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## JULY CHARTER, REFERENDUM BNP softens stance, Jamaat still rigid

NCP concerned over implementation uncertainty

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Although the BNP is not fully satisfied with the government's decisions on key issues regarding the July charter's implementation, it has chosen a softer stance over the matter, ruling out any stern move for now.

On the other hand, the Jamaat-e Islami has stuck to its demand for holding a referendum on constitutional reforms in the charter before the national election, warning of indefinite sit-ins if its call was ignored.

Meanwhile, the National Citizen Party expressed frustration over the announcement, saying that there is still uncertainty over full implementation of

**BNP does not want to start a new dispute over July National Charter**

the July charter. Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus unveiled the decisions in a televised address on Thursday after the parties missed a one week deadline set by the government to reach a consensus on the unresolved July charter issues.

As per the announcement, the national election and the July charter referendum will be held on the same day, a decision that matched the BNP's demand.

The government also decided that an upper house of parliament will be formed through a proportional representation system on the basis of

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**AL cannot take part in national polls**

**Yunus tells UK minister**

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has said the Awami League would not be able to take part in the upcoming national election as its activities have been suspended under the country's anti-terrorism laws.

He said the Election Commission has subsequently removed the party from the official list of registered political parties.

Prof Yunus made the remarks on Thursday evening during a meeting with visiting British Minister for International Development Baroness Jenny Chapman at the State Guest House Jamuna.

During the meeting, he reaffirmed his government's commitment to ensuring that the upcoming general election will be free, fair and inclusive.

The two discussed a wide range of issues, including the February general election, tackling illegal migration, boosting

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## REFERENDUM QUESTION ‘Too complicated for voters’

MOHNUDDIN ALAMGIR

Despite deep disagreements over the timing of the referendum and other issues, major political parties agreed on one point yesterday – the proposed four-part referendum question is too difficult for voters to understand.

All parties that participated in drafting the July charter – BNP, Jamaat-e Islami, National Citizen Party, Communist Party of Bangladesh, Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal,

Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, Ganosamhati Andolon, and the Revolutionary Workers Party – said the set of questions for a “Yes/No” vote is illogical and likely to confuse voters.

In the July National Charter (Constitution Reform) Implementation Order, 2025, issued on Thursday, the referendum question contains four parts covering major constitutional reforms.

The question reads: “Do you

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## Govt debt tops Tk 21 trillion

### GOVT DEBT SITUATION

DOMESTIC DEBT EXTERNAL DEBT

	IN TRILLION TAKA
*AS OF JUNE 30	
2022*	8.49
2023*	4.96
2024*	9.62
2025*	6.73
2022*	10.77
2023*	8.12
2024*	11.95
2025*	9.49

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and  
WASIM BIN HABIB

For the first time, Bangladesh's outstanding government debt has surged past the Tk 21 trillion mark, pushed upward by chronically weak revenue collection and years of ambitious development spending.

The amount reached Tk 21.44 trillion at the end of June, nearly 14 percent higher than Tk 18.89 trillion a year earlier, according to the Finance Division's debt bulletin released on Thursday.

Foreign borrowing stood at Tk 9.49 trillion, or 44.27 percent of the total, continuing a steady

rise over the past five years. In 2021, foreign debt was Tk 4.20 trillion, roughly 37 percent of total liabilities.

Domestic borrowing also grew, rising around 11 percent to Tk 11.95 trillion from Tk 10.76 trillion last fiscal year. In 2021, the figure was Tk 7.22 trillion.

The trend shows that foreign borrowing has expanded at more than twice the pace of domestic debt.

Finance ministry officials attributed the surge to post-pandemic budgetary support from development partners and heavy disbursements for mega

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم  
**In Everlasting Memory of**  
**MD. MUJIBUR RAHMAN**

Founder Chairman of Blessing Group  
Managing Director of Roxy Paints Ltd.

Former President of Bangladesh Paints Dyes &amp; Chemicals Merchants Association

On his 5th Death Anniversary

The void he left, no one can heal. The memories that we cherish no one can steal. His values will continue to inspire us to take his noble works forward. He will live on with us always in our thoughts and forever in our hearts.

Deeply missed and remembered by.....

BLESSING GROUP

(15 November, 2020)

**YOUR HOLIDAY STARTS HERE**

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**Emirates**

Woman assaulted in Dhanmondi 32 sent to jail in uprising case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sent to jail a woman who was assaulted in Dhanmondi 32 by another woman during the Awami League-announced "lockdown" on Thursday, after showing her arrested in an attempted murder case linked to the July uprising.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Partha Bhadra passed the order after police produced Salma Islam before the court, said a court sub-inspector.

A video of the assault went viral on social media on Thursday.

In the footage, a woman was seen hitting Salma with a plastic pipe near what was once Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's residence in Dhanmondi 32, claiming Salma was affiliated with the AL.

Police later rescued Salma and took her into custody.

Police produced her before the court yesterday with an application to show her arrested as a suspect in an attempted murder case.

The court granted the plea and sent her to jail, rejecting her bail petition, said a court staffer.

According to the case documents, Abu Sayed Md Saim joined protests on Satmasjid Road in Dhanmondi on July 19 last year, where he was shot in the back.

Saim filed a case on December 1 last year with Dhanmondi Model Police Station against 37 people, including top AL leaders.

## MY DHAKA

# Dhaka through the eyes of a rickshaw-puller

JANNATUL BUSHRA

If there is one vehicle that truly defines Dhaka, it has to be the rickshaw! Three wheels, one bell, some flashy artwork, and infinite audacity. A contraption that makes you question science: how does it survive in a city full of apps, cars, and speed limits?

And the man who drives it, the rickshaw-wala mama, is perhaps Dhaka's truest narrator. Because nobody understands the city better than someone who navigates it inch by inch, hour after hour.

No, he doesn't write essays. At first glance, he looks ordinary -- a lungi or pant, a patched shirt or panjabi, a rusty bell, the usual. But once the wheels start moving, the urban data begins to flow.

"What's wrong with the city?" you ask. His answers are never bureaucratic. There is no mention of zoning codes, population density, or infrastructure. Instead, he says,

"Bhodrolokrao signal mane na, apa." (Even gentlefolk don't follow traffic signals, sister).

To him, this is the root of all chaos. Not climate change, not megacities, not density

graphs, and certainly not his own occasional defiance of traffic rules. He talks about the city like it's a classroom where everyone cheated their way out of the traffic chapter -- except him.

Although he learned his lessons well! He knows every alley where time moves strangely faster, every shortcut that saves minutes, and which



streets to avoid because "political meeting" or "traffic police await."

Forget Google Maps -- his knowledge is built on years of fieldwork.

He also believes Dhaka runs on two economies: the fare according to the metre in his head, and the fare dictated by the rider's outfit, mood, or corporate ID. Expensive shoes? Tk 20 extra. Student look? Tk 10

discount, along with a fifteen-minute lecture on education reform. Yet, he listens, too. He has heard every flavour of urban anxiety: breakups in Banani, burnout in Shahbagh,



PHOTO: STAR

existential dread in Mohakhali. Sometimes, he even diagnoses. A fifteen-minute ride with him is no less than a therapy session.

The mama is simultaneously economist, sociologist, therapist, and political analyst -- yes, all rolled into one.

Ask him about the city, and he doesn't call it unlivable. He points out lived problems you might add to a survey. Five minutes in his rickshaw, and you'll know his family tree, the fastest shortcuts not just in Dhaka but Rangpur or Sherpur, and how much he

misses home.

Humour surfaces sometimes. But it's never cheap -- it's collected from lived pain. You might struggle with his accent, but you cannot miss his care, his observation, his insight. Some U-turns will make your heart skip, but he insists they save time. So, you listen.

And, as always, the rickshaw-wala mama has the last word -- part complaint, part confession, fully Dhaka. "In this city, everyone talks, no one's ready to listen," he says.

Dhaka argues with itself at every intersection. Everyone wants order here, yet no one is willing to wait. Horns blare, engines stall, tempers flare -- and somehow, against all logic, the city moves. And through it all, the rickshaw-wala mama keeps moving too.

For him, Dhaka is a ledger of small sacrifices. In every ride, every cramped turn, there is stubbornness, grit, and a pulse that refuses to quit. Yes, the city is exhausting, maddening, sometimes absurd. But it is alive. And its rhythm is strongest in those who navigate it inch by inch, knowing that survival here is both a chore and a kind of quiet pride.

## BNP softens stance, Jamaat still rigid

FROM PAGE 1  
total votes received by each party. The PR system was among Jamaat's core demands.

At a Standing Committee meeting on Thursday night, BNP leaders reviewed Yunus' address and voiced dissatisfaction over several elements.

Yet, as part of a strategy to keep the election at the heart of its politics, the party decided against any aggressive response for now. Acting chairman Tarique Rahman virtually presided over the meeting at the party chairperson's Gulshan office.

The party does not want to start a new dispute over the charter at this stage. The government has placed proper importance on holding the election, a key demand the party has long been pushing for," a Standing Committee member told this newspaper after the meeting.

"We will now closely watch how the government proceeds in the coming days," the member added.

Speaking at an event in Shahbagh yesterday, Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed said the BNP remains committed to upholding the July National Charter exactly as signed.

Welcoming the referendum timing, he added, "If any coercive proposals beyond the signed July charter remains, the people will give their decision on these matters through the referendum on the election day."

**DEBATE AT STANDING COMMITTEE**  
During the three hour meeting, Salahuddin detailed discrepancies between the signed charter and the July National Charter (Constitution Reform) Implementation Order, 2025 issued by President Mohammed Shahabuddin soon after Yunus' address.

Under the order, the next parliament would also function as a Constitutional Reform Council to implement the charter's reforms.

The government had "bowed to the

demands of BNP" by planning both votes on the same day, Jamaat Nayeb-e-Ameer Syed Abdullah Muhammad Taher said while delivering the alliance's official reaction.

He said they were "surprised" that instead of adopting the consensus commission's recommendations, the chief adviser introduced "many changes by compromising with a particular party," implying the BNP.

"As a result, the people and the nation are disappointed," Taher said at a briefing in Moghbazar, flanked by alliance leaders.

Taher argued that the nation had wanted the referendum on a separate day and claimed that if it were held earlier, "80 percent people would go against the thinking and ideology of a particular party."

He said the BNP had refused to accept any referendum held first, and the government had "bowed to their demand."

They also questioned the legitimacy and authority of a Constitutional Reform Council whose members would not be directly elected -- an issue that had surfaced during the National Consensus Commission talks.

Salahuddin further criticised the government for choosing the PR system for the upper house despite divergent views in the consensus process.

Some members said the president has the authority to issue ordinances, but the head of the state does not have the constitutional power to issue an order of this kind.

**JAMAAT REMAINS RIGID**

The eight-party alliance, including Jamaat and Islami Andolan Bangladesh, maintained its uncompromising demand for holding the referendum before the national polls.

The government had "bowed to the

interest payments upward as well. Last year, the government paid Tk 13,2460 crore in interest, a 17 percent year-on-year increase.

Interest payments on foreign loans jumped 21 percent, while domestic loan payments rose 16 percent. In 2016, interest payments were Tk 31,669 crore; by 2021, the amount had almost doubled to Tk 63,823 crore. Interest payments on loans taken from commercial banks through treasury bills and bonds rose 43 percent year on year.

The debt bulletin said Bangladesh's external debt-to-GDP ratio remains moderate and within the IMF's "safe zone", but several economic indicators now demand caution.

Ensuring long term sustainability, it warned, will require more disciplined debt management, rigorous scrutiny of new development projects, stronger improvements in implementation efficiency, accelerated domestic resource mobilisation, and deeper efforts to expand and diversify export earnings.

Prof Mustalizur stressed that the next government must prioritise domestic resource mobilisation, which is currently about half the South Asian average, through stronger technology, training, and financing for the National Board of Revenue, alongside improved governance.

Future borrowing, he said, must be undertaken with far greater caution, carefully weighing interest rates, sources,

first quarter and \$3.34 billion in the first half. The IMF will monitor such borrowing quarterly under its loan programme.

A senior finance ministry official said the ceiling stems from the IMF's latest Debt Sustainability Analysis (DSA), which reclassified Bangladesh as a "moderate-risk" country in FY23 and FY24.

The downgrade from "low risk" reflects growing repayment pressures relative to exports and revenues.

According to the DSA, Bangladesh's debt-to-export ratio surged to 162.7 percent in FY24, far above the IMF's earlier projection of 116-118 percent.

The debt bulletin said Bangladesh's external debt-to-GDP ratio remains moderate and within the IMF's "safe zone", but several economic indicators now demand caution.

Ensuring long term sustainability, it warned, will require more disciplined debt management, rigorous scrutiny of new development projects, stronger improvements in implementation efficiency, accelerated domestic resource mobilisation, and deeper efforts to expand and diversify export earnings.

The International Monetary Fund has imposed a ceiling on Bangladesh's foreign borrowing for FY26, citing mounting risks in external debt.

Under the cap, the country may borrow a maximum of \$8.44 billion this fiscal year, including \$1.91 billion in the

Reform Council's authority, are still unclear.

"What will happen if the council cannot complete its job within the 180-day timeframe?" NCP Member Secretary Akhter Hossen asked while giving the party's official response to the chief adviser's address at a press conference yesterday.

One of the alternative proposals recommended by the consensus commission had stated that the proposed reforms would be automatically incorporated into the constitution in case of the Constitution Reform Council's failure to complete the process within a 270-day timeframe. The final order shortened the deadline, but dropped the proposal on automatic inclusion.

"The language used in the order is subject to interpretation ... As a result, instead of ensuring transparency, the order has created further questions," Akhter said.

He urged the government to promptly provide a clear explanation of the order and remove all ambiguities so that the ongoing crisis surrounding the July charter can be effectively resolved.

He demanded that the referendum result must be made binding so that no one can deviate from the charter.

"All in all, the ambiguities and interpretive flexibility left within the July charter implementation order make it vulnerable to exploitation by those who will come to power. We find it deeply concerning," he said.

Chief Coordinator Nasiruddin Patwary said the party would sign the charter only after receiving clarity on the implementation order, referendum framework, and reform roadmap.

"We wanted to dismantle the authoritarian framework of 1972, but through this order, we are once again walking the path of the 1972 Constitution," he said.

Leaders of Islami Andolan Bangladesh, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, Khelaf Majlis, Bangladesh Nezame Islam Party, JAGPA, and Bangladesh Development Party were present.

**NCP SEES VAGUENESS, RISKS**

The NCP said several key aspects, such as the implementation order, referendum question, fate of dissent notes on crucial reform proposals and the Constitution

repayment schedules, and grace periods to avoid a cycle in which new loans only serve old debts.

**UNIFIED DEBT MANAGEMENT**

Bangladesh is now preparing to establish a unified Debt Management Office to strengthen public debt oversight and reduce fiscal and operational risks, following recommendations from the IMF and the World Bank.

The multilateral lenders, which are providing technical assistance, presented their proposals at a workshop earlier this month at the Finance Division.

A joint mission observed that debt management responsibilities are currently scattered across multiple agencies, creating coordination gaps, inconsistent data, and difficulties in formulating and executing a comprehensive strategy, according to a Finance Division statement.

It noted the absence of a centralised, audited debt database and a formal cash flow forecasting mechanism -- both essential for informed and cost-effective borrowing.

The mission proposed consolidating all government and government-guaranteed debt functions under the Finance Division, beginning with restructuring the Treasury and Debt Management Wing.

These conditions are sharply increasing the country's debt-servicing burden, he added.

An Asian Development Bank report last month noted that Bangladesh has recorded the fastest rise in foreign debt among South Asian nations, with public and publicly guaranteed loans more than tripling in 13 years.

The growing stock of debt has pushed

Russia pounds Kyiv with drones, missiles  
Eight killed, dozens injured;  
Zelensky says Ukraine hit targets in Russia successfully

REUTERS, Kyiv

Russia launched a massive drone and missile attack on Kyiv early yesterday, killing eight people and wounding dozens in strikes on energy facilities, apartment buildings and infrastructure, Ukrainian officials said.

President Volodymyr Zelensky said the Russian forces used 430 drones and 18 missiles, making the attack one of the biggest on the capital so far.

Kyiv was responding with long range strikes, he said, urging allies to toughen sanctions on Russia.

The air force said most of the drones and missiles were shot down, but officials said falling debris and fires damaged high-rise apartments, a school, a medical facility and administrative buildings across nine districts in the city of about 3 million.

**BBC apologises to Trump over speech edit**

**Rejects defamation claim**

REUTERS, London

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) sent a personal apology to US President Donald Trump on Thursday but said there was no legal basis for him to sue the public broadcaster over a documentary his lawyers called defamatory.

The documentary, which aired on the BBC's "Panorama" news programme just before the US presidential election in 2024, spliced together three parts of Trump's speech on January 6, 2021, when his supporters stormed the Capitol. The edit created the impression he had called for violence.

"While the BBC sincerely regrets the manner in which the video clip was edited, we strongly disagree there is a basis for a defamation claim," the broadcaster said in a statement.

Lawyers for the US president threatened on Sunday to sue the BBC for damages of up to \$1 billion unless it withdrew the documentary, apologised to the president and compensated him for "financial and reputational harm."

## AL cannot take part

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trade, the Rohingya crisis, and cooperation in the aviation and maritime sectors.

Prof Yunus said the July charter would mark "a new beginning" for Bangladesh,



PHOTO: COURTESY

reflecting the aspirations of millions who took part in the July-August uprising last year.

**Too complicated for voters'**

FROM PAGE 1  
consent to the July National Charter (Constitution Reform) Implementation Order, 2025, and the following proposals related to constitutional reforms mentioned in the July National Charter? (Yes/No)

a) The election-time caretaker government, the Election Commission, and other constitutional institutions will be formed in line with the process outlined in the July charter.

b) The next parliament will be bicameral. A 100-member upper house will be formed in proportion to the votes received by parties in the national parliamentary election. Approval from a majority of the upper house will be required to amend the constitution.

c) The parties that win the next parliamentary election will be bound to implement the 30 proposals agreed upon in the July National Charter, including increasing women's representation in parliament, electing the deputy speaker and several committee chairpersons from the opposition, limiting the prime minister's term, enhancing presidential powers, strengthening fundamental rights, ensuring judicial independence, and empowering local government.

d) Other reforms mentioned in the July National Charter will be implemented as per the commitments of the political parties.

“



Our dream is to produce capable cadets. We want female leadership and women's empowerment. Fifty percent of this country is women; excluding them while planning development would be wrong. That's why women must be trained and empowered with proper skills.

WAKER-UZ-ZAMAN  
Chief of Army Staff General at the opening session of a three day first reunion of former cadets at Joypurhat Girls' Cadet College

**The Jurain area under DSCC has long been facing a myriad of issues -- from dilapidated roads and alleyways to persistent waterlogging and a high rate of dengue infections -- while authorities concerned turn a blind eye to the problems.**

## Jurain turns into dengue hotspot

Waterlogging, poor drainage worsen outbreak

HELEMUL ALAM

Eleven-year-old Mrinmoyee Hridita of Jurain recently recovered from dengue after week-long treatment at a city hospital. Her family considers it a stroke of luck, as this was her third dengue infection in two years.

"We took her to Dhaka Community Hospital when her condition began to deteriorate after three days of fever. She stayed there for seven days," said her father, Mizanur Rahman.

**At least 326 dengue patients have died as of yesterday, while 83,066 others have been hospitalised across the country this year. Of them, 156 deaths and 11,920 cases are from DSCC areas.**

"My daughter has been infected with dengue a total of six times between 2018 and 2025, including twice in 2024 alone. This time her life was in danger. In 2023, she suffered from both dengue and typhoid," said Mizan, a resident of Purba Jurain.

He said all five members of their family have suffered multiple infections of dengue, chikungunya, and other mosquito-borne diseases in recent years.

"There are no clear statistics on dengue cases in Jurain this year. People are afraid to speak. However, I have been informed by hospitals and pharmacies that the situation is worse," he said.

Mizan pointed to Purba Jurain Government Primary

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## TITAS GAS KHAL ROAD IN PURBA JURAIN

## Battered road makes commute a daily hassle

HELEMUL ALAM

Residents of Dhaka's Purba Jurain continue to suffer as the Titas Gas Khal Road remains in a battered state, forcing many to walk instead of taking rickshaws.

Last Monday, Josna Begum, who

Grocery shop owner Abdur Rahman said the road has been in a dilapidated condition for the past five years.

"Recently, two women were seriously injured when their rickshaw overturned. Such incidents regularly happen as the damaged road gives



lives in the Mistir Dokan area, was seen carefully making her way along the damaged road. "It is better to walk than to take a rickshaw on this damaged road. I have a spinal injury, the jerks cause unbearable pain," she said.

way to numerous potholes. Apart from battery-run rickshaws, no other vehicles even enter the area due to the road's present condition," he said.

Echoing him, resident Mohammad Sumon said waterlogging persists for

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A girl moves cautiously along a road in Dhaka's Purba Jurain area. Despite repeated complaints by residents, many roads there remain in a dilapidated condition.

PHOTO: STAR

## 'Reinstate 170 workers'

**Bangladesh High Commission in Malaysia writes to Mediceram**

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh High Commission in Malaysia has formally written to Mediceram, requesting the company to reinstate more than 170 migrants dismissed on October 31 and to thoroughly review the workers' allegations.

The high commission made the statement on its Facebook page yesterday, two days after Ansell Limited -- the Australia-based buying company -- announced it had suspended its relationship with Mediceram, a small Malaysian supplier of ceramic formers.

Mediceram terminated 177 Bangladeshi workers on October 31 after they protested the non-renewal of work visas for more than 90 migrants.

In early November, Malaysian authorities deported 16 of the workers after Mediceram allegedly forced them to the airport.

Upon returning home, the workers formed human chains in Dhaka and Cumilla and submitted a letter to Expatriates' Welfare Adviser Prof Asif Nazrul, seeking justice over the forced deportation.

Each migrant had spent between Tk 4,50,000 and Tk 6,00,000 to migrate to Malaysia. Many received irregular and low wages, and several had their work permits left unrenewed.

The high commission said it contacted the company's chairman and the workers after receiving the termination notices, offering cooperation to resolve the issue peacefully. It held several rounds of discussions with both sides.

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Fishermen mend their nets inside the Sundarbans. After obtaining permits from the Forest Department, they live in temporary shelters in Dublar Char for six months to catch fish and earn their livelihood. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Ahead of ICT verdict, Hasina denies all accountability

**The deposed PM talks to BBC**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina has denied committing crimes against humanity during the July 2024 deadly crackdown, days before the International Crimes Tribunal-1 delivers its verdict in a major case against her and two top aides on November 17.

In her first BBC interview since fleeing Bangladesh on August 5 last year, Hasina dismissed the trial in absentia as a "farce" run by a "kangaroo court" controlled by political rivals. Prosecutors are seeking the death penalty.

Hasina stands accused of orchestrating hundreds of killings -- 1,400 deaths according to UN estimates -- during mass protests against her autocratic rule. She is also accused of personally ordering security forces to fire on protesters in the weeks before she fled.

In an email to the BBC, she said she "categorically" denied the allegations. "I'm not denying that the situation got out of control, nor that many lives were lost needlessly. But I never issued any order to fire on unarmed civilians," she said.

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## Murder case filed over killing of judge's son

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A case was filed yesterday in connection with the attack on the residence of a judge that left his son dead and his wife injured in Rajshahi.

Rajshahi Metropolitan and Sessions Judge Mohammad Abdur Rahman filed the case with Rajpara Police Station, naming Limon Miah, 35, of Bhabiganj in Gaibandha, as the sole accused.

On Thursday, the judge's son, Tawshif Rahman Sumon, 16, was killed and his wife, Tasmin Nahar Lusi, 44, was injured in the attack.

According to the case statement, Judge Abdur Rahman left his flat around 8:45am on Thursday to attend court.

"While doing my office work around 3:42pm, my gunman and driver informed me that my

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## DU teacher sent to jail over sexual harassment

DU CORRESPONDENT

Police have detained Prof Ershad Halim of Dhaka University's Chemistry Department following multiple allegations of sexual harassment made by male students.

He was produced before a court yesterday morning.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Mahbub Alam sent him to jail, said a sub-inspector working at the court.

Halim was detained from his Shewrapara residence around 11:00pm on Thursday, said Mirpur Model Police Station Officer-in-Charge Sajjad Rumon.

"He was arrested after a student filed a case accusing him of sexually harassing male students," said the OC.

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## 'Disability inclusion must move beyond box-ticking'

Says ILO specialist in interview with Star

NILIMA JAHAN

Bangladesh has made notable legal progress for persons with disabilities, ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and adopting strong domestic laws and action plans.

However, implementation remains weak, particularly for women with disabilities. They experience higher illiteracy, limited education, and very low participation in vocational training (0.13%) and formal employment (3.13%).

Their overall labour force participation is just 11.34%, with 93% excluded from employment versus 59% of men, according to National Survey of Persons with Disabilities 2021.



In this regard, Jürgen Menze, disability inclusion specialist at the ILO, shared his insights in an interview with The Daily Star.

Menze coordinates the ILO Global Business and Disability Network, which links more than 40 multinational

Laws are good on paper, but what's happening with implementation? Everybody has to push. We have to hold the government accountable for what they ratified.

Jürgen Menze

enterprises and national networks to promote employment for persons with disabilities in the private sector.

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## 'Sramik Dal leader' shot dead in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A man was shot dead by unidentified miscreants in Chattogram's Rangunia upazila on Thursday night.

Police said the victim -- Abdul Mannan, 40 -- was an upazila-level leader of the Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal, although they could not confirm his exact position in the pro-BNP organisation.

Witnesses said Mannan was attacked in Sarafbhata union around 9:00pm, when the armed men opened fire and fled the scene immediately afterward.

Balayat Hossain, assistant superintendent of police (ASP) of Rangunia Circle, told The Daily Star that Mannan had recently returned to Bangladesh after working in Saudi Arabia, following the fall of the Awami League government.

"Last night [Thursday night] he went there to attend a wedding ceremony with his wife. Later, locals found his bullet-riddled body beside the road, around 3km from the wedding venue," Hossain said.

Police said Mannan was shot in the chest and on the left side of his forehead. His mobile phone was missing from the scene.

## IUB's business conference begins

CITY DESK

The two-day conference on economics, business and technology management -- organised by the School of Business and Entrepreneurship of Independent University, Bangladesh -- kicked off yesterday at The Westin Dhaka, said a press release.

Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairman of the Power and Participation Research Centre, opened the event as chief guest.

He was joined by IUB Board of Trustees Chairman Didar A Husain, Vice Chancellor Prof M Tamim, Pro-VC Prof Daniel W Lund, Acting Dean of SBE Prof Raisul Awal Mahmood, and Conference General Chair Prof Md Mamun Habib, Syed Nasim Manzur, managing director of Apex Footwear, was guest of honour.



PHOTO: STAR

## Barnoi turns toxic as untreated waste pours in

SHOHANUR RAHMAN RAFI, Rajshahi

Once a lifeline for locals, the Barnoi river has turned into a narrow channel overwhelmed by pollution from toxic, untreated wastes flowing into it from drains across Rajshahi city.

Rajshahi City Corporation (RCC) has allegedly been disposing of the city's waste from its 488.59 kilometre drainage network into the river through two canals near Duari and Nowhata points.

"British engineers designed a system in which, during monsoon, floodgates would release water from the Padma to flush the city's drains into the Barnoi, keeping the drainage system clean," said river expert Mahbub Siddiki.

"Now drains require cleaning at least four times a month, but due to negligence, much of the waste ends up in the river," he said.

Rakhi Das from Nowhata under Paba upazila said, "I heard that our ancestors once used the river's water for bathing and cooking. Now we avoid it entirely because of health risks."

Her neighbour, Sudhir Chandra Sarkar, added, "During the dry season, the water

emits an unbearable stench. Those of us who live on the riverbank cannot live normally. The indiscriminate pollution has left the river almost devoid of fish."

Saifur Rahman, who relies on the Barnoi's water for irrigation, said, "Even though we know this water can cause skin problems and damage soil and crops, we have no alternative."

A study by Rajshahi University's Geography and Environmental Science department, in collaboration with the Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, found alarming levels of pollution in the river.

Samples from South Nowdapara showed dissolved oxygen levels as low as 1.2 mg per litre, far below the 4-5 mg required to sustain aquatic life. Conductivity and alkalinity were also abnormally high, indicating excessive dissolved solids and chemical contamination.

Prof Mizanor Rahman of RU said wastewater should be treated and reused instead of being discharged untreated, both to reduce pressure on groundwater and to protect rivers.

"The BSCIC industrial area alone has around 200 factories but lacks an effluent

treatment plant. A dedicated treatment facility is essential to prevent industrial waste being released untreated," he said.

Sheikh Md Mamun, chief conservancy officer of RCC, said sewage management is technically the mandate of Wasa.

"Since they have done nothing, we are monitoring the situation ourselves. We already have a wastewater treatment plant and have submitted a comprehensive project proposal to the government. Once implemented, wastewater will be properly treated before being released into the Barnoi or Padma."

Parvez Mamud, chief engineer of Rajshahi Wasa, said the city would be connected to pipelines feeding a treatment plant near the Barnoi.

"Liquid waste will be treated before being released into the river. RCC's safety tanks will collect residual waste. We are progressing collectively through a structured discussion and planning process."

"Once a donor is selected, preliminary project development will begin, followed by implementation. Fieldwork may take another 1.5-2 years, and full project completion could take 3-4 years," he said.

## Ducsu to celebrate 'Adi Noboborsho Utsab' at DU

DU CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka University Central Students' Union (Ducsu) is set to celebrate Nabanna Utsab as "Adi Noboborsho Utsab" on Pahela Agrahan at the university's Faculty of Fine Arts.

In a joint initiative with Biplobi Sangskritik Oikya, Ducsu will organise a daylong programme on the first day of Agrahan (November 16) at the Fine Arts faculty, Ducsu Literature and Culture Secretary Musaddiq Ali ibne Mohammad told The Daily Star.

According to a press release, the younger generation is gradually forgetting that Pahela Agrahan was once observed as the Bangla New Year in this region.

"To remind today's youth of that history, we have taken the initiative to celebrate Nabanna Utsab as the 'Adi Noboborsho Utsab,'" it said.

The release said Bangla New Year festivities have existed in this region since ancient times, with historians identifying the "Amani or Nabanna festival" held on Pahela Agrahan as the earliest form of New Year celebrations.

"During Emperor Akbar's reign, Baishakh was introduced as the first month of the Bangla year to streamline revenue collection, but Bangalees did not immediately begin celebrating Pahela Baishakh as the start of the year," it added.

"The modern celebration of Pahela Baishakh as Bangla New Year began in the early 19th century with Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore later organised grand festivities at Santiniketan, which were gradually adopted by educated middle-class Bangalee families in Kolkata. In Bangladesh, Pahela Baishakh was first celebrated in 1967," said the press release.

"As the Pakistani authorities opposed the celebrations, they grew more popular among Bangalees with anti-Pakistani sentiments."

Every year, the Faculty of Fine Arts at DU marks Nabanna Utsab with colourful rallies and cultural performances.

## 2 die in Meghna trawler capsizes

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

The bodies of two men, who went missing after a trawler sank in the Meghna in Narayanganj's Sonargaon Thursday night, have been recovered.

Roni Sardar, 20, and Md Shubho, 35, were from Barishal.

Their bodies were recovered yesterday by the Fire Service divers and the River Police from the Sonamoi area, said Inspector Mahbubur Rahman, in charge of Baidyabazar River Police Outpost.

He said the cement-laden trawler was going towards Barishal with three workers on board.

**FLAT FOR SALE**  
Six storied building (Land Area 10 Katha). Apt.- 1st Floor, 8 Dutabash Road, Baridhara, Dhaka-1212. 4000 sq. ft. with Land Area Ratio -1.69 Katha. 04 Bedroom, Contract: 01552647937

NOTICE : THE 23RD ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM)



Cadet College Club Limited

CCCL/SECT/MEETING/GB/00104A/99 13th November 2025

The 23rd Annual General Meeting of the Cadet College Club Limited will be held as per Article 49 of the Articles of Association of the Club.

Date : Saturday, 13th December 2025

Time : 1100 hours

Venue : Cadet College Club Limited, Purbachal. (Plot # 002, Road # 203A, Sector-12, Purbachal New Town)

Agenda :

- Confirmation of the minutes of the 22nd Annual General Meeting held on Saturday, 14th December 2024.
- Consideration of the Annual Report of the Board of Directors for the year 2025.
- Adoption of the Audited Statement of the Accounts for the Financial Year (FY) ended on 30th June 2025.
- Adoption of the Annual Budget for the Financial Year (FY) ended on 30th June 2026.
- Appointment of the Auditor(s) and fixation of the remuneration for the Auditor(s).
- Discussion and Adoption of Resolution(s), if any (proposed by members to the Board and placed as per Article).
- Refurbishment of Multipurpose Shed with Air Conditioning facilities.
- Discussion on the beautification of the green belt around the lake site.
- Any other business allowed by the chair.
- Electio of the Office Bearers for the year 2026.

Primary Members who have cleared their respective Club dues by Thursday, 27th November 2025, are eligible to attend and vote in the 23rd Annual General Meeting of Cadet College Club Limited as per Article 49 (f) of the Articles of Association of the Club.

Sd/  
(Ashraf Hussain)  
Director of Administration and Services



### TENDER NOTICE

1. **Name of the Institution:** Sig Training Centre and School, Jashore Cantonment.

2. **Job Description :** For IT management, maintenance, purchasing and installation of equipment and various training expenses related to the areas of responsibility, including the Cyber Security Lab, Digital Forensic Lab, Disaster Recovery Site of the Army Data Centre.

3. **Date of tender sell:** Upto 14 days from the date of publication of tender notice.

4. **Last date of tender sell:** Upto 14th day from the publication date of tender notice.

5. **Tender opening date:** On 15th day after purchasing schedule (If it is a govt holiday then the date will be next working day).

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Commandant  
Signal Training Centre and School  
Jashore Cantonment  
Mobile Number: 01769-553400

## Disability inclusion must move beyond box-ticking

FROM PAGE 3  
He emphasised that while laws matter, implementation is key. "Laws are good on paper, but what's happening with implementation? Everybody has to push. We have to hold the government accountable for what they ratified," he said.

Menze pointed to the UN CRPD Committee's 2022 concluding observations as a key guide for Bangladesh. Ratifying ILO Convention 159 on employment and vocational rehabilitation could further strengthen social dialogue and help build more inclusive labour markets.

Real progress, he stressed, depends on collective action. "It's not only one labour market actor working alone. It involves companies, government, trade unions, and OPDs to share learning and adopt practical solutions.

Employment challenges are especially severe in the

or organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), but they must learn from each other. An inclusive ecosystem where partners contribute their complementary strengths is essential," he said.

"People with disabilities know best what they need at work. Companies must innovate and change to be truly inclusive. It's not an add on; it changes how companies operate," he said.

National Business and Disability Networks, active in over 45 countries including Bangladesh, play a central role by providing a collaborative space for private companies, government agencies, trade unions, and OPDs to share learning and adopt practical solutions.

Employment challenges are especially severe in the

private sector, where many people with disabilities struggle to secure formal jobs, Menze said.

"Companies can take proactive steps rather than waiting for policy reforms. Globally, leading firms

have introduced on-the-job learning programmes for employees lacking formal education or vocational skills due to discrimination. Affirmative action can support specific groups, such as women with disabilities or people with intellectual disabilities," he said.

He also stressed the importance of involving women's rights groups and OPDs to address gender-specific barriers.

"One of the biggest obstacles for women, with or without disabilities, to enter and stay in the labour market is care

responsibilities, which still fall disproportionately on women," he said.

"Companies must incorporate this reality into programmes for women with disabilities."

"Sometimes we work on women, sometimes on people with disabilities, sometimes on youth or the elderly. Ultimately, we need labour markets that work for all, with workplaces that are accessible, accommodating, and responsive to individual needs," Menze said.

Accessibility -- both physical and digital -- remains a major barrier, Menze said, stressing that accessibility alone does not guarantee inclusion.

He highlighted the "three A's" -- accessibility, accommodation, and awareness.

Mental accessibility

-- awareness and understanding of disability needs -- is equally vital, he added.

He noted that neither governments nor companies can rely on goodwill alone.

"OPDs play an essential role in advocating and holding authorities accountable. Companies can use structured tools, such as the Global Business and Disability Network's self-assessment tool, to evaluate HR practices, facilities, accessibility, and procurement," he said.

Menze's message was clear: disability inclusion must go beyond formality or box-ticking. True inclusion requires collaboration, accountability, and sustained action.

With the right systems, employers can move from good intentions to real results -- recognising persons with disabilities as equal contributors to national progress, Menze concluded.

### Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Office of the Executive Engineer, RHD

Road Division, Shariatpur.

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e-mail: cesar@rhd.gov.bd

তারিখ: ১১-১১-২০২৫

স্মারক নং: ৩৫, ১, ৮৬৬৯, ৮৬৮, ০৭, ০০২, ১২-১৭১৮

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the below works.

Tender ID No	Package No.	Name of Work/Package Description	Last Selling date & time	Opening date & time	Remarks
1172508	e-GP-13/EE/SRD/2025-2026.	Pavement Maintenance work by Base Type-I & DBS Wearing Course of Mostafapur-Madaripur-Shariatpur (Monohar bazaar)-Ibrahimpur-Horin-Chandpur (Bhatialpur) Road (R-860) at 30th km (P) & 31st Km (P) under Shariatpur Road Division, during the year-2025-2026.	23-11-2024 17:00 AM	24-11-2025 13:00 PM	Only online tender.

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP portal. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and e-GP help desk (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>).

Sheikh Nabil Hossain  
ID No-602255  
Executive Engineer (C.C), RHD  
Road Division, Shariatpur

GD-2433

### Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Office of the Executive Engineer, RHD

# INTERNATIONAL

## DRUG BOAT New US strike kills four in Caribbean

AFP, Washington

US forces have struck another alleged drug trafficking boat in the Caribbean, upping the death toll in the contentious anti-narcotics campaign to 80, US media reports said Thursday.

Washington began carrying out such strikes – which experts say amount to extrajudicial killings even if they target known traffickers – in early September, taking aim at vessels in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific.

This week's reported strike took the toll to 80 deaths in 20 strikes in international waters.

The timing of the strike was not clear, with broadcaster CBS reporting the boat was destroyed on Monday and the New York Times reporting the strike took place on Wednesday, both citing an unnamed Pentagon official.



Workers clean up debris outside an apartment building damaged in an overnight Russian drone and missile strike in Kyiv, Ukraine, yesterday. President Volodymyr Zelensky said Russian forces used 430 drones and 18 missiles and Kyiv was responding with long-range strikes. It was one of the biggest attacks on the capital so far.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Modi's alliance wins Bihar assembly polls

REUTERS, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling coalition comfortably retained power in Bihar, one of India's poorest and most populous states, a vote count showed yesterday. The result gives him a boost after last year's disappointing national vote.

Winning Bihar is crucial because it is India's third-most populous state with nearly 130 million people and it sends the fifth-highest number of lawmakers to Parliament. Control of the eastern state strengthens any party's power in the Hindi heartland and often helps to shape national political narratives.

Modi's National Democratic Alliance coalition easily crossed the majority mark of 122 seats, with data from the Election Commission of India showing it was leading in more than 170 seats. TV channel NDTV said it was ahead in 209 seats, a potential gain of 87 seats from the last election.

"Bihar's mandate is clear!" Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party said on X. "The people have made it clear - now development is the identity. Not jungle raj, good governance is needed!" Political analysts have said one of the key factors in the Bihar election was Modi's September transfer of 75 billion rupees (\$853 million) to millions of women in the state under an employment programme.

## Israeli army builds walls inside south Lebanon

Say UN peacekeepers; Beirut curbs money transfers to cut off Hezbollah funding following US pressure

AFP, Beirut

United Nations peacekeepers said yesterday that Israel's army has built walls in south Lebanon near the UN-demarcated Blue Line, the de facto border, nearly a year after a ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah.

In October, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon surveyed "a concrete T-wall erected by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) southwest of Yaroun. The survey confirmed that the wall crossed the Blue Line, rendering more than 4,000 square metres of Lebanese territory inaccessible to the Lebanese people," UNIFIL.



"In November, peacekeepers observed additional T-wall construction in the area. A survey confirmed that a section of wall southeast of Yaroun also crossed the Blue Line," it added, urging Israel to withdraw.

Meanwhile, Lebanon announced

yesterday that money changers and transfer companies must comply with stricter rules as the country faces heavy US pressure to regulate its cash economy and cut off Hezbollah funding.

The move comes days after a visiting US official said his country was determined to cut off Tehran's funding to the group, and after the US Treasury said Iran's Revolutionary Guards had transferred over \$1 billion to Hezbollah this year, mainly via money exchange companies.

Lebanese authorities are seeking to disarm Hezbollah, which was badly weakened in a recent war with Israel.

## LDA terms order 'unconstitutional'

FROM PAGE 12

charter, everyone must remain prepared and vigilant so that no one can create divisions in unity.

In a separate statement, Bazlur Rashid Firoz, general secretary of Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal, said the order issued in the name of the president has created serious constitutional complications.

On the other hand, Revolutionary Workers Party General Secretary Saiful Huq welcomed the idea of holding the referendum on the same day as the national election.

However, it expressed concern over whether an interim government has the authority to issue any constitutional order, according to a statement.

The statement noted that such an order issued in the name of the president lies beyond the mandate and jurisdiction of an interim government.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) President ASM Abdur Rab said that any renewed political crisis over the implementation of the July National Charter could push the state into disaster.

"At this critical juncture for the nation, political divisions, antagonism, and rivalries must be avoided," he said in a statement sent to media.

For the sake of national security and stability, a balance of constitutional, political, and social safeguards must be established through dialogue and understanding," the JSD president added.

Meanwhile, AB Party Chairman Mojibur Rahman Monju and General Secretary Asaduzzaman Fuad, in another statement, said the party supports the chief adviser's proposals in the greater interest of the nation.

They believe this is a relatively acceptable solution.

The leaders expressed hope that BNP, Jamaat, and all political parties will avoid division, participate in the election in a free, fair, and festive environment, and guide the country toward a stable democratic path.

## Country sees more arson attacks

FROM PAGE 12

Around 9:00pm, a crude bomb exploded in front of the Mohakhali kitchen market, said Rasel Sarwar, OC of Banani Police Station. No casualties were reported.

Meanwhile, the Detective Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police arrested five leaders and activists of the AL and its affiliated bodies in the past 24 hours for allegedly attempting sabotage and preparing for flash rallies.

The AL, whose activities are now banned, announced the "lockdown" after the International Crimes Tribunal-1 set Thursday for fixing the date for delivering the verdict in a case against deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina on charges of crimes against humanity. Later, the tribunal set November 17 as the verdict date.

Apart from police and army, 12 platoons of Border Guard Bangladesh are patrolling the capital to strengthen security and maintain law and order, said Shariful Islam, the BGB public relations officer.

In Manikganj, unidentified miscreants set fire to a parked school bus early yesterday, seriously injuring the driver, Tabrez Khan, 45, who was asleep inside. The incident occurred around 3:00am in the Folsatia area of Shibalaya upazila, said Sub-Inspector Suman Chakraborty.

Tabrez was first taken to the Sadar hospital and later referred to Dhaka's National Burn and Plastic Surgery

Institute for advanced treatment.

Shibalaya Police Station OC SM Aman Ullah said investigators are looking into whether the attack was an act of sabotage.

In Barguna, a parked bus of Swarna Paribahan was set on fire around midnight in the Bandhghat area in Amtali upazila. Police later arrested five activists of various AL associate bodies for their alleged involvement, said Amir Hossain Serniabat, an officer of Amtali Police Station.

The arrestees are Ataur Rahman Russell, 29; Parvez Khan, 28; Tamoy Gazi, 33; Kawshar Ahmed Rony, 33; and Saghir Mallik, 23.

In Gazipur, unidentified miscreants set fire to a parked bus in Baktarpur of Kaliakair upazila around 3:00am. No one was injured, though part of the bus was damaged, said Habibur Rahman Uki, inspector of Kaliakair Police Station. A case has been filed against unnamed individuals.

Monir Hossain, a staff member of Itahas Paribahan, said four persons arrived on two motorcycles around midnight, boarded the bus, set the seats on fire and fled. Locals managed to douse the flames before firefighters reached the spot.

In Kishoreganj, miscreants set fire to a boat moored at a river ghat in Nikli upazila, burning it to ashes and partially damaging another boat. The incident occurred early yesterday under the Kamalpur Bridge

DHAKA SATURDAY NOVEMBER 15, 2025

KARTIK 30, 1432 BS

The Daily Star

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## CHARTER AMENDMENT

## Pakistan top court meets after judges quit

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan's top court called a meeting of all judges yesterday, after parliament passed a constitutional amendment this week that curbed its remit, prompting two judges to quit, saying the reform "stands as a grave assault on the constitution".

Under the amendment, which the political opposition says has undermined democracy, the Supreme Court will no longer hear constitutional cases. The changes also expand the powers of the country's army chief and extend his term.

In theory, the remaining Supreme Court judges can suspend the new law, but lawyers said that was unlikely. Before this week, the court had 24 judges.

Pakistan's government has waged a sweeping crackdown on dissent and its main opposition, which has included jailing former prime minister Imran Khan for over two years. Rights groups say the crackdown has been led by the powerful military and have routinely looked to the courts to safeguard democracy.

The administration of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said the changes would improve governance and reward the army chief for the military's performance in conflict with India in May.

"Pakistan has today taken a constitutional path," Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif told parliament yesterday. "The judges used to do politics. They used to undermine parliament."

## India puts new privacy rules into force

REUTERS, Bengaluru

India put new privacy rules into force yesterday that will make Meta, Google, OpenAI and other companies minimize collection of personal data and give people more control over their information.



The rules, akin to the goals of the EU's GDPR privacy law, come as countries are scrambling to safeguard personal data with the rising adoption of AI.

Companies will only be able to collect data that is necessary for a specified purpose under the rules, which will enforce India's stringent 2023 Digital Personal Data Protection law.

Firms will also have to give Indian users a clear explanation for the collection.

## Govt shelves several key

FROM PAGE 12

Out of more than a hundred recommendations by the commission, 33 were selected by the health ministry for immediate implementation. Of them, 23 were supposed to be implemented by the Health Services Division (HSD), and the rest by the Medical Education and Family Welfare Division.

The HSD even categorised the 23 recommendations into short (six months), mid (one to two years) and long-term (more than two years) actions.

The health ministry regularly updated the Cabinet Division on the implementation status of the selected recommendations, said a ministry official, seeking anonymity.

"More than a month ago, the Cabinet Division struck off 15 recommendations from the list, keeping 18 for regular updates."

In the ministry's progress report, some of the dropped recommendations were marked as "sensitive", which might have led to their exclusion, the official said.

When asked, Health Secretary Saidur Rahman said the Cabinet Division is now seeking updates on the progress of 18 recommendations from the Health Sector Reform Commission and one from the Public Administration Reform Commission.

Regarding the omission of the 15 recommendations, he said in a written reply, "These are big issues which are not easily implementable. They will take a long time."

### THE EXCLUDED RECOMMENDATIONS

Several of the dropped recommendations were considered vital for bringing positive changes to the health sector, said experts and officials.

They include the formation of a health commission to develop a health policy; the establishment of Bangladesh Health Service and the promulgation of an ordinance to create a separate secretariat for it; and the creation of a separate public service commission for recruitment and promotion of doctors.

Suggestions for forming a medical police unit to ensure security at hospitals and clinics, and introducing a five-day academic week for medical colleges were also dropped.

Another recommendation was excluded

introduction of a service centre to swiftly deal with licensing and other administrative matters involving private medical hospitals, clinics, and diagnostic centres.

The suggestion to introduce a time-befitting pay scale for health workers in the private sector was omitted from the list as well.

### SLOW OR NO PROGRESS

The implementation of several of the 18 recommendations, retained by the Cabinet Division for regular updates, has seen little progress over the past seven months, said health ministry officials.

For instance, the reform commission had recommended the enactment of at least nine laws and amendments to more than half a dozen existing ones related to the health sector.

But the health ministry has so far prepared two drafts – the Health Service Workers and Institutions Protection Ordinance 2025, and the Patient Protection and Remedy Ordinance 2025, according to the ministry's update report.

It further said the government has been able to partially implement the recommendation to offer primary healthcare free of cost or at subsidised rates.

No steps have been taken yet to implement the commission's recommendation for making primary healthcare free of cost or at subsidised rates.

They believe this is a relatively acceptable solution.

The health ministry is now conducting "further scrutiny" of at least five recommendations, including the formation of a search committee to recommend appointments to top posts in the proposed health service; the enactment of a health information safety act; and the drawing up of a list of essential diagnostics.

## Country sees more arson attacks

FROM PAGE 12

Around 9:00pm, a crude bomb exploded in front of the Mohakhali kitchen market, said Rasel Sarwar, OC of Banani Police Station. No casualties were reported.

Meanwhile, the Detective Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police arrested five leaders and activists of the AL and its affiliated bodies in the past 24 hours for allegedly attempting sabotage and preparing for flash rallies.

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In Kishoreganj, miscreants set fire to a boat moored at a river ghat in Nikli upazila, burning it to ashes and partially damaging another boat. The incident occurred early yesterday under the Kamalpur Bridge

near Moharkona. Police are trying to identify those involved.

In Khulna, police recovered four bomb-like objects in Terokhada upazila yesterday morning after three explosions near the house of a local union parishad member triggered panic among residents, reports UNB.

Mehedi Hasan, OC of Terokhada Police Station, said the blasts occurred around 3:30am at the entrance of UP member Bellal Molla's house in Parhajigram Katasia Bazar area of Madhupur Union.

## US pushes UN Council to adopt

FROM PAGE 12

force for Gaza, and does not mention the "Board of Peace" that the US has proposed as a transitional administration for Gaza.

Meanwhile, Indonesia has trained up to 20,000 troops to take on health and construction-related tasks during a planned peacekeeping operation in the war-torn enclave of Gaza, the defence minister said yesterday.

## No turning back on economic reforms

### An elected government can use its mandate to finish unfinished tasks

Bangladesh is approaching a moment of political and economic reckoning. The upcoming general election, now twinned with a referendum on constitutional reforms, is expected to provide the incoming government with the mandate and momentum necessary to act swiftly on crucial and long-overdue matters, including the task of putting the economy firmly back on track. The International Monetary Fund's recent decision to pause a crucial review under the \$5.5 billion loan programme, and engage with the "newly elected authorities," only reaffirms the importance of a smooth transition.

The economic anxieties, including stubbornly high inflation and flagging growth, are not cyclical hiccups but rather the consequence of past failures to address deep-seated vulnerabilities. The core demands of the IMF—a simpler, fairer tax system and urgent banking sector reforms—are precisely what the Awami League government long avoided. Following its ouster, the interim government has "made notable progress in maintaining macroeconomic stability," as the IMF has acknowledged. To ease external imbalances and contain inflation, the authorities tightened both fiscal and monetary policies. Importantly, foreign exchange reserves have begun to rebuild following the exchange rate reform launched in May. However, the economy "continues to face significant macro-financial challenges" stemming from weak tax revenue and undercapitalisation in the financial sector.

The next administration will understandably inherit these and other economic challenges. That's precisely why it must embrace necessary but often painful reforms to drive recovery. The political transition following the election must not become a pretext for delay. Bangladesh can no longer afford to postpone the difficult decisions required to clean up state-owned banks, implement tax reforms, and enforce strict monetary discipline. Economic complacency is exactly what the IMF cautions against, and any indulgence at this stage would be a costly mistake.

Bangladesh is required to act on three fronts. First, it must launch the ambitious tax reform demanded by the IMF, eliminating non-essential exemptions and subsidies. The new government must be ready to take on the powerful lobbies that thrive on tax loopholes. Generating more revenue means the state will be capable of expanding social safety nets and infrastructure, key requirements for inclusive growth. Second, the new leadership must take banking reforms forward. That requires political courage, as it will inevitably mean confronting powerful figures and vested interests. Finally, the central bank's independence in conducting monetary policy must be safeguarded. The transition period must not be allowed to undermine the recent progress made in adopting a flexible exchange rate regime.

Delayed or inadequate policy action in addressing fiscal and banking challenges would weaken growth, raise inflation, and increase macro-financial risks. Any success in these cases will be measured by the government's willingness to make hard, politically uncomfortable choices. It's a crucial test, one in which we must not fail.

## Can we climate-proof our coastal towns?

### Long-term planning vital as 22 urban centres face escalating risks

A recent study published in the Journal of Water and Climate Change has brought into focus an often overlooked dimension of climate risk: our coastal towns. According to the Buet-led research team, 22 urban centres across 10 coastal districts now face heightened threats from river erosion, salinity, cyclones, and acute water scarcity, which directly undermine people's livelihoods, health, and social security. While migration to Dhaka gets the most attention, a recent *Prothom Alo* report shows that coastal upazila towns have become the first destination for climate-displaced families from more vulnerable areas, resulting in heavy population pressure and deteriorating living conditions.

The lived realities described in the report make the severity of this crisis clear. In Satkhira city alone, the population has surged from 1.13 lakh in 2011 to over 2 lakh, with 47 slums now housing families displaced from places like Gabura and Shyamnagar. However, these settlements remain waterlogged for months during the monsoon and lack basic amenities. Similar stories emerge from Khulna, where repeated cyclones, including Aila, Sidr, Amphan, and Remal, have forced more than 1.23 lakh people to leave their homes over the past decade and a half. The World Health Organization estimates that over 71 lakh people in Bangladesh were displaced due to climate impacts by 2022, a figure that may rise to 1.33 crore by 2050. These numbers emphasise the urgency of reassessing how we manage vulnerable areas, including coastal towns.

The Buet study identifies towns such as Chalna, Moreganj, Kuakata, Char Fesson, Lalmohan, Kalaroa, Patharghata, Borhanuddin, and Paikgacha as being under high risk due to the combined challenges of population density, poor housing, inadequate water and sanitation, limited transport options, and recurring disasters. Meanwhile, some towns with lower vulnerabilities at present still face high future risk due to exposure to storm surges, embankment breaches, and salinity intrusion. Add to that the fact that unregulated shrimp farming often accelerates embankment damage, worsening displacement. This mismatch between institutional preparedness and the scale of the hazard leaves coastal towns trapped in a cycle of crisis.

Local governments cannot address this challenge through relief operations or isolated interventions alone. What is required is the integration of multi-hazard risk assessments, similar to the approaches outlined by Buet researchers, along with climate-resilient urban planning and stronger municipal governance. There must be durable embankments, safe housing, affordable water supply systems, sustainable drainage, and regulated land use to prevent further ecological damage. Long-term interventions rather than reactive fixes must define our approach. Coastal urban centres are now frontline climate hotspots, and unless the government ensures coordinated investments and proper planning, the ongoing displacement, poverty, and urban breakdown will only intensify.

# Matarbari and Pangaon: Bridging the gap in our logistics chain



Ahamedul Karim Chowdhury is adjunct faculty at Bangladesh Maritime University, and former head of the Kamalapur Inland Container Depot and the Pangaon Inland Container Terminal under Chittagong Port Authority.

AHAMEDUL KARIM CHOWDHURY

Bangladesh stands on the brink of a transformative moment in its maritime history. The Matarbari Deep-Sea Port under rapid development in Moheshkhali, promises to be a game-changer for the country's shipping and logistics landscape. By enabling direct vessel calls to Europe and the United States, it could reduce Bangladesh's reliance on feeder routes through Singapore and Sri Lanka's Colombo, and help reshape its maritime future.

However, a key challenge stands in the way of this transformation: our logistics infrastructure. To truly unlock Matarbari's potential, the government must simultaneously develop the Pangaon Inland Container Terminal properly, creating an integrated port system that links the deep-sea facility with Dhaka, the industrial heart of Bangladesh. Without this inland hub, the port risks getting underutilised, or worse, stranded.

The figures are compelling. Matarbari's first container terminal—a 460-metre quay with an 18.5-metre draught (depth)—is scheduled to accommodate 8,000-TEU (Twenty-foot Equivalent Unit) ships by 2026 or 2027. This represents an enormous leap in capacity for Bangladesh, bringing it within reach of direct Europe-bound sailings. According to forecasts by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), logistics costs could fall by 25-35 percent once Matarbari reaches full operational capacity. Transit time from Bangladesh to Europe could be reduced from 45 days to just 17, cutting shipping costs by more than half.

These benefits are not theoretical. The opportunity to reshape Bangladesh's position in global trade is real. However, these advantages hinge on one critical factor: the ability to move cargo quickly and efficiently between Matarbari, Dhaka, and Chattogram. And here lies our biggest challenge.

At present, the logistics infrastructure connecting Matarbari to the rest of the country is woefully inadequate. Rail links are incomplete, roads are congested, and the Dhaka-Chattogram corridor is already operating at full capacity. If we cannot move containers inland from Matarbari rapidly, all the progress

represented by the deep sea port will be lost. Even the most modern quay will be ineffective if cargo spends days waiting to be transported inland.

This is where the Pangaon Inland Container Terminal comes into play. Located on the Buriganga River near Dhaka, Pangaon was designed a decade ago as a solution to congestion in Chattogram. Although its capacity is relatively modest—roughly 116,000 TEU annually—its strategic location near the capital makes it invaluable. Once a navigable corridor is established between Pangaon and Matarbari, this inland terminal can



Located on Buriganga River near Dhaka, the Pangaon ICT serves as an inland counterpart to the Matarbari deep port, linking the capital to the coast and enabling a seamless flow of containers across Bangladesh's logistics network.

PHOTO: AHAMEDUL KARIM CHOWDHURY

serve as a crucial link in Bangladesh's logistics chain, connecting the capital to the coast and transforming the country's export and import systems.

Experts across the shipping and logistics sectors are increasingly advocating for the leasing of Matarbari and Pangaon under a unified operating framework. By bringing these two terminals under a single operator, or a consortium led by global shipping giants such as MSC or Maersk, Bangladesh could create a seamless logistics network integrating sea, river, and rail transportation. This would reduce bottlenecks, lower dwell times, and establish a true multimodal transport system capable of competing with India's western corridor.

Global shipping lines including

the capital, the government can avoid the costly inefficiencies that would arise from developing Matarbari in isolation.

Critics may argue that leasing the two terminals together could result in an over-concentration of control or slow down the commissioning process. However, these concerns pale in comparison to the costs of developing Matarbari without the necessary inland connectivity. Without the ability to move containers efficiently inland, Matarbari will operate far below capacity. Containers will pile up at the quay, exporters will face delays, and Bangladesh will, in effect, possess a world-class deep-water dock that serves little practical purpose.

By contrast, a synchronised

Matarbari-Pangaon model would unlock the full potential of both terminals. Containers would move more quickly from the quay to the capital, reducing reliance on Chattogram's congested roads and railways. This integrated logistics network would also encourage more efficient use of the country's inland waterways, ensuring that ports such as Narayanganj, Ashuganj, and others can feed and drain cargo effectively.

In essence, this contributes directly to national logistics reform. Every day saved in shipping schedules translates directly into higher competitiveness in global markets, particularly in the EU and the US, which together absorb more than 60 percent of Bangladesh's exports. By reducing the need for transhipment and minimising delays, the government can boost the country's standing in international trade.

The deep port's economics depend on a steady flow of containers. Without the Pangaon link, that flow will be inconsistent, and the port's potential will be wasted. When combined, Matarbari and Pangaon can transform Bangladesh from a feeder-dependent country into a true maritime hub. So, the opportunity before Bangladesh is enormous.

The government must act now to ensure that Matarbari and Pangaon are developed together as part of a single, integrated logistics system. The Public-Private Partnership Authority (PPP) should package both into a single concession and invite bids from experienced global operators. Companies that already have a strong presence in South Asia could be ideal candidates to oversee the development of this integrated system.

For the shipping majors, the benefits are obvious. A direct Matarbari-to-Europe route would cut sailing times by nearly 40 percent, saving significant amounts on fuel and operating costs. However, these savings will only be realised if a proper inland transport infrastructure is in place to move containers swiftly from port to destination. By investing in Pangaon's development, shipping lines can ensure that the entire logistics chain is optimised for efficiency.

The Matarbari and Pangaon terminals are thus twin pillars on which much of our maritime future rests. The message for policymakers is clear: lease them together, manage them as one, and measure success in days saved per shipment. If they can take this bold step, Bangladesh could become South Asia's next major maritime gateway, reaping the benefits of enhanced trade, lower logistics costs, and a stronger presence in global shipping.

## Women journalists key to a strong, inclusive democracy



Irina Schoulgren-Nyoni is Sweden's Ambassador for Human Rights, Democracy, and the Rule of Law.

IRINA SCHOULGIN-NYONI

I write as Sweden's human rights ambassador and as a committed partner to Bangladesh in the shared pursuit of democracy, equality, freedom of expression, and media freedom. In times of political transition, journalism becomes even more vital. But when only a fraction of journalists are women, we must ask: whose voices are amplified, and whose are missing? Journalism that does not reflect the diverse perspectives in society fails its duty to reflect reality. And this limits its potential.

Women journalists face a double threat—the universal risks of censorship and violence, and the gendered risks of harassment, exclusion, and online abuse. These threats are global, and journalism, for many women, has become a battlefield. During the 2024 student-led protests in Bangladesh, the cost of truth-telling became painfully visible, as it has on many other occasions, including for women journalists. These are not isolated incidents but crystal-clear reminders of the need for stronger protections for those who report what some would prefer

hidden.

Sweden's own media sector has faced similar struggles. Despite our early press freedom law from 1766, gender equality in journalism has not come automatically. Investigative roles went to men; lifestyle beats to women. Progress came through pressure—from unions, civil society, and journalists themselves. We have learned that democracy does not automatically deliver inclusion; it must be designed to do so.

In newsroom after newsroom across the world, women journalists describe a familiar pattern: being paid less than male colleagues, denied promotions, and harassed by peers. Some are hired for their appearance rather than their skills. Others are steered away from politics, crime, or conflict, and assigned to "soft beats" like fashion or food. These are not just personal setbacks; they are structural barriers that often push women out of journalism and negatively affect the overall quality of journalism.

Yet despite these challenges, women journalists are driving change. They report from the streets, moderate

debates, and lead investigative work. Their contributions expand civic space and challenge stereotypes. As Bangladesh's national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam wrote, "The good done by civilisation—half created by man, the rest by woman." That truth must apply to journalism, too.

Today, new technologies are reshaping the media landscape and,

**Women journalists face a double threat—the universal risks of censorship and violence, and the gendered risks of harassment, exclusion, and online abuse. These threats are global, and journalism, for many women, has become a battlefield.**

with them, the risks. Disinformation, hate speech, and algorithmic bias threaten journalistic integrity. Artificial intelligence, if used ethically, can support inclusion, but it must not become a tool for surveillance or censorship. Proposed AI and data protection laws should be carefully reviewed to ensure they do not undermine media freedom or disproportionately harm women journalists.

There are reasons for optimism. Over 20 newsrooms have signed on to a new initiative, a Gender Charter

of Commitments for News Media, which Sweden has proudly supported to make Bangladesh's media sector a safer working environment and a place from which women's and men's realities are portrayed equally. The interim government's initiative for structural reforms—particularly the Media Reform Commission's recommendations—can, if implemented, provide stronger protections for journalists, fairer media ownership, and independent oversight. At the same time, the UN Human Rights Office has been established in Dhaka, aiming to safeguard human rights including freedom of expression. These steps matter.

As both Bangladesh and Sweden prepare for national elections, the stakes are high. A free, independent, and inclusive media is essential not only for credible elections but also for a vibrant democracy. Sweden welcomes all efforts to protect freedom of expression, ensure the safety of journalists, and embed gender equality in media policy and practice.

I have seen how both women and men stand to gain from equality. It is by embracing the strength of multiple perspectives that societies are enriched. Focusing our efforts on creating equal opportunities, rather than on prejudice or fear of losing privilege, is a winning recipe for sustainable development in its broadest sense.

# The China pivot for students merits attention



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza  
is professor of English at Dhaka  
University.

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

"Seek knowledge even if you have to go to China"—this popular saying is fast becoming a reality for our students. A recent claim by the Chinese ambassador confirms that 20,000 Bangladeshi students are currently studying in China. However, many of the Western datasets do not include this figure. The Unesco website updated in 2024 mentions 52,799 students and offers a top ten list featuring the US (8,524), the UK (6,586), Canada (5,835), Malaysia (5,714), Germany (5,046), Australia (4,987), Japan (2,802), India (2,606), South Korea (1,202) and Saudi Arabia (1,190). ICEF also has a similar list with different ranks and higher figures, claiming the UAE as the number one destination for Bangladeshi students, followed by Malaysia.

China does not appear in any of these lists. Yet, the country has been strategically investing to become a target for higher education, especially for students from the Global South. According to the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, quoted by Chinese American chemist Peidong Yang, China is the top destination in Asia for international students. In 2018, it accounted for 10 percent of the global market (*Handbook on Migration to China*, p. 9) and welcomed 492,000 international students. This is far below the 1.1 million students going to the US or 670,000 students going to the UK (Unesco TNE trackers). However, the rise of international students in China tells a lot about the changing educational landscape. This data is further complemented by the number of Chinese universities ranked by the international students.

During my recent visit to China as a fellow at the Shanghai Institutes of International Studies (SIIS), I experienced the phenomenal growth of the universities. Having studied both in the UK and the US, I could understand why there is a major shift unfolding in our region with the pivot of Bangladeshi students toward the East. I talked to several Bangladeshi expatriate teachers and students to understand what China now offers to Global South learners, notwithstanding our policy imagination



VISUAL: MONOROM POLOK

that has remained static. My visits, starting from the medical units to the aeronautical and geographic information system (GIS) infrastructures of over five universities, made me aware of how China is leapfrogging into a future where education, technology, and culture blend seamlessly.

At the East China Normal University, I asked officials whether there was a decline in the humanities with so much emphasis presently given to STEM. They were proud to say that 40 percent of their students were in the humanities. Yet this is the same university that has the world's leading tech ventures hosting 1,400 companies—including Intel, Microsoft, and Coke—on its industrial park.

new culture, everyone seemed quite upbeat. They all appreciated the welcoming nature of Chinese culture. The respondents I spoke with identified three pull factors. First, China excels in fields such as AI, robotics, renewable energy, pharmacy, traditional medicine, and logistics. These fields align directly with Bangladesh's development needs. Many of the students are attracted to the language programmes, knowing that in the evolving world, this linguistic competency can be a capital for future employability. Second, many of these students have come through the Chinese Government Scholarship (CSC), provincial scholarships, and full university funding, which do not require them to do

gentler social transition. However, since the trend is very recent, there is no strong alumni output to understand how these degrees are changing the lives of Bangladeshi students.

I realised my own biases were creating a blind spot. This oversight, shared by the country, shows something important: the common belief is that students from developing nations always "look West" for education, but the trend is shifting eastward towards countries like China, Malaysia, and the UAE. The oversight is likely to have policy consequences. Bangladesh's education planners must reconsider where its human resources can and should be directed and what kind of language and cultural training,

as well as reintegration pathways, they should incorporate in the curriculum to address this mobility shift.

According to the pilot survey I did for my fellowship, most of the students have completed the HSK test in Chinese language proficiency to study in undergraduate programmes. Most of them are studying computing/AI, the fastest-growing sector in both Bangladesh and China. Most come through university scholarships. Such activity indicates the emergence of a new pipeline of young and skilled, China-educated professionals. For the postgraduate students, the responses were slightly varied: five hoped to stay in China for work or further study; three aspired to move to a third country (often in the West); two planned to return to Bangladesh; and two aimed for entrepreneurship. The pattern can be interpreted not with the traditional lens of brain drain but through the brain gain nexus, which involves a more dynamic exchange of skills, networks, and technologies flowing between countries.

However, this journey is not without barriers. The main challenge faced by our students involves the language issue. Even in English-taught programmes, everyday life demands language skills. Students must use VPN to remain connected to their friends back home, as China insists on its homegrown digital systems (Alipay, WeChat). The other concern that these students shared involved the lack of familiarity of Bangladeshi employers with Chinese degrees. Without systematic recognition of Chinese credentials, returnees may struggle to prove their value. China's work-visa pathway for international graduates, though improving, remains competitive and often uncertain.

For Bangladesh to leverage China-trained talent, it must prepare mechanisms to absorb, certify, and deploy these returnees into sectors that need them most, including AI, renewable energy, pharmaceuticals, supply chain, and public health. Bangladeshi universities should also do curriculum mapping to understand the merit of Chinese degrees, especially in STEM and health sciences. The University Grants Commission (UGC) can create structured reintegration pathways and degree equivalency tools. Building institutional partnerships (dual degrees, credit transfers, and co-supervised PhDs) can enhance the South-South cooperation needed for our ranking efforts, while Bangladesh-China alumni forums can coordinate policy, mobility, and research collaboration.

## Reviving the RTI regime is essential for our democratic journey

Dr Shamsul Bari and Ruhi Naz  
are chairman and deputy director (RTI),  
respectively, at Research Initiatives,  
Bangladesh (RIB). They can be reached at [rib@ctech-bd.com](mailto:rib@ctech-bd.com).

SHAMSUL BARI and RUHI NAZ

Despite widespread public outcry for over a year, Bangladesh's Right to Information (RTI) regime remains stuck in a deadlock. Its consequences are becoming harder to ignore. Frustration is mounting among those who have long supported the law and used it as a means to hold public authorities accountable. For more than fifteen years, civil society organisations have patiently nurtured a community of RTI users. Their numbers were never large, but their dedication kept the law alive. Through small, steady efforts, they showed all the power of disclosure and the democratic promise embedded in the RTI Act.

However, that momentum has slowed sharply. In recent months, civil society activity around the law has diminished, applications have dropped, and fresh examples of successful RTI usage have become rare. The Information Commission, long the centrepiece of enforcement, remains dormant. Whether it will be revived under the interim government remains uncertain. Promised amendments to strengthen the law have also stalled. In this climate, hopes now rest on political parties preparing for the forthcoming national elections: will they commit to safeguarding and revitalising RTI as a democratic instrument?

As we await political clarity, it seems timely to step back and examine the broader picture: what has the RTI movement achieved globally, why do these laws so often struggle with implementation, and what lessons does Bangladesh need to heed?

Over the last three decades, RTI laws have been adopted in over 130 countries. They aim to transform the state from an opaque administrative fortress to an institution answerable to the people. But implementation has been uneven across continents.

Bureaucratic resistance remains the most significant barrier. Many officials still consider public information to be their personal domain, not the public's. Such tendencies are particularly strong in

post-colonial bureaucracies, where administrative culture was built on hierarchy and control. Even mature democracies are not immune to it—studies show persistent delays, excessive redactions, and misuse of exemptions in the UK and Canada.

Weak institutional capacity also undermines RTI. Without organised record-keeping, trained officers, and digital infrastructure, disclosure becomes slow and unreliable. Vague exemptions—such as "national security" or "public order"—are frequently used to deny uncomfortable requests. Low public awareness keeps RTI in the hands of journalists and activists rather than ordinary citizens. Oversight bodies are often underfunded and lack real enforcement authority. Add to this the risk of intimidation faced by many RTI users, and it becomes clear why implementation gaps persist worldwide. The lesson is simple: an RTI law can change rules, but not mindsets—and mindsets are where secrecy lies.

Bangladesh's RTI Act, passed in 2009, was a democratic breakthrough. It recognised information as a public right, created an independent Information Commission, and signalled that transparency was essential to accountable governance. Civil society played a central role in training citizens and demonstrating, through practical use, how RTI could expose corruption in land offices, improve delivery of social safety nets, and correct administrative injustices.

Progress came steadily. The use of the law moved from the personal domain to more national issues. Public officials were trained; designated officers were appointed to respond to information requests, however haltingly; and public bodies began responding to requests. The achievements were small but meaningful.

But entrenched challenges never disappeared—and some have sharpened in recent years. The culture of secrecy continues to dominate public administration. Officials often discourage applications or let deadlines lapse. Record management remains weak, with most files still maintained manually. The application of exemption clauses remains broad and inconsistent. Proactive disclosure is sporadic and often limited to outdated, English-only websites. And RTI users face pressure or harassment when exploring sensitive issues. The

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Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh  
Local Government Engineering Department  
Office of the Executive Engineer  
District: Tangail  
[www.lged.gov.bd](http://www.lged.gov.bd)

Memo No. 46.02.9300.000.01.014.25-6448

Date: 13-11-25

### e-Tender Notice No.27/2025-2026 [OTM/OSTETM]

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of following works.

SL No.	Tender ID No.	Name of Scheme	Package No	Last Selling Date & Time of e-tender Document	Closing & Opening Date & Time of Submission e-Tender Document	Remarks (OTM/ OSTETM)
1	1168512	Periodic Maintenance of Kalihati (Dhunai)-Shayhat-Hatia JBA Road from Ch.00m-3640m Under Upazila: Kalihati, District: Tangail (Road ID No.393472001)	LGED/ GOBM/ Tang/25-26/RW-60	07-12-2025 & 16.00pm	08-12-2025 & 15.00pm	OTM
2	1168513	Periodic Maintenance of Elenga GC-Bolla GC Road from Ch.8000m-13150m Under Upazila: Kalihati, District: Tangail (Road ID No.393472005)	LGED/ GOBM/ Tang/25-26/RW-61	07-12-2025 & 16.00pm	08-12-2025 & 15.00pm	OTM
3	1168517	Rehabilitation of Barachowna-Kalihati via Chakpara Road from Ch.5000m-10130m Under Upazila: Shakhipur, District: Tangail (Road ID No.393852009)	LGED/ GOBM/ Tang/25-26/RW-65	07-12-2025 & 16.00pm	08-12-2025 & 15.00pm	OTM
4	1140133	Rehabilitation of Nagarpur RHD-Shahjani GC Road via Goyhata UPC Office Road from Ch.00-4500m Under Nagarpur Upazila, District: Tangail (Road ID No.393762002)	CAFDRIRP/ Tangail/UZR/W-30/FD/2023-24	07-12-2025 & 16.00pm	08-12-2025 & 15.00pm	OTM
5	1140134	Rehabilitation of Nagarpur RHD-Shahjani GC Road via Goyhata UPC Office Road from Ch.4500-8685m Under Nagarpur Upazila, District: Tangail (Road ID No.393762002)	CAFDRIRP/ Tangail/UZR/W-31/FD/2023-24	07-12-2025 & 16.00pm	08-12-2025 & 15.00pm	OTM
6	1174171	Rehabilitation of Tangail (Main Road)-Kakua Bazar via Dhalan Sibpur Bazar, Kakua UP Road from Ch.7750-8180m & Ch. 8462-12221m Under Sadar Upazila, District: Tangail (Road ID No.393953001)	CAFDRIRP/ Tangail/UNR/FD/W-52/2025-26	07-12-2025 & 16.00pm	08-12-2025 & 15.00pm	OTM
7	1161553	(a) Rehabilitation of Bhandesher GC-Dewpara GC Road via Vial Bazar Road from Ch.2380-3880m Under Kalihati Upazila, District: Tangail (Road ID No.393472006) (b) Rehabilitation of Salia UP to Mogra Bazar via Dashakia UP Road from Ch.600-5030m Under Kalihati Upazila, District: Tangail (Road ID No.393473013)	CAFDRIRP/Tangail/UZR/ER/W-53/2025-26	07-12-2025 & 16.00pm	08-12-2025 & 15.00pm	OSTETM

1. This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted.
2. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP system portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.
3. Detail about the tender have shown in e-tender notice and e-tender document.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP system Portal and from e-GP help desk ([helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd](mailto:helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd)).

Mohammad Qamruzzaman  
Executive Engineer  
LGED, Tangail  
E-mail: xen.tangail@lged.gov.bd

# FROM A CURIOUS CHILD TO 'LITTLE MISS CHAOS': Sadnima's story

SHARMIN JOYA

When *Little Miss Chaos* premiered on Chorki, audiences were instantly drawn to Ira — a fiery, bold young woman played by newcomer Sadnima Binte Noman. Her natural, unfiltered performance captured hearts and introduced a promising new face to Bangladesh's OTT scene.

The web film, directed by Mahmuda Sultana Rima, starred Sadnima opposite Saad Salmi Naovi. But what made her portrayal remarkable was how far-removed Ira was from the actress herself. "Rima *apu* told me that grooming me for Ira would be a challenge," Sadnima recalled. "The character was bold and sassy, whereas I am, by nature, calm and soft-spoken."

The project became a turning point in her career — one that came after an audition she didn't even follow up on. "I gave the audition and forgot about it. Then one day, the casting director called to say that Rima *apu* wanted to meet me. I went after office hours, and she told me she was determined to cast me."



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

despite knowing it would take work to mould me into Ira."

After she was selected, rehearsals began in earnest. "We did 20 days of rehearsal, and during that time, I was completely immersed in the role. That's how Ira came alive on screen," said Sadnima. The preparation paid off; her performance was met with critical praise, and audiences began to remember her name.

The role also left something deeper behind for the artiste. "Something that will always remain in me from Ira is that I've learnt people need space and a chance to start afresh. I think I'll apply that in my own life. I'm too emotional and afraid of attachments."

Yet, long before *Little Miss Chaos*, Sadnima's life had already played out like a scene from a film.

It all began one ordinary afternoon in Uttara. A six-year-old Sadnima was playing with her cousins when a film crew nearby caught sight of her.

"Someone from the Half Stop Down production house approached me and asked if I wanted to shoot," she laughed. "I was told by my mother never to talk to strangers or eat anything they offer, so I was very confused. Then he said I would be on television — and I immediately said, 'No!'"

The production was none other than Amitabh Reza Chowdhury's. "It was Amitabh Reza himself who told his team members to go to my parents. He said, 'She's a kid, go to her parents!'" she shared. Her mother soon handed over some photographs, and within a month, she got her first offer.

The commercial aired, and more followed. Between 2006 and 2015, she appeared in numerous advertisements, working repeatedly with Amitabh Reza Chowdhury and other leading directors. During that time, her



parents encouraged her to explore dance, singing, and art — but it was performance that truly drew her in. She learned classical dance for several years and, in 2010, made her fiction debut as the young Jaya Ahsan in Nurul Alam Atique's *Dubshatar*.

After years in front of the camera, she chose to step back in 2015 to focus on her studies. "After 2015, I took a break to focus more on education," she said. When she returned in 2020, she was no longer the little girl people remembered. "By that time, people had forgotten me. They knew me as a new artiste."

She re-entered the industry through commercials, working with Adnan Al Rajeev and reuniting with Amitabh Reza Chowdhury. Then came her supporting role in Mohammad Mostafa Kamal Raz's *Moneri Rong Rangive* (2025), followed by her first lead role in Parthe Sarker's *Gold Fish*, opposite Khairel Basar.

But *Little Miss Chaos* truly marked her arrival. Its director, Rima, became a mentor figure, pushing Sadnima beyond her comfort zone. "Rima *apu* groomed me so well that the result is what the audience loved," she reflected. "That film changed how people saw me."

Having worked with both male and female directors, Sadnima has observed subtle but striking differences. "I've so far worked with two female directors, and they are Subrina Irene and Mahmuda Sultana Rima. They're both very particular about what they need," she said. "There's less room for improvisation, which I found while working with Rima *apu*. We rehearsed for a long time, and hence we didn't need to, either. Another thing is that they like to work in detail. I haven't seen that level of thoroughness in any male directors yet."

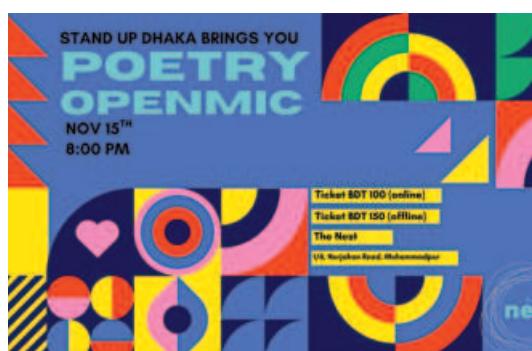
Off-screen, Sadnima leads a dual life. A graduate of North South University, she holds a full-time job and takes on acting projects only on weekends. "My workplace is flexible, and my colleagues are supportive," she said. "At this stage, I'm selective about scripts and prefer weekend shoots. I want roles that challenge me, stories that have a message."

As a newcomer, she observes that the industry still struggles with script quality. "Most of the good scripts go to big artistes," she admitted. "For new actors like us, there aren't enough good stories, nor chances to work with senior actors to learn from them. We're affordable, but with budget cuts, opportunities have shrunk."

Still, her ambitions reach far. "I want to work with Raihan Rafi, Mizanur Rahman Aryan and Jahid Preem," she said. "And internationally, with Imtiaz Ali and Anurag Basu — they're my favourites."

From a six-year-old who stumbled into the world of television to an actress creating waves with *Little Miss Chaos*, Sadnima Binte Noman's journey is a story of quiet persistence, courage, and charm. She may be calm in nature, but as Ira taught her, sometimes a little chaos is what makes you unforgettable.

## TRENDY STREAMS

NETFLIX  
FrankensteinAPPLE TV+  
PluribusPRIME VIDEO  
MaliceDISNEY+  
Love+WarHBO Max  
EddingtonTV TALKIES  
Idli KadaiOUT AND ABOUT  
IN DHAKA

Poetry Open Mic  
Nov 15 | 8 pm onwards  
The Nest, Nurjahan Road,  
Mohammadpur



Play: Siddhartha  
Nov 19-21 | 7:30 pm onwards  
Experimental Theatre Hall,  
BSA



'Sound of Soul'  
Nov 28 | 3 pm-11 pm  
Swadeshi Arena, 300-feet  
Expressway



## 'The Fate of Ophelia' by Taylor Swift

Taylor Swift stakes her claim with *The Fate of Ophelia*, a pulse-driven blend of synth-pop and theatrical flair that turns a Shakespearean tragedy into pop-cultural triumph. The lead single from her 12th studio album *The Life of a Showgirl*, it opened on October 3, 2025 and went viral at warp speed. The numbers are staggering: it set Spotify's single-day streaming record (over 90 million plays) and claimed the No 1 spot globally with 128.9 million streams in one week. It also maintained its dominance, holding the top spot on the Spotify Global chart for more than 36 consecutive days. Styled like cinematic runway pop, the track fuses post-punk guitars, and polished vocals. It's Swift's curtain call to heartbreak and her encore to herself — where she doesn't mourn Ophelia; she turns her into the muse.

*Idli Kadai* has won hearts with its simple yet emotional story about family, love, and tradition. Set in a peaceful Tamil village, the film follows Murugan (played by Dhanush), who returns home after his father's death and rediscovers his roots by reviving the family's old idli shop. The film beautifully blends nostalgia and cultural pride. Released on Netflix on October 29, 2025, *Idli Kadai* became a global favourite ranking among the top non-English films. Filled with warmth, food, and family bonds, it is a comforting story that celebrates love, resilience, and home. It is available in five languages — Tamil, Telugu, Hindi, Malayalam, and English (dubbed). A heartfelt celebration of home and heritage, it is now streaming on Netflix.



Activists hold placards at a protest rally titled "My Scarf, My Choice" (Amar Orna, Amar Choice) at the capital's Shahbagh Intersection yesterday. They demanded punishment for harassers, urged women's participation in policymaking, promoted women's safety in every sphere and freedom to choose what to wear.

## Murder case filed over killing

FROM PAGE 3  
wife called them over the phone and told them my residence came under attack... They informed that my wife and son suffered severe injuries in the attack, and my wife sought police help," he said in the case.

Accompanied by colleagues, the judge rushed to his residence.

The statement notes that Tasmin had earlier filed a GD with Jalalabad Police Station in Sylhet on November 6, alleging that Limon had threatened to kill her.

Meanwhile, the autopsy report confirmed that Tawshif died from excessive

bleeding caused by a deep injury to his leg.

Rajshahi Metropolitan Police Deputy Commissioner (CTC) Gaziur Rahman said, "There were also marks of strangulation."

Limon was also injured and is undergoing treatment at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital under police guard.

### JUDGES THREATEN TO GO ON STRIKE

The Bangladesh Judicial Service Association (BJSAs) yesterday demanded immediate measures to ensure the security of judges across the country.

In a statement, the association of lower court

judges demanded action against "police officers' negligence" that led to the Rajshahi incident.

BJSAs also warned that if the government fails to implement these measures within 48 hours, judges will begin a collective "pen down" strike from Sunday.

All judicial officers will wear black badges on Sunday to honour the victim and protest the deteriorating security situation, the statement added.

Tawshif Rahman Sumon was laid to rest at their family graveyard at Boyra Chakpara village in Sharishabari, Jamalpur.

## Ahead of ICT verdict

FROM PAGE 3  
However, leaked audio verified by BBC Eye and played in court suggests she authorised the use of lethal force in July 2024. The Daily Star's own investigation also found evidence that she issued such orders.

One recording from July 18, 2024 captures her telling her nephew, former Dhaka South mayor Fazle Noor Taposh: "I have given instructions, now I have given direct instructions; now they will use lethal weapons. Wherever they find them [protesters], they will shoot directly."

Hasina told the BBC she has been unable to defend herself or appoint her own lawyers, alleging the case is designed to deliver a "pre-ordained guilty verdict".

She also said her political opponents went after her to "liquidate" Awami League as a political force. All activities of Awami League and its associated and affiliated organisations

remain banned.

Hasina's lawyers in the UK, meanwhile, have filed an urgent appeal to the UN over fair-trial concerns at the tribunal.

The BBC interview also touched on further allegations stemming from her 15-year rule, including a separate ICT case involving accusations of crimes against humanity. Hasina denied all charges.

Asked about the secret jails discovered after she was ousted -- facilities where people had been held for years without due process -- Hasina said she "did not know" of them.

She also denied involvement in extra-judicial killings and enforced disappearances.

Her earlier written interviews were published by Reuters, AFP and The Independent on October 29, followed by The Hindu, Hindustan Times and The New Indian Express on November 7.

## DU teacher sent

FROM PAGE 3  
School as an example of long-standing infrastructural negligence. The 31-year-old school building remains waterlogged persistently. Its ground floor has been unusable for nearly 20 years. It was repaired once, but not properly -- they just dumped sand on the floor, with water accumulating for years, especially after it rains. It is a major breeding site for mosquitoes."

"The academic committee sent a recommendation letter to the vice chancellor, who then took necessary steps against the teacher," he said, adding that around 100 students accompanied the victims when they submitted the letters.

At least seven students signed each of the two allegation letters as witnesses.

Students of the department said many others also joined to testify to the allegations. The victims accused the professor of sexual harassment, physical and mental abuse.

According to both complainant letters, Halim called the students to his residence under the pretext of providing academic support, where the abuse took place.

They have been avoiding his classes out of fear, according to their statements.

Contacted, DU Proctor Saifuddin Ahmed said the allegations have been forwarded to the university's anti-sexual harassment cell for investigation.

"The accused professor has been relieved of all academic and administrative duties until the probe is completed," he said.

On Thursday night, a group of Chemistry Department students held a press conference at the Dhaka University Journalists' Association office, where they presented the contract.

"The contractor then filed a petition, and until the legal issue is resolved, we cannot proceed," he said.

## Jurain turns into

Ayman Akhtar, a resident of Darogabari area, said her younger brother, Ayat Hossain Ashfaque, a first grader at the school, was diagnosed with dengue a month ago and has just recovered.

While speaking to students and teachers at the school, this correspondent also suffered mosquito bites -- even at noon.

Assistant teacher Rabeya Sultana said around 10 percent of their students were infected with dengue this year and have since recovered.

"DSCC often sprays insecticide inside the school. We also use mosquito coils and repellents, but mosquitoes bite us round the clock. Poor cleanliness in the area and shortage of cleaners contribute to this situation."

Contacted, Nishat Parvin, chief health officer of DSCC, said they are conducting drives in major hotspots, including Wari, Jurain, Jatrabari, and Kamrangirchar. "As part of our initiative, we will conduct extensive drives in Ward 62 and 63 on Saturday. We will cover all DSCC wards gradually including hotspots," she said.

Jurain, Dania, Shyampur, Konapara, and Matuail are among the worst dengue-affected areas, he added.

"Many dengue patients are from these areas. Waterlogging and low-lying houses are major contributors. The government rarely addresses it. City corporation staffers come sometimes, but scaring people by imposing fines is what they do best."

According to the Directorate General of Health Services, at least 326 dengue patients have died as of yesterday, while 83,066 others have been hospitalised across the country this year. Of them, 156 deaths and 11,920 cases are from DSCC areas.

In response to the High Commission's request, Mediceram has expressed willingness to resolve the issue quickly and agreed to reinstate the striking workers immediately, subject to their return to work and clearance from Malaysian immigration.

## Reinstate 170

FROM PAGE 3  
Following the restructuring of the company's management, several positive measures improved working conditions, but some disputes remained.

Contacted, Pinki Akter, a student of Purba Jurain Government Primary School, said they endure mosquito bites inside classrooms even after using mosquito repellent coils.

## Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Office of the Executive Engineer RHD  
Magura Road Division, Magura  
Fax: 024777-10318  
e-mail: eerhdmagura@gmail.com

Date: 13.11.2025

### e-Tender Notice

e-Tenders are invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) by Executive Engineer, RHD, Road Division, Magura for the procurement of

Sl No.	Tender ID No.	Name of Work	Last Selling Date & Time	Last Tender Security Submission Date & Time	Closing and Opening Date & Time
1	1176312, e-GP/LTM-05/MRD/2025-2026	Embankment Fill work at Ch. 30+680 of Jashore (Daratana More)-Magura (Vaina More) (N-702) Road under Road Division, Magura during the year 2025-2026.	30-11-2025 at 17:00	01-12-2025 at 11:30	01-12-2025 at 12:00
2	1176440, e-GP/LTM-06/MRD/2025-2026	Soiling & HBB work at Ch. 82+200 to Ch. 83+360-1160.00m of Dauladia - Faridpur (Goalchamot)-Magura-Jhenaidah-Jessore- Khulna-Mongla (Digraj) N-7 Road Under Road Division Magura during the year 2025-2026.	30-11-2025 at 17:00	01-12-2025 at 11:30	01-12-2025 at 12:00

1. This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in e-GP portal.
2. To submit e-Tender, registration in the e-GP system portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.
3. For further information, please contact e-GP helpdesk. ([helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd](mailto:helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd))

Md. Rasel 13-11-25  
ID. No. 602347

Executive Engineer (c.c) RHD  
Road Division, Magura

## Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Office of the Executive Engineer, RHD  
Kishoreganj Road Division  
E-mail: [cekitis@rhd.gov.bd](mailto:cekitis@rhd.gov.bd)

Memo No: 35.01.4849.782.42.001.21-1868

Dated: 13.11.2025

### e-Tender Notice (OTM)

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of the following works.

Tender ID, Reference No. & Name of works	Last Selling Time	Last Time for Security Submission	Last Closing and Opening Time
Tender ID: 1176105, Ref No: 01/e-GP/KRD/PMP Road/2025-2026: Periodic Maintenance Programme by Repairing and providing DBS Wearing Course and other ancillary works at Ch.32+665 (Mothkhola) to 45+114 (Katiadi) of Itakhola-Mothkhola-Kotiadi Road (R-211) under Kishoreganj Road Division, Kishoreganj during the year 2025-2026.	21/12/2025 17:00	22/12/2025 11:30	22/12/2025 12:00

This is an online Tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal is required. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System portal and from e-GP help desk ([helpdesk@www.eprocure.gov.bd](mailto:helpdesk@www.eprocure.gov.bd)).

Sakil Mohammad Faysal  
I.D. No.-602216  
Executive Engineer (C.C), RHD  
Kishoreganj Road Division..

GD-2435

বিষয়টি অতীব জরুরী।

## গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

### প্রাথমিক শিক্ষা অধিদপ্তর

সেকশন ২, মিরপুর, ঢাকা ১২১৬

[www.dpe.gov.bd](http://www.dpe.gov.bd)

তারিখ: ২৪ কর্তিক ১৪৩২  
১৩ নভেম্বর ২০২৫

### বিজ্ঞপ্তি

এতদৰা সংশ্লিষ্ট সকলের অবগতির জন্য জানানো জাচ্ছে যে, প্রাথমিক শিক্ষা অধিদপ্তরে ৩ অক্টোবর ২০১৬ তারিখের ৩৮,০০,০০০, ১০৭,১১,০০০, ১০৭,১১,০০৬, ২০১৬ (অংশ-১)-২৩৫৩

উক্ত নিয়োগ কার্যক্রম সম্পন্ন করার জন্য ২০১৬ সালে অফিস সহকারী-কাম-কম্পিউটার মুদ্রাক্রিক ও হিসাব সহকারী পদে নিয়োগের নিমিত্ত টেলিটেক বাংলাদেশের মাধ্যমে অনলাইনে আবেদন গ্রহণ করা হচ্ছে।

আগামী ১৯ নভেম্বর ২০২৫ তারিখের মধ্যে রাস্তার ছবি ও স্থান আপলোড করার জন্য অনুরোধ করা হলো। যেসকল প্রার্থী নির্ধারিত সময়ের মধ্যে ছবি ও স্থান আপলোড করবেন না তাদের বিপরীতে প্রবেশপত্র ইস্যু করা সম্ভব হবে না।

মোঃ মাসুদ হোসেন  
মুকাবিল  
পরিচালক (প্রশাসন)  
ফোন-৫৫০৭৮২৯  
[ihmedul-diradmindpe@gmail.com](mailto:ihmedul-diradmindpe@gmail.com)

GD-2436

## ESSAY

# TWO AWAKENINGS:

## Reading 'Dhorai Charita Manas' and 'Things Fall Apart'

If I had not recognised that Gandhi was being referred to as Ganhi Bawa, I would never have known the time period of Dhorai. Not a single mention of the British Raj, if my memory serves. Nor in Things Fall Apart, until the very last leg of Okonkwo's journey.

ALI TAREQUE

My readings of the two books—the subject of this write-up—happened to be on two momentous occasions, set two decades apart in utterly contrasting ways. The first was an awakening. The second was... well, also an awakening, albeit in a quite different sense. The two books in question are Satinath Bhaduri's *Dhorai Charita Manas* (Bengal Publishers, 1963) and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (Heinemann, 1958). Before delving into the "momentousness", let me note one difference between the two occasions.

While reading *Dhorai*, I felt a quiet solitude in which I stumbled upon a rare gem—one that, though lying in plain sight, had somehow remained hidden amid the vast, anonymous sea of books. My emotion was shared by few—an awakening to the unseen epic that was latent in our own soil. *Things Fall Apart*, on the other hand, was already riding the glorious, western, shiny crest of the highest wave of worldwide recognition—that brought about a realisation as to how under-translated and under-represented Bengali literature is, even as a similar epic form lived fully in another colonised world.

Back in the mid 90s, Professor Abdullah Abu Sayeed of Biswa Sahitya Kendra sent someone to the BUET campus to fetch me for his newly formed study circle—Biswa Shaitya Chakra, which he described as the echelon of all study circles at Kendra. Among many famous books we read and discussed, *Dhorai* had the most unassuming title—its rusticity and backwardness perfectly setting up the biggest surprise upon reading.

I remember Ahmad Mazhar's reaction resonating exactly with mine, validating it: "As I was reading this book, I felt an enormous shame—how come I had never even heard of this novel, let alone read it?"

I became an instant admirer of Satinath Bhaduri and soon went on to read his other works—the awe never ceasing to inspire. Yet I carried the unease of being a lonely wolf placing Bhaduri on such a high pedestal, sensing a widespread paucity of his recognition—until one day.

On television, Shawkat Osman was asked about his favourite writer. "You may not recognise him—not someone very well known," he began. "Satinath Bhaduri," he declared. I felt redeemed. Later, of course, I saw Bhaduri's stock begin to rise in our literary society.

As for *Things Fall Apart*, I first became aware of its celebrated existence soon after moving to the United States,



ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

around the turn of the millennium. Web searches for the "top 100 books" kept returning Achebe's title near the top. Intrigued, I made a few attempts to read it, but each was thwarted by other urgencies.

Then, in 2014, after an exhilarating literary discussion with a Brazilian educator of African descent—an excitable client and friend—he expressed shock that I hadn't read *Things Fall Apart* yet. He insisted I do so immediately, lent me his copy, and extracted a promise that I would finish it within two days. I complied. It set a big rock rolling—a story for another time. What matters here are the thoughts that passed through my mind before that rock was tipped off.

Two decades separated my readings of the two books, yet the memetic gap was bridged instantaneously. So much of *Things Fall Apart* reminded me of *Dhorai Charita Manas*. "The absence of author!" That was my first reaction. I had no idea—almost as if by providence—of the writer or person Bhaduri was when I first read *Dhorai*. The same was true of Achebe when I began *Things Fall Apart*. Neither author intruded upon the reading experience with their person. In both,

the characters are self-sustained, the narration local, the conflicts raw and internally charged. Judgment is not absent but expressed only in the moral idiom of the indigenous. Globality is kept rigorously at bay—spatially and temporally.

If I had not recognised that Gandhi was being referred to as Ganhi Bawa, I would never have known the time period of *Dhorai*. Not a single mention of the British Raj, if my memory serves. Nor in *Things Fall Apart*, until the very last leg of Okonkwo's journey. As a reader from a different world, I was equally in the dark about the historical moment of Achebe's tale. This authorial invisibility is perhaps the most significant quality that places these two novels among the highest in the literary canon.

The next recognition was structural. Both heroes are born of uncelebrated backgrounds; both exhibit off-the-shelf heroism; both face mimetic incidents that drive them into exile; both achieve renewed leadership and return home seeking restoration, only to meet inevitable downfall. The parallels are almost architectural. The resemblance made me wonder if one writer had influenced the other. But realising that *Things Fall Apart* was written nearly

a decade later, and that an English-speaking Nigerian could scarcely have encountered an untranslated Bengali novel, I turned to the possibility of historical convergence—the twin consciousness of colonised worlds wrestling with moral collapse.

To expand further on their mirrored odyssey is to find more reflections still. Both emerge from familial backgrounds that epitomise societal vice: the dubious moral circumstances of *Dhorai*'s mother, and Okonkwo's father—a failure within the Igbo value system. Both men strive to transcend inherited shame through the pursuit of dignity and order, only to commit acts that destabilise their moral standing (Okonkwo's killing of Ikemefuna; *Dhorai*'s compromised role in rebellion and violence). Both endure exile and return, their homecomings culminating in futile redemption.

Beyond these parallels lie the more predictable correspondences of two postcolonial masters: the documentation of vanishing indigenous orders, the erosion of spiritual leadership. And, overarching all, a universal phenomenon—the empire as an unseen gravitational force, not a character but a condition-making

their tragedies less about conquest than about internal corrosion.

Contrasts are not my subject here, but one deserves mention: the titles. Achebe borrows from a contemporary poem, "The Second Coming"; Bhaduri, by contrast, invokes the archaic and rustic cadence of *Ramcharitmanas*, a half-millennium-old epic. One gestures outward to the modern world; the other descends into the folk epic soil of its own.

I often wonder how *Dhorai Charita Manas* would fare if translated and placed alongside *Things Fall Apart* in the global run for the great novel canon. The crowd mind may be unpredictable, but in my private hierarchy, *Dhorai* would stand a few rungs higher—its quiet moral resonance reaching further than its fame ever has.

Ali Tareque is a Bangladeshi-born writer based in Houston, Texas. He is the author of the English novel *Echo of the Silence* (Arrow Books/Penguin Random House, 2023) and the Bangla short story collection *Sontan o Sonketer Upokotha* (Roots, 2022). Alongside fiction, he writes poetry, directs plays and films, and performs elocution.

## NONFICTION

## Kumu: Meye bela

### Chapter 2, section 1

LAZEENA MUNA

Kumu was born five years after Peara. Five long, whisper-filled years. Peara, the third child, the first son, the long-awaited heir who arrived with the weight of joy and expectation. Before him came Bulbul and Tuntun—two girls with soft feet and striking beauty—and after him came silence. A pause. A space too wide to ignore.

In those in-between years, the house in Bogra filled with questions the way courtyards fill with laundry: daily, uninvited, flapping in the wind. What had gone wrong? How could one son carry the lineage? The house must be filled with children. Was it the evil eye? A curse? Something Nani had eaten, or not eaten? Something her body had forgotten to do? Everyone had an opinion. Suggestions arrived wrapped in pity. Boiled herbs. Aluminum amulets. Unpronounceable oils from faraway villages. Someone suggested sleeping under a new moon. Someone else, an old aunt with no children of her own, whispered of dark water, "phoo" (breathing), and old gods.

Nani bore it all in silence. Not the noble, defiant kind. Just the worn-down, practical quiet of a woman already raising three children and a thousand invisible demands that didn't wear names but still drifted through her house every day—loud, invisible, and constant as breath. There was no time for tears. Not in front of others. Not even in secret.

She folded her disappointment into her sarees, into the soft pleats she tucked beneath



her navel each morning, into the threadbare ones that smelled of turmeric and firewood. Someone suggested sleeping under a new moon. Someone else, an old aunt with no children of her own, whispered of dark water, "phoo" (breathing), and old gods.

She stitched her shame into kanthas, old sarees reborn as stories. Of women bent like question marks, of birds mid-flight, of fish with eyes too wide. She chose her threads like memories, green for envy, red for rage, blue for waiting. Every stitch, a silence; every color a wound softened by time. She wasn't just stitching warmth. She was stitching grief into flowers and leaves. Stitching longing into patterns that didn't ask for explanations. She stitched to keep her hands busy. She stitched to hold something still before it

slipped away again.

And then, as if by accident, as if her body remembered something the mind had stopped hoping for, there was Kumu. Kumkum. Born in Bogra, in the back room of a house that held its breath for her. Her birth was witnessed not by doctors or nurses, but by her mother, her grandmother, and two watchful sisters—hands steady, hearts braced.

Outside, the mulberry trees stood bare-boned and brittle in the hemanta air, their last yellow leaves clinging like rumours whispered, half-believed—rustling stories of a summer long gone. Their branches reached crookedly into the dusk, sketching ink-thin lines against a sky bleeding vermilion. In the

corner of the courtyard, a cow lowed softly, calling her calf home with the insistence of instinct.

And inside, the house, heavy with the scent of kamini blossoms and the stillness of waiting, sharpened by the anxious waiting for a life to arrive. Three generations of women braced themselves. Knees pressed to cold floors. Sarees tucked in. Eyes unwavering. They held their breath between contractions. Folded screams into silence. Swallowed pain, swallowed joy—lips sealed tight with centuries folded inside. They carried their mothers' losses and their daughters' hopes in the quiet strength of their spines. Water boiled. Invocations were murmured. Sweat and tears ran together, wiped away with the threadbare end of a saree.

And then, without ceremony, with the muted explosion only birth knows, they made space. Raw, wide, aching space for one more girl. In a world that never gave them space unless they carved it out themselves, where every inch of space had to be earned in silence and struggle.

Kumu arrived in the folds of a kantha Nani had stitched for this day—sewn from worn sarees and older sorrows. She was received into hands that had stirred pots and buried grief, that raised daughters on the strength of dreams never spoken, only carried.

After Kumu, the children came like rain on a metal roof. Tultul, two years later, wide-eyed and always reaching. Then Bacchu, Faruk, and finally Lucky, the last—the lightest, the one Nani cradled with the exhausted love. Eight children in total. And

Nani stopped. Not because she chose to. But because her body, one day, simply said "enough". It whispered no in a language only women's bones understand. Her hips refused. Her womb closed like a fist. Her strength, once infinite, began to slip quietly out of her joints, like water from a leaky pot.

When people asked her why she stopped, she didn't give them reasons. She gave the truth to her.

"Bochorer e matha ar o mathai shudhu atar ghar," she would mutter half under her breath, half into the pillow she was thumping into shape. Speaking to no one, yet heard by all. That year, to her, was nothing but a blur of birth: her cradle at one end of the bed, someone else's screams of labour at the other. A year bookended by blood and breath, swaddled beginnings and sweat-soaked ends.

And that was that.

No ceremony. No announcement. Just the quiet retreat of a woman who had birthed eight children, survived the gossip, the bleeding, the endless boiling of milk and pain and still managed to cook two meals a day with very little help available.

"Kumu" is a living memoir of Selina Hossain's early life, told through carefully chosen themes reimaged by her daughter.

Lazeena Muna writes occasionally, weaving together gender and politics, and often exploring memory, movement, and meaning.

## MBAPPE

nets record 400th

France superstar Kylian Mbappe became the youngest player after Pele (23 years and 4 days) to reach 400 career goals, hitting the milestone at just 26 years and 328 days with a brace in a 4-0 win at home in a World Cup qualifier against Ukraine on Thursday which booked France's place in next year's event. Neither Lionel Messi nor Cristiano Ronaldo had reached that total at his age. Messi did it at 27 years and 95 days, while Ronaldo arrived there at 28 years and 335 days. Mbappe reached the mark in 537 matches -- quicker than Messi (525 matches) and Ronaldo (653).

PHOTO: REUTERS



Cristiano Ronaldo's first-ever red card for Portugal in their 2-0 loss away from home against Ireland in a World Cup qualifier yesterday has sparked big questions about his availability for the main event next year. Sent off for violent conduct against Ireland, the 40-year-old now faces a potential multi-match ban that could roll into the World Cup itself.

Ronaldo received his first red card in 226 appearances for Portugal after elbowing Dara O'Shea in a World Cup qualifier against Ireland.

• The straight red means he is automatically suspended for one match, ruling him out in the World Cup qualifier against Armenia -- a game Portugal need to win to seal automatic qualification.

• Because the offence was classified as violent conduct, Ronaldo is likely to face an extended ban which would have to serve in competitive fixtures.

• FIFA's disciplinary code suggests a three-match suspension for "assault, including elbowing, punching, kicking, biting, spitting or hitting an opponent".

• If he receives a three-game ban, he would miss:

• Portugal's first two group-stage matches at the 2026 World Cup if Portugal qualify directly, or both play-off matches if Portugal drop into the play-offs.

• The suspension can only be served in competitive fixtures, so friendlies don't count.

• Decision will be made by the FIFA disciplinary committee, expected around early December, close to the World Cup draw (on December 5).

## Joy's return, Murad's emergence reinforce Test core

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI FROM SYLHET

The Mount Maunganui Test in January 2022, when Bangladesh beat the then ICC World Test Championship holders New Zealand in their own backyard, remains their biggest achievement in the five-day format till date.

That victory was the collective outcome of many outstanding performances, one of which was opener Mahmudul Hasan Joy's 78 run knock off 228 balls, a gutsy effort from someone playing in just his second ever Test.

Joy's fortitude did not go unnoticed as though the right-hander's form with the bat slumped, he kept getting picked

### SCORES IN BRIEF

#### IRELAND

**First innings:** 286 all out (Stirling 60; Miraz 3-50) and **Second innings:** 254 all out (McBride 52; Murad 4-60)

#### BANGLADESH

**First innings:** 587-8d (Joy 171, Shanto 100, Mominul 82, Shadman 80; Humphreys 5-170)

#### RESULT

Bangladesh won by an innings and 47 runs

#### PLAYER OF THE MATCH

Mahmudul Hasan Joy



for the Test team for the next 14 series -- a string that ended in June this year when he was dropped from the Sri Lanka tour.

The 25-year-old's exodus from the Test side did not last for too long as he was recalled for the two Tests at home against Ireland. In the series opener in Sylhet, he announced his return with a career-best 171 -- a knock that helped the hosts beat the Irish by an innings and 47 runs inside four days on Friday.

"Joy was not in the team. Coming back after being dropped and playing such a big innings in the first match was actually very tough for him. But the way he batted,

it didn't even feel like he was making a comeback," skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto, who also hit a century in the first innings, heaped praises on Joy after the match.

"I think Joy has made a lot of changes to himself in terms of mindset. I hope that he plays with this mentality against all teams in the future," he added.

Seven of the first eight names in Bangladesh's playing XI against Ireland was the same as the Mount Maunganui Test, signalling a solid base in the Test side, while the names of the bowlers were different.

One of them was Hasan Murad, a left-arm spinner who made his Test debut as the third member of the team's spin trio.

Murad held his own alongside veteran spinners in Mehidy Hasan Miraz and Taijul Islam -- both with over 200 Test wickets -- and stood out with the amount of turn he produced.

Having bagged 2 for 47 in the first innings, he bagged 4 for 60 in the second, breaking Ireland's resistance on Day 4 with the wicket of skipper Andrew Balbirnie.

The 24-year-old had to wait for a while for his Test cap, having been a part of the side since the home series against New Zealand in 2023 -- the beginning of Shanto's first captaincy stint.

And the match where Shanto resumed his second stint, Murad began his journey as a Test cricketer.

"Murad was outstanding. He was sitting out for quite a few series, not getting a chance. But he plays first-class cricket every year, and performs every year. If you look at his stats, they are very good," said the skipper.

"The way he bowled after coming in was worth watching. And I hope the way he has started, he will slowly improve more and continue to contribute more to the team," he added.

Murad's smooth integration and Joy's successful comeback added dimensions to Shanto's Test squad but still the side has some way to go before earning formidability.

## 'India tie more than a football match'

SPORTS REPORTER

Still reeling from the stoppage time equaliser from Nepal that denied them a win on Thursday, Bangladesh are shifting their focus to the AFC Asian Cup Qualifying tie against India.

Before squaring off against India on November 18 at the National Stadium, the men in red and green played a friendly against Nepal in Doha, which ended a 2-2 draw.

Javier Cabrera's charges could hardly impress with the exception of Hamza Choudhury, who struck twice inside four minutes in the second half, first with a wonderous bicycle kick and then with an audacious panenka penalty kick, that gave the hosts a 2-1 lead.

The hosts were less than three minutes away from their first win over Nepal in five years before they conceded in the stoppage time, something that has turned into a habit.

Defender Saad Uddin, however, felt they were unlucky as he termed Ananta Tamang's equaliser "unbelievable".

"We were unlucky because we defended set pieces well in the last few matches including the last away match against Hong Kong," the 27-year-old defender said. "We still can't believe



we conceded a goal like that from zero angle even with such tight marking. The blame always falls on the defenders for conceding goals but people should look at how we concede them.

"Everyone was alert in the last moments. It still seems unbelievable to us, conceding from that angle. No one can be blamed for that goal."

The Bashundhara Kings defender is now looking forward to the India tie which he labelled as 'more than a football match'.

"We have to rectify the silly mistakes we made against Nepal, and return stronger against India because the tie against India is more than a football match for us," said Saad, who scored in a 1-1 draw against India in Kolkata in 2019.

With Bangladesh and India both out of contention for a place in the main competition, the match will be a battle for pride, with Saad still

feeling the 0-0 draw against India in the first leg on March 25, should have ended in a victory for his side.

"We deserved to win over India in the away match where we created three chances in the first 20 minutes while India could not muster a single shot on target," Saad said. "I think we will also get goal-scoring chances against India in the home match and if we can take an early lead within 20 to 25 minutes, then India will be under pressure."

## Leonine GM Chess back after 21 years

SPORTS REPORTER

The Leonine GM Chess Tournament makes its comeback today after a gap of 21 years, once again offering local talents a platform to pursue GM and IM norms.

This year's round robin tournament features 10 players, including three GMs from Bangladesh, Vietnam and Uzbekistan, along with four IMs and three FMs. IM Fahad Rahman, IM Manon Reza Neer, FM Tahsin Tajwar Zia -- who has completed IM norms but lacks rating points -- and IM Abu Sufian Shakil will all be vying for GM norms, requiring at least seven points from nine rounds. FM Sakline Sajid aims to secure an IM norm with 5.5 points.

A total prize purse of US\$1,000 will be awarded, with the champion earning US\$500, the runner-up US\$300, and third place US\$200.

## what to WATCH

Star Sports 2  
India vs South Africa  
1st Test, Day 2  
Live from 10:00 am  
Sony Sports 1, 2, and 5  
Asia Cup Rising Stars

Bangladesh A vs Hong Kong  
Live from 12:30 pm  
Afghanistan A vs Sri Lanka A  
Live from 5:30 pm  
World Cup Qualifiers  
Georgia vs Spain

Live from 11:00 pm  
Switzerland vs Sweden  
Live from 1:45 am (Sunday)  
Denmark vs Belarus  
Live from 1:45 am (Sunday)

## Asian Archery C'ships end amid India's dominance

SPORTS REPORTER

The 24th Asian Archery Championships concluded on Friday with India dominating the medal's table. India won a total of 10 medals -- 6 gold, 3 silver and 1 bronze. South Korea secured 2 golds, 4 silvers and 4 bronzes.

Hosts Bangladesh claimed one silver and one bronze.

The final day began with the recurve women's team final. South Korea claimed the gold medal with a 6-0 set point victory over Chinese Taipei. Malaysia had already secured the bronze medal earlier by defeating Uzbekistan 6-0.

In the recurve men's team final, a thrilling contest unfolded between South Korea and India, with India eventually claiming the gold following a tie-break.

In the recurve mixed team final, Chinese Taipei earned the gold medal while Uzbekistan won silver. India's Ankita Bhakat won the gold medal in the women's recurve individual event while the recurve men's individual final saw Dhiraj Bommadevara of India beat compatriot Rahul by 6-2 to win the gold medal.

Meanwhile the Adviser for Youth and Sports, Asif Mahmud Sojib Bhuiyan, announced a cash reward of Tk 100,000 each for the three medal winners of the Bangladesh team. Bonna Akter and Himu Bachhar won a silver in compound mixed team event while Kulsum Akter Moni won a bronze medal in women's individual compound event.

## Hosts flattened as Pakistan seal WC qualifying spot

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's struggles in the three-match hockey series continued as they were outclassed once again -- this time in an 8-0 drubbing by Pakistan at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium on Friday. The loss, following an 8-2 defeat in the opening match, effectively sealed Pakistan a place in next year's FIH World Cup Qualifiers and highlighted the gulf in quality between the two sides and underscored Bangladesh's inability to cope with Pakistan's pace, structure, and finishing.

While Bangladesh had at least managed to find the net twice in the first match, they offered no resistance on Friday. Pakistan, the four-time world champions, dominated from start to finish, converting four penalty corners and scoring four goals from open play as the hosts failed to settle into any rhythm or organisation.

Bangladesh's Obaidul Hasan Joy admitted that the team could not maintain their game plan, resulting in repeated defensive lapses.

"We tried to follow the game plan, but most of the time we failed to stick to it, and that caused many of the goals we conceded," Joy said.

Joy further acknowledged that the lack of preparation showed on the field. "Pakistan are a big team, and we are learning a lot from them. I believe with more preparation time, we could have performed better," he added.

Pakistan captain Ammad Butt, meanwhile, expressed satisfaction by saying, "Our main goal was to qualify, and we have achieved it."

Bangladesh will look to avoid another heavy defeat in the dead rubber third match on Sunday.

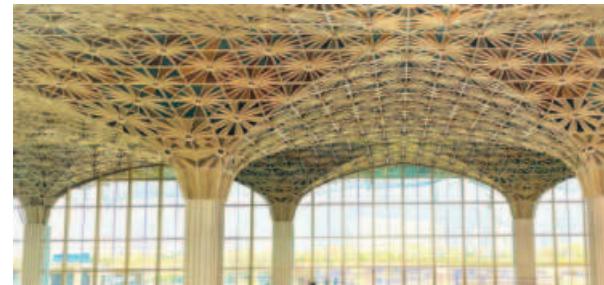


India pace ace Jasprit Bumrah was at his devastating best, taking five wickets for 27 runs -- his 16th five-wicket haul in Tests -- to bundle out World Test Championship holders South Africa for 159 in 55 overs on Day 1 of the first Test at Eden Gardens in Kolkata yesterday. India went to stumps at 37-1 after losing opener Yashasvi Jaiswal.

PHOTO: BCCI



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After nine months without tourists, St Martin's Island has regained its natural charm. Lush greenery thrives, the sands feel softer, and dark corals line the azure shore. Anchored fishing boats in the distance lend the island a serene, picturesque beauty. Although the island is welcoming visitors again, overnight stays remain off-limits. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

**Country sees more arson attacks**  
**Man burnt as vehicles torched in 5 districts; 35 crude bombs recovered from Geneva Camp**

## STAR REPORT

Several arson attacks took place yesterday in at least five districts, leaving a bus driver seriously injured in Manikganj.

The attacks came a day after the Awami League's "Dhaka lockdown" programme. At least 30 vehicles, mostly buses, were set ablaze in run-up to the programme and during it. Dozens of crude bomb blasts were also reported across the country.



A burning bus in Manikganj.

Two deaths have been reported so far. On Tuesday, a bus driver was burned to death after miscreants set fire to his vehicle in Mymensingh's Phulbaria. On Thursday, a youth died after jumping into the Turag river while fleeing a crowd that chased him for allegedly setting a bus on fire in Dhaka's Mirpur area.

In the capital, police yesterday recovered at least 35 crude bombs and bomb-making materials from Geneva Camp in Mohammadpur.

Kazi Rafique, officer-in-charge of Mohammadpur Police Station, said the raid was conducted based on information that some miscreants are making crude bombs. The seized explosives would be defused later, he said.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 4

**COP30 SUMMIT IN BRAZIL**  
**Heat prompts \$300m for climate health research**  
**Fund aims to build data, direct investments tackling heat and pollution**

## AGENCIES

With more than a half-million people worldwide dying from heat-related causes every year, a group of philanthropies is putting \$300 million into developing life-saving solutions as global temperatures continue to rise.

The money, announced this week at the COP30 climate negotiations in Brazil, is aimed at developing data and figuring out the best investments for tackling rising risks from extreme heat, air pollution and infectious disease.

"We are a philanthropy. We can't just keep plugging holes and resuscitating a dying model of development," said Estelle Willie, the director of health policy and communications at The Rockefeller Foundation, one of the funders.

"So what we are trying to do is through our philanthropy, we can start testing and validating new solutions through this work and coming together," she said.

Separately, COP30 host Brazil launched an initiative called the Belem Health Action Plan to encourage countries to monitor and coordinate climate-related health policy across their various ministries and departments, reports Reuters.

## Govt shelves several key health reform measures

TUHIN SHUBHIRA ADHIKARY

The government has pushed back the implementation of several key health reform recommendations made by a commission, casting doubts over the future of the reform initiatives aimed at improving public healthcare.

Fifteen out of 33 reform proposals, primarily selected from the Health Sector Reform Commission's recommendations, have been excluded from the implementation process following a review by the Cabinet Division, said health ministry sources.

This means the health ministry is no longer required to regularly update the Cabinet Division about the implementation of these recommendations, they said.

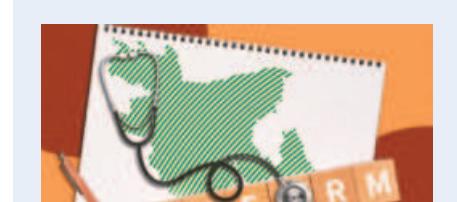
The excluded recommendations include VAT and tax exemptions on essential antibiotics and medicines used to treat cancer, diabetes and hypertension, and the imposition of higher taxes on low priority items.

Besides, the suggestions for a permanent health commission, a health service for doctors and a separate public service commission for their recruitment were omitted from the implementation list.

The development comes at a time when the health sector is facing numerous challenges, including a funding crunch, a shortage of health workers, high out-

of-pocket expenses, unequal access to services, and weak governance.

On May 5 this year, the 12-member reform commission, led by National Professor AK Azad Khan, submitted its report, recommending a sweeping overhaul of the health service management to make it more people-centred.



It suggested that the government make primary healthcare a constitutional obligation and provide it free of cost to ensure universal access.

Contacted on November 6, Prof Muzaherul Huq, a member of the commission, said, "The measures to implement the commission's recommendations is yet to be visible. If people do not benefit and the steps are not visible to them, the suggestions will become meaningless."

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Govt drops 15 of 33 shortlisted reform proposals

VAT, tax exemptions on essential medicines excluded

Plans for permanent health commission, separate PSC for doctors shelved

Progress slow on remaining 18 recommendations

Only two new health-related ordinances drafted so far

No move yet to make primary healthcare a constitutional obligation



**Khalilur to join security forum in India at Ajit Doval's invite**

## DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

National Security Adviser Khalilur Rahman will attend a regional forum in New Delhi at the invitation of his Indian counterpart Ajit Doval.

Khalilur will lead the Bangladeshi delegation to the two-day Colombo Security Conclave starting November 19.

Bangladesh joined the CSC as its fifth member last year. India, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, and the Maldives formed the platform in 2020 to strengthen maritime cooperation among regional countries.

The Chief Adviser's Press Wing said Khalilur's participation in the conclave is a "continuation of the interim government's efforts to foster mutually beneficial regional cooperation".

"The interim government prioritises regional cooperation and has actively participated in meetings of various regional bodies," it said in a statement yesterday.

Khalilur had earlier led the

SEE PAGE 5 COL 4



A family of artisans prepares idols for Kartik Puja, a Hindu festival celebrated on the full moon of the Bangla month Kartik (October–November). This year, the festival falls on November 17. The photo was taken yesterday in Char Aicha village of Barishal Sadar upazila.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

**US pushes UN Council to adopt Gaza plan**  
**Russia offers counter text**

## AGENCIES

Russia on Thursday proposed its own draft of a UN resolution on Gaza in a challenge to a US effort to pass its own text at the Security Council that would endorse President Donald Trump's Gaza peace plan, according to a copy of the draft seen by Reuters.

The US formally circulated the draft resolution to the 15 Council members last week and has said it has regional support for its resolution that would authorize a two-year mandate for a transitional governance body and international stabilization force.

Russia's UN mission said in a note to Security Council members on Thursday afternoon, seen by Reuters, that its "counter proposal is inspired by the US draft."

"The objective of our draft is to enable the Security Council to develop a balanced, acceptable, and unified approach toward achieving a sustainable cessation of hostilities," the note said.

The Russian draft, also seen by Reuters, requests that the UN Secretary-General identify options for an international stabilization

SEE PAGE 5 COL 6

**HARIPUR ZAMINDAR BARI IN BRAHMANBARIA**

# On the banks of Titas, a palace fading into memory

**MASUK HRIDOV**

The Haripur Zamindar Bari in Brahmanbaria's Nasirnagar upazila stands in quiet resignation, its ageing walls holding the weight of a world long gone.

Once a proud seat of power and artistry, the mansion now sits on the eastern bank of the Titas river like a fading memory -- beautiful from afar, fragile up close.

Its once-grand gateways are worn and moss-covered, the carved cornices chipped, and the long verandas cracked by time. The palace, known locally as the Borobari or Rajbari, remains one of the region's most striking Mughal-era structures, drawing the attention of anyone who passes by.

"This is not just a mansion, it is a

metallic architecture in eastern Bengal," said Md Saeed Inam Tanvirul, field officer at the Department of Archaeology's Cumilla office.

"Structures like this, made entirely of brick, lime and local materials, show a unique fusion of Mughal symmetry and colonial aesthetics."

Just west of the mansion, along the banks of the Titas, stands the stone-paved ghat built in memory of Uma Rani Roy Chowdhury, the zamindar's wife. Beside it are two temples that once welcomed guests arriving by boat.

Today, they stand silent, their reflections trembling in the river's flow.

"I've seen how the palace breathes during the monsoon," said



PHOTO: JAHID KHANDAKER

**HOW TO GET THERE**

Although the palace sits in Brahmanbaria, it lies close to Madhabpur upazila in Habiganj.

Travellers from Dhaka can take a Sylhet-bound bus and get off at Madhabpur Bus Stand, then take a CNG-run auto-rickshaw to Haripur Borobari.

Alternatively, visitors can take the Parbat Express train to Nayapara Station in Habiganj and travel to Haripur via Madhabpur.

perfect poem in brick and silence," said Joydul Hossain, poet and president of Brahmanbaria Sahitya Academy. "Each arch is a forgotten verse, each corridor a fading stanza of a Bengal that no longer exists."

According to the Department of Archaeology's Cumilla office, the palace was built between 1843 and 1850 by zamindars Gouriprasad and Krishnaprasad Roy Chowdhury. It once spanned over five acres and featured nearly 60 rooms, including a music hall, dance chamber, court hall, treasury, bathing ghat and gaming room -- all constructed without a single rod of iron.

In 2018, the government declared the palace an archaeological heritage site.

It is believed that the zamindars of Haripur descended from a wealthy landlord family in Tripura. Restoration work began in 2016 and remains ongoing. Parts of the veranda, temples, roof and ghat have already been repaired, and officials expect the project to be completed within the next couple of years.

"This is a rare specimen of non-

Zahirul Islam Chowdhury Swapan, founder of the Brahmanbaria Museum. "When the river overflows and mirrors the house, it feels as if the mansion is trying to remember itself -- trying to exist again, if only in shadow."

The palace's decline began with the partition of 1947, when the zamindar family left for Kolkata. The estate later fell under the Vested Property Act.

Locals said when the family departed, a few Hindu priests stayed behind to maintain the property. Over decades, their descendants, along with several local households, occupied the estate informally as the structure slipped into neglect.

The situation changed in 2023 when, following a resolution from a district development coordination meeting, then deputy commissioner Shahgir

Alam relocated the families to government-built shelters under the Ashrayan Project and formally reclaimed the palace.

Most of the descendants left voluntarily, and the Department of Archaeology began fresh restoration work, including a lime wash on the exterior.

"I've heard from elders that this zamindar house stands on wooden beams, so it could collapse anytime," said Jamal Mia, former chairman of Haripur Union Parishad.

"We urge the government to renovate the entire structure as soon as possible. If that happens,

carvings and a courtyard left in sheer neglect."

According to him, many elements of Brahmanbaria's cultural heritage have already disappeared. "It is our collective responsibility to preserve what remains. Once these treasures are lost, they cannot be regained."

Local residents and cultural activists have long called for proper preservation. Many envision turning the estate into a museum or a cultural retreat.

Ansar members assigned to guard the property said it remains open for visitors from 10:00am to 5:00pm, and until 6:00pm during the monsoon when many arrive by boat and enjoy picnics along the river.

However, the lack of local accommodation remains a challenge. People travel from far away to see the palace, but since there are no residential hotels or restaurants nearby, visitors suffer, said several locals. They believe the area could thrive as a tourism spot if facilities were developed.

College student Tabassum Akter said, "The ornamentation is beautiful, but the interior is in poor condition. If the authorities renovate it, many more tourists and students will come to learn

about its history."

Visitors Samsuzzaman Chowdhury Sujon and Morad Mia said they often return during the monsoon when "the mansion's charm multiplies".

Sanjay Deb, a local schoolteacher, said the palace is a symbol of Nasirnagar's history. "It must be preserved through government initiative. Such efforts will help the younger generation connect with our past."

Nasirnagar UNO Shahina Nasrin said the administration will continue working with the Department of Archaeology. "We reclaimed the estate from illegal occupation, and now we plan to move forward with restoration."

Brahmanbaria Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Didarul Alam said the palace has "immense potential," adding that the administration is considering proposals to restore and protect it.

Contacted, Dr Nahid Sultana, regional director of the Department of Archaeology's Cumilla office, said the complete restoration of Haripur Zamindar Bari has been included in the 2025-26 fiscal year's work plan.

"The extent of restoration will depend on the allocated budget," she said.



visitors will surely increase."

The mansion briefly returned to the spotlight when renowned writer and filmmaker Humayun Ahmed shot "Ghetuputro Komola" here in 2012. Earlier, the film "Madhu Malati" was filmed in 1991, followed by "Naiyori" in 2001 and the UK-Bangladesh production "The Last Thakur" in 2008. But beyond these moments, decay has continued to outpace memory.

"During the monsoon, many tourists come to see this palace, mesmerised by its beauty -- but they leave with a heavy heart," said Swapan. "Behind the façade are broken doors, eroded



PHOTOS: STAR

# WHO OWNS DHAKA'S STREETS?

## The politics of eviction and survival

ISHTIAQ MOHAMMAD

Discussions around street vendors usually begin with accusations of "encroachment." But these lives and livelihoods need to be understood within the wider story of the informal economy and the way our cities are planned.

A study jointly conducted by Karmojibi Nari and FES Bangladesh has surveyed 768 informal sector workers across the country. This study has identified about 450 occupations in Bangladesh's informal sector. Most of the workers are engaged in retail and sales, and others in agriculture and livestock, food and beverage services, transport, and craft.

**An invisible backbone**

The informal economy accounts for a major portion of Bangladesh's economy. The National Labour Force Survey of 2024 presents that about 84.07% of the workforce (59.68 million people approximately) were employed informally in 2023. A deeper look shows that women are especially part of the informal economy. Almost 95.96% of female workers were in informal employment, whereas this was 78.08% for male workers. Additionally, various studies estimate that this informal economy accounts for 40-43% of Bangladesh's GDP.

As a result, when the eviction drives are happening, for whatever justified reason, this is not only about a small group of the country's population. Rather, this is dealing with a large chunk of the economic base of the country.

However, this phenomenon is not unique to developing countries. Even the most advanced economies host substantial informal work—sometimes hidden in subcontracting, platform gigs, unpaid (or casually paid) domestic work, and micro-entrepreneurship. ILO/WIEGO data show that about 15.9% of employment in "higher-income countries" is informal. This means the informal economy is not a leftover of



PHOTO: MAMUNOR RASHID

Roadside street shops are being destroyed under city corporation regulation.

"under-development" but continues to operate across advanced societies.

This is especially significant in how we deal with vendors in Dhaka. They cannot be dismissed as mere "encroachers" to be removed, but must be recognised as citizens with basic rights. They are investing time and capital, paying informal rents and fees, and supporting households. When they are considered mere "encroachers", this invisibilises the economic aspects and strips off the minimal social protections they might access.

Globally, most cities regulate street vending rather than pursue outright eradication. This establishes it as an urban management problem. Brazil introduced its Micro Entrepreneur (MEI) scheme back in 2009. This provides millions of micro-entrepreneurs with a simple registration path to access legal recognition and some formal benefits. Data from Brazil's

National Statistics Agency (IBGE) show that by 2022, 14.6 million individuals were registered. Indonesian cities such as Jakarta have also attempted to formalise street vending. This has treated it as an urban reality rather than an anomaly, and designed vendor bays as part of spatial plans. This has recognised vendors' role in city life while managing the flows and safety of citizens.

**What happened in Dhaka — and the way forward**

In Bangladesh, in 2022, the Dhaka South City Corporation planned to designate parts of the city as red, yellow, and green zones to regulate vending. Two roads in the Gulistan area were marked red, and large-scale evictions followed. These ideas were used to justify eviction. However, no clear and participatory implementation, such as alternative spaces or transitional support,

was observed. These evictions continued in waves, often without any relocation plans.

Sajib (name changed for anonymity) sells momos from a small stall tucked inside a residential lane in eastern Dhaka. He used to sell from a stall on the main road near a local college. After the eviction drive in the neighbourhood, he moved inside an alley with a smaller, "easy-to-go" stall setup. Although his sales have reduced significantly, it still gives him some means to survive. "Now, fewer customers come to the stall due to the location — but those who do, they keep coming back." Sajib learnt how to make momos when he was staying with some Nepali chefs in Dhaka. His story reflects the learning, adaptation, and resilience shared by countless other vendors. Yet, it also reveals a deeper reality—the shift towards increasingly fragile livelihoods across the country. The plans of eviction or anything else must be inclusion, not erasure. Drawing from global practices, a few concrete steps could be taken:

can be introduced to give vendors a legal identity. This will give them basic rights, e.g. protection from arbitrary eviction, access to small loans, and training.

**Guaranteed transitional arrangements during clearances:** In places where clearance is unavoidable (due to safety or infrastructure), relocations must be time-staged and include temporary income support. In such cases, there should be provisions for credit to re-establish stock.

**Targeted social protection for women in informality:** As the majority of the female working population are tied to the informal economy, there should be linked registration for health coverage and maternity support.

**Tackle illicit extractive rents:** There should be measures to eliminate the unofficial fees vendors pay to middlemen or enforcement actors. Instead, small, transparent municipal fees should be introduced and utilised to cover sanitation, lighting, and waste collection.

**Eviction makes for an easy spectacle, but the real and lasting challenge lies in designing a Dhaka that acknowledges its invisible workforce as part of the city's social and economic fabric.**

Eviction makes for an easy spectacle, but the real and lasting challenge lies in designing a Dhaka that acknowledges its invisible workforce as part of the city's social and economic fabric. A society that excludes its population is brittle, and one that dignifies its population builds resilience.

**Ishtiaq Mohammad** is a lecturer in the Department of Sociology at East West University, Dhaka.

# The hands that clean, the Harijans we refuse to see

MINTU DESHWARA

Her name is Rani, which literally means "queen". But her life could not be further from royalty. She lives in a ten-by-twelve-foot, single, damp room at the Harijan Colony in Moulvibazar's Kulaura Upazila. The room, and 199 others, are cluttered with kathas and pillows for sleeping, a rope strung across to hang clothes, and a stove in one corner. Even though the condition is unlivable, Rani Basfor is more concerned about what to cook and feed her family of five.

This is not an isolated case. It is the reality of the Harijan people across the country, who spend hours cleaning civilised cities and municipalities but are forced to live a life not suited to a civilised society.

Rekha Basfor of Moulvibazar's Sreemangal goes to work in the morning after drinking only a glass of water. "I don't have the luxury of having breakfast — a piece of bun and half a cup of tea costs about Tk 15, and my daily wage is Tk 33," she said. For the family, she often cooks only rice and sometimes mashed potatoes. Fish and meat are never part of her meals except on special occasions, when she



Scenes from the Harijan colony in Sylhet, where families live in cramped, unhygienic conditions with poor sanitation and limited access to basic facilities.

PHOTOS: SHEIKH NASIR

but a luxury to us."

According to the Bangladesh Harijan Oikya Parishad, the lowest municipal salaries are alarmingly low: Sharaiatpur pays Tk 3,000, Madaripur Tk 2,000, Kumarkhali Tk 1,800, Rajbari Tk 2,300, Akhaura Tk 1,500, Kushtia Tk 2,700, Natore Tk 2,100, Bogura Tk 3,300, and Shanthar Tk 1,200. Sylhet City Corporation offers Tk 3,200 a month (up from Tk 2,200 last July), Sreemangal pays Tk 1,000 (previously Tk 550), while Kulaura provides the highest rate at Tk 3,800.

Sumita Basfor of Sreemangal said, "Our stomachs often remain empty—not because we do not work hard, but because life is unfair. What hurts most is not only the hunger, but the humiliation of being treated as less than human." Rani from Kulaura said, "When we go to hospitals, doctors don't examine us properly, considering us contaminated. Even during pregnancy, it's hard to secure proper treatment or safe delivery."

According to the book *Study on the Wages of Urban Cleaners*, published by Nagorik Uddog in January 2025, 75 percent of workers

do not receive protective equipment, and only 8 percent of workers have access to healthcare. The deprivation hits hardest among the children, as education remains out of reach for most of them. Shabiria, an eleven-year-old student, said she no longer wishes to attend school. "No one in my class wants to sit next to me, and they refuse to talk to me. It makes me feel like never going back again."

Pannanlal Basfor, organising secretary of Bangladesh Harijan Oikya Parishad, said, "The British brought Harijans to this land over 200 years ago to work as sweepers. Even after two centuries, we are still excluded from being incorporated into the official system." He said that the Harijan community is estimated to number 1.5 million people, living in 124 colonies across 55 districts, and all of them face the same unfortunate conditions.

According to the book *Harijans of Bangladesh and SDG-II: A Critical Analysis* (published in May 2025), around 85 percent of Harijans live below the poverty line, where low income severely restricts their access to adequate food, proper

nutrition, and healthcare. Living conditions are equally alarming: only 22 percent of households have access to piped water, while 90 percent lack proper drainage systems, creating an environment that worsens disease and undermines nutritional security.

Educational and social indicators also reflect deep marginalisation, with 68 percent of Harijans having limited access to education, 74 percent facing workplace harassment, 41 percent experiencing child marriage, and 55 percent reporting domestic violence.

Sagar Basfor, general secretary of the Bangladesh Harijan Rakha Parishad's Sreemangal Upazila unit, said, "Many journalists, NGOs, and government officials come, capture photos, write stories or reports. They all promise everything, but nothing changes."

Md Shah Jahan, Deputy Director (Beggars, Harijans, Tea Workers and Hijras), Social Security Branch, Department of Social Services, said, "Now only two programmes are being run for Harijans — a scholarship for students and a monthly allowance of six hundred taka for people from the Harijan community above 50 years of age. However, these allocations are given subject to the availability of the budget. We distribute whatever allocation we get."

Supreme Court lawyer and rights activist Sara Hossain said Harijans should unite to achieve their rights and they should not be divided among themselves. A quota system should be maintained to protect the rights of the backward communities.

"To build a society without discrimination, the first task is to establish the rights, stability, and dignity of those who are most oppressed. This is the state's responsibility. The existing organisations working on the rights of Harijans must be organised to fulfil their righteous demands," said noted economist and activist Professor Anu Muhammad.

**Mintu Deshwara** is a journalist at The Daily Star.



manages to get some extra money from somewhere.

A Harijan seeking anonymity said that the "extra income" often refers to income from drug peddling, as many of them are being forced into the business to cover the increasing cost of living. Santa Basfor of Sreemangal said, "We cannot afford to put basic food on our table. Proper nutritional food, even some snacks, are nothing





## WHO BANKRUPTED OUR STRENGTH?

### The forgotten story of North Bengal's sugar mills

**Newspaper reports over the years consistently highlighted losses in the mills, gradually creating public perception that corruption and mismanagement were the root causes of these losses. They completely overlooked the fact that interest payments were one of the main sources of escalating costs.**

MOSHAHIDA SULTANA

It was December 2, 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the sugarcane farmers in northern Bangladesh were preparing for harvest. The sugarcane fields were full of standing crops, ready to be collected and transported to the mill gate for crushing. Suddenly, a government announcement declared that six out of the fifteen state-owned sugar mills must suspend their operations. Farmers found it hard to believe whether this was true or false. The news left millions of people across six districts of North Bengal stunned and bewildered.

These sugar mills had formed the economic backbone of North Bengal since the British period. Since British colonial times, these mills have catalysed migration and economic activity in the region. Before the sugar mills were built, the region did not have any significant economic base. To attract migrant workers, the mill owners had to build schools, mosques, and hospitals, and allocate land around farms for living. Railways were laid to facilitate transportation, and various incentives were provided to encourage sugarcane cultivation. With this development, the region could export sugar after meeting local consumption.

In the 1970s, all of the sugar mills were nationalised. At that time, the government used to offer a low price for sugarcane. As a result, producing jaggery instead of supplying sugarcane was more profitable. Farmers shifted their focus to jaggery production. Farmers found it more profitable to produce jaggery

Sugar and Food Industries Corporation (BSFIC) was responsible for both producing and importing sugar. Due to government control, BSFIC had been able to regulate the price of sugar within the country for a long time. It was because of these mills that a widespread marketing network was maintained, enabling fair distribution at controlled prices and protecting consumer interests.

In 2002, liberalisation of the sugar industry began with the authorisation of private imports. From 2004 onward, refineries were required to export 50% of their refined sugar as a condition of getting permission to enter the market. However, this condition has not been met. Moreover, when importing surplus sugar, two main arguments are presented: first, that private refineries will import extra raw sugar, refine it, and export it to earn foreign currency; second, that these private refineries will release the excess stock of sugar to control market prices during times of need. But in reality, these private refineries were not exporting to foreign markets at all. Instead, they started to sell the sugar within the local market, posing a threat to the market of the fifteen domestic mills. Meanwhile, the unsold stock of sugar in the state-owned sugar mills continued to increase.

Since 2002, when the import of sugar was liberalised, the government has lost control over sugar prices. By the time the government attempted to limit imports again in late 2015 by imposing tariffs (duty), private importers had already established such a strong grip on the market that the government could not control their imports. In other

The properties of these mills became attractive targets for foreign investors, leading to proposals for industrial parks and export zones. However, protests, especially by indigenous communities like the Santals, halted many plans. Even recent attempts to reinvest and revitalise mills, such as an MoU with a private company in 2024, faced suspicion and rejection by authorities.

It is important to note that, according to the Public Corporations Ordinance of 1986, sugar and food industries were required to sell sugar at government-fixed prices. According to the ordinance, if the mills produced at a cost higher than the price, the government was expected to cover the resulting loss, which is termed the trade gap. This was a way to protect both the industry and consumer rights. However, for many years, instead of providing this trade gap (the difference between the sale price and production cost), the government guaranteed loans instead. This caused the debt of the Food and Sugar Industries Corporation to increase continuously. Every year, the interest payments on these loans amounted to around 40% of the production costs; in some mills, this interest component was even higher.

Newspaper reports over the years consistently highlighted losses in the mills, gradually creating public perception that corruption and mismanagement were the root causes of these losses. They completely overlooked the fact that interest payments were one of the main sources of escalating costs.

However, due to fierce protests by the Santal community, the project was cancelled. Since 2020, investors from various countries have shown interest in investing in the mills. Several discussions took place, but ultimately, no proactive steps were taken.

In 2024, the government signed an MoU with the S. Alam Group to improve the management and profitability of the mills. The strategy was to show the MoU as a guarantee for securing loans from S. Alam's banks and then to invest in modernising the mills. There were serious doubts about whether this was truly the goal of S. Alam. The Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation was particularly suspicious of this arrangement, leading to the MoU's cancellation shortly after August 5, 2024.

**Setabganj Sugar Mills in the northern district of Dinajpur.**

FILE PHOTO: STAR



Following Sheikh Hasina's departure in 2024, farmers' and workers' organisations took initiatives to reopen the mills. The Ministry of Industries formed a task force, including officials from the Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation, experienced engineers, chemists, agronomists, researchers, labour leaders, farmers, and indigenous representatives, appointing a joint convenor. Based on their recommendations, the government withdrew the suspension of crushing in the mills and planned to gradually reopen six mills. They submitted a three-year budget proposal for the two most promising mills (Shetabganj and Shyampur) to the Ministry of Industry, which was then sent to the Ministry of Finance.

In the first year, the plantation budget for both mills was Tk 17 crore, but the money was not released. Despite this, farmers around the Setabganj and Shyampur mills were motivated anew to grow sugarcane. Surveys conducted at the beginning of 2025 with nearly a thousand farmers in these areas expressed their willingness to cultivate sugarcane if the mills reopened. Now, more than a year later, the Ministry of Finance has still not provided any explanation for withholding the funds. Interestingly, the Ministry of Industry has expressed the view that these mills are unprofitable.

Sources within the Ministry of Industry reveal that, since the government is no longer interested in investing, they are expecting foreign investments. Accordingly, the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA) is in talks with foreign companies. Earlier, a feasibility study was conducted with Thailand's SUTEC company, but it was intended not for reopening the mills but for shutting down fifteen mills and investing only in three, consolidating operations in just three districts across North Bengal. This means farmers would face great hardship supplying to distant mills, as the quality of their sugarcane diminishes over long transport. The close relationships between farmers and local communities have built with each mill—through schools, mosques, hospitals—

would be lost. Authorities carried out feasibility studies and made proposals without prior community consultation, disregarding public interest.

Before market liberalisation, the Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation (BSFIC) had control over the sugar price. After privatisation, price control shifted entirely to private refineries, which grew stronger while state mills weakened through competition. Today, private refineries produce approximately 3.2 million metric tonnes of sugar annually, importing low-quality, health-damaging re-sugar that dominates the local market. Meanwhile, state-owned mills, despite being profitable in some cases, have been pushed into greater challenges.

After the mass uprising, when new hope sparked among the people, and as workers and farmers once again looked towards the government to revive the economy through the sugar industry, it became apparent that the old system and development philosophy remained intact.

Only a few new faces appeared, with no connection to farmers or workers. Their sole purpose was to secure political power at any cost. The law enacted in 1986, meant to protect local industries, ultimately failed as successive governments chose to cover losses with loans rather than strategic reform, leaving Bangladesh's sugar industry in a vulnerable state. The ongoing cycle of promises, fake development rhetoric, and failure to support local industry reflects a broader systemic neglect.

Before any country liberalises trade or decides to privatise, it must first ensure that its own industries have attained sufficient capacity. Pushing an industry into competition before it is ready can crush its confidence forever. It is like, before teaching a child to run, asking him or her to win an Olympics marathon. If they fail, we label them as incapable of running. Similarly, creating hostile environments for industries while hoping for profit is unrealistic.

Our country is about to graduate from a Least Developed Country (LDC) to a middle-income country, yet we lag far behind in every aspect of national capacity. While discussions are going on to reform following the July Charter, economic reforms remain the most neglected issue. Additionally, a Sustainable Development Task Force was formed after the July uprising, but it offers no proposals for capacity development of Bangladesh's state-owned enterprises. Politicians and celebrity policy-makers often publicly claim their policies would make Bangladesh another Singapore, Malaysia, or China. But they don't see that most East Asian countries have strengthened their state enterprises, improved their technological, managerial, and institutional capacities, built their own economic foundations, and then opened themselves to global competition.

Our policymakers show very little interest in leveraging the country's resources through minimal investments to develop industries. They equate development solely with foreign investment. But to move away from this flawed thinking, we need to understand Bangladesh's industrial history. We must question why, after acquiring so much land for Special Economic Zones over the years, foreign investors are still reluctant to invest. Instead of lamenting the lack of foreign investment, we need to identify and strengthen the areas where our own strengths lie. The state-owned sugar mills are our strength if we really can utilise the existing resources.

**Dr. Mosahida Sultana** is an Associate Professor, Department of Accounting, University of Dhaka.



Empty cargo beds that were once used to haul sugarcane have been left to rust under the open sky at Pabna Sugar Mills following the unit's closure in December 2020.

FILE PHOTO: AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU



A view of the state-owned Setabganj Sugar Mills in Dinajpur. The government decided to close down several sugar mills at the end of 2020.

FILE PHOTO: STAR

**After the mass uprising, when new hope sparked among the people, and as workers and farmers once again looked towards the government to revive the economy through the sugar industry, it became apparent that the old system and development philosophy remained intact.**

instead of supplying their sugarcane to the mills. In the 1970s, farmers were even shot at to force them to supply sugarcane to the mills, resulting in the death of a young farmer. Later, the government gradually increased sugar prices, restoring farmers' interest in cultivating sugarcane, leading to increased supply to mills and profit for the industry. However, this prosperity was short-lived.

When mills couldn't pay farmers on time, as the government delayed payment because of its inefficient process of disbursing money, farmers' interest in supplying sugarcane declined again, and mills faced losses. The following year, poor payments and reduced crop yields caused supply to drop further, especially in years when market prices were low, prompting farmers to turn to jaggery production again. However, despite the ups and downs of profitability since the 1970s, some mills used to consistently make profit while others made profit only sporadically.

The capacity of Bangladesh's state-owned sugar mills has never been sufficient to meet the entire country's demand. Sugar has always had to be imported to supplement domestic production. Until 2002, the Bangladesh

words, after simplifying the import process, excess imports empowered private refineries indiscriminately. It is evident that the government, unable to regulate importers, shifted the burden onto consumers. As a result, the price of sugar increased from Tk 60 in 2020 to Tk 160 in 2022, within just two years.

This shift is rooted in the global economic trend of neoliberal policies since the 1980s—privatisation and market liberalisation—implemented in Bangladesh without strengthening state-owned industries. While India maintained support for its sugar mills, Bangladesh's approach weakened its industry, leading to inefficiencies and mounting losses in state mills. Despite laws to protect domestic industries, the government often covered losses with loans instead of strategic investments, causing debts to swell and reducing efficiency. These state mills struggled intensely to survive in the face of fierce competition. The gap between production costs and market prices kept widening further.

The government's failure to develop a cohesive modernisation plan and to support existing mills transformed them into unprofitable, relic assets.

While corruption and mismanagement certainly existed, the bigger problem was the lack of a long-term, comprehensive plan on which to base modernisation efforts. With proper investment, these mills could have been upgraded, producing not only sugar but also various other products from by-products, making the Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation profitable.

Every government adopted the same policy stance—delaying payments on the trade deficit, avoiding new investments, and encouraging a gradual shutdown process. Despite such adverse conditions, some mills with better performance were still operational. However, there was no serious discussion or strategy on how to reduce losses. Instead, the government kept justifying the closure of these mills by citing their losses, using that as the main excuse.

All the infrastructure—properties, central locations, and the vast assets of these mills—made them attractive sites for foreign and local investors. Over time, there were attempts to utilise these lands for Special Economic Zones (SEZs). For example, in 2016, plans were made to establish an SEZ on the farmland of Bagda Farm in Gaibandha.

through schools, mosques, hospitals—

# KHATUNGANJ

## The fading glory of a trading hub

Once the country's largest trading hotspot, the wholesale market is now losing its old rhythm amid cash crises, loan scams and crumbling infrastructure



MD MEHEDI HASAN, back from Chattogram, and MOHAMMAD SUMAN

If you were opening a bank in Bangladesh, Khatunganj in the port city of Chattogram would be at the top of your list for new branches. This alone shows how vital this wholesale hub is to the country's essential commodity supply chain and overall trading activities.

For generations, traders and importers have been bringing in goods, storing them in Khatunganj and supplying them across the country. The daily value of its transactions is often compared to that of the country's premier bourse Dhaka Stock Exchange.

To grasp its influence, just look into your kitchen. Chances are, at least one item there -- lentils, spices, oil or onions -- has passed through Khatunganj.

Sitting on the banks of Chaktai canal, this centuries old trading heart has been pumping lifeblood to the country's food supply chain. It also sits at the centre of numerous loan scams and a flashpoint of money allegedly laundered by the Chattogram-based S Alam Group.

Now struggling to stay afloat after the lending anomalies and amid an increasing cash crisis, the market is somewhat a shadow of its former self. Traders speak of glory days gone by.

They blame worsening traffic congestion, a lack of business diversification, poor roads and decaying infrastructure. Many also say the trading community has failed to adapt to a changing business climate. The S Alam saga has only added to the turmoil.

Even so, each afternoon, sunlight still glints off the Karnaphuli river as trucks and vans squeeze through the narrow, crowded lanes, loading and unloading goods.

On the surface, it might look like business as usual. But traders and bankers say all is not well. Loans are scarce, and banks have lost much of their lending power.

**LOSING THE TRADE RHYTHM**  
The political changeover last year and large loan defaults by Chattogram-based borrowers have dealt another blow to the already struggling businesses in Khatunganj, according to traders.

Abul Bashar Chowdhury, chairman of the BSM Group, said, "The glory of Khatunganj is gone. In terms of business and trade, what used to be a bustling, vibrant marketplace is now only about 25 percent of what it once was."

He pointed to infrastructural problems, such as narrow roads, poor electricity supply, and recurring natural disasters. Besides, waterlogging occurs several times almost every year, damaging goods and commodities.

"Due to multiple factors, such as unhealthy competition, economic downturn, and structural challenges,



the business community in the port city has been hit harder than others."

Chowdhury believes many of the traditional businessmen have failed to adapt.

"They did not shift toward value-added activities such as retail packaging or product diversification in line with changing market demands. They should have moved in that direction, but they did not."

Before 2024, Khatunganj underwent its first major shake-up in 2007 during the army-backed caretaker government.

The decline began after the 1/1 period, when the government pressured traders to sell essentials at lower prices under the pretext of market control, said Mosharrif Hossain Mintu, chairman of MH Group.

He added that many leading traders vanished from the market during that time.

Before 2007, Khatunganj had around 1,500 importers and 3,000 to 3,500

wholesalers.

Over the years, those numbers have fallen to 80-100 importers and 500-700 wholesalers, while daily transactions have dropped from Tk 700-Tk 800 crore to just Tk 150-Tk 200 crore now, Mintu said.

According to the businessman, many traders have also moved operations from the congested, waterlogged market to areas such as Agrabad and Chawkbazar.

From 2009 to 2024, access to bank loans became nearly impossible for anyone without strong political connections, he said. "Even when loans were issued from local branches in Khatunganj, Asadganj, or Chaktai, the

branches of Islami Bank Bangladesh, Social Islami Bank, Bangladesh Commerce Bank, Global Islami Bank, Union Bank and First Security Islami Bank were reportedly taken by S Alam Group and its affiliates, bypassing proper banking procedures.

An investigation by the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU) found the group and its associates withdrew around Tk 2.25 lakh crore in loans from eleven banks and one non-bank financial institution. The majority of these loans came from Khatunganj branches.

At Social Islami Bank's Khatunganj branch, Tk 4,821 crore out of Tk 5,335 crore in loans went to S Alam companies.

At Islami Bank, they took Tk 80,000 crore, including Tk 66,000 crore from the Khatunganj branch.

Other branches followed a similar pattern -- Tk 1,448 crore from Jubilee Road and Tk 666 crore from Dewanhat -- leaving massive defaults.

Now those branches are half-dead.

At the Social Islami Bank Khatunganj branch, a depositor recently asked to withdraw Tk 5,000 but was told he could only take Tk 2,000 due to a cash shortage. After repeated pleas, the manager finally approved the withdrawal of the full amount.

"There has been continuous pressure from depositors since the merger news," said branch manager Mohammad Salim Ullah. "This branch has lost its capacity to lend, and we are struggling to manage withdrawals."

At Global Islami Bank's Khatunganj branch, the ATM booth was found closed, and the counters were nearly empty. "There is no money in the branch. Banking activities are almost at a standstill," said branch manager SK Rasel Uddin.

Bankers say many S Alam companies have almost stopped operations since early this year, while those still open are barely producing anything.

Syed Mahbubur Rahman, CEO of Mutual Trust Bank, said there is no business left in Chattogram now. "Most of the loans have turned default. No bank feels comfortable lending anymore."

However, Mohammad Ali, managing director and CEO of Pubali Bank, said their business in Chattogram, particularly at Khatunganj, is doing well.

"We have not lent to any controversial businessmen," he said, adding that banks that gave money to controversial businesses are now suffering.

Except for one or two clients, Ali said they are continuing to do good business in the port city as before.

Bangladesh Bank officials in Chattogram also said several branches are under pressure because of excessive loan concentration among a few borrowers. Some investigations into those irregularities were never acted upon.

"We reported the risks, but decisions were taken at the top level," said a central bank official, preferring anonymity.

However, Areif Hossain Khan, executive director and spokesperson of the central bank, who once oversaw the central bank's Chattogram office told The Daily Star that any investigation report submitted by divisional offices, including Chattogram, is treated with due importance.

Among the large defaulters in Chattogram are Saad Musa Group, Western Marine Shipyard, Rising Steel, Quantum Power, SA Group, Ratanpur Group, Ehsan Steel Re-Rolling Mill, and Siddique Traders, according to central bank documents.

### A LOOMING SHADOW

Apart from lending anomalies, Khatunganj's decline as a trading hub points to a wider trading shift.

Most new trade and credit now flow towards Dhaka. A study by local think tank Policy Research Institute found that around 78 percent of all loans in the country go to Dhaka and Chattogram combined, but Dhaka now claims nearly 63 percent, leaving only 15 percent for the port city.

This imbalance has drained vitality from the port city's economy. Warehouses still open at dawn, and trucks still jam the narrow alleys, but the energy is not the same. The wholesale market now runs on habit, not momentum.

"Authorities need to pay attention to Khatunganj, a business hub with 400-500 years of history," said BSM Group Chairman Bashar. "If they do not, it will soon become just a story people tell about the past."

**Sitting on the banks of Chaktai canal, this centuries-old trading heart has been pumping lifeblood to the country's food supply chain. It also sits at the centre of numerous loan scams and a flashpoint of money allegedly laundered by the Chattogram-based S Alam Group**

funds were often diverted elsewhere instead of being reinvested in trade."

The situation worsened as interest rates rose and new investments dwindled.

Abdur Sabur, managing director of Jahan & Brothers, said Khatunganj once supplied goods to Noakhali, Feni, and Cumilla via waterways. But the construction of sluice gates in Chaktai and nearby canals to tackle urban flooding has disrupted those routes and left the market area persistently waterlogged, he said.

He added that while 25-tonne trucks run freely from Dhaka's wholesale hubs, goods-laden trucks from Khatunganj cannot carry more than 12 tonnes due to weight restrictions at the Mirsarai weigh station since mid-2018.

This limitation has sharply increased transport costs.

### CASH CRISIS CHOKING THE MARKET

Inside Khatunganj's narrow streets, the sound of trucks and shouting workers still fills the air. But behind the bustle, there is a deep liquidity crunch.

Banks see their loan repayments stalled, and many debts unpaid. Bankers say their lending has slowed sharply.

"Our business situation is very bad. On top of the political uncertainty, the looters have emptied everything," said Syed Sabbir Ahmed, owner of Sabbir Trading, a spice importer.

"We cannot get money from banks anymore. S Alam has taken all the loans," he added. "We small and medium entrepreneurs are in real trouble."

Mohammad Abdus Salam, president of the Khatunganj Trade and Industries Association, said, "Many traders here are now on the run. Loans are no longer as easily available from banks as before."

Salam said those with strong financial records can still manage, but banking has become painfully slow. "Banks now require too much paperwork. The pace of business is gone," he added.

Some small and medium traders have already left Khatunganj, shifting elsewhere or closing down entirely.

The confidence is gone, one trader said. "Earlier, you could walk into a bank and get a loan based on your reputation. Now even the bankers are afraid."

**S ALAM SAGA AND BROKEN BANKS**  
Almost all the loans from Khatunganj