

The Daily Star

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End this meaningless war without delay

Escalation in US-Israel war on Iran deeply alarming

It is extremely distressing to see the escalation in the war of choice being waged by the United States and Israel against Iran as it engulfs the entire Middle East, threatening not only the region but also the global economy. The shifting objectives of the US-Israel war—ranging from the so-called denuclearisation of Iran to regime change and democratisation—have already caused widespread disruption. The consequences are being felt from farming fields and factory floors to transportation networks, affecting people across the globe.

Like the ambiguity surrounding the war's objectives and the likely timeframe for ending the US-Israeli campaign remains unclear. Comments by Donald Trump about the success of US operations have sent mixed signals. While his remarks to the US network CBS—that he believed the war “is very complete”—briefly calmed markets, within hours he appeared to walk back that statement, saying: “We could go further. And we’re going to go further.” It remains uncertain whether he would accept anything short of what he called Iran’s “unconditional surrender” only days earlier.

Conversely, ruling out a quick end to the conflict, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said his country was prepared to continue missile attacks for as long as necessary and that talks with the US were no longer on the agenda. Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps also warned that it would not allow “one litre of oil” to be shipped from the Middle East if US-Israeli attacks continued.

Beyond the ongoing blockade of shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, which carries more than one-fifth of the world’s energy supply, the war could expand further through continued Iranian attacks on US military assets in Gulf countries. Several producers have already reduced or partially shut down their wells. Experts warn that even if the war ended immediately, restoring oil and gas production to pre-war levels would take weeks, if not months.

This oil shock has the potential to wreak havoc in countries like Bangladesh. Some economists have likened its possible impact more to the aftermath of an earthquake than a storm surge. Farmers are already struggling to secure fuel for irrigation, without which the country’s main staple crop could suffer. Universities have been closed in a bid to conserve power. Exporters are scrambling to find cargo flights to keep supply schedules on track, often at higher costs. Meanwhile, a potential decline in remittance inflows from the Gulf is unnerving policymakers already grappling with weak foreign exchange reserves. The deaths of four Bangladeshis caught in the conflict also highlight the grave danger faced by millions of expatriate workers from other countries living in the Gulf, through no fault of their own.

Once again, we see that while no one truly emerges victorious from war, millions of innocent people bear its harshest pain and endless suffering. It is, therefore, imperative for world leaders to act urgently to halt further fighting. Any escalatory move by any party in the name of securing commercial shipping through the Strait of Hormuz should be addressed through the United Nations rather than through the unilateral will of any superpower. The world can no longer afford to absorb the cost of this meaningless war.

NHRC ordinance must pass promptly

Any changes, if necessary, can be made later

We ardently support the recent call from civil society to pass the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Ordinance, 2025 in its current form. The ordinance, along with 132 others issued by the interim government, is due to be placed before the 13th parliament at its very first session tomorrow. The ordinance needs immediate approval so that the recently reconstituted commission can get legal validity.

Per constitutional requirement, ordinances issued during the interim period have a 30-day window for approval once they are placed before parliament. If the NHRC ordinance is subjected to further review now, the process will risk the loss of the developments made under the new law. The country was without its primary national rights watchdog for 15 months after the previous commission resigned in the aftermath of the Awami League government’s ouster. Despite repeated calls for urgent action, it took the interim government more than 10 months to issue the new ordinance, and the new NHRC was appointed per this law in February this year, just before the election. In a country where human rights are regularly infringed in varying degrees, we cannot afford to have another spell of a non-functional NHRC.

The new ordinance, designed to replace the NHRC Act, 2009, aims to empower the state body with a broader mandate, plugging loopholes that prevented the commission from becoming a proper defender of human rights. Under this law, the NHRC will have full financial autonomy and independence. It also aims to align the commission’s mandate with international human rights instruments ratified by Bangladesh, as well as those recognised by customary international human rights law consistent with the country’s laws. These are essential factors for a strong, effective commission that will protect and uphold people’s fundamental rights.

The past human rights commissions were often ineffective in addressing the gross violations of human rights in the country: suppression of free speech and dissent, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary and prolonged detention, custodial torture, and attacks on minority communities. Political and bureaucratic influence weakened the state body. If the government is to realise its electoral pledge to restore democracy and justice for all, ensuring a strong, fully functional NHRC is a crucial first step. For that, approving the current NHRC ordinance in the parliament and its proper implementation are essential.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Japan struck by earthquake, tsunami

On this day in 2011, a 9.1-magnitude earthquake struck off the northeastern coast of Honshu, Japan, causing widespread damage in the country and triggering a devastating tsunami that instigated a major nuclear accident.

Jungle Salimpur and a warning for strategic land management



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The massive joint-forces operation launched this week in Jungle Salimpur, Chattogram, did more than expose a criminal stronghold; it revealed a deeper policy problem showing how strategic land around our most important port can gradually fall outside effective governance. For years, reports described this area as a place where illegal land transactions, informal authority structures, and criminal networks operated with limited state oversight. While the immediate concern now is law enforcement, the broader challenge of protecting strategic land around major logistics and industrial hubs is also something that cannot be ignored.

The scale of the problem at Jungle Salimpur became clearer when around 4,000 personnel from the army, Rab, police, and BGB were deployed to dismantle criminal hideouts and re-establish state control there. This is particularly significant because of where it occurred. Chattogram is Bangladesh’s principal maritime gateway, handling over 90 percent of the country’s international seaborne trade through the port there. When governance problems emerge near such a critical economic hub, the implications extend far beyond local administration.

This illustrates what may befall even strategically important land when monitoring and planning fail to keep pace with urban expansion. Over several decades, weak oversight of government-owned land, combined with rapid population growth, appears to have allowed informal settlements and illegal land transactions to spread across the area. The scale of the settlement itself is striking. Jungle Salimpur, reportedly, covers nearly 3,100 acres of government-owned hills, where tens of thousands of residents live in largely unregulated housing clusters.

In many rapidly growing cities, informal settlements initially emerge because low-income households cannot find affordable housing within the formal urban system. But when land ownership remains unclear and

institutional oversight is weak, informal brokers and organised groups often begin to control land transactions. Over time, a shadow land market develops outside the legal framework. Such dynamics are not unique to Bangladesh.

According to UN-Habitat, rapid urbanisation frequently produces informal settlements when planning systems fail to expand alongside population growth. The difference lies in how quickly authorities respond. When informal occupation is detected early, governments can intervene through planning measures or relocation strategies. But when settlements expand for decades without



Members of the army in armoured personnel carriers patrol the Jungle Salimpur area of Sitakunda in Chattogram, on March 9, 2026.

effective oversight, reversing the situation becomes extremely difficult and expensive.

For a logistics-driven economy like Bangladesh, these risks are particularly serious. Industrial growth depends on predictable land availability, clear property rights, and stable governance. Investors and infrastructure planners need confidence that land designated for industrial zones, logistics facilities, or transport corridors will remain available for those purposes.

But pressure on our industrial land

is already increasing. As manufacturing expands and logistics networks become more complex, demand for properly serviced industrial zones continues to rise. The Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority (BEZA) is developing multiple economic zones across the country to support export-oriented industrial expansion. Meanwhile, ports require surrounding space for container yards, warehouses, inland depots, and transport connectivity. Highways and rail corridors also need protected land for future expansion. When large areas of government land near key economic centres gradually fall into informal occupation, reclaiming them later becomes extremely costly.

Chattogram’s future development makes the issue even more important. The city is expected to play a central role in Bangladesh’s next phase of trade and industrial growth. Planned infrastructure such as the Bay Terminal project, expected to significantly expand port capacity and allow larger vessels to berth, is intended to transform cargo handling and logistics efficiency in the

Salimpur adds another layer of sensitivity. The area lies within a belt surrounded by important national institutions, including Chattogram Cantonment, Faujdarhat Cadet College, and the Bangladesh Military Academy. From a planning perspective, land located near such key state institutions, transport corridors, and economic infrastructure should receive stronger monitoring and governance than ordinary urban land or areas.

At the same time, any long-term response must recognise the complex social realities of informal settlements. Not every resident in such areas is involved in illegal activities. Many families settle there simply because affordable housing options are limited. According to the World Bank, housing shortages and rural-to-urban migration are major drivers of informal settlement growth in Bangladesh. A sustainable solution therefore requires distinguishing between organised criminal actors, illegal land brokers, and vulnerable residents who may require alternative housing arrangements. Addressing only the security dimension without tackling underlying housing pressures is unlikely to produce lasting results.

So the broader policy lesson here is clear: protecting strategic land around major logistics hubs must become a national priority. Government land near ports, highways, and industrial corridors should be continuously monitored through digital land records, satellite mapping, and coordinated institutional oversight. Modern land administration increasingly relies on geospatial mapping and digital land information systems to detect illegal occupation early, and Bangladesh should adopt or strengthen such approaches.

Urban planning must also evolve alongside economic growth. As Bangladesh expands its manufacturing base and logistics infrastructure, planning authorities must anticipate where industrial zones, transport corridors, and urban housing can expand in a balanced and sustainable manner.

To sum up, the Jungle Salimpur development should be viewed not only as a law-enforcement episode but also as a policy warning. For a country whose economic future depends heavily on logistics efficiency and export growth, protecting strategic land near its principal port city must be treated as part of its long-term economic strategy.

Will disability rights be finally delivered?



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According to the World Health Organization (WHO) Health Equity Report 2023, some 16 percent of the global population experiences a disability. As per this calculation, the number of Bangladeshis living with disabilities should be around 2.7 crore, which is around 15 percent of the total population of the country and is almost the same as Australia’s total population.

Given Bangladesh’s recent political transition, it is a critical moment to place the rights, inclusion, and dignity of this significant portion of our population at the centre of the country’s reform and development agenda. BNP’s election manifesto—specifically pledging to advance disability rights and the existing legislation about disability—signals hope.

Bangladesh ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2007 as one of the first countries in the world and enacted the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities (RPPD) Act in 2013. Implementation mechanisms, including a National Action Plan, were later introduced in 2018. However, due to the lack of a sound implementation strategy, most of the country’s disability-inclusive initiatives remain trapped in charity models.

BNP’s manifesto states that the current disability laws and the National Policy on Disability (1995) will be updated to ensure effective implementation of rights-related laws.

This is indeed a positive development. However, Bangladesh has already enacted a comprehensive RPPD Act in 2013 and ratified the UN CRPD, and both uphold the rights of people with all types of disabilities. So, BNP does not necessarily need to update the 1995 national policy for a rights-based implementation; it should first prioritise the effective implementation of the National Action Plan 2018 under the RPPD Act. This work can be done by activating the central and local disability committees and establishing inter-ministerial coordination.

BNP’s manifesto also pledges disability-friendly citizen services, including accessible travel infrastructure. It is easier said than done, especially as most of the existing infrastructure in the country was not planned to be inclusive. In terms of public transport, the metro rail is the only mode of transportation that accommodates people with disabilities. So, the government must build infrastructure following the global accessibility guidelines. Similarly, all newly procured public transport must meet the universal accessibility standards.

What BNP should rather focus on is strengthening the Jatiyo Protibondhi Unnayan Foundation (JPUF), as it is already a specialised agency for persons with disabilities and functions as a foundation under the Ministry of Social Welfare, where more persons with

disabilities can be recruited. Without ensuring that persons with disabilities are making decisions about their own future, positive changes will be difficult to bring about.

As prominent disability rights activist and author James Charlton famously wrote in his book “Nothing about us without us”, lived experiences and a deep understanding of people

The geographic setting of Jungle

As prominent disability rights activist and author James Charlton famously wrote in his book ‘Nothing about us without us’, lived experiences and a deep understanding of people with disabilities are a must-have to remove the entrenched social barriers that provide little space for disabled people to participate, especially in the decision-making domain.

with disabilities are a must-have to remove the entrenched social barriers that provide little space for disabled people to participate, especially in the decision-making domain. The government should also prioritise persons with disabilities as recipients of the proposed family cards, as many of them live in deeper economic vulnerability compared to other marginalised groups.

There are a few representational factors that BNP would do well to respond to. For example, BNP’s manifesto uses the term “people with special needs,” which is considered inappropriate under both the UN’s

CRPD and Bangladesh’s RPPD Act 2013. The phrase “special needs” is misleading because it suggests that only persons with disabilities require additional or unique support. However, in reality, the fundamental needs of persons with disabilities are no different from those of persons without disabilities. Like everyone else, they require food, oxygen, education, healthcare, work opportunities, and a chance to participate in society to live with dignity.

Disability, therefore, is not solely an attribute of an individual; it emerges through interaction with societal barriers. It is often the state or society that creates conditions in which disability is experienced. For example, if a voter with a disability cannot cast their ballot because polling centres are inaccessible or election procedures are not adapted, the problem lies not with the individual but with the system that has failed to ensure accessibility. Yet, when exclusion occurs, we often focus solely on a person’s impairment instead of recognising the structural obstacles that prevent inclusion. This misplaced focus obscures the real issue: the need to transform institutions, environments, and attitudes so that everyone can participate equally.

To conclude, it is worth recalling the concept of the “surplus population,” described by political economist James O’Connor. Historically, persons with disabilities in Bangladesh have often been treated as part of this “surplus population”—individuals perceived as economically unproductive and therefore positioned primarily as recipients of charity rather than as equal participants in economic and social life. However, if the commitments outlined in the BNP manifesto are translated into effective policy and practice, this cycle could very well begin to change.