



"Gaza is piled with rubble, piled with bodies and piled with examples of what may be serious violations of international law."

UN chief Antonio Guterres

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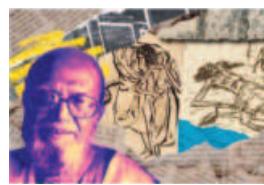
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Bangladesh's
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Only 5% road crash victims get compensation

Govt creates Tk 225cr fund but
complex process leaves majority of
victims with no compensation

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Though the number of road crash victims receiving government compensation has risen slightly in recent months, most victims remain excluded from the scheme due to a lengthy and complex process, as well as a lack of awareness.

The process requires the submission of at least half a dozen documents, along with an application, within 30 days of a road accident, making it difficult for a crash victim to complete the procedure within the deadline, according to officials and campaigners.

Only 1,471 victims or their family members received compensation totalling Tk 65.57 crore between January 2023 and July this year, whereas the total number of casualties was 31,904 -- during the period, shows Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) data.

This means the number of recipients is less than five percent of the official count of road crash victims since the government began providing compensation through a trustee board in January 2023.

However, the situation has improved slightly in recent months.

A total of 352 crash victims received compensation over the past three months, compared to 1,119 recipients in the preceding 28 months.

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JAN 2023 TO
JULY 2025

14,817 accidents
13,827 deaths
18,077 injured

1,471 PEOPLE SO
FAR RECEIVED
COMPENSATION

CATEGORY	CASUALTIES
Deaths	1,245
Severe injuries	53
Injuries	173

COMPENSATION RATES

Death: Tk 5 lakh
Severe injuries: Tk 3 lakh
Other injuries: Tk 1 lakh

DOCUMENTS NEEDED

FOR DEATH

- ④ Deceased's NID card or birth certificate
- ④ Attested copy of the death certificate
- ④ Succession certificate
- ④ Power of attorney signed by the heirs
- ④ Declaration on stamp paper by the legal guardian (for minor heirs)

FOR INJURIES

- ④ NID card or birth certificate
- ④ Treatment-related documents and proof

Haunted by scars, still waiting for justice

Survivors of enforced disappearances recount
torture, demand accountability

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Survivors of enforced disappearances broke down yesterday as they recalled the torture, humiliation, and threats they endured in secret detention centres.

Their testimonies, along with those of their families, painted a grim picture of inhuman treatment and what they said is a justice system yet to hold perpetrators accountable.

The event, organised by the Human Rights Support Society (HRSS) on the eve of the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearance, brought together survivors, human rights defenders, and political representatives who called for urgent action to end the culture of disappearances in Bangladesh.

One survivor, Jesmin Nahar, said she was picked up along with her husband, Mohammad Alamin, and their house help by members of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) on January 14, 2015. They were held for four months in secret confinement.

"During my detention at a secret location, I was tortured inhumanely.

They cut my legs and spread salt on the wounds. I was also given electric shocks," she said, adding that she still bears the scars on her body.

Alamin said he was kept bare-chested in winter and officers tried to uproot victims' nails with pliers. The couple were released only after being

INT'L DAY OF THE VICTIMS OF ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

warned never to reveal who had picked them up, and were threatened with the disappearance of their children.

Others echoed similar accounts. Rahamat Ullah, detained in 2023, said he was confined in a three-foot-long room for nine months, tortured with electric shocks, and later transferred to Kolkata Jail before being deported back to Bangladesh.

Mikel Changma, another survivor,

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JP, Gono Odhikar clash in Kakrail

Nur, 5 others hospitalised;
law enforcers deployed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders and activists of Jatiya Party and Gono Odhikar Parishad clashed in front of the former's central office in the capital's Kakrail yesterday.

At least six people, including Gono Odhikar President Nurul Haque Nur and General Secretary Rashed Khan, were hospitalised for injuries during the incident that occurred between 6:15pm and 7:30pm. Jatiya Party claimed several of its leaders were injured.



Golam Faruk, officer-in-charge of Ramna Police Station, said during the clash, both sides threw brick chips at each other, amid chase and counter-chase. "Following the clash, police and other agencies were deployed at the scene."

Along with police, army personnel were also deployed, said leaders of both parties, who blamed each other for the clash.

Nur and Rashed, along with four other injured, were brought to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital for treatment last night, said Inspector Md Faruk, in-charge of DMCH police outpost.

Talking to The Daily Star, Rashed said, "First, Jatiya Party men attacked us and later, police and army carried out the second phase of attack. Nur was injured in the second phase of the attack."

Abu Hanif, media coordinator of Gono Odhikar, in a press release alleged they were attacked after organising a demonstration yesterday

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Old order risks stalling hard-won democratic gains

Warn scholars at Bengal
Delta Conference

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

As Bangladesh aspires to a paradigm shift in governance after the July uprising, scholars from home and abroad yesterday warned that concentration of power, growing inequality, and the use of religion for political gains could undermine progress.

Speakers at the inaugural session of the Bengal Delta Conference 2025 said people remain disappointed as the power structure has not shifted significantly over the past year.

They cautioned that citizens will not accept such structures in the future, as they fail to deliver on people's aspirations.

The Dacca Institute of Research and Analytics (Daira) organised the conference titled, "Bangladesh at the Crossroads: Rethinking Politics, Economy and Geopolitical Strategy", at the Hotel InterContinental.

Prof Mushtaq Khan, economics professor at SOAS University of London, said the Hasina regime's development model was based on extreme centralisation, where a handful of people decided everything. "Infrastructures were built on massive theft, with double or triple the real cost, leaving the country with unsustainable debt," he said.

Such a model, he argued, cannot survive as it fails to create jobs, improve health and education, or meet the aspirations of millions.

He said both ruling and opposition politicians in Bangladesh must realise that people would not accept a return to the old settlement.

"The idea that we can return to the old politics after elections, with a few corrupt parties competing for spoils every five years, is also not feasible," Mushtaq said.

RELATED STORY ON PAGE 12

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STUDENTS' UNION ELECTIONS

Umama eyes major academic reforms

SHARIF M SHAFIQUE

If elected Vice-President (VP) of Ducusu, independent candidate Umama Fatema from the Independent Student Unity Panel has pledged to prioritise major academic reforms.

"My core objective is to explore the academic potential of the university, departments, and faculties, enhance research, and build an environment of knowledge sharing. At the same time, there has been no initiative to align education with the job market. I want to work on this issue. Overall, if elected VP, I plan to lead Dhaka University towards major academic reform," she told The Daily Star.

Umama, one of the coordinators of the July Movement, clarified that their panel is non-political. "We formed this panel solely to work in the interest of students, beyond any partisan agenda. Our main goal is to reshape the university's academic atmosphere



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Meghmaller pledges to end disparity

SADI MUHAMMAD ALOK

Meghmaller Basu, general secretary candidate from the Protirodh Porshod panel in the upcoming Ducusu election, said he will remain vocal against injustices and for the rights of students, regardless of the election result.

Speaking to The Daily Star, the Dhaka University Chhatra Union president said his fight is for equal rights and justice, not for power.

"If students want someone who stands for justice and who speaks eye to eye with state power, they will elect me. But even if I lose, our struggle will continue," he said.

Meghmaller said the promises of last year's uprising have largely remained unfulfilled.

"During the 2024 uprising, we fought to establish the idea that this university belongs to everyone, this country belongs to everyone. But after August 5, we



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Latif Siddique refuses to seek bail

Claims court has no
power to grant it; sent to
jail in anti-terrorism case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former minister and expelled Awami League leader Abdul Latif Siddique yesterday refused to seek bail, saying the court had "no authority" to grant it.



He declined to sign a vakalatnama when defence lawyer Saiful Islam approached him during a hearing in an anti-terrorism case at the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court in Dhaka.

"I requested him three times, but every time he repeated, 'Why should I seek something from what [court] has no authority? I will not sign any vakalatnama, I will not seek bail,'" Saiful told The Daily Star.

Around 10:30am, Latif, Dhaka University law Professor Sheikh Hafizur Rahman, and 14 others were brought to the courtroom in handcuffs, helmets, and bulletproof vests. Hafizur requested

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MY DHAKA



PHOTO: STAR

DHAKA AFTER DARK

The lives that keep the city alive

REHNUMA SHAHREEN

Have we ever stopped to wonder when the ATM machines refill themselves? Or who stocks the shelves of our favourite stores before we walk in the morning? Who guards our streets while the rest of the city sleeps? And who, beneath the weight of more than 22 million people, carries the night on their shoulders so that the day can run without pause?

Night-time Dhaka is nothing like its daytime self. The congested roads, the honking horns, the endless arguments between cars and rickshaws all vanish after sunset. The city, so restless in daylight, finally exhales. For most, the night means rest. But for a few, it is when life begins.

At a small roadside hotel near Dhaka Medical College, a man named Lokman has been serving tea and meals late into the night for years. He prefers it this way. "The rush of customers is manageable, so I can work with a peaceful mind," he said.

But not all night-time work brings comfort. For Fazlur Bari, who has guarded ATMs for almost a decade, the silence brings unease. "I like the environment but I don't like working at night. My job is already lonely. At night, it becomes lonelier. I provide security for others, but I worry about my own."

Beyond the workers are the unseen lives that stir only at night: street dogs patrolling like unofficial guards, homeless people laying claim to small patches of pavement, and trucks unloading supplies that keep the city running the next day. Night-time is when Dhaka's invisible economy breathes freely -- the stocking of goods, the movement of money, the flow of

labour that make daytime life appear seamless.

For some, the city at night feels entirely different. Jubayer Mahmud Khan, who works nights for a foreign company, said, "I go to the office in the evening

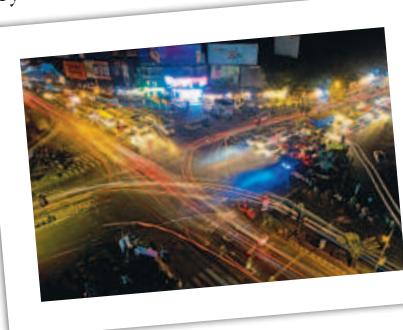
and spend most of my hours inside. But when I return home around four in the morning, I see a new Dhaka. The chilly air, the empty roads, the people sleeping on the sidewalks -- I notice them then. It feels like the city shows me a side it doesn't reveal otherwise."

For others, the night carries both convenience and danger. Sauvik Debnath, who works in cash management, enjoys the traffic-free

streets but worries about safety. "Public transport is rare, so I spend extra on bikes or rickshaws. That's when the risk grows. Once, I was attacked while returning from work. They took my wallet and phone. So, you see, the night is peaceful, but also dangerous."

Some, however, thrive in it. A rickshaw puller explained why he prefers the night shift. "Even though I get fewer passengers, I can drive easily and more efficiently because the roads are empty. The rides are enjoyable, and for me, night-time is actually more profitable."

Perhaps this is the true nature of Dhaka after dark: a city stripped of its façade. Most will never know this version except in fleeting glimpses -- on a late drive home, crossing a road before dawn, or gazing out of a window when sleep won't come. But for those who live and work in it, night-time Dhaka is not an intermission. It is their shift, their solitude, their risk, their discovery. It is, in its own way, another city altogether.



Only 5% road crash victims

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They were compensated from a fund generated through the annual fees paid by vehicle owners. The fund stood at Tk 225 crore as of November last year.

According to different non-government organisations, the number of road crash victims is much higher than the government count because many accidents are not reported.

Contacted, BRTA Chairman Abu Momtaz Saad Uddin Ahmed, also the chairman of the trustee board, said the board in its last meeting on August 12 decided to extend the application deadline to two months.

"Necessary documents have already been conveyed to the Road Transport and Highways Division for approval," he told The Daily Star on August 25.

REASONS BEHIND POOR NUMBER

Following the enactment of the Road Transport Act 2018, the government formed a trustee board led by the BRTA chairman.

In December 2022, the government approved the rules of the Road Transport Act, allowing the compensation process to begin in January the following year.

According to the rules, the family of a victim killed in a road crash is entitled to Tk 5 lakh in compensation.

Those who lose a limb or suffer other life-altering injuries receive Tk 3 lakh each, while victims expected to recover and return to normal life are given Tk 1 lakh each.

An individual seeking compensation must fill out a form and submit it to the trustee board

SCAN THE QR CODE TO WATCH VIDEO



chairman within a month of the road crash.

In case of death, the victim's family members are required to submit the deceased's NID card or birth certificate (in the case of a child), an attested copy of the death certificate, a succession certificate, a power of attorney signed by the heirs on a Tk 300 stamp paper, a declaration on stamp paper by the legal guardian (for minor heirs), and other supporting documents where applicable.

In case of an injury, the victim must submit a copy of NID card or birth certificate (in the case of a child), treatment-related documents and proof.

Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury, secretary general of Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity, said that one month is not enough to manage all the required documents.

"Many people lose interest in filing applications because of the complex process," he told The Daily Star last week.

Many people are not even aware of the government scheme. Some families also refuse to conduct post-mortems on relatives killed in road crashes, making them ineligible for compensation, Mozammel noted.

"The process must be simplified, and there should be dedicated manpower to deal with the compensation claims. Otherwise, most people will continue to be deprived of the benefit."

Besides, the investigation process is lengthy, and in the absence of dedicated manpower, disposal of applications takes a long time.

Replies to a question on submission of so many documents within a month, he said, "We will work to simplify the process so that people can easily get compensation."

On teacher student relations, he said students must also have the right to evaluate teachers. "Teachers can evaluate students, but students have no mechanism to do that. That must change."

Meghmaller said he wants a campus where every student enjoys equal rights.

"We resisted before, we are resisting now, and we will resist in the future. No matter who wins the election, students will see me speaking for resistance and justice."

"I will also fight to remove the gap in facilities for male and female students, I will

Mozammel pointed out.

According to the rules, the trustee board chairman is supposed to form a probe committee within 10 days of receiving an application, and the committee has to submit a report within a month.

But in most cases, the deadline is not maintained, he added.

ABRTA official echoed Mozammel's remarks.

"The verification of documents takes a long time, which delays the disposal of applications," said the official, seeking anonymity.

However, another BRTA official said that as part of efforts to speed up the process, the agency's district offices started receiving applications from crash victims or their families from October last year.

"An auto rickshaw hit my bike in Dhammgoni last month, leaving me with a fractured left hand. I had to spend a lot on surgery and medicines and could not attend work. Had I known about the compensation, I would have applied for it," said Nurul Alam, a private job holder.

Earlier, applications could be submitted only to the BRTA headquarters in Dhaka.

The BRTA chairman Momtaz said, "We intentionally make no delay. The law stipulates that we must verify all documents, and it takes time."

Talking to this correspondent on August 24, Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan, adviser to road transport and bridges ministry, said they are working to make people aware of the government scheme.

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Citing India, he said religious polarisation has damaged the social

also work to provide mental health support for students, address the transport shortage, and digitalise the registrar's office to reduce their suffering."

He also promised to end the gono room culture, which he said is tied to the torture and humiliation of students.

"We are the only panel proposing a faculty-based student union with class representatives. This will give non-residential students an equal voice."

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"I will also fight to remove the gap in facilities for male and female students, I will

and ensure equal rights for ethnic and religious minorities."

On the election environment, he said, "The positive side is voters' engagement -- they are asking and discussing manifestos."

However, he raised concerns about the shortage of polling centres. "We fear voter suppression. There are not enough polling centres. If students cannot vote, even after waiting for hours, that will be unacceptable. Moreover, the election is being held during the exam season. We have raised this issue many times, but the administration has done nothing."

Meghmaller vowed to continue the struggle for a better DU and a better country.

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FROM PAGE 1

"This isn't just about constitutional tweaks. It's about where parties get their money, who they are accountable to, and how power is organised."

Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain also said the political culture has to change. "The intention cannot simply be about going to power, but about building the country, institutions, education, and opportunities for the young."

He said the young generation, which brought about change in July 2024, will not allow politics to return to the conditions of 1974 or 1991.

"They may not succeed right away because politics is still in the hands of our generation, who are clinging to it. But they will not be there for long," he said.

"The young will make mistakes. They will gain experience, maybe the

fabric and undermined economic potential. "India has become a cautionary example. We must tell the world: for heaven's sake, do not allow religion and sectarianism to polarise and divide."

Prof Maszlee bin Malik, chairman of the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies, warned that when 10.6 percent of the youth are unemployed and civil society is sidelined, the country risks trading short-term calm for long-term fragility.

"Elite capture erodes trust. Political alienation fuels unrest. Hence, Bangladesh must rebuild its democratic infrastructure not with rhetoric but with decisive action," he said.

He recommended credible electoral reforms, including digital voter verification and independent election monitoring, and proposed a permanent

governance requires four things: it must deliver on people's aspirations, be accountable, respond quickly to crises and it must provide stability so the people of all ethnicities and faiths can go about their work.

He said South Asia may need to go back to history and see what worked and what didn't, and borrow ideas wisely for today. "Asking the right questions is the first step. By working together as South Asians, we can eventually find the answers."

Indian foreign policy expert Sreeradha Datta, professor of international affairs at OP Jindal Global University, also emphasised cooperation among South Asian nations.

She said Bangladesh and India need to have honest and frank conversation with focus on specific issues concerning their national interests, moving beyond



Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain speaking at the inaugural session of the Bengal Delta Conference 2025 at a city hotel yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

FROM PAGE 1

saw people being dehumanised, mob rule and moral policing spreading. Indigenous people, women, and minorities have been further marginalised," he said.

He said his panel is based on inclusivity.

"Our panel is inclusive -- 40 percent of our candidates are female. Indigenous students, students with disabilities, and those who work for animal rights are also there. We want a university and a country where everyone's participation is recognised."

If elected, Meghmaller said his top priority will be reforming the Duchs constitution.

"Housing and transport problems cannot be solved without reform. Some propose public private partnerships, but that will only privatise and raise costs. We will use the university's budget instead. I will

also work to provide mental health support for students, address the transport shortage, and digitalise the registrar's office to reduce their suffering."

On the election environment, he said, "The positive side is voters' engagement -- they are asking and discussing manifestos."

However, he raised concerns about the shortage of polling centres. "We fear voter suppression. There are not enough polling centres. If students cannot vote, even after waiting for hours, that will be unacceptable. Moreover, the election is being held during the exam season. We have raised this issue many times, but the administration has done nothing."

Meghmaller vowed to continue the struggle for a better DU and a better country.

"We resisted before, we are resisting now, and we will resist in the future. No matter who wins the election, students will see me speaking for resistance and justice."

Citing India, he said religious polarisation has damaged the social

national dialogue framework to institutionalise negotiations among government, opposition, civil society, and the youth.

Dhaka University Vice Chancellor Prof Niaz Ahmed Khan said the conference was an opportunity to develop the delta perspective as a window for understanding this region, its people, communities, experiences, as well as physical and agroecological features.

The July uprising has given this perspective a special significance, he said. "People have made the ultimate sacrifices, paving the way for a new episode, even a new epoch for our country."

Dr Dipak Gyawali of the Nepal Academy of Science and Technology argued that democracy -- the imported Westminster model -- itself needs rethinking in South Asia. "The question is: are we talking about democracy, or good governance?"

According to Gyawali, good

historical baggage.

It was important to keep the Liberation War as a base to the present times and look at the lessons of history -- that is to trust each other, because "trust deficit" is "a double-edged sword and works both ways," she said.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, said political parties -- the practitioners of democracy -- use democracy to go to power, but the moment they win an election, they start subverting democracy. "That, unfortunately, is the history of Bangladesh," he said.

On the current realities, he warned, "No matter how good a democratic structure you bring, if the practitioners of democracy don't believe in democracy, it will fail."

Urging the youth, he said, "You may have the energy, the spirit, and the dream, but you do not have the experience. It is in the combination of energy, spirit, and experience that our future lies."

BNP leader stabbed to death in Pirojpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

A BNP leader was stabbed to death allegedly by a rival in Pirojpur's Bhandaria upazila yesterday.

The deceased Rezaul Karim Jhantu, 50, was the general secretary of Bhitabaria union ward 8 unit of BNP, said police.

Md Jahangir Hossain, officer-in-charge of Bhandaria Police Station, said Rezaul was attacked around 10:30am near Manju Market in the area by his neighbour Mohammad Rubel, 35, over previous ememy.

Witnesses said Rubel stabbed Rezaul in the chest with a sharp weapon during an altercation. Rezaul fell into a roadside ditch, and Rubel continued stabbing him, leaving him critically injured.

Locals rushed him to Bhandaria Upazila Health Complex where the on-duty doctor declared

Expanded dengue syndrome a growing concern

Doctors urge early hospitalisation as cases spike

Early treatment crucial for vulnerable patients

Watch for warning signs: severe abdominal pain, breathing difficulty, bleeding, extreme weakness, low urination, or dropping platelet count

Patients with kidney or lung complications can recover if treated promptly

People with hypertension, diabetes, or chronic organ diseases are at higher risk

HELEMUL ALAM

Mohammadpur resident Hujaifa Tanveer, 28, who has been receiving treatment at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital, was due to be discharged on Thursday, but doctors postponed it after tests revealed that dengue had partially damaged his kidneys and lungs.

His mother, anxiously moving around arranging more tests, said through tears, "My son was infected by dengue, but why is he now suffering from kidney and lung diseases?"

Tanveer said this was his second dengue infection in just six weeks. "I came to the

hospital with high fever, mouth sores, diarrhoea, and body pain," he recalled.

Other families expressed similar worries. Rashida Begum, wife of Habibur Rahman, was busy packing after her husband was discharged following a week of treatment. But Rokeya was tense, as doctors had for the first time detected kidney disease and diabetes in her husband while treating him for dengue.

"We will have to come back in 15 days for a kidney follow-up. I also have to take measures for diabetes," she said. "He never had kidney problems before, but after he complained of leg pain, tests revealed

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Expanded dengue syndrome (EDS) is a severe form of the disease that damages vital organs such as the liver, kidneys, lungs, heart, brain, and central nervous system.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



Students under the banner of 'Engineers' Rights Movement' brought out a torch procession in front of the Buet campus in Dhaka yesterday, protesting police action against students during their demonstration on Wednesday.

PHOTO: STAR

INT'L DAY OF VICTIMS OF ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

Disband Rab, ensure justice for victim families

Demand speakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The interim government must immediately disband the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), which has been accused of carrying out enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, said speakers at a discussion yesterday.

They also called for prosecuting those involved in destroying evidence of disappearances, enacting a victim and witness protection law, and ensuring independent and transparent investigations into every case.

The programme, titled "International Day of Victims of Enforced Disappearances", was organised by rights organisation Odhikar at the Jatiya Press Club in the capital.

At the discussion, Tasneem Arefa Siddiqui, professor of political science at Dhaka University, said, "We must now raise a question -- do we need Rab or not? What are we actually getting from this force? It is easier to speak against a government or a political leader, but when it comes to a powerful group, we remain silent. Evidence of disappearances has been destroyed, and that must be investigated."

Speaking as the chief guest, Environment Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan said, "On behalf of

the government, I assure you there is no lack of goodwill in ensuring justice."

She added that once a new law is passed and a fund is created, victims and their families will receive support.

"We must remain united. If division grows among us, if hopelessness takes over, then the group actually responsible for these crimes will become stronger," she said.

We must now raise a question -- do we need Rab or not? What are we actually getting from this force? It is easier to speak against a government or a political leader, but when it comes to a powerful group, we remain silent.

TASNEEM AREFA SIDDIQUI
Professor of political science at DU

Taskin Fahmina, senior researcher at Odhikar, said their organisation has documented 745 cases of enforced disappearance.

She highlighted the need for trauma counselling for victims and financial support for their families.

**In the draft Ordinance-2025,
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Waiting for a country without enforced disappearances

Salahuddin tells Mayer Daak event

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP standing committee member Salahuddin Ahmed yesterday said they are waiting for a Bangladesh where no one will ever fall victim to enforced disappearances again.

"As a political worker, I can say that if people give us their mandate, we will take all necessary steps to prevent enforced disappearances -- from enacting laws to ensuring their implementation," he said.

"We are waiting for a Bangladesh where no one will fall victim to enforced disappearance. We want a country where the family members of such victims will never have to stand on the street," he added.

Salahuddin made the remarks at a seminar organised by Mayer Daak at the Bangla Academy auditorium in the capital, marking the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances.

Recalling his own ordeal after being picked up in 2015, the BNP leader said he was held in a small, suffocating cell for 61 days. "I could not believe they would let me go alive. At



that time, I told them to at least send my body to my family. They gave no answer," he said.

"My photo was supposed to be there today, with family members sitting with the photos of their loved ones. I am very fortunate," he said.

The victims' families hope future politicians will ensure that no one ever has to attend such an event again, he said, adding, "That is why we continue our struggle."

The fascist Awami League government has harmed the country a lot only to stay in power, yet they still have no regret, said Salahuddin.

"They are not even admitting to the victims of their crimes; rather, they are labelling the people of the mass uprising as criminals. After this, can the people of Bangladesh ever invite them back into politics? Can the people ever forgive them? They have not even asked for forgiveness," he said.

The BNP leader also said a section of democratic political parties that participated in the anti-fascist movement is now trying to create division.

"The people of this country struggled for 16 years and shed blood to establish their voting

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Potato, papaya now only choice for many families



SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MD ABBAS

More and more people are now relying on potatoes and papaya to feed their families as the prices of other vegetables continue to rise in Dhaka's kitchen markets.

At Karwan Bazar yesterday afternoon, Kamala Begum, 50, was seen buying only these two items. She runs a small catering service on the Gulistan footpath, selling meals for low-income people at Tk 50 each.

"I used to serve good vegetables along with a small piece of fish for each meal. But for the last month, I can only afford to give potatoes and papaya because other vegetables are out of reach," she told The Daily Star.

She said she cannot raise the price of her meals, so she has no choice but to replace better vegetables with cheaper ones.

Feeding her six-member family has now become a major struggle.

Potatoes now sell for Tk 20-25 a kg and papaya for Tk 20-30 – the cheapest options available at the kitchen markets.

Munni Begum, a resident of Moghbazar who works at a private firm, said her family is also depending on these two items.

"We used to eat different vegetables every day. Now it's only potatoes and papaya," she said.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

KURIGRAM'S FORGOTTEN JEWEL

Naodanga Zamindar Palace in ruins

S DILIP ROY

On the northern border with India, in Kurigram's Phulbari upazila, stands the decaying Naodanga Zamindar Palace, once a hub of aristocratic power and cultural celebration, now abandoned to neglect and ruin.

Built by Zamindar Bahadur Sri Promadaranjan Bakshi, the palace was the nerve centre of Naodanga Pargana, covering several adjoining areas.

Bakshi was known for philanthropy and support for education. He was also a patron of the arts. He entrusted the estate to his middle son, Bishweshwar Prasad Bakshi, who later migrated with the family to Cooch Behar in India.

The 200-year-old palace is now under the custody of the district administration.

At its height, the palace boasted a bathing area, prayer chambers, guest quarters, and detention cells. Today, only traces of that splendour survive. A nearly 100 foot-high arched gateway still rises as a reminder of its lost glory.

Three temples -- dedicated to Shiva, Vishnu, and Durga -- stand beside the ruins. Locals have helped keep them alive, with partial repairs to the Shiva



temple and annual puja continuing at the Durga temple.

The estate's cultural crown jewel was the Dol Utsab, a festival of colours on Dol Purnima initiated by Bishweshwar Prasad Bakshi. At its peak, it drew visitors from Rangpur, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari, and even across the border in Cooch Behar.

"Naodanga's Dol Utsab was the biggest cultural event in the region," recalled

local journalist Anil Chandra Roy. "It was a carnival of colour, music, and devotion. Now it is symbolic at best." The field that once hosted the fair is now crowded with over 50 makeshift shops, a shadow of its past grandeur.

Time and neglect have left the palace crumbling. Built using lime, brick, and mortar, much of its structure has collapsed. A two-storey building on the western end is gone, while roofs and



beams have caved in elsewhere. Vandals have stripped away bricks and wood, and thick vegetation has swallowed the estate.

Shailan Chandra Barman and Bijoy Chandra Roy, grandsons of the estate's former manager, still hold oral histories of the zamindars. "We grew up hearing stories of their generosity and discipline," Bijoy said. "It hurts to see the palace die like this."

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July uprising paved way for welfare state Speakers tell discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh is at a "critical juncture", with the July uprising opening up new political possibilities to rebuild the country as a welfare state, speakers said at a discussion yesterday.

They said the youths who led the uprising must now prepare to translate those possibilities into public well-being in the long run and remain cautious so that their aspirations are not undermined.

The discussion, titled "July Revolution: Critical Juncture or Another Historical Loop", was part of the two-day Bengal Delta Conference 2025, which began yesterday. The conference is organised by the Dacca Institute of Research and Analytics under the theme "Bangladesh at the Crossroads: Rethinking Politics, Economy, and Geopolitical Strategy" at a city hotel.

"The politics that Bangladesh gave birth to on August 5 is a historically new type of politics," author and philosopher Farhad Mazhar told the discussion.

He said it was the first time that this "new politics" opened up possibilities for structural reforms of state organs.

"The July uprising also created scope for the nation to fight against imperialism and colonialism and to prepare for a long struggle," he added.

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INTERNATIONAL

DHAKA SATURDAY AUGUST 30, 2025

BHADRA 15, 1432 BS

The Daily Star

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69 migrants killed as boat capsizes off Mauritania

AFP, Nouakchott

A boat carrying migrants capsized off the coast of Mauritania earlier this week, killing at least 69 people, with around 100 likely missing, officials told AFP yesterday.

"One of our patrols was able to rescue 17 (people)", a senior coastguard official told AFP. "So far, 69 bodies have been recovered and buried, and the search is continuing."

The accident occurred late on Tuesday night when the migrants saw the lights of a town off the coast of Mauritania some 80 kilometres (50 miles) north of Nouakchott and "moved to one side, causing it to capsize", the official said.

According to a statement from the migrants, the boat had left The Gambia a week earlier with about 160 people on board, including Senegalese and Gambian nationals, the official added. The local gendarmerie confirmed "69 bodies have already been recovered".



Japan, India to deepen economic ties

REUTERS, Tokyo

Japan's Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba and his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi yesterday agreed to deepen economic and security ties as New Delhi confronts new US tariffs and Tokyo looks to counter China's growing influence.

"Japan and India should draw on each other's strengths, help solve each other's challenges, and even tackle together the issues that future generations will face," Ishiba said at a joint press announcement with Modi after talks in Tokyo.

The two leaders pledged to boost defence cooperation in the Indo-Pacific over the next decade.

EC to set up cell to combat fake news

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disinformation on social media now pose a significant challenge alongside traditional political and law-and-order issues... To counter false and misleading information, the EC will set up a separate cell," Nasir said.

"We are constantly facing new challenges - ones that did not exist before. Law and order issues have always been there. Earlier the degree was lower, now it may be somewhat higher. And we may also have to confront challenges that we do not yet know," he added.

He made the comments a day after the EC unveiled its work plan for the next general election and set November as the deadline for wrapping up all major preparations.

In his August 5 televised address, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus said he would request the Election Commission to hold the national polls before next Ramadan in February 2026. The following day, his office sent the formal directive to the EC to complete all necessary preparations by that time.

Nasir Uddin yesterday also underscored professionalism and neutrality as the core principles guiding the Election Commission in preparations for the upcoming 13th parliamentary election.

He stressed that the commission's foremost duty is to deliver a fair and acceptable election, regardless of the risks involved. "There is no alternative. There can be no deception or malpractice in the election. The commission and everyone on the ground must remain committed," he said.

"This is why politics, economics, and foreign policy are deeply intertwined."



ANTI-GRAFT CRACKDOWN

Fugitive Sri Lankan former minister detained

AFP, Colombo

A Sri Lankan ex-government minister surrendered himself to a court yesterday after two months on the run, the latest high-profile detention in a sweeping anti-corruption crackdown.

Anti-graft units have ramped up their investigations since President Anura Kumara Dissanayake came to power in September on a promise to fight corruption.

Former fisheries minister Rajitha Senaratne, who served in the cabinet of then-president Mahinda Rajapaksa, is accused of illegally awarding a 2012 contract to a foreign firm, allegedly causing a loss to the state of \$83,000.

Senaratne had repeatedly dodged questioning, the Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption said.

High Court judge Lanka Jayaratne ordered him transferred to a lower court to face multiple cases.

Several politicians from the Rajapaksa administration, as well as family members, are either in jail or on bail pending corruption investigations.

Former president Ranil Wickremesinghe was arrested last week on a charge of misusing \$55,000 of government funds for a private stopover in Britain.

'No way' US troops can invade Venezuela

Says Maduro as US naval buildup targets Latin America drug cartels

AFP, Caracas

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro said Thursday there was "no way" US troops could invade Venezuela after Washington deployed five warships and 4,000 troops to the Caribbean to pressure the leftist强人.

The United States said the deployment to the southern Caribbean, near Venezuela's territorial waters, is an anti-drug trafficking operation.

Venezuela has responded by sending warships and drones to patrol its coastline and launching a drive to recruit thousands of militia members to bolster its defenses.

"There's no way they can enter Venezuela," Maduro said, vowing that his country was well prepared to defend its "peace, sovereignty and territorial integrity."

The United States has, however, made no public threat to invade. Maduro, who claimed a disputed third term in July 2024 elections, has been in US President Donald Trump's sights ever since the Republican's first term in office.



Cartel de los

administration has

organization.

The US recently doubled its bounty to \$50 million for Maduro's capture to face drug charges.

Maduro, who succeeded socialist firebrand Hugo Chavez in 2013, has accused Trump of attempting to effect regime change.

Maduro's government regularly accuses the opposition and foreigners of conspiring with US entities such as the CIA to harm Venezuela, accusations the opposition and the US have always denied. It characterizes sanctions as "economic war."

Maduro has also called for civil defense groups to train each Friday and Saturday.

Since returning to power in January, Trump's attacks on Venezuela have focused chiefly on its powerful gangs, some of which operate inside the United States.

Washington accuses Maduro of heading a cocaine trafficking cartel, Cartel de los

Soles, which the Trump

designated a terrorist

organization.

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JP, Gono Odhikar clash

FROM PAGE 1
demanding a ban on the activities of Awami League's accomplices.

"After the protest at the central office, we were marching from Paltan towards the Nightingale intersection. Bricks and stones were thrown at us from behind while passing by the Jatiya Party office," he said.

He also said there were about 300-400 people in front of the Jatiya Party office and Gono Odhikar suspects those included Awami League and Juba League men.

The Jatiya Party organised an emergency press conference at its central office after the incident.

Its Secretary General Shameem Haider Patwary alleged Gono Odhikar carried out an attack from its procession.

Later, army and police came to the spot and brought the situation under control, he said. He said several JP leaders were injured and hospitalised.

said, adding that five members of the army were injured in the incident.

Meanwhile, protesting the attack on Nur, leaders and activists of Gono Odhikar Parishad marched on the DMCH premises. Similar protests were held in Narayanganj, Chattogram and Gazipur.

In Dhaka, National Citizen Party leaders and activists also brought out a procession in protest against the attack on Nur.

CA's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam visited Nur at the hospital, while Law Adviser Asif Nazrul condemned the attack on Nur in a Facebook post.

When Asif Nazrul went to visit Nur at the DMCH later, Gono Odhikar leaders and activists started demonstrating in front of the hospital. Later, law enforcers escorted him out of the DMCH, said hospital sources.

The BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Andolan Bangladesh also condemned the attack on Nur.

43 bodies recovered from

FROM PAGE 12
the condition of the bodies and other evidence. They also acknowledged that the actual number of murder victims is likely higher.

On August 27, police recovered a headless corpse from the Shitalakkhya River in Narayanganj. With the help of the Police Bureau of Investigation, the body was identified through fingerprint matching as Habib, 27, a resident of Moddhy Kanchpur under Sonargaon upazila.

"It was a gruesome murder. The criminals had beheaded him and hidden the head elsewhere, possibly to prevent identification. The body was identified because it surfaced early and had not yet decomposed severely," said Inspector Abdul Mamud, in charge of Kanchpur River Police Outpost.

Police officials also said decomposition of bodies in water, along with evidence damage -- sometimes from fish bites or vessel impacts -- often misleads investigators and forensic doctors during autopsies.

Typically, police file an unnatural death case after recovering a body. This case is later reclassified as a murder case if evidence of homicide is found during the investigation or through autopsy results.

Omar Faruk, a professor of criminology and police science at Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, said criminals often use rivers and railway tracks to dump bodies after murders to destroy evidence and evade legal action.

"This mainly happens in cases of organised crime. The criminals usually select river areas for dumping the bodies even before committing the killings," he said.

"Many of the bodies are recovered in a heavily decomposed state, while others drift far from the victims' localities, leaving families without any clue about their fate," he added, noting that in many cases, police fail to make headway in investigations, ultimately depriving families of justice.

There are five people eligible to become prime minister, with only one from Pheu Thai, 77-year-old Chaikasem Nitisiri, a former attorney general with limited cabinet experience, who has maintained a low profile in politics.

Economic policies must be freed

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power. Who holds power in Bangladesh, and how do they exercise it?" he said.

Khan said the political settlement shifted again from the middle class to the elite-dominated class during the Awami League regime, from 2009 onwards.

"It was growth for the oligarchs' growth through theft and capture."

"Infrastructure was built at two or three times the cost. Power plants were priced 50 percent higher than competitors. All of it was hidden behind subsidies, corruption, and bank looting."

Such a system, he argued, was bound to collapse. The recent student uprising merely accelerated an implosion already in motion.

Khan, however, said that Bangladesh's early success in manufacturing and job creation after independence was rooted in a broad-based capitalist class.

Unlike India or Pakistan, where narrow elites controlled industry, Bangladesh in the 1980s and 1990s saw entrepreneurs rising from the bottom.

"Thousands of garment factories, small industries, and medium enterprises emerged. At that time, Bangladesh was creating more jobs per unit of growth than India."

Because the political system was responding to the middle class of society, not just the upper echelon.

"When we speak of revolution, we mean building a new society and a new economy. But Bangladesh, like the Bengal delta, sits on unstable soil. You cannot construct a five- or ten-story building on weak ground; similarly, piling reforms on a fragile socioeconomic foundation will not hold."

The foundation must be rebuilt by redistributing power, a gradual process that requires time and patience, said Prof Mahbub.

"That is why I do not see a bright future for Bangladesh in the near term. This is my unfortunate conclusion: we must wait. If we do, perhaps we will see results."

"This is why politics, economics, and foreign policy are deeply intertwined."

At the event, Prof Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modelling, said, "Over the last 15 years, we have seen an increasing reliance on deals-based arrangements. This led to a deepening form of state capture."

"Business groups realised that influencing bureaucrats or politicians wasn't enough; they aimed to secure power by becoming MPs themselves, which deepened and entrenched a deals-based system."

Prof Raihan also said the country now confronts major reform challenges in taxation, banking, trade, exports, and public spending, particularly in health and education, where budget allocations and quality have stagnated or declined.

Raihan said, revitalising Bangladesh's economy faces two main challenges. On the supply side, political, business, and bureaucratic elites must reach a consensus to implement reforms.

On the demand side, reform calls largely come from civil society and development partners, not political actors. Without political buy-in, behavioral change is unlikely, risking a repeat of past cycles, he added.

Prof Mahbub Ullah, former chairman of Dhaka University's economics department, said the key challenge is creating a foundation for productive and innovative entrepreneurship.

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Otherwise, as before, we will face

another uprising, then another, in a recurring cycle. Whether that cycle can be broken, I do not know, he added.

Nuria Lopez, chairperson of the European Chamber of Commerce (EuroCham), called for urgent reforms and a strategic extension of the timeline with LDC graduation approaching amid global economic uncertainty.

She highlighted private sector challenges, including unreliable power and gas, high interest rates, and logistics costs 10 percent higher than regional competitors, which discourage investment.

At the event, Imran Matin, executive director of BRAC Institute of Governance and Development at BRAC University, also spoke while Zakir Hossain Khan, chief executive of Change Initiative, moderated the panel discussion.

National polls

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would suffer immensely and the risk of fascism returning would only increase. He urged that only a free, fair and impartial election could pave the way for restoring democratic governance.

Stressing the importance of restoring democracy in the country, Fakhrul said BNP has historically been at the forefront of political reform in Bangladesh and the party's founder Ziaur Rahman ended one-party rule and introduced multi-party democracy.

He guaranteed press freedom, judicial independence and opened the door to a free-market economy. It was under BNP initiatives that reforms were achieved.

Fakhrul called on party members to reflect deeply on their responsibilities, saying, "Think about how to take the country forward, how to purify our intentions, and how to serve the people. People are yearning for change -- and they expect that change from the BNP. If we are to deliver it, we must stand before them with honesty and dedication."

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Act now to curb air pollution

It has become the country's deadliest external health risk

We are distressed by the lack of measures to curb air pollution which continues to wreak havoc across the country, posing a serious threat to public health. According to a recent report, the average life expectancy in Bangladesh is being cut short by 5.5 years due to toxic air, making it the deadliest external health risk in the country. The report, published by the University of Chicago's Energy Policy Institute (EPIC), warns that the health toll caused by particulate matter (PM) pollution far surpasses that of tobacco use, malnutrition or unsafe water. While smoking shortens life expectancy by approximately two years, malnutrition accounts for a reduction of 1.4 years. According to the study, Bangladesh's population is exposed to fine particulate matter pollution levels that exceed both the World Health Organization (WHO) guideline of five micrograms per cubic metre and the national standard of 35. These findings are deeply worrying.

In recent years, various reports and studies have highlighted the perils of air pollution, often ranking Dhaka among the most polluted cities in the world. One study reported that air pollution causes about 20 percent of all premature deaths in Bangladesh, while another linked poor air quality to rising cases of premature birth and low birth weight in Dhaka. Amid growing concerns from citizens and environmentalists, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change formulated the Air Pollution Control Rules in 2022, but it remains unimplemented to this day.

Sources of PM2.5 in the country include transboundary pollution, brick kilns, smoke from low-grade fuels, solid waste burning, dust from construction sites, etc. Reportedly, brick kilns around Dhaka alone contribute 58 percent of the city's air pollution. Although there is a law that prohibits kilns near residential, commercial, agricultural and sensitive areas, it has been hardly enforced. Earlier this year, the High Court ordered the removal of all illegal brick kilns nationwide, yet no visible progress has been made to this end. Another major challenge is phasing out old, unfit vehicles, a key source of pollution in the cities. The interim government initiated a plan to remove expired, dilapidated vehicles from the roads, but vehicle owners have not complied. As a result, rundown vehicles emitting black smoke remain a common sight in the capital.

As laws and policies remain largely unenforced, air pollution continues to worsen by the day. To contain the debilitating effects of air pollution, the government must immediately implement the Air Pollution Control Rules. This requires formulating a National Air Quality Control Plan, nationwide monitoring, identifying pollution sources, and setting emission standards for industries, vehicles, and major projects. We need some tangible progress in combating air pollution before it's too late.

Save Moheshkhali's mangrove forest

Profit-driven enterprises are inviting long-term disaster

We are appalled by the sheer extent of destruction caused to the mangrove forest in Moheshkhali upazila of Cox's Bazar. This forest, planted after the devastating 1991 cyclone, serves as a natural shield against cyclones, tidal surges and flooding. Yet, according to a recent *Prothom Alo* report, 12,563 acres of this protective forest have been cleared and converted into shrimp enclosures and salt fields by certain quarters. According to local environmental organisations, more than 50 shrimp projects and salt pans now operate in Sonadia where lush mangroves once stood.

The process of destruction is systematic: canals are blocked to cut off water flow, trees are felled, roots are dug out, then the cleared land is set on fire to prepare it like farmland. This industrial-scale clearance can cost up to Tk 1 crore per project, showing that only well-funded, influential actors are involved. Reports show that shrimp projects bring crores of taka in annual profit, but this private gain comes at the expense of public safety. Experts recall how the 1991 cyclone claimed countless lives in Moheshkhali, and how the mangroves were planted precisely to prevent such tragedies. Today, by destroying this shield, coastal communities are once again being put in harm's way.

What is equally alarming is the collective silence among influential quarters across the political spectrum. Cases against mangrove grabbers date back to 1989, yet the main beneficiaries—politically connected investors—escape accountability, while only labourers are made scapegoats. In recent years, ruling party and opposition leaders alike have been named in Forest Department cases, but encroachment continues unabated. From 2010 to May 2025 alone, 196 cases have been filed, naming around 930 accused, yet enforcement remains weak. Even High Court orders have been ignored on the grounds.

The administration has recently identified 45 kilometres of illegal embankments and requested Tk 4.2 crore for their removal. The interim government has also cancelled BEZA's allotment of Sonadia land, which may reduce future destruction. But unless strong, sustained measures are taken—including establishing permanent Ansar or forest camps in Sonadia, prosecuting influential investors, and replantation of the mangroves—these gains will be temporary. The destruction of Moheshkhali's mangroves is not just an environmental crime, but a national security threat. The government must treat this as an urgent priority and stop all new shrimp and salt projects inside the forest areas, demolish illegal embankments, and hold the powerful encroachers accountable.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

US troops leave Afghanistan

On this day in 2021, following a chaotic withdrawal, the last US troops left Afghanistan, ending a 20-year war in the country in response to the September 11, 2001 attacks in the US by Taliban allied al-Qaeda.



INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE VICTIMS OF ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

When will there be justice?



Monorom Polok
is a member of the editorial
team at The Daily Star.

MONOROM POLOK

For Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government, enforced disappearance was not just a tool to suppress or remove critics, political opponents, or anyone deemed a threat to them—it also served as a chilling warning to everyone else. During her 15-plus years in power, Bangladesh witnessed this egregious crime on a scale whose full extent is still unknown.

Before my father, Shafiqul Islam Kajol, was disappeared in March 2020, we had heard the term "enforced disappearance" a few times. My mother would sometimes caution him at the dinner table, "You're doing too much; you might disappear." But once that fear became our reality, I witnessed its impact firsthand: even people with no ties to politics, activism or journalism were afraid of criticising the government, even in their own circles, in what should have been their safe spaces. This revealed just how deeply the fear of disappearance penetrated, affecting not only those in politics or human rights advocacy, but also ordinary citizens. How many thoughts were left unspoken? How many voices were muted in the name of survival?

When the interim government came to power last year, it took a few positive steps to address the menace of enforced disappearance. It signed the UN instrument of accession to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances on August 29, 2024, established the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearance, and the chief adviser visited Aynagar, the secret detention cells where the victims of enforced disappearance used to be confined.

The inquiry commission submitted its second interim report to the chief adviser on June 4 this year. The report mentions that the commission received 1,837 complaints and were able to verify 1,350 of them. It also states the total number of complaints could exceed 3,500. The commission found 16 secret detention centres across the country till the submission of that report.

However, somewhere along the way, progress in this regard stalled. First, it must be acknowledged that dealing with something as sensitive as enforced disappearance was never

going to be easy. Preventing state-sponsored human rights violations or holding to account those responsible has frequently proved to be a Herculean challenge. And when we consider that the police and other security and/or intelligence agencies were involved in carrying out enforced disappearances and other such crimes, it is not difficult to understand why progress has been disappointing. Still, the interim government should have made some headway by now.

The first priority should have been confirming the number of victims of enforced disappearance, alive or deceased. It is essential to disclose the full list to the public as a primary measure of accountability. While our justice system has always been slow, the interim government has only itself to blame for failing to accomplish this most basic task.

Second, some form of recognition for the victims should have been established. Many of the families of the disappeared need official documentation to address various legal matters, including those related to banking and property transfer. Such documents should have been issued to the victims' families by now. These families have already endured immense suffering since, in many cases, the victims were the primary breadwinners whose responsibilities or liabilities they have been forced to shoulder alone. An official document confirming disappearance—or, where applicable, a death certificate for those confirmed dead or missing for, say, over seven years—would give these families the legal basis to resolve some of the issues.

Unfortunately, this has not been addressed in the draft Enforced Disappearance Prevention and Redress Ordinance, 2025 either. Perhaps it was not addressed partly because to issue a death certificate, the death would have

to be confirmed, for which the time and place of the death (killing) would also need confirmation. While these issues would likely feature in the investigation about the perpetrators, the need for some sort of documentation cannot be disregarded either.

Next, some sort of compensation for the victims should have been introduced by now. These victims were oppressed and persecuted by state agencies that were meant to protect citizens and uphold the rule of law, but instead they participated in this severe violation of human rights. As such, the government should have already implemented a compensation mechanism.

The draft ordinance, it should be mentioned, was approved in principle on Thursday. It is reassuring that under the ordinance, the National Human

faith in these institutions, justice must be served without delay.

While the draft ordinance outlines how justice will be pursued in this regard, it also contains some flaws. The minimum punishment upon conviction has been set at ten years' imprisonment. Experience shows that when the minimum punishment for any violent crime is set too high, conviction rates often remain low. For example, in the context of rape, which can carry the death penalty, the conviction rate is below three percent. The draft ordinance also allows for the possibility of capital punishment. To align the law with international standards, this provision must be reconsidered; otherwise, it is unlikely to gain international support. Several human rights bodies have already raised this concern. We need to keep



VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

Rights Commission (NHRC), and not any law enforcement agency, was made responsible for investigating the cases related to enforced disappearances. But given the limited investigative capacity of the NHRC, which has to rely on the cooperation of state agencies, the provision raises concerns about whether the commission can do its job properly.

We must also talk about the prosecution of those responsible for carrying out enforced disappearances, a process that should have begun long ago. The interim government, formed with the mandate of citizens desperate for justice and truth in the aftermath of the July uprising, had a unique opportunity to pursue these cases free from political bias. More than a year has passed since its formation, with less than six months left before the planned general election in February 2026, and yet the process of holding those responsible to account has not even started. Many of those who committed or benefited from abducting and torturing citizens, denying them their constitutional and basic rights, are still actively working within our law enforcement and intelligence agencies. This is unacceptable. To restore any

delay in finalising this draft. While the government did just approve the draft in principle, we don't have any possible date for when it will be enacted. With potentially six months left of this government's tenure, legal proceedings, including filing cases and initiating trials, should already have commenced. If not, this transitional period may be wasted, and along with it the hope of expedited actions and impartial investigations possible under a non-political administration. Whether the next government, when elected, will prioritise this issue—and whether it can be expected to act without bias—remains uncertain.

These measures are vital not only for rectifying past mistakes and injustices but also for preventing future violations. So the interim government must address these issues with priority, and justice for enforced disappearances must be served sooner rather than later.

Transforming our agricultural policies for future economic success



K.M. Arshad
is an undergraduate student of the Department of
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K.M. ARSHAD

Bangladesh's agriculture sector, which employs 40 percent of the society and generates 11 percent of GDP, now stands at a crossroads. With growing global economic instability, climatic stresses piling up, and the nation poised to graduate to Least Developed Country (LDC) status in 2026, agricultural policy sustainability is under unprecedented pressure. Budget increases and high-profile global programmes demonstrate government resolve, but further analysis exposes structural deficits that continue to endanger food security and rural livelihoods against growing economic pressure.

FY2025-26 budget outlay has allocated Tk 39,620 crore (approximately \$3.5 billion) to agriculture, food, fisheries, and livestock—a 3.6 percent year-over-year nominal increase over FY25. But that expansion is offset by rising input prices and inflation. Worse, sectoral contribution to the overall

Annual Development Programme (ADP) has fallen from 5.0 percent in FY25 to 4.7 percent in FY26. The severe underfunding of areas essential for long-term productivity, such as research and mechanisation, directly contradicts the government's stated strategic priorities. In the view

of Naziba Ali of LightCastle Partners, such steps are "insufficient to drive transformative change."

Internal weakness includes industry vulnerability to volatile global and domestic fiscal pressures and ubiquitous markets. The US tariff policy imposing 20 percent additional duties worsens an already strained trade scenario. While garment exports bear the immediate brunt, secondary pressure lands on farm producers. Bangladeshi imported \$2.2 billion worth of US goods (including cotton and grains) against \$8.4 billion export proceeds in 2024. Such a deficit forebodes coercion-indexed opening up of markets to subsidised US farm produce that can overrun non-price-competitive domestic producers. Locally, agriculture is also funded, as 46 percent budget deficit is covered by bank borrowings at the expense of crowding out funding of smallholders and liquidity-starved Agri-SMEs.

At the same time, climate change widens production uncertainties. Analyst projections place potential yield loss at 14 percent for rice and 76 percent for wheat by 2050, and prices for staple foods are being revealed to be extremely volatile, particularly for rice—the lynchpin of food security. Despite increased

production, Bangladesh is among 45 nations still requiring external food aid. Policy inconsistency and weak market watchfulness cannot insulate these shocks, making nutritional availability vulnerable.

Keeping these challenges in mind, various kinds of work are in motion. The most ambitious is the "Technical Support to Sustainable and Resilient Investment Towards Agriculture Sector Transformation Programme (AsTP)" with unprecedeted tripartite support of \$25 million involving the Government of Bangladesh, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the Gates Foundation, signed in July 2025.

Under this programme, evidence-based planning aims to leverage FAO's Monitoring and Analysing Food and Agricultural Policies (MAFAP) programme to improve monitoring of public expenditure and policy alignment.

To relieve near-term pressures, steps are being taken to cut advance income tax (AIT) paid by raw commodities to agro-processors, slash withholding tax paid by major crops (paddy, wheat, potatoes, jute) from one to 0.5 percent, and exempt cold store plant and equipment from duties to minimise post-harvest losses.

However, there are still critical contradictions. Despite VAT exemption for LNG, the power and industry sector competes with the agriculture sector for limited gas. Restrictive supply directly jeopardises fertiliser production and prices, driving direct outputs from crops into already high food inflation. Policy campaigns fail to consider the feasibility of lobbying for agro-

processing zones. An 89 percent market share is achievable with affordable Indian/Chinese machinery; large, expensive US machinery has poor spare networks and is ill suited to smallholder farms. Diminishing ADP investment overlaps with other successful high-return investment prospects—the seed industry target of 25 percent certified production by 2030, and 5.64 percent GDP per annum contributed by horticulture.

Bangladesh's agricultural policies have shown predictions about upcoming storms, but are not strong and integrated enough to remain resilient. Budget allocations are weakened by inflation and minimised development expenditures. The AsTP model shows promising future horizons, leveraging on key international expertise, but is vulnerable in the face of tumultuous political transition and a weak banking sector.

Renewable energy targets (20 percent by 2030) must explicitly prioritise decentralised solar power for irrigation and cold chains, moving beyond fossil fuel dependence. In addition to production hikes, implementing real-time price monitoring and strategic stocks, along with import policies, can reduce fluctuations.

As Dr Marco V. Sánchez of FAO's MAFAP programme asserts, "transformative change requires not just spending more, but 'optimizing' this government spending, so that every taka is spent more effectively." Whether policy will advance from fragmented response to holistic resilience will come into focus in the forthcoming years.

Why are BSc and diploma engineers at war?



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza
is professor of English at
Dhaka University.

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

In a chance meeting with a senior police officer who graduated from BUET, I asked the obvious question: how did he feel about the recent police action on the students from his alma mater? He candidly said he felt terrible, especially because the student with gagged mouth was from his department. Police had a duty to maintain order and prevent the procession from reaching the chief adviser's official residence. While brows can be raised as to why excessive force was used to disperse the students, a similar question can be asked: why did inarguably the most meritorious students of the country waylaid the capital's Shahbagh crossing for two consecutive days? Shouldn't we expect our future professionals to be more accountable?

The question bothered me while I tried to avoid the traffic congestion created by the protest. As a member of the Dhaka University community, I am both a victim of and witness to the chronic pain of commuters and hospital goers at Shahbagh. On Tuesday, when the engineering students started blocking the

[shushil] self! How dare you threaten 'knifing' one of our friends...?" The old wound between BSc engineers and diploma engineers has been reopened. The interim government has formed two separate committees to listen to the demands of both sides. One can't help but ask: why has this age-old wound been left untreated for so long?

I am sure both parties, BSc and diploma engineers, have discussed their problem in multiple forums. At the heart of the dispute lies the rigid job structure in the public sector, where Grade 9 (assistant engineer) positions are largely for BSc graduates and Grade 10 (sub-assistant engineer) positions are exclusively reserved for diploma holders. One of the primary demands of BSc engineers is the opportunity to compete for Grade 10 positions. As the tension erupted, it soon occurred to me that the debate is not just about recruitment rules; it is about the hierarchical mindset that permeates our education and employment systems.

There is another underlying issue: a serious

well as a technician. However, BSc engineers cannot escape the societal obsession with hierarchy over function. The debate primarily revolves around the title of "engineer" and the corresponding pay grade. The solution must come through the way the country structures opportunity, values technical skills, and employs its most talented graduates.

The manner in which some protesting students confronted the police members

the number of high-level, innovation driven positions is shockingly low. The dream with which they start their academic journey, hoping to contribute to the country's infrastructural, industrial and technological transformations, soon evaporates. They see that their country thrives on the service sector, while the technical sector is dominated by outsourced companies and donors where they have little or no access. The absence of sufficient opportunities is

opportunities. In most cases, the white-collared jobs relocate with their families, severing their ties with home. Conversely, the ones who stay back home discover themselves in jobs unrelated to their training. It is not surprising that many BUET graduates end up working in customs, police, or the civil service general cadre. The country's taxpayers have every right to ask why their money is being spent to train engineers who are ending up in professions that have nothing to do with engineering.

The fierce resistance of diploma engineers to protect Grade 10 is because they see these posts as their main pathway to social mobility. A manufactured conflict pits these groups against each other. The real adversary is the narrow pipeline of opportunities. The government cannot simply shift the blame to their predecessors because they came with an agenda of reform. Their failure to form an education reform commission is a sign of gross negligence. The ongoing debate is a by product of that negligence. Education reform should have addressed the hierarchical mindset that confuses qualification with function. The government must learn from lessons abroad where there is a clear demarcation between professional engineers and technologists. It must define an educational pathway with meaningful roles, outlining opportunities for advancement within its track. The title "engineer" has become a matter of prestige rather than professional definition.

The other body that has a role to play in resolving this crisis is the Public Service Commission. They need to clarify entry qualifications for grades 9 and 10 in line with international standards. To facilitate in-service career mobility, bridging programmes with examinations should be established to enable diploma engineers to upgrade to BSc equivalence if they choose to do so, thereby ensuring merit-based mobility instead of relying on political quotas. We can fill higher posts through transparent and competitive examinations, eliminating the need for institutional pedigree as an automatic qualification. However, we can only resolve these issues if we increase the number of professional engineering jobs. The solution will require emphasis on industrialisation, infrastructure expansion, and investment in research and development. Unless more jobs are created at the top, the conflict will continue at the bottom.



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Members of police clash with BUET students during a protest march by the latter group towards the chief adviser's official residence in Dhaka on August 27, 2025.

shows a dismissive mindset. "Can you spell BUET? Do you know what BUET means?" one student was heard saying. Some of them even explained the difference between university-trained engineers as the "problem solvers and designers" while the diploma graduates as the "technicians." The pecking order in which one designs or supervises while the other executes or carries out instructions is informed by an outdated and ingrained hierarchy that feeds into the Grade 9 versus Grade 10 divide.

This hierarchy, however, is dented when the brightest students in the country, who entered the engineering universities through highly competitive examinations, find that

prompting the university-trained engineers to look "downward," eyeing the posts that were not designed for them.

This doesn't imply that these graduates lack ambition; rather, their aspirations have reached a stalemate. With a lack of adequate employment, a significant number of BSc engineers, especially from BUET and other leading institutions, seek opportunities abroad. This situation represents a crucial loss of national investment. Our public education system that relies solely on government funding spends millions in producing a graduate. Yet, the return on this investment leaks out of the country when graduates leave for better

road, I turned to both my GPS and the Traffic Alert group on Facebook to find an alternative route. There was a warning post by a BUET student, "Don't you dare bring your 'civic'

scarcity of professional jobs and a mismatch between higher education and the labour market demands. Hence, a BSc engineer vies to become a foreign service cadre as

We must do better in mainstreaming health into climate action



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HASEEB MD. IRFANULLAH

In the development discourse, one of the most overused terms is probably "mainstreaming." Over the past 25 years, Bangladesh has invested billions of dollars in mainstreaming community-based approaches, gender equity and climate change adaptation, for example, through thousands of development projects. However, while health is a human right, has it been mainstreamed in our climate change policies and actions?

Till now, the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP, 2009) has been our most treasured climate change policy instrument. It has 44 programmes grouped under six themes. The first theme is "Food Security, Social Protection and Health," which includes "Adaptation in health sector" as one of its nine programmes. This health programme has three basic purposes: i) to conduct research and monitoring of climate change impacts on disease patterns (of malaria, dengue, diarrhoea and heatstroke); ii) to estimate the social and economic costs of such diseases; and iii) to formulate measures to adapt to climate change impacts. However, the BCCSAP programmes were essentially research-focused.

Thirteen years on, Bangladesh achieved another milestone by formulating the National Adaptation Plan (2023-2050), popularly known as the NAP. Many of us may think that, given the climate change impacts on the health sector, the NAP may have emphasised health significantly. But health issues have barely been touched on in some of the six goals of NAP. Under Goal 3, climate-resilient healthcare and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities will be developed to improve human well-being and liveability in urban areas, while Goal 6 expects technological innovations in health and WASH to fight climate change. While the plan has also identified 113 interventions costing a total of \$230 billion by 2050, only three interventions are directly linked to health. Speaking of finance, these three interventions would cost only 1.36 percent of the total NAP budget.

Apparently, the main reason for the NAP's low focus on health is the draft Bangladesh Health-National Adaptation Plan (HNAP). This reasonable five-year plan was drafted by the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) and the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2018. Now, more than



Bangladesh is not doing well in taking strong climate action in the health sector through effective policies, plans or finance.

FILE PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

seven years later, it is still a draft. So, Bangladesh has efficiently missed the opportunity to strategise adaptation in the health arena twice in the last seven years. But we were not supposed to be facing this disappointment because the country's National Health Policy 2011 made "monitoring climate-induced health disasters and prevalence and patterns of related diseases, and developing measures to address these" as one of its 19 primary goals, and related that goal with relevant principles and strategic actions 14 years ago.

Since FY2016, the Bangladesh government has been preparing climate budgets for 25 ministries, departments, and divisions. The total allocation for climate-relevant interventions for FY2026 is Tk 41,208.97 crore—5.2 percent of the total national budget and 0.66 percent of the GDP. The Health Services Division (HSD), representing the health ministry, received Tk 61,022 crore, which is only 1.48 percent of the total climate budget of FY2026. Further, it is only 1.97 percent of the HSD's total budget, making it the fifth-lowest proportion among all 25 agencies.

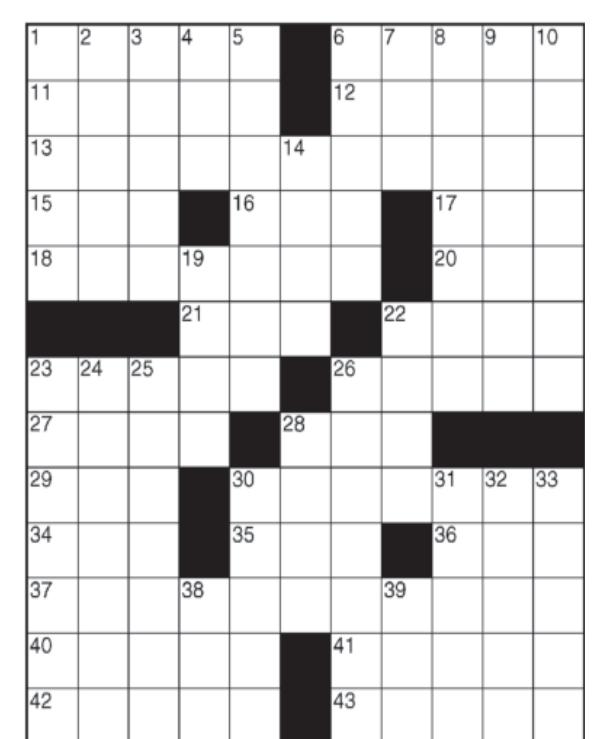
Another way to track climate-related investments in the health sector is the disbursement of the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund (BCCTF). The trust allocated Tk

change-induced losses and damages has already begun, we have to bring that lens into our health sector. We have delayed taking adaptive measures in the health sector due to institutional, policy, legislative and financial constraints, creating a significant gap in adaptation, which will continue causing losses and damage. We may think that physical and mental health-related loss and damage are only non-economic issues. However, illness due to heatwaves or loss of limbs during cyclones not only affects physical and mental well-being, causing non-economic losses, but it also leads to economic damages by reducing household income and saving. On the other hand, damage of crops or fish in the ponds due to floods is not only an economic loss, but it also affects the mental health of the family members as well as their physical health due to lower food security.

It is high time the environment, health, planning, and finance ministries came together to comprehensively plan how to deal with climate change-induced losses and damages in the health sector to fill in the adaptation void we have created over the years. In transdisciplinary research, the core problem gets the focus, not the academic disciplines involved in solving it. We now need "trans-ministerial" climate action for the health sector.

CROSSWORD

BY THOMAS JOSEPH



8-8

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



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

There's no stopping SADIA AYMAN



Being part of such a project with some of the greatest artistes of our time—especially those whose work has inspired me since childhood—still feels like a dream! My constant effort is to embody characters fully and present them to the audience in the most believable way possible.

SHARMIN JOYA

"I am fortunate that in the initial years of my career, I got the opportunity to work with such great filmmakers," recalls Sadia Ayman from one of her old interviews with The Daily Star. Her aim for the stars led her to a place where she is now making her mark in the glittering world of showbiz.

Both critically and publicly acclaimed projects have built a ladder

for her to climb higher since the early years of her career. What's the magic behind her success? Sadia spills the beans, alongside her plans for the future.

"It can be called magic," she smiles, "but more than that,

I believe it's my instincts that always guide me. For instance, I make sure to choose roles I feel confident about and that match my calibre—otherwise, I humbly decline them."

She made her silver screen debut with Gias Uddin Selim's *Kajol Rekha*, which earned both national and international acclaim and was even included in the

curriculum for master's students in the Department of History at Dhaka University. "Would you not call it an achievement any artiste would dream of?" she exclaims.

She is undeniably remembered by the audience for her role in Shihab Shaheen's *Mayashalik*, Mizanur Rahman Aryan's *Full Hata Shirt*, and Amitabh Reza Chowdhury's *Bohemian Ghora*—among her other roles.

Her portrayal of young Jasmine, whose older version was portrayed by Afsana Mimi in Tanim Noor's *Uishob*—a film that became the biggest attraction during this Eid-ul-Azha, continued to run for a long time, and is now making waves overseas.

"The feeling is surreal. Being part of a project with some of the greatest artistes of our time—especially those whose work has inspired me since childhood—still feels like a dream! My constant effort is to embody my characters fully and present them to the audience in the most believable way possible. I was truly overwhelmed when my seniors, including the likes of Zahid Hasan, praised my work publicly. For that, I am deeply grateful."

Reminiscing about the role of Jasmine, a much-loved character, Sadia shares how she prepared to portray someone from the 1990s. "I was born in the late 90s, so I can only remember my cousins from that era, and I tried to recall their personalities, the way they acted and inspired me. At the same time, I've often said that I like watching films and reading books to hone my acting skills. As an avid fan of the renowned writer and filmmaker Humayun Ahmed, his characters—both on the page and on screen—helped me shape the image of Jasmine."

Sadia is grateful to the small screen audience, who have pampered her so much. "My appearances on the small screen earned me so much love that I don't know how to repay it! Even when I was away for a while, they eagerly awaited my return," she expresses. "I promise to return soon with something truly special."

On a lighter note, the actress speaks about her personal life. "Some fans often ask when I'll get married,"

Sadia admits. "Others tell me I'm too young and should focus on my career first, which I find sweet. I trust the Almighty's timing, but I hope to be settled by 30, with a family and a partner who supports me in my journey. Otherwise, life would get boring!"

PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED



OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA



16th International Inter-University Short Film Festival (IUSFF)
August 31-Sep 2 | 10am - 10pm
TSC, University of Dhaka



Play: 'Dushashon'
Sept 3 | 7pm onwards
Experimental Theatre Hall, BSA



Play: 'Guardians of the Gods'
Sept 6 | 7pm and 8:15pm
Alliance Française de Dhaka,
Dhanmondi

TV TALKIES

'SAARE JAHAN SE ACCHA' A riveting spy story that puts humanity first

Netflix's *Saare Jahan Se Accha* is a gripping espionage tale that stands apart from the usual fast-paced thrillers. Rooted in sharp research and layered writing, it balances intelligence with emotion, making the story itself the true hero.

Set in the tense 1970s, the series traces India's R&AW and Pakistan's ISI in a high stakes clash over nuclear ambitions, while offering a humane lens where every operative—RAW or ISI—is shown as a patriot driven by duty.

The performances by Pratik Gandhi, Tillotama Shome, Anup Soni, Sunny



Hinduja, and Suhail Nayar add depth and authenticity, ensuring no character feels secondary.

The show's strength lies in its complexity: multiple threads, moral dilemmas, and moments that stay with you—like the heartbreaking arc of Anup Soni's officer torn between duty and family.

Created by Gaurav Shukla and produced by Bombay Fables, the series is a tribute to unsung heroes who serve in silence and is one of Netflix's most compelling Indian originals.



WHAT'S PLAYING 'Anxiety' by DoeChii

Anxiety is where raw confession meets pop experimentation. What began as a lo-fi recording in DoeChii's bedroom has evolved into one of 2025's most striking breakout singles.

Built on the bones of Gotye's *Somebody That I Used to Know* and reimagined with DoeChii's mix of razor-sharp rap, the song feels both intimately personal and larger than life. Every verse pivot between panic and poise, a sonic embodiment of the tension its title suggests.

It drew viral traction on TikTok and climbed into the Billboard Hot 100's Top 10. Critics have praised its daring structure.

"Anxiety Is Watching Me" lands as both a hook and a truth—proof that pop music can still carve out space for conversations we often sidestep.



STYLE STATEMENT

Austin Butler

Headlining actor Austin Butler made a suave appearance during the premiere of his upcoming film *Caught Stealing*, directed by Darren Aronofsky. He paired a daring low-cut tank with low-waisted trousers exuding effortless sophistication in a monochrome ensemble. Adding structure to the look, Butler layered on a sharp double-breasted blazer, while Saint Laurent Oxfords provided the perfect finishing touch, reinforcing the timeless appeal of his red-carpet style.

TRENDY STREAMS

Netflix
Wednesday



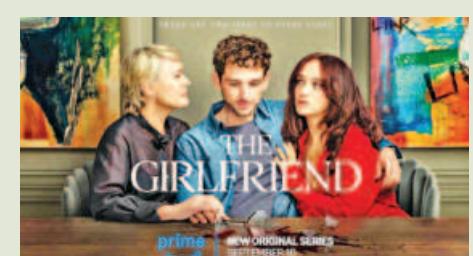
HBO Max
Task



Hulu
Only Murders in the Building



Prime Video
The Girlfriend



Apple TV+
The Morning Show



NEWS

Shamsul Hoque Mojumder's death anniversary

CITY DESK

The 17th death anniversary of Shamsul Hoque Mojumder, a retired engineer of PWD and social worker, was observed yesterday, said a press release.

On this occasion, a doa and milad mahfils were held after the Juma prayers at Amjad Mojumder Bari Jame Masjid, Hosne Ara Bulbul Hifzul Quran, Wadarpur Orphanage Mosque, Al-Haj Shamsul Haque Mojumder Jame Masjid, Purba Devpur Patuabari Jame Masjid, Adddar Bari Jame Masjid and Ferdous Nagar Jame Masjid in Amjadhat union of Fulgazi upazila, Feni.

The friends, relatives and well-wishers of Shamsul Hoque Mojumder, father of Zakir Hossain Mojumder, BJMC retired engineer, and Ferdous Alam Mojumder, chairman and managing director of Frontline Communications Limited, are requested to attend the programmes to pray for the salvation of the departed soul.

Bamboo trade thrives

FROM PAGE 4

rising to about 50 during peak season, from early winter to the start of the monsoon.

Bamboo trader Basit Mia, who has been running his business at the market for the past 35 years, said bamboo is brought in from nearby upazilas such as Srimangal, Kamalganj, and Kulaura.

"Bamboo is sold here daily, but the main haat days are Monday and Friday. On those days, the market sees transactions worth Tk 2-3 lakh, and even up to Tk 5-6 lakh on Fridays," he said.

However, supply has been declining in recent years.

Kalam Mia, another trader, said, "Straight, long, and strong bamboo is getting harder to find. As villages expand and housing increases, land once used to grow bamboo is being repurposed. That's why production and supply are low now."

Despite these challenges, the market remains a key source of quality bamboo.

Sajjad Hosain, a contractor from Sylhet town, said he frequently sources bamboo from Kalarbazar for construction projects.

Mahendra Sarkar, a 60-year-old cane craftsman from Rajapur village, said, "I've been buying bamboo here for 40 years. I use it to make baskets, kula, and khola. I don't know of any bamboo haat as large as this one in our area."



Chickens perch on bamboo poles after their coops were destroyed by the waters from the Padma. Many crops were damaged and some livestock lost to foxes. As the water recedes, villagers are returning to their ravaged homes with whatever poultry they managed to save. The photo was taken in the Madhya Char area of Paba upazila, Rajshahi yesterday.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

MAWLANA BHASHANI BRIDGE

Incomplete approach road poses risk for vehicles

S DILIP ROY, *Latmonirhat*

Around three kilometres of the approach road on Kurigram's Chilmari side of the newly built Mawlana Bhashani Bridge remain unfinished, forcing buses and goods-laden trucks to navigate it at risk every day.

Heavy rainfall on August 27 caused two portions of the incomplete road to collapse. Although the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) carried out emergency repairs, the road has yet to be fully carpeted.

The 1,490-metre-long bridge over the Teesta River, connecting Chilmari upazila in Kurigram with Haripur in Gaibandha's Sundarganj upazila, was inaugurated on August 20.

Since then, thousands of light and heavy vehicles have been crossing the bridge daily, improving connectivity between Chilmari, Gaibandha, Dhaka, and other parts of the country.

Chilmari Upazila Engineer Julfikar Ali said, "The incomplete road has made our movement difficult."

Truck driver Jahurul Haque, 50, said,

"The bridge has eased travel from Chilmari to Gaibandha and Dhaka, reducing both time and costs. But driving heavy trucks on the unfinished road is still risky."

Bus driver Mizanur Rahman, 55, echoed him.

According to LGED sources, a total of 57 kilometres of approach roads has been built on both sides of the bridge. Of this,



51.77 kilometres in Sundarganj upazila of Gaibandha have been completed, while 5.23 kilometres in Chilmari upazila remain partially unfinished.

Chilmari Upazila Engineer Julfikar Ali said, "Out of 5,230 metres of approach road, carpeting of 2,150 metres has been completed. Another 2,380 metres are

ready for carpeting. But 700 metres have been delayed due to land acquisition complications. Although heavy rainfall caused some damage, we repaired it quickly. At present, there is no major problem for movement."

Executive Engineer of LGED in Gaibandha, Uzzal Chowdhury, said, "We have instructed the contractor to complete the remaining work in Chilmari quickly. The entire approach road will be finished within this year."

The project was implemented by China State Construction Engineering Corporation under LGED, with joint funding from the Saudi Fund for Development (SFD) and the Opec Fund for International Development (OFID).

The bridge was built using 290 piles, 30 pillars, 28 spans, and 155 girders. In addition, 12 bridges, 58 box culverts, and 57 kilometres of approach roads with river training works were constructed after acquiring 133 acres of land.

The core bridge structure cost around Tk 367 crore, while approach roads, river training, culverts, and land acquisition required another Tk 363.85 crore.

Umama eyes major

and ensure political coexistence of all views," she said.

She added, "Before August 5, I was involved in numerous movements and student-oriented initiatives, while continuing my studies. I tried to balance academics and activism."

"After August 5, when the country was in crisis, I stepped forward as one of the faces of the July movement -- working on issues from ensuring treatment for the injured to holding the government accountable," said Umama.

Now, according to Umama, she wants to do something concrete for her alma mater.

"I want to continue working on the campus issues I have long been engaged with. Recently, through our science organisation, I arranged a science fest. I have also called for a healthy campus environment and hall politics. Dhaka University has long suffered from partisan politics, and I want to end that," she said.

The former spokesperson of Students Against Discrimination also stressed the lack of female representation in the Ducusu leadership.

"Since independence, no woman has ever been elected VP. Women themselves can best raise their safety concerns and rights on campus. For decades, women led movements, but when it came to securing rights, they were sidelined."

Umama said female

Haunted by scars, still waiting

FROM PAGE 1
demanded an end to the culture of state violence.

"Almost a year has passed, but many remain missing, and there is still no clarity on how trials will take place. It is very frustrating," he said, urging that secret detention centres be preserved as evidence.

These testimonies are among 1,752 complaints now under investigation by the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances.

Human rights groups say the scale of disappearances remains alarming. Odhikar recorded 708 cases between 2009 and June 2024, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) listed 629 from 2007 to 2023, HRSS counted 392 from 2015 to 2024, Human Rights Watch estimated nearly 600 from 2009 to 2021, while the International Federation for Human Rights reported 709 cases between 2009 and June 2024.

Of these, 471 people eventually returned or were produced in court, 83 were found dead, and 155 remain missing.

At the event, HRSS Secretary General Muniruzzaman presented seven key demands, including Bangladesh's full implementation of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

He urged that families be informed of relatives' whereabouts, each case investigated, perpetrators brought to justice, and victims and witnesses

given protection. He also called for public awareness through textbooks and the media.

Nur Khan Liton, a member of the inquiry commission, said political parties have pledged commitments, but accountability is essential.

"We must ensure that the word 'disappearance' no longer exists in Bangladesh. While we say we have defeated fascism,

we must also remove the fascism that lives in our

and false cases. "Civil society has long demanded this, but political leaders are the ones in power. We want this promise from them."

Huma Khan, chief of mission of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, urged Bangladesh to act urgently to ease families' suffering.

She highlighted three priorities: ensuring victims' families' right to death certificates, property transfers, and bank access;

the need for nationwide consultations with victims and families.

Regarding the reliance on the death penalty, she said, "What is needed is an impartial and efficient justice system."

She appealed to the interim government and the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs to prioritise accountability and meaningful justice over rushed legislation or symbolic punishments.

Political representatives present at the event, including Mahdi Amin of BNP and Advocate Ehsanul Mahbub Zobaer of Jamaat-e-Islami, promised to address enforced disappearances in their election manifestos.

International Crimes Tribunal Prosecutor SM Mainul Karim, Inquiry Commission Member Nabil Idris, Jatiya Nagarik Party's Senior Joint Convenor Ariful Islam Adib, and Nagarik Oikya's General Secretary Shahidullah Kaiser also spoke.

Meanwhile, in a statement yesterday, ASK urged the government to ensure justice, compensation, protection for families and witnesses, and rehabilitation for victims of enforced disappearances. It also called for exemplary punishment for perpetrators and effective steps to prevent such violations in future.

ASK added that these measures are essential not only for victims but also for the safety of society and the rule of law.

SEVEN KEY DEMANDS

- ⦿ Fully implement Int'l Convention for Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
- ⦿ Inform families of whereabouts of disappeared relatives
- ⦿ Investigate each case thoroughly
- ⦿ Bring perpetrators to justice
- ⦿ Ensure protection for victims, witnesses
- ⦿ Raise public awareness through textbooks, the media
- ⦿ Preserve secret detention centres as evidence

minds," he said. "What is happening now cannot be denied. Whether it is mob actions or other methods, these must be stopped, because they create opportunities for fascism to return."

Sara Hossain, honorary executive director of BLAST, warned that justice must be fair. "If innocent people are falsely implicated, then it will again be injustice," she said, urging political leaders to pledge an end to disappearances, killings,

ending harassment through fabricated cases; and aligning the draft ordinance on enforced disappearances with international standards. She referred to the offer of technical assistance from the UN Working Group, which she said Bangladesh did not accept, and warned that the draft law does not align with international human rights standards.

Justice cannot be achieved by rushing a law," she said, stressing the rule of law.

DHAKA SATURDAY AUGUST 30, 2025
BHADRA 15, 1432 BS
The Daily Star 9

Latif Siddique refuses

FROM PAGE 1

the police to remove the bulletproof jackets, citing discomfort, and the officers complied.

Magistrate Sarah Farzana Haque began the proceedings at 10:55am and later ordered all 16 accused to jail.

As he was being taken back to the lockup of the CMM Court, journalists asked if he had anything to say. Latif shook his head, signalling "no".

Police filed the case with Shahbagh Police Station earlier in the day, accusing Latif and others of inciting terrorism through a speech delivered under the banner of Mancha 71.

The case statement said he conspired to destabilise the country through armed struggle and to overthrow the interim government.

For his speech, people present there surrounded Latif Siddique and others and chanted slogans calling them "Awami fascists", the case statement said. It made 70 to 80 unidentified others accused.

During the hearing,

Hafizur said they were victims, not perpetrators.

"I have taught the constitution for 33 years. Yet a conspiracy involving the Liberation War and the constitution is being hatched against me. Yesterday, a mob was created against us, and we were arrested."

He alleged denial of protections under article 33 of the constitution and sought Tk 5 crore in compensation for "physical and mental harm inflicted by the state". Holding up a copy of the constitution, he said, "We will protect the constitution. We will protect the Liberation War."

Journalist Monjurul Alam Panna, another accused, also spoke from the dock. "What crimes have we committed? Why are handcuffs placed on a journalist's wrists? Is it a crime to speak about the Liberation War? Are we criminals?" he asked.

Opposing bail, Additional Public Prosecutor Md Shamsuddoha Sumon told the court the accused attended a roundtable organised by Mancha 71, founded on August 5 -- the anniversary of the Awami

League's ouster.

He alleged the platform's "main objective is to bring [Sheikh] Hasina back" and that the accused "were involved in conspiracies" and had benefitted from the AL in the past. He said 300-400 people had gathered in Bhatara with the same aim, later blockading Shahbagh. He described it as part of a blueprint to sabotage the election, adding that a remand petition would follow.

Latif, Hafizur, and others were detained on Thursday after a group calling itself "July Fighters" disrupted a discussion on "Our Great Liberation

War and the Constitution of Bangladesh" organised by Mancha 71 at Dhaka Reporters Unity. The group tore the banner, confined participants, and handed them over to police.

Organisers said they formed Mancha 71 to prevent distortion of Liberation War history and protect the dignity of freedom fighters, and their event was meant as a peaceful discussion.

Prof Anu Muhammad, former Jahangirnagar University teacher, condemned the incident. "They assaulted freedom fighters, a university teacher, and a journalist -- people who only wanted to speak. Wasn't it for this very right to free expression that we fought against Sheikh Hasina's regime?" he said at a separate programme at Central Shaheed Minar yesterday.

He warned against rising mob violence by certain groups to silence thoughts, opinions, and the right to speak. "After such an attack, the government should have filed a case against the attackers. Instead, to our shock, those attacked were charged under the Anti-Terrorism Act and sent to prison, while the attackers -- whose faces are visible in videos -- roam free, preparing for the next wave of mob terror."

Bangladesh Udichi Shilpigoshthi in a statement said with the government's boundless silence and indirect support, the scale of mob violence across the country has been increasing day by day.

Greed fuelling new

FROM PAGE 12

gripped the country during this period, fuelled by rampant looting, money laundering, corruption, and politicisation, he said.

Although the Proclamation of Independence had pledged to establish equality, human dignity, and social justice, people in reality have been deprived of self-respect and fundamental rights," said the noted jurist.

The

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ESSAY

Sonnet of the riverbank: Remembering Al Mahmud, the poet

SALAHUDDIN AYUB

Some poets arrive like rain on parched soil—needing no defense, only recognition. Al Mahmud (1936-2019) was one of them. And yet, in the usual crookedness of history, we have found ourselves having to defend what should already have been canonised. There was a time—not long ago—when his name unsettled literary editors in Dhaka, when praising *Sonali Kabin* (1973), risked being branded reactionary, and even admirers hesitated to carry his new poems to print. I remember it vividly: the early 1990s, when Muhammad Nizamuddin and I set out to compile the special *Upama* issue on Al Mahmud. We went door to door across Dhaka, knocking on the confidence of poets and critics, asking for essays. Most refused. One professor, with oracular weight, told us: "Time is not in favor of Al Mahmud." As though poetry was supposed to submit its worth for time's approval.

And yet *Sonali Kabin* (1973), like Farrukh Ahmad's *Shaat Shagorer Majhi* (1944), is what the great George Kubler, the giant of art history, once called a "prime object". In *The Shape of Time* (1962), the Yale art historian introduced the enigmatic yet generative idea of "prime objects"—singular works that initiate new series of forms, patterns, or techniques. These are not simply "firsts" in a chronological sense; rather, they are works so decisive in conception that they generate whole families of replicas, copies, derivations, variants, and discards. "Things create things," Kubler writes, emphasising not inheritance but propulsion. A prime object is not an origin so much as a rupture—something that breaks through and, by doing so, alters the sequence of what follows.



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

who had no need to exoticise.

Critics liked to compare him to Jasimuddin. It was a mistake. Jasimuddin wrote the village from within the lyric logic of its innocence; Al Mahmud wrote it from within the contradictions of historical survival. His love poems are not about lovers in cafés or students in half-rented hostels—they are about women with 'shabari' feet and tribal rhythms, about nakedness in rice fields, about eros as ecology, about bodies cast in the same grammar as land. If Sunil Gangopadhyay wrote love in a Kolkata register, and Shakti Chattopadhyay in tantric ambiguity, Al Mahmud wrote it like a peasant Zainul Abedin might have drawn—with hard lines and muscular shadows, their contours shaped by

classical training in European art history at the Calcutta Art School, where names like Michelangelo loomed large and Principal E.B. Havell could not have imagined how such formal rigour would one day be retooled for famine sketches. Later, Zainul would channel those same classical skills—honed in part through his exposure to Michelangelo and other Renaissance masters—into depicting Bengal's peasants as monumental figures, echoing the muscular dignity of Sistine bodies. But it was first in the famine sketches—drawing dying bodies with lines borrowed from Europe—that he translated classical form into a language of Bengali suffering. There is a continuity here worth tracing.

Farrukh Ahmad, a communist in the 1940s, wrote his famous poem *Lash* (1944) after witnessing the dying on Kolkata's famine-stricken streets—bodies the Indian half of Bengal, still enthralled by a certain Shankarian metaphysics where death and hunger are 'maya' and only Brahma is real, refused to see. After all, why sketch famine if the world itself is an illusion? At that very moment, Zainul was sketching those

same bodies, while their dominant non-Muslim counterparts were still searching for heroes in the 'puranas' and Rajput legends. Unlike their peers, whose artistic traditions often turned toward metaphysics or allegory, these Muslim poets and painters grappled with famine, dislocation, and injustice as immediate, embodied realities. Al Mahmud's muscular rural eroticism continues that thread—not in imitation, but in inheritance. A modernity not of the city, but of the broken field, the ploughed body, the unwitnessed hunger. And behind it all was a poet who did not believe love was private. His was not the romance of soft modernity, but the heat of ancient Bengal's hunger, sweat, loss, and memory.

He loved the sonnet, but only in the sense that he could house ancient textures within its frame. The craft never announced itself. No elaborate technique, no formal pyrotechnics. His poems never tried to impress. They moved with the conviction of someone who had no patience for experiment—for the sake of experiment. Technique, he said more than once, is the substitute of those without poetic metal in them. He had metal. He had rhythm. And he had an instinct for metaphor that would make even his enemies pause. Even in the poems where Islam, Muslim history, or classical narratives appear, there is no trace of sermon or sanctimony.

Al Mahmud, in moments of frustration, would often quip: "woju kore sahitya hoy na"—you can't do literature after performing ablation. What he meant was not merely that ritual purity and creative labour are mismatched, but that literature and religion are fundamentally different modes of being. When certain Islam-lovers began demanding he write only about Muslim history or themes, he reminded them—bluntly and repeatedly—that literature is

not a branch of preaching. It comes from a different impulse, and it obeys no doctrine.

It's a line I remember well, because it came during a long interview I conducted with him for that *Upama* issue in 1994—a special issue that would become a small act of resistance. The interview was one of the most electric I have ever done, and his answers remain legendary. I had been working through Derrida, Paul de Man, and post-structural theory at the time, and at one point I pressed him on Tagore's definition of the short story—that it had "no theory." I asked, hadn't theory now become part of life itself? Al Mahmud laughed, then said: "Rabindranath was right. Theory has never been part of life. And whenever you let philosophy enter literature, it will inevitably make your 'prajanan shakti' impotent."

Those are his words: *prajanan shakti*. Generative power. And that's what his poetry had in abundance. It had sex, soil, hunger, injustice, betrayal, belief, and myth, all thrown together in one unforgettable voice. It had sonic force and syntactic strangeness. It had metaphors you could never predict but instantly recognise. And perhaps that is why so many could not forgive him. He wasn't the poet they expected. He had come out of schoolrooms they never entered, spoken to villagers they never heard, kissed women they never met. He did not inherit the city, nor did he need it. And when the city turned its back, he kept writing. Through imprisonment, marginalisation, political exile, and career sabotage, he kept writing. Like Farrukh before him—who wrote *Shaat Shagorer Majhi* in 1944 without knowing whether Bengal would remain Bengal—Al Mahmud wrote with the sense that Bengali Muslim literature still had to be invented.

It begins, for many of us, with the

sonnets.

The 14 sonnets of *Sonali Kabin* (1973)—composed over the late 1960s—have become so central to the canon of modern Bangladeshi poetry that we forget how improbable they once were. They arrived in a decade of rupture, revolution, and rhetorical excess. And yet here was something measured and sensuous, earthy and metaphysical, teeming with folk memory and ancient hunger. Al Mahmud did not write these poems as a manifesto, and yet they have the force of one. They stand not just as a personal triumph but as a reminder that poetic form is not an afterthought to meaning—it is its most intimate double.

In *Sonali Kabin*, Bengal is imagined not as a map but as a body—female, fertile, wounded, defiant. It is not a sanitised, civilisational Bengal but one filled with *kirat*, *shabar*, *kol*, *bhela*—the indigenous and the ostracised, the forest dwellers and the river-people. The *shabari* of myth—real tribal women mythologised in the *Ramayana*—are here reimagined not as devotional figures but as elemental presences, closer to the soil than to scripture. This is the Bengal bypassed by Sanskrit epics and Brahminical genealogies. Al Mahmud's Bengal is not a land of temples or pilgrimage routes—it is a land of labour, hunger, and sensual knowledge. His Bengal resists not with ideology but with flesh, river, and memory.

Much has been written about *Sonali Kabin*, and rightly so. But too much of that writing has tried to either domesticate or dismiss him—by classifying him as a rural poet, a 'non-experimental modern', or worse, a peddler of nostalgia. These are errors. No one who reads the sonnets with care can miss their deliberate structure, their philosophical musculature, or their near-surreal tonal range. Al Mahmud, in these poems, was not retreating from modernity. He was re-rooting it in a language and geography that the self-anointed urban avant-garde had trained itself to ignore.

The terms are familiar enough: modernism, romanticism, lyricism, indigeneity. But Al Mahmud reshuffled them. He borrowed from the entire available past—*Charyapada*, *puthi* literature, archaeology, tribal lore, *puran-rupkatha*, and the Buddhist past of Bengal—and repurposed them into something unmistakably his own. In doing so, he gave Bengali poetry something it rarely achieves: a center of gravity.

This is an excerpt. Read the full essay on *The Daily Star* and *Star Books and Literature*'s websites.

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POETRY

THREE SONGS: Kazi Nazrul Islam

Neelambori sari pori neel jamunay (Wearing a blue sari)

Wearing a blue sari, to the blue Yamuna,
who goes, who goes, O who goes?
It looks as if lotuses dance in water,
bumblebees as if anklets on feet tinkle.
The jingles of the pitcher and bangles

stun the indifferent champa woods.
With kohl-smudged eyes glittering,
wagtails and deer go into hiding.
With rhythm of the frame, wild flowers
blossom,

listening to anklets, petals of basilis rejoice.
Covered with clouds, the glowing twilight
has descended mistaking the path—
her limbs swaying in style,
the river water overflowing the banks.

Ogo Boishakhi jhar, loye jao abelay (The Nor'wester)

O Nor'wester! Take away this bud
fallen in an inauspicious time.
Take away my life, this trodden
flower.
O river water! Take me
to the seven seas of agonies,
the afflicted ocean wailing
evermore looking at the moon.
O clouds! Carry me away to the
land
from where Shyam doesn't move
to Mathura,
the land where for a fleeting
fault
life isn't trampled by pain and

anguish.
Translated by Mohammad Shafiqul Islam.
Mohammad Shafiqul Islam, a poet, translator, and academic, is Professor in the Department of English at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet, Bangladesh. His latest collection of poetry, *On the Other Side of Silence*, has recently appeared from Red River, India. Reach him at msislam-eng@sust.edu.



ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

Ami chiratare dur-e chole jabo (I will go far away forever)

I'll go far away forever—
yet I won't let myself be obliterated.
I'll turn air to knot your hair
when the bun gets loose.
Immersed in your tune
when the sky dozes, wind weeps,
with teary eyes, I'll worm my way
to your heart to warm mine.
To celebrate your grand ceremony,

myriad admirers will appear.
You'll recall the knight of the road
whom you forsook right here.
On the way to your bower,
you'll be shook, halt in torment—
someone will be lying dead
becoming one with the dust.
I'll go far away forever—
yet I won't let myself be obliterated.



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

GG



They [Bangladesh] have played some good cricket recently, but they have also shown vulnerability in other series. We have come here confident that we can play a good game of cricket, knowing that Bangladesh will bring a strong style of play. They have some very good players and are tough to face in their home conditions. So, it's going to be a great challenge for our guys. But we wouldn't be here if we didn't think we could win some games.

Current Netherlands head coach and former Bangladesh fielding coach **RYAN COOK**



What to WATCH

Sony Sports 1
Asia Cup Hockey
Bangladesh vs Chinese
Taipei
Live from 1:30 pm
T Sports

Bangladesh vs Netherlands
1st T20I
Live from 6:00 pm
Star Sports 1 and 2
US Open
Live from 9:00 pm

Star Sports Select HD1
Premier League
Chelsea vs Fulham
Live from 5:30 pm
Man Utd vs Burnley
Live from 8:00 pm

SHORT CORNER

Europa League, Conference League draws held

Aston Villa will host Coppa Italia winners Bologna and visit Feyenoord in the Europa League opening stage, while Scottish sides Celtic and Rangers will both welcome AS Roma as Friday's draw also set up a clash between Nottingham Forest and Porto. Meanwhile, FA Cup winners Crystal Palace, who were demoted from the Europa League, are set to host Strasbourg and visit Dynamo Kyiv in the third-tier Conference League.

Messi prepares for final WC qualifiers

Lionel Scaloni has unveiled Argentina's 29-man squad for their last two World Cup qualifying fixtures, but all eyes are fixed on Lionel Messi, who is preparing for what could be his final home qualifier in the Albiceleste shirt. Argentina, already qualified for the 2026 World Cup, will host Venezuela on September 4 before travelling to Ecuador on September 9.

Fenerbahce part ways with Mourinho

Jose Mourinho's contract at Fenerbahce has been terminated, the Turkish club said on Friday, bringing an early end to the Portuguese coach's tenure in Istanbul. Mourinho's side failed to seal a Champions League spot after they lost 1-0 against Benfica on Wednesday night in their play-off tie.

Read full stories on *The Daily Star's* website.

Red-ball pace trio helps Tigers prepare for Dutch attack

SPORTS REPORTER from Sylhet

Despite having five pace bowling options in the squad, Bangladesh are carrying three extra pacers in Nahid Rana, Khaled Ahmed and Ebadot Hossain in Sylhet to better prepare for the Netherlands pace attack they are set to face in the three-match T20I series starting today.

Bangladesh have four pacers in Mustafizur Rahman, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, Taskin Ahmed, and Shoriful Islam, and one fast-bowling all-rounder in Mohammad Saifuddin for the Netherlands series.

The same squad will then travel to the UAE to take part in the Asia Cup, scheduled to start on September 9.

Despite not even being in the standby list for Asia Cup, Nahid, Khaled and Ebadot— who mostly play red ball cricket for the Tigers -- have been practicing with the side in Sylhet in the preparation camp.

"The reason they are here is because they bowl and train with us. And also because our batters will get that level of practice before the game that we know they [Netherlands] will offer us in the games," Bangladesh head coach Phil Simmons told *The Daily Star* yesterday.

The Dutch pace attack will be led by Paul van Meekeren, who was the player-of-the-match in Netherlands' 87-run win over Bangladesh in the 2023 ICC World Cup in India with figures of 4-23, and also features Fred Klaassen, Ryan Klein and Kyle Klein.

HOCKEY ASIA CUP

Bangladesh face Chinese Taipei in do-or-die clash

SPORTS REPORTER

Smarting from a 4-1 defeat to Malaysia in their AHF Men's Hockey Asia Cup opener on Wednesday, the Bangladesh team are determined to put up a gritty performance in today's crucial encounter against Chinese Taipei in Bihar.

"Our target is to finish third in the four-team group, so the match against Chinese Taipei is a do-or-die affair for us," head coach Moshirul Rahman Biplob told *The Daily Star* over the phone from Rajbir yesterday.

"If the boys can stick to the game plan while maintaining team structure and shape, I believe we have a good chance of winning the match," said the former national player.

Chinese Taipei, who suffered a crushing 7-0 loss to South Korea in their opening match, came into the tournament with better preparation. They finished runners-up in the qualification tournament held in March. In contrast, Bangladesh had just three weeks of preparation after being called in on short notice to replace Pakistan.

However, history favours the men in red and green. Bangladesh beat Chinese Taipei comfortably in their previous two encounters -- a 4-2 victory in the AHF Cup in 2016 and a resounding 11-3 win in the Asia Cup in 2013.

Bangladesh fared better against Malaysia than they did in the previous edition in Jakarta in 2022, where they suffered an 8-1 defeat. The margin could have been even narrower this time if the forwards had capitalised



on opportunities during counter-attacks.

"Our strategy was to play quarter by quarter, keeping the scoresheet clean and looking to exploit counter-attacks. We succeeded in the first quarter and even took the lead in the second, but the boys couldn't maintain the momentum against an opponent ranked 13th in the world," said Biplob, adding that Malaysia scored three of their goals from transition moments.

Biplob is optimistic that his players will improve as the tournament progresses.

"The artificial turf is very fast, which led to a lot of missed passes and made it difficult to control the ball. But I believe the boys will adapt and get better with each match," he said.



"Losing against a team that is lower down on the table is not a bad thing, because if we don't play well on the day, we deserve to be criticised," Simmons said at the pre-match press conference in Sylhet yesterday.

"We don't think about losing to anybody. We think about how we play and the standards we want to set. And I'm sure if we play to that level, we will win," he added.

Simmons was also very specific about the standard he wanted his team to match, setting the 2-1 triumph over Sri Lanka in Sri Lanka as the benchmark over their recent-most series win over Pakistan in Mirpur by the same margin.

"I'm looking for us to continue the

levels that we have set in Sri Lanka. Taking away a little bit from Mirpur, I don't think the wicket was as good as Sri Lanka. But the standards we set in Sri Lanka, that's what we're looking to continue," said the former Caribbean international.

Even after the Pakistan series in July, it was reported that Simmons wasn't satisfied with the Mirpur wicket despite their series triumph.

The series against the Netherlands is taking place in Sylhet, which is known to produce the best sporting wicket in the country.

But recurrent rain has been an issue in the lead up to the series as it hampered both team's outdoor training on Thursday and remains a threat throughout the series as well.

Yesterday, however, the sun was out in Sylhet and both teams completed their outdoor training without a hitch.

Meanwhile, Simmons also informed that all-round Shamin Hossain might not feature in today's match as he is still recovering from fever and declared opener Parvez Hossain Emon fit to play.

Opposing team's head coach Ryan cook, who has worked with the Tigers previously as their fielding coach, vowed to play their best cricket to beat the hosts. "We believe that if we play a good game of cricket, we can beat any team on any day and we've shown that we are capable of doing that. Of course, we are confident that we can do it."



Third seed Coco Gauff displayed great resolve to overcome another shaky performance that reduced her to tears in her US Open second-round fixture against Donna Vekic on Thursday. Gauff wiped away a flood of mid-match tears after a litany of service errors to defeat the unseeded Croatian 7-6 (7/5), 6-2, later revealing that she drew inspiration from the presence of gymnastics icon Simone Biles, who was among the crowd at the Arthur Ashe Stadium.

PHOTO: REUTERS



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National polls to take place on schedule Hopes Fakhrul; warns delay could risk return of fascism

UNB, Dhaka

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday said the upcoming national elections will be held as scheduled, despite growing uncertainty and frustration among citizens.

Speaking at the unveiling ceremony of a book titled *Roktoakto* July at the Jatiya Press Club, he reassured the public that elections cannot be halted or delayed.

"People are increasingly confused, asking whether elections will take place at all," he said. "A sense of doubt and frustration has spread. But I have always said – elections will be held."

He warned that if polls were postponed or cancelled, the nation

SEE PAGE 5 COL 4

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Economic policies must be freed from grip of oligarchs Experts call for power reform, economic overhaul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh's economic policies must be liberated from the control of a few oligarchs, bureaucrats, and a narrow capitalist elite to ensure broad-based growth and sustainable job creation, economists said yesterday.

"When power is concentrated in the hands of a few elites, economic growth may occur, but it fails to generate widespread employment," said Mushtaq Khan, professor of economics at SOAS University of London.



For Bangladesh to move forward it must confront its oligarchic system head-on. That means prosecuting those responsible for mega-crimes and mega-theft.

Mushtaq Khan, professor of economics at SOAS University of London

Prof Khan made the remarks while delivering a keynote presentation of the two-day international event "Bengal Delta Conference 2025: Bangladesh at the Crossroads" at the InterContinental Dhaka, organised by the Dacca Institute of Research and Analytics (DAIRA), a newly-formed think tank.

In his speech, Khan outlined why Bangladesh was able to generate jobs and drive manufacturing growth for decades and why that progress has now slowed.

"The direction of any economic strategy must be implementable, and that depends on the distribution of

SEE PAGE 5 COL 2

ETHICS VIOLATION Thai court sacks PM Shinawatra

Five candidates eligible to become next premier

REUTERS, Bangkok

Thailand's Constitutional Court yesterday dismissed prime minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra from office for an ethics violation after only a year in power, in another crushing blow to the Shinawatra political dynasty that could usher in a new period of turmoil.

Paetongtarn, who was Thailand's youngest prime minister, becomes the sixth premier from or backed by the billionaire Shinawatra family to be removed by the military or judiciary in a tumultuous two decade battle for power between the country's warring elites.

In its verdict, the court said Paetongtarn violated ethics in a

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What was once a 150-metre-wide, roaring river is now a shallow, silt-choked channel. The Salta, having lost its navigability, leaves boats stranded at low tide. With water barely reaching knee height at its centre, residents on both sides of the river are now forced to wade across on foot. This waterway, once vital to the lives of thousands, has been reduced to a lifeless stream.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

EC to set up cell to combat fake news: CEC Next election could be 'riskiest', says EC Anwarul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin expressed concern yesterday that, in addition to political and law-and-order challenges, the commission may also have to confront the threat of misinformation and disinformation on social media during the next polls.

Highlighting emerging threats to the electoral process, the CEC, while inaugurating a two-day training programme for election core trainers at the Electoral Training Institute in Dhaka, asked all officials to combat "fake news" and ensure accurate information reaches even the remotest areas.

"Misinformation and

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

POST-JULY UPRISING Greed fuelling new wave of anarchy

Says Dr Kamal Hossain

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In the aftermath of the July uprising, the country has witnessed a new wave of terror, killings, and mob violence, centring extortion, land grabbing, and establishing dominance, said Gono Forum founder and Emeritus President Dr Kamal Hossain yesterday.

"If the government fails to contain this evil force, it could lead to a disastrous situation, which is undesirable," he said in a written statement.



Gono Forum General Secretary Mizanur Rahman read out the statement on Dr Kamal's behalf at a discussion marking the 32nd founding anniversary of the party at the Jatiya Press Club.

Dr Kamal said the country had long been under the grip of an oppressive authoritarian regime, where the absence of democracy led to violations of the rule of law, voting rights, and fundamental human rights.

A deep crisis and uncertainty

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7

43 bodies a month recovered from rivers this year

Shows data of River Police Headquarters

RAFIUL ISLAM

Bodies of a woman and a child were recovered from the Buriganga River on August 23. Autopsies initially found that they had been strangled before their bodies were dumped. A murder case was filed with Sadarghat River Police Station in this regard.

Police have yet to identify the victims, as their fingerprints are unidentifiable and no one has come forward to claim the bodies.

"They launched a firebomb attack only 150 metres (492 feet) away from us. They scorched the entire area. Not only that, but they fired from helicopters ... very scary bombardments," he said.

Displaced Palestinian Ahmed Moqat said he had been continuously on the move in a bid to escape Israeli attacks.

The Israeli army said yesterday its so-called temporary daily "tactical pause" in Gaza, announced last month for humanitarian purposes, will no longer apply to Gaza City.

Police sent the victims' details to various police stations to cross-check with missing persons' entries and have preserved DNA samples in case anyone comes forward.

This is a recurring challenge for police, who often struggle to identify bodies recovered from rivers. According to police and criminology

experts, criminals frequently use rivers to dump bodies in an attempt to avoid arrest.

Besides, police also recover bodies of suicide or drowning victims from the rivers.

River police recovered an average of 43 bodies every month this year, compared to 36 per month last year.

Data from the River Police Headquarters shows that at least 301 bodies of men, women, and children were recovered from rivers across the country between January and July this year.

The highest number of bodies, 34, was found in Narayanganj, followed by 32 in Dhaka.

Of them, 209 were later identified, while 92 remain unidentified. Last year, at least 440 bodies were recovered from rivers, of whom 141 remain unidentified.

This year so far, at least 41 murder cases have been filed in connection with recovered bodies, compared to 53 cases last year.

River police officials said they register murder cases whenever they suspect foul play, based on

SEE PAGE 5 COL 5



Children play at their makeshift family home along the right bank of the Ravi River in Lahore, Pakistan, yesterday, following heavy monsoon rains and rising water levels. Punjab officials said floods have claimed at least 20 lives, mostly due to drowning.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Disruptive forces becoming more and more visible

Anu Muhammad tells event honouring Jatin Sarkar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country is seeing the rise of disruptive, authoritarian forces just a year after the mass uprising that promised a new Bangladesh, said Prof Anu Muhammad yesterday.

"Instead of moving toward a country free from inequality, we are witnessing the rise of discriminatory, non secular, and authoritarian forces. Their dominance is becoming increasingly visible," he said at an event remembering the life of Jatin Sarkar, a prominent intellectual.

The event was held at the Central Shaheed Minar.

Anu Muhammad said the presence of an intellectual of Jatin's stature was needed at these trying times.

"The society Jatin Sarkar dreamed of was one without discrimination," he said, adding that last year's uprising was born out of this very spirit of resistance against discrimination.

"Yet today, we see forces -- often with the direct patronage of the government -- perpetuating mob terror to suppress such progressive voices."

"We need to build the intellectual and moral strength to resist inequality and bigotry in all forms -- class oppression, gender discrimination, caste prejudice, and religious intolerance."

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PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUJ

SAPAHAR

the heartland of mango trade

MOSTAFA SHABUJ, back from Naogaon

If you stand at the Charmatha Zero Point of Naogaon's Sapahar upazila town between June and August, all you see for nearly 2.5 kilometres in every direction are vehicles laden with crates of mangoes.

A decade ago, such a sight was unimaginable for locals.

For three months each year, the once quiet border town transforms into a bustling hub. Makeshift kitchen markets, grocery shops, restaurants,



DAE officials said.

For decades, Naogaon's highlands yielded little more than Aman paddy during the rainy season, lying fallow the rest of the year for lack of irrigation. The turning point came in 1999 with

Md Ryhan Siddiki of Bondhupara in Porsha upazila started with 8 bighas in 2004. Now, he leases land to grow late season Gourmati mangoes on about 100 bighas. "After expenses, I've profited Tk 100,000 to Tk 120,000 per bigha this season," he said.

Others, like Sakhawat Habib of Gobindabati village, have scaled up even further. From 4 bighas in 2006, he now cultivates mangoes on 460 bighas.

But he warned of new threats. "For the last three years, thrips have been turning the mangoes black. No pesticide seems to work, and farmers are getting lower prices," he said.

Many echoed his frustration.

Despite such challenges, mangoes have brought prosperity. Farmers' incomes have soared, and living standards have improved. Sapahar has seen a surge in schools, colleges, private hospitals, and clinics. Eight government and private banks now operate in the town, while mobile financial services handle hundreds of crores of taka daily during the season.

Imam Hossain Rifat, general secretary of the Sapahar Upazila Mango Arotdar Somoby Samity.

The boom has also opened the door to exports. In 2024, Bangladesh exported 1,290 tonnes of mangoes. This year, as of August 24, shipments to Europe and the Middle East have already reached 2,167 tonnes, according to the DAE.

Farmer Sohel Rana recently sold 4.5 tonnes at the Bangladeshi Mango Festival in Qatar, organised by the embassy. With shipping costs of Tk 350 per kilogramme and sales at Tk 600, his profits soared. "If we could export even 20 percent of our mangoes, we would earn more foreign currency than we spend importing fruits," he said.

But about 30 percent of the crop still goes to waste. "If the government provided training, technology, and certification, our educated youth could develop industries for dried mango, pulp, or jams. Neighbouring countries are earning billions this way," Sohel added.

Sapahar UNO Selim Ahmed said arranging cargo flights from Rajshahi airport every two days during the season could greatly expand exports.

But rising costs are a hurdle. "It now costs about Tk 600 per kilo to ship to Europe, compared with less than Tk 250 two years ago," said Aminur Rashid, deputy director of the DAE's Central Packing House in Dhaka.

Regulatory barriers add to the problem. "Each country has different conditions. We lack treatment plants and technology to meet those standards, which limits exports," said Shahjahan Seraj, deputy director of the DAE at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

Still, he expressed optimism about improvements ahead.

For Naogaon, according to locals, the mango has become more than a fruit. In just a decade, it has reshaped the economy, transformed landscapes, and redefined livelihoods -- turning a once water-starved land into the heart of Bangladesh's mango trade.

garages, and hotels spring up almost overnight to accommodate an additional 50,000 people drawn by the mango season.

From dusk till dawn, bicycles, auto-rickshaws, covered vans, buses, and trucks move continuously, transporting millions of blue crates filled with mangoes of every variety. Farmers from neighbouring districts including Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj, and Joypurhat flock to Sapahar, the country's one of the largest mango markets, according to Sapahar Upazila Executive Officer Selim Ahmed.

Mangoes, he said, have dramatically transformed the socio-economic landscape of Naogaon.

Once known for its paddy fields, the district has built a new reputation over the last decade. Mango orchards now cover 30,300 hectares, up from just 6,000 in 2015, according to the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

In 2017, the figure was 17,907 hectares, showing how quickly farmers embraced the crop.

This year alone, Naogaon produced around 390,000 tonnes of mangoes, worth an estimated Tk. 2,500 crore,

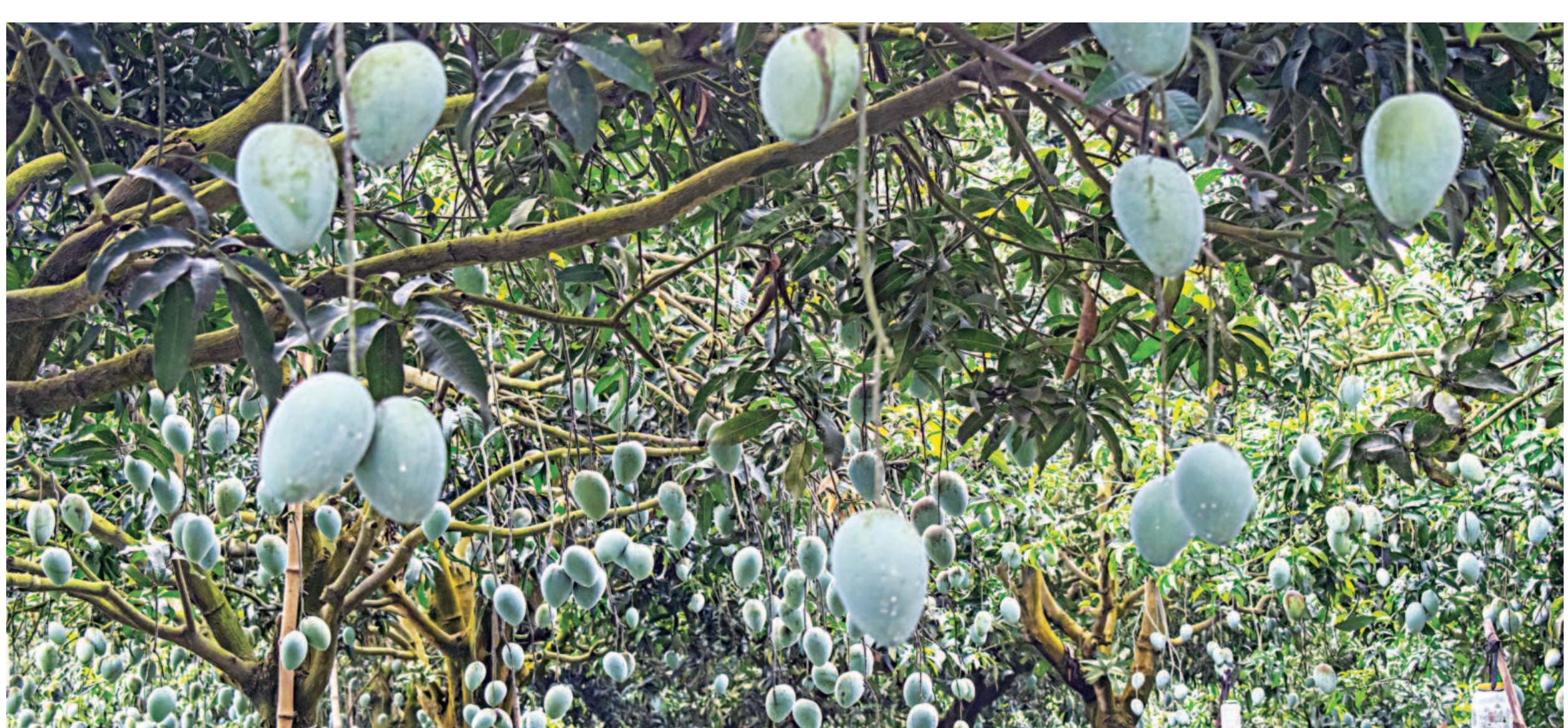
the introduction of the Amrapali variety. Farmers discovered they could earn Tk 100,000 to Tk 150,000 in profit per bigha, sparking a rush to plant mango trees.

Sohel Rana of Rupgram village in Sapahar began cultivating mangoes on 12 bighas in 2014. Today, he tends nearly 200 bighas. "We used to lose money on paddy. Now the profits from mangoes have changed everything," he said.

Initially, costs were low. Leasing a bigha for 12 years cost Tk 8,000 to Tk. 10,000. That figure has since risen to Tk 25,000-30,000, reflecting soaring demand.

The boom has also pushed land prices sky-high. "In 2010, roadside land in Sapahar sold for Tk. 50,000 per decimal. Now it goes for Tk. 30 to 40 lakh, higher than in Naogaon or even Bogura town," said Mizanur Rahman, a local clinic owner.

The mango trade itself has created vast seasonal employment. Since 2007, around 500 temporary arots (depots) have sprung up in Sapahar Bazar, providing work for nearly 50,000 people. During the peak season, 700 to 800 truckloads of mangoes worth hundreds of crores are dispatched daily to different parts of the country, said



How to rescue Bangladesh from the AMBULANCE MAFIA



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

SHAFIUN NAHIN SHIMUL

In the critical moments of a medical emergency or sudden accident, the very service meant to save lives—the ambulance—often becomes another source of dismay. At the gates of major public and private hospitals, from the capital to the divisional cities, an invisible fortress has been created. It is controlled by a vicious syndicate that holds ambulance services in a stranglehold, exploiting vulnerable patients and their families through exorbitant fares, deliberate delays, and dangerously substandard care.

This “ambulance mafia,” thriving in a vacuum of regulation, coordination, and clear policy, has twisted a life-saving

service into a predatory enterprise. If Bangladesh is to achieve universal health coverage, it has no choice but to dismantle the exploitative market forces. The question is, how?

How political will, combined with technology, can transform a nation’s emergency healthcare is brilliantly demonstrated by Sri Lanka’s Suwaseriya 1990 service. Launched less than a decade ago, the system operates under a single national emergency hotline (1990). When a citizen calls, the request is routed to a central command centre. There, a digital dispatch system and artificial intelligence (AI) analyse the patient’s location, traffic conditions, and the real-time availability of nearby ambulances. The system ensures that the ambulance dispatched is not merely the closest, but the one that can arrive the fastest.

The most revolutionary feature of this service is that it is provided completely free of charge to all citizens. Having already served millions, Suwaseriya has made emergency healthcare a universal right, effectively neutralising the syndicates that once preyed on helpless patients. When the state guarantees a superior service at no cost, the business model of exploitation simply collapses. Even amid its recent economic crisis, Sri Lanka has found ways to sustain this

vital service. Pakistan, though with a different approach, has implemented two highly effective models that have successfully curbed the monopoly of such syndicates. The first is the state-run Rescue 1122 service, similar in concept to Bangladesh’s 999. It boasts an average emergency response time of just seven minutes, a critical factor in saving lives. Crucially, Rescue 1122 is not just a transport service. The state has invested heavily in developing the professional skills of its paramedics, who are trained to begin critical care at the scene and stabilise patients during transit, ensuring the proper use of the “golden hour.”

The second model is the Edhi Foundation in Pakistan, which operates the world’s largest volunteer ambulance network, funded entirely by donations. Without any government assistance and running on public trust alone, the Edhi Foundation provides free or nominal-cost ambulance services across the country. The combined presence of the state-run Rescue 1122 and the citizen-funded Edhi Foundation has drastically curtailed the space for exploitative private syndicates to operate.

Beyond large-scale state or institutional initiatives, smaller

but equally instructive examples exist globally. In Laos, the capital city is served by Vientiane Rescue, a completely volunteer-run ambulance service. Founded by a group of young citizens, the organisation proves that even with limited resources, a high-quality emergency service can be delivered through social commitment and goodwill alone.

Drawing on these international experiences, Bangladesh can forge an integrated action plan for its ambulance services, addressing operations, funding, and public trust.

1. A unified and modern system

The first step must be to establish a single, toll-free national ambulance hotline that integrates all public and private ambulances into one network. This would immediately end reliance on the brokers and syndicate members who linger at hospital gates.

The ambulance fleet must be diversified to match the country’s realities. For the gridlocked streets of Dhaka and Chattogram, “motorcycle ambulances” staffed by trained paramedics could provide rapid first response. Similarly, for the haor, char, and flood-prone rural areas, “boat ambulances” are not a luxury but an absolute necessity.

Most importantly, a national training and certification programme must be launched to upskill ambulance drivers

cap based on distance and the level of care required, protecting patients from extortionate pricing.

In the long term, ambulance services should be integrated with health insurance schemes. Furthermore, inspired by Pakistan’s Edhi model, a central trust could be established, funded through corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, Zakat, and public donations.

3. Reclaiming public service

An ambulance must be treated as a citizen’s right, not a commercial product. Syndicates thrive on human helplessness—the panic when a loved one is on their deathbed, in labour, or bleeding on a roadside. To combat this parasitic trade, the government must do more than just enforce laws and provide subsidies; it must earn the public’s trust.

A nationwide awareness campaign should encourage citizens to call the official hotline instead of turning to brokers. To embed the idea of the ambulance as a public asset, pilot programmes establishing community-based services—perhaps in partnership with organisations like the Red Crescent—could be launched.

Simultaneously, local administration and the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) must actively monitor the quality of service and ensure that exemplary punishment is handed down to anyone involved with the syndicates.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

into qualified paramedics. This will ensure patients receive life-saving pre-hospital care, not just a ride to the hospital.

2. A sustainable funding model

The state must take primary financial responsibility. For life-threatening emergencies—such as maternal crises, road accidents, heart attacks, and strokes—the ambulance service should be entirely free. In other cases, the government can set a maximum fare

Dismantling Bangladesh’s ambulance syndicates is a formidable challenge, but it is not an insurmountable one. Countries around the world have proven that a reliable and humane emergency transport system can be built even with limited resources. In an emergency, every second is precious. The time to act is now.

Shafiu Nahin Shimul is a Professor and Director at the Institute of Health Economics of Dhaka University.

BREAKING SILENCE WITH CINEMA

Indigenous Lives on Screen



A scene from *Mor Thengari (My Bicycle, 2015)*, the first full-length feature film in the Chakma language, directed by Aung Rakhine.

I haven’t been able to show it widely yet, but there have been some personal screenings—I mean, in universities, groups, and clubs. During the July movement, quite a few open shows were held here and there in a scattered way. But officially, I couldn’t release it in Bangladesh.

The story is basically about a man—a middle-aged man—who, unable to survive in the city, returns to his village on a bicycle. But the “village” here is set in the hills, where life itself is a constant struggle because the hills have been diminished so much. The film portrays that struggle for survival. Then, after going back with his bicycle, he starts

a small business. So, the whole thing is the story of that man’s struggle—with elements of love and romance woven into it as well.

TDS: Could you tell us about your upcoming projects, particularly *Mro*?

AR: Actually, no two works are ever the same. My first film, *My Bicycle*, was a full-length feature, while my second, the Bangla short film *Post Master*, was completely different in style and approach. Now, I am planning a new film, *Mro*—which is neither like *My Bicycle* nor like *Post Master*. The *Mro* are an indigenous people living in Thanchi, Bandarban. This project takes an anthropological perspective, exploring

many stories behind their lives. One particularly intriguing aspect is that it deals with the world’s newest religion, established in 1985.

So, while it is fundamentally a story, it is approached through a rich anthropological lens.

We have been researching this film since 2019. At present, however, we are facing a funding crisis. I do not have a producer yet, so whether we can start shooting this year or next depends entirely on financial support. My first film was funded through family support and

crowdfunding—my wife even sold her jewellery to help cover costs. That project was essentially a no-budget film.

This new film, however, is on a much larger scale, with a budget of around one and a half crore taka, and we hope it will be completed by 2028. Beyond that, I have plans

for 2032 or 2033 to create a film about my own ethnic community, the Rakhine people—a community that has never been represented in cinema before.

TDS: As an independent filmmaker in Bangladesh, how do you see your place in the industry, and what keeps you motivated despite the challenges?

AR: All over the world, whether they are called filmmakers or artists, they more or less share the same identity. But in Bangladesh, independent filmmakers like us are still not fully recognised—neither by audiences nor by business circles. The mindset of promoting art or supporting it has not yet taken root here, and I do not know when a sustainable cinema market will truly emerge in this country.

However, the global market is now opening up in promising ways, and I am working with that in mind. There is no reason to be frustrated. For me, making films is not just about ambition—it is about responsibility and commitment. It is a professional duty to my community and to Bangladeshi cinema as a whole.

The interview was taken by Priyam Paul.



AUNG RAKHINE

BANGLADESH'S NEW EPIDEMIC

MOB VIOLENCE in the age of misinformation

Mobs, often ideologically motivated, consume these viral narratives and interpret them through personal or political lenses. This ideological lens, combined with low digital literacy, creates fertile ground for rapid escalation from online outrage to street-level attacks.

MIFTAHL JANNAT

When justice is hijacked by rage and rumour, it takes only minutes for a mob to become a murderer. Like those two men beaten to death in Sirajganj on August 4 over alleged cattle theft. Or the Hindu homes vandalised in Rangpur in July, triggered by a Facebook post. Or the lynching in Cumilla's Muradnagar claiming the lives of a woman and her two children earlier that month. Or the 70-year-old barber and his son brutally attacked following accusations of hurting religious sentiments in Lalmonirhat in June. The man in Bholia whose eyes were gouged out by a mob in March. The Uber driver, mistaken for a mugger, beaten to death in Dhaka that same month. Or the mentally unstable Tofazzal killed for suspected theft in a university dorm last September.

Each of these incidents is a chilling reminder of how mob violence is carving deep, brutal scars into the fabric of Bangladesh — fuelled by rumours, sharpened by rage, and amplified by social media. In this digital era, where smartphones are ubiquitous and digital freedom runs largely unchecked, misinformation is becoming a deadly weapon, and the consequences are playing out in real time.

The orchestration of violence

According to Shahzada M Akram, Senior Research Fellow at TIB, the anatomy of a mob in Bangladesh often follows a grim pattern. While some outbreaks are purely driven by misinformation, circulated through social media or messaging apps, others are far more calculated.

"There are instances where misinformation is deliberately seeded to serve political or personal motives," he explained. "Religious sentiment becomes an easy trigger." In cases like Dinajpur, mobs have vandalised temples and shrines based on false claims, while



FILE VISUAL: ALIZA RAHMAN

Alam, Associate Professor in Mass Communication & Journalism at Dhaka University, highlighted the structural changes in media dissemination.

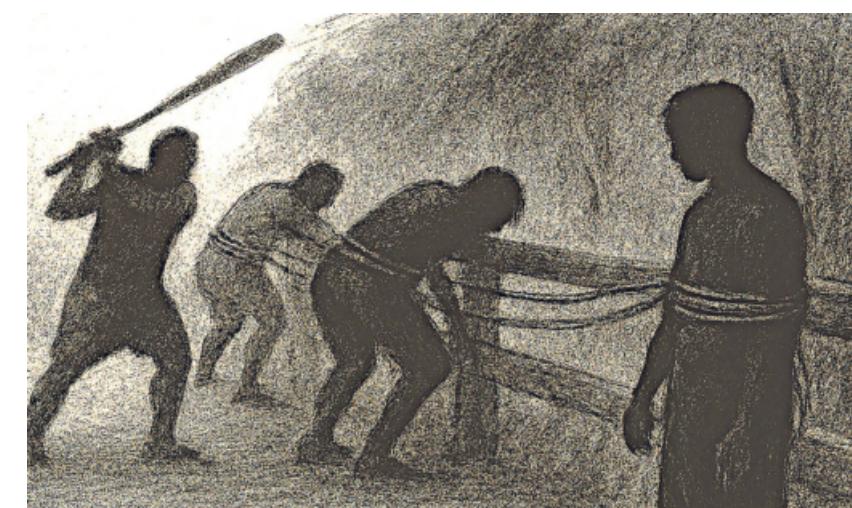
"Traditional media like newspapers, TV, and radio had gatekeeping systems. Information passed through checks, and accountability was embedded," he explained. "Social media, however, allows consumers to become producers, or prosumers, with little or no gatekeeping."

This shift has enabled rapid, often unchecked, circulation of misinformation, disinformation, and mal-information. Even mainstream media, when publishing online, has tended to prioritise speed and virality over accuracy, sometimes adding sensational elements to attract likes, shares, and comments. Dr Alam noted that this "virality" replaces careful journalism with a race to capture attention, often without verifying facts from all parties involved or considering potential consequences.

When such content circulates, it can catalyse real-world violence. Mobs, often ideologically motivated, consume these viral narratives and interpret them through personal or political lenses. This ideological lens, combined with low digital literacy, creates fertile ground for rapid escalation from online outrage to street-level attacks. "People see an excerpt, a photocard, or a video clip, and make decisions without context. Even if a correction is issued later, the initial impact is far more powerful," explained Dr Alam.

"The general people in the mob don't wake up every day intending to commit crimes. But when they see perpetrators repeatedly go unpunished, their fear of the law disappears. They start to believe they too can cross the line and walk away," said Shishir from AFP.

In such an environment, one misleading image or miscalculated video can ignite rage. Sometimes even outdated photos, like those claiming attacks on BNP offices, are recirculated to stir political outrage and potentially violent responses.



A 15-year-old boy was killed and two others injured in a mob attack in Chattogram's Fatikchhari on August 22. This is an AI-generated image from a photo of the teens being beaten, the original withheld due to graphic content and the victims' ages.

A digital chain reaction

Neither misinformation nor mob violence are new phenomena. But what social media has done is intensify the chain reaction. A crime occurs, a video circulates online, and public outrage follows. What was once a local issue now reverberates across the country in minutes.

This repeated exposure to crime through visual content online can provoke a sense of collective anger. "When a crime happens, and its visual representation is out on social media, general people can get disproportionately enraged," mentioned Qadaruddin Shishir, Fact Check Editor at AFP.

This effect is intensified in a society where visible justice is slow or absent, and the public may perceive taking

matters into their own hands as the only option, resulting in mob justice, often brutal and tragically misdirected.

Md Rezaul Karim Shohag, a lecturer in Dhaka University's Criminology Department, reinforced this point with insights from routine activities theory. The theory suggests that crime occurs when a likely offender encounters a suitable target in the absence of legal guardianship, emphasising factors such as availability, proximity, and exposure that influence crime rates.

"In many recent mob cases, those involved are often the likely offenders. When perpetrators go unpunished, groups with personal grievances see an opportunity and join in the violence," he explained.

The role of impunity

The growing public participation in mob violence stems from a breakdown in accountability. When justice remains elusive and offenders walk free, ordinary citizens, who would normally fear the law, start to shed that fear, emboldened by the impunity they witness.

"The general people in the mob don't wake up every day intending to commit crimes. But when they see perpetrators repeatedly go unpunished, their fear of the law disappears. They start to believe they too can cross the line and walk away," said Shishir from AFP.

In such an environment, one misleading image or miscalculated video can ignite rage. Sometimes even outdated photos, like those claiming attacks on BNP offices, are recirculated to stir political outrage and potentially violent responses.

that alone could have deterred others and set an example. We are neither deterring crime nor creating such examples, which only encourages more people to join mob violence," he said.

Political manipulation and ideological triggers

"Recent cases of mob violence have been serving political ends. Small groups without formal party structures use social unrest to advance agendas, intimidate minorities, and destabilise society," said human rights activist, Liton. These orchestrators exploit emotional triggers, such as religious sentiment or perceived injustices, while simultaneously avoiding legal consequences.

Dr Alam echoed this, noting that ideological baggage among social media users intensifies mob activity. Users interpret viral content according to pre-existing beliefs. Photocard journalism, circulating excerpts, images, and snippets without context, further fuels the cycle, according to him.

When lies go viral

What makes this crisis especially dangerous is the speed of viral content. "By the time fact-checkers verify something, the damage is often done," mentioned Apon Das, a researcher on information integrity at Tech Global Institute. The Facebook algorithm, like others, promotes content that generates high engagement, meaning sensational and fear-inducing posts travel faster than the truth.

Fact-checking efforts, while crucial, often fall short. "Fact-checkers don't have the same reach as viral posts," added Das. This gap is not just technical, it is deeply educational. Media and digital literacy remain worryingly low among Bangladesh's general population. "Most people don't know how to verify the content they consume, or even feel the need to."

Minhaj Aman, co-founder of Activate Rights also draws attention to the algorithmic influence. "Social media platforms show you more of what you already believe. This creates an echo chamber," he explained. When users consume one fake news item, the algorithm begins to serve more of the same, reinforcing their biases and skewing their perception of reality.

Disinformation as income

There is also another dimension to this: financial and reputational incentives. Many actors knowingly spread disinformation for money, political leverage, or sheer visibility. "For some, social media isn't just a platform; it's an income source. Outrage and sensationalism are profitable," Das explained. The proliferation of monetised content has created a dangerous incentive system. The more outrageous the post, the higher the click count.

Yet Bangladesh lacks clear legal definitions and investigative mechanisms to address such targeted disinformation. While cyber laws exist, they often fall short — or worse, get misused. "The laws are vague about intentional misinformation and can be used to silence critics rather than penalise actual bad actors," Das warned.

Media must do better

Media institutions, both traditional and digital, have a critical role in the current situation. Shishir argued that mainstream media's editorial decisions can either inflame or calm

volatile situations. Clickbait headlines and fear-inducing narratives amplify mob action. Dr Alam highlighted that online editions of newspapers often fail to replicate the rigorous verification applied in print. Reproductions of partially verified news, coupled with low treatment of corrections or rejoinders, further confuse the public. When clarifications are issued, they rarely receive the prominence of the initial story, leading to entrenched misconceptions that can trigger violence.

Education and digital literacy

Literacy, both general and digital, is crucial in curbing the spread of misinformation and mob violence. Dr Alam noted, "The internet, smartphones, and social media are accessible to everyone, but understanding varies widely. Those with lower comprehension are more easily influenced." Apon Das and Aman advocated for national campaigns to increase media literacy, ideally integrated into school curricula, community workshops, and online platforms. Citizens must learn not only how to recognise fake news but also how to respond responsibly. Waiting before reacting to viral content, cross-checking information, and understanding context are essential steps.

Shishir added that unrestricted internet access without education is a recipe for misuse. Countries like Indonesia introduce media literacy early in education, a model Bangladesh could emulate. Digital literacy empowers citizens to resist misinformation and reduces the potential for collective violence.

Strengthening fact-checking and regulatory capacity

Currently, fewer than 30 active fact-checkers operate in Bangladesh, a stark mismatch for a population exceeding 50 million internet users. Aman emphasised the need for alliances between media, fact-checkers, and civil society, similar to India's Shakti coalition, to counter false narratives effectively, especially before the election.

Dr Alam underscored the necessity of updating cybersecurity and digital security laws, ensuring that legal enforcement mechanisms can detect and respond to misinformation. He also suggested government negotiations with social media platforms to minimise the spread of harmful content, following international examples such as the way the EU fined Google for abusing its monopoly.

The delicate balance

Experts agree that solutions cannot rely solely on legal mechanisms. Capacity building — within the state, media, and civil society — rather than simple control is more crucial. Strengthening accountability, empowering fact-checkers, and enhancing digital literacy collectively form a sustainable approach.

Bangladesh stands at a crossroads between digital freedom and digital peril. Without decisive action the cycle of mob violence is likely to continue. Knowledge, vigilance, and democratic accountability remain the only antidotes to a society where rumours and rage can so easily override justice.

Miftahul Jannat is a journalist at The Daily Star.



Mistaken for a thief, 35-year-old Tofazzal Hossain was brutally tortured to death by Dhaka University students at Fazlul Huq Muslim Hall, who assumed the roles of judge, jury, and executioner.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

The proliferation of monetised content has created a dangerous incentive system. The more outrageous the post, the higher the click count. Yet Bangladesh lacks clear legal definitions and investigative mechanisms to address such targeted disinformation.

incidents like the Cumilla Muradnagar beating show how local interest groups exploit digital rumours to incite violence. Often, law enforcement arrives too late to prevent the damage and, by then, the mob has already done its work.

Nur Khan Liton, a prominent human rights activist, pointed out that while mob beatings existed in the past, their nature has evolved drastically in recent years. "In earlier times, there were isolated incidents, sometimes planned, but what we see now is a coordinated culture of violence," he explained.

These orchestrated mobs not only physically attack individuals; they target homes, properties, and even legal processes. "There have been instances where defendants in custody, brought before the courts, were assaulted. In some cases, mobs attacked the accused even when they were taken to the hospital for treatment," observed Liton.

These events often involve politically motivated small groups seeking personal or ideological gain. "They don't necessarily have formal political party structures, but they fish in troubled waters, exploiting chaos for their own interest," he mentioned. "Such actors sometimes even co-opt law enforcement to facilitate attacks, further blurring the lines of accountability."

The implication is clear: mob violence in Bangladesh is not merely spontaneous public outrage. While emotions play a role, many incidents are carefully orchestrated to destabilise communities, exploit religious or ethnic sentiments, and intimidate political and other social groups.

Misinformation and the digital echo chamber

In the midst of this orchestrated violence, social media has become the accelerant. Dr Md Khorshed

Current weaknesses within the law enforcement amid the volatile political climate have reinforced this sense of impunity among people. Many officials fail to intervene, while others are complicit or sidelined. The result is a culture where mob beatings have become normalised. "People are adjusting to crimes without punishment, and this lack of deterrence only encourages further violence," Das explained.

The criminology expert also pointed out the deterrence theory, where ensuring the severity of punishment matters more than who committed the crime. "From last August to this August, many people have been beaten or killed by mobs, yet how many have actually received justice? If proper justice had been served even for just ten people —

Miftahul Jannat is a journalist at The Daily Star.

MATAR BARI

The island where Bangladesh is building its economic future

Close to the sandy beach town Cox's Bazar, Matarbari offers advantages over Bangladesh's existing ports in Chattogram, Mongla and Payra.

JAGARAN CHAKMA, SOHEL PARVEZ and MOKAMMEL SHUVO

Life on Matarbari island revolved around the sea, salt and shrimp even several years ago. Days used to begin slowly, with waves rolling on the shore and the sun rising over the hills. That quiet scene has now been replaced.

Today, plumes of smoke rise from the chimney of a coal-fired power plant, drifting above salt fields that still cling on.

The island, part of Moheshkhali upazila in the southeastern district of Cox's Bazar, is being transformed into a hub for power, ports, logistics and manufacturing for Bangladesh, a \$460 billion economy in South Asia.

The plan promised better connectivity, energy security and industrial development with Japan as a long-term partner.

In 2019, the Maheshkhali-Matarbari Integrated Development Initiative (MIDI) was rolled out, centred on a deep sea port designed to handle rising volumes of containers and cargo from mother vessels.

This July this year, the interim government gave the project fresh momentum by issuing an ordinance to form the Moheshkhali Integrated Development Authority (Mida). Its task is to prepare a master plan covering ports and logistics, industry and manufacturing, energy, fisheries



PHOTO: KABBO SAWRAB

between 8.5 metres and 11 metres, restrict them to smaller vessels.

By contrast, Matarbari's up to 18.5-metre draft will allow ships of up to 100,000 dead weight tonnage and container vessels with 8,000 TEUs to dock directly, according to a 2023 study by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica).

The agency projects shipping cost reductions of 25 to 35 percent, while lead times for garment exports could shorten by around three to four weeks. Cutting reliance on trans-shipment hubs in Singapore and Colombo would save both time and money.

Neighbouring countries stand to benefit too. Nepal and Bhutan, both landlocked, could use Matarbari to access global markets, while India's landlocked northeast could also be connected.

"Matarbari is the only feasible location for such infrastructure. Other sites are limited by geographical and environmental constraints," said Jica's Bangladesh Chief Representative Ichiguchi Tomohide.

Banking on this, the government plans to develop Moheshkhali as an integrated economic hub by making Matarbari port a gateway for Bangladesh.

The deep-sea port will also help decongest Chattogram port for container trade, offering better and more efficient handling facilities, according to Jica.

BUILDING THE PORT
The first phase of the port is already operational, receiving coal for the nearby power plant. Future phases will add container and multipurpose terminals.

In April, the Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) signed a \$500 million contract with Japanese firms Penta Ocean and Toa Corporation to build a 760-metre terminal. Construction is scheduled to begin in September 2025, with operations expected in early 2029.

The full deep sea port project, mostly financed by Jica, is projected to cost Tk 24,380 crore. A 27-kilometre access road linking the port to the inland network is also under construction by Max Infrastructure and Japan's Tokyo Construction.

According to Jica, the port and its road links could reduce logistics costs by up to 30 percent. By 2041, it could handle 36 to 43 percent of Bangladesh's projected container traffic and up to 70 million tonnes of bulk and breakbulk cargo each year.

AN ENERGY HUB IN THE MAKING
Matarbari is also being prepared as a major energy gateway. Plans are underway for a liquefied natural gas terminal, a liquefied petroleum gas plant, and potentially an oil refinery.

By 2041, Jica estimates that the

network," he added.

Business leaders also stress the need for private investment.

"The government should open the door for private investors to set up LNG terminals, as public initiatives alone may not be cost-effective," said Mohammed Amirul Haque, managing director of Premier Cement Mills.

He urged the authorities to avoid land monopolies and give priority to basic industries.

CONCERN AT HOME

The rapid development has brought mixed feelings among residents. Some expect jobs and business opportunities, while others fear displacement and environmental damage.

SM Abu Haider, chairman of Matarbari union, said local residents are yet to feel the impact of the government's development initiatives in the area. "Some residents are hopeful, expecting employment opportunities or business prospects."

But, he said there is frustration, too.

On July 28, young people and environmental activists of Moheshkhali staged a protest against the formation of Mida, citing risks to society, livelihoods and future generations.

"Moheshkhali is not just an island, it is a key region rich in natural resources, supporting the lives of around 5 lakh people," said Abdul Mannan Rana, one of the organisers.

He warned that nearly 3 lakh people could be displaced within five years.

Environmental activist Abdul Rashid Manik said coal plants, the deep-sea port and industrial zones had already damaged the island's ecology. Shrimp farming and fishing, once the backbone of the local economy, are fading fast.

"These days, what I see is the giant chimney of the Matarbari coal-fired power plant. The smoke coming out of it is now the air we breathe at dawn," Rana said. "Our lives are becoming harder. Previously, we survived by fishing or farming salt and shrimp. But now those livelihoods are disappearing."

Prof Anu Muhammad, a former economics professor at Jahangirnagar University, questioned transparency.

He said the project's plan was made during the tenure of Sheikh Hasina and was initiated through the use of power.

Jica, however, said its master plans usually undergo consultations and that the MIDI plan would be subject to one before being finalised.

Bida Executive Chairman Ashik Chowdhury acknowledged the concerns. "We will deviate slightly to ensure alignment with local employment needs. It must reflect our economic goals and social realities," he said.

He added that while heavy industry would be part of the plan, labour-intensive sectors would also be prioritised. "Once the basic structure is in place, we will focus on revisiting the original master plan."

FUTURE READY BANGLADESH
The infrastructures are slowly taking shape, gradually turning Matarbari into Bangladesh's next economic frontier.

But for now, it remains a work in progress. The port, LNG facilities and industrial zones will take years to complete, while the new Mida authority is still in its infancy.

"It is not just about big infrastructure. It is about making Bangladesh future-ready," as Jica Bangladesh Chief Representative Ichiguchi Tomohide put it.

Potential hubs in Moheshkhali-Matarbari area

Deep-sea port & logistics hub

Matarbari has 16+ metre draft, can handle large ships

4.9 million TEUs container capacity

16-39 million tonnes bulk cargo capacity

Likely to handle 25% of bulk and 36-43% of container traffic by 2041

Expected to reduce shipping costs by 20-35%, save time

Reduced cost and lead time to boost export competitiveness

Direct impact on GDP by 2041: \$1.6b

Direct jobs by 2041: 7,200

Power & energy hub

Likely power generation capacity by 2041: 15GW

Expected to supply 20-30% of national power demand

LNG import capacity: 2,000m cubic feet/day

Petroleum import capacity: 4.5m tonnes/year

LPG import capacity: 1m tonnes/year

Manufacturing hub

Possibility of establishment of 7 economic zones

Potential sectors: Steel & cement, food processing, petrochemicals & polymers, fertiliser, auto and electronics

Investment potential: \$18-\$20b

Likely to contribute 10% to national manufacturing output

Likely exports by 2041: \$7.6b

Potential of direct impact on GDP by 2041: \$52b

Projected to create direct jobs: 150,000

Economic impact by 2041

Total envisioned investment: \$60-65b

Govt: \$15-16b

Private investment: \$47-48b

Foreign direct investment: \$4.8b

Contribution to GDP by 2041: 6%

Risks & challenges

Global fuel price volatility

Growing regional port competition

Skilled labour & industrial ecosystem gaps

SOURCE: MIDI STRATEGIC VISION DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC IMPACT ANALYSIS 2023, JICA

The 1,200-megawatt power plant, built at a cost of Tk 57,000 crore, went into operation in 2023.

Next to it, the country's first deep-sea port is under construction. From flights to Cox's Bazar, the outlines of these projects can be seen below.

On the other side, the Single Point Mooring project is visible, a sign of how swiftly this island in the Bay of Bengal is changing.

The roots of this transformation stretch back to 2014, when the Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt, or BIG-B, was announced during the visit of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to Dhaka.

processing and residential townships.

"This area is geographically significant. This is a naturally gifted place, so development here serves the broader national interest," said Chowdhury Ashik Mahmud Bin Harun, executive chairman of the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (Bida).

WHY MATAR BARI MATTERS

Close to the sandy beach town Cox's Bazar, Matarbari offers advantages over Bangladesh's existing ports in Chattogram, Mongla and Payra. Their shallow drafts,

mostly financed by Jica, is projected to cost Tk 24,380 crore. A 27-kilometre access road linking the port to the inland network is also under construction by Max Infrastructure and Japan's Tokyo Construction.

According to Jica, the port and its road links could reduce logistics costs by up to 30 percent. By 2041, it could handle 36 to 43 percent of Bangladesh's projected container traffic and up to 70 million tonnes of bulk and breakbulk cargo each year.

AN ENERGY HUB IN THE MAKING
Matarbari is also being prepared as a major energy gateway. Plans are underway for a liquefied natural gas terminal, a liquefied petroleum gas plant, and potentially an oil refinery.

By 2041, Jica estimates that the

Despite the promise, experts warn that building a global trade hub will not be easy. Jica projects \$60 to \$65 billion of investment over 20 years, but success depends on the timely delivery of the port, access road and economic zones.

"The recent establishment of Mida is strategically sound, but it is not enough. Creating a new body must be matched with institutional capacity, skilled human resources and clear operating procedures," said Reaz.

"Ultimately, the success of MIDI will depend not just on infrastructure but on inter agency coordination, investor confidence and long-term commitment. If executed properly, it could position Bangladesh as a central player in South Asia's supply chain



PHOTO: FARUQ AZAM