

Living in fear in the Middle East

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 In Bahrain, SM Tareq from Azimpur in Sandwip, Chattogram, died, and two others were injured after missile fragments landed in the Salman Industrial Area, Rais Hasan Sarower, Bangladesh's ambassador to Bahrain, told The Daily Star.

The embassy is in close contact with Tareq's family and is monitoring the condition of the injured, who are receiving treatment at a local hospital.

While most Bangladeshis in Bahrain remain safe, he described the security situation as unpredictable.

"Drones and missiles appear suddenly rather than following a continuous pattern, making it difficult to anticipate potential danger," he said, adding that many expatriates are staying indoors as a precaution.

The Bangladesh embassy in Bahrain has opened a Facebook group to share updates and instructions with community leaders and is actively monitoring developments.

Members of the Bangladeshi community say tensions have risen

sharply amid escalating regional conflict following the US and Israeli airstrikes on Iran.

Several areas have experienced incidents in recent days, said Mohammad Emon, president of the Bangladesh Youth Club in Bahrain.

"Attacks happened in Seef, including two towers – S Tower and a hotel in the area. There were also incidents in Hura and Isa Town. The most severe attack occurred in Isa Town."

He also mentioned an incident near Juffair, close to the US Navy base.

The authorities evacuated much of the area, including residential hotels housing foreign nationals.

"From the first day, Juffair was cleared. Most Bangladeshis living there have moved elsewhere. Only a few go back occasionally for work, but no one is really staying there now."

Although international reports often mention Manama, the capital has not faced direct damage so far. However, the repeated use of the capital's name has heightened anxiety.

Bangladeshis living near affected

areas are "in a state of panic", Emon said, adding that many have relocated to comparatively safer neighbourhoods.

The Bahrain government has instructed residents to remain indoors unless necessary and has been sending emergency alerts ahead of potential attacks.

Over in the UAE, fears intensified after the foreign ministry confirmed that another Bangladeshi national, Saleh Ahmed from Sylhet, was killed after being struck by debris from an aerial attack on a civilian installation.

In a statement issued yesterday, the ministry said the government was "deeply saddened" by the loss of lives and expressed "grave concern over the escalating situation in the region".

The Bangladesh embassy in the UAE is maintaining close contact with local authorities and is extending assistance to repatriate Ahmed's remains once commercial flights resume.

The news has shaken Bangladeshi expatriates in Abu Dhabi and other cities, particularly those working near key infrastructure sites.

"We never thought something like

this could happen here. Now every loud sound makes us nervous," said a construction worker, requesting anonymity.

Another resident said many are limiting movement to work and home. The death has made people "constantly worried", especially those employed near sensitive locations.

"Our families back home keep calling us again and again," he said, adding that although they are trying to remain calm, the anxiety persists.

Regarding the four Bangladeshis injured following the attack at Kuwait International Airport, the foreign ministry said they "have received necessary medical treatment and are currently reported to be in stable condition".

The Bangladesh embassy in Kuwait is in regular contact with the injured, and the ambassador personally visited them at the hospital.

Despite their stable condition, the incident has heightened fear among expatriates.

"When we heard that Bangladeshis were hurt, everyone became scared

– we are going to work and coming straight back home," said a grocery shop employee living near the area.

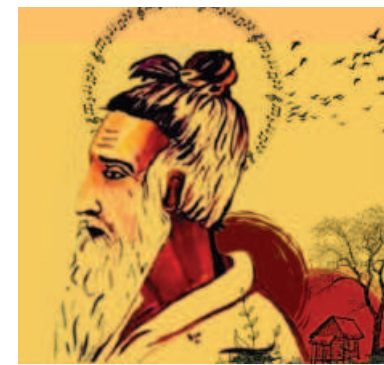
Another expatriate said many workers are closely following news updates and official advisories amid fears of further escalation.

"Even though the injured brothers are stable now, the tension has not gone away," he said.

The foreign ministry also said that the Bangladesh Shipping Corporation vessel Banglar Joyatra is stranded at Jebel Ali Port in the UAE, though all crew members are safe and in communication with the embassy.

Reiterating its concern, the government said the "safety and security of more than six million Bangladeshis living in the Middle East are the top-most concern of the government".

The embassies in the affected countries have been instructed to urge nationals to remain vigilant and strictly follow host government guidelines, while Dhaka continues to monitor the situation closely, it added



Devotees gather as Lalon festival begins in Kushtia

The annual Dol Purnima observance at the shrine of mystic poet Lalon Shah began yesterday (March 2) at Chheuriya Akhrabari in Kushtia, drawing Baul singers and devotees despite a reduced schedule due to Ramadan. Traditionally a three-day event featuring music and a rural fair, this year's programme has been shortened to two days, with cultural performances and the fair suspended.

Organisers said the focus will remain on spiritual discussions and rituals. Proceedings will conclude at noon today.

Devotees had begun gathering days earlier, singing Lalon songs across the shrine compound. Rituals include Gurukarya, Rakhial service, midnight Adhibash, dawn Balya service and the Purna service. Security has been tightened, with CCTV surveillance and law enforcement on duty.

Flights scrapped, visa clock ticking

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 that he needs to return at any cost so he does not lose his job amid the ongoing uncertainty arising from the tense situation in the Middle East.

His experience reflects the uncertainty that has gripped migrant workers and their families since Middle East air travel was disrupted following the US and Israel's joint military attacks on Iran and Iran's retaliation on February 28.

While some are rushing home, fearing the situation may worsen and flights may become harder to secure later, others – despite fear and family pressure – are trying to return to work as soon as possible to protect their income and keep their visas valid.

A total of 131 flights to and from HSI are cancelled in four days, including today, following the attacks, airport authorities said.

Amid the evolving security situation, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar and Jordan closed their airspace, disrupting air connectivity across the region, they added.

Amanullah, 40, travelled from Cumilla for a Biman flight to Dammam scheduled at 2:25pm yesterday. He arrived at the airport at 10:00am, only to be told later that the flight had been cancelled.

He said he had asked why the flight was cancelled, as everything seemed normal until 12:30pm. Airport staff told him that a drone attack had occurred at Dammam airport that morning, prompting the temporary suspension of flights to the destination.

He is now anxious as his visa remains valid for only four more days. "If I cannot go within four days, what will I do?" he said, adding that his family depends on his earnings.

"I am now trying to find an alternative route, including searching for urgent tickets to Jeddah or Riyadh. I can then travel back to Dammam by road."

Salma Akhter, 30, from Shariatpur, said she left home early yesterday morning for a US Bangla Airlines flight scheduled at 3:55pm to Abu Dhabi. She entered the airport around 11:00am and waited until 12:30pm, when she was told the flight was cancelled. "I have been working abroad for about 10 years. I was on a seven-month leave and now I am just trying to go back to work."

Lipi Akhter, 30, was travelling with Salma. She had come home on an eight-month leave after spending two years abroad.

Both said they had contacted the airline on Sunday and were told they could travel yesterday. "We were aware of attacks and explosions being reported over the last two days, but were told the strikes were centred on US bases and not elsewhere," Salma said.

Even so, Lipi said they remained tense, and family members were increasingly worried about whether they would be able to fly and whether further disruptions could follow.

"Our visas were arranged without cost, as the households we work for processed them. We fear that if travel becomes impossible, there will be no compensation, and the opportunity could be lost. I need to get back to work, even if that means taking a risk."

While outbound travellers waited for clarity, inbound passengers described their own anxieties as they returned home, unsure when they would be able to leave again.

Zakir Hossain, who returned from Saudi Arabia yesterday on a six-month leave after six years, said he had spent the last two days worrying. "My family repeatedly told me not to travel to Bangladesh if I sensed serious trouble. I still chose to come because I wanted to spend Eid here and also in case the situation escalates and I can't come later."

After landing in Dhaka around 11:00am, he said he was happy to see his relatives, but remained worried about whether he would be able to return to work on time or whether work would still be available.

Hossain, 47, arrived from Jeddah on a Saudia flight on a five-month leave. He was to travel to his home in Netrokona. "I was tense the whole time as my family had been calling me since Sunday, asking me to stay alert while travelling."

"Many Bangladeshis were returning during Ramadan as planned, while others who might have waited until after Eid instead bought higher-priced tickets to come now because of the uncertainty."

Till 11:50pm on February 28, 23 flights were cancelled, including one each of Emirates, Gulf Air and Flydubai, three of Air Arabia, six of US Bangla Airlines and 11 of Biman Bangladesh Airlines, airport sources said.

On March 1 (Sunday), a further 40 flights were cancelled, including those of Jazeera Airways, Emirates, Gulf Air,

Flydubai, Qatar Airways, SalamAir, Air Arabia (Sharjah), Kuwait Airways, US-Bangla Airlines and Biman Bangladesh Airlines.

Yesterday till 10:00pm, another 46 flights were cancelled, including those of Qatar Airways, Emirates, Gulf Air, Flydubai, Kuwait Airways, Air Arabia (Sharjah), Biman Bangladesh Airlines and US Bangla Airlines.

Around 10:00pm last night, airport authorities informed that another 22 flights have been cancelled today – four of Qatar Airways, four of Emirates, four of Gulf Air, four of Flydubai, two of Kuwait Airways and four of Jazeera Airways.

Meanwhile, 44 flights departed for different Middle East destinations till yesterday, according to airport officials.

They said flights to Muscat and multiple destinations in Saudi Arabia continued operating between February 28 and March 2 despite widespread disruptions.

On February 28 (from 2:00pm to 11:59pm), one Muscat bound flight (BG122) and five Saudi-bound flights operated, including services to Jeddah, Riyadh and Madinah. On March 1, four flights operated to Muscat, while 16 Saudi-bound flights ran to Dammam, Jeddah and Madinah, including services of Biman Bangladesh Airlines and other carriers. On March 2, five Muscat-bound flights operated and 13 Saudi-bound flights ran to Dammam, Jeddah and Madinah, officials said.

Contacted by The Daily Star yesterday, Shariful Hasan, associate director of BRAC's Migration Programme and Youth Platform, said around 30-40

flights are being cancelled daily. "Many people's visa validity is nearing its end, so they are anxious about whether they will be able to travel and what will happen if their visas expire."

"I think the government should, in this context, work with the embassies of these countries in Dhaka and with our Bangladesh missions abroad to engage with their foreign ministries and take steps to extend visas where needed."

He added that Bangladesh sends over 10 lakh workers abroad every year, and around 70-80 percent go to the Middle East.

"If overseas employment in the Middle East becomes limited or is halted, and our workers cannot find work after going there, it will cause long-term damage for us... We need to observe the situation over the next few days and see which way it goes."

IDRA, Sonali Bank

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 Contacted, he said he stepped down for personal reasons.

However, a senior finance ministry official, requesting anonymity, said Bari had been signalled to resign after the new government assumed office.

The official described the transition as part of the normal process following a change in administration.

Muslim Chowdhury, chairman of the board of Sonali Bank, submitted his resignation in person at the bank's head office, sources said.

Chowdhury, a former comptroller and auditor general, was appointed by the Yunus administration on August 24.

Bangladesh condemns

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 mutual respect and adherence to international law can resolve disputes," the ministry said.

In the statement on Sunday, the Bangladesh government said that the continuation of hostilities in the Middle East will only endanger regional peace, stability and the wellbeing of civilian populations. In the context of the emerging situation in the Middle East, the foreign ministry yesterday convened an inter-ministerial meeting to assess the current situation, especially the security of the Bangladeshi citizens in the Gulf region and the fate of the stranded Bangladeshis who failed to fly because of air traffic challenges.

After the meeting, Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman said the deaths of two Bangladeshis and the injury of seven others in the ongoing conflict in the Middle East give a significant message.

The foreign ministry has already spoken to the officials of the concerned countries including the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain. The Bangladeshi diplomats in those countries visited the injured citizens.

The foreign ministers of Kuwait and Bahrain and the state minister for foreign affairs of Qatar have already called Khalilur and provided full assurance of security and protection of Bangladeshi citizens in those countries.

The government has all preparations to facilitate the travel of those who

are stranded and bring back the two dead bodies home as soon as flight operations resume.

Prime Minister's Foreign Affairs Adviser Humaitun Kobir said Bangladesh's position on the Middle East crisis is clear.

"We want de-escalation of this situation. We are strongly calling for choosing the path of diplomacy. And, our citizens who have employment in the Middle East in various places and those stranded are our topmost priority. We are also taking initiatives to extend visas for those who are facing such issues," he said.

All the relevant ministries are coordinating for safety, accommodation, visa and ticketing issues, said Shama Obaid, the state minister for foreign affairs.

In another development, four ministers of Gulf countries spoke to Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman and assured him of all necessary measures to ensure the overall security, protection, and welfare of Bangladeshi migrants living in their respective countries amid the conflict.

Those who called Khalilur include Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrar Jaber Al-Ahmed Al Sabah, Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Rashid Al-Zayani, UAE Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and Qatar's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad Al Muraikhi.

Yunus gets VVIP status

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 the stringent security coverage of the Special Security Force (SSF) for a year.

The gazette said that he has been given this status as per Section 2(a) of the Special Security Force Act, 2021.

Section 2(a) of the law states, "Very important person" means the Head of State or Head of Government of a foreign country and includes any other person declared by the Government, by notification in the Official Gazette, to be such person for the purposes of this Act."

The law does not automatically grant SSF protection to outgoing heads of state, unless they are declared VVIP.

The gazette was not publicised by the interim government. It was not uploaded to the Bangladesh Government Press website, which archives all gazettes issued by the government and updates every day.

Saifuzzaman's UK property financier

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 entities tied to the Mayfair-based firm have now entered insolvency, the FT added.

MFS provided what it called "complex, property-backed lending". The company's main products included buy-to-let mortgages and bridging loans – short-term debt that borrowers could use for various kinds of investments in real assets, according to The Telegraph.

After the fall of the Hasina regime, it appeared that nearly all of the MFS-linked mortgages were repaid. At the time, lawyers for Paresh Raja, the founder and chief executive officer of MFS, said that MFS had "a large underwriting team who scrutinises every loan and carries out detailed and thorough anti-money laundering and other checks."

They emphasised that Raja "has

no connection to Bangladesh or the Hasina government", it added.

MFS differed in important ways from mainstream banks. It was a shadow bank, meaning it offered loans but did not take deposits. As a result, it was not subject to the strict regulations that high street lenders must adhere to, according to The Telegraph.

The FT said major global lenders, including Barclays, Jefferies and Apollo's Atlas SP Partners, are facing significant exposure following the sudden collapse of UK-based mortgage provider MFS amid allegations of fraud and "double pledging" of collateral.

Barclays, which provided both banking services and financing to MFS, has an estimated exposure of £600 million. The bank reportedly began blocking certain transactions for the lender in late 2025 before freezing all related accounts in early January, as

per the FT report.

Barclays declined to comment on the matter.

The Telegraph said the fallout from property deals linked to Hasina's government continues. Authorities in Bangladesh are also looking into Chowdhury's affairs amid a broader investigation into flats and houses bought by former allies and family members of the prime minister.

In Britain, Labour MP Tulip Siddiq, Hasina's niece, resigned as Treasury minister in January last year amid growing pressure over allegations of an anti-corruption scandal in Bangladesh.

Siddiq faces a corruption trial in Bangladesh over claims that she illegally received a plot of land from her aunt's government. She denies the allegations.

Raja did not respond to a request for comment. The Telegraph was unable to reach Chowdhury for comment.

Found with throat slit, 7yr-old girl

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 abducted and taken to the secluded hilltop by miscreants who intended to murder her.

Her paternal uncle said it would have been impossible for a child to travel such a distance alone and insisted she had been kidnapped. He added that the family had no known enemies.

"We don't know what will happen to my niece. How can anyone be so cruel as to try to slaughter a child? We want justice and the immediate arrest and punishment of those responsible."

The victim underwent an emergency operation on Sunday evening. She was taken to the operating theatre again last morning for a second surgery to stabilise her respiratory tract, while anxious family members waited outside.

Dr Selim Kashem Chowdhury, an

ENT consultant at CMCH, said the girl's trachea was severely injured in the attack but noted that she was rescued within half an hour.

Doctors performed a standard tracheostomy and inserted a tube to assist her breathing. "As long as the tube remains in place, she will be unable to speak. We hope to remove it in two to three weeks, depending on her recovery."

Law enforcement agencies, including police and the Rab, have launched investigations into the incident.

Sitakunda Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mahi Noor-e-Islam said the victim's mother filed a case against unidentified individuals on Sunday. "We are investigating the matter with the highest priority, though no arrests had been made as of this [yesterday] afternoon."

Security in diplomatic zone

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 other issues of mutual interest.

At the outset, Salahuddin welcomed the ambassador and said the US is a close ally of Bangladesh and has been working as a close partner in counterterrorism and the security sector.

Christensen said America wants to strengthen relations with Bangladesh.

He said the US is interested in implementing the SPEAR programme to consolidate security arrangements for the US embassy in Dhaka and the wider diplomatic area.

The envoy said a memorandum of understanding needed to be signed quickly for the programme, otherwise the US fund

could be returned or shifted elsewhere.

The home minister said the government wants to implement the programme soon with approval from the highest level.

The US ambassador also congratulated Salahuddin on assuming charge of the home ministry.

On illegal migration, the envoy said the US wants to implement the ENV programme in Bangladesh, adding that its implementation would bring Bangladesh into a "green zone" in the US immigration sector.

He said the US has long supported Bangladesh in counterterrorism, adding that since 2010 it has trained

around 30,000 Bangladesh police officers – from investigating officer level to deputy inspector general (DIG) level – and provided necessary equipment. However, he said the support has not yielded the desired results due to officers' retirement and transfers.

Salahuddin assured the diplomat of necessary steps and instructed relevant ministry officials to organise a meeting or workshop with the stakeholders.

Among others, Joint Secretary Rebecca Khan of the Political-1 Wing of the Home Ministry, and US embassy officials Eric Geelan, Shane Sanders, Tanik Munir, and Riley Palmertree were present at the meeting.

Two killed

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 tried to fish in the pond while the other tried to resist them. There are varying reports which group went to fish in the pond.

Shamsul Alam said Siddique is the general secretary of ward-2 of Dhamaingar union unit BNP. He claimed that Asmat Ali and his men used to control fish farming in the pond before August 5, 2024. After the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government, the operations of the pond went to Siddique, but the Asmat group did not want to give up control.

When Siddique's men went to catch fish yesterday, Asmat's men attacked them and mercilessly beat them, which left two people dead, he said.

Some 10 to 15 people from both sides were injured in the clash. They were taken to the 250-bed Sirajganj General Hospital and Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital in Bogura.

Two of them succumbed to their injuries at 250-bed Sirajganj General Hospital, said Additional SP Saiful. He added that the deceased were supporters of BNP leader Siddique.

Contacted, assistant director of the hospital, Dr Akikun Nahar, said two people were brought to the hospital in critical condition with several injury marks in their bodies. "We tried our best but they succumbed to their injuries," she said.

Contacted, Raiganj Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Abdul Khaleq Patoary said the pond is leased out in the name of a woman.

The Daily Star tried to contact Asmat and some of his associates multiple times for comments but no one received the calls or responded to text messages.

No case was filed till the filing of the report at around 8:00pm, said Golam Kibria, officer-in-charge (OC) of Raiganj Police Station.

Nurul Islam

FROM PAGE 12
 chief whip and six whips in parliament. President Mohammed Shahabuddin made the appointments under the Bangladesh (Whips) Order, 1972.

The chief whip shall be responsible for keeping members of parliament supplied with information about parliamentary business, securing their attendance at sessions, arranging the business of each sitting of parliament and performing other related duties.

A whip shall perform such functions as may be assigned to him by the chief whip.