

The Daily Star

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BNP man's death in custody demands proper probe

It is also in the interest of the army's public image

It is concerning to learn that Shamsuzzaman Dablu, 52, general secretary of the BNP's Jibannagar municipal unit in Chuadanga, died while in army custody supposedly during a late-night joint forces operation, a fact acknowledged by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR). Any death in custody, regardless of the allegations involved, raises grave constitutional and legal concerns.

The sharply conflicting narratives provided by the army and eyewitnesses about the incident demand scrutiny. According to the ISPR, Dablu died after "falling ill" during the joint forces operation on Monday. The ISPR press release also states that he was detained from a pharmacy near an upazila health complex on allegations of possessing illegal weapons. It further claims that the patrol team later searched the pharmacy and recovered a 9mm pistol, one magazine, and four rounds of ammunition. However, two local BNP leaders and eyewitnesses have alleged that Dablu was tied up, gagged, and beaten for between one-and-a-half to two hours at the BNP party office before being taken to hospital. Family members have also alleged that he was tortured to death.

These divergent accounts make an independent investigation imperative. According to our report, the Chuadanga superintendent of police confirmed that the local police had not been informed about the army operation. This is quite puzzling and raises procedural questions about oversight, coordination, and accountability in internal security operations. We welcome the army's immediate withdrawal of the personnel involved and its promise of a high level investigation. But while an internal probe is necessary, it will not, on its own, be sufficient to ensure public confidence.

Protests by local residents and BNP activists indicate that this has become a matter of broad public concern. Human rights organisations Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) and Manabdhikar Shongskriti Foundation (MSF) have described the incident as a grave violation of human rights, emphasising that no member of the security forces is above the law and that the state bears an absolute responsibility to protect those in custody. According to ASK, 29 people were killed extrajudicially or died as a result of torture in custody between January and November last year.

We therefore call for a transparent and independent investigation, not just an internal military inquiry. The army must also fully cooperate with any such investigation, including by producing all personnel involved, operational records, medical reports, and CCTV footage, if available. This is essential not only for justice but also for upholding the army's public image and institutional credibility. Accountability must be visible and lawful, reinforcing that the rule of law applies to all institutions. Failure to act decisively risks normalising deaths in custody—a chilling phenomenon reminiscent of Awami League-time authoritarian trends, and one that must be unequivocally rejected by any future elected government.

Make roads safer for our children

Enforcing road safety measures must be a national priority

Road crashes remain one of the worst threats to children's safety in Bangladesh. According to the latest report by the Road Safety Foundation, in 2025, as many as 7,359 people were killed by road crashes, of whom 1,008—13.7 percent—were children. This is a stark reminder of the state's failure to protect its youngest citizens from a preventable death. The Road Safety Foundation has found that most child deaths from road mishaps occur in rural areas, where reckless traffic, unsafe road conditions, and lack of pedestrian infrastructure combined create a deadly situation.

Alarming, pedestrian deaths accounted for nearly half of child fatalities last year. Of the children who died on the roads, 44 percent were aged 13-17 years. Rural roads, which run close to homes and lack traffic control, are particularly unsafe for children. Additionally, small vehicles such as three-wheelers pose a serious risk to children on the highways. Analyses also show that midday is the most dangerous time, when children are moving between homes, schools, and playgrounds.

Children are inherently more vulnerable on the roads, as experts point out: their height and lack of experience make them less visible to drivers, and they are often inattentive when moving in groups. Therefore, taking particular measures for children's safety is necessary. Common measures taken in other countries include adult supervision while crossing roads, school buses, road awareness campaigns, and special measures around schools. But such measures are largely absent in Bangladesh.

The report by the Road Safety Foundation should serve as a warning that urgent, efficient action is needed to prevent further child fatalities and injuries on the roads. The government must treat road safety as a national priority, with targeted policies to protect children. Families, schools, and communities must be educated on safe road use, while strict law enforcement, improved road design, child-friendly infrastructure, and regulation of drivers and vehicles are urgently required. Political parties must include road safety in their manifestos as they prepare for the upcoming national election. Without proper measures and effective enforcement of the law, our children will remain vulnerable on the roads.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Wikipedia founded

On this day in 2001, Wikipedia, a free internet-based encyclopaedia that operates under an open-source management style, was launched. It was founded by Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger.



The interim has little to show in foreign aid governance



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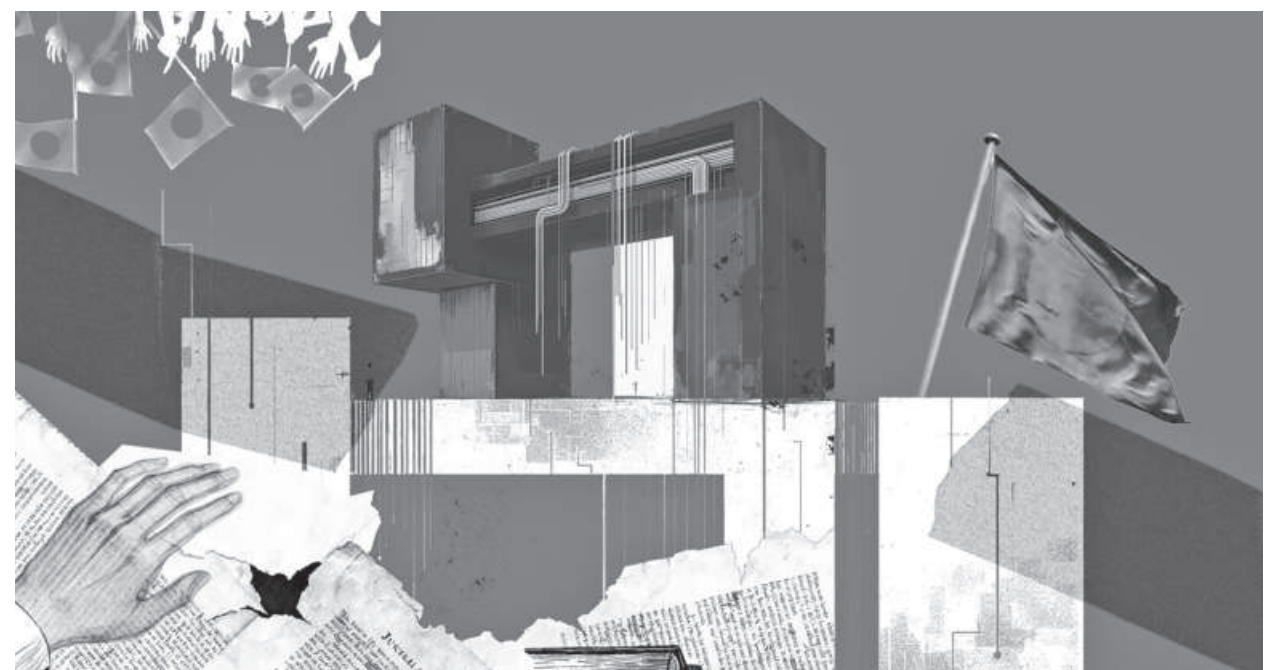
It has been 17 months since the interim government assumed office. Given that several advisers and key policymakers are known for their familiarity with the foreign aid ecosystem—some having played important roles in shaping the country's development trajectory—the nation expected visible improvement in the management of external loans and grants channelled through the government system. If we take into account the FY2024-25 budget ratios, foreign aid accounted for 37.7 percent of the Annual Development Programme (ADP), the core policy instrument through which the country's development priorities are operationalised. Expectations from the interim government rose further when it placed governance reform at the centre of its mandate. Yet, as the country moves closer to a national election scheduled for February 12, the critical question dominating the policy debate is: how far has the interim administration actually strengthened foreign aid governance in practice, and what key lessons must the next elected government carry forward?

The interim government assumed office at a time when Bangladesh, under the previous administration, had been mobilising large annual external resource flows. Disbursement of foreign assistance reached a record high of \$10 billion in FY2021-22. Although foreign fund utilisation hovered between 11 percent and 13 percent from FY2010-11 to FY2020-21, it improved over the next three fiscal years, reaching as high as 19 percent by FY2023-24—the highest in more than a decade. External partners also continued to provide large-scale financing, including budget support, indicating their confidence in macroeconomic management and stated reform commitments, at least at the negotiating table. However, the country remained constrained by a structural absorptive capacity bottleneck driven by chronically weak execution. Foreign aid was also loan-dominated. Using FY2023-24 data, the loan-to-grant ratio stood at 92:8, showing how the country's external financing was structurally debt-based rather than grant-driven.

In this context, the interim administration was expected to deliver measurable improvements and governance innovations in foreign aid management and implementation, creating replicable benchmarks for

the next elected government. So, if the promise was reform, and the measure is performance, how much has the government actually delivered?

Compared to FY2023-24, foreign aid commitments fell by 22.5 percent and disbursements by 16.6 percent in FY2024-25, the first full fiscal year under the interim administration. The external resource model also remained structurally loan-dominated: in the first six months of FY2024-25, the loan-grant composition stood at around 87:13, and by year-end it worsened further to 94:6 (as per an ERD report), reinforcing the country's



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deepening reliance on borrowing rather than concessional grants. Early FY2025-26 data show that commitments and disbursements of foreign loans have picked up again, with loan commitments rising by 133 percent in the first five months, even as debt repayment pressures continue to climb.

Yet, external financing has not stopped flowing. Japan announced a \$1.063 billion package in FY2024-25, including a \$418 million development policy loan and a \$641 million loan for rail modernisation. The World Bank signed a \$850 million financial package in April 2025 to help Bangladesh with developing the Bay Terminal deep sea port and modernising the national social protection system. Earlier in

December 2024, it announced a \$1.16 billion package to help with inclusive and climate-resilient development. The Asian Development Bank also approved a \$400 million loan in June 2025 to build resilience against climate impacts, curb emissions in climate-critical sectors, and promote inclusive development. This steady stream of loans underscores an uncomfortable truth about aid governance.

Bangladesh is receiving external resources largely as concessional debt that is increasingly policy-driven, but the interim government has not demonstrated commensurate improvement in delivery systems, absorptive capacity, or the institutional discipline required for effective aid governance. In effect, the state is becoming better at mobilising loans than at utilising them for timely implementation and measurable development outcomes.

The deeper concern, however, lies in absorptive capacity—where foreign aid governance either succeeds or collapses—and Bangladesh's recent

months.

Foreign aid governance is ultimately judged by delivery, yet the state's absorptive capacity continues to erode under layers of procurement delays, overcentralised approvals, and weak project readiness. When implementation remains hostage to slow contracting, poor monitoring, and a culture of spending without results, every new loan agreement becomes a future repayment burden rather than a development gain.

The interim government's foreign aid record so far reveals some hard realities. Loans and financing packages continue to arrive, yet commitments and disbursements have declined, and absorptive capacity has weakened further. In a loan-dominated aid regime, this is not merely inefficiency; it is a fiscal risk. Seventeen months was sufficient time for the interim administration to establish a visible reform footprint in foreign aid governance. At a minimum, the country should have seen a stronger project readiness

regime, faster procurement cycles, stronger monitoring discipline, and a public transparency framework for the aid pipeline and its results.

The lesson for any future elected government is clear: foreign aid governance cannot remain a negotiation-centred exercise; it must become an execution-centric discipline. Bangladesh needs a rules-based delivery system that enforces readiness, compresses procurement timelines, rationalises the pipeline, and links every external loan to measurable outcomes and repayment capacity. Without these reforms, the country will remain trapped in a cycle of borrowing to finance its development ambitions, while failing to build the institutions needed to deliver them.

Is Greenland the 'two-bigha land' of Upen?



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The world has felt the tremor. In a move ripped from a darker, forgotten chapter of history, the United States under President Donald Trump invaded Venezuela, abducting its leader Nicolás Maduro and his wife. The international community stood stunned. The justification was thin, the act brazen: a raw demonstration of power that seemed less a product of 21st-century statecraft and more a relapse into the law of the jungle. The clock appeared to turn backwards to an era where kings captured rival kings, holding them for ransom in a dungeon. This, we are told, is the new "greatness." And from this audacity, a new target has been fixed: Greenland.

Trump's initial threat to seize the vast, icy landmass has now softened, at least in rhetoric, to an offer to purchase it. However, in the context of the Venezuelan gambit, this offer rings not as a business proposition, but as an ultimatum disguised as a deal. Greenland, an autonomous territory under the Kingdom of Denmark, finds

itself in the precarious position of a chess piece on a board where only one player seems to be making the rules. Its strategic location, closer to Washington than to Copenhagen, is cited as geographical logic for a political *fait accompli*. However, the US itself holds territories adjacent to other nations. Does proximity alone confer a right of possession? The precedent being set is chilling, a 21st-century echo of the Doctrine of Discovery, where might, not right, redraws the map.

The European response has been a predictable chorus of outrage and protest. Denmark and fellow European nations voice their disapproval. Yet, beneath the diplomatic statements lies a profound and unsettling helplessness. Europe's capacity for meaningful resistance has atrophied. Decades of sheltering under the American security umbrella, of allowing their own martial muscles to weaken within the comfortable confines of Nato, have left them mostly

strategically enfeebled. They entrusted their defence to the very power that now flexes its strength against their interests. Their protest is the formal complaint of a tenant to a landlord who has already decided to sell the building.

For the US, Greenland is like Upen's two bighas of land. The wealthy landlord covets his poor neighbour's

Greenland, an autonomous territory under the Kingdom of Denmark, finds itself in the precarious position of a chess piece on a board where only one player seems to be making the rules.

small, adjacent plot not for its inherent value, but to perfect the geometry of his own estate. The irregularity offends him; its acquisition would make his property a flawless rectangle. Similarly, Greenland represents a missing piece in the puzzle of security for the US. Its acquisition is about strategic tidiness, about eliminating irregularity in the nation's defensive perimeter.

This pursuit is primarily motivated by a strategic desire to enhance national security and establish a

more robust defensive posture. By acquiring Greenland, the US could consolidate its influence over the Arctic—an increasingly important geopolitical region—and expand its network of early warning radars and missile defence infrastructure. This move would strengthen the northern defensive perimeter and limit the ability of rival powers, such as Russia or China, to establish a strategic presence in the North Atlantic. Ultimately, such a move is designed to secure long-term American regional dominance and reduce the strategic options available to global competitors.

The conclusion echoes Upen's landlord's cold calculation: "If we get it, the width will be two bighas and the length will be equal, that must be given." The "must" here is not one of mutual agreement, but of imperial will in a world where rules are for those who lack the strength to break them.

The story of Greenland, therefore, is more than a potential real estate deal. It is a litmus test for our age. It asks whether the international system built over the last 75 years can withstand the return of the kind of logic it was designed to prevent. When one partner decides to become an overlord, the fragility of alliances is revealed. The world holds its breath, watching to see if the map of the 21st century will be drawn in diplomatic ink, or etched by reckless, retrograde ambition.