



**Nawabganj: where heritage meets harmony**

WR1



**Are Bangladesh's multilingual youth being heard?**

WR2



**Emerging pollutants and public health risks**

WR3



**The flower trail behind our celebrations**

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# Govt plans 100-day energy push

ASIFUR RAHMAN

The government is planning a fresh round of bidding for both onshore and offshore gas exploration, with the finalisation of model Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs) targeted within its first 100 days in office.

It aims to complete the bidding process this year and sign final agreements by 2027, officials said.

This initiative follows a stalled attempt in March 2024, when the previous Awami League government announced September as the submission deadline for an offshore bidding round for global companies. This was the first major initiative to exploit natural resources from the sea after maritime border disputes were settled with India in 2012 and with Myanmar in 2014.

However, the process failed to attract bids due to the subsequent political transition in August 2024. The interim administration extended the deadline by three months, yet failed to draw participants. Revised documents prepared by Petrobangla were later sent to the ministry, but the matter was deferred to the elected government.



## GOVT'S 100-DAY PLAN

- Finalising onshore-offshore production sharing contracts
- Drilling 16 gas wells
- Adding two drilling rigs
- Moving ahead with land-based LNG terminal, new FSRU
- Initiating Bhola pipelines, expanding LNG transmission capacity
- Developing framework for LPG imports
- Restructuring Titas Gas company

The plan to finalise the PSCs is part of a broader 100-day roadmap for the sector, unveiled by Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Iqbal Hassan Mahmood at an introductory meeting with officials on his first day in office last Wednesday.

Ensuring uninterrupted power supply during Ramadan and the irrigation season is the top priority of the new government, Iqbal Hassan told journalists after the meeting. "We will move ahead with the future plans after that," he said.

Under the roadmap, the new administration plans to submit proposals to the Planning Commission for drilling at least seven exploratory wells, seven development wells and two workover wells. A development well is drilled in

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Prime Minister Tarique Rahman pays homage to the language martyrs with a floral wreath at the Central Shaheed Minar shortly after midnight on International Mother Language Day.

PHOTO: BNP MEDIA CELL

# AMAR EKUSHEY

Today, the legacies of Language Movement martyrs Abdul Jabbar, Abdus Salam, and Shafiur Rahman lie in neglect. This first part of the two-part series looks at the state of their museums, memorials, homes, and families, raising the question whether these heroes are receiving the recognition they deserve.

## Fading memories of language heroes

AHMAD ISTIAK

More than seven decades after the Language Movement of 1952, the memories of several state-recognised martyrs remain poorly preserved.

Abdul Jabbar's family continues to call for a museum in Shimulkuchi, where they still live, as the existing facility in Panchua holds no personal belongings and draws little public interest.

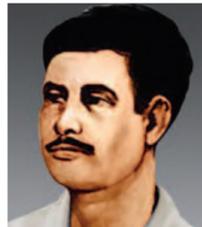
In Feni's Salamnagar, Abdus Salam's memorial library stands largely empty, with his blood-stained shirt and photographs long stolen, leaving only a hand-drawn portrait to represent his sacrifice.

And in Dhaka, Shafiur Rahman remains the most overlooked of all — with no museum or facility in his name, only a road recently approved in his honour and a few photographs preserved at Bangla Academy.

Together, their stories reveal a pattern



Abdul Jabbar



Abdus Salam



Shafiur Rahman

of neglect: libraries without artefacts, memorials in disrepair, families struggling with hardship, and promises of recognition left unfulfilled.

**CALL FOR MUSEUM IN SHIMULKUCHI** Language Movement martyr Abdul Jabbar was born in Panchua village of Gafargaon upazila, Mymensingh. While

servicing in the Ansar force in the early 1950s, he relocated most of his family to Shimulkuchi village in Haluaghat upazila. After his death in 1952, the remaining family settled permanently in Shimulkuchi, leaving little connection with Panchua.

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READ OUR 8-PAGE SUPPLEMENT ON INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY

## Nation honours language martyrs

President, PM pay tribute

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As the clock struck midnight and the familiar melody of "Amar Bhaiyer Rokte Bangla" drifted through the air, the nation paid homage to the Language Movement martyrs.

It was a solemn tribute to those who sacrificed their lives for the recognition of Bangla as a state language on this day in 1952 — the language heroes.

The Ekushey observance began with the laying of wreaths at the Central Shaheed Minar in the capital.

President Mohammed Shahabuddin and Prime Minister Tarique Rahman led the nation in paying tribute shortly after midnight, marking Amar Ekushey and International Mother Language Day. Dhaka University Vice-Chancellor Prof Niaz Ahmed Khan received them on arrival.

At 12:01am, the president placed a wreath and stood in solemn silence. The prime minister reached the Shaheed Minar at 12:04am and laid his wreath around 12:07am, observing a moment of silence in honour of the language heroes. A doa was offered in his presence.

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## US Supreme Court strikes down Trump global tariffs

AGENCIES

The US Supreme Court yesterday ruled Donald Trump's sweeping global tariffs illegal — a stunning rebuke of the president's signature economic policy that upended international trade.

➤ Trump says tariff ruling 'deeply disappointing'

➤ Orders temporary 10% global tariff to replace duties struck down

The conservative-majority high court ruled six-three in the judgement, saying that a 1977 law known as the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) Trump has relied on "does not authorise the President to impose tariffs."

In response to the ruling, Trump said that he would impose a 10 percent global tariff for 150 days to replace some of his emergency duties that were struck down by the US Supreme Court.

Trump said that his order would be made under Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 and the duties would be over and above tariffs that are currently in place.

The statute allows the president to

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Farmers wash potatoes after harvesting them in Gobindaganj of Gaibandha. Despite a bumper yield this year, growers say they are selling their produce at prices far below production costs, raising fears of a second straight year of losses amid oversupply and weak export demand.

PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUJ

## Potato farmers stare at losses as prices dip

Many struggle to cover costs for second straight year

MOSTAFA SHABUJ, Bogura

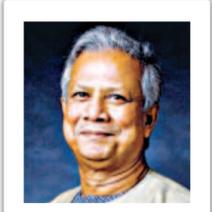
Potato growers across the country are bracing for financial losses for the second consecutive year as prices of one of the nation's largest vegetable crops have plunged further during the peak harvesting season.

Farmers in the north, central and southern regions said they are selling potatoes in the field at Tk 300-350 per maund (37.32kg), depending on the variety. At the same time last year, the price ranged between Tk 500 and Tk 550.

They warned that if prices remain this low, their financial strain will deepen, compounding the heavy losses they suffered last year.

Many frustrated growers were

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## Family, future plans keep Yunus busy

MD ABBAS

After his tenure ended as chief adviser to Bangladesh's interim government, Prof Muhammad Yunus has retreated to a quieter routine, spending more time with family and planning for his next chapter.

The Nobel Peace Prize laureate is still staying at the state guest house Jamuna after handing over power to the newly elected BNP-led government. According to aides, he is expected to return to

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## CNG stations to remain shut from 3:00pm to 9:00pm

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has revised the operating hours of CNG refuelling stations during Ramadan to ensure uninterrupted gas supply to the power sector during iftar.

The decision was announced in a notification issued yesterday by the Energy and Mineral Resources Division.

According to the notification, CNG refuelling stations across the country will remain closed daily from 3:00pm to 9:00pm until March 14.

Previously, CNG refuelling stations remained closed from 6:00pm to 9:00pm. Under the new directive, the shutdown period has been extended from three hours to six hours.

The notification said the move aims to address low-pressure conditions in the gas distribution network and meet the increased demand for gas in the power generation sector during Ramadan.

Meanwhile, to facilitate smooth travel on highways ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr, all refuelling stations will remain open round the clock from March 15 to March 25.

After Eid, from March 26, CNG refuelling stations will revert to the previous schedule and remain closed daily from 6:00pm to 9:00pm.



Fishers cast their nets from small boats in the Kazibacha river in Batiaghata of Khulna. During high tide each day, they head to mid-river to catch shrimp, bele and other native fish. At day's end, they sell their catch at nearby markets, earning between Tk 600 and Tk 1,000.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN



## Malaysian PM greets Tarique

Both leaders emphasise enhancing bilateral ties

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar bin Ibrahim yesterday called Bangladeshi Prime Minister Tarique Rahman to congratulate him on assuming office.

The telephone conversation took place around 3:00pm, according to the PM's office.

During the call, Anwar expressed Malaysia's willingness to work closely with Bangladesh on various bilateral issues and strengthen cooperation in areas of mutual interest.

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman thanked his Malaysian counterpart for the congratulatory message and conveyed his commitment to advancing relations between the two countries.

Tarique also expressed hope that Bangladesh and Malaysia would continue to work together for shared development and prosperity.

## Fading memories of language heroes

FROM PAGE 1

In 2008, the district council built the Abdul Jabbar Library and Memorial Museum in Panchua, despite the family's preference for Shimulkuchi. The museum contains no personal belongings of Jabbar, and visitors often leave disappointed. The library holds about 4,000 books, and Martyrs' Day programmes are organised annually on its grounds.

"Visitors mainly want to see Shaheed Jabbar's personal belongings, but we have none to display," Librarian Md Kaisaruzzaman told this correspondent.

Meanwhile, in Shimulkuchi, where Jabbar's family resides, there is no proper road connecting his house to the main thoroughfare. The one-kilometre stretch is partly earthen and partly broken, forcing visitors to cut through a paddy field on foot.

In front of the house, a Shaheed Minar built three decades ago by Jabbar's son, freedom fighter Nurul Islam Badal, stands neglected. Renovated in 2010 with district council funding, it has since fallen into disrepair.

Speaking to this correspondent, Jabbar's granddaughter, Afroza Khanam, lamented the lack of basic facilities like a proper road to their house and spoke of the financial hardship currently afflicting the family.

In 2007, Jabbar's nephew Atik Ullah donated one acre of land for the Language Martyr Abdul Jabbar Foundation, registered in 2010.

Initially operating from a tin-roofed room, the structure later collapsed in a storm, leaving only a signboard on the property.

Atik told this correspondent that the family was still in possession of Jabbar's personal belongings, and they could arrange for the memorabilia to be displayed if a museum were built in Shimulkuchi.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Mymensingh District Council CEO Shah Md Kamrul Huda said, "The council does not have the authority to independently take up a project to build a museum to preserve the memories of Shaheed Jabbar in Haluaghat, but a government directive can make it possible."

On the road issue, he said, "If his family formally submits an application, the district council can take steps. Considering historical significance and local hardship, the road should be built."

About an earlier proposal to rename Panchua to Jabbar Nagar, the official said, "There was a government pledge to rename Panchua as Jabbar Nagar, but it did not materialise. To revive the initiative, we would now require

a formal application from residents. Once submitted, the process can move forward."

**REMEMBERED ONLY IN FEBRUARY** Language Movement martyr Abdus Salam's family home is in Laxmanpur village of Daganbhuiya upazila, Feni. In 2008, the village was renamed Salamnagar, and a library and memorial museum were built there in his memory. Despite the name, the



Language martyr Abdus Salam library and memorial museum in Feni's Daganbhuiya upazila.

museum holds no personal artefacts previously belonging to Salam.

In the 1960s, then-MP Khaja Ahmad took Salam's blood-stained shirt and photographs from his father, promising to donate them to the museum. The items were later stolen along with other memorabilia. Today, only a widely circulated hand-drawn portrait remains.

Locals say the library remains largely



The dilapidated shaheed minar built in memory of Abdul Jabbar in Shimulkuchi village in Mymensingh's Haluaghat upazila. There is no road leading to the shaheed minar and his family home.

unused except on February 21, when the upazila administration organises cultural programmes on its grounds. The library currently holds about 2,500 books. During the 2024 floods, several shelves and books were damaged.

Librarian Lutfur Rahman told

The Daily Star, "Some books were ruined by the flood, while others were salvaged and are now readable. Visitors mainly come to see Salam's personal belongings, but since we have none, they leave disappointed."

Adjacent to the library is the Language Martyr Salam Government Primary School, established in 1995 and nationalised in 2013.

Headteacher Akhshi Rani Das said the library lacks a children's corner.

"If a children's corner were available, students could learn about the Language Movement and history. We often discuss events of 1952 in class, and such a space would help children develop reading habits from an early age," she told this correspondent.

Among Salam's siblings, only his younger brother Abdul Karim is still alive, though old age has left him unable to recognise anyone.

His nephew, Md Mamun, said, "No one checks on us except in February. Though neglected all year, our importance is suddenly remembered then."

**A FORGOTTEN HERO**

Shafiqur Rahman is one of the most neglected among state-recognised language martyrs. Unlike others, no memorial museum or facility exists in his name, and no public structure has been dedicated to him.

In 2023, Dhaka South City Corporation named the road from Doyel Chatter to Shikkha Bhaban after him. A few of his photographs are preserved at the Language Movement Museum of Bangla Academy.

Born in West Bengal, Shafiqur moved to erstwhile East Pakistan with his family following the partition in 1948. In February 1952, he was working as a clerk in the Accounts Section of the Dhaka High Court.

Among his family, only his daughter Shahanaaz survives. She lives in the capital's Uttara. Her brother and Shafiqur's only son, Shafiqul Islam, passed away in 2013.

"We donated all of my father's memorabilia and personal belongings to the Language Movement Museum. As a martyr's family, we currently receive a monthly allowance of Tk 10,000, which had been suspended for five years and was reinstated only last year," Shahanaaz told The Daily Star.

She added, "We repeatedly approached government offices to establish a museum or facility in his name. My brother tried many times while he was alive, but nothing happened. Now I am old and have given up those hopes. Yet if the government wished, something could have been done."

## Govt plans 100-day energy push

FROM PAGE 1

An already known gas field to enhance production while a workover well involves drilling an abandoned well to extract any leftover gas.

By fiscal year 2026-27, it targets an additional 652 million cubic feet of gas per day from 46 wells. Two more drilling rigs are also expected to be added to ongoing exploration.

At present, Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration and Production Company Limited (Bapex) operates five rigs and rents four.

The plan also advances liquefied natural gas (LNG) infrastructure. Authorities will review proposals from interested firms and appoint a transaction adviser to implement a land-based LNG terminal under a public-private partnership model.

They will also move ahead with another floating storage and regasification unit (FSRU).

At the same time, decisions will also be coordinated on pipelines to carry gas from Bhola to the mainland and expand transmission networks to handle additional LNG supply.

Reducing system loss, including theft and leakage, is another priority.

The government aims to cut losses to 6.25 percent within the first 100 days from the current 6.38 percent, and bring them down to 4 percent by 2030. Officials estimate that existing losses waste about 173 million cubic feet of gas daily, costing Tk 4,094 crore annually.

Separately, a framework is expected to be developed to continue liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) imports through Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation. A pre-feasibility study has been planned to assess government-to-government, PPP and other models for LPG terminals in Chattogram and Cox's Bazar.

Authorities also plan to appoint an operation and maintenance contractor for the single point mooring facility, designed to transmit fuel oil from deep sea mother vessels to Eastern Refinery through pipelines. Although commissioned in 2024, the project has yet to become operational due to delays in appointing an operator.

Within the same window, a project director will be appointed for the modernisation and expansion of Eastern Refinery PLC, along with a

project management consultancy. The interim government has already approved the long-pending plan to raise refining capacity to 45 lakh tonnes a year from 15 lakh tonnes, with several donors expressing interest in financing the expansion.

The government will also undertake a coordinated programme to complete geological surveys for coal and other mineral resources, including heavy minerals in rivers and offshore areas.

Policy reform forms another pillar of the agenda, with planned amendments to key energy regulations, including the Energy and Power Sector Master Plan. A time-bound action plan will be drawn up to split Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Limited into three entities and consolidate eight subsidiaries under BPC into five companies.

Capacity building is also in focus, with seminars, in-house training programmes for energy stakeholders, and new laboratory facilities planned for the Bangladesh Petroleum Institute.

## Family, future plans keep Yunus busy

FROM PAGE 1

his residence in Gulshan within a month or after Eid, although no date has been fixed.

Yunus started residing in Jamuna on August 8, 2024, after being sworn in as the chief adviser of the interim government.

A close associate said Yunus is preparing documents and organisational matters related to his return to the Yunus Centre, the institution that promotes his social business philosophy worldwide. He is also spending time with family members, particularly his ailing wife.

"He is now mostly preparing works and documents related to his return to the Yunus Centre and spending time with his close ones," an aide said. "He is also thinking about new initiatives for youths, but nothing has been finalised yet."

Those initiatives are expected to draw on his long-standing "Three Zero" vision — zero poverty, zero unemployment and zero net carbon emissions — a framework he has championed globally in recent years. However, aides emphasised that no concrete programme has yet been announced.

At Jamuna, Yunus follows a routine. He begins his day with a walk along the lanes inside the compound. After breakfast, he starts work around 10:00am.

Unlike during his tenure in office, his schedule now allows more time for visitors. He has instructed staff to accommodate those who wish to meet him, as long as arrangements remain manageable.

"He has clearly told us that anyone who wants to meet him should be given the opportunity," a source said. "Earlier, due to official engagements, many people could not meet him. Now he wants to listen to them."

Visitors come from different walks of life. Some are eager to hear about his experience leading the interim government; others seek insight into his plans or discuss professional matters.

Assisting him in managing invitations — particularly from abroad — is Lamia Morshed, former chief coordinator for the Sustainable Development Goals. According to aides, a backlog of foreign invitations accumulated during his time in office.

"A huge number of foreign invitations were pending," another associate said. "She is sorting out where he would join in person and where he would deliver virtual lectures."

Yunus is scheduled to visit Japan next month to attend a five-day conference. Details of the visit will be revealed later, he added.

Beyond professional commitments, much of Yunus's attention is on his family. After office hours, he spends time with his ailing wife. In the late afternoon, he takes another walk around 5:00pm before settling into the evening.

He spends the evening with close friends and relatives, and enjoys lighter moments with his daughter's two cats, Minu and Kairo.

"For now, he is calm and focused," a close associate said. "He is reflecting on his experiences and preparing for the next chapter of his work and public life."

## Nation honours

FROM PAGE 1

Tarique later led his cabinet colleagues to lay another wreath, and placed one as chairman of the BNP. At 12:18am, he, along with his wife Zubaida Rahman and daughter Zaima Rahman, offered tributes on behalf of the family.

After the prime minister's departure, Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer and Leader of the Opposition Shafiqur Rahman led his 11-party alliance in placing a wreath at 12:23am and offered doa. Leaders of the alliance, including National Citizen Party's Nahid Islam and Hasnat Abdullah, accompanied him.

Chief of Army Staff General Waker-Uz-Zaman, Chief of Naval Staff Admiral M Nazmul Hassan, and Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Hasan Mahmood Khan placed a wreath. Chief Justice Zubayer Rahman Chowdhury, Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin, foreign diplomats, invited guests, senior military and civil officials, and Dhaka University teachers also paid homage.

Thereafter, barefoot and wearing black badges, people from all walks of life streamed to the altar with flowers, bowing their heads in respect.

On this day in 1952, students and citizens defied Section 144 and took to the streets of Dhaka to protest the then Pakistani government's refusal to recognise Bangla as a state language, and its imposition of Urdu as the sole state language of Pakistan.

Salam, Barkat, Rafiq, Jabbar and

others were killed in police firing as a procession emerged from the Dhaka University campus.

Their sacrifice became a seed of resistance, inspiring the nation's struggle for rights and, ultimately, independence.

The day is observed globally as International Mother Language Day after UNESCO recognised February 21 in 1999.

In separate messages marking the occasion, the president and the prime minister called for collective efforts to uphold linguistic diversity.

In his message, the prime minister urged all to preserve the country's linguistic heritage, ensure the proper cultivation of Bangla, and protect cultural identity.

He said the government remains committed to advancing democracy, honouring the Language Martyrs, the heroes of 1971, the victims of the 2024 mass uprising, and all who sacrificed for democratic ideals.

The day is a public holiday. The national flag flies at half-mast at educational institutions, government and autonomous offices, and private establishments across the country.

Newspapers have published special supplements, television channels are airing special programmes, while the cultural affairs ministry and social and cultural groups have organised observances nationwide.

## US Supreme Court strikes

FROM PAGE 1

impose duties of up to 15 percent for up to 150 days on any and all countries related to "large and serious" balance of payments issues. It does not require investigations or impose other procedural limits.

"We have alternatives, great alternatives," Trump said. "Could be more money. We'll take in more money and we'll be a lot stronger for it," Trump said of the alternative tools.

Trump said his administration also was initiating several Section 301 unfair trade practices investigations "to protect our country from unfair trading practices of other countries and companies."

Trump's decision to lean on other statutes, including Section 122, while initiating new investigations under Section 301 had been widely anticipated. But the 10 percent tariffs he announced yesterday can only remain in effect for 150 days, and Section 301 investigations generally take months to complete.

**MAJOR SETBACK**

Still, this marks Trump's biggest defeat at the Supreme Court since returning to the White House last year.

While Trump has long relied on tariffs as a lever for diplomatic pressure and negotiations, he made unprecedented use of emergency economic powers in his second term to slap new duties on virtually all US trading partners.

These included "reciprocal" tariffs over trade practices that Washington deemed unfair, alongside separate sets of duties targeting major partners Mexico, Canada and China over illicit drug flows and immigration.

The court noted yesterday that "had Congress intended to convey the distinct and extraordinary power to impose tariffs" with IEEPA, "it would have done so expressly, as it consistently has in other tariff statutes."

The Supreme Court's three liberal justices joined three conservatives in Friday's ruling, which upheld lower court decisions that tariffs Trump imposed under IEEPA were illegal.

Conservative Justices Brett Kavanaugh, Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito dissented.

Chief Justice John Roberts, in delivering his opinion, said, "IEEPA contains no reference to tariffs or duties."

A lower trade court ruled in May that Trump overstepped his authority with across-the-board levies and blocked most of them, but that outcome was put on hold as the government appealed.

With the White House already bracing for a negative outcome, KPMG

chief economist Diane Swonk warned that "tariffs ruled illegal can be rapidly reinstated via other levers."

"Financial markets rallied on the news, but that is premature," she added. **"MUCH-NEEDED CERTAINTY"** Nonetheless, business groups cheered the ruling, with the National Retail Federation saying this "provides much-needed certainty" for American firms and manufacturers.

"We urge the lower court to ensure a seamless process to refund the tariffs to US importers," the federation said.

But the justices did not address the degree to which importers can receive refunds. This will likely be litigated.

Kavanaugh warned that this process — as acknowledged during oral arguments — could be a "mess".

EY-Parthenon chief economist Gregory Daco told AFP the loss of IEEPA tariff revenues for the US government could amount to around \$140 billion.

Delighted Democratic leaders pounced on the ruling, with Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer lauding the outcome as a "win for the wallets" of US consumers.

But top Democrat on the Senate Banking Committee Elizabeth Warren cautioned there remains "no legal mechanism for consumers and many small businesses to recoup the money they have already paid."

The Budget Lab at Yale University estimates consumers face an average effective tariff rate of 9.1 percent with Friday's decision, down from 16.9 percent.

But it said this "remains the highest since 1946," excluding 2025.

**CONSTRAINED AMBITION**

The European Union said it was studying the court ruling and will remain in close contact with the Trump administration.

Britain plans to work with the United States on how this affects a trade deal between both countries, while Canada said the decision affirms that Trump's tariffs were "unjustified."

Striking down the emergency tariffs "would constrain the president's ambitions to impose across-the-board tariffs on a whim," said Erica York of tax policy nonprofit the Tax Foundation.

But it leaves him other statutes to use for tariffs, even if they tend to be more limited in scope — or require specific processes such as investigations — York told AFP.

"The ruling dismantles the legal scaffolding, not the building itself," said ING analysts Carsten Brzeski and Julian Geib of Trump's trade restrictions.



## No security threat to Ekushey observances

Says DMP chief

STAR REPORT

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner Sheikh Mohammad Sazzat Ali yesterday said there is no security threat to today's observance of Language Martyrs' Day and International Mother Language Day, with extensive security arrangements in place across the capital.

"Comprehensive preparations are in place to safeguard the Amar Ekushey observances," he told reporters at the Central Shaheed Minar premises.

Referring to the peaceful 13th parliamentary election, he said security measures and public cooperation had ensured a calm environment, adding that no specific threat had been identified regarding Ekushey.

Despite this, specialised units, including SWAT, dog squad, bomb disposal and crime scene investigators, will remain on standby alongside regular forces. Intelligence surveillance and cyber monitoring have also been intensified under a layered security framework. Around 15,000 police members will be deployed across Dhaka city, he added.

## Culex surge worsens

FROM PAGE 3

"When there is no rainfall for a long time, water in drains and sewers becomes stagnant. Organic pollutants increase and serve as food for larvae. As the water remains still, Culex mosquitoes lay eggs there, and the eggs are not destroyed," he said.

He added that rising temperatures after winter create favourable conditions for the eggs to hatch simultaneously.

"It is a common phenomenon in our country that in late February and March, mosquito populations rise sharply," he said.

Bashar also noted that mosquito control activities slowed before and after the February 12 national election, contributing to the rise in density.

"As a result, mosquito density has increased significantly and is likely to continue rising until around mid-March," he said.

As an immediate step, he suggested ensuring the free flow of water in drains, ditches and sewers through proper cleaning, followed by the application of larvicide.

He also noted that many stagnant water bodies in Dhaka — including drains, canals, wetlands and lakes — currently have high Culex density.

Entomologist GM Saifur Rahman said this year's winter was very short, and only one or two weeks of cooler weather that slowed mosquito growth. In previous years, colder temperatures lasted three to four months and helped suppress populations.

"By mid-February, we were already overwhelmed, even up to the 10th floor of buildings. What usually happens at the end of March has arrived earlier this year," he said, warning that the population will grow further

without effective control.

"The new government needs to realise the gravity of the problem. If initiatives are taken now, there may be results. Otherwise, the situation may become chaotic," he warned.

He said breeding sites are widespread and must be modified or removed. If no action is taken, the population will continue to grow rapidly. Control efforts should continue until the end of April, with a possible natural decline in May.

Regarding Aedes mosquitoes, he said that as temperatures did not drop significantly this winter, the Aedes population remains largely intact. While outdoor breeding sites have decreased somewhat, indoor breeding sources like water storage containers remain.

He warned that the dengue season may begin earlier and be more severe. Saifur urged authorities to intensify control measures now to identify and target hotspots effectively.

Nishat Parveen, health officer of Dhaka South City Corporation, said fogging operations targeting Culex mosquitoes have been increased. "All our activities are ongoing. The decrease in Aedes does not mean we have reduced our work," she said.

She added that the corporation is preparing to conduct its own field surveys in every area and will take targeted action based on the findings. Public awareness and cleanliness campaigns will also continue, particularly during the rainy season.

An official of Dhaka North City Corporation said regular drives are ongoing. "We have also launched an extensive drive. Operations were carried out in parts of Mirpur last week and will continue in other areas in the coming days," he said.

## Prevent corruption within your

FROM PAGE 3

mutual understanding, how will similar logic be prevented from spreading to other sectors like health, education, social protection, law enforcement, customs, and beyond? The question naturally arises."

"If the government's anti corruption pledges are not mere rhetoric or populist slogans, the prime minister must immediately reject the minister's remarks and ensure accountability through due process," he said.

The statement said after the fall of authoritarian rule, control over extortion, partisan dominance and illegal occupation shifted across the country. It added that the minister's stance cannot be seen in isolation.

TIB recalled that in February 2012, the road transport minister of the then authoritarian regime had similarly tried to justify road extortion, which the organisation strongly opposed at the time.

It expressed concern that the new government may be following the same path.

The watchdog said the minister's comments directly contradict the strong anti-corruption position declared by him

and other cabinet members when taking office.

Just 48 hours after the prime minister reaffirmed the government's anti-corruption pledge, the remarks defending extortion were "deeply disappointing," said the organisation.

"Through such comments, the transport minister has undermined the anti-corruption commitments in his party's election manifesto and the government's declared position," the statement read.

Dr Iftekharuzzaman said that by defending extortion in the transport sector, the minister is attempting to legitimise a corrupt practice. The direct victims are transport stakeholders and ordinary citizens, who bear the burden of such practices.

Using owners' and workers' welfare to justify extortion is misleading and reflects an effort to protect and prolong disorder in the sector, he added.

The TIB chief called on the prime minister to prioritise internal rectification and reform within his party to reinforce public confidence and prevent party leaders and activists from pursuing a self-destructive path.

Otherwise, he warned, public trust may erode, and groups whose ideology contradicts the spirit of Bangladesh — shaped by the sacrifices of 1952, 1971 and 2024 — may gain ground.

Meanwhile, Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman questioned whether the minister's remarks amounted to a declaration to "nationalise extortion."

The leader of the opposition in the parliament raised the question in a post on his verified Facebook page yesterday.

At a press conference on Thursday, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Sheikh Rabiul Alam responded to a question about extortion in the transport sector by saying he does not view what is called "toll" or "extortion" in that way.

He said owners' and workers' associations collect money at fixed rates for welfare purposes, and that it would only be extortion if someone were forced to pay.

He described the practice as based on "mutual understanding", while acknowledging that there may be debate over how the funds are used.

## Ex-Kuet VC accused of fund

FROM PAGE 3

partners, who later decided not to offer future projects to the university.

Masud denied diverting funds, saying, "This is absurd. I have no personal business or land anywhere in the world, let alone in Khulna."

He also denied handling any cash or forcibly taking over the project.

"They explicitly asked me to take over as 'Professor Masud', not as vice-chancellor, to save the project from cancellation. It was a rescue effort requested by the donors," he told The Daily Star.

The report said Masud was removed as VC in April 2025 but withdrew salary and allowances for June and July 2025 after returning from the USA, despite not holding the VC or project lead post at the time.

Defending the withdrawal, Masud said he was paid as project lead and that teachers are allowed to head research projects regardless of administrative position.

Beyond the project, the report alleged that four employees, known on campus as the "Four Caliphs", exercised undue influence under Masud's protection. At the centre was Md Moniruzzaman, a former data processor.

The committee cited an earlier audit by the Directorate of Inspection and Audit, which

termed Moniruzzaman's appointment and promotion illegal and said it caused a loss of Tk 55.54 lakh to the public exchequer.

Despite a recommendation to cancel the appointment, Masud later promoted him to deputy registrar.

The report also named Jalal Munshi and Emdadul Haque, saying they were promoted to section officer positions without the required qualifications.

Masud said the audit objection dated back to a previous VC's tenure. "Besides, the appointment followed a standard recruitment process approved by the selection board and syndicate," he said.

The probe further alleged that within five months of taking office, Masud appointed 42 temporary employees in violation of a 2018 government directive banning such recruitment. The appointments were not advertised or made through competitive selection.

Masud said the staffers were hired to address a crisis and questioned why subsequent VCs had not removed them if the appointments were illegal.

In another instance linked to the German project, Masud removed project secretary Ankon Singha and appointed his personal secretary,

allowing him to draw an additional 500 euros per month from the grant alongside his university salary.

The committee also cited irregularities in demolishing two condemned buildings. Although engineering estimates valued the work at Tk 35 lakh, the tender was awarded for Tk 24 lakh, allegedly causing a loss of Tk 11 lakh.

Masud defended the decision, saying it was the highest bid received and allowed under Public Procurement Rules.

"I asked the committee if we were allowed to accept the bid since it was below the government estimate, and they cited the specific PPR clause allowing it," he claimed.

The committee recommended legal action and recovery of losses, including Tk 55.54 lakh linked to Moniruzzaman's appointment and the Tk 13 lakh withdrawal.

It also suggested an external audit of development projects during Masud's tenure and filing criminal cases where evidence supports the allegations.

Masud said he had provided documents in hard copy, email, and WhatsApp to prove his innocence.

"The committee presented false information despite having the documents," he told this newspaper.

## Unread

FROM PAGE 3

text. The total number of textbooks distributed this year is 577."

He said they discussed with the ministry the details of how to teach these books and also informed the NCTB.

Educationists and rights advocates say the problem is not simply logistical. It is structural and risks undermining the very goal it set out to achieve.

AFM Zakaria, professor of anthropology at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, said, "If the government really wants development of the indigenous communities, it must protect their languages and ensure education in their mother tongue."

Zakaria, a member of the ethnic language steering committee under the education ministry, recommended a special government census on sociocultural and education status of the indigenous people, a separate academic calendar and special teacher recruitment for specific communities to continue indigenous children's education.

Gourango Patro, president of Kapaeng Foundation, said, "Books have been published in only five languages, and even then, not all children are receiving them. There are not enough trained teachers to teach in those mother tongues. The programme appears to be running without adequate preparation, planning, or monitoring. As a result, it is failing to deliver meaningful outcomes."

## 'Revolutionary' shift

FROM PAGE 3

Khosru emphasised that Chattogram, widely regarded as Bangladesh's commercial hub, would be developed further as a trade centre through increased investment and modernisation of port operations.

"The development of Chattogram means the development of the country," he said, adding that employment and investment growth would guide policy direction.

He said steps would be taken to upgrade port infrastructure and create an investment-friendly environment, with the aim of positioning Chattogram as a regional and international trade centre. Port modernisation, infrastructure development, and investment facilitation would receive particular

focus. Later, in the day, addressing a meeting of port users at his residence in Mehediabag, the minister said he had instructed relevant authorities to ensure that activities centred around Chittagong Port Authority do not contribute to higher commodity prices, especially during Ramadan.

Following the meeting, Khosru told journalists that certain port-related factors were contributing to price increases ultimately borne by consumers.

He said the government would identify the causes of rising prices and take corrective measures through inter-ministerial coordination.

Participants at the meeting called for port tariffs to be set at a rational level.

## No more running

FROM PAGE 3

at the doorsteps of citizens."

He said the government bears equal responsibility towards all citizens, regardless of whether they voted for the ruling party.

Responding to the long-standing demand for establishing a medical college in Narsingdi, he said, "We will work to establish a medical college in Narsingdi as soon as possible. Similar initiatives will be taken wherever necessary across the country."

He also said steps would

be taken to make the 250-bed Narsingdi District Hospital fully functional at the earliest and to introduce two intensive care units (ICUs) in the district.

Among others, Narsingdi Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Anwar Hossain, Additional Superintendent of Police (Administration) Md Kalimullah, Superintendent Dr ANM Mizanur Rahman of Narsingdi District Hospital and leaders and activists of BNP and its associate organisations were present.

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

Office of the Executive Engineer, RHD

Netrokona Road Division, Netrokona

Phone: 02-996651285, Fax: 02-996651479

e-mail: cenet@rhd.gov.bd

Memo No.: 35.01.7200.455.00.000.22-234

Dated: 19/02/26

### e-Tender Notice

This is to notify all concern that the following tender have published through e-GP portal.

Sl. No.	Tender ID, Package No. & Date of Publishing	Name of Work	Date & Time
01	Tender ID 1221662 Tender Package No.: e-GP/NRD/PPM-Bridges/04/2025-2026 & APP ID: 214446 ; Scheduled Tender/Proposal Publication Date and Time: 18-Feb-2026 16:30	Periodic Maintenance Programme (Major-Bridge) for Construction of 33.54m Long P.C GIRDER PAHARPUR BRIDGE at 4th km (Ch. 3+000m) on Avoygasha-Atpara Road (Z-3713) under Netrokona Road Division During the Year 2025-2026.	Tender/Proposal Document last selling/downloading Date and Time: 15-Mar-2026 16:00 Last Date and Time for Tender/ Proposal Security: 16-Mar-2026 12:00 Tender/Proposal Closing & Opening Date and Time: 16-Mar-2026 12:30

The interested persons/firms may visit the web site [www.eprocure.gov.bd](http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) to get the details of the tender.

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 Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.

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)).

(Mahmud Al-Nur Salehin)

ID: 602300

Executive Engineer, RHD

Netrokona Road Division, Netrokona.

GD-355

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

Local Government Engineering Department

Office of the Executive Engineer

District: Pabna

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

Memo No. 46.02.7600.000.07.309 (Part-2).21-959

Date: 18/02/2026

### Invitation for Tender (Works)

**Tender Notice: 35/2025-26 (OTM & LTM)**

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

Sl No	Name of Work	Tender ID No	Tender Security (Tk.)	Closing, Opening Date & Time
1	Package No. RDIRWSP/PAB/SUJA/CUL-22 Construction of Single vent (1-VX4.00m x 4.50m) RCC Box Culvert on Shamgonj GC - Kagirhat GC road (Sujanagar part) at Ch. 0+030 km Under Upazila - Sujanagar, Dist - Pabna (Road ID no -176832006) (Salvage Cost BDT:82,713.00)	1222552 OTM	1,00,000.00	09.03.2026 14.00 PM
2	Package No. RDRIDP/Pab/Santhia-31/25-26 Improvement of Sharisha Bissho road - Ichamoti River Dyke road at Ch. 730.00m-1500.00m by HBB (Road ID: 176724087) Upazila -Santhia, Dist-Pabna	1224477 LTM	2,00,000.00	09.03.2026 14.00 PM
3	Package No. PAB/TULO-2/WD-3/971 Construction of Bharara Union Land Office under Pabna Sadar Upazila District Pabna.	1222252 LTM	2,50,000.00	

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 (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.

The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank branches and purchase e-tender documents up to dated: 08/03/2026 (OTM) Time: 17:00 PM. & 08/03/2026 (LTM) Time: 17:00 PM. 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))

(Md. Monirul Islam)

Executive Engineer

LGED, Pabna

e-mail: xen.pabna@lged.gov.bd

GD-356

**খুলনা কৃষি বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়**  
 অস্থায়ী অফিস: ০২৭, মৎস্য রোড, উত্তর মুন্সিগঞ্জ, খুলনা-৯০০০

Memo No.: 37.01.4703.057.32.024.225/225/226 Date: 18/02/2026

**E-Tender Notice**

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

Sl. No.	Tender ID No.	Ref./Package No.	Description	Online Tender Notice Publication date	Online Tender Closing date
01	1230879	37.01.4703.057.32.02 4.25.193; Date: 16/02/2026	Supply and Installation of Stationary and Fire Extinguisher	22-Feb-2026	04-Mar-2026
02	1231583	37.01.4703.057.40.01 9.25.192; Date: 16/02/2026	Supply and Installation of Electrical and Office equipment	22-Feb-2026	05-Mar-2026
03	1231554	37.01.4703.057.34.02 7.26.194; Date: 16/02/2026	procurement and Installation of Laboratory equipment	22-Feb-2026	08-Mar-2026

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 (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.

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)).

Engr. S. M. Moniruzzaman  
 Chief Engineer  
 Khulna Agricultural University

GD-354

**LEGAL NOTICE**  
 IN THE SUPREME COURT OF BANGLADESH  
 HIGH COURT DIVISION  
 (STATUTORY ORIGINAL JURISDICTION)  
 COMPANY MATTER NO. 2365 OF 2025

Mohammad Wasil Hoque Chowdhary .....PETITIONER

-VERSUS-

The Registrar of Joint Stock Companies & Firms and others .....RESPONDENTS

Notice is hereby given to all concerned that an application for directing to call, hold and conduct AGM under section 81 read with section 85(3) of the Companies Act, 1994 and Rules 8 & 263 of the Companies Rules, 2009 and execution of person/persons in default, if applicable, under section 396 of Companies Act, 1994 was filed by the above-named petitioner before the Hon'ble High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh praying, inter alia, for condonation of delay in holding Annual General Meetings of Harmony Builders Limited for the calendar years 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025 and also for subsequent calendar years), if fallen due. The Hon'ble High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, presided over by Hon'ble Madam Justice Kazi Zinat Hoque, vide order dated 01.02.2025, was pleased to admit the above application. The Hon'ble High Court Division was also pleased to direct the petitioner to file an affidavit in compliance on or before 26.02.2026. Any person interested in the said application may appear before the Hon'ble High Court Division either personally or through his duly authorized Advocate. Copy of the said application may be obtained from the undersigned. (Was-E-Alam Chowdhury) Advocate Supreme Court of Bangladesh For the Petitioner/Chowdhary & Law Firm House No. 09, Suite No. 1A2, Road No. 113, Gulshan-2, Dhaka-1212, Mobile No. 01911535351

**NOTICE**  
 IN THE SUPREME COURT OF BANGLADESH  
 HIGH COURT DIVISION  
 (STATUTORY ORIGINAL JURISDICTION)  
 COMPANY MATTER NO 116 OF 2026

IN THE MATTER OF :  
 Md. Monzur Hossain, Managing Director of TSPL International (Pvt.) Ltd.  
 ....Petitioner

-VERSUS-

The Registrar, Joint Stock Companies and Firms and another,  
 .....Respondents

Notice is hereby given to all concerned that an application under section 81 (2) read with section 85 (3) of the Companies Act, 1994 has been filed before the High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh for condonation of delay in holding Annual General Meeting of Md. Monzur Hossain, Managing Director of **TSPL International (Pvt.) Ltd.** for the year of first AGM 2021 and the AGM for year 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025 Upon preliminary hearing, **Justice Kazi Zinnat Haque** was pleased to admit the application by an order dated 01.02.2026 and also directed to submit the affidavit in compliance. Anyone interested may appear before the Hon'ble Court. Copy of the application may be obtained from the undersigned on payment of charges.

(Shariful Hasan)  
 Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh

## INTERNATIONAL

## GLOBAL SUMMIT

## UN touts panel for 'human control' of AI

AFP, New Delhi

A UN panel on artificial intelligence will work towards "science-led governance", the global body's chief said yesterday as leaders at a New Delhi summit weighed their message on the future of the booming technology.

However, the US delegation warned against centralised control of generative AI, highlighting the difficulties of reaching consensus over how it should be handled.

The flip side of the gold rush around AI is a host of issues from job disruption to misinformation, surveillance and the heavy electricity consumption of data centres.

"We are barreling into the unknown," UN chief Antonio Guterres told the AI Impact Summit in New Delhi. "The message is simple: less hype, less fear. More facts and evidence."

Dozens of world leaders and ministers delivered a shared view on the benefits of AI, such as instant translation and drug discovery, but also the risks. It is the fourth annual global meeting focused on AI policy, with the next to take place in Geneva in the first half of 2027.

Tens of thousands of people from across the sector visited the vast summit and expo site, with some complaining of poor organisation including crowded and chaotic entry and exit points.



Demonstrators protest outside Argentina's National Congress on Thursday, as lawmakers debate labour reforms proposed by President Javier Milei's libertarian government to attract investment and revive growth. Unions argue the measures would roll back workers' rights. PHOTO: REUTERS

## Attackers kill at least 50 in Nigeria

Several women and children abducted

REUTERS, Maiduguri

At least 50 people were killed, and several women and children were abducted after armed men attacked a village in Nigeria's northwestern Zamfara state, a state lawmaker told Reuters yesterday.

Hamis A. Faru, a lawmaker representing Bukkuyum South, said the attackers raided Tungan Dutse village from around 5:00pm on Thursday until about 3:30am on Friday, burning down buildings and shooting residents who tried to flee.

"They have been moving from one village to another ... leaving at least 50 people dead," Faru told Reuters by phone.

He said the number of abducted victims was yet to be determined. Traditional leaders and local government officials were still accounting for the missing.

## Russian plan to kill officials halted: Kyiv

AFP, Kyiv

Kyiv said yesterday that 10 people were arrested in Ukraine and Moldova on suspicion of planning to assassinate senior Ukrainian political figures on Moscow's orders, with payouts of up to \$100,000.

Kyiv has previously accused Russia of plotting to kill several senior officials, including President Volodymyr Zelensky and the head of Ukraine's intelligence service.

"As part of the work of a joint investigative team of Ukrainian and Moldovan law enforcement officers, an organised group has been exposed that was preparing contract killings of well-known Ukrainian citizens and foreigners," Prosecutor General Ruslan Kravchenko said.

## Path for Gaza must start with end to 'aggression'

Says Hamas after Board of Peace meets for first time

AFP, Gaza City

Discussions on Gaza's future must begin with a total halt to Israeli "aggression", Palestinian movement Hamas said after US President Donald Trump's Board of Peace met for the first time.

"Any political process or any arrangement under discussion concerning the Gaza Strip and the future of our Palestinian people must start with the total halt of aggression, the lifting of the blockade, and the guarantee of our people's legitimate national rights, first and foremost their right to freedom and self-determination," Hamas said in a statement Thursday.

Trump's board met for its inaugural session in Washington on Thursday, with a number of countries pledging money and personnel to rebuild the Palestinian territory, more than four months into a fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hamas.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has insisted however that Hamas must disarm



before any reconstruction begins.

"We agreed with our ally the US that there will be no reconstruction of Gaza before the demilitarisation of Gaza," Netanyahu said.

The Israeli leader did not attend the Washington meeting but was represented by his foreign minister Gideon Saar. Trump said several countries, mostly in the Gulf, had pledged more than seven billion dollars to rebuild the territory. Indonesia will take a deputy commander role in a nascent International Stabilisation Force.

## Trump orders release of UFO records

REUTERS, Washington

President Donald Trump said on Thursday he would direct federal agencies to begin releasing government files related to aliens and unidentified flying objects, pointing to what he described as strong public interest in the issue.

In a social media post, Trump said he would order Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth and other agencies to release the information, calling the matter "extremely interesting and important."

Earlier in the day, Trump, without providing evidence, accused former president Barack Obama of improperly disclosing classified information when discussing aliens publicly, saying Obama "made a big mistake."

"He took it out of classified information ... He's not supposed to be doing that," Trump told reporters while traveling to Georgia.

During an interview with podcast host Brian Tyler Cohen released on Saturday, Obama was asked if aliens were real.

## EPSTEIN SCANDAL

## Probe into former UK prince goes on Cops search royal mansion

REUTERS, Sandringham



British police were searching the former mansion of King Charles' younger brother Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor yesterday after a photograph of the royal emerging from a police station was splashed on newspapers around the world.

Mountbatten-Windsor was arrested on Thursday, his 66th birthday, on suspicion of misconduct in public office over allegations he sent confidential government documents to disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein when he was a trade envoy.

The former prince was released under investigation after being held by police for more than 10 hours.

He has not been charged with any offence.

## Potato farmers stare at losses as prices dip

FROM PAGE 1

forced to sell their produce at throwaway prices. Some even dumped potatoes on the streets last year, unable to sell them or store the surplus in already full warehouses.

The production cost for high-yielding potato varieties such as Asterix, Diamond and Granola stands at Tk 16.64 per kilogramme this year. However, over the past month, field prices have hovered around Tk 8-9 per kg, according to data from the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

Agriculturists attributed the low prices to overproduction, compounded by the government's failure to expand export capacity.

Last year, potato production reached a record 1.15 crore tonnes, significantly higher than the country's annual demand for 90 lakh tonnes, according to the DAE and the Bangladesh Cold Storage Association.

Frustrated by losses due to low prices, farmers cultivated the tuber on 4.69 lakh hectares this season, down 5 percent from 4.94 lakh hectares the previous year. Yet prices have continued to fall.

"We are selling at the field level at Tk 9-10 per kilogramme. If the market price remains like this, we will suffer greater losses compared to last year," said Jamal Uddin, a farmer from the Mostafi area of Lalmonirhat sadar upazila, a bordering district in the north and a key potato-growing region.

He cultivated potatoes on 18 bighas of land this year, down from 22 bighas last year due to financial losses.

In Lalmonirhat and four other northern districts — Kurigram, Rangpur, Gaibandha and Nilphamari — potatoes have been cultivated on 110,700 hectares of land.

Munshiganj, one of the leading potato-producing districts, saw potatoes cultivated on approximately 34,758 hectares in the 2025-26 season, 100 hectares less than the previous year.

Anwar Hossain, a farmer from Panchasar in Munshiganj sadar, said he planted potatoes on 4 bighas of land this year, compared to 15 bighas last year after incurring huge losses.

"I'm really worried about a further

slump in price this year," he said.

Tozammel Hossain, a farmer from Balakur village in Joypurhat, said he deliberately delayed harvesting in hopes of securing a better price.

"But I will still incur a loss of at least Tk 8,000 to Tk 10,000 per bigha at the current price, despite an increased yield compared to last year," he said.

Another farmer from the same village, Md Mukul, said, "I invested Tk 70,000 in 80 decimals of land, borrowing Tk 50,000 from an NGO. I harvested 240 maunds of potatoes, but if I sell at the current price, I can't even recover the costs, let alone repay my debt."

Alzal Hossain, a vegetable wholesaler at Rangpur Poura Market, said potatoes were being sold at Tk 13-14 per kg, while traders were purchasing from farmers at Tk 9-10 per kg.

"Prices are gradually declining," he added.

Trader Rostam Ali of Tilakpur Haat, a major potato market in Akkelpur upazila of Joypurhat, said on February 18 high yielding potatoes were selling for Tk 300-340 per maund, while red potatoes of the Rumana variety fetched Tk 450.

"Every day I am buying three trucks of potatoes, but prices are much lower than last year and are continuing to drop daily," he said.

Fazlul Haque, a seasonal potato trader in Gobindaganj, Gaibandha, echoed Rostam.

Ratan Kumar Ray, acting Agricultural Marketing Officer of Joypurhat district, said market prices over the past month ranged from Tk 300 to Tk 350 per maund.

"At this same time last year, the price was Tk 500 per maund," he added.

Abu Taher, Agricultural Marketing Officer of Bogura district, said farmers had been selling high-yielding potatoes directly from the field for Tk 280-300 per maund over the past month, compared to more than Tk 560 per maund at the same time last year.

Additional Director Sirajul Islam of the Rangpur Regional Office, DAE, said farmers achieved expected yields due to favourable weather this year but remained deeply disappointed by

the low market prices.

"If potatoes cannot be exported abroad, farmers will face extreme anxiety over their produce again this year," he said.

According to agriculture ministry data, potato exports from Bangladesh have not exceeded 62,000 tonnes in the last five years. In the 2020-21 fiscal year, only 51,543 tonnes were exported, while in 2024-25 exports reached 62,135 tonnes.

Asked about managing surplus potatoes and the continuous losses faced by farmers, Abdur Rahim, director general of the DAE, told The Daily Star, "This year, favourable weather and low pest infestation led to a bumper harvest. However, we now have a potato surplus. This excess must be exported."

He blamed high transportation costs as a major hurdle to exports.

"Special care must be given to potato varieties that are in high demand abroad. We will urge the new government to prioritise potato exports — we are working on it," he said.

The DG also stressed the need to increase storage facilities to prevent surplus produce from going to waste.

Jahangir Alam Khan, an agricultural economist and former director general of the Bangladesh Livestock Research Institute, said, "In terms of both consumption and production, potato is the second most important crop in Bangladesh. If farmers repeatedly fail to get fair prices during the peak season, they will be discouraged from production."

"To save farmers from losses, the government could initiate potato procurement and storage, similar to how they purchase rice and paddy every year. These potatoes could be sold year-round alongside TCB products. Additionally, the government could release these stocks into the open market if prices skyrocket later," he suggested.

Khan further recommended that Bangladeshi embassies abroad should work on capturing international markets.

[Our Lalmonirhat Correspondent S Dilip Roy and Munshiganj Correspondent Tanjil Hasan contributed to this report]

## Kabul shakes as 5.8-quake hits eastern Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

A strong earthquake rocked eastern Afghanistan including the capital Kabul yesterday, AFP journalists and residents said.

The 5.8 magnitude quake struck a mountainous area around 130 kilometres (80 miles) northeast of Kabul, the United States Geological Survey said.

The epicentre was near several remote villages and struck at 5:39 pm (1309 GMT), just as people in the Muslim-majority country were sitting down to break their Ramadan fast.

"We were waiting to do our iftars, a heavy earthquake shook us. It was very strong, it went on for almost 30 seconds," said Zilgay Talabi, a resident of Khenj district near of the

epicentre.

"Everyone was horrified and scared," Talabi told AFP, saying he feared "landslides and avalanches" may follow. Power was briefly cut in parts of the capital, while east of Kabul an AFP journalist in Nangarhar province also felt it.

Earthquakes are common in Afghanistan, particularly along the Hindu Kush mountain range, near where the Eurasian and Indian tectonic plates meet.

Haqmal Saad, spokesman for the Panjshir province police, described the quake as "very strong" and said the force was "gathering information on the ground".

Mohibullah Jahid, head of Panjshir Natural Disaster Management

agency, told AFP he was in touch with several officials in the area.

The district governor had told him there were reports of "minor damage, such as cracks in the walls, but we have not received anything serious, such as the collapse of houses or anything similar", Jahid said.

Residents in Bamiyan and Wardak provinces, west of Kabul, told AFP they also felt the earthquake.

In Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, rescue service official Bilal Ahmad Faizi said the quake was felt in border areas.

In August last year, a shallow 6.0 magnitude quake in the country's east wiped out mountainside villages and killed more than 2,200 people.

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**S M Zulkarnine**  
Joint Venture Customer  
Casa Palmera, Uttara

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

## Ekushey's spirit must guide us all

### Preserve and promote linguistic diversity, build a nation free of discrimination

On Ekushey February, we honour the heroes of our Language Movement, who sacrificed their lives to give Bangla its due recognition. Their courage and determination made it possible for us to speak, write and learn in Bangla with dignity, and to assert our cultural identity in the face of oppression. Over time, Ekushey February has taken on global significance and is now observed as International Mother Language Day. It highlights not only the importance of preserving Bangla but also the urgent need to protect endangered languages and mother tongues around the world. Yet, seven decades on, the question remains: are we truly living up to the spirit of Ekushey?

The essence of Ekushey is rooted in the right to use our mother tongue in all aspects of life. Yet, that is not the reality in Bangladesh today. In academia, for example, multiple streams of education exist, from primary to secondary and higher secondary levels, creating an unequal reality for the country's younger citizens. Meanwhile, Indigenous languages continue to fade due to little efforts to preserve them.

Language carries our history, traditions, and values. It connects generations, shapes our thinking, and fosters a sense of belonging. Preserving Bangla and other mother tongues in the country, therefore, requires concrete action. While Bangla must be actively promoted at all levels, the languages of minority communities, many of which are on the verge of extinction, must also be protected. Endangered languages should be preserved through education, institutional support, and legal safeguards.

The 1952 Language Movement was much more than a fight for Bangla. It laid the foundation for a political and cultural awakening in the then East Bengal. By resisting systematic discrimination against Bangla, people asserted their identity, dignity, and right to self-expression. That same spirit of resistance inspired all our later struggles, from the 1969 mass uprising to the 1971 Liberation War. Even the mass uprising of July-August 2024 draws on this legacy, uniting diverse political and social forces in the pursuit of equality and justice.

As we commemorate Ekushey February this year, we must strive to build a nation free from all forms of oppression and discrimination. The newly formed government must make a firm commitment to ensure the use of Bangla in every sphere of life, while also honouring the diverse languages that enrich our nation. Respecting and promoting every citizen's mother tongue is essential for national progress and cultural dignity. By embracing our linguistic diversity, we can build a stronger, more united nation where every citizen feels proud of their identity, and where culture and language thrive, respected and celebrated by all.

## Complete haor embankments on time

### Investigate allegations of delays and irregularities, take action

We are concerned by the delays and irregularities in the construction of crop protection embankments in the haor regions of Sunamganj. According to a *Prothom Alo* report, with the deadline only days away, work on dozens of such embankments still remains incomplete. In the haor areas, there is only a short window of a few months for crop cultivation every year. Timely completion of the work is, therefore, critical as even a brief delay can leave crops vulnerable to sudden rain and waterlogging.

According to the Sunamganj Water Development Board (WDB), work on 710 projects is underway in 42 haors across 12 upazilas of the district, covering the repair and construction of 602 km of embankments. Project officials say about 68 percent of the work has been completed. Leaders of the Haor Bachao Andolon, however, allege that only token soil dumping took place in a few projects on December 15, and that full-scale work has yet to begin. Meanwhile, even though allocations have been increased from Tk 130 crore last year to Tk 145 crore this year, bottlenecks in fund disbursement and administrative inefficiencies continue to stall progress.

In Sunamganj, rice is produced in roughly 225,000 hectares of haor land annually, and these haors are protected by more than 1,700 km of embankments. Any delay or disruption in their construction or repair directly threatens the livelihoods of thousands of farmers. Past experience shows that poor-quality embankments and administrative negligence can lead to widespread crop loss. The WDB has overhauled its approach to embankment construction. Yet, despite new policies placing district and upazila administrations directly in charge, oversight remains inconsistent. Locals have also alleged irregularities in project selection and in the formation of implementation committees.

If these issues are not addressed promptly and the embankments are not completed on time, crop damage and economic losses for local communities could be severe. We urge the authorities to expedite the embankment work, and at the same time ensure timely fund release, strengthen monitoring of construction, and enforce accountability at all levels. Regular site inspections should be mandatory to ensure that embankments are built following proper standards. Local government bodies and community organisations should also be actively involved in monitoring progress.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

### Language Martyrs' Day



On this day in 1952, students and other activists in Dhaka defied a ban on public gatherings to protest the declaration of Urdu as the state language of then East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh). The police opened fire at the protest near the Dhaka Medical College and killed several people.

# What the scheduling fiasco of Ekushey book fair tells us

BLOWIN' IN THE WIND



Dr Shamsad Mortuza  
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SHAMSAD MORTUZA

Ekushey February (February 21) is a date that reminds the Bangladeshi people of their culture as well as their originary moments. Not too many states in the world have given a central role to language as the primary marker of their national identity. Bangladesh, the land where Bangla is spoken, has. Soon after Partition, the country, then the eastern province of Pakistan, realised that its civilisational core conflicted with the ruling class of the western province. Despite their demographic majority, the Bangalee people found their status relegated to second-class citizens and their language overlooked for administrative and academic use. Thus, the demand for Bangla as a state language, for which blood was spilled on February 21, 1952, became an inflection point that eventually caused the eastern territory to drift away from the religion-based two-nation theory and opt for an independent Bangladesh in 1971.

February is not only the month of language martyrs; it is also the month of books. The formal launch of the Amar Ekushey Boi Mela at the Bangla Academy grounds is more than a calendric event. However, in September last year, the Bangla Academy announced that they would prepone the book fair and start it not on the usual February 1 but a month and a half earlier, on December 17. The Bangla Academy director general mentioned the timing of the election and Ramadan as the main reason for the change. Then, on December 17, the academy announced that the fair would start on February 20 and run until March 15. With Eid-ul-Fitr holidays in between, the short span of the fair irked the publishers, who objected to this plan and decided to boycott this year's fair. Their concerns are valid, as constructing makeshift stalls is an expensive venture, and they won't be able to invest in such projects knowing that they will incur huge financial losses. A boycott is a major decision because publishers wait for this annual book fair, where they manage to showcase their new titles and earn 50-60 percent of their annual revenue.

The scheduling glitch—most

recently, the fair was rescheduled for a February 25 launch—exposes a deeper cultural anxiety in a transitioning Bangladesh. We need to ask questions about our cultural gatekeepers. And then there are those who are weighing national memory in market terms. And the immediate victims are the publishers who wait for this month to keep their business afloat. At the same time, these indecisions are symptomatic of weak institutional governance.

It is not the first time that the book fair is coinciding with the



VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

month of Ramadan. But this time, suddenly, there was extra alertness and sensitivity for religious practices that created the confusion in the first place. Some publishers showed concerns over recruiting volunteers or student staff during the Ramadan and Eid break. Seasonal storms could cause further worries if the fair extends until the end of March. The consultation with stakeholders seems less transparent, albeit ineffective. When over 300 publishers threaten to boycott an event, it signals a breakdown of trust. And not to address this matter as a national priority will be disastrous.

The Ekushey book fair has traditionally been our intellectual pilgrimage. In order to restore the fair to its former splendour, we must not only safeguard the publishers but also endeavour to comprehend the reasons behind its challenges. There

remain unsustainable.

So the entire Ekushey book fair ecosystem needs to be revisited. And it must speak of a "new Bangladesh," where inclusivity extends to independent and small presses, district-based publishers, minority-language publications, academic and scholarly presses, women-led publishing houses, and diaspora Bangla writers. The last-minute changes of date cannot promise any such inclusivity. The fair still heavily privileges Dhaka-centric, mainstream commercial publishers. A genuinely inclusive fair could subsidise marginal presses, create thematic pavilions (for translations, indigenous literature, and young adults), facilitate rights exchanges and translation grants, and include panel spaces curated outside metropolitan networks. We need to think beyond political majoritarianism

# Reconciling hundi realities with LDC graduation goals



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SABA EL KABIR

At 2am in a remote village in northern Bangladesh, a mother waits for a phone call from a hundi broker. The monsoon rain hammers against the tin roof, a rhythmic intrusion on the silence of a house built by money earned thousands of miles away. Her son has just finished a sixteen-hour shift at a construction site in the Gulf, and the money he sends tonight will determine whether a family medical bill is paid tomorrow. In this late-night transaction, there are no forms to complete and no procedural delays. There is only a relationship of trust operating with a speed and proximity that the formal financial system has yet to replicate.

Bangladesh's Least Developed Country (LDC) graduation was widely framed as an economic milestone. However, the newly appointed government has officially initiated a process to seek a three-year deferment of this transition, potentially pushing the graduation from late 2026 to 2029. For policymakers watching foreign exchange reserves and trade preferences, graduation feels less like a trophy and more like a reckoning. The current administration's push for a delay, citing that the country is not yet ready for an "open-field competitive

environment", acknowledges a fundamental truth: the economic data previously used to justify a 2026 exit may have masked deep seated structural vulnerabilities.

For decades, growth has been supported by preferential market access and international concessions. In a country whose rise has been underwritten by the labour of nearly 13 million citizens abroad, remittances remain a pillar of macroeconomic stability. They account for roughly 6-7 percent of GDP and represent one of the country's largest sources of foreign currency.

The pressure to stabilise reserves has sharpened enforcement against informal remittance channels. The war on hundi is a necessity aligned with global anti-money-laundering standards. But the crackdown risks dismantling informal networks before viable alternatives are in place.

The imbalance begins in credit policy. The Bangladesh Bank agricultural and rural credit targets remain heavily concentrated in short-term crop finance. Historically, a large majority of formal agricultural credit in Bangladesh has been seasonal, with a substantial share going to short-term crop loans and only a smaller

portion to longer-term investment in irrigation, machinery, or storage. Rural loans are only helping farmers survive from one harvest to the next, rather than helping them buy equipment or infrastructure that would make them wealthier in the long run.

According to Bangladesh Bank data, outstanding rural deposits stood at Tk 37,487 crore as of June 2025,

This credit structure creates a local liquidity constraint. Short-term crop loans must be repaid at harvest, often forcing farmers to sell produce at depressingly low prices to meet immediate deadlines. Households remain in cycles of subsistence rather than accumulation. For a migrant earning approximately \$400 per month, the 2-3 percent exchange rate differential in the hundi system can cover several days of groceries. More importantly, the funds arrive instantly. When repayment schedules or medical emergencies cannot wait, the informal system is a rational financial necessity.

This imbalance is not inevitable. To rebalance capital allocation, the credit framework must transition from a reliance on collateral to a logic of cash flow. A district-level loan to deposit framework could require that a defined share of deposits collected in a district be reinvested locally. Warehouse receipt financing could transform stored crops into recognised collateral, enabling farmers to access credit based on the value of their harvest rather than land titles. Alternative credit scoring could incorporate verified remittance histories, allowing landless households to build credit profiles.

The three-year "breather" requested by the new government offers a final opportunity to implement these reforms. As the revised 2029 deadline approaches, LDC graduation should not be measured solely by reserve adequacy or export diversification. A more significant test is whether the workers who generated the nation's foreign exchange remain integrated into the financial system they helped sustain.

**The pressure to stabilise reserves has sharpened enforcement against informal remittance channels. The war on hundi is a necessity aligned with global anti-money-laundering standards. But the crackdown risks dismantling informal networks before viable alternatives are in place.**

while loans disbursed in those same areas totalled only Tk 6,656 crore, even as deposits grew by nearly 15 percent compared to just a 1.2 percent rise in rural lending. Nationally, more than 90 percent of formal lending continued to flow to urban borrowers. Deposits mobilised in remittance-rich districts were not being recycled locally at a comparable scale. Liquidity generated in the periphery was routinely deployed elsewhere, lowering borrowing costs for large urban firms while leaving local credit conditions tight.

# A bizarre mission to restore the Madhupur Sal forest



**Philip Gain**  
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**PHILIP GAIN**

The interim government set an ambitious goal to restore the Madhupur Sal forest in Tangail. Once a legendary habitat of tigers, elephants, peacocks, bears, golden langurs, hundreds of bird species, and rich biodiversity, the forest today bears little resemblance to its past. Vast stretches have been converted into commercial plantations of exotic acacia, pineapple, banana, and spices. Only fragments of the original Sal forest remain.

The principal cause of this ecological devastation—both in Madhupur and in other Sal forest patches in Tangail, Gazipur and Mymensingh—is the social forestry programme introduced in 1989, along with the rubber plantation initiated in 1986. Industrial establishments, roads, highways, and expanding settlements have further accelerated forest loss.

The most recent Sal forest restoration drive by the government was ceremonially launched on October 18 last year. Acacia saplings were felled at the social forestry plot of Md Aminul in the Dhorung Par Tilental area of the Dokhla Range. Some indigenous fruit and medicinal tree saplings were planted in their place. “When the trees mature, they will be auctioned in accordance with the social forestry rules. A valuation will be fixed, but the trees will not be cut. Only the valuation will be determined, and dividends will be distributed under the social forestry framework. The Forest Department will inform us what percentage will be allocated from carbon trading,” said Md Aminul, secretary of the Forest Co-Management Committee of the Dokhla Range, at that time.

When I visited Aminul’s 2.5-acre plot again on January 16 this year, it was densely covered with acacia and pineapple. Of the native saplings planted in October, only two

or three were visible, covered in dust. In an adjoining area, a vast tract of land was cleared of acacia at the end of its third rotation of plantation. Acacia logs were still being loaded onto a truck. One corner of the large plot was covered with mustard plants in yellow bloom, while pineapple saplings had just been planted in some sections. Elsewhere, acacia stumps had recently been uprooted, and the land was tilled with tractors—an activity prohibited on forest land.

If the Forest Department were genuinely committed to restoring natural forests, it could have easily stopped such practices. Instead, it allows the destruction to continue. Official statistics show that social forestry covers about 4,551 acres in the Madhupur Sal forest area, according to the 2025 Restoration Plan of the Madhupur Sal Forest (2025-26 to 2027-28) of the Forest Department. The department now acknowledges that plantations of exotic species have had profound, destructive impacts. In response, the environment ministry issued a gazette notification on May 15, 2025 banning the plantation, extraction, and sale of eucalyptus and acacia seedlings.

According to the ministry plans, about 3,401 acres of land under social forestry in Madhupur are to be restored as Sal forest. An additional 3,210 acres of illegally occupied land are to be planted with Sal and Sal-compatible species. Together with surviving forest patches, these efforts aim to expand Sal forest to nearly 20,000 acres by 2028, according to the restoration plan.

Yet, official rhetoric clashes with reality. In Jhatarbaid of South Jangalia under Beribaidd mouza, a Forest Department signboard reads that five hectares have been planted with native species. In fact, the area is scattered

across three locations several kilometres apart. In one such plot, the Forest Department abruptly cut down some 30 self-regenerating (*apanjala*) acacia trees and planted native saplings without consulting the landholders, some of whom were not participants in any social forestry programme.

Md Munaf Munna, who jointly owns 2.4 acres of the land, has lived there for decades. I visited his plot on December 16,

in Uttar Jangalia and Gubudia, forest officials planted native saplings inside banana and pineapple plantations without consultation, leaving landowners confused about how such actions could restore the natural forest.

Former Chief Conservator of Forests Md Yunus Ali has also said, unequivocally, that restoring the Sal forest in this manner is impossible. Pineapple cultivation, he explains, makes the soil highly acidic, preventing Sal

acacia, raising serious questions about fund misuse under the Tk 14-crore Madhupur Sal Forest Regeneration Project.

During recent visits, I found that most saplings planted in the name of restoring natural forest, particularly Sal, have died. Although project guidelines stipulate that 70 percent of plantings should be Sal, very few Sal saplings remain. By contrast, wherever social forestry continues, vast plantations of acacia, pineapple, banana, papaya, turmeric, and spices dominate the landscape.

In 2007, during the emergency rule, Sal saplings were planted across several hundred acres under the leadership of the then adviser CS Karim. During that phase, with the support of the joint forces, the Forest Department cut down banana plants on roughly 5,000 acres of forest land as part of an operation to reclaim encroached areas. However, they failed to recover the forest land.

It is still too soon to say if the restoration of the forest will fail again. However, what has been done so far in the name of restoring can only be described as bizarre. By destroying some acacia saplings, the Forest Department’s efforts to bring back the Sal forest amount to little more than putting up signboards and empty fanfare. Moreover, there appear to be no restrictions on cultivating pineapple, banana, papaya, and spices.

Restoring the Madhupur Sal forest is a commendable goal. But success will require genuine consultation with local communities, transparency, and trust. Powerful vested interests profit from forest land. Without confronting these interests, restoration will remain illusory. A possible way forward would be an independent legal body to develop a shared framework, review former donor-funded projects, and ensure accountability without becoming another bureaucratic burden.

Turning the Madhupur Sal forest back from its current state will be extraordinarily difficult. Only integrity, long-term commitment, and the meaningful participation of local communities can yield positive outcomes, even if limited. We hope that the current government, which emerged after a long struggle for democracy, will pay careful attention to the Madhupur Sal forest, the third-largest one in the country.



A vast pineapple plantation in the Tilental area, which was once home to a dense Sal forest.

PHOTO: PHILIP GAIN

2025 and found piles of pineapple saplings. When I returned on January 16 this year, pineapple plants covered the entire area. His wife, Shirina Begum, said their family had farmed the land since before 1971, growing rice, ginger, pineapple, turmeric, wheat, and mustard. “When people cleared the forest and built homes, the Forest Department said nothing,” she said. “Now they plant trees without informing us.”

Another local, Md Ruhul Amin, fears losing land for which his father once paid tax. Although invasive acacia trees dominate the site, most are self-generated. Elsewhere

saplings from surviving. Restoration requires preparatory species, soil conditioning, and careful sequencing. “Madhupur is an extremely sensitive area,” he notes. “Its challenges are social and political. You cannot act without considering local interests.”

Further evidence of recklessness can be seen in roadside social forestry plots in the Gachhabari Beat, where two participants in social forestry were pressured to plant thousands of saplings during the peak of winter. Most saplings died within weeks. Meanwhile, participants have yet to receive their full share of proceeds from harvested

# Club Epstein and crimes against humanity



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**BINOY KAMPMARK**

With a sex trafficking, flesh-peddling empire of favours, logistics and the good times to be had by the powerful, the gigantic scale of Jeffrey Epstein’s criminal network continues to disturb. The least savoury digital library on the planet, available through the offices of the US Department of Justice as the Epstein Library, is being combed through with its 3.5 million items comprising 180,000 images, 2,000 videos, emails and text correspondence, not to mention an assortment of miscellaneous material.

The combing process has displaced the sheer gravity of Epstein’s dehumanising enterprise. Like a gold mine of ill-repute, slime and crime, researchers, journalists, political hacks and the purely voyeuristic individuals are fossicking for material about the next public figure to be tainted. Agendas abound. The central agenda—ruined lives and the despoiled innocence of young women and girls, and their retraumatisation with shockingly redacted files—has been eclipsed.

On February 16, a panel of United Nations

experts appointed by the Human Rights Council issued a sharp statement on the Epstein files urging a return to a focus on the victims. The members include, among others, Reem Absalem, special rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences, George Katrougalos, independent expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order, and Ana Brian Nougères, special rapporteur on the right to privacy.

The documents revealed, according to the statement, “disturbing and credible evidence of systematic and large-scale sexual abuse, trafficking and exploitation of women and girls.” The panel members took note of crimes “committed against the backdrop of supremacist beliefs, racism, corruption, extreme misogyny, and the commodification and dehumanisation of women and girls from different parts of the world.” A “global criminal enterprise” had “raised terrifying implications of the level of impunity for such crimes.”

The panel further proposed that the severe nature of the crimes required stern reclassification. “So grave is the scale, nature, systematic character, and transnational reach of these atrocities against women and girls, that a number of them may reasonably meet the legal threshold of crimes against humanity.” Acts such as sexual slavery, rape, enforced prostitution, trafficking, persecution, torture, or murder can fall within such a determination, and if so, would deserve prosecution in international and domestic courts.

Unfortunately, the Department of Justice shows little interest in pursuing any of those named in the files, let alone conducting genuinely impartial investigations. Deputy US Attorney General Todd Blanche, in dismissive remarks made early this month, observed that, “There’s a lot of correspondence. There’s a lot of emails. There’s a lot of photographs. But that doesn’t allow us necessarily to prosecute somebody.” Just because the victims wanted “to be made whole” did not “mean we can just create evidence or that we can just kind of come up with a case that isn’t there.”

The bountiful nature of the Epstein files would suggest no evidence of any sort needs to be created, with the late financier and convicted paedophile most prolific in communicating with various associates on meetings, rendezvous, and logistical matters. And there is that troubling failure to disclose the remaining three million files or so that remain sealed.

The panel experts relevantly insist that the allegations were so “egregious in nature” as to require “independent, thorough, and impartial investigation, as well as inquiries to determine how such crimes could have taken place for so long.” States were under an obligation to prevent, investigate and punish instances of violence against women and girls, including inflicted by private perpetrators.

Strong words were also reserved for the slipshod process of disclosure that left unredacted the identities and details of a multitude of victims while sparing the powerful, participating members of Club Epstein. “The grave errors in the release process underscore the urgent need for victim-centered standard operating procedures for disclosure and redaction, so that no victim suffers further harm.” That ship sailed well before, given the utter lack of interest shown by the DOJ in involving victims in the process. Six survivors in a September 2025 interview confirmed that fact.

In the view of the panel, failing “to safeguard [the victims’] privacy puts them at risk of retaliation and stigma. The reluctance to fully disclose information or broaden investigations, has left many survivors feeling retraumatised and subjected to what they describe as ‘institutional gaslighting.’”

To date, promised investigations, such as those into former UK Ambassador to the US Lord Peter Mandelson, focus less on the victims than commercially and politically sensitive information he allegedly disclosed

to Epstein when occupying public office. The standard formula used by those trapped in the web has been the fool’s defence, the implausible bliss of ignorance. There have been resignations aplenty, and cataracts of apology.

The UN panel had harsh words for such woeful responses, insisting on a few courses of action. Lift the statute of limitations preventing the prosecution for grave crimes linked to the Epstein enterprise. Provide full remedies and reparations for the victims. Government failures to “effectively investigate, and prosecute those responsible for these crimes, including by complicity or acquiescence, where jurisdiction exists, risks undermining legal frameworks aimed at preventing and responding to violence against women and girls.”

The Trump era of crude, vulgar might as the sole indicator of worth does not augur well for human rights advocates demanding investigations and prosecutions into the victims of Epstein’s predation. Even before President Donald Trump got the keys to the White House, there was impunity, complicity and permissiveness in the depravities of Club Epstein, a state of affairs tolerated, even encouraged by a ruling class bankrupt and soiled. If you were not in it, as the reprehensible socialite Lady Victoria Hervey scorned, you were a “loser.”

This article first appeared on [CounterCurrents.org](http://CounterCurrents.org) on February 19, 2026.

**CROSSWORD**  
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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**YESTERDAY’S ANSWERS**

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WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO [dsopinion@gmail.com](mailto:dsopinion@gmail.com).

## 2 killed by mob on mugging suspicion

OUR CORRESPONDENT,  
Bogura

Two suspected muggers were allegedly beaten to death by a mob of villagers in Sadullapur upazila of Gaibandha early yesterday.

The incident took place in the Mujahidpur area of Khoddokomarpur village, police said.

The deceased were identified as Lebu Mia, alias Bhondol, 24, of Satarpara village, and Moinul Islam, 50, of Mostafapur village in Palashbari upazila, said Sarwar Alam Khan, officer-in-charge (OC) of Palashbari Police Station.

According to police and witnesses, three muggers on a motorcycle intercepted a woman and her relative on Sadullapur-Thutiapakur road when they reached the Madarhat Kheya Ghat area upon arrival from Dhaka on a night coach around 4:30am.

Brandishing sharp weapons, the suspects robbed them of cash and gold ornaments, the witnesses said.

"When the victims screamed for help, locals began chasing the muggers.

While attempting to flee, the suspects lost control of their motorcycle and crashed in the Mujahidpur area," said Bidroh Kumar Kundu, additional superintendent of police (Gaibandha Circle). "Two of them were caught and beaten to death on the spot by the locals, while the third suspect managed to escape," he added.

Family members said Lebu Mia, the only son of widow Phulmati Begum, had been working in Dhaka as a rickshaw puller for three years. He lived there with his wife and one-year-old son and had returned to the village just two days ago to visit his mother.

The other deceased, Moinul Islam, had married Lebu's cousin as his second wife and was living with his father-in-law in Satarpara.

Abdul Alim, OC of Sadullapur Police Station, said police recovered the bodies and sent them to Gaibandha General Hospital morgue for autopsy. The motorcycle used by the suspects was seized.

Lebu Mia's mother, Phulmati, filed a murder case in connection with the incident, the OC added.

## Author Sankar

FROM PAGE 12  
treatment at Peerless Hospital in Kolkata.

A Sahitya Akademi award winner, Sankar is better known for his novels — "Chowringee", "Seemabaddha", and "Jana Aranya".

Chowringee, first published in Bangla in 1962, revolves around the life of Shankar, an ambitious young man who loses his job of secretary after his employer, an English barrister, dies. Shankar, the protagonist, is forced to sell wastepaper baskets until a friend notices his state and helps him get a job at the Shahjahan Hotel. The story then takes readers through the lives of the elite of Calcutta (now Kolkata). The novel was adapted into a movie in 1968.

His other works — Seemabaddha and Jana Aranya — were also made into films and directed by Satyajit Ray.

Sankar was born on December 7, 1933 in Bongaon, in the then undivided Jessore district (now Jashore). His father, Haripada Mukherjee, was a well-known lawyer. Even before World War II, his family had moved to Kolkata. He spent his

childhood in Howrah. In 1959, Ritwik Ghatak started making a film "Kato Ajanare" based on Sankar's first novel. The film project was shelved due to financial and production issues, with only a few scenes left to be filmed.

"Charan Chhuye Jai", "Vivekananda", "Achena Ajnana", "Dwitiya Purush", "Monihar", and "Piklu's Kolkata Travel" are some of his well-known works. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister of West Bengal Mamata Banerjee expressed condolences over the demise of the noted litterateur.

Sankar's literary works remains unnervingly relevant. The anxieties of educated unemployment, moral compromise, social aspiration, and urban alienation persist across generations. Shankar understood something fundamental about modern existence — that the greatest tragedies are not spectacular. They are incremental. He constructed moral cartographies, mapped the fault lines of ambition, survival, and dignity. His literature stands not as monument, but mirror.

## Rebels want reinstatement, BNP unmoved

FROM PAGE 12  
Seeking anonymity, another BNP Standing Committee member said it would not be easy for the expelled leaders to return to party politics.

"Many expelled leaders have now contacted senior party figures to come back into the party fold. However, the party is unlikely to take a soft stance on the matter and is not giving it priority at the moment.

"Instead, it is focusing on evaluating loyal leaders who have followed central directives and are carrying out organisational activities at the district level."

In the February 12 national election, BNP alone won 209 seats, with its Chairman Tarique Rahman himself entering parliament for the first time after winning two constituencies. Its allies got three seats.

Of the 66 BNP rebel candidates, seven won in Mymensingh-1, Dinajpur-5, Cumilla-7, Kishoreganj-5, Tangail-3, Chandpur-4, and Brahmanbaria-2.

Expelled leaders said they are seeking an opportunity to return to the party, arguing that their absence is hampering the party's organisational activities in their districts.

They said implementation of central directives has slowed, coordination between district and grassroots units has weakened, and observance of national days and routine party programmes has also been affected.

Grassroots leaders are privately communicating with top leaders to get back their party posts, saying they are willing to abide by future party directives if given another chance.

In Munshiganj-3, expelled BNP district member secretary Md Mohiuddin, who lost the polls, said, "As the district BNP convener was ill, I had to carry out the party's activities as the second top leader of the party."

"Every year around February 21, the district BNP organises various programmes. But this time, very little is happening. Organisational activities are also stuck.

"For 17 years, I was involved in party's different movements and struggles. Now I appeal to the party to reinstate my party position."

In Sylhet-5, Mamunur Rashid, an adviser of Sylhet district BNP, who

was expelled for defying the party decision, lost the seat to the Khelafat Majlis candidate, a partner of Jamaat-led H-party alliance.

"I contested the election out of necessity for the party. I was expelled without even being served a show-cause notice. I seek an opportunity to take part in the party's activities in the future."

Another rebel candidate, Jamal Ahmed Chowdhury, vice-president of Narsingdi BNP, was defeated by the BNP candidate in Narsingdi-5.

Jamal said, "I stood by the party during its difficult times. The party did not evaluate us. But if Tarique Rahman now considers bringing us back into the party, we are here. If not, we have nothing to ask for."

This newspaper has spoken to over two dozen leaders who said they want to return to the party.

Meanwhile, the highest number of expulsions occurred at the district level.

The BNP also dismissed over 200 grassroots leaders for campaigning for rebel candidates. Many of them sought their return to the party, otherwise they will face uncertainty over their political future.

An expelled grassroots leader, wishing not to be named, said, "We don't know why the party expelled us without following proper procedure. As expelled leaders, we don't know how to continue in politics."

In total, 31 district leaders, including four general and joint general secretaries, five vice-presidents, and 22 members and conveners, along with 11 upazila and thana level leaders and seven general members, faced exclusion from the party.

At the central level, 17 leaders were expelled, including one adviser, one joint office secretary, one joint international affairs secretary, 13 executive members, and one central leader of an associate body, according to the expulsion documents.

According to the party's central office in Nayapaltan, any reconsideration of reinstatement would likely depend on written appeals, review of individual cases, and assessment of their roles during the election.

For now, the BNP leadership appears determined to send a message that defying party discipline carries consequences, said party sources.

**LEGAL NOTICE**

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF BANGLADESH  
HIGH COURT DIVISION, DHAKA  
(Admiralty Jurisdiction)

**Company Matter No. 2023 of 2025**

**Md. Solaiman**, Shareholder & Managing Director,  
Haji Hashem Spinning Mills Ltd.  
.....Petitioner

**-Versus-**

**Haji Hashem Spinning Mills Ltd. & Others**  
..... Respondents

Notice is hereby given that Md. Solaiman has filed an application under Sections 81(2) and 85(3) of the Companies Act, 1994 read with Section 396 before the Hon'ble High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh.

The petition was admitted by the Hon'ble Mr. Justice Kazi Zinat Hoque on 01.02.2026. The Hon'ble Court has directed that any person intending to oppose the said petition shall file an Affidavit-in-Opposition within 26.02.2026 after publication of this notice. Any person having objection may appear in person or through a duly appointed Advocate before the Hon'ble Court within the stipulated time.

A copy of the petition may be obtained from the undersigned on payment of the prescribed cost.

Sd/-  
**Md. Rokunuzzaman**  
Advocate  
Supreme Court of Bangladesh  
Supreme Court Bar Association Building, Dhaka

## Gaza deaths far higher than reported

FROM PAGE 12  
author is Michael Spagat, a professor at Royal Holloway, University of London. The study is the first independent population survey of mortality in the Gaza Strip, said its authors, whose research involved surveying 2,000 Palestinian households over seven days starting on December 30, 2024.

"The combined evidence suggests that, as of Jan 5, 2025, 3-4 percent of the population of the Gaza Strip had been killed violently and there have been a substantial number of non-violent deaths caused indirectly by the conflict," the authors wrote.

The Gaza death toll has been bitterly disputed since Israel's assault began on October 7, 2023. Gaza health authorities, whose figures the UN has long deemed reliable, report more than 72,000 killed and estimate thousands

more remain uncounted beneath destroyed buildings 28 months later. Israel has questioned those tallies, citing Hamas control of the ministry, though a senior military officer told Israeli media last month its figures were broadly accurate — a view the army later said did not reflect official data.

Lancet researchers said their analysis contradicts claims of inflation and suggests the ministry numbers are, if anything, conservative under extreme conditions.

Researchers who published a statistical analysis last year for The Lancet, its flagship journal, found the health ministry likely undercounted deaths by about 40 percent during the first nine months of the war. The new research published on Wednesday appears to suggest an undercount by a similar margin.

## Delhi seeks

FROM PAGE 12  
inclusive Bangladesh. "Building on the warm and historic ties between the two countries, India looks forward to further strengthening our multifaceted bilateral ties with Bangladesh," he said.

Asked if India had formally stopped purchasing Russian oil as is being claimed by the United States, the spokesperson said Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri has already clarified the country's position in this regard.

Misri had recently stated that India's oil imports from Russia, and elsewhere, are guided by national interest, energy security, and diversification, rather than external pressure.

On whether India would start buying oil from Venezuela, the spokesperson said New Delhi can explore that option also if it is commercially viable.

Responding to another question, the spokesperson said India did participate in the Board of Peace meeting in Washington as an observer.

"We did attend the Board of Peace meeting in Washington DC as an observer. We have also welcomed the Gaza Peace Plan initiative of President Trump as well as efforts under way as part of resolution 2803 of the UNSC," he added. India was represented at the meet by Charge d'affaires at the Indian Embassy in Washington Namgya Khampa.

**আমর একুশ**

আন্তর্জাতিক মাতৃভাষা দিবসে  
ভাষা সৈনিক ও ভাষা শহীদদের প্রতি  
গভীর শ্রদ্ধাঞ্জলি

মার্কেটাইল ব্যাংক পিএলসি.  
Mercantile Bank PLC.  
দকতাই আমাদের শক্তি

ইসলামী ব্যাংক  
বাংলাদেশ পিএলসি. (ইসলামী নীতি অনুযায়ী মোকদ্দেমার পরিচালনা)

## '10-15 days'

FROM PAGE 12  
But he declined to be specific, except to warn again of "really bad things" and insist that Iran would have to make a deal one way or another.

Russia called for restraint, with a Kremlin spokesperson saying, "We are currently witnessing an unprecedented escalation of tension in the region, but we still hope that political and diplomatic means and negotiations will continue to prevail in the search for a settlement".

In a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Tehran said it would not start any war but that "in the event that it is subjected to military aggression, Iran will respond decisively and proportionately" in its exercise of the right of self-defense.

"All bases, facilities, and assets of the hostile force in the region would constitute legitimate targets," the letter said. "The United States would bear full and direct responsibility for any unpredictable and uncontrolled consequences."

Meanwhile, Norway is relocating some of the around 60 soldiers it has in the Middle East to Norway as well as to other countries in the Middle East, citing the security situation in the region, a spokesperson for the Nordic country's armed forces said yesterday.

Trump's threats to bomb Iran, with the two sides far apart in talks on Tehran's nuclear programme, have pushed up oil prices, and a Russian corvette warship on Thursday joined planned Iranian naval drills in the Gulf of Oman, a vital sea route for global energy.

**আমর একুশ**  
ফেব্রুয়ারি

ভাষার অধিকার  
মানেই  
মানুষের অধিকার

আন্তর্জাতিক মাতৃভাষা দিবসে  
সকল ভাষা সৈনিক ও ভাষা শহীদদের প্রতি আমাদের  
বিনম্র শ্রদ্ধা ও ভালোবাসা।

শাহজালাল ইসলামী ব্যাংক পিএলসি.  
আন্তর্জাতিক সেবার প্রতিশ্রুতি

**একুশ** আমার অহংকার  
আমার অধিকার  
আমার পরিচয়

আন্তর্জাতিক মাতৃভাষা দিবসে ভাষা সৈনিকদের শ্রদ্ধা করছি বিনম্র শ্রদ্ধায়

ইসলামী ব্যাংক  
বাংলাদেশ পিএলসি. (ইসলামী নীতি অনুযায়ী মোকদ্দেমার পরিচালনা)



Immortal Ekushey 2026 Martyrs' Day and International Mother Language Day

Special Supplement Art & Design : Department of Films & Publications (DFP) Guidance : Press Information Department (PID), Ministry of Information and Broadcasting



Message from President Md. Murshid Khasan, 8 Falgun 1432, 21 February 2026.

Today, on 21 February, we observe Great Martyrs' Day and International Mother Language Day. On this solemn and historic occasion, I pay my deepest respects to the language martyrs, Rafiq, Salam, Barkat, Jabbar, Shafiq, and all the unnamed heroes who laid down their lives to secure the right to Bangla as our mother tongue.

Mohammed Shahabuddin

The Language Movement-based Play 'Kabor': Politicism and State-Vision Professor Mohammad Azam

A proof of the profound impact of Language Movement as a component of nationalism was the stir it generated in the domain of art. Essays on the subject were written even earlier. Following the occurrence of Ekushey February, its shadow started to fall in diverse ways on plays, poems, songs, and films.



Message from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, 8 Falgun 1432, 21 February 2026.

On the occasion of Martyrs' Day and International Mother Language Day, I extend my heartfelt greetings and warm felicitations to all people and linguistic communities across the world, including the speakers of our mother tongue, Bangla.

Tarique Rahman

The Language Movement-based Play 'Kabor': Politicism and State-Vision

programme, its implementation and the actions of the state against it could be gathered fully. The state was portrayed here as a monster having expertise in perpetrating repression. When Hafiz says, "Not many corpses, I could bury all of those alone by clearing the place" - the fang and claw of a terribly repressive state-structure get exposed.

considered the matter to be very serious, but could not move in that direction because of prevailing circumstances. The proposal of Inspector Hafiz - "Dump all the corpses together after digging a big hole and then fill it up with soil" - and the enthusiastic support extended to it by the leader brings to the fore their irreligious and immoral stances.



Verses of Ekushey Hasan Hafiz

In consciousness is it fountain of light In cyclone or gusty storm It lives forever Burns with resolute valour.

Translation: Dr Helal Uddin Ahmed



ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

FICTION

# LITTLE GREY

## Part 2

**It is a quiet afternoon and the festivities are nearing their end when the father drives the family's electric car through the gate. He had gone to a neighbouring town to pick up a delivery from Taobao, China's Amazon, which literally means "search for treasure." This particular treasure arrived in a cardboard box so large that the back seats had to be folded down to make space for it. The daughters help to unload the box from the trunk. They put the back seats back up, and the father parks the car next to the front door, its usual spot.**

RAINER EBERT

As evening sets in and the stars begin to appear in the dark sky above the village, a sharp series of pops and bangs pierces through Xiaohui's peace. It is the sound of firecrackers lit by the neighbourhood's children, which invariably plunges Xiaohui into a raw, all-consuming terror. As the Spring Festival draws closer, these terrifying episodes are becoming more frequent. They usually end as abruptly as they begin and rarely last longer than a minute or two. This evening is no different. After the last pop and the last bang, a smell of burnt sulphur lingers in the air for some time, eventually giving way to the smell of the fire burning in a small oven in the house. The whole family is sitting around the oven with their guests. The father is keeping the fire alive by feeding it corncobs, one after another, as they burn more quickly than wood. Corn is woven into nearly every aspect of daily life in this household, and it would only be logical for grilled corn or popcorn to be the snack of choice. Yet, it is sunflower seeds that keep their hands busy as they talk, and there is always much to talk about in a village. The hulls are falling to the floor in a constant drizzle until late at night, setting a task for the next morning.

Xiaohui has lain down to rest. He enjoys gazing into the sky at night. For a brief moment, he lifts his head. Did he hear them say his name? He misheard. They are talking about Xiaohei in English, "little black." Xiaohei lived with his grandfather. Both passed away years ago. Xiaohei had black fur and was well-liked by everybody who knew him. He never bit anybody, and his good character as well as his cleverness are the stuff of many stories that are still being told today. He lived a long and healthy life. When he passed away, he was roughly ninety in human years. It is no coincidence that Xiaohui's name sounds similar to that of Xiaohei. Xiaohui was given his name not only because it describes him well, but also as a way to commemorate Xiaohei, and in the hope that Xiaohui would also be good and have a long life. Only someone looking to offend would have named him after the grandfather or some other revered relative instead. In China, a person is a person, and an animal is an animal. For the grandfather, naturally, a different form of commemoration was chosen. As is traditional Chinese custom, a shrine was built inside the house. It includes incense and candles, and a large photograph of him in his later years, sitting in one of the fields the family has farmed for generations. During the Spring Festival, food and other offerings will be placed at the shrine, and mothers will bring new candles from a nearby temple.

The story of Xiaohei was one of many stories that were conveyed to the guests around the nightly fires. Another story painted a vivid picture of the village's remarkable transformation from humble mud houses to modern homes with solar panels on their roofs, electric cars parked outside their doorsteps, and all the conveniences of contemporary life—all achieved within the span of a single generation. Local wedding customs, funeral rites, food, the seasons, and the advantages of the Chinese way of life over western decadence were discussed as well, but no topic seemed to captivate the guest as much as Xiaohei's life, and by extension Xiaohui's. He appeared taken aback by the amount of thought that was evidently put

into choosing Xiaohui's name, and the care it reflects. It reminded him of the love and attention one might give to a family member, making it difficult for him to reconcile that affection with the seemingly stark reality of Xiaohui's existence.

It is not long before, one sunny morning, the guest leaves through the gate, never to return. Xiaohui is sitting upright, breathing the crisp morning air as the sun gently warms his fur. Quietly, he watches the guest's steps. The gate closes and, for a little while, everything is back to how it always was. Eventually, the Spring Festival arrives and the kitchen goes into a frenzied overdrive. A steady stream of neighbours and relatives from near and far needs to be fed. Each morning the mother uses a broom to gather the scattered sunflower hulls into a growing mound. The mound is a temporary testament to the conversations of previous nights, waiting to share the corncobs' destiny. Xiaohui cherishes and resents this time of year in equal measure. The many strangers walking in and out the gate mean more work and little rest, and the firecrackers may well give him a heart attack one day. But he is handsomely compensated by an abundance of left-over food from the kitchen. He has never been a fussy eater and will eat almost anything, happily.

It is a quiet afternoon and the festivities are nearing their end when the father drives the family's electric car through the gate. He had gone to a neighbouring town to pick up a delivery from Taobao, China's Amazon, which literally means "search for treasure." This particular treasure arrived in a cardboard box so large that the back seats had to be folded down to make space for it. The daughters help to unload the box from the trunk. They put the back seats back up, and the father parks the car next to the front door, its usual spot. The treasure chest made of cardboard contains thick plastic panels that are quickly assembled into a small house. The father is visibly amused by this strange idea of a gift, but not surprised, as strange ideas are expected from outsiders—and hospitality requires that one indulges one's guests, within reason. The house is located in Xiaohui's corner. Xiaohui eyes the foreign structure with suspicion. He does not trust it.

Days go by. Every now and then, one sister or the other appears at one of the windows facing the courtyard, checking to see if Xiaohui has gone inside his new house. But each time they look, they find the little house empty, Xiaohui still sitting or lying on the concrete floor. The older sister is particularly invested, which does not go unnoticed by the father. "I could have told you that he won't go inside," he says in a variety of Mandarin commonly spoken in Yunnan. Mandarin is a Chinese language, but not all Chinese is Mandarin. Chinese, in fact, is not the name of a language at all. It refers to a group of languages, many as different from one another as Spanish and Italian, that are spoken natively by the ethnic Han Chinese majority. The father is part of one of China's ethnic minority groups, the Yi, and so is the mother, yet unlike the mother and many other Yi people, he does not speak the Yi language. Why that remains a forgotten chapter of family history. "Xiaohui just needs some time," the sister counters her father. Surely, he must prefer warmth and shelter.

As temperatures drop and snow is expected soon, the older sister decides to take a more active approach. She lines the floor of the small house with a warm blanket

and places some food inside. Xiaohui sniffs around the entrance, lingers for a little while, and then retreats back to a spot on the concrete floor near the stored corn. For a brief moment, it looked like he might go inside. He hesitantly extended his head towards the entrance. His nose was twitching as it caught the enticing scent of food, and he imagined what it would feel like if he were to place his fur on the blanket. But the courage to step over the threshold eluded him, and he quickly withdrew. Some neighbours chuckle at the sister's persistence, while others offer advice. Maybe it is the house's orientation that makes the structure unattractive to Xiaohui. The entrance faces the corn rather than the gate and the courtyard, and someone named after the late Xiaohei surely cannot be expected to abandon his sacred duty. Sometimes, unsolicited advice is still good advice, so the house is reoriented. But Xiaohui remains unmoved.

Late in the afternoon of the next day, the snow sets in as predicted. The sisters are back at the window which offers the best view of Xiaohui's corner, expecting him to finally seek shelter. Instead, Xiaohui curls up in a little space under the wooden slats on which the bags of corn are stored to keep them off the ground. Though corn is not very effective at storing heat, it offers some protection from the snow and helps fend off the wind. "If he doesn't want it, he doesn't want it," remarks the grandmother, who is over for afternoon tea, as she often is. "Look at me. How often have your parents offered me to move in with them? Their house has air conditioning for the summer, heating for the winter, warm water in the showers, and a big couch in front of a big TV. And where am I? In my old little place down the street with none of this modern comfort, where I've always been, sitting in front of my old wood stove, listening to old Chinese songs on the radio. I'm used to it." As the snow slowly covers the empty little house in white, Xiaohui remains nestled beneath the wooden slats, surrounded by the familiar scent of corn and the voices coming from the fireplace. Though the family's love for him is not expressed in grand gestures, he feels its warmth.

Days go by, then weeks. The snow has long melted away and the sun is back, warming Xiaohui's fur. The little house remains untouched, until it is eventually moved away. Xiaohui has come to resent it, and he is relieved it is gone—a stubborn storm cloud has moved on at last. Life continues as before. Xiaohui stretches, yawns, and reclaims the spot on the concrete previously occupied by the house. He perks up when people pass, watches the sky at night, sits in the rain, seeks shelter below the corn when the rain gets too cold, or turns into snow, attentively listens to distant conversations he does not understand, and gets excited whenever there is activity in the kitchen, hoping for his next meal. Though his days are back to their old rhythm, a quiet weariness settles into his bones. Xiaohui is tired.

**This is the second of two parts of the short story "Little Grey."**

**Dr Rainer Ebert holds a PhD in philosophy from Rice University in Texas and is a research fellow in the Department of Philosophy, Practical and Systematic Theology at the University of South Africa. He has been visiting Bangladesh regularly for years. Reach him at [rainerEBERT.com](mailto:rainerEBERT.com) and on X @rainer\_ebert.**

POETRY

# The ways of love

IFTEHAZ YEASIR IFTEE

A chipped teacup, warmed in my hands,  
Is love when you stir in the honey, unmasked,  
Knowing my morning starts slower than sands  
Drifting and dabbling, until the sun is tasked.  
A hand, brushing my unkempt hair from my eyes,  
While folding laundry, a simple grace,  
A silent promise beneath the morning skies,  
Finding beauty in this ordinary place.  
What else is love? What are its ways?  
A shared glance across a crowded room, eye to eye.  
More than a look, perhaps a secret sign,  
In an instance what I thought was a coincidence,  
Was a proclamation you were mine.  
Love, as I see it, isn't loud and bold,  
Inexpressive in its purest form, it's a poem told,  
Where you tilt the umbrella to shield me while you take the rain,  
Where you gently mark the book where I drifted off and  
clench me in your arms,  
Where you silently place a glass of water for me by my bed  
before I sleep,  
Or when you carefully tiptoe the wooden part of the room  
just not to wake me up.  
Love, my darling, is an oversized jacket I help you put on  
before we leave for a holiday.  
Love, my darling, is going unnoticed, and still loving its ways.

**Iftehz Yeasir Iftee, a student at IBA, University of Dhaka, is a featured poet in the global anthology Luminance under the pseudonym Brotibir Roy.**



ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

# Four leaf clover

FAIZA ISLAM

In cold evenings, when the forecaster  
predicts a scatter of hail to fall  
I wish you had sent me a voicemail  
So that I could have played it over and over  
Awfully soon, and  
Long after your departure  
This season will not last forever  
It was dreamy and rose colored  
Until it was over  
Loss of an autumn into winter  
A goodbye letter to a lover  
One day, I will cry over the loss of grace  
And warmth's absence  
But for now, I hate how well the phrases  
"I love you" and  
"Time fades everything with its passage"  
go together  
I had said, I want to be in love with you  
for an eternity  
But it ended before I could even  
feel the fragrance of a gentle spring  
Still, don't look back with pity or be somber  
I had been in love with you madly  
And my hands were warm for the first time that winter

**Faiza Islam is an aspiring poet who dreams of catching a falling star.**



ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD



## Super Eights begin as PAK FACE NZ

New Zealand and Pakistan kick off the T20 World Cup Super Eight stage today at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo, with Pakistan holding a historical edge over their opponents in the tournament.

- Pakistan have a superior head-to-head record against New Zealand in T20 World Cups, winning five of their seven meetings.
- Overall in T20Is, however, the rivalry is almost even. In 49 matches, Pakistan have won 24, New Zealand 23, while two games ended with no result.
- Pakistan opener Sahibzada Farhan, the tournament's leading run-scorer with 220 runs at a strike rate of 164.17 in four matches, has struggled against the Black Caps. In three T20Is against New Zealand, he has managed just 21 runs at an average of seven.
- Babar Azam is Pakistan's most successful batter against New Zealand in T20Is, scoring 880 runs at an average of 41.9 in 26 matches.
- Mark Chapman is New Zealand's leading run-scorer against Pakistan in T20Is, with 663 runs at an average of 41.43 in 25 matches.

## Will home advantage define Tigers' WC qualification bid?

SPORTS REPORTER

Having already qualified for the 2028 ICC T20 World Cup despite not featuring in the ongoing edition, Bangladesh cricket team's focus for the rest of the year will shift to 50-over assignments with the 2027 ODI World Cup qualification still on the line.

In the 14-team ODI World Cup, Full Member hosts South Africa and Zimbabwe and the eight highest ranked Full Members in the ICC ODI rankings as of March 31, 2027, will make up the 10 direct entrants. The remaining four spots will be decided through a qualifiers' event.

South Africa are currently ranked fifth, and unlikely to slip below eighth, and Zimbabwe are 11th, well adrift of the top 10. So, Bangladesh, now lagging at 10th, must climb to ninth or higher before the deadline to secure direct berth.

The Tigers have 20 ODIs lined up till the cut-off and if India's tour of Bangladesh in August happens, the number will rise to 23. The home series against Pakistan in March starts the run of key ODI assignments at home with New Zealand, Australia and India also in the agenda this year. There are also ODI series away against Ireland, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

In comparison, ninth placed West Indies, who are leading Bangladesh by one rating point, have 12 ODIs lined up in the same period till now.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) Game Development Committee's program coordinator Habibur Bashar feels that the Tigers can do more than the bare minimum in ODI rankings by banking on home advantage. "Pakistan, New Zealand, Australia, and India

are all absolutely top-tier teams. However, since these are home series, we will definitely have the home advantage," Bashar told The Daily Star.

"Our goal shouldn't just be to stay at No.9 to barely qualify. If we play well in these four series, since wins against top teams carry more points, we can significantly improve our ranking and move up to the 6th or 7th position," he added.

Bashar reflected that what opposition Bangladesh play will dictate what kind of wickets are used.



"We are not going to prepare seaming tracks against New Zealand and Australia, nor will we prepare turning tracks against India and Pakistan. Tailoring pitches to the opposition is a standard practice that everyone follows," he said.

The Tigers had a rough time in ODIs in the last 15 months, having lost 12 and won only three in the period. Their last ODI series was against West Indies at home, which they won 2-1, but their batters visibly struggled.

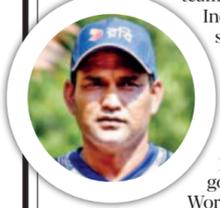
"Our primary concern is our batting... Recently, our primary focus was heavily on the T20 format because of the consecutive World Cups. We tried to change our style of play for T20s, but our adaptations to those changes were not properly executed for ODIs," he added.

Bashar also issued a warning that failing to get direct qualification and competing in a 10-team qualifiers event could prove really challenging. "Even a strong team like the West Indies failed to qualify for the World Cup through the qualifiers," he recalled.

## Salahuddin slams Nazrul's 'blatant lies'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh cricket team's senior assistant coach Mohammad Salahuddin criticised former sports adviser Asif Nazrul over his change of narrative relating to Bangladesh's T20 World Cup exclusion. "He told such blatant lies," Salahuddin told reporters on Thursday when asked to comment on Nazrul's U-turn -- after initially stating the government decided against sending the team to the ICC T20 World Cup in India before later appearing to shift responsibility onto the board and players.



After wide criticism, Nazrul had attempted another U-turn, claiming on social media that he had failed to communicate properly and that it was the government's decision to skip the World Cup.

"I myself am a teacher; teachers generally lie a bit less. That he would say such lies so openly -- I honestly can't even imagine it," Salahuddin said.

"He is a teacher, a teacher at Dhaka University. A person from the highest educational institution of my country saying such lies -- we can't accept this. He said one thing earlier and later took a U-turn," he added.

\*\* Read The Daily Star website for full story

## Mirpur to host Pakistan ODI series

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday confirmed the schedule of their upcoming three-match ODI series against Pakistan, set to be held between March 11 and 15 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Dhaka.

**SERIES SCHEDULE:**

- March 9** - Pakistan arrival
- March 11** - First ODI at the SBNCs at 2:15pm
- March 13** - Second ODI at SBNCs at 2:15pm
- March 15** - Third ODI at SBNCs at 2:15pm
- March 16** - Pakistan departure

## Clubs not happy with BFL resumption date

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Premier League is set to resume on March 6, two months after the completion of the first phase of the country's top-tier football competition, but several clubs are unhappy with the revised schedule.

Following the restart of the league, the Federation Cup will also resume on March 10, after the Professional Football League Management Committee of the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) took the decision on Thursday night.

The second phase of the league had initially been scheduled to begin before the February 12 national elections, after a month-long mid-season transfer window that closed on January 31. However, the league committee deferred the restart, citing the national elections.

There were also discussions about resuming on February 20, three days after the planned February 17 restart of the Federation Cup, but that too fell through as several clubs had not returned to training camp.

The revised calendar now means the league, originally expected to conclude in April, will instead run into May. In addition, there will be another significant pause of more than three weeks from March 15 to April 9, after the 10th and 11th rounds, due to the Bangladesh national team's AFC Asian Cup qualifying match against Singapore on March 31.

"It is good that they finally gave a resumption date," Brothers Union manager Amer Khan told The Daily Star. "The league will now end in May instead of April, increasing the burden of the players' payment and camp expenditure."

Fortis FC coach Masud Parvez

Kaiser said, "We are talking about the professionalism in football but there is no reflection of it in the league. It is not a good schedule for good football."

"Is it acceptable to decide the resumption of the league based on the training of Kings and Mohammedan?" Kaiser asked.

Rahmatganj coach Kamal Babu said, "As a small team, we are in trouble running the training camp due to financial constraints. Actually, the BFF has long been protecting the interest of big and financially solvent clubs."

Declining to criticise the decision, Abahani coach AKM Maruful Haque however said, "If other clubs don't have any problem, then we have also no problem. We will play the way the league committee will ask us."

However, coaches from several clubs have expressed concern over the mental fatigue of players, many of whom have remained in training for an extended period without clarity over the league's resumption.



PHOTO: FACEBOOK

Skipper Fahima Khatun delivered a superb all-round performance as Bangladesh Women's A stormed into the final of the Asia Cup Rising Stars Women's with a commanding 54-run win over Pakistan A in Bangkok yesterday. At the Terdthai Cricket Ground, Fahima struck an unbeaten 32-ball 40 to lift Bangladesh to 110-8 after being sent in to bat. She then claimed two wickets with her leg-spin, while left-arm spinner Sanjida Akter Meghla starred with 3-6 as Pakistan were bundled out for 56 in 16.4 overs. Bangladesh face India in the final on Sunday.

বাংলা আমার চেতনা  
অগ্রগতির প্রেরণা

একুশের চেতনায় আমাদের পথচলা হোক অর্জন ও গর্বের  
মহান শহিদ ও আন্তর্জাতিক মাতৃভাষা দিবসে ভাষা আন্দোলনের  
সকল শহিদের প্রতি জানাই বিনম্র শ্রদ্ধা

দশকের বিশ্বাস  
সবসময় আছি সাথে

আল-আরাফাহ  
ইসলামী ব্যাংক পিএলসি

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## Delhi seeks stronger, friendly ties with Dhaka

THE STATESMAN ONLINE

India yesterday said it wants to build and strengthen ties with Bangladesh and the new BNP government which assumed office in the neighbouring country earlier this week.

At his regular press briefing, Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal noted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Bangladesh's new Prime Minister Tarique Rahman soon after his election victory.

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla attended the swearing in ceremony of the new government and handed over a letter from Modi to the new Bangladesh PM.

The letter, the spokesperson pointed out, underlined India's commitment to support a democratic, progressive and

SEE PAGE 8 COL 5



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Work on the 'Dholaikhal Reservoir Greening and Aesthetic Environment Development' project, aimed at turning the polluted Dholaikhal retention pond in Old Dhaka into a scenic, eco-friendly park, remains unfinished despite its April 2024 deadline. The Tk 19.88 crore Dhaka South City Corporation project, spanning 5.31 acres, includes 60,000 sq ft of landscaping, walking and cycling paths, and two amphitheatres. Intended to curb pollution, it has instead become a source of it for locals.

## Rebels want reinstatement, BNP unmoved

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

BNP rebel candidates, who lost the polls, are now pushing for a comeback to the party.

At least 66 such candidates were expelled from the party. Of them, 49 were district and upazila-level leaders, while around 17 were central leaders.

Grassroots leaders, expelled for taking part in their campaigns, are now communicating with the party leadership to return to the party.

The BNP has made it clear that those who defied party instructions before the polls should not expect an easy return to the party fold. The high command is signalling a firm stance against acts of defiance, emphasising that disciplinary decisions made ahead of the polls would not be easily reversed.

Talking to The Daily Star, BNP Standing Committee member Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain said, "After discussing the matter at our party meeting, we will decide what stance the party will take, and the decision will be announced afterwards."

SEE PAGE 8 COL 5

**HASANAH ISLAMIC BANKING**  
البنكية الاسلامي  
Prime Bank

**PRAYER TIMING**  
FEBRUARY 21

Fajr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 5:14	12:45	4:30	5:59	7:30
JAMAT 5:24	1:15	4:45	6:09	8:00

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

**SEHRI, IFTAR TIMING**

RAMADAN	FEB	SEHRI	IFTAR
3	21		5:59
4	22	5:10	5:59
5	23	5:09	6:00

## '10-15 days' left for Iran to make deal

Trump warns of 'bad things'; Tehran says US assets 'legitimate targets' if it attacks

REUTERS, Washington

President Donald Trump warned Iran on Thursday it must make a deal over its nuclear programme or "really bad things" will happen, and set a deadline of 10 to 15 days, drawing a threat from Tehran to retaliate against US bases in the region if attacked.

Amid a massive US military buildup in the Middle East that has fuelled fears of a wider war, Trump said negotiations with Iran to end the tense standoff were going well but demanded that Tehran reach a "meaningful" agreement.

- Kremlin urges all sides to show restraint
- Oil prices have risen on fears of fresh attack on Iran
- Norway relocates some of its 60 soldiers in ME

"Otherwise bad things happen," Trump, who has repeatedly threatened to attack Iran, told the first meeting of his Board of Peace in Washington.

Trump spoke of the US airstrikes carried out in June, saying Iran's nuclear potential had been "decimated," adding "we may

have to take it a step further or we may not."

"You'll be finding out over the next probably 10 days," he said. Asked later to elaborate, he told reporters aboard Air Force One: "I would think that would be enough time, 10, 15 days, pretty much maximum."

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Author Sankar passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent Bangla author Mani Sankar Mukhopadhyay, better known by his pen name "Sankar", died at a private hospital in Kolkata yesterday. He was 92.

He breathed his last around 1:30pm (local time) while undergoing

SEE PAGE 8 COL 3

## 'Tank'-like shark filmed in Antarctic waters for first time

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

An unexpected sight has challenged long-held scientific assumptions about marine life in Antarctica, after a substantial sleeper shark was filmed in the region's frigid depths.

The creature, described as an "ungainly barrel" of a shark, was captured on video in January 2025, cruising languidly over a barren seabed far beyond the reach of sunlight.

Researcher Alan Jamieson revealed this week that many experts had previously believed sharks did not inhabit the icy Antarctic waters.

The specimen, estimated to measure between 3 and 4 metres (10 and 13 feet), represents a significant discovery, overturning prior understanding of the area's biodiversity.



## Gaza deaths far higher than reported

Lancet study says over 75,000 Palestinians killed in the first 15 months of 2-year war

REUTERS, Jerusalem

More than 75,000 Palestinians were killed in the first 15 months of Israel's military assault in Gaza, a figure far higher than the 49,000 deaths local health officials announced at the time, says a new study by The Lancet Global Health medical journal.

The peer-reviewed study, published on Wednesday, found that women, children and the elderly comprised some 56.2 percent of violent deaths in Gaza during that period, a composition that it said roughly aligned with reporting by Gaza's health ministry.

The field work was conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, run by Palestinian pollster Khalil Shikaki, who has carried out public opinion polling in the West Bank and Gaza for decades. The lead

SEE PAGE 8 COL 3



- Women, children, elderly made up 56pc of dead
- UN accepts health ministry figures; Israel disputes them
- Non-violent deaths estimated at 16,300 during conflict

১১শে ফেব্রুয়ারি শহিদ দিবস ও আন্তর্জাতিক মাতৃভাষা দিবসে সকল ভাষা শহীদের প্রতি

বিনম্র শ্রদ্ধা

বাংলাদেশ কৃষি ব্যাংক  
গণমানুষের ব্যাংক



অমর একুশে

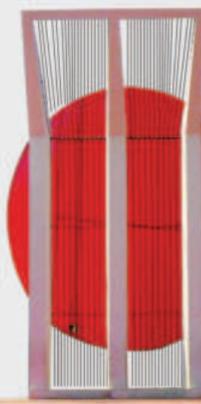
মহান শহিদ দিবস

আন্তর্জাতিক মাতৃভাষা দিবসে

সকল ভাষা শহীদের প্রতি আমাদের গভীর

শ্রদ্ধাঞ্জলি

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# NAWABGANJ

## Where heritage meets harmony

**Nawabganj is not only known for old architecture, but also for a tradition of communal harmony. Alongside temples and mosques, the area has several historic churches.**

SAKIB AHMED

A crumbling mansion rises unexpectedly along the main road of Kolakopa Union in Nawabganj, Dhaka, its grand pillars still holding their ground against time. Just an hour and a half from the capital, the riverside estate on the banks of the Ichamati is more than a relic. It is a window into centuries of wealth, memory and local legend.

This is the Kokil Pyari Zamindar Bari, a neoclassical marvel now abandoned but impossible to ignore. Its towering pillars and intricate carvings still catch the eye, even as the building succumbs to neglect.

After the zamindari system ended in 1950, the mansion served as a residence for teachers of Kokil Pyari High School. Locals recall that six to seven families once lived there. On closer inspection, the walls reveal faint sculptures, including one of Venus, the Roman goddess of love, beauty and prosperity.

Yet the history of Kokil Pyari is as layered as the walls themselves.

Who was Kokil Pyari? Locals offer two accounts.

According to one version, Kokil Pyari was a descendant of the Bhagya Kul Zamindars of Bikrampur, who founded this estate. Around 200 years ago, Yadunath Roy acquired the zamindari from the British. He was related by blood to Radharaman Roy, the mansion's builder. Both Yadunath Roy and Radharaman Roy were merchants, trading areca nuts, salt and saris from Barishal to Kolkata and Murshidabad.

Another account says that in the 18th century, a wealthy businessman named Brajen Roy, also known as Sudarshan Roy,

constructed the mansion. Surrounded by a garden, the mansion, built with brick, lime and rods, was originally called Braj Niketan. Over time, ownership changed hands, first to an oil trader and later to a judge, which led to the mansion also being referred to as the Telibari (Oil House) and the Judge's House.

The 500-yard premises of Kokil Pyari Zamindarbari include a Buddhist temple, the house of Shriloknath Saha, Kolakopa Ansar Camp, Ukilbari, Dasbari, Adnan Palace and the Ichamati river. Many believe all these structures were once part of the original estate.

Unofficial sources suggest that Kokil Pyari had five sons. He left his main house to his youngest son and



built four additional houses for the remaining sons.

Within the premises stand two memorial shrines. After Zamindar Kokil Pyari died, his son Radharaman Roy built a shrine in the Bangalee year 1334 in memory of his father. Later, he built another shrine in memory of his



Braj Niketan, now known as Judge Bari.



Our Lady of Holy Rosary Church.

PHOTO: STAR

mother. Both shrines originally housed sculptures of his parents. Locals say that during the Liberation War, the mother's sculpture disappeared and the head of the father's statue was broken. The sculptures were reportedly imported from Europe.

Adjacent to Kokil Pyari Zamindarbari is Braj Niketan, now known as the Judge's House. Locals say that around 200 years ago, in the 18th century, wealthy businessman Brajen Roy built it as his residence. Its five elaborately decorated pillars, adorned with pieces of precious glass, immediately draw attention. Eight large windows and a central grand veranda add to its imposing appearance. Surrounded by a garden of diverse trees, the Judge's House still carries a sense of the world it once belonged to.

Moving along the narrow road to the right of Kokil Pyari Zamindarbari, one encounters Telibari, also called Mothbari, by the riverbank. It is currently used as an Ansar and VDP camp and houses 17 Ansar Battalion members. According to local lore, it was once owned by an oil trader named Loknath, hence the name Telibari.



Telibari now being used as an Ansar camp.



Next along the riverbank is a structure called Painna Bari, said to have belonged to Madhubabu, who became wealthy by selling toddy (palm wine). Its walls are adorned with intricate carvings, and the house sprawls across a large area.

Galib Rahman Khan, a banker with extensive knowledge of Nawabganj's history, said, "The buildings in Kolakopa are all late-colonial, dating from the late 1800s to the early 1900s. None of them were zamindar houses. They belonged to prominent businessmen, some traded in oil, others in salt or betel leaves. Most of these houses were abandoned after the Partition of the country."

To the right along the road lies a two-storey mansion on the edge of a large pond, believed to have been built in the late 19th century. The ground floor houses several dark rooms. The building features nine domes resembling granary roofs, with

the central dome being the largest. Some locals refer to this as Khelaram's Vighra Mandir or Khelaram Datar Kotha.

According to Syed Nurul Islam, a septuagenarian who lives nearby, "Khelaram was called a donor because he supposedly robbed from the rich and distributed among the poor. There was an underground passage from the mansion to the Ichamati river, which he used." Towards the end of his life, he reportedly became devout.

However, Galib said, "There are many stories and myths about Khelaram Dutta's Kotha. Putting those aside, documented history shows that it is a late Mughal-era temple, built by Khelaram Dutta himself."

Across Kolakopa village, other old structures remain, each carrying its own story. On entering, the Shri Shri Mahamaya Mandir, built in Bangalee year 1315, stands out, where rituals are still conducted. Nearby, an old house is now home to the Mitra family, whose forebear was once a timber trader. Legend says he struggled to unload a piece of timber from a boat and was guided in a dream to bring it home, leading to the start of a worship practice centred on the timber. Locals believe dreams about it still occur.

In Baktar Nagar, Shikaripara Union, another zamindar house, Ata Khan's Zamindarbari, is visible from across the road. The second-storey building, though now ruined, still shows the outlines of its past. Plaster has fallen away, and large banyan trees grow through the brickwork. Doors and

windows are missing, and the structure appears precarious. Locals call it Sab Bari or Shaheb Bari. A mosque stands nearby.

Based on the mosque's construction style, Professor AKM Shahnawaz of the Department of Archaeology at Jahangirnagar University said the buildings likely date to the Mughal era, though exact dates remain uncertain.

Galib, however, said a stone inscription at the mosque's main gate shows that a woman, Foyzunnisa, built it in 1870 after inheriting the zamindari from her aunt, Janab Hasina. This suggests the mansion was likely built around the same time.

On Nawabganj's architectural history, archaeologist Dr Shahnawaz said these settlements were established in the late 18th century, primarily by Hindu merchants who built multiple palatial residences along the Ichamati for habitation and for trade convenience. "Kolakopa and Bandura in Nawabganj are highly traditional and historically significant areas. These landmarks are important archaeologically," he said.

Nawabganj is not only known for old architecture, but also for a tradition of communal harmony. Alongside temples and mosques, the area has several historic churches. In Hasnabad village of Bandura stands one of the most striking, Our Lady of Holy Rosary Church.

Hubert Joseph Gomes, principal of St Joseph Tutorial in Hasnabad, said, "It is the fifth church in undivided Bengal, built in 1777 by priest Raphael Gomez. It was renovated first in 1888 and again in 2002."

"Over 1,700 Christian families live in Nawabganj. People of all religions have lived here peacefully and harmoniously for generations," he added.



Mairia Tripura, Heali Tripura, Tongam Tripura, and Tumbas Chakma holding textbooks written in their mother tongues.

PHOTO: KHOKAN BIKASH TRIPURA JACK

# Are Bangladesh's multilingual youth being heard?

As we celebrate International Mother Language Day 2026 under the theme "Youth Voices on Multilingual Education", it is time to ask a deeper question: are the voices of Bangladesh's multilingual youth being heard, supported, and sustained within the current education system?

SUSAN VIZE, SHOURAV SIKDER

In a world where globalisation provides unprecedented access to information and opportunities for education, business and social activities, "killer languages" have emerged as a threat to multilingualism. We often hear from parents that they want their children to learn English, or, as the case may be in Bangladesh, Bangla, because they will have better education and livelihood opportunities. This can be based on a false assumption. Around 40 percent of learners worldwide still lack access to education in a language they understand best, highlighting the scale of the challenge.

There is clear evidence that learning in multiple languages, starting with the mother tongue and then gradually adding national and global languages, is good for cognitive abilities and does not impair language skills in second and third languages. Opening the language learning window in young children, an optimal, biologically determined period from birth to the onset of puberty when the brain is most receptive to acquiring languages, strengthens language ability. During this childhood period, the brain's ability to create neural networks for language is high, and this has pay-offs for neural development and, hence, cognitive capacity. Neuroscientific research consistently shows that multilingual learning strengthens executive function, memory flexibility, and problem-solving skills.



A display of alphabets representing the languages spoken by indigenous peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

PHOTO: PHILIP GAIN

multilingualism? How can resources for multilingual education be developed with input from local communities? These are questions facing educators all around the world. They reflect broader tensions between linguistic diversity and standardised education systems worldwide.

UNESCO advocates for approaches that are context-specific and based on the number and status of languages in each country or region, and offers critical areas to guide educators, policymakers, and communities in creating inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments. Across regions, UNESCO supports governments in designing policies, developing learning materials, and strengthening teacher capacity for multilingual education systems. This is where this year's theme is important: youth need not only to be beneficiaries but active participants in language preservation.

Harnessing technology for language innovation is one way to support multilingual education. Storytelling is another way to document cultural heritage, develop educational resources, and promote language learning. UNESCO recently published stories from young storytellers from Bangladesh's indigenous communities, including the volume *Of Roots and Heritage*, featuring narratives from Chakma and Tripura communities. Such efforts complement work by civil society organisations and universities that are documenting and publishing materials in local languages. These global realities are reflected in national contexts, where multilingual education becomes not only an educational strategy but also a question of equity.

Every year, International Mother Language Day reminds Bangladesh of a truth that is both historical and urgent: language is not merely a tool of communication but a foundation of identity, dignity, and intellectual growth. Bangladesh's commitment to linguistic rights is deeply rooted in its national history. The Language Movement of 1952 established the

principle that language is inseparable from dignity and citizenship. This historical legacy later shaped the country's constitutional commitments to equality and non-discrimination, including the right to education for all citizens regardless of linguistic, ethnic, or cultural background. Bangladesh's own linguistic history has given the country a unique moral authority in global conversations on linguistic rights. Yet today, as we celebrate International Mother Language Day 2026 under the theme "Youth Voices on Multilingual Education", it is time to ask a deeper question: are the voices of Bangladesh's multilingual youth being heard, supported, and sustained within the current education system?

For thousands of indigenous and ethnolinguistic minority youths across Bangladesh, multilingualism is their daily reality. They grow up speaking one language at home, encountering Bengali in public life, and learning English in school. Bangladesh is home to more than 50 indigenous communities, many with their own languages, and national commitments to equality and education rights reinforce the importance of inclusive multilingual learning. Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education is therefore not simply about language. It is also about access, equity, and educational success without cultural loss. As Rani Ukhengching Marma, External Affairs, Mong Chief Circle, notes, "Learning in one's mother tongue is a fundamental right for every indigenous child, and it is the responsibility of the government to ensure this in schools. Starting education in the language children hear at home makes learning easier, strengthens communication skills and cognitive development, and fosters pride in their language and cultural heritage."

To advance multilingual education, the Government of Bangladesh introduced Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education from pre-primary to Grade 3 in five languages: Marma, Tripura, Chakma, Garo, and Sadri. Textbooks were developed and distributed in 2018 to support

implementation. However, progress has remained limited due to several challenges, including insufficient teacher training and a lack of sustained mentoring and classroom support.

Furthermore, when learners transition to mainstream Bengali-medium instruction after Grade III, they often lose the literacy skills they developed in their mother tongues. This transition can pose challenges for continuity in the learning pathway, highlighting the importance of sustained government attention and support to strengthen the long-term effectiveness of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education initiatives.

Recent scholarship has highlighted both the transformative potential and the structural limitations of multilingual education in Bangladesh. Similar patterns have been observed in multilingual education systems across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. One of the most consistent findings is that mother tongue-based education improves outcomes. As Samar M Soren, Indigenous Language Technology Specialist and Head of the Language Resource Hub from the Santal community, explains, "When Indigenous children learn in their own language, they are far more likely to stay in school and carry forward their ecological and cultural knowledge to the next generation." Children who begin schooling in their first language demonstrate stronger literacy skills, deeper understanding, and greater participation. They also transfer these skills more effectively when learning additional languages. Research also shows that multilingual education facilitates, rather than hinders, the acquisition of Bengali and English.

However, research also shows gaps between policy and implementation. Teacher shortages remain a serious challenge, particularly the shortage of teachers fluent in indigenous languages and trained in multilingual pedagogy. Many educators report that multilingual classrooms demand strategies for which formal training opportunities remain limited.

Supplementary learning materials are scarce, and literacy support often ends too early. Students often acquire basic literacy in their mother tongue during early schooling but lose these skills due to the lack of continued institutional support, creating a paradox where education introduces literacy but fails to sustain it.

Yet opportunities remain substantial. Bangladesh's experience shows that progress is feasible with sustained investment. Successful programmes demonstrate that community participation strengthens outcomes, especially when communities are involved in teacher recruitment, curriculum development, and school governance. Multilingual education is therefore not merely an educational intervention; it is also a matter of linguistic justice. The challenge now is not whether multilingual education is valuable, but how it can be strengthened sustainably.

As Bangladesh moves forward, strengthening multilingual education requires a comprehensive approach. One urgent priority is expanding multilingual education beyond the early primary level. Literacy development cannot be sustained if mother tongue instruction ends after Grade III. Teacher recruitment and training must also be strengthened, including recruiting teachers from indigenous communities and equipping them with multilingual pedagogical skills. Resource development must expand to include textbooks, storybooks, digital tools, and teaching aids that are culturally relevant and linguistically accurate. Digital platforms, community archives, and youth-led language initiatives also offer new pathways for preservation and learning.

Policy coherence is equally important, and multilingual education must be integrated into the broader national education framework rather than treated as a temporary initiative. Research must also be strengthened so that policy-making is guided by evidence. Most importantly, youth voices must be included in policy discussions. Young people are not merely beneficiaries of multilingual education; they are its future custodians.

Youth today live in a multilingual world shaped by mobility, technology, and globalisation. Supporting their multilingual abilities is both an educational necessity and a cultural investment. The linguistic diversity of Bangladesh is not a problem to be solved but a resource to be nurtured. Multilingual youth represent a bridge between tradition and modernity, between local identity and global participation.

International Mother Language Day is therefore not only a commemoration of the past but a call to future action. Listening to youth voices on multilingual education means recognising that language rights are ongoing commitments. Its success will ultimately depend on whether societies invest in that diversity. The voices of multilingual youth are already speaking. The question is whether we are ready to listen.

Dr Susan Vize is the Head of Office and UNESCO Representative to Bangladesh.

Dr Shourav Sikder is a Professor in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Dhaka.



PHOTO: MINTU DESHWARA

A child is being taught the letters of the Saura language, an endangered language in Bangladesh.

Language is not only for economic gain; it is also central to identity, cultural preservation, and societal cohesion. Preserving and passing on our cultural heritage contributes to local and national identity and enriches the world. Promoting cross-cultural understanding helps us to avoid past mistakes, stimulates innovation, and has significant economic potential.

At the heart of this is education that includes mother tongues and other languages. UNESCO defines multilingual education as the use of at least three languages: the mother tongue, a regional or national language, and an international language in education. In countries such as Bangladesh, where there are mother tongues including indigenous and local languages, the national language Bangla, and then important educational and business languages such as English, the ability to speak multiple languages is clearly advantageous. But it is not necessarily easy to achieve.

How does a teacher manage a classroom where students have multiple mother tongues? How does the Ministry train teachers to manage



PHOTO: STAR

# Emerging pollutants and public health risks in Bangladesh

SHAFI MOHAMMAD TAREQ

Public health in Bangladesh is facing serious threats due to the presence of emerging pollutants in the environment. Emerging pollutants are natural or artificially created chemicals that are not usually controlled or monitored by legislative agencies. Although they are present in very small amounts (at nanogram to microgram levels) in the environment, in recent years they have caused widespread concern due to their potential for gradual accumulation in the bodies of animals, as well as their persistence and toxicity. Nowadays, emerging pollutants are found not only in wastewater

Emerging pollutants in Bangladesh are primarily generated from pharmaceuticals, industrial factories, and household waste. Various types of antibiotics and chemical waste from pharmaceutical industries are entering water bodies. Industrial sectors such as textile and leather processing are polluting water bodies by discharging contaminated water containing various types of heavy metals, dyes, and microplastics. On the other hand, the excessive use of pesticides and fertilisers in agriculture is polluting rivers and groundwater. In addition, inadequate waste management and sewage systems are spreading household waste and plastic waste into the environment. The rapid progress of industrialisation, urbanisation, and agricultural expansion in Bangladesh has accelerated the presence of these pollutants in the environment.

Bangladesh's rivers and canals are often used for domestic purposes, agricultural irrigation, and fish farming. These water bodies are polluted with antibiotics, pesticides, heavy metals, and microplastics. Fish and other aquatic organisms in polluted water bodies can accumulate emerging pollutants such as pharmaceutical residues, pesticides, and microplastics in their tissues. Consuming these contaminated fish as food poses a risk of toxins gradually entering and accumulating in the human body. In addition, agricultural products irrigated with contaminated water pose a similar risk. In urban areas, microplastics and chemicals enter the body through the air, causing respiratory problems, especially among children and the elderly. Moreover, exposure to contaminated soil and water in industrial areas increases the risk of harmful chemicals entering the bodies of farmers, fishermen, and people living nearby.

Public health in Bangladesh faces multiple challenges. A large portion of the population is still unable to access improved healthcare, resulting in serious health problems that are increasing day by day. Malnutrition, infectious diseases, and air and water pollution are having adverse effects on public health. Children and the elderly are particularly vulnerable to these challenges. Due to an underdeveloped healthcare system, shortages of doctors and health workers, and a lack of accurate information, many people are deprived of adequate healthcare. In this situation, the widespread presence of emerging pollutants is further reducing quality of life and increasing mortality rates among the population.

Various studies conducted by the Hydrobiogeochemistry and Pollution Control Laboratory of the Department of Environmental Science at Jahangirnagar University have shown that the rivers, canals, beels, and other water bodies of Bangladesh are being polluted by emerging pollutants. One study found that the excessive use of antibiotics is causing residues in the environment, which can be dangerous for public health. Human and animal medical waste has been identified as the main source of

this pollution. The study also found that residues of various antibiotics, such as ciprofloxacin, clarithromycin, amoxicillin, clindamycin, and many others, were present in river water, with ciprofloxacin and clarithromycin recorded at the highest concentrations. In addition, residues of detergents and a type of chemical known as a fluorescence whitening agent were also found in river water, which can cause various health problems, including cancer. These substances also increase the risk of eczema, allergies, and skin infections. Fluorescence whitening agents are popular brighteners that are widely used in commercial detergents to increase brightness. One study has shown that rivers and streams near industrial areas contain high levels of fluorescence whitening agents.

Various pesticides, such as organophosphates, carbamates, and organochlorines, have also been found in these water bodies, as well as in water bodies located near irrigated agricultural lands. In addition, recent studies have shown that microplastics are present in salt, sugar, tea leaves, packaged milk, and even flour. Large amounts of microplastics have also been detected in various rivers, canals, and beels across Bangladesh. Microplastic contamination has been found in both water and sediment samples collected from freshwater bodies. Studies have further shown that microplastics are accumulating in the meat and intestines of fish, which can enter the human body through the food chain. Microplastics usually enter rivers through urban wastewater, industrial waste, and agricultural runoff. Landfill

through transboundary rivers. These pollutants have a negative impact on water quality and aquatic ecosystems.

Emerging pollutants pose a major public health risk in Bangladesh. They have long-term effects and can slowly accumulate in the human body, causing serious health problems. One of the biggest concerns is the rise of antibiotic resistance. The presence of antibiotic residues in food, water, and the environment contributes to the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. When bacteria are exposed to low levels of antibiotics, they can develop resistance, making infections increasingly difficult to treat. This problem is further aggravated by the excessive and unnecessary use of antibiotics. As a result, antibiotic resistance leads to increased mortality, higher medical costs, and prolonged hospital stays.

Microplastics have also been identified as a major environmental hazard in Bangladesh. Microplastics contain various harmful chemicals, such as phthalates, bisphenol A, and polyvinyl chloride, which can disrupt the body's hormonal system. This disruption can lead to serious diseases, including reproductive health problems, stunted growth, and cancer. In addition, microplastics are associated with various chemical additives, such as plasticisers, antioxidants, stabilisers, and dyes, which can also be harmful to human health. Polystyrene microplastics, in particular, are harmful to the human body, as they can disrupt kidney function, damage mitochondria, and cause inflammation. Studies have shown that microplastics can enter the

significantly increase cancer risk. In addition, these metals have neurotoxic effects, which can severely disrupt brain development in children. As a result, the risks of cognitive impairment, developmental delays, and behavioural problems among children increase. The shortage of clean water is also becoming more acute in Bangladesh. Since conventional water treatment plants are unable to remove emerging pollutants effectively, contaminated water poses an increased risk of long-term health problems, particularly for people who directly use untreated or inadequately treated water.

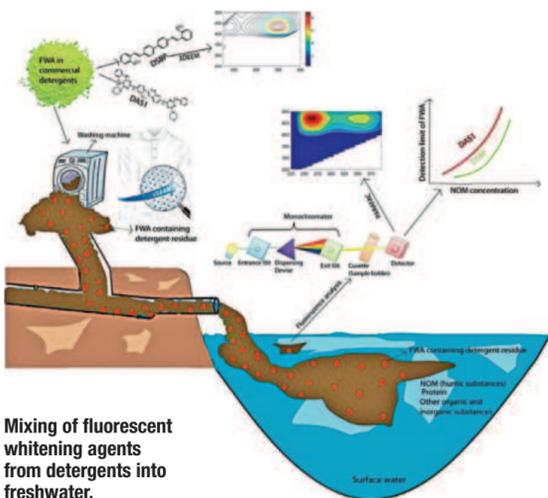
It is very important to take urgent steps to reduce the public health risks posed by emerging pollutants in Bangladesh. Several strategies can be adopted to reduce the impact of these pollutants. First, wastewater treatment plants need to be made more modern and effective. This will help prevent pharmaceuticals, industrial chemicals, and microplastics from entering freshwater bodies. Through improved waste management, it will be possible to properly treat and dispose of waste, which will reduce pollution in the environment. Therefore, Bangladesh should invest in modern infrastructure and increase the capacity of wastewater treatment plants.

Second, the government needs to implement strict rules and policies to ensure the proper use and disposal of pharmaceuticals, agrochemicals (chemicals used in agriculture), and industrial waste. This will help stop the uncontrolled spread of these pollutants into the environment. Environmental quality monitoring must be strengthened and made more effective. This will make it easier to control the levels of pollutants in water, air, and soil. Along with this, regular environmental standards must be enforced so that overall pollution levels can be reduced.

Third, it is very important to raise awareness among the general public. Public education can inform people about the dangers of emerging pollutants and encourage them to adopt sustainable practices, such as reducing the use of plastics, disposing of pharmaceutical waste properly, and limiting the use of pesticides in agriculture. Fourth, it is essential to increase research on emerging pollutants and their harmful effects on human health. New research can help identify better ways to control emerging pollution. Scientific innovation in emerging pollution control and waste management needs to be encouraged further, as it can provide new and effective solutions.

In short, to reduce the impact of pollution, emphasis should be placed on infrastructure development, strict policy implementation, awareness raising, and research, so that both the environment and public health are adequately protected.

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Mixing of fluorescent whitening agents from detergents into freshwater.



Microplastics and other debris collected from a beach through sieving, revealing the scale of plastic pollution that often remains invisible in coastal and marine environments.

sites, where plastic waste accumulates, have been identified as a major source of microplastic pollution. Over time, products such as plastic bags, bottles, and packaging materials break down into tiny particles, which are converted into microplastics. The studies also found that wastewater treatment plants serving the textile industry are among the most significant contributors to microplastic pollution. In addition, microplastic pollution also occurs

lungs through inhalation, leading to oxidative stress, cellular damage, and cytotoxicity. Some studies have even detected microplastic fibres in the lung tissue of lung cancer patients.

Moreover, microplastics can absorb heavy metals such as nickel, cadmium, lead, copper, and titanium onto their surfaces, increasing the risk of cancer in the human body. Among these heavy metals, cadmium, lead, and mercury are particularly harmful, as they

# The flower trail behind our celebrations

From Godkhali to Dhaka, flowers journey daily, bringing colour, fragrance, and joy to homes, weddings, and celebrations



**Over time, flower cultivation spread to about 3,500 hectares across 24 districts. Around seven lakh people now earn their livelihoods directly or indirectly from growing, transporting and selling flowers.**

PHOTO:  
HABIBUR RAHMAN

SUKANTA HALDER

Winter in Bangladesh is a festival season. From November to February, weddings, office galas and national observances follow one another in quick succession.

December closes the corporate year with award nights and conferences. January spills into neighbourhood wedding feasts.

February unfolds in layers: Pahela Falgun, the first day of spring in the Bengali month of Falgun, dressed in yellow; Valentine's Day in red; and International Mother Language Day in solemn black and white.

On February 21, the Central Shaheed Minar draws the lenses. The scenes are familiar: wreaths stacked high, petals blanketing intricate Alpona (graffiti), barefoot processions at dawn honouring the language heroes.

All of these occasions need flowers. Not a few bouquets. Tonnes. Most travel along a roughly 200km route first carved out 43 years ago by a handful of farmers.

The trail mostly begins at Godkhali union in Jashore and runs to Dhaka before branching across the country. What started as a small farming experiment in the 80s has now grown into a nationwide supply line.

Among its pioneers was Md Shar Ali Sardar, widely regarded as the country's first commercial flower cultivator.

His story carries a certain mystique. His father, Abdur Rahman Sardar, used to run a nursery that produced fruit and timber saplings. Shar Ali grew up working beside him. Flowers were not yet the family trade.

and drew others into floriculture.

Shar Ali expanded production and began sending flowers to Shahbagh and Bailey Road in Dhaka. Malancha, the first dedicated flower shop in Shahbagh, depended largely on growers like him.

Former US ambassador to Bangladesh Dan W Mozena once visited his nursery at Godkhali and said, "Shar Ali's flowers are world-class."

Over time, flower cultivation spread to about 3,500 hectares across 24 districts all over the country, as per government estimates. Around 7 lakh people now earn their livelihoods directly or indirectly from growing, transporting and selling flowers.

Rising demand has driven much of that growth. As urban middle-class incomes increased, so did the appetite for flowers for weddings, corporate events and public commemorations alike.

On the supply side, higher returns per hectare, new varieties and improved farming methods strengthened the change. Together, rising demand and profits turned a small experiment at Godkhali into a national flower corridor that underpins the country's most prominent celebrations.

After establishing Godkhali as the heart of flower cultivation, much of the harvest now makes its way to Dhaka, where markets like Shahbagh, Bailey Road, Agargaon and Gabtoli handle the city's busiest trade.



One afternoon in 1982, while Shar Ali was at the nursery, a passerby stopped to ask for water. In his hand were a few stalks of tuberose. The man introduced himself as Nur Islam from Jashore Sadar. In the course of their conversation, Shar Ali's curiosity was stirred. Through Nur Islam, he later collected 100 kg of tuberose bulbs and planted them on less than a bigha of land.

The results changed farming in the area. Ali's success spread quickly

**A MARKET THAT NEVER SLEEPS** Of Dhaka's flower markets, Shahbagh is probably the oldest and most iconic. More than 50 permanent shops and countless makeshift stalls cluster around the busy intersection. The unmistakable scent of blooms drifts over the burnt octane of traffic, making Shahbagh a unique sensory experience.

At the market, stalls spill into the street like living canvases. Garlands of marigolds hang in chains, roses blush

in buckets, and gladioli stand tall like painted spears. The display is unapologetically exuberant.

The shops stay open round the clock. Here, reds demand attention, yellows glow with warmth, whites hint at purity, and pinks soften the edges of the chaos.

Mohammad Abul Kalam Azad, 55, proprietor of Anika Pushpa Bitan and president of the Shahbagh Bottola Small Flower Traders Cooperative, has spent nearly four decades at the market.

He arrived in Dhaka after river erosion swallowed his family home at Shibchar of Madaripur, and an uncle who used to sell flowers at Shahbagh introduced him to the trade.

"When I started, people wanted maricha, kathgolap, baganbilash," said Azad. "Now the demand is for orchid, gerbera, lily, carnation, gladiolus and China rose. Well-off customers prefer gerbera, lily and China rose out of these."

His supply chain is improvised. Flowers arrive mostly on passenger buses, sometimes on pickup vans. He buys from districts across the

country, with weddings, corporate events and political programmes accounting for most of his sales.

Azad said the recent national elections and political situation have hit business this season. The timing of the polls cut into peak sales around Valentine's Day and Pahela Falgun. Pre-election rallies and protests also hurt trade.

But he added that business was improving ahead of Ekushey February.

While talking about the sales this season, Azad said the margin of the flower business is thin, and risks are immediate. "Whatever we source does not always sell. Unsold flowers cannot wait. If they spoil, we have to throw them away. Then we bear the loss and try to cover it later."

Retail prices in Shahbagh often double or triple wholesale rates in Jashore. Yet that margin hides wastage, rent, transport costs and multiple layers of commission. After deductions, a rose that sells for Tk 15 in Dhaka may leave the farmer with about half that amount.

During peak winter, several hundred tonnes of flowers move into Dhaka each week, according to traders. Demand spikes sharply before February 14, February 21, and again around Pahela Baishakh.

By contrast, the monsoon brings slow sales and price drops that can halve farmgate returns.

Much of what fills Shahbagh's stalls comes from gardens hundreds of

kilometres away in Godkhali. That journey, however, is far from easy and hides risks that rarely meet the eye.

**THE CORRIDOR COLOURING OUR CALENDAR**

The trip from field to footpath is the weakest link in the flower supply chain. Flowers from Godkhali travel overnight to Dhaka. Many are stacked on bus rooftops, wrapped in paper and plastic sacks.

Farmers and traders estimate that up to 20 percent of flowers perish between harvest and retail. Dust, heat, or a delayed bus can dull petals within hours. Losses can rise sharply in summer and during the rainy season.

Transport operators charge Tk100 to Tk 200 per bundle. Commission agents take their cut at wholesale markets. Retailers add another margin to cover shop rent and labour. Each layer pushes up the final price while squeezing what reaches the grower.

However, mobile phones have improved price discovery recently. Farmers now check Dhaka wholesale rates on mobile phones before fixing deals at Godkhali.

But information alone cannot solve a structural problem. There is still no nationwide cold chain for flowers, no standard grading system, no uniform packaging protocol.

Still, the domestic flower market reached roughly Tk 1,500 to Tk 1,600 crore in FY 2021-22, according to Abdur Rahim, president of the Bangladesh Flower Society.

He said local growers currently produce 11 commercially viable cut-flower varieties. Tuberose, rose, and marigold remain dominant, while gerbera, lily, chrysanthemum, gladiolus and China rose have broadened the mix. Gladiolus, rose and tuberose account for a large share of output.

The bottom line is, the supply chain survives largely on improvisation.

**TRACING THE ROOTS**

Commercial floriculture began in the early 90's at Godkhali union of Jhikargachha upazila in Jashore. Nearby Panishara union was also among the early centres of cultivation.

At Godkhali bazar, trading starts before sunrise. Bicycles and rickshaw vans roll in with freshly cut roses, tuberose, marigolds, and gladioli. Buyers from Dhaka and other cities crowd beneath old rain trees to bargain.

Mohammad Saiful Islam, now in his late fifties, was among the few farmers alongside Shar Ali who first experimented with commercial floriculture.

He began in 1983 with six katha of tuberose while still at school. His father gave him a small plot. In the first year, he earned Tk 8,000. By class 9, he was making around Tk 100 a day.

He used to keep his earnings in a geometry box. His father knew nothing of the business until one day he discovered Tk 800 inside. Surprised, he joined his son in expanding the land under cultivation.

Like Shar Ali, Islam supplied Shahbagh, including Malancha. Today he grows tuberose, rose, chrysanthemum and sunflower on about four bighas. High-quality tissue culture saplings arrive from Pune in India.

Pointing to the layers of commission, Islam said, "If a flower sells for Tk 15, the farmer may receive only Tk 8."

He said that farmers handle steady cash during peak months, but profits shrink once fertiliser, labour and transport costs are deducted.

At Shampur village in Savar, known as "Golap Gram" and closer to the capital, Abdul Khalek, 53, has been growing flowers for 27 years.

He cultivates three types of roses and plans to expand to seven. Flower farming lifted him from an earthen home to a four-room tin-roofed house and financed his sons' education. "Financial strength and social status have grown considerably," he said.

Khalek also spoke of a personal affection for flowers. "On Valentine's, my wife often says she does not need me gifting her roses, because we already live in a house surrounded by blooming flowers."

Apart from business prospects, the story of Shar Ali also reflects a similar and mystique affection for flowers. He died last year at 75, in February, the busiest month of the floral calendar.

Shar Ali travelled to more than 20 countries, yet never sold flower seeds for profit. "I have never sold flower seeds in my life. I distributed as much as I could," he once said.