



"Dependent on what China says about the hostile 'order' that they have just put out, I will be forced, as President to financially counter their move."

DONALD TRUMP

YOUR RIGHT
TO KNOW

SECOND EDITION

DHAKA SATURDAY OCTOBER 11, 2025



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in Haturia's
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of Lawachara
forest

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Who cares about
Bangladeshi
women prisoners
in India?

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Between
dreams and
debt

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Ceasefire takes hold in Gaza

Gazans start to trek home as Israeli forces pull back from several areas

AFP, Palestinian Territories

Thousands of displaced Palestinians trekked over the wastelands of Gaza to return to the ruins of their abandoned homes yesterday, after a ceasefire took effect and Israeli troops began pulling back under a Trump peace agreement to end the war.

The Israeli military said its troops had ceased fire at noon (0900 GMT) "in preparation for the ceasefire agreement and the return of hostages".

Three hours later, the US Pentagon confirmed Israel had completed the first phase of a pullback laid out in Trump's peace plan. Israeli forces still hold around 53 percent of the Palestinian territory.

The withdrawal set the clock running on a 72-hour deadline for Hamas to release the remaining hostages held in Gaza.

Israel, meanwhile, published the list of the 250 Palestinian prisoners it plans to release – along with 1,700 Gazans detained since Hamas triggered the latest conflict with its attack on Israel on October 7, 2023. The list does not contain key Palestinian political prisoners.

As the ceasefire began under the first phase of the peace deal, long columns of Palestinians, exhausted by two years of intense bombardment and what the UN has warned were famine conditions, began a trek from the southern city of Khan Yunis towards their shattered homes further north.



- Israel completes 1st phase of withdrawal: US envoy
- Forces still hold 53% of Palestinian territory
- Team of 200 US troops to 'oversee' Gaza truce
- US to deploy 200 troops to Israel for Gaza task force, no operations in Gaza
- UN unveils 60-day aid plan

The EU mission at the Rafah border between Gaza and Egypt will be reopening a pedestrian crossing on October 14, Italy said.

Under the ceasefire deal proposed by Trump, Hamas will hand over 47 remaining hostages – living and dead – from the 251 abducted during the attack two years ago.

The remains of one more hostage, held in Gaza since 2014, are also expected to be returned.

Leaders of Britain, France and Germany called on the UN Security Council to back the plan.

"We agree that the UN Security Council should give its full backing to the plan and support its implementation," the so-called E3 group of nations said in a statement.

Gaza's civil defence agency confirmed that Israeli troops and armoured vehicles were pulling back from forward positions in both Gaza City and Khan Yunis.

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Shahidul Alam freed, returns home today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Acclaimed Bangladeshi photographer and human rights activist Shahidul Alam, after being released by Israeli authorities, is expected to arrive in Dhaka around 5:00am this morning.

Shahidul reached Istanbul on a Turkish Airlines flight yesterday around 2:30pm (local time), where he was received by Bangladeshi Consul General in Istanbul M o h a m m a d Mizanur Rahman.

Bangladesh Ambassador to Turkey Md Amanur Rahman said Shahidul's return flight to Dhaka was scheduled to depart Istanbul at 6:45pm (local time).

Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus has expressed gratitude to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan for his cooperation in facilitating Shahidul Alam's release and safe repatriation from Israel.

Following Shahidul's detention by Israeli authorities, Bangladesh embassies in Jordan, Egypt, and Turkey were instructed to engage with the respective foreign ministries and take immediate

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IN RUINS, HOPE FINDS A WAY HOME

Palestinians return to their homes through a damaged neighbourhood in the aftermath of an Israeli operation in Gaza City after Israel's government ratified a ceasefire with Hamas yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Gas supply declining despite higher LNG imports

ASIFUR RAHMAN

The country's overall gas supply dropped further last fiscal year, despite higher LNG imports, due to a continued decline in domestic production.

The country requires around 3,800 million cubic feet of gas per day (mmcf/d) to stabilise the power supply and feed factories and industries.

In fiscal 2024-25, the average daily gas distribution stood at 2,526 million cubic feet of gas a day (mmcf/d), down from 2,715 mmcf/d the previous year.

While the government's expenditure for importing liquefied natural gas in fiscal 2024-25 stood at Tk 54,954 crore, up 28.9 percent year-on-year.

To import the high amount of LNG, the government had to provide more subsidies: about Tk 8,900 crore was expended on subsidies last fiscal year, up from Tk 6,000 crore in fiscal 2023-24.

On the other hand, domestic production has been decreasing constantly since 2018, the year the country started importing LNG.

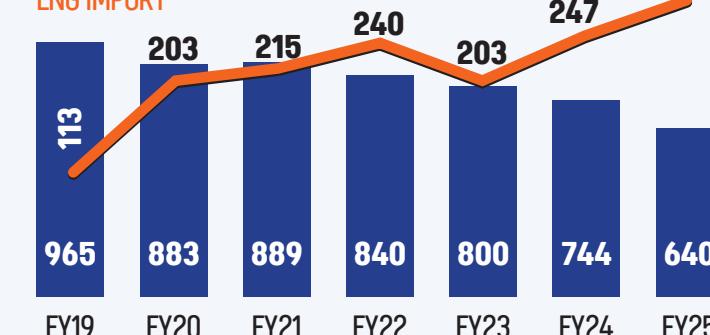
GAS SUPPLY TREND

In billion cubic feet

LOCAL GAS PRODUCTION

LNG IMPORT

SOURCE: PETROBANGLA



Since then, the volume of LNG imports has been increasing in every fiscal year, accounting for 30 percent of the gas supply.

"It was a bad precedent that the then government moved for an import-driven gas supply strategy," said M Shamsul Alam, energy adviser to the Consumers' Association of Bangladesh.

Amid the rising concerns from experts and activists, the then-government in 2022 had announced a three-year plan to drill 50 wells by 2025 to add around 648 mmcf/d of gas from local sources.

Until the changeover in government in August 2024, the

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Syed Manzoorul Islam
(1951-2025)

A voice of reason falls silent

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Professor Emeritus Syed Manzoorul Islam of Dhaka University's English department, revered for his teaching, literary brilliance, and principled engagement with Bangladesh's cultural and civic spheres, breathed his last yesterday. He was 74.

Manzoorul, widely regarded as one of the pioneers of postmodern Bangla literature, died around 5:00pm while undergoing treatment at Labaid Hospital in Dhaka. Mazharul Islam, chief executive of Anyaprokash, confirmed.

Mazharul said Manzoorul's body will be kept at the Central Shaheed Minar around 11:00am today for the public to pay their last respects. After Zehr prayers and

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Sediment buildup near the Shah Amanat Bridge on the Karnaphuli river has triggered a serious navigability issue. In response, authorities have been conducting an extended dredging campaign to restore the river's depth. However, the dredged sand is now being stockpiled at an illegal depot near the bridge and is reportedly being sold illegally. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Venezuela's Machado wins Nobel Peace Prize

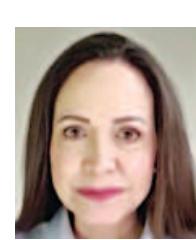
AFP, Oslo

The Nobel Peace Prize was awarded yesterday to Venezuela's opposition leader and democracy activist Maria Corina Machado, a "unifying" figure in what has become a "brutal" state, the Nobel jury said.

Woken in the middle of the night by a call from the secretary of the Norwegian Nobel Committee who informed her of the prize, the 58-year-old said she was confident the opposition would succeed in securing a peaceful transition to democracy in her country.

"We're not there yet. We're working very hard to achieve it, but I'm sure that we will prevail," she told Kristian Berg Harpviken in a video of the call posted to X.

"This is certainly the biggest
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From quacks to qualified vets, Dhaka's evolving pet care scene

RBR

People are becoming increasingly aware of animal welfare, leading to an increase in pet ownership and a push for better care for strays.

Fourteen years ago, when we first adopted Boo (our spitz breed of canine), the city had few real veterinarians, and only a handful of assistants who later became de facto "vets", daring to even do surgeries. Taking care of Boo's geriatric ailments at his advanced age, I realised how far the pet care industry has evolved and flourished in Dhaka over the years.

Farzana Alam, Director, Pranicool Animal Wellness Clinic, reiterates, "The demand for good veterinary services and emergency care has grown, making it clear that there's a lot more support for our furry friends in the city now."

Dr Mir Nishat Tasnim Tania, who is a registered small animal practitioner (Medicine and Surgery), says, "Inside Dhaka, there are now more than 50 shelters and hundreds of veterinary care-giving places, and the demand for these facilities is rising with the new trend of pet ownership. We now have proper diagnostic facilities like

X-ray, ultrasonography, blood test, CBC, biochemical tests, different hormone tests, and other microscopic examinations."

But Dr Tania feels the industry still has miles to go.

"Veterinary infrastructure and the focus



PHOTO: MIR NISHAT TASnim TANIA



on veterinary education and services still prioritise livestock over companion and stray animals. Besides the lack of training and development in the community, the inadequate

support for research, and the widespread use of unqualified quackery undermine the profession, creating a significant gap in care."

Dr Nusrat Jahan, a Senior Veterinarian and Pet practitioner (Medicine and Surgery), believes veterinary is an amazing profession. She goes on to say, "In many ways, vets still face stiff challenges to treat critical diseases as we have not developed a pet-specific pharmaceutical yet."

Hopefully, with time, these gaps will also be filled.

As a pet owner of an old dog, I am

grateful for the expansion of the pet industry and for qualified, registered veterinarians. The amount of patience and care veterinarians are required to give and show to cure these sick animals is unimaginable. They tirelessly treat patients who are unable to communicate their suffering with them.

Despite my initial zoophobia, attending a furry friend for 14 long years has taught me that having a companion animal is a lifetime commitment. If you are not ready to be a pet parent, I suggest you give the idea a rest. Ill-kempt, malnourished, abandoned in bathrooms or kennels, or subjected to inhuman torture and cruelties is no way to keep a pet. If you truly want to adopt a cat or a dog, then treat them with care and love as you would a family member. And believe me, now there are people around, with professional expertise, to help you in that process.

EU grills Apple, Snapchat, YouTube over risks to children

AFP, Brussels

The EU Friday demanded digital giants including Snapchat and YouTube explain how they are protecting children from online harm, as all but two member states signalled openness to restricting social media access for minors.

The European Union has stringent rules regulating the digital space, including what children should be able to see, but there is increasing concern that more needs doing.

Inspired by Australia's social media ban for under-16s, Brussels is analysing whether to set bloc-wide limits on minors' access to platforms -- with 25 of 27 EU countries coming out Friday in support of at least studying such a measure.

Europe's biggest weapon for ensuring platforms tackle illegal content and keep children safe online is the Digital Services Act, which has sparked censorship claims from the US tech sector and retaliation threats from President Donald Trump.

Taiwan leader vows stronger air defences to counter 'enemy threats'

AFP, Taipei

Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te vowed Friday to speed up construction of a multi-layered air defence system as part of efforts to counter "enemy threats".

Lai's government has been under US pressure to improve its ability to defend itself against a potential attack by China, which claims the island is part of its territory.

"We will accelerate our building of the T-Dome, establish a rigorous air defence system in Taiwan with multi-layered defence, high-level detection, and effective interception," Lai said during Taiwan's National Day celebrations.

Lai said Taiwan was determined to "maintain peace through strength" and called on China to "renounce the use of force or coercion to change the status quo across the Taiwan Strait".

Lai's speech followed a bruising 17 months for the president, a staunch defender of Taiwan's sovereignty who is loathed by Beijing.

Gas supply declining

FROM PAGE 1

number of completed drills was only seven, which now stands at 19.

The authorities have been able to connect only 82 mmcfd of gas from the sources to the national gas grid so far.

In January 2024, another plan to drill another 100 gas wells was announced.

Concerned officials from Petrobangla said the interim government accelerated the implementation of the projects by initiating the drilling of at least 41 wells under 15 projects.

From the second plan, which aims to ensure more than 1,300 mmcfd gas supply by 2028, the development project proposals are being readied to drill 19 wells under six separate projects, the officials said.

The ousted government went on offshore drilling in 2024 for the first time after 2012.

In March last year, Bangladesh's offshore bidding round was announced for global oil companies and the deadline for bidding was in September.

In between, the political changeover happened, and none of the participants placed bids. The interim government extended the deadline for three months but failed to attract the bidders.

"The interim government just did business-as-usual duties in the energy sector," said Badrul Imam, honorary professor of geology at the University of Dhaka.

They had a chance to go for rigorous drilling to increase local gas supply, which they failed, he said.

"We didn't find any special attention or encouragement among the officials in this regard," he said, adding that there should be a special arrangement for exploration activities amid the continuous fall in local supply.

Those who worked in favour of imports during the previous government are still in place, Alam said.

"They have turned the energy sector into an import-driven market. The decisions were dangerous, and the same trend is continuing. What the previous government did to push the energy sector into a fragile state is being continued, with pricing mechanisms now moving further towards dependence on international markets," he added.

Petrobangla officials said they have prepared the fresh documents and sent it to the ministry for further approvals.

"But it seems that the interim government will leave it for the elected one," said an official asking not to be named.

Ceasefire takes hold in Gaza

FROM PAGE 1

But Israel warned some areas were still off-limits and that Palestinians should steer clear of its forces while they were "in the midst of adjusting operational positions in the Gaza Strip".

"Thank God my house is still standing," Ismail Zayda, 40, said in the Sheikh Radwan district of Gaza City. "But the place is destroyed, my neighbours' houses are destroyed, entire districts have gone."

In the south, people picked their way through the dusty moonscape that was once Gaza's second largest city Khan Younis, which Israeli forces razed earlier this year. Most walked in silence.

A middle-aged man, Ahmed Al-Brim, was pushing a bicycle with bundles of scrap timber tied to the front and back; his family would need the firewood to cook. It was all they had been able to recover from the ruins of their home.

"We went to our area. It was exterminated. We don't know where we will go after that," he said. "We couldn't get the furniture, or clothes, or anything, not even winter clothes.

The accord, if fully implemented, would bring the two sides closer than any previous effort to halt the war.

Much could still go wrong. The sides have yet to publish the list of Palestinian prisoners to be released in exchange for Israeli hostages. Hamas

Nothing is left."

In a televised address, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israeli forces were staying in Gaza to ensure Hamas was disarmed: "If this is achieved the easy way then that will be good, and if not then it will be achieved the hard way."

Israel's government ratified the ceasefire with Hamas in the early yesterday. Once Israeli troops have pulled back, Hamas has 72 hours to release the 20 living Israeli hostages it is still holding. Israel will free 250 Palestinians serving long terms in its prisons and 1,700 detainees captured during the war. Hundreds of trucks per day are expected to surge into Gaza carrying food and medical aid.

The exiled Gaza chief of Hamas, Khalil Al Hayya, said he had received guarantees from the United States and other mediators that the war was over.

The accord, if fully implemented, would bring the two sides closer than any previous effort to halt the war.

Much could still go wrong. The sides have yet to publish the list of Palestinian prisoners to be released in exchange for Israeli hostages. Hamas

is seeking freedom for some of the most prominent Palestinian convicts held in Israeli jails.

Further steps in Trump's 20-point plan have yet to be agreed. Those

include how the demolished Gaza Strip is to be ruled when fighting ends, and the ultimate fate of Hamas, which has rejected Israel's demands it disarm. Trump said the issue of Hamas surrendering its weapons would be addressed in the second phase of the peace plan.

Senior Hamas official Osama Hamdan told Qatar-based broadcaster Al Arabi the Palestinian Islamist movement rejects the transitional authority.

The Hamas-run interior ministry said it would deploy security forces in areas where the Israeli army withdrew. It was not clear whether armed militants would return to the streets in significant numbers, a move Israel would see as a provocation.

Trump said he would head to the region on Sunday, possibly to attend a signing ceremony in Egypt, and Israeli police said they were preparing for a visit by him on Monday.

Shahidul Alam freed

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diplomatic measures to secure his release.

On Thursday, Shahidul, along with more than 140 journalists, medics, and human rights activists, was taken to Israel's Ketziot Prison.

On Wednesday, the group was intercepted by Israeli forces in international waters approximately 120 nautical miles off the coast of Gaza.

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, 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.

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.

Venezuela's Machado

FROM PAGE 1

recognition to our people that certainly deserve it," she said, adding: "I am just, you know, one person. I certainly do not deserve this."

Machado, who has lived in hiding for the past year, was honoured for her tireless work promoting democratic rights for the people of Venezuela and for her struggle to achieve a just and peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy," said Jorgen Watne Frydnes, the chair of the Norwegian Nobel Committee in Oslo.

The committee hailed her as "one of the most extraordinary examples of civilian courage in Latin America in recent times".

"Despite serious threats against her life, she has remained in the country, a choice that has inspired millions."

Rumours have circulated on social networks that she is sheltering at the US embassy.

Venezuelan opposition figurehead Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia hailed her win as "a well deserved recognition of the long struggle of a woman and an entire people for freedom and democracy".

Machado was the opposition's presidential candidate for Venezuela's 2024 elections, but Nicolas Maduro's government blocked her candidacy.

She then backed the reluctant, little-known ex-diplomat Gonzalez Urrutia as her stand-in, accompanying him on rallies.

Always dressed in white, she was welcomed like a rock star, her supporters rushing to get a glimpse or touch her, holding up babies and children and proffering handwritten notes of support and presents of baseball caps or flowers.

An engineer by training, Caracas-born Machado entered politics in 2002 at the head of the association Sumate (Join us), pushing for a referendum to recall Maduro's mentor, the late socialist leader Hugo Chavez.

She was accused of treason over the referendum call and received death threats, prompting her to send

her two young sons and daughter to live abroad.

In 2024, Machado was awarded the European Union's human rights Sakharov Prize, and the Council of Europe's Vaclav Havel Prize.

Her latest accolade comes as the United States has increasingly carried out strikes off Venezuelan shores in international waters, claiming to act against drug smugglers.

Washington accuses Maduro of leading a drug cartel, and does not recognize him as the country's legitimate leader.

Machado and Gonzalez Urrutia have backed US military pressure on the Maduro regime as a "necessary measure" towards the "restoration of popular sovereignty in Venezuela."

Venezuela has evolved from a relatively democratic and prosperous country to a "brutal authoritarian state that is now suffering a humanitarian and economic crisis," the Nobel committee's Frydnes said.

The opposition has been systematically suppressed by means of "election rigging, legal prosecution and imprisonment."

Machado has been a "key, unifying figure in a political opposition that was once deeply divided," he said.

She was not among those mentioned as possible laureates in the run-up to Friday's announcement.

US President Donald Trump had meanwhile made no secret of his desire to win this year's Peace Prize and his office derided Friday's decision as "politics over peace".

YUNUS GREETS MACHADO

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday congratulated Machado on winning the Nobel Peace Prize.

Machado has faced oppression with steadfast resolve, never wavering in her commitment to a free and more just future for her country and her people, he said in a congratulatory message.

She has dared to imagine a better world and worked tirelessly to make it so, added Yunus, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006.

In 2023, Dhaka University honoured him as Professor Emeritus.

His academic interests spanned Elizabethan drama, literary theory, and cultural studies. He had been a vocal advocate for university autonomy and inclusive education, especially during the pandemic, highlighting the digital divide and the need for greater investment in higher education.

Manzoorul served on the Board of Trustees of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and was the Ombudsman of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB). He was a former trustee of both TIB and the National Museum, and a member of the Executive Council of Bangla Academy.

He was also a noted columnist, writing regularly on political and social issues.

Manzoorul was awarded the Ekushey Padak for his contribution to language and literature in 2018, and received the Bangla Academy Award for literature in 1996.

Born on January 18, 1951, in Sylhet, Manzoorul completed his BA and MA in English from Dhaka University, followed by a PhD in English literature from Queen's University, Canada.

He taught English literature for over four decades, retiring from Dhaka University in 2018. He later joined the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB) and served as visiting faculty at Brac University.

He taught English literature for over four decades, retiring from Dhaka University in 2018. He later joined the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB) and served as visiting faculty at Brac University.

O Alo Dekhar Golpo", "Adhkhana Manushyo", "Dinratriguli", "Ajjub Rat", "Tin Porber Jibon", and "Nandantattwa". His English short story collection "The Merman's Prayer and Other Stories" was acclaimed for its magical realism and postmodern style.

In a condolence message, Education Adviser CR Abrar said, "His passing is a great loss to the nation. We have lost a guiding light and a cultural pioneer, and the education community has lost an inspiring teacher and thinker."

DHAKA



Makeshift shops selling fresh produce stand perilously close to a railway line, where passing trains come within inches of the stalls and vendors. A single misstep by anyone nearby could cause a tragic accident. The photo was taken at Malibagh in Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

'Sharot Utsav' barred at DU, Gendaria

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Satyen Sen Shilpigoshthi was barred from holding its traditional Sharot Utsav (Autumn Festival) at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Dhaka University's Bakultala and later in Gendaria yesterday.

At Bakultala, the Faculty of Fine Arts authorities stopped the event to "avoid unwanted incidents", while in



Gendaria, police halted the festival, saying the organisers had not taken permission from the Kisholoy Kachhi Kachar fairground authority or the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP).

For 19 years, Satyen Sen Shilpigoshthi has organised the Sharot Utsav at Bakultala of the Faculty of Fine Arts. This year, the group had prepared for the event and sought permission from the university administration.

Manzar Chowdhury, general secretary of Satyen Sen Shilpigoshthi, told Prothom Alo that they had planned to hold the event at Bakultala from 7:00am yesterday.

He said they had received permission from the faculty earlier, but on Thursday evening, they were told the event could cause trouble.

According to him, they were informed that there were complaints that the festival was being used to rehabilitate a banned political party, and there might be unrest. As a result, they were not allowed to hold the programme there.

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Dengue patients crowd Suhrawardy hospital

HELEMUL ALAM

Soniya Akhter, 25, a resident of Mirpur 1, has been undergoing treatment at the dengue ward of Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital since Wednesday night.

She had been suffering from fever for a week but went for a dengue test only on the sixth day, which worsened her condition.

"We took medicine from a dispensary thinking it was a normal viral fever, but we admitted her to the hospital when her condition deteriorated," said her sister, Faria Islam.

Faria said Soniya had been suffering from vomiting, fever, and abdominal pain at the time of admission.

Echoing a similar experience, Eshrat Jahan Surovi, an eleventh-grade student from Farmgate, said she also took the dengue test three days after her fever began.

Mohammad Harish Mollah, 22, a resident of Shewrapara, said, "My platelet count dropped to 11,000, and I had to take one bag of blood for that." He too took the NS1 dengue test three days after his fever began.

Like them, many dengue patients have been admitted to the dengue ward of the hospital, putting heavy pressure on the facility. Many of the admitted patients are in critical condition.



"If more dengue patients arrive, they will initially be admitted to the medicine wards and later shifted here when beds become available," she said.

She added that while most patients are from Dhaka city, some are also coming from outside the capital.

Medical experts said people often ignore early symptoms and delay testing, which leads to complications.

"My brother was admitted to Ma O

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

One in three child brides now divorced

Says global report by Plan International

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nearly one in three girls who were married as children are now divorced, facing stigma and financial hardship, according to a new global report by Plan International.

The study found that 35 percent of these girls left school after marriage, while 63 percent are not in education, employment, or training, showing how early marriage continues to deprive girls of their futures.

Many face pressure to become pregnant soon after marriage, with husbands controlling contraception and finances, leaving them with little autonomy over their lives and bodies.

Plan International's State of the World's Girls Report 2025 titled "Let me be a child, not a wife: Girls' experiences of living through child marriage" gathered testimonies from more than 250 girls and young women across 15 countries, including Bangladesh. All were married or in informal unions before the age of 18.

In Bangladesh, the stories of girls and young women echo these global findings, exposing how poverty, social pressure, and weak enforcement of laws continue to push families to marry off their daughters before the age of 18.

"I was married at 14 because my parents

thought it was the only way out of poverty. I was so unhappy in that marriage, but after my divorce, I started working in a factory and now I can support my family," said Sumaiya, 21.

"I want other girls to have opportunities, not child marriage. If I have a daughter, I'll tell her to study and stand on her own feet. And if I have a son, I'll teach him to be the



kind of man who never ruins a girl's life," she added.

Another young woman, Useaking, from Cox's Bazar, said she left school at 15, got married, and became a mother soon after.

"I feel bad when I see my friends studying and working. They can live freely, but I cannot. If I had known the consequences, I might have made different choices," she said.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

Why this tug of war over sheaf of paddy?: Fakhrul

UNB, Dhaka



BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday criticised the National Citizen Party (NCP) for demanding that the Election Commission remove other national emblems, including the "Sheaf of Paddy," from the list of election symbols if their request for "shapla" is not granted.

NCP has been warning that it will not contest the election unless the party is allocated the shapla (Water Lily) symbol.

"Brother, we have not stopped you from getting any symbol. Which symbol you will receive will be decided by the Election Commission. We never said you could not be given that symbol. So why this needless tug of war over BNP's Sheaf of Paddy?" Fakhrul said.

He said the reason behind talking about BNP's Sheaf of Paddy is simple, as it is an irresistible symbol.

"Everywhere in the villages, the slogan is the same: 'In Bangladesh, the BNP's Sheaf of Paddy is unstoppable.' That is why it must be restrained – because if the BNP's Sheaf of Paddy survives, the enemies of Bangladesh will be forced to abandon all their conspiracies and be defeated."

Fakhrul was addressing a discussion at IEB auditorium in memory of Nazir Uddin Ahmed Jihad, who was shot dead in Dhaka on October 10, 1990, during the anti-Ershad movement.

Urging the government to maintain complete neutrality, he alleged that attempts were being made to place bureaucracy under the control of a particular party ahead of the national election.

"We [BNP] will never tolerate such moves. During the election, the bureaucracy, government, and the Election Commission must remain completely neutral," he said.

He said the national election must be held only within the February 2026 timeframe set in June by BNP Acting Chairman Tarique Rahman and Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus at a meeting in London. "Otherwise, there will be no election."



Farmers transport Aus paddy through village canals by boat after harvesting it from the wetlands in Barakula village of Narail. This year's harvest, which can be used to produce various kinds of rice, is being sold for Tk 1,000-1,100 per maund. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

RU professor killed, another injured in road accident

RU CORRESPONDENT

A Rajshahi University teacher was killed and another injured in a road accident in Rajshahi's Paba area yesterday morning.

The deceased was Prof Shubh Shankar Roy, 58, of the Marketing Department, while the injured, Prof Asaduzzaman, teaches in the Department of Philosophy.

Paba Police Station OC Monirul Islam said an unidentified vehicle hit the motorbike they were on in front of Nowhat Jute Mill, near the Ansar Camp on the Naogaon-Rajshahi Highway, around 7:00am and fled the scene.

Locals rushed the two professors to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH), where doctors declared Prof Shubh Shankar Roy dead on arrival, confirmed RMCH spokesperson Shankar K Biswas.

Prof Asaduzzaman, who suffered injuries to his hands and legs, was admitted to the hospital's ICU.

RU Proctor Prof Mahbubur Rahman said, "The duo shared a passion for fishing and they set out to fish in the morning but unfortunately met with the accident."

Processions, rallies near Ctg port banned for 30 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Chattogram*

The Chattogram Metropolitan Police (CMP) has imposed a 30-day ban on all types of processions, meetings, rallies, human chains, and street gatherings in the Chattogram port area, starting today.

According to a public notice signed by CMP Commissioner Hasib Aziz on Thursday, the decision aims to ensure smooth and uninterrupted flow of import and export activities at the port.

The ban covers areas including Barak Building intersection, Nimtala intersection, Tin Number Jetty Gate, Customs intersection, and Saltgola crossing.

The notice described Chattogram Port as the "economic heart of Bangladesh", handling the majority of the country's import and export operations.

It said around 5,000 to 6,000 cargo vehicles move through the port area daily to transport essential goods, industrial raw materials, and other products.

PHQ gets ICT warrants

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disappearance, deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina and her former defence and security adviser Maj Gen (retd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique are among the accused.

Former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, nine former and 13 serving army officers who served in the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) and the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) are also accused. It could not be confirmed whether another brigadier general accused in one of the cases is currently in service or retired.

Two other army officers who had served in Border Guard Bangladesh, and two police officers were formally charged in the third case over the killings of 28 people in Rampura during the July uprising.

The ICT issued the arrest warrants on October 8 after taking cognisance of the formal charges against the accused.

On Thursday, the ICT registrar's office forwarded the tribunal's order regarding the arrest warrants to the inspector general of police and other respective authorities for immediate action.

The tribunal also ordered that copies of the order be transmitted for information to the chief of army staff, chief of general staff, adjutant general (Army Headquarters), director general of DGFI, DG of National Security Intelligence, principal staff officer (Armed Forces Division), secretary of the Chief Adviser's Office, director of Military Intelligence Directorate, Personnel



Charred interior covers the floor in an apartment in a building that was set ablaze during Russian drone and missile strikes on the capital, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Kyiv, Ukraine October 10, 2025.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Parts of Kyiv plunged into darkness after Russian attack

REUTERS, Kyiv

Large parts of Kyiv were plunged into darkness in the early hours of Friday after Russian drones and missiles struck Ukrainian energy facilities, cutting power and water to homes and halting a key metro link across the Dnipro river.

In the latest mass attack targeting the energy system as winter approaches, electricity was interrupted in nine regions and over a million households and businesses were temporarily without power across the country. Ukraine's prime minister called it one of the heaviest such strikes to date.

In southeastern Ukraine, a seven-year-old was killed when his home was hit and at least 20 people were injured. In Kyiv, an apartment block in the city centre was damaged by a projectile, while on the left bank of the Dnipro that divides the capital, crowds waited at bus stops with the metro out of action and people filled water bottles at distribution points.

"We didn't sleep at all," said Liuba, a pensioner, as she collected water. "From 2:30 a.m. there was so much noise. By 3:30 we had no electricity, no gas, no water. Nothing."

According to Ukraine's energy ministry, over 800,000 customers lost power in

Kyiv because of the attack, with 380,000 still disconnected on Friday afternoon.

Ukrainians are bracing for a tough winter, as the full-scale war nears its fourth anniversary. Russia has intensified attacks on the energy system in recent

➤ **One child killed, 20 people hurt; transport delays and power cuts**

➤ **Russia intensifies attacks on Ukrainian energy infrastructure**

➤ **Zelenskiy appeals for more support from allies**

weeks, striking power plants and gas production facilities, and local authorities are struggling with the scale of repairs required.

"It is precisely the civilian and energy infrastructure that is the main target of Russia's strikes ahead of the heating season," President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said on X.

For many Kyiv residents, the day started

Calling for more support from Kyiv's allies, he said, "What's needed is not window dressing but decisive action – from the United States, Europe, and the G7 – in delivering air defence systems and enforcing sanctions."

In Kyiv, Energy Minister Svitlana Hrychuk met G7 ambassadors and representatives from some of Ukraine's biggest energy companies to discuss how allies could help protect the country against further attacks and repair the damage.

Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski, who was visiting Ukraine on Friday, said his country was looking at ways to support its neighbour.

Ukraine's air force said it had downed 405 of 465 drones and 15 of 32 missiles in this attack. Ukraine's stretched air defences are no match for regular barrages on such a scale.

Russia said its overnight strikes were in response to Ukraine's attacks on Russian civilian facilities.

Ukraine regularly launches drone strikes against Russia, focusing on oil installations, although they are generally on a far smaller scale. Kyiv says it wants to force Moscow, which started the war, to negotiate a peace deal in good faith.

For many Kyiv residents, the day started

Trump says

FROM PAGE 14

Services Directorate, commandant of Army Security Unit, provost marshal, and commanding officer of the Army's MP Unit.

The ICT registrar's office also sent these copies on Thursday.

The tribunal fixed October 22 for submission of a compliance report on the execution of the arrest warrants, the order added.

In a Facebook post on Thursday, Nahid Islam, convener of the National Citizen Party, demanded that the army officers against whom the ICT had issued arrest warrants in connection with crimes against humanity be arrested soon and brought to justice.

"To free the army from disgrace, those officers involved in crimes against humanity must be brought to justice. We hope the military leadership will fully cooperate with the government and the tribunal in this regard. This is not a matter of institutional ego or prestige. It is a question of the state, democracy, and justice," he added.

He further said that under the Awami League regime, almost all state institutions were used for party interests, which had its impact on the army. Some army officers, particularly those who were in charge of Rab or DGFI, had committed crimes against humanity, he said. "Even some officers fired on unarmed people during the July uprising," he alleged.

In his post, Trump said China has been sending letters to countries worldwide saying it planned to impose export controls on every element of production related to rare earths.

He said he had been contacted by unnamed countries incensed over Beijing's steps and said he was surprised because of the "very good" recent relationship with China.

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7

Spain reaffirms Nato commitment after Trump threat

AFP, Madrid

Spain hit back at Donald Trump yesterday after the US President suggested expelling the country from Nato for failing to meet his ramped-up defence spending target.

In June, the Nato agreed to massively boost defence spending to five percent of annual economic output over the next decade under pressure from Trump.

But Spain, which was Nato's lowest defence spender in relative terms last year, insisted it would not need to hit the headline figure.

"We had one laggard, it was Spain," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office on Thursday.

"They have no excuse not to do this, but that's all right. Maybe you should throw them out of Nato, frankly."

Government sources said on Friday that "Spain is a committed and full member of Nato. And it meets its capacity targets as much as the United States."

The Spanish opposition pounced on the stir caused by Trump's remarks to criticise Sanchez late on Thursday.

GAZA REBUILDING Germany wants to organise conference

AFP, Berlin

Germany wants to organise an international conference with Egypt for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, Chancellor Friedrich Merz said yesterday, as Israel and Hamas edged closer to ending hostilities.

The main goal of this conference "should be to address the most urgent needs, such as rebuilding water and energy supplies and medical care", Merz said in a statement.

A spokeswoman for the German development ministry said Friday that Berlin could quickly provide 850



temporary accommodation units for Gaza.

"Fifty of them are in Ramallah and can quickly be brought to Gaza so that people can be provided with urgently needed shelter," she said, adding that 90 to 92 percent of Gaza's buildings have been badly damaged or destroyed.

On Friday Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said the government had "approved the framework" of a hostage release deal with Hamas.

Merz said the deal must be "implemented swiftly" and that "the hostages, including German nationals, must finally return to their families."

"Humanitarian aid must quickly reach the people in Gaza," he added.

Merz said Germany would provide an additional 29 million euros (\$33.6 million) in humanitarian aid and would also help in "supporting the medical and psychological care of the released hostages".

Netanyahu said on Friday that 48 hostages were still in Gaza, 20 of them still alive and 28 dead.

One of the dead is understood to be an Israeli soldier killed in 2014 whose remains are being held by Hamas.

Four of those still alive are reported to be German nationals.



Fireworks light up the sky as spectators react during the "Long Live the Workers' Party of Korea" performance to celebrate the 80th founding anniversary of the Workers' Party of Korea at the May Day Stadium in Pyongyang on October 9, 2025.

PHOTO: AFP

Japan in political crisis as coalition collapses

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's ruling coalition collapsed yesterday as junior partner Komeito quit the alliance, putting in peril Sanae Takaichi's bid to become the country's first woman prime minister.

Takaichi became head of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) less than a week ago and had been expected to be approved by parliament as premier this month.

But Komeito's decision to end the alliance that has governed Japan almost uninterrupted for 25 years sank Japan into a new political crisis.

"We want the LDP-Komeito coalition to go back to the drawing board for now and bring an end to our relationship," Komeito party chief Tetsuo Saito told reporters after talks with the LDP.

"Given that we have not received clear and concrete cooperation from the LDP regarding our demands, and if these reforms prove impossible to achieve, I said (in the meeting) that it would be utterly impossible for us to write Sanae Takaichi's name in the nomination," he said.

In particular, Saito told Takaichi that her answers on the LDP's recent slush fund scandal were unsatisfactory, media



reports said.

Saito said however that Komeito would still support budget plans and other legislation that the two parties have prepared.

Takaichi said the coalition's collapse was "extremely regrettable" and that their decision to exit the alliance was "unilateral".

She was due to replace Shigeru Ishiba, who took the reins last year, but saw his coalition lose its majority in both houses of parliament, driven in part by voter anger at inflation and the LDP slush fund scandal.

Tomoaki Iwai, professor emeritus of Nihon University, told AFP that she would likely still be elected prime

minister "if the opposition fails to unite in electing their own candidate".

But "the running of the government will be extremely unstable", he warned, "with everything decided in a form of cooperation from outside the government".

Komeito was reportedly also unhappy about Takaichi's more conservative policies.

This includes her previous regular visits to the Yasukuni shrine honouring Japan's war dead, including war criminals.

The last visit to Yasukuni by a serving prime minister in 2013, by the late Shinzo Abe -- Takaichi's mentor -- prompted fury from China and South Korea and disquiet from Washington.

Media reports this week said that Takaichi might skip going to the shrine during the upcoming autumn festival, which will be held from October 17 to 19.

Takaichi, 64, whose hero is Margaret Thatcher, had hailed a "new era" Saturday after becoming head of the LDP.

She had won a runoff leadership contest against the telegenic and more socially progressive Shinjiro Koizumi.



State and local law enforcement officers detain a protester during a demonstration near an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facility in Broadview, Illinois, yesterday. A federal judge on October 9 ordered a temporary halt to President Donald Trump's deployment of hundreds of National Guard troops in the Chicago area as part of his sweeping crime and immigration crackdown.

PHOTO: AFP

India to upgrade Afghan mission to full embassy

AFP, New Delhi

India will upgrade its technical mission in Afghanistan to a full embassy, Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said yesterday, as he met his counterpart from Kabul in New Delhi.

Russia is the only country to officially recognise the Afghan Taliban government since they seized control of the country in August 2021, although several nations do have embassies in Kabul.

India had a large embassy in the Afghan capital until the Taliban takeover, when they withdrew most diplomats and downgraded the facility to a technical mission.

"I am pleased to announce today the upgrading of India's Technical Mission in Kabul to the status of Embassy of India," Jaishankar told Amir Khan Muttaqi.

Tempers flare as US shutdown puts troops pay at risk

AFP, Washington

US senators began a long weekend yesterday that guarantees the government shutdown lasting at least 14 days, with both sides more entrenched than ever and the military facing an unprecedented threat to its pay.

Republicans and Democrats have been getting into angry confrontations in the corridors of Congress, with frustration mounting as the crisis over funding the government hits public services harder each day.

Pressure is mounting on Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson to bring the shuttered lower chamber of Congress back in session to hold an emergency vote on at least providing military pay.

But the Republican leader is sticking to his guns, telling reporters Thursday that he was "committed to keeping the House out of session as long as it takes to pressure Senate Democrats."

With the Senate out until Tuesday next week, there's little hope for federal workers left wondering when their pay will be unfrozen. Now, 1.3 million active-duty service military personnel are also set to miss their pay due next Wednesday -- something that has not happened in any of the funding shutdowns through modern history.

ICC rejects release bid by Duterte

AFP, The Hague

Former Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte, charged with crimes against humanity, will remain in custody after the International Criminal Court yesterday rejected a request from his defence team for release on medical grounds.

ICC judges ruled that Duterte posed a flight risk and could influence witnesses if freed, arguing that this outweighed any medical problems suffered by the 80-year old.

"The Chamber finds that Mr Duterte's detention continues to remain necessary," the ICC said in a heavily redacted ruling dated October 10.

ICC prosecutors have charged Duterte with three counts of crimes against humanity, alleging his involvement in at least 76 murders as part of his "war on drugs".

The first count concerns his alleged involvement as a co-perpetrator in 19 murders carried out between 2013 and 2016 while Duterte was mayor of Davao City.

The second count relates to 14 murders of so-called "High Value Targets" in 2016 and 2017 when Duterte was president.

And the third charge is about 43 murders committed during "clearance" operations of lower-level alleged drug users or pushers.

Taliban points to Pakistan as double blast hits Kabul

AFP, Kabul

heinous act in the history of Afghanistan and Pakistan," it added.

The statement did not specify how Kabul's territory had been violated, but AFP journalists heard two loud blasts in the capital late Thursday.

The Taliban have previously accused Islamabad of border strikes, but this is the first time it has alleged an incursion deep into its territory, describing it as an "unprecedented act".

"Pakistan violated Afghanistan's airspace, bombing a civilian market in the Marghi area of Paktika near the Durand Line and also violating Kabul's sovereign territory," the Defence Ministry said in a post on social media.

"This is an unprecedented, violent, and

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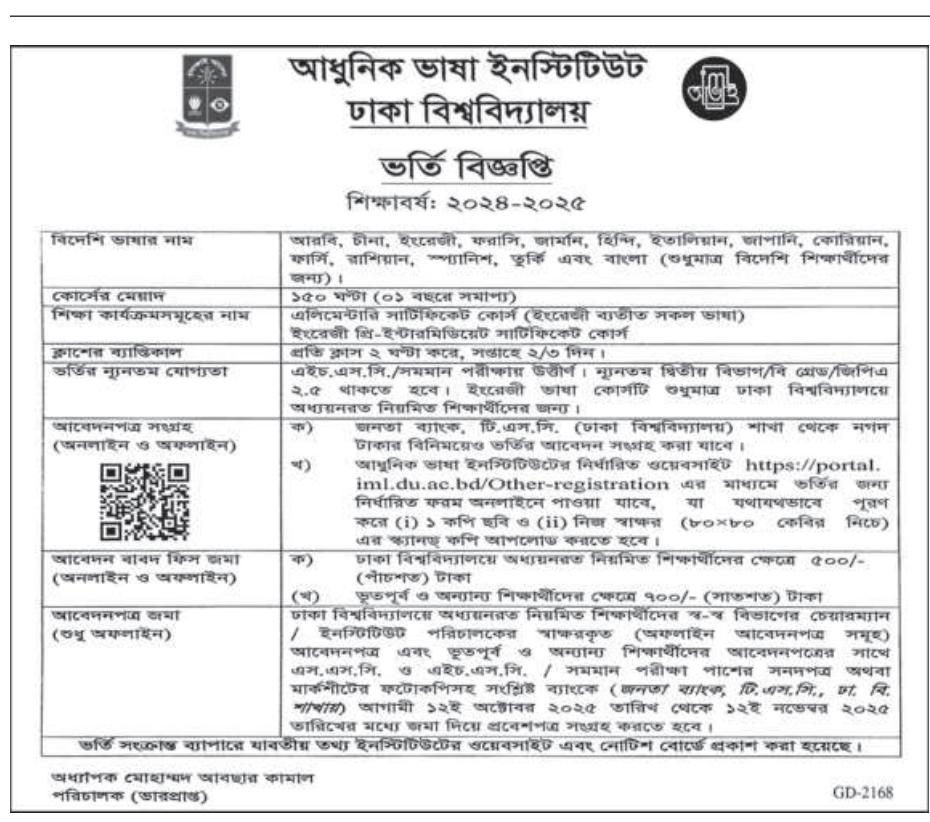
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GD-2168

Critical rights reviews reveal systemic failures

Govt must improve law and order as election approaches

It is quite unfortunate that the practice of reviewing human rights has become contentious after Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam recently questioned the methodology of rights groups compiling data on the law and order situation. Controversially, Alam blamed the media for inflating rights violations, as it has "received very great freedom" under the interim government, which he said was evident in rights groups' estimations based on media sources. Such an assertion presumes that the government's own account—that the reality "is much better" than being portrayed—is more credible than that of witnesses, victims, NGOs, or independent journalists. This is dangerous because the state is not a neutral observer but a party to the very story being told, with a vested interest in managing its image. One may recall how the Awami League government similarly insisted, against evidence, on its record of human rights defence.

The reason we allude to this episode is the release of another unflattering rights review, not unlike the one unveiled in the press secretary's presence. While we don't think human rights reporting is above mistakes or flawed interpretations, the fact that similarly alarming numbers are surfacing makes critical assessments more realistically grounded than the government would have us believe. According to just-released data from the Human Rights Support Society (HRSS), between January and September, at least 107 people were killed in political violence and 130 others in mob beatings. While both surveys—covering different periods—acknowledged improvements in terms of enforced disappearances and crossfire killings, their overall findings make any complacency misplaced given the persistently high occurrence of other violent crimes.

The HRSS, for instance, has documented 239 incidents of mob violence and 692 incidents of political clashes, most stemming from internal feuds within the BNP and its affiliated organisations. Meanwhile, 1,511 women and girls reportedly faced violence—663 of them victims of rape, including 393 children, with at least 152 gang-raped and 19 killed afterwards. During the same period, at least 340 journalists were subjected to murder, torture, or harassment. There were also considerable numbers of deaths in custody, attacks on religious minorities, shrines, and mazars, violent border incidents involving India's Border Security Force, and incidents of violence against workers. Tellingly, even Human Rights Watch—one of the international bodies cited by Shafiqul Alam to validate rights violation claims—has recently warned that the government is "increasingly using" the recently amended counterterrorism law to arrest alleged supporters of the ousted regime.

True, the government's failure alone cannot account for the full range of these violations, as there are many other actors and underlying influences. But it is ultimately the state's responsibility to ensure justice and protect all citizens. This responsibility cannot be deflected by questioning research methodologies or drawing convenient comparisons with AL-era crime figures and state-sponsored abuses. What we are currently witnessing is largely the fallout of persistent systemic failures that the government was expected—but ultimately failed—to address. This must be fixed. With the country approaching its next election, we urge the government to double down on improving law and order through stringent measures, regardless of the identities of the perpetrators.

Empower local govt for inclusive growth

Job and industrial growth must be even across regions

The World Bank's (WB) latest Bangladesh Development Update offers both a promising and cautionary picture of the country's growth trajectory. The report identifies a "trident-shaped" growth corridor, stretching across Dhaka, Chattogram and Rangpur, which captures how Bangladesh's industrial and job growth has become increasingly concentrated along a few economic poles, highlighting a polarised growth trend where certain urban centres are thriving and others remain left behind. The spatial concentration of industry has thus intensified regional disparities. This uneven progress, if unaddressed, risks straining existing infrastructure and constraining inclusive economic progress.

The WB study attributes the growth pattern to market-driven "bottom-up" forces, which often outpaced planning and infrastructure support. While this unregulated expansion enabled rapid absorption of labour and investment, it has also created congestion and pressure in Dhaka and Chattogram, pushing industrial development to suburban and peri-urban areas with fewer services. Municipalities like Madhabdi-Narsingdi, Brahmanbaria, and Noakhali have seen notable industrial spillovers, yet their growth remains uneven. Meanwhile, Export Processing Zones (EPZs), such as Mongla in Bagerhat and Uttara in Nilphamari, struggle to attract investors despite incentives, reflecting a misalignment between policy focus and actual economic activity. The WB identifies this as a major "policy blind spot," meaning urban development policies have not evolved in tandem with actual growth patterns.

This geographic disparity is mirrored in social outcomes. According to WB, labour force participation has fallen from 60.9 percent to 58.9 percent, with women disproportionately affected, and poverty has risen between 2023 and 2024. The WB cautions that sustained growth alone will not ensure inclusive prosperity unless it is paired with spatially-aware planning, infrastructure development, and targeted investment in emerging regional centres. Strengthening local governance and enhancing the fiscal and technical capacities of municipalities are critical for enabling efficient, decentralised development.

Bangladesh's projected GDP growth of 4.8 percent in FY26, rising to 6.3 percent in FY27, reflects a positive trajectory, but the opportunity to convert growth into inclusive development is time-sensitive. Empowering secondary cities to host manufacturing and service hubs, improving transport connectivity, and fostering cluster economies can relieve congestion in core urban areas while reducing the east-west divide in industrialisation. Bold spatial strategies, fiscal discipline, and investment in human capital are essential to ensure inclusive job growth across regions, particularly for youth and women seeking formal employment. Without such reforms, long-term economic resilience could be undermined.

Has the interim government delivered on climate as expected?



MUHAMMAD MUKTADIRUL ISLAM KHAN

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Over a year has passed since the interim government took office under a Nobel laureate whose widely recognised "Three Zeros" concept placed the environment at its centre, envisioning a world with zero net carbon emissions as the foundation for sustainable and equitable growth. Climate activists had high hopes as, for the first time, a globally prominent environmental advocate was leading a country facing urgent climate crises, with the environment ministry entrusted to one of its most respected environmentalists. Activists worldwide closely followed the government's actions, anticipating dynamism and innovation in confronting Bangladesh's pressing challenges. Now, as elections approach, the question remains: how far has the government met these expectations in addressing climate change, and what lessons might it leave for the next administration?

When the interim government assumed office, Bangladesh had already integrated climate and environmental priorities into national planning, beginning with the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan in 2009 and advancing to the Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan 2022-2041. In FY 2023-24, a total of 917 projects had been launched under the Climate Change Trust Fund. Solar power had expanded rapidly, with more than six million home systems installed in off-grid areas, bringing electricity to rural households. Cyclone preparedness had also improved, with new shelters and stronger early warning systems reducing fatalities from hundreds of thousands in 1991 to only a few dozen in recent severe storms. Yet, serious challenges persisted: limited fiscal space, reliance on loan-based financing, unchecked pollution, and weak enforcement of environmental regulations. The World Bank's 2022 Country Climate and Development report identifies near-term policy and investment priorities and highlights the need to build institutional capacity to deliver on climate commitments, underlining that strategy is not enough without resource mobilisation and effective governance.

In this context, the interim government's climate actions can be assessed across four key environment and climate governance domains: (a) energy transition, (b) climate finance, (c) pollution control and conservation, and (d) disaster resilience.

Regarding energy transition, public expectations were high that the interim government would phase out costly quick rental power plants



Despite a ban on single-use plastics, nationwide plastic use continues to climb in the absence of a comprehensive regulatory framework.

FILE PHOTO: STAR

and accelerate renewable expansion. Instead, its decision to retain rentals sparked controversy for prolonging dependence on expensive fossil-fuel-based electricity rather than moving towards a clean energy shift. The draft Renewable Energy Policy 2025, which sets ambitious targets of 20 percent renewable power by 2030 and 30 percent by 2041, has drawn scrutiny. The draft lacks structural support, adequate financing, and clear implementation strategies, cautioning that without critical

the international funds came as loans rather than grants, raising concerns about debt sustainability.

In terms of pollution control and conservation, the government's steps have been largely symbolic, producing little real impact. It announced a ban on single-use plastics in government offices and introduced limited enforcement measures in public spaces. Nationwide plastic use continues to climb in the absence of a comprehensive regulatory framework. The government also launched drives to evict illegal encroachers from forest

transformative shift, but progress on the ground has not been as expected or much different from those in previous regimes. Bangladesh continues to demonstrate strong leadership on climate justice at the global stage, but domestically, the gap between promise and delivery remains wide. As elections approach, the real challenge lies in whether the next leadership can move beyond ambitious rhetoric and demonstrate the statesmanship needed to deliver tangible outcomes for communities on the frontlines of climate change.

The real test of our progress begins after LDC graduation



Ashfaq Zaman is the founder of Dhaka Forum and a strategic international affairs expert.

ASHFAQ ZAMAN

In November 2026, Bangladesh is set to graduate from the United Nations' Least Developed Country (LDC) category. It is a moment many have called historic—a badge of honour earned through decades of hard work and resilience. An economy once synonymous with famine and aid dependency has become the world's second-largest garment exporter, lifting millions out of poverty in the process.

But celebrating the graduation without addressing the challenges that come with it would be misleading. Graduation is not a fairy-tale ending; it comes with real risks, new rules, and the potential for painful shocks if we fail to prepare.

Drawing reference from what BNP's Tarique Rahman recently remarked, graduation is not just a milestone—it comes with risks and challenges which we need to be honest about. Preferential trade deals will expire, concessional loans will dry up, and intellectual property rules on medicine will tighten. These are not distant hypotheticals; they are certainties. The question is whether we will treat graduation as a springboard to greater opportunities or stumble into a trapdoor of economic fragility.

The most urgent challenge lies in trade. At present, nearly 85 percent of Bangladesh's export earnings come from one source: ready-made garments. For millions of workers, most of them women, this industry represents not just a pay cheque but survival. Yet, once LDC graduation takes effect, the tariff-free access to Europe, Canada, and Japan that enabled our garments industry to flourish will gradually disappear.

Economists often use the metaphor of a chair: a country that depends on one or two sectors is like a chair with only two legs—it can stand, but not steadily. To stand firmly, a country needs four legs. Vietnam, once our direct rival in garments, understood this well. It diversified into electronics, ICT, and even shipbuilding, transforming itself into a manufacturing hub. If we do not follow suit, our chair may wobble and fall.

For years, as an LDC, Bangladesh has benefited from soft loans—low interest, long repayment periods, easy terms. Graduation will end this privilege. From then on, we will borrow like any other middle-income country, at a much higher cost.

The numbers are already daunting. Bangladesh's external debt has

surpassed \$100 billion. Ministries and state-owned enterprises, such as Biman and the power sector, also carry their own heavy debt burdens. Without proper fiscal discipline, the risks will accumulate rapidly.

Sri Lanka's experience should worry us. After losing access to concessional finance, it filled the gap with costly loans and, within a few years, spiralled into crisis. The lesson is clear: cheap credit disappears after graduation, but the bills keep arriving. Unless we modernise revenue collection, broaden the tax base, and attract more foreign investment, we could find ourselves cornered in the same way.

There is another dimension of graduation that strikes closer to home: medicine. Under the World Trade Organization's (WTO) rules, LDCs are allowed to produce generic versions of essential drugs. This has kept life-saving medicines affordable for ordinary people and enabled Bangladesh to build a thriving pharmaceutical industry.

But graduation ends this waiver. Without it, prices will rise, and many families will struggle to pay for drugs they currently buy at a fraction of the cost. Unless Bangladesh negotiates an extension or develops the capacity to produce advanced biosimilars and patented medicines, the health of millions will be at risk.

Behind all these issues—trade, debt, and medicine—lies a deeper concern: are our institutions ready? Too often, policymaking is fragmented, debt data is scattered across ministries, and reform is sidelined by politics.

For Bangladesh to thrive after graduation, its institutions must step up. Courts and regulators need to

enforce contracts efficiently. Customs systems should be digitised to reduce costs and delays. Workers must be offered opportunities to reskill and transition into higher-value industries. Without this foundation, graduation will only expose the cracks.

Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed recently emphasised the situation, stating that other countries are moving ahead, and we must make sure our country does not fall behind. While the remark is certainly true in some respects, we must also consider both sides of the coin.

Botswana built strong institutions and turned diamonds into lasting prosperity. Mauritius escaped the "sugar trap" by investing in services and tourism. Yet the Maldives, despite booming tourism, remains vulnerable to climate shocks, and Sri Lanka's debt crisis demonstrates what happens when finance races ahead of reform.

Bangladesh still has a choice. We can sprint through the next two years, negotiating smarter trade deals, creating a sovereign stabilisation fund, and reforming our tax and governance systems. Our story has always been one of resilience—of people refusing to give up in the face of adversity. But resilience alone cannot carry us forever. LDC graduation must not become an empty badge of honour that ordinary people end up paying for.

We need new industries, stronger institutions, and smarter governance. Only then will graduation be more than a milestone—only then will it mark the beginning of a new chapter, where Bangladesh competes in the world not as a fragile exception, but as a confident peer.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL CHILD

Girls hold the future; but we aren't shaping the one they deserve



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NAZIFA RAIDAH

Now well into my 20s, I still find it difficult to gather my thoughts on the International Day of the Girl Child as I reflect on my experiences growing up as a girl in this country. I remember how defenceless and vulnerable it felt to be an adolescent, and realise that my entire girlhood was spent not as a child but rather as a soldier creating defences against patriarchal norms and expectations, and mostly its invasion of my sense of self. Which makes me wonder: what does it really mean to be a girl child? And for how long does a girl truly get to be a child in our society?

They say trauma is passed down through generations. But I don't think it is trauma per se; it feels more like reminders that the world our grandmothers knew is not so different from the one we've come to know. It's tragic how centuries can pass, but the experiences of women and girls remain almost the same in many ways.

Growing up, I was always confused when my grandmother would say things like, 'It's a curse to be born a woman.' I could see the bitterness in her eyes and hear the hate in her voice as the words left her lips. I used to wonder how she could hold so much disdain towards her own kind. Did she hate herself, too? I didn't quite understand her words until I was harassed as a child myself.

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to wonder how she could hold so much disdain towards her own kind. Did she hate herself, too? I didn't quite understand her words until I was harassed as a child myself.

I still remember the first time it happened. A postman, who thought I was "adorable," kissed me on the lips. I don't remember how old I was, but I know I was small enough that, standing up, my head barely reached the knees of most adults. Isn't it strange? I had no concept of what "good touch" or "bad touch" meant, unlike many children who learn this now in schools. But I knew it was wrong, wrong enough that the memory remains vivid, and even now, recalling it leaves me hollow.

The second time I was sexually harassed was on Pahela Baishakh; I was just 14 years old. I was wading through the crowds with my parents when I felt a hand grab me and hold me back. I froze. I didn't know what to do, and words left me. By the time

on, until my adulthood, when I walk among crowds, I walk with eyes in the back of my head. I know my story isn't unique. Every woman I know has gone through a similar dark experience in their lifetime. We brush these stories off and often barely ever talk about them, because we are constantly forced to choose between speaking out and having society think we are

and trafficking, and murder. One particular incident that recently drew massive outrage was the alleged rape of a 12-year-old girl in Khagrachari. Even though a government medical board later claimed to have found "no evidence of rape," the fact remains that sexual assaults in Chittagong Hill Tracts, and indeed across the country in general, remain widespread, with

government-wide campaign has addressed this issue. Societal taboos and cultural discomfort often prevent us from discussing anything related to intercourse, let alone rape.

In many cases, rape survivors are shamed into silence or, worse, married off to their rapists as a so-called remedy. Social pressure even drives many to die by suicide. The

considered rape—a major gap that stands in direct conflict with child protection norms.

There is also the ongoing debate around the death penalty for rape and whether retribution serves justice or creates further harm. Tragically, even when parents try to do the right thing and fight for justice, they often face harassment, threats, or sometimes even death. Earlier this year, in March, the father of a rape victim in Barguna was brutally killed the night before his daughter's court hearing.

All these are indicators that repression of women has only intensified in our society. In Nazi Germany, the phrase Kinder, Küche, Kirche (meaning "Children, Kitchen, Church") was popularised and politically reinforced to define a woman's "proper" place in society.

We may not yet see such overt restrictions, but the signs are unmistakably there. In May this year, a religious group gathered thousands of protesters in Suhrawardy Udyan demanding the abolition of the Women's Affairs Reform Commission and the withdrawal of its recommendations. Meanwhile, another religious group claimed that the commission's proposals went against the nation's beliefs, values, and traditions and that they offended religious sentiments, framing women's empowerment as a "Western ideology."

The alarm bells are ringing. If we do not hold the line now, it will not be long before a girl's entire identity is reduced to that of a woman whose sole purpose is to give life, only to fade into the background.

Ambassador Matthew Rycroft of the UK Mission to the United Nations once said, "How a society treats its most vulnerable is always the measure of its humanity." If our children, especially our girls, find themselves in a worse position in this so-called new beginning for Bangladesh, then the future we are shaping is bleak. For the sake of every little girl who still carries wonder in her eyes, I can only hope that will not be the case.



VISUAL: ALIZA RAHMAN

vulnerable or choosing to forget it because we are so hell-bent on not letting that instance define us. The tragedy is that we never actually forget; we only could've if we had found that circumstances had changed.

A just-released review of the first nine months of 2025 by the Human Rights Support Society (HRSS) reveals that 1,511 women and girls faced violence during this period. Overall, 663 rape incidents were recorded; of the victims, 393 were children. Moreover, at least 152 women and girls were gang-raped, and 19 rape victims were killed. Similar reviews also highlighted the persistence of sexual harassment and abuse, abduction

justice hardly delivered for the victims. Circumstances like these enrage me every time I come across the word "alleged rape" in incidents of sexual violence against children. It is often termed "alleged" because, unless the report is filed within a narrow window, forensic evidence becomes difficult to collect. Rape tests or forensic exams for DNA evidence are most effective within the first 72 hours (three days) after an assault, though evidence can still be gathered within seven days. Victims are advised not to bathe, shower, change clothes, or clean their bodies before the exam to preserve potential evidence. Most victims are unaware of this fact, as no major

situation in Bangladesh is worsened by a high rate of child marriage. We have the highest prevalence of child marriage in Asia and rank eighth globally. According to data, 51.4 percent of women aged 20-24 were married off before they turned 18. The law itself reinforces this cycle through the "special circumstances" loophole in the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017, which allows marriages under 18 with court or guardian consent in undefined "special cases." This clause effectively shields statutory rape within such marriages. Besides, as per Section 375 of the Penal Code, forced sex within child marriages between the ages of 13 and 17 is not legally

The real barriers facing CA students in Bangladesh

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Dr Khondkar Karim
is a professor of accounting at the Manning School of Business, University of Massachusetts Lowell, and a CPA.

Dr M. N. Elahee
is a professor at Quinnipiac University, Connecticut, and a former faculty member at the Department of Accounting and the Institute of Business Administration in Dhaka University.

SHERIF SAEED, KHONDKAR KARIM, and M. N. ELAHEE

A recent article in *The Daily Star*, titled "Rewarding yet relentless: The Chartered Accountancy journey in Bangladesh", offered a compelling window into the personal struggles of Chartered Accountancy (CA) students—the low allowances, demanding work culture, and sacrifices required to enter this prestigious profession. Reading that account, we—three Bangladeshi professionals now based in the United States—felt compelled to offer a different lens on these struggles. While that article captured the individual journey, we aim to examine the systemic failures that make that journey so unnecessarily difficult.

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh (ICAB) estimates that the country needs about 20,000 qualified professionals. Yet, since independence, it has produced only 1,967 CAs, with merely 613 currently practising. In 2024, these 613 practitioners served a population of 17.5 crore and issued 57,993 audit reports—an average of 95 reports per practitioner. This overwhelming workload systematically compromises audit quality and undermines financial integrity across the economy.

The most damning example is the Hallmark-Sonali Bank scandal, where over \$450 million in fraud went undetected for years because auditors failed to verify collateral and detect forged documents. This was not a failure caused by a shortage of accountants; it was a failure of compromised quality within a restrictive system. If the current model truly produced excellence, such failures would be anomalies—not recurring symptoms of systemic dysfunction.

Regional disparities are equally stark. Sri Lanka, with one-eighth of Bangladesh's population, has 225 percent more professional

accountants. India boasts over 400,000 chartered accountants. Even Pakistan, despite its economic and political turbulence, has trained 10,000 CAs.

At the current growth rate of 63 new CAs annually, meeting even ICAB's conservative estimate would take 310 years—assuming Bangladesh's economy stops growing altogether. This mathematical impossibility exposes a fundamental institutional failure that no amount of individual perseverance can overcome.

While colonial-era structures laid the initial framework, today's restrictive system serves the economic interests of those who control it. Both ICAB and ICMAB leaderships benefit from an artificial scarcity that protects incumbent practitioners from competition, ensures high fees for a handful of firms, and concentrates power within Dhaka-based networks.

Defenders argue that restrictive entry safeguards quality or that articleship provides essential training. However, evidence shows that Bangladesh's audit environment is characterised by low fees and client pressure that compromise auditor independence. The articleship system itself lacks structured mentoring and often relegates trainees to routine clerical work rather than meaningful, value-added learning.

The system's harmful manifestations are clear. Professional bodies treat the profession as an exclusive club rather than a vital national resource. Nearly all professional activity is concentrated in the capital, perpetuating geographic inequality. Article students often work for Tk 7,000-8,000 per month—far below Dhaka's living costs—creating financial barriers that exclude talented individuals from lower-income backgrounds while sustaining a cycle of cheap labour.

This shortage imposes tangible costs. Bangladeshi businesses increasingly hire senior accounting professionals from abroad. Bangladesh Bank's recent consulting contracts with foreign firms exemplify this pattern of exporting opportunities. The consulting sector—where IT consulting alone is projected to reach \$2.11 billion by FY2025—remains dominated by foreign firms recruiting qualified accountants from other countries. Meanwhile, poor quality financial statements continue to erode investor confidence, and Bangladeshi representation

in Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian markets lags behind its neighbours.

The crisis is deepening as artificial intelligence (AI), robotic process automation, and data analytics replace traditional compliance tasks—not in the distant future, but today. Accounting graduates often possess theoretical knowledge but lack essential digital skills, including data analytics (Power BI, Tableau), enterprise resource planning (ERP) expertise (SAP, Oracle, NetSuite), automation tools (UiPath), advanced Excel and SQL, and an

increasingly indispensable. This would also raise billable rates, attract top talent, redefine the profession's value proposition, and directly boost national productivity.

The following roadmap outlines incremental yet achievable steps:

Modernise entry requirements: Establish unified Bachelor of Accounting degrees enabling direct exam access without mandatory articleship, and integrate accounting-related information system tools into the curriculum.



FILE VISUAL: MONG SHONIE

understanding of AI and blockchain.

Future Bangladeshi accountants must evolve into strategic partners—auditors who use data analytics to examine 100 percent of transactions, management accountants who build real-time dashboards with predictive models, and consultants who advise on cloud-based systems and RPA implementation. By automating routine tasks, technology enables accountants to focus on interpretation and strategy—areas where human judgment

Implement two-tier certification: Separate examination qualifications (certificate level) from practice requirements (licence level), allowing work experience during articleship to count towards licensing. This would increase the number of qualified professionals while maintaining practice standards.

Decentralise institutional control: Establish independent regional licensing authorities in each administrative division,

comprising local businesses, academics, and professionals.

Mandate fair compensation: Introduce living-wage standards for entry-level roles and replace the exploitative term "article student" with "staff auditor" or "junior consultant." Fair compensation should be a regulatory requirement, not a voluntary gesture.

Strengthen regulatory oversight: Expand the authority of the Financial Reporting Council and the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission to investigate professional misconduct, criminalise financial statement fraud, and establish transparent audit quality metrics.

Require local partnership: Enforce 20-80 partnership models for foreign consulting engagements—20 percent foreign expertise combined with 80 percent local resources—to ensure effective knowledge transfer.

These steps are essential not merely to produce more accountants, but to build a professional infrastructure capable of supporting Bangladesh's transition to middle-income status. The anonymous writer rightly captured the personal resilience required to become a CA—the sacrifices, perseverance, and determination. But individual heroism cannot substitute for institutional reform. We should not accept a system that demands extraordinary personal sacrifice merely to enter a profession. As the women CAs quoted in that article observed, pursuing Chartered Accountancy "is still a privilege"—and that is precisely the problem. In a modern economy, professional accounting should be an accessible career path, not a privilege reserved for those who can endure years of exploitation.

Bangladesh stands at a crossroads. Recent scandals—from loan defaults and money laundering to the collapse of financial institutions—further highlight the steep cost of inadequate professional oversight, a burden the nation can no longer afford. Nor can it allow neighbouring countries to seize regional opportunities that Bangladesh is well-positioned to capture.

The era of gradual change has ended. What Bangladesh needs now is bold, transformative action—action that dismantles the professional bottleneck and expands the vision of what the nation's economic potential can truly be.

THE SHELF

6 books that bring Bangladesh to life for diaspora teens

Step into Bengal in the 1940s, a land still grappling with famine, poverty, and the echoes of peasant revolts. Work is scarce, wages are meagre, and food is never guaranteed.

Amid this uncertainty, the elections of 1946, the proposal for Pakistan, and communal riots are reshaping the future of the region.

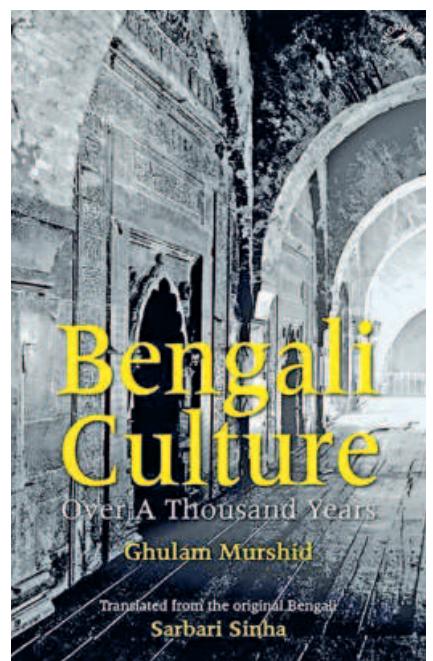
NUR-E-JANNAT ALIF

For teenagers growing up far from Bangladesh, the country can often feel like a patchwork of family anecdotes, festival memories, and half-understood news headlines. Books, however, have the power to fill in the gaps—to offer voices and histories that make the abstract appear real. The following six titles open windows into Bangladesh's culture, politics, and everyday lives, helping diaspora teens connect more deeply to their roots.

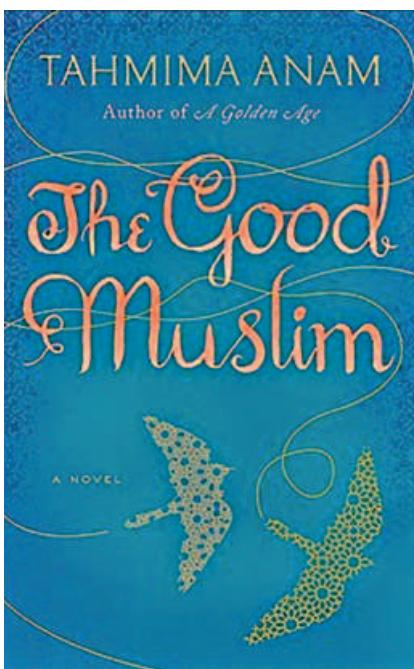
Bengali Culture Over a Thousand Years

Ghulam Murshid, Sarbari Sinha (Translator)
Niyogi Books, 2022

First published in Bangla in 2006 as *Hajar Bochhorer Bangali Shongskriti*, this book now comes to English readers translated. In clear and accessible prose, Ghulam Murshid traces how Bengali culture has taken shape over



a thousand years: through literature, music, art, rituals, and the everyday customs that make life uniquely Bangali. He captures its plurality, showing how different religious and social traditions have sometimes clashed yet always remained tied together by a shared language and imagination. What sets this work apart is its balance: Murshid neither romanticises nor simplifies, presenting culture as something alive, layered, and constantly evolving. For diaspora teens and young adults, it opens a doorway into the roots of being Bangali, offering context that stretches far beyond family stories and festival snapshots, helping readers see how history, creativity, and identity intertwine to shape the present.



The Good Muslim

Tahmima Anam
Harper, 2011

From the prize winning author of *A Golden Age*, *The Good Muslim* takes readers into a Bangladesh still healing from the scars of the Liberation War. Through the intertwined lives of siblings Sohail and Maya, Anam explores how the aftermath of conflict shapes not just a nation but the very people who call it home. Maya clings to her revolutionary ideals, while Sohail has chosen a very different path, embracing religious devotion in ways that gradually pull them apart. What makes this novel so compelling is its balance of the personal and the political—you feel the tension in family bonds, the weight of belief, and the long shadows of war, yet it is told with a warmth and humanity that makes the story deeply relatable. This is a novel that brings Bangladesh vividly to life, not merely as history, but as a world of choices, emotions, and relationships that feel immediate and intimate.

Khwabnama

Akhteruzzaman Elias, Arunava Sinha (Translator)
Penguin Hamish Hamilton, 2021

Step into Bengal in the 1940s, a land still grappling with famine, poverty, and the echoes of peasant revolts. Work is scarce, wages are meagre, and food is never guaranteed. Amid this uncertainty, the elections of 1946, the proposal for Pakistan, and communal riots are reshaping the future of the region. In a small, unnamed village, we meet Tamiz, a young farmhand whose life is rooted in the soil he tills, yet whose dreams stretch far beyond the mud of his fields. His aspirations are shaped by the land, the memories of his ancestors, and the turbulent saga unfolding around



him. *Khwabnama* is a magnum opus that intertwines memory with reality, legend with history, and personal struggle with collective movements like the Tebhaga uprising, where peasants demanded two-thirds of the harvest they produced. Akhteruzzaman Elias masterfully blends magical realism into the daily lives of his characters, crafting a narrative that feels at once poetic, haunting, and grounded in the hard truths of history. This is a novel that immerses readers in a world of resilience, longing, and the quiet yet powerful heartbeat of a people shaping their own destiny.

Hellfire

Leesa Gazi, Shabnam Nadiya (Translator)
Eka, 2024



Hellfire

Leesa Gazi
Translated from the original Bengali by Shabnam Nadiya

The torn tune of a broken violin
Signifies the evanescence of joy.
So many faded voices intermingle
This day and the night.
Moonlight has disappeared
In the sky overcast with
commingled clouds.
The wind is sombre with the
sadness
Of Bismillah's 'shehnai'.
The songs of 'Mohiner Ghoraguli'
Leave a rhythmic effect
In the somnolence of the mind.
Feelings are transmuted into
excruciating pain.
A kind of communication
Changes into a complex form.
The bright book of life is
Shrouded with obscurity;
The candle light slowly burns out
Into a darkness deep;
In this night and silence
We'll get lost or
Get back the lost words
By walking through lanes and
bylanes of life.

Ahaduzzaman Mohammad Ali
is a former professor of Dhaka University.

Transmutation

POETRY

AHADUZZAMAN MOHAMMAD ALI

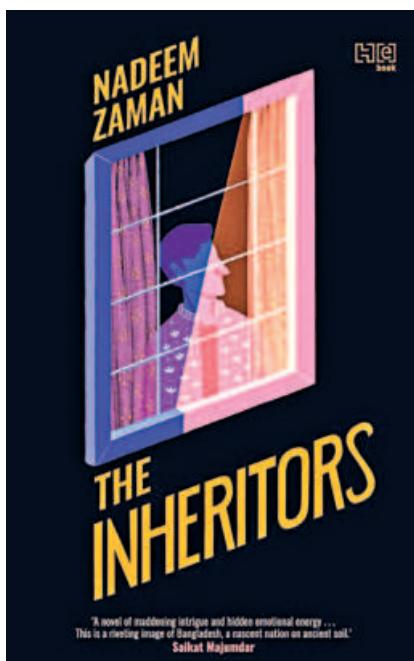
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Ahaduzzaman Mohammad Ali
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ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

And this one is for anyone who loves family drama that burns from the inside out. Life under Farida Khanam's watchful eyes is suffocating for sisters Lovely and Beauty. Their mother's rules and constant surveillance make the home feel more like a cage than a place of safety. However, finally, on her 40th birthday, Lovely walks out alone to visit Gausia Market, and what begins as a simple journey quickly exposes the fragile arrangements of their household. Secrets long buried start to surface, and the delicate balance holding their family together begins to wobble. This novel is raw, messy, magnetic, and it captures how love, control, and desire can twist together until you are not sure whether you are rooting for escape or for staying. Not only a quick escape from the daily grind, *Leesa Gazi* lets you comprehend Bangladesh from an entirely different perspective, making even the familiar feel fresh and unexpectedly vivid.

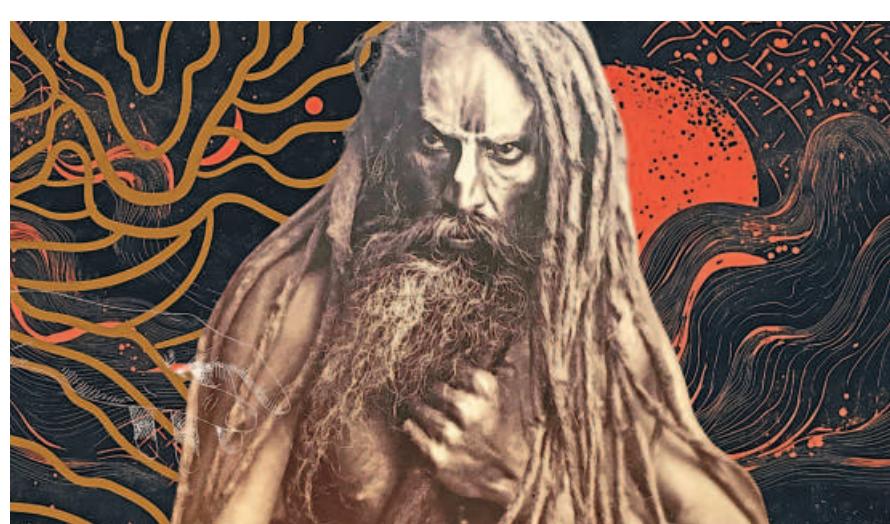
to the corridors of power. The book is unapologetically controversial, offering sharp insights into politics, religion, and societal tensions. For diaspora teens, it is a rare chance to engage with these realities, understand differing perspectives, and reflect on their own stance. *Babu Bangladesh!* invites readers to witness, question, and decide for themselves, a provocative read for anyone trying to grasp the pulse of contemporary Bangladesh.



The Inheritors
Nadeem Zaman
Hachette India, 2023

Nisar Chowdhury returns to Dhaka, expecting the city of his forefathers—a tapestry rich in history and artistry—but finds something fictitiously new. Streets, people, and memories have shifted, replaced by tales of modern ambition, hidden deals, and unexpected alliances. Central to it is his father's decision to sell their family home, a link to the past that Nisar must reconcile with as he navigates this transformed city. *The Inheritors* captures a Dhaka caught between old and new, tradition and change. Through Nisar's eyes, readers glimpse a city full of possibilities, betrayals, and complex human connections. The novel traces a journey of understanding a home that has evolved, holding on to meaningful roots while adapting to the present, and finding where one truly fits.

NUR-E-JANNAT ALIF is a gender studies major and part-time writer who dreams of authoring a book someday. Find her at [@literatureinsolitude](https://www.instagram.com/literatureinsolitude) on Instagram or send her your book/movie/television recommendations at nurejannatalif@gmail.com.

PHOTO: COLLECTED,
ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

FLASH FICTION

The hair fair

EKRAM KABIR

On the northern side of Dholgram, a very large field hosts a fair every year—a Hair Fair, where people gather to show off their hair. The one who has the longest hair gets the highest honour. All kinds of hair can be seen—entangled, shiny, untidy, thin, black, and grey—all sorts of hairy people come. A thousand more audiences join them as well. The spectacle of hair dazzles everyone's eyes, and at the end of the event, judges announce the awards. The poets recite their poems, artists paint their masterpieces.

As the daylight fades into the darker night, another kind of fair takes place. When the spectators fall asleep, the long-haired people secretly unfold their razors

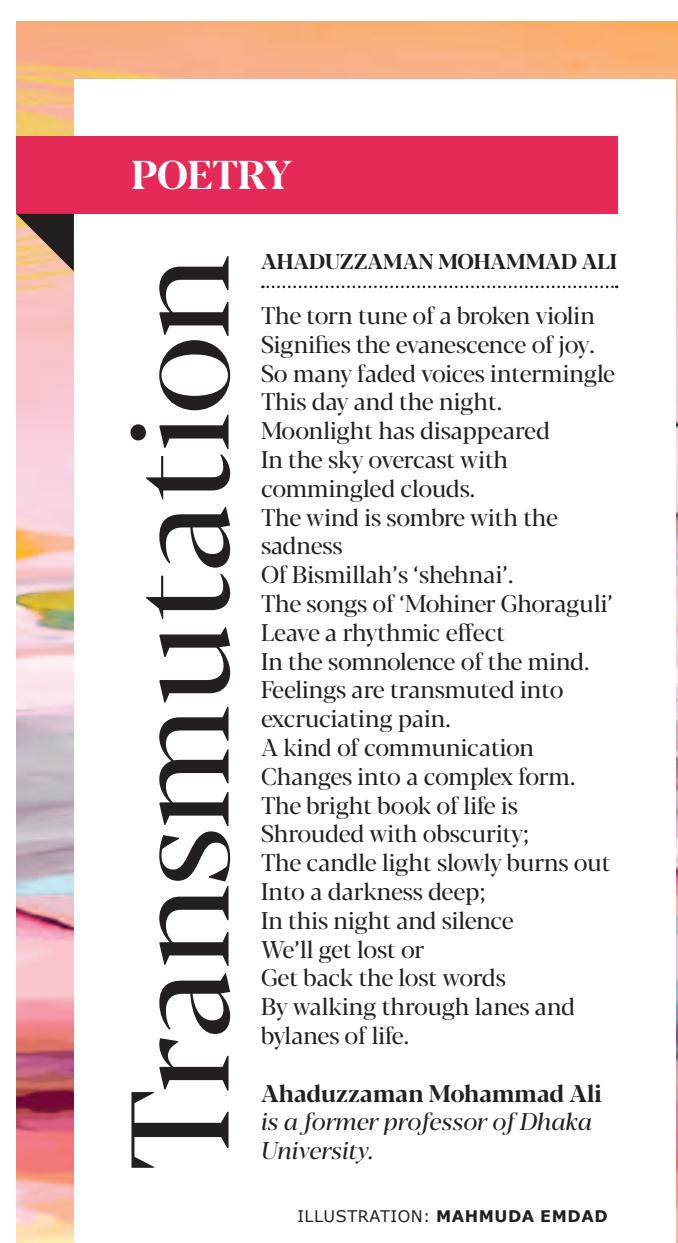
and jump onto one another's heads to cut their hair. They proclaim: "I cannot tolerate your hair". Everyone's head becomes bloody with the razors' strokes.

***This flash fiction is inspired from the occurrence of 2025, when a specific organisation forcefully cut the hair of many of the homeless street people in Dhaka who kept long hair and beard intentionally.**

Translated from Bangla by Sabreena Ahmed.

Ekram Kabir is a Bangladeshi storyteller.

Dr. Sabreena Ahmed is Associate Professor at the Department of English and Humanities, Brac University, and a translator.



A match made in music PUTUL AND REZA'S STORY

"I am used to calling her *tui* because we were friends first. Some might find it odd, but it does not bother us. Our friendship is what makes our relationship special," laughed Reza.

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

For Putul Sajia Sultana and Syed Reza Ali, love has always revolved around music. Their little world grew even more beautiful with the arrival of their daughter, Geetoleena. Despite their differences in taste, with Putul finding happiness in regional songs, while Reza leans towards metal. Even their football loyalties differ, as one supports Brazil and the other Argentina. Yet it is this very passion for music that drew Reza from Australia to Dhaka, where he not only found his calling, but also his soulmate.

The couple recently visited The Daily Star, complementing each other in coordinated outfits. Between interviews and photographs, they could not stop capturing moments of one another on their phones. Married for four years, they

describe themselves as best friends who respect each other's personal space while nurturing their shared world. Although deeply in love, they affectionately address each other using *tui*, a term that might sound a bit strange to others, but feels natural to them.

"I am used to calling her *tui* because we were friends first. Some might find it odd, but it does not bother us. Our friendship is what makes our relationship special," laughed Reza.

Their love story was never about formal confessions. Instead, it unfolded naturally. Their families, especially Putul's mother-in-law, could see that they were made for each other.

"At that time, I was looking for a composer. It was just after Covid had ended, and I wanted a studio close to my house. While talking to him, I found out he lived in Dhanmondi and his studio was there as well. That is how we started working together. Our friendship grew so close that we did not even realise when it shifted from *tumi* to *tui*."

"We first met at a Valentine's Day programme organised by NTV in Australia. We had two shows in Sydney and Melbourne. Our first interaction was brief, only a one-hour practice session on February 16. I returned to Bangladesh soon after, but we stayed connected on Facebook. For a long time, we did not even exchange a simple hello," recalled Putul.

Reza, spontaneous by nature, once had everything. He had a stable banking career and an Australian passport. Yet in 2019, he came back to pursue music in Dhaka.

"I made the decision within hours," he shared. "After years in banking, I felt suffocated. I could not give time to my love for music. In 2011, I shared the stage with Ayub Bachchu in Australia and that was magical. Then in 2015, when Wind of Change came to Bangladesh, I thought that if our country could produce something so extraordinary, then I must pursue music. Within hours, I sent in my resignation, told my agent I would sell my house, left my

car behind, and packed my bags. I had a huge collection of guitars, but brought only my red guitar with me. And with that, I came to Dhaka."

Their paths crossed again in 2020, in the most unexpected way. While commenting on a mutual friend's post on Facebook, Reza left a funny remark that caught Putul's attention. A lighthearted exchange of comments led them to finally move their conversations to inbox, and from there, a friendship began to blossom.

"At that time, I was looking for a composer. It was just after Covid had ended, and I wanted a studio close to my house. While talking to him, I found out he lived in Dhanmondi and his studio was there as well. That is how we started working together. Our friendship grew so close that we did not even realise when it shifted from *tumi* to *tui*," said Putul with a smile.

For a long time, they lived in their own little bubble, caring deeply for each other without ever putting a label on their relationship. "Putul's elder sister and my mother saw that our chemistry was strong. They decided between themselves and told us that we were ideal for each other," said Reza.

Their marriage, too, came about in a spontaneous way. Putul recalled the story with joy. "The day we got married, my mother-in-law told us in the afternoon that the government was going to impose lockdown again. She said, 'I have decided you will get married in the evening.' It is true—we got married with only three hours' notice. But somehow, my mother-in-law managed everything, from my bridal makeover to arranging a lovely dinner for our guests. We even took photos. And guess what, we got married at his house with the local Kazi. So, in the end, I never had to leave my own home," said Putul, her face lighting up.

The musical duo is now working on two albums. With eight tracks, the first will step away from their usual genres, featuring stage-ready songs, alongside jazz and blues. Reza himself is also working on his own solo album, in which he plans to use Putul's voice.

Although both are singers, Putul has been active in the industry for two decades, much longer than Reza's career. His journey hasn't been without challenges. "Since I was abroad for so long, entering the music field here has been tough. Right now, the industry is struggling because listeners aren't always engaging with good music, or good songs aren't reaching audiences and getting views. It's a huge challenge to establish myself," said Reza.

As an artiste couple, they also face prejudice. "Because I have a longer career, people sometimes assume Reza is getting extra privileges because of me," said Putul. "Whatever Reza has achieved so far, he has earned on his own. He has worked on films, TV series, background scores for various projects—sometimes I don't even know the clients he is working with. The projects we've done together are actually quite small compared to what we've done separately. But people assume that we only work with each other. The truth is, we simply respect one another's work ethics. We make sure no outside pressures can affect our relationship," she concluded.



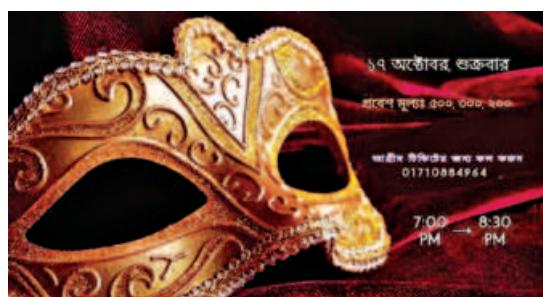
PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA



Reels of Resistance: Voices from the Hill Tracts

Oct 12 | 7 pm onwards
TSC, Dhaka University



Play: Rajnetra

Oct 17 | 7 pm – 8:30 pm
National Theatre Hall, BSA



'Hajar Bochhor Dhore'

Oct 18 | 4:45 pm – 9 pm
Bishwo Shahitto Kendro

TV TALKIES

KURUKSHETRA

The Great War of Mahabharata

Netflix's *Kurukshetra: The Great War of Mahabharata* is an animated series that launched yesterday, depicting one of India's most beloved epics. This animated series marks Netflix's dive into Indian mythological storytelling, and it's a visual treat that brings ancient battles to modern screens.

The series show the 18-day war between the Pandavas and Kauravas—a

battle that tore families apart. 18 different warriors, give a personal look at their struggles, doubts, and heartbreaks.

The first season dropped on October 10, 2025, with all 18 episodes now streaming on Netflix in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, and English.



WHAT'S PLAYING



'The Fate of Ophelia' by Taylor Swift

Fresh off her new album *The Life of a Showgirl*, Taylor Swift drops the lead single "The Fate of Ophelia", released October 3, 2025.

The track blends dance-pop and synth-pop with a driving beat, and anthemic energy. Lyrically, it reimagines the tragic story of Shakespeare's Ophelia—Swift positions herself as someone pulled back from the brink through a deserved and loyal love.

It became the most-streamed song in a single day on Spotify, breaking records for first-day performance. The album *The Life of a Showgirl* also shattered streaming records, becoming the biggest first-day album on several platforms. Swift also released the music video for "The Fate of Ophelia" in conjunction with a theatrical "Release Party of a Showgirl" event, adding cinematic flair to the visual narrative.

With its bold production, poetic lyricism, and strong debut in streaming and buzz, *The Fate of Ophelia* cements Taylor's return to high-stakes pop storytelling in her *Showgirl* era.

TRENDY STREAMS

Netflix
Kurukshetra



Prime Video
Maintenance Required



Apple TV+
The Last Frontier



HBO Max
The Chair Company



Chorki
Little Miss Chaos



The tricky thing about fencing is that there are no secrets. Once you get on the strip... it comes down to a battle of minds, really.

American sabre fencer
MARIEL ZAGUNIS.



THREE WEAPONS, THREE STYLES

Foil: Precision is king. Only the torso counts as a target, and a touch is a whisper of skill rather than force.

Épée: Patience pays off. Every part of the body is a target, and hesitation can cost you dearly.

Sabre: Lightning on the piste. Fast, aggressive, and dazzling -- speed and edge rule the bout.

FROM DUELS TO SPORT

What began on the cloudy battlefields of Europe became a disciplined sport with lighter blades, protective gear, and electronic scoring. Fencing turned duelling into a chess match of steel.

OLYMPIC LEGACY

Present at every modern Games since 1896, fencing has grown into a stage for men and women to test strategy, reflex, and nerves. Women first entered with foil in 1924 and currently all three weapons are contested globally.

CHAMPIONS AND POWERHOUSES

Legends like Edoardo Mangiarotti (Italy), Christian d'Oriola (France), Valentina Vezzali (Italy), and Áron Szilágyi (Hungary) set the standard. Powerhouses include Italy, France, Hungary, with South Korea, China, and the USA emerging as modern forces.

LOCAL PROMISE

The Bangladesh Fencing Federation has been nurturing the sport since 2007. Participation is steadily spreading beyond Dhaka, with schools, clubs, and youth taking up the challenge.

WHY GIVE FENCING A GO?

Fencing is called "physical chess" for a reason. It hones reflexes, agility, and strategic thinking. On the piste, timing is everything -- sometimes the slow and steady will outwit the bold.



BANGLADESH'S FENCING JOURNEY

Fencing was introduced in Bangladesh in 2007, with support from India.

Breakthrough came at the 2016 South Asian Games, with Bangladesh winning 11 medals on debut.

There are currently around 450 registered players, about 60 percent of them male.

Bangladesh has 20 clubs, including 4 outside Dhaka.

Five major tournaments are held annually: the National Championship, Cadet & Junior Championship, President's Cup, Victory Day Cup, plus one additional event.

At the 2019 South Asian Games, Bangladesh secured 11 medals in fencing: 1 gold, 3 silver, and 7 bronze.

BLADES DANCING in the shadows

RAMIN TALUKDAR

As the afternoon light softened over Dhaka, the Shaheed Suhrawardy Indoor Stadium in Mirpur suddenly echoed with the metallic clash of steel. Upon stepping closer, one would see two young women facing each other, their faces hidden by black mesh masks, dressed in white, holding slender glistening blades. They take guard with an "en garde" stance, freeze for a heartbeat, then surge forward at the call of "Allez!"

Steel cuts the air like lightning slicing through clouds -- no blood, no violence. Only strategy, rhythm, and the science of signals. The sport is fencing.

In a country where sport is almost synonymous to cricket or football, fencing feels like a submerged tale from distant seas -- unseen, unknown; yet stirring a faint vibration, like the soft hum of a tamura.

Among those preparing at the corner of the venue was Fatematz Zohra Jaimah, a student of BAF Shaheen School and College. Adjusting her lamé (pronounced lah-may) jacket, she said softly, "When I first held a foil, it felt like I was writing poetry. Rhythm defined the attack. That poetic voice may not have sustained, but the feeling remains. I practise quietly; maybe one afternoon, with an international medal, I will find that rhythm again."

"While swapping feet at will to maintain agility, the mind also has to keep up with the dynamic beats of tactics."

The genesis of fencing may be traced back to Europe's cloudy fields, but its language requires no translation. "Right of way" may sound like legal jargon, but in truth it is like cinematic dialogue in a play -- who speaks first, who pauses, where the interval happens. "Halt" stops the action, "Allez" reignites it. A touch on a designated target sparks a flash of green or red on the scoring box, and for a spectator, a quick jolt of excitement. In Mirpur, without a crowd, that jolt remains locked within the fencers' hearts.

Stationed nearby, coach Shahidul Islam of Bangladesh Ansar explained the three events: the precision of foil, the patience of épée, the flair of sabre. Why has the sport not spread at the grassroots? He sighed: "Wishing is not enough; structure is needed. The gear -- mask, lamé, body wire, electric sword -- is specialised and costly, with maintenance required too. You need trained coaches and safe indoor spaces."

On a street corner near New Market, college student and cricket lover Nafis laughed: "Swords? I've seen them in films, but never on a playing field." His friend Shamim showed more curiosity: "If it's safe, I'd try. But where would I learn?" Their questions mirror society's scepticism in the face of the unfamiliar. A parent in Dhamondi, Mamta Begum, said: "If children can play safely, I have no objection. The problem is, we don't even hear about it. Who will teach, and where?" Head coach Abu Zayed Chowdhury of the Bangladesh Fencing Federation pointed to small nations that embraced the sport

-- Hungary, South Korea. "Here, our sporting culture is narrow. Media, society, playing fields -- all revolve around a few games. For others, space exists, but not light. Fencing demands discipline, focus, cognitive speed -- qualities that support education as well. If schools and universities had clubs, in ten years the picture would change."

Far from Dhaka, in a village by the Dhaleshwari River, two children stood facing each other in a yard. They had drawn a narrow line on the ground for their imaginary piste. With slim PVC pipes in hand, they lunged and retreated, laughter mixing with sharp concentration. In

In Dhaka's indoor halls and village yards alike, young Bangladeshi fencers are learning to wield their blades with strategy, rhythm, and courage.



PHOTO: BANGLADESH FENCING FEDERATION

their imagination, they whispered commands: "Advance!", "Retreat!", "Lunge!" Then they froze, eyes meeting curiously, as if both said together: "Allez!" In such small games lie the maps of greater journeys, for fencing is not a contest of strength but of timing and decision. Who reads the feint first? Who senses the rhythm of distance? Who knows that the best defence can be the perfect attack?

The story of fencing in Bangladesh circles back to Major Kamrul Islam (retd), president of the federation, who first introduced the sport in 2007 after leaving archery. Despite political interruptions, he returned and oversaw tournaments, including the recent National Championship. "Bringing fencing here in 2007 was a challenge," he said. "The Indian federation helped by sending coaches, some at no cost. Slowly, schools and colleges joined in. At first, people were afraid, but once they knew it was safe, they came forward. Later, the armed forces embraced it, and clubs followed." In 2016, Bangladesh made its debut at the South Asian Games -- and returned with 11 medals.

At the latest nationals, Sumaiya Yasmin from Lalmoni School and College, trained through a civilian club, Bengal Academy, won gold in sabre. The army have since offered her a place. "I come from a poor family," she said. "Getting equipment outside the armed forces is very difficult. If we had better support from the federation or sponsors, we could go further. Our local coaches are good, but international expertise would take us to another level."

Even so, the passion is undeniable. Emily Rai Isha, a nurse, won a medal at the nationals. "I fell in love with the game the moment I first tried it," she said. Another fencer, Nazira Khatun, summed it up differently: "There is something royal about this sport."

When the discussion turned to sponsorship, Rejaur Rahman Sinha, head of the media committee of the federation, said, "Previously, we had always relied on in-house sponsors, but for this year's Nationals, we've got Suzuki on board. It's a huge step for us. Having such a well-known brand associated with us is truly inspiring. Suzuki has also assured us that their support will continue in the future."

Meanwhile, Major Kamrul added: "This time, at the South Asian Games, those who win gold will receive a motorbike from Suzuki, while the women's gold medallists will get scooters."

One night, rain beat down on tin roofs, sounding like blades striking. The city seemed to ask itself: will we remain content with familiar games, or will we awaken to a new discipline, to the soft flash of the sword? The answer has not yet been spoken, but the preparation has begun. In Mirpur's indoor hall, each step, each whisper "Allez!", is proof. Fencing is no longer entirely unknown. And those who pursue it -- quietly, patiently -- are our unknown warriors, learning not just to strike, but to pause, and to triumph through restraint, while history whispers that swordfighting has long been woven into the tales of this region.

Cabrera at a crossroads

SHABAB CHOWDHURY

Bangladesh coach Javier Cabrera finds himself at a defining crossroads, blessed with a momentous opportunity to shape the very future of the country's football.

The Spaniard has been entrusted with the golden chance to manage the national team at a juncture standing on the rebirth of Bangladeshi football, fuelled by the arrival of Hamza Choudhury, Shamit Shome, and several other high-quality expats. Now, buoyed by all the attention and support from fans, time is ticking for Cabrera to deliver the goods: harness the positivity and upliftment around football to create a legacy, or become the main character to fluff the opportunity to cash in on the serious quality boost and kill this incredible buzz.

As things stand, Bangladesh are yet to find a victory since the arrival of Hamza in March and are on the brink of failure after losing both their home matches and drawing the other, away from home, in the AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers, with the latest 4-3 defeat coming at home against Hong Kong on Thursday. A win has indeed eluded Bangladesh, but the major concern has also been the fact that the team's performances have largely paid tribute to the stagnant phase of Bangladeshi football -- or the pre-Hamza era. There are numerous instances when Bangladesh went toe-to-toe with much higher-ranked opponents and came back with losses; there are notable instances where the men in red and green could've nicked games. And that was when the team did not have players like Hamza or Shamit and relied on local talents groomed in the dilapidated domestic structure. So, after being presented with such supreme talent, one would rightly expect a major boost in how the team would play. This brings forth the burning



Javier Cabrera looking relaxed at the airport lounge on Friday as Bangladesh left for the return fixture against Hong Kong, but he surely knows his job is hanging by a thread.

PHOTO: BFF

question: Why has nothing changed? Why are Bangladesh still paying odes to past performances despite having superior talents in key positions?

Ideally in such cases, when on-field displays are questionable and tactics make heads scratch, the head coach is held responsible. And in line with that convention, Cabrera must take the lion's share of the responsibility.

The Spaniard has persistently welcomed scrutiny with his questionable player choices -- adamantly relying on underperforming regulars and being

hesitant to promote promising players. His immovable trust in error-prone right-forward-turned-left-back Saad Uddin in defence has consistently backfired, with the latest instance of his defensive shortcomings costing Bangladesh big time against Hong Kong. Moreover, forwards like Faisal Ahmed Fahim have constantly failed to justify the coach's unwavering faith.

The squad suffers from a major deficiency, as it has no out-and-out striker; however, Cabrera has persistently opted to overlook this vacuum and

instead tried to make up for it with wingers -- an attempt that has almost always proved futile. Even if new talents are called into preliminary squads, they are almost destined never to see any playing time, as Cabrera has his favoured players, with no amount of exciting form ever forcing its way through to the coach's plans. It's almost always the regulars who will get a seat at Cabrera's table. Even the women's team coach Peter Butler, who had coached the BFF Elite Academy, voiced his frustration about players not being roped through the ranks to the senior side.

Cabrera's ultra-conservative approach has also been under the microscope, and another sampling of that was laid bare against Hong Kong. Having named a conservative eleven with questionable starters, it was only after going down 2-1 that he opted for a proactive role -- one that paid off. Off went Sohel Rana Senior and Junior and Fahim, and in came captain Jamal Bhuyan, Fahmedul Islam, and Shamit Shome. All three had an impact and left their mark on the game with key offensive contributions. Jamal's delivery was involved in two of the goals, Shamit found the net, Fahmedul looked menacing, and it went on as left-back Zayan Ahmed became a serious attacking outlet in the dying moments of the game. So why not go with a positive mindset from the get-go? Why bind your team with a straitjacket from the outset and set them free only after the damage has been done?

With so many of his choices in how this Bangladeshi team operates, Cabrera's decisions continue to bewilder. But, given the unpromising performances, time has come to ask whether he is the right man to take Bangladesh forward. It's now or never as Bangladesh face Hong Kong in the reverse fixture on Thursday.

Zarif makes history

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's promising youngster Zarif Abrar has become the first tennis player from the country to clinch a title in ITF World Tennis Tour Juniors J30 group by winning the single's event in the Rajshahi World Tennis Tour Juniors J30 competition at the Rajshahi Complex on Friday.



In the final of the boy's single's event, Zarif beat top seed Napat Pattanalertphan of Thailand by straight sets, 7-6 (3) and 6-4.

In the boy's doubles final, the Thai pair of Napat and Ariyaphol Leekul beat the Indian pair of Gowtham and Shanmugasundaran, 7-6 and 6-0, to lift the title.

In the girls' section, Chinese players reigned supreme. Zijie Yang beat Aaraa Aasaal Azim of Maldives 7-5, 3-6 and 6-3 in the girls' single's final. It was an all Chinese final in the double's event, where Zijie paired up with Hanyu Wang and beat Tianran Dong and Zican Yang 6-4, 4-6 and 10-5.

Akbar fires Rangpur into NCL final

SPORTS REPORTER

Skipper Akbar Ali smashed a blistering 21-ball 40 as Rangpur Division booked their place in the National Cricket League T20 final with a thrilling four-wicket win over Chattogram Division in the second qualifier at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Rangpur will now face Khulna Division in the final on Sunday, also at the same venue.

Chasing 168, Rangpur got off to a steady start, thanks to a 41-ball 54 from Veteran Nasir Hossain. He fell in the 15th over after which Akbar then took charge, smashing three sixes and a four, injecting much-needed momentum into the chase.

Mominul Haque's twin strikes in the penultimate over -- dismissing Akbar and Nasim Ahmed -- set up a nervy finish. With three runs required off the final over, Naeem Islam held his nerve, dispatching Ashraful Hosan for a boundary off the last ball to seal the win.



India opener Yashasvi Jaiswal celebrates his century on the opening day of the second Test against West Indies at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi yesterday. The left-handed batter remained unbeaten on 173 -- his innings laced with 22 boundaries -- as the home side, 1-0 up in the two-match series, took the driving seat with a score of 318 for two at stumps.

PHOTO: BCCI

Taming Rashid key to keeping series alive

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will face Afghanistan in a do-or-die second ODI today in Abu Dhabi, where a defeat would hand them their third successive series defeat in the format against the Afghans.

The Tigers lost the first match by five wickets on Wednesday, which exposed many of their frailties in the batting department.

Ahead of the do-or-die tie, Bangladesh would be hoping to sort out their slow middle-over batting, underconfident top order and most importantly find an answer to Afghan spin wizard Rashid Khan.

Skipper Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Bangladesh's highest run-getter against Afghanistan in ODIs with 471 runs in 12 innings, has usually been the answer to the riddles that the Afghans serve.

However, he has often been guilty of slowing down the run-scoring through the middle-overs as his strike rate against the opponents is a measly 67.38.

His sluggish scoring rate emerged as a problem in the first ODI as well, when Miraz and Tawhid Hridoy put on a 101-run partnership off 142 deliveries.

Still, their fourth wicket stand had provided some sort of a platform, taking the side from 53-3 to 154-4. But Bangladesh



could not capitalise on it because of Rashid, in particular his googlies.

Two googlies and a straighter one later, Rashid had swept through Bangladesh's middle-order resistance, accounting for Miraz, Jaker Ali and Nurul Hasan, all three right-handers out leg before.

Even in the T20I series which Tigers swept 3-0, Rashid's effect was visible.

Rashid bagged four for 18 in the first, two for 29 in the second and went wicketless for 13 in the third T20I. Jaker in particular found it tough to counter him, twice getting trapped leg-before by him in

the T20I series.

It remains to be seen whether the Tigers effect a personnel change in the middle-order -- they have the option of bringing in the left-hander Shamim Hossain -- or shuffle the batting order to keep Rashid at bay.

Bangladesh were all out 221 in the last game. Since this year's ICC Champions Trophy, Bangladesh's highest score with the bat has been 248 against Sri Lanka in the second ODI in Colombo, giving an idea of the batting struggles in the format.

The top-order too has not been clicking. Opener Tanzid Hasan Tamim has got starts in five of his last six innings and yet has just one fifty to show for his troubles.

Saif Hassan, who made his ODI debut in the last game, has to sink his teeth into the format quickly while former skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto needs to snap out of his timid mindset in ODIs and get the top order back into some shape.

Partnerships are important but Tigers must ensure they have impact too. Afghanistan found contributions and meaningful partnerships from likes of Rahmat Shah and Mohammad Nabi. Tigers need to effect the right changes to keep the series interesting or risk falling prey to Rashid again.



Eighteen-year-old Chelsea winger Estevao scored twice as an impressive Brazil thrashed fellow World Cup qualifiers South Korea 5-0 away in a friendly on Friday. Real Madrid winger Rodrygo, too, scored twice while another Real Madrid forward, Vinicius Jr, wrapped up the victory as Carlo Ancelotti's side put on a perfect performance in Seoul.

PHOTO: REUTERS

We don't just aim for the hole, we aim for Excellence

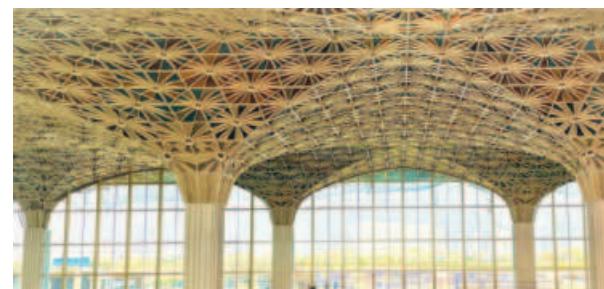


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PHQ gets ICT warrants for 25 former, serving military officers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Police Headquarters has received the International Crimes Tribunal's order to execute arrest warrants against 32 people, including 25 serving and retired army officers, accused in two cases related to enforced disappearances and another to killings during the July uprising.

The order arrived on Thursday, Assistant Inspector General (Media) AHM Sahadat Hossaine said yesterday.

He could not confirm whether the arrest warrants had been dispatched to the police stations concerned because yesterday was the weekend.

"It is routine work, and those warrants are supposed to be dispatched by this time," he said.

When asked, AKM Alamgir Jahan, officer-in-charge of Dhaba Cantonment Police Station, told The Daily Star yesterday evening that they were yet to receive any arrest warrants issued by the ICT from the Police Headquarters.

In both cases of enforced

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

Include proposal of PR system in the referendum Demands Jamaat leader Porwar at a city rally

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami, calling for a referendum in November to implement the July Charter, has demanded that a proposal for the introduction of a proportional representation (PR) system in the national election be incorporated in the referendum.

"If the people support the PR system in the referendum, all parties must accept it. If the majority reject it, Jamaat-e-Islami will also accept the decision. But the PR system cannot be ignored without seeking the people's opinion," Jamaat Secretary General Md Golam Porwar said while addressing a rally in the capital yesterday.

"We urge the government and the consensus commission to reach an agreement on the PR system before signing the July Charter to fulfill the nation's aspirations."

The rally and subsequent procession were held near the South Gate of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque after Juma prayers as part of the second phase of a simultaneous movement launched by several parties, mainly Islamists. They are demonstrating over a five-point demand, including full implementation of the July Charter and holding the next election under the PR system.

In mid-September, seven political parties, including Jamaat and Islami Andolan Bangladesh, held a three-day joint programme to press home the demands.

The parties also carried out campaigns across the country from October 1 to 9 to drum up support for their demands.

Rallies and processions were also held in all divisional cities yesterday. Marches and submission of memorandums to deputy commissioners are slated for tomorrow.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

New species of 'sword dragon' found in UK



AFP, London

A skeleton found on Britain's Jurassic Coast has been identified as a new species of ichthyosaur, a type of prehistoric marine reptile that once ruled the seas, scientists said yesterday.

Comparable in size to a dolphin, the ichthyosaur has been named *Xiphodracon goldencapensis*, or the "Sword Dragon of Dorset", after the English county where the near-complete skeleton was discovered.

It is "the only known example of its kind in existence and helps to fill an important gap in the evolutionary fossil record of ichthyosaurs", the University of Manchester said.

Ichthyosaur expert Dean Lomax, an honorary research fellow at the university, led the three-strong team of paleontologists who carried out the analysis.

BNP starts screening nomination hopefuls

Races to finalise one candidate per seat by month-end as delay fuels frustration

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

The BNP has launched intensive meetings with hundreds of nomination hopefuls nationwide, aiming to finalise candidates for the next general election by the end of October, party leaders said.

The high command is assessing popularity, organisational strength, and winning prospects in the selection.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir began joint meetings with aspirants last week. The secretary of the respective division is accompanying him.

All hopefuls from each constituency were called together to send them a signal of unity. One-on-one interviews will follow later, insiders said.

Invitations were sent only to those with "strong local acceptance based on surveys and field reports", said BNP Joint Secretary General Syed Emran Saleh Prince.

About 1,500 aspirants are in the race, according to senior leaders.

Standing committee members have met aspirants from Barishal, Cumilla, and Rajshahi, while Fakhrul has held discussions with those from Khulna Division.

Md Moniruzzaman, joint convener of Satkhira BNP and a hopeful for Satkhira 4, said Fakhrul met aspirants from all four constituencies starting October 7.

"It seems that after about two weeks, the seats with single candidates will receive signals," he said.



Since the BNP is a large party, it is normal to have multiple candidates. Those who do not receive the nomination will be offered positions such as district council or upazila chairman to prevent division.

SYED EMRAN SALEH PRINCE
BNP Joint Secretary General

Moniruzzaman and Syed Iftekhar Ali, convener of Satkhira BNP, said Fakhrul told them that whoever gets the nomination, others must work for him.

"Those who do not get it will be recognised in other ways," Moniruzzaman said.

In Kushtia, district Member Secretary Zakir Hossain said he met Fakhrul last Monday as acting chairman Tarique Rahman and his team are checking different matters about the candidates.

From Bagerhat 3, nomination hopeful Kazi Khairuzzaman said, "They told me to work in my area, and I have been doing so accordingly."

Tarique earlier clarified the party's selection philosophy, saying on October 6, "We want to give the party's nomination to someone from each area who understands local problems and has a connection with the people."

BNP Vice Chairman Abdul Awal Mintoo said the party is close to finalising half of its candidates. "In about 150 of the 300 seats, the party has no difficulty selecting a single candidate. But choosing nominees for the rest is more complicated."

"In some constituencies where there is more than one strong candidate, senior leaders are talking with them."

Tarique Rahman is privately speaking with local leaders to ensure better coordination in the field. We hope to finish all meetings with aspirants within this month," he added.

To prevent internal rivalry, the BNP leadership assured alternative positions to those not selected.

"Since the BNP is a large party, it is normal to have multiple candidates. Those

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1



Residents suffer greatly navigating the Sarat Chandra Chakraborty Road in Armanitola, Old Dhaka, yesterday when only a brief spell of rain completely flooded the road plagued by poor drainage.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Trump says no reason to meet Xi, threatens tariffs in new rift

REUTERS, Washington

US President Donald Trump yesterday threatened to hike tariffs on Chinese exports and cancel a meeting with President Xi Jinping in a broadside against Beijing that sent markets and relations between the world's largest economies into a spiral.

Trump, due to meet Xi in about three weeks in South Korea, complained on social media about what he characterised as China's plans to hold the global economy hostage after China dramatically expanded its rare earth element export controls on Thursday. China dominates the market for such elements, which are essential to tech manufacturing.

Trump said there was no reason to hold the meeting with Xi that he had previously announced. Beijing had never confirmed the meeting between the leaders.

The remarks signaled the biggest rupture in relations in four months and immediately raised questions about whether an economic détente between Beijing and Washington -- the world's biggest factory and its biggest consumer -- can survive.

Trump, a Republican who has wielded tariffs paid by US importers against friends and foes, said on Friday that he was weighing a "massive" increase in such levies on Chinese-made goods.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

Mother, daughter found dead at home

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

A woman and her daughter were killed, allegedly by burglars, at their house in Ramganj upazila of Lakshmipur on Thursday night.

The criminals also looted 30 bhorti of gold jewellery from the home, Ramganj Police Station Officer-in-Charge Abdul Bari told The Daily Star yesterday.

The deceased are Julekha Begum, 55, wife of businessman Mizanur Rahman, and their daughter Tanha Akhter Mim, 18, a college student, of Paschim Srirampur village in Chandpur union, said the OC.

According to police and locals, Mizanur is a well-known businessman at Sonapur Bazar. He, along with his son Forhad, was at the bazar when the incident occurred.

Mizanur said he called his wife's mobile phone several times in the evening but found it switched off. Around 9:00pm, Forhad returned home and found the doors open.

He went upstairs and found their throat-slitted bodies in a room. Later, neighbours informed the police.

Senior Assistant Superintendent of Police (Raipur Circle) Jamilul Haque said the filing of a case was underway.

Seven die as quakes strike Philippines

AFP, Mati

Two powerful quakes struck off the southern Philippines on Friday, killing at least seven people and triggering tsunami warnings.

The biggest of the quakes, with a magnitude of 7.4, hit about 20km off Manay town in the Mindanao region just before 10:00am (0100 GMT), according to the United States Geological Survey.

An aftershock with a magnitude of 6.7 rocked the same area almost 10 hours later, one of scores that followed the morning quake.

Both came 11 days after a magnitude 6.9 earthquake killed 75 people and injured more than 1,200 in Cebu province in the central Philippines, according to official data.

Three miners tunnelling for gold were killed when a shaft collapsed in the mountains west of Manay during the larger quake, rescue official Kent Simeon of Pantukan town told AFP.

One miner was pulled out alive and several others were injured in the remote hamlet of Gumayan, he said.

"Some tunnels collapsed, but the miners managed to get out," Simeon said.



Echoes of grandeur linger in Haturia's fading palaces

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU,
Pabna

Tucked away on the banks of the Jamuna in Pabna's Bera upazila, the remote village of Haturia holds on to a remarkable past.

Once celebrated as the "village of 13 landlords", it was a flourishing hub of grandeur and commerce in the early 19th century, when stately homes, temples and ponds bore witness to influence and prosperity.

Much of that splendour has since faded. The grand palaces and ornate temples are now broken walls and empty shells. Yet even in their ruin, the remnants -- moss-covered gates, scattered wells, terracotta temples, and the still waters of ponds -- whisper stories of a glorious era.

They make Haturia not only a place of memory, but a forgotten heritage site waiting to be seen.

Haturia rose to prominence in the 1800s. Its location by the Jamuna made it a thriving business hub, attracting landlords and traders alike. Smooth river communication made the area ideal for commerce, and within decades it transformed from a quiet riverside settlement into an estate-rich village.

According to historians and locals, the settlement began with only two landlords. Before long, more powerful families arrived, building residences and estates along a two-kilometre stretch of the village.

In time, 13 landlords had established their presence here: Promothnath Bagchi, Kanchinath Bagchi, Upendronath Bagchi, Vobanicharan Bagchi, Kalishundor Roy, Khirodchandro Roy, Surenchondro Roy, Sudhangsho Mohon Roy, Shaktinath Roy, Bonkim Roy, Khudiram Pal, Jadunath Voumik, and Jitendronath Voumik.

They maintained their estates until the abolition of the landlord system in 1950.

But Haturia's fortunes did not last. Some families left during the partition, and the rest departed during the Liberation War.

Their vast estates, palaces and establishments were abandoned, left to decay or be overtaken by others.

"Haturia was once rich with the memories of ancient landlords. But their families left, leaving their estates behind," said Md Abdul Hamid, chairman of Haturia Nakalia Union Parishad.

He said that much of the land was later leased out, and eventually occupied by locals who produced their own land documents. In time, the palaces and ponds became possessions of villagers.

Residents recall that dozens of grand buildings stood until the 1980s. But over time, most were demolished to make way for new homes. Only fragments remain today, silent witnesses to what once was.

One of those is the palace of Khirchandro Roy's family, built in 1911. Though crumbling, the two-story structure still shows signs of its architectural beauty -- thick walls, strong pillars, long corridors and wide windows.

Once adorned with terracotta, only a few remnants of statues survive. A dilapidated gate, overrun with creepers, stands as a lonely reminder of its past grandeur.

A family that once served the landlords still lives in its shadow. "My forefathers served them. When they left during the Liberation War, my father, Dilip Goshwami, took charge of the estate," said Polash Goshwami.

"In our childhood we saw many structures around the palace, but natural disasters and neglect destroyed them. Later, the palace became unsafe, with cracks in the walls and tilted pillars. We built a tin-shed behind it, where we still live," he added.

Elsewhere in the village, a temple from that era stands alone in the middle of a vast crop field. Known locally as "Shyama Roy's home", it still bears centuries-old terracotta work.

"We don't



Haturia rose to prominence in the 1800s. Its location by the Jamuna made it a thriving business hub, attracting landlords and traders alike. Smooth river communication made the area ideal for commerce, and within decades it transformed from a quiet riverside settlement into an estate-rich village.

know the real history. It is said a golden statue of Radha-Krishna once stood here, moved to safety during the Liberation War," Polash said.

Once part of a wider complex, the temple now rises in solitude, its beauty surrounded by fields.

At the Haturia Health and Family Planning Centre, traces of

another estate remain. A wide brick wall and an ancient well, now hidden behind modern structures, are said to be parts of a landlord's residence long destroyed.

Similar traces are scattered throughout the village -- wells, ponds, and broken walls, reminders of vanished palaces.

The most striking relic is "Bimola Pukur", a vast pond established

in the Roy estate in honour of Bimola Sundori Roy, Kali Sundor Roy, Hara Sundor Roy and Durga Sundor Roy. Its well-decorated ghats and concrete walls bore European architectural touches, designed to welcome British rulers of the time.

Over the years, the estate around the pond was demolished and the water body itself fell into disrepair. But the administration later restored it, and today it serves as the main water source for villagers.

"In our childhood, we saw part of a destroyed palace beside Bimola Pukur. Back then, we were afraid to come here because of myths about spirits. Over time the palace disappeared, replaced by houses, but the pond still carries the memory of the past," recalled Md Sajahan Ali, an elderly resident.

He said the pond was once connected to the Jamuna but the river has since moved away. "There were 13 palaces in this small village, each with their own ponds, wells, temples and offices. Most have been lost."

Other relics have also disappeared under the weight of time and modern life. Beside another ancient pond surrounded by brick walls now stand rows of new houses.

One resident, 80-year-old Md Ardash Fakir, said he had bought the estate from a landlord decades ago and demolished the palace to build homes for his family.

"My family bought the estate when I was young," he said. "I don't remember now from whom."

Like him, many locals claimed abandoned properties, producing land documents to secure ownership. Palaces were demolished, replaced by residential houses and shops. Officials from the archaeology department visited several times, but no preservation efforts followed.

For many villagers, it is a story of loss. "If the ancient heritage had been preserved, Haturia could have become a tourist spot," said Sajahan Ali. "But no one has taken

initiative since independence. Over time, everything was destroyed."

Younger generations echo that regret. "We heard stories from our parents and grandparents about the landlords and their estates, but now we have nothing left except two or three ruins," said Md Russel Hossain. "If the government takes steps, the remaining structures can be preserved to teach future generations."

Contacted, Md Morshedul Islam, Bera upazila nirbahi officer, said most ancient structures were demolished because the site was never declared an archaeological one.

"We are trying to protect the existing memories," he added.

Today, Haturia is like any other riverside village. Crops grow in fields where temples once stood. Tin houses rise where palaces once dominated. Children play around ponds whose steps were once polished stone. Life moves on, but the air is heavy with echoes of what the place once was.

The Jamuna still flows by, though further away than before, its currents quieter than the voices of history it once carried.

And in Haturia, the mossy walls, broken gates and still ponds remain, holding fast to the memory of 13 landlords, their legacy reduced to ruins. The grandeur is gone, but the whispers endure, waiting for recognition, preservation, and perhaps, rediscovery.

There is no archaeological office in Pabna. The custodian of Shahzadpur Rabindra Kachari Bari in Sirajganj is responsible for looking after the archaeological sites in Pabna.

Contacted, its custodian Shawli Talukder said she was not aware of the site as she had only recently joined. Shawli said she would look into the matter soon.

"After the site is declared an archaeological site, steps can be taken to preserve it," she said, adding that without a proper archaeological survey, its value cannot be determined.





A group of protesters injured during the July Uprising staged a sit-in at the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (NITOR) in November 2024. They demanded proper treatment and the swift release of funds.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON / THE DAILY STAR

SCARS OF JULY

How are the injured now?

MIFTAHUL JANNAT

The July Uprising ended with the fall of an autocratic government on August 5, but for thousands who survived the atrocity, the struggle did not end with their newfound freedom. They now remain crippled by lasting injuries, trapped in a daily fight against pain, disability, and financial insecurity. Despite promises of financial support and rehabilitation, many are still waiting for aid to arrive, while official commitments continue to lag far behind on-the-ground realities.

Injuries that changed everything
Arafat Hossain, once a driver, lost his leg to amputation—and with it, his livelihood. Categorised as a B-level injury victim, he received Tk 2 lakh from the government and an additional Tk 1 lakh from the July Foundation. But the financial aid has only partially mitigated his struggle.

"With the family's main source of income gone, my younger brother had to drop out of school. Another brother is educated but still struggling to find a job," he said. Although he cannot return to his previous job, he wanted to start a small poultry farm to support his family—a dream that remains distant

without additional assistance. "If the monthly allowances arrived on time, I could at least start a small business," he mentioned.

Md Mijanur Rahman Badol is confronting the harsh reality of total visual impairment. "I can't see anything with my right eye, and my left eye has only 23% vision," he shared. "All the pellets are still lodged in my face, eyes, and head. They couldn't be removed. At times, they cause pain, and I often feel weak and disoriented. I'm still learning to live with this new reality."

He now relies on a small betel nut garden and a few livestock animals, which he managed to acquire with help from NGOs and other sources. The one-time government assistance was quickly consumed by the debts piled up in the months after his injury, leaving him no closer to financial stability. "I received the government-promised monthly allowance for only one month so far. The payments for the past two months are still pending. They informed me it would be disbursed together, so I'm waiting for that," he said, the frustration barely concealed in his tone.

Another victim, Akbar Ali, survives

similar bureaucratic complications who submitted verified documentation. were faced by another victim, Shahinur Miah. One of his eyes is gone forever, and the other now offers only a blur of light and shadow. Yet, he was incorrectly placed in Category B. When the writer first met him in April, Shahinur was at the National Institute of Ophthalmology & Hospital (NIOH), seeking approval from the director for a special letter recommending his reclassification to Category A.

He later submitted that letter to the local civil surgeon's office, which also issued a certificate acknowledging the misclassification and confirming that his case had been sent to the Ministry for correction. However, five months later, no change has been made.

"Since I'm listed as a B-category injured, I'm entitled to only Tk 3 lakh in one-time assistance from the government, of which I've received just Tk 1 lakh," he added. "I have to visit NIOH regularly for follow-up, which costs a lot for transportation, medicine, and accommodation."

Where do the authorities stand?
The Ministry of Liberation War Affairs



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN / THE DAILY STAR

Md Shahinur Miah waits outside the director's office at the National Institute of Ophthalmology & Hospital (NIOH), seeking reclassification of his documents to Category A. Five months on, no change has been made.

on borrowed money from his sisters and anyone willing to help. So far, he has only received support from the July Foundation. "I haven't received any government aid yet. There were some paper complications and delays in publishing the gazette list that contains my name," he said.

acknowledges the ongoing issues. Md Faruk Hossain, Joint Secretary and In-Charge of the July Mass Uprising Cell at the Ministry, said at the end of September that monthly allowance disbursements had been completed for four divisions—Sylhet, Barishal, Mymensingh, and Rangpur—for those

who submitted verified documentation. "The rest of the divisions will be cleared within the first week of October," he added. One-time assistance Tk 2 lakh for A-category, and Tk 1 lakh for B- and C-category fighters—has already been cleared, according to him. "The additional amount of Tk 3 lakh and Tk 2 lakh for A- and B-category injured, respectively, will be made once all information is updated," he added.

When asked about the total number of disbursements, Md Hossain explained, "The monthly disbursement process is ongoing, and the exact number cannot be shared at this stage. Once we have updated information for all recipients, likely within the next five to six months, we will be able to provide an exact figure." He cited delays due to missing documents and incomplete bank details from many beneficiaries.

Apart from the Ministry, the July Shaheed Smriti Foundation is another key organisation assisting the injured with direct financial aid. "According to the latest update, more than 6,006 injured July fighters have so far received financial assistance from us," shared Md Zahid Hossain, Head of PR & Media at the Foundation.

Although the official number of the injured stands at 13,799, according to the Health Ministry's website, the shared figure indicates that a great number of survivors are still struggling for support and awaiting the assistance they are entitled to.

Urgent intervention required
Victims consistently call for urgent measures:

- » Timely disbursement of entitled monthly stipends to ensure financial stability.
- » Lifetime medical care through valid health cards.
- » Streamlined procedures to reduce bureaucratic delays and minimise documentation-related hurdles.

For many, even a modest monthly allowance could mean the difference between survival and further despair. Delays and fragmented support have left many victims to fend for themselves, often at the cost of dignity and hope. Without prompt, comprehensive, and empathetic intervention, these survivors risk being left behind—reduced to mere shadows of the lives they once led.

Miftahul Jannat is a journalist at The Daily Star. She can be reached at miftahul@thedadystar.net

The slow death of LAWACHARA FOREST

Illegal tree felling, bamboo theft, gas exploration, excessive tourism, and land encroachment have compounded the crisis, forcing animals out of the forest and into nearby localities—often leading to fatal encounters.

MINTU DESHWARA

Dawn no longer breaks with the chirping of birds in Lawachara National Park—only with the rustle of leaves falling from dying trees. The cries of monkeys echo through the emptiness where deer once danced. As tourists shout for selfies, the forest quietly bleeds. Lawachara, once a sanctuary of life, now stands as a symbol of nature's silent suffering.

Illegal tree felling, bamboo theft, gas exploration, excessive tourism, and land encroachment have compounded the crisis, forcing animals out of the forest and into nearby localities—often leading to fatal encounters.

According to Swapan Deb Sajal, director of the Wildlife Service Foundation, the forest area in Lawachara has shrunk alarmingly



A monkey lies lifeless, hanging from an electric wire.

villages and handed them over to the Forest Department. "In 2024 alone, we rescued 35 wild animals. The previous year, it was 38. Some of these species are rare and endangered," Swapan added.

Nurul Mohaimin Milton, general secretary of the Bangladesh Paribesh Sangbadik Samittee, Moulvibazar unit, mentioned that growing human encroachment—through lemon orchards, houses, and tourist infrastructure—is reducing the safe habitats for animals. "Vehicles and human noise are making things worse," he said.

Rehabilitation of degraded forest zones and ensuring safe water sources during the dry season are essential. "The government should also support local communities to create alternative livelihoods so that people don't depend on forest resources," he added.

Data from the Forest Department and voluntary group Stand for Our Endangered Wildlife (SEW) show that in 2024, around 350 wild animals that escaped from Lawachara were recovered—250 alive and 100 dead—from different parts of Kamalganj and Srimangal. The rescued species

included deer, monkeys, leopard cats, pythons, owls, hawks, and vultures.

SEW co-founder Sohel Shyam said unregulated tourism is disturbing the forest ecosystem. "Lawachara is a place for wild animals, not for human shouting and selfies. We've seen tourists mimic owl calls when real owls are calling—that disrupts their behaviour. The number of visitors should be limited, and guides must ensure responsible conduct. Fines should be imposed for violations."

Locals echoed similar concerns, saying the increasing number of irresponsible tourists is driving animals deeper into the forest or into nearby villages. They reported frequent monkey raids on homes and markets. "They steal food because they are hungry," said Mamun Ahmed, a Srimangal resident. "They too need to eat—they must be protected."

Manjur Ahmed Azad Manna, president of the Kamalganj Biodiversity Protection Committee, said the forest lacks tall trees that once provided shelter for monkeys.

"The food crisis now affects all animals in Lawachara. Because of this, all types of animals are going outside in search of food," he said.

Saju Marchiang, publication secretary of the Khasi Social Council, echoed this sentiment. "Barking deer, once a common sight in Lawachara, have become rare. Now you hardly see anything other than monkeys."

He said the forest that existed in Lawachara a few years ago is no more. There is no chloroform tree in the garden either. The roots of the trees stand as silent witnesses to the passage of time. At that time,

large trees of the decision-making process, noting that it had been taken hastily and without proper consultation with all stakeholders. A more inclusive discussion, he added, could have led to a balanced solution that benefited both conservation efforts and local communities.

Shamsul also mentioned irregularities in the development of a market inside the forest, which began around 2014. The shops, set up without proper procedures or transparent approval, continued to expand under subsequent CMC leadership. He pointed out that many of these shops are now operated by private traders with connections to local influential, rather than by members of the Community Patrol Groups (CPGs) who are tasked with protecting the forest. In fact, only one shop is reportedly operated by a CPG member, while women CPGs—despite their crucial role—have been entirely left out.

Hassan Al Razi, a PhD fellow (wildlife research and conservation) at the University of Western Australia, said no such system has been seen anywhere else in Bangladesh. "Higher tourist numbers mean higher revenue, which is viewed very positively in our country, even though it endangers our forests and wildlife."

We need to determine the carrying capacity of our forests to protect them and their wildlife from the pressures of tourism. A policy should be made so that tourists cannot go everywhere. Also, tourist guides should be trained to serve as forest and wildlife conservators," he added.

Abul Kalam, Divisional Forest Officer of Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation in Sylhet, said, "Following a ministry meeting on September 14, we received eight directives for the conservation of the Lawachara forest. One of the key decisions is to make the forest eco-friendly. We are currently working on implementing that."



A dead Gondhogokul (Asian palm civet).

sandalwood, chloroform, agar, teak, and chapalish species were there, but they are gone now. Trees and bamboo are being stolen, and large species such as sandalwood, agar, and teak have almost vanished. Many animals—snakes, monkeys, foxes, even pigs—die in road and railway accidents, he added.

Shamsul Haque, general secretary of the Lawachara People's Forum and a former member of the Co-Management Committee (CMC) of Lawachara National Park, strongly supported the recent ban on vehicle entry, explaining that it was introduced primarily to protect wildlife and restore ecological balance. However, he also criticised



With forests stripped of bamboo and large trees such as sandalwood, agar, and teak, Lawachara's wildlife are being forced out—many dying on roads and railway tracks in search of food and shelter.

PHOTOS: MINTU DESHWARA

over the past few decades. Along with this, the sources of food and drinking water for wild animals have also decreased. As a result, animals often stray into localities in search of food or habitat and sometimes die on roads or at the hands of humans.

Since 2012, the foundation has rescued 658 wild animals from nearby

Mintu Deshwara is a journalist at The Daily Star.

WHO CARES about Bangladeshi women prisoners in India?



RIMPLE MEHTA

As I read the news of the political crisis in Bangladesh unfold in August 2024, I was reminded of Salma, Hasina, Rumpa (pseudonyms have been used for reasons of anonymity and confidentiality) and several other Bangladeshi women I met in prisons in India between 2010 and 2011. Their narratives of Bangladesh and the echo of their voices singing *Amar Shonar Bangla* in unison are still fresh in my mind.

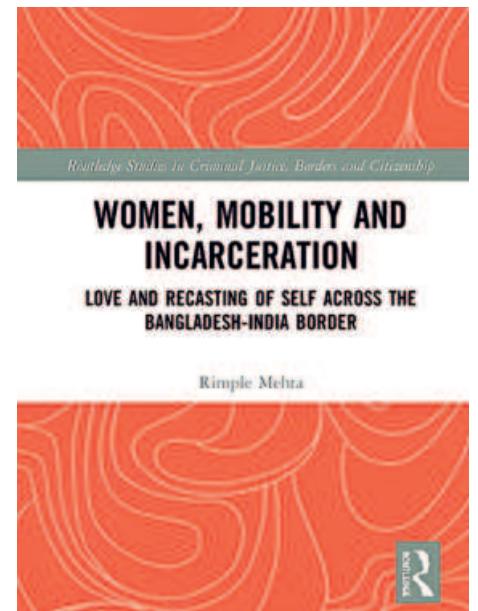
Where would they be now? How has the crisis impacted them? What do Sheikh Hasina's downfall and subsequent changes in political history mean for the India-Bangladesh border and the people who live in the borderlands or move across these borders? Are border crossers even a consideration in this turmoil and change, or do they continue to be on the margins and invisible? Political changes across the world—UK, USA, Australia, and India—have either used issues of borders and migrants for furthering political gain, or there remains a silence on these issues. How this translates in Bangladesh is yet to be seen.

The young women I met in two prisons

grit and resilience in the face of violence they experienced in Bangladesh, during the process of crossing the border, and once they reached India. However, when I asked them questions about their experiences of violence, they said they would rather talk about their experiences of love in prison.

Conversations about love in prisons revealed how it enabled them to make meaning of their everyday monotonous life there. Thinking about love, or establishing relationships of love in prison, enabled them to explore a sense of self that was not tied to the role of a daughter, a wife, or a mother. The women wanted to be represented through their stories of love. These stories reflected the structural and institutional violence they had experienced in India, Bangladesh, or at the border. The women expanded the horizons of what I understood as feminist research, as well as the way women in prison are perceived.

The second conceptual exploration that was furthered by the narratives of the women was the understanding of borders and the alternative ways in which they may be conceptualised. The women's narratives offered possibilities for critiquing as well as



community because their daughter was in a prison in India.

In cases where the family was unaware of their imprisonment, the women were concerned that aspersions would be cast on their character, as the family and community members would assume that they were involved in *kharap kaaj* (sex work) in India. In prison, the women were concerned about upholding the honour of Bangladesh. They often policed each other's behaviour in prison so that they did not bring dishonour to their country while incarcerated in India. The border, police station, prison, and brothel were also spaces where they were concerned about a 'loss' of honour. They feared that when they returned to Bangladesh, they would not be accepted into their families and/or communities.

The theme of resistance cuts across the different narratives. Resistance to institutional and socio-political norms is prominent in the narratives of the women. They did not want to be represented as victims but as agents actively engaging in changing the conditions of their existence. They moved from one space to another,

In prison, the women were concerned about upholding the honour of Bangladesh. They often policed each other's behaviour in prison so that they did not bring dishonour to their country while incarcerated in India. The border, police station, prison, and brothel were also spaces where they were concerned about a 'loss' of honour. They feared that when they returned to Bangladesh, they would not be accepted into their families and/or communities.



A section of the Bangladesh-India border.

FILE PHOTO / STAR

in Kolkata as part of my doctoral research were incarcerated under Section 14 (a) and (b) of the Foreigners Act 1946 for crossing the India-Bangladesh border without valid documents. What started as a curiosity about the trajectories of violence, experiences with the criminal justice system in India, and the role of honour in their lives, resulted in a revelation of diverse conceptualisations of borders, meanings of love in prisons, and the role of *maan-samnaan* (honour) in their lives.

The book *Women, Mobility and Incarceration* is based on the ethnographic fieldwork I carried out in two prisons in Kolkata, India, and delves into the experiences of 40 Bangladeshi women I interviewed there. The women were between 18 and 22 years of age and came to India for varied reasons ranging from the hope of making a living to escaping violent and abusive marriages; others came to meet relatives on the other side of the

border. They questioned the naturalness of the border by highlighting that it was a human construct. The distinctive nature of city, state, and country was not assumed by the women. They often merged into each other in their understanding, thereby creating a continuity between India and Bangladesh. Little did they know that this continuity and fluidity of borders, as they understood it, would land them in prison.

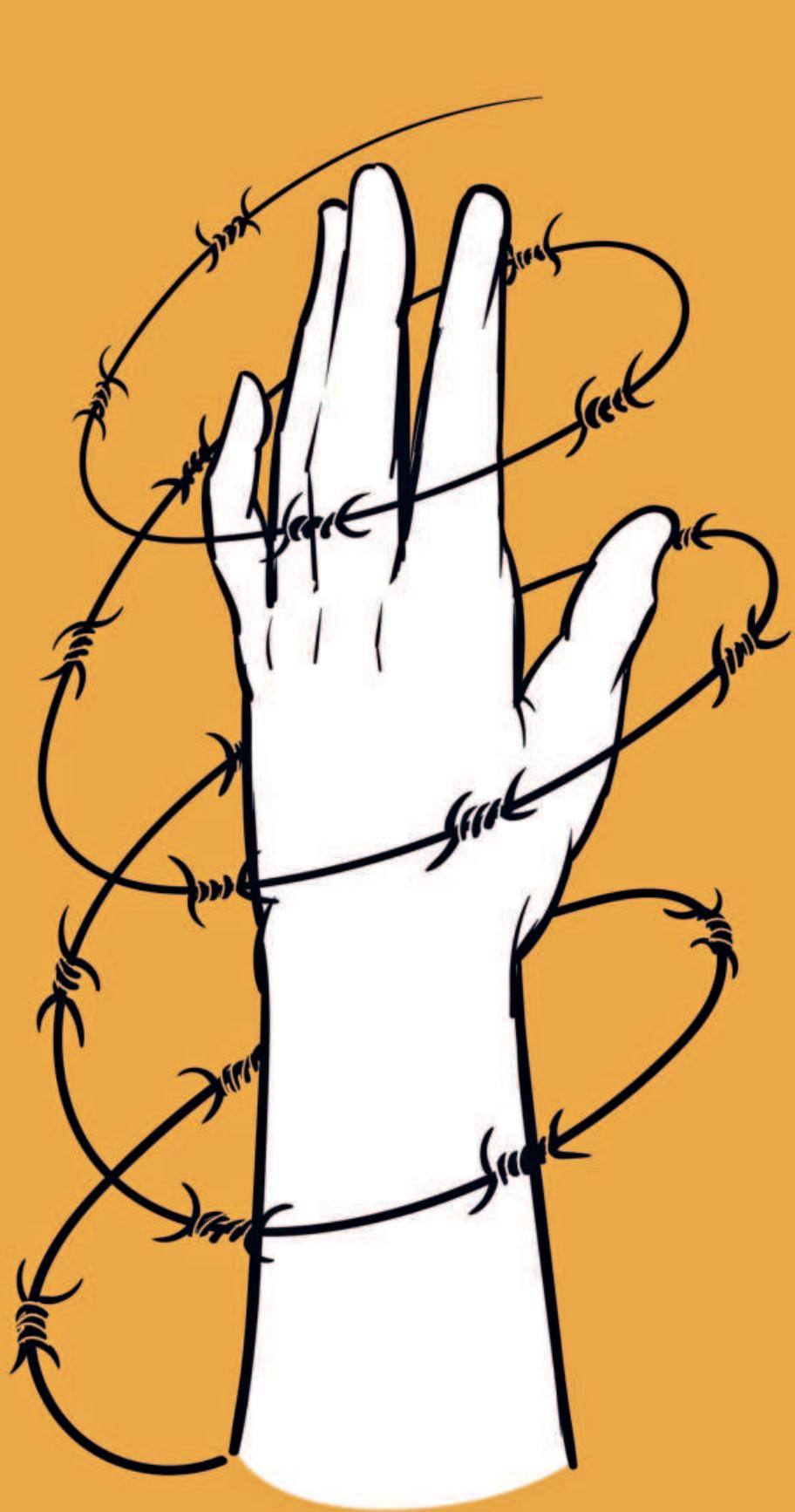
India and Bangladesh—the nation-states—had a different conceptualisation of the border, which stood in sharp contrast to the way the women understood it. They challenged the idea of borders, resisted the monotonous and desexualised space of the prison by forging relationships of love, and even challenged my methodological approaches as a researcher. The women formed solidarities with each other and supported one another at times when their interests were under challenge from the prison authorities. These solidarities were often fragile and did become strained in the context of limited resources in prison, which created grounds for competitive claims.

The narratives of the Bangladeshi women I met are about the pain, shame, and desire that they experienced as they moved across the India-Bangladesh border and were imprisoned in India. They urge us to take a humane approach to the lived realities of these women and not merely perceive them as 'illegal' migrants in India.

As they experienced these emotions, alongside others, they went through a process of recasting the 'self'. In prison, they conceived of themselves outside the normative gender roles. The anonymity in a prison in India provided them with a space to recast themselves, even if momentarily. While they underwent this process of recasting themselves, they navigated the structural forms of disadvantage with which they were confronted as a 'foreigner', 'prisoner', and 'woman'. The fear of institutionalised forms of violence at the border continued to thwart their imagination of a future after prison. The uncertainty surrounding the time and process of deportation loomed in the background.

The book has been written with the intent of raising awareness about the circumstances that women like Salma, Hasina, and Rumpa find themselves in, and to develop a humane lens through which to view the lived realities of people who move across borders and are consequently incarcerated.

Rimple Mehta is a Senior Lecturer in Social Work and Community Welfare in the School of Social Sciences at Western Sydney University.



Lured by promises of work and safety, many Bangladeshi women and girls are trafficked across the border into India, where they often end up in brothels or prisons instead of the better life they were promised.

FILE PHOTO / STAR

border. Some women had been trafficked across the India-Bangladesh border.

The women's education levels ranged from no schooling at all to an average of five years in formal education, while a few had attended madrasas for religious learning. A majority of them could not read or write and belonged to impoverished backgrounds, residing in temporary settlements in rural areas. They had been employed in different forms of labour from childhood, and some had worked in garment factories before they came to India. Although several of the women were married, they came to India without their husbands and children, except one.

The time I spent with these women in prison had a transformational impact on the research as well as on me as a researcher. The women were exemplars of

to their own understanding. This prompted the women to make a distinction between *bhool* (mistake) and *aporadh* (crime) when referring to their act of crossing the border. They referred to the role of awareness and intentionality involved in the crossing of borders, which could determine whether a border crossing was a *bhool* or an *aporadh*.

Maan samnaan was the third important concept that women brought up in their narratives. The idea of *maan-samnaan* played an important role in the lives of the women. They grappled with the idea, sometimes conforming to gendered norms and at other times negotiating or resisting them. Crossing the boundary of the home to cross the borders of another country, the women believed, would bring them dishonour. They worried that their families would be shamed within the broader



PHOTOS: SYED QUMRUL HOSSAIN AND SHAKIL CHOWDHURY

BETWEEN DREAMS AND DEBT

Excessive recruitment fees, low salaries, and permit costs trap thousands of Bangladeshi workers in Malaysia despite their vital remittances

According to Bangladesh Bank data, Bangladeshi migrants sent a record \$3.03 billion from Malaysia in 2024, accounting for 11.8 percent of total remittance inflows, up from \$2.13 billion in 2022

JAGARAN CHAKMA and PORIMOL PALMA

After paying Tk 5 lakh to a middleman, Ariful Islam finally made it to Malaysia a year ago. In the Southeast Asian country, it took him two more months to find a job at an Indian restaurant.

The work was far from ideal, but the 42-year-old was desperate to start sending money to his family in Brahmanbaria.

Now he earns about Tk 57,000 a month, including overtime.

From that, Islam manages to send home around Tk 34,000, though he has yet to start repaying the debt he took on to make the journey.

Living in a cramped shared room in Kuala Lumpur, the Bangladeshi worker has recently found himself worrying about how he will manage Tk 92,000 to renew his work permit.

"Middlemen at home promise immediate jobs, but the reality here is

According to Bangladesh Bank data, Bangladeshi migrants sent a record \$3.03 billion from Malaysia in 2024, accounting for 11.8 percent of total remittance inflows, up from \$2.13 billion in 2022.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE remain the top two sources.

Most migrants now use formal banking channels, citing exchange rates that are nearly identical to those offered by informal and illegal routes such as hundi and hawala. Many also benefit from a 2.5 percent government incentive meant to discourage unofficial transfers. Yet the macro figures mask the precariousness of many workers' lives.

The high cost of migration can turn opportunity into long-term indebtedness.

For instance, Mohammad Siam (32) from Cumilla paid Tk 3.6 lakh initially, but after political turmoil and delays, his total cost rose to Tk 5.7 lakh.

informal credit sources, paying interest rates of up to 10 percent monthly due to limited access to formal banking.

He criticised the poorly regulated recruitment chain, dominated by middlemen in both Bangladesh and Malaysia, and called for urgent reforms.

He also urged the government to pursue bilateral agreements to lower renewal costs and improve job security.

"Without systemic reforms, migrants will continue to face exploitation despite their vital contribution to the economy," said Rahman.

Over the years, allegations of fraudulent recruitment and corruption have repeatedly disrupted labour flows to Malaysia.

The Southeast Asian country suspended recruitment from Bangladesh on May 31, 2024, amid reports of excessive recruitment costs, an oversupply of workers and the role of a syndicate of 101 agencies selected by the Malaysian government in 2022.



of recruiting agencies. A Verité study published in May last year found that 96 percent of Bangladeshi migrant workers in Malaysia face exploitation risks tied to recruitment debt.

NOT ALL STORIES END IN DESPAIR

There are, however, examples of better outcomes under formal channels.

Md Aiub Ali (28) from Kalihati in Tangail paid Tk 4.5 lakh to go to Malaysia seven years ago and found employment with a Chinese firm producing steel water tanks.

Starting at Tk 52,000, his monthly earnings, including overtime, have since risen to about Tk 86,632.

After Tk 20,000 in expenses, he remits Tk 57,000-Tk 63,000 a month and prefers formal remittances for safety and parity of rates.

Monirul Islam (28) from Faridpur Sadar went to Malaysia two years ago and secured a job immediately at a government-owned cable company, earning between Tk 63,000 and Tk

cost of Tk 4.5 Tk 6 lakh leaves many indebted for years.

Government-level initiatives include G2G labour agreements, periodic Joint Working Group meetings and active involvement of the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment to streamline processes.

Pranab Kumar Ghosh, first secretary (commercial) at the High Commission, credited policies discouraging hundi for rising formal remittance inflows.

He said remittance inflows have risen largely due to government policies aimed at curbing the use of unofficial channels.

Bangladesh Bank spokesperson Arif Hossain Khan highlighted mobile financial services and incentives that have made official channels more attractive.

"The government is offering a 2.5 percent cash incentive to remitters to discourage the use of hundi and other unofficial channels. Migrants can also use mobile financial services for instant transfers."

"Besides, they now get almost the same exchange rate from banks as from the informal market," Khan said.

"For this reason, more and more migrant workers are sending their remittances through official channels," he added.

But critics warn that policy attention often concentrates on remittance volumes rather than migrant welfare.

Shakirul Islam, chairman of Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Program, a community-based migrant organisation in Bangladesh, argued that many workers remain indebted and exposed to harsh conditions.

"No doubt, there are lots of workers earning enough, but a large portion of them are also indebted and face harsh conditions in Malaysia. Instead of improving their lives, they are pushed into poverty and debt," he said, calling for sweeping reforms and stronger regulation of both licensed and unlicensed brokers.

He urged that labour wings abroad, particularly in receiving countries, be better staffed and better equipped to protect migrants.

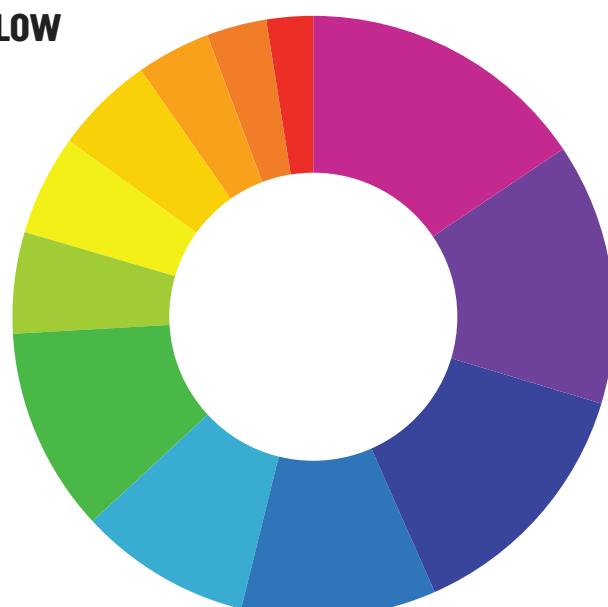
Bangladeshi migrants are integral to Malaysia's economy, from construction sites to kitchens and factories, and their remittances sustain families and national reserves back home. Yet the billions sent annually are only one measure of this relationship.

Behind them lie personal stories of endurance, sacrifice and, in many cases, unmet expectation.

The policy challenge is clear: protect workers through fair recruitment, stronger consular support and meaningful regulation so that migration can deliver on its promise rather than deepen precarity.

SHARE OF REMITTANCE INFLOW BY COUNTRIES (In %)

Bahrain	2.51
Singapore	3.23
Qatar	3.97
Kuwait	5.35
Oman	5.39
Italy	5.44
Malaysia	9.25
UK	10.46
UAE	13.73
Saudi Arabia	14.08
USA	15.58
Other countries	10.99



BANGLADESHI WORKERS IN MALAYSIA

Official number: 800,000

Unofficial estimate: Up to 1.5m

Average migration cost: Tk 4.5 lakh-Tk 6 lakh

Common jobs: Construction, manufacturing, food and beverage

Average monthly salary: RM 1,500-RM 4,000

Main challenges: Debt, fraud, permit delays, low wages

Preferred remittance channel: Formal banking (due to better exchange rates)

SOURCE: BANGLADESH HIGH COMMISSION IN MALAYSIA



different," he said.

His experience reflects that of many Bangladeshi expatriates in Malaysia who arrive full of hope and burdened with debt, only to face low pay, long hours and overcrowded accommodation.

Some, however, find more stable employment and manage to send sizable sums back home, a contrast that captures both the promise and the peril of migration.

BROKERS AND BILLS

From quiet Bangladeshi villages to Malaysia's buzzing factories, construction sites and kitchens, hundreds of thousands have journeyed in search of better wages. Their remittances have helped keep Bangladesh's economy afloat.

Meanwhile, Malaysia became the third largest source of remittances for Bangladesh last year, contributing over \$3 billion.

Delayed by visa issues, Siam was idle for six weeks before starting work.

Now, he sends Tk 45,000-Tk 50,000 monthly but says about 60 percent of migrants are in hardship.

"Those on free visas or deceived by middlemen suffer the most," he commented.

Adding to the pressures, Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow at local think tank Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), highlighted that many workers are trapped in a cycle of debt and low wages.

"High recruitment costs, low salaries, and annual work permit renewal fees, ranging from 2,500 to 3,200 ringgit, impose heavy burdens."

Rahman said many workers resort to

similar actions were taken under earlier Malaysian governments, including a suspension in 2018.

A March 2024 letter from two UN Special Rapporteurs noted that Bangladeshi nationals were being charged between \$4,500 and \$6,000 in recruitment fees, far above the bilateral MoU of \$720.

That makes Bangladeshi migrants among the most expensive to recruit globally, and it underlines how multilayered middlemen networks extract large sums from workers.

Researchers and industry insiders worry whether, when recruitment resumes, it will be open to all licensed agencies or again limited to a group

75,000.

He spends around Tk 17,000 on living costs and remits the rest. These cases illustrate how transparent, formal recruitment and employment reduce uncertainty and exploitation.

THE NEED FOR THE RIGHT POLICIES

Bangladesh's Deputy High Commissioner in Malaysia, Mosammam Shahana Monica, acknowledged both progress and ongoing challenges.

"High migration costs, fraudulent practices, and labour exploitation remain serious issues," she told The Daily Star, noting efforts to expand safe migration campaigns, outreach programmes and consular services.

Bangladesh now supplies nearly 40 percent of Malaysia's foreign workforce, about 800,000 officially employed, with unofficial estimates closer to 1.5 million. Most work in construction, manufacturing and food services, earning between Tk 43,000 and Tk 115,510 a month. The average migration

cost of Tk 4.5 Tk 6 lakh leaves many indebted for years. Government-level initiatives include G2G labour agreements, periodic Joint Working Group meetings and active involvement of the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment to streamline processes. Pranab Kumar Ghosh, first secretary (commercial) at the High Commission, credited policies discouraging hundi for rising formal remittance inflows. He said remittance inflows have risen largely due to government policies aimed at curbing the use of unofficial channels.

Bangladesh Bank spokesperson Arif Hossain Khan highlighted mobile financial services and incentives that have made official channels more attractive.

"The government is offering a 2.5 percent cash incentive to remitters to discourage the use of hundi and other unofficial channels. Migrants can also use mobile financial services for instant transfers."

RISE IN SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS

Rape of girl children rose 83% in the first nine months of 2025 – 357 cases, up from 195 last year

Attempted rapes increased 163% (nearly 2.6 times)

Other sexual harassment incidents rose 76% during the same period

SOURCE: AIN O SALISH KENDRA (ASK) MEDIA MONITORING, ANALYSED BY THE DAILY STAR

AGE DISTRIBUTION OF VICTIMS JAN-AUG 2025

0-6 years: 20%

7-12 years: 39%

13-18 years: 41%

Highest number of incidents: March (106) and April (64), compared to 29 and 24 in the same months of 2024

SOURCE: ASK, THE DAILY STAR ANALYSIS



CHILD HELPLINE 1098 DATA

29,414 calls related to abuse and violence

7,241 calls on child marriage

2,468 on cyber abuse

1,137 child marriages stopped through intervention and support services

SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES (DSS) & UNICEF, JANUARY-SEPTEMBER 2025

A nation's daughters in peril



INT'L DAY OF THE GIRL CHILD

In a year shadowed by violence and uncertainty, Bangladesh's girls have stood where courage is tested most. They are the first to lose when systems fail, yet the first to rise when the world needs rebuilding. From classrooms to clinics, protest lines to policy tables, they lead with resilience beyond their years.

This year's theme -- **"The girl I am, the change I lead: Girls on the frontlines of crisis"** -- is both a celebration and a warning. Behind the data on violence and discrimination are girls who refuse silence, mothers who teach defiance, fathers who learn to listen.

They are not waiting for permission. They are already redefining what it means to grow up a girl. Here's to their courage, their brilliance, their fight. Here's to the girls of the world!

NILIMA JAHAN

On October 2, an eight-year-old girl playing near a puja temple was raped by 55-year-old Vajendra Sarkar in Gazipur's Kashimpur. Relatives and neighbours found her with her mouth tied with a gamchha.

Just a day before, a 15-year-old Garo girl was raped by an auto-rickshaw driver in Mymensingh's Haluaghat while returning home. Instead of dropping her

harassment by 76 percent.

The ages of the victims highlight the crisis: in the first eight months this year, 20 percent of rape victims were aged 0-6, 39 percent aged 7-12, and 41 percent aged 13-18. The highest number of cases were recorded in March and April, with 106 and 64 incidents respectively, compared to 29 and 24 in those last year.

According to the National Girl Child Advocacy Forum (NGCAF), at least 390 girls were raped and 134 faced rape



PHQ STATISTICS

A total of **3,589** rape cases filed nationwide during Jan-Aug 2025

1,172 cases involved minors

Actual child sexual violence far exceeds what's reported in the media

attempts in the first eight months of 2025, compared with 224 and 32 last year. Eighty-three girls were murdered during this period.

While ASK and NGCAF data show a sharp rise, police statistics reveal an even bleaker picture. From January to August, 3,589 rape cases were filed nationwide – 1,172 involving minors – suggesting the true scale of violence is far greater than what media reports capture.

The growing crisis is also reflected in the soaring demand for emergency help. The national emergency helpline 999 received 25,412 calls under the "Violence against Women and Children" category between January and September this year. These included 903 rape cases, 504 attempted rapes, 704 stalking incidents, 647 homicides, and 656 cases of sexual harassment. There were also 356 calls concerning violence against children and 2,434 about child marriage.

A Daily Star analysis based on Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) data shows rape of girl children rose by 83 percent in the first nine months of this year – from last year's 195 to 357 cases. Attempted rapes increased by 163 percent, and sexual

Inspector Anwar Sattar of 999 said most calls likely involved minors. "Children themselves often call for help, while parents, teachers, or neighbours report incidents on their behalf."

The 24/7 child helpline 1098, run by the Department of Social Services with UNICEF support, handled 29,414 calls related to abuse and violence during the same period, along with 7,241 concerning child marriage and 2,468 involving cyber abuse. It helped stop 1,137 child marriages and provided counselling, legal aid, and financial support.

YOUNG VICTIMS, YOUNG PERPETRATORS

A Mahila Parishad report from August 2025 found that both victims and perpetrators are mostly young, with adolescents and men under 30 forming the majority of the accused. Around 60 percent of rape victims were under 18, and girls in grades 6-10 faced the highest rates of sexual violence. Those in grades 1-5 were most often victims of rape.

"It is alarming that so many perpetrators are adolescents," said Afroza Arman, senior training and research officer at Mahila Parishad. "Nearly one-third of rapists are aged 11-30, a quarter of gang rapists are 16-25, and most accused in stalking and cybercrime cases are 16-30."

HELPLINE 999 DATA

25,412 calls linked to violence against women, children

903 rape cases

504 attempted rapes

710 stalking incidents

647 homicides

656 sexual harassment cases

173 sexual violence cases

423 parental abuse cases

2,434 calls on child marriage

SOURCE: NATIONAL EMERGENCY SERVICE, JAN-SEPT 2025

Dangers exist in both public and private spaces -- at home, at neighbours' houses, and even on the way to school. Many attacks are carried out by classmates, boyfriends, ex-husbands, or neighbours, showing that abuse often comes from within trusted circles.

Experts say the new Child Rape Crime Repression Tribunals and setting case deadlines are steps forward, but laws alone cannot tackle a problem rooted in everyday life and deepened by digital exposure.

Chowdhury Md Mohaimen, manager of helpline 1098, said, "Many parents say children today have become unruly, but the challenge is adapting parenting to a world shaped by technology and social media." He added that weak supervision and poor communication leave children vulnerable to exploitation and risky behaviour.

Mahila Parishad President Dr Fauzia Moslem said the education system is failing to teach respect for women. "Lessons on equality and consent are missing, allowing misogyny to take root. Safe recreational spaces are disappearing, leaving children to fill the void in unhealthy ways."

She urged reviving local Nari Nirjaton Protirodh committees and involving community figures like Totto Apas to raise awareness and drive action.

Dr Prakash Kanti Chowdhury, joint secretary of the women and children affairs ministry, said a new Tk 309.39 crore project titled "Strengthening Integrated Services to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Women and Children and Quick Response Team Activities" has been launched, replacing the previous Multi-Sectoral Programme on Violence Against Women.

The initiative will ensure that Quick Response Teams from union to district levels respond within 24 hours of an incident being reported, providing medical, forensic, legal, and psychosocial support. Unlike the previous programme, this one focuses on prevention through schools, colleges, and madrasas, engaging youth, community members, and religious leaders.

"It will also use creative awareness tools -- social media, reels, and pocket-sized guides on relevant laws -- to make information more accessible," he said.





THE BRAVE GIRLS OF JULY

SHAMIMA RITA

The photo of Sanjida Ahmed Tonni, blood streaming down her face after being attacked by Chhatra League activists, became one of the defining images of Bangladesh's July Movement. Around the same time, Nusrat Tabassum was dragged away by plainclothes detectives. Elsewhere in Dhaka, Nazifa Jannat led marches through private universities, while Nusrat Jahan Tumpa stood before a police van demanding the release of detained students.

Each risked her life for a cause larger than herself, a fight that began on the streets and continues long after the chants have faded.

For 27-year-old Nazifa Jannat, the night of July 18, 2024, remains vivid. She was leading a procession near Rampura Bridge when police opened fire from both sides. "My brain went blank. I thought I was going to die. Someone shouted, 'Apu, run!' I did, not knowing a student had just been shot nearby."

A fourth-year student at East West University, Nazifa helped mobilise private university students through posters, social media, and rallies. "When the internet shutdown began, I feared we might lose momentum. But unity kept us going."

At Dhaka University, political science student Nusrat Tabassum became one of the movement's

faces. Arrested by the Detective Branch after leading a rally demanding Sheikh Hasina's resignation, she said, "I faced police firing and DB custody. Even now, 70 percent of my hearing in one ear is gone. But I'd do it again, because we were fighting for everyone's right to be heard."

In Rokeya Hall, psychology

rained down; one hit me below my eye. My glasses broke, and blood poured. My friends pulled me to safety."

The photo of her wounded face went viral, becoming a rallying cry — but also a reminder of danger. "People in my hometown put my picture on banners. It inspired others, but it scared me too."

but I feel stronger now."

AFTER THE UPRISING
The end of the protests brought no peace. "The journey after July is harder than those 36 days," said Tabassum. "Propaganda, doctored photos, online harassment — nothing stops."

Nazifa said, "Even now, I face verbal abuse for being outspoken. If I could lead a movement, why can't I live freely?"

Tonni still flinches at the sight of police uniforms. "But silence helps no one."

Today, these women continue to fight in classrooms, communities, and politics. Tabassum is joint convener of the National Citizens Party and preparing to contest the next election. Nazifa works on campus for women's rights. Tonni was elected Research and Publications Secretary of Dhaka University Central Student Union. Tumpa, back to her studies, is preparing for future leadership.

All four share one conviction: women must keep pushing forward. "Change begins with how society sees women in leadership," said Tabassum.

Nazifa added, "Women were visible in July but sidelined afterward. We must stay focused and unshakable."

Tumpa put it simply. "To speak against injustice is to live. That's what we owe every girl who comes after us."



student Sanjida Ahmed Tonni had watched the protests from her dorm until the former prime minister called protesters "Razakars". On July 15, Chhatra League members attacked students on campus. "When they chased me, I hid inside a bus. Bricks

For 21-year-old law student Nusrat Jahan Tumpa, courage meant standing alone before a police van on July 31. "Every day we faced checkpoints and fear. But that day, I rediscovered myself. After the photo went viral, I received threats online and offline,

When motherhood comes with fear Raising girls in a patriarchal society

NILIMA JAHAN

For mothers across Bangladesh, love for their daughters comes with an inseparable companion: fear. From Dhaka's crowded apartments to quiet village streets, raising girls in a patriarchal society demands constant vigilance, courage, and resilience.

Filmmaker Farhana Bulbul Kangkhita, mother of 12-year-old dancer Azra Akin Rahman Samridhi, said raising a daughter comes with an invisible layer of responsibility and risk that parents of sons rarely feel. "Every choice — what she wears, how she travels, when she returns home — feels like a calculation. Public spaces, buses, even online platforms feel unsafe. It's not just fear for her body, but for her spirit — that she might lose the sense of freedom every young girl deserves."

For Nabila Basher, mother of 12-year-old Anaisha Hossain now living in Canada, the distance brings perspective. "I wouldn't feel safe letting my daughter go out alone in Bangladesh until she's much older. My biggest fears would be abduction, sexual violence, even murder. Public transport and online spaces would constantly worry me."

For development professional Saudia Afrin, fear began early. Her daughter Adoita is only two and a half. "She's so small, but I've already had to teach her about good and bad touch. It breaks my heart to prepare her for danger before she can even spell the word."

Shahira Sultan, owner of Toyomoy and mother of two daughters, said freedom must be negotiated daily. Her elder daughter Aurora, who has mild autism, faces barriers of acceptance. "For girls like her, the first challenge is inclusion. Even other parents teach their children to stay away." Her younger daughter, 11-year-old Aniya, though more independent, still grows up within invisible boundaries — allowed to visit neighbours or attend tuition, but always under supervision.

In Kapasia, Gazipur, 35-year-old Roksana Akter, who never had formal education, shares the same anxiety. "Now girls have no safety. I always worry when my daughter Raisa goes to school. My mother didn't have to worry this much."

Experts say this fear leaves measurable marks on both mothers and daughters.

Physician and psychotherapy practitioner Dr Sunjida Shahriah said constant anxiety about daughters' safety takes a toll on mothers' mental health, triggering stress hormones that cause irritability and restlessness. "This over-caution can also undermine a girl's confidence. When she internalises limits early, she sees herself as trapped —

restricting her creativity and freedom."

These mothers carry a contradiction: protecting their daughters while teaching them not to be ruled by fear.

Farhana encourages Azra to find strength through dance — a way to claim both confidence and freedom — while reminding her that the world can be cruel.

Entrepreneur Fayeka Zabeen Siddiqua, mother of five-year-old Rehma, walks the same tightrope. "I want to raise a daughter who knows the world for what it is," she said. They take the metro, walk the streets, and join public celebrations. "I teach her to be cautious but also to take up space, knowing family and community stand behind her." Yet every outing comes with a silent calculation: should she let her travel alone or stay out late? "I know I'm not alone; mothers across Bangladesh walk this same line."

Saudia often feels torn between courage and caution. "Fear stops me from letting her try things she wants. It's heartbreaking. I feel guilty, like I can never protect her enough."

Farhana confessed she sometimes cries after warning Azra to 'be careful'. "I worry I'm stealing small pieces of her girlhood."

For Shahira, the pain runs deeper. "Differently abled girls are not welcome anywhere — not in schools, not in public spaces. Freedom feels like a luxury."

Fayeka refuses to carry the burden alone. "Society and policymakers should feel guilty," she said. "They've failed their daughters."

Despite everything, these mothers hold on to hope. Farhana envisions a Bangladesh where girls live without fear, valued for their minds and talents — not judged by gender. "Where boys are raised with empathy, not entitlement, and schools teach kindness and consent as seriously as math."

Shahira's wish is simple: dignity and inclusion. "For those with disabilities, stronger laws and real enforcement are needed so our daughters can live with dignity — even when we're gone."

Roksana Sultana, executive director of Breaking The Silence, said equality begins at home. "Families must raise sons and daughters alike, not by outdated gender roles. Prevention at family and community levels is far more effective than law after abuse occurs."

She called for stronger local systems — community schools, safer public spaces, and strict penalties — to dismantle the culture of impunity that breeds fear.

Dr Shahriah added that while boys and girls may differ physically, their dignity must remain equal. "Equal inheritance, economic security, and education empower girls toward independence."

To the girl raising her father

WASIM BIN HABIB

It still feels like yesterday.

It was a March evening in 2017. I stood outside the labour room — anxious, restless, and counting the seconds.

Amid the noise of relatives and attendants, time seemed to crawl. My wife had been taken in around 2:30pm for a C-section, and by 5:00pm, there was still no news.

It was our second child, and we hadn't asked whether it would be a boy or a girl. Quietly, we wished for a girl. Around 5:15pm, the doctor came out.

As I rushed towards her, she smiled and said, "It's a girl."

When I walked in and held that baby for the first time, the rest of the world stood still. The hospital room, the chatter outside, even my own thoughts blurred into the background.

There she was — tiny, fragile, yet powerful enough to rearrange the very core of who I was.

Something inside me shifted. It wasn't loud or dramatic, but a quiet realisation that life would never be the same.

Her arrival completed our family in every sense. We already had a son, five years older, and her birth brought a balance we didn't know we were missing.

Our home soon filled with new sounds — softer, sweeter, yet commanding in their own way. Her presence coloured our world, transforming me in ways I had not imagined.

The way she stretches a word, asks a question, or mimics an adult's tone has an inexplicable charm. Her laughter, her curiosity, her wild colour choices, her drawings filled with blooming flowers, smiling suns, and dancing children bring me a joy I had long forgotten.

I find myself enchanted by the way she sees beauty in raindrops, in butterflies, in her mother's sari. The way she speaks with unfiltered honesty softens my own tone.

Raising my daughter has reshaped my

understanding of what it means to be a man. I once believed manhood was about being strong and stoic.

But in her little face, I found a reason to be patient, caring, kind. Her tears can undo my toughest day. Through her, I learned that real strength lies in expressing emotion — not in hiding it. It is not dominance, but empathy and respect.

I began to see how deeply words and

gestures matter as she watches everything I do. I know she will use me, consciously or not, to understand men and measure the world around her. That thought makes me strive to be a better version of myself — one she can trust and be proud of.

Raising a girl also brings a sense of vulnerability only parents understand. I worry about her safety — the streets she will walk, the systems she will face, the

biases she may encounter. Will her voice be heard? Will her worth be seen?

These questions come not from fear alone, but from reality.

As a journalist, I have covered women's struggles and triumphs — from the fight for education and safety to equality at work. I have seen how opportunities shrink, how voices are dismissed, how security is never guaranteed.

Raising a girl also brings a sense of vulnerability only parents understand. I worry about her safety — the streets she will walk, the systems she will face, the biases she may encounter. Will her voice be heard? Will her worth be seen?



AI-generated image

But being a father to a daughter gives those stories new meaning. They are no longer distant reports; they are personal.

The International Day of the Girl Child reminds us that investing in girls — in their education, rights, and opportunities — is not just a moral duty but a collective necessity.

For me, it is also a moment of reflection. I see in my daughter the potential that too often goes unrealised. I think of the barriers — early marriage, discrimination, neglect, violence — and feel the urgency to do better, as a father and as a citizen.

When I watch her sleep, her hair fanned across the pillow and her small hand tucked beneath her cheek, I often think about the future she will step into — a future I cannot control, but one I can help shape.

I want her to grow up believing her dreams are valid, her voice matters, and her worth is beyond measure.

In raising her, I am learning to raise myself — as a father, as a man, and perhaps, as a better human being.