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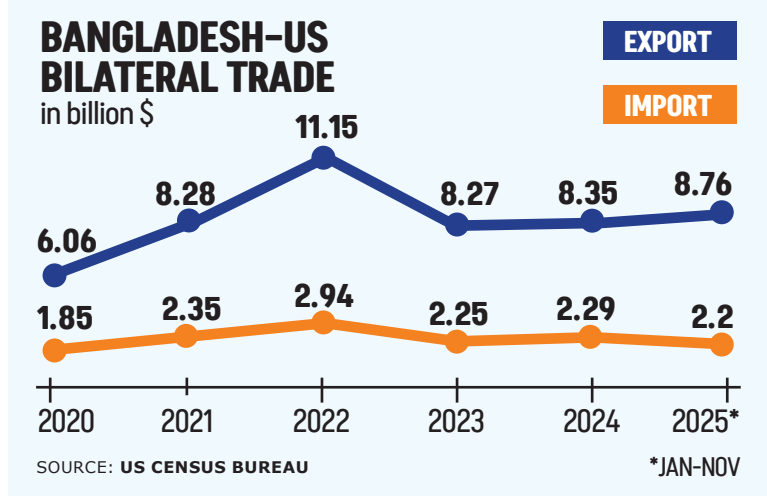
Uncertainties loom over Dhaka's trade prospects

REFAYAT ULLAH MIRDHA

The US Supreme Court's decision to scrap the reciprocal tariff arrangement could lift consumer demand in the American market and potentially increase orders for Bangladeshi exports, according to local entrepreneurs and trade analysts. However, they caution that the outlook remains uncertain, particularly as Dhaka has already signed a bilateral trade deal with Washington.

The uncertainty deepened almost immediately. Shortly after the ruling on Friday, President Donald Trump slapped a 10 percent tariff on all countries. Yesterday, he went further, raising the rate to 15 percent.

Commenting on the developments, Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), told The Daily Star that



Bangladesh must respond with strategic caution and careful calculation in the face of shifting US trade policy.

He said the interim government, in the first place, should not have signed the trade deal in haste, especially just three days before the February 12 national election, and future negotiations should be approached more carefully.

The US president, he noted, retains constitutional authority to revisit the tariff, which Trump did.

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A young student places flowers at a Shaheed Minar made of banana trees on Language Martyrs' Day yesterday. The Line Beel Pabla Government Primary School in Dumuria upazila of Khulna, established in 1945, has yet to get a permanent Shaheed Minar. Each year on February 21, students collect banana trees, build a makeshift monument, and pay tribute to the language martyrs.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

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NEWS ANALYSIS

Dhaka needs a measured, patient engagement with the Trump administration over the trade deal, as the legal ground beneath Washington's tariff policy cracks

A costly trade gamble

STAR REPORT

Time is the most valuable currency in global trade. Wise governments spend it carefully. On February 9, however, Bangladesh's interim administration spent it recklessly. In a rush to secure what it believed was protection from an unpredictable Trumpian world, Dhaka signed a trade agreement just three days before a national election. Eleven days later, the legal foundation of that agreement cracked. The US Supreme Court ruled that the Trump administration had acted unlawfully in using the International Emergency Economic Powers Act to impose reciprocal tariffs. Overnight, the logic behind Bangladesh's hurried decision weakened, and the deal began to

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Jamaat finds footing in the cities

Secures 10 of 45 seats in city corporation areas for first time in national polls

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR and MAMUNUR RASHID

Jamaat-e-Islami appears to have begun rewriting its political story through the 13th national polls. Once rooted largely in rural heartlands, the party has now made visible inroads into urban constituencies, drawing support from affluent and educated voters.

Analysis of final result sheets shows that in the February 12 polls, Jamaat secured 10 of the 45 seats located in city corporation

areas across the country. In another seat, a candidate from Jamaat's 11-party alliance won, while results from one constituency remain withheld.

The change is striking against historical patterns. Since 1991, all of Jamaat's victories had come from rural constituencies.

"Jamaat's results mark a significant political shift, as Islamic-based parties are now performing better in urban areas. Their popularity is gradually increasing

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The US aircraft carrier USS Gerald Ford heads through the Strait of Gibraltar to the Mediterranean as seen from Gibraltar. The photo was taken on Friday. Story on page 12.

PHOTO: AFP

Some groups patronising mob activities

Alleges info minister; Anee calls for end to 'mob culture'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Information Minister Zahir Uddin Swapan yesterday alleged that certain quarters are secretly patronising mob activities.

"A section has been seen trying to indulge mobs. A section, even while holding important positions in the administration, secretly patronises mobs," Swapan said at a discussion marking International Mother Language Day at the Barishal Shilpakala Academy.

"We have taken responsibility for running the government, we have all kinds of information and will continue to have it. Our ultimate commitment is accountability to the people," he said.

"Some people try to show activity outside the conventional law enforcement agencies. We identify such organised, unlawful activities as mob."

Addressing democracy and media freedom, Swapan said a free press was

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Khatibs, imams to get allowances before Eid

Says Tarique at first PMO meeting

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government plans to introduce monthly honorariums and festival allowances for khatibs, imams, muezzins and religious leaders of other faiths in some areas before the upcoming Eid-ul-Fitr in line with the ruling party's election pledges.

At a meeting yesterday on his first day at the Prime Minister's Office in Tejgaon on a public holiday, Prime Minister Tarique Rahman has directed that the work for honorarium be completed step by step for disbursing before Eid, said his adviser Mahdi Amin.

The amount of honorarium is yet to be fixed and will be finalised at an inter-ministerial meeting, he said.

A committee has been formed to determine how the programme will be implemented, how many people will be covered and which districts will be prioritised in the first phase.

"Our election commitments were discussed today," he said. Tarique issued directives to immediately begin work on implementing the BNP's election pledges.

He instructed ministers, state ministers and government officials to maintain transparency and carry out their duties with

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Rumeen accuses BNP men of assault at Shaheed Minar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

Rumeen Farhana, MP from Brahmanbaria 2, yesterday said she was obstructed and attacked while attempting to place a wreath at the Sarail Shaheed Minar during the first hour of International Mother Language Day.

Her supporters blocked the Dhaka-Sylhet highway following the incident.

Speaking to local journalists, she said, “As an elected member of parliament, I was supposed to place the first wreath at 12:01am. But some BNP men launched an attack. I was pushed aside, and a situation was created where I could have been knocked to the ground.”

“After 17 years, BNP has returned to power. If the party does not immediately control its activists at the local level, the consequences will be dire,” she said.

Describing the incident as “premeditated,” she claimed that the local BNP president and secretary were not present and a locally known “goon” led a group of unruly youths in carrying out the attack.

Rumeen also linked the incident to political rivalry, saying her victory as an independent candidate had fuelled resentment among her opponents.

Terming the law-and-order situation “vulnerable”, she said police had tried to intervene but “five or ten officers cannot control such a violent situation when ruling party activists unleash mayhem.”

“I want justice. I have already filed a case,” she said.



Prime Minister Tarique Rahman unveiled a commemorative postage stamp at his office in the capital's Tejgaon, marking International Mother Language Day yesterday.

PHOTO: PTD

Jamaat finds footing in the cities

FROM PAGE 1

among the educated and affluent classes,” said Prof Sk Tawfique M Haque, director of the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance at North South University.

Dhaka University political science Professor Sabbir Ahmed said Jamaat, from its rightist stance, has been showing a tendency toward centrism. “We saw this just yesterday, when the Jamaat leader went to the central Shaheed Minar to offer tribute to language martyrs on February 21.

“That too is proof that they are leaning toward a centrist position, which has an impact. Because the liberal, urban educated class prefers this kind of approach. For that reason, their change or shift has been accepted by many.”

Both Tawfique and Sabbir said Jamaat's role in the July mass uprising, along with its well-planned organisational activities, also contributed to the party gaining support in urban areas.

STRONG PRESENCE

Election Commission data shows that of the 45 constituencies in 11 city corporation areas, including Chattogram-4, where results are withheld, the BNP won 21 seats. These include Rajshahi 2, Khulna-3, Barishal-5, Mymensingh-4, Dhaka 6 to 10, Dhaka-13, Dhaka-17 and 18, Gazipur-1 and 2, Narayanganj-3 and 5, Sylhet-1 to 3, Cumilla-6, and Chattogram 5, 8, 9, 10 and 11.

Jamaat won 10 seats: Rangpur-1, 2 and 3, Khulna 2, Dhaka-4 and 5, Dhaka-12, and Dhaka-14, 15 and 16. Jamaat led alliance's National Citizen Party won Dhaka-II. Of Dhaka's 15 constituencies, Jamaat secured six.

There were also close contests in several other Dhaka seats. In Dhaka 7, 8, 10, 13, and 17, Jamaat or alliance candidates lost by narrow margins. The gap was 2,320 votes in Dhaka-13, 3,300 in Dhaka-10, 4,399 in Dhaka-17, and 5,239 in Dhaka-8.

Sabbir Ahmed said, “Jamaat has managed to build a hold among the lower urban classes, particularly

the working people, in various ways. I believe this shows that they have gradually entered urban areas. For them, relying on this lower-class base has made it easier to strengthen their position and increase their votes.”

“I have noticed similar patterns in several constituencies around Dhaka as well. Therefore, I think it would be wrong to take it for granted that they [Jamaat] cannot establish influence in urban areas. On the contrary, they have already created opportunities to perform well in future elections,” he said.

Tawfique pointed out, “In Gulshan, a constituency where people are usually educated and liberal, Jamaat lost by only a very narrow margin, which highlights their growing strength.

“Many of these constituencies have madrassas, and in some seats, voters were strategically transferred from other constituencies to boost their chances. Young voters have shown strong support, and notably, many women voters have also backed them. My general observation is that in constituencies with higher turnout, the BNP performed well, while Jamaat tended to do better in seats with lower turnout.”

WHAT HISTORY SHOWS

In 1991, Jamaat won 18 seats, all outside city corporation areas: Dinajpur-6, Bogura-2, Chapainawabganj-3, Naogaon-4, Natore-3, Pabna-1 and 5, Chuadanga-2, Jessore-6, Bagerhat-4, Khulna-6, Satkhira-1, 2, 3 and 5, Rajbari-2, Chattogram-14, and Cox's Bazar-1.

In June 1996, it won three seats: Nilphamari-3, Satkhira-2, and Pirojpur-1 — again all outside city corporation areas.

Since then, Jamaat has contested elections in alliance with the BNP. In 2001, it won 17 seats; in 2008, two — all from rural constituencies. BNP and Jamaat boycotted the one-sided polls of 2014 and 2024. In 2018, Jamaat contested using BNP's symbol in an election marred by ballot stuffing the night before polling.

Political analyst Altaf Parvez said,

“There are many reasons behind Jamaat's success. In fact, it is the result of their organisational activities over the past 15-20 years combined with various social changes. For example, Jamaat has long faced criticism for its anti-Liberation War role in 1971. But in my view, this is no longer a major issue for young people. For new voters, it is not a significant concern.”

He added, “Secondly, Jamaat has never been in power in Bangladesh. This has given them a certain advantage. Beyond that, Jamaat has directly provided material support to a large section of society. They distributed rice and lentils, and arranged medical treatment.

“Another factor is that anti-India sentiment has become a strong political product in Bangladesh. Jamaat has been able to capitalise on this effectively.”

Altaf also noted that Bangladeshis are generally religious, and over the past two decades the influence of religion has grown.

“Finally, after the uprising, the BNP filed many cases against Awami League supporters, while with a few exceptions Jamaat did not do that. As a result, many minority voters and Awami League supporters felt safer with Jamaat,” he said.

Ahsanul Mahboob Zubair, assistant secretary general of Jamaat, said, “We have been carrying out our organisational activities in Dhaka and other cities for a long time, especially social and humanitarian programmes. Every city has a huge population, and a large portion of them belong to lower-income or marginalised groups, and the party has tried to stand by them.

“For the past 16-17 years, we could not engage in open politics, but our social work never stopped. Despite organisational obstacles, we continued our social and humanitarian activities.”

He added that in cities, especially Dhaka, Jamaat tried to nominate quality and capable candidates.

“All of these combined helped us achieve good results from the people,” he said.

now hangs in doubt. Exporters face a troubling question: have they escaped a high, certain cost only to enter a world of lower but unpredictable risk? With the US administration exploring alternative, legally secure tariff tools, the rules could change again before the next export cycle.

BUY TIME, DON'T RUSH

Bangladesh's path forward is extremely delicate. Any abrupt attempt to withdraw from commitments could trigger retaliation. Yet blind continuation would lock the country into costly commitments. The challenge is to buy time without provoking confrontation.

Trade analysts have pointed toward a practical solution. The US Supreme Court ruling provides Bangladesh with a legitimate, non-confrontational justification to request a technical pause for the sake of a review. Such a move would shift the discussion away from politics and into the neutral language of compliance and due diligence. It would signal caution, not rejection. Trump's February 18 letter to Tarique Rahman, urging “decisive action” and praising “tremendous momentum,” carried a veiled warning. Washington expects compliance, not hesitation.

Other countries offer useful lessons. The United Kingdom, despite securing a favourable tariff rate, has adopted a strategy of quiet restraint — maintaining core benefits while avoiding unnecessary political noise. Malaysia is waiting for clarity before committing. Larger economies such as India and South Korea are studying developments before acting. None are rushing. Bangladesh must do the same.

Time, once lost, cannot be recovered — but it can still be managed. Bangladesh cannot undo the haste of February 9, but it can prevent further strategic errors.

Uncertainties loom over Dhaka's trade prospects

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If the 15 percent rate replaces the 19 percent reciprocal tariff finalised for Bangladesh under the trade deal, Bangladesh's effective tariff for exports to the US would stand at 31.5 percent, including the existing 16.5 percent Most Favoured Nation (MFN) duty. The MFN rate varies across apparel categories, and many key items — such as trousers, T-shirts, formal shirts and denim — face duties below 16.5 percent.

The sudden shift in America's tariff regime could disrupt the exporters' calculations, Mahmud Hasan Khan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), told The Daily Star over the phone.

“Frequent tariff changes make business planning difficult. Suppliers had already adjusted plans based on the 19 percent rate agreed under the trade deal,” he said.

Meanwhile, he added that the US Supreme Court's ruling could be a “positive sign” for Bangladesh since lower tariffs would reduce prices, which could raise demand and boost exports from Bangladesh.

But according to economist Mohammad Abdur Razzaque, chairman of Research and Policy Integration for Development (RAPID), the ruling could only temporarily boost exports, and the benefit may be short-lived. The new tariff may only be in place for a limited period, and further measures could follow, he said.

He said the implications of both the scrapped reciprocal tariff and Bangladesh's signed deal require deeper legal interpretation.

It also remains unclear whether Bangladesh, under the trade deal, is still bound to import the committed aircraft and other goods, including wheat, cotton, soybean, LNG and LPG, or to proceed with defence purchases and sourcing conditions.

“Will Bangladesh be able to bypass the American pressure and say ‘no’ to purchasing the committed commodities from the US?” Razzaque asked.

Commerce Secretary Mahbubur

Rahman acknowledged that the interim government signed the agreement under pressure from the US side amid concerns that a new government after the election might delay it.

He also said he hoped the deal too would be cancelled in light of the Supreme Court's decision. “The scrapping of the tariff is good news for Bangladesh,” he said.

Under the deal, Bangladesh agreed to import significant American goods, including 14 aircraft from Boeing, as well as soybean, wheat, cotton, LNG

US for our business relations,” the commerce secretary said, referring to a message from Brendan Lynch, assistant US trade representative for South and Central Asia.

Citing Lynch, Mahbubur said future US trade relations would depend on partner countries' engagement in trade deals, and Washington is expected to issue new notifications following the imposition of the new rate.

Mohammad Hatem, president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), urged the government to revisit the February 9 deal, citing difficult clauses.

He also said Bangladesh should begin negotiations to see whether the new tariff can be reduced further.

Mostafa Abid Khan, former member of the Bangladesh Trade and Tariff Commission (BTTC), called for a more strategic approach. He noted that the trade agreement has neither been notified nor ratified and has yet to come into force.

Some of its clauses were concerning, he said, but the current tariff offers at least 150 days of breathing space, as it could be reviewed by Trump. He also said the US Congress could take a different stance due to the upcoming midterm elections in November.

Khadija Nazneen, additional secretary of the WTO wing at the commerce ministry, said they would first analyse the deal, and then take a decision.

She noted that the agreement signed by Bangladesh includes an exit clause — a provision not granted to other countries. “Only in the case of Bangladesh is there an exit clause in the deal. So, we will decide as per government policy,” said Nazneen, who led the delegation that was present during the signing of the deal in Washington.

Trump had declared reciprocal tariffs under a national emergency on April 2 last year. Bangladesh had initially faced a proposed 37 percent tariff, later reduced to 35 percent. After negotiations, it fell to 20 percent and then to 19 percent following the deal.

“Will Bangladesh be able to bypass the American pressure and say ‘no’ to purchasing the committed commodities from the US?”

Mohammad Abdur Razzaque, chairman of Research and Policy Integration for Development



“Only in the case of Bangladesh is there an exit clause in the deal. So, we will decide as per government policy.”

Khadija Nazneen, additional secretary at commerce ministry

and LPG, to reduce the trade gap.

The US is Bangladesh's single largest export destination. Bilateral trade is currently tilted in Bangladesh's favour, with over \$8 billion in exports to the US annually, compared to \$2 billion in imports. Garments account for 86 percent of Bangladesh's exports to the US.

“We will keep contact with the

Reforms in education, especially technical and vocational training, and policy changes for business and industry were also discussed to help create skilled manpower and faster job opportunities, he added.

Another meeting was held on establishing a cheerful and career-oriented education system, creating employment opportunities and expanding sports infrastructure and training facilities.

Tarique Rahman started the day by planting a Magnolia Champaca sapling on the grounds of the PMO and offering special prayers.

He then unveiled a commemorative

Some groups patronising mob activities

FROM PAGE 1

essential to democratic practice, but added that media freedom must be accompanied by accountability.

Later, at the Barishal Press Club, he spoke about regional development plans, including transporting gas from Bhola to Barishal and upgrading the Bonga-Payra road into a four-lane highway.

Meanwhile, Water Resources Minister Shahid Uddin Chowdhury Anee yesterday called on all sides to move away from what he termed “mob culture”.

After paying tribute at the

Lakshmipur Central Shaheed Minar, he said, “Everyone must move away from mob culture and work from a position of responsibility. We must cooperate with the government and the country. If anyone acts outside of this, they will be held accountable.”

Referring to the parliamentary election and subsequent referendum, he said elected MPs had taken their oaths and the “yes/no” vote had been completed.

“In the referendum, ‘yes’ has prevailed. Naturally, the bill will be raised in the parliament. There is no need for a separate oath for ‘yes’; it will

postage stamp marking ‘Amar Ekushey’, the Language Martyrs’ Day and International Mother Language Day.

Navy Chief M Nazmul Hassan and Air Chief Hasan Mahmood Khan paid a courtesy call on Tarique.

Tarique also spoke with PMO employees who had served during his mother Khaleda Zia's tenure.

He exchanged greetings with officials and staff, calling over a number of familiar faces for a conversation.

Tarique, who took the oath of office on February 17, had spent the previous two days working from the secretariat.

take effect automatically,” he said.

He said issues relating to “no” votes or notes of dissent would be discussed in parliament.

“Legal experts have explained this clearly. It is important to understand and articulate it properly,” he said.

Calling for political cooperation, Anee said, “Opinions and paths may differ, but we must move away from opposing every issue. Everyone should work sincerely to build the nation.”

Local BNP leaders and activists were present at the programme in Lakshmipur.



CENTRAL SHAHEED MINAR Shafiqur pays tribute, cites ‘state protocol’

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The appearance of Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman at the Central Shaheed Minar early yesterday has sparked a debate across political and social circles, piquing interest around this “unprecedented” visit.

This had been the first time in 74 years, since the 1952 Language Movement, that a chief of the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami had laid a wreath at the Central Shaheed Minar to pay tribute to the language martyrs.

Although other parties within the Jamaat alliance have marked the day in previous years through rallies and discussions, no Jamaat chief has publicly paid floral tribute at the monument.

Asked why Jamaat had not laid flowers before and what prompted the visit this year, Shafiqur cited “state protocol”.

“As part of state protocol, it is my responsibility,” he said. “As the leader of the opposition, I had to come with my colleagues, so I have.”

Currently serving as leader of the opposition in parliament, Shafiqur went to Shaheed Minar with members of the opposition alliance and paid tribute after the president, the prime minister and cabinet members. After placing wreaths, he offered a quick prayer and then spoke to reporters.

When asked whether the party still considers the act of paying tribute with floral wreaths “najayez” (religiously impermissible), Shafiqur reacted, “Why are you asking such a question on such a solemn day? It is better not to ask such questions.”

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AMAR BHAI-ER ROKTE RANGANO EKUSHEY FEBRUARY...

Clad in black and white and carrying flowers, people thronged the Central Shaheed Minar in Dhaka and elsewhere in the country to honour the language martyrs on the occasion of International Mother Language Day and Martyrs' Day yesterday. Despite fasting during Ramadan, crowds including children and the elderly arrived early to pay tribute, while Dhaka University students staged a commemorative street play as part of tradition.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON, PALASH KHAN, SHEIKH NASIR

Brinda's fight to save a fading script



MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

On Friday mornings, the otherwise quiet veranda of a house in Haktiarkhola village under Kamalganj upazila in Moulvibazar turns into a classroom.

Around 30 children from the Manipuri community sit on plastic mats, their eyes fixed on Brinda Rani Sinha -- a retired schoolteacher and poet -- as she carefully writes the alphabet of the Manipuri script, Meitei Mayek, on a blackboard.

The children repeat after her, learning letters, words and sentence structures in their mother tongue.

Manipuri, the mother tongue of the community, has a rich literary and cultural heritage and its own script.

While the language remains alive in daily conversations and festivities, literacy in the script has declined sharply. Many can speak Manipuri, but only a few can read or write it.

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INT'L MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY Nation pays homage to language martyrs

STAR REPORT

From midnight yesterday, people from all walks of life thronged Shaheed Minars across the country to pay homage to the martyrs of the 1952 Language Movement, observing Martyrs' Day and International Mother Language Day.

Barefoot mourners joined pre-dawn processions -- "probhat ferries" -- singing in chorus the timeless "Amar Bhai-er Rokte Rangano."

In the capital, floral tributes poured in at the Central Shaheed Minar from 12:01am until the sehri hours. Many dressed in black and white stood in quiet lines to place wreaths.

After the pre-dawn break, processions resumed around 6:30am, drawing students, professionals, public and private officials, and members of social, cultural and political organisations, BSS reported.

At the zero hour, President Mohammed Shahabuddin laid a wreath at 12:01am, followed by

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman at 12:07am, according to BSS.

In his first tribute at the Central Shaheed Minar as prime minister, Tarique stood in silent homage, offered prayers for the martyrs, and placed wreaths alongside cabinet colleagues and family members.

The chiefs of the three armed services also paid tribute, as did



opposition leaders -- including Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Dr Shafiqur Rahman, NCP Convener Nahid Islam and leaders of the 11 party alliance -- along with representatives of various political, social, cultural and sports organisations.

The president and prime minister

issued separate messages marking the day. National flags were flown at half-mast at government offices and educational institutions, and the day was observed as a public holiday.

The observance drew a strong public presence. From early morning, families were seen heading towards the Shaheed Minar, many accompanied by young children, and dressed in black and white attires. Some children carried paper flowers and placards. Young people, including students of schools, colleges, and universities, were especially noticeable.

Wreath-laying ceremonies, black badge observances and pre-dawn processions were also held at Azimpur graveyard and other locations in the capital, BSS reported.

Across the country, district administrations, political parties, freedom fighters, educational institutions and cultural organisations observed the day with due respect.

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Absence of Ekushey songs sparks outrage in Lalmonirhat



S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

On the occasion of International Mother Language Day and Language Martyrs' Day, no patriotic songs were played on the central Shaheed Minar premises in Lalmonirhat district yesterday, drawing flak from local eminent citizens and cultural activists.

Even the song "Amar Bhai-er Rokte Rangano Ekushey February, Ami Ki Bhulite Pari..." -- considered an inseparable part of the day -- was not played in the official programme arranged under the supervision of the district administration to pay tributes to the martyrs of the Language Movement.

Although two sound systems were installed at the venue, they remained practically unused, leaving people from all walks of life -- who came

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Shoal children build temporary Shaheed Minars

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

A competition was held yesterday on making temporary Shaheed Minars on the occasion of the Martyrs' Day and the International Mother Language, featuring children from local marginal families in Rasulpur shoal within Kirtankhola river in Barishal.

More than 100 children and adolescents participated to construct 15 temporary Shaheed Minars as part of the daylong event. Special prizes were awarded to encourage the participants.

The event was jointly



organised by Samajtantrik Chhatra Front and the Shaheed Altaf Mahmud Smriti Pathagar.

The competition has been held consistently for the past 15 years with children from working-class families, said Dr Manisha Chakraborty, one of the organisers.

The event also included a free medical camp, a discussion meeting and the honouring of a

freedom fighter, she added.

Using bamboo, paper, cloth and other temporary materials, the children built their Shaheed Minars blending imagination with creativity.

"I feel very happy to have participated in the competition," said Mim, one of the young participants.

Sujon Ahmed, convener of the Barishal metropolitan unit

of Samajtantrik Chhatra Front, presided over the event, and physician Dr Ahida Sultana, cultural figures Arup Gautam and Arup Roy, and cultural activist Mostafizur Rahman attended, among others.

Comrade Khalequzzaman Bhuiyan, veteran freedom fighter and chief adviser of the Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD), spoke among others.

The children's efforts would help nurture historical consciousness and patriotism, the speakers said.

Participants demanded government initiatives to construct a permanent Shaheed Minar at the local primary school in Rasulpur, establish libraries and expand cultural programmes in low-income colonies.

Freedom fighter and cultural personality Nazrul Islam Chundu was posthumously conferred the Shaheed Altaf Mahmud Memorial Award at the event.

Rajshahi gets long-awaited Shaheed Minar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Rajshahi city residents have finally received a permanent Shaheed Minar to pay tribute to the heroes of the 1952 Language Movement.

At 12:01am yesterday, marking Language Martyrs' Day and International Mother Language Day, the long-awaited monument -- built under the initiative of the Rajshahi City Corporation -- was opened to the public.

Land Minister Mizanur Rahman Minu, along with local government officials, placed floral wreaths at the altar before it was formally opened for all.

This is the first time residents have been able to collectively pay homage at a single, central Shaheed Minar. Previously, tributes were offered at separate monuments in Bhubanmohan Park, Rajshahi College, and Rajshahi University.

Constructed on nearly one acre at Sonadighi Mor, on the site of the former Survey Institute, the permanent structure was built at a cost of around Tk 7.80 crore under the Rajshahi District Council's initiative. The design follows the architectural style of the Central Shaheed Minar.

The foundation stone was laid on December 16, 2020, by language

movement veteran and freedom fighter Golam Arif Tipu under the management of Rajshahi City Corporation.

The opening has been welcomed enthusiastically by residents.

Kamrul Islam, a student of Rajshahi College, said the monument holds special significance as it enables people from all walks of life to gather and pay tribute at one place.



Hasan Mehdi, a local resident, described it as a long-standing demand. Mohammad Habibur Rahman, administrator of Rajshahi District Council, said there was no formal inauguration ceremony; instead, the monument was opened at the first hour of February 21 to allow the public to pay their respects.



People inspect the damage at the site of an Israeli strike in Bednayel, Bekaa valley, Lebanon, yesterday. At least 10 people were killed and 50 wounded in the Israeli strikes in Bekaa Valley. The strikes on Friday were among the deadliest reported in eastern Lebanon in recent weeks and risk testing a fragile US-brokered ceasefire between Israel and Shia Islamist group Hezbollah, which has been strained by recurring accusations of violations.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Trump to travel to China next month

REUTERS, Washington

US President Donald Trump will travel to China from March 31 to April 2 for a highly anticipated meeting between the leaders of the world's two biggest economies, a trip announced as the Supreme Court overturned Trump's sweeping tariffs on imported goods.

A White House official confirmed the trip on Friday, just before the highest U.S. court dealt Trump a stinging defeat by striking down many of the tariffs he has used in a global trade war, including some against rival China.

Trump's talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping on an extended visit to Beijing had been expected to revolve around extending a trade truce that kept both countries from further hiking tariffs.

But the Supreme Court's reversal created new questions for tense U.S.-China relations that had recently stabilized after Trump trimmed tariffs on Chinese goods, in exchange for measures from Beijing, including cracking down on the illicit fentanyl trade and pausing export restrictions on critical minerals.

Twenty-percent tariffs on China's U.S.-bound exports were imposed under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, or IEEPA, which the court ruled Trump had overstepped. Those tariffs were tied to national emergencies related to fentanyl distribution and trade imbalances.

Brazil, India ink rare earth, mineral deal

AFP, New Delhi

India and Brazil agreed to boost cooperation on critical minerals and rare earths yesterday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said after talks in New Delhi with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

"The agreement on critical minerals and rare earths in a major step towards building resilient supply chains," Modi said.

Brazil has the world's second-largest reserves of critical minerals, which are used in everything from electric vehicles, solar panels and smartphones to jet engines and guided missiles.

India, seeking to cut its dependence on top exporter China, has been expanding domestic production and recycling while scouting for new suppliers.

"Increasing investments and cooperation in matters of renewable energies and critical minerals is at the core of the pioneering agreement that we have signed today," Lula said.

The details of the deal were not immediately available.

Nine other agreements and memoranda of understanding were finalised yesterday, the foreign ministry's spokesman said, touching on digital cooperation, health, entrepreneurship and other fields.

"Brazil is India's largest trade partner in Latin America. We are committed to

taking our bilateral trade beyond \$20 billion in the coming five years," Modi said.

"Our trade is not just a figure, but a reflection of trust."

Lula, who arrived in New Delhi on Wednesday for a summit on artificial intelligence, is accompanied by a delegation of more than a dozen ministers as well as business leaders.

On Saturday, he was given a ceremonial welcome and paid his tributes to India's

minerals complements recent supply chain engagements with the United States, France and the European Union.

India, the world's most populous nation, is the 10th largest market for Brazilian exports, with bilateral trade topping \$15 billion in 2025.

Key Brazilian exports to India include sugar, crude oil, vegetable oils, cotton and iron ore. Demand for iron ore has been driven by rapid infrastructure expansion and industrial growth in India, which is on



independence hero Mahatma Gandhi, before going into the meeting with Modi.

With China holding a near-monopoly on rare earths production, some countries are seeking alternative sources.

Rishabh Jain, an expert with the Delhi-based Council on Energy, Environment and Water think tank, said India's growing cooperation with Brazil on critical

track to become the world's fourth largest economy.

India's Foreign Minister Subrahmanya Jaishankar said he was confident that Lula's talks with Modi "will impart a new momentum to our ties".

Modi said that "our cooperation in the defence sector is also continuously growing," hailing a "win-win partnership".

GLOBAL SUMMIT ON AI Call grows for 'trustworthy and robust AI'

AFP, New Delhi

Dozens of nations including the United States and China called for "secure, trustworthy and robust" artificial intelligence, in a declaration issued yesterday after a major summit on the technology in New Delhi.

The statement signed by 86 countries did not include concrete commitments to regulate the fast-developing technology, instead highlighting several voluntary, non-binding initiatives.

"AI's promise is best realised only when its benefits are shared by humanity," said the statement, released by the five-day AI Impact Summit.

It called the advent of generative AI "an inflection point in the trajectory of technological evolution".

"Advancing secure, trustworthy and robust AI is foundational to building trust and maximising societal and economic benefits," it said.

The summit -- attended by tens of thousands including top tech CEOs -- was the fourth annual global meeting to discuss the promises and pitfalls of AI, and the first hosted by a developing country.

Hot topics discussed included AI's potential societal benefits, such as drug discovery and translation tools, but also the threat of job losses, online abuse and the heavy power consumption of data centres.

Analysts had said earlier that the summit's broad focus, and vague promises made at the previous meetings in France, South Korea and Britain, would make strong pledges or immediate action unlikely.

The United States, home to industry-leading companies such as Google and ChatGPT maker OpenAI, did not sign last year's summit statement, warning that regulation could be a drag on innovation.

"We totally reject global governance of AI," US delegation head Michael Kratsios had said at the Delhi summit on Friday.

The United States signed a bilateral declaration on AI with India on Friday, pledging to "pursue a global approach to AI that is unapologetically friendly to entrepreneurship and innovation".

But it also put its name to the main summit statement, the release of which was originally expected Friday but was delayed by one day to maximise the number of signatories, India's government said.

On AI safety risks -- from misinformation and surveillance to fears of the creation of devastating new pathogens -- Saturday's summit declaration struck a cautious tone.

"Deepening our understanding of the potential security aspects remains important," it said.

"We recognize the importance of security in AI systems, industry-led voluntary measures, and the adoption of technical solutions, and appropriate policy frameworks that enable innovation."

On jobs, it emphasised reskilling initiatives to "support participants in preparation for a future AI driven economy". And "we underscore the importance of developing energy-efficient AI systems" given the technology's growing demands on natural resources, it said.



A woman and man walk along a pedestrian crossing on a main street in Tehran yesterday. The United States and Iran are facing off with threats of military action, even as the arch-foes pursue fresh negotiations. Story on Page 12.

PHOTO: AFP

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Ministry of Public Administration

Bangladesh Civil Service Administration Academy

Publication Section

Shahbag, Dhaka-1000

Invitation for Research Article

Bangladesh Civil Service Administration Academy is inviting Research Articles for the upcoming issue (January-June 2026) of Bangladesh Journal of Administration and Management (BJAM). Articles should be based on the following research areas/fields in the Bangladesh context:

01) Governance and Policy Studies: Exploring Public Policy of Bangladesh.

02) Development Administration

03) Public Administration: Innovation and Service Simplification.

04) Impact Assessment of the Training Programs in BCS Administration Academy.

05) Application of 4IR Technology in the Public Service Delivery System in Bangladesh.

06) Human Resource Development in Public Administration.

07) Administrative Reforms: Challenges and Way Forward.

08) Competency-Based Framework for the Recruitment Process of Civil Servants.

09) Local Government Institutions.

10) Micro Credit and Women Empowerment & Economic Development.

11) Performance Appraisal of the Civil Servants.

12) Artificial Intelligence and Public Administration.

13) Land Acquisition Management.

14) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Challenges and Opportunities.

15) Public Financial Management.

16) Government-NGO Collaboration in Sustainable Development of Bangladesh.

17) Climate Change: Bangladesh and World Scenario.

18) International Migration and Remittance.

19) Disaster Management in Bangladesh.

20) Green Energy.

Articles should not exceed 6000 words, including an abstract containing 250 to 300 words. Manuscripts should be submitted as MS Word file with Times New Roman font (font size 12), and the Harvard Referencing system should be followed. An article must have a separate title page which will include the name(s) of the author(s), the e-mail address, a brief CV of the author(s), cell phone number of author(s) and a non-publication declaration of the article. The author(s) will have to submit a similarity check report generated automatically through Turnitin Software. The successful author(s) of selected articles will be entitled to remuneration according to the Publication Policy of the Academy.

Interested academics, researchers, professionals and practitioners are requested to send the article through e-mail to the address publicationofficer@besadminacademy.gov.bd or publicationsection1987@gmail.com, following a printed copy sent to the address of the Academy by 20 March 2026 within office hours.

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Director (Research & Publication)

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GD-358

US Supreme Court ruling on global tariffs

How will it affect the US-Bangladesh trade deal?

The US Supreme Court ruling has struck down President Donald Trump's global tariffs and declared them illegal. The ruling declared that the US president had exceeded his authority under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) by imposing sweeping reciprocal tariffs without congressional approval. This would invalidate the legal foundation of Trump's "reciprocal" tariffs, which many countries, including Bangladesh, urgently tried to renegotiate. For Bangladesh, especially the lowering of tariff to 19 percent may have seemed like a big relief, but it has come with a trade deal with the US that has rigid compliance conditions. In reaction to the ruling, Donald Trump, invoking Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974, has announced an imposition of a flat 10 percent tariff on most countries.

What is most baffling, however, is why the interim government was in such a rush to sign the deal on February 9, just 72 hours before our national election, particularly when the issue was under the US Supreme Court's scrutiny. Critics have questioned the transparency and democratic legitimacy of an interim government signing such a long-term, binding agreement. The current foreign minister, who was the chief negotiator of the deal as an adviser of the interim administration, must explain why such haste and such constraining clauses were accepted. The nation deserves to know.

Now that the deal has been signed, does the new government have any options to back out or renegotiate? The agreement (Article 6.6) does not typically take effect until 60 days after "applicable legal procedures" are complete. Can the new parliament simply refuse to ratify without consequences? Bangladesh's commerce ministry has already suggested the US Supreme Court's verdict may mean the February 9 deal "loses its legal basis." However, walking away from a deal with the Trump administration would be a risky move with potentially swift consequences for Bangladesh. President Trump is known for viewing trade as a zero-sum game, where any perceived loss for the US could be treated as unacceptable and result in retaliation. Bangladesh's new administration is thus in a delicate spot. On February 18, Trump sent a congratulatory letter to Prime Minister Tarique Rahman. Apart from the good wishes, the latter explicitly urged him to maintain the "tremendous momentum" of the trade deal and take "decisive action" on defence pacts. The uncertainty regarding the deal, therefore, remains.

Bangladesh must urgently reassess the agreement clause by clause. This means identifying provisions that have become redundant by the invalidation of reciprocal tariffs, commitments that are still enforceable, hidden fiscal or procurement burdens, and regulatory obligations that will affect industrial policy. Bangladesh will therefore have to step cautiously and continue to engage with the US constructively. It must express its respect for the US legal process and its commitment to mutually beneficial trade. Most importantly, Bangladesh must renegotiate to firmly protect its national interest.

Prioritise mosquito control

City govts must take proactive action

The short winter this time has brought in the menace of Culex mosquitoes for Dhaka citizens earlier than usual, and as always, our city corporations have largely failed to predict and manage the situation. According to a report in this daily, the worst affected areas include Mirpur, Eskaton, Ramna, Gandaria, Mohammadpur, Razabazar, Tejturibazar, Uttara, Hazaribagh, Kamrangirchar, Hatirpool, Moghbazar, and parts of Old Dhaka, among other places.

Although officials of both Dhaka North and South City Corporations claimed that mosquito control drives are ongoing, these have reportedly been sporadic and largely ineffective. According to experts, the methods being used—fogging and spraying larvicides—are not sufficient to control the Culex population. Culex mosquitoes lay eggs in ditches, drains, and sewers during the dry season, when the water in these depositories becomes stagnant due to lack of rainfall. Since there was a small number of cold days this winter, the warmer conditions of breeding grounds acted in the Culex's favour. In fact, as an entomologist told this daily, the current density of Culex mosquitoes is unusually high, about 40 percent higher than in December. Therefore, proper cleaning of drains, ditches, and sewers to ensure free flow of water is crucial.

Something as basic as the birth cycle of mosquitoes common in our country should not be unknown to city officials. Yet, proactive action and planned measures appear absent or insufficient year after year. The authorities must realise that climate change is, and will be, affecting mosquitoes' breeding seasons, and so control efforts must be designed accordingly. While the absence of elected representatives has partially impacted the operations of city corporations in the last 18 months of interim administration, this alone cannot be a reason for the slow and lacklustre mosquito control measures. City officials, too, are accountable to the public and must ramp up efforts in line with expert advice.

More importantly, they must heed experts' warnings that the dengue season may start earlier this year. Since temperatures did not drop significantly during winter, the Aedes population remained intact. This means the first rain could potentially release scores of dengue carriers. We hope the newly elected administration will not wait for a city government election to adopt an Integrated Mosquito Management System—a unified system covering surveillance, source reduction, appropriate insecticide use, community engagement, etc.—not just in the capital but across the country. The preventable menace of mosquitoes and related diseases should be easy to control if priorities, funds, and, above all, political will are firmly in place.

Why do voters elect controversial politicians?



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ABDULLAH A DEWAN

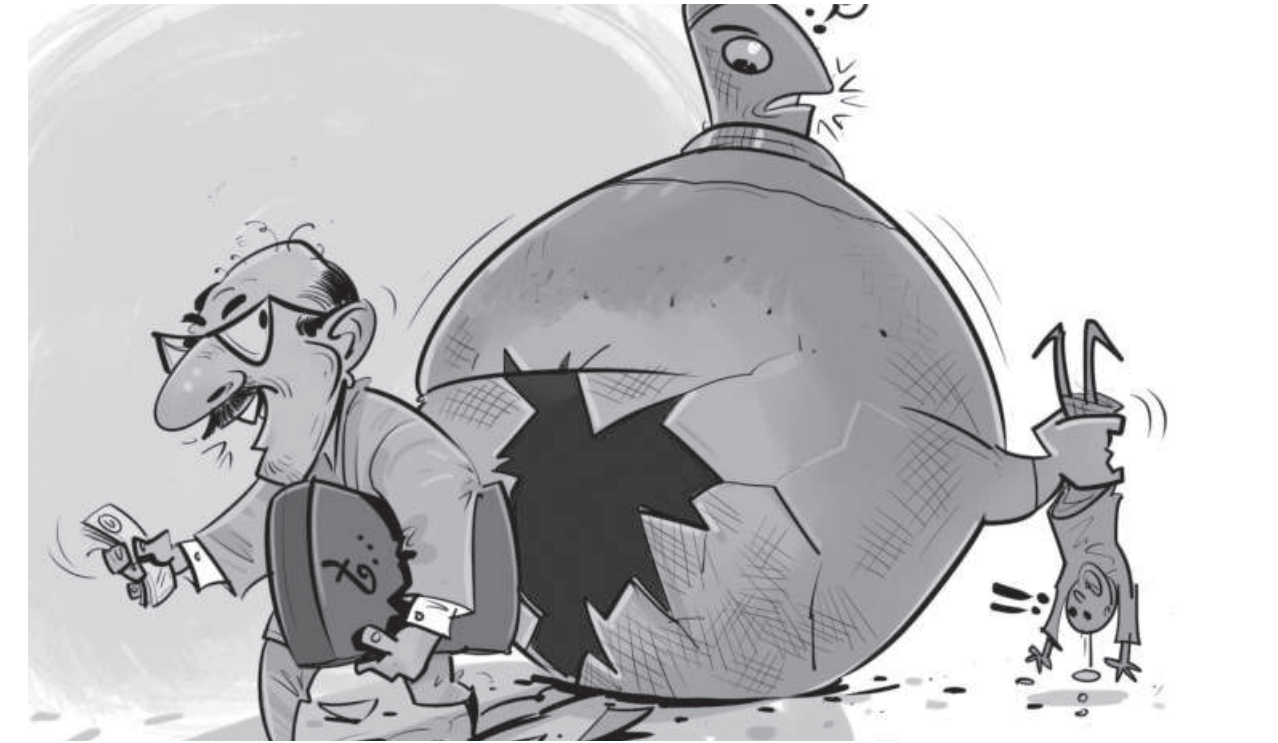
In a typical model of democracy, the electoral process is designed to perform two functions simultaneously: it acts as a filter to select leaders with the potential to serve public interest, and as a disciplinary tool to "purge" those with the potential to abuse power and betray public trust. The benchmark theory suggests that if an incumbent, for instance, is identified as corrupt, voters—armed with this information—will cast them out in the next election.

However, the reality in Bangladesh presents an unsettling contradiction to this theory. The country seems trapped in what may be termed the "Bangladesh Paradox": a state of adverse selection in which transparency does not necessarily lead to rejection. Instead, individuals associated with alleged bank loan defaults, tender manipulation, or other abuses of power are often returned to office. This is less a failure of civic virtue than a rational response to a broken institutional environment where voters reward perceived effectiveness, or "raw capability," over moral integrity.

To understand why this happens, one needs to turn to the economics of information. The 2001 Nobel laureates in economics—George Akerlof, Michael Spence, and Joseph Stiglitz—demonstrated that informational imperfections, where knowledge is imperfect or asymmetric, systematically generate market failure. In a healthy market, if a buyer knows a car is a "lemon" (defective or low-quality), they will not pay the price of a "pristine vehicle" (high-quality) for it. In Bangladesh, however, the "lemon law" of economics has been turned on its head.

The problem is not asymmetric information (that is, voters being deceived); it is symmetric information, or rather, the reaction to it. Voters often know who these candidates are, including their past controversies and their methods. They still choose them because, in a weak institutional environment, evidence of a candidate's ability to manipulate or "work" the system is interpreted not as a disqualifying lack of integrity, but as a perverse signal of "fitness" or raw capability required to deliver results in a lawless landscape.

Recently, there have been allegations that a number of loan defaulters and questionable millionaires have made it to the 13th parliament. According to data provided by SHUJAN, 147 out of the 297 elected candidates have carried bank loans, with the loans of 36 exceeding Tk 5 crore. About 126 of these



FILE ILLUSTRATION: BIPLOB CHAKROBORTY

MPs are affiliated with BNP alone. The question is, why would voters choose a leader of potentially questionable background? The answer lies in a real-life calculation. In a patronage-mediated polity, the more rational voter may seek to maximise expected access or benefits, such as protection from administrative harassment, preferential treatment, employment opportunities, a degree of security in an uncertain environment, etc.

In this context, a "clean" candidate is an unknown quantity, a potential risk. They may possess integrity, but they are often perceived as lacking the organisational reach or administrative control required to translate a vote into protection and services. By contrast, a questionable candidate with a track record of wielding power becomes a preferred instrument of survival. When the state fails to provide services as a matter of right, voters are compelled to "purchase" them by giving their vote to a powerful patron. The relevant electoral question then shifts from "who is honest?" to "who can deliver?"

When defensive voting rewards those with money, muscle, and administrative reach, the system suffers from adverse selection: it attracts the "wrong type" of person to power—those most attracted to it but often least suited to hold it. Once these actors are in office, moral hazard follows.

This has evolved into "bureaupolitigraft," the collusive fusion of politicians and bureaucrats into a single mechanism of organised graft. Policy, regulation, and administration are converted into instruments of private accumulation, often protected by a "klepto-fascist" regime that intimidates opposition and represses dissent.

Our history illustrates how this equilibrium was maintained before being eventually shattered. The corruption scandals of BNP's 2001-2006 tenure, when the country was ranked the most corrupt in the world for five consecutive years, contributed to a climate of public discontent that culminated in the party's heavy defeat in the 2008 election. Voters acted on what they knew. However, the subsequent era under Awami League saw nearly 15 consecutive years of bank looting, regulatory capture, and the institutionalisation of bureaupolitigraft. The persistence of loyalty among some circles was not due to a lack of information; instead, it reflected a structure of political payoffs where many supporters were protected or benefited by the system. For them, the regime represented access rather than exclusion. When loyalty is incentive-compatible, defection means the loss of privilege or proximity to power.

What sustains this equilibrium is not ideology but risk management.

survival strategy. As long as access to credit, contracts, protection, and public services remains politically mediated, a rational voter may continue to prefer a candidate who can control the system over one who promises to reform it.

So, breaking the Bangladesh Paradox requires more than informing voters; it requires lowering the cost of voting against patronage. The transformation has to be institutional rather than rhetorical. Hospitals must treat patients by rule, not by recommendation. Bank lending must follow enforceable contracts, not political connections. Police must respond to citizens' needs, not to partisan signals. Businesses must operate without paying for protection. When daily life can be navigated without the shelter of a patron, the perceived risk of supporting a cleaner political option will fall sharply.

The 2024 uprising finally broke the seemingly permanent grip of Awami League, and the February 12 election installed BNP back to power. The nation now stands at a pivotal crossroads. There is a fervent expectation that BNP has learned a critical political lesson: the cycle of "bureaupolitigraft" is no longer a sustainable path to political survival. The same fate that befell the previous regime could loom much earlier than a 15-year horizon if the new leadership fails to reform to establish the rule of law in governance.

Markets abroad balance profit and festival spirit, why can't we?



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MAHTAB UDDIN

There is something remarkable about how markets operate abroad during major festivals, especially in the final weeks preceding a holiday. Instead of hiking prices, retailers slash them significantly.

For instance, Christmas in the UK—the biggest festival in the West—triggers massive retail discounts. A kilogramme of carrots, a staple of the Christmas roast, that usually sells for one pound (approximately Tk 165) is sold for as low as 15 pence (Tk 24) during the festive week. Similarly, a 2kg bag of potatoes or parsnips, usually priced around one pound per kg, can be found for under 20 pence. Even the traditional six-pack of mince pies, which usually costs two to three pounds, is often offered for one pound or less in December.

This trend isn't exclusive to Christmas. In Muslim-majority neighbourhoods in the UK, the same phenomenon occurs before Ramadan. Where I live, big discounts on Asian groceries began a month ago. Cooking oil that was two pounds is now 1.50 pounds. Rice prices have been slashed by half. Significant price reductions are evident in chickpeas, onions, and other

ifrar essentials.

In the developed world, festivals are seen as an opportunity for "volume sales," earning profit by selling more at a lower price. This system is not only affordable for consumers but also ensures that the joy of the festival reaches everyone.

Contrast this with Bangladesh, where a culture of excessive profit dominates festivals. As soon as Ramadan approaches, prices of essentials skyrocket. For instance, the cost of lemons and limes rose by Tk 20-30 on average this year; in some kitchen markets, four pieces of this fruit were selling for around Tk 150-200 on the second day of the Islamic holy month. A similar price hike is seen for other Ramadan essentials such as cucumber, dates, certain varieties of bananas, and papayas. Even dresses originally priced at Tk 1,000 are sold for Tk 3,000.

Why such a stark difference? Let's look at the economics first. Abroad, businesses purchase in bulk; import costs are low; most food items are exempt from import taxes; and logistics are fast and inexpensive, with low-cost cold storage. By keeping prices low

when demand is high, they move more inventory. Total revenue remains stable because of price elasticity. This ensures businesses' profitability during the festive season.

In Bangladesh, however, we face high import duties, bureaucratic delays, a lack of cold storage, a faulty agricultural supply chain, and the notorious "syndicates." Then there are the issues of extortion and the archaic system of "leasing" out kitchen markets. In the digital age, registered traders should be able to pay fees directly to the government treasury, thereby drastically reducing market-based corruption.

Two major structural flaws contribute to our market instability. First is the "multi-layered middleman" crisis. In Bangladesh, a vegetable changes hands five to seven times before reaching the urban consumer. Each "faria" or middleman adds a margin without adding any value to the product, often inflating the price by 300 percent from the farm gate.

To solve this, we must establish direct farmer-to-consumer channels. By creating government-backed digital platforms, or "farmers' markets," where growers can sell directly to retailers or consumers, we can bypass the exploitative intermediaries that thrive during Ramadan.

Second is the absence of "real-time market intelligence." In the UK, supermarkets use sophisticated data to predict demand and manage stock. In Bangladesh, our authorities often work with outdated or fabricated data

on local production and stock. This information gap allows syndicates to create "artificial crises" even when supply is abundant. The solution lies in a national digital food dashboard. By tracking the movement of every tonne of onion or sugar from the port or farm to the warehouse in real-time, the government can intervene the moment a hoarders' syndicate tries to choke the supply.

Beyond economics lies the issue of moral bankruptcy. Some traders hoard, overcharge, and adulterate food, ignoring the true spirit of Ramadan. True humanity requires integrity. One cannot be a "good believer" while actively deceiving the public. Claiming to be devout but acting as an opportunist does not make a person a good follower of any faith, let alone a good human being.

To curb this, we need the strict application of the law to bring dishonest traders to heel. If the Directorate of National Consumer Rights Protection and law enforcement agencies maintain the same vigour throughout the year as they often do for a few photo-ops, these moral hazards can be kept in check.

It is time for the Bangladeshi market to evolve. In the West, the "spirit of giving" is reflected in the price tag. In our country, a "spirit of greed" unfortunately takes over. We must realise that a sustainable economy is built on the happiness of the masses, not the bulging pockets of a few hoarders. Let the blessings of Ramadan be reflected in our fairness and our humanity.

A questionable detention policy

The International Crimes Tribunal is violating its own rules that require that those detained for over a year be released unless there are ‘exceptional circumstances.’



David Bergman is a journalist who has written about Bangladesh for many years. His X handle is @TheDavidBergman

DAVID BERGMAN

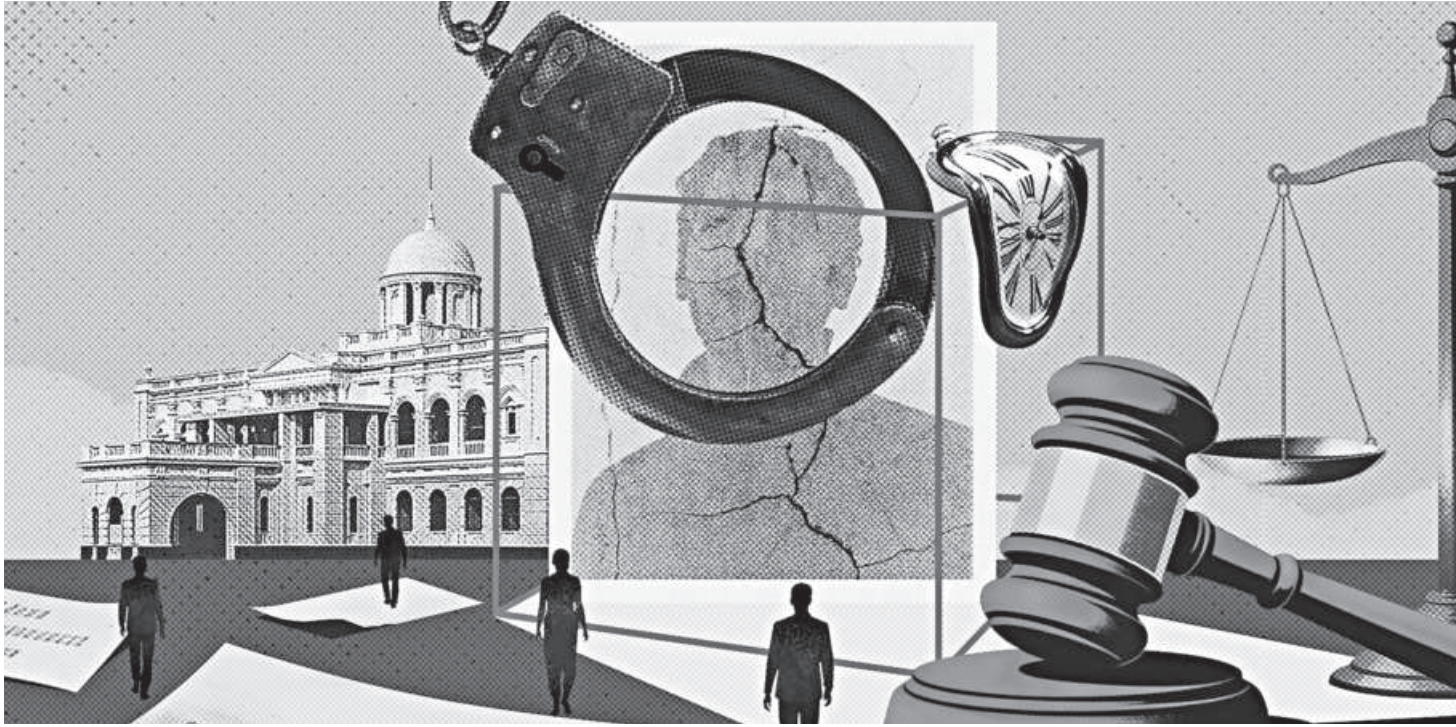
In August 2025, I wrote in *Prothom Alo* about the arrest, 10 months earlier in October 2024, of Dr Tawfiq e-Elahi Chowdhury—former power, energy, and mineral resources adviser to ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina—by the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) on allegations of crimes against humanity. In that article, I argued that there was no evidential basis to justify his detention by the ICT either at the outset or 10 months on. Now, six months later, Chowdhury has been detained for a full 15 months without charge.

At this point, his detention is not merely arbitrary; it is very possibly unlawful under the Tribunal’s own procedural rules. Rule 9(5) of the ICT Rules of Procedure provides that:

“If an accused is in custody during [the] investigation period, the investigation officer shall conclude the investigation within one year of his arrest under the Rules. In case of failure to complete the investigation as specified above, the accused may be released on bail subject to fulfilment of some conditions as imposed by Tribunal. But, in exceptional circumstances, the Tribunal, by showing reasons to be recorded in writing, may extend the period of investigation and also the order detaining the accused in custody for a further period of six months.”

The structure of the rule is clear. First, investigations must be completed within one year of arrest. Second, if that period expires without completion, the accused may be released on bail subject to conditions. Third, and crucially, continued detention beyond one year is permissible only in “exceptional circumstances,” which must be justified in writing.

It might be argued that the word “may” (in the second sentence of the rule) gives the Tribunal discretion to refuse bail. However, that discretion is plainly constrained by



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

the third sentence: detention can continue beyond one year only where exceptional circumstances exist and are properly recorded. Why, then, does Chowdhury remain in ICT custody? What exceptional circumstances justify the continued detention of an 81-year-old man who has not been formally charged? None have been publicly identified.

After the expiry of one year in detention, Chowdhury’s family did not apply for bail, perhaps owing to inadequate legal advice. Yet, arguably, the Tribunal itself bears

responsibility. Once the one-year threshold was crossed, and absent exceptional circumstances, the Tribunal should have acted proactively to ensure compliance with its own rules and ordered his release.

This issue is not confined to just Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, however. There are at least seven other accused who have also been detained without charge by the ICT for more than a year, including former ministers or

would be released from custody only if they were not simultaneously being detained in connection with separate offences under the Penal Code—a circumstance in which most, if not all, of them currently find themselves.

In its judgments, the Tribunal claims that it is meeting international standards. It is true that since July 2024, significant amendments were made to the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973 to ensure that the

detained by the ICT without charge for over a year), certainly thinks so. “The procedure that has been used against him has no legal credibility whatsoever,” he told me. “If [the ICT prosecutors] have got evidence against him, they should serve it on him, but they haven’t... There was no statement of evidence, no photographs, no documents showing he supported the things he is accused of.”

“You can’t detain someone for a year and pretend that you have the evidence against them until you serve it.”

He went on to say, “The Bangladesh legal system and the current government need to get their house in order, as otherwise they are going to be a total outlier in the Commonwealth. This is not what we would expect of the interim administration headed by Muhammad Yunus. I would have expected much better.”

There will no doubt be objections from certain populist groups to the application of due process and the rule of law, particularly if that results in bail being granted to individuals whom they describe as “fascists” or “fascist enablers,” labels now frequently applied to anyone associated with Awami League. Over the past 18 months, in discussions about accountability for the July 2024 events, the emphasis within some of these circles has been overwhelmingly on retribution and punishment, with insufficient regard for the requirements of a fair and impartial trial process.

The Tribunal—and the new government—must, however, resist any populist pressure and ensure that due process is applied faithfully, even in politically sensitive cases. This means that the ICT applies Rule 9(5) of the Rules of Procedure and grants bail to those who have been detained pre-charge for over a year. Justice is not served by abandoning procedure and due process; it is secured only by upholding them.

As Tarique Rahman, the new prime minister, said at his first press conference following his party’s election victory, reconciliation within Bangladesh can only happen through the “rule of law.” Indeed, this is precisely what his mother’s former UK lawyer is now also calling for.

(The ICT prosecution office did not respond to requests for comment.)

‘Modern-day slavery’ threatening our women migrants



Md Abbas is a journalist at The Daily Star. He can be reached at abdulla180395@gmail.com.

MD ABBAS

The recent return of a 32-year-old Bangladeshi domestic worker from Saudi Arabia—six months pregnant after alleged rape, torture, and imprisonment—is not an isolated tragedy. It is a stark reflection of the structural vulnerabilities that many Bangladeshi women face when they migrate to the Middle East for domestic work. From Bangladesh’s perspective, this is not only a human rights issue abroad but also a question of national responsibility which should begin at home and extend across borders.

Bangladesh sends hundreds of thousands of workers overseas each year. According to Brac Migration Programme data from 2025, more than 470,000 Bangladeshi migrant workers had returned home over the previous six years after facing abuse, exploitation or hardship, including at least 67,199 women who reported physical or sexual violence. Many returned injured, traumatised, or psychologically distressed, struggling to reintegrate into society due to stigma and a lack of support.

Remittances from migrant workers act as a lifeline for Bangladesh’s economy, contributing over \$31 billion last year, and a large portion of this came from Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia. However, behind these figures are Bangladeshi women who migrate there with limited education, minimal bargaining power, and deep economic or social vulnerabilities.

The International Labour Organization

(ILO) estimates there are over 11 million migrant domestic workers worldwide, many concentrated in the Middle East. ILO research with the Walk Free Foundation also estimates that nearly 50 million people globally live in conditions of modern slavery, including forced labour. Domestic work in private households is consistently identified as a high-risk sector due to isolation and lack of labour oversight. For Bangladeshi women, the journey often begins with promises of secure jobs, fixed hours, and decent salaries arranged through recruiters or local brokers. But in reality, many end up placed in private homes under the *kafala* (or “sponsorship”) system, which ties their legal status to a single employer. Although some Gulf states have introduced limited reforms, domestic workers remain largely excluded from meaningful protection and full labour law coverage.

Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have documented patterns that mirror many testimonies from Bangladeshi migrant workers: employers routinely confiscate passports, withhold wages, confine workers to homes, and demand excessive hours without rest. Despite laws against passport confiscation in some Gulf states, the practice remains widespread. Without their passports, workers cannot leave the country, change employers or even safely approach authorities.

Many Bangladeshi domestic workers also report having their mobile phones taken away or being denied access to contact with family

members. Isolation inside private households in a foreign country means having no co-workers, no visible workplace, and often no independent witnesses. Abuse can continue for months without detection. Between 2020 and 2024, an estimated 63 percent of returning female domestic workers reported experiencing at least one form of abuse, with 30 percent reporting sexual violence and 15 percent returning pregnant from assault.

International law outlines clear standards for what constitutes decent working conditions. The ILO Convention No. 189 on Domestic Workers, for instance, calls for equal labour protections, weekly rest, fair wages, and protection from violence. The Forced Labour Convention and its protocol prohibit coercion and exploitative conditions, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) obliges states to protect women from gender-based violence. However, ratification gaps, limited labour law coverage for domestic workers, and weak enforcement mean that these protections are often theoretical rather than practical.

From the workers’ perspective, the consequences do not end at the homecoming stage as many return traumatised, injured, or even pregnant due to sexual assault. Some face social stigma in conservative communities. Others return without savings or with unpaid wages. Returnee women report high levels of physical abuse, psychological trauma, and restricted access to necessities abroad. Several studies by the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) and the Oivbashi Karmi Unnayan Program (OKUP) also found that returning women experienced conditions such as denied medical care, excessive work hours, and severe abuse.

Without structured reintegration programmes, survivors often struggle to find work or receive proper medical and psychological care. Mental health support

is limited and legal redress against abusive employers abroad is rare, especially when cases are quietly resolved through repatriation without prosecution. With crimes going unpunished, the impunity of abusive and exploitative employers is reinforced.

Bangladesh must confront its own responsibilities when it comes to protecting its citizens working abroad. For one, recruitment practices need tighter regulation as sub-agents operating informally at village or neighbourhood levels often escape scrutiny. Transparent contracts in Bangla, verified job descriptions, and clear complaint channels should be made mandatory. Recruitment agencies involved in deception or trafficking should also face criminal consequences.

Pre-departure training should be strengthened not only to provide practical skills but also to inform workers about their rights, embassy contacts, and emergency procedures. Additionally, digital registration systems could track contracts and reduce substitution fraud. Bangladesh’s hotlines must be responsive and accessible from abroad.

At the same time, the Bangladesh government must take a more assertive diplomatic stance when it comes to ensuring protection for workers abroad. Embassies in destination countries need to be equipped with adequate resources to operate safe houses, provide legal assistance, and actively pursue complaints with host authorities. Simply issuing travel documents for return without seeking investigation undermines deterrence. Bilateral agreements with Gulf states should include enforceable labour protection, joint monitoring, and mechanisms to blacklist abusive employers.

Destination countries must also realise their responsibility and carry out structural reforms accordingly. Reforms to the *kafala* system must be meaningful and practically implemented. Domestic workers should be fully covered under labour laws. Passport

confiscation and other coercive tactics should be prosecuted. Independent complaint mechanisms must be accessible to workers without threats of retaliation.

The experiences of workers from Nepal, the Philippines, Ethiopia, and Sri Lanka show that this is a regional problem affecting migrant women from many developing countries. Some governments have imposed temporary bans on sending domestic workers to certain Gulf states following high-profile abuse cases. While such bans may offer short-term political signals, they neither satisfy the underlying demand for migrant domestic labour nor lessen the systemic vulnerabilities that enable exploitation.

Ultimately, this is about redefining how we value migrant labour. Bangladeshi women who travel abroad as domestic workers are not disposable labour units. They are citizens whose dignity and rights must be protected across borders. Remittances should not come at the cost of their bodily integrity and basic freedom. Calling these patterns modern-day slavery is not rhetorical excess. When deception, coercion, confinement, violence and exploitation intersect, the elements of forced labour are present. When women are isolated, abused and denied autonomy, fundamental human rights are violated.

If Bangladesh is to continue sending workers abroad, it must ensure that migration is safe, informed, and rights-based. Protection must follow the worker to her place of employment and extend throughout her return and reintegration. Each abused migrant worker represents a systemic failure. Accountability must involve recruiters, employers, and officials where negligence or complicity exists.

For Bangladesh, the challenge is clear: protect the women who sustain the nation’s economy through their labour abroad, or continue being complicit in a system that trades vulnerability for remittance.

CROSSWORD BY
THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

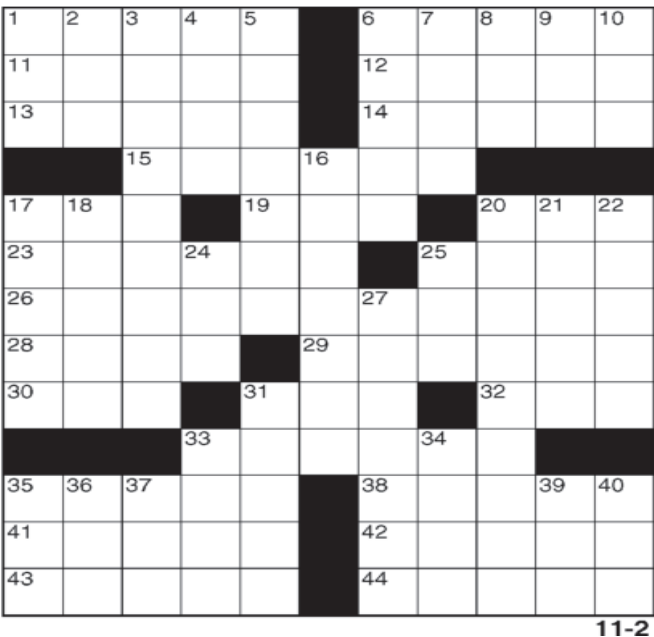
- 1 Was sore
- 6 Thoroughly disgusted
- 11 Suspicious
- 12 Bring to mind
- 13 Unadorned
- 14 Saloon quaff
- 15 Buy and sell
- 17 Brief time
- 19 Blend
- 20 Pet perch
- 23 Strangely wondrous
- 25 Make over
- 26 Absolutely sure
- 28 Rainbow shapes
- 29 Not optional
- 30 Ultimate
- 31 Braying beast
- 32 Astronaut
- Grissom

33 Fairy tale sister

- 35 Hummer’s instrument
 - 38 Play place
 - 41 Inklings
 - 42 Big name in auto racing
 - 43 “Divine Comedy” writer
 - 44 Some bow ties
- ## DOWN
- 1 Mont Blanc, for one
 - 2 Animation frame
 - 3 Team leader
 - 4 War of 1812 port
 - 5 Spirited
 - 6 Oscar’s roommate
 - 7 Skater Lysacek
 - 8 Pound occupant

9 Luau strings

- 10 Apiece
- 16 Driving need
- 17 Lot choice
- 18 Put to use
- 20 High-quality window material
- 21 Parting word
- 22 Homes for koi
- 24 Six-pt. scores
- 25 Hwy.
- 27 Regains energy
- 31 Stood
- 33 Blame recipient
- 34 Sicilian peak
- 35 Nanny’s child
- 36 Oklahoma city
- 37 Buddhism branch
- 39 Acquire
- 40 Geologic period



YESTERDAY’S ANSWERS



WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO
dsopinion@gmail.com.

I dedicate my ‘Ekushey Padak’ to Lubna Marium:

ARTHY AHMED

MAISHA TASNIM SRESHTHA

Classical dance in Bangladesh has long been associated with discipline, hierarchy and years of rigorous training. It is rarely viewed as a space for those who did not follow the traditional path from an early age. With the Ekushey Padak, the country’s second-highest ranking civilian award, in the field of dance now attached to her name, Arthy Ahmed’s work is being recognised for both her performances and her broader vision of inclusivity within classical practice.

“My work is not about perfection; it’s about celebrating dreams. Even if there are mistakes, we learn and do better next time. We have never claimed we are perfect,” says Arthy Ahmed. The philosophy sits at the heart of the initiative that earned her the prestigious honour. According to her, the honour recognises the project’s social impact rather than personal achievement.

In her telling, the award belongs as much to her gurus and students as to herself. “I wholeheartedly dedicate this honour to my Guru, Lubna Marium,” she adds, a stalwart of Bangladesh’s cultural sphere whose lifelong commitment to classical and performing arts has helped nurture successive generations of dancers and cultural practitioners.

She also sees the award as opening a door for young dance artists who might otherwise feel unseen. Such acknowledgement, she suggests, reminds younger artists that sincere and transformative work can be recognised without waiting a lifetime. Recognition at a younger age may help prevent the kind of discouragement that often pushes artists away from their practice.

Their children grow up seeing dance as part of life, rather than something exclusive.

Despite the pressures of adult life, students continue their training. In some productions, audiences have been moved to tears, not only because they relate to the stories, but because they have followed these performers’ growth over time.

However, she emphasises that the standards of classical discipline have not been compromised. Adult beginners do not perform Bharatanatyam publicly until they reach a certain level. While other forms may be explored, classical grammar consistently shapes their bodies in training.

A defining part of her practice has involved adult learners, many of whom once believed their dreams were no longer relevant. “In our society, when girls grow up, they stop prioritising themselves,” she notes. “They think it was just a childhood dream. They lose confidence that they can start something new and be appreciated.”

She has watched students return to an art form after years of absence. “When you practise an art form, your brain works differently. You start loving your body differently. It changes you as a person.”

“It doesn’t have to be dance,” she adds. “Any art form can bring that change. I want that to become part of our regular lifestyle.”

other regions. But safe space must come first. And I can’t do it alone.”

The young dance practitioner hopes other dancers will step forward to create similar spaces for adults and ordinary people in their own regions. Yet, for her, building safe spaces across the country also raises a larger concern that whether dancers themselves are able to survive and work with respect.

“As dancers, we should be able to live with dignity.

We should not have to beg for support. It should be possible to practise classical dance and still sustain ourselves.”

When asked what difference she hopes her work will make, she notes, “I want people, even those who don’t dance, to feel courageous enough to attempt the art form they’ve always wanted to try.”

The recognition reflects what she has long been working towards; making art accessible, encouraging participation, and ensuring that trained dancers are treated with respect. Over time, the initiative has evolved into what she calls an “alternate universe” within Bangladesh’s dance community — a progressive space where learners support one another despite differences in skill, a space they once only imagined as children and have now managed to build for themselves.

Such acknowledgement, she suggests, reminds younger artistes that sincere and transformative work can be recognised without waiting a lifetime.

In a rather philosophical discussion, Arthy questions why only those with proper guidance and opportunity were able to learn an art form. “Not everyone has to become a ‘renowned’ artiste. First, everyone should be granted the opportunity to learn.”

Even strong productions struggle to attract audiences beyond their usual circles. Although it is a refined art form, dance often felt distant from everyday life. She believed the real problem was limited access, even though talent was always present.

In conversations with her guru, whom she adoringly calls Lubna *khala*, discussions often centred on how to reach people outside the arts-and-culture bubble. She says, if 100 students are involved, 100 families become invested.

Arthy faced criticism in the beginning when “untrained artistes” were brought on stage. Some people were dismissive, but most were supportive. “Ninety per cent of what we received was appreciation,” she adds, explaining that audiences responded warmly to the courage of people returning to dreams they had once given up.

Since receiving the honour, Arthy feels her sense of responsibility has deepened. “My responsibility has increased, not only towards my students, but towards society and fellow dancers.”

She has also received requests from outside Dhaka. Students in other districts have spoken about limited opportunities and social taboos surrounding dance education. “I want this to grow outside Dhaka and into



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED



STYLE STATEMENT

Peter Claffey

HBO series *A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms* star Peter Claffey, who plays Dunk, looked dapper in a classic black suit, stepping away from his usual medieval attire for a sleek, modern appearance at the red-carpet premiere of the show.

Effortlessly polished and understated, his look reflected a contemporary sense of elegance rooted in simplicity. He embraced a refined aesthetic with a well-tailored ensemble in a sophisticated tone that exuded quiet confidence.

‘BAPTIZED IN FEAR’ by The Weeknd

Baptized in Fear finds The Weeknd returning to his darkest register; sleek, shadowed, and built for late-night listening. The track leans into a slow-burning atmosphere of synth haze and cinematic tension, with Abel Tesfaye’s vocals hovering between confession and performance.

Since its release, *Baptized in Fear* has quickly gained traction across streaming platforms, breaking into Spotify’s Top 20 Global in its first week and pulling in tens of millions of streams within days. Fans have gravitated toward its moody production and lyrical intensity, placing it

among his most discussed recent releases online.

With its blend of polished pop minimalism and emotional unease, The Weeknd continuing to refine the sound of nocturnal glamour, where vulnerability and spectacle sit in the same frame.



OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA

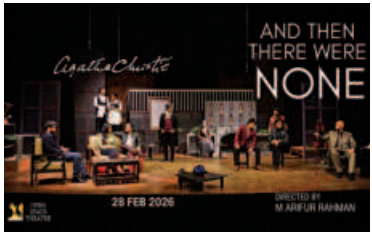


‘Witness to My Own Absence’

Feb 6-March 2 | 4-8pm
Kalakendra, Lalmatia

AND THEN THERE WERE NONE

Open Space Theatre
Feb 28 | 3:30 PM onwards
Experimental Theatre Hall, BSA



‘SANGKALAN’

Feb 20-28 | Mon-Sat | 3-9pm
Alliance Française de Dhaka, Dhanmondi

DID YOU KNOW?

Long-term air pollution exposure raises Alzheimer’s risk, especially after stroke

A new study has found that long-term exposure to air pollution increases the risk of developing Alzheimer’s disease, particularly among older adults with a history of stroke. The research was published in PLOS Medicine.

Alzheimer’s disease is the most common form of dementia, affecting about 57 million people worldwide. Previous research has already linked air pollution to Alzheimer’s and to chronic health conditions like hypertension, stroke, and depression — conditions that themselves are associated with dementia. But it was not clear whether pollution leads to dementia indirectly by causing these illnesses or whether it harms the brain directly.



To find out, the team led by Yanling Deng analysed data from more than 27.8 million U.S. Medicare recipients aged 65 and older from 2000 to 2018. They compared individuals’ long-term exposure to fine particulate air pollution with their likelihood of developing Alzheimer’s disease, while also tracking whether they had conditions such as stroke, hypertension, or depression.

The study found that people with greater exposure to fine particulate matter had a higher risk of Alzheimer’s. This risk was slightly stronger in individuals with a history of stroke, suggesting that stroke survivors may be particularly vulnerable to the effects of pollution on brain health.

These results are important for several reasons. First, they suggest that air pollution contributes to Alzheimer’s disease primarily through direct effects on the brain rather than only through other chronic illnesses. That means improving air quality could directly help protect brain health, not just heart and lung health. Second, identifying groups that are more susceptible — such as people who have had a stroke — can help doctors and carers tailor health advice and monitoring.

Women and underserved communities face biggest gaps in cataract care!

The World Health Organisation (WHO) is urging countries to accelerate access to cataract surgery, a simple and highly effective procedure that can restore sight and prevent avoidable blindness.

Cataract, a clouding of the eye’s lens that causes blurred vision and can lead to blindness, affects more than 94 million people worldwide. The surgery takes around 15 minutes and is considered one of the most cost-effective medical procedures, providing immediate and lasting restoration of vision.

A new study in The Lancet Global Health shows that nearly half of all people with cataract-related blindness still need surgery. While global coverage has improved by 15% over the past two decades, ageing populations and rising cataract cases mean demand continues to outpace progress. Current projections suggest only an 8.4% increase in coverage this decade, falling short of the 30% target by 2030 set by the World Health Assembly.

The study highlights major gaps in access, particularly in the African region, where three in four people needing surgery remain untreated. Women are disproportionately affected in all regions, reflecting long-standing barriers such as shortages of trained eye-care professionals, high costs, long waiting times, and limited awareness of treatment options.

WHO recommends integrating vision screening into primary health care, investing in surgical infrastructure, and expanding the eye-care workforce, especially in rural and underserved areas. Targeted efforts for women and marginalised communities are essential to reduce inequities.

With sustained commitment, cataract surgery can become universally accessible, helping millions regain independence, dignity, and opportunity while ending avoidable blindness worldwide.

Source: World Health Organisation

Nutrient synergy: Eating smarter for better health

RAISA MEHZABEEN & TABASSUM BINTA NOWSHAD (RAHMA)

We often admire dynamic duos in movies—Sherlock and Watson, or the Avengers—working together to achieve the impossible. Surprisingly, the same principle applies to our food. Many nutrients, while powerful alone, become even more effective when paired with others. This is the concept of nutrient synergy—when two or more nutrients work together to enhance absorption, functionality, and overall health impact.

What is nutrient synergy?
Nutrient synergy happens when the combined effect of nutrients in your body is greater than the sum of their individual effects. Take vitamin C and iron, for example. Iron from plant foods (non-heme iron) is poorly absorbed on its own, but consuming it with vitamin C from citrus fruits, bell peppers, or tomatoes dramatically improves absorption. Such combinations show how thoughtful food pairing can maximise nutrition.

Everyday examples of nutrient synergy
Many of us unknowingly benefit from nutrient synergy every day:

- **Fats + Carotenoids:** Olive oil boosts absorption of beta-carotene from carrots and lycopene from tomatoes.
- **Turmeric + Black Pepper:** Piperine in black pepper increases curcumin absorption from turmeric by up to 2,000%.
- **Magnesium + Vitamin D:** Magnesium activates Vitamin D, supporting stronger bones.

Other notable combos:

- **Calcium, Vitamin D, and K:** Vitamin D helps absorb calcium, while Vitamin K directs it to bones instead of arteries, lowering osteoporosis and heart risks. Try grilled salmon with spinach and cheese, or yoghurt with fortified cereal and broccoli.
- **Vitamin C + E:** Both are antioxidants that protect cells differently. Salads with kale, bell peppers, strawberries, and nuts, or smoothies with papaya, guava, avocado, and sunflower seeds, make great combinations.
- **B Vitamins (B6, B12, Folate):** Support metabolic health and reduce the risk of conditions like high blood pressure and high blood sugar. Eat fortified cereal with banana and milk, or a spinach and chickpea salad.
- **Potassium, Magnesium, and Calcium:** Together, they lower blood pressure and support heart, brain, and eye health. Try yoghurt with bananas and pumpkin seeds, or tofu with olive oil and leafy greens.

How to apply nutrient synergy
Applying nutrient synergy is simple:

- Add lemon juice to lentils or salads to improve iron absorption.
- Pair vitamin D-rich foods like eggs or milk with nuts or seeds.
- Combine carotenoid-rich vegetables like carrots or sweet potatoes with healthy fats.
- Mix legumes with whole grains and leafy greens for immune and metabolic support.

A word of caution
Not all nutrient combinations are beneficial. Calcium can reduce iron absorption, and tea or coffee with iron-rich meals may hinder uptake. Individual factors like age, gut health, and diet also influence nutrient absorption.

Nutrient synergy shows that health is not just about eating more—it is about eating smarter. By choosing colourful, balanced meals with complementary nutrients, we can naturally amplify the benefits of every meal, boost immunity, prevent chronic disease, and support overall wellness. Just like a great team, the right food combinations can make all the difference.

Raisa Mehzabeen is the founder & CEO of Nutrition For Change. E-mail: raisameh20@gmail.com



RAMADAN DAILY FOOD GUIDE

Nourishing your body while fasting

DR NUR A-SAFRINA RAHMAN

Ramadan is a sacred month of fasting from dawn to sunset. While fasting is primarily spiritual, proper nutrition is essential to maintain energy, hydration, and overall health. With meals limited to suhoor (pre-dawn) and iftar (sunset), a structured daily eating routine, portion control, and hydration plan help prevent fatigue, digestive issues, and dehydration.

Daily iftar routine: Breaking the fast

- 1. Start with the sunnah:** Begin with 1-3 dates and a glass of water, milk, or fresh juice. This quickly restores blood sugar, potassium, and hydration.
- 2. Light starter:** Enjoy a small bowl of lentil or vegetable soup. It gently prepares the stomach for digestion and adds extra fluids.
- 3. Main plate structure: Complex carbohydrates (1/4 plate):** Whole-grain rice, oats, barley, or wholemeal bread for slow-release energy.
Lean protein (1/4 plate): Grilled, baked, or steamed chicken, fish, beans, lentils, or eggs to support muscle repair and satiety.
Vegetables & fibre (1/2 plate): Fresh salads, sautéed vegetables, or light soups for vitamins, minerals, and hydration.
Healthy fats (small amount):

Olive oil, nuts, or seeds for nutrient absorption and fullness.

- 4. Hydration:** Sip water gradually instead of drinking large amounts at once. Include water-rich fruits like watermelon, oranges, and cucumbers. Herbal teas are a gentle alternative to caffeine.
- 5. Treats:** Fried foods and sweets are best enjoyed occasionally. Focus on moderation to prevent sluggishness.

Daily suhoor routine: Fuel for the fasting day

- 1. Focus on slow-release energy:**
Protein: Eggs, yoghurt, milk, paneer, cholar dal, moong dal, or light fish curry.
Complex carbohydrates: Whole-grain roti, brown rice, red rice (lal chaal), oats, or lightly soaked flattened rice (chira).
Fruits & vegetables: Banana, papaya, apples, cucumber, or lightly cooked greens like pui shak or spinach for fibre and hydration.
Healthy fats: Nuts (cashews, almonds), seeds (pumpkin, sesame), or a small drizzle of mustard or groundnut oil.
- 2. Example suhoor meals:**
 - Oatmeal with milk, dates, and nuts
 - Yoghurt with fruit and seeds
 - Whole-grain roti with eggs or paneer and a side of cucumber or salad

3. Tips:

- Avoid very salty or fried foods and limit caffeine to prevent thirst.
- Drink 1-2 glasses of water before dawn to stay hydrated throughout the day.

Daily practical tips for healthy fasting

- Drink 5-6 glasses of water between iftar and suhoor, spread evenly.
- Eat slowly and stop when comfortably full.
- Include light physical activity, such as a short walk after iftar, to aid digestion.
- Plan meals in advance to avoid impulsive or less nutritious choices.
- Special groups, such as the elderly or people with diabetes, should focus on easy-to-digest, nutrient-rich foods and monitor sugar intake.

By following this daily Ramadan routine, starting iftar with dates and water, eating a balanced main meal, having a slow-release suhoor, and staying hydrated, individuals can maintain energy, support overall health, and fully engage in the spiritual essence of the month. Consistency, moderation, and mindful eating turn fasting into a period of both physical well-being and spiritual growth.

E-mail: safrina.rahman@thedailystar.net

UPDATE

Next-generation flu vaccines could save millions of lives worldwide

Next-generation influenza vaccines, which aim to provide broader and longer-lasting protection than current seasonal vaccines, could significantly reduce the global burden of flu, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). Seasonal influenza causes around a billion cases each year, with 3 to 5 million leading to severe illness and an estimated 290,000 to 650,000 deaths from respiratory complications.

Current vaccines help protect against influenza, but their effectiveness varies by season, vaccine type, and age group, and protection usually lasts for only one season. WHO recommends new flu vaccine strains twice a year to keep up with evolving viruses, yet most vaccines are used in higher-income countries.

WHO’s Full Value of Improved Influenza Vaccine Assessment (FVIVA) suggests that next-generation vaccines could prevent up to 18 billion cases of influenza and save 6.2 million lives globally between 2025 and 2050, particularly among older adults, young children, and pregnant women. Wider vaccine use could also reduce unnecessary antibiotic use, helping combat antimicrobial resistance. Next-generation vaccines could avert up to 1.3 billion daily doses of antibiotics in the same period.

WHO guidance encourages developing vaccines that provide broader and longer-lasting protection, better prevent severe disease, and can be locally produced in low- and middle-income countries. People can benefit from staying informed about vaccine updates, getting vaccinated annually, and supporting efforts to make influenza vaccines more widely available.

Source: World Health Organisation



Neck pain from improper device use: Prevention and treatment

DR MEASIN ALI

In today’s digital era, smartphones, tablets, and laptops have become inseparable parts of our daily lives. From students attending online classes to professionals working long hours and individuals scrolling through social media, prolonged device use has become routine. However, improper posture while using these devices is leading to a growing health concern—neck pain, commonly known as “text neck”.

When we bend our head forward to look at a phone, the weight on the cervical spine increases significantly. A human head weighs approximately 4-5 kilograms in a neutral position. But when tilted forward at 45°-60°, the effective load on the neck can increase up to 20-25 kg. This excessive strain puts pressure on the muscles, ligaments, intervertebral discs, and joints of the cervical spine.

Over time, this abnormal stress may lead to muscle fatigue, stiffness, burning pain between the shoulder blades, headaches, and reduced neck mobility. In severe or prolonged cases, it can contribute to cervical spondylosis, nerve irritation, and even bony changes such as osteophyte (bone spur) formation.

Common symptoms

- Persistent neck stiffness and pain
- Shoulder and upper back discomfort
- Headaches, especially at the base of the skull
- Tingling or numbness in the arms



Forward head posture and rounded shoulders
Ignoring these symptoms can worsen the condition and affect productivity, sleep, and overall quality of life.

Prevention: Simple but effective measures
Fortunately, neck pain from improper device use is largely preventable with lifestyle adjustments:

- 1. Maintain proper posture:** Keep your phone at eye level instead of bending your neck downward. While working on a laptop or desktop, ensure the screen is at eye height and

your back is properly supported.

- 2. Follow the 20-20-20 rule:** Every 20 minutes, take a short break. Stretch your neck gently, roll your shoulders, and change your posture.
- 3. Use ergonomic support:** Sit on a chair with proper lumbar support. Keep both feet flat on the floor and avoid slouching.
- 4. Limit continuous device use:** Reduce unnecessary screen time, especially prolonged scrolling while lying down.
- 5. Regular exercise:** Strengthening the neck, shoulder, and upper back muscles helps maintain spinal alignment and reduces strain.

Treatment options
If neck pain has already developed, early management is essential.

- **Rest and activity modification:** Reduce activities that aggravate symptoms.
- **Hot fomentation:** Applying heat helps relax tight muscles and improve blood circulation.
- **Physiotherapy:** A structured physiotherapy programme is highly effective. Treatment may include posture correction training, manual therapy, stretching, strengthening exercises, and ergonomic education.
- **Medical consultation:** In persistent or severe cases, proper medical evaluation is necessary.

The writer is the chairman and chief consultant at Dhaka City Physiotherapy Hospital, Dharmadondi, Dhaka. Email: dreasin20@gmail.com

Synchronising brain activity makes people more generous!

A recent study suggests that coordinating activity between two brain areas can increase altruistic behaviour. Researchers from East China Normal University and the University of Zurich found that stimulating the frontal and parietal lobes together made people more likely to act unselfishly.

In the study, 44 people played a game where they had to decide how to share money with someone else. While they were making these decisions, a mild electrical stimulation was applied to their brains to make two areas work together in a specific rhythm called gamma waves.

The results showed that



participants were slightly more likely to make altruistic choices, offering more money to others even when it meant earning less for themselves. A computational model suggested that the stimulation nudged people to weigh their partner’s outcomes more in their decisions.

The study provides evidence that altruistic behaviour may depend on coordinated brain activity. Researchers caution that they did not directly record neural activity during the trials, and future studies combining stimulation with EEG could confirm the effect more clearly.

These findings suggest that our willingness to help others may not only be shaped by upbringing and culture but also by the underlying neural networks in the brain, offering new insight into the science of cooperation and generosity.

Source: PLOS Biology

India, South Africa run back 2024 final in Super Eights

Rain threat looms over England–Sri Lanka tie

AGENCIES

Ahmedabad braces for a blockbuster Super Eights clash of the ICC T20 World Cup today as unbeaten India take on equally flawless South Africa in a high-voltage rematch of the 2024 edition's final.

In that game in Bridgetown, India had come out on top by seven runs in a thrilling final to lift their second ever T20 World Cup title.

This time, both sides are eyeing to begin their Super Eights leg with a win and take early control of the four-team Group 1.

India' struggling opener Abhishek Sharman has been under the spotlight before the match. The Southpaw, who tops the ICC batters rankings in T20Is, has had three successive ducks so far and missed one game owing to sickness.

However, his captain Suryakumar Yadav has thrown his weight behind out-of-form opener and said his team will continue to "cover for him" till he returns to form.

"People who are worried about Abhishek's form, I worry for them,"



Suryakumar said with a smile. "It is a team sport, it happens. Team requires him to play with his identity, so if he fires it's okay, otherwise we are there to cover for him. Last year he covered for us, now we



will do it for him," he added. Though India topped their group and carry a 12-match unbeaten streak in T20 World Cups, their batting has yet to fully ignite.

Spin could once again shape the outcome. India boast the world's top-ranked T20 bowler in Varun Chakravathy, who has nine wickets in four matches.

But South Africa, led by Aiden Markram, arrive with momentum and balance. Their own slow-bowling options, spearheaded by Keshav Maharaj, have thrived on surfaces offering grip, while their batting unit has looked measured and adaptable.

Elsewhere, England face Sri Lanka in a rain-threatened Super Eights Group 2 match in Kandy, with skipper Harry Brook warning his side must be ready to adapt if showers reduce the contest to a sprint.

"I think you just have to prepare as if it is a T20," Brook told reporters. "I think you can sometimes go down a bit of a rabbit hole thinking that you're going to play a five-over game and then it ends up being a T20 and you kind of play it slightly differently.

"So, I think we've just got to prepare as if it is a T20 game and hope that the rain stays away. And then if it doesn't, then we've got to adapt," he added.



PHOTO: AFP

The first Super Eight match of the ongoing T20 World Cup, between Pakistan and New Zealand, was washed out at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo yesterday. Pakistan skipper Salman Ali Agha elected to bat, but relentless rain prevented any further on-field action. Both teams collected a point each, as no reserve days have been set aside for any Super Eight fixtures.

BCB-ICC tie 'not best right now'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board vice-president Faruque Ahmed said the board's relationship with the International Cricket Council is "not at its best", expressing hope that newly appointed State Minister for Youth and Sports Aminul Haque will act prudently to avoid further complications.

The BCB election on October 6 last year was marred by allegations of irregularities, including vote rigging and manipulation, and Aminul's earlier criticism of cricket administration has raised speculation over whether the current board structure will remain unchanged.

Speaking on the sidelines of an Iftar organised by the Bangladesh Sports Press Association in Gulistan, Faruque acknowledged concerns about a possible ICC embargo but avoided firm predictions.

"I believe there will be a difference between the statements he made before becoming Sports Minister and those he makes now. When you are in a position of responsibility, you have to think differently and more carefully," Faruque said.

"It is difficult to say anything definite at this moment. However, you should keep in mind that our relationship with the ICC is not at its best right now. If any incident occurs and the ICC finds fault, they may decide to take action if they wish."

WOMEN'S ASIA CUP RISING STARS

Unbeaten run fuels REDEMPTION BID

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Before departing for the ACC Women's Asia Cup Rising Stars 2026 tournament in Thailand, Bangladesh set two key objectives: to compete for the title and provide players with much-needed international exposure after a prolonged lack of matches.

Having reached the final unbeaten, Bangladesh now focus on lifting the trophy when they face India at the Terdthai Cricket Ground in Bangkok today, believing their goal of offering valuable match experience has already been fulfilled.

Leg spinner Fahima Khatun has led the side, alongside left-arm spinner Shanjida Akther Meghla and left-arm pacer Fariha Islam Trisna, who recently featured in the ICC Women's T20 World Cup qualifiers in Nepal. While Fahima is a regular in the national eleven, Meghla and Trisna have had limited opportunities due to the presence of established players such as Nahida Akter and Marufa Akter.

All three have impressed – particularly skipper Fahima, who has led from the front with 89 runs and six wickets in four matches. Meghla and Trisna have claimed seven and two wickets respectively. Shorifa Khatun and Fatema Jahan added five and four wickets, while Lata Mondol and Sarmin Sultana contributed 83 and 75



runs, highlighting the team's collective strength.

Head coach Nasiruddin Faruque expressed satisfaction, saying several players are ready to challenge for national selection.

"For the future, Farjana Easmin Medha

and Sadia Akter are performing well," Faruque told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Players like Trisna don't get many chances in the national team because Marufa usually plays as the main pacer, so this is a great opportunity for her to show her value. Meghla also doesn't get many national matches, so this tournament is a chance for them to fight for a spot.

"Fahima is doing very well so far. She hasn't had many batting opportunities in the national team, but here she is showing her skill. I planned to promote her from number six to number four in the last match, and she contributed fully."

Faruque also noted that other teams fielded experienced internationals, with India led by Radha Yadav and including Minnu Mani, Pakistan featuring Shawaal Zulfiqar, and Sri Lanka captained by Anushka Sanjeevani. "I saw India chase well against Sri Lanka [on Friday]; they are playing well," he said.

Reflecting on conditions, Faruque said the wickets in Bangkok are "tricky" and "good bowling has dominated in all the matches".

The tournament, formerly the ACC Women's T20 Emerging Teams Asia Cup, was first held in Hong Kong in 2023, where India beat Bangladesh in the final. This time, the women in red and green are determined to go one step further.

SHORT CORNER

23 Bangladeshis in The Hundred Auction

A total of 23 Bangladesh cricketers have registered for The Hundred Auction 2026 set to take place in central London on March 11 and 12. Pacer Mustafizur Rahman has the highest base price among the Bangladeshis, set at £100,000. No one from Bangladesh has ever competed in this league, which has been running since 2021.

Flick tells Barca stars to feel 'responsibility' for dip

Barcelona coach Hansi Flick told his team they must feel responsibility after two damaging defeats ahead of Sunday's clash against Levante in LaLiga. After a 4-0 thrashing by Atletico Madrid last week in the Copa del Rey semifinal first leg, Barca fell to a 2-1 league defeat against Girona on Monday, giving Real Madrid a two-point advantage at the summit.

Neymar hints at possible retirement

Former Brazil captain Neymar said he is thinking of retiring at the end of the year after being hampered by injuries but hopes to go to the 2026 World Cup first. He missed the start of the Brazilian season in January after undergoing knee surgery in late December.

Floyd Mayweather to come out of retirement

Floyd Mayweather is coming out of retirement and will return to professional boxing after his exhibition fight with Mike Tyson this spring, the 48-year-old announced Friday.

** Read full stories on The Daily Star's website

Title tension rises as Arsenal visit Spurs

AGENCIES

As the Premier League season is reaching its climax, the storyline feels all too familiar for Arsenal – points slipping away while closest rivals Manchester City gain ground.

Still, Arsenal coach Mikel Arteta insists his side must endure such crunch situations to eventually lift the title that has long eluded the Gunners.

"The more repeatedly you are in these kinds of positions, you're going to win it. ... So, first of all, you have to be there, and then in April or May, it will be decided who is the best, who can get over the line," Arteta said ahead of their visit to a spiraling Tottenham side, who are playing their first match since the firing of manager Thomas Frank on Sunday.

In the last four seasons, Arsenal have finished second – almost every time losing ground in the final stretch. To put it into perspective, during those four seasons, the Gunners dropped at least 10 more points than City in three campaigns and six more in another across the final 12 matches of each season. They lost the title race to City



twice during this period.

The omens do not look encouraging for Arsenal this time either. In one of the more shocking results of the season, Arsenal (17-3-7, 58 points) surrendered a two-goal lead in a 2-2 draw at Wolverhampton Wanderers on Wednesday.

The result trimmed the Gunners' lead to five points over Manchester City, who had a game in hand entering the weekend, and marked the second straight league match in which Arsenal squandered a lead.

That may heighten the nerves in North London. Arsenal have dropped only seven points from winning positions this season – the eighth-fewest in the league and fewer than City's 11. Arteta believes those nerves can still be channeled positively as the Gunners attempt to win their first league crown since 2003-04.

"I think it's becoming more and more exciting because that means that you are closer," Arteta said.

Meanwhile, Spurs (7-11-8, 29 points) are simply trying to steer clear of the relegation scrap, beginning the weekend in 16th place and five points above the drop zone.

That would make them eager to start life under the new coach on a positive note, adding another layer of difficulty to an already tricky trip for Arteta's Arsenal.

With the title race tightening and familiar pressure mounting, Arsenal once again find themselves walking a fine line between promise and heartbreak – knowing that how they navigate the decisive weeks ahead could finally determine whether this season ends in vindication or deja vu.



PHOTO: BFF

BANGLADESH GET GOING IN SYDNEY

Bangladesh's women's football team began preparations for the AFC Women's Asian Cup soon after arriving in Sydney on Thursday night, holding their first training session at Valentine Sports Park early the next morning. Despite travel fatigue, the squad completed a two-hour session before continuing their acclimatisation with gym work in the afternoon. Bangladesh will begin their campaign against defending champions China on March 3.



Dhaka resumes visa services in India

PORIMOL PALMA

All Bangladesh missions in India resumed visa services on Friday, signalling a step towards normalising relations between the two countries.

“We have resumed issuing visas of all categories on a limited scale since Friday and will expand the service from the coming week,” a diplomatic source in New Delhi told The Daily Star last night.

The move comes three days after the BNP-led government took oath on February 17 following a landslide victory in the February 12 polls.

The India-Bangladesh relations have been strained since the ouster of the Awami League government through a mass uprising on August 5, 2024, when the former prime minister Sheikh Hasina fled and took shelter in New Delhi.

India restricted travel visas for Bangladeshis while limiting other

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1



PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

Workers put the finishing touches on stalls at Bangla Academy yesterday ahead of the Amar Ekushey book fair, set to run from February 25 to March 15. Despite objections from several notable publishing houses, this year's fair is being held during Ramadan.

GUNMEN FACILITIES

Home ministry, police differ on withdrawal

TOUSIF KAIUM and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Uncertainty has arisen over the withdrawal of security support – including the deployment of gunmen, and in some cases, house guards – provided to at least 70 politicians and politically important individuals ahead of the 13th parliamentary election.

The facilities were approved for a limited period and were supposed to remain in

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

US evacuates troops from ME bases

Another aircraft carrier arrives in Mediterranean as military planning on Iran reaches ‘advanced stage’

AGENCIES

Hundreds of US troops have been pulled out of the Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, The New York Times reported Friday, as US President Donald Trump said he was considering limited military strikes on Iran.

Two US officials told Reuters that US military planning on Iran had reached an advanced stage, with options including targeting individuals as part of an attack and even pursuing leadership change in Tehran, if ordered by Trump.

Trump on Thursday gave Tehran a deadline of 10 to 15 days to make a deal to resolve their longstanding nuclear dispute or face “really bad things” amid a US military buildup in the Middle East that has fueled fears of a wider war.

Amid the tensions, the USS Gerald R Ford aircraft carrier, the world's biggest, was seen entering the Mediterranean Sea on Friday. The carrier was seen transiting the Strait of Gibraltar – which links the Atlantic Ocean to the Mediterranean – in a photo taken from the Gibraltar side of the strait. It will

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4

- US evacuates hundreds of troops from Qatar, Bahrain
- Trump considering limited military strikes
- Serbia, Sweden urge citizens to leave Iran
- Iran eyes draft counterproposal as talks continue

NCP mulls ties with Jamaat beyond polls

Party insiders cite reform agenda

SHAMIMA RITA

The youth-led National Citizen Party is considering transforming its electoral alliance with Jamaat-e-Islami into a political one.

Though top party leaders have remained silent on the issue, insiders say they will move ahead with Jamaat both inside and outside parliament to ensure the implementation of the reform initiatives taken by the interim government.

Some NCP leaders expressed hope that the move would help them build a strong opposition to the BNP government and push for constitutional reforms in line with the July charter.

The NCP, formed by the frontline July protesters, which contested the February 12 national election with the Jamaat-led 11-party alliance, is likely to take part in the upcoming local government polls

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

JS to convene on March 12 or earlier

Says home minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The first session of Bangladesh's newly elected 13th Parliament will take place on March 12, or possibly a day or two earlier, said Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed last night.

The home minister shared the information through a post on his verified Facebook page.

According to the post, the election for the Speaker and deputy Speaker of the House will be held during the inaugural session.

In addition, ordinances passed during the tenure of the interim government will be tabled, and a condolence motion will also be moved during the session, he added.



A physically challenged person with crutches jumps over the divider to manoeuvre past moving traffic on the road outside the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation. Dhaka still lacks adequate accessible options for people with disabilities to get across the city streets. The photo was taken yesterday in the capital's Agargaon.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

LDC GRADUATION

UN panel set to evaluate Dhaka's deferment plea

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

The Enhanced Monitoring Mechanism (EMM), a body of the UN Committee for Development Policy (UN CDP), will begin an evaluation process following Bangladesh's request to defer its graduation from the group of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) to developing nation status.

The EMM will assess Bangladesh's request in light of recent socio-economic data, cross-country experience, and progress in implementing the Smooth Transition Strategy, EMM Chief Debapriya Bhattacharya said yesterday. Debapriya, also a distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, left Bangladesh yesterday to attend a UN CDP meeting in New York, USA, from Monday to assess the situation of both graduating and recently graduated countries.

Speaking to The Daily Star before leaving, he said Bangladesh's plea to defer graduation for three years until 2029 will be discussed at the meeting, following a letter sent by Economic

Relations Department Secretary Md Shahriar Quader Siddiqui to UN CDP Chairperson José Antonio Ocampo on Wednesday.

He added that the EMM will also discuss the cases of two other nations, Nepal and Lao PDR, which are also



scheduled to graduate from the LDC group to developing nation status on November 24 this year.

However, neither Nepal nor Lao PDR applied for deferment, Debapriya said, adding that the UN CDP will also assess the country statements on the economic situation submitted by all three countries to the UN in November last year.

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Brazil, India ink critical minerals deal as leaders meet

P5



PRAYER TIMING FEBRUARY 22					
Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha	
AZAN 5:13	12:45	4:30	5:59	7:30	
JAMAAT 5:23	1:15	4:45	6:09	8:00	
SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION					

SEHRI, IFTAR TIMING			
RAMADAN	FEB	SEHRI	IFTAR
4	22		5:59
5	23	5:09	6:00
6	24	5:08	6:00

