



JU: a campus awash with colour and life

WR1



Ukrainian missiles strike Belgorod energy sites

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Inside Dana Wyse's pharmacy of desire

P8



The rice gene bank that feeds Bangladesh

WR4

'Now it's open war'

Says Islamabad as strikes hit Kabul; clashes rage across border; both sides report heavy casualties; world urges calm



Pakistan says **274** Afghan fighters killed; **74** border posts seized



Kabul claims killing **55** Pak soldiers, seizing **19** border posts

Kabul urges dialogue to resolve crisis

AGENCIES

Pakistan bombed government targets in the Afghan capital Kabul and in Kandahar, where its Taliban leadership is based, officials from both countries said yesterday, with Pakistan's defence minister calling the conflict "open war".

The Pakistani air strikes are the first time Islamabad has directly targeted Taliban installations rather than militants allegedly backed by them, a

stark rupture in ties between the Islamic neighbours, once close allies.

The strikes came after the Afghan Taliban announced a major offensive against Pakistani military posts near the border on Thursday night, following air strikes by Pakistan earlier in the week.

The latest attacks follow months of clashes between the two neighbouring nations, despite agreeing to a fragile ceasefire in October.

MORE STORIES ON PAGE 5 SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



CHILDREN'S DAY OUT AT BOI MELA... A Bengal Tiger mascot from the Kaktaria Puppet Theatre makes a sudden appearance on stage and greets children during a puppet show at the children's corner of Amar Ekushey Book Fair. As it was the weekend yesterday, many parents brought their children to the fair in Suhrawardy Udyan.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Contraceptive shortage turns alarming

Many upazilas run out of stock; govt agency to make small procurement to ease crisis

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

An acute shortage of contraceptives has hit the country as more than one-third of the 487 upazilas have run out of all types of government-supplied contraceptives, raising fears of a spike in unwanted or unplanned pregnancies.

The supply crunch, which has persisted since 2020, has turned severe, with condoms – the most widely used contraceptive – going out of stock in 397 upazilas, according to data from the Directorate General of Family Planning (DGFP).

The DGFP provides five types of contraceptives – condoms, oral pills, intrauterine devices (IUDs), injectables, and implants – free of cost through its field-level workers across the country.

At least 220 upazilas have exhausted their supplies of oral pills, while implants are out of stock in all upazilas, IUDs in 353 upazilas and injectables in 169 upazilas, show DGFP data as of February 22.

Over the past year, the supply of

CONTRACEPTIVE SUPPLY	TYPE	JAN 2019		JAN 2026	
		Supply	Stock	Supply	Stock
	Condom	99.24 lakh	7.54 lakh	7.54 lakh	7.54 lakh
	Oral pill	72.35 lakh	21.96 lakh	21.96 lakh	21.96 lakh
	Injectable	4.82 lakh	4.82 lakh	4.82 lakh	4.82 lakh
	Implant	34,982	2,325	2,325	2,325
	IUD	13,992	3,286	3,286	3,286

SOURCE: DGFP

contraceptives has declined steadily. For instance, condom supply fell to 7.49 lakh in January this year from 53.31 lakh in January last year – a drop of more than 85 percent.

Health and family planning experts warn that the crisis may have serious implications for fertility control, particularly at a time when the country has seen a rise in the total fertility rate (TFR) for the first time in five decades.

Mohammad Mainul Islam, a professor at the Population Science Department of Dhaka University,

said the fall in the contraceptive prevalence rate and the rise in the TFR indicate that the family planning programme is not functioning properly at the grassroots level.

"The disruption in contraceptive supply will directly affect people from the lower quintile, who cannot afford to buy contraceptives from the market. This could drive up unplanned and unwanted pregnancies," he told The Daily Star.

A prolonged supply crunch will lead to a rise in TFR and ultimately

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

Quakes outside seismic zones worry experts

Yesterday's 5.4 was biggest among 9 in February

PINAKI ROY

Two earthquakes within 24 hours struck the Khulna region, triggering panic in an area not typically known for seismic activity.

According to the Met office, yesterday's 5.4-magnitude quake had its epicentre in Assasuni of Satkhira, 188km southwest of Dhaka. It struck at 1:52pm.

The tremor was felt in several districts, including the capital, and in Kolkata, where people rushed out of homes, offices and schools as buildings shook across the city.

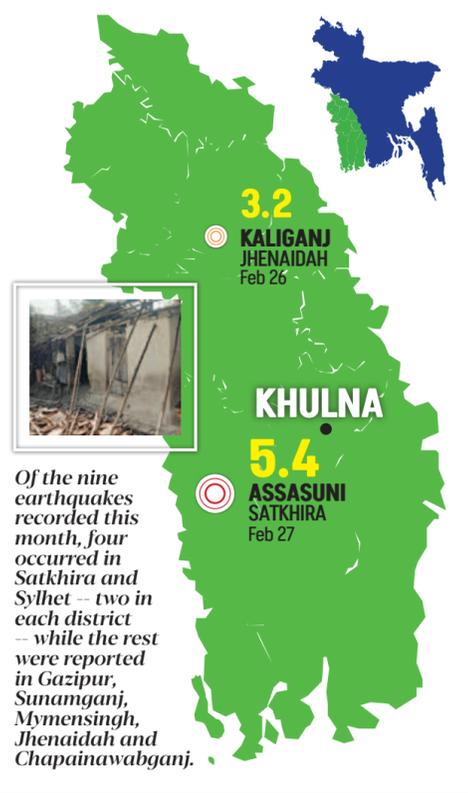
On Thursday, a 3.2-magnitude tremor originated in Kaliganj of Jhenaidah, a neighbouring district of Satkhira.

A total of nine earthquakes struck Bangladesh in the past 27 days, raising concerns among experts and residents.

Nabidul Islam, a resident of Kaliganj upazila in Satkhira, said he was sitting on his sofa when the quake struck.

"At first, I thought my head was spinning. Then I realised the sofa itself was shaking violently. I

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5 held over Narsingdi girl rape, murder

Rights orgs demand justice; protests held at DU, JU

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

Five people have been arrested in connection with the abduction and killing of a teenage girl in Madhabdi upazila of Narsingdi, in what police say was an attempt to suppress a rape incident.

The victim's mother, Fahima Begum, filed a case with Madhabdi Police Station on Thursday night, naming nine accused, said Rezaul Karim Mallik, deputy inspector general (DIG) of the Dhaka Range. He spoke to journalists at the police station yesterday noon after visiting the crime scene.

The arrestees are former member of Mahishashur union Ahmad Ali Dewan, 65; his son Imran Dewan, 25; Mohammad Ayub, 40, a cousin of prime accused Nurul; Ebaiddullah, 38; and Abdul Gaffar, 40, of Hossain Bazar area.

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BUZZING WITH ACTIVITY... With Eid approaching, roadside markets for clothes are drawing more and more crowds, especially on the weekends. The photo was taken near Motijheel Ideal School in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

BNP moves to unite grassroots ahead of local polls

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

After forming the government, the ruling BNP has shifted its focus to reorganising and strengthening its party structure, placing particular emphasis on preparations for the local government elections.

The party has made it clear that revamping its grassroots organisations is a top priority, as a strong base is essential for resolving internal issues and ensuring success in future polls.

Party leaders said before the national election, a large number of BNP leaders were expelled for defying party directives, and several key party committees were dissolved to address deep-rooted divisions at the grassroots level, which weakened the party structure and affected the unity and overall effectiveness of the party.

Three Standing Committee members said as the BNP looks forward, the challenge is clear: revitalise the party structure, address internal divisions, and strengthen grassroots unity.

Seeking anonymity, a BNP Standing Committee member said, "Without reorganising the party, implementing central party directives becomes extremely difficult. Now, our next priority is the local government polls, so before that, we are focusing on revamping the party and its wings."



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PM to launch Family Card in Bogura on Mar 10

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman is set to inaugurate the Family Card programme in Bogura Sadar upazila on March 10, Social Welfare and Women and Children Affairs Minister Dr AZM Zahid Hossain said yesterday.



Speaking to reporters in his hometown of Dinajpur, Zahid provided details about the upcoming launch.

The government is set to begin the pilot phase of its Family Card programme on March 10, with the ultimate aim of gradually bringing two crore families under monthly cash support.

Tarique will formally inaugurate the four-month pilot in 14 upazilas, where eligible families with at least five members will receive Tk 2,500 a month through direct transfers to their mobile wallets or bank accounts.

During the pilot, 6,500 families will be covered, with the scheme expanding nationwide in phases.

If fully implemented, the programme, a key election pledge of the BNP, would cost about Tk 5,000 crore a month, or roughly Tk 60,000 crore a year.

Cancel bails of Ivy, Bodi, other AL leaders

Demands Jamaat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami has expressed deep concern over the granting of bail to Awami League leaders arrested in connection with the July killings and the reopening of party offices despite a ban on its activities.

In a statement yesterday, the party's Secretary General Mia Golam Porwar alleged that leaders and activists of AL and the "fascist Hasina government" carried out indiscriminate killings of students and civilians during the July uprising.

He claimed that those directly involved in the killings are being granted bail one after another, while AL offices are reopening in different parts of the country despite the ban.

Porwar said there are fears that anti-state activities could be reorganised from those offices, calling the developments an ominous sign for democracy.

He said former Narayanganj City Corporation mayor Selina Hayat Ivy, whom he accused of being active in suppressing the July uprising, has been granted six months' interim

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1



EVERYDAY SURVIVAL in a city of surprises

RBR

A rickshaw ride in the evening is one of my favourite ways to unwind. Although pedalling through the crowded residential lanes of Dhaka is anything but relaxing, I love it nonetheless.

One reason, beyond the simple joy of the evening breeze brushing against my face, is the presence of street vendors. I enjoy watching what they sell, their exchanges with customers, the bargaining wars, the light banter, and sometimes even the mood swings or flare-ups.

It could be an old man, bent with age, selling overpriced bananas and claiming they're from the famous Narsingdi plantation. Or a street-smart middle-aged woman seated beneath the wide canopy of an old tamarind tree, offering uncommon vegetables from her homestead, such as banana pith or in-season bok phul (literally "heron flower"). We Bangladeshis, after all, love to batter-fry anything remotely edible.

On one such ride, I stumbled upon a traditional handwoven bamboo shorposh, commonly known as jaali or food covers in Bengali households. Crafted from thin, flexible, and sustainable bamboo splits, this dome-shaped lid was once a common household essential. Today, plastic has replaced these indigenous home accessories.

In a city like Dhaka, finding a

bamboo shorposh feels not only like discovering a collectible antique by sheer stroke of luck but also like reconnecting with eco-friendly alternatives, just like in the old days.

Tucked into a small rag-and-bone cart belonging to 46-year-old Md Shaheen Hossain, who is not merely a hawk, but perhaps better described as a purveyor or stockist, the bamboo shorposh was displayed alongside other artisanal crafts.

Shaheen sells inexpensive products that were once common in Bengal's rural and urban homes but are now edged out by modern lifestyles.

His cart is parked along the narrow curbs of Uttara Sector 3 and is nothing short of a treasure trove. Shaheen once ran a cosmetic shop in Brunei, but the pandemic forced him to abandon his flourishing business. "I came back to Dhaka and was out of a job for a long time, until last year, when I decided to sell local handicrafts. The idea came to me while browsing Facebook and Instagram, going through ads, newspaper supplements, and features on local products," he recalls.

Shaheen now sources traditional Bangladeshi crafts directly from village artisans and brings them to the city. His cart carries accessories made from wood, cane, betel nut husk fibre, and kans grass: hand-painted bamboo jewellery boxes, multipurpose baskets, and neem-wood combs. Each item has its own character — perfectly

shaped wooden bowls, polished plates, coconut husk ladders, and spatulas.

He sources crafts from as far as Jashore, Barishal, and beyond.

"I have an eye for beautiful and uncommon items. Since the pavements are crowded with vendors selling clothes, ceramics, glassware, fruits, and vegetables, I dared to place these earth-conscious, simple living products among them. I feel delighted that taking a chance with handicrafts worked out for me; customers appreciate my holistic products," he says, adding that his sales are enough to put his only son through school.

This Eid, I thought of buying these thoughtful items as gifts instead of the usual clothes and jewellery. These slow interior accessories are my absolute favourites; they spark joy in me, and gifting them will allow my personal preference to be in use again.

To me, Shaheen offers more than just products; he embodies prestige, shares the stories of artisans, and breathes life into forgotten crafts by bringing them back into everyday use. It is people like him, with their enterprising spirit, who write the stories of my Dhaka.

As I pass by in the rickshaw, I often stop at these vans, though I rarely ask the vendors about their lives. Yet, each man standing under the streetlight, braving the mosquito riot, has inked his own story of everyday survival in this city of surprises.

Dhaka condemns Israeli legislation on land purchase

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has unequivocally condemned the recent Israeli legislation on land purchase, which aims at unlawfully annexing the occupied Palestinian territory.

In his address to the Open-Ended OIC Executive Committee Meeting at the Level of Foreign Ministers in Saudi Arabia on Thursday, Bangladesh Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman said this action by Israel is designed to alter the legal and demographic character of the Palestinian lands, including the Al Quds Al Sharif, according to a statement of the foreign ministry.

Khalilur expressed grave concern over the fact that the Israeli decision to ease land purchase and open land registries in the West Bank to public scrutiny exposes the Palestinian landowners to multiple forms of intimidation and harassment.

He noted that these actions are clearly in breach of relevant international law and undermine the very foundations of a just and lasting social order.

The foreign minister categorically stated that the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State following the two-State formula under 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, can offer a sustainable solution to this long-protracted crisis.

He outright rejected the land-related legislation of Israel and demanded the protection of the due

SEE PAGE 9 COL 3

Israeli fire kills 8 people in Gaza

Civil defence reports as truce deal staggers

REUTERS, Cairo

Israeli attacks killed five people in Gaza on Thursday night, the territory's health officials said, and the Israeli military said it killed a Palestinian who posed a threat to its forces in the south of the enclave.

Medics said an Israeli airstrike against a group of Palestinians in Gaza City's Tuffah neighbourhood in northern Gaza killed two people and wounded several others.

Five people were killed and several others injured, some critically, in Israeli drone strikes on two police checkpoints in southern Gaza's Khan Younis and in the Abu Hujair area northwest of the Bureij refugee camp later in the day, medics said.

The Israeli military did not immediately comment on the reports.

Separately, the Israeli military said forces operating in the southern Gaza Strip killed a Palestinian who posed an imminent threat to them after he crossed into an area still occupied by Israel inside the enclave.

It described the incident as a violation of the US-brokered ceasefire between Israel and Hamas that began last October.

Gaza has been reduced to rubble in the war that was triggered by an attack by the Palestinian group Hamas on southern Israel on October 7, 2023.

The Gaza health ministry says more than 72,000 people, mostly civilians, have been killed by Israeli fire since then. It also says that at least 600 people have been killed by Israeli fire since a ceasefire agreement came into effect last October.

'Now it's open war'

FROM PAGE 1

Last year's negotiations failed to reach a broader agreement for a complete end to hostilities, with both sides blaming each other for not engaging seriously with talks.

Security sources in Pakistan said the strikes involved air-to-ground missile attacks on Taliban military offices and posts in Kabul, Kandahar, and Paktia province. There were ground clashes in multiple sectors along the border between the Islamic nations.

The Taliban said it launched what it described as retaliatory attacks on Pakistani military installations. Both sides reported heavy losses, issuing sharply differing figures that Reuters could not independently verify.

Shehbaz Sharif, Pakistan's prime minister, said the country's forces "have the full capability to crush any aggressive ambitions".

"Our cup of patience has overflowed. Now it is open war between us and you (Afghanistan)," Pakistani Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif said yesterday.

The strikes threaten to unleash a protracted conflict along the 2,600-km (1,615-mile) frontier, with relations between Kabul and Islamabad shattered by a long-running dispute over Pakistan's accusation that Afghanistan harbours militants carrying out attacks across the border.

A Pakistan military spokesperson said air strikes hit 22 Afghan military targets. At least 12 Pakistani soldiers and 274 Taliban officials and militants have been killed since Thursday night. "Operation is continuing on the directions of the prime minister," military spokesperson Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry told reporters.

However, Mujahid, the Taliban spokesperson, said 55 Pakistani soldiers were killed, and 19 posts seized, while eight Taliban fighters were killed, 11 wounded, and 13 civilians injured in Nangarhar province.

"Still, right now, Pakistani planes, reconnaissance aircraft, are flying over Afghanistan's airspace," Mujahid said, adding that Afghanistan wants

to resolve the conflict with Pakistan through dialogue.

After a lull in fighting, an AFP journalist on the Afghan side heard incoming shellfire from around 9:30am, before cross-border clashes resumed near the key Torkham border crossing. He saw Afghan soldiers heading towards the frontier before being told to leave the area by the security forces.

The escalation drew calls for calm from world leaders.

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan discussed the conflict between Afghanistan and Pakistan in separate calls yesterday with counterparts from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, a Turkish diplomatic source said.

Russia, the only country to formally recognise the Taliban government, called for an end to hostilities and said it would consider mediating talks if asked by both parties, state media reported citing Moscow's foreign ministry.

China's foreign ministry said it had been mediating in the conflict through its own channels and was deeply concerned about the escalation. Iran offered to help facilitate dialogue between the two countries, reports AFP.

Meanwhile, India "strongly condemns Pakistan's airstrikes on Afghan territory".

In a statement posted on X, Randhir Jaiswal, spokesperson for India's Foreign Ministry, said the attacks have led to civilian casualties, including women and children, during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

"It is another attempt by Pakistan to externalise its internal failures. India reiterates its support for Afghanistan's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence."

Pakistan has been on high security alert since it launched air strikes earlier this week that Islamabad said targeted camps of Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP), or Pakistani Taliban, and Islamic State militants in eastern Afghanistan.

Videos shared by Pakistani

security officials showed flashes of light in the night from firing along the border and the sound of heavy artillery. A video of strikes on Kabul, for which Reuters was able to verify the location, showed thick plumes of black smoke rising from two sites and a massive blaze in part of the capital.

Kabul taxi driver Tamim said he was asleep when he heard the sound of an aircraft, which was followed by strikes on what appeared to be a weapons depot.

"We woke up, and the plane came and dropped two bombs, then flew away again. After that, we heard explosions," he said.

"Everyone, in panic, ran down from the second floor of the house. The ammunition inside the depot kept exploding on its own."

Reuters witnesses in Kabul said many ambulance sirens could be heard following loud blasts and the sound of jets.

Pakistan's military capabilities are vastly superior to Afghanistan's. However, the Taliban are adept at guerrilla warfare, hardened by decades of fighting with US-led forces, before returning to power in 2021.

Relations between the neighbours have plunged in recent months, with land border crossings largely shut since deadly fighting in October that killed more than 70 people on both sides.

Negotiations facilitated by Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia brought an end to the hostilities.

Islamabad accuses Afghanistan of failing to act against militant groups that carry out attacks in Pakistan, which the Taliban government denies.

Most of the attacks have been claimed by the TTP, a militant group that has stepped up assaults in Pakistan since the Afghan Taliban returned to power.

The overnight strikes mark a "significant and dangerous escalation from earlier clashes", South Asia expert Michael Kugelman said on X.

"Pakistan appears to have expanded its targeting beyond TTP to the Taliban regime itself," he said.

Contraceptive shortage turns alarming

FROM PAGE 1

create obstacles to achieving the demographic dividend, he added.

DGFP officials said a major project to purchase all types of contraceptives, approved in November last year, is still at the initial stage, and it will take at least four months to complete the procurement process.

To ease the crisis, DGFP has moved to make a small procurement of condoms and oral pills on an emergency basis, but it is unlikely to restore the supply to normal levels, they said.

The grim picture emerges around three months after the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2025, published in November last year, found that TFR rose to 2.4 from 2.3 in 2019.

It also revealed that the use of contraceptives and access to modern contraception have declined, indicating a direct link between the rise in TFR and the shortage of contraceptives.

As a large number of rural people rely on these government-supplied contraceptives, the fall in supply is likely to affect birth control efforts.

The use of contraceptives by married women aged 15 to 49 dropped to 58.2 percent from 62.7 percent in 2019 — the highest in the country. Access to modern contraception also declined, meeting the needs of 73.5 percent of women compared to 77.4 percent in 2019, said the survey carried out by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in collaboration with UNICEF.

In January 2019, the supply of condoms was 99.24 lakh, oral pills 72.35 lakh, injectables 9.5 lakh, IUDs 0.14 lakh, and implants 0.35 lakh.

The stock gradually declined and reached its lowest level in January this year, when condom supply dropped to 7.54 lakh. Stocks of oral pills stood at 21.96 lakh, injectables at 4.82 lakh, IUDs at 3,286 and implants at 2,325.

SEVERE CRISIS

According to DGFP data, 397 upazilas have run out of condoms, while 50 upazilas face a potential stock-out, with supplies expected to last up to 18 days. Another nine upazilas are understocked, with supplies that may last up to 48 days.

Seven upazilas have satisfactory stocks, with supplies sufficient to last between 51 and 90 days. At least 24 upazilas are overstocked, meaning they have supplies that may last more than

three months.

The data show that 221 upazilas have run out of oral pills, while 125 upazilas face a potential stock-out and 63 are understocked. Only 41 upazilas have satisfactory stocks, and 37 are overstocked.

This correspondent spoke to three deputy directors at the district level, and all of them said the crisis had gone from bad to worse.

"The supply crunch has continued for over a year. We received very limited quantities of contraceptives during the period, and the situation has worsened further," said a deputy director from a district in Rajshahi division, seeking anonymity.

"We now have less than a month's stock of injectables. Our field-level workers are coming under pressure from service seekers," the official said, adding that the adverse impact of the supply disruption will be visible in two to three years.

Abdur Razzaque, director of the Logistics and Supply Unit, said the government approved a Tk 1,664 crore project in November last year to procure contraceptives, but the project director was appointed only last week.

"The official will now initiate the procurement process, but it will take at least four months to complete," he told this correspondent on February 22.

For the time being, DGFP has started the process of purchasing 12 million condoms and three million oral pills, using available funds, Razzaque said.

"We hope to receive the condoms after Eid-ul-Fitr, but it will take some more time to get the oral pills. However, the quantity is too small to mitigate the crisis."

ORIGIN OF THE CRISIS

DGFP officials said the unmet demand for contraceptives rose sharply during the Covid pandemic that hit the country in 2020. However, the then government deprioritised family planning instead of increasing contraceptive supply.

The crisis deepened in June 2024 following the expiry of the Fourth Health, Population and Nutrition Sector Programme (HPNSP) under which most contraceptives were bought in the past.

When contacted, DGFP Director General Ashraf Ahmad said, "We have not been able to procure contraceptives since 2023, except for an insignificant quantity last year."

"The crisis has had a cumulative effect. We cannot deny it... To be frank, family planning did not receive priority at that time," she told this correspondent on February 22.

When asked about the rising trend in TFR, she said, "This crisis will not disappear overnight. It will have long-term effects."

Replying to another query, she said a new administration has taken charge and the issue will be brought to its attention with the aim of mitigating the crisis.

World must not normalise use of force

FROM PAGE 12

becoming a more dangerous place".

Turk said there was the increasingly relentless competition for power for power's sake, to the detriment of rights everywhere.

"Players compete for control over land, energy, attention. But to what end?" he asked.

"Dominating the global economy? Accumulating more power? Putting AI into space? Surely power must serve other purposes."

Turk slammed leaders who "use power for their own ends, (who) exploit and subjugate," adding that it was "baffling that political leaders are not taking urgent steps to reverse (current) trends".

Instead some were actually "attacking the institutions designed to keep us safe — the United Nations, including International Court of Justice; the International Criminal Court; this Council, and its mechanisms".

Turk said a decade ago, "an attack on a hospital triggered a global outcry... (But) recent figures show there are now an average of 10 attacks per day on healthcare".

"The world cannot stand by as the edifice of international humanitarian and human rights law is dismantled before our eyes," he said.

Tax hike crucial for economic recovery

Says Khosru

STAFF CORRESPONDENT,
Ctg

Finance and Planning Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury



yesterday said raising taxes is crucial to pull the country out of the current economic downturn.

"The priority is to increase taxes. Through higher taxes, we must attract more domestic and foreign investment. Creating new employment is our [BNP's] one of the main objectives. If investment grows, it will, in turn, create more jobs," he told reporters while visiting the site of a proposed government hospital in his electoral area at Patenga's Jele Para.

He also said that employment, education, and health would remain top priorities in the upcoming national budget.



Two children burst into laughter while flipping through books at a stall at the Amar Ekushey Book Fair at the Suhrawardy Udyan yesterday. Marking 'Shishu Prohor', the fairgrounds were filled with young visitors and their guardians, creating a lively and festive atmosphere as children browsed colourful books, drawing notebooks, rhymes and story collections.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

PM shares warm moments with children



UNB, Dhaka

The solemnity of Juma prayers gave way to smiles and laughter as Prime Minister Tarique Rahman yesterday paused to spend warm, unhurried moments with children and adolescents outside a mosque at Dhaka's Banani.

Surrounded by curious children, he exchanged greetings, shared light-hearted remarks and posed for photographs, turning an ordinary afternoon into a memorable encounter for many.

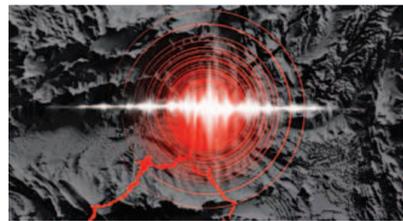
The PM Tarique offered Juma prayers at the central mosque of the Navy Headquarters in Banani, while his wife, Dr Zubaida Rahman, also offered her prayers in a separate area of the mosque for women, the PM's additional press secretary Atikur Rahman Rumon.

After the prayers, as the PM was leaving, he went to greet the children and adolescents outside the mosque, exchanged pleasantries with them and inquired about

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

'Strongest tremor in our memory'

Residents recount moments of terror as 5.4 quake jolts Satkhira



OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Satkhira was jolted by a sudden earthquake yesterday at 1:52pm.

The tremor was measured at 5.4 on the Richter scale, with the epicentre near Assasuni upazila, about 18 kilometres south east of Satkhira town, said Zulfikar Ali, acting officer at Bangladesh Meteorological Department, Satkhira.

Local residents, including worshippers offering Juma prayers at mosques, felt the tremor for several seconds. Many families, scared and panicked, rushed down staircases.

Residents, visibly shaken by the quake, said it was the strongest in memory.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer Saiduzzaman Imu said the earthquake caused strong tremor and widespread panic, but no damage has been reported so far.

Alauddin Hossain, who was at a mosque in Assasuni, said, "I felt the jolt right in my chest."

Rabul Alam and Tuhin Gazi recounted that they were offering prayers in Kulla Baitul Aman Jame Mosque when the ground started shaking violently.

"People in our building started running for their lives. Thankfully, there were no casualties," said Abdul Ali, owner of a two-storey building.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

Forced to travel 250km for treatment

Critical Ctg burn patients referred to Dhaka for lack of facilities; China-aided hospital delayed for a year

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

Critical burn patients in the port city are being forced to travel over 250km to Dhaka for life-saving treatment due to a severe lack of facilities in Chattogram.

The tragic death of five members of a family following a gas explosion in Halishahar this week has once again highlighted the absence of a specialised burn ICU in Chattogram, leaving millions of residents vulnerable to healthcare gaps.

The victims were initially rushed to Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH). However, with most suffering from severe inhalation burns and over 40 percent body surface burns, they required immediate ICU and HDU support. Currently, CMCH lacks a specialised burn ICU, forcing relatives into a frantic, and often fatal, search for ICU-equipped ambulances to transport them to Dhaka.

"It took hours just to manage an ICU ambulance," said Mohammad Jamsheer, a relative of the family affected by the Halishahar explosion on Monday. "One died on the way to Dhaka, and another died just after reaching the capital. If we had these facilities here, they might have survived."

For years, the four crore people residing in the greater Chattogram region have relied on a 26-bed burn unit (Ward 36) at CMCH, which lacks modern specialised equipment.

The deaths have reignited the demand for the completion of the

"China-Aid Project of Burn Unit of CMCH." The Tk 285 crore project, largely funded by the Chinese government, is currently under construction in the city's Goachi Bagan area.

According to sources, the project is set to end in June 2026. The Chinese government will fund Tk 179.83 crore as a grant.



The work for 'China-Aid Project of Burn Unit of CMCH' continues in the city's Goachi Bagan area.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

A formal agreement was signed on March 13, 2023 to establish a 150-bed burn unit at the Goachi Bagan site.

Following the fall of the Awami League government on August 5, 2024, the pace of the project temporarily slowed down due to the shifting political landscape, said CMCH sources.

Despite the earlier slowdown,

work resumed with land preparation starting at the beginning of last year. Physical construction work officially commenced, marking the transition from planning to actual building in June 2025.

Contacted, Dr Rafiq Uddin Ahmed, head of CMCH Burn and Plastic Surgery Unit, said, "So far the progress of the project work is

26 percent, and we have applied for an extension of the project deadline till June 2027."

He said they currently treat nearly 15,000 patients a year with almost zero vacant beds. "We try our best with limited resources, but without an ICU, we have no choice but to refer critical cases to Dhaka."

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

Little ones bring joy to book fair

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

There had been growing concerns surrounding the fair due to last-minute complications.

The issues were resolved only four days before the opening, leaving little time for preparation. The lack of readiness was still evident across the fairgrounds.

Yet, on the second day, the venue came alive with the cheerful buzz of children.

Yesterday was the first Shishu Prohor (Children's Hour) of the fair.

The gates opened shortly after 11:00am, but from early morning, children and their guardians were waiting in line.

Inside, children wandered from stall to stall, browsing books, taking photos, and playing. Many were seen buying books.

The main attraction was a puppet show. Zahriya, a third grade student, walked hand in hand with her mother, stopping at different stalls to flip through cartoon-illustrated books.

She later stood in front of the puppet stage, eagerly waiting for the show.

At one point, a voice called out from behind the stage: "Friends, how are you all? We are ready -- come join us."

Instantly, Zahriya and the other children rushed forward and sat down. Rows of eager faces filled the mat covered floor, while parents stood behind them.

Children's Hour created a different atmosphere at the fair. Beyond the main stage, smaller stalls displayed colourful books, drawing notebooks, rhymes, and story collections, adding to the festivities.

Asaduzzaman Ashiq, founder of Kakataruya Puppet Theatre, said children easily absorb stories.

"Through puppet shows, we entertain them

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

32 out of 36 brick kilns in Netrakona illegal: DoE

JAYDUL ISLAM, Netrakona

Of the 36 brick kilns operating across nine upazilas in Netrakona, 32 have been identified as illegal, according to the Department of Environment (DoE).

The kilns have been established on agricultural land and near residential areas, educational institutions, roads, and railway lines, using fertile topsoil from croplands to manufacture bricks, and burning firewood instead of coal, thereby violating existing regulations.

Despite court directives to shut down the illegal kilns, locals allege that the orders have not been effectively implemented, raising concerns about the lack of enforcement by local administration and the DoE.

As per Section 5 of the Brick Manufacturing and Brick Kiln Establishment (Control) Act, 2013, the use of topsoil from agricultural land, hills, and mounds is prohibited for brick production.

Under Section 6, anyone using wood as fuel for burning bricks faces up to three years' imprisonment, a fine of Tk 3,00,000, or both. Section 8 further prohibits the establishment of brick kilns in residential, reserved, or commercial areas; within city corporations, municipalities, or upazila headquarters; on government or privately owned forests; sanctuaries; gardens; wetlands; and agricultural land.

The kilns must also maintain a minimum distance of one kilometre from forests, special installations, railway lines, educational institutions, hospitals, and research centres.

Considering these provisions, many previously issued clearances have been revoked.

Sources at the DoE's Netrakona office said that in 2022, then-inspector Sushil Kumar Das filed multiple cases with the



Netrakona Special Magistrate's Court. Judge Suhel Mroing imposed fines of varying amounts on the illegal kilns and ordered them to relocate to legal and environmentally compliant sites by December that year.

The court also instructed the assistant director of the DoE to demolish the illegal kilns.

However, kiln owners appealed against

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1



Buddhist monks distribute iftar items to fasting Muslims at the Dharmarajik Buddhist Monastery in Basabo, Dhaka, yesterday. Organised daily by the monastery authorities during Ramadan, the programme serves 200-250 people and stands as a gesture of communal harmony and mutual respect.

PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

Govt to revive non-functional institutions

Says Fakhrul

BSS, Thakurgaon

LGRD Minister Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday said the government is working to make state institutions, long rendered ineffective, functional and properly institutionalised once again.

He also confirmed that local government elections will be held on schedule.

Mirza Fakhrul, also the BNP secretary general, made the remarks while responding to journalists after laying the foundation stone of a multi-storey building at Hajipara Hafizia Madrasa in Thakurgaon.

In reply to a question, he said, "For a long time, we have heard that the previous fascist government had weakened various state institutions and rendered them ineffective. The major challenge before the new government is to restructure these institutions, ensure accountability, and restore the framework of good governance."

He further said, "I am most indebted to the people of Thakurgaon. They supported me by giving their valuable votes. I want to work responsibly to repay their trust and affection."

Man burnt in Old Dhaka AC blast dies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A man who suffered burns along with his parents in an explosion at their Old Dhaka residence early yesterday died last night.

Selim Bepari, 25, breathed his last around 10:00pm at the National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery, confirmed Dr Shawon Bin Rahman.

Selim had suffered 100 percent burns and his airway was severely damaged, he added.

His parents - Mukter Bepari, 55, and Selina Begum, 46 - are undergoing treatment at the institute with 22 percent and 20 percent burns, respectively. The explosion occurred around 12:30am yesterday inside their flat in Narinda.

Fire Service said the fire originated from an air conditioner compressor blast. However, locals managed to extinguish the blaze and rush the victims to the hospital before firefighters arrived.

Abir Hossain, Selim's cousin, said Mukter, who owns a shop selling AC and refrigerator compressors in Dholaipar, used to store merchandise, including compressors, inside their flat.



Fishermen aboard a boat on the Kirtankhola River set out to catch fish in nearby rivers in Barishal. The photo was taken in the district's Charmonai area yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

KALAPARA OF PATUAKHALI

Schoolteacher's home declared a bird haven

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

In Musulliyabad village under Kalapara upazila of Patuakhali, the house of a schoolteacher has been declared a bird haven.

A signboard declaring the house a "Colony of Native and Migratory Birds" was unveiled on Thursday afternoon, formally acknowledging and honouring schoolteacher Akhteruzzaman's decades-long devotion to protecting and nurturing birds.



The house, now renamed "Bihanga Bilash", has long been a haven where many avian species found shelter and sustenance.

For nearly 40 years, Akhteruzzaman has hosted generations of birds, with their presence filling the air with a chorus of chirps and calls. White egrets, cormorants, and



several other species, as well as bats find refuge here, making his house and adjoining banana plantation a lively theatre of nature's rhythms.

The story of this unique habitat first appeared in The Daily Star on October 1 last year, prompting the administration to formalise the recognition.

Yasin Sadiq, assistant commissioner (Land) in Kalapara, represented the local administration and formally declared the home a bird sanctuary. Officer-in-Charge of Payra Port River Police Nayan Arkun, and members of Animal Lovers of

Patuakhali, an animal rights and welfare group, who have long supported the teacher's efforts, were present.

Highlighting the teacher's unwavering commitment, Yasin said, "Akhteruzzaman has taken sincere initiatives to ensure a safe habitat for migratory and other birds, and raised a banana plantation on 33 decimals of land solely to provide food for birds."

Akhteruzzaman's initiative first came to attention through media reports, leading Yasin Sadiq to inform the Patuakhali deputy commissioner.

"He then instructed us to

install a signboard here," Yasin added.

He also noted that Kalapara, already a popular tourist destination, may now see visitors drawn to the sanctuary.

"Such initiatives encourage kindness towards birds and other animals and may open a new horizon for tourism," he added.

Talking to this correspondent, Akhteruzzaman said, "The birds have now become part of our family. Most of them collect their food from nature. Even so, I have set aside 33 decimal of my land to grow a banana plantation specifically for the birds. The fruits are meant only for them. Now the villagers have also become very caring toward the birds."

"At times, many injured birds come to our house. We provide them with treatment. All members of our family keep watch to ensure the birds' safety," he also said.

"I hope everyone will come forward to help protect birds, which play a vital role in maintaining ecological balance," Akhteruzzaman added.

Man beaten to death, brother hurt 'by neighbours'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

A man was beaten to death and his brother injured allegedly by their neighbours following a dispute over setting up a clothesline in Faridpur yesterday morning.

The deceased was identified as Jewel Ahmed, 40. His younger brother, Sohel Ahmed, 24, was admitted to Faridpur Medical College Hospital.

Locals said one Md Sarfaraz, 55, who earns a living by making and selling paper bags, lived in Goalchamot Mollah Bari Road area under Sadar upazila with his wife Moni Begum and sons Shahriyar, 22, and Rifat.

Moni Begum attempted to fix a bamboo pole and string a clothesline along Jewel's boundary, leading to an altercation.

Witness Sajib Sheikh said Sarfaraz, his sons, and two of his employees broke into Jewel's house and beat him and Sohel. Jewel was declared dead at the hospital.

Faridpur Kotwali Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md Shahidul Islam said Sarfaraz and Moni Begum were detained.

3 DB men attacked in Manikganj; 9 held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Three members of Manikganj district Detective Branch (DB) of police, including a sub-inspector, were injured in an attack while conducting an anti-drug operation in the district's Singair upazila on Thursday.

Police arrested nine people in connection with the incident as of last evening.

Singair Police Station OC Mazharul Islam said a DB team, led by SI Md Anwar Hossain, went on an operation in Char Ulail village under Dhalla union on Thursday afternoon.

During the drive, one Md Lablu alias Labu Mia, 45, was arrested with 20 pieces of yaba pills.

Three of the team were injured as they were attacked by Lablu's relatives and some locals on

SEE PAGE 9 COL 3

'No more office-to-office hassle' Land minister says govt planning one-stop service

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Land Minister Mizanur Rahman Minu yesterday said the government is moving to introduce one-stop service centres across the country to reduce public suffering by addressing long standing complexities and irregularities in land-related services.

The initiative, he said, is being planned following models used in developed countries.

"The core objective of modernising the land ministry is to ensure hassle-free services for ordinary people. For years, citizens have had to move from one office to another at different stages of land-related processes, often facing harassment and unnecessary delays," he told reporters at a community centre in Rajshahi city.

LEGAL NOTICE
IN THE SUPREME COURT OF BANGLADESH
HIGH COURT DIVISION
(STATUTORY ORIGINAL JURISDICTION)
COMPANY MATTER NO. 194 OF 2026.

IN THE MATTER OF:
Md. Mufassir Ali Talukder, Managing Director and Shareholder, The Decision Maker Ltd. (Reg. No. C-165623, Reg. Date: 11-NOV-2020) of House No-64, East Jinnah Afsar Karim Road, P.O.- Faridabad, P.S.- Kadomtali, Dhaka-1204, Dhaka. ----- PETITIONER.

VERSUS
The Registrar of Joint Stock Companies & Firms, TCB Bhaban, 33 Karwan Bazar, Dhaka and another. ----- RESPONDENT.

This is to notify of all concern that The Decision Maker Ltd. has filed an application under Section 81(2) and 85(3) read with Section 396 of the Companies Act, 1994 before the Hon'ble High Court Division for condonation of delay in AGM of the Company for the year of 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025. That the Company Bench of the Hon'ble High Court Division upon hearing the learned advocate for the petitioner was pleased to admit the application vide order dated 22.02.2026 and directed to file the compliance within 03(three) weeks. If any person or body of persons has got any interest on the matter may appear before the court on the date so fixed for hearing. A copy of the application may be obtained from the undersigned on payment of prescribed fees.

Md. Faizullah
Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh. Mob: 01723511044

LEGAL NOTICE
IN THE SUPREME COURT OF BANGLADESH
HIGH COURT DIVISION
(STATUTORY ORIGINAL JURISDICTION)
COMPANY MATTER NO. 193 OF 2026.

IN THE MATTER OF:
Azadul Haque, Managing Director and Shareholder, Partners Box Company Limited. (Reg. No. C-174692), Rangs Paramount-2, level-5, Block-K, Plot-11, Road No -17, Banani, Dhaka. ----- PETITIONER.

VERSUS
The Registrar of Joint Stock Companies & Firms, TCB Bhaban, Karwan Bazar, Dhaka and another. ----- RESPONDENT.

This is to notify of all concern that Partners Box Company Limited has filed an application under Section 81(2) and 85(3) read with Section 396 of the Companies Act, 1994 before the Hon'ble High Court Division for condonation of delay in AGM of the Company for the year of 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025. That the Company Bench of the Hon'ble High Court Division upon hearing the learned advocate for the petitioner was pleased to admit the application vide order dated 22.02.2026 and directed to file the compliance within 03(three) weeks. If any person or body of persons has got any interest on the matter may appear before the court on the date so fixed for hearing. A copy of the application may be obtained from the undersigned on payment of prescribed fees.

Md. Faizullah
Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh. Mob: 01723511044

Strongest

FROM PAGE 3
Purbopod Mallik, another homeowner in Harinagar village, shared a similar experience.

In Satkhira town, Jahangir Hossain said, "As soon as I felt the tremor, I just picked up my child and rushed out to the street. My heart is still pounding."

In the mini market area, shopkeeper Shariful Islam said he was busy in his shop, but ran out as soon as he felt a sudden jolt.

Asked about any fault line in Satkhira, Prof Syed Humayun Akhter, former chairman of the Department of Geology at Dhaka University, said that only a fault line is not responsible for a tremor. It can happen for several other reasons. "Another tremor happened in Satkhira around 10-12 years back," he mentioned.

Forced to travel

FROM PAGE 3
Once finished, the six-storey facility will house 150 beds, including 10 ICU beds, 25 HDU beds (dedicated sections for men, women, and children), three state-of-the-art operating theatres, and hyperbaric oxygen therapy (currently available only in Dhaka), he said.

Brigadier General Taslim Uddin, director of CMCH, said there is no funding crisis, as the Chinese government is providing the equipment and overseeing construction. "Once they hand it over next year, we will be able to treat the most critical patients right here," he said.

PM shares warm moments

FROM PAGE 3
The children replied in unison, "We also fast."

One child greeted the premier with "Assalamu Alaikum" and said, "Uncle, I fasted all except today."

The PM patted the child on the head and said, "That's good." Another child said, "Uncle, I fasted all the days," to which the PM responded, "Very good."

The interaction created a joyful and lively atmosphere

as the children smiled and chatted freely with the premier, who shook hands with many of them and asked how they were doing.

Later, as Zubaida Rahman left the mosque, the PM Tarique bade farewell to the children, saying "Allah Hafez."

At that time, the children said, "Uncle, please pray for us." The PM waved to them before walking towards his vehicle.

পরিকল্পনা ও উন্নয়ন বিভাগ
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

বাংলাদেশ উন্মুক্ত বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়
BANGLADESH OPEN UNIVERSITY

জনসতর্কীকরণ বিজ্ঞপ্তি

এতদ্বারা সর্বসাধারণের অবগতির জন্য জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, নিম্ন তফসিলে বর্ণিত জমিটি বাংলাদেশ উন্মুক্ত বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের নিকট বিক্রয়ের প্রস্তাব দিয়েছেন এলিট অায়রন এন্ড স্টিল জি. পি. সীট লিমিটেড, সাং-সাইন বোর্ড, গাজীপুর। উক্ত জমিটি দায়মুক্ত, নিষ্কষ্টক এবং সকল রেকর্ড হালনাগাদ রয়েছে বলে বিক্রয় দাবি করেছেন। যদি উক্ত জমির ওপর ব্যাংক/আর্থিক প্রতিষ্ঠান, ব্যক্তি বা কোনো প্রতিষ্ঠানের কোনো দায়বদ্ধতা, মামলা, অগ্রক্রম (Pre-emption) বা কোনো ধরনের ওজর আপত্তি থাকে, তবে এই বিজ্ঞপ্তি প্রকাশের তারিখ হতে ১৫ (পনের) দিনের মধ্যে প্রয়োজনীয় প্রমাণাদিসহ স্মিত্বাকরকারীর ঠিকানায় যোগাযোগ করার জন্য অনুরোধ করা হলো। উক্ত সময়ের মধ্যে কোনো দাবি বা আপত্তি না পাওয়া গেলে, জমিটি দায়মুক্ত মনে করা হবে। পরবর্তীতে কোনো দাবি-দাওয়া বা ওজর আপত্তি গ্রহণযোগ্য হবে না।

জমির তফসিল

জেলা	উপজেলা সার্কেল	মৌজা ও জে.এল.নং	এসএ খতিয়ান নং	আরএস খতিয়ান নং	এসএ দাগ নং	আরএস দাগ নং	জমির শ্রেণী	জমির পরিমাণ (শতাংশ)	মন্তব্য	
গাজীপুর	চঙ্গী	১৫নং বাদে কলমেশ্বর	৯৩,	১২৩,	৯১	৩০০	সাইল	০৬	জমা খরিজ খতিয়ান নং ২৭৫	
			৭৪,	১৪৩, ৭০,	২৭৮	৩০১	সাইল	০৩	তারিখ: ০৩/০৫/২০২৩	
			৫৬,	১২, ৬৪,	২৮০	৩২৬	চালা	০১	জমি উন্নয়ন কর	
			৫৫	৭২, ৫৫	২৭৯	৩২৩	চালা	১৫	০৯/০৫/২০২৩ পর্যন্ত পরিশোধ	
						৩২২	চালা	২৬		
						৩২৪	চালা	১৬		
						৩২৫	চালা	১০		

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নজর চৌহদ্দি: উত্তরে-সিটি কর্পোরেশন রোড, দক্ষিণে-বাংলাদেশ উন্মুক্ত বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়, পূর্বে-হাজী নজরুল ইসলাম, আঃ কাদের মডেল, মাইনুদ্দিন চেয়ারম্যান ও সালমান, পশ্চিমে- হাজী নজরুল ইসলাম ও মারিয়া খাতুন। বিক্রয়: এলিট অায়রন এন্ড স্টিল জি. পি. সীট লিমিটেড, সাইনবোর্ড, গাজীপুর।

পরিকল্পনা ও উন্নয়ন বিভাগ,
বাংলাদেশ উন্মুক্ত বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়, গাজীপুর
মোবাইল-০১৭১৫-৬২০৪৬২।

পরিচালক (ভারপ্রাপ্ত)
গাজীপুর

GD-428

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
office of the Director
Shaheed M. Monsur Ali Medical College Hospital
Sirajganj

Memo No: SMMAMCH/SIRAJ/MSR-EGP.TENDER NOTICE/2025-2026/322 Date: 26/02/2026

e-Tender Notice

e-Tender is in the e-GP System Portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procuring of following goods.

Tender ID	Name of Goods	Tender/Proposal Publication Date and Time :	Tender/Proposal last selling Date and Time :	Tender/Proposal Closing / Opening Date and Time :
1230528	Supplying outsourcing service workers for the Shaheed M Monsur Ali Medical College Hospital, Sirajganj for 2025-2026 financial years.	26-Feb-2026 12:00	15-Mar-2026 15:30	16-Mar-2026 13:00

1. This is online Tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted.

2. To submit e-tender, Registration in the National e-GP system portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.

3. Details about the Tender have shown in e-Tender notice and e-Tender document further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP help Desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

(Dr. A. T. M. Nuruzzaman)
Director
Shaheed M. Monsur Ali Medical College Hospital
Sirajganj

GD-417

INTERNATIONAL

Afghans fear further escalation

Blasts followed by continuous detonations as stored munitions catch fire

REUTERS, Kabul

Pakistani air strikes hit a weapons depot on the western outskirts of Kabul overnight, triggering hours of secondary explosions that rattled homes across the Afghan capital and left residents fearing further violence.

Video verified by Reuters showed thick plumes of black smoke rising above Darulaman, a residential neighbourhood in western Kabul that also houses several government and military compounds, as a blaze engulfed part of the depot and repeated flashes lit up the night sky when ammunition ignited inside.

Residents said the bombardment began



An injured Pakistani girl receives treatment at a hospital in Bajaur, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Pakistan, yesterday, following overnight cross-border fighting between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

PHOTO: AFP

What's behind Pakistan's attack on Afghan Taliban?

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan has been the Afghan Taliban's closest friend for decades. It was Islamabad that helped give birth to the Taliban in the early 1990s – as a way to give Pakistan "strategic depth" in its rivalry with India. What's gone wrong?

Pakistan carried out air strikes on Afghanistan's major cities overnight, officials in Islamabad and Kabul said yesterday, escalating months of border clashes between the Islamic neighbours.

The escalating conflict is a long way from Islamabad's historic support for the Taliban. The key questions:

WHY ARE THE NEIGHBOURS AT ODDS?

Pakistan welcomed the return to power of the Taliban in 2021, with then-prime minister Imran Khan saying that Afghans had "broken the shackles of slavery". But Islamabad soon found that the Taliban were not as cooperative as it had hoped.

Islamabad says that the leadership of militant group Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and many of its fighters are based in Afghanistan, and that armed insurgents seeking independence for the southwestern Pakistani province of Balochistan also use Afghanistan as a safe haven.

Militancy has increased every year since 2022 with attacks by the TTP and Baloch insurgents growing, according to Armed Conflict Location & Event Data, a global monitoring organization.

Kabul for its part has repeatedly denied allowing militants to use Afghan territory to launch attacks in Pakistan. The Afghan Taliban say Pakistan harbours fighters from



its enemy, Islamic State, a charge Islamabad denies.

Islamabad says the ceasefire did not hold long due to continued militant attacks in Pakistan from Afghanistan, and there have been repeated clashes and border closures since then that have disrupted trade and

movement along the rugged frontier.

WHAT SPARKED THE LATEST CLASHES?

The day before last weekend's strikes, Pakistani security sources said they had "irrefutable evidence" that militants in Afghanistan were behind a recent wave of attacks and suicide bombings which targeted Pakistani military and police.

The sources listed seven planned or successful attacks by militants since late 2024 that they said were connected to Afghanistan.

One attack last week that killed 11 security personnel and two civilians in Bajaur district was undertaken by an Afghan national. This attack was claimed by the TTP.

WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN NEXT?

Pakistan is likely to intensify its military campaign, analysts say. On paper, there is a wide mismatch between the military capabilities of two sides. At 172,000, the Taliban have less than a third of Pakistan's personnel. The Taliban do possess at least six aircraft and 23 helicopters but their condition is unknown and they have no fighter jets or effective air force.

Pakistan's armed forces include more than 600,000 active personnel, more than 6,000 armoured fighting vehicles and more than 400 combat aircraft.

Ukrainian missiles hit energy sites in Russia's Belgorod

REUTERS

Ukrainian missiles struck the Russian town of Belgorod near the border, inflicting serious damage on energy installations and disrupting power, water and heating, the regional governor said early yesterday.

The attack on Belgorod, 40 km (25 miles) from the Ukrainian border, and the surrounding district, was the second in five days to cause serious damage.

The area has been a frequent target of Ukraine's military in the four years since Russia invaded its smaller neighbour. "Serious damage has occurred with energy infrastructure," Vyacheslav Gladkov wrote on Telegram. "As a result, there have been disruptions to supplies of power, water and heating."

About 50,000 people were left without power. There was no comment from Ukrainian officials.

Gladkov said the extent of the damage would be assessed at first light. Pictures posted on unofficial Telegram channels showed residential areas in darkness and skies lit up with explosions.

Along with the neighbouring Kursk region, parts of which were seized by Ukraine in a surprise attack in August 2024 and held for many months, Belgorod has borne the brunt of Ukrainian cross-border strikes since the start of the war.

Shelling and blackouts have made the war a daily reality that is impossible to ignore - in contrast with the rest of Russia, where opinion polls suggest many are trying to get on with their lives while tuning out news from the battlefield.

SEPT 2025 PROTESTS Nepal's ex-police chief ordered lethal force: BBC

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's former police chief ordered the use of lethal force during the September 2025 anti-corruption protests, a BBC investigation revealed.

At least 77 people were killed in the September 8-9 protests, the deadliest unrest since the end of the 2006 civil war, which ultimately forced the government to collapse. No one has been held accountable for the deaths as yet.

The report, which aired on Thursday, comes ahead of the March 5 elections, in which major parties from the coalition government toppled by the uprising are seeking to return to power.

Nepal's police did not immediately respond to AFP request for comment yesterday.

The BBC reported that police said they had been "faced with an overwhelming situation where we had to respond to multiple incidents simultaneously".



shortly after midnight. "We were asleep when we heard the sound of a plane," said Tamim, a taxi driver who lives near the depot. "It came and dropped two bombs, then flew away again. After that, we heard explosions."

He said the initial blasts were followed by continuous detonations as stored munitions caught fire. "The ammunition inside the depot kept exploding on its own," he said. "Everyone, in panic, ran down from the second floor of the house."

Tamim said the fire burned until about 6:00 am, when it was brought under control. His family escaped injury, but doors and windows were damaged and glass shattered from the force of the blasts.

"The blaze was very intense," he said. Danish, a 35-year-old pharmacist who lives about 10 minutes from the depot, said he had been awake following news of rising tensions.

UN CDP discusses Bangladesh's

FROM PAGE 12

The recommendation will then be forwarded to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and subsequently to the UN General Assembly for the final consideration.

The assessment will examine whether Bangladesh is facing a crisis arising from unanticipated and uncontrollable factors that could justify deferment, said Debapriya.

When asked whether the CDP will recommend a deferment as per Bangladesh's plea, Debapriya said, "It can only be said after the end of the review process of the application."

Bangladesh, along with Nepal and Lao PDR, is scheduled to graduate in November 2026. However, only Bangladesh has formally sought a three-year extension.

In a letter sent to CDP Chairperson José Antonio Ocampo on February 18, Economic Relations Division Secretary

Md Shahriar Quader Siddiqui said the five-year preparatory period had been "severely disrupted" by overlapping global and domestic shocks.

The government cited the lingering effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war and its impact on global energy and food markets, tightening financial conditions, sluggish trade recovery, instability in the Middle East, and growing uncertainty in the global trade regime.

Domestically, it referred to financial sector irregularities, the July 2024 political upheaval that led to a change in government, and the continued burden of Rohingya repatriation, which requires significant fiscal support.

According to the letter, these shocks have contributed to macroeconomic instability, slower GDP growth, high inflation, declining investment, pressure on foreign exchange reserves, a falling tax-to-GDP

ratio, reduced imports of capital machinery and raw materials, weak job creation, and setbacks in poverty reduction.

The banking sector and capital market have also faced governance challenges.

The government argued that an extension until 2029 would provide critical policy space to stabilise the macroeconomy, consolidate reforms, and complete priority actions under the Smooth Transition Strategy for LDC graduation.

Bangladesh was originally set to graduate in November 2024 but received a two-year extension until November 24, 2026, due to the severe fallout of Covid-19, after meeting all three graduation criteria in consecutive triennial reviews.

Business leaders have long urged the government to seek deferment, citing the lingering impact of the pandemic, global inflation, high interest rates,

currency volatility, and geopolitical disruptions.

The businesspeople and a section of economists argue that the country is not prepared to tackle challenges of graduation, including discontinuation of lower duty facilities for LDCs by the developed nations, especially those in the European Union, a large market of Bangladesh's main export product garment.

Studies suggest that, upon graduation, Bangladesh could lose around 14 percent of its exports – roughly \$8 billion annually – as preferential trade benefits expire. Exporters would also forgo nearly \$1 billion in annual government incentives.

Despite earlier cabinet decisions to graduate on schedule, the newly formed BNP-led government has now formally sought additional time, arguing that a smoother transition is essential to safeguard economic stability and competitiveness.

US tells its citizens to leave Israel

FROM PAGE 12

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi yesterday said that "success in this path requires seriousness and realism from the other side and avoidance of any miscalculation and excessive demands".

Following the talks, Araghchi told state TV the negotiations "made very good progress and entered into the elements of an

agreement very seriously, both in the nuclear field and in the sanctions field".

He said the next round would take place in "perhaps less than a week", with technical talks at the IAEA to begin in Vienna on Monday.

Trump said in his State of the Union address this week that Iran was working on missiles that could reach the United States and

accused Iran of "pursuing sinister nuclear ambitions".

Iran has always insisted its nuclear programme was peaceful and called the claims "big lies".

Trump's accusations were delivered in the same forum in which then-President George W Bush laid out the case for the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Washington already had more than a dozen

warships in the Middle East, including another aircraft carrier, before deploying the Gerald R Ford.

The UN rights chief Volker Turk said he was "extremely alarmed" at the risk of a regional escalation around Iran and raised concerns over domestic issues in Iran, where protests have resumed.

"I hope the voice of reason prevails," he said.

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

উপজেলা নির্বাহী অফিসারের কার্যালয়

ভোলা সদর, ভোলা।

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"ফেরি/খোয়াঘাটের ইজারা বিজ্ঞপ্তি"

এতদ্বারা সংশ্লিষ্ট ফেরি/খোয়াঘাটের পেশাদার পাটনী ও সর্বসাধারণের অবগতির জন্যে জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, ভোলা জেলাধীন ভোলা সদর উপজেলার নিম্নোবর্ণিত ফেরি/খোয়াঘাট ১৪৩৩ বঙ্গাব্দের জন্য (১লা বৈশাখ হতে ৩০ শে চৈত্র পর্যন্ত) একসন ইজারা প্রদানের লক্ষ্যে সিডিউল সপথে সংযোজিত শর্ত সমূহের ভিত্তিতে প্রকৃত বাংলাদেশী নাগরিকদের নিকট হতে সীলপালাযুক্ত খামে দরপত্র আহবান করা যাচ্ছে।

ক্রম নং	ফেরি/খোয়াঘাটের নাম	ইউনিয়নের নাম	বাংলা ১৪৩৩ বঙ্গাব্দের জন্য ধার্যতা	দরপত্র মূল্য
১	রাজাপুর- রামদাসপুর (বঙ্গের চর) ফেরিঘাট	রাজাপুর	১,৭৭,০৪২/-	১০০০/-
২	বিশ্ব রোড তালতলী- মাঝের চর খোয়া	ইলিশা	১৬,৫৫২/-	৫০০/-
৩	কাঠিরমাথা- মাঝের চর খোয়া	কাঠিয়া	৫৬,০৬৯/-	৫০০/-
৪	ভেদুরিয়া- চটকীমারা খোয়া	ভেদুরিয়া	৬,০৫,৬৩২/-	২,০০০/-

১ম বিজ্ঞপ্তি	সিডিউল বিক্রির তারিখ	দরপত্র দাখিল ও খোলার তারিখ	সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণের তারিখ	মন্তব্য
	ফাল্গুন ১২ হতে ২৭ ফাল্গুন, ১৪৩২ বঙ্গাব্দ	ফাল্গুন ২৯, ১৪৩২ বঙ্গাব্দ	ফাল্গুন ২৯, ১৪৩২ বঙ্গাব্দ	
	২৫/০২/২৬ হতে ১২/০৩/২৬ খ্রিঃ	১৪/০৩/২০২৬ খ্রিঃ	১৪/০৩/২০২৬ খ্রিঃ	

২য় বিজ্ঞপ্তি	চৈত্র ০১ হতে ১০ চৈত্র, ১৪৩২ বঙ্গাব্দ	১৫/০৩/২৬ হতে ২৪/০৩/২৬ খ্রিঃ	চৈত্র ১১, ১৪৩২ বঙ্গাব্দ	১ম দরপত্রে যে সমস্ত ফেরি/খোয়াঘাটের কাঙ্ক্ষিত ইজারামূল্য পাওয়া যাবে না ২য় দরপত্রে সে সমস্ত ফেরি/খোয়াঘাটের দরপত্র আহবান করা হবে।
	১৫/০৩/২৬ হতে ২৪/০৩/২৬ খ্রিঃ	২৫/০৩/২০২৬ খ্রিঃ	২৫/০৩/২০২৬ খ্রিঃ	

৩য় বিজ্ঞপ্তি	চৈত্র ১৪ হতে ২২ চৈত্র, ১৪৩২ বঙ্গাব্দ	চৈত্র ২৩, ১৪৩২ বঙ্গাব্দ	চৈত্র ২৩, ১৪৩২ বঙ্গাব্দ	১ম ও ২য় দরপত্রে যে সমস্ত ফেরি/খোয়াঘাটের কাঙ্ক্ষিত ইজারামূল্য পাওয়া যাবে না ৩য় দরপত্রে সে সমস্ত ফেরি/খোয়াঘাটের দরপত্র আহবান করা হবে।
	২৮/০৩/২৬ হতে ০৫/০৪/২৬ খ্রিঃ	০৬/০৪/২০২৬ খ্রিঃ	০৬/০৪/২০২৬ খ্রিঃ	

আগ্রহী দরপত্র দাখিল উপরে বর্ণিত ডাকের সম্মুখে উল্লেখিত সিডিউল বিক্রির তারিখ সমূহে অফিস চলাকালীন সময়ে (১) নিম্নাধিকারকারীর কার্যালয় (২) উপজেলা ভূমি অফিস, ভোলা সদর (৩) জেলা প্রশাসক, ভোলা এর কার্যালয়, হতে দরপত্র-সিডিউল নির্ধারিত মূল্যে (অফেরতযোগ্য) সংগ্রহ করতে পারবেন। ডাকের সম্মুখে উল্লেখিত দরপত্র দাখিল ও খোলার তারিখ দিনগুলোতে সকাল ৯.০০ টা হতে দুপুর ১.০০ টা পর্যন্ত নিম্নাধিকারকারীর কার্যালয়, উপজেলা ভূমি অফিস, ভোলা সদর, এবং জেলা প্রশাসক, ভোলা এর কার্যালয়ে রক্ষিত বাজে সীলপালা যুক্ত খামে দরপত্র দাখিল করা যাবে এবং ঐ দিন দুপুর ২.০০ টার উপস্থিত দরপত্র দাখিলের (যদি কেহ উপস্থিত থাকেন) সম্মুখে নিম্নাধিকারকারীর কার্যালয়ে রক্ষিত বাজে প্রাপ্ত দরপত্র নিম্নাধিকারকারী কর্তৃক, উপজেলা ভূমি অফিস, ভোলা সদর এর রক্ষিত বাজে প্রাপ্ত দরপত্র সহকারী কমিশনার (ভূমি), ভোলা সদর কর্তৃক এবং জেলা প্রশাসক, ভোলা এর কার্যালয়ে রক্ষিত বাজে প্রাপ্ত দরপত্র সমূহ জেলা প্রশাসক, ভোলা মহোদয়ের মনোনীত প্রতিনিধি কর্তৃক খোলা হবে। এ ছাড়াও অন্যান্য বিস্তারিত তথ্য শর্তাবলী দরপত্র জমাদানের তারিখ পর্যন্ত নিম্নাধিকারকারীর কার্যালয়ে অফিস চলাকালীন সময়ে জানা যাবে। দরপত্রের সঙ্গে বিস্তারিত শর্তাবলী লিপিবদ্ধ রয়েছে।

এ বিজ্ঞপ্তি স্থানীয় সরকার পল্লী উন্নয়ন ও সমবায় মন্ত্রণালয়ের স্মারক নং প্রজ্ঞাই-২/ফ-১/২০০৩/২৬২ (৫১৭২), তারিখ ১৯-০৪-২০০৩ খ্রি. এর আলোকে জারী করা হলো।

(মোঃ আরিফুল্লাহ)

উপজেলা নির্বাহী অফিসার

ভোলা সদর, ভোলা।

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ফোন: ০১৩১৮-২৫৯১১৬

GD-429

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

Boost TCB supply and distribution

Ease people's suffering, safeguard their dignity

It is deeply disturbing to see how the rising prices of essentials, coupled with stagnant incomes, is pushing more families towards financial hardship, forcing them to increasingly rely on subsidised food programmes for basic sustenance. This is reflected in the growing queues of people at TCB truck sale points across Dhaka, where men and women are seen jostling for their spots every day. An average package of basic iftar items of soybean oil, lentils, sugar, chickpeas, and dates that costs around Tk 950 in the open market is available for just Tk 550 at the TCB trucks. For many families, this Tk 400 difference is significant.

The scenes at the sale points are heartbreaking. Reportedly, 40-year-old Nasir Khan, waiting at Kazipara metro station with his leg in plaster following a serious accident, struggled to secure a package for his family. Seventy-year-old Mulkuch Bibi had to prepare the night before to ensure she could get cooking oil and sugar. Young mother Minuara Begum stood in line for hours with her baby because she had no one at home to help. Stories like these unfold across the city every day, highlighting the urgent need for more effective, humane support for vulnerable families.

According to BBS, food inflation rose to 8.29 percent in January, reversing the earlier signs of easing. Meanwhile, projections by the World Bank last year suggested that the national poverty rate could climb to 22.9 percent, with extreme poverty nearly doubling compared to three years ago. Findings from the PPRC indicate an even sharper rise, with nearly 28 percent of the population now living below the poverty line, and about 1 in 10 surviving in extreme poverty. The numbers are indeed alarming and deserve urgent action.

At present, 450 mobile trucks of the TCB are operating nationwide, aiming to distribute 23,000 tonnes of essentials to 35 lakh consumers during Ramadan. Clearly, this is not enough. The government must increase the volume of TCB's open market sales in line with demand. It must modernise the distribution process and consider area-based distribution in labour-dense neighbourhoods, factory zones, and informal worker hubs to reduce crowding at central points. Special arrangements should be made for the elderly, persons with disabilities, and working class people who cannot afford to lose hours of income. Moreover, as the government prepares to inaugurate its family card programme on March 10, which will provide four crore families with Tk 2,500 or essential commodities of equivalent value, poor households must be included urgently and without any political affiliation.

While providing subsidised food is essential, safeguarding the dignity of citizens is equally important. The sight of thousands waiting in queues for hours should not become a normal feature of our urban landscape. Instead, it should serve as a call to ensure that assistance is delivered efficiently and respectfully. In times of economic distress, compassion must be matched with competence.

Footbridges must not be 'deathtraps'

Authorities must ensure safe pedestrian crossings urgently

No matter how many roads and flyovers are built to accommodate vehicles in the country, pedestrian safety has always been something least prioritised by our authorities. Even in the capital city of Dhaka, in a busy area like Paribagh, a major pedestrian bridge remains "cordoned off" for months. A recent report by *Prothom Alo* highlights the deadly state of the foot overbridge: missing steps, existing ones being eaten away by rust and age, and littered landings. A cable restricts entry at the foot of the bridge in a flimsy effort to prevent pedestrians from using it. But without a safer alternative, most pedestrians either use the road to cross or use the broken bridge anyway.

Unfortunately, the Paribagh footbridge is not an exception in the city. One would struggle to find a foot overbridge in Dhaka that is in perfectly usable condition. When the steps are not completely broken or missing altogether, they are uneven and visibly dirty. At night, with lighting being inadequate or absent, these bridges become hubs for criminals of various degrees. It is not uncommon for pedestrians to be mugged or physically harmed at night when using such dark footbridges.

All of these factors make it so that pedestrians have to resort to simply crossing the busy roads. Here, too, they are forced to accept great risk as few vehicles abide by basic traffic rules such as driving per the speed limit and not occupying zebra crossings. Needless to say, this level of inaccessibility follows pedestrians onto the footpaths as well. Not only are these usually uneven, but they are often scattered with open manholes that pose further danger to pedestrians. In many areas, footpaths are also occupied by the wares of formal and informal businesses, making them all the more difficult for pedestrians to navigate.

Bangladesh's urban centres have a reputation for being extremely unwalkable. It is unacceptable that necessary structures such as foot overbridges, which are constructed using taxpayers' money, should remain in such dilapidated states for months. In a country where walking is a big part of commuting, the government must prioritise the construction and upkeep of pedestrian-friendly infrastructure. Without adequate foot overbridges, people are exposed to various crimes, physical injury, and even the risk of death.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Chemical structure of DNA discovered

On this day in 1953, Cambridge University scientists James Watson and Francis Crick announced that they determined the double-helix structure of DNA, the molecule containing human genes. The molecular biologists were aided significantly by the work of another DNA researcher, Rosalind Franklin, although she was not included in the announcement, nor did she share the subsequent Nobel Prize award for it.

Depoliticise institutions, not ideas



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza
is vice chancellor at the University of
Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB).

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

Nor often do you hear a politician saying that "politicising education, research, and the practice of arts and literature is never a mark of a civilised society." There is a lot to unpack in Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's speech made at the Ekushey Padak 2026 award distribution ceremony on Thursday.

Ekushey, by design, is a political space. It is an archive of ideologically driven sacrifice leading to the formation of a nation-state. The award ceremony named after Ekushey celebrates dignity and intellectual freedom that is not devoid of politics. But when the prime minister labels "politicising" as an "anti-civilisational" marker, we need to ask: what does it mean to "depoliticise" education and the arts? The answer is far from simple.

It is impossible to sweep politics out of universities or academies of arts and culture. The transformative agenda of education is political in its noblest sense. When we design our curriculum to decide how we want to shape our citizens, to give them the knowledge and consciousness to question power and distinguish right from wrong, we embrace politics as a civilising agenda. The same goes for art. It is more than aesthetics that entertains. Arts teaches us to critique injustice and to push the boundary of our imagination by challenging established order. Politics does not threaten civilisation; it shows that it is alive and functional.

The real problem is not politics. It is the partisan attitude with which parties capture power. The Ekushey Padak to a certain individual was given and then stalled this year. The merit of the prize conflicted with the award-giving politics. Since the announcement of the resignation of Dhaka University's vice-chancellor, speculations have been running high. A short list of candidates is available, but ironically

all these senior teachers are being identified by their party loyalty and affiliations. Having worked with some of them in close quarters, I know of their high academic acumen and strong scholarly aptitudes. Yet, media tends to focus on their contribution to the political party alone.

As we have transitioned from an unelected interim government to a political one, we expect lessons to be learnt from the previous malpractices that corroded the system from within and gave politics a bad name. As a



VISUAL: ALIZA RAHMAN

nation, we have inherited a proud legacy of politics synonymous with civic courage; moments of rupture, such as 1952, 1969, 1971, 1990 and 2024, erupted into the political scene, ushering in significant changes in our national life. One atrocity in such frequent brushes with politics is a culture of partisan affiliation. It started with student organisations, which acted as extensions of national parties. Then other professional bodies joined the bandwagon. We are living in a culture that demands political

loyalty.

It is in this context that Tarique Rahman's comment makes sense. It is the duty of the state to give weightage to these words. Gaps between what is said and what is practised will render this statement mere rhetoric. We need a system that promotes education and culture as spaces to nurture excellence in thought. We need a system that does not necessarily equate success with proximity to power. That system has to start with our educational institutions and academies. Our graduates must not internalise political patronage as normal before they enter the bureaucracy, the media, the judiciary—the job sector. Politicians must stop thinking of campuses as recruitment grounds. Over the years, we have created a culture that mobilises youthful energy for state control and electoral machinery. Curriculum has also been symbolically controlled to advance a convenient cultural narrative that supports party politics.

biased answers—it produces fewer questions. Frustrated by conservatism, brain drains can accelerate. For a developing country aspiring to move up in the global indexes, we need aggressive pursuits of innovation and technology. To uphold the value of our civilisation, we must protect the arts from symbolic appropriation. Already, we have seen how the issues of Bauls, Qawali, Mazars, Pahela Baishakh, and Probat Feri have been scrutinised for ideological leanings. When cultural institutions or festivals feel pressured to align with partisan narratives, we realise the importance of the depoliticisation that the premier talked about. Since art depends on patronage from both state and non-state agencies, the depolitical paradigm must take the tension between power and imagination responsible for its creation into consideration.

There is a popular saying: everything is political. While it is true to a great extent, not everything needs to be partisan. We need to create an academic culture that knows the difference between political consciousness and party allegiance. The call for depoliticisation at the institutional level requires the establishment of civic rules and the safeguarding of democratic norms. A weak system devoid of rules allows partisan agents to thrive. The answer is transparency and accountability. We need to select academic and administrative leaders using clearly published criteria and independent search committees.

If the political leadership desires, they can decouple their student wings on campuses. Elected, non-partisan student unions may serve democracy better than formally or informally party-affiliated bodies. For a non-political system to thrive, there has to be an inbuilt grievance redress mechanism. If I understand the spirit of Tarique Rahman's statement correctly, "politicising" as an anathema to civilisation means freedom of consciousness. Can a teacher or a student question authority without calculating risk? Can researchers publish uncomfortable data without consequence? Can artists stage dissent without fearing cancellation? The answer is not devoid of politics. But it is where politics respects boundaries.

Who truly pays for the Ramadan price spike?



Farah Kabir
is country director at ActionAid Bangladesh.

FARAH KABIR

In much of the Muslim world, Ramadan brings discounts on staples, state-subsidised markets, and public messaging about restraint. In Bangladesh, it brings something else: a predictable surge in prices. The holy month, meant to cultivate self-discipline and solidarity with the poor, has become a season of extraction. And nowhere is the cruelty felt more sharply than in our women's kitchens.

The annual hike in the cost of essentials is now treated as routine. The price of rice, lentils, edible oil, sugar, meat, and fruit rises steeply in the weeks before the month of fasting begins. Iftar items such as dates and chickpeas become conspicuously dear. But the inflationary fever does not stop at food. Clothing, footwear, and transport fares swell ahead of Eid. Demand is predictable while profiteering is rehearsed.

This pattern is not inevitable. In countries such as Pakistan and Indonesia, governments routinely expand subsidised sales. Even in low-income countries across North Africa, Ramadan markets are often associated with discounts rather than mark-ups. Seasonal demand spikes are anticipated, not exploited. Bangladesh's opposite trajectory is, therefore, not a cultural destiny but a policy failure and an ethical collapse.

Traders cite port congestion, supply chain bottlenecks, currency pressures, and rising global prices. While these factors exist, they do not explain the regularity or brazenness of the Ramadan price spike. Nor do

they justify the open secret that some wholesalers hoard goods to engineer scarcity.

Blaming shadowy syndicates alone is too easy: a small group of traders and importers controls the market, holding power to set higher prices. It absolves the rest of the value chain. Retailers adjust price tags without question. Transport operators invoke holiday demand to rationalise higher fares. Opportunism trickles down because it is tolerated upwards.

The economic consequences are severe. With inflation already high, low- and fixed-income families enter Ramadan stretched thin. For day labourers, garment workers and the urban poor, the month becomes a calculus of anxiety: how to honour a sacred tradition without falling into debt. Yet, this hardship is not gender-neutral. It is profoundly feminised.

Ramadan in Bangladeshi households rests on women's labour. They wake before dawn to prepare sehri. They cook iftar while fasting. They clean, host, serve, and manage the domestic rituals. Religious discourse often reinforces this arrangement by promising spiritual reward for feeding family members and elevating domestic service into devotion. Household, long romanticised as an expression of love and sacrifice, intensifies during Ramadan.

When prices rise, it is women who absorb the shock. They stretch budgets that no longer stretch. They negotiate with shopkeepers who will not budge. They dilute lentils, substitute beef with

cheaper protein, slice fruits thinner, cook with less oil, and serve smaller portions. They try to manage children's expectations about Eid clothes when they suddenly cost more. Many go without new clothes. Women carry the emotional burden of scarcity so that the family's sense of celebration remains intact. This is invisible labour layered upon economic precarity.

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Men dominate the market—wholesalers, transport operators, shop owners, and association leaders. Women, largely excluded from these spaces of price-setting power, confront the consequences without meaningful agency. The gendered irony is stark: women are charged with sustaining the moral atmosphere of Ramadan at home, while men in commercial networks extract profit from the rituals women sustain.

The normalisation of this cycle is perhaps its most corrosive feature. Each year, headlines lament rising prices, authorities conduct publicised raids, and the pattern repeats. Breaking this cycle requires more than seasonal

crackdowns. It demands structural reform and a moral reckoning.

Price monitoring must be continuous, not theatrical. Permanent market surveillance, real-time publication of wholesale and retail benchmarks, and accessible complaint mechanisms would reduce the space for arbitrary mark-ups. Enforcement must be consistent; token fines that can be absorbed as a business expense only embolden repeat offenders.

Predictable demand should be met with planned supply. Advance import scheduling for high-demand goods, temporary duty adjustments where necessary, and expanded subsidised outlets in low-income neighbourhoods can blunt artificial scarcity. Demand spikes during Ramadan and Eid are not surprises; they are annual certainties.

Accountability must extend beyond "syndicates." Trade associations and chambers of commerce should adopt public pledges of price stability in Ramadan, with reputational incentives for compliance. Corporate social responsibility cannot mean distributing iftar packs while quietly raising prices. Ethical commerce should be a badge of honour.

Crucially, women must be recognised as economic actors, not merely household shock absorbers. Supporting women-led cooperatives and small-scale enterprises can shift the bargaining power. Including women's organisations in market oversight would bring perspectives currently largely absent from price-setting conversations. When women gain agency in markets, not merely responsibility in kitchens, the balance begins to tilt.

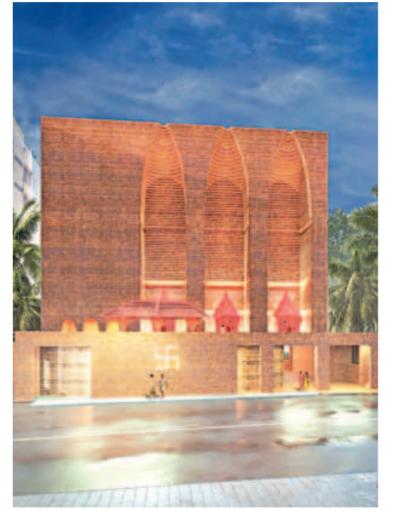
Ramadan is meant to discipline appetite and cultivate empathy. To convert it into a season of calculated escalation is to betray both the spirit of the month and the households that keep its rituals alive. Breaking the cycle is not merely an economic imperative, but a feminist one and a moral one.



Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council Building, Farmgate, Dhaka, 1982.
Architect: Rabiul Hussain.



Zebun Nessa Mosque, Ashulia, Dhaka, 2023. Architect: Saiqa Iqbal Meghna, Studio Morphogenesis.



Golpohar Mohashoshan Kali Mandir, Chattogram, 2022. Architect: FRAMEWORK.

THE PROMISES AND PERILS OF A 'NOTUN TEJ' in Bangladeshi architecture

ADNAN ZILLUR MORSHED

Nearly a hundred years ago, in 1927, something “revolutionary” happened in Stuttgart, Germany. The German design collaborative known as the Deutscher Werkbund organised an exhibition featuring a full scale experimental housing estate that has since become known as the Weissenhofsiedlung. Conceived to showcase “a home for modern city dwellers,” the exhibition attracted more than half a million visitors, intrigued by the idea of modernity in everyday domestic life, a novelty in the 1920s. Many visitors must have gawked at the estate’s futuristic, unornamented, white, boxy, flat-roofed, industrial-looking buildings with a mix of anxiety and wonder. The Weissenhofsiedlung’s deliberate break from traditional house forms, while promising to create a modern society with a new type of architecture as its ideological vehicle, crystallised what had already been known as *esprit nouveau* within European art and architectural circles. The exhibition is widely regarded as a harbinger of modern architecture in Europe and beyond.

A Bangladeshi *esprit nouveau* has been flourishing with palpable, organic energy—let us call it *notun tej*—for the past three decades or so. Architects have been experimenting with aesthetic expression, formal articulation, material choices, environmental adaptation, and, most importantly, architecture’s relationship to history, culture, and land. Although the results have sometimes been mixed, these varied experiments have brought to the fore a collective sense that something significant has been unfolding in this densely populated South Asian country.

What drives this restless energy is uncertain, though one can identify a host of possible catalysts. Is it the combined social and cultural effects of a society in transition? The aspirations of a rising middle class? The progressive vision of entrepreneurial practitioners? Globalisation and its neoliberal order? The cultural cross-pollination of the local and the global? The gradual discovery of an architectural *genius loci*—that archetypal spirit of place shaped by vernacular commitments? Or the political economy of the built environment intersecting with the politics of development? Perhaps it is all of these at once.

Whatever the underlying cause, an engaged observer may perceive this spirit as an open-minded search for an aesthetic calculus of “local” modernity, one that unfolds without the burden of performing overt Bengali identity politics. From places of worship to factories, from residential buildings to markets, and from park restorations to riverfront developments, a macro-tendency has emerged that transcends the neoliberal narrative of modernity as a purely globalising project. Many projects are simultaneously modern in the clarity of their aesthetic grammar and “unmodern” in their defiance of international modernism’s visual orthodoxy. High profile national architectural competitions have fostered a new kind of design entrepreneurship, producing edifices that invite a wide arc of interpretive possibilities. Architects have also expanded the boundaries of professional practice by working with low-income communities, reimagining design in an age of climate change and rising seas, and participating in policy dialogues on urban welfare.

One thing is certain: architectural practice has shattered Dhaka-centrism. Buildings that embody the country’s *notun tej* are now found not only in Dhaka but also in Gaibandha, Sreepur, Bogra, Pabna, Dinajpur, Kulaura, Moulvibazar, Matlab, Jhenaidah, Cox’s Bazar, Teknaf, Netrokona, Tangail, and Gazipur, among other places far removed from the nation’s financial and political centers.

Even as the roads of major cities remain paralysed by traffic congestion and marked by a pervasive sense of civic chaos, and even amid the infernal pace of urbanisation across the country, the architectural culture of *notun tej* has taken root. It brings both promise and

peril, introducing contentious debates about its character, its future, its ability to serve society, and, most importantly, the nature of its political engagement.

While there is, of course, an intellectual indebtedness to the country’s independence, the spirit of *notun tej* is deeply intertwined with the 1980s, a decade of intense change in social norms, public discourse, and political aspirations, catalysed by both local and global forces. On December 16, 1982, eleven years after Bangladesh achieved independence, architect Syed Mainul Hossain’s National Martyrs’ Monument was inaugurated in Savar. A year later, with the completion of Louis Kahn’s Parliament complex in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, the nation gained an architectural emblem of its political odyssey towards statehood. Yet the decade’s complex political tapestry—shaped by autocratic military rule, infrastructure modernisation, rural development, industrialisation, urbanisation, and a rising middle class—led to the breakdown of traditional cultural thresholds, the emergence of new forms of civil discourse about the past, present, and future, and, most significantly, a national tenor of soul-searching.

Architecture—bearing cultural meanings that reach far beyond the physicality of the built environment—became an important component of this introspection. What did Bengali nationhood mean, and how did it dovetail with, or complicate, the tangible expressions of the places around us? Competing ideas began to permeate architectural thinking across the country.

Three stories, although hardly a tell-all saga, deserve mention. First, an “avant-garde” architectural study group named *Chetona* (meaning awareness), created at the behest of architect Muzharul Islam, sought to introduce critical thinking as an essential component of architectural practice. Many architects, both senior and junior, disillusioned with the prevailing view of architecture as primarily a professional service devoid of broader social vision or engagement with history and culture, gravitated towards *Chetona*. The group’s iconoclasm centred on reading critical architectural texts and questioning existing methods of architectural pedagogy, as well as the treatment of architecture as merely a technical discipline. Its reading list included, among many others, Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul Islam, works on Bengal’s history, literature, and art, the writings of the Franco-Swiss architect Le Corbusier, the environmentalist Rachel Carson, and the Norwegian architectural theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz.

Not all architects, however, agreed with this effort to intellectualise the design profession, and many kept their distance from what they perceived as elitism. Paradoxically, this rift created an opportunity for introspection, as a contentious yet productive architectural conversation began to unfold.

Second, the influence of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture (AKAA), an architectural prize established by Aga Khan IV in 1977, was strongly felt during the 1980s. The award sought to champion regional, place-based, and culturally sensitive architectural approaches in Islamic societies, although what “Islamic” meant remained open to debate. Awarded projects spanned contemporary design, social housing, community development, restoration, adaptive reuse, and landscape design. In many ways, the AKAA presented “Islamic regionalism” as an antidote to the abstract orthodoxy of Western modernism (and its perceived domination), which had allegedly homogenised architectural practice around the world.

Meanwhile, on the world stage in the 1980s, the proposition of “universalism” was increasingly seen as a problematic idea, as it implied humanity could be understood as a single, seamless narrative. “Contextualism,” by contrast, gained wider currency, emphasising that events occur within specific cultural and historical contexts rather than being predetermined by universal patterns and

values. The French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard’s critique of the “metanarrative” opened new ways of making sense of the plurality of local, small-scale narratives: the contextual stories. Alexander Tzonis, Liane Lefaivre, and Kenneth Frampton promoted the idea of “critical regionalism” as a grounded path toward contextual architecture, one intended to produce a rich interplay between the global and the local. Christian Norberg-Schulz advanced “phenomenology”—the discourse of embodied experience—as a rallying cry in architectural pedagogy, introducing architects to the philosophical work of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Gaston Bachelard. Several Bangladeshi architects took note of these developments and were inspired to reimagine architecture as a place-based practice shaped by the internal dynamics of society and culture.

Third, the publication of several international architectural magazines struck

Bangladesh’s metropolises began to face an acute housing shortage.

During this transitional period, real estate developers emerged as powerful economic actors in Dhaka and beyond, playing a key role in replacing traditional single-family houses with multistory apartment complexes. Meanwhile, the public sector failed to meet rising housing demand, and private real estate companies expanded rapidly to fill the gap. For example, in the early 1980s only five real estate firms operated in the country; by 1988, that number had grown to forty-two. The rapid rise of private developers reflected a robust market for high-density, multifamily housing, even though affordability remained a major challenge. During this time, many architects experimented with materials, forms, spatial organisation, construction techniques, aesthetic expression, and the relationship of individual plots to their surrounding neighbourhoods.

Meanwhile, in 1993, Bangladesh formally

aesthetics and increasingly hired architectural firms to compete in the building market. Together, these developments ushered in a vibrant and dynamic period of architectural experimentation.

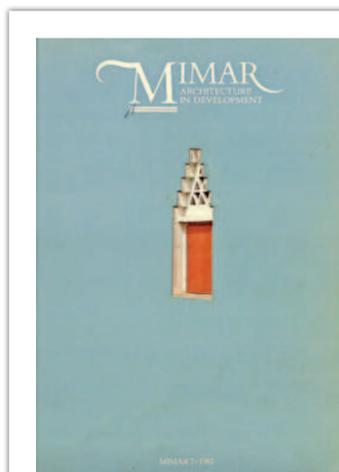
Over the last two decades, Bangladesh has witnessed an intense contest of architectural ideas. Earlier debates—such as modernism versus regionalism or formalism versus contextualism—have given way to a more complex landscape marked by nonbinary design theories, diversified construction materials, engagement with the country’s deltaic ethos, and, more broadly, the political economy of the built environment. Approaches that proved aesthetically or philosophically compelling in the 1980s and 1990s became untenable or insufficient as architectural practice responded to environmental degradation, the neoliberal economic order, and the rise of social media. The profession has simultaneously conformed, resisted, and zigzagged, producing a diverse array of outcomes.

Yet there is a darker side to this narrative. While architecture—largely in the form of individual, plot-based or stand-alone projects—thrived, cities, with Dhaka as the most glaring example, descended into unbearable chaos. In extreme cases, opulent “Taj Mahals” produced one city of cloistered interiors, while overflowing dumpsters and pervasive urban poverty produced another. Private oases and luxurious cafés overlooked the ghettoised worlds of informal settlements, many of which periodically fell victim to arson as part of draconian eviction tactics.

As architects searched for a synthesis between Bengali roots and an ecumenical vision of spatial wellbeing, they largely failed to articulate an ethical framework for how cities should function or how a foundational commitment to spatial justice might drive urban life. Globalisation fueled architectural patronage even as cities continued to suffer from extreme economic inequalities that, as French economist Thomas Piketty has argued, define contemporary predatory capitalism. Architects seem either unable or unwilling to grapple with how the built environment could—or should—play a mitigating role in addressing social inequities and spatial injustice. Slums burned, and architects responded with naïve, cosmetic solutions, rarely attempting to understand the exploitative economic and political systems that marginalise the urban poor in the first place. The profession appears to have struck a Faustian bargain, surrendering to the irony that “architecture is great, but the city rots” as a form of convenient fatalism. Thus, consciously or unconsciously, architects become complicit in perpetuating a culture of injustice, alas—through the very designs in which they take pride.

It is a problem of scale, both in physical and metaphysical terms. The delicate balance between the micro scale of the building and the macro scale of the city must be handled with care. To understand an anthropology of care, the design community must undertake a forensic analysis of the “class” dimension that complicates these two scales, along with the multivalent social complexities that exist between them. Most people in the city have very little access to purpose-built environments; yet they persist, clinging to the city as their shelter, their daily battlefield, and their assertion of the right to exist. Thus, care—both as a tactical imperative and as a moral buffer—offers the possibility of resisting the injustice of deciding who matters and who does not so that society may march on, the nefarious basis of what African philosopher Achille Mbembe calls “necropolitical” governance. The spirit of *notun tej* in Bangladeshi architecture must resist this dehumanising division by mediating between the scales of the building and the city.

Adnan Zillur Morshed is an architect, architectural historian, urban theorist, and public thinker. He can be reached at morshed@cua.edu



Mimar: Architecture in Development, the flagship magazine of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, first published in 1981.



Chetona Newsletter, 1980s.

a popular chord among design professionals and students. The Aga Khan Award for Architecture’s flagship magazine, *Mimar: Architecture in Development*—first published in 1981 and produced for forty-three issues—encouraged many Bangladeshi architects and architecture students to look beyond Western modernism and the aesthetic hegemony it allegedly created. The Indian architectural magazine *Architecture + Design* (A+D), first published in 1984, positioned itself as a vanguard platform for chronicling creative architectural projects in South Asia and became an essential source of knowledge about the subcontinent’s design culture. Its affordability further magnified its influence on design communities across the country.

On a broader national scale, the architectural aspirations of design professionals coincided with the rapid urbanisation of Bangladesh and the rise of an urban middle class that gradually fostered a flourishing culture of architectural patronage. Historically agrarian, Bangladesh began to urbanise quickly in the late 1980s. The country’s total urban population rose from a modest 7.7 percent in 1970 to 31.1 percent in 2010. Impoverished rural migrants flocked to major cities—particularly the capital, Dhaka—in search of employment and better lives. Dhaka’s population soared from 1.8 million in 1974 to more than 6 million in 1991, reaching nearly 18 million by 2015. This massive population boom placed unsustainable pressure on urban land, driving land values sharply upward. As occurred in nineteenth-century industrial cities such as London, Manchester, Liverpool, Paris, and New York,

introduced a national building code (BNBC), a milestone document prepared by the Housing and Building Research Institute (HBRI) with support from professional bodies. This was the country’s first effort to consolidate structural, architectural, fire, electrical, and safety standards into a single document. The code sought to integrate aesthetic creativity, building safety, environmental exigencies, and public health within a comprehensive framework for professional practice. As a result, new architectural imperatives and obligations entered the debate.

A burgeoning class of urban entrepreneurs—who had made their fortunes in the country’s export-oriented ready-made garment industry, as well as in manufacturing, transportation, construction, and the consumer market—began to emulate “old money” and emerged as a new generation of architectural patrons. They invested substantial sums in building signature single-family houses and a wide range of other projects, including apartment complexes, hospitals, shopping malls, private schools and universities, factories, and places of worship. Happily for the profession, architects began to find abundant work from the mid-1990s onward.

The liberalisation of the market, the emergence of a strong private sector, rapid urbanisation, and increased collaboration with international design communities created demand for a wide range of building typologies, which in turn required specialised architectural consultancy services. Public-sector agencies also began to recognise the social and commercial value of architectural

NONFICTION

Kumu: Meye bela

Chapter 2, section 2

LAZEENA MUNA

The house in Bogura did not shout its presence. It stood quietly, as more than shelter, more than walls and roof. With some walls made of clay, the house was warm and porous, absorbing many things and remembering every monsoon. Others were tin-thin and loud-echoing every footstep, every childhood rush towards something or away from it. The walls also held stories, chatter, and smells. The memory of lullabies sung not only at night but in broad daylight; when the sun slid in through unopened windows and played kutkut on the floor. The hiss of oil lamps lit when the day gave up too soon. Arguments too soft to be called fights, too familiar to be remembered. Words that fluttered and died before they could bruise.

The cement floors stayed cool even on the hottest days, and the verandahs wrapped around the house. The thatched roof was patched just often enough to show care, sagging just enough to show comfort. They did not measure wealth in a well-kept



ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

Nani and Nana shared the central room of the house, just off the long, shaded verandah. It always smelled faintly of betel leaf and mustard oil—sharp, familiar, lingering in the air like memory. At the far end of the front verandah, in a small, dim room, Nani's mother lay bedridden, quietly counting her days.

thatched roof or freshly plastered walls, but in new books stacked carefully at the bedside and in small blackboards dusted white with sums and spelling. Wealth was a report card inked with numbers above ninety. Wealth was a glass of hot milk pressed into drowsy

hands at sunrise or a spoonful of ghee dissolved into steamed rice—for brain food.

And above all, wealth was children, boys and girls alike, and their widening gaze beyond the courtyard, beyond the mulberry rows and the low clay walls, imagining a world that did not end where the village path did. Wealth was the understanding and the steady support to send them outward—to rise, to learn, to unfold into their own becoming. Because space on this earth is never simply granted. It must be claimed, with ink on fingers, with books held close to the chest, with the stubborn insistence on becoming.

So, if the house looked modest, it was only because its true architecture stood elsewhere, rising quietly in classrooms and libraries, in sharpened pencils and open books, in the invisible scaffolding of becoming that no visitor could see but that held everything up.

From its front verandah, the world spilled open into a sea of green, miles upon miles of mulberry trees stretching toward the horizon like a quiet promise. In winter, they stood stripped and skeletal, their branches brittle, their silence deep. But by spring, they softened. The same mulberries unfurled, their leaves tender as breath, trembling in the hush before dawn.

These were not trees for shade or show. They were the living spine of the household's survival, leaf by leaf feeding the silkworms that spun gold in silence.

Nani and Nana shared the central room of the house, just off the long, shaded verandah. It always smelled faintly of betel leaf and mustard oil—sharp, familiar, lingering in the air like memory. At the far end of the front verandah, in a small, dim room, Nani's mother lay bedridden, quietly counting her days. She had once followed a man across rivers and then along rail tracks. When he died, she unpacked her sadness and came to her younger daughter, my nani, to stay. Not quite

a guest. Not quite the mistress of the house. Just there, loved but always forgotten. That room held the scent of talcum powder and silence. Her eyes, even when closed, seemed to see everything.

There were three rooms at the back of the house, stitched together by a long, quiet verandah where shadows lingered and time staggered, especially in the late afternoon. The breeze came through the smell of guava skins, kamini blossoms, and mulberry dust, slipping between the slats. The largest of the rooms held the tender democracy of five small lives. There were rules, but broken as needed, and also rhythms—sometimes soft, sometimes wild. Kumu, at 10, already carried the seriousness of someone older, her hair parted with precision, her manner quietly exacting. Tultul, eight, was a tempest in a frock, her voice sharp as shattered glass, beautiful, reckless, and impossible to ignore. Bacchu, six, slept with fists tight and secrets tighter, always plotting the next bit of mischief he'd deny with a grin. And Faruk, four and a half if asked, five if not, wore his bewilderment like a second skin. He cried in installments, pausing mid-sob to follow the trail of an ant or wonder aloud why spoons shine. A spoon's curve with sugar could derail his misery. A beetle's shimmer restored his peace.

"Kumu" is a living memoir of Selina Hossain's early life, unfolding through carefully chosen themes and reimagined by her daughter, Lazeena Muna. This is an excerpt; read the full piece on The Daily Star and Star Books and Literature's websites.

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

INTERVIEW

BENJAMIN WOOD

From early writing days to 'Seascraper' success

MOHAMMED FARHAN

Benjamin Wood's latest novel *Seascraper* (Scribner, 2025), longlisted for the Booker Prize in 2025, is a tale of a young shrimp fisher Tom Flett who has an extraordinary expertise about sea and beaches. With a dependent grandmother, he ekes out his living from fishing the shrimps, growing sullen of his difficult life. Apart from Flett, there are more dexterously drawn characters in the novel that organically take place in the story as it unfolds further. However, the most extraordinary feature of Benjamin's writing is his exquisite Dickensian prose that makes the novel a feast for the readers. Here we speak to Benjamin about his writing and *Seascraper*.

How did it strike you to write about sea and beaches as a backdrop of your novel? Do you have some personal liking or fascination for the sea and beaches?

I grew up in Southport, a coastal town on the northwest coast of England. Longferry in *Seascraper* is a fictionalised version of that place, scaled down to suit my authorial purposes, amplified and stylised here and there. But I built it from my personal experiences and memories of the beach and the dismal weather conditions which usually prevail there. The scenes on the beach were, in some ways, the easiest—or perhaps just the most instinctive—aspects of the book to write, because I felt I understood what it felt like to stand there in Thomas's place. I can conjure up Southport beach in my mind in a blink. **The novel seems to be set in older times, somewhere in the 1950s rural side. What was your deliberation on this?**

The novel is actually set in the early

1960s—and there are plenty of factual indicators scattered throughout the book which reveal exactly which year, if the reader wishes to notice them and Google them for clarity. But I didn't want to date-stamp the story, because I hoped to give the reader the impression that Thomas is stuck in time—i.e. he is still practicing traditional methods of shrimping in an age of mechanisation, and he can see the world moving on around him while he is still rooted to the same old customs and expectations. I wanted the reader to enter the novel's world uncertain about which period the book's action is unfolding in, for them to think or assume it is earlier in history than it is, and then for it to pull them into 'modernity' along with Thomas.

separation and ensuing grief in the novel?

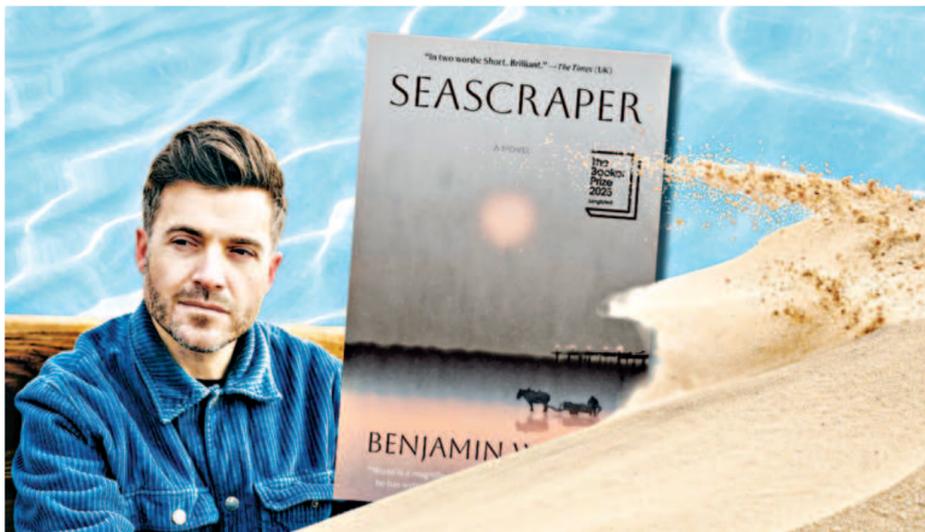
Without going too deeply into the subject here, I have quite a bit of personal experience of parental separation, and of estrangement from parents, to draw from as a writer. With *Seascraper*, I made a conscious decision to use those experiences to shape the characters' situations and perspectives as much as possible. It's probably my most personal novel, in that respect, even though the characters' life stories are a long throw from my own.

Which character did you find the most difficult to carve out while writing the novel?

Every character in a novel is difficult to carve out, or, at least, to render with sufficient authenticity of voice

and while the spotlight is upon them, or they might as well not be there at all. **It's a densely written novel in Dickensian style with detailed impeccable prose. How much do you find that this craft is important for fiction writing?**

Well, 'Dickensian' and 'impeccable' are words every writer wants to hear in relation to their work, so thank you very much for saying that. I'll have to get it printed on a t-shirt! Honestly, I try to make every sentence in a novel as fresh and interesting, as rhythmic and fluent, as concise and particular as I can make it. The music of a writer's prose is the first thing I care about as a reader, so I try to make mine as tuneful to the ear as possible. **This is an excerpt from the interview.**



DESIGN: MAISHA SYEDA

Honestly, I try to make every sentence in a novel as fresh and interesting, as rhythmic and fluent, as concise and particular as I can make it.

The idea of separation is enormously intriguing in the novel as it's been depicted through all major characters; Flett's mother is long separated from her husband, Flett has to bid adieu to his new friend Edgar, and Edgar is also somewhat in separation from his wife and daughter. How do you look at the idea of such instances of

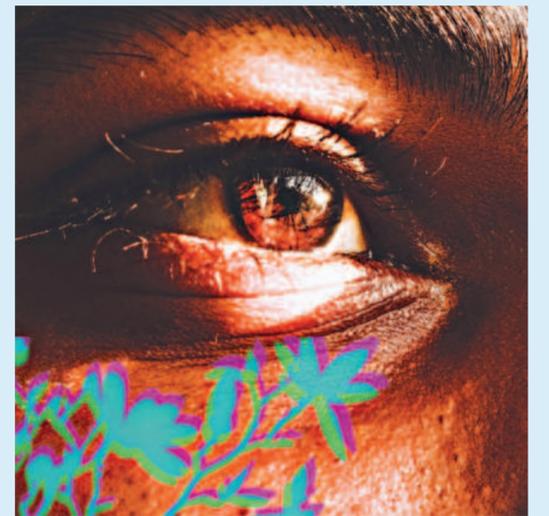
and experience. I'd say that, in *Seascraper*, the side characters were the toughest to render—for example, John Rigby the seafood merchant Thomas sells his shrimp to, or the sparky fella who's a porter at the hotel where Edgar stays—because they don't have a lot of space to declare their personalities to the reader. And even minor or incidental characters in a

Read the full conversation on The Daily Star and Star Books and Literature's websites.

Dr Mohammed Farhan teaches English at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. He often writes on books, and interviews authors for various reputed English dailies including The Hindu, Hindustan Times, and Hindu Business Line, among others.

POETRY

Unlearning you one syllable at a time



DESIGN: MAISHA SYEDA

TAHSEEN NOWER PRACHI

When your bright beaming dark eyes, matched mine, locked like a stubborn vine, I helplessly surrendered, like the petals comply, Sleeping between the pages in your pale book, tea-dyed. Chanting with each passing breath 'Forever mine, forever thine.' I learned you in quiet ways. Your little habits slipped into my senses, Without bothering to ask. Your favoured words, Became mine. Your pauses, sighs, the lingered quiet, Taught me how to soften a thought, When to smile, through silence, through voids that shine. Loving you was a language now, As if my voice wanted to be your childhood home, where everything's just delusionally fine. Now you are gone, the forever, alas, was actually timed and grief, with its slow work, incessantly dived. I must unlearn what once felt sunk in my skin. Each familiar phrase feels like a mistake, each habit a reminder, I did not choose to keep, to mean. I stop myself mid-sentence and feel the loss of our words again. You are no longer here to recognize these echoes, Your voice, your mirrors. So I carry them alone, mourning your language like shards of broken glass, A million tinkling, deafening me with the warning that, you, I now must unlearn. Your once home, my empire Rome, frozen in time, shall always burn.

Tahseen Nower Prachi is a writer whose head is a koi pond of micro tales too scattered to come down to her keyboard. Find more pieces on The Minute Chronicles on Facebook.

BNP moves to unite grassroots

FROM PAGE 1

He said a strong grassroots network is essential for connecting with supporters, implementing policies at the local level, and maintaining unity within the party.

Party sources said the top leadership is likely to raise the organisational challenges at its policy-making forum in April.

Following the talks, decisions will be made on revamping the party structure, which is set to begin after Eid-ul-Fitr.

Before the national polls, nearly five dozen district and upazila-level top leaders, including district presidents, secretaries, organising secretaries, conveners, and member secretaries, were expelled for violating party directives.

Key leadership positions in 29 districts are now vacant, severely impacting the party's organisational activities.

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

Grassroots leaders who were expelled or sidelined are privately communicating with top leaders, expressing their desire to regain their positions. They have indicated their willingness to abide by future party directives if given another chance.

Meanwhile, BNP expelled over five dozen rebel candidates and more than 200 grassroots leaders for their involvement in factional struggles.

Sources said many district committees lack full membership and are being led by controversial figures, further deepening divisions within the party.

Moreover, some grassroots leaders have been accused of failing to provide the necessary support to party lawmakers, making it more difficult for the elected representatives to carry out their work effectively.

The party has yet to discuss the return of the expelled leaders.

"We know that many top-ranking district leaders were expelled, but there is little chance of bringing them back to their posts. After the Standing Committee meeting, we will make the final decision," said another Standing Committee member.

The party also puts emphasis on assessing its strongholds across the country, looking at where it has the most support and identifying areas that require attention.

Party leaders stressed that the organisational challenges within the party need to be addressed immediately to ensure that the BNP can regain its strength and maintain unity at all levels.

"If any organisational weaknesses are identified, we will take immediate action to solve the issues to strengthen the party's

all units," said a senior BNP leader, wishing to be unnamed.

The decision to reorganise the party comes after an evaluation of its performance in the February 12 election.

Sources have indicated that BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman will make the final decision regarding the expelled leaders.

As the BNP moves forward, the party is making it clear that the MPs and ministers in the newly formed government will be expected to focus primarily on their duties.

Other leaders within the party who are not involved in government roles will be given more importance when it comes to strengthening the party at the grassroots level, said party leaders.

Besides internal divisions, the BNP is grappling with incidents involving criminal activities by some of its leaders, which have damaged the party's image and posed further challenges for its leadership.

Party sources said the BNP is taking firm action against those involved in such activities, while additional measures will be implemented to tackle the root causes and safeguard the party's integrity.

According to Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), a rights organisation, internal conflicts within the BNP from December last year to January this year resulted in four killings, 25 incidents of infighting, and 272 party leaders being injured.

A party yet to find its voice

FROM PAGE 12

and questions over whether its early momentum can translate into lasting influence.

Talking to The Daily Star, Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain, party spokesperson, said, "It was challenging to establish ourselves as a political party since the July uprising and to secure our position by participating in the national election. We overcame that and secured six seats in parliament. Now our main goal is to strengthen the organisational and political structure."

Senior Joint Member Secretary Ariful Islam Adeb said the party plans to expand activities nationwide by forming official committees, professional forums, and political councils at district, upazila, and thana levels.

Party sources said the NCP currently operates 10 front organisations, including those for students, youth workers, doctors, lawyers, and professional

associations.

Several attempts were made to contact party Convener Nahid Islam for comment on the party's future activities and the alliance's position, but he could not be reached.

Amid plans for organisational expansion, the NCP faces a leadership crisis. At least 60 leaders and activists have resigned in three phases over the past year.

Ahead of the national election, around 20 leaders, including former senior joint member secretary Tasneem Zara, left after the party joined an 11-party alliance led by Jamaat in December.

While senior female leaders, including Samanta Shermeen and Nahida Sarwar Niva, have not resigned from the party, they remain inactive in its activities.

"I will always have good wishes for the party. I'm staying away from the activities due to various differences within the party, but I will always be by the side

of the party in any crisis," Samanta told The Daily Star.

Party Member Secretary Akhter Hossen said discussions are ongoing to bring back those who resigned.

Political analyst Mohiuddin Ahmed noted that repeated departures of key leaders have weakened the party's organisational strength and continuity. "The NCP has not yet been able to develop an independent political identity. Although six seats in parliament are possible with the alliance's votes, not as an independent force."

Writer and researcher Altaf Parvez added that the party's potential has diminished due to "political inexperience and moral inconsistency."

He said the decision to shift from a movement to a party and accept ministerial positions damaged its momentum. "Now the party needs to make an objective assessment of itself, identify its mistakes, and plan for the future," he said.

5 held over Narsingdi girl rape

FROM PAGE 1

According to the DIG, two of them are directly accused in the rape, while the other three allegedly acted as local arbitrators in an effort to hush up the incident through a so-called social arbitration.

The prime accused, Nurul, remains at large, and drives are underway to arrest the remaining suspects.

Local MP Khayrul Kabir Khokon, who accompanied the DIG during the visit, told reporters that political identity would not shield anyone. "Criminals must face the law. There will be zero tolerance," he said, urging lawyers not to assist those accused in what he termed a "heinous and inhuman" crime.

An autopsy was conducted at Narsingdi Sadar Hospital yesterday, said Resident Medical Officer Dr Farida Gulshanara Kabir. "The victim was strangled to death with an orna (scarf) wrapped around her neck. There are also signs indicating that she was raped before the murder," she told The Daily Star.

The five arrestees were sent to jail by a court yesterday, said Md Kamal

Hossain, officer-in-charge of Madhabdi Police Station. Police have sought a 10-day remand for each of them; the hearing is scheduled for Sunday.

The body was handed over to the family and buried later in the afternoon. The family has been placed under police protection over security concerns, the OC added.

Police recovered the body of the 15-year-old, Amena Akter, from a cropland in Madhabdi on Thursday morning.

Her parents alleged that she was abducted in front of her father on Wednesday night and later killed by a group of stalkers who had gang raped her around two weeks earlier.

Rights groups and student organisations have condemned the killing and demanded exemplary punishment.

Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) expressed deep anger and concern in a statement yesterday, calling for justice and accountability. The incident once again shows that women and children remain gravely unsafe, it said.

Citing data from Ain o

Salish Kendra, MJF noted that 35 children were subjected to various forms of violence and abuse and 25 were killed last month, nearly one child falling victim each day.

It urged the newly elected government to fulfil its pledge to ensure justice and protect women and children, and to guarantee immediate security for the victim's family.

In a separate statement, Human Rights Support Society (HRSS) termed the incident a "grave breach" of human rights. Referring to its own data, the organisation said 2,047 women and girls faced violence in 2023, including 828 rape victims, of whom 474 were children. It demanded a prompt, transparent investigation and trial under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act.

Meanwhile, Dhaka University Central Students' Union and Jagannath University Central Students' Union staged separate protests on their campuses yesterday, calling for exemplary punishment for those responsible.

Little ones bring joy to book fair

FROM PAGE 3

while also delivering meaningful messages. We try to address social superstitions through this medium," he said.

Despite the lively Children's Hour, the general crowd was thin in the afternoon. Although it was Friday, most stalls saw low turnout.

At several stalls, instead of books, the sounds of hammers and saws could still be heard, as construction work remained unfinished and some publishers had yet to arrange their displays.

Sirajul Kabir Chowdhury, director of Anyaprakash, said the environment was poor, with piles of garbage, soil and bricks in front of many stalls. He said there seemed to be confusion over waste disposal.

Visitor Sushmita Roy said, "I usually visit the book fair several times every year. This is my first visit this time, and it feels like the fair started without proper preparation. Most stalls are not ready, and there is excessive dust. It should have been better organised before opening." Another visitor, Adilur

Rahman, said the fair appeared disorganised this year and that it was harder to navigate compared to previous years.

A total of 16 new books arrived at the fair yesterday. The morning featured children's drawing and recitation competitions.

In the afternoon, a discussion titled "In Remembrance: Farida Parveen" was held.

The paper was presented by Mohammad Romel, with participation from Dr Abu Ishak Hossain. Poet and thinker Farhad Mazhar presided over the session.

Cancel bails of Ivy

FROM PAGE 2

on bail have been accused of looting and organised extortion in different areas and demanded their arrest and trial.

Porwar demanded that the bail of Bodi, Ivy, and other AL leaders be cancelled and that they be brought to trial quickly.

He also urged an investigation into the reopening of AL offices and necessary measures to stop such activities, warning that otherwise a mass resistance involving students and the public would be built.

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on bail have been accused of looting and organised extortion in different areas and demanded their arrest and trial.

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32 out of 36 brick

FROM PAGE 3

the directives while continuing operations.

Several kilns, including M/S MRS Bricks in Sadar upazila and M/S PN Co Bricks in Durgapur upazila, appealed to the Environment Court, but their appeals were dismissed. Apart from this, the court's directives have not been fully enforced.

Recent visits found at least four kilns operating along the Netrakona-Mohanganj railway line. In Thakurakona under Sadar upazila, MRS Bricks operates beside a road and railway line.

In Patli village of Barhatta upazila, RMB Bricks is located close to a railway line and a primary school. In Kalmakanda upazila, PCB Bricks operates on cropland along the Gumai riverbank.

Contacted, Md Abdullah Al Amatin, assistant director of DoE in Netrakona, said that 32 of the 36 brick kilns in the district have been operating without proper

authorisation in one way or another.

He added that several kilns have been fined during drives conducted for violations such as using topsoil and firewood. "More enforcement operations will be carried out in the coming days, and legal action will be taken in accordance with the law."

Netrakona Deputy Commissioner Md Saifur Rahman said that action against illegal brick kilns is primarily taken through the DoE.

"Due to election-related engagements, operations had been temporarily halted. However, regular drives will now resume. Executive magistrates have already conducted operations against several illegal kilns, imposing fines and demolishing some structures," he said.

The DC warned that no one continuing illegal operations in defiance of court orders would be spared.

Dhaka condemns

FROM PAGE 2

land rights of the Palestinians.

He also demanded a permanent ceasefire in Gaza and an unconditional and unhindered access of the international aid workers and humanitarian support providers to the affected men, women and children in the Strip.

Khalilur conveyed the Ramadan greetings from Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman to the Muslim Ummah and stated that the newly elected democratic government in Bangladesh looks forward to closely working with the OIC Member States.

On the sidelines of the OIC meeting, the foreign minister held bilateral talks with Pakistan Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar; the Gambian Foreign

Minister Sering Modou Njie, Palestinian Foreign Minister Dr Varsen Ohanes Vartan Aghabekian, Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Musa Kulaklikaya, and Saudi Arabia Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Waleed A Elkhereiji.

The foreign minister shared with the leaders the visions and work programmes of the government particularly with regard to foreign policy, foreign trade and investment, resolution of the Rohingya issue and improving the effectiveness of the OIC Secretariat.

They also expressed strong support to Bangladesh's candidature for the presidency of the 81st UN General Assembly. He invited the dignitaries to pay a visit to Bangladesh at their convenience.

3 DB men attacked

FROM PAGE 4

their way back, accompanying Lablu.

The injured are SI Anwar Hossain, constables Mirza Rezaul Karim and Hasan Ali. The two constables are currently undergoing treatment at hospital, while the sub-inspector received first aid. At that time, the attackers snatched Lablu, added the OC.

SI Anwar filed two cases with Singair Police Station yesterday – one under the Narcotics Control Act, naming Lablu as an accused, and another against 19 named individuals along with 15 to 20 unidentified individuals.

Those who have been arrested are Purnima Begum, 20; Shabana, 26;

Jahanara, 23; Azimuddin, 65; Aminur, 27; Antar, 20; Mou Akhtar, 19; Asma Begum, 45; and Abdur Rouf alias Jewel, 26.

Preliminary evidence suggests that the arrested individuals were involved in the attack. Efforts are underway to arrest the remaining accused, the OC said.

The investigation officer of the case, Md Rezaul Karim, said all the arrestees have directly participated in the attack.

However, relatives of the arrested individuals said the real attackers have fled, and those who have been arrested are innocent.

Further legal action will be taken based on the investigation, added the OC.

Saudi invites PM

FROM PAGE 12

Bangladesh's support for major reforms to enhance the performance of the OIC Secretariat.

On the sidelines of the OIC meeting on Palestine, Khalilur held separate bilateral talks with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar of Pakistan, Deputy Foreign Minister Musa Kulaklikaya of Turkey, Foreign Minister Dr Varsen Ohanes Vartan Aghabekian of Palestine, and Foreign Minister Sering Modou Njie of the Gambia.

The leaders congratulated Tarique on the BNP's electoral victory, expressing confidence that Bangladesh would achieve political stability and accelerate development under his leadership.

They also commended Bangladesh for its unwavering support for the Palestinian cause and expressed full backing for Bangladesh's candidature for the presidency of the 81st session of the UN General Assembly.

In a separate meeting, Dar recalled his meeting last year with the late prime minister, Begum Khaleda Zia, and said that Pakistan Prime Minister Shabbaz Sharif looked forward to visiting Bangladesh to greet Tarique, hoping for improved bilateral ties under the new government.

Highlighting the longstanding ties between Turkey and Bangladesh,

Turkey deputy FM expressed hope for the steady expansion of cooperation in multiple sectors under the new government in Dhaka.

Khalilur thanked Turkey for its continued support for Rohingya refugees, and both

sides agreed to work for an early resolution of the crisis. He also handed over an invitation to Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan to visit Bangladesh after Ramadan.

During talks with Aghabekian, the foreign minister reiterated Bangladesh's steadfast support for the Palestinian people and stressed that a just solution lies in establishing an independent, sovereign Palestinian state based on the pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. The Palestinian minister praised Bangladesh's consistent support.

Khalilur said that although Palestine had withdrawn its candidature for the UNGA presidency, its cause would be upheld if he is elected to the post. The Palestinian side assured support from Arab and Islamic countries for Bangladesh's candidature.

In his meeting with Njie, Khalilur thanked Gambia for its continued support for the Rohingya, including the case filed against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice over alleged genocide.

Both sides agreed to hold an event on the Rohingya issue during the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in Baghdad in April. Njie also pledged support for Bangladesh's UNGA presidency bid and offered to mobilise backing from African countries.

Prime Minister's Adviser on Foreign Affairs Humayun Kabir, Foreign Secretary Ambassador Mollah Farhad Hossain and Bangladesh's Permanent Representative to the OIC MJH Jabed were present at the meetings.

Quakes outside

FROM PAGE 1

jumped up, called my wife, and ran outside," he said.

The man in his mid-60s said he had never experienced anything like it. "We've felt tremors before, but never a jolt like this in my life. It was terrifying. Many of my neighbours were screaming in panic."

What alarmed him most, he added, was learning that the epicentre was in his own district, near his upazila.

Earlier, three earthquakes that rattled Narsingdi within 32 hours in November last year caused panic among Dhaka residents and became a widely discussed issue nationwide.

Of the nine earthquakes recorded this month, four occurred in Satkhira and Sylhet – two in each district – while the rest were reported in Gazipur, Sunamganj, Mymensingh, Chapainawabganj and Jhenaidah.

The unusual frequency of seismic activity within such a short span has sparked fresh anxiety among people.

All the quakes ranged from 3.0 to 5.4 on the Richter scale and were categorised by the Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD) as minor to moderate.

According to the BMD, over the past 14 months, 38 tremors occurred within Bangladesh or along its borders in 15 districts, including Dhaka, Narsingdi, Gazipur, Mymensingh, Sunamganj, Sylhet, Moulvibazar, Habiganj, Satkhira, Jhenaidah, Jashore, Rangpur, Kurigram, Bandarban, and Thakurgaon.

These measured between 2.9 and 5.7 on the Richter scale.

Prof Syed Humayun Akhter, former chairman of the Department of Geology at Dhaka University, told The Daily Star that the epicentre was at a shallow depth of less than 10km, which caused the strong shaking.

Akhter said he does not expect an earthquake stronger than a moderate one in Satkhira, as the

district does not fall within a seismically active zone.

"Still, people need to be careful while constructing houses," he said, pointing to cracks formed in many homes by yesterday's tremor.

Bodruddoza Mia, chairman of Dhaka University's geology department, said Bangladesh is in a tectonically active zone.

"Earthquakes of magnitude four to five are expected and will continue to occur," he said.

He said the country lacks updated data on active fault lines within its borders. While the Dauki and Madhupur faults are well known, many others remain unmapped.

He said the government should conduct a fresh seismic survey, as the last one was carried out several decades ago.

"With modern technology, we will be able to update our seismological map to pinpoint earthquake risks more precisely," he said.

Bazlar Rashid, deputy director of the Geological Survey of Bangladesh, said the last seismic mapping was conducted in 1979.

He said the country's internal fault lines are unlikely to trigger a "mega-earthquake", as geological mapping has yet to identify any "mega-thrust" fault line within Bangladesh.

However, experts have previously warned that 7.0-magnitude earthquakes occur in this region roughly every 150 years, and magnitude-8 events every 250-300 years.

The last major earthquake in this region was an 8.1 in 1897, which originated in Assam. In 1918, a 7.6 magnitude earthquake struck the Srimangal area, causing extensive damage.

According to the experts, Bangladesh sits at the junction of the Indian, Myanmar and Eurasian tectonic plates.

The Dauki Fault in Sylhet, the Chattogram-Arakan Fault along the Chattogram-Teknaf belt, and the Sagaing Fault in Myanmar together place the country at extremely high seismic risk.

I see this qualification as a huge achievement. This is a very young group. Almost half the squad is under 20 years old, and at the same time our U-20 team also qualified for the Asian Cup. It shows there's something big happening.

Bangladesh coach
PETER BUTLER



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Asia's finest gather as Bangladesh prepare for historic debut

STAR SPORTS DESK

Bangladesh's journey in women's international football began with a modest first step – their maiden international fixture against Nepal at the South Asian Games in Dhaka in 2010. What started as a tentative introduction to the international arena has, over the next sixteen years, grown into one of the proudest stories in the country's sporting history.

What started with a modest South Asian Games fixture against Nepal in 2010 has grown into one of the proudest journeys in Bangladesh sport, with the Bangladesh Women's football team now preparing for their maiden appearance at the AFC Women's Asian Cup in Australia – a historic milestone for the country's women's football programme.

The rise to this stage has been built on persistence and collective effort. From players and their families to administrators, sponsors and supporters, many have contributed to a journey that transformed modest ambitions into genuine conviction. Qualification last July confirmed the steady progress of the programme and secured Bangladesh a place among Asia's elite for the first time.

The tournament, which begins on March 1 and runs across Perth, Gold Coast and

Sydney, will feature 12 of Asia's strongest sides. Returning to Australia for the first time since 2006, the competition will use several venues that staged matches during the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup, providing Bangladesh's young squad with a rare opportunity to perform on some of the biggest stages in the region.

Drawn in a difficult Group B alongside defending champions China, former champions North Korea and Uzbekistan, Bangladesh face a daunting introduction to top-level continental football. Their opening match against China in Sydney on March 3 will be followed by equally demanding encounters against North Korea and Uzbekistan – fixtures that will test both the team's resilience and its readiness.

The scale of the challenge has led head coach Peter Butler to temper expectations and emphasise discipline over adventure, particularly with a squad in which many players are still under 20.

"We will have to modify our approach," Butler recently said. "If you go there with a cavalier mindset thinking you can just press and attack these teams, you are in for the shock of your lives. When you play top teams and make mistakes, you get severely punished."

Rather than focusing solely on results,

Butler views the tournament as part of a longer journey – an opportunity to help a young group mature through exposure to the highest level of competition.

"This is an opportunity for these players to showcase their talents on a much larger stage," he said. "We are not coming in expecting to win the tournament, but the main aim is to lay the foundations, to build something that enables Bangladesh to qualify again and again."

Beyond the immediate challenge, the tournament carries additional significance as it offers a pathway to the 2027 FIFA Women's World Cup, giving Bangladesh further motivation to compete as strongly as possible.

Hosts Australia will kick off the tournament against the Philippines in Perth, while the continent's established powers once again line up as title contenders.

For Bangladesh, the Asian Cup represents both an arrival and a beginning – a chance to measure themselves against Asia's best while laying the groundwork for the future. The experience gained in Australia may ultimately prove as valuable as the results themselves, shaping the next phase of a journey that continues to gather momentum.

'A lot of effort required to compete against the best'

Having created history by qualifying for the AFC Women's Asian Cup for the first time in July last year, Bangladesh's women's football team are preparing for their maiden appearance at Asia's premier competition. Although the Bangladesh Football Federation had outlined an ambitious preparation plan, the programme fell short before the team departed for Australia last week. Despite the limitations in preparation, captain Afeida Khandoker has vowed that the team will give their best against Asia's leading sides. She spoke to The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman about expectations, preparation and future ambitions. The excerpts are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): You are going to play in the Asia Cup for the first time; what are your expectations?

Afeida Khandoker (AK): Since this is our first appearance, expectations are naturally high. This achievement did not come overnight; it is the result of long and sustained hard work. We will be facing some of Asia's strongest teams, so we must give a lot of effort to compete against the best. From the very beginning, we will try to produce positive results.

DS: Since qualifying in July last year, Bangladesh have played only four international matches and held two phases of intensive training at KEPZ. Do you feel there were any gaps in preparation?

AK: I would not say there were major gaps in preparation. We played 10 matches in the recently concluded Women's Football League, and we learned a lot from those games. We tried to improve by correcting our mistakes from the league. Whatever happened, we believe it has helped us move forward.

DS: You have previously played against strong teams such as Japan and Vietnam at the Asian Games. How challenging will it be to face China and North Korea in the group stage in Sydney?

AK: We played against Japan a long time ago, but we have not faced China or North Korea before. From our experience against South Korea at the U-20 level, we saw how quick and advanced they were in every aspect. The lessons we learned from that match could be useful in the Asian Cup.

DS: You were outside the national camp for a period due to the league. How much has your fitness improved under fitness trainer Cameron Lord in the short training phase?

AK: Everyone is now in quite good physical condition. During the league break for the

SAFF Women's U-19 Championship, we worked very hard under him. We tried to follow all his instructions and hopefully the results will be positive.

DS: How do you think Bangladesh's participation in the Asian Cup will influence women's football in the country in the future?

AK: Everyone dreams that Bangladesh will one day play in the World Cup. The interest from the public, especially after winning the SAFF Women's Championship twice and qualifying for the Asian Cup, shows that women's football will grow further in the coming years.

DS: How comfortable do the senior players feel with the inclusion of new faces like Alpi Akter, Saurovi Akanda Priti and Anika Rania Siddiqui?

AK: It is very encouraging for the whole team. We also have the AFC Women's U-20 Championship after the Asian Cup, so it is important for younger players to gain experience. Training and playing with the senior team

will help them learn how to handle competitive situations and perform better in the future.

DS: The national team have performed well internationally, but the domestic structure remains relatively weak. Do you have any regrets about the competition system?

AK: Honestly, there is nothing to regret or be frustrated about. In our country, the allocation for men's football has always been higher than for women, and we have accepted that reality. However, facilities for women's footballers should be improved because we have been achieving better results. I also think it is important for us to face stronger opponents in domestic competitions.



TEAM PROFILE

GROUPS

Group A

AUSTRALIA

FIFA Ranking: 15
Previous appearances: 8
Best finish: **Champions (2010)**
2022 record: **Quarterfinals**
Coach: **Joe Montemurro**

SOUTH KOREA

FIFA Ranking: 21
Previous appearances: 13
Best finish: **Runners-up (2022)**
2022 record: **Runners-up**
Coach: **Shin Sang-woo**

PHILIPPINES

FIFA Ranking: 41
Previous appearances: 10
Best finish: **Semi-finals (2022)**
2022 record: **Semi-finals**
Coach: **Mark Torcaso**

IRAN

FIFA Ranking: 68
Previous appearances: 1
Best finish: **Group Stage**
2022 record: **Group Stage**
Coach: **Marziyeh Jafari**

Group B

CHINA

FIFA Ranking: 17
Previous appearances: 15



PHOTO: AFC

Best finish: **Champions (9 times)**
2022 record: **Champions**
Coach: **Ante Milicic**

NORTH KOREA

FIFA Ranking: 9
Previous appearances: 10
Best finish: **Champions**
2022 record: **Did not participate**
Coach: **Ri Song Ho**

BANGLADESH

FIFA Ranking: 112
Previous appearances: **Debutants**
Coach: **Peter Butler**

UZBEKISTAN

FIFA Ranking: 49
Previous appearances: 5
Best finish: **Group stage**

2022 record: **Did not participate**
Coach: **Kotryna Kulbyte**
Group C

JAPAN

FIFA World Ranking: 8
Previous appearances: 17
Coach: **Nils Nielsen**

VIETNAM

FIFA World Ranking: 36
Previous appearances: 9
Best placing: **Quarterfinals**
2022 result: **Quarterfinals**
Coach: **Mai Duc Chung**

Chinese Taipei

FIFA World Ranking: 40
Previous appearances: 14
Best placing: **Champions (3 times)**
2022 result:

Quarterfinals
Coach: **Chan Hiu Meng**

INDIA

FIFA World Ranking: 67
Previous appearances: 9
Best placing: **Runners-up (2)**
2022 result: **Withdrew**
Coach: **Amelia Valverde**

KEY DATES

Tournament: March 1-21, 2026

Opening Match

Australia vs Philippines

Perth

Knockout Stage

Quarterfinals

March 13-15,

Semifinals

March 17-18,

Playoffs

March 19

Final

March 21

Bangladesh's Matches

Bangladesh vs China
March 3, 2:00 pm (BST),
Sydney

Bangladesh vs DPR Korea
March 6, 8:00 am (BST)

Sydney

Bangladesh vs Uzbekistan
March 9, 3:00 pm (BST),
Perth

ROLL OF HONOUR

Year	Host	Winners	Runners-up
1975	Hong Kong	New Zealand	Thailand
1977	Chinese Taipei	Chinese Taipei	Thailand
1979	India	Chinese Taipei	India
1981	Hong Kong	Chinese Taipei	Thailand
1983	Thailand	Thailand	India
1986	Hong Kong	China	Japan
1989	Hong Kong	China	Chinese Taipei
1991	Japan	China	Japan
1993	Malaysia	China	North Korea
1995	Malaysia	China	South Korea
1997	China	China	North Korea
1999	Philippines	China	Chinese Taipei
2001	Taiwan	North Korea	China
2003	Thailand	North Korea	China
2006	Australia	China	Australia
2008	Vietnam	North Korea	China
2010	China	Australia	North Korea
2014	Vietnam	Japan	Australia
2018	Jordan	Japan	Australia
2022	India	China	South Korea

Most titles: China (9)

Defending champions: China (2022)

What to WATCH

T SPORTS
 T20 World Cup
 Sri Lanka vs Pakistan
 Live from 7:30 pm
STAR SPORTS SELECT HD1, HD2
 Premier League
 Bournemouth vs Sunderland

Live from 6:30 pm
 Liverpool vs West Ham
 Live from 9:00 pm
 Newcastle vs Everton
 Live from 9:00 pm
 Leeds vs Man City
 Live from 11:30 pm



With England pulling off a four-wicket win over New Zealand in their final Group 2 Super Eight fixture in Colombo yesterday, Pakistan are still in with a chance of squeezing into the semifinals of this T20 World Cup if they can secure a convincing win over Sri Lanka in Pallekele today. For that, they will need their in-form opener Sahibzada Farhan to deliver once again, as Pakistan must beat Sri Lanka by at least 64 runs or complete the chase within 13.1 overs. However, Sri Lanka head coach Sanath Jayasuriya will be hoping that Maheesh Theekshana and the other spinners can thwart Pakistan and help them end their World Cup campaign on a positive note, having already been eliminated from the tournament.

PHOTO: FACEBOOK

Another episode of the Real-City saga

PSG face Chelsea in CWC final rematch

A Real Madrid vs Manchester City clash has become a staple of the Champions League, and fans will see the two giants face off for the second time this season, having already met earlier in the league stage. They have now been drawn together in the Champions League knockout phase for the fifth consecutive season, with City's director of football, Hugo Viana, calling the tie "like a final." The Last 16 draw ceremony in Nyon yesterday threw up a few other heavyweight clashes, with reigning champions PSG set to take on Chelsea in a repeat of last year's ill-tempered Club World Cup final, in which the Premier League side came out on top. Meanwhile, Barcelona will face Newcastle, while Arsenal -- the only side to have stayed perfect in the league stage -- play Bayer Leverkusen.

LAST-16 DRAW

- Real Madrid vs Man City
- Bodo/Glimt vs Sporting
- PSG vs Chelsea
- Newcastle vs Barcelona
- Galatasaray vs Liverpool
- Atletico Madrid vs Tottenham
- Atalanta vs Bayern Munich
- Bayer Leverkusen vs Arsenal

QUARTERFINALS

- QF1:** PSG/Chelsea vs Galatasaray/Liverpool
- QF2:** Real Madrid/Man City vs Atalanta/Bayern
- QF3:** Newcastle/Barcelona vs Atletico/Tottenham
- QF4:** Bodo/Sporting vs Leverkusen/Arsenal

SEMIFINALS

- SF 1:** QF1 winners v QF2 winners
- SF 2:** QF3 winners v QF4 winners

FIRST AND SECOND LEG DATES

- Last 16:** March 10-11 and March 17-18
- Quarterfinals:** April 7-8 and April 14-15
- Semifinals:** April 28-29 and May 5-6
- Final:** May 30 in Budapest's Puskas Arena



Rinku leaves team after father's death

AFP, Chennai

India batter Rinku Singh has left the team during the T20 World Cup in the middle of the tournament after the death of his long-ailing father, official sources told AFP.

The middle-order batter had rejoined India ahead of Thursday's Super Eights victory against Zimbabwe, but did not feature in the playing XI in Chennai.

India hammered Zimbabwe by 72 runs to move into a winner-takes-all decider against the West Indies in Kolkata on Sunday for a last semi-final berth.



The Press Trust of India news agency said Khanchand Singh had been battling liver cancer and died Friday morning at a hospital on the outskirts of New Delhi.

An attacking left-hander, 28-year-old Singh emerged as a finisher for his Indian Premier League team Kolkata Knight Riders before making his place in the Indian T20 team.

Singh rose from a humble background, with viral videos of his father delivering gas cylinders emerging after he made his India debut in 2023.

Tributes poured in from former cricketers for Rinku's father.

"This must be an especially difficult time for Rinku and his family," former spinner Harbhajan Singh wrote on X.

Opportunity over regret in long-awaited Australia tour

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Bangladesh will tour Australia for a two-Test series in August for the first time in 23 years, ending one of the longest gaps in the Tigers' red-ball history.

The last time Bangladesh played a Test series Down Under was in 2003. The enormity of that gap can be gauged from the fact that Mushfiqur Rahim -- one of only three cricketers since the 2000s to enjoy a 20-year-plus Test career alongside England's James Anderson and Zimbabwe's Brendan Taylor -- has never played a Test in Australia.

While the upcoming series has been finalised, the matches are slated for Marrara Stadium in Darwin and Great Barrier Reef Arena in Mackay -- venues not traditionally considered Australia's iconic Test centres.

Mackay is set to debut as a Test venue in the series while Darwin, which had hosted its first Test during Bangladesh's previous Test tour, is set to host a five-day game for the first time since 2004.

Test careers are often measured by appearances at the game's most storied venues and in this regard, most Bangladeshi cricketers may feel a sense of deprivation.

Mushfiqur made his Test debut at Lord's and in 2010, Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal also featured alongside him at the Home of Cricket. Yet, Australia's grand amphitheatres -- the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG) and the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) -- have remained beyond reach.

However, former Test captain Mominul Haque insists the opportunity to face Australia matters more than the venue.

"It felt really good when I heard it as I have never played Tests in Australia and even Mushfiqur bhai hasn't. It's great from many aspects because in the last few Test cycles, we haven't played any big teams except India and South Africa," Mominul told The Daily Star.

"Not exactly thinking about SCG or

not invite us to play for so many years, nor was it included in the FTP [Future Tours Programme]. But yes, I am happy that Bangladesh is playing against Australia in Australia," he told The Daily Star.

"Grounds like Melbourne and Sydney are very prestigious. Not being able to play in such venues may cause some regret. I



MCG. We haven't played Australia in a while so it's a big thing that we are playing there. We are excited to play a big side. So, I don't have much regret," he stated.

Former skipper Khaled Mahmud Sujon, who led Bangladesh in the 2003 series against an Australian side boasting the likes of Steve Waugh, Glenn McGrath and Ricky Ponting, termed the long hiatus unfortunate.

"It was our misfortune that Australia did

don't think they should be upset; they have achieved a lot in their long careers," he opined.

Mahmud also believed the current Bangladesh side is far more mature and feels the warmer conditions in Darwin could work in their favour.

"We managed in New Zealand conditions; Mount Maunganui was similar in that it wasn't that cold -- it was warm. I think that will also help us," he said.



Manchester City players were in high spirits during training on Thursday ahead of their trip to Elland Road to face Leeds Utd today. The Premier League title race looks to have come down to a straight battle between Arsenal and City. The Gunners hold a five-point lead after a 4-1 win over Tottenham but with Pep Guardiola's men holding a game in hand, the margin for error is slim. Arsenal face another derby test against fifth-placed Chelsea at the Emirates, raising the prospect of yet another twist this weekend. City, meanwhile, arrive in Yorkshire in a positive mood, having won their last five matches in all competitions.

PHOTO: MANCHESTER CITY

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A relief for consumers

Prices of key Ramadan essentials drop in Dhaka

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Prices of several essential items have fallen in the second week of Ramadan, bringing some relief to consumers in Dhaka. However, traders say the sharp decline is hurting producers at the farm level.

A visit to kitchen markets in Shewrapara, Kazipara, Ibrahimpur, Farmgate, and Karwan Bazar showed noticeable price drops in vegetables, fruits, and some protein items compared to the first days of Ramadan.

Lemons, which sold for Tk 150-200 for four normal-sized pieces two weeks ago, are now priced at Tk 100-120. Slightly smaller lemons, previously Tk 100-120 for four pieces, are now Tk 50-60, while the smallest ones have dropped from Tk 40 to Tk 30.

Cucumber prices have also declined. Local varieties that had reached Tk 160 per kg are now selling at Tk 120. Hybrid cucumbers, which were retailing between Tk 100 and Tk 120 per kg at Karwan Bazar and Mohammadpur Geneva Camp market, are now priced between Tk 60 and Tk 100.

Prices of tomatoes have dropped sharply, from Tk 60-80 per kg to Tk 30-60.

Onion prices have also dropped significantly in retail markets. "Before Ramadan, onions were Tk 200 for 3kg. Today, I bought the same amount for Tk 120," said Awlad Hossain, a customer at Shewrapara Bazar, affirming that

SEE PAGE 9 COL 5



Vendors have set up stalls at the entrance of the emergency department of Dhaka Medical College Hospital, restricting access for patients in need of urgent care. The illegal road occupation leads to congestion and chaos in the area that already sees heavy traffic from ambulances and other vehicles. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

NCP TURNS ONE

A party yet to find its voice

SHAMIMA RITA

The National Citizen Party (NCP), formed under the leadership of students who coordinated the July uprising, marks its first anniversary today.

The party was officially launched on February 28 last year at Manik Mia Avenue in the capital.

Born out of the student-led mass uprising that toppled the Awami League regime, the party entered the political arena with promises of a "Second Republic" and a new democratic paradigm.

Within a year, it has secured six parliamentary seats through an alliance with the Jamaat-e-Islami, expanded its organisational wings, and announced plans to contest local elections independently.

Yet analysts say the NCP's biggest challenge lies in defining its political identity amid internal divisions, leadership resignations,



SEE PAGE 9 COL 4

Saudi invites PM for visit

Says Khalilur as he spends busy day at OIC meet in Jeddah

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Saudi Arabia expects Prime Minister Tarique Rahman to visit the Kingdom at a mutually convenient time soon and has expressed readiness to work with Bangladesh on opportunities under Saudi Vision 2030.

Saudi Vice Foreign Minister Waleed A Elkhreji conveyed the message during a bilateral meeting with Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman on the sidelines of an OIC foreign ministers' meeting in Jeddah on Thursday.

Elkhreji also invited Khalilur to visit Riyadh, noting that Vision 2030 offers significant opportunities for Bangladesh across a wide range of sectors.

Khalilur said Saudi investors could explore key opportunities in Bangladesh, and both sides agreed to work together to realise the potential. Saudi Arabia is Bangladesh's largest labour market, employing more than two million Bangladeshi workers.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7

US tells its citizens to leave Israel

China, UK join countries in urging nationals to exit Iran as 'biggest military build-up in ME' raises war fears

AGENCIES

The United States authorised the departure of non-emergency embassy staff and their families from Israel yesterday, as it threatened strikes on Iran and pressed its biggest military build-up in the Middle East in decades.

The move came a day after a round of Oman-mediated talks between Iran and the US, seen as a last-ditch bid to avert war. However, initial optimism was tempered by Tehran's warning that Washington must drop "excessive demands" to reach a deal.

As the world's largest aircraft carrier, the USS Gerald R. Ford, was due to arrive off the coast of ally Israel, the US embassy there announced it was allowing non-emergency government personnel and family members to leave "due to safety risks".

"Persons may wish to consider leaving Israel while commercial flights are available," the embassy said on its website.

The New York Times reported that US Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee sent an email to embassy staff yesterday morning saying that those wishing to leave

"should do so TODAY".

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio will hold talks on Monday in Israel on Iran, the State Department announced.

Growing fears of conflict spurred China to join other

would lead to economic reprieve for their sanctions-hit nation.

The high cost of living had sparked protests in December that rocked Iran's clerical leadership, leading to a crackdown that killed thousands of people, according to

US-IRAN TENSIONS

- Iran urges US to drop 'excessive demands' to reach deal
- World's largest aircraft carrier nears Israel, joins a dozen more warships
- UN calls for calm ahead of technical-level talks set for next week

countries in warning its citizens to leave Iran "as soon as possible". Britain too withdrew its embassy staff from Iran.

Iranian and Omani officials presented Thursday's talks in Geneva as positive, but the United States has not publicly commented on their outcome.

In Tehran, ordinary Iranians expressed distrust of the United States and hoped negotiations

rights groups.

On February 19, Trump gave Iran 15 days to reach a deal. While Iran has insisted that discussions focus solely on nuclear issues, Washington wants Tehran's missile programme and its support for militant groups curtailed.

Without specifying what demands he was referring to, Iran's

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1



World must not normalise use of force

UN rights chief says

AFP, Geneva

The UN rights chief yesterday voiced alarm at the normalisation of the use of force to resolve disputes, saying armed conflicts had almost doubled since 2010.

"We must not revert to violence as an organising principle," Volker Turk said as he provided an update on rights situations around the world to the United Nations Human Rights Council.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights warned that "the threat and use of force to solve disputes is becoming more frequent and normalised".

"The number of armed conflicts has almost doubled since 2010, to around 60," he said. "The world really is

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

LDC GRADUATION

UN CDP discusses Bangladesh's deferment plea

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

The United Nations Committee for Development Policy (UN CDP) has discussed Bangladesh's request to defer its graduation from the least developed country (LDC) category by three years during its latest plenary session.

The session, 28th of the committee, began at the UN headquarters in New York on February 23 and concluded yesterday.

AT A GLANCE

- Decision expected within next few weeks
- Economic instability, high inflation, slow growth contribute to request
- Graduation deferral aims to provide policy space for stabilising economy

"We have received the request letter from Bangladesh and discussed the issue at the plenary session," Debapriya Bhattacharya, a member of the UN CDP and its Enhanced Monitoring Mechanism, told The Daily Star over the phone yesterday.

He said the committee will now prepare a report assessing the government's arguments and outline the process for evaluating the plea. A decision from the CDP may come within the next couple of weeks.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

Trump, Mamdani meet for 2nd time

Discuss housing, ICE detentions



REUTERS, Washington

New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani said he had a productive meeting with US President Donald Trump at the White House on Thursday, discussing issues including housing and student detentions by federal immigration authorities.

It was the second meeting between them since Mamdani's mayoral election win late last year. Mamdani is a Democrat and Trump a Republican.

Mamdani posted a photo with Trump on social media. "I had a productive meeting with President Trump this afternoon. I'm looking forward to building more housing in New York City," Mamdani wrote.

Mamdani said he raised concerns with Trump about a detention on Thursday of Columbia University student Elmina Aghayeva from Azerbaijan by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement and that Trump later informed him she will be "released imminently."



Will Jinks and Rehan Ahmed celebrate after steering England to a four-wicket win over New Zealand in a thrilling T20 World Cup Super Eight clash in Colombo yesterday. Jinks smashed 32 off 18 balls and Rehan struck 19 off seven as the pair shared an unbroken 44-run seventh-wicket stand to seal the chase of 159-7 with three balls to spare. The result left New Zealand's semifinal hopes hanging in the balance and kept Pakistan in contention for a final-four berth.

PHOTO: AFP

Schoolteacher's home declared a bird haven

P4

HASANAH ISLAMIC BANKING
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PRAYER TIMING
FEBRUARY 28

Fajr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 5:08	12:45	4:30	6:02	7:30
JAMAAT 5:18	1:15	4:45	6:12	8:00

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

SEHRI, IFTAR TIMING

RAMADAN	FEB	SEHRI	IFTAR
10	28	5:02	6:02
11	Mar 1	5:05	6:03
12	2	5:04	6:03



Small Saheli bird perched on a tree beside the swimming pool.

PHOTO: MIR MASUDUL ALAM, AURITRO SATTAR

JAHANGIRNAGAR UNIVERSITY

A campus awash with colour and life

SAKIB AHMED

Every morning, after getting out of bed, Siyam Nazmul, a residential student at Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam Hall at Jahangirnagar University, steps onto the veranda of his room to breathe in the day's first light. Usually, the air carries the familiar stillness of campus dawn, but today feels different.

The breeze is softer, almost tender. It brushes past his face with a sweetness he cannot quite name. In the southern wind floats the scent of fresh blossoms. Winter's stiffness has quietly retreated, and nature seems to have stretched itself awake. Tender green leaves unfurl on every branch, and clusters of vibrant flowers sway gently, as if celebrating their own return. From somewhere beyond the trees, the melodious call of the cuckoo spills into the morning, turning silence into music.

Yes, you guessed it right – spring has sprung. Not just across the fields and gardens, but in the restless corners of every campus resident's heart. With its colours, fragrance, and quiet longing, spring carries a gentle urgency, a reminder that after every season of stillness, life finds a way to bloom again.

Although winter in JU ends a little later than in many other parts of the country, nature never fails to decorate the campus in its full glory. The dry, leafless trees of winter are now covered with fresh green leaves. Colourful flowers have bloomed, and new fruits have started to grow. Mango trees are filled with tender buds on every branch. The soft, sweet fragrance of these new buds spreads through the air as bees busily collect nectar. Under the touch of spring, many small but beautiful changes are taking place across JU.

Flowers like palash and shimul, along with the soft green of fresh leaves, have given nature a new look and new energy. In front of the newly built Faculty of Arts building, the mahua tree at Mahua Tola has also bloomed with fresh flowers.

Under its shade stands Aminur, a student of International Relations at the Faculty of Arts. "The harshness of winter is gone. The campus has regained its life, and so have I," he says with a smile. "The colourful flowers have not only decorated the campus; they have coloured our minds too. That's why I'm wearing something bright today."

Aminur is right. Just as the palash trees wake up in the golden sunlight, and the buzzing of bees mixes with the playful wind, the young people of JU also celebrate the spirit of spring. Young men come out wearing basanti panjabis or fatuas. Many female students wear basanti-coloured sarees, tuck flowers into their hair, and wear glass bangles on their hands.

On this campus, spring is not just a season. It is a feeling – simple, bright, and full of life. A closer look across

campus only enriches the picture. On the southwest side of the Botanical Garden, clusters of shimul flowers have bloomed. Their bright red petals catch the eye from afar. As soon as one looks up, a squirrel can be seen jumping from branch to branch. The scene feels almost magical – nature in its purest form.

"I came with my friends to collect shimul flowers," says Shifa, a student of Journalism, gently placing a petal behind her ear. "Aren't they beautiful? We will make garlands with some of them and decorate our room with the rest."

Walking further towards the

and the tiny creature together create a picture that feels like a painting.

Naim, who has come from Dhaka University to visit JU, cannot hide his feelings. "Ah, why didn't I get admitted here? That will remain my lifelong regret," he says with a smile. "The fragrance in the air, the beautiful flowers, the life and nature – it's impossible to experience such a spring in the city."

To the south of the Botanical Garden, small wildflowers peek out from tree branches. Breaking through layers of green leaves, pink buds appear at first glance to be forest blooms. But on closer look, they

For now, JU still blooms. The trees continue to flower, and petals still fall softly along quiet paths. Students still pause to take photos, to breathe in the fragrance, to feel the season. But those who have watched the campus for years notice the slow changes – quieter lakes, shrinking shade, and empty spaces where old trees once stood.

eastern side of the Botanical Garden, another squirrel appears – this time resting comfortably on branches full of palash blossoms. The fiery flowers

turn out to be young shimul buds preparing to open.

Still, many wildflowers have truly bloomed with the arrival of spring.



Palash tree along the road from New Registrar Building toward Shaheed Minar.



Shet Rangon/Surabhi Rangon flowers behind the Old Registrar Building.



Squirrels on a blooming shimul tree in the south-west corner of the Botanical Garden.



Golapi (Pink) Amrul flowers behind Social Science Building.



Shimul buds (south of the Botanical Garden).



Nageshwar Champa flower beside Medical Building.



Registrar Building, hundreds of tiny white flowers (shet rangon) quietly bloom. Near the new Arts Building, gamari flowers add their own subtle charm. And of course, beside the Botanical Garden, delicate sharango flowers complete this living canvas of colours.

However, as the years pass, a quiet change can also be noticed in JU's spring. "The number of shimul trees

on campus has decreased," says Prof Mir Masudul Alam of the International Relations department. "Shimul trees usually grow naturally; they do not need to be planted. Perhaps due to deforestation on campus, their numbers have declined."

Prof Alam, who has long been involved in wildlife photography around the university, also points out another shift. While shimul and some wildflowers have declined, the number of palash trees has noticeably increased. "Among wildflowers, the number of udal has also dropped significantly," he adds.

Still, spring colours continue to brighten many corners of the campus. In front of the Social Sciences faculty and opposite the Zahir Raihan Auditorium, kosmos, shimul, and palash bloom side by side. "I can't walk this path without taking pictures. It has become my daily habit," says Juthi, a student of Economics.

Near the TSC garden, petunias are in full bloom. Besides the Bachelor's Quarters, clusters of rudra palash catch the eye. Around the Medical Centre area, gunwood (nagkeshar chaapa) flowers blossom along the pond's edge. A little further ahead, in front of Al Beruni Hall, a garden of sunflowers stands tall, where parrots and other small birds often come to rest.

Prof Amir Hossain Bhuiyan of the Environmental Science Department said Jahangirnagar offers exactly the kind of environment plants need to

thrive. He explains that many high-quality trees were planted in a planned way, arranged in rows so that different species bloom in different seasons. That is why the campus remains colourful throughout the year. He also mentions plans to plant even more flowering trees in the future.

Yet, while flowers continue to bloom, a quiet sadness lingers in the background. Bit by bit, JU is losing parts of its natural beauty. Over the years, thousands of trees have been cut down. Several lakes have disappeared, filled in to make space for new buildings and roads. The campus is expanding. New structures rise, facilities improve, and development moves forward. But with every tree that falls and every lake that vanishes, something gentle fades away. The birds seem fewer. The shade feels thinner.

"JU is still beautiful, no doubt. But twenty years ago, it was different – more flowers, more colours, more lakes. Even the air felt different. I still carry those memories. And yes, I miss it," says Mohiudduain, an alumnus of the Government and Politics department who graduated about 25 years ago.

For now, JU still blooms. The trees continue to flower, and petals still fall softly along quiet paths. Students still pause to take photos, to breathe in the fragrance, to feel the season. But those who have watched the campus for years notice the slow changes – quieter lakes, shrinking shade, and empty spaces where old trees once stood.

THE POISON TREE of Rangpur

Agriculture, environment and human health at risk



PHOTOS: SDILIP ROY

four crore kilograms each year. On average, 9 to 10 kilograms of tobacco leaves are produced per decimal of land.

Omar Faruk, Agriculture Officer of Aditmari upazila in Lalmonirhat, said nearly half the upazila's land is under tobacco. "This year tobacco has been cultivated on 8,375 hectares here, compared to 7,520 hectares last year. As the offices of all local and foreign tobacco companies are located here, the tendency is higher," he said. He warned that tobacco farmers are using subsidised government fertilisers, creating shortages. "Without a strong government plan, tobacco cultivation cannot be controlled. Tobacco is destroying soil fertility. From children to the elderly, members of farmers' families work in tobacco fields, putting their health at risk."

Anwar Hossain, 65, from Mominpur village in Rangpur Sadar, said tobacco must be grown on the most fertile land and requires large quantities

suffers nausea, fever and body pain. "Tobacco cultivation is very harmful. I tell my husband to quit, but he does not listen. Due to the encouragement of company people, I am failing to make him aware," she said.

Noren Chandra Barman (75), from Sarpukur village in Aditmari, said he entered tobacco cultivation about 35 years ago when companies moved into the area. "I fell into the trap 35 years ago. Financially I am benefiting, but soil, environment and health are being damaged. My family members often fall ill," he said, adding that other crops yield poorly on tobacco land and require heavy fertiliser use.

Didarul Islam (55), another farmer from the same area, said 8 to 10 maunds of tobacco are produced per bigha. Production costs range from Tk 20,000 to 25,000, and tobacco sells at around Tk 8,000 per maund. "Although expected profits can be made, the risks are also high. Tobacco requires constant care. The whole

labourers, it is not profitable," he said.

Sanjida Yasmin, Fisheries Extension Officer in Lalmonirhat, warned that the excessive use of chemical fertilisers in tobacco fields is having a severe impact on indigenous fish species. Chemicals wash into canals and wetlands through rain and irrigation water, affecting fry and brood fish. Native species are gradually disappearing.

Dr Shaykhul Arifin, Deputy Director of the Department of Agricultural Extension in Lalmonirhat, said efforts to reduce tobacco cultivation are facing resistance. "We are working to reduce tobacco cultivation, but farmers are not listening. Farmers are more attached to tobacco companies. The current level of cultivation is severely affecting food production. If these lands were used for food crops instead, a large quantity of food could be produced," he said, adding that without a government ban they cannot act against companies.

Dr Safinur Rahman, Senior Scientific Officer at the Rangpur Divisional Soil Resource Development Institute said the increasing trend of tobacco cultivation is putting agricultural land at serious risk. "Tobacco plants have extensive roots that absorb large amounts of nutrients, reducing soil fertility. Eventually, the land loses its ability to produce crops. Immediate action is needed to save fertile land from the aggression of tobacco; otherwise, the poison tree tobacco will one day push agriculture to the brink of destruction," he warned.

Rangpur Civil Surgeon Dr Shaheen Islam said those working in tobacco fields, especially children, women and the elderly, suffer from stomach ailments, fever, vomiting and ulcers. "Children and women must be kept away from the aggression of tobacco," she said.

Sirajul Islam, Additional Director of the Rangpur Regional Agricultural Extension Directorate, said the ministry has sought suggestions to curb tobacco cultivation. "Since there is no specific government law, we cannot take strong measures. If tobacco cultivation is not brought under legal control swiftly, Rangpur's agriculture will face a severe crisis," he said.

SDilip Roy is a journalist at The Daily Star.

If tobacco cultivation is not brought under legal control swiftly, Rangpur's agriculture will face a severe crisis.

SDILIP ROY

While farmers in other parts of the country are improving their livelihoods by producing high-quality crops using modern methods, many in the agriculture-dependent northern Rangpur region remain tied to the "poison tree" of tobacco. Here, tobacco cultivation is widely seen as a path to financial stability. Local and foreign tobacco companies reinforce that belief by offering free seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, interest-free loans and gift items. Many farmers have fallen into what can be described as a leaf trap. Rather than getting out they are becoming even more entangled.

The consequences are far-reaching. Tobacco farming is damaging soil fertility, reducing food crop production and affecting the environment and the health of farming families. Heavy use of subsidised fertilisers in tobacco fields has created shortages, leaving growers of other crops struggling to secure fertiliser supplies. Despite these problems, many farmers continue to prioritise tobacco in the hope of immediate profit. Although the agriculture department holds courtyard meetings to raise awareness, officials admit their efforts are failing to

counter the influence of tobacco companies.

According to the Department of Agricultural Extension, tobacco has been cultivated this year on 21,290 hectares across five districts of the Rangpur region, up from 18,734 hectares last year. Of this, 1,810 hectares are in Rangpur, 10 in Kurigram, 35 in Gaibandha, 18,225 in Lalmonirhat and 1,210 in Nilphamari.

Khorshed Alam Sagar, a member of the Anti-Tobacco Media Alliance, claims the actual area is nearly double the official figure. "Wherever you look now, you see nothing but the poison tree tobacco. There is little visible campaign from the agriculture department to discourage farmers. On the other hand, tobacco companies are constantly campaigning. Company representatives are going door to door," he said. "Unless tobacco companies' activities at the field level are stopped, tobacco cultivation cannot be controlled. Three foreign and four local tobacco companies are openly encouraging farmers, yet no action is being taken."

He added that the tobacco leaf market in Rangpur exceeds 10 crore kilograms annually. One foreign company alone purchases more than



of chemical fertilisers. From sowing seeds in November to bringing tobacco home in March, hard labour is needed. "Last year I cultivated tobacco on eight bighas; this year on 11 bighas. When we sell to the company, we receive the money at once," he said.

His wife, Fatema Begum (58), said in an irritated tone that their suffering increases during the tobacco season. She cannot tolerate the smell but is forced to work cutting, drying and tying leaves. During the season she

family must spend time on it. Initially we make profits, so we cultivate tobacco. We do not make much profit from other crops," he said. For 20 years he has cultivated tobacco with a company card and expanded from 10 bighas last year to 13 this year.

Dhiren Chandra Barman (60), from Bhadai village, acknowledged the damage but said they cannot leave it. "Women and children in our families work in tobacco fields. We profit because we work together. If we hire

VOTING WITHOUT ACCESS

How the national election failed voters with disabilities

YSTIAQUE AHMED

For the first time in years, voters across Bangladesh felt they had taken part in a national election without fear. That sense of relief was extended to many voters with disabilities. Yet beneath the optimism, a different picture emerged. A significant number of voters with disabilities reported misbehaviour, harassment, or practical barriers that prevented them from casting their ballots.

In August 2025, the Bangladesh Election Commission, with UNDP, organised a consultation titled "National Consultation on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in the Electoral Process". Officials noted that more than three million registered voters in Bangladesh are persons with disabilities, but only about 10 per cent have historically been able to vote. The promise was clear. The outcome, according to many voters and observers, was uneven.

Student elections at several public universities revealed that many visually impaired students were unable to cast their votes because polling centres lacked basic accessibility. Similar concerns resurfaced during the national election. Despite assurances that arrangements would be in place, most centres relied solely on human assistance. There were no Braille ballots, tactile templates, or assistive devices.

Ayesha Ahmed Liza, a polling official in Dhaka-4, said, "We received training from the Election Commission before the election, including specific guidance on how to assist persons with disabilities in casting their votes. In my booth, two such voters came to cast their ballots, and there were designated people to support them. However, there were no accessibility machines at the voting station."

For some voters, simply reaching the booth was the first hurdle. Rifat Pasha, a policy officer at the Institute of Wellbeing Bangladesh who is blind, voted in a national election for the first time since becoming eligible in 2009. This year, he finally received his voting slip. "My wife was with me as my voting assistant. I was lucky my voting station was closer to my home



Rashan Ara arrives at the polling station in a wheelchair, accompanied by her grandson.

and the room was on the ground floor, so I didn't have to climb two or three floors." But his arrival was unsettling. "What was shocking at first was that security saw me and said, 'Why are you here?' When I said I was a voter, he eased off but again probed why there was another person with me." After he explained, they allowed him in, yet "the first experience left a bad impression on me."

Ajmeri Nishat, a voter with low vision, also cast her ballot for the first time this year. Her polling centre, a three-storey school in Mirpur, had her booth on the second floor. "Since I went with my mother, she was with me from start to finish. She took me to the second floor." Inside, officials allowed her mother to accompany her after she explained her eye condition. "They held the pen for me at the right spot, and I signed the two pads."

However, the ballot itself presented challenges. "I told them it wasn't possible for me to stamp the ballot on my own because of the layout; I needed an assistant." She

ultimately voted with her mother's help. Yet she stressed that her experience depended heavily on family support and familiar officials. "If I hadn't taken my mother and had gone alone, I would have needed support from start to finish."

She added, "For a visually impaired person, a three-storey building with only stairs is not accessible. There were no ramps or lift systems." Nor were there any Braille or tactile ballots.

"No, it was just a plain piece of paper." Looking ahead, she said, "polling centres must be accessible, and the ballot paper needs to change."

Jahangir Alam, Senior Coordinator at the CDD (Centre for Disability in Development), said he was able to vote without much difficulty, though others were less fortunate. "I went with a guide and cast my vote without much trouble." However, two totally blind voters who accompanied him faced rude behaviour before officials eventually apologised. "I believe the

root cause is a lack of awareness," he said.

He cited reports of guides being stopped at polling stations and polling agents attempting to stamp ballots on voters' behalf. "This raises serious concerns about the privacy and dignity of voters." In one constituency, wheelchair users found that booths were located on upper floors without ramps. "We do not want these so-called 'favours' or charity from the state; we want our rights and our dignity. Voting is meant to be secret."

Salma Mahbub, Executive Director of B-SCAN, a women-led organisation of persons with disabilities (OPD), said this was the first time organisations working with persons with disabilities had formally observed a national election. Despite meetings with the Election Commission and discussions about making 100 centres accessible, "when we went for observation, we did not see anything of that sort." Although officials were instructed to prioritise voters with disabilities, she said, "they were not told how to support them."

Wheelchair users assigned to upper floors were often carried upstairs. "In those cases, the

mindset that truly wants all citizens to vote."

According to earlier surveys, Bangladesh has an estimated 3.3 million voters with disabilities, though no participation data is available. That, she said, is a question she would put directly to the Election Commission.

Ruhul Amin Mollik, Director of Public Relations at the Election Commission, said trainers were instructed to ensure voters with disabilities could cast their ballots with ease. If booths were located upstairs, "arrangements should be made to assist the person upstairs, if possible." Where that was not feasible, officials were told to come downstairs. He noted that many newer school buildings have ramps, although older ones may not. On voter participation figures, he acknowledged, "we don't have a number. We do not collect or conduct surveys specifically for voters with disabilities."

Both Jahangir Alam of CDD and Salma Mahbub of B-SCAN called for structural reform. "We wanted persons with disabilities and the elderly to be allowed to vote by postal ballot. The Election Commission introduced the system, but only for expatriates, not for citizens with disabilities. If postal ballots had been available, participation would likely have been higher."

Ultimately, the experience of voters with disabilities in the recent national election reveals a gap between intention and reality. While the absence of widespread violence and the presence of some supportive officials offered reassurance, these alone cannot substitute for structural preparedness. Inclusion cannot depend on personal goodwill, family assistance, or improvisation at polling centres. For participation to be meaningful, accessibility must be built into the electoral process as a matter of right, not exception. Clear legal safeguards, consistent training, accessible polling infrastructure, and enforceable standards are essential if future elections are to ensure that voters with disabilities can exercise their franchise with dignity, privacy, and independence.

Ystiaque Ahmed is a journalist at The Daily Star.



Indrani Chakrobarti, a voter with a disability, casts her ballot.

secretary of the vote was not maintained." While some officials were cooperative, others were not. "People with mobility impairments did not receive the support they were supposed to get." There were no Braille ballots and no clear signage for voters with hearing impairments.

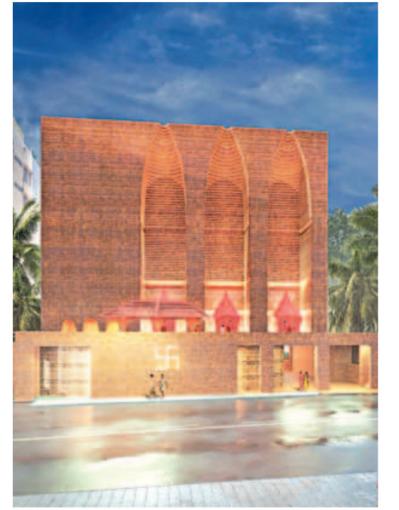
She believes a simple circular mandating voting booths on the ground floor could have addressed many of these issues. "It requires a



Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council Building, Farmgate, Dhaka, 1982.
Architect: Rabiul Hussain.



Zebun Nessa Mosque, Ashulia, Dhaka, 2023. Architect: Saiqa Iqbal Meghna, Studio Morphogenesis.



Golpaha Mohashoshan Kali Mandir, Chattogram, 2022. Architect: FRAMEWORK.

THE PROMISES AND PERILS OF A 'NOTUN TEJ' in Bangladeshi architecture

ADNAN ZILLUR MORSHED

Nearly a hundred years ago, in 1927, something "revolutionary" happened in Stuttgart, Germany. The German design collaborative known as the Deutscher Werkbund organised an exhibition featuring a full scale experimental housing estate that has since become known as the Weissenhofsiedlung. Conceived to showcase "a home for modern city dwellers," the exhibition attracted more than half a million visitors, intrigued by the idea of modernity in everyday domestic life, a novelty in the 1920s. Many visitors must have gawked at the estate's futuristic, unornamented, white, boxy, flat-roofed, industrial-looking buildings with a mix of anxiety and wonder. The Weissenhofsiedlung's deliberate break from traditional house forms, while promising to create a modern society with a new type of architecture as its ideological vehicle, crystallised what had already been known as *esprit nouveau* within European art and architectural circles. The exhibition is widely regarded as a harbinger of modern architecture in Europe and beyond.

A Bangladeshi *esprit nouveau* has been flourishing with palpable, organic energy—let us call it *notun tej*—for the past three decades or so. Architects have been experimenting with aesthetic expression, formal articulation, material choices, environmental adaptation, and, most importantly, architecture's relationship to history, culture, and land. Although the results have sometimes been mixed, these varied experiments have brought to the fore a collective sense that something significant has been unfolding in this densely populated South Asian country.

What drives this restless energy is uncertain, though one can identify a host of possible catalysts. Is it the combined social and cultural effects of a society in transition? The aspirations of a rising middle class? The progressive vision of entrepreneurial practitioners? Globalisation and its neoliberal order? The cultural cross-pollination of the local and the global? The gradual discovery of an architectural *genius loci*—that archetypal spirit of place shaped by vernacular commitments? Or the political economy of the built environment intersecting with the politics of development? Perhaps it is all of these at once.

Whatever the underlying cause, an engaged observer may perceive this spirit as an open-minded search for an aesthetic calculus of "local" modernity, one that unfolds without the burden of performing overt Bengali identity politics. From places of worship to factories, from residential buildings to markets, and from park restorations to riverfront developments, a macro-tendency has emerged that transcends the neoliberal narrative of modernity as a purely globalising project. Many projects are simultaneously modern in the clarity of their aesthetic grammar and "unmodern" in their defiance of international modernism's visual orthodoxy. High profile national architectural competitions have fostered a new kind of design entrepreneurship, producing edifices that invite a wide arc of interpretive possibilities. Architects have also expanded the boundaries of professional practice by working with low-income communities, reimagining design in an age of climate change and rising seas, and participating in policy dialogues on urban welfare.

One thing is certain: architectural practice has shattered Dhaka-centrism. Buildings that embody the country's *notun tej* are now found not only in Dhaka but also in Gaibandha, Sreepur, Bogra, Pabna, Dinajpur, Kulaura, Moulvibazar, Matlab, Jhenaidah, Cox's Bazar, Teknaf, Netrokona, Tangail, and Gazipur, among other places far removed from the nation's financial and political centers.

Even as the roads of major cities remain paralysed by traffic congestion and marked by a pervasive sense of civic chaos, and even amid the infernal pace of urbanisation across the country, the architectural culture of *notun tej* has taken root. It brings both promise and

peril, introducing contentious debates about its character, its future, its ability to serve society, and, most importantly, the nature of its political engagement.

While there is, of course, an intellectual indebtedness to the country's independence, the spirit of *notun tej* is deeply intertwined with the 1980s, a decade of intense change in social norms, public discourse, and political aspirations, catalysed by both local and global forces. On December 16, 1982, eleven years after Bangladesh achieved independence, architect Syed Mainul Hossain's National Martyrs' Monument was inaugurated in Savar. A year later, with the completion of Louis Kahn's Parliament complex in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, the nation gained an architectural emblem of its political odyssey towards statehood. Yet the decade's complex political tapestry—shaped by autocratic military rule, infrastructure modernisation, rural development, industrialisation, urbanisation, and a rising middle class—led to the breakdown of traditional cultural thresholds, the emergence of new forms of civil discourse about the past, present, and future, and, most significantly, a national tenor of soul-searching.

Architecture—bearing cultural meanings that reach far beyond the physicality of the built environment—became an important component of this introspection. What did Bengali nationhood mean, and how did it dovetail with, or complicate, the tangible expressions of the places around us? Competing ideas began to permeate architectural thinking across the country.

Three stories, although hardly a tell-all saga, deserve mention. First, an "avant-garde" architectural study group named *Chetona* (meaning awareness), created at the behest of architect Muzharul Islam, sought to introduce critical thinking as an essential component of architectural practice. Many architects, both senior and junior, disillusioned with the prevailing view of architecture as primarily a professional service devoid of broader social vision or engagement with history and culture, gravitated towards *Chetona*. The group's iconoclasm centred on reading critical architectural texts and questioning existing methods of architectural pedagogy, as well as the treatment of architecture as merely a technical discipline. Its reading list included, among many others, Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul Islam, works on Bengal's history, literature, and art, the writings of the Franco-Swiss architect Le Corbusier, the environmentalist Rachel Carson, and the Norwegian architectural theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz.

Not all architects, however, agreed with this effort to intellectualise the design profession, and many kept their distance from what they perceived as elitism. Paradoxically, this rift created an opportunity for introspection, as a contentious yet productive architectural conversation began to unfold.

Second, the influence of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture (AKAA), an architectural prize established by Aga Khan IV in 1977, was strongly felt during the 1980s. The award sought to champion regional, place-based, and culturally sensitive architectural approaches in Islamic societies, although what "Islamic" meant remained open to debate. Awarded projects spanned contemporary design, social housing, community development, restoration, adaptive reuse, and landscape design. In many ways, the AKAA presented "Islamic regionalism" as an antidote to the abstract orthodoxy of Western modernism (and its perceived domination), which had allegedly homogenised architectural practice around the world.

Meanwhile, on the world stage in the 1980s, the proposition of "universalism" was increasingly seen as a problematic idea, as it implied humanity could be understood as a single, seamless narrative. "Contextualism," by contrast, gained wider currency, emphasising that events occur within specific cultural and historical contexts rather than being predetermined by universal patterns and

values. The French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard's critique of the "metanarrative" opened new ways of making sense of the plurality of local, small-scale narratives: the contextual stories. Alexander Tzonis, Liane Lefaivre, and Kenneth Frampton promoted the idea of "critical regionalism" as a grounded path toward contextual architecture, one intended to produce a rich interplay between the global and the local. Christian Norberg-Schulz advanced "phenomenology"—the discourse of embodied experience—as a rallying cry in architectural pedagogy, introducing architects to the philosophical work of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Gaston Bachelard. Several Bangladeshi architects took note of these developments and were inspired to reimagine architecture as a place-based practice shaped by the internal dynamics of society and culture.

Third, the publication of several international architectural magazines struck

Bangladesh's metropolises began to face an acute housing shortage.

During this transitional period, real estate developers emerged as powerful economic actors in Dhaka and beyond, playing a key role in replacing traditional single-family houses with multistory apartment complexes. Meanwhile, the public sector failed to meet rising housing demand, and private real estate companies expanded rapidly to fill the gap. For example, in the early 1980s only five real estate firms operated in the country; by 1988, that number had grown to forty-two. The rapid rise of private developers reflected a robust market for high-density, multifamily housing, even though affordability remained a major challenge. During this time, many architects experimented with materials, forms, spatial organisation, construction techniques, aesthetic expression, and the relationship of individual plots to their surrounding neighbourhoods.

Meanwhile, in 1993, Bangladesh formally

aesthetics and increasingly hired architectural firms to compete in the building market. Together, these developments ushered in a vibrant and dynamic period of architectural experimentation.

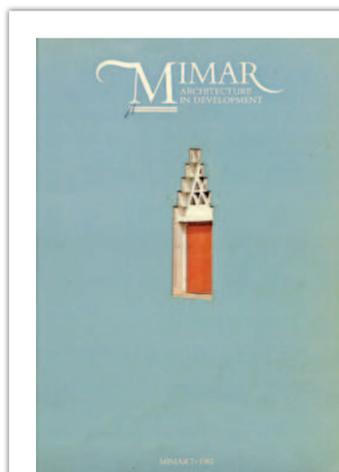
Over the last two decades, Bangladesh has witnessed an intense contest of architectural ideas. Earlier debates—such as modernism versus regionalism or formalism versus contextualism—have given way to a more complex landscape marked by nonbinary design theories, diversified construction materials, engagement with the country's deltaic ethos, and, more broadly, the political economy of the built environment. Approaches that proved aesthetically or philosophically compelling in the 1980s and 1990s became untenable or insufficient as architectural practice responded to environmental degradation, the neoliberal economic order, and the rise of social media. The profession has simultaneously conformed, resisted, and zigzagged, producing a diverse array of outcomes.

Yet there is a darker side to this narrative. While architecture—largely in the form of individual, plot-based or stand-alone projects—thrived, cities, with Dhaka as the most glaring example, descended into unbearable chaos. In extreme cases, opulent "Taj Mahals" produced one city of cloistered interiors, while overflowing dumpsters and pervasive urban poverty produced another. Private oases and luxurious cafés overlooked the ghettoised worlds of informal settlements, many of which periodically fell victim to arson as part of draconian eviction tactics.

As architects searched for a synthesis between Bengali roots and an ecumenical vision of spatial wellbeing, they largely failed to articulate an ethical framework for how cities should function or how a foundational commitment to spatial justice might drive urban life. Globalisation fueled architectural patronage even as cities continued to suffer from extreme economic inequalities that, as French economist Thomas Piketty has argued, define contemporary predatory capitalism. Architects seem either unable or unwilling to grapple with how the built environment could—or should—play a mitigating role in addressing social inequities and spatial injustice. Slums burned, and architects responded with naïve, cosmetic solutions, rarely attempting to understand the exploitative economic and political systems that marginalise the urban poor in the first place. The profession appears to have struck a Faustian bargain, surrendering to the irony that "architecture is great, but the city rots" as a form of convenient fatalism. Thus, consciously or unconsciously, architects become complicit in perpetuating a culture of injustice, alas—through the very designs in which they take pride.

It is a problem of scale, both in physical and metaphysical terms. The delicate balance between the micro scale of the building and the macro scale of the city must be handled with care. To understand an anthropology of care, the design community must undertake a forensic analysis of the "class" dimension that complicates these two scales, along with the multivalent social complexities that exist between them. Most people in the city have very little access to purpose-built environments; yet they persist, clinging to the city as their shelter, their daily battlefield, and their assertion of the right to exist. Thus, care—both as a tactical imperative and as a moral buffer—offers the possibility of resisting the injustice of deciding who matters and who does not so that society may march on, the nefarious basis of what African philosopher Achille Mbembe calls "necropolitical" governance. The spirit of *notun tej* in Bangladeshi architecture must resist this dehumanising division by mediating between the scales of the building and the city.

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Mimar: Architecture in Development, the flagship magazine of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, first published in 1981.



Chetona Newsletter, 1980s.

a popular chord among design professionals and students. The Aga Khan Award for Architecture's flagship magazine, *Mimar: Architecture in Development*—first published in 1981 and produced for forty-three issues—encouraged many Bangladeshi architects and architecture students to look beyond Western modernism and the aesthetic hegemony it allegedly created. The Indian architectural magazine *Architecture + Design* (A+D), first published in 1984, positioned itself as a vanguard platform for chronicling creative architectural projects in South Asia and became an essential source of knowledge about the subcontinent's design culture. Its affordability further magnified its influence on design communities across the country.

On a broader national scale, the architectural aspirations of design professionals coincided with the rapid urbanisation of Bangladesh and the rise of an urban middle class that gradually fostered a flourishing culture of architectural patronage. Historically agrarian, Bangladesh began to urbanise quickly in the late 1980s. The country's total urban population rose from a modest 7.7 percent in 1970 to 31.1 percent in 2010. Impoverished rural migrants flocked to major cities—particularly the capital, Dhaka—in search of employment and better lives. Dhaka's population soared from 1.8 million in 1974 to more than 6 million in 1991, reaching nearly 18 million by 2015. This massive population boom placed unsustainable pressure on urban land, driving land values sharply upward. As occurred in nineteenth-century industrial cities such as London, Manchester, Liverpool, Paris, and New York,

introduced a national building code (BNBC), a milestone document prepared by the Housing and Building Research Institute (HBRI) with support from professional bodies. This was the country's first effort to consolidate structural, architectural, fire, electrical, and safety standards into a single document. The code sought to integrate aesthetic creativity, building safety, environmental exigencies, and public health within a comprehensive framework for professional practice. As a result, new architectural imperatives and obligations entered the debate.

A burgeoning class of urban entrepreneurs—who had made their fortunes in the country's export-oriented ready-made garment industry, as well as in manufacturing, transportation, construction, and the consumer market—began to emulate "old money" and emerged as a new generation of architectural patrons. They invested substantial sums in building signature single-family houses and a wide range of other projects, including apartment complexes, hospitals, shopping malls, private schools and universities, factories, and places of worship. Happily for the profession, architects began to find abundant work from the mid-1990s onward.

The liberalisation of the market, the emergence of a strong private sector, rapid urbanisation, and increased collaboration with international design communities created demand for a wide range of building typologies, which in turn required specialised architectural consultancy services. Public-sector agencies also began to recognise the social and commercial value of architectural

THE RICE GENE BANK that feeds Bangladesh

BRRI's gene bank preserves biodiversity, enabling high-yield varieties, boosting production, and securing the country's long-term food security

"The high-yielding rice varieties and the resulting food security that we have at present would have been impossible without the gene bank's collections," said Dr Mir Sharf Uddin Ahmed, chief scientific officer and head of the Genetic Resources and Seed Division at BRRI.

KN DEYA

Milon Sarker grows paddies on two bighas of land in Kalikapur, a village in Jashore's Bagherpara upazila. He inherited the profession from his father, who cultivated varieties with lyrical names like Machranga, Ratna, Bilkhali. Milon farms BRRI dhan51 and Rod Miniket – varieties his father never heard of, names that sound borrowed from a science textbook.

The exchange has been worth it. Where his father's varieties produced enough for the family, Milon's produce enough for a profit. "I tried several popular varieties, and found that these new varieties produce more rice than the ones my father used to cultivate."

This generational shift, replayed across millions of farms, captures one of the great transformations of modern agricultural history. In 1970, traditional rice varieties covered over 97 percent of Bangladesh's paddy fields and produced 92 percent of the harvest. By 2025, they accounted for barely 7 percent of the land and just 3 percent of output.

Dozens of hybrid and high-yielding varieties (HYVs) – the product of decades of scientific breeding – now dominate almost completely. Many

last century, when technology transfer initiatives resulted in a significant increase in crop yields. The wave of change reached Asia in the mid-60's, making HYVs rapidly popular in Bangladesh.

As the world's population surged and experts warned of impending famine, a team of IRRI researchers utilised traditional rice varieties to develop IR8. When an Indian farmer named Subba Rao planted it in 1967, he harvested nearly ten times more than conventional varieties had yielded, and the results caught the attention of scientists across the continent.

The scale of what followed is almost impossible to overstate.

In a 2000 lecture at the Norwegian Nobel Committee, Nobel Laureate Dr Norman Borlaug noted, "Had 1950 cereal yields still prevailed in 1999, the world would have needed nearly 1.8 billion hectares of additional land of the same quality – instead of the 600 million that was used – to equal the current global harvest."

From 1950 to 2000, Asia's population had increased from 1.2 billion to 3.8 billion, as per Borlaug, and without the yield increase brought about by the Green Revolution, food

Bangladeshi landrace named Lati Shail was involved in developing IR8," said Dr Md Khalequzzaman, former director general of BRRI.

Yet even as HYVs spread, their success created new vulnerabilities. Intensive monoculture attracted pests and diseases that traditional varieties had naturally resisted. BRRI researchers were forced to shift strategy, mining the genetic material of the old varieties to breed resistance into the modern ones.

To improve HYVs, it turned out, you needed the genes of the very crops they had displaced. This paradox – that modernity depended on preserving what it had replaced – is why gene banks matter so profoundly.

BRRI's efforts paid off. In the four decades that followed independence, rice production tripled, keeping pace with a population that showed no signs of slowing. By 2024-25, Bangladesh ranked third among the world's top rice-producing



The BRRI rice gene bank and seed laboratory is housed at the institute's Genetic Resources and Seed Division building.

PHOTO: MASUM RANA/BRRI



adaptation, nutritional value, and higher yield.

"The HYV varieties and the resulting food security that we have at present would have been impossible without the gene bank's collections," said Dr Mir Sharf Uddin Ahmed, chief scientific officer and head of the Genetic Resources and Seed Division at BRRI.

Landraces are goldmines of genes, Dr Biswas stressed. "The pest- or disease-resistant features we see in improved varieties were undoubtedly derived from the gene of a landrace."

The BRRI gene bank facility, upgraded in 2007, operates on three tiers.

Dr Biswas explained that short-term storage, with seeds in glass jars at 20-22°C, keeps the samples viable for 3-5 years and functions as the working collection, from which distributions are made when needed.

Medium-term storage, with lower temperature and moisture content, extends viability to 15-20 years.

Long-term storage, maintained at sub-zero temperatures with minimal humidity, can preserve seeds for 50-100 years. It serves as the last line of insurance against an uncertain future.

For storage, BRRI collects rice seeds not only from all over Bangladesh, but also from other countries.

When researchers seek to breed a disease-resistant variety, they search the gene bank's inventory, sequence the relevant genes, and then proceed through rounds of pre-breeding and crossing, according to Dr Ahmed.

The larger the inventory, the more possibilities open up. Most of BRRI's 121 released varieties owe their existence to germplasm drawn from the bank, including the popular Boro variety Atash, the coarse variety BRRI dhan51, and the late Aman varieties BR22 and BR23.

Six varieties approved recently include salinity-resistant, disease-resistant, and vitamin-enriched types. Of them, three "mega" varieties are capable of yielding 9-10 tonnes per hectare.

The BRRI gene bank continues to collect, preserve, multiply, and document rice seeds, aiming to assist research and development of new and improved rice varieties down the line.

"While a gene bank does not directly

benefit a farmer at the root level, it is a source of hope for their future," Dr Ahmed said.

Despite the significant success, HYV rice is not the endgame. According to data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the production of Aus and Aman crops shrank to some extent, yet Boro production rose in the fiscal year (FY) 2024-25.

This rise was attributed to higher acreage of Boro driven by the adoption of hybrid varieties that produce even higher yields than HYV rice. BRRI has so far developed and released 121 HYVs, including 113 inbred and 8 hybrid types.

Dr Biswas described the progress. "At first, the inbred HYV rice developed by our researchers hit a yield ceiling of 5 tonnes, which was frustrating. However, now they're breaking that ceiling, and it is expected that hybrid rice will continue to excel."

THE DOOMSDAY BACKUP

Bangladesh is not alone in this work. India, Pakistan, Myanmar, Nepal, and Bhutan all maintain their own gene banks, some dedicated entirely to rice. The International Rice Gene Bank at IRRI houses 132,000 accessions, the world's largest rice genetic repository. In Africa, the Africa Rice Center preserves 22,000 varieties. The US Department of Agriculture manages a network storing over 600,000 crop varieties.

And then there are the so-called doomsday vaults – facilities designed to survive civilisational catastrophe.

The Millennium Seed Bank, buried beneath botanical gardens in Sussex, UK, aims to preserve the world's wildest plant diversity.

The Svalbard Global Seed Vault, cut into the permafrost of a remote Norwegian archipelago, safeguards more than 930,000 food crop varieties in a structure built to withstand war, flood, and the slow violence of time. These are humanity's genetic insurance policies.

But the more ordinary miracle happens in places like BRRI's gene bank. When asked whether Milon Sarker's father's Machranga rice might still exist somewhere in BRRI's collection, Dr Ahmed replied: "There's a possibility." At least four samples named Machranga are currently stored there.

The seeds live on, waiting. Should Bangladesh's farmers ever need them again, they will be there.



PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

Farmers in the Barind region are busy transplanting boro rice. This photo was taken recently from Talondo village under Tanore upazila, Rajshahi.

farmers, like Milon, barely remember the old varieties – once more than 12,000 in an estimate – their fathers and grandfathers grew.

HYVs have been imperative in feeding the exploding population of the country, which has grown some 2.5 times since independence, from roughly 70 million to 176 million. The old varieties that fed an agricultural society could never have sustained a modern nation of this size, especially where food security is nearly synonymous with rice security. That they haven't needed to is a quiet triumph of plant science, and it hinges on a facility few Bangladeshis know exists: the gene bank at the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI).

HUNGER AND REVOLUTION

The story of HYV rice varieties began at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines during the Green Revolution in the

security would have been long lost.

Bangladesh got its own version of this miracle. After independence, researchers at the BRRI, established in 1971, developed varieties suited to local conditions, and food grain production climbed steeply.

"Back in the 60's, all the rice varieties cultivated around the world could only produce up to 1 tonne per hectare yield," said Dr Jiban Krishna Biswas, a prominent scientist.

This scenario changed with the arrival of the IR8 rice variety, which became popularly known in Bangladesh as IRRI rice. Food grain production went from 8 million tonnes to 13 million tonnes between 1950 and 1970.

In a detail that tends to get lost: among the traditional Bangladeshi varieties now largely forgotten was one that had contributed to IR8 itself.

"It is not common knowledge, but a

countries, with output crossing 36 million tonnes.

THE GENE BANK

A gene bank contains no money or jewels – only seeds.

"In case a crop or a variety vanishes from the fields, it can be restored from the samples saved at a gene bank," explained M Abdul Momin, senior communications officer at BRRI.

BRRI established its gene bank in 1974, initially to preserve Bangladesh's vanishing rice diversity.

A book – Deshi Dhaner Jat – published in 1982 catalogued 12,479 traditional rice varieties in the country. While the majority no longer have any meaningful presence in the fields, a large number of samples survive in storage at BRRI.

Today, BRRI's bank holds 9,128 accessions – each one a sample that might carry traits the world will one day need: disease resistance, climate



Three separate facilities hold rice seeds in short-, medium-and long-term storage in the BRRI gene bank. This photo of the short-term storage was taken recently.

PHOTO: MASUM RANA/BRRI



The IRRI gene bank's first head, Dr Mike Jackson, gives Nobel Laureate Norman Borlaug a tour of the gene bank's large cold storage facility in 1999.

PHOTO: IRRI