

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

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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

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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'

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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

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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.