



China is glad to see Russia and the United States maintain contact ... and promote a political settlement of the Ukraine crisis.
Xi Jinping tells Vladimir Putin in a phone call

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Economy shows signs of healing

Macroeconomic stability has improved, but deeper reforms and investment revival remain elusive

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

When Salehuddin Ahmed was appointed finance adviser to Bangladesh's interim administration in August 2024, the country's economy was in a tailspin. Growth was slowing. Inflation was entrenched in double digits. Foreign exchange reserves were plummeting. The banking sector was in crisis. External dues, especially in the energy sector, were mounting, and revenue collection was far off track.

Twelve months on, the economic emergency has eased, but not been averted.

"When we took office, macroeconomic stability was in disarray," Ahmed said in a recent interview. "I would say the situation is reasonably satisfactory. When I took charge, the situation was precarious, but now things are working well. Reserves are increasing, remittances have risen, and export growth has been modest but steady. The foreign exchange market is stable, even after we liberalised it."

The comments reflect a sentiment shared by many: that their primary achievement has been stopping the slide, rather than engineering a turnaround. A closer look suggests that while the interim government has made gains on some fronts, especially inflation and reserves, it has left deeper reform challenges largely unaddressed.

Zahid Hussain, former lead economist at the World Bank's Dhaka office, said the government's approach has been more conventional than transformational. "After the interim government took office, it implemented the previous government's budget and, at the same time, presented a new one," he observed. "After such a major change, we haven't seen the mark of any change. I am not saying whether that is good or bad. That is what happened. No innovative change was seen in the new context."

The economic situation inherited by the interim government was anything but normal. According to data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, point-to-point inflation reached 12 percent in July 2024. It had stayed in double digits for six out of seven previous months and had hovered above 9 percent for nearly three years, the longest such stretch in decades.

"Inflation didn't come down here because of flawed monetary and fiscal policy," said Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD). "The previous administration relied too heavily on administrative price control and liquidity pumping. The interim government had to shift course immediately."

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Hattrick hero Trishna Rani Sarkar is the toast of her teammates as Bangladesh celebrate their 8-0 win against Timor-Leste in their second Group H match of the AFC U-20 Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers at the New Laos National Stadium in Vientiane yesterday. The win lifted the women in red and green to the top of the table with six points from two matches.

PHOTO: BFF

'No govt interference in media operations'
CA's press wing responds to concerns raised by NOAB

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In response to concerns of the Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh regarding overall media freedom and journalists' safety, the Chief Adviser's Press Wing yesterday said there has been "no government interference" in media operations since it took office.

In a statement, the press wing also called for reflection within the news industry.

It acknowledged concerns raised by NOAB on Thursday but "firmly" rejected the insinuation that the interim government has been responsible for undermining freedom

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ALL PARTIES AGREED ON

1. Chairmanship of the parliamentary standing committees
2. Delimitation of constituencies
3. Provisions relating to the president's power of pardon
4. Decentralisation of the judiciary
5. Declaration of a state of emergency
6. Appointment of the chief justice
7. Amendment of the Constitution
8. Tenure of the prime minister
9. Formation of the Election Commission
10. Formation of the Police Commission
11. Expansion of citizens' fundamental rights

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Consensus Commission will resume talks next week, beginning with consultations with experts, to decide how to implement the July National Charter and ensure its legal enforceability.

"Based on those discussions, the commission will initiate the next round of talks with political parties. We hope this process will lead to a timely and appropriate decision," the commission's Vice-President Prof Ali Riaz said yesterday.

Speaking at a press conference at the LD Hall of the Jatiya Sangsad, he said, "The method of ensuring the legally binding nature of the charter, which has been drafted based on national consensus and is expected to be signed, must be determined through discussions with political parties."

The press conference was held to brief the public on the charter's progress. Riaz said the first two rounds of dialogue produced significant consensus on key

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proposals adopted with notes of dissents

Consensus talks resume next week

Experts will be consulted first to determine legal status of July Charter

PROPOSALS ADOPTED WITH NOTES OF DISSENTS

1. Amendment of Article 70 of the Constitution
2. Allowing the prime minister to hold multiple offices
3. Appointment of Public Service Commission, Comptroller and Auditor General, Anti-Corruption Commission and Ombudsman
4. Women's representation in parliament (increase in number, election procedure, etc.)
5. Bicameral parliament (formation of the upper house, method of election of members, jurisdiction, etc.)
6. Method of electing the president
7. Caretaker government
8. Fundamental principles of the state
9. Powers and responsibilities of the president



BNP, allies to contest polls unitedly

Tarique tells leaders of 12-party alliance

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

The BNP and its like minded partners, who had staged simultaneous protests against the Awami League government, will take part in the February election as an alliance.

Party's acting chairman Tarique Rahman made the assurance while addressing a meeting virtually from London with leaders and activists of the 12 party alliance and other like-minded groups at the BNP chairperson's Gulshan office yesterday.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, Standing Committee

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To avoid traffic on the new bridge, locals in Kamrangirchar risk injuries crossing this adjacent iron bridge that has been abandoned. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

India pauses plans to buy US arms after Trump tariffs

Defence minister cancels planned trip to Washington

REUTERS, New Delhi

New Delhi has put on hold its plans to procure new US weapons and aircraft, according to three Indian officials familiar with the matter, in India's first concrete sign of discontent after tariffs imposed on its exports by President Donald Trump dragged ties to their lowest level in decades.

India had been planning to send Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to Washington in the coming weeks for an announcement on some of the purchases, but that trip has been cancelled, two of the people said.

Trump on Aug 6 imposed an additional 25 percent tariff on Indian goods as punishment for Delhi's purchases of Russian oil, which he said meant the country was funding Russia's invasion of Ukraine. That raised the total duty on Indian exports to 50 percent -- among the highest of any US trading partner.

The president has a history of rapidly reversing himself on tariffs and India

SEE PAGE 9 COL 6



BISKUT FACTORY STUDIO
**LUNCH, ART
AND LEGACY**
at Beauty Boarding

RBR

I have never been to the legendary Beauty Boarding in Shiris Das Lane, Bangla Bazar. I know, it is an unpardonable offense, and I should probably be denied my self proclaimed title as a Dhaka know all.

Lunchtime here is flanked by office goers from as far as the Secretariat for its tangy chutneys, vegetable mash, fish, and curries. The flurry of actions, shouts for second helpings, the handwoven bills, and friendly staff gave me a guilty tinge as to why I am so late in visiting this place.

Having confessed to it finally, I can say that the name Beauty Boarding has always evoked a sort of colonial nostalgia in me. It was complemented by the stories I heard about the legends of Bangla literature and art, who frequented the place. It was a version of a country club, where these stalwarts engaged in free thinking and fed their intellectual curiosity.

The once-upon-a-time zamindar house with wooden crossbeam ceilings is painted in a faded shade of yellow. Long verandas with short railings and winding staircases now serve as a background for selfies and couple photography. The pigeonhole boarding rooms, the community dining hall serving simple and flavourful desi menu, add to the milieu and the charms of this old establishment.

Last Sunday, I set up a meeting with

Biskut Abir at this famous location. Abir is the creative head and owner of Biskut Factory, a rickshaw art craft shop, and Shantigraam, a guided tour planner. The talented, and slightly dreamy, Biskut Abir fell for this nostalgia and moved his Biskut Factory Studio and workshop to room number 27 of this boarding house.

Even though the prodigies of Bangla art and culture vacated the place long ago, it is their vivacious spirits and life forces, along with old-world charms, that have brought Biskut Abir to this two-storyed building, with a small courtyard in the midst.

"Biskut Factory Studio is now open for everyone, and we have also rented an attic near the steep staircase here at Beauty Boarding. My idea is to bank on the stream of customers who still flock to this historic landmark and tell them the colourful stories, be their tour guide and allow them to discover the core of old Dhaka that lies beyond the known



PHOTO: BISKUT ABIR

tourist places," says a passionately fierce crusader of traditions, Biskut Abir.

He customised and incorporated fusion copies of rickshaw paint and movie poster art in everyday style, and fashion accessories that have gained immense popularity in our pop culture.

Biskut Factory's plans to hold an exhibition called 'Beehive and Behaviour,' which will take place in the last quarter of the year at Beauty Boarding.

"Just as bees collect honey from different flowers and build a hive, so does Beauty Boarding, in the context of attracting creative arts and artists, and harbouring their talent. This is the reason why the exhibition will consist of artworks of artists working on the intangible theme — the Beauty Boarding fever. I want heritage, ambience, emotion, and the evolving culture of Puran Dhaka, and my stories, as well as your stories, to all come together in this artistic pursuit," he explains.

He realised that his relocation to this premise allowed him to survive artistically, simply because Beauty Boarding is on a different plateau in terms of cultural and historical mentions.

Missing the cultural activities of his childhood clubs, where he pursued his special interests and co-curricular activities, he feels that his space can fill that void.

"Our association with shahitto songothor or literary clubs built our confidence and expanded our social circles and gave us a sense of belonging. I want Beauty Boarding to once again be a cultural hub, celebrating its minimal raw glamour. Thus, I planned 'Beehive and Behaviour,' a lowkey, self financed exhibition, open for all to participate and to give people some lingering memories," he explains. Participants need not be only from Old Dhaka but from every nook of the capital.

The workshop also offers painting therapy and a cosy atmosphere to pursue any cultural endeavours like reading poetry or playing music. Biskut's other project, Shantigraam, offers a guided tour of heritage property, promotes local food tourism, and shares hidden gems of this part of the city.

If you are like me, who has never ventured to this boarding house, then please plan a lunch at Beauty Boarding this weekend.



Economy shows signs of healing

FROM PAGE 1

That shift came in the form of tight monetary policy. The Bangladesh Bank, without waiting for IMF directives, raised the policy rate multiple times and allowed the exchange rate to adjust more flexibly. Fiscal policy was also redirected: development spending was curtailed, and growth targets were adjusted downward.

"Unlike the past, we didn't try to suppress the exchange rate artificially," Ahmed said. "We stopped intervening excessively in the market. That has helped stabilise remittances."

Indeed, remittance inflows rose 26.46 percent in FY25, reversing years of stagnation. Exports also rebounded, increasing 8.58 percent, after contracting nearly 6 percent in FY24. Combined, they contributed to a recovery in gross reserves, which stood at \$32 billion by June 2025 under the central bank's accounting, and \$27 billion under the IMF's BPM6 standard.

The government's monetary tightening had an effect: point-to-point inflation finally fell below 9 percent in June 2025, the first time in nearly three years. The finance adviser believes this has provided tangible relief. "Overall, the pressure on the cost of living has been significantly alleviated," Ahmed said. "The price of rice is stable, although there are some fluctuations in the price of fine rice."

But the 12-month moving average still remains above 10 percent, and food inflation continues to strain low-income households. "We've seen progress, yes," said Mustafizur Rahman. "But the pace is slow, and people are still hurting. Income growth hasn't picked up, and employment generation remains stagnant."

REVENUE COLLECTION: THE ACHILLES' HEEL

If macroeconomic stabilisation has been the interim government's main success, revenue collection is its most glaring failure.

In FY25, revenue collected by the National Board of Revenue (NBR) grew just 2.23 percent, compared to 15 percent the previous year. The government fell short of its revenue target by over Tk 100,000 crore, with actual collection totalling Tk 371,000 crore. Bangladesh's tax-to-GDP ratio remains among the world's lowest.

The finance adviser disputes the severity of the problem. "It's not that there has been a major collapse in revenue collection," Ahmed argued. "There is growth."

A key reform initiative has been the separation of the tax and customs departments, long recommended by development partners. The move triggered internal protests from revenue officials, but the finance adviser has not backed down. Even critics see this as a positive development.

"The separation of the NBR is a bold step," acknowledged Zahid Hussain. "By not backing down from it despite the agitation, it has been possible to send a strong message. There is a lesson to be learned from this: resistance will come with major reforms, and how to manage it better." The reform is expected to be completed by December 2025.

Despite the poor revenue performance, the government exercised unusual fiscal restraint. In FY25, the administration did not borrow from the Bangladesh Bank, and bank borrowing totalled Tk 7,372 crore, well below the revised target of Tk 99,000 crore.

Perhaps the most worrying signal is from the real economy, where investment remains depressed.

In June 2025, private sector credit growth was just 6.4 percent, far below the 12-14 percent typical of a growing economy. LC openings for capital machinery imports dropped by 25 percent, while settlements for intermediate goods and raw materials also declined. Public investment didn't compensate either. ADP implementation stood at just 69 percent, the lowest since Bangladesh's independence and a major drag on overall GDP growth.

Ahmed attributes the slump to political jitters. "In the world of business, there is still some uncertainty or lack of confidence. This is mainly because there will be an election in the country, and what may or may not happen. It is natural for business people to be a little concerned about all this. However, confidence is now returning compared to before."

He also pointed to structural issues, adding, "Secondly, some banks have liquidity problems. Then again, some banks are unable to provide loans."

This acknowledgment points to another critical, unfinished agenda:

the banking sector. "The banking sector had hit rock bottom," Ahmed said. "From there, it has returned to a reasonably normal state. There were some bad banks, not all of which have become good. Bangladesh Bank is looking into it seriously. The BB will restructure them."

For analysts like Hussain, the lack of a clear, time-bound plan for such reforms is the budget's biggest weakness. "Another expectation from the new budget was that there would be a clear and specific timeline and roadmap for reform," he said. "For example, if there had been a roadmap stating how many banks the interim government would merge during its tenure, which reforms would be carried out in the revenue sector, what reforms would be done in the fuel, power, and port sectors, what reforms would be made in the next two years, then it could have been measured later."

This critique cuts to the heart of the interim government's dilemma. After one year, Ahmed's performance can be summarised as macroeconomic containment without a structural breakthrough. Inflation has eased, reserves have recovered, and external dues have been settled. But the revenue crisis, weak investment, and unfinished reforms present growing threats.

Defending his government's pace, Ahmed pushed back against what he sees as textbook criticism. "Economists generally criticise from within a framework. But the reality is different. Making any policy is not that easy a task," he said. "The budget is like a balloon. If you press one side, the other side will bulge."

As Bangladesh prepares for election in February, whether the opportunity to deliver a deeper transformation can be materialised remains to be seen. The interim administration has successfully pulled the economy back from the brink of a full-blown crisis. Yet, this stability is fragile.

With the political clock ticking down, the window for making difficult, and potentially unpopular, structural reforms is perhaps closing. The government's focus may inevitably shift towards ensuring a smooth electoral process, leaving the tough economic decisions for the next elected administration. The coming months will therefore be a critical test.

Consensus talks resume next week

FROM PAGE 1

reforms. In the first phase, agreement was reached on 62 of 165 proposals, some already implemented through ordinances, policies and executive orders. Twenty-five proposals were dropped due to sharp differences among parties.

In the second phase, political consensus was achieved on 11 of 20 major constitutional issues, with the remaining nine settled with notes of dissent. The final report will specify which parties dissented on which issues.

Asked if the commission has been "successful" and whether its tenure would be extended, Riaz said, "Success always depends on perspective... As of July 31, we were able to reach consensus on 62 points. Later, out of 19 points, 10 were fully agreed upon... From that viewpoint, this is a major achievement in the context of the country's history."

He said the commission's duty is to bring everyone to a common ground. "Even if there are differences, we hope a compromise will be reached. Parties are continuing discussions. Our aim is for the charter to be signed, and we are working toward that."

The commission's tenure ends in mid-August. "We will not separately recommend tenure extension. It's up to the government. If, by good fortune, the process is finalised within seven days, then extension becomes irrelevant," Riaz said.

Asked when the charter might be signed, Riaz said it depends on the third round of discussions with political parties and expert opinions.

"A preliminary draft has already been shared, and parties have provided feedback. A revised, consolidated draft will be sent within the next two days. Once there is consensus on that, a signing date can be set. If there are differing opinions, those will also be considered."

He said whether the interim government or the next parliament implements the charter will also be decided after expert and party consultations.

Riaz expects the third phase of talks to be short. "There is no need for long-term discussions with experts. Based on their input and the positions of political parties, we will try to reach common ground. It won't take too long."

Regarding the future of the notes of dissent, Ali Riaz said the commission will consult experts. They will examine global practices and local realities to determine how to implement the decisions, considering both the value of dissenting opinions and majority consensus.

"Our team does not want to seem like it's imposing anything. We have decided to seek opinions from outside experts who were part of other commissions and understand their views. Based on that, we will talk to political parties."

Ali Riaz acknowledged that the commission initially hoped to reach consensus on all 166 expected points in the National Charter, but that was not achieved — nor is it likely.

"First, we knew consensus wouldn't be possible on everything. Second, we're not trying to impose anything. Therefore, dissent has emerged. For example, on 25 issues, the differences were so large that we couldn't even proceed to the second round of discussion. So, we dropped them. The focus has been on areas where consensus is realistically possible."

He added that in the second phase, efforts were made to be as transparent as possible so all could see who was doing what. Many issues saw unexpected progress thanks to the cooperation of political parties. Now, the implementation phase depends on experts and political parties.

Asked about curbing MPs' influence in local government elections, Riaz said, "The influence of MPs in local governance is not legally valid. There is also a court ruling on the matter. Among the 62 points of consensus reached in the first phase, several contain specific proposals to curb the influence of MPs at the local level, and political consensus has been established on those points."

On elections and the charter, he said, "Some parties are talking about holding elections based on the charter. Currently, the commission is not involved in the election process. Our responsibility is to establish a national consensus. Based on discussions, the government will take necessary steps in this regard. What we will do is determine the implementation process of the consensus that is being established."

Regarding the Constitutional and Electoral Reform Commission's proposals, Riaz said one of the Constitutional Reform Commission's key goals was balancing power. "It is not just about balancing the powers of the prime minister and the president. Though there are dissenting opinions on term limits and holding multiple offices, the goal is to prevent the centralisation of power... to bring about a major shift in the country's political culture."

Some recommendations are already being implemented by the government and the Election Commission (EC), he said, expressing

Rushanara Ali resigns as UK minister over rent hike claims

REUTERS, London

Britain's minister for homelessness Rushanara Ali resigned late on Thursday after claims that she evicted tenants from a property she owns and then increased the rent by hundreds of pounds.

Rushanara, a junior minister in the ministry of housing, said in her resignation letter to Prime Minister Keir Starmer that she had followed all the legal requirements "at all times" but that continuing in her role would have distracted from the work of the government.

Her exit represents an embarrassing blow for Starmer's Labour government, which trails Nigel Farage's right-wing Reform UK party in opinion polls just over a year after winning a landslide election victory.

Rushanara, a Bangladeshi origin politician, is the fourth Labour minister to step down under pressure following the exits of the transport minister, the anti-corruption minister and a junior health minister for separate reasons. Others have left the government over policy disagreements.

"Keir Starmer promised a government of integrity — but has instead presided over a government of hypocrisy and self-service," the opposition Conservative party's chairman Kevin Hollinrake said, adding it was right that Ali had quit.



College student, teen niece raped in Rajbari Three arrested, sent to jail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

Three men were arrested and sent to jail yesterday in a case filed over the rape of a college student and her teenage niece in Rajbari's Goalanda upazila.

According to the case, the girls were raped on Tuesday by a group of men in Riaz Uddin Para of Uzanchar union.

Goalanda Ghat Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mohammad Rakibul Islam told The Daily Star that the college student's father filed the case against seven men around 3:00pm yesterday.

The arrestees are Faisal Sheikh, 22, of Bil Mamudpur village in Faridpur Sadar, Rakib Molla, 21, of Doraper Dangi in Goalanda, and Sajib Molla, 24, of Gani Shekher Para in the same union.

"The three have been sent to jail after being arrested. The victims have given their statements in court and will undergo medical examinations on Saturday," the OC said.

hope that structural reforms would go ahead without obstruction.

ON SUCCESS AND TENURE

On reforms before the election slated for February 2026, Riaz noted that some reform proposals are immediate while others are long term. "A single election cannot stop the resurgence of fascism. That requires institutional reforms and constitutional changes... Political parties must take a leading role in addressing the practices that enable fascism."

He added, "We have worked with hope. Every citizen wants a fair election. The country should move towards a democratic structure."

About the commission's expenditures, Riaz said the records are with the law ministry and the Parliament Secretariat, and will be audited by the government. Monir Haider, special assistant (consensus) to the chief adviser, said the commission itself does not spend money, and all logistical costs are borne by the law ministry and the Parliament Secretariat.

Israel strike kills one in Lebanon: ministry

AFP, Beirut

An Israeli strike killed one person in southern Lebanon yesterday, the Lebanese health ministry said, in the latest attack despite a November ceasefire.

It comes a day after Israeli strikes killed seven people in the eastern Bekaa Valley, two of them members of leftist militant group, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

The man killed in Friday's strike in Nabatiyeh district, Mohammad Shahadeh, ran a local news website and colleagues took to social media to offer their condolences to his family.

Social media users circulated an obituary released by Hezbollah, which described him as a "martyr on the road to Jerusalem", the term the group uses for members killed in fighting with Israel.

The PFLP meanwhile mourned "commander and Central Committee member, Mohammad Khalil Wishah" and "field commander Mufid Hassan Hussein, who were martyred yesterday (Thursday) in a treacherous Zionist assassination crime on the road between Syria and Lebanon".

DHAKA



Adult beginner dancers from diverse professions -- including students, teachers, and corporate officials -- perform at Bokultola of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Dhaka University, yesterday. Titled "Ghonghota", the production was staged by Arthy Ahmed Dance Academy. The event was organised with an aim to create a safe space for adults to pursue their lifelong dream of learning Bharatanatyam and other dance forms.

PHOTO: COURTESY/BISHWAJIT GOSWAMI

TUHIN MURDER

Grieving family seeks justice for slain journalist



OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

"Bring back my son alive, my heart, my beloved one," cried 90-year-old Hasan Jamal, father of slain journalist Asaduzzaman Tuhin, 40, as relatives and neighbours gathered around him.

Tuhin was brutally killed in front of a crowded market in Chandana Chowrasta of Gazipur around 8:00pm on Thursday night.

He had worked as a staff reporter for the Mymensingh-based daily *Pratidin* for about five years.

Family sources said Tuhin, father of two sons -- eight-year-old Takir Ahmed and three-year-old Fahim Ahmed -- lived in a rented house in Chandana Chowrasta.

Alongside journalism, he was engaged in medicine and clinic business and had been living in Gazipur for over 15 years.

Nothing could stop the sobbing of Hasan Jamal, father of seven children -- five sons and two daughters -- with Tuhin being the youngest. Speaking to this correspondent at his village home in Phulbaria Bhatipara, Jamal said he last spoke to his son over the phone on Wednesday about family matters and his illness.

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Women's dignity still unprotected after July uprising
Says Adviser Farida Akhter

STAR REPORT

The silence of women following the July Uprising reflects how women's dignity remains unprotected in society, said Fisheries and Livestock Adviser Farida Akhter yesterday.

She also said the patriarchal society pushes women backward, reports Prothom Alo.

She was speaking as the chief guest at the "July Kanya Award 2025" distribution ceremony at the Krishibid Institution Bangladesh in Dhaka, organised by the July Kanya Foundation.

Farida Akhter said women are making remarkable progress in skill development with dedication and sincerity, adding, "They will be a vital force in shaping Bangladesh's future."

However, she pointed out the lack of opportunities at the national level for female activists involved in the July Uprising.

"We, at the policy-making level, are trying to bring the July Kanyas [the female activists of the July Uprising] forward, but they still have very limited space on national platforms," she said, according to BSS.

Highlighting the historic role of women in Bangladesh's movements, the adviser said their contributions -- from the 1952 Language Movement to the 1971 Liberation War and the 2024 Mass Uprising -- have been immense.

"The role of mothers has been crucial in every major struggle of this country," she added.

Farida Akhter stressed that women's contributions to these movements must be formally recognised.

"Women, who make up 51 percent of the population, must not be left behind. No one gives rights willingly -- they must be realised [through struggle]," she said, urging

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RAKIB MADBER

Once the lifeline to Bangladesh's southern districts, Sadarghat Launch Terminal is now a shadow of its former self. With the rise of modern highways and faster road travel, the once-bustling river port is witnessing a sharp drop in passenger traffic.

As travellers increasingly opt for road-based transport, the future of the country's historic inland waterway network and its century-old launch industry hangs in the balance.

According to the Bangladesh Inland

down to two. Patuakhali and Barguna have seen similar nosedives.

For the operators, it's a financial freefall.

"Since the inauguration of the Padma Bridge, the number of passengers has dropped significantly. The severe traffic congestion from Gulistan to Sadarghat and the rise in fuel prices have put this sector at serious risk," said Md Altaf Hossain, master of the launch

The impact ripples beyond launch decks to those on the shore. Porters, once part of the vibrant chaos of Sadarghat, now sit idle for hours.

"We used to earn 1,500 to 2,000 takas a day. Now, it's hard to make even 500-700 takas," said

Padma Bridge's opening. Mohammad Hannan Khan, treasurer of the Launch Owners' Association, said the industry is no longer sustainable. "Before the

Padma Bridge, each launch operated 14 to 15 trips monthly. Now, it's down to four or five. Our monthly income has dropped from 40-50 lakh takas to just 15-20 lakh takas. Around 40 launches have already been scrapped."

With no other options, many workers are abandoning river transport altogether, shifting to other vessel types such as oil tankers, sand carriers, or even auto-rickshaws in search of stable income.

Beyond the bridge, other factors have worsened the crisis. Skyrocketing fuel prices are eating into whatever revenue remains. Launch operators say it costs between Tk 8.5 lakh and Tk 9 lakh to make a single trip to Barishal -- costs that are rarely recovered now.

Even infrastructure is working against them. The Gulistan-Sadarghat road is plagued with severe congestion, further discouraging passengers from opting for water travel.

Mahbubur Rahman, assistant director of BIWTA, emphasised the importance of fuel regulation and long-term sustainability.

"We must look into alternative energy. India has already started using solar-powered launches on some routes. Bangladesh could consider similar technology."

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According to BIWTA, the number of active launches on Dhaka's 43 river routes has dropped from 210 to 170, with only 37 routes still operational. Daily departures from Sadarghat have also declined sharply, falling from 140 to just 40-45 launches.

Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), the number of active launches on Dhaka's 43 river routes has fallen from 210 to 170. Of these, only 37 routes remain operational. The daily number of departures from Sadarghat has shrunk drastically from 140 to just 40-45 launches.

Several routes have been entirely shut down, including services to Madaripur, Ghuma, Patabuni, Dewanbari, Tekerhat, Surjomoni, Rainda and Tushkhali. Barishal-bound launches, once eight per day, are now

Sundarban-16.

"On July 6, we went to Barishal with only 175 passengers, incurring a loss of over 2 lakh takas. This is how things are going. On average, we're losing around 10 lakh takas every month. This is supposed to be an off season, but it feels like a shutdown. Since the bridge opened, things have slowed to a crawl. If this trend continues, we may not last five more years."

Shamim, a porter who has worked at Sadarghat for over a decade.

"Passengers and goods both are gone. Most of the day, we just sit and wait."

The downturn is stark even during peak travel periods. This year's Eid-ul-Azha rush saw 139 launches depart from Sadarghat on June 5, noticeably fewer than the 158 departures recorded during the same festival before the



SURGE IN DENGUE

DMCH overrun with patients from outside Dhaka

Experts urge better district-level healthcare

HELEMUL ALAM

Three days ago, 37-year-old Mohammad Hanif was admitted to the Bhedarganj Upazila Health Complex in Shariatpur. As his condition worsened, doctors referred him to Dhaka Medical

to 20,000, prompting the referral. "The number of dengue cases in our upazila is quite high," he added.

Mohammad Alamgir, 61, a resident of Bhola's Monpura, said he was infected at his workplace in Baful about five days ago and initially took treatment at home.

Critically ill patients are often referred from local hospitals to major city hospitals. By the time they arrive, their condition is often already severe.

DR HM NAZMUL AHSEN
Associate professor, Suhrawardy Hospital

"As my condition deteriorated, the doctor advised me to get admitted to DMCH. I've been under treatment here for the past three days," said Alamgir.

Like Hanif and Alamgir, many dengue patients are arriving at DMCH from

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

College Hospital (DMCH) on Thursday.

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Body found in abandoned travel bag

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Gazipur

Police recovered the dismembered body of an unidentified person from an abandoned travel bag in Tongi yesterday morning.

The recovery was made around 10:00am on Tongi Station Road, along the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway. Inside the travel bag, police found body parts wrapped in polythene.

Tongi East Police Station Officer-in-Charge Faridul Islam confirmed the incident, saying that they believe the victim was killed elsewhere two to three days ago before being dumped at the location.

"After inspecting the scene, the body parts have been sent to the morgue of Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmad Medical College Hospital," Faridul said, adding that police were reviewing CCTV footage to identify those involved.



A battery-run auto-rickshaw dangerously overtakes between two buses, risking being sandwiched -- a reckless move that often leads to accidents on city streets. The photo was taken in the Shahbagh area of the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

From the kitchen to continents Nasima and Shanta's homemade pickles go global



MASUK HRIDOV, Brahmanbaria

It began with a storm and some fallen mangoes. During a nor'wester around five years ago, a cluster of raw mangoes dropped from the trees in Nasima Begum's village home. Not one to let them go to waste, she turned them into jars of homemade pickles -- an idea sparked by her expatriate brother. By her side stood her daughter-in-law, Shanta.

Together, the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law duo launched a Facebook page called "Paker Ghor Dotcom", hoping to share their homemade flavours with others.

What began on the kitchen floor of a rented house in the Imampura area of Brahmanbaria's Kasba upazila has since travelled far, reaching the dinner tables of Bangladeshis expatriates across Europe and the Middle East.

In the past five years, Nasima and Shanta have expanded beyond mango pickles, crafting over 20 varieties of traditional achaars -- olive, hog plum (chalta), jujube (boroi), garlic, beef, and naga chili -- alongside coconut sweets (narus), intricately designed pitas, and homemade cakes.

From their modest kitchen, they now earn Tk 60,000 to 70,000 per month while supporting household expenses. Their commitment to hygiene and quality has earned them a loyal following both online and in local markets.

Today, Nasima and Shanta are widely celebrated in their community as successful women entrepreneurs.

"Each item is made with the same care as a home-cooked meal," Nasima told this correspondent. "In an era of adulterated food, we make sure to use high-quality ingredients like pure oil and molasses. That's how we built our reputation for reliability."

Shanta, a college student, added that they also



SEE PAGE 9 COL 6

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Without pontoons at several launch ghats in the coastal upazilas of Rangabali, Galachipa, Doshmina, and parts of Bauphal in Patuakhali, passengers face serious hazards while boarding and disembarking vessels.

These areas heavily rely on waterways, as boats, trawlers and speedboats are the only means of transportation to and from the district and upazila headquarters.

However, due to the absence of pontoons or connecting roads at many ghats, people are forced to wade through mud or tidal water to reach vessels, often risking accidents and injuries.

"There is no pontoon or jetty here. The approach road was damaged years ago and has never been repaired. Now passengers and goods must be carried through knee-deep mud," said Gazi Mehedi Hasan, a local trader.

"The sufferings intensify during the rainy season. This ghat connects our area with Galachipa, the district town, and other parts of the country. Had there been a pontoon here, the government could also earn revenue," he added.

Another passenger, Jakir Hossain, 48, said, "We have to walk through dirty water and mud to board launches. It's extremely difficult when you're travelling with kids."

According to the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), Patuakhali has 55 designated launch ghats, among

which 10 currently lack pontoons.

The authorities are also in the process of withdrawing pontoons from five more ghats. Bauphal, Amkhola in Galachipa, Tulatali in Rangabali, and Payrakunj in Sadar upazila.

However, locals claim there are around 70 to 75 ghats in the district, including informal and small-scale ones, and about 30 to 35 of them operate without pontoons, mostly in remote or char areas.

Rangabali UNO Rajib Das Purkayastha said, "We've taken

this route to travel to Galachipa, Kalapara, the district town, and even Dhaka."

Rangabali Upazila LGED Engineer Md Habibur Rahman said a proposal for the construction of the approach road to the ghat has already been submitted. "Once funds are allocated, we will begin the work through the tendering process," he said.

Rangabali UNO Rajib Das Purkayastha said, "We've taken



Abdus Salam Mia, master of "ML Prince of Hamza 5", a vessel operating on the Galachipa-Rangabali route, said, "It's not only the passengers, we, the boat operators, also face severe difficulties due to the lack of pontoons."

Jafar Mridha, panel chairman of Boro Baishdia Union Parishad, described Gaiyapara ghat as crucial for the people of Boro Baishdia and Maudubi unions. "Residents use

steps to build the connecting road to ease public suffering. We will also communicate with BIWTA regarding pontoon installation."

Contacted, Zaki Shahriar, assistant director of BIWTA in Patuakhali, said, "Pontoons may be installed if launch operators and locals make formal requests, preferably through their public representatives. Revenue potential from the ghat will be a major factor in our decision."



Farmers in a process to dry jute in the sun along village canals and wetlands. This year, Rajshahi has seen a bumper jute harvest, prompting many farmers to seize the opportunity to maximise their earnings. The photo was taken near Baghmari Bridge in Paba upazila yesterday.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

JP to hold its 10th council today

It will resolve the party's long-standing factional rifts, says a faction's chair Anisul Islam

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Today's national council of the Jatiya Party will resolve the party's long-standing divisions and open a new chapter of unity, said Anisul Islam Mahmud, acting chairman of a JP faction, yesterday.

Speaking at a press conference in the capital's Gulshan, he said the council will pave the way for a fresh journey towards fulfilling the dream of party founder HM Ershad.

Anisul said several thousand councillors and delegates from across the country are expected to attend.

"Some are saying this party has split. But I want to state firmly that we have organised this council in accordance with the court order and the party's constitution. We have informed the Election Commission and invited their representatives to attend," he said.

"Through this council, we want to restore democracy within the Jatiya Party. Afterwards, we will abolish the controversial provisions of the party's constitution. The party will no longer be run under a single leadership, but under collective leadership," Anisul added.

In a written statement, JP Secretary General Mujibul Haque Chunnu said the party's 10th

SEE PAGE 9 COL 8

26km highway in Natore turns deadly 72 killed in road crashes on Bonpara-Hatikumrul stretch since 2021



AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

The 26-kilometre stretch of the Bonpara-Hatikumrul highway in Natore has turned into a death trap, with frequent road accidents claiming dozens of lives over the years.

On July 23, eight people, including seven from the same family, were killed in a head-on collision between a truck and a microbus in the Shreerampur area. Within a week of that incident, two more accidents occurred on the same road, leaving one dead and several injured.

In 2014, 33 people were killed in a single accident at Rijor More area, which had sparked widespread criticism over road safety. Despite the tragedy, frequent accidents continue to occur on this stretch of highway, raising concern among locals and transport workers.

According to highway police, 72 people were killed and 40 critically injured in dozens of accidents along the 26-kilometre stretch between January 1, 2021 and July 31, 2025.

Md Ismail Hossain, officer-in-charge of Bonpara Highway Police Station, said this section of the road is the most accident-prone in Natore and the northern region. "There is no three-wheeler movement here, and the highway is

SEE PAGE 9 COL 3

Trader stabbed to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

A trader was stabbed to death at his shop in Moulvibazar town on Thursday evening.

The victim -- Faizur Rahman Rubel, 53, from Kadipur union under Kulaura upazila -- was the owner of F Rahman Trading at Shamshernagar.

His brother-in-law Emon Tarafdar said, "He [Rubel] had his own reputable establishment called Sadaipati (F Rahman Trading). We suspect he might have been killed due to some old enmity."

According to locals, Rubel was reportedly attacked inside his shop between 6:00pm and 8:00pm. Hearing his screams, nearby residents rushed to the scene and found him critically injured.

He was first taken to Moulvibazar Sadar Hospital and later transferred to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared him dead around 10:00pm.

Physician Ahmed Faisal Zaman, resident medical officer of Moulvibazar Sadar Hospital, said the man was admitted to the hospital with stab injuries. His condition was critical, so he was referred to the Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital, he added.

Quoting locals, Moulvibazar Police Station Officer in Charge Gazi Mahbubur Rahman said Rubel had been under financial stress due to debt, but it was unclear who was behind the attack or what the motive was.

প্লট বিক্রয়

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INTERNATIONAL

Pak troops kill 33 militants crossing from Afghanistan

REUTERS, Karachi

Pakistani security forces killed 33 militants trying to cross from Afghanistan overnight, the military said yesterday, describing them as "Indian sponsored".

The fighters were intercepted and engaged with "precise" fire, the military's public relations wing said, adding that weapons, ammunition and explosives were recovered.

A search operation was underway to find and eliminate any remaining insurgents, the military said.

Pakistan often accuses the Taliban government in Afghanistan of turning a blind eye to militants operating near the frontier. Kabul denies the charge.

Pakistan and India, nuclear-armed neighbours with a history of conflict, often accuse each other of backing insurgents. New Delhi denies supporting militants in Pakistan.



A Palestinian woman standing in a doorway reacts as she watches the aftermath of an Israeli strike that hit Gaza City's southern al-Zeitoun neighbourhood yesterday. Story on Page 12.

DHAKA SATURDAY AUGUST 9, 2025

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The Daily Star

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Floods kill 10 in northwest China

REUTERS, Beijing

President Xi Jinping yesterday ordered "all-out" rescue efforts in China's arid and mountainous northwest after flash floods caused by exceptionally heavy rain killed 10 people and left 33 missing.

Torrential downpours began around 6 p.m. on Thursday and unleashed flash floods in Gansu province's Yuzhong, stranding some 4,000 people, state broadcaster China Central Television (CCTV) reported.

In one mountainous area, precipitation had reached up to 195mm (7.7 inches) since early Thursday evening. Yuzhong county normally sees 300-400mm of rainfall for the entire year.

Yuzhong is situated among gullies and hills of wind-blown silt on one of the world's biggest loess plateaus. That makes it vulnerable to flash floods and landslides given the loose structure of the soil.

Ankle-high muddy water could be seen coursing down a hilly road flanked by uprooted trees in a video posted by CCTV.

Record rainfall has lashed China's north and south in recent weeks in what meteorologists describe as extreme weather events linked to climate change.

Heavy rains and flooding have killed at least 60 people across northern China, including Beijing, since late July.

Xi welcomes US-Russia talks

Modi speaks to Putin, discusses Ukraine amid US tariff row

REUTERS, Beijing

China is pleased to see Russia and the United States maintaining contact and improving ties to advance a political resolution of the Ukraine crisis, President Xi Jinping said in a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday.

Beijing will maintain its stance on the need for peace talks and a diplomatic solution to the conflict, Chinese state broadcaster CCTV quoted Xi as telling Putin.

The call was held at Putin's request, CCTV said.

The call came after the Kremlin said on Thursday that Putin would meet US President Donald Trump in the coming days in the search for an end to the war, now in its fourth year.

Trump took a more conciliatory

approach towards Russia after returning to the White House in January but has voiced growing frustration with Putin over the lack of progress towards peace and has threatened to impose heavy tariffs on countries, including



China, that buy Russian oil.

Putin is expected to visit China in September for events marking the 80th anniversary of the end of World War Two.

Meanwhile, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday

said that he spoke to Russian President Vladimir Putin by phone and thanked him for sharing the latest developments on Ukraine.

The conversation between the two leaders came days after Trump announced an additional 25% tariff on Indian goods to penalise New Delhi for continuing to buy Russian oil.

The penalty took the total levy on Indian goods exported to the US to 50%, among the highest levied on any US trading partner.

"Had a very good and detailed conversation with my friend President

Putin. I thanked him for sharing the latest developments on Ukraine," Modi said in a post on X.

India's foreign ministry said Modi invited Putin to New Delhi for the 23rd India-Russia Annual Summit later this year.

AL discreetly sets up 'party office'

FROM PAGE 12
office fit the bill. The furniture was left behind by the previous tenants," one AL leader told BBC Bangla.

He added that 30-35 people can hold meetings there.

Apart from AL leaders and activists, various professionals, civil servants, police officers, and retired military officials have also fled to India.

About six months ago, party sources estimated that around 200 people, including at least 70 MPs, district-level party leaders, upazila chairmen, and mayors, had fled to greater Kolkata.

Some live with families; others share flats with colleagues. Families occasionally travel from Bangladesh for visits.

"Some who arrived have since moved on to the US, Canada, or Australia," another leader told BBC Bangla.

The party office has no fixed hours, with senior leaders dropping in as needed.

Former lawmaker Pankaj Debnath told BBC Bangla that they are in regular contact with grassroots workers through digital platforms.

On social media, questions frequently arise about why grassroots activists are being assaulted, arrested or harassed in Bangladesh, while senior leaders remain in India.

"This is a valid question," said Pankaj Debnath. "But look at 1971; if the then-leadership hadn't fled to India and formed a government-in-exile, could the Liberation War have been coordinated? I'm not equating 1971 to now, but history offers such examples, even in India.

"How many leaders of the main party and its affiliates are even abroad? Most remain in Bangladesh," he added.

Until recently, top leaders hadn't met Hasina in person. She reportedly held a meeting with them in Delhi on July 31.

Multiple AL leaders confirmed this to BBC Bangla but declined to reveal the agenda or location.

Separate WhatsApp and Telegram groups have been created, and live online programmes are regularly held, with Hasina occasionally joining.

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Former lawmaker Pankaj

Japan daily

FROM PAGE 12

Perplexity users click only on its search summaries and not on the newspaper's website, reducing traffic.

The Yomiuri, with a daily circulation of around six million -- down from over 10 million in 2010 -- and some 2,500 reporters, is one of five major daily newspapers in Japan.

Perplexity was not immediately available for comment.

After a lawsuit by the Wall Street Journal and the New York Post in October, Perplexity criticised the "adversarial posture" of many media as "shortsighted, unnecessary, and self-defeating".

"We've had to drastically change our lifestyles," said Pankaj Debnath.

In Dhaka, some never travelled without a car or shared accommodation, but in India, they use public transport and share a flat with others, he said.

"If we go somewhere together, we share the taxi fare. The idea is to live as frugally as possible."

In May, the government banned all activities of the AL and its associated and affiliated organisations, on allegations of killings, genocide, crimes against humanity, and other grave offences during the July uprising.

As Bangladesh's interim government marks its first year, the AL has stepped up criticism, accusing it of multiple failures.

AL General Secretary

Yusuf Mia, a trader at Tejgaon who visited Karwan Bazar to buy food items for his family, said, "I wanted to buy a one-kilo hilsa, but a trader asked for Tk 2,300, which is beyond my means."

Farm-grown rohu and koi weighing one kilo per piece were sold at Tk 350 to Tk 400 per kg yesterday, up from Tk 320 to Tk 350 per kg a week earlier.

Although the ongoing monsoon is considered the prime season for hilsa, there has been no sign of a price decrease for the popular fish in the capital's markets.

Yesterday, hilsa weighing between 600 grammes and one kilogramme per piece were sold for Tk 1,400 to Tk 2,300 per kg.

Farm-produced eggs were sold at Tk 135 to Tk 140 per dozen yesterday.

Farm-grown Sonali chicken was sold at Tk 320 to Tk 350 per kg, marking a Tk 10 increase from the previous year.

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FROM PAGE 12

to Tk 52 per kg wholesale, but yesterday the price reached Tk 66 to Tk 74 per kg. He said for several months, onion prices had remained steady and affordable for most consumers, with wholesale rates between Tk 42 and Tk 50 per kg.

Meanwhile, traders at various kitchen markets said the retail price of onions increased to Tk 80 to Tk 90 per kg yesterday.

Mohammad Roni, a grocer at Shewrapara kitchen market, said he had been selling onions at the increased rates. He

said he sold a kilogramme of locally grown onions at Tk 85 yesterday, compared to Tk 60 a couple of weeks earlier.

Mosharraf Hossain, a retail vegetable trader at Karwan Bazar, said prices of most vegetable items had risen by Tk 20 to Tk 50 within a week, reaching over Tk 100 per kg.

For example, he sold round-shaped eggplants at Tk 160 per kg and common long eggplants at Tk 100 per kg yesterday.

He said ridge gourd and bitter gourd each sold at Tk 100 per kg, while cucumber and tomato prices reached Tk 100 and Tk 180 to Tk

200 per kg respectively.

Furthermore, prices of okra and pointed gourd rose to Tk 70 to Tk 80 per kg yesterday, up from Tk 40 to Tk 50 a week earlier.

He said that

Protect journalists, uphold press freedom

Tuhin's killers, Anwar's attackers must be brought to justice

We condemn the killing of journalist Asaduzzaman Tuhin by miscreants in Gazipur on August 7, and echo the concern expressed by the Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh (NOAB) regarding the safety of journalists and media freedom in the country. Tuhin, a staff reporter of the Mymensingh-based daily *Pratidin Kagoj*, was fatally attacked at a busy intersection of the city in full public view. This occurred just a day after another reporter, Anwar Hossain of *Bangladesh Alo*, was brutally attacked in Sahapara, Gazipur.

In both cases, the journalists were on duty. Tuhin was recording footage of several armed men chasing two individuals, while Anwar was investigating allegations of extortion from auto-rickshaw drivers. These incidents reflect the increasingly unsafe working conditions for journalists, particularly those operating outside Dhaka. Journalists are being targeted not only by criminal groups and extortionists but also by political activists and, at times, even law enforcement. Just last month, the Committee to Protect Journalists (Asia) in a tweet urged the government to investigate the assault on a DBC news reporter allegedly by security forces during a protest in Khagrachhari on July 17.

Attacks on journalists are not limited to physical harm. According to a recent Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) report, from August 2024 to July 2025, as many as 496 journalists were harassed, 266 were implicated in murder cases related to the July uprising, and three were killed while on duty. During the same period, eight newspaper editors and 11 news chiefs from private TV channels were dismissed, and at least 150 journalists were terminated. Besides, the TIB report and speakers at a recent seminar highlighted the issue of "mob" to coerce, threaten and put pressure on media houses to change the narrative of news reports if they don't favour certain quarters. NOAB, too, cited the alarming case of a mob attempting to evict the owner of *Janakantha*, which involved a politically connected individual.

Following the fall of Sheikh Hasina's autocratic regime, expectations were high for a freer, less politically influenced media. While there is no longer overt government intervention, hostility towards the media persists among other quarters. The interim government has yet to take visible steps to ensure press freedom. Controversial issues such as press accreditation procedures, the stalled implementation of the Information Commission, and lack of progress in reforming the Right to Information Act raise concerns about its commitment to fostering a free media environment. Most worrying is the government's failure to improve law and order. Why is the police still inactive while crimes occur in broad daylight? With elections just six months away, the government must act decisively to ensure that journalists can work without fear. We urge the authorities to swiftly bring Tuhin's killers and Anwar's attackers to justice and demand stronger police vigilance. No one can feel safe in a society where criminals roam free, brandishing weapons and attacking people in public.

Save our children from lead poisoning

Eliminate all sources of emission

We are alarmed to learn about the high levels of lead found in children living in Dhaka. A joint study by the icddr,b and Stanford University on 500 slum children aged two to four years in the city has found that around 98 percent of them have concerning levels of this toxic heavy metal in their blood. While proximity to industrial sites is the main driver of high blood lead levels (BLLs), other sources include indoor second-hand smoke, high levels of dust containing lead, and exposure to household items containing lead, such as cosmetics, cookware, and paint, according to the study.

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), lead exposure can seriously harm a child's growth and development, causing damage to the brain and nervous system, learning and behavioural issues, hearing and speech problems, lower IQ, and decreased attention levels, among other conditions. The CDC considers BLLs above 3.5 micrograms per deciliter to be concerning, especially for young children, while according to WHO, there are no safe BLLs.

The above-mentioned study found much higher BLLs in the surveyed children than the tolerable levels. It also observed that children in Dhaka South have higher BLLs than those in the north, mostly because there are more lead-polluting industries in the southern part of the city. Children living within one kilometre of battery manufacturing, recycling or other lead-related industries were found to have 43 percent higher BLLs than those living more than five kilometres away. These findings are alarming and call for urgent action from the relevant authorities, including the two city corporations. The question is, are the authorities doing anything to curb this serious public health threat?

With an estimated 36 lakh children already affected and countless more at risk, we can no longer afford to ignore this problem. The government, therefore, must develop a comprehensive plan to eliminate all sources of lead exposure, including air pollution, from Dhaka as well as the rest of the country. It must ensure that no children are employed in factories where lead exposure is high. Raising public awareness about the issue is also necessary. All these measures are crucial to safeguard the future of our children, to make sure they grow up healthy, empowered to contribute meaningfully to the nation's progress. The time to act is now.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Michael Brown shot

On this day in 2014, the fatal shooting of Michael Brown, an unarmed Black American teenager, by Darren Wilson, a White police officer, resulted in days of civil unrest and protests in the city of Ferguson in Missouri, US, spurring the Black Lives Matter movement, which was born a year earlier.

EDITORIAL

The cracks in our education system



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza
is professor of English at Dhaka University.

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

When Dhaka University's admission test results came out in March, we were shocked to learn that only six percent of examinees had qualified for the science unit. Out of 120,488 students, only 7,437 candidates passed against the 1,896 seats. For the country's premier university, many of us saw it as a sign of competitiveness. By the time admissions were completed, classes resumed, and internal migrations took place, the university identified that 505 of its 6,135 seats had remained vacant. The crisis is severe among some of the science faculties, such as applied chemistry, electrical and electronic engineering, leather technology, and physics, as well as in language courses like Urdu, Pali, and Sanskrit.

There are at least two aspects of this problem. First, the schooling system, serving as a feeder channel for our tertiary system, is in a state of disarray. Second, our students are not interested in some of the disciplines for various reasons that merit close examination. Years of systemic neglect, misplaced priorities, and populist grade inflation have plagued our education system, leading to devastating consequences. Not surprisingly, the World Bank's Human Capital Index has reported that a student completing 12 years of schooling in Bangladesh achieves the equivalent of just 6.3 learning-adjusted years, which is comparable to a Grade 7 international benchmark. The diagnostic report aligns with both the admission test results and the SSC results, which saw the lowest pass rate in 16 years.

Our education system has stunted the cognitive development of our youth at a time when the country is supposed to cash in on its demographic dividends. Their readiness for higher education is questionable. The state-funded public system has the luxury of operating institutions with many

vacant seats. Meanwhile, many unsuccessful students transition to the private education system, which offers a range of pre-university courses designed to address the learning gaps experienced by some of these students. In the process, we enter another dimension of the problem: knowledge is available to those who can afford it. Even an enemy would agree that the

main cause of our education debacle

is the lack of investment. With an allocation worth less than two percent of GDP for education, our school system has failed to attract qualified teachers. Underpaid teachers in schools and other educational institutions are forced to work part-time due to financial challenges. This scenario has allowed coaching centres, private tutoring, and question-paper-leaking syndicates to emerge as shadow systems. Students now study for exams at proxy institutes, learn some guessing patterns on the internet or from mentors, memorise notes, and reproduce them at exams. The fun of learning, the curiosity to

in Bangla was recorded at 26 percent (2011), 25 percent (2013), and declined to 23 percent (2015), then to just 10 percent (2017). In maths, it was 30 percent in 2011, 25 percent in 2013, and 10 percent in 2015, before a slight rebound to 16 percent in 2017. The NSA report reveals a foundational weakness that contradicts figures like the 84 percent school completion rate and the number of GPAs celebrated with drumbeats and exchange of sweets.

The admission test fiasco, along with the World Bank's assessment, reveals to us the dangers posed by years of grade inflation and data doctoring. Our obsession with pass

rates, GPA scores, and enrolment targets was weaponised by successive governments to claim success, appease anxious parents, and hide structural weaknesses. Teachers are pressured to ensure pass rates or given impossible deadlines to check thousands of scripts. This year's SSC review, prompted by a sharp fall in the pass percentage, suggests that even the government must rethink its assessment procedures.

The bluff of GPA 5 has been called. It will take time for students and parents who have gotten used to the badge of academic excellence promised by the numbers to acknowledge the learning deficiency. The controversial "auto-pass" policy, which mitigated learning loss during the pandemic, is already reaping its consequences. Policymakers were unaware that the practice of mass promotion instead of exams conveyed a problematic message: performance is negotiable rather than earned. This ethos continued even after the July mass uprising when the empowered students felt entitled to demand similar report cards.

This culture of resistance, however, is not entirely the students' doing. We are a nation that failed to create a system that teaches failure and reflection as essential life lessons for personal growth. We have failed to dissociate the education system from personal interests or donors' desires and craft a curriculum that emphasises critical thinking. While the policy documents will present all the buzzwords of competence-based creative learning, once you come to the actual textbook contents, you will notice a deliberate dumbing down. Those who wrote the books will tell you that they had to keep the low-skilled teachers in mind while developing the material. Otherwise there will be serious backlash. Why are we surprised that our students cannot be benchmarked against their international peers?

The outcome that bothers us is our doing. Instead of building resilience, we have bred fragility. Instead of teaching critical thinking, we have taught strategic complaining. The system that once demanded academic discipline has become hostage to political entitlement.

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The admission test fiasco, along with the World Bank's assessment, reveals to us the dangers posed by years of grade inflation and data doctoring. Our obsession with pass

60TH ANNIVERSARY OF SINGAPORE'S INDEPENDENCE

A renewed commitment to Bangladesh's future



Mitchel Lee
is chargé d'affaires of Singapore High Commission in Bangladesh.

MITCHEL LEE

August 9, 2025 marks a historical milestone for Singapore. We celebrate our 60th year of independence this year. Singapore has come a long way since our early years of nationhood. When independence was thrust upon us, our GDP per capita was around \$516. We were no longer part of a common market with Malaysia and no longer to play a role as the administrative, commercial and military hub of the British Empire in Southeast Asia. Dr Albert Winsemius, a Dutch economist who led the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) mission to provide advice on industrialisation, painted a bleak but not entirely hopeless picture for us back then. Singapore faced high unemployment, poor housing, low education, and the list went on.

Today, Singapore's GDP per capita is among the highest in the world. Our educational institutions are ranked among the best, and we rank among the top 10 countries in quality-of-life surveys. Our 60th birthday celebration is a day to celebrate these accomplishments, but more importantly, to also remember what it took to get to where we are today, a vibrant and thriving global city-state confident in its future.

A key to our success has been nurturing a set of national values that have stood the test of time. Meritocracy, adherence to the rule of law, and a zero tolerance for corruption have all become components of our DNA. Singapore ranks as the third

least corrupt country in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. Singapore also consistently ranks high in the World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index in areas like regulatory enforcement. Singapore also ranks the highest among Southeast Asian countries in the Global Social Mobility Index by the World Economic Forum, performing well in areas such as health, education and access to technology and employment opportunities.

Another key to our success is the quality of our civil service and public institutions. Singapore ranks third globally in the 2022 Chandler Good Government Index, scoring well in areas such as policy effectiveness and institutional trust. We were also rated No. 1 in the 2024 Blavatnik Index of Public Administration, scoring high marks in leadership, public service delivery, public policy and integrity. Singaporeans and foreign residents and visitors alike have come to expect a competent, efficient and non-corrupt bureaucracy that works.

This is also reflected in our world-class public infrastructure, such as Singapore Changi Airport, our public transportation system and public hospitals. Changi Airport, for instance, is consistently ranked the world's best airport by World Airline Awards. Singapore's mass rapid transit (MRT) public transport system has also received international recognition for its inclusive architecture for elderly and disabled commuters. The MRT

won an International Association of Public Transport award for operational excellence for its AI-powered system, which monitors train service disruptions in real time, leading to significant improvements in reliability. Our public healthcare system has also been lauded for its good public health outcomes. Singaporeans enjoy a long life expectancy of 84 years and low infant and maternal mortality rates. Singapore General Hospital and National University Hospital are listed among the world's best.

Singapore's outward-looking, proactive and principled foreign policy posture has also been integral to our success. External trade has always been our lifeblood. Today, trade is three times the size of our GDP. We, therefore, consistently champion a stable, rules-based multilateral trading system. A more robust rules-based trading system creates more economic opportunities for Singaporeans and our companies. Singapore has built a strong network of bilateral, regional, and multilateral frameworks to promote trade. We have implemented 28 free trade agreements (FTAs) so far. We are also complementing this with innovative partnership agreements that foster rules and norms for new forms of trade, such as in the digital economy.

This brings me to my final point regarding our bilateral relations with Bangladesh. As Singapore turns 60, I am pleased to note that Singapore and Bangladesh have been long-standing friends since the establishment of bilateral relations in February 1972. While we have had long-standing people-to-people links, best encapsulated by the many Bangladeshi who live and work in Singapore, our relationship has since evolved into a multifaceted one which includes areas such as trade and investment, energy, health, infrastructure development, port management, and capacity-building.

As Bangladesh undertakes economic reforms, including diversifying its range of economic products and services, Singapore will continue to walk this journey with Bangladesh. This is why Singapore agreed to pursue an FTA with Bangladesh, which both sides seek to conclude in time for Bangladesh's graduation from the LDC status in 2026.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Bangladeshis for their strong friendship and cooperation during our 53 years of diplomatic relations. Looking ahead, we will continue to work closely with our Bangladeshi friends to expand ties into new areas to take our countries to greater heights.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Protecting indigenous knowledge in the age of AI



Pavel Partha,
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PAVEL PARTHA

The International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples this year is focused on the impact of artificial intelligence on indigenous rights, identities, and cultural and linguistic identity. AI is essentially a set of regulated algorithms, governed by global power structures and colonial legacies. As a result, existing AI models tend to obscure or misrepresent the knowledge and voices of indigenous communities. Consequently, such discriminatory AI models contribute to marginalisation and dispossession of indigenous societies.

Dr Maneesha Perera and others (2025) reviewed research on indigenous knowledge and AI, published between 2012 and 2023. They found a substantial body of work on indigenous knowledge offering a global indigenous perspective through intergenerational knowledge systems. At the same time, promising and aspirational research on AI has also been published.

However, how these two strands of research intersect has not been discussed anywhere.

AI can play a crucial role in the development of indigenous knowledge. However, the potential risks to the indigenous knowledge systems must be considered as well. There is a risk of AI technology contributing to the erasure of indigenous cultural knowledge, committing biopiracy and violating the fundamental principles of indigenous data sovereignty. The expansion of AI technology could potentially exacerbate existing knowledge-based inequalities as well as structural discrimination.

In his address at the AI Action Summit 2025, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said, "AI has gone from the stuff of science fiction to a powerful force that is transforming our world. Reshaping the way we live, work, and interact. Fueling breakthroughs in education, healthcare, agriculture." However, he cautioned that with this tremendous potential comes significant risks. "It (artificial intelligence) must accelerate sustainable development—not entrench inequalities," he warned.

Colonial plunder and biopiracy

Indigenous communities have been integral to nearly all geographic identifiers and elements of national pride in Bangladesh. Yet, their contributions remain othered, mostly invisible, in the national narrative and

consciousness.

For example, Muslin and Jamdani, the signature fabrics of Bangladesh, used to be woven using *Phuti karpas*, a cotton variety cultivated by indigenous communities in the Bhawal and Madhupur region. The sesame molasses of Kushtia originated from indigenous jhum cultivation at the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). Even the puffed rice used to weave Tangail sarees came from the indigenous villages along the Sherpur-Jamalpur border. Indigenous communities have suffered due to colonial plunder and biopiracy, often in the name of control, governance, research, development or management.

Indigenous peoples are arguably the most researched population in the world. Today, in the name of scientific inquiry, "bioprospecting" and genetic research, their biological resources and the traditional knowledge systems tied to these resources are being appropriated and stolen. Indigenous communities and their biological resources are the main target of biocolonialism. These resources are being taken without their consent and turned into patented commercial products.

Sporadic discussions have now emerged about how indigenous data and knowledge can be integrated, represented, and utilised within the broader AI ecosystem. The indigenous movement for information sovereignty has persisted for years, emphasising the right to own, control, and manage their own data. However, powerful states and corporations are steering the direction of AI to incorporate indigenous knowledge without ensuring the active inclusion of indigenous communities in decision-making and governance. This glaring absence poses a serious crisis, undermining the free flow of indigenous information and the commitment to prior informed consent. Particularly, the use of indigenous knowledge, data, images, or identities in AI frameworks—without consent or conditional participation—creates a disconnect between the indigenous peoples and the technologies being developed.

Hence, it is imperative to ensure active and respectful inclusion of indigenous peoples at every level of AI development. If there are any discrepancies regarding any content, they can flag and resolve such complexities at the outset.

Decisions and governance over how AI

models incorporate the genetic and cultural information of indigenous jhum crops and wild food sources must align with the traditional indigenous traditional systems. Otherwise, there will be a risk of unilateral commercial exploitation of these traditional knowledge systems.

Marginalisation, discrimination, and universal human rights

During the first wave of COVID pandemic, racism against indigenous communities spiked in the country, particularly on social media, as speculations about the virus originating from a "wildlife market" in Wuhan, China spread. Digital technologies failed to prevent the racism targeting them.

Human Rights. Such frameworks must ensure that indigenous peoples are not confined within digital boundaries or subjected to renewed oppression through neo-colonial or binary systems imposed on them.

Neoliberal AI commerce and the alarming environmental question

The environmental question is emerging as a central concern in the field of AI. The massive data centres required for AI model research, development, and expansion demand an enormous amount of energy. Evidence suggests that the raw materials for energy production—fossil fuels—are often extracted from indigenous territories, putting entire ecosystems at risk. Multinational mining

account the direct and indirect environmental impacts of AI technologies at all levels. The massive carbon emissions and energy consumption associated with AI development, data infrastructure, and governance must be assessed to understand their environmental impact. We hope that Bangladesh will place the issues of life, nature, and environment at the centre of its AI governance strategies.

Global and national policies: The indigenous message

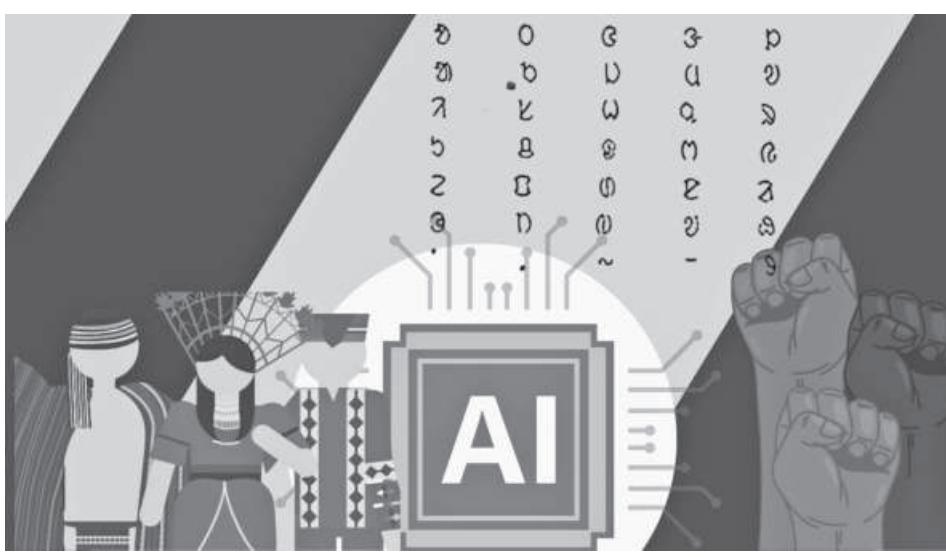
The theme for the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples 2025 is "Indigenous Peoples and AI: Defending Rights, Shaping Futures." UNESCO believes that AI technologies can be used in multiple ways to support indigenous peoples and can serve as tools for positive transformation. They can be particularly useful in revitalising endangered and disappearing indigenous mother tongues.

How will the indigenous communities in Bangladesh engage with AI? Will the narratives of colonialism, entrenched binaries, ethnonationalism, and authoritarianism remain silent in this context? Certainly not. The decisions regarding the adoption or rejection of AI must emerge through the collective consent, control, and decision-making of indigenous communities. AI technology can play a significant role in protecting indigenous rights and reducing binary divisions and inequalities, especially through the preservation and expansion of indigenous languages. However, AI technologies must evolve through the ongoing critiques and diverse dialogues to truly gain the resilience and legitimacy it needs.

The Small Ethnic Minority Cultural Institution Act, 2010 legally commits to the preservation of the languages, cultures, and heritages of the indigenous peoples in Bangladesh. Meanwhile, one of the 12 stated objectives of the National Innovation and Intellectual Property Policy, 2018 is to "make the citizens of the country more informed, aware, and skilled regarding intellectual property." Bangladesh needs to decide on officially recognising indigenous self-identity.

At the same time, multifaceted engagement with the indigenous communities must take place regarding their local knowledge, natural resource rights, and intellectual property, as well as the realms of digital technologies and AI. Before any decisions are made, indigenous communities must be introduced to fundamental concepts such as global power structures, the politics of AI, algorithmic bias, open and communal uses of AI technologies, and digital colonialism. Any decisions made without prior learning risk fostering both alienation and intense dispossession.

This article has been translated from Bangla.



VISUAL: MONOROM POLOK

The current AI frameworks have yet to set compelling examples of eliminating discrimination or safeguarding indigenous rights. In March 2024, a caution was raised at the UN General Assembly that AI must respect, protect, and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms. Respect for indigenous rights can serve as a powerful opportunity for AI technologies to curb widespread inequalities and risks. Without comprehensive safeguards, AI technologies are more likely to deepen digital inequalities than to create positive opportunities for indigenous peoples. At the 24th session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2021, a resolution was adopted to ensure meaningful inclusion of indigenous peoples in all aspects of AI development, application, and governance.

In Bangladesh's case, discussions around AI technologies must give due importance to the knowledge, values, and rights of indigenous peoples. The country must adopt AI governance policies that are aligned with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, global AI principles, and the values enshrined in the Universal Declaration of

operations linked to AI technologies have left the indigenous Atacameño territories in Chile endangered and devastated. Lithium and copper—key minerals used in digital hardware and electric supply systems—are being extracted from these indigenous territories. Reports indicate that the data centres release vast amounts of mercury, lead, and other toxic materials, causing severe public health risks.

Indigenous communities in Bangladesh live under severe environmental stress. The people of the hills have grown up with the wounds inflicted by the Kaptai hydropower development project. From Phulbari to Lawachara, from Lama to Bagdabarm, indigenous homesteads and their lives, nature, environment and ecology have been damaged by the so-called development projects. Natural forests have been cleared in indigenous areas to plant aggressive monoculture plantations. These regions are constantly targeted for commercial extraction, putting indigenous villages from Sherpur to Moulibazar at risk.

To safeguard the environment and ecosystems, the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of AI (2021) urges that member-states and the business community take into

Land rights can ensure the overall rights of indigenous peoples



Mangal Kumar Chakma
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Chittagong Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS)*.

MANGAL KUMAR CHAKMA

The aim of the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, observed annually on August 9, is to raise awareness and promote the rights, cultures, and unique contributions of indigenous populations worldwide. The day also serves to acknowledge the challenges indigenous peoples face and to strengthen international cooperation in addressing issues such as human rights, environmental protection, development, education, and health.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), adopted in 2007 and supported by Bangladesh, along with the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Convention No. 107 on Indigenous and Tribal Populations, which Bangladesh ratified in 1972, form the basis for recognising indigenous peoples' rights in the country.

Effective implementation of these rights also depends on national frameworks such as the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord, 1997 and the State Acquisition and Tenancy Act, 1950.

While past governments have expressed rhetorical support for the UNDRIP and have at times mentioned ILO Convention No. 169, Bangladesh has not ratified the latter. The rights to land, forests, natural resources, education, and cultural preservation are enshrined in ILO Convention No. 107. Given that Bangladesh is a state party to this convention, it bears legal responsibility to uphold and implement these provisions.

The reality is different, however. The traditional rights of Jumma people to their mouza and jhum-farming lands were taken away. The lands are now leased to companies from outside the CHT region and influential

individuals, which is a direct violation of ILO Convention No. 107. The establishment of tourist centres, declaration of reserve forests, expansion of military oversight, and construction of roads are also taking away the Jumma people's traditional land rights in the CHT.

Similar violations of ILO Convention No. 107 include the destruction and occupation of Paanjum belonging to the Khasi community in Sylhet, declaration of a reserve forest in Madhupur without any discussion with or consent from the Garos, occupation of cremation grounds of the Rakhines in the coastal areas and eviction of their villages for the Payra port without any compensation, occupation and eviction of lands belonging to indigenous peoples in northern Bangladesh, and the initiative to establish an export processing zone in the Bagdabarm area of Gaibandha district, instead of returning the land to the indigenous Santal people as per agreement.

Recognising Bangladesh's indigenous peoples as "indigenous" in the constitution is the first, most critical step towards securing their rights. The ongoing constitutional reform presents a historic opportunity to do so, honouring their right to self-identification under the UNDRIP. But a name is not

enough. This recognition must be backed by concrete constitutional guarantees for their rights to land, culture, and self-governance. Ultimately, international law protects their rights; whether they are called "tribal" or "indigenous," the fight is for both the dignity of the correct name and the tangible rights that must come with it.

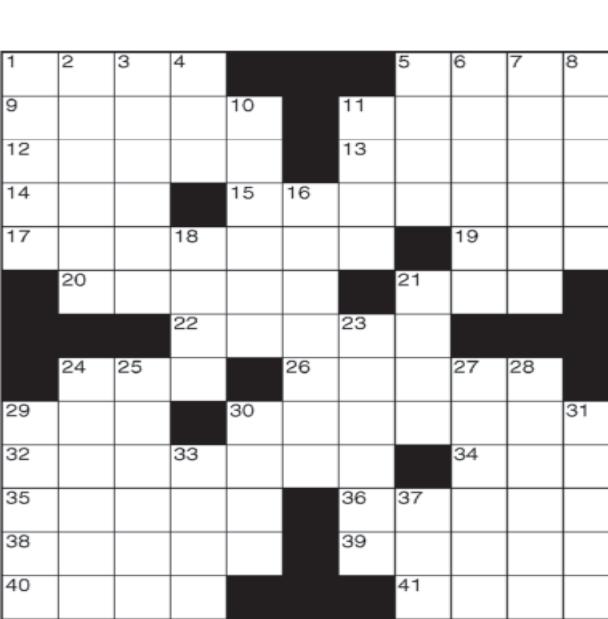
Many put forward excuses, saying recognising indigenous peoples as "indigenous" will threaten the sovereignty of the country. In this regard, Article 46(l) of the UNDRIP clearly states that "Nothing in this Declaration may be... construed as authorizing or encouraging any action which would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent States." Therefore, there is no possibility of the sovereignty of the country being threatened or undermined.

The framework of special governance for the CHT region lies in the proper implementation of the CHT Accord. The special governance system will become effective through the proper implementation of the three Hill District Council (HDC) Acts and the CHT Regional Council Act made in accordance with the CHT Accord. In this case, law and order, land management, forest and environment, tourism, secondary education,

development of communication systems, etc must be entrusted to the HDCs.

According to the Regional Council Act, the CHT Regional Council is tasked with the comprehensive oversight of the region. Its duties include supervising the administration, security, and development functions of the three hill district councils and coordinating all local government bodies and NGOs. The council is also responsible for upholding indigenous law, issuing licences for heavy industry, and directing the CHT Development Board. Crucially, the act mandates that the central government must consult the council before enacting any laws of the CHT, establishing it as the principal authority for regional governance.

or the indigenous peoples of the plains, achieving cultural autonomy requires dedicated initiatives to preserve their unique customs, traditions, and languages. Their cultural heritage is inextricably linked to their ancestral lands, forests, and natural resources. Consequently, any meaningful effort to protect their culture must also guarantee their customary rights over these territories. A critical legal foundation for this is the proper and full implementation of the relevant sections of the State Acquisition and Tenancy Act, 1950.



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

N	A	D	I	R	S	A	R	A	B
A	V	E	N	U	E	M	A	X	I
B	A	C	K	S	T	O	P	P	E
						I	S	S	U
V	I	N	O			T	R	A	P
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O	R	E				T	A	R	E
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J	U	M	P	S	T	A	R	T	E
I	S	E				O	T	T	A
B	A	N	D			P	O	S	T

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO
dsopinion@gmail.com.

Pivotal point for PRANTAR



While many artistes focus solely on one category of character and become selective, I do the opposite. When preparing for a more demanding role, I intentionally take on lighter ones—be it in fiction, TVCs, or OVCs. It not only keeps me practicing but also helps me understand camera dynamics and mentally prepare for the main role.

SHARMIN JOYA

In a short span of time, emerging talent Prantar Dastider has had the privilege of working with some of the most acclaimed directors in the industry. He began his journey with Goutam Koiri's *Antonagar* (2023). He quickly gained recognition through standout performances in Mostofa Sarwar Farooki's *840* (2024), Vicky Zahed's *Tithidir* (2024), and Ashfaque Nipun's *Jimmi* (2025)—projects that significantly boosted his career. In conversation with The Daily Star, the actor reflected on his recent work and shared insights into his creative process.

"I consider myself really lucky to have worked with some of the best directors of our time and to have learned so much early in my career—both on and off camera. It's a blessing I owe to my parents," shared Prantar. He also gained valuable experience behind the scenes, working as an assistant director, line producer, and executive producer, which deepened his understanding of the craft from both sides of the camera.

In just two years, Prantar has impressed audiences not only with his charm and looks but also with the range and depth of his performances, alongside the variety of roles he has taken on. "I have a very contented heart and mind when it comes to my career so far. But I'm not fully satisfied with my acting—I'm always eager to learn." Prantar believes consistent practice is the key to growth.

Sharing the secret to his unique approach to his craft, he admits to choosing not to limit himself to select roles. "While many artistes focus solely on one category of character and become selective, I do the opposite. When preparing for a more demanding role, I intentionally take on lighter ones—be it in fiction, TVCs, or OVCs. It not only keeps me practicing but also helps me understand camera dynamics and mentally prepare for the main role," he explained. For Prantar, this is both a method of growth and a means of livelihood.

At this early stage of his career, he believes working across all visual media is essential to



reach audiences and evolve as an actor. "I'm conscious about not repeating roles, and that comes with experience," he said. Despite receiving suggestions to avoid small-screen projects after working in OTT and film, Prantar refuses to discriminate between platforms. "Some advised me to wait for bigger projects or work only with established directors, but I believe every medium and project is an opportunity to learn and grow."

At a pivotal point in his career, Prantar Dastider followed his heart and embraced the small screen with full confidence. "I believed that if I allowed myself to explore my potential, time would bring me the right opportunities, and I had to prove that to myself first," he said.

Balancing confidence with humility, he added, "I try to keep my insecurities in check, hold my head high, and stay as humble as possible."

His experience behind the camera—as an assistant producer, line producer, and executive producer—shapes the way he approaches scripts. A filmmaking scholarship at BRAC University, offered in collaboration with Pathshala and BRACU, further deepened his understanding. "During that course, I learned to focus closely on scripts, and that training now helps me decide which stories are worth telling."

Prantar Dastider's journey has been shaped by passion, learning, and a strong sense of purpose. "I gained valuable insight during my filmmaking course at BRAC University, which I later applied while working as an assistant director. That experience helped me develop a strong sense of scripts and storytelling," he shared. Whether in lead or supporting roles, he feels grateful to

have contributed meaningfully to each project.

Working with Ashfaque Nipun had been a long-awaited dream of his. "I said yes without even knowing the role," he recalled. Equally surreal was the chance to work with Mostofa Sarwar Farooki—"something I never imagined."

Prantar began his small-screen journey with Rubel Anush, and it was definitely after landing on OTT. He went on to work with Vicky Zahed, Mabruj Rashid Bannah, Chayanika Chowdhury, Rafat Mozumder Rinku, and Riyad Mahmud—directors he deeply trusts.

He credits fiction for sharpening his acting, camera sense, and dialogue delivery. "Fiction gives an artiste the space to grow. Without it, I wouldn't be where I am today."

While he dreams of directing someday, for now, his focus remains on acting. "I hope to be a dependable actor who truly connects with audiences," he said, sharing his goal.

He is in the final stages of work on *Jibon Amar Bon*, a government-funded film (2022–2023 fiscal year) directed by Enayet Karim Babul and based on Mahmudul Haque's novel of the same title. His latest release

Five Go Wild, directed by Rahat Kabir is now available on the OTT platform Bongo.



PHOTOS: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

'MATERIALISTS'

Love, money, and everything in between

Celine Song's *Materialists* offers a witty, bittersweet spin on the age-old dilemma of marrying for love or money.

Dakota Johnson dazzles as Lucy, a stylish New York matchmaker torn between a wealthy stranger (Pedro Pascal) and a struggling ex (Chris Evans).

What begins as a glossy rom-com soon deepens into a soulful exploration of modern relationships and economic realities.

Song's screenplay is both piercing and poetic, filled with authentic, emotionally complex characters. Chris Evans delivers one of his better performances, shedding superhero polish for raw vulnerability.

Gorgeous visuals, mesmerising backdrops and a lush score enhance the film's melancholic charm, while sharp costume



design and clever dialogue keep things grounded in the present.

Moreover, a brief subplot adds value to the script by highlighting the unexpected challenges one may face when looking for love. It ultimately enriches Lucy's

character arc.

With its honest questions and elegant storytelling, *Materialists* proves that fairy-tale endings can still exist—only tempered by the longings and compromises of real life.

OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA

"Indigenous Peoples and AI: Defending Rights, Shaping Futures"

আদিবাসীদের অধিকার প্রতিষ্ঠা ও করিয়াবাদে পুরুষদের সাথে কোথো

১৯ আগস্ট ২০২৪, সকল ১০:০০ থটকা

কেন্দ্রীয় শহীদ মিনার, ঢাকা

বাংলাদেশ আদিবাসী কোরাম

NEWS

Biker dies after crashing into road divider

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

A 25 year-old man was killed yesterday morning when his motorcycle crashed into a road divider on the Dhaka-Mawa Expressway in Sreenagar upazila.

The victim, Mohammad Siam, son of Ali Akbar from Hatupara village in Madaripur, was reportedly returning to his Bangshali home in Dhaka after visiting Mawa Ghat the previous night.

According to Dewan Azad Hossain, station officer of Sreenagar Fire Service and Civil Defence, the accident occurred around 6:30am in Ompara on the Dhaka-bound lane of the expressway. Siam is believed to have lost control of his motorcycle.

Fire service personnel recovered his body from the scene and handed it over to Hashara Highway Police.

Mohammad Abu Naim Siddiqui, OC of Hashara Highway Police Station, said excessive speed was the likely cause of the crash, adding that Siam died instantly after falling onto the road.

Global outcry as Israel

FROM PAGE 12
Israeli taxpayers tens of billions, and lead to diplomatic bankruptcy".

The main campaign group for hostages' families also slammed the plan, saying it amounted to "abandoning" the captives.

The cabinet chose last night to embark on another march of recklessness, on the backs of the hostages, the soldiers, and Israeli society as a whole," the Hostage and Missing Families Forum said.

An expanded Israeli offensive could see ground troops operate in densely populated areas where hostages are believed to be held, local media have reported.

Other Israelis, meanwhile, offered their support.

"As they take control of Gaza, they will eliminate Hamas completely -- maybe not completely, but at least a good percentage of them," said Chaim Klein, a 26-year-old yeshiva student.

The Israeli army said last month that it controlled 75 percent of the Gaza Strip, mainly from its positions in the territory along the border.

Out of 251 hostages captured during Hamas's 2023 attack, 49 are still

DMCH overrun

FROM PAGE 3
outside Dhaka, adding to the hospital's growing burden.

During a visit to DMCH yesterday afternoon, many patients in the dedicated dengue ward on the fourth floor were found to be from outside the capital.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), 95 dengue patients have died and 23,410 have been hospitalised across the country this year.

Among the deaths, DMCH recorded the highest number at 23. It also ranks second in total dengue admissions, with 892 patients till yesterday.

Dr Ahsan urged local hospitals to follow national dengue treatment guidelines and provide care at the district level.

"Only patients in severe condition should be transferred to Dhaka. Often, patients are referred prematurely out of fear, even when their condition isn't critical," he said.

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He further stressed that patients in shock should only be transferred after initial stabilisation. "Unfortunately, many hospitals fail to do this, resulting in patients arriving in decompensated shock, where the risk of death is significantly higher."

Women

FROM PAGE 3
the July Kanya Foundation to continue working for women's advancement.

The event was chaired by Foundation President Jannatul Naim Promy and attended by several notable guests, including the mother of Shaheed Abbar Fahad, Stamford University student Nasrat Jahan Tumpa, the mother of Shaheed Nayma Sultana, and July warrior Ayman.

A total of 100 women were honoured with the "July Kanya Award 2025" at the programme.

Ex-secy alleges corruption by

FROM PAGE 12

the mass uprising -- at least eight advisers -- I can prove with evidence that they are involved in widespread corruption."

Sattar alleged that no major appointments or transfers are made without prior deals. "There is evidence of this. The matter has reached the highest levels of government through intelligence agencies," he said.

He also questioned why no action had been taken against an adviser whose personal officer allegedly has Tk 400 crore in their account and another adviser whose assistant personal secretary reportedly has Tk 200 crore. However, he did not name any of the advisers.

Sattar also raised concerns over the appointment of an "inexperienced individual"

to key posts in the local government ministry and the youth and sports ministry. He said Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus knows "what is happening there, but no steps are being taken".

While pointing out these concerns, Sattar acknowledged some achievements of the government over the past year. He noted that economic discipline has been restored, fascists were being brought to justice, the July Declaration had been announced, and the July Charter would be adopted soon.

He also termed the announcement of the national election date as a major success of the current administration.

In his speech as chief guest, M Siraj Uddin Miah, principal secretary to the chief adviser, said, "The

July uprising has shown that corruption will no longer go unpunished in this new Bangladesh."

He added, "The public administration is now at a crossroads -- either return to the old ways or engage in self-reflection to forge a new path. Everyone must decide which way to go."

The keynote speaker at the seminar was Dhaka University Vice-Chancellor Prof Niaz Ahmed Khan while the keynote paper was presented by Sanowar Jahan Bhuiyan, secretary of the Bangladesh Public Service Commission Secretariat.

The event was presided over by Nazrul Islam, secretary of the housing and public works ministry and president of BASA. Officers from various levels of the administration cadre were present at the seminar.

No govt interference in media

FROM PAGE 1

of expression or media independence over the past year.

Since taking office, the interim government has shown "exceptional restraint, avoiding interference in any media outlet's editorial, operational, or business aspects even in the face of misinformation and politically motivated broadcasts", it said.

"Television talk shows and columns have frequently featured false and incendiary claims about this government. Yet, we have neither censored nor retaliated," the statement reads.

The government has not censored, retaliated, or filed complaints. The interim government even paved the way for some media that had been forcibly closed down by the past regime to republish or return to on air, it said.

The statement also said journalists have had full access to advisers and special assistants to the chief adviser. No one has been denied interviews or briefings based on their outlet or editorial stance.

Describing NOAB's criticism of the reformed accreditation system as "misplaced and misinformed", the press wing said the previous system was deeply compromised, allowing access to non-journalists including politicians, lobbyists and opportunists who used it to unfairly influence policy.

That compromised structure has been replaced by a temporary pass system, ensuring only genuine journalists retain access to the Secretariat to restore integrity to a process that had been corrupted, it said.

The press wing said the previous accreditation policy also pressured accredited journalists to toe the government line. Some humiliating clauses that undermined their constitutional rights have been amended. The process of issuing fresh accreditation cards with extended renewal period is underway, it added.

The statement said journalists were let go due to editorial and corporate decisions by media owners, not under any instruction or pressure from the

interim government.

The statement also reads, "We are fully committed to the physical safety and dignity of all citizens, including journalists." Ensuring their protection is a shared responsibility of the media, government, and law enforcement. It also said the government is considering promulgating "Journalists' Protection Law" to strengthen legal safeguards and reduce intimidation as recommended by the Media Reform Commission.

"While we remain open to constructive criticism, we suggest that NOAB look internally before attributing blame," the press wing said.

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Family members and locals demanded a proper investigation and immediate arrest of the killers to ensure exemplary punishment.

Protesting the killing, journalists from various media outlets formed a human chain in front of Phulbaria Upazila Parishad Chhatar yesterday morning, organised by Phulbaria Press Club.

Grieving family seeks justice

FROM PAGE 3

"Tuhin managed food and medicines for me and his mother, Sabahia Khatun Bakul, 80. He sent Tk 1,000 through bKash for my medicines and food and said he would send more money for expenses shortly," Jamal said.

This was the second major blow for the family, he added, as his eldest son Jasim Uddin had died of cancer some 15 years ago. While Jasim's death had devastated the family, Tuhin's earnings had kept them afloat. "Now all hopes are gone, as the other three sons have to manage their own families with their

meagre incomes," Jamal said.

Tuhin's mother became speechless upon hearing the news of her son's death, staring vacantly at the visitors. His elder sister, Shahida Akter Ratna, said she was in Sylhet at her daughter's home.

"I visited a doctor in Sylhet for my illness and spoke to Tuhin on Thursday afternoon about the doctor's reports. While we were talking, the call suddenly got disconnected due to poor network. Later, I tried repeatedly but could not reach him. At night, we got the news of his death,"

she said, breaking into tears.

Neighbour Habibur Rahman said Tuhin visited home occasionally but was known as a good soul to his family, relatives, and neighbours.

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26km highway in Natore turns

FROM PAGE 4

free for heavy vehicles. Drivers often speed and overtake recklessly on this two-lane road, which leads to accidents," he said.

He said there are five high-risk spots on the highway -- Razzaker More, Rijur More, Tormuj Pump, Armari Bridge, and the 10 No. Bridge -- mostly due to sharp turns.

Drivers said the road is too narrow for safe movement.

Md Mahabub Hossain, a driver of Shishir Special Travels, said, "We try to cover time on this road because other highways are more congested, but the two lanes here are not enough for safe driving."

Md Alhaz, a driver of Siam Paribahan, said, "There's no divider on this road. Vehicles move fast in both directions on the narrow lanes, and that's the main problem."

Md Shawkat Ali Khokon, a CNG driver who uses the service lane beside the highway, said drivers

frequently try to overtake on the narrow lanes, which leads to accidents.

According to police, driver negligence and disregard for traffic rules are major causes behind the frequent accidents. "We have installed many signboards showing speed limits and warning against overtaking, but drivers ignore them," said OC Ismail.

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Md Kamrul Hasan, executive engineer of the Natore Roads and Highways Department, said road expansion is in progress. "The government has already approved a project to widen the highway to four lanes up to Bonpara. The next phase will include the Bonpara-Hatikumru section," he said.

Md Shawkat Ali Khokon, a CNG driver who uses the service lane beside the highway, said drivers

approved within a year. Once completed, there will be a road divider," he added.

He also said while the current two-lane road is manageable for vehicles, drivers must follow speed limits to ensure safety.

Their first international order, shipped to Saudi Arabia, marked a turning point.

That milestone led to a growing customer base in Qatar, Dubai, Oman, and Bahrain, and eventually in the UK, Italy, and Germany.

Receiving that first international order was nerve-wracking," Shanta said. "I kept wondering whether it would arrive safely? But once we got positive feedback, it felt amazing."

She said over half of the products they have sent abroad so far were delivered personally through people who just wanted to take some deshi achar to their relatives abroad. "Apart from that, we sometimes use courier services to ship them internationally."

Nasima added, "I treat my daughter-in-law like my own daughter. That's

BNP, allies to contest polls unitedly

FROM PAGE 1

members Nazrul Islam Khan and Selima Rahman were present.

Nearly 60 leaders spoke at the event participated by top leaders of the 12-party alliance -- Jatiyatabadi Samamona Jote -- and the Labour Party, expressing their full trust in Tarique's leadership.

The BNP said that after Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus announced that the election will be held in February next year, the party has taken the initiative to talk with like-minded parties to strengthen ties and exchange views.

Calling on everyone to stay alert regarding the July Declaration and the polls, Tarique said no one should be able to sabotage the election, and all pro-democracy forces must stay united to protect the people's right to vote.

In his opening speech, Tarique said, "Through your unity, our long struggle brought down fascism in the July student-worker people's uprising."

"Through the upcoming election, with the people's vote, we will be able to build a democratic welfare state

DHAKA SATURDAY AUGUST 9, 2025

SRABAN 25, 1432 BS

The Daily Star

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in the election and form the government under his leadership. He assured us that he will properly value everyone."

Tarique told the meeting that in the coming days, any conspiracy over the election would be confronted together and that the BNP and its partners would work jointly to solve any crisis.

Jatiya Ganotantrik Party's Khandaker Lutfar Rahman said, "In the coming days, we will stay united in any protest. We will face any conspiracy together."

During the one hour meeting, Tarique urged us to stay alert and form the relationship between the BNP and its like-minded allies. Tarique further said the BNP and its allies would move forward in unity and that those who made sacrifices in the democratic movement would be given priority for the distribution of seats.

Bangladesh LDP Secretary General Shahadat Hossain Salim said, "We have been in the movement with Tarique Rahman for the last 17 years. In the future, we want to take part

Western analysts.

The broader US-India defence partnership, which includes intelligence sharing and joint military exercises, continues without hiccups, one of the Indian officials said.

India also remains open to scaling back on oil imports from Russia and is open to making deals elsewhere, including the US, if it can get similar prices, according to two other Indian sources.

Trump's threats and rising anti-US nationalism in India have made it politically difficult for Modi to make the shift from Russia to the US, one of the people said. Nonetheless, discounts on the landing cost of Russian oil have shrunk to the lowest since 2022.

India's petroleum ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

India's deepening security relationship with the US, which is fuelled by their shared strategic rivalry with China, was heralded by many US analysts as one of the key areas of foreign policy progress in the first Trump administration.

India is the world's second-largest arms importer and Russia has traditionally been its top supplier. India has in recent years however, shifted to importing from Western powers like France, Israel and the US, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute think-tank.

The shift in suppliers was driven partly by constraints on Russia's ability to export arms, which it is utilizing heavily in its invasion of Ukraine. Some Russian weapons have also performed poorly in the battlefield, according to

Trump administration.

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Their reputation continues to grow, both online and among local buyers.

Sharmin Sultana, a schoolteacher and regular customer, said, "Shanta's homemade naru and mango-chalta pickle are always stocked in my

FICTION

Give back the forests, take away this city



ILLUSTRATION: AMREETA LETHE

"So many people from our village got jobs. The village children can now study at the mill school. People go to the mill's hospital for treatment. There's a daily market now."

ABDULLAH ZAHID

Every night, a market forms near the mill gate. When it's time for that market to close, Fulbanu stands on the high bank of the pond, waiting for her husband's return. The raised bank has been especially useful for her; it's like a watchtower. From there, she can see for a great distance.

In their village, there used to be a weekly market, the Kaliachapra market. After the sugar mill was established, however, a small town soon grew around it, and a new daily market formed near the mill gate. It was created for the convenience of the mill workers. At first, a few villagers would bring their homegrown vegetables, cow's milk,

and fish caught from the river to sell in front of the mill gate. Later, the mill authorities provided space near the gate and built some small stalls. Then several grocery stores opened there. The market was called the Mill Bazaar.

Fulbanu's husband, Syed Ali, goes to the market after finishing his work in the field. The extra milk, fruits, and vegetables from their farm are brought to the market by the farmhand, who sells them at a designated price. Meanwhile, Syed Ali spends his time chatting at Jagar's tea stall near the mill gate. When everything is sold, the farmhand brings the money to him. With that money, Syed Ali sometimes buys fish brought from the city, or sometimes meat. He also buys goods

from the grocery stores. Previously, one had to wait for the weekly market day to buy such items.

While waiting with Fulbanu on the bank of the pond, Sajal says, "Grandma, isn't it great that the mill was built?"

Without waiting for an answer, he continues. "So many people from our village got jobs. The village children can now study at the mill school. People go to the mill's hospital for treatment. There's a daily market now."

Even though Fulbanu had never learned to read or write, life had taught her many lessons. From her experience, she understood that her grandson saw the mill only in a positive light.

With a deep sigh, she replied, "No, my dear."

Fulbanu's voice was soft, and she brushed her grandson's hair with trembling fingers.

"Even though the mill has brought some good, it has also caused a lot of harm. Now, all night long, tractors roar past, raising clouds of dust, and their noise breaks my sleep. We never used to sleep under mosquito nets, but now, because of the mill's waste, mosquitoes lay eggs there and invade our village. The smoke from the mill scatters ash onto our trees, and we don't get as many mangoes as we used to. Many of our people are suffering from asthma. And it's not just the air or the mosquitoes. The mill drains dirty water into the canal where children used to bathe and catch little fish. Now the water stinks, and no one dares to go near it. The once clear night skies are often fogged with smoke, and stars that used to twinkle above our rooftops are hidden. The peace of the village and its gentle rhythms are gone."

"The mill has brought strangers, too—tricksters and fraudsters. Our own Moti Mia took money from people, promising them jobs, and then vanished. That never used to happen before. There's more tension now. People argue over money, over land, even over market stalls. Who knows what more will happen in the days to come? Only Allah knows."

After answering her grandson's question, Fulbanu sat still for a long while, her eyes lost in the fields beyond the yard. Memories floated back like dust in the wind. In every household, there used to be cows, and any extra milk was used to make curd, payesh, or firni. If a baby was born, neighbors would bring milk in exchange for bottle gourds, pumpkins, or radishes—no money needed, just love and mutual care. The new market had brought opportunities, yes. People earned more, sold their vegetables, fruits, and even fish from their ponds.

But something had changed. The warmth of simple living had faded. Kindness was being replaced by monetary calculations. Where laughter

once rang during neighborly chats over a cup of tea, there were now hurried glances and guarded words.

Fulbanu felt a quiet ache in her chest. There was one more thing which she didn't say to her grandson. In the past, when the sun dipped and the fields quieted, her husband, Syed Ali, would return home, wash up, and sit beside her under the dim light of a kerosene lamp. He would tell her stories—about his youth, the fields, the festivals, and the dreams he once had. She would chew betel leaves, and give some to him from her brass container, and they would talk for hours. These days he returned from the market drained, silent, and heavy-eyed. Dinner was followed immediately by sleep. The cherished conversations—the ones that kept their hearts close—had disappeared like dew in the morning sun.

As Fulbanu blinked away her thoughts, she saw Syed Ali walking slowly along the narrow path between the fields, a three-battery torch in his hand, his posture slightly bent under the weight of his years. The fireflies danced gently around him, unaware of all that had changed. Her grandson watched too, sensing something in her silence.

"Didi," he asked quietly, "are you sad?"

She smiled faintly, placing a hand on his shoulder.

"No, shona. Just remembering."

But in her heart, she knew—some things that are lost never come back. Not the stars, not the mangoes, and sometimes, not even the long, quiet talks under the moonlight.

This is the second part of a two-part story.

Abdullah Zahid is a Bangladeshi-American writer, librarian, and cultural commentator based in New York. He began his literary journey as a columnist for *Jaijaidin*, where his widely read column "Manhattan Diary" was later published as a book of the same name. The second edition of the book was released in 2024.

NONFICTION

Kumu: Nani's salt

Chapter 1, section 2

LAZEENA MUNA

My nani's nickname was Bokul—like the flower. In English, it's called the Spanish Cherry or *Mimusops elengi*, though no translation quite captures its softness. The Bokul tree is tall and unassuming, often overlooked until it blooms. Its flowers are tiny, pale yellowish-white, with a scent so deep and lingering it seems to float long after the petals fall.

They bloom quietly at night. By morning, the ground beneath the tree is scattered with fallen blossoms, as if the tree had shed dreams in its sleep, quiet and deeply personal. At dawn, girls and sometimes boys gather beneath the Bokul tree, lifting each fallen flower with care, as if each one holds a blessing. The faint yellow-white blooms are collected in the ends of scarves or bamboo baskets, destined to be placed around khopas, slipped onto wrists, or simply inhaled. It's not just about beauty; it's about wearing a scent that stays with you, a small act of peace that softens the sharp edges of the day.

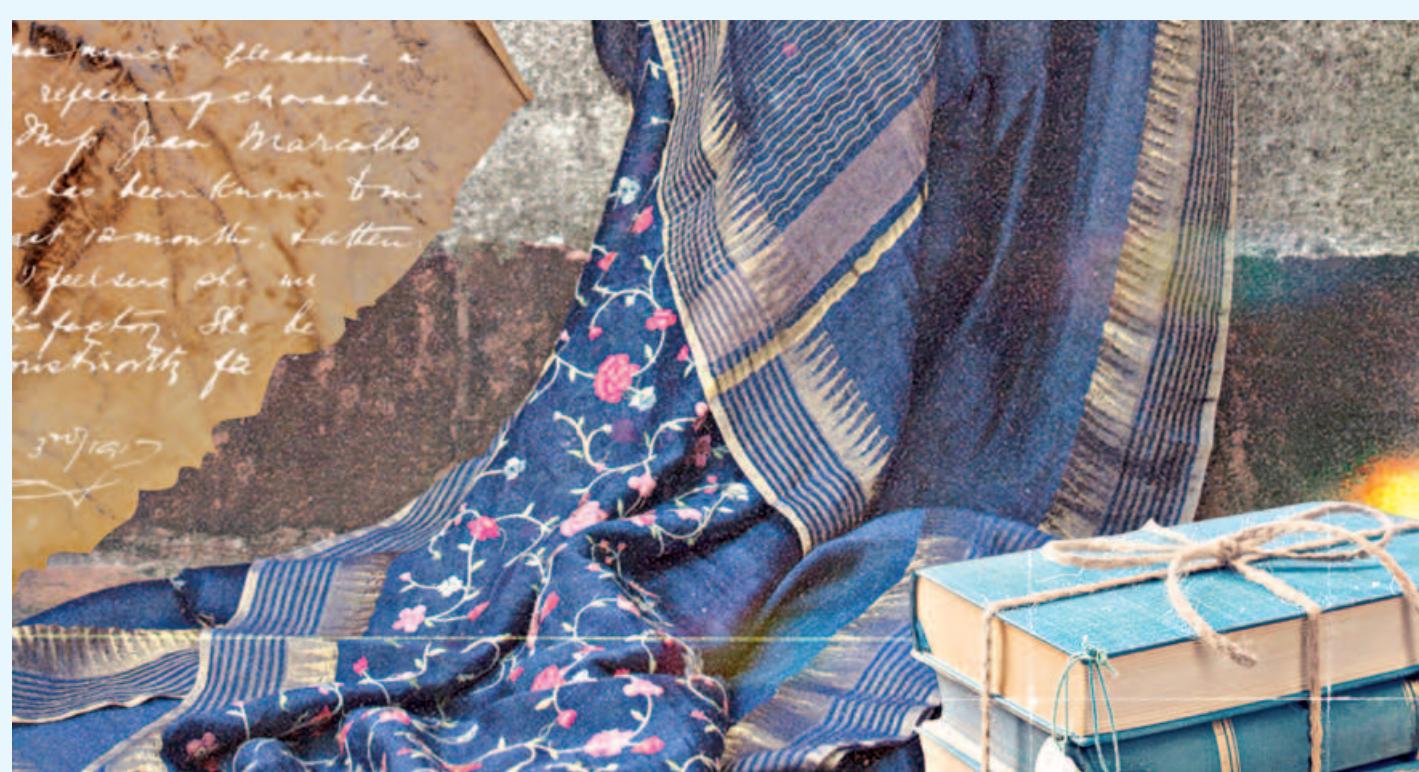
My nani was much the same. She moved through her day quietly, unassumingly, like the scent of the flower she was named after. She was taken for granted, as women often

tracks and destinies a railway man, moved with timetables and transfers, and for a brief, shining moment, the family lived near a school. And so she went, bangles jingling, slate in hand, Bangla blooming on her tongue.

She was quick with language, quicker with wit, curiosity, and intelligence. But in homes where duty pressed against every wall, intelligence in a girl was an indulgence, a temporary distraction. Not something to be nurtured. Not something to last.

When her mother fell ill, nani stepped into the silence of unpaid labour. No farewell. No choice. Just the quiet shifting of roles, keeper of the house—laundry, rice and lentils, and firewood. She didn't ask why. Women like her rarely did. Not aloud. Her dream for education crashed. Her father instead turned to the boy, the one who would marry her someday, and poured the family's future into him: books, encouragement, ambition. He was the chosen path. She was the hands that cleared it. A life of her own was not a conversation had. Not for her. Not then.

My grandfather, Mosharraf Hossain, was "Gobore podo phool"—a lotus growing out of the filth. His merit shone bright enough to blind my great-grandfather. He



DESIGN: AMREETA LETHE

Books brought home by the children, borrowed from neighbours, forgotten in school bags or rescued from the damp corners of someone's almirah. Dog-eared magazines tucked under piles of folded sarees in drawers that smelled of mothballs and camphor. They waited for her faithfully. They knew she would return.

are, but like the fragrance of Bokul, her presence was felt, steady, grounding. She brought a stillness that held the household together—necessary and full of grace.

She grew up in Assam, in the railway quarters, walls the colour of old tea, mornings blurred with coal smoke, the whistle of trains slicing through the stillness like unfinished sentences. Her father, who was a railroad official under the British Raj, a man who believed in building

handpicked my nana for his daughter, not for his family, not for his charm, but for his intelligence. My nana was able to earn his degrees from a prestigious university in Kolkata, funded by my nani's father. It was part of the agreement, a promise of marriage to his daughter. A merit match, designed to secure an educated husband for her, with a faint promise of love lingering beneath the arrangement.

Nani's rebellion didn't arrive like

thunder. It didn't raise its voice or slam doors. It came instead in the rush of afternoons, in slivers of time stolen from the tyranny of chores. Her protest was made of smaller things—quiet, stubborn, fiercely her own. Moments carved out like prayer beads from the long rosary of the day. When the rice had boiled, when the knives were rinsed, when the sweat on her back had dried into salt, she would lie down. On the floor. The cool cement kissing her cheek, as if the earth itself had been waiting for her to pause.

The ceiling fan hummed above, its blades lazy with heat, whispering lullabies to no one in particular. The house, finally done needing her, exhaled. And in that breathless space, she read.

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magazines tucked under piles of folded sarees in drawers that smelled of mothballs and camphor. They waited for her faithfully. They knew she would return.

She read with the urgency of someone who had once been denied. As if every sentence restored a breath she didn't know she was holding. There were no exams, no applause, no audience. Just pages and silence. And a woman reclaiming a piece of herself that no one else could touch.

The books didn't demand. They didn't ask for salt or stillness, didn't tug at her saree or cry from a distant room. They waited, quiet and sure, asking only to be opened. And in that waiting, they became hers. The only thing in the house, besides her breath, that belonged to her without question, without noise.

In time, all four daughters, and the three sons too, walked barefoot and brave through

the unbeaten paths, winding shortcuts, and narrow backyards of the Bogura police line, that led to the tin-shed classrooms of Latifpur Primary School. And my grandmother, who fought battles too heavy for her small frame, battles that never quite surrendered, found in her daughters' lives a kind of rebellion, a quiet, unspoken triumph. Not her freedom, perhaps. But theirs.

"Kumu" is a living memoir of Selina Hossain's early life, told through carefully chosen themes and reimagined by her daughter, Lazeena Muna. Section 1 of Chapter 1 was published on Selina Hossain's birthday, 14 June.

Lazeena Muna writes occasionally, weaving together gender and politics, and often exploring memory, movement, and meaning.

'They're a breath of fresh air'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh stormed to an emphatic 8-0 victory over Timor-Leste in their second match of the AFC U-20 Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers in Laos yesterday to top Group H, thanks to a hattrick from Trishna Rani Sarkar.

Following a confident 3-1 win over hosts Laos in their opening game, expectations were high for an easy outing against Timor-Leste, especially after their 9-0 loss to South Korea. However, the opening quarter-hour posed a surprising challenge for Peter Butler's side.

The physically dominant and determined Timor-Leste side managed to unsettle Bangladesh early on, threatening to score twice -- first denied by a sharp save from Swarna Rani Mandal, and then by a goalline clearance from Joynob Bibi Rita.

"We were a little bit sloppy in the first 10 minutes," Butler admitted after the game. "But I told the girls not to chase goals -- to focus on creating chances, to be patient, and the goals would come. I'm delighted with their response. They're a breath of fresh air."

The breakthrough came in the 20th minute through Sinha Jahan Shikha, after which Bangladesh settled into their



Forward Trishna Rani Sarkar lines up a shot during Bangladesh's group fixture of the AFC U-20 Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers against Timor-Leste at the New Laos National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: BFF

rhythm and took complete control of the match. Interestingly, the first three goals came from corners -- an area that clearly paid off.

"We got a bit lucky with Shanti Mardi's goal that went straight in, but you

make your own luck in football," Butler said. "Shikha was excellent today -- her performance stood out."

With confidence growing, Bangladesh's technical superiority soon overwhelmed Timor-Leste, as the goals

kept flowing and the players showcased precise passing, smart positioning, and well-rehearsed movements.

Apart from Trishna's treble and one each from Shikha and Shanti, goals also came from Mosammat Sagorika, Nabiran Khatun and Munki Akter.

Despite the dominant scoreline, Butler remains focused on the bigger challenge ahead -- a crucial tie against South Korea, who however labored to a 1-0 win against Laos in the second match of the day. That result meant Bangladesh edged South Korea to the top spot on more goals scored as both teams have a positive goal-difference of 10 after two matches each.

The Bangladesh coach, however, was wary of the challenge expected from the Koreans.

"We experimented a lot during the SAFF tournament, but this is a completely different level," Butler noted. "Korea are a polished outfit with great quality. On paper, we're not in their league. They've spent millions and millions in development."

"We've got everything to play for. We'll give our best shot," the Englishman said. Regardless of the result, we must learn lessons and continue doing things the right way."

TRANSFER CORNER

United land Sesko, Liverpool ready fresh Isak bid

AGENCIES

From Manchester United's latest attacking addition to PSG's defensive reinforcement, here's a look at the latest moves and rumours in the transfer market:

Man Utd seal £74m Sesko deal

Manchester United have agreed a £73.7 million package with RB Leipzig for Slovenia striker Benjamin Sesko. The deal includes a guaranteed £66.3 million, with the rest coming in performance-related add-ons.



Sesko, 22, is expected to complete his medical on Friday before signing at Old Trafford. Newcastle were also in the race, but United moved decisively for the forward, who has netted 39 goals in 87 appearances for Leipzig. Sesko is big, strong, quick, good in the air and a fine finisher. He was one of the fastest strikers in the Bundesliga with this speed clocking at 35.7km/h, and had the best aerial success rate amongst strikers.

Garnacho agrees personal terms with Chelsea

United could also raise funds through the departure of winger Alejandro Garnacho, who has agreed personal terms with Chelsea, reports Fabrizio Romano. The two clubs, however, remain apart on valuation. As a home-grown player, any transfer fee potentially up to the £60 million United wants would be recorded as pure profit from a profit and sustainability perspective, giving them room to pursue other targets. One of those could be Brighton's Cameroon midfielder Carlos Balem, who is on United's radar.

PSG bring in Zabarnyi and Chevalier

PSG have bolstered their defence by signing Ilya Zabarnyi from Bournemouth for £56.3 million plus add-ons. The 21-year-old Ukrainian centre-back has penned a five-year contract.

PSG also secured Lucas Chevalier from Lille for around £35m. The 23-year-old goalkeeper, recently nominated for the Yashin Trophy, played a pivotal role in Lille's Europa League qualification last season. Chevalier's arrival raises questions over Gianluigi Donnarumma's future, with reports suggesting PSG sporting director Luis Campos has promised the Frenchman significant game time for his ability with his feet would align more with Luis Enrique's style of play.

Slot hints at fresh Isak bid

Liverpool manager Arne Slot has not ruled out a renewed attempt to sign Newcastle striker Alexander Isak, even after having a £110 million bid rejected. Newcastle are believed to be holding out for around £150 million -- which would be a British transfer record.

The Reds have spent nearly £300 million under Slot, with Darwin Nunez expected to join Al Hilal in a £46 million move to help offset that expenditure.

Gender inequality in Bangladesh cricket laid bare, again



There is a difference between a cricketer and a woman cricketer, my friend.

Bangladesh captain Nigar Sultana Joty wrote in a post on her official Facebook page yesterday, pointing to the gender-based inequality that persists in the sport.



SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

In the past few months, the women's cricketers of Bangladesh have faced gross neglect from two of the leading cricketing entities in the country -- the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and the Cricketers Welfare Association of Bangladesh (CWAB) -- in two different instances.

The BCB, the game's governing body in Bangladesh, failed to arrange any international series for the national women's team since they qualified for the ICC Women's World Cup in the qualifiers - in two different instances.

Because of this, Nigar and Co will travel to India next month for the mega event without any real match practice. The BCB's solution for it -- arranging a few practice matches for the women's team players against the men's U-15 side this month at the BKSP.

Meanwhile, CWAB recently held a few meetings ahead of its upcoming election on September 4, where many current and former men's national team cricketers were present, however, no women's cricketers were in attendance.

The neglect from the BCB must be disappointing for the women's cricketers, however, it could not have been a surprise as when it comes to ensuring equity in men's and women's cricket, the BCB lags severely behind the global curve.

Right now, India, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa give the same match fee for men's and women's cricketers while

other countries are working towards it. Meanwhile, a significant pay gap remains between the men's and women's teams in Bangladesh, and there is hardly any talks of reducing it.

However, the neglect from CWAB should sting worse for the women's cricketers, as unlike the BCB, this organisation, which has been operational since 2004, is run by the cricketers for the cricketers in Bangladesh.

Therefore, not getting invited for the meetings makes it apparent that for this organisation, or at least for the people running it, women's cricketers are an afterthought at best.

This blatant neglect was captured perfectly by the women's team captain Nigar Sultana Joty in a one-lined post on Facebook on Friday morning, which read, "There is a difference between a cricketer and a woman cricketer, my friend."

All-rounder Rumana Ahmed then followed it up with a much more detailed rant, where she questioned, "Recently, there has been much discussion about CWAB. While many male cricketers were seen involved, there was not a single female cricketer in sight. So, where do we stand?"

When contacted by The Daily Star, Rumana claimed that they were not even communicated to attend any CWAB meetings.

"We are still unclear about how CWAB works. They arranged a programme a few days ago but we were not invited. In fact, there were no discussions about us... It's about valuing women's cricketers. At this

stage of my career, I'm feeling a lack of it," said Rumana, who even claimed that she doesn't even know whether she can vote in the upcoming CWAB election.

According to CWAB convenor Salim Shahed, the BCB contracted cricketers can apply for permanent membership at the organisation by paying an annual fee and if the women's cricketers apply and pay their dues, they can vote in the next election. They could also pay a hefty one-time sum of Tk 1,00,000 to gain a life-time membership.

In the last women's contract, which expired on June 30 this year, 18 were under central contract and another 30 were under a national contract.

Meanwhile, men's cricketer Mohammad Mithun, who attended all those CWAB meetings, claimed the anger of his female counterparts was the result of miscommunication.

"We have an ad-hoc committee right now. For any meeting, they are responsible to invite players. The ad-hoc committee also hadn't invited us. We went there out of our own accord.

"I think there is a misunderstanding. As they weren't present there, they didn't know what was happening. So, I think it's an emotional outburst." Whether it is passed off as an emotional outburst, or be seen as a cry for equality, the issue must be addressed soon otherwise these women's cricketers who gave the country its first triumph at the Asia Cup in 2018, will continue to feel neglected and cornered.

BCB to hold board meeting today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is set to hold a board meeting today to discuss key agendas, including appointing a sports management and consultancy firm to organise the upcoming Bangladesh Premier League (BPL).

"We expect the board to approve the sports management company on August 9. Once that's done, we can seek board approval on the model for hosting the BPL," BPL Governing Council Chairman Mahbub Anam told The Daily Star.

Five firms have presented their proposals -- four are international, while one local company has partnered with a foreign firm. However, concerns are surfacing over whether some companies may gain an advantage due to prior links with the board.

The BCB has considered two models: one where the selected firm acts solely as a service provider, and another where the firm purchases and executes the league. Sources indicate board directors are divided on the issue, while the second option is financially more lucrative, there are concerns over issues such as betting arising from the deal, as top management firms are reportedly leaning toward the first option. BCB directors are scheduled to meet an hour before the official meeting to discuss internally.

Other agenda items include domestic cricket scheduling, financial matters, and a report from the Anti-Corruption Commission.



GIANT-SLAYER MBOKO CROWNED MONTREAL CHAMPION

Canadian teenager Victoria Mboko conquered four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka 2-6, 6-4, 6-1 on Thursday, capping a fairytale run at the WTA Canadian Open with her first WTA title. The 18-year-old wild card rallied after dropping the first set to complete her fourth victory over a Grand Slam champion in the tournament, having already defeated Sofia Kenin, Coco Gauff, and Elena Rybakina en route to the final. Mboko, who was ranked outside the top 300 to start the season and had climbed to 85th entering the week, is now projected to rise to 34th in the world.

PHOTO: AFP

sembcorp



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Sembcorp North-West Power Company extends its heartfelt congratulations to the Government and people of Singapore on its 60th year of independence. In celebration of this significant milestone, we also honour the enduring partnership between Singapore and Bangladesh -- one built on mutual trust, shared values, and a common vision for sustainable development.

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Ex-secy alleges corruption by govt advisers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former secretary ABM Abdus Sattar yesterday alleged that several advisers of the government are involved in widespread corruption. Although he indicated one or two ministries, he did not mention any specific names. However, he claimed to have evidence to support his allegations.

Currently the general secretary of Dhaka Officers Club, Sattar was speaking as a guest at a seminar titled "Expectations of the July Uprising and the Future of Public Administration", organised by the Bangladesh Administrative Service Association (BASA), a platform of administration cadre officials.

The event was held at the BIAM auditorium in the capital.

Sattar, who is also serving as personal secretary to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, began his speech with harsh criticism about corruption within the administration cadre. He then said, "Our (civil servants') character may have already deteriorated. But those who have come to power today through

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Palestinians check the devastation following an Israeli strike that hit Gaza City's southern al-Zeitoun neighbourhood yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Onion, vegetable prices soar amid rain, supply crunch

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

After a brief respite over the past few months, the prices of onions, vegetables, eggs and fish have risen again in the capital's kitchen markets, placing additional financial strain on low- and fixed-income families.

Traders blamed the ongoing heavy rains, which have inundated many farmlands, as the main cause behind the price hike of various essentials, particularly vegetables.



Buyers at kitchen markets in Farmgate, Kazipara, Shewrapara, Karwan Bazar, Ibrahimpur and Kachukhet reported that prices of staples such as onions, vegetables, eggs and fish were higher than last week.

Saifur Rahman Chowdhury Sujan, general secretary of the Karwan Bazar Brihatpaikari Kacha Bazar Arot Byabasaiy Malik Samity, said that recent incessant rainfall across the country had flooded many vegetable farmlands, resulting in reduced supply and price increases.

Sajib Sheikh, proprietor of the wholesale onion shop Matri Bhandar at Karwan Bazar, said over the last two weeks, the wholesale price of locally produced onions rose by Tk 20 to Tk 22 per kilogramme.

He said two weeks ago, such onions were sold at Tk 46

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Global outcry as Israel to 'take control' of Gaza City

AGENCIES

Israel's military will "take control" of Gaza City under a new plan approved by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's security cabinet, touching off a wave of criticism yesterday from both inside and outside the country.

Nearly two years into the war in Gaza, Netanyahu faces mounting pressure to secure a truce to pull the territory's more than two million people back from the brink of famine and free the hostages held by Palestinian militants.

Israel's foe Hamas denounced the plan to expand the fighting as a "new war crime", while staunch Israeli ally Germany took the extraordinary step of halting military exports out of concern they could be used in Gaza.

Under the newly approved plan to "defeat" Hamas, the Israeli army "will prepare to take control of Gaza City while distributing humanitarian assistance to the civilian population outside combat zones", the premier's office said yesterday.

Before the decision, Netanyahu had said Israel planned to seize complete control of the Gaza Strip, but did not intend to govern it.

"We don't want to keep it," the premier told US network Fox News on Thursday, adding Israel wanted a "security perimeter" and to hand the Palestinian territory to "Arab Authority".

The new plan triggered swift criticism from across the globe, with China, Turkey, the UK, EU and the UN's rights chief issuing statements of concern. Arab nations also condemned the plan.

UN human rights chief Volker Turk said the plan must be

forces that will govern it properly without threatening us".

Israel occupied Gaza from 1967, but withdrew its troops and settlers in 2005.

Netanyahu's office said a majority of the security cabinet had adopted "five principles", including

➤ Germany suspends arms exports to Israel

➤ Hamas says Israeli plan "means sacrificing the hostages"

➤ Palestinians fear another forced displacement

"immediately halted".

Israel should instead allow "the full, unfettered flow of humanitarian aid" and Palestinian armed groups must unconditionally release hostages, he added.

"The Israeli government's decision to further extend its military operation in Gaza must be reconsidered," EU chief Ursula von der Leyen said on X.

China condemned the move.

"Gaza belongs to the Palestinian people and is an inseparable part of Palestinian territory," a foreign ministry spokesperson told AFP.

In a major shift, meanwhile, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz announced his country was halting military shipments to Israel, saying it was "increasingly difficult to understand" how the new plan would help achieve legitimate aims.

"Under these circumstances, the German government will not authorise any exports of military equipment that could be used in the Gaza Strip until further notice," he said.

Reactions in Israel were more mixed.

Israeli opposition leader Yair Lapid denounced the cabinet's move as a "disaster that will lead to many other disasters".

He warned on X that it would result in "the death of the hostages, the killing of many soldiers, cost

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About six months ago, party sources estimated that around 200 people, including at least 70 MPs, district-level party leaders, upazila chairmen, and mayors, had fled to greater Kolkata.

AL discreetly sets up 'party office' in Kolkata

Reports BBC Bangla

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In the bustling outskirts of Kolkata, a commercial complex has begun drawing unfamiliar visitors for the last few months.

Many of these individuals, just a year ago, were among the most powerful figures in Bangladeshi politics – the senior and mid-level leaders of the Awami League and its affiliated organisations.

According to a BBC Bangla report, the Awami League has set up a "party office" on the 8th floor of this complex.

The report said AL leaders began to come to India after former prime minister Sheikh Hasina fled to India on August 5, 2024, in the face of a mass uprising.

Hasina is believed to be somewhere near Delhi, and many senior AL and its affiliated bodies' leaders, including former ministers, have rented homes in and around Kolkata.

Initially, they used their homes for informal meetings and organisational tasks, while larger meetings were held in restaurants or rented banquet halls.

The 500-600 sq ft office now serves as a regular venue for party meetings.

According to the report, the office has no signboards or portraits of Sheikh Hasina or Bangladesh's founding president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, either inside or outside.

"There are no typical party office files here. We needed a discreet space for regular meetings, and this commercial

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Rare 'Hobbit' first edition auctioned for £43,000

AFP, London

A rare first edition of JRR Tolkien's "The Hobbit" sold for 43,000 pounds (\$57,000) at auction on Wednesday, after it was found during a house clearance in southwest England.

Purchased by a private collector in the United Kingdom, the book is one of 1,500 original copies of the British author's seminal fantasy novel that were published in 1937.

Of those, only "a few hundred are believed to still remain", according to the auction house Auctioneum, which discovered the book on a bookcase at a home in Bristol.

Bidders from around the world drove the price up by more than four times what the auction house expected for the manuscript.

"It's a wonderful result for a very special book," said Auctioneum rare books specialist Caitlin Riley.

"The surviving books from the initial print run are now considered some of the most sought-after books in modern literature," Auctioneum said in a statement.

Auctioneum unearthed the book during a routine house clearance after its owner passed away.



Coal is being illegally produced using specially designed clay furnaces to burn timber collected from nearby villages. The process not only strips the landscape of green trees but also fills the air with black smoke. The photo was taken in Siddhipasha of Jashore's Abhaynagar upazila.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Japan daily sues 'free-riding' AI firm Perplexity

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper, one of the world's biggest by circulation, is suing US-based AI firm Perplexity for allegedly "free-riding" on its content on its search engine.

The lawsuit filed Thursday is one of a slew by media companies worldwide against AI firms using their material and is the first by a major Japanese news organisation, Yomiuri said.

It accuses Perplexity of "free-riding" on the results of the activities of news organisations, which have invested a great deal of effort and expense".

A spokesman for the paper added that this "could have a negative impact on accurate journalism... and shake the foundations of democracy".

The lawsuit filed in Tokyo seeks damages of 2.2 billion yen (\$14.7 million), equivalent to 120,000 Yomiuri articles used "without permission" between February and June.

It is also seeking damages for lost advertising revenue, saying that

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PANCHHARI

life in nature's gentle embrace



JOYANTI DEWAN

Cradled in the rolling, green embrace of Khagrachhari's Panchhari, the small villages feel like a place where time slows down to match the rhythm of nature. At dawn, the sun's first golden rays rest gently on the hilltops before spilling into the valley, bathing the village in a warm, soft light. The air carries the scent of wildflowers, bamboo groves, and the deep, earthy aroma of the surrounding forest.

The narrow paths -- sometimes rocky, sometimes just well-trodden earth -- wind along the slopes, passing the shimmering cascades of the Barokumbh waterfalls. Their melody mixes with birdsong, weaving a soundtrack that belongs only to this place.

Panchhari's homes, crafted from bamboo and wood, wear roofs of tin or straw. In sunlit courtyards, crimson



PHOTOS : JOYANTI DEWAN

chilies, golden turmeric, and pale grains of rice lie drying in neat, colorful spreads. Women, draped in bright attire, begin their day early -- some stirring pots over wood-fired stoves,

others tending ducks and chickens, planting on jhum fields carved into the hillsides, or walking through the hilly terrain to fetch water. Men set off towards the bustling market or walk

to their orchards and vegetable plots high on the slopes.

Children travel miles on foot to reach school, their chatter and laughter

brightening the morning. Others, free from the day's lessons, climb trees for ripe fruit, race barefoot across the fields, and disappear into the bamboo thickets in search of adventure.

As dusk descends, cool breezes drift down from the hills, rustling leaves and carrying the scent of damp earth.

Stars spill across the velvet sky in uncountable numbers, casting their quiet light over the sleeping village.

In Panchhari, life moves with the seasons, anchored in the land and the sky -- simple, self-sufficient, and serenely beautiful. It is a place where nature is not a backdrop, but a constant companion.



KHARIA'S LAST SPEAKERS

Holding on to a fading world



Pius Nanuar, along with Dhirghu Kharia, his wife, and other Kharia language speakers from the Rajghat Tea Garden in Moulvibazar.

PHOTO: SREEJON PAL

"If we two die, this language will die with us," said Veronica, the elder of the two. Her voice trembles with emotion, aware that their mother tongue might vanish from this land forever.

MINTU DESHWARA

In the heart of Moulvibazar's Sreemangal upazila, inside the Bormachhara Tea Garden, a language is quietly slipping into oblivion. Spoken now only by two elderly sisters, Veronica Kerketa and Christina Kerketa, the Kharia language—once a vibrant medium of cultural expression—is facing imminent extinction.

The sisters, who belong to the tea garden, are the last fluent speakers of Kharia in Bangladesh. A language once spoken by an entire community is now confined to their conversations after work, spoken softly over evening meals and during daily chores.

"If we two die, this language will die with us," said Veronica, the elder of the two. Her voice trembles with emotion, aware that their mother tongue might vanish from this land forever.

The sisters, seven years apart in age, learnt Kharia from their parents, who were brought from Ranchi, India, by British planters during colonial times to work in the tea gardens. Veronica, now retired, and Christina, still a daily wage worker, are widows and live in separate houses within the same village. But they meet often and speak only in Kharia to one another.

They are also fluent in Bangla and communicate with others in Sadri or Bagan when needed. However, none of their children or grandchildren speak the language. "I tried to teach them," said Veronica. "But they had no interest. They prefer Bangla."

Christina echoed her sister's concerns. "Once we're gone, no one will speak Kharia here anymore. The government must take steps now, or it will be too late."

"Only a handful of ten to fifteen

people in Sreemangal can recall a few Kharia words," said Jaharlal Indwar Pandey, the head of the Kharia community in the area. "Our ancestors came from Ranchi to then Assam after 1884. They brought the language with them. Now, even though some of us can understand it, we don't know how to keep it alive."

Nestled in Bormachhara, the local Kharia community—just 24 families strong—comprises around a hundred people in total. But within this tight-knit group, the language that once bound generations together now lingers only in memory. There is no platform, curriculum, or organised effort to pass it on. No books, no schools, and no linguistic support. Without these, Kharia has steadily slipped away from daily life.

"Only my mother and aunt speak it,"

But on the ground, the reality appears much grimmer. Independent verification suggests only Veronica and Christina can speak it fluently.

Dr Mohammad Ashaduzzaman, Director of IMLI, acknowledged the urgency. "We are currently working on documentation and research on endangered languages, including Kharia, Kanda, and Rengmitchaya," he said. "Our team has already visited Sreemangal and plans to return. We're preparing proposals for the government and will hold regular awareness events and community discussions."

Despite this momentum, the absence of a structured education model continues to hinder progress. Dr Mashrur Imtiaz, Assistant Professor in the Department of Linguistics at Dhaka University, who conducted a

have a Kharia grammar book that I collected from India," Dr Imtiaz added. "Using this, a basic grammar can be developed for new learners so that the language can be preserved."

Pius Nanuar, a Kharia social activist who conducted a population study in early 2020, found around 5,700 Kharia individuals across 41 villages in Sylhet division. Despite recent government attention, tangible support remains limited. Visits from officials and IMLI signal growing awareness, but these gestures haven't yet translated into lasting initiatives.

What the community needs is simple yet vital—a language school with proper funding and resources. For now, the burden of preservation lies squarely on the Kharia people themselves.

Families try to pass down the language informally. Some even reach out to Kharia-speaking regions in India for materials. But these grassroots efforts, noble as they are, struggle without institutional backing.

Students from Jagannath University have created the docu-film *The Last Leaf*, focusing on the Kharia community of Bangladesh. With deep respect and authenticity, the film highlights the cultural richness, resilience, and challenges of the Kharia people. Director Shajnun Rahman emphasises the importance of preserving their language and culture, while Executive Producer Adnan Soykot underscores the power of storytelling to give voice to marginalised communities. *The Last Leaf* is a tribute to the dignity and heritage of the Kharia tribe.

Because Kharia is more than a means of communication. It is a vessel of the community's identity, history, and rituals. Letting it vanish would mean losing an entire heritage.

With sincere collaboration among the government, academia, and the Kharia community, there is still time to rescue the language—before its final echoes fade into silence.

Mintu Deshwara is a journalist at The Daily Star.



Young Kharia children listen as Veronica Kerketa speaks to them in their ancestral Kharia language at Bormachhara, Sreemangal upazila, Moulvibazar.

shared Hilarus Soreng, son of Veronica Kerketa. "When they talk to each other, the children laugh—they don't understand a word."

According to the International Mother Language Institute (IMLI), there are an estimated 4,000 to 5,000 Kharia speakers across Bangladesh.

field survey in 2018, estimated that fewer than 20 people in Sylhet still speak Kharia.

"I'm not aware of any institutional work or research on the Kharia language," he said. "There are no people who speak it, and no schools."

But there is a glimmer of hope. "I

"Most couldn't say what a home looked like"

In conversation with Nasir Ali Mamun—renowned photographer, writer, and author of *Ghor Nai*, a poignant chronicle of the lives, dreams, and despair of Dhaka's homeless.

The Daily Star (TDS): What inspired you to begin interviewing people living on the streets?

Nasir Ali Mamun (NAM): After the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, I pioneered portrait photography in the country. For over 30 years, I continued this practice, capturing portraits of prominent individuals from various walks of life. Over time, I started to feel that—being born and raised in the capital city—I should also pay attention to what lies beneath my feet, so to speak. I noticed that many small children—boys and girls—were on the streets. I began asking: why are they here? Are they beggars? I started investigating and eventually became involved with Prothom Alo.

Many of these people were concentrated in areas like markets, Sadarghat, Kamalapur Railway Station, and other locations where people arrived from different parts of Bangladesh. As I continued my inquiry, I realised that these people are not all homeless in the same way. There are two categories: those who live on the streets—sleeping and staying on the roads—and those who live in slums across different parts of Dhaka. The first group begs during the day or wanders around, perhaps hoping for some food or help. Some don't even beg; they just roam. They come from various districts and rural areas of Bangladesh. The main problem they face is poverty. Then there are issues like parental divorce, polygamy, or being separated from their parents at a young age. Many of these children never learn the whereabouts of their parents again, and vice versa. These are the truly homeless.

In contrast, those living in slums are not technically homeless. They have some form of shelter, however informal. But those without an address—they are truly without identity. Every human being has an address. But these people—these children—have neither a visible identity nor an address. In essence, they are the dispossessed, the address-less people. Isn't that astonishing? The government has no statistics on them. No NGO, to my knowledge, has worked specifically with those who are truly homeless. They sleep on the streets, all looking the same—lying down, sitting, roaming.

TDS: What was your interviewing style or

technique?

NAM: My main focus had always been on the children, though I did interview a few elderly men and women. But the children were at the heart of it.

I developed a set of seven common questions to identify who was truly homeless and who lived in slums or at least had some form of address. Just by asking those seven questions, I could differentiate between them. I then began conducting interviews using informal language—colloquial speech—transcribing exactly what they said, including their incorrect pronunciations. I noticed that many of the boys and girls, especially girls between the ages of 12 and 14 or 15, would often flee.



Cover of the book *Ghor Nai* by Nasir Ali Mamun.

The boys would too. I used to wonder—why do they run away? I treated them kindly.

Eventually, I discovered that this approach wasn't enough. I stopped carrying bags. I started taking just a small camera, a tiny tape recorder, wore old clothes, and began approaching them more naturally. Then they began to come to me—they felt I was one of them. Many



A snapshot from the book *Ghor Nai*. Sixty-year-old Abdus Sattar, captured on the streets of Dhaka, declares: "Most people in the capital will end up in hell."

of them said that people like me had come before—chhokra-baj, meaning undercover CID officers. The girls also said things like, "These people talk nonsense—they're bad people." They had already experienced much.

These street children sleep exposed—they have no protection, no homes, nothing. Their bodies, their desires—everything exists in a kind of liminal zone, like a no man's land between two countries. That's where these people truly exist.

And we, as a society, have created this situation. These people—homeless individuals—are not accepted anywhere. We don't give them jobs. Many of us say they are thieves, robbers, or that they will kill us and run away. These are the kinds of narratives that exist about them.

TDS: Was it difficult to publish these stories?

NAM: Normally, no one publishes this kind of writing. First, they said, "Why are you bringing this up? What daily newspaper gives space to these kinds of people?" I said, "Just give it a try—print one." One piece was published. Then, after two and a half months, I requested again and got another published. In the meantime, people like Humayun Ahmed, Latifur Rahman (the patron of Prothom Alo), and

Justice Habibur Rahman called up the editor, Matiur Rahman, and praised the writing, saying, "I want to read more." After the third piece, the column continued for almost three years—between 2002 and 2005.

TDS: What was the response to your series?

NAM: What surprised me most was the reach of these writings—they were read by everyone, from students in Class Five to elderly readers. The response was overwhelming. Two books eventually emerged from the series. The first, *Ghar Nai*, was published by Mowla Brothers in 2010. The second, *Charalnama*, came out in 2016, published by Agamee Prakashani. I co-authored it with poet Shakhawat Tipu.

He was conducting research based on these interviews. His work explores why these people come to Dhaka—what compels them to leave their homes. Within just three to three and a half years of arriving, their native or regional dialects

most couldn't describe it. They would simply say things like, "Room... room... room..." That was the extent of their understanding of 'home'.

TDS: Was there a moment during your interviews that left a lasting emotional impact on you—something you still carry with you today?

NAM: There was a boy named Shahadat. His father came looking for him after his story was published. I asked the man to stay nearby, as the boy was somewhere in Karwan Bazar and not easy to find. A few days later, I came across Shahadat on the street. Even then, he refused to tell me where he was sleeping. Eventually, I found out—he was living on a footpath across the road from Karwan Bazar, under an overbridge.

I asked his father to come with me one night. He arrived, his face wrapped in a gamchha—a poor man, no doubt about it. We began searching for the boy.

When I called out to him, Shahadat somehow recognised his father—not from his face, which was mostly covered, but from his clothes, his lungi, his worn shirt, his posture. Only his eyes were visible. And yet, Shahadat knew. He froze.

Then he ran to him.

I said, "Son, don't be afraid. It's your father—no one's going to hurt you."

And then—what I saw in that moment—I've witnessed only once in my life. The two of them embraced tightly, sobbing into each other's arms. It was overwhelming.

Another boy once said something to me that I've never forgotten: "I'll open every lock with the key of my heart." I was stunned. Where had he found such language? He used to sleep on the streets and earn a living repairing locks. I asked him, "You make keys so others can open their doors—but you're so poor, what will you use to unlock your own future?"

He replied, "I'll open it with the key of my heart." Isn't that extraordinary?

The interview was taken by Priyam Paul.

begin to vanish. They adopt Dhaka's hybrid, semi-standard street language. Only those from Chattogram and Noakhali tend to retain their original dialects; the rest lose theirs entirely. This blended Dhaka dialect becomes their new mother tongue.

In effect, a new kind of language is born—a language of the homeless. But it's more than just speech. Through it, we catch glimpses of their psychological landscape, their perceptions of society, and their views of wealth and privilege. These interviews reveal all of that. And why are they so distrustful of us? Because of how we treat them.

When I asked them what a home is like,



Nasir Ali Mamun



The Yarlung Tsangpo River winds dramatically through the Tibetan Plateau at the Great Bend, where it makes a sharp U-turn before descending into the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh.

WILL CHINA'S MEGA DAM ON THE BRAHMAPUTRA

threaten Bangladesh's future?

As the most downstream country in the Yarlung Zangbo-Sian-Brahmaputra-Jamuna River watershed, Bangladesh has reason to be concerned about any unilateral control of transboundary rivers by upstream nations, whether India or China.

MD. KHALEQUZZAMAN

The government of China has formally embarked on constructing what is projected to become the world's largest hydropower dam on the Yarlung Zangbo River, known downstream as the Brahmaputra in India and Bangladesh. This mega dam will comprise a cascade of five hydropower stations situated in Nyingchi, southeastern Tibet, and will be capable of generating 60,000 MW of electricity—roughly three times the annual electricity generation of Bangladesh. The groundbreaking ceremony was attended by Premier Li Qiang in July 2025. Once completed in 2033, the project, costing \$167 billion, will be the largest hydropower station in the world. The initiative aligns with China's broader energy ambitions as part of its "West-to-East Electricity Transfer Project", which aims at achieving carbon neutrality and promoting economic development in Tibet.

Technical feasibility studies for the

in transboundary rivers. These countries instead maintain bilateral treaties and memoranda of understanding to share flow information. India and Bangladesh share 54 transboundary rivers, but there exists only a non-functional treaty to share lean season flow in the Ganges River.

India and Bangladesh have both raised strong concerns over the potential hydrological, ecological, and strategic impacts on their economies and environments. A 2020 report published by the Lowy Institute, an Australia-based think tank, noted that "control over these rivers effectively gives China a chokehold on India's economy." The Chief Minister of India's Arunachal Pradesh, Pema Khandu, expressed concern that China could even use this as a sort of "water bomb." These concerns are legitimate. However, the irony lies in the fact that India's unilateral control of all 54 transboundary rivers shared with downstream Bangladesh has already been acting as a "chokehold"



China embarks on building the world's largest hydropower dam, raising concerns among downstream countries, including Bangladesh.

SOURCE: NATURAL EARTH; IN BOUNDARIES. JITESH CHOWDHURY, REUTERS.

the specifics and downstream effects of the project. Chinese authorities have claimed that the dam will not significantly impact downstream water flow and argue that the primary benefits will be renewable energy supply and local economic growth. They have promised to pay "special attention to ecological preservation", but have yet to offer detailed mechanisms for official cross-border consultations.

As the most downstream country in the Yarlung Zangbo-Sian-Brahmaputra-Jamuna River watershed, Bangladesh has reason to be concerned about any unilateral control of transboundary rivers by upstream nations, whether India or China. Environmental concerns regarding the construction of large dams on the Yarlung Zangbo River are extensive and multi-layered, encompassing ecological risks, hydrological impacts, economic losses, seismic hazards, and downstream effects on delta-building processes—particularly in the context of sea level rise caused by climate change.

Bangladesh receives about 70% of its lean season flow through the Brahmaputra-Jamuna River system. Any uncertainty or disruption in that flow will have devastating impacts on agriculture, irrigation, fisheries, navigation, and livelihoods.

There are also risks of sudden large water releases—whether intentional or accidental—posing serious flood threats to Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and downstream Bangladesh. Any run-of-the-river hydroelectric project alters the natural flow regime, making downstream flows more erratic and "flashy", which results in ecological and environmental disruptions.

Additionally, even run-of-the-river dams result in a loss of approximately 5% of the flow due to evapotranspiration, seepage, and other factors.

China has already constructed three dams on the upper Brahmaputra (Yarlung Zangbo) River and plans to build several more, including this megadam at the Great Bend. Regardless of their design, all these dams—run-of-the-river or not—will inevitably reduce downstream flow.

Large dams typically trap sediments, which can lead to riverbed degradation,

loss of soil fertility, collapse of local fisheries, and decline in migratory species such as hilsa and mahseer—species that are critical for regional livelihoods. Additional consequences include the intrusion of saline water in coastal regions of Bangladesh and a decline in sedimentation rates on the coastal plain, which are necessary to offset rising sea levels caused by climate change.

A study found that sediment flow in the Mekong River has reduced by about 50%, leading to degraded agriculture and diminished fisheries. A similar reduction in water and sediment flows prevails in the Ganges and Teesta rivers in Bangladesh due to upstream damming. In the 1960s, transboundary rivers carried over 2 billion tonnes of sediments to Bangladesh annually, which has declined to about 1 billion tonnes in recent decades. Dams reduce downstream sediment supply, increasing the erosive power of water and interrupting the natural land-building processes needed to stabilise riverbanks and the delta in Bangladesh.

Increased rates of riverbank erosion in recent decades along major rivers in Bangladesh—such as the Brahmaputra-Jamuna, Ganges, Teesta, and Meghna—have been reported by many researchers.

While some Chinese studies suggest dams may stabilise flows by releasing more water in the dry season and holding back floods during the monsoon, Indian officials and hydrologists dispute this, warning that upstream control could worsen floods or create sudden droughts through deliberate or accidental releases, particularly during political tensions or emergencies. The Brahmaputra is a vital source of water for drinking, irrigation, and hydropower for millions in India and Bangladesh. Officials in India's border state of Arunachal Pradesh have expressed concerns that the Chinese dams could "dry out 80% of the river passing through the Indian state", thereby threatening regional water supplies and agricultural livelihoods, while also potentially causing massive floods if water is suddenly released.

The lack of water-sharing agreements among the co-riparian countries, or transparent data, exacerbates these risks for downstream users.

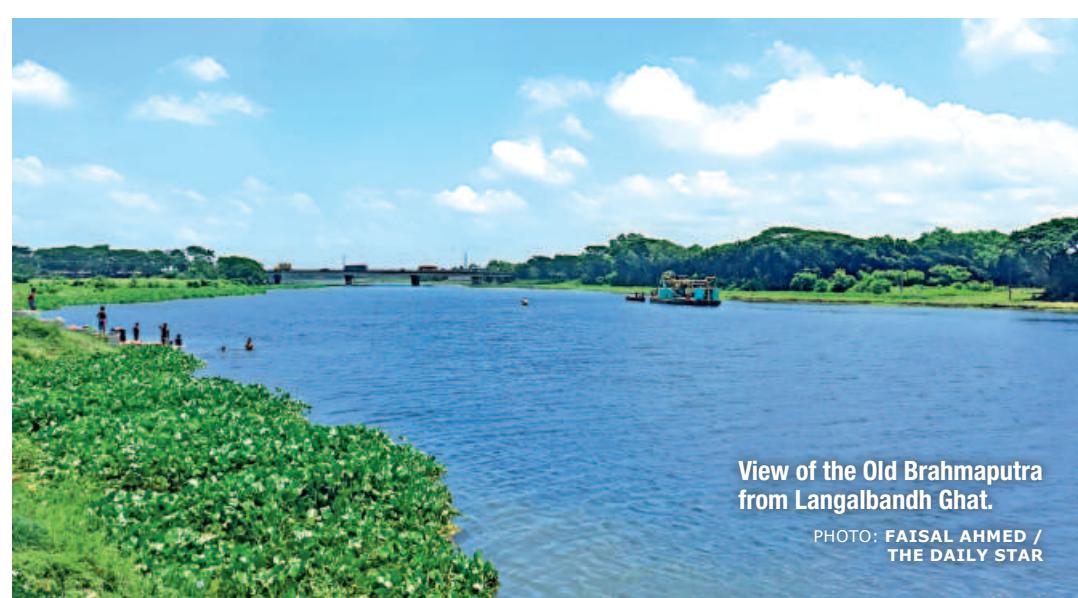
Despite claims of thorough geological

and engineering studies, the absence of published full feasibility reports or Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) remains a concern for downstream stakeholders and environmental observers. The dam is located in one of the world's most seismically active regions, near the site of the devastating magnitude 8.6 Assam-Tibet earthquake of 1950. Experts warn that a strong earthquake or landslide could cause catastrophic dam failures with severe downstream consequences—not only for ecology but also for human settlements and farmland.

In light of the current situation, a proper and technical response by the government of Bangladesh to China's proposed hydropower station should be multi-layered, assertive, and grounded in international water law and best practices for transboundary river governance. Drawing from expert commentary, global precedents, and Bangladesh's responses so far, the following ten steps are recommended by this author:

(a) Reiterate and expand the formal request to China for the release of detailed technical documents, specifically the EIA, Feasibility Study, Climate Impact Assessment, and Disaster Impact Assessment; (b) Actively pursue tripartite engagement—including India, the midstream country—for joint risk assessment and response planning on the Brahmaputra system. However, Bangladesh should forge a partnership with India on the Brahmaputra River issue in exchange for changes in India's behaviour towards downstream Bangladesh in managing transboundary rivers; (c) Propose or join basin-wide river management initiatives including China, India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and possibly Nepal, to ensure that all stakeholders' concerns are addressed before project commissioning; (d) Expedite ratification of the 1997 UN Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses to enhance Bangladesh's standing as the lowest riparian state and to leverage international legal norms for equitable and reasonable use; (e) Explore options for legal arbitration or recourse to international dispute resolution mechanisms if adequate information or mitigation is not assured; (f) Undertake an independent project to study the potential impacts of the dam on Bangladesh, involving both international and local experts; (g) Build alliances with regional and transnational NGOs advocating for equitable and fair transboundary river management; (h) Accelerate internal measures to enhance irrigation efficiency, diversify water sources, and bolster riverine ecosystem resilience to anticipated changes in Brahmaputra flow; (i) Proactively brief media, water experts, and civil society regarding the risks and government actions, thereby increasing international visibility and consensus around Bangladesh's position; (j) Promote an ecological approach to water resources management at all scales for domestic rivers.

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View of the Old Brahmaputra from Langalbandh Ghat.

PHOTO: FAISAL AHMED / THE DAILY STAR

Bangladesh receives about 70% of its lean season flow through the Brahmaputra-Jamuna River system. Any uncertainty or disruption in that flow will have devastating impacts on agriculture, irrigation, fisheries, navigation, and livelihoods.

project have been referenced in Chinese state media and engineering circles, highlighting the unique topographical advantages and engineering challenges. However, detailed feasibility study documents have not been widely circulated internationally or made available in the public domain.

There is no evidence that a comprehensive, project-specific Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for this cascade of dams has been publicly released. Historically, for large dam projects in China, EIA documents are seldom disclosed for transboundary river initiatives. Calls for greater transparency and public participation have been voiced both domestically and by international NGOs, but no disclosure had occurred for this project as of July 2025.

According to international laws such as the UN Convention on the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (1997), China cannot unilaterally determine the fate of such a transboundary river that flows through downstream India and Bangladesh. However, none of the co-riparian nations have adopted the 1997 Convention as a mechanism to resolve disputes regarding the sharing of waters

on Bangladesh's economy and environment—much like what India now fears from China. Moreover, while China's dams are of the run-of-the-river type, India's barrages are diversionary in nature and, therefore, far more devastating for Bangladesh. The unilateral diversion of the Ganges River and the Teesta River through the Farakka Barrage and Gajoldoba Barrage, respectively, exemplifies this impact.

What India has been doing to Bangladesh with transboundary rivers does not justify China's proposed project on the Yarlung Zangbo River. Bangladesh should strongly oppose this project. If necessary, Bangladesh ought to form a partnership with India to raise this concern both with China and at the international level.

India officially protested through diplomatic channels, urging China to ensure that there are no adverse transboundary impacts. India is reportedly planning its own dam in Arunachal Pradesh as a countermeasure. Such a counter-dam will further aggravate water flow issues in downstream Bangladesh. Bangladesh has formally requested more information from China regarding

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Tariff math favours Bangladesh in shifting US trade landscape

The shift of the USA to reciprocal tariffs has shaken global trade. But for Bangladesh, it's opened a rare window of opportunity

KEY FACTS

US is Bangladesh's largest export market, accounting for one-fifth of total exports

MAJOR EXPORTS TO THE US

Apparel, footwear, and textile products

Headgear

Agricultural products

MAJOR IMPORTS FROM THE US

Seeds, soybeans, cotton, wheat, and corn

Machinery

Iron and steel products

BANGLADESH-US TRADE IN GOODS AND SERVICES

\$12.4BN IN 2024

- US exports to Bangladesh: \$2.3bn
- US import from Bangladesh: \$8.4bn
- Trade in services: \$1.8bn
- US exports: \$1.3 billion
- US imports: \$423m

12 – BILATERAL TRADE BETWEEN BANGLADESH AND USA

10 – in billion \$; SOURCE: BANGLADESH TRADE PORTAL

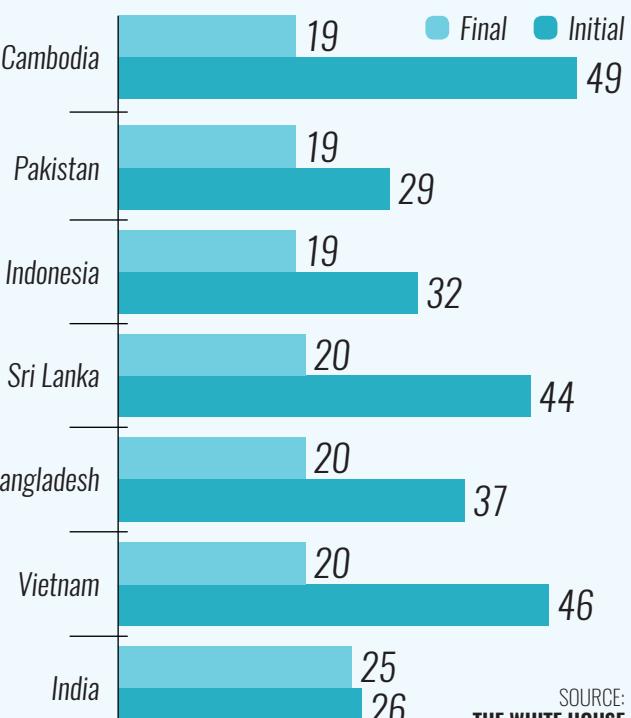


AGREEMENTS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES

- Bilateral Investment Treaty
- Avoidance of Double Taxation Treaty
- Trade and Investment Cooperation Forum Agreement (TICFA), signed in September 2013

FDI Stock of investment from US firms in Bangladesh was \$1.08 bn as of March this year

RATE OF TARIFF FOR BANGLADESH AND ITS COMPETITORS



Many Bangladeshi garment exporters use nearly 40 percent US cotton fibre and in near future there is a possibility of using more US material as Bangladesh has already agreed to import more American cotton and building warehouse for the American cotton.

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

When US President Donald J. Trump burst back onto the global trade stage, he brought with him a term that's now rattling old school trade economists: reciprocal tariff. Think of it as "you charge us this much, we'll charge you the same"—a tit-for-tat pricing game that bypasses the World Trade Organization (WTO), the traditional referee of global trade rules.

While this move has left WTO purists in a daze, for some countries—Bangladesh included—there is a silver lining.

After lengthy negotiations with the United States Trade Representative (USTR), the American government's chief trade negotiation body, Bangladesh has secured a 20 percent reciprocal tariff rate on its exports to the US. Add that to the existing 16.5 percent average US import duty, and you get a new effective tariff rate (ETR) of 36.5 percent, according to the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

Sounds high? Perhaps. But it's all about comparison. In a world where competitors are being slapped with tariffs as high as 50-60 percent, 36.5 percent starts to look like a discount.

take more time to absorb the additional tariff by the importing companies in the USA," he said.

Mahmud Hasan Khan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, is also hopeful that exports from the country will rise because of the tariff benefit.

"If the local suppliers are not aware, the international retailers and brands may put pressure on them to share a certain portion of the additional tariff," he said.

HOW WE FARE AGAINST COMPETITORS

Vietnam, Bangladesh's close competitor in the global apparel market, currently enjoys an 18.9 percent share of the US market and faces a similar 20 percent reciprocal tariff. But the devil is in the details.

Vietnam's export portfolio to the US consists largely of high-end, synthetic garments (activewear, skiwear, and outerwear), which already attract an average 32 percent US duty. Add the reciprocal tariff, and the effective tariff rate could easily exceed 50 percent.

Moreover, President Trump imposed an additional 40 percent tariff on garments found to be transshipped through Vietnam to avoid Chinese duties. Since Vietnam's garment sector relies heavily on Chinese raw materials, investment, and supply chains, this adds another layer of complexity and cost, potentially eroding its competitiveness.

India, another major competitor with a 5.9 percent market share in the US, has been hit the hardest. Trump slapped a staggering 50 percent rate on the country due to its continued import of Russian oil. That is the highest tariff rate among all countries in this new regime. Considering India's average tariff on garment items to the US, its ETR now stands at 66.5 percent.

Then there's China. The world's largest apparel supplier, with a 20.8 percent share of the US market, is facing a steep 55 percent ETR, which may climb higher as US-China tariff negotiations remain unresolved.

The East Asian economic superpower has been steadily losing ground in the American market since 2018, when Trump launched a trade war during his first term in office. Since then, countries like Bangladesh, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Pakistan, and India have begun carving out bigger shares.

Indonesia faces a 19 percent reciprocal tariff, resulting in a 35.5 percent ETR, giving the country a comparatively advantageous position over Bangladesh.

BANGLADESH'S SECRET WEAPON

What gives Bangladesh the edge?

Cotton.

Its five top garment exports—trousers, knitted polo shirts, woven shirts and blouses, sweaters, and underwear—together account for 80



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

percent of its total apparel exports to the US. The concentration of cotton fibre in all these items is particularly high. And in the US tariff regime, cotton garments are treated far more leniently than synthetic ones.

This puts Bangladesh in direct contrast with Vietnam and China, who are more dependent on non-cotton and high-tariff products.

There's more. Under Trump's executive order, if an export item contains 20 percent US origin content, such as American-grown cotton, the 20 percent reciprocal tariff is waived on that portion of the product's value.

Here's what that means: A \$10 shirt made in Bangladesh using 20 percent US cotton will have the 20 percent reciprocal tariff applied to only \$8 of its value, not the full \$10.

Some Bangladeshi exporters are already using up to 40 percent US cotton, meaning they'll enjoy even lower ETRs.

In the near future, there is a possibility of using more US content as Bangladesh has already agreed to import more American cotton and build warehouses for American cotton.

Exporters expect exports from Bangladesh to the US to grow because of this competitive edge.

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Even with this competitive edge, a cloud looms over the celebrations: the US apparel market itself is shrinking.

"Just a few years ago, the US imported \$105 billion worth of apparel annually. In 2024, that number dropped to \$85 billion. And now, it could fall further, to \$75 billion due to the higher tariff rate,"

said Mohammad Abdur Razzaque, chairman of the Research and Policy Integration for Development (RAPID).

No matter how favourable Bangladesh's tariff rate is, it won't matter if there are fewer orders coming in.

Before the introduction of the reciprocal tariff, the US's average import duty was 2.2 percent. The leap to 20 percent overnight is likely to fuel inflation, affecting consumers' purchasing power and leading to reduced spending.

The tariff burden, ultimately, falls on the consumer. Importers pay it initially, but it shows up in the price tag. As costs rise, American shoppers may scale back. And when retailers cut orders, even countries with favourable deals, like Bangladesh, feel the pain.

So where will all the surplus go?

The obvious answer is Europe. But that presents a new challenge: oversupply.

"Too many suppliers will compete in the same markets, and the European buyers may ask for price cuts because of unhealthy competition by the supplying countries," said Razzaque.

WHAT BANGLADESH TRADED FOR THE DEAL?

The reciprocal tariff agreement didn't come without strings attached.

Currently, the trade gap between the two countries is \$6 billion, whereas Bangladesh exports goods worth \$8.2 billion and imports goods worth \$2 billion from the US.

To win a lower ETR, Bangladesh had to agree to a shopping list of US demands during negotiations, including buying more American goods—such as aircraft, wheat, soybeans, cotton, and other agricultural exports—to reduce the trade gap.

Bangladesh also agreed to open up its domestic market to US dairy, meat, and poultry industries, where local producers, especially small and medium enterprises, will now face stiff competition.

During the negotiation, the USTR also asked Bangladesh to reduce its dependence on China for procuring industrial raw materials—a tall order, considering China is the largest trading partner of Bangladesh. Local entrepreneurs import nearly \$20 billion worth of goods a year from China.

Bangladesh is also set to undertake significant policy and regulatory reforms, including removing foreign ownership restrictions, streamlining investment approvals, and improving transparency for American investors.

The pending agreement is expected to broaden this engagement beyond apparel, into sectors such as agriculture, energy, aviation, and infrastructure.

Bangladesh will have to ratify several international agreements, including the Berne Convention (copyright), the Brussels Convention, the Budapest Treaty (patents), the Marrakesh Treaty (accessible books), the Singapore Treaty, the WIPO Copyright Treaty, the Patent Law Treaty, the Hague Agreement, and the Paris Convention, among others.

But the mood in Bangladesh is optimistic so far.

"This is a very good negotiation, and it is expected that the shipment of goods from Bangladesh will increase as the country has comparative tariff benefits over other countries," said Commerce Secretary Mahbubur Rahman, who was an integral part of the negotiation.

Apart from garments, the export of other goods—such as shoes and leather and leather goods—will also increase to the USA because of the lower tariff benefit, he also said.

The new reciprocal tariff regime of the world's largest economy presents a new phase of global economic diplomacy. In the end, it's a very delicate balancing act. Bangladesh has managed to turn a turbulent moment in US trade policy into a permanent advantage. But it's a narrow path. The tariff rate may be lower, but the stakes are higher than ever.



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A COMPETITIVE EDGE

In 2024, Bangladesh held 9.3 percent of the \$85 billion US apparel market, a figure that could now rise significantly. Why? Because the reciprocal tariff system affects different countries in dramatically different ways, and for Bangladesh, it happens to be largely favourable.

The government and local private-sector entrepreneurs are optimistic. The new tariff rate is much lower than what other competing countries such as Vietnam, India, and China are facing. They have already noted that the new ETR will help boost Bangladesh's exports to the US, as American clothing retailers and brands will prefer Bangladesh as a sourcing destination over its competitive tariff edge.

AK Azad, managing director of Ha-Meem Group, a major garment exporter to the USA, said the reduction of the tariff is a relief for him.

However, his American business partners are demanding a share of the additional tariff burden, which is squeezing his profit further. "It will

be a challenge for us to maintain our competitiveness in the US market," he said.

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