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People prepare graves yesterday for children killed in an Israeli strike on a primary school in Iran's Minab. The strike on Saturday killed at least 165 people.

PHOTO: AFP

ACC chief, his two deputies quit en masse

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

It was hardly a resignation. It was a walkout.

Not just one, but all three members of the Anti-Corruption Commission, led by Chairman Mohammad Abdul Momen, submitted resignation letters to Cabinet Secretary Nasimul Gani yesterday, effectively dissolving the commission.



Abdul Momen

Momen declined to cite any specific reason, claiming that there was none. The decision was taken in "public interest", he said.

"We felt that the new government may require a more competent commission to implement its vision and plans," Momen told reporters while leaving his office.

"A political government will naturally want to work according to its own manifesto and expectations. I do not see anything unusual in that," he said.

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Rivals dig in for 'longer war'

US embassy in Riyadh hit; Israel seizes land in Lebanon, bombards Tehran, other cities; Iran closes Strait of Hormuz

AGENCIES

Explosions tore through Tehran, Beirut and elsewhere across the Middle East yesterday, as the United States, Israel and Iran escalated attacks, raising fears that the conflict could drag on.

Hours after US President Donald Trump warned that his attack on Iran could run longer than initially planned, Tehran stepped up its attacks as drones and missiles crashed into oil facilities and US embassies in the Gulf.

US and Israeli strikes also pummelled targets across Tehran, as Trump warned it was "too late" for Iran to seek talks to stop the attacks.

Israel also bombarded Lebanon and pushed troops deeper into Lebanon to battle the Tehran-backed militia Hezbollah.

Meanwhile, Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps yesterday said the Strait

HOW KHAMENEI WAS KILLED -- PAGE 7

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Iran warns West against joining war

IAEA says Iran nuclear site hit

Iran's death toll reaches 787

China tells Israel to end war

6 US soldiers killed in Kuwait

'Too late' for Iran talks: Trump

Strait of Hormuz closure threatens LNG supply

ASIFUR RAHMAN and FEDA AL HOSSAIN

The closure of the Strait of Hormuz by Iran amid its escalating war with the US and Israel has raised fresh concerns over liquefied natural gas (LNG) supplies to Bangladesh, which relies heavily on the narrow maritime corridor for its energy imports.

Nearly all LNG shipments from Qatar and Oman destined for Bangladesh transit

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

BB governor offers mega incentives to businesses

Continuous loans for industries, soft loans to pay workers' salaries

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Bank yesterday offered major incentives to the business community through two decisions aimed at tackling loan defaults and facilitating the payment of workers' wages for the month of February.

In two separate directives, the banking regulator relaxed rules for the renewal of continuous loans and allowed a special loan facility for February wages for export-oriented industries.

A continuous loan functions like revolving credit,

SEE PAGE 10 COL 5

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Anti-clockwise from left: Plumes of smoke rise from the sites of Israeli airstrikes on the southern suburbs of Beirut. Foreign workers watch as a tall plume of black smoke rises following an explosion in the Fujairah industrial zone in the UAE. Israeli security forces and emergency personnel stand next to the wreckage of cars at a site struck by a projectile in Ramat Gan near Tel Aviv. The photos were taken yesterday.



PHOTO: AFP

Paul Kapur in Dhaka to boost bilateral ties

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

US Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs, S Paul Kapur, arrived in Dhaka last night on a two-day visit to discuss expanding bilateral trade and investment, enhancing security cooperation, and advancing shared interests in the Indo-Pacific region.



"We warmly welcome Assistant Secretary S Paul Kapur to Bangladesh. Assistant Secretary Kapur will engage with government officials and business leaders to strengthen US-Bangladesh strategic ties," said the US embassy in Dhaka.

This is Paul Kapur's second leg of the visit, following his trip to India from March 1-3.

Today, the US assistant secretary is scheduled to meet US embassy officials and then Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman, Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed, Minister of Power, Energy, and Mineral Resources Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku, and Commerce Minister Khandakar Abdul Muktadir.

In the evening, he is scheduled to meet a business delegation. The US assistant secretary will also talk to political leaders tomorrow.

Rivals dig in for 'longer war'

FROM PAGE 1

of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's oil consumption passes, is now "closed", and warned that any vessels attempting to pass through the waterway will be attacked.

"Their air defence, air force, navy, and leadership is gone. They want to talk. I said: 'Too late!'" Trump posted on his social media site, two days after he had agreed to talks and four days after US and Israeli strikes wiped out much of Iran's senior leadership.

Iran's ambassador to the UN in Geneva denied that his country had approached the US for talks.

As if to underline Trump's new stance, loud blasts echoed around downtown Tehran. According to Iranian media, US and Israeli strikes had targeted the building housing the committee that is to elect Iran's new supreme leader.

"The military has launched a ninth wave of strikes in Tehran. The Air Force has now begun a large-scale wave of strikes targeting the Iranian terror regime's infrastructure in Tehran," the Israeli military said.

Meanwhile, the US embassy in Riyadh — which was damaged and briefly caught fire overnight in an Iranian drone strike — yesterday warned of an imminent attack in the eastern Saudi city of Dhahran, home to much of the kingdom's oil and gas installations along the Gulf coast.

"There is a threat of imminent missile and UAV (drone) attacks over Dhahran. Do not come to the US Consulate," the embassy posted on social media.

As Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu gave open-ended answers when asked how long the war would last, a source told Reuters that Israel's campaign was to overthrow Iran's clerical rulers, and there was no firm deadline to achieve it.

Netanyahu told Fox News in an interview that Israel's strikes on Iran would continue, but not become an endless war. "It may take some time, but it's not going to take years."

While Israeli officials explicitly say they want to overthrow Iran's government, US officials have said the war aims to destroy Iran's ability to project force beyond its borders.

Trump yesterday denied that Israel had forced his hand into launching the war, a day after his Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the US did so only after learning that ally Israel was going to strike.

"Just about everything's been knocked out," Trump said as he met German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, answering his first questions from reporters since the strikes began.

"Based on the way the negotiation was going, I think they (Iran) were going to attack first. And I didn't want that to happen," Trump said in the Oval Office. "So, if anything, I might have forced Israel's hand."

He also claimed that two waves of US-Israeli attacks on Iran had killed figures he had eyed as potential new leaders.

"Most of the people we had in mind are dead," he said. "Now we have another group. They may also be dead, based on reports."

As Trump dismissed any remaining hope of a negotiated solution, Israel's Foreign Minister Gideon Saar urged foreign capitals to cut all ties with Tehran "following the Iranian regime's attacks on all its neighbours and the massacre of its own people".

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi, according to the official Xinhua news agency, warned Saar in a call that Beijing opposes the strikes. "Force cannot truly solve problems — instead, it will only bring new problems and severe after-effects," he said.

The United States and Israel triggered the rapidly spreading war on Saturday with a strike on Tehran that killed supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and several more senior Iranian figures.

Iran's armed forces responded with missile and drone attacks on Israel, US embassies and military bases and on its Arab neighbours around the Gulf, targeting oil and gas facilities, ports and airports, foreign missions and landmark hotels.

Qatar has shut down its massive LNG industry, shipping traffic through the strategic Straits of Hormuz has all but halted, and thousands of flights have been cancelled, leaving foreign governments scrambling to rescue trapped travellers.

The war has already sent shockwaves through world markets. Energy prices are soaring, and share prices are falling. India yesterday expressed concerns over the evolving conflict in a region vital for its energy supply, and where more than 10 million citizens work.

"Our trade and energy supply chains also traverse this geography. Any major disruption has serious consequences for the Indian economy," ministry spokesman Randhir Jaiswal said.

Drones, meanwhile, struck a fuel tank in Oman, and in the UAE, an oil storage zone was hit by falling debris from an intercepted drone, as Iran apparently widened its targets beyond US assets.

Qatar's state-run QatarEnergy said it would halt some downstream production of substances including urea, polymers, methanol and aluminium after Iran attacked two gas processing plants.

In Oman, several drones targeted the port of Duqm on its eastern coast yesterday. The attack was the second on the port in three days, with the sultanate hit despite acting as a mediator between Iran and the United States just days prior to the war.

The UAE says it has been targeted with more than 800 drones and nearly 200 missiles since the war erupted.

Reporters in the Saudi capital Riyadh saw smoke damage on the walls and roof of the American embassy after two drones hit it overnight, starting a fire in one building. The Saudi foreign ministry described the attack as "heinous and unjustified".

Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei yesterday warned European countries against joining its conflict with Israel and the United States, after Germany, Britain and France said they could take "defensive action" to destroy Iran's missile-launching capabilities.

"It would be an act of war. Any such act against Iran would be regarded as complicity with the aggressors," Baqaei said at a press briefing when asked about the statement.

A spokesman for the Revolutionary

Guards warned, "The gates of hell will open more and more" upon the US and Israel.

Iran said its death toll from the attacks had reached 787, citing the Red Crescent. The US said that six American soldiers were killed in an Iranian strike that hit a military facility in Kuwait on Saturday.

United Nations rights chief Volker Turk said he was "deeply shocked" by the war's toll on civilians, and the UN nuclear watchdog said Iran's Natanz enrichment plant appeared in satellite imagery to have suffered "recent damage".

On Monday, the US State Department had urged "Americans to DEPART NOW" from all of the countries and territories of the Middle East "due to serious safety risks".

Israel, meanwhile, said it was seizing new forward positions inside southern Lebanon, after Hezbollah fired missiles in support of its backer Iran, provoking a furious Israeli bombardment.

Defence Minister Israel Katz said Israeli forces had been authorised "to advance and take control of additional strategic positions in Lebanon in order to prevent attacks on Israeli border communities".

Shortly afterwards, the military spokesman said: "In practice, Northern Command has moved forward... and is creating a buffer, as we promised, between our residents and any threat."

A Lebanese army source said Israeli forces had advanced from around Kfar Kila, in an apparent attempt "to establish a broad security belt in south Lebanon".

According to a Lebanese military source, following Israel's "escalation", the Lebanese army redeployed troops posted near the southern border back to their bases. Hezbollah said it had launched strikes targeting three Israeli bases.

A spokesman for the UN refugee agency said 30,000 Lebanese had been driven from their homes and registered at collective shelters, while "many more slept in their cars on the side of roads".

HC questions legality of July charter and referendum

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday issued a rule questioning the legality of the relevant provisions of the July charter, the referendum ordinance, and the letter regarding lawmakers taking oath as members of the Constitution Reform Commission.

The court asked the respondents to explain why the provision in the implementation order of the July National Charter (Constitutional Reform), 2025, for "yes" or "no" vote in referendum and the letter issued by the parliament secretariat on February 16 to lawmakers for taking oath as members of the Constitution Reform Council should not be declared void and unconstitutional.

It also asked them to show causes why Schedule-3 of the Referendum Ordinance, 2025, containing the 30 proposals, on which the political parties reached a consensus, should not be declared unlawful and unconstitutional.

The secretaries of law, cabinet, and Jatiya Sangsad; the prime minister's principal secretary, the Election Commission, and the chief election commissioner have been made respondents to the rule and asked to provide their explanations in four weeks.

The bench of Justice Razik-Al-Jalil and Justice Md Anwarul Islam issued the rule after hearing arguments from lawyers concerned on two writ petitions challenging the legality of the referendum ordinance and the July charter.

Lawyers Ahsanul Karim, Syed Mamun Mahbub, Jyotirmoy Barua, Gazi Kamrul Islam Sajal, and Gazi Touhidul Islam placed arguments in support of the petitions, while lawyers Mohammad Hossain Lipu, Mohammad Shishir Manir, Imran Siddiqi, and Md Saddam Hossen opposed the petitions on behalf of the National Citizen Party and the Jamaat-e-Islami.

Acting Attorney General Md Arshadur Rouf and Additional

Attorney General Aneek R Haque represented the state during the hearing.

After the HC issued the rule, lawyer Shishir told The Daily Star that if there is no implementation order for the July charter and no reform proposals based on the 30 points of consensus, then even the provisions of a referendum become invalid, so in the end, what will remain?

"Will be the election valid? Will a government exist? Everything will face questions of legality. Therefore, the government will have to take responsibility for this."

The 30 proposals include introducing a bicameral parliament with an upper house; expanding women's representation; limiting the prime minister's tenure; rebalancing powers between president and PM; strengthening judicial independence; reforming appointment processes for constitutional bodies; enhancing fundamental rights and civil liberties; recognising all mother tongues; redefining national identity as "Bangladeshi"; decentralising local government; ensuring police and public administration reforms; strengthening anti-corruption mechanisms; reforming election oversight; removing restrictive constitutional clauses; improving transparency and accountability; and establishing independent commissions to safeguard democracy, human rights, and institutional checks and balances, lawyer Shishir Manir added.

Supreme Court lawyers Gazi Md Mahbub Alam and Chowdhury Md Redwan E Khuda recently filed the petitions as public interest litigations, appealing to restrain respondents from implementing any act related to the referendum ordinance.

In the petitions, they said the implementation order of the July charter and the referendum ordinance were issued beyond the mandate of the constitution, the supreme law of the republic.

Strait of Hormuz closure threatens LNG Supply

FROM PAGE 1

through the Strait. Officials said there has been no disruption so far, as most scheduled cargoes are already in transit.

But analysts warn that an extended closure could delay cargoes, make gas harder to get in the region, drive up prices and strain the country's energy security at a time when domestic gas output continues to decline and industrial demand is rising.

Bangladesh now meets nearly 30 percent of its gas demand through imported LNG amid persistent shortages in domestic production.

This year, the government plans to utilise its full regasification capacity of 1,100 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) for the first time since LNG imports began in 2018. It has also planned to import 115 cargoes, including 59 from the spot market.

Amid the conflict, Oxford Economics has projected LNG prices could rise 30 percent to average about \$14 per million British thermal units (MMBtu) between April and June, up from the current \$9-10.

In addition, Wood Mackenzie have warned that a prolonged closure of the Strait could remove around 86 billion cubic metres of LNG

about 15 percent of global supply. Such a shock would intensify global competition and force Asian buyers to outbid European markets for US cargoes.

The spike would push Bangladesh's LNG import bill beyond the projected Tk 57,000 crore for FY26, adding to fiscal pressure and straining the exchequer.

Data from Kpler Insight show that while China and India are the largest importers of Qatari LNG, Bangladesh — alongside Pakistan — ranks among the top Asian buyers dependent on the Middle East.

Roughly one-fifth of global hydrocarbons pass through the Strait of Hormuz, the strategic gateway linking the Gulf to international markets. More than half of Bangladesh's LNG imports in 2025 moved through this chokepoint. In March alone, nine cargoes were scheduled, six of them from Qatar via the Strait.

Mohammad Erfanul Haque, chairman of Petrobangla, told The Daily Star on Monday that four of those six cargoes had already crossed the Strait.

"So there is no risk regarding those cargoes for now," he said,

adding that authorities are in contact with alternative suppliers in case of disruption.

When The Daily Star spoke to the Petrobangla chief, the Strait remained open. Later, Iranian media quoted a senior Revolutionary Guards official as saying it had been closed and that Iran would fire on any vessel attempting to pass.

A senior Petrobangla official said yesterday there is no uncertainty over LNG supply until the third week of this month. Beyond that, any disruption to incoming vessels could tighten supply.

Energy analysts warn that prolonged constraints could hit power generation, fertiliser production and industrial competitiveness, particularly during the summer peak. Think tanks have also cautioned that heavy reliance on LNG imports without boosting domestic exploration or diversifying supply contracts could deepen fiscal vulnerabilities.

The power sector consumes 41 percent of total gas supply, industries 34 percent, households 10 percent and fertiliser 6 percent.

Daily demand stands at around 3,800 mmcf against supply of about

2,650 mmcf, including around 950 mmcf from imported LNG. Ahead of summer, imports were to be raised to 1,050 mmcf.

Failure to increase imports could limit additional gas allocation to power plants, potentially lowering electricity generation, triggering load-shedding and reducing pipeline pressure for households.

A similar shock unfolded in 2022 after the Russia-Ukraine war disrupted global energy markets. Spot LNG prices surged beyond \$60 per MMBtu.

Although Bangladesh bought cargoes at up to \$36, it later suspended spot purchases. From July that year, spot imports were halted for seven consecutive months, resulting in gas shortages, reduced power output and widespread load-shedding.

If spot prices spike again, pressure could mount on foreign exchange reserves and retail energy tariffs.

Until 2022, Russia was the world's largest LNG exporter, but its exports declined sharply following its invasion of Ukraine. The United States is now the largest exporter, followed by Qatar and Australia.

Mother of 2 found dead in Cox's Bazar

Family alleges land dispute behind rape, murder

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Police recovered the body of a woman from her residence in Cox's Bazar's Ukhiya upazila yesterday morning.

The 30-year-old homemaker Laila Bibi was the wife of Malaysia expatriate Abdur Shukkur and mother of two.

Police suspect she was killed after rape.

According to the victim's family, she lived with her children in a house on a small, remote hill.

Nur Ahmad, officer-in-charge of Ukhiya Police Station, said, "They alleged that miscreants entered the house when she woke up for sehri. They then raped and killed her.... Her children were in a separate room during the incident."

The victim's brother-in-law Abdul Alam said she was preparing sehri around 3:00am when two to three masked individuals broke open the door and entered the house. "The miscreants raped her and killed her. Hearing her screams, neighbours

rushed in, and the attackers fled."

He also alleged that the attack was planned following a land-related dispute.

On information, police rushed to the spot and recovered the body. The inquest report found multiple injury marks on her body. It was sent to Cox's Bazar 250 Bed District Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy.

The OC said primary investigation found signs of rape. "But it will be confirmed after the autopsy."

He added, "We have learned that there was a land-related dispute between the victim's family and neighbours. We are investigating whether the murder was carried out over that dispute."

No case was filed and no arrests were made until filing the report around 8:00pm.

Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital's Resident Medical Officer Dr Subaktagin Sohel could not be contacted by phone despite repeated attempts.

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No congratulatory banners, billboards in the capital PM orders their removal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman has ordered the removal of banners and billboards across Dhaka displaying congratulatory messages featuring his photograph.



Additional Press Secretary Atiqur Rahman Ruman said while leaving his Gulshan residence yesterday morning, the prime minister noticed a banner with his photograph in front of Police Plaza at Hatirjheel and immediately instructed that it be taken down.

"It was removed right away," Ruman said.

He said the premier also directed authorities to remove similar billboards across the capital where various companies had displayed congratulatory advertisements carrying his image.

Earlier in the day, Bangladesh Coast Guard Director General Rear Admiral Md Ziaul Haq paid a courtesy call on the prime minister at the Secretariat.

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A child smiles in her mother's arms as she helps her browse through the children's books available at a stall at the Ekushey Book Fair. Although attendance at this year's Boi Mela has been sparse so far, the joy it brings to those who have visited the fair is immense. The photo was taken at Suhrawardy Udyan recently.

PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

'I asked for Ziaul to be restrained'

Iqbal Karim tells ICT-1

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former army chief Gen (ret'd) Iqbal Karim Bhuiyan yesterday told International Crimes Tribunal-1 that he had received reports of misconduct by several officers while serving as chief of general staff during the 2007-2009 army-backed government, which he described as a "pseudo-military rule".

He said after informing the then army chief Gen (ret'd) Moeen U Ahmed about the alleged wrongdoing, he was advised to stay away from the matter and was later transferred to the Staff College.

Iqbal made the remarks during cross examination by Mohammad Abul Hasan, counsel for Maj Gen (relieved) Ziaul Ahsan, who is accused of crimes against humanity for allegedly abducting and extrajudicially killing 104 people while serving in Rab between 2010 and 2013.

Iqbal named Brig Gen Amin, Brig Gen Bari, Lt Col Saiful Islam Joardar, Lt Col Mehedi and some officers of the 46 Infantry Brigade as allegedly involved in misconduct. He said he did not know whether any action was taken.

Denying allegations of shielding wrongdoing, Iqbal said he had verbally instructed that "crossfire" incidents be stopped and rejected the defence claim that he had failed to inform Gen Moeen.

When Justice Md Shofiqul Alam Mahmood asked whether he could evade responsibility for the period, Iqbal

SEE PAGE 5 COL 7

MARCH 12 FIRST JS SESSION BNP sets March 6-7 orientation for MPs, ministers

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

The BNP is likely to hold a two day programme on March 6 and 7 for elected members of parliament and ministers of the 13th National Parliament, focusing on parliamentary rules, legislative procedures and governance priorities.

Six days before the start of the first session of the 13th Jatiya Sangsad, the party, which formed the government by securing 209 seats in parliament, has organised the initiative. The sessions will bring together ministers, state ministers, advisers and ruling party lawmakers at the BNP chairperson's office in Gulshan.



Prime Minister and BNP Chairperson Tarique Rahman is scheduled to inaugurate the programme and address participants on the party's policy direction and expectations from its parliamentary team.

According to party insiders, the orientation aims to ensure that lawmakers are fully prepared to carry out their legislative responsibilities and align their work with the party's election commitments.

During the programme, the prime minister is expected to stress the importance of implementing the party's manifesto in a structured and measurable manner.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 4

February marked by polls-related violence

10 killed, 1,933 injured: HRSS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

February witnessed a wave of political and electoral violence surrounding the 13th National Parliamentary Election, leaving at least 10 people dead and 1,933 injured, according to the monthly monitoring report of Human Rights Support Society (HRSS) revealed yesterday.

The human rights body compiled the data based on reports from 16 national media outlets and its own sources.

According to the HRSS report, at least 346 incidents of political violence took place in February. Over half of these - 191 incidents - were clashes between BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami activists, which led to one death and 998 injuries.

Meanwhile, internal conflicts within the BNP accounted for 95 incidents, leading to eight deaths and 599 injuries.

The report also noted that following the elections, leaders and activists of the Awami League, whose activities are currently banned, reopened or reoccupied their offices in at least 30 districts, triggering further clashes.

Election-related violence specifically accounted for 285 incidents in February, claiming five lives and injuring 1,555 others. A portion of this violence involved attacks by supporters of winning candidates on houses

and businesses of rival supporters.

The report highlighted a particularly gruesome incident in Noakhali's Hatia, where a 32-year-old mother of three was raped and assaulted in her home for voting for a particular candidate.

Journalists faced hostility, with 63 media workers attacked in 28 incidents during the month. One of the severe cases involved Miraj Uddin, a BTV journalist, who was injured severely in a machete attack in Hatia.

Additionally, at least 14 attacks were carried out against religious minorities, including vandalism and arson at a temple in Narayanganj's Rupganj.

HRSS described the situation regarding violence against women and children as "highly alarming". The report recorded at least 45 incidents of rape involving women and children, with over half (24) of the victims being minors. The gang rapes and subsequent murders of teenagers in Narsingdi and Pabna highlighted a deep societal moral decay, the report noted.

Furthermore, HRSS documented 19 deaths from mob beatings in February. Border violence also claimed casualties, with six people injured in BSF attacks and a child killed by Arakan Army gunfire in Teknaf. In addition, 12 people, including former water resources minister Ramesh Chandra Sen, died in prison custody, it said.

A celebration of colour and music Hindu community celebrates Dol Purnima across the country



RAKIB MADDER

Dol Purnima, a major religious festival of the Hindu community, was celebrated across the country yesterday with colourful festivities and prayers.

Also known as Doljatra or Holi, the festival began in the morning with prayers at temples, followed by devotees - from children to elderly - smearing each other with abir (traditional powdered colours) and turning neighbourhoods and temple premises into vibrant spaces of colour and music.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Dhaka Night Market season 2 begins March 5



CITY DESK

Dhaka Night Market is set to return with Season 2 from March 5 to 7 at the United Convention Centre, beside CenterPoint Mall in the Airport area of the capital.

The event is jointly organised by United Commercial Bank, Nibedita and The Daily Star.

The market will remain open daily from 2:00pm till 9pm.

Organisers said more than 100 lifestyle brands and over 20 food stalls will participate in this year's edition. The event will also feature 10 or more speciality brands, with over 25,000 visitors expected across the three days.

In addition to shopping and food, the event will include a kids' play zone, a magic show, raffle draws, and other entertainment activities.

Organisers said there will also be digital marketing campaigns, along with celebrity and influencer engagements.

Entry to the event will be open to all.



This stretch of the road opposite Kamalapur Railway Station in Dhaka has remained dug up for over a month, causing inconvenience to commuters and pedestrians. Dhaka Mass Transit Company Ltd is repairing drainage lines damaged during its construction, but work has progressed slowly. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Govt mulls 7 to 10-day Eid holidays

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is considering extending the public holiday for Eid-ul-Fitr, which is now five days.

If the holiday is extended by one day before Eid, the government holiday will be seven days. On the other hand, if two days are added after Eid, the vacation could extend up to 10 days.

Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury, secretary general of the Jatri Kalyan Samity (Passenger Welfare Association), told The Daily Star that the decision to extend the holidays is positive. Extending the holiday before Eid makes the journey more comfortable; therefore, it would be better if the government considers this aspect, he said.

At the same time, he emphasised that if the holiday is extended before Eid, the salaries and allowances of workers must be ensured before the break. Otherwise, millions of workers will not be able to go home.

This year, government employees are going to get a five-day holiday from March 19 to March 23 for Eid, which is subject to the moon sighting.

There is a public holiday for the holy Shabe-e-Qadr, which falls on March 17. If a holiday is announced for March 18, it would result in a seven-day break from March 17 to March 23.

Besides, March 26 (Thursday) is Independence Day, which is a public holiday. If the two days prior - March 24 and 25 - are declared holidays, government employees could enjoy a 10-day vacation from March

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Govt appoints four new secretaries

UNB, Dhaka

The government has appointed new secretaries to one ministry and three divisions as part of a major reshuffle in the country's administrative structure.

Separate notifications in this regard were issued by the Ministry of Public Administration last night.

As per the orders, Rafiqul I Mohammad has been appointed secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Md Kamruzzaman to the Health Services Division, Abdul Khalek to the Secondary and Higher Education Division, and Md Shahidul Hasan to the Local Government Division.

According to the notifications, the appointed officials will serve in their respective posts on a contractual basis for one year from the date of joining.

The notifications stated that their appointments have been made on the condition that they sever all ties with any other profession, business, or employment with government, semi-government, private institutions or organisations before joining their new posts. Other terms and conditions of their appointments will be determined through separate contractual agreements, the notifications added.



PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Customers from different upazilas of Khulna and neighbouring areas crowd the Khulna Railway Market amid the Eid-ul-Fitr shopping rush. They browse through stores, keeping shopkeepers busy while boosting business. The photo was taken yesterday.

Man arrested for raping 7-year-old girl in Jashore

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Police arrested a man in Jashore yesterday on the charge of raping a seven-year-old girl after luring her to a rented house on Monday.

The accused — Hafijur Rahman, 40 — from Shyamnagar upazila in Satkhira — is one of the victim's relatives, said Faruk Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Jashore Kotwali Model Police Station.

The child was staying at her maternal grandmother's house in Nazir Shankarpur area of Jashore town. The accused, her grandmother's brother, visited his sister's house on the day of the incident. Later that night, Hafijur took the victim to a rented residence near Jashore Medical College and raped her.

Yesterday morning, the victim's physical condition deteriorated, prompting relatives to rush her to Jashore General Hospital.

OC Faruk Ahmed said a case was filed in connection with the incident and legal action will be taken accordingly.

CHT PEACE ACCORD

Adopt a time-bound action plan: speakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Accord Implementation Movement has demanded a time-bound action plan for the full implementation of the Peace Accord.

It also urged the withdrawal of the non-indigenous state minister from the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs, saying the current appointment contradicts the accord.

The demands were announced at a press conference held yesterday at the Sagar-Runi Auditorium of Dhaka Reporters Unity, under the movement's initiative.

The platform made three other demands, including the immediate reconstitution of the Accord Implementation and Monitoring Committee, the full functionalisation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Land Dispute Resolution Commission, and the arrangement of a policy-level dialogue between the government and the CHT Regional Council.

Presenting the keynote, Khairul Islam Chowdhury, joint coordinator of

the movement and a teacher at Dhaka University, said the historic Peace Accord was signed on December 2, 1997, after 26 rounds of discussions to end the long-standing armed conflict in the CHT region.

However, even after 28 years, the accord has not been fully implemented, he added.

"Because the core provisions of the accord remain unimplemented, the future of the indigenous people in the hills remains uncertain," he said.

He said the delay has caused concern among those who believe in democratic governance.

Prof Khairul urged the government to prioritise the full implementation of the CHT Peace Accord in its plans.

Referring to the appointment of a non-indigenous state minister at the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs, Prof Khairul said the move is inconsistent with the spirit and provisions of the Peace Accord.

He said the government should withdraw the state minister and assign responsibilities in line with the agreement.

Rights activist Dipayan Khisa said Clause 19 of Part 'D' of the accord clearly

states that the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs should be headed by a minister from among the indigenous communities.

"Whatever we do, it must be consistent with the Accord," he said, adding that respecting the agreement is essential for building trust in the region.

Khan Asaduzzaman Masum, president of Bangladesh Youth Union, said the Peace Accord was the result of years of struggle and conflict.

He warned that maintaining controversial decisions could create further tension between indigenous communities and Bangalee settlers in the region.

He urged the government to act wisely and ensure peaceful coexistence.

Alamgir Kabir, general secretary of Bangladesh Environment Movement, said the signing of the accord had created hope for justice and equal rights but expressed disappointment that full implementation remains pending.

The event was moderated by Zakir Hossain, joint coordinator of the movement.

Govt mulls 7 to 10-day Eid holidays

FROM PAGE 3

19 to March 28 without any break.

Sources of the public administration ministry and the Cabinet Division indicate that the issues of pre-Eid and post-Eid holiday extensions would be presented at the cabinet

meeting for a decision.

Seeking anonymity, a senior ministry official said that extending the holiday before Eid eases the journey home, while a post-Eid extension makes the return trip more comfortable. Proposals are being prepared accordingly

for the cabinet meeting.

Meanwhile, the ministries of roads, railways, and shipping support the extension of holidays. An inter-ministerial meeting with stakeholders, including highway and river police, is slated for tomorrow to finalise the recommendations.

A celebration

FROM PAGE 3

In Old Dhaka's Shankhari Bazar, Tanti Bazar and on the Dhakeshwari National Temple premises, people congregated to participate in the rituals and celebrations.

Shops in Old Dhaka area reported brisk sales of abir, candles, incense sticks, flowers and other materials throughout the day since early morning.

Temples in Dhaka and across the country arranged special prayers, homa rituals and distribution of prasad. Cultural programmes were also held in several areas to mark the occasion.

In Shankhari Bazar, five local organisations — Alpona Krira Sangha, Tridhara Boys Club, Shankhabina Krira Sangha, Albatross and Sahitya Sangsad — organised celebrations this year.

Surjo Kumar Sen, president of Alpona Krira Sangha, said they have been arranging Dol festivities over the past five years with their own funds and support from residents. "We wait for this day throughout the year. Besides locals, people from

different parts of Dhaka join the celebration," he added.

For the first time, Hindu students of Jagannath University organised Dol celebrations at the university's central temple. Suman Kumar Das, president of Jagannath University Sanatan Bidyarthi Sangsad, said the festival was observed through prayers and cultural performances with active participation of students.

He expressed hope that such initiatives would promote harmony and mutual respect.

Priyonto Swarnakar, president of Chhatra Oikya Parishad, said while celebrating, organisers remained mindful of the ongoing month of Ramadan and showed due respect to people of other faiths.

Dol Jatra is primarily observed by followers of Vaishnavism. According to belief, Lord Krishna played with colours with Radha and her companions in Vrindavan on this day, giving rise to the tradition of colour play that now defines the festival.

Set priorities for health reforms

Speakers urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Health experts and professionals yesterday called upon the new government to set priorities and begin implementing the necessary reforms in the health sector to make healthcare more accessible and affordable for the people.

They said the Health Sector Reform Commission report, prepared in consultation with major political parties and stakeholders, should not be viewed as a report of the then interim government and should be implemented to bring significant positive changes to the sector.

The speakers made the call at a discussion titled "Implementation of Health Sector Manifesto — Stakeholder Dialogue and Priority Framework" at Dhaka's CIRDAP auditorium, jointly arranged by the Alliance for Health Reform Bangladesh, Institute of Health Economics (IHE) of Dhaka University and Clinical Oncology Department of Bangladesh Medical University.

IHE director Prof Shafiqun Nahin Shimul said the new government can set three priorities for the health sector: primary and preventive healthcare; capacity building, good governance and institutional reform; and innovative financing to bring major reform under the existing financial model.

National Professor AK Azad, also chief of the Health Sector Reform Commission, said in implementing reforms, the new government should start with easier tasks, such as issuing directives to ensure all food producers list nutritional ingredients on their packages, and emphasise disease prevention to reduce people's healthcare expenses.

He noted that the targets set for primary healthcare are achievable.

Zahirul Islam Shakil, secretary general of the pro-BNP platform Doctors Association of Bangladesh, said the health sector would see major changes if the BNP's manifesto on the sector is implemented. He said they are in discussions with BNP leaders to this end.

In his presentation, Prof Syed Abdul Hamid, convener of the alliance, said a supreme authority should oversee issues regarding food, water, and other health-related factors.

Prof Syed Akram Hossain, joint convener of the alliance and a member of the commission, said the BNP government should take into consideration the commission's recommendation to form a separate health service and health commission.

Saidur Rahman, former health secretary, Prof Abul Kamal Azad, former director general of the Directorate General of Health Services, also spoke, while Mushtuq Husain, another joint convener of the alliance, chaired the event.

Parwar slams bringing political issues to court

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An attempt is being made to gain political advantage by evading political responsibility and creating pressure on the court, alleged Mia Golam Parwar, secretary general of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami.

He made the allegation in a statement issued yesterday in response to the High Court division of the Supreme Court issuing a four-week rule over matters related to the implementation of the July Charter.

According to the statement, the HC issued the rule regarding an order on the implementation of the July Charter, the oath-taking of a constitutional reform council, the question of a referendum, and 30 reform proposals adopted on the basis of consensus.

Golam Parwar said political issues should not be brought to the court. In the past, attempts to resolve political matters through judicial means did not yield positive outcomes; rather, they created confusion and stalemate in national life.

The Jamaat leader said the old tactic of using the court to secure desired outcomes must be abandoned. If the government retreats from its commitment to implement the July Charter, it would go against public expectations, he said.

Expression of Interest (EOI) Sponsorship Rights

Bangladesh Cricket Board

Ref No: BCB/Official Drinks and Official Beverage Partner /2026/167 Date: 04th March 2026

Expression of Interest (EOI)

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) hereby invites Expression of Interest (EOI) along with financial offers from the reputed Business Houses/ Companies/ Parties/ Agencies for acquiring the following Sponsorship Rights for a period of Two (02) years starting from 17th March 2026 to 16th March 2028.

- Official Drinking Partner Rights
- Official Beverage Partner Rights

Eligibility Criteria :

- Companies related to Tobacco, Alcohol (surrogated and non-surrogated), Betting or Online Betting and its surrogate shall not be eligible to participate in the EOI process.
- Any person(s) or entities with an existing unresolved dispute (i.e. Financial, Disciplinary and any other) with BCB or ICC on a point of law or fact shall be ineligible to acquire the aforementioned rights or to participate in the EOI Process.
- Reputed business houses, companies, agencies or parties with proven experience in the marketing, sales, or management of organized cricket tournaments, series, or sports events shall be given preference during the evaluation of EOI submissions.

Document Collection Procedure:

Interested parties need to obtain a copy of the EOI Document (General Guidelines) related to EOI will be available at the BCB's Official Website: www.tigercricket.com.bd

The details of the EOI process, Series Itinerary, etc. set out in the EOI document. EOI document will be available from 05th of March 2026 to 15th of March 2026.

EOI Submission Procedure:

The EOI along with financial offer (prepared in accordance with the EOI Document) must be submitted at the BCB Management Office at Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Mirpur-2, Dhaka 1216, Bangladesh by 16th of March 2026 during office hours (between BST 1000 to BST 1700) and should be in a sealed envelope to be addressed to: **Chief Executive Officer, Bangladesh Cricket Board.**

The EOI needs to be accompanied with the following documents:

- Company Profile and Individual Directors' / Owners' Profile.
- Latest auditor's report on financial statements (each consortium's member must submit separately).
- Bank Solvency Certificate along with bank Statement.
- Certified copy of Memorandum and Articles of Association along with certificate of Incorporation or similar constitutional documents.
- Updated VAT Registration Certificate, Trade License and Tax Identification Number (TIN) Certificate or similar documents.
- In case of consortium/ Joint Venture (JV) - a Notarized Consortium/ JV Agreement.

The BCB reserves the unconditional right to accept or reject any or all offers at its sole discretion without assigning any reason whatsoever during the EOI process. The BCB also reserves the right to amend, postpone or cancel the entire EOI process and / or modify, add or alter the terms of the document and/ or the conditions for EOI process by issuing further addendum(s) at any time prior to the submission of the EOI.

Chief Executive Officer
Bangladesh Cricket Board
Management Office: Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Mirpur-2, Dhaka 1216

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Chief Commercial Manager (East)
Bangladesh Railway, CRB, Chattogram

No. 54.01.1500.107.05.325.26-472 Date: 03-03-2026

Corrigendum-01

for
Invitation for Proposal for
Integrated Facility Management and Operation of Cox's Bazar ICONIC Station
Reference Proposal No.: 54.01.1500.107.05.325.26-161; Date: 25/01/2026
Package No.: CCM/East/CMG/CXB-01

| Reference Details: | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Published Notice Reference No.: | 54.01.1500.107.05.325.26-160, dated 25 January 2026 | | |
| Issued Bid Document Reference No.: | 54.01.1500.107.05.325.26-161, dated 25 January 2026 | | |
| Package No.: | CCM/East/CMG/CXB-01 | | |

In partial modification of the above-referenced Invitation for Proposal, the following amendments are hereby made:

| Sl. No. | Section, Clause & Page No. | Clause Description (As Published in Original Notice / Bid Document) | Amendment/Modification (Revised Clause) |
|---------|--|---|---|
| 01 | Invitation for Proposal Notice Para 3 Page No. 1 | Bid documents may be purchased up to 04 March 2026 . | Bid documents may be purchased up to 05 April 2026 . |
| 02 | Section 2: Proposal Data Sheet ITB Clause 29.1 Page No. 25 | Proposals must be submitted no later than 05 March 2026 at 12:00pm . | Proposals must be submitted no later than 06 April 2026 at 12:00pm . |
| 03 | Section 2: Proposal Data Sheet ITB Clause 28.3(vi) Page No. 25 | Proposal Opening Date is 05 March 2026 at 12.15pm . | Proposal Opening Date is 06 April 2026 at 12.15pm . |

ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR BIDDERS

A. Bid Document Purchase:
Interested bidders may purchase Bid Documents up to **05 April 2026** during office hours from the locations mentioned in Para 2. f of the original Invitation for Proposal Notice (Reference No. 54.01.1500.107.05.325.26-160, dated 25 January 2026).

B. For Bidders Who Have Already Purchased Bid Documents:
Bidders who have already purchased the Bid Document (Reference No. 54.01.1500.107.05.325.26-161, dated 25 January 2026) are not required to purchase a new document. This corrigendum shall form an integral part of the original Bid Document.

C. Bid Security Validity:
Bidders must ensure that their Bid Security (Bank Draft/Pay Order/Irrevocable Bank Guarantee) remains valid until **28 days beyond the new proposal opening date of 06 April 2026**. If necessary, an extension of Bid Security validity or a new Bid Security must be submitted before the new submission deadline.

D. All Other Terms Unchanged:
All other terms, conditions, specifications, and evaluation criteria of the original Bid Document remain unchanged.

This corrigendum shall form an integral part of the original Bid Document.

এম (২৬) (২০১)

Md. Mahabur Rahman
Chief Commercial Manager (East)
Bangladesh Railway, CRB, Chattogram

GID-480

'Textbooks to be revised; no scope for auto-pass'

Says education minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Education Minister ANM Ehsanul Hoque Milon yesterday said textbooks will be revised, while physical, mental health and arts education will be made mandatory from Class IV.

He also said there will be no scope for "auto-pass" in examinations.

Milon made the remarks at separate meetings with officials of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), and chairmen of all education boards and senior ministry officials.

At the NCTB meeting, Milon said Prime Minister Tarique Rahman is giving the highest priority to education, according to press release sent by the ministry.

"Textbooks must be revised," he said, adding that, "Curriculum formulation and textbook revision will be carried out by high quality experts. No party consideration will be made in this regard."

The minister also said physical education, mental health and arts education will be made mandatory for all students from Class IV, with evaluation examinations to be introduced for these subjects.

Addressing another meeting at the education ministry, Milon reviewed preparations for the SSC and equivalent examinations for 2026.

"To build a merit based nation, the examination system must change. There will be no more opportunity for auto-pass," he said.

The minister also directed authorities to re-investigate vulnerable centres and prepare an updated list, said a press release of the ministry.

Reiterating a strict stance against irregularities, Milon said proper body searches of examinees while entering examination centres must be ensured and that teachers should actively prevent cheating.

"If any question paper or question-related content is uploaded on social media or any online platform during the examination, legal action will be taken," he said, adding that if cheating materials are found in the toils of examination centres, the respective centre authorities will be held responsible.

Milon also stressed for ensuring proper evaluation of all examinations including practical exams.

He outlined plans to establish schools in areas of districts where there are none. These schools will provide education from Class I to Class XII in the form of higher secondary schools.

State Minister for Education Bobby Hajaj was present at the meeting.

Only four staffers in five districts for wildlife protection

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

Tasked with protecting wildlife and managing vast forest areas across Habiganj, Kishoreganj, Brahmanbaria, Cumilla and Netrakona districts, the Habiganj office of the Bangladesh Forest Department's Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Division has been functioning amid severely strained manpower and resources.

At present, it is operating with only four staff members – a wildlife and nature conservation officer, a deputy ranger, a gardener and a night guard – raising concerns over the effectiveness of wildlife conservation and rescue operations.

Officials say the manpower shortage, coupled with an irregular budget and lack of transports for rescue operations, has made it increasingly difficult to respond promptly to wildlife emergencies across the unit's vast operational area that includes several ecologically critical sites such as Satchari National Park, Rema-Kalenga Wildlife Sanctuary, Haor region, numerous wetlands and forest patches.

While the Moulvibazar office reportedly has comparatively adequate manpower, the Habiganj office has long been grappling with staff shortages.

There are also allegations that the office's name and information are not listed on the district's national information portal, limiting public access to official contact details.



Sony Ahmed, a resident of Madhabpur upazila of Habiganj, said the unit often cannot respond quickly to rescue operations due to staff shortages and lack of logistics stemming from administrative negligence.

"As such, ordinary people – tea workers, farmers, and villagers including me – are left to deal with snakes, pythons or other wild animals on their own. This causes panic, raises injury risks, and even leads to retaliatory killing of animals," he added.

Biswajit Paul, joint convener of volunteer group Pakhipremik Society, and Tofazzal Sohel, general secretary (Habiganj unit) of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon

(BAPA), called upon authorities concerned to recruit adequate manpower and ensure necessary logistics to equip the unit for functioning effectively.

"We do not receive regular government funds for wildlife rescue operations. Yet we are responsible for carrying out all related activities across five districts amid acute manpower shortage," said Mahmud Hossain, in charge deputy ranger of Habiganj unit.

Abul Kalam Azad, divisional forest officer for Habiganj and Moulvibazar under the Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Division, said they are making every effort to ensure service standards despite limited manpower.

"Steps will be taken through the department to address the manpower crisis at the Habiganj office," he said.

'I asked for Ziaul to be restrained'

FROM PAGE 3

said he was removed after reporting the misconduct.

Recalling the 2009 BDR mutiny, he said he was the commandant of the Staff College at the time. After the killings, resentment grew among many senior officers towards India and the Awami League, with divisions widening between senior and junior officers. Six to seven junior officers who addressed the then prime minister and army chief over the mutiny were later forced into retirement.

Iqbal denied involvement in any procurement syndicate. He acknowledged corruption in procurement during his tenure but said it was beyond his jurisdiction.

On Ziaul, Iqbal said he had verbally instructed then Col Mujib to stop "crossfire" incidents and restrain Ziaul, then a lieutenant colonel.

He admitted he did not issue a written show cause notice when the incidents continued. He also denied that his testimony was intended to malign the Bangladesh Army.

During the hearing, Ziaul repeatedly stood up to assist his lawyer. The tribunal chair asked him to maintain decorum and speak through counsel.

Despite the warning, he again stood, saying, "A former army chief is speaking against me, and I am accused in this case. If something is being contradicted, let me speak."

The cross examination of the former army chief ended yesterday.

At the end of the proceedings, a lawyer for Zunaid Ahmed Palak sought privileged

communication with his client, which the tribunal allowed.

Meanwhile, the prosecution, led by newly appointed Chief Prosecutor Aminul Islam, will move ICT-1 today, seeking a postponement of the verdict in a case over the killing of two people and the shooting of two others in Rampura during the July uprising.

The three-member tribunal had earlier set today to deliver the verdict in the case against five former police officers, including the then DMP commissioner Habibur Rahman.

VICTIM TESTIFIES AGAINST SALMAN, ANISUL

Adham Bin Amin, 17, a victim of the July uprising, yesterday told ICT-1 that former prime minister's adviser Salman F Rahman and then law minister Anisul Huq had ordered protesters to be "finished" by imposing curfew.

Testifying as the third prosecution witness, Adham alleged that the Sheikh Hasina, Asaduzzaman and Obaidul Quader were also involved in ordering the crackdown.

A ninth grader at a Mirpur school at the time, Adham said he joined protests at Mirpur-10 from July 16 to 19. Though protesters were unarmed, they were fired upon from the ground and from a helicopter. He was shot in both knees and is still undergoing treatment.

Adham also alleged that local Awami League activists assaulted him on February 26, 2026. A complaint was filed with Mirpur Model Police Station.

ANTI-MOSQUITO DRIVE

DNCC forms quick response team

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) yesterday formed a quick response team to strengthen its anti-mosquito drive and decided to apply insecticides three times a day.

The new schedule was issued through an office order yesterday signed by Chief Health Officer Brig Gen Imru-al-Quais, said a press release.

According to the order, larvicides will be applied

in the morning and adulticides in the afternoon and evening based on peak mosquito flight and activity times in different zones.

DNCC has also decided to continue anti-mosquito drives during weekends and asked all officials concerned to monitor the anti-mosquito activities.

The press release added that DNCC Administrator Md Saifuddin Islam Khan, since taking charge, has given the highest priority to the drive.

A DNCC official said the corporation has already taken initiatives to conduct special drives in mosquito hotspots to destroy breeding sources of Culex mosquitoes.

He added that DNCC is also giving priority to curbing Aedes mosquitoes to protect residents from mosquito-borne diseases such as dengue.

DNCC also requested residents to actively cooperate in destroying mosquito breeding sites.

BNP sets March 6-7 orientation for MPs, ministers

FROM PAGE 3

"Ministers may share their thoughts on the work they have done in their areas and how they will place local problems in parliament. They may also receive guidance on the role of a lawmaker in parliament and how to carry out their responsibilities effectively," said a minister, seeking anonymity.

The party will soon invite the lawmakers to join the programme and confirm their participation. Party insiders said lawmakers may be advised to prioritise local area development, policy follow-up and oversight of ministries to ensure that pledges made during the campaign are fulfilled.

Sources said the prime minister is also likely to

remind MPs to maintain transparency in public dealings and strengthen communication with local communities.

Lawmakers may be instructed to hold regular meetings with constituents, maintain open complaint channels and ensure that public grievances are addressed through appropriate administrative mechanisms.

The sessions will cover parliamentary conduct, including how to raise points of order, submit notices, participate in debates and engage in question-answer sessions. The role of standing committees in monitoring ministries and reviewing draft legislation will also be discussed, sources said.

Participants are

expected to receive guidance on drafting and evaluating bills, understanding budget documents and reviewing policy proposals before parliamentary approval.

Governance issues will form a central part of the discussions, including budget allocation, fiscal discipline, inflation management and investment promotion.

Economic reform will also be addressed, including strategies to support small businesses, expand employment opportunities and attract foreign investment. Discussions may include measures to strengthen revenue collection without burdening low-income groups.

Technology and youth

policy are expected to feature prominently. The party leadership may discuss expanding digital governance systems, reducing bureaucratic delays and promoting innovation in public service delivery. Creating jobs for young people and linking education with market demand may also be addressed.

The programme will also discuss internal coordination between the government and the party organisation.

On the first day, the morning session from 10:30am to 12:30pm will be attended by ministers, state ministers and advisers. The afternoon session from 2:30pm to 4:30pm will include MPs from Rangpur, Rajshahi, Dhaka

and Faridpur.

On the second day, the morning session will involve MPs from parts of Dhaka, Mymensingh, Dhaka Division and Faridpur district. The afternoon session will include MPs from Sylhet, Cumilla and Chattogram.

Party sources said the division-based participation is designed to ensure focused discussions and allow lawmakers to raise region-specific issues, including infrastructure gaps, social services and local administrative challenges.

Party insiders said the leadership wants the parliamentary team to function as a cohesive unit capable of responding effectively to policy debates and public scrutiny.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Bangladesh Police
Office of the Superintendent of Police
Munshiganj District
www.munshigonjpolice.gov.bd

Memo No-1445/E Date: 02 Mar 2026

e-Tender Notice

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP portal (www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of following goods:

| SL No. | Package Name | Tender ID No | Tender publication Date and Time | Tender/Proposal Closing/Opening Date & Time |
|--------|---|--------------|----------------------------------|---|
| 1. | Procurement of High Quality Edible oil (Soyabean Oil) | 1237173 | 03 Mar 2026 15:00 | 15 Mar 2026 15:00 |
| 2. | Procurement of High Quality Lentils (600 grains per 10 grams) | 1237706 | | |
| 3. | Procurement of Wheat Grinding | 1237223 | | |
| 4. | Procurement of High Quality Polao Rice | 1237784 | | |
| 5. | Procurement of High Quality Fuel Wood | 1237690 | | |
| 6. | Rice and Wheat Transportation (Including loading and unloading) | 1237786 | | |
| 7. | Sugar Transportation (From other Districts) | 1237742 | | |

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the national e-GP portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted.

To submit e-Tender, registration in the national e-GP portal (www.eprocure.gov.bd) is required.

The fees for downloading the e-Tender document from the national e-GP portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank branches.

Further information and guidelines are available in the national e-GP system portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).


02.3.2026
Md. Menhajul Alam PPM
BP-7406119781
Superintendent of Police
Munshiganj District
Tel:02997731116, Fax:02997731297
Mail:spmshigonj@police.gov.bd

GD-481

No congratulatory

FROM PAGE 3

The prime minister praised the patriotism and professionalism of the Coast Guard and their continued efforts in carrying out duties.

He urged the force to keep serving people in coastal and riverbank areas, maintain peace and security, and assist communities during disasters, the press aide said.

He also asked the force to remain fully prepared to protect the country's sovereignty.

Meanwhile, citing a report submitted to the prime minister, Ruman said vehicle speeds in the capital have increased as traffic signals are being followed and VIP protocol movements are reduced.

According to the report, the average vehicle speed in Dhaka previously stood at 4.5 kmph. Data from the past 14 days show that the average speed has risen to 5.3 kmph as traffic is no longer halted for VIP movements.

The report attributed the improvement to the prime minister reducing VIP protocol and complying with traffic signals.

It added that the president, ministers and state ministers are also following traffic rules.

The additional press secretary also said the prime minister directed authorities to take immediate steps after reports of rising prices of coarse rice, a staple for lower-income groups.

Ruman said once the matter came to the premier's attention, he instructed the relevant ministries to act promptly.

"There was an immediate positive impact on the market," the additional press secretary said.

The prime minister is set to formally launch the "Family Card" distribution programme from the Korail slum in the capital on March 10.

Social Welfare and Women and Children Affairs Minister Dr AZM Zahid Hossain confirmed the development to reporters yesterday following a high-level meeting with the prime minister at the Secretariat.

Under the earlier plan, the programme was to be inaugurated in Bogura on the same day. However, the visit was postponed due to the upcoming by-election in the Bogura-6 (Sadar) constituency.

Officials said the decision was taken in line with the election code of conduct.

বাংলাদেশ বিদ্যুৎ উন্নয়ন বোর্ড
Bangladesh Power Development Board
www.bpdb.gov.bd

Office of the Executive Engineer
P.C. Pole Mfg. Plant,
BPDB, Rampur, Halishahar,
Chattogram-4224
Telephone: 01730119978
E-mail: senepc@bdmail.com

Memo No. 27.11.1500.509.01.006.26-540 Date: 02-03-2026

Invitation for e-Tender

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

| Tender ID | Name of Work, Ref. No. & date | Tender publication date and time | Tender document last selling date and time | Tender closing/opening date and time |
|-----------|--|----------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1229116 | Supplying of Spiral Wire (Phase-1) at PC Pole Mfg. Plant, BPDB, Halishahar, Chattogram. 27.11.1500.509.01.006.2 6-539 D1. 02/03/2026 | 03-Mar-2026 10:00 | 15-Mar-2026 15:30 | 16-Mar-2026 10:00 |

This is online tender, where only e-Tenders will be accepted in e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copy will be accepted. To submit e-Tender please register on e-GP System (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>).

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd) contact number (01762625528-31).

বিদ্যুৎ/জন-৮১৪(২)/০৩/০৩/২৬


02.03.26
Pratiti Chakma
ID No. 1-02005
Executive Engineer
P.C. Pole Mfg. Plant
BPDB, Halishahar, Chattogram

GD-477

Israel's strike plan triggered US attack on Iran: Rubio

REUTERS, Washington

Planned Israeli action against Iran that would have seen retaliation against American forces prompted the United States to launch its weekend strikes against Tehran, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Monday.

"We knew that there was going to be an Israeli action, we knew that that would precipitate an attack against American forces, and we knew that if we didn't preemptively go after them before they launched those attacks, we would suffer higher casualties," Rubio told reporters.

On Saturday, Israel's defense minister Israel Katz described its missile attack against Iran as pre-emptive.

Iran has said the US assault was unprovoked, occurring as Tehran and Washington were in negotiations on a nuclear accord.

US President Donald Trump has said the US faced an imminent threat from Iran that justified war, although he gave no specifics and some US lawmakers said

he has shown no evidence to back that assessment.

"The United States would not deliberately target a school. Our objectives are missiles, both the ability to manufacture them and the ability to launch them," Rubio told reporters, while adding that the Pentagon was investigating the alleged incident.

He voiced support for toppling Iran's Islamic authorities but said it was not the objective of the US and Israeli war against Tehran.

"We hope that the Iranian people can overthrow this government and establish a new future for that country. We would love for that to be possible," Rubio told reporters.

"But the objective of this mission is the destruction of their ballistic missile capabilities and of their naval capabilities," he said.

Trump also spoke to CNN on Monday, flagging what he said would be an escalation in the assault on Iran. "The big wave hasn't even happened," he said. "The big one is coming soon."



Emergency personnel gather in Ramat Gan, Israel, yesterday, following an Iranian missile barrage amid the US-Israel conflict with Iran. The Middle East has become gripped by war triggered by US and Israeli airstrikes against Iran on February 28, which killed Iran's supreme leader and other officials.

PHOTO: REUTERS

How Khamenei was killed

Report says Mossad spies, traffic cameras sealed Iran supreme leader's fate

AGENCIES

Nearly all the traffic cameras in Tehran had been hacked for years. And when the senior Iranian officials came to work near Pasteur Street in Tehran - where Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was killed in a US-Israeli air strike on Saturday - the Israelis were watching, according to a Financial Times report.

One camera had an angle that proved particularly beneficial, the British daily said, providing Israel a window into the workings of a monotonous part of the closely guarded compound.

Sophisticated algorithms added details to dossiers on members of these security guards that included their addresses, hours of duty, routes they took to work and, most importantly, who they were usually assigned to protect and transport - building what intelligence officers call a "pattern of life", the report detailed.

The effort was a part of a years-long intelligence campaign that helped pave the way for the 86-year-old Ayatollah's assassination.

Tracking this real-time traffic data was one of the many ways Israel and the CIA were able to determine exactly what time the supreme leader would be in his offices on Saturday morning and those who would be joining him.

Israeli intelligence detected a meeting at the leadership compound in the heart of Tehran on Saturday morning and the strikes were moved forward, Reuters had earlier reported.

Crucially, the CIA learned that the supreme leader, who subjected Iranians to severe authoritarianism and repression, would be at the site.

Israel was also able to disrupt single components of roughly a dozen or so mobile phone towers near Pasteur Street, the report said, making the phones seem as if they were busy when called and stopping Khamenei's protection detail from receiving possible warnings.

"The intelligence picture of the arch-

enemy's capital was the result of laborious data collection, made possible by Israel's sophisticated signals intelligence Unit 8200, the human assets recruited by its foreign intelligence agency Mossad and the mountains of data digested by military intelligence into daily briefs," the report said.

Israel, the report said, used a mathematical

method known as social network analysis to parse billions of data points.



"We took their eyes first," the report said, quoting an intelligence official. Both in the June war and now, Israeli pilots have used a specific kind of missile called the Sparrow, variants of which are able to hit a target as small as a dining table from more than 1,000km away - far from Iran and the reach of any of its aerial defence systems, the report elaborated.

Khamenei, unlike his ally Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, did not live in hiding. When the CIA and Israel determined that Khamenei

would be holding a meeting on Saturday morning at his offices near Pasteur Street, the chance to kill him, along with much of Iran's senior leadership, was real.

While Donald Trump had repeatedly threatened to attack Iran in recent weeks, building up an "armada" off its shores, negotiations between the US and Iran over the

Islamic republic's nuclear programme were meant to continue this week.

Israeli intelligence had information from signals intelligence, such as the hacked traffic cameras and deeply penetrated mobile phone networks, the report said. The meeting with Khamenei was on schedule, with senior officials heading to the location, the report said. But the Americans had something even more concrete - a human source, the report said. The vital information provided a window of opportunity for the two countries to go in for the kill. And they did.

IRAN SCHOOL UN calls for probe into deadly strike

REUTERS, Geneva

The UN human rights office yesterday urged what it called the forces behind a deadly attack on a girls' school in Iran to investigate and share insights into the incident, without saying who it believed was responsible.

"The High Commissioner (Volker Turk) calls for a prompt, impartial and thorough investigation into the circumstances of the attack. The onus is on the forces that carried out the attack to investigate it," UN human rights office spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani told a Geneva press briefing.

"This is absolutely horrific," Shamdasani said, adding that images circulating on social media captured "the essence of the destruction, despair and senselessness and cruelty of this conflict".

Turk also urged all parties to exercise restraint and to return to the negotiating table, she said.

The school in southern Iran was hit on Saturday, the first day of US and Israeli attacks against the country. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Monday that US forces "would not deliberately target a school". Israel has said it is investigating the incident.

US-UK ties 'not like it used to be' Trump says after Starmer's refusal to allow US to use British bases in Cyprus

AFP, London

US President Donald Trump said the historical relationship between his country and Britain was "not like it used to be", in an interview to British daily newspaper The Sun, amid a major transatlantic fall out over US-Israeli strikes against Iran.

"This was the most solid relationship of all. And now we have very strong relationships with other countries in Europe," he said, singling out France and Germany, after UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer's initial refusal to allow the United States to use British military bases in its war with Iran.

Trump said Starmer "has not been helpful", adding: "I never thought I'd see that. I never thought I'd see that from the UK. We love the UK."

In a telephone interview from the White House on Monday evening, Trump said: "This was the most solid relationship of all. And now we have very strong relationships with other countries in Europe."

"It's a different world, actually. It's just a much different kind of relationship that we've had with your country before."

"It's very sad to see that the relationship is obviously not what it was," he added.

The scathing comments come a day after Trump described Starmer's reaction as "very disappointing" in an interview with The Daily Telegraph.

He added that Starmer's later decision to allow the use of UK bases on specific grounds as "useful" but said it "took far too much time".



Golestan Palace in Tehran damaged

AFP, Tehran

Iran's Unesco-listed Golestan Palace in Tehran has been damaged in US and Israeli strikes, local media reported Monday.

"Following the joint US-Israeli attack on Arag square in southern Tehran on Sunday evening, parts of the Golestan Palace... were damaged," the ISNA news agency reported, adding that windows, doors, and mirrors were hit by reverberations from blasts.

The former royal palace "was reportedly damaged by debris and the shock wave following an air strike to the Arag Square, located in the buffer zone of the site in the Iranian capital", Unesco said in a statement late on Monday.

The UN agency said it had "communicated to all parties concerned the geographical coordinates of sites on the World Heritage List as well as those of national significance, to avoid any potential damage".



Burned-out cars lie beside a damaged residential building after a Russian air strike in Druzhkivka, Donetsk region, Ukraine on Monday, in this handout from Ukraine's 93rd Kholodnyi Yar Brigade.

PHOTO: AFP

France to boost nuclear arsenal

Macron hints at support for allies; Nato chief says 'widespread support' for US Iran campaign

AFP, Ile Longue

President Emmanuel Macron said Monday evening that France will expand its atomic arsenal and could deploy nuclear-armed aircraft to allied countries for the first time, as he unveiled an unprecedented plan to bolster security on the continent.

Speaking from the Ile Longue nuclear submarine base as the clock ticks on his presidency, Macron announced that eight European countries including Germany, Poland, Sweden and Britain had agreed to participate in what he called a "forward" nuclear deterrence scheme.

"Today more than ever, independence cannot mean isolation," Macron said in his 50-minute speech, with one of France's four ballistic missile submarines in the background.

"We are currently experiencing a period of geopolitical upheaval fraught with risks," Macron said, speaking after the launch of US and Israeli attacks against Iran in a campaign that risks destabilising the Middle East.

Macron said eight European countries had agreed to join his plan to use France's nuclear stockpile to bolster security on the continent. "Germany will be a key partner in this effort," he said.

Meanwhile, Nato chief Mark Rutte said yesterday there was broad backing among US European allies for President Donald Trump's military campaign against Iran. "I feel widespread support in Europe. I was on the phone with many leaders over the weekend and also early this week," Rutte told journalists on a visit to North Macedonia.

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

When will this monstrosity stop?

Death of child with throat slit reveals how defenceless victims remain

We are devastated and outraged by the death of a seven-year-old child, who was rescued from near Sitakunda Eco Park on Sunday, with her throat slit, which rendered her literally speechless and unable to provide details of her attacker(s). The child succumbed to her injuries at the Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH)'s ICU early Tuesday morning. The child's mother filed a case on Sunday against unidentified individuals, and law enforcement agencies—including police and Rab—launched investigations into the incident. So far, police have arrested one suspect. According to the One Stop Crisis Centre at the CMCH, the victim was swabbed to test for evidence of sexual assault, but the report is still pending.

Sadly, besides this heinous crime, a number of other criminal incidents involving the abuse of women and children happened in Bangladesh over just the past week. On February 25, the body of a 15-year-old was found in a cropland in Narsingdi. Fifteen days earlier, the girl had sought justice from the local union parishad member, alleging abduction and rape by miscreants. Those same accused abducted her on the night of February 26 when she was travelling to her relative's house with her father. This time, they killed her. In Pabna, a 15-year-old girl was raped and killed on February 28, allegedly by her relative, after he killed the teenager's grandmother.

What is unconceivable is how common such atrocious acts have become nationwide. In 2025, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) recorded 749 rape cases, including 569 gang rapes. At least 370 victims were under 18. After rape, 36 women were killed, seven died by suicide, and six died after attempted rape. ASK also recorded the abuse of 1,023 children and the deaths of at least 410 children due to rape, murder, physical abuse, abduction, suicide and explosions.

In recent memory, one case that saw major public outcry and also received a rare, speedy trial was the rape and killing of an eight-year-old in Magura last year. Unfortunately, there appears to be a correlation between the intensity of public response that a case of child or woman abuse generates and the speed with which the trial concludes. In a country where many incidents of sexual violence go unreported due to associated stigma, the authorities should feel morally obligated to strongly pursue reported cases. Unfortunately, the reality is often otherwise, which emboldens perpetrators to carry out heinous crimes without fear of facing justice.

This must change. Now that a new elected government is in place, it is crucial that the public's trust in law enforcement and the judiciary is restored. That police in Sitakunda are investigating the seven-year-old's murder as a high priority is reassuring. We urge that they pursue justice in this case until it is achieved. But without all cases of abuse against children and women being treated as emergencies, the crimes may only get more frequent and crueler.

A worrying trail of deception

Govt must stop forced participation of migrants in Russia-Ukraine war

The findings by Fortify Rights and Truth Hounds that more than 100 Bangladeshis were misled and forced into fighting for Russia in its war against Ukraine—with at least 34 reportedly killed—are both shocking and deeply regrettable. The report, based on interviews conducted in Bangladesh and Ukraine with survivors, families and prisoners of war, exposes a disturbing pattern of deception in the recruitment of desperate, unemployed young men. Some of them believed they were heading to factory jobs in Europe; others thought they would take on non-combat roles linked to the military. Instead, many were deployed to the front lines without adequate military training or even basic language skills.

The result is, young men who sought overseas employment to support their families have returned home in coffins, if at all. Others have come back injured or deeply traumatised. Equally tragic is the financial devastation left behind: many families borrowed heavily to pay brokers, shelling out between \$1,000 and \$5,000 per person in the hope of securing legitimate jobs abroad. In numerous cases, they lost both their sons and their life savings, leaving them trapped in debt. Although the report identifies at least 104 such victims, experts believe the actual number could be significantly higher.

Perhaps most troubling is our government's failure on two fronts. First, it has been unable to curb the illegal activities of brokers and human traffickers who facilitate such recruitment. Second, it has not taken sufficient diplomatic steps to prevent Russia-linked groups from recruiting Bangladeshis and placing them in harm's way. In the absence of any formal labour migration agreement between Bangladesh and Russia, the government should press Moscow to immediately stop employing Bangladeshis in military roles or in any capacity linked to its operations in Ukraine. One particular concern in this connection has been the apparent inaction in repatriating the bodies of those killed. The report cites anguished families who described prolonged delays, a lack of clear communication, and insufficient empathy from the authorities in response to their requests to bring their loved ones' bodies home.

The government must address this matter urgently and fulfil its fundamental obligation to its citizens. Finally, there must be a thorough investigation to identify and prosecute the recruiters who deceived these young men and sent them to fight in a foreign war in which Bangladesh has no direct stake. This must be done without delay. It is also imperative to establish the true number of those recruited and to determine whether any ideological networks or other organised interests were involved in facilitating their deployment.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Radio Pakistan renamed as Dhaka Betar

On this day in 1971, during the non-cooperation movement launched by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the vital decision to rename Radio Pakistan as Dhaka Betar was taken by the officers and employees of the radio's centre in Dhaka.

A stress test for Bangladesh's export logistics



AHAMEDUL KARIM CHOWDHURY

Ahamedul Karim Chowdhury is adjunct faculty at Bangladesh Maritime University and former head of inland container depot at Kamalapur and Pangaon Inland Container Terminal under the Chittagong Port Authority.

Bangladesh's export success has never been just about competitive labour or entrepreneurial energy. Logistics—the quiet, disciplined movement of goods from factory floors to port gates, from container yards to mother vessels, and from ships to global retail shelves—has also played a massive part in it. That machinery now faces one of the most serious external stress tests in recent memory.

Amid the ongoing war between US-Israel and Iran, the suspension of trans-Suez services combined with a closure of the Strait of Hormuz will not only disrupt shipping routes but also expose structural vulnerabilities in global trade lanes, as well as in Bangladesh's own trade architecture. These two maritime chokepoints serve different but equally critical roles. The Suez Canal, the 193-km artificial waterway in Egypt, is the principal artery connecting Asia to Europe. When it shuts down, vessels are forced to divert around the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa, which significantly extends sailing distances and transit times. A round trip between South Asia and Northern Europe can lengthen by roughly one to two additional working weeks. In liner shipping, time is of the essence: when ships stay longer at sea, global capacity shrinks. Containers remain tied up, and schedules lose rhythm.

Meanwhile, the Strait of Hormuz, which sits between Iran and Oman, is one of the world's most important energy transit chokepoints through which more than 20 percent of global oil and liquefied natural gas exports is shipped. Its closure will send immediate shockwaves through oil and gas markets. For Bangladesh, that translates directly into higher fuel import costs, increased power generation expenses, rising inland transport costs, and more expensive bunker fuel for ships. Freight rates would inevitably respond.

Taken together, these disruptions would produce two simultaneous shocks: a "time-and-capacity shock" and an "energy-and-cost shock." And for an export-driven economy like Bangladesh, that combination is consequential.

In FY2024-25, Bangladesh exported roughly \$48 billion worth of goods, of which more than 80 percent was ready-made garment products. This is a highly containerised, schedule-sensitive industry. Retail supply chains in Europe and North America are calendar driven. Missing a delivery window is not simply a delay; it can

mean discounted sales, contract penalties, or lost future orders.

Our exposure is concentrated in precisely those markets dependent on these trade corridors. The European Union and the US together account for the majority of Bangladesh's apparel exports. When shipping routes lengthen and freight costs rise, our competitive edge, built carefully over decades, faces pressure from both cost escalation and delivery uncertainty.

Rerouting shipping lines is not free. Longer voyages increase ton-miles, absorb vessel capacity, and strain container rotations. Disruption often results in port congestion as ships arrive in uneven clusters instead of predictable weekly intervals. Under such conditions, variability becomes the enemy.

Bangladesh's primary maritime gateway has demonstrated impressive growth capacity, handling record container volumes in recent years. However, resilience under disruption is not only about scale but also about flexibility and predictability. When vessel arrivals become irregular, container dwell times increase, yard density rises, inland container depots face pressure, trucking corridors become bottlenecks, and customs delays compound the strain. Even modest inefficiencies become magnified during systemic stress.

Bangladesh's evolving trade relationship with the US introduces

another dimension. The recently announced reciprocal trade framework signals deeper two-way commerce, including expanded imports of American cotton, wheat, and other inputs. Stronger bilateral trade ties are welcome, but increased inbound volumes will compete for shipping space, port handling capacity, foreign exchange liquidity, and trade finance

are recurring features, not exceptional events.

Fourth, trade finance resilience must be safeguarded. Longer transit times tie up working capital. Banks and financial institutions should anticipate this shift and adjust liquidity planning accordingly.

Finally, communication must be clear and credible. Markets react



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

precisely when outbound logistics may already be strained.

Bangladesh could therefore face a dual flow challenge: exports grappling with longer transit times while imports rise under new trade commitments. Is this scenario inevitable? Not necessarily. But it is plausible enough to demand preparation.

The first step is recognising that logistics, during disruption, becomes a central economic priority. A coordinated, data-driven supply chain response is essential. Government agencies, port authorities, shipping lines, terminal operators, customs officials, banks, and exporters all must operate in close alignment. Daily monitoring of berth schedules, yard occupancy, container dwell time, and inland evacuation rates should be institutionalised during such periods of instability.

Second, inland connectivity must be treated as strategic infrastructure. Greater reliance on rail-based container evacuation can reduce highway pressure and accelerate yard turnover. Inland depots must operate with strict turnaround targets. Even small reductions in average dwell time can create significant capacity buffers.

Third, contractual realism is required. Exporters and buyers must revisit shipment lead times, buffer stock strategies, and war risk clauses. The global supply chain is entering a period where rerouting and volatility

poorly to uncertainty. Transparent guidance to exporters regarding port conditions, expected delays, and contingency planning can prevent panic-driven decisions.

Bangladesh has demonstrated resilience before, from pandemic-era container shortages to global freight rate spikes. The private sector has shown adaptability in navigating turbulence. However, an indefinite suspension of trans-Suez services combined with Hormuz instability would represent a structural, not temporary, alteration of trade routes and energy flows, reshaping cost assumptions across Asia-Europe and Asia-America corridors. In such an environment, competitiveness will depend less on nominal production costs and more on supply chain reliability.

Global trade geography may be shifting. Sea lanes may detour. Energy prices may fluctuate. These forces lie beyond our control. What remains within our control is how efficiently we respond. Bangladesh has built a world-class export engine over the decades. The task now is to embed resilience into that engine. Cleaner customs processes, faster inland connectivity, digital documentation, diversified routing options, and disciplined institutional coordination will determine how well we can weather a prolonged maritime uncertainty.

Are we desensitised to violence against women and children?



MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

Maisha Islam Monamee is a contributor to The Daily Star.

In the span of a few days, an 18-year-old was arrested for attempting to rape a four-year-old. A 15-year-old girl was abducted in front of her father and found dead the next day, all because she had dared to demand justice for her rape. A grandmother was killed while trying to protect her granddaughter, who was then raped and strangled to death. A university student was assaulted by someone she knew and trusted. This is not an exhaustive list; these incidents are simply what pierced through the noise.

There is something deeply unsettling about how quickly we get accustomed to horror. We read, freeze, feel the sharpness of anger, and then, almost reflexively, move on to another breaking news, investigation, social media post, debate, or distraction. The tragedy shrinks into a statistic, a life gets reduced to a number, and a

family's devastation is compressed into a paragraph. When sexual violence recurs with such frequency, it ceases to shock institutions, and individuals' shock doesn't last long. And that is where the crisis lies.

It is tempting to frame these crimes as the work of monsters and aberrations detached from society. But monsters operate within systems. When perpetrators act with confidence, it is often because consequences appear uncertain, distant, or negotiable. Delayed trials, fragile investigations, uneven enforcement, and the shielding of the influential all contribute to an atmosphere in which deterrence erodes. Each case that lingers for years in procedural limbo signals that time is on the side of the accused. Each influential suspect who escapes scrutiny signals that connections can outweigh crimes. Each family

pressured into silence signals that reputation matters more than justice.

To describe these cases as isolated is analytically dishonest. Sexual violence thrives in environments where harassment is underestimated, survivors are doubted, reporting mechanisms are weak, and institutions lack urgency. It thrives where communities advise silence over scandal and where political ecosystems prioritise loyalty over accountability. Addressing this crisis requires certainty of punishment beyond symbolic arrests. It requires transparent investigations and time-bound trials. It requires institutional reform: survivor-centred policing, strengthened forensic capacity, and specialised prosecution units trained to handle gender-based violence with rigour and sensitivity. It requires political courage to ensure that affiliation, influence or proximity to power does not shield the accused.

Perhaps one of the most troubling questions is how we keep functioning as if these crimes are inevitable. Normalcy, in moments like these, becomes tempting. It shields us from the discomfort of confronting structural failure. Acknowledging the scale of the crisis would require institutional audits, budget reallocations, and sustained

public pressure. It would require confronting entrenched interests and admitting that existing approaches are insufficient. It is easier to treat each case as a standalone tragedy than to admit that they collectively accuse a system.

But safety is not a privilege to be intermittently delivered; it is a right. The state cannot outsource protection to families, nor can it reduce justice to rhetoric. Each case is a personal catastrophe, but together they form a national warning. A society that grows accustomed to violence against its women and children risks eroding its own moral foundation. We cannot undo the harm that has already been done. What we can decide is whether the victims' names fade into the background noise of the next news cycle, or whether they compel sustained demand for accountability that extends beyond temporary discomfort.

The question is no longer whether the situation is alarming. The evidence answers that unequivocally. The real question is whether we are prepared to confront what we need to do emotionally, institutionally, politically, and collectively.

Deferment or not, we must prepare for LDC graduation



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SABBIR AHMAD

During my decades of studying and working abroad, I had the privilege of watching this country surprise the world repeatedly. It delivered infrastructure projects rising from barren lands, mobile connectivity reaching remote river-bound villages, and a garment industry rising from zero into a global force. Bangladesh has always found a way. But engineering a system at its early growth phase and sustaining it through maturity requires fundamentally different strategies. What got us here may not get us there.

That tension sits at the heart of Bangladesh's impending graduation from the LDC framework in November this year. A national consensus involving the government, major political parties, and the business community has emerged around seeking a deferment. A formal request has been made to defer graduation by three years to 2029, and the United Nations Committee for Development Policy (UN CDP) has started the process to assess the request. The deferment is understandable, but precisely what it is must be understood: a pause, or a solution. The more consequential question is what Bangladesh does with the time it has sought.

The arithmetic of graduation is sobering. Today, 73 percent of our exports benefit from duty-free access to 38 countries under the LDC framework. Last year, 44 percent of our exports went to the EU alone. WTO estimates suggesting Bangladesh could forfeit up to 14 percent of total exports upon full graduation, portray a cliff, not a gentle slope. The safety net beneath that cliff is already fraying. Inflation in recent years has been persistently high compared to other South Asian countries, rising from 8.49 percent in December to 8.58 percent in January. Moreover, non-performing loans have ballooned to 35.73 percent of total disbursed loans as of September 2025. A deferment changes none of these realities. These are symptoms of a growth model that has reached a state that must be transformed now.

The depth of our vulnerability is rooted in structural concentration. Garments account for over 80 percent of our exports, generating \$39.34 billion in FY2025. This dependence



VISUAL: BIPILOB CHAKROBORTY

was rational when preferential market access was guaranteed and global labour arbitrage rewarded volume over value. That calculus is now shifting on two fronts simultaneously. First, automation is no longer a distant threat; it is a present reality. Robotic sewing systems, AI-powered quality control, and automated cutting technologies are progressively narrowing the human-machine cost gap. A competitive advantage built on cheap labour is a depreciating asset. Second, garments are precisely where our tariff exposure is most acute. The EU's average tariff on imported clothing from countries that do not enjoy special trade preferences is about 12 percent; for general industrial goods, it is about three percent. Our export basket, dangerously concentrated on apparel, makes post-graduation exposure severe. No amount of operational efficiency within garments alone can fully absorb that structural cost.

industry under standard WTO rules. Beyond pharmaceuticals, ICT services, high-value food-processing, advanced engineering, and outsourced semiconductor assembly and testing represent sectors where our demographic dividend: a young, growing, increasingly connected workforce can be deployed with targeted skill investment. These industries reward technical excellence, not wage competition alone. But no diversification strategy succeeds without addressing two structural constraints that we have long acknowledged: education and bureaucracy.

Our universities continue to prepare graduates for a job market that is rapidly becoming obsolete. The shift required is not marginal but a fundamental reorientation towards STEM disciplines, data analytics, AI literacy, and technical-vocational training aligned with 21st-century industrial demand.

respond quickly to economic needs. These models have shown that when technical education is genuinely valued by society and closely aligned with industry, it can drive broad economic transformation.

However, for such a transformation, the bureaucratic environment must be conducive. A dedicated single-window mechanism for FDIs staffed by officials who understand investors' requirements of a biotech facility or a semiconductor design service is not a luxury but a competitive necessity. Bangladesh must pursue administrative digitalisation with an urgency to transform bureaucracy so that it facilitates rather than stalls trade and investment.

One chronically underutilised asset deserves particular attention: our global diaspora. More Bangladeshi professionals now hold senior technical and managerial roles in multinational corporations and

lead research institutions worldwide. These individuals represent not just remittance flows but intellectual capital, international networks, and industry access that money alone cannot buy. India, China, and Israel have each demonstrated that diaspora engagement, when formalised and sustained through structured frameworks: advisory councils, targeted tax incentives, mentorship programmes, functions as a genuine strategic multiplier. Bangladesh must pursue this with equivalent sophistication and far greater urgency.

International investors seek reliability above everything. Our current image, built on resilience under difficult conditions, is admirable but insufficient for the next chapter. Safety compliance, transparent governance, and consistent regulatory enforcement are prerequisites for the transition from low-cost supplier to precision manufacturing or design partner. This rebranding cannot be achieved through marketing alone; it must be earned through performance. Rigorous enforcement of regulations, demonstrating superior labour and governance standards, and delivering consistently on commitments to international partners are the building blocks of that transition. The Chinese model of streamlined Special Economic Zones, the Indian model of technical education and English-language services, and the Singapore model of uncompromising efficiency in a constrained geography each offer Bangladesh distinct and actionable lessons.

This country now requires a synchronised national strategy with clear milestones rather than aspirational lists. An AI-ready workforce through integrated technical education at every level. Stable, clean power infrastructure is essential for sensitive manufacturing or data centres. What we require are: formalised diaspora engagement with genuine incentives and recognition; comprehensive administrative and tax policy reform to increase investment and a strategic focus on three to five high-value industries where competitive advantage is achievable within a decade.

LDC graduation and the rise of automation may be potential challenges, but properly navigated, they become the catalysts for a long-overdue transformation. The era of the stitch is our proud history—the foundation upon which our prosperity has been built. The era of the chip, the code, and the precision instrument must define what comes next. We possess human capital, geographic positioning, and the demonstrated capacity for rapid structural adaptation. With the graduation clock—deferred or not—already ticking, a synchronised national strategy cannot wait.

Loan waiver alone won't protect potato farmers



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MOSTAFA SHABUJ

Prior to cultivating any crop, farmers naturally wonder whether they can earn a profit from it or not. In other words, the prospect of profit is what motivates them to cultivate a certain crop. This concern isn't limited to the farmer; it is shared by their family members as well.

When I was in eighth grade, I understood this well because we were primarily a farming family. After planting the crops, my siblings and I would think about the rice my father would harvest. We hoped that when the harvest came, and if the prices were good, many of our dreams would be fulfilled, such as getting new clothes for school or being able to ask for a new outfit for Eid. I would also hope to take private lessons with two teachers or plead for a new football. My mother and sisters had their own dreams about what we could do if we made a profit from selling the

crops. However, when it is time to harvest and the crops sell for less than their production cost, farming families experience losses so severe that they cannot even pay for irrigation, land leases, or loans, let alone fulfil the modest hopes and aspirations they had tied to a good harvest.

Recently, the BNP government has announced a waiver of up to Tk 10,000 in agricultural loans, including interest, for about 12 lakh farmers, which is undoubtedly commendable. However, this waiver will only benefit those who have taken agricultural loans from the government or private banks. Millions of other farmers who borrow from private institutions or local businessmen each year to cultivate crops are being excluded from this benefit.

While a loan waiver is a welcome gesture, how much does it truly help a farmer who is forced into a cycle of debt because they cannot secure a fair price for their crops? The current suffering of potato farmers is undeniable in this regard. According to the Bangladesh Cold Storage Association and the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), our annual demand for potatoes is roughly 80-90 lakh tonnes. Last year, production soared to 1.15 crore tonnes, leading to massive losses for farmers by the end of the season.

The northern region produces nearly 65 to 70 percent of the country's potatoes. Farmers say they had initially hoped that last year's losses would lead to reduced cultivation and better prices this year. However, DAE data show that cultivation exceeded the target by 2,477 hectares this year as well. After two consecutive years of losses, many farmers have lost their financial capacity to farm altogether.

According to the DAE, in Bogura, the cost of producing one kilogramme of potatoes has risen from Tk 14.50 last year to Tk 16.64 this year. Last year, farmers were forced to sell potatoes for around Tk 8-10 per kg at the cold storage gate. Over the past month, the situation has worsened, with farm-gate prices hovering around Tk 8-9 per kg, according to agriculture marketing officers in these

regions. Farmers are currently earning less than half of their production costs.

On the other hand, potato growers find themselves in a systematic trap again this year: the potatoes are ready for harvest but low prices discourage farmers from harvesting them. According to data from the field wing of the DAE, nearly 20 lakh tonnes of potatoes were harvested over just 10 days in February. Without home storage or access to cold storage, and under immense pressure to repay lenders for fertiliser, pesticides and irrigation, farmers were forced to sell at any price offered. Traders capitalised on this vulnerability, buying potatoes at low prices for future profit.

However, according to the Department of Agricultural Marketing, last year a total of 31.61 lakh tonnes of potatoes were stored in 384 cold storages and 539 non-refrigerated warehouses, utilising 96 percent of their total capacity. This indicates that Bangladesh currently possesses the infrastructure to store less than 25 percent of its total potato production. With this year's production target set at 1.13 crore tonnes — around 30 lakh tonnes above demand — we are looking at a massive surplus of potatoes. Meanwhile, our export track record is equally discouraging. In the last five years, potato exports have failed to cross 62,000 tonnes.

The current state of our potato farmers is thus quite demoralising. If left unaddressed, this frustration could spill over into other agricultural sectors, reducing our overall food production capacity. To protect potato growers, experts are suggesting that the government should purchase potatoes directly from farmers, similar to the procurement process for rice and paddy. These stocks can be sold through TCB trucks throughout the year. The government can also release these potatoes into the wholesale market when prices rise. To further assist farmers, the government should subsidise cold storage fees and help them hold on to their produce.

Beyond such reactive measures, the ultimate solution can be narrowed down to two ways through which the government can help farmers avoid debt: reducing production costs and ensuring that farmers receive fair prices for their products. We must also bridge the communication and coordination gap between the DAE and farmers so as to ensure accurate data on the amount of harvest to be targeted for each crop. If we cannot guide our farmers effectively, they may eventually abandon the fields to join the urban working class—a shift that poses another grave threat to our economy and food security.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Game with a bouncing ball
 - 6 Baghdad native
 - 11 Concur
 - 12 Second airing
 - 13 Empire
 - 14 Don Draper, e.g.
 - 15 Impertinent
 - 17 Ties the knot
 - 18 Pretentious
 - 20 Invasion
 - 22 _____ Lobos
 - 23 Advise
 - 26 Last letter
 - 28 Suspicious
 - 29 Dawdled
 - 31 Carnival city
 - 32 Some trucks
 - 33 Kitchen need
 - 34 Stylish
 - 36 Fare carrier
 - 38 Lucy's TV husband
 - 40 Nouveau _____
 - 43 "Hello" singer
 - 44 Inklings
 - 45 Plague
 - 46 Lemon rind strips
- DOWN**
- 1 Pickle buy
 - 2 Wisdom bringer
 - 3 Film caterers
 - 4 Grace in film
 - 5 Big rig
 - 6 Lyricist Gershwin
 - 7 Merlot, e.g.
 - 8 The military
 - 9 Campus part
 - 10 Travel stops
 - 16 Debate side
 - 18 Bunches
 - 19 Italia's capital
 - 21 "_____ Lang Syne"
 - 23 Abel's brother
 - 24 Huron neighbour
 - 25 French city
 - 27 Iridescent blackbird
 - 30 Superlative suffix
 - 33 Rust compound
 - 34 Shore crawler
 - 35 Stash away
 - 37 N. Mex. neighbour
 - 39 By now
 - 41 Topper
 - 42 Curvy letter

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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Deadline extended for 2025–26 government film grants

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has extended by one month the deadline for submitting proposals under its government grant scheme for full-length and short films for the 2025–26 fiscal year.

Under the revised schedule, filmmakers may submit complete package proposals until April 1, instead of the earlier March 1 deadline. The extension was confirmed by Joint Secretary Mahfuza Akhter.

The ministry had earlier invited package



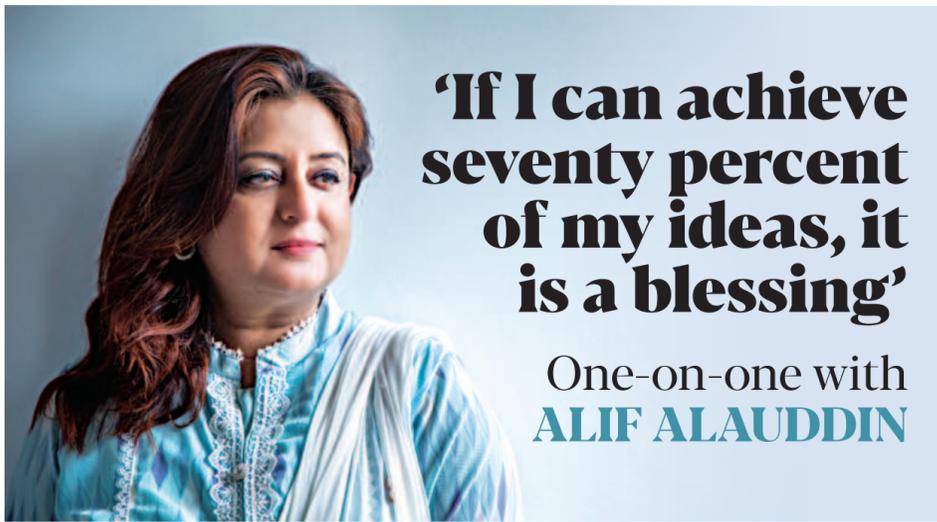
proposals from producers, directors, filmmakers, writers, screenwriters, film personalities and professional institutions for the selection of stories and screenplays. So far, 189 proposals for full-length films and 140 for short films have been submitted in three phases.

Officials expressed hope that this would be the final extension and expect the required number of proposals in both categories within the new timeframe.

As part of efforts to promote the growth of the film industry and encourage creativity, the government plans to provide grants to 32 films in the upcoming fiscal year, including up to 12 full-length features and 20 short films.

Applicants must submit one original copy along with 12 sets of the complete package proposal for both categories.

Industry insiders believe the extended deadline may intensify competition, as the additional time could allow filmmakers to submit more refined, detailed and well-structured proposals.



'If I can achieve seventy percent of my ideas, it is a blessing'

One-on-one with
ALIF ALAUDDIN

PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

MAISHA TASNIM SRESHTHA

Pop music in Bangladesh continues to evolve, with artistes constantly experimenting across genres. However, Alif Alauddin has always identified herself as a pop artiste and has chosen to stay within that space, even though the industry encourages constant change.

"Pop isn't just a genre I experiment with; it is who I am at my core," she said when asked about her place in this changing landscape. For many artistes, especially women, remaining within one genre risks being labelled predictable. The expectation is to constantly transform, to prove elasticity. Instead of adjusting herself to fit every new trend, she prefers to grow at her own pace.

This approach continues in her recent work, including the 2025 remix of *Bondhu Tin Din*, which may appear new, but actually began nearly a decade ago. She first reimagined the song in 2016 with her husband, Kazi Faisal Ahmed, when her father, the late maestro Alauddin Ali, was still alive.

"I vividly remember the discussions we had about giving the song a fresh perspective while still honouring its soul," she recalled. They were not trying to remake a hit. They wanted to keep the song alive while holding on to its original feeling.

The response to the remix reminded

her of something she has always felt. Good songs do not grow old; they simply find new listeners.

Another project connected to her father's music is also in progress. Fuad Al Muqtadir is currently working on a new interpretation of one of Alauddin Ali's patriotic anthems. The news has already drawn attention, and Alif responded with hope.

"With his unique sense of groove and musical poise, I'm hopeful he will present something that connects with the younger generation while honouring the original spirit," she said, without sharing further details ahead of the release.

Her fourth solo album, slated for release after Eid, is her first major project following a kidney transplant. Healing after a major surgery affects every part of life. It naturally influenced the tone of this album. The album includes two tribute tracks; one dedicated to her parents, another to Ayub Bachchu and Kawsar Ahmed Chowdhury. The remaining songs are originals, written by her and composed by Kazi Faisal Ahmed.

"The journey shaped the spirit of the project," she said. Her health struggles made her approach music more honestly. The album explores different styles and lets her create based on what she truly feels.

Revisiting *Tumi Chole Gecho* formed part of that reckoning.

Originally sung by her mother, Salma Ali, and written and composed by her father for Bangladesh Television, the song is inseparable from memory. Singing it now feels both personal and emotional. "I may never sing it the way my mother did," she admitted. The rearrangement by Ahmed preserves its emotional depth while situating it within a contemporary soundscape.

Beyond solo work, her band

Pentagon is preparing an EP expected around Eid-ul-Azha. Parallel to that, she is developing her own show and other music-oriented projects. In addition to her music, she also takes on other responsibilities. The singer is deeply involved with Bangladesh Lyricist, Composers & Performers Society (BLCPS), the country's music collective management organisation. Artist royalty collection and rights management sit at the centre of that effort. It may not be the most visible work, but it is important. It involves paperwork, processes, and long-term effort. But it helps fix a problem that many musicians have faced for years.

Looking ahead, "My first and foremost prayer is to remain in good health," she said. If that remains steady, she plans to focus deeply on music and continue creating. "Even if I can achieve seventy percent of my ideas, I would consider that a blessing," Alif noted.

Fazlur Rahman Babu undergoes heart surgery



Acclaimed actor and singer Fazlur Rahman Babu is recovering in hospital after undergoing open-heart surgery. The veteran artiste was admitted to a private hospital in Dhaka on February 16 following a heart attack. He was later transferred for further evaluation, where an angiogram revealed severe blockages.

Theatre director Kamruzzaman Sagar confirmed on Facebook that actor and singer Fazlur Rahman Babu was admitted to hospital after falling ill. He said that Babu is under close medical observation and is recovering, requesting prayers for his swift recovery.

Fazlur Rahman Babu has built a distinguished career across film, television, and music, earning widespread acclaim for his performances.

WHAT'S THE HAPS?

'The Human Voice'

Written by visionary poet-playwright Jean Cocteau, this haunting Bangla adaptation turns a single telephone conversation into a fragile battlefield of memory, desire, and emotional collapse. Director Prajna Tasnuva Rubayat crafts a stark, intimate world where Marsha Shawon's solo performance exposes love at its most vulnerable and unsparing.



DATE: SATURDAY | MARCH 7, 2026
TIME: 7 PM ONWARDS
VENUE: ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE DE DHAKA, DHANMONDI

NEWS

ACC chief, his two deputies quit en masse

FROM PAGE 1

Under the ACC Act, the chairman may resign at any time by submitting a written letter addressed to the president through the Cabinet Division, typically giving one month's notice. In this case, the commissioners were not retained for the notice period and vacated their posts after meeting the cabinet secretary.

ACC officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, claimed the BNP-led government, formed last month, had earlier indicated it did not wish to continue with the Momen-led commission and that members were asked to step down voluntarily.

A career bureaucrat who served as deputy commissioner of Dhaka, chairman of BRTA and CEO of Biman Bangladesh Airlines, Momen had been forced to retire in 2013 – a decision by the Awami League government for his earlier role as APS to former prime minister Khaleda Zia.

The interim government reinstated him to head the ACC in December 2024 for a five-year term. Now he has resigned less than a year and a half into office. The other two commissioners who stepped down are Miah Muhammad Ali Akbar Azizi and Brig Gen (ret'd) Hafiz Ahsan Farid. During Momen's tenure, the commission reported significant enforcement activity.

In 2025, it confiscated or froze 6,979.43 acres of land worth Tk 5,459.6 crore, compared to 281.17 acres worth Tk 63.2 crore by the previous commission.

It also froze and attached assets totaling Tk 29,309.8 crore – Tk 6,137 crore in immovable property and Tk 23,172.8 crore in movable assets – against Tk 11 crore seized in 2024 by its predecessor.

The commission submitted charge sheets against several influential figures of the previous Awami League government, long viewed as beyond scrutiny.

Among them was Mohammed Saiful Alam of S Alam Group. In October 2025,

the ACC submitted a charge sheet accusing him of loan

misappropriation through shell companies and laundering funds via Reliance Finance Limited.

At least 14 cases were filed against him. He and 66 others were prosecuted for allegedly embezzling Tk 10,479.62 crore from Islami Bank – one of the largest cases in the commission's history.

Additional cases allege embezzlement of Tk 15,671.60 crore from two Janata Bank branches and Tk 1,102 crore from First Security Islami Bank. Around 2,250 acres of land were confiscated or frozen, including land worth Tk 700 crore transferred to government ownership.

The ACC also prosecuted Nassa Group boss Nazrul Islam Mazumder, submitting a charge sheet on January 6 over allegations of embezzling Tk 616 crore from EXIM Bank, which he headed.

Similarly, former land minister Saifuzzaman Chowdhury was charge-sheeted this week over alleged embezzlement of Tk 25 crore from United Commercial Bank's Chattogram Port Branch. On February 26, the ACC secured a court order to attach his UK properties to prevent their transfer during the probe.

Investigations were also intensified against businesses linked to S Alam, including Nabil Group. Its managing director, Md Aminul Islam, was prosecuted in multiple cases over alleged embezzlement of Tk 2,358 crore from three Islami Bank branches.

In total, 1,360 bank accounts holding Tk 2,619 crore and shares worth over Tk 8,000 crore in 105 companies were frozen.

The commission was finalising investigations into Sayem Sobhan Anvir of Bashundhara Group and former industries adviser Salman F Rahman. In February 2026, it filed a case against Bashundhara founder Ahmed Akbar Sobhan, his son Safiat Sobhan and 24 others over alleged embezzlement of Tk 575 crore in funded loans; the charge sheet is being finalised.

An investigation was also launched into Muhammed Aziz Khan,

chairman of Summit Group, and his family.

The case against Salman was filed on January 8, alleging the embezzlement of Tk 136.68 crore through fictitious import-export transactions and reportedly embezzling Tk 2,858 crore from Janata Bank by taking export development fund facilities in the name of four different garment factories.

A separate ACC case accused him of misappropriating Tk 800 crore where funds collected through overvalued land-backed bonds were diverted to Beximco Engineering Limited and other entities.

On November 25, 2025, a Dhaka court ordered the attachment of all movable and immovable foreign assets belonging to the Sobhans, and the order was sent to authorities in the UK, UAE, Singapore, Switzerland, Slovakia, Cyprus, St Kitts and Nevis, and the British Virgin Islands.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman yesterday criticised the way the ACC chairman and two commissioners had to quit.

"While it is disappointing, it is hardly surprising. It reflects a deep-rooted politico-governance culture in the country, where ruling authorities seek to ensure that critically important state oversight institutions are led by individuals of their choosing," he said.

Within political and bureaucratic power structures, he added, it is "unthinkable" for entities like the ACC to operate outside partisan and bureaucratic control. Such practices are not new or isolated.

Iftekharuzzaman further noted that power-holders, hostage to short-term gains, disregard the long-term consequences of undermining institutions.

"No matter what was pledged in the election manifesto about ensuring independence and effectiveness of such institutions, it now remains to be seen who are going to be the successors, in what process, and what eventually happens to the ruling authority's rhetoric of corruption control," he said.

Thousands of Afghans displaced by Pakistan conflict

AFP, Kabul

More than 8,000 Afghans have been forced from their homes by fighting with Pakistani forces along the border in recent days, the Taliban government said yesterday.

The neighbours have clashed along the frontier since Thursday, when Afghanistan launched a border offensive in retaliation for Pakistani air strikes.

Islamabad has hit back along the border and with fresh air strikes, bombing multiple sites including the former US air base at Bagram, the capital Kabul and the southern city of Kandahar.

"Due to these brutal bombings and attacks, 8,400 of our families have been displaced, forced to leave their villages and homes," Afghan deputy government spokesman Hamdullah Fitrat said at a news conference.

An AFP journalist near the frontier has spoken to residents who have fled the clashes.

Afghanistan's defence ministry reported "extensive and heavy offensive and revenge attacks" across seven provinces over the past day.

The government acknowledged earlier air strikes on Bagram for the first time.

"Yes, the enemy targeted Bagram as well, but there were no casualties or damage," defence ministry spokesman Enayatullah Khwarazmi said.

Two residents told AFP on Sunday that they heard air strikes in Bagram, north of the capital.

Pakistani security sources said strikes at Bagram were based on "credible intelligence" to disrupt the "supply of critical equipment and stores" for Afghan soldiers and militants fighting Pakistan forces along the frontier.

They said Pakistan reserves the right to respond to the Taliban government's "aggression along its border by striking legitimate targets at the time and place of its own choice".

Pakistani fighter jets also flew nighttime sorties over Kabul, another security source told AFP.

BB governor offers

FROM PAGE 1

allowing a business to repeatedly withdraw, repay, and withdraw funds up to an approved maximum limit to manage daily operations.

The decisions come less than a week after the government appointed Md Mostaqur Rahman, a garment entrepreneur by profession, as the governor of the central bank, replacing Ahsan H Mansur.

"This is a classic conflict of interest, and what was feared is now happening," said Md Deen Islam, professor of economics at the University of Dhaka.

The decisions were taken in view of global and domestic economic headwinds, declining exports, delays in opening letters of credit and liquidity stress, which have disrupted production in many export-oriented industrial establishments, the BB said.

Earlier in 2020, Bangladesh Bank had announced soft loans for export-oriented companies to pay workers' wages to weather the global coronavirus pandemic.

If the garment sector has to rely on easy-term loans just to pay workers' wages, it is easy to imagine the state of the sector – and what it will face after LDC graduation, Islam said.

"If political considerations influence banking decisions, it will be difficult to maintain control," he said, adding that during the previous government's tenure, businesses were given extensive privileges, which largely contributed to the current condition of most banks.

The decision on who will receive a loan and when should depend on the relationship between the banker and the client, said Mustafa K Mujeri, executive director at the Institute for Inclusive Finance and Development.

"Why should the central bank issue directives on that?" he said, adding that excessive intervention by the central bank in all areas does not send a positive message.

The central bank's role is to formulate policy and ensure monitoring, said Mujeri, also a former chief economist of the BB.

"When it remains within its mandate, there will be no conflict of interest," he added.

Under the special term loan facility, banks have been instructed to provide loans outside existing working capital limits to solvent export-oriented firms.

The loan amount cannot exceed the average wage and allowance payments

of the preceding three months.

To qualify as export-oriented, firms must export at least 80 percent of their total production and must have paid workers' wages from November 2025 to January 2026.

Their "export-oriented" and "operational" status must be certified by relevant trade bodies, including the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association and the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

Banks will disburse wages directly into workers' bank accounts, including through mobile financial services.

The loans will carry market-based interest rates and must be repaid within a year, including a three-month grace period, either in monthly or quarterly instalments.

The central bank has barred lenders from charging any additional fees, commissions or penalties beyond regular interest.

The move came after the BGMEA sought a two-month wage-equivalent loan facility on easier terms to ensure timely payment of salaries, allowances and bonuses.

Meanwhile, the BB has allowed banks to renew continuous loan facilities before they turn default, aiming to support businesses amid ongoing economic challenges.

Banks must initiate the renewal process at least two months before loan expiry.

If renewal is delayed for reasons beyond control, lenders may still renew the facility before it is classified as default, provided the reasons are properly documented.

Excess amounts over approved limits must be adjusted before renewal.

Banks are prohibited from separating excess portions into new loans or transferring them to other accounts to avoid proper classification.

The policy will remain in force until December 31, 2027. A previous circular, issued in June 2025, which has now been revoked, was a much stricter attempt by the central bank to enforce credit discipline.

Specifically designed to stop banks from endlessly rolling over bad debt and artificially keeping struggling borrowers off the defaulters' list, the circular mandated that banks had to renew continuous loans strictly within their current tenure. There was no leniency or extended window for delays.



Venezuelan opposition politician Freddy Superlano speaks to the media after his release from house arrest under a limited amnesty law passed by the National Assembly, outside El Rodeo detention center in Guatire, Venezuela, on Monday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Pollution exposure linked to mental health problems: EU agency

AFP, Copenhagen

Environmental pollution is linked to several mental health disorders in Europe, the European Environment Agency (EEA) warned yesterday, arguing that enforcing legislation would result in Europeans being both less depressed and less anxious.

Air, noise and chemical pollution are to blame in particular, according

to the EU agency.

"Studies consistently indicate that air pollution, for example in the form of fine particulate matter (PM2.5) and nitrogen dioxide (NO2), is associated with depression and depressive symptoms," the agency noted in a report.

Exposure to lead, endocrine disruptors and other chemical substances, especially in

"developmental life phases, may increase the risk of mental health issues later in life," it added.

Furthermore, noise pollution, from air and road traffic, may be linked to an increased risk of depression and anxiety, particularly for vulnerable people.

"Progress towards zero pollution targets can deliver co-benefits for mental health and well-being," the EEA said.

Police likely to revert to old uniform

FROM PAGE 16

the condition of anonymity.

The Bangladesh Police Service Association in a statement on February 24 said the new uniform selected by the interim government ignored police members' complexion, the country's climate and their opinions.

The attire closely resembles uniforms of other agencies, making it difficult to identify police personnel in the field. Besides, most members were not in favour of the hurried change.

Apart from visibility issues, questions have been raised over the quality of the fabric supplied for the new uniform.

Laboratory tests found the shirt fabric did not meet contractual specifications: the required yarn density was 205 GSM (±5), but tests reportedly found it to be 193 GSM, according to PHQ officials.

The moisture-wicking capacity, essential for officers working long hours outdoors, was also below standard.

While the contract required a wicking capacity of 6-10 centimetres, tests showed it to be around 4.5 cm.

Wicking measures how effectively sweat is drawn away from the body, and textile experts say fabric below 6 cm is unsuitable for active outdoor duty, as it hampers temperature regulation and increases fatigue.

Such shortcomings make the uniform particularly uncomfortable during extended duty in hot and humid conditions.

The fabric was supplied by Noman Group.

Nurul Islam, chairman of Noman Group, could not be reached for comment.

However, he had earlier told reporters that the material had been tested by independent international agencies before delivery and met all tender specifications.

A Tk 141-crore tender was called for the new uniform in 2025. Noman Group was awarded the contract as the lowest bidder and has already supplied some of the fabric. While the

new uniforms have been distributed in major cities, they have yet to reach all districts.

PHQ declined to provide details on how many uniforms have been produced or the exact expenditure on the fabric.

The government would not incur any financial loss if the uniform is changed again, said Mosleh Uddin Ahmed, additional inspector general (Logistics and Asset Acquisition).

Police members are provided with new uniforms every year under a specific government allocation. The uniforms distributed last year were part of that annual provision.

"If a decision is taken to change the uniform again, we will simply stop producing the current design and move to the new one."

Those who have already received uniforms will not get another set immediately; they will receive the new design during the next annual distribution cycle.

"There is no issue of financial loss here."

'Tricked into war'

FROM PAGE 16
FROM DHAKA TO MOSCOW

According to the report, Bangladeshi victims typically leave Dhaka for Saudi Arabia on religious visas or travel to Dubai on tourist visas. From there, brokers help them secure Russian visas before flying them to cities such as Saint Petersburg or Moscow.

John Quinley, director of Fortify Rights, said testimonies from both brokers and recruits indicate cooperation with Russian authorities in facilitating the process.

Once in Russia, most men are allegedly forced to sign contracts written in Russian, a language they cannot read, before being transported to military facilities and later fed to the frontlines.

Between May 2025 and February 2026, Fortify Rights and Truth Hounds conducted 24 interviews in Bangladesh and Ukraine, including with survivors who returned home, relatives of men killed in combat, anti-trafficking police, and service providers to get data.

PROMISED JOBS, DELIVERED TO WAR

Researchers say brokers target men from low-income backgrounds, offering promises of work as cleaners, factory workers, or electricians.

Arman Mondol, 23, from Rajbari, Dhaka, told the researcher he was promised around US\$1,000 per month and assured he would travel to a European country, not Russia.

The report quoted him as saying that he first travelled to Saudi Arabia, obtained a Russian visa there, and then flew to Saint Petersburg.

Within days, he found himself undergoing military training.

"I attended basic training for 10 days. I was trained to use rocket launchers and shoot a machine gun. It was an AK 47... I went to Ukraine to fight for 15 days. It was intense fighting," he said.

Another survivor, Maksudur Rahman, 31, said he travelled from Dhaka to Dubai and then to Moscow after losing his job in Malaysia. At Moscow airport, brokers allegedly

demand additional money.

"Groups of Bangladeshis were taken one by one into airport toilets, where cash was collected... I paid about US\$1,000 under pressure," he said.

Believing he was signing a cleaning-services contract, he signed a document in the Russian language, later to discover it was a military contract.

COERCION AND ABUSE

The report says many men corroborated accounts of being routed through third countries, handed contracts they could not read, and transferred to military training facilities shortly after arriving in Russia.

Several survivors described being sent into combat with little or no training.

Others reported beatings by commanders, denial of pay, confiscation of passports, and threats when attempting to leave.

One Bangladeshi survivor described the battlefield as a "meat grinder" where escape was nearly impossible due to checkpoints and constant drone strikes.

Photographs included in the report show a Russian military-issued identification tag belonging to Mohammad Masud, who later fled and returned to Bangladesh after enduring beatings and other abuses in the Russian army.

FAMILIES PAYING THE PRICE

Back home, families often sell land or take high-interest loans to pay recruitment fees -- often thousands of US dollars -- to brokers.

The report notes that families were left in crushing debt after paying such fees, only to later receive news of a son or husband killed on the frontlines.

Habibullah, a Bangladeshi man who died on the frontlines, last spoke to his family on May 1, 2025. During that call, he pleaded, "Please save me if you can. I haven't eaten for three-four days," according to the report.

Bangladesh's Anti-Human Trafficking Unit has acknowledged

that economic desperation and lack of awareness are key drivers behind the rise of trafficking syndicates that fed civilians to sustain Russia's war in Ukraine.

Mohammad Badrul Alam Molla, special superintendent of police at the Criminal Investigation Department, was quoted in the report as saying in January 2026 that trafficking networks exploit men from rural or disadvantaged backgrounds by offering unrealistic promises of high salaries and secure jobs abroad.

CALL FOR ACTION

Amy Smith, executive director of Fortify Rights, said recruitment through deception, cross-border transport, and exploitation on the battlefield meets the definition of human trafficking under international law.

"If you recruit someone through deception, you transport them across borders, and you force them into exploitation even on the battlefield. That is human trafficking," she said.

The report urges the Bangladeshi government to dismantle local broker networks, monitor migration routes through Middle Eastern transit hubs, and press Russia to withdraw trafficked Bangladeshi nationals from the frontlines.

It also calls for systematic documentation of recruitment methods and intermediary networks, as well as accountability measures at national and international levels.

As the war grinds on, the report warns that Bangladeshi men continue to risk becoming "expendable manpower" in a conflict thousands of miles from their homes.

During the briefing yesterday, Maria Tomak, researcher and advocacy expert at Truth Hounds, characterised the findings as evidence of "predatory recruitment done by Russia [that] is spread all around the globe."

She noted the far-reaching impact of the conflict, stating that not only are Ukrainian people affected by the war, but it appears that Bangladeshi people are as well.

EU asylum applications down but Iran concerns mount

AFP, Brussels

Asylum applications to the EU dropped by almost 20 percent in 2025, the bloc's asylum agency said yesterday -- warning however that a crisis in Iran could result in refugee movements of "unprecedented magnitude".

Turmoil in the Islamic republic risked upending a downward trend in requests for protection, the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) said, in a report written before the outbreak of the US-Israel war with Iran.

"With a population of approximately 90 million, even partial destabilisation could generate refugee movements of an unprecedented magnitude," the EUAA said.

The prospect, which is likely to worry EU nations that have long worked to curb inbound migration, was discussed at an extraordinary meeting of the bloc's foreign ministers Sunday, according to diplomatic sources.

And the issue will be on the agenda as the EU's 27 interior ministers meet

in Brussels on Thursday.

The European Commission said Monday it was "enhancing preparedness through closer monitoring" of the situation and reinforcing cooperation with relevant United Nations agencies and partner countries.

Asked for a fresh assessment as the Iran war spread across the region, the EUAA said it was "not in a position to comment on any impact the ongoing hostilities in the Middle East may have".

"The situation remains very fluid and it would be irresponsible to make any hypothetical or predictive statement," it said.

Its report said displacement of just 10 percent of Iran's population would rival the largest refugee flows of recent decades, albeit cautioning that the scenario remained "highly speculative".

Citing mass protests against Iran's clerical authorities and last year's US-Israeli strikes on its nuclear facilities, the agency described the country as a "potential flashpoint" in a highly volatile global environment.

"The decline in applications

should therefore be interpreted with caution," it wrote.

Iran is among the world's top hosting countries for refugees, it noted.

The country is home to about 2.5 million refugees, mainly Afghan nationals, according to the UN refugee agency.

So far, Iranian displacement has remained limited, the EUAA said.

The country's nationals lodged only 8,000 asylum requests in the European Union plus Switzerland and Norway (EU+) in 2025, making them the 31st largest group of applicants, said the EUAA.

EU+ nations received around 822,000 asylum applications in 2025, down 19 percent on the previous year. That followed an 11-percent decrease in 2024.

The 2025 drop was largely driven by fewer applications by Syrians, Bangladeshis and Turks, the agency said.

Afghans accounted for the most requests, filing 117,000 applications -- a 33-percent increase on the previous year -- followed by Venezuelans, with 91,000.

7yr-old victim dies

FROM PAGE 16

Her body was sent to the morgue for autopsies.

On Sunday afternoon, the child was rescued with her throat slit on a hill inside the park by a group of labourers and rushed to the upazila health complex. The same day, her mother, Rokeya Begum, filed a case with Sitakunda Police Station against unidentified accused.

After being transferred to CMCH, she underwent a surgery on Sunday evening when doctors performed an emergency tracheostomy to help her breathe and inserted a tube to stabilise her airway. She then had a second surgery on Monday morning.

Her paternal uncle, Ramij Uddin, said she appeared to be stable when he left the hospital around 10:00pm that night. "She was doing well at that time... Her condition suddenly deteriorated around 1:30am, and she died in the ICU."

At the briefing, SP Nazir said Babu Sheikh had a prior feud with the victim's father, Monir Hossain, which led to the incident.

"Babu Sheikh lured the girl with chocolate and took her to Sitakunda Eco Park from Kumira by bus. Later,

he took her to the top of a hill and attempted to rape her there. When the victim started screaming and threatened to inform her family, he slit her throat with a sharp knife and left her there. ... The girl managed to survive and walked while bleeding.

"After receiving the complaint, police began collecting CCTV footage from Kumira to Sitakunda and traced Babu. He was later arrested in Kumira. Police took him to the crime scene, where officers recovered the victim's blood-stained trousers."

The SP added, "Police seized the clothing as evidence. During primary interrogation, Babu admitted that he attempted to rape the girl but failed. We will cross-examine the victim's samples with his DNA samples."

"During primary interrogation, the accused told police that he tried to rape the girl but failed. After receiving the forensic report, we will make an official statement."

Contacted by The Daily Star, CMCH Director Brigadier General Taslim Uddin said, "Doctors found scratch marks near her genitals during the primary examination. Following due procedure, we will cross-match the accused's DNA with the victim's to confirm whether she was raped."

Anxiety grips migrants

FROM PAGE 16

according to the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh and airport officials.

Of the cancelled flights, 147 were from HSLA in Dhaka and 35 from Shah Amanat International Airport in Chattogram.

Yesterday alone, 38 flights were cancelled, they said.

Amid the worsening security situation in the Gulf, Biman Bangladesh Airlines has suspended, until further notice, all flights to six destinations -- Dammam, Doha, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, and Kuwait, said Bushra Islam, the national carrier's general manager (public relations).

She requested passengers travelling to those destinations to contact the nearest Biman sales centre or their travel agency.

Meanwhile, the situation has hit labour-dependent Middle Eastern destinations particularly hard, leaving thousands of expatriate workers uncertain about when they can return to their jobs.

Airport officials said many passengers have been coming to the airport daily, even when services remain suspended, hoping for updated information or last-minute changes.

Contacted by The Daily Star earlier, Shariful Hasan, associate director of BRAC's Migration Programme and Youth Platform, said, "Bangladesh sends more than 10 lakh workers abroad every year, with 70 to 80 percent going to the Middle East alone -- including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and even Jordan and Lebanon."

"If overseas employment in the Middle East becomes limited or comes to a halt, and our workers go there and fail to find work, it will cause long-term damage for us," he said, adding that the fallout would be multidimensional.

"So right now, I think we need to keep a close watch so that our workers are not harmed and the country does not suffer."

During a visit to the airport yesterday, these correspondents saw second floor busier than usual, with travellers in both Terminal 1 and Terminal 2. Several passengers were seen sitting with packed luggage, looking tense and unsure whether they would be able to fly.

Those whose flights were still scheduled, particularly to the Middle East, also appeared anxious, fearing

what they might face upon landing.

Relatives repeatedly called some passengers, urging them not to panic, while others said they had been waiting for hours at the airport for alternative flights or updated information after learning their previously-scheduled flights were cancelled.

Anis Mia, 51, from Tangail's Delduar, said his visa had only four days of validity left.

Scheduled to fly on SriLankan Airlines at 1:00pm yesterday, he arrived at the airport in the morning and learned that the flight had been cancelled.

Anis reached Dhaka from Tangail at 9:00pm the previous night and later learned that flights to Dammam -- his destination -- were not operating.

"I was told arrangements would be made within the remaining four days, but as of last night, I am still waiting at the airport with my family. I don't know if another flight will be arranged for me."

Saiful Islam, 30, a Dubai expatriate from Kishoreganj Sadar, said he checked in by 10:45am yesterday for a US Bangla flight scheduled to depart at 4:45pm. "I learned around midday that the flight had been cancelled, and airline staff advised me to contact the agency from which I bought the ticket."

Saiful said he would wait until 5:00pm in case any new arrangement was made.

He described feeling deeply anxious after seeing content on Facebook and YouTube about bombings and insecurity in the region, adding that his family repeatedly called him, worried about whether he should travel.

Saiful said he felt torn -- eager to leave yet fearful about what might happen after arriving, including whether he would find safety and work, and whether fresh trouble could emerge.

Sanjay Das travelled from Gopalganj's Muksudpur to Dhaka early yesterday and arrived at the airport around 11:00am to fly to Dammam after spending six months on leave.

He too was told his flight had been cancelled and that he should contact his agency.

Sanjay said the agency later informed him that he could travel on a Riyadh-bound flight at 5:00am today (March 4). "I am now staying in Farmgate. But I am still worried about whether I will be able to fly as scheduled, whether

BFIU seeks

FROM PAGE 16

public. Before resigning, I had already submitted my income and asset details to the Cabinet Division."

Asif was one of three student representatives who served as advisers in the interim government formed after the July uprising.

He oversaw the ministries of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, and Youth and Sports.

Asif joined the NCP after stepping down from his advisory post on December 10 last year.

Triceratops skeleton

FROM PAGE 16

welcomed visitors at the 1995 grand opening of the Wyoming Dinosaur Center in Thermopolis, where it remained on loan until 2023.

Following a recent private sale, the skeleton is currently in Singapore, where it is being offered for private viewings until the end of March, according to Joopier.

Palaeontologist Andre LuJan, who assisted Joopier in preparing the fossil for auction, noted Trey's unique appeal: "Trey has this cultural aspect that a lot of fossils that go to auction these days just simply don't have. This one is connected to people and undoubtedly has inspired young children who've seen it to pursue a career in palaeontology."

the flight will operate, and what the situation will be like after I land there."

Meanwhile, at the lower level of HSLA, arrivals from Middle Eastern countries drew emotional scenes as relatives greeted returning workers with flowers and tight embraces.

Many families said they had been worried after watching reports and videos about tensions and bombardment linked to Iran and the region on social media and television.

Some returnees from Saudi Arabia told relatives that areas outside US installations were calm and that there was no immediate reason for panic.

Samad Ali, 42, from Tangail's Kalibhati, who landed in Bangladesh yesterday morning from Saudi Arabia, said he boarded a Saudia flight at 2:45am from Jeddah and arrived in Dhaka around 11:40am.

He said he had been working in Makkah and returned to Dhaka after two years.

Samad said the situation in Makkah was calm, but after reaching Jeddah he heard there were disturbances near US military bases. "My family and I are now worried about what will happen after my two-month leave ends -- will my job still be there? Will there be new complications due to the evolving situation?"

He added that there were fears of missile strikes or similar incidents during the flight as well.

Blasts in Kabul

FROM PAGE 16

all sides to "exercise maximum restraint, protect civilian lives".

Islamabad said its February air strikes that sparked the escalation were targeting militants.

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

The border fighting has hit multiple Afghan provinces.

The latest clashes were taking place in southern Kandahar, the defence ministry said, as well as neighbouring Zabul, according to the provincial information department.

The violence of recent days is the worst since October fighting killed more than 70 people on both sides, with land borders between the neighbours largely shut since.

LAW OPINION

In defence of a criminal defence lawyer

RAFID AZAD SAUMIK

In recent times, we have seen an alarming phenomenon in our country: criminal defence lawyers in sensational cases are often painted as villains by many. Fearing the repercussions, some lawyers also refuse to accept certain cases, resulting in accused individuals receiving below-standard representation, even in death penalty cases. This populist sentiment unknowingly hinders our struggle to realise a society with rule of law as envisioned in the preamble to our Constitution.

If we look for reasons underlying this tendency to vilify the criminal defence lawyers, we get mainly two: first, the people are frustrated with a high rate of crimes and how our criminal justice system is failing the victims; and second, they believe the reason why criminals do not get punished lies with the "malicious" support provided by the criminal defence lawyers. Needless to say, the concerns about the high crime rate and the frustration with our criminal justice system being practically broken are genuine and deserve both our due attention and acknowledgement. Unfortunately, painting the defence lawyers as the bad guys does not help us; rather, it derails us from the real issue and breeds further injustice.

First, this anger against the defence lawyers for helping criminals go free is misguided. Criminal defence lawyers do not have supernatural powers to make black into white or otherwise. In reality, they only have to analyse evidence adduced by the police and prosecution, question the prosecution's evidence and witnesses, and present their own evidence and witnesses (if any). They can win cases if the prosecution frames an innocent person, or if the prosecution fails to build a strong case. Hence, the liability for failing to build strong cases, make strong arguments, or obtain sufficient evidence lies solely with the state and its various agencies, e.g., law enforcement agencies, prosecution lawyers, forensic department, etc.

To add to this, we need to remember that the state has all the resources, manpower, and almost everything, including forensic labs, the latest technologies, and the best lawyers, at its disposal to build a strong case against the accused. In contrast, all the accused have is just one person in their corner. Moreover, after an accused

is arrested, their movement and other freedoms remains curtailed. Oftentimes, even the family members and friends of the accused stop helping them, a phenomenon known as social death, which is common in the lives of many accused with lower socioeconomic circumstances. It is essentially state as the leviathan versus one individual. Regardless, if the state still fails to do its job properly, only the state can be blamed. Hence, our focus should be on building a strong, cultivating a criminal justice system that bends to neither power nor money, applies laws judiciously, has police do their jobs properly, and skilled prosecution lawyers

Even where the accused individuals are actually guilty, they still require quality representation to protect themselves from disproportionate or unfair sentences and to safeguard their procedural and substantive rights. For instance, they have a right not to be tortured in custody, the right to be treated humanely before and after trial, the right to privacy, the right to communication with family members and lawyers.

giving their best efforts. Because if the prosecution's case has loopholes, and even if good defence lawyers refrains from taking up cases, a reasonably prudent (and independent) judge would still not convict the accused.

The other concern with this irrational blaming of the defence lawyers lies at the heart of the concept of "justice". When we hear the word, we may immediately only think of the alleged victim. However, in reality, to ensure true justice, it must be allocative. Just how an aggrieved person has the right to *enjoy the protection of law*, the accused also has the right to be treated *only in accordance with law* (Article 31 of the Constitution). In the absence of either, the justice system can be deemed neither fair nor just.

The reason the accused has *the right to be defended by a legal practitioner of his own choice* (Article 33 of the Constitution, section 340 of the CrPC) is owing to an established principle of law, "*the burden of proof is on the one who accuses*". We often forget that an accused is not necessarily a guilty person. In our country, it is common for many innocent individuals to be framed as guilty, either out of malice (corruption, vindictiveness) or due to incompetence on part of law enforcement. The fact that mass and social media also make similar mistakes, or willfully contribute to them, is also well known to us. Hence, even in sensational cases where it may seem that someone is in fact guilty, we need to step back, act sensibly, and let justice take its course. As a result of the relentless vilification of defence lawyers, many genuinely innocent individuals would otherwise be deprived of proper representation.

Moreover, even where the accused individuals are actually guilty, they still require quality representation to protect themselves from disproportionate or unfair sentences and to safeguard their procedural and substantive rights. For instance, they have a right not to be tortured in custody, the right to be treated humanely before and after trial, the right to privacy, the right to communication with family members and lawyers, etc. However, when the populist culture of bashing defence lawyers persists, we risk creating a society where the rights of detainees or convicts, who are already vulnerable, in that most of their rights are restricted at this stage, are threatened.

Fortunately, our apex court has shown genuine concern regarding this right in many cases. In *Md. Saifuzzaman v State* (2003), the HCD noted, "*the arrested person has the constitutional right to be defended by a legal practitioner. Section 340 of the Code also provides that any person accused of any offence before any criminal court may, as of right, be defended by a pleader [..] The word "defended" clearly includes the exercise of the right so long as the effect of the arrest continues.*" In *Babu Khan v State* (2003), the HCD remitted the case for a fresh trial after finding that the accused did not receive proper

representation at the trial stage.

In sum, we need to remember that while it is true that we have a high crime rate and powerful criminals are indeed walking free with impunity, it is also true that innocent people are getting framed and consequently suffering as well. Hence, the solution lies not in weakening the criminal defence system, but in strengthening the prosecution. If we wish to truly solve this problem, we need to channel our anger and frustration in the right place in realising a society where justice is ensured for all.

The writer is Law Desk Assistant at the law page of the Daily Star.



LEGAL PHILOSOPHY

Why the State doesn't define good and evil

SHAHJAD HASIN SADAB

By the time you finish reading this introduction, a law will have been passed somewhere in the world that is technically legal but fundamentally unjust. For instance, if a bill mandating the execution of anyone who spits in a public space were to pass through the Bangladeshi Parliament, it would legally constitute a law, but it would be universally condemned as morally vicious. This leads us to understand interactions between law and morality.

The first question to arise is that: "What is morality?" In short, morality is a set of objective and universal rules, that I believe, originate from the "Divine Good", and are pre-installed in human beings, that can sometimes be rationally discovered. Killing an innocent person, raping someone, or stealing someone's possessions is objectively and morally wrong. Now the question is: what is *objective* morality? I will not use sophisticated academic jargons. Rather, to be quite plain and simple: objective morality implies moral truths which are true regardless of the presence of moral agents (i.e. human beings). In other words, moral truths are true just as *two plus two equals four* is true, regardless of whether mathematicians exist or not. A simpler illustration: "I like strawberry ice cream" may be a subjectively true statement. However, "ice cream melts in heat" is objectively true. Likewise, killing an innocent person is objectively morally wrong, even if the entire world subjectively agrees that it is not.

The most logical follow-up is the question: "How can a moral claim not be true if everyone agrees with it?" The answer is that a claim's truth being contingent on agreement



makes morality subjective. If the bar is consensus among people, then morality is barely an opinion: it is just a modified "we like strawberry ice cream". This question can be answered from two different perspectives.

First, consensus does not equate moral truth, just as "two plus two equals four" will never be false even if the entire world says it is. Second, if consensus were held necessary for an action to be morally right or wrong, then

Nazi Germany could never be condemned for its actions, as the German society of the time reached a consensus that the holocaust was not wrong. Similarly, Israel could not be vilified for the genocide committed in Palestine as the Israeli nation and its allies at large stand in agreement and support thereof.

Another problem with subjective morality is that it leaves no real meaning for the words "good" or "bad". Speaking more academically, there would no longer remain an ontological basis for morality. One might argue that a moral subjectivist can explain why murder is wrong, but I say he will be found profoundly

Consensus does not equate moral truth, just as "two plus two equals four" will never be false even if the entire world says it is.

lost when asked: What is wrong? Is "wrong" made of particles? or can "wrong" be put in a test tube? This is where the remarkable observation of Professor Ian Markham, "Embedded in the word 'ought' is the sense of a moral fact transcending our life and world... The underlying character of moral language implies something universal and external." To elaborate simply, the term "ought" implies that morality is not just a personal feeling, but a universal standard that exists outside of human invention.

Now that the definition of morality and objectivity is established, it is recommended for states to enact laws in line with it. A law (man-made, opinion based) cannot be the standard so to speak. To call a law "unjust", there must be a fixed, objective rule outside the legal system to measure it against. If the

state-sanctioned or man-made rules are the only standard, then every line it draws is straight by definition, and tyranny becomes a legal impossibility.

Second, we must distinguish between legal process and moral purpose. John Finnis, for instance, argues that a bill may follow every parliamentary procedure to the letter, but if it violates the "Divine Good" pre-installed in our nature, it remains an act of force rather than a true law. The validity of a statute is thus seen not as an arbitrary rule, but as a codification of an objective moral truth. Legality is merely a subjective human process; morality on the other hand is an objective reality.

Third, the State does not *create* rights; it only has the duty to recognize them. If rights were merely "gifts" from the government, the government could revoke them at any time. Finally, we must reject the "tyranny of the majority". Just as consensus cannot make "two plus two equals five", a ballot box cannot transform a vice into a virtue. The State's legitimacy does not come from the number of votes it can count, but from its alignment with the objective truth that transcends our world. Without objective morality, injustice could be chosen as the main purpose behind enacting a law.

To summarize, true justice requires that the "Law" of the State bows to the "Right" of the Divine. Because morality is an objective, transcendental reality, immutable as mathematics, and it cannot be manufactured by consensus or legislation. A state only achieves legitimacy when its laws reflect these pre-installed truths, ensuring that power serves eternal justice.

The writer studies law at the Nottingham Trent University.

What to WATCH

T Sports
 Women's Asian Cup
 Japan vs Chinese Taipei
 Live from 11:00 am
 Vietnam vs India
 Live from 5:00 pm
 T20 World Cup

Semifinal
 England vs South Africa
 Live from 7:30 pm
Star Sports Select HD1, HD2
 Premier League
 Live from 1:30 am (Thursday):

Brighton vs Arsenal
 Man City vs Nottingham Forest
 Aston Villa vs Chelsea
 Live from 2:15 am (Thursday):
 Newcastle vs Man Utd

Eternal cycle of giving and reminding

KHALID HOSSAIN

The scoreline yesterday in Sydney read: China 2 – Bangladesh nil. To the uninitiated, it was a routine victory for the reigning Asian champions. To those who have followed the Bangladesh women's footballers through the smog of Dhaka and the broken promises of the Bangladesh Football Federation, it felt like a miracle of defiance.

Bangladesh's debut at the Women's Asian Cup was a masterclass in heart over infrastructure. The manner of it – the stubborn resistance for 40-odd minutes, the tactical recalibration at half-time, relentless press against a side ranked 17th in the world while Bangladesh sit at 112 – told a more layered story at the picturesque Western Sydney Stadium.

As the game matured, so did they. But when the final whistle blew, a familiar, bitter notion resurfaced: the tragedy of Bangladesh women's football is that it evolves despite the system, not because of it. From the 2022 SAFF winners being denied Olympic qualifiers due to financial shortcomings to the 2026 squad facing China on the back of scaled-down preparation, the cycle feels eternal.

After the 2024 SAFF title and the historic Asian Cup qualification in 2025, the air was thick with the scent of reform. Under the Dr Mohammad Yunus-led interim government and new BFF boss Tabitha Awal, "Mission Australia" was launched with fanfare. BFF women's wing chairman Mahfuza Akter Kiron promised a roadmap of friendlies with much stronger oppositions and a Japan camp.



Instead, the roadmap led to a dead end. The elite preparation consisted of matches against Thailand (ranked 53), Azerbaijan (74) and Malaysia (91) – respectable, but hardly the crucible required to face China or North Korea, ranked ninth. While India toured Turkey for six matches and Uzbekistan prepared in Vietnam, Bangladesh's "overseas camp" amounted to a single practice match against local club Western Sydney FC.

After the qualifiers, captain Afeida Khandaker and her teammates spoke publicly about nutrition, functioning gyms, proper

training grounds and a stable domestic league. It was a damning indictment of the federation that national heroes like Afeida – who had earlier toured Qatar with the then Chief Adviser Dr Yunus – still had to request basic support.

As the players kept training in one of the most polluted cities on earth, on pitches that barely spare their knees, even their team bus could at least have received an air-conditioning upgrade.

Eventually, the golden generation went to the biggest tournament of their lives without

a designated physio. They had spent months in the low-intensity Bhutanese league because their own domestic competition remained in an 18-month limbo, eventually squeezed into a six-week sprint on the unforgiving artificial turf of Kamalapur.

"The conditions that they actually train and live in are not ideal... not conducive to producing professional footballers," Bangladesh coach Peter Butler remarked post-match.

Returning to yesterday's "statement performance", it suggested that the talent in Bangladesh is of top-50 calibre. Bangladesh had stunned near-50-ranked Myanmar in the qualifiers. Rankings, as that night proved, can mislead.

Against China, they did not disgrace themselves. Butler said so. Most neutral observers would agree. But this cannot become an endless cycle where the women keep producing the goods and yet have to keep reminding the authorities of the bare necessities. "We've had our peaks and troughs, we've hit loads of speed bumps in the road," Butler reflected.

One might wonder – what could have been had Bangladesh received preparation suited to a mega event like this?

"We don't have the luxury and the finance and we don't have the opportunity to prepare like other teams do... Hopefully we can give these girls a better life."

Will future structures match their stride? Or will the women continue to give, and remind, and give again?

99 DAYS TO GO



MESSI'S legendary campaign

At Qatar 2022, Lionel Messi led Argentina to their FIFA World Cup title. He played 690 minutes from the group-stage to the final and scored 7 goals, averaging one goal every 99 minutes – capping off a legendary campaign with the ultimate trophy in his hands.

GOALS:
Group stage: Saudi Arabia (1) and Mexico (1)
Knockouts: Australia (1), Netherlands (1) and Croatia (1)
Final vs France: 2 goals

Perfect Proteas meet resilient Black Caps

AGENCIES

South Africa will look to continue their charge toward a maiden white-ball global crown when they face New Zealand in the first semifinal of the 2026 T20 World Cup at Kolkata's iconic Eden Gardens today.

With defending champions India taking on England in Mumbai a day later, the tantalising prospect of a rematch of the 2024 final looms large.

Led by Aiden Markram, South Africa have been the standout side of the tournament, winning all seven of their matches – the only side to do so.

Their campaign has blended power, poise and maturity – a marked shift from past editions where the Proteas faltered at decisive moments. Last year's World Test Championship triumph appears to have eased long-standing psychological scars, and eight members of that red-ball-winning squad are part of this T20 unit.

South Africa's strength lies in their balance. Markram has provided smooth starts with 268 runs so far, while the likes of Quinton de Kock and David Miller provide explosive firepower.

Their bowling has been equally impressive. Lungi Ngidi's clever change-ups have yielded 12 wickets, and left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj offers control in



the middle overs. South Africa comfortably beat New Zealand in the group-stage, chasing 176 with 17 balls to spare after Markram's unbeaten 86. Yet knockout cricket brings unique pressures. Memories remain fresh of the dramatic 2024 final loss to India, when South Africa collapsed needing 26 from four overs.

To stack up odds further, South Africa

have never won against the Black Caps in the knockout stages in ICC tournaments – having lost the quarterfinal and semifinal in the 2011 and 2015 ODI World Cup, and a defeat in the semis of the 2025 Champions Trophy. But there's a catch. Despite their struggles in 50-over tournaments, the Proteas have swept the Black Caps at T20 World Cups, winning all five meetings.

Mitchell Santner's side, however, squeezed into the semifinals on net run-rate after a Super Eight loss to England but their ability to stay composed in tight qualification scenarios reflects their tournament savvy. Runners-up in 2021, the Black Caps are accustomed to navigating high-pressure knockout fixtures.

At the top, explosive openers Tim Seifert and Finn Allen can tilt the powerplay in New Zealand's favour, while the explosive options in the middle-order – Glenn Phillips and Santner himself provides depth.

Phillips remains their X-factor – a 360-degree hitter capable of transforming a game in a matter of overs – and his athleticism in the field adds another edge.

Their bowling unit offers variety as well. Santner's stump-to-stump left-arm spin is central to their plans, especially against South Africa's right-hand-heavy middle order. The pace of Matt Henry and Lockie Ferguson provide attacking options.

In a knockout contest at Eden Gardens, reputation counts for little; execution under pressure will determine who advances to Sunday's final in Ahmedabad.

Will Iran play 2026 World Cup in the US?

AFP, Paris

The recent US and Israeli strikes on Iran have cast doubt over whether Iran will take part in the 2026 FIFA World Cup in the United States, where they are scheduled to play group matches later this year.

Iranian Football Federation president Mehdi Taj said shortly after the strikes began that "with this attack and this cruelty, we cannot look forward to the World Cup with hope." "Team Melli" had secured qualification in March last year for a seventh World Cup appearance and a fourth in a row. Iran were drawn in Group G alongside Belgium, Egypt and New Zealand, with two matches set for Los Angeles and one in Seattle.

FIFA has taken a cautious stance. Secretary general Mattias Grafstrom said it was "premature to comment in detail" and that developments would be monitored. A source close to FIFA confirmed no discussions had yet been held with Iran about withdrawal. With 100 days until kickoff, the issue could become sensitive for president Gianni Infantino, particularly as other Gulf nations bound for the tournament – Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan – have also been drawn into the conflict.

FIFA regulations do not explicitly cover a boycott but allow the governing body to act at its discretion in cases of force majeure, including replacing a team. Eight Asian teams have qualified so far, with Iraq still in contention via a play-off. Unlike Olympic boycotts, no World Cup has seen a comparable withdrawal, though precedents exist in other tournaments.

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



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Saif Hassan smashed a 78-ball 87 and stitched a 164-run second-wicket stand with opener Mohammad Naim, who scored 78 off 87 deliveries, to guide Central Zone to a commanding five-wicket victory over North Zone in the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) final in Mirpur yesterday. After North Zone were bundled out for 238 in 49.3 overs, Central Zone got over the line with 12 overs to spare. The one-day version of the tournament returned following a two-year gap, aiming to prepare the national stars for the upcoming home ODI series against Pakistan this month.

Real reeling as title ambitions dented

AGENCIES

After 26 matchdays, Real Madrid (60) find themselves four points adrift of leaders Barcelona (64), a gap that now feels heavier than the numbers suggest. Monday's damaging 1-0 home defeat to Getafe handed their archrivals a firm grip in the LaLiga title race – and exposed worrying cracks in Arvalo Arbeloa's side.

A superb Martin Satriano volley stunned the Santiago Bernabeu and condemned Madrid to back-to-back league defeats for the first time since 2020. After already falling at Osasuna last weekend, Real saw Barcelona leapfrog them. Hansi Flick's side now have a significant cushion at the top. With 36 points still available, Madrid technically remain in the hunt. Arbeloa struck a defiant tone, insisting the record 36-Liga champions would fight until the end.

"No, there are 36 points left, and we have no other objective but to fight for those points," he said. "Four points is a distance we believe we can make up. This is Real Madrid and no one is going to give up here."

Yet the numbers tell a more



troubling story.

Madrid have now fallen behind in seven league matches this season, recovering just five points from those games. In contrast, Barcelona have amassed a league-high 18 points from the 10 matches in which they have trailed – a statistic that underlines the growing difference in resilience between the rivals.

Against Getafe, Madrid created only two clear-cut chances – through Vinicius Junior and Arda Guler – and rarely looked convincing.

Getafe coach Jose Bordalas, who had previously failed to win any of his 16 LaLiga matches against

Madrid (D2 L14), finally broke his duck in emphatic fashion. It was also Getafe's first victory at the Bernabeu since 2008.

Injuries to Jude Bellingham and Kylian Mbappe offered some mitigation, but not enough to excuse a flat display on home soil.

The pressure now intensifies ahead of Friday's tricky trip to Celta Vigo. Madrid have already suffered a 2-0 league defeat to Celta this season and have not lost both meetings in a campaign since 1998-99. Another stumble would not just widen the gap – it could leave their title ambitions in tatters.

BSRM
THE ONLY STEEL FACTORY IN BANGLADESH TO RECEIVE THE
GREEN FACTORY AWARD 2025

SHAH CEMENT
Superbrands
WINNER
4 TIMES

Anxiety grips migrants as Gulf flights stay halted

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

With one day left before his visa expired, Mohammad Julhas, 28, could not afford another cancellation.

His younger brother, Akash Islam, said Julhas was scheduled to fly to Jeddah on February 28, but the flight was cancelled. "After two days of uncertainty, we received a message on March 2, just before midnight, saying Biman had arranged another flight."

Julhas reached Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport by 11:00am yesterday and eventually boarded a plane at 3:55pm.

"For two whole nights, my brother couldn't sleep as his visa had only one day of validity left," Akash told The Daily Star.

Julhas's case reflects wider fallout, as a total of 182 Middle East-bound flights were cancelled from Dhaka and Chattogram airports over the last four days following US-Israeli strikes on Iran and Iran's retaliatory attacks.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4



Bangladesh defender Kohati Kisku makes a lunging tackle against China's Wurigumula during their AFC Women's Asian Cup fixture at the Western Sydney Stadium on Tuesday. Peter Butler's charges, ranked 95 places below China, eventually went down 2-0 but made a massive impression on their continental debut with fearless football, going toe-to-toe with the defending and nine-time champions. Story on Page 15.

PHOTO: AFP

SITAKUNDA MURDER CASE 7yr-old victim dies in hospital; neighbour held

Police say arrestee tried to rape child before slitting her throat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police yesterday arrested a man in a case filed over the murder of a seven-year-old girl, who was found with her throat slit at Sitakunda eco park on Sunday.

The girl died at a Chattogram hospital yesterday. According to police, she was also subjected to attempted rape.

Addressing a press briefing at Sitakunda Model Police Station following the arrest, Chattogram Superintendent of Police Mohammed Nazir Ahmed Khan said the arrestee was identified as Babu Sheikh, 50, from Gaibandha's Gobindaganj upazila. "He was a neighbour of the victim."

Earlier, around 1:30am yesterday, the victim, Jannatun Nayema Ira, succumbed to her injuries while undergoing treatment at Chattogram Medical College Hospital's intensive care unit, according to Dr Selim Kashem Chowdhury, an ENT consultant at the hospital.



Accused Babu Sheikh

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Police likely to revert to old uniform

TOUSIF KAIUM

Police Headquarters (PHQ) is now moving to revert to the former uniform of Bangladesh Police that was replaced just three months ago following a procurement process worth around Tk 141 crore.

The development comes after 96.5 percent of the respondents in an internal survey of the police wanted the previous uniform back.



New uniform



Old uniform

Less than 1 percent of the respondents were satisfied with the current attire. Traffic Police reported near-unanimous opposition to the present design as it is clearly visible, especially at night, officers said requesting anonymity.

"We will place our survey results before the government through proper procedures -- the next steps will be taken in line with the government's decision," said AHM Shahadat Hossain, assistant inspector general (Media and Public Relations).

The newly-formed government is keen to restore the previous uniform, which was introduced in 2004 when the BNP was in power, said several senior PHQ officials on

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

'TRICKED INTO WAR'

Report uncovers trafficking pipeline that forces Bangladeshis into Russian army to fight as expendables in Ukraine

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and KEERO ADHNAN AHMED

Bangladeshi men are being flown out of Dhaka, routed through Saudi Arabia and the UAE, before being taken to Moscow and forced onto the frontlines of Russia's war in Ukraine.

The route -- using a combination of religious and tourist visas through Middle Eastern transit hubs -- is part of what rights groups describe as a trafficking pipeline feeding civilians into the Russian armed forces.

The findings were disclosed yesterday in a joint report by Bangkok-based Fortify Rights and Ukraine-based Truth Hounds, titled "I Was Tricked into the War", at a press conference at Drik Gallery in the capital's Panthapath.

With early access to the findings, this newspaper published an article the day before yesterday titled "Over 100 Bangladeshis Sent to the Front, 34 Dead: report".

MUCH WIDER PATTERN
The report shows that Bangladesh is part of a much wider South Asian recruitment pattern.

According to data published by the Ukrainian Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War, as of February 2026, at least 751 Sri

AT A GLANCE

- Pilgrimage visas used as cover
- South Asia key recruitment hub
- Hundreds killed, many trapped
- 1,876 recruited; 448 confirmed deaths

Lankans, 851 Nepalis, 170 Indians, and 104 Bangladeshis had been recruited into the Russian army.

The data also shows that at least 275 Sri Lankans, 116 Nepalis, 23 Indians, and 34 Bangladeshis have so far been killed in the fighting between Russia and Ukraine.

Researchers said the figures indicate that South Asia has become a key recruitment ground for Russia's military efforts, with brokers exploiting economic hardship and established labour migration routes across the region.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

BFIU seeks bank details of Asif Mahmud

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU) has sought detailed banking information on Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain, spokesperson of the National Citizen Party (NCP) and a former adviser to the interim government.

According to officials familiar with the development, the BFIU -- the anti-money laundering wing of Bangladesh Bank -- on Monday issued letters to all banks, asking them to provide information related to Asif's accounts following a complaint.

Banks have been instructed to submit, within three working days, account opening forms, transaction statements, and all relevant documents related to his accounts.

The Daily Star called Asif Mahmud last night for comments but could not reach him.

Meanwhile, in a Facebook post last night, Asif Mahmud said, "Tomorrow I will personally make my bank statement

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Triceratops skeleton set for multi-million dollar auction sale

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

A triceratops skeleton, a fixture in a Wyoming museum for decades, is set to go under the hammer, marking a rare occasion where a publicly exhibited dinosaur fossil enters the auction market at a time of unprecedented demand for prehistoric remains.



Named "Trey," the fossil will be available for bids between March 17 and March 31 on Joopter, the online auction platform established by Grammy-winning artist and producer Pharrell Williams. Its pre-auction valuation stands between \$4.5 million to \$5.5 million.

Dating back over 66 million years to the late Cretaceous period, Trey was unearthed near Lusk, Wyoming, in 1993 by Lee Campbell and the late Allen Graffham, a commercial palaeontologist renowned for his many significant discoveries.

This 17-foot-long (5.3-metre-long) herbivore

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

BORDER CROSSING

Blasts in Kabul as Afghan, Pak troops keep up fighting

AFP, Kabul

AFP journalists in Kabul heard multiple explosions and gunfire yesterday, as Afghan and Pakistani troops keep up their border battles.

The blasts in the Afghan capital were heard alongside anti-aircraft weapons and gunfire from across the city, and came as the Afghan defence ministry said "the fighting is still ongoing" against Pakistani forces.

An AFP journalist in Jalalabad city, between Kabul and the frontier, reported hearing explosions and various weapons being fired.

At the nearest border crossing, around 50 kilometres (30 miles) from Jalalabad, residents in Torkham told AFP the days-long fighting was continuing.

The neighbours have clashed along the frontier since Thursday, when Afghanistan launched a border offensive in response to Pakistani air strikes.

The latest casualties include three children killed Monday in a "crime committed by the Pakistani military regime" in Kunar province, Afghan deputy government spokesman Hamdullah Fitrat said.

At least 39 civilians have been killed since Thursday, the Afghan government said, a toll which Pakistan has not commented on.

The UN children's charity said it was "alarmed" by reports of child casualties in the conflict, and called on

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6



Children celebrate Dol Purnima at Dhakeshwari temple yesterday, tossing clouds of colour into the spring air. Their laughter rises with the purple dust as the premises turned radiant with festive joy.

PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

Israel's strike plan triggered US attack on Iran: Rubio

P7

HASANAH ISLAMIC BANKING
البنكية الاسلامي
Prime Bank

PRAYER TIMING
MARCH 4

| | | | | |
|-------------|-------|------|---------|------|
| Fajr | Zohr | Asr | Maghrib | Esha |
| 5:05 | 12:45 | 4:30 | 6:04 | 7:30 |
| JAMAAT 5:15 | 1:15 | 4:45 | 6:14 | 8:00 |

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

SEHRI, IFTAR TIMING

| RAMADAN | MAR | SEHRI | IFTAR |
|---------|-----|-------|-------|
| 14 | 4 | 5:01 | 6:04 |
| 15 | 5 | 5:01 | 6:05 |
| 16 | 6 | 5:00 | 6:05 |