to the federation's own office building.

There, the disarray continued. With the main conference room unavailable, the press meet was hastily shifted to the



federation president's cramped office, where several reporters had to stand in the balcony, with no space to sit.

The event began with a one-page press release that didn't even mention the championship's name. General Secretary M.A. Quddus Khan addressed the press, but questions quickly arose about Zinnat Ferdous, a US-based boxer hyped as the star attraction. She didn't arrive, reportedly due to flight issues.

Then came the confusion over participants. Khan mentioned that

four foreign athletes would take part in what is supposed to be a national championship. When questioned, he gave a vague explanation -- that these athletes were foreign students at local universities. Moments later, he contradicted himself, saying those universities had been excluded and that one team had already been dropped for fielding foreigners.

He further stated that 71 teams would now participate -- from clubs, districts, schools, colleges, universities,

city corporations, the Army, Police, and Ansar. Notably, BGB was not among them. Additionally, several new clubs -- some unregistered -- were reportedly being considered for inclusion less than 24 hours before the event begins.

Asaduzzaman, president of a club named 'A Boxing Club', alleged exclusion due to their involvement in professional boxing. The federation responded that only those who apologised for previous professional stints were being allowed, and even at the last moment, new teams could be accepted if they approached the federation.

The championship begins July 27 and runs through July 30, featuring boxers from across the country. But the lack of organisation, the contradictory communication, and the murky eligibility rules leave one wondering: has the federation actually shed away its 'amateur' status or just removed the word from its signage?

UAE to host Asia Cup from Sept 9

AGENCIES

After months of speculation, the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) has officially confirmed the dates for the 2025 Asia Cup T20.

The tournament will be held in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from September 9 to 28, ACC president and Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Mohsin Naqvi announced via his official X (formerly Twitter) account on Saturday.

The announcement followed the ACC's Annual General Meeting held in Dhaka on Thursday. "I am delighted to confirm the dates for the ACC Men's

FIXTURES



Group Stage

- 9 Sept: Afghanistan vs Hong Kong
- 10 Sept: India vs UAE
- 11 Sept: Bangladesh vs Hong Kong
- 12 Sept: Pakistan vs Oman
- 13 Sept: Bangladesh vs Sri Lanka
- 14 Sept: India vs Pakistan
- 15 Sept: Sri Lanka vs Hong Kong, UAE vs Oman
- 16 Sept: Bangladesh vs Afghanistan
- 17 Sept: Pakistan vs UAE
- 18 Sept: Sri Lanka vs Afghanistan
- 19 Sept: India vs Oman

Super 4

- 20 Sept: Group B Q1 vs Group B Q2
- 21 Sept: Group A Q1 vs Group A Q2
- 23 Sept: Group B Q1 vs Group A Q2
- 24 Sept: Group A Q1 vs Group B Q2
- 25 Sept: Group A Q2 vs Group B Q2
- 26 Sept: Group A Q1 vs Group B Q1

Final: 28 Sept

Asia Cup 2025 in UAE," Naqvi wrote, calling it a prestigious event.

Originally granted to India, the hosting rights will remain with them despite the change in venue, in line with past hybrid models approved by the ACC.

The shift to UAE comes amid heightened political tensions between India and Pakistan, who have not played a bilateral series since 2012 and only meet in multinational events at neutral venues.

This edition of the Asia Cup will be played in the T20 format, serving as a key build-up to the ICC T20 World Cup 2026 in India.

The five ACC full members -- Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka -- have earned automatic qualification. They will be joined by Hong Kong, Oman, and UAE, who secured their spots via the ACC Premier Cup.

Tigresses to face men's U-15 team for WC prep

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) will stage a three-team Challenge Cup next month as part of the national women's team's preparation for the upcoming ICC Women's World Cup, scheduled in India between September 30 and November 2.

The Challenge Cup, which will run between August 18 and 28 at the BKSP, will see two women's teams, composed of national team players and probables, and the men's U-15 national team compete in a round-robin league tournament.

This is not the first time the Tigresses will face an age-level team for preparation as last year they had played practice games against the U-19 team ahead of the Women's Asia Cup.

The women's team are currently in the last phase of their Sylhet camp, which will end on July 29. They will take part in another camp at the BKSP on August 6-15.

"We currently have 18 players in the camp

[Sylhet]. Maybe two to three players will be added for the next camp at the BKSP. Then the tournament will happen," chief selector of the women's wing Sazzad Ahmed Shipon told *The Daily Star* yesterday, adding the women's team could have another camp in Dhaka in September.

It was learnt that the women's team is expected to leave for India in between September 20 to 22. They will begin their World Cup campaign against Pakistan on October 2 in Colombo.

The Tigresses have not played any international matches since the qualifier tournament in April while the seven other World Cup bound teams have either played international matches or are set to play before the tournament.

England, New Zealand, South Africa and Sri Lanka have had international engagements since May. India will host Australia for three ODIs in September and Pakistan will play three T20Is against Ireland next month.



England captain Ben Stokes ended his more than two-year wait for a Test hundred as his dominant 141 powered England to 669 all out -- their fifth-highest total of all time -- and helped the hosts take a 311-run lead on Day 4 of the fourth Test against India at Old Trafford, Manchester yesterday. In doing so, Stokes became just the third all-rounder in Test history to achieve the double of 7000 runs and 200 wickets, joining the exclusive company of Sir Garfield Sobers and Jacques Kallis. He had brought up his 200th Test wicket last year at Lord's against the West Indies. Chris Woakes then rattled India, taking two wickets, with India's score on nought. The visitors, however, recovered and went to tea at 86-2, with KL Rahul and Shubman Gill unbeaten.

PHOTO: REUTERS

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MILESTONE TRAGEDY Yunus visits burn institute to inquire about injured

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus visited the National Burn and Plastic Surgery Institute last night to inquire about the treatment of the patients injured in the fighter jet crash at Milestone School and College Uttara's Diabari of the capital.

Upon arriving at the hospital at 9:10pm, Yunus met with hospital director Prof Mohammad Nasiruddin, who briefed him on the accounts of the day of the incident and the current status of the patients.

Nasir said that currently the patients hospitalised are being treated based on the advice of the multidisciplinary consultation board. The patients have been



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Residents of the Moddhom Mohora area wade across knee-deep floodwaters after wind-driven tidal surges, triggered by a low-pressure system over the north Bay of Bengal, inundated low-lying areas along the Haldia river basin in Chattogram city yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Star INTERVIEW

'We broke the fear, but not the system'

Umama reflects on the July uprising, lost trust, and the way forward

MD ABBAS



One year after the July uprising shook Bangladesh's political landscape, former student leader Umama Fatema says the movement's most significant achievement was breaking the long-standing culture of fear and silence.

She, however, says the July movement's core promises remain unfulfilled.

"We felt like something big was about to happen, and we were right in the middle of it," Umama said, recalling the night of July 14 last year when students took to the streets chanting, "Who are you? Who am I? Razakar, Razakar."

"It felt like the negative narrative about who is a true freedom fighter and who is a traitor had been shattered."

In a recent conversation with The Daily Star, Umama opened up about the emotional toll of the movement, political betrayals, exclusion from leadership spaces, and her vision for inclusive, systemic reform.

Umama was injured during the crackdown on July 15, when law enforcers opened fire on student protesters.

"When Abu Sayed gave his life by taking bullets to his

SEE PAGE 8 COL 4

SOUTHEAST IRAN
**9 people killed in
courthouse attack**
**22 hurt; 3 gunmen killed
during assault; Baloch jihadist
group claims responsibility**

AFP, Tehran

Nine civilians were killed in a "terrorist attack" on a judiciary building in southeast Iran yesterday, before three gunmen were shot dead, state media reported.

"Unknown gunmen attacked the judiciary centre in Zahedan," the capital of southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan province, the judiciary's Mizan Online said.

"Nine people have been killed and 22 injured in this terrorist attack," the report said while adding that the counts are "preliminary" and the toll may rise.

Separately, the official IRNA news agency reported that three of the attackers were killed during the assault, citing the regional headquarters of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

According to Alireza Daliri, deputy police commander of Sistan-Baluchestan province, the attackers attempted to enter the building disguised as visitors.

The assailants threw a grenade into the building, Daliri said, killing several people inside, including a one-year-old baby and the child's mother.

According to Iranian media, Jaish al-Adl (Arabic for "Army of Justice"), a Baloch jihadist group based in Pakistan but also active in Iran, claimed responsibility for the attack.

Man killed in broad daylight in Rayer Bazar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A 25-year-old man was stabbed to death allegedly by his rivals in broad daylight at Rayer Bazar in the capital's Mohammadpur area yesterday.

The incident took place near the gate of the Rayer Bazar Intellectuals' Graveyard around 1:30pm, said Hafizur Rahman, inspector (investigation) of Mohammadpur Police Station.

The victim, Fazle Rabbi Sumon, originally from Borhanuddin upazila of Bhalia, had been living in the Pabna House Lane area of Mohammadpur and worked at a local hardware store.

Sumon was critically injured in the attack and was first taken to Shikder Medical College Hospital by his friends. He was later shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared him dead around 3:30pm.

His wife, Manjuma Akter, said that Sumon went to the Rayer Bazar Intellectuals' Graveyard area with some friends when a youth named Munna suddenly attacked

SEE PAGE 8 COL 2

One Islamist candidate per seat to counter BNP

Like-minded parties move to reach 'understanding'

RASHIDUL HASAN

Different Islamist parties are in efforts to reach an "understanding" to counter the BNP ahead of the 13th parliamentary election.

To that end, they want to field a single candidate in every constituency in the upcoming polls.

As part of this move, top leaders of four Islamist parties -- Islami Andolon Bangladesh (IAB), Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, Khelafat Majlis, and Jomiat-e-Ulamaye Islam, have recently formed a liaison committee to coordinate the formation process of an electoral understanding among the parties."

YUNUS AHMED
IAB secretary general

parties fear that their importance will weaken if the BNP assumes power, political analysts say.

This concern, along with differing positions on reforms, is pushing the Islamist parties towards forming an alliance, they say.

Over the past few months, Jamaat and IAB have been working with the aim of fielding single candidates in every constituency and positioning themselves as an alternative to the BNP.

However, the Islamist parties do not want to call this initiative a "political alliance". Rather, they refer to it as an "electoral consensus".

According to sources in different Islamist parties, their initiative will take shape after the election schedule is announced.

They are preparing to contest the upcoming election against the BNP with the assumption that the AL will not be able to participate.

On the key issues like constitutional reforms, most of the parties have similar positions.

Jamaat, NCP, IAB, and both factions of

SEE PAGE 8 COL 1

GOPALGANJ VIOLENCE
**'No rationale
found for lethal
weapon use'**

**11 citizens say resurgence
of repressive tactics
worrying, demand probe,
legal safeguards**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The indiscriminate use of the repressive Anti-Terrorism Act, along with arrests and the detention of children, in Gopalganj signals a troubling return of repression, said a group of 11 citizens in a statement yesterday.

"We haven't found any rationale for using lethal weapons," said the group that visited Gopalganj on July 22 following the violence centring a National Citizen Party (NCP) rally on July 16 which left five people dead.

"Since there are allegations that the army and police violated human rights in this incident, the inclusion of the army, police and home ministry representatives in the inquiry commission will bring its impartiality into question," the group said.

"One of the basic principles of impartiality is that the accused will never be the investigator," it added, calling for the reconstitution of the inquiry commission formed over the incident.

The group of citizens stressed the urgent need to avoid blanket charges, arbitrary detentions, and mass arrests, and called for legal

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A squirrel forages for food in a fig tree in Sylhet city's Temukhi area, right next to a busy road, just off frame. While these creatures typically inhabit quiet forest environments, increasing urbanisation is steadily stripping them of food, habitat, and breeding grounds. A little awareness and more tree planting could help these animals continue to thrive and maintain the ecological balance.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

**Teen sent to
jail for raping
4-yr-old girl in
Netrakona**
**3 held over rape
in Tangail**

STAR REPORT

A Netrakona court yesterday sent a teenage boy to jail over the rape of a four-year-old girl in Barhatta upazila of the district.

Police arrested the 16-year-old accused on Friday afternoon after the victim's father filed a rape case against him, said Md Kamrul Hasan, officer-in-charge of Barhatta Police Station.

According to the case statement, the victim was playing in front of her house on Thursday afternoon. The accused took her to his house and raped her. When the victim screamed, the accused fled.

The victim then went home and told her mother about the incident. Her father later filed the case.

The victim was first taken to the Barhatta Upazila Health Complex and later shifted to Netrakona Modern Sadar Hospital for advanced treatment.

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