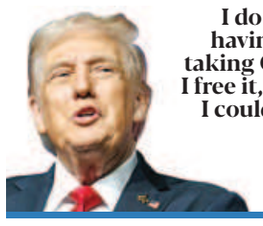


I do believe I'll be... having the honor of taking Cuba. Whether I free it, take it -- think I could do anything I want with it.

Donald Trump
US president

YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW

The Daily Star

SECOND EDITION

DHAKA WEDNESDAY MARCH 18, 2026

REGD. NO. DA 781 | VOL. XXXVI NO. 63 | CHAITRA 4, 1432 BS | www.thedailystar.net | RAMADAN 28, 1447 HIJRI | 16 PAGES: TK 15.00

KSRM
শেকড় থেকে শিখরে

Tens of millions more in acute hunger if ME war drags on: UN
P5

Too many holidays are bad for any growth economy
P6

We must restore momentum in environmental governance
P7

Legal grounds for Bangladesh to withdraw from US trade deal
P10

No talks until US, Israel 'brought to their knees'

Says a defiant Khamenei; Iran's security chief Larijani, head of Basij militia 'killed'; Trump blasts Nato, says US needs no help

AGENCIES

Israel yesterday claimed to have killed Iran's security chief, Ali Larijani, while a senior Iranian official said the new supreme leader had rejected de-escalation offers conveyed by intermediaries, demanding Israel and the US first be "brought to their knees".

Larijani's death would be a massive blow to Iran just weeks after US-Israeli strikes on February 28 killed Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the republic's long-serving supreme leader, throwing the Middle East into war and upending global markets.

A senior Iranian official, who asked not to be identified, said two intermediary countries had conveyed proposals to Iran's Foreign Ministry for "reducing tensions or ceasefire with the United States".

Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, who had held his first foreign policy session since being named supreme leader, had responded that it was not "the right time for peace until the US and Israel are brought to their knees, accept defeat, and pay compensation", the official said.

He did not clarify whether Khamenei, who has not yet been pictured since being named last week to replace his slain father,

Tehran says post-war ME has no place for US

War 'generational opportunity' to change region, says Israel

Israel pounds Beirut suburbs; issues new evacuation order

Missiles, drone target UAE, Kuwait, Qatar; Fujairah attacked again

US counterterrorism chief resigns, protesting war

200 US troops wounded so far

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz yesterday said Larijani was "eliminated last night", although Iran has not confirmed this. Katz also said Gholamreza Soleimani, who led the volunteer Basij militia, which plays a major role in domestic security, was also killed by Israeli strikes.

His killing came as strikes pounded Iran and Lebanon yesterday. Missiles and drones also targeted Israel, the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, killing one person in Abu Dhabi and setting the critical Fujairah oil facility on fire.

had attended the meeting in person or remotely.

The war has been framed by both Iranian and Israeli leaders as a test of survival.

Iran's influential parliament speaker, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, yesterday said the US has no place in the Middle East's post-war order.

"The order here will change, but it will not be an order in which the will of the United States prevails," Ghalibaf said in

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Vehicles crawled along the Dhaka–Sylhet highway yesterday due to the ongoing expansion work there. This bottleneck is raising fears of suffering for Eid holidaymakers. The photo was taken at Ashuganj Gol Chattar in Brahmanbaria around noon. PHOTO: MASUK HRIDOY

EID JOURNEY HOME

Dhaka-Sylhet highway a major concern

Other key routes may also see delays over roadworks, bottlenecks

SHAMIMA RITA

Around 11:00am on Sunday, pickup van driver Elias Mia switched off his engine on the Dhaka–Sylhet highway in Tarabo, seeing no chance of reaching Kanchpur Bridge in a short period although it was only about two kilometres away.

He finally crossed that short stretch around 4:00pm. On a route where a trip should take five to six hours now often takes 12 to 15, Elias said, adding that gridlock has become part of daily life.

"Work is already going on along this road. On top of that, look at how vehicles are being driven," he said, pointing at a vehicle coming from the opposite direction.

His experience may soon become common for those heading home for Eid, as major highways face mounting pressure from roadworks, bottlenecks and poor traffic discipline.

With millions expected to leave Dhaka over the next two days, officials fear long tailbacks on key corridors, especially on southern and northern routes, despite expanded traffic management efforts.

According to a Special Branch report of police, 164 congestion-prone points have been identified on eight major highways, including the Dhaka–Sylhet and Dhaka–Chattogram corridors.

According to a Special Branch report of police, 164 congestion-prone points have been identified on eight major highways, including the Dhaka–Sylhet and Dhaka–Chattogram corridors.

Police said the main causes include ongoing road construction, illegal roadside shops and temporary markets, unauthorised bus stoppages, battery-run rickshaws, auto-rickshaws and legunas, passengers boarding and alighting on highways, wrong-way driving, and slow toll collection.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

PM orders drive to curb violence against women

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman has instructed cabinet members and senior government officials to launch a special nationwide drive to curb rape and violence against women, warning that immediate and visible action is needed to prevent further incidents.

The government has decided to take coordinated, multi-agency measures to prevent such crimes and ensure faster disposal of cases already under trial.

The directive came at a cabinet meeting chaired by the prime minister yesterday, the last such meeting before the Eid-ul-Fitr holidays, Cabinet Secretary Nasimul Ghani told reporters afterwards.

The authorities have been instructed to ensure swift investigation and trial through closer coordination among law enforcement agencies, prosecutors and the judiciary.

The aim is to strengthen the institutional structure by reinforcing courts in every district so that speedy trials can be ensured, he added.

Meanwhile, law enforcement agencies warned that incidents of violence against women could increase during and immediately after the Eid period, prompting the government's emphasis on preventive measures.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

Firefighters work at the site of an Israeli airstrike in the southern suburbs of Beirut yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

SCRAPPING OF LOTTERY SYSTEM

A return to the old admission rat race?

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

It is rare for a government decision in Bangladesh to move at lightning speed -- raised in parliament one day and implemented the very next.

Responding to a lawmaker's question in parliament on Sunday, Education Minister ANM Ehsanul Hoque Milon said the government would review the existing lottery system for school admissions. He argued that the lottery was not a rational approach and said the government intended to consult stakeholders, including parents, education experts, and lawmakers, before finalising a new framework for admissions starting in January 2027.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Yet within roughly 24 hours, the minister announced that the government had decided to scrap the lottery system altogether.

Asked about the swift turnaround, Ehsanul said the decision followed "extensive discussions" and a month-long review process. He added that admission tests would not be reintroduced immediately, though simple exams could be considered for the primary level, with further adjustments later. The government also plans to gradually introduce a zoning system under which school admissions will be determined by locality.

So what does this decision mean?

The lottery-based admission system will no longer be used for new intakes from classes one to nine.

The lottery itself was not introduced overnight. It began in 2010 for first-grade admissions and was later expanded to other levels in response to long-standing demands from parents and educationists seeking relief from an increasingly stressful and inequitable admission process.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

India arrests 7 for 'training' Myanmar rebels

AFP, *New Delhi*

Indian investigators have arrested seven foreigners, including six Ukrainians and an American, on suspicion of illegally crossing into neighbouring Myanmar to train armed militia groups, the public radio broadcaster reported yesterday.

Myanmar descended into civil war after a junta seized power in a 2021 coup, with pro-democracy guerrillas and ethnic-minority armed groups fighting for control of large parts of the country.

India has long been suspicious of certain Myanmar factions that have the same ethnicity as populations on the Indian side of the border, fearing a spillover of violence and unrest.

On Monday, a closed court in New Delhi remanded the seven foreign nationals in custody for 11 days of interrogation after they allegedly illegally entered sensitive Mizoram state without an official permit, All India Radio (AIR) reported.

The seven then allegedly passed from Mizoram into neighbouring Myanmar, where they were "training ethnic war groups... associated with insurgent groups in India", according to AIR.

Workers dry freshly made semai (vermicelli) at a factory in Khulna city's Khalishpur area yesterday. From dawn till deep into the night, labourers are busy kneading flour, shaping the strands, and drying them to meet the seasonal demand. For many families, semai remains an essential part of Eid morning, served to relatives and guests after prayers. PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

OCCUPIED WEST BANK

'Unprecedented' 36,000 displaced in one year: UN

Urges Israel to immediately halt its settlement expansion

AFP, *Geneva*

The UN yesterday urged Israel to immediately halt its dramatic settlement expansion in the West Bank, raising concerns of "ethnic cleansing" with over 36,000 Palestinians displaced in a single year.

A fresh report from the United Nations rights office, looking at the 12 months up to October 31, 2025, warned that Israel's accelerating expansion of unlawful settlements and annexation of large parts of the West Bank was driving "unprecedented" displacement.

"The displacement of more than 36,000 Palestinians in the occupied West Bank represented the mass expulsion of Palestinians on a scale previously unseen, amounting to unlawful transfer that is prohibited under international humanitarian law," the report said.

Alongside "the extensive displacement of Palestinians in Gaza", it "appears to indicate a concerted Israeli policy of mass forcible transfer throughout the occupied territory, aimed at permanent displacement, raising concerns of ethnic cleansing".

The report pointed to the advancement or approval by Israeli authorities of 36,973 housing units in settlements in occupied East Jerusalem and around 27,200 in the rest of the West Bank.

No talks until US, Israel

FROM PAGE 1

a recorded video interview, carried by Tasnim news agency and other media.

"This will be a regional, indigenous order."

On Monday, Israeli President Isaac Herzog told AFP that the war against Iran marked a key turning point for the entire region.

"We are at a historical juncture, there comes a moment that after well over a generation of endless wars, bloodshed and terror, the root cause of it, which comes from Tehran, will be blocked and stopped, and the whole direction of the region will change," Herzog told AFP in an exclusive interview at his Jerusalem residence.

The US-Israeli war on Iran is now in its third week, with at least 2,000 people killed and no end in sight.

Meanwhile, a senior US counterterrorism official resigned yesterday to protest the US-Israeli war against Iran and said the Islamic Republic posed no imminent threat to the US.

"I cannot in good conscience support the ongoing war in Iran," Joseph Kent, the director of the National Counterterrorism Center, said in his resignation letter to President Donald Trump.

Kent -- a former member of the Green Beret special forces who served multiple combat tours – said, "It is clear that we started this war due to pressure from Israel and its powerful American lobby."

Kent is the first senior US official to resign from the Trump administration to protest the war against Iran.

Trump yesterday lashed out at "foolish" Nato over Iran, saying the US needs no help after allies rebuffed his calls to join efforts to reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

Trump said most US allies had rejected his push to escort ships through the crucial waterway, with French President Emmanuel Macron saying his country would "never" do so until the situation was calmer.

"I think Nato is making a very foolish mistake," Trump told reporters as he hosted Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin in the Oval Office.

"I've long said that I wonder whether or not Nato would ever be there for us. So, this was a great test."

But Trump insisted that Washington was ready to go it alone against Iran. "We don't need too much help. We don't need any help."

Asked if he would reconsider the US relationship with Nato as he has suggested in the past, Trump said it was "certainly something that we should think about", but added: "I have nothing currently in mind."

In an interview with Reuters yesterday, European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said diplomatic ways have to be found in order to keep the strait open.

"Nobody is ready to put their people in harm's way in the Strait of Hormuz. We have to find diplomatic ways to keep this open so that we don't have a food crisis, fertiliser crisis, energy crisis as well," Kallas said.

There was no let-up in attacks by both sides yesterday, with Iran launching missiles on Israel overnight, underscoring that Tehran retains the capacity to carry out long-range strikes despite more than two weeks of pounding by US and Israeli weapons.

Iran's army released a statement saying it had targeted with drones cybertechnology centres in Israel, as well as weapons manufacturing centres of the Israeli arms manufacturer Rafael.

The Israeli military said it was targeting "Iranian regime infrastructure" with a new wave of strikes across Tehran, as well as Hezbollah sites in Beirut, a day after saying it had drawn up detailed plans for at least three more weeks of war with Iran.

Trump on Monday admitted he was "shocked" at Iran's response to the US-Israel attacks.

"They weren't supposed to go after all these other countries in the Middle East. Those missiles were set to go after them," he said.

"So, they hit Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait. Nobody expected that. We were shocked."

However, six foreign diplomats in the Middle East have told Reuters it was widely anticipated that Tehran would target Gulf Arab states if the US or Israel attacked Iran, an assessment they said was shared by regional and Western governments.

Gulf Arab states, including the UAE, have faced more than 2,000 missile and drone attacks since the start of the war on Iran on February 28, striking US diplomatic missions and military bases as well as oil infrastructure, ports, airports, ships and residential and commercial buildings.

Oil loading at the UAE port of Fujairah was at least partly halted yesterday after a third attack in four days caused a fire at the export terminal. Fujairah is important as it lies on the far side of the Strait of Hormuz from the Gulf, making it one of the few ports from which the region's oil can be shipped without passing through the blockaded waterway.

The cascading disruptions threaten to completely sever the OPEC producer's remaining crude export outlet from global markets, potentially deepening a crisis that has sent energy prices surging.

UAE authorities said debris from an intercepted ballistic missile also fell in Abu Dhabi's Bani Yas area, killing one Pakistani national, while a fire caused by a drone attack was being fought at Abu Dhabi's Shah gas field.

In Kuwait, two medical staff were injured when shrapnel fell on an emergency medical centre where they were working, the health ministry said.

Two barrages of missiles were also launched at Qatar yesterday, with the Gulf state's defence ministry saying it had intercepted the projectiles in two separate statements.

Oil prices jumped about 4 percent yesterday and stock futures slipped as investors fretted about a renewed spike in inflation as the conflict drags on.

According to analysis from the World Food Programme released yesterday, at least 45 million more people in the region will face acute hunger if the Iran war continues through to June.

China yesterday said it will provide humanitarian assistance to Middle Eastern countries, including Iran and Lebanon.

Beijing is a close partner of Iran and has urged the US and Israel to cease their attacks on the country, while also criticising Tehran's strikes against Gulf states housing US military bases.

Meanwhile, around 200 US military personnel have been wounded in seven countries across the Middle East since the start of the US-Israel war against Iran, a US military spokesman said Monday.

Dhaka-Sylhet highway a major concern

FROM PAGE 1

Officials of the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) said they have taken steps to reduce congestion during the Eid rush through traffic management and alternative arrangements on key routes.

DHAKA-SYLHET HIGHWAY

The Dhaka–Sylhet highway remains one of the biggest concerns.

Highway Police have identified 43 congestion points along the 209-kilometre route, including Kanchpur, Tarabo, Barpa, Chhapra, Madhabdi, Panchdona, Itakhola, Bhairab, Brahmanbaria, Bishwa Road, Madhabpur and Osmaninagar. The highway has been under a six-lane expansion project since 2021.

"Only 20 percent of the Dhaka–Sylhet highway construction has been completed. For the Eid journey, we repaired the old highway and coordinated with Highway Police, local police and magistrates to manage traffic," RHD Additional Chief Engineer Fazlul Haque told The Daily Star.

During visits to the highway over the past two days, this correspondent saw traffic jams stretching up to seven kilometres at Kanchpur and the 300 Feet Road section during rush periods because of heavy trucks, buses and private cars, along with construction work, potholes and slow toll collection.

The western side towards Kuril also comes under pressure.

At Chhanpara in Araihazar, damaged roads, ongoing expansion work, illegal parking and slow-moving trucks carrying sand and construction materials frequently cause gridlock, particularly between Tarabo Bishwa Road and Barpa.

Despite restrictions, battery-run three-wheelers and CNG-run auto-rickshaws were seen on the highway. Some drivers carried passengers while driving on the wrong side, while others crossed damaged dividers to change lanes.

Md Rifat, a conductor of a bus operating between Dhaka and Gaucia, said congestion has become routine.

"If the road is clear, it takes half an hour to reach the destination, but now it takes two to two and a half hours," he said.

Aminul Ehsan, the RHD official responsible for the Brahmanbaria–Habiganj zone, said the old two-lane road was being kept operational during the construction period.

Waterlogging on the alternative highway of the route at Sherpurbazar in Moulvibazar is disrupting traffic even after light rainfall, particularly near Muktijoddha Chattar.

Pedestrians are forced to use makeshift crossings, while unplanned parking worsens congestion, said bus stand manager Jahangir Khan.

Kaiser Hamid, executive engineer of the Moulvibazar sewage department, said the responsibility for the affected section now lies with the Dhaka-Sylhet Corridor Road Development Project authorities.

"We will inform the concerned officials to take necessary measures to ensure proper drainage," he said.

RISKS ON DHAKA-CTG ROUTE

The Dhaka–Chattogram highway, another major Eid corridor used by travellers from at least 22 districts, also remains vulnerable to congestion.

According to Highway Police, unauthorised bus stoppages, alleged extortion by stopping vehicles, passengers boarding and alighting on the highway, wrong-way driving and ongoing development work continue to slow traffic.

A truck breakdown near Daudkandi or Meghna Bridge can paralyse traffic for more than 12 hours, while toll plaza problems can trigger tailbacks stretching 13 to 30 kilometres, a Highway Police officer said.

Emergency repairs on Langalbandh Bridge, potholes at Jatramura Bridge, slow toll collection at the Meghna toll plaza, road repairs between Madanpur and Bastul, and bridge work at Rampur in Feni remain key risks.

RHD Additional Executive Engineer in Cumilla Khandaker Mostofa said traffic hotspots were being monitored and repairs coordinated, with police and volunteers stationed at congestion points.

PRESSURE RISING IN THE NORTH

On the northern route, vehicle pressure has already increased on the Jamuna Bridge after the week-long Eid holiday began on Monday night, as homebound passengers started heading to northern districts.

Some 35,658 vehicles crossed the bridge in the last 24 hours, generating Tk 2,84,49,700 in toll revenue. Usually, 20,000 to 22,000 vehicles cross the bridge daily, said Sayed Riaz Uddin, an executive engineer of the Jamuna Bridge.

Despite the surge, traffic was moving steadily on northern highways with no major disruption reported.

Officials, however, fear congestion near Elenga on the Dhaka–Tangail–Rangpur highway due to flyover and overpass constructions under the SASEC-2 project. The 13.5-kilometre Elenga–Jamuna Bridge section is about 50 percent complete, while the Jamuna Bridge toll plaza remains a key pressure point.

SASEC-2 Project Director Waliur Rahman said congestion could occur on the bridge because of the narrow route.

To manage the Eid rush, around 780 police officers have been deployed on northern highways in Sirajganj, including 144 highway police personnel.

"Additional police have been stationed at every key point to maintain vehicle flow during the Eid journey," said Md Ismail Hossain, officer-in-charge of Hatikumrul Highway Police Station, adding that no congestion had been reported so far despite the high volume of vehicles.

OTHER HIGHWAYS ALSO VULNERABLE

Other major highways may also see delays during the Eid rush.

On the Dhaka–Aricha highway, congestion may build up at the Baipayl intersection due to ongoing road repair and development work. Traffic is also slowed by the nearby bus stand and wholesale fruit and fish markets, where roadside activity often spills onto the highway.

On the Jashore–Khulna highway, renovation work has narrowed traffic movement from Baniyargati to the Ghuni rail crossing, where half of the 10.3-metre-wide road remains closed. The route also becomes riskier at night because of poor lighting in work zones. Officials fear congestion at Akij City, Betarkona, Prembag Union Parishad and Basundia bus stand during busy hours.

Delays may also occur on the Chattogram–Cox's Bazar highway near Dohazari and on the Dhaka–Mawa highway at the Dhaleshwari toll plaza.

Meanwhile, the rush of homebound passengers intensified yesterday on the Dhaka–Mymensingh–Tangail highway after 444 garment factories in Gazipur closed for the Eid holiday.

Vehicles were seen moving slowly throughout the day.

The situation was similar on the Dhaka–Aricha highway, where vehicle pressure increased though no severe gridlock was reported.

At the Paturia ferry terminal in Manikganj, the crowd was larger than usual as holidaymakers gathered to cross the Padma River.

[Our correspondents in Pabna, Narayanganj, Sylhet, Moulvibazar, Gazipur, Savar and Manikganj contributed to this report.]

A return to the old admission rat race?

FROM PAGE 1

Before the lottery system, the pressure on families was immense. Determined to secure seats in reputed schools, many parents pushed their children -- some as young as four or five -- into coaching centres long before they were ready for formal education. In many cases, schoolteachers themselves ran these coaching businesses.

The pressure surrounding school admissions became so intense that some guardians even manipulated official documents, deliberately changing their children's birth years to secure an extra year or two before entering the ruthless race for admission.

Irregularities were also common. Schools often admitted more students than the number of seats advertised, and many believed these additional places were secured through money.

Parents queued for hours just to collect admission forms. Children sat for dozens of tests at different schools. Childhood became trapped in a cycle of coaching centres, stress, and relentless competition.

The introduction of the lottery system largely ended this ordeal. It removed admission tests and spared young children the psychological strain of early academic competition.

Now, with the system set to be withdrawn, there is a real possibility that the old scenes -- long queues, coaching pressures, and anxious examinations -- may return.

It's true the lottery was far from perfect. For some families, repeated failed attempts led to disappointment, and some children even began to believe they were simply unlucky. Yet despite its flaws, the system was humane. It spared pre-schoolers from competing before they could even properly read or write.

It also curbed the coaching-centre frenzy, where teachers often profited from anxious parents.

Coaching centres are costly, and most families cannot afford them. Without safeguards, education risks becoming a commodity accessible only to those with money -- undermining the principle of education as a right that people in this country have struggled for decades to establish.

The government's decision-making process also raises questions. Although the minister said the move followed "extensive discussions" and a month-long review, it remains unclear who exactly was consulted.

Transparency is lacking.

The Awami League governments under the ousted autocrat Sheikh Hasina did not always make the right decisions, and criticising past policies is part of democratic debate. Governments have every right to overturn flawed initiatives. But it becomes troubling when policy shifts appear driven less by public interest and more by the impulse to undo whatever a previous government introduced.

Bangladesh has long suffered from another troubling pattern: students are treated as guinea pigs by successive governments. Each administration reshapes education policy, exam systems, and admission frameworks. This government now appears to be following the same path.

The solution to the admission crisis does not lie in scrapping lotteries or reviving exams for four-year-olds. What the country needs is a commitment to raising the quality of all schools.

That requires thinking beyond quick fixes and embracing a long-term vision.

It begins with a comprehensive national plan that treats education not as a privilege for the few but as a right for all. Such a plan must ensure an adequate number of qualified teachers -- because no such reform can succeed without strong human resources. Schools also need proper infrastructure and sufficient funding to function effectively.

But resources alone are not enough. Misuse of funds has long plagued the sector, and unless corruption and inefficiency are addressed, even generous budgets will fail to produce results. Accountability and transparency are essential at every level.

Above all, the system needs visionary leadership -- leaders who can rise above partisan rivalry and treat education as a national priority rather than a policy experiment.

PM orders drive to curb violence against women

FROM PAGE 1

There are also concerns that any surge in such incidents could trigger political protests, potentially putting additional pressure on the administration during a sensitive period, according to officials.

To address the risks, the government plans to roll out a special monitoring and enforcement drive involving multiple ministries, including home, law, women and children affairs, and local government.

Officials said the directive includes field-level monitoring, rapid response mechanisms and stricter enforcement of existing laws.

Senior officials have also been asked to remain in close contact with district administrations and law enforcement units to ensure that any incident is addressed promptly.

Officials said the cabinet also discussed measures to further strengthen existing tribunals dedicated to handling cases of violence against women, saying that delays in trials often contribute to a sense of impunity.

The directives come amid broader concerns within the government over law and order, market stability and public safety during the Eid holidays.

Meeting sources said the PM asked ministers to remain actively engaged in monitoring the situation across sectors, particularly in transport management, fuel supply and commodity markets, where price manipulation and shortages often emerge during holidays.

Officials were also instructed to ensure that public transport fares remain within approved limits and to maintain heightened vigilance to reduce the risk of road accidents, which typically rise during mass Eid travel.

The cabinet meeting also focused on recent natural disasters affecting farmers in several northern and northeastern districts.

Tarique directed the agriculture ministry and the disaster management and relief ministry to provide immediate assistance to those affected by hailstorms and flash floods in Thakurgaon, Joypurhat and Sunamganj.

The deputy commissioners have been instructed to use available funds to provide urgent relief support, while relevant ministries will take longer-term measures to assist affected farmers, Ghani said.

Death anniv of Abul Mansur Ahmad today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Today is the 47th death anniversary of Abul Mansur Ahmad, a renowned litterateur, journalist, and politician of the sub-continent. He passed away in 1979.

One of the greatest satirists of Bangla literature, he was also a pioneer of modern and progressive journalism. He worked for prominent newspapers such as Krishak, Nabajug, Sultan, and Mohammadi, and was editor of the Kolkata-based Daily Ittehad from 1946 to 1948.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

A father bids a temporary farewell to his family on a train at Dhaka's Kamalapur Railway Station, planning to travel later to reunite with them. Amid the rush of passengers heading home for Eid, this family, like many others, is returning in stages to ease the journey. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Surge in measles overwhelms hospital

Patients forced onto floors

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The Infectious Diseases Hospital (IDH) in Dhaka is struggling to cope with a surge in measles cases, with infections rising since January.

The 100-bed hospital has recorded 255 patients suffering from the infectious disease so far this year, compared to 69 cases throughout last year.

As a result, many patients -- mostly under one year old -- were seen lying on makeshift beds placed on the floor at the hospital in Mohakhali.

Amid the pressure, authorities have decided to shift measles patients aged over two years to the DNCC Dedicated Covid-19 Hospital, they said.

Although hospital authorities had earlier informed higher officials about the surge, the issue drew attention on Monday night after an eight-month-old measles patient died.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

Eid exodus in full swing as seven-day holiday starts

Heavy rush at transport hubs; capital wears a quieter look

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A seven-day public holiday has begun across the country as people prepare to celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr, triggering a rush of travellers from major cities, particularly Dhaka, where terminals are witnessing increased passenger pressure.

Government offices, courts, and many private institutions are closed from March 17 to March 23. Subject to moon sighting, Eid-ul-Fitr is expected to be observed on March 20 or 21.

The holiday was extended after the government declared March 18 an additional public holiday, allowing uninterrupted leave for public employees.

The decision was approved at a cabinet meeting following public demand for a continuous break to facilitate Eid travel.

As Monday was the last working day before Eid, the movement of homebound travellers intensified from the evening, with large numbers leaving the capital by road, rail, and waterways.

Although there is no exact figure for how many city dwellers will leave the capital, acting commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Mohammad Sarwar yesterday said that more than one crore people are expected to travel from Dhaka to different districts to celebrate Eid with their loved ones.

At major bus terminals, including Sayedabad, long-distance buses continued to depart for destinations

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Last-minute Eid shopping frenzy in Dhaka

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

With Eid-ul-Fitr just around the corner, Dhaka's streets, footpaths, and markets have turned into bustling hubs as thousands of residents rush for last-minute shopping.

From clothing and footwear to gifts and festive accessories, vendors across the capital -- including in areas such as Mirpur-10, Mirpur-1, Farmgate, New Market, Gausia, Chawk Bazar, and Karwan Bazar -- are witnessing a surge in activity.

Shoppers were seen thronging the narrow lanes lined with colourful stalls, while street vendors, small shops, and makeshift stalls catered to their festive needs by offering everything from traditional panjabis and sarees to decorative items and toys.

Sheikh Shafiqul Islam, a customer at Mirpur-1, said, "I received my Eid bonus on Sunday, but could not shop on Monday. So I came today to buy dresses for my family members."

He added that he spent modestly, buying only a pair of shoes for himself, as he did not want to exhaust his bonus due to concerns over the ongoing crisis in the Middle East.

Shaheen Ahmed, an employee at Mirpur Milk Vita, said that although he had completed some shopping days earlier, he returned to Mirpur-10 roundabout to buy a few remaining items.

"I purchased two pairs of jeans today for Tk 1,200 for me and my son," he said.

Ibrahim Khalil, who has been selling dresses for six years at Mirpur-10 roundabout, said the crowd was smaller compared to previous years.

"Customers from different economic levels, especially those from low-income groups, come to purchase dresses and shoes from footpath stalls. We are still hopeful for a bigger rush in the next two days before Eid," he said.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

Actor Shams Suman passes away at 50

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

National Award-winning actor Shams Suman died on last evening while undergoing treatment at a private hospital in the capital. He was 50.

He breathed his last around 6:30pm in Dhaka, confirmed his younger brother, Shobhon, to The Daily Star.

Ananya Ruma of channel-i also confirmed the news.

He had been undergoing treatment at a hospital in Dhanmondi.

Suman was serving as station chief at Radio Bhumi at the time of his death.

He first gained prominence through television dramas before expanding his career across stage and cinema. Known for his restrained, naturalistic performances, Suman belonged to a generation of actors who moved fluidly between mediums, helping shape Bangladesh's screen culture in the late 1990s and 2000s.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7

INFECTIOUS DISEASES HOSPITAL

ICU services resume after a year following infant's death

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After more than a year, the Infectious Diseases Hospital (IDH) in Dhaka's Mohakhali yesterday resumed operation of its Intensive Care Unit (ICU), following the death of an eight-month-old who could not access critical care.

The infant named Sayeed, from Savar, was admitted to the 100-bed facility on the morning of March 14 with measles and fever. His condition later worsened as he developed respiratory complications and was placed on oxygen support.

Doctors recommended ICU care as his health deteriorated.

However, the hospital's ICU services have remained suspended since June 2024, when the project under which the unit had been established and staffed expired.

The child's family subsequently tried to transfer him to several hospitals, but they declined, citing the risk of measles infection to other ICU patients, hospital sources said.

Doctors at IDH also attempted to manage ICU-level care but were unsuccessful. Sayeed died around 9:00pm on Monday (March 16).

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Security beefed up ahead of Eid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law enforcement agencies have stepped up security across the country, especially at transport hubs and residential areas, to ensure safe and smooth Eid travels for millions of homebound passengers.

Police, Rab, and the Bangladesh Coast Guard have intensified patrols and surveillance ahead of the holidays.

Inspector General of Police Md Ali Hossain Fakir yesterday said all police units have been instructed to remain fully alert, warning that no wrongdoing will be tolerated.

"There will be no compromise over any untoward incident or injustice," he said after visiting the Gabtoli Bus Terminal in Dhaka.

He noted that criminals, including drug users and snatchers, often gather in terminal areas.

"Terminals attract all

SEE PAGE 9 COL

Khalilur, UNCTAD chief urge restraint in Middle East

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Secretary-General Rebeca Grynspan yesterday joined Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr Khalilur Rahman in calling for restraint in the Middle East and urging all sides to seek a diplomatic solution.

The call came during a meeting at the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the UN in New York, according to a foreign ministry statement.

The foreign minister is currently in the US as part of his campaign for the post of UN General Assembly president for the 2026–27 term.

During the meeting, Khalilur and Grynspan also discussed the global economic situation in light of the ongoing Middle East conflict.

The US-Israel war on Iran on February 28 and Iran's attacks on the US bases across the Gulf have sent a global shockwave, with the energy supplies disrupted via the Strait of Hormuz as well as the impacts on the millions of migrant workers, mostly from Asia.

The meeting in New York observed that the conflict presented major risks to the global economy.

"Disruptions in international trade and turmoil in the energy markets are already negatively affecting the developing countries, particularly the poorest among them, who are witnessing a reversal of years of progress," they said during the meeting, the foreign ministry said.

They urged all relevant parties to avoid further escalation and urgently seek diplomatic solution.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

With Eid-ul-Fitr just around the corner, customers throng shopping malls in the capital, making last-minute purchases for themselves or their loved ones. The photo was taken at Bashundhara City Shopping Mall in the Panthapath area yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

31% of RMG factories in 6 key zones yet to pay Eid bonus

Says intelligence report

STAR REPORT

At least 31 percent of garment factories in six key industrial belts have yet to pay Eid bonuses to workers as of yesterday (March 17, 2026), despite the government-set deadline already expired, according to an intelligence agency report.

The report also says that at least 12 percent of factories did not even pay wages for February by yesterday in Dhaka, Gazipur, Ashulia-Savar, Narayanganj, Chattogram and Mymensingh.

According to the intelligence agency, there are 3,429 garment factories in these six regions. Of them, 3,014 factories had paid wages till yesterday, while only 2,388 had paid Eid bonuses.

That means 87.89 percent of factories cleared wages and 69.2 percent paid bonuses.

Industrial police officials, however, said pressure was being maintained on factories that failed to clear wages and bonuses by yesterday.

Ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr, the labour ministry had set a strict deadline for factories to pay February wages by March 9 and bonuses by March 12.

Bangladesh Bank also issued a circular allowing one month's wage-equivalent loans for export-oriented factories.

Gazi Jashim Uddin, additional inspector general of the Industrial Police, said the overall situation in the garment sector was expected to remain manageable, although isolated problems might arise in some factories.

"You know the number of factories is huge. Even if only one percent face problems over wages or bonuses, that still means several factories. If even five factories have disputes and workers come out onto the streets, it can create a significant situation," he said.

According to him, both the ministry and law enforcement agencies have taken initiatives, while coordination is ongoing with industry associations, including the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, and Bangladesh Textile Mills Association.

"Most factories have already cleared wages for January and February. Only a small number remain, and those payments are expected to be completed soon," Jashim added.

The intelligence report shows that out of 689 garment factories in Ashulia and Savar, 607 had paid wages and 469 had paid Eid bonuses by Monday.

In Gazipur and Tongi, 1,064 out of 1,196 factories paid wages, while around 850 paid bonuses.

In Dhaka metropolitan area, 436 out of 522 factories paid wages and 360 paid bonuses.

In Narayanganj, 349 out of 395 factories paid wages and 272 paid bonuses.

In Chattogram, 433 out of 487 factories paid wages and 340 paid bonuses. In Mymensingh, 125 out of 140 factories paid wages, while 98 paid Eid bonuses.

Earlier, in a report on March 8, the home ministry had recommended tripartite talks involving owners, workers and the government to resolve disputes at vulnerable factories, alongside tighter surveillance in garment zones and extended banking hours to facilitate payments. It also warned that workers denied dues might gather on highways or at key public points to press their demands.

Manjur elected president, Liton GS of DUJA

Manjur Hossain

Liton Islam

DU CORRESPONDENT

The Dhaka University Journalists' Association (DUJA) has elected a new executive committee for 2026, with Manjur Hossain Mahi of Kaler Kantho as president and Liton Islam of Star News as general secretary.

The election took place yesterday at the association's office at the Teacher-Student Centre (TSC) on the Dhaka University campus. The results were announced around 3:00pm by Chief Election Commissioner Nurul Karim Bhuiyan, a former DUJA president and currently the deputy commissioner of Gazipur.

Others elected to the committee are Vice President Mahathir Mohammed (The Daily Star), Joint General Secretary Rahad Uddin (Daily Janakantha), Treasurer Neimur Rahman Emon (The Daily Observer), Office Secretary HM Khalid Hasan (Desh Rupantor), and Executive Members Borhan Uddin (Channel 24), Samsuddoza Nabab (Dhaka Tribune), and Mohammad Shahedul Islam (Times of Bangladesh).

Khalilur, UNCTAD

FROM PAGE 3

Grynspan, who was previously vice president of Costa Rica, is a candidate for the position of secretary-general of the United Nations, while Foreign Minister Rahman is a candidate for the president of the 81st session of the UNGA.

The two officials discussed their respective candidatures.

Ambassador Salahuddin Noman Chowdhury, permanent representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations, was present during the meeting.

Nine killed in road accidents in Tangail, Kishoreganj

STAR REPORT

At least nine persons were killed in separate road accidents in Tangail and Kishoreganj districts yesterday and the day before.

In Tangail, three people were killed as a CNG-run auto-rickshaw collided with an oncoming, Jamalpur-bound bus of Rajib Paribahan near Nolia Grameen Bank area in Dhanbari upazila around 3:30pm yesterday, reports our Jamalpur correspondent.

The bus fled the scene immediately afterward.

The deceased were identified as: Akbar Ali, 55, auto-rickshaw driver and resident of Dhanbari; Omar Faruk, 50, and Khokon Mia, 45, both residents of Sarishabari upazila of Jamalpur and passengers of the auto-rickshaw.

Akbar Ali died on the spot, while the two others succumbed to their injuries after being taken to Dhanbari Upazila Health Complex.

The bodies will be handed over to families after legal procedures. Police were trying to locate

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7

China is our true friend: Shafiqur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer and Leader of the Opposition Shafiqur Rahman yesterday described China as a "true friend" of Bangladesh, calling for expanded initiatives for public welfare.

Shafiqur made the remarks at a food distribution programme for underprivileged people at Adarsha High School ground in Mirpur-10. The event was jointly organised by Jamaat and the Chinese Embassy in Dhaka, with Chinese Ambassador Yao Wen present.

He said China had never interfered in Bangladesh's internal affairs and had proven to be a dependable development partner. "Some countries interfere at will after taking everything from Bangladesh without offering anything in return. But China does not do that," he said.

Referring to five decades of ties, he said China recognised Bangladesh in 1976 and has since become one of its largest development partners, contributing to major infrastructure projects.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 6

ICU services resume after a year following infant's death

FROM PAGE 3

The incident triggered outrage and grief, drawing the attention of higher authorities.

Health Minister Sardar Md Sakhawat Husain, accompanied by the health secretary and other senior officials, visited the hospital on Monday night and assured that ICU operations would resume within a day.

"The condition of the boy was very critical and he required ICU support. But the ICU at this hospital remained inoperative... Other hospitals usually do not take patients with such infectious diseases," the minister told reporters.

"We came here after learning about the incident... We will resume ICU operations by tomorrow [March 17] by any means, including attaching doctors," he added.

ICUs with a total of 240 beds were established in hospitals across 22 districts between 2020 and 2023 under the Covid-19 Emergency Response and Pandemic Preparedness (ERPP) Project, largely funded by the World Bank.

More than 1,000 staff members, including medical officers and technicians, were recruited to operate the units.

At IDH, a five-bed ICU was set up under the project and became operational in 2021 with 12 doctors, according to sources at the hospital and the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

However, contracts of the workforce, including those at IDH, expired in June 2024. The interim government neither renewed these contracts nor appointed replacements, rendering the ICU non-functional.

Hospital sources said they had written on several occasions to the higher authorities seeking manpower to run the ICU, but to no avail.

The ICU and High Dependency Unit are located on the fourth floor of the hospital.

During a visit to the unit yesterday at noon, a nurse told this correspondent it had already been cleaned in preparation for reopening.

"Upon instructions from the health minister, we have already taken the necessary preparations to resume ICU operations today [Tuesday]," said Tanzina Jahan, superintendent of the hospital.

She added that four doctors have been attached to the hospital and a roster of nurses has been prepared to run the ICU.

Death anniv of Abul Mansur Ahmad today

FROM PAGE 3

Abul Mansur Ahmad wrote about the language issue from the early 1940s and contributed to the Language Movement as the editor of the Ittehad.

A very successful politician, Abul Mansur Ahmad played a key role in the formation of the Awami Muslim League. He served as vice-president of the organisation from 1953 to 1958.

Abul Mansur Ahmad was the author of the famous Ekush Dafa (21-point programme) election manifesto of Jukta Front in the 1954 election through which the Muslim League was ousted from power.

The Ekush Dafa was the first comprehensive articulation of the political, economic and cultural demands of the Bangalees of the then eastern part of Pakistan.

He was elected a member of East Bengal Provincial Assembly in that election, and served as health minister in the United Front cabinet under Sher-e-Bangla AK Fazlul Huq. In 1955, he was elected a member of Pakistan Constituent Assembly.

He was the minister for education in the United Front government of East Pakistan in 1956 and the minister for commerce and trade in 1956-1957. After the promulgation of martial law by Ayub Khan in 1958, he was imprisoned and subsequently released in 1962.

He then retired from politics.

Abul Mansur Ahmad was known for his strong stand in favour of regional autonomy of East Pakistan. He also made remarkable contributions to industrialisation of the long-neglected East Pakistan.

He always propagated secularism in a manner unparalleled in the forties, fifties and sixties.

Ahmad's publications include great satires like "Aina", "Asmani Purdah", "Gulliverer Safar Nama" and "Food Conference". He also penned insightful works on the social and political history of Bengal, such as "Bangladesher Culture". He has two autobiographical writings -- "Atma Katha" and "Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchash Bachar".

Abul Mansur Ahmad was born in 1898 in Dhanikhola village of Trishal, Mymensingh.

Bangla Academy has published Ahmad's writings which are available in four volumes now.

Eid exodus in full

FROM PAGE 3

such as Sylhet, Chattogram, Barishal, and Khulna. Passenger movement also increased at Gabtoli and Mohakhali bus terminals.

Many travellers booked tickets in advance to avoid last-minute mishaps, while others queued at counters in search of seats.

At Gabtoli and Mohakhali terminals, passengers without prior bookings said they were struggling to secure tickets amid the rush.

Some transport operators said services of certain less popular bus companies have been limited due to fuel shortages, reducing trips on some routes.

Meanwhile, passenger pressure has also increased at railway stations and domestic airports, where advance bookings increased in recent days ahead of the Eid rush.

At Sadarghat Launch Terminal, the capital's main river port, passenger numbers have been rising steadily, with people heading to southern districts.

Rows of launches were seen anchored at the pontoons as passengers crowded the terminal from noon, travelling to Barishal, Bhola, Chandpur, Hatiya, Jhalakathi, and Patuakhali.

A total of 174 launches will operate on 37 routes from Sadarghat this Eid, officials said.

Many passengers said they prefer waterways during Eid for comfort and convenience, especially when travelling with family.

"I am going to my village home to spend Eid with my family. The crowd is heavy, but that is expected," said Sohel Rana, a Barishal-bound passenger.

Another passenger, Ridwan Ahmed, said he prefers launches due to safety concerns on highways and ease of travel.

To manage the surge, authorities have introduced measures at the terminal.

According to Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority official Mohammad Mobarak Hossain, these include free porter services, wheelchairs, and trolleys.

He said launch fares have been reduced by 10 percent for Eid.

Security has also been strengthened, with personnel from Dhaka Metropolitan Police, Bangladesh Coast Guard, Rab, River Police, and Ansar deployed at the terminal.

Control rooms, mobile teams, and mobile courts have also been set up to monitor operations and ensure passenger safety, reports BSS.

Sadarghat Police Outpost in-charge Sajib Ahmed said 221 police personnel have been deployed to prevent theft, snatching, and harassment.

"We are maintaining strict vigilance so that passengers are not overcharged or harassed," he said.

Meanwhile, the outbound rush has eased traffic in parts of Dhaka, giving the city an unusually quiet appearance.

Roads that typically remain congested during workdays are seeing smooth traffic flow as residents continue to leave the city.

"I travelled from Farmgate to Matijheel with very little traffic today. We rarely see Dhaka like this," said Mohammad Polash of Indira Road.

Office of the
Gouripur Pourashava
Dist: Mymensingh

Memo No. 45.33.6123.002.14.001.26/11 Date: 08.03.2026

Invitation for e-Tender OTM/NCT
No. 01/2025-2026 (LGCRRP)

e-Tenders are invited in the National e-GP System Portal (www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of following works:

Sl. No.	Tender ID & Pkg No.	Name of works	Tender security	Tender document selling last date & time	Tender closing & opening date & time
01	1235066 LGCRRP/ Gouripur/ 2025-26/ W-07	Upgrading of Uni-block road 1. Shahid Harun Park Sarok starting from bazaar main road to Bijoy 71 Sriti Shoudho (West site) ch-0.00m to 108.0m, 2. In front of Bijoy 71 Sriti Shoudho starting from Press Club Mur to Gobindobari (North site) ch-0.0m to 60.0m, 3. Mohila College Road starting from Bijoy 71 Mur to Mohila College (West Site) ch-0.00m to ch-90.0m, under Gouripur Pourashava, Dist. Mymensingh.	1,00,000.00	30.03.2026 16.00	31.03.2026 14.00

This is an online tender, where only e-Tenders will be accepted in the National e-GP System Portal and no offline/hard copy will be accepted. To submit e-Tenders, registration required in the National e-GP System Portal (www.eprocure.gov.bd).
The tender security and the fee of downloading e-Tender document to be deposited online through any registered Bank to CPTU. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).
Payment to be made subject to availability of Fund.

Md. Aminul Islam
Executive Engineer (In-charge)
Gouripur Pourashava
Dist: Mymensingh

GD-636

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
পরিকল্পনা মন্ত্রণালয়
বাস্তবায়ন পরিবীক্ষণ ও মূল্যায়ন বিভাগ
পরিবীক্ষণ ও মূল্যায়ন সেক্টর-৬
IVA Unit, LAISE
শের-ই-বাংলা নগর, ঢাকা-১২০৭
www.imed.gov.bd

স্মারক নং: ২১.০০.০০০০.১৫৬.১৪.০০১.২৪-০৪ তারিখ: ২ চৈত্র, ১৪৩২ বঃ / ১৬ মার্চ, ২০২৬খ্রিঃ

আগ্রহ ব্যক্তকরণ পত্র আহ্বান বিজ্ঞপ্তি

"Learning Acceleration in Secondary Education (LAISE)" শীর্ষক বিনিয়োগ প্রকল্পের ২০২৫-২৬ অর্থবছরে Year 2 এর নিম্নোক্ত Disbursement Linked Results (DLRs) ভেরিফিকেশন কার্যক্রম পরিচালনার লক্ষ্যে DLR ভিত্তিক পরামর্শক প্রতিষ্ঠান নিয়োগের নিমিত্ত আগ্রহ ব্যক্তকরণ পত্র আহ্বান করা হচ্ছে।

প্যাকেজ নং	প্যাকেজের নাম: ডিএলআর ভেরিফিকেশন
পিএস ১	**DLR 1.2:** Number of teachers trained in one of the following domains: core subject mastery, pedagogy for blended learning, climate change mitigation, adaptation meets yearly target;
	DLR 2.2: Number of schools implementing learning acceleration program (formative assessments and remediation among grade 6 and 8 students) meets yearly targets;
	DLR 4.2: SRGBV protocol activated, and poverty-targeted stipends disbursed with (i) (a) at least 5,000 institutions have sexual harassment prevention committees (SHPCs) set up; (b) referral pathways established; (c) standard operating procedures (SOPs) adopted; and (ii) poverty-targeted stipends disbursed for grades 6-12 based on the manual.
	DLR 7.2: Number of secondary students that received instruction on climate change mitigation and adaptation through dedicated sessions meets target (year 2: 15,000 students);
পিএস ২	**DLR 3.2:** Blended learning implemented in at least 700 secondary institutions;
	DLR 6.2: (i) Certifications/awards distributed to top 100 learning accelerator schools as per manual (DLR 6.1, part (i)); and (ii) additional 100 schools implementing climate resilience measures as per manual (DLR 6.1, part (ii)) meets yearly target (cumulative target for Year 2: 200 schools);
	DLR 8.2: Complete vocational training for 700 secondary teachers.

১। পরামর্শক প্রতিষ্ঠানকে নির্ধারিত টিওআর অনুযায়ী ডিএলআর ভেরিফিকেশন কাজ সম্পাদন করতে হবে এবং **www.imed.gov.bd-এই ওয়েবসাইটে টিওআর পাওয়া যাবে;**
২। ডিএলআর ভেরিফিকেশন কাজে পরামর্শক প্রতিষ্ঠান নিয়োগে পাবলিক প্রকিউরমেন্ট আইন-২০০৬ ও বিধিমালা-২০২৫ অনুসরণ করতে হবে;
৩। ডিএলআর ভেরিফিকেশন কাজ চুক্তি সম্পাদনের পরবর্তী সর্বোচ্চ ০২ (দুই) মাস সময়ে সম্পন্ন করতে হবে;
৪। পরামর্শক প্রতিষ্ঠানের আওতায় সমীক্ষায় নিয়োজিতব্য পরামর্শক দলের সদস্যদের শারীরিক ও মানসিকভাবে এ কাজ সম্পাদনের উপযুক্ত হতে হবে;
৫। ডিএলআর ভেরিফিকেশন কাজের জন্য আগ্রহী প্রতিষ্ঠানকে আগ্রহ ব্যক্তকরণ পত্রের সাথে (ক) পরামর্শক প্রতিষ্ঠানের ইতঃপূর্বে এ ধরনের কাজে ০৩ (তিন) বছরের অভিজ্ঞতা এবং প্রমাণক; (খ) প্রয়োজনীয় বুদ্ধিবৃত্তিক এবং পেশাগত সেবা পরিসরের বিস্তারিত বর্ণনাসহ সকল কাজের বিবরণ; (গ) বর্ণিত কাজ সম্পাদনের জন্য যোগ্যতার প্রমাণস্বরূপ সম্ভাব্য আবেদনকারী/আবেদনকারীদের নাম, ঠিকানা, জাতীয় পরিচয়পত্র নম্বর, যোগাযোগের নম্বর, শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা ও অভিজ্ঞতা; (ঘ) প্রতিষ্ঠানের কর্মরত পেশাদার জনবলের নামের তালিকা, জাতীয় পরিচয়পত্র নম্বর, শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা ও পেশাগত অভিজ্ঞতা ও সেবা প্রদানের সামর্থ্য; (ঙ) প্রতিষ্ঠানের QR কোড সংবলিত হালনাগাদ (২০২৫-২৬) আয়কর সনদপত্র; (চ) বৈধ/হালনাগাদ ট্রেড লাইসেন্স; (ছ) কোম্পানি হিসেবে নিবন্ধিত হলে নিবন্ধনের প্রমাণক, কোম্পানীর গঠনতন্ত্র, কোম্পানীর হালনাগাদ তথ্য সংবলিত ওয়েবসাইট ও ই-মেইল অ্যাড্রেস; (ক) কোম্পানীর নিজস্ব অফিস, ভাড়া হলে চুক্তিপত্র, অফিসের স্পেস, প্রশিক্ষণের জন্য নির্দিষ্ট সুবিধা ও অন্যান্য লজিস্টিকের তালিকাসহ সুনির্দিষ্ট পরিমাণের Bank Solvency; (জ) বর্তমান অর্থবছরসহ পূর্ববর্তী ২টি অর্থবছরের নিরীক্ষা প্রতিবেদনসহ বাৎসরিক টার্ন-ওভার এবং (ঝ) প্রতিষ্ঠানের সার্বিক প্রোফাইলসহ সকল সনদপত্রের সত্যায়িত কপি সংযুক্ত করতে হবে।
৬। খামের উপর ডিএলআর এর নাম ও আবেদনকারী পরামর্শক প্রতিষ্ঠানের নাম স্পষ্টভাবে লিখতে হবে। EOI মূল্যায়নের ভিত্তিতে পরামর্শক প্রতিষ্ঠানের শর্টলিস্ট করা হবে। শর্টলিস্টেড পরামর্শক প্রতিষ্ঠানের অনুকূলে Request for Proposal (RFP) ইস্যু করা হবে;
৭। আগ্রহ ব্যক্তকরণ পত্র আহ্বান বিজ্ঞপ্তি (REOI) এর বিস্তারিত তথ্য **www.bppa.gov.bd** এবং **www.imed.gov.bd** website-এ পাওয়া যাবে। এ বিষয়ে প্রয়োজনে ০২-২২২২১৬৮৬৬ টেলিফোন নম্বরে যোগাযোগ করা যাবে;
৮। পরামর্শক প্রতিষ্ঠানকে বন্ধ খামে ভরে ডিএলআর ভেরিফিকেশনের জন্য প্রয়োজনীয় কাগজপত্রসহ আগ্রহ ব্যক্তকরণ পত্র (EOI) অনুচ্ছেদ-৫ এ বর্ণিত কাগজপত্রসহ ৩ (তিন) সেট আগ্রহ ব্যক্তকরণ পত্র ডাকযোগে/সরাসরি আগামী **০১/০৪/২০২৬ খ্রিঃ তারিখ দুপুর ১২:০০ ঘটিকার মধ্যে মহাপরিচালক, পরিবীক্ষণ ও মূল্যায়ন সেক্টর-৬, ভবন নং-১১, কক্ষ নং-২৫, বাস্তবায়ন পরিবীক্ষণ ও মূল্যায়ন বিভাগ, পরিকল্পনা মন্ত্রণালয়, শের-ই-বাংলা নগর, ঢাকা-১২০৭** এর বরাবরে প্রেরণ করতে হবে; এবং
৯। কর্তৃপক্ষ কোন প্রকার কারণ দর্শানো ব্যতিরেকে প্রয়োজনবোধে সকল কিংবা যে কোন আবেদন বাতিল ঘোষণা করতে পারবে।

১২.০৩.২০২৬
(পঙ্কজ ঘোষ)
পরিচালক (উপসচিব)
পরিবীক্ষণ ও মূল্যায়ন সেক্টর-৬
বাস্তবায়ন পরিবীক্ষণ ও মূল্যায়ন বিভাগ
ভবন-১৩, কক্ষ-০৮
শের-ই-বাংলা নগর, ঢাকা
ই-মেইল: drsector6@imed.gov.bd

GD-634

Millions could face acute hunger if ME war drags on

UN warns

AFP, *Geneva*

An extra 45 million people could face acute hunger if the Mideast war carried on through June, swelling the number worldwide to a "terrible" high, the United Nations warned yesterday.

The war, now in its third week, has killed hundreds and seen Iran launch retaliatory strikes against Israel and Gulf nations, as well as a front opening in Lebanon with Israel battling Hezbollah.

"If the Middle East conflict continues through June, an additional 45 million people could be pushed into acute hunger by price rises," Carl Skau, the deputy executive director of the UN's World Food Programme, told a press conference in Geneva.

"This would take global hunger levels to an all-time

record, and it's a terrible, terrible prospect," he said, with 319 million people -- already an historic high -- currently acutely food insecure.

"Really it is again taking this to a whole other level."

Skau said the WFP was already facing a "perfect storm" before the war erupted on February 28.

"Hunger has never been as severe as now," he said, driven by extreme weather events, conflict and pockets of famine being declared.

"At the same time, the resources fell sharply from 2023 and 2024 levels."

Having had to cut staff and streamline operations, "we are basically stretched to the limit", said Skau.

He said the Middle East war was making WFP's operations "much, much more expensive". Skau said the agency was trying to deal with supply chain disruptions but its operating costs had shot up, notably through soaring fuel prices.

the Iranian Ambassador to the UN in Geneva, Ali Bahreini, said that more than 1,300 people had been killed and more than 7,000 people injured, including a six-month-old baby. "The international community must not remain silent," he insisted. The war is now well into its third week, having spread to nearly a dozen nations across the Middle East region.

Israeli rescuers and firefighters cordon off an area damaged by a strike over Holon, on the outskirts of Tel Aviv, yesterday. A series of distant blasts were heard from Jerusalem after sirens sounded in northern Israel following a warning that Iran had fired missiles. PHOTO: AFP

AIR STRIKES ON GULF ALLIES

Trump warned of likely Iranian retaliation

Sources say citing US intelligence; Democrats report no imminent threat justifying the war

REUTERS, *Washington*

President Donald Trump was warned that attacking Iran could trigger retaliation against US Gulf allies despite his claims on Monday that Tehran's reaction came as a surprise, said a US official and two sources familiar with US intelligence reports.

Pre-war intelligence assessments did not say that Iran's response was "a guarantee, but it certainly was on the list of potential outcomes," said one source, who like the other two requested anonymity to discuss the issue.

The president twice on Monday said that Iran's retaliatory strikes against Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Kuwait were a surprise, the first time at a Kennedy Center board meeting in the White House.

"They (Iran) weren't supposed to go after all these other countries in the Middle East," he said. "Nobody expected that. We were shocked."

Trump's assertion followed other administration claims that have not been backed by US intelligence reporting, such as that Iran would soon have a missile capable of hitting the US homeland and that it would need two to four weeks to make a nuclear bomb and would then use it.

Those allegations and an imminent threat posed by Iran to the US and its forces in the region have been among varying reasons that Trump and some top aides have given to justify his decision to join Israel in launching their air war against Iran on February 28.

French troops, civilian structures, including hotels, airports, and energy facilities.

Iran has also halted almost all shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, through which 20 percent of oil supplies move, causing global energy prices to spike.

Trump was also briefed ahead of the operation that Tehran would likely seek to close the economically vital Strait of Hormuz, according to two other sources familiar with the matter.

Over the past two weeks, Iranian drones and missiles have struck targets in the Gulf states that have included US military bases and an Emirates base hosting

Democratic lawmakers emerged from administration briefings on the war last week saying they heard of no imminent threat that required the US and Israel to launch the war. The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence declined to comment.

Israeli strike kills three in Gaza

12 others injured

REUTERS, *Cairo*

An Israeli airstrike killed at least three people including a child in the Gaza Strip yesterday, local health authorities said, the latest violence jeopardising the ceasefire which has been under strain during the Israeli-US war against Iran.

Medics said the airstrike targeted a vehicle in the western area of Khan Younis, south of the enclave, killing three people, including a child, and wounding 12 other people. There was no immediate Israeli comment.

Israel's military has continued to strike Gaza during the regional war with Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon. On Sunday it killed 12 people in Gaza, including nine police officers in one strike that Israel said targeted a Hamas cell. The military has cited threats or fire from Hamas as the reason for its attacks.

Israel's assault has since killed more than 72,000 Palestinians, Gaza's health authorities say, including more than 670 since a ceasefire was reached last October.

Philippine battles fuel crunch with cash aid, fare hikes

AFP, *Manila*

Hundreds of Philippine tricycle drivers lined up in Manila yesterday for cash handouts they hope will provide temporary relief from a war-driven surge in fuel prices that has left the country scrambling for short-term answers.

Sri Lanka announced a shorter work week to conserve its scarce fuel reserves as it prepares for a prolonged war in the Middle East, officials said.

Commissioner-General of Essential Services Prabath Chandrakeerthi said state institutions will operate only four days a week starting today. Sri Lanka cabinet has approved an emergency purchase of 300,000 tonnes coal from an Indian company named Taranjot Resources Pvt Ltd, a cabinet statement said.

Since US-Israeli strikes on Iran triggered the Middle East war last month, Philippines has implemented a four-day work week for civil servants, seen ferry schedules reduced in some areas, and begun eyeing the possibility of Russian oil imports.

As the drivers awaited their handouts yesterday, officials unveiled a series of price hikes across a range of local transportation, including the ubiquitous smoke-belching jeepneys millions of Filipinos rely on to get to work each day.

But the increases did not extend to the country's hundreds of thousands of tricycle drivers, who earn money by carrying passengers down narrow, winding alleys on small motorbikes and carriages.

Philippines has implemented a four-day work week for civil servants

Sri Lanka announced a shorter work week to conserve its fuel reserves

"These are the highest fuel prices I've ever experienced," said Romeo Cipriano, who has driven a tricycle for four decades.

The subsidy of 5,000 pesos ($84) would be "better than nothing", the 60-year-old said, describing how he had arrived at 6:00 am to avoid standing in the tropical heat, something his high blood pressure would not allow.

Al de Ocampo said his daily earnings had been halved from 1,000 to just 500 pesos in recent weeks.

The handout he received would last no more than a week, he told AFP.

"The price of fuel rose again today, but the fare is still the same," with customers unable to afford to pay any more, de Ocampo said.

"They must remove the fuel tax if possible... If they can't remove the tax entirely, then reduce it 50 percent. That would be a great help until the end of the war."

The Senate was expected to vote later in the day to grant President Ferdinand Marcos, who was on hand for the subsidy dispersal, the authority to temporarily suspend or reduce excise taxes on oil.

At a press briefing yesterday, Vigor Mendoza, chair of the country's transportation regulator, announced fare hikes that he said were "proof of... genuine concern" for both commuters and the embattled sector.

Trump vows to 'take' Cuba

The communist island reels from oil embargo imposed by US

AFP, *Havana*

US President Donald Trump vowed Monday to "take" Cuba as the communist island plunged into darkness under a total power blackout linked to a crippling oil embargo imposed by Washington.

After nearly seven decades defying the United States, Havana's communist authorities are under massive pressure from a Trump administration determined to make history.

"You know, all my life I've been hearing about the United States and Cuba. When will the United States do it?" Trump told reporters at the White House.

"I do believe I'll be...having the honor of taking Cuba," Trump said. "Whether I free it, take it -- think I could do anything I want with it, you want to know the truth. They're a very weakened nation right now."

It was one of Trump's most explicit threats and came as the Caribbean island of 9.6 million people grappled with yet another major power cut.

The blackout resulted from a "complete shutdown of the national grid," Union Nacional Electrica de Cuba (UNE) said in a statement, adding that work had begun to restore electricity flow. Cuba's aging electricity generation system is in shambles, with daily power outages of up to 20 hours the norm in parts of the island.

But since the US ouster of Cuba's top ally, Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela, on January 3, the island's economy has been hammered further as Trump maintains a de facto oil blockade.

Police bomb squad members work at the site of a postal distribution centre belonging to Nova Post, hit by a Russian missile in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Nigeria suicide attacks kill 23

Wound over 100

AFP, *Maiduguri*

Multiple explosions staged by suspected suicide bombers rocked the northeastern Nigerian city of Maiduguri, killing at least 23 people and wounding more than 100 others, police said yesterday.

"Preliminary investigation reveals the incidents were carried out by suspected suicide bombers," police spokesman Nahum Kenneth Daso said in a statement. "Regrettably, a total of twenty three persons lost their lives, while one hundred and eight others sustained varying degrees of injuries," he added.

The blasts, which struck on Monday evening, came after an attack on a military post overnight Sunday, which authories blamed on jihadists. Fighters from Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) have recently stepped up attacks in northeastern Nigeria.

The Daily Star
FOUNDER EDITOR: **LATE S. M. ALI**

Time to build an accountable Biman

Address pilot licensing fraud, aircraft procurement plan with due seriousness

The systemic licence fraud by several senior pilots of Biman Bangladesh Airlines, unearthed through an internal investigation by the airline itself, is condemnable as such practices jeopardise passengers' safety and destroy the carrier's reputation. While we commend Biman for the probe, how such an oversight was allowed to occur in the first place remains a concern.

According to a report by this daily, following allegations raised over the years, Biman formed a committee on January 28 this year to investigate five pilots over forged flying licences. Although the committee submitted its report on February 3, citing discrepancies in the licences of all five and wilful submission of forged documents in at least two cases, no action has been taken, even though more than a month has passed. Worse still, a pilot, against whom there is an allegation of sexual misconduct, has been allowed to continue work, apparently due to a pilot shortage during the Hajj season. Biman's explanation for that is, they are waiting for a response from CAAB about the probe. Meanwhile, the regulator says it is conducting an audit of the investigation, though, curiously, the one person in CAAB qualified to oversee the licensing issue has recently been transferred. This raises doubts about CAAB's seriousness regarding the matter, particularly because the regulator has a history of ignoring irregularities in pilot licensing.

While we await the fate of the findings of this particular investigation, bigger questions surrounding Biman's performance, planning, and growth remain unanswered. In the past, the carrier acquired several expensive aircraft but left them largely underutilised, while struggling to service huge debt. There has been a consistent mismatch between the airline's global expansion plans and aircraft acquisition. And yet, during the interim period, it decided to buy 14 aircraft, valued between Tk 30,000 crore and Tk 35,000 crore, from US planemaker Boeing, backed by a sovereign guarantee from the government. In other words, the government will have to pay off the debt or financial obligation if Biman defaults on the payment. What remains unknown is the airline's plan regarding these aircraft. Does it have a concrete route expansion plan, enough qualified crew, maintenance personnel, etc to justify such a large-scale acquisition? Why should such a procurement, which could strain the national coffers, remain shrouded in mystery?

We demand an end to this lack of transparency at the Biman board and urge that public discussions on its expansion and procurement plans be held before any such decisions are made. We want to see our national flag carrier follow in the footsteps of internationally reputable and profitable airlines. The primary difference between them and Biman lies in proper planning and transparency, which must be addressed. Finally, we urge CAAB to take urgent measures against pilot licensing irregularities. No gaps should be allowed when it comes to the issue of passengers' safety.

Why reintroduce school admission exams?

Scrapping lottery system could bring back old problems

We are deeply concerned by the government's decision to scrap the lottery-based admission system for school enrolment from class one to class nine, which is supposed to take effect from the 2027 academic year. The move has raised concerns among educationists and parents alike, who fear it could revive many of the problems the lottery system was originally designed to address. Children will again be facing the old-style admission battle to secure places in their desired schools, while those at the primary level will have to bear unnecessary pressure.

The lottery system was introduced in 2011 to address longstanding irregularities in school admissions, which had often been marred by allegations of corruption, nepotism, and favouritism. Many parents felt compelled to enrol their young children in coaching centres and private tutoring to prepare for admission tests, fuelling the coaching business across the country. The lottery system was therefore seen as a way to make the process more transparent and equitable, particularly for children from ordinary and low-income families.

It also helped curb the intense competition for admission to a limited number of reputed schools in major cities. Although there are tens of thousands of government primary schools in the country, admission pressure remains concentrated in a relatively small number of urban institutions perceived to offer better education. Reintroducing admission tests in such circumstances could therefore exacerbate inequalities, as children from wealthier families are better positioned to prepare for them. Although the education minister insists that the proposed primary-level tests will be very simple, it is unlikely to prevent parents from turning once again to coaching centres for better results, especially given the limited number of seats in many sought-after schools.

Educationists further argue that admission tests for young children are neither educationally sound nor psychologically healthy. At such an early age, children's abilities are still developing, and subjecting them to competitive examinations risks labelling them unfairly and exposing them to unnecessary stress. While admission tests at higher levels may be appropriate for evaluating students, they make little sense at the primary stage.

We believe that a policy change of this magnitude should not be rushed. Before taking any decision regarding the scrapping of the lottery system, the government should conduct further research and hold broad consultations with all stakeholders. Instead of replacing one system with another, the government must go for proper educational reforms that benefit the students. Policymakers must consider minimising inequality in education, reducing unnecessary pressure on children, maintaining transparency in the admission process and ensuring that all neighbourhoods have good quality schools.

Too many holidays are bad for any growth economy

Mamun Rashid
is an economic analyst and chairman at Financial Excellence Ltd.

MAMUN RASHID

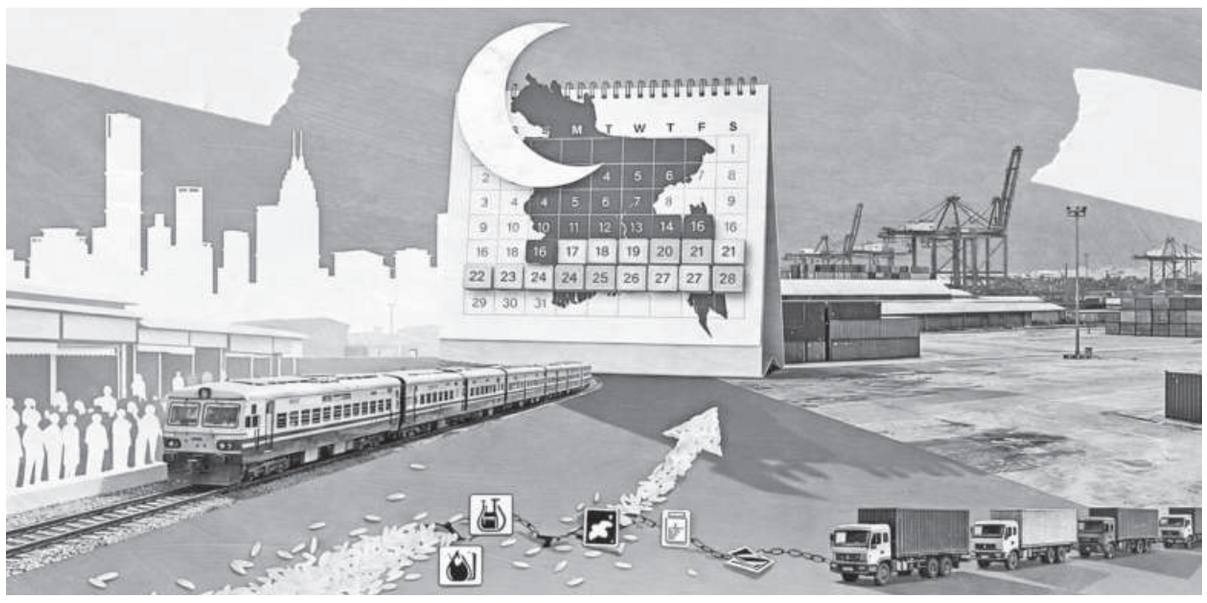
Amid the prevailing Middle East crisis and economic lull, Bangladesh is heading into a prolonged holiday period around Eid-ul-Fitr. Officially, the government has declared a seven-day holiday beginning on March 17 and ending on March 23. Offices will reopen briefly on March 24-25, but the Independence Day observance on March 26, followed by the Friday-Saturday weekend, will effectively extend the holiday atmosphere across the country. In reality, many officials and employees are likely to take additional leave on the two working days in between, meaning that economic activity would considerably slow down for 12 consecutive days.

At first glance, extended holidays during festivals appear harmless, even desirable. Festivals are deeply embedded in the country's social fabric. Eid, in particular, is not merely a religious event but a powerful cultural moment that reconnects families and communities. However, the economic implications of long, veritable shutdowns are often underestimated.

Our recent experience suggests that extended holidays can disrupt supply chains, slow down production, and ultimately contribute to inflationary pressures. The country witnessed a clear example of this in 2025. During Eid-ul-Fitr that year, it observed a nine-day holiday between March 28 and April 5. Later in the same year, the Eid-ul-Azha holiday stretched even longer from June 5 to June 14, effectively suspending economic activities for 10 days. In the weeks that followed, prices of essential commodities such as rice, eggs, poultry, and vegetables increased noticeably. Various surveys and studies confirmed that the extended holidays had disrupted agricultural supply chains and contributed to price increases.

One important factor behind these price movements is the seasonal shift in consumption patterns during Eid. Millions of people travel from major cities to their hometowns and villages to celebrate the festivals with their families. This mass migration alters the geographic pattern of demand for food and consumer goods. Goods that are usually consumed in urban centres must suddenly be transported to rural markets located far from traditional supply hubs. This shift increases pressure on the transport system and raises logistics costs. When goods need to travel longer distances within a limited time frame, freight charges inevitably rise.

This year, however, the situation is further complicated by fuel shortages caused by the ongoing Middle East crisis. Business leaders and transport operators report that many filling stations are struggling to meet demand, even after the withdrawal of fuel rationing. Drivers are forced to wait in long queues to refuel, and transport operators are already reporting freight cost increases by 20-25 percent. Truck shortages are also emerging in long-distance routes, a problem that may intensify once the Eid holiday progresses.



VISUAL: **SALMAN SAKIB SHARYAR**

Such developments matter because Bangladesh's economy is currently navigating a fragile macroeconomic phase. High inflation, weak investment growth, rising unemployment, and concerns about energy security have already placed the economy under stress. In such circumstances, extended nationwide shutdowns can amplify vulnerabilities.

The economic logic here is straightforward. Each additional day of nationwide closure interrupts production, slows trade, and weakens supply chains. Factories suspend operations, banks close their counters, administrative decisions are delayed, and port activities slow down. Even if these disruptions are temporary, their cumulative impact can be significant.

Trade and logistics are particularly sensitive to such interruptions. For example, if a cargo vessel is forced to remain idle at a port for several days due to reduced operations or banking closures, demurrage charges begin to accumulate. Eventually, these additional costs are passed on to consumers through higher product prices.

Agricultural supply chains are even more vulnerable. Following the extended Eid-ul-Azha holiday last year, the Bangladesh Bank conducted a study covering 61 upazilas across 18 districts to examine the efficiency of agricultural value chains. The findings were revealing. During the survey period, the retail price of coarse rice stood at Tk 61 per kg, compared with Tk 55 in the same period of the previous year. Fine rice was selling at Tk 78 per kg, up from Tk 70 a year earlier. In other words, prices increased by around 10.9 percent for coarse rice and 11 percent for fine rice within a single year.

The study indicated that extended holiday closures were one of the contributing factors. Many rice mills remained closed for around 10 days during Eid. At the same time, banking services were suspended, preventing normal transactions between farmers, traders, and mill owners. As a result, farmers and wholesalers delayed selling their paddy and instead held onto their stocks. When the mills reopened after the holiday, they attempted to resume production simultaneously. This created a sudden surge in demand for paddy while supply remained limited. The imbalance pushed up paddy prices, which quickly translated into higher rice prices for consumers.

Of course, extended holidays were not the only reason behind the price increases. Rising labour costs, higher irrigation expenses, shrinking arable land, and import duties also played roles. Nevertheless, the study clearly highlighted that prolonged holiday shutdowns can aggravate supply disruptions.

This brings us to a broader question: does Bangladesh have too many holidays?

Compared with many emerging economies, the country observes a relatively large number of public holidays throughout the year. In addition to religious festivals, there are numerous national commemorations and administrative holidays. When combined with two days of weekly breaks, the total number of non-working days becomes substantial.

In contrast, many growth economies, including our neighbour, maintain a more concentrated holiday structure. China, for example, observes a long holiday during the Lunar New Year but maintains a strong work culture during the rest of the year. Bangladesh, apart from regular earned, casual, and sick leave, however, experiences multiple extended holidays throughout the calendar, each of which temporarily slows economic momentum. Government-declared special holidays particularly impact the growing private sector most.

This does not mean that cultural traditions should be diminished. For us, the challenge is not to eliminate holidays but to manage them more strategically. A balanced approach, where cultural priorities co-exist with economic efficiency, would be essential. Otherwise, celebration may gradually translate into supply disruptions, higher inflation, and additional pressure on an already strained economy.

Will Family Card actually lift the poor or sink the economy?

Dr Md Deen Islam
is professor of economics at the University of Dhaka and research director at Research and Policy Integration for Development (RAPID).

MD DEEN ISLAM

The announcement of the Family Card programme, which promises a Tk 2,500 monthly allowance for vulnerable families, has been celebrated as a landmark initiative in the government's efforts to deliver on a major election promise. On the surface, it is a heartwarming initiative that seeks to help millions of people escape poverty. Even though the intention behind the programme is admirable, the government's haste in rolling out the programme without a clear economic strategy or a comprehensive review of the existing social protection programmes threatens to undermine the very foundations of the economy that it seeks to strengthen.

The first and most pressing concern that arises from this programme is the fiscal sustainability that it requires. The government has indicated plans to expand this programme to include some two crore families by 2030. This means that it will cost the government approximately Tk 60,000 crore annually. This amount is a major part of the country's Annual Development Programme (ADP) that goes into building roads, bridges, power plants, etc. The government's capacity to generate revenue is limited, with a tax-GDP ratio that remains one of the lowest in the world. Additionally, a huge and ever-expanding share of the national budget is already locked into inflexible commitments, such as the interest payments on the national debt and power sector subsidies. This leaves a very narrow fiscal space for a new, recurring commitment.

To finance the family card at the intended scale, the government might have to make difficult trade-offs. It cannot cut the salaries and benefits of its employees, so the funds for the card are likely to come from somewhere else: the human capital, including the education and health budget, or the ADP for physical capital. Reducing the education and health budget will be a short-sighted solution as it will undermine the country's growth potential. Similarly, the ADP cannot be deprived of funds, as this will only slow down the growth of the country's infrastructure, which, in turn, will slow down the growth of the economy's capacity to produce goods and services.

In addition to the macroeconomic considerations, the design of the family card programme also poses questions about its efficacy. Bangladesh already has some 140 social protection programmes running under 26 ministries, but they have been roundly criticised for their inclusion and exclusion errors. The process for the family card programme is also prone to similar problems and may fail to include those who deserve to benefit most from the initiative. If the money is transferred to those who are not actually poor, then the programme's ability to combat poverty will be reduced to nothing but a waste of public money.

To finance the family card at the intended scale, the government might have to make difficult trade-offs. It cannot cut the salaries and benefits of its employees, so the funds for the card are likely to come from somewhere else: the human capital, including the education and health budget, or the ADP for physical capital.

Furthermore, discussions on the family card have been almost exclusively on the potential benefits of the programme with little attention paid to the opportunity costs. Perhaps the funds could be better utilised for programmes that have a long-term rate of return, such as those that combine early childhood nutrition with effective communication and skill trainings. A recent study conducted on the long-term impact of cash transfers in Bangladesh found that while cash transfers give a temporary reprieve from poverty, a combination of cash and complementary services like nutrition education may result in a long-term solution to poverty.

Ultimately, the family card is a litmus test for good economic management. Launching a scheme of this nature without a dedicated source of finance, without streamlining existing welfare programmes, and all the while lacking a proper and transparent mechanism to ensure that funds are channelled to the right people, is fiscally irresponsible. The government needs to treat this as an opportunity to reform the overall structure of social welfare web, not just add another layer of inefficiency to an already crumbling system.

The Daily Star Reg. No. DA 781 | **EDITOR & PUBLISHER: Mahfuz Anam** Printed by him on behalf of Mediaworld Ltd at Transcraft Ltd, 229, Tejgaon Industrial Area, editor@thedailystar.net | **Registered & Head Offices:** The Daily Star Centre 64-65 Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, Dhaka-1215 Phone: 09610222222 | **Newsroom:** Fax- 58156306 reporting@thedailystar.net | **Advertisement:** 01711623910 advertisement@thedailystar.net GPO Box: 3257 | **Subscription:** 01711623906 | thedailystar.net bangla.thedailystar.net/

We must restore momentum in environmental governance

Muhammad Muktadirul Islam Khan
is country researcher and head of consultants at Sustainability Action Learning Lab. He can be reached at muktadirr@hotmail.com.

MUHAMMAD MUKTADIRUL ISLAM KHAN

The environment remains a priority concern in Bangladesh given its status as one of the most vulnerable countries in terms of environmental degradation and climate change impacts. The country's riverine geography, low-lying coastal regions, high population density, and inadequate capacity to cope with environmental changes have made millions of people vulnerable to floods, storms, cyclones, ecosystem degradation, and pollution-related hazards. Changes in climatic patterns have become increasingly evident in recent decades, affecting lives, livelihoods, and overall wellbeing. Bangladesh currently ranks 13th globally in the Long-Term Climate Risk Index, and over the past two decades, some 185 extreme weather events have resulted in 11,450 deaths and Tk 372 crore in economic losses. Continued degradation of environmental conditions is also threatening its broader social stability. Environmental considerations, therefore, are becoming increasingly critical to national policy debates.

FILE VISUAL: **ANWAR SOHEL**

Without strengthening the capacity of regulatory institutions, improving coordination across ministries, and ensuring consistent environmental financing, even well-designed initiatives—such as large-scale tree plantations, waste management programmes, or river restoration projects—may struggle to deliver sustainable outcomes.

Over the last two decades, Bangladesh has experienced clear momentum in environmental governance. Significant progress has been made in recognising the country's environmental vulnerability and in shaping a policy environment with stronger institutional arrangements to tackle environmental challenges. The Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP), acknowledged as one of the earliest comprehensive national-level climate-related policy frameworks among the developing nations, was adopted in 2009, outlining priorities for adaptation, mitigation, and institutional capacity building. In 2010, The Environment Court Act was enacted, providing for specialised courts to address environment-related offences and strengthening the enforcement of environmental laws. The establishment of the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund (BCCTF), in the same year further demonstrated the commitment to finance climate adaptation and resilience initiatives using domestic resources, marking an important step towards sustainable climate finance.

The policy momentum continued in 2011, when environmental protection received constitutional recognition through the inclusion of Article 18A, which mandates the state to protect natural resources, biodiversity, forests, wildlife, and wetlands. In 2018, the Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100 was developed, integrating water management, climate change, and land-use strategies across six specific hotspots to reduce floods, droughts, and salinity risks. All these initiatives laid a strong foundation for environmental governance and created significant policy momentum in addressing the country's environmental priorities.

However, the momentum that had gradually developed over previous decades could not be sustained during the interim administration, which assumed office in August 2024 and transferred power in February 2026. Development planning and implementation trends during that period reflected a weaker performance in environmental and climate change actions. In both FY2024-25 and FY2025-26, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change received only about 0.23 percent and 0.27 percent of the national budget respectively—allocations that remain far below the roughly one percent level that many policy analysts consider necessary to effectively address Bangladesh's environmental challenges. The implementation of environmental actions by the interim government also showed similar weaknesses. Overall Annual Development Programme (ADP) spending fell to only 68 percent in FY2024-25—the lowest in 49 years—while development spending up to December 2025 in FY2025-26 reached only 17.54 percent, the lowest first-half implementation rate in the past five years. These trends indicate persistent gaps between the country's environmental policy commitments and their actual delivery.

The period of the interim government also witnessed several incidents related to the protection of natural resources and ecologically sensitive landscapes that drew widespread public criticism. The looting of white stones from Sylhet's Sada Pathor area and continued illegal sand extraction from rivers across the country caused serious ecological damage, clearly reflecting weaknesses in regulatory enforcement during that period.

With the end of the interim administration and new political leadership now in the driving seat, Bangladesh has another important opportunity to restore momentum in its environmental governance. The new government has made a number of commitments in its election manifesto that signal a positive intention to strengthen environmental governance. These include the plantation of 250 million trees and creation of green employment opportunities by linking ecological restoration with livelihood generation; promoting integrated waste management and recycling initiatives under a circular economy framework; strengthening pollution control and environmental monitoring; exploring the development of a national carbon trading mechanism; and improving river and water resource management, along with the protection of coastal ecosystems. These commitments could play a critical role in restoring Bangladesh's environmental momentum and reinforcing the country's long-term sustainability agenda.

While the commitments outlined in the election manifesto reflect positive intent, many of the proposed initiatives appear more as individual actions rather than elements of a comprehensive governance framework. Over the past two decades, Bangladesh has been able to build a strong policy foundation for environmental governance, but translating this policy momentum into effective institutional practice—through stronger regulatory enforcement and adequate financial resources—remains a challenge. Addressing this should be a priority for the new government. Without strengthening the capacity of regulatory institutions, improving coordination across ministries, and ensuring consistent environmental financing, even well-designed initiatives—such as large-scale tree plantations, waste management programmes, or river restoration projects—may struggle to deliver sustainable outcomes.

Bangladesh's environmental governance has evolved through decades of policy development shaped by the country's acute vulnerability. Although the interim administration struggled to sustain the policy and institutional momentum built in previous years, the return of elected political leadership now presents an opportunity to restore that momentum. With stronger institutional commitment, effective regulatory enforcement, and strategic investment, Bangladesh can translate its policy foundations into concrete environmental action and move towards a more resilient and sustainable future.

Building energy resilience in an age of global shocks

A CLOSER LOOK

Tasneem Tayeb
is a columnist for The Daily Star. Her X handle is @tasneem_tayeb.

TASNEEM TAYEB

Global energy shocks don't always create vulnerabilities for countries; often they expose the ones that already exist. The latest Middle East escalation is doing exactly that for Bangladesh's energy system, revealing how closely the country's economic stability is now tied to developments far beyond its own borders.

For decades, the country has relied primarily on domestic natural gas to power its economy. Fields such as Bibiyana, Habiganj, and Titas supported electricity generation and industrial expansion. But by the early 2010s, demand rose faster than domestic supply, forcing policymakers to confront an uncomfortable reality: the reserves that had sustained the system would not last indefinitely.

Bangladesh began to look outwards. Infrastructure was developed to import LNG, linking the national grid to international energy markets. Floating storage and regasification units were installed off the coast so that LNG cargoes arriving by tankers could be converted back into gas and injected into the national grid. The first of these terminals began operating in 2018, marking a significant shift in the architecture of the country's energy system. The system now stretches far beyond its own geography, from gas fields in Sylhet to LNG tankers crossing the Strait of Hormuz. With that shift came a new form of exposure. Much of the country's imported LNG is tied to volatile global spot markets, where geopolitical disruptions push prices sharply upwards within weeks.

The transition helped avert an immediate crisis, but it also altered the system's risk profile. Over the past decade, Bangladesh has moved from a system largely reliant on domestic resource security to one increasingly exposed to global fuel markets. The decision was difficult to avoid. Gas discoveries slowed and exploration investment lagged—partly reflecting regulatory constraints and pricing structures that discouraged heavier investment—while electricity demand rose rapidly alongside industrial expansion. Policymakers faced a stark choice: constrain growth through shortages or connect the system to global fuel markets through LNG imports.

Imported fuel now plays a central role in meeting the country's energy needs. It relies heavily on imported oil and coal, while LNG imports—approaching 70 lakh tonnes annually—supply power plants across the economy. A significant share of these cargoes is purchased on the spot market—roughly 29 percent of Tk 55,000 crore allocated for LNG imports in the current fiscal year—leaving the system widely exposed to sudden price movements.

More broadly, Bangladesh now relies on imports for around 95 percent of its primary energy inputs. In such systems, volatility in the global market can quickly spill over into forex reserve pressures, fiscal constraints, and domestic energy pricing.

The effects of these disruptions are not always visible in energy statistics. During the recent fuel rationing imposed on refilling stations on March 6, and subsequently withdrawn on March 15, long queues formed outside the stations in Dhaka and elsewhere as people waited hours for limited allocations. For households and businesses alike, these scenes illustrate that energy shocks are not distant geopolitical events but real social and economic disruptions that ripple through everyday life. Energy shocks quickly spill into transport costs, food prices, and industrial production. For an economy already grappling with inflation of over nine percent, energy security is not only about keeping power plants running but also about protecting economic stability.

Many countries have faced similar challenges. The difference lies in how energy systems are designed to absorb shocks. After the oil crises of the 1970s, Japan developed large strategic petroleum reserves to cushion supply disruptions. India has constructed underground storage caverns for similar purposes. Bangladesh, by contrast, typically holds only a few weeks of fuel stocks and relies heavily on continuous LNG deliveries. Unlike crude oil, LNG is difficult and costly to store in large quantities, leaving the system with limited room to manoeuvre when markets tighten. Countries manage this vulnerability through diversified supply contracts and flexible import infrastructure rather than large fuel stockpiles.

Energy security is ultimately defined by the buffers that prevent global market turbulence from spilling directly into domestic disruption. The safeguard principle is familiar in corporate risk management: business continuity planning. Organisations that operate across volatile markets do not assume stability; they build redundancy into critical systems so that disruptions in one part of the network do not halt operations entirely. National energy systems require a similar discipline. When imports become central to a country's energy system, resilience depends not only on expanding supply but also on the institutional capacity to anticipate and mitigate risks.

Bangladesh has begun exploring ways to diversify its energy mix, gradually expanding renewable capacity while pursuing nuclear generation as an additional source of baseload power. These shifts reflect a longer-term effort to reduce reliance on imported fuels and align with global energy transition trends. However, managing that transition while maintaining affordable and reliable supply presents its own set of challenges for policymakers.

Diversifying the energy mix, for instance, will require more than vision statements and setting new targets. Expanding renewable power depends on building the right conditions for investment—clear policies, reliable regulatory framework, adequate incentives, and sustained structured financing that can support projects over the long term. Private companies will ultimately play a major role in that transition, and it is important that they are given the right ecosystem to attract that investment. Without those foundations, the new government's pledge to raise the country's renewable energy capacity from its current five percent to 20 percent by 2030 will remain an unrealised aspiration.

The energy sector is not without planning frameworks, though. The Integrated Energy and Power Master Plan (IEPMP) adopted in 2023 outlines a long-term roadmap for the sector through 2050, while earlier initiatives such as the Renewable Energy Policy and the Energy Security Fund were intended to strengthen domestic capacity and fuel supply stability. Even so, much of the current strategy continues to rely heavily on imported fuels to meet rising demand. In practice, policy has focused more on expanding supply than on building resilience against external shocks.

For Bangladesh, the latest tensions in the Middle East highlight how intricately national energy systems and domestic economic stability are now intertwined with global political developments. Eventually this crisis will subside, energy prices will stabilise, and shipping routes will return to normal. But the structural capability gaps it has revealed will remain. Can Bangladesh's energy system absorb the next crisis? Strengthening strategic reserves, diversifying supply contracts, broadening the energy mix, and developing a robust energy continuity framework will determine whether future shocks will be manageable.

CROSSWORD
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

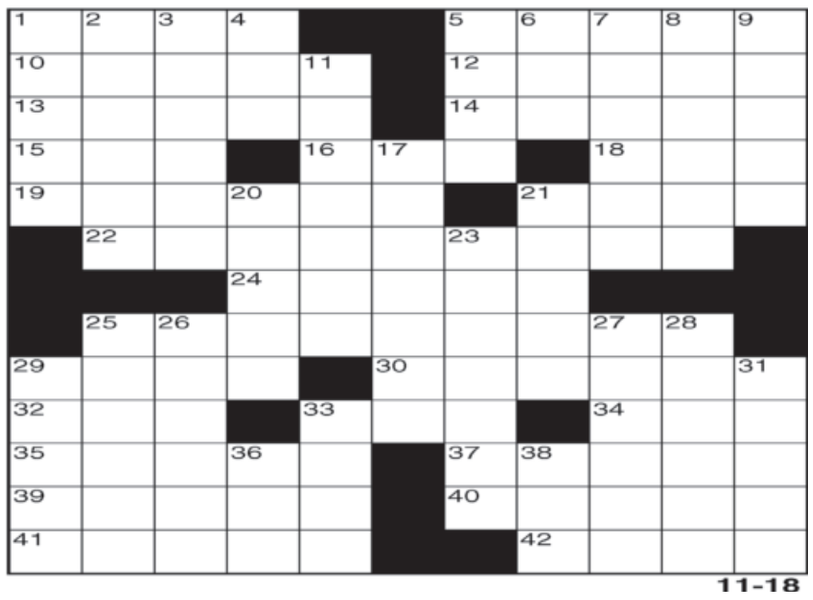
ACROSS

1 Headed out
5 Hotel workers
10 Wise saying
12 Don Draper, e.g.
13 "Oh, how — to get up..."
14 Lofty
15 Ring wins, for short
16 Brunched
18 Saloon order
19 Secret stuff
21 Surgery souvenir
22 Road rescuers
24 Thingamajig
25 Lively tune
29 Wander
30 Girls in the family
32 Verb for you
33 Mayo buy
34 Energy
35 Date qualifier
37 Justice Kagan
39 Supply with funds
40 Stadium tops
41 Alex Haley work
42 Cordial

DOWN

1 Early space dog
2 Urge
3 Utter failure
4 Young one
5 Lion's pride
6 Bustle
7 Return announcement
8 Cowboys' home
9 Insolent look
11 Was serious
17 Los Angeles section
20 "Shucks!"
21 Extent
23 Called a game
25 2006 Winter Games setting
26 Carry too far
27 Skin problem
28 "Stand by Me" director
29 Daytona entrant
31 Twitch
33 Spielberg movie
36 Guest bed
38 Depressed

SATURDAY'S ANSWERS



11-18

R	I	C	E	S	■	A	C	H	E	S
A	G	O	N	Y	■	R	H	O	N	E
I	N	N	E	R	■	M	A	T	T	E
D	O	T	■	U	P	B	R	A	I	D
E	R	R	■	P	R	O	■	I	R	S
R	E	A	L	■	S	N	A	R	E	■
■	■	B	O	P	■	E	B	B	■	■
■	T	A	X	I	S	■	C	A	P	S
D	A	S	■	O	U	T	■	L	I	T
I	T	S	O	N	M	E	■	L	E	O
S	T	O	R	E	■	A	C	O	R	N
C	L	O	S	E	■	M	O	O	R	E
S	E	N	O	R	■	O	W	N	E	D

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

Prioritised the audience's choice this time:
Tawsif Mahbub

SHARMIN JOYA

As Eid approaches, actor Tawsif Mahbub is pitching up for one of his busiest festive seasons yet. This time, the popular television star returns with the new season of the widely loved series ***Bachelor Point***, while also venturing into darker territory with his web debut in ***Chokro 2***. Alongside these major releases, he will also appear in several Eid dramas on the small screen. The lineup, he says, reflects a conscious decision to prioritise the audience's taste this year rather than his own.

One of the biggest highlights of his Eid slate is the return of ***Bachelor Point***, directed by Kajal Arefin Ome. Over the years, the series has grown into one of Bangladesh's most popular television shows, building a massive fan base that continues to grow with each season.

"***Bachelor Point*** is a crazy world -- It's extremely energetic, and what you see on screen is very similar to what happens off-screen," Tawsif said with a laugh. "I genuinely enjoy the shoot. Every month we usually have five to ten days of shooting, and I actually look forward to the next schedule."

For nearly eight years, he has portrayed the character of Nehal—one of the most recognisable faces of the series. Sustaining a character's popularity for so long, he says, is rare.

He credits director Kajal Arefin Ome for keeping the show fresh despite its long run. Many popular series eventually lose momentum, but ***Bachelor Point*** has managed to keep audiences hooked.

While ***Bachelor Point*** continues to bring its signature humour and energy, Tawsif is also stepping into a completely different space with ***Chokro 2***, directed by Vicky Zahed and set to release on the OTT platform iScreen. The project marks his first true experience working on an OTT series.

"The original ***Chokro*** was produced for television, which meant certain elements had to be toned down. This time, however, the creative team had far more freedom. In the first one, we had many limitations—budget constraints, time pressure, and the need to shoot multiple scenes in a single day," he explained. "With ***Chokro 2***, those limitations weren't there, and I would consider this my debut in OTT space."

Some scenes proved so intense that even crew members struggled to watch them being filmed. Tawsif recalled moments when members of the unit walked away during certain shots because the visuals were too disturbing. "Filming the project took nearly 20 days, including several late-night shoots, and the team travelled widely for the production. Locations ranged from Dhaka neighbourhoods such as Old Dhaka, Dhanmondi, Uttara and Diabari to destinations outside the capital, including Manikganj and Cox's Bazar. The experience was both demanding and creatively rewarding."

"Quite a few good small screen projects are coming this Eid," he said, referring to titles like ***Golapi***, directed by Rubel Hasan and co-starring Tanjin Tisha, ***Jokhom***, directed by Imraul Rafat with Tanjim Saiyara Totini, ***Prematal***, directed by Hasib Hossain Rakhi alongside Naznin Niha, and ***Beshi Bole Bulbuli*** directed by Rubel Hasan, also featuring Tanjim Saiyara Totini, among others. "These are good productions with strong stories, and many talented directors are involved."

"I'm particularly excited about ***Lilith***, directed by Ashikur Rahman. While working on it, I had a feeling of what many call the golden era of television dramas—slow, calm, and deeply engaging. I hope audiences will feel that same warmth when it releases," he said.

Despite his excitement about the projects, Tawsif admitted that many of the dramas he chose this year are not the kind of work he would normally gravitate towards. Over time, he realised that his personal taste does not always align with what the mass audience enjoys.

"I've noticed that my own taste can be a little niche," he explained. "Because of that, sometimes I move away from the mass audience. But television drama is completely a mass medium. It's a drawing room medium. You can't just think about your own preferences—you have to think about everyone's."

"Most of the dramas this time are romantic or comedic in tone, which audiences love to watch during Eid," he said. "In a way, these projects are experimental for me because they're not exactly my personal style. But I'm quite confident viewers will accept them well. Otherwise, I wouldn't have taken them."

"At the end of the day, our work is for the audience," he said. "If they enjoy watching it, that's the biggest success for us."

Five films receive censor clearance

With only a few days remaining until Eid, the Bangladesh Film Certification Board has cleared five films for release, marking the start of final preparations for the festive season. The approved titles include ***Domm***, ***Rakkhosh***, ***Prince: Once Upon a Time in Dhaka***, ***Pressure Cooker***, and ***Bonolota Express***, spanning a mix of genres and storytelling styles.

Domm and ***Pressure Cooker*** received uncut clearance, while ***Rakkhosh*** has been granted an 18+ rating. Featuring stars such as Afran Nisho, Shakib Khan, Siam Ahmed, and Shobnom Yesmin Bubly, the films bring together both commercial and content-driven narratives. From crime and action to romance and women-centric storytelling, the lineup reflects a diverse Eid slate, as filmmakers gear up for one of the year's most competitive release windows.

Featuring stars such as Afran Nisho, Shakib Khan, Siam Ahmed, and Bubly, the films bring together both commercial and content-driven narratives.

WHAT'S THE HAPS?

'Rishka Festival 3: Beyond Cinema'

A three-day celebration of Bangla cinema unfolds with screenings, conversations, and tributes honouring the craft behind the camera. ***Rishka Festival 3: Beyond Cinema*** gathers filmmakers, performers, and cinephiles to revisit beloved stories while spotlighting new voices through a short film competition and immersive discussions on the future of Bangladeshi cinema.

Date: Thursday–Saturday | March 26–28
Time: 11 am–11 pm
Venue: Aloki, Gulshan

NEWS

PM to launch Farmers' Card

FROM PAGE 12

at a meeting of the Farmers' Card preparing cell held at the Secretariat yesterday afternoon with the premier in the chair, said Additional Press Secretary Atikur Rahman Ruman.

During the meeting, the PM instructed his cabinet members and officials to maintain transparency in identifying farmers and ensure that assistance reaches the actual beneficiaries.

The government is set to roll out the cards under a pre-piloting initiative.

Apart from Tangail, the programme will also cover Panchagarh Sadar and Boda upazila of the district, Shibganj in Bogura, Shailkupa in Jhenaidah, Nesarabad in Pirojpur, Teknaf in Cox's Bazar, Cumilla Adarsha Sadar upazila, Islampur in Jamalpur, Goalanda in Rajbari, and Juri in Moulvibazar.

The additional press secretary said the card will function as a banking debit card. Landless, marginal, and small-scale farmers will receive an annual incentive of Tk 2,500 to purchase agricultural inputs.

Through the card, farmers will be able to buy fertiliser, seeds, pesticides, and animal feed, he added.

Officials concerned believe the initiative would help establish a reliable identification system for farmers across the country. It is also expected to ensure a more transparent and efficient distribution of agricultural subsidies, loans, seeds, and fertilisers.

The PM directed the authorities concerned to gear up the process to prepare the Farmers' Card to ensure modern and integrated services for farmers across the country, said the additional press secretary.

He stressed on creating a comprehensive database of farmers, ensuring direct delivery of subsidies and incentives, and simplifying agricultural services through digital systems.

Related ministers, state ministers, and advisers, as well as senior officials of the ministries, were present at the meeting.

According to the BNP's election manifesto, through the card, farmers will be able to access fertilisers, seeds, pesticides, government subsidies, and incentives at fair prices, as well as agricultural machinery at low cost.

Besides, they will receive low-cost irrigation services, easy-term agricultural loans, agricultural insurance, facilities to sell farm produce at fair prices, and agriculture-related training.

Farmers will also be able to receive weather and market information on their phones and access mobile-based crop treatment or advisory services using the card.

Fish and livestock farmers will also receive the benefits. Small businesses linked to the agricultural sector will be included as well.

In every union parishad, a list of genuine farmers eligible for state support will be prepared through discussion.

The BNP-led government, as part of its electoral promises, has launched canal excavation projects, waived agricultural loans up to Tk 10,000, including interest, introduced the Family Card, and begun providing monthly honorariums to religious leaders."

Half of youths

FROM PAGE 12

With global uncertainties rising, it is urgent for the government to undertake the long-pending macro-economic and financial sector reforms that are needed to address foundational bottlenecks to economic growth and job creation, Zutt added.

The WB was among the first development partners to support Bangladesh following its independence and has committed more than $46 billion in International Development Association financing in the form of grants, interest-free loans, and concessional credits to help the country address its development priorities.

Over 400 killed in Pakistan air strike

FROM PAGE 12

exercise restraint, a spokesperson of its foreign ministry, Lin Jian, said yesterday.

The Pakistani Information and Broadcasting Ministry said the Afghan Taliban claim was "misreporting of facts".

In an overnight post on X, it said that Pakistan targeted military installations and "terrorist support infrastructure" including technical equipment storage and ammunition storage of the Afghan Taliban and Pakistani Taliban militants in Kabul and Nangarhar that were being used against Pakistani civilians.

"Pakistan's targeting is precise and carefully undertaken to ensure no collateral damage is inflicted," the post said. "This misreporting of facts as drug rehabilitation facility seeks to stir sentiments, covering illegitimate support to cross-border terrorism."

Fierce fighting between the South Asian neighbours, who were close allies earlier, erupted last month with Pakistani air strikes in Afghanistan that Islamabad said targeted militant strongholds.

Afghanistan called the strikes a violation of its sovereignty that targeted civilians and launched its own attacks.

Both sides have claimed to have inflicted heavy damage on the other but independent verification has not been possible.

Islamabad says Kabul provides a safe haven to militants launching attacks on Pakistan. The Taliban deny the allegation, saying tackling militancy is Pakistan's internal problem.

The conflict had ebbed amid attempts by friendly countries, including China, to mediate and end the fighting before flaring up again.

Condition of Kushtia rape victim critical

FROM PAGE 12

Madrasa in Kuthibazar area of Kushtia's Bheramara upazila headquarters; his wife Shamima Khatun, 42; and his colleague Risha Khatun, 20.

They were produced before a court that sent them to jail yesterday, said the police officer.

According to case statement, Saidul raped the girl, while the two others assisted him.

In the case statement, the victim's mother said the girl has been a residential student of the madrasa since June last year.

"I went to the madrasa on Sunday morning to bring my daughter home for Eid vacation, but I found her severely ill," she said, adding that when she asked the madrasa authorities about her daughter's illness, they did not give proper response.

The girl was first taken to a local health complex where doctors provided her primary treatment and referred her to RMCH.

"Then, I took my daughter to RMCH on Monday morning," said the mother.

"My daughter has told me that she was raped by Saidul while the two other accused beat and tortured her so that she does not disclose the incident," she also said in the case statement.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday at RMCH, the mother said, "My daughter is frightened and traumatised. In the madrasa, I found her in severe condition with a swollen abdomen and bruised left leg."

"I want justice," she demanded.

She also alleged that assocoates of the madrasa authorities tried to settle the issue with money and threats.

[Our correspondents from Kushtia and Rajshahi contributed to the report.]

Fuel shortage forces buses to limit Eid trips

FROM PAGE 12

Mojibur Rahman, a pharmacist who had gone to the Mohakhali bus terminal with his wife and daughter yesterday to travel to Bogura on an Ekota Paribahan bus scheduled for 12:00pm, said they were waiting for over an hour and a half, but the bus had not yet arrived.

On the start of a seven-day government holiday for Eid-ul-Fitr yesterday, long queues were seen at filling stations across the capital.

This newspaper visited at least 16 fuel pumps in Dhaka on the day. At least four stations had run out of octane by the afternoon, including two on the outskirts on the Banasree–Demra road.

In the Tejgaon area, Southern Automobiles was sold out of octane in the afternoon. Only diesel-run vehicles were seen in lines.

With fresh supplies, there was a long queue at Satata & Co, which was found shut a day earlier.

In the Mohakhali area, there are six to seven refuelling stations. Most were open, but there was a long queue only outside Clean Fuel Filling Station. In the Mohakhali railway gate area, Eureka Enterprise had a usual queue.

The Trust Filling Station in the Bijoy Sarani area had huge queues, as motorcycles stretched near the Prime Minister's Office while cars extended past the BAF Officers' Mess gate in the afternoon.

Earlier in the morning, at Sonar Bangla Service Station in Asad Gate, a visit around 10:00am revealed a line of vehicles stretching for over a kilometre. Motorcycles, cars, minibuses and pickup trucks were all waiting for fuel.

However, the queue for motorcycles and cars was comparatively shorter than the previous couple of days, said the staff members at the station.

As of 10:30am, the station appeared to be supplying fuel in line with demand.

The situation was different at nearby Talukdar Filling Station, where fuel supply was suspended shortly before 10:00am after stocks ran out. By 10:30am, more than a hundred vehicles were seen lined up.

"We have run out of fuel for now," said cashier Md Azam, adding that supply may resume around 2:00pm once new stock arrives.

After 2:00pm, the supply resumed, but the customers were complaining that they were not getting fuel as per their demand. Rather, the pump was rationing: for bikes, up to Tk 500, and for cars, Tk 1,500 worth of fuel.

A similar situation was found at another pump, Purbachal Traders in Paribagh, which followed a similar rationing system.

As of yesterday, diesel stock stood at 1.20 lakh tonnes, while petrol and octane stocks were 15,000 tonnes each, with more shipments in the pipeline, data from Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation shows.

Officials said BPC has increased the supply ahead of the Eid rush, and the supply would be adequate to satisfy demand for this month.

Govt to import 2 lakh tonnes

FROM PAGE 12

major rainfed Aman rice crop.

Aman rice, which is grown in a season beginning after June, accounts for 40 percent of the total annual rice crop, estimated at around 4 crore tonnes in the 2024-25 fiscal year.

"We want to complete the procedures of imports before the start of the Aman season. So, we have floated the tenders," said a top BCIC official, adding that the corporation operates state fertiliser factories and imports urea on behalf of the government to distribute among farmers at subsidised rates.

In its notifications, BCIC sought submission of quotations to purchase the urea -- to be supplied through Chattogram and Mongla ports -- by April 8.

The official said the procurement process needs to start three to four months in advance to complete the import process within the stipulated time.

The peak season for fertiliser demand is November to March, mainly for Boro rice cultivation when Bangladesh uses 60 percent of the crop production input.

Apart from urea, the government also plans to sign a contract with Egypt to import Diammonium Phosphate and Triple Super Phosphate fertilisers.

Contacted by The Daily Star recently, Ahmed Faisal Imam, additional secretary for the fertiliser management and monitoring branch at the agriculture ministry, said the country currently has urea stocks until June, while non-urea fertiliser stocks will last until October. "There is no fertiliser crisis at present."

Molten alien planet

FROM PAGE 12

"The planet lacks distinct structure within its magma ocean, so there is no crust, upper mantle and lower mantle. The magma ocean is a single deep, mushy layer," said Harrison Nicholls, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Cambridge Institute of Astronomy and lead author of the research published on Monday in the journal Nature Astronomy.

Small crystals of solid rock may be trapped within the turbulent fluid magma comprising the mantle, Nicholls said.

The planet's metallic core appears to be relatively small, with the magma ocean comprising 70-90 percent of the planetary interior radius - reaching a depth between 2,775 and 3,565 miles (4,465-5,740 km). Its thick atmosphere is composed primarily of hydrogen, but has a very high sulfur content.

Strawberry cultivation expands in Rangpur region

S DILIP ROY, *Lalmonirhat*

In Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila, Hasan Zahid, 35, started cultivating strawberries on a small piece of land in 2017 to pursue his hobby. Following a promising yield, he gradually expanded cultivation to four bighas.

"Now I earn around Tk 4-5 lakh annually after expenses by cultivating strawberries, while employing four workers," he said.

Visiting Zahid's plantation recently, this correspondent observed neat rows of plants covered with polythene for mulching.

Like Zahid, many others in Rangpur region are now showing an ardent interest in cultivating strawberries, a high-value exotic fruit. The region's long, cool winters, fertile soil, and relatively dry conditions make it well-suited for strawberry cultivation.

Agriculture experts said with use of improved seedlings, modern cultivation methods, and effective market management, Rangpur could become one of Bangladesh's major strawberry-producing hubs.

According to the Department of Agricultural Extension, around 47 hectares of land across Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Gaibandha, Rangpur, and Nilphamari districts have been brought under strawberry cultivation this season, up from only about six hectares in the region just five years ago.

Strawberries generally grow well in temperatures between 10-20 degrees Celsius, which is typical from November to February in Rangpur. Farmers prepare raised beds in October–November and plant 10,000 to 12,000 seedlings per bigha.

Organic manure, cow dung, and fertilisers like TSP, MOP, and urea are applied in specific amounts. Polythene is laid at the base of the plants for mulching to reduce weed growth, retain soil moisture, and keep the fruits clean. Flowers appear 60-70 days after planting, and harvesting continues between December and March.

While strawberry cultivation offers good returns, it requires higher investment than traditional crops. The total cost per bigha -- including seedlings, fertilisers, mulching polythene, irrigation, bamboo, and labour -- ranges from Tk 1,20,000 to Tk 1,50,000. On a hectare, production costs can reach around Tk 9-10 lakh.

The cost of producing each kilogramme of strawberries is approximately Tk 150-160, while it fetches a wholesale price of Tk 300-600 per kg.

According to DAE data, yields average 6-10 tonnes per hectare. As such, farmers can earn profits of Tk 2-3 lakh per bigha.

Abdur Razzak, 34, from Bajra village in Kurigram, has been cultivating strawberries commercially on 12 bighas since 2022. He now also produces his own seedlings, which reduces costs significantly.

"The demand for strawberries is strong. Wholesalers come directly to the fields, although we receive only about half the market price," he said.

Khoimuddin Bepari, a fruit wholesaler at City Bazar in Rangpur, said strawberries currently sell in the retail market for Tk 700-800 per kg, but farmers receive Tk 350-400 per kg.

"There are market challenges. If strawberries cannot be sold on time, they spoil quickly. Transportation and storage costs are also high," he explained.

Despite these challenges, strawberries from Rangpur are now being sent across the country, including Dhaka, after meeting local demand.

Sirajul Islam, DAE additional director in Rangpur region, expressed optimism about the crop's future.

"Strawberry emerges as a promising crop in Rangpur's soil. Many young entrepreneurs are achieving success by cultivating strawberries using modern mulching methods," he said.

The DAE provides technical advice to farmers and has taken initiatives to train those interested in strawberry cultivation, he added.

China

FROM PAGE 4

Shafiqur also alleged that during a past "fascist period," symbols of Bangladesh-China friendship were undermined, citing the renaming of the China Friendship International Conference Centre.

Describing the long-delayed Teesta River project as "the cry of Bangladesh," he stressed its implementation and said his party would support any initiative to advance it.

He welcomed China's reported plans to support specialised hospitals and build residential halls for Dhaka University students, calling them examples of "genuine friendship."

Ambassador Yao Wen said Bangladesh and China are comprehensive strategic cooperative partners.

Referring to Eid-ul-Fitr, he said the programme aimed to support local residents and that China would continue projects to improve people's well-being.

Later, at a press conference in Moghbazar, Jamaat leaders criticised recent government decisions to appoint administrators to city corporations and district councils, as well as changes in leadership at several public universities.

Actor Shams Suman

FROM PAGE 3

In recent years, he had stepped away from regular television appearances.

His film credits include "Mon Janena Moner Thikana" (2016), "Cox's Bazar e Kakatuya" (2016), "Chokher Dekha" (2016), "Priya Tumi Sukhi Hou" (2014), "Ayna Kahini" (2013), "Hello Amit" (2012), "Nomuna" (2008), "Bidrohi Padma" (2006), and "Joyjatra" (2004).

In 2008, he received the National Film Award for Best Supporting Actor for his performance in "Swapnopuron."

Suman was also associated with the recitation group Swanan at the Rajshahi University, where he developed his early grounding in performance. Though less visible in recent years, his work across stage, television, and film remains part of a defining period in Bangladeshi acting.

Nine killed

FROM PAGE 4

bus while legal action was under way, said Dhanbari Police Station OC Nurus Salam Siddique.

In Kishoreganj, six were killed in road accidents in Sadar, Katiadi and Itna upazilas on Monday, reports our correspondent.

A truck lost control and veered off the Bhairab-Kisshoreganj regional highway near Achmita George Institution in Katiadi upazila around 11:00am, and hit farmer Imon Mia, 26, on the roadside, leaving him dead, said Khurshed Alam, in-charge of Katiadi Highway Police Outpost.

Irfan, 16, and his pillion, Naushad, 20, were injured after he lost control on the motorcycle at Nilganj intersection around 2:00pm. Irfan died at Kishoreganj General Hospital. Naushad passed away at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.

A bus hit an oncoming CNG-run auto-rickshaw at Chauddashata in Sadar upazila, killing an unidentified woman.

An unidentified child died after being hit by a motorcycle at Binnati under the upazila, said Kishoreganj Sadar OC Abul Kalam Bhuiyan.

A truck hit a motorcycle in Mriga of Itna upazila, leaving the motorcycle rider Jayanta Gope, 32, dead, confirmed union parishad chairman Darul Islam.

Surge in measles overwhelms

FROM PAGE 3

The child required Intensive Care Unit (ICU) support, but the hospital's ICU had been non-functional for over a year due to a lack of manpower.

Several other hospitals reportedly declined to admit him, citing the risk of measles infection to other ICU patients, hospital sources said.

The incident triggered outrage and grief, drawing attention of higher authorities.

Health Minister Sardar Md Sakhawat Husain visited the hospital late Monday night and assured that ICU services would resume within a day and that some measles patients would be shifted to the DNCC hospital.

During a visit to the Infectious Diseases Hospital yesterday, this correspondent saw many patients lying on the third and fifth floors.

Mobashwara Akhter, a nine-month-old measles patient from Savar, was admitted to the hospital four days ago, but could not get a bed or any space inside the ward. Her parents were forced to place her near the stairs on the fifth floor.

"We have nothing to do but stay here," said her father, Anowar Hossain.

A nurse said 38 patients, most with measles, were being treated against 25 beds on the fifth floor, forcing many to stay on the floor.

Five-month-old Aditya Rajbangshi from Tangail also could not get a bed and was receiving treatment on the floor.

"A local hospital referred him to Shishu Hospital in Dhaka, but that hospital again referred him to this hospital," his mother, Tumpa Rajbangshi, said.

Hospital superintendent Tanzina Jahan said measles cases have been rising since January, with a further increase in February and this month.

"Measles outbreaks usually occur at five-year intervals, with the last in 2019. We are seeing a rise in measles cases this year," she told The Daily Star.

She said 63 patients were admitted yesterday, compared to 78 the previous day.

Of the hospital's 100 beds, 25 are dedicated to HIV patients.

Measles patients also cannot be kept with chickenpox patients, limiting available space for measles patients and forcing some to stay on the floor.

A total of 21 doctors and around 60 nurses are working at the hospital, which also vaccinates about 1,500 outpatients daily, in addition to treating patients with other infectious diseases, she said.

"Following the minister's instructions, we have reopened the ICU," she said, adding that four additional doctors have been assigned to handle the increased patient load.

Security beefed

FROM PAGE 3

kinds of people, including muggers and drug addicts. That is why I have directed all units across Bangladesh to deploy forces to ensure safe and orderly Eid travel," he said.

He added steps are being taken to prevent passenger harassment, overcharging of fares, and traffic congestion during the Eid rush.

Meanwhile, Rab has launched round-the-clock security operations across the capital as large numbers of residents leave the city.

Rab-10 Commanding Officer Mohammad Kamruzzaman said around 15 million people are expected to leave Dhaka, leaving many residential areas vulnerable to theft and robbery.

"In such situations, incidents of burglary and mugging tend to increase, especially as many homes remain vacant," he said after inspecting the Sadarghat Launch Terminal.

To prevent crime, Rab has intensified patrols across key areas, particularly at night, focusing on empty homes and less crowded neighbourhoods.

Monitoring has also been strengthened at major transport hubs, including Sadarghat and the Sayedabad Bus Terminal, to prevent harassment and overcharging, said the Rab official.

Passengers have been asked to report any such incidents to the Rab control room, which will operate 24/7 throughout the holiday.

The Bangladesh Coast Guard has also increased security at key river terminals nationwide. Personnel have been deployed at major launch terminals, ferry ghats, and river crossings under its four operational zones -- Dhaka, Bhola, Chattogram, and Mongla.

At Sadarghat yesterday, coastguards were checking passengers at pontoon entry points and inspecting launches to ensure safe travel during the busy Eid period.

Last-minute Eid shopping frenzy

FROM PAGE 3

Large crowds were observed around shops selling dresses, shoes, and cosmetics at Muktijoddha Market and Cooperatives Market at Mirpur-1.

Mofizul Islam, a Mirpur resident, said he went to Cooperatives Market after receiving his salary and bonus yesterday.

"I am buying three-piece outfits and shoes for my wife and younger sister, a lungi and panjabi for my father, and shoes and dresses for my children," he said.

Mehedi Hasan, who planned to travel to Barishal by launch yesterday, purchased multiple items from Karwan Bazar Supermarket, including shirts, three-piece outfits, and panjabis for his family and close relatives.

"I am going straight to Sadarghat launch terminal after shopping. I try to give everyone dresses during Eid and come to this market to buy at lower prices," he explained.

Abdul Jalil Mollah, proprietor of Messer's Bhai Bhai Saree House, noted that although customer numbers increased yesterday, the sales have not been as expected.

চট্টগ্রাম বন্দর কর্তৃপক্ষ
বন্দর ভবন, চট্টগ্রাম ৪১০০
www.cpa.gov.bd

সতর্কীকরণ বিজ্ঞপ্তি

সাম্প্রতিক সময়ে অতি উদ্বেগের সাথে লক্ষ্য করা যাচ্ছে যে, চট্টগ্রাম বন্দর কর্তৃপক্ষের আহবানকৃত চট্টগ্রাম বন্দরে শিপ হ্যান্ডলিং অপারেটর ও বার্থ অপারেটর লাইসেন্স প্রদানের আশ্বাসে বন্দরের উর্ধ্বতন কর্মকর্তা এবং বিভিন্ন প্রভাবশালী মহলের রেফারেন্স দিয়ে একশ্রেণির অসাধুচক্র বিভিন্ন লোকের নিকট থেকে অনৈতিক সুবিধা গ্রহণ করছে, যা গর্হিত অপরাধ।

সংশ্লিষ্ট সকলের অবগতির জন্য জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, চট্টগ্রাম বন্দরে হ্যান্ডলিং কার্যক্রম পরিচালনার নিমিত্তে শিপ হ্যান্ডলিং অপারেটর ও বার্থ অপারেটর লাইসেন্স প্রদানের লক্ষ্যে অনুমোদিত লাইসেন্সিং নীতিমালা-২০২৫ অনুযায়ী বিজ্ঞপ্তির শর্ত পূরণকারী লাইসেন্স গ্রহণে ইচ্ছুক প্রতিষ্ঠান সমূহকে যথাযথ দলিলাদি দাখিল সাপেক্ষে প্রয়োজনীয় সংখ্যক লাইসেন্স প্রদান করার বিষয়টি কর্তৃপক্ষ বিবেচনা করতে পারে। সরকারি বিধিবিধান, নীতিমালা ও প্রচলিত আইন মেনে যাচাই বাছাই প্রক্রিয়া সম্পন্ন করা হবে। এমতাবস্থায় অসৎ প্রতারক চক্রের মাধ্যমে বা আর্থিক লেনদেনের মাধ্যমে আলোচ্য লাইসেন্স পাওয়ার কোন সুযোগ নেই। চবক এর উর্ধ্বতন কর্মকর্তা, বিশিষ্ট ব্যক্তিদের নাম/পরিচয় ব্যবহার করে অসৎ উদ্দেশ্য হাসিলকারী এসব প্রতারক চক্রের প্রলোভন থেকে সকলকে সতর্ক থাকার পরামর্শ দেয়া হলো। উপরন্তু এধরনের কর্মকান্ডে কেউ সম্পৃক্ত হলে বন্দর কর্তৃপক্ষ দায়ী থাকবে না। প্রতারকচক্র কাউকে প্রতারিত করতে চাইলে তাদেরকে নিকটস্থ আইন প্রয়োগকারী সংস্থার নিকট সোপর্দ করার জন্য অনুরোধ করা হলো।

চবক জরুঃ ৪৪/২০২৬
সাইজ ৫x৩

আদেশক্রমে
চট্টগ্রাম বন্দর কর্তৃপক্ষ

GD-637

Housing and Building Research Institute
Soil Mechanics and Foundation Engineering Division
120/3, Darus Salam, Mirpur, Dhaka-1216
www.hbri.gov.bd

Memo No- 25.14.2600.000.000.14.0226.26-171 Date: 16-03-2026

e-Tender Notice

e-Tender will be invited in the National e-GP system portal https://www.eprocure.gov.bd for procurement of the following goods and services

Tender ID No.	Description	Tender Document last selling Date and Time
1245911	Supply, Installation and Commissioning of Geophysical Survey Instrument for HBRI and supply of PVC pipes compatible with downhole seismic survey for the research project titled Empirical Correlations between Standard Penetration Test (SPT) Blow Counts and Shear-Wave Velocity (Vs) Across Different Geological Formations in Bangladesh	05-Apr-2026 15:00

This is an online Tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP system portal (https://www.eprocure.gov.bd) is required.

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

Dr. Partha Saha
Senior Research Engineer
Housing and Building Research Institute

GD-633

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Bangladesh Police
Police Headquarters, Dhaka
www.police.gov.bd

INTERNATIONAL RE-TENDER NOTICE

Memo No.44.01.0000.024.02.002.25.683 Date: 16/03/2026

Sealed tender is hereby invited from the breeders/principals/suppliers in their official pad for supply of Horses as required by Bangladesh Police in fiscal year 2025-2026

1.	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Home Affairs
2.	Agency	Police Headquarters, Dhaka
3.	Head Of Procuring Entity	Inspector General Of Police, Bangladesh.
4.	Invitation for	Procurement Of Horse
5.	Invitation Ref no	44.01.0000.024.02.005.25./ 08 (2025-2026)
6.	Date	16 March 2026
	KEY INFORMATION	
7.	Procurement Method	One Stage Two Envelopes Tendering Method (OSTETM)
	FUNDING INFORMATION	
8.	Budget and source of Fund	GOB Revenue
	PARTICULAR INFORMATION	
9.	Tender Publication Date	17 March 2026
10.	Last selling Date	15 April 2026
11.	Closing date and time	16 April 2026 at 12.00 hrs
12.	Opening Date and Time	16 April 2026 at 12.30 hrs
13.	Name and address of the office	Addl. DIG (Transport), level-4, NCCOM Center, Police Headquarters, Phoenix Road, Fulbaria, Dhaka-1000
	Place of selling /Receiving/ opening tender document	Transport Section, level-4, NCCOM Center, Police Headquarters, Dhaka-1000
14.	Date and time of pre-tender meeting (optional)	06 April 2026 at 15.00 Hrs Office room, Addl. DIG (Transport), level-4, NCCOM Center, Police Headquarters, Dhaka
	INFORMATION FOR TENDERER	
15.	Eligibility of tenderer	i) Up to date trade license ii) Up to date income tax certificate iii) VAT registration certificate iv) Other requirements described in the Standard Tender Document
16.	Price of Tender Document (BDT)	TK. 4,000 (Four Thousand) Only (Non-Refundable).

Brief description of goods

	Package	Identification of item	Tender security amount in USD or EURO/JPY	Completion time
17.	PKG -31	Horse	$ 3,200.00 (Three Thousand Two Hundred)	180 days

	PROCURING ENTITY DETAILS	
18.	Name of official inviting tender	Mohammad Ashrafuzzaman, BPM
19.	Designation and address of the official inviting tenderer	Addl. DIG (Transport), level-4, NCCOM Center, Police Headquarters, Dhaka-1000
20.	Contract detail of official inviting tender	Phone-+88 02 223384779 e-mail: addldigtrans@police.gov.bd
21.	Special Instruction	
a.	No tender will be received after the deadline of submission	
b.	The Procuring Entity reserves the right to reject all/ any tender or annul the tender process without causing any reason	
c.	The Procuring Entity also reserves the right to omit, increase or decrease the quantity of tender item(s).	
d.	The bidders must abide by the decision of the HOPE	
e.	The procurement process will be performed according to the Public Procurement Act-2006 & PPR- 2025	

(Mohammad Ashrafuzzaman, BPM)
BP-7705121323
Addl.DIG (Transport)
Bangladesh Police
For Inspector General, Bangladesh Police
Police Headquarters, Dhaka
Phone: +88 02 003384779

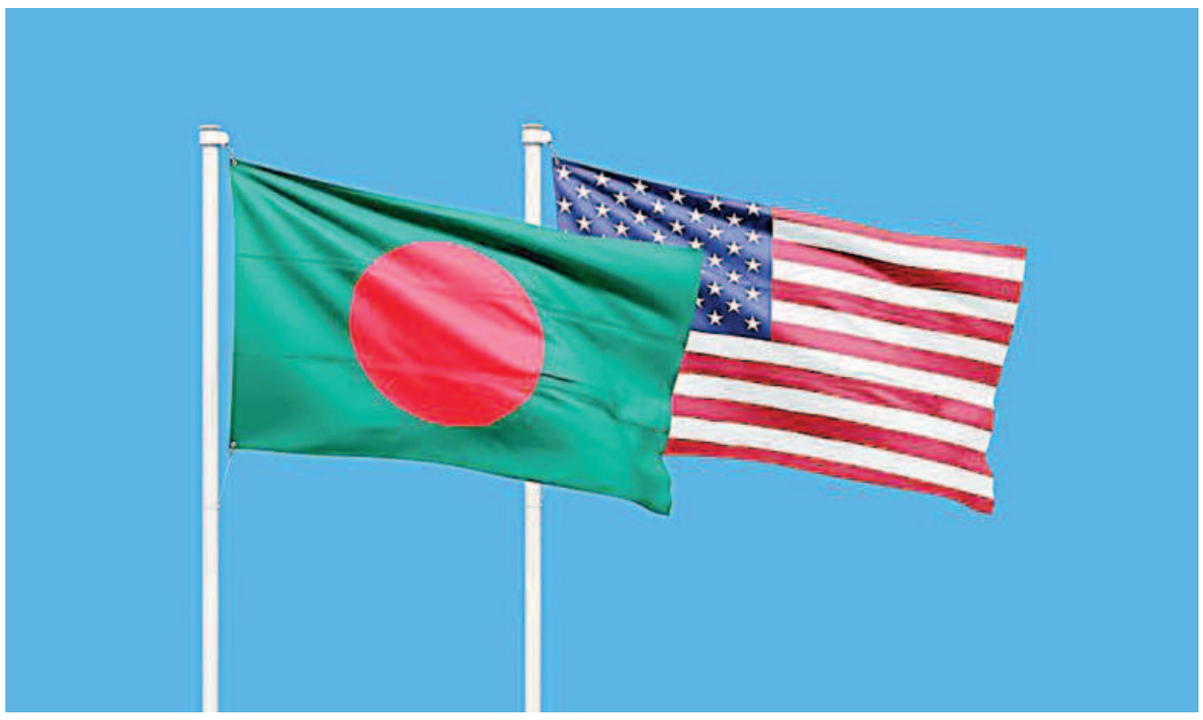
GD-635

LAW OPINION

The Reciprocal Trade Agreement with the US: Legal Grounds for Bangladesh to Withdraw

PROFESSOR M RAFIQUL ISLAM

The Agreement on Reciprocal Trade between the US and Bangladesh concluded on 9 February 2026 has become a cause of concern in Bangladesh. This Agreement is criticised as highly discriminatory, militating against the net economic benefit and strategic interests of Bangladesh. The Centre for Policy Development (CPD) is dismayed as the Agreement serves only the US trade interests and recommends that Bangladesh should withdraw (Daily Star, 28 February 2026, 5 March 2026). Similar criticisms and recommendations may also be found in 'The US-Bangladesh Reciprocal Trade Agreement: Geopolitical Realignment, Asymmetric Obligations and the Imperatives of Balanced Trade' Dacca Institute of Research and Analytics, February 2026. This write-up suggests some legal grounds for lawful withdrawal, should Bangladesh decide to pursue this option under section 6(5-6) of the Agreement.



The Reciprocal Agreement fails to address the vital trade interest of Bangladesh. Its features violate the constitutional requirement that Bangladesh should base its treaty relations 'on the principle of respect for national sovereignty and equality' and to determine and build up its own economic system 'by ways and means of its own free choice' (Art. 25).

Under the Vienna Convention on the Law of the Treaties (VCLT) 1969, a treaty is void if it conflicts with a peremptory norm of international law (jus cogens) (VCLT Articles 53, 64). The right to self-determination is one such norms, having both political and economic aspects as defined in the UN International Covenants on Human Rights (Art.1). Political self-determination entitles the people to freely determine their political destiny. Economic self-determination entitles the people to freely pursue their economic development. A plain reading of the specialised studies mentioned before reveals the marginalised economic plight of Bangladesh under the Reciprocal Agreement. Trade-induced gains for Bangladesh are riddled with mandatory conditions, restrictions and sanctions that are set to hamstring its free economic developmental pursuits.

Apart from its stultifying effects on the Bangladesh economy shown in specialised studies on the Agreement, any lay reader of its terms and conditions cannot avoid developing a feeling that the negotiators from both sides had a common goal of making the Agreement to benefit the US. This goal has been achieved at the expense of the net trade-induced economic gains and economic sovereignty of Bangladesh. The GATT/WTO provides tariff concessions under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) for developing and least-developed countries to improve their exports for economic development. Bangladesh received this GSP tariff concessions in the US, which the US eventually suspended in 2013. Bangladesh has been requesting for the restoration of GSP since 2015 but remains unheeded. The Reciprocal Agreement fails to address this vital trade interest of Bangladesh. Its reciprocity merely camouflages asymmetric trade relations and economic strangulation of Bangladesh. These features violate the constitutional requirement that Bangladesh should base its treaty relations 'on the principle of respect for national sovereignty and equality' and to determine and build up its own economic system 'by ways and means of its own free choice' (Art. 25). This Agreement was concluded in strict confidentiality under the guise of 'non-disclosure treaty' to avoid public knowledge and scrutiny. It was the US, not Bangladesh, that first brought this Agreement to the public domain. Indeed, the Agreement falls far short of the newly elected BNP government's policy of 'Bangladesh first' in which 'national interest' will guide the foreign policy of Bangladesh (Dhaka Tribune, 27 February 2026 and Daily Star, Dhaka, 4 March 2026).

Besides, the fundamental change in circumstances under which a treaty was signed entitles the affected party to withdraw from, or terminate, the treaty (VCLT Art. 62). President Trump imposed his so-called 'freedom tariffs' on almost all states. Facing high tariffs, some states negotiated special tariff deals to remain accessible in the US market. As it seems, Bangladesh, motivated by its exports to the US market at a concessional tariff rate, negotiated and signed the Reciprocal Agreement. The US Supreme Court has recently declared Trump's tariffs illegal and at present, US tariffs stay at 10-15% on foreign products. Contrarily, the Reciprocal Agreement imposes 19% tariff on Bangladesh products, which is higher than the current 15% maximum tariff in the US. The US Supreme Court decision and the new US tariff regime has fundamentally altered the consideration and circumstances that had led to the Reciprocal Agreement, thereby making the negotiation comparatively more onerous for Bangladesh. Had these changes been known or foreseen at the time of making the Reciprocal Agreement, Bangladesh would not have signed it. The changes in the US tariff regime are fundamental enough to justify a withdrawal or termination.

Moreover, under the VCLT, the negotiators must 'produce appropriate full powers' accreditation, or if an intention of 'full powers' can be obtained from the state practice or other circumstances of the representing state (VCLT Art. 7:1). A treaty negotiated and signed without appropriately accredited full powers 'is without legal effect' (VCLT Art. 8). The VCLT also notes, non-compliance with 'internal law of fundamental importance' (meaning the Constitution in our case) in treaty-making invalidates a treaty if the manifestation of non-compliance is objectively evident (Vienna Art. 46).

Notably, the authority in 'carrying on of any trade or business and the making of any contract' is vested with the Executive (Article 144, Bangladesh Constitution). Since treaty implementation requires a domestic parallel legislation, Article 145A requires that treaty made with foreign countries 'shall be submitted to the President, who shall cause them to be laid before Parliament'. In light of recent claims made by the President regarding his non-involvement in the treaty-making process (Kaler Kantho 23 February 2026; The Daily Star 23 February 2026), it appears that Bangladesh negotiated and concluded the Reciprocal Agreement sidestepping these constitutional requirements. In any case, the treaty-making process that the interim government followed in making the Reciprocal Agreement does not exist in the Constitution. Hence, it may be argued by invoking Articles 7 and 8 of the VCLT that the treaty is inconsistent with the Constitution, rendering it "without legal effect".

The Reciprocal Agreement provides for withdrawal after 60 days from the letter of withdrawal (s.6:5). If Bangladesh serves a withdrawal notice, the Agreement allows the US to reimpose its 'freedom tariffs' (s. 6:4) which is now illegal, and this sanction of reimposition does not exist anymore. This option of withdrawal appears rather easy for Bangladesh as it has not exchanged written notification for ratification as necessary for a treaty to entry into force (Vienna Art. 12, 16).

Alternative to the withdrawal under section 6(5) of the Reciprocal Agreement is the judicial option. Bangladesh or concerned NGO/s, businesses or citizen/s may file a writ with the High Court Division seeking an order of invalidation of the Agreement relying on the above grounds, particularly for non-compliance with the constitutional treaty-making process, violation of the supreme national law, and undermining the national interests, of Bangladesh.

The writer is Emeritus Professor of Law at Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia.

YOUR ADVOCATE

Kazi's jurisdiction and the validity of marriage

This week Your Advocate is Barrister Omar H. Khan, Advocate of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh. He heads the chambers of the renowned law firm 'Legal Counsel,' a full-service corporate practice in Bangladesh with extensive expertise in commercial, family, labour, land, constitutional and criminal law, as well as dispute resolution.

Query

I recently got married under the Muslim law. However, I have lately learnt that the Kazi who conducted our marriage was not authorised for the area where the ceremony took place. Will this affect the validity of our marriage?

Faisal Fayaz, Bogura.

Response

Dear Mr Fayaz, thank you for your query. Before diving deep into the matter, a little bit of context is important. In Bangladesh, matters related to marriage, divorce, etc. are dealt with by the personal laws of the respective individuals. As such, the marriage of Muslims is governed by the Muslim Shariah law. As you may be aware, nikah or marriage under Muslim personal law is considered fundamentally a contract. Thus, the validity of a nikah depends primarily on whether the essential requirements of that contract were fulfilled. These include a clear proposal and acceptance between the bride and the groom, the presence of competent witnesses, the free and voluntary consent of both parties, and dower. When these elements are present, the marriage is generally considered valid under Muslim personal law, regardless of administrative irregularities surrounding the officiant.

On the other hand, the requirement of registration of Muslim marriages arises under the Muslim Marriage and Divorce (Registration) Act, 1974 read with the Rules of 1975. The Act makes provision for a nikah registrar (also known as 'Kazi') who is licensed by the government to register marriages and divorces. Such licenses are granted for a particular geographical area, and he can register marriages solemnised or divorces affected within that area only.

This is where many misunderstandings arise. People often assume that the Kazi's jurisdiction determines the validity of the marriage itself. In reality, the Kazi's role under the said laws is largely administrative. Kazis are appointed to register marriages, maintain official records and issue the Nikahnama so that the marriage can be properly documented and proved when necessary. Territorial jurisdiction, on the other hand, is mainly intended to ensure organised record-keeping and to avoid confusion in registration. It does not determine the validity of a marriage. Instead, where a marriage is conducted by a Kazi in an area of which he is not in charge, it becomes a misconduct on the part of such Kazi. Commission of such misconduct may result in revocation/ suspension/ annulment of his license by the government. Such violation or misconduct by the Kazi does not, however, invalidate the marriage or render the registration defective.

However, while non-registration of the marriage does not make the marriage invalid, please bear in mind that the same is considered a crime, which is punishable even with imprisonment. As per the Act, a Muslim marriage has to be registered within 30 days of solemnisation. If the marriage is solemnised by the Kazi himself, it is his duty to register it at once.

In short, registration does not confer validity to the marriage. Rather, it makes the marriage documented and capable of being proved by acceptable evidence. Contrarily, lack of registration may cast doubt on the solemnisation of the marriage but does not invalidate the marriage.

I hope this explanation clears your concern and provides reassurance allowing you to move forward with greater confidence and peace of mind.

LAW LETTER

On the right to emergency healthcare

A comparative constitutional analysis shows a growing trend of recognising 'Emergency Healthcare Service' as a fundamental right. In several jurisdictions, constitutions explicitly guarantee the right to emergency medical care, while in other places, broader 'health or life-related' rights are relied upon, providing indirect protection. For instance, article 27(3) of South African Constitution states that no one may be refused emergency medical treatment. Later, in the case Soobramoney v Minister of Health (1998), it was clarified that the constitutional guarantee of emergency healthcare imposes an immediate obligation. However, where the circumstances do not call for emergency, the state is allowed more deference based on its resource constraints, thereby reflecting the principle of progressive realisation. A similar approach has been taken in countries like Kenya, Zimbabwe, Nepal, Egypt etc.

The Supreme Court of Bangladesh, through several cases created room for interpreting emergency healthcare as part of, among others, the right to life. However, in my opinion, the absence of an explicit and distinct constitutional provision arguably weakens enforceability and leaves state accountability largely dependent on judicial interpretation.

On the other hand, in Bangladesh, the Fundamental Principles of State Policy, particularly articles 15 and 18, directs the state to improve public health and medical service. However, the provisions cannot be judicially enforced directly due to article 8(2). The Supreme Court of Bangladesh, through several cases created room for interpreting emergency healthcare as part of, among others, the right to life. However, in my opinion, the absence of an explicit and distinct constitutional provision arguably weakens enforceability and leaves state accountability largely dependent on judicial interpretation.

It is the stark reality that the healthcare system of Bangladesh faces multiple structural and operational challenges, such as overcrowded government hospitals, demands for informal payments, discrimination based on socioeconomic status, etc. Without explicit constitutional status, emergency healthcare remains vulnerable to administrative inefficiency, corruption, discrimination, and denial of care based on socioeconomic status. Contrarily, reliance solely on judicially interpreted rights risks inconsistency, unpredictability, and excessive dependence on judicial discretion.

Overall, the comparative experience reflects that explicit constitutional recognition is best understood as enabling rather than a determinative factor. While such recognition does not guarantee judicial activism, it performs an important normative function by lowering doctrinal barriers to enforcement, clarifying the minimum content of state obligations, and shifting the justificatory burden onto the State. These observations highlight the value of explicitly incorporating emergency healthcare in the constitutional framework, as contemplated in the recent Constitution Reform Proposals for Bangladesh.

The Constitution Reform Commission has recommended expanding the scope of fundamental rights by unifying the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights into a single charter of 'Fundamental Rights and Freedom' that would be enforceable in courts. Within this expanded charter, the commission proposes inclusion of the right to emergency healthcare explicitly, alongside other socioeconomic rights. It also emphasises that rights that require significant resources and time for realisation, such as health, should be implemented progressively based on resource availability, thereby balancing enforceability with practical constraints.

To conclude, the COVID-19 pandemic and the other public health emergencies have consistently exposed our systemic limitations in the emergency healthcare system, particularly the absence of an explicit constitutional guarantee to emergency healthcare services. It is high time we rethink and reform the current constitutional status of emergency healthcare.

Faria Mehjabin Medha
Student of Law
University of Dhaka.

Star
SPORT
DHAKA WEDNESDAY MARCH 18, 2026, CHAITRA 4, 1432 BS

What to WATCH

T SPORTS
AFC Women's Asian Cup
South Korea vs Japan
Live from 3:00 pm
SONY SPORTS 1, 2, 5
Champions League
Barcelona vs Newcastle
Live from 11:45 pm
Bayern vs Atalanta
Live from 2:00 am
(Thursday)
Liverpool vs
Galatasaray
Live from 2:00 am
(Thursday)
Tottenham vs Atletico
Live from 2:00 am
(Thursday)

'Rehabilitation was very painful'

*Right-back **Bishwanath Ghosh**, once a key attacking outlet for the Bangladesh national team, spent nearly one-and-a-half years out after suffering a knee injury during a FIFA friendly against Bhutan on September 3, 2024. The 26-year-old, who has 44 international caps, has now recovered from a lateral meniscus cartilage injury and returned to the preliminary squad for upcoming fixtures against Vietnam and Singapore. In an interview with **The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman,** Bishwanath spoke about his gruelling rehabilitation, the uncertainty surrounding his comeback, and the resolve it took to push for a place in the final 23. Excerpts follow:*

The Daily Star (DS): How does it feel to return to the national team setup after such a long injury layoff?

Bishwanath Ghosh (BG): To be honest, it feels like the first time I was called up. After 17 to 18 months out, everything feels new, and it feels really good to be back. I had been waiting a long time to get back on the field.

DS: Did you ever fear you might not return?

BG: Yes. Being away for so long made me feel, at times, that I might not come back. I had knee surgery in Thailand in mid-December 2024, with support from Bashundhara Kings, and was bedridden for three months, moving only with crutches. Later, I started light exercises at home and then swimming, where someone had to help me in and out of the pool. The rehabilitation was very painful, and I kept counting the days to return. At times, frustration took over, but my wife supported me immensely. Physio Sufian bhai, doctor Tushar bhai, my younger brothers Saikat and Moyeen, and even ball boy Maruf helped me a lot through that phase. Finally, I am grateful for the grace of God.

DS: In your first league appearance this season, what did those four minutes against Abahani in December last year mean to you?

BG: Coach Mario and trainer Khalil told me I was ready and that I would get a chance against Abahani. Before matchday, we usually pray as a team, and then the 23-member squad is announced. I was eagerly waiting for that moment. When the list was delayed, I even called my wife to ask why it had not been released yet. When I finally saw my name, I felt a deep sense of peace -- something I cannot describe in words. I was also nervous before the match, but once I stepped onto the pitch for the warm-up, the support from teammates, coaches, and spectators helped me overcome that nervousness.

DS: How are you approaching this comeback?

BG: My main goal is to become a regular player for my club. If you perform consistently at club level, the national call will come. In football, name doesn't matter -- you have to prove yourself through performance.

DS: What difference have players like Hamza Choudhury and Shamit Shome made?

BG: During my recovery, I watched matches and hoped to return -- it was a difficult feeling. I don't think one or two players can change everything. Our team was good before and is still good now with players like Hamza and Shamit. But earlier, we lacked leadership on the pitch. Since Hamza joined, he has brought that -- controlling the game and helping the team gel.

DS: Are you excited to share the dressing room with Hamza and Shamit?

BG: Not thinking of that right now. My focus is on earning a place in the final 23. The competition is very tough, and I know I have to perform.

From NSC to ICC: BCB's puzzling stand

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

The Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) statement issued on Monday night, in response to the National Sports Council's (NSC) March 11 gazette regarding an investigation into the October 2025 BCB elections, has left many within the cricketing fraternity confused.

There are, in fact, plenty of reasons behind this confusion.

According to the BCB statement, the current board held "informal" talks with the International Cricket Council (ICC) leadership regarding the matter, citing "external interference in the affairs of an elected cricket board" – a remark that could be interpreted as a thinly veiled threat towards the NSC.

What adds to the surprise is that two highly placed BCB directors told this newspaper yesterday that they had no knowledge of how the statement came about. BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury preferred not to comment on this issue.

This has raised questions over whether BCB president Aminul Islam Bulbul made the decision to issue it single-handedly.

Ironically, the current BCB administration had not previously voiced concerns regarding government intervention.

"It is a kind of threat, saying they communicated with the ICC regarding interference, so that they will be saved. It is quite ironic for the current board to complain to the ICC [about government interference]," former BCB general secretary and ex-Asian Cricket Council (ACC) CEO Syed Ashraful Huq told The Daily Star yesterday.

Another aspect that appears inconsistent is that the last board elections, in fact, took place under the NSC, which is now investigating them. Both Bulbul and Faruque Ahmed entered the board by availing the NSC-held quotas for directorship.

Following the interim government's

takeover, instances of government interference were widely reported, particularly through the NSC quota, which conflicts with the principles of a self-governed organisation and reinforces the notion of state involvement.

BCB's current stance now threatens to escalate into a legal battle between the board and the NSC. Under the 'Jatiyo Krira Parishad Ain, 2018', the NSC is authorised to form investigation committees, and sports federations are obliged to respond to government inquiries. If a board fails to function properly or acts against the interests of the federation, the NSC can dissolve the executive committee and, if necessary, appoint an ad-hoc committee.

"If BCB can't run cricket well, NSC has the right to dissolve it – it's there in the laws. The cricket leagues weren't run well, among other issues, and if there were violations of election laws, they can dissolve it. NSC can do that without question because BCB is a part of NSC. ICC also cannot raise objections since this is outlined in the BCB constitution, which the ICC follows. Yes, the ICC has guidelines regarding good governance through democratic elections, but those are guidelines, not mandatory requirements," Ashraful said, adding that all assets – including grounds – belong to the NSC. He warned that in the event of a conflict, if the government restricts the board's access to these assets, the board would be rendered ineffective.

Ashraful also recalled that the ICC did not intervene when the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) changed its president multiple times.

"We are under the ICC, but first we are under the NSC, which is the parent body. The ICC does not interfere in domestic governance as long as the BCB constitution is followed. It did not intervene when Pakistan changed its board president multiple times within a few months," he added.

"ICC is not our master; they are facilitators and friends. They will follow the constitution," he further stated.

Meanwhile, State Minister for Youth and Sports, Aminul Haque, said yesterday that the NSC would review the investigation report before speaking to the ICC and considering the next steps.

"I believe we should first review the investigation report. After that, I will speak with the ICC and then inform you of our next steps. We will take all our decisions after consulting with the ICC," Aminul said.

Ultimately, cricket in the country has always operated within a spectrum of political influence, which makes the current stance of Bulbul's BCB appear even more unusual.

Kerr puts Matildas in final

Chelsea striker Sam Kerr celebrates with her teammates after sending Australia into the final of the Women's Asian Cup final with a tense 2-1 victory over defending champions China in Perth yesterday. Kerr fired home from a tight angle in the 58th minute, her fourth goal of the tournament proving the difference in a gruelling semi-final in front of 35,170 fans. Arsenal forward Caitlin Foord had given the hosts a 17th minute lead before Zhang Linyan converted from the spot nine minutes later. The Matildas will face title favourites Japan or South Korea in Saturday's final in Sydney. PHOTO: FACEBOOK

85 DAYS TO GO

85 names, one legacy

So far, Brazil have had the highest number of different goalscorers in World Cup history -- a total of 85 players. At the top of that scorers' list is Ronaldo with 15 goals. Pele sits second with 12 goals, while Jairzinho and Vava jointly occupy third place with nine goals each. Altogether, Brazil, the record five-time winners of the competition, have scored 237 goals in 114 World Cup matches.

** Visit The Daily Star's website to also read: 'When underdogs rewrite history'

Two players from Iran's women's football squad who sought asylum in Australia have begun new lives in the country and were recently pictured training with a local A-League club. Midfielder Fatemeh Pasandideh and defender Atefeh Ramezanizadeh were among seven members of Iran's delegation granted humanitarian visas after fears they could face persecution if they returned home following their AFC Women's Asian Cup campaign in Australia. Concerns over their safety arose after several players did not sing the national anthem before their opening match on the Gold Coast in Queensland. Iranian state media branded them 'wartime traitors' as the tournament coincided with air strikes on Iran by the United States and Israel. Five members of the group later withdrew their asylum requests and made their way home via Malaysia, although their destination was unclear. Queensland-based Brisbane Roar FC said Pasandideh and Ramezanizadeh joined a women's team training session on Monday, with photos showing them meeting players and taking part in shooting drills. Meanwhile, Iran's football federation president Mehdi Taj said they were in discussions with FIFA about moving their World Cup matches to Mexico from the United States due to concerns about the safety of their players after the US launched joint air strikes at the country along with Israel. Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum, in response, said yesterday that her country would have no problem hosting Iran's matches if FIFA agrees.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Newcastle up against it in daunting Camp Nou clash

STAR SPORTS DESK

Newcastle will be up against it when they travel to the Camp Nou in the second-leg of their round of 16 Champions League clash against Barcelona on Wednesday evening.

The tie is delicately poised after a 1-1 draw in last week's first leg at St James' Park. Newcastle winger Harvey Barnes appeared to have secured victory for the hosts with an 86th-minute strike before Barcelona teenager Lamine Yamal converted a dramatic penalty in the 96th minute to level the contest.

The late equaliser could prove significant. Barcelona have progressed from each of their last 10 Champions League knockout ties after drawing the first leg away from home, with their last such elimination coming against Juventus in the 2002-03 quarterfinals.

The Catalan giants will also take confidence from their attacking consistency. They have failed to score in just one of their last 29 Champions League matches – a 3-0 defeat away to Chelsea F.C. earlier this season. However, defensive frailties remain a concern, with Barcelona having gone 12 consecutive matches in the competition without a clean sheet.

Barcelona's record against English oppositions at home is formidable. They have lost only two of their 37 UEFA competition matches at home to English clubs (W22 D13) and are unbeaten in their last 14 such games since a 2-1 defeat to Liverpool in 2006-07.

The hosts head into the clash in high spirits after a 5-2 win over Sevilla in La Liga on Sunday, a result that restored their four-point lead at the top of the table.

Newcastle, meanwhile, bounced back from their first-leg frustration with a 1-0 Premier League victory away to Chelsea, courtesy of a first-half strike from Anthony Gordon – their fourth win in five away games across all competitions.

Eddie Howe's side have also impressed in Europe, going unbeaten in their last six Champions League matches (W3 D3). In this season's competition they have lost just two of 11 games (W6 D3), including a 2-1 defeat at home to Barcelona on matchday one.

Victory in Spain would send Newcastle into uncharted territory as the Magpies have never progressed beyond the Champions League round of 16.

Elsewhere, Liverpool will attempt to overturn a 1-0 first-leg deficit against Galatasaray at Anfield, while Atalanta face a daunting task away to Bayern Munich after a 6-1 defeat in the first leg.

Meanwhile, Atletico Madrid have one foot in the quarters after thrashing Tottenham Hotspur 5–2 in the Spanish capital, with the second leg in London expected to be little more than a formality for Atletico.

PM to launch Farmers' Card on Pahela Baishakh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman will inaugurate the Farmers' Card programme in Tangail Sadar upazila on Pahela Baishakh, the first day of the Bangla New Year, on April 14.

In the first phase, financial assistance will be disbursed to 21,500 farmers in 11 upazilas through mobile financial service (MFS).

The decision was made

SEE PAGE 8 COL 1

Volunteers clear the debris at the site of a drug rehabilitation hospital destroyed in what the Taliban said was a Pakistani air strike in Kabul, Afghanistan yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Fuel shortage forces buses to limit Eid trips

ASIFUR RAHMAN *and* SHAMIMA RITA

Fuel supply disruptions have begun to affect inter-district bus services ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr, with operators struggling to maintain schedules as passenger pressure builds.

At Mohakhali bus terminal, several operators said delays in securing fuel forced them to cancel or reschedule trips.

Desh Travels and Fahmita Express, which run on North Bengal routes, reported operating fewer buses due to limited diesel.

"We are unsure if we will get the necessary fuel," said Md Ramzan of Desh Travels.

Fahmita Express managed to operate only two of its seven buses yesterday and was preparing to put only two more in operation, citing rationed supplies.

"We could not operate buses on Monday. There are passengers, but ticket sales have declined during this peak Eid season," Amit Bhowmik, of Fahmita Express, noting that while each trip requires around 120 litres of diesel, they are getting 90 litres.

"We are being asked to get fuel from the filling stations on the side of the highways. But most of them are also short on fuel," Amit added.

Operators of United Express on the Dhaka–Mymensingh route also reported delays, saying buses are struggling to maintain schedules due to the time required to secure fuel. Passengers, meanwhile, are facing delays.

SEE PAGE 8 COL 1

Half of youths missed out on jobs in past decade

Says WB VP on Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nearly half of working-age youths in Bangladesh did not find jobs over the past decade, with young women facing particularly steep barriers, said Johannes Zutt, the World Bank's vice-president for South Asia.

In the past decade, 14 million youth entered Bangladesh's labor market, competing for only 8.7 million jobs, he said in a press release issued at the end of his three-day visit to Bangladesh.

During the trip, he met with senior government leaders, officials' and civil society representatives.

"In this context, we are stepping up our focus on supporting the government priority of creating jobs, notably for youth and women."

The government places a high priority on large-scale job creation, alongside skills and investment, and the World Bank Group shares this commitment, he said.

SEE PAGE 8 COL 3

Over 400 killed in Pakistan air strike

Says Afghan Taliban; Islamabad rejects claim as false, misleading; China urges restraint

- Pakistan claims military strikes on terrorist support infrastructure
- Taliban reports 250 injured in the air strike
- UN urges de-escalation, protection of civilians

REUTERS, *Kabul*

More than 400 people were killed and 250 injured in an air strike by Pakistan on a drug users rehabilitation hospital in the Afghanistan capital Kabul, a spokesman of the Afghan Taliban government said yesterday.

Pakistan rejected the claim as false and misleading and said it "precisely targeted military installations and terrorist support infrastructure" on Monday night.

Hamdullah Fitrat, the deputy spokesman for the Taliban, said the air strike took place at 9:00 pm (1630 GMT) on Monday and targeted the Omid 2,000-bed drug rehabilitation hospital.

"Large parts of the hospital have been destroyed, and there are fears of heavy casualties," he said in a post on X. "Sadly, the number of those killed has so far reached 400, with up to 250 others injured."

Rescue teams were at the scene working to control the fire and recover the victims, he added.

Reuters could not verify the casualty numbers and the Pakistani military could not be reached for comment outside business hours.

Richard Bennett, the UN Special Rapporteur for human rights in Afghanistan, said he was "dismayed" by fresh reports of Pakistani air strikes and resulting civilian deaths.

"My condolences. I urge parties to de-escalate, exercise maximum restraint and respect international law, including the protection of civilians and civilian objects such as hospitals," he said in a post on X.

China hopes Afghanistan and Pakistan will stay calm and

SEE PAGE 8 COL 4

Condition of Kushtia rape victim critical

3 arrested, case filed

STAR REPORT

The condition of a 10-year-girl, who was allegedly raped in a madrasa in Kushtia, is critical, said a doctor at the Rajshahi Medical College Hospital yesterday.

She was initially admitted to the One-stop Crisis Centre (OCC) of RMCH on Monday morning after being rescued.

"She is now in critical condition. As her physical condition is deteriorating, we have shifted her to ICU today [Tuesday] afternoon," said the hospital's spokesperson Dr Sanker K Biswas last night.

"We have found several injury marks in her body and evidence of sexual abuse. Details will be known later after further investigation," he added.

Meanwhile, police arrested three persons in connection with the incident after the victim's mother filed a case on Monday, said Delwar Hossain, additional superintendent of police in Kushtia.

The arrestees are: Md Saidul Rahman, 50, head-teacher of Jamilatunnssa Asarsha Mohila Hafijiya

SEE PAGE 8 COL 4

Govt to import 2 lakh tonnes of urea

Disruption in Hormuz fuels supply fears ahead of Aman season

SUKANTA HALDER

The government is seeking to import 200,000 tonnes of granular urea through private suppliers to secure supply and build stocks, amid uncertainty over shipments from the Gulf region due to the Middle East war, according to two notifications issued yesterday.

The development comes two weeks after authorities shut five of Bangladesh's six urea fertiliser factories amid concerns over gas supply disruptions linked to the US-Israel war on Iran. Tehran has effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly one-fifth of global oil and about one-third of fertiliser trade passes.

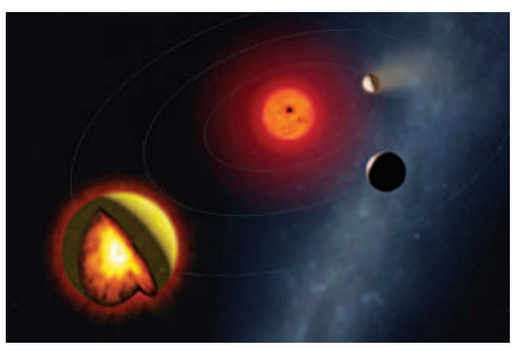
Bangladesh requires over 26 lakh tonnes of urea annually and depends on Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar for more than two-thirds of its supply. These countries ship fertiliser, gas, and oil through the Strait of Hormuz.

At the time the factories were shut, the government had a stock of over 468,000 tonnes of urea.

Last week, state agency Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) finalised a plan to import 500,000 tonnes of urea fertiliser amid uncertainty, so that it can build stocks and ensure availability of the crop nutrient ahead of the upcoming season of the

SEE PAGE 8 COL 4

Molten alien planet with sulfur atmosphere reveals hellscape



REUTERS, *Washington*

Astronomers have spotted a planet orbiting a star in our neighbourhood of the Milky Way galaxy that presents a unique hellscape – covered with a perpetual ocean of magma and enveloped by a noxious and fiercely hot sulfur-rich atmosphere.

The molten planet's diameter is more than 60 percent greater than Earth, though its density is only about 40 percent that of our planet. It orbits a star smaller and dimmer than the sun located about 34 light-years from Earth in the constellation Volans. A light-year is the distance light travels in a year, 5.9 trillion miles (9.5 trillion km).

SEE PAGE 8 COL 6

Homebound passengers crowd Sadarghat Launch Terminal in Dhaka yesterday as they rush to board launches for their destinations ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr. With Eid less than a week away, thousands are leaving the capital each day to celebrate the festival with their loved ones back home. PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

Surge in measles overwhelms hospital

P3

HASANAH ISLAMI BANKING البنكية الاسلامي
Prime Bank

PRAYER TIMING
MARCH 18

	Fajr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN	4-52	12-45	4-30	6-10	7-45
JAMAAT	5-02	1-15	4-45	6-20	8-15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

SEHRI, IFTAR TIMING

RAMADAN	MAR	SEHRI	IFTAR
28	18		6:10
29	19	4:48	6:11
30	20	4:47	6:11