



"Trump doesn't understand that the Iranian nation is resilient. The more pressure the US applies, the stronger the people's resolve becomes."
Ali Larijani, secretary of Iran's National Security Council

The Daily Star

YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW

SECOND EDITION



DHAKA SATURDAY MARCH 14, 2026

REGD. No. DA 781

VOL. XXXVI No. 59

FALGUN 29, 1432 BS

www.thedailystar.net

RAMADAN 24, 1447 HJRI

16 PAGES: Tk 15.00



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'Stop the war'

UN chief urges Israel, Hezbollah as he visits Beirut amid shelling; Trump says US will hit Iran 'very hard' after easing sanctions on Russian oil

AGENCIES

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres called on Israel and the Iran-backed armed group Hezbollah to "stop the war" at the start of his visit to Beirut yesterday, as Israel expanded its strikes across the country.

Lebanon was drawn into the Middle East war last week when Hezbollah attacked Israel in response to the killing of Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in US-Israeli strikes.

"My strong appeal to those parties, to Hezbollah and to Israel, is for a ceasefire to stop the war," Guterres said.

"This is no longer the time of armed groups. This is the time of strong states."

Later in the day, the UN chief launched a humanitarian appeal to help the more than 800,000 people registered as displaced in Lebanon.

Meanwhile, President Donald Trump said the US was going to be hitting Iran

"very hard over the next week", shortly after issuing a partial 30-day waiver for purchases of sanctioned Russian oil, hoping to ease prices fuelled by the US-Israeli war on Iran.

More than 800,000 displaced in Lebanon

Israel and Iran exchange missile barrages

6 US service members die in plane crash in Iraq

Prices have been whipsawing on Trump's changing comments on the likely duration of the war, which has prompted Iran to attack vessels in the Strait of Hormuz, the conduit for a fifth of the world's oil.

Benchmark Brent crude (LCOc1) eased about 0.6% to around \$99.80, still up almost 40% since the start of the conflict.

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A burst of burning debris erupts after reported Israeli strikes in Beirut's southern suburbs, Lebanon, early yesterday, amid escalating clashes between Hezbollah and Israel.

PHOTO: REUTERS

NATION GASPS UNDER TOXIC SKIES

Air pollution driving up respiratory diseases

Country's top treatment facility grapples with surge in patients

"During the dry season, germs remain suspended in the air, and people inhale them. That is why more and more people suffer from respiratory diseases at this time."

Golam Sarwar Liaquat Hossain Bhuiyan
Director of Nat'l Institute of Diseases of the Chest and Hospital

NUMBER OF PATIENTS AT NIDCH

2025	1.95 lakh
2024	1.92 lakh
2023	1.75 lakh
2022	1.62 lakh
2021	1.28 lakh

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and PINAKI ROY

The outdoor department of the country's premier respiratory treatment facility in the capital's Mohakhali was so packed with patients that staffers were struggling to manage the crowd.

Clutching their medical test reports, many stood in front of doctors' chambers because the seating arrangement was inadequate. With only a few minutes left before the

outpatient services closed at 1:00pm, some looked visibly worried, unsure whether they would be able to see a physician.

This scene unfolded at the National Institute of Diseases of the Chest and Hospital (NIDCH) on February 23. Several staffers said such situations have become frequent at the 870-bed specialised facility. Their claims are corroborated by the hospital's yearly

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Smoke fills the air we breathe

Landfills, kilns and vehicles combine to push pollution to hazardous levels

PINAKI ROY

Smoke from burning garbage at the Matuail and Amin Bazar landfills often blankets Dhaka's sky, underscoring how poor waste management has become a major driver of the city's air pollution.

Waste collectors also frequently burn trash along highways outside the capital. Along with emissions from brick kilns and vehicles, and dust from roads and construction sites, these practices further worsen the city's already toxic air.

According to the Switzerland-based Air Quality Index (AQI), Dhaka's air is frequently ranked among the most polluted in the world. The average AQI in Dhaka and its surrounding areas consistently hovers around 200, occasionally surging beyond 600.

Just yesterday, Dhaka's air quality ranked the third worst in the world, after Karachi and Beijing, while Bangladesh's overall average air quality was the second worst globally.

On the AQI scale, 0-50 is considered "good," 51-100 "moderate," 101-150 "unhealthy for sensitive groups," 151-200 "unhealthy," 201-300 "very unhealthy," and anything above 300 is classified as "hazardous."

On March 4, the AQI in Savar was 640. Contacted, Ziaul Haque, head of the CASE

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Govt moves to secure fertilisers for Aman season

SUKANTA HALDER

The government has finalised a plan to import five lakh tonnes of urea fertiliser as a precautionary measure amid fears that a prolonged US-Israel war on Iran could disrupt Bangladesh's fertiliser supply after June.

Apart from urea, Bangladesh is set to sign a contract with Egypt to import DAP and TSP fertilisers, while proposals from several other countries for various fertiliser supplies are under discussion.



FERTILISER	TONNES IN STOCK
Urea	4,52,000
TSP	4,67,000
DAP	5,44,000
MoP	3,38,000

SOURCE: AGRICULTURE MINISTRY

The Aman seasons will begin after June. Aman rice accounts for 40 percent of the total annual rice crop, which was estimated around 4 crore tonnes in the fiscal year 2024-25.

Since March 4, the authorities have shut five of Bangladesh's six urea fertiliser factories amid concerns over gas supply disruptions caused by the war and Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a key energy route. With domestic production already meeting only a small portion of demand, the closures have

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Bangladesh's energy future clouded by LNG risks

Warns Global Energy Monitor

ASIFUR RAHMAN

Low prices through the end of this decade may make liquefied natural gas (LNG) temporarily more attractive, but they could obscure the long-term risks for developing economies like Bangladesh, according to the latest briefing by the Global Energy Monitor (GEM).

In the immediate term, however, the fallout from the recent US-Israel war on Iran has highlighted the "fragile assumption" that LNG imports will remain affordable and reliably delivered to Asia, it said.

The conflict threatens shipments through the Strait of Hormuz. A significant portion of global LNG trade flows through the narrow channel.

"The pricing implications are savage," the report said, adding that futures for the

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Fuelled by waste, including plastic and polythene, the Matuail landfill under Dhaka South City Corporation continues to smoulder. Locals say the stench and smoke are overpowering. This drone photo of smoke rising from an around 25-foot-high pile of garbage was taken recently.

PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

US launches labour probe into 59 nations, Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The United States Trade Representative (USTR) yesterday announced investigations into 60 economies, including Bangladesh, in relation to what it called failures to take action on forced labor.

The investigations will determine whether the acts, policies and practices of these economies led to their failure to impose and effectively enforce a ban on the import of goods produced with forced labour and whether it impacted US commerce, said a USTR statement dated March 12.

"Despite the international consensus against forced labor, governments have failed to impose and effectively enforce measures banning goods produced with forced labour from entering their markets. For too long, American workers and firms have been forced

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

Parliament must debate, scrap US trade deal

Say speakers at seminar



It'll be an understatement if the deal is described as a slavery deal. Because, it has left no room for autonomy.



Economist ANU MUHAMMAD

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh should immediately cancel the recently signed trade deal with the US because the terms and conditions of the agreement hardly protect the interests of the country, said noted economist Anu Muhammad yesterday.

The real loss to Bangladesh from the deal would be more than the Tk 1,500 crore annual financial loss estimated by research organisations, he said at a seminar on the risks of the US-Bangladesh trade deal organised by Ganatantrik Odhikar Committee, a left-leaning platform, at the Economic Reporters' Forum auditorium in Dhaka.

It is not only the loss in revenue from the zero-duty

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1



The holiday market on the street in front of Motijheel Ideal School and College bustled with customers yesterday as crowds of shoppers thronged the area ahead of Eid.

PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

Air pollution driving up respiratory diseases

FROM PAGE 1
data showing a steady increase in patient numbers.

Linking the rise in respiratory cases to air pollution, NIDCH Director Golam Sarwar Liaquat Hossain Bhuiyan said, "During the dry season, germs remain suspended in the air, and people inhale them. That is why more and more people suffer from respiratory diseases at this time."

"Air pollution of various types – dust, vehicle fumes and emissions from brick kilns – has increased, posing significant health risks, particularly respiratory problems. As a result, we are seeing a higher number of patients with asthma and COPD [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease]," he told The Daily Star on February 25.

He further said patients with asthma, in particular, suffer from symptoms such as cough, shortness of breath and wheezing. They can otherwise lead normal, healthy lives, but when they come into contact with certain triggering factors like air pollution, their symptoms worsen and the disease goes out of control.

Many patients come to the outdoor department with symptoms such as cough that doesn't subside easily, he said.

"Most people are engaged in some form of work, and when they go to their workplaces, they are exposed to these pollutants. Due to this repeated exposure, the number of such patients at the outdoor department has increased."

With Dhaka and other major cities seeing a rise in air pollution,

the number of patients at NIDCH – the top referral centre for respiratory diseases in the country – increased to 1.95 lakh last year from 1.92 lakh in 2024. The number was 1.75 lakh in 2023; 1.62 lakh in 2022; and 1.28 lakh in 2021, show the data.

Of the 1.95 lakh patients last year, the highest number – 1.60 lakh – sought care at the outdoor department, while 19,461 received treatment at the emergency unit and 15,886 were admitted to the hospital, according to the data.

Patients of all ages – from neonates to elderly people – visited the hospital, with those aged between 25 and 49 dominating the tally.

Health experts warn that health risks are especially high for patients with already-compromised lungs.

Safiqul Islam, an associate professor at NIDCH, said, "Air pollution is very dangerous for people with post-tuberculosis complications, pneumonia, or congenital lung problems. We are observing a rise in such patients at the hospital."

One such patient is 50-year-old Abdur Razzaq, who came to NIDCH on February 23. He had undergone treatment around three years ago when fluid accumulated in his lungs.

The street vendor from Narayanganj's Bhulta said he remains exposed to polluted air as he lives and works in an industrial area.

"I have been suffering from cough over the last few days and consulted a local doctor. He advised me to undergo some tests," Razzaq said.

Shihab Uddin, an employee of a

private company in Motijheel, said, "My daughter suffers from sinusitis and often falls ill due to air pollution. Her condition gets better in the monsoon when rains bring down the pollution level."

VERY UNHEALTHY AIR

As the dry season continues, Dhaka city's air quality has remained at unhealthy levels for more than a month. The city's Air Quality Index (AQI) crossed 300 on February 25 and 26, placing it in the "hazardous" category.

In Savar, the situation was even worse. The AQI there hit 443 on February 26 while it was 418 the day before, according to real-time data from the Department of Environment (DoE) which classifies an AQI above 300 as hazardous.

On both days, Dhaka's air quality was the worst among major cities across the globe, with an average AQI of 177 and 172. Beijing and Kathmandu jointly ranked second, according to IQAir, a Switzerland based private company that monitors air quality.

Between 1998 and 2023, Bangladesh saw a 66 percent surge in PM2.5 pollution caused by fine particulate matter measuring 2.5 micrometres or less in diameter, shows the Air Quality Life Index (AQLI) published by the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago in October last year.

Last year, the annual average PM2.5 level in Dhaka stood at 90.35 microgrammes per cubic metre, about 16 times the annual limit of 5µg/m³ recommended by the WHO,

underscoring a severe public health risk.

The PM2.5 level rises significantly during the dry season compared to other times of the year. Last month, Dhaka's average PM2.5 concentration rose to 193 microgrammes per cubic metre – 38 times higher than the WHO standard.

According to last year's report by the Energy Policy Institute, air pollution is cutting Bangladeshis' average life expectancy by 5.5 years, making it the country's deadliest external health risk.

It warns that the health toll caused by particulate matter pollution far exceeds that of tobacco use, malnutrition, or unsafe water. Smoking cuts life expectancy by about two years, while malnutrition reduces it by 1.4 years.

When contacted, DoE Additional Director General Ziaul Haque said there has been a sharp rise in air pollution in the capital. "The burning of solid waste in Matuail, Amin Bazar and several other areas could be contributing to the spike."

In August last year, the interim government declared Savar a degraded airshed and halted operations of 106 brick kilns. However, 30 to 40 kiln owners obtained permission from the High Court last month to resume activities.

DoE sources said brick kilns account for around 58 percent of Dhaka city's total air pollution, with vehicle emissions, construction activities and other sources contributing the remainder.

authorities not to disrupt operations in accordance with the order in Writ Petition No-15982/2025.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Enayet Hossain, who oversees the kiln, said the HC granted them six months of operational permission after they filed a petition citing financial losses. He claimed many other kiln owners in Savar are also operating under similar court directives.

According to DoE sources, brick kilns contribute around 58 percent of Dhaka's total air pollution.

Burning solid waste, along with smoke from industries and brick kilns and emissions from old vehicles, generates PM2.5 (particles smaller than 2.5 micrometres) in the air – considered the main pollutant in Dhaka's air.

PM2.5 RISING; AUTHORITIES IDLE
Between 1998 and 2023, the country's PM2.5 pollution surged by 66 percent, according to the global annual report of the Air Quality Life Index, published by the Energy Policy Institute of the University of Chicago.

Last year, Dhaka's annual average PM2.5 level stood at 90.35 microgrammes per cubic metre – around 18 times higher than the WHO recommended annual limit of 5 microgrammes per cubic metre.

Generally, during the dry season, the PM2.5 level surges higher than in other months of the year.

In January 2026, Dhaka's average PM2.5 concentration rose to 193 per cubic metre – 38 times higher than the WHO standard.

BREATHING TOXIC AIR
Just in 2023, 271,000 people in Bangladesh died from air pollution-related causes that year, according to a global report.

Over 90 percent of those deaths were linked to noncommunicable diseases, such as heart and lung ailments, diabetes and dementia, said the sixth edition of the State of Global Air 2025.

(Our Savar correspondent contributed to this report)

'Stop the war'

FROM PAGE 1

After nearly two weeks of war, 2,000 people have been killed, most of them in Iran, but many also in Lebanon and a growing number in the Gulf, which has, for the first time in decades of Middle East conflicts, found itself on the front line. Several million people have been displaced from their homes.

As Israeli warplanes pounded Beirut's suburbs with air strikes, Lebanon's interior minister said authorities were unable to accommodate the hundreds of thousands of people who have sought refuge in the capital.

Israel also dropped leaflets threatening Gaza-scale devastation as it deployed more troops to fight Hezbollah and warned of more attacks on Lebanon's infrastructure.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards announced yesterday that they had launched missiles and drones at Israel in coordination with Hezbollah.

Several homes in a Bedouin Arab town near an air base in northern Israel were heavily damaged overnight.

Later in the day, smoke could be seen rising from two locations around Tel Aviv, AFP journalists said, after blasts were heard following a warning that missiles were fired from Iran.

US forces have also suffered casualties. The US military confirmed that all six crew members aboard a refuelling aircraft that crashed in western Iraq were dead.

Iranian drones were reported flying into Kuwait, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Oman.

The Israeli military launched strikes across Tehran. It said its air force had struck more than 200 targets in western and central Iran over the past day.

Iranian Press TV said a woman had been killed by an airstrike close to a rally in Tehran for Quds (Jerusalem) Day,

one of many across Iran in support of Palestinians living in Israeli occupied territory.

President Masoud Pezeshkian, Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi and security chief Ali Larijani all appeared in videos verified by Reuters openly attending the rally in a gesture of defiance, despite an assertion by US Defense Secretary Peter Hegseth that the leadership were "cowering" underground.

The war has sparked a critical shortage of cooking gas in India, a country with longstanding ties to Iran. Iran has allowed two Indian-flagged liquefied petroleum gas carriers to sail through the Strait of Hormuz, four sources told Reuters.

The US waiver on Russian oil was welcomed in Moscow but left Kyiv and its allies angry.

Trump said he thinks Russian President Vladimir Putin may be helping Iran a "little bit" in the interview with Fox News Radio that aired on Friday.

"I think he might be helping him (Iran) a little bit, yeah, I guess. And he probably thinks we're helping Ukraine, right?" Trump told "The Brian Kilmeade Show", without specifying the nature of that help.

The Washington Post reported last week that Russia was providing Iran with targeting information that included locations of U.S. warships and aircraft in the Middle East. Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff later said Russia had denied doing so, and "we can take them at their word."

Iran's new supreme leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, in his first public comments on Thursday, vowed to keep the Strait of Hormuz shut and urged neighbouring countries to close US bases on their territory or risk being attacked themselves.

Govt moves to secure fertilisers

FROM PAGE 1

heightened reliance on imports amid global market volatility, rising freight costs, and vessel shortages.

A top official of the Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC), speaking to The Daily Star on condition of anonymity, said a meeting held a few days ago between the ministries of agriculture, finance, and the Energy Division finalised the decision to procure fertiliser.

The official said that of the five lakh tonnes, three lakh tonnes would be imported through government-to-government arrangements, while the remaining two lakh tonnes would be procured through open tenders.

Discussions are also underway on whether fertiliser can be transported via alternative routes under the existing government to government agreement with Saudi Arabia, the official said.

At the same time, preparations are being made to invite local and international tenders, the official added.

Meanwhile, a shipment of urea fertiliser, which was scheduled to reach Bangladesh from the United Arab Emirates, is currently stuck there due to the ongoing war. It is expected that the ship will set sail for Bangladesh once the situation stabilises and a safe maritime route is ensured, the official added.

In Bangladesh, urea fertiliser is produced and imported by the BCIC.

Non-urea fertilisers, such as diammonium phosphate (DAP), Triple Super Phosphate (TSP), and Muriate of Potash (MoP), are imported by the Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC).

Ahmed Faisal Imam, additional secretary for the fertiliser management and monitoring branch at the agriculture ministry, said that at this moment, the country has urea stock until June, while non-urea fertiliser stock will last until October. Currently, there is no fertiliser crisis in the country.

The total fertiliser demand in the country is around 68 to 69 lakh tonnes, of which the demand for urea is 26 lakh tonnes, according to the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

Imam added that an agreement with Egypt is expected to be signed next month.

A BCIC official said China and the UAE have made proposals to sell Bangladesh fertilisers.

Bangladesh usually imports fertilisers from Canada, Russia, Saudi Arabia, China, Morocco, and Tunisia.

Saudi Arabia is one of the main sources of DAP used in Bangladesh. Last year, the BADC purchased 6,00,000 tonnes of the fertiliser from the country and has set a target of importing the same amount this year.

However, due to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, Bangladesh's DAP imports from Saudi Arabia have become uncertain.

The official added that Egypt has

proposed selling 3 lakh tonnes each of DAP and TSP to Bangladesh.

Discussions are currently underway on importing 3 lakh tonnes of TSP.

In addition, the UAE has offered to supply Bangladesh with 2 lakh tonnes each of TSP, DAP, and MoP fertilisers, saying that the shipments would be sent to Bangladesh from other countries.

Bangladesh had an agreement with China to import 2.80 lakh tonnes of DAP annually. As the agreement has expired, the renewal process is now underway. At the same time, work is progressing on a new deal to raise the annual import target by 40,000 to 3,20,000 tonnes of DAP, the official mentioned.

Imam said that due to the ongoing war, one supply route has been affected, Saudi Arabia. Therefore, Bangladesh has kept several options open. Agreements with several countries have been renewed, and some new deals will also be signed.

Bangladesh imports MoP mainly from Russia and Canada, whose supplies have not been affected by the war. DAP is imported from China, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia, with the majority coming from Morocco. If any disruption occurs with imports from Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh will buy the fertiliser from China and Morocco instead, he said.

According to information from the agriculture ministry, the country's annual demand for DAP fertiliser is about 15 to 16 lakh tonnes. Of this amount, the DAP Fertiliser Company Ltd produces about 1 lakh tonnes annually.

The remaining demand is met through imports, most of which are handled by the BADC. A small portion is bought by the private sector.

Sources at the BADC's Procurement Division said it plans to purchase 26 lakh tonnes of fertiliser this year. Of the amount, 11.76 lakh tonnes will be DAP, 8,59,000 tonnes MoP, and 6,50,000 tonnes TSP.

Rafiqul I Mohamed, secretary of the agriculture ministry, told this correspondent that the government is closely monitoring the war and plans to buy fertilisers from other countries.

According to him, farmers are being advised that larger amounts of fertiliser do not necessarily result in higher crop yields.

Rafiqul said the government plans to continue awareness efforts while promoting greater use of organic fertilisers as part of a more holistic agricultural approach.

He said reported demand is often inflated and fertiliser is sometimes overused due to a lack of awareness. By adjusting demand estimates and improving usage practices, he expressed confidence they would be able to manage the upcoming agricultural season even if supplies are somewhat tight.

US launches labour probe

FROM PAGE 1

to compete against foreign producers who may have an artificial cost advantage gained from the scourge of forced labour," USTR Ambassador Jamieson Greer said.

The investigations will determine whether foreign governments have taken sufficient steps to prohibit the import of goods produced with forced labour and how the failure to eradicate the "abhorrent practices" impacts US workers and businesses, he said.

The initiative under Section 301(b) of the Trade Act of 1974 came just a day after the Trump administration said it was launching unfair trade investigations into excess industrial capacity in 16 countries in the first set of probes.

Section 301 of the act is designed to

address unfair foreign practices affecting US commerce and may be used to respond to unjustifiable, unreasonable or discriminatory foreign government practices that burden or restrict US commerce. Under Section 302(b), the USTR may self-initiate an investigation.

Before launching the probes, the Trump administration considered the advice of the inter-agency Section 301 Committee and consulted with appropriate advisory committees.

The USTR has already requested consultations with the governments of the relevant economies. It will hold hearings on April 28.

To be assured of consideration, the interested persons should submit written comments, requests to appear at the hearing along with a summary of the testimony by April 15.

Smoke fills the air we breathe

FROM PAGE 1

project at the Department of Environment, stated that the visible air pollution in Dhaka this winter and post-winter season was primarily caused by smoke originating from the landfills at Amin Bazar and Matuail.

MATUAIL: WASTE PILES AS HIGH AS 80FT

Last Saturday morning, despite the sunshine, the sky remained obscured by a thick haze, with smoke clearly visible.

A field visit to the Matuail landfill revealed numerous 50 to 80ft-high mounds of waste sprawling across the 100-acre site.

One such mound, consisting mostly of polythene, was on fire, with plumes of smoke spiralling upwards. Sanitation workers present at the site claimed that these fires ignite spontaneously and are not intentionally set by anyone.

Md Harun, a sanitation worker, noted that fires occur daily and that once a fire starts, it continues to burn unless the Fire Service intervenes.

"This morning," he had told this correspondent, "the Fire Service was here to douse a fire that had broken out earlier. Even still, it's not completely extinguished."

Hena Begum, who has been collecting polythene at the Matuail dumping site for five years to sell, said that the frequency of fires has increased this year. "I could not come to the site for a few days because of the fire and smoke here."

Earlier, the Department of Environment built an organic fertiliser plant at Matuail with funds from the Climate Change Trust Fund, but it remains non-functional.

Nashir Uddin Bhuiyan, who recently took charge of the plant's operations, explained that approximately 80 percent of the incoming waste, such as polythene, is non-biodegradable.

He said their plant intends to produce fertiliser from the remaining 20 percent and is expected to commence operations soon.

He further noted that methane gas

generated within these waste piles causes fires to persist once they are ignited.

Asked, Dr Mohammed Shafiullah Siddique Bhuiya, supervising engineer of the Waste Management Department of Dhaka South City Corporation, also said these fires start spontaneously.

"Waste has been accumulating at the site for 35 to 40 years, forming multiple layers where methane and greenhouse gases have built up. When daily waste is deposited, the presence of any flammable substances can react with the accumulated methane, triggering fires."

STAGGERING STATS

➔ Matuail dumping site emits around 4,000kg of methane per hour

➔ 2,71,000 people died from air pollution-related causes in Bangladesh in 2023

➔ Brick kilns cause about 58% of Dhaka's air pollution

➔ Dhaka's average PM2.5 level 18 times the WHO limit

➔ January 2026 PM2.5 level 38 times the WHO standard

A 2023 article by Dev Patel, published by Harvard University on the Matuail dumping site, states that the Matuail site emits 4,000 kilograms of methane gas per hour.

THE WASTE-LADEN ROAD TO CUMILLA

On the route to Cumilla after leaving the Matuail site, sanitation workers were seen setting fire to small piles of waste starting from Jatrabari. Further along the highway, numerous waste heaps lined the roadsides.

In some areas, waste was spread out to prevent the piles from becoming too high.



JS Speaker pledges neutral role

UNB, Dhaka

Jatiya Sangsad Speaker Hafiz Uddin Ahmed yesterday said parliament will be centerpiece of building a prosperous state by implementing the goals including equality, human dignity and social justice of the Liberation War.

"This government is elected by the people which will build a happy, prosperous state by implementing the goals of the Liberation War and fulfilling the hopes and aspirations of people and parliament will be its centerpiece," he said.

The newly appointed Speaker of the 13th

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Two parrots playfully sing to each other atop a sunflower. In the early morning, parrots venture into this open garden in the Diabari area of Uttara in the capital to feast on sunflower seeds. Afterwards, they flutter around the garden, playing with one another. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

HSIA'S 3RD TERMINAL Bangladesh seeks revised proposal from Japan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has called upon the Japanese side to promptly submit a revised proposal on the operation and maintenance of the third terminal at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka.

The request was made during a meeting between the Civil Aviation and Tourism Affairs Ministry, Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB), and a Japanese delegation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs yesterday, meeting sources said.

The issue is expected to be discussed again at another meeting, likely to be held by the end of March.

After nearly a year, the two sides resumed talks in a renewed effort to turn the long-delayed third terminal operational on a win-win basis.

Foreign Minister Dr Khalilur Rahman, Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister Afroza Khanom Rita, Prime Minister's Foreign Affairs Adviser Humayun Kabir, State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism M Rashiduzzaman Millat and State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shama Obaed Islam represented Bangladesh during the negotiations, among others.

The Japanese delegation included Charge d'Affaires of the Japan Embassy in Bangladesh Takahashi Naoki,

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SEMI-AUTOMATED TRAFFIC SIGNAL SYSTEM IN DHAKA

Pilot project shows promise, but delays stall wider rollout

Poor road discipline among drivers remains a key challenge

HELEMUL ALAM

On a recent Thursday afternoon, traffic pressure was high at the Sonargaon intersection in Dhaka. Although buses were stopping and moving according to traffic signals, traffic police were still using hand signals to manage traffic.

The scene reflects both the progress and limitations of Dhaka's newly introduced semi-automated traffic

buses stopped in the middle of the road to pick up passengers, slowing traffic flow and wasting valuable green-light time.

"As timings are maintained both manually and automatically, the system is working well," said Traffic Sergeant Omit Chowdhury. "Vehicles do not have to wait long because the signals

traffic movement in the area has improved significantly since the system was introduced, he added.

FRUSTRATION OVER PROJECT DELAYS

Despite the positive results at the intersections where the system has been installed, experts say the project has faced major delays.

Prof Moazzem Hossain of Civil Engineering at Buet said authorities

results were very good. But we couldn't implement the rest because of procurement complications, administrative changes and changes of engineers," he said.

According to him, the two city corporations were responsible for completing the civil works and preparing sites for installation. However, they have yet to finish the tender process or award contracts for

As timings are maintained both manually and automatically, the system is working well. Vehicles do not have to wait long because the signals operate in a coordinated way. However, many people try to break the signal. That is why traffic police often have to enforce it using hand signals.

Omit Chowdhury, Traffic Sergeant

Initially, the results were very good. But we couldn't implement the rest because of procurement complications, administrative changes and changes of engineers. The two city corporations were responsible for completing civil works and preparing sites. However, they have yet to finish the tender process or award contracts.

Prof Moazzem Hossain, Civil Engineering, Buet

signal system.

Since the system was introduced at several intersections under a pilot programme, traffic congestion has eased somewhat. However, many drivers and pedestrians still ignore traffic lights and try to move or cross during red signals, forcing traffic police to intervene manually.

During a visit to the intersection, it was also observed that some public

operate in a coordinated way."

However, he said the biggest challenge is ensuring that drivers and pedestrians follow the signals properly.

"Many people try to break the signal. That is why traffic police often have to enforce it using hand signals," he said.

Public buses also remain a major challenge to traffic discipline, though

have failed to

install signals at 15 additional intersections under the pilot project in the seven months since its inauguration.

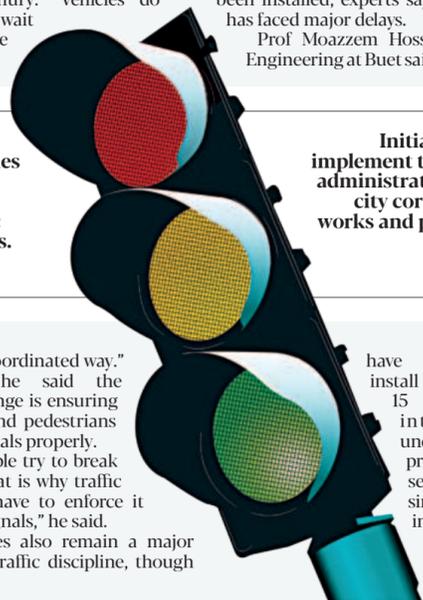
"Initially, t h e

all locations.

"Because of procurement and administrative complications in such an important project, we lost around seven to eight months," he said.

Under the pilot project, Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) was supposed to implement signals at 14 intersections, while Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) was responsible for eight.

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Dreams crushed under wheels Engineering student loses leg after being pushed from train by muggers

MONJURUL HAQUE, Gazipur

Nur Mohammad Nayeem had boarded the Lalmoni Express from Joydebpur Railway Station on the night of March 5.

He was heading to his father's rented home in Dhaka's Motijheel from the university campus in Gazipur. It was meant to be a routine journey home.

It became the night that changed his life forever.

Nur, 23, a third-year civil engineering

student at Dhaka University of Engineering and Technology (DUET), lost both legs after being pushed from the moving train during a mugging. His attackers fled with his bag containing a mobile phone, a laptop and academic documents, leaving him beneath the wheels.

Today, the DUET student lies in a hospital bed at the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (NITOR), his dreams of becoming an engineer are now overshadowed by a long and painful recovery.

Nayeem used to live in a university dormitory at DUET. His father, a security guard at a building in Dhaka, lived in a rented house in Motijheel.

His mother, Nurunnahar Begum, sat beside him at

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7



Dhaka sees sudden hailstorm

STAR REPORT

Sudden hailstorms hit parts of the capital yesterday, accompanied by strong winds and rain.

Sourav Sarkar, a resident of Dhaka's Bashundhara Residential Area, told The Daily Star that the rain started suddenly in the evening, causing inconvenience for people who were out for Eid shopping.

Omar Faruk, a meteorologist at the Bangladesh Meteorological Department, told The Daily Star, "This is similar to the strong winds that come with a nor'wester. However, it is not long-lasting. It rains for an hour and then stops again. There may be hailstorms."

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh-Pakistan ODI cricket match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur was temporarily halted due to lightning and thunder.



Cars, motorbikes and CNG-run autorickshaws move through a sudden hailstorm that hit parts of the capital yesterday. Strong winds and rain accompanied the hail, though the storm lasted only about an hour. The photo was taken in the Farmgate area.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

'It's completely unacceptable'

41 eminent citizens, Gonotantrik Jukta Front, Udichi protest condolence motion for war criminals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A group of 41 eminent citizens, the Gonotantrik Jukta Front, and the Bangladesh Udichi Shilpigoshthi yesterday strongly condemned a condolence motion in the 13th Jatiya Sangsad that honoured "Razakars (collaborators of the Pakistani army)" and others convicted of crimes against humanity during the 1971 Liberation War.

They described the motion as a grave insult to the spirit of the Liberation War and demanded immediate corrective action.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Mirza Abbas undergoes brain surgery

PM visits him at Evercare Hospital earlier

STAR REPORT

The brain surgery on Mirza Abbas, a member of the BNP Standing Committee and political adviser to the prime minister, has been successfully completed.

Doctors said the BNP leader was under close observation following the operation at Evercare Hospital in Dhaka.

Speaking to journalists on last night, Prof Dr Shahabuddin Talukder said, "His [Mirza Abbas's]

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7



No fuel crisis, price hike ahead of Eid

Says road transport and bridges minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Shaikh Rabiul Alam yesterday said fuel supply for public transport will be ensured from March 15 and that fuel prices will not increase ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr.



"Sufficient fuel will be available from March 15. The energy minister has assured me. So there is no possibility of fare hikes or disruption to Eid travel due to fuel shortages," he told reporters after visiting Kamalapur Railway Station in Dhaka.

Regarding arrangements for private transport, the minister said the issue was under consideration and that the rationing system currently in place may be reviewed after March 15. "Some limitations remain. We are still facing a major crisis and have not fully overcome it. Everyone will need to make some sacrifices," he said.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7



PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

Workers construct and prepare the National Eidgah ground for the main Holy Eid-ul-Fitr congregation, in front of the High Court in the capital's Ramna area, under the supervision of Dhaka South City Corporation. With Eid being a week away, preparation for the joyous occasion is in full swing everywhere. The photo was taken recently.

5-year-old killed as pillar falls on him

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

A five-year-old boy was killed after a piling pillar fell on him at a construction site in Narayanganj's Fatullah yesterday, police said.

The incident occurred in the Dokkhin Sastapur area, said Fatullah Model Police Station OC Abdul Mannan.

Muntasir Islam Hamza, son of Rubel of Burir Dokan area, was injured when a piling pillar left at the site after work collapsed on him while he was passing by, he said.

Family members rushed him to Narayanganj 300 bed Hospital, where doctors declared him dead.

Rubel alleged he was offered Tk 3 lakh to settle the matter. He said Siddiqur Rahman Uzzal, organising secretary of the district unit of Jatiyatabadi Tati Dal and a neighbour, sat with the building owner and contractor to discuss compensation.

"They offered me Tk 3 lakh. What will I do with the money? My son is no more," Rubel told The Daily Star.

Contacted, Uzzal said he attended the discussion at the family's request. "The contractor proposed to give some money," he said.

Police said piling work at the site was carried out without proper safety measures. "There was negligence on the part of both the contractor and the building owner," the OC said. "If the family files a case, we will take action accordingly," he added.

4 years on, hospital not fully operational

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Even after four years since its inauguration, the 50-bed Islamic Mission Hospital, Sirta in Mymensingh Sadar upazila has yet to become fully operational due to acute staff shortage.

As such, over a million residents of the remote Char Sirta are deprived of essential healthcare.

At present, the hospital only runs its outpatient services, while the beds and other logistics are lying idle.

The four-storey hospital, built on three acres of land, was intended to provide healthcare for rural people in the remote riverine shoal including maternity care and normal child deliveries. The facility was also designed with quarters for doctors and staff to provide round-the-clock services. However,

none of these services are currently available.

Fuad Hasan Sifat, administrative officer of the hospital, said the inpatient services could not be started since the hospital's inauguration in 2022 due to manpower crisis.



As such, patients now have to travel a distance of some 20 kilometres to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH) for treatment, said Selim Mahmud, a school teacher.

Only a few doctors visit the hospital for outdoor consultations, often requiring hundreds of patients waiting for hours for their turn, he added.

According to hospital sources, there are 61 staff posts but appointments have been made to only five posts including that of a superintendent, while 20 fourth-class employees have been outsourced. While there are 15 doctor posts including consultants and surgeons, only three doctors work in the hospital including an eye specialist who visits occasionally.

Diagnostic services such as ECG, ultra-sonogram and pathology tests are done but X-ray service has been suspended due to staff shortage, said hospital superintendent Dr AKM Badrul Ahsan.

Similarly, surgeries are not being

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7

45 injured in clash over VGF cards

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenaidah

At least 45 people were injured in a clash between two groups over the distribution of VGF cards ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr in Shaikhpura upazila of Jhenaidah.

"The incident occurred in several phases on Thursday night in Chargoloknagar village under Mirzapur union. Several people have been taken into custody for questioning," Shaikhpura Police Station Officer in Charge Humayun Kabir Molla said.

He said the injured were admitted to Shaikhpura Upazila Health Complex, Jhenaidah 250-bed General Hospital and other hospitals.

Locals said the union parishad issued VGF cards to distribute rice among the underprivileged people of Mirzapur union on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr.

On Thursday morning, an argument broke out between the two villagers over the VGF cards.

Later in the evening, local community leaders sat for a village arbitration to resolve the matter. At one stage, a clash broke out between the two opposing sides. They attacked using locally made weapons. The clashes continued intermittently from around 8:30pm to 11:30pm.

On receiving the news, police and army personnel rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control by charging batons.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer Md Mahfuzur Rahman told The Daily Star that VGF rice was distributed at Mirzapur Union Parishad and no trouble occurred during the distribution. "What happened later will be dealt with by the law enforcement agencies."

1 killed, 10 hurt in bus-van collision

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

One person was killed and at least 10 others were injured in a head-on collision between a bus and a covered van in the Surjanarayanpur Notun Bazar area in Kapasia upazila of Gazipur yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Tarikul Islam, the driver of the covered van.

Citing witnesses, police said a bus collided with the van coming from the opposite direction, leaving 11 people, including Tarikul, injured.

Tarikul was declared dead at Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmad Medical College Hospital.

The injured were taken to different hospitals in Kapasia and Gazipur, Salna Highway Police said.

Salna Highway Police confirmed that both vehicles involved in the accident were seized and taken to the police station.

Sub-Inspector Zakir Hossain of Kapasia Police Station told The Daily Star that Tarikul's body has been sent to the morgue of Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmad Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

It's completely unacceptable

FROM PAGE 3

In a joint statement, the citizens said the first session of Bangladesh's parliament after independence was held with a pledge to uphold the spirit of the Liberation War.

"Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman led the parliament, and many freedom fighters had the honour of serving as representatives," the statement said.

"Sadly, that tradition is not reflected in today's parliament. Instead, individuals accused of crimes against humanity have misrepresented the Liberation War and created a narrative that dishonours the nation. This is deeply shameful for history-conscious citizens."

The signatories strongly criticised the recent parliamentary session under the newly sworn-in BNP government.

"The condolence motion for convicted war criminals in parliament is completely unacceptable. We express our strongest protest against this insult to the Liberation War," the statement said.

Honouring those who opposed the Liberation War and committed atrocities is an extreme insult to the sacrifice of three million martyrs and 200,000 women who suffered unimaginable loss during the war, it added.

"This is a deliberate attempt to question the spirit of the Liberation War and the foundation of a secular Bangladesh. We also fear attempts are underway to erase the memory of 1971 under political agendas."

The citizens demanded the immediate removal of the controversial section from the parliamentary record.

"We urge that parliament and other state institutions never allow such moves again. The spirit of the Liberation War must remain invincible," the statement added.

Among the signatories were poets Nirmalendu Goon, Henry Swapon, Shahed Kaves, Manik Bairagi, Sanjib Purohit and Rais Mukul; researcher and journalist Enayet Kabir; academic Prof Abu Yusuf; writer and filmmaker Shahadat Raseel; and writer Piyush Kanti Barua.

The Gonotantrik Jukta Front, an alliance of nine left-leaning political parties including the Communist Party of Bangladesh, also condemned the motion, calling it a betrayal of the spirit of the Liberation War.

The alliance said the motion included the names of individuals convicted by the International Crimes Tribunal for their involvement with the Al-Badr and Razakar forces.

"The inclusion of the names

of convicted war criminals in the parliamentary condolence motion is extremely shameful and unacceptable," the statement said.

The Front also criticised the BNP chief whip for proposing the names, calling the act "deeply embarrassing".

It further alleged that some MPs hesitated to stand during the national anthem in parliament, describing this as a sign of disrespect to the country and its dignity.

The alliance also criticised the appointment of ATM Azharul Islam, convicted of crimes against humanity, to the panel of the parliamentary presiding body.

"Appointing a person convicted of crimes against humanity to such a respected parliamentary position is not only an insult to parliament but also to the martyrs of the Liberation War," it said.

Bangladesh Udichi

Shilpigoshthi also strongly condemned the motion.

Acting President Mahmud Selim and General Secretary Amit Ranjan Dey said including the names of notorious war criminals in a parliamentary condolence motion was a stain on history and a grave insult to the martyrs.

"Disrespecting the national anthem is unacceptable. It is not just a song but a symbol of our Liberation War, sacrifice and national identity. Respecting the national anthem is also a constitutional obligation," they said.

Udichi emphasised that no compromise can be made in protecting the spirit of the Liberation War and the country's cultural heritage.

"We call on all progressive cultural and democratic forces in the country to unite against any attempt to glorify war criminals or disrespect national symbols," the statement said.

APARTMENT SALE
Own 4450 sqft south-facing luxury apartment in Gulshan North With infinity pool, movie room, BBQ, Gym facilities and marble floors.
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Chittagong Port Authority Computer Center e-GP

e-Tender Notice (OTM)

Memo No. 18.13.0000.680.07.138.25 Date: 04/03/2026

Sl No.	Tender ID No.	Tender Ref No.	Name of works	Tender closing date & time
1	1233503	CPA/COMPUTER/EGP/10/25-26	Supply of HP Original Toner Cartridge for Chittagong Port Authority.	31-Mar-2026 12:00pm
2	1217224	CPA/COMPUTER/EGP/06/25-26	Supply of Computer, Laptop, Color Printer & UPS for Chittagong Port Authority.	01-Apr-2026 12:00pm
3	1223138	CPA/COMPUTER/EGP/04/25-26	Supply of Computer and Peripherals for Chittagong Port Authority.	01-Apr-2026 12:00pm

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender 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>).

Systems Analyst
Chittagong Port Authority

NOTICE
IN THE SUPREME COURT OF BANGLADESH
HIGH COURT DIVISION
(STATUTORY ORIGINAL JURISDICTION)
COMPANY MATTER NO. 264 OF 2026
IN THE MATTER OF
Pulok Podder, Managing Director of Bond Packaging & Accessories Ltd.
VERSUS
The Registrar of Joint Stock Companies & Firms & another
--- Petitioner
--- Respondents

Please take notice that an application under Section 81(2) read with Section 85(3) of the Companies Act, 1994 for condonation of delay in holding Annual General Meeting (AGM) for the year 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 & 2025 of Bond Packaging & Accessories Ltd. has been filed before the Hon'ble High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh. Upon his Lordship Justice Kazi Zinat Hoque was pleased to admit the application on 13.03.2026. Any person interested in the matter may appear before the Hon'ble Court on the date of hearing either personally or through duly appointed Advocate.

(Md. Ashf Ekbal)
Advocate, Supreme Court, Room # 225, 1st Floor, Supreme Court Bar, Association Main Building, Dhaka-1000. Phone: 01712091605

NOTICE
IN THE SUPREME COURT OF BANGLADESH
HIGH COURT DIVISION
(STATUTORY ORIGINAL JURISDICTION)
COMPANY MATTER NO. 225 OF 2026
IN THE MATTER OF: Md. Masud Rana, Shareholder & Managing Director
Motor Guard Technologies Limited, 33, Shah Ali Tower (10th Floor), Karwan-bazar, Dhaka-1230.
VERSUS
The Registrar, Joint Stock Companies & Firms, Dhaka. ... Respondent.

Please take notice that an application under section 81(2) read with section 85(3) of the Companies Act, 1994 for condonation of delay for holding the Annual General Meeting for the year 2022, 2023 and 2024, 2025 of the petitioner's company has been filed before the Hon'ble High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh. Upon hearing his Lordship Justice Kazi Zinat Hoque was pleased to admit the application on 08.03.2026 being item No.32(Bench Mian-26). Any person interested in the matter may appear before the Hon'ble Court on the date of hearing either personally or through duly appointed Advocate.

(Mohammad Jahangir Alam) Advocate
Supreme Court of Bangladesh, Room-216 (Annex Hall Room)
Supreme Court Bar Association, Shahbag, Dhaka-1000.
Phone: 0176-0940038

E IN C'S BRANCH, WORKS DIRECTORATE, DHAKA CANTONMENT

INVITATION FOR TENDERS

Notice no. 400/Ad/62/E-4/11 Dated: 08 March 2026

MILITARY ENGINEER SERVICES

1.	Sponsoring Ministry/Division	Ministry of Home Affairs			
2.	Agency	Military Engineer Services			
3.	Procuring Entity Name	E in C			
4.	Procuring Entity District	Dhaka			
5.	Procurement Method	Open Tendering Method (OTM)			
6.	Budget and source of Funds	Foreign Finance			
7.	Development Partners (if applicable)	None			
8.	Project / Programme Name (if applicable)	Construction of 1x 50 Bed Hospital (04 storey with 06 Storiad foundation) including ancillary works at BMA Bhatary, Chattogram.			
9.	Selling of tender will commence from	15 March 2026 (During Office hour).			
10.	Selling of tender will Close on	30 March 2026 (During Office hour).			
11.	Last date & time of submission of Tender	31 March 2026 at 1200 hours.			
12.	Date & time of opening of Tender	31 March 2026 at 1230 hours.			
13.	Name & Address of the Office(s)	Tender Selling & Information Centre at GE (Army) Central Dhaka & AHQ, E in C's Branch, Works Directorate, Dhaka Cantonment			
	Receiving Tender Document	Tender Selling & Information Centre at GE (Army) Central Dhaka			
	Opening Tender Document	Tender Selling & Information Centre at GE (Army) Central Dhaka			
14.	Eligibility of Tenderer	a. MES enlisted contractors Class 'C'/'D' for lot no. 15(a). b. On receipt of DGFI clearance with others Govt. Department (equivalent classes) contractors may also apply for tender. c. Contractors having experience in similar works with enlistment in other Govt., Semi Government & Autonomous Organization may also apply. d. Having experience of similar work mentioned in lot no. 15(a) amounting Tk. 1,12,00,000.00 for each lot in one/two tender during last 05 (Five) years.			
15.	Brief Description of Works				
Lot No	Identification of Lot	Location	Price of Tender Document (Non-Refundable)	Tender Security in the form of Bank Draft/ Pay order in favour of AHQ, E in C's Branch, Works Directorate, Dhaka Cantt. (Taka)	Completion Time in weeks/ Months
1	a.	AGE (Army) Bhatary	3,000.00	3,75,000.00	06 (Six) Months
16.	Name of Official Inviting Tender	Director of Works			
17.	Designation of Official Inviting Tender	Director of Works			
18.	Address of Official Inviting Tender	Army Headquarters, E in C's Branch, Works Directorate, Dhaka Cantonment. Web address : www.army.mil.bd			
19.	Contact details of Official Inviting Tender	Tel No. 9832870	Fax No. 9832882	e-mail- wksdte@army.mil.bd	
20.	The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject all tenders				

আই এস পি আর/সেনা/২৩৭

XEN E/M
For Director of Works
Works Directorate
Engineer in Chief's Branch
Dhaka Cantonment
Tel: Mili: 8711111 Ext: 2886
Civil: 9833886

INTERNATIONAL

WAR WITH US-ISRAEL

Iran's Shia allies step up strikes

REUTERS, Baghdad

Shia Muslim armed groups in Lebanon and Iraq are stepping up their role in the war with the US and Israel, showing the Iran-backed 'Axis of Resistance' can still wage attacks despite damage inflicted on the alliance during the Gaza conflict.

Groups that have long been armed and financed by Iran and loyal to its Shia Islamist rulers are now helping Tehran intensify the war around the region. Hezbollah and Iran's Revolutionary Guards on Wednesday launched their first-ever simultaneous rocket barrage on Israel, with the Lebanese group firing 200 missiles.

Iraqi Shia members have also picked up the pace of drone and missile attacks on US interests in Iraq in the last 3-4 days, according to three Iraqi security sources.



Palestinian worshippers pray on a roadside after being barred from attending the final Friday prayers of Ramadan at Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, yesterday. Israeli authorities imposed restrictions on large gatherings, leaving many faithful to observe the holy day outside the compound.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Putin's 'hand' behind Iran's drone tactics
Says UK defence secy

AFP, London

UK Defence Minister John Healey suggested on Thursday that Russia was influencing Iran's use of drone attacks in its war with the United States and Israel.

Healey said Russian President Putin's "hidden hand" may be behind some of the tactics deployed by Tehran in the Middle East conflict, which started when the United States and Israel struck Iran on February 28.

He told reporters that officials were analysing an Iranian-made drone that hit the UK's Akrotiri air force base in Cyprus on March 1 "for any evidence of Russian or any other foreign components and parts". "We will update you and appropriately publish any findings from that when we've got them," he said.

Why Trump's Arab allies are reluctant to join Iran war

CNN ONLINE

Since the Iran war began, Gulf states have faced a barrage of Iranian missiles and drones, leaving their leaders with an unenviable choice: anger their closest ally and security guarantor, or risk the wrath of a powerful neighbour they must live beside long after the war ends.

Over the weekend, Iran's Revolutionary Guards acknowledged that about 40 percent of its firepower had been directed at Israel, with the majority targeting its Arab neighbours instead. More than 2,000 projectiles have been fired at Gulf states.

Both sides in the conflict appear to be using strikes on the Gulf to their advantage. Iran hopes that hitting Gulf states will drive them away from Washington, while the US and Israel appear to be using the Iranian attacks to pressure Arab governments to join the war.

Kamal Kharrazi, a key foreign policy adviser to Iran's supreme leader, told

CNN that the strikes would continue in an effort to push Gulf states to persuade US President Donald Trump to step back from the conflict.

Last week, Trump told CNN that seeing the United States' Arab allies battered by Iran was the "biggest surprise" of the war, adding that the attacks prompted the Gulf states to "insist on being involved."

Yet Gulf Arab nations have repeatedly said they have no desire to join the war.

Republican senator and Trump ally Lindsey Graham has been the most explicit in pressing Washington's Arab allies to participate. After a trip to Israel, he questioned why the US should defend partners like Saudi Arabia that refuse to take part in what he described as a shared struggle against Iran. If they do not, "consequences will follow," he warned.

Regional leaders have largely avoided responding publicly to such pressure. But Dubai billionaire and business tycoon Khalaf Al Habtoor offered a glimpse of

the sentiment in the Gulf in a response to Graham's comments.

"We know full well why we are under attack, and we also know who dragged the entire region into this dangerous escalation without consulting those he calls his 'allies' in the region," he wrote on X, before deleting the post. Gulf states are deeply wary of being drawn into a wider war, the long-term consequences of which they may ultimately have to manage alone.

There is a sense in the Gulf that by going to war with Iran, the Trump administration prioritised Israel's security over that of its Arab allies, said Hasan Alhasan, senior fellow for Middle East policy at the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

"That distrust is likely to be a barrier to Gulf states joining an offensive action," he said. Relations with Tehran would eventually have to normalize, even if it takes decades to rebuild the "huge trust gap," a UAE official said.

Parliament must debate

FROM PAGE 1

the benefit extended to American goods; Bangladesh will have to purchase some unnecessary goods from the US at higher costs, he said.

For instance, under the agreement, Bangladesh will have to purchase 14 aircraft from the American company Boeing.

Bangladesh's trade with other countries such as Spain, Russia and China may be affected due to signing of the deal as the US does not have warm relationship with these countries, said Muhammad, also the chairman of the platform.

Nearly 70 lakh people may lose employment, particularly in the rural poultry, dairy and related industries, as these sectors will be severely affected by the deal.

"It'll be an understatement if the agreement is described as a slavery deal. Because, it has left no room for autonomy. Autonomy persisted even in the colonial times, but here, it does not exist. It is an unjust and unfair trade deal."

The deal was signed ignoring the norms of the United Nations, the World Trade Organisation, the free market economy and even without following the general rules of economics, he said.

"The economy will face a catastrophe if the deal is implemented -- although the foreign minister advocated in favour of this agreement."

So, the elected government should take the deal to the parliament for wider discussion and ultimately scrap it.

There should be punitive actions against the persons involved in the signing of the agreement, Muhammad added.

The Tk 40,000 crore invested in local poultry and dairy sectors will be the highest affected from the deal, said Maha Mirza, a researcher and rights activist.

The American government gives \$42 billion subsidy to its poultry sector, so Bangladesh's poultry sector will not be able to compete as a result.

"The language of the deal is aggressive, as if the Lord is ordering the subordinates," she said, citing the stipulation that Bangladesh will have to buy \$15 billion worth of LNG over the next 15 years from the US.

It is a double standard agreement and Bangladesh should cancel this agreement, she added.

"In the agreement, it is mentioned 130 times that 'Bangladesh will have to' but only six times that 'the US

will have to' -- this indicates that the deal was dominated by the US," said Moshahida Sultana, an associate professor at the University of Dhaka's accounting department.

The immediate past interim government cannot claim it as a success story as the deal will damage the economy, she said, adding that both Jamaat and the BNP were silent during the signing of the agreement.

Many issues are hidden in this agreement and all the issues have not been published yet, said Jyotirmoy Barua, a lawyer.

"The interim government has signed the agreement hurriedly and could not wait for the elected government. But the deal was supposed to be widely discussed in the Parliament before the signing."

In the constitution, there is no provision of interim government, but it was formed under a special situation. So the deal needs to be discussed in the parliament under the elected government for finalisation, Barua said.

The local pharmaceutical sector will be heavily affected by this agreement, he said.

"This is a lop-sided agreement with strategic risks of mandatory import obligation, pressure on domestic industries and public health and food sovereignty risks," said Golam Rasul, professor and chair of the department of economics at the International University of Business Agriculture and Technology.

Bangladesh must therefore examine this agreement not only as a commercial document, but as a long-term development commitment.

"Supreme Court ruling invalidates the deal's legal foundation -- Bangladesh must not ratify an agreement built on a collapsed basis," he added.

5 Bangladeshis

FROM PAGE 12

The news outlet said preliminary reports from local authorities attributed the blaze to a gas leak.

It added that the HRCM is currently assessing the site to determine if any human rights violations contributed to the incident while emphasising the urgent need for improved safety standards in worker housing.

According to official estimates by the Maldivian authorities, as of December 2024, around 96,000 Bangladeshis were residing in the archipelagic country in South Asia, the local media had earlier reported.

India to hold off

FROM PAGE 12

not authorised to speak to media.

A spokesperson from India's trade ministry denied any hold off in bilateral engagement. "It is reiterated that the two sides remain engaged for a mutually beneficial trade agreement," the spokesperson added, without offering details on formal signing of the deal.

A White House official said the US was continuing to work with India on finalising a deal.

Negotiations lost momentum after the US Supreme Court in late February struck down Trump's tariffs, the Indian government sources said, adding that there have been no substantive talks since, particularly as Washington has been preoccupied with the war on Iran. India never halted Russian oil purchases, only slowed them, and US officials are now urging New Delhi to increase buying to help ease a global energy crunch triggered by the conflict.

Complicating matters is a new US investigation into what it calls "structural excess capacity and production in manufacturing sectors" in 16 trading partners, including India.

"We are not in a hurry to sign any deal," said one of the sources. "The new investigation is a pressure tactic to force countries into signing deals after the court order. It's a spanner in the works."

India would instead largely take a "wait and watch" approach as US tariff policy evolves, the source said, noting that Trump dropped a 25% punitive tariff on India after saying New Delhi had agreed to curb Russian crude imports, while India only said it would diversify its supply base. The overall tariff on India was 50% earlier, among the highest in the world.

The latest probe has been launched under Section 301 of the US Trade Act of 1974. India plans to present its case to the Office of the United States Trade Representative if permitted, or await a ruling before considering options such as approaching the World Trade Organization, the source said.

The US ambassador to New Delhi, Sergio Gor, said Trump had multiple other tools to impose tariffs, including through 301.

"So, we fully expect the nations that we've made deals with to honour those deals," he told a conclave organised by the India Today media group yesterday.

"I think India will do that because ... it's not just about honouring it -- it's a win-win situation."

Following the Supreme Court ruling, Trump imposed a 10% tariff on imports from all countries through July 24.

Prices of meat jump before Eid

FROM PAGE 12

Ramadan, said Mohammad Gofran, proprietor of Cumilla General Store at Kawran Bazar.

Raisins are going for Tk 850 to Tk 900 per kg, compared to Tk 700 earlier.

Pistachios now cost Tk 3,700 to Tk 3,800 per kg, up from Tk 3,200 to Tk 3,300 at the start of Ramadan.

The prices of cinnamon and cardamom have remained high for about a year, ranging between Tk 4,500 and Tk 5,500 per kg.

Egg prices have also risen by Tk 10 from last week to Tk 100 to Tk 120 a dozen.

Meanwhile, onion prices continued to decline, said Sajib Sheikh, a wholesale onion trader at Kawran Bazar.

Onions are selling for Tk 22 to Tk 28 per kg in the wholesale market, while the retail prices ranged from Tk 35 to Tk 45.

Potatoes are selling for Tk 10 to Tk 11 per kg in the wholesale market and

at Tk 15 to Tk 20 in the retail market, said Md Sabuj, a major wholesale potato trader of Bikrampur Bhandar at Kawran Bazar.

If the prices of potatoes and onions continue to fall this way, farmers may lose interest in producing them, which could lead to an abnormal price hike later.

The government should consider how to protect farmers from losses in prices of potatoes, onions and other agricultural products, he added.

Some vegetable prices have also dropped.

Cucumbers, which sold for Tk 100 to Tk 150 per kg at the beginning of Ramadan, and tomatoes, which sold for Tk 60 to Tk 80, are now selling at Tk 30 to Tk 60. The prices of brinjal and some other vegetables have also declined.

Loose soybean oil price has gone up by Tk 5 per litre, while the prices of bottled soybean oil, pulses, rice, salt, sugar and other essentials remain largely unchanged.

GAZA GENOCIDE CASE

US sides with Israel at UN's top court

AFP, The Hague

The United States will defend its ally Israel against accusations at the top United Nations court that it breached the Genocide Convention during its Gaza campaign, the court said yesterday.

Washington filed a so-called "declaration of intervention" at the International Court of Justice, which is examining the genocide case against Israel brought by South Africa.

"The United States affirms, in the strongest terms possible, that the allegations of 'genocide' against Israel are false," said Washington in its filing.

The US said South Africa's case was the latest in a series "to level false charges of 'genocide' against Israel" that it said had been going on for decades.

Such charges serve to "delegitimise the State of Israel and the Jewish people and to justify or encourage terrorism against them", Washington said.

South Africa brought its case before the ICJ in December 2023, arguing the Gaza war breached the 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention, an accusation Israel has strongly denied.



Nepal sells half-filled gas canisters

AFP, Mumbai

Nepal has started selling half-filled cooking gas cylinders to curb hoarding and panic buying, officials said yesterday, following import disruptions caused by the Middle East conflict.

The landlocked Himalayan nation of 30 million relies almost entirely on India for its fossil fuel needs.

About 90 percent of India's liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) passes through the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic chokepoint where maritime traffic has largely stalled.

Silence, sorrow

FROM PAGE 12

Ashraful said, "I have lost everyone -- my father, brother, wife, children, and niece. How will I bear the losses?"

Mujibur Rahman, caretaker of Mongla Graveyard where the nine victims from the family were buried yesterday afternoon, said, "I have been discharging duties here for around 17 years. I never dug so many graves at a time. This is a heart-wrenching incident."

Before the burial, the funeral prayers for the victims were held at Mongla Upazila Parishad ground around 2:30pm.

State Minister for Environment Shaikh Faridul Islam, Bagerhat-2 lawmaker Shaikh Monzurul Haque Rahad, senior government officials, and several thousands of people joined the prayers.

Following formal requests from the bereaved families, the authorities released the bodies from hospitals on Thursday late night without autopsies. Ten of them were at Khulna Medical College morgue and four at Rampal Upazila Health Complex.

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The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

Trade probe against Bangladesh is baffling

Govt must engage in dialogue with the US to ensure fairness

Bangladesh's inclusion in the trade investigation initiated by the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) comes as a surprise. The probe was launched on Wednesday against 15 other countries as well, including China, the European Union, Vietnam, Mexico, Japan and India—countries that have bilateral trade surpluses with the US ranging from \$500 million to \$1 trillion, compared to our \$6.15 billion.

The USTR, in a statement, said it would dig into the acts, policies, and practices of these economies relating to structural excess capacity and production in certain manufacturing sectors that threaten American manufacturing. It also said "large or persistent trade surpluses" of these countries with the US are an indicator that "excess capacity and production exist" in certain manufacturing sectors of these economies. In other words, the US is arguing that these trading partners are producing more goods than they can consume domestically, incentivised by state subsidies, suppressed wages, and lax labour laws, and are exporting the surplus to the US at very low prices.

In Bangladesh's case, its trade surplus with the US, according to the USTR, is led by the textile sector and government cash incentives for dozens of export products, including domestic textiles and leather. They even cite excess capacity in the country's cement industry—a curious inclusion, since Bangladesh is not among the US's top exporters for cement. Canada, Turkey, Mexico and Vietnam are, and except for Turkey, the other three have large trade surpluses with the US. Furthermore, the American diagnosis suffers from a fatal flaw when applied to the RMG sector. Bangladesh's RMG industry is almost entirely based on orders from international buyers. Therefore, it is neither profitable nor logical for manufacturers to "overproduce."

Besides, the USTR's insinuation of lax labour standards relies on outdated stereotypes. In preparation for graduating from the Least Developed Country (LDC) status, Bangladesh has actively tightened its belt and modernised its laws. In fact, it is the first country in Asia to have ratified all fundamental International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, including vital measures on occupational safety and workplace harassment. Export incentives, too, were significantly slashed three years ago.

The Trump administration's recent move to investigate these economies using a 1974 trade law highlights a broader, troubling shift in Washington: the weaponisation of trade law to mask a desperate hunt for tariff revenue. For Bangladesh, it appears to be a tactic to keep the new government under pressure. As an economist pointed out, these investigations are rarely objective. What our government must do is engage in proactive and regular dialogue with the US, ensuring that our case is properly presented and fairly assessed. In the new world order, countries have little choice but to employ every diplomatic tool available to survive.

Hospital buildings must not lie idle

Make Narsingdi Sadar Hospital's new building functional urgently

It is unfortunate that the services at the new eight-storey building of Narsingdi Sadar Hospital have yet to begin, even after four years of its completion. The problem persists due to an acute shortage of manpower and equipment, while patients are forced to receive treatment on the floors and in the corridors of the hospital's old 100-bed building. According to a report published in this daily, the hospital—the district's main government healthcare facility—struggles to cope with a daily flow of around 1,200 patients, operating from its old infrastructure. Patients report standing in long queues, with some waiting up to four hours just to consult a doctor at the outpatient department.

As the hospital is situated right beside the Dhaka-Sylhet highway, many road accident victims and critically injured patients are frequently brought here. However, they are often referred to Dhaka's hospitals, as the ICU, CCU, SDU, isolation units, and expanded emergency services in the new building are not operational. Along with loss of time and money, the delay of transferring patients to Dhaka often turns life-threatening.

The project to upgrade the hospital to 250 beds was taken in 2019, and construction of the eight-storey building was completed by the Public Works Department (PWD) in 2022. However, the hospital authority did not take over the building from PWD, because they said it is not feasible to operate a 250-bed facility with manpower allocated for a 100-bed hospital. Disappointingly, several requisitions were sent to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) seeking additional staff, but to no avail. Although the civil surgeon of Narsingdi said efforts are underway to resolve the manpower crisis and make the new building operational within the year, he did not explain why the building, worth Tk 40.38 crore, has been lying idle for four years.

Bangladesh's public healthcare has long been marred by unused hospital buildings. It is time that infrastructure development is strictly tied to workforce recruitment. The DGHS must immediately fulfil the staffing requisitions for Narsingdi Sadar Hospital to operationalise its ICU and emergency units situated in the new building. Furthermore, the health ministry must implement a strict protocol ensuring no future medical building is constructed without a pre-approved staffing plan. Government must ensure public funds translate into active patient care, not just empty concrete structures.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Gorbachev becomes Soviet Union's president

On this day in 1990, Mikhail Gorbachev was elected as the new president of the Soviet Union. He was the only person to hold the title before the dissolution of the USSR.

The unfinished promise to our women



BLOWN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza
is vice chancellor at the University of Liberal Arts
Bangladesh (ULAB).

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

The 13th parliament, in its inaugural session on Thursday, saw the slim presence of seven female members in a cohort of 300. The 50 reserved seats for women, once inducted based on proportional representation, may reduce the gender gap. The presence, or rather absence, of female MPs in a country where more than half of the population are women speaks volumes of the existing structural barriers that hinder women's political participation. A democratically elected government must own up to this reality and create opportunities for women, especially educated women, so that they remain engaged in the development calculus.

The current government, in particular, must recognise that they owe it to the women voters who changed the course of the election last month with their decisive voting weight. The heavy turnout and unmistakable preferences of women voters were a reaction to a controversial remark by the chief of the now opposition party. Comments on the women's ineligibility for top leadership positions or the need to cut short the working hours to increase home stay triggered a backlash. For many voters, it was more than an insensitive comment in a country where we have had successive female premiers for more than three decades, and where women are the driving force behind the economic growth. The comment made the long-standing struggle over women's place in the public sphere obvious.

Given the election results, one could assume that the female voters have registered a clear electoral message. They do not want to retreat into the margins of civic life. And why should they? Bangladesh has made extraordinary progress in educating girls and women. However, a recent study shows that the transition from classroom to career remains overwhelmingly frustrating. Women constitute 47 percent of public university graduates in Bangladesh (as of 2023). This is a remarkable feat attained through strategic interventions by different governments

over the last three decades, including initiatives to promote female education, scholarship programmes, and awareness campaigns aimed at reducing gender disparities in higher education. Every year, we get to see how girls consistently outperform their male peers in many public examinations. There is no question over their competence and conviction.

However, the employment situation presents a contrasting narrative. Female graduate unemployment (20.39 percent) is almost double that of male graduates (11.31 percent). Women's



VISUAL: ALIZA RAHMAN

unemployment figure is 34 percent in the age group of 15-29 years, compared to men's 26 percent. The survey also claims that among the employed women, the majority are absorbed into the informal sector, where job security, career progression, and social protection are minimal, leading to questions about the effectiveness of education in providing sustainable employment opportunities for women.

This scenario presents us with a development paradox. What benefit does educating women provide if we fail to employ them and transform them into economic agents? The labour of love, often associated with homemaking, frequently withdraws women from the workforce. But the

main problem lies in the mismatch between education and employment. Universities continue to produce graduates in disciplines that do not necessarily align with the demands of the job market. Women remain under-represented in sectors such as technology, finance, engineering, and digital services. Female students are often advised to pursue humanities and social sciences, based on the assumption that they would be engaged in less challenging professions. Policymakers must decide what they expect from this country's women.

The configuration of academic seats, often decided based on the available seats in the dormitory, must be rethought. Then again, the issue is far from academic allocation. Most tertiary institutions lack clear career placement services. The speed and trajectory of career progression, otherwise known as "career velocity," must also be considered. It denotes the rate at which individuals move

the compliance regulations, these female workers receive somewhat due attention. But the situation remains dire in the informal sector. For instance, in domestic work, small-scale services, and home-based production, wages are low with little or no opportunities for advancement. Their contribution to economic statistics remains invisible, even though it sustains families and communities.

There has to be some social awareness campaign as women's choices are in many cases restricted by societal and cultural expectations. Women are expected to prioritise domestic responsibilities over professional ambitions to demonstrate that they are "good" daughters, wives, and mothers. Even those who escape this identity trap face workplace safety and harassment, as well as housing and transportation issues. The M-shaped curve corresponding to marriage and maternity is another challenge that women face. This curve shows how female labour participation is high in early adulthood but declines during the child-rearing years and is only partially recovered later. Then there are enough moral police out there to stigmatise female participation in the labour market, which further reinforces the societal belief that women's primary role should be confined to the home rather than in professional settings.

The reality is, Bangladesh's development story cannot be separated from female participation. The demographic dividend window that has opened up for the country will remain unattainable if women aren't engaged in a strategic manner. They have already proven their capacity in almost all economic sectors and professional fields. Their academic achievements indicate the intellectual foundations they have attained. The new government must not only expand education but also ensure that educational investment is translated into economic output. This requires a more coordinated policy approach where universities align curricula with emerging sectors of the economy, and where public and private sectors work together to place women in high-growth industries such as technology, renewable energy, and financial services. Additionally, there has to be a support structure in childcare, transportation, and workplace protections to enable women to pursue their careers.

The government and this country owe it to women.

Why our vegetable exports fail long before take-off



Tahmeed Rifa
works at Innovision Consulting Private Limited.

TAHMEED RIFA

Bangladesh produces more than 1.7 crore tonnes of vegetables annually, yet exports account for less than 0.3 percent of total output. This is mainly due to a combination of poor practices and decisions leading up to boarding the air freight.

When we talk about the challenges surrounding our vegetable exports, we often frame the issue as a simple question of export promotion, certification, or country branding. But the real issue is whether our vegetable production and supply chain can consistently deliver safe, traceable, and market-ready output. A major misunderstanding in our policy formulation is the assumption that awareness automatically leads to compliance. Many farmers have heard of Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) requirements but do not follow it. SPS measures are food safety and plant health rules meant to ensure exported products are safe and free from harmful pests, diseases, and chemical residues.

This gap between awareness and compliance is one of the most serious weaknesses in Bangladesh's vegetable export chain. Farmers may know about safe pesticide use in principle, yet very few keep records of pesticide or fertiliser application. Without records, there is no reliable traceability and without that, exporters cannot confidently verify compliance.

The biggest challenge, however, is likely overuse and misuse of pesticide. This is where Bangladesh's export ambition runs directly into farm level realities. Excessive spraying, frequent chemical application, and mixing multiple pesticides in one spray cycle raise the risk of residue exceedance. These practices are often shaped by immediate pressure from pests, fear of crop loss, and advice from agro-input shopkeepers, instead of formal guidance from government agriculture officers. So, when exporters later face residue related problems, the issue is often portrayed as an export side problem, even though it is actually a governance problem on the production side.

The same applies to pre-harvest intervals (PHI) which is the minimum waiting time between the last pesticide application and harvest. This is one of the most basic principles of safe production for export. Yet in practice, farmers often harvest too quickly after spraying. Market demand is immediate, so is pest pressure and the need for cash. On the other hand, the benefits of compliance are distant, uncertain, and often captured by someone else in the chain. Until this incentive mismatch is addressed, PHI noncompliance will continue to undermine export competitiveness.

Another uncomfortable truth is that

Bangladesh's vegetable export system still depends heavily on fragmented sourcing. Most farmers do not sell directly to exporters. They sell to local markets and middlemen. This weakens traceability and encourages mixing of produce from different sources, including farmers who may not have followed safe production practices. When exporters need to fill shipment volumes, the system becomes even more vulnerable to compliance uncertainty. In effect, we expect strict quality control at the end of the chain after allowing disorder in the middle.

Post harvest handling is another neglected issue. Public discussions on export rejection often focus on pesticide residues, which is important, but hygiene and packaging matter too. If produce is not washed properly, if packaging materials are unsafe, or if pesticide and fertiliser sacks are reused for vegetables, contamination risks rise sharply. This has a direct effect on export credibility. We cannot build a reputation for safe vegetable exports if basic post-harvest hygiene remains weak at the farm and local aggregation level.

Similarly, when it comes to testing infrastructure, exporters need rapid and reliable residue testing, especially for perishable vegetables. But when testing facilities are limited, centralised, expensive, or slow, the compliance system becomes impractical. In Bangladesh, there are very few private and public testing labs that can conduct the tests required for vegetable exports. Even then, the tests take a few weeks to produce results. A few weeks can be a significant amount of time in vegetable value chains. Which is why farmers and exporters often neglect proper testing prior to exports.

Then comes the obstacle everyone acknowledges but few address

effectively: logistics, especially the absence of a functional cold chain. Bangladesh cannot scale fresh vegetable exports if cold chain management is treated as optional. The problem is made worse by the centralised handling system, where vegetables must first be sent to the packing house in Shyampur for sorting, grading, inspection, and issuance of the Phytosanitary Certificate (PC), which confirms export eligibility. As a result, even vegetables arriving from northern districts often have to pass the airport area, travel onward to Shyampur for certification, and then return to the airport for shipment. This back-and-forth movement increases transit time, handling, and exposure to non-cold storage conditions, all of which can significantly reduce product quality and export viability.

So, what does any of this mean for policy? It means Bangladesh should stop treating SPS compliance as a final checkpoint before export. Compliance has to be built into the full value chain. That requires coordinated action across farmer training, pesticide usage, PHI enforcement, traceability systems, safe packaging, residue testing, and cold chain logistics. It also requires something we often avoid discussing: incentives. Farmers and traders will not sustain better practices unless the market rewards compliance and the system makes compliance feasible.

Bangladesh has the production potential. The question is whether it is willing to make the institutional and logistical investments needed to export safely and consistently. The bottlenecks in our value chain are not isolated and they are not accidental. They are systemic. And unless they are addressed as a system, Bangladesh's vegetable export ambitions will continue to fall short on their promise.

Population control and the lure of policy by numbers

Why Mahmood Mamdani's question still matters



AHMED MUSHTAQUE RAZA CHOWDHURY

Dr Ahmed Mushtaque Raza Chowdhury is convener of Bangladesh Health Watch and founding dean of the James P Grant School of Public Health at BRAC University.

Zohran Mamdani has recently been in the news—young, articulate, politically sharp, and controversial in equal measure. But whenever I read his name, my mind returns to another time and another figure: his father, Mahmood Mamdani. Today, as Bangladesh once again hears bold announcements about family cards, health cards, social protection, and Universal Health Coverage (UHC), I find myself wondering: are we standing before an old question in a new form?

I first encountered Mahmood Mamdani's work as a student at the London School of Economics (LSE) in the late 1970s. The world was then gripped by anxiety over what was called the "population explosion." Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* had injected a tone of urgency, even alarm, into development thinking. In the geopolitical climate of the Cold War, high fertility rates in the Global South were viewed not just as an economic problem but as a political risk as well. In policy circles in Washington and elsewhere, rapid population growth was increasingly framed as a driver of poverty, instability, and even extremism. Family planning became more than a public health initiative; it became a geopolitical priority. In classrooms, we were shown graphs: population curves rising steeply, food production lagging. The prescription appeared straightforward: reduce fertility. Set targets, increase "acceptors."

The numbers were clear. The logic was simple. It was at this moment that I read Mahmood Mamdani's *The Myth of Population Control*. The book unsettled me.

At the heart of Mamdani's analysis was Khanna, a district in India's Punjab, where, in

the 1960s, a long-term family planning study led by Harvard University was conducted. The objective was direct: if modern contraceptives were made available and incentives provided, would rural couples adopt them?

Researchers visited the village regularly, provided counselling, distributed pills and injections, and collected survey data. The results showed rising "acceptance." The study was celebrated internationally. Khanna became evidence that even rural India was embracing family planning. But Mamdani, an anthropologist, went back to the field and found a more complex reality. Many of those recorded as "acceptors" were not consistent users. Some took the pills but did not consume them. Others received injections once, but did not return. More importantly, Mamdani examined the power dynamics at play. The foreign researchers were educated, authoritative, and backed by state and international institutions. Villagers perceived them as *sahibs*. Refusal was not socially easy. In that context, what surveys recorded as "acceptance" often reflected deference rather than conviction.

In statistical terms, uptake had increased. In social terms, compliance masked constraints. Mamdani posed an even deeper question: why should these families reduce fertility in the first place? In agrarian settings marked by economic insecurity, absence of social protection, and reliance on children for old age support, children are not merely mouths to feed but also labour, insurance, and dignity. Without altering these structural conditions, how sustainable could a purely technical fertility intervention be?

I still remember sitting in the LSE library,

winter light filtering through the windows, reading Mamdani's arguments. I was studying demography—rates, regressions, projections. Yet, Mamdani reminded me that numbers do not float above society; they are produced within it. I may not have grasped the full implications at the time, but a seed of doubt was planted: does development thinking fall too easily in love with measurable success?

Later, during my doctoral studies at

technical matter or a question of power. Years later, Masuma visited us in Dhaka. In 2023, when our book *50 Years of Bangladesh: Advances in Health* was launched in London, jointly by LSE and the Bangladesh High Commission, she was present. Time seemed to complete a circle. The intellectual challenge that once unsettled me had become part of my own professional journey.

When I returned to BRAC to help build

The family planning revolution in Bangladesh did not stem from contraceptive supply alone. It was the result of the work of female community health workers, expansion of girls' education, women's economic participation, and reductions in child mortality. Smaller families become a rational choice when women earn, when girls stay in school, and when children survive. Mamdani taught me that "acceptance" is not the same as empowerment.

Years later, working on global health systems and UHC, I saw the same pattern recur: elegant policy frameworks, sophisticated financial models, coverage statistics. But the fundamental questions remained: is inequality narrowing? Are households protected from catastrophic health expenditures? Are women and marginalised communities genuinely empowered?

Today, in Bangladesh, we are discussing health cards, family cards, and expanded social protection schemes. Millions of cards distributed may indeed be impressive. But the essential question lies elsewhere: who is actually receiving services, and of what quality? Who is being excluded? Is a card equivalent to an entitlement? Numbers can write press releases. Justice writes history.

For me, *The Myth of Population Control* was never just a book about fertility. It was a warning against the arrogance of technocratic development. It taught me that evidence is never neutral, numbers never tell the whole story, and policies fail when power structures remain untouched.

As Zohran Mamdani's name circulates in political debate today, I am reminded that intellectual legacies travel across generations. His father once taught me to question the comfort of numbers. That question remains relevant not only in population debates of the 1960s but in contemporary discussions of UHC, social protection, and reform. Are we turning people into statistics, or are we putting statistics to work for people? Numbers tell stories. But when people cease to be at the centre of the story, the narrative collapses, and so does development.



A female community health worker discusses family planning options with local women at a community clinic in Fulchhari upazila, Gaibandha. FILE PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUI

the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, I became close friends with Mahmood Mamdani's sister, Masuma Mamdani. We spoke often about Africa, colonial legacies, and the politics of development. I visited her in Dar es Salaam. We walked by the Indian Ocean and debated whether development was fundamentally a

Research and Evaluation Division (RED), Mamdani's lesson was quietly at work in my thinking. We did not want to produce numbers for their own sake. We did not want to celebrate coverage rates without understanding context. We asked why people change, why they don't, and how power relations shape behaviour.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF ACTION FOR RIVERS

Our rivers are dying, and so is our future



SABBIR AHMAD

Dr Sabbir Ahmad is a researcher and expert in project delivery and engineering. He can be reached at sabbir@icee.org.

A few days ago, I stopped by the Turag River near Aminbazar on my way to Savar. The water, a murky greyish brown, barely moved. A thick film of industrial waste floated on the surface; the smell was difficult to endure. A local fisherman indicated that he had not caught anything worthwhile in three years. "This river is dead," he flatly suggested, as if it were obvious, the way one might comment on the heat or traffic. That casual acceptance stayed with me. How did we arrive at a point where a dead river is simply another feature of the landscape?

The world marks March 14 as the International Day of Action for Rivers to recognise the crucial role of rivers in sustaining livelihoods and ecosystems. This year's theme, "Protect Rivers, Protect People," feels like an ultimatum. The world also observes March 22 as "World Water Day," focusing on access to fresh water. The 2026 campaign slogan for the day is "Where water flows, equality grows." Naturally, these two days commemorate deeply interconnected themes.

For Bangladesh, a nation shaped by the sediments from the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna, the health of our rivers is not a peripheral environmental concern—it is the very foundation of our survival. A 2025 study by the River and Delta Research Centre (RDRC) reveals a grim reality: at least 79 rivers across the country have either died or are drying up. The crisis is most acute in the Khulna division, with 25 dying rivers, followed by 19 in Rajshahi and 14 in Rangpur. This decay mirrors a parliamentary statement from February 2024: that 308 rivers around the country have lost navigability. While the total river network in Bangladesh spans approximately 24,000km, the portion that remains navigable during the dry season is roughly 3,800km, a staggering decline that threatens the very lifeline of our delta. And yet, the gap between our riverine identity and our developmental choices has never been more consequential.

The picture is bleak in the capital. A recent study reveals that over the last three decades, Dhaka's built-up areas surged by 288

percent, while its vital water bodies shrank by 60 percent. Consequently, the six rivers encircling the city—Buriganga, Shitalakkhya, Bangshi, Turag, Balu, and Dhaleshwari—are now functionally dead, choked by industrial and municipal waste. The Department of Environment's 2023 report confirms that these waterways fail to meet the vital Environmental Quality Standards set by law. This is not just an ecological issue but also an economic one: the World Bank estimates river pollution costs the nation \$2.83 billion annually, a figure set to balloon to \$51 billion over the next two decades if we fail to act.

The drivers of this crisis are well-documented but politically inconvenient. According to the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), roughly 350 tonnes of waste are dumped into Dhaka's rivers daily from approximately 7,000 industrial and residential sources. Another RDRC survey report on 56 rivers finds them to be extremely polluted. The ready-made garment sector, the backbone of our economy, discharges an estimated 5.6 crore tonnes of wastewater annually, mostly into the Buriganga. The dissolved oxygen levels has become too low to support aquatic life in Buriganga, Turag and Balu. For nearby slum residents, the cost is physical: Human Rights Watch reports chronic fevers, skin diseases, and respiratory illness. Besides, with the rivers being choked by the 63,200 illegal encroachers identified by the National River Conservation Commission (NRCC), the city's natural drainage is also failing. The urban waterlogging that paralyses Dhaka with less

than an hour of rain is not a natural disaster but the predictable result of replacing waterways with concrete.

Beyond our borders, the challenge takes on a geopolitical dimension that demands far greater urgency than it currently receives. Bangladesh is at the downstream end of 57 transboundary rivers, which means we are perpetually subject to our neighbours' decisions. During the dry season, upstream diversions reduce rivers like the Ganges to trickles, allowing salinity to advance deep into the agricultural belt of our coastal districts, ruining farmland and displacing communities. During the monsoon, sudden uncoordinated releases from upstream dams trigger what are often described as flash floods. There is nothing natural about a flood caused by dam management decisions made without warning or accountability. The Ganges Water Treaty was ratified decades ago, yet we still lack access to transparent, real-time data on upstream operations. As the treaty comes up for renewal, Bangladesh must push for enforceable real-time data-sharing, early warning systems for dam releases, and a genuine framework for joint ecological stewardship of the shared watershed.

Domestically, the problem is not an absence of law but a chronic failure to enforce it. In 2019, the High Court declared rivers in Bangladesh as living entities with legal rights, designating the NRCC as their legal guardian. The court also directed that encroachers be barred from participating in elections and getting bank loans. In 2026, those directives

remain largely symbolic. Eviction drives generate headlines; encroachers return within months.

Breaking this cycle requires structural reform. The NRCC must be empowered with genuine fast-track authority to penalise polluters and evict encroachers beyond the reach of political interference. Every major infrastructure project must pass a mandatory river impact assessment before approval. In the case of industrial pollution, the standard cannot remain voluntary compliance. Industries operating without functional effluent treatment plants are externalising the true cost of their production onto the public health of millions. It is basic hydrological common sense, not idealism.

At the community level, the Halda River offers a model worth national attention. The partnership between local fishermen and government agencies to protect the country's last natural carp breeding ground shows what is possible when communities are given genuine ownership rather than treated as spectators to top-down policy.

There is no foundation more fundamental than the water that flows through this delta. A Bangladesh of high-speed internet and soaring skylines means very little if the rivers are retreating. If we fail to act urgently through enforceable law, assertive diplomacy, and genuine community stewardship, we will be the generation that presides over the irreversible loss of our most defining natural heritage, and our aspiration for equality may remain elusive.

CROSSWORD
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS
1 Chops into fine bits
6 Sore spots
11 Extreme pain
12 River of Provence
13 Essential
14 Dull finish
15 Morse bit
16 Chide
18 Screw up
19 Favoring
20 Auditor's org.
21 Genuine
23 Trap
25 Jazz style
27 Flow out
28 Fare carriers

30 Upper limits
33 "- Kapital"
34 Ump's call
36 Set fire to
37 Treater's words
39 Summer sign
40 Put away
41 Squirrel's find
43 Nearby
44 Sculptor Henry
45 Madrid mister
46 Had title to

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2 Disregard
3 Double-reed instrument
4 Compass dir.

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6 Radius, e.g.
7 Scorch
8 Ride with a basket
9 Complete
10 Garden starters
17 Twosomes: Abbr.
22 Bagel topper
24 Jackson 5 hit
26 Lead the way
28 Squeal
29 Total
31 Dakota city
32 High
33 Brake shapes
35 I love you: Sp.
38 Roughly
42 Farm grazer

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11-17

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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WRITE FOR US, SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.



PHOTOS: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

JOYFUL JUBILATIONS

Eid memories that evoke emotions

For every individual, any festival is woven with memories—of childhood excitement, family gatherings, and moments that quietly shape our lives.

SHARMIN JOYA

For several figures from Bangladesh's entertainment industry, these memories range from joyful to bittersweet, revealing how the spirit of Eid evolves over time while always remaining deeply rooted in family and togetherness.

TANZIKA AMIN

Childhood Eids remain the most cherished memories for most people. Tanzika Amin shares, "The excitement of buying a new dress and hiding it so no one could see it before Eid, just to keep its exclusivity, felt truly special. Back then, Eidi ranged from three to ten taka, and when we added everything together, it

members celebrates it together."

DOLA RAHMAN

Festivals carry layers of emotions — joy, nostalgia, and sometimes a quiet touch of melancholy. For singer Dola Rahman, Eid memories reflect all of these.

"Last year's Eid was really special for me professionally because my song *Chand Mama* became a party anthem, and it still lingers with people. But another Eid has a more personal place in my heart. While I was doing my BAR in the UK, I spent two Eids away from my family for the first time. Being far from home felt a little empty, but celebrating with the Bangalee community there made it special. We shared meals, laughed so much, and even got our foreign friends to wear salwar kameez — that memory is still so sweet and unique to me."

This year, Dola is thrilled to return home to her hometown, Netrokona in Mymensingh, to celebrate Eid surrounded by family — a feeling she has deeply missed.

SARIKA SABAH

Sarika Sabah fondly recalls an Eid whose memories still live in her heart. "My uncles and cousins live abroad, but there was one Eid when we were all together — it was when my grandfather passed away. I don't really remember the year, as I was very young, but the memory of our entire family being united feels so fresh. It was the first time we were all together during a festival."

She also reminisces about celebrating Eid in Rangpur. "We loved *chand raat* — the night before Eid. We would feast together, have so much fun on the rooftops, and all the cousins would stay over. It always felt like a little picnic."

KHAIRUL BASAR

Basar has one bittersweet memory of Eid that made him realise many things about life, while also bringing him joy.

"It was around 2000. I was quite young, and our family's financial condition at that time was not very good. My elder brother bought some Eid groceries with the money he earned from giving tuitions, and he also bought a panjabi for me. Since our sister was too young to understand anything, he bought the gift only for me. At that time, I was really happy. However, as I grew up, it gave me a lot of realisations about life, and even now, thinking about it brings tears to my eyes."

would become nearly a hundred taka."

With that money, she mentioned that they could buy cold drinks in glass bottles, which cost only six or seven taka—those moments were pure joy. "Many of those Eids came during winter, and even on chilly mornings, we would take early baths and wear our new clothes with excitement. Later in the day, cousins would buy colourful plastic sunglasses from nearby shops. Eid has always meant family for me, and even today our big family of nearly 70



OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA



Musical Evening: 'Swarashree'
March 14 | 8 pm-10 pm
Satori Academy of Arts, Banani



'The Handloom Tradition of Bangladesh'
March 8-16 | 12 pm - 8 pm
Bengal Shilpalay, Dhanmondi



'Unlearning the Book'
March 10-20 | 11 am-8 pm
Alliance Française de Dhaka, Gulshan

TV TALKIES

A romance under the spotlight

Love Story: John F Kennedy Jr & Carolyn Bessette revisits one of America's most captivating public romances — the relationship between John F Kennedy Jr and Carolyn Bessette-Kennedy. Blending archival footage with intimate recollections, the film explores the magnetic charm, intense media scrutiny, and vulnerability that defined their life together.

Rather than leaning purely on nostalgia, the documentary reflects on the burden of legacy and the price of living under relentless public fascination. Their story unfolds as both fairytale and cautionary tale.



WHAT'S PLAYING

'American Girl' by HARRY STYLES

Harry Styles' *American Girl* continues the singer's exploration of classic pop-rock influences. Built around bright guitar riffs and an easy mid-tempo rhythm, the track carries the breezy feel of 1970s soft rock, a sound Styles has increasingly embraced in recent years.

Since its release, the song has attracted millions of streams across major platforms, quickly finding space on global pop playlists. Fans have responded to its relaxed tone and melodic simplicity, helping it gain steady traction online.

Musically, *American Girl* reflects Styles' preference for vintage textures and straightforward songwriting. The



result is a track that leans into warmth and familiarity, maintaining the retro-inspired direction that has shaped much of his recent work.

TRENDY STREAMS

Netflix
One Piece: Into The Grand Line



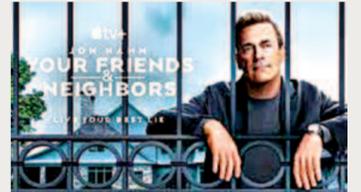
Prime Video
Young Sherlock



HBO Max
Rooster



Apple TV
Your Friends & Neighbors



Hoichoi
Bonolota Express



STYLE STATEMENT

Yerin Ha

Bridgerton's Season 4 actress, Yerin Ha, is proving she's a fashion force to be reckoned with. At the recent SAG-AFTRA Awards, she turned heads in a dramatic white feathered top paired with a sleek, high-waisted black skirt. The airy texture of the feathers contrasts beautifully with the skirt's fitted silhouette, creating a perfect balance of drama and structure. The classic black-and-white palette adds an extra layer of timeless sophistication, making the ensemble both striking and elegant.



NEWS

3,484-hectare arable land lost in 5yrs in Rangpur

SDILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Agricultural land across Rangpur district is gradually shrinking, with vast stretches of arable land being used for non-agricultural purposes such as housing development and industrial establishments, brick kilns, and other infrastructures.

Meanwhile, the population has been rising rapidly in the district, thereby increasing the demand for food as well. As a result, the agriculture-dependent economy of Rangpur region is being threatened, raising concerns over potential food insecurity in the future, according to experts.

According to the Department of Agricultural Extension, arable land in Rangpur district has decreased by 3,484 hectares over the past five years. During the same period, the district's population increased by 1,54,183. The annual demand for food has increased by 27,594 tonnes, but the food surplus stands at only 2,705 tonnes.

At one time, surplus food grains produced in the Rangpur region were supplied to rest of the country. At present, while there is still a surplus in food production, it is

families are landless, while 2,04,490 are marginal farming families.

Also, the district has 8,773 hectares of single-crop land, 87,472 hectares of double-crop land, 92,832 hectares of triple-crop land, and 8,960 hectares of four-crop land. The net area is about 4,97,933 hectares.

With growth in population, the demand for housing is also rising, and residential houses are being built by filling up agricultural land. Besides, factories, brick kilns, educational institutions, and



not significant compared to the rise in demand. Currently, the food demand of nearly 3.2 million people in the district can still be met from local production, but concerns have emerged over whether this capacity can be maintained in the future as arable land continues to shrink, said DAE officials.

According to statistics, there are 5,33,129 agrarian families in Rangpur district. Of them, 95,140 are

various commercial establishments are also being constructed on fertile land. As a result, agricultural land is gradually shrinking.

Sunil Kumar Roy, a college teacher from Shathibari area of Rangpur, said, "Even 15-20 years ago, there were vast stretches of green agricultural land in our area. Now almost all that land has been lost to factories built one after another."

Abdus Sattar, a school teacher and resident of Mithapukur upazila town, said, "Much of the croplands in the area has been used in the recent years to build government and private institutions, small factories, and residential houses."

Advocate Palash Kanti Nag, adviser to the Rangpur District Homestead and Agricultural Land Protection Committee, said, "In

many cases, fertile agricultural land is being destroyed for industrial expansion. If this continues, food security in the Rangpur region will face a serious threat."

Agriculture officials said due to lack of effective implementation of the land zoning law and policies to protect agricultural land, farmlands are being indiscriminately occupied and converted. As a result, there is a growing risk that food grain production may decline in the northern region in future.

They, however, also said while

agricultural land has decreased somewhat, there has been no major shortage in food production so far due to modern technology, improved seeds, and short-duration, high yield crops.

Sirajul Islam, DAE additional director in Rangpur region, said, "Production is still in surplus as farmers have become more skilled in modern cultivation. However, it must be ensured that triple-crop land is not used for non-agricultural purposes under any circumstances. At the same time, balanced fertiliser use is very important to protect soil fertility."

"The country's economy is largely dependent on agriculture. Therefore, priority must be given to preserving farmlands in agricultural hubs like Rangpur," he added.

Bangladesh seeks Dreams crushed

FROM PAGE 3

He added that the Japanese side has agreed to consider Bangladesh's proposals and submit a revised offer shortly, after which further discussions will be held to finalise the arrangement.

CAAB officials said the delay largely resulted from indecision during the interim government, when negotiations over terminal management, operational control and revenue-sharing arrangements failed to reach consensus.

The Japanese consortium involved in the project includes Japan Airport Terminal Company, Sumitomo Corporation, Sojitz Corporation and Narita International Airport Corporation, while the terminal project was largely financed by the Japan International Cooperation Agency.

The high-level meeting marked the first formal negotiation under the newly formed BNP-led government, reflecting a fresh push to resolve contractual and operational deadlocks that have kept the nearly completed third terminal idle.

Humayun Kabir and M Rashiduzzaman Millat described the discussions as positive and expressed optimism that a mutually acceptable solution could be reached soon.

Millat said Bangladesh and Japan are seeking a solution beneficial for Bangladesh while correcting shortcomings in earlier agreements.

He said complications had arisen regarding certain charges and operational issues in the agreement related to the management of the terminal.

The state minister explained that civil aviation agreements generally involve three categories of charges, and differences had emerged between the two sides over some of these issues.

"Both sides discussed the matter in detail. Bangladesh presented its proposals and the Japanese side also shared their position."

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FROM PAGE 3

the hospital recently, her voice trembling. "My husband had just returned home after spending three months in hospital. We were looking to Nayeem to support the family once he completed his studies," she said, tears streaming down her face. "And now this happened."

According to family members and police, the incident occurred after the train passed Airport Railway Station and the compartment became less crowded.

A group of men allegedly tried to snatch Nayeem's bag. When he resisted, a scuffle broke out. They pushed him from the train. His legs went under the wheels.

Locals rescued him and took him to Kurmitola General Hospital before he was transferred to NITOR. Doctors amputated one leg, while the toes of his other foot were also removed. Another surgery is scheduled for March 16.

Seven days after the incident, the family says they are still waiting for answers. "We filed a case, but we have not been informed about any progress," Nurunnahar said.

His sister Rokshana Akter filed the case with police.

The family also alleged that Nayeem did not receive significant medical attention immediately after the incident until university authorities became aware of the matter.

After learning about

the incident, DUET Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Zainal Abedin contacted the hospital, after which treatment arrangements improved.

"Nur is a member of our family," the VC said. "We are in constant contact to ensure his proper treatment and justice."

Students of DUET held a protest march on March 10 demanding justice for Nayeem. They later submitted a memorandum to the Gazipur deputy commissioner.

SM Saliqul Islam, deputy commissioner of Gazipur Metropolitan Police, said the incident falls under the jurisdiction of the railway police.

Dhaka Railway Police Station OC Zainal Abedin said police have registered a case. "We have not yet been able to arrest the accused, but efforts are ongoing."

ABM Kamruzzaman, divisional railway manager, said ensuring security on trains primarily falls under the responsibility of railway police.

"Compensation may be possible if an accident occurs due to railway negligence, but in this case, the opportunity appears limited," he added.

For Nurunnahar, however, compensation is not the biggest concern.

"My son dreamed of becoming an engineer," she said, glancing at Nayeem, who lay silent, staring at the ceiling.

"Who will return his legs? Who will return his dreams?"

4 years on, hospital

FROM PAGE 4

operation, said Nazmul Anwar, a local resident.

Aynul Islam, a local battery-run auto-rickshaw driver, said people are not getting their desired services from the hospital. For serious cases, they have to travel some 20km to MMCH, which is often costly for poor people, he added.

Expressing frustration over the hospital's facilities, local people demanded immediate steps to appoint adequate number of doctors and staff to make it fully operational.

"Higher authorities have been informed in this regard but it is still uncertain when the issue will be resolved," said hospital superintendent Dr Badrul Ahsan.

them departed on time, only two trains left about 40 minutes late due to delays caused by an earlier accident.

"Trains are expected to run on time within the next two days," he further said, adding that around 124 additional coaches and five pairs of special trains have been introduced to handle the Eid rush.

"These measures will allow the Railway to serve around 36,000 to 42,000 passengers daily," he said.

He further said work is underway to expand the Dhaka-Sylhet Highway into six lanes.

"As such, vehicles will be able to move on at least two lanes. Speed may be reduced, but vehicles will not stop anywhere," he said.

While most of

advance train ticket sales began online on March 3, he said, adding that the online platform faced heavy pressure on the first day.

"About 37 lakh people attempted to purchase tickets online, while around 36,000 tickets were sold in line with railway capacity," he also said.

Rabiul said 21 trains left for their scheduled destinations yesterday on the first day of Eid journey. While most of

the report suggests that if Bangladesh were to channel similar levels of investment into solar power and energy storage, it could potentially achieve its energy ambitions more quickly and at lower cost.

With renewable energy accounting for less than 2 percent of electricity generation, Bangladesh ranks among the bottom 10 percent of countries globally in terms of renewable energy share, the report said.

"Growing deployment of renewable power, energy storage and other clean technologies can provide a buffer against fluctuating gas markets and serve as a reliable, affordable alternative," it added.

Pilot project shows promise, but delays stall wider rollout

FROM PAGE 3

The interim government inaugurated semi-automated signals at seven intersections — Hotel InterContinental, Bangla Motor, Sonargaon, Farmgate, Bijoy Sarani, the Chief Adviser's Office and Jahangir Gate — on August 30, 2025.

Authorities had planned to install signals at 15 more intersections within the following six months.

"We are getting very good results compared to the previous situation," Hossain said. "If the system is implemented in more areas, its usefulness will be much greater."

He said the system's full impact cannot be understood when it is implemented only in limited areas.

"Basically, the 22 intersections should have been completed around July or August last year, at most September. By now,

one full corridor across Dhaka should have been operational," he said.

"If around 50 nearby intersections had also been added, most of the city would already be covered."

According to him, such delays show a lack of commitment among implementing agencies.

He also said technology alone cannot solve the problem unless authorities and road users cooperate.

"Technology is technology, but when implementing it among the public, you must consider public behaviour as well," he said.

The system can operate fully automatically like an "autopilot", but the semi-automated design allows manual supervision during special events or unusual traffic situations.

He also stressed the importance of enforcement.

"An intersection is a very valuable hub. If there

is chaos there, nothing will work," he said. "Traffic police must keep intersections clear."

For example, he said the system works well at Bijoy Sarani because the area is relatively free of hawkers and roadside obstructions.

"If other intersections are kept similarly clear, congestion would improve significantly," he said.

According to Hossain, expanding the system would not be very costly.

"Even with civil works included, each intersection costs less than Tk 1 crore," he said. "For 100 intersections the project might cost around Tk 60-80 crore."

"With proper commitment, we could complete all 100 intersections within this timeframe."

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS
DM Ghius Malik, deputy traffic engineer at Dhaka Transport Coordination

Authority (DTCA), said several installed signals are already functioning properly.

"At Bijoy Sarani, Karwan Bazar and Farmgate, I saw that the lighting system was being maintained and operating," he said.

He also noted that under the current government policy, traffic signals are no longer supposed to be stopped for protocol during VVIP movement.

"The signalling system should continue functioning normally," he said.

If the pilot project proves successful, authorities plan to expand the system further.

Currently, Dhaka North and South together have about 338 intersections, most of which are managed manually by traffic police.

"Our goal is eventually to bring all these intersections under a signalling system," he said.

Rajib Khadem,

superintendent engineer of the Traffic Engineering Circle of Dhaka South City Corporation, said signals have been installed at several locations, including Shikha Chatra, Kadam Chattar, Matsya Bhaban, Kakrail Mosque, Hotel InterContinental, Bangla Motor and Shahbagh.

"Our work is finished. Now Buet is installing the lights and related equipment and running them on a trial basis," he said.

However, officials from DNCC said coordination challenges and administrative processes contributed to the delays.

Khondoker Mahub Alam, superintendent engineer of DNCC's Traffic Engineering Circle, said the main issues were coordination between the two city corporations, tender procedures and frequent administrative changes.

"The delay in the tender happened because of

Bangladesh's energy future clouded by LNG risks

FROM PAGE 1

invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the JKM spot price surged to as high as \$70 per million British thermal units (MMBtu). Bangladesh endured rolling blackouts after it was periodically shut out of the LNG market when suppliers diverted cargoes to higher-paying European markets.

Spot prices have since stabilised — at least prior to the Middle East conflict — with the JKM hovering around \$11 per MMBtu as of January. Even at these levels, however, strong demand growth has yet to materialise in South Asia.

According to the GEM briefing titled "Southern Asia's Gas Plans May Be Overblown," a massive wave of new LNG export capacity led by the United States and Qatar is expected to come online over the latter half of this decade.

"Global LNG export capacity is conservatively set to grow 56 percent by 2031, counting projects that are already under construction or have

reached final investment decisions," the report said.

Even so, GEM cautioned that the apparent opportunity could prove misleading for developing importers.

"Even if LNG prices fall in the next few years, buyers and sellers in Southern Asia should be careful because the apparent opportunity may be an illusion and not sustainable in the long run," the briefing noted.

The International Energy Agency also projects that LNG demand in Bangladesh could grow by about 60 percent by 2030.

Bangladesh has proposed 11.3 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) of new LNG import capacity, enough to roughly double the country's existing capacity of 8.3 mtpa. Industry plans to build additional LNG import terminals would therefore significantly expand the country's ability to import the fuel.

"Bangladesh is one of the eight most populous

countries in the world with gas infrastructure plans that could shape their energy mixes for decades to come," it said.

The report warned that failure to expand supporting infrastructure could bottleneck LNG development, as pipeline connectivity remains a major constraint.

Bangladesh has plans to build 2,695 kilometres of gas pipelines to link LNG import facilities with gas-consuming sectors such as power plants, industries and city gas networks. Yet only about 8 percent of those pipelines are currently under construction, according to data from GEM's online database Asia Gas Tracker.

Dependence on LNG is increasing as the country's domestic gas production from mature fields has declined by 9.3 percent between 2014 and 2024, the report said.

In 2025, the government imported 109 LNG cargoes and has stood out in the

region for its growing commitment to long-term LNG contracts. Three additional contracts are scheduled to begin in 2026.

Despite the anticipated supply growth, the report said LNG may still struggle to compete with other energy sources. "LNG that is relatively cheap during a period of oversupply may still not be competitive with alternatives."

It also warned that the expected period of oversupply could be short-lived.

Quoting the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, the report noted that global LNG markets are expected to rebalance in the early 2030s. QatarEnergy has also argued that a potential LNG-fuelled artificial intelligence boom could tighten the market sooner, possibly ending the oversupply period by 2030.

Petrobranga, the state-owned oil and gas exploration company, has warned that fluctuating LNG prices could further

strain the country's finances, the report added.

According to Petrobranga, the cost of LNG is nearly 20 times higher than domestically produced gas. Rising fuel costs have already forced some factories to cut production, slowing economic growth.

The report suggests that if Bangladesh were to channel similar levels of investment into solar power and energy storage, it could potentially achieve its energy ambitions more quickly and at lower cost.

With renewable energy accounting for less than 2 percent of electricity generation, Bangladesh ranks among the bottom 10 percent of countries globally in terms of renewable energy share, the report said.

"Growing deployment of renewable power, energy storage and other clean technologies can provide a buffer against fluctuating gas markets and serve as a reliable, affordable alternative," it added.

CREATIVE NONFICTION

Sweetened ice and other lessons in kindness



COLLAGE: MAISHA SYEDA

A recollection of life in Santiniketan would be incomplete without a mention of Nabadwip da. His little stall witnessed so many of our evenings, filled with steaming cups of lebu cha, buttered toast sprinkled with sugar, sponge roshogolla, fish chop, kochuri with mind-blowing tamarind chutney, and shingara (the samosa is a pale rival).

ANINDITA ROY

A few days ago on a dreary, grey Sunday, as I was busy with my weekend chores and preparing for the week ahead, I received a call from my sister. Among the many things she said was, "You remember Gopal da? He passed away." A rush of memories came flooding over me, memories I had not even realised were still tucked away in a quiet corner of my mind.

Gopal da used to sell ice cream at my school in Santiniketan. This is a place that had an immense influence on me. I do not know if the current generation at school would even call it an "ice cream" at all. It was sweetened ice on sticks, white or brightly coloured. We desperately craved Gopal da's ice cream. On summer days, after class, we used to gather around Gopal da's ice cream cart. As hostel students, we were not allowed to keep money with us. If one of us had some money, we felt on top of the world knowing we could pay for our ice cream. Although it was never enough to buy an ice cream each, we would probably get one for four or five of us. I vividly remember a few of us licking the same sweetened coloured ice, giggling for no reason, hiding the ice cream behind our backs if one of our teachers happened to be passing by, on their way home.

On days when we had no money, we would gather around Gopal da and plead for a free ice cream "O Gopal da, dao na ekta free (please, Gopal da, just one)." Sometimes he would wave us away with a firm voice, "no free ice cream today," but sometimes, I think, the sight of our faces, children living so far from home, melted his heart. He never asked for money for these small indulgences, and we never thought of repaying him in later years. Perhaps that is

what it means to make someone your own.

Gopal da's ice cream had the power to take away our sadness, whether it was because of a teacher's ire or from the quiet disappointment of being unnoticed by the boy I liked. It washed away my small troubles and brought happiness back into my days.

In Santiniketan, there were several people like Gopal da, who watched over us with a tenderness that asked for nothing in return. At the end of the month, when money had almost run out, they would feed us without complaint, as though our hunger too, belonged to them. One such figure in our world was Yusuf da, our own baker, who came with unsliced bread (a strong competition for baguette), cream rolls, fruit cake, and other goodies that brightened our days.

As younger students, we had no real access to Yusuf da. He catered mostly to our seniors, the didis, who were allowed to keep money with them. So, when we reached high school (Classes 11 and 12), it felt as though we had arrived at a long-awaited freedom. We could now buy from Yusuf da ourselves.

How vividly I can still see him, tall and slender, in a white checked shirt and flowing white pyjamas we laughingly call ghagra pyjamas, carrying on his head a basket filled with small wonders. The very sight of him would bring us joy. We bought from him throughout the month and paid later, never troubling ourselves to count too carefully, and he, in turn, never charged us more than what was due. There was, between him and us, that simple and precious thing on which childhood often rests without knowing its value: trust.

A recollection of life in Santiniketan would be incomplete without a mention of Nabadwip

da. His little stall witnessed so many of our evenings, filled with steaming cups of lebu cha, buttered toast sprinkled with sugar, sponge roshogolla, fish chop, kochuri with mind-blowing tamarind chutney, and shingara (the samosa is a pale rival). In those days Santiniketan had hardly anything one could truly call a restaurant. Nabadwip da's stall was our go-to place, our evening refuge, simple, familiar and full of comfort. When our parents or other family members came to visit, we might occasionally go to Bolpur for the excitement of a restaurant meal. On most days, it was his shop that sustained us, not merely with his food, but with his warmth and homeliness, which have become inseparable from Santiniketan itself.

Nabadwip da was a quiet witness to our vibrant fearless youth, to our desire to understand the world and in our own way to change it for the better. He also witnessed our serious relationships, our hesitant date evenings in which friends often played their part, sitting with us with curiosity and amusement. He always seemed to know who was falling for whom. And when our hearts were broken and our little worlds felt shattered, his bright smile and a cup of lebu cha worked wonders. He knew not only the secrets of our young hearts, but of our families as well.

He kept a monthly account of what we owed him. If a payment was delayed, he would simply smile gently and remind us, there were never threats of not giving us tea or snacks, no harsh words. Such gestures, small as they may seem, were part of the tenderness with which Santiniketan held us in those years.

Their mock anger and boundless affection were part of our growing up.

I know Santiniketan shaped my life in many ways, but the news of Gopal da's passing made me realise how deeply the people at Santiniketan, in their own quiet ways, took part in my growing up. Our teachers, some still with us, some who have since passed away, opened the doors to a larger world; and people like Gopal da, Yusuf da, and Nabadwip da taught us about tenderness, trust, and empathy, those invisible threads that bind one human being to another.

We never thought that they had no right to admonish us, or that our relationship with them was merely transactional. Instead, they drew us into their web of affection and made us feel that we belonged. In ways I perhaps understood only much later, they helped make me who I am. They taught me the meaning of human kindness.

When I heard of Gopal da's death and felt all these memories come rushing back, I was struck by the realisation of how deeply they too are woven into my girlhood, into the very fabric of my growing up.

Gopal da, Yusuf da, and Nabadwip da, thank you.

Anindita Roy is a public health specialist working with an international organisation in Geneva, Switzerland.

POETRY

Blue

SNATA BASU

This forest is a tideline-deep with stillness, where, strands of my loose hair levitate around a blinking, cleft star in the distance and through the opening of the trees, I sunder; the hem of my heart surrenders in soft recoiling, in ocular restraint—with nowhere gentle to land. I am at crossroads with myself and my self, buoyed in a room, in a thin place, in a fracture, in a fragile ending. I remember the carrying of oceans, and how the visiting of a simple memory loosening inward scared me so ardently, I blurred into the clearing, into the peripheries of my own blankness from which I sought nothing more.

Snata Basu is a writer based in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Her poetry has appeared on numerous literary platforms including The Opiate, Visual Verse: An Online Anthology of Art and Words, and Small World City.



ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

ESSAY

A MEANINGLESS WORLD: Sartre, Camus, Waliullah, and Badal Sircar

MOSTOFA SARWAR

Existentialism is a philosophical theory and a literary perspective. Its central proposition is that the world has no a priori meaning or purpose. Yet life has value. Therefore, human beings strive to discover the meaning and worth of life within their own environment and circumstances. Humans create the meaning of life in their conscious and subconscious minds and apply it through action and freedom.

A somewhat different philosophy is absurdism. According to this philosophical viewpoint, humans seek the meaning of life, but the indifferent world does not provide it, thereby creating a tension that Camus calls the 'Absurd', yet one must confront the adversities of a meaningless life. To live through defiance or revolt against an irrational world is the absurdist response. The main contributor of absurdism is Albert Camus.

The most successful in applying existentialism in literature is Jean-Paul Sartre. According to him, *existence precedes essence*—existence or being precedes essence. We are born; therefore, we exist; we shall determine our essence and the purpose and flow of our lives after birth. I shall apply Jean-Paul Sartre's above idea to the animal world five hundred and forty-one million years before the emergence of humans. At that time, the complex eye, as preserved in the fossil record, appeared in a kind of aquatic arthropod called the trilobite. Later, it created its new essence—somewhat like the essence of spreading across all oceans. The complex eye bearing aquatic arthropod, the trilobite, became one of the most successful groups in the aquatic world. Due to catastrophic climate change 252 million years ago, the Earth suffered terrible destruction, known as the Permian



ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

Extinction. 90 percent of all creatures, including the trilobite, became extinct. For the once-great invader trilobite, the earth ultimately proved meaningless. Today, countless trilobites lie crushed in rocks and stones across the corners of the earth. Therefore, it seemed to me in my own poetic privilege:

"Now your existence lithified on the rocks like billions of other fossils

The destructive decay of eras covered you and your prey with a transparent shroud of Marxian equality You are now equal to all Perhaps, you were emperor, monk, preacher, liar, cultist, conspiracy peddler or ordinary lover There are no signs, no placards, no semiotics,

no witness Nothing preserved except your naked self Your existence lithified over millions of years, time squeezed upon your rocky being" From Abu K M Sarwar's "Trilobite" (*Ellipsis: A Journal of Art, Ideas, and Literature*, 2024) In the unrestrained caravan of the

space-time continuum, the human world is meaningless, just as the trilobite's is, unless the meaning is created by one's own actions and choices.

At the root of existentialism lies anxiety. And here enters the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard. Almost a hundred years before Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, Kierkegaard wrote *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844). Anxiety arises from freedom, not from chaos or the absence of order. Freedom offers a wide spectrum of options, but also the burden of choice. This is natural. Anxiety, guilt, and death—these are bound to human existence. Many have called Soren Kierkegaard the father of existentialism.

In the historical backdrop of literature and philosophy, existentialism is a broader literary and philosophical perspective. Where the contributions of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, Beauvoir, and Merleau-Ponty are inscribed in golden letters.

Besides Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, existentialism in literature has been applied by Dostoevsky, Franz Kafka, Simone de Beauvoir, André Malraux, Samuel Beckett, Edward Albee, and Harold Pinter. It may be mentioned here: André Malraux, even in old age, wished to join the Bangladesh Liberation War as a soldier. During the Spanish Civil War, he joined the frontline as a fighter.

This is an excerpt. Read the full essay on *The Daily Star* and *Star Books and Literature's* websites.

Dr Mostofa Sarwar is professor emeritus at the University of New Orleans, former visiting professor and adjunct faculty at the University of Pennsylvania, and former dean and former vice-chancellor of Delgado Community College. He can be reached at asarwar2001@yahoo.com.

Star SPORT

DHAKA SATURDAY MARCH 14, 2026, FALGUN 29, 1432 BS

What to WATCH

T SPORTS

Women's Asian Cup
Quarterfinals
China vs Chinese
Taipei
Live from 11:00 am
South Korea vs
Uzbekistan

Live from 3:00 pm
STAR SPORTS
SELECT 1
English Premier
League
Arsenal vs Everton
Live from 11:30 pm
West Ham vs Man

City
Live from 2:00 am
(Sunday)
English Premier
League
Star Sports Select 2
Chelsea vs Newcastle
Live from 11:30 pm

'Batters need to take more responsibility'

SPORTS REPORT

Bangladesh captain Mehidy Hasan Miraz rued the lack of runs from the top order after his side suffered a comprehensive 128-run defeat in DLS method in the second ODI of the three-match series against Pakistan at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Chasing 275, Bangladesh could bat for just 6.3 overs before a sudden hailstorm in Mirpur stopped play.

In that brief period, the hosts their top three batters, openers Tanzid Hasan Tamim (one off seven), Saif Hassan (12 off 12) and Najmul Hossain Shanto (0) for just 27 runs on the board.

Losing three quick wickets had an adverse affect for Bangladesh in the DLS calculation as once play resumed after a little over two hours, they were set a very steep target of 243 in 32 overs, one they eventually fell well short of.

"We didn't execute well in the first 10 overs, which we did the last time," Miraz said after the match, recalling how his team had plundered 81-1 in the Powerplay in the first ODI, which they won by eight wickets.

Liton Das' innings, batting at No.4, was the only bright spot in Bangladesh's overall bleak batting performance.

After play resumed, the right-hander played positive cricket and formed a 58-run stand off 48 deliveries with Tawhid Hridoy to keep Bangladesh in the game.

But after he got trapped LBW by left-arm spinner Maaz Sadaqat for 41 off 33 balls, the Tigers kept losing wickets in regular succession and eventually were bundled out for a mere 114 in 23.3 overs.

"It's a very good wicket to bat on but our top order batters didn't get many runs. We have to improve our batting and need to take more responsibility," he added.



Bangladesh skipper Mehidy Hasan Miraz celebrates with Najmul Hossain Shanto after having Pakistan batter Salman Ali Agha run out during the second ODI of the three-match series at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. However, the manner of the dismissal did not bode well with Agha, who showed his frustration before leaving the field -- exchanging heated words with Bangladesh players and throwing his helmet and gloves onto the ground. Agha's wicket turned out to be a turning point in Pakistan's innings, as they were bundled out for 274 in 47.3 overs despite getting off to a flying start. [Bottom] Meanwhile, heavy rain and hailstorm halted the game for around two hours, before Pakistan made light work of the hosts, bundling them out for 114 in 23.3 overs to win the contest by 128 runs (DLS method) and level the series 1-1.

PHOTO: FROZ AHMED

Salman's lapse sparks runout drama

SPORTS REPORTER

The age-old debate over the ethereal spirit of the game was reignited yesterday during the second ODI between Bangladesh and Pakistan in Mirpur because of Salman Ali Agha's bizarre run out, which could either be deemed a clear case of brain fade from the batter or a lack of sportsmanship from the fielder.

The incident occurred in the 39th over when Bangladesh skipper Mehidy Hasan Miraz came in to bowl with Pakistan well placed at 230 for three.

Mohammad Rizwan drove a length delivery straight down the ground, right where Salman was standing at the non-striker's end.

Instead of moving away from the line of the ball, Salman gingerly turned to make it back to the crease. At the same time, Miraz quickly got behind Salman and stopped the ball with his right foot.

The ball laid motionless between Miraz and Salman, and the batter, instead of trying to get back inside the crease, tried to pick it up, perhaps assuming that the ball was dead, which it wasn't.

Miraz, still vigilant and aware, snuck the ball away from just under Salman's gloves and produced a direct hit with the batter strangely static outside the crease.

Salman was seen immediately debating the proceedings with Miraz and then threw his gloves and helmet onto the ground in equal parts anger and frustration.

He then exchanged some stern words



with a few Bangladeshi players and Liton Das and Miraz were apparently fuming at Salman's reaction. Najmul Hossain Shanto seemingly tried to calm the situation as Salman left the field, given out by the third umpire, still fuming and again throwing his gears onto the ground just before entering the dugout.

Former Pakistan cricketer Ramiz Raza, who is commenting in the match, in his immediate reaction to the dismissal said on-air, "As far as the law is concerned, he is out, but sportsmanship, I am afraid, got a massive hit."

Salman's dismissal on a well-made 64 off 62 deliveries proved crucial for Bangladesh as after he furiously walked to the dressing room, the Pakistan

innings crumbled.

The visitors lost their remaining six wickets for just 43 runs, and were bundled out for 274 in just 47.3 overs.

Interestingly, had Miraz not gone for the run out and just let Salman grab onto the ball, the end result would have most likely been the same.

As the ball was still in play, Bangladesh could have then appealed against Salman for obstructing the field and chances are that the third umpire would have heeded to their appeal and send Salman packing. Debates can rage on, but the fact remains that by going for the ball and not rushing to get inside the crease, Salman displayed a lapse in judgement, which ultimately caused his demise.

SCORES IN BRIEF

Pakistan: 274 all out in 47.3 overs (Sadaqat 75, Agha 64, Rizwan 44; Rishad 3-56, Miraz 2-34)

Bangladesh: 114 all out in 23.3 overs (Liton 41, Hridoy 28; Sadaqat 3-23, Rauf 3-26)

Result: Pakistan won by 128 runs (DLS method) and levelled THE SERIES 1-1

Player of the match: Maaz Sadaqat

When asked about the controversial run-out he made against Salman Agha in the first innings, Miraz claimed he acted on instinct.

"He was away from the wicket and I was just looking for the ball. If I had missed, he would have gone for the run. So I was just thinking like that."

Meanwhile, Pakistan's Maaz, who won his first player-of-the-match prize in just his second ODI for a brisk 46-ball 75 with the bat and a 3-25 with the ball, said playing their "natural game" helped the side pull off such a quick turnaround.

"In our meeting, we spoke about playing our natural game. In the last game, it was my debut, so there was some pressure too. This time I played my natural game and Allah helped me." Two matches in, the series is squared up at 1-1. The series decider will be played at the same venue on March 15.

MOHAMMEDAN'S struggles continue

SPORTS REPORTER

Defending champions Mohammedan Sporting Club's struggles continued in the Bangladesh Football League as the Black and Whites were held to a 1-1 draw by Bangladesh Police in their third meeting of the season at Shaheed Dharendraanath Datta Stadium in Cumilla on Friday.

The Motijheel-based outfit have endured a difficult campaign from the start of the season, largely due to a financial crisis that also led players to boycott training on several occasions. Although the club has since appointed a new board of directors, Mohammedan's fortunes remained unchanged after the league resumed last week.

They suffered a defeat to Fortis FC in their first match after the resumption, and Friday's stalemate meant Mohammedan recorded their fifth draw in 11 league matches, alongside four defeats and only two wins.

The Black and Whites now sit sixth in the standings with 11 points, five behind fifth-placed



Bangladesh Police, who have now held Mohammedan to a draw for the seventh time in 12 league meetings since 2021.

Mohammedan were fortunate to avoid defeat in Cumilla, as Uzbekistan midfielder Muzaffarjon Muzaffarov rescued them with an eye-catching

equaliser from outside the box three minutes after Brazilian forward Paulo Santos had given Police a 39th-minute lead from the penalty spot, following a couple of missed chances earlier in the game.

After the break, Police continued to dominate and

created two more opportunities, but failed to capitalise, either due to poor finishing by Paulo Santos or a brilliant save from Mohammedan goalkeeper Sujon Hossain, who tipped a powerful effort over the crossbar.

Mohammedan nearly snatched victory in stoppage time when substitute Saurov Dewan saw his attempt blocked by goalkeeper Rakibul Hasan, while another effort went inches wide of the near post.

Meanwhile, at the Birshrestha Shaheed Flight Lt Matiur Rahman Stadium in Munshiganj, Rahmatganj MFS registered their fifth win of the season with a comfortable 3-0 victory over Fakirerpool Young Men's Club.

The result strengthened Rahmatganj's hold on third place with 18 points from 11 matches, three behind joint leaders Bashundhara Kings and Fortis FC, both of whom have played one match fewer.

Gambian forward Solomon King, Rafiqul Islam and Ghanaian striker Ernest Boateng scored one goal each in the one-sided contest.

89 GOALS

DAYS TO GO



THE 13-GOAL WONDER

In the third-place playoff of the 1958 World Cup, Just Fontaine scored in the 89th minute against West Germany. It was the 13th goal of the tournament for the legendary French striker. The extraordinary feat of scoring the most goals in a single edition of the World Cup still belongs to him.

**** Visit The Daily Star's website to also read: 'Italy's world triumph at a stadium lost to time'**

SHORT CORNER

Arsenal lead as City must respond

The Premier League title race could take another decisive turn on Saturday as leaders Arsenal and closest challengers Manchester City face crucial fixtures. Arsenal host Everton at the Emirates Stadium with their sights firmly set on a first league crown since Arsene Wenger's famed 'Invincibles' lifted the Premier League trophy in 2004. With just eight games remaining, Mikel Arteta's side hold a seven-point lead over second-placed City and could stretch that advantage to 10 if they defeat Everton earlier on Saturday. City, however, still have a game in hand and will kick off away to West Ham United roughly 30 minutes after the final whistle in Arsenal's match. But Pep Guardiola has made it clear that any slip-up now could prove fatal to their title hopes.

'No one can exclude Iran from World Cup'

Iran says no one can exclude it from the World Cup later this year, in response to the USA President Donald Trump's warning that their "life and safety" would be at risk in the US. The Iranian team also said in the social media post on Thursday that the United States should not be allowed to co-host the tournament if it could not guarantee the safety of the teams taking part. Trump's comments came just two days after he told FIFA chief Gianni Infantino the Iranian players would be welcome despite the Middle East war. Iran's team responded: "The World Cup is a historic and international event and its governing body is FIFA -- not any individual, country.... Certainly no one can exclude Iran's national team from the World Cup; the only country that can be excluded is one that merely carries the title of 'host' yet lacks the ability to provide security for the teams participating in this global event."



PHOTO: AFP

AUSTRALIA FIRST TO QUALIFY FOR WORLD CUP

Australia players run for joy to celebrate their 2-1 victory over North Korea in the first quarterfinal of the AFC Women's Asian Cup in Perth yesterday. Alanna Kennedy and Samantha Kerr scored for the Matildas, who have become the first team to qualify for next year's FIFA Women's World Cup in Brazil. Chae Un-Young scored a late consolation goal for North Korea, who will still have a chance to qualify for the global showpiece event later in the tournament.



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Potato growers across the country are already reeling from humiliatingly low prices. Deepening the crisis, two days of rain have submerged fields where they stored potatoes. Many in Gobindaganj of Gaibandha, Shibganj of Bogura, and Kalai of Joypurhat were seen unable to drain water. This photo shows farmers at Moslimganj in Kalai struggling after a tractor transporting potatoes got stuck in mud. PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUJ

FIRE AT MALDIVES ISLAND 5 Bangladeshis killed, 2 hurt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Five Bangladeshi migrant workers in the Maldives were killed and two other fellow countrymen were critically injured in a fire that broke out at an expatriate accommodation block early yesterday morning on Dhigurah Island, about 100 kilometres from capital Malé.

The Bangladesh High Commission in Malé identified the victims as Taj Uddin Islam, Sadar Ali, Robin Molla, Shafiqul Islam, and Noor Nabi Sarkar, according to Md Sohel Parvez, first secretary at the mission.

"We are deeply saddened by this tragic incident. The high commission is closely monitoring the situation and is working with the Maldivian authorities to ensure that the bodies of the deceased are sent back to Bangladesh as soon as possible," he told The Daily Star.

The two other Bangladeshis who suffered "serious" injuries in the fire were identified as Jamal Uddin and Saddam Hossain, the official said, adding that they were receiving treatment at Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital in Malé.

Parvez said the high commission is maintaining constant communication with the hospital authorities and the victims for necessary support. "We are keeping a close watch on their condition," he said.

He further said that the expatriates' welfare and overseas employment ministry and the foreign ministry are also keeping regular contact with the high commission while the Maldivian authorities are investigating the cause of the fire.

Meanwhile, the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives (HRCM) has initiated a formal investigation into the fire at the expatriate accommodation block, Maldivian media Sun MV reported.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 2

Lost page of Archimedes' text found

AFP, Paris

It all started off as a joke, a French researcher told AFP. But what the team found was a piece of history -- a long lost page from a legendary manuscript by ancient Greek mathematician Archimedes which had been languishing, forgotten, in the archives of a French museum.



Archimedes, considered one of history's greatest mathematicians and inventors, lived in the third century BC in the city of Syracuse. Among his many discoveries was the principle of buoyancy, which he struck while stepping out of a bath -- famously prompting him to shout "Eureka!"

This treatise and many others of his lasted down through the centuries on a manuscript called a palimpsest, which changed hands many times.

Victor Gysembergh, the researcher at France's CNRS research centre who found the missing page of Archimedes's palimpsest, told AFP it was a "treasure trove of lost texts from antiquity".

As well as Archimedes's mathematical breakthroughs, the manuscript contains his "philosophical, literary and religious" writings, Gysembergh enthused.

'India to hold off on US trade deal'

REUTERS, New Delhi

India will hold off on signing a trade deal with the US for several months, four Indian sources said, as fresh investigations by President Donald Trump's administration into what it calls excess industrial capacity among trading partners add new friction after an early understanding last month.

New Delhi had initially expected to sign an interim deal in March, followed by a full deal later, after Trump agreed in early February to cut punishing US tariffs on Indian imports in return for commitments, including halting Russian oil imports, lowering duties on US goods, and pledging to buy \$500 billion worth of American products.

That timeline could now slip by several months, the sources said, although US officials say they expect India to honour its commitments. The Indian sources, all government officials with direct knowledge of the matter or briefed on it, declined to be named because they were

SEE PAGE 5 COL 3

Prices of meat jump before Eid

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MUNTAKIM SAAD

With Eid-ul-Fitr around the corner, the prices of chicken, beef and several spices commonly used during the festival have gone up.

Retailers in Mirpur-11, Shewrapara, Kazipara, Ibrahimpur, Farmgate and

"Chicken prices have risen abnormally within a week," said Sakib Hossain, who came to Kawran Bazar from Tejagang to buy groceries.

The prices are rising because the demand has gone up ahead of Eid, said Mohammad Hanif, a chicken trader at Kawran Bazar.

"Since we are buying at a higher

ITEM (PER KG)	PRICE (LAST WEEK)	PRICE (NOW)
BEEF	TK 750-800	TK 780-820
BROILER CHICKEN	TK 180-210	TK 220-250
SONALI CHICKEN	TK 260-300	TK 310-350

Kawran Bazar blamed the price hike on the law of supply and demand kicking in ahead of the largest religious festival in Bangladesh, where 91 percent of the population is Muslim.

Eid-ul-Fitr is expected to be celebrated on March 20, with the government announcing a seven-day holiday for the festivities starting from March 18.

Subsequently, in just a week, the price of beef increased from Tk 750-800 per kilogram to Tk 780-820 a kg.

The prices of broiler and Sonali chickens have increased by Tk 40 to Tk 50 per kg over the past week to Tk 220 to Tk 250 per kg and Tk 310 to Tk 350 per kg respectively.

price, we are selling at a higher price. When wholesale prices fall, we also sell at lower prices," he said.

In a similar vein, Md Swapan, a meat seller at Shewrapara Bazar in Mirpur, said the prices of cattle weighing around 2.5 to 3 maunds at Gabtoli cattle market have increased by Tk 5,000 to Tk 10,000. As a result, beef sellers have had to adjust their prices by Tk 40 to Tk 50 per kg.

The prices of some spices widely used during Eid have gone up.

For instance, dried plum, commonly known as aloo bukhara, is now selling at Tk 1,250 to Tk 1,300 per kg, up from Tk 700 to Tk 750 at the beginning of

SEE PAGE 5 COL 4

Silence, sorrow blanket Shehla Buniya village

Locals bury 9 of a family after Thursday's crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

A heavy cloud of shock and sorrow hung over Shehla Buniya village under Bagerhat's Mongla municipal area yesterday.

"We have never seen so many bodies together before. It is unbearable," said Rahim Baksh, a relative of the victims of a road crash that claimed 14 lives near Belai Bridge on the Khulna-Mongla highway on Thursday afternoon.

"This house was supposed to be filled with joy and celebration," Rahim said, referring to a wedding party from which the victims were returning home. "But now it is overwhelmed with grief," he said.

"Even, we don't have so many funeral cots in our village. We have to collect these from neighbouring areas to keep the bodies in a row," he added.

Grief gripped the house of Abdur Razzak where a large number of people gathered in silence.

Razzak and eight of his family members were killed as a bus of the Bangladesh Navy collided head-on with the microbus carrying them from the Naksha area of Khulna's Koyra upazila after the wedding ceremony of Razzak's son Ahadur Rahman Sabbir and Marzia Akhter Mitu. The newlywed couple were also among the victims.

Four others were from bride Mitu's side. They were buried in their village while the other one -- the microbus driver -- was laid to rest in Rampal.

At Razzak's house, his two other sons Saddam Sardar and Ashrafal Alam Jonny had no other family member left to share the grief.

"We pray that no other family has to go through such a tragic road accident as we did," said Saddam.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 6

WAR ON IRAN:
Endgames and lessons for Bangladesh

WR3

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البنكية الاسلامي
Prime Bank

PRAYER TIMING
MARCH 14

Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 4:56	12:45	4:30	6:09	7:30
JAMAAT 5:06	1:15	4:45	6:19	8:00

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

SEHRI, IFTAR TIMING

RAMADAN	MAR	SEHRI	IFTAR
24	14		6:09
25	15	4:52	6:09
26	16	4:51	6:10

Pakistan strikes Kabul, border provinces

Afghan govt says six killed

AFP, Kabul

Afghan authorities said yesterday that Pakistan attacks on Kabul and border provinces killed four people in the capital and two in the east, the latest deadly clashes in the long-running conflict.

Pakistani security sources said four "terrorist camps and support infrastructure" were "targeted and destroyed" in Kabul and frontier provinces, as well as an oil storage facility at Kandahar airport.

Islamabad last month launched a military operation against its neighbour, targeting Islamist extremists following growing attacks in Pakistan.

The Taliban government has denied any involvement or the use of Afghan territory for militancy.

Kabul police spokesman Khalil Zadran said four people were killed and 15 wounded when homes were hit in the capital, with women and children among the victims.

His counterpart in the eastern province of Nangahar, Sayed Tayeed Hammad, told AFP that a woman and child were killed when a Pakistan mortar shell hit a house.

An AFP team in the Guzar area of Kabul saw one destroyed house and around a dozen others that were badly damaged, with collapsed roofs and walls.

There was a sizeable police presence in the area, and visibly shocked local residents were in the streets, including some with bandaged faces.



Pakistan players celebrate the dismissal of Bangladesh batter Tawhid Hridoy, who has his head bowed as he makes it back to the dressing room during the second ODI at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Chasing a revised target of 243 in 32 overs following rain intervention, the hosts were bowled out for 114 runs in 23.3 overs, having a 128-run win to the visitors. The three-match series is tied 1-1, with the decider on Sunday. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUJ, HASNAT RONY

Rajshahi, a city of wings

MOSTAFA SHABUJ

Rajshahi does not reveal all its beauty at once. At first glance, it is the city's orderly avenues, flowering trees and well-planned streets that draw admiration. In spring, blossoms soften the edges of the thoroughfares and decorative lights add colour to the evenings.

But lift your gaze from the pavements to the sky in winter or early spring, and another Rajshahi begins to unfold – one ruled not by traffic or time, but by wings.

Above the city stretches a vast theatre of motion. Flocks gather and disperse in sweeping formations, crossing the pale blue horizon in rhythms that seem almost choreographed.

along the Padma and across its vast char lands. Summer visitors arrive to breed. Those fleeing colder climates seek safety and food. According to experts, of the more than 700 bird species recorded in Bangladesh, over 300 can be seen in Rajshahi throughout the year.

Considering its geological and natural setting, experts describe Rajshahi as a true paradise for migratory birds. The region's ecosystem draws birdwatchers, enthusiasts and photographers almost year-round. According to eBird, the world's largest project tracking bird sightings worldwide, around 250 species were recorded in Rajshahi and adjacent areas in the first two months of this year alone.

To witness this spectacle, I

River.

The moment we reached the riverbank, any lingering doubt disappeared. In the shallow waters near the shore, flocks of Ruddy Shelducks and Gadwalls floated together. They moved with remarkable calm near the boats of fishermen and oarsmen – a rare sight compared to stretches of rivers such as the Brahmaputra or Jamuna.

Because of this abundance, Rony affectionately calls Rajshahi "Birdshahi", a nickname that has gained popularity among birdwatchers. He describes the Ruddy Shelduck as the "Brand Ambassador of Birdshahi" – among the first migratory ducks to arrive in large flocks during winter and the

types of terns. His records include sightings of the Black-necked Stork, Painted Stork, Black Stork, Woolly-necked Stork, Lesser Adjutant and the elusive Eurasian Spoonbill.

Among migratory storks, the Woolly-necked Stork breeds in Rajshahi, he said.

He also listed notable ducks found here: Common Pochard, Baikal Teal, Tufted Duck, Eurasian Wigeon, Northern Pintail, Common Shelduck, Common Teal, Garganey, Red-crested Pochard, Northern Shoveler and Ferruginous Duck.

His portfolio includes several species recorded for the first time

boatman took us to Mazhar Diar char near the Indian border. There, amid thorny bushes, we spotted the rare and shy Grey Francolin. Experts note that in Bangladesh this species is found only in the Padma char areas of Rajshahi and Kushtia.

Another rare bird, the Brahminy Starling, resides on the Rajshahi University campus.

Dr Saleh Reza, professor in the Department of Zoology at RU, has conducted extensive research on the region's avifauna, publishing in multiple journals and books.

"Rajshahi can be called a paradise for birds due to the availability of food, suitable habitats, safety and its unique

species of migratory birds of prey."

"These ducks typically arrive from Mongolia, China, Tibet and the Himalayan regions to escape harsh winters, while many smaller species travel from Siberia and Africa," he said.

Dr Saleh said bird poaching has declined since 2015-2016, coinciding with the rise of birdwatchers visiting from across the country.

However, urban sprawl has introduced significant light pollution. Upward-facing bulbs installed along streets create excessive illumination. Since most migratory birds travel at night, such lighting disorients them, contributing to a decline in their numbers, he said.

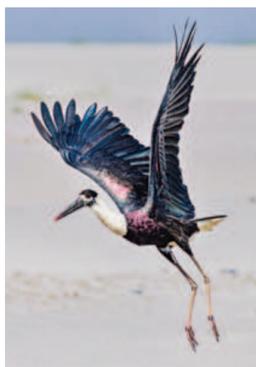
He believes populations could recover if eco-friendly lighting is adopted and excessive decorative illumination reduced. The conversion of large natural wetlands into commercial fish farms is also diminishing suitable habitats.

Renowned wildlife specialist Dr Reza Khan offered further insight into why Rajshahi remains a haven. The region, he said, offers a rare blend of rivers, expansive char lands and adjoining villages.

"Except during the monsoon, water remains static in pockets of the Padma for most of the year, providing a steady food source. This attracts migratory birds to a vast stretch from Rajshahi to Chapainawabganj along the Indian border," said Reza, principal wildlife specialist at Dubai Safari Park.

He concluded that the stable water levels provide a significant advantage for visiting species, sustaining the seasonal rhythm of migration.

Considering its geological and natural setting, experts describe Rajshahi as a true paradise for migratory birds. The region's ecosystem draws birdwatchers, enthusiasts and photographers almost year-round. According to eBird, the world's largest project tracking bird sightings worldwide, around 250 species were recorded in Rajshahi and adjacent areas in the first two months of this year alone.



It is a sight few other cities in Bangladesh can claim with such consistency.

The enchantment deepens along the banks of the Padma River. Stand there in the late afternoon and watch the sun descend slowly on the western horizon. As molten gold dissolves into the water, a lone boatman may glide across the current in a small wooden craft, while birds drift past in dark silhouettes against the fading light before dissolving into the dusk.

Most of the birds that migrate to Bangladesh in both winter and summer can be found in Rajshahi –

travelled to Rajshahi on March 1. I checked into a hotel in the Ganakpara area of the city. With winter nearly over, I wondered whether the migratory flocks would still be there. Ramadan had begun a couple of weeks earlier, and as sehri approached, sleep proved elusive.

As planned, Hasnat Rony, a banker by profession, arrived at the hotel at 8:00am. Rony has been photographing birds in the region for over 14 years and has documented more than 300 species in Rajshahi alone. We rode by motorcycle towards the char-10 of the Padma

last to leave the Padma.

Our boatman, Asadul, soon joined us. Within two hours on the river, we encountered nearly 20 species. We photographed Northern Pintails, Gadwalls, Little Cormorants, Common Greenshanks, Black-headed Ibis, Little Ringed Plovers and Grey Herons.

As the camera shutters clicked, Rony shared stories from years spent exploring these chars. On these shifting sandbanks, he has photographed nearly 14 species of migratory ducks and about six

in Bangladesh.

In summer, the char lands become breeding grounds for Little Tern, River Lapwing, Yellow Bittern and Little Ringed Plover. The Padma's chars are also known for 6-7 species of gulls, he added.

Beyond birds, the region shelters otters, freshwater crocodiles, dolphins, wild boars and the Indian Hare.

During a visit in early February last year, a local

geological location," he told The Daily Star.

He noted that over 300 species are found in Rajshahi, with 280 sighted specifically in the Padma River and surrounding chars.

"Among them, more than 100 species are migratory, including 25 to 26 types of ducks and over 27



WHO PRODUCES THE WORKERS?

The hidden cost of cutting women's working hours

KHAIRUL HASSAN JAHIN, AISHWARYA AHMED, NIPUN SARKER

In the days following the election, as we found ourselves drifting through the familiar routine of scrolling endlessly on Facebook, we began noticing posts from friends and colleagues reflecting on the results. Some of them joked, half in satire and half in frustration, that it was unfortunate Jamaat had not won the election. Had the party come to power, they quipped, perhaps the eight-hour workday might have disappeared. The remarks carried the tone of political dark humour, perhaps even a hint of wishful thinking. Yet behind the jokes lies a serious question: what would it actually mean if women's working hours were reduced?

Within the domestic sphere, women's work is often dismissed as "non-economic," yet it is central to the reproduction of the labour force. In mainstream society, this role has been viewed as a charitable yet mandatory contribution by women and is therefore treated as unpaid domestic work.

Recently, policymakers have attempted to calculate the economic value of this unpaid labour. According to a Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) report, women spend around 4.6 hours a day on household work while men spend only 0.6 hours. Unpaid household and caregiving labour was valued at Tk 5.3 trillion in 2021.

In a capitalist labour market built on cost minimisation and efficiency maximisation, attempts to reduce work hours rarely unfold as intended. Instead, they risk reinforcing the very structures of inequality they claim to challenge.

In a system where employers evaluate workers by output per unit of cost, a policy that formalises women as "five-hour workers" inevitably labels them as less productive. No matter how wages are paid by the company or the state, employers will see women working fewer hours for the same monetary cost. Over time, this incentivises employers to quietly avoid hiring women, especially in competitive, low-margin industries such as garments, where profit depends on maximising every labour minute. Women become economically "risky hires". This solidifies the idea that women's "real duties" remain at home. Instead of challenging the burden of unpaid work, it validates the assumption: if women are expected to work fewer hours outside, who is expected to cover the rest? Women themselves, through a repackaging of domestic confinement.

Even more troubling is the potential for long-term exploitation through

informalisation. Employers may offer temporary or under-the-table contracts, or piece-rate, home-based work. If wages are partly subsidised by the state, women's economic security becomes vulnerable to political cycles and austerity cuts. A policy masquerading as "relief" actually deepens vulnerability. Instead of reproductive justice, it offers reproductive containment. Instead of empowerment, it cements women as a secondary, subsidised, and easily discardable labour force.

To understand why talk of reducing women's work hours reinforces inequality, we turn to Social Reproduction Theory (SRT), which begins with a fundamental question: "Who produces the workers?" It focuses on life after 5 pm and before 9 am as something that sustains the structure outside the formal workspace. In the capitalist system,

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the family, as the basic unit of society, functions as the space of reproduction of both the existing structure and, in a literal sense, the workforce.

This leads to the question: who actually does the work of reproduction? It is the women in the family who are disproportionately impacted, as their efforts sustain the capitalist labour supply, yet remain unseen in the economy and dismissed as "unpaid" work. Social reproduction occurs through three processes: regenerating workers for the next day's work by looking after the family, cooking and feeding them, and managing the household; preparing and caring for non-workers, such as children and students, to function within the existing system; and producing future workers through childbirth.

We need to address the unpaid labour behind this reproduction of labour, challenging the invisibility of

this work and the disproportionate burden placed on women.

Furthermore, recognising the unpaid work of women highlights the magnitude of their workload, but does it benefit women economically? The answer is no. Recognition in documentation or statistics is ineffective unless it results in tangible improvements, such as economic independence, social protection, or a reduction in the persistent double burden.

Here, the government can play a crucial role. Instead of subsidising institutes for the five-hour workday, it can initiate comprehensive policy reform. A sustainable approach would be revisiting labour regulations and policies to redistribute care infrastructure, alongside universal social protection and enhanced childcare and public transportation systems.

Care work in households should not be seen only as a woman's responsibility, but rather as socially necessary work to be shared, supported, and mitigated by the state.

The state can redistribute the workload by building infrastructure that supports these efforts, including affordable childcare (e.g., public or community childcare), community kitchens to reduce the burden of cooking and feeding, and the enforcement and incentivisation of paid parental leave for both parents.

Without acknowledging and addressing the unpaid

burden placed on women within the existing structure, reducing work hours merely re-establishes existing inequality by banishing women to the house and the kitchen, sustaining the social reproduction of the workforce and the system, and failing to challenge the structures that invisibilise women's labour.

Social Reproduction Theory ultimately reveals a paradox: capitalism survives on women's unpaid labour, yet refuses to value or redistribute it. Recognition without redistribution cannot bring justice. Whether through policy proposals to reduce women's work hours or through government initiatives to include unpaid care work in GDP, these measures do not challenge the fundamental logic that sustains gendered economic inequality.

True liberation of women requires dismantling the system that profits from women's unpaid work, not decorating it with

new incentives. Instead, new policies need to redistribute care work, expand public services, and restructure labour markets. Otherwise, such proposals will merely preserve the status quo under a veneer of progress, creating a reserve army of labour in which women become part-time workers and full-time caregivers, while employers continue to pursue control over the supply-demand dynamics of the labour market.

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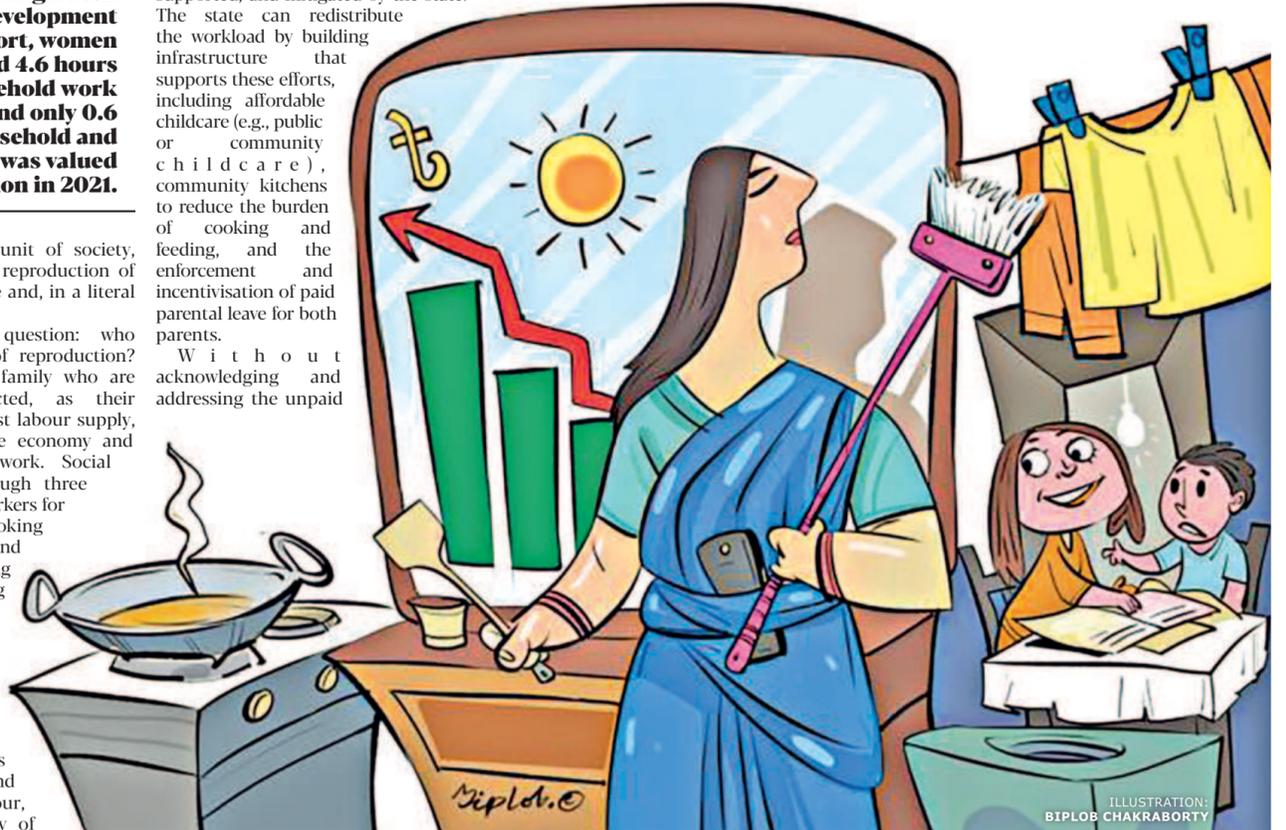


ILLUSTRATION: BIPOB CHAKRABORTY

The last echo of Kui



Ashwini Kondo and his 110-year-old uncle.

"Only four elderly people, including my uncle and aunt, still know Kui," says Pankaj. "Even they now mostly speak Bengali or regional dialects. The younger generation does not speak the language. I barely know a few words that I learned from my grandmother."

MINTU DESHWARA

In the tea garden villages of Sylhet division, a language is breathing its last.

The Kondo community, one of the smallest indigenous groups in Bangladesh, is facing the near extinction of its ancestral language, Kui. Recent studies suggest that less than one percent of the community can speak the language fluently.

According to local accounts, only four elderly individuals still retain the ability to converse in Kui. With their passing, the language may disappear entirely from Bangladesh.

The international linguistic organisation SIL International has identified Kui among the country's most endangered languages. In a recent survey of four indigenous languages, SIL found that all are at risk, but Kui is among the most critically threatened.

According to the Society

for Environment and Human Development (SEHD), most Kondo families in Moulvibazar, Habiganj and Sylhet districts are descendants of labourers brought from present-day Odisha and Jharkhand by British colonial authorities around 150 years ago to work in tea plantations.

In 2016, SEHD documented 539 Kondo households across 30 tea estates in Sylhet division.

At Kalighat Tea Garden in Sreemangal upazila of Moulvibazar, 67-year-old Shyamoli Kondo says opportunities to speak Kui are almost nonexistent.

"I only speak a few words of the Kui language when I meet my elder brother," she says. "Outside that, we have to speak Oriya, Jangli (a mixed dialect), or Bengali. Many people do not even recognise our language anymore."

She dreams of returning to Jharkhand. "There, I could speak freely

in my own language. Here, once you leave the village, Kui disappears."

SIL research shows that 76 percent of the Kondo community identify Oriya as their mother tongue, though only 42 percent actively use it. While 11 percent claim Kui as their mother tongue, fewer than one percent can actually speak it. The language now survives mainly among elderly speakers in a few tea gardens of Moulvibazar.

Within the community, Oriya is commonly used, while Bengali dominates communication with other groups.

Pankaj Kondo, 50, vice president of the Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union, calls the situation an identity crisis.

"Only four elderly people, including my uncle and aunt, still know Kui," he says. "Even they now mostly speak Bengali or regional dialects. The younger generation does not speak the language. I barely know a few words that I learned from my grandmother."

He recalls how his grandmother once gathered children in the evenings to tell stories of Kondo heroics, myths, riddles, harvest festivals and folk

anymore."

As the language fades, so too do traditional customs, oral histories and lifestyle practices. Community leaders fear that ethnic identity itself is weakening.

Researcher Porimol Baraik points out that Article 30 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child — to which Bangladesh is a signatory — guarantees minority communities the right to use their own language. The International Mother Language Institute Act (2010) also emphasises preserving and documenting ethnic languages.

Yet implementation remains limited.

Cornelius Tudu, Country Director of SIL International Bangladesh, says the assessment used the internationally recognised Fishman Criteria, formally known as the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS), which measures language vitality across eight levels.

"When a language falls beyond Level 6, it indicates severe disruption in intergenerational transmission," he

"A dominant language like Bengali becomes associated with education, employment and social mobility. Minority languages are confined to private spaces, then to the elderly, and eventually to memory."

He warns that documentation alone will not save Kui.

"Recording vocabulary can preserve data, but not a living language. Revitalisation requires community will, institutional support and meaningful opportunities for children to learn and use the language."

Each language, he adds, carries unique ecological knowledge, oral literature and collective memory. When a language dies, humanity loses an irreplaceable worldview.

Samar M. Soren, Indigenous Language Technology Specialist, Head of the Language Resource Hub (LRH), and Global Taskforce Member of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL) at UNESCO, said the Konda language of the Dravidian language family is critically endangered in Bangladesh.

"This language is going extinct before our eyes in Bangladesh. According to recent field reports, only two fluent speakers remain in Sreemangal — one over 100 years old and his nephew, Ashwini Konda, 78."

Ashwini can still speak Kui, though his elderly uncle is now ill and unable to converse.

In a moment of regret, Ashwini reportedly said, "Grandfather, forgive me. I could not teach my children the Kondo language."

That regret echoes far beyond one family. It signals the possible end of a language that once carried the history, identity and memory of a people.

Unless urgent steps are taken through community-based initiatives, mother-tongue education and institutional recognition, Kui may vanish within a generation.

And when the last fluent speaker falls silent, revival may no longer be possible.

Mintu Deshwara is a journalist at The Daily Star.



The Kondo community's traditional festival, Jangol Puja.

traditions.

"That has stopped," he says quietly. For many young Kondo people, the cultural disconnect is already complete.

Sukhen Kondo, 26, a degree student, says he does not clearly know what distinguishes Kondo culture. "We speak the same mixed language at home and outside. I do not even know if we have a separate language



Children of the Kondo community.

PHOTOS: MINTU DESHWARA

explains. "In such cases, children are no longer learning the language at home."

According to SIL's findings, Kui has crossed that threshold.

Anthropologist AFM Zakaria, professor at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, says the decline follows a familiar pattern.

"It begins with bilingualism, then gradual language shift," he says.

IRAN-US-ISRAEL WAR

Endgames and lessons for Bangladesh

Veteran diplomat, M Humayun Kabir, explains the current escalation of war in the Middle East and the ramifications for Bangladesh, in an exclusive interview with Ramisa Rob, Geopolitical Insights Editor at The Daily Star

How has the current war and the Trump administration been different to US foreign policy you witnessed firsthand?

During the Bush administration, we have seen the US attacks on Iraq. Then during Obama's time as well, we have seen Libya disintegrating thanks to the US involvement. The US establishment does have a tendency to get involved in external wars. But what makes President Trump's administration different from his predecessors is that both the Bush and Obama administrations used multilateral facilities more. They would rally different countries and build up a coalition, then go into military action.

President Trump is more inclined to take unilateral initiatives, without as much consultations or taking Congress into as much of a consideration before going to war. We have seen what he has done in Venezuela. My sense is, that example inspired him to do something similar in Iran.

Do you think Trump is looking for an exit plan?

After nearly two weeks, he must be looking at some exit plans. As political analysts have stated in the US press, the administration seems to have gone to war thinking it would have been a short one and lead to regime change in Iran. But Iran is an extremely resilient country. Trump said that the war will end soon, but Iran has said they are not ready to end it now.

After 8 years, in 1988, Iran agreed to a ceasefire with the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq. Motjaba Khamenei, who has just been elected as the new supreme leader, also fought in the Iran-Iraq war. The leaders of Iran are veterans of the war. Iran wants to remove the "shadow of war," permanently. Iranian scholars are indicating a few demands to the US: guarantee of non-aggression; withdrawal of US bases from the Gulf nations; acknowledge their right to useful use of nuclear energy; and compensation for damages caused from the war. All these elements provide a framework of what could come, as parties search for a way out.

How long can Iran last against the US – historically the most powerful nation in the world?

For Iran, the survival of the regime is not a big deal. Iran has been under sanctions for nearly 40 years. The war is devastating for them. The US and Israel have the capacity to destroy Iran. But the regime in Iran would bet on surviving at the minimum, despite the destruction. If someone can survive at rock bottom, it is difficult to push them down even further. Iran is dexterous at asymmetric warfare. They know they cannot fight the US and Israel face-to-face. They are using other tools: the power of geography and economy by choking the Strait of Hormuz, putting a lot of pressure on the Gulf nations, the entire international community and the US as well. Iran is using whatever leverage it has, and



M Humayun Kabir, former Bangladesh Ambassador to the US, and President of Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI).

using it intelligently.

We, in Bangladesh, are not at war but we're facing multiple challenges. We're seeing huge lines at the petrol pumps. A panic has caught up with the users of petrol and fuel. Our economy is in a fragile state – our inflation will go up if the war continues for another few weeks. There are millions of expatriate workers living in the Middle East, who form the remittance lifeline. Due to the disruptions to economic activities in the region, many people will also lose work if the war continues.

How can Bangladesh's government insulate the economy from negative impact in the long-run?

The current government is talking to different countries for oil supply, such as gasoline from China and diesel from India. In the long-term, we need to focus on renewable energy. So far, we have only been talking about it and there has been practically no contribution of renewable energy to our energy supply. This war should be a lesson to improve our energy security. We also have both onshore and offshore gas. For the last 12 years, no progress has taken place. It is time for Bangladesh to find a new strategy for energy for the long-run.

Is getting Russian oil refined through India an option for an emergency solution?

Russian crude oil is thick, and cannot be suitably processed in our refineries. We can look at the opportunity of importing Russian oil through India, if we can do that. India has been given 30-day relief by the US, and I am sure India will be importing a lot.

There have been reports in Middle East Monitor, though it hasn't been substantiated by the government, that Iran is granting Bangladesh safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz. Will that grant relief?

If it happened, I would say it's a gracious move on the part of Iran to give us the concession of safe passage.

However, even if they have given us that facility, getting the vessels and insurance companies to cover that, will not be easy. Regardless, if we can get that, my position would be: let's try it.

How would that impact the relationship with the US though?

Well, my sense is that if the US can give relief to India to import Russian oil, we can very well approach the United States and ask to bring oil supply from the Strait of Hormuz to Bangladesh.

Is now the time to defer LDC graduation?

I think the new Bangladesh government has already decided and applied for deferral to the United Nations. My understanding is that Bangladesh may get three years of deferral time, to graduate in 2029. Even then, we need to focus on the graduation process with the Iran war shaking us again. My personal observation is that previous processes were more of a slogan than a preparation.

LDC graduation will require massive internal reforms. We will lose our preferential access, and Bangladesh will have to renegotiate agreements with all our partners. That will be very difficult especially with the reciprocal tariff agreement that we have signed with the United States. We will have to sign similar agreements with India, China, the European Union which is already in talks with Bangladesh to sign GSP

plus facilities. The moment we ask the EU to give us such facilities, we have to sign all the human rights records and so on. What this means is that we have to make ourselves more competitive on multiple fronts.

We have to reorganise our economic management, our governance structure, our skills management, among others. All of these elements need reforms, in order to be brought to a global, competitive standard. So, we need to take massive measures to prepare, and ensure that the transition will be less painful.

What should the people and government of Bangladesh focus on now?

The war should be a reminder that the world outside is very uncertain. If we want to weather through such uncertainty, consolidation of our homefront is very important. The July uprising has given indications of which way to go. We really need to focus on reforms and build a consensus-based, inclusive political structure so that Bangladesh can go beyond both the domestic transition – characterised by the rising aspirations of people – and the economic transition that is coming up, along with the geopolitical shifts that are occurring from the war in Iran. We have to think differently. We have to do things differently. Only then, we can face the challenges ahead with dignity as a nation.

Is the Middle East's "rupture" becoming global?



IMTIAZ A. HUSSAIN

To Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, "the global rules-based order" faces "rupture." He had US President Donald J. Trump in mind. A month later, Trump illustrated how he does it. With Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu, he tried to "rupture" Iran's theological and military infrastructures.

Iran still stands two weeks later. Bombing US military bases in the neighbourhood alerted European navies and NATO, inflicted civilian casualties, and closed the Strait of Hormuz. Fears of World War III mirror a 2025 "YouGov poll" indicating a near-majority European and US public opinion.

Why does this local "rupturing" predict global war-mongering?

During Israel's 12-day bombings in 2025, Iran trumped Trump's quick victory plan: to not impact the November mid-term elections. Over half a dozen of Iran's neighbours, even more US military bases, refineries, and the US embassy in Riyadh were hit by Iranian missiles. A day after Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian publicly apologised to those civilians, Dubai was hit again, exposing a possible rift between Iranian regular forces and revolutionary guards. Rumours, suspicion, and anger riddle the air, as Israel "ruptures" Lebanese Hezbollah for serving as Iran's proxies.

Plots also thicken. One involves Netanyahu and Zionist groups campaigning for a biblical revival. Pushing Amalek – evil force haunting Jews, with Iran being the

latest – the "final solution" meted out to Gaza's Palestinians now targets Hezbollah and Persians.

Of the one-fifth of the world's gas and oil flowing through the narrow strait, much goes to Asia, half to China, a quarter to India, with Japan and South Korea the rest. Interestingly, since quadrupling oil prices after the 1973 Yom Kippur war impacted western countries hugely, could Asia's eye-catching economic growth make it a geopolitical player now? By controlling Hormuz, could Trump choke China?

Trump treats China more reverently than his other pariahs, Iran and Venezuela. With predictions of China overtaking the United States in economic size and value later this century, is the historical pattern of mid-century global leadership change unfolding now? Is a regional "rupture" becoming global?

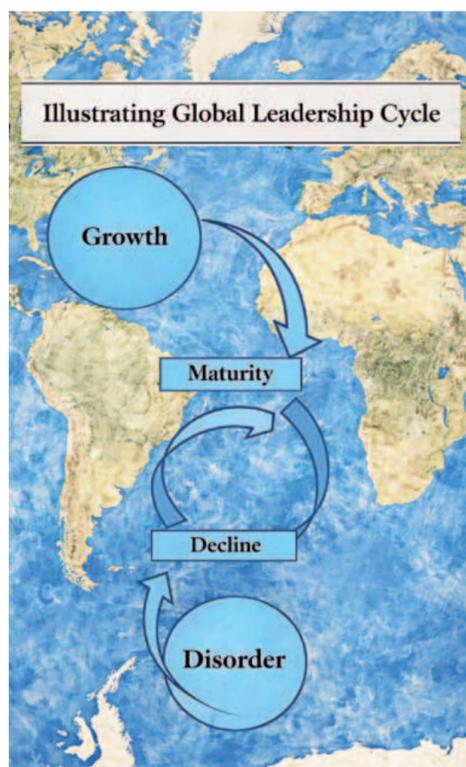
When British colonialism slid into American imperialism from the 1940s, multipolar rivalry was replaced by bipolarity. Europe vanished from the stage, as two outsiders emerged: the Soviet Union and the United States. Negotiations between them converted a "hot war" into the Cold War. Could China and the United States repeat that now?

Carney's "rupture" cannot be passively finished. So far, only a military foundation permits preaching human rights. Since championing them leaves the United Nations flat-footed, could Trump's militaristic approach profit from China's globally inclusive counterpart?

World leadership today echoes the 1930s, with populism edging democracy. Trump's populism attracts the likes of Netanyahu, just as Benito Mussolini drifted towards Adolf Hitler in the 1930s. No European leader could till now go against Trump.

China's Xi Jinping can. He hosts Trump next month. Both could eke out fake *modus operandi*, as Hitler and Joseph Stalin briefly did on the eve of World War II, or a real one, as Soviet and US negotiators did during the Cold War.

Both the "American century" and the "British Century" show a cyclical pattern with rise, maturity, and decline, in stages.



Tariffs are the game-changing weapon. Lowering them boosts trade, growth, and stability. Ramping them invites decline, while maturity mixes both as a preface to inevitable disorder. In short, one world leader brings more peace, but as the number increases, stability diminishes. The Cold War was more stable than the period before World War II, or during neoliberalism, as it promotes competition.

Britain's leadership began after corn tariffs were lowered in 1846 to promote economic growth, while the US' leadership began in 1934 to escape economic depression. In its growth phase, Britain launched the first and second industrial revolutions on RMGs and steel, respectively, replacing the East India Company to govern the colony of the British Empire. Correspondingly,

the United States signed the Atlantic Charter in 1941 to replace the League of Nations with the United Nations, then constructed the IMF and World Bank in 1944. When World War II ended, the Marshall Plan revived developed countries from 1947 and NATO protected them from 1949. Economic competition was fundamental for Britain, but military strength was the ace card. Britain won the first and second world wars only because of US military intervention. US leadership salvaged Europe from the Soviet Union's peril. Today Trump distances Europe, but previous US leadership needed it. They were the top free-riders of US economic and military resources, which Trump does not want.

When Trump and Xi Jinping meet next month Trump will sweeten his midterm election approach,

China will be anointed as the other superpower, and from both we will deduce the future of war.

An already shaken Bangladesh economy faces a grimmer future. Rationing fuel usually triggers other downwardly spiraling trends. With exports too expensive to ship and remittances from Middle East work-migrants plummeting, households, transportation, factories, and ultimately, development could face and feel unprecedented pinches.

Rekindling solar alternatives demands attention, given their notable usages in rural areas. Converting factories to them and automating RMG production demands attention. Yet, to become a developed country, Bangladesh must shift from such low-wage industries towards high-tech and allow the ECOSOC's November meeting to make its "graduation"

decision. Bangladesh's upward swing cannot be held hostage to low-wage profiting. Long-term oil price-hike recovery depends on these moves. So too the public desire to shift from hardware job outlets to software. Reinvigorating under-utilised high-tech parks across the country may answer the spark that produced the 2024 movement.

The "rupture" from the war in Iran opens a can of worms locally, regionally, and globally. Increasing distrust within these domains would logically feed nationalism the most, with religious fundamentalism not far behind. Rising above them is the most urgent call of the day.

Dr Imtiaz A Hussain is professor at the Department of Global Studies and Governance (GSG) at Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB).

COMPARING HISTORICAL LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS

	1930s, 1940s	2020-2023s
Prevalent World Leader	Great Britain	United States
Key Challenger	Germany	China
Dominant Attitudinal Atmosphere	Populism	Populism
Political Conditions	Dictatorship ascendant	Dictatorship ascendant
Economic Conditions	Great Depression, 1929-39	Great Recession, 2008-11
Political Settings	* Colonies seeking independence * Democracy too raw to prevail * Democracy vs. Communism	* Rising developing nations * Democracy shaky * Democracy, Communism & Socialism marginalised
Key International Organisations & Status	League of Nations; Ignored by All	United Nations IMF/World Bank NGOs marginalised
Industrial Setting	Shift from Agricultural to Industrial Growth	Shift to High-Tech & Automated Systems
Contending Leaders & International Institutions	US, Did Not Join; Germany Rejected It	Trump Pulled Out of Agreements

The rise of A DENIM EMPIRE

Bangladesh leads global markets with over \$5b in exports



INVESTMENT AND EXPANSION

The rapid growth of the sector has been supported by strong local investment. Entrepreneurs have invested over \$1 billion in expanding denim production and strengthening global market access.

Around a decade ago, investment in the sector stood at Tk 8,000 crore with about 12 operating mills. Today, nearly 50 mills are operational with an investment of around Tk 25,000 crore, producing about 40 million yards of fabric per month.

"The sector began expanding significantly after 2000," said Md Shahid Ul Hasan, deputy managing director of Amber Group. His company, Amber Denims – one of the country's oldest mills – produces about three million yards per month.

Mostafiz Uddin, managing director of Denim Expert Ltd, said when he launched the Bangladesh Denim Expo in 2014, there were about a dozen mills; now the number has grown to nearly 50.

He said international buyers favour Bangladesh because prices remain competitive compared to other sourcing destinations.

RISING GLOBAL DEMAND

Global demand for denim trousers and garments continues to rise due to comfort, durability, affordability, climate change factors and the growth of casual fashion.

Major international retailers sourcing denim from Bangladesh include H&M, Inditex, Zara, Primark, Marks & Spencer, Uniqlo, Next, Hugo Boss, Ralph Lauren, G-Star RAW, Puma, C&A, Bestseller, Walmart, Gap and VF

costs, especially when garments are re-exported, industry insiders added.

Muna Nahid, a sustainable fashion designer and specialist who has worked with international brands, said demand for denim is rising globally for multiple reasons.

"Denim is popular because it is easy to wash, affordable and now more sustainable due to global recycling initiatives," she said.

She added that office goers prefer semi-formal outfits and often choose denim.

"Consumers also like denim because it does not need frequent washing, making it more convenient than other clothing," she explained. "For example, many people wear denim bottoms three days a week without washing them and wear other clothes on the remaining days."

She said denim is popular among young men and women and noted that Bangladesh has become a major sourcing destination for global brands.

Mahmud Hasan Khan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said global demand for Bangladeshi denim products is rising and the country has strong growth potential. He described Bangladesh as an important sourcing destination for international retailers.

Shams Mahmud, managing director of Shasha Denims, said there is no reason for a slowdown in the sector.

CHALLENGES: GAS, COSTS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Despite strong growth, industry leaders pointed to several challenges.

Shams Mahmud identified high production costs, limited access to funds, weak renewable energy performance and inadequate gas supply as key issues.

Most mills are currently operating at 60 to 70 percent capacity due to gas shortages, he said.

Showkat Aziz Russell, president of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA), said rising costs have hurt some mills.

"The cost of production has risen sharply as the government increased gas prices for industries by nearly 400 percent over the last four years, and bank interest rates are also high," he said.

"Despite the gas price hike, energy supply remains inadequate, so mills cannot use their full production capacity. The new government should ensure an adequate gas supply to the industrial sector as soon as possible," he added.

BGMEA President Khan echoed concerns over low gas pressure and the absence of new gas connections. He noted that washing – a key process in denim production – requires high gas pressure.

Environmental concerns have also come to the forefront.

Khan acknowledged that denim washing consumes significant groundwater but said mills are increasingly using modern technologies to reduce water use due to pressure from environmental authorities and international buyers.

Mostafiz Uddin said earlier mills used 300 to 350 litres of water to wash one kilogramme of denim fabric.

"Now many mills use 30 to 60 litres, and with advanced technology it is possible to reduce it to just 15 litres, though only a few companies have adopted such systems," he said.

Alamgir Kabir, general secretary of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (BAPA), said 70 percent of Bangladesh's water demand is met by groundwater, including for industries such as denim.

He alleged that many mills discharge contaminated wastewater into nearby land, rivers and canals, damaging water resources and threatening the environment.

Kabir urged factories to use surface water and adopt water reuse practices to reduce dependence on groundwater, adding that nearly 80 percent of water can be reused through modern technologies.

He also said many mills collect rainwater during the monsoon season for washing and toilet use.

However, he criticised the fact that most factories do not properly operate their Effluent Treatment Plants (ETPs), even though they install them to meet compliance requirements. He said the government should ensure proper operation of ETPs so contaminated water is not discharged into water bodies or land.

MARKET OUTLOOK

Sayed Ahmed Chowdhury, director of operations at Square Denim, said demand declined from September to December last year due to political uncertainty ahead of the national election held on February 12.

"Work orders are now returning as the election is over and a new government is in place," he said.

He added that Cambodia and Indonesia are trying to strengthen their presence in the global denim market.

As the global denim industry moves toward a projected \$76.1 billion market value, Bangladesh's future growth will depend on balancing production expansion with sustainable practices and a stable energy supply. For now, its position as a leading global denim hub remains firmly established.



According to the latest 2025 data from the Office of Textiles and Apparel (OTEXA) and Eurostat, Bangladesh has strengthened its position as the top denim supplier to both the United States and the European Union, with annual exports exceeding \$5 billion

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

In 1984, a small two-line factory named NZN Fashion made history by shipping \$12,000 worth of jeans to an Italian buyer. What began as a modest export has grown into a multi-billion-dollar industry, transforming Bangladesh into the world's premier "Denim Destination."

Today, denim plays a key role in reshaping the country's ready-made garment (RMG) industry. While Bangladesh's RMG sector has traditionally depended on five core products – trousers, T-shirts, sweaters, shirts, and underwear – the denim sector has broken that pattern. It now leads product diversification, pushing the country beyond basic apparel into high-end and value-added segments.

According to the latest 2025 data from the Office of Textiles and Apparel (OTEXA) and Eurostat, Bangladesh has strengthened its position as the top denim supplier to both the United States and the European Union, with annual exports exceeding \$5 billion.

In the US, denim exports grew from \$649.96 million in 2023 to \$712.87 million in 2024 and further to \$955.70 million in 2025 – registering 34.06 percent growth in 2025. Bangladesh captured a 25.97 percent market share in 2025, becoming the leading supplier among all countries listed.

In the EU, where industry estimates suggest one in three consumers wears Bangladeshi-made denim, exports rose from \$1,208.59 million in 2023 to \$1,357.88 million in 2024 and to \$1,643.50 million in 2025, reflecting



21.03 percent growth in 2025.

With a 29.88 percent market share in 2025, Bangladesh remains the undisputed leader in the EU market, having surpassed China in 2017.

Beyond these key markets, "Made in Bangladesh" denim is widely exported to Japan, India, Australia, Argentina, Brazil, South Korea, Central Asia, the Middle East, Canada and Chile, according to industry insiders.

Corporation.

Local mills currently meet around 70 percent of domestic denim fabric demand, while the remaining 30 percent is imported from India, China and Pakistan, industry sources said.

Garment manufacturers and exporters prefer locally produced denim because it is easier to source and offers shorter lead times. Imported fabric increases processing time and

"Well-known global retailers and brands are now placing orders in Bangladesh, as the country has the capacity to produce high-end denim for premium customers in Western markets," he added.

Shasha Denims produces nearly four million yards per month, though output sometimes drops below three million yards due to changes in buyers' fabric choices.