

## Drive against old vehicles must persist

It is essential to reduce accidents and environmental risks

Of all the sectors that affect people's day-to-day life in Bangladesh, road transport remains one of the most chaotic and undisciplined. Any attempt to fix it has always fallen through, thanks to the strong resistance put up by transport owners and workers. According to a report by this daily, they have now threatened to go on a nationwide strike for 72 hours on August 12 if the ongoing drive against old, unfit vehicles is not stopped. Not only is this demand in direct conflict with the imperatives of public health and safety, but it also forces us to look deeper into the anarchy in this sector. We must ask: why are transport owners and workers so bent on disregarding any regulatory action meant to discipline the sector?

Per our report, three major road transport organisations made the above-mentioned demand while protesting the government drive, which was launched on July 20 aiming to curb road crashes and environmental pollution. Their eight-point demand also includes extending the economic lifespan of outdated vehicles by 5-10 years, amending the provisions in the Road Transport Act (RTA) regarding punishments for reckless driving and crash-related offences.

There is little doubt that these demands are unreasonable and dangerous. There are 6,26 lakh unfit vehicles currently operating across the country, according to BRTA data. Meanwhile, more than 80,000 buses, minibuses, trucks, lorries and tankers have already exceeded their economic life as of July 16. This being the reality, we are unable to comprehend on what basis the transport leaders are demanding an extension of these vehicles' economic lifespan, when these rickety old buses and trucks are responsible for fatal road crashes, not to mention toxic emissions. In their defence, they argued that proper maintenance and spare part replacement can fix the problem. But if that were the case, how come there are still so many unfit vehicles in the first place?

For years, attempts to fix the road transport sector have been frequently stonewalled by the powerful transport associations. The RTA, passed seven years ago following the road safety movement, remains stuck in limbo because they refuse to cooperate with the government and put public well-being above their own interest. Blatant disregard for the existing rules is commonplace, no matter the consequence. Undue political influence and rampant corruption have caused a rot in the sector, especially during the Awami League regime, and its remnants continue to haunt us to this day.

Things cannot go on like this. Transport associations must not be allowed to hold a vital public service hostage whenever they don't get their way. The government must be firm in employing any legitimate measure to sort out the mess that this sector has become. Meanwhile, more dialogues should be held involving all stakeholders to work out a way to resolve the impasse. But whatever the outcome may be, people's safety must never be compromised.

## Don't stop Rohingya children's education

Adequate funding crucial to ensure their future does not derail

We are deeply concerned about the future of 400,000 Rohingya children who are facing uncertainty due to disruptions in their education. Reportedly, because of a shortage of funding, nearly 6,400 informal schools run by NGOs in the refugee camps of Cox's Bazar have either suspended classes or significantly reduced teaching hours. On June 3, UNICEF and Save the Children, which supervise the informal learning centres, suspended classes for students ranging from kindergarten to class 4. This is deeply worrying, as these centres not only provide education but also serve as safe spaces for the children.

The total budget requirement for the 1.2 million Rohingyas and 300,000 members of the host community is \$934 million this year, but as of July 12, only \$303 million (32 percent) has been secured. This means the refugees will now have to struggle even more to access basic rights, including proper nutrition and healthcare. The suspension of educational activities is particularly worrying considering its long-term impact. While \$72 million is reportedly required to cover the educational expenses of Rohingya children this year, less than \$10 million has been received so far. Hundreds of teachers at the learning centres have also lost their jobs as a consequence of the funding crunch, which was caused by a drastic reduction in humanitarian aid from the US.

Rohingya leaders and teachers of these centres believe that suspending classes from kindergarten to class 4 is not a good idea since most children are enrolled in grades below class 6. Teachers proposed reducing lesson hours for kindergarten to class 4 instead of full suspension, like the way other classes are receiving reduced hours—classes 5 to 7 are receiving lessons four days a month, and those in classes 8 to 10 five days a week. That way, teachers say, the children will not be deprived of their education. They also demanded that the suspended teachers be reinstated. These proposals are valid, and we hope the relevant authorities will consider them.

The learning centres have offered the Rohingya children a hope for a better future and their suspension threatens to rob them of that hope, which must not happen. We urge the government, international donors, and NGOs to work together to secure alternative funding to continue education projects in the camps, and prevent these children from becoming a lost generation.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY



### NASA established

On this day in 1958, criticised for allowing the Soviet Union to launch the first man-made satellite to orbit Earth (Sputnik 1, on October 4, 1957), US President Dwight D Eisenhower signed legislation that created NASA.

# It's time to modernise our air force



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RASHED AL MAHMUD TITUMIR

The crash of a Bangladesh Air Force fighter jet into Milestone School on July 21, 2025 was a moment of national reckoning. It was not merely a tragic accident, but a visible consequence of accumulated neglect in planning. The human cost is now etched in our collective memory.

The crash exposed more than a mechanical fault. It revealed a strategic vacuum—a lack of alignment between the growth of the nation and the transformation of its air power. Against a backdrop of economic ambition, urban expansion, and regional volatility, the country's military infrastructure has not kept pace. This is not just a matter of decisive modernisation or equipment upgrades, but also a need to revisit the strategies guiding the country's airspace security.

#### Airspace security

Airspace is no longer an inert boundary, but rather a dynamic domain. Securing it requires layered surveillance, rapid response, and integrated command. For Bangladesh, the strategic urgency of airspace security cannot be overstated. It is bordered by India, a regional air power with robust force projection, and Myanmar, where militarisation and instability continue to intensify along the frontier.

The country's airspace is both congested and vulnerable—crowded with civil aviation, military operations, and increasingly unregulated drone traffic. These pose threats to critical installations and population centres. Sadly, what exists today is a patchwork system where reaction replaces anticipation, and gaps in coverage are filled with hope rather than capability.

The situation calls for Bangladesh to build a national airspace architecture with three pillars: persistent early warning systems, an agile interceptor fleet, and data fusion centres, enabling real-time coordination across military and civilian domains.

#### Power and politics

Air power is not a support arm, but



Securing sovereignty in the air requires clarity of doctrine, capability for deterrence, and commitment to modernisation.

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rather a strategic determinant. It extends beyond the battlefield into the realms of diplomacy, deterrence, and doctrine. Countries project air power not only to defend but also to define their role in the geopolitical and geo-economic order.

This is evident across South Asia. India has expanded air bases in its northeast, not merely for national defence but for strategic signalling. It is integrating air capabilities with space-based intelligence and precision strike systems. Meanwhile, Myanmar's military junta, despite sanctions and diplomatic pressure, has invested significantly in combat aircraft to maintain internal control and regional posture.

Bangladesh cannot afford to remain static while its neighbours modernise. Air power is no longer about proximity. It is about presence and the ability to command the skies, matching the aspiration of a nation.

Whether in response to cross-border threats, humanitarian missions, or geopolitical deterrence, the ability to command airspace must be a central element of Bangladesh's progress and prosperity.

with data links and ground control. It invests not only in aircraft but in the operational ecosystem that makes the response effective. This is a lesson Bangladesh must heed: modern air power is not about numbers but about integration, agility, and the ability to act decisively.

Bangladesh's Forces Goal 2030 envisaged a shift in principle—a modern tri-service structure with strategic deterrence and interoperable capacities. But implementation remains sluggish. The Air Force is the slowest to modernise.

Without clarity of role, the Air Force becomes reactive. Without a broad employment strategy, procurement becomes piecemeal. Without credible deterrence, diplomacy is exposed to coercion. As regional air doctrines evolve towards integrated multi-domain operations, Bangladesh must not be caught in the inertia of past assumptions.

#### Beyond the budget

The idea that Bangladesh cannot afford air modernisation must be challenged. National security is not an abstract ideal. It is a public good, foundational to economic and social stability. A modern air force supports not only war

deterrence but also disaster response, border surveillance, counterterrorism, and civil-military coordination. It is both a shield and an enabler of development.

At one percent of GDP—which has declined in recent years—Bangladesh's military expenditure lags behind its developmental trajectory and the accelerated growth of regional counterparts. This is not an argument for excessive militarisation, but for smart allocation, prioritising capabilities that deliver strategic returns.

Modernisation is not about prestige purchases but about capability integration—including Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) platforms, long-range multirole combat aircraft (MRCA), anti-drone systems, and electromagnetic warfare preparedness.

Bangladesh must move beyond episodic procurement and towards platform synergies—linking aircraft, surveillance, command, and electronic warfare into a cohesive force.

#### A fractured fragmentation

Urban density in Dhaka has surpassed the thresholds for safe air operations. Military and civil aviation now operate in a dangerously overlapping airspace. Yet air base relocation proposals—from Kurmitola to Trishal, and the planned shift to Arial Beel—remain incomplete or indefinitely deferred. These failures are not logistical. They are political and institutional, reflecting a dearth of strategic prioritisation.

Even among military institutions, there exists turf protection, outweighing strategic coherence and breeding risks. Bangladesh's defence planning must encompass land, water, aerial and hybrid dimensions. There is also an urgency for institutional reform to facilitate at least biannual joint domain operations.

#### Mature modernisation

Securing sovereignty in the air requires clarity of doctrine, capability for deterrence, and commitment to modernise. A credible air force does not only defend the skies. It provides the reach, response, and resilience needed in a century where threats travel faster than ever before. It enables national development. It ensures that a growing economy is not hostage to security fragility.

The shocking event of July 21 marks a turning point not only in mourning, but also in meaning. Bangladesh must reimagine its defence thinking, reclaim its sky, and modernise with purpose—not merely to fly higher, but to think further.

# How the Liangzhu model is challenging Silicon Valley's AI dominance



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In a quiet suburb on the outskirts of Hangzhou, the capital of China's Zhejiang province, something amazing is happening. This modest village is at the heart of China's AI revolution, offering technological innovation that is distinctly different from what the world is used to seeing in Silicon Valley. Here, innovators and entrepreneurs spend hours discussing ideas over endless cups of tea. This is Liangzhu.

The Liangzhu model, as it is being called, represents something fundamentally distinct from what is seen elsewhere. While Silicon Valley operates on the principle of disruption through market forces and private investment, Liangzhu thrives on a blend of academic excellence, community collaboration, and strategic state support, creating an entirely new playbook for technological advancement. But how does it work?

At the core of Liangzhu's success is top-tier education, backed by nearby Zhejiang University. This university has nurtured some of China's most innovative tech leaders, including Liang Wenfeng, the founder of DeepSeek. His transition, from engineering student to AI pioneer, demonstrates how a strong technical education, combined with entrepreneurial spirit, can lead to breakthrough innovations. DeepSeek is one of the Six Tigers, China's leading AI startups, all of which are based in Hangzhou, emerging from the bustling

tea houses of Liangzhu.

Holding warm teacups, entrepreneurs exchange ideas, investors seek talent, and partnerships form through casual conversations. This informal networking fosters an ecosystem where knowledge flows through the community's natural social fabric. The tea drinking tradition is more than just a social ritual; it's a mindful act of slowing down that encourages deeper thinking and relationship-building. While Silicon Valley races ahead with an eye on the upcoming quarterly earnings report, Liangzhu advances through genuine human connection and long-term vision.

The Liangzhu model benefits from coordinated support from both large corporations and the government. Companies like Alibaba, SMIC and Huawei not only provide funding but also offer market access, technical expertise, and strategic guidance. This creates a virtuous cycle where startups have clear paths to grow, and established companies gain access to cutting edge innovation. Local authorities offer tax breaks and subsidies to attract tech startups, a strategy that has helped seed hundreds of companies. This nuanced policy support fosters innovation while allowing market forces to determine winners and losers.

DeepSeek embodies the sustainable mindset that the Liangzhu ecosystem

promotes. The company's success is not just about creating competitive AI models; it's about doing so effectively and sustainably. While US AI firms spend billions in venture capital, DeepSeek has delivered comparable results with far fewer resources. This efficiency-focused approach underscores the Liangzhu model's emphasis on sustainable innovation

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rather than pursuing growth at any cost.

The true strength of the Liangzhu model lies in its synergy with Shenzhen, a city in southeastern China in Guangdong province. While Liangzhu excels in AI research and development, Shenzhen offers a seamless supply chain and highly efficient production line. This creates a strong complementary relationship: AI innovations in Liangzhu's tea houses and university labs can be rapidly prototyped and mass-produced in Shenzhen's factories. This enables AI companies to bring products to market faster and more cost-effectively, while maintaining close control over their supply chains and intellectual property.

The Liangzhu model has profound geopolitical implications. It gives China the resilience it needs in the race for global technological dominance; it doesn't depend on foreign investment or technology transfer, reducing the impact of Washington's sanctions. This model signifies more than just a new idea; it embodies a different approach to innovation itself. While Silicon Valley champions the solo genius entrepreneur, Liangzhu stresses collective intelligence and teamwork. Whereas Silicon Valley focuses on market disruption, Liangzhu emphasises technological progress that supports broader social and economic objectives.

This difference in approach could be crucial in the AI race. Artificial intelligence requires substantial computational resources and expertise, and its success ultimately depends on integration with existing systems and societal acceptance. The Liangzhu model's focus on gradual, consensus-driven innovation might be better suited for deploying AI technologies that genuinely improve people's lives rather than merely generating investor profits.

The rivalry between Silicon Valley and Liangzhu will likely shape the next stage of global technological progress. The key question isn't which model will "win," but how both will evolve and what hybrid approaches might emerge. In an era of flashy IPOs and billion-dollar valuations, the Liangzhu model reminds us that the most meaningful innovations often occur behind the scenes, through careful and patient effort to create something lasting. As the AI race intensifies, this approach could become its most significant competitive advantage.

In 2006, archaeologists uncovered remains of a Neolithic civilisation at the site of Liangzhu. Is this 3,000-year-old civilisation making a comeback to reclaim its status as a global leader?



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