

# Full pay, half freedom, complete upheaval



## MIND THE GAP

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## NOSHIN NAWAL

Apparently, salvation for Bangladeshi women has arrived. Jamaat-e-Islami has declared that, under their rule, women will work five hours a day and still receive a full day's pay. Employers will pay for five, and the government will foot the bill for the remaining three. Because nothing screams women's empowerment quite like being paid to work less. Let us take a moment to applaud this grand gesture. Women will finally have time to rest, they say. Rest from what, exactly? The office? The factory? Or the unpaid double shifts they work every day at home?

For centuries, Bangladeshi women have been the country's invisible economic engine. They have built households, raised children, cooked meals, and cared for the sick without clocking out or cashing in. Their labour has been missing from every GDP calculation, every national budget, and every line of economic policy. And now, the political solution seems to be to pay women for staying home. I am sure our grandmothers are thrilled. These are the women who kept entire households running through famine, war, and political upheaval. They managed to make ends meet with ration cards, borrowed rice, and sheer determination. They did not need five-hour shifts. They deserved recognition.

Our mothers, too, have been the silent infrastructure of our lives. When a woman in Dhaka goes to work, five other women make that possible. Her mother cooks, her grandmother picks up the children from school, her sister supervises homework, her mother-in-law cleans the house, and her neighbour keeps an eye on the stove when the gas runs low. For every woman who steps out, there is a small army of other women holding

it all wrapped neatly in the vocabulary of care. The word "honour" is being thrown around again, that sacred Bangladeshi word which has excused everything from child marriage to silencing women on talk shows. Women are being told that they are valued, but only in carefully contained portions. Work, yes, but not too much. Speak, but not too loudly. Exist, but within limits. This pseudo-progressive idea is dressed up as benevolence,

safe, factories humane, and workplaces fair. If the state really wants to honour women, how about enforcing harassment laws so that women can travel without fearing for their lives or dignity? But no, instead we get a political bedtime story. In this version of equality, women are delicate flowers who must be shielded from the exhaustion of an eight-hour workday. Their freedom is measured in coffee breaks, and their dignity

handle without upsetting the moral fabric of society. Sarcasm aside, this is not about kindness. It is about control. Reducing women's visibility in the public sphere, under the pretext of protecting them, has always been a favourite tactic. Because once women start showing up, they also start speaking up. And that is when things get inconvenient.

Our mothers and grandmothers stepped in so that we could step out. They carried the unpaid weight of the household work so that their daughters could study, work, and build lives that stretched beyond the kitchen. They were the scaffolding of progress. And now, the scaffolding is being asked to pack up and go home, along with the building. A five-hour workday is not a gift. It is a leash tied with a silk ribbon. It tells women that they are only welcome in the workforce as long as they do not take up too much space, time, or power.

And for those who argue that this is a choice, let us be honest. There is no real choice when social norms and political rhetoric tell you that "good women" prioritise family over ambition. There is no freedom when staying home is framed as virtue and going out is framed as defiance. If Jamaat truly wanted to empower women, it would address the issues that keep women unsafe and underpaid. They would protect women like the one on that bus in Dhaka, who fought off harassment with nothing but her shoe while other passengers sat silent. They would build systems that respect women's work, not policies that reduce it.

Instead, we are being offered what looks like progress but smells like nostalgia for a time when women knew their place. The irony is that every woman who makes it to the workplace does so because generations of other women made sacrifices to get her there. And now, after all that effort, we are being told that progress means clocking out early. If this is empowerment, then patriarchy must be laughing somewhere in an air-conditioned office, collecting a full day's pay for half a day's work. Bangladeshi women have already worked enough unpaid shifts for one lifetime. They do not need shorter hours. They need respect, safety, and equality—not the illusion of it.



VISUAL: ARWIN SHAMS SIDDIQUEE

the fort behind her. And now, we are being told to go home. We are told it is progressive, even compassionate. It is apparently for our honour and well-being. Because heaven forbid women get too used to public spaces, financial independence, opinions, or options. Better to tuck them back into the domestic comfort zone with a full day's pay and a pat on the head.

but it reeks of regression. You cannot put women in the workforce for decades, rely on their labour to prop up the economy, and then hand them a symbolic half-day like it is a bouquet of roses. Women are not tired of working; they are tired of being patronised.

It is also economically absurd. If the government wants to spend public money on women, perhaps start by making buses

is apparently restored by working less.

If we follow this logic, maybe next the government can introduce the "three-hour honour package" for working mothers, or a special "one-hour premium" for those who promise to stay extra modest. Perhaps we could also establish a Department of Dignity, staffed entirely by men, to determine exactly how many hours of freedom women can

## Apathy and lack of legal protection endanger dwindling urban greenery



**Anjum N Choudhury**  
is a climate policy research consultant at the Asian Development Bank.

## ANJUM N CHAUDHURY

There is a 55-year-old, perhaps older, sheesham tree on a narrow stretch of municipal land behind our apartment building. Roughly five storeys tall, its thick canopy glitters in the sun, and it is visited daily by a wide array of birds—shalik, doyel, bulbul, kaththokra, shui chorha and, of course, kaak. In addition to our residential building, it is flanked by the official compounds of two government institutions, neither of which owns the strip of land the sheesham tree occupies.

We had always assumed the tree would be safe from harm, as its surrounding area is fully developed, and it does not pose a threat to nearby structures, electrical wires, or passers-by. On the contrary, its shade cools its vicinity in the summer, and its presence has been an invaluable source of mental support to us through the pandemic and the unpleasant dreariness of day-to-day life in Dhaka. It had slipped our minds that wood from a sheesham tree is widely used to build furniture and, therefore, highly valuable.

One afternoon, the sheesham tree caught the attention of a group of contractors hired by one of the government complexes to do some other landscaping work. Fortunately, my parents and I were at home at the time, and we spotted them just as they were fastening their ropes around its branches and scaling its trunk, equipped with sickles and a chainsaw. In our race downstairs to stop them, we encountered a few of our building's other tenants. Hoping to garner strength in numbers, I asked them to join us in trying to save the tree, but to my utter dismay, no one wanted to help. One uncle even tried to find a silver lining, saying no tree meant fewer insects. To them, the tree's felling was a foregone conclusion, so why even bother?

The tree's protection ultimately fell to me, my parents—both in their seventies—and two guards. We demanded that the contractors show us an official permission for the tree's felling. When they failed

to present one, we scrambled to get in touch with someone from their client institution. The contractors panicked and abandoned their enterprise before we actually managed to speak to anyone.

Having narrowly escaped disaster this time, I consulted a lawyer at the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA), hoping to secure some form of legal protection, perhaps a plaque, for the tree's future preservation. Sadly, Bangladesh's existing environmental laws do not have

and stores vast volumes of carbon dioxide. Bangladesh has been party to the Paris Climate Agreement since 2015 and has made an international commitment, through its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 20.3 percent by 2035.

Would it not, then, make sense to legally protect the trees that are actively removing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere?

A tree's full "environmental value" can only be realised once it is 10 years old. Every Earth Day, every Environment Day, every climate conference at home and abroad, and every heatwave, our leaders and administrators lament the loss of green spaces and entreat citizens to plant more trees. Their words ring hollow when they subsequently do nothing to ensure saplings grow to their full potential, protect older trees, or implement zoning laws mandating green spaces in urban areas.

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provisions for protection of this kind. The Bangladesh Environment Conservation Act, 1995, only applies to trees in ecologically critical areas. What's more, the sheesham tree is not considered a native species (though a quick internet search would say otherwise) and is not deemed to have any environmental, medicinal, or livelihood value that warrants legal protection. The only way to protect a tree that is not located in an ecologically critical area is by obtaining a High Court order or by getting a prominent public figure to declare it a tree of cultural significance.

The legal assertion that the sheesham tree has no "environmental value" is factually incorrect. Even if one overlooks the wildlife that frequents it, a 55-year-old sheesham tree possesses immense carbon sequestration potential, meaning it absorbs

The sitting environment adviser is a career environmental lawyer who could have, at the very least, begun revising Bangladesh's environmental laws to be more thorough. In December 2024, she announced that a new law for the protection of trees was being formulated, but there has been no follow-up in the 11 months since. In the meantime, a lack of preemptive legal protection led to trees in Hatirjheel and Panthakunja Park being felled for the elevated expressway's construction. Although a High Court order was eventually issued to halt it in September this year, contractors continued their operations, claiming they had not received an official notice.

When I shared the story of my family's confrontation with the contractors on social media, a family friend told me she had come

home one day to find someone had

dismembered her neem tree because

its branches had grown past her

property's boundary wall. I hope her

grief and my family's anxiety over

our cherished trees never harden our

hearts like those of our neighbours.

However, I wonder if there is any

other way to cope when our country's

laws are so ill-equipped to protect

the things we hold dear, and loss is

perpetually imminent.

### Maddhapara Granite Mining Company Limited

(A company of Petrobangla)  
Parbatipur, Dinajpur.

#### Invitation for International Open Tender

01	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Power, Energy & Mineral Resources/Energy & Mineral Resources Division
02	Agency	Bangladesh Oil, Gas & Mineral Corporation (Petrobangla)
03	Procuring Entity Name	Maddhapara Granite Mining Company Limited (MGMC)
04	Procuring Entity District	Dinajpur, Bangladesh
05	Invitation For	Procurement of Prilled Ammonium Nitrate.
06	Invitation Ref. No. and Date	28.17.0000.413.38.001.25.162; Dated: 13-11-2025
KEY INFORMATION		
07	Procurement Method	Open Tendering Method
FUNDING INFORMATION		
08	Budget and Source of Funds	Company's own fund.
PARTICULAR INFORMATION		
09	Last Selling Date and Time of Tender Documents	Date: 28-12-2025; Time: 06:00 PM
10	Closing Date and Time of submission of Tender Documents	Date: 29-12-2025; Time: 12:15 PM
11	Opening Date & Time of Tender Documents	Date: 29-12-2025; Time: 12:30 PM
12	Place of Tender Documents selling	# Accounts Department, Maddhapara Granite Mining Co. Ltd, Maddhapara, Parbatipur, Dinajpur, Bangladesh.
13	Place of Tender Receiving & Opening	# Accounts Section MGMC, Dhaka Office, Petrobangla, Petrocenter (Level-13), 3, Kawran Bazar C/A Dhaka, Bangladesh.
INFORMATION FOR TENDERER		
14	Eligibility of Tenderer	Any individual(s)/Firm(s) who fulfill the qualification(s) criteria stipulated in the Tender Data Sheet (TDS) and other conditions of the Tender Document are eligible to participate in the Tender.
15	Brief Description of goods	Procurement of Prilled Ammonium Nitrate.
16	Price of Tender Document (Tk.)	Tk. 5,000.00 (Five Thousand).
17	Identification of Group	Procurement of Prilled Ammonium Nitrate.
	Location	US Dollar 18,000.00 or Equivalent Bangladeshi Taka 22,14,000.00
	Tender security Amount	Delivery will be made in 3 schedules as mentioned in Tender Documents under section: 6 Schedule of Requirements.
	Delivery time in days	
PROCURING ENTITY DETAILS		
18	Name, Designation and Address of Official Inviting Tender	Md Shamsul Mostafa General Manager (PEP&M) Maddhapara Granite Mining Company Ltd., Maddhapara, Parbatipur, Dinajpur, Bangladesh Phone no. +88 01711-563236 E-mail: <a href="mailto:purchase@mgmc.org.bd">purchase@mgmc.org.bd</a>
19	Special Instructions	<p>a) Tender must remain valid for 150 days from the date of closing of the Tender</p> <p>b) Tender security in the form of Bank Guarantee or Bank Draft or Pay Order in favor of Maddhapara Granite Mining Company Limited from any schedule Bank in Bangladesh with full obligation and liabilities.</p> <p>c) Tender security must valid for 150 (One Hundred Fifty) days from the closing of the Tender.</p> <p>d) If any unavoidable circumstances prevail in the date of receiving/opening of the Tender, Tender will be received/opened in the next working date of same hours.</p> <p>e) This notice may be viewed in <a href="http://www.mgmc.org.bd">www.mgmc.org.bd</a> ; <a href="http://www.petrobangla.org.bd">www.petrobangla.org.bd</a> &amp; <a href="http://www.cptu.gov.bd">www.cptu.gov.bd</a></p>
20	This Tender will be conducted as per the Public Procurement Rules-2025.	
21	The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject all tenders without assigning any reason whatsoever.	

Md Shamsul Mostafa  
General Manager (PEP&M)