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# Hope for peace in Gaza

## Joy, celebrations as Israel, Hamas sign first phase of Trump's peace plan; doubts remain over key issues

AGENCIES

Israel and Hamas yesterday signed an agreement to cease fire and free Israeli hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners, in the first phase of US President Donald Trump's initiative to end the war in Gaza.

Israelis and Palestinians alike rejoiced after the deal was announced, the biggest step yet to end two years of war in which over 67,000 Palestinians have been killed, and return the last hostages seized by Hamas in the deadly attacks that started it.

The agreement in Egypt follows a 20-point peace plan for Gaza announced last month by US President Donald Trump. Officials on both sides



Palestinian children celebrate at a camp for displaced people in Nuseirat in the central Gaza Strip yesterday, following news of a new Gaza ceasefire deal.

PHOTO: AFP

confirmed they had signed the deal following indirect talks in the Egyptian beach resort of Sharm el-Sheikh.

Under the deal, fighting will cease, Israel will partially withdraw from Gaza, and Hamas will free all remaining hostages it captured in the attack that precipitated the war, in exchange for hundreds of prisoners held by Israel.

Fleets of trucks carrying food and medical aid would be allowed to surge into Gaza to relieve civilians, hundreds of thousands of whom have been sheltering in tents after Israeli forces destroyed their homes and razed entire cities to dust.

Much could still go wrong. Even after the deal was signed, a Palestinian source said the list of Palestinians to be freed had yet to be finalised. The group

is seeking freedom for some of the most prominent Palestinian convicts held in Israeli jails, as well as hundreds of people detained during Israel's assault.

Further steps in Trump's 20-point plan have yet to be discussed by the sides, including how the shattered Gaza Strip is to be ruled when the fighting ends, and the ultimate fate of Hamas, which has so far rejected Israel's demands that it disarm.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said the ceasefire would take effect once the agreement is ratified by his government, which would convene in full after a meeting of his smaller security cabinet later yesterday.

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Israel says ceasefire to take effect only after cabinet approval

Trump eyes ME trip, says hostages to be freed by Tuesday

Disarmament of Hamas to be part of the second phase of talks

Hamas rejects Trump's 'Board of Peace' for Gaza

Israel refuses to release key Palestinian prisoner

# SHIELDING PERSONAL DATA Govt brings big tech under local courts' purview

MAHMUDUL HASAN and BAHARAM KHAN

The Advisory Council yesterday approved the Personal Data Protection Ordinance, 2025, making social media platforms and foreign and local tech companies answerable to the courts of Bangladesh regarding the handling of restricted personal data and confidential personal data of Bangladeshi citizens.

"In an attempt to resolve complaints related to a host of issues from unauthorised data processing to data breaches, we have brought all platforms, software or hardware companies, and data fiduciaries -- who process and are responsible for managing and safeguarding user data -- under the jurisdiction of Bangladesh's courts," said Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, special assistant to the chief adviser for telecom and ICT, at a press briefing at the Foreign Service Academy in Dhaka.

"In other words, this law has established a legal... SEE PAGE 5 COL 6

# All DSA cases, convictions to be thrown out Govt okays changes to ordinance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is introducing an amendment to the Cyber Security Ordinance 2025 that will grant immediate reprieve to those accused or convicted under certain sections of the now defunct Digital Security Act (DSA).

The Cyber Security Ordinance was drafted to replace the Awami League-era draconian Cyber Security Act and DSA, both of which have been scrapped.

The proposal to amend the ordinance was approved at the advisory council meeting yesterday.

The amendment states that all cases or investigations related to offences under sections 21, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29,

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## SIGNING JULY CHARTER

# Parties to decide only after seeing implementation plan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Major political parties yesterday said they would decide whether to sign the July Charter only after reviewing the National Consensus Commission's recommendations for the government on how to implement the charter.

Their reactions came hours after the commission announced that the signing ceremony for the charter will be held on October 15 at the South Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad in the presence of Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, who also heads the commission.

The announcement followed a series of dialogues that ended without agreement on the implementation process.

While the commission said consensus was

reached on holding a referendum to ensure public endorsement of the charter, the parties remained divided over its timing.

The BNP said the referendum should be held on the same day as the next national election in February 2026, arguing that holding it earlier would be "impractical, costly, and could delay the polls".

The Jamaat-e-Islami and the National Citizen Party insisted the referendum must take place before the election, with Jamaat saying this would give the charter "strong legitimacy", and NCP warning that holding it on polling day would "make it lose importance".

A commission press release said the date for signing was finalised at a meeting yesterday.

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# Shahidul Alam, others taken to Israeli prison

STAR REPORT

Acclaimed Bangladeshi photographer Shahidul Alam, along with more than 140



journalists, medics, and human rights activists, was taken to Ketzot Prison yesterday following their detention by Israeli forces.

The group was aboard an aid flotilla that was intercepted on Wednesday in international waters approximately 120 nautical miles off the coast of Gaza.

Drik, the independent media organisation founded by Shahidul in Dhaka, confirmed the development in a statement posted on its verified Facebook page yesterday afternoon.

Informed by the Freedom Flotilla Coalition (FFC) and Adalah (The Legal Centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel), Drik learnt that Shahidul, along with all journalists, health workers,

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

# 'Anti-terror law being abused for repression'

## HRW urges govt to focus on polls instead

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Human Rights Watch has said Bangladesh's interim government is "increasingly using the recently amended counterterrorism law to arrest alleged supporters of the deposed Awami League government".

The United Nations human rights team in Bangladesh should immediately seek the release of those arbitrarily detained and encourage the authorities to uphold rights and prosecute all those who use unlawful political violence, said the global rights body.

The interim government took office in August 2024 after former prime minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government was toppled following weeks of protests in which 1,400 people were killed, the rights body said in a statement on Wednesday.

On May 12, 2025, the interim government ordered a ban on the Awami League's political activities, using new authority under amendments to the Anti-Terrorism Act, it said. The ban includes prohibitions on meetings, publications, and online speech supporting the party and is being used to "arrest Awami League members and peaceful activists".

"The interim government should not be engaging in the same... SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

237 LIVES LOST TO MOB ATTACKS, POLITICAL VIOLENCE: HRSS - PAGE 3

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SHELTECH

# Shapla or no registration

## NCP threatens to decline EC listing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Citizen Party will reject registration if the Election Commission (EC) does not allocate the Shapla as its electoral symbol, said its Chief Coordinator Nasiruddin Patwary yesterday.

"If we are to be registered, it must be with the Shapla symbol. NCP will not be registered without Shapla, and we will not accept any registration without it," he told reporters after a two-hour meeting with Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin.

The NCP will wait until the end of this month for the EC's final decision.

"The EC now faces... SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

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## Bangladesh's gut-healing food among Time's Best Inventions of 2025

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Time magazine yesterday named the MDCF-2, a gut-restoring complementary food for undernourished children developed through a long-standing collaboration between icddr,b and Washington University in St Louis, one of its prestigious Best Inventions of 2025 in the Social Impact category.

This year's list features 300 groundbreaking innovations worldwide.

Microbiota Directed Complementary Food (MDCF-2) is an affordable food formulation that repairs gut microbiomes to treat malnutrition, the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr,b) said in a press release issued last night.

MDCF-2 contains a precise mix of chickpea flour, soybean flour, peanut flour, and green banana. These ingredients were selected for their ability to nourish beneficial gut bacteria that support healthy growth, immune function, and neurodevelopment in malnourished children.

Supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, MDCF-2 has shown promising results in improving growth and immune recovery among undernourished children. Major studies are now underway in India, Pakistan,

Mali, and Tanzania.

The idea originated from discussions between Dr Tahmeed Ahmed, executive director of icddr,b, and Dr Jeffrey Gordon, director of the Edison Family Center for Genome Sciences and Systems Biology at Washington University. The collaboration merged Dr Ahmed's decades of work on malnutrition in Bangladesh with Dr Gordon's pioneering research on the human gut microbiome.

Despite progress in recent decades, undernutrition remains a major threat to child survival and development, contributing to nearly half of all under-five deaths. The global burden continues to worsen due to wars, displacement, and natural disasters, leaving millions of children at risk of stunting and wasting.

"This recognition is deeply encouraging," said Dr Tahmeed. "It shows how science and compassion can come together to solve one of the most persistent global health challenges. MDCF-2 gives us new hope that locally developed, affordable solutions can help millions of undernourished children not only survive but thrive."

"The next step is to get the treatment to larger populations of children where acute malnutrition is rampant," Dr Gordon was quoted as saying.



Six-year-old Alaina Islam lies quietly on a bed at Mugda Medical College Hospital yesterday after being admitted with dengue fever the day before. In the 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, four people died and 781 were hospitalised, while 2,452 patients remained under treatment nationwide.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## Shapla or no registration

FROM PAGE 1

two options -- either cancel symbols like Dhan (paddy), Tara (star), and Sonali Aash (golden fibre) or allocate Shapla. We do not want the symbols of any fraternal political parties to be cancelled."

At the meeting, the NCP leaders sought the EC's explanation for not giving them the Shapla symbol.

The party will continue its fight for the Shapla symbol through democratic means.

"The election will not be halted over the issue of a symbol. But if someone is trying to stop the election by denying us the symbol and our rights, we will not compromise on that right."

Some influence or force may be affecting the EC, or perhaps they are planning a new election-related conspiracy by keeping the issue of the Shapla symbol unresolved, he said.

"This will become clear to the nation within this month, and we will wait until then," he added.

At the meeting, the three member NCP delegation also discussed the issue of voting rights for expatriates.

NCP leader Zahurul Islam Musa, referring to delays in launching the expatriate voter app, said: "Expatriates are eager to vote. We urged the EC to explain why the app launch is being delayed. Such apps typically require trial and error phases, but we are concerned that the EC is heading in a direction where a significant portion of expatriate voters might be deliberately excluded."

The EC informed the NCP delegation that they plan to launch the app within October, he added.

## All DSA cases

FROM PAGE 1

and 31 of the DSA will be cancelled, and no further action can be taken on them. All convictions will be annulled as well.

These sections pertain to offences involving speech and online expression, including defamation, dissemination of false or offensive information, hurting religious sentiments, identity misuse, and digital content considered harmful to the Liberation War, national symbols, or social and communal harmony.

However, the amendment does not mention those facing charges under similar sections of DSA's successor, the Cyber Security Act (CSA), which was repealed by the interim government.

The decisions of yesterday's meeting were announced at a press conference at the Foreign Service Academy by Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, chief adviser's special assistant for information and communication technology affairs; Shafiqul Alam, CA's press secretary; and Shish Hayder Chowdhury, ICT secretary.

Taiyeb said that 95 percent of those accused under the DSA have already been relieved.

Prior to the repeal of the CSA, the law ministry calculated last year that there were 1,340 cases involving speech-related offences. A majority of those, 879, were being tried at cyber tribunals, while 461 were under investigation. Of them, 786 cases were filed under the Digital Security Act and 275 under the Cyber Security Act.

According to data collected by the Centre for Governance Studies, at least 3,208 named and 2,080 unnamed people have been sued under the DSA for online expression between October 2018 and August 2024. Another 372 people have been prosecuted under the CSA.

These figures do not include the cases filed for sexual harassment, blackmail, and fraud.

Of those accused, nearly half were prosecuted for social media posts deemed critical of the government, office holders, or elected representatives.

One in every three of those accused under the DSA and one in every four of those accused under the CSA were journalists.

## Hope for peace in Gaza

FROM PAGE 1

However, Israel said the release of the captives would "bring the end to this war".

US envoy Steve Witkoff said Trump would travel to Egypt next week for an event celebrating the conclusion of the agreement, with Trump himself saying: "I'm going to try and make a trip over... We're working on the timing, the exact timing."

Despite celebrations and a flood of messages from world leaders hailing the deal, numerous issues remain unsettled in the negotiations.

Senior Hamas official Osama Hamdan said the Palestinian Islamist movement rejected the planned transitional authority as proposed in the Trump plan.

"No Palestinian would accept this. All the factions, including the Palestinian Authority, reject this," Hamdan told Qatar-based broadcaster Al Arabiy.

Trump said the issue of Hamas surrendering its weapons would be addressed in the second phase of the peace plan.

"There will be disarming," he told reporters, adding there would also be "pullbacks" by Israeli forces.

A ceasefire was to take hold in devastated Gaza within 24 hours of Netanyahu convening his security

cabinet for a meeting that was scheduled to begin at 1400 GMT, the government said.

Speaking at a cabinet meeting yesterday, Trump said the agreement between Israel and Palestinian militant group had "ended the war in Gaza" and would lead to broader Middle East peace.

"We secured the release of all of the remaining hostages, and they should be released on Monday or Tuesday," Trump told his assembled cabinet secretaries at the White House.

However, Trump said that the bodies of some of the dead hostages would be "hard to find." At least 47 hostages remain in Gaza, including 25 the Israeli military says are dead.

A source within Hamas told AFP the group would exchange 20 living hostages all at the same time for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners as part of the deal's first phase.

The deal also envisions a surge of aid into Gaza, where the UN has declared famine.

The announcement sparked joy in Gaza, much of which has been flattened by bombardment and most of whose residents have been displaced at least once over the past two years.

"Honestly, when I heard the news, I couldn't hold back. Tears of joy

flowed. Two years of bombing, terror, destruction, loss, humiliation, and the constant feeling that we could die at any moment," displaced Palestinian Samer Joudeh told AFP.

In Israel, thousands of people gathered in a Tel Aviv square to celebrate, some holding photos of hostages still in Gaza and waving Israeli and US flags.

Many wore stickers reading: "They're coming back."

Countries around the world welcomed the deal, with UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres saying: "The fighting must stop once and for all."

In a statement yesterday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Bangladesh believes that diplomacy and dialogue are the only means to resolve any conflict and commended all stakeholders for their efforts in facilitating the diplomatic initiative to end the crisis.

"By ending the ongoing war in Gaza, this diplomatic process would pave the way for the realisation of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine," read the statement. Dhaka also said it wants to take part in the post-war peace efforts and the reconstruction process in Gaza.

The deal was thrashed out in indirect negotiations behind closed doors in a conference centre in the Red Sea resort town of Sharm El-Sheikh.

will be another meeting or a signing ceremony that day," Salahuddin said.

Hamidur Rahman Azad, assistant secretary general of Jamaat, said his party participated sincerely in the reform talks.

"Reforms are necessary for the people and the country. Those who refuse to change their stance for the greater good are against reforms," he said.

Asked if Jamaat would sign the charter, he replied, "We are positive about the government and hope it will hold a referendum before the next parliamentary election and implement the necessary reforms beforehand."

Javed Rasin, joint convener of NCP, said his party supports the key reform proposals but will decide on signing after reviewing the commission's implementation plan and its decision on notes of dissent from parties.

## Parties to decide

FROM PAGE 1

The meeting discussed implementation of the charter based on feedback from five rounds of dialogues with political parties and opinions from experts.

The commission said it would finalise the charter and submit it to the government alongside implementation recommendations after analysing the parties views.

Formed in mid-February to build consensus on reforming state institutions, the consensus commission drafted 84 proposals, half involving constitutional reforms.

The final round of dialogue ended in a deadlock on Wednesday.

The commission earlier asked 30 political parties and alliances to send two representatives each for the signing ceremony. Most have already submitted names, and commission sources said major parties, including

BNP, Jamaat and NCP, have responded positively about attending.

Monir Haider, special assistant to the chief adviser, told reporters after yesterday's meeting that the commission is in touch with the parties on their participation and "they are giving positive responses".

Speaking to The Daily Star last night, BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed said it would be appropriate to comment on the matter only after reviewing the recommendations.

He said that before making a decision on the signing, parties are supposed to be informed about what recommendations the commission will send to the interim government on the charter's implementation.

However, the BNP was not informed about the fixing of the date for the signing. "We don't know whether there

## Bangladesh not ready for upper house: CPD

FROM PAGE 12

Instead of improving accountability, the think tank warned, an upper house might deepen political deadlock, intensify power struggles and further centralise authority.

It stressed that "without structural and cultural change, institutional reforms alone cannot guarantee accountability".

To make the current system of parliament functional, CPD proposed appointing opposition MPs as chairs of parliamentary standing committees and ensuring transparency in political funding.

It recommended increasing local government's financial autonomy, expanding women's political participation, and reforming anti-defection laws.

It said the ruling party should have the powers to make key executive and constitutional appointments, but these appointments should be subject to parliamentary scrutiny.

CPD also proposed establishing an independent legislative commission, modelled after the Venice Commission of the European Union, to review draft laws and evaluate enacted legislation. It suggested naming the body the Commission on Democracy, Legislation, Executive, and Parliamentary Affairs.

During the presentation, Moazzem urged the consensus commission to focus on reforms related to the judiciary, local government, electoral system, and political parties for the final list of reforms.

He said reforms must start with the electoral system.

"Ensuring free, fair and transparent polls through an empowered Election Commission is the starting point," he said, adding that parliamentary boycotts and lack of legitimacy stem from "rigged elections".

Political leaders present at the dialogue were sharply divided over the upper house concept.

BNP Organising Secretary Shama Obaid backed bicameralism, calling for "political change and stronger parliamentary accountability".

She said an upper house could make parliament "more transparent, inclusive and balanced", with representatives from civil society, academia, journalism and youth, but clarified that BNP does not support proportional representation.

In contrast, Akhter Hossen, member secretary of the National Citizen Party supported both bicameral parliament and PR in the upper house.

He said the country faces a political crisis because the majority party in parliament can change the constitution without a broader consensus.

"The upper house is a way to create a constitutional check and balance," he said. "If representatives are not chosen proportionally, then the purpose of the upper house will be lost," he added.

He argued that PR would give a voice to even small parties with 1 percent of votes.

Ruhin Hossain Prince, former

## Shahidul Alam, others taken to Israeli prison

FROM PAGE 1

human rights defenders, and crew members aboard the freedom flotilla fleet, was forcibly taken to the Israeli port of Ashdod before being transferred to Ketziot Prison, located in the Negev desert.

The detainees informed Adalah's legal team that they had been subjected to various forms of violence since the seizure of the ships by Israeli forces, according to the Drik statement.

Stating that Palestinians face similar and often more severe forms of violence on a daily basis, Drik noted that approximately 10,000 Palestinians are currently imprisoned by Israel in Ketziot Prison.

Expressing solidarity with all inmates, Drik demanded the immediate release of all Palestinian political prisoners and the unconditional release of all detained Freedom Flotilla activists.

The statement concluded with the declaration, "Palestine will be free."

As part of the FFC, Shahidul's ship, the Conscience, along with eight other smaller vessels, was sailing toward war-ravaged Gaza to challenge Israel's blockade and deliver humanitarian aid to Palestinians in the besieged enclave.

This was the second interception,

## 'Anti-terror law being abused for repression'

FROM PAGE 1

partisan behaviour that Bangladeshis had to endure under Sheikh Hasina, whether it is stuffing the prisons with political opponents or shutting down peaceful dissent," said Meenakshi Ganguly, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch.

"The UN's human rights office has been invited by the government to support the protection of human rights in Bangladesh, and it should monitor developments and urgently intervene to discourage politically motivated arrests," she added.

"Thousands have been arrested under the interim government, many on dubious murder allegations, while scores are being held under the Anti-Terrorism Act. Several have alleged mistreatment in custody, including lack of access to medical care, a chilling reminder of similar allegations under the Sheikh Hasina government," the HRW statement said.

Police detained 16 people, including journalists and academics, on August 28 at a discussion organised by Mancha '71, a platform that celebrates Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan in 1971, HRW said.

At the public meeting, a mob surrounded and heckled the participants, accusing them of being loyal to the Awami League because the party promotes its role in the freedom struggle, it added.

The statement said one of the participants, Monjurul Alam Panna, a journalist, called the police for protection. Instead of arresting the disrupters, the police detained 16 participants in the event, some of them in their 70s and 80s.

Among those arrested are a Dhaka University professor, Sheikh Hafizur Rahman, and Abdul Latif Siddique, a former minister who was later expelled by the Awami League.

after Israel last week stopped about 40 vessels and detained more than 450 activists in an aid convoy, the Global Sumud Flotilla, that was also attempting to deliver supplies to Gaza.

According to the FFC, an international network of pro-Palestinian activist groups, all nine boats in the Thousand Madleens to Gaza campaign -- Abd Elkarim Eid, Alaa Al-Najjar, Anas Al-Sharif, Gaza Sunbird, Leila Khaled, Milad, Soul of My Soul, Umm Saad and Conscience -- were intercepted.

It said Israeli forces "hijacked the humanitarian fleet," adding that the ships were "illegally intercepted", and that a total of 150 unarmed participants, including humanitarians, doctors and journalists from across the world, have been "taken against their will and are being held in unknown conditions".

"The Israeli military has no legal jurisdiction over international waters," it said. "Our flotilla poses no harm."

The ships carried aid worth more than \$110,000 in medicines, respiratory equipment and nutritional supplies intended for Gaza's starving hospitals, it added on its Instagram account.

After initially telling family members and lawyers that they were holding the detainees for their safety, the police arrested them under the anti-terrorism law, HRW said.

Two more people were later arrested in the same case. The police complaint claims that those arrested had incited violence against the interim government, which was denied by witnesses.

"It was a discussion, not even a political event, so how can it be considered terrorism?" a family member of one of those arrested told HRW.

The Anti-Terrorism Act was enacted in 2009 under the Awami League government. Officials said the 2025 amendments were needed to hold Awami League party members accountable for their abuses while in power, and that they were acting on demands from political parties and student organisations.

The statement said the Bangladesh Editors' Council had warned that the amendments to the Anti-Terrorism Act would "curtail people's freedom of expression and limit the wide scope of freedom of the mass media, which is worrying and it would threaten freedom of the press".

Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, however, has denied any restrictions on freedom of expression.

"The government has also been unable to contain conservative Muslim interest groups that have engaged in violence to press their demands, ranging from targeting alleged Awami League supporters to opposing women's rights," HRW said.

"The Bangladeshi government should stop abusing the anti-terrorism law, which is just becoming political repression by another name," Ganguly said. "The interim government should instead focus on creating conditions for safe and participatory elections."

## Tarique stresses fair election to uphold democracy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Acting Chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday said a free and fair election is essential to ensuring the continuity of democracy in the country.



"Democracy is not just about holding elections -- it means guaranteeing freedom and fundamental rights of the country's people," Tarique said in a message marking the "Shaheed Jihad Day".

Nazir Uddin Ahmed Jihad, a Chhatra Dal activist from Ullapara upazila in Sirajganj, was shot dead in Dhaka on October 10, 1990, during the movement against the autocratic rule of HM Ershad.

In his message, the BNP acting chairman urged the nation to uphold the spirit of Jihad's sacrifice to resist any potential domestic and foreign conspiracies.

"We must carry Jihad's ideals in our hearts -- to defeat internal and external plots, safeguard the country's freedom and sovereignty, and restore true democracy," Tarique said.



Motorcycles and rickshaws illegally cross this divider onto the opposite side of the road -- over a zebra crossing, no less. Despite a U-turn being available just 10 metres away, they make this illegal manoeuvre to save less than two minutes, while creating traffic congestion for other vehicles. The photo was taken in the Tejgaon area of the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## We must reach 30% renewable energy by 2030

Says Rizwana

BSS, Dhaka

Environment Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan yesterday stressed the need to achieve the target of generating 30 percent of Bangladesh's energy from renewable sources by 2030.

"We have to achieve the target of having 30 percent renewable energy by 2030," she said at the inaugural ceremony of the Team Europe Initiative-Climate and Energy, held at a city hotel.

The adviser said the government has taken various initiatives to make the installation of solar panels mandatory in government offices, while also reviewing the potential of solar and wind power to meet the target.

She called on the global community to extend greater support to Bangladesh in tackling natural disasters and advancing the country's energy transition.

"We have started the process, but we need technology transfer from European countries and affordable finance," she said.



## Raise immunisation coverage to 95%

Experts urge govt; Typhoid vaccination starts Oct 12

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With immunisation coverage hovering between 80 and 84 percent for over a decade, health experts yesterday urged the government to address manpower shortages and revise the urban immunisation plan to reach the 95 percent target.

They made the call as the country prepares to launch the Typhoid Conjugate Vaccine (TCV) campaign on October 12, aiming to immunise 4.9 crore children aged between nine months and 15 years to reduce deaths from the disease.

Health authorities have urged all eligible children to be registered and vaccinated, stressing that the vaccine is safe, effective, and free of cost.

Online registration for the vaccine began on August 1, and around 1.68 crore children had been registered using their birth certificates as of Wednesday. Many others without birth certificates were registered manually. Registration will remain open throughout the campaign.

The campaign will be conducted in all educational institutions during the first 10 working days between October 12 and 31, followed by the next eight working days at both temporary and permanent vaccination centres until November 13.

At a press conference organised by Unicef Bangladesh and the Shastho Shurokkha Foundation, in association with the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI), at Jatiya Press Club, experts called for urgent measures to raise immunisation coverage.

Prof Nizam Uddin Ahmed, executive director of Shastho Shurokkha Foundation, said the EPI has helped reduce under-five mortality by 81.5 percent, preventing around 94,000 child deaths annually.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



Coverage stuck between 80-84pc for over decade

Campaign to vaccinate 4.9cr children (9 months-15yrs)

1.68cr registered online so far

Campaign to run in schools till Oct 31, then at vaccine centres till Nov 13

## HRSS REPORT ON FIRST 9 MONTHS OF THIS YEAR

# 237 lives lost to mob attacks, political violence

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The human rights situation in Bangladesh remained "alarming" during the first nine months of this year, with at least 107 people killed in political violence and 130 others in mob beatings, according to Human Rights Support Society (HRSS).

"After the fall of autocrat Sheikh Hasina in August 2024, the interim government -- led by Nobel laureate Dr Muhammad Yunus -- assumed power. However, the human rights and law-and-order situation in the country has not improved as expected," the report said.

In its January-September Human Rights Observation Report, HRSS said Bangladesh continues to witness incidents of political violence, mob attacks, and violence against women and children, though enforced disappearances and so-called crossfire killings did not occur during the period.

The report cited the murder of trader Sohag, 39, near the gate of Sir Salimullah Medical College Mitford Hospital, and the rape of an eight-year-old girl in Magura by her sister's father-in-law.

According to HRSS, at least 107 people were killed and 5,579 injured in 692 incidents of political violence across the country in nine months. Most of the clashes were linked to internal feuds within the BNP and its affiliated organisations.

Violence mainly occurred over establishing dominance, political vengeance, rallies, disputes over committee formation, extortion, and occupation of various establishments, it said.

Of those killed, 71 were from BNP, 23 from Awami League, three from Jamaat-e-Islami, one from Students Against Discrimination, and six from the UPDF. The political identities of three others, including one woman, could not be confirmed.

Meanwhile, at least 340 journalists were victims of murder, torture, or harassment in 236 incidents during the nine months. Among them, two journalists were killed, 209 injured, 36

In this period, 663 rape incidents were recorded. Of the victims, 393 were children, the report said.

At least 152 women and girls were gang-raped, 19 rape victims were killed, and nine took their own lives.

Besides, 61 inmates -- including seven AL leaders and activists -- died in prisons during this period.

The report said 28 people died in incidents involving law enforcement agencies, including 10 in custody, eight in clashes or shootings, and four due to torture. Seven others died while fleeing police operations.

HRSS recorded 22 incidents of attacks on religious minorities, which left five injured and resulted in the vandalism of five temples, 37 idols, and 38 homes. It also noted over 50 attacks on religious shrines and mazars, including one in Rajbari where the body of a self-proclaimed pir was exhumed and set on fire.

The report said 23 Bangladeshi nationals were killed, 34 injured, and 56 detained by India's Border Security Force during 61 border incidents. HRSS alleged that 3,264 people were pushed back from India between January and September.

During the same period, 176 incidents of violence against workers were reported, resulting in 74 deaths and 828 injuries.

HRSS said to establish the rule of law and improve democracy and human rights, it is essential to strengthen dialogue among political parties, civil society, journalists, and citizens. "If these issues are not properly addressed, the rights situation will continue to deteriorate," the report warned.

Among them, two journalists were killed, 209 injured, 36



- 1,511 women, girls faced violence
- 340 journo victims of murder, torture
- 22 attacks on religious minorities
- 74 workers killed, 828 hurt in 176 incidents

humiliated, and 54 threatened. Eleven were arrested, and 103 others were accused in 29 cases, it added.

The report mentioned the killings of journalists Asaduzzaman Tuhin in Gazipur and Wahed-uz-Zaman Bulu in Khulna.

HRSS documented 239 incidents of mob violence that left at least 130 people dead and 212 injured.

Between January and September, 1,511 women and girls faced violence.

## Burglars in burqas loot 500-bhori gold from Mouchak mall

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Around 500 bhoris of gold ornaments were reportedly looted in a daring burglary at a jewellery shop inside Fortune Shopping Mall in Dhaka's Mouchak area early yesterday.

The incident took place around 3:00am at Shampa Jewellers, located on the first floor of the mall.

CCTV footage shows two members of a gang, wearing burqas, entering the market, cutting through the shutter lock, and looting the gold ornaments, shop owner Achintyo Kumar Biswas told The Daily Star.

The burglars had covered their faces to avoid identification.

He said the shop had around 400 bhoris of gold ornaments on display and another 100 bhoris kept as mortgaged gold, along with around Tk 40,000 in cash.

"The burglars took everything, including the cash," he said.

"I closed my shop around 9:00pm as usual and went home. Early in the morning, the market's

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security guard called me, saying there was a problem at my shop. When I rushed there, I saw everything was gone," said Achintyo.

The shop owner alleged that someone inside the shopping mall might have been involved in the theft.

"The security guards of the market are definitely involved. Such looting is not possible without inside help," he said.

"I have nothing left of what I earned in the last 20 years. I don't know how I will survive and maintain my family. I want the law enforcers to recover my gold," he said in a choked voice.

Talking to reporters, Tamjid Khan, organising secretary of the shop owners' association of the market, claimed that there was no lack of security measures and that security guards were on duty at the market.

"It is an accident that happened for the first time," he said, adding that they would review CCTV footage to determine what the guards were doing at the time.

Mazharul Islam, assistant commissioner of Ramna Zone, said, "The owner alleged that around 500 bhoris of gold were stolen from the shop, and we are investigating it."

Filing of a case is underway and no one was arrested so far, said Sub-inspector Nasima Akter, duty officer of Ramna Police Station.



On a bright and sunny day, two children of tea workers in Sylhet play with clay toys, twigs, and plastic containers amid the lush green tea leaves, finding joy in small things. The photo was taken in Malnicharra Tea Garden yesterday.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

## DU moves up 200 places in Times Higher Education rankings 2026

DU CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka University has advanced 200 places in the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings 2026, to secure a position in the 801-1,000 band, according to a press release issued by the university's Public Relations Office.

Last year, DU was placed in the 1,001-1,200 band.

The UK-based Times Higher Education, one of the world's most influential higher education publications, released the latest rankings on Wednesday.

According to the DU media release, the university's research environment score improved from 10.3 to 13.3, while its research quality score rose from 67.2 to 76.5. The industry engagement score also jumped from 21.4 to 33.2.

DU scored 17.7 points in teaching and 45 points in international outlook.

The university credited these improvements to the work of a 16-member committee formed to advance global rankings.



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## 'Talk of safe exit at 72 unfortunate' Says adviser Fouzul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Road Transport and Bridges Adviser Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan yesterday said it would be "deeply unfortunate" if he now has to think of a "safe exit" at the age of 72.

"I have never taken any undue advantage of my position, nor have I used my post to help any relative or friend with a business or a job. With my limited ability, I have tried to fulfil my duty to the people," he wrote in a Facebook post yesterday.

"As a teacher, I also declined opportunities for permanent residency in the US and Singapore," he said.

His comments came days after NCP Convener Nahid Islam claimed that many advisers in the interim government have established ties with political parties and are now thinking about their "safe exits".

In his post titled "Adviser's daily note, driver without helmet and safe exit," Fouzul Kabir also described his trip to Brahmanbaria on Wednesday, where he was stuck for hours in a 15km tailback while visiting the Dhaka-Sylhet highway and eventually had to ride a motorcycle to move from there.

"I found that none of the motorcycle riders or passengers had helmets. After searching about 10 bikes, I managed to find only one helmet and wore it myself. After failing to find a helmet for the rider, I took the ride with advice from others," he wrote, adding that he later instructed the police and BRTA to take action against helmetless bikers.

## 4 more die of dengue, 781 get hospitalised

STAR REPORT

At least four dengue patients died while 781 others were hospitalised in the 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), three deaths were reported from areas under Dhaka South City Corporation and one from Dhaka North.

With the new deaths and cases, the total number of deaths from dengue this year rose to 224 while total cases rose to 52,885.

Among the total cases, 50,209 dengue patients have been released so far after treatment. Currently, 2,452 dengue patients are undergoing treatment at different hospitals across the country, 1,625 of whom are from outside Dhaka.



People wade through knee-deep water in Botunia of Khulna's Dacope upazila yesterday, as vast areas remain inundated following the collapse of an embankment on the Dhaki river. *Inset*, the breached section of the embankment near Harisabha Temple in Tiladanga union.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

# Emergency care eludes mental health patients

### Pabna hospital struggles amid staff, medicine shortages

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

Mental health in Bangladesh remains a topic many find difficult to discuss even in 2025, entangled in social stigma and widespread misconceptions.

Issues related to mental health are often viewed through the lens of superstition, leaving patients vulnerable and struggling in silence.

On top of all that, systemic gaps and a lack of proper healthcare support — particularly emergency services — also persist, meaning even those who seek help often struggle to receive timely and adequate treatment.

Take the case of Khadiza Begum, 35, from Pabna's Bhangura upazila. After her divorce, she suffered from mental illness for four years without any medical attention.

Believing she was a victim of "black magic", her family took her to local quacks, which worsened her condition.

She was only recently brought to Pabna Mental Hospital.

"She wasn't treated early because there is no emergency mental healthcare in her area, which led her to become violent," said Dr Masud Rana, a senior psychiatrist at the hospital. "If she doesn't improve, we'll have to admit her."

Doctors, social workers, and patients' relatives say the absence of an emergency response system continues to cripple mental healthcare across the country.

"A vast number of patients cannot get minimum treatment early on. Consequently, their conditions often fail to improve properly," Dr Rana added.

The government plans to upgrade the hospital to 1,000 beds under a proposed project with a research centre and international-standard treatment facilities, which could improve services," Dr Kamal said.

The hospital is also facing an acute shortage of medicines. Only six types of anti-psychotic drugs and one mood stabiliser are currently available, far short of the minimum requirement.

"I brought a patient from Bogura, but we couldn't get the prescribed medicines for free," said Md Hasan, a patient's relative.

Officials report that only six types of anti-psychotic medicines are available for indoor patients — short of the minimum required 10 — and only one mood stabiliser is in stock.

"There has been no supply for the last few months, so we are treating admitted patients with the existing stock," said a hospital official, wishing anonymity.

Hospital Superintendent Dr Ahia Kamal said hospital rules require a



## BNP leader, 6 policemen hurt in clash over land

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

At least eight people, including six policemen, were injured during a clash between two groups at Palpara Bazar in Patuakhali Sadar upazila on Wednesday night.

Among the injured are one sub-inspector, two assistant sub-inspectors, and three constables of Sadar Police Station.

Officer-in-Charge Intiaz Ahmed said land dispute led to the clash. "When we tried to bring the situation under control, some people attacked us. We are investigating the incident..." he added.

Locals said the clash ensued when a group led by Sohail Majhi attacked BNP leader Mofizul with sharp weapons.

On information, police rushed to the spot. However, sensing their presence, the group attacked them with sharp weapons.

Joint forces later conducted an operation, firing blank shots to disperse the attackers and restore order. The injured were taken to Patuakhali Medical College Hospital. Later, Mofizul was referred to Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital in Barishal, while four injured policemen were admitted to Patuakhali Medical College Hospital, police said.

## Raise immunisation coverage

FROM PAGE 3

"There are some challenges for which immunisation coverage has been hovering between 80 and 84 percent over the past 12 years," he said.

He noted that nearly 40 percent of posts in the immunisation programme are vacant, including 43 percent at the EPI headquarters. Delays in approving health programmes have also disrupted vaccine supply, he added.

Riad Mahmud, health manager (immunisation) at Unicef Bangladesh, said a new strategy is needed to address low-coverage areas.

While rural immunisation coverage

stands at 85 percent, it is below 80 percent in urban areas, he said.

The government's own workforce is engaged in rural vaccination, whereas coverage in urban areas mainly depends on NGOs and private hospitals.

He suggested that the government deploy its own manpower in urban areas as well.

EPI Deputy Director Mohammad Shahariar Sajjad said funds have already been allocated for vaccines and the supply is expected within this month, which will help resolve some issues.

Meanwhile, at a separate press conference at the health ministry, Prof

Sayedur Rahman, special assistant to the chief adviser for the health ministry, said the WHO-prequalified typhoid vaccine has been used safely in countries like Nepal and Pakistan.

"The vaccine is completely free, and no one is allowed to charge money. Action will be taken against any violation," he said.

## PRAYER TIMING

OCTOBER 10

Fazr	Juma	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
4:45	12:30	4:15	5:45	7:15

JAMAAT	5:20	1:15	4:30	5:50	7:45
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## DACOPE UPAZILA

# 40hrs on, no repair to breached Dhaki embankment

DIPANKAR ROY, Khulna

More than 40 hours after the collapse of an embankment on the Dhaki river in Khulna's Dacope upazila, authorities have yet to take any step for repairs, while water continues to inundate vast areas, submerging homes, croplands, and fish enclosures.

Locals have been working voluntarily round the clock to repair the breached section, but their efforts have so far failed.

The breach occurred on the night of October 7 near the Harisabha Temple in Tiladanga union. Since then, water from the river has flooded several villages including Botunia, Nishankhali, Uttar Kaminibashia, and Arakhali.

Locals said the Water Development Board's embankment along the 31/1 polders was already in a fragile condition before the collapse. "We repeatedly informed the authorities about the risk, but no effective measures were taken," said Jalal Uddin Gazi, chairman of Tiladanga Union Parishad.

According to residents, WDB had temporarily reinforced the embankment with geo-bags and soil last year, but it could not withstand the strong tidal surge this time. Around 50 metres of the embankment initially gave way, and the breach later widened to more than 200 metres.

"We've been trying to close the breach with bamboo, sandbags, and mud since October 8 morning, but the strong current keeps sweeping everything away," said Sanjay Sardar, a member of Tiladanga Union Parishad.

Over 3,000 bighas of Aman paddy fields have already been submerged, and if the water cannot be stopped soon, the crop damage will be irreversible, he added.

"Around 302 hectares of Aman fields have been inundated so far. The crops have not reached the flowering stage yet and are still standing. If the water can be controlled within a day or two, major damage might be avoided," said Md Nazrul Islam, district agricultural officer in Khulna.

Ashrafal Alam, executive engineer of WDB-2, said, "We are providing materials like sandbags and bamboo, and locals are working voluntarily, but repairing the breach is challenging as the geo-bags placed earlier have been washed away."

"A 500-metre permanent embankment is under construction with JICA funding, and a Tk 2,200 crore project proposal for long-term riverbank protection in the area has been sent to the Planning Commission for approval," he added.

## CAAB issues security directive for airports

### Move follows major cyber incidents in Europe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) has issued a 10-point directive to prevent possible cyber-attacks at the country's airports and ensure uninterrupted air travel.

CAAB issued the instructions following a recent cyber-attack on a provider of check-in and boarding systems that disrupted operations at several major European airports, including London's Heathrow — the continent's busiest — causing flight delays and cancellations.

The disruption was the latest in a series of hacks targeting governments and companies worldwide, affecting sectors ranging from healthcare and defence to retail and automobiles, reports Reuters.

The directive includes using strong passwords, avoiding reuse of passwords across different platforms, and changing them regularly; refraining from clicking on unfamiliar or suspicious emails, links, or attachments (including on platforms such as WhatsApp and Messenger); keeping software, security patches, and antivirus programmes up to date; not using pirated or cracked software; using CAAB's official email address (with the domain caab.gov.bd) for all official communications; keeping regular backups of important data and information; and scanning pen drives before use.

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## FIRST PHASE OF GAZA PEACE DEAL

## Does it mean the end of war?

REUTERS

US President Donald Trump says the deal agreed between Israel and Hamas marks the first steps toward a "strong, durable, and everlasting peace" that will end the two-year-old Gaza war.

Yet the agreement signed after indirect talks in the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, a favoured location for Middle East peace conferences over the decades with a patchy record of success, is only an initial phase involving a ceasefire, a handover of hostages held in Gaza in exchange for Palestinian prisoners inside Israel, and a partial withdrawal of Israel from the enclave.

Plenty of pitfalls remain after negotiators left for later discussions about some of the thornier issues on which previous initiatives have floundered, such as the full extent of an Israeli withdrawal, the disarmament of Hamas, how to guarantee that war will not resume after this phase -- and who could provide such a guarantee.

Not yet. Trump demanded Israel halt its bombing when Hamas first indicated partial acceptance for his 20-point plan on Friday. That has not happened. Scores of Palestinians have been killed since then in airstrikes and shelling, particularly in and around Gaza City, the focus of a recent Israeli offensive.

However, the bombardment has been more sporadic since Trump declared a deal had been secured on Wednesday, prompting celebrations in Israel, where families of hostages were jubilant in Tel Aviv's so-called hostages square, and in Gaza, where people gathered among the ruins even as blasts could be heard.

While this is a partial deal, a notable difference from previous ceasefire arrangements is that there is no deadline for reaching a full deal. It does not set a deadline of a few weeks, after which hostilities could resume if talks falter.

The jury is still out on whether that



makes this deal more durable. There are those among Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's religious nationalist coalition who are already talking of more war. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, a staunch opponent of any concession to Palestinians, has called for Hamas to be destroyed after the hostages are returned.

But on this occasion, Trump has been far more vocal in his determination to hold feet to the fire on both sides, leaving less room for Israel to relaunch its offensive or Hamas to delay, even if past experience counsels caution over too much optimism.

Trump announced his plan standing next to Netanyahu in Washington last week with what seemed a "take-it-or-leave-it" offer for Hamas. Yet when Hamas gave only a partial acceptance, Trump immediately demanded Israel stop bombing. And as the days ticked by in the Sharm el-Sheikh talks, he warned Hamas "all HELL, like no one has ever seen before, will break out" if

it did not sign up.

By stamping his authority, Trump may have gone some way to answering the key question of who will guarantee this deal does not collapse at the next hurdle.

The timeline is emerging but still seems fluid.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said the ceasefire would take effect once the agreement is ratified by his government, which would convene after a security cabinet meeting on Thursday.

An Israeli government spokeswoman said a ceasefire would go into force within 24 hours of the cabinet meeting. After that 24-hour period, the hostages held in Gaza will be freed within 72 hours, she said.

A source briefed on details of the agreement said earlier that Israeli troops would begin pulling back within 24 hours of the deal being signed.

Humanitarian aid to Palestinians

should then start to flow. Calling for full access for humanitarian workers in Gaza, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the United Nations was ready to help and "prepared to move -- now."

Trump's plan also calls for an international stabilisation force, which could start taking shape after a meeting of European ministers and top officials from Arab states in Paris on Thursday. They were also due to discuss issues such as future governance of Gaza, aid, reconstruction and demilitarisation.

Israeli President Isaac Herzog's office said Trump was expected to be in Jerusalem on Sunday.

Both Israel and Hamas have shown a readiness to respond positively to pressure from Trump and others, but each side faces their own political calculations.

For Netanyahu, agreeing to the plan seems based on a calculation he can stay on the right side of the United States, Israel's vital ally, and win over an Israeli public desperate to see an end to the war, while conceding as little as possible to avoid alienating his religious nationalist coalition partners. The 20-point plan, for example, offers a possible pathway, albeit highly conditional, to a Palestinian state although Netanyahu has said that will never happen.

Hamas has dropped its opposition to any deal that was only partial because of the risk of war resuming once hostages were handed over. It has also signed up to a deal calling for demilitarisation, which it had repeatedly rejected.

Under pressure from Arab states and Turkey, alongside Trump, Hamas may have had little choice but to accept. But it may be calculating that Trump's determination is the best guarantee that war will not resume for now, while the talks in Sharm el-Sheikh have put the militant group at the negotiating table to shape the future for Palestinians even though the deal seeks to sideline it.

## Govt brings big tech under local

FROM PAGE 1

obligation for Meta or Facebook to comply with any order of the court."

However, the law has not made data localisation mandatory for foreign platforms.

He said that since the world is moving toward cloud-based data management, the ordinance does not include a data localisation clause. He explained that global tech giants process their data in the cloud, and enforcing localisation would disrupt business operations.

The new law emphasised the principle of informed consent. It mandates that data fiduciaries must obtain clear, specific, and unambiguous consent from individuals before processing their personal data. This consent must be freely given and can be withdrawn at any time.

The law grants citizens rights over their information. These include the right to access their data, the right to correction and erasure, and the right to data portability.

This portability clause will allow individuals to seamlessly transfer their data between service providers. The individuals will have the right to object to automated decision-making.

The ordinance introduces stringent protections for sensitive personal data, a category that includes financial information, health records, genetic and biometric data, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, and official identifiers like national ID and passport numbers. The processing of such data is subject to much stricter conditions.

Special safeguards are also established for children and individuals incapable of giving consent. For anyone under 18, data processing requires the consent of a parent or legal guardian. The law prohibits tracking, profiling, or targeting advertisements at children.

Data fiduciaries and processors must ensure data is processed lawfully, for specified purposes, and is accurate and secure. The law mandates the implementation of appropriate technical and organisational security measures, including encryption, to prevent data breaches.

In the event of a personal data breach, defined as any unauthorised access, disclosure, or loss of data, data fiduciaries are

required to promptly notify the national regulatory authority.

It was also made mandatory to appoint a Chief Data Officer to ensure compliance and act as a point of contact for the regulator.

Violation of data rights of individuals can lead to fines of up to two percent of annual domestic turnover for standard entities and five percent for significant data fiduciaries.

Criminal penalties, including imprisonment of up to seven years and fines, are prescribed for offences like processing data without legal basis, unlawfully sharing sensitive data, or using children's data without proper consent.

The law classifies data into four categories: public, internal, restricted, and confidential, with escalating levels of control.

The transfer of sensitive data, including national ID numbers, biometrics, and genetic data, outside Bangladesh's borders will require explicit permission from the authority.

The ordinance operates under the oversight of a data management authority, established under a separate National Data Governance Act, 2025, which the cabinet also passed yesterday.

The authority will be tasked with ensuring data security and privacy and making different government and private sector systems work together seamlessly -- a concept known as interoperability.

There will also be the establishment of the National Responsible Data Exchange (NRDEX), a secure platform that will enable approved, purpose-based data sharing between different entities.

All government and relevant private organisations will be required to connect their data to this system.

For citizens, the law paves the way for a unified electronic identity (e-ID) system, allowing for secure access to a wide range of digital services using a single digital identity.

The law introduces data security measures, including the adoption of a "zero-trust" security architecture, and defines penalties for violations. Under the law, a high-level National Data Governance Policy Council, to be chaired by the Prime Minister, will provide strategic direction for the new data ecosystem.

## EU chief Von der Leyen survives no-trust motion

AFP, Strasbourg

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen survived two confidence votes Thursday in the European Parliament -- touting "strong support" from the assembly despite the tensions laid bare by the challenge.

The motions of censure against the European Commission president were brought by the hard-left and far-right, which accuse her of a lack of transparency and reject her trade policies.

Neither motion secured the minimum 361 out of 720 votes. But the challenges reflected mounting discontent with von der Leyen's leadership and tested the cohesion of the coalition led by her European People's Party.

Von der Leyen held up the results as evidence of continuing faith in her team, given a wide majority of the assembly had rejected the confidence motions.

"I deeply appreciate the strong support received today," the EU chief wrote on X.



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer speaks with his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi upon his arrival at the Raj Bhavan ahead of their bilateral meeting in Mumbai yesterday. Starmer is on his first visit to India as premier, accompanied by a 125-member delegation, after the two countries signed a trade deal in London in July. Under the accord, India will slash tariffs on imports of British goods such as whisky, cosmetics and medical devices, while Britain will reduce duties on clothing, footwear and food products.

## Women must have equal space in politics

FROM PAGE 12

It also urged at least 33 percent nomination for women, with a gradual rise to 50 percent through reforms to the Representation of the People Order; provision of state funding for women candidates; decentralisation of Members of Parliament's powers; protection of women from physical and online violence during polls; and the introduction of a "No Vote" option in all constituencies.

Former caretaker government adviser and educationist Rashed K Choudhury, who presided over the seminar, said it was unfortunate that even after 55 years of independence, women still had to demand their rightful share in politics.

"Women have contributed to every sector -- from foreign currency earnings to healthcare and education -- yet they remain sidelined in decision-making ... We don't seek charity or tokenism; we seek recognition, respect,

and a dignified place in leadership."

Speaking at the event, Fisheries and Livestock Adviser Farida Akhter called for an end to nomination-based reserved seats. "Reserved seats must come through direct election -- no party selection, no tokenism." She criticised parties for treating these seats as a "bonus" for ruling majorities and urged women leaders to reject such humiliation. "We don't want decorative roles; we want real power," she said, adding that women's organisations should also be eligible for nominations alongside political parties.

Senior Supreme Court Advocate Sara Hossain said women's participation must reflect diversity. "Representation should include women of different professions, faiths, ethnicities, beliefs, abilities, and regions."

She added, "Every political party and leader should pledge that women

will not face discrimination -- not in public life, not in social life, and not within family life."

Sara Hossain noted that the judiciary also lacks adequate representation of women and those who believe in gender equality. "That gap must be addressed."

BNP leader Mahbuba Habiba urged all parties to increase direct nominations of women rather than rely on reserved seats, which she said have had limited impact. While acknowledging their temporary role, she called for mandatory quotas and structural reforms so women can compete equally in general elections.

Jamaat-e-Islami's Foreign Affairs Secretary Khandakar Ayesha Khatun said her party's internal ratio of women members has reached 43 percent, surpassing its initial 33 percent target. "Many women now serve as vice chairpersons, commissioners, and councillors. But future

progress must align with social values and familial harmony."

National Citizen Party Senior Joint Convener Samantha Sharmin said Bangladesh's politics remains dominated by money and muscle, pushing women and marginalised groups to the sidelines. "Without reforming party structures and the electoral system, women cannot gain a real foothold in politics."

NCP leader Tajnuva Jabeen said political parties must take responsibility for empowering women at the grassroots and policymaking levels, starting with the promised 33 percent representation. She warned that entrenched political interests often exclude women to preserve corruption and control.

Student leaders Umama Fatema and Ashrefa Khatun, along with other rights activists and political representatives, were also present at the event.



এসেনসিয়াল ড্রাগস্ কোম্পানী লিমিটেড

৩৯৫-৩৯৭, তেজগাঁও শিল্প এলাকা  
ঢাকা-১২০৮।

## দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি

ইডিসিএল নিম্নোক্ত আইটেমটি প্রকৃত প্রস্তুতকারী/সরবরাহকারীদের (সংশ্লিষ্ট ব্যবসার সহিত জড়িত) নিকট হইতে সীলমোহরকৃত খামে দরপত্র আহ্বান করছেঃ-

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২.৫%	টাকা ১০০০.০০ প্রতি সেট	২১/১০/২০২৫ ইং বেলা ১২-০০ ঘটিকা	২১/১০/২০২৫ ইং বেলা ১২-১৫ ঘটিকা

সকল কার্যবিবসে অফিস চলাকালীন সময়ে উপরোক্ত কার্যালয় হইতে শর্ত ও নিয়মাবলীসহ দরপত্র শিডিউল ক্রয় করা যাইবে।  
উল্লেখ্য যে, যাহাদের ভ্যাট রেজিস্ট্রেশন নাই তাহাদের দরপত্রে অংশগ্রহণ করার প্রয়োজন নাই।

দরপত্র খোলার দিনে কোন দরপত্র শিডিউল বিক্রয় করা হইবে না। কর্তৃপক্ষ যে কোন দরপত্র গ্রহণ বা বাতিল করার ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করেন।

উপ-মহাব্যবস্থাপক, প্রকিউরমেন্ট (চলতি দায়িত্ব)  
পক্ষেঃ ব্যবস্থাপনা পরিচালক।

৫' x ৪

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

## Release detained Gaza flotilla activists

### Govt must take steps to get Shahidul Alam freed from Israeli prison

The waters off the coast of Gaza—already stained by endless conflict—witnessed another disturbing chapter this week with the brazen interception of the Conscience, a vessel carrying humanitarian aid. The detention of renowned Bangladeshi photographer Shahidul Alam, along with more than 140 journalists, doctors, and activists, at Israel's Ketzioz Prison in the Negev Desert is a flagrant blow to the principles of international law and humanitarian action.

Israel's claim of enforcing a "legal naval blockade" in international waters rings hollow when applied to an unarmed civilian flotilla carrying vital medical supplies for Gaza's collapsing hospitals. The seizure has shaken the very notion of a neutral space for aid delivery and free expression. What's concerning is that Israel carried out a similar action last week against the Global Sumud Flotilla, comprising more than 40 vessels and nearly 450 activists, including climate activist Greta Thunberg. While most of the Global Sumud activists have since been deported, six of them, hailing from Norway, Morocco, and Spain, remain detained in Israel, highlighting both the severity and arbitrariness of these actions.

In this context, Bangladesh's diplomatic response must therefore be swift and unequivocal. The fact that Dhaka is having to rely on an unnamed "friendly Middle Eastern country" to secure Alam's release reveals the complex, often uncomfortable geopolitical tightrope that nations walk when confronting the Gaza crisis. The strong domestic reaction in Bangladesh, with widespread demands for Alam's immediate freedom, who left a prerecorded message declaring that he had been "kidnapped by the occupation forces of Israel," underlines the gravity of the situation.

Yet this outrage at sea unfolds against a fragile backdrop of hope on land, with the news that Israel and Hamas have signed off on the first phase of a US led peace plan. According to a Reuters report, Israelis and Palestinians rejoiced after US President Donald Trump announced a ceasefire and hostage deal as part of his initiative to end a war in Gaza that has killed more than 67,000 people and reshaped the Middle East.

Still, euphoria must be tempered by caution. The limited details of the agreement—particularly the lack of clarity on its timing and on a post-war administration for Gaza—leave vast potential for collapse, as has happened with so many peace efforts before. The cessation of fighting is not peace; it is only the precondition for it. Even as the ceasefire plan was underway, Israeli strikes continued overnight and into Thursday morning on three Gaza City suburbs. Witnesses reported lines of smoke rising over Shejaia, Tuffah, and Zeitoun, though there were no immediate reports of casualties.

While we welcome the positive news of a potential ceasefire, it must not eclipse the grim reality of the detentions. The release of all detained activists—particularly Alam and the remaining six from the earlier flotilla—should be treated as a diplomatic priority.

## Time to end medical oxygen crisis

### A robust strategy for oxygen production, distribution essential

The government's decision to declare medical oxygen an essential drug is a commendable move, but it must be seen for what it is: a preliminary gesture, not a solution. The declaration will ring hollow if it does not translate into a tangible, uninterrupted supply of this life-sustaining gas reaching every patient who needs it, from the capital's premier hospitals to the most remote clinics in rural areas.

Severely limited or unreliable oxygen services have long been an issue in Bangladesh, the acute nature of which was exposed during the pandemic. Around 74 lakh people in the country require 84 million normal cubic metres of oxygen annually. However, we don't produce enough medical oxygen. The government therefore must adopt a multi-pronged strategy to ensure a resilient supply chain. It must increase production by expediting the establishment of government-owned medical gas plants so that dependency on private companies and imports can be reduced. It is a waste of resources to keep most of the Pressure Swing Adsorption (PSA) oxygen plants, installed during the pandemic, inactive while the demand remains so high.

Centralised oxygen systems, also known as Vacuum Insulated Evaporators (VIEs), must also be expanded, especially in remote areas, to ensure uninterrupted oxygen flow, which is more efficient and safer than relying on cylinders. Moreover, without investing in human resources and training medical staff properly, this crisis cannot be addressed. This training must extend to all hospitals and clinics across the country.

Investing in expanding our oxygen capacity is not merely a health expenditure; it is a fundamental investment in our nation's well-being and its future. It is essential to recognise medical oxygen as both a citizen right and a national priority, underscoring its critical role in Bangladesh's preparedness for future health emergencies. The pledge to "ensure healthy lives" under SDG-3 cannot be met with policy declarations alone. It must be fulfilled with the steady flow of oxygen to every citizen in need.

The harrowing memories of the pandemic, when thousands of healthcare workers and families experienced the desperation of trying to find oxygen for severely unwell patients and family members, must fuel a relentless drive to build a resilient oxygen ecosystem, from production and storage to distribution and delivery.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY



### Malala wins Nobel Peace Prize

On this day in 2014, Pakistani girls' education activist Malala Yousafzai won the Nobel Peace Prize at the age of 17 and became the youngest-ever Nobel laureate in history.

# Why Upper House PR makes sense in today's political climate



Afia Ibnat  
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AFIA IBNAT

In Bangladesh's context, proportional representation (PR) is viable only for an Upper House (UH) within a bicameral legislature, with the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system retained for Lower House (LH). This would ensure historical continuity, voter-MP linkage, and electoral simplicity. With an Upper House allocated by PR based on a pre-disclosed party list, Bangladesh can create an inclusive oversight body on lawmaking that gives the opposition a tangible stake in parliament. However, this is not a cure-all for our governance woes, but it would pave the way for a much-needed check-and-balance mechanism in parliament.

Bangladesh's political trajectory vividly illustrates FPTP's distortions. Since 1991, small vote differences have produced huge seat gaps: in 2001, BNP won about 41 percent of votes but 193 of 300 seats, while Awami League (AL) won around 40 percent but only 62 seats; in 1991, a near tie (30.81 percent vs 30.08 percent) still gave BNP a 52-seat advantage; and in 2008, a 15-point vote lead resulted in an overwhelming parliamentary supermajority for AL (230 seats versus 30 for BNP). This dominance was later used to amend the constitution unilaterally, which led to the abolition of the non-party caretaker government through the 15th Amendment in 2011—plunging Bangladesh into an era of electoral authoritarianism that lasted until 2024. Time and again, FPTP has magnified the victory of the largest party far beyond its actual support, sidelining both voters and opposition parties.

These skewed outcomes led to political tensions and deadlocks. When pluralities turn into landslides, "losers" feel shut out, and "winners" often govern with little regard for opposition voices, reinforcing zero-sum politics. The stakes under FPTP are so high that even a one-percent vote swing can flip a seat, encouraging desperate measures such as vote rigging, ballot stuffing, intimidation, and other electoral code violations. In this winner-takes-all duopoly, both major parties (Awami League and BNP) resorted to extreme tactics, including nationwide hartals, blockades, or

election boycotts, rather than playing the role of a loyal opposition. FPTP also wasted a large portion of votes and fuelled violence and conflict in an already volatile country.

There are legitimate concerns that prevailing political opportunism could also lead to a UH being co-opted by the majority party. Over the past three decades, we witnessed how co-opted civil and police administrations have undermined neutral arbitration mechanisms of the state. Bangladesh's entrenched patron-client system also makes it difficult to hold free and fair



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

elections, especially with the culture of vote-buying on the eve of polling. Moreover, executive encroachment into the judiciary and legislature has repeatedly thwarted prospects for good governance. Parliament has often reflected the executive's will rather than the people's.

The root of Bangladesh's governance issues lies in the ruling party's capture of state apparatuses owing to weak institutions. This, combined with the lack of institutional avenues for parliamentary grievance redress, forces the opposition to take to the streets frequently. Politics has thus become inseparable from violence and turmoil. To shift politics from agitation to legislation and proper governance, the opposition must have

real influence within parliament. If they feel the "winner" does, or can, not take it all, incentives for extra-parliamentary confrontation—and the disruptions it brings to citizens' lives—will diminish.

Israel's case is often cited as a cautionary tale for PR in Bangladesh, but its instability stems from design choices that are not being proposed here. Israel's Knesset uses a unicameral, single nationwide district with closed-list PR—features that encourage party fragmentation and fragile coalitions. By contrast, the debate here concerns a bicameral model that retains FPTP for the Lower House and introduces PR only for a limited power Upper House with a published party list, no role in money bills or no-confidence motions, and at most a time-limited suspensive veto on specified subjects. That architecture seeks inclusion, balanced voter representation, and legislative scrutiny without making governments hostage to micro-parties.

Israel's coalition volatility is not an indictment of PR itself; it is a warning to design PR carefully—precisely what a PR UH layered over an FPTP LH aims to achieve.

Evaluating counterfactuals, if we use simple arithmetic or the Sainte-Lagué method to project Upper House seats for the 2001 elections, then BNP would have won 44 seats (193 in LH), the AL 43 (62 in LH), Jamaat 5 (17 in LH), and Islami Jatiya Oikya Front 8 (14 in LH)—assuming a 100-seat chamber and a three-percent entry threshold. In this hypothetical scenario, no party holds a majority in the UH. All parties, including BNP and AL, would have UH representation proportionate to their total vote share, putting them on near-equal footing. BNP would likely have

partnered with IJOF to pass bills. Either major party would need allies, creating built-in incentives for negotiation. This avenue for democratic cross-party negotiation has been missing for decades. In 2026, this will be more important than ever before, as it marks the first election after a revolution that fought for democracy.

It goes without saying that an electoral system cannot, by itself, transform a country's governance overnight. But it can certainly aid in fostering greater accountability, fairer representation, and political stability. FPTP has historically amplified Bangladesh's governance weaknesses. A mixed system offers a way forward: it maintains government stability (as laws and budgets depend primarily on the LH) while introducing a check through the UH's review role and veto. That said, it is crucial that this is paired with enforceable guardrails that work in tandem, including an independent Election Commission (EC), an empowered Anti-Corruption Commission, and merit-based, transparent civil service recruitment to keep the administration neutral.

The July Charter's move to repeal Article 70 is similarly pivotal, allowing UH members to deliberate without the fear of automatic party expulsion. In this conception, the UH would operate as a serious revising chamber on vital legislation, including those related to constitution, rights, large procurement, and mega infrastructure. When LH majorities reject UH amendments, they should be required to issue reasoned public explanations. To preserve governability and avoid slow policymaking, not every bill should pass through the UH; its mandate must remain narrow and clearly defined. Party lists should also undergo rigorous EC vetting to ensure the chamber leans technocratic rather than patronage-driven.

The priority now is political stability and accountability so that the country has a chance to flourish. A mixed system gives the opposition a tangible stake in lawmaking and reduces the urge to topple governments from the streets. It is vital that the majority party not enjoy total certainty in parliament, for that undermines democracy itself. We must move beyond strawman arguments rejecting PR for the LH when the proposal concerns only the UH. We have already seen what happens when one party monopolises power, and we cannot afford a repeat of that. Bangladesh must dare to reimagine a new political reality that paves the way for true democratic consolidation.

# Global South should lead the ethical AI drive



Sahadat Hossain  
is an ICT strategist.

SAHADAT HOSSAIN

Jensen Huang, the CEO of NVIDIA, recently stated in an interview, "Nobody needs atomic bombs. Everybody needs AI," and presented a moment of clarity in a world increasingly clouded by technological arms races, algorithmic governance, and geopolitical anxiety. Yet, beneath the applause lies a deeper question: who owns the intelligence? Is it a shared inheritance of humanity, or is it becoming a private empire—coded, patented, and monetised?

This question is no longer philosophical. It is civic, economic, and existential. Artificial intelligence is no longer a laboratory curiosity; it is the infrastructure beneath our hospitals, classrooms, courts, and cities. From predictive policing to automated diagnostics, AI is shaping how decisions are made, who gains access, and what futures are possible.

But this infrastructure is not neutral. It is built on data often extracted without consent, trained on language frequently biased by history, and governed by corporations largely beyond the reach of democratic oversight. In this context, Huang's message is both urgent and ironic. While urging nations to invest in intelligence over weaponry,

he represents a company whose chips power the very systems that concentrate intelligence into private hands.

Historically, intelligence was communal. Farmers shared seasonal knowledge, healers passed down herbal wisdom, and poets encoded civic memory. Intelligence was not a commodity; it was a commons. Even in the digital age, open-source movements, academic research, and public education systems have sought to preserve this ethos. The internet itself was born from a vision of decentralised access to information. However, today, that vision is under threat. Large language models are trained on public data, yet their outputs are locked behind paywalls. National AI strategies prioritise economic competitiveness over ethical inclusion. Intelligence is being fenced off, turned into a gated estate.

Consider the current landscape. A handful of companies—OpenAI, Google DeepMind, Anthropic, Meta—control the frontier models. These models require billions of dollars in computing power, access to proprietary data, and elite talent pools. The result is a concentration of power unprecedented in the

history of science. When intelligence is privatised, it reshapes the social contract—citizens become users, teachers become content moderators, doctors become data annotators. The algorithm becomes the arbiter, not just of truth, but of possibility.

In the Global South, the stakes are even higher. Countries such as Bangladesh face a double bind: they

**If intelligence is to remain a shared inheritance, we must reimagine its architecture. First, we need public AI infrastructure: models trained on local languages, civic data, and ethical frameworks that are open, auditable, and accountable.**

must adopt AI to remain competitive, yet they lack the infrastructure to shape it. Without strategic investment, they risk becoming consumers of intelligence, not co-authors. Bangladesh has made strides in digital transformation. From mobile banking to e-governance, the country has embraced technology as a tool for inclusion. But AI presents a new challenge—one that requires not just adoption, but authorship. To invest in intelligence is not merely to buy servers or train engineers. It is to address what kind of intelligence we want, whose

values it will shape and what languages it will speak. This is where Bangladesh must lead—not by replicating Silicon Valley, but by offering a plural vision of intelligence, rooted in civic ethics, linguistic diversity, and generational memory.

If intelligence is to remain a shared inheritance, we must reimagine its architecture. First, we need public AI infrastructure: models trained on local languages, civic data, and ethical frameworks that are open, auditable, and accountable. Second, we need plural participation—not just engineers, but poets, teachers, farmers, and elders must shape the datasets and design principles. Third, we need ethical guidelines that go beyond privacy and bias to ask deeper questions about dignity, agency, and inclusion. Finally, we need transmission strategies to teach AI literacy in schools, communities, and workplaces.

Around the world, the debate is intensifying—the European Union is passing AI regulations, the US is investing in frontier models, China is building state-aligned intelligence systems. Yet, few are asking the civic question: what kind of society does this intelligence serve? This is where Bangladesh, and other nations in the Global South, can offer leadership by building the most ethical model and cultivating plural memory.

We stand at a crossroads. One path leads to an algorithmic oligarchy, where intelligence is owned, monetised, and weaponised. The other leads to civic intelligence, where knowledge is plural, ethical, and inclusive. The choice is ours. And the future will remember what we chose.

# Truth is defeating Israel's monopoly over the victim narrative



**Yousef SY Ramadan**  
is the ambassador of Palestine to Bangladesh.

**YOUSEF SY RAMADAN**

After his speech at the UN General Assembly, Netanyahu met with a group of American digital influencers in New York. During this meeting, he declared social media platforms to be the "Eighth Front," calling them "the most important weapon" for maintaining Israeli influence in the United States. He singled out TikTok as especially strategic, asserting that controlling it would yield great impact, and said the same of the X platform. Calling these forums battlegrounds where competing narratives about Gaza and Palestine collide, he said that if influence is secured on these two platforms, Israel will gain "a lot." Seeking to convert influencers into what he termed "digital soldiers," Netanyahu insisted that the battle of consciousness is no less important than the military battle, and may be even more decisive in resolving international positions and ensuring continued Western support.

This strategy is hardly new in Israel's long-running narrative war. Since 1948, the Israeli discourse has dominated Western public consciousness, framed as a small Jewish state surrounded by "enemies" on all sides, facing existential threat. This narrative was adopted early by Western political, media, and technocratic institutions, represented by the adoption of European governments and successive American administrations, and has become the foundation for Western policy and media framing of the Palestinian issue. That dominance was crafted deliberately, with huge budgets, and channelled through pro-Israel lobbies directing funding toward decision-making centres, media organisations, and arts institutions, particularly cinema, which played a pivotal role in consecrating the image of Israel as a victim trapped in the midst of a hostile ocean.

These resources and networks have enabled Israel and its lobby groups to maintain deep influence within capitals such as Washington, Paris, and London. Major media outlets from *The New York Times* to *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian* to *Le Figaro*, have long echoed pro-Israeli narratives. In film and television, especially in Hollywood, the investment in imagery and storytelling has reinforced this bias. Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim characters are frequently portrayed as terrorists or backward, while Israelis are portrayed as a symbol of progress, modernity and democracy. These ideas have penetrated Western collective consciousness, hardening the visual memory of Palestine through the lens of the Israelis.

Israel also established its presence in digital spaces early and intensively. It created specialised websites and official social media accounts, and deployed organised electronic propaganda units enabled by bots (sometimes referred to as "digital armies") that publish targeted messages designed to influence Western, Arab and Muslim audiences. This digital machinery has long marketed the Israeli perspective by using psychological warfare, invoking the Holocaust and centuries of Jewish suffering to secure a justifiable framework for Israel's occupation of Palestine. Even major Western academic institutions have come under influence, funding programmes or research aligned with the Israeli narrative, and branding dissenting voices as antisemitic, which has been an effective weapon to silence their opponents. The West also punishes pro-Palestinian voices with threats of expulsion and sabotage of their future.

The strength of this narrative was particularly evident after the October 7,

2023, attack. Israel successfully framed itself in Western media as the victim under existential threat. Western media, driven by the influence of the Israeli lobby, even published false news in favour of Israel. Many agencies had to retract the news later, but the damage had already been done. The voices of Palestinians were muted, marginalised, and portrayed as doubtful or misleading. This replayed the old trope: Israel under siege,

weapon, brought deep doubt into the minds of millions around the world about the truth. Over time, Israel began to lose its ability to shape the narratives, as it could no longer deny the crimes and violations broadcast in real time, such as targeting schools, hospitals and refugee camps. This public exposure pushed Israel into a real dilemma: how can it defend its image as the victim while playing the role of executioner before the eyes of the world?

an alternative narrative that denies, or at least questions, the discourse promoted by traditional Western media funded in part or entirely by Israeli lobbyists. More importantly, these platforms succeeded in creating broad popular sympathy for the Palestinian cause and in rehumanising the Palestinians who have long been treated as numbers and portrayed as a security threat.

The impact of this transformation started to alter political discourse in many parts of the West. Opposition parties in several European countries began to adopt stronger criticism of Israeli policies, labelling them "war crimes" or "genocide." Some states have even openly declared recognition of the Palestinian state, reflecting the depth of the ongoing public shift in the narrative balance.

What we are witnessing today is a battle of narratives, in which Israel is no longer capable of absolute monopoly as it has been since 1948. The occupation's tools of money, media, powerful lobbies and political influence remain formidable, but they no longer suffice in the face of real time exposure of the unimaginable violence it inflicts on Palestinians. The war in Gaza has demonstrated that Israel's narrative falls apart like a house of cards in the face of truth. Meanwhile, the Palestinian narrative, despite its weak capacity, can withstand and even gain new ground when it finds the right platforms.

Whether Thursday's ceasefire and hostage-release deal between Israel and Hamas, as part of US President Donald Trump's 20-point Gaza peace plan, holds or falters, Israel, long presented to the world as a permanent victim, now stands widely accused of crimes against humanity. Palestinians, long silenced in traditional media, are asserting their presence in a space no longer dominated by Israel. The war in Gaza is not merely about words or images anymore. It has become a battle for consciousness itself: the consciousness of populations, of policy makers, and of future generations. The balance of narrative is shifting, perhaps irreversibly, so that recognition of Palestinian rights is not just a moral or humanitarian position but rather a political reality that cannot be ignored.



Images coming from Gaza, of destroyed cities and children under rubble, of severe malnutrition resulting from the use of starvation as a weapon, are challenging Israel's long-standing victim narrative.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

Palestinians as aggressors.

However, Israel's monopoly over the narrative began to falter with the continuation of its war on Gaza, as phone screens began to display a livestream of the destruction, killing, and displacement committed by Israel. Images coming from Gaza, of destroyed cities and children under rubble, of severe malnutrition resulting from the use of starvation as a

Here, social media was essential. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, X, and YouTube opened space for Palestinian voices, where activists, civilians, and journalists are posting minute-to-minute accounts of life under siege. Despite censorship, their accounts thrived. These voices pushed the Palestinian narrative to the forefront of the global media landscape and presented

## WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

# The pain we don't see



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

**MONOROM POLOK**

One of the most insidious challenges of the 21st century, that has grown into a tsunami we remain unprepared for, is the global mental health crisis. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), over a billion people around the world are living with some form of mental health condition. Words such as "stress," "depression," "ADHD," or "OCD" frequently appear in casual conversations. Yet, many people fail to recognise their existence and admit that they are real, complex, and deserving of attention.

As someone who has suffered from major depressive disorder for almost four years, I know the drawbacks that arise from a lack of basic awareness. Even for someone like me, a socially active person, deeply connected to others and constantly plugged into the internet, it took far longer than I'd expected to recognise that I was struggling with depression. Even those closest to me couldn't see it. The delay might be partly because of our collective ignorance of the issue, but the stigma that still strongly surrounds conversations of mental health in our society

also played a key role.

I have survived so far through therapy, physical activity, family support, and, I must admit, a significant amount of luck. But I often wonder: can I count on that luck forever? And what about the countless others who still cannot speak about their suffering at all, especially in our society?

In Bangla, terms related to mental illness are often reduced to one crude word: *pagol* (a mad person). That single label, loaded with mockery and shame, pushes families and friends into denial. It prevents them from recognising anxiety, panic attacks, or depression as real, serious conditions that need care, not ridicule. Sadly, in Bangladesh, disabilities caused by mental health conditions are often not acknowledged, yet five percent of the global population suffers from major depression at some point in their lives, and it is now the fourth leading cause of disability worldwide. Countless people miss work, school, and other necessary daily activities due to depression. But, in our society, it is unimaginable for a student or

an employee to talk about this disability with their teacher or supervisor and expect to be understood.

Perhaps suicide is the only visible marker in our society that underscores the significance of mental health issues. A 2021 WHO estimate reveals that every year 727,000 people die by suicide globally, making it the third leading cause of death among individuals aged 15–29. In Bangladesh, at least 310 students—from

**Social media and the internet have also made things worse. Negative news travels fast and the sheer scale of it leaves us feeling helpless in a world where problems never seem to end. The resulting anxiety is worsened by online bullying, harassment, and the hostility one often faces just for holding a different opinion.**

schools, colleges, and universities—died by suicide in 2024, as per a survey published by Aachol Foundation earlier this year. We often discuss these lives lost in numbers, but rarely do we stop to consider the human beings, the families, and the pain that remained unseen behind those numbers. Perhaps those lives lost to suicide could have been saved through timely attention and proper care.

While there's a lack of acknowledgment, the growing issue of self-diagnosis in mental health is also becoming a concern on the other hand. Inadequate formal, affordable support and high internet-dependency drive many people to turn to social media or online content and self-diagnose. However, misdiagnosis can delay proper help or worsen the situation, as most of us are not qualified to understand the complexities of the mind just from the internet. We need professional intervention.

Such intervention is more crucial in today's world as we are paradoxically more disconnected than ever, despite being constantly "connected" through social media. The pandemic made this painfully clear. Beyond the fear of the virus itself, one of the most claustrophobic experiences of lockdown was the sudden interruption in human contact. Seeing loved ones through screens gave us the illusion of connection, but deep down, we longed for face-to-face connection. Human beings are inherently social creatures; no algorithm can replace that.

Social media and the internet have also made things worse. Negative news travels fast and the sheer scale of it leaves us feeling helpless in a world where problems never seem to end. The resulting anxiety is worsened by online bullying, harassment, and the hostility one often faces just for holding a different opinion. You can share dozens of beliefs with someone, but one disagreement can still lead to abuse and isolation. It's exhausting and corrosive, and young people are mostly bearing the brunt of this crisis.

Then there's the dopamine trap. Apps and algorithms are designed to keep us hooked with tiny bursts of pleasure, but over time, the same amount isn't enough. The pleasure narrows. It takes more scrolling, more clicking, and more screen time to feel the same small hit. That's why it's so difficult to put down the phone: at first, it's fun, but soon it becomes a compulsion.

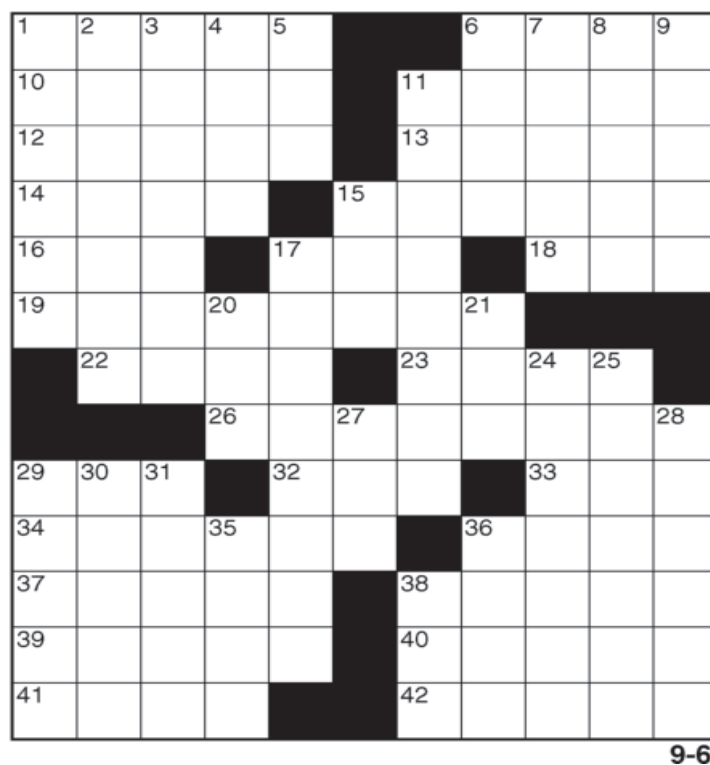
And while our minds are overstimulated, our bodies are underused. We move less than ever. We don't walk, we don't play, and we don't exercise. According to the WHO, 31 percent of adults and 80 percent of adolescents do not meet the recommended levels of physical activity. Besides, our interaction with the natural environment has become limited, especially in urban areas. Plus, we have turned to junk food, replacing natural nourishment. All these together impact our mental well-being.

Though this crisis is reshaping our lives and societies, we continue to look away, because it's invisible, it's uncomfortable, and because we don't want to admit how unprepared we are for it. But denial won't save us. Awareness and compassion will. We must build systems that care for our minds with the same seriousness we devote to our bodies. Most of all, talking openly and honestly, without shame, is crucial. To address this mass health and social issue, we need robust mental health support systems. We need to ensure accessible institutions, trained professionals, and social mechanisms designed to help people seek and receive care without fear or shame.

**CROSSWORD**  
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**  
1 Group of top players  
6 Trumpeter Baker  
10 Math proposition  
11 Full of pep  
12 Crime outing  
13 Skin features  
14 Good pair  
15 Zealous  
16 Golf goal  
17 Greek X  
18 Pig's place  
19 Stretch out  
22 Half of a sextet  
23 Clumsy ones  
26 Tighten up  
29 Greek T  
32 Rap's Lil \_\_\_ X  
33 Farm grazer  
34 Fish-catching bird  
36 Tortoise's rival  
37 Gather fleeces  
38 Weighed down  
39 Euro divisions  
40 Vigilant  
41 "No ifs, \_\_\_s, or butts"  
42 Overbearing

- DOWN**  
1 Dogpatch creator  
2 Serving aid  
3 Napoleon, for one  
4 Iowa city  
5 Impair  
6 LummoX  
7 Puts on the payroll  
8 News item  
9 Irritable  
11 Sachertorte ingredients  
15 Cry of insight  
17 Crosby and Sinatra  
20 Quirk  
21 Ship sealer  
24 Fronts  
25 Game officials  
27 Opposing vote  
28 Wallet bill  
29 Puccini opera  
30 Pale  
31 Tip over  
35 "Doggone!"  
36 Head light?  
38 Research setting

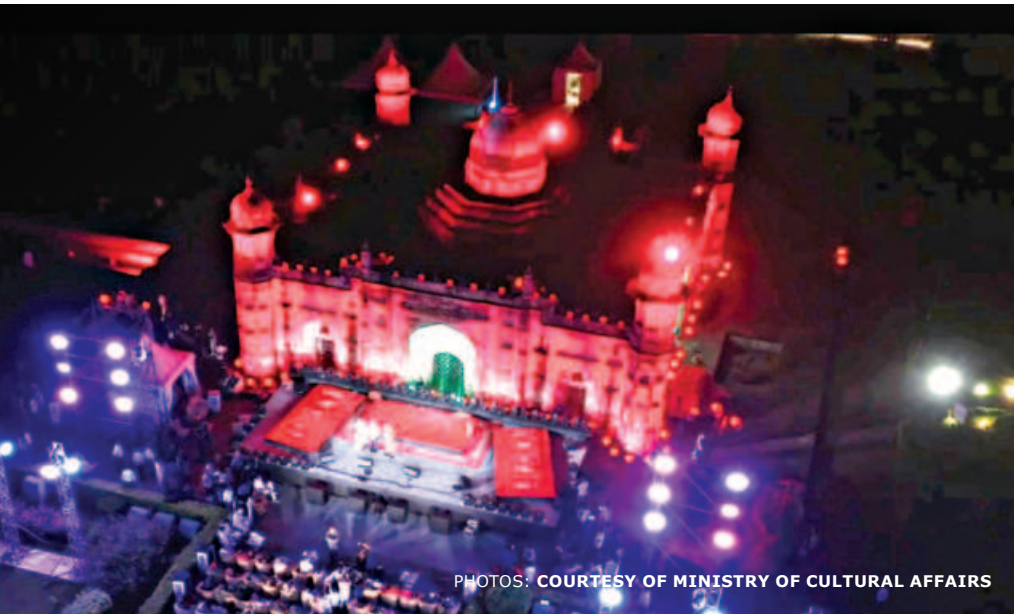


## WEDNESDAY'S ANSWERS



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# Allauddin Khan's tribute at Lalbagh Fort momentous, inspiring



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF MINISTRY OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

**Among those in attendance were Cultural Adviser Mostofa Sarwar Farooki, Housing and Public Works Adviser Adilur Rahman Khan, and Environment Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan.**

## ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

The centuries-old ramparts of Lalbagh Fort reverberated with the timeless strains of classical music on Wednesday evening, as the nation commemorated the 163rd birth anniversary of Ustad Allauddin Khan—one of the subcontinent's most revered maestros and a pioneer who elevated South Asian classical music to international prominence.

Organised by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs and managed by Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, the event transformed the historic Mughal fort into a confluence of heritage and harmony.

In a video message, Chief Adviser Dr Muhammad Yunus inaugurated the evening, calling Allauddin Khan "a legendary figure who brought South Asian classical music to the world stage." He described the setting as

"a fitting tribute—where history itself seems to listen."

Among those in attendance were Cultural Adviser Mostofa Sarwar Farooki, Housing and Public Works Adviser Adilur Rahman Khan, and Environment Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan.

Speaking to the audience, Farooki reflected, "Ustad Allauddin Khan was not merely a musician—he was a philosophy, a vision that continues to inspire generations."

Both Khan and Hasan also used the occasion to draw attention to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza, expressing solidarity with the people of Palestine. Their remarks stirred

the audience, who spontaneously joined in a chorus of "Free, free Palestine!"—a moment of shared conscience amid art and beauty.

The finale of the night belonged to Ustad Allauddin Khan's great-grandson, Siraj Ali Khan—the evening's most anticipated performer. "The sarod I'm playing tonight belonged to my great-grandfather," he shared, holding up the century-and-a-half-old instrument before beginning his set.

The evening was gracefully hosted by legendary actor and director Alzar Hossain and television presenter Maria Fariha Upoma, who guided the audience through the night's performances with warmth and wit.



## 'Shaaticup' director Touqir Islam to debut in feature film



Filmmaker Mohammad Touqir Islam, acclaimed for his OTT series *Shaaticup* and *Sinpaat*, is set to make his big-screen debut with *Delupi*. The feature explores 'fictional reality', drawing inspiration from the lives, struggles, and relationships of residents in Deluti Union, Paikgacha Upazila, Khulna, while presenting universally relatable human experiences.

Touqir emphasised the film's authenticity: "Every character and every frame in this film reflects real lives and emotions. For me, conveying genuine feelings mattered far more than big budgets or star names."

Produced by Footprint Film Production House, *Delupi* marks their first full-length feature. Announced on social media on October 9, the film was shot entirely in local settings and is expected

## 'Deshlai' will close out Seattle's film festival



The film *Deshlai* has been selected as the closing feature of the Tasveer International Film Festival in Seattle on October 12. Directed by Indian filmmaker Quashiq Mukherjee, known as Q, the film explores contemporary youth culture in Bangladesh and India, and the pervasive influence of social media.

*Deshlai* follows Zewel, a young TikToker with 15,000 followers, whose ambitions clash with harsh realities after his brother Jibon is caught dealing drugs. Facing financial hardship, Zewel's journey leads him across the border into India, encountering further tragedy.

Originally titled *Zewel*, the cast includes Sizu Shahriar, Priyam Archi, Quazi Nawshaba Ahmed, and Rahi Abdullah. It is produced by Odd Joint, Chorki, Luminary Pictures, Dreams on Cell, and Platoon Films. Priyam Archi will represent the team at the festival.

## Rowan Atkinson's Netflix comedy 'Man vs Baby' set for December release

Netflix will premiere *Man vs Baby*, a four-part comedy series starring Rowan Atkinson, globally on December 11, 2025.

Atkinson reprises his role as Trevor Bingley from *Man vs Bee*, now facing Christmas chaos while caring for a baby in London. Set against the festive backdrop, the series follows Trevor, a school caretaker, who must manage a luxury penthouse and an unattended baby from a nativity play.

Alanah Bloor joins as Maddy, Trevor's daughter, replacing India Fowler. The show reunites Atkinson with co-writer Will Davies and director David Kerr, and is produced by HouseSitter Productions. Netflix calls it "a lighthearted, family-friendly holiday story about responsibility, chaos, and laughter," blending Atkinson's signature slapstick with festive charm.



# NEWS

## The silent cries while on the job

FROM PAGE 12

"One teammate tried to pull out a body. As he grabbed the hand, it tore away.... We had to stay professional, but later, as ordinary people, the emotions return. Our families suffer too, as they wait in fear until we come home."

By the time the operation ended around 9:00pm, Alam was feverish and nauseated from exhaustion.

Firefighters are trained to stay calm under pressure and support victims—yet they themselves receive none. They rely on grit and each other to survive repeated exposure to death and disaster.

That invisible weight is not unique to them. It grips others at the frontline of tragedy—including journalists.

Print journalist Naima Rahman (not her real name) still remembers writing the caption for the viral photo of July martyr Golam Nafiz—a protester slumped in a rickshaw, flag tied to his head, legs hanging on one side, head on the other. "My fingers trembled as I typed. That image never left me—it shows up in dreams, at the dinner table, in the silence before sleep."

She also spoke with parents of slain children, some showing her bloodstained clothes, schoolbooks, and awards as they spoke.

For female journalists, the strain doesn't end in the field. They face harassment and struggle for recognition in male-dominated newsrooms—then return home to caregiving and unpaid labour. With little workplace support, this double burden steadily chips away at their mental health.

In corporate towers, the pressure takes another shape.

Rafiqul Islam, 36, a relationship manager at a non-bank financial institution, officially works eight hours a day. But his hours often stretch to nearly 12 under relentless monthly targets.

"Every day feels like a race against numbers. If I fall short, scrutiny is immediate. Even when we do well, no one acknowledges our effort. I come back exhausted, snap at my family, and can't sleep."

Workplace stress is not just a personal burden; it carries social and economic costs.

According to a 2024 World Health Organization report, poor working environments—discrimination, inequality, excessive workloads, low job control, and job insecurity—pose serious mental health risks.

Globally, depression and anxiety

cause around 12 billion lost working days each year, costing USD 1 trillion in productivity. In Bangladesh, research on workplace mental health remains scarce.

The crisis is worsened by a shortage of professionals. Bangladesh has only 260 psychiatrists and 565 psychologists—fewer than six per million people, mostly in cities, according to a recent Icdrr report.

With over two decades of experience, Monira Rahman, founder of the Innovation for Wellbeing Foundation and country lead for Mental Health First Aid Bangladesh, said wellbeing is vital across sectors.

"In these fields, employees often face direct or secondary trauma. Without support, how can they keep performing?"

"Wellbeing ensures personal resilience and institutional strength. Leaders must understand that investing in wellbeing is not a luxury; it directly improves performance."

Research shows that "wellbeing inspires well doing": every USD 1 invested in treating depression and anxiety yields a USD 4 return, Monira noted.

Experts cite workplace culture as a key stressor: long hours, rigid supervision, constant availability, bullying, job insecurity, and lack of recognition. Women face a double burden, while social media overuse, sleeplessness, and financial pressure add to the strain.

Clinical psychologist Ismat Jahan, head of the National Trauma Counselling Centre, said stress also stems from office politics, poor communication, and difficulty balancing work and personal life.

"Stress manifests physically as headaches, high blood pressure, or fluctuating blood sugar, while damaging relationships through irritability, anger, burnout, and marital strain."

The toll is visible among community health workers too. A BRAC study published in August 2025 found that overwhelming workloads, irregular pay, poor supervision, and pressure to meet targets caused tension, sleeplessness, and fear of infection.

Despite these symptoms, workers coped silently through prayer, hobbies, or talking to peers.

Stigma remains a barrier, with many fearing that seeking counselling will make others think they are "crazy." "Even in organisations

offering free counselling, employees often hesitate to use it," Monira said.

**SMALL STEPS, BIG IMPACT**  
Ismat Jahan advocates linking organisations with counselling services and offering stress management workshops.

"Simple steps—occasional sessions, counselling access, or partnerships with mental health providers—can reduce anger, improve relationships, and boost productivity. Mentally well employees make better workplaces."

One example is the Wellbeing Ecosystem Bangladesh Network, led by IWF. It brings together leaders from education, health, ecology, and the arts to create stronger workplace support systems.

As the sole license holder of Mental Health First Aid (MFHA) Bangladesh, the network runs awareness campaigns, trains leaders, and helps managers spot early signs of stress, anxiety, or depression.

In several banks, corporations, and development organisations, trained managers identified long-standing depression cases, and staff who sought counselling reported improved wellbeing and performance.

Monira said solutions need not be costly. "Empathetic listening and checking in on employees build trust and gradually shift workplace culture. Even small acts can ripple across an office, creating a healthier, stronger, and more compassionate workforce."

## Peacekeeping

FROM PAGE 12

monitoring ceasefires, protection of civilians, working with the humanitarians, or other peacekeeping activities," the official said.

The 25 percent reduction in troops will be spread across nine of the 11 peacekeeping missions, which had already developed contingency plans for potential budget cuts, the official said.

The UN has peacekeepers deployed in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, southern Lebanon, Central African Republic, South Sudan, and Western Sahara, among other places.

The announcement "potentially means a significant reduction in protection for things like humanitarian convoys and the civilians who rely on aid," Louis Charbonneau of Human Rights Watch told AFP.

## 'Hasina gave the order to kill us'

FROM PAGE 12

Zone DC Humayun Kabir were among those who put pressure on them to call off the movement.

The DB forced the six coordinators of the movement to sign and read out a statement prepared by them, which they recorded on a mobile phone and then circulated to the media.

"While detained at the DB office, we began a hunger strike unto death. After 32 hours, our health deteriorated, and we were released on August 1."

After consulting with fellow coordinators, they immediately declared on social media that the movement would continue.

When tribunal Chairman Justice Md Golam Mortuza Mozumder asked why he held Hasina responsible, Asif said she ordered the use of lethal weapons and firing of tear shells from a helicopter—claims he said

were later corroborated by social media footage and media reports.

The tribunal recorded the statement of Asif, now the adviser for LGRD and Sports and Youth ministries, for around two hours in the case against former Dhaka Metropolitan Police commissioner Habibur Rahman and seven other policemen over the killings of six people in Chankharpool on August 5 last year.

Asif said he was abducted from the Gulshan-Niketan area on July 19 by men who claimed to be DB officers. He was blindfolded, hauled into a microbus, and taken to a detention room.

After the fall of the Hasina regime on August 5, he said he inspected "Aynagar" in Dhaka Cantonment and identified the room where he had been held.

He told the tribunal that during

his detention in Aynagar, he was pressured to record a message calling off the movement.

"When I refused, I was injected [with something] and became unconscious."

After the proceedings, Asif told journalists that doctors at Gonoshasthya Nagar Hospital—where he was admitted with several other coordinators after his release from Aynagar on July 24 last year—had tested his blood and confirmed administration of pethidine, an opioid-type sedative.

Replying to a journalist's query regarding the filing of formal charges against several army officials for their alleged involvement in enforced disappearances, Asif described the development as a milestone.

He urged for following proper procedures and warned against any efforts to shield perpetrators.

## Krasznahorkai wins Nobel in Literature

FROM PAGE 12

with one more. "My life is a permanent correction," he said.

Critically difficult and demanding, his style was described once by Krasznahorkai himself as "reality examined to the point of madness".

The settings of his novels move across central Europe's remote villages and towns, from Hungary to Germany, before skipping to the Far East, where his travels to China and Japan left deep-seated impressions on Krasznahorkai.

The Academy highlighted Krasznahorkai's first novel, published in 1985, "Satantango", which brought him to prominence in Hungary and remains his best-known work. The Academy called it "a literary sensation".

The second Hungarian to win the prize, after Imre Kertész in 2002, Krasznahorkai was born in the small town of Gyula in southeast Hungary, near the Romanian border.

"Satantango" is set in a similarly remote rural area.

The novel portrays, in powerfully suggestive terms, a destitute group of residents on an abandoned collective farm in the Hungarian countryside just before the fall of communism," the Academy said.

Across the region, collective farms had been set up when farming land was confiscated at the start of communist rule, and many had

become symbols of mismanagement and poverty by the time it ended in 1989.

"Everyone in the novel is waiting for a miracle to happen, a hope that is from the very outset punctured by the book's introductory (Franz) Kafka motto: 'In that case, I'll miss the thing by waiting for it,'" the Academy said.

Krasznahorkai has repeatedly referenced "The Castle" by Kafka as a key influence.

"When I am not reading Kafka, I am thinking about Kafka. When I am not thinking about Kafka, I miss thinking about him," he told the White Review in 2013.

**PIERCE CRITIC HAILED**

Hailing the noble laureate, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban wrote in a short message on X: "Laszlo Krasznahorkai, Hungary's Nobel Prize laureate in literature, brings pride to our nation. Congratulations!"

A fierce critic of Orban, Krasznahorkai previously said his government was a "psychiatric case" because of its stance on the Ukraine war. Orban opposes military aid to Kyiv and says Hungary should stay out of the war.

"How can a country be neutral when the Russians invade a neighbouring country?" Krasznahorkai said in an interview with the Yale Review in February.

Much of Krasznahorkai's inspiration comes from experiences in central Europe on the cusp of the fall of communism. In 1987, he moved from communist Hungary to West Berlin, where he said he found "a democratic ambience" he had never experienced before.

"Ever since, I have never forgotten the taste of freedom," he said in an interview on the Friderikusz Podcast in 2023.

**LITERARY SENSATION**

"It is Laszlo Krasznahorkai's artistic gaze, which is entirely free of illusion and which sees through the fragility of the social order, combined with his unwavering belief in the power of art that has motivated the Academy to award him this prize," Academy member Steve Sem-Sandberg said.

American critic Susan Sontag crowned Krasznahorkai the "master of the apocalypse" after having read his second book, "The Melancholy of Resistance" in 1989, the Academy said.

His "War and War" novel (1999) was described by the New Yorker magazine critic James Wood as "one of the most profoundly unsettling experiences I have ever had as a reader".

He is the second Hungarian to win the prize, after the late Imre Kertész won it in 2002.



# A day inside the FORBIDDEN CITY



MD ABBAS  
is a journalist at  
The Daily Star and  
an avid traveller.

## MD ABBAS

The moment I stepped into the Forbidden City, the noise of the modern world seemed to fade away.

Just moments earlier, Beijing's familiar chaos – the honking cars, the rush of people, the hum of a vast megacity – had filled my ears. But as I passed through the towering red gates, everything fell silent. Inside those ancient walls, there was only space and stillness. Standing in a wide courtyard with the sun glinting off golden rooftops, I paused and held my breath. It felt as if I had crossed into another world, a place untouched by time.

I was awestruck by the scale of the compound. The stone-paved courtyard seemed endless, an almost living embodiment of history. I felt small – a tiny figure within a grand imperial dream. At that moment, I understood why this place was called a city.

The Forbidden City is the largest surviving palace complex on earth, spanning about 720,000 square meters (178 acres) and containing 980 buildings with more than 8,700 rooms. Built by over a million workers in just 14 years, beginning in 1406, it served as the residence of 24 emperors from the Ming and Qing dynasties. Today, it remains the world's most extensive and best-preserved collection of ancient wooden structures.

Not all of its sections are open to visitors. Tourists enter through the southern

of tourists, yet I could almost hear the echo of drums, the murmur of courtly rituals, and the faint rustle of silk robes from centuries past.

Eventually, I arrived at one of the grand halls, its stairs flanked by dragons carved in stone. I stopped and tried to picture what it must have been like during an imperial ceremony. I closed my eyes and saw the golden throne at the centre, the emperor seated high above while courtiers bowed before him. When I opened my eyes, the hall was empty – only visitors with cameras and curious eyes remained.

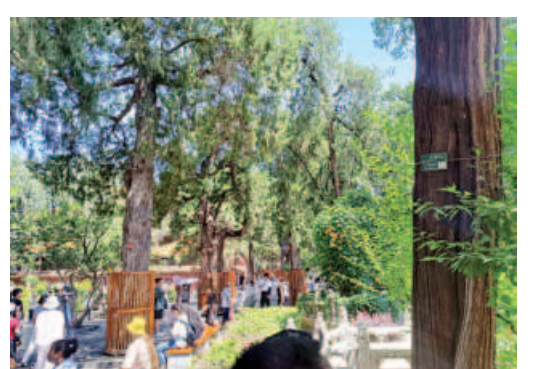
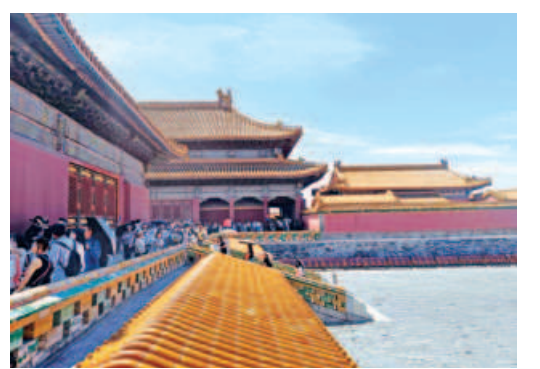
Everywhere I looked, details captured my attention. The edges of the roofs curved upward like wings, and rows of tiny animal figures stood at the corners, silently watching over the buildings. I had read that these creatures were believed to protect the palace from evil spirits.

As I wandered deeper, my emotions shifted. Sometimes curiosity made me pause to study the intricate door carvings or the painted motifs. Sometimes I felt peace as I walked through wide courtyards bathed in sunlight. And sometimes, an unexpected wave of emotion washed over me – a realisation that countless lives had passed through this very space, and now I was treading the same stones.

Inside several halls, exhibitions were displayed. Under soft lights, jade carvings glowed like captured moonlight. Porcelain bowls painted with dragons stood beside delicate scrolls of calligraphy. I lingered in

Eventually, I sat beneath one of the oldest cypress trees and closed my eyes. The sounds of the crowd faded away. For a few moments, I felt perfectly calm, surrounded by whispers of the past. I imagined emperors and empresses strolling through these same paths, seeking a brief moment of peace from the burdens of rule. Perhaps they, too, had sat beneath these trees, listening to birdsong and the rustle of leaves in the wind.

As the day went on, my feelings evolved. At first, there had been excitement and wonder; later, admiration and respect. And toward the end, a soft, reflective sadness. The Forbidden City is now a museum. Its halls are empty, its thrones abandoned, its rooms filled with objects instead of people. The walls that once symbolised absolute power now hold only memories. Yet that sadness wasn't heavy – it was tender, a quiet



Meridian Gate and follow a one-way route that leads either to the northern Gate of Divine Prowess or the eastern East Prosperity Gate. Even so, exploring the accessible areas – the grand ceremonial halls of the Outer Court and the maze-like courtyards of the Inner Court – can easily take an entire day.

As I began to walk, I was struck by how perfectly everything was arranged. The gates, the halls, the courtyards – all reflected a deliberate symmetry. Every path seemed to guide me forward, deeper into the city's heart. The sunlight danced on the golden tiles, while the red walls glowed softly. I couldn't stop taking photos, though I knew no image could capture what I was seeing or feeling.

The air itself felt different. It carried a sense of history and quiet mystery, as if the walls were still guarding their secrets. I imagined the emperors who once ruled from these halls, the guards who stood at attention, the servants who hurried silently across the courtyards. The city was now full

front of a yellow silk robe embroidered with dragons and wondered about the emperor who once wore it. These were more than artefacts – they were fragments of daily life, frozen in time.

Then I reached my favourite part of the visit: the Imperial Garden. After the grandeur of endless courtyards and massive halls, the garden felt intimate, almost secretive. The air was cooler, scented faintly with cypress. Ancient trees stood tall – some over 300 years old – their twisted trunks like living sculptures. I walked slowly among them, resting my hand on the rough bark, imagining how many generations they had silently witnessed.

To my surprise, each tree had a QR code. Scanning one opened a page describing its history and age. I loved this subtle blend of technology and tradition – standing in a centuries-old garden, using a smartphone to connect with its story. I scanned several more, learning as I went, and each time I felt a little closer to the past.

acknowledgement that time moves on.

By the time I reached the northern gate, the sun hung low, casting a warm, fading glow over the palace. The red walls deepened to a rich crimson, and the golden roofs shimmered like fire in the dying light. A hush fell over the courtyard as shadows stretched long and soft across the stones. I turned for one last look, and for a fleeting moment, it felt as though the palace itself was breathing – whispering a slow farewell to the day, and perhaps, to me.

The Forbidden City is no longer forbidden. Stepping beyond the gates, I realised I was leaving with more than memories and photographs. What I carried was something harder to name. Travel, I understood, is not merely about visiting new places. It is about forming a connection – with the silences, the echoes, and the stories that linger in the stones.

Md Abbas is a journalist at The Daily Star and an avid traveller.

Want to share your travel experiences with us? Please send your stories to [holiday@thedailystar.net](mailto:holiday@thedailystar.net)

## Hong Kong fan's playful wish comes true

ANISUR RAHMAN

Football fans wear their hearts on their sleeves, but at Dhaka's National Stadium yesterday, Hong Kong, China's travelling supporters added a refreshing twist. Around 110 fans journeyed from Hong Kong, China, not only waving their own emblems but also incorporating a touch of Bangladesh into their banners and scarves. The placards bore both the Chinese dragon and the Royal Bengal Tiger, symbolising goodwill and sporting respect ahead of the AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers fixture.

Arriving on Tuesday, the Hong Kong FA-supported group transformed a corner behind the dugouts into a lively patch of Hong Kong. "We made the scarves ourselves, not for sale -- a gesture of friendship," said one fan, with George Tan adding it was their first away-game street march.

Before kick-off, one female supporter cheekily predicted a Hong Kong win, while another grinned: "We want Bangladesh to score one, and Hong Kong two." The first hour delivered that wish, with Hamza Choudhury giving the hosts a breakthrough before Hong Kong pulled one back at the stroke of half-time before taking the lead in the 50th minute, leaving the score level at 2-1 in favour of the visitors.

More drama unfolded in the remaining minutes, as both sides netted two more goals each, but eventually, the Hong Kong



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

fan's wish of a narrow win came true. Earlier, as the gates opened at 3:00pm, local fans poured in, families in red and green eager to see Hamza and company in action. Madrasa student Sifat Ullah was

"hoping for a good result," while Tofael Ahmed brought his young daughter to share the football fever which evoked nostalgia in him.

While the home crowd brought

warmth and family spirit, the Hong Kong supporters stood out for their passion and goodwill -- proof that football, at its best, is a celebration of connection as much as competition.



## Avishek powers Khulna into final

SPORTS REPORTER

All-rounder Avishek Das Aronno's quickfire knock powered Khulna Division to the final of the National Cricket League (NCL) T20 after they beat Chattogram Division by four wickets in DLS method in the first qualifier at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium on Thursday.

The former Under-19 World Cup winner, who returned to competitive cricket through NCL T20 after a long injury layoff, struck an unbeaten 27 off 11 balls with three fours and two sixes and shared an unbroken 51-run stand with Nahidul Islam (21 not out off nine balls) to guide their side to 81-6 in 8.3 overs in the rain-marred encounter.

Earlier, chasing 149, Khulna reached 3-1 in 2.1 overs when rain interrupted the contest. Later, they were given a revised target of 78 runs in nine overs.

Chattogram's Ahmed Sharif and Hasan Murad then took two wickets each to reduce Khulna to 30 for six in 5.1 overs before the late surge from Avishek and Nahidul powered their side home with three balls to spare.



Earlier, skipper Yasir Ali struck an unbeaten 45 off 37 balls while Irfan Shukkur contributed 39 runs as Chattogram posted 148-6 in 20 overs after they were sent into bat.

The defeated Chattogram will now take on reigning champions Rangpur Division in the second qualifier on Friday at the same venue.

Rangpur, earlier on the day, beat Dhaka Division by one wicket in a thrilling eliminator at the same venue to knock out Dhaka.

Chasing 124, skipper Akbar Ali's 44 off 27 took Rangpur close to the finish line. But after he was out in the second ball of the final over, No.11 batter Gaffar Saqlain hit the winning four to take them home in 19.5 overs.

### SHORT CORNER

#### 'Mental fatigue the real test'

Shubman Gill said Thursday that his biggest opponent could be "mental fatigue" after the India Test captain recently took over charge of the 50-over side. Speaking ahead of Friday's second Test against the West Indies in New Delhi, Gill conceded that it was a challenge to play all three international formats, but that was what drove him.

#### WI name squads for Bangladesh tour

The West Indies have announced their squads for this month's white-ball tour of Bangladesh. Shai Hope is named captain of both squads, with the likes of Gudakesh Motie, Sherfane Rutherford, Jayden Seales, Romario Shepherd and Brandon King also included in both formats. There is a maiden ODI call-up for former West Indies Under-19 captain Akeem Auguste, with experienced top-order batter Evin Lewis to skip the tour as he continues his recovery from a wrist injury.

#### Mbappe relaxed and ready for WC qualifiers

France captain Kylian Mbappe said Thursday he was feeling relaxed with his life in Madrid and was in good shape as his nation seeks to move to the brink of World Cup qualification as they face Azerbaijan in Paris. Mbappe had received treatment for a "small niggle" in his right ankle picked up playing for Real Madrid last weekend.

Read full stories on The Daily Star's website.

## Marufa 'doing well' as Tigresses target Kiwis

SPORTS REPORTER

Undeterred by the defeat to England from a commanding position, Bangladesh are turning their focus to today's ICC Women's World Cup clash against New Zealand in Guwahati, boosted by confidence from their fight against a vastly superior opponents following a win over Pakistan.

Bowling has been their primary strength, and pacer Marufa Akter, who suffered cramps in the last match, is expected to recover fully. Spinner Nahida Akter informed in yesterday's pre-match press conference that Marufa "is doing well" and the team hope she is "ready" for their third contest in the eight-team tournament.

It is the batting department where improvements could really produce dividends. Rubya Haider Jhelik and Sobhana Mostary provided solid starts, while Rabeya Khan was the latest to



impress with a fiery knock in the lower order. Skipper Nigar Sultana Joyt, along with Shorna Akter and Sharmin Akter

have misfired, but Nahida opined the batters have "maybe collapsed a bit in a few areas".

The England loss, sealed after Heather Knight was reprieved by inconclusive TV replays, is behind them. "What happened is already in the past," Nahida said, adding that the Tigresses feel secure in the plans they made.

"Every World Cup match is challenging. Nothing comes easy. We are preparing with that mindset. I feel if we play a little better than we did in the last game, we can do something significant."

The Kiwis, on the other hand, despite losing their opening matches, feature in-form Sophie Devine -- who followed up a 112 against Australia with an 85 against South Africa -- and the explosive Suzie Bates. All-rounder Amelia Kerr acknowledged Bangladesh's bowling attack is capable of troubling teams.

"I think, apart from the opening bowler [Marufa], they're a spin-heavy attack, and they've had a lot of teams in trouble as well throughout this tournament we've seen," Kerr said.

Mohamed Salah underpinned his value to Egypt with two sublime goals in their 3-0 win over Djibouti on Wednesday as they qualified for the World Cup. It means an opportunity for the 33-year-old Salah to play at a second World Cup for a team who have not won a trophy during his 14-year international career. At the 2018 World Cup in Russia, he scored both Egypt's goals, but they lost all three group matches. Salah also missed a decisive penalty against Senegal in the 2022 qualifiers for Qatar.

PHOTO: FACEBOOK



## The inflation of Bangladesh's run drought

ASHAQ-UL-ALAM

If there ever was an award in cricket for stating the obvious after a defeat, Bangladesh ODI captain Mehidy Hasan Miraz would be up for it for the reasoning he provided following the loss against Afghanistan in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday.

"We lost 40 runs on this wicket... if we could get 260 plus, it would definitely be better," said Miraz at the post-match ceremony, explaining why his side suffered a five-wicket defeat.

To be fair to Miraz, ruing not scoring enough runs is a tried and tested excuse for Bangladesh captains as many of his predecessors have used it numerous times. The only difference is the number of runs.

Earlier, that figure used to hover around the 15-20 runs mark, but now it has jumped to 40, an inflation that could be likened to the recent surge of gold prices in the country.

However obvious his reasoning was, it wasn't off the mark. Batting first, the Tigers could not put up a

decent total, getting rolled over for a mere 221 in 48.5 overs.

The bowling attack did well to make the match somewhat competitive but overall, Bangladesh was the second best team on the field throughout the game.

It was Bangladesh's ninth defeat in their last 10 ODIs, a clear indication of how far the Tigers have fallen in their once preferred format. And the bulk of the blame for this downfall lies on the batting department.

In the six ODIs Miraz and Co. have played this year so far, they have batted out their 50 overs only once, against New Zealand in Rawalpindi in the ICC Champions Trophy, and even in that game they had lost nine wickets.

They have been bowled out in their last four ODIs and they were similarly bundled out for four straight matches in 2022-2023.

Prior to that, the last time they had been all-out in four or more ODIs on the trot was back in 2008 -- twice against Pakistan and thrice against Australia, all away fixtures. The batters who the team



depended on 2024, have lost their rhythm. Skipper Miraz, who averaged 38.12 in eight innings last year, averages 19.16 in six outing this year.

Former captain Najmul Hossain Shanto's average has fallen from 75.15 to a mere 19.33 while opener Tanzid Hasan Tamim's average has gone down from 33.42 to 24.16.

Jaker Ali, who averaged 50.33 at a brisk strike rate of 111.85, has had his average knocked down to 37.50 while his strike rate has tumbled to 69.44.

Amidst all the slumps, Tawhid Hridoy's average has improved, going up from 30 to 44.33, but his slow scoring rate of 70.37 has stagnated the innings in the middle overs.

The top-order is not setting a solid base in most games, the middle-order is providing some runs but at a snail's pace and the lower order is not sticking around long enough to make a difference, leaving the tail-enders to fend for themselves in the death overs.

The poor form of batters is concerning, but the dearth of options to replace them is more alarming.

The management brought in the in-form Saif Hassan for the first ODI as a probable solution and he made 26 on debut. But when a side is betting on the form of a debutant to turn their fortunes, it can't be a surprise that after the game, their captain would rue not having enough runs.



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## ICT-1 CASE 'Hasina gave the order to kill us'

Adviser Asif Mahmud testifies before tribunal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Asif Mahmud, a key leader of Students Against Discrimination, yesterday told the International Crimes Tribunal-1 that the then prime minister and home minister had ordered the killings of him and other coordinators when they were in DB custody last year.

"We were repeatedly told that we had been picked up on the direct orders of prime minister Sheikh Hasina and home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal. We were warned that if we refused to call off the movement, we would be killed on their instructions. They even said we were still alive only because of their mercy," he said while testifying as a prosecution witness.

Then DB chief Harun-Or Rashid and Ramna

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## JEWEL OF THE FORESTS



A twin-spotted tree frog spotted in Chattogram's Hazarikhil Wildlife Sanctuary rests motionless on a damp branch, its emerald skin glistening under the forest light. Native to the humid forests of northeastern India, Bangladesh, and northern Myanmar, this striking amphibian spends most of its life in the treetops, emerging at night to hunt insects. During the day, it shelters among leaves and tree hollows near streams. Recognised by its vivid green body, yellow underside, and twin dark flank spots, the frog's webbed limbs allow it to glide between branches like a tiny parachutist. Listed as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List, the species plays a vital ecological role -- controlling insect populations and linking forest and freshwater ecosystems through its life cycle.

PHOTO: SHAMEEM HASAN

## Women must have equal space in politics

Speakers say at seminar

### SIX KEY DEMANDS INCLUDE

- Increasing reserved seats to 100 and filling those through direct vote from 2026
- Ensuring 33% women nominees, raising it to 50% through reforms
- Funding, decentralisation, and safety for women candidates

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As Bangladesh looks toward its next national election, women leaders yesterday called for sweeping reforms to ensure fair and proportional political representation for women, who make up more than half of the country's population.

The call came at a seminar at the capital's Krishibid Institute Bangladesh, organised by Narir Rajnoitik Adhikar Forum, a coalition of 12 organisations working to secure women's rightful place in national politics.

The forum placed six key demands, including proportional participation of women in all political structures. It proposed increasing the number of reserved seats for women in parliament to 100 and filling those through direct voting in 2026.

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## Bangladesh not ready for upper house: CPD

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Centre for Policy Dialogue has recommended that the National Consensus Commission drop its proposal to form a bicameral parliament, saying Bangladesh's historical and structural realities do not support a second chamber at this stage.

It said the priority should be strengthening the existing unicameral parliament through legal, institutional and structural reforms rather than introducing an upper house.

It made the recommendations in a study presented yesterday at a national dialogue titled "Proposed Upper House in the National Parliament: Can it Ensure Accountability of the Majority Party?"

The think tank, however, did not explain why it came up with the recommendation at a time when structural reforms have been finalised by the consensus commission after months of talks with political parties. The implementation process will also be finalised in the coming days.

Its study was based on primary and secondary data on parliamentary systems, detailed literature reviews, and interviews with political scientists, academicians, and party leaders.

CPD Research Director Khandaker Golam Moazzem and Prof Nizam Ahmed of Chittagong University made the presentation at a city hotel. They said the study found several proposed constitutional and electoral reforms may seem appealing in theory but are not realistic in the country's current political context.

These include bicameralism, proportional representation (PR), appointment committees and inclusion of non-partisan members.

In Bangladesh, CPD said, long-standing patron-client networks and a "winner-takes-all" culture have kept such reforms largely symbolic.

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## EXTORTION CASE Mikel Chakma sentenced to eight years

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

A Rangamati court has sentenced Mikel Chakma, an organiser of the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF), along with one Suman Chakma, to eight years imprisonment in a 2007 extortion case.

The details of the verdict, delivered on Wednesday, were confirmed yesterday by Prasadeb Chakma, assistant to the bench of the Rangamati Additional District and Sessions Judge Court.

Both accused were absent when Judge Tawhidul Haque delivered the verdict.

Mikel serves as a central organiser of the UPDF. He had been in a secret detention facility and was released after the fall of the Awami League-led government on August 5, 2024.

UPDF's spokesperson Niron Chakma wrote on Facebook, "Mikel Chakma has already endured more than 5 years of confinement and torture. What's the point of sentencing him to prison again at this stage?"

## WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

# The silent cries while on the job

Poor work conditions fuelling mental health crisis, costing trillions worldwide, shows WHO data



NILIMA JAHAN

By the time Alam Hossain, station manager of Uttara Fire Service & Civil Defence, reached Milestone School and College on July 21, the campus was in chaos -- flames leapt from the Haider Ali Bhaban, smoke choked the sky, and children lay on the ground as parents screamed their names. A fighter jet had just crashed into

the building, leaving it in ruins.

"The mental pressure was crushing," Alam recalled. "All I could think was how to save lives and minimise damage."

With limited men and equipment, he called for backup. His team spent hours battling fires, pulling survivors from rubble, and rushing the injured and dead to hospitals.

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Globally, about 15% of working-age adults had a mental disorder in 2019

Depression and anxiety lead to an estimated 12 billion lost working days each year

Bangladesh has fewer than six mental health professionals per million people

Community health workers in the country face exhaustion and fatigue from heavy workloads



## Krasznahorkai wins Nobel in Literature

AGENCIES

The Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded yesterday to László Krasznahorkai, considered by many to be Hungary's most important living author, whose works explore themes of postmodern dystopia and melancholy.

The Swedish Academy honoured him "for his compelling and visionary oeuvre that, in the midst of apocalyptic terror, reaffirms the power of art."

Krasznahorkai is "a great epic writer... characterised by absurdism and grotesque excess," the Academy said.

Speaking to Swedish Radio, Krasznahorkai said he had only planned to write one book, but after the first one, he wanted to improve his writing

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## Peacekeeping forces to be cut 25% due to budget strains: UN

AFP, United Nations

The United Nations will be forced to reduce its peacekeeping forces worldwide by around 25 percent due to a lack of funding, largely linked to US aid cuts, a senior UN official said Wednesday.

About 13,000 to 14,000 military and police personnel, as well as their equipment, will have to be repatriated, the official said on condition of anonymity, with "a large number of civilian staff in missions" also to be affected.

The United States was expected to contribute \$1.3 billion of the total \$5.4 billion budget for 2025-2026 peacekeeping operations.

But it has now informed the UN that it will only pay around half the amount, or \$682 million -- which includes \$85 million earmarked for a new international anti-gang mission in Haiti that was not in the original budget.

China is expected to contribute \$1.2 billion to the peacekeeping budget, which had \$2 billion in unpaid contributions as of July.

Of its total budget, the UN now expects a shortfall of 16 to 17 percent in the current peacekeeping budget.

President Donald Trump has long claimed that international institutions have taken advantage of the United States and has overseen massive cuts to US foreign aid since his return to the White House in January.

"We know that there will be consequences in terms of

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Bangladesh players were left distraught after fighting valiantly but ultimately falling 4-3 to Hong Kong, China, in a 2026 AFC Asian Cup qualifying fixture at the National Stadium in Dhaka yesterday, leaving their hopes of progression in jeopardy. The hosts started brightly, with Hamza Choudhury curling in a powerful early free-kick, while late goals from Sheikh Morsalin and Shamit Shome sparked hopes of a dramatic turnaround after Hong Kong went ahead 3-1. Yet, in the dying moments, Raphael Merckies' hat-trick sealed the visitors' win.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Thriller ends in heartbreak

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hamza Choudhury, Shamit Shome and Sheikh Morsalin found the net, still Bangladesh could not avoid defeat against Hong Kong, China, losing 4-3 in an entertaining AFC Asian Cup Qualifier at the National Stadium on Thursday.

Raphael Merckies hit the decisive goal in the last minute to complete a hat-trick and silence the home crowd. Everton Camargo scored the other goal for the visitors.

The defeat leaves Bangladesh's hopes of progressing in disarray, with one point in three games. Hong Kong, meanwhile, moved to the top with seven points.

Hamza gave the hosts the lead in the 13th minute from a free-kick, but Bangladesh squandered the lead four minutes into stoppage time, when Camargo tapped the ball home after a misplaced header from Faisal Ahmed Fahim.

Merckies, who came in as a substitute, then scored in the 50th and 74th minute as Hong Kong were seemingly running away with the match.

However, Morsalin then pulled one back in the 84th and Shamit made it 3-3 in extra time. But in the dying moments, Merckies sealed the win for Hong Kong.