



"The genocide in Gaza exposes Europe's failure to act and speak with one voice."
European Commission's Executive Vice President Teresa Ribera



Venezuelan F-16 jets fly over US warship

P5



Violence, discrimination, and the failure to reform

P6



Disposable lives, dispensable labour

P7



A shopper's paradise on a budget in the heart of Dhaka

WR1

EC denied power to appoint its secy, key officials

Cabinet Division rejects reform proposal for separate 'EC Service' and an independent secretariat

BAHARAM KHAN

The Cabinet Division's rejection of a proposal for empowering the Election Commission to appoint its secretary and other key officials runs counter to a key reform initiative recommended by the Electoral Reform Commission, say election experts.

Such a decision undermines the interim government's efforts to strengthen the EC's autonomy and streamline its operations ahead of the upcoming national polls, they noted.

The EC recently sent the "Election Commission Secretariat (Amendment) Ordinance-2025" to the Cabinet Division through the law ministry, seeking to establish a separate "Election Commission Service" to run its secretariat independently.

The proposal is in line with the recommendations made by the Electoral Reform Commission that submitted its report to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus on January 15 this year.

The EC Service is intended to empower the commission to appoint its own officials to key positions, including secretary, additional secretary

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BNP says 'no' to constitutional reforms under interim govt

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

The BNP has said it will not support any constitutional reforms before the national election in February 2026, arguing that such changes must be made by the next parliament.

In a letter to Prof Ali Riaz, vice-president of the National Consensus Commission, the party said only proposals that do not require constitutional amendments may be carried out by the interim government through ordinances, rules, or administrative orders.

It sent the letter last Wednesday after the commission had sought opinions from political parties on implementing the July Charter.

The July Charter, now being finalised, reflects consensus among political parties on 84 points agreed in two rounds of talks on proposals from six reform commissions.

The letter, signed by BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, said, "All constitutional reform proposals must be implemented within two years of an elected government assuming office."

The BNP cautioned against giving the July Charter the status of a "supra-constitutional instrument", calling it "legally and constitutionally impossible and unacceptable".

It warned that if any government formed under the current constitution used state power to replace the current system with a new one, it would be "considered a coup, not a revolution".

The party added that it would be "unfortunate for the nation" if any party or group tried to push the interim government, formed after the July uprising, onto a "disrespectful path".

The letter further stressed, "At the same time, it must be remembered

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Form Constituent Assembly for implementing July Charter

NCP proposes in a letter to consensus commission

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Citizen Party has proposed forming a Constituent Assembly, stating that it represents the most democratic means of implementing the July Charter.

The proposal was sent to Prof Ali Riaz, vice-president of the National Consensus Commission, yesterday.

In a letter signed by NCP Joint Convener Javed Rasin, the party said that since the July Charter reflects the will of the people, its implementation must be done by a body that is directly representative of the people.

A Constituent Assembly will represent all sections of society, political parties, and social forces and will also establish a constitutional framework to implement the proposed reforms and July Charter.

NCP added that such a method would protect the fundamental spirit of democracy and help avoid any future political debate or crises of legitimacy.

The party hoped that the consensus commission would consider its proposal and include the recommendation of formation of a Constituent Assembly as part of implementing the July Charter.



After exhuming the body of Nurul Haque, agitators set it alight in Padmar Mor area on Dhaka-Khulna highway in Goalanda, Rajbari yesterday. *Inset*, Nurul's house was also vandalised and set on fire.

PHOTO: SUZIT DAS

Israel opens 'gates of hell' in Gaza

Dozens killed as IDF prepares for major ground assault

AGENCIES

Israeli military yesterday said "gates of hell" have been opened in Gaza, as its intensifying offensive killed dozens across the territory and destroyed high-rises in Gaza City.

Despite mounting pressure at home and abroad to halt its nearly two-year offensive in Gaza, Israel has been calling up reservists, intensifying its bombardments and closing in on Gaza City ever since announcing its intention to capture the Palestinian territory's largest city.

In a statement, the military yesterday said it had "identified significant Hamas terrorist activity within a wide variety of infrastructure sites in Gaza City, and particularly in high-rise buildings", adding it would target those sites "in the coming days".

Less than an hour later, it said it had struck one such high-rise, accusing Hamas of using it "to advance and execute attacks against troops in the area".

Prior to the attack on the tower, Israel's Defence Minister Israel Katz said on X that Israel's military activity in Gaza City is intensifying. He said "the bolt has now been removed from the gates

of hell in Gaza" and warned that they will not be closed until Hamas "accepts Israel's conditions for ending the war -- led by the release of all the hostages and disarmament".

Israel expects its new offensive will displace around a million people

- Israeli military says it controls 40pc of Gaza City
- Egypt vows to block Palestinian displacement
- Finland joins declaration on two-state solution

towards the south.

AFP footage showed the Mushthaha Tower in the city's Al-Rimal neighbourhood collapsing after a massive explosion at its base, sending a thick cloud of smoke and dust billowing into the sky.

The army said that before the strike, "precautionary measures were taken in order to mitigate harm to civilians", including prior warnings.

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Star INTERVIEW

'Political power cannot be for sale'

TI chief calls for transparency in party and campaign funding

PORIMOL PALMA

Transparency in party and campaign funding must be ensured so that political power cannot be used for profit or abuse, Transparency International chair François Valérien has said.

He also said that institutions such as the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and the judiciary must operate free from political or administrative interference if Bangladesh is to dismantle entrenched networks of corruption.

Valérien said the aspirations expressed during last year's mass uprising make him optimistic that corruption is neither inevitable nor unbreakable, and that reforms demanded on the streets -- from judicial independence to genuine accountability -- can succeed.

"Political power cannot be for sale. Yet in many countries, campaign financing is treated as an investment. Businesses or even foreign powers provide money to politicians or parties with the expectation of returns, often through inflated public contracts, at the expense of citizens," he said in an interview with The Daily Star during his three-day visit to Bangladesh from 1-4 September.

During his visit, he met the chief adviser, the chief justice, ACC officials, and reviewed Transparency International Bangladesh's activities. The trip came as the country pursues reforms in various

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François Valérien

1 killed in attack on 'darbar sharif' in Rajbari

Grave desecrated, corpse exhumed, burnt; govt terms incident 'abhorrent', 'despicable'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

Hundreds of people attacked a "darbar sharif", exhumed the body of Nurul Haque -- widely known locally as "Nurul Pagla" -- from his grave and set it on fire in Goalanda upazila of Rajbari yesterday.

Followers of Nurul, who claimed to be a pir (spiritual leader), and locals under the banner of "Iman-Aqeedah Rokkha Committee" locked into a clash after Juma prayers.

One person was killed, and 22 others, including a journalist, were injured.

The interim government has condemned the incident, terming it "abhorrent" and a "despicable act".

Goalanda Upazila Nirbahi Officer Md Nahidur Rahman said the attack was carried out on the Goalanda Pak Darbar Sharif, also Nurul's house, in the Ghonapara area, where the grave was located.

"Later, his body was exhumed and taken to the Padmar Mor area on the Dhaka-Khulna highway, where it was set on fire," he added.

The deceased was identified as Russel Molla, 28, of Debgam village. He was initially taken to Goalanda Upazila Health Complex, said Shariful Islam, its resident medical officer.

He was later transferred to Faridpur Medical College Hospital, where he died, Shariful added. He also said 22 people received treatment at the health complex.

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MY DHAKA

ELEVATOR POLITICS OF DHAKA

The unseen hierarchy in vertical transit

JANNATUL BUSHRA

There was a time Dhaka only sprawled horizontally, stubbornly, like a city allergic to the sky. But then, when the land grew scarce, Dhaka simply looked up and thought -- why not the sky? So now, it climbs.
Buildings shoot up like they're competing in a race to touch the clouds, staircases are quietly written off as relics, and elevators have become the new vertical vehicles of survival.
And, because this is Dhaka, the elevator was never going to be just a machine. It is politics on pulleys. Not only do we rage on the roads; we now fume in little steel boxes too.
All of Dhaka's Class System, in a Box with a Button
Yes! Step into a lift, and you've already entered a miniature model of the city's class system. It's rarely a neutral experience. Who gets in first? Who gets to press the buttons? Who is invisible enough to blend into the corners? In corporate towers, executives glide into air-conditioned cabins while staff wait for the service lift as if queuing for rations. In posh apartments, domestic workers perfect the skill of being there without being there. All of Dhaka's social gymnastics are squeezed into six square feet of metal.
The People We Know Without Knowing
Elevator silence deserves its own study.



lift shutdowns. Sometimes for hours. Energy-saving? Technical issue? A new form of punishment? Nobody knows, but everyone sweats.
And let's not forget the first-floor residents who faithfully occupy lifts as if climbing one flight of stairs would risk their life expectancy. These are often the same people who ignore the "stand on the right, walk on the left" escalator rule.
The Box You Keep Coming Back To
Ask any Dhaka resident and they'll have a lift horror story—being stuck mid-ride during a blackout, pounding the panic button, calling out for the building guard like a character in a badly written play. The fear is real. But then, like many Dhaka traumas, it is repurposed into humour. "Remember when we spent 25 minutes trapped with that aunty from 3B?" becomes dinner-table folklore.
Dhaka's Oddest Stage for a Brief Humanity
But sometimes, just sometimes, a neighbour who's never once stepped inside your flat might offer a polite nod. A junior might whisper a timid "good morning" to the boss. Students cram in a week's worth of gossip between the ground floor and the fifth. For a few fleeting floors, strangers become co-passengers in life's most awkward intimacy.
The elevator, then, is Dhaka's oddest stage. A box that both reveals

You know your neighbour's face, their schedule, their floor number, and maybe even the brand of their cologne. And yet, you've never spoken. Both of you stare at the glowing digits as if they're the last great invention of mankind. Somehow, a simple hush inside a lift manages to be louder than traffic outside Bijoy Sharani during rush hour.
The Politics of the First Floor
In Dhaka, time is a rare mineral, mined in seconds. So, shaving half a minute by sneaking into a lift feels like luxury. But there are the mysterious and mocks our hierarchies, amplifies silences, breeds grudges, and yet, still allows brief sparks of humanity. The city rises, yes—but it drags all its politics, big and small, up with it.

CRACKDOWN ON MISUSE Businesses, users hit as Nepal restricts social media

AFP, Kathmandu

Several social media platforms, including Facebook, were inaccessible in Nepal yesterday after the government blocked unregistered platforms, leaving millions of users angry and confused.

The Ministry of Communication and Information Technology has instructed the telecommunication authority to deactivate access to 26 unregistered platforms operating in Nepal, including Meta-owned Facebook, YouTube, X and LinkedIn.

"After the directive yesterday we stopped the URLs but a full shutdown will take time," Sudhir Parajuli, the president of the Internet Service Providers Association of Nepal, told AFP. "We are deciding what methods to employ."

Popular platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and X have millions of users in Nepal who rely on them for entertainment, news, and business.

"I really feel bad about the government's decision because we run our business through Facebook and, if it is closed, our business will be affected," said Jenisha Joshi, 25, who sells jewellery and accessories through Facebook.

Western troops in Ukraine would be fair targets

Says Putin as European countries pledge post-war security support to Kyiv

REUTERS, Vladivostok

Russian President Vladimir Putin said yesterday that any Western troops deployed to Ukraine would be legitimate targets for Moscow to attack, in a warning to Kyiv's allies as they discuss measures for its future protection.

Putin was speaking a day after French President Emmanuel Macron said 26 countries had pledged to provide postwar security guarantees to Ukraine, including an international force on land, sea and in the air.

Russia has long argued that one of its reasons for going to war in Ukraine was to prevent Nato from admitting Kyiv as a member and placing its forces in Ukraine.

"Therefore, if some troops appear there, especially now, during military operations, we proceed from the fact that these will be legitimate targets for destruction," Putin told an economic forum in Vladivostok.

"And if decisions are reached that lead to peace, to long-term peace, then I simply do not see any sense in their presence on the territory of Ukraine, full stop."

Miladunnabi today

FROM PAGE 1

AFM Khalid Hossain in the chair.

Meanwhile, President Mohammed Shahabuddin and Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus issued separate messages yesterday, greeting the people of Bangladesh and Muslims around the world on the eve of Miladunnabi.

The national flag will be hoisted atop all government, semi-government, autonomous offices, and private buildings.

As in previous years, the government will decorate important roads and key locations in the capital with national and colourful flags and banners inscribed with the Kalima Tayyiba.

The Islamic Foundation has been instructed to organise various religious and cultural programmes, including Qirat, Naat recitations, poetry readings, cultural competitions, and an Arabic Khutba writing contest.

The foundation will also release a commemorative publication and arrange seminars.

Starting from the 12th Rabiul Awwal, the foundation will host a two-week-long Islamic book fair on the southern premises of the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque.

Bangladesh Television, Bangladesh Betar, and other electronic media outlets will air special programmes, while newspapers will publish special supplements marking the day.

Universities and all educational, cultural and religious institutions, along with the offices of the Waqf Administrator, Islamic Foundation, and Hajj offices in Dhaka and Jeddah, have been directed to organise discussions, prayers and milad, Naat recitations, and quiz competitions.

These programmes will focus on the life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PUBH), including Islam's messages of peace, progress, tolerance, global brotherhood, human rights, and women's dignity.

Bangladesh's embassies and missions abroad will also observe the day with due solemnity.

SECURITY MEASURES

The government has made extensive arrangements across Bangladesh to ensure the peaceful observance of the day, reports BSS.

Security measures focus on smooth and safe congregations and processions, especially in major cities like Dhaka, Chattogram, Sylhet, Khulna, and Rajshahi.

Home Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury has directed the law enforcement agencies to remain on high alert and ensure tight security at mosques and other religious sites expecting large gatherings.

EC denied power to appoint its secy

FROM PAGE 1

and joint secretary. It would also create a structured career path for EC personnel, enabling them to advance to senior roles within the EC secretariat.

According to the existing EC Secretariat Act, 2009, officials from outside the commission are allowed to serve in various positions at the EC secretariat.

The current EC secretary -- the top position at its Secretariat -- is an officer from the administration cadre. At least 10 other mid-level positions are held by officers from either the same cadre or the judicial service, according to EC sources.

At a meeting on August 19, the Cabinet Division's Inter-Ministerial Committee on Reviewing Draft Laws turned down the proposal, arguing that the formation of such a service falls under the jurisdiction of the public administration ministry as per the Rules of Business.

The committee is responsible for reviewing draft ordinances to decide which ones can be placed before the Advisory Council.

Experts strongly disagree with the committee's view.

"There is no scope for blocking reform initiatives by citing the Rules of Business or any other laws and regulations. If reforms are blocked with excuses, then what can we say?" Badiul Alam Majumdar, who headed the Electoral Reform Commission, told The Daily Star.

"Reform means creating something new or updating the existing one... Rejecting reform proposals is nothing but an attempt

to preserve the old system," he noted.

EC officials said that the commission, as a constitutional body, does not fall under the public administration ministry and therefore the Rules of Business, which outline the roles of ministries and divisions, cannot be applied in this case.

Jesmin Tuli, former additional secretary at the EC Secretariat, said that if the EC is to emerge as a self-reliant and independent institution, it must have its own officials at all levels.

"How can an officer, who has spent most of his career following government orders across various ministries and departments, suddenly act independently in a constitutional body?" she told The Daily Star.

Until 2007, the EC Secretariat operated under the Prime Minister's Office. Later in 2009, the then caretaker government amended the law, bringing the secretariat under the EC.

However, a provision was kept allowing the public administration ministry to depute officials including those from the admin cadre to fill several posts at the EC.

EC officials see this as a major obstacle to the functioning of the commission as a fully independent institution.

Some former admin cadre officials who worked in the EC secretariat said the EC's proposal, if approved, could disrupt the secretariat's operation.

"It is unfair to blame the administration cadre officers alone because it is the government that compels officers to act with bias in

carrying out election duties," said a former EC secretary, requesting anonymity.

EC officials usually serve as ROs in local elections. However, during parliamentary polls, the role is usually assigned to deputy and divisional commissioners -- all of whom come from the admin cadre.

Officials at EC have been calling for an end to this practice for a long time.

On August 30, the Upazila Election Officers' Association demanded that the government establish the EC Service by 15 September, cautioning that without it, the upcoming national election may lack credibility.

'CONTRADICTION' STANCE ON NID

The draft ordinance proposed assigning the responsibility of "preparing and preserving the National Identity Card database" to the EC Secretariat.

However, at the August 19 meeting, the Cabinet Division's Inter-Ministerial Committee rejected the proposal, saying it goes against the Electoral Reform Commission's recommendation for establishing a separate statutory body for NID database.

EC officials view this as a double standard.

"The committee did not consider the reform commission's proposal on formation of a separate EC Service. But it referred to the reform commission's recommendation while rejecting the proposal on NID database. This is a contradictory position," said a deputy secretary of EC on condition of anonymity.

BNP says 'no' to constitutional reforms

FROM PAGE 1

that any dangerous attempt to disrupt constitutional continuity is not realistic in the current political situation."

Talking to The Daily Star, BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed said no arrangement could alter the constitution while it remains in force. "Any such move would face a legal challenge in court and would not stand," he said.

In its letter, the BNP referred to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus's June 5 address to the nation, where he described the charter as "a pledge".

Quoting him, the party noted, "By signing the July Charter, the political parties will make a pledge to the

nation to implement it."

The BNP praised the chief adviser's "thoughtful and well-planned" position on implementation and urged the consensus commission to follow his guidelines.

"Within two years of the formation of the next elected National Parliament, the recommendations of the July Charter related to constitutional amendments, as well as other recommendations left unfinished by the interim government, will be implemented," the letter read.

The party presented three proposals in the letter. The first is immediate implementation of urgent recommendations not requiring constitutional amendments, using

any lawful means.

Secondly, it proposed partial implementation of non-urgent, non-constitutional reforms where possible; and finally, full implementation of constitutional and outstanding reforms within two years of the next parliament's formation.

The BNP also said that after the next election, the political parties that win seats in parliament will be bound by their earlier promise -- through signing the July Charter -- to carry out the reforms.

Insiders said that while the consensus commission is emphasising implementation of reforms under the interim government, the BNP has taken a different stance, focusing on its three-point plan.

Narita route was revived without proper planning

Say Biman officials, experts; blame poor assessment for suspension

RASHIDUL HASAN

Biman Bangladesh Airlines did not conduct a proper feasibility study on the commercial and profitability viability before resuming operations on the Dhaka-Narita-Dhaka route, said several officials of Biman.

As a result, the national flag carrier was forced to suspend the flight on this route within 21 months of resumption due to huge losses, they told The Daily Star.

The sudden decision also drew widespread criticism from Bangladeshi expatriates, while aviation experts termed it “unfortunate and suicidal”.

Biman first launched flights on the Dhaka-Narita route in 1979. After a temporary suspension in 1981, the route was resumed, only to be suspended again in 2006 due to continuous losses. Seventeen years later, on September 1, 2023, the Narita flight was resumed amid much fanfare, with passengers welcoming the move for reducing travel time to six to seven hours and eliminating lengthy transit stops.

However, Biman ceased operations on the Narita flight from July 1 this year citing aircraft shortage and continuous financial loss. The move forced passengers to rely on third-country transits, significantly increasing both travel time and expenses.

Biman sources said each Narita flight incurred losses of nearly Tk 95 lakh. The average cabin occupancy stood at 69 percent, with overall losses amounting to Tk 215.58 crore on the route, they added.

Several Biman officials said then managing director Shafiul Azim was the key person behind

the resumption of the Narita flight, which was promoted as an achievement of the then Sheikh Hasina government.

Biman operated the six-and-a-half-hour-long Narita flight with Boeing 787 aircraft, which have 271 seats. According to insiders, half of the capacity remained vacant on almost every flight.

“Then authorities of Biman launched the route without



- Biman suspends Dhaka-Narita flights from July 1
- Resumed on Sept 1, 2023
- Route incurs Tk 215.58cr loss; each flight lost Tk 95 lakh
- Average cabin occupancy 69%
- Boeing 787 used, but half the seats remained vacant
- Abrupt suspension tarnished Biman's image
- Biman failed to draw transit flyers from India, Nepal

assessing commercial viability and feasibility study, ignoring market demand and financial analysis,” a top official involved in resuming the flight told this correspondent.

“Those, especially the then fleet planning committee, should be held responsible for giving nod to resume the Narita flight without conducting proper study for which the airline incurred huge loss,” he said.

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Dhaka University Professor Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury, former director general of Bangla Academy Prof Monsur Musa, lyricist Shahidullah Farazi, Rajshahi University Prof A Al Mamun, writer-politician Hasnat Quaiyum, writer Firoz Ahmed, and journalist Tahmidal Jami, along with the winners of a speech competition on Abul Mansur Ahmad, at a lecture and award-giving ceremony titled “New Political Settlement: The Culture of Bangladesh” at the Prof Muzaffar Ahmed Chowdhury Auditorium of Dhaka University yesterday. The event was organised by Abul Mansur Ahmad Smriti Parishad and Tarkajal.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

STUDENTS' UNION ELECTIONS

Will ensure student voice in JU syndicate
Says Jucusu VP candidate
Amartya Roy

ABU TALHA

Amartya Roy, a vice-president (VP) candidate in the Jahangirnagar University Central Students' Union (Jucusu) election, has pledged to include a student representative in the university syndicate if elected.

“This will ensure students' voices are heard at the policymaking level,” he told The Daily Star in a recent interview. “This will also help maintain the continuity of Jucusu elections,” Amartya added.

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Ensuring students' rights my first priority
Says Jucusu GS candidate
Abu Touhid Siam

SHARIF M SHAFIQUE

Abu Touhid Mohammad Siam, general secretary (GS) candidate in the upcoming Jahangirnagar University Central Students' Union (Jucusu) election, sees the long-awaited polls as a tool for change.

Siam is contesting from the Shikharthi Oikya Forum panel, supported by Bangladesh Ganatantrik Chhatra Sangsad.

“For the first time in 33 years, Jucusu election is

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Equal rights, opportunities key to democracy

Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury tells event

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Democracy is not only about elections but also about ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all, said Dhaka University Professor Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury yesterday.

He was speaking at a lecture and award-giving ceremony, titled “New Political Settlement: The Culture of Bangladesh”, held at the Prof Muzaffar Ahmed Chowdhury Auditorium of Dhaka University. The event was organised by Abul Mansur Ahmad Smriti Parishad and Tarkajal.

Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury, also the president of the Abul Mansur Ahmad Smriti Parishad, said Abul Mansur Ahmad never separated politics from culture.

“According to Abul Mansur Ahmad, politics is shaped by culture, and culture is also influenced by politics. His political and literary vision aimed at the liberation of peasants, social revolution, and the establishment of a democratic society.”

Abul Mansur Ahmad dreamed of breaking the colonial political system. His works reflected deep sympathy for people, philosophical insight, and a desire for freedom.

PROF SERAJUL ISLAM CHOUDHURY

“Democracy cannot be limited to elections only. Real democracy will be established when equal rights and opportunities exist, power is decentralised, and people's true representatives hold authority,” he said.

He added that Abul Mansur Ahmad's literature was not written for entertainment alone. “His works reflected deep sympathy for people, philosophical insight, and a desire for freedom. Even in satirical writings, he highlighted inequality and oppression in society.”

Speaking about Abul Mansur Ahmad's political thought, Prof Serajul said he dreamed of breaking the colonial political system.

“Abul Mansur Ahmad understood that to build a truly democratic society, it was necessary to end the feudal relationships between landlords and peasants, as well as between owners and workers, by creating a new social contract based on equal rights.”

Addressing the event as chief guest, Prof Monsur Musa, former director general of

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A stray cat takes shelter from the scorching sun beneath a life-size spool on the rooftop of a factory building. The ongoing heatwave over the past week has left many struggling to cope with daily life. The photo was taken at Lalbagh in Old Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Former AL lawmaker Pavel, 7 others arrested

STAR REPORT

The Detective Branch have arrested former Awami League lawmaker Saddam Hossain Pavel and seven others for “planning and financing subversive activities”.

Saddam, former MP from Nilphamari-3 constituency, was arrested around 10:45pm on Thursday night during a raid in Dhaka's Mohammadpur area, said a press release sent by Dhaka Metropolitan Police's media wing yesterday.

The others were arrested when several DMP teams conducted raids across Dhaka Thursday night, the release added.

The other arrestees are: Tanzil Hossain Ovi, 29, organising secretary of the Bauphal upazila unit of the banned Chhatra League

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Late hospitalisation puts dengue patients at risk

HELEMUL ALAM

Mahbub Rahman, 25, a resident of Keraniganj, has been undergoing treatment for dengue at Sir Salimullah Medical College Mitford Hospital since Wednesday.

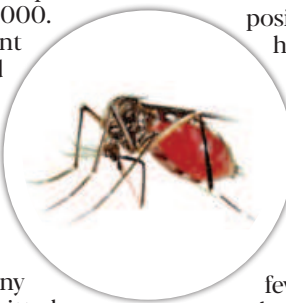
He was admitted in critical condition with nosebleeds and his platelet count dropping to 15,000.

By Thursday, the count had risen to 40,000, and doctors said his condition improved yesterday.

Rahman was diagnosed with dengue on Wednesday, though he had been suffering from fever for a week.

“I could not take any liquids before being admitted as I couldn't eat anything,” he said yesterday afternoon.

Rahman, who works in the Mitford area, added that this was his first experience with dengue and he had been unaware of the importance of drinking plenty of fluids during home treatment.



The condition of another patient, Mohammad Jamal, 40, also became critical when he was admitted on Wednesday. Jamal began drinking coconut water and papaya juice after developing fever on August 31. He returned to work the next day after the fever subsided.

“On Monday, he was tested dengue positive and got admitted to the hospital on Wednesday after his blood pressure started dropping,” said Jamal's brother, Nowaz Sharif.

Faisal Hossain, 30, another dengue patient at Mitford Hospital, admitted that he did not seek medical care when his fever started. “I just took rest at home. But when my condition worsened on the fourth day, I went to a doctor, who diagnosed dengue and referred me to the hospital,” he said.

Similarly, Shimul Mondal of Jatrabari ignored his illness and tried to return to work two days after developing fever. “I fainted while getting ready for

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THE WAIT ENDS TOMORROW!

The Daily Star

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*Participation is by invitation only

Love finds a way in hospital

Injured groom ties knot from hospital bed in Manikganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

A year ago, Ananda Saha and Amrita Sarker met, and their acquaintance slowly blossomed into love. With the consent of both families, their wedding date was set for December 15 this year. But a sudden accident changed everything.

On the night of August 7, Ananda was seriously injured when a truck hit his motorcycle on his way back to Manikganj from Dhaka. Both his hands and one leg were broken, and his waist was badly injured. After initial treatment at a private hospital in Dhaka, he was later admitted to a hospital in Manikganj. He still cannot get out of bed and remains fully dependent on others for movement.

In this crisis, Amrita decided to stay by his side. She refused to leave Ananda alone. Following discussions between the two families, the wedding was brought forward. On Thursday night, the marriage ceremony was held in the hall room of a private hospital in Manikganj town.

Photos of the wedding have since spread on social media. They show Ananda lying on a hospital bed, his



hands wrapped in bandages, as he applies sindoor to the bride's forehead. The rituals were completed in the presence of a few close relatives.

Ananda, a resident of Chan Mia Lane in Manikganj town, is the son of Arabinda Saha, a local businessman. The bride, Amrita, hails from Banajuri village in Ghior upazila and is a first-year undergraduate student at a college in Manikganj.

Ananda is undergoing treatment at Afroza Begum General Hospital in the town.

Dr Sirajul Islam, medical and unit head of the hospital, said, "The wedding was arranged at the hospital with due regard to the patient's safety and health. Only a small number of people were present. The event did not disrupt treatment for any other patient."

He also said Ananda's condition is better than before. Arabinda Saha said, "There was a plan for a big wedding in December. But after the accident, our first priority is Ananda's treatment and care. That's why, by the family's decision, the wedding was held on a limited scale on Thursday night. We seek everyone's prayers for the newlyweds."



Condemning the death of a factory worker in Nilphamari's EPZ on September 2, Bangladesh Garment Sramik Sanghati formed a human chain in front of Jatiya Press Club in Dhaka yesterday. The organisation also demanded fair investigation, justice, and exemplary punishment for those responsible.

PHOTO: STAR

MOULVIBAZAR HOSPITAL

Dialysis services near closure amid fund crisis

MINTU DESHWARA

The dialysis unit at the 250-bed Moulvibazar General Hospital is on the verge of a complete shutdown due to a severe funding crisis.

Hospital authorities said no new patients have been admitted for dialysis over the past month, while limited services for 15 existing patients may also cease by the end of September unless urgent government funding is secured.

Lower and middle-income patients, who depend on the hospital for affordable, life saving treatment, are the worst affected. They are now being forced to seek dialysis at private facilities that charge significantly higher fees.

"Dialysis has to be done twice a week. Private hospitals charge Tk 3,500 per session. It is impossible to bear this cost regularly," said kidney patient Lokman Ahmed, who previously received treatment

at the hospital.

The dialysis unit has 17 machines, 15 of which are currently operational. Each patient is offered a package of 48 sessions

To operate at regular capacity -- approximately 300 sessions per month -- an annual allocation of about Tk 1 crore is required, officials said. But without fresh funding, the



at a subsidised rate of Tk 20,000, bringing the per-session cost to around Tk 400. The government bears the rest.

hospital has been forced to scale back operations.

"We are still providing services

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

BU students on hunger strike for 3-point demand

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

Seven students of Barishal University (BU) have staged a hunger strike to press home their three point demand, including infrastructural development of the campus.

Around 10:30pm on Thursday,

Sharmila Zaman Senjuti of the English department, Amiya Mondal of Journalism and Mass Communication, Tajul Islam of Accounting and Information Systems, Md Abu Bakar Siddique of Chemistry, Piyal Hasan of Philosophy, Ahmed Riaz of Public Administration, and Shawkat Osman of Law began the strike in front of the university's administrative building.

"We have been demonstrating for a long time

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7



Eviction drive faces pushback in Cox's Bazar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

The Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority's eviction drive in the Nuniachhara area along the Bakkhali river in Cox's Bazar town was halted yesterday after strong resistance from locals.

Around 9:30am, hundreds of residents blocked the main road at Gungachola beach for nearly two hours, burning tyres and building barricades. Soon after, people from Nuniachhara, Samiti Para, Tekpara, and Peshkar Para also joined the demonstration.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

Former AL

FROM PAGE 3

in Patuakhali; Anisur Rahman Hawlader, 43, a union-level Jubo League leader; AKM Khorshed Alam, 65, general secretary of Bangabandhu Kalyan Parishad; Delwar Hossain Bablu, 61, an Awami League leader from ward 32 in Dhaka; Al Mamun Bhuiyan, 29, organising secretary of Jubo League's Uttara east ward 1 unit; Kaykobad Osmari, 53, a central executive member of Jubo League; and Md Anwar Hossain, 60, former president of Khatirpata union AL and ex-UP chairman in Louhajang, Munshiganj.

All are accused in different cases filed with several police stations, the release said.

They had been conspiring together to destabilise the country by disrupting law and order and attempting to spread panic among people through flash processions at different places in Dhaka, the DMP said.

Equal rights, opportunities key

FROM PAGE 3

Addressing as chief guest, Prof Monsur Musa, former director general of Bangla Academy, said remembering those who contributed to the state and society is both a social and state responsibility, but it is often neglected.

Prof Musa explained that culture should be understood in two ways -- human culture and material culture. "Human culture includes literature, music, thought, and creativity, while material culture includes the physical creations of society and the state," He said the material culture of Bangladesh is relatively weak and often borrowed from others.

"Abul Mansur Ahmad raised the right questions in his time. The ability to ask questions is one of the main strengths for moving society forward," he said.

Musa also said without correct questions and direction, uprisings cannot be turned into revolutions.

Lycrist Shahidullah

Farazi said the new political settlement is not only about the transfer of power but also about transforming political culture.

"The key question is whether we will continue to live under new rulers or build a society based on dignity and justice," he said.

He added that while power has changed hands many times in Bangladesh's history, political culture has not. "For the new settlement to succeed, politics must stand on truth and morality, people's participation and accountability must be ensured, and the culture of authoritarianism must be replaced with democratic values."

He said July uprising was not only about a change of government but also about people's resistance against authoritarian culture.

Rajshahi University Prof A Al Mamun said, "Abul Mansur Ahmad wanted to show that Bangalee Muslims' roots stretch beyond lower-caste Hindus, linking them to the Harappa civilisation,

Buddhist heritage, and later Muslim identity. He sought an alternative history against Calcutta-centred dominance."

Writer and politician Hasnat Quaiyum called Abul Mansur Ahmad a rare figure who led politics while enriching literature. "Today, the idea of a 'new settlement' is widely discussed but still not clearly defined. We must identify and change the structural 'cage' left by the British," he said.

Writer Firoz Ahmed described Abul Mansur Ahmad as more than a literary figure and said he was "a thinker in search of the national soul".

"Abul Mansur Ahmad's life reflected the anti-colonial struggle, giving voice to Bangalee Muslim culture. Ahmad's vision of East Bengal as the future centre of Bangalee civilisation shaped Bangladesh's foundation," he said.

Journalist Tahmidul Jami said Abul Mansur Ahmad's debates on language and identity remain relevant. "His view of a creolised Bangalee language, blending dialects and Urdu-Bihari speech, offered a basis for a new collective identity."

At the event, winners of the speech competition on Abul Mansur Ahmad were also awarded. They were presented with prizes, certificates, and cash awards.

Narita route

FROM PAGE 3

Aviation expert Kazi Wahidul Alam said, "Biman should take effective measures to minimise its loss. It also should take proper planning and branding to continue this route."

"Biman's move has damaged Bangladesh's aviation image abroad," he added. "Ceasing operation to a major destination like Japan -- where we have trade, tourism, and a significant expatriate population -- reflects poor business planning of Biman."

Wahidul Alam said at the beginning of the Narita flight many passengers were from Nepal and Kolkata as they found this route profitable instead of travelling from their own countries. But due to absence of proper marketing and branding, Biman failed to attract more transit passengers from Nepal and Kolkata for Narita.

Rakib Hasnet, working at a foreign media house in Dhaka who visited Tokyo four times in the last two years by Biman, said the national carrier failed to turn the Narita route into a profitable venture despite prospects.

Contacted, Shafiul Azim,

who was made secretary of the Election Commission while serving as Biman MD and CEO in May 2024 and is now secretary (OSD), said allegations of not assessing financial viability are not true.

"We had forward planning centring Narita flight. We had plan to go to Los Angeles, USA and Canada through code sharing with All Nippon and Canadian Airlines," he said.

But those plans were not implemented later.

In aviation, code sharing is an agreement where one airline sells seats on a flight operated by another airline but under its own flight number and code. This allows airlines to expand their route networks and offer a wider selection of destinations to customers, even if they do not operate the flights themselves.

Biman spokesperson ABM Raoshan Kabir said no route of Biman is launched or resumed without feasibility study. "The consideration on which the Narita flight was resumed didn't comply finally for which this route was suspended," he added.

Late hospitalisation

FROM PAGE 3

the office. Then I was rushed to the hospital," he said.

Sabina Yesmin, senior staff nurse at Mitford Hospital's medicine ward, said most dengue patients are being admitted in critical condition, many of them from Keraniganj.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services, a total of 130 dengue patients has died this year, while 33,467 others were hospitalised across the country till yesterday. At Mitford Hospital, 11 patients died so far and 707 remained admitted yesterday.

Dr HM Nazmul Ahsan, associate professor at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital, identified delayed hospitalisation as a major reason behind the rising fatality rate this year.

"Although the number of dengue cases is slightly lower than in previous years, deaths are higher because people are paying less attention to dengue amid the presence of other viruses," he said.

At present, four viral infections -- dengue,


influenza, chikungunya, and Covid-19 -- are circulating in the country, according to medical experts.

"Many patients fail to recognise warning signs such as severe abdominal pain, difficulty breathing, bleeding, extreme fatigue, or a sharp drop in urination or platelet count. By the time they arrive at hospitals, their condition is often critical," Dr Ahsan added.

He recommended early admission for patients with comorbidities, elderly individuals, and pregnant women to reduce the risk of death. He also warned about the dangers of cross-infection from different dengue serotypes, which may lead to more severe complications if treatment is delayed.


Dr Ahsan further advised dengue patients to take sufficient fluids such as oral saline, coconut water, rice starch, soups, and homemade fruit juices while under home treatment. He also stressed that the 48 hours after recovery from fever is a critical period requiring close monitoring.

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Narail District, Narail.
E-mail: ee.narail@dphe.gov.bd

Memo No: 46.03.6500.061.07.018.21-3363 Date : 04/09/2025

Sl.No	Invitation For e-Tender notice (OTM)
1.	Ministry/ Division Local Government Division.
2.	Implementing Agency Department of Public Health Engineering.
3.	Project/ Program Name Project for Safe Water Supply Through Out The Country (PSWSC).
4.	e-Tender ID's 1145241.
5.	Description of works Installation of 05 nos piped water supply Scheme with 02 nos Test Tubewell, 02 nos Production well, Pump House, 01 Nos R.C.C Over Head Water Tank, Mechanical works, Electrical Works, Pipe Line/water distribution Networks at Kalia Upazila in Narail District under Safe Water Supply Through Out The Country Project.
6.	Name, Designation & Address of official inviting Tender M. M. Abu Shaleh Executive Engineer DPHE, Narail District E-mail: ee.narail@dphe.gov.bd
7.	This is an online Tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the national e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. Interested person/firms can see details in the website: www.eprocure.gov.bd .

GD-1946


(M. M. Abu Shaleh)
Executive Engineer
DPHE, Narail District.

Trump seeks to rebrand Dept of Defense as Dept of War

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump is changing the name of the Department of Defense to the Department of War, the White House announced Thursday, insisting the rebrand will project a more powerful image.

While the department's official name is set in law, Trump in an executive order is authorizing use of the new label as a "secondary title" by his administration, a White House document said.

Defense officials are permitted to use to use "secondary titles such as 'Secretary of War,'...in official correspondence, public communications, ceremonial contexts, and non-statutory documents within the executive branch," according to the document.

It was not immediately clear when Trump planned to sign the order, but his public schedule for yesterday said he would be signing executive orders in the afternoon as well as making an announcement in the Oval Office.

'We decide who stays' Says Pakistan after UN plea to pause mass expulsion of Afghans

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's government yesterday said "we decide who stays", after the United Nations refugee chief urged the country to pause its mass expulsion of Afghans after a major earthquake.

Thousands of Afghans who were registered as refugees have surged over the border from Pakistan in recent days, with returns escalating despite a weekend earthquake that killed 2,200 people and flattened entire villages in Afghanistan.

It prompted a call by Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees: "Given the circumstances, I appeal to the (government of Pakistan) to pause the implementation of the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan."

Pakistan has hosted Afghans fleeing violence and humanitarian crises for more than four decades, from the Soviet invasion to the 2021 Taliban takeover.



Brothers in arms and relatives lay flowers at the coffin of Vitali Panakhov, a Ukrainian serviceman with the call sign "Witch," during his funeral ceremony at Independence Square in Kyiv, Ukraine, yesterday, amid the ongoing Russian invasion. PHOTO: AFP

Venezuelan F-16 jets fly over US warship

Pentagon calls the move 'provocative'; US sending fighter jets to Puerto Rico to counter drug cartels

REUTERS, Washington

Two Venezuelan F-16 fighter jets flew over a US Navy destroyer in the Caribbean on Thursday, a US official told Reuters, triggering a stern US warning to Venezuela against interfering in intensifying US military operations in the Caribbean.

The incident, which the Pentagon said occurred in international waters, further raises tensions just two days after a US strike killed 11 people aboard a vessel from Venezuela that President Donald Trump said was carrying illegal narcotics.

Legal experts have raised questions about the attack, despite the Trump administration arguments that it has the authority to strike alleged members of criminal gang Tren de Aragua trafficking drugs to the United States after Washington designated it terrorist organization earlier this year.

In a terse statement confirming only the broad outlines of the incident, the Pentagon equated Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro's government to a narco-trafficking cartel, allegations Caracas



denies. Trump has accused Maduro of running Tren de Aragua.

"Today, two Maduro regime military aircraft flew near a US Navy vessel in international waters," the Pentagon said in a statement, calling it a "highly provocative move."

"The cartel running Venezuela is strongly advised not to pursue any further effort to obstruct, deter or interfere with counter-narcotics and counter-terror operations carried out by the US military."

Venezuela's Communications Ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. A US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the

Venezuelan military aircraft were F-16s and that they flew over the USS Jason Dunham.

The Dunham is one of at least seven US warships deployed to the Caribbean, carrying more than 4,500 sailors and Marines, in a military buildup that has drawn concern from Caracas.

US Marines and sailors from the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit have also been carrying out amphibious training and flight operations in southern Puerto Rico.

Trump's decision to blow up a suspected drug vessel passing through the Caribbean, instead of seizing the vessel and apprehending its crew, is highly unusual and evokes memories of the US fight against militant groups like al Qaeda.

US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth defended the strike on Thursday and vowed such activities would continue, citing the threat that illegal narcotics pose to public health in the US.

Meanwhile, US is sending ten F-35 jets to Puerto Rico as part of President Donald Trump's vow to crack down on drug cartels in the Caribbean, sources familiar with the matter told AFP yesterday.

Mumbai on alert after bombs in cars message

Sender identified himself as 'Lashkar-e-Jihadi'

NDTV ONLINE

Mumbai is on high alert after the police received a WhatsApp message threatening dozens of blasts in the financial hub where the Ganesh festival is set to culminate today. The threat message claimed that "human bombs" had been planted in 34 vehicles, and it would shake the entire city.

The threat message was received on the WhatsApp helpline of the traffic police's control room on Thursday as the cops covered the city in a security net for Anant Chaturthi, which would mark the end of the 10-day Ganesh festival with the immersion ritual.

The sender identified himself as "Lashkar-e-Jihadi" and said that 14 Pakistani terrorists have entered India. About 400 kg of RDX will be used for the blast, which can "kill 1 crore people", the threat said.

Mumbai Police has become alert following the threat, and security deployment has been increased across the city. An official said the threat is being investigated from all angles and that the Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) has been informed.

"Our security forces can handle any threat," a senior officer said at a press conference.

Read to reduce sentence

Uzbekistan tells prisoners

AFP, Tashkent

Prisoners in Uzbekistan will be able to plead for reduced sentences if they read books selected by authorities to cultivate "correct spiritual and moral values", officials said.

Lawmakers in the Central Asian former Soviet republic passed a penal code amendment on Thursday introducing the scheme for around 13,500 inmates, all except for those sentenced to life imprisonment.

They will have to pick books "from a list approved by the Republican Center for Spirituality and Enlightenment (a state body), aimed at forming correct spiritual and moral values in convicts", the country's Senate said.

"For each book read, the sentence can be reduced by three days, but not more than 30 days per year," it added. A special committee will verify whether the inmate has actually read the book.

The list of authorised books has not been made public. Opening up to the world since the 2016 election of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev after a quarter-century of relative isolation, Uzbekistan has successfully attracted foreign investment and developed tourism.

But political opposition and civil society remain virtually nonexistent, while the press and economy are still largely controlled by the state.

Earlier this year, Uzbekistan, through its state news agency, said it was "working to ensure the rights and freedoms of convicts".

Tight battle among panels

FROM PAGE 12

preparing himself for the Ducsu candidature, becoming vocal for solving campus related problems.

Umama, once general secretary of Bangladesh Chhatra Federation's DU unit, resigned after the uprising and later served as SAD's spokesperson until June. She quit SAD, alleging "ill-politics inside the platform", and is now contesting with the slogan "politically conscious, academic campus".

Both candidates face tough competition from partisan nominees: Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal's Abidul Islam Khan and Islami Chhatra Shibir's Abu Shadik Kayem, both MPhil students, of Islamic studies and political science, respectively.

Despite their affiliations, they earned respect for their roles during the movement.

Umama is expected to attract strong support from female students, but her chances may be diluted by two other female VP contenders, and independents like Shameem Hossen of the English department, who has won attention with dynamic campaigning.

"The more votes independents capture, the more Umama's share could shrink," said one student campaigner of Umama's team.

Still, she remains strong in three science faculty dormitories, being a student of biochemistry and molecular biology. The science faculty accounts for 15 percent of the electorate.

For general secretary, BGCS Convenor Md Abu Baker Mojumder of geology department is also expected to draw science faculty votes. A key contender with SAD roots, his chances brightened after fellow SAD coordinator Mahin Sarker withdrew yesterday in his favour. "If Abu Baker wins, it will be my victory as well," Mahin said at a Madhu's Canteen press conference.

Baker's strongest rivals are Chhatra Dal's Sheikh Tanvir Baree Hamim, Shibir's Farhad Hossain, and Ganatantrik Chhatra Jote's Meghmalla Bosu, a Chhatra Union leader. All come from social sciences, which together with arts and law

faculties make up 57 percent of voters. Heavy competition there may scatter votes.

Shibir faces low popularity in Jagannath Hall, DU's only non-Muslim dorm, but its 2,200 votes are expected to split between Hamim and Megh, potentially benefiting Shibir's Farhad. He may also gain from other candidates, including Sabina Yasmin of Chhatra Odhikar Parishad and journalist-turned-candidate Al Sadi Bhuiyan, both of whom reached out to female voters. Nearly half of total voters are female.

Students noted that Chhatra Dal struggles in female halls, while Shibir receives organised support from its sister body, Islami Chhatra Sangstha.

For assistant general secretary, BGCS nominated Ashrefa Khatun, whose chances hinge on female support. But rebel BGCS candidate Tahmid Al Muddassir Chowdhury is said to be stronger in male dorms.

Close contests are also expected among Shibir's Muhammad Mohiuddin Khan, Chhatra Dal's Tanvir Al Hadi Mayed, Umama's panel member Jahed Ahmed.

Though most panels have not announced hall union candidates, BGCS and Shibir members are running independently while informally aiding their central panels. Students said that both groups are also leveraging local networks to influence families, with regional ties emerging as a major factor.

Nahiduzzaman Shipon, Chhatra Dal's DU general secretary, said the panel faced a disadvantage as they were not allowed to reside in the dormitories, limiting opportunities to meet students during the Awami League regime.

"But we are getting positive responses from the students in the campaigns and we hope for a positive result," he said, adding that none of the panels are non-political.

He also alleged that the government and National Citizen Party are backing BGCS candidates, promoting them even on their pages, while Shibir is engaging in covert politics under the guise of general student interests.

JP central office set on fire again

FROM PAGE 12

Khan said, "We had a rally in Shahbagh today [yesterday]. We heard about the incident. Jatiya Party has enmity with various groups. We don't know anything about it."

Earlier, on the night of August 29, a clash broke out between activists of the Jatiya Party and Gono Odhikar Parishad in Kakrail. Several people, including Gono Odhikar Parishad President Nurul Haque Nur, were injured when law enforcement personnel charged truncheons to control the situation. The Jatiya Party office was vandalised and set on fire the next day.

Series of strong aftershocks

FROM PAGE 12

to hit the country in decades.

In Nuristan province, north of Kunar, resident Enamullah Safi said he and others ran out of their homes when the aftershocks hit overnight.

"Everyone was afraid. We are still afraid and have not returned to our homes," the 25-year-old cook told AFP, saying he huddled under a blanket with several other people to keep warm in the cold, mountain night.

Some houses were damaged or destroyed he said, adding that they have received little assistance, as aid is concentrated in the worst-hit zones.

Access has been stymied by already poor roads blocked by landslides and rockfall that continued as the area was convulsed by aftershocks.

The disaster comes as Afghanistan is already facing multiple crises after decades of conflict, contending with endemic poverty, severe drought and the influx of millions of Afghans forced back to the country by neighbours Pakistan and Iran since the Taliban's 2021 takeover.

30 Bangladeshis sent back from US

FROM PAGE 12

Abdullah, a 22-year-old deportee from Noakhali, told The Daily Star, "We were chained like criminals throughout this long journey. It felt as if we were treated like terrorists while returning to Bangladesh. I hope no one else has to face such a situation."

The US has intensified deportations of undocumented immigrants during Donald Trump's second presidential term. At least 180 Bangladeshis have been sent back in recent months as part of multiple phases of the crackdown.

Under US law, immigrants without valid documents may be deported by court order or administrative directive. If asylum claims fail, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) arranges their removal. The process has recently accelerated, with increased reliance on chartered and military flights.

Cops under scrutiny over past poll roles

FROM PAGE 12

officers, who held commanding positions in the past three elections, have been made officers on special duty (OSD) or sent into forced retirement, according to the home ministry database.

Around 15,000 officers, mostly constables, were appointed during the period, raising the number of police personnel to 1.93 lakh.

In the 2024 election, around 174,000 police members were deployed across the country, while the figure was 170,000 in the 2018 election.

Police high-ups insist that the force will draw on its experience of playing a neutral role in the 1991, 2001, and 2008 elections to restore public confidence in it.

THE SCREENING

The PHQ last month instructed all units across the country to check the backgrounds of police officers, their roles during the mass uprising and

Most Bangladeshis attempt to enter the US through Mexico or Latin America, often paying between Tk 30 lakh and Tk 75 lakh to traffickers.

Several deportees said they had been held hostage by Mexican mafias linked to trafficking syndicates. At least six reported being tortured until their families paid Tk 40-50 lakh for their release. Others said traffickers extorted up to Tk 75 lakh, forcing them to sell all their assets.

"There are countless Bangladeshis trapped by such national and international trafficking networks," said Tanzil Hasan of Munshiganj, who added that many deportees intend to pursue legal action against the traffickers in Bangladesh.

This is not the first time such treatment has sparked outrage. In 2016, 27 Bangladeshis were also deported from the US in handcuffs.

social media records.

The Daily Star has obtained a copy of a letter that the DMP's Intelligence and Analysis Division issued on July 30 to all police units, asking them to get details of officers with ranks of SI and ASI, and political affiliations of their family members and relatives.

The PHQ warned that any attempt to conceal information would result in strict action.

Several officers, who have already gone through the screening, said they found some of the questions from evaluators "embarrassing".

A DMP inspector said he received a call from the Special Branch in early August.

"The enquirer asked for addresses of my in-laws and wanted to know about political affiliations of my relatives, including uncles and aunts."

"I felt embarrassed to answer such questions about my relatives after 20 years of service," the officer said,

That episode triggered public outcry and raised questions about human rights and dignity, prompting discussions between the Bangladeshi government and US authorities.

Migration experts argue that deportees should not be restrained unless they pose a security risk. Handcuffing and shackling ordinary migrants, they say, violates international human rights standards.

Shariful Hasan, associate director of BRAC's Migration and Youth Platform, said, "People migrate seeking better lives but often fall prey to trafficking rackets charging Tk 30-75 lakh. While destination countries have the right to deport, chaining people for hours is extremely unfortunate and leaves them traumatised. We hope future repatriations are carried out more humanely."

adding that screening before an election is not new but such questions were never asked in the past.

An inspector from Narayanganj said he underwent screening about a month and a half ago by the District Special Branch (DSB).

"The DSB asked me about my earlier postings and my role as a commanding officer in past elections," the inspector said, requesting anonymity.

POLICE TO GET EQUIPMENT, VEHICLES

Keeping the next election in mind, police will introduce body-worn cameras for its members in January. The devices will allow real-time monitoring of field-level operations from the PHQ, regional offices and the EC, said IGP Baharul Alam.

Besides, communication devices, including walkie-talkies, and vehicles for police patrol are expected to arrive from abroad by October, he added.

Increase efforts to recover bad loans

To rein in NPLs, political commitment is essential

There was a time when many international financial agencies hailed Bangladesh as the fastest-growing economy in South Asia. However, after the ouster of Sheikh Hasina's corrupt, authoritarian regime, it was revealed that many of the numbers used to calculate this growth had been inflated—manipulated to hide the country's looted coffers. Today, the once thriving economy is burdened with non-performing loans (NPLs).

A report published by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in August 2025 revealed that, in 2024, Bangladesh had the highest NPL ratio (calculated as a percent of total loans) in South Asia: 20.2 percent. Even Sri Lanka, ranking second in the chart, had only 12.9 percent NPL ratio in 2024. Between 2023 and 2024, the NPL ratio also increased the most in Bangladesh—by 11.2 percentage points. During the same period, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka saw a decline in their respective NPL ratio. In fact, India's NPL amount came down from \$69.41 billion in 2023 to \$56.31 billion in 2024, because of its sweeping banking reforms.

The reasons behind Bangladesh's high NPLs are well-known. The ADB cited structural weaknesses in credit underwriting and loan resolution, while experts also pointed to regulatory lapses and political interference in loan classification. Under political pressure, defaulted loans from large conglomerates were repeatedly rescheduled, pushing many banks to the brink of insolvency. Following the political changeover last year, the interim government now faces the difficult task of uncovering the full extent of the banking crisis and recovering defaulted loans.

This has led the Bangladesh Bank (BB) to finally tighten the loan classification rules, which it warns will increase the total amount of distress loans, including NPLs, re-scheduled loans and the written-off ones. BB has also been ramping up measures to recover defaulted loans. In a significant move, it recently identified 100 pending lawsuits involving Tk 38,000 crore in bad loans that are preventing banks and financial institutions from taking action against the defaulters by selling their assets and recovering the loans. However, many large defaulters are currently absconding and some have syphoned the money abroad, which complicates the recovery process.

In addition to domestic factors, the amount of NPLs might also rise because of the global economic slowdown caused by trade disputes and geopolitical conflicts. Therefore, it is crucial for the government to not just continue the bad loan recovery process but also take strict disciplinary measures against both borrowers and lenders whose disregard for banking regulations contributed to the crisis. Transparency and accountability in the banking and financial sector must be ensured. Large conglomerates must break free from the default culture that has become normalised in the country. Political parties must also commit to continuing the banking reforms initiated by BB, whoever comes to power through the election next year. Furthermore, legal changes should be made to prevent the proliferation of banks, ensuring that financial institutions are never again exploited to drain the country's resources.

Dismantle the teen gangs

Without proper intervention, they are getting more reckless and violent

We are alarmed by recent reports of violence and extortion carried out by teen gangs in Dhaka's Adabor and Mohammadpur areas, which have left residents afraid and insecure. According to a report by this daily, locals in these areas are routinely forced to pay extortion or face physical assault by these gangs. Many don't dare to go out after dark. An Adabor resident shared how he was forced to leave the area after gang members demanded monthly payments and beat him up when he refused. Gang members abduct individuals, demand ransom, rob valuables, and openly trade drugs. In one incident, a police team responding to a 999 call was attacked with sharp weapons, a constable getting injured and a police vehicle vandalised in the process. Such acts of brutality, often committed in broad daylight, expose the growing menace of teen gangs in the capital who continue to operate with impunity and little fear of consequences.

The teen gang culture has existed in Bangladesh for a long time. The fall of the Awami League government last year brought a temporary pause to their activities, but it has surged again in recent months, with violent crimes reported in Dhaka, Cumilla, Chandpur, and Manikganj. These gangs, often starting as teen groups, have now evolved into organised criminal networks. Beyond petty extortion and ransom, their influence has now extended to major land and property dealings, according to intelligence sources. Since August 5, 2024, Rab has arrested 884 suspects, most linked to teen gangs, in Mohammadpur and Adabor. Despite the arrests, these gangs continue to thrive, with new leaders emerging after each crackdown.

As political parties in the country often use these gangs to extend influence in their areas, we fear that the situation may worsen ahead of the next election. Therefore, we urge the political parties to stop using these young people to serve their petty political interests. At the same time, the government must take urgent and coordinated action to dismantle these gangs and restore public safety. For this, police must increase surveillance in known hotspots and ensure that arrests are backed by solid evidence to prevent repeat offences.

The fight against teen gang culture, however, cannot be won through arrests alone. For that, we need to address the root causes of gang involvement, including poverty, lack of education, and social tensions and alienations. Schools, families, and communities must work together to create a safe and nurturing environment for our youth so that they don't end up in teen gangs.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Baltic states get recognition

On this day in 1991, the Soviet Union recognised the independence of the Baltic states—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

Violence, discrimination, and the failure to reform



Anu Muhammad
is a former professor of economics at
Jahangirnagar University.

ANU MUHAMMAD

The grounds for a historic mass uprising in the country last year was laid by many factors over the years. Among them were an authoritarian rule, a thoroughly repressive regime, total surveillance over people, and severe restrictions on freedom of expression. Elections became a farcical exercise. Courts, police, and universities—these institutions ceased to function as they should, operating instead under orders from above. There was also an unprecedented level of corruption and crime, alongside indiscriminate killings and atrocities aimed at suppressing public discontent. The mass uprising took place to break free from this unbearable situation, with the expectation that a democratic environment would be established, one where people would be freed from physical and mental repression, where tolerance would flourish instead of revenge and hatred, and institutions would become effective. A major expectation behind the uprising was that reforms would lead to a Bangladesh free from discrimination.

Fast forward a year, there is growing disappointment and a sense of broken expectations among the people. Over the past year, the word “reform” has been heard more often than ever before, yet the interim government has hardly employed reforms to ensure people's safety, strengthen the economy, or make institutions effective. One year on, no effective change in governance is visible. Recently, violence in several universities escalated sharply. A garment worker was killed by police—again. Attacks on political leaders and political party offices are also ominous signs.

Despite promises of a discrimination-free Bangladesh, discrimination has increased in many forms. Unemployment has risen and precarious work now dominates the job market. A large number of people work in the informal sector, but the legitimate demands of many from this group have been met with either indifference from the government or

punitive actions from law enforcement agencies.

Recently, we also witnessed cases of mob violence, the collapse of the legal system, and violation of public rights. A discussion meeting on the topic of the Liberation War was organised by a group of people. Before the scheduled meeting could



VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

even begin, a group of outsiders assaulted the speakers physically and verbally, using aggressive and offensive language. Present at the meeting were several senior freedom fighters. Among them, Abdul Latif Siddiqui—an elderly man, a former politician expelled from the Awami League, and a freedom fighter—was subjected to serious mistreatment. Sheikh Hafizur Rahman Karzon, a law teacher at Dhaka University, was also harassed, as was journalist Monjurul Alam Panna. When the police arrived at the scene, instead of suppressing or arresting the perpetrators, they arrested the victims. A day later, the victims were charged under the

enrich the social fabric. To attack people for their words, or to arrest, detain or imprison them for their opinions, is absolutely unacceptable. This is precisely a fascist attitude we are witnessing, once again. It is the government's obligation to ensure that such incidents do not recur. If someone commits a crime or engages in activities against the national interest, the government must address it through legal procedures carried out with full transparency.

During the recent spate of violence at several university campuses, we saw administrations—for example, at agricultural university—behaving just like their predecessors, harbouring

With only a few months left until the election takes place, as announced, the sole responsibility of the government now is to implement the necessary reforms and create an environment conducive to a credible election. Therefore, the key questions are whether the government will prevent further deterioration of law and order, whether it will take a strict stance against those engaged in violence, and whether it will move towards holding an acceptable election. The primary responsibility rests with the government, and only through the fulfilment of this obligation can Bangladesh hope to overcome the current uncertain situation.

The Cumilla crash exposes a systemic failure



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ZAKIR KIBRIA

The video of a crash in Cumilla last month presents the horrifying portrait of a system in collapse. The grainy, time-stamped frames on the Dhaka Chattogram highway shows a sedan making a lawful turn and a colossal covered van losing its battle with physics, resulting in a catastrophic crush of metal. Then comes the frantic escape of the driver—not a portrait of evil, but a rational calculation in a system where accountability is absent and survival demands flight.

The Cumilla tragedy, which claimed four lives, is more than a news story. It is a live autopsy of the state's governance failure. It exposes the broken code beneath our asphalt, written in the language of corruption, institutional neglect, and disregard for human life.

To fix this, we must move beyond easy outrage over “reckless drivers.” That is a symptom, not the disease. The disease is technical, political, and deeply systemic. Our roads mirror the state's priorities, and they are designed less for citizen safety than for profit. As Paul Virilio observed, inventing the highway means inventing the highway disaster. In Bangladesh, we have engineered a particular disaster—optimised for failure through deliberate policy choices and technical neglect.

Let us break down the crash sequence not as a traffic incident, but as a policy failure.

First, the infrastructure deficit. That U-turn near Hotel Nurjahan was not fate; it was poor planning. It was a known black spot, a flaw hardwired into the design. Our roads are built for ideal conditions, not for real human behaviour. We leave under-construction flyovers to narrow lanes but fail to install temporary calming measures. We design highways as straight-line racetracks interrupted by deadly conflict points. The engineering is blind to human error—a profound technical failure.

Second, the vehicle ecosystem. The cement-laden van flipped not only due to speed. Although the actual causes have not been verified yet, many such vehicles crashed in the past due to weight distribution and poor maintenance. Regulatory bodies meant to ensure vehicle fitness—checking for overloading, faulty brakes, and rotten suspensions—are complicit or powerless. The commercial transport economy runs on overloading and skipped maintenance; it is more profitable to risk a fine than to operate safely. Policy incentivises death. When a driver knowingly operates a hazardous vehicle, he is making a rational economic choice within a

broken system—a choice designed for him.

Third, the enforcement architecture. The most telling image is the driver's escape. He ran because he knew he could. The odds of being caught, prosecuted, and held accountable are vanishingly small. Enforcement is sporadic, theatrical, and often corrupt. It functions as negotiation, not deterrence. A traffic police force is not only about issuing fines; it is the citizen's most visible interaction with the rule of law. When this becomes transactional, it signals that laws are optional for those with cash or connections.

Here theory meets tarmac. This is not random chaos, but a textbook case of the “tragedy of the commons.” The road is a shared resource—we all benefit from safety and efficiency. Yet individual actors—the bus driver taking shortcuts, the trucker overloading, the car owner double-parking—gain by cheating. The collective cost is gridlock and carnage. Preventing this requires a strong, impartial referee—the state. In Bangladesh, the referee is not merely absent; it often plays for the other team.

So, what is the way out? We need a ruthless, technical, and systemic overhaul. This is not about vague appeals to awareness but about rewriting the code.

First, engineer the roads for failure, assuming human error. Design roads that forgive mistakes. Mandate regular safety audits of all highways by independent engineers, instead of government committees. Install crash barriers, signage, automated speed cameras, and redesign lethal intersections. These are technical fixes requiring political will and

capital directed to safety.

Second, fix the incentives by reforming vehicle regulation and enforcement. Remove human discretion and its corruption. Use automated weight-in-motion sensors at bridge approaches to fine-tune overloading digitally. Mandate GPS trackers in commercial vehicles to monitor speed and rest times. Make vehicle owners, not just drivers, legally liable for accidents caused by mechanical failure. Shift the calculus from “unsafe is cheaper” to “unsafe is bankrupting.”

Third, build real deterrence. Modernise and depoliticise the police force for data-led enforcement. Use CCTV footage, like that which captured the Cumilla tragedy, not for viral shame but as legal evidence. Establish a dedicated highway patrol with forensic capacity to investigate crashes as crimes, not accidents. Ensure swift, transparent trials for traffic fatalities. When the state demonstrates impartial rule of law, behaviour changes. The fleeing driver is the canary in the coal mine; his escape confirms systemic failure.

The Cumilla family died not from misfortune, but from a chain of deliberate policy choices: flawed engineering, a corrupted regulatory environment, and a culture of impunity sanctioned from above. Mourning them is not enough. We must demand a cold, technical revolution on our roads—governance built not on connections and chaos, but on data, design, and deterrence.

The road is a test—the simplest, most daily measure of whether the state can perform its basic duty: to protect its people. Right now, we are failing. Yet the blueprint for success is clear, if we have the courage to read it.

VIOLENCE IN BANGLADESH’S RMG SECTOR

Disposable lives, dispensable labour



THE SOUND AND THE FURY

Sushmita S Preetha
is a writer and activist.

SUSHMITA S PREETHA

On September 1, at the Uttara Export Processing Zone (EPZ) in Nilphamari, 20-year-old RMG worker Habibur Rahman was shot dead when police and army personnel opened fire on a demonstration against layoffs and the sudden closure of the Evergreen Products Factory (BD) Ltd. Habib, a night-shift operator at Eque International and a resident of Kazirhat village in Shongalshi union under Nilphamari Sadar upazila, was killed while leaving the EPZ after his shift, according to *Prothom Alo*. At least 10 others were grievously wounded as law enforcers attacked workers demanding their due rights.

It is a bitter irony that in the post-uprising Bangladesh, a nation quite literally built upon the blood and courage of the working class, it is their bodies that are once again being sacrificed, with Habib now the third RMG worker to be shot dead since the much-heralded dawn of “New Bangladesh.” Kawsar Hossain Khan was gunned down in Ashulia in September 2024 by law enforcers who opened fire on workers demanding their rights, while Champa Khatun succumbed in October to injuries sustained during clashes over unpaid wages.

Their bodies join a long procession of the dead: Rasel Howlader, Anjuara Khatun, and Jalal Uddin shot in Gazipur in 2023; Jesmin Begum at Dhaka EPZ in 2021; Sumon Mia in Savar in 2019; Badsha Mia and Ruma Akter in Gazipur in 2013; Tajul Islam, Babul Sheikh, and Shafiqul Islam in Tongi in 2009; and further back still, those who fell during the mass strikes of 2006, and countless others whose names barely make it to the news before fading from memory. They are so insignificant, in fact, that there’s no documentation even of the actual number of workers killed in the country over the decades for daring to demand their rights.

Karl Marx’s injunction that “capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt” finds tragic clarity here. The garment industry thrives on biopolitical disposability—labour rendered precarious, expendable, even terminal when workers assert their rights. The repression of labour is rationalised as economic stability, and indeed, is necessary to maintain the rates of surplus extraction demanded by buyers like H&M, Zara, and others, who profit while distancing themselves from the violence in the factories. It is no wonder that the powers-that-be inevitably smell plots to destabilise the nation whenever workers mobilise. Habib’s death is emblematic of a recurring regime of accumulation sustained by neoliberal governance, in which the industrial police act as the final line of enforcement for the genealogy of capital.

Bangladesh’s garment industry is frequently held up as a miracle, cited by the World Bank, the IMF, and the government itself as evidence of the country’s integration

into the global economy, yet beneath the charts of export earnings and growth rates lies the reality that this “success” is premised on systematic repression and structural violence. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) estimates that the sector employs more than four million workers, of whom around 53 percent are women, often young migrants from rural areas who enter the factories because they are the only source of survival wages in an agrarian economy increasingly destabilised by landlessness, climate shocks, and dispossession. They do backbreaking work—12 hours, sometimes 14, bent over sewing machines, in suffocating heat and air thick with fibre dust—and for what? For wages that remain among the lowest in the world. Even after the most recent “increase,” the minimum wage stands at Tk 12,500 (about \$103) per month, a figure that does not even begin to cover the cost of rent, food, healthcare, and schooling for a family of four in Dhaka. It is not a living wage in any sense of the word. It is, what you might call, a survival wage, calibrated precisely to keep workers alive enough to return to the factory floor the next day, but never secure enough to stand with dignity or to bargain without fear.

About 10 percent of more than 4,500 garment factories in the country have

Even as the existing industrial zones remain sites of recurring violence, the state continues to expand the model, announcing new export processing zones (EPZs) as symbols of progress and investment. Yet, union formation remains banned in Bangladesh’s EPZs. Despite growing calls from labour groups and mounting international pressure, EPZ workers are still denied the most basic rights that are taken for granted elsewhere.

registered unions. Yet, even this figure risks exaggerating the actual strength of labour, for many of the registered bodies are little more than management-controlled “yellow unions,” while only a handful have managed to secure genuine collective bargaining agreements. It is a system carefully designed to preserve the façade of freedom of association while ensuring that workers’ power is neutralised. Meanwhile, union registration is routinely delayed or denied, organisers are attacked, harassed, dismissed or blacklisted, and legal harassment wears down those who persist. And when co-option, intimidation, and firings fail to discipline labour, the state

does not hesitate to reach for the ultimate weapon: bullets. The lesson is brutal in its clarity: in Bangladesh’s garment sector, the very act of organising carries a cost that exceeds lost wages or dismissal, for to stand up is to risk not only your job but your life.

At least 45,000 workers were arrested at different times during the Sheikh Hasina regime. Can you imagine the devastation in their households—families forced to sell off

business leaders demanded a specialised force, and in 2009, then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced the plan in parliament. In October 2010, the Industrial Police was formally launched with units in Dhaka, Gazipur, and Chattogram.

Stripped of its euphemisms, this admission is damning. The Industrial Police was designed specifically to defend capital, ensuring that the logic of accumulation is

The 2024 mass uprising, which many hoped might reconfigure the architecture of power, has done little to alter this. For all the rhetoric of transformation, the structure of the state remains intact, its class character unchanged. Indeed, what has followed has been a more brazen embrace of neoliberal capitalism, celebrated by the new ruling elite as the pathway to national redemption. The same factory owners who



VISUAL: SUSHMITA S PREETHA

the little they had, to mortgage their futures, to drown in debt simply because a father, mother, son or daughter dared to participate in a wage protest? After relentless advocacy by labour rights groups and unions, many of those cases have finally been dropped. (We won’t ask why well-known/convicted extremists/criminals walked free within the first month of the uprising, yet it has taken over a year for innocent workers, jailed only for demanding their due wages, to be released.) But what of the system that criminalised them in the first place? What of the state machinery that treats wage demands as sedition, sees “conspiracy” whenever workers take to the streets, and brands collective action itself as a threat to national stability?

Why was the Industrial Police created in the first place, and why are we not demanding its dismantling? Its own website explains that the force was created in response to repeated “unrest” in the garment sector—protests over the 2006 labour law, demands for unpaid wages and Eid bonuses, factory fires, and what it describes as “sabotage” or “rumour-mongering.” It laments how every year around Eid, workers’ mobilisations would spill into the streets of Ashulia, Gazipur, Narayanganj, and Chattogram, leading to highway blockades, vandalism, and clashes that, in the words of the state, “disrupted production, threatened investors, and undermined a safe investment environment.” Owners’ associations, foreign buyers, and

never interrupted by the demands of those who make accumulation possible. Its very existence lays bare the fusion of industrial capital with political power, for the factory owners in Bangladesh are also often parliamentarians (or friends and family of parliamentarians), ministers, financiers of ruling parties, and architects of state policy. They are, in effect, the state itself, entangled at every level of governance.

When workers are fired upon, it is law and order of capital functioning exactly as intended.

Even as the existing industrial zones remain sites of recurring violence, the state continues to expand the model, announcing new export processing zones (EPZs) as symbols of progress and investment. Yet, union formation remains banned in Bangladesh’s EPZs. Despite growing calls from labour groups and mounting international pressure, EPZ workers are still denied the most basic rights that are taken for granted elsewhere. In practice, EPZs carve out pockets where labour law is suspended in the name of attracting foreign capital, offering global buyers and local owners an even cheaper and more disciplined workforce. Critics have long argued that this regime is not about creating decent jobs but about insulating capital from accountability, where profits are secured by enclosing workers in zones in which surveillance is constant, police presence is permanent, and dissent is criminalised at the outset.

enriched themselves through repression now continue to preside over the sector, enjoying impunity for past crimes and protection for the present ones. The same police who once fired on workers under Hasina’s rule now fire on workers under a different dispensation, proving that the coercive apparatus does not belong to a party but to capital itself. And the same global brands continue to extract value from the cheapened lives of Bangladeshi workers while carefully disavowing responsibility for the conditions that make their profits possible. The uprising, in other words, did not rupture the order of exploitation but reinscribed it, proving again how flexible capital can be in absorbing crises and renewing its grip.

As long as capital commands the state, and as long as the state secures accumulation through coercion, workers will continue to die, no matter which party is in power. The question has always been: can we imagine and construct politics that refuses disposability altogether—a political system that recognises the sanctity of life and that refuses to subordinate human dignity to the demands of global accumulation? Until we can do so, no matter how many reform proposals we draft and how many press conferences we hold, we will keep adding names to the list of martyrs, each death both an individual tragedy and a collective indictment, each body yet another reminder that under capitalism, workers’ blood is the cheapest commodity of all.

Five and a half years ‘gone with the wind’



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H.M. NAZMUL ALAM

There are many ways for a nation to measure its decline. Some count the number of young men leaving through airports with one-way tickets. Some tally the failing bridges and half-built flyovers that stand like wounded dinosaurs across the urban landscape. And some, like Bangladesh, count in breathless coughs, in shortened lives, in the invisible yet suffocating arithmetic of particulate matter. According to the latest Air Quality Life Index (AQLI), Bangladeshis are losing 5.5 years of life expectancy on average to toxic air. Not to war, not to famine, not to some biblical plague of locusts, but simply to the very act of inhaling. Breathing itself has become hazardous, an occupational risk of living in one’s own homeland.

It is a sobering revelation, though hardly a surprising one. Anyone who has walked the streets of Dhaka, especially during winter, knows the acrid tang that often stings the throat. But to see its effect quantified—five and a half years lopped off our collective timeline—gives it the weight of tragedy. It is as if *Father Time* himself were being mugged at the crossroads of Farmgate, his hourglass shattered into smog.

The AQLI report is merciless in its detail. Every single person in Bangladesh breathes air worse than both the World Health



Brick kilns, most of them illegal, are a major contributor to air pollution in Dhaka as well as across Bangladesh.

FILE PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Organization’s (WHO) “ideal” and our own “tolerable” standards. Even Lalmonirhat, the country’s least polluted district, inhales

air seven times more toxic than what global doctors prescribe. Dhaka’s residents could gain nearly seven years of life if PM2.5 levels were cut to the WHO limits. In Gazipur, the figure climbs to a staggering 7.1 years. Here, years are currency, and dirty air is the most ruthless tax collector.

If this were a Shakespearean play, the brick kilns would make excellent villains, puffing and wheezing like Macbeth’s

for 58 percent of Dhaka’s air pollution, despite repeated promises of regulation. The government’s new declaration of Savar as a “degraded airshed” and the ban on certain types of kilns seems a promising yet eventually doomed step in the right direction, given the many interlinked challenges involved and our own history of policy failure.

There is a peculiar irony here. Smoking, according to the same AQLI study, reduces life expectancy by two years; malnutrition by 1.4 years. Yet, both are trumped by the air itself, which silently robs us of more years than the cigarette, the empty stomach, or the polluted well. Breathing has become more lethal than smoking. How does one quit air? This slow poisoning or suffocation has been long in the making. Between 1998 and 2023, PM2.5 levels in Bangladesh rose by 66 percent, stealing 2.4 years of life expectancy in just a generation. What wars, dictatorships, and cyclones could not take, dust and soot accomplished with quiet efficiency.

During these years, governments, like tragic heroes, oscillated between Hamlet’s paralysis and Don Quixote’s misdirected battles. Laws were passed, plans were drafted, and promises were made to plant trees, modernise industries, and shift to electric vehicles. But enforcement remains as elusive as Banquo’s ghost. The 2019 law barring kilns near residential areas might as well be a bedtime story told to comfort anxious children. And when illegal kilns are finally ordered shut by the High Court, one wonders how many will rise again under new disguises.

Citizens, too, have played their part in this tragicomedy. With the resignation of Eliot’s

Prufrock, they stroll “through half-deserted streets,” inhaling smog as if it were destiny. Social media timelines are full of complaints about the AQI, yet many ride unregulated buses, burn waste in back alleys, and vote for leaders who treat environmental laws as optional. “I will think about it tomorrow,” says Scarlett O’Hara in *Gone with the Wind*. Dhaka’s citizens, it seems, have adopted the same mantra. Tomorrow, however, is the one thing we are steadily running out of.

But even in tragedy, there lies possibility if we believe in change. Consider Singapore, once plagued by vehicular chaos, now an exemplar of emission control. Consider Mexico City, which drastically reduced smog through policy and enforcement. These cities did not wait for divine intervention. They acted. Why should Dhaka or Gazipur not dream the same?

The battle here is not merely technological, it is also moral. Air, that most basic of commons, has been privatised by the few at the cost of the many. Brick kiln owners profit while children suffocate. Old vehicles run on the fuel of corruption. Construction companies build towers, but not conscience. It is, in essence, a heist—life expectancy robbed from the poor to enrich the few.

In the AQLI’s grim arithmetic, 5.5 years are already gone. But arithmetic also allows for addition. Cleaner fuels, stricter enforcement of regulations, proper urban planning, genuine political will—these could return years to our lives. But as always, the only question that remains is whether we will choose to act in proportion to the gravity of the challenge before us, or let inertia continue to destroy our life and future.



The stars descend tomorrow

Blender's Choice- The Daily Star OTT & Digital Content Awards 2024

The fourth iteration of Blender's Choice-The Daily Star OTT & Digital Content Awards is set to unfold tomorrow, promising to celebrate the finest talents in the OTT industry. Since the inception of the show, the awards have spotlighted outstanding achievements in the vibrant digital entertainment sector, and this year's event is no exception.



Ziaul Faruq Apurba



Siam Ahmed



Rupanty Akid



Vicky Zahed



Saraf Ahmed Zibon



Imtiaz Barshon



Mosharraf Karim



The web-series category has also seen a leap forward, with nominations for Anam Biswas, *Rongila Kitab*, Kazi Asad, *Adhunik Bangla Hotel*, Mohammad Touqir Islam *Sinpaat*, Shihab Shaheen, *Golam Mamun*, and Vicky Zahed *Chokro*.

In the Popular category, Mosharraf Karim (*Adhunik Bangla Hotel*) stands out for his variant portrayal in the anthology, while Ziaul Faruq Apurba (*Golam Mamun*), Chanchal Chowdhury (*Last Defenders of Monogamy*), Pritom Hasan (*Kacher Manush Dure Thuiya*), and Siam Ahmed (*Tikit*) join him in the race.

The Best Actor, Female (Critics) category features stellar performances from Mehazabien Chowdhury (*Forget Me Not*), Sabila Nur (*Golam Mamun*), Sarika Subrin (*Mayaa*), Tasnia Farin (*Kacher Manush Dure Thuiya*), and Zinnat Ara (*Sinpaat*). In the Popular category, nominees include Mehazabien



Sabila Nur

Chowdhury (*Ararat*), Pori Moni (*Rongila Kitab*), Safa Kabir (*Tikit*), Tasnia Farin (*Kacher Manush Dure Thuiya*), and Xefar (*Last Defenders of Monogamy*).

Supporting actors have made equally strong impressions, with Iresh Zaker and Saraf Ahmed Zibon both for *Osomoy*, Imtiaz Barshon for *Golam Mamun*, Manoj Pramanik and Partho Sheikh both for *Baaji*, vying for the male category, while Bijori Barkatullah for *Forget Me Not*, Monira Mithu and Runa Khan both for *Osomoy*, Rupanty Akid for *Kacher Manush Dure Thuiya*, and Tanzika Amin for *Kaalpurush*.

The red carpet will be hosted by rising stars Priyontee Urbee and Partho Sheikh, while the event itself will be anchored by Naziba Basher and Rafsan Shabab alongside two huge surprises. Notable productions such as *Kacher Manush Dure Thuiya*, *Forget Me Not*, *Last Defenders of Monogamy*, *Maya*, *Osomoy*, *Ararat*, *Golam Mamun*, *Kaalpurush*, *Rongila Kitab* and *Sinpaat* will compete against each other for supremacy.

The evening will be enlivened by performances from Xefar Rahman, Sabila Nur, Mondera Chakroborty, Parsa Evana, Jahid Nirob, Parsha Mahjabeen, and the Alifia Squad, promising a night of surprises and celebration.



Anam Biswas



Shamol Mawla



Mostafizur Noor Imran



Kajal Arefin Ome



Raihan Rafi



FS Nayeem



Sarika Subrin



Safa Kabir



Xefar Rahman



Bijori Barkatullah



Runa Khan



Tanzika Amin

NEWS

Dr Ibrahim's death anniv today

CITY DESK

Today is the 36th death anniversary of National Professor Dr Mohammad Ibrahim, founder of the Diabetic Association of Bangladesh, said a press release.

On this day in 1989, he died of cardiac arrest at his residence.

To mark the occasion, wreaths will be laid at his Banani grave at 8:30am by various associate organisations of the association. From 8:00am to 11:00am, free diabetes diagnosis will be offered at the BIRDEM General Hospital complex as well as at centres adjacent to BIHS General Hospital and NHN.

In addition, a blood donation programme will be held at the Transfusion Medicine Department (Blood Bank), 3rd floor (Room 326) of BIRDEM Hospital.

A discussion and question-and-answer session between specialist doctors and patients will take place at the BIRDEM Auditorium (3rd floor) at 10:00am, followed by a memorial meeting at 11:30am.

Besides, a doa mahfil will be held at the BIRDEM mosque after the Asr prayers.



Birendranath Das works on making an ektara in Khulna. For decades, he has been crafting traditional instruments such as ektaras, tablas, and harmoniums. Using a wooden body, he can make up to two ektaras a day, which sell for Tk 300-800. The photo was taken on the city's Sir Iqbal Road yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Old bricks for new monastery

Contractor uses bricks from abandoned school building in construction project, allege locals

MONG SING HAI MARMA, Bandarban

In the Galengya union of Ruma upazila, Bandarban, allegations have emerged that bricks from an abandoned government primary school are being used in the construction of a new Buddhist monastery.

Locals claim the contractor reused old bricks from the school instead of bringing new ones for the project, which is funded by the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board.

During an on-site visit, it was observed that the walls of the Yathuramu Para Government Primary School building had been completely dismantled. Bricks from the demolished walls were stacked near the under-construction monastery, with only a few skeletal pillars remaining.

Many of the bricks still bore marks of cement and sand from their previous use, and broken bricks had been mixed into concrete, which was also visible at the site.

Principal U Pandit Thero (Bhante) of the monastery said, "The old monastery was in a very fragile state and could have collapsed at any moment, so rebuilding it was necessary. However, I saw that the contractor and workers used bricks from the old school building."

Local resident Aungsainu Marma said, "Contractor Kamal Pasha didn't bring a single new brick. All the bricks came from the dismantled school. Initially, they even used sand from the Sangu River, but after our objections, they brought some sand from Bandarban."

Mohammad Mohsin Chowdhury, assistant engineer of the Chittagong



Hill Tracts Development Board in Ruma, said, "We visited the site early in the construction phase and stopped the work. We instructed the contractor to bring new bricks. Later, I heard that new bricks were transported by boat. However, I am not aware if permission was obtained from the education department to demolish the school building."

He said the project was approved in the 2023-24 fiscal year at a cost of Tk 40 lakh. The new monastery is a two-storey building with a concrete ground floor and a tin-shed upper floor.

Executive Engineer Mohammad Yasir Arafat of the development board's Bandarban office said if the allegations are found to be true after an on-site inspection, appropriate action will be taken against the contractor.

Contacted, District Primary Education Officer Mohammad Mofazzal Hossain Khan said his office had no prior information about the demolition of Yathuramu Para Government Primary School. After seeing photos of the site, he instructed the upazila education officer to conduct an urgent investigation and submit a report.

Asked, contractor Kamal Pasha said, "Although villagers suggested using bricks from the abandoned school building, I did not use them. Since trucks could not reach the site due to the road conditions, I transported materials like concrete with great difficulty by boat through Bolipara."

When informed that old bricks and brick chips were found piled near the monastery, he abruptly hung up the phone. Further attempts to contact him went unanswered.

Prof Mohammed Noman's death anniversary

CITY DESK

The 29th death anniversary of Prof Mohammed Noman, an educationist and former vice-chancellor of Jahangirnagar University, will be observed today, said a press release.

On the occasion, the family members of Prof Noman have arranged Qurankhwani and a milad mahfil. Besides, food will be distributed among the destitute in orphanages, and special prayers will be offered at mosques.

Professor Noman Smriti Foundation has chalked out elaborate programmes to observe the death anniversary. The recipient of the "Ekushey Padak" and the President's Gold Medal, Prof Noman's relatives, well-wishers, and students are requested to pray for the salvation of his departed soul.



Eviction drive faces

FROM PAGE 4
Police and army personnel later intervened, while former Cox's Bazar-3 MP Lutfor Rahman Kajol arrived and persuaded the protesters to disperse.

The drive followed a High Court order issued on August 24, directing the government to identify all encroachers along the Bakkhali river and demolish illegal structures within four months. BIWTA and joint forces began the campaign on Monday.

On the fifth day of the operation yesterday, bulldozers were scheduled to enter Nuniachhara, but protesters blocked the road. Amid the standoff, BIWTA Port Department Director AKM Arif Uddin, who was leading the drive,

left the scene with other officials and could not be reached for comment.

During the protest, BNP leader and former MP Kajol said eviction should only continue once the river boundary has been clearly demarcated. "We respect the High Court order," he said. "But the authorities must explain the ruling to the people and clarify their plan."

Earlier in the week, BIWTA also faced resistance in Peshkar Para on the second and third days of the operation.

Elias Khan, officer-in-charge of Cox's Bazar Sadar Model Police Station, confirmed that two cases have been filed against 650 people for obstructing the drive.

Will ensure student voice in JU syndicate

FROM PAGE 3

He is contesting the Jucusu polls, scheduled for September 11, from the left-leaning "Sampriti'r Oikya" panel.

Amartya, former president of JU Chhatra Union, said their panel aims to transform JU into a world-class university. "We have identified key issues that must be addressed. We believe we are the right people to build that foundation," he said.

"Our panel unites people from diverse perspectives and ideologies. That is our strength," he also said.

"While Chhatra Dal and Chhatra League appear on campus alternately, and Shibir was absent for years, leftist student organisations have persisted in their

own unique way and consistently carried on with pro-student activities," said the Jucusu VP candidate.

If elected, Amartya said he would push for research opportunities, better funding, and coordination with other universities. "JU doesn't provide students with skills for the job market and suffers from low research funding," he said.

He said his panel wants to introduce positions such as teaching assistants, research assistants, and lab assistants, so students can earn without sacrificing study time.

"Right now, many are compelled to tutor, which eats into their academic hours," he noted.

He also pointed to

infrastructure gaps, a lack of an academic master plan, and a poorly maintained calendar. "Students shouldn't arrive in the morning only to find classes cancelled. We want to put an end to such practices," he said.

Amartya highlighted his commitment to promoting cultural activities.

Calling Jahangirnagar the cultural capital, he said, "But since Chhatra Shibir resurfaced after 35 years last August, and due to some other issues, the cultural atmosphere has been stifled."

Amartya believes students today are more politically aware, especially after the July uprising. "Votes can't be bought with money. August 5 proved that those who

practise politics of terror and dominance will be expelled from campus," he said, expressing optimism about winning.

Moreover, at Jahangirnagar, students focus less on national narratives and more on solving the university's problems and protecting its environment," he added.

On the long-awaited Jucusu election, he said, "It didn't take place for 33 years due to party influence. That influence remains this time as well."

"Teachers aligned with mainstream politics want to ensure their party-backed candidates win. They only want elections when they are confident of their candidate's victory," he added.

Political power

FROM PAGE 1

sectors following last year's mass uprising, which sought to build a society based on equity.

The head of the Berlin-based watchdog said, "We want transparency on both sides: money going in and money going out. Party and campaign financing must be public, not only reviewed by regulators but also available on a public platform. Spending also needs to be transparent, so citizens can check discrepancies between reported expenditures and reality."

"Only then can we end the market for political power and return elections to what they should be: competitions between ideas and projects for society."

Valerian acknowledged the reform initiatives, but said the principle has to be simple: positions of power must serve the people, not be used to extract profit.

On the upcoming national polls in February, he said elections are not meant to grant unchecked power to one person or party.

"Profound reform is needed to dismantle entrenched corruption. This must continue regardless of which party wins."

He added that elections must be peaceful and inclusive, free from violence, intimidation, or harassment of voters. "All communities, including remote and indigenous populations, must be able to participate freely, without vote buying or coercion."

Asked about his meetings with interim government officials, Valerian said he emphasised institutional independence, transparency, and sustained reforms.

"What I emphasised was that the world is watching Bangladesh. Last year's revolution was unique, a revolution for integrity, and the reforms underway are ambitious and necessary."

He highlighted two urgent priorities: separating the judiciary from the executive and adopting beneficial ownership transparency to prevent corruption. "These must be put in place before the February elections. The ACC also needs to function as an independent instrument, not a partisan one as it used to be."

Beneficial ownership transparency involves disclosing the real individuals who control or benefit from companies and other entities. In Bangladesh, corruption often links political elites, businesses, bureaucracy, and law enforcement.

Asked if dismantling such a system is realistic, Valerian said the courage people showed last year gives him hope.

"Despite repression, people stood up

and ousted corrupt leaders, who had to flee. Bangladesh is now working to recover their stolen assets. This proves corruption is not as fatalistic or entrenched as many may think."

He said that during the previous regime, an estimated \$16 billion was stolen annually from Bangladesh. Recently, £185 million was confiscated in London following a joint call by TI Bangladesh, TI UK, and Spotlight on Corruption.

"This illustrates the global economy of corruption, which may seem abstract but amounts to \$1 trillion annually — public money stolen from many countries and invested in just a few."

"When public money is missing, it is missing from everything: health, education, infrastructure. And crucially, it is also missing for climate action, which is a matter of survival for a country like Bangladesh."

Asked what global legal framework is needed to stop developed countries from accepting dirty money, François Valerian said the responsibility lies with all nations.

"The mechanism is complex. Leaders no longer carry suitcases of cash to Swiss banks. The money is hidden behind legal entities. This is why beneficial ownership transparency is crucial. Each entity has real owners — often powerful figures — hidden behind layers of trusts and shell companies."

He said this is why TI Bangladesh is pushing for the adoption of the draft beneficial ownership bill.

"Offshore centres — Singapore, Dubai, Hong Kong — play a role, as do poorly regulated cryptocurrency platforms."

"Contrary to the hype, cryptocurrencies are often used to launder dirty money because they obscure ownership before being converted back into dollars, pounds, or euros for investment in luxury real estate, cars, or capital markets."

"This doesn't create value. Stolen public money could fund health, education, or infrastructure, but instead it inflates property prices in London or Paris. It even harms citizens in recipient countries while undermining global development goals."

Valerian reiterated that all anti-corruption bodies, including the ACC and the judiciary, must remain free from political interference. Appointment and oversight processes for civil servants, investigators, and judges, he said, must ensure independence throughout the system.

"This was a clear demand of the citizens who risked their lives last year. They did not sacrifice to return to a system of partisan manipulation."

BU students on hunger

FROM PAGE 4

demanding infrastructural development, but the administration has turned a blind eye. Having no other option, we are on hunger strike, and we will continue until our demands are met," said Amiya Mondal, a first-year student.

Since July 29, BU students have staged rallies, human chains, and road blockades to press home their demands.

The protesting students are demanding an increase in the number of academic buildings, dormitories, and other facilities; expansion of the campus area; introduction of new buses for students, and urgent repair of the existing transports.

BU Vice Chancellor Prof Md Taufiq Alam told The Daily Star that he expressed solidarity with the students.

"As a guardian, I stayed by their side throughout the night [during the hunger strike]. I agree with their demands," said the VC yesterday morning.

"We are considering their demands, but it is not possible to meet all of them overnight. The official process for land acquisition to expand the campus has already begun," he added.

He further said he urged the students to give them time for meeting their demands.

PRAYER TIMING		SEPTEMBER 6	
		Fazr	Zohr
		Asr	Maghrib
		Esha	
AZAN 4:35		12:45	4:30
JAMAAT 5:10		1:15	4:45
		6:25	8:15
SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION			

Dialysis services near

FROM PAGE 4

to a few old patients, but no new admissions have been made in the past month," said Dr Pranoy Kanti Das, superintendent of Moulvibazar General Hospital.

He said, "Every year we get allocation in July but last year we did not get it. Still, we have managed for the last one year somehow with other budgets of pathology. But now if we do not get allocation, it will not be possible to run it anymore."

"We have written to the health ministry requesting an allocation of Tk 1 crore to keep the service running for the next year. We hope the fund will arrive before services are fully suspended."

Relatives of patients

expressed frustration and anxiety, saying they have no choice but to turn to expensive private providers or travel long distances to Sylhet city for treatment, incurring additional costs.

"I had to bring my patient from Sylhet and admit them to a private hospital in Moulvibazar. The cost is very high. I don't know how long I can manage this," said Akhlaq Hossain, a relative of a patient.

Contacted, Deputy Commissioner Md Israil Hossain said steps are being taken to prevent a shutdown. "We have sent a letter to the health secretary seeking an allocation of Tk 1 crore. We are taking maximum efforts to keep the dialysis service running," he said.

Ensuring students' rights my first priority

FROM PAGE 3

being held. My first priority will be to ensure the polls are held regularly. To protect students' rights, it is essential to keep the union institutionally active," he told The Daily Star in a recent interview.

He argued that power in the university is concentrated in the hands of a few teachers. "A small syndicate of teachers controls almost the entire university. We want to reduce this imbalance and bring power closer to students."

Siam stressed that his candidacy is not driven by personal ambition. "It comes from years of involvement in student struggles — anti-harassment and environmental movements, anti-corruption protests,

and the recent mass uprising. These experiences have connected me to the real crises and possibilities of the university."

He said his panel reflects diversity. "Among our 25 candidates, female students are contesting beyond the six reserved seats, and we have an indigenous candidate as well. We have also included some who are not directly from our organisation."

On his plans if elected, Siam pointed to one core issue. "At the root of all problems is the teachers' syndicate. Because of them, automation has stalled, food quality hasn't improved, and student politics has turned into hooliganism. Their negative influence is visible in accommodation, security, and transparency."

My aim is to deliver a strong jolt to this syndicate."

He added that if this grip is broken, other office bearers of Jucusu will be able to implement their manifestos more effectively. "If we can weaken their control, all members who made promises will actually be able to fulfil them."

On the election atmosphere, the GS candidate expressed frustration. "Strict enforcement of the code of conduct has hampered direct engagement. We are not allowed to organise cultural events or debates. We aren't getting the chance to talk to voters properly. This has taken away the real electoral environment."

Still, Siam remains hopeful. Referring to July

uprising, he said, "Students' political awareness has grown, and new leadership has emerged. Whoever wins will be part of the anti-fascist forces. I believe students will choose the right person — whether me or someone else."

He also noted that his activism predates the uprising. "I did not enter politics after July. Long before that, I stood up to the administration and past fascist rulers. Since August 5 last year, many coordinators and leaders of the uprising across the country have faced allegations of moral and financial compromise. But the coordinators and leaders at Jahangirnagar have kept their clean image, and I am one of them. That is why I believe students trust me."



ILLUSTRATION : MAISHA SYEDA

FICTION

The dawn’s return

She was the morning. Gentle, at first. Sweetness and warmth and a little bit of laziness. You turn and you wonder why you ever wanted the night to end, for the light to return. Yet she is here already, and her voice cannot be denied. The world of the living calls through her words, so you rise and reenter life, and she is beside you, the sun itself in all her splendour.

SARAZEEN SAIF AHANA

Long, long ago, when the world was younger, wiser, softer, when the animals were braver and the people were gentler, when art lived and music sailed, and the skies were a true, honest blue, there lived a man who loved a woman, and they lived in a little house they loved very much. How they met or how they loved is not important. What is important is this: their love was real and true, and it flourished.

The little house they lived and loved in was set in a tiny village in a tiny kingdom by the big, blue sea, and the blue enormity of the ocean was dwarfed by the red enormity of their love.

Yet this world—though younger and gentler and more loving than ours—remained real, and one day, the woman passed away into the ether and left her love behind. The man watched her fade, and though it tore his heart out, he let her go, for he knew she would find no peace until he did.

But what of his own peace? He had none without her.

When she was gone and he was alone, he walked and walked and he walked some more. He walked until his feet no longer knew where they were going. The world had blurred into one unbroken ache, until suddenly the ground beneath him softened, and the whisper of waves reached his ears. He looked up and realised—he had come to the sea.

It was night, the first night without her, and everything around him carried the same hush of mourning. The sky stretched vast above, black and glittering with a thousand cold fires. Yet when he lowered his gaze, he saw no difference. The sea had stilled, vast and patient, and it wore the sky like a second skin. Stars trembled on its surface as though the heavens had fallen down and shattered upon the water. He could not tell where the firmament ended and the ocean began; the world had folded in upon itself, so that he stood at the edge of an infinity doubled.

He sat on the sandy shore of the great blue, and he watched the blue of the sky meet the blue of the water. The two worlds of blue met and mingled, as old lovers do—comfortably, gently, tiredly but happily. The man sighed

and felt a twinge of envy, for the sky and the water would merge and then separate, and then come back together again. Yet his own love never would.

“Why do you weep, mortal man?” the sea asked him in her breathy voice. “The world is great and beautiful.”

The man smiled. “Yes, it was.”

“Was?”

“Not for me. Not anymore. Not without her.”

“Ah.” There was a soft silence, like the cool darkness that comes over you when you lie down in search of comfort after a day of troubles. The sea spoke again, her voice now salt-rough: “Tell me of her.”

The man smiled again. “Even you, vast and blue as you are, do not have the ability to comprehend one as such as her.”

The sea laughed gently. “Perhaps. But tell me anyway.”

So he began: “She was the dawn, long-awaited and prayed for, dreamed of and ached for—yet always a surprise when the hint of the sun’s brilliant rim first peeks over the horizon, and you feel all the breath rush from your lungs. You watch as the sun rises, as it has every day for uncounted days, yet every day is a miracle. You watch the dawn, you watch the sky come back to life, you watch the world awaken in heat and sun and power, but you realise... this is all the proof you need of God.”

“She was the morning. Gentle, at first. Sweetness and warmth and a little bit of laziness. You turn and you wonder why you ever wanted the night to end, for the light to return. Yet she is here already, and her voice cannot be denied. The world of the living calls through her words, so you rise and reenter life, and she is beside you, the sun itself in all her splendour.”

“She was the noon. Blazing, burning, brilliant. Too hot to touch, scorching those who dare, her rage a terrible fire, her heat you would endure... and wonder if you would survive. Yet it was this very heat that made life possible. For the tides to turn, for the moon to live, for the great fires and smokes and bangs of the human race. And she is beside you still, the sun in all her splendour.”

“She was the afternoon. Her radiance

slightly dimmed, made gentler. More playful. She would let the sky breathe again, let the blue waters laugh and play, and the clouds dance as they craft their paintings in the canvas of the firmament. The children were run from their cages, free at last to let all of nature hear their voices, their screams and shouts and laughs and jokes and joy and joy and joy. And she is beside you still, the sun in all her splendour.

“She was the evening. Purple. Green. Violet. Black. Even pink, sometimes, if the mood is right and the light is allowed to show off its infinite variety. She is calm, restful. The day was long and hard, and full of fire, but the coals have simmered down to a softer orange now, and she allows you to simply be. A seat by the window, the glass slightly fogged by age. A cup of tea on the sill, and the angry old alley-cat now slinks in through the door to curl up in your lap, accepting love for the first time. And she is beside you still, the sun in all her splendour.

“She was the night. Dark. Black. Dangerous. Full of fear, full of horror, full of the great, vast, unknown. Depthless, and endless, and cursed. Eyes in the dark. Fangs in the dark. Claws in the dark. Yet the darkness of rest, of sleep, of comfort and love and hidden laughter. And she is no longer beside you, the sun in all her lost splendour.”

The man fell silent at last.

The sea listened to every word, her heart fuller than she could’ve imagined. “Tell me, then, mortal man—why do you cry?”

“Because she is gone, and I am alone.”

The sea smiled now, her voice now tidal-slow. “No, mortal man. She was, as you say, the sun. The sun must set, for that is the law. Yet the law also says, the dawn must return.”

And the man, startled, looked up.

And there, over the horizon, the sun was rising.

Sarazeen Saif Ahana is an adjunct member of the faculty at Independent University, Bangladesh and Southeast University, where she teaches English and hopes her students will one day understand the light they bring to her life.

POETRY

The fire that has no shape

BIPRA PRASUN DAS

What do you carry in your heart’s bundle?
A lineage?
A doctrine?
A fear?
Cast them into the fire—
that has no shape,
but still gives light.
There is a music that unbinds.
Not heard by ears,
but by the aching in your marrow.
It is sung by those who have shed skin
after skin,
until only breath remained,
hovering between two worlds—
neither dead,
nor alive,
only becoming.
The divine does not wear a crown,
nor sit upon a throne.
It stirs
where your silence deepens beyond thought,
where your hands tremble
before a stranger’s wound.
It flickers
in the sweat of labour,
in the tear withheld for dignity’s sake.
It hums
in the cracked voice of longing,
in the tremor
before you choose love again.
It is not far.
It leans close
where you kneel in grief,
where you dance without name,
where you burn,
and still offer light.
So do not call me brother by blood,
nor enemy by script.
Call me by the soundless name
we shared
before the stars spoke of our fates.
That name still glows
in the ashes of your forgetting.
Come.
Unrobe your mind.
Let the fire take your shape.
And in its smoke,
you may see the formless Beloved
smiling back—
as you.

Bipra Prasun Das is a student at North South University.



PHOTO: MAISHA SYEDA

CREATIVE NONFICTION

A visit before the journey

FARUK KADER

Before returning to Australia, I felt a quiet urgency to visit my elderly and ailing relatives in Dhaka. Not just a social obligation—it was something deeper, a whisper from within. I heard such visits were acts of virtue, but for me, it was more about connection, memory, and respect.

A few days ago, I went to Katasur to see an elderly aunt recovering from Chikungunya. Now, after many years, I’m heading to Ruppur to visit another aunt, 85 years old and frail from age. As our rented car made its way through the city’s chaotic landscape, I tried to find my aunt’s address on Google Maps. Synthia, my companion, teased me: “You came here in 2018. Don’t you remember the route to her house?” But Dhaka is a city that sheds its skin every few years. After seven or eight years, even Ruppur, located at the furthest corner of the city, felt foreign now. Thankfully, our driver, Hasan, had no trouble finding the place.

Back in 2018, I brought my mother to visit this same aunt. My mother, then in her twilight years, had been eager to

reconnect with family. I remembered the two women chatting warmly on the sofa, their conversation flowing like a river of shared memories. Today, things were different. The aunt lay in her dim bedroom, curtains drawn, and the air heavy with gloom. Her face bore the unmistakable marks of time—missing teeth, sunken cheeks, and she looked like a faded black-and-white photograph, framed by age. She loved watching cricket on TV...no more. I noticed on her bed a religious text, now the only means to spend her idle time.

I sat on a wooden stool close to her bed, unsure what to say. Should I ask about her health? Her medications? Instead, I asked gently, “Do you remember when I came with my mother?” Her face lit up. She hadn’t forgotten. It felt like a bridge across time.

Her voice was hardly audible, but she wanted to speak. I, now hard of hearing myself, relied on Synthia to interpret. She sat beside her on the bed, translating the aunt’s murmurs with care.

Back then, the aunt’s youngest son, Faisal, had been there too. He fetched Dalpuri from the local restaurant to entertain me; he, for



ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

sure, was aware of my indulgence in Dhaka street food. Faisal had been a thoughtful soul, living with his mother and caring for her. His love for books was evident—two towering bookshelves in the lounge were packed with titles by Zafar Iqbal, Edward

Said, and Salman Rushdie. I wondered if I had noticed them during my last visit. Faisal passed away three months ago, claimed by a rare disease. Faisal breathed his last at a Dhaka hospital. But the news of his death was not immediately revealed to his mother.

She came to know about it as she listened to the local mosque’s on-air announcement of his son’s funeral arrangement. Now, Faisal’s wife had taken over caring for the aunt, with help from a full-time caregiver named Rahima.

Upstairs, Faisal’s elderly mother-in-law lived alone. I considered visiting her, too. I reckon, she would have been happy to receive us, even though we’re distant relatives. So many elders, I thought, were quietly slipping through the gap of loneliness. Echoes from their silent heartbeats ripple through the air.

As Hasan drove us back home, I felt the weight of time and memory pressing gently on my heart. These visits aren’t just about saying goodbye—they are about honouring lives, preserving stories, and offering a moment of warmth in a world that often forgets its oldest voices.

Faruk Kader writes stories from his fractured heart. He is an uprooted BUET civil engineer, yet to settle either in Bangladesh or Australia. He can be reached at faruk.kader718@gmail.com.

MESSI'S EMOTIONAL home qualifier farewell

Lionel Messi bid farewell to home World Cup qualifiers in unforgettable fashion at Buenos Aires' Monumental Stadium on Friday (Bangladesh Time), walking out hand-in-hand with his three sons -- Thiago, Mateo and Ciro -- as his wife Antonela and mother Celia watched from the stands. At 38, the eight-time Ballon d'Or winner lit up the night with a brace in Argentina's 3-0 win over Venezuela, equalling Ecuador's Ivan Hurtado's record of 72 qualifier appearances and drawing level with Cristiano Ronaldo on 36 goals in such matches, just three shy of all-time leader Carlos Ruiz of Guatemala.



PHOTO: X

"I love this, I love playing football and I don't want it to ever end, but I'm also aware that the moment will eventually come... I want to take it step by step, feeling things day by day."

Messi on football.

"Same as I said before about the World Cup that I don't think I'll play another. Because of my age, the most logical thing is that I won't make it. But well, we're almost there, so I'm excited and motivated to play it."

Messi on World Cup 2026

Same goal, different milestones

AGENCIES

Aryna Sabalenka and Amanda Anisimova will clash in a highly anticipated US Open final on Sunday night, with both players chasing different individual milestones.

For Sabalenka, it is about completing unfinished business. The defending champion is through to her third straight final at Flushing Meadows and is aiming to become the first woman since Serena Williams in 2014 to retain the crown in New York.

The 27-year-old Belarusian has dominated the season with three titles and 45 weeks at the top of the rankings, but her quest for a fourth Grand Slam has repeatedly stalled. She fell short in both the Australian Open and French Open finals this year, losing to Americans Madison Keys and Coco Gauff respectively.

For Sabalenka, this final will also serve as an opportunity to avenge her Wimbledon semifinal loss to the American earlier this year.

"Just super happy to be back in the final and hopefully I can go all the way again," said Sabalenka after overcoming Jessica Pegula 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 in a re-run of last year's final.



Sabalenka is aiming to become the first woman since Serena Williams in 2014 to retain US Open.

Anisimova is searching for her maiden Grand Slam title.

U-23s eye comeback against Yemen

SPORTS REPORTER

Smarting from a 2-0 defeat to hosts Vietnam, Bangladesh are aiming to bounce back in their second AFC U-23 Asian Cup Qualifiers encounter against Yemen, scheduled to kick off at the Viet Tri Stadium at 3:00pm Bangladesh time on Saturday.

Despite the disappointing start, the young men in red and green remain upbeat, with hopes of securing their first-ever qualification from the group stage.

Putting the performance against Vietnam behind them, the team is now focused on staying in the race with a must-win match against Yemen, who beat Singapore 2-1 to share the top spot in Group C alongside Vietnam.

"We couldn't perform in the first match as per our expectations because we couldn't play our natural game," said Hasan Al Mamun, who is guiding the side in the absence of head coach Saiful Bari Titu, currently sidelined due to illness. "Now, we are looking forward to showcasing our true potential against Yemen, and the boys are ready to fight for all three points."

Captain Sheikh Morsalin echoed the urgency of the task ahead, saying, "It is a do-or-die match for us, and we must win at any cost to keep our qualification hopes alive. We've already analysed Yemen's strengths and weaknesses through video sessions and have made our final preparations accordingly."

Match against Nepal, focus on Hong Kong

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will look to fine-tune their preparations for October's Asian Cup Qualifiers against Hong Kong as they take on Nepal in the first of two international friendlies at the Dasharath Rangasala Stadium in Kathmandu on Saturday, with the match is scheduled to kick off at 5:45pm Bangladesh time.

"Our focus is to prepare as well as possible for the matches against Hong Kong," said Bangladesh head coach Javier Cabrera during a pre-match press conference on Friday. "What we are really thinking about is how we can improve on our last performance against Singapore and how we can perform at our best against Hong Kong in October."

Recalling his previous experience of playing against Nepal in 2022, Cabrera said, "I think it's always difficult for Bangladesh to play here in Kathmandu. My only experience here was in September 2022, and we were trailing 3-0 at half-time (eventually lost 3-1). So that was quite tough. We expect another tightly contested match, but we believe we are going to perform better this time. Although the pitch is not in ideal condition, hopefully it doesn't rain on match day. If the weather holds, we'll be able to put on a good show."

The Spaniard admitted that the team's preparation has been far from ideal, with only half of the squad available for nearly 20 days before 10 players from Bashundhara Kings joined the camp just two days prior to their departure for Nepal. Bangladesh also played two closed door warm up matches against Police FC, which featured Nepal

national team captain and goalkeeper Kiran Kumar Limbu -- a move that raised questions about Cabrera's planning ahead of facing Nepal. However, the head coach defended the decision, saying, "It wasn't so much about confidentiality, but rather about finding the right context for the team to focus on the concepts we were training,"



Despite the absence of players such as Hamza Choudhury, Shamit Shome, Fahamedul Islam, and several under-23 players currently competing in the AFC U-23 Asian Cup Qualifiers in Vietnam, Cabrera remains optimistic. "Many players are not here, but to be very honest, we competed at a very high level a few months ago with 95 percent of this current squad. Most of them are U-23 players who delivered fantastic performances against teams like Lebanon, Palestine, and even Australia. I would still say we've brought our A team,

though some people may call it a B team. We are expecting a tough competition here."

Nepal's Australian head coach, Matt Ross, also said that their focus was on preparing for the upcoming Asian Cup Qualifiers, but stressed the importance of making a strong statement on home soil

-- especially after their disappointing 2-1 defeat to Laos in their last qualifier.

"I know our boys are really looking forward to these games, which will be closely contested," said Ross. "We talk a lot about preparation for the next AFC Qualifiers, but when the whistle goes, it's about those 90 minutes. We're desperate to show that our performance against Laos was not up to our standards. The boys are 100 percent ready to show that we are here to win and continue the progress we've made over the last few months."

Hridoy missing T20 beat?

ASHEFAQ-UL-ALAM

If the 2-0 margin of victory doesn't make it obvious, the fact that only eight Bangladeshi batters got a chance to bat in the three-match series against the Netherlands is a solid indicator of just how one-sided the series in Sylhet was.

The number would have been halved to four had the Tigers not batted first in the third match on Wednesday, which got called off due to rain after the hosts made 164-4 in 18.2 overs.

Four batters -- Towhid Hridoy, Shamim Hossain, Jaker Ali, and Nurul Hasan -- batted for the first time in the series in that game.

While Nurul (22 off 11 balls) and Jaker (20 off 13) hit some boundaries in their short stay and Shamim (21 off 19) got some game time after recently recovering from fever, there were no positive takeaways from Hridoy's 14-ball stay in the middle, which yielded nine runs.

His knock was the only boundary-less innings from a Bangladeshi batter in the series and also the only innings with a strike-rate lower than 100.

This poor innings against the Dutch wasn't an aberration but a reflection of how Hridoy has been batting in the shortest format in this calendar year.

The 24-year-old's last half-century, an unbeaten 63 off 42 balls against India, came in October last year. In the 12 innings



since then, he has crossed the 30-run mark thrice, with his best knock being a 24-ball 45 against the UAE in a losing cause.

Both his strike rate and average in T20Is have dropped significantly from last year. In 2024, he averaged 30.81 at a strike rate of 130.08, whereas in 2025, his average dipped

to 20.45 and strike rate plunged even further to 110.84.

The slump in Hridoy's T20I numbers indicates that other teams now know how to keep him quiet.

His struggle to rotate the strike is still apparent. At one point during his innings on Wednesday, he had hit three consecutive deliveries straight to fielders inside the circle -- twice at short-third and once at cover point -- ruining the momentum of the innings with dots.

After six dots against a sub-par attack, Hridoy tried to break free by charging down the wicket against Tim Pringle, only to get caught at long-off.

Batting is not the only aspect of his game where he is showing a lack of match awareness.

In the first match of the series, he missed a blatant run-out opportunity at the non-striker's end -- first trying to run in from extra-cover to break the stumps, then trying to hit the wickets with an underarm throw.

In the same match, he also misjudged a catch at the boundary, as the ball went over his head and dropped before the ropes to trickle over the line.

While Hridoy's struggle continued, in the same series, Saif Hassan made an impressive comeback, hitting a brisk 19-ball 36 and taking a couple of wickets in the first T20I.

With Saif's resurgence, Hridoy's spot in the middle-order does not look set in stone anymore.

At 18 years and four months, Estevao Willian opened his Brazil account in their convincing 3-0 win against Chile in a World Cup qualifier at the Maracana on Friday. With goals also coming from Lucas Paqueta and Bruno Guimaraes, Carlo Ancelotti's Brazil -- who have already qualified for the 2026 World Cup -- displayed an inspiring performance for the first time since the Italian took charge of the five-time World Champions in May.

PHOTO: AFP





JP central office set on fire again

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jatiya Party central office in the capital's Kakrail once again came under attack last night.

"We were informed around 7:00pm that some people hurled bricks and stones at the Jatiya Party office and then set it on fire," said Rozina Akhter, duty officer at the control room of the Fire Service and Civil Defence headquarters.

Later, the fire service got another call about the bla being extinguished, she added.

According to a Ramna Police Station official, a police team was already present at the scene. "They brought the situation under control."

Strongly condemning the attack, JP Secretary General Shameem Haider Patwary said the party blames Gono Odhikar Parishad for it. "The government should launch a judicial inquiry into the incident. If found guilty, Gono Odhikar's party registration should be cancelled."

Meanwhile, Gono Odhikar Parishad Secretary General Rashed

SEE PAGE 5 COL 3



Fire burning at the central office of the Jatiya Party in Kakrail, Dhaka, last night.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

DUCSU POLLS

Tight battle among panels, independents

ASIFUR RAHMAN and MAHATHIR MOHAMMED

The upcoming Dhaka University Central Students' Union polls on September 9 are set to be highly competitive, with nearly 10 panels in the race. Students think no single panel is likely to secure a sweeping victory.

Conversations with around 50 students across 18 dormitories suggest that candidates' roles during last year's July uprising and onwards, their leadership quality, pledges to students, academic record, and regional ties will be decisive.

Political affiliation, however, may prove a liability, as many

students openly criticise partisan influence on campus. Among vice-president candidates, two have drawn special attention: Abdul Qader of "Boishommo Birodhi Shikkharthi Sangsad" and Umama Fatema of "Swatantra Shikkharthi Oikya". Both were coordinators of Students Against Discrimination (SAD), which spearheaded the July uprising.

On July 19, 2024, when SAD's front-line leaders were detained, Qader announced the nine-point demand, including a ban on partisan campus politics -- seen as a turning point in the movement. Earlier this year, he became convener of the DU chapter of Bangladesh Ganatantrik Chhatra Sangsad (BGCS) and has since been

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

AFGHANISTAN QUAKE

Series of strong aftershocks cause more injuries

Rescuers slowed by landslides, blocked roads, rough terrain



AFP, Jalalabad

A series of strong aftershocks from a deadly earthquake that hit eastern Afghanistan at the weekend injured at least another 10 people and caused further damage, Taliban authorities said yesterday.

Five shallow aftershocks, the strongest measuring at magnitude 5.6, were recorded by the US Geological Survey on Thursday night and yesterday morning, with some rattling Kabul and the Pakistan capital, Islamabad.

National disaster authority spokesman Mohammad Hammad told AFP 10 people were injured across eight provinces jolted by the aftershocks, including the hardest hit Kunar, Nangarhar and Laghman, adding to the more than 3,700 already injured in the initial quake.

More than 2,200 people were killed after the magnitude-6.0 earthquake hit eastern Afghanistan just before midnight on Sunday, making it the deadliest quake

SEE PAGE 5 COL 3

Cops under scrutiny over past poll roles

Those who played 'commanding roles' won't be deployed in next election

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

With the national election approaching, police have sped up the process of identifying officers who played "commanding roles" in the three previous controversial polls or had strong political affiliations during that period.

The vetting of officers from the rank of inspector to DIG is expected to be completed by December 15. Those officers who performed duties as team leaders in the past three polls, will not be deployed during the next election, said sources at Police Headquarters.

Several officers told The Daily Star that they have already undergone rigorous scrutiny and faced questions not only about their own political leaning but also that of their close relatives.

When contacted, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Baharul Alam, said those officers, who played "commanding roles" in the past three polls, will not be assigned duties in the upcoming election.

"We hope to complete the screening by December," he told The Daily Star on September 1.

Referring to election preparations, he said, "Out of around two lakh police personnel, about 1.5 lakh might be needed to help the authorities conduct the election.

"We will start providing election-related training to officials in Dhaka on

CURRENT STRENGTH OF POLICE FORCE



TOTAL MEMBERS
1,93,487

Additional IGP	21
DIG	117
Additional DIG	339
SP	746
Additional SP	961
ASP	899
Inspector	5,706
Traffic Inspector	973
SI	22,489
ASI	20,662

September 7 and hope to complete it by December 15," he said, adding that a list of vulnerable polling centres will be prepared by that time.

The parliamentary election is likely to be held in the first half of February, as announced by the interim government and reaffirmed by the Election Commission.

Maintaining law and order during the polls will be a significant challenge for police, given the lingering impact of

diminished morale following the mass uprising that toppled the Awami League government.

The force's credibility was called into question due to controversial roles in the previous polls, as many police officers faced allegations of playing partisan roles and engaging in ballot-stuffing on the eve of polling.

Over the past year, more than 200

SEE PAGE 5 COL 4

30 Bangladeshis sent back from US in cuffs and shackles

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Thirty undocumented Bangladeshis were deported from the United States with their hands cuffed and feet shackled. A special chartered flight carrying them landed at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka late Thursday night.

Flight Lieutenant Masud, spokesperson for the airport, told The Daily Star that the plane touched down around 11:30pm. Among the deportees was one woman.

Airport officials said the aircraft remained on the runway for nearly three hours after landing, during which the deportees' restraints were gradually removed.

Witnesses reported that they were escorted off the plane still in chains and only unshackled before reaching the arrival lounge. No one was allowed to approach them during this time.

Around 2:00am, under tight security, the group was moved inside the airport. A special team from the Ministry of Home Affairs, several intelligence agencies, and US embassy officials were present.

Journalists attempting to take photographs were stopped.

According to sources, BRAC provided financial support for the deportees to return to their homes. Witnesses said the group appeared physically and mentally exhausted after the long journey.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 4

Scientists create multi-coloured, luminescent plants

CNN ONLINE

Glow-in-the-dark plants bright enough to light up streets at night may sound like the stuff of science fiction or fantasy. But scientists have already made plants that emit a greenish glow. They are even commercially available in the United States.



A group of Chinese researchers has just gone even further, creating what they say are the first multi-coloured and brightest-ever luminescent plants.

"Picture the world of Avatar, where glowing plants light up an entire ecosystem," biologist Shuting Liu, a researcher at South China Agricultural University in Guangzhou and co-author of the study published August 27 in the journal Matter, said in a statement.

"We wanted to make that vision possible using materials we already work with in the lab. Imagine glowing trees replacing streetlights," she added.



PHOTO: SUSHANTA GHOSH

Several students of Barishal University on Thursday night began an indefinite hunger strike to press home their three-point demand, including infrastructural development on campus. In a sign of solidarity, Vice Chancellor Prof Taufiq Alam (front and centre) joined them and spent the night alongside the protesting students. The photo was taken around midnight.



Right-wing tycoon Anutin new Thai PM

AFP, Bangkok

Right-wing Thai tycoon Anutin Charnvirakul was confirmed yesterday by parliament as the nation's next prime minister, ousting the dominant populist Shinawatra dynasty.

The Shinawatras have been a mainstay of Thai politics for the past two decades, sparring with the pro-monarchy, pro-military establishment that views them as a threat to traditional social order.

Their Phue Thai party has monopolised the top office since 2023 elections, but they have been bedevilled by a series of setbacks and a court ruling that resulted in dynasty heirress Paetongtarn Shinawatra's sacking as prime minister last week.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

MOTIJHEEL HOLIDAY MARKET

A shopper’s paradise on a budget in the heart of Dhaka

RAFFAT BINTE RASHID

Holiday markets, weekend farmer’s markets, night markets, thrift markets – these are the places that always seem to trigger my spending compulsion. Even though I have enrolled myself in a self-imposed rehabilitation programme from emotional spending sprees and retail therapy in general, my brain insists

College. To my surprise, I had been completely unaware of this lively, penny-pinching shopping option in the heart of Dhaka. It opens only on Fridays from 10:00am and continues long after sunset and Esha prayers, transforming the entire area into a buzzing, sprawling fair. After only strolling through half the market, I found myself at the far end, already immersed in the festive rhythm.

sudden sight of glass jars and bottles, stacked precariously on makeshift racks of wooden stools and cane baskets. The variety was astonishing: jars in every possible shape, size, and design, ranging from simple, utilitarian containers to ornate, vintage-inspired pieces. Some were brand new, others recycled, and many were nothing more than old liquor bottles, gleaming in the hazy light.

I noticed that homemakers were showing great interest in these glass treasures, not just for their versatile uses but also because more households are consciously shunning plastic in their kitchens. These jars could store everything – powdered spice mixes, dry condiments, nuts and pulses, seasonal pickles, even sauces. I could not resist buying a round glass jar perfectly suited for my steamed chicken jug soup. At only Tk 20 for the smallest jars, with slightly larger ones costing an extra Tk 10 or so, the bargains were irresistible.

The highlight of my haul, however, was a vintage-designed amber glass bottle with a small hand grip on its neck. It could hold nearly three litres of liquid, and had once belonged in the shelves of a chemist or pharmacist. Meticulously cleaned, it bore no trace of its earlier life and was priced at just Tk 250. To me, it seemed destined to be transformed into a decorative vase. I could already picture it against a sunlit wall, casting a warm amber hue, holding a couple of white lilies.

Another delightful find was the assortment of Japanese, Korean, and Chinese rice wine bottles, porcelain and glass alike, in dark tones and pastel shades. Their decorative textures, vintage-inspired detailing, and unusual lids made them striking pieces of design. I haggled hard for a pale pink bottle with a diamond pattern, but at Tk

500 it seemed indulgent for someone supposedly in “retail rehab”. With some reluctance, I walked away, though not without glancing back at it more than once. Instead, I invested in something equally exciting: 50 yards of crochet lace in intricate, delicate patterns. At only Tk 10 per yard, it was a staggering bargain, considering the same would fetch Tk 60 to Tk 80 per yard in regular malls. Of course, in ordinary circumstances, I would never dream of buying such an excessive length. I have no concrete plan for it yet, but I imagine it will eventually find its way into party favour bags or be distributed among friends who love lace as much as I do.

There was, however, one catch. These laces were not displayed neatly but bundled into large plastic bags, laid haphazardly on the street, and needed hand-washing before use. They were leftovers from wholesale markets, rough around the edges but still treasures for those willing to sort through them.

As I tore myself away from the lace vendor, I stumbled upon Manik, a sturdy vendor selling soft, creamy cotton balls. It was the first time I had encountered a street seller offering local Shimul Tula sourced from Narayanganj. Their natural nude shade was stunning, and I was taken back by the sheer softness.

“I take lease of cotton plants from villagers and process the cotton myself,” Manik explained cheerfully as we engaged in light-hearted bargaining. The encounter lent a personal warmth to the transaction, linking the material directly to the land and its cultivators.

Moving along, I found more wonders. Amidst stacks of clothes, rubber shoes and slip-ons were curtains, kitchen utensils, and melamine crockery. Entire stalls were dedicated to plants and gardening tools, while others showcased

sturdy metal racks. To my delight, one vendor specialised in Macramé – wall hangings, plant holders, and decorative accessories. The intricate knotting technique, an age-old craft, has been enjoying a resurgence, and here it was available at bargain prices.

As I took in the sheer variety, I reflected on the art of thrift shopping. It is not about grabbing everything in sight; it requires a trained eye to discern unique finds from heaps of ordinary stock.

The Motijheel market demanded patience, but it also rewarded curiosity. Every corner seemed to hold something unexpected – a treasure, a curiosity, or simply a useful household item at a fraction of the mall price.

It dawned on me that if such a tiny fraction of the market had so much to offer, then the remaining stretch must be brimming with countless undiscovered gems.

The sheer expanse of this vibrant Friday market reminded me of Bangkok’s famed Chatuchak Market, albeit in a distinctly Dhaka setting.

By the time I made my way out, my hands were full, my wallet lighter, but my heart strangely content. Despite my claims of retail restraint, I had succumbed once again to the thrill of discovering bargains. Yet there was no regret, only the quiet satisfaction of finding beauty and value in the most unexpected of places.

The Motijheel holiday market may not have cured me of my spending impulses, but it gave me a morning filled with small joys, cheerful banter, and a renewed appreciation of the city’s hidden marketplaces. For those who, like me, revel in the art of thrift, it is a must-visit.

So, will you be joining me next weekend?



that anything below Tk 500 does not qualify as “serious” shopping. In my mind, therefore, I stand on the high moral ground, convincing myself that the Motijheel holiday market would not possibly draw me into another spree. Last Friday, I drove down to Motijheel, where the market stretches across the length of the street and pavements outside Motijheel Ideal School and

It was here that I bargained for a kilo of local Shimul tula – red silk cotton – to crochet lace with, and that first purchase gave me a sense of what treasures the market had in store. The day was overcast and humid, yet the atmosphere was joyous, the sort of Friday morning one rarely associates with pleasure until something delightful interrupts routine. For me, it was the



BECAUSE NO ONE ASKED

Archiving the Rohingya past



Visitors at Ek Khaale: Once Upon a Time, curated by Greg Constantine and organised by BRAC University's Centre for Peace and Justice, engage with archival photographs that seek to reclaim the memory and dignity of the stateless Rohingyas.

COURTESY: GREG CONSTANTINE

NASEEF FARUQUE AMIN

It began with a question, the kind of question that arrives quietly, almost like a sigh. Greg Constantine, an American photojournalist and documentarian who has spent nearly two decades chronicling the plight of the Rohingya, sat inside a bamboo hut in Cox's Bazar, leaning towards the elderly men who were holding plastic bags filled with their pasts—brittle documents, photographs yellowed into sepia, certificates folded and refolded until the creases seemed older than the paper itself. He asked them, almost casually: Why have you never shown these to anyone else?

The answer was short, devastating, a reply that could have been whispered by ghosts: Because no one asked.

That single phrase carried the weight of exile. It explained the decades of invisibility, the silences in the archive, the way the world had walked past without pausing to look. Journalists had come, yes, lawyers too, researchers with clipboards, UN officials with acronyms and deadlines. But their questions were always about the destruction: When did

the soldiers come? How many houses were burnt? How many were killed? Never: What did you carry? What survived of your life? And so the archives—the land deeds, the family portraits, the yellowing certificates of births and schools and marriages—remained unasked for, unacknowledged, unshown.

Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh: the world's largest refugee camp, where nearly a million Rohingyas endure lives reduced to rations, patrols, and waiting. Bamboo shelters collapse in monsoons, fires return like curses. Stateless and unnamed, they grow up without citizenship, without futures.

Their condition is not just displacement but archival deletion. Myanmar denies their very belonging. Bangladesh hosts but refuses integration. The world offers aid, but not recognition. The Rohingya are spoken of as a burden, as a crisis, as a statistic. Rarely as people. Rarely as history.

It is this long silence that the exhibition Ek Khaale: Once Upon a Time sought to confront. Curated by Greg Constantine and organised by BRAC University's

Centre for Peace and Justice, the ten-day show ran from 18 to 28 August 2025 at the Merul Badda campus in Dhaka. Through photographs, dialogues, and archival fragments, it became less an art exhibition than a reclamation of memory—an attempt to reassemble the scattered lives of a people into a visible, dignified whole.

For decades, the Rohingya were photographed into victimhood. Constantine himself acknowledges that his own lens, alongside those of his peers, helped produce this visible identity: the endless march across rivers, the mothers clutching infants, the skeletal shelters on the bare hillsides. Necessary, yes, but reductive. Necessary, yes, but imprisoning.

And so he asked himself: what happens when photographs define a community, not as they are, but only as they suffer? What if the very act of documentation turns into a cage?

From that crisis came the decision to stop producing images of the present and instead to search for images of the past. Family albums, wedding photographs, handwritten letters, property deeds—the private, the domestic, the overlooked. These would not erase the story of persecution but would complicate it, broaden it, and humanise it.

This is where diaspora studies become a compass. Stuart Hall reminds us: identity is not essence, but positioning. The Rohingya archive repositions. It insists that the community be seen not only as stateless victims but as agents with deep pasts, thick roots, and futures denied but not extinguished.

Constantine turned from photographer into archivist, a metamorphosis rare in the world of photojournalism. He trained young Rohingya in Bangladesh, in the refugee camps, and inside Myanmar—in Buthidaung, in Sittwe, in Yangon—to ask questions, to listen carefully, to photograph documents, to build trust.

The method was radical in its patience. “No deadlines,” he told them, “no

expectations.” And so materials began to appear, quietly, like shy animals emerging from a forest. An old man would bring out a single deed, carefully unfolded on the floor. Conversation would follow, trust would build, and then—almost ceremonially—the man would disappear into his hut and return with a plastic bag filled with papers, papers carried over rivers, smuggled across mountains, hidden under floorboards.

What surfaced was more than personal memorabilia. It was world history. A war service certificate from 1945, issued by the British government to a Rohingya man named Abdul Salam. A passport from 1949. Diaries, letters, certificates of education. Oral traditions long dismissed as myth now bore documentary proof: the Rohingya had served in the British “V Force”, intelligence agents working behind Japanese lines in Arakan during World War II.

Constantine, researching simultaneously in the British Library, stumbled upon military memoirs describing the very same man. In the dusty pages of a 1945 book, an illustration captioned “Abdul Salam, Arakanese headman from Buthidaung.” The coincidence was uncanny, as if the archive itself had been waiting for recognition.

Later, he found the descendants of the British officer who had commanded Rohingya fighters. In their attic lay suitcases filled with photographs, letters, and diaries—among them, the only known photograph of a Rohingya guerrilla unit in 1943, standing with their British commander holding the British flag. History, dismissed, denied, suddenly glared back from paper and ink.

Archival research, as Achille Mbembe reminds us, is always about power: who gets remembered, who gets erased. Here, the Rohingya archive re-entered world history, not as victims but as participants.

From these fragments emerged a cartography of diaspora. Rohingya memories surfaced in California, in Karachi, in Indiana, in Dublin. A man who studied engineering in the US co-



Greg Constantine

LAST WITNESS TO A LOST KINGDOM

Landslides push Tripura families to the brink

MINTU DESHWARA

“Our part of the village, Satchari, was once part of the Tripura state,” said 90-year-old Mangeswari Debbarma, a long-time resident of Tripura Palli. “The traditional Kachari House in Srimangal, established by the Tripura Maharaja in 1897, stood as a witness to our heritage. But now, it’s being lost to neglect and indifference.”

She added that thousands from the Tripura community once lived in the region, which lies just across from the present-day Indian state of Tripura. However, after the Partition of India, many families migrated, and the area began to suffer from recurring landslides.

“A few years ago, there were 30 families. Five have already left due to landslides. Just recently, four more families lost their homes. The rest of us live in fear, not knowing when our homes might be next,” she said.

Mangeswari said erosion has been ongoing for several years, displacing families year after year. “Two families left in 2018, one in 2019, another in 2021. Now we live under the hillocks, watching them erode every time.”

“The landslides this year may not seem severe, but they haven’t stopped. The only road we use to travel is also damaged, making life even harder. Two more families are now getting ready to leave. If this continues, there will be no one left here.”

The Tripura indigenous community in the Satchari area of Chunarughat upazila of Habiganj is facing an existential crisis as landslides continue to threaten their homes and disrupt daily life.

Once spread across several areas of Chunarughat, the Tripura people have now been reduced to just 24 families, living precariously on a hill surrounded by dense forest and tea gardens near Satchari National Park — an area locally known as Tripura Palli.

Despite their remote location and harsh conditions, the Tripura community has shown strong interest in education. However, frequent landslides during the

monsoon season have not only put their homes at risk but also severely hampered movement, especially during emergencies.

“Whenever it rains, landslides hit us so hard that it’s hard to believe,” said Akash Debbarma, assistant headman of the village. “We can’t send our children to school or take patients to hospital. A few months ago, a maternity patient had to wait an hour before we could even cross the stream.”

The village sits just behind the main gate of Satchari National Park. The steep earthen mounds, formed of red soil, are visibly eroded in many places. Several houses are now perched dangerously close to the edge.

Landslides have become more frequent and intense in recent years. In one incident, five families were rendered homeless after heavy rains washed away portions of the mound. The erosion continues, narrowing the terrain and putting more homes at risk.

“Previously, we used to catch fish from the streams, but now there’s nothing left,” said Chittaranjan Debbarma, the village



Members of the Tripura community in Tripura Palli stand on the edge of an eroded hillock. Just a few years ago, 30 families lived here. Repeated landslides have already forced many to leave, while those who remain live in fear that their homes could collapse at any moment.



A partially collapsed concrete bridge in Tripura Palli, Chunarughat upazila, Habiganj. Local residents blame years of unregulated sand extraction from nearby hills for worsening erosion.

PHOTOS: MINTU DESHWARA

headman. “Climate change has taken away our traditional livelihood and changed the forest. We’re being forced to adapt.”

“We’ve sought assistance from various places to no avail. The villagers fear losing everything if urgent action isn’t taken.”

The Water Development Board proposed an 8 crore 21 lakh Tk project in 2020 to protect 480 metres of hill slope in Tripura village from erosion. However, the Ministry showed reluctance due to the perceived high cost for the benefit of 24 families, he added.

Local residents say the situation began deteriorating years ago due to unregulated sand extraction from nearby hills. Although efforts have been made to improve infrastructure — including the construction of a concrete bridge in 2012 — none have provided lasting relief.

“The bridge collapsed due to erosion

from the hill slopes,” said Sanjukta Debbarma, vice-president of the Satchari National Park Forest Management Committee. “It was extended in 2022 by Barrister Syed Sayedul Haque Suman, but it didn’t last a year.”

“We are requesting the construction of a proper bridge and a guide wall to protect our homes,” said Sanjukta. “We have approached many people, but we are still waiting for a real solution.”

Women in the village echoed the concerns. “It’s very dangerous for our children to go to school or for us to get medical help,” said housewife Sandhya Debbarma. “We are in dire need.”

For the Tripura families in Tripura Palli, time is running out — and the next heavy rain could push them further towards the edge.

Tofazzal Soheli, general secretary of

the Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (BAPA) in Habiganj, said uncontrolled and illegal sand extraction has significantly destabilised the hillocks in Tripura Palli and surrounding areas. These activities are not only violating environmental regulations but are also directly threatening the lives and homes of indigenous Tripura families living in the area.

He said the fragile geology of the hillocks makes them particularly vulnerable to erosion and landslides when large-scale sand removal occurs.

“When sand is extracted without regulation, it weakens the structure of the hills, making them prone to sudden collapses during monsoon or even moderate rainfall. This has led to repeated landslides over the years, displacing families, destroying homes, and eroding the only access roads in the area.

“The authorities must take immediate and sustainable action. First, illegal sand extraction must be stopped through strict enforcement of environmental laws. Secondly, comprehensive rehabilitation plans must be developed for the affected indigenous families — including safe and permanent housing, as well as the restoration of safe transportation routes.

“We are not only witnessing environmental degradation — we are watching a community lose its history, its land, and its sense of security. These people have lived here for generations. They deserve protection, not neglect.”

Calling for greater coordination between government departments, local administration, and environmental experts to ensure long-term safety and cultural preservation in the area, he added.

Chunarughat Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Shafiqul Islam said, “A concrete bridge was built, but part of it collapsed due to the slope. An alternative road through the Satchari tea garden has been made. We will consult higher authorities to address the landslide problem.”

Mintu Deshwara is a journalist at The Daily Star.



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3

Architecture in the living Bengal Delta

DNA of place, memory and time

SAJID BIN DOZA

Bengal's deltaic landscape, nourished by the alluvial embrace of mighty rivers, has for centuries cultivated a unique and enduring architectural identity. Rooted deeply in geography, mythology, and climate, its built environment evolved through vernacular wisdom, where house forms, courtyards, and spatial orientations responded both to natural elements and to the spiritual beliefs of its people. This is the DNA of place—an architectural expression inseparable from the ecology of water, soil, and climate—where brick became the genetic material of form.

Over centuries, this fragile yet fertile terrain has carried the DNA of memory, a palimpsest of cultural imprints ranging from the serene geometry of Buddhist and Gupta structures to the sensuous terracotta idioms of the Sena period, from the austere elegance of Sultanate mosques to the imperial scale of Mughal complexes, and later the infrastructural legacies of British colonialism. Each epoch reshaped the architectural narrative while retaining an unmistakable cultural soul, resulting in a mosaic of forms that reflect Bengal's socio-political exchanges and cultural amalgamations.

long been a crucible of culture, ecology, and imagination. Here, architecture has never been an isolated practice of walls and roofs, but a living dialogue with climate, myth, and memory. To understand Bengal's architecture is to trace the DNA of place, memory, and time—an inheritance written not on paper but in brick, earth, and water.

Vernacular wisdom and the birth of place

The journey begins with Bengal's rural vernacular. Plate 01 depicts the archetypal deltaic dwelling: mud walls, thatched roofs, shaded verandas, and central courtyards. These forms were not aesthetic accidents but ecological necessities—raised plinths resisted floods, sloping roofs shed monsoon rains, and open courtyards caught breezes in humid summers. This is the DNA of place: architecture born from geography, soil, and water. It reveals a language of intimacy and resilience where daily rituals, seasons, and community life wove seamlessly into spatial design.

Memory in clay and terracotta

From the soil-bound vernacular, Bengal's architecture expanded into temples and monasteries that carried myth and ritual into form. Plate 02 recalls the exquisite terracotta temples of the Gupta period and the serene Buddhist viharas of Paharpur—structures that embodied the DNA of memory. Their walls were not mere enclosures but narrative canvases, inscribed with epics, folklore, and sacred motifs.

Later, the austere mosques of the Sultanate, the monumental Mughal complexes, and the infrastructural imprints of the British layered the land with new vocabularies. Each dynasty rewrote the surface of Bengal, yet never erased its cultural soul. Memory endured in brick and ornament, carrying the whispers of civilisations forward in time.

Modern awakening and the monument of democracy

If Bengal's past was a tapestry of place and memory, the 20th century brought the dimension of time into full force. Plate 03 turns to the post-independence era, when pioneer architect Muzharul Islam launched a critical regionalist approach—modernism grafted onto Bengali roots. His vision extended further when he invited Louis I. Kahn to design the National Parliament House, now revered as the world's largest legislative complex.

Kahn's Parliament radiates as a vessel of inexhaustible treasures, symbolising how centuries of architectural DNA condensed into a single, timeless monument. Here, democracy itself found expression in geometry, light, and brick—an architecture of permanence in a land of shifting waters.

Muzharul Islam and the language of modern Bengal

Plate 04 shines a moonlit light on Muzharul Islam himself, the pioneer of Bengali modernism. His works bridged the vernacular with the global, creating a language that was both rooted and forward-looking. The thought bubble in the sketch—"Architect and pioneer of Bengali modernism has greatly enriched our architectural treasure"—captures his role as a translator of memory into modernity.

In his hands, modern architecture was not an imported style but a continuation of Bengal's evolving story, carrying the delta's DNA into a new age.

Towards a future language of architecture

If the first four plates trace the inheritance of Bengal's architecture, Plate 05 looks forward. It asks: what language will future architects speak? Will they succumb to the homogenising pull of global styles, or will they craft a design vocabulary that resonates with the DNA of their land, its rivers, its rituals, and its resilience? The task for the next generation is not to replicate the past, but to reinterpret it. Just as terracotta once spoke of myth, and Kahn's Parliament embodied democracy, tomorrow's architecture must respond to the urgencies of climate change, urban growth, and cultural continuity. Plate 05 becomes



4

a manifesto: the blueprint for a future where sustainability, sensitivity, and identity converge into a living architectural language of Bangladesh.

Glorious architectural life of the delta: A legacy carved in clay and spirit

The story of Bengal's architecture is not merely a history of buildings, but a living chronicle of a civilisation that thrived upon its rivers, rituals, and resilient spirit. The deltaic landscape, nourished by the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and countless tributaries, nurtured a cultural ecosystem where architecture emerged not only as shelter but as a reflection of life, myth, and memory. The fertile alluvial plains gave rise to an architecture of earth, brick, and spirit—rooted in nature and guided by cosmic order.

The historical layers of Bengal's architectural narrative are profound. From the sacred geometry of early Buddhist viharas to the sensual terracotta temples of the Sena and Pala periods, from the introverted elegance of Sultanate mosques to the majestic urban imprints of the Mughals, each era left a distinctive vocabulary, yet all echoed the same soul of the land. With the British colonial intervention came new materials, institutions, and a redefinition of space and power, leading to confrontation and negotiation between the native and the imposed. This continuum did not break with time; rather, it matured and found fresh expression in the Bengali Modernism of Muzharul Islam, whose works were not just forms but philosophies, drawing the past into the present with conscious reverence.

Bengal's architecture is, therefore, a palimpsest—a surface rewritten through centuries, yet never erasing its origins. The courtyard-centric dwellings, shaded verandas, and humble thatched forms of the rural Barind or delta regions were not randomly devised; they were responses to climate, topography, and collective living. These homes were spiritual enclosures, where architecture became ritual, and daily life unfolded within sacred geometry.

In the modern context, as the nation moves towards urban expansion and globalised aesthetics, the forgotten methods of spatial planning, orientation, and material wisdom offer vital lessons. The past is not a burden here—it is a solution. The time-tested strategies embedded in Bengal's vernacular traditions—from passive cooling to community-centric planning—can inspire a more sustainable, humane, and culturally rooted architectural future.

Modern heritage, too, is part of this continuum. The works of contemporary architects must not reject the past but reimagine it through reinterpretation, abstraction, and ethical responsiveness. There lies the potential of a newness in architecture—a future that is not foreign but

evolved organically from within our own soil.

This illustrated architectural discourse is thus not merely a nostalgic return, but a visionary attempt to reconnect the emerging generation with a lineage of built wisdom. Through the blend of visual storytelling and academic reflection, we aspire to cultivate a deeper awareness, so that the young architects and dreamers of this land can walk forward without losing sight of the path behind them.

To truly understand and shape the future of architecture in Bengal, we must first reconnect with heritage—not merely as preserved monuments, but as living methods. The soul of Bengal's built environment lies in the way its walls breathe with air and memory, the way courtyards shape light and life, and how rituals unfold within architectural rhythms. This inherited intelligence—silent yet profound—must be embraced as a vital method rather than frozen as an artefact. Reconnection demands that we decode how materials were sourced from the land, how forms grew out of both climate and culture, and how architecture once served as ritual, not just as shelter.

In this journey, we must also revalue vernacular logic as resilient science. What was once dismissed as 'rustic' now emerges as a sophisticated response to ecology and community. The homes of the Barind, the stilted shelters of haor regions, and the layered thresholds of Bengal's courtyards hold within them centuries of adaptation. These are not primitive solutions but deeply localised systems guiding us to build sustainably with what the land offers, and for those who understand its language. Revaluing this logic is an urgent act in a time of global environmental instability.

As we embrace these traditions, we must also reframe them through modern sensibilities and technologies. Tradition must not be embalmed—it must evolve. Through abstraction, reinterpretation, and innovation, Bengal's design language can be reborn in contemporary expressions. Parametric terracotta patterns, modular plans inspired by the courtyard logic, and climate-responsive technologies rooted in ancient wisdom—these can lead us into a future where modernity is not imposed, but emerges from within.

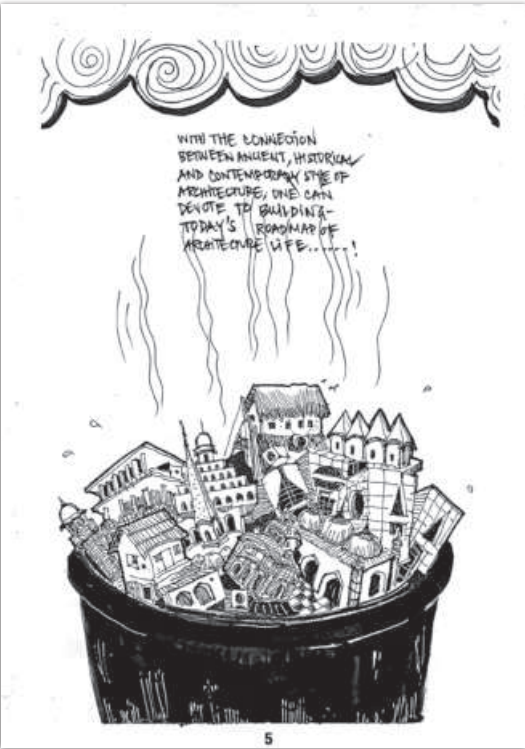
Yet, beyond function and form, architecture must also reclaim the spatial narratives of emotion, memory, and community. In Bengal, space was always storytelling. From mosques where echoes of prayer wove through domes, to porches where life unfolded with the seasons, architecture has held the rituals of daily life. Reclaiming these narratives means designing places that feel as much as they function—where buildings speak of identity, inclusiveness, and collective memory. It is through this reclamation that architecture becomes a vessel of belonging.

Ultimately, we must reimagine the future not as a break from the past, but as its mindful extension. Development must no longer be erasure, but dialogue—a continuity of culture across time. Every intervention should begin with the DNA of the place, layered with history and lived experience. This vision encourages us to see architecture as temporal layering, not stylistic rupture. The future must rise from the footprint of the past—enriched, not erased.

In conclusion, this architectural journey through drawings, narratives, and philosophical reflections is more than creative storytelling; it is a call for ethical remembrance. Let this work act as a recipe, blending material, memory, and meaning; a ritual, renewing our bond with the land and its people; and a roadmap, guiding future architects to design with identity, ecology, and compassion at heart. In the still-wet clay of Bengal, the past waits patiently—not to be forgotten, but to be shaped anew.

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Bengal's architecture is, therefore, a palimpsest—a surface rewritten through centuries, yet never erasing its origins. The courtyard-centric dwellings, shaded verandas, and humble thatched forms of the rural Barind or delta regions were not randomly devised; they were responses to climate, topography, and collective living.



5



Quiet revolution in fish farming

Bangladesh's success is the result of visionary policies combined with practical measures, said Fisheries Adviser Farida Akhter. Improved technologies reached farmers' doorsteps, hatcheries and feed industries expanded, and conservation efforts like the hilsa ban paid off.

SUKANTA HALDER, SHOHANUR RAHMAN RAFI and AMINUL ISLAM

Over the decades, Bangladesh has lost vast swathes of its waterbodies as its population has kept growing. Fishermen saw their catches shrink year after year. Still, many in rural areas refused to let go of the old saying: "Mache bhat-e Bangali", which roughly translates as fish and rice make a Bengali.

They dug ponds, stood waist deep in water for hours at small hatcheries, and slowly built a thriving industry. Their determination ensured that fish curries never disappeared from Bengali meals.

Such stories of grit and enterprise abound in villages across the country. Take Abdul Jalail Bakul, for example. Seventeen years ago, he dug two ponds on a field no larger than a football pitch at his village in Mymensingh. Locals in Anandipur laughed at the idea.

Today, the 56-year-old owns 25 ponds spread across 35 acres, rearing carp, pangas and tilapia.

When Bakul first started, he collected fries from hatcheries around Mymensingh, brought feed from Bhaluka upazila, and sold fish in the kitchen markets of Dhaka. Subsequently, traders from the capital began visiting his farm directly.

Now, Bakul says he will expand further if he can acquire more ponds.

Over the past decade, another villager of Anandipur, Anwar Hossain,

two-thirds of the national intake. Their share has now dropped to 28 percent, though the overall volume has held steady.

The gap has been filled by farmed fish, cultivated across 8.7 lakh hectares of ponds, canals and wetlands.

Aquaculture contributes 2.53 percent of GDP and 22 percent of agricultural GDP, supporting some 2 crore people, including 14 lakh women. Bangladesh is now the world's second-largest producer of inland fish.

For households, the gains are nutritional as well as economic.

Fish provides nearly 60 percent of the nation's animal protein intake. Daily consumption has reached 67.8 grams per person, surpassing the government's 60-gram target.

Farmed species such as pangas and tilapia became staples over the past decade, replacing costlier wild fish like hilsa and Katla in many rural households.

Officials and fisheries experts credit a mix of regulation, investment and entrepreneurship.

According to them, seasonal bans helped replenish hilsa stocks. Hatcheries expanded the seed supply. And the Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute (BFRI) introduced improved breeds and methods to tackle disease.

"Bangladesh's success is the result of visionary policies combined with practical measures," said Farida Akhter, adviser at the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock. "Improved

preservatives.

"At the same time, export opportunities, particularly shrimp and frozen fish, created incentives for production expansion, while government subsidies, credit, and research support reduced risks for farmers," Akhter added.

The private sector also played a vital role. More than 31 lakh farmers are now engaged in aquaculture.

"Together these initiatives not only boosted production by more than 20 lakh tonnes since FY10, but also enhanced rural livelihoods, nutrition security, and export potential, while setting a foundation for sustainable and climate-resilient fisheries development," she said.

ABM Shamsul Alam, a farmer-turned consultant from Mymensingh, recalled how it all began.

"I became involved in fish farming in the early 1990s, when commercial aquaculture in Bangladesh was still in its infancy. At that time, commercial farming was very rare," said Alam.

"Some pioneers were experimenting with pangas from Thailand, but overall, the sector was undeveloped. Initially, I tried shrimp farming, but yields were too low to be sustainable. Around 2002, I shifted to tilapia, which proved much more viable."

Alam was among the first to import Thai koi and later tilapia fingerlings, which he sold in Karwan Bazar at record prices. Koi eventually lost demand, but tilapia became a mainstay.

"Over time, local fish farming became not only a livelihood for traditional farmers but also a field where educated entrepreneurs began investing," he said.

Today, Alam advises projects abroad, including pilot farms in Fiji that combine shrimp and tilapia.

The district harvested 1.10 lakh tonnes in FY24, worth Tk 2,400 crore. Each day, around 300 tonnes of live fish are shipped out, most of it to Dhaka.

Among the leading players is SS Fish Farm, founded by Md Golam Saklayen, a chemistry student turned entrepreneur.

Inspired by a fish week campaign in the 1990s, he leased a pond and began farming. His business now spans up to 800 bighas, with trucks leaving daily carrying fish worth Tk 15-20 lakh.

AN UNEVEN BOOM

The boom has not benefited everyone equally. In Khulna and Satkhira, saline intrusion and flooding have forced farmers towards crabs and salt-tolerant species, though earnings remain unstable.

Feed prices have doubled in a decade, rising from Tk 600-700 a sack to Tk 1,400-1,500, said Rafiqul Islam, a grower in Godagari, Rajshahi. Other costs, such as lime and medicines, have also increased.

"I spent Tk 1.5 lakh this year on lime and other inputs to maintain pond health, but they did not work," he said.

Islam estimates that 80 percent of small farmers face losses each year. Larger operators with more capital can hold fish longer and fetch better prices. Smaller ones are forced to sell early, often at thin margins.

Experts also warn of declining nutritional quality.

"Studies show that farmed fish often contain lower nutrients, partly due to poor-quality feed," said Md Monirul Islam, professor of fisheries at Dhaka University.

"Heavy metals and antibiotics have also been detected in some farmed fish. Fish from polluted rivers face similar risks, as contaminants in water directly enter their bodies," said the professor.

Officials say they are tackling the issue.

Fisheries adviser Akhter said extension services now promote "good aquaculture practice" and eco-friendly pond management. The government is encouraging local feed production, research into alternatives, and regular residue testing under the National Residue Control Plan.

"At the same time, we recognise that rising feed costs put pressure on farmers, so the government is encouraging local feed production, research on alternative ingredients, and cluster-based buying systems to reduce costs," she added.

environment.

"Government statistics suggest overall fish production rose by 2.5 percent this year, yet hilsa production fell by 7 percent and shrimp by 18 percent," said Professor Islam, highlighting flaws in data collection.

In 2024, rainfall came late, temperatures soared, and extreme weather battered fish farms. In the Barind region, ponds that once held water for nine months now dry up within five. In Jashore, heavy rains submerged fields. Lightning has become frequent in haor wetlands, killing large stocks.

"Climate change is already affecting our fisheries through rising temperatures, floods, salinity intrusion, and erratic rainfall," said Akhter. "To address this, the government is promoting climate-resilient practices, supporting research on salt- and heat-tolerant species, and strengthening early warning systems under the Blue Economy framework."

But Professor Islam warned that adaptation efforts remain piecemeal and poorly funded. Bangladesh has yet to secure significant international climate finance for fisheries.

He said, "Most Department of Fisheries projects are small scale, limited to awareness or pilot initiatives. PKSF has begun experimenting with crabs under Green Climate Fund projects, and the LGD is working in Haor areas, though conflicts often arise between fisheries and agriculture."

As aquaculture expanded, food safety concerns grew. Reports surfaced of harmful chemicals being used to preserve fish and antibiotics applied excessively to prevent disease.

International buyers have taken notice. Shrimp exports, once Bangladesh's top earner, suffered repeated rejections in the EU and US over residue and compliance lapses.

Md Abdur Rouf, director-general of the Department of Fisheries, said compliance is now a priority. "Beyond shrimp, we are promoting tilapia, pangas, koi, crab, and other live fish for overseas markets. International-standard labs and traceability systems are being developed."

With better branding, he argued, Bangladesh could double export earnings within a decade.

Meanwhile, industry experts cautioned that while intensification has driven growth, it has also raised risks. Higher feed demand, chemical use and disease outbreaks loom large.

"We do not need more ponds. What we need is stronger monitoring for food safety and environmental standards," said Saklayen in Rajshahi.

Officials insist that sustainability is now central to policy. Cluster-based farming, certification schemes, integrated models and biosecure pond management are being promoted, alongside research on climate-resilient species.

For farmers such as Alam, the message is clear. "The challenges of species selection, feed development, and marketing remain, but the trajectory shows how innovation and entrepreneurship drove the fish revolution. Now the time has come to motivate farmers towards safe fish production, reducing antibiotics and chemicals harmful to humans. This must be the task of government agencies."

The challenge ahead is not simply to produce more fish, but to do so sustainably, protecting small farmers and fragile ecosystems alike.

"The future demand for fish will only grow with population," said Professor Islam. "The question is whether production can be made climate-resilient and sustainable."

For now, the ponds remain full and the markets well supplied. Whether Bangladesh can keep that promise in the years to come will depend on how it balances growth with resilience.



has grown his farm from one pond to five.

With efforts by farmers like Bakul and Anwar, fish farming has transformed into a nationwide industry, feeding crores, employing lakhs, and pushing Bangladesh into the ranks of the world's top producers.

AQUACULTURE TAKES THE LEAD

In fiscal year 2023-24, the country produced more than 50 lakh tonnes of fish, according to official data. Nearly 60 percent came from aquaculture, compared with only 16 percent in the early 1980s.

Rivers, haors and floodplains once supplied

technologies reached farmers' doorsteps, hatcheries and feed industries expanded, and conservation efforts like the hilsa ban paid off."

Fast-growing species such as pangas and tilapia, introduced in the 1990s and 2000s, spread quickly. Feed mills and oxygenated transport tanks reduced spoilage and the use of harmful

THE REGIONAL HUBS

Mymensingh and Cumilla have become the country's largest fish producing districts, each harvesting more than three lakh tonnes annually.

"There are some one lakh fish farmers in the district and they are cultivating some 15 varieties of fish, including some varieties developed by Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute (BFRI). Mainly, carp fish are cultivated in the district," said Mohammad Nazim Uddin, district fisheries officer in Mymensingh.

"Pangas is mainly cultivated in Bhaluka, Muktagacha and Trishal, while singi, koi, pabda and magur are mainly cultivated in Phulpur and Tarakanda. Many farmers are also involved in mixed fish cultivation," said the fisheries officer.

In Rajshahi, the shift has been quieter but no less significant.

CLIMATE AND QUALITY STRAINS

For the local commercial fish farming, the hardest challenge comes from the



PHOTOS: AZAHAR UDDIN, MD ANWAR HOSSAIN