

FORGING A FUTURE

Where Every Woman Thrives

TAGABUN TAHARIM TITUN

The dawn of International Women's Day 2026 arrives with a sombre resonance. While the streets of Dhaka are often decorated in shades of purple, the headlines tell a grimmer story. Recent incidents of violence in Sitakunda, Madhabdi, and various others serve as haunting reminders that for many Bangladeshi women, the struggle for basic safety remains a daily battle. As we observe this

day, the air is thick with a sense of urgency. Yet, amidst the shadows of insecurity, a parallel narrative of indomitable resilience is being written in our stadiums, our schools, and our financial boardrooms.

Aligning with the United Nations 2026 theme, "Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL Women and Girls", this year's focus shifts from mere awareness to dismantling structural barriers. It is a call to move beyond symbolic gestures toward a reality where justice is swift and progress is inclusive.

A PREREQUISITE FOR PROGRESS

Safety is not a luxury; it is the foundation of development. Fauzia Moslem, president of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, points out the stark gap between policy and practice. "We are observing a lack of gender-addressed programmes from the newly elected government," she notes, highlighting that nearly 97% of rape cases in the country do not result in punishment. This lack of accountability creates a climate of fear that hinders women's mobility and potential.

She further emphasises that "employability" is intrinsically linked to safety. Unfavourable working environments and harassment during commutes hold women back even as they progress.

“Women remain hindered by hostile workplaces and a humiliating justice system. Financial independence is the power to fight, yet systemic harassment continues to strip them of dignity. True progress requires both economic freedom and legal respect.”

FAUZIA MOSLEM
President
Bangladesh Mahila Parishad

SEE PAGE J2



When she gains confidence
the world gains
her strength

This Women's Day,
we renew our commitment to giving her double protection
so she can keep moving forward every single day.



Not just protection
but double protection



Forging a Future Where Every Woman Thrives



▲ Every educated girl is a future architect of our nation's socio-economic growth.

FROM PAGE J1

For her, true empowerment requires an "emergency policy" and a national master plan to ensure that justice is not just a word but a protocol that protects a woman's dignity from the police station to the courtroom.

A LEGACY OF SPORTING ACTION
 If action had a definitive face in Bangladesh, it would be the triumphant national women's football team. Their back-to-back SAFF Championship titles—the victories that captivated the nation—have evolved from singular sporting moments into a permanent cultural shift. By 2026, the "SAFF effect" had moved beyond the stadium; it had dismantled the structural myth that sports are "not for girls".

This victory serves as a loud rebuttal to the barriers of the past. It proves that when girls are provided with infrastructure and societal support, they don't just participate—they dominate. This legacy of action has sparked a grassroots revolution, with thousands of young girls across rural districts now seeing the pitch as a field of freedom, proving that a girl's potential is limitless when her right

to play is protected.

THE LITERACY OF LEADERSHIP
 The narrative of the "thriving woman" begins in the classroom. According to UNICEF, Bangladesh has achieved remarkable gender parity in primary education, with female youth literacy (ages 15-24) soaring above 95%. However, as Fauzia Moslem cautions, the "dropout rate" remains highest among girls as they transition to higher education. Addressing this is ensuring safe transport and social security so that academic potential isn't cut short by external threats.

BANKING ON RESILIENCE
 While sectors like sports and education show upward trajectories, the corporate world presents a more complex challenge. According to a recent report by the central

bank, women's participation in the banking sector has seen a slight decline, dropping by 4.96% in the first half of 2025. This dip highlights the structural barriers the UN aims to remove—ranging from a lack of childcare to rigid work-life balances that favour traditional male roles.

Despite these declining macro numbers, leading financial institutions are providing the blueprint for a fix. Ahsan Zaman Chowdhury, Managing Director and CEO of Trust Bank PLC, asserts that the future of banking lies in specifically designing systems for women.

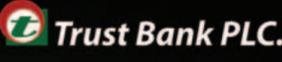
"When you design credit properly for women, they repay. "The data is clear," he states. At Trust Bank, women account for 25% of the depositor base, and their non-performing loan (NPL) ratios often outperform the broader portfolio.

This is echoed by Shaila Abedin, SEVP, Head of Liability & Women Banking and core member of diversity & inclusion at Prime Bank PLC, who argues that "symbolic gestures are not enough." She emphasises that reversing the decline in female participation requires a "culture of accountability, equity, and respect." The fix isn't just about hiring more women but about creating an environment where they can reach the top table of leadership without being hindered by domestic or safety-related barriers.

Ultimately, progress in sports, banking and education is fragile without the bedrock of justice. This Women's Day, we celebrate the gold medals and the high literacy rates, but we pledge our action toward a future where every girl can walk to school, every woman can lead a bank, and every citizen is protected by a system that values her life as much as her contribution.



Bangladesh women's football team dismantles barriers, driving national progress through athletic brilliance.
 PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS



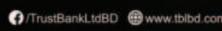
#GiveToGain

**SHE SHINES, SHE SAVES
 ENDLESS SUCCESS WAVES WITH
 TRUST SRISTI**

Happy International Women's Day



16201



EMPOWERING WOMEN for brighter futures

“Our focus has shifted to non-metro areas, where women-led enterprises are growing three times faster than in major cities. Through digital enablement and financial literacy, we are ensuring every woman can access the formal economy.”



MASHRUR AREFIN
 Managing Director and CEO, City Bank PLC

City Bank PLC is widely utilising its City Alo platform, successfully in order to dismantle the structural barriers while fostering digital literacy to ensure women remain central pillars of Bangladesh's formal economy. In this interview with the Daily Star, Mashrur Arefin, the Managing Director and CEO of City Bank PLC opens up about how in this year's International Women's Day, the bank is promising a vital commitment to inclusive growth

The Daily Star (TDS): What led to the launch of City Alo?

Mashrur Arefin (MA): We launched City Alo in 2019 to address the persistent gap

base look like?

MA: We serve 8.5 lakh active women customers. In 2025, their transaction volume grew 30% to BDT 66,000 crore. Additionally, 23% of Citytouch app users are female, highlighting a steady rise in digital adoption among women.

TDS: How has this segment grown recently?

MA: Growth is robust. Over the past three years, our female customer base increased by 49%, while retail loan disbursements rose by 82% and the deposit portfolio expanded by a staggering 107%.

TDS: How is the repayment performance of women borrowers?

MA: Women SME borrowers show exceptional discipline. Our women's SME portfolio expanded sixfold in five years with an average annual growth of 55%. Most importantly, NPL ratios remain well below the overall SME average.

TDS: What trends are you seeing in women-led businesses?

MA: Beyond traditional commerce, women are entering manufacturing, healthcare, and ICT. Interestingly, non-metro growth is outpacing cities, expanding nearly three times faster than in major hubs like Dhaka and Chittagong over the last five years.

TDS: How are you addressing structural barriers?

MA: Limited decision-making power and collateral remain challenges. We tackle these through entrepreneurship certification, mentorship networks, and rural outreach like Uthan Boithok, ensuring women move beyond account acquisition toward sustained financial participation.

Interview conducted by Tagabun Taharim Titun

Women are the bedrock of deposit stability. We have seen our female SME portfolio grow sixfold while maintaining superior asset quality, proving that investing in women is not just inclusive, but a mathematically sound and strategic business decision.

in women's financial inclusion. While women represent half our population, structural barriers historically limited their participation. City Alo aligns with our strategy of inclusive growth and sustainable portfolio development.

TDS: How large is your current women's portfolio?

MA: City Alo currently holds one-third of our retail deposits, approximately BDT 13,000 crore. In 2025, we disbursed BDT 2,500 crore in loans. Notably, female Nano loan disbursements reached BDT 791 crore, growing threefold from the previous year.

TDS: What does your female customer

Women leading institutional change

As the world marks International Women's Day 2026, four board members at BAT Bangladesh reflect on how women shape institutions through leadership. Their journeys across business and academia converge on shared principles: opportunity, mentorship, and credibility. By widening the path for the next generation, they ensure women entering boardrooms find greater opportunity.



“Creating opportunities within organizations is central to sustaining leadership pipelines. Mentorship, empowered ownership and strategic exposure help emerging leaders develop the confidence to step forward and succeed in their careers.”

MONISHA ABRAHAM
Managing Director
BAT Bangladesh

Leadership through opportunity

Monisha Abraham, the first woman Managing Director in BAT Bangladesh's 116-year history, sees leadership as something earned through action and accountability, not titles. Early in her career, senior leaders trusted her with real responsibility, shaping that belief.

Having led across markets in the Middle East, Europe, and Asia, she values flexibility and cultural awareness. For Monisha, leadership means stepping forward when opportunity appears and navigating complexity with confidence. It also requires constant evolution as organisations adapt to rapid economic and technological change.



“I am committed to structured mentorship and succession planning while also advocating for a more transparent and competitive business environment through my leadership roles in various national business bodies.”

RUPALI HAQUE CHOWDHURY
Independent Director
BAT Bangladesh

Strength through quiet discipline

Rupali Haque Chowdhury, Managing Director of Berger Paints Bangladesh and president of Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), built her career on financial independence and discipline. Early exposure to strategy gave her insight into high-level decision-making, shaping decades of leadership across economic cycles.

She rejects the idea that leadership must be loud. In male-dominated industries, credibility comes from sustained performance. For Rupali, leadership means guiding institutions through technological change and growth while staying grounded in professional accountability.



“My students closely watch how women navigate leadership spaces. If my journey helps them see that path more clearly, then every challenge along the way has been worthwhile for me.”

PROFESSOR DR MELITA MEHJABEEN
Independent Director
BAT Bangladesh

Earning credibility in the room

Dr Melita Mehjabeen, a tenured professor at DU-IBA and chairman of National Bank PLC, bridges academia and corporate governance. Her move into the boardroom required credibility built through preparation and thoughtful questioning.

Rather than dwell on gender stereotypes, she focused on competence in difficult governance conversations. When women take seats at decision-making tables, the horizon widens for those watching. Leadership, she believes, requires the courage to engage and the responsibility to represent more than personal success.



“The most important role one can play is to use influence to recommend, introduce and promote the right talent for bigger roles, going beyond offering advice to actively championing talent.”

NIRALA NANDINI SINGH
Finance Director
BAT Bangladesh

Growth through authentic empathy

Nirala Nandini Singh, Finance Director at BAT Bangladesh, believes leadership lessons often come from difficult moments. Having overseen commercial finance across 30 global markets, she sees low points as opportunities to grow.

Nirala challenges the idea that empathy weakens authority. Admitting doubts and listening to colleagues, she says, builds accountability and stronger teams. Her approach is simple: weigh different perspectives and leave things better than she found them. Leadership, to her, means slowing down to understand the human side of complex business decisions.

City Bank PLC
City Bank Center
28 Gulshan Avenue, Gulshan 1, Dhaka
☎ 16234 | citybankplc.com

making sense of money

BANGLADESH'S FIRST EDGE CERTIFIED BRAND

City Bank sets a national benchmark for workplace excellence

EDGE is the global standard for fairness, diversity, gender equality and pay equity—designed to transform workplaces into inclusive, merit-based environments. With this certification, City Bank joins the ranks of leading global organizations such as Chevron, UNDP, the World Bank Group, Standard Chartered, among others.

We are proud to have achieved the second level of EDGE certification—EDGE Move—reflecting our continued commitment to employee happiness.

EDGE (Economic Dividends for Gender Equality) is a global certification framework developed by the EDGE Certified Foundation.

EBL WOMEN BANKING

ব্যবসায় আত্মবিশ্বাস ও সমৃদ্ধির পথে বিশ্বস্ত সঙ্গী

ইবিএল মুক্তি লোন

এখন মাত্র **৫%** রেট-এ

- > সর্বোচ্চ ৫০ লক্ষ টাকা পর্যন্ত জামানতবিহীন লোন
- > জামানতসহ ১ কোটি টাকা পর্যন্ত লোন নেয়ার সুযোগ
- > সর্বোচ্চ ৪৮ মাসে পরিশোধযোগ্য

*শর্ত প্রযোজ্য

eb.com.bd

myebi

Women leading institutional change

As the world marks International Women's Day 2026, four board members at BAT Bangladesh reflect on how women shape institutions through leadership. Their journeys across business and academia converge on shared principles: opportunity, mentorship, and credibility. By widening the path for the next generation, they ensure women entering boardrooms find greater opportunity.



“Creating opportunities within organizations is central to sustaining leadership pipelines. Mentorship, empowered ownership and strategic exposure help emerging leaders develop the confidence to step forward and succeed in their careers.”

MONISHA ABRAHAM
Managing Director
BAT Bangladesh

Leadership through opportunity

Monisha Abraham, the first woman Managing Director in BAT Bangladesh's 116-year history, sees leadership as something earned through action and accountability, not titles. Early in her career, senior leaders trusted her with real responsibility, shaping that belief.

Having led across markets in the Middle East, Europe, and Asia, she values flexibility and cultural awareness. For Monisha, leadership means stepping forward when opportunity appears and navigating complexity with confidence. It also requires constant evolution as organisations adapt to rapid economic and technological change.



“I am committed to structured mentorship and succession planning while also advocating for a more transparent and competitive business environment through my leadership roles in various national business bodies.”

RUPALI HAQUE CHOWDHURY
Independent Director
BAT Bangladesh

Strength through quiet discipline

Rupali Haque Chowdhury, Managing Director of Berger Paints Bangladesh and president of Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), built her career on financial independence and discipline. Early exposure to strategy gave her insight into high-level decision-making, shaping decades of leadership across economic cycles.

She rejects the idea that leadership must be loud. In male-dominated industries, credibility comes from sustained performance. For Rupali, leadership means guiding institutions through technological change and growth while staying grounded in professional accountability.



“My students closely watch how women navigate leadership spaces. If my journey helps them see that path more clearly, then every challenge along the way has been worthwhile for me.”

PROFESSOR DR MELITA MEHJABEEN
Independent Director
BAT Bangladesh

Earning credibility in the room

Dr Melita Mehjabeen, a tenured professor at DU-IBA and chairman of National Bank PLC, bridges academia and corporate governance. Her move into the boardroom required credibility built through preparation and thoughtful questioning.

Rather than dwell on gender stereotypes, she focused on competence in difficult governance conversations. When women take seats at decision-making tables, the horizon widens for those watching. Leadership, she believes, requires the courage to engage and the responsibility to represent more than personal success.



“The most important role one can play is to use influence to recommend, introduce and promote the right talent for bigger roles, going beyond offering advice to actively championing talent.”

NIRALA NANDINI SINGH
Finance Director
BAT Bangladesh

Growth through authentic empathy

Nirala Nandini Singh, Finance Director at BAT Bangladesh, believes leadership lessons often come from difficult moments. Having overseen commercial finance across 30 global markets, she sees low points as opportunities to grow.

Nirala challenges the idea that empathy weakens authority. Admitting doubts and listening to colleagues, she says, builds accountability and stronger teams. Her approach is simple: weigh different perspectives and leave things better than she found them. Leadership, to her, means slowing down to understand the human side of complex business decisions.

City Bank PLC
City Bank Center
28 Gulshan Avenue, Gulshan 1, Dhaka
16234 | citybankplc.com

making sense of money

BANGLADESH'S FIRST EDGE CERTIFIED BRAND

City Bank sets a national benchmark for workplace excellence

EDGE is the global standard for fairness, diversity, gender equality and pay equity—designed to transform workplaces into inclusive, merit-based environments. With this certification, City Bank joins the ranks of leading global organizations such as Chevron, UNDP, the World Bank Group, Standard Chartered, among others.

We are proud to have achieved the second level of EDGE certification—EDGE Move—reflecting our continued commitment to employee happiness.

EDGE (Economic Dividends for Gender Equality) is a global certification framework developed by the EDGE Certified Foundation.

EBL WOMEN BANKING

ব্যবসায় আত্মবিশ্বাস ও সমৃদ্ধির পথে বিশ্বস্ত সঙ্গী

ইবিএল মুক্তি লোন

এখন মাত্র **৫%** রেট-এ

- > সর্বোচ্চ ৫০ লক্ষ টাকা পর্যন্ত জামানতবিহীন লোন
- > জামানতসহ ১ কোটি টাকা পর্যন্ত লোন নেয়ার সুযোগ
- > সর্বোচ্চ ৪৮ মাসে পরিশোধযোগ্য

*শর্ত প্রযোজ্য

'No surrender'

Says Tehran as Trump vows to hit Iran 'very hard'; Iran apologises to Gulf states for attacks, strikes US bases in the region; war enters second week

AGENCIES

Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian yesterday rebuffed US President Donald Trump's surrender demand as warring parties stepped up attacks and the war entered its second week.

Trump, hours after Pezeshkian's remarks, said Iran would be "hit very hard" in the coming hours and that he was considering widening the areas and groups of people being targeted, without providing details.

"Today, Iran will be hit very hard! Under serious consideration for complete destruction and certain death, because of Iran's bad behavior, are areas and groups of people that were not considered for targeting up until this moment in time," Trump said in a post on Truth Social.

Meanwhile, the Islamic Republic made an unusual apology to neighbouring states, some of which host major US military bases, for its "actions", apparently seeking to calm regional anger at Iranian strikes on Gulf civilian targets.

"I personally apologise to neighbouring countries that were affected by Iran's actions," Pezeshkian said. He said Iran's temporary leadership council had agreed to suspend attacks on nearby states unless strikes on Iran originated from their territory.

Yesterday, Israel announced a fresh blitz led by 80

fighter jets on Iran, which set one of Tehran's main airports on fire. The wave of pre-dawn Israeli raids was one of the biggest since the bombing campaign began on February 28, with a military academy, an underground command centre and a missile storage facility named as targets.

AFP photos showed fire and smoke billowing from Tehran's Mehrabad International Airport, one of two that serve the capital. Later, Israel's military said it launched another wave of air strikes on Tehran and Isfahan.

Pezeshkian struck a defiant tone in a speech broadcast on state TV in which he appeared to address Trump, who said Friday that only Iran's "unconditional surrender" could end the war.

Iran's enemies "must take their wish for the unconditional surrender of the Iranian people to their graves," he said.

Iran also hit back, with air raid alerts and explosions heard above Jerusalem as well as Gulf cities Dubai, Manama and near Riyadh -- where Saudi Arabia intercepted a ballistic missile fired at an air base housing US military personnel.

It said the targets included the UAE's Al-Minhad base and another in Kuwait, as well as a "strategic facility" in Israel.

Later, the Revolutionary Guards said their forces also targeted Al-Dhafra air base in the UAE.



PHOTO: REUTERS
A damaged compound housing offices and warehouses used by a US firm, in Iraq.



PHOTO: AFP
A man cries as he holds aloft the body of a two-year-old child killed in a strike in Tehran yesterday.



“Iran's enemies must take their wish for the unconditional surrender of the Iranian people to their graves.”
 Masoud Pezeshkian, Iran President

- 'Massive' drone attacks target Israel, US bases in UAE, Kuwait**
- Wave of strikes pounds key Iranian sites, including airport**
- Another oil tanker hit near Strait of Hormuz**
- US firms to 'quadruple' weapons production**
- Iran Guards hit Kurdish groups, vow to crush them**
- Drones, missile target Iraq airport; arms depot, oil field**



PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN
Women make up the majority of the workforce in the apparel industry, a sector that keeps the wheels of the national economy turning. Yet labour rights groups argue that women's working conditions, wages, and benefits remain well below standard across many workplaces.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

They leave with hope, return with scars

Abuse haunts Bangladeshi women migrants who returned home

MD ABBAS

When Liza Akter left for Saudi Arabia two years ago, she hoped the job would help secure a better future for her two children.

The woman from Patuakhali already had a difficult life. She lost her parents at a young age, and later her husband abandoned her. Working abroad seemed like her only option.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 3

Men, money and muscle still guard the gates of politics

Women candidates say at Star discussion

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **DOMESTIC LABOUR REDISTRIBUTION:** Redistribute care work to provide women the "time-wealth" necessary for political participation.
- **MARGINALISED INCLUSION:** Ensure genuine representation by integrating Dalit and working-class women into mainstream political planning.
- **INSTITUTIONAL NEUTRALITY:** Constitutionally protect the Election Commission and administration from being used as partisan agents.
- **SUBSTANTIVE DECISION-MAKING:** Integrate women into party "backrooms" where finance and alliances are decided, moving beyond symbolic quotas.

NILIMA JAHAN

The vision of an inclusive democracy, forged on the streets during the July uprising, has collided with a formidable structural wall.

While the movement promised to remove discrimination from society, including those enforced by patriarchy, the February 12 election this year has instead exposed a pattern of systemic exclusion.

Initial ambitions for gender parity were incrementally diluted, with demands for 100 direct seats eventually shrinking to just 84 female candidates contesting the election, of whom only seven secured seats -- a disparity that reflects a failure to penetrate the country's true epicentre of political influence.

Ahead of International Women's Day today, The Daily Star sat with five female candidates, a professor of women and gender studies at Dhaka University, and a senior leader from Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami.

Their collective experiences surrounding the recent national polls reveal that the structures of power remain guarded by deeply entrenched patriarchy, which manifests through immense capital,

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

MAKE SURE YOU COLLECT THE SPECIAL 8-PAGE SUPPLEMENT: **RIGHTS. JUSTICE. ACTION. FOR ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS.**



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN
A long queue of motorcycles and cars formed outside a filling station in Dhaka's Asad Gate area on Mirpur Road yesterday. Fears of a possible fuel shortage, amid ongoing tensions in the Middle East, are driving more and more people to filling stations across the capital. Story on page 16.

Do not dip into forex reserves

Economists suggest at meeting with BB governor

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Top economists have urged the Bangladesh Bank to remain cautious about spending from the country's foreign exchange reserves as tensions in the Middle East threaten to create fresh economic shocks.

The recommendation came during a meeting convened yesterday at the Bangladesh Bank headquarters in Dhaka with eight leading economists amid growing uncertainty in the global energy market.

Newly-appointed Governor Md Mostaqur Rahman, the deputy governors, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) and the central bank's chief economist attended the meeting.

The economists warned that the rising global fuel prices due to the Middle East crisis could increase the country's import bills and eventually put pressure on the foreign exchange reserves. The Daily Star has learnt from three of the economists present at the meeting.

Global oil price has surged 24 percent

ECONOMISTS' PRESCRIPTION

- Find alternative funding sources
- Seek loans from ADB, IsDB
- Negotiate deferred payment with oil exporters
- Seek alternative fuel source
- Do not pass on higher energy bills to consumers
- Do not cut policy rate

this week to more than \$90 a barrel and is on course for its steepest weekly gains since the coronavirus pandemic, driving up fuel prices for consumers worldwide, reports Reuters.

The economists advised the central bank to explore alternative funding

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1



RUMEEN FARHANA

In the final 10 days, you are forced to spend at least Tk 10 lakh every day just to keep the campaign alive. You cannot even ask where the money goes or whether it reaches voters.



TASLIMA AKTER

At the end of the day, political parties legislate in Parliament and shape the path and policies of the state. Yet the mindset within these parties is still not conducive enough for meaningful participation by women.



TASNIM JARA

We might have female MPs, but are they in the decision-making seats? No. The number of women may be an 'convenient metric' to track, but it does not reflect where real power actually lies.



NABILA TASNID

In clusters of joint families, a male mediator approaches political leaders saying, 'I have 10 NIDs' or 'I can supply 20 votes'.... The women don't even know their identities are being sold.



MEGHNA ALAM

I am a survivor of state repression. The conspiracy and false case against me were engineered by the state. My opponent has over 200 cases -- yet the media focus only on my supposed 'crimes'.



HABIBA AKTER CHOWDHURY

We went to the Election Commission with videos of our sisters being attacked on the streets. We were met with chilling indifference. If we must run to local authorities for everything, why is the commission there?



TANIA HAQUE

We try to fight our battles in the political arena, but the real battlefield should be the home. Family is the root. When we talk about family policy, it should begin with how we raise children.

Men, money and muscle still guard the gates of politics

FROM PAGE 1
systemic muscle power, and coordinated digital warfare.

"We use the number of women in Parliament as a 'convenient metric,' but it measures presence, not power," said Tasnim Jara, who was an independent candidate for Dhaka-9. She argued that while parties aggressively court the female electorate -- who comprise 51 percent of voters -- they remain fundamentally resistant to allowing women into the "backrooms" where real decisions are made.

This "calculated erasure" is reinforced by what gender specialist Dr Tania Haque, professor of the women and gender studies department at Dhaka University, described as a "toxic masculinity" that weaponises misinformation.

"Our society is conditioned to view women as liabilities rather than leaders," she noted, pointing to a persistent narrative that "decent girls don't do politics."

As Bangladesh navigates its post-uprising transition, these candidates warn that the "July Spirit" will remain unfulfilled until the political parties' "Mother-Sister" trope is replaced by genuine political agency, they said.

THE 'MASTAN' PHENOMENON
Candidates argued that Bangladeshi politics equates leadership with physical aggression, rebranding criminality as an asset while dismissing feminine traits as inherent weaknesses.

They noted that this culture of "muscle power" creates a formidable barrier, measuring political viability through dominance rather than merit.

"When we imagine a hero, the image of a man still flashes before our eyes," said Taslima Akter, a Gonosamhati Andolon candidate for Dhaka-12, highlighting how societal expectations and party biases define

women by appearance and demeanour rather than capability.

Meghna Alam, independent candidate for Dhaka-8, exposed a stark double standard: while she faced scrutiny for what she described as a single politically motivated case, her opponent was lauded for having over 200. "People said, 'He is a mafia boss? That's exactly who we need,'" she recalled, noting that society often views a "mastan" (thug) or arrogance as the only source of protection.

"Almost always, if a man is beaten, he is a survivor; if a woman is harassed, society asks, 'Why was she there?'"

Nabila Tasnid, a National Citizen Party candidate for Dhaka-20, described the persistent barriers within party structures.

"Women are constantly forced to re-prove their qualifications," she said, pointing to internal resistance where some partners of the Jamaat-led II party alliance, which the NCP joined, refused to campaign under female leadership, costing her thousands of votes.

She said religious narratives and misinformation further marginalise women in rural constituencies, leaving female candidates fighting not only for electoral success but also for basic recognition as capable leaders.

"While many supported me, a significant segment was adamant that they would neither vote for a woman nor campaign for one. These prejudices remain deeply entrenched in our society."

To survive this, Barrister Rumeen Farhana, a member of parliament who contested independently and won in Brahmanbaria-2, described a publicised "outburst" against a biased administration as a strategic shield.

"Had I remained 'polite,' I would have lost 50 percent of my votes. I had to show my workers I could protect them... I had to be a 'mastan' when it

was needed."
WHEN MONEY TALKS
Candidates reported that despite legal spending ceilings, Bangladeshi elections remain a "money game" of financial attrition that structurally excludes women.

Rumeen described the process as "straight-up vote-buying", noting that contesting effectively for less than several crores is impossible.

"Beyond legalities, we see systemic bribery through direct cash or gifts like soap or oil to voters' homes... The scale is staggering."

She revealed that in the final ten days, she had to spend Tk 10 lakh daily, while opponents spent triple that amount.

On the gendered nature of political investment, the MP added that investment follows expected profit.

"Investors back those they believe will win, while confidence in a female candidate is often absent from herself, her family, society, and the business community."

In this battle of capital, a woman begins the race already handicapped, she said.

Nabila also noted that "investors" prioritise financial returns over ethics, allowing wealthy male candidates to exploit the economic vulnerability of voters.

"This creates an unequal playing field where women are sidelined by the sheer volume of 'black money'." Jara identified this as the "elephant in the room" -- a rigged system that protects the status quo.

"If rules are just decorative and the real game is played with off-the-books money, how do you compete honestly?"

She argued that the system is designed to keep newcomers out, calling for a "cross-partisan commitment" to return people -- not money and muscle -- to the centre of

politics.
THE PENALTY FOR COMPLIANCE
Candidates highlighted a paradox: the administration often penalises rule-followers while allowing violators to thrive.

Jara described the system as skewed.

"If there are no consequences for breaking rules, what is the incentive to comply? Rules regarding decibel limits or posters are violated openly because the rewards for breaking the law outweigh the risks."

Nabila also recounted following the 20 billboard limit precisely, only to see her opponent exceed it in a single union.

When she complained, authorities told her to document the violations herself -- a reflection of systemic bias favouring wealth and influence.

Rumeen highlighted a partisan administration that ignored formal complaints while her opponent engaged in hate speech and personal attacks.

"When the state apparatus shows a step-motherly attitude, the law is reduced to a tool used only against the weak."

"Where is the neutrality when even a UNO [upazila nirbahi officer] visits localities to solicit votes for a major party?"

Dr Habiba Akhtar Chowdhury, member of Central Working Council and campaigner of the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, reported 13-14 documented cases of physical assaults on female party workers.

"We went to the Election Commission with videos of our sisters being attacked on the streets. We were met with a 'chilling indifference'. We were heated with urgency; they were cold."

When they demanded action, the commission simply redirected them to local authorities.

"If we have to go to local authorities for everything, why is the Election Commission even there?"

IDENTITY AS COMMODITY
The candidates also highlighted how economic dependence and low literacy reduce female voters to a "silent vote bank."

"Despite comprising 52pc of the electorate, women in areas like Dhamrai remain politically invisible," Nabila said, describing men openly "trading" women's National ID cards, treating them as commodities rather than citizens.

This systemic theft of agency is reinforced by inadequate voter education: many women do not know the candidates and simply follow instructions from husbands, sons, or fathers.

Jara argued that this lack of female representation in decision-making leads to a catastrophic failure in addressing basic human needs -- issues that disproportionately cripple women's lives.

In her constituency, she found that utility crises, such as the chronic shortage of cooking gas, were viewed as peripheral by male leaders but were central to women's survival.

"Systems disproportionately affect women, yet women's political agency is absent from the rooms where decisions are made -- neither in nominations, nor finance committees, nor the cabinet, nor in policy-making. These issues should not just be 'women's burden'; both men and women must treat them as national issues."

This systemic neglect is further masked by what Meghna described as the "charity mask" of political corruption.

"The public often leans toward a 'mafia' candidate because he spends lavishly during festivals -- handing out soap, oil, and blankets.

"The voters often do not stop to think that this money is actually looted or earned unethically. Honest, policy-driven politics is becoming helpless against this manufactured 'charity' image."

THE DIGITAL BATTLEFIELD
Beyond financial and structural barriers, female candidates face a relentless war of coordinated delegitimisation online.

Rumeen, who has endured 15 years of online abuse, calls it a systemic attempt to weaponise women's identities.

"I started politics 15 years ago as a single woman -- an easy target... Now we see AI and deepfakes, but the motive remains the same: character assassination. I may have developed a resistance overtime. But why should every woman be forced to develop such a thick skin against filth?"

She also criticised agencies like the National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre, whose effectiveness remains unclear.

Jara added, "For women, it is about coordinated character assassination and delegitimisation... Men are attacked too, but for women, the target is always their personal character. It's subtle and sinister. When these are read or shared at dinner tables, it plants a seed of doubt in voters' minds."

CHANGE STILL POSSIBLE
Despite the "cancerous" systemic inertia described by Nabila -- where parts of society instinctively defend a corrupt system -- there remains an undeniable hunger for reform.

Jara offered a defiant note of hope. "There is an appetite for change. It always seems impossible until it's done. As long as people hold onto the hope that change is possible, the politics of 'money and muscle' will come to an end. The ground is fertile, but we need more agents to act on it."

No surrender

FROM PAGE 1
"In this attack, the American terrorists' air warfare centre, satellite communication centre, early warning radars, and fire control radars were hit," the Guards said in a statement, according to Tasnim news agency.

Dubai airport, the world's busiest for international traffic, briefly suspended all operations yesterday after an aerial interception in the area.

Iran's Guards also said they had targeted the oil tanker Prima in the Gulf as it attempted to cross the narrow Strait of Hormuz, a key chokepoint for global shipping that Iran has effectively closed.

A spokesperson for the Guards yesterday challenged Trump to deploy US naval vessels to escort oil tankers through the strait, warning that they will meet with fatal blows. The US Navy could begin escorting oil tankers through the Strait of Hormuz if necessary, Trump said on Tuesday.

At least nine vessels have been attacked since the war began.

Amid the tensions, Saudi Arabia's Defence Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman yesterday urged Iran to "avoid miscalculation". His comment came a day ahead of the meeting of the foreign ministers of the Arab League to discuss Iranian attacks on several of the group's members.

Revolutionary Guards also said they struck three positions of separatist groups in Iraq's Kurdistan region at 4:30am local time. A spokesman for the armed forces warned that if separatist groups in the Kurdistan region took any action against Iran's territorial integrity, "we will crush them."

Earlier reports said the CIA and Israel were preparing Kurdish groups to infiltrate Iran and support efforts to bring about regime change.

On Friday, drones struck airports and oil facilities in Iraq, and the US-led troops shot down several over the Kurdish city of Erbil after a warning of possible attacks on hotels.

Late Friday, Baghdad International Airport, which houses a military base and a US diplomatic facility, "came

under a series of attacks" with drones and missiles, a security official told AFP.

Fire also broke out in offices and warehouses belonging to US firms Halliburton and KBR after a drone attack in Iraq's Basra targeted a compound housing employees of foreign oil companies.

Now in its second week, the war was sparked by joint Israeli and US airstrikes on February 28 that killed Iranian supreme leader Ali Khamenei and destroyed military, administrative and security infrastructure.

The conflict has since widened to Lebanon, as well as Cyprus in the EU, Turkey and Azerbaijan -- and reached as far as waters off Sri Lanka, where US forces sank an Iranian warship with a torpedo.

Meanwhile, Trump on Friday said major US defence companies have agreed to quadruple production of advanced weapons.

"The largest US defence manufacturing companies" have "agreed to quadruple Production of the 'Exquisite Class' Weaponry," Trump said in a post on Truth Social, referring to advanced, high-precision military hardware.

In another development, the US State Department approved the "emergency" sale of 12,000 bomb casings to Israel. The requested sale of 1,000 pound bomb casings, worth an estimated \$151.8 million, was approved by the State Department's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, according to a press release.

The Iranian health ministry put the civilian death toll at 926 on Friday, with around 6,000 injured -- numbers that AFP could not independently verify. It did not add military casualties.

Israel has also intensified its air strikes on Lebanon, repeatedly striking and ordering the evacuation of Beirut's densely populated southern suburbs, where the Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah holds sway.

Lebanon's health ministry said at least 294 people have been killed in Israeli air strikes. In addition to the toll, 300,000 people in the country had been

DAMAGE TO US MILITARY SITES HIT BY IRAN



BASE IN MANAMA, BAHRAIN, MARCH 1



ALI AL-SALEM BASE, KUWAIT, MARCH 1



WARNING RADER, QATAR, MARCH 3



PRINCE SULTAN BASE, SAUDI ARABIA, MARCH 5

forced to flee their homes, the Norwegian Refugee Council said.

Global stock markets have slumped, while crude oil prices have surged, with analysts warning that there appears to be no clear path to ending a conflict that US and Israeli officials have suggested could last a month or more.

Though Iranian retaliation has been

inflicted widely across the Middle East, US rivals China and Russia have stayed largely out of the fray despite their ties to the Islamic Republic.

Russian President Vladimir Putin voiced support for an "immediate" ceasefire during a phone call with Iranian counterpart Masoud Pezeshkian on Friday, the Kremlin said.

US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said the United States is "not concerned" about reports that Russia is providing intelligence to Iran on US troop positions and movements.

While declining to confirm the reports, Hegseth, in an interview with CBS's "60 Minutes", said: "We're tracking everything."

Eid shopping ends in tragedy

Father, daughter die under truck in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A father and his daughter went out for Eid shopping, but their return home ended in tragedy on Dhaka's streets.

Four people, including a female student and her father, were killed in two road crashes in the capital on Friday night.

In the first incident, Saju Ahmed Sumon, 45, a public works department official, and his only daughter, Sumaiya Ahmed Trisha, 19, died in the Science Laboratory area when a truck ran over their motorcycle around 10:30pm.

Trisha's uncle Ripon Ahmed Shakil said Trisha went out with her father in the evening to buy dresses for Eid.

They first went to a shop at Asad Gate. After searching for a long time, she could not find a dress she liked. She later called her mother and said she had not found anything suitable and that they were heading back home in Shahjahanpur.

Her mother then asked her to buy a pair of shoes from Chourangi on Elephant Road on their way home.

Following that request, the father and daughter were heading towards Elephant Road when the accident occurred.

Shakil said Trisha secured GPA 5 in this year's HSC examinations. As she had studied science, her father wanted her to pursue medicine, and preparations were underway to admit her to a private medical college.

Sub-Inspector Mahmudul Hasan of New Market Police Station said victim Sumon worked at the public works department office in Segunbagicha and the family lived in South Shahjahanpur.

He said Sumon and his daughter were returning home on a motorcycle when a truck hit and ran over the vehicle in front of the mosque near Science Laboratory.

Sumon died on the spot.

Trisha was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital in critical condition.

Pubali Home Loan
just a **click** away

Apply online - instantly know your loan limit.
Your loan now at your fingertips.

• Flat • Office • Construction • Renovation

Scan QR code or <https://applyhomeloan.pubalibankbd.com>



পূবালী ব্যাংক পিএলসি
PUBALI BANK PLC.

AAA
Rated Bank

ISO/IEC
27001:2022

Open your
Account
from anywhere

PI Banking-
a Pubali Bank apps

ইসলামী ব্যাংকিং সেবা প্রদানে 'ইসলামী ব্যাংকিং কর্ণার' পূবালী ব্যাংকের প্রায় সকল শাখা এবং উপশাখায়

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2026



PM vows equal rights for men and women

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman yesterday said the government wants to build a Bangladesh where men and women will enjoy equal rights and women will work in the family, state and society with respect, dignity and security.

"In our society, let equality be a promise, dignity a reality, and empowerment the foundation of development," he said in a message marking International Women's Day to be observed today (March 8).

The day will be observed this year with the theme -- "Today's steps, tomorrow's justice: Protect the rights of women and girls."

The premier said sustainable development of a country is possible only when women's rights, SEE PAGE 10 COL 1

Workplaces to Himalayas, women keep facing barriers

Say speakers at event organised by Prothom Alo at Chhayanaut

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Women in Bangladesh continue to face an "extra mile" of institutional resistance despite proving their abilities in fields ranging from journalism and forensic medicine to sports and politics, speakers said at an event yesterday.

Marking International Women's Day 2026, the event -- organised by Prothom Alo and supported by City Alo -- was held at the Chhayanaut Auditorium in the capital.

At the event, speakers highlighted the administrative and social barriers that still hinder women's progress in Bangladesh.

Dr Mumtaz Ara, associate professor of forensic medicine at Dhaka Medical College, pointed to the critical shortage of female forensic experts.

Having conducted more than 1,000 autopsies, she said the lack of female doctors in medico-legal examinations, particularly in rape cases, directly obstructs the judicial process.

"When conducting examinations for rape victims, female doctors are required. There is even a High Court order regarding this. Yet the number of female physicians specialising in this field remains very low," she said.

Dr Ara said increasing female participation in forensic medicine could significantly speed up the judicial process.

Responding to a question about pressure to alter reports in sensitive cases, she said, "You

“We are still asked how five women can travel to the Himalayas 'alone'. Since we do not have a male companion with us, society assumes we are alone.”

Yasmin Lisa
Member of an expedition of team comprising five women

have to conquer both greed and fear. If you can overcome these two things, you can survive. I do not know what destiny holds next, but I remain steadfast."

Zyma Islam, senior reporter at The Daily Star, reflected on her 14-year career in investigative journalism, where women remain under-represented.

"Throughout this entire time, I held on to my position by gritting my teeth," she said. "I did this because I knew that if I left, my place would likely be filled by ten men standing in line, and there might not be a single woman to replace me."

She said newsroom diversity is essential for comprehensive and inclusive storytelling.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 5



Ensure greater participation of women in JS

Demand rights activists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Women's rights activists yesterday expressed concern over the low participation of women in the recent parliamentary election, saying political parties nominated very few female candidates and only a small number won in direct contests.

They made the remarks at a programme organised by the International Women's Day Committee at Manik Mia Avenue, titled "The 13th National Parliament Election: Women's Representation in Parliament -- Reality and Expectations".

Tamanna Khan Popi, coordinator of the protest and a member of Naripokkho, said women's participation in direct parliamentary seats had generally increased over the years, with a few exceptions. However, the latest election saw a significant drop in both nominations and victories for women, she added.

Organisers said women received only a small share

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1

From ridicule to resilience

Asma overcomes obstacles to becoming a changemaker

JAHID HASAN, Shariatpur

Asma Akter, 38, a woman with disability from Shariatpur, has overcome myriad obstacles to eventually become a changemaker by lifting other women through her entrepreneurial venture.

Asma, who has dwarfism, had faced widespread ridicule in earlier years but remained steadfast in her aim of making a difference.

In 2014, she started Alpana Ladies' Corner, a block boutique production unit in the Palong Middle Bazar area



of Shariatpur Sadar upazila with an initial capital of Tk 1 lakh. Alongside this, she provided training on block boutique printing to 400 women free of charge. Some of the trainees later began working at Asma's production unit upon completion of training.

Over the past 12 years, Asma has expanded her work further into jute-

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1



Speakers at the 14th session of The Daily Star Itihias Adda, titled 'Religion-governed state or state-governed religion?', held in memory of Abul Mansur Ahmad at The Daily Star Centre in the capital yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

Misuse of religion in politics fuels conflict in South Asia

Say speakers at Star Itihias Adda

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Attempts to use religion to consolidate political power have repeatedly led to conflict, deprivation, and crisis in South Asia, speakers said at a discussion yesterday.

Recalling the ideas of renowned journalist, politician and litterateur Abul Mansur Ahmad, they said the use of religion as a political tool ultimately harms both faith and the state.

They made the remarks at the 14th session of The Daily Star Itihias Adda, titled "Religion-governed state or state-governed religion?", held in memory of Abul Mansur Ahmad at The Daily Star Centre in the capital.

Researcher on South-East Asian history Altaf Parvez said Abul Mansur Ahmad was not only a commentator on political history but also someone directly involved in shaping it.

Referring to Mansur Ahmad's essay on whether religion should govern the state or the state should govern religion, Altaf said the writer had argued that a religion-governed state was neither possible nor beneficial.

He said Mansur Ahmad explained that religion belongs to the realm of human conscience, while the state operates in the political sphere where people relate to it as citizens.

"But when the two are brought together, serious disasters occur," Altaf said.

He said the consequences of such an approach became clear in 1971, when Pakistan attempted to hold together deep injustice and deprivation through religion.

Altaf said Pakistan continues to follow a similar approach in Balochistan. The region holds some of South Asia's largest reserves of copper and gold, yet the opinions of local people are often ignored by the Islamabad-centred ruling establishment despite ongoing extraction of resources.

According to him, the crisis in Pakistan stems from the failure to recognise that a state created solely on the basis of religion cannot sustain itself.

"To sustain a state, there must be good governance, fair distribution of

SEE PAGE 10 COL 7

Scuffle at Shahbagh over playing March 7 speech

Seven detained from Chankharpul

DU CORRESPONDENT

A scuffle broke out in front of Shahbagh Police Station last night over the playing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's historic March 7 speech, during which a Dhaka University student was beaten after being accused of being affiliated with the banned Chhatra League.

The tension began after police detained Asif Ahmed, a former DU student and a BCL leader, for playing the March 7 speech on a loudspeaker at the Chankharpul intersection earlier in the evening.

Ramna Division Deputy Commissioner Masud Alam said police had received information in the afternoon that a DU unit BCL leader was

SEE PAGE 10 COL 3

Priority banking

Eastern Bank PLC.

introducing EBL Visa Infinite Debit Card



Exclusive Benefits

- > Exclusive Welcome vouchers and Premium Lifestyle discount propositions
- > Complimentary Global Lounge Access through Priority Pass
- > Unlimited access in EBL Skylounge at Dhaka and Chattogram Airport
- > Complimentary Pick and Drop services at Dhaka and Chattogram Airport

Conditions apply

16230

eb.com.bd

myeb

VISA
Infinite

Go for major reform, not just small-scale health initiatives

Say experts at dialogue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Health experts and professionals yesterday suggested that the new government undertake major institutional reforms in the health sector from the start; otherwise, small-scale initiatives would not be sustainable.

The comments came at a dialogue titled "Actionable Priority Agendas for Achieving UHC" at CIRDAP auditorium, organised by Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) and the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Forum with Unicef's support.

Speakers also asked to remove barriers holding back service delivery in the health sector and to place greater emphasis on primary healthcare to achieve UHC by 2030.

Aminul Hasan, member secretary of the UHC Forum, said the sector is facing several system constraints, including high out-of-pocket expenditures, fragmented service delivery systems and weak referral systems.

Bangladesh will not be able to achieve UHC without reforming the existing system, he added.

Public Health Expert Mushtaq Husain said the government has to go for major institutional reforms like forming a permanent health commission and a separate directorate for public health and health services.

Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairman of the PPRC, said the country has an extensive health infrastructure that is trapped in low productivity with the service coverage index at 54 percent only. Although, our health sector is underfunded, a significant amount of annual budget allocation remains unused.

He suggested proper integration of three key organisations - union sub centres, family welfare centres and community clinics - and to immediately fill the 40 percent vacancy at the field level.

MA Muhi, state minister for health ministry, said the recommendations presented here are mostly identical to those outlined in BNP's manifesto and the government has already formed a special cell to implement the manifesto.

The government will introduce e-health card and appoint one lakh health workers in primary healthcare in phases, he added.

Prof Syed Abdul Hamid of Institute of Health Economics; Prof Syed Akram Hossain, a member of the Health Sector Reform Commission and Prof Abul Kalam Azad, former director general of DGHS, gave presentations.

The country has an extensive health infrastructure that is trapped in low productivity with the service coverage index at 54 percent only.

HOSSAIN ZILLUR RAHMAN
Executive chairman, PPRC



PHOTO: STAR

Defying hardship and terrain, hill women support their families

RIKORS CHAKMA, Rangamati

Every Saturday and Wednesday, Alo Rani Chakma makes a long journey from her village in Naniarchar upazila of Rangamati to Banarupa Bazar in the district town.

Carrying fresh produce, she boards an engine-driven boat at dawn and reaches the bustling market between 6:00 and 7:00am. After spending the morning selling her vegetables, she heads back home around noon. The income she earns from these trips helps sustain her family.

Alo Rani's story is not unique. Across the remote hills of Rangamati, many indigenous women like her are quietly carrying the responsibilities of their households.

Travelling long distances through hilly terrain and waterways, they bring agricultural produce and handmade goods to local markets, determined to earn a living for their families.

Many of these women are primary breadwinners for their families, a duty they fulfil with resilience and perseverance.

Bhagya Devi Chakma, from the Sapchhari area of Rangamati Sadar upazila, spends most of the year working on a waist loom.

Patently weaving thread by

thread, she makes traditional hill women's clothing known as pinon-hadi.

The garments she produces are both practical and cultural. "I wear them myself and also sell them to customers, using the income to support my household," she said.

Like her, many other hill women are turning their weaving skills into a source of livelihood while keeping their traditions alive.



Yesterday morning, at Banarupa Market, Shyamoli Chakma was seen arranging plums, sweet pumpkins and potatoes on a small stall.

A resident of Bandukbhanga union in Sadar upazila, she had arrived by boat at around 7:00am.

After selling her produce, she planned to buy some necessities

for her family before returning home.

Another seller, Nirala Chakma, who sells pinon-hadi, said the work has given women a sense of independence.

"We are becoming self-sufficient by selling these traditional clothes," she said.

"At the same time, we are preserving our tradition. It feels good to see that our traditional clothes are now reaching people abroad. Members of our communities in different countries also wear them on various occasions," she added.

Nuku Chakma, a member of the CHT Women Resource Network, said the role of hill women in society is gradually changing.

"Hill women are no longer sitting at home," she told The Daily Star.

"They are taking responsibility for their families, running small businesses like men, and learning to stand on their own feet. This is certainly hopeful."

She believes economic participation is crucial for women's empowerment.

"When women earn, they become self-reliant and better able to support their families. It increases their confidence and also raises their value within the family," she said.

'A pragmatic policy approach for the country'

Pledges Jamaat ameer at iftar hosted for diplomats

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami will pursue a "principled and pragmatic" policy approach that safeguards Bangladesh's sovereignty while promoting economic development, peaceful international relations and inclusive democracy, said party Ameer Shaifur Rahman yesterday.

Addressing an iftar hosted in honour of diplomats at Dhaka's parliament complex, he expressed appreciation for the support and

SEE PAGE 10 COL 8



Stepfather admits killing Narsingdi girl: police

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

Police yesterday claimed that the recent murder of a teenage girl in Madhabdi of Narsingdi was committed by her stepfather out of frustration.

The accused, Md Ashraf Ali, 45, has confessed to the crime in court, Narsingdi Superintendent of Police Abdullah Al Faruq claimed at a press briefing yesterday noon.

A total of nine people, including Ashraf Ali, have so far been arrested over the killing of the girl named Amena.

According to a press release issued by Narsingdi police, Amena had been in a relationship with Nur Mohammad alias Nura, 28.

In his confessional statement before the court, Ashraf said on the night of February 25, he took Amena with him, telling her they were going to

SEE PAGE 10 COL 7

STATUTORY NOTICE

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF BANGLADESH
HIGH COURT DIVISION
(STATUTORY ORIGINAL JURISDICTION)
COMPANY MATTER NO. 209 OF 2026

An application under Section 81(2) and Section 85(3) of the Companies Act, 1994
Md. Nazrul Islam - - - - - Petitioner

-VERSUS-

Prasine International Limited and another - - - - - Respondents.
Take Notice that an application under Section 81(2) and Section 85(3) of the Companies Act, 1994 for condonation of delay in holding the AGM for the calendar years 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025 of Prasine International Limited was filed before the Hon'ble High Court Division. Upon hearing of the application on 01.03.2026, a single Bench of the High Court Division comprising His Lordship Mrs. Justice Kazi Zinat Hoque was pleased to admit said application and also pleased to issue notices upon the Respondents as well as by way of publication in daily newspaper within 3(three) weeks from date. If you are interested to oppose the said application you may appear before the Hon'ble Court either in person or through an Advocate. Copy of the said application may be obtained from the under mentioned advocate on payment.

Md. Wabaydullah Emon
Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh; 0162-5758259

MEMBERS AND CREDITORS MEETING

Barnali Collections Ltd.
IN THE SUPREME COURT OF BANGLADESH
HIGH COURT DIVISION
(STATUTORY ORIGINAL JURISDICTION)
COMPANY MATTER NO. 169 OF 2026

IN THE MATTER OF:
Barnali Collections Ltd and Another - - - - - Petitioners

-VERSUS-

The Registrar, Joint Stock Companies and Firms and Others - - - - - Respondents

Notice is hereby given that an application under section 228 read with 229 of the Companies Act, 1994 ("the Act") is filed for confirmation of the scheme of amalgamation of the Barnali Collections Ltd. (Transferee Company) with the Barnali Textile and Printing Industries (Pvt.) Ltd. (Transferor Company) with its assets and liabilities. That a Bench of Hon'ble High Court Division of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of Bangladesh comprising of Her Lordship Ms. Justice Kazi Zinat Hoque was pleased to admit the application upon hearing of the petitioners on 15.02.2026. That a meeting of the members and creditors of the Barnali Collections Ltd. will be held on 31 March/2026 at 10:00 a.m., and a separate meeting of the creditors of the Company will be held on the same day at 11:00 a.m., at the registered office of the Company situated at Floor 8A, Bays Park Heights, Plot No. 522 (Old), 2 (New), Road No. 8 (Old), 9 (New), Dhanmondi, Dhaka. A copy of the said application may be obtained from the undersigned.

Mohammad Golam Kibria FCS
Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh
GK CHAMBRERS, Meherba Plaza, Suite # 8-B, (Lift # 8)
33, Tophkhana Road, Dhaka-1000. Mobile: 01707-429282

STATUTORY NOTICE

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF BANGLADESH
HIGH COURT DIVISION
(STATUTORY ORIGINAL JURISDICTION)
COMPANY MATTER NO. 169 OF 2026

IN THE MATTER OF:
Barnali Collections Ltd and Another - - - - - Petitioners

-VERSUS-

The Registrar, Joint Stock Companies and Firms and Others - - - - - Respondents

Notice is hereby given that an application under section 228 read with 229 of the Companies Act, 1994 ("the Act") is filed for confirmation of the scheme of amalgamation of the Barnali Collections Ltd. (Transferee Company) with the Barnali Textile and Printing Industries (Pvt.) Ltd. (Transferor Company) with its assets and liabilities. Upon hearing of the application on 15.02.2026, the Hon'ble Ms. Justice Kazi Zinat Hoque has been pleased to admit the said application and directed to file an affidavit in-compliance within 5 (five) weeks. Any one desirous of opposing the said application, you may appear before the Hon'ble High Court either in person or through Advocate. Copy of the said application may be obtained from the undersigned on payment of nominal fees.

Mohammad Golam Kibria FCS
Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh
GK CHAMBRERS, Meherba Plaza, Suite # 8-B, (Lift # 8)
33, Tophkhana Road, Dhaka-1000. Mobile: 01707-429282

When women earn, they become self-reliant and better able to support their families. It increases their confidence and also raises their value within the family.

NUKU CHAKMA
A member of the CHT Women Resource Network

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
Director's Office
Mymensingh Medical College Hospital, Mymensingh
Phone No. 029966-66061
Web: www.mmch.gov.bd, E-mail: mmch@hospi.dghs.gov.bd
Ref. No. MMCH/Medical & Equipment/e-Tender/2026/1373
Date: 07/03/2026

Invitation for Tenders (Goods)

Re-Tender Notice

This is an online tender, where only e-Tenders will be accepted in e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, please register on e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>). For more details, please contact support desk contract numbers.

e-Tender are invited in e-GP System Portal (www.eprocure.gov.bd) by Brigadier General Md. Zakir Hossain, Director, Mymensingh Medical College Hospital for the Procurement of:

Tender/Proposal Id Name of goods Tender/proposal publication date & time Tender/closing/opening date & time

Tender/Proposal Id	Name of goods	Tender/proposal publication date & time	Tender/closing/opening date & time
1241114	Procurement of Medical Equipment for the F.Y.2025-2026 at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.	08-Mar-2026 12.00	16-Mar-2026 12.00

e-Tender details can be downloaded on e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for pursuer.

e-Tender will be accepted only as stated in above list; accepted tenders will be opened online immediately as stated in above list.

Brigadier General Md. Zakir Hossain
Director
Mymensingh Medical College Hospital
Mymensingh
Phone No. 029966-66061
E-mail: mmch@hospi.dghs.gov.bd

GD-512

Government of The People's Republic of Bangladesh

Office of the Project Director

"Developing a cost-effective and sustainable erosion protection strategy for medium and small rivers of Bangladesh and upgrading the research facilities of the River Research Institute" Project
River Research Institute, 72 Green Road, Dhaka

Phone: +880-2-58155538 Fax: 0631-63065 Web Site: www.rrri.gov.bd

Memo No.-RR/SMR Project/2026/07

Date: 07/03/2026

CORRIGENDUM NOTICE

Invitation Tender Notice No.: RRI/SMR Project/G-07/26 Dated 04/03/2026 invited in the national e-GP portal (ID No. 1239511) and published in the National and Local News Papers have been amended in the invitation of Tender (IFT) notice and Tender Data sheet (TDS) as below.

Package Name	Old Value	New Value
Package No- G-07: Procurement of Mini Current Meter for Discharge Measurement	In TDS, Sub-Section D (e-Tender Preparation), ITT Clause 30: "The amount of the Tender Security Shall be 2.60 lakh in favor of the Project Director, RRI, Dhaka"	In TDS, Sub-Section D (e-Tender Preparation), ITT Clause 30: "The amount of the Tender Security Shall be 2.58 lakh in favor of the Project Director, RRI, Dhaka"

This corrigendum will be the part of the Tender document. All other terms and conditions and requirements will remain unchanged.

(Dr. Moniruzzaman Khan Eusufzai)
Chief Scientific Officer & Project Director
pd_smrproject@rrri.gov.bd

GD-513



GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH OFFICE OF COMMANDANT (SUPERINTENDENT OF POLICE) IN-SERVICE TRAINING CENTER, NETROKONA.

Memo No: 254 /(ITC)

Dated: 05.03.2026.

e-TENDER NOTICE NO-01/2025-2026

(Open Tendering Method)

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

Sl No.	Tender ID	Name of Work	Last Selling Date & Time	Closing/Opening Date & Time
01	1238384	Repair works of Inservice Training Center Netrokona.	29-Mar-2026 17:30	30-Mar-2026 13:30

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 system portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fee's for downloading the e-Tender Documents from the National System portal have to be deposited, online through any registered Bank's branches. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP system portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

(Kamal Lal Sarkar)
Bp-7708121599

Commandant (Superintendent of Police)
In-service Training Center, Netrokona.
Phone: 02-998827341, Fax-02-9966514407
Email-comistcnetrokona@police.gov.bd

GD-509

Closing Policy Gaps to Unlock Climate Finance for Women and Youth

A roundtable titled “Empowering Women and Youth for Climate Resilience: Bridging Policy and Funding Gaps” was held on October 12, 2025, at The Daily Star Centre in Dhaka. The event was jointly organised by The Asia Foundation, The Daily Star, and the Centre for Climate Change and Environmental Research (C3ER) under the Green Voices project—an initiative supported by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and implemented by the Asia Foundation in partnership with Bonhishikha and The Earth. The discussion highlighted policy, financing, and institutional barriers limiting women’s and youth’s participation in climate governance. Through this dialogue, Green Voices seeks to foster inclusive approaches to climate action in Bangladesh and open pathways toward potentially transformative outcomes. On the occasion of International Women’s Day, this supplement reaffirms a shared commitment to an equitable society where every woman can live with dignity and exercise her leadership with confidence.



Farah Kabir
Country Director
ActionAid
Bangladesh

For 15-20 years, climate justice work in Bangladesh has highlighted persistent gaps: lack of disaggregated data, weak inter-ministerial coordination, and inadequate investment. Women and youth, once underestimated, now clearly understand climate impacts and actively contribute to solutions, from grassroots adaptation strategies to emergency response and renewable energy practices. Policies have evolved from these community-led initiatives, yet implementation and funding gaps remain. Advocacy must focus on increasing investment, with ambitious targets, gender-sensitive and youth-specific platforms, capacity building, and continuous political accountability. The solutions I would like to propose include creating a national climate fund ring-fenced for women and youth, developing a comprehensive climate data dashboard aggregating NGO and government data, and strengthening local government access to climate information. Integrating climate into education curricula and supporting research, innovation, and venture funding for youth-led and women-led initiatives are essential. Moreover, sustained activism, transparent governance, and strategic funding are critical to transform policies into real adaptation and resilience outcomes.



Dilruba Haider
Programme
Specialist, DRR/CCA/
HAS
UN Women

Work on climate change, gender equality, and disaster risk reduction must continue, despite limited progress over the years. While 25 ministries are engaged in climate-related actions, this should not be viewed as fragmentation but rather as progress, since these issues are inherently cross-cutting and require an all-of-government approach. However, duplication of efforts exists, making stronger coordination essential. A model similar to the inter-ministerial disaster management committee could help align actions, reduce overlap, and enhance collective impact. The second key point is the need for disaggregated data. Without baselines and indicators, meaningful target setting is impossible. All actors, including government and development partners, must prioritise collecting and reporting disaggregated data, even within routine programme monitoring. Finally, social norm change is crucial. Progress on gender,



acknowledging that patriarchy harms men as well as women, and that it operates within women, too. Addressing knowledge gaps, such as confusion between weather and climate, is essential, especially in a country as climate-vulnerable as Bangladesh. Inclusive policy framework and sustainable financing are needed. Research shows that intersecting factors, including location, time, class, clothing, pregnancy, and menstruation, influence women’s climate-related stress differently, even within the same workplace. These inequities reduce productivity and fuel verbal violence, ultimately affecting national growth. Bangladesh needs national representative research, a digital knowledge hub, inclusive metrics, and recognition of youth and women as active agents. Equally critical is engaging men to ensure empowered women are supported, not resisted.



Fariha Sultana Aumi
Chair
Brighters
Youth,

like women, are not a homogeneous group. While many young people now speak on climate issues, very few reach decision-making or leadership spaces. This gap persists because policies and projects treat youth as recipients rather than active agents. Once a project ends, their engagement ends too, leaving no long-term space to apply their skills. Urban-centric project design further excludes rural and marginalised youth whose needs remain overlooked. Capacity-building efforts often lack a bottom-up approach, limiting real skill development. Adolescents are even more invisible, with no sustained platforms to nurture their leadership. Meaningful engagement must integrate youth perspectives, from policy design to implementation, ensuring

adaptation finance. We must raise this allocation to at least 1% to address the glaring policy gap. Second, although policies like BCCSAP and NAP include gender-responsive data, project templates, especially within the Planning Commission, often lack clear indicators, goals, and dedicated budgets for inclusion. Third, institutional coordination remains weak; stronger collaboration among ERD, the Planning Commission, the Ministry of Disaster Management, the Ministry of Environment and MoWCA could enable large-scale inclusive resilience programs. Finally, despite 20 years of adaptation, we still lack learning documents, which are essential for improving future projects and ensuring meaningful youth inclusion. So, this learning integration is extremely important to ensure youth inclusion.



Mousumi Pervin
Senior Climate
Change Officer
Asian Development
Bank

Bangladesh faces a major climate finance gap: the NAP requires USD 8.5 billion annually for adaptation over the next 27 years, but only USD 3.5 billion is currently available from domestic and international sources, leaving a USD 5 billion shortfall each year. Before addressing group-specific needs, women, children, elderly, the overall financing gap must be reduced. Policy implementation also remains weak. Multiple climate policies exist, but responsibilities are unclear; recommendations must specify whether the government, NGOs, civil society, or banks should act. Government capacity is limited, with insufficient staff to ensure inclusive, community-based processes, and leadership changes disrupt continuity. Civil society generates strong pilot models, but scaling remains minimal. A recent study highlights coordination gaps and the absence of local voices. In response, the government has launched the Bangladesh Climate Development Partnership and approved a Locally Led Adaptation Framework to strengthen coordination and local participation.



Farah Anzum
Country Lead,
Bangladesh
Global Strategic
Communications
Council (GSCC)

Women and youth may be mentioned in policies like the NAP and NDC, but they remain largely absent from climate mitigation and energy policies such as the Energy Master Plan and the Renewable Energy Policy. Meaningful participation requires not just policy references but concrete implementation plans that ensure their involvement. Climate finance also poses challenges, while funding exists, women- and youth-led organisations struggle to access it due to dependency on larger intermediaries and restrictive conditions. Dedicated national and international funding windows are essential. Moreover, effective two-way communication mechanisms are also missing, leaving many youths and women unaware of opportunities, while women remain underrepresented in climate and energy media coverage. Finally, Bangladesh must enable regional and global engagement so women and youth can participate as genuine decision-makers, and learning documentation must be integrated into project indicators to strengthen future interventions.



Sohanur Rahman
Executive
Coordinator
YouthNet Global

Coming from grassroots activism in Jhalokati and Barishal, I want to highlight persistent gaps in mainstreaming youth, women, and gender-diverse voices in Bangladesh’s climate policies. While terms like GDC, Gender, Disability, and Social Inclusion appear in NDCs, these remain cross-cut and rarely enter core planning. Youth, in particular, lack dedicated representation and budgeting in climate initiatives, with no Youth Ministry presence in climate allocations. Similarly, meaningful engagement of journalists and local communities is limited. So, I would like to emphasise the need to shift from gender-sensitive to gender-responsive and gender-transformative approaches and call for integrated planning to include youth and women at the local level. Finally, I think it’s urgent to remove systemic barriers that prevent youth-led organisations from accessing funding and fully participating in climate action.



Jannat Ara Shifa
Gender Analyst
International Centre
for Climate Change
and Development
(ICCAD)

I see progress from the trickle-down theory to sustainable development, but women and marginalised communities are still treated as tools, not active participants. Field experience in Khulna and Barguna shows that community structures like water management groups collapse after projects end due to a lack of funding, monitoring, and post-project mechanisms. Policies often include many components but fail to measure micro-level impacts such as gendered labour burdens, time poverty, and unequal access to resources. Women’s adaptation roles and successes remain neglected, creating a major information and decision-making gap. Complex finance processes further limit local access, and women remain token participants even in global spaces like COP. According to me, inclusion must evolve into a transformative change that challenges gender norms, empowers real decision-making, and strengthens policy implementation and financing.



M. Zakir Hossain Khan
Chief Executive
Change Initiative

I believe women’s and youth’s rights must be recognised as non-negotiable natural rights, not privileges or policy favours. Access to water, health, and climate-resilient living should be guaranteed everywhere, not just in Bangladesh but globally. Research organisations and think tanks must adopt a “think and do” approach, engaging youth in real-time data collection on environmental hazards, funded through mechanisms like pollution or carbon taxes. Climate finance must prioritise people: only 0.01% of global climate funds have targeted communities. Bangladesh should now actively pursue global funds and create dedicated proposal pools, with ERD leading the collaboration with youth organisations. Nationally, at least 30% of climate budgets should support youth-led, nature-based entrepreneurship. True resilience requires bottom-up, community-

driven financing, moving away from centralised, top-down models.



Banasree Niogee Mitra
Programme Director
Manusher Jonno
Foundation

Climate change impacts society, the economy, and human potential, but the primary responsibility lies with the government, which alone possesses the mechanisms to act. Civil society, media, and other stakeholders can facilitate and raise awareness, but implementation and financial inclusion remain major gaps. Despite numerous policies—NDC, NAP, BCCSAP—alignment, budgeting, and actionable planning are weak, particularly for women, youth, indigenous people, and other marginalised groups. Inclusion must go beyond terminology; vulnerability should be leveraged to create change agents. Gender-responsive budgeting and intersectional analysis must inform fund allocation, including engagement of the Ministry of Education and local governments. Capacity-building, technology, and skills should be prioritised for those who need them most. Addressing these gaps requires comprehensive, integrated planning informed by ground-level realities and collective stakeholder effort.



A K M Sohel
Additional Secretary
and Wing Chief, (UN
Wing)
Economic Relations
Division
Ministry of Finance

Bangladesh has made progress in climate policy, having developed the NAP and updated its NDC, covering multiple sectors and establishing a baseline for international engagement. However, gaps remain, particularly in detailed budgeting for specific interventions, limiting climate finance mobilisation. Persistent climate events, like the February flood, which caused \$1.2 billion in losses, underscore the urgent need for innovative financing. Efforts include advocating for concessional debt aligned with vulnerability, streamlining GCF project approvals, and exploring capital market instruments such as green and blue bonds. Coordination mechanisms like the Bangladesh Climate Development Partnership (BCDP) aim to reduce overlap and include youth, gender, and private sector representation. Future priorities include climate finance taxonomy, climate-smart education, youth climate windows, gender-responsive budgeting, and leveraging domestic and diaspora resources. While grants and loans from GCF, GEF, and the Adaptation Fund have been received, greater self-reliance and inclusive, strategic financing are essential for Bangladesh to meet its adaptation and mitigation goals.



Tanjim Ferdous
In-Charge, NGOs and
Foreign Missions
The Daily Star
(Moderator of the
session)

Bangladesh remains at the forefront of the global climate crisis, with women and youth driving innovative, community-level solutions despite limited recognition and participation in decision-making. The recent study conducted by C3ER highlights persistent policy and financing gaps that hinder their meaningful inclusion. Today’s roundtable created a space to unpack these findings and explore how inclusive policies, fair access to finance and stronger institutional mechanisms could better empower women, youth and structurally excluded groups. The discussion aimed to generate actionable recommendations to ensure that women and youth are not just beneficiaries but leaders in building climate resilience.

Kazi Faisal Bin Seraj, Country Representative of The Asia Foundation, **Samira Yasmin**, Project Manager at The Asia Foundation, **Nafisa Navrin Chowdhury**, Resilient Infrastructure Specialist, Centre for Climate Change and Environmental Research at BRAC University, **Shorot Shadhin**, Project Coordinator, The Earth, and **Samina Yasmin**, Director of Bonhishikha also attended the event as discussants.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthen Youth & Women’s Meaningful Participation in Policy

Include youth perspectives at every policy stage and ensure youth and women are active decision-makers, not just token participants

2. Improve Policy Implementation and Accountability

Clearly assign responsibilities to ministries, NGOs, civil society, or the private sector, and improve government capacity to ensure continuity

3. Make Climate Finance Accessible to Youth & Women

Create direct funding windows (national & international) for youth- and women-led organisations and reduce bureaucratic barriers so small/local groups can access climate funds

4. Decentralise Climate Action & Ensure

Bottom-Up Approaches

Design policies and projects using a bottom-up model, include rural and climate-vulnerable voices, and invest in community-led, locally informed interventions

5. Strengthen Gender-Responsive & Age-Disaggregated Data

Mandate the use of gender- and age-disaggregated data in all projects and funding proposals.

6. Enhance Inter-Ministerial Coordination and Build Mechanisms for Learning

Operationalise national coordination structures and align planning and actions across ministries to avoid duplicated interventions

7. Expand Climate-Smart Education

Introduce climate-smart education to build knowledge to cultivate climate leadership among adolescents and gender-sensitive awareness early

youth, and other vulnerable groups remains slow because societal beliefs are not shifting. Integrating social norm change into all initiatives is vital.



Dr Tania Haque
Professor
Department of
Women & Gender
Studies, University of
Dhaka

A recent BRAC study on social norms revealed that 77% of youth believe a woman need not work if her husband earns, highlighting how interconnected gender norms continue to limit progress. Thus, social norm change requires

representation beyond major cities. Strong political commitment is essential to sustain inclusion through leadership changes. Ultimately, youth must be treated as a priority at every level, not as symbolic participants.



MD. Golam Rabbani
Associate Director
Climate Hub, BRAC

I want to highlight four key points. First, gender-focused climate finance is extremely low, only 0.05%, despite women making up 58% of Bangladesh’s 35 million farmers, and global data showing that small-scale farmers receive just 0.8% of

Do not dip into forex reserves

FROM PAGE 1

sources to settle fuel import payments instead of using the reserves, which stood at \$30.76 billion as of March 5. The current reserves cover just over five months of import bills.

They suggested forming an inter-ministerial crisis management committee to provide regular briefings to the public and help prevent panic over potential economic shocks.

They suggested that Bangladesh could negotiate arrangements with oil-exporting countries such as Saudi Arabia to allow deferred payment facilities for fuel imports.

Alternatively, the government could seek financial support from multilateral lenders such as the Asian Development Bank to settle energy import bills.

The economists also recommended diversifying energy import sources instead of relying heavily on the Middle East.

Importing fuel from alternative markets such as Brunei and Singapore could help reduce risks if supplies from the Middle East face disruption.

At the same time, they cautioned against immediately passing on higher fuel costs to consumers, warning that doing so could further accelerate inflation.

Bangladesh has been facing elevated inflation for more than three years. The inflation rose to 8.58 percent in January this year from 8.49 percent in December, according to official data.

Economists also advised the central bank not to reduce the policy interest rate at this stage. The policy rate is the rate at which banks borrow from the BB.

Currently, the rate stands at 10 percent after a series of increases since

2022 aimed at curbing inflation.

Lowering the rate now could worsen inflationary pressure. Instead, a rate cut could be considered later to stimulate investment once the immediate global uncertainties subside.

Mostaqur, who joined the BB on February 26, had earlier attempted to lower the policy rate, but the move stalled after one member of the MPC resigned and several economists opposed the move.

During Saturday's meeting, participants also discussed broader economic risks originating from escalating tensions in the Middle East, including the exchange of attacks between Iran, the US and Israel.

Officials present at the meeting said the Iran-US conflict could once again put pressure on the dollar and disrupt global financial flows. It may also negatively affect remittance inflows and raise concerns about energy supply stability.

The economists noted that remittances could face disruption if migrant workers encounter travel difficulties due to the conflict. However, they stressed that the remittance process should be made smoother to encourage expatriates to send money through formal channels.

They also advised the government to seek fast disbursement of pledged foreign loans, including those from the World Bank, to strengthen external financing.

In addition, they suggested seeking financing from the Islamic Development Bank to support fuel imports if necessary.

The economists further emphasised the need for stronger market management to prevent price

manipulation during the period of uncertainty.

They also urged proper implementation of government programmes aimed at easing inflationary pressure on low-income households, including the Family Card programme.

At the same time, they stressed the importance of ensuring adequate credit flow to small and medium-sized enterprises so that investment and employment generation are not hampered.

Bangladesh's foreign exchange reserves had declined significantly during the previous Awami League-led government due to rising global fuel prices and supply chain disruptions caused by the Ukraine war.

However, reserves have shown improvement during the interim government period due to strong remittance inflows, a relatively stable exchange rate and the suspension of dollar support from reserves for government imports.

Among those present were Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD); Fahmida Khatun, executive director of CPD; former chief economist of Bangladesh Bank Mustafa K Mujeri; Mohammad Abdur Razzaque, chairman of Research and Policy Integration for Development (RAPID); Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM); Masrur Reaz, chairman of Policy Exchange Bangladesh; AK Enamul Haque, director general of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS); and Nazmus Sadat Khan, senior economist at the World Bank's Dhaka office.

Unable to buy diesel, RMG factories

FROM PAGE 16

In Joydebpur, said he needs 200 litres of diesel a day to keep his 2,200-worker factory running at full capacity. But nearby pumps have refused to sell diesel in containers, prioritising vehicles instead.

As a result, his production has dropped to 60 percent capacity, reducing the daily output of 10,000 pieces of sweaters and knit items worth Tk 10 lakh.

A few other garment factories have reported similar struggles.

Anwar Hossain, managing director of Knit Studio Ltd in Board Bazar, could only manage 80 litres yesterday, enough for just one hour of operations, while enduring five hours of load-shedding.

He said he is fortunate to have some old stock of diesel at his factory. Anwar Hossain's unit employs 750 workers and produces 6,000 sweaters a day.

Another managing director of a factory in Zazor, requesting anonymity, said he needs 50-60 litres daily but has been unable to buy any fuel for two days, fearing a 30 percent production loss.

The factory, which employs 450 workers, produces 4,000 sweaters a day.

The government, however, insists fuel stocks are sufficient.

Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku said two vessels carrying fuel are due on March 9,

urging people not to crowd filling stations.

Mahmud Hasan Khan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said at least 30 factory owners reported similar problems in recent days.

The BGMEA is preparing a database of diesel-run factories to issue special cards allowing them to purchase fuel directly from filling stations.

Showkat Aziz Russell, president of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA), said he will also seek clarification from the energy ministry, as textile mills are suffering from gas shortages despite having confirmed work orders from international retailers and brands.

Curtailed, delayed Boi Mela

FROM PAGE 16

the fact that Dhaka city faces severe traffic congestion in the later part of the day during this month.

"Because of these realities, we suggested holding the fair either before or after Ramadan, but neither happened. As Ramadan will coincide with the fair for the next two or three years, I hope there will be advance planning on how to organise the fair effectively, either before or after Ramadan, because publishers are suffering immense losses," Mazharul added.

He further noted that small publishers are in a dire state, with many stalls seeing no sales at all. Some are unable to even cover the necessary expenses for their employees' tiltar.

Kaosar Ahammad, deputy manager of Prothoma Prokashon, said sales at the 2026 book fair are currently one-fifth of what they were in 2025 and one-tenth compared to 2024.

Tanvir Hasan, a private-sector employee, said the fair remains a special annual experience.

"I come every year because the atmosphere is unique. But this time I bought only one book," he said.

University student Nusrat Jahan said

she has reduced her budget for buying books due to the current economic situation.

Food inflation -- which affects ordinary Bangladeshis the most -- climbed to 8.29 percent in January, up nearly 0.6 percentage points from December, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS).

Renowned author Anisul Hoque said he had expected lower attendance due to the election and the overlap with Ramadan.

"Many publishers wanted the fair to be held after Eid, but it began late in February and continued into March. That timing inevitably reduced attendance and sales.

"Perhaps this is the lowest in the fair's history," he said. "Still, the fair has symbolic value. It brings together discussions, rituals and new books."

Author Zakir Talukder said it was already clear that this year's fair would struggle, arguing that Ramadan alone cannot explain the downturn since the event has been held during the fasting month before.

According to him, a more significant reason is the financial condition of the urban, educated lower-middle class, who make up the core buyers of books

Family Card pilot to cover 40,000 homes

FROM PAGE 16

election pledge of the BNP, would cost about Tk 5,000 crore a month and roughly Tk 60,000 crore a year.

The projected annual allocation would amount to nearly 12 percent of this fiscal year's revenue target, making it potentially the largest social spending commitment in Bangladesh's history.

The Family Card Piloting Implementation Guideline, 2026 prepared by the social welfare ministry envisions transforming the family card into a "Universal Social ID Card" for every citizen by 2030 and raising the social security budget to 3 percent of GDP by 2028.

At present, 95 social safety net programmes are run by 23 ministries. The allocation for the programmes is Tk 1.26 lakh crore this fiscal year, which is 1.87 percent of GDP.

Under the new scheme, cards will be issued in the name of the female head of household. Beneficiaries will be selected using Proxy Means Test (PMT) scoring, a scientific poverty assessment method.

Rural families owning 0.50 acres or less of homestead and cultivable land will be considered eligible, with income

and assets also assessed to identify poor and ultra-poor households.

Families will be excluded if any member is a regular government employee or pensioner, owns a commercial licence or large business or possesses a car or air conditioner.

Priority will be given to the landless, homeless, persons with disabilities and marginalised communities, including hijra, Bede and small ethnic groups.

Selection will be carried out by committees formed at the city, upazila, union, municipality and ward levels.

The programme will be overseen by government officials under a two-tier checking system to minimise errors.

Existing TCB cards will be integrated into the family card's Dynamic Social Registry, as per the guideline.

Using the same smart card with OTP verification, beneficiaries will be able to buy essential food items at subsidised prices and, in future, access services such as education stipends and agricultural subsidies.

The main philosophy of this programme is 'family is the core unit of development, not the individual', the guideline said.

Fragmentation and weak coordination among the 95 existing

programmes have led to duplication, while 22-25 percent of the actual poor are left out.

The aim of this programme is to build a human welfare state by eliminating discrimination, the guideline said.

The programme's pilot will inaugurate by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman on March 10.

Eid shopping ends

FROM PAGE 2

where doctors declared her dead around 11:30pm.

Police later seized the truck and detained its driver, the SI said.

In another incident, two people were killed and two others injured when a CNG-run auto-rickshaw crashed into a central reservation in the Tejgaon Industrial area and overturned while taking a U-turn around 10:30pm, said police.

The deceased were passenger Harunur Rahman Sani, 32, and driver Alim, 50.

The injured, Brishti Akter, 26, Sani's wife, and her sister Happy, 21, were undergoing treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Panic buying drains filling stations

FROM PAGE 16

Resources Minister Iqbal Hassan Mahmud Tuku met Prime Minister Tarique Rahman at his office yesterday and briefed him on the situation.

The minister reiterated that Bangladesh's fuel stocks are sufficient and urged citizens not to panic.

"There are adequate reserves of diesel, petrol, and octane in the country. People have no reason to be worried," Tuku told reporters at the Prime Minister's Office.

He added that two more fuel-carrying vessels are scheduled to arrive tomorrow, ensuring continued supply.

The minister acknowledged public anxiety triggered by the Middle East conflict and the shutdown of the Strait of Hormuz but stressed that panic buying itself is creating unnecessary pressure.

"If people start stockpiling fuel, it creates artificial shortages," he said, adding, "In reality, there is no shortage of fuel."

Mobile courts will be deployed from today to monitor filling stations and prevent irregularities, he said, adding that the government is exploring alternative sources beyond Qatar to secure future supplies.

According to Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC), as of yesterday the country held 15,000 tonnes of petrol, enough for 15 days' supply; 23,000 tonnes of octane, enough for 25 days' supply; and 1,29,000 tonnes of diesel, enough for 14 days' supply.

Officials said despite delays in scheduled arrivals, supply remains manageable. One vessel carrying diesel arrived on March 4, while shipments expected on March 6 and yesterday are now due today. Another vessel is expected on March 12.

Under BPC's March import schedule, Bangladesh is set to receive 2,00,000 tonnes of crude oil; 3,74,000 tonnes of diesel; 25,000 tonnes of octane; and 45,000 tonnes of jet fuel from Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

April shipments include 1,00,000 tonnes of crude oil; 2,93,000 tonnes of diesel; 50,000 tonnes of jet fuel; and 25,000 tonnes of octane.

However, officials cautioned that the ongoing conflict could delay arrivals.

Fuel sales have spiked dramatically since the conflict began on February 28. Officials said this spike, is straining

supply management and could turn "relatively low stock levels" into a major risk if imports are delayed.

Prof M Tamim, vice-chancellor of Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) and an energy expert, explained that Bangladesh operates on a "running inventory" system rather than a strategic reserve.

"Our total storage capacity, including tankers, pipelines, and private power plant tanks, is enough for approximately 35 to 40 days," he said. "But we lack a formal strategic storage policy where fuel is kept untouched for emergencies."

Tamim warned that in a crisis, existing contracts may not be honoured if suppliers invoke force majeure.

Although maintaining a permanent strategic reserve would require major financial investment in infrastructure and significant capital tied up in fuel that remains unused, he urged the government to establish at least 15 days of dedicated strategic inventory to safeguard against global volatility.

To curb panic buying, the government has capped daily fuel purchases. Motorists can buy up to 2 litres of fuel oil for motorcycles; cars up to 10 litres; SUVs/microbuses 20-25 litres; pickup trucks/local buses 70-80 litres; and long distance buses/trucks 200-220 litres.

Officials said these limits are precautionary, not due to shortages.

However, rationing itself has prompted some to stockpile fuel out of fear.

Correspondents visiting stations in Dhaka, Chattogram, Khulna, Rajshahi, Pabna, Gopalganj, and Rangamati found most pumps closed or selling limited quantities.

In Dhaka, only a few stations continued distribution, drawing huge crowds. Even at Friday midnight, long queues were seen at Tejgaon filling stations. Employees said weekend depot closures worsened shortages.

In Chattogram, long lines formed at several stations.

"I visited eight filling stations today before coming here and standing in line," car driver Rezaul Karim told The Daily Star at the CMP Filling Station in the Wasa area of the port city.

"But when my turn finally came after half an hour, I was told that there was no fuel left."

In Rajshahi, temporary disruptions

Bangladeshi POW in Ukraine

FROM PAGE 16

want to work as a Russian soldier anymore. I want to go back to Bangladesh now. I do not want to sign any new contract again."

The man was identified as Rimel Mia, from Gaibandha, who had previously worked in Dhaka, where he reportedly came into contact with recruiters.

According to the account shared in the video, he said he had been deceived into signing a contract with the Russian army.

Ukraine-based Truth Hounds and Bangkok-based Fortify Rights, two rights groups that have been documenting the issue over the past year, confirmed the capture of a Bangladeshi prisoner of war to The Daily Star, although they could not say exactly when the capture took place. They, however, said this was the only known case so far of a Bangladeshi man captured as a prisoner of war in Ukraine.

His account echoes the pattern documented by the two groups in a report published on March 3, which found that Bangladeshi men were lured by false promises of jobs, taken through transit countries, made to sign Russian-language contracts they could not understand, and later sent into combat roles in Ukraine.

The rights groups found at least 104 Bangladeshis had been recruited into the Russian army as of February 2026, with at least 34 reportedly killed in the

fighting.

The report said many Bangladeshis were promised jobs as cleaners, factory workers, electricians, or security guards, but were instead routed through Saudi Arabia or the UAE before being taken to Russia.

Researchers also found that many recruits came from low-income backgrounds and paid brokers between \$1,000 and \$5,000 in the hope of securing work abroad. In many cases, families later fell into debt after borrowing money or selling assets to finance the journey.

Some survivors told researchers they faced assault, non-payment of wages, passport confiscation, and threats when they tried to leave.

Contacted by this newspaper, Maria Tomak, researcher and advocacy expert at Truth Hounds, said the capture reinforced the findings of the report.

"The Russian war against Ukraine is ongoing even though it does not make the headlines in the international press every day.

"The capture of the first Bangladeshi citizen by the Ukrainian unit, the 425th Assault Regiment, is proof of that, as well as the problems we raised while presenting the report to the Bangladeshi public."

She said the group did not yet know exactly where the Bangladeshi man had been captured, but said the account he gave in the video reflected the same trend of luring Bangladeshi men into war highlighted in the report.

India eye historic title defence

FROM PAGE 16

cricket in successive years -- having won the 2024 T20 World Cup and the 2025 ICC Champions Trophy.

Aside from the long list of firsts, a victory today will also allow India to exorcise their demons from the crushing defeat against Australia in the final of the 2023 ICC ODI World Cup at the same venue.

Similar to the ongoing event, India were the pre-tournament front-runners and had blazed their way to the final three years ago before getting shell-shocked against Pat Cummins' Australia.

On that day, a capacity crowd at the 1,32,000-seater stadium stood in deafening silence and helplessly watched their dreams of lifting a trophy in home soil crumble.

This time, not Australia, but their trans Tasman neighbours New Zealand stand in India's way to glory.

New Zealand, who started as dark horses, have seemingly gotten better as the tournament has progressed, which is often a hallmark of teams that lift the silverware.

Having lost by seven wickets against South Africa in the group-stage, the Kiwis thrashed the same opponents by

nine wickets and with 43 balls to spare in the semifinal to book their place to the final.

They had also lost to England in the Super Eights, who were beaten in a run-fest semifinal by India by seven runs in the other semifinal.

Both teams will be looking towards their in-form right-handed opener to fire in the final, with India pinning their hopes on Sanju Samson and the Kiwis placing their bets on Finn Allen.

Samson came into the side late in the tournament and has lit up the event with back-to-back player of the match performances, while Allen's blistering unbeaten ton handed New Zealand the crushing win in the semifinal.

In the bowling department, India will be depending on its spearhead Jasprit Bumrah to deliver the goods. Meanwhile, for the Kiwis, their wily brigade of finger spinners, led by skipper Mitchell Santner, could hold the key against an Indian batting line-up which has shown signs of weakness against off-spinners.

Overall, India, having breached the 250-run mark twice in their last two matches, seem to be the favourites heading into the final, but a foreboding sense of deja vu still lingers for the hosts.

led to commotion at some pumps, with some suspending sales after running out of fuel and others selling limited quantities.

In one case, fuel had to be sold in the presence of police after a commotion. Around 10:30am, long queues of motorcycles and other vehicles were seen at Habib Filling Station in front of Rajshahi Airport.

At Nayan Filling Station in the RUET area, biker Sabuj Ahmed said he uses his motorcycle daily and was visiting different filling stations, trying to fill the tank.

Customer flow normalised in Patuakhali and Gopalganj after rationing began, though the queue remained slightly longer than usual.

In Rangamati, supply was stable but demand for octane rose sharply at Kalyanpur, Rajbari, Banarupa and Old Bus Stand filling stations. Meanwhile, a 22-year-old anti-discrimination student leader, identified as Nirab Ahmed, died in Jhenaidah yesterday allegedly after being beaten by workers of a filling station.

Saidur Rahman, convener of the Jhenaidah District Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, told The Daily Star that Nirab, originally from Barobazar area of Kaliganj upazila, had been actively involved on the front lines during the movement.

Additional Superintendent of Police (Sadar Circle) Mahfuz Hossain told The Daily Star that the incident occurred at Taj Filling Station in the terminal area on the highway to Dhaka.

Locals said when Nirab went to buy fuel for his motorcycle around 8:45pm, the filling station workers refused to sell. But when he saw the workers pour fuel into bottles, an altercation ensued. At one stage, the workers beat up Nirab, they said. When he collapsed, his friends rushed him to Jhenaidah 250-Bed General Hospital, they said.

Sabyasachi Pal Suman, an emergency department physician at the hospital, said that Nirab had swollen injuries on the back of his waist and the back of his head. He was declared dead at 9:05pm. ASP Mahfuz said three salesmen of the filling station were taken into custody.

[Our correspondents in respective districts contributed to this report]

Balendra Shah

Tomak added that the man would apparently be granted prisoner-of-war status, but the way he was recruited should be investigated and those responsible prosecuted.

"If enough evidence is found, he could also be considered a survivor of human trafficking."

John Quinley, director of Fortify Rights, said Ukrainian authorities should work with anti-trafficking organisations to screen the Bangladeshi man and determine whether he may be a trafficking survivor.

"If he is identified as a survivor, the Ukrainian and Bangladeshi governments should cooperate to ensure his safe return to Bangladesh," he told this correspondent, adding that Bangladesh must crack down on trafficking networks and push Russia to end the recruitment of Bangladeshis into the war.

Regarding the capture, Mostafizur Rahman, additional superintendent of the Trafficking in Human Beings Wing of the Criminal Investigation Department, said the agency had not yet received any official information about a Bangladeshi being captured in Ukraine.

"It is possible that a Bangladeshi could be captured if they are involved in the war. We are trying to address the issue by working closely with the Bangladesh embassy in Russia, while also carrying out drives against trafficking syndicates," he told The Daily Star.

FROM PAGE 16

commission spokesperson Narayan Prasad Bhattarai told AFP.

In his own constituency, in the eastern district of Jhapa, Shah led with more than 59,500 votes with Oli trailing on 16,350 -- and with more than 85 percent of votes counted, AFP calculations show Shah has passed the winning threshold.

A large crowd gathered outside the counting centre, cheering and chanting slogans of support, as security in the area was stepped up.

"This is heading to a landslide victory -- this reflects the frustration that has been building up," said political analyst Chandra Dev Bhatta.

"It is actually the people's revolt against the established political parties," he added.

"The people understand that the new do not really have strong agendas, but it is a punishment to the parties for their decades-long poor governance."

"I was 99.99 percent sure he will win, but the majority is shocking. That shows how much the people were upset with the previous government," Rojan Bhattarai, 22, a student in Jhapa, told AFP.

"He is a performer. He has inspired us all."

Let every child hear, learn and thrive this World Hearing Day 2026

On 3 March, the world marks World Hearing Day 2026 with a clear and urgent message: act now so no child is left behind due to ear or hearing problems.

Around 90 million children and adolescents aged 5–19 years are living with hearing loss globally, according to the World Report on Hearing and the Global Burden of Disease Study. Yet in many settings, particularly in low-resource communities, hearing difficulties remain undetected and untreated.

The tragedy is that much of this burden is preventable. More than 60% of childhood hearing loss can be avoided through simple, cost-effective public health measures. Common conditions such as otitis media with effusion, chronic suppurative otitis media and impacted earwax continue to affect millions of children. Left unaddressed, hearing loss can silently worsen over time.

Untreated hearing loss does not only affect a child's ability to hear. It can disrupt speech and language development, hinder learning, affect social interaction, and ultimately shape educational achievement and future employment opportunities.

This year's theme, "From communities to classrooms: hearing care for all children", calls for two key actions: preventing avoidable hearing loss and ensuring early identification and timely care. Integrating systematic screening and early intervention into school and child health programmes can transform outcomes.

Every child deserves the chance to hear clearly, participate fully in class, and reach their potential. The time to act is now.

Source: World Health Organisation



MORE THAN A PERIOD PROBLEM: why menstrual migraine needs attention and action

DR NUR A SAFRINA RAHMAN

For many women and adolescent girls, menstruation brings more than abdominal cramps and mood changes. It can trigger a severe, throbbing headache that disrupts school, work and family life. Menstrual migraine is common, yet frequently dismissed as something women simply have to endure.

Migraine is a neurological condition, not just a "bad headache". Globally, it affects around 15% of the population and is up to three times more common in women than in men. Hormonal fluctuations are a major reason for this difference. Among women who experience migraine, more than half report attacks linked to their menstrual cycle.

Menstrual migraine typically occurs from two days before bleeding begins to three days after it starts. The trigger is the natural drop in oestrogen levels just before menstruation. This hormonal shift activates pain pathways in the brain, resulting in intense, often one-sided pulsating pain. Nausea, vomiting and marked sensitivity to light and sound are common. Compared with migraines at other times of the month, menstrual attacks are often more severe, last longer and respond less well to treatment.

Why is this a concern? First, the

impact on daily life can be profound. Attacks may last up to three days, leading to missed classes, reduced productivity and repeated absence from work. For adolescents, this may affect academic performance. For working women, it can hinder career progress.

Second, untreated or poorly managed migraines can become more frequent. Overuse of painkillers – particularly if taken on more than 10 to 15 days per month – may lead to medication-overuse headache, creating a cycle of worsening pain. In some cases, episodic migraine can progress to chronic migraine, defined as a headache occurring on 15 or more days each month.

Third, there are broader health considerations. Women who experience migraine with aura and use oestrogen-containing contraceptives have a small but increased risk of stroke. Proper diagnosis is therefore essential before starting or continuing certain hormonal methods.

The good news is that menstrual migraine can be effectively managed.

Early and adequate treatment is crucial. Taking non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, such as ibuprofen or naproxen, at the first sign of pain can reduce severity. For moderate to severe attacks, migraine-specific medicines are recommended in clinical guidelines.



Delaying treatment often makes attacks harder to control.

For women with predictable cycles, short-term preventive treatment – sometimes called "mini-prophylaxis" – may be advised. This involves taking medication for several days around the expected start of menstruation to reduce the likelihood or intensity of attacks.

Lifestyle measures also play an important role. Regular sleep, adequate hydration, balanced meals and stress management help stabilise the body's response to hormonal changes. Identifying personal triggers through careful observation can further improve control.

Importantly, medical attention should be sought urgently if a headache is sudden and severe, described as the "worst ever", accompanied by weakness or confusion, occurs after a head injury, or is associated with fever and neck stiffness.

Menstrual migraine is not merely a monthly inconvenience. With proper recognition, timely treatment and informed medical guidance, most women can significantly reduce its burden and protect both their health and productivity.

The writer is a public health specialist. E-mail: safrina.rahman@thedailystar.net

BLOOD TEST Predicting Alzheimer's years before symptoms

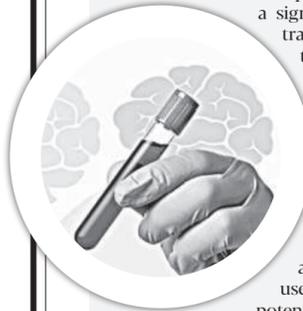
A simple blood test might one day act as a molecular 'clock' to predict not only whether someone will develop Alzheimer's disease but also when symptoms could begin, according to a Nature report.

Researchers are exploring how levels of a protein in the blood – specifically p-tau217, a marker linked to Alzheimer's pathology – rise steadily as the disease develops long before cognitive decline becomes apparent. By analysing these changes in repeated blood samples, scientists can now create models that estimate the likely age of symptom onset within a three- to four-year window.

This approach represents a significant shift from traditional diagnostic tools such as PET brain scans or cerebrospinal fluid tests, which are costly and not widely available. A predictive blood measure could be cheaper, more accessible and used much earlier, potentially years before memory loss or other clinical symptoms emerge.

According to researchers, understanding when symptoms are likely to begin – not just if someone is at risk – could reshape both clinical care and research. For example, it could allow doctors to identify people who are most likely to benefit from early interventions and could dramatically improve how clinical trials for treatments are designed, focusing on people before the disease takes hold.

While further validation and refinement are required before this test can be used in routine clinical practice, the development marks a promising step toward earlier, more personalised prediction of Alzheimer's disease.



Increased pain during Ramadan: Causes and management

DR MEASIN ALI

During the holy month of Ramadan, many individuals experience an increase in various types of pain – particularly in the lower back, knees, neck, shoulders, and other joints. This tendency is more common among those who already suffer from arthritis, musculoskeletal disorders, or spinal conditions. Understanding the underlying causes and adopting appropriate management strategies can significantly reduce discomfort and help individuals observe fasting more comfortably.

WHY DOES PAIN INCREASE DURING RAMADAN?

1. **Dehydration:** Prolonged abstinence from water during fasting hours can lead to dehydration. Reduced fluid levels may decrease joint lubrication and increase muscle stiffness, thereby intensifying pain. Individuals who do not consume adequate fluids during Suhoor and Iftar are particularly vulnerable.

2. **Electrolyte imbalance:** Deficiencies in essential minerals such as sodium, potassium, and magnesium can cause muscle cramps and discomfort. Excessive sweating, insufficient water intake, and inadequate nutrition may contribute to these imbalances.

3. **Prolonged static posture:** Many people spend long hours sitting at work or standing during prayers. Maintaining improper posture places additional strain on the spine and joints, leading to musculoskeletal pain. Poor ergonomic habits during daily activities can aggravate pre-existing conditions.

4. **Changes in medication schedule:** Individuals who regularly take pain medications may need to adjust their dosing schedule during Ramadan. Improper timing or missed doses can make pain control more challenging.

5. **Sleep disturbances:** Waking up early for Suhoor and staying up late for Taraweeh prayers may disrupt normal sleep patterns. Inadequate rest

can lead to muscle fatigue, increased sensitivity to pain, and delayed recovery.

TREATMENT AND PREVENTIVE MEASURES

1. **Adequate hydration:** From Iftar to Suhoor, it is advisable to drink at least 8–10 glasses of water, distributed evenly throughout the evening. Gradual hydration helps maintain the body's fluid balance and supports joint health.

2. **Balanced nutrition:** Both Suhoor and Iftar should include adequate protein, vegetables, fruits, and calcium-rich foods. Items such as bananas, dates, yogurt, and nuts help replenish electrolytes and support muscle function.

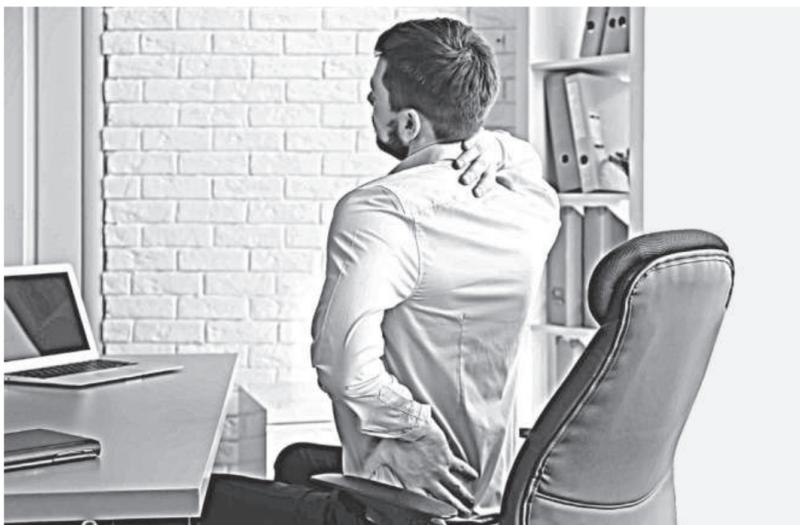
3. **Light exercise and stretching:** Engaging in gentle free-hand exercises and stretching 1–2 hours after Iftar can improve blood circulation and maintain muscle flexibility. Individuals with arthritis or spinal disorders should follow exercise programs prescribed by a qualified physiotherapist.

4. **Maintaining proper posture:** Those who sit for prolonged periods should take short movement breaks every 30–40 minutes. Proper posture during daily activities and prayers is equally important to minimise strain on the spine and joints.

5. **Proper medication planning:** Patients should consult their physician to adjust medication schedules appropriately between Iftar and Suhoor, ensuring effective pain control without compromising fasting.

6. **Importance of physiotherapy:** For individuals with chronic joint or muscle pain, regular physiotherapy before and during Ramadan can be highly beneficial. Modalities such as ultrasound therapy, Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (TENS), and manual therapy are effective in reducing pain and improving mobility.

The writer is the chairman and chief consultant at Dhaka City Physiotherapy Hospital, Dhanmondi, Dhaka. Email: dresain20@gmail.com



What to drink after dates at iftar

SADIA SULTANA

After long hours of fasting during Ramadan, iftar is a sensitive transition for the body. Fasting often leaves the body mildly dehydrated with low blood glucose. Many people consume sweet drinks or packaged juices after dates, but nutrition experts recommend starting with a light, natural beverage to gradually restore fluids and prepare the digestive system for the meal.

After dates, a simple, nourishing option is water with chia seeds, lemon, and a little honey. This helps retain fluids longer, promotes a lasting feeling of fullness, and the chia fibre supports bowel regularity, a common concern during Ramadan. A touch of honey adds mild energy and taste without excess sugar.

Individual needs and tolerance vary. The drink can therefore be adjusted if necessary:

- People with diabetes may omit honey or use only a very small amount.
- For weight management, honey can be skipped and plain lemon-chia water used.
- If chia causes discomfort or bloating, limit to 1 teaspoon.
- When trying for the first time, begin with a small quantity.



Chia seeds should always be fully soaked before consumption.

- If tooth enamel is sensitive, reduce lemon or drink through a straw.
- For children (above 5 years), only a very small amount of chia should be used.
- Individuals with swallowing difficulty or airway sensitivity should avoid chia drinks.
- Those with a history of kidney stones should avoid frequent high lemon

- intake.
- During pregnancy, it is advisable to consult a healthcare professional before adding new foods.
- Thick chia drinks are best avoided immediately before or after medications, as fibre may affect absorption.

The writer is a student of the Department of Food and Nutrition at the Government College of Applied Human Science. Email: sadiasultana143.341@gmail.com

What digital health is teaching us about rural Bangladesh

AINDRILA RAHMAN

For decades, rural healthcare in Bangladesh has been shaped by distance, shortages, and silence. Distance from facilities, shortages of doctors, and the silent progression of chronic diseases have kept millions outside the reach of timely care. While cities debate advanced hospitals, villagers struggle with something more basic: access. In this context, digital health is not a luxury; it is a necessity.

In December 2020, Amader Gram launched a modest but ambitious experiment in Rampal sub-district, Bagerhat: a community-based digital health service built on a store-and-forward telemedicine model. The idea was simple. Trained Community Health Workers (CHWs) would visit households, record vital signs and symptoms using a mobile app, and send the data to a medical assistant for review. Only complicated cases would be referred to doctors. In every stage, a patient can speak to share, send texts or meet on video.

Five years later, the results tell a compelling story about what happens when technology meets trust.

Reaching the unreached

Between December 2020 and September

2025, the programme served 6,287 people across 173 villages, mostly in Rampal but also in Mongla and nearby areas. What stands out immediately is who used the service: 77.5% were women.

This is not accidental. In rural Bangladesh, women often delay or avoid care due to mobility constraints, cost, privacy concerns, and social norms. When healthcare comes to the doorstep – delivered by trusted local workers – those barriers fall. Widowed and older women, often among the most vulnerable, were able to access care without travelling long distances or depending on family support.

A hidden epidemic revealed

Among adults screened, 61.5% were found to be hypertensive. Yet only 16.7% reported knowing they had high blood pressure. In other words, nearly two-thirds of those with hypertension were unaware of their condition.

This gap is not a statistical anomaly – it is a public health warning. Hypertension is often silent until it causes a stroke, heart attack, or kidney failure. Rural Bangladesh is not free from non-communicable diseases (NCDs); it is simply underdiagnosed.

Body mass index (BMI) data tell a similar story. While undernutrition still exists

(11.7% underweight), more than half of adults were overweight, pre-obese, or obese. The traditional image of rural Bangladesh as nutritionally deprived alone no longer holds. The country is facing a dual burden: lingering undernutrition alongside rapidly rising lifestyle-related diseases.

Overall, 64.6% of all recorded cases were non-communicable diseases, reflecting Bangladesh's ongoing epidemiological transition. The village is no longer protected from hypertension, diabetes, or cardiovascular disease.

Why doorstep screening matters

Rural residents rarely seek preventive care. They visit facilities only when symptoms become severe – often too late. The digital health model changed this pattern. Monthly household visits normalised blood pressure checks, weight measurement, and routine follow-ups. People who once believed headaches or fatigue were "normal" began to understand risk.

In a country striving to meet its universal health coverage goals, this may be one of the most practical pathways forward: digital health rooted in community life, not distant hospitals.

The writer is a research coordinator at Amader Gram Cancer Care & Research Center in Rampal, Bagerhat.

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

Panic buying may only deepen fuel crisis

Govt must tighten oversight, deter hoarding

As the war in the Middle East continues to unsettle global energy markets, Bangladesh is beginning to feel the ripple effects. Over the weekend, filling stations in Dhaka, Chattogram, and elsewhere were overwhelmed by motorists rushing to buy fuel amid fears of supply disruptions. Long queues formed at many stations, with drivers waiting for hours to fill their tanks. The country relies heavily on imported energy, particularly fuel oils and liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the Middle East, and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz has raised concerns about potential disruptions to supplies for transport, industry, and households. Around one-fifth of our crude oil imports pass through this vital route. Although most refined petroleum products are sourced from other Asian suppliers, uncertainty in global energy flows has increased consumer anxiety. Their reaction is therefore not entirely surprising, though the situation does not appear to warrant panic.

According to the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC), the country currently has around two weeks' supply of petrol and diesel and nearly four weeks' supply of octane. Additional diesel shipments have already arrived at ports and are awaiting unloading. In other words, while global developments may complicate supply logistics, there is no immediate sign of a collapse in imports. However, panic buying could create the very shortage that people are fearing. On a typical day, Bangladesh sells about 12,000 to 13,000 tonnes of diesel, but in recent days daily sales have reportedly exceeded 20,000 tonnes. This surge appears to be driven not by genuine demand but by stockpiling. To manage the situation, the BPC has imposed a cap on daily fuel sales, which is a welcome measure. The state minister has also assured us that fuel stocks are adequate.

Still, the government must act decisively to manage potential shortages efficiently. Moreover, experts warn that instability in the Middle East is affecting not only the supply of fuel but also of natural gas, a key input for urea production in the country. And rising gas prices in the international market are pushing up fertiliser costs, meaning Bangladesh may soon face higher bills to secure both energy and agricultural inputs. Reportedly, five domestic fertiliser factories have already been shut due to gas shortages. The government must act urgently to address this situation.

To curb panic buying, the government must communicate clearly and consistently about fuel availability, stock levels, and import schedules so that fears do not give rise to unnecessary anxiety. At the same time, authorities must strictly monitor filling stations and depots to prevent hoarding, black-marketing, and price manipulation. Ensuring fair and orderly fuel distribution is equally important. While restrictions on sales are necessary, they must be implemented in a way that protects the livelihoods of those who depend on fuel for daily income, such as transport workers and ride-sharing drivers. We may still overcome the current global energy turbulence without major disruption, but that will require careful management, collective discipline, and the responsible use of our limited resources.

Gas explosions rising, destroying families

Negligence from authorities, users concerning

Over the last few years, a horrifying rise in gas leak-related explosions has claimed many lives and destroyed families. On February 23, six members of a family died in a fire caused by a gas pipe leak in their home in Chattogram. Three children, aged between four and 10, survived but sustained burns on over 40 percent of their bodies. On the same day, four members of another family, including a three-year-old, suffered severe burns from a fire reportedly triggered by a gas leak in Dhaka. A report by *The Daily Star* found that half of the victims of similar accidents treated at the burn institute in Dhaka had burns covering 20 to 100 percent of their bodies, significantly reducing their chances of survival.

Blasts usually occur when gas leaking from pipes or stoves accumulates in a closed space with poor ventilation. Fire officials and experts blame both the negligence of gas suppliers and the lack of awareness among users. Fire service data show that gas cylinder-related fires are on the rise, with 920 incidents last year, up from 702 in 2024. Fire incidents related to gas pipe leaks increased to 562 last year, from 465 in 2024. Even tiny leaks in a pipeline or a loose LPG cylinder regulator can allow gas to build-up, leading to a deadly fire. Gas can also accumulate in sewerage lines or septic tanks. Given that around one crore consumers rely on gas cylinders and 38 lakh households use pipeline gas, it is unfathomable why successive governments have been so negligent in this regard.

Major gas explosions linked to Titas Gas pipelines have also occurred. In 2020, one such explosion in a mosque in Narayanganj caused at least 34 deaths. Another, in the capital's Moghbazar in 2021, left 12 people dead and 50 others injured. It was reportedly caused by large accumulations of methane gas from leaks in the pipeline and sewerage lines inside the building.

Given the increasing frequency and severity of such incidents, we urge the government to properly adopt the measures advocated by experts. Beyond regular monitoring of all gas lines and cylinder connections, other precautionary steps must be taken seriously by both the authorities and ordinary users. The authorities should conduct regular inspections to detect faults in pipelines. Widespread awareness campaigns are also needed. Users must understand that kitchens should have an open window or door to allow leaked gas to disperse. Gas stoves must always be turned off after use, especially before going to bed. Septic tanks must be regularly cleaned to ensure proper ventilation. Gas detectors can also be installed in homes and offices. These steps are vital to ensure safety.

Six years on, have we learnt our lessons from Covid?



A CLOSER LOOK

Tasneem Tayeb is a columnist for *The Daily Star*. Her X handle is @tasneem.tayeb.

TASNEEM TAYEB

It has been six years since the first known cases of Covid-19 were reported in Bangladesh, on March 8, 2020. By then, the pattern became difficult to ignore: global Covid infections crossed one hundred thousand, the virus reached more than a hundred countries, and outbreaks across Europe were accelerating rapidly, with Italy emerging as the epicentre outside China. And the illusion that the crisis could be contained geographically was beginning to dissolve. What followed over the next two years would be remembered as a catastrophic, all-consuming global pandemic.

Hospitals filled, borders closed, economies slowed sharply, and in many cities, morgues struggled to keep pace as vaccines were rushed from laboratories into supply chains stretching across continents. Covid also revealed something deeper than the behaviour of a virus: it exposed how fragile many of the institutions designed to protect people, not just here but across much of the world, had become.

In Bangladesh, many national healthcare facilities had already been operating close to capacity before the pandemic appeared. Intensive care units were built for efficiency rather than surge capacity. Medical supply chains depended on global production networks vulnerable to disruption. The systems responsible for disease surveillance and outbreak detection remained chronically under-prioritised. The pandemic only exposed the implications of that imbalance. Even countries with advanced medical capabilities found themselves scrambling for protective equipment, oxygen supplies, and diagnostic capacity and precision. Covid turned what once seemed like "technical" matters—epidemiological modelling, genomic sequencing, infection surveillance—into matters of national emergency.

Epidemics like this leave behind a choice. Countries can treat them as temporary disruptions and move on, or as indications of deeper structural vulnerability requiring long-term redress. Six years after Covid, the question for Bangladesh is whether that process of institutional learning and redress has been embedded in its

healthcare system.

During the pandemic, Bangladesh, like most countries, responded through rapid improvisation. Hospitals expanded intensive care capacity. Oxygen supply systems were strengthened. Vaccination campaigns eventually reached millions of citizens within a relatively short period of time, although the vaccine procurement controversy left a lingering shadow. Those efforts demonstrated an ability to mobilise under pressure, but crisis response and institutional resilience are not the same thing. The harder question lies in the years that follow a crisis: whether emergency adaptations



'Six years after Covid first reached Bangladesh, the memory of that crisis should serve as more than a historical marker.'

FILE VISUAL: STAR

become permanent capacity or whether the underlying structure returns to its earlier state.

Recent findings from the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr), suggest that vulnerabilities remain. A study conducted in several intensive care units in Dhaka has identified the presence of the drug-resistant pathogen *Candida auris*, a fungal organism that has drawn global attention because of its resistance to common treatments and its ability to spread within hospital environments. In recent years, there have been several similar disclosures of such superbugs, especially in public hospitals. Hospital-acquired infections tend to reflect

broader weaknesses in infection control—hygiene practices, antibiotic regulation, laboratory monitoring, and clinical oversight, to name a few. A surge in such infections thus justifies persistent concerns about our institutional capacity.

This is but one indicator of what changed (or not) in the health sector since the pandemic ended. Financing is another area deserving close scrutiny. True, public spending on health has risen gradually over the past years. Budget allocations have moved from over Tk 32,000 crore in the early pandemic period to nearly Tk 42,000 crore in the most recent fiscal cycle. This upward movement may look encouraging on paper, but the wider budget structure tells a more layered story, with health spending remaining close to five percent of the national budget for years. As a share of GDP, it continues to sit well below one percent, which is frustrating. Even within that envelope, utilisation has seldom kept pace with allocation, with development spending frequently

they fail.

Hospitals reveal another layer of the system. Drug-resistant organisms such as *Candida auris* tend to emerge where infection-control practices are irregular. They appear in environments where antibiotic use is poorly regulated, hygiene protocols are inconsistently applied, and monitoring systems struggle to track transmission patterns early. Vulnerable patients, invasive procedures, crowded wards and heavy antibiotic use all create conditions in which resistant organisms can move between patients. Preventing their spread requires proper institutional support, discipline, and oversight—a combination that, unfortunately, has yet to materialise evenly.

We must remember that outbreaks rarely appear without warnings. Clusters emerge in laboratory reports, unusual symptoms appear in emergency wards, and patterns develop in hospital admissions long before the public hears of a pathogen. The ability to recognise those warnings early is what epidemiologists often describe as epidemic intelligence. Bangladesh expanded elements of its surveillance capacity during the pandemic. Testing laboratories increased. Reporting systems improved in several areas. But the structure still remains irregular.

Information flows among hospitals, laboratories, and central health authorities still do not always move systematically. Private healthcare facilities, which treat a large share of patients, are not consistently integrated into national reporting structures. Environmental monitoring of emerging pathogens remains limited. If the past years have taught us anything, it is that sustained institutional strengthening must be prioritised. The government must treat public health safety as an inseparable part of national resilience, requiring consistent financing for laboratories and hospital infrastructure, systematic strengthening of infection-control systems across public and private hospitals, and making surveillance networks capable of detecting unusual disease patterns early. These investments and tasks may not seem politically urgent but they remain paramount.

Six years after Covid first reached Bangladesh, the memory of that crisis should serve as more than a historical marker. It should function as a reminder that pandemics do not just test hospitals; they also test the preparedness, coordination, and foresight of entire systems. We must ensure that this lesson is fully learned and properly acted on.

Women must lead, not just participate, in the labour force



Max Tunon is country director of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Bangladesh.

MAX TUNON

Bijly Baroi is the sole breadwinner for a family of six. A caregiver in Barishal, Bijly entered the healthcare workforce after her father, a former carpenter, became unable to work due to illness. She received the specialised training and certification necessary for formal employment to build a life of dignity for herself and her siblings. Across Bangladesh, working women like Bijly are empowering themselves, strengthening household resilience, and contributing to key economic sectors and social services.

Yet the data tells a troubling story: women's labour force participation fell from 2.53 crore to 2.37 crore between 2023 and 2024, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. Despite near-parity in secondary school enrolment, only 20 percent of women proceed to university, and of those who do, just one in four enters the workforce. This gap between education and employment is not an accident; it is the product of persistent social expectations, the unequal distribution of unpaid care work, and workplaces that remain unwelcoming, or outright unsafe, for women. Frequently, societal expectations for women to manage the household and take on the primary responsibility for

raising children prevent even highly educated women from entering or remaining in the labour market.

The International Labour Organization's (ILO) starting point is the labour law, and the organisation worked closely with the government to strengthen the Bangladesh Labour Act in 2025, which now includes many positive provisions that explicitly prohibit discrimination, gender-based violence, and harassment in employment. While women are technically protected by law, the reality is often shaped by power asymmetries that make voicing grievances impossible.

The law now recognises both direct and indirect discrimination; crucially, this can address unwritten restrictions and informal exclusions that have long defined women's experience at work: being passed over for promotion without cause, being assigned lower-value tasks, or being quietly edged out by unwritten rules regarding overtime that reduce their earnings compared to men. Critically, Bangladesh recently ratified ILO Convention No. 190 on violence and harassment at work, a landmark commitment that provides the necessary legal teeth to ensure gender equality moves beyond rhetoric

and into workplace practice.

Ratification alone, however, does not change what happens on a factory floor, in a hospital ward, or in a corporate office. That is why the ILO's work goes beyond legislation by supporting the strengthening of labour inspection systems so that rights are enforceable in practice. We work to build accessible, confidential complaint mechanisms that women can use, which is particularly important given that workplace harassment remains severely under-reported.

With over 90 percent of women workers in the informal economy, where legal protections are weakest, the ILO supports the government and social partners to develop policies that progressively protect all workers. While domestic workers are legally recognised, they must achieve full equality of opportunity and treatment under the Bangladesh Labour Act. Central to this is the fundamental right to freedom of association. Women must be able to organise, participate in workplace decision-making, and raise concerns without fear of retaliation.

Legislative reform alone cannot close the gap in labour force participation; consequently, Bangladesh and its partners have recognised the urgent need to invest in skills development. The inter-ministerial Gender and Skills Taskforce (GST) represents a critical institutional response: a coordination platform designed to address occupational segregation and increase women's entry into high-growth sectors, including digital services, green technology, and skilled

professions.

To close the gender gap, the ILO is driving a Transformative Care Agenda in Bangladesh. By applying the 5R Framework for Decent Care Work—recognising, reducing, and redistributing unpaid care, while rewarding and representing care workers—ILO tackles the "time poverty" that holds women back. Through the Gender and Skills Action Plan 2025–2027, the ILO is mobilising investment in childcare and social protection to ensure that vocational training translate into sustainable economic empowerment.

The reform agenda is clear: increasing women's participation in education, formal employment, and broader economic activities. The ILO stands as a long-term partner in this effort: supporting the government, employers, and workers together to build a labour market where women are not just present, but protected, valued, and anchored as leaders.

The resilience of women like Bijly helped build the Bangladesh of today. But the Bangladesh of tomorrow—one defined by dignity, productivity, and shared prosperity—cannot be built by leaving them behind. Rights must be enforced and justice made accessible. But for rights to be real, they must be anchored by market-responsive skills and a robust care economy.

Bangladesh now has a transformative opportunity to push this agenda forward. Therefore, action must be immediate and bold. Now is the time to move from promises to implementation, placing women's decent work at the very heart of Bangladesh's next chapter.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

The journey from presence to power

The Daily Star recently organised a roundtable titled 'Post-Uprising Election: Women's Political Participation and the Road to Inclusive Democracy.' We invited women candidates who participated in the 13th parliamentary election to share their thoughts about their campaigning experience, the challenges they each faced, and what inspired them despite all the hurdles.

'Political parties' attitude still not conducive to women's participation'

TASLIMA AKHTER
(Dhaka-12, Ganosamhati Andolon)

From the moment the July charter was issued, discussions erupted surrounding women's participation in direct elections. But as things progressed, their participation declined and eventually only 78 contested the election. It was clear that the state's policies do not provide equal opportunities for men and women.

In Bangladesh, coalition-based politics and alliances with major political parties have so far been the criteria by which ordinary citizens evaluate a candidate. Another issue is the amount of financial resources made available. In my party's case, we simply did not have the funds needed to reach approximately 350,000 voters in 18 days. Furthermore, society still visualises men as leaders or heroes, and this is reflected within political parties. For example, one party stated that women cannot reach the highest positions of state leadership. These attitudes hinder women's journey as active citizens.

When I was visiting different wards and interacting with voters, I initially felt that everything—from my gender to my attire—was subject to evaluation. Dhaka-12 is also a very important, economically central area and if we look back on the last 15 years, those who have held control were mostly men. So, calculations about muscle power were a significant factor. The attitude of political parties itself is crucial because, ultimately, they decide the state policies. And their attitude is still not conducive to women's political participation.

In this regard, I feel that women need to be much more involved. My participation was part of a movement, given that the number of women directly participating in elections is still so low. Still, I feel that contesting the election presented a new opportunity. After all, in the last 15 years, we rarely had the chance to go to a ward or neighbourhood and promote our political vision or party agenda in terms of what we think, how we want to change Bangladesh, and what our agenda is for women and workers. Back then we often faced barriers—people even threw bricks at us. But this time, I felt that in all six wards, largely with my party's help, we were able to reach people, exchange ideas, share our manifesto and, to the extent possible, establish interaction and communication, particularly with women and workers. Many people, independently and even outside my party, were organising in various places. This was very inspiring for me. Even if women's overall participation was low, the new participants displayed political commitment and were inspired by the uprising. So, this sets a positive precedent for the future.

'The system is rigged to keep you out of it.'

TASNIM JARA
(Dhaka-9, Independent candidate)

In my campaign, what we found is that our current system often penalises people for following the rules; if you do not follow the rules, there are little or no consequences. We tried to conduct the election campaign with as little disruption as possible. For example, the Election Commission had a rule that no paper posters could be used and we followed that rule. We did not use loudspeakers, either. Instead, we simply went door to door. We visited people where they live and work, and tried to understand their problems.

Perhaps because I was a woman candidate, women voters and residents of the constituency felt comfortable approaching me and speaking about their problems. For example, when we visited a park, women told us that there were no toilets for them. This is such a basic issue, but they had not had the space to voice this before.

Ultimately, how many women candidates contest the elections and how many are elected are symptoms of broader inequalities in society. Women lack access to education, healthcare, and also the networks where decisions are made. Some women, through individual brilliance, manage to break through and that benefits society as a whole. But structurally, the inequalities have not improved much.

Another issue is the metric we use: the number of women in parliament. It is a convenient metric, but it measures presence, not power. Even if women are members of parliament, are they involved

in decision-making? They are not. Power in a political party lies in its decision-making bodies. How many women are in those bodies? Many important decisions take place in party backrooms where coalitions are decided, alliances are negotiated, and financial decisions are made. How many women do you see there? Even though women's parliamentary presence has increased via reserved seats in recent years, that does not translate into real power. Reserved seats do not have constituencies, and those MPs depend on party machinery to get nominated.

Our campaign itself was really positive: we had a lot of participation from women across the country. One of our intentions was to challenge the idea that politics is something negative. Politics governs our lives, and it is where we should feel that we belong, where we have a place and a voice.

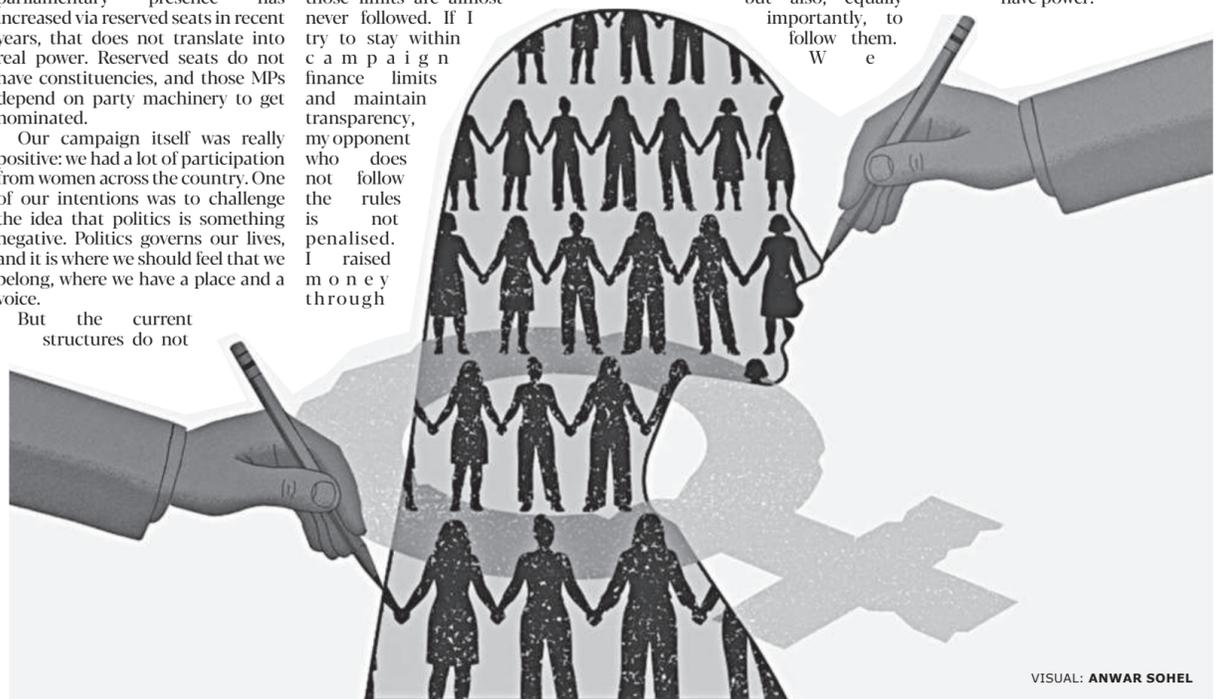
But the current structures do not

incentivise keeping people at the centre. For example, if a candidate violates election rules, they face no consequences. In that situation, people's agency—their right to have minimal disruption in their daily lives—is ignored. Another major challenge is campaign financing. There are limits on how much candidates can spend, but those limits are almost never followed. If I try to stay within a campaign finance limits and maintain transparency, my opponent who does not follow the rules is not penalised. I raised money through

crowdfunding and people donated to support the campaign. But if the rules are merely decorative, and the real game is played with off-the-books money, how can you honestly compete in that system? The system is rigged to keep you out of it.

We need cross-partisan understanding and commitment not just to create new rules but also, equally importantly, to follow them. We

need political commitment from all stakeholders, not just political parties, but also the informal networks that finance these campaigns and benefit from keeping the system the way it is. Until we are able to have meaningful conversations around this, the system is unlikely to change. Women may have presence, but we will not have power.



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

'What voters really consider is who can provide them protection'

RUMEEN FARHANA
(Brahmanbaria-2, Independent candidate)

The main problem I faced during the campaign was discrimination. Even though I was conducting my campaign following the rules, my opponents openly violated them every day. They delivered hateful speeches and attacked me personally using abusive language, and the administration simply ignored it. We filed complaints, but received no remedy.

Since I was an independent candidate, it seemed like I had to follow every single law in the most meticulous way possible in order to campaign. Right from the first step, I faced discrimination.

Then something happened—I had an outburst during one incident, which the whole of Bangladesh saw. But if I had not had that outburst, it would not have been possible for me to keep going in the election. I had to give my supporters the feeling that no matter what the administration did, I was there to protect them. I had to do it, and I will do it again in the future. What the so-called civil society thinks about me because of the outburst does not matter. Unless you are doing politics on the ground, you cannot comprehend it.

The second issue was the abnormal

level of campaign spending. Whatever the legal spending ceiling is, the reality is that it is almost impossible to run an election without spending several crores. In plain sight, going outside the law, voters are given money by candidates. Gifts are sent directly to voters' homes. These may look more "decent" than direct cash, but they serve the same purpose.

The third issue is that during the last 10 days of the campaign, you are expected to spend at least Tk 10 lakh every day. "Expected" meaning that if you don't, the campaign simply cannot be run. Now, where exactly this money goes and who receives it—and whether it even reaches voters—is something a candidate cannot really question. Because the moment you question the people handling the money, it means you are showing distrust, and they may stop working for you the next day.

This is where women candidates fall behind. Where will they get this money? And who will invest that money in them? Investment usually happens when investors expect profit in return. In reality, many women contest elections only so they can later secure a reserved seat in parliament. So if the candidate herself, her family, and society do not fully believe

in her chances, why would the business community invest in her campaign? That makes funding much harder for women.

Another barrier appears during campaigning itself. In my constituency, there are villages to which I had to travel by boat for over an hour, after which I had to ride in an autorickshaw over muddy, dusty terrain where there is essentially no road. How many families in Bangladesh would allow their daughters to travel like that? Because I do not have a family structure controlling me, my responsibilities and accountability are entirely my own. But these obstacles make politics for women truly like climbing a mountain.

Ultimately, what voters really consider is who can provide them protection. So, you must present yourself as that strong voice and convince them that you will protect them against all odds. Sometimes women struggle to present themselves in that way. In my case, when necessary, I behave like a tough street enforcer. It is not something someone taught me to do; it is how I am by nature. If you can position yourself well—being the way each situation demands—and reassure voters that you will stand by them, and if you remain honest, then you can earn their trust.

'The only challenge that is clearly gender-specific is sexualised scrutiny'

MEGHNA ALAM
(Dhaka-8, Gono Odhikar Parishad)

An election has two primary components. One is muscle power, which can mean money, organisational backing, or structural support. The other is security, both online and offline. These factors affect both men and women. So when we talk about women-specific problems, they are not always strictly gender-specific problems; these are often power-related problems.

In Bangladesh's elections, there are designated vote banks which function through the networks of patronage and political families. Many voters depend on particular candidates for jobs or financial benefits. For years they have received gifts during Eid, Shab-e-Barat, and other occasions from particular candidates. When they speak publicly about these candidates, they speak of how kind they are. The fact that these practices are unethical and illegal rarely enters public perception. People simply see these candidates as generous and helpful.

Dhaka-8 may be one of the most educated areas in Bangladesh, but it has never elected a woman MP. I researched the history of women candidates in the area and found that before me, no woman had ever received more than 100 votes. The issue is that people in the area have never imagined a woman as a "guardian". Major political parties have never presented a woman as the leader who will represent and protect voters in a constituency. So even though I lost electorally, I believe my candidacy introduced the idea that a woman can also be a protective political figure.

As for the challenges I faced, many people may associate my name with controversy. I would describe myself as a survivor of state repression. But the accusations and cases against me were part of state mechanisms, whereas my rival candidates had over 200 criminal cases against them. Yet, public discussion focused on what misdeeds I might have committed, while no one questioned those hundreds of cases against my opponents. In fact, some voters see these cases as evidence of strength. When women candidates speak about policies and governance instead of aggression, voters sometimes view that as weakness. Sometimes it feels like one must deliberately break rules or act aggressively just to survive politically.

Another challenge I faced was intimidation. I received direct threats from activists affiliated with major political parties, both online and offline. Some even came to my home and tried to pressure me to allow their representatives to act as my polling agents. Security was also a major issue. Because of past conflicts with the state, I did not receive adequate protection. As a woman candidate, it was extremely difficult to campaign alone among hundreds of thousands of voters without security. Some of my female volunteers were harassed in the field.

The only challenge that is clearly gender-specific is the sexualised scrutiny women face. If a male candidate survives violence, he is seen as heroic. But if a woman experiences harassment, people blame her for entering politics at all. This attitude needs to change. That said, we also need institutional reforms, especially around campaign funding. If the state or EC created a fair public funding system for candidates, many more women would feel safe entering politics.

'Educated and younger voters tend to desire change more strongly'

NABILA TASNID
(Dhaka-20, National Citizen Party)

There are official limits for campaign spending, and while we tried to follow those rules—women candidates tend to be more naturally compliant with regulations—we saw that others did not follow them. For example, the rules allowed no more than 20 billboards to be put up for each candidate. We placed exactly 20 billboards across the whole of Dhamrai. But some of our competitors put up 20 billboards in just one union. When we reported this to the administration, they told us to count them, take photos, and submit proof, which is an unrealistic request. This shows how systemic bias operates, and how the system often favours those with money and muscle power.

Another challenge was the mindset in rural areas. In villages, even though a woman has already gone through the nomination process and become an official candidate, voters still expect her to prove her competence repeatedly. This mindset is even stronger among political actors. Since I was a candidate from the II-party alliance, I had to coordinate with all II parties. However, two of those parties refused to withdraw their candidates because they did not want to accept female leadership. This created confusion among voters, particularly in rural areas where many people rely primarily on religious schooling and may not have access to broader education. As a result, some people did not go to vote at all. Together, those two candidates received around

12,000 votes—votes that otherwise might have gone to our alliance.

Campaign finance was another major challenge. When investors cannot see a clear return from supporting a woman candidate, they hesitate to invest. Ironically, investors still support candidates with known records of corruption because they expect profits later. This shows how deeply corrupted the system itself is.

One particularly disturbing issue we observed was something known as "vote trading." This often occurs the night before the election: individuals collect voter ID cards, often belonging to the women in their households, and negotiate with candidates on how many votes they can "deliver." The women whose IDs are used often have no idea

that this is happening. In Dhamrai, where about 52 percent of voters are female, many women, especially those who lack education or financial independence, are easily manipulated by male family members.

Finally, while many voters do want change, others remain attached to the existing corrupt system and are not ready to accept new political approaches. Educated and younger voters tend to desire change more strongly. However, the political awareness of women in rural areas is still very low compared to women in urban areas. This creates a chain effect on voter awareness all the way to representation in parliament. Changing this system will take time. But change always begins with small steps, and those steps have already started.

From ridicule

FROM PAGE 3
based products from her production line named MA Jute Products, including jute yarn bags, office bags, tissue bags, pen holders and various decorative items. Currently, 22 women work regularly at her production unit, including eight working from their homes.

At present, products worth around Tk 1 lakh are sold from her production unit monthly. After all expenses, she earns around Tk 60,000 in profit.

During this time, she also provided training to around 8,000 individuals, including around 6,000 women, free of charge. For her selfless contribution to help women achieve self-reliance, she was recognised as the district's best 'Joyita' in 2022. In the same year, she received the Best Youth Award from the then prime minister.

Meanwhile, Asma completed her graduation from Damudya Government College in Shariatpur in 2020.

Recently, she began exporting her jute products to Oman, and discussions are currently underway to export her products to Italy and the UAE as well. The Department of Environment in Shariatpur has also collected jute yarn bags in an effort to discourage the use of polythene.

"Among my seven siblings, I am the only one with a physical disability. I wanted to become self-reliant; I did not want anyone to consider me a burden on society. That is why I became an entrepreneur," Asma said.

"I also wanted to uplift other women. So far, I have provided free training to at least 6,000 women at my workshop. Some of them were later employed in my production unit," she also said.

Asma added that she receives a large number of orders from across the country and abroad. However, due to a lack

of capital, she often has to cancel some of those orders.

"So far, I have reinvested around Tk 10 lakh in my ventures from my revenues. If the government provided any financial incentives, or if any government or private organisation came forward with financial assistance, I could enhance my production capacity and export more goods abroad. At present, I do not have the kind of capital required to produce in larger quantities for international markets," she said.

"There are many women like me who aspire to become entrepreneurs despite their limitations. If the government arranged easy access to low-interest or interest-free loans for them, it would help them to become successful entrepreneurs," Asma added.

Subarna Akter, 18, a second-year student of Shariatpur Government College, has been working at Asma Akter's workshop for the past year while continuing her studies.

"I work here alongside my studies, earning around Tk 10,000-15,000 monthly. I use this income to cover my educational expenses and contribute to my family," she said.

Antika Mostari Hima, 28, a housewife, has also been working at Asma's workshop for the past two years. She earns around Tk 12,000-15,000 per month, which has brought financial stability to her family.

Md Russel Noman, DoE assistant director in Shariatpur, said, "As an alternative to polythene, we placed an order for 300 jute yarn bags from her. These bags are completely environmentally friendly. As a woman entrepreneur, she is also contributing to environmental protection. Her achievements deserve widespread recognition."

He called upon others to come forward and support such women entrepreneurs.

PM vows equal

FROM PAGE 3
the education, health, security and participation are ensured.

"In this context, I believe this year's theme of International Women's Day is very significant," he said.

He mentioned that nearly half of the world's population is women, and development is not possible if they remain outside the mainstream of the state, government and politics.

"In particular, if women's economic empowerment is not ensured, the benefits of overall development cannot be fully achieved," he said.

Tarique Rahman highlighted the roles of former president Ziaur Rahman and former prime minister Begum Khaleda Zia in women's political and economic empowerment.

The Prime Minister also said the government

has introduced the "Family Card" programme to support women's economic empowerment and remains committed to ensuring women's effective participation in all sectors, including education, the economy, health and politics.

"Our goal is to implement our election pledges by introducing free education up to the postgraduate level, increasing women's participation in higher education, providing free school uniforms for girls and expanding digital learning facilities and modern education systems," he said.

The Prime Minister said the government is also giving top priority to ensuring women's safety and has taken a strong stance against cyberbullying and online harassment targeting women.

Ensure greater

FROM PAGE 3
of party nominations in the recent polls, and just over eight percent of them managed to win.

Lila Arifa Khanom, a women's rights activist, said the election had raised hopes of restoring democratic practices in the country and increasing women's participation in politics.

"However, the Women's Reform Commission's recommendation that political parties allocate at least 50 percent of nominations to women and the women's movement's demand for a minimum of 33 percent, were not met," she said.

On average, women received only 3.98 percent of nominations, she said, adding that Jamaat-e-Islami did not nominate any female candidates.

The activists reiterated their demand for filling reserved seats in parliament through direct elections instead of nominations by political parties.

They also called for greater participation of women in parliamentary activities and leadership roles, transparent guidelines for nominating candidates to reserved seats, and stronger action against violence against women.

The programme was supported by Women with Disabilities Development Foundation, Karmojibi Nari, Shakti Foundation, ActionAid Bangladesh, Brotee, Breaking the Silence, Gonoshasthaya Kendra, BRAC, CARE Bangladesh, Save the Children, BLAST, Disable Child Foundation, Naripokkh and several others.

Scuffle at Shahbagh

FROM PAGE 3
The programme also celebrated a unique Himalayan expedition inspired by Begum Rokeya's "Sultana's Dream," which was inscribed in UNESCO's Memory of the World register in 2024.

A team of five women trekked through the Himalayas to mark the achievement. Representing the team, Yasmin Lisa spoke about the social stigma surrounding female autonomy.

"We are still asked how five women can travel to the Himalayas 'alone'," she said. "Because we do not have a male companion with us, society assumes we are alone."

She also described the physical hardships of the trek, recalling that the team once went 12 hours without water after failing to melt ice in the extreme cold.

Sharmin Farhana Chowdhury, former athlete and founder of Sports for Hope and Independence (SHI), spoke about administrative challenges faced by young athletes.

Although her team recently won three gold medals and one bronze in an international competition, she said obtaining travel documents remains a major obstacle.

"Obtaining travel documents for underprivileged and differently abled children is an ordeal. It sometimes feels as if the authorities are reluctant to issue them," she said, urging the government to prioritise such cases so athletes can represent Bangladesh internationally.

The political segment, moderated by Prothom Alo Editor and Publisher Matiur Rahman, featured women

a rickshaw carrying the microphone – along with the rickshaw to Shahbagh Police Station.

Videos circulating on social media show that around 10:45pm, Chhatra Shakti activists and some protesters assaulted a DU student, Al Mamun, accusing him of being affiliated with the Chhatra League.

Mamun, a student of the 2020-21 academic session, was beaten and initially forced out of the police station before being dragged back inside the premises. At one point, an individual was seen pulling Emi by the hair from behind.

Later, both Emi and Mamun were handed over to the police.

Earlier around 9:30pm, some former Ducus leaders and local people chased those demonstrating in front of the station, Masud said. During the incident, two journalists were injured while filming.

Police later rescued the two journalists, he added.

DC Masud said police have collected CCTV footage and are trying to identify those responsible for attacking the journalists.

A case was being filed over the incident while the detained man remained in custody, he said.

Earlier yesterday, police arrested at least six people while they were attempting to march in a procession to place a wreath at the residence of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Dhanmondi 32, marking the day.

The detainees are Runa Begum, 50; Janata Begum, 65; Akchhari Kahn Urmii, 18; Shohel Miji, 48; Mohammad Moniruzzaman, 36; and Mohammad Jasim Uddin, 40.

They leave with hope, return with scars

FROM PAGE 1
But the dream quickly turned into a nightmare.

Liza says she was sold between four households and subjected to severe abuse and sexual violence. On February 9 this year, she returned to Bangladesh when she was six months pregnant.

Airport authorities later referred her to a migration support programme run by BRAC. She is now uncertain about how she will rebuild her life.

Her experience is not unique.

Rizia Begum from Barlekha in Moulvibazar went to the Middle Eastern country six years back in the hope of better supporting her family. She was a domestic help.

She was subjected to long working hours, insufficient food, and repeated abuse. Eventually, she fell ill and lost contact with her family.

For nearly five years, her relatives believed that she died.

In February this year, she was found at Dhaka's Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in a mentally unstable condition. With assistance from BRAC's Migration Welfare Centre and the Police Bureau of Investigation, her identity was confirmed and she was reunited with her family after 13 days.

She is now undergoing treatment for her mental health.

Stories like those of Liza and Rizia highlight the darker reality behind Bangladesh's growing female labour migration.

Over the past decade, the number of Bangladeshi women migrating for work has increased significantly.

According to the Bureau of Manpower, Employment, and Training, more than one million Bangladeshi women are currently working abroad.

However, there is no official record of how many have returned after facing difficulties.

Data from BRAC's migration programme suggests that at least

70,000 women have returned to Bangladesh over the last seven years, many of them reporting various forms of abuse.

In addition, according to the Wage Earners' Welfare Board, the bodies of 799 female migrant workers have been brought back home over the past eight years.

Most death certificates mention suicide as the cause. However, many families suspect abuse or foul play.

In several cases, relatives say they noticed marks of physical violence on the bodies.

According to the home ministry, more than 6,000 women became victims of human trafficking between 2012 and 2025.

These realities come into focus as the world marks International Women's Day today under the theme "For all women and girls: rights, equality, and empowerment."

Advocates say the rights and safety of women working abroad must also be part of that conversation.

SAUDI ARABIA
Bangladesh began sending female migrant workers abroad in 1991, although only a few thousand left each year initially. The numbers began increasing after 2004 and crossed 50,000 annually in 2013.

A major turning point came in 2015 when Bangladesh signed an agreement with Saudi Arabia to send female domestic helps.

Since then, the number of women leaving for work abroad often exceeded 100,000 annually, except during the Covid-19 pandemic.

More than half a million Bangladeshi women have travelled to Saudi Arabia in the past decade alone.

While many send remittances home and improve their families' economic condition, thousands have returned with traumatic experiences.

There is no comprehensive national database on returning

Workplaces to Himalayas

FROM PAGE 3
The programme also celebrated a unique Himalayan expedition inspired by Begum Rokeya's "Sultana's Dream," which was inscribed in UNESCO's Memory of the World register in 2024.

A team of five women trekked through the Himalayas to mark the achievement. Representing the team, Yasmin Lisa spoke about the social stigma surrounding female autonomy.

"We are still asked how five women can travel to the Himalayas 'alone'," she said. "Because we do not have a male companion with us, society assumes we are alone."

She also described the physical hardships of the trek, recalling that the team once went 12 hours without water after failing to melt ice in the extreme cold.

Sharmin Farhana Chowdhury, former athlete and founder of Sports for Hope and Independence (SHI), spoke about administrative challenges faced by young athletes.

Although her team recently won three gold medals and one bronze in an international competition, she said obtaining travel documents remains a major obstacle.

"Obtaining travel documents for underprivileged and differently abled children is an ordeal. It sometimes feels as if the authorities are reluctant to issue them," she said, urging the government to prioritise such cases so athletes can represent Bangladesh internationally.

The political segment, moderated by Prothom Alo Editor and Publisher Matiur Rahman, featured women

who contested the 13th National Parliamentary Election.

Matiur Rahman praised their courage in navigating unequal power structures and said the newspaper would continue to highlight their experiences.

Dr Manisha Chakraborty, a candidate from the Democratic Left Alliance, said the 22,486 votes she received represent a "new political current".

"Sometimes losing can mark the beginning of a new journey towards victory. We are striving to build a society based on equality rather than power-centric politics," she said.

Nabila Tasnid, an engineer who contested the Dhamrai constituency, described the intimidation she faced at polling stations.

Comparing her determination to the "violinist on the Titanic" who played until the end, she said, "I may have lost the count, but when people in Dhamrai told me, 'You are the MP of our hearts,' I knew I had won the battle that truly matters."

Mahia Juned, additional managing director of City Bank, spoke about the bank's efforts to promote financial literacy and economic opportunities for women.

She said City Bank is the first institution in Bangladesh to receive EDGE Certification, an international standard for gender equality.

Juned also mentioned a pilot project with UNFPA in which 120 underprivileged girls were trained in pharmacy and later recruited.

"True change is possible through empathy and by creating opportunities for one another in the

workplace," she said.

The event was attended by several prominent figures, including Tamara Hasan Abed, chairperson of the board of trustees of BRAC University, and Rupali Haque Chowdhury, chairperson of the Prothom Alo Trust.

Political leaders who shared their experiences included Barrister Rumeen Farhana, newly elected MP for Brahmanbaria 2; Taslima Akhter, candidate for Dhaka-12 and president of Bangladesh Garment Sramik Sanghati; and former upazila chairman Sabira Sultana, candidate for Jashore-2.

Stepfather

FROM PAGE 4
the house of his colleague Suman. On the way, he killed her by strangling her with her scarf.

Termining her involvement with Nur "socially inappropriate activities", Ashraf said it caused him frustration as he faced repeated social humiliation because of it, which ultimately led him to commit the murder.

Earlier, on February 10 at midnight, the girl was allegedly gang-raped at the house of Hazrat Ali. Police investigations found involvement of Hazrat Ali, Ebadul, Jaman, and Gaffar in the incident.

On February 26, locals found Amena's body lying in a mustard field in Darikandi, Kotowalir Char, and informed police.

On the same day, the victim's mother, Fahima Begum, filed a case with Madhabdi Police Station naming nine people as accused.

Police later arrested seven of the named suspects, including Nur.

Meanwhile, former Mahishshura Union Parishad member and union BNP unit vice-president Ahammad Ali Dewan has been expelled from his party position following allegations of his involvement in the incident.

According to the case statement, a few of the accused allegedly tried to cover up the rape incident and later threatened the victim's family as they failed to do so.

Misuse of religion

FROM PAGE 3
resources and justice," he said, adding that ignoring these principles led to the birth of Bangladesh in 1971 and continuing unrest in Balochistan.

Altaf also traced the roots of religiously divided politics in the subcontinent to British colonial rule. After the failed uprising of 1857, colonial authorities realised that dividing Hindus and Muslims politically would help them maintain control, he said.

"They gradually took steps to divide the two communities and place them in opposition to one another," he added.

Jagannath University Islamic Studies Associate Professor Md Ebrahim Khalil said Abul Mansur Ahmad's essay, written more than two decades after the creation of Pakistan, remains relevant today.

"The same contradictions, the same misuse of religion, the same collapse of thought are still present in our society," Khalil said.

He said religion is often used not to establish justice but to consolidate political power.

Khalil said political leaders frequently invoke religion to gain public support. He cited the example of election campaigns beginning with visits to the shrine of Shahjalal, even though many politicians otherwise show little commitment to religious practice.

Khalil also referred to historical examples in Islamic history where rulers attempted to use religion to legitimise their authority.

A pragmatic

FROM PAGE 4
cooperation extended to Bangladesh by different countries and international organisations.

Shafiqur Rahman added that his party would extend cooperation to Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, his cabinet members and other relevant stakeholders, assuring that Jamaat's role both inside and outside the parliament would remain constructive and responsible.

He said Islamic values would shape the broader framework of Jamaat's engagement with the global community. His party firmly opposes extremism and terrorism and seeks to demonstrate through policy and action that Islam is compatible with democracy, inclusivity and peaceful international relations, he added.

He further said Jamaat is committed to protecting the rights and dignity of all ethnic and religious groups in the country.

The party also aims to promote good governance, judicial independence and a relentless fight against corruption, he added.

Shafiqur Rahman said Jamaat's public messaging would focus on development, trade, investment, climate issues and connectivity to ensure tangible benefits for the people of Bangladesh through cooperation with the international community.

Ambassadors from the US, China, Russia, the UK, Palestine, the European Union, Canada, India, Türkiye, France, Germany, Italy, Pakistan, Singapore, Malaysia, Vatican City, Iran, Brunei, Maldives, Algeria, Kosovo, Egypt, Vietnam, Myanmar, Indonesia, Australia, Norway, Nepal, the Philippines, the Netherlands, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Brazil, Switzerland and South Korea, and representatives from international organisations including UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNODC, Democracy International and IOM, attended the iftar programme.

Ipas Partners for Reproductive Justice icddr,b The Daily Star

FROM AWARENESS TO ACTION

Building Safer Digital Spaces for Women

A roundtable titled “Ending Digital Violence: Policy Priorities for Advancing Health and Justice for Women and Girls” was held on December 8, 2025, at The Daily Star Centre, Dhaka. Jointly organised by CSO Forum for Strengthening Sustainable SRHR Ecosystem in Bangladesh and The Daily Star, with support from Ipas Bangladesh and Advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (AdSEARCH) by icddr,b, the dialogue convened policymakers, development practitioners, scientists, legal professionals, and civil society representatives. The discussion focused on the rising risks women and girls face online and their mental, physical, and social impacts and strategies to way forward. Participants identified gaps in awareness, services, legal enforcement, and digital literacy, proposing practical, multi-sectoral strategies to enhance prevention, survivor support, and accountability in Bangladesh’s digital environment.



DR AHMED EHSANUR RAHMAN
Scientist, Maternal and Child Health Division
icddr,b

Digital violence against women and girls is an escalating public health crisis with profound mental and physical health consequences. While violence against women has remained unchanged for decades, digital tools have expanded perpetrators’ reach, disproportionately affecting young, urban, and digitally connected women. Globally, 16-58% of women report experiencing digital violence; in Bangladesh, 8% have faced it, rising to 16% among young urban women. Evidence shows victims are three times more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, stress, suicidal ideation, and psychosomatic illnesses. Yet most cases go unreported due to limited awareness of laws, support services, and stigma. Addressing digital violence, therefore, requires urgent health-system responses, community reporting mechanisms, and accessible mental health support alongside legal action.



SARIA TASNIM
Professor, Gynaecology and Obstetrics
Advisory Committee Member
Obstetrical and Gynaecological Society of Bangladesh (OGSB)

Violence against women has long existed, evolving, with digital violence now emerging as a new threat. The OGSB, working primarily with adolescent girls and mothers, plays a vital role in both prevention and support. Members collaborate with government programmes, NGOs, and development partners to raise awareness, promote healthy parent-child relationships, and guide public opinion on harmful online content. Gynaecologists also document and record evidence of violence, ensuring survivors can access support and legal assistance. To reduce violence and protect women, collaboration across professional bodies and partners is essential.



PRIYA AHSAN CHOWDHURY
Barrister and Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh
BLAST

Gendered cybercrimes affecting young people and women include revenge pornography, sextortion, doxing, cyberstalking, cyberbullying, grooming, catfishing, photo morphing and AI-generated deepfakes. These abuses often involve threats, coercion, emotional manipulation and the non-consensual spread of intimate content. Survivors or Aggrieved can file a General Diary, contact cybercrime units or helplines, or pursue cases through police or courts, though lengthy processes, social stigma and lack of victim protection create barriers. Content can be reported to platforms, and evidence preservation is crucial. Recent laws, including the Cyber Protection Ordinance, criminalise sextortion, online sexual harassment, deepfakes and child sexual abuse material, offering clearer legal remedies.



KAMAL AHMED
Consulting Editor
The Daily Star

Two powerful presentations highlighted how deeply technology-facilitated sexual harassment and violence have penetrated society, posing a serious concern. The Daily Star reaffirmed its long-standing, proactive stance against gender-based violence and discrimination, consistently reporting to keep these issues in public discourse. A June 2024 report showed that although over 500,000 calls were made to 999 in 2023, only 23,000 related to women seeking help for violence, indicating severe underreporting; over 9,000 cases were recorded in early 2024 alone. Despite strong campaigns, progress on preventing child marriage has stalled. While Bangladesh has introduced relevant cyber laws, weak enforcement, low awareness and fragmented support systems limit impact. At this point, stronger coordination, a single helpline model, and greater pressure on Big Tech to enforce their own policies are urgently needed.



DR RUCHIRA TABASSUM NAVED
Emeritus Scientist, Maternal and Child Health Division
icddr,b

The prevalence of technology-facilitated violence is high in Bangladesh, and it is important to recognise that setting up services is not enough; response-related efforts need to go hand in hand with the prevention of this violence. Evidence shows stigma and fear of blame silence victims, with 60% of women abused by husbands never speaking out.

Beyond adults, the scale of violence against children is staggering. Childlight reports 300 million children globally experience technology-facilitated violence, with AI-generated sexual abuse materials rising 1,325% between 2023 and 2024. This requires urgent focus in South Asia due to the high prevalence. Finally, while legal and health responses are vital, we must also understand and address the profound social implications of this violence.



MAHBUBUL ALAM (MAHBUB)
Lead Gender Mainstreaming I
Gender Justice & Diversity
BRAC

Despite decades of collective efforts in Bangladesh, violence has not decreased, and its definition continues to expand. While campaigns like 16 Days of Activism raise awareness, social norms, victim-blaming, and superficial implementation prevent real change. Certain groups—adolescents and young women, women in public roles, and rural-to-urban migrants—remain particularly vulnerable, especially due to low digital literacy. Bangladesh Police’s Cyber Support Unit receives over 2,000 complaints monthly, with 70-80% of them coming from women and girls, highlighting the severity of the issue. Tech-based violence is a global problem, and it has profound health and social impacts. To reduce this form of violence, strengthening digital literacy at the household level, targeting education, and engaging policymakers and influencers are crucial.



DR NADIA AFROZ
Assistant Professor (Psychiatry)
National Institute of Mental Health, Dhaka

As an Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, I often encounter young patients affected by online harassment. One ninth-grade girl came to me once, deeply depressed after posting a photo on social media, which led to negative comments about her appearance. The experience caused anxiety, depression, and even suicidal thoughts. Incidents like this, which means everyday harassment, through comments rather than overt bullying, are often overlooked, yet they can have severe, lasting effects. Immediate reassurance, avoiding victim-blaming, and family support are critical. Guiding children on age-appropriate content and digital habits, combined with counselling when needed, helps recovery. Education on safe social media use must be ongoing, structured, and consistent, like a regular vaccination, to protect children’s mental health and productivity.



MONIRA RAHMAN
Executive Director, Country Lead
Innovation for Wellbeing Foundation, MHFA
Bangladesh

Our social norms and value systems contribute to both physical and mental harm, particularly for women experiencing violence. Gender-based violence, online, offline, or

technology-facilitated, has significant mental health consequences, yet services remain limited, unaffordable, or inaccessible. Only 0.44% of the health budget is allocated to mental health, mostly for infrastructure rather than skilled professionals, and most services are Dhaka-centric. While digital solutions exist, investment and capacity are weak, and culturally appropriate mental health resources are scarce. To address this, stigma must be reduced, awareness raised, and support networks, including para-professionals, established nationwide. We can see that policies exist, but they require urgent investment to be implemented effectively.



DIPTI SIKDER
Director, Legal Advocacy
Bangladesh Mahila Parishad

Being an independent, middle-aged woman, I also face daily violence. Adolescent girls and children, with no platform to speak up, are even more vulnerable. Socially, women and girls remain systematically marginalised, and safety is far from guaranteed, both offline and online. The cyber world, meant to be a space for connection, often exposes women and children to harassment, slander, and cyberbullying, as seen in political activism cases after August 2024, discouraging them from speaking up or participating. Families often struggle to provide support, and state mechanisms remain insufficient. We must continue efforts, address health hazards, create safe digital spaces, and ensure both children and women can live and work without fear.



SHILPI SAHA
Senior Staff Lawyer
Ain O Shalish Kendra (ASK)

Today, women and girls face violence not only online but also offline. Legal action after offline harassment is often impossible because identifying the perpetrator is difficult, and without proof, support is limited. Also, when young girls seek help from their parents, they are sometimes blamed and discouraged from taking any legal action. In terms of online harassment, perpetrators frequently hide behind fake accounts, and it can come from abroad as well. In our country, the legal process for this kind of violence is long, and help desks or investigating officers often lack expertise. There is no dedicated helpline for digital violence, leaving many women unsure where to turn. We must act now to ensure access to support year-round, not only during the 16 Days of Activism, aiming for a society free from all forms of violence.



FARHANA JESMINE HASAN
Senior Technical Advisor, SGBV
Ipas Bangladesh

Communities and civil society can play a transformative role in addressing digital violence by focusing on both perpetrators and survivors. Those who abuse online platforms must be educated on digital literacy, ethical behaviour, legal consequences and social accountability. At the same time, people at risk and survivors need skills to stay safe, clear information on reporting pathways and support to overcome stigma. Community action should engage youth as peer educators, equip parents to guide and support children, and involve local and religious leaders in prevention. Establishing community-based protection mechanisms, monitoring systems and widely known referral pathways is essential to reduce digital violence and break the culture of silence.



MAHBUB UL ALAM
Country Director
Pathfinder International

Bangladesh is still benefiting from a demographic dividend, with nearly one-third of its population made up of adolescents and youth. Harnessing this potential is critical for future development, but it is hindered by child marriage, substance use and the growing threat of digital violence—particularly affecting young women. While girls perform strongly in education, this progress is not reflected at the policy level. Health, especially mental health, is central to realising the dividend, and digital violence poses serious long-term risks. As development programmes increasingly rely on digital platforms, clear government guidelines are urgently needed to ensure safety, manage risks and address areas beyond existing regulatory control.



AYESHA AKHTER
Legal Specialist,
Gender Justice & Women Empowerment Cluster
BLAST

Today, while much attention is on online violence, offline abuse remains significant. As a lawyer, I see that offline SGBV is often easier to assess, physical injuries are visible, and medical examinations help validate the trauma. Online violence, however, is more complex. Private moments shared on social media can be misused in ways affected cannot foresee, causing long-lasting harm. Thankfully, the 2025 Cyber Security Ordinance now defines offences, sets timelines, and provides protective measures. Yet survivors face discouragement navigating the legal system, and early removal of content can weaken evidence. Through today’s event, I want to emphasise that from service providers to survivors, everyone must act courageously, using the law effectively to tackle both online and offline violence.



TAUHIDA SULTANA
Coordinator
Nari Maitree

Violence against women often begins at home, where girls grow up under constant restrictions instead of receiving guidance on safe technology use and the confidence to speak openly. Families must be the first space to teach digital safety and support victims, rather than blaming them. At the community level, awareness is needed to recognise cyber violence as a crime, through local discussions and engagement with community leaders. Preventive action is also crucial in schools, colleges and workplaces through training on gender sensitivity and cyber safety. Finally, engaging boys and men as allies—encouraging empathy, responsible online behaviour and speaking out against abuse—can play a powerful role in reducing cyberbullying and digital violence.



SHARIF MOSTAFA HELAL
Executive Director
Bangladesh Women’s Health Coalition (BWHC)

Digital literacy can play a transformative role in supporting women and girls, particularly in the face of increasing gender-based violence through digital platforms. The Bangladesh Women’s Health Coalition (BWHC) has demonstrated this through its 24/7 hotline, enabling women to access medical guidance and support confidentially, overcoming social stigma. Digital literacy also allows adolescents and parents to find vital health information, locate doctors or ambulances, and utilise

government and NGO services efficiently. Expanding digital literacy empowers timely access to healthcare and guidance. Also, a central helpline number for all services would further improve access and streamline support for women and mothers.



DR RAHAT ARA NUR
Program Director
Ipas Bangladesh

The health sector plays a critical role in addressing violence against women, encompassing prevention, clinical, medicolegal and psychosocial care services. Despite challenges like staffing shortages, funding gaps, and skill deficits, services continue, but readiness for digital violence must be strengthened. Healthcare providers need training to identify cases, provide first-line support, assess risks, and manage both mental and physical consequences, as digital harassment can escalate to offline violence, including abduction or assault. National protocols should integrate technology-facilitated gender-based violence, with strategies for data management, confidential reporting, and community outreach. Key priorities include digital literacy at household and educational levels, accessible health and legal services, and nationwide expansion of cybercrime support and forensic services. Last but not least, multisectoral collaboration is essential to advance prevention, response, and justice.



SALMA SULTANA
National Professional Officer (Communication)
World Health Organisation

Digital literacy is essential for everyone, as adults, women, and girls alike can unknowingly face risks on digital platforms. Long-term solutions require multisectoral collaboration; families, educational institutions, communities, governments, tech companies, NGOs, UN agencies, and academicians must work together. Strengthening digital skills, improving cybersecurity, and ensuring effective implementation of laws are crucial. Data-driven research guides interventions, particularly for mental health challenges caused by digital violence. WHO’s zero-tolerance approach, quality service delivery, and technical support to providers serve as models. Also, tele-counselling and direct support for survivors further enhance protection and care in the digital era.



AHNAF TAHMEED PURNA
SCOME Capacity Building Assistant,
Bangladesh Medical Student Society (BMSS)

Mandatory digital safety education must be strengthened in schools and colleges, as current ICT curricula barely address online safety, cyberbullying, data protection, or emerging threats such as deepfakes. Alongside curriculum reform, skills-building workshops for girls, run jointly by schools and civil society, can build digital confidence. Students also need clear information on reporting mechanisms, helplines, and counselling, especially in a victim-blaming context. Digital parenting training is equally vital, promoting non-judgmental communication and agreed family rules on safe internet use to significantly reduce risks.



TANJIM FERDOUS
In-Charge, NGOs and Foreign Missions
The Daily Star (Moderator of the Session)

Digital spaces offer powerful opportunities to empower women and girls, yet they are increasingly marked by harassment, cyberbullying, and exploitation, disproportionately affecting young and marginalised women. The roundtable examined these challenges through three lenses: the health impacts of digital violence on adolescent girls and young women; the legal framework and justice pathways, including reporting barriers; and policy and advocacy priorities. The discussion aimed to generate evidence-informed recommendations to guide policymakers, legal professionals, health practitioners, and civil society in preventing digital violence and building safer, more inclusive digital spaces for women and girls.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strengthen cyber law enforcement with specialised units and digital forensics, ensuring survivor-centred safeguards, timely content removal, and digital platform accountability
- Establish a nationwide 24/7 helpline combining health, legal, psychosocial, and cybercrime support for survivors
- Mandate digital safety education in schools and expand digital literacy for parents and women to promote safe online behaviour and early risk detection
- Invest in mental health for gender-based violence via trained professionals, community counselling, telehealth, and culturally appropriate care

৮ মার্চ আন্তর্জাতিক নারী দিবস ২০২৬

আজকের পদক্ষেপ, আগামীর ন্যায়বিচার

সুরক্ষিত হোক নারী ও কন্যার অধিকার

বিশেষ ক্রোড়পত্র • অঙ্গসজ্জা : চলচ্চিত্র ও প্রকাশনা অধিদপ্তর (ডিএফপি) • সার্বিক তত্ত্বাবধান : তথ্য অধিদপ্তর (পিআইডি), তথ্য ও সম্প্রচার মন্ত্রণালয়



রাষ্ট্রপতি
গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ
বঙ্গভবন, ঢাকা।
২৩ ফাল্গুন ১৪৩২
০৮ মার্চ ২০২৬

বাণী

বিশ্বের অন্যান্য দেশের ন্যায় বাংলাদেশেও যথাযথযোগ্য মর্যাদায় 'আন্তর্জাতিক নারী দিবস' পালিত হচ্ছে যেনে আমি অত্যন্ত আনন্দিত। এ উপলক্ষে বাংলাদেশসহ পৃথিবীর সকল নারী ও কন্যাকে জানাই আন্তরিক শুভেচ্ছা ও উচ্চ অভিনন্দন।

দেশের জনগোষ্ঠীর অর্ধেক নারী। আমাদের অর্থনীতির চাকা ঘুরছে নারীর শ্রম, মেধা ও সাহসিকতায়। তৈরি পোশাক শিল্পে নিয়োজিত লক্ষ-লক্ষ নারী রপ্তানি আয়ের প্রধান শক্তি। দেশের জিডিপি প্রায় ১৬ শতাংশ গৃহস্থালির কাজ থেকে শুরু করে স্বাস্থ্যসেবা, শিক্ষা, উদ্যোক্তা, কলকারখানা, কৃষি ও নির্মাণসহ প্রভুত কাজে নারীর অবদান অসামান্য। আজ নারীরা নীতিনির্ধারণক, সফল উদ্যোক্তা, বিশিষ্ট বিজ্ঞানী, প্রযুক্তিবিদ, প্রশাসক, শান্তিরক্ষী, ক্রীড়াবিদ, বিজ্ঞানী বীর। আবার মহান মুক্তিযুদ্ধ, সকল গণতান্ত্রিক ও গণআন্দোলন, ছাত্র-শ্রমিক-জনতার জুলাই গণঅভ্যুত্থানের সম্মুখসারিতে ছিলেন নারীরা।

কিন্তু আমাদের আত্মসম্মতি সূচক নেই। নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতা, জঘন্য অপরাধ, নানাবিধ বৈষম্য, দুর্বল আইনি সুরক্ষা, নিরাপত্তাহীনতা, সামাজিক কুসংস্কার, সাইবার বুলিং ও নারী বিরোধী মানসিকতার মতো নানাবিধ চ্যালেঞ্জ রয়েছে। বর্তমান সরকার বিশ্বাস করে, নারীর ক্ষমতায়ন ছাড়া দেশের উন্নয়ন অসম্পূর্ণ। নারীর অধিকার, মর্যাদা ও অর্থনৈতিক স্বাধীনতা নিশ্চিত করা হলে জাতীয় উন্নয়ন ও সামাজিক ন্যায় অর্জন সহজ সম্ভব। সরকার শিগগিরই নারীদের জন্য 'ফ্যামিলি কার্ড' ও 'বিনামূল্যে চালিত বিশেষায়িত বাস চালু' করতে যাচ্ছে। নারীবান্ধব বর্তমান সরকার নারী শিক্ষার্থীদের জন্য স্নাতকোত্তর পর্যন্ত বিনামূল্যে পড়াশোনার সুযোগ সৃষ্টি এবং সর্বোপরি নারী নির্ধারিত, যৌতুক, এসিড নিক্ষেপ, যৌন হয়রানি, ধর্ষণ, নারী ও শিশু পাচার রোধে কঠোর কার্যক্রম আইনি ব্যবস্থা গ্রহণে দৃঢ়প্রজ্ঞ।

আমি আশা করি, এ বছরের দিবসটির প্রতিপাদ্য 'আজকের পদক্ষেপ, আগামীর ন্যায় বিচার, সুরক্ষিত হোক নারী ও কন্যার অধিকার' সরকারের ঘোষিত সামাজিক চুক্তির সঙ্গে সামঞ্জস্যপূর্ণ, যা সরকারকে এফুনি নারীবান্ধব পদক্ষেপ নিতে উজ্জীবিত করবে। নারীর অগ্রযাত্রা মানে দেশ ও জাতির অগ্রযাত্রা। এক্ষেত্রে পরিবার, শিক্ষাপ্রতিষ্ঠান, ধর্মীয় ও সামাজিক নেতৃত্ব, গণমাধ্যম এবং তরুণ প্রজন্মকে সমতার মূল্যবোধে উদ্বুদ্ধ হতে হবে। আর এই অভিযাত্রায় নারী-পুরুষ উভয়কে একত্রবন্ধনে এগিয়ে আসার আহ্বান জানাই।

আন্তর্জাতিক নারী দিবস ২০২৬ উপলক্ষে গৃহীত সকল কর্মসূচির সফলতা কামনা করি।
মোঃ সাব্বাউদ্দিন



মন্ত্রী
মহিলা ও শিশু বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয়
২৩ ফাল্গুন ১৪৩২
৮ মার্চ, ২০২৬

বাণী

আজ ৮ মার্চ, আন্তর্জাতিক নারী দিবস। এ উপলক্ষে বিশ্বের সকল নারীকে জানাই আন্তরিক শুভেচ্ছা ও অভিনন্দন। বিশ্বের অন্যান্য দেশের মতো বাংলাদেশেও যথাযথ মর্যাদায় দিবসটি উদ্‌যাপিত হচ্ছে। এ বছর আন্তর্জাতিক নারী দিবসের প্রতিপাদ্য হলো- 'Rights. Justice. Action. For All Women and Girls.' সে আলোকে আমাদের প্রতিপাদ্য-

'আজকের পদক্ষেপ, আগামীর ন্যায়বিচার সুরক্ষিত হোক নারী ও কন্যার অধিকার'

নারীর শিক্ষা, স্বাস্থ্য, নিরাপত্তা এবং অর্থনৈতিক ও সামাজিক ব্যবস্থাপনায় সমান সুযোগ নিশ্চিত করাই এই পদক্ষেপের মূল অংশ, যা আগামী প্রজন্মের জন্য স্থায়ী ন্যায়বিচারের ভিত্তি স্থাপন করবে। নারী ও কন্যার অধিকার অধিকার রক্ষায় মহিলা ও শিশু বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয় এবং এর আওতাধীন দপ্তরসমূহ নিরবচ্ছিন্নভাবে কাজ করে যাচ্ছে।

স্বাধীনতা-পরবর্তী বাংলাদেশে নারীর ক্ষমতায়নে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ অবদান রেখেছেন শহীদ রাষ্ট্রপতি জিয়াউর রহমান। তিনি নারীকে দেশের উন্নয়নের মূলধারায় সম্পৃক্ত করার লক্ষ্যে বিভিন্ন সাংবিধানিক, প্রশাসনিক ও সামাজিক পদক্ষেপ গ্রহণ করেন। তাঁর ১৯ দফা কর্মসূচিতে নারীর মর্যাদা ও অধিকার প্রতিষ্ঠার বিষয়ে বিশেষ গুরুত্ব প্রদান করা হয়। তাঁর শাসনামলে নারীদের উন্নয়নে প্রতিষ্ঠিত হয় মহিলা বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয়।

১৯৯১ সালে বেগম খালেদা জিয়া দেশের ইতিহাসে প্রথম নারী প্রধানমন্ত্রী হিসেবে নির্বাচিত হয়ে রক্ষণশীল সমাজে নারীদের জন্য নতুন দিগন্ত উন্মোচন করেন। তাঁর শাসনামলে উচ্চ মাধ্যমিক পর্যন্ত নারীদের শিক্ষা অবৈতনিক করা হয় এবং কর্মসংস্থান, রাজনীতি ও অর্থনীতিতে নারীর অংশগ্রহণ বৃদ্ধি পায়, যা নারীদের আত্মনির্ভরশীল ও আত্মমর্যাদাশীল করে গড়ে তোলে।

বর্তমান রাজনৈতিক পরিস্থিতিতেও নারীর ক্ষমতায়ন অগ্রাধিকার পেয়েছে। বর্তমান প্রধানমন্ত্রী জনাব তারেক রহমানের নেতৃত্বাধীন বাংলাদেশ জাতীয়তাবাদী দল (বিএনপি) তাঁদের নির্বাচনী ইশতেহারে নারীর ক্ষমতায়ন নিশ্চিতকরণে কার্যক্রম উদ্যোগ গ্রহণের ঘোষণা দিয়েছে। ইশতেহারে দরিদ্র পরিবারের নারী প্রধানদের নামে 'ফ্যামিলি কার্ড' চালু করে আর্থিক ও খাদ্য সহায়তা প্রদান, নারী শিক্ষার্থীদের স্নাতকোত্তর পর্যন্ত বিনামূল্যে শিক্ষা, নারী উদ্যোক্তাদের বিনামূল্যে ঋণ ও প্রশিক্ষণ সহায়তা এবং আনুষ্ঠানিক খাতে কর্মসংস্থান বৃদ্ধির কথা উল্লেখ করা হয়েছে। নারীদের জীবনমান উন্নয়নে ইশতেহারে বর্ণিত বিষয়সমূহ সামনে রেখে মহিলা ও শিশু বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয় কার্যক্রম নীতি ও পদক্ষেপ গ্রহণ করবে।

নারীর ক্ষমতায়ন কেবল নারী সমাজের উন্নয়নের বিষয় নয়, এটি দেশের সার্বিক উন্নয়নের মূল ভিত্তি। আমার দৃঢ় বিশ্বাস, নারীর ক্ষমতায়ন নিশ্চিতকরণে সরকার, রাজনৈতিক দল এবং বিভিন্ন সংস্থা একযোগে কাজ করবে এবং বাংলাদেশের নারীসমাজ বিশ্ব দরবারে নিজেদের প্রতিষ্ঠার স্বাক্ষর রাখবে। আমি আন্তর্জাতিক নারী দিবস ২০২৬ উপলক্ষে গৃহীত সকল কর্মসূচির সফলতা কামনা করছি।

অধ্যাপক ডা. এ জেড এম জাহিদ হোসেন

গণতন্ত্র, সার্বভৌমত্ব, আধিপত্য বিরোধী, আপসহীন এক অনন্য রাজনৈতিক ব্যক্তিত্ব: বেগম খালেদা জিয়া

দিলারা চৌধুরী, রাষ্ট্রবিজ্ঞানী

৩১ডিসেম্বর ২০২৫ সালের বাদ জোহর লাখ লাখ জনতা দেশের সর্বত্র থেকে উপস্থিত হয়ে শোকাহত হনয়ে বাংলাদেশের সবচেয়ে জনপ্রিয় নেত্রী খালেদা জিয়াকে- (যিনি ৩০ ডিসেম্বর দীর্ঘ রোগ ভোগের পর মৃত্যুবরণ করেন) বিদায় দিতে উপস্থিত হয়। এটি বাংলাদেশের ইতিহাসের সবচেয়ে বড়ো জানাঘা বলে অভিহিত। উনার প্রয়াত স্বামী শহীদ জিয়াউর রহমানের জানাঘায় দুই মিলিয়ন শোকাহত জনতার উপস্থিতি-কে সেই সময়ের ইতিহাসের সর্ববৃহৎ জানাঘা বলে পরিগণিত করেছিল। খালেদা জিয়ার রাজনৈতিক জীবন, সংগ্রাম, রাজনীতি বাংলাদেশের রাজনৈতিক অঙ্গনকে এমনভাবে প্রভাবিত করে যে, তাঁর মৃত্যুতে রাষ্ট্রীয় মর্যাদায় দাফন, শোকপালন থেকে শুরু করে আন্তর্জাতিক ও সার্বভূক্ত দেশ থেকে আসা শোকবার্তা এবং শোকাহত জনতার উপস্থিতি এই নেত্রীর জীবন ও মৃত্যুকে উচ্চতর মহিমায় মহিমাযিত করে। মুসলিম বিশ্বের প্রথম নারী প্রধানমন্ত্রী, তিন দলবিরোধী দেশের প্রধানমন্ত্রী, জাতীয় নির্বাচনে প্রতিটি সংসদীয় এলাকা হতে বিজয়ী বেগম খালেদা জিয়ার এই দুর্লভ সম্মান, এই জনপ্রিয়তা, জনতার এই ভালোবাসার জন্য বেগম জিয়াকে দিতে হয়েছে অনেক মূল্য ব্যক্তিগত ও পারিবারিক অঙ্গনে। বাংলাদেশের ইতিহাসে তিনি 'স্বরণীয় থাকবেন বহুদিন কারণে'। এই নেতৃত্বের যেসব বৈশিষ্ট্যের দ্বারা তিনি বাংলাদেশের রাজনীতিতে এক অবিশ্বরণীয় নেতা হয়ে উঠেন তা হলো মূলত স্বামী শহীদ জিয়াউর রহমান প্রবর্তিত বাংলাদেশি জাতীয়তাবাদ, সার্বভৌমত্ব, আধিপত্য বিরোধীতার রাজনৈতিক ধারাকে তাঁর আপসহীনতা, প্রজ্ঞা, সম্মোহনী ক্ষমতার দ্বারা তৃণমূল পর্যায়ে নিয়ে যেতে সক্ষম হন। গৃহবধু থেকে এক পোড়খাওয়া রাজনীতিক হিসেবে অবতীর্ণ হওয়াটো এ সব গুণাবলির জন্য সম্ভব হয়েছে। যদিও এ পথ ক্রসুমাত্রীয় ছিলনা।

পার্টির নেতৃত্ব
তিন বারের প্রধানমন্ত্রী যে কোনো জাতীয় নির্বাচনে অপরাধিত খালেদা জিয়া গুণ বাংলাদেশ জাতীয়তাবাদী দলকে তুণমূলেই নিয়ে যাননি পার্টি চেয়ারপার্সন হিসেবে নির্বাচিত হওয়ার পর থেকেই তাঁর নেতৃত্বে দলকে দুই দুইবার ভাগদেহ হাত থেকে রক্ষা করেছিলেন। এ কথা অনস্বীকার্য যে জিয়াউর রহমান বিভিন্ন আদর্শগত দলের সমন্বয়ে দল প্রতিষ্ঠা করেছিলেন। প্রাথমিকভাবে তাই খালেদা জিয়ার নেতৃত্ব নিয়ে দলের সাথে যে বিভ্রান্তি ছিল তা থেকে তিনি উত্তীর্ণ হতে পেরেছিলেন। তবে তাঁর নেতৃত্বের বড়ো পরীক্ষা ছিলো ১/১১ এর সরকারের সময়ে। তখনকার সরকারের প্রত্যক্ষ মদদে জাতীয়তাবাদী শক্তিকে দ্বিখণ্ডিত করার চেষ্টা তাঁর প্রজ্ঞার কারণে সম্ভব হয়নি। তিনি প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বীদের বহিষ্কার করেননি তবে তাদের প্রভাব দলের ভিতর প্রশমিত করে দলকে একত্রিত করে রাখতে পেরেছিলেন। এটি তাঁর জন্য ছিল দুঃস্বপ্ন পরীক্ষা যা যে কোনো পরিষ্কৃতিতে নীতির সত্যতা নির্ধারণ করেছিলো। খালেদা জিয়া তাঁর ব্যক্তিত্ব, জনপ্রিয়তা, সত্যতা দিয়ে সেই কঠিন পরীক্ষা অনায়াসে উত্তীর্ণ হয়ে যান। দলের ভিতরে এক স্বাধীন এর অভিজ্ঞতা তাঁকে পরবর্তীতে জাতীয় ঐক্যের প্রতীকে পরিণত করে।

আপসহীন নেত্রী খালেদা জিয়া
খালেদা জিয়ার অন্যতম একটি পরিচিতি আপসহীন নেত্রী হিসেবে। এ পরিচিতি আসে কতগুলো বাস্তবধর্মী ও সুদূরপ্রসারী সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণের মাধ্যমে। গণতন্ত্র উদ্ধারের সংগ্রামে ১৯৮৬ সালে এরশাদের দেওয়া জাতীয় নির্বাচন বর্জন ছিলো তাঁর রাজনৈতিক প্রজ্ঞার পরিচয়। নীতির প্রশ্নে জনগণের আশা আকাঙ্ক্ষার সাথে আপস করার প্রশ্নে তিনি ছিলেন অনড়। এরশাদের সঙ্গে সমঝোতায় ব্যক্তিগত সুযোগ সুবিধা ও প্রলোভন তিনি নির্বিধায় ছুড়ে ফেলেছিলেন। পরবর্তীতে নীতির প্রশ্নে আপসহীন ছিলেন ২০১৪ সালে। কেয়ারটেকার সরকার ছাড়া নির্বাচনে তাঁর অংশগ্রহণের আপত্তিকে নিরক্ষের করার জন্য ক্ষমতার অংশদারিত্ব দেওয়ার প্রস্তাবকে তিনি জনগণের সঙ্গে প্রত্যাহার শামিল বলে সে প্রস্তাব অত্যন্ত দৃঢ়ভাবে প্রত্যাখান করেন এবং আগামী লীগের জনগণের সঙ্গে প্রত্যাহার করার প্রবৃত্তিকে আগামী লীগের ভবিষ্যৎ অবহেলা ও সূচিকব্দের অভাবে দ্রুত বিভিন্ন জটিল রোগে আক্রান্ত হলেও তিনি প্রতিপক্ষের কাছে ক্ষমা প্রার্থনা করে বিদেশে চিকিৎসার সুযোগ গ্রহণ করেননি। ২০২৪ সালে ছাত্রজনতার বিপ্লবের পর তিনি মুক্তি পান। তার এই তাগণ ও তিতিক্ষা জনগণকে গভীরভাবে প্রভাবিত করে এবং তিনি জাতীয় ঐক্যের প্রতিভূ হয়ে উঠেন।

স্বাধীনতা, সার্বভৌমত্ব, আধিপত্য বিরোধী
বাংলাদেশের স্বাধীনতা, সার্বভৌমত্ব ও আধিপত্য বিরোধী ভূমিকায় তাঁর রাজনীতি ছিল স্বর্গীয়। বলিষ্ঠ কণ্ঠে তিনি প্রতিবাদ করেছিলেন ২০০৯ সালে সংগঠিত পিলখানার নারকীয় হত্যাকাণ্ডে। ৫৭ জন কৈশিক সেনা অফিসারকে হত্যা ছিলো বাংলাদেশের স্বাধীনতার উপর আঘাত। এই পরিকল্পিত যত্নবদ্ধ যে বাংলাদেশের সার্বভৌমত্বের উপর আঘাত সেক্ষণে সেনিন কোনো রাজনীতিবিদ বা সূচীল সমাজের কোনো সদস্যরা বুঝতে পেরেছিল? বেগম জিয়া দীর্ঘ কণ্ঠে নেওয়ার তুলেছিলেন। আবুল তুলেছিলেন তদানীন্তন প্রধানমন্ত্রীর দিকে। আজ প্রায় দুই দশক পর ছাত্রজনতার বিপ্লবের পর জেনারেল ফজলুর রহমান সাহেবের রিপোর্টে সে কথাটি হয়তো পরিষ্কার হতে পারে। শাপলা চত্বরে নির্দেশ এতিন হত্যার কথাও তিনি ভোলেননি। তেমনি ভোলেননি প্রতিবেশী রাষ্ট্রের বাংলাদেশের স্বাধিবিরোধী নীতি। গঙ্গার পানির ন্যায্য হিসাব বুকে নেওয়ার জন্য জাতিসংঘের দারুণ হাতে দ্বিধাবোধ করেননি। বারবার বিদেশে আমাদের বন্ধু আছে কোনো প্রভু নেই। স্বজন হারানোর পর বলেছেন এই দেশের জনগণই তার রক্ষা। বলেছেন এ মাটি ছেড়ে আমি কোথায় যাবো? তার প্রমাণও দিয়েছেন। ১/১১ এর সরকার বহু চেষ্টা করেও তাঁকে বিদেশে পাঠাতে পারেনি। যদিও প্রতিস্বক শেখ হাসিনা চিকিৎসা নেওয়ার অজুহাতে বিদেশে পাড়ি জমিয়েছিলেন প্রথম সুযোগেই।

রাষ্ট্র পরিচালনা, সংবিধান ও সহনশীলতা
স্বামী শহীদ জিয়াউর রহমান শাহাদত বরণের পর নিতান্ত বাধ্য হয়েই তিনি বাংলাদেশ জাতীয়তাবাদী দলে যোগদান করেন ও কতৃকুবাদী এরশাদ শাসনের বিরুদ্ধে গণতন্ত্র উদ্ধারের সংগ্রামে সাহসী ভূমিকা পালনের দ্বারা দলের ভিতর তাঁর অবস্থানকে সুসংহত করেন। ১৯৯১ সালের গণঅভ্যুত্থানে তাঁর ভূমিকা ছিল অবিশ্বরণীয়।

১৯৯১ সালের নির্বাচনে বিএনপির বিজয়ে তাঁরই অবদান ছিল বলে মনে করা হয়। খালেদা জিয়া বাংলাদেশের ইতিহাসে প্রথম নারী প্রধানমন্ত্রী। এরপর আরও দুইবার প্রধানমন্ত্রীর আসন অর্জিত করেন। প্রথম মুসলিম নারী প্রধানমন্ত্রী হিসেবে OIC তে বক্তৃতা দেন। তার প্রথমবারের অর্জিত সাহসী ভূমিকা পালনের দ্বারা দলের ভিতর তাঁর অবস্থানকে সুসংহত করেন। ১৯৯১ সালের গণঅভ্যুত্থানে তাঁর ভূমিকা ছিল অবিশ্বরণীয়।



প্রধানমন্ত্রী
গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
২৩ ফাল্গুন ১৪৩২
০৮ মার্চ ২০২৬

বাণী

০৮ মার্চ 'আন্তর্জাতিক নারী দিবস'। দিবসটি উপলক্ষে আমি বিশ্বের সকল নারীকে আন্তরিক শুভেচ্ছা ও অভিনন্দন জানাচ্ছি। একটি রাষ্ট্রের উন্নয়ন তখনই টেকসই হয়, যখন নারীর অধিকার, শিক্ষা, স্বাস্থ্য, নিরাপত্তা ও অংশগ্রহণ নিশ্চিত হয়। এ প্রেক্ষাপটে আন্তর্জাতিক নারী দিবসের এবারের প্রতিপাদ্য "আজকের পদক্ষেপ, আগামীর ন্যায়বিচার, সুরক্ষিত হোক নারী ও কন্যার অধিকার", অত্যন্ত তাৎপর্যপূর্ণ হয়েছে বলে আমি মনে করি।

বিশ্বে জনসংখ্যার প্রায় অর্ধেক নারী। নারীদের রাষ্ট্র সরকার ও রাজনীতির মূলধারার বাইরে রেখে উন্নয়ন সম্ভব নয়। বিশেষ করে, নারীর অর্থনৈতিক ক্ষমতায়ন নিশ্চিত না হলে ঘরে বাইরে সামগ্রিক উন্নয়নের সফল সম্ভব নয়। বাংলাদেশে জনসংখ্যার অর্ধেকেরও বেশি নারী। নারীদের রাজনৈতিক এবং অর্থনৈতিক ক্ষমতায়নে স্বাধীনতার ঘোষক শহীদ প্রেসিডেন্ট জিয়াউর রহমান এবং মাদার অব ডেমোক্রেসি বেগম খালেদা জিয়া যুগান্তকারী ভূমিকা পালন করেছিলেন। শহীদ জিয়ার শাসনামলে ১৯৭৬ সালে রাষ্ট্রপতির সচিবালয়ে 'নারী বিষয়ক দফতর' প্রতিষ্ঠা করা হয়। ১৯৭৮ সালে গঠন করা হয় 'মহিলা বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয়' যা পরবর্তীতে বেগম খালেদা জিয়ার শাসনামলে ১৯৯৪ সালে 'মহিলা ও শিশু বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয়' এ রূপান্তরিত হয়েছিল।

নারীর আর্থ সামাজিক ক্ষমতায়নে দেশনেত্রী বেগম খালেদা জিয়া দ্বন্দ্ব শ্রেণি পর্যন্ত মেয়েদের অবৈতনিক শিক্ষা চালু করেছিলেন। বাংলাদেশে নারীর ক্ষমতায়নে এটি ছিল একটি ভৈরণিক সিদ্ধান্ত। একই ধারাবাহিকতায় বর্তমান সরকার নারীর অর্থনৈতিক ক্ষমতায়নে 'ফ্যামিলি কার্ড' চালু করেছে। সরকার শিক্ষা, অর্থনীতি, স্বাস্থ্য ও রাজনীতিসহ সকল স্তরে নারীর সক্রিয় ও কার্যকর অংশগ্রহণ নিশ্চিত করতে অঙ্গীকারবদ্ধ।

আমাদের লক্ষ্য হলো নির্বাচনী প্রতিশ্রুতি বাস্তবায়নের অংশ হিসেবে স্নাতকোত্তর পর্যন্ত বিনামূল্যে শিক্ষা চালু করা, উচ্চশিক্ষায় নারীর অংশগ্রহণ বৃদ্ধি, মেয়েদের জন্য ফ্রি স্কুল ইউনিফর্ম, ডিজিটাল লার্নিং সুবিধা এবং আধুনিক শিক্ষাব্যবস্থা সম্প্রসারণ করা। সরকার নারীর নিরাপত্তা বিধানকে সর্বোচ্চ অগ্রাধিকার দিচ্ছে। সাইবার বুলিং এবং অনলাইনে নারীর বিরুদ্ধে হয়রানি বন্ধে সরকার কঠোর অবস্থান নিয়েছে।

আমরা এমন একটি বাংলাদেশ গড়তে চাই, যেখানে নারী-পুরুষ সবাই সমান অধিকার ভোগ করবে। সম্মান ও মর্যাদা এবং নিরাপত্তা নিয়ে পরিবার, রাষ্ট্র ও সমাজে কাজ করবে। আমাদের বিদ্যমান সমাজে সমতা হোক অঙ্গীকার, মর্যাদা হোক বাস্তবতা, আর ক্ষমতায়ন হোক উন্নয়নের ভিত্তি। আমি 'আন্তর্জাতিক নারী দিবস' উপলক্ষে গৃহীত সকল কর্মসূচির সফলতা কামনা করছি।

তারেক রহমান



প্রতিমন্ত্রী
মহিলা ও শিশু বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয়
২৩ ফাল্গুন ১৪৩২
৮ মার্চ, ২০২৬

বাণী

আজ ৮ মার্চ, আন্তর্জাতিক নারী দিবস। নারীর অধিকার ও মর্যাদা প্রতিষ্ঠার সুদীর্ঘ সংগ্রামের ইতিহাসকে গভীর শ্রদ্ধার সঙ্গে স্মরণ করে বিশ্বের অন্যান্য দেশের মতো বাংলাদেশেও যথাযথ মর্যাদায় দিবসটি উদ্‌যাপিত হচ্ছে। আন্তর্জাতিক নারী দিবস ২০২৬ উপলক্ষে বাংলাদেশসহ বিশ্বের সকল নারীকে জানাই আন্তরিক শুভেচ্ছা ও অভিনন্দন। একইসঙ্গে নারীদের অবদান, সংগ্রাম ও সাফল্যের প্রতি রইল সম্মান ও কৃতজ্ঞতা। এ বছর আন্তর্জাতিক নারী দিবসের প্রতিপাদ্য-

'Rights. Justice. Action. For All Women and Girls.'

সে আলোকে আমাদের প্রতিপাদ্য-

'আজকের পদক্ষেপ, আগামীর ন্যায়বিচার সুরক্ষিত হোক নারী ও কন্যার অধিকার'

এ প্রতিপাদ্য অত্যন্ত সময়েযোগ্য গভীর তাৎপর্যপূর্ণ। এই প্রতিপাদ্য আমাদের স্মরণ করিয়ে দেয়, বর্তমানের সচেতন উদ্যোগই ভবিষ্যতের ন্যায়জীবিত সমাজ গঠনের মূল ভিত্তি। বাংলাদেশের উন্নয়ন অগ্রযাত্রায় নারীর সক্রিয় অংশগ্রহণ প্রমাণ করেছে যে, শিক্ষা-বিস্তার, অর্থনৈতিক ক্ষমতায়ন, সামাজিক নিরাপত্তা এবং শক্তিশালী আইনি সুরক্ষা নিশ্চিত করা গেলে নারীরাই সমাজ পরিবর্তনের অন্যতম প্রধান চালিকাশক্তি হয়ে উঠতে পারেন। নারীদের অর্থসামাজিক উন্নয়নের লক্ষ্যে মহিলা ও শিশু বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয় বিভিন্ন বাস্তবধর্মী কর্মসূচি গ্রহণ ও বাস্তবায়নের মাধ্যমে নারী ও কন্যাশিল্পের অধিকার সুরক্ষায় কাজ করে যাচ্ছে।

বিশ্বের সঙ্গে তাল মিলিয়ে বাংলাদেশের নারীরাও আজ ঘরে-বাইরে তাঁদের মেধা, শ্রম ও নেতৃত্বের মাধ্যমে জীবনযাত্রার মানোন্নয়নে অসাধারণ অবদান রাখছেন। দেশের সুখ ও টেকসই উন্নয়নে নারীদের সম্ভাবনা ও দক্ষতাকে উৎসাহিত করে এবং সম্পৃক্ত করা সরকারের অন্যতম লক্ষ্য। এই লক্ষ্যকে বাস্তবায়নে মহিলা ও শিশু বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয় এবং এর আওতাধীন দপ্তরসমূহ নিরবচ্ছিন্নভাবে কাজ করে যাচ্ছে।

নারীর ক্ষমতায়ন শুধু একটি শ্লোগান নয়, এটি দেশ ও জাতির উন্নয়নের অন্যতম ভিত্তি। নারীর ক্ষমতায়নকে প্রতিষ্ঠানিক রূপ দিতে শহীদ রাষ্ট্রপতি জিয়াউর রহমান উল্লেখযোগ্য অবদান রেখেছেন। তাঁর শাসনামলে ১৯৭৮ সালে 'মহিলা বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয়' গঠিত হয়, যা ১৯৯৪ সালে 'মহিলা ও শিশু বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয়' এ রূপান্তরিত হয়। বাংলাদেশের নারীদের জীবনমান উন্নয়নে সাবেক প্রধানমন্ত্রী বেগম খালেদা জিয়া নিরলসভাবে কাজ করেছেন। তাঁর সময়ে নারীর অধিকার, শিক্ষা ও সামাজিক নিরাপত্তা জোরপূর্ণভাবে পদক্ষেপসমূহ নারী উন্নয়নের ইতিহাসে এক সোনালি অধ্যায় হিসেবে বিবেচিত হয়। বর্তমান রাজনৈতিক পরিস্থিতিতেও নারীর ক্ষমতায়ন অগ্রাধিকার পেয়েছে। বিশেষ করে, পরিবারের নারী প্রধানের নামে 'ফ্যামিলি কার্ড' চালু করার সিদ্ধান্ত নারীর ক্ষমতায়নে ক্ষেত্রে একটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ উদ্যোগ হিসেবে বিবেচনা করা হচ্ছে।

নারীর সার্বিক উন্নয়নই নারীর ক্ষমতায়ন। নারীর ক্ষমতায়ন নিশ্চিতকরণের লক্ষ্যে বর্তমান সরকার সকল অংশীজনকে সম্পৃক্ত করে কার্যক্রম নীতি ও পদক্ষেপ গ্রহণে নিরলসভাবে কাজ করছে। আমার দৃঢ় বিশ্বাস, আগামী দিনে বাংলাদেশের নারীসমাজ বিশ্ব দরবারে নিজেদের প্রতিষ্ঠার স্বাক্ষর রাখবে। আমি আন্তর্জাতিক নারী দিবস ২০২৬ উপলক্ষে গৃহীত সকল কর্মসূচির সফলতা কামনা করি। আমি বিশ্বাস করি, নারীরা তাঁদের অদম্য ইচ্ছাশক্তি ও সুস্পষ্ট পরিকল্পনার মাধ্যমে দেশের অর্থনীতিতে, সামাজিক এবং মূল্যবোধের অবক্ষয় রোধে, দেশের প্রতিটি সেক্টরে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ এবং অগ্রণী ভূমিকা পালন করতে সক্ষম। 'আমি পারি' - এই মনোভাব নিয়ে এগিয়ে যাক প্রতিটি নারী, সকল বাধা জয়ী হোক নারীর ইচ্ছাশক্তির কাছে।

ফারজানা শারমীন

শাসনামলে বিরোধী দল কেয়ারটেকার সরকার এর দাবিতে অস্থিতিশীল পরিবেশ সৃষ্টি করেছিল। বিরোধী নেত্রী শেখ হাসিনা তো প্রকাশ্যেই ঘোষণা দিয়েছিলেন যে খালেদা জিয়ার সরকারকে তার দল একদিনের জন্য শান্তিতে থাকতে দিবেনা। অস্থিতিশীল পরিষ্কৃতি, লাগাতার হরতাল ও সহিংসতার মধ্যেও তিনি সহনশীল ছিলেন। কোনো নিপীড়নের পক্ষে ছিলেন না। আলোচনা সাপেক্ষে সমস্যার সমাধান করার পক্ষে ছিলো তার অবস্থান। সংবিধানের প্রতি ছিলেন শ্রদ্ধাশীল। সৎবিধানের দুই তৃতীয়াংশ আসনের অজ্ঞা (যেহেতু বিরোধী দল সমগ্রীণভাবে পদত্যাগ করেছিলেন) ১৯৯৬ সালের নির্বাচন (সব রাজনৈতিক দল বর্জন করেছিল ও বিতর্কিত করেছিল) যার মাধ্যমে সংবিধানের অয়োজন সংশোধনী দ্বারা কেয়ারটেকার সরকারের সংযোজন করেন। কিন্তু পরবর্তীতে শেখ হাসিনা বিভিন্ন সংশোধনীর দ্বারা ১৯৭২ এর সংবিধানকে একটি ফ্যানসিট তৈরির দলিলে রূপান্তরিত করেন। খালেদা জিয়া ঘোষণা দেন যে বিএনপি ক্ষমতায় আসলে ৭২ এর সংবিধান কে ছুড়ে ফেলে দেবেন। তাঁর শাসনকালে তিনি জনহিতকর বহুবিধ সিদ্ধান্ত নেন। ১৯৯১ সালে ক্ষমতায় আসার পর তিনি রাষ্ট্রপতি শাসিত সরকার থেকে সংসদীয় গণতন্ত্রে রূপান্তর নিশ্চিত করেন। নারী উন্নয়নের ক্ষেত্রে তার অবদান বিশেষভাবে উল্লেখযোগ্য। তিনি মেয়েদের দশম শ্রেণি পর্যন্ত বিনামূল্যে শিক্ষা, বাধ্যতামূলক প্রাথমিক শিক্ষা এবং শিক্ষা উপবৃত্তি চালু করেন। অর্থনৈতিক স্বাক্ষরের ক্ষেত্রে বাংলাদেশে প্রথম ভাট (Vat) বা মূল্য সংযোজন কর প্রবর্তন করেন এবং অর্থনীতির উদারীকরণ ও বেসরকারিকরণকে উৎসাহিত করেন। যমুনা বহুমুখী সেতুর কাজ শুরু ও বাস্তবায়ন বাংলাদেশে অবকাঠামো উন্নয়নের ক্ষেত্রে তাঁর সরকারের গুরুত্বপূর্ণ অবদানের প্রতীক ছিল। পররাষ্ট্র নীতির ক্ষেত্রেও তিনি পরিপক্ব নীতি গ্রহণ করেন। মুসলিম বিশ্বের সঙ্গে বাংলাদেশের সম্পর্ক সম্প্রসারণের ফলে প্রবাসী আয়ের পথ সুগম হয়। এরছাড়া তাঁর সরকারই প্রথম বাংলাদেশের নিকটতম প্রতিবেশী সাউথইস্ট দেশগুলির সঙ্গে সম্পর্কের গুরুত্ব উপলব্ধি করেন। ৯০ দশকের মিয়ানমার হতে বিতাড়িত রোহিঙ্গা জনগোষ্ঠীকে দেশে ফিরানোর উদ্যোগও ছিলো প্রশংসনীয়। খালেদা জিয়ার জনপ্রিয়তা বিশেষ করে তরুণদেরকে প্রভাবিত করেছে তাঁর দৃঢ় ও আপসহীন আধিপত্য বিরোধী অবস্থানের জন্য। তাছাড়া তাঁর ভিন্নমতের দলের সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ বা গণতান্ত্রিক শাসনের অন্যতম ও অবিচ্ছেদ্য সংস্কৃতি, দেশ পরিচালনায় বিশেষ অবদান রাখে। বেগম খালেদা জিয়া আজ আমাদের মাঝে নেই। তবে তাঁর নেতৃত্ব, আত্মবিশ্বাস, দেশপ্রেম, সার্বভৌমত্ব, আধিপত্য বিরোধী অবস্থান ও গণতন্ত্রের লড়াই, শত নিপীড়ন ও নির্বাতনের মধ্যে অবিলম্ব থাকা তাঁকে দেশের ইতিহাসে এক অনন্য মর্যাদায় পৌছে দিয়েছে। তিনি আজ জাতীয় ঐক্যের প্রতীক। তাই জুলাই অভ্যুত্থান পরবর্তীতে অসুস্থ অবস্থাতেই তিনি গভীর উদ্দেশ্যে যা ভাষণ দিয়েছিলেন তা অবশ্যই প্রণিধানযোগ্য। তিনি বলেছেন: ধ্বংস নয়, প্রতিশোধ নয়, প্রতিহিংসা নয়, ভালোবাসা, শান্তি ও জ্ঞানভিত্তিক সমাজ গড়ে তোলাই হবে বাংলাদেশের ভবিষ্যৎ পথযাত্রা। বাংলাদেশ আশা করি সেই পথেই চলেবে। খালেদা জিয়া অমর হউক। □

A Joint initiative by




NIRBHOYA 2026

Celebrating fearless female changemakers

In celebration of International Women's Day 2026, The Daily Star, in partnership with UNDP Bangladesh, presents the sixth edition of "Nirbhoya." Aligned with the global theme, "Rights, Justice, Action for All Women and Girls," Nirbhoya 2026 spotlights fearless female changemakers who are actively breaking systemic barriers and driving transformative action across various fields. Through inspiring storytelling, digital outreach, and policy-focused dialogue, Nirbhoya 2026 aims to amplify marginalised voices, empower the next generation of female leaders, and help build a society where women lead with confidence, courage, and impact.

KHUSHI CHAKMA

Innovating for climate resilience

Khushi Chakma, a 34-year-old mother from Shimultuli Village in Rangamati, is transforming her community's economic landscape through climate resilient farming. For years, Khushi's family relied on sharecropping and fishing. However, repeated droughts and devastating flash floods have ruined their rice fields, leaving them without viable land or a stable income.

Her life took a pivotal turn in 2024 when she was selected as a beneficiary under the Local Government Division's LoGIC Project. Receiving training from the Department of Agriculture Extension and



Khushi joined forces with two other women, Sagarika and Shanti Devi Dewan, to cultivate papaya on abandoned land. Together, they planted 1,200 papaya saplings. In just three months, the plants began bearing fruit. Each tree produced 20-25 papayas, each weighing between 2 to 3 kilograms. The fruit was sweet and in high demand in local markets, selling for 50-70 BDT per piece.

guidance from a Community Mobilisation and Facilitator (CMF) Khushi saw a new path forward. She joined forces with two other local women, Sagarika and Shanti Devi Dewan, to cultivate 1,200 papaya saplings on a plot of abandoned land.

Within just three months, each tree began producing 20 to 25 sweet papayas. Wholesale buyers from Rangamati City now visit the village weekly to purchase the fruit in bulk. So far, the group has sold nearly 2,500 kilograms of papaya, earning 123,600 BDT. "The financial and technical support from the LoGIC Project has been extremely helpful," Khushi says. "We've had a great harvest, and I hope to earn 3 to 4 lakh BDT from papaya sales this year."

Motivated by her impressive yield and consistent income, over two dozen other women in the village have started their own individual papaya farms. Khushi has not only secured her family's future but also turned climate-smart agriculture into a profitable, community-wide movement.

ASMA BEGUM

Transforming personal hardship into community leadership

Born into extreme poverty in Balipara village, Pirojpur, 42-year-old Asma Begum's early life was marked by relentless hardship. She was married off at a young age, only to be abandoned later by an abusive husband. Left to raise her two children alone, she survived by doing domestic work in other people's homes.

Her turning point arrived when she joined the SWAPNO project. Through wage employment, savings support, and enterprise training, Asma began to rebuild her life from the ground up. Utilising her savings and an enterprise grant, she invested in livestock and restarted a small clothing business. Today, she earns a stable income of approximately 13,000 BDT per month.

Asma turned her success into a lifeline for her community. She hired a neighbouring woman as a tailoring assistant, directly creating income

Beyond employment generation, Asma has become a local community mobilizer. She helped 45 ultra-poor women access grants of BDT 9,000 each (totaling BDT 405,000), enabling them to start income-generating activities. This intervention significantly increased household income across dozens of families.



for another vulnerable household. Emerging as a powerful local mobilizer, Asma guided 45 ultra-poor women in her village to access business grants totalling 405,000 BDT.

Her leadership extends well beyond economic empowerment. Seeing the daily struggles of her neighbours, Asma successfully advocated with local authorities to pave a muddy village road, ensuring safe travel for 30 families during the rainy season. Asma Begum stands today as a respected community leader, a champion for women's empowerment, and a true catalyst for grassroots development. Her journey serves as a powerful reminder that when one woman rises with courage and conviction, she lifts her entire community along with her.

KANAKLATA MONDOL

Shattering gender and climate barriers

In the climate-vulnerable coastal village of Gunari in Khulna, 35-year-old Kanaklata Mondol faced a dual battle: rising soil salinity and deeply entrenched patriarchal norms that kept women economically invisible. While women were allowed to grow food in their homesteads, public marketplaces were strictly male domains. For Kanaklata, the challenge was not just crop failure; it was a society that dictated women could produce, but never price, negotiate, or sell.

In 2021, she joined a Women Livelihood Group under the Gender-responsive Coastal Adaptation (GCA) project. Equipped with training



Through a Women Livelihood Group formed under a coastal adaptation initiative, she received training in homestead gardening, sesame cultivation, and aquaponics techniques designed for saline-prone environments. She learned to align crops with seasonal calendars and maximise every usable corner of her homestead.

in climate resilient agriculture, including innovative aquaponics, Kanaklata dramatically improved her harvests. But her boldest move was stepping out of her yard and into the local markets of Kalinagar and Nalian to sell her produce directly.

On her first day, she was met with harsh backlash, but she stood her ground. Twice a week, she carried her vegetables and fish to the market, absorbing the social scrutiny. Her persistence forced the community to focus on the quality of her produce rather than her gender.

Today, Kanaklata is not only a financially independent farmer who controls her own revenue, but a recognised community leader. She has even taken on the role of "Pani Apa," guiding local water management systems. "Through the GCA Project, I have gained not only financial stability but also the confidence to take control of my life," Kanaklata proudly shares. "Now I can make my own decisions."

JOTILA RANI SHIL

Championing justice and girls' education in the Chittagong Hill Tracts

At 68 years old, Jotila Rani Shil remains one of the most trusted and courageous figures in Lama Sadar Union, Bandarban. A former Union Parishad member for 15 years, she has spent her life acting as a grassroots peacebuilder and a fierce protector of women and girls in the remote Chittagong Hill Tracts. From personally rescuing a female student who had eloped to another upazila to taking firm legal action against those who harass schoolgirls, Jotila has consistently defied age and societal barriers to uphold justice, security, and harmony in her community.

Currently, Jotila serves as the president of the Mothers' Group for Lama Sadar

The barriers adolescent girls face in schools, Jotila mobilised the School Management Committee to establish separate single-sex toilets, later constructed with support from the project. She frequently negotiates with head teachers and school authorities to reduce or waive fees for children from poor families, ensuring that financial hardship does not interrupt their education.

School and College under the ERRD-CHT UNDP Project. In this vital role, she actively mobilises mothers to prevent early marriage, combat gender-based

violence, and promote girls' education. Recognising the unique barriers adolescent girls face, she successfully advocated with the School Management Committee to establish separate single-sex toilets, ensuring a safe and dignified learning environment. She also frequently negotiates with school authorities to waive fees for disadvantaged students, ensuring financial hardship never costs a child their education.

Though her family now discourages her from running for office due to her age, Jotila's dedication remains unwavering. She continues to mediate family conflicts and tackle deep-rooted social challenges like drug addiction, dowry practices, and violence against women.

"I have spent my whole life beside the people of my community. When I see a girl continue her education, a family resolve conflict peacefully, or a vulnerable woman feel safe, I feel my work is meaningful," Jotila shares. "Age cannot stop me. As long as I can walk and speak, I will continue to stand for justice, dignity, and the future of our children."



TRINLA MRONG

Bridging culture and access to justice for Garos

As an elected Union Parishad member of Kangsha Union, under Jhenaigati Upazila in Sherpur district, Trinla Mrong has emerged as a symbol of confidence and courage for the indigenous Garo community women. She has dedicated herself to ensuring accessible

guided the affected families to apply through the Village Court. She supported them through every step of the process, ensuring that the conflict was resolved peacefully and that justice was ultimately delivered.

Trinla has fundamentally shifted how

Trinla served as the bridge between her community and local legal institutions; when a complex land dispute emerged near the village, she proactively assisted affected families in filing through the Village Court, guided them step-by-step through the proceedings.

resolutions for local conflicts over land, loans, and physical disputes.

Serving as a panel member of the Village Court, Trinla acts as a bridge between her community and local legal systems. When a complex land dispute arose near her village, she proactively

her community views dispute resolution. By blending legal processes with a deep respect for cultural nuances, Trinla has proven that justice is not just about enforcing the law; it is about understanding, inclusion, and empowering the marginalised.

What is the end-game in the US-Iran-Israel war?

Wars become protracted not simply because adversaries are strong, but because political aims are imprecise. Iran's strategy is built for endurance. Israel's for decisive deterrence. The US appears suspended between preemption, containment, and coercive transformation.

ASM TAREK HASSAN SEMUL

Wars rarely begin with clarity. But they become dangerous when they continue without it.

The latest escalation between the United States, Israel, and Iran has already crossed the threshold from tactical confrontation to strategic inflection point. Precision strikes, missile retaliation, proxy mobilisation, and open-ended warnings from Washington have reshaped the regional security environment in a matter of days. Yet beneath the spectacle of airpower and retaliation lies a question that grows more urgent with every passing hour: what does victory mean for the United States in Iran?

When a defined political end state is absent, even successful military operations can drift into prolonged conflict. And, in geopolitics, drift is rarely neutral. It is costly.

In the past 48 hours, US officials have offered varying explanations for the decision to escalate. One justification frames the strikes as pre-emptive – necessary to neutralise Iranian capabilities before they endanger US forces. Another suggests the United States acted to shape the battlefield because an Israeli strike was inevitable and Iranian retaliation would have targeted American bases regardless.

These are not semantic differences. A pre-emptive war is justified by imminence. A protective escalation is justified by alliance management. A transformative campaign – implied in some of the more forceful rhetoric – seeks to permanently degrade an adversary's strategic capacity.

Each rationale carries a different timeline, a different threshold for success, and a different tolerance for risk.

If the objective was to prevent a specific imminent attack, then the benchmark for success is finite. If the goal is to reset regional deterrence architecture, the horizon expands. If the ambition extends toward reshaping Iran's strategic posture altogether, then the United States is entering far more uncertain terrain.

When political objectives blur, military operations multiply.

Iran does not conceptualise war through symmetrical confrontation. Its defence architecture is structured for survival under sustained attack. Decentralised command networks, dispersed launch platforms, layered proxy relationships, and redundant

supply chains form a strategic mosaic designed to prevent catastrophic collapse from concentrated strikes.

Iran's approach transforms the battlefield into a test of resilience rather than dominance. Even if missile inventories are degraded and naval assets targeted, Iran retains alternative channels for retaliation. Proxy actors can escalate indirectly. Cyber and asymmetric maritime tactics remain available. Regional militias can act with varying degrees of autonomy.

Attrition, therefore, becomes ambiguous. What appears as battlefield success may not translate into strategic submission. Iran's objective is not necessarily victory in conventional terms, but endurance

if supply chains tighten or political constraints emerge in Washington.

The imbalance between cheap offensive systems and expensive defensive interceptors is a structural vulnerability. It favours endurance over decisive knockout blows. Iran does not need to achieve battlefield dominance; it only needs to impose persistent costs.

On the other hand, speculation about renewed US coordination with Kurdish elements along Iran's western frontier introduces an additional layer of complexity to an already fragmented battlespace. Historically, Kurdish groups have served as tactical partners in counter-extremism campaigns, valued for their local knowledge and operational discipline. In theory,

Tehran's most enduring strategic advantage lies in its distributed proxy architecture – Hezbollah in Lebanon, militias in Iraq and Syria, and aligned actors in Yemen. Together, they form a calibrated escalation ladder that allows Iran to impose costs without committing to full conventional confrontation. These actors do not require constant direction from Tehran to generate instability; their very existence complicates de-escalation.

The consequence is structural. Even if direct US-Iran exchanges stabilise, secondary theatres remain capable of reigniting hostilities. Missile launches, maritime harassment, drone strikes, and limited cross-border engagements create sustained friction while staying below the threshold of total war. Punishing one node does not collapse the network. It merely shifts pressure to another front.

Peripheral escalation, in other words, rarely remains peripheral. Once multiple semi-autonomous actors are engaged across overlapping theatres, containment becomes exponentially more difficult. The battlefield expands horizontally, while strategic clarity contracts.

Now the question is: could boots on the ground follow? Thus far, Washington has avoided committing to a ground invasion scenario. However, senior officials have conspicuously declined to rule it out. That ambiguity serves as a deterrent but also leaves open the possibility of mission creep.

Ground deployment would fundamentally transform the conflict. Securing hardened facilities, ensuring regime compliance, or stabilising post-strike environments could require physical presence. Yet history demonstrates that once boots touch the ground, strategic horizons expand unpredictably.

If such a decision were made, coordination with Israel would be indispensable. Israeli intelligence integration, aerial support, and operational planning would likely be central. At the same time, overt Israeli participation inside Iranian territory would heighten regional symbolism, potentially consolidating domestic Iranian support around resistance narratives.

The threshold for ground war is therefore not purely military – it is political, symbolic, and generational.

On the economic front, while disruptions around the Strait of

Hormuz have understandably drawn global attention, they are symptoms rather than the core issue. Energy markets respond to risk perception as much as physical obstruction. Even limited threats generate price volatility and strategic anxiety among energy-importing economies.

The broader geopolitical consequence is prolonged instability, which affects alliance cohesion, defence planning cycles, and great-power competition. Asian economies dependent on Gulf energy flows recalibrate risk assessments. European partners confront inflationary pressures. Regional states accelerate defence procurement.

The ripple effects extend far beyond the Gulf.

Ultimately, the strategic ambiguity surrounding America's objectives remains the central dilemma. Is the aim to restore deterrence? Permanently degrade missile capability? Collapse Iran's proxy system? Force regime behavioural change? Or create conditions for internal political transformation?

Each objective requires different timelines, tools, and risk tolerances. Pursuing all simultaneously invites strategic overextension.

Wars become protracted not simply because adversaries are strong, but because political aims are imprecise. Iran's strategy is built for endurance. Israel's for decisive deterrence. The US appears suspended between preemption, containment, and coercive transformation. If Washington does not define a coherent political end goal, the conflict risks evolving into a long war of attrition in which success is measured not by decisive outcome but by relative exhaustion. The most powerful military in the world can degrade infrastructure and suppress adversaries. But without strategic clarity, even overwhelming force cannot guarantee strategic resolution. Without strategy and discipline, what began as a limited confrontation may harden into a defining geopolitical contest whose consequences reshape the Middle East – and US global leadership – for years to come.

ASM Tarek Hassan Semul is a Research Fellow, Defence Studies Division, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) and International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) Alumni. He can be contacted at tarek@biiss.org.



The strategic ambiguity surrounding the US' objectives remains the central dilemma. PHOTO: AFP

long enough to outlast adversary cohesion.

A prolonged campaign would transform the war into a contest of stamina. And in wars of attrition, material sustainability often matters more than initial shock. This raises an uncomfortable reality for Washington and its partners. Gulf states operate sophisticated, layered air defence systems designed to intercept ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and drones. Yet even advanced systems rely on finite interceptor stockpiles. Sustained barrages of relatively inexpensive drones and missiles can gradually deplete costly, slow-to-replenish defensive inventories. If the conflict drags on for months, Gulf capitals could face difficult calculations about allocation and resupply, particularly

activating this axis could stretch Tehran's internal security apparatus, forcing Iran to divert resources inward amid external pressure.

But strategy does not operate in isolation. Any expanded Kurdish role immediately intersects with Turkey's acute sensitivities regarding Kurdish militarisation. Escalating along this frontier risks generating friction within NATO at precisely the moment alliance cohesion is critical. Moreover, empowering sub-state actors is never a purely tactical decision. Political aspirations evolve. Local agendas diverge. Instruments of pressure can transform into autonomous actors whose objectives are misaligned with their original sponsors. This dynamic mirrors Iran's own approach to regional power projection.

The Middle East is now in a struggle for a new regional order

YOUSEF SY RAMADAN

It is no longer possible to treat what is happening in the Middle East as a passing round of escalation or simply another war added to the region's long record of conflict. Today's confrontation has crossed red lines that have existed for decades and has opened the door to the possibility of restructuring the entire region, not just adjusting the balance of power within it.

It is a rare moment in the region's history, where not only the capabilities of armies are being tested, but the regional system itself: its foundations, alliances, borders and perhaps even its maps. While capitals are busy calculating the course of the battles, a deeper and more serious question is taking shape: are we witnessing a war that will end with new arrangements, or the beginning of a long period of chaos for which no one holds the keys to an end?

For four decades, the region has lived under what might be described as an unequal balance of deterrence: a sharp conflict between Iran and a US-led axis in which Israel stands as an advanced spearhead, yet this conflict has been governed by an undeclared ceiling that prevented a slide into full direct confrontation. Wars were fought through intermediaries, strikes were carried out with calculation and assassinations occurred in the shadows, because all sides understood that starting a major war meant entering an arena of unpredictable results. Today, with the reality of direct confrontation, that ceiling has collapsed and the deterrence equation that has governed the region since 1979 has come to an end. What we are witnessing is not an escalation within the old system but an exit from it. The conflict has moved from managing tension to attempting to resolve it.

There is an important difference between a war fought to improve the terms of negotiation and a war

undertaken to redefine the rules of the international or regional order. The first can often be contained. The second tends to expand because it addresses existential questions: who sets the rules of the game? Who holds the authority to distribute power? Declaring the goal of regime change places the war in this second category. For Iran, this is not understood merely as a political threat but as a threat to the state itself as it has existed since the revolution. In such circumstances, war becomes a struggle for survival, where escalation shifts from an option to a necessity.

Lessons from Iraq to Libya suggest that overthrowing regimes through external force may be possible, yet it often leaves behind a strategic vacuum that is difficult to fill. Iran, however, is not a fragile state. It is an ancient civilisational state with a deeply rooted identity and a well-established institutional structure. Any attempt to remove it by force from the regional equation could produce wider chaos than the problem it seeks to solve.

Four decades ago, Iran became a central knot within the regional order. It could not be fully integrated into the Washington-led system and it could not be ignored or excluded without pushing the region toward instability. The US relationship has been complex and contained. Even strikes directed at the leadership of the regime, however harsh, do not fundamentally change this reality. The Iranian state is not built around a single individual but around a network of security, military, religious and bureaucratic institutions capable of reproducing leadership.

Iranian history also shows that external threats often strengthen nationalism and reduce internal divisions. Iran additionally relies on a dispersed model of power: long-range missiles, cyber warfare, the ability to threaten navigation and energy routes and the capacity to extend the battlefield beyond its own borders. Any war with it would not be a single battle but a series of interconnected battles across time

and geography.

The traditional military superiority of the US-Israeli alliance is indisputable. Yet recent experience has shown that military superiority does not automatically produce political victory, particularly in wars aimed at reconfiguring entire states. The United States is facing strategic fatigue after two decades of war. It is facing a global economy highly sensitive to disruptions in energy supply and

loses its regional influence. This would also require internal stability in Iran and the construction of an alternative regional system, both of which would be extremely difficult. A second possibility is a multipolar Middle East, if Iran withstands the pressure and remains an influential force, producing a balance of power in which neither side can impose full dominance. A third scenario is extended strategic chaos, which aligns closely with many of the

a period in which the old order is dying while a new one has not yet been born. In such moments, wars and miscalculations tend to multiply because the system that once regulated interactions has collapsed, while an alternative structure has not yet emerged. If the war continues, the region will not return to what it was before. The old rules of engagement have fallen and new rules have not yet been written.



a range of competing international priorities. Israel, despite its qualitative military edge, remains a state with a small territory and population, which makes it vulnerable to prolonged wars of attrition. Tactical military success can turn into a strategic impasse if it is merely supported by Netanyahu's broader vision of war with Iran with no end in sight.

Against this background, the region does not appear to be moving toward a single outcome but toward several possible paths that could shape the Middle East for decades. One path would be a Middle East with a stronger US grip, if Iran retreats sharply and

region's past experiences: no actor is decisively defeated, conflicts persist at lower intensity, the authority of the nation state weakens in certain areas and instability becomes a permanent condition.

In a globalised world, major wars are decided not only on the battlefield but also in energy and financial markets. Disruption of oil supplies or sharp increases in prices could push many international powers to intervene in order to halt escalation, not out of moral motives but to protect vital economic interests.

The Middle East today stands at a historical crossroads that resembles

Will the Middle East become a region dominated by a single power, an arena of multiple balances, or a zone of open chaos? The answer is not yet clear and it may not become clear quickly. What is certain is that if this war continues, it will not only alter the map of influence but reshape the very concepts of security, alliance and power for decades ahead. The Middle East is witnessing more than a war. It is facing a historic test: either the birth of a new order from the heart of conflict or a slide into a prolonged era without a decisive end.

Yousef SY Ramadan is Palestine Ambassador to Bangladesh.

▲ The region does not appear to be moving toward a single outcome but toward several possible paths that could shape the Middle East for decades.

PHOTO: AFP



Beyond the BOUNDARY

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

For many years, women's involvement in cricket in Bangladesh was largely confined to playing on the field. Recently, however, a new pathway has emerged as women step into officiating roles, proving that their contribution to the sport can extend further.

The shift began gaining momentum in late 2022, with the rise of female umpires in the country. At the forefront of this movement is Sathira Jakir Jessy, widely regarded as the pioneer of women's umpiring in Bangladesh. A former cricketer, Jessy chose to pursue umpiring at a time when very few women saw it as a professional option.

Her progress has been rapid. Jessy has already officiated in several major tournaments, including the ICC Women's World Cup, the ICC Women's T20 World Cup, and the ACC Women's Asia Cup. She has also stood in men's domestic and international matches, becoming one of the first Bangladeshi women to do so.

Jessy believes umpiring offers long-term opportunities for those involved in cricket. "I think women's umpiring is a very good profession," she said. "In fact, I'd say it's better than playing because a playing career has a certain age limit, but in umpiring, your value increases with experience."

She explained that the profession requires resilience and confidence. "First, you must be mentally very strong and ready for anything, whether officiating men's or women's matches," Jessy said. "If you are soft or lack confidence, you won't do well."

At the same time, she highlighted the importance of education. "A good educational background is important, especially proficiency in English," she added. "All the laws and playing conditions are written in English."

Jessy's success has already influenced other cricketers to consider officiating as a career after their playing days. National team players such as Sharmin Akhter Supta and Rumana Ahmed have completed umpiring courses, while others are exploring similar opportunities.

Another Bangladeshi official making steady progress is Mishu Chowdhury, who recently officiated at the ACC Women's Rising Teams Asia Cup in Thailand. She believes former players have a clear advantage when transitioning into umpiring.

"I believe it is much easier for former cricketers to become umpires because they understand the nuances of the game much faster than someone without a cricket background," she said.

Institutional backing has also played a role in developing this new pathway. Alongside continuing to organise training programmes, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has begun including women umpires in its payroll since 2025, with four women umpires currently on its payroll.

Chairman of the board's umpires committee, Iftekhar Rahman Mithu, said the initiative has already shown results. "We provided opportunities three years ago, and now they are officiating in World Cups and international matches," he said.

With more women joining training programmes and gaining experience, umpiring is gradually becoming a new frontier for female cricketers in Bangladesh – showing that their presence in the sport is expanding well beyond the boundary line.

Sensational Shopna rewriting the rules

Most athletes gain recognition after shining in the national colours. For **Shopna Akter Jili**, the order was reversed. Long before she played a key role in Bangladesh securing the inaugural SAFF Women's Futsal Championship in Thailand earlier this year, the teenage goalkeeper from Mymensingh had already become a phenomenon on rural football grounds. In local exhibition tournaments – popularly known as "khyap" matches – she drew crowds wherever she went. Videos of her reflex saves and lively personality spread widely online, earning her the nickname "Viral Shopna". A college student, Shopna grew up in a large family of seven siblings and is the only sportsperson among them. Her football journey began in 2017, and after showing early signs of potential she first caught wider media attention when she was selected as one of three girls to train in Portugal in 2022. Along the way, she has also navigated the patriarchal mindset that often surrounds girls' participation in sport in rural Bangladesh, doing so with confidence and flair. In a wide-ranging conversation with *The Daily Star's* Anisur Rahman and Khalid Hossain, Shopna reflects on her unusual path as she balances the realities of fame and responsibility at just 18, while reshaping perceptions of what girls can achieve and how. Excerpts from the exclusive interview follow:

The Daily Star (DS): You were reluctant to join the futsal squad at first.

Shopna Akter Jili (SAJ): At first, I felt I might not be able to adjust because the court seemed very small and the rules – especially about throwing the ball by hand – were difficult. But after about ten days of practice I understood everything.

DS: How does it feel to be credited alongside stars like Sabina Khatun and Krishna Rani Sarkar for the SAFF futsal triumph?

SAJ: It was a matter of luck for me to play alongside such seniors. They supported me a lot. If I made a mistake, they did not blame me but encouraged and helped me improve.

DS: How did your football journey begin?

SAJ: When I was studying at Nandail Panchrukhi Primary School, our senior team suddenly lost their goalkeeper. I used to play often, so a teacher asked me to try the position, and I gladly agreed. Our team later became champions in 2017, and many players from that team have gone on to play at higher levels.

DS: Did your family face criticism for allowing you to play?

SAJ: Some local people used to call my brother and say negative things, so initially he created some obstacles. But my father, mother and elder siblings always supported me, allowing me to continue.

DS: Have you faced negativity from coaches or officials?

SAJ: Some people have helped me a lot, but others have spoken negatively behind my back or spread rumours to hinder my progress. There were even attempts to push me out of the national team through false accusations, but instead of giving up, I decided to answer through my performance.



DS: Your fashion sense also makes you stand out.

SAJ: I have liked dressing up since childhood and enjoy grooming myself. But after joining futsal I feel it is better to stay simpler.

DS: You have played in many districts. Have you ever faced problems?

SAJ: I cannot even count how many districts I have played in. In places like Bogura and Nilphamari the crowd and organisation were wonderful, but once in Sirajganj the crowd was so big that I became quite scared. The biggest problem happened in Kushtia when spectators came too close to the field, and there were also some disruptive boys. Only five minutes of the match were played before organisers moved me to a safe location.

DS: How do you ensure security when travelling for matches?

SAJ: Most people in northern Bangladesh know me now. I still try to tag along a trusted female figure to accompany me and set conditions about proper safety and arrangements before agreeing to play anywhere. At the venue, usually other female players surround me, while organisers and police help manage security.

DS: How much do you earn from playing "khyap" games?

SAJ: I receive about 20,000 taka per match. My elder brothers mainly support the family, but whenever I can, I also help financially. Earlier I used to get five or six request calls every day, but it is not possible to play daily. Now I usually decline such offers.

DS: How has life changed after becoming a champion?

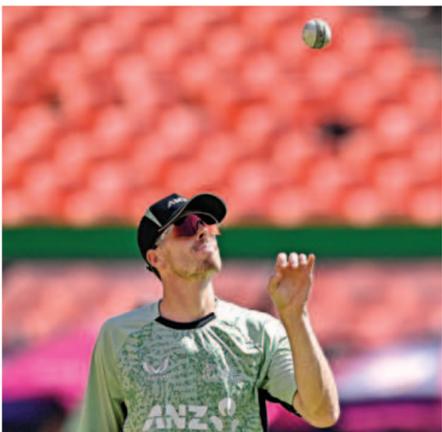
SAJ: Sometimes I am sleeping at home and four or five women enter my room just to see me once. Managing such attention can be difficult, but it's a big achievement for me. Before, I could move around freely and sometimes felt aimless. Now, as a national team player, I feel much more responsibility and think carefully before making decisions.



HISTORY BECKONS

India, NZ clash in blockbuster final

India and New Zealand will face off in a high-intensity T20 World Cup final at the world's largest cricket stadium, the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad, today. While the Black Caps roared into the final with a sweeping win over in-form South Africa in the semifinal, India booked their place in the title decider with a nerve-racking win over England in a high-scoring contest.



➤ India hold the edge over New Zealand in the overall T20I head-to-head, winning 16 of the 30 matches between the two sides. The Black Caps have won 11, while three matches ended in ties.

➤ However, India are yet to beat New Zealand in T20 World Cups, having lost all three encounters so far.

➤ India and New Zealand have met three times in the finals of ICC events. The Black Caps came out on top in the Champions Trophy in 2000 and the 2021 ICC World Test Championship, while India won the most recent meeting in the 2025 Champions Trophy final.

➤ India now have the chance to become the first host

country to win the T20 World Cup, as well as the first team to successfully defend the World T20 title.

➤ Meanwhile, New Zealand are chasing their first global T20 crown, having lost their only other final against Australia in 2021.

➤ However, there are ominous signs for India. Their only defeat in this edition of the T20 World Cup came at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad, where they suffered a 76-run thrashing against South Africa in the Super Eights. They also carry the heartbreak of losing the 2023 ODI World Cup final to Australia at this ground, despite entering that final on the back of 10 consecutive wins.



FORTIS back on top

SPORTS REPORTER

Gambian forward Essa Jallow scored twice as 10-man Fortis FC defeated defending champions Mohammedan SC 2-1 in Cumilla yesterday to rejoin Bashundhara Kings atop the Bangladesh Football League, leaving the losing side in the sixth place.

Essa opened the scoring in the 20th minute with a clever chip over Mohammedan goalkeeper Sujon Chowdhury and doubled his tally in the 51st minute with a close-range header from Pa Omar Babou's low free-kick at Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium.

Fortis were a player down in the 62nd minute when Sajed Hasan Jummon Nijhum handled a goal-bound header, conceding a penalty that Muzaffaroz, returning to the club after leaving in the first phase, converted with ease. However, Fortis held firm to claim all three points – taking their tally to 21 – and now trailing Kings only on goal difference.



When Mexico delivered 95

At the 1970 FIFA World Cup in Mexico, 32 matches delivered 95 goals. While 1930 and 1934 hold the record for the fewest goals (70), the game has only gotten bigger. Qatar 2022 currently sits at the top with a record-breaking 172 goals. The 2026 World Cup, featuring the highest number of 48 teams and 104 games, has every chance to set the bar even higher.

**** Visit *The Daily Star's* website to also read: 'From an 11-second storm to a 13-goal epic'**



Bangladesh players moved from Sydney to Perth yesterday, ahead of Monday's must-win group game against Uzbekistan in the AFC Women's Asian Cup. Afeida Khandaker and company visited Kings Park for light walking and stretching to aid recovery following Friday's 5-0 loss to North Korea. Team physiotherapist Isnad Zaman reported that the squad recovered quickly, with hopes of advancing to the next stage still alive.

PHOTO: BFF



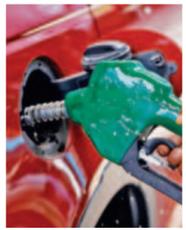
BSRM
THE ONLY STEEL FACTORY IN BANGLADESH TO RECEIVE THE
GREEN FACTORY AWARD 2025



SHAH CEMENT
BANGLADESH'S
NO. 1 CEMENT BRAND

Panic buying drains filling stations

Energy minister assures adequate stock, supply; filling station workers 'beat student leader to death' in Jhenaidah



DIESEL SALES
FEBRUARY DAILY AVERAGE: 12,879 tonnes
MARCH 1-4 DAILY AVERAGE: 24,478 tonnes

OCTANE SALES
FEBRUARY DAILY AVERAGE: 1,173 tonnes
MARCH 1-4 DAILY AVERAGE: 2,000 tonnes

PETROL SALES
FEBRUARY DAILY AVERAGE: 1,212 tonnes
MARCH 1-4 DAILY AVERAGE: 2,345 tonnes

ASIFUR RAHMAN and MOHAMMAD SUMAN

Many filling stations across Bangladesh, including Dhaka, Chattogram, and Rajshahi, ran dry yesterday as panic buying continued for a second day amid fears of supply disruption due to

the war in the Middle East. Long queues stretched into the night, with motorists scrambling to secure fuel despite repeated government assurances that reserves remain adequate and prices will not rise this month. Power, Energy and Mineral

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

Unable to buy diesel, RMG factories losing steam

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Garment factories in Gazipur are struggling to keep production at full capacity due to a shortage of diesel, as filling stations in the area have stopped supplying fuel in containers over the past two days.

Exporters say many units are losing four to five hours of production daily, raising fears of missing shipment deadlines for international buyers.

The factories rely on diesel to run generators during at least six hours of power cuts by the Bangladesh Rural Electrification Board.

Industry leaders say panic buying, triggered by concerns over Middle East tensions, has worsened the shortage.

Rashid Hossaini, managing director of Nexus Sweaters



People weaving through clothing stalls on the pavement at the capital's New Market yesterday as the Eid shopping rush gathers momentum.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

BESSENT HINTS AT LIFTING MORE RUSSIAN OIL SANCTIONS: B4

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

Balendra Shah unseats former Nepal PM

AFP, Kathmandu

Rapper-turned-politician Balendra Shah unseated former Nepal prime minister KP Sharma Oli in his own constituency, Election Commission data showed Saturday, with his party also seemingly headed for a landslide victory nationally.

The 35-year-old's victory over the 74-year-old Marxist leader -- and his rise from city mayor to potential prime minister -- marks one of the most dramatic results in recent Nepali politics.



The high-stakes election on Thursday came six months after deadly protests toppled the government led by Oli, with at least 77 people killed.

The September 2025 youth-led demonstrations, under a loose Gen Z banner, began over a brief social media ban but quickly tapped into broader grievances over corruption and a struggling economy.

Nationwide, Shah's centrist Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) was on track to win a majority in the 275-member House of Representatives, the lower house of parliament, according to early trends issued by the Election Commission, although counting still has far to go.

"Looking at the trend, the Rastriya Swatantra Party has taken the lead in many places and has won several seats,"

SEE PAGE 6 COL 6

Curtailed, delayed Boi Mela sees sales plummet

DIPAN NANDY and SUKANTA HALDER

On most evenings, the grounds of the Amar Ekushey Boi Mela still reflect the familiar spirit of Bangladesh's literary season -- students browsing poetry collections, families posing for photographs beneath colourful banners, and writers signing newly released books.

But behind the festive atmosphere, this year's fair -- the country's largest literary gathering -- is grappling with a sharp decline in book sales, complaints from publishers over management issues, and concerns about the timing of the event.

Publishers, visitors and organisers say a combination of factors lies behind the slowdown: the fair's delayed start, its overlap with Ramadan, economic pressures on readers, and disagreements over organisational decisions.

Traditionally, the Ekushey Book Fair begins on February 1 and continues throughout the month. This year, however, the schedule was disrupted by



the national election in mid-February. As a result, the fair started on February 26, later than usual, and will continue until March 15, making this edition the shortest in its half-decade history.

The decline in sales has alarmed many within the publishing industry. Publishers say this year their sales have fallen by 40 to 80 percent compared to previous fairs held outside Ramadan.

According to Mazharul Islam, chief executive officer of Anyaprokash, the sales at this year's book fair are

"horribly bad".

"The turnout is much lower than we had anticipated; it is even worse than our estimates. We did not imagine it would be this bad when we proposed holding the fair after Ramadan," he told The Daily Star on Friday.

Mazharul explained that during the holy month of Ramadan, people do not find the time to buy books as they must balance office hours with iftar and subsequent preparations for Taraweeh prayers. He also pointed out

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

India eye historic title defence

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A sea of blue will turn up in the stands of the Narendra Modi



Stadium in Ahmedabad today with hopes of seeing India's coronation when they take on New Zealand in the final of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup, at the same place where the echoes of a heartbreak from three years ago still linger.

The match, which will culminate the 20-team tournament co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka, will begin at 7:30pm Bangladesh time.

Defending champions India started the tournament as favourites and barring the lone hiccup against South Africa in the Super Eights, they have marched their way into the final.

Suryakumar Yadav's men are now just one win away from becoming the first team to defend the T20 World Cup title, the only team to win the tournament in home soil and also become the first team in history to win three ICC events in senior men's

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

Family Card pilot to cover 40,000 households

RAJAUUL KARIM BYRON

At least 40,000 families will receive Family Cards in the pilot phase over the next four months, which will cost about Tk 39 crore.

Starting from March 10, 10,000 families will be provided the cards each month, according to the Family Card Piloting Implementation Guideline, 2026. Each family with the card will receive Tk 2,500 every month.

Some Tk 39 crore has been set aside from the block allocation from this fiscal year's revised budget, a finance ministry official told The Daily Star.

Of this, Tk 25.15 crore will be required for the allowance, while the remaining fund will be used for the beneficiary selection process, he added.

According to the guideline, Tk 4.8 crore will be used for field survey, Tk 5.08 crore for smart card and other related purchases.

In the first phase, 50 types of information on 320,000 families of 14 wards will be collected to assess their eligibility. For this task, 560 supervisors will be appointed, each receiving Tk 5,000.

By June, data collection will be completed and 40,000 beneficiaries will be selected.

The 14 upazilas selected for the pilot phase are Banani (Korail, Sattala and Bhashantek slums) and Mirpur/Shah Ali (Oli Miar Tek and Baganbari slums) in Dhaka; Pangsha in Rajbari; Patenga in Chattogram; Banchharampur in Brahmanbaria; Lama in Bandarban; Khalishpur in Khulna; Charfesson in Bhola; Derai in Sunamganj; Bhairab in Kishoreganj; Bogura Sadar in Bogura; Lalpur in Natore; Thakurgaon Sadar in Thakurgaon; and Nawabganj in Dinajpur.

The government's ultimate objective is to gradually bring two crore families under monthly cash support, as per the guideline.

When fully implemented, the programme, a key

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

India says it will push ahead with Russian oil imports

B4

HASANAH ISLAMIC BANKING
البنكية الاسلامي
Prime Bank

PRAYER TIMING
MARCH 8

Fajr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 5-01	12-45	4-30	6-06	7-30
JAMAAT 5-11	1-15	4-45	6-16	8-00

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

SEHRI, IFTAR TIMING

RAMADAN	MAR	SEHRI	IFTAR
18	8		6:06
19	9	4:57	6:07
20	10	4:57	6:07



The Mayor Anisul Huq Road in Tejgaon remains choked by illegally parked lorries, eating up more than half the road's width. This persistent problem has plagued this road for years. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

TRICKED INTO WAR Bangladeshi POW in Ukraine wants to return home

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

A Bangladeshi man, reportedly captured by Ukrainian forces, has made a desperate appeal to return home, saying he wants to go back to Bangladesh and no longer remain with the Russian side after what he claims was a deceptive recruitment process.

The appeal appeared in a video posted on a Telegram channel on March 3.

In the video, the man says he first went to Russia to work for a company and spent four months there before other Bangladeshis approached him with an offer to work as a security guard.

He says he accepted the offer without knowing it involved the Russian military, and pleaded to be brought back, saying "I want to go back to Bangladesh".

"Please help me get back to Bangladesh through my embassy. I appeal to you to help me return home. I do not



IMAGE: VIDEO GRAB

SCAN THE QR CODE TO WATCH VIDEO



SEE PAGE 6 COL 4