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Ursula von der Leyen
European Commission
president

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CTG-COX'S BAZAR HIGHWAY

Expansion to put wildlife in peril

Warn environmentalists, Forest Department

SIFAYET ULLAH, Ctg

The Roads and Highways Department's move to expand the Chattogram-Cox's Bazar highway running through the Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary could spell disaster for wildlife habitats and disrupt several key elephant corridors in the ecologically sensitive area, warn forest officials and environmentalists.

RHD plans to expand a 63km section of the 148km-long two-lane highway into a six-lane one. Wild animals are already in danger of being struck by vehicles, as well as trains running on Dohazari-Cox's Bazar route, while crossing a 10km stretch of the sanctuary, according to forest officials.

"If the highway becomes wider, it will be nearly impossible for wild animals to cross the stretch... We strongly oppose any road expansion that will further endanger the sanctuary. It cannot withstand another blow in the name of development," said Abu Naser Mohammad Yasin Newaz, divisional forest officer of Chattogram Wildlife Division.

Chunati, a major habitat for Asian elephants in southeastern Bangladesh, is home to at least 372 species of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians, according to a 2022 biodiversity assessment by conservation groups Nishorgo and Aranyak Foundation.

Among them are several endangered species such as hoolock gibbon, leopard cat, and Asian black bear.

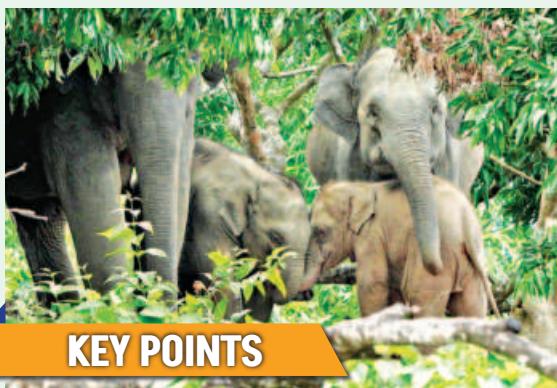
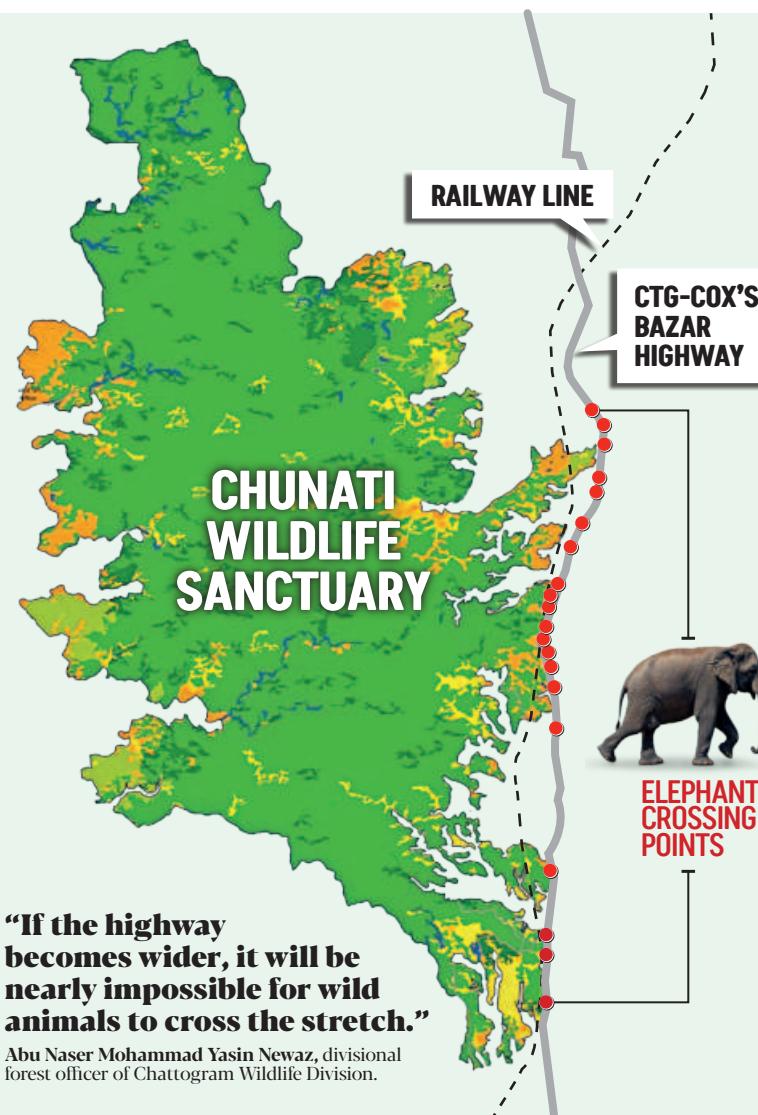
The forest area, spanning 7,764 hectares of land between Chattogram and Cox's Bazar, was declared a sanctuary in 1986.

On July 23 this year, RHD wrote to the Forest Department, seeking its opinion on the road expansion plan.

RHD maintained that the project is necessary to cope with the rising passenger and freight traffic in the region and to reap the full benefit of Matarbari Deep Sea Port, scheduled to begin operations in 2030.

In its reply to RHD, the Forest Department warned that the project would significantly increase the risk of roadkill or wild animal

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KEY POINTS

- RHD plans to expand a 63km section of the 148km-long two-lane highway into a six-lane one.
- The highway will cross a 10km stretch of Chunati wildlife sanctuary.
- Chunati is a major habitat for Asian elephants and home to at least 372 species of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians.
- There are 20 key elephant crossing points in and around the sanctuary.
- Forest Dept recommended building a flyover over the 10km stretch of the sanctuary to facilitate the movement of wild animals.

METRO LINE-1

DHAKA AIRPORT TO KAMALAPUR

- DURATION: Sept 2019 - Dec 2026
- ORIGINAL COST: Tk 53,977cr
- JICA FUNDING: Tk 39,450cr
- GOVT FINANCING: Tk 14,527cr

METRO LINE-5

HEMAYETPUR TO BHATARA

- DURATION: July 2019 - Dec 2026
- ORIGINAL COST: Tk 41,288cr
- JICA FUNDING: Tk 29,117cr
- GOVT FINANCING: Tk 12,121cr

Costs of 2 new metro lines set to soar

Taka devaluation puts strain on projects; govt in talks with Japan to adjust terms to keep them affordable

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and
ASIFUR RAHMAN

The cost of two metro rail projects — Mass Rapid Transit (MRT)-1 and MRT-5 — is projected to rise sharply, mainly due to the taka's devaluation against the dollar. This has raised doubts about their financial viability under Bangladesh's current financial arrangement with Japan.

When the two projects, funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), were approved in 2019, their costs were estimated at Tk 95,000 crore. Since then, the taka has lost over 40 percent of its value against the dollar, meaning the costs will be revised up significantly.

According to an estimate by a consultant appointed by Japan, the total cost is now expected to double.

"Japan's consultant has given a revised cost, which has jumped significantly from the original. We are now trying to reduce this revised cost," Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed told The Daily

Star last week following his recent visit to Japan.

The ballooning costs highlight the strain Bangladesh's weakening currency is placing on large infrastructure schemes,



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SALEHUDDIN AHMED
Finance Adviser

particularly those reliant on foreign loans. While Japan remains Dhaka's largest development partner, officials say the government may have to explore alternative financiers if Tokyo is unwilling to

adjust terms to keep the metro projects affordable.

"If the cost is too high, we will have second thoughts. Then, we will think about alternatives," Salehuddin said.

JICA is also financing MRT Line-6, which has yet to be completed, though its major portion from Uttara to Motijheel is already in operation.

An indication of the possible rise in costs came from bidders' proposals for implementing one of the 12 packages under the 31.24 km MRT-1 line, which will connect Dhaka airport with Kamalapur.

An official associated with MRT-1 recently informed Dhaka Mass Transit Company Limited (DMTCL) — the implementing authority for metro rail projects — that the cost of Japan's funding package would rise to Tk 75,649 crore from Tk 39,450 crore, while the entire project was initially estimated at Tk 53,977 crore.

The official noted that it is not possible to calculate the costs of all packages at this moment,

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BNP's survey-based nomination plan vexes grassroots

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

Ignoring its own constitution, the BNP has begun selecting nominees for the upcoming national election through surveys conducted by its central leadership, a move that has left many grassroots leaders anxious and dissatisfied.

District-level leaders say they no longer trust this system, recalling that candidates were previously chosen through multiple surveys in past polls.

They fear bypassing grassroots opinion will fuel internal discord and weaken the party ahead of the election.

The BNP's constitution stipulates that its Standing Committee, acting as the Parliamentary Board, must nominate final candidates from panels formed by ward, union, upazila, thana or district committees.

Moreover, section 90B(iv) of the Representation of the People Order (RPO) requires grassroots participation in nominating parliamentary hopefuls.

Leaders, and political analysts, questioned how the party can follow its charter and election laws after the schedule is announced if it does not practise these itself.

Md Abdul Alim, a member of the Election System Reform Commission, said, "Instead of coming from the grassroots, candidates are being selected from the central level. Intra-party democracy is not being practised."

BNP leaders at the local level complain that this process has been sidelined. At least two dozen grassroots figures told The Daily Star they are in the dark, as surveys ordered by acting chairman Tarique Rahman's team now appear to determine nominations.

Manikganj BNP's former secretary SA Jinnah Kabir, seeking nomination from constituency-3, said, "Earlier, union and upazila BNP presidents and general secretaries

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5



APBn to resume
security duty at
Dhaka airport

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Armed Police Battalion (APBn) will resume security duties inside Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport as soon as possible, as decided at a meeting held at the Chief Adviser's Office on Wednesday.

The decision was taken to resolve the year-long dispute over security duties at Dhaka airport between the APBn, a specialised combat unit of the Bangladesh Police, and Aviation Security (AVSEC), a division led by the Bangladesh Air Force.

It was also decided that both APBn and AVSEC would carry out their respective responsibilities at the airport as mandated and that the BAF task force, currently deployed there, would withdraw as soon as possible, according to meeting notes on airport security and policing.

The Daily Star obtained a copy of the meeting notes yesterday.

The meeting was chaired by Lutfe Siddiqi, special envoy to the chief adviser on international affairs. Among others, Civil Aviation Ministry Adviser SK Bashir Uddin, Civil Aviation Secretary Nasreen Jahan, Inspector General of Police Baharul Alam, Chief Adviser's Office Secretary M Saifullah Panna, CAAB Chairman Air Vice Marshal Md Mostafa Mahmood Siddiqi, Additional Secretary (Home) Faisal Ahmed,

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Discarded lifeboats -- salvaged from decommissioned ships -- are being repurposed into fishing vessels. Each boat sells for between Tk 15,000 and Tk 1 lakh. The photo was taken recently in Bhatiari of Sitakunda upazila, Chattogram.

'TK 568CR SCAM'
BTRC sues
Beximco and
IGW top brass

MAHMUDUL HASAN and
EMRUL HASAN BAPPI

The telecom regulator has filed a case against Beximco Group Chairman Ahmed Sohail Fasihur Rahman, Vice-Chairman Salman Fazlur Rahman, CEO Shayan F Rahman, and 22 current and former members of the IGW Operators Forum (IOF), accusing them of embezzling over Tk 568 crore.

The case also brings charges of fraud, violation of licensing and contractual conditions, and criminal breach of trust, according to court documents.

The others accused in the case include current IOF executive members AKM Shamsuddoha, Mohammed Abdus Salam, Brig Gen Md Abdul Hannan, Gazi Md Saluddin, Hafizur Rahman, Khalid Islam, Md Zainal Abedin, Nadir Shah Qureshi, and Nazrul Islam.

The accused also include former IOF members, said an official of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), requesting anonymity. They are Syed Moinul Haq, Ashik Ahmed, Imran Karim, Kafil HSMueed, Md Mahatul Amin, Mir Nasir Hossain, Mohammad Azizul Haque, Mohammad Sarwar Hossain, Abul K Shamsuddin, SM Ashikur Rahman, Sohel Sharif, Tareq Ekramul Haque, and Tajin Alam.

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Nostalgia on wheels

RBR

My first ride in a Murir Tin bus was when I visited my grandfather in Bheramara, Kushtia, in the late seventies. The mere mention of this old mode of public transportation caught my fancy. As a child, the explanation of being rattled like puffed rice in a bus almost the size of a Jolly Tin Box naturally excited me.

And yes, the thrills of that first ride were nothing less than a roller coaster. Unexpected road bumps, worn out suspensions, engine vibrations, and the driver's favourite tactics of frequent acceleration and braking gave the Murir Tin bus its name.

Jolted and tossed around, it was the jerky, vibrating sensation that made up the idea of enjoying such broken-down bus rides. There is another equally



PHOTO: STAR

exhilarating ride called Chander Gari in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Dhaka streets also have these amusement rides in public transport packages; I don't have to go out of the city to enjoy being rattled.

There is no sarcasm. I do love the excitement and thrill of such rides. I had to take trips from Farmgate to Azampur, Uttara, so I know what I am talking about.

The toiling mass of Dhaka knows even better. If not in structural frames, but in thrills, Dhaka's public minibuses are like yesteryear's Murir Tins.

My second similar ride, if not the exact Murir Tin, but on a Dhaka local bus near the Bahadur Shah Park Panir Tanki on Old Dhaka's Johnson Road,

was almost like a scary amusement ride.

I always park my car in the parking lot of Azad Cinema Hall, opposite the lower courts in Old Dhaka. I take a battery-rickshaw or hop on a minibus to manoeuvre better in those traffic-crammed, narrow lanes.

But thrills aside, it is the colour and décor that hold my attention. Ever since the early 1900s, art has adorned the bodies of trucks, buses and rickshaws in South Asian streets.

Today, when I see Dhaka in my imagination, these vibrant, over-the-top, kitsch rickshaw, baby taxi and truck colours come to mind.

Such art on old Bedford trucks and

buses, from the British rule over South Asia to Dhaka's current battery-driven trishaws, has become the backdrop or canvas of our physical city.

Urbanisation didn't erase these colours; instead, the palette's vibrant and exuberant hues in boisterous designs on the body of our public transport have seeped into our fashion, our festivals, and even our interiors.

The actual Bedford Murir Tin buses, since the early 1990s, no longer ply the streets of Dhaka. They were the first public transport. These buses had wooden plank benches, started with a crank, and used a rubber bulb horn for signalling.

The vehicles were mostly leftover army trucks from the post-World War II era, sold in auctions and retrofitted by local businessmen who purchased them. Their wooden structural frame was bound in tin, thus the smile of the bus resembling a tin container, and a crowd of passengers compared to puffed rice (muri) stuffed inside the tin.

As an ode to the iconic, chunky local buses and the recent jumpy rides in stressful traffic, Coke Studio Bangla's Season 2 song "Murir Tin" is a fun and high-energy tribute to the colours and thrills of Dhaka.

The term Murir Tin is now used as a symbol of dilapidated nostalgia, thrilling public rides, and the colours of the city.

'Govt negotiating with BNP in secret'
Allege Jamaat leaders; party hold rallies in 7 cities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami leaders yesterday alleged that the government, bowing to BNP's pressure, is secretly negotiating with the party over elections, ignoring reforms.

The government's stance has forced Jamaat and like-minded parties to take to the streets, they said while addressing rallies in seven divisional cities -- Chattogram, Sylhet, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barishal, Rangpur, and Mymensingh.

The rallies were part of the party's ongoing programme to press home its five-point demand, including holding the next national election in line with the spirit of the July Charter.

Reiterating their call for introducing the proportional representation (PR) system in elections, they said this method would prevent anyone from "turning into a fascist."

Addressing a rally at Rangpur Public Library ground, Jamaat Secretary General Mia Golam Porwar said, "On one hand, you [the interim government] announce the July Charter, while on the other hand, you secretly negotiate with the BNP. This won't be allowed. Be neutral. Accept our five-point demands. And only then will we step back from the movement."

He said, "Of the 31 parties, 25 have agreed on the PR system. But the BNP is opposing it, because if PR is introduced, their nomination trading and muscle power will come to an end."

At another rally in Sylhet's Bandarbar area, Jamaat Assistant Secretary General HM Hamidur Rahman Azad said, "The government announced the July Charter, but instead of upholding its spirit, it is implementing the agenda of a particular section."

At the Barishal rally, Jamaat Nayeb-e-Ameer Prof Mujibur Rahman demanded a referendum on the PR system, while in Chattogram, Assistant Secretary General Rafiqul Islam Khan echoed the same.

Jamaat, along with six other parties, recently announced a three-day protest programme. The other parties are Islami Andolan Bangladesh, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, Khelafat Majlis, Nazame Islam Party, Bangladesh Khelafat Andolan, and Jatiya Ganatantrik Party (Jagpa).

APBn to resume

FROM PAGE 1

CAAB Member (Security) Air Cdr Md Asif Iqbal, and Group Captain M Kamrul Islam, director, CW&IT, Air Headquarters, were present.

In his opening remarks, Lutfey Siddiqi underscored the importance of inter-agency cooperation, noting that all government departments are working towards the same goal.

The Civil Aviation secretary and the CAAB chairman gave separate PowerPoint presentations on CAAB's functions and the current security and policing arrangements at airports.

The inspector general of police informed the meeting that prevention and detection of crime are legally the responsibility of the police, and no other agency is authorised to carry out those duties.

After the discussions, the meeting took six decisions, which include that all agencies operating within airports will function under CAAB, ensuring unified command, regulation and control.

The IGP and the CAAB chairman will engage in regular discussions to minimise operational challenges.

It was also decided that weekly security meetings must be held at every airport.

For long term reforms, the civil aviation ministry may recommend ways to restructure CAAB to separate its roles as operator and regulator.

For almost a year, APBn and the Air Force-led AVSEC had been locked in a dispute over security responsibilities inside the airport.

After the change of government in August last year, many Ansar personnel left their posts, prompting the temporary deployment of the BAF task force. At the same time, APBn was barred from securities duty inside the airport.

Later, APBn alleged that AVSEC members had removed office materials from its airport office, prompting the battalion to file a general diary with the Airport Police Station.

Stray bullet

FROM PAGE 12

group took control of several villages, including Birgaon.

According to a witness, some two dozen men arrived in Birgaon on two boats yesterday. The witness said the men were supporters of Kaiyum, as she recognised two of them, while the rest had their faces covered.

Toufeequl Islam, senior assistant director of BTRC, filed the case with Gulshan Police Station on Thursday under sections 73, 74 and 76 of the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulation Act, as well as sections 420 and 406 of the Penal Code.

Yesterday, Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Nazmin Akter fixed October 20 for submission of the probe report.

In Bangladesh, IGW operators handle international incoming calls -- a task earlier performed by mobile operators.

In 2014, a group of IGW operators proposed an experimental model called the IGW Operator Switch, which gave them control of a common switch for call termination

Expansion to put wildlife in peril

FROM PAGE 1

vehicle collisions and cause permanent harm to wildlife habitats.

"If the highway is expanded, elephants and other wildlife will need more time to cross it. In the future, an increased volume of traffic will further obstruct the movement of wild animals, resulting in habitat fragmentation and disruption to their natural way of life," it said in a letter to RHD on August 25 this year.

The letter also referred to the recently built Chattogram-Cox's Bazar railway line, 10km of which cuts through the sanctuary, and said that Asian elephants and other wild animals are already at risk of being hit by trains while crossing the track.

The Forest Department recommended that RHD build a flyover over the 10km stretch of the sanctuary to facilitate increased vehicular traffic, avoiding further disruption to the movement of wild animals.

It also identified 20 key elephant crossing points in and around the sanctuary and suggested construction of additional overpasses and underpasses to facilitate their safe movement.

However, RHD officials said the construction of a 10km-long flyover would substantially raise the project cost, estimated at Tk 21,754 crore in 2023.

Jahid Hossain, superintendent engineer of the RHD Chattogram Circle, said it is not financially viable to build such a structure.

"Nevertheless, we are in favour of building a 700-metre-long flyover from Jangalia to Satgarh within the sanctuary, along with several

underpasses and overpasses at key locations," he said.

Last year, RHD signed a memorandum of understanding with Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to conduct a survey on the highway's expansion from Shikhabala in Chattogram to the bridge over Matamuhuri River in Cox's Bazar.

When contacted, Bashir Ahmed, a member of the JICA survey team, said, "The one-year survey, launched in October last year, is scheduled to be completed this month. However, that won't be possible as the stakeholders -- RHD, the Forest Department and JICA -- are yet to reach a consensus on the proposed Chattogram-Cox's Bazar Highway Improvement Project (Phase 2)."

He hoped that the survey will be completed by December this year.

WHAT EXPERTS SAY

Experts warn that if the highway expansion project is implemented, it could severely obstruct elephant movement across three major corridors, including the Chunati-Satgarh route.

Sanjida Rahaman, an environmental activist and coordinator of Chunati Rokkhay Amra, said the highway's expansion would jeopardise the elephant corridors.

She urged the RHD to consider constructing a flyover for the 10-km stretch of the sanctuary or upgrading the Chattogram-Banskhali-Pekua road as an alternative route for better connectivity between Matarbari Port, Cox's Bazar, and Chattogram.

MA Aziz, professor of Zoology at Jahangirnagar University, said government agencies in Bangladesh

often cite financial constraints as a justification for neglecting conservation priorities. But budgetary concerns cannot be used as an excuse when it comes to protection of critical elephant corridors.

"Development must be balanced with ecological responsibility. Government agencies must not be allowed to construct roads that would inflict irreversible damage on protected forest ecosystems," noted Aziz, also a member of Asian Elephant Specialist Group of the IUCN, a global organisation working in the field of nature conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

THE RAILWAY LINE

There was an outcry from conservationists in October last year after an elephant was killed by a train operating on the Chattogram-Cox's Bazar rail line that went into service on December 1, 2023.

They pointed out a lack of safeguards for elephants and other wild animals in the sanctuary.

Forest officials said that when Bangladesh Railway took up the project, it had pledged to construct "sufficient" overpasses and underpasses for elephants to safely cross a 10km stretch of the 103km rail line from Dohazari to Cox's Bazar. But only three such structures were built, with one of them unusable because of design flaws.

To facilitate the project, the government in 2018 revoked the protected status of 207 acres of forestland. Later, around 240,000 trees were felled, and several hills were razed, according to Wildlife Division data.

using them as Market Development Expenses (MDS) and submitting reports to the BTRC on the expenses.

The commission cited a lack of transparency in handling the money and referred the matter to the Anti-Corruption Commission for investigation.

Syeda Nasrin, lawyer for the IOF, told The Daily Star last night that if embezzlement did occur, those who bore the costs of the MDS should be treated as the actual victims. "In that case, how can they be accused?" she asked.

She argued that the BTRC could have informed the IOF, allowing the operators who bore the MDS expenses to file their own case to recover the money.

"Neither BTRC nor the government has any interest in this money. What happened took place entirely under BTRC's contractual supervision," she added.

BNP's survey-based nomination plan

FROM PAGE 1

gave their opinions to the central leadership. That is no longer happening. Now Tarique Rahman's team is conducting surveys, and two rounds have already been completed.

Similar frustrations were voiced by a senior leader from Munshiganj and a Sharaiptpur district leader, both of whom requested anonymity.

The leader from Munshiganj said the party relies heavily on the high command, sidelining local leaders, and treating the high command's decision as final could have serious consequences.

The Sharaiptpur district leader, said he is a candidate from the area but the party is ignoring grassroots input.

"How can we trust this survey process? Even as a leader, I have the right to know what procedure is being followed, but I don't know what is happening inside the party."

Sylhet district BNP president Abdul Quayum Choudhury, an aspirant from constituency-3, echoed the concern. "I have heard surveys are underway, but I don't know how they are being done or what the results are." He urged Tarique to ensure nominations follow the party's constitution.

Zakir Hossain Sarker, member secretary of Kushtia and an aspirant for constituency 3, warned that if someone from another party, often described by the grassroots as "hybrid" activists, "buys" a nomination, the grassroots will not accept it.

Cumilla South District BNP's former convener Aminur Rashid Yasin defended the survey-based

process, saying, "There was never any system to nominate through grassroots panels."

BNP Standing Committee member Salauddin Ahmed also defended the survey-based process. "We are not doing just one survey. We are doing multiple surveys from two or three angles. Professional organisations conduct these surveys, not political people. This is a combined effort, and no decision is made based on a single survey," he said.

Asked about violating the party constitution, he added, "The instructions of the Election Commission will be followed. There is still time to do these."

Election experts, however, warn of risks.

Election expert Alim said that after the July uprising, people expected political reform and positive change, but "nothing is visible yet, and if this continues, no change will come".

Political analyst Prof Mojibur Rahman said the process appears to be based in London, where Tarique resides. "The connection between local people and the high command, the bridge, the link, the tuning is not happening properly," he observed.

He also pointed out that survey predictions have often proven unreliable, citing the recent student union polls at Dhaka and Jahangirnagar universities, where BNP's student wing Chhatra Dal suffered heavy defeats.

"If decisions are forced from the central to the grassroots, it will be bad for the party," warned Mojibur.

Costs of 2 new metro lines

FROM PAGE 1

the tender process has yet to be completed.

Referring to the reasons behind the cost hike, the project director said that at the time of the initial estimate, the exchange rate was Tk 84.5 per dollar, which now stands at about Tk 120. An escalation in land acquisition costs was cited as another reason.

Besides, rising inflation has driven up construction material costs and local and international labour wages, transport and logistics expenses have also increased.

The cost increase will be similar for the 20km MRT-5 line that will link Hemayetpur with Bhatara via Gabtoli, Mirpur, and Gulshan.

The project, divided into 10 packages, was initially approved at Tk 41,261 crore. However, the latest estimate shows it will require Tk 15,527 crore to implement just one package, which was originally calculated at Tk 3,968 crore.

Officials at the planning ministry and DMTCL said the costs of all the packages would see similar hikes, making the projects too costly for Bangladesh to afford.

The team is expected to submit its report soon, the official added.

"It is true that their quality of work is high... But we must ensure that the projects don't become a burden for us," Salehuddin told this newspaper.

"We told them that we will review the costs with the help of our experts. JICA may also do

DHAKA

Osmani Udyan stays closed

Renovation drags on as DSCC misses five deadlines over seven years

HELEMUL ALAM

Dhaka residents have been deprived of using a vital park at the heart of the capital, as Dhaka South City Corporation has missed five deadlines to complete the renovation of Osmani Udyan.

Although around 92 percent of the work has been finished, construction has remained stalled since June 30 last year, when the latest deadline expired, according to DSCC sources.

The project was extended until June 2024 after new contractors were appointed in September 2023, and the park was supposed to reopen in July 2024. Yet the finishing work remains incomplete.

"About 92 percent of the work is already done. Only the finishing touches remain, which would take just two months to complete once the deadline is extended -- without any additional costs," a DSCC official said.

Contacted on September 2, DSCC Administrator Md

Shahjahan Miah said the corporation is trying to extend the deadline again and aims to finish the work within this fiscal year.

The renovation was originally supposed to be completed in 2018 but was halted for nearly two years after the first contractor, Builders Limited, had its work order cancelled in 2022 for an alleged breach of contract.

DSCC began renovating the 29-acre park in January 2017, with an initial deadline of June 2018. The deadline was later extended multiple times -- to June 2019, June 2020, June 2021, and then June 2022.

The initial project cost of Tk 58 crore was later revised to Tk 86 crore. Following the new work order, an additional Tk 61 crore was allocated to complete the remaining work.

The renovation -- part of the Tk 200-crore "Jol Sobujey Dhaka Project" to modernise 19 parks and 12 playgrounds -- includes

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Renovation work at Osmani Udyan in Dhaka has remained stalled since June last year, with Dhaka South City Corporation missing five deadlines. Although 92 percent of the work is reportedly complete, the park at the heart of the capital remains closed to residents. The photos were taken recently.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

We need to shift toward affordable, sustainable energy
Says Professor Yunus

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Chief Adviser Professor Md Yunus has underscored the urgent need for Bangladesh to transition towards cleaner, safer, and more affordable energy solutions as the country navigates a new path toward sustainable economic development.

Speaking during a virtual conference on Thursday evening with Carl Page, chairman of the Anthropocene Institute, and his colleagues, Yunus said Bangladesh -- one of the world's most densely populated and climate-vulnerable nations -- cannot afford prolonged reliance on fossil fuels.

"It is time for Bangladesh to seriously consider clean energy alternatives, including large scale solar deployment," Yunus said.

Carl Page, brother of Google co-founder Larry Page, highlighted recent advancements in next-generation nuclear technologies and hybrid systems that offer reliable, zero-carbon power.

He emphasised that barge-mounted nuclear reactors are cost-effective, low-maintenance, and capable of powering Bangladesh's growing industrial sector for decades.

Nuclear power is no longer a taboo topic among major development financiers like the World Bank, Page said, adding that countries such as Indonesia are already adopting these technologies to meet their rising energy demands.

He noted that Bangladesh, with its

Tree smuggling rampant in Chunarughat forests

Forest officials accused of complicity; case filed against four in Satchari

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

Tree smuggling has become rampant in the Kalenga, Rema and Satchari forest ranges of Chunarughat upazila in Habiganj, with locals alleging that forest officials have either turned a blind eye or are complicit in the illicit trade.

On August 22, Forest Department officials recovered 55.45 cubic feet of illegally felled Gorjon, Chapalish and Banak logs from Babur Bazar area, worth an estimated Tk 80,000.

The seized timber is now in the custody of a Community Patrol Group member at Bholiarum Bazar, said Kalenga Range Officer Md Masudur Rahman.

On June 17, miscreants felled and stole teak trees from Satchari National Park at night. Locals say such crimes occur openly and routinely, yet authorities fail to take effective action.

"Day after day, trees are being felled and stolen, but forest officials act as if they don't see anything," said Malek Mia, a resident of Aitan village.

"Satchari attracts visitors from all over the country," said Mashur Rahman Khan Jumel, founder of the local social initiative Beautiful Chunarughat. "A permanent police presence is crucial to prevent crimes and ensure tourists' safety."

Meanwhile, Mujahid Mosi, convener of voluntary wildlife protection group Pakhi Premi Society, filed a case on September 11 with Habiganj Senior Judicial Magistrate's



Court against four over their alleged direct involvement in tree smuggling and other environmental crimes.

The accused are Mamanur Rashid, range officer of Satchari National Park; Nur Mohammad, junior wildlife scout; Mehedi Hasan, beat officer of Telmachhara; and Sumon Biswas, forest guard.

According to the complaint, large quantities of valuable timber, including teak, were illegally felled and smuggled on March 2, March 20 and August 9 from Satchari and Telmachhara areas.

"Such destruction to the forests has been going on for years," said Mosi. "To protect the forests' biodiversity and hold the culprits accountable, we filed the

case in the public interest."

Complainant's counsel Advocate Shah Fakhruzzaman said the court has accepted the case and directed the Police Bureau of Investigation in Habiganj to probe and submit a report by December 12.

Contacted, Mamanur Rashid denied the allegations. "I've been here for three years. Only five trees have been stolen during my tenure, and I filed a case regarding that," he said.

Abul Kalam, Sylhet divisional forest officer, said they are also conducting an internal investigation and that anyone found guilty would face legal action.

He said the Forest Department has suspended Mamanur Rashid and ordered departmental action over allegations of professional misconduct.

Recently, the forest ministry, in

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

Fair polls impossible if govt shows bias
Says TIB chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A fair election will not be possible if the government acts with bias during the election period, said Iftekharuzzaman, member of the National Consensus Commission and executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh.

"If political parties themselves do not want a fair election, it will be difficult to ensure neutrality. That is why it is essential to guarantee impartiality among election observers and journalists," he said at the inauguration of a training programme on election reporting.

Reporters Forum for Election and Democracy and TIB jointly organised the event in Dhanmondi.

Pointing out that many individuals close to the ousted Awami League government still remain in the administration, Iftekharuzzaman said, "It

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

RUCSU POLLS Voting to take place in 17 centres

RU CORRESPONDENT

The Rajshahi University Election Commission has published a list of polling centres for the upcoming Rajshahi University Central Students' Union, hall union, and senate representative elections.

According to the announcement, the voting will take place in 17 centres across nine academic buildings with 990 booths.

Each of the 17 residential halls has been assigned a separate polling centre.

Chief Election Commissioner F Nazrul Islam said ballot counting will take place at the Rucusu treasurer's office, while results will be announced at the Kazi Nazrul Islam Auditorium.

The entire counting process will remain under CCTV surveillance.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

'He was fearless in face of state repression'

Say speakers on Badruddin Umar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

To uphold progressive ideology, intellectual practices, and critical thoughts, it is essential to preserve the legacy of prominent thinker and writer Badruddin Umar, said speakers at a memorial discussion yesterday.

They noted that his writings will remain relevant for understanding political and social history and for shaping future generations.

The programme, titled "Memorial of Comrade Badruddin Umar", was held at Bangla Academy. It was organised by the Marxist-Leninist Communist Revolutionary National Memorial Committee.

Badruddin Umar, one of the country's most prominent leftist thinkers, writers, and politicians, passed away on September 7 at the age of 91.

Dhaka University Professor Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury described Umar as a unique figure, unmatched in many ways.

"He was fearless, never swayed by state repression or the lure of recognition. He was a revolutionary and wrote for revolution, and his legacy will remain an inspiration for future generations," he said.

Highlighting Umar's ability to fuse knowledge with politics, Prof Serajul added, "He will remain for future generations as

heritage, inspiration and guide."

Eminent economist Anu Muhammad said Umar's writings remain indispensable for understanding history, imperialism, revolutionary politics, and the role of culture.

"His presence was powerful in life, and in death, his influence has only grown. Society needs individuals like him, who can stand tall, ignoring personal gain, for the greater good," he added.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir described Umar as uncompromising in his ideals. Umar would always be remembered with deep respect in both intellectual and political spheres, he said.

"He sought a revolutionary transformation of society, but such organisations are absent today. Umar not only pursued intellectual practice but also dedicated himself to building organisations for that cause. The new generation has much to learn from his life and work," he said.

Dipa Dutta, a leader of the 1969 mass uprising, paid tribute to Umar, calling him a courageous and defiant voice of his time.

Khalequzzaman Bhuiyan, chief adviser of the Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (Basad), said Umar never walked the path of opportunism. "He upheld the ideals of

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8



Hundreds of waterlilies in full bloom cover the wetlands of Satia village in Ujirpur upazila of Barishal, locally known as Shapla Beel. From August to November, the beel transforms into a sea of flowers, drawing tourists who rent boats at sunrise to enjoy its natural beauty. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Death row convict held in Dhaka

He escaped from Kashimpur jail in August last year

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Terrorism Unit (ATU) of police arrested a death row convict on Thursday, who had escaped from Kashimpur High Security Jail during the July uprising last year.

Sakib alias Babu, 23, was arrested during a raid from Dhaka's Tejuri Bazar area, said Mahfuzul Alam Russell, SP (Media and Awareness Wing) of the ATU.

Acting on a tip-off, a team of the ATU carried out the raid around 7:00pm. Sakib has already been handed over to Konabari Police Station, he added.

According to the ATU, Sakib and his associates abducted Shakil Madbor, 15, from East Naodoba village in Zajira upazila of Shariatpur on June 25, 2020. The kidnappers demanded ransom from the victim's family, but after failing to get the money, they killed Shakil and buried his body near an under-construction railway bridge.

Sakib was sentenced to death and sent to Kashimpur High Security Jail in a case filed with Zajira Police Station under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act.

On August 6, 2024, taking advantage of the political changeover situation, Sakib fled from the prison.

Later, jail authorities filed another case with Konabari Police Station in this regard.

Sakib had been hiding in different parts of Dhaka and other areas of the country to avoid arrest.



The escalator on the footbridge in front of Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital on the capital's Mirpur Road remains non-functional and fenced off, making it difficult for the elderly and people with disabilities to access the bridge and cross the road safely. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN



BRAC University, one of the leading private universities in Bangladesh, is seeking an outstanding academic leader to serve as "Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences". This is a unique opportunity to shape the school's future-focused vision, advancing its teaching, research, and societal impact in alignment with BRAC University's mission and values. The dean will play a pivotal role in positioning the school as a hub of academic excellence, interdisciplinary innovation, and global collaboration, amplifying the voice of the Global South on the international stage.

ROLE OF THE DEAN

Reporting to the vice-chancellor, the dean will provide strategic and academic leadership, ensuring the school achieves the highest standards of excellence in teaching, research, and engagement.

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- Research and Societal Impact: Foster a vibrant academic environment that supports impactful research addressing pressing social, political, and economic challenges in Bangladesh and beyond.
- External Engagement: Build and sustain partnerships with academia, policymakers, industry, and civil society to strengthen the school's global reputation and reach.
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QUALIFICATIONS

- PhD in Humanities, Social Sciences, Public Policy, or related discipline
- A distinguished record of teaching and research, with deep knowledge of higher education, internationalization, and impactful scholarship.
- At least 12 years of academic leadership experience, including a minimum of 5 years at the level of associate dean, dean, or equivalent.
- Proven experience in leading complex academic or research organizations, securing research grants, and building external partnerships.
- Demonstrated ability to manage school-level operations, with international leadership experience preferred.
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APPLICATION PROCEDURE

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- A cover letter

- Curriculum vitae

- Names and contact information of three professional references

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Subject line: Dean, School of Humanities & Social Sciences

Application deadline: 7 October 2025

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BRAC University, one of the leading private universities in Bangladesh, is establishing a new "School of Life Sciences" to advance teaching, research, and innovation in biotechnology, microbiology, and related disciplines. These programs, currently offered under the Department of Mathematics and Natural Sciences of the School of Data and Sciences, will now be housed in a dedicated school due to the growing importance of life sciences in addressing national and global challenges.

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- Institutional Leadership: Contribute to university-wide policy development and strategic planning as part of the senior leadership team.
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- Operational Stewardship: Oversee resources from financial acumen and support value creation through intellectual property and innovation.
- Long-Term Growth: Shape the school's identity and position it as a thought leader in life sciences both within Bangladesh and globally. For more information, and the full job description please visit career.bracu.ac.bd

QUALIFICATIONS

- A PhD in life sciences or a closely related discipline, with a distinguished record of teaching, research, and academic leadership.
- At least 12 years of leadership experience in higher education, including a minimum of 5 years at the level of associate dean, dean, or equivalent.
- Demonstrated success in building networks across academia, research, industry, and policy.
- Proven financial management skills and a strong understanding of how universities can generate value from intellectual property.

APPLICATION PROCEDURE

Applications should include the following documents:

Applications should include:

- A cover letter

- Curriculum vitae

- Names and contact information of three professional references

Please submit applications via email to deanrecruitment@bracu.ac.bd or through the career portal at career.bracu.ac.bd

Subject line: Dean, School of Life Sciences

Application deadline: 7 October 2025

Join us in shaping the future of BRAC University and advancing life sciences education and research in Bangladesh and beyond.

Osmani Udyan stays

FROM PAGE 3

walkways, a library, a food court, a drainage system to control two lakes, direct walkways from the Secretariat to Nagar Bhaban, a lakeside stairway, an indoor games zone, and parking facilities.

The park -- named after Liberation War commander-in-chief General Muhammad Ataul Gani Osmani -- features rare trees, sculptures, and an auditorium.

Urban planner Adil Mohammed Khan, president of Bangladesh Institute of Planners, said the prolonged closure is "totally unacceptable".

"It is unthinkable that it takes seven years to renovate a park. If the city corporation had real accountability, the park would have reopened long ago. This park is one of the lungs of Dhaka, especially for Old Dhaka, where green spaces are scarce," he said.

He also urged the government to open the park immediately -- even before final touches are complete -- and to identify the reasons behind the repeated delays so that

such failures are not repeated in future projects.

Meanwhile, the government has begun construction of the July Memorial Monument at Osmani Udyan to commemorate the July uprising.

Work started on July 23 and is scheduled to finish by December this year, with a government allocation of Tk 46.40 crore, a DSCC official said. Eighteen pillars have already been erected, and efforts are underway to meet the deadline.

According to the approved design, the centrepiece will be a 90-foot bronze pillar engraved with the names of July martyrs, standing on a circular platform. Surrounding it will be semi-circular sculptures depicting the British era, the 1952 Language Movement, the 1971 Liberation War, and the 2024 uprising.

The park's entrance will feature a symbolic gate shaped like the number "24", while landscaped walkways, an epitaph with martyrs' names, and other features will complete the memorial.

Fair polls

FROM PAGE 3

cannot be claimed that there are no agents or associates of the fallen government within the government within the administration and law enforcement agencies."

He added, "By infrastructure, we mean good governance, accountability, transparency, honesty and institutional integrity. These have been shaped over a long process, not just over the past 16 years, but throughout nearly 54 years.

Every institution has been politicised and brought under double layers of partisan influence, creating professional conflicts. Some of these institutions have been made functional at times, but in many cases, they have been rendered dysfunctional."

Referring to those long deprived of opportunities, he said that even when their positions were restored, politicalisation persisted.

"There is no denying this reality. I do not believe that all members of the administration or law enforcement agencies are entirely biased. Some officials and staff are still making sincere efforts," he said.

According to him, the administration is moving forward amid the tension between these forces and will continue to play its role. However, he noted, this cannot be changed overnight nor can the entire administration be restructured from scratch.

"We must allow time for stability to develop and for a new kind of professionalism to emerge," he said.

We need to shift

FROM PAGE 3

strong track record of innovation, is well-positioned to lead in clean energy transition -- delivering benefits such as job creation, energy price stability, and enhanced industrial competitiveness.

"Bangladesh can serve

as a strategic hub for

emerging technologies and a peaceful leader in atomic energy adoption.

However, he noted that any decision on nuclear options would require rigorous research and feasibility assessments.

Voting to take place

FROM PAGE 3

The nine academic buildings where the polling centres will be set up are -- Montaz Uddin Academic Building, Dr Muhammad Shahidullah Arts Building, Ismail Hossain Siraj Academic Building, Rabindra Arts Building, Jaber Ibn Hayyan Science Building, Jamal Nazrul Islam Science Building, Satyendranath Bose Academic Building, Jagadish Chandra Academic Building, and Zuberi Building.

With 24,892 registered voters, the Rucus election

is scheduled for September 25, following a long pause of 35 years.

A total of 248 contenders will vie for 23 Rucus posts, while 58 students will run for seats in the university Senate.

In the hall unions, 597 candidates will compete for 15 positions across 17 residential halls -- 459 from 11 male halls and 138 from six female halls.

Campaigning for the Rucus polls began on Monday and will continue until 10:00pm on September 23.

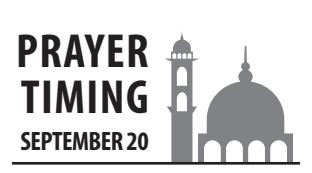
Tree smuggling

FROM PAGE 3

letter signed by Deputy Secretary to Forest Department-1 Tushar Kumar Paul, directed the acting chief conservator of forests to respond to reports of frequent deforestation in the Rema-Kalenga Reserve Forest and Satchari National Park.

Md Humayun Kabir, Sylhet divisional forest officer, said surveillance would soon be

strengthened with night-vision CCTV cameras and drone patrols under a project already approved.



Fazr Zohr 12:45 4:30 6:05 7:30
Asr 1:15 4:45 6:10 8:00
Magrib 6:00 7:30 8:30 9:30
Esha 8:00 9:30 10:30 11:30

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১৩. মুক্তিপুর মুক্তিপুর	মুক



A young girl cries as she struggles to get food at a community kitchen in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. The food crisis in Gaza's south has been at a critical level, and thousands of new arrivals at the overly crowded tent camp for internally displaced people due to a new Israeli evacuation order is escalating the crisis.

India expects KSA to respect mutual ties

REUTERS, Mumbai

India yesterday said it hoped Saudi Arabia would keep in mind mutual interests and sensitivities between the two countries, two days after Riyadh signed a mutual defence pact with New Delhi's old foe Pakistan.

Saudi Arabia and nuclear-armed Pakistan signed the pact on Wednesday, and although few details have been made public, analysts said it could mean Riyadh will have a de facto nuclear shield under the agreement. The agreement, which came amid diplomatic upheaval in the Middle East and just months after a deadly India-Pakistan conflict, says any aggression against either country shall be considered an aggression against both.

"India and Saudi Arabia have a wide-ranging strategic partnership which has deepened considerably in the last few years," Indian foreign ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal told reporters during a weekly news briefing.

"We expect that this strategic partnership will keep in mind mutual interests and sensitivities," he said.

Ex-Nepal PM Oli blames 'infiltrators'

Nepal interim PM Kakri vows to fix 'failure'

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's deposed prime minister KP Sharma Oli yesterday said his government did not order police to open fire on protesters and called for a probe into violence that killed at least 73 people.

In his first statement since stepping down last Tuesday, the 73-year-old said "infiltrators" were responsible for inciting bloodshed during youth-led protests that swept the Himalayan nation beginning September 8.

The demonstrations were sparked by a short-lived ban on social media, but fuelled by anger at corruption and long-standing economic woes.

At least 19 people were killed in a crackdown on the first day.

"Those who infiltrated (the protests) incited violence, resulting in the tragic loss of young lives," Oli said in a post in Nepali on Facebook.

"The government did not issue orders to target the protesters and fire shots," Oli said, as the country marked its constitution day yesterday.

Mobs ransacked government offices, set fire to a newly opened Hilton hotel and attacked other symbols of authority

-- including Oli's residence -- as fury swept across towns and cities.

Some protesters were seen brandishing automatic rifles on the second day of the unrest.

"There should be an investigation into incidents of use of automatic weapons which the police did not have," Oli said in his post.

"I will not say much about the conspiracy behind this today, time will tell itself," he added.

Oli has not been seen in public since his removal, with allies saying he was under military protection.

"He was under the protection of the army and returned yesterday," party colleague Agni Kharel from Oli's CPN-UML told AFP.

His successor, Prime Minister Sushila Karki, a 73-year-old former chief justice, has been tasked with restoring order and addressing demonstrators' demands for a corruption-free future ahead of elections in six months.

"The demonstrations and movement led by youth reflect both the aspirations of our young generation, growing public awareness and the dissatisfaction with prevailing corruption in the country," Karki said in a speech to mark the country's constitution day.



EU seeks to speed up Russian gas phase-out

AFP, Brussels

The European Union yesterday proposed to bring forward a ban on Russian gas imports as part of a new package of sanctions aimed at sapping Moscow's war chest -- and pleasing US President Donald Trump.

Under the measures presented for approval by the bloc's member states, the European Commission said it aims to phase out liquefied natural gas (LNG) purchases from Russia by January 2027 -- one year earlier than planned.

"Russia's war economy is sustained by revenues from fossil fuels. We want to cut these revenues. So we are banning imports of Russian LNG into European markets," commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said.

"It is time to turn off the tap".

The proposal comes as the United States pressures the EU to end fossil fuel imports from Russia. The US leader has so far held back from upping pressure on Russian President Vladimir Putin but said last week he was ready to do so if allies stopped buying Russian oil and hit China with tariffs.

The 27-nation EU has already banned most Russian oil under previous rounds of sanctions -- slashing the share it imports from 29 percent in early 2021 to two percent by mid-2025.

UNSC to vote on snapback sanctions on Iran

AFP, United Nations

The United Nations Security Council was set to vote yesterday on reimposing deep economic sanctions on Iran over its resurgent nuclear programme.

Britain, France and Germany -- signatories to a 2015 deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) intended to stop Tehran obtaining nuclear weapons -- allege that Iran has broken its promises under the treaty.

Diplomatic sources said the resolution before the Security Council was unlikely to get the nine votes needed to uphold the status quo -- in which sanctions remain lifted -- meaning the punishment would be reimposed.



Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Friday he had put forward a "fair and balanced" proposal to European powers to prevent the return of sanctions.

But French President Emmanuel Macron said he expected international sanctions to be reinstated by the end of the month, in an excerpt from an Israeli television interview broadcast.

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 Department of Criminology
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Eligibility for admission: Admission is open to both Bangladeshi & Foreign nationals who have at least a Bachelor's Degree with a minimum CGPA of 2.50 (Out of 4.00) or equivalent. This is a very time demanding Post-graduate Program offered by the University of Dhaka. Legal professionals, law enforcement officials, members of security agencies and crime reporters are encouraged to apply. Applicants with a third class/division in any examination are not eligible to apply.

Application Procedure: Prescribed application forms for the admission test can be downloaded from the official Facebook page ([Department of Criminology, University of Dhaka](#)). Admission form is also available at the contact address given below from 19/09/2025 to 16/11/2025, between 9.30 am to 4.30 pm. The filled-in admission form along with three attested passport size photographs, attested copies of certificates and mark sheets of all examinations must be submitted to Room No. 822-823 by 5.00 pm on 16/11/2025. The admission test will be held on Saturday, 22/11/ 2025, from 3.00-4.00 pm (tentative).

Application Fee: 1500/-

Contact Address: Department of Criminology, Room No: 822-823, 7th Floor, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Dhaka. Website: criminology.du.ac.bd
 Phone: 01916-965364 (Faculty Member)

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When will we see effective govt action?

It must ensure incidents like Cumilla's shrine attacks are not repeated

Yet again we are witnessing attacks on shrines, this time in Cumilla's Homna upazila, raising urgent questions about whether the government is really doing anything to ensure peaceful co-existence of people of different belief systems in the country. Since August last year, numerous such attacks have occurred, often without any provocation, and statements from the government have done little to prevent them. Instead, anonymous attackers, who often act under the banner of an aggrieved religious group, which opposes Bangladesh's centuries-old shrine-Sufi culture, seem to be gaining confidence.

Earlier this month, a similar group not only vandalised a shrine and attacked the followers of a self-proclaimed spiritual figure, but exhumed his body and set it on fire on a highway. Though several arrests followed, attacks on four more spiritual sites on Thursday show that reactive arrests are not enough to deter such violence.

Worryingly, legal actions intended to respond to these groups' grievances are also proving ineffective. This was evident in Homna. On Wednesday morning, police detained a man linked to one of the shrines after locals protested a religiously offensive social media post. But the next morning, a group appeared outside his home, using loudspeakers to rally a crowd. Within an hour, they vandalised two shrines and burned down another shrine and an akhra. Since the custodians of three of these sites had no link to Wednesday's incident, local villagers and followers are asking what really motivated the attacks. The use of loudspeakers suggests the violence was premeditated, setting a troubling precedent.

In this context, it's time law enforcement and intelligence units adopted pre-emptive strategies, rather than only reacting after the damage is done. While police acted swiftly on Wednesday, with the rise in mob violence by fringe groups, a continued security presence in the area was needed, given the sensitivity of the circumstances. More broadly, the government must take a stronger stance against far-right ideologies that threaten the country's pluralistic fabric. Shrines, mazars, and darbars have been part of our religious heritage for centuries. While many may not agree with their mode of worship, such differences in practice cannot justify violence. Grievances—real or perceived—must be addressed through legal means, and this standard should apply equally to all faiths.

Our constitution guarantees every religious community the right to "establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions," subject to "public order, law and morality." The government, which took oath under this constitution on August 8, 2024, must uphold these rights for all. We also urge the government to ensure protection of the family members and followers of the shrines' spiritual leaders, who are scared to return to their homes after Thursday's incident. Besides, with major religious festivals approaching, security must be strengthened to ensure that no community is intimidated by the self-appointed moral police who, in the absence of stern state action, have come to believe they are above the law.

Banks must retain female talent

Decline in women's participation in the banking sector is concerning

The recent data on women's participation in the country's banking sector presents a dismal trend. Against a backdrop of steadily increasing female enrolment in higher education and a central bank push for greater gender equity, the proportion of women in the financial workforce has shrunk. A 4.96 percent decline year-on-year in the first half of this year is a worrying indicator of a sector where economic headwinds are colliding with deep-seated social and institutional barriers.

While top bankers point to the immediate catalyst—a slowdown in recruitment driven by global economic turbulence—the downturn in female representation is disproportionately sharp. This trend suggests that in times of uncertainty, the default hiring preference may still favour men. A recent World Bank study found that greater diversity, particularly at senior levels, is correlated with stronger financial performance and better risk management.

According to the latest data, there are only 35,782 women among the sector's total workforce of 213,267. Private banks employ 24,050 women, while state banks employ 10,700. Foreign banks, despite having the smallest number of female staff at 1,032, maintain the highest proportion of women at 25.18 percent. However, a significant portion of the female workforce is concentrated in urban centres, particularly Dhaka, often due to spouses' employment and family ties. This urban-centric career preference clashes directly with the sector's rural expansion, leaving new opportunities unfilled by qualified women. Professional ambitions of educated women are often constrained by traditional expectations of domestic responsibility and family proximity. The societal roles of women can create a powerful, often subconscious, pressure that discourages them from accepting roles that disrupt family life.

Hopefully, the central bank's directive to ensure a 50 percent female quota for agent banking staff could be a lever to boost women's participation, particularly in rural areas where such a presence is crucial for financial inclusion. However, real and sustainable progress requires a fundamental shift in institutional behaviour. Banks must move beyond ticking a box and actively create career pathways, offer flexible work arrangements, and foster a culture that supports women through life-cycle events, such as marriage and childbirth. When a qualified woman leaves the workforce, the loss is not merely personal but a setback for the country's economic and social development. To reverse this concerning trend, banks must invest in new models of recruitment and retention. They must actively address safety concerns, and provide robust training. Also, banks should create mentorship programmes that empower women to ascend to senior leadership and board positions since their numbers drop significantly at mid-level and senior roles in financial institutions. It is imperative to build an ecosystem within the sector where women can thrive, lead and contribute fully.

EDITORIAL

Universal, not targeted, social protection is the path forward



Dr Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir is professor in the Department of Development Studies at the University of Dhaka.

RASHED AL MAHMUD TITUMIR

The country's manufactured "miracle" tapestry, celebrated by the deposed regime and others in glowing terms, is fraying. The nation finds itself navigating a narrow ridge against the chasm of economic vulnerability. At the household level, the story is bleak. The World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook projects that extreme poverty will rise from 7.7 percent to 9.3 percent in 2025 in Bangladesh. In plain terms, 30 lakh more Bangladeshis will be pushed below the poverty line within a single year. This is a devastating

reckoning. The Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC)'s study titled the State of the Real Economy, commissioned by the Ministry of Finance, reveals that debt is crushing the poor. The bottom 40 percent of households owe at least double their savings. Underemployment affects 38 percent of workers. The economy is precarious for the labouring class, who sacrificed the most, including their lives, during the mass uprising in July-August last year, in pursuit of a better future.

The latest Labour Force Survey by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) reveals a further setback for the youth, the front-runners of the July uprising. Youth unemployment has been rising steadily since 2016-17, reaching 13 lakh among those aged 15-24, followed by 9.16 lakh in the 25-34 age group and 3.79 lakh aged 35 or older in 2024. The plight is particularly severe for graduates, rising to nine lakh in 2024. One in three graduates cannot secure employment. The situation for the female workforce remains disheartening, accounting for 33.10 percent, while male workers constitute 66.90 percent of the employed

population. Regionally, Dhaka Division has the highest number, with 687,000 unemployed individuals. The statistics should be interpreted with caution, as the definition may mask the true extent of unemployment.

This confluence of evidence exposes an inescapable truth. The existing social protection framework, a fragmented patchwork of targeted programmes, is fundamentally broken.

The current model's failure is not anecdotal. Its core mechanism is



FILE VISUAL: SHAIKH SULTANA JAHAN BADHON

flawed, which perpetuates exclusion and wastes precious resources. The most damning fiasco is the exclusion error, with the intended beneficiaries left behind. The PPRC findings are shocking: the widow allowance reaches only 15.3 percent of eligible households.

The Fair Price Card programme, a cornerstone of food security, deserts a staggering 94.7 percent, serving only 5.3 percent. Millions of the most destitute citizens are rendered invisible

protection is a fundamental right of citizenship, not a form of charity.

A universal life-cycle system provides support at every stage of vulnerability. This framework could consist of certain pillars. For example, universal child benefits can ensure that every child receives adequate nutrition, given that two in three children under five in Bangladesh face food poverty. Second, universal education stipends can guarantee

that no child drops out since almost 41 percent of the population aged between 5 and 24 years are not in educational institutions.

Third, for universal healthcare to function effectively, there is a need for a digital health card, an integrated referral platform and a digital logistics system to eliminate waste and inefficiency. Fourth, schemes such as unemployment insurance and maternity benefits could buffer the employment-seeking youth and people employed in unorganised sectors, including farming, cottage, small enterprises, and informal sectors.

Finally, an overarching requirement is a universal pension to ensure dignity for the elderly, a fast-ageing population of 1.5 crore people aged 60 and above.

The most common objection to universality is the cost. This approach, however, ignores the far greater cost of the status quo, particularly in view of the current predicament.

The government has already allocated Tk 116,731 crore to social protection in FY2025-26. The problem is not the size of the budget, but its inefficiency. On the fiscal front, reallocation of resources wasted on targeting errors and pursuing progressive fiscal measures is necessary.

A robust Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), using the national ID (NID), can be a foundation for a unique identity system, integrated with a payment interface, creating "digital rails" for efficient delivery. Global experiences such as India's Aadhaar platform could help.

Simultaneously, at the national level, consolidation is vital. At present, multiple ministries run overlapping programmes, breeding duplication. A single social protection agency could harmonise delivery. Implementation can be gradually devolved to local governments. Proximity enhances accountability.

Universal life-cycle social protection is an architecture of a resilient and just state. It forges a pathway where prosperity is shared. Hence, to protect the future of Bangladesh, universal social protection is the way forward.

The critical need for forensic infrastructure in Bangladesh



Md. Anwar Hossen is an advocate at the Supreme Court of Bangladesh. He can be reached at anwar.lawvalley@gmail.com.

MD. ANWAR HOSSEN

In the complex machinery of the criminal justice system, forensic laboratories are essential pillars, providing scientifically accurate evidence that can make or break a case. From DNA testing to narcotics analysis, these facilities have proven to be indispensable in identifying perpetrators, exonerating the innocent, and ensuring fair trials. Yet in Bangladesh, the potential of forensic science remains largely untapped due to a scarcity of infrastructure, old-fashioned technology, and systemic inefficiencies.

Currently, Bangladesh has a limited number of operational forensic laboratories capable of conducting DNA testing. The National Forensic DNA Profiling Laboratory (NFDPL), set up within the premises of Dhaka Medical College Hospital, serves as the central hub for forensic investigations nationwide. Other institutions, both government-run and private, have begun to expand their capabilities, but the scale remains inadequate for a country of over 17 crore people.

Despite its critical role, NFDPL is marred by challenges such as outdated equipment, a shortage of skilled personnel, and a growing backlog of cases. These constraints have led to significant delays in forensic reporting, which in turn hinders the timely dispensation of justice. According to official records, as of late 2024, investigations into 789 cases were stalled due to delays in obtaining DNA test results.

Courts in Bangladesh regularly require forensic analysis to expedite proceedings, particularly in cases of murder, rape, and drug trafficking. The Ministry of Home Affairs, in

collaboration with the Directorate of Forensic Medicine, has established protocols prioritising urgent cases. The country's reliance on the single operational DNA lab under the CID, combined with the challenges faced by NFDPL, is a major reason for the systemic delays.

The legal framework for forensic evidence is well established. The Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1898, the Evidence Act, 1872, and the DNA Act, 2014 collectively provide for the collection, admissibility, and regulation of forensic evidence. Notably, Section 45 of the Evidence Act allows expert opinion, including on DNA evidence, to be presented in court. However, the lack of infrastructure has hindered the practical application of these provisions.

In the landmark case of *Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) & Ors. vs. Bangladesh*, a division bench of the High Court Division of the Supreme Court issued 18 directives mandating that DNA samples in rape and sexual assault cases be collected within 48 hours of the incident. This decision came after a Garo woman's rape complaint was delayed due to jurisdictional complications, highlighting systemic failures.

In another notable case, *Bangladesh Jatiyo Mahila Ainjibi Samity vs. Bangladesh*, the High Court Division used a sibling's DNA during the trial of an attempted child trafficking case, reinforcing the use of forensic science in protecting children's rights. Additionally, the court ruled that DNA test reports are admissible only if the expert who prepared the report testifies in Court, ensuring the integrity of evidence and

the rights of the accused.

However, there have been some persistent gaps. The Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) Act, 2014 was a legislative milestone that established a legal basis for DNA profiling in criminal and civil cases. It includes provisions for a national DNA database and penalties for tampering with samples. However, critical flaws remain. The

The persistent delay in the establishment of sufficient forensic infrastructure in Bangladesh stems from a combination of bureaucratic inertia, budgetary constraints, and institutional inefficiencies.

Act lacks explicit safeguards for informed consent, privacy protection, and independent oversight, raising concerns about misuse and wrongful convictions.

Section 12 of the Act permits DNA collection from suspects and victims but does not mandate judicial authorisation or define consent protocols. Besides, section 15 provides for a national DNA database but fails to set retention timelines for samples collected from acquitted individuals, diverging from international standards.

Countries like the UK, the US, and India have progressed in DNA legislation and application over the years. These developments reflect a shared judicial recognition of DNA's forensic value, even though disparities in legal infrastructure, enforcement capacity, and technological integration highlight the uneven global evolution of DNA profiling in criminal justice systems. However, the Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) Act, 2014, lacks nuanced provisions, featuring the need for urgent reform to align with global best practices.

Experts suggest the incorporation of informed consent mechanisms, strict data protection protocols, and independent regulatory bodies to ensure ethical handling of DNA evidence.

Importantly, calls for reform and expansion have been raised from various stakeholders and social worker groups. To address this issue, in March 2025, the interim government of Bangladesh approved amendments to the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000, promising to establish specialised Tribunals and additional DNA labs. These reforms are expected to accelerate case resolution and improve access to justice for vulnerable populations in the country.

However, experts argue that piecemeal efforts are insufficient. To meet international benchmarks, Bangladesh should aim to set up at least 8-10 fully equipped forensic labs across key regions, each supported by trained forensic scientists and legal experts. According to international standards, high-density countries should maintain at least one forensic lab for every 10-20 million people, a target that Bangladesh currently falls far short of.

The persistent delay in the establishment of sufficient forensic infrastructure in Bangladesh stems from a combination of bureaucratic inertia, budgetary constraints, and institutional inefficiencies. Despite repeated pledges from successive governments, the development of DNA testing capabilities has lagged, leaving law enforcement agencies and the judiciary to rely on less reliable forms of evidence.

A strategic, data-driven approach to expanding forensic infrastructure, coupled with legal reforms and capacity building, can transform the landscape of criminal justice in Bangladesh. By investing in modern forensic laboratories or DNA labs, training forensic and legal professionals, and revising outmoded laws, we can expedite the resolution of criminal cases, ensure justice for victims, and restore public confidence in our judicial system.

Defiance in tongue and spirit



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza
is professor of English at Dhaka University.

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

Have you noticed how easily expletives are permeating our everyday conversations? Roll down your car windows and allow the white noise to enter your personal space, open the TV to watch a talk show, walk through any public place, or watch short videos on social media, and you will come across words once considered unutterable. Obscene and profane words show up almost everywhere, and with remarkable ease. And the shocking thing is, it is not the feisty Gen Z that is violating languages or linguistic norms. We have all subscribed to these changes: journalists, politicians, civil servants, preachers, educators, the working class—you name it. We are using words in public that were previously spoken only in private space or in special circumstances.

Language is a dynamic entity that evolves not in isolation but with the full weight of society. The demographic and technological landscape of Bangladesh is responsible for these linguistic changes. Today, the youngest generations dominate almost all public spaces, both physical and virtual, with the country's median age of 26 (Worldometer). New speech habits form in these spaces. Our sense of space is further formulated by the urbanisation process: around

40 percent of the population now lives in cities. By design, cities unite diverse populations from various backgrounds and promote mixed-class interactions and relatively anonymous urban life. Cities also disrupt traditional social structures. The shift is further intensified once we move to the digital sphere. Our internet penetration is around 44.5 percent, and our mobile connections have already outnumbered the population itself. The growth of digital space has led to the emergence of digital language, or more specifically, digital vernaculars.

When we started texting in Romanised Bangla, we were initiated into an online communication process that steadily seeped into our everyday offline talk. Teachers are tired of capitalising "i" and expanding "r" into "are." Now that over one-third of the population uses social media, it is quite evident that our online behaviours have an impact on real-life interactions. When we type a post or comment, our devices suggest and dictate our language choices and expressions. We get fascinated with the new and embrace novelty. Take the 2012 example of Murad Takla's diction, for example. It was a clear case of transliteration going wrong. Someone dared to say "Murod thakle" ("If you have guts"), but ended

up typing "Murad Takla," meaning Murad the Bald. The comedy became a platform for a collective delight in subversion. Errors became memes. Memes became inside jokes. And in-jokes became a new shared register to resist linguistic gatekeeping. To laugh at the absurd spellings is to endorse that script.

Social media rewarded this

a structural change that coincides with the series of acts of defiance in which our young generations were involved. Therefore, the defiant derogatory language cannot be seen without referring to the major student-led movements of the past decade. It started off with the No VAT Movement in 2015 when private university students rallied against a

angry students took over the streets. Memes, transliterated chants, and blunt expletives flooded social media, carrying rage across the nation.

Then the nation had a deadly experience during the Covid pandemic, which suddenly made all social norms irrelevant. We transitioned to virtual space out of necessity and got pulled into its

their spirit. They were indomitable, impatient, and bold, unwilling to pitch their demands in any low, polite frequency.

With these student leaders enjoying the media spotlights, we are having a review of what is considered proper Bangla or English. This linguistic generation gap is not just about words but about authority. Here is a generation who refuses to care. Language for them is a weapon of rebellion. These students, who defied bullets, tear gas, and torture, are now defying the decorum of politeness. A blunt expletive can be a battle cry; a meme or a photocall can undercut anyone in power. Our city walls still adorn the graffiti to show us the fruits of political disobedience.

For a puritan, the distortion of Bangla for a nation that rose from the shadow of the 1952 Language Movement and the dilution of Bangla by English profanity and Roman letters may feel like betrayal. But we need to remember that language has never survived by purity. Our Bangla has been influenced by Persian, Arabic, English, and regional dialects. Now it is absorbing TikTok syntax and transliterated punchlines. We cannot stall the changes within language. Then again, we need to distinguish between harmless intensifiers and harmful slurs, to teach context rather than enforce blanket bans. What looks like linguistic chaos is in fact linguistic vitality. And the sooner the national leaders realise it, the better. We need clear guidance from the authorities on not how to preserve purity, but whether we can communicate meaning, civility, and the democratic energy that makes our language, like our people, unafraid to change.



VISUAL: ALIZA RAHMAN

linguistic play that often bordered on profanity. It encouraged others to use quirky, loaded languages, albeit slang. These changes in language indicate the wider structural forces that are reshaping how we communicate with others. The normalisation of vulgarity is more than a breakdown in manners—it is symptomatic of

proposed tax on tuition. Many of the slogans they used were in Bangladeshi, and the code-mixing was laced with irreverence for the authority and their protocols.

We saw the same pattern in the Road Safety Movement in 2018. After two schoolchildren were killed by a speeding bus in the capital,

various lures. The generation who saw and participated in these phenomena was once again called into action to dethrone the dictator. During the July uprising last year, protesters, mostly young, abandoned deference in both speech and slogan. The distorted, playful, sometimes vulgar register of these movements defined

Another report draws clear conclusions on genocide in Gaza



Dr Binoy Kampmark
was a Commonwealth scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He is a senior lecturer at RMIT University, Australia. He can be reached at bkampmark@gmail.com.

BINOY KAMPMARK

Yet another blistering addition to the ghastly accounts of cruelty regarding the ongoing actions of Israel in Gaza made its appearance on September 16. It came in the form of a report by the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory (COI), a lashing publication finding Israel guilty of committing genocide on the strip. Of the five elements outlined in the 1948 Genocide Convention, Israel was found guilty of four. (The state's interest in transferring Palestinian children from one group to another is yet to show itself.)

The relevant acts outlined in the report include instances of killing, causing serious bodily or mental harm, deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about physical destruction, and imposing measures intended to prevent births, all conducted with the specific intent to destroy the Palestinian people as a group. "Today we witness in real time how the promise of 'never again' is broken and tested in the eyes of the world," Navi Pillay, the commission's chair, said in a press conference following the report's release.

This report finds itself in the adhesive, if gruesome, company of such publications as Amnesty International's December 2024 effort, "You Feel Like You Are Subhuman," and the August 2025 conclusions of the

International Association of Genocide Scholars. Francesca Albanese, special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, has also been admirably busy drumming up interest in the links between genocide and starvation. Such bountiful material has yet to convince the Israeli authorities to pause their efforts in Gaza, now culminating in the systematic destruction of Gaza City and the displacement of its population.

The COI authors, all sound and weighty figures of international jurisprudence, also found that Israeli President Isaac Herzog, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant "incited the commission of genocide and that Israeli authorities have failed to take action against them to punish this incitement." More broadly, Israel's political and military leaders responsible for prosecuting the war strategy "are ultimately responsible for the commission of the underlying acts of genocide by members of the Israeli security forces," with such leaders being "agents of the State of Israel."

The mental state for establishing genocide were established by relevant statements made by members of the Israeli authorities. In addition to this, there was "circumstantial evidence of genocidal intent and that genocidal intent was the only reasonable

inference that could be drawn from the totality of the evidence." Israeli authorities and security forces "had and continue to have the genocidal intent to destroy, in whole or in part, the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip."

The COI also makes various recommendations, including the obvious one of ending the commission of genocide and Israel's compliance with the three provisional orders of the International Court

There is certainly much to draw upon, be it the commission's findings or the excoriating report by UN Special Rapporteur Albanese. The latter tartly exposes the misuse of international humanitarian law as an instrument of Israeli advancement, making a mockery of aid to the very people the state seeks to dislocate, kill and humble.

of Justice (ICJ) made in January, March and May last year; immediate implementation of a permanent ceasefire in Gaza and conclusion of military operations in the occupied Palestinian territory that entail genocidal acts; restoration of the UN aid model, unimpeded; and investigation and punishment of acts of genocide and incitement to genocide against the Palestinians in the strip.

Pointed words are also reserved for the international community, among them that all member-states pull their weight in insuring the prevention of genocidal acts in Gaza, cease the transfer of arms and equipment to Israel or third parties "where there is reason to suspect their use in military

operations that have involved or could involve the commission of genocide," ensure that corporations and individuals within their territories and jurisdiction are not part of the genocidal programme, and facilitate necessary investigations and prosecutive proceedings against the State of Israel and corporations and individuals regarding genocide, its facilitation and incitement.

The UN commission of inquiry arose in 2021, when it was established by the UN Human Rights Council to investigate alleged violations of international law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel. The September report makes much of three previous reports issued by the COI, and three papers relevant to international law violations committed by all the parties to the conflict.

To have reached findings of genocidal intent is a tall order indeed. The mental threshold needed to satisfy genocidal intent is a dizzyingly high bar to meet. The ICJ, even as it considers Israel's own actions in Gaza at the litigious prodding of South Africa, has shown itself reluctant to identify the destructive intent (dolus specialis) against an identifiable group as protected by the UN Genocide Convention. In the Bosnia vs Serbia case, Serbia was not found to be responsible for the commission of genocide, but for its failure in preventing it with respect to the killings of over 7,000 Bosnian Muslims at Srebrenica in July 1995. The court imposed a giddy standard of proof: that the pattern of acts in destroying the identifiable group should "have to be such that it could only point to the existence of such intent." It was a standard criticised by Judge Awn Al-Khasawneh in his dissenting opinion, feeling that such acts as "population transfers" and "evidence of massive killings systematically targeting the Bosnian Muslims" evidenced obvious genocidal intent.

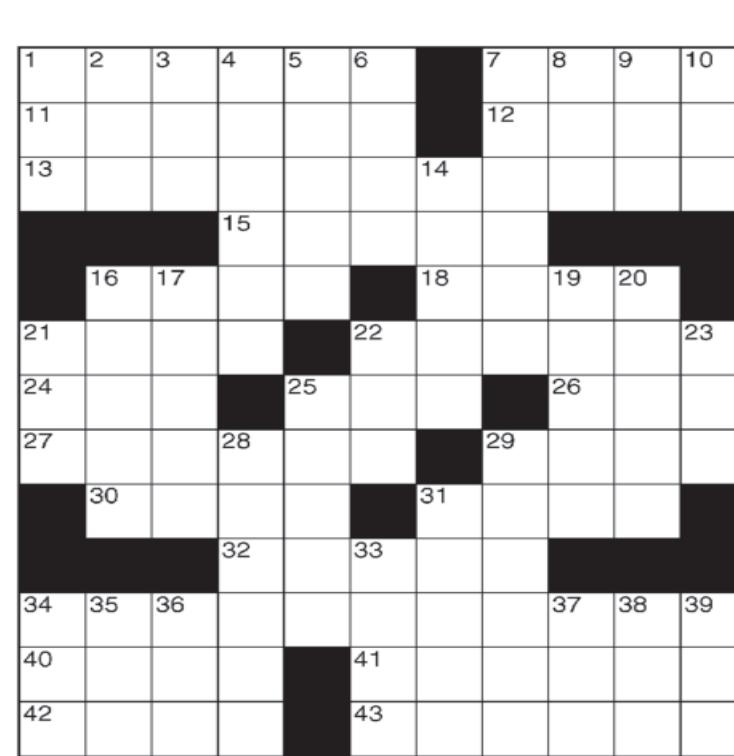
In 2015, the ICJ also found that neither Serbia nor Croatia had committed acts of genocide against each other's populations during the disintegration of Yugoslavia, despite killings and the infliction of serious bodily or mental harm to both groups by virtue of them being members of an ethnic group.

Judge António Augusto Cançado Trindade, in his dissenting opinion in Croatia vs Serbia, proffers a salutary observation, "Perpetrators of genocide will almost always allege that they were in armed conflict, and their actions were taken 'pursuant to an ongoing military conflict'; yet, genocide may be a means for achieving military objectives just as readily as military conflict may be a means for instigating a genocidal plan."

There is certainly much to draw upon, be it the commission's findings or the excoriating report by UN Special Rapporteur Albanese. The latter tartly exposes the misuse of international humanitarian law as an instrument of Israeli advancement, making a mockery of aid to the very people the state seeks to dislocate, kill and humble.

The response from Israel is also instructive in terms of how that state fits within the law of nations, which it has sought to reinterpret with postmodern elasticity. A statement from the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs makes short work of the report as "distorted" and "false," accusing the authors as "Hamas proxies, notorious for their antisemitic positions" and demanding the "immediate abolition of this Commission of Inquiry." That would be all too convenient.

This article first appeared on Countercurrents.org and Middle East Monitor under the headline "Clear conclusions: A UN commission finds Israel responsible for genocide in Gaza" on September 18, 2025.



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



ANKAN'S aspirations

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

There is a sense of melancholy and serenity in Ankan Kumar's voice that draws listeners into the emotions he pours into his songs. Though an introvert at heart, the moment he begins to sing he lets go completely and invites you into his world of melody.

I first discovered his music through *Upo* from Hatirpool Sessions, and his recent Coke Studio Bangla track *Long Distance Love* infatuated me with his voice, all over again.

"From a young age, I have been practicing pure classical music. Back then, I always thought about how to play with notations and create melody. I am a curious soul, which is why I always want to explore new sounds. However, I believe the essence of Bangla music should remain the same even while experimenting," said Ankan, sipping coffee at The Daily Star.

Upo went on to

become one of the most viewed

that people began sharing their own love stories in my comment section," he said.

The song came together under the guidance of Arnob. "Arnab da reached out to Pragata and me, asking if we could create a song about long distance love. I prefer acoustic instruments for orchestration, and Shuvendu bhai and Arnob da arranged everything beautifully. During the recording, I saw violin and cello players laying down their parts alongside my track. I had always dreamed of a full orchestral setup, and with this song, I finally experienced it. Shuvendu bhai and Arnob da nailed it," said Ankan.

Some felt that *Upo* and *Long Distance Love* sounded similar. Ankan smiled at the comparison. "When Shuvendu bhai and I sat together, we were deciding how to begin



Listening to Ankan Kumar sing is like stepping into a world where emotions are raw, unfiltered, and beautifully human. Ankan's songs remind you that vulnerability can be a kind of strength, and that true artistry comes from the heart.

Songs from Hatirpool Sessions. Talking about its origin, Ankan said, "I made this song during Covid, when I had a 102-degree fever. I couldn't go outside, and my thoughts felt trapped within me. In that vulnerable state, at the break of dawn, something inside me sparked and I composed the tune. Later, I met the people behind Hatirpool Sessions. They told me they were working on a lot of original tracks, and asked me to create one. It felt surreal that the song I wrote in isolation during Covid was finally recorded after the pandemic." At the time, Ankan had no idea that the song would go viral on social media.

There are also specific compositions in which he completely loses himself while singing. "Certain notations make me feel as though I am zoning out and travelling back to those emotions. Each time I go through that, I relive the pain. But as an artiste, revisiting that emotion adds more honesty and integrity to my music," he reflected.

Recently, Ankan has been making waves with *Long Distance Love*, composed by Shuvendu Das Shuv, with lyrics co-written by Pragata Naoha and Ankan himself. The song resonated deeply with listeners who related to the pain of separation. "Some loved it, while others didn't. But what I cherished most was

the song. I had seven favourite chords that I also used in *Upo*, and naturally they slipped into this one too. That is why some thought it sounded similar. But the approach was different. We created the whole song in a conversational tone, which gave it its own identity."

Listening to Ankan Kumar sing is like stepping into a world where emotions are raw, unfiltered, and beautifully human. Ankan's songs remind you that vulnerability can be a kind of strength, and that true artistry comes from the heart.



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

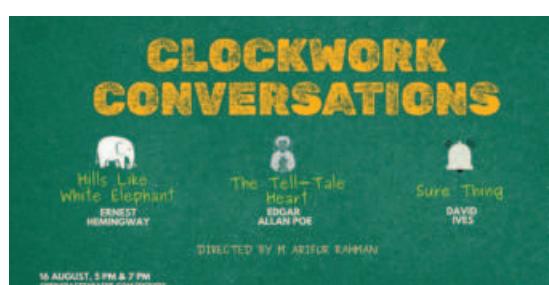
OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA



Melody & Memories
Sep 25 | 7 pm-10 pm
Jatra Biroti

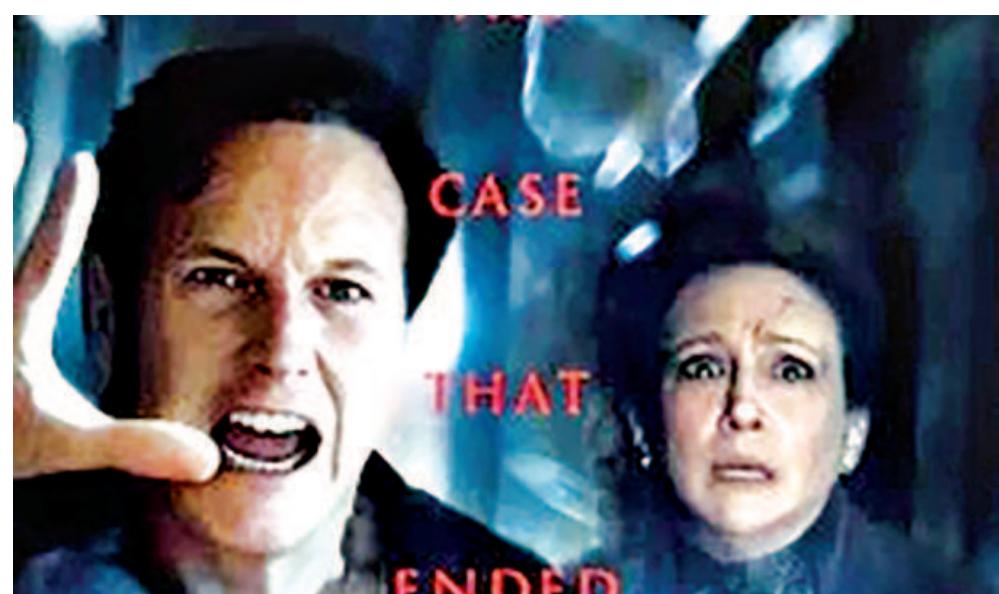


Play: Kohey Facebook
Sep 27 | 7 pm-9 pm
Experimental Theatre Hall, BSA



Play: Clockwork Conversations
Sep 29 | 5:30 pm and 7:30 pm onwards
Studio Theatre Hall, BSA

1-MINUTE REVIEW



The Warrens return for one final haunting in *The Conjuring: Last Rites*, closing out one of horror's most successful franchises. Director Michael Chaves leans on atmospheric dread more than gore, weaving a story that balances intimate family stakes with supernatural spectacle. Vera Farmiga and Patrick Wilson once again ground the

terror with heartfelt performances, their chemistry anchoring the chaos. While some scares feel familiar, the film shines in its quieter moments — grief, faith, and love battling against darkness. Supported by moody cinematography and a stirring score, *Last Rites* offers a satisfying, spine-tingling farewell that honours the Warrens' legacy.

'The Conjuring: LAST RITES'



WHAT'S PLAYING

'LADY LADY'

by Olivia Dean

Olivia Dean returns with *Lady Lady*, a sun-kissed hymn to growth and identity. It's a graceful blend of neo-soul warmth and pop clarity — earthy, honest, and steeped in a kind of golden-light nostalgia. Since its July 11 release as the second single from her upcoming album *The Art of Loving, Lady Lady*, it has quietly become a buzz pick in the UK, reaching No. 38 on the Official Singles Chart and making its mark in the Official Trending Chart. It's music for the thresholds — changing seasons, changing selves; a song you play late at night while reflecting on both who you were and who you're becoming.

TRENDY STREAMS

Netflix
The Wrong Paris



Hulu
Swiped



Prime Video
Gen V



Chorki
Ondho Balok



Apple TV+
The Morning Show



STYLE STATEMENT

Mehazabien Chowdhury

Mehazabien steps into the spotlight at the Blender's Choice—The Daily Star OTT & Digital Content Awards in an ocean-hued gown that redefines elegance. The soft aqua satin flows like liquid silk, while a silver off-shoulder bodice shimmers in striking contrast. A matching satin clutch and minimal jewelry let the dress shine, complemented by luminous makeup and softly styled hair. The overall effect is serene yet regal — a timeless display of femininity that feels both refreshing and unforgettable.



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

Two die in Sherpur flash flood

Breaches in embankments inundate homes and croplands

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

Flash floods triggered by onrush of water from upstream hills left two people dead in Sherpur's Jhenaigati and Nalitabari upazilas.

The deceased are Ismail Hossain, 17, son of street vendor Abdullah Mia of Tamagaon village in Jhenaigati, and Humayun Kabir, 10, son of Dulal Mia of Burunga village in Nalitabari and a second grader at Burunga Government Primary School.

Jhenaigati Police Station OC Al Amin said Ismail went missing around 4:00pm Thursday while trying to collect logs washed away by floodwaters in the Maharshi river near Tamagaon. Locals recovered his body around 1:00am after an 9-hour search.

Earlier around noon the same day, Humayun went missing in a similar incident while collecting logs in the Chellalakhal river at Burunga. His body was recovered six hours later, around 8:30pm, said Nalitabari Police Station OC Sohel Rana.

Meanwhile, the flash flood damaged croplands and homesteads in both upazilas. According to the upazila administration, Water Development Board (WDB) and agriculture office sources, several points of the flood control embankment along the Maharshi river in Jhenaigati suffered breaches.

Around 100 metres of the embankment at Khoikura and 50 metres at Dighirpar collapsed, flooding croplands and localities. A total of 1,565 hectares of farmland were submerged, of which 650 hectares of transplanted aman were completely damaged and 915 hectares partially affected.

Hafiz Mia, 38, a farmer from Gollar Char in Nalitabari, said, "The embankment breach has caused river water to inundate my land and house. My entire harvest is gone. I don't know how we will survive. We need government support."

Karim Sheikh, 55, of Tamagaon in Jhenaigati, echoed him.

Jhenaigati Upazila Agriculture Officer Md Forhad Hossain said, "Floodwaters from the Someshwari and Maharshi rivers have submerged croplands. Around 650 hectares of transplanted aman are fully damaged, 915 hectares partially damaged, and 86 hectares of vegetable fields remain under water. The damage may lessen if waters recedes quickly."

Jhenaigati UNO Ashraful Alam said, "We have visited the affected areas and moved disaster-hit families to shelters. Assistance will be provided after assessing the losses. WDB has also been instructed to repair the embankments without delay."

Arrests made over violent disruption at NY consulate
Says press minister at Bangladesh embassy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Several arrests have been made after activists from the Awami League's US chapter attempted to violently disrupt an event marking the first anniversary of the July uprising at the Bangladesh Consulate in New York on August 24.

Golam Mortuza, press minister at the Bangladesh Embassy in Washington, DC, confirmed the development in a Facebook post yesterday.

"According to the US government, as of the second week of September, several individuals have been arrested, though no specific number was disclosed. The investigation is still ongoing," he shared.

He said both the embassy and the New York consulate are actively monitoring the situation. The New York Diplomatic Security Wing is coordinating with the New York Mayor's Office.

He informed that once the investigation is complete, US authorities will formally inform the New York consulate and the embassy. Based on the findings, a case may be filed.

This is the legal process in the US. The stage for filing a case has not yet arrived, he said in the Facebook post.



People wading through floodwaters in Jhenaigati of Sherpur yesterday. Flash floods from upstream hills left two people dead and damaged croplands and homes in the district's Jhenaigati and Nalitabari upazilas.

PHOTO: STAR

Where have all the big hilsa gone?

Undersized catch floods markets amid poor jatka protection

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

Large-sized hilsa have almost disappeared from markets across the southern region, with traders reporting that most of the catch now weighs between 200 and 400 grammes.

These smaller hilsa are being sold for Tk 400 to Tk 600 per kilogramme. According to the Barishal Divisional Fisheries Office, 60-65 percent of the hilsa currently being caught fall within this size range.

Fishermen said that unlike in previous years, when larger fish were available at this stage of the season, this year's catch is not only smaller in quantity but also dominated by undersized fish.

The Divisional Fisheries Department noted that hilsa below 225 grammes are considered jatka, whose capture and sale are prohibited. Yet jatka and slightly larger fish are being openly sold in markets.

On Wednesday alone, around 567 tonnes of hilsa were brought to 364 markets and landing stations in Barishal division, 65 percent of which were between 200 and 400 grammes.

At Barishal Port Road's

wholesale landing centre, Arif Enterprise's manager Md Shakil said most of the market supply consisted of small fish.

"A 300 grammes fish that cost Tk 1,000 per kg two days ago is now Tk 1,060. Fish weighing 700-800 grammes went up from Tk 1,960 to Tk 2,000 per

of 300-400 grammes of hilsa. Traders blamed poor jatka protection drives last year for the scarcity of larger hilsa this season.

"Monsoon is supposed to bring good catches of large fish, but we haven't seen them so far," one trader said.

kg, while one-kilo fish rose from Tk 2,210 to Tk 2,260," he said, adding that 60-70 percent of the fish were small and overall supply was about half of last year's.

Fisherman Siddik Majhi from Kuakata said that from every five maunds of fish brought to shore, three maunds consisted

of 300-400 grammes of hilsa. Traders blamed poor jatka protection drives last year for the scarcity of larger hilsa this season.

Fish weighing 500-700 grammes now sell for Tk 70,000 per maund, up from Tk 60,000-65,000, while one-kilo fish that fetched Tk 70,000-80,000 are now going for Tk 90,000 per maund.

Mohammad Anisuzzaman, senior assistant director of the Barishal fisheries department, said this year's hilsa production is likely to fall compared to last year. "We have indications of a decline. The main reason is that hilsa migration routes are shifting due to navigability loss, river pollution and climate change," he said.

"As a result, larger fish are scarce, and around 65 percent of the catch consists of hilsa weighing 200-450 grammes," he added.

While catching and selling jatka is illegal, he said monitoring the vast network of rivers is difficult.

"Whenever we get reports, we conduct drives with police, and law enforcers have already been instructed to crack down harder on jatka catching and sales."

Shariful Islam, manager of the BFDC fish centre in Alipur, said adverse weather has kept many trawlers from going out to sea, cutting production.

"Of the 30 maunds of fish we received today [yesterday], about 25 maunds weighed between 300 and 400 grammes," he said, adding that hilsa prices

WARI-BATESHWAR Gangariddhi museum project stalls for 6yrs

JAHIDUL ISLAM, Narsingdi

The construction of the Gangariddhi Museum at Wari-Bateshwar, one of Bangladesh's most significant archaeological sites in Narsingdi's Belabo upazila, has remained stalled for six years due to delays and administrative complications.

Initially planned for completion within two years, the project began in 2019 with an allocation of Tk 7.69 crore by the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives.

Narsingdi Zila Parishad was tasked with implementing the project, while RCCL RI received the contract. However, the work remains incomplete despite five deadline extensions.

According to the plan, a three-storey museum was to be built to showcase archaeological artefacts discovered at the site. But slow progress and management complications have left the structure unfinished.

At present, the incomplete building stands alone, while work remains halted.

Officials of Narsingdi Zila Parishad claimed that the construction work is now at the final stage. They said the delay stemmed from the fact that the museum is being built on privately owned land using public funds, creating uncertainty over who will manage it once completed.

Visitors, who continue to visit Wari-Bateshwar, mostly leave disappointed due to the absence of a functioning



museum to display the recovered artefacts.

"I recently visited Wari-Bateshwar site, expecting to see something

However, it was a disappointment to see the museum's construction still ongoing. There was nothing much to experience," said Saiful Islam Akash, a student at Rajshahi University.

Wari-Bateshwar is considered a key archaeological site linked to the ancient Gangariddhi civilisation, dating back 2,500 years. Excavations led by Oitijhypo

Onneshan since 2000 have unearthed coins, weights, iron tools, terracotta figurines and manuscripts, indicating the presence of a prosperous urban centre in the past.

The Gangariddhi Museum was intended to preserve these artefacts and boost local tourism.

Khondkar Faisal Ahmed, founder of Bhai Girish Chandra Sen Central Library, said, "Our house is located right next to Wari-Bateshwar site. Due to administrative complications and negligence of those involved, the work was not completed on time. If the complications are resolved and the

work is completed quickly, the number of visitors to the site will increase significantly."

Contacted, Nur-E-Elham, assistant engineer of Narsingdi Zila Parishad, said, "We expect to finish the work within two to three months. Discussions with the ministry concerned are ongoing to resolve management issues."

Regarding the delay, he added, "The landowner repeatedly requested design changes. If the design was changed, the cost would have increased from Tk 7.69 crore to nearly Tk 19 crore. As there was no additional budget, the work had to be stopped."

Contractor Tapan Kumar Pal said, "There was repeated pressure to change the design and carry out the work as per the landowner's suggestions. Due to improper payment of bills and administrative complications, I could not complete the work within the stipulated time."

Professor Dr Sufi Mostafizur Rahman, founder of Oitijhypo Onneshan and professor of archaeology at Jahangirnagar University, said, "The government approved the design for a three-storey museum building. However, the Zila Parishad and the contractor wanted to complete the work as a two-storey building, to which I raised objections. As a result, they halted the work."

"Wari-Bateshwar is an asset of the entire country. Thousands of foreign tourists visit this site, and this has been made possible due to our writings. We have already received three awards for books written on Wari-Bateshwar. Therefore, if the museum is developed in accordance with the site's historical significance, it will enhance university research and attract more tourists," he added.

Bangladesh-US joint drill ends



PHOTO: COLLECTED

BSS, Dhaka

The six-day long joint exercise titled "Operation Pacific Angel 25-3" with participation of Bangladesh Air Force and US Pacific Air Force has concluded at BAF base Zahurul Haque in Chattogram.

The drill was held under the management of BAF, said a press release of ISPR yesterday.

Representatives of the US embassy in Dhaka, senior military and civil officials of the US Pacific Air Force, BAF officials and senior officials of the three services were present at the ceremony.

Assistant Chief of Air Staff Air Vice Marshal (Ops) Javed Tanvir Khan delivered the closing speech.

"Operation Pacific Angel 25-3" was aimed at training the BAF to arrange exercise programme to ensure maximum use of the BAF helicopters and transport aircraft in emergencies and adverse situations.

A C-130J transport aircraft of the BAF, one Mi-17 helicopter and two C-130J aircraft of the Pacific Air Force, 150 members of the BAF and 92 members of the US Pacific Air Force participated in the drill.

Hidden diabetes affecting 25m finally gets a name

STAR REPORT

An unusual and long overlooked form of diabetes, linked to severe childhood malnutrition and affecting mostly lean patients, has finally been given a name, according to a Bloomberg report.

Researchers estimate that about 25 million people worldwide suffer from "type 5" diabetes, including in countries such as Bangladesh, Rwanda, and Indonesia, where healthcare systems are already strained and communities are vulnerable to climate change.

The findings, published September 18 in The Lancet Global Health, call for urgent development of diagnostic criteria and treatment guidelines. "The diabetes community must formally recognise this neglected entity, which likely affects the quality and length of life of millions of people worldwide," wrote lead authors Pradyashree Wadiykar of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York and Felix Jasingh of Christian Medical College, Vellore, India.

Unlike type 2 diabetes, which is commonly linked to obesity and sedentary lifestyles, type 5 diabetes affects patients who are often in their early 30s, thin, and from impoverished communities. Many share a history of severe undernourishment as a fetus or in early childhood.

British researcher David Phillips, emeritus professor at the University of Southampton, first noticed this pattern nearly two decades ago while working in northern Ethiopia.

"There are people who die in a corner of their house because nobody ever thought about them having diabetes," Phillips told Bloomberg, highlighting how atypical patient profiles often delay diagnosis in resource poor countries.

He was fearless

FROM PAGE 3
working people's liberation and stayed true to his principles. The younger generation must follow the path he showed," he said.

Nagorik Oikya President Mahmudur Rahman Manna called Umar a beacon in politics devoid of intellectual practice. "Politics without study and knowledge can achieve nothing substantial. Our politics needs more people like him," he said.

Jonayed Saki, chief coordinator of Ganosamhati Andolon, said Umar influenced different generations through his writings and organisational work.

Speaking on behalf of the family, Umar's daughter Sara Akhtar Banu thanked the organisers and attendees, recalling her father as a tireless worker who never stopped writing, reflecting, or engaging with the country's issues, even in his final days.

Journalist Abu Sayeed Khan and Revolutionary Communist Party leader Saiful Haque also spoke, among others. Messages of condolence were also read out from writers and academics in West Bengal.

The programme, conducted by Faizul Hakim, convener of the memorial organising committee, began with a minute's silence. It also featured poetry recitation and the screening of a documentary titled "Chirantan Dipshikha" on Umar's life and work.

ESSAY

Farhad Mazhar and the Being of Lalon Fakir

SALAHUDDIN AYUB

Farhad Mazhar has long stood at the unpredictable intersection of poetry, politics, and philosophy. To some, he is a Marxist agitator; to others, a mystical seeker; to many, an enigma. But labels do little justice to someone whose intellectual project cuts across established categories, with little regard for academic gatekeeping or ideological loyalty. At the heart of his recent work lies a remarkable effort to excavate the philosophical foundations of Baul thought—particularly in the songs and sayings of Lalon Fakir—and to place them in conversation with some of the most challenging figures of European thought. This effort, spanning his books *Bhabandolon* (Mowla Brothers, 2008) and *Shainjir Doinno Gyan* (Mowla Brothers, 2009), reveals a thinker who is not merely interpreting tradition, but actively reimagining it as a living philosophical resource.

Mazhar's encounter with Lalon is not the sentimental recuperation of a folk icon. Nor is it the academic cataloguing of an "obscure religious cult" of the sort once found in colonial ethnographies. Instead, Mazhar approaches Lalon as a philosopher in his own right, a vernacular phenomenologist whose concept of 'odhara' (the ungraspable, the ever-elusive) anticipates—and perhaps even exceeds—Heidegger's quest for 'Being'. If this sounds implausible, Mazhar is happy to show his work. Through dense, often exhilarating pages, he draws out the resonances between Lalon's "Moner



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

This dream of a Bengali state, grounded in justice and governed perhaps by a philosopher-king, carries more than a whiff of Plato. Mazhar is aware of this, and somewhere in his writings is the dry smile of a man who knows Christendom too was ruled by such philosophers. But even so, he insists on the necessity of ideas. Without bhav, there is no future.

Manush", his elusive 'man within the mind', and the ontological ambiguity that haunts Heidegger's 'sein'. What Heidegger attempts in the abstract, Lalon performs through song. What Mazhar does is hold them together long enough for the sparks to fly.

Of course, Mazhar's interest in Lalon is not limited to metaphysics; it is deeply political too. His reinterpretation of Nityananda-Sri Chaitanya's companion and, in Mazhar's telling, the true initiator of Bengal's revolutionary Bhav movement—allows him to distinguish between bhakti and bhav, between a scriptural devotion tied to Brahminical hierarchy and a folk ontology rooted in bodily practice, sensuality, and resistance. For Mazhar, the spiritual power of Lalon lies not in his rejection of the world, but in his radical commitment to transforming it. The bhav of Nadia is not a mystical escape but a philosophical ground for dismantling caste, class, and coloniality.

There is also the matter of language. Mazhar is acutely aware that bhav cannot be cleanly translated into "idea", "emotion," or "feeling"; it hovers

between concept and experience, between thought and embodiment. This is why he insists on staying within the Bangla tradition, not out of parochial loyalty but because that is where the term lives. In doing so, he also shows how language is not simply a medium of expression but a condition of thought. Lalon's verbal artistry is, in this sense, a philosophical labour.

Mazhar has never claimed to be an academic philosopher. He didn't finish his studies in New York, though he read widely—Heidegger, Marx, Lenin, Foucault, Derrida—and debated fiercely. Many of the Marxist formulations that later found their way into the works of Gayatri Spivak were already present in his Bangla essays. He used to joke about it. He wasn't bitter. Spivak became a theorist; Mazhar remained a street philosopher. He writes for his fellow men, as he often

says, to change their minds, so that they may build the Bengali state that never quite arrived in 1971.

This dream of a Bengali state, grounded in justice and governed perhaps by a philosopher-king, carries more than a whiff of Plato. Mazhar is aware of this, and somewhere in his writings is the dry smile of a man who knows Christendom too was ruled by such philosophers. But even so, he insists on the necessity of ideas. Without bhav, there is no future.

What makes Mazhar unique is that he takes philosophy out of the university and places it alongside farming, folklore, song, and soil. His work with rural farmers, his critique of global agribusiness, and his revival of traditional agricultural knowledge are not a detour from philosophy; they are its continuation by other means. The bhav-centered resistance to Monsanto

and Cargill is as central to his thinking as any reading of Hegel or Heidegger.

Farhad Mazhar remains a controversial figure, but that hardly matters here. The real question is: Who else in Bangladesh has tried to think so deeply, so seriously, and so originally with the resources of both east and the west? Who else has dared to place Lalon in conversation with Heidegger or Nityananda in opposition to Puri's temple theology? Who else has shown, with such care and force, that folk philosophy is philosophy—and that it may be the only kind that matters?

Dr. Salahuddin Ayub is Professor and Chair, Department of Criminal Justice, Philosophy, and Political Science, Chicago State University. He is the author of several books including *Farashi Tattwa*, *Paul de Man o Shabtiyer Agastayayatra* (Bangla Academy, 2018). Email him at msalahud@csu.edu.

CREATIVE NONFICTION

Writer in the dark

NAFISA AFREEN MEGHA

There is a strange insanity that comes with being a woman in her 20s. A haunting fear that follows like a thought lingering in the back of our minds, refusing to leave. The constant ache of amounting to nothing, even after devoting every breath we take in pursuit. That every unacknowledged sacrifice, every swallowed insult, every underpaid job, and every pretend smile might dissolve into nothingness, forever engulfed by the void of disregard. Each day feels like a theatrical performance, and the curtain never truly falls. There's a certain loneliness in that gnawing fear—the kind that rests behind the eyes of every woman, even those who have done everything right, yet still find themselves running on fumes.

There is a fine line between passion and hysteria, and I have spent my whole life being told not to cross it. They say I am the firstborn daughter of contradictions—someone who embodies duality, tenderness, and rage. The world made women like me believe there is something inside us that must be restrained: a fierce, unspeakable wildness that must be tamed if we don't want to risk being labelled as something not meant to survive in a world designed for silence. We constantly walk the tightrope between rage and grace, between self and sacrifice. This is the type of insanity we inherit: to chase dreams that slip through the cracks of reality.

There are days when the burden of that effort feels unbearable, when I wonder if all this wandering is just leading me back to the same place I started—unheard, unseen, and lost. Every stumble confirms the quiet voice that maybe they were right all along—that no amount of endurance will ever be enough. We are told the sky is the limit, as long as we fold our wings before flight. And still, I write. I write of compliments that sting like salt in an open



ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

wound, of pavements that turn into ghosts with watching eyes and reaching hands, of glass cages disguised as protection. Because what kind of writer am I, with so much rage, loss, and pain—and no words for it? I perform this act of rebellion in the dark, turning anger into art, grief into poetry, and fear into metaphors.

There is a strange beauty in the duality we carry. We are made to believe that we are always on the verge of madness, but maybe this is what selfhood looks like when it refuses to be dimmed. For us, passion and hysteria live in the same room, where one is celebrated and the other is villainised. But this fine line

between madness and ambition was never meant to be walked; it was meant to trap us. What they call chaos is often just the weight of constant endurance. What they portray as insanity is often just a response to unending oppression. There is no end to this, no wins and no redemption. No amount of sacrifice will ever be enough.

So I write. Not to heal or to prove myself, nor to inspire, but to document the injustice, the unfairness, and the inequality. I write to give form to what the world chooses to ignore. It is the only way I can give weight to every swallowed scream, every sincere nod, and every quiet surrender. Only we know what it means

to constantly balance on the tightrope of reverence and ridicule. We learn early to sugar-coat every sentence and dull the edges of our knives before we speak. So I write, not for grace, but to bear witness. My work is the trace I leave behind—proof that I was here and I witnessed it all. It is both my quiet revenge and my unyielding resistance. In the end, the last word is mine to speak.

Nafisa Afreen Megha is an aspiring writer from Dhaka, Bangladesh. Her work consists of her thoughts, carefully put into words and turned to poetry. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in English at North South University.



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

POETRY

Scent of the day

Iftehaz Yeasir Iftee

I wake up to the smell of coral jasmine
Those mushrooms in my garden of dreams.
I can't but forget the weary smell of the dry leaves
And a hint of iris on top.
What was the scent about? And the stories it
carried with it?
I look for the name of the scent in the streets of
mahogany and mossy grass.
Ignorant, I look for the wearer of the scent.
Traces of wood and smoky pineapple,
Bitter grape and an emblem of cherry,
I keep looking for it as it plays hide-and-seek.
I sit in my rose garden and contemplate his
whereabouts.
Eyes closed, I harness the scent carried by the
winds.
Enticed, intoxicated, do you know where the
wearer can be?
I am just around you, come find me.

Iftehaz Yeasir Iftee is a poet and student at IBA, University of Dhaka. He has contributed to a global anthology of poems named *Luminance: Words for a World Gone Wrong* under his pen-name *Brotibir Roy*.



Truce ends, RIVALRY RESUMES

EKUSH TAPADER from Dubai

From the edge of elimination, Bangladesh are set to begin their campaign in the Super Four phase of the Asia Cup today in Dubai against Sri Lanka -- the very team that ensured their survival by defeating and knocking out Afghanistan.

The Sri Lanka-Afghanistan contest in Abu Dhabi on Thursday felt as much about the Tigers as it was about the two sides involved, with fans across Bangladesh eagerly following the match which did not even feature their own team.

"We were watching the game. I personally saw the last part of it, checking the score before dinner," Bangladesh pace bowling coach Shaun Tait said, admitting the squad was just as engrossed.

Sri Lanka successfully chasing down 170 runs with six wickets in hand gave Bangladesh the joy of qualification, but also left a lingering concern -- Kusal Mendis and his teammates looked in sublime form.

Back in July, Bangladesh had beaten Sri Lanka in their own backyard for the first time in a bilateral T20I series, but in their

Bangladesh only have three wins against 14 defeats to Sri Lanka in Asia Cup, across ODI and T20I iterations. Their wins came in the 2012, 2016 and 2018 editions respectively and in all three editions, the Tigers made it to the final.

group-stage meeting here, the Lankans brushed them aside.

Still, for Bangladesh, escaping from the brink of elimination could act as motivation.

"The beauty of these tournaments is that the games come quickly," Tait reflected. "It gives you a chance to forget the past and move straight on to the next one. Making the final four is a big effort, but now it's about training tonight and the big clash tomorrow [Saturday]."

Sri Lanka's win, however, came in the shadow of tragedy. Left-arm spin allrounder Duniwell Wellalage lost his father during the game in Colombo.

Wellalage left for home after the game and it remains unclear if he will be available for the next fixture.

The combination of Bangladesh's survival thanks to Sri Lanka and Wellalage's loss has somewhat mellowed the usually intense rivalry. This time the contest could carry more of a sporting, even friendly, atmosphere, and not a hostile one, which often is the case in encounters between the two nations.

For Bangladesh, the fifth bowling option remains the big question. Against Afghanistan, two part-time spinners conceded more than 50 runs in just four overs, a weakness that nearly cost them.

While Tait avoided commenting on selection, signs point to an extra specialist bowler being drafted in, especially given Dubai's spin-friendly conditions. As the Super Four begins with a clean slate, a single win could be enough to bury all the bitter memories of the group stage. For Bangladesh, surviving the brink may yet serve as the perfect spark to ignite their campaign.

T Sports
Asia Cup T20
Bangladesh vs Sri Lanka
Live from 8:30 pm
Star Sports Select HD1
Premier League

Everton vs Liverpool
Live from 5:30 pm
Brighton vs Tottenham
Live from 8:00 pm
Man Utd vs Chelsea
Live from 10:30 pm



Season opener highlights football's ground realities

ATIQUE ANAM

In a repeat encounter of last season's Challenge Cup fixture, Federation Cup winners Bashundhara Kings thrashed Bangladesh Premier League champions Mohammedan by 4-1 in the curtain-raiser of the new football season at the Shaheed Dhiren Nath Dutta Stadium in Cumilla yesterday.

However, it was not the on field action but the appalling condition of the pitch and the substandard broadcast quality that captured most of the attention.

The match kicked off 10 minutes later than scheduled due to last-minute efforts to make the ground playable. Journalists at the venue reported that nets were still being installed on the goals when the game was supposed to begin. Despite these efforts, the pitch resembled a long-neglected neighbourhood playground at best, showing no signs of curation.

Even more astonishingly, labourers were seen cutting grass beside the pitch after the match had already begun. Rifat Masud, one of the commentators for official broadcaster T Sports, could not hide his disappointment, gushing "jacchetai" (shambolic) live on air.

As the defending league champions, Mohammedan held the responsibility to prepare the pitch for this fixture. They also share ongoing maintenance duties for the ground with Abahani, as the venue will be used by both clubs throughout the season. Although Mohammedan secured



the rights to use the ground from local administration on September 14, they reportedly made no effort to prepare it for play, leaving the local football's governing body scrambling at the last moment.

Sudipta Ahmed Ananda, a senior journalist from Desh Rupantor, expressed his frustration while speaking to The Daily Star from the venue. "This is unacceptable for a season-opening match but this is also the sad reality of our football. A match like this demands attention from all involved. Playing on such pitches can be extremely risky for the footballers."

Arafat Jubair, a senior journalist at Dhaka Post, added: "I would say Mohammedan should take the lion's share of the blame for this but the federation, as the organiser of the event and guardian of football, cannot escape its responsibility."

Notably, the Bangladesh Football Federation's (BFF) governing body has yet to form a grounds committee -- nearly a year after assuming office.

The Cumilla venue is one of five designated for the upcoming season, each to be shared by two clubs. Only the Bashundhara Kings Arena -- shared by Bashundhara Kings and Fortis FC -- is in proper condition. The other four venues in Gazipur, Manikganj, Munshiganj, and Cumilla remain in poor shape, with clubs and the federation now in a race against time to prepare them ahead of the Federation Cup, which begins next Tuesday, and the league, set to kick off next Friday.

The quality of the pitch was not the only issue to spark discontent. The broadcast production also left much to be desired.

Sources confirmed that T Sports, the official broadcaster, was only confirmed of their rights by the BFF a day before the match. Consequently, they were only able to deploy five cameras for the telecast, and did so without a riser (a platform used to improve camera angles) at the venue. In stark contrast, recent international matches involving Bangladesh at the Kings Arena featured as many as 21 cameras.

Several senior BFF officials have recently made bold claims in the media about making this football season a "complete package" with improved pitches and enhanced broadcast quality.

If yesterday's match was any indication of what lies ahead, football fans across the country should brace themselves for more frustration and disappointment in weeks to come.

SHORT CORNER

Bangladesh make futsal debut today

Bangladesh are set to play their first official futsal match when they square off against 13-time champions Iran in a Group G encounter of the AFC Futsal Asian Cup Qualifiers in Kuantan, Malaysia, today. The match will kick off at 2:00 pm [Bangladesh Time] at Stadium Tertutup Sukpa.

Bulbul admits World Cup prep 'not ideal' for Tigresses

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Aminul Islam Bulbul on Friday conceded that the women's team's preparations for the upcoming ICC Women's ODI World Cup have been far from ideal. The tournament begins on September 30 in India and Sri Lanka. The Nigar Sultana Joty-led team will leave for Colombo on September 23.

Bangladesh beat India in C'wealth Beach Handball

Bangladesh came from behind to defeat India 2-1 in the sixth fixture of the ongoing Commonwealth Beach Handball Championship in Kuhudhuffushi, Maldives on Friday. After conceding the first set 28-16, the men in red and green claimed the next sets in style: 19-3 and 7-3.

Nasrin SA to play in maiden SAFF Women's Club C'ship

Bangladesh women's football received a significant boost as the South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) confirmed it will stage the maiden Club Women's Championship later this year, with the participation of five clubs, including defending Bangladesh Women's Football League champions Nasrin Sports Academy. The tournament is scheduled to be held in Nepal from December 5 to 20.

Read full stories on The Daily Star's website.



LYLES MATCHES BOLT; MELISSA CLINCHES DOUBLE

Noah Lyles matched Usain Bolt's record of four consecutive world 200 metres titles as he scorched to victory at the world championships in Tokyo on Friday. Lyles, who won bronze in the 100m here, clocked 19.52sec for victory in what the American calls his "bread and butter" event. Bolt won his four titles from 2009 to 2015, going on to collect 11 world golds and eight Olympic titles. Meanwhile, in the women's division, American Melissa Jefferson-Wooden became the fourth woman to complete the sprint double at the world championships with victory in the 200 metres in 21.68 seconds. The 24-year-old ran the fastest time of the year to cap a dominant season with another gold medal to add to the one she won in the 100m on Sunday.



PHOTOS: AFP/REUTERS

'NUMBERS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES'

Manchester City's prolific striker Erling Haaland bagged a record-breaking goal as Pep Guardiola's side kicked off their Champions League campaign with a dominant 2-0 victory over 10-man Napoli on Thursday.

Haaland's second-half strike took him to a half-century of goals in the Champions League, needing just 49 games to do so -- the fastest in the competition.

Haaland surpassed Ruud van Nistelrooy, who reached the landmark in 62 matches.

The goal also moves him into the top 10 leading scorers in the history of the European Cup or Champions League, surpassing Alfredo Di Stefano on 49.

Out of the 50, Haaland scored 27 for Manchester City. He netted 15 times for Borussia Dortmund and on eight occasions for Red Bull Salzburg before moving to the Etihad.

"The numbers speak for themselves. If he can play 10 to 12 more years and maintain this progression, absolutely [he can break Cristiano Ronaldo's all-time Champions League goals record of 140]."

Manchester City coach Pep Guardiola



PHOTO: MANCHESTER CITY



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Stray bullet kills woman as fresh violence erupts in Narsingdi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

A woman was fatally shot yesterday afternoon as fresh violence erupted following Thursday's clash between rival groups in Alokbari union of Narsingdi Sadar upazila.

The deceased is Ferdousi Begum, aged around 35-45, said Narsingdi Additional Superintendent of Police Sujon Chandra Sarkar.

Locals said Ferdousi did not have any political affiliation.

The incident took place in Birgaon village, a day after a man was shot dead in Muradnagar village.

According to locals, two groups are fighting over establishing dominance in the union. One group is led by Shah Alam Chowdhury, convenor of BNP's Alokbari union unit, and the other by Abdul Kaiyum Miya, expelled member secretary of the same unit.

On Thursday morning, Kaiyum's supporter Idan Miya, 55, was fatally shot during a clash between the two groups. Locals said on the day, the Shah Alam

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

No alliance with major parties for now: Nahid
Says NCP doesn't want PR for lower house

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



National Citizen Party (NCP) Convener Nahid Islam yesterday said his party is not considering any alliance with major parties at this moment.

"We will move forward with our independent political agenda," he said while talking to reporters after National Coordination Meeting of the party in Dhaka.

Nahid also said NCP is not part of the Jamaat-e-Islami-led protests as they oppose the proportional representation (PR) system in the lower house of the parliament in the upcoming general election. "We want PR only in the upper house and an effective upper house to ensure accountability," he said.

Nahid's comments came a day after he met Hefazat-e-Islam Ameer Shah Muhibullah Babunagri in the capital. The NCP said it was an "informal courtesy meeting" where no political issues were discussed, according to media reports.

Nahid also said discussions with the National Consensus Commission on ways to implement constitutional reforms were still underway. "We are not supporting the ongoing protests [for PR] because we do not think the time has come yet to hit the streets, ignoring the consensus commission."

Asked about recent processions organised by the Awami League and its affiliated bodies, Nahid alleged they were being held with the "indulgence of the government and the state machinery".

About the Jatiya Party, Nahid said its Chairman GM Quader and the party were "accomplices of the fascist Awami League" and should be brought under the law.

He also demanded an investigation and trial of the AL as a party.

Fundamentalist forces trying to delay polls

Says CPB president at party's 13th congress

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Fundamentalist forces are gaining ground in the country and are trying to delay the upcoming election, alleged Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) President Shah Alam yesterday.

"If the election is not held on time, the fundamentalists will become more consolidated, and the country may head towards a Taliban-style state," he said at the inaugural session of CPB's four-day 13th Congress at the Engineers Institute in Dhaka.

Speaking after the session, the CPB president said an elected government must be formed immediately to safeguard people's voting rights. "Today, in the name of Islam, radical groups are rising in Bangladesh -- this is something we must take into account," he said.

Although last year's mass uprising toppled an authoritarian government, it



did not change the class character of state power, Shah Alam said.

CPB General Secretary Ruhin Hossain Prince said, "Ultra-right communal forces are growing in the country. At the same time, imperialist powers are aggressively trying to impose their dominance over us."

Prince said the interim government's main duty was to quickly hand over power to an elected government through free, fair, and acceptable elections.

"But instead, it is wasting time by initiating constitutional changes, creating new crises," he said.

He warned, "If any crisis emerges due to delay, the interim government will have to take responsibility."

The four-day congress will run until September 22. On the final day, the CPB delegates will elect the party's new leadership including the president and general secretary.

Although last year's mass uprising toppled an authoritarian government, it



Palestinians from Gaza City move southwards with their belongings, on the coastal road near the Nuseirat refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

GAZA CITY OFFENSIVE Israel threatens to use 'unprecedented force'

AFP, Gaza City

The Israeli military yesterday warned it would operate with "unprecedented force" in Gaza City, telling residents to flee southwards as it presses its ground offensive on the territory's largest urban centre.

Israel has pummeled Gaza City with strikes and tank fire in its bid to seize it, nearly two years into the war that has devastated the Palestinian territory and left the Gaza City area gripped by a UN declared famine.

The assault comes ahead of a planned move by several Western countries, including France and Britain, to recognise a Palestinian state next week at a UN summit.

The military launched its major ground offensive on Tuesday and has for days been telling residents to head south, but many Palestinians say the journey is prohibitively expensive and they do not know where to go.

The United Nations estimated at the end of August that about one million people were living in Gaza City and its surroundings.

The military on Friday said it estimated 480,000 of them have fled since late August.

Yesterday, the military's Arabic-language spokesman announced the closure of a temporary evacuation route opened 48 hours earlier, saying the only way south was via the Al-Rashid coastal road.

AFP footage from Al-Rashid street on Thursday showed long lines of Palestinians heading south on foot or in vehicles piled high with meagre belongings.

Nivin Ahmed, 50, fled south from Gaza City to the central city of Deir el-Balah on Thursday, walking with seven family members.

"We walked more than 15 kilometres (nine miles), we were crawling from exhaustion," he said.

"My youngest son cried from fatigue. We took turns dragging a small cart with some of our belongings."

Mona Abdel Karim, 36, said she had been unable to secure transport south and had

been sleeping with her family on Al-Rashid street for two nights waiting for a driver.

"I feel like I'm about to explode. We can't walk on foot -- my husband's parents are elderly and sick, and the children are too weak to walk," she said.

Israeli fire killed at least 22 people across the territory yesterday, including 11 in Gaza City, according to a tally of figures given by Gaza hospitals contacted by AFP.

In a statement, the Israeli military said its troops continued to "expand their activity" in Gaza City, adding it had "dismantled more than 20 military infrastructure sites" over the past day.

➤ Israel military says around 480,000 Palestinians have fled Gaza City

➤ US again vetoes UN Security Council Gaza ceasefire call

➤ At least 22 more Palestinians killed

The US-backed offensive on Gaza City came as a United Nations probe accused Israel of committing "genocide" in the Gaza Strip, saying Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other senior officials had incited the crime.

Israel rejected the findings and slammed the probe as "distorted and false".

The United States on Thursday again vetoed a UN Security Council resolution calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, shielding its ally Israel from diplomatic pressure.

Since October 7, 2023, Israel's military campaign has killed at least 65,174 people, also mostly civilians, according to figures from the territory's health ministry that the United Nations considers reliable.

Case filed over shrine attacks in Cumilla

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cumilla

A case was filed yesterday against unidentified individuals over the vandalism and arson attacks on three shrines and an akhra in Asadpur village of Cumilla's Honma upazila.

Rafiqul Islam, officer-in-charge of Honma Police Station, told The Daily Star that Sub-inspector Tapas Sarker filed the case.

Locals and police said Md Mohsin, 35, of Asadpur village, posted "derogatory comments about Islam" on Facebook on Wednesday.

Following protests by locals, Mohsin was detained, and a case was filed later against him.

Around 10:30am on Thursday, a group of people under the banner of "Tawhid Janata" vandalised two shrines and set fire to another and an akhra (a place for spiritual gatherings), said police.

The sites attacked include the shrines of Kafil Uddin Shah, Abdu Shah, Kalai (Kanu) Shah, and the akhra of Hawali Shah.

Mohsin is the grandson of Kafil Uddin Shah.

Sub-inspector Mir Hossain, who visited the sites yesterday, said those involved in the attacks would be brought to book. Additional police personnel have been deployed in Asadpur village to prevent any further untoward incident.

➤ 147 deaths, 40,709 cases recorded so far this year

➤ 83 deaths reported in DSCC

➤ 11,927 cases in Barishal

➤ Experts warn of October outbreak

➤ Lack of national mosquito control programme blamed



This makeshift charging rig for battery-run autorickshaws on a pavement poses a risk of electrical short circuits and electrocution, potentially leading to accidents involving pedestrians. The photo was taken recently in the capital's Tejgaon Industrial Area.

DSCC tops in dengue deaths, Barishal in cases

HELEMUL ALAM

Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) has recorded the highest number of dengue-related deaths this year, while Barishal tops the country in terms of dengue cases until yesterday.

The DSCC reported 83 deaths from the mosquito-borne disease, with 19 deaths reported in Dhaka North City Corporation, according to data from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

Among the divisions, Barishal and Chattogram saw 22 deaths each, followed by 10 in Rajshahi.

Khulna and Mymensingh reported 5 and 4 deaths, respectively, while two deaths were recorded in Dhaka division outside the city corporations.

No deaths have been reported this year from Sylhet and Rangpur divisions.

When it comes to reported cases, Barishal leads with 11,927, followed by Chattogram with 6,256.

The DSCC recorded 6,270 cases, DNCC 4,290, and Dhaka division outside the city corporations 5,894. Rajshahi reported 2,781 cases, Khulna 2,074, Mymensingh 822, Rangpur 278, and Sylhet 114.

According to DGHS data, the total number of deaths stood at 147 and cases at 40,709 this year, as of yesterday.

Experts stressed the urgent need for stronger control measures against Aedes mosquitoes, alongside community engagement for sustainable results.

Comics slam 'censorship' after Kimmel pulled off air

AFP, Washington

Late night TV comics skewered US President Donald Trump and denounced "blatant censorship" after Jimmy Kimmel's late-night show was pulled off air over his comments on the murder of right-wing activist Charlie Kirk.

Network ABC's decision to suspend Kimmel "indefinitely" came after Federal Communications Commission chairman Brendan Carr threatened to revoke the licenses of ABC affiliates that broadcast his show.

Trump, on his way back from a trip to Britain, again condemned evening shows on network television, saying "all they do is hit Trump."

HUNGER AND HARDSHIP behind every leaf

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Malnutrition grips tea workers, especially women, as wages fall short of basic food needs

MINTU DESHWARA

Every day before dawn, Sukalmoni Rikiyashon wakes up in a cramped tin-roofed house nestled in a tea estate of Kamalganj upazila in Moulvibazar.

She prepares flatbread and tea for her nine member family and rushes to the garden by 9:00am, already weary.

Four months pregnant with her second child, the 18 year-old spends the whole day plucking tea leaves, clearing weeds and carrying heavy loads under the scorching sun.

She earns Tk 187.42 a day and also gets rations.

Her husband, a day labourer, gathers firewood from nearby forests to supplement their meagre income.

For the expecting mother, there is no access to maternal healthcare, no nutritious food and no rest.

Sukalmoni's story is not unique. Thousands of women across

A field-level survey by The Daily Star among 22 tea garden workers in Sylhet and Moulvibazar supported these findings. Of the respondents, seven reported a pregnant woman in the family. The average family size was six, and their average monthly income stood at Tk 6,995.

Diets were carbohydrate heavy, with only occasional protein and rare intake of vegetables, fruits or dairy. No change in diet was reported for pregnant women.

Among the 22 workers, 95 percent reported experiencing issues such as anaemia, stunted growth, night blindness, skin disorders, hair loss or frequent infections.

Shapon Mirdha, a mother of two, said, "During my pregnancy, I received no medical check-ups. I gave birth at home with the help of a midwife."

A community health provider at a clinic in Sreemangal's Khaichhara

of plain rice and lentils, with protein appearing only once or twice a week.

Many reported attending school on an empty stomach, while around 65 percent did not attend school regularly. Additionally, 12 percent reported experiencing moderate food crises at home, while others said their families faced frequent shortages.

A teacher at Luyaiuni Tea Garden Government Primary School said, "Some students are too weak to participate in school activities."

For many tea workers, affording basic food staples is a daily struggle. With rice prices between Tk 60-70 per kg, and lentils, vegetables, fish and meat significantly more expensive and beyond their purchasing power,

The ILO has similarly observed that adequate nutrition could boost productivity by as much as 20 percent.

Nipen Paul, general secretary of Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union, said workers currently receive two annual festival bonuses, totalling around Tk 10,500. They also get around 3.5 kg of rice or flour each week at a subsidised rate of Tk 2 per kg, small huts within the garden premises, access to some agricultural land, primary schools and basic healthcare.

However, he said these facilities are "very nominal" given the rising cost of living.

A comparative analysis by GAIN shows that tea workers face a far deeper nutritional crisis than another

by contrast, are only beginning to explore workforce nutrition initiatives through a newly formed alliance.

Employers, tea estate owners and government agencies have clear obligations to ensure the health and nutrition of tea workers under national labour laws and health policies. Still, most tea worker families remain excluded from government-run food-friendly programmes, said experts.

Particularly, the TCB's subsidised food distribution system is yet to reach most tea estates, they added.

Local union parishad members and health officials admitted that tea workers are often missing from official beneficiary lists.

integrate tea workers into national food security programmes.

Muhammad Shahidul Islam, director of the Department of Social Services in Sylhet division, said his department provides a one-time grant of Tk 6,000 to 25-30 tea workers per garden.

He added that their housing project has supported 8-10 workers in each estate.

Sanjay Kanta Das, adviser of the Cha Sramik Oikya, said, "Women tea workers are doing the hardest labour on the lowest nutrition. With only dry bread and salted tea to survive on, anaemia and malnutrition have become the norm. The authorities shouldn't expect the tea industry to be productive without meeting the workers' basic nutritional needs."

Rambhajan Kaiti, former general secretary of Bangladesh Tea Workers Union, said, "Over 50 percent of tea workers are malnourished. The condition is worse among women. Its effects are visible in tea production and in family health. If no steps are taken, the industry may collapse."

Kamran Tanvir Rahman, chairman of the Bangladesh Tea Association, acknowledged that nutrition is vital for worker productivity.

"But the tea industry is itself struggling to survive," he said. "Wages have increased, and when support like subsidised food, free housing and basic healthcare is added, workers receive benefits worth over Tk 500 per day. Still, we are selling tea below production cost and operating gardens on loans with 13-14 percent interest rates."

"Without government support, especially in reducing loan interest rates and recognising tea as part of the agriculture sector, we lack the capacity to do more for workers. The health of workers and the survival of gardens are interdependent," he added.



most rely almost exclusively on rice to meet their calorie needs. On average, a woman worker can spend no more than Tk 25-30 per meal.

Dr Rudaba Khondker, country director of GAIN Bangladesh, attributed the crisis to low wages, poor education and lack of healthcare access.

She emphasised that investing in nutrition could significantly improve worker productivity and economic returns.

Citing findings from the Global Nutrition Report and the World Bank, she said every dollar invested in nutrition can yield up to \$16 in return.

vulnerable group, ready-made garment workers.

Tea workers earn half as much per month as RMG workers. Their average daily calorie intake remains at 1,795 kcal, well below nutritional standards, while RMG workers typically consume 1,900-2,100 kcal per day.

RMG workers, while not free from nutritional challenges, benefit from workplace health services, Fair Price Shops and targeted nutrition programmes.

Since 2020, interventions like midday meals and iron-folic acid supplements have improved their diets and health outcomes. Tea gardens,

Out of 22 respondents in The Daily Star survey, 20 reported receiving no government food aid, while two said they received occasional support.

Nurul Alam Masud, secretary of the Bangladesh Food Security Network-KHANI, described the situation as a human rights crisis. He called for inflation-adjusted wages, universal ration cards for tea worker families, and a special Garden Nutrition Card for targeted food support.

He also urged the government to



THE LAST MONKEYS

of Sadhana Aushadhalaya

YSTIAQUE AHMED

In Gandaria, one of the oldest neighbourhoods in Puran Dhaka, two unlikely legacies are fading together: a century-old herbal medicine company and the monkeys that once thrived in these streets. For generations, Sadhana Aushadhalaya was both a medicine factory and a sanctuary. Established in 1914 by the chemist and nationalist Jogesh Chandra Ghosh, it symbolised rebellion, resilience and compassion. Along with it, the monkeys became part of the area's residents, swinging from trees, scavenging for food and wandering into the courtyards.

Jogesh Chandra Ghosh, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Chemistry and a member of the American Chemical Society, sought to popularise the use of affordable herbal medicine amongst the poorer population, which led to the creation of Shadhana Aushadhalaya after the Swadeshi movement. His efforts advanced the practice of Ayurvedic medicine and modernised the process of medicine production. What started in Dhaka later expanded to Kolkata and other parts of India. They even began exporting products to Africa and China.

The character of Sadhana was defined not merely by commerce, but also by acts of



A troop of monkeys gathers for a feast at Sadhana Aushadhalaya, once a renowned ayurvedic pharmaceutical in Gendaria, Old Dhaka. As demand for ayurvedic medicine wanes, the company's ability to care for the monkeys has also diminished.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

The decline of Sadhana has had a direct and tragic impact on the monkeys. The lush trees that once provided food and shelter for them have been felled by rapid urbanisation. The factory's dwindling capacity means less food to spare for the monkeys. Somit Dash, a guard at Sadhana Aushadhalaya who has worked there since 2009, explains, "There was a time when we needed 20-30 different types of trees for one drug, but now only five or six of these trees remain."

later, during the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, Jogesh Chandra Ghosh was tragically killed by the Pakistani junta for sheltering freedom fighters, and most of the company's assets were looted. This severely hampered Sadhana's operations and triggered its gradual decline. After the war, his son, Dr Naresh Chandra Ghosh, continued the company's legacy of providing natural remedies.

It was in this environment of compassion that the monkeys found their anchor. As the British rulers developed Gandaria into a residential hub in the early 20th century, the trees planted by Sadhana provided the perfect habitat. In a characteristically generous act, the medicine enterprise welcomed these monkeys and even dedicated a room in the factory to feed them. The monkeys became an ever-present part of the community, a symbol of Sadhana's symbiotic relationship with its environment. Even a century later, Sadhana still maintains this practice, albeit on a much narrower scale.

Chitta Ranjan Dash, a doctor who has been working at Sadhana Aushadhalaya for the past 16 years, spoke to The Daily Star about the decline of Sadhana. "Of

the 72 sales centres that once operated in Bangladesh, only 65 remain active today. The range of medicines has also shrunk—from about 450 types to just 120 currently in production."

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"There was a time when we

needed 20-30 different types of trees

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these trees remain."

Their population has now dwindled to a meagre 100 to 125, according to local estimates. Chitta Ranjan Dash laments the matter: "The number of monkeys has declined sharply in recent years, with no signs of recovery. We frequently hear of their deaths—caused by electrocution, disease, or falls from

rooftops. Our labourers collect the dead bodies, and at times the municipal authorities have taken them away."

Somit Dash says, "The monkeys around here are not in Sadhana's care. What we provide for the monkeys is voluntary work."

Asim Mallik, a wildlife inspector from the Forestry Department of Bangladesh, told The Daily Star that most of their work involves rescue missions and treating injured animals. "We have worked on monkeys in that area before. After rescuing an injured monkey, we took it to Mirpur Animal Hospital for treatment and later released it in the wild. And in the case of dead animals, we take a sample from them and then bury them," he explained.

A local resident explained that with food sources dwindling, clashes between people and monkeys have become more frequent. The animals now steal food and even clothes from houses, and many windows in the area have been reinforced with steel bars to keep them out. Since Covid, residents have also reduced feeding, leaving the monkeys even more vulnerable.

According to Sohag Mohajon, president of the Dhaka Youth Club International, his organisation tries to feed the monkeys at least once a year, usually in winter when survival is hardest, as a gesture to ensure they are not forgotten. In 2021, the group submitted a memorandum to Dhaka City Corporation requesting food support, but the official feeding programme, he noted, appears to have been inactive for the past two years.

Sadhana Aushadhalaya itself is now overseen from afar by Nila Ghosh, the founder's granddaughter, who lives in Kolkata and visits only briefly. Also, the export business has ceased, not for lack of demand, but because the transportation process has become too costly and time-consuming.

The story of Sadhana's monkeys is not merely about a dwindling troop of animals, but about memory, compassion, and survival. For over a century they have lived alongside a factory that symbolised both scientific pursuit and human kindness. Their decline is a reminder of what happens when we neglect the fragile balance between people and nature. If they vanish, it will not only mark the end of a community of monkeys but also the loss of a living fragment of Dhaka's heritage.

Ystiaque Ahmed works at The Daily Star.



At Sadhana Aushadhalaya in Old Dhaka, a mother monkey carries her baby while high-voltage wires loom dangerously overhead. Many monkeys have fallen victim to electrocution in this hazardous setting.

PHOTO: ORPON H KHAN

profound courage. During the 1964 riots, Ghosh sheltered Hindus from the neighbourhood in the factory of Sadhana Aushadhalaya. Seven years

later, during the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, Jogesh Chandra Ghosh was tragically killed by the Pakistani junta for sheltering freedom fighters,

and most of the company's assets were looted. This severely hampered Sadhana's operations and triggered its gradual decline. After the war, his son, Dr Naresh Chandra Ghosh, continued the company's legacy of providing natural remedies.

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Where safety NEVER REACHES

Vulnerabilities of women in Dhaka's low-income communities



non-consensual

photography,

groping, and rape are

disturbingly common,

whether in public spaces,

at work, or even within their

own homes.

Lingering impact of poor sanitation

In a dimly lit alleyway in Dhaka North, 14-year-old Sultana was going to the toilet when a man suddenly embraced her from behind.

A witness misconstrued the situation, and

within days, rumours spread. Her family,

already marginalised, was evicted, cast out

by the weight of shame and societal stigma.

This is not an isolated incident.

"In slums, fetching water or bathing often

happens in open, insecure areas. Shared

toilets are dominated by men, poorly lit, and

lack locks," says Bulbul Bala, Programme

Lead at WaterAid Bangladesh.

Morning routines often see women and

children queuing behind male elders for

limited facilities, delaying school or work.

Menstrual hygiene is another challenge

jeopardising women's health and dignity.

According to WaterAid Bangladesh's

Gender Assessment under the WASH for

Urban Poor Project – Phase II, 9% of women

Our Forgotten Public Spaces WHO STOLE DHAKA'S REAL WEALTH?



The true capital of our capital city: A vision for inclusive public space. Concept plan by Bengal Institute.

We spend billions on expressways and megaprojects that look impressive in photographs, while overlooking something far more valuable: public spaces. They are the true capital of this capital city, yet we treat them as if they do not matter at all—or perhaps we have forgotten that they ever could.

ARFAR RAZI

Walk through Dhaka at any time—depending on the neighbourhood, there is always something remarkable to witness. People gather wherever they can find shared space—on traffic islands, building steps, and sidewalk corners. They transform street nodes into makeshift community centres, and tea stalls into neighbourhood gatherings.

City authorities may ignore public space, but residents do not. People create public life wherever they can. Street vendors, food vendors, and tea stalls—everywhere, people are reclaiming their spaces, transforming them into street markets and food courts. This is not chaos—it is what urbanist Jane Jacobs recognised as the 'sidewalk ballet', the spontaneous coordination that makes cities work.

This is not urban disorder, though that is how it is often perceived. These informal space-making practices are evidence of our most fundamental urban need, one that formal planning has somehow forgotten to address.

We spend billions on expressways and megaprojects that look impressive

Public space critic Matthew Carmona's work on contemporary public space identifies this as part of a broader debate between those who see public spaces as "overmanaged" (commodified, homogenised, controlled) and those who see them as "undermanaged" (neglected, poorly designed, insecure). Both perspectives miss what is actually happening. Dhaka's informal spaces are successful examples of community self-organisation that formal planning consistently fails to understand or adapt to. Consider how the community under Dhaka's Tejgaon Nabisco Flyover has autonomously organised socio-economic activities spanning a full kilometre, or how Karail's 200,000 residents have self-organised utilities and services over four decades.

What the streets already know

Assessing the "publicness" of urban spaces through their physical configuration and animation qualities, our research found something obvious yet overlooked. Even a traffic-dominated street on a service road named Bir Uttam Aminul Haque Sarak in Banani, which scored only 5.5 out of 10 on 'comfort' measures, was consistently described by

space advocates, claiming they commit "epistemic violence" by imposing Western models on the local context. This accusation treats imagination itself as suspect, as if envisioning better public spaces automatically means copying the West. But the demand for public space comes from Dhaka's streets, not Western textbooks. It is emerging organically from our streets, our riverbanks, our terminals, and our lakefronts. When someone challenges a footpath monopoliser (particularly motorbikers on footpaths) with "G Bdly Ucv Zwkt Zviev &ci?" ("Does this footpath belong to your father?"), they are asserting something essential: certain spaces must remain common because they constitute the very possibility of collective life.

What we lack is not just imagination but political courage. Policymakers focus on piecemeal projects rather than bold decisions for the greater community. Investing in public space does not seem to be considered "sexy". Can we actually recall any moment when investors were excited about funding a public space, or agencies gave it real attention—except

least partially. We need more research to identify such roads that could be converted into common spaces—to stroll, walk, explore, and discover.

This could include evening streets (closed to traffic during certain hours), living streets (permanently prioritising pedestrians), and shared streets (removing the separation between vehicular and pedestrian areas). Although Dhaka's streets are predominantly 'shared streets', instead of regularising pedestrian movement, vehicular movement and the use of horns should be policed. Most ambitiously, a connecting city-wide network of public space systems should be introduced to link selected streets, parks, and pavements—from Old Dhaka to Dhanmondi, from Dhanmondi to Mohakhali-Banani-Gulshan, and from Gulshan to Badda Khilkhel Uttara.

However, what we lack on the streets is age diversity. It is not always necessary to provide seating on every street, but seating remains an important element. A zone could be purely for passing through, like the Gulshan-Badda link road, while

The true meaning of capital

We treat land as a commodity, not a community resource. But what if we remembered that cities also have use value—the capacity to generate encounter, creativity, and community?

French philosopher and socialist Henri Lefebvre explained this distinction. He wrote about cities as "oeuvre"—works of art created for human flourishing rather than mere products for exchange. This is precisely what quality public spaces enable: they become canvases for collective creativity. People gather to make music, paint, perform, celebrate—transforming ordinary spaces into living artworks.

Even in Dhaka's most constrained conditions, we see this creative impulse wherever people can claim space—from the walls of Dhaka University transformed into "vibrant canvases that convey messages of understanding, harmony, and freedom of expression," to the community-organised cultural events where street art, music, and performance create temporary stages for



The commons should be a welcoming and vibrant place. Concept plan for a new public space by Bengal Institute.

for Sir Patrick Geddes's advocacy and planning of Dhaka's Ramna Park in the 1920s? Does our city authority now consider this a capital investment?

The violence of everyday spatial life

The absence of quality public space creates daily violence that we have somehow normalised. Women die from falling construction debris while walking on pavements. People fall through open manholes during rain. Families are electrocuted to death on waterlogged streets when electrical wires fall into floodwater. Students are killed by garbage trucks while crossing roads because there are no safe pedestrian crossings. How many go unreported?

This is not just about accidents. It is about what happens to a society when people cannot safely gather, when children cannot play freely, when the elderly cannot walk peacefully.

Some basic questions reveal our spatial poverty: can you imagine reading a book beside a road in Dhaka, sitting? Can your elderly parents have a peaceful conversation while walking on our pavements, over the constant honking? Where do we take our children to show them the sky, to let them explore nature—even within their minds—in some indoor, fancy establishments? How long can anyone have peace of mind while walking through our streets?

We have created a paradox: those fancy tiles on our sidewalks—made with imported materials that break easily and become slippery—are often less walkable than the street itself. We regulate pedestrian movement instead of traffic movement, when people are naturally fluid and organic, growing spontaneously and moving organically. Cars are the rigid, destructive force that requires control—yet somehow we have reversed this logic entirely.

How we could conceive public space differently

Planning documents should start with public space, not end with it. Instead of treating it as 'undermanaged' residual space—what is left after roads, buildings, and utilities are accounted for—or 'overmanaged' with active and excessive surveillance systems—what if public space requirements became the foundation around which everything was organised?

While many assume that Dhaka's population density makes creating 'space for the public' impossible, we should challenge this assumption. We have numerous streets—main roads, service roads, and residential roads—that could be put to use, if not fully, then at

other streets host night gatherings—street food and kebab stalls, for instance—from Mohammadpur's haleem and kebab evenings on Salimullah Road to Khilgaon's 1.85-kilometre food street on Shaheed Baki Road, Uttara Sector 3's Wednesday street vendor markets, and Rampura's tea shop gatherings around the Bangladesh Television headquarters. We should think of providing more seating where it makes sense. The places that people are continuously reclaiming need to be identified and documented. The first task should be to create an inventory.

The city-wide network could help decentralise the population from Dhaka as well. If bike lanes are incorporated into this network, people could use rented bikes and then public transport to commute from home to the workplace. On a leverage, it could create alternative mobility networks that reduce pressure on our failing transportation system.

Ensuring maintenance and inclusivity

The requirements are basic: regular cleaning where people gather. Basic seating where communities have claimed space. Toilets and drinking water—so fundamental that their absence becomes exclusion. Lighting for evening conversations, shading for afternoon gatherings. But real inclusivity means understanding what keeps different groups away. In our research, the same corner that welcomed young men felt threatening to women after dark, and the same tea stall that hosted vibrant gatherings excluded families because of traffic chaos. Any public space strategy must also ensure the inclusion of all people regardless of class, gender, religion, or age.

This requires understanding what urban designers Varna and Tiesdell call the "thresholds and gateways" that either welcome or exclude different groups. It means designing for "inclusiveness"—spaces that truly enhance diversity and "attract users across different ages, abilities, and socio-economic statuses." Our research shows that genuinely inclusive spaces do not just serve more people—they create the social mixing that makes urban life vibrant and democratic.

Most importantly, we could trust communities to manage their own spaces rather than imposing external visions of order. The spaces with the highest levels of genuine "publicness" are invariably those where local people have real agency over how space gets used and maintained.

collective creativity. This creative energy is the true capital of any city—the human creativity, social bonds, and cultural vitality that no amount of infrastructure investment can purchase.

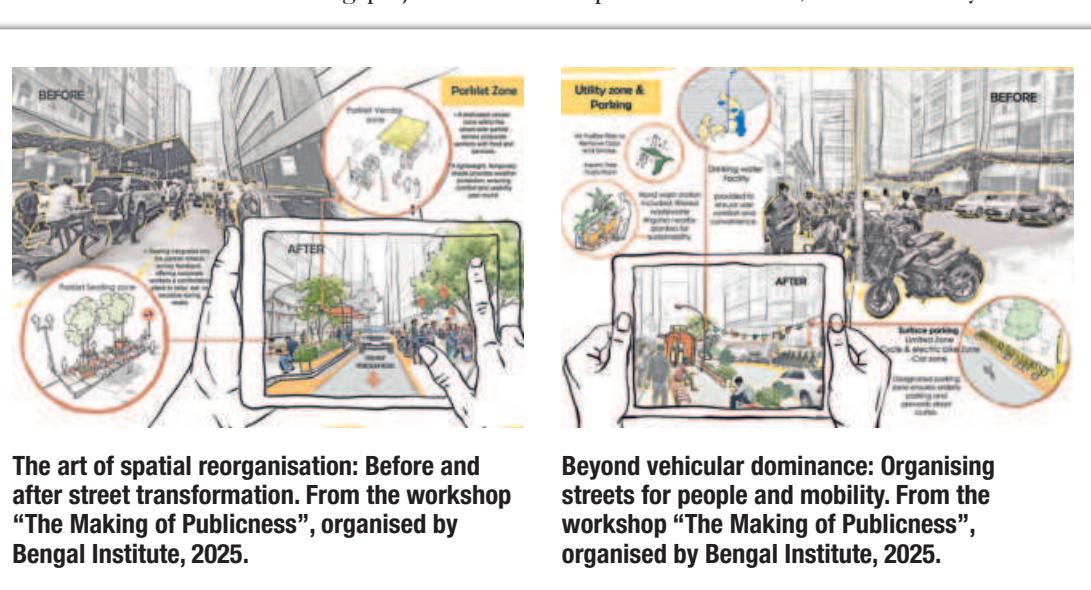
What is remarkable is how public spaces solve problems we did not realise we were addressing. That tree-lined gathering spot? It is cooling the neighbourhood by degrees. That community space in an abandoned lot? It is absorbing floodwater during monsoons—if we can design it sensitively. These spaces work multiple jobs—providing ecosystem services while building community, improving public health while strengthening social trust—creating numerous "positive externalities," as economists term them. They make neighbourhoods resilient during crises (and we have many crises).

Breathing room for democracy

Sometimes Dhaka feels remarkably close to what Jane Jacobs envisioned—a city where density, diversity, and organic community create extraordinary urban vitality. What is missing is not the human energy or social creativity (we have that in abundance). It is the political courage to protect and enhance the spaces where this energy can flourish. Our agencies should inspire more private investment in public spaces—a tax rebate on such investment could be considered, and such private investment should be recognised as a form of corporate social responsibility. More critically, we are still far behind in including children, women, and the elderly in our commons. We need spaces where the mixing of differences creates the foundation for democratic life.

Although Dhaka residents are already reclaiming every available inch of common ground, quality remains an issue—specifically, cleanliness, prioritising pedestrians over vehicles, seating, and shading. The question is whether we will have the wisdom to listen to what our streets are already teaching us about the true meaning of urban capital. The commons are not a luxury we cannot afford—they are the foundation of everything we might become (if we choose to become it).

Arfar Razi, a planner, geographer, and Fulbright Scholar, coordinates the Academic Programme at Bengal Institute for Architecture, Landscapes and Settlements. Several analyses and visual materials presented here were collectively developed during "The Making of Publicness" workshop, organised by Bengal Institute with participation from diverse contributors.



The art of spatial reorganisation: Before and after street transformation. From the workshop "The Making of Publicness", organised by Bengal Institute, 2025.

in photographs, while overlooking something far more valuable: public spaces. They are the true capital of this capital city, yet we treat them as if they do not matter at all—or perhaps we have forgotten that they ever could.

Who is to blame for this forgetting? Is it the pressure of rapid building, or have we actually lost our way with being public?

How the ability to see value is lost

We do not just lack public spaces—we have forgotten why they matter. In a recent workshop I conducted with the Bengal Institute for Architecture, Landscapes and Settlements, participants were asked about their favourite public spaces. Almost everyone described a gated and heavily policed park. When I asked if walkable streets are as basic a right as food, education, or healthcare—most participants looked confused.

This shows how our spatial imagination has been shaped. Pointing to "an old classist perspective," Professor Kazi Khaleed Ashraf notes that many middle class residents avoid anything public, associating it with chaos and disorder. The middle and upper classes, he argues, "generally avoid anything associated with the public, be it people or places." Many have internalised the idea that public space equals disorder, that safety requires exclusion, and that quality demands control.

users as "vibrant" and "welcoming."

People tolerate significant discomfort and poor infrastructure for the sake of good community. When assessing the "experiential qualities" that matter to users—comfort, inclusiveness, vitality, image, and likeability—these informal spaces often scored surprisingly high on animation and social engagement, even when their physical infrastructure failed basic comfort standards. We see a street corner, or even an entire street, transform into a place where strangers can become neighbours.

In contrast, our second study site—the Gulshan-Badda link road, adjacent to Gulshan Lake—preserved natural elements while remaining publicly accessible, and scored 8.6 out of 10 on measures of genuine "publicness," even though it is primarily a "passing through" zone for office goers. The difference was not in the amount of policing or control, but in whether the space could accommodate what communities actually needed: opportunities for both passive engagement (sitting, watching, being present) and active engagement (conversation, social interaction, community building).

Nobody talks about this anymore

What is troubling is that we discuss community development endlessly but rarely mention its foundation: shared space where communities can actually live. Sometimes critics dismiss public

aspects of public space as "trivial" or "superficial."

Factories slash carbon in rooftop solar push



Industries are gradually turning rooftops into miniature power plants. Those who were wary even two years ago are now installing vast solar panels on factory rooftops on their own.

MD ASADUZ ZAMAN

The world's energy landscape is at a tipping point. Environmental necessities, economic opportunities, and geopolitics are forcing a shift towards renewables. For a growing export-dependent and climate-vulnerable economy like Bangladesh, the stakes are high.

And industries are moving. They are gradually turning rooftops into miniature power plants. Those who were wary even two years ago are now installing vast solar panels on factory rooftops on their own.

The spread is now visible in export-processing zones, pharmaceutical complexes, and garment clusters. Youngone Corporation, a Korean conglomerate, was one of the earliest movers. In 2021, it built Bangladesh's largest rooftop solar plant in the Korean Export Processing Zone in Chattogram.

The project began with 16 megawatt-peak (MWp) and has since grown to 37 MWp, producing 120 to 140 megawatt-hours daily. For context, one MWp of solar can typically meet the daytime electricity needs of around 300-400 households.

"Solar meets a large share of our energy demand. Our immediate focus is to expand capacity further, targeting 50 MWp," said Md Shahjahan, managing director of the zone.

He estimates the project has already cut 95,760 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions.

PHOTOS:
HA-MEEM GROUP,
KOREAN EPZ

expand capacity to 6.6 MWp.

Ha Meem Group, one of the largest diversified Bangladeshi conglomerates, has built 12.2 MWp across its factories, cutting emissions by about 6 percent.

"The company is committed to global sustainability forums and buyer compliance requirements," said Tanul Chakraborty, who heads its energy department.

Ha Meem has pledged to reach net zero by 2050, a goal that will require another 300 MWp. The group is planning a large-scale solar plant in Moulivibazar.

This year, it added a 4.4 MWp system at its Kaliganj industrial park in Gazipur and plans another 15 MWp by mid-2026. "If any factory has available rooftops, especially those with shed buildings, they should adopt solar without hesitation," Chakraborty said.

"This has been very encouraging over the last two years," said Alamgir Morshed, executive director and chief executive officer of the Infrastructure Development Company Limited (Idcol), the state-owned financier for renewables.

According to him, solar has emerged as a proven way to cut costs. Factories pay Tk 10-12 per kilowatt-hour (kWh) of grid electricity -- the amount needed to run an air conditioner for 40 minutes. Rooftop solar delivers power at nearly half that rate. "The economic benefit of rooftop solar is now clear for industries."

Technological concerns had also largely faded. "Solar is not complicated, it is a good option for entrepreneurs, especially exporters.

GLOBAL BUYERS ENCOURAGE GREEN POWER

Today, global brands are binding their suppliers to climate commitments. Most top apparel companies have signed onto the UN's Science Based Targets initiative, which requires measurable reductions in emissions.

American Eagle now demands that at least 10 percent of the electricity used by its tier-one and tier-two suppliers come from renewables. Levi Strauss & Co and GAP have pledged 42 percent emission cuts by 2030.

Meanwhile, leading Belgian apparel brand Stanley/Stella outlined its goal to cut Scope 3 carbon emissions, indirect greenhouse gas emissions that occur in a company's value chain, by 30 percent by 2030.

At a meeting with the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) on Thursday, it praised Bangladesh's progress in expanding renewable energy and stressed closer cooperation with local suppliers to adopt greener technologies.

To this regard, Ha-Meem Group's Chakraborty said compliance is no longer optional for factories in Bangladesh.

"Without evidence of renewable sourcing, contracts are at risk. We are now required to submit a plan to buyers outlining how we will reduce emissions year by year," he said.

The risk of the end of subsidies



the economic benefits and moved ahead.

He added, "We have also seen new merchandise power purchase agreements, such as one signed between Pran RFL Group and H&M."

"This is encouraging, as it opens new opportunities for private-sector contracts. Those unable to set up plants themselves can still benefit through the grid using such agreements, creating fresh possibilities."

Authorities do not have any separate data on rooftop solar installed by factories.

But the Sustainable and Renewable Energy Development Authority (Sreda), Bangladesh, estimates that 3,909 rooftop solar panel units are producing around 190 MWp of electricity under the net metering system, covering offices, factories, and households.

The amount is meagre given the renewable energy generation potential from rooftop solar and the government's target.

The interim government has launched a National Rooftop Solar Programme, mandating installations on public buildings and targeting 3,000 megawatt-peak by December 2025.

In the longer term, it promises 30 percent renewable energy by 2040. To meet this plan, solar capacity would need to increase twelvefold in six months.

Experts say the goal is too ambitious. Past targets of generating five percent of total energy needs through renewables by 2015 and 10 percent by 2020 were

missed.

Industry stakeholders said addressing the challenges to rooftop solar would help meet the target better.

CHALLENGES ARE MANY

Financing remains a central hurdle. Solar requires a high upfront investment, and loans from commercial banks are short-term and costly.

"Industries moving to rooftop or floating solar need subsidies and affordable financing," Idcol's Khan said. "Investors should be offered very low-interest loans, with the government covering the interest component."

The net metering system, which allows factories to sell excess electricity back to the grid, often takes months of paperwork and multiple approvals. In export-processing zones, rooftop solar is prohibited altogether since zone authorities profit from reselling grid electricity to tenants.

While technology has advanced, it is still not optimal. When the grid is unstable, factories cannot always feed surplus electricity back. Storage solutions, such as batteries, remain too costly.

Mostafa Al Mahmud, president of the Bangladesh Sustainable and Renewable Energy Association, said that while many industries have installed solar systems, without proper back-feed into the grid, a lot of electricity goes to waste whenever the national grid is down.

"Major global buyers' push for cutting carbon emissions is driving adoption in the garment industry. But as a nation, our dependence on imported fuels and subsidies is putting enormous pressure on the economy. Renewables are the rational way forward."

Renata PLC, one of the country's leading pharmaceutical firms, has installed 5.6 MWp, reducing carbon emissions by 3.5 million kilogrammes annually and meeting 10 percent of its total power consumption.

"Our primary reason is to protect our environment by reducing carbon emissions," said Razib Hasan, the company's general manager of the Project Management Division.

"Besides, solar power makes us more energy independent and less vulnerable to load shedding, while proving economical over its twenty-year lifecycle," he said.

According to Hasan, Renata plans to

and customers now trust it," Morshed said.

Md Enamul Karim Pavel, Idcol's head of renewable energy, reported that in the past eight months, more than 30 companies had expressed interest in rooftop installations. "So far, Idcol has financed 165 megawatt-peak across 52 factories."

The state-owned financial institution estimates that Bangladesh has the potential to generate 4,000 MWp of electricity by installing rooftop solar panels on ready-made garment (RMG), textile, and other industrial buildings.

The use of green electricity to meet

part of the energy requirement is on energy in the coming years is also driving decisions. Once subsidies on electricity are withdrawn, prices are likely to rise sharply.

"Without subsidies, industries could end up paying Tk 20 per kWh for grid electricity. That could trigger deindustrialisation overnight. Renewable energy is the only viable path for industrial competitiveness," warned M Zakir Hossain Khan, chief executive officer of Change Initiative, a research think tank.

Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), said even without major policy support, businesses saw

Gas reserves are dwindling fast. According to Petrobangla, recoverable reserves now stand at about 8.5 trillion cubic feet. At the current extraction rate, this reserve will last for about eleven more years, though experts say the realistic figure is closer to eight.

Duties on solar equipment remain high, and small-scale incentives are absent.

"Take the example of lithium iron phosphate batteries. The government reduced some duties on them, but not in a meaningful way. The main components of lithium-ion systems, lithium cells, pack materials, and battery management systems, have seen no duty reductions," said Mahmud.

Although solar panels are supposed to enjoy lower duties, buyers still face 14 to 28 percent in advance income tax and other charges. "This is contradictory. The government provides large subsidies to the energy sector, but has not waived duties on renewable energy equipment."

"No project succeeds without incentives. Installing a one-kilowatt solar system costs Tk 40,000 to Tk 50,000. But no such measure exists," he added.

Ashraful Alam, a member of Sreda's renewable wing, said the main reason is that rooftop solar on factories has been voluntary as of now.

"People were not forced to do it. They did it if they saw profit. Many installed it, many did not. A lot of it was off-grid, mainly solar home systems in villages. These do not go into the grid; they are purely off-grid."