"My whole life, I've made deals. I think we're going to have this one done, hopefully soon."
DONALD TRUMP
on meeting with Vladimir Putin for peace in Ukraine

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July charter signed, NCP stays away

24 parties including BNP, Jamaat ink landmark document for state reform; 4 left parties skip ceremony; Gono Forum abstains from signing

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, flanked by Consensus Commission Vice President Ali Riaz and political party leaders, holds up the July National Charter just after it was signed by 24 parties at the South Plaza of Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban yesterday. PHOTO: CA PRESS WING

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a display of political unity, 24 parties signed the much-anticipated July National Charter yesterday. However, five parties -- including the NCP, formed by student leaders who spearheaded last year's July mass uprising -- sat out the ceremony.

The signing -- the outcome of three rounds of negotiations between the National Consensus Commission and 30 political parties -- took place on a rainy autumn afternoon at the South Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

The event was marked by protests from a group calling itself July Warriors, who demanded formal recognition in the charter.

Parties long split along ideological lines shared a single stage in what organisers hailed as a watershed in the country's political history.

"It is a great day. It gives me goosebumps ... ," said Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, moments after the signing.

"Today is the day of a new birth. We have introduced a 'New Bangladesh' through the signing."

The chief adviser said the political consensus on complex national issues achieved by Bangladesh could become an example worldwide.

"People across the country witnessed the debates and joined the process. Consensus was reached on many complex issues through discussion. These achievements will be included in textbooks so the young generation can learn about the path our politicians have shown."

"It is a great day. It gives me goosebumps ... Today is the day of a new birth. We have introduced a New Bangladesh through the signing."

Prof Muhammad Yunus

Yunus also paid a glowing tribute to the martyrs and injured of the July uprising, saying, "The nation is forever indebted to the July fighters."

He recalled that his government was cautiously optimistic about the consensus commission's success when the efforts were launched to build national consensus on key issues proposed by the reform commissions.

"We had quietly hoped it might be able to bring the political parties together on one or two issues."

But leaders reached consensus on many issues and made their way to the stage for the signing ceremony, he added.

"The entire nation has come together. All the political leaders have united to sign the July charter. None of us could have imagined such an event would take place."

The chief adviser credited the members of the consensus commission for uniting the parties behind the July charter.

"The members of the consensus commission will be remembered in history," he said. "Their names will endure. People will wonder how they managed to achieve this."

Yunus hoped that the changes will take the country forward with proper execution of the charter by all, setting aside differences.

"We have to bring changes in our national life. Changes have to be made in our constitution and in running the government," he said.

CEREMONY

The ceremony began at 4:37pm with the national anthem. Earlier, Yunus arrived amid a light drizzle to a welcome by school and college students in traditional red-and-green attire, beating drums.

Members of the consensus commission sat beside him on stage, surrounded by leaders of 25 political parties in the second row.

At 5:05pm, two representatives from each party signed the charter alongside Commission Vice-President Prof Ali Riaz and other members. Yunus signed it two minutes later. The signatories then raised

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CHECK OUT THE 4-PAGE PULLOUT ON JULY CHARTER

LAST-MINUTE CHANGES

Proclamation of independence retained

Legal indemnity added for July uprising activists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Consensus Commission yesterday made last-minute changes to the July charter, retaining the Proclamation of Independence in the constitution and adding provisions for legal indemnity for July uprising activists.

Four left-leaning parties -- the Communist Party of Bangladesh, Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal (Basod), Bangladesh JSD, and Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal (Marxist) -- along with Gono Forum, had objected to the recommendations for removal of the Declaration of Independence (March 26, 1971) and the Proclamation of Independence (April 10, 1971) from the constitution.

They also protested the exclusion of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's March 7 speech.

The left parties stayed away from the July charter signing event yesterday, while Gono Forum attended the ceremony but abstained from signing the agreement.

Speaking to The Daily Star last evening, Prof Ali Riaz, vice-president of the commission, said the Proclamation of Independence was retained in response to demands from some political parties.

Earlier, in the hours leading up to the signing ceremony, groups calling themselves July Warriors staged protests in and around the parliament complex, demanding state recognition for the July martyrs and the injured; rehabilitation for their families; and legal assistance and indemnity.

While addressing the agitating protesters at the South

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Some parties deceived people by signing July charter: Nahid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

National Citizen Party Convener Nahid Islam yesterday said that some political parties were deceiving people in the name of national consensus by signing the July Charter.

Speaking at the launch of Jatiya Sramik Shakti, the party's labour body, in the capital's Eskaton, he said that a meeting of a few parties cannot be considered a manifestation of national unity.

"National unity is when workers and people from various professions come together to work for the country's welfare and fight for their rights."

The interim government has formed several commissions. A labour commission was formed. But there has been no discussion about this commission. There has been no discussion about the health commission either, the NCP leader said.

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Police break up July Warriors' protests

10 hurt in clashes near JS ahead of signing ceremony

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The signing day of the July charter, hailed by the government as historic, was marred by protests from groups calling themselves the "July Warriors."

The protesters gathered at the south plaza of the parliament complex yesterday morning, where the signing of the charter was scheduled for the afternoon.

They climbed over barricades and took positions inside the parliament complex as preparations were underway for the programme. The protesters occupied the seats arranged for guests.

They were demanding state recognition of those killed in the 2024 mass uprising as "martyrs," recognition of the injured as "July Warriors," a specific roadmap for the rehabilitation of martyrs' families, and legal assistance for the injured, among others.

Around 1:15pm, law enforcers moved in to break up the gathering, firing tear gas shells and using batons on the protesters, leading to several injuries.

Tejgaon Division Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Ibne Mizan said they were instructed to disperse the protesters.

"A programme of the chief adviser was going to take place there, and there were security concerns. Other agencies were also present. We had given them time to leave peacefully, but since they did not, they were dispersed on instructions from higher authorities," he said.

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East Senpara turning into a 'chemical colony'

Illegal warehouses, factories thrive in Mirpur's residential areas

SHAMIMA RITA *and* SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Right under the authorities' noses, chemical warehouses and small factories are operating in full swing in Mirpur's densely populated residential areas, defying safety regulations and gambling with thousands of lives.

Despite repeated warnings and past tragedies, these establishments have been running for years without proper authorisations or monitoring -- an issue that came to light following Tuesday's devastating Rupnagar fire that claimed at least 16 lives.

According to the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE), officials face challenges in taking necessary actions, as the boundaries between residential and commercial areas remain blurred.

During a visit to Rupnagar's Shialbari area, this newspaper found that residential buildings stand a mere 14 metres from the site of the deadly fire.

According to the fire service and locals, over a hundred buildings in the Rupnagar residential area house chemical warehouses, small- and medium-sized garment factories, and dyeing units.

Kazi Nazmuzzaman, assistant director of the Fire Service and Civil Defence, said, "Every time there has been a fire, that's when we've learnt about these warehouses. These warehouses mainly store highly flammable dyeing chemicals, and they operate without following any regulations."

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Atikul Islam, who lost his right arm during the July uprising and now relies on a prosthetic, falls to the ground during police action on protesters calling themselves the "July Warriors". Ahead of the signing of the July charter, they staged a demonstration outside the South Plaza of the parliament complex yesterday morning, demanding compensation, rehabilitation, and legal protection. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Shibir sweeps Rucsu too

Wins 20 of 23 central posts

ARAFAT RAHAMAN

The Islami Chhatra Shibir-backed Sommilito Shikkharthi Jote has swept the Rajshahi University Central Students' Union (Rucsu) election, securing 20 out of 23 central posts in the first such polls held in 35 years.

The panel also dominated the hall and senate elections, marking a near-clean sweep across the university's student representative bodies.

Results were announced around 8:00am yesterday by Chief Election Commissioner Prof F Nazrul Islam at the Kazi Nazrul Islam Auditorium, following an overnight vote count that began at 8:30pm Thursday.

Mostakur Rahman Jahid of Sommilito Shikkharthi Jote was elected vice-president with 12,687

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PHOTO: CA PRESS WING

The chiefs of three services *(left)* and advisers to the interim government *(right)* attend the July charter signing ceremony held yesterday at the South Plaza of Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

"A new chapter began in Bangladesh's political history through the signing of the July charter."

Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir
BNP Secretary General

"If the national charter we signed today is implemented, it will bring a qualitative change in our politics."

Syed Abdullah Mohammad Taher, Nayeb-e-Ameer
Jamaat-e-Islami

"I'm very happy. I would have felt even better if the NCP student leaders, those who led the July movement, had been present."

Dr Asif Nazrul
Law Adviser

"At this historic moment, not signing this charter would be showing disrespect to the uprising."

Nurul Haque Nur
President
Gono Odhikar Parishad

"If the implementation framework is finalised and the fundamental reforms are safeguarded, NCP will sign."

Khaled Saifullah
Joint Convener
National Citizen Party

United, we'll move towards February polls: Yunus

UNB, *Dhaka*

Urging political leaders to hold talks for a fair and festive election, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday said the signing of the "July National Charter 2025" symbolises unity, which will guide the nation towards the upcoming national election.

He expressed optimism that a fair and festive election would be held in February next year while maintaining the existing unity among political parties.

"We are talking about the elections. The tune we played together today is a tune of unity. We will move forward to the election with this same spirit. The election will be held in February, and it is essential that we maintain this unity," Yunus said soon after signing the charter.

He urged political leaders to come together -- through a commission or committee, whichever they prefer -- to discuss and determine practical ways to ensure a fair and celebratory election. "We can make this happen," he added.

The chief adviser said the next national election must be held in such a way that nobody can raise any questions about it.

Yunus urged everyone to work together so that the election could be held fairly and in a festive manner. "We can do that. Fix your mind," he said.

He described the signing of the July National Charter 2025 as a "great day" and called it the beginning of a "New Bangladesh".

The charter was officially signed at the South Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

July charter signed, NCP stays away

FROM PAGE 1

the document in a symbolic gesture to applause from several hundred guests -- many of whom struggled to find dry seating in the open-air event.

"This was a combined effort for state reform. A document alone will not guarantee success. We still have a long way to go," said Ali Riaz.

"This national charter is not merely an accord among political parties. It is a social contract between citizens, the political parties and the State," he added.

SIGNATORIES

From the BNP, Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and Standing Committee Member Salahuddin Ahmed signed the charter while the Jamaat-e-Islami sent its Nayeb-e-Ameer Syed Abdullah Muhammad Taher and Secretary General Mia Golam Porwar for the signing.

The other parties included the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Khelafat Majlish, Rastro Songskar Andolon, Amar Bangladesh Party (AB Party), Nagorik Oikya, Nationalist Democratic Movement (NDM), Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish, Ganosamhati Andolon, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), Gono Odhikar Parishad (GOP), Biplobi Workers Party, Jatiyatabadi Sammanna Jote, 12-Party Alliance, Islami Andolon Bangladesh, Zaker Party, Jatiya Gonofront, Bangladesh Nezam-e-Islam Party, Bangladesh Labour Party, Bhashani Jonoshokti Party, Jamiat Ulamaye Islam Bangladesh, Islami Oikya Jote and Amjonotar Dal.

Although Gono Forum attended the event, it did not sign the charter.

Its General Secretary Mizanur Rahman said the party would have signed the charter if the Proclamation of Independence had been retained in the constitution.

"We were assured amendments would be made, but at the event, we were given only the page for the signature, not the final copy of the charter. That's why we refrained from signing it."

THOSE WHO STAYED AWAY

Besides the National Citizen Party(NCP), Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal (Basod), Bangladesh JSD, and Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal (Marxist) stayed away from the ceremony.

In a statement on Facebook, NCP Senior Joint Convener Ariful Islam Adeb said, "Since this signing ceremony will not achieve any legal basis, this is only a formality. We have spoken about this legal basis many times. Before such a basis is established, this will turn into another one-sided document like the 'July Declaration'."

He added that the party would participate in the next process of the consensus commission as its tenure has been extended.

"If our demands are met, we will sign the charter later."

The four leftist parties said they cannot sign any charter, even with a note of dissent, that commits to changing the constitution's four fundamental principles: democracy, socialism, secularism and nationalism.

They also objected to any move preventing legal challenges to the charter in future.

The event was attended by family members of the July martyrs, including Mir Mostafizur Rahman, father of Shaheed Mir Mahfuzur Rahman Mugdho, and Shamsi Ara Begum, mother of Shaheed Tahir Zaman Priyo.

Advisers, senior civil and military officials, diplomats, editors, journalists, eminent citizens, and members of various reform commissions were also present.

The fall of the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League regime through the July uprising last year generated huge public aspirations about long-cherished state reforms.

After taking charge, the Yunus-led interim government formed a number of commissions last year to make proposals on the changes.

The consensus commission was formed in mid-February this year with Yunus at the helm to build consensus among political parties on key changes proposed by six major reform commissions on the constitution, judiciary, electoral system, Anti-Corruption Commission, and public administration.

It drafted 84 proposals after two rounds of talks. Half of these issues were constitutional reforms.

BNP and its allies submitted notes of dissent on at least nine issues.

The final draft of the charter was sent to parties on September 10, and a third round of talks on its implementation began the next day.

During these discussions, parties agreed that non-constitutional reforms would be enacted through ordinances and executive orders, while constitutional changes would go to referendum.

Although parties accepted the idea of a referendum, they failed to agree on its timing, procedures and framework.

After closing the third round of talks, on October 14, the commission sent the final version of the charter to the parties, seeking their firm commitment to its full implementation.

The charter also calls for assurances that parties will not challenge its legality or necessity in court, and that they will uphold legal and constitutional safeguards throughout every stage of its execution.

Besides the reform issues, the charter seeks pledges from the parties to enshrine the document in the constitution, either as a schedule or in another appropriate place.

Yesterday, the commission made last-minute changes to the charter to ensure legal indemnity, protection of fundamental rights, and security for the families of July martyrs and the injured, amid protests by the group called July Warriors.

East Senpara

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Locals said landowners in this residential zone have been selling plots and buildings to industrial entrepreneurs, who then build three- to six-storey structures on two- to five-katha plots and use them for garment production and chemical storage.

'CHEMICAL COLONY'

Just across from the fire department near the Mirpur-10 intersection is East Senpara, which is locally known as the "chemical colony".

After Old Dhaka's Nimtoli, Chawkbazar, and Mitford, this area has become one of the city's most concentrated chemical trading hubs.

For more than a decade, nearly a hundred businesses -- many operating illegally, disguised as entities that are officially registered and licensed -- have been dealing in chemicals here.

A recent visit revealed that almost every ground floor in the colony houses chemical shops or warehouses, while people live upstairs despite the constant risk.

According to the Bangladesh Garments Printing Chemicals Traders' Association, there are over 90 registered chemical shops in the colony.

Abu Sufian, general secretary of the association, said, "On top of the registered shops, there are others that are unauthorised. There are stores that sell dyeing chemicals, though they claim to maintain adequate safety measures. The traders moved to this location in 2010 after relocating from Old Dhaka."

In 2010, a tragic fire in Nimtoli, Old Dhaka, killed over a hundred people when a chemical warehouse ignited in a densely populated residential area.

In East Senpara, while most claim to sell garment-related dyes and finishing chemicals, several also stock and sell flammable materials.

A businessman, who has been operating in the colony for 12 years, said, "Almost every shop deals with some amount of flammable materials. We have trade licences, and the fire service visits occasionally to inspect out fire safety protocols. We conduct business upon approval of the fire service."

Fire official Nazmuzzaman said, "We often conduct mobile court drives along with a magistrate, and we inform the city corporation whenever we find that anyone is found operating a chemical business with only a trade licence."

Dhaka North City Corporation Revenue Officer Monowar Hossain said, "When we issue a trade licence, it is clearly mentioned that any kind of business involving chemicals or flammable substances is not allowed."

Another DNCC official, wishing anonymity, said, "If we receive a complaint, we take necessary action, including cancellation of the trade licence."

LACK OF CLARITY

Inspector Asadul Islam of the Department of Explosives said, "No licences have been issued for chemical warehouses in the Mirpur area. Due to the high demand created by the presence of garments, dyeing, and washing plants, many warehouses have been set up illegally under the guise of licensed entities."

Several officials at the department, however, said that though they were supposed to conduct drives regularly, they couldn't because of a lack of manpower.

Atiqur Rahman, deputy inspector general of DIFE's Dhaka region, said, "In Dhaka, it's very difficult to determine which areas are residential and which are industrial."

"Whenever we conduct drives or attempt to evict chemical warehouses from residential buildings, we face this very challenge," he added.

Atiqur added that without clear zoning and stronger coordination among agencies, identifying and removing hazardous chemical businesses from densely populated neighbourhoods will remain nearly impossible.

Some parties

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"There is no discussion about reforming institutions that are directly connected to people's lives. The consensus commission has been formed solely around six election-centric reform commissions," Nahid said, adding, "There too, we could not see good intentions from everyone towards democracy."

Calling for broader reforms, he said, "We believe that along with the struggle for democratic transformation, we must also continue the struggle for economic transformation. We must break free from the development narrative of the past and place human dignity above all in Bangladesh.

"We seek a democratic transformation from Bangladesh's deeply corrupt and looted system. The mafias from the fascist era remain unpunished, their businesses still protected by the government. Those who exploited workers for years continue to get protection from the government and political parties. We want the change of the system."

About workers' rights, Nahid said his party will do politics for their rights. "Jatiya Sramik Shakti will stand by those who keep the country's economy running."

He added that they would be committed to establishing their new settlement, promoting a politics of justice and fairness, and upholding human dignity. "This is our commitment to the people of Bangladesh, to the martyrs of the July uprising, and to the injured.''

Shibir sweeps Rucsu too

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votes, defeating Sheikh Nur Uddin Abir of the BNP-backed Oikyaboddho Notun Projonmo panel, who received 3,397 votes.

The only major exception came in the general secretary post, where Salahuddin Ammar of Adhipottobirodhi Oikya secured 11,537 votes, defeating Shibir-backed Fazle Rabbi Md Fahim Reza, who got 5,729 votes. The former Students Against Discrimination coordinator Ammar's victory prevented a clean sweep in the top leadership tier.

In the assistant general secretary (AGS) race, SM Salman Sabbir of the Shibir-backed panel won with 6,971 votes, defeating Zahin Biswas Esha of the BNP-backed panel, who received 5,941 votes.

Another exception came in the sports secretary post, which went to Nargis Khatun of the BNP-backed panel. She secured 7,785 votes, defeating Shibir-backed Hamidullah, who received 5,238 votes -- the only post won by the Chhatra Dal-backed panel.

Independent candidate Tufayel Ahmed Tufa won the science and technology secretary post with 6,780 votes, narrowly beating Shibir-backed Md Hasan Howlader, who received 6,753 votes.

The Shibir-backed panel secured the remaining secretary and executive member positions, including those related to cultural, women's, information, media, debate, environment, and social welfare affairs.

Among the elected candidates are Abu Sayeed Muhammad Noon, Zayed Hasan Joha, Md Rakibul Islam, Saiyida Hafsa, Samia Jahan, BM Najmus Sakib, Sifat Abu Saleh, Md Mujahidul Islam, Asadullah, Mujahidul Islam Saim, Imran Laskar, Md Nayon Hossain, Abdullah Al Masud, and Masuma Israt Mumu.

All four executive member posts were also won by the Shibir-backed panel -- Md Dip Mahbub, Md Imjiaul Haque Kamali, Sujan Chandra, and ABM Khaled.

At the hall level, the panel swept all VP, GS, and AGS posts in six women's halls and 11 men's halls.

In the senate polls, the Shibir-backed panel won three of the five student representative seats. Mostakur Rahman Jahid, Fazle Rabbi Md Fahim Reza, and SM Salman Sabbir were elected, while Salahuddin Ammar and independent candidate Akil Bin Taleb claimed the remaining two seats.

Chief Election Commissioner Prof Nazrul Islam said the election was held peacefully and without major incidents, with a voter turnout of 69.83 percent. There were 28,901 registered students -- 17,596 male and 11,305 female.

According to the Election Commission, 247 candidates contested for 23 Rucsu posts under 10 panels, while 597 vied for 15 hall union positions in 17 halls, and 58 ran for five student representative posts in the university senate.

RU Vice-Chancellor Prof Saleh Hasan Naqib, in a Facebook post, urged elected representatives to avoid politicising the platform.

"Holding office is not a privilege but a trust. They must work for all students, regardless of political affiliation," he wrote.

Newly elected VP Jahid and GS Ammar pledged to uphold the students' mandate with integrity and dedication. "We will work according to the students' mandate. I hope those who could not win will extend their full cooperation," Jahid said at a post-result press conference.

Ammar said, "My mandate is from the students. I will never go beyond that mandate. If I can fulfil my responsibilities properly, I will proudly say I have served this role with honour."

Following the announcement of results, the auditorium area erupted in celebration. Supporters were seen chanting slogans including "Nomani's blood will not go in vain," "Justice for Shahbagh killers," "Inqilab Zindabad," "Ward quota no more," and "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free."

Voting took place from 9:00am to 4:00pm across 17 centres in nine buildings on Thursday. The daylong polling was largely peaceful, though marked by allegations and counter-allegations among rival panels, including complaints over ballot handling, voter queues, and polling agent interference.

Proclamation of independence

FROM PAGE 1

Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban in the capital, Ali Riaz said the amendment to the fifth clause in the commitment section of the charter reflected their demands, according to a press release issued yesterday.

He read out the amended fifth clause: "It will ensure justice for those who were victims of enforced disappearance, killing, and torture during the 16-year democratic struggle against Awami fascism in pre-mass-uprising Bangladesh, as well as for all killings committed during the July–August 2024 mass uprising by members of the fascist Awami League and its allied law enforcement agencies."

It also states: "State honours will be conferred on the martyrs, and recognition will be given to their families, alongside the injured of the July [uprising], who will be declared state heroes. Appropriate assistance will be provided to the injured July Warriors, including monthly allowances, proper medical treatment, and rehabilitation. It will also ensure legal indemnity, protection of fundamental rights, and security for the families of martyrs and the injured July Warriors."

He added that there was no difference of opinion between the political parties and the commission on this issue.

Clause 5 of the July National Charter 2025, sent to political parties on October 14, had no provision for legal indemnity.

The fifth, sixth, and seventh schedules were added through the 15th amendment in 2011. The fifth schedule includes Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's historic March 7, 1971 speech, the sixth contains his Declaration of Independence made on March 26, and the seventh includes the Proclamation of Independence issued by the Mujibnagar government on April 10, 1971.

The commission finalised the charter after nearly eight months of consultations with political parties.

Dengue taking its toll on little ones

Over 20 children admitted to Mugda hospital daily

HELEMUL ALAM

Eighteen-month-old Tabassum Alo was crying on her mother's lap in the children's dengue ward at Mugda Medical College Hospital yesterday afternoon.

Her mother, Monira Akter Moyna, tried in vain to calm her down. The little girl has been undergoing treatment for dengue fever since Thursday night.

"We admitted our daughter with dengue fever, along with vomiting, diarrhoea, and high fever. She had been suffering from fever since Monday, and her condition deteriorated on Thursday when doctors confirmed dengue," said Moyna, a resident of Khilgaon Goran.

Alo's father, Ali Osman, expressed frustration at the lack of mosquito control drives. "We haven't seen any anti-mosquito campaign since August last year," he said.

Nearby, two-and-a-half-year-old Sumaiya Aysha lay sleeping as IV saline dripped into her arm. Her anxious mother, Amina, watched quietly.

"Aysha was admitted on Tuesday after suffering from fever for four days. She also had convulsions, nausea, and diarrhoea," Amina said.

Nine-year-old Mohammad Sayem was admitted to the same hospital on October 14. His parents were deeply worried -- this was his second bout of dengue in two years.

"He had fever and body pain when we brought him in. He's a little better now, but still not well enough to go home," said his mother, Bithi Akter.

According to Kamrunnahar, senior staff nurse at Mugda's children's dengue ward, the number of young patients is rising sharply.

"On average, 20 to 25 children are being admitted to the ward every day. By Friday noon, 22 children had already been admitted," she said.

Children aged from 0–12 years are treated in this ward, while older patients are admitted to the general dengue ward.

According to data from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), 243 dengue patients have died and 58,280 have been hospitalised across the country this year as of yesterday.

Of them, 34 deaths and 2,374 hospitalisations occurred at Mugda Medical College Hospital alone, where 139 patients were still receiving treatment till Friday noon.

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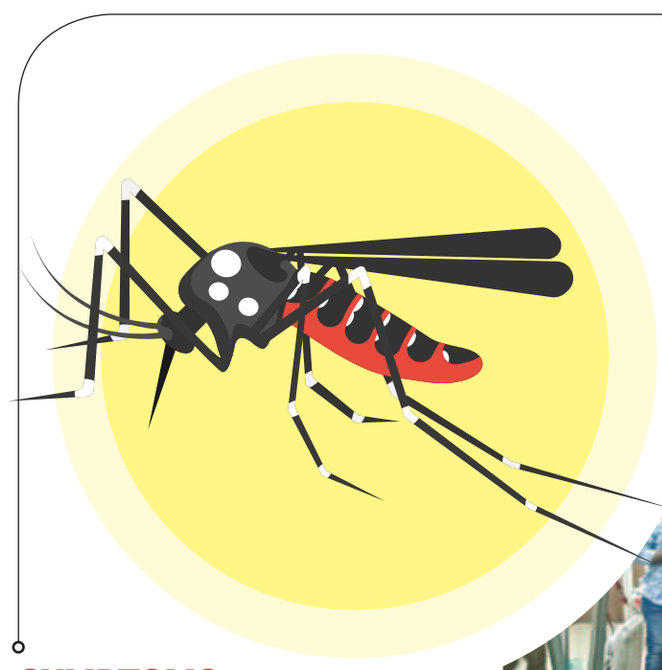


SYMPTOMS

- Fever, severe headache
- Pain behind eyes
- Muscle and joint pain
- Nausea, vomiting, swollen glands
- Unusual weakness, rash
- Abdomen pain, cough, loose motion

ADVICES

- Immediate blood test on doctore's advice
- Rest and drink plenty of fluids
- Paracetamol can be taken to reduce joint pains, fever
- Aspirin or ibuprofen should not be taken

A child sleeps in the dengue ward at Mugda Medical College Hospital yesterday afternoon as her worried parents look on. PHOTO: STAR

KAMINI BHABAN IN SREEMANGAL

Once a cultural hub, now a forgotten ruin

PHOTO: STAR

MINTU DESHWARA, *Moulvibazar*

A 350-year-old zamindar residence in Bangaon village under Sreemangal upazila of Moulvibazar now lies in ruins, its rich history fading into oblivion due to years of neglect and abandonment.

The building, locally known as Kamini Bhaban, was once part of a vibrant feudal estate. It was built in the late 17th century by Kamini Bihari Sen, the eldest son of Kunja Bihari Sen, who arrived in the Balishira Pargana of Moulvibazar from Bangaon in the then Jashore of undivided Bengal around 1675.

Kunja Bihari established and settled in Kunjaban village, named after him. His son Kamini later built a one-storey, three-room residence in Assamese architectural style in a nearby area, which came to be known as Bangaon -- named after their place of origin.

The materials used to build the house, including ornamental ironwork for the balconies, were sourced from Assam and Kolkata. Kamini Bhaban was not just a residence -- it was the administrative and cultural centre of the estate.

A kachhari ghar (revenue office) was built for tax collection, a charity medical centre provided treatment for locals, and a jalsa ghar hosted cultural events. Performers from Kolkata would entertain guests with music and dance, while a large pond beside the house served the local community with clean water.

However, time and neglect have taken a heavy toll. Much of the structure has been buried under overgrowth and erosion. The pond has been filled in, and the house itself is in decay.

"The house is about 350 years old and holds deep ancestral value for us," said Anupam Sen Babla, a descendant of the zamindar family. "Most of our family has moved abroad. The house is collapsing due to abandonment."

A large banyan tree still stands near the house, offering shade and reminding locals of the estate's former glory.

"The zamindar system brought Kamini Sen's family here from Bangaon, now in India's West Bengal," said local social activist Konkan Purkayastha Titu. "The estate was once a symbol of power and culture. Now it is only a ruin."

"This structure reflects the socio-cultural heritage of the region. Losing it would mean losing a part of our identity. The government should take immediate steps to protect it," said Md Ekramul Kabir, headteacher of Kunjaban Government Primary School.

Islam Uddin, Sreemangal upazila nirbahi officer, said necessary measures would be taken to preserve the building.

"I will bring the matter to the attention of the authorities concerned. We will assess the situation and discuss possible steps to preserve and protect this important historical structure," he said.

Include 'July forerunners' in charter

Says Moyeen Khan

UNB, *Dhaka*

BNP Standing Committee member Abdul Moyeen Khan yesterday stressed the need for including the "July forerunners" in the July Charter to make it more meaningful.

In his reaction to the evolving situation over the signing of the Charter, he said the current situation is "completely undesirable".

"It is natural that not everyone will agree on this document. In a country of 18 crore people, it is not realistic to expect that everyone will suddenly agree on everything. If that is the case, we will be heading back to a one-party system like Baksal," the BNP leader said.

He said the charter would only have real significance if those who led the July movement were included in it.

He also questioned why consensus could not be reached on some fundamental issues and why the discussions were expanded beyond the main focus to so many other topics.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Factory gutted in CEPZ blaze lacked fire safety

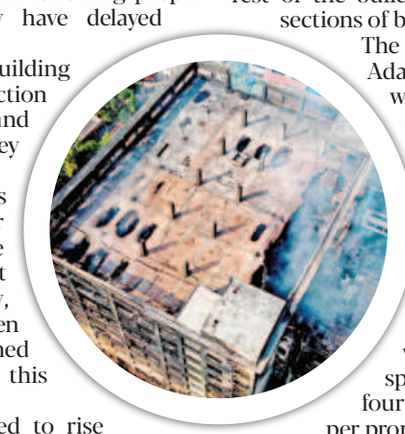
Say officials; fire brought under control after 17 hours

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, *Ctg*

The eight-storey factory building at the Chittagong Export Processing Zone (CEPZ), which was completely destroyed in a massive fire on Thursday afternoon, had structural flaws and lacked a mandatory fire safety plan, according to fire service officials.

Officials said warehouses on several floors were not built following proper rules, which may have delayed firefighting efforts.

Although the building had a fire detection alarm system and extinguishers, they were not adequate.



The blaze was brought under control after more than 17 hours, at 7:25am yesterday, but had not been fully extinguished as of the filing of this report at 6:30pm.

Smoke continued to rise from several parts of the building while firefighters kept spraying water to cool the site.

Md Tazul Islam Chowdhury, director (operations) of Fire Service and Civil Defence, said they brought the fire under control at 7:25am. "But it is yet to be fully extinguished."

Earlier, 17 firefighting units, with assistance from Bangladesh Navy and other forces, worked to bring the fire under control after it broke out on the seventh floor of the building on Road-5 of CEPZ in Chattogram's South Halishahar around 2:00pm on Thursday.

The seventh floor housed the warehouse of Adam Caps & Textiles, a towel manufacturer and the sixth floor contained the warehouse of Jeihong Medical Products BD Co Ltd, while the rest of the building comprised other sections of both companies.

The building is owned by Adams Caps & Textiles, while Jiehong had rented three floors several years ago.

Factory officials claimed the top two floors housed the warehouses, though fire service and CEPZ officials suggested the warehouses were spread across the top four floors and not built as per proper standards.

Lt Col Tajul said the building was not constructed according to the building code. He noted that two adjoining buildings were erected without sufficient space between them, preventing firefighters from spraying water from one side.

He added that the storehouses were packed with flammable materials, including synthetic fabrics and yarns,

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7

Country needs to update pneumonia vaccine: experts

Current one no longer provides protection against evolved serotypes, says study

STAR REPORT

The pneumonia vaccine currently used in Bangladesh no longer provides protection against newly evolved pneumonia serotypes, according to a study.

The study was conducted by icddr,b and the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), supported by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

It analysed data from four public tertiary hospitals to identify Streptococcus pneumoniae serotypes currently causing infections among young children.

The study found that most circulating pneumococcal serotypes in Bangladesh are not well covered by the existing PCV-10 vaccine, which has been part of the national Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) since 2015.

While PCV-10 has significantly reduced illnesses and deaths caused by targeted serotypes, researchers noted that new serotypes have emerged, making it necessary to introduce newer-generation vaccines.

The findings were presented at a roundtable on introducing higher-valency pneumococcal conjugate vaccines (PCVs) in Bangladesh, held at icddr,b on October 16, according to a press release.

Dr Md Zakiul Hassan, associate scientist at icddr,b's Infectious Diseases Division, presented the data, which showed that switching to PCV-13, PCV-15, or PCV-20 could increase protection to about 17 percent, 19 percent, and 52 percent of currently circulating serotypes, respectively.

The study found that most circulating pneumococcal serotypes in Bangladesh are not well covered by the existing PCV-10 vaccine, which has been part of the national Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) since 2015.

Health experts at the discussion emphasised the need to update the vaccine to ensure stronger protection for children.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 3

Jamaat announces third phase of two-day programmes

STAR REPORT

Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami has announced a fresh two-day programme as part of its ongoing simultaneous movement, pressing for five demands including holding the next national election in February based on the "July National Charter".

In a statement issued by the party's central publicity department on Sunday evening, Jamaat Secretary General Mia Golam Porwar announced the new programmes.

The statement also mentioned a new demand -- to include a provision for a referendum on adopting the proportional representation (PR) system in the July Charter.

According to the announcement, the new programmes are: a human chain in Dhaka and all divisional cities on Tuesday, October 14, and similar human chains in all district towns on Wednesday, October 15.

Golam Porwar said in

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

Eliminating polythene key solution to waterlogging

Says Ctg mayor

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Ctg*

Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) Mayor Shahadat Hossain yesterday urged port city residents to abstain from using single-use plastics, saying that a sustainable solution to the city's waterlogging problem lies in eliminating polythene.

"Plastic is the 'top enemy' of our city's environment. To fight it, we must work together," he said, launching an initiative called "Plastic Exchange Programme" jointly organised by Bidyanondo Foundation and the city corporation.

Under the initiative, residents are able to receive medical treatment and daily essentials in exchange for discarded plastic.

Around 500 people were given free medical consultations in return for plastic waste at the event.

Bidyanondo Foundation Board Director Md Jamal Uddin said, all collected plastic will be recycled in partnership with the country's renowned recycling companies.

As part of the "Plastic Exchange Programme" an exhibition of sculptures made from the collected plastic will be organised at Patenga sea beach to raise awareness among the public, including tourists, said organisers.

Teachers from non-government MPO-listed institutions stage a sit-in at the Central Shaheed Minar in Dhaka yesterday, demanding nationalisation of their jobs and a 20 percent house rent allowance based on their basic salary. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Frequent gas blasts in N'ganj spark concern

SAURAV HOSSAIN SIAM, *Narayanganj*

Frequent gas explosions in Narayanganj have sparked concern among residents and civic activists, as the industrial district with its dense housing continues to witness a rise in such incidents.

According to the fire service records, Narayanganj saw 399 fire incidents in the first eight months of this year, including 29 caused by gas explosions.

Over the past five years, more than 400 gas-related blasts have been reported, most linked to leakages from Titas Gas pipelines, while others originated from LPG cylinders.

One of the deadliest accidents occurred in 2020, when leaked gas from a Titas pipeline accumulated and exploded inside Baitus Salat Mosque in West Tolla, killing 34 worshippers.

On September 4 this year, a blast from a leaked LPG cylinder in Sonargaon's Kanchpur area left five members of a family burnt, two of whom later died. Earlier, on March 3, another explosion in Siddhirganj left seven members of a family injured, three of whom later died.

Officials say poor urban planning, ageing pipelines, illegal and tampered connections, and unsafe cooking practices are the major causes of the recurring disasters.

In Narayanganj Sadar's Fatullah and Siddhirganj -- both densely populated and industrially active -- the risks are particularly high, with frequent reports from Sonargaon, Araihazar, Rupganj, and Bandar as well. Despite repeated tragedies, accountability remains elusive.

According to the fire service records, Narayanganj saw 399 fire incidents in the first eight months of this year, including 29 caused by gas explosions.

"In many households, kitchens are connected to bedrooms, turning them into gas chambers if leakage happens. A small spark can trigger catastrophe," said Abdullah Al Arefin, deputy assistant director of Fire Service and Civil Defence in Narayanganj. He also noted the lack of safety practices in factories as a cause for concern.

"Neither customers nor Titas take gas leakage seriously. Pipelines are rarely monitored. Some are so old that they corrode and leak constantly. Illegal connections only worsen the danger," said another fire service official, requesting anonymity.

He cited the 2020 mosque blast, where Titas initially denied having a distribution line nearby -- only for investigators to later find a leaking pipe right under the road. Although a case was filed naming Titas engineers as accused, little has changed since.

Titas currently supplies over 68,000 residential customers and 396 industries in Narayanganj, with much of its distribution line dating back six decades.

Contacted, Md Mamunur Rashid, deputy general manager of Titas's Narayanganj regional office, said such accidents are mainly due to customers' negligence. "We provide main line connections, but household links are made by building owners, often without skilled mechanics. We lack the manpower to inspect every home," he said.

He admitted that some pipelines from the 1960s remain in use but insisted Titas repairs leaks once reported, and that a project to replace old lines is in planning.

Civic activists, however, rejected such explanations.

"Titas cannot wash its hands of responsibility. Their negligence in maintaining old pipelines is a major reason behind these disasters. Illegal connections and corruption worsen the risk. It's a systemic failure of monitoring by Titas, Rajuk, and the city corporation," said Dhiman Saha Jewel, district president of Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik.

He also pointed out the lack of specialised burn care facilities in Narayanganj, forcing victims to be rushed to Dhaka, often leading to deaths due to delayed treatment.

Sand lifting puts two bridges at risk in Moulvibazar

MINTU DESHWARA, *Moulvibazar*

Unabated illegal sand extraction from the Manu river in Moulvibazar's Kulaura upazila has put the Kotarkona Bridge and the newly constructed Rajapur Bridge along the Kulaura-Prithimpasha-Hazipur-Sharifpur road at risk.

The foundations of the two structures have been severely threatened due to sand extraction nearby, despite several drives and fines imposed by local authorities, alleged locals.

Reportedly, Nazmun Nahar Lipi, wife of Habiganj Jubo League leader Selim Ahmed, is allegedly overseeing the sand extraction operations near both Kotarkona and Rajapur bridges, bypassing the terms of the government's lease agreement.

On September 2, Lipi was fined Tk 1 lakh for extracting sand illegally in the Salon area of Tilagaon union. Later, on September 30, her associate Ashraf Khan was also fined Tk 1 lakh for illegally installing a machine for sand extraction near the Rajapur Bridge in Prithimpasha union.

According to Section 4(b) of the Sand and Soil Management Act, 2010, sand extraction is prohibited within one kilometre of bridges, culverts, embankments, roads, highways, railway lines, and other important government and private establishments or residential areas.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

Khulna on edge amid rise in murders

DIPANKAR ROY, *Khulna*

After dusk, an eerie silence descends on Khulna city. Fear creeps into homes, roads, and alleyways alike -- fear of another murder, another lifeless body found somewhere. For residents, living in the city now comes with anxiety as news of killings and mysterious deaths emerge almost daily.

Over the past month alone, eight people have been murdered, while four others were found dead under mysterious circumstances. Since August last year, 45 murders have been reported in Khulna city, more than double the 19 reported in the previous year.

Toriqul Islam, owner of a small eatery near Khalishpur Peoples Jute Mills, said he used to keep his outlet open late for night-shift workers but now closes by 9:00pm.

"Murders, mugging, extortion, and fights have become frequent in the city. Even with my son escorting me home, I still feel afraid," he said.

According to Naval Police statistics, a total of 39 bodies were recovered from rivers this year till September, of which 15 remain unidentified. Several of the bodies recovered were of women and children.

Superintendent of the Naval Police Dr Manzur Morshed said, "Criminals use rivers to dispose of bodies. Some people die of drowning, but in many cases, the victims are murdered first and then their bodies are thrown into the river."

On September 30, the killing of Tanvir Hasan Shuvo, a former multinational company executive, shook the city. Tanvir was shot dead while sleeping beside his mother in Maheshwarpasha. The same neighbourhood has seen at least three high-profile murders in the past year.

On September 23, a female day-labourer was found dead with her throat slit inside a bathroom of an under-construction building in the city's KDA Mayuree Residential Area. Two days before that, in Phultala upazila, Alamgir Hossain Rony, 30, was beaten to death in broad daylight over extortion disputes.

Over the past month alone, eight people have been murdered, while four others were found dead under mysterious circumstances. Since August last year, 45 murders have been reported in Khulna city, more than double the 19 reported in the previous year.

More bodies kept surfacing -- from Lobonchhara, Dacope upazila, and Sadar areas -- including that of a local Awami League leader, Towhidur Rahman Tuhin, who was found dead inside a hotel room near Khulna Sadar Police Station on September 14.

On September 4, Parveen Begum, a homemaker in Rupsha, was hacked to death by her husband over a domestic dispute, while that same night, Imran Hossain Manik, a suspected member of an armed gang, was gunned down in nearby Joypur village.

Most recently, Liton Khan, 45, a fish vendor, was killed by his 17-year-old son for refusing to give him money for drugs on October 2 in Basupara Bashatola area.

According to law enforcers and local sources, during the Awami League's rule, control over drug trafficking networks and extortion rackets reportedly remained with a single political family.

However, since the political changeover last year, that syndicate has collapsed, leading to a turf war among rival drug dealer groups and local gangs.

In an effort to curb the killing spree and spike in violence, authorities transferred officers-in-charge of all eight police stations in Khulna city on September 11.

"Most of the recent killings are connected to the drug trade," said Md Rashidul Islam Khan, additional commissioner (crime and operations) of Khulna Metropolitan Police. "We are working hard to restore order and identify those behind these crimes."

KMP Commissioner Md Julfikar Ali Haider said, "Most of the listed criminals have been arrested since I took charge. We are investigating every murder and robbery with equal importance. However, factors like drug addiction, family disputes, and local crime networks make the situation complex."

Include July

FROM PAGE 3

Moyeen Khan also raised doubts about the competence of those responsible for coordination and asked whether it was necessary for the interim government to engage in such a complex process.

"Would it not have been more logical to leave these matters to a representative government formed through a free and fair election held within the shortest possible time?" he asked.

PRAYER TIMING
OCTOBER 18

	Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN	4-50	12-45	4-00	5-38	7-15
JAMAAT	5-25	1-15	4-15	5-41	7-45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

LOST

"I, Md. Risalat Huda (NSU ID: 1612147030), have lost my BBA certificate issued by North South University (Graduated Apr 8, 2021, Lost Oct 14, 2025). A GD is filed with Khilgaon PS (Tracking no. MVHMLS), Date: 14.10.2025, **Contact : 01743039016".**

2 killed, 20 injured as bus overturns in Khagrachhari

UNB, *Khagrachhari*

At least two people were killed and some 20 others injured as a passenger bus overturned while descending a hilly road in Khagrachhari's Matiranga upazila yesterday morning.

The deceased were identified as Abdur Razzak and Anil Chakma, residents of Kabakhali area in Dighinala upazila.

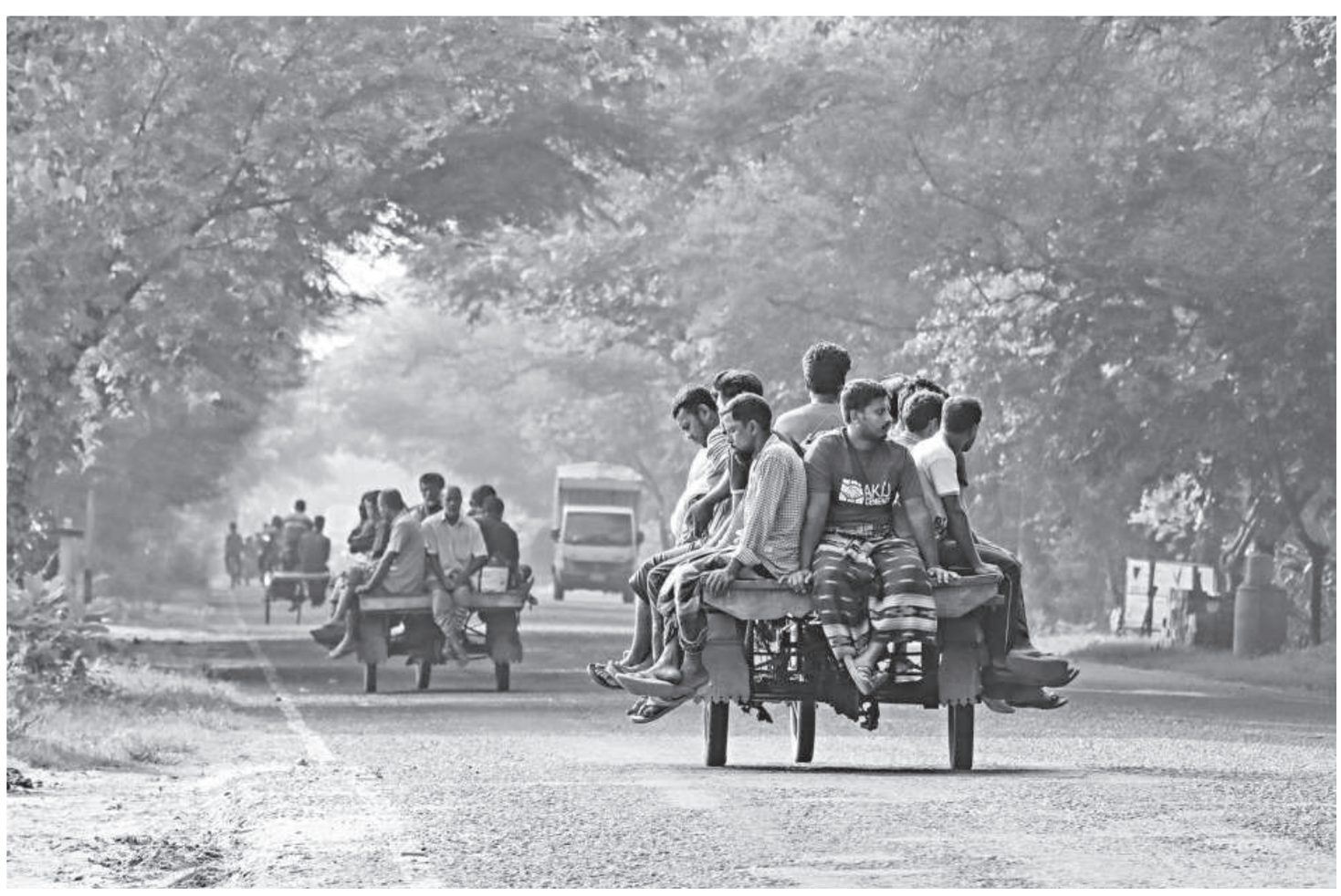
A Chattogram-bound bus of Shanti Paribahan lost control and overturned while descending the road through Sapmara hill in Alutila around 10:30am, said Kazi Wazed Ali, assistant superintendent of police (Matiranga Circle).

On information, army personnel, police, and local residents rushed to the spot and rescued the injured, he added.

Some of the injured were admitted to Matiranga Upazila Health Complex, while others were taken to Khagrachhari Modern District Sadar Hospital.

Md Shahidul Islam, line controller of the Khagrachhari Road Transport Owners' Group, said the bus was travelling from Baghaihat to Chattogram with around 40 passengers on board. Of them, 13-14 were seriously injured.

Dr Jaya Tripura, on-duty doctor at Khagrachhari Modern District Sadar Hospital, said six injured individuals were being treated in the hospital.



Daily wage earners arrive in the city early in the morning by vans, nosimons (human haulier), and other small vehicles in search of work. Many of them come from nearby villages and sometimes return home empty-handed after failing to find a job. Depending on the type of work, they earn between Tk 500 and Tk 700 a day. The photo was taken at Bypass Road's Akmaner Mor in Khulna city yesterday. PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

EU: Asean must seek change in Myanmar

AFP, *Kuala Lumpur*

The European Union will not send observers to Myanmar's upcoming election, its top human rights official said yesterday, dismissing the vote as neither free nor fair and urging Southeast Asian nations to "push for change".

"We're calling upon all neighbouring countries, including the Asean countries, to really firmly push for a change of course," EU commissioner Kajsa Ollongren told AFP in an interview in the Malaysian capital.

Myanmar junta chief Min Aung Hlaing has touted the December 28 elections as a path to reconciliation in the civil war he sparked by snatching power in a 2021 coup.

But international monitors, including a UN expert and Amnesty International, have dismissed the vote as a ploy to legitimise continuing military rule.

"As long as Myanmar is unstable, as long as it's sort of a source of instability for the whole region, it should be the number one concern... for the Asean countries," she said.

Hamas men stand guard, as heavy machinery operates at the site where searches are underway for the bodies of hostages in Khan Younis of the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

MISHANDLING OF CLASSIFIED INFO

Trump critic John Bolton indicted

AFP, *Washington*

John Bolton, Donald Trump's former national security advisor, was indicted on Thursday -- the third foe of Trump to be hit with criminal charges in recent weeks.

The 76-year-old veteran diplomat was charged by a federal grand jury in Maryland with 18 counts of transmitting and retaining classified information.

The 26-page indictment accuses Bolton of sharing top secret documents by email with two "unauthorised individuals" who are not identified but are believed to be his wife and daughter.

It says he shared more than 1,000 pages of "diary-life" entries about his work as national security advisor via non-government email or a messaging app.

The Justice Department said the documents "revealed intelligence about future attacks, foreign adversaries, and foreign-policy relations."

Each of the counts carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison.

In a statement to US media, Bolton refuted the charges and said he had "become the latest target in weaponising the Justice Department... ."

Bolton has become a highly visible and pugnacious detractor of Trump, frequently appearing on television news shows and in print to condemn the man he has called "unfit to be president."

Trump to meet Zelensky ahead of Putin summit

Ukraine says talks may focus on Tomahawk missiles

AFP, *Washington*

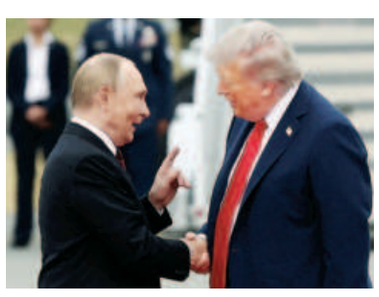
Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky meets Donald Trump at the White House yesterday, seeking US-made Tomahawk missiles even as the US president readies for a fresh summit with Russia's Vladimir Putin.

Zelensky will be making his third trip to Washington since Trump returned to office, following a disastrous televised shouting match in February and a make-up meeting in August, as the US leader's stance on the war blows hot and cold.

Trump's latest pivot came on the eve of Zelensky's visit. He announced that he would be meeting Putin in Budapest, in a fresh bid to reach a peace deal and end Moscow's invasion of Ukraine launched in 2022.

Ukraine had hoped Zelensky's trip would be more about adding to the pressure on Putin, especially by getting American-made long-range Tomahawk cruise missiles that can strike deep into Russia.

But Trump, who once said he could end the war in Ukraine within 24 hours, appears set on pursuing



a new diplomatic breakthrough to follow the Gaza ceasefire deal that he brokered last week.

Trump said on Thursday he had a "very productive" call with Putin and that they would meet in the Hungarian capital within the next two weeks. He added that he hoped to have "separate but equal" meetings with both Putin and Zelensky but did not elaborate.

Zelensky said as he arrived in Washington on Thursday that he hoped Trump's success with the Gaza deal would bring results to end the war that has left swaths of his own country in ruins.

"We expect that the momentum of curbing terror and war that succeeded in the Middle East will help to end Russia's war against Ukraine," Zelensky said on social media platform X.

Zelensky insisted that the threat of Tomahawks had forced Moscow to negotiate.

"We can already see that Moscow is rushing to resume dialogue as soon as it hears about Tomahawks," he said.

The Ukrainian leader yesterday said he had met officials from US defense firm Raytheon, which produces the Tomahawk missiles and Patriot systems.

However, Trump cast doubt on whether Ukraine would ever get the coveted weapons, which have a 1,000-mile (1,600-kilometer) range.

Trump told reporters on Thursday that the United States could not "deplete" its own supply. "We need them too, so I don't know what we can do about that," he said.

The US president said the Russian leader "didn't like it" when he raised the possibility of giving Tomahawks to Ukraine during their call.

Israeli forces kill 11-year-old in West Bank

AFP, *Ramallah*

Israeli forces shot dead an 11-year-old boy in the occupied West Bank, his family and health officials said yesterday, while the army said its troops opened fire at rock throwers.

The Palestinian health ministry said that Mohammad Hallaq was shot dead on Thursday by Israeli soldiers in the town of Al-Rihiya, south of Hebron. The bullet penetrated his pelvis."

Hallaq's uncle told AFP the child was sitting in front of his house when he was shot dead.

The number of children and teenagers shot dead by Israeli forces in the West Bank dramatically increased in 2025.

Since October 7, 2023, when Israel launched its war on Gaza, Israeli troops and settlers have killed at least 986 Palestinians in the West Bank, including many militants, according to health ministry figures.

AFGHAN-PAK BORDER CLASHES

Ceasefire extended as Doha talks set to begin

AGENCIES

Pakistan and Afghanistan yesterday mutually agreed to extend their 48-hour ceasefire until conclusion of planned talks in Doha, according to three Pakistani security officials and one Afghan Taliban source.

A Pakistani delegation had already arrived in Doha while an Afghan delegation was expected to reach the Qatari capital today, said the sources, who did not want to be named as they were not authorised to speak to the media.

A temporary truce between the neighbours on Wednesday paused days of fierce fighting that killed dozens and wounded hundreds.

Dozens of soldiers and civilians on both sides have been killed since the clashes began nearly a week ago, with explosions also heard in the Afghan capital Kabul.

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said Thursday that for the truce to continue, the ball was "in the court" of the Taliban government.

"If in 48 hours they want to resolve the issues and address our genuine demands, then we are ready for them," Sharif told his cabinet.

Pakistan, facing a rise in attacks on its security forces, has accused Afghanistan of harbouring terrorist groups, mainly Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, a claim that Kabul denies.

Afghans in the frontier town of Spin Boldak -- where the fighting had been particularly intense -- described scenes of normalcy early yesterday.

"Everything is fine, everything is open," said Nani, 35, told AFP.

"I'm not afraid, but everyone sees things differently. Some say they're going to send their children elsewhere as the situation isn't good, but I don't think anything will happen," said Nani, who did not give a surname.

MPO teachers begin hunger strike

FROM PAGE 12

procession on Dhaka University campus.

Azizi said the number of teachers joining the strike would gradually increase. The work abstention, which began on Monday, would continue at all MPO-listed institutions.

Following a discussion with teacher leaders on Thursday, the government proposed providing a house rent allowance of 5 percent of the basic salary (minimum Tk 2,000) from November 1, but the protesters rejected it and announced that they would continue their demonstration.

On Sunday, teachers across the country joined the protest in front of the Jatiya Press Club and police dispersed their rally, using water cannons, batons, and sound grenades.

They then moved to the Shaheed Minar, where they protested the police action and announced a countrywide work abstention from the following day.

Azizar Rahman, a 56-year-old teacher at Paschim Phulmati High School in Kurigram's Phulbari upazila, has joined the hunger strike. "No matter how long it takes, I will continue fasting."

Asked what he will do if his health deteriorates, he said, "There's nothing to do. I'm nearing retirement, but I don't want the next generation to struggle to support a family as a teacher. I joined the hunger strike so that teachers can live with dignity in society."

At the entry level, an MPO-listed teacher receives a monthly salary of Tk 12,500, including Tk 1,000 house rent, Tk 500 as medical allowance, and 50 percent of their basic pay as festival bonus.

Currently, there are over 26,000 MPO-listed non-government institutions across the country, employing around 3.8 lakh teachers and 1.7 lakh staffers.

Asma Akter, a teacher from Khulna who joined the programme, said, "The government has proposed increasing the house rent allowance to Tk 2,000. But can anyone rent a house for that amount these days?"

Meanwhile, the University Teachers' Network has expressed solidarity with the ongoing protest. In a statement yesterday, the organisation also condemned the recent police attack on the protesters.

In a separate statement, the health wing of the National Citizen Party announced that it would provide medical support to the protesting teachers.

Police break up July Warriors' protests

FROM PAGE 1

At least one of the protesters had a prosthetic limb, a reminder of injuries sustained during the July uprising. The protester, M Atikul Islam, was seen lying on the ground after being injured in the police action. He left his prosthetic arm behind as he exited the scene.

Witnesses and journalists at the scene said a police vehicle was vandalised during the confrontation. Around noon, protesters also set fire to event furniture near the MP Hostel adjacent to the South Gate. Around 1:45pm, police again fired multiple rounds of tear gas near the hostel to disperse the crowd.

Following the eviction, the demonstrators regrouped and marched towards Dhanmondi.

Around 2:15pm, they gathered in front of Rapa Plaza at Dhanmondi-27 and blocked Mirpur Road, bringing traffic to a standstill.

Witnesses said some of the protesters, armed with sticks, allowed only ambulances to pass while stopping all other vehicles.

Around 2:30pm, police again fired tear gas shells to disperse the group and took positions at the Shukrabad intersection, while the demonstrators scattered into nearby lanes and alleys.

At least 10 people were injured and required medical attention at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said Inspector Md Faruk, officer-in-charge of the DMCH police outpost. He said they were brought in around 2:00pm.

The injured include Shafiqul Islam, Synthia Mim, Shafiullah, Habib Ullah, Tanvirul Islam, Saiful Islam, Atikul Gazi, Rakib, and Laily.

"Their condition is stable," he added.

Imaul Haque, OC of Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station, said a total of 11 police officers were injured.

A case will be filed against those who took part in assaulting police, vandalising vehicles, setting fire to a control room, and forcibly entering a restricted area.

Gazi, a resident of Uttara, said, "Police suddenly began hitting us to clear the area. We were beaten indiscriminately."

Soheli Tamanna, a student of Mirpur Law College, said she was hurt during the incident.

"When I was at the parliament's south gate in the morning, police suddenly hit me with a baton. My hand is broken. We were peacefully demonstrating to press for our demands," she said.

"I was injured during the mass uprising, and now I am hurt again. The July charter cannot be signed without ensuring rehabilitation, allowances, and proper support for those injured in the movement," Soheli added.

Protesters again regrouped in the vicinity of the parliament around 4:00pm. Over a dozen assembled at the Khamarbari intersection in Farmgate. They chanted slogans, demanding the implementation of the July Protection Act and rehabilitation for those injured during the uprising.

Speaking at the demonstration, Mosad Uddin, a teacher at Banasree Bidyaniketan School, said holding the July charter signing ceremony without enforcing the protection act would be "a betrayal" of those who took part in the movement.

"We want our demands met. We have already submitted them to different ministries," he told reporters.

Another protester, Aminul Islam Imon, said, "Those of us injured in the uprising are being betrayed. This government was formed because of our movement, yet now they are ignoring us."

Monir Haider, special assistant (consensus building) to the chief adviser, said that they had met with this protesting group the night before the signing and assured them that their demands would be met.

"When they left last night, they seemed reassured. The whole team [National Consensus Commission] met them again at the venue of the signing, where we read out to them the amended Charter, which incorporated their demands. It is unclear why they continued protesting. It is also questionable as to how such a security breach was allowed in the first place," said Haider.

Meanwhile, the 'July Joddha Sangsad' (July Warrior Council) has announced a highway blockade in every district across the country tomorrow from 2:00pm to 5:00pm if their demands are not fully included and implemented in the July charter.

While all this was happening, a separate group of protesters occupied the entrance of Manik Mia Avenue around 5:30pm, demanding that Noakhali be given division status.

Dhaka wants impartial

FROM PAGE 12

According to the officials of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), the deceased were identified as Jewel Mia, 32, of Alinagar village; Pati Mia, 45, of Basulla village; and Sajal Mia, 20, of Kavilashpur village under Chunarughat upazila in Habiganj.

They had illegally entered Karengichhara under Tripura's Khowai Police Station through Sreemangal border two to three days ago.

BGB said initial reports suggest the victims may have entered India with the intention of cattle smuggling.

Fearing theft, local Indian residents attacked them at night. All three died on the spot.

Meanwhile, the Tripura police handed over the bodies of three Bangladeshis to the BGB at a ceremony, reports our correspondent from New Delhi.

Following the incident, border security forces on both sides have intensified surveillance to maintain peace in the area.

Tripura police said a case was registered at Champahoar Police Station after the three bodies were recovered.

Meanwhile, Indian External Affairs Ministry's Official Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the killing of three Bangladeshis and an Indian underscore the need for Bangladesh to take necessary measures to uphold the sanctity of the international boundary and support the construction of fencing where needed to prevent cross-border crimes and smuggling.

Responding to media queries regarding the incident, he said in a statement the authorities rushed to the spot where two smugglers were found dead and a third succumbed to his injuries in hospital the following day.

"This incident in Tripura underscores the need for Bangladesh to undertake necessary measures to uphold the sanctity of the international boundary and support the construction of fencing where needed to prevent cross-border crimes and smuggling," the MEA spokesman said.

Malibagh mall

FROM PAGE 12

alias Shahin, 46; Nurul Islam, 33; Uttam Chandra Sur, 49; and Anita Roy, 31.

Police recovered 190 tolas of gold, some silver, a motorcycle, and Tk 1,77,200 in cash.

Shafiqul said Shahin was first caught in Chattogram, followed by two others in Barishal and one in Dhaka.

According to police, the gang was not new to such crimes. In 2021, they were involved in another gold theft at Chattogram's Karnaphuli Market. After securing bail, they returned to the same trade.

The shop owner claimed that around 500 tolas of gold were stolen, but police have so far recovered 190 tolas. "One suspect is still absconding. We hope to trace the rest of the gold once he is caught," said the DB chief.

Detectives said the recovered gold had not yet been sold, though some had been melted with the shop's tags still attached.

Lethal gas found in gutted Mirpur

FROM PAGE 12

Fire service officials confirmed that the warehouse was filled with chemicals.

"We have information that chemicals worth Tk 7 crore were brought to the warehouse just the day before the fire. The whole warehouse was full to its maximum," said Talha Bin Zasim, media officer of Fire Service & Civil Defence.

Despite the danger, crowds of onlookers and grieving families gathered at the site yesterday, while nearby factories and businesses remained closed for the third straight day.

Many family members, who believe their loved ones are still inside, were seen wailing at the scene.

Several tried to break through a police barricade to enter the gutted "Arian Fashion" garment factory, which caught fire on Tuesday.

They claimed their relatives were not among the 16 bodies taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital and insisted the bodies were still inside.

Tara Begum, one of those trying to enter, said her 14-year-old son Abdul Alim had worked at the factory last month but had not received his salary. He was told to come to the factory on October 14 to collect his pay.

The fire occurred that day, and she has not seen him since.

"None of the bodies at the DMCH morgue looks like my son. I want to go inside. My son's body is still lying there," she said.

The Daily Star
FOUNDER EDITOR: **LATE S. M. ALI**

HSC results should be an eye-opener

We can no longer ignore our educational crisis

This year's SSC and HSC results have indeed been a real "eye-opener," as the education adviser said. The average pass rate in this year's HSC and equivalent examinations stands at 58.83 percent, 18.95 percentage point lower than last year and the lowest in 21 years. The number of GPA-5 achievers also fell from 145,911 last year to 69,097 this time around. In July, we saw a similar plunge in the pass rate for this year's SSC and equivalent exams, which dropped to a 16-year low.

The results of both exams expose deep cracks in our education sector, built up over years, if not decades. Educationists believe that inflated results during the previous government's tenure had masked the real learning gaps that have become deeply entrenched over time. However, the neglect of our education system cannot be blamed on the previous government alone. It has, in fact, become far too systemic—a societal problem. At the root of this crisis lies the tendency to rely heavily on rote memorisation rather than analytical thinking, a problem that has plagued our education system for decades. The poor quality of schools, inadequate teacher pay as well as training, and other structural deficiencies have persisted for years, yet little has been done to address them, despite repeated warnings from educationists about the long-term consequences of neglect.

Sadly, millions of students continue to pass through this same system and they will inevitably suffer the consequences unless the underlying systemic issues are finally addressed. On top of these longstanding problems, many students have suffered from unaddressed learning losses caused by the Covid pandemic. Additionally, the July uprising—and the trauma it inflicted on students, much of which they continue to bear in the absence of proper counselling, ongoing instability, and a lack of a safe environment—was bound to affect them deeply.

Alongside these issues, there is also clear regional disparity. For example, places such as Cumilla, Jashore, Mymensingh, and Sylhet are lagging behind in terms of pass rates. Shockingly, there were even 43 colleges in the Rangpur division with a zero pass rate.

All of these factors must be studied carefully by policymakers and educationists. If young people hold the key to the future of our country, then we must equip them with the right tools—and education is among the most important of them. Government must invest in this sector improving the quality of education to meet global standards. Clearly, in this respect, there are shortages that must be addressed. It is high time that the government focused on what is one of the greatest crises facing our country today: the state of our education system.

Our children deserve clean air

Air pollution must be dealt with on an emergency basis

We are unnerved by a new report revealing the disproportionate effects of air pollution on children, especially in the least developed countries, including Bangladesh. Children under five die from air pollution-related causes nearly six times more often than adults. Meanwhile, children in LDCs face air pollution death rates 94 times higher than those in most-developed countries.

Bangladesh, with one of the worst air quality ratings worldwide, faces a dire situation. It ranked as the second-most polluted in 2024, while in 2021, air-pollution led to over 19,000 recorded deaths in children under five in the country. Besides, a decade-long study on children of this age group in Dhaka revealed that particulate matter (PM) 2.5 from brick kilns was the primary contributor to their respiratory issues. However, vehicular and industrial emissions, construction, and waste burning also produce PM 2.5. Furthermore, Bangladesh, with the lowest access to clean cooking technologies in Southeast Asia, has a high rate of household air pollution. This disproportionately affects pregnant women and infants. Mothers using high-polluting solid cooking fuels, such as coal, wood and dung, are 2.6 times more likely to have babies with low birth weight. Regardless of where the cooking takes place, the use of solid fuels was found to raise the likelihood of pregnancy complications by 36 percent. Moreover, children between the ages of 3-5 who are exposed to solid fuel pollution are 47 percent more likely to experience developmental delays compared to unexposed children.

A deeply ingrained reliance on polluting infrastructure and fossil fuels has created an environmental justice crisis, with children bearing the heaviest health burdens. Although authorities ordered a halt to brick-making operations, except clean ones, in Savar from September onwards, the country's spending on fossil fuels remains significantly higher than that on environmental pollution mitigation measures. This financial imbalance highlights how existing systems perpetuate a cycle of environmental harm. It is high time Bangladesh framed air pollution not just as an environmental issue, but as a critical public health and child rights crisis. The country must redirect its financial priorities from fossil fuels to clean air, accelerate the transition to clean cooking solutions, enforce strict regulations on industrial polluters, launch a public health campaign, and frame the issue as a matter of justice for the section of the population who were born in a polluted world.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

BBC established

On this day in 1922, the British Broadcasting Company, Ltd, was established, to be replaced by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in 1927.

When teachers are attacked and workers die, who takes responsibility?

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

ANU MUHAMMAD

Two deeply disturbing incidents occurred last week. In one, teachers took to the streets with minor demands but were met with police violence instead of dialogue. The situation remains uncertain at the time of writing this column on Friday evening. The other incident is that of the fire in Mirpur's Rupnagar. Despite repeated warnings and recommendations for reform, safety measures in factories are still not ensured. Once again, we have witnessed a factory fire and casualties. Both incidents are linked to the state's responsibility, its outlook, how it views its people, and where its priorities lie.

Let us first talk about the teachers. Their demands are very minor and basic. These include increases in house rent allowance, medical allowance, and festival bonuses. There are people who argue that an interim government cannot fulfil such demands. However, they fail to notice that the interim government has no problem allocating much bigger amounts for importing LNG and other products from the United States at prices higher than the international market, or allocating Tk 20,000 crore to merge discredited banks, or setting aside a big amount for bureaucrats. The government is also ignoring its interim status when pursuing long-term contract in favour of foreign business. For example, it is bringing in foreign companies to manage ports without accountability or legal procedure, imposing illogical tariffs to make the economy weaker. It is also planning to buy defence equipment. One wonders why the government's budget crunch theory does not apply to these cases or why no one asks how an interim government can take such decisions.

School and college teachers, especially those from MPO-listed or private schools, have been one of the most deprived sections of the people in Bangladesh. They repeatedly take to the streets to demand their mere survival salary. Their strikes, protests, or sit-ins on roads have been going on for years. Even during the previous government's tenure, teachers were lying on the streets and fasting for months on the roads, braving police attacks. False promises and the same "there's no money" argument were given by the previous government, too. Unfortunately, the same attitude of government continues to this day.

When this government presented last year's budget, many hoped that the long-standing neglect of the education sector, reflected in the current state of the MPO-listed teachers, would be addressed. If Bangladesh had spent anything close to international standards on education, teachers wouldn't be in such distress. So, we expected that a change would begin to take place in the last budget, that the education sector would receive priority. Instead, we saw that in the 2025-26 budget, allocation increased for government administration—spending went up for purchases, extra posts, foreign tours, etc. But for education and healthcare, which are essential for the people, the proportion of expenditure remained the same as under the previous government. Even a small increase in these sectors would have made it possible to meet the minor demands of the teachers.

On October 12, in front of the Jatiya Press Club, police used water cannons and sound grenades to disperse MPO-listed teachers, who were demanding an increase in their house rent allowance. FILE PHOTO: **AMRAN HOSSAIN**

What's worse is; over the years, different governments in Bangladesh have gradually pushed education towards commercialisation and privatisation. As a result, the sector is now in disarray, marked by discrimination and dysfunction. There are many streams of education: various kinds of madrasas, several types of schools, and different categories within private schools. Quality education requires extremely high spending in this highly commercialised education system, and discrimination begins from the primary level. The demand for a unified non-discriminatory education system that enhances people's potential has existed for a long time, but still remains unmet. If the state truly prioritised education, it would have allocated at least six percent of GDP, which is the international standard. But education allocation remains one of the lowest in Bangladesh: less than two percent.

Therefore, the current allocation in Bangladesh must triple; only then a widespread network of schools can be created across the country. With such a network under state responsibility, a common foundation for education can be established. The coaching centres, private schools, and the vast system of private tuition will no longer be necessary. Those involved in these areas can, instead of their current informal work, teach within the formal education system, carrying the badge of a dignified profession, while improving their expertise. Besides, the students, the children of Bangladesh, can develop their leadership within a unified structure. It will end the discrimination that only those with money can develop leadership while those without cannot.

If education were given this importance, teachers would also have received their due respect. How can a country progress when neither education nor teachers are valued? How can it stand on a strong national foundation? We see the consequence of this neglect when teachers repeatedly have to take to the streets, and former students attack or beat them. The students of other teachers sit in the secretariat, indifferent, allowing these attacks to continue. We should never have had to witness such a situation.

As for the issue of labourers, this too is the responsibility of the state. Factories must ensure safety, with secure entry and exit and a safe working environment. This demand has been raised for a long time. For the lack of a minimum safety and monitoring system, we have witnessed tragedies like Rana Plaza and Tazreen. After those incidents, there was international attention and much agitation at home. But necessary steps to strengthen labour inspection, transparency, and monitoring are still missing! The whole monitoring system remains neglected, inefficient, and corrupt.

As a result, there are only about few hundred labour inspectors for the vast number of factories across Bangladesh. Inspections are practically non-existent. This means violations remain completely unaddressed. Factories are built without licenses, security, or safety systems. The recent incident in Mirpur began at an unapproved chemical factory. In recent years we also saw repeated terrible fires in Old Dhaka, in Rupganj's Hashem Food and Beverage factory, and in Bailey Road. We witness these devastating incidents again and again and each time, the government forms an investigation committee, but the recommendations that follow are never implemented.

There had been expectations for change. The Labour Reform Commission had prepared a report containing several proposals. Implementing them would at least ensure that factories are regularised and compliance is digitised. There should also be accountability. Anyone operating outside the rules should face appropriate action. It was expected that this government would at least take these basic steps. Yet, in both the teachers' protest and the fire incident case, we see a striking lack of sensitivity and responsibility towards people's interests. This attitude which existed even during the previous government, continues. Even hostility in response to public demands has changed little, which unfortunately leads to these painful and unacceptable incidents.

When waste meets AI, resources are better managed

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Views expressed in this article are the authors' own.

SABBIR RAHMAN KHAN, SAIDUZZAMAN PULAK *and* SAIEF MANZOOR-AL-ISLAM

Artificial Intelligence, often linked to self-driving cars, robots or ChatGPT, is redefining how the world collects, sorts, and reuses waste. Several countries are using AI to process waste, reflecting their priorities, level of governance and innovation.

In Barcelona, Spain, for example, smart bins equipped with sensors monitor fill levels in real-time, allowing waste collection trucks to optimise their routes and collect bins only when necessary. This system has reduced waste collection costs and CO2 emissions by limiting unnecessary garbage truck trips. Seoul, South Korea's capital, has implemented a "pay-as-you-throw" system, supported by AI-driven data, where households pay for waste by weight. This has significantly reduced waste and boosted recycling rates. India's Chennai has piloted Airbin, where bins use sensors and Internet of Things (IoT)—a network of physical objects that uses technology to connect and exchange data over the internet—to send real-time alerts to municipal authorities when they are full. Ireland has over 3,000 solar-powered smart compactors that hold five times more than traditional bins, cut trips, and keep streets cleaner. Each of these examples shows that AI does not replace human effort; it multiplies it.

AI in waste management usually begins with the basics: sensors in bins to track filling levels. The next stage is prediction which means systems learning to forecast when and where waste will be produced. The most advanced stage is sorting, where robots and machines identify materials, turning garbage into valuable resources. This step-by-step journey is important. Few countries leap straight to robots. Most begin with data- knowing how much waste is produced, when, and where. From there, smarter collection routes are planned. Then, recycling and resource recovery improve.

Although, AI-based systems can work anywhere, adaptation matters. In areas without steady electricity and internet connectivity, bins can run on solar panels. Where internet is weak, SMS alerts work. Replication also depends on local government institutions (LGIs) as they are central to waste management. In developing countries, LGIs often face limited budgets, insufficient staff, and inadequate infrastructure. AI can help them overcome these challenges by improving efficiency and reducing costs. Smart bins with sensors can monitor waste levels in real time, so trucks collect only when necessary, saving fuel, labour, and cutting emissions. Prediction systems can forecast waste surges after festivals, public gatherings, or harvests, allowing LGIs to plan resources ahead. AI-assisted sorting, combined with manual labour, can improve recycling accuracy for plastics, metals, and paper, even in low-resource settings.

Globally, "3R" principles—reduce, reuse, recycle—are now being mainstreamed. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) laws hold companies accountable for packaging. Circular economy strategies aim to keep resources in use. AI helps enforce these laws by giving clear data on who is polluting. Besides, AI integration aligns with private sector's sustainability goals. In Asia Pacific, Microsoft partnered with groups like Sustainable Coastlines to use AI for categorising and tracking litter on beaches. In Hong Kong, Microsoft supported "Clearbot Neo", an AI-enabled robotic boat that recognises and logs types of trash collected from waterways using cameras and AI systems. Thus, companies can provide funding, technology, or logistics support to gain ESG recognition, brand value, and compliance with sustainability commitments. AI-driven waste management systems give them measurable impact reports—a key incentive for investment. Local governments in developing countries can use such partnerships to scale solutions while reducing costs.

Bangladesh, too, can experiment with AI-waste management as it has the institutional framework to experiment with AI-based waste management: the National 3R Strategy for Waste Management, Solid Waste Management Rules 2021, e-governance initiatives and the upcoming Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) guideline. However, the enforcement requires strong push. Many LGIs lack equipment, trained staff, and even reliable electricity and internet connectivity. The challenge, of course, is cost. Sensors, software, and training require money. But under EPR, companies responsible for packaging waste can be required to fund smart collection pilots. LGIs can save fuel costs by using data-driven routes, freeing resources to reinvest in technology. And where gaps remain, public-private partnerships with recycling industries and development partners can close the loop.

Bangladesh already has laws that governs how data is collected and used. Linking these frameworks with waste collection and processing laws will ensure that waste data is treated responsibly, while also giving LGIs digital dashboards to enforce 3R and EPR obligations. To make this real, Bangladesh needs to pilot the concept, beginning with markets of a city corporation, where organic waste is overwhelming. A rural pilot could cluster 5-10 villages under one upazila, using solar bins with SMS alerts. And a producer-funded pilot, targeting plastic packaging, could show how EPR can finance AI tools.

Bangladesh can leverage AI not just to manage waste but to operationalise its legal frameworks effectively. The world is already moving; the question is whether we will align technology, law, and governance to catch up or remain buried under our own garbage.

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The weight of a green passport

BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

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SHAMSAD MORTUZA

Once upon a time, we watched a bespectacled John Lennon in white with his Japanese wife by his side, singing, "Imagine there's no countries; it isn't hard to do." Then we came across words like "globalisation," "glasnost," "fall of the Berlin Wall," and "end of apartheid" and thought Lennon was probably right, a borderless world can be imagined. Then came Brexit, like another brick in the wall, and fences became fashionable to keep illegal intruders out, like infected zombies in the movie *World War Z*.

Migration is a natural human propensity; controlling it is a logical consequence. The "not hard" imagined world of a global village is fast becoming a gated community with many grumpy gatekeepers. Some of them have particularly developed allergic reactions to our green passport, as is evident in this year's Henley Passport Index report.

Little does it matter that we have a Nobel laureate at the helm and foreign-trained experts behind the drive for good governance restoration; the weightage of our passport has dropped to 100 from last year's 97th slot. As we peer through the rabbit hole of passport rankings, we find ourselves in the league of North Korea, Libya and Afghanistan. Only 38 countries offer us visa-on-arrival privileges.

Travelling to the remaining countries for Bangladeshi citizens, however, is far from pleasant. I have seen travellers being pulled away for further interrogation or overheard the fear of being refused entry at immigration despite having valid visas. The sceptical scan, the little phone call to the supervisor, and the restlessness of the crowd queuing up behind are all part of our experiences of travelling with Bangladeshi passports.

Many economists may equate this phenomenon with "demand drag." Simply put, our travellers are not in demand. Other countries do not want us to show up in theirs. Even when we have valid documents, their data tells them to be wary of us. In a growing political climate of insularity and jingoism, many countries are twitchy about refugees and migrants. They look at Bangladeshi visa applicants through the spreadsheet of risks that include high asylum applications, illegal migration routes through Libya or forged documents.

In 2024 alone, tens of thousands of Bangladeshis applied for asylum in Europe. Frontex, the European Union's border and coast guard agency, labels Bangladesh as the "most detected nationality" on irregular migration routes. And then there are horror stories: migrants chained in Malaysian jungles for ransom, passports confiscated by traffickers in Libya, and Rohingya refugees posing as Bangladeshis getting into criminal acts in the Middle East. Western countries find these tales of modern-day slavery compelling, using them as justifications to tighten their borders. The white man's burden of being humane is thereby relieved, while every Bangladeshi applying for a visa continues to carry the invisible burden of those who didn't come back.

The weakness of our passport is evident when we, as Bangladeshis, are even denied passing through a country as transit passengers. Imagine you want to fly from Toronto to Cancun via America or from Dhaka to Toronto via Frankfurt; your airline agent will tell you to get an airport transit visa. This is a joke: you need a visa, not to enter Europe, but to breathe in its continental air. For Bangladeshis, even the layover has become a luxury.

VISUAL: **ALIZA RAHMAN**

Before we get too indignant about Western gatekeeping, we also need to know how we have harmed our own reputation. For every honest traveller submitting a clean visa application, there are ten others with a fake bank solvency certificate or a doctored employment letter from a company that exists only on Facebook. Every fake document chips away at collective credibility.

Bangladesh's international image is like a bad student project: a few pupils cheat, and everyone gets punished. When a Bangladeshi student enters Eastern Europe only to use it as a gateway to go west, a Balkan university rethinks its quota next year. When a migrant worker jumps a visa and "games" the system to stay illegally in a foreign country, other genuine candidates suffer for it with a delayed application process and a colder interview. In many cases, the consulate offices have moved out of our country. They operate from affiliated offices to narrow the window of opportunities further. This allows their local agents to act with a holier-than-the-pope attitude, doing the ritual of rejection with sadistic pleasure.

The consistent slide in the passport ranking shows how bruised our national identity is. The world doesn't subscribe to our hollow promises, not because they hate us, but because our paperwork has cried wolf too many times. The appointment of a few international darlings to cabinet positions has visibly failed to melt hearts abroad.

Foreign governments look at long-term data, not short-term optics. Visa liberalisation is based on treaties, reciprocity, and trust metrics, not on who made the best speech at the UN. Political instability, caretaker uncertainties, or transitional headlines don't inspire the confidence needed for mobility deals. We need consistent diplomacy. We need to give a strong signal of reforms to fix the backend. We need data integrity audits to stop the leaks and the forgery pipelines. The actions must be transparent and visible. Cancelled fraudulent passports must also act as deterrents. Such actions must be complemented by our missions abroad. Embassies can take smaller steps to attain small, practical facilities like medical travel and student exchanges instead of grand visa-free fantasies for all workers.

Our overseas consular services need to be proactive in curbing irregular migration and improving documentation. Unless we adopt "perception-change" as a policy, other countries will keep us on probation. Sometimes our glorification of remittance adds to the problem. We sell unrealistic dreams to unskilled workers. And once these dreams are unmet, they long for more and bend the rules to harm our national image on the international stage.

John Lennon can sing his utopian tune, but in the real world, imagination isn't an acceptable travel document. The reality is that Bangladesh's passport will only rise when both the state and the citizens act like partners in credibility, not co-conspirators in chaos. A stronger passport isn't a gift from the powerful; it's a slow accumulation of trust.

Mirpur fire is a lethal alliance of corporate greed and state negligence

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MD OMAR FARQUE

The recent incident of fire in a chemical warehouse in a densely populated area in Rupnagar, which killed at least 16 people, once again exposes Bangladesh's chronic failure to regulate hazardous industries. Testimonies reveal that the blaze originated from an adjacent chemical warehouse, before rapidly spreading through the building, trapping workers behind locked exits and engulfing the structure in minutes. The tragedy is not merely an accident; it is a foreseeable legal wrong. Under the principles of absolute liability, as established in South Asian jurisprudence, this incident demands uncompromising accountability.

Absolute liability of the chemical warehouse

The landmark Indian Supreme Court decision in *M.C. Mehta v. Union of India (Oleum Gas Leak Case)*, pioneered the rule of "absolute liability" in environmental jurisprudence. Introducing the doctrine, Justice P. N. Bhagwati—one of the most visionary chief justices of India—held that any enterprise engaged in a hazardous or inherently dangerous activity is absolutely liable for harm caused, regardless of fault, negligence, or unforeseen circumstances. Closing the door to traditional defences, including "third-party fault," the court declared that such enterprises have an absolute and non-delegable duty to ensure that no harm results from their operations, and that if harm occurs, they must compensate victims automatically. The rationale is clear; those who earn profit from hazardous activities must bear the costs of their risks. They cannot externalise danger to workers, communities, or the environment at large.

Comprehensively, in the Mirpur fire, storing volatile chemicals in a congested urban building constitutes precisely the kind of "hazardous activity" as in the case of *M.C. Mehta v. Union of India*. Even if the fire's precise trigger remains under investigation, the very operation of a chemical warehouse in a residential-commercial block without safety clearance suffices to attract absolute liability. No defence can exonerate the operators, owners, or lessors (the person who leased out the property) involved. Their duty was to prevent harm, not to explain it after the incident.

Moreover, Article 32 of the Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees that "no person shall be deprived of life or personal liberty save in accordance with law." Our Supreme Court in *Dr Mohammad Farooque v. Bangladesh* (1997), the first major environmental public interest litigation, interpreted Articles 31 and 32 to encompass the right to a healthy environment and allowed environmental protection lawsuits under public interest litigation. Thus, such judicial interpretations, echoing both Indian and global human rights jurisprudence, have expanded this to include the right to live with human dignity, safe working conditions, and a healthy environment. The right to life cannot be reconciled with the existence of "chemical houses" beside living quarters and garment factories employing hundreds of low-income workers. Thus, when the state allows unregulated hazardous industries to flourish within residential zones, it fails this constitutional guarantee.

Under the current legal framework related to chemical hazards, including the Factories Act, 1965, the Bangladesh Environment Conservation Act, 1995, and the Fire Prevention and Extinction Act, 2003, both factory and warehouse owners and the state have non-delegable duties to ensure safety, obtain licences, and prevent environmental and occupational hazards. Accordingly, the absence of a fire safety licence, locked emergency exits, and improper chemical storage are flagrant violation of Sections 22, read with 41-42 of the Factories Act 1965. The violation of these duties constitutes negligence per se, engaging civil tortious liability.

Environmental liability and the state's duty to act

Beyond losing human lives, the fire also inflicted environmental harm. The burnt chemical fossils released toxic fumes, ash, and chemical residues into the air and water—a direct assault on Dhaka's already fragile environment. As such, in such incidents, environmental harm is closely interconnected with human rights violations.

Upholding this interactive framework, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), in its 2025 Advisory Opinion on Climate Change Obligations, has affirmed that states have positive obligations to protect individuals from environmental harm, including industrial pollution, under the umbrella of human rights law. Comprehensively, the advisory opinion's underlying principle, which acclaimed that environmental protection is a condition of human survival and dignity, is directly related here.

Thus, we urge that this responsibility extends not only to large-scale climate impacts but also to localised industrial disasters. Comprehensively, Bangladesh, as a party to international environmental treaties, such as the Basel Convention on Hazardous Wastes (1989), the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (2001, revised in 2025), and the Paris Agreement (2015), bears obligations to regulate, monitor, and manage hazardous substances. Allowing chemical factories to cluster within Dhaka's dense neighbourhoods runs counter to these commitments and aggravates cumulative environmental risks. In this light, the government's inaction in regards to chemical factories within densely inhabited areas violates its international environmental obligations, e.g., Article 5 of the Stockholm Convention; in addition to the guiding principles under soft laws, like Principles 11-16 of the Stockholm Declaration.

Regrettably, despite repeated tragic incidents, including the Nimtoli fire (2010) and the Chawkbazar blaze (2019) and the government's pledged to relocate chemical warehouses outside Dhaka, the Mirpur fire shows how these pledges remain unfulfilled. The city remains a patchwork of unregulated, often unlicensed chemical storage facilities—potential bombs in waiting.

Relocation is not simply a policy option; it is a legal and moral imperative grounded in the doctrines of absolute and environmental liability. The state must treat unregulated chemical storage as a violation of the constitutional right to life and environmental protection. As such, formulating a stronger policy to remove chemical warehouses from densely populated areas—paired with financial incentives for compliance, strict zoning enforcement, and criminal liability for violations—is urgently needed. The state's duty, under both domestic and international law, is preventive, i.e., to anticipate risk, not merely to compensate after catastrophe.

Corporate and state responsibility: Shared but unequal

The Rupnagar tragedy brought a broader ethical and legal truth; while both corporations and the state share responsibility, their burdens differ. Corporations owe duties of care and safety; the state owes a duty of governance to ensure that these duties are enforced. The ICJ's opinion reminds us that states cannot hide behind corporate autonomy. Failure to regulate private entities that pose environmental or human rights risks constitutes a breach of international obligations as well. As such, criminal investigation, civil compensation, and environmental remediation must all follow—not as charity, but as its obligations under the constitution and international law.

On the other hand, corporate entities cannot hide behind the regulatory gaps of the state. Their corporate social responsibility (CSR) extends beyond philanthropy, requiring active compliance with safety and environmental standards and remediation for harms caused. Additionally, under the doctrine of absolute liability, those who engage in hazardous activity must bear the full consequences of the harm they cause.

Therefore, the government must treat this fire incident not as an isolated event but as a symptom of a chronic disease, i.e., the dangerous cohabitation of chemical depots, garment factories, and residential areas in Dhaka. The government must implement an immediate relocation policy for chemical factories. Additionally, the state should establish a national industrial safety tribunal empowered to apply absolute liability in cases of industrial accidents, ensuring speedy compensation to victims and preventive oversight for future operations.

Every fire that engulfs our factories burns away another layer of public faith in governance and justice. The Rupnagar tragedy should be a turning point—a call to reaffirm the principle that human life and environmental safety are non-negotiable. Thus, Bangladesh stands at the convergence of its constitutional and international obligations, now echoing a single message: industrial negligence is not fate—it is failure, and failure must bear a cost.

CROSSWORD
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS
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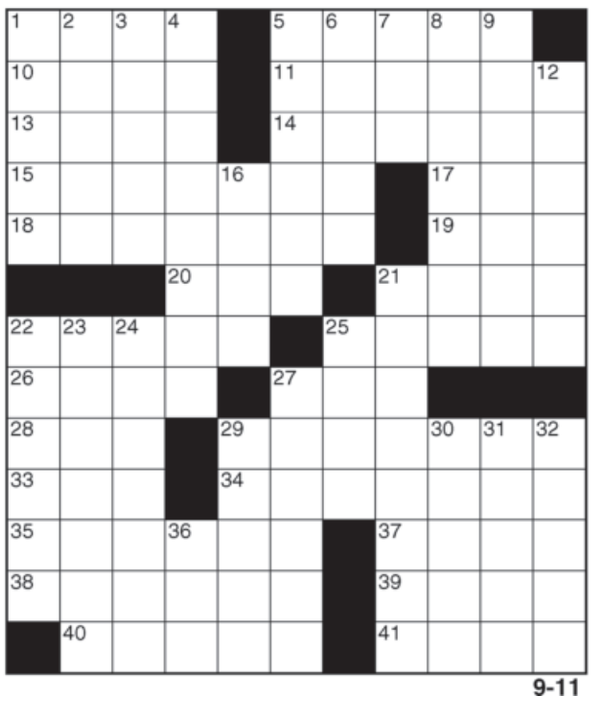
25 Lure
27 Speakers' stands
29 Carell of "The Office"
30 Cager Shaquille
31 Unbending
32 A lot
36 Sue Grafton's "- for Innocent"



9-11

THURSDAY'S ANSWERS

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dsopinion@gmail.com.

"The television industry has become completely dominated by commercials. Audiences pay a lot of money to watch these channels — so why aren't they getting quality content? The crisis we're facing today has been building for years. Just look at BTV's YouTube channel — it has millions of views. So why is there such a disparity?"

TARIQ ANAM KHAN

"This wage gap affects not only the drama's budget, but also the livelihoods of co-artistes, playwrights, and crew members. Earlier, we had strong federations and associations that worked collectively to support everyone. Now, people have become so self-centred that the spirit of solidarity has disappeared."

SALAHUDDIN LAVLU

"Audiences today are exposed to content from across the world, while the quality of our television productions continues to fall. Why do you think YouTube is thriving? It offers diverse content tailored to specific audiences even catering to expatriates in the Middle East."

AZAD ABUL KALAM

"As artistes, we've taken so much from this industry but given back very little — and that's why this void exists today. Many less skilled individuals have entered the field because we failed to prioritise true talent."

RASHED MAMUN APU

"TV dramas have become mere commodities. When investors entered the scene, their main concern became profit — ensuring a return on their investment. As a result, meaningful content began to disappear, replaced by shows built around big names."

AZIZUL HAKIM

"Our television industry lacks discipline. We keep blaming YouTube, but if we had maintained proper structure and unity under a single umbrella, we could have easily avoided this crisis. I also find it deeply concerning that many young actors entering the industry today have no knowledge of the veterans who built this medium."

WAHIDA MOLLICK JOLLY

THE FUTURE OF TELEVISION

PHOTOS: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

Renowned stars air concerns, share solutions

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

Once the pride of Bangladeshi entertainment, the television industry gave audiences timeless classics like ***Kothao Keu Nei*** and ***Aaj Robibar***. At the time, BTV was the sole window into a world of stories that shaped generations. As private channels emerged, the number of television dramas soared, but their quality began to falter. Today, the industry finds itself struggling to restore its lost glory and stability.

In an effort to address this growing concern, The Daily Star brought together some of the most respected names in the field — Afzal Hossain, Tariq Anam Khan, Azad Abul Kalam, Wahida Mollick Jolly, Azizul Hakim, Salahuddin Lavlu, Masum Reza, Rased Mamun Apu, Deepa Khandakar, Ahsan Habib Nasim, Zahid Hossain Shovon, Tonima Hamid, and Aranyo Anawer, for an in-depth roundtable discussion. Moderated by entertainment journalist Shah Alam Shazu, the session explored the pressing crises facing the television industry and the collective search for solutions to revive its golden era.

At the event, all eyes turned to the incomparable Afzal Hossain to open the discussion. However, the celebrated artiste humbly chose to listen to others first before sharing his own thoughts.

The legendary Tariq Anam Khan, who remains an active presence on television, spoke candidly about how over-commercialisation has compromised the industry's artistic value.

"Imagine you're watching a comedy serial, and suddenly a scroll about an accident flashes across the screen, or multiple pop-up ads appear between scenes. Would you still enjoy watching that series after so many interruptions? I don't think so. The television industry has become completely dominated by commercials. Audiences pay a lot of money to watch these channels — so why aren't they getting quality content? The crisis we're facing today has been building for years. Just look at BTV's YouTube channel — it has millions of views. So why is there such a disparity?," said the actor.

Salahuddin Lavlu, known for creating evergreen dramas like ***Vober Hat*** and ***Ronger Manush***, reflected on the impact of YouTube and the growing pay gap among artistes.

"Nowadays, YouTube and social media have become far more influential than television. Private channels no longer focus on quality content. Most of them are owned by big business groups who use TV as a tool for their own interests. Back in 2016, when we were still young directors working with passionate artistes, channels like ETV and NTV allowed us to tell our own stories. But everything changed when YouTube arrived. Families no longer gather around the TV in many homes; it's barely turned on," stated the director.

"The discipline that once defined this industry is gone. Take the per-day payment system, for example. One artiste charges three lakh taka per day, while another earns only fifteen to twenty thousand. This wage gap affects not only the drama's budget but also the livelihoods of co-artistes, playwrights, and crew members. Earlier, we had strong federations and associations that worked collectively to support everyone. Now, people have become so self-centred that the spirit of solidarity has disappeared," added Lavlu.

Noted playwright Masum Reza, who has penned acclaimed dramas like ***Ronger Manush*** and ***Vober Hat***, shed light on one of the core issues plaguing the television industry.

"The biggest problem, in my opinion, is that we don't have a peer group strong enough to pressure channels into listening to our collective voice. Remember the Writers Guild of America strike in 2023? They stood united and successfully secured their demands. If every association's playwrights, directors, and producers agreed that no drama featuring an artiste outside these associations would be aired, the industry would have to take us seriously. We need a unified pressure group for this industry to survive."

"The biggest problem, in my opinion, is that we don't have a peer group strong enough to pressure channels into listening to our collective voice. Remember the Writers Guild of America strike in 2023? They stood united and successfully secured their demands. If every association's playwrights, directors, and producers agreed that no drama featuring an artiste outside these associations would be aired, the industry would have to take us seriously. We need a unified pressure group."

MASUM REZA

"Television is a medium that makes people laugh, cry, and smile together. When actors become stereotyped, it affects the entire industry. For example, if Jaya Ahsan and Shakib Khan hadn't ventured into Tollywood, much of their potential would have remained undiscovered. We must create space for young talents to explore their full abilities, because I believe our audiences are still eager for quality storytelling. If we can deliver that, this crisis can absolutely be overcome."

AFZAL HOSSAIN

Renowned artiste and President of Actors' Equity Bangladesh, Azad Abul Kalam, stressed the importance of self-reflection within the industry.

"Audiences today are exposed to content from across the world, while the quality of our television productions continues to fall. Why do you think YouTube is thriving? It offers diverse content tailored to specific audiences, even catering to expatriates in the Middle East. We often talk about globalisation and the market economy, but when it comes to creating content, we're still stuck in the past. The only way out of this crisis is through collective effort. We're here having this roundtable discussion, but where are the stakeholders of YouTube and television channels? We should have included artistes who are earning massive paychecks — only then could we have found real solutions."

Rashed Mamun Apu, General Secretary of Actors' Equity, reflected on the industry's lack of reciprocity and internal accountability.

"As artistes, we've taken so much from this industry but given back very little — and that's why this void exists today. Many less skilled individuals have entered the field because we failed to prioritise true talent. BTV once gave us remarkable dramas — perhaps around 150 of them — but other channels have produced countless works that are now forgotten. Television itself bears responsibility for its decline. We need to bring young artistes and YouTube creators to the same table, to listen to voices like Afzal Hossain, Tariq Anam Khan, Masum Reza, and Salahuddin Lavlu. Right now, everything depends on the political and social atmosphere of our country — if people are struggling, they won't have the heart to watch our content."

Veteran actor Azizul Hakim, who worked in television and continues to explore grey characters in OTT, spoke about the growing commercialisation that has overtaken TV channels.

"In the past, channels had an unspoken commitment to highlight quality dramas. They used to prioritise them in prime-time slots. But now, television dramas have become mere commodities. When investors entered the scene, their main concern became profit — ensuring a return on their investment. As a result, meaningful content began to disappear, replaced by shows built around big names. Meanwhile, OTT is producing high-quality work that's rarely seen on television anymore. If we can acknowledge this problem and work toward solutions, we may still be able to turn things around."

Wahida Mollick Jolly emphasised the urgent need to unify the television and OTT sectors under a shared framework.

"Our television industry lacks discipline. We keep blaming YouTube and claiming that everything has become view-based, but if we had maintained proper structure and unity under a single umbrella, we could have easily avoided this crisis. I also find it deeply concerning that many young actors entering the industry today have no knowledge of the veterans who built this medium. The media has a vital role to play in highlighting the achievements and contributions of these artistes, both those still active and those who created timeless masterpieces."

Finally, Afzal Hossain concluded the roundtable discussion with a thoughtful reflection on the industry's evolution and the path forward.

"I'm truly grateful to The Daily Star for arranging such a meaningful discussion. Just like in life, good and bad coexist: there have always been good dramas and weak ones. The difference is that before, we had ten to fifteen good dramas and only a few that were average. Now, it's the other way around — only two or three stand out among many ordinary ones. Television is a medium that makes people laugh, cry, and smile together. When actors become stereotyped, it affects the entire industry. For example, if Jaya Ahsan and Shakib Khan hadn't ventured into Tollywood, much of their potential would have remained undiscovered. We must create space for young talents to explore their full abilities, because I believe our audiences are still eager for quality storytelling. If we can deliver that, this crisis can absolutely be overcome."

Risky buildings being demolished in Barishal city

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Barishal*

Barishal City Corporation (BCC) has initiated a drive to demolish risky buildings as part of a wider effort to remove structurally unsafe structures across the city.

On the first day of the drive yesterday, two old buildings were torn down on the busy Sadar Road in the morning, said BCC officials. One of the two buildings had already tilted toward an adjacent structure, causing visible cracks.

A total of 35 buildings have been identified as risky in a 2013 survey within the 58-square-kilometre city area, including both old and relatively new structures, ranging from single-storey to multi-storey ones, said Swapan Kumar Das, administrative officer of BCC.

"We had earlier issued notices to the owners, but the tenants took the matter to court. After obtaining a verdict lifting the temporary injunction, we issued final eviction notices this morning and began demolition. The work is expected to be completed in seven days, after which other risky structures will be demolished in phases across the city," he added.

Barishal City Corporation officials in a drive to demolish risky buildings across the city. The photo was taken on Sadar Road yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Factory gutted

FROM PAGE 3

which prolonged the blaze.

"These products are chemical-based, and we saw large flames with a bluish colour," he said.

The fire service director also confirmed that the building had not implemented a fire safety plan and lacked the required fire effectiveness certificate, which is mandatory as per the Fire Prevention and Extinguishing Act, 2003.

Md Jashim Uddin, divisional deputy director of fire service, said the factory, built in 2008, only recently applied for a fire safety plan.

CEPZ Executive Director Abdus Sobhan said they would investigate the matter.

He, however, said Adams Caps is a compliant factory and conducts fire drills regularly.

Md Shahidur Rahman, fire consultant for CEPZ and Karnaphuli EPZ, said Jiehong had some fire extinguishers but they were insufficient. He added that he had repeatedly instructed the management to install a proper fire system, but they did not comply.

Meanwhile, two probe committees were formed to investigate the incident.

The fire service formed a five-member committee and asked it to submit a report within 15 days. CEPZ formed another five-member body and directed it to submit its report within five days.

Prime suspect held over Lakshmipur double murder

UNB, *Lakshmipur*

Police have arrested the prime suspect in the murder of a mother and daughter in Lakshmipur's Ramganj upazila.

During a press briefing yesterday, SP Md Akhtar Hossain said the arrestee, Parvez Hossain, killed his aunt Julekha Begum and cousin Tanha Akhter Mim over money and gold.

Police also recovered over seven bhori of gold ornaments from his possession.

Parvez, who returned from abroad about two months ago, was under financial strain and struggling to repay NGO and bank loans.

On the day of the incident, he bought a knife, visited his uncle's house in North Chandipur, and fatally attacked Mim when she screamed after seeing the weapon.

He then murdered Julekha Begum similarly and fled with the gold ornaments.

Police later arrested Parvez from Dhaka's Turag area through digital tracking.

He has confessed to the murders before a court, police said, adding that a detailed report will be submitted soon.

On October 9, Julekha and her daughter Mim were found dead with their throats slit at their home in North Chandipur village.

Locals block Ctg-Cox's Bazar highway, demand expansion to six lanes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Ctg*

A group of locals blocked the Chattogram-Cox's Bazar highway by placing logs on the road in Lohagara upazila of Chattogram yesterday, demanding expansion of the highway from two lanes to six.

Witnesses said the protest took place after Juma prayers in front of the Lohagara Upazila Parishad. The demonstration halted traffic on the busy highway for nearly 30 minutes.

The blockade ended after Lohagara Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) and police officials assured the protesters that their demands would be communicated to higher authorities.

Protesters said the current two-lane highway frequently causes long traffic jams and accidents, resulting in fatalities.

"Despite repeated incidents, the government has not taken necessary measures," said Tamim Mirza, a resident of Lohagara.

Another protester, Muslim Uddin, warned that if their demand for a six-lane highway is not met, they would announce tougher protest programme.

Lohagara UNO Md Saiful Islam told The Daily Star, "Students and locals blocked the highway demanding six lanes. The road was closed from 2:00pm to 2:30pm. We explained

the inconvenience caused to the public and convinced them to lift the blockade. We will convey their demand to the higher authorities."

During the protest, participants also formed a human chain to press their demand.

Sand lifting puts two

FROM PAGE 4

Local sources alleged that Lipi and her associate Deepak Dey have been operating the machines illegally for a long time, despite repeated drives and fines imposed by the upazila administration.

Recently, Md Anisul Islam, upazila assistant commissioner (Land) and executive magistrate, fined Shambhu Kumar Deb, manager of the sand extraction site, Tk 2 lakh in an effort to curb the illegal activity.

Contacted, Lipi hung up the phone when asked about the illegal sand extraction operations.

"Sand is extracted from the river near Kotarkona Bridge every year, no matter how many times the administration conducts drive and imposes fines," said Shahidur Rahman, a local resident.

Nurul Mohaimin Milton, general secretary of the Environmental Journalists' Forum in Moulvibazar, said they had organised protests and formed human chains to stop indiscriminate sand lifting from the Manu river, but to no avail.

"The sand extraction facilities will be relocated to designated areas, and we will continue our drives until the violations end," said AC (Land) Md Anisul Islam.

Md Kaysar Hamid, executive engineer of the Roads and Highways Department in Moulvibazar, said illegal sand extraction under the bridges has continued for a long time, even though they had raised concerns in this regard.

"A formal letter has been sent to the Moulvibazar deputy commissioner requesting an immediate halt to illegal sand lifting to keep the infrastructures safe," he added.

Dengue taking its toll

FROM PAGE 3

DGHS data also shows that at least 12 children aged 0–5 years have died and 3,553 were infected this year, while four children aged 6–10 years have died and 3,190 were hospitalised.

Dr HM Nazmul Ahsan, associate professor at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College and Hospital, said many parents are delaying testing their children this year, even after the onset of fever.

"Children are often brought to the hospital only when their condition turns critical," he said.

Dr Ahsan explained that dengue symptoms in children can appear differently than in adults.

"For adults, symptoms usually start with sudden fever, body pain, and eye pain. But in children, it often begins with nausea and coughing. Infants may cry excessively, refuse to breastfeed, or appear unusually tired," he noted.

He warned that dengue can reach the critical stage faster in children.

"For adults, it may take 48 hours to become critical, but in children, it can happen within just 24 hours. That's why we strongly recommend hospitalisation as soon as possible," he said.

Dr Ahsan also cautioned that children are more prone to developing dengue shock syndrome, which is extremely dangerous.

Urging guardians to be vigilant, he added, "The risk of infection is high at schools and coaching centres. Most schools don't provide full-sleeve uniforms, but these are essential during dengue season. Children's legs should also be covered with long socks and shoes."

Jamaat announces

FROM PAGE 3

the statement, "Based on the five-point demand declared by Jamaat-e-Islami, we... observed a mass communication campaign across the country from October 1 to 9, mass processions in Dhaka and other divisional cities on October 10, and submission of memorandums to deputy commissioners on October 12..."

He added, "The government should... immediately accept Jamaat's five-point demand to ensure an inclusive, free, fair and neutral election. The people will not leave the streets until these demands are fulfilled."

The other demands include ensuring a level playing field for all parties in the upcoming election, ensuring visible justice for the government's alleged oppression, killings, and corruption, and banning the activities of the "autocratic" ruling alliance -- the 14-party coalition -- and its ally, the Jatiya Party.

As part of the Dhaka programme, a human chain will be formed jointly by the party's Dhaka City North and South units from Jatrabari intersection to Gabtoli bus terminal via Matsya Bhaban.

Earlier, on September 15, Jamaat announced a three-day protest programme as part of the simultaneous movement, jointly observed by several Islamist parties including Islami Andolon Bangladesh. After completing the first phase of programmes on September 26, the party announced a new round of activities from October 1 to 12 through a press conference on September 30.

Country needs

FROM PAGE 3

They noted that the shift in serotypes is a natural result of a successful vaccination programme, as targeted serotypes have become less common.

The speakers agreed that updating to a higher-valency vaccine would be a prudent, evidence-based step to sustain progress and ensure continued protection for Bangladeshi children.

Dr Firdausi Qadri, senior scientist at icddr,b and chairperson of the National Immunization Technical Advisory Group, said many countries are already transitioning to higher-valency pneumonia vaccines.

Currently, PCV-10 is used in 35 countries, including Bangladesh, while PCV-13 is used in 130, and PCV-15 and PCV-20 are used in 16 and nine countries, respectively.

Dr Tajul Islam A Bari, former EPI programme manager, noted that switching from PCV-10 to PCV-13 could even be cost-saving, as PCV-13 is slightly cheaper.

Prof Md Farhad Hussain, director (disease control) at Directorate General of Health Services, said Bangladesh should upgrade the vaccine to reduce antibiotic dependence amid rising antimicrobial resistance.

Mohammad Shahariar Sajjad, deputy director of EPI, reaffirmed the government's commitment to reviewing and updating the vaccine based on new evidence and global best practices.

Dr Zakaria Bin Amjad, senior assistant secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, added, "Health security and international relations are deeply intertwined, and updating our immunisation programmes based on robust evidence is not just important but essential."

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
মহিলা ও শিশু বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয়
মহিলা বিষয়ক অধিদপ্তর
নারী ও শিশু নির্যাতন প্রতিকার ও প্রতিরোধে সমন্বিত সেবা জোরদারকরণ এবং কুইক রেসপন্স টিমের কার্যক্রম প্রকল্প

স্মারক নং- মশিবিম/মবিঅ/নাশিনিপ্রসসেজোকুরেটিকা/০২/২০২৫-৩২ তারিখ: ১৬/১০/২০২৫

আউটসোর্সিং পদ্ধতিতে জনবল সরবরাহের পুনঃ দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি

মহিলা ও শিশু বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয়ের আওতাধীন মহিলা বিষয়ক অধিদপ্তর কর্তৃক বাস্তবায়নাধীন "নারী ও শিশু নির্যাতন প্রতিকার ও প্রতিরোধে সমন্বিত সেবা জোরদারকরণ এবং কুইক রেসপন্স টিমের কার্যক্রম" শীর্ষক প্রকল্পের বিভিন্ন কার্যক্রম পরিচালনার জন্য মাসিক সেবামূল্যে আউটসোর্সিং পদ্ধতিতে জনবলের সেবা গ্রহণের উদ্দেশ্যে The Public Procurement Act 2006, The Public Procurement Rules 2025 অনুযায়ী প্রকৃত ঠিকাদার/সরবরাহকারী প্রতিষ্ঠানের নিকট হতে সীলমোহরকৃত খামে উন্মুক্ত পুন:দরপত্র আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে।

১.	মন্ত্রণালয়/বিভাগের নাম	:	মহিলা ও শিশু বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয়
২.	বাস্তবায়নকারী সংস্থার নাম	:	মহিলা বিষয়ক অধিদপ্তর
৩.	সংগ্রহকারী সত্তার নাম	:	প্রকল্প পরিচালক, "নারী ও শিশু নির্যাতন প্রতিকার ও প্রতিরোধে সমন্বিত সেবা জোরদারকরণ এবং কুইক রেসপন্স টিমের কার্যক্রম" শীর্ষক প্রকল্প।
৪.	ক্রয়/সংগ্রহের সত্তাধিকারীর জেলা	:	ঢাকা
৫.	ক্রয়/সংগ্রহের সত্তাধিকারীর কোড নং	:	২২৪৪১১২০০
৬.	দরপত্র আহবানের কারন/উদ্দেশ্য	:	"নারী ও শিশু নির্যাতন প্রতিকার ও প্রতিরোধে সমন্বিত সেবা জোরদারকরণ এবং কুইক রেসপন্স টিমের কার্যক্রম" শীর্ষক প্রকল্পের বিভিন্ন কার্যক্রম পরিচালনার জন্য
৭.	দরপত্র আহবানের সূত্র ও তারিখ	:	মশিবিম/মবিঅ/ নাশিনিপ্রসসেজোকুরেটিকা/০২/২০২৫- তারিখ: ১৬/১০/২০২৫খ্রি:
৮.	দরপত্র প্রকাশের তারিখ	:	১৮/১০/২০২৫
৯.	ক্রয়/সংগ্রহ পদ্ধতি	:	উন্মুক্ত দরপত্র পদ্ধতি (OTM)
১০.	বাজেট এবং তহবিলের উৎস	:	জিওবি
১১.	দরপত্র প্যাকেজ এর নাম	:	আউটসোসিং পদ্ধতিতে জনবল সরবরাহ।
১২.	লট সংখ্যা	:	৫৪৭জন জনবল মোট ০৩টি লটের মাধ্যমে (লট-১, লট-২, লট-৩)
১৩.	দরপত্র সিডিউল বিক্রয়ের সময়সীমা	:	২০/১০/২০২৫ হতে ০৪/১১/২০২৫ তারিখ বিকাল ৫:০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত।
১৪	ক) দরপত্র দাখিলের তারিখ ও সময়সীমা খ) দরপত্র বাক্স বন্ধের তারিখ ও সময়সীমা	:	০৫/১১/২০২৫ তারিখ সকাল ৯:০০টা হতে দুপুর ১:০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত। ০৫/১০/২০২৫ তারিখ দুপুর ১:০১ মিনিট।
১৫.	দরপত্র খোলার তারিখ, সময় ও স্থান	:	০৫/১১/২০২৫ তারিখ বিকাল ২:০০ ঘটিকা, প্রকল্প পরিচালকের দপ্তর, "নারী ও শিশু নির্যাতন প্রতিকার ও প্রতিরোধে সমন্বিত সেবা জোরদারকরণ এবং কুইক রেসপন্স টিমের কার্যক্রম" শীর্ষক প্রকল্প, মহিলা বিষয়ক অধিদপ্তর, ৩৭/৩ ইস্কাটন গার্ডেন রোড, ঢাকা। {দরপত্রে অংশগ্রহণকারী/প্রতিনিধিগণ-এর সম্মুখে (যদি কেহ উপস্থিত থাকেন) দরপত্র খোলা হবে}।
১৬.	দরপত্র সিডিউল বিক্রয়কারী অফিসের নাম ও ঠিকানা	:	"নারী ও শিশু নির্যাতন প্রতিকার ও প্রতিরোধে সমন্বিত সেবা জোরদারকরণ এবং কুইক রেসপন্স টিমের কার্যক্রম" শীর্ষক প্রকল্প, মহিলা বিষয়ক অধিদপ্তর, ৩৭/৩ ইস্কাটন গার্ডেন রোড, ঢাকা।
১৭.	দরপত্র দাখিলের স্থান	:	"নারী ও শিশু নির্যাতন প্রতিকার ও প্রতিরোধে সমন্বিত সেবা জোরদারকরণ এবং কুইক রেসপন্স টিমের কার্যক্রম" শীর্ষক প্রকল্প, মহিলা উন্নয়ন ভবন, (৪র্থ তলা) ৩৭/৩ ইস্কাটন গার্ডেন রোড, ঢাকা।
১৮.	দরদাতার যোগ্যতা	:	বিস্তারিত টেন্ডার ডকুমেন্ট/সিডিউলে উল্লেখ রয়েছে।
১৯.	দরপত্রের সহিত যেসকল কাগজপত্র জমা দিতে হবে	:	দরপত্র সিডিউলের উল্লেখিত কাগজপত্রাদির সত্যায়িত কপি দরপত্রের সাথে জমা দিতে হবে।

		ক্র.নং	লট-১ এর আওতায় পদের/ সেবার নাম	ক্যাটাগরী	পদের সংখ্যা	শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা	বয়সসীমা
	সেবা প্রদানকারীর বিবরণ	১.	ব্যবস্থাপনা সেবা (প্রোগ্রাম অফিসার)	বিশেষ সেবা-১	৯৭	বিস্তারিত বিবরণ দরপত্র সিডিউলে উল্লেখ রয়েছে।	০৫/১১/২০২৫ তারিখে ১৮-৬০ বছর
		২.	প্রকৌশল সেবা (হার্ডওয়্যার মেইনটেনেন্স ইঞ্জিনিয়ার)	বিশেষ সেবা-১	১		
		৩.	হেল্পলাইন সেবা (ন্যাশনাল হেল্পলাইন সার্ভিস প্রোভাইডার)	বিশেষ সেবা-৩	৬০		
			উপমোট (লট-১)		১৫৮		
			লট-২ এর আওতায় পদের/ সেবার নাম	ক্যাটাগরী	পদের সংখ্যা		
		১.	ক্লিনিক্যাল সাইকোলজি সেবা (ক্লিনিক্যাল সাইকোলজিস্ট)	বিশেষ সেবা-১	৪০		
		২.	আইনী সহায়তা সেবা (আইন কর্মকর্তা)	বিশেষ সেবা-১	১২		
		৩.	ক্লিনার (পরিচ্ছন্নতাকর্মী)	ক্যাটাগরি-৫	১৪৫		
			উপমোট (লট-২)		১৯৭		
			লট-৩ এর আওতায় পদের/ সেবার নাম	ক্যাটাগরী	পদের সংখ্যা		
		১.	মনিটরিং সেবা (হেল্পলাইন ইনচার্জ)	বিশেষ সেবা-১	১		
		২.	গবেষণাসেবা (বৈজ্ঞানিক) (বৈজ্ঞানিক কর্মকর্তা)	বিশেষ সেবা-১	১৮		
		৩.	আইটি সেবা (আইটি অফিসার)	বিশেষ সেবা-১	১		
		৪.	ডকুমেন্টেশন সেবা (ডকুমেন্টেশন অফিসার)	বিশেষ সেবা-১	২		
		৫.	গবেষণা সেবা (গবেষণা কর্মকর্তা)	বিশেষ সেবা-১	১		
		৬.	টেকনিশিয়ান সেবা (ল্যাব টেকনোলজিস্ট	বিশেষ সেবা-২	২২		
		৭.	কম্পিউটিং সেবা (কম্পিউটার অপারেটর)	ক্যাটাগরি-১	১৪৫		
		৮.	রিসিপশনিষ্ট সেবা (রিসিপশনিষ্ট)	ক্যাটাগরি-১	২		
			উপ মোট (লট-৩)		১৯২		
২০.			সর্বমোট (লট-১+লট-২+লট-৩)		৫৪৭		

	দরপত্র সিডিউলের মূল্য	:	প্রতিটি লটের জন্য ২,০০০/- (দুই হাজার টাকা মাত্র) (অফেরৎযোগ্য)		
২১.	সংগ্রহতব্য সেবার পরিচয়		কাজের অবস্থান	টেন্ডার সিকিউরিটির পরিমাণ	সরবরাহের (সময়/মাস)
২২.	আউটসোসিং পদ্ধতিতে জনবল সরবরাহ লট-১ এর আওতায় ১৫৮ জন লট-২ এর আওতায় ১৯৭ জন লট-৩ এর আওতায় ১৯২ জন	:	সমগ্র বাংলাদেশ	লট-১ এর জন্য ৩৫,০০,০০০ (পঁয়ত্রিশ লক্ষ) টাকা মাত্র লট-২ এর জন্য ৩১,০০,০০০ (একত্রিশ লক্ষ) টাকা মাত্র লট-৩ এর জন্য ২৯,০০,০০০(উনত্রিশ লক্ষ) টাকা মাত্র	চুক্তি সম্পাদনের দিন হতে ০২ বছর পর্যন্ত সেবা প্রদান। তবে কর্তৃপক্ষের অনুমতিক্রমে উভয়পক্ষের সম্মতিতে প্রয়োজনে চুক্তি নবায়ন করা হতে পারে।
২৩.	দরপত্র সিডিউল সংগ্রহের উপায়	:	প্রত্যেক লটের জন্য দরপত্র সিডিউলের মূল্য বাবদ ২,০০০/-(দুই হাজার) টাকা (অফেরতযোগ্য) হারে প্রকল্প পরিচালক, "নারী ও শিশু নির্যাতন প্রতিকার ও প্রতিরোধে সমন্বিত সেবা জোরদারকরণ এবং কুইক রেসপন্স টিমের কার্যক্রম" শীর্ষক প্রকল্প, ঢাকা বরাবর যে কোন তফসিলী ব্যাংকে ট্রেজারী চালানের মাধ্যমে ১৩০০২০১১১৮১৮২- ১১০০০০০০০-১১০০১০০০-১৪২২৩২৮ কোডে জমা প্রদানপূর্বক নিজস্ব প্যাডে আবেদনের মাধ্যমে চালানের ফটোকপিসহ নির্ধারিত সময়ের মধ্যে দরপত্র সিডিউল সংগ্রহ করা যাবে।		
২৪.	দরপত্র আহবানকারীর নাম, পদবী, ঠিকানা ও টেলিফোন নম্বর	:	ড. প্রকাশ কান্তি চৌধুরী, প্রকল্প পরিচালক, "নারী ও শিশু নির্যাতন প্রতিকার ও প্রতিরোধে সমন্বিত সেবা জোরদারকরণ এবং কুইক রেসপন্স টিমের কার্যক্রম" শীর্ষক প্রকল্প, মহিলা বিষয়ক অধিদপ্তর, ৩৭/৩ ইস্কাটন গার্ডেন রোড, ঢাকা। টেলিফোন: ০১৭১৩-৬৫৯৫৭৭		
২৫.	বিশেষ নির্দেশাবলী	:	ক) কর্তৃপক্ষ দরপত্র প্রক্রিয়াকরণের যে কোন পর্যায়ে যে কোন দরপত্র/সকল দরপত্র গ্রহণ ও বাতিলের ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করেন। খ) দরপত্র ক্রয়ের চালানের মূল কপি দরপত্রের সাথে জমা দিতে হবে। গ) দরপত্র সিডিউলে উল্লেখিত শর্তাবলী যথাযথভাবে অনুসরণ করতে হবে। ঘ) চুক্তি সম্পাদনকালে জনবলের সংখ্যা হ্রাস/বৃদ্ধির ক্ষমতা কর্তৃপক্ষ সংরক্ষণ করেন।		

অনির্বায কারণবশত: দরপত্র দাখিলের দিন/খোলার দিন অফিস বন্ধ থাকিলে পরবর্তী কার্যদিবসে একই স্থানে ও একই সময়ে দরপত্র গ্রহণ ও খোলা হবে।

(ড. প্রকাশ কান্তি চৌধুরী)
যুগ্মসচিব
মহিলা ও শিশু বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয়
এবং
প্রকল্প পরিচালক

GD-2211

FICTION

FREE AT LAST

The two brothers drove quietly to their old house near Mitford Road. They left it years back, when the brothers were in their teens. It was rented out, but just a few months back, Dr Yusuf finally decided to give it out to the developers. The builders were going to start wrecking the place in two weeks.

HASIB UR RASHID IFTI

"If my father had any unpaid debt to anyone, please contact me or my younger brother Hamza," Omar said to the congregation at the funeral, trying to sound soft and loud at the same time, "And if my father ever hurt any of you unintentionally, please forgive his soul and pray for him. Thank you."

There were murmurs of acknowledgement from the crowd. People in the back stood on their toes, trying to take a peek at the late Dr Yusuf's two sons. Dr Yusuf was known as a stern and honest man to his entire village of Sundarpur. Sure, he was a bit short-tempered but he helped his people more than anyone else in the entire district. He funded the construction of the bridge above the river, built the dams and the roads, and even had a madrasa to his name. It seemed like everything he earned back in Dhaka, he spent for his people back home.

So, after his stroke and the consequent death last night, Omar and Hamza found themselves having to fill some big shoes. The people in Sundarpur expected the two brothers to look after the village the way their father did—which Dr Yusuf reminded them of constantly. Omar had to discard his plans of moving abroad and settled down as a Senior Engineer at a private firm. Hamza was preparing for the Civil Services Exam after graduation.

On their way to Dhaka, Omar was sitting in the front seat with his wife, daughter and mother behind him and Hamza all the way in the back. Omar stared at Hamza through the rearview mirror, trying to find an ounce of emotion in those dead eyes. When Hamza looked at the mirror, his brother didn't look away, perhaps for the first time in years. Hamza noticed a text pop up on his phone. It was Omar:

Do you want to go back to the old house? I spoke to the caretaker. It's vacant now and the new tenants don't arrive until next month.

Hamza didn't reply. The entire journey, Omar kept looking at Hamza but Hamza didn't look back. When the car took the turn into the alleyway in front of their home, Hamza told his mother, "Amma, all of you go up and rest. Omar bhai and I have somewhere we want to go. We'll be back in an hour."

DESIGN: **MAISHA SYEDA**

His mother looked at the two of them and let the brothers have their moment, hoping it'd reconnect them. Ever since Omar decided to give up on moving out of the country, Hamza had been awfully quiet. Omar's departure was Hamza's ticket out of the house. It was always the deal between the two brothers and when Omar broke the pact, Hamza knew he was stuck along with his brother.

The two brothers drove quietly to their old house near Mitford Road. They left it years back, when the brothers were in their teens. It was rented out, but just a few months back, Dr Yusuf finally decided to give it out to the developers. The builders were going to start wrecking the place in two weeks.

Hamza broke the lock on the front door with a brick he found nearby. They didn't bring the key with them and it was 2 in the night anyways, so no one would really notice. They slowly stepped into the house, in between the sooty walls and underneath the cobwebs hanging from the walls. Even in between the dust, sludge and rats, Omar could smell the ditch behind the house. It smelled of stool and garbage but it always reminded Omar of his childhood. Even now, when he walks back home from Banglamotor, the ditch behind the Sonargaon Hotel reminds him of their old house.

"Omar, look," Hamza said as he sprinted across the hallway. He stopped near the staircase, looked back and broke into laughter, "No one to stop us now!"

Omar stared at Hamza for a while and grinned. The scar on his back suddenly started tingling. As he touched the scar and stared at the wall cabinet near the staircase, it all flashed in front of him. Right on the edge of the staircase was where his father had thrown Omar and slashed his back all red with his belt. All Hamza could do was stand behind his mother and try his best to not make a sound as he wept. Omar had broken an expensive vase while chasing Hamza, so Hamza thought it was him who deserved to get whipped and was spared simply because he was too young to survive such a thrashing.

Omar told Hamza to follow him as he walked past the stairs and onto the study. He ran a quick lap across the room and shouted, "Hamza!"

"I'm right here!" Hamza replied with a grin.

"No, that's not the point," Omar stood on the old table which his father used as a desk and screamed at the top of his lungs, "H-A-M-Z-A!"

Hamza started laughing and shouted back, "O-M-A-R!"

The two brothers ran across the whole house and shouted everything that came to their mind. They went to the old office that their father used as a chamber, to the spare bedroom that was off-limits to the both of them and to the roof that was off limits for them at night.

No running in the hallway, no speaking when guests are at home, no entering Abba's study or chamber, no loud music in the house—they broke all the rules that night. Even after all these years and even with their father six feet under, it still felt like his ghost could appear right behind them and give them a beating, but it didn't. They spent the entire night running around, swearing, kicking the old furniture and wreaking havoc across the house.

Right before Fazr, the two of them were lying down in their old bedroom, smoking cigarettes—one last act of hooliganism. With the azaan starting in the distance, Hamza replied, "I still remember the azaan from that night as well. It was the same mosque."

Omar got up and stared at Hamza. They had broken all the rules that night but Omar didn't realise it'd take Hamza that far. He thought they'd never mention it to each other, ever again.

"Omar, we don't need to pretend anymore," Hamza said, "We can let go. Amma will be just fine. Abba's left enough for all of them."

"I've got a family now, Hamza. I just can't do it," said Omar, "It's not the same for me. I've got responsibilities now."

"They're just kids Omar!" Hamza shouted, "Kids, alone all these years! No one even knows they're just lying there. No one's visited them all these years, not even Amma! If you won't, I will."

The dawn was darker than usual that day. It was going to rain in half an hour, and possibly throughout the entire day. As the Fajr azaan played through the speakers of the nearby mosques, the two brothers started digging the ground behind their house, right underneath the jackfruit tree.

It took some 20 minutes of continuous digging before they found the two bodies. In the last 23 years, the bodies hadn't decomposed one bit. They couldn't, not with their souls hovering around the earth. The back of Omar's body still had those scars, but the face was untouched, unbruised. Hamza's body had marks of suffocation on his throat, but his face looked so much at peace.

Sitting on the grave, Omar hugged the two bodies and broke down into tears. "We need to find someone to bury us back, Omar," Hamza said, staring at the two bodies.

Mrs Yusuf had been sitting by the phone the entire night. After her husband's stroke, they knew it'd be the first thing the two brothers would do. So, when Hamza called his mother, she picked it up on the first ring.

Omar and Hamza didn't know Mrs Yusuf's body was just 14 feet to the west of theirs. It'd take another 20 years before Omar's daughter would get married and Mrs Yusuf could return to her body like their sons did.

Hasib Ur Rashid Ifti *is a writer from Dhaka. Reach him out at hasiburrashidifti@gmail.com.*

REFLECTIONS

Autumnal offerings for seasonal readers

FARAH GHUZNAVI

As summer draws to an end in the Northern hemisphere, a certain kind of booklover prepares to shift to the next set of items on their TBR (To Be Read) list. Because whether or not you are a fan of spooky stories, the arrival of autumn–and with it, Halloween–evokes in many a sense of seasonal creepiness.

This fits perfectly with the desire to curl up with a hot drink of choice and indulge in the cosy comfort of some undisturbed reading time. Even though serious bookworms are ready to do that at any hour of the day or night, regardless of the weather, the season, or the demands of work.

Those who love horror stories especially come into their own at this time of year, with everyone from booksellers to *Buzzfeed* articles vying to provide them with lists of essential books to add to the incorrigible book addict's never-ending TBR list (IYKYK).

Personally, I'm not a fan of straight-up horror stories, not since Stephen King traumatised me with his 1983 novel *Pet Sematary*, but I do sometimes like dipping into stories that explore the hidden sides of human nature, the complexity of human behaviour being endlessly fascinating to me. Reading about it has the added benefit that it's far safer to keep odd people and encounters firmly at a distance within the pages of a book.

PHOTO: **COLLECTED**

Reeling from the death of her mother, Finn was on her way to meet her aunt Maura, her late mother's estranged twin, when the accident occurred. Although she has never met her aunt before, the young woman is eager for family support for herself and her baby. Maura's mountaintop refuge is isolated and fairly basic, but Finn's desperation to fill the void created by her mother's death renders that unimportant.

In this regard, the premise of Steve Cavanagh's book *Witness 8* is an intriguing one. What happens when the secret observer of a murder is not only an unreliable witness, but also one with an agenda of her own?

Strap in for storytelling that effortlessly weaves multiple strands together to reveal an intricate pattern. Though, as any writer can tell you, "effortless" is really not an accurate way to characterise writing of this calibre, because as someone once put it, so-called "easy reading" invariably involves difficult writing!

Working as a nanny to rich families, Ruby Johnson knows many of the secrets that her employers would rather keep hidden. What nobody else knows is that Ruby has dark secrets of her own.

As the only witness to a killing where she recognises both the killer and the victim, Ruby finds herself in possession of a valuable secret. So, when she tips off the police about the identity of the murderer, why does she give them the wrong information? What is Ruby's motivation to point the finger at her blameless employer, John Jackson, a gifted surgeon and a well-liked man? And why does the sinister painting of the Red Priest in the Jacksons' home seem to influence Ruby's behaviour in such bizarre ways?

Ruby's actions have several consequences–both intended and unintended–in this gripping thriller, packed with memorable characters and multiple plot twists.

Caroline Mitchell is another writer who delivers compelling stories, often with a strong focus on relationships. In *The Survivors*, she describes the fallout when two vehicles collide on a treacherous mountain road. The women driving each car are travelling alone, but both are accompanied by their infant daughters. Only one baby survives the accident. But whose is it?

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The real question here is whether the surviving baby is actually hers. Kathryn, the woman in the other car, who is from an infamous Dublin crime family, thinks otherwise. And she is determined to retrieve her child. Meanwhile, the more time Finn spends with Maura, the more she realises that her aunt is unstable. Plus, Maura clearly has many secrets–and some of them could be dangerous.

Finally, there is *Probable Son* by Cindy Jiban, a debut novel that is more of a mystery than a thriller, which explores the undercurrents that fester beneath the surface of family life.

Elsa Vargas has experienced two major traumas in adulthood. And to her dismay, in the second case, nobody believed her. After Elsa's first child was a stillborn baby girl, everyone assumed that she was still traumatised when she insisted that the hospital had wrongly placed her second baby with another family shortly after his birth.

Because Elsa was utterly convinced that the baby she took home did not look like the newborn boy she had briefly held. And as the years passed, much as she loved her son Bird, Elsa could not disregard the nagging feeling that this child was nothing like the rest of her family. So, when Thomas, a boy with the same birthday as Bird, who also bears an uncanny resemblance to Elsa's younger son shows up in the class she teaches at school, Elsa struggles to convince herself that Thomas is not her biological son.

Unsurprisingly, things get complicated fast, and ensuing events take the reader on a fascinating journey through Elsa's personal life, her experiences of motherhood, and the eternal question of whether nurture or nature is more important when it comes to child-rearing.

This last story is quite different from the other two, in that its dilemmas are very human, and not even remotely sinister. So, if you are seeking an excellent read to curl up with to enjoy the forthcoming change of season, one of these will probably do the trick!

Farah Ghuznavi *is a writer, translator, and development worker. She published a short story collection titled* Fragments of Riversong *(Daily Star Books, 2013), and edited the* Lifelines *anthology (Zubaan Books, 2012). Reach her on Instagram @ farahghuznavi.*

Star SPORT
DHAKA SATURDAY OCTOBER 18, 2025, KARTIK 2, 1432 BS

What to WATCH

T Sports
Bangladesh vs West Indies
1st ODI
Live from 1:30 pm
Sony Sports 5
England vs New Zealand
1st T20I
Live from 12:15 pm
Star Sports 1
ICC Women's World Cup
New Zealand vs Pakistan
Live from 3:30 pm
Select HD1
Premier League
Nottingham Forest vs Chelsea
Live from 5:30 pm
Man City vs Everton
Live from 8:00 pm
Fulham vs Arsenal
Live from 10:30 pm

ODI LIFT ON THE LINE
on 'never-before-seen' pitch

- West Indies and Bangladesh have met 47 times in ODIs. Of those, West Indies have won 24, while Bangladesh have won 21, with two matches ending without a result.
- The two sides are evenly matched in bilateral ODI series, having won six each over the years.
- At the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, West Indies hold a slight edge, winning six of their 10 encounters against Bangladesh, while losing four. The visitors also played one additional match at the venue -- a 2011 ICC World Cup fixture, where they lost to Pakistan.
- From the current West Indies squad, only Shai Hope and Roston Chase have previously played ODIs in Bangladesh.

SPORTS REPORTER

After a 3-0 whitewash against Afghanistan, Bangladesh must recover quickly to avoid a fifth successive ODI series defeat. The upcoming home series against the West Indies offers a chance for respite, but familiar questions loom over their batting and the Mirpur wickets.

While head coach Phil Simmons said they are building towards the 2027 ODI World Cup through chops and changes to find the right profiles, the nature of wickets back home has hardly helped the batters' cause -- which raises the question: what exactly are they building towards?

The wicket in Mirpur, meanwhile, has drawn intrigue. Its dark soil suggests a spin-friendly surface, though West Indies head coach Darren Sammy described it as "something we've never seen before," acknowledging the unique challenge of subcontinental conditions for his batters.

Simmons, however, saw it differently. "It looks like a normal Mirpur wicket. So it usually has some sort of turn in it, which is good," he told reporters on Friday.

Bangladesh's reliance on spin could resurface, especially given the absence of a Rashid Khan-type threat in the West Indies attack. Mirpur typically produces 250-run wickets, but even that has seemed distant of late, with inconsistent batting and poor shot selection proving costly.

Simmons hinted that mindset, more than skill, remains the issue. "We have the tools to put up 300," he said, referencing past successes in the Caribbean but also pointing to limitations.

"Well, in discussion, sometimes your composition and the tools you have determine how you're going to play. We don't have the tools like England to come out like that," he added.

Turning tracks do not necessarily mean low-scoring affairs. Bangladesh's headache stems from the fact that, bar Saif Hassan in recent series, few batters have applied themselves according to the demands of conditions and match situations.

Simmons conceded that the search for a stable opening pair continues. "We're still finding the right combinations," he said.

For Bangladesh, the series presents multiple objectives: to secure results, find respite through the tried-and-tested Mirpur formula, and at the same time develop consistency in batting for the future. Whether these ambitions align while ranking points are at stake remains the bigger question.

I'm glad you brought it up because I, first of all, don't agree with players having anything to do with social media. It is your right as a person to be on social media, to say what you want on social media. But as an international player, as a national player for Bangladesh, my players should not be on there.

Bangladesh head coach **PHIL SIMMONS** said in a pre-match press briefing yesterday, referring to batter Mohammad Naim's social media reaction to the hostility he faced recently.

A golden age of substandard batters

ASHFAQ-UL-ALAM

Bangladesh opener Mohammad Naim's fortunes went from bad to worse to worst in a span of 72 hours.

On October 14, he was dismissed for an ugly seven off 24 balls in Bangladesh's third ODI against Afghanistan. The following day, he, alongside other players, got jeered by fans at the airport in Dhaka, and on the 16th, he was dropped for the three ODIs against West India at home, set to begin on Saturday.

In an ODI career spanning five years, Naim has only played nine matches and has made a mere 102 runs. Most tellingly, he is yet to play an innings of authority, a knock that would prove that he belongs in ODIs.

The irony is that Naim, who averages a paltry 12.75 for the Tigers in ODIs, possesses the third highest average among all Bangladeshis who have played a minimum of 50 List A matches.

What is even more ironic, considering the shambolic state of the team's batting department in the recent past, that the top three names in this list are part of the national setup right now.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

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A golden age?

Out of all Bangladeshi batters who have batted at least 50 times in List A cricket, Tawhid Hridoy possesses the highest average, 46.16 in 106 innings.

Naim is third, averaging 44.31 in 121 innings, and in-between them is Mahidul Islam Ankon, the man who replaced Naim for the West Indies series and is yet to debut for Bangladesh, who averages 44.53 after 90 innings.

All three of them are in their mid-20s, with considerable experience behind them and a long career ahead, and should be leading the charge as the next generation of Bangladesh batters in the 50-over format.

But the reality is quite different. Ankon is yet to be tested at this level, Naim in his few chances has looked underprepared for ODIs and Hridoy, after a great start to his ODI career, is now scoring runs at a snail's pace in the middle-order.

Looking at the Tiger's current ODI setup, a few other names of young batters pop up like Tanzid Hasan Tamim, Parvez Hossain Emon, and Saif Hassan, but all of whom are yet to emerge as the next big hope in ODI batting for Bangladesh.

Because of their failures and the exit of many experienced faces, Bangladesh's batting in ODIs is looking more vulnerable than it has in many years.

But why is that?

A lost league and broken pipeline

The Dhaka Premier League (DPL) is the only List-A domestic tournament in Bangladesh, the place where the country's cricketers learn how to play in the 50-over format.

The DPL gradually losing its zeal in the past decade or so has been on the news many times, but its true ramification is being felt right now.

For years in Bangladesh, cricketers have broken into the national setup from a same pattern.

The management earmarks talented players from age-level cricket, picks them for the developmental teams, sends them in tours with the 'A' team or the HP team, and eventually picks them for the national side.

Whenever Bangladesh needs reinforcements, selectors don't automatically select the in-form player from DPL, instead, they reuse players who were dropped a few series earlier, as the common consensus is that runs in the DPL is not enough to earn a Bangladesh cap.

This pattern creates a divide, with players who don't get spotted at an early age having little to no chance of making it into the national setup, making DPL only a source of earning a steady income for cricketer, not the last stop before playing for Bangladesh.

No other Test-playing country has such an overdependence on age-level cricket and pays such little attention to its top 50-over league. And till DPL regains at least some of its past glory, Bangladesh will continue to suffer in ODIs.

Tariq terminates Kings contract

SPORTS REPORTER

Bashundhara Kings centre-back Tariq Kazi announced the termination of his contract with the club, citing unpaid wages.

"Today, I have legally terminated my contract with Bashundhara Kings due to outstanding salary payments," Tariq announced in a Facebook post on Friday.

"There are moments in a footballer's life when silence becomes too heavy to carry," Tariq wrote. "For over a year, I lived through a period of inconsistent and delayed salary payments, months of uncertainty that tested my strength both as a professional and as a person. It wasn't only a financial challenge; it was an emotional burden that true professionals quietly endure."

The 25-year-old Bangladesh international, capped 33 times for the national team, joined the five-time Bangladesh Premier League champions in 2019 from Finland having been naturalised as a Bangladeshi citizen. Since then, he has been a mainstay in defence for both club and country, winning four league titles with the Kings.

Tariq also called for greater transparency and fairness in Bangladesh football.

"As I know too well, there are many players across the country facing even more difficult situations -- professionals who continue to suffer in silence as clubs systematically fail to meet their salary obligations. Their struggles often go unheard, but their dedication keeps the game alive," he said.

Despite repeated attempts, no Bashundhara Kings official could be reached for comment.

Bronze for BFF, but gold standard still distant

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) received the AFC President's Recognition Award for Grassroots Footbal in the Bronze category on Thursday night at a dazzling ceremony in Riyadh, marking a rare positive moment amid concerns over the country's continued struggle to produce quality footballers.

Under new president Tabith Awal, the BFF was recognised for expanding local tournaments, partnering with youth academies on educational programmes, and promoting inclusivity through initiatives such as child safeguarding, women's empowerment in the Hill Tracts, and the Street Children Festival.

The honour acknowledges the new committee's active year, but also highlights a long-standing weakness: the neglect of grassroots development that has left men's football stagnant. Despite 17 years of professional league football, most top-tier clubs lack genuine youth academies, existing only on paper to meet formal requirements -- something the BFF has long overlooked.

Globally, clubs form the backbone of player development, and without such systems, Bangladesh's progress will remain limited. While expatriate players like Hamza Choudhury and Shamit Shome have revived interest, sustainable growth depends on a nationwide youth structure and stricter enforcement of development standards at club level.

The AFC also recognised Bangladesh's grassroots work in women's football, where an unconventional system -- keeping players in year-round training at the BFF dormitory -- has yielded remarkable results. Within a decade, Bangladesh's women reached the AFC Women's Asian Cup, proving the impact of structured development even without a domestic league.

This is not the BFF's first international recognition: under previous president Kazi Salahuddin, it won the AFC "Aspiring Award" in 2015. However, progress stalled as football's growth remained Dhaka-centric, and by 2023, FIFA sanctioned the federation over fund mismanagement, banning its general secretary for three years and restricting financial support.

Now, under Tabith, the challenge is to avoid repeating past mistakes and turn the AFC Bronze award into a springboard for sustainable reform -- one that could, in time, lead Bangladesh towards the AFC Grassroots Gold standard achieved by nations like the UAE.

Rivalries renew as Europe's leagues resume

AGENCIES

European football returns this weekend as the Premier League, La Liga, Bundesliga and Serie A resume following the international break.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Liverpool vs Manchester United

Liverpool hope to end a three-match losing run across competitions as they host rivals Manchester United, with Mohamed Salah seeking to extend his prolific record in the fixture. New boss Arne Slot needs a strong response after recent defensive lapses, while Ruben Amorim's side chase their first Anfield win since 2016.

Pressure on Postecoglou

Nottingham Forest coach Ange Postecoglou is still searching for his first win after seven league games. With fans growing restless and Sean Dyche linked as a possible replacement, Saturday's home clash against Chelsea could define his future.

LA LIGA

Barca's injury woes and Yamal's return

After a 4-1 defeat to Sevilla, Barcelona regroup with Lamine Yamal and Fermin Lopez returning from injury. Hansi Flick's depleted side host Girona as they look to regain momentum before next week's Clasico against Real Madrid, with Pedri urging the team to show resilience.

BUNDESLIGA

Kane leads Bayern into Der Klassiker

Harry Kane's extraordinary form — 18 goals in 10 matches — headlines Bayern Munich's showdown with Borussia Dortmund. Both sides remain unbeaten, but Bayern's ruthless attack faces Dortmund's improved defence under Niko Kovac in a clash that could shape the early title race.

SERIE A

Inter's title credentials on the line

Cristian Chivu's Inter, winners of five straight in all competitions, visit leaders Roma in a crucial top-of-the-table clash. With Lautaro Martinez in fine form but Marcus Thuram still sidelined, Inter Milan aim to prove their Scudetto credentials before next week's trip to Napoli.

TRIPURA KILLINGS

Dhaka wants impartial investigation

Delhi for fencing to stop cross-border smuggling

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has called on the Indian government to launch an immediate, impartial, and transparent investigation into the killing of three Bangladeshis by mob in India's Tripura State on October 15.

"This heinous act is an unacceptable and grave violation of human rights and the rule of law," said Bangladesh Foreign Ministry in a statement yesterday.

"All individuals, regardless of nationality, are entitled to full protection of their human rights, even if they inadvertently cross borders," the foreign ministry said.

Bangladesh expressed serious concern and condemned the incident and stressed that the perpetrators must be identified and brought to justice without delay.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

The upper portion of the Adams Caps & Textiles Ltd factory building caved in after a massive fire ravaged the seven-storey structure since Thursday afternoon at the Chattogram Export Processing Zone (CEPZ) in South Halishahar. Even 19 hours later, smoke was still seen rising from the site yesterday morning.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

MPO teachers begin hunger strike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Over 100 teachers and staffers from non-government educational institutions under the Monthly Pay Order (MPO) scheme, who have been demonstrating for several days to press their three-point demand, began a hunger strike until death yesterday.

The demands include a 20 percent house rent allowance based on their basic salary, a 75 percent festival bonus, and a medical allowance of Tk 1,500.

Delwar Hossain Azizi, member secretary of the Alliance for Nationalisation of MPO Institutions, the platform leading the demonstration, said, "We want 20 percent house rent allowance. Teachers will not accept any other proposal. We will continue this hunger strike until the demand is met."

He made the comments before the strike started at the Central Shaheed Minar around 2:15pm.

Earlier in the day, the demonstrators brought out a

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

Lethal gas found in gutted Mirpur warehouse

Hydrogen sulphide measured at 'immediately lethal' levels, says DMP bomb unit official

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Toxic hydrogen sulphide gas at "immediately lethal" levels was detected yesterday inside the burnt chemical warehouse in Mirpur's Shialbari, where smoke was still billowing more than 72 hours after a blaze killed at least 16 people.

The hydrogen sulphide concentration inside the warehouse was measured at 149 parts per million (PPM), said Mohammad Mahmuduzzaman, assistant commissioner and team leader of the DMP's Bomb Disposal Unit, yesterday.

FILE PHOTO

He warned that exposure to hydrogen sulphide at levels above 100 PPM can cause instant unconsciousness and death. Other toxic gases, including carbon monoxide, were also detected, and many sacks of chemicals were still lying inside, he added.

Earlier, Mahmuduzzaman and a four-member team entered the warehouse equipped with gas detectors and other equipment.

"The gas levels were fluctuating and rising," he said. "Yesterday (Thursday), our gas detectors found hydrogen sulphide above 20 PPM. Today (Friday), it was 149 PPM."

He also cautioned that other toxic elements were present in the surrounding air and advised evacuating people within a 150–300 metre radius, warning that the gas could spread up to 1.5 kilometres downwind.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 4

Advance to the next step of Gaza peace deal

Hamas urges mediators, reaffirms commitment to truce

AGENCIES

Hamas yesterday called on mediators to push for the next steps under the ceasefire in Gaza, including reopening the border, letting in aid, beginning reconstruction, setting up an administration and completing Israel's withdrawal.

Fighting has largely stopped in Gaza under US President Donald Trump's plan, endorsed by mediators Egypt, Qatar and Turkey. But further steps have been held up in part by Israeli accusations that the militants were too slow in handing over bodies of dead hostages.

Israel said on Thursday it was preparing for the reopening of Gaza's Rafah crossing with Egypt to allow Palestinians to move in and out, but gave no date as it traded blame with Hamas over violations of the ceasefire.

Other unresolved elements of the plan include the disarmament of militants and Gaza's future governance.

Hamas insisted it was committed to returning all the hostage remains still unaccounted for under Gaza's ruins, as a Turkish official said specialists dispatched to help find bodies were awaiting Israel's authorisation to enter.

Responding to a call from Hamas for help locating the bodies of the 19 hostages, buried under the rubble alongside an untold number of Palestinians, Ankara sent specialists to help in the search.

A Turkish official told AFP that dozens of disaster response specialists were at the Egyptian side of the border awaiting a green light from the Israeli government to enter the war-shattered Palestinian territory.

The 81-member team from Turkey's Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) is equipped with specialised search-and-rescue tools, including life-detection devices and trained search dogs.

"It remains unclear when Israel will allow the Turkish team to enter Gaza," the official said.

Under a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas spearheaded by US President Donald Trump, Hamas returned 20 surviving hostages and the remains of nine of 28 known deceased hostages -- along with another body, which Israel said was not that of a former hostage.

In exchange, Israel freed nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners from its jails and halted the military campaign that it launched in Gaza after Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack.

A Hamas source told AFP the Turkish delegation is expected to enter Gaza by Sunday.

The Turkish official noted that the recovery team's complicated mission included locating both Palestinian and hostage bodies.

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reaffirmed on Thursday his determination to "secure the return of all hostages" after his defence minister warned that the military would restart the conflict if Hamas failed to do so.

- Turkish experts await Israeli go ahead to help recover bodies in Gaza
- UN says will 'take some time' to scale back Gaza famine

Malibagh mall burglary was a planned heist

Say police; 4 held, 190-tola gold recovered

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

For nearly three months, a gang quietly watched, calculated, and waited for the right time to strike at Sompa Jewellers in Fortune Shopping Complex in Dhaka's Malibagh. When the night of October 8 arrived, they executed their plan with almost cinematic precision, detectives of Dhaka Metropolitan Police said yesterday.

During a press briefing at the DMP Media Centre, Md Shafiqul Islam, additional commissioner (detective branch) of DMP, said four members of the gang had been arrested after a 72-hour drive across several districts.

One of them had earlier tied a thin string to the bathroom window of the market during the day. After nightfall, they returned, used that string to pull up a thick rope, climbed to the second floor, broke the window, and entered the building.

Hidden inside the bathroom were burqas and burglary tools, stashed there days earlier. Disguised and prepared, the burglars broke into Sompa Jewellers and made away with gold worth crores.

The detectives disclosed the findings after claiming to have finally cracked the case.

The arrestees are Shahin Matbar

SEE PAGE 5 COL 3

Around 900m poor exposed to climate shocks

AFP, *United Nations*

Nearly 80 percent of the world's poorest, or about 900 million people, are directly exposed to climate hazards exacerbated by global warming, bearing a "double and deeply unequal burden," the United Nations warned yesterday.

"No one is immune to the increasingly frequent and stronger climate change effects like droughts, floods, heat waves, and air pollution, but it's the poorest among us who are facing the harshest impact," Haoliang Xu, acting administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, told AFP in a statement.

COP30, the UN climate summit in Brazil in November, "is the moment for world leaders to look at climate action as action against poverty," he added.

According to an annual study published by the UNDP together with the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, 1.1 billion people, or about 18 percent of the 6.3 billion in 109 countries analysed, live in "acute multidimensional" poverty, based on factors like infant mortality and access to housing, sanitation, electricity and education.

Half of those people are minors.

One example of such extreme deprivation cited in the report is the case of Ricardo, a member of the Guarani Indigenous community living outside Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia's largest city.

Illinois State police detain a protester outside of the Broadview ICE facility after US President Donald Trump ordered increased federal law enforcement presence to assist in crime prevention in Chicago yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Trump refiles $15b lawsuit against NYT

AFP, *Miami*

US President Donald Trump has refiled a $15 billion defamation lawsuit against The New York Times, court documents show, weeks after it was thrown out by a federal judge.

Trump has intensified his long-established hostility toward the media since his return to the White House and the suit is one of numerous attacks against news organisations he accuses of bias against him.

The Times complaint was thrown out in September because District Judge Steven Merryday took exception to its florid writing, repetitive and laudatory praise of Trump and its excessive 85-page length.

The suit filed Thursday in Florida and seen by AFP runs to less than half the length, at 40 pages.

It takes aim at "false, defamatory, and malicious publications", highlighting a book and two Times articles.

The lawsuit named the newspaper, three Times reporters and the publisher Penguin Random House as defendants.

THE MANTAS
A LIFE ADRIFT

SUSHANTA GHOSH

Along the banks of the Arial Khan River in Laharhat under Barishal Sadar upazila, rows of boats lie anchored side by side, swaying gently with the current. Similar floating clusters can be seen along the Kalabadar River near Bukhainagar.

These are home to the Manta people -- a river-dwelling community that has spent generations living entirely on water.

Fishing is their only means of survival. Using small nets and traditional hooks, they set out at dawn and return by dusk with whatever catch the river offers. Each fleet of boats is led by a "sardar" -- a leader who oversees daily affairs and ensures harmony among the families.

But despite centuries of life on the water, the Mantas remain invisible in official records.

They have no National ID cards, no fisher cards, and receive no government aid. There are no schools for their children, no healthcare for their sick, and no land to call their own.

They live and die on the water -- a people adrift in every sense.

LIFE ON THE WATER

In Char Monai union, just six to seven kilometres from Barishal city, two Manta fleets live along the Kalabadar River, while another floats on the Arial Khan. According to the Department of Social Services and local NGOs, more than 350 people live in these three clusters.

During a recent visit to Bukhainagar and Laharhat, this correspondent spoke with more than 50 Manta men and women. More than half said they do not have NIDs or fisher cards, and none receive any social safety allowances. They said they often visit local union members to seek help, but are turned away because they live on boats and not on land.

Eighteen-year-old Marjina Begum from Bukhainagar recalled her heartbreak. "My son had a cold six months ago," she said softly. "I gave him medicine from a local pharmacy. He died after a week. We had no money to take him to a hospital."

Ayub Ali Sardar, a fleet leader, said most men and women in the community are illiterate. "They can receive phone calls but can't dial numbers," he said. "Children don't go to school. Women usually have four or five children, but none can tell their own or their children's ages."

In one fleet, there are 44 boats -- home to families who have lived their whole lives afloat. Only two men, Ayub Ali and Dulal Sardar, can read and count money. Women, in particular, cannot count.

Most boats have solar lights; about half have small TVs, and nearly all families own mobile phones. But even young people cannot read, write, or dial numbers, though they recognise currency notes easily. Children swim as soon as they can walk, and row boats across wide rivers fearlessly. Yet almost none have ever seen the inside of a classroom.

In Laharhat, the river glitters at sunset, and the boats line up like beads on water. Women sit by the edge of their boats washing utensils, while men mend nets. It is a life full of rhythm but empty of recognition.

Hafez Sardar, another fleet leader, said, "We are landless. We've asked for land many times, but no one helps. Even when someone dies, we depend on the mercy of local chairmen for burial."

Aleya Begum, a mother of five, could name her children but not their ages. When asked to count her fingers, she hesitated and laughed shyly. Most women and teenage girls in the community share this same quiet struggle.

Local NGOs estimate that more than 8,000 to 10,000 Mantas live across Barishal, Bhola, and Patuakhali districts. The Chandradwip Development Society, one of the few organisations working with them, says around 1,000 Mantas live in Barishal Sadar upazila alone.

Azaharul Islam, assistant commissioner (land) of Barishal Sadar upazila, said he has not received any application from the Manta community seeking government khas land.

Manta women give birth on their boats -- always naturally, without medical help. If complications arise, they rely on tablets bought from local shops. To prevent infants from falling into the water, many mothers tie their children with ropes.

At least two children have drowned in Laharhat in recent years, said fleet leader Jasim Sardar.

"Once, when someone died, we would float the body away," recalled 60-year-old Kadomjan Bibi, her eyes fixed on the horizon. "Now, if the chairman allows, we bury them on land. We live and die on the water -- this is our fate."

Almost every child in the community grows up without formal education. NGO workers say nearly 100 percent of the Manta population is illiterate. Recently, four small day-care centres were opened, teaching around 150 children rhymes and basic counting. But their learning rarely lasts.

"These children are eager to learn," said assistant teacher Archana Rani Mistri, who works in one of the centres. "But their families can't afford to send them to school. They move constantly with their boats, so the children can't continue studying."

Girls are typically married off by the age of 14 or 15. For them, childhood is short and work begins early -- fishing, cooking, rowing, or caring for younger siblings.

STRUGGLING FOR RECOGNITION

The Mantas are not officially recognised as fishermen. During the ongoing 22-day fishing ban, they receive no rice rations or government assistance. Last week, over a hundred Manta men and women stood in front of the Muladi upazila fisheries office demanding inclusion in the relief programme.

"We live and die on the river," said Ayub Ali. "Fishing is our only work. But when the ban starts, we have no food. No one helps us. Some of us are forced to fish secretly at night just to survive."

Government records show that in Bhola's Charfassion upazila, 143,438 fishing families are receiving rice aid -- but the Mantas are not among them. Many have already left their river settlements in search of a living elsewhere.

Local fisheries officials admit that only 80 percent of registered fishers receive aid, and the Mantas remain excluded because they were never registered.

"They move from place to place," said Barishal Divisional Fisheries Officer Md Anisuzzaman. "That's why chairmen and members hesitate to include them in the lists."

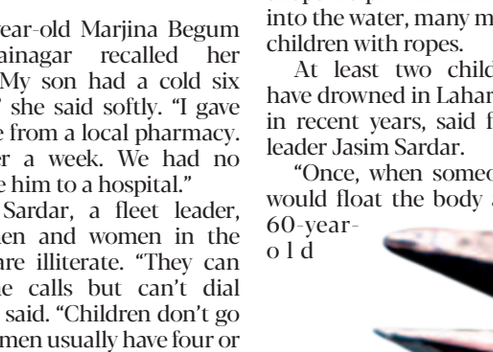
In the fading evening light, the Arial Khan River glows copper. The sound of children laughing echoes across the water as they splash beside the boats. Women prepare dinner over small clay stoves, and men mend their nets for another uncertain day. It is a quiet world, self-contained, almost forgotten.

For generations, the Manta community has lived and died on the rivers of southern Bangladesh -- stateless, landless, and unseen by the state. Their lives flow with the rivers, governed by the seasons and tides, yet untouched by the rights and protections others take for granted.

Without education, identity, or access to government support, they remain one of the most marginalised and invisible groups in the country, said Gazi Zahid Hossain, convener of the Sacheton Nagorik Committee in Barishal.

"The Mantas have no land, no schools, no hospitals, and no recognition. They are citizens of the river -- born on water, living on water, and dying on water -- while the rest of the world looks away," he added.

In Laharhat, the river glitters at sunset, and the boats line up like beads on water. Women sit by the edge of their boats washing utensils, while men mend nets. It is a life full of rhythm but empty of recognition.



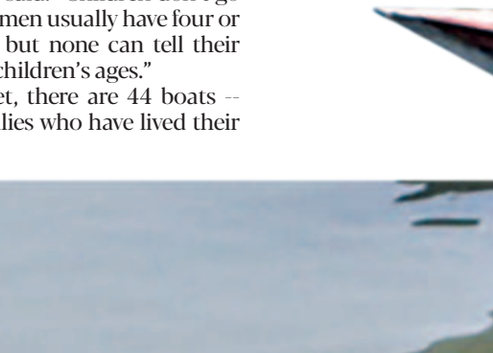


PHOTO: **TITU DAS**

At least 16 bodies were recovered from a garment factory in Rupnagar, Mirpur, following a devastating blaze triggered by a suspected chemical explosion. PHOTO: STAR

MIRPUR FACTORY FIRE

How many more workers have to die before impunity ends?

TASLIMA AKHTER

Time after time, factory owners have evaded accountability through political connections and influence. In the post-uprising period, can we afford to allow this pattern to persist?

"Unknown 14, Unknown 15, Unknown 12"—such numbers were marked on the white plastic body bags holding the charred remains of seven or eight garment workers inside the morgue. The rest of the bodies were kept in another morgue's freezer. According to available information, the death toll stood at sixteen—nine men and seven women. Amidst the burnt remains, one of the bodies still had its eyes open.

From one of the body bags, the raised hand of "Unknown 14" was sticking out—perhaps a final desperate attempt to survive. The air felt suffocating, heavy, and unbearable. I hurriedly stepped outside. In front of the emergency morgue, a few relatives of the victims were still waiting—hoping to identify their loved ones. The official in charge opened the door again. I wondered—how will these families find their people? How will they accept what they see? How will they carry such a horrific memory for the rest of their lives?

Overwhelmed by these thoughts, I left for the burn unit to meet the injured—Shukuruzzaman, Sohel, and Mamun. I could meet only two of them; Sohel was not in a condition to talk. From the others, I learned fragments of what had happened. I felt it would be cruel to ask too many questions. Their bodies and minds still bore the wounds of that terrible night.

It was Tuesday, 14 October 2025. Mirpur's Shialbari neighbourhood—around nine kilometres from Dhaka's bustling Farmgate—was just beginning to stir. As on any other morning, the rhythmic sound of workers' footsteps filled the narrow lanes. Among them were fourteen-year-old Mahira Akter, a newly married couple of seven days, and others—Tofail Ahmed (21), Nargis Akter (18), Nure Alam (23), Sanowar Hossain (22), Abdullah Al-Mamun (39), Rabiul Islam Robin (19), Nazrul Islam (40), and Muna—unaware that this ordinary morning would be their last.

Arian Fashion (some called it Anwar Fashion), a small garment factory employing 35 to 40 workers, stood opposite Alam Traders, an unauthorised chemical warehouse. The workers produced hoodies and sweaters—sold in local markets and exported to Saudi Arabia under the brand Texora Global Ltd. Around 11 a.m., a deafening explosion erupted, and flames and smoke engulfed the building. The roof door was locked, and the narrow staircase below offered no escape. Even children aged between fourteen and fifteen were trapped inside, unable to make it out alive.

When we visited the site the following day, locals, workers, and relatives stood in stunned silence. The fire had been so fierce that rescuers could not enter the warehouse.

For more than fifteen years, workers in Bangladesh have suffered the same recurring tragedies, born of a culture of impunity. Time after time, factory owners have evaded accountability through political connections and influence. In the post-uprising period, can we afford to allow this pattern to persist?

We have long demanded reforms to the Labour Commission and amendments to labour laws to ensure workers' rights and dignity. The interim government's priority list, we were told, placed the labour sector at the top—to bring it up to international standards. We trusted those promises. Yet the Mirpur tragedy has again stirred our doubts, fears, and anger. The cries of these sixteen workers seem to echo through history—reminding us of Tazreen, Hashem Foods, Chawkbazar, Tikatuli, and Rana Plaza.

History sometimes teaches us lessons—but often, we fail to learn from our own mistakes. Let us hope that this time, the interim government will draw strength from history and set an example by ensuring justice for the victims of Mirpur. Alongside labour law reform, the government must also establish accountability for such structural killings. It must explain how unapproved chemical warehouses and hazardous establishments are allowed to operate in residential areas—and take immediate action to end this negligence.

The number of those burnt to death—sixteen—may yet rise, as more cries of anguish join their ranks. The voices demanding justice for those lost at Rana Plaza, Tazreen, Hashem Foods, and countless other tragedies return to haunt us once more. None of us can claim innocence.

We can only hope that the cries of the dead reach the ears of the government. They must not forget—those "unknown" workers who died nameless were the very ones who gave their lives in the people's uprising, alongside students and ordinary citizens.

The progress of Bangladesh's labour sector and the dignity of workers' lives are inseparably linked. If we are to achieve democratic transformation, we cannot separate workers' rights, safe working conditions, and human dignity from national economic development. The new Bangladesh cannot bear another death born of negligence, nor another dream crushed by indifference. It must be built on unity and justice.

We must remain vigilant before the coming election. The new social contract of the new Bangladesh cannot exclude the workers. The dying cries of those sixteen workers still echo around us—we want justice, we want dignity as human beings, we want the guarantee of a natural death.

To prevent another tragedy like Mirpur, justice must be ensured. The culprits must be punished, and warehouses must be removed from residential areas. Equally necessary is a new social order—one that belongs to the workers. We need a new image of the labour movement, and a new class of entrepreneurs who will see workers not merely as tools for profit but as partners in progress.

Even after 24 hours, firefighters continued to battle lingering smoke and toxic fumes at the Rupnagar fire site. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN / THE DAILY STAR

Taslima Akhter is the President of Bangladesh Garment Sramik Samhati (BGWS) and the Bangladesh Trade Union Federation. She is also a Member of the Labour Reform Commission (2024), a Recipient of the Rokeya Padak (2024), and a Member of the National Tripartite Consultative Council (NTCC).

The disappearing snails of Sundarbans

Protecting bonojibis is key to saving biodiversity

MD RAIHAN RAJU

The bonojibis—forest-dependent communities who survive on the resources of the Sundarbans—are increasingly turning to the collection of snails and mud clams as traditional fishing grounds continue to shrink under successive conservation restrictions. Although the Forest Department has imposed a strict ban on harvesting these aquatic species, many bonojibis continue to do so discreetly, driven by the absence of viable alternative livelihoods.

Edible snails and mud clams (bivalve mollusc species) are abundantly found across the estuarine zones, alluvial forest terrain, and riverbeds of the south-western deltaic regions of Bangladesh. Despite their abundance, the bonojibis of the Sundarbans hardly collected them in earlier times. A few locals used to gather these species to produce lime from their hard shells or to make compost fertilisers.

However, since June 2025, fishers from the villages adjacent to the forest have begun collecting snails and mud clams rampantly. It signals that a new profession for survival is in its embryonic stage. Within just one and a half months, sometime around July, the prices of snails and mud clams increased significantly following the surge in demand. By the end of August and beginning of September, the bonojibis were selling their catch to agents at a rate of Tk 80 per kilogram. For the last few months—particularly from June to August—the forest-dependent people have largely relied on catching snails and mud clams for their daily subsistence.

There are multiple local agents in these regions already connected to the global supply networks of shrimp, soft-shelled crab, live eel fish, live crab, and chilled fish. Some of these agents have recently begun purchasing snails and mud clams from the Sundarbans region.

In mid-September, the Bangladesh Forest Department moved to stop the widespread collection of snails and mud clams in the Sundarbans after discovering that the practice—illegal under existing forest laws—was causing serious environmental damage.

Snails and mud clams play a crucial role in maintaining ecological balance, enabling collaborative survival and sustenance among the various species within the wetland ecosystem. Most importantly, they help to sustain the food cycle, which is essential to maintaining ecological stability.

Snails and mud clams also play a vital role in maintaining aquatic ecosystems by absorbing harmful substances from river and canal beds, thereby helping to purify water and keep aquatic habitats healthy. They are often called natural filters. These species also serve as a crucial food source for fish, crabs, shrimp, and other aquatic organisms, thus supporting the biodiversity of these environments. A significant number of wild animals ultimately rely on snails and clams for survival.

Bags filled with snails and mud clams collected from the Sundarbans by local bonojibis are stacked and awaiting sale to agents who export them abroad. PHOTO: MD RAHAMATULLAH

The removal of these species threatens not only water quality but also the entire aquatic food chain and ecosystem. Protecting snails is therefore essential for preserving biodiversity and sustaining the livelihoods of communities dependent on the Sundarbans' aquatic resources.

Furthermore, snails and clams play a key role in stabilising alluvial mud, helping to protect coastal areas from erosion. Rampant and unregulated collection of these species can disturb the sediment layer, leading to increased riverbank erosion and long-term environmental degradation. Snail and clam collection often requires digging up riverbeds and alluvial mudflats, causing significant ecological damage. This practice disrupts natural habitats, destroys fish breeding grounds, and leads to a decline in crab and other aquatic populations.

According to Fazlul Hoque, Range Officer of Satkhira, Bonojibis began collecting snails and clams in large numbers due to shifting global food habits and rising international demand. These species have become delicacies in Singapore, Indonesia, China, Taiwan, and parts of Europe. Consequently, exporters have incentivised local communities to collect them. Although licensed to export live blood clams from the ocean, many exporters are reportedly sending mud clams instead.

However, these are not the only causes. Over the past two decades, fishing grounds in the Sundarbans' coastal regions have shrunk drastically due to various conservation laws and regulations. An elderly woman fisher from Munshiganj Union stated, "More than half of the forest is closed to us. Nobody can enter throughout the year. Bondo bada has permanently restricted us. Some influential people enter these areas by bribing local forest officials, but fishers like us are not allowed." The business that has thrived around these restricted areas is locally known as bondo-bada byabsa.

Another respondent from the coastal region lamented, "Earlier we never used to catch snails and clams. But since the forest is closed, what else can we eat if we do not collect them? They also fetch a good price."

For the Bonojibis of the Sundarbans, survival is becoming increasingly uncertain. More than half of the forest is now restricted for biodiversity conservation, and during certain periods, the entire forest is declared off-limits. Seasonal bans on fishing further tighten the noose, leaving marginalised fishers struggling to survive. With their traditional fishing grounds shrinking and no alternative livelihoods available, many have turned to collecting snails and mud clams, especially during the closed months of June and July. These landless Bonojibis, whose lives are inseparably linked with the forest's ecology, cannot simply be excluded in the name of conservation. Their forced disconnection undermines both their survival and the forest's balance. Once protectors of the ecosystem, they are now driven by desperation—an unintended consequence of rigid, top-down conservation policies that ignore the human side of sustainability.

Md Raihan Raju is a journalist at The Daily Star and can be contacted at raihanraju29@gmail.com

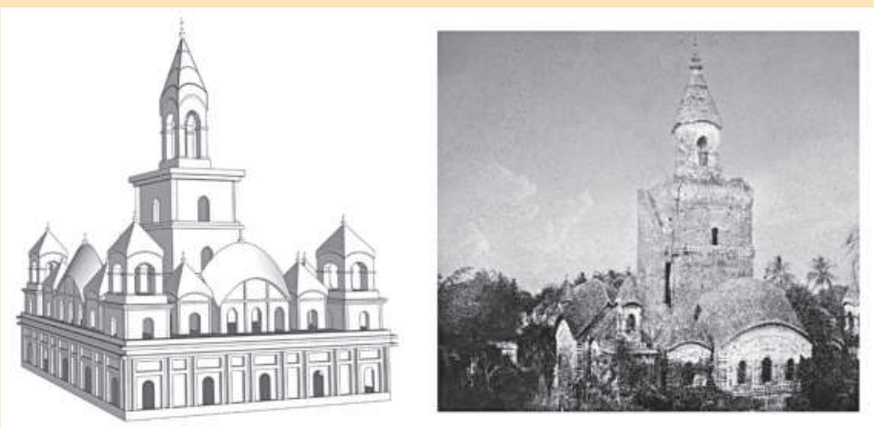
IN SEARCH OF RAJNAGAR

A city devoured by the Padma

HASSAN M. RAKIB

While human settlements have originated on the banks of rivers, the landscape of Bangladesh is a vast graveyard of cities and villages, as noted by architect and writer Kazi Khaleed Ashraf. Catapulted into tempestuous rivers or slowly eroded by their treacherous movements, the cities of Bengal have always been at the mercy of its rivers. The most powerful and capricious of them all is, of course, the Padma. Whiplashing along its banks, especially as it nears the confluence with the Meghna, the Padma has devoured an untold number of villages and settlements, upturned countless lives, and then, in some compensatory way, laid over the same drowned settlements new silt and sand, almost as if on a clean slate. Of all the settlements on the Padma's hit list, the most fabled are Rajnagar and Japsa.

Rajnagar was a settlement adorned with grand temples, palaces, gateways, large water tanks, festive grounds, and bustling bazaars – its architecture was unique and original even in the context of the entire subcontinent. Once a symbol of pride, the nagar was gradually washed away by the Padma. The tale of Rajnagar is about a vanished city and the *tandab* unleashed by Bengal's rivers. Yet the story of Rajnagar is not merely one of disappearance; it is also a story of Bengal's architecture and heritage, which we hope to retrace.



A reconstructed image of the Saptadash Ratna Temple, based on an old photograph (right) recently published by Philip Thornton.

Rajnagar was situated in southern Bikrampur, specifically near the present-day Zajira area of Shariatpur district. Before Rajnagar, this area was known as Beel Deonia, a name that still survives. Using the location of Rajnagar on English cartographer James Rennell's map of 1777, geographers at the Bengal Institute place it somewhere in the northeast of present-day Shariatpur.

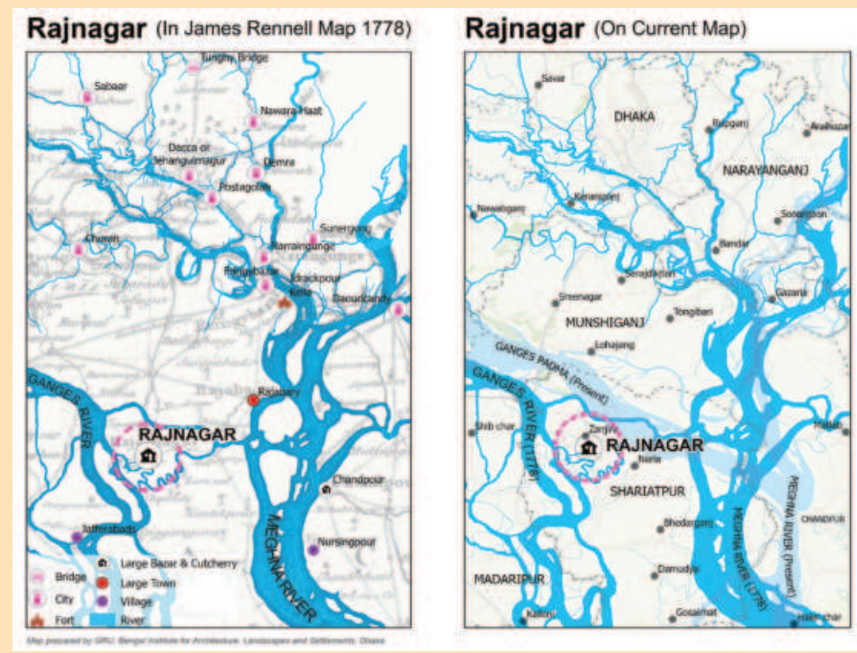
Established by Raja Rajballabh in his birthplace, Beel Deonia in Bikrampur Pargana, Rajnagar was later developed by his son and grandson. According to documents and descriptions, the town was rich in architecture, featuring wondrous buildings and tanks. The most notable structures were temples with high spires known as *ratna* or 'jewels,' visible from the Padma River. The English cartographer James Rennell, in his journal chronicling his riverine journey from Calcutta to Dhaka in 1764, mentioned spotting multiple-spired structures – what he called the "pagodas" of Rajnagar. Among these, described in various texts, were nine-spired, five-spired, seventeen-spired, and the most famous twenty-one-spired buildings, or the *ekobingsho ratna*. A visual reference of the twenty-one-jewel structure appeared in the book *Pundra Nagar to Sher-e-Bangla Nagar: Architecture in Bangladesh* (1997, edited by Saif Ul Haque, Kazi Khaleed Ashraf, and Raziul Ahsan). The image was a sketch made by Joseph Scott Philip in 1833.

Son of Krishnajiban, Rajballabh was born in Beel Deonia in 1707. He began his career as a *muhuri* in the *Qanungo* division of the Mughal administration. In 1756, he became the *dewan* of Dhaka under the Mughals and was granted the title of Maharaja. As an accomplice of Ghasheti Begum and Mir Jafar in the power struggle against Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula, he acquired an ill repute. Like Rajnagar, Rajballabh too met a watery end when Mir Qasim reputedly had him drowned in 1763. Though Raja Rajballabh is portrayed as a controversial character in Bengal's history, his Rajnagar remains a unique example of innovative regional architecture and urban planning.

In its present-day location, Beel Deonia lies on the south bank of the Padma River. When Rajnagar was established, the Padma flowed further to the west. From Rennell's map, we can infer that the Arial Khan River channel was one of the main courses of the Padma, and the confluence of the Padma and Meghna rivers was then located further south, near Mehendiganj in Barishal district. The Padma there flowed as a smaller river. Although Rennell marked it as the Kaliganga River on his map, historians such as Jatindramohan Ray argued that it was the Rothkhola River. South of Rajnagar, a river ran from the south-west to the east. From Rennell's map, we can see that one mouth was located at Chekondy and another near Mulfatganj; however, no name was assigned to it. It may be the present-day Palong River, which has also undergone reshaping. When the Kaligonga or Rathkhola River became the main course of the Padma, it began eroding both banks. On the north bank, there were also some establishments by Raja Kedar Roy, one of the twelve *baro bhuiyans*. Destroying these establishments, the river acquired the name Kirtinasha (destroyer of human achievements). After ravaging the north bank, Kirtinasha gradually engulfed the Rajnagar area from the south bank.

In describing the architecture of Rajnagar, the twenty-one-spired building stands out as the most unique. Erected by Raja Roy Gopalkrishna, the fifth son of Rajballabh, the structure was in fact the main entrance to the palace compound. The three-storey building had chambers for soldiers on the ground floor, and the first-floor chambers were for musicians who used to play morning ragas from there. This remarkable building, not quite a temple, was a composite of features from traditional Bengali temple architecture. It featured an "ek bangla" (*chala*) roof on the gateway, ten *ratna*-type small chambers, and, most remarkably, eleven *math*-like spires at the top, forming a bow that could be seen from a great distance.

The Rajnagar palace complex had multiple yards. The Saptadash Ratna temple was in the third yard. It was a *Dol Mancha* used for *Dol* festivals. As a *mancha*, pavilion-like structures are seen in Bengal in a variety of forms, from the simplest pavilion to complex multi-storeyed ones such as the Dol Mancha in Rajnagar. The Dol Mancha was called the Saptadash (seventeen) Ratna temple as it had four storeys and 17 jewels or *ratnas*.



Location of Rajnagar identified using James Rennell's map, prepared by the Geographic Research Unit of the Bengal Institute.

On every *Basanti Purnima*, the idol of goddess Lakshmi-Narayan was taken from the Pancharatna Temple and placed on the topmost pavilion of the Saptadash Ratna on the golden throne. This procession carrying the idol was called *Dol Jatra*. At Rajnagar, this was a famous and significant festival. From Rasik Lal's description, we get a vibrant picture of the celebration. People used to wear beautiful dresses called *basanti* and play with red-coloured dust.

The structure of the Saptadash Temple was very high. There were more structures of such height in the complex, but the Saptadash Temple was the only one that was accessible from the highest floor. Its pinnacle could be seen from the other side of the Padma River. People used to follow it as a landmark for crossing the river.

In addition to its fascinating structures, Rajnagar also had numerous large tanks and reservoirs. The largest one was called Rajsagar; there was a saying that it was so big that one could not hear gunfire from the other side. Another notable location adjacent to Rajsagar was known as Old Dighi. A significant and famous festival known as *Kalboishakhi Mela* was held for two months on the west bank of the dighi. The largest *Charak Puja* and festival of Bengal was also held there.

A Nabaratna Temple was located in the old *haveli* or building complex beside the famous Old Tank. This old complex, which once housed the tank, was the residence and homestead of Krishna Jiban Mojumdar, the father of Rajballabh, who established the complex and also erected the *Nabaratna* before the place became Rajnagar. The Nabaratna is a two-storey building with a square plan. On the first floor, there were eight small *chala* structures known as *jhitki ghar* and one high spire known as *math*. All structures had ornamental peaks, known as *ratnas*. For these nine structures with peaks, the building was known as *Nabaratna* or the nine-peak, or jewel, building. Krishna Jiban Mojumdar's old complex was the last one destroyed by the river Kirtinasha, and the Nabaratna was the last building to fall.

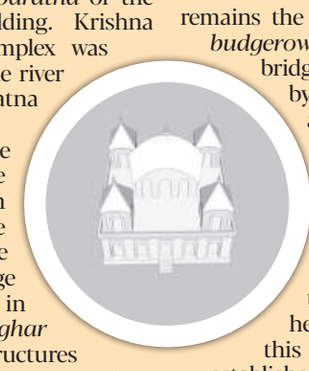
The Pancharatna Temple was situated on the same campus as the Saptadash Ratna Temple. The name Pancharatna, or the five jewels, indicated a large Bengali *chala* structure in the centre, and four *jhitki ghar* or small pavilion-like structures in the four corners. Compared to other Pancharatna structures, which typically have one large *jhitki ghar* as the *ratna*, a centrepiece in the middle of the roof, the Pancharatna Temple in Rajnagar had a large Bengali *chala* structure as its central pavilion. This characteristic makes this temple unique. Across the front yard of the Pancharatna was a building complex with an inner courtyard where Rajballabh used to reside.

The story of Rajnagar also includes the nearby complex at Japsa. Sometime in the 17th century, Bedgarbha Sen, a *vaidya* or physician, came from Jashore and settled in Deonia (now in Shariatpur). He had two sons. One remained in Deonia, while the other, Nilkantha, moved to the nearby town of Japsa. There, Gopiraman Sen, the great-grandson of Nilkantha and a *khasnabis* (private secretary) of a high official of *Khas Mahal*, built six palaces or *havelis* for his six children. From that, the group of buildings came to be known as the "Choy Habeli" of Japsa. The most famous structure was a high-spired one, known as Japsa Math, which was marked on James Rennell's map of Bengal. He also mentioned that it could be seen from both rivers. In later days, with Krishnaram's son Lala Ramprasad becoming famous, the complex also came to be known as "Lala-Bari". Masons from Japsa were very skilled and well known for the construction of *maths* and other building structures, and used to travel to various places in Bengal to construct buildings.

Japsa Habeli was a centre of education. There was a *maktab* for learning Farsi and a *chatushpathi* for learning Sanskrit. Raja Rajballabh came here at an early age to learn Farsi. Many poets and writers from this family were engaged in intense literary production. Lala Ramgati, son of Lala Ramprasad, wrote a Bengali poetry book, *Mayatimir Chandrika*. The daughter of Ramgati was known as Bidushi Anandamayi, who wrote *Harilila* (the story of Satya Pir/Satyanarayan) along with her uncle Jaynarayan. Jaynarayan also wrote *Chandimagal* in 1763.

Waterways were the primary means of trade, transportation, and social activity in Rajnagar. One of the prominent waterways in Munshiganj district was Taltola Khal, which connects the Dhaleshwari and Padma rivers. This canal still exists and is navigable during the monsoon season.

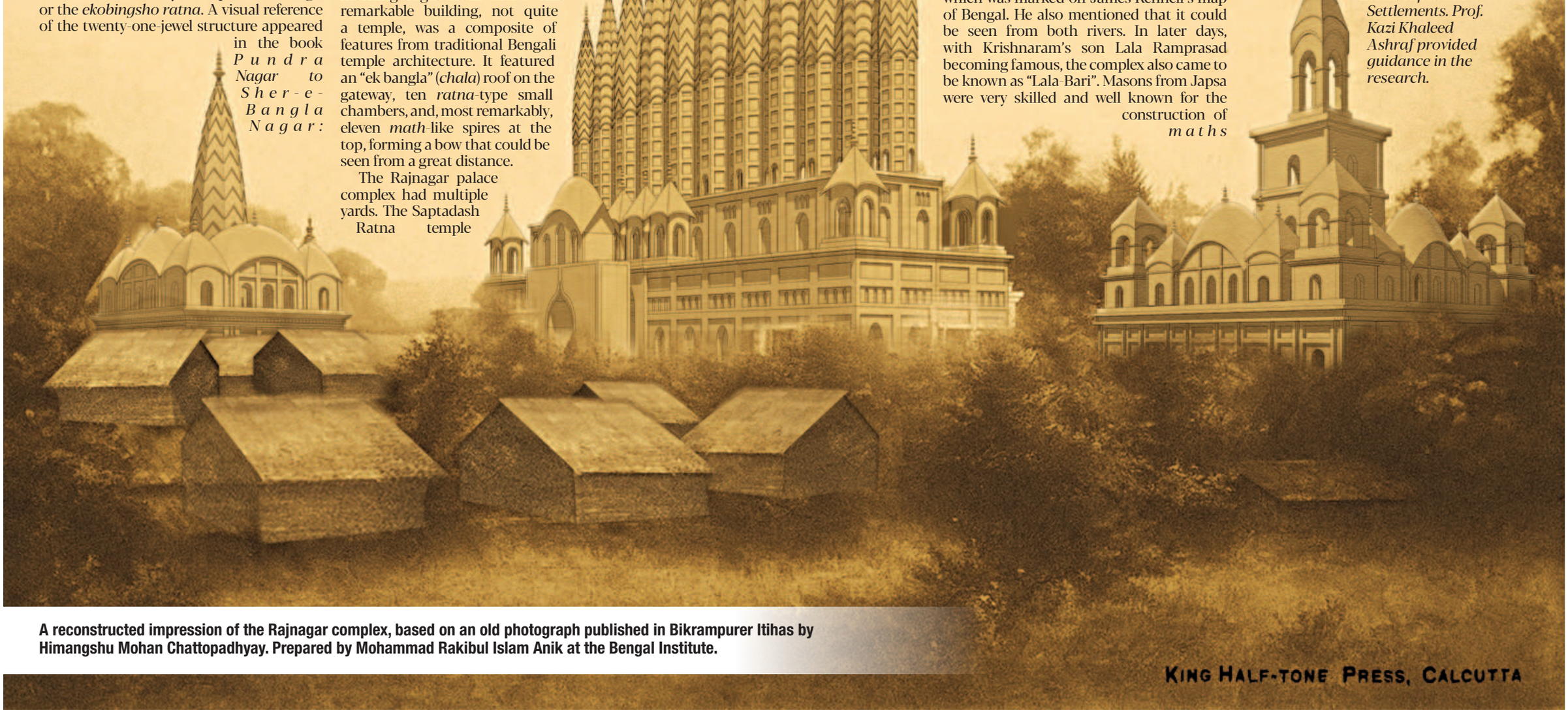
Rajballabh and his son Ramdas used this canal as the main route for travelling from Dhaka to Rajnagar. Some historians believe Rajballabh excavated it for this purpose. Others suggest that Rajballabh merely made it navigable, the canal being much older. Taltola Khal, which is nearly 13 km long, meets the River Padma at Dohori village in Louhajang, also known locally as Dohori Khal. The other end meets a branch of the Dhaleshwari River at the Taltola Bazar point. James Rennell, during his expedition, used this canal at a time before the Kaliganga River became Kirtinasha and destroyed Rajnagar. From his documents, we learn that he entered this canal from the Nullua-Kaliganga junction, which no longer exists. He marked Taltola point at Mirganj, which remains the name of a village today. His *budgerow* went underneath an old brick bridge, which was later destroyed by the East India Company to allow larger mercenary boats to pass. On the eastern bank, he marked a 'pagoda'. Possibly, this was the Pancharatna Temple, established by Rajballabh, which is now lost. It was said that he or his son Ramdas, starting from Rajnagar at night, used to reach here by dawn and perform *Sandhyavandana*. He dedicated 300 bighas of land for the maintenance of this temple.



Reconstructed image of the Pancharatna Temple by Hassan M. Rakib.

Rajnagar might have disappeared, but its legacy endures through poetry, maps, and historical documents, and remains a significant part of Bengal's architectural and cultural heritage. Although there is no photograph of any of the Rajnagar structures (except a historic one of the famous seventeen-jewel temple published by Philip Thornton recently on his Facebook page), there exist some simple hand-drawn depictions and sketches of different structures. We have tried to reconstruct the visuals of those structures in new drawings and present them here for the first time.

Hassan M. Rakib *is an architect and coordinator of design projects at the Bengal Institute for Architecture, Landscapes and Settlements. Prof. Kazi Khaleed Ashraf provided guidance in the research.*



A reconstructed impression of the Rajnagar complex, based on an old photograph published in Bikrampurer Itihas by Himangshu Mohan Chattopadhyay. Prepared by Mohammad Rakibul Islam Anik at the Bengal Institute.

PHOTOS: **MOSTAFA SHABUJ, AZAHAR UDDIN, SOHRAB HOSSAIN, PRABIR DAS**

GOLD FEVER

The relentless surge in the prices of gold, driven by central banks and geopolitical panic, is putting Bangladeshi families in a tight corner, but some people are still buying the precious metal for potential gain

In Bangladesh, where the precious metal is deeply embedded in the social fabric as both a primary form of wealth and an indispensable wedding gift, the price of one bhori has hit an unprecedented Tk 2.16 lakh -- nearly double the cost of 26 months ago.

SUKANTA HALDER

The gold earrings Farzana Khalid purchased for her sister-in-law's wedding were intended as a meaningful treasure. But as the private-sector employee in Dhaka settled the bill, the Tk 50,000 gift plus the soaring making charges felt more like a financial burnout than a cherished ritual.

"Gold prices have surged dramatically," Farzana Khalid says, reflecting that a chain with a small locket now costs nearly twice as much as it did just two years ago.

The budget that once covered a substantial ornament now barely stretches to a token.

"At my own wedding 13 years ago, relatives gifted me small pieces of gold," she recalls. "Today, such gestures have become increasingly rare as many families struggle to keep up with the costs."

In Bangladesh, where the precious metal is deeply embedded in the social fabric as both a primary form of wealth and an indispensable wedding gift, the price of one bhori has hit an unprecedented Tk 2.16 lakh -- nearly double the cost of 26 months ago.

According to the Bangladesh Jeweller's Association (Bajus), the local market is convulsing, with customer turnout plummeting by as much as 50 percent.

The crisis is most acute among Bangladesh's middle class, the very demographic that historically fuelled the market.

Sheikh Mohammad Musa, owner of Shahadat Jewellers in Barishal, has seen his daily sales drop by nearly 60 percent.

"Even a year ago, people would gift gold ornaments during weddings or festivals," he says. "But as prices have surged, that gifting trend has sharply declined."

In Khulna, one trader estimates that about 90 percent of buyers have disappeared. Many recent purchases are only made under duress.

"Many weddings took place during Durga Puja, but very few people actually bought gold for the ceremonies," he explains. "Those who had old gold at home reused it. Others, just to maintain appearances, bought a small ring or a thin chain."

The pain extends down the income ladder. Poorer customers, those who used to buy small pieces worth Tk 2,000-Tk 5,000, have "stopped buying altogether," says Masudur Rahman, vice-president and spokesperson for Bajus.

Sukanta Das, a banker from Sreemangal who is making savings for his 2026 wedding, must slash other expenses just to meet his marital obligations.

"In our social context, a wedding without gold is often viewed negatively," says Das, expressing the pressure to conform.

The market response has been a shift from buying new pieces to exchanging or selling old ones.

Homemaker Kabita Ghosh in Barishal confirms the trend, noting that she and her family used to gift small gold ornaments during Durga Puja, but in recent years, "hardly anyone gives such gifts anymore."

GLOBAL ANXIETY AND THE FRAYING DOLLAR

Local price spikes are tethered to a relentless global rally that has sent the international price per ounce above $4,000.

The surge, an estimated 54 percent rise this year, is attributed by a Reuters report to heightened global anxieties ranging from geopolitical tensions and inflationary risks to sluggish European growth and uncertainty surrounding US monetary policy.

Analysts at Société Générale have already suggested that, on the back of surging institutional flows, reaching

$5,000 per troy ounce is "increasingly inevitable."

This surge is being fuelled by several distinct, interwoven forces. One of the most significant has been the long-held inverse relationship between gold and the dollar. Gold's best start since the 1970s comes as the dollar is on track for its worst year since 2017.

Another big engine powering the rally since 2022 has been record

purchases by central banks, mainly in developing countries, who want to diversify their reserve assets away from the US dollar. These annual acquisitions have surpassed 1,000 tonnes since 2022.

According to World Gold Council data, global central banks, excluding the Federal Reserve, held 29,998.4 tonnes at the end of June. That implies, at current prices, the value of official bullion reserves outside the US would be around $3.93 trillion, a fraction higher than the end-of-July number for total foreign holdings of Treasury securities, which stood at $3.92 trillion.

Globally, gold has, in value terms, risen from just 10 percent of central bank reserves a decade ago to around 24 percent at the end of June. For

private investors, this structural shift, coupled with geopolitical fears, has triggered a speculative wave. A record $26 billion poured into gold-backed exchange-traded funds during the third quarter.

Bangladesh holds 14.28 tonnes of gold, compared with Pakistan's 64.75 tonnes and India's 879.98 tonnes, according to data from the World Gold Council.

For Bangladesh, the global dynamics are compounded by chronic domestic market imperfections.

While the country's annual domestic demand is estimated at 40 tonnes, industry insiders allege that around 80 percent is met through smuggling, a process that drains substantial revenue from the government and keeps local prices at a sharp premium to international rates.

According to central bank data, 21 authorised dealers imported less than 1 tonne of gold over the past five years.

Due to insufficient legal gold imports to meet domestic demand, traders say, gold brought in under baggage rules has become a major source of supply.

Moreover, following the Covid-19 pandemic, the sharp depreciation of the local currency taka against the US dollar has also contributed to the relentless rise in local gold prices.

An analysis by Bajus clearly maps the dramatic rise.

The real acceleration began recently: gold crossed Tk 50,000 per bhori for the first time in January 2018; it hit Tk 100,000 just five years later in July 2023, reached Tk 150,000 in February this year, and has now surged past Tk 200,000.

Even with prices at this level, fewer people are selling their existing gold. Many track global rates on mobile apps and are betting on continued appreciation.

"They assume if they sell today, they might get Tk 10 lakh, but if they wait a month, they might get Tk 12 lakh," says Bajus vice-president Rahman, explaining that only those absolutely forced by circumstances are selling or exchanging the metal.

Bajus argues that stability and transparency can only be achieved by formalising the supply chain.

"Unlike other countries where central banks import gold, Bangladesh relies on recycled gold and baggage inflows," Rahman says, suggesting that allowing the Bangladesh Bank to import directly could reduce volatility, improve transparency, and bring local prices closer in line with global benchmarks.

Atef Hasan, chief financial officer of Gold Kinen, a local startup that allows users to buy, sell, and store gold in personal vaults, says the current surge reflects these broader global market shifts.

"History once again reminds us that during economic uncertainty, gold remains a sustainable and dependable store of value," he says.

In Bangladesh, prices have risen by nearly 56 percent in 2025 alone, prompting a positive change in perception.

Hasan says his company has observed a moderately increased interest among their customer base in purchasing gold bars and coins, especially their newly launched 0.5-gram gold bar.

He believes gold is "no longer considered merely for its ornamental value but as a credible and strategic savings and investment tool."

Some buyers purchase jewellery, anticipating further increases. But for now, the surging price of the yellow metal is doing more than re-rating central bank reserves; it is rewriting the culture of gifting for many families in Dhaka and beyond.

[The Daily Star's Khulna correspondent **Dipankar Roy** *and Barishal correspondent* **Sushanta Ghosh** *contributed to this report.]*