We will continue to thwart and hunt them all down.

Israel Katz, Israeli defence minister, on authorising the killing of any high-ranking Iranian official

YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW

The Daily Star

DHAKA THURSDAY MARCH 19, 2026

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Eid journey largely smooth

Derailment in Bogura, tailbacks in Gazipur, launch accident in Sadarghat mar otherwise hassle-free travel

SHAMIMA RITA *and* **MD ABBAS**

Holidaymakers heading home for Eid-ul-Fitr have, for the most part, travelled on smoother roads and steady waterways -- though rail disruptions cast a shadow over journeys to the north.

Passengers travelling by train to northern districts faced difficulties after eight coaches of the Nilsagar Express from Dhaka derailed Santahar Railway Station in Bogura around 2:00pm yesterday, leaving at least 66 people injured.

Following the accident, train communication between Dhaka and the northern districts remained suspended until the filing of this report at 10:00pm, stranding passengers and disrupting schedules.

Bangladesh Railway Director General Afzal Hossain said train movement from Dhaka to at least five northern districts was affected by the derailment.

He added that passengers were informed at stations and that disruptions could continue into the following day.

Sazedur Rahman Saju, Station master of Bogura Railway Station, told The Daily Star that it would take at least 8–10 hours to clear the line after two rescue teams from Pakshi and Parbatipur arrive.

Primarily, the accident is believed to have occurred due to a misunderstanding of signals, said Ahmed Hossain Masum, chief engineer of Bangladesh Railway, Rajshahi, and member of a probe committee formed over the accident.

On the roads, the picture was mixed.

A nearly 40-kilometre tailback formed between Gazipur's Chourasta and Chandra on the Dhaka-Tangail highway, causing severe congestion for buses from northern districts.

Another 10–12km jam developed in the Chandra Trimor area of Kaliakoir, where vehicles crawled through the morning.

Elsewhere, traffic remained relatively manageable.

Parts of the Dhaka-Chattogram highway saw normal movement, although vehicles entering and leaving Dhaka faced delays of up to an hour, compared to the usual 10–15 minutes.

From Wednesday morning until 3:00pm, the Narayanganj and Cumilla stretches remained largely smooth.

The Dhaka-Mymensingh highway also experienced heavy pressure, but no major gridlock.

Despite pockets of congestion, transport operators said long-distance buses departed terminals on time this year, marking an improvement over previous Eids.

Better road conditions also helped ease travel, though some passengers alleged that operators charged extra fares amid the surge.

At Gabtoli bus terminal, most services left on schedule, with only a few delayed by about 30 minutes in the morning.

Transport workers said pressure has been rising steadily with the growing passenger volume.

The rush is expected to intensify as factories close.

After 1:00pm, when most factories in Gazipur's industrial belt shut for the holidays, large numbers of workers began heading home simultaneously, sharply increasing pressure on highways.

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WHERE THE HEART IS … Sitting on a mini truck with bags tied tight, a man smiles and waves, his daughter in his arms, as they head home to Shariatpur to celebrate Eid with loved ones. The photo was taken near Postogola Bridge in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: **MEHEDI HASAN**

War 'will hit us all'

Warns Iran's FM as Tehran vows strikes on Gulf oil facilities after its biggest gas field hit; Israel 'kills' Iran intel chief, tells military to hunt down officials; blasts rock Gulf states; at least 2 killed in Israel

Israel conducts wave of strikes on Beirut; at least 12 killed | **Trump suggests US could leave allies alone to secure Hormuz** | **US hits missile sites near strait with 'bunker buster' bombs** | **Iran says nuclear doctrine unlikely to change** | **Saudi Arabia to host Arab, Islamic ministers to discuss war**

AGENCIES

The repercussions of the Middle East war will be felt globally, Tehran's top diplomat warned yesterday, as Iran's huge Pars gas field was hit in the first reported strikes on its energy infrastructure during the US-Israeli war.

The attack prompted Tehran to warn its neighbours to evacuate energy installations. Experts say the escalation could further spook the already shaken global energy market.

Pars is the Iranian sector of the world's largest natural gas deposit, which Iran shares with Qatar across the Gulf. Iran's Fars news agency reported that gas tanks and parts of a refinery had been hit, workers had been evacuated to a safe location, and emergency crews were trying to put out a fire.

The attack was widely reported in Israeli media to have been carried out by Israel with the consent of the United States. The Israeli military did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Qatar, a close US ally which hosts the largest US airbase in the region, called it an Israeli attack without mentioning any US role. The Qatari foreign ministry spokesperson called it a "dangerous and irresponsible" escalation that put global energy security at risk.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards swiftly told Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar to evacuate several energy facilities.

The warning was directed at Saudi Arabia's Samref Refinery and Jubail Petrochemical Complex, the United Arab Emirates' Al Hosn Gas Field, and Qatar's Mesaieed Petrochemical Complex, Mesaieed Holding Company and Ras Laffan Refinery.

The US and Israel had previously held back from targeting Iran's energy production facilities in the

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Rescuers carry a victim on a stretcher after airstrikes hit an area of Tehran yesterday.

PHOTO: **AFP**

Clarification from Biman

Biman Bangladesh Airlines has issued a clarification to a report published in The Daily Star on March 17 under the headline "Shady pilot licences expose Biman to risk".

The report stated that several pilots were operating flights with questionable licensing documentation and that a lack of rigorous verification was placing the national carrier and its passengers at risk.

The Biman clarification, sent on March 17, read, "The said report appears to be based on unverified documents, an anonymous email, and speculative information, which do not accurately reflect the current status of the matter."

The statement added that the airlines had issued an official press release on March 5, 2026, clearly stating that pilot licensing, verification, and regulatory compliance fall under the

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BNP to revamp central, grassroots bodies after Eid

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

The BNP is planning to overhaul its central and grassroots committees, along with affiliated and associate bodies, to address gaps that exist in the current organisational structure.

The party has largely been operating expired committees of affiliated and associate bodies that have been functioning on a limited scale.

Besides, after the February 12 election, several key leaders have taken on government roles, and dozens of others have been removed, creating a vacuum in the organisational structure, weakening coordination between central and grassroots units, and slowing decision implementation.

Party insiders say a major restructuring is long overdue, with plans to bring in fresh faces to policymaking so the BNP can strengthen its organisation and deliver on election promises.

At a recent meeting, advisers urged BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman to expedite the restructuring process to begin revitalising the organisation.

Four BNP Standing Committee members told this correspondent that the reorganisation is likely to begin after Eid.

The BNP last held its national council

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PHOTO: **AFP**

A fireball rises from the site of an Israeli airstrike on a building in Beirut's Bashoura neighbourhood early yesterday.

IMF STAFF REPORT

Educated youth return to farms as job market falters

REJAUL KARIM BYRON *and* **ZYMA ISLAM**

Unemployed youth are finding an unlikely ally in the soil -- turning, once more, to agriculture for survival.

Where higher education is often seen as an exit from the farm, Bangladesh tells a different story. As educational attainment rises, the expected shift away from agriculture has instead reversed.

Unable to secure a foothold in a sluggish industrial sector, many young people are being drawn back to their rural roots.

This paradox is laid bare in a staff report prepared by the Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund following its 2025 consultation for Bangladesh, concluded on January 26, 2026.

On paper, the country appears to follow a familiar path of industrialisation. Manufacturing's share of the economy has grown by nearly 5 percentage points over the past decade. Yet this growth has been largely "jobless".

Employment in manufacturing and services has actually declined -- by 2.2 and 2.6 percentage points respectively -- creating a structural contradiction: the economy is industrialising, but the labour force is de-industrialising.

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Clockwise from left: **Homebound passengers jostle to board an overcrowded train at Joydebpur Junction in Gazipur; crowds wait for buses at a counter in Dholairpar; and the Nilsagar Express derails near Santahar station in Bogura, leaving at least 66 injured and disrupting rail communication with eight districts in the Rangpur region. The photos were taken yesterday.**

PHOTO: **PALASH KHAN, FIROZ AHMED, COLLECTED**

Bring VOA employees back to work

US judge orders Trump admin

AFP, *Washington*

A US federal judge on Tuesday ordered the Trump administration to bring more than 1,000 Voice of America employees back to work and resume broadcasts by the government-funded media outlet.

District Judge Royce Lamberth's order comes 10 days after he ruled that President Donald Trump's pick to oversee mass layoffs at VOA was unlawfully appointed, rendering the job cuts invalid.

Kari Lake, a former TV anchor, slashed jobs and funding after she was appointed by Trump to head the US Agency for Global Media (USAGM), which runs VOA, Radio Free Europe, Radio Free Asia and other stations.

Lamberth, an appointee of Republican president Ronald Reagan, ordered the reinstatement by March 23 of 1,042 VOA employees who have been on paid administrative leave for the past year.

The judge also ordered USAGM to come up with a plan by next week to resume international broadcasts.

VOA was created in the wake of World War II as a key instrument of American soft power worldwide.

Trump frequently attacks media outlets and denounced the editorial firewall at VOA that prevents the government from intervening in its coverage.

War 'will hit us all'

FROM PAGE 1

Gulf, a move that could invite retaliation against other producers and make it harder for global markets to recover from what has already been the biggest ever interruption to energy supplies.

But nearly three weeks into the war, there has been no sign of de-escalation.

Israel yesterday said it had killed Iran's intelligence minister in the second strike on a top leadership figure in two days, and had authorised the military to target any senior Iranian official it can locate.

Israel also hit central Beirut, destroying apartment buildings in some of the most intense airstrikes on the Lebanese capital for decades.

"No one in Iran has immunity, and everyone is in the crosshairs," said Defence Minister Israel Katz, who announced that Israel had killed Iran's Intelligence Minister Esmail Khatib a day after killing security chief Ali Larijani.

"The Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and I have authorised the Israel Defense Forces to target any senior Iranian official for whom an intelligence and operational opportunity arises, without the need for additional approval."

It appeared to be the first time Israel has publicly stated that it would let the military target enemy officials without seeking special permission from political leaders for missions. Katz did not say when the order had been given.

In Tehran, thousands of people appeared in the streets for a funeral for Larijani and other slain figures. The crowd waved Iranian flags and carried portraits of the dead as a eulogist sang: "Martyrs are leading the way, they've become more alive, burning with love."

Iran retaliated for the killing of Larijani by firing missiles at Israel, which Israeli authorities said killed two people near Tel Aviv. Tehran said it fired overnight on Tel Aviv, Haifa and Beersheba in Israel, and at US bases in Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said the US and Israel failed to understand that the Islamic Republic was a robust political system that did not depend on any single individual.

"Wave of global repercussions has only begun and will hit all, regardless of wealth, faith, or race," Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi posted on X, urging the international community to abandon the US-Israel nexus.

He also told Al Jazeera that Iran's stance against the development of nuclear weapons will not significantly change, cautioning that the new supreme leader is yet to publicly express his view on the matter.

Former Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was killed early in the US-Israeli war against Iran, opposed the development of weapons of mass destruction in a fatwa, or religious edict, issued in the early 2000s.

The unprecedented disruption to global energy supplies has raised the political stakes for US President Donald Trump. Diesel prices in the US rose above $5 a gallon for the first time since the 2022 inflation surge that eroded support for his predecessor Joe Biden.

Trump yesterday angrily suggested that he could leave US allies to secure the Hormuz strait on their own since they have refused to fight alongside US forces against Iran in the crucial shipping lane.

Trump has responded to the Hormuz crisis with a series of contradictory statements, saying both that allies must help the US and then, on Tuesday, saying "we don't need any help."

His latest statement on Truth Social suggested the US could abandon the situation altogether, leaving other countries to deal with the aftermath.

On Tuesday, the US military said it had hit Iranian missile sites near the Strait with some of the most powerful bombs in the US arsenal.

"US forces successfully employed multiple 5,000-pound deep penetrator munitions on hardened Iranian missile sites along Iran's coastline near the Strait of Hormuz," Central Command said in a statement on X.

Israel has stepped up strikes on Lebanon and a ground assault in the south in pursuit of the Iran-backed Hezbollah group, which has fired across the border in solidarity with Tehran.

In central Beirut's Bachoura district, Israel warned residents early yesterday to leave a building it said was used by Hezbollah, which it then completely flattened. Eyewitness video, verified by Reuters, showed it crumbling into dust as it was struck at dawn.

Abu Khalil, who lives in the area, said he had helped people flee nearby homes after the Israeli warning. "It's just an operation to hurt, to terrify people, to terrify children," he told Reuters, insisting there were no military targets nearby.

No similar warnings were given for strikes that hit apartment buildings in two other central districts, killing at least 10 people, according to Lebanese authorities. Smoke poured from the balcony of one building as residents swept debris from the street.

Meanwhile, missiles and drones yesterday continued to target the Gulf states.

Saudi Arabia said it had intercepted two drones targeting the diplomatic quarter of its capital, Riyadh.

Qatar's defence ministry said it intercepted a missile attack as blasts were heard in Doha.

Meanwhile, a drone attack targeted the US embassy in Baghdad early yesterday, causing explosions. At least four explosions were heard in the city of Erbil in the autonomous Kurdistan region.

Amid the raging war, Saudi Arabia said it will host a consultative meeting of foreign ministers from several Arab and Islamic countries in Riyadh on Wednesday to discuss ways to support regional security and stability, given the Iran war, the kingdom's foreign ministry said.

A Turkish diplomatic source said separately that representatives from Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Pakistan, Qatar, Syria, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates would attend the meeting.

US-based Iran human rights group HRANA said on Monday that an estimated 3,000-plus people had been killed in Iran since the US-Israeli attacks began on February 28. Authorities in Lebanon say 900 people have been killed there and 800,000 forced to flee their homes.

Iranian attacks have killed people in Iraq and across the Gulf states. Fourteen have been killed in Israel.

Eid journey largely smooth

FROM PAGE 1

According to factory authorities and Industrial Police sources, around 2,000 factories in Gazipur closed, with most workers released after completing shifts by noon.

Saiful Alam, secretary general of the Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association, said bus travel across the country has remained largely smooth so far.

He added that stricter monitoring by volunteers, highway police, and magistrates at key congestion points could further ease traffic.

Waterways, meanwhile, offered a steadier passage despite a tragic accident at Sadarghat Launch Terminal in Dhaka.

One person was killed and another critically injured after a launch rammed into passengers waiting to board at the terminal in the evening, while at least two others went missing. Search efforts were underway to locate the missing individuals, police said.

However, launches from the terminal operated normally since morning, with vessels continuing to ply 43 destinations without disruption.

Ferry services on the Paturia-Dauladia and Shimulia-Kathalbari routes -- key links between Dhaka and the southern districts -- also ran as usual.

Transport operators said the exodus to village homes is likely to peak today, following the closure of garment factories for Eid.

During a visit to Gabtoli, Transport Minister Sheikh Robiul Alam said fares were being maintained, travel conditions remained smooth, and no major complaints or fuel shortages had been reported.

He added that around 124 additional coaches and five pairs of special trains had been introduced to manage the Eid rush.

Although the seven-day public holiday officially began on March 17, many travellers had started leaving Dhaka a day earlier, on March 16 -- setting in motion the annual tide of homebound journeys.

BNP to revamp central, grassroots bodies after Eid

FROM PAGE 1

on March 19, 2016. These councils decide on the various committees, each of which serves a three-year term.

So the party constitution requires a council every three years, but leaders said it could not be held under the Awami League regime in the past 17 years due to political, legal, and organisational constraints.

The high command has yet to decide on holding the next council.

Talking to reporters at his Gulshan residence yesterday, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said, "We hope to hold the council this year, but no date has been fixed yet."

The terms of 10 out of 11 committees of BNP and its affiliated and associate bodies having expired, say party insiders.

Committees of Chhatra Dal, Swechchhasebak Dal, Krishak Dal, Mohila Dal, Muktijoddha Dal, Sramik Dal, Tanti Dal and Jatiotabadi Samajik Sangskritik Sangstha (JASAS) have expired; Jubo Dal's partial committee is yet to be expanded into a full one; and Matsyajibi Dal has had no committee since 2024.

Chhatra Dal's committee expired on March 1 this year. Most leaders of the 257-member committee enrolled in undergraduate studies a decade ago and were expected to graduate years earlier. With the term expired, lobbying for new positions has intensified.

The Jubo Dal central committee remains incomplete one and a half years after a partial committee was announced on July 9, 2024. The committee has yet to be expanded.

The Swechchhasebak Dal committee, formed on September 4, 2022, completed its term last year.

Krishak Dal's committee expired one and a half years ago.

Mohila Dal's committee, formed in 2016 for a two-year term, has functioned for nearly a decade under Afroza Abbas and Sultana Ahmed.

Muktijoddha Dal and Sramik Dal are operating with committees formed more than a decade ago. The last council of Muktijoddha Dal was held in December 2013, while Sramik Dal's committee dates back to April 2014. Neither has held new councils since.

The committee of Tati Dal, formed in 2019, completed its term in 2022. Matsyajibi Dal's committee was dissolved in September 2024, but no new committee has been announced.

JASAS's committee, with a three-year term, has been in place for nearly five years, with limited activity beyond commemorations.

Educated youth return to farms

FROM PAGE 1

At the same time, while agriculture's share of the economy fell by 3.96 percentage points, employment in the sector rose by 4.8 percentage points.

Education levels have increased across all sectors over the past decade. But the labour market has failed to keep pace.

"Rising educational attainment has outpaced job creation within the existing industrial structure, leaving too few high-quality employment opportunities for the expanding pool of highly educated workers, particularly among youth," the report said.

"The contradiction between rising education levels and the reversed pattern of employment structural transformation indicates that building human capital has not translated into movement toward higher-productivity sectors," it added.

The IMF described agriculture as "acting as a buffer for unemployment, absorbing excess labour but at the cost of persistently low productivity".

The disparity in employment outcomes is stark. Those with education below Secondary School Certificate level face an unemployment rate of 3.01 percent, while those with higher degrees face 8.7 percent.

"By 2024, unemployment among highly educated youth stands at a staggering 25 percent -- more than triple the rate of their less-educated peers," the report said.

The overall unemployment rate remains relatively low at 3.69 percent, but deeper fault lines emerge among the youth. Youth unemployment stands at 8.49 percent -- more than double the national average -- with 13.27 percent of urban youth unemployed, compared to 6.63 percent in rural areas.

Women face even harsher realities. Highly educated women experience an unemployment rate of 16.66 percent -- more than double that of their male counterparts.

The IMF noted that unemployment among the highly educated "has persistently stayed high for nearly a decade", calling it an "alarmingly weakening labour market for youth and highly educated workers".

Mustafa K Mujeri, former director general of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, said the implications stretch far beyond employment figures.

"The higher-educated youth look for jobs in the formal sector, whereas the rest go to the informal sector. And private sector investment is barely existent," he said.

"The education system is disconnected from the industry. The degrees do not serve the needs of the job market. The RMG sector still has a scarcity of skilled labour, yet so many youth are unemployed," he added, noting that the standard of education has declined over the years.

He warned that low-skilled jobs in manufacturing are being replaced by automation, meaning employment in the sector will continue to shrink unless education is aligned with industry needs.

Speaking about agriculture's evolving role, Mustafa said, "Over the years, agriculture has gone through a feminisation, with uneducated women taking the place of educated men exiting the sector."

Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, pointed to another constraint: a lack of diversification.

"The growth in the formal sector is low job-creating growth, and if expansion does not take place at a faster pace, then the absorption [by the agriculture sector] too will not be adequate," he said.

Because industries are not diversifying fast enough, a swelling labour force is competing for a limited pool of jobs, he added.

"This discontent was also a driver of the July uprising," he said.

Mustafizur cautioned that overseas employment will not expand sufficiently to absorb the growing number of unemployed youth. The focus, he said, must shift inward.

"The focus should be on the domestic market, and so the private sector needs to be incentivised."

The IMF report observed that overeducation and education-occupation mismatches are particularly pronounced in agriculture and manufacturing, with the garment industry and youth workers most affected while gender disparities in unemployment remain significant.

It said advancing structural reforms and labour market policies will be critical to enhancing resilience, fully harnessing Bangladesh's demographic dividend, and unlocking higher growth potential.

"Key priorities include upgrading the industrial structure, channeling investment toward high productivity sectors, and promoting diversification to expand high quality employment," the report said.

At the same time, building stronger linkages between education institutions and industry is essential. Improved skill training,co-designed apprenticeship programmes and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education can better align workforce abilities with evolving labour market needs.

Finally, the IMF report said, the role of foreign direct investment (FDI) cannot be overstated. Currently Bangladesh's FDI inflows remain very low compared to other peer developing economies, limiting opportunities for technology transfer, industrial diversification and job creation.

"Increasing FDI would bring new high-value markets into the economy and serve as a significant source of employment for youth, particularly in skill-intensive sectors."

Clarification

FROM PAGE 1

sole statutory jurisdiction of the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB).

Biman further said it has already communicated with CAAB for the necessary verification and that the matter remains under review by the competent authority.

However, it claimed, despite the aforementioned press release, the report published in The Daily Star presents the matter in a manner that may create unnecessary confusion among the public and could potentially harm the reputation of the country's aviation sector.

China blasts 'colonial' Australia, New Zealand over rights concerns

AFP, *Sydney*

China yesterday condemned Australia and New Zealand for "colonial-style arrogance" and poor treatment of Indigenous people after a joint statement by the two nations raised concerns over Beijing's rights record.

In comments sent to AFP, a spokesperson for Beijing's embassy in New Zealand said the comments by Australia and New Zealand's defence and foreign ministers were "marked by bias, misinformation, and inexplicable colonial-style arrogance".

The spokesperson accused the two countries of overlooking the "root cause" of the current war in the Middle East, triggered by joint US-Israeli strikes on Iran on February 28.

And they accused New Zealand and Australia of staying silent on their "own poor records concerning human rights and ethnic minority issues".

Ukrainian drone attack kills one in Russian region

AFP, *Moscow*

A Ukrainian drone attack in Russia's southern Krasnodar region killed one person, its governor said yesterday.

"Ukrainian Armed Forces drones struck apartment buildings in the regional capital tonight," Krasnodar's Governor Veniamin Kondratyev posted on Telegram, adding one person had been killed.

"A total of three buildings were damaged. A fire broke out in an apartment in one of them, but it was quickly extinguished," he added.

Kyiv regularly carries out strikes within Russia in response to Russian attacks - which have targeted Ukrainian territory daily since Moscow's full-scale offensive began in February 2022.

Kyiv says it primarily targets military and energy infrastructure.

Early in March, a Ukrainian missile strike in the Russian border region of Bryansk killed seven and wounded dozens, according to regional authorities.

The United States is pushing Kyiv and Moscow to agree to an elusive peace deal, but a third round of three-party talks has been derailed by the war in the Middle East.

Tarique to exchange greetings on Eid day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman will exchange Eid greetings with people from all walks of life, including diplomats and academics, on the day of Eid-ul-Fitr.

The programme will be held at the state guest house Jamuna at 10:00am, said Prime Minister's Additional Press Secretary Atikur Rahman Rumon.

According to him, the prime minister will begin the day by offering Eid prayers at the National Eidgah before proceeding to Jamuna, where he will first exchange greetings with diplomats.

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A group of teenagers sets up a makeshift roadside stall in the capital's Mirpur-13 area, drawing and selling Eid cards to younger children. Considered a nostalgic tradition in the digital age, exchanging Eid greeting cards with heartfelt or playful messages appears to be making a pleasant comeback this year. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

Dhaka all set for Eid congregations

DNCC, DSCC make arrangements to handle large gatherings amid weather concerns

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Dhaka South and North city corporations have completed preparations for the main Eid-ul-Fitr congregations, with a focus on ensuring safety, crowd management, and a comfortable environment for worshippers.

The main congregation under DSCC will be held at the National Eidgah ground adjacent to the Supreme Court premises at 8:30am.

DSCC Administrator Md Abdus Salam, after inspecting the venue, said all arrangements have been taken to ensure a smooth and peaceful congregation.

The prime minister, chief justice, cabinet members, diplomats, and other senior officials are expected to attend the congregation at the Eidgah, he added.

The Eidgah, spread over about 25,400 square metres, can accommodate around 35,000 devotees at a time. A large covered structure has been set up with adequate fans, lighting, and air-cooling facilities. Separate prayer spaces and entry routes have been arranged for women.

Authorities have also taken contingency measures in view of possible rain, including waterproof coverings and rapid drainage systems. In case of adverse weather, the main congregation will be shifted to Baitul Mukarram National Mosque at 9:00am.

Facilities have been arranged for around 140 people to perform ablution simultaneously. Safe drinking water,

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Bangladesh committed to gender equality

Says foreign minister at CSW70

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister Dr Khalilur Rahman has reaffirmed Bangladesh's strong commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women.

He was delivering the national statement at the 70th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70) held at the UN headquarters in New York on March 17.

Reiterating Bangladesh's full commitment to advancing the goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the foreign minister emphasised that access to justice for women and girls remains a central priority for Bangladesh.

He also highlighted the vital contributions of Bangladeshi women in UN peacekeeping.

Khalilur further noted that climate change, economic uncertainty, conflicts, and the digital divide continue to create

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

Eid exodus, rain raise dengue concerns

HELEMUL ALAM

With millions of residents leaving Dhaka ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr, prompted by a seven-day holiday, experts have warned of a possible spike in dengue cases if preventive measures are not taken in time.

Meanwhile, the city has already seen rainfall, with more expected during the holiday.

Entomologists fear empty homes and unattended water sources could become breeding grounds for Aedes mosquitoes.

According to the Bangladesh Meteorological Department, rain and thundershowers with gusty winds and lightning are likely in parts of Rangpur, Rajshahi, Mymensingh, Dhaka, Khulna, Barishal, Chattogram and Sylhet divisions, with isolated hail in some areas. The weather pattern may continue until March 22.

Experts say Aedes mosquito eggs can survive for long periods, and with the dengue virus still present, rainfall can create new breeding sites. If necessary preventive measures are not taken -- especially during the Eid vacation -- the risk of Aedes mosquito proliferation increases, they warned.

Prof Kabirul Bashar, an entomologist at Jahangirnagar University, urged residents to take preventive steps before leaving home. "Any place where water can accumulate must be emptied. No container should be left where rainwater can collect, as it can become a breeding site for Aedes mosquitoes," he said.

He emphasised that drains, toilets, and other water-holding areas in and around homes should be properly covered. Containers like plant pots or flower tubs that can retain water must also be managed carefully.

Products such as insect growth regulators (IGR) like Novaluron, and microbial insecticides such as BTI (Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis) or Pyriproxyfen, can be used to prevent mosquito breeding, he added.

Residents should open doors and windows after returning home to let trapped mosquitoes out and flush toilet commodes, which may contain larvae.

SUGGESTIONS

- Empty all containers that can hold water before leaving
- Clear rooftops and yards of discarded containers
- Use bleaching powder or salt in water-prone areas
- Check basements for standing water from leaks
- Open doors and windows after returning
- Inspect home again for breeding spots after Eid

"Turn buckets and containers upside down to prevent water accumulation. Basements with stagnant water from pipe leaks or car washing are particularly vulnerable. Applying bleaching powder or salt in such areas can curb mosquito breeding," he added.

Prof Bashar also advised checking rooftops and yards for discarded containers before leaving and inspecting homes for potential breeding grounds again after returning. "If mosquitoes breed during the holiday, they will mature by the time residents return, increasing dengue risk, especially if it rains during Eid," he warned.

Entomologist GM Saifur Rahman stressed the need for proactive measures. "Authorities should use environmentally safe BTI insecticides to control Aedes mosquitoes, but their application is often neglected. Even light rainfall can trigger a rise in dengue cases, as the first generation of mosquitoes helps the population grow. Early BTI application can prevent their spread," he said

Contacted, Md Emdadul Hoque, deputy chief health officer of Dhaka North City Corporation, said necessary steps are already in place to control both Aedes and Culex mosquitoes.

"Apart from regular drives, mosquito control drives will continue during the Eid holidays, except on the day of Eid," he told The Daily Star on March 17.

An official of Dhaka South City Corporation said regular waste management and anti-mosquito activities will also continue during the holiday.

One dead, one injured in launch accident at Sadarghat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least one person was killed and another critically injured after a launch rammed into a group of passengers who were waiting to board their launch at the Sadarghat Launch Terminal yesterday evening.

The accident occurred around 5:30pm, according to Assistant Sub Inspector (ASI) Abdullah Al Mamun, duty officer of Sadarghat River Police. The deceased was identified as Md Sohel Fakir, 22.

Meanwhile the injured, Rupa Akter, 20, was rushed to a hospital in critical condition.

However, at least two others currently remain missing, Shah Md Faisal Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station, told The Daily Star.

At present, search efforts are underway to locate the missing individuals, Kotwali Police Station Officer-in-Charge Faisal added.

OC Faisal said the body of the deceased, Md Sohel Fakir, was taken by onlookers to Sir Salimullah Medical College and Mitford Hospital.

The incident occurred during the heavy holiday rush, as thousands were heading to their village homes ahead of Eid to celebrate the festivities.

CANAL RESTORATION

'It has potential to transform farming, ecology'

Researcher Sheikh Rokon says the programme must be part of broader water management system

Less than a month after the BNP government assumed power, Prime Minister Tarique Rahman inaugurated a canal and river excavation programme -- first introduced by his father, late President Ziaur Rahman, in 1976 -- to improve irrigation, support agriculture, and preserve water bodies. How relevant is the programme after five decades? ***Sheikh Rokon****, a river researcher and secretary general of Riverine People, shared his views with* ***Porimol Palma*** *of The Daily Star.*

Sheikh Rokon

The Daily Star: What is your initial reaction to the canal excavation programme?

Sheikh Rokon: It is a good initiative that can improve water conservation, irrigation, fisheries, and agriculture. However, definitions, lists, and basic groundwork must be finalised first. Certain issues also need to be clarified. There are around 31 laws related to rivers, but none clearly define what a "river" is. As a result, different agencies provide different figures regarding the number of rivers in Bangladesh. The same problem exists with canals. In English, a canal is man-made, but in Bangla, "khal" can also refer to natural water bodies. The programme seems to focus more on canals, which may reduce the importance of rivers.

DS: What is the number of canals and rivers in Bangladesh now?

Rokon: The number of rivers has increased from 230 in the Water Development Board's list to 1,415 now. There is similar uncertainty about

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7

Mirza Fakhrul alternate in-charge of PMO in parliament

BSS, *Dhaka*

The government has given alternative responsibility to LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir to carry out parliamentary affairs tasks in the House in the absence of the prime minister.

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman will perform his responsibilities of the Prime Minister's Office in the 13th national parliament, according to a gazette notification issued on Tuesday by the Cabinet Division.

But, in the absence of the prime minister, his responsibilities will be performed by LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, said the notification signed by Cabinet Secretary Nasimul Gani.

The order will come into effect immediately, the notification read.

Act now to protect children from sexual violence

Demands MJF

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) has expressed deep outrage over the continuing incidents of sexual violence against children across the country.

In a press statement issued yesterday, the organisation said the recent rape of a 10-year-old child at a madrasa in Kushtia underscores a serious lack of monitoring and oversight in educational institutions.

MJF said the incident highlights the urgent need for stronger surveillance and accountability measures to ensure children's safety.

In January and February 2026 alone, Ain o Salish Kendra documented 71 incidents of violence against children, including the rape of 38 girls and two boys, as well as 14 reported attempts to rape. In 2025, ASK recorded 1,024 incidents of violence against children.

Most of these incidents have taken place in private domains, public places, and educational institutions, the MJF statement added.

MJF urged the authorities to look into this matter with utmost urgency. All educational institutions must be brought under the High Court ruling requiring the formation of sexual harassment committees until a law on sexual harassment is passed in the parliament, it said.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

With Eid knocking on the door, shoppers crowd clothing stalls at Mohammadpur Krishi Market in Dhaka for last-minute purchases yesterday.

Three killed as microbus catches fire in Bogura

2 killed in Rajshahi road crash

STAR REPORT

Three people were killed and at least nine others injured after a microbus caught fire due to a gas leakage in Bogura's Sherpur upazila yesterday morning.

The accident occurred around 7:30am on the Dhaka–Bogura Highway near Chhonka in Bhabanipur union.

Eyewitnesses said the microbus, travelling from Dhaka, suddenly burst into flames, making it difficult for passengers to evacuate immediately due to the intensity of the fire.

The deceased were identified as Shiuli Begum, 48, Tayeba Khatun, 35, and the driver, Rintu, 47.

Bakhtiar Uddin, warehouse inspector of Sherpur Fire Service, said one person died at the scene.

The others were taken to Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital, where two more victims succumbed to their injuries, said Rokon Uddin, in-charge of Sherpur Highway Police Camp.

"The vehicle has been taken into custody. After completing legal procedures, the bodies will be handed over to their families," he added.

In a separate incident in Rajshahi, a man and his son were killed when their motorcycle was hit by an oncoming sand-laden truck on Dhaka-Rajshahi Highway in Puthia upazila around 12:00pm yesterday.

The victims -- Kawsar Imam, 26, and his son Md Redowan, 6, of Maugachhi village in Charghat upazila -- died on the spot, said Mozammel Haque, officer-in-charge of Paba Highway Police Station.

Police recovered the bodies and will hand them over to the family after legal procedures, he said.

Following the incident, locals set the truck on fire, leading to traffic congestion. Later, police removed the truck and cleared the highway for vehicular movement, the OC added.

PHOTO: STAR

Firefighters extinguish a blaze on a truck set on fire by angry locals after the sand-laden vehicle ran over a motorbike, killing a father and his son on the Dhaka–Rajshahi highway in Puthia upazila of Rajshahi yesterday.

2 patients die during fire evacuation in SBMCH

Probe body formed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Barishal*

Two patients died while being evacuated after a fire broke out inside Barishal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital (SBMCH) on Tuesday night.

The deceased are Kazi Ataur Rahman, 80, of Patuakhali Sadar, and Abul Hossain Hawlader, 65, of Barishal city.

Hospital authorities initially denied any deaths related to the incident, but later acknowledged that two patients had died at that time.

"During the fire, relatives hurriedly brought the critically ill patients down from the fourth floor of the medicine ward without oxygen support. They were stroke patients who had been on oxygen. The deaths occurred during that process," said Brig Gen AKM Mashiul Munir, director of SBMCH.

Following the incident, the hospital formed a six-member investigation committee headed by Dr AJM Emrul Kayes, associate professor of the medicine department.

However, the committee was later reconstituted.

Confirming the change, the SBMCH director said a new committee was formed as Dr Kayes' wife is currently ill.

Associate Professor Dr Fazle Rahman Khan has been appointed as the head of the newly formed committee, which has been asked to submit its report within 48 hours.

Other members of the committee include representatives from the Deputy Commissioner's Office, Fire Service and Civil Defence, Barishal Metropolitan Police, Public Works Department, and Dr Ikhtiar Hossain, resident surgeon of the surgery department.

The fire broke out around 11:00pm in a storage room in the medicine unit and was brought under control within about 20 minutes with minimal damage, said Abul Bashar, acting deputy director of Barishal Fire Service.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

Doctor shortage disrupts services in Bagerhat

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Bagerhat*

Healthcare services in the coastal areas of Bagerhat are being severely disrupted due to an acute shortage of doctors.

At least 41 of the 64 sanctioned doctor positions have been lying vacant for months in Morrelganj and Sharankhola upazila health complexes, according to data from the Bagerhat Civil Surgeon's Office.

As such, thousands of residents of the climate-vulnerable region are being deprived of basic healthcare facilities.

In Morrelganj, 25 out of 38 sanctioned doctor posts remain vacant, while 16 out of 26 posts are vacant in neighbouring Sharankhola.

The complete absence of gynaecologists in both facilities is the most alarming gap, often putting lives at risk.

Rahima Begum, a resident of Rajapur village, said a trip to the Sharankhola Upazila Health Complex is usually futile, as she often has to wait in long queues for hours, only to be told later that the doctor is unavailable.

"Patients have to be taken to Bagerhat Sadar for treatment, or Khulna for critical or emergency cases, since hardly any service is available here," she added.

To add further woes, that journey is an arduous one, as Sharankhola is largely isolated from the mainland, and requires patients to be transported across the Panguchi River before they can be taken to the 250-bed Bagerhat General Hospital by road.

For critical cases, Khulna Medical College Hospital is usually the only option, and it takes a costly, several-hour-long trip, often unaffordable for low-income families.

During natural disasters like cyclones and tidal surges, the crisis worsens, as ambulance movement stops, and child deliveries become complicated and sometimes fatal in the absence of specialists.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

Tarique to exchange

FROM PAGE 3

He will later meet cabinet members, members of parliament, distinguished citizens, academics, religious scholars, artists, writers and senior government and private officials, along with people from different sections of society.

After the programme, Tarique, along with his family, will visit Zia Udyan to pay tributes to his late parents Ziaur Rahman and Khaleda Zia.

This will be his first Eid in the country in more than one and a half decades, after spending the last 17 years in London.

He returned home on December 25 last year and took office following the 13th national election on February 12.

Meanwhile, Tarique Rahman continued his official duties from his Gulshan residence yesterday, keeping a close watch on government activities across the country amid the Eid holidays.

"The prime minister is staying at his Gulshan Avenue residence and carrying out urgent official work from there. He is also keeping track of the situation across the country," said Atikur Rahman Rumon.

He said the prime minister is regularly seeking updates on the ongoing canal restoration programme, including whether the work is progressing as planned, and is speaking with the relevant ministers to ensure proper supervision.

Rumon said the prime minister has also contacted mayors and administrators of city corporations, urging them to maintain cleanliness during the Eid holidays.

"He has also taken updates on Eid travel from concerned ministers and state ministers," he added.

Bangladesh

FROM PAGE 3

new barriers, particularly for women in rural and vulnerable communities.

To address these challenges, Bangladesh proposed strengthening justice systems through women's leadership and enhancing regional and international cooperation to combat trafficking, according to the Bangladesh Mission in New York.

The CSW70 is being held from March 9 to 19 in New York, focusing on strengthening access to justice, eliminating discriminatory laws, and addressing structural barriers for all women and girls.

Dhaka all set for Eid

FROM PAGE 3

emergency medical services, and mobile toilets will also be available on-site.

Law enforcement agencies will maintain strict surveillance with archway screening at entrances, while four entry and seven exit gates have been designated to manage crowd movement. Fire service units will remain on standby.

Worshippers have been requested not to carry any sharp or flammable objects.

Meanwhile, DNCC will hold its main Eid congregation at the old trade fair ground in Agargaon at 8:00am.

DNCC Administrator Shafiqul Islam Khan said measures have been taken to ensure a hassle-free Eid congregation.

A steel-structured shed has been installed to prevent disruption in case of rainfall. Arrangements have been made for around 10,000 worshippers, with provisions to expand capacity if needed. Separate prayer areas and entry routes have been designated for women.

Security arrangements include archway screening at entry points and deployment of a large number of law enforcement personnel.

Officials said coordinated preparations by the two city corporations are aimed at ensuring that residents can offer Eid prayers in a safe, orderly, and comfortable setting.

Act now to protect

FROM PAGE 3

Shaheen Anam, executive director of MJF, said sexual violence against children within madrasas is rarely reported unless the injury is severe or fatal due to a culture of fear and secrecy.

"These offenders hide behind institutions, which protect them, as children are not allowed to speak out. The child survivor in Kushtia's Bheramara upazila is now fighting for her life," she said, expressing condolences and solidarity with the child's family.

Three people, including the head teacher of the madrasa where the child was a residential student, have reportedly been arrested.

However, arresting offenders alone will not prevent the ongoing atrocities children are experiencing at present.

MJF said strict implementation of laws, impartial investigation, and timely action are needed, along with greater awareness amongst parents and guardians about the vulnerability of children and the dangers they may encounter inside their homes, schools, madrasas, or public spaces.

The protection and safety of children is the responsibility of both the state and society, and both seem to be failing at present.

Civil society, women's rights, and human rights organisations are ready to cooperate and join hands with the government to address this issue and bring about meaningful change so that children can grow up in an environment of safety, security, and freedom, MJF said in the statement.

STATUTORY NOTICE

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF BANGLADESH, HIGH COURT DIVISION
(STATUTORY ORIGINAL JURISDICTION)
Company Matter No. 231 of 2026
An Application under Section-81(2) read with Section 85(3) and 396 of the Companies Act, 1994.
AND
IN THE MATTER OF:

Nasir Uddin Hirji ..... **Petitioner.**
-VERSUS-
The Dacca Refractories Limited and nothery. ----------**Respondents.**

Take Notice that an application under Section-81(2) read with Section 85(3) and 396 of the Companies Act, 1994 was filed before the Hon'ble High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh on behalf of the above named Petitioner for condonation of delay in holding the Annual General Meetings of The Dacca Refractories Limited for the years 1984 to 2025 and relieving the Directors and officers of the Company from the liability of fine or penalty.

Upon hearing of the application on 08/03/2026 Hon'ble Company Judge **Mr. Justice Kazi Zinat Hoque** has been pleased to admit the said application and directed to publish this notice within 3 (three) week from date and file affidavit-in-compliance on or before 23/04/2026.
If any body is interested to oppose the said application he may appear before the Hon'ble High Court Division either in person or through an Advocate.
Copy of the said application may be obtained from the undersigned on payment of necessary cost.

A.K.M. Badruddoza
Senior Advocate, Alamin Center (Floor M)
25/A, Dilkusha C/A, Dhaka-1000. Phone: 01711541141

Office of the Executive Engineer
Department of Public Health Engineering
Kurigram.
ee.kurigram@dphe.gov.bd

Invitation for Tender (Works)

e-Tender Notice No.03

1	**Ministry/Division**	**Local Government Division**
2	**Implementing Agency**	**Department of Public Health Engineering(DPHE)**
3	**Project/Programme Name**	Rural Sanitation Project.
4	**e-Tender ID**	1220096
5	**Description of Work:** Construction of 36 Nos Community Toilet (CT) at Different Upazilla (09 Upazila and 04 Nos in each upazila) in Kurigram District, Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE), Under Rural Sanitation Project (RSP), FY-2025-2026.	
6	**Name, Designation & Address of Procuring Entity (PE).**	**Md. Harunur Rashid. Executive Engineer, Department of Public Health Engineering Kurigram.**
7	This is online Tender where only e-Tenders will be accepted in the National e-GP portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. Interested persons/firms can see details in the website; **www.eprocure.gov.bd**	

Signed
(Md. Harunur Rashid)
Executive Engineer,DPHE
Kurigram.

GD-639

RPGCL Rupantarita Prakritik Gas Company Limited (RPGCL)
(A Company of Petrobangla)

Invitation for Enlistment

1	Ministry / Division	Ministry of Power, Energy & Mineral Resources/ Energy and Mineral Resources Division
2	Agency	Rupantarita Prakritik Gas Company Limited (RPGCL)
3	Procuring Entity Name	Bangladesh Oil, Gas & Mineral Corporation (Petrobangla)
4	Procuring Entity District	Dhaka
5	Invitation for	The application for enlistment as a potential LNG supplier to supply LNG on spot basis.
6	Invitation Ref. No	28.19.0000.701.40.11.26/589
7	Date:	19 March 2026
KEY INFORMATION		
6	Procurement Method	International RFQ
FUNDING INFORMATION		
7	Source of Fund	Government of Bangladesh - GoB (Own Source)
PARTICULAR INFORMATION		
8	Application Closing Date, Time	9 April 2026, 12:30pm,
9	Name & Address of the Office	
	-Application form Availability	Place: LNG Division (2nd floor), RPGCL Bhaban, Plot # 27, New Airport Road, Khilkhet, Dhaka-1229, Bangladesh. or from the website: www.rpgcl.org.bd.
	-Submission Place	Applicants have to submit their application physically or by courier. The applicant may submit their application through email (md.lng@rpgcl.org.bd, gmlng@rpgcl.org.bd, mukitche@rpgcl.org.bd) also but in that case the applicant have to submit the hard copy of the application through courier or physically. Submission Adress (for physical or courier): Place: LNG Division (2nd floor), RPGCL Bhaban, Plot # 27, New Airport Road, Khilkhet, Dhaka-1229, Bangladesh.
INFORMATION FOR APPLICANT		
10	Brief Description of the Project/ Assignment.	Supply of Lean LNG as per specification (e.g., methane molecular composition not less than 91% etc.) mentioned in Master LNG Sale and Purchase Agreement (MSPA) on Delivery Ex-Ship basis to LNG Receiving Terminals of Petrobangla in Bangladesh.
11	Eligibility for LNG Supplier	Must comply with the minimum criteria mentioned on the Standard Application form for Enlistment for procurement of LNG.
12	Other Details (if Applicable)	This is the Enlargement of Enlisted LNG suppliers. Those are Enlisted with Petrobangla for LNG Supply on Spot Basis, is not required to apply. By agreeing with Petrobangla's existing Master LNG Sale and Purchase Agreement the Applicant must apply. Successful Enlisted LNG Suppliers will be notified by email.
13	LNG Supplier's Composition	The interested LNG Suppliers may either be a single or Joint Venture (JV) of more than one firm or as a consortium.
14	Application Fees	500.00 USD or 60,000.00 BDT
15	Enlistment Fees	42.00 USD or 5,000.00 BDT
16	Bank Details	A/C Name: Rupantarita Prakritik Gas Company Limited A/C No.: 4716-01-0000120 Bank Name & Branch: Basic Bank Limited, Banani Branch Routing No.: 055260437 Swift: BKSIBDDH022
PROCURING AGENCY DETAILS		
17	Name of Official Inviting Application	Engr. Md Anwarul Islam
18	Designation of Official Inviting Application	Managing Director
19	Address of Official Inviting the Application	Rupantarita Prakritik Gas Company Limited (RPGCL), RPGCL Bhaban, Plot # 27, New Airport Road, Khilkhet, Dhaka-1229, Bangladesh.
20	Contact details of Official Inviting the Application	**Tel:** +8802-41040229 **Fax:** 41040420 **E-mail:** md.lng@rpgcl.org.bd;
21	Other Contacts	gmlng@rpgcl.org.bd; mukitche@rpgcl.org.bd,
22	The Procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject any or all applications without assigning any reason.	

আরপিজিসিএল /পিআর-২৭৫

Engr. Md Anwarul Islam
Managing Director

GD-638

Why Larijani's killing could prolong war

CNN ONLINE

As Iran's top national security official and de facto leader, Ali Larijani had emerged as the key architect of the country's military and diplomatic strategy since the start of the conflict with the US and Israel.

On Tuesday, Israel said it had killed him in a strike – a move that experts warned could prolong the fighting. According to Iran's Supreme National Security Council, he was killed alongside several others, including his son and security personnel.

At the age of 67, Larijani had become a visible emblem of the regime and its continuity. He even took part in a public rally in Tehran last week, despite being a prime target for Israel since the war began on February 28.

Throughout the first two weeks of the conflict, Larijani was also prolific on

social media, goading US President Donald Trump and on Monday warning Muslims across the Persian Gulf: "You know that America has no loyalty to you, and that Israel is your enemy. Stop for a moment and think about yourselves and the future of the region."

Larijani's death will deprive the Iranian leadership of one of its most astute and powerful voices – and may make any negotiations to end the war more difficult, analysts say. To many observers, Larijani had become the de facto leader of Iran amid the upheavals of recent weeks, especially in the days following Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's death.

He has been a "true insider who spent decades at the center of the system, which gave him credibility across different parts of the elite," according to Hamidreza Azizi, a visiting fellow at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs.

In recent days, Larijani had been vocal and eloquent about Iran's readiness for sustained conflict. His death may make it longer. On Monday, media announced that a 71-year-old former IRGC commander, Mohsen Rezaei, had come out of retirement to become senior military adviser to Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei.

Israeli security forces and rescue workers gather at a Tel Aviv train station struck by shrapnel after an Iranian missile strike yesterday. Two people were killed in the barrage, Israeli medics said, as security services reported falling munitions hit multiple sites. PHOTO: AFP

US warship with Marines tracked off Singapore

The Wall Street Journal reported that additional troops would be ferried to the Middle East aboard the USS Tripoli

CNN ONLINE

A US Navy warship believed to be carrying Marines and sailors to the Middle East is nearing the Malacca Strait off Singapore as it makes its way to the region, maritime tracking data showed Tuesday.

The amphibious assault ship USS Tripoli was approaching Singapore, at the southwestern edge of the South China Sea, Tuesday morning, according to AIS tracking data seen by CNN.

US Navy ships often move with AIS transponders turned off. Revealing their positions while transiting areas with heavy maritime traffic, like the waters around Singapore, enables safer operations.

The Wall Street Journal reported that the additional Marines would be ferried by the Tripoli to the Middle East.

Those Marines are coming from the Okinawa-based 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), a rapid-response force of 2,200 personnel, after the Pentagon ordered the unit to deploy, according to three officials familiar with the plans.

US Central Command has said that roughly 50,000 US troops are already in the Middle East as part of the war with Iran. CNN has asked the US Navy's 7th Fleet and 5th Fleet for comment.

Officials told CNN the unit was being sent to the Middle East, without revealing exactly where it would be deployed or what it would be used for.

An MEU consists of four elements: command, ground combat, air combat and logistics combat. MEUs typically have been used for missions like evacuations and amphibious operations that require ship-to-shore movements, like raids and assaults.

Tuesday morning at a speed of about 22 mph.

Based in Sasebo, Japan, the Tripoli, almost 850 feet long and displacing 45,000 tonnes, is essentially a small aircraft carrier and carries F-35 stealth fighters and MV-22 Osprey transports as well as landing craft to move troops ashore.

They also have ground and aviation combat components, and some units are trained for special operations.

Marinetraffic.com showed a track for an "unspecified US warship" departing Okinawa on March 11, through the South China Sea and nearing Singapore

It is the lead ship in an amphibious ready group, which would normally include the amphibious transport docks USS New Orleans and USS San Diego. CNN could not confirm the presence of those smaller ships with the Tripoli in maritime tracking sites Tuesday.

UK adviser attended US-Iran talks

Judged nuke deal was within reach

AGENCIES

Britain's national security adviser, Jonathan Powell, has attended the final round of US-Iran talks and judged that Tehran's offer on its nuclear programme was significant enough to prevent a rush to war, according to multiple sources and a report by The Guardian.

Powell believed progress had been made during discussions in Geneva in late February and described the Iranian proposal as "surprising," sources said. A further round of technical talks had been scheduled in Vienna, but never took place. Two days after the Geneva talks ended, the US and Israel launched their war on Iran.

Powell's presence at talks, held at Oman's ambassadorial residence in Cologny, was confirmed by three sources. He attended in an advisory role.

One source said his involvement reflected concerns over the level of technical expertise in the US delegation, which included Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and special envoy Steve Witkoff. A former official briefed on the talks said: "Witkoff and Kushner did not bring a US technical team with them."

Why convoys can't fully protect tankers from Iran attacks

AFP, *Paris*

The Israeli-US war on Iran has provoked a reaction from Tehran that has effectively choked a large chunk of the world's oil supply, and untangling the blockage will take a regional effort beyond what is currently being proposed, experts have told AFP.

President Donald Trump has repeatedly urged other global powers to send warships to escort convoys of tankers through the Strait of Hormuz, a vital waterway for the world's oil and liquefied natural gas supplies.

Iran has effectively closed the strait since the United States and Israel began a war on the Islamic republic last month, sending global oil prices up by more than 40 percent.

Trump has acknowledged the dangers of this kind of attack, at least in the strait.

But strategic planners need to look at a much bigger geographical area and consider a much wider array of tools if they are serious about protecting oil tankers, experts have told AFP.

"Treating 'Hormuz security' as a chokepoint-only problem is analytically incomplete," naval analyst Tayfun Ozberk told AFP.

The strait is labelled a "chokepoint" because it narrows to around 24 miles as it snakes between the southern Iranian coastline and the Arabian Peninsula's eastern tip, a jutting piece of land shared between UAE and Oman.

"The effective threat envelope Iran can generate already extends well beyond the narrows," said Ozberk. "That matters because traffic is exposed not only during the brief transit of the strait, but during the longer 'funnelling' phase where routes, speed constraints, and predictable lanes increase vulnerability."

'LIMITED PROTECTION'

Iran has carried out attacks on shipping hundreds of miles from the strait since the war began, towards the Iraqi coast on one side and well into the Gulf of Oman on the other.

"Outside the strait, there are risks as long as you're within missile range," said a European military source who requested not to be named. And even within the strait, there are particular challenges that convoys could struggle with -- for one, the narrowness of the channel drastically reduces the time a warship might have to stop an attack.

'RAISE UNCERTAINTY'

One of the thorniest problems a convoy could face is the possibility of sea mines. Turkish expert Ozberk said mines remained Iran's "most strategically efficient lever" because they "raise uncertainty and cost even when they don't sink ships".

"You can't 'convoy' your way around a credible mine threat without some degree of mine countermeasures," he said. Putting these measures in place slows convoys, as specialist vessels take time to clear any devices and they themselves need further protection.

The European military source told AFP if an area is mined "you first have to create safe routes with mine countermeasure vessels, which are very vulnerable and therefore must be protected, and which advance at four kilometres an hour to clear a strip a few hundred metres wide".

The overall complexity of protecting tankers in the wider region means any operation would probably not resemble a traditional convoy at all, Sidharth Kaushal, of the UK-based RUSI think tank argued. "Instead, destroyers and aircraft would likely attempt to provide an air-defence network over routes as a whole," he said. "The tempo of activity needed to make this shield persistent while also prosecuting targets on the Iranian mainland will likely prove highly resource intensive, however," he added.

Head of victorious Nepal party hails 'win for the country'

AFP, *Kathmandu*

The head of the victorious party in Nepal's election hailed its landslide triumph as a "win for the country" yesterday, urging new lawmakers to deliver for people who "sacrificed their blood" in last year's protests.

The March 5 polls elected a new 275-seat lower house of parliament, with 165 members chosen directly and 110 through proportional representation.

The Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) won a commanding mandate, taking 125 constituency seats and 57 proportional seats, falling just two short of a two-thirds majority. "This is not a win for RSP, this is a win for the country. We have to prove that," party founder and president Rabi Lamichhane told newly appointed lawmakers at an orientation programme, in his first public remarks since the election.

"The common people have voted for RSP so that the country can win... It is now in your hands what kind of future we write," the 51-year-old said.

The vote was the first since youth-led anti-corruption protests in September toppled the government.

The demonstrations began over a brief social media ban but tapped into longstanding fury over corruption and economic hardship.

At least 77 people were killed over two days of unrest.

"This (change) has not come about through a normal situation," Lamichhane said. "(Our) brothers and sisters have sacrificed their blood for this change, we have to institutionalise it." Lamichhane vaulted to prominence in 2022 by channelling public frustration with Nepal's ageing political class, serving briefly as deputy prime minister and interior minister.

People queue with scooters outside a fuel station in Colombo, Sri Lanka, yesterday, after the government declared a weekly Wednesday holiday for public officials to conserve fuel amid concerns over supplies during the US–Israeli conflict with Iran. President Anura Kumara Dissanayake also urged electric vehicle owners to avoid charging their cars at night. PHOTO: AFP

UNICEF AID

Israel to end Gaza-bound shipments from Egypt

AFP, *Jerusalem*

Israel said it would halt UN children's fund shipments to Gaza from Egypt after it said it had foiled an attempt to smuggle tobacco and nicotine in Unicef-coordinated shipments Tuesday.

Israel "informed the head of Unicef of the suspension of aid shipments to the Gaza Strip originating from Egypt and coordinated by the agency, following the thwarting of an attempted smuggling of tobacco and nicotine products detected today at the Kerem Shalom Crossing within humanitarian aid shipments coordinated by the agency," said COGAT, the Israeli body in charge of civilian affairs in the Palestinian territories.

COGAT added that the suspension would remain in place "until the agency provides the findings of a full investigation".

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

May this Eid be peaceful and joyous

Let festivities and harmony take centre stage

As we bid farewell to Ramadan, it is vital that we carry forward the lessons this holy month imparts. The patience, charity, and restraint encouraged during the month are all much-needed values for us at this time that we should try to emulate throughout the year. Let the upcoming Eid-ul-Fitr mark a new beginning characterised by harmony rather than division or conflict at every turn.

With millions of people leaving the capital and elsewhere to celebrate Eid with their loved ones, it is crucial that safe, hassle-free journey is ensured for everyone. Understandably, given the war in the Middle East and the resulting strain on fuel supplies, there are fewer buses on the roads, leaving operators struggling to accommodate the surge of passengers. Moreover, long queues at the refuelling stations are lengthening the journey time. Many stations are also running out of fuel, adding to the uncertainty faced by both operators and travellers. Add to that poor road conditions, incomplete construction work, unauthorised bus stops, and slow toll collection in many places, which are contributing to kilometres of gridlocks on major highways.

As in previous years, road safety remains a major concern this time, too. On Wednesday morning, a speeding microbus lost control and overturned on the Dhaka-Bogura highway, killing three people and injuring 10 others. It is imperative that the authorities work diligently to ensure that citizens reach their destinations safely. This means directing traffic efficiently, reducing delays wherever possible, and enforcing the law to prevent reckless driving.

Despite the Middle East crisis, remittance inflows are reportedly seeing a boost. According to Bangladesh Bank data, expatriate Bangladeshis sent home $2.20 billion in the first 14 days of March, up 36 percent from $1.62 billion during the same period last year. However, while our reserves benefit from the surge of dollars sent by migrant workers, many at home are still being deprived of their due pay and bonuses. As of Tuesday, at least 31 percent of garment factories in six key industrial belts were reportedly yet to pay Eid bonuses to workers, despite the government-set deadline having already passed. Another report in *Prothom Alo* stated that 1,026 factories across Dhaka, Chattogram, Mymensingh, Khulna, and Sylhet had yet to pay February wages and bonuses as of Tuesday afternoon. It is unacceptable that so many workers are having to face this crisis despite RMG being hailed as our largest export sector. This must be addressed without delay.

This Eid season, we wish for a Bangladesh that reflects kindness, empathy, and honesty. We urge the authorities to fulfil their duties proper to ensure a quality life for all citizens. Amid the festivities, we also hope citizens will act with kindness towards one another in every circumstance. We wish our readers and well-wishers a safe and happy Eid.

Partisan selection of VCs is concerning

Public universities need merit-based leadership

The government's latest decision to appoint vice-chancellors to seven major public universities—including Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi—has once again brought into focus the continued trend of political considerations in academic appointments. Despite repeated calls for a merit-based and accountable system at our public universities, the latest selections appear to signal a return to the old practice of partisan appointments, which is regrettable.

Among the newly appointed VCs, most have direct or indirect affiliations with the ruling party, either holding party positions or having been active in the aligned teachers' organisations. We saw a similar trend during past regimes when leadership positions at universities were often awarded on the basis of political loyalty. Such practices have historically encouraged academics to engage in partisan activities. After the July uprising, people hoped for a break from this culture, but those expectations remained unfulfilled as institutional procedures were not followed in VC appointments even during the interim government's tenure.

While the rules in several universities require the VCs to be appointed by senate-elected panels, the senate elections themselves have frequently been delayed or not held at all, allowing appointments to proceed without proper consultation. Even where mechanisms such as search committees have been established, they have not been consistently employed. BNP, in its election manifesto, pledged to build a "non-discriminatory, merit-based and accountable state" and to establish a "merit-based, transparent, efficient and people-oriented administration in all state institutions." The latest VC appointments do not appear to reflect these commitments.

The education minister has defended these appointments, arguing that political engagement is not a disqualification and that selections were based on qualifications and performance. While participation in politics is a democratic right, it cannot be allowed to overshadow the need for neutrality and integrity in academic leadership. Universities require administrators who can rise above partisan lines and uphold the principles of fairness, transparency, and academic excellence. Otherwise, they risk becoming extensions of political interests rather than centres of independent thought and learning.

We urge the government to break away from the old practice of partisan appointments at public universities. It should lead by example, strictly adhering to established procedures when filling key academic positions. It must learn from past mistakes and ensure academic freedom at all costs. Otherwise, it will be difficult to strengthen academic standards and institutional credibility. Overall, the government must act decisively to prioritise merit, transparency, and independence in university governance.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

First encounter with Pakistani troops

On this day in 1971, on the 18th day of the non-cooperation movement in then East Pakistan, people locked into a clash with Pakistan Army troops in Joydebpur. At least two civilians died.

Reflections on the moral crisis of modern leadership

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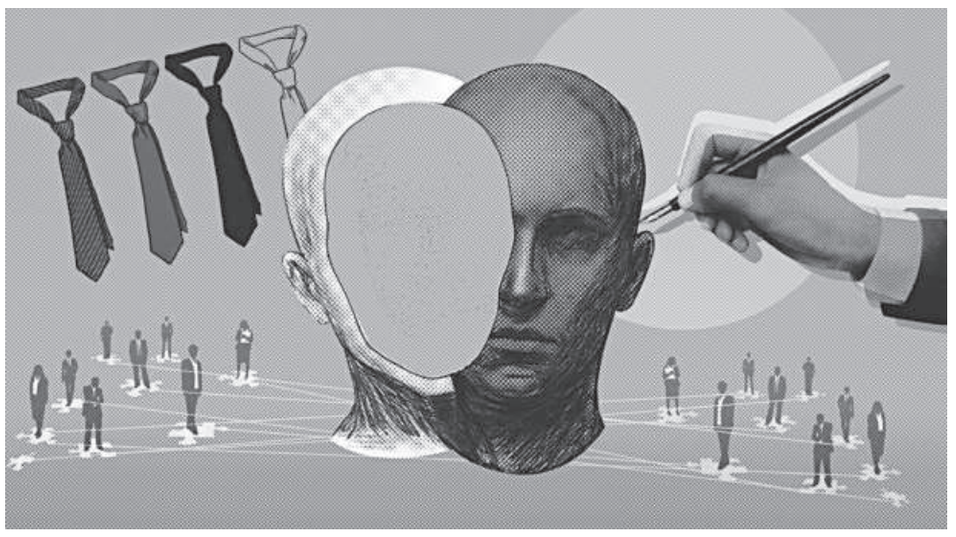
RUBAIUL MURSHED

"A fish rots from the head"—this ancient proverb reminds us that when leadership loses its moral compass, the entire system begins to decay.

One of the most overlooked leadership skills among political and corporate leaders these days is not intelligence, strategy or technological expertise, but something far older and far more essential: moral values and virtues. Amid an unprecedented technological advancement that the world has been witnessing, humanity stands at a paradoxical moment in history. Nuclear weapons, artificial intelligence, and cyber warfare systems have given modern societies extraordinary power, yet our ability to manage this power wisely remains deeply uncertain.

The ongoing tensions and confrontations surrounding the US-Israel war against Iran illustrate this challenge clearly. As geopolitical rivalry intensifies in the Middle East, public discussions are often focusing on military capabilities, strategic alliances, and deterrence policies. However, underneath these calculations lie a deeper concern: the erosion of moral restraint in leadership. Pride, rivalry, and political ego are shaping decision-making these days, which means conflicts that could have been resolved through diplomacy are ending up spiralling into dangerous crises.

As history shows us, good people operating within flawed systems can still produce harmful outcomes. Leaders may believe they are defending national interests or protecting economic stability, but if institutions reward aggression, competition, and short-term advantage, even well-intentioned individuals can become agents of destructive decisions. This pattern has appeared throughout history. As societies grow more technologically sophisticated, they often continue to repeat the same moral mistakes: war, exploitation, injustice, and rivalry. Many philosophers have argued that the true struggle of civilisation is not between nations but between two forces within human nature itself: wisdom and ego.



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

One of the central dilemmas of modern civilisation is that technological intelligence and economic capability have evolved far faster than moral maturity. A nation may develop nuclear weapons capable of annihilating entire populations but be missing the ethical framework to prevent their use. Corporations may command enormous global influence, generating immense wealth, but some of them also exploit labour or natural resources without regard for fairness or sustainability.

Philosopher Bertrand Russell warned that humanity might achieve "technological power without moral progress." Today, that warning feels more relevant than ever.

Part of the explanation lies in human psychology. While societies have evolved dramatically, many of our instincts remain ancient. Tribal loyalty, fear of outsiders, competition for status, and the desire for dominance once helped humans survive in small communities. In modern societies, however, these same instincts can manifest as nationalism, prejudice, corporate greed, and geopolitical rivalry. Even highly educated leaders are not immune to these impulses. When ego goes unchecked, intelligence can easily transform into arrogance, strategy into hubris, and negotiation into confrontation.

Importantly, the value of moral leadership is not merely philosophical; it is supported by research. A comprehensive review examining more than 300 books, essays, and academic studies on moral leadership published between 1970 and 2018 found that leaders who prioritise ethical values consistently build stronger and more resilient organisations. These organisations tend to see lower employee turnover, while individuals working under morally grounded leaders are more creative, proactive, engaged, and satisfied.

These findings challenge the common assumption that ethical restraint reduces competitiveness. In reality, leaders guided by integrity and responsibility often create more sustainable and effective institutions.

For leaders, ego may be the most dangerous invisible weapon. Decisions driven by pride, prestige or personal ambition can escalate small disagreements into major conflicts. By contrast, leaders guided by humility and empathy remain open to dialogue, cooperation, and peace. Ego-free leadership is, therefore, more than just a moral ideal—it is a practical necessity. Humility allows leaders to listen, learn, and adjust their strategies when circumstances change. Arrogant leaders frequently misjudge risks or underestimate adversaries, increasing the likelihood of unnecessary escalation.

Compassion plays a crucial role in responsible leadership. When leaders consider the human consequences of their decisions, they are less likely to pursue policies that cause unnecessary suffering. Justice must also guide decision-making. Short-term incentives often reward aggression or exploitation, but leaders who prioritise fairness help build societies that are more stable and less prone to conflict. Leaders must recognise that their choices echo far beyond their time in power. Ego-driven decisions may produce immediate political or economic benefits, but they can endanger future generations.

The importance of ethical leadership is not a new idea. Across civilisations and spiritual traditions, moral values have long been recognised as essential to responsible governance. In the Abrahamic traditions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—the sanctity of human life is a central principle. Similarly, peace and reconciliation are promoted as moral ideals across cultures. Leaders who pursue dialogue rather than domination align themselves with values that have guided civilisations for centuries.

Political and business leaders today hold unprecedented influence over global stability. Their decisions shape economies, societies, and international relations. Without humility, compassion, and ethical restraint, that power can easily become destructive. History's lessons are clear: without moral wisdom, societies risk repeating the same catastrophic mistakes.

Therefore, the future of humanity may depend not on the power of our weapons or the sophistication of our technologies, but on the wisdom, integrity, and moral courage of those who lead.

The cost of politicising university leadership

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ARAFAT RAHAMAN

Is involvement in politics a crime? Education Minister ANM Ehsanul Hoque Milon posed that question while defending the government's decision to appoint vice-chancellors to seven universities and a new chairman of the University Grants Commission on Monday. The answer is no. A scholar does not surrender the right to political belief by entering academia. Nor would it be fair to dismiss the new VCs simply as political operatives.

However, that is not the question these appointments raise. The real question is whether a public university can remain autonomous when its highest offices are handed to academics closely tied to the ruling party's political structure.

The new VC of Dhaka University is also the education affairs secretary of BNP central committee. The new UGC chairman sits on the party chairperson's advisory council. At Dhaka University, such appointments do more than fill offices; they show whom the state considers trustworthy enough to run its oldest and most sought-after university.

And the concern is not only political—it is institutional. Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chittagong, and Jahangirnagar universities are supposed to have VCs appointed from senate-elected panels. But that structure has repeatedly been delayed, bypassed or drained of meaning, now even under an elected government.

The government says it reviewed research output, publications, citations, and academic credentials before making the appointments. That may well be true. But the public has not been told what criteria were used, whether there was a shortlist, who else was considered, how partisan office was weighed against academic independence, or why these names emerged as the best choices. If merit truly guided these decisions, the government should make the basis public. The fact that every successful candidate is linked to Sada Dal, Zia Parishad or the Nationalist Teachers' Forum makes one conclusion hard to avoid: that political comfort came first, merit later.

To understand why this is problematic, we need only look at recent history. The first casualty is recruitment. A VC who arrives through patronage is often expected to reward the network that helped secure the post. Rajshahi University under former VC Prof M Abdus Sobhan remains a clear example. In 2021, this daily reported that he publicly said Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) men would get the highest priority in university jobs. On his last day in office, defying a government embargo, he oversaw the mass appointment of 137 teachers and staff.

The second casualty is campus governance. A partisan VC often comes to rely on ruling party student cadres to maintain control. At Jahangirnagar University, former Awami League-backed VC Prof Farzana Islam faced allegations of distributing money from a major development project to BCL leaders to keep them pacified in 2019. The result was protest, violence, and institutional paralysis.

The practice of partisan appointments is bipartisan. Under the Awami League, the Blue panel, a teachers platform backed by AL and allied bodies, became a pipeline to vice-chancellorships. A 2022 report by this daily found that 39 of 48 VCs had held posts in pro-government teachers' organisations, and that 12 teachers associated with DU Blue panel had become VCs elsewhere.

Then came the July uprising in 2024. The interim government took charge, with the promise to break away from this culture, among others. But that promise did not last. As *The Daily Star* reported in December 2024, the interim administration quickly gave in to the same political logic, appointing 30 VCs and 18 pro-VCs and treasurers with links to pro-BNP and pro-Jamaat teachers' bodies. Instead of dismantling the machinery of patronage, it merely changed the list of beneficiaries.

When the interim did form a search committee in May 2025, they did so after the top administrative posts in at least 47 public universities had already been filled. Reform arrived after the spoils had been distributed.

The latest appointments suggest that the BNP government has now dropped even that limited pretence, returning openly to executive selection through partisan comfort.

As a result, Bangladesh remains trapped in a cycle in which successive governments rely on politically driven appointments because no credible system has been built to restrain them. But warnings have existed for decades. The 1991 interim government's education task force, the 2003 education commission, and the UGC's Strategic Plan for 2006-2026 all recommended an independent, legally empowered national search committee.

More than five decades after independence, Bangladesh still has no uniform policy for appointing VCs. Even where the law envisages a senate-based route, the process is too easily delayed, bent or bypassed. Elsewhere, the space for executive discretion is wider still.

So, why has reform failed for so long? Because the current arrangement serves governments too well. It gives them manageable campuses, loyal administrators, and leaders less likely to resist partisan recruitment, challenge student violence, or defend dissent when it becomes inconvenient.

That is why this issue is bigger than the names announced this week. VCs shape recruitment, promotions, procurement, discipline, research culture, and the moral tone of a campus. Once the office is politically captured, the damage spreads through departments, halls, and classrooms.

If the government is serious about building a merit-based administration, it must prove it where it matters most. It must establish a legally binding and uniform appointment framework for all public universities, publish clear eligibility criteria and shortlists, ensure that senate elections are held on time where required by law, and introduce meaningful performance reviews for the sitting VCs.

This is the real test of the post-uprising era. The question is not whether a teacher's involvement in politics is a crime, but whether the state is willing to stop treating universities as conquered territories, to be managed through blind loyalty.

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Strait of Hormuz crisis shows why a renewable transition is urgent

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Amanullah Porag
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BAREESH CHOWDHURY *and* **AMANULLAH PORAG**

A war thousands of kilometres away suddenly shows up in the prices of groceries, the cost of running a factory, government subsidies or import bills, and the anxious arithmetic of a family budget as the people navigate the long lines outside refuelling stations. This is how the impact of the US-Israel war on Iran is being felt in many parts of the world through disruptions to the energy system. And the longer the war continues, the greater the disruptions will be, especially for import-dependent economies like ours.

At the centre of this global stress test is the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's most strategic chokepoints, about 33 km wide at its narrowest point—narrow enough that Iran's threats of closure, along with missiles and mines, can quickly shut down shipping and reorder global prices, supply chains, shipping patterns, and national budgets. In 2025, oil flows through the Strait averaged about 20 million barrels per day, roughly one-fifth of liquid petroleum consumed worldwide, according to the US Energy Information Administration (EIA). That number alone, and the disruptions we're currently witnessing, underscore how the fossil fuel-based energy system is fragile by design.

In early March, Reuters reported oil surging to around $85 for Brent, and as the conflict has entrenched, with markets reacting to shipping restrictions and disruption risks connected to Hormuz, prices have crossed the $100 mark early this week. If the Strait remains closed or restricted, exports from Iraq and Kuwait could drop by 3.3 million barrels per day. In the meantime, the US has lifted sanctions on Russian oil and petroleum exports to ease the crisis. The International Energy Agency is coordinating the largest-ever release of emergency stockpiles from strategic reserves. Yet such measures may offer only temporary respite. As the conflict continues, there are serious concerns about crude prices skyrocketing towards a devastating $150 or even $200.

The market shock is not only about crude. LNG interruptions are also creating a wider disruption in West Asia. Asia is particularly exposed because it is the main destination for Gulf energy flows. Bangladesh sits inside that vulnerability zone. We import energy, and along with it, energy volatility. According to reports, Bangladesh paid about $3.88 billion for 109 LNG-filled cargoes in 2025, up from $3.02 billion for 86 cargoes in 2024, highlighting our increasing dependence as well as vulnerability. Even without a war, the LNG market can be highly volatile.

Painful memories of the volatility caused by the Russia-Ukraine war should remain fresh in the minds of policymakers and citizens alike. When Bangladesh had to halt spot market purchases for almost a year, it caused severe strain on the electricity and industrial sectors, ultimately leading to a cost-of-living crisis for ordinary citizens. That fuelled resentment and a wider economic crisis, with rapidly depleting foreign reserves that the government at the time could never recover from.

During the ongoing war, we have already seen panic fomenting. Fuel shortages have been reported across the country. The government has taken measures to conserve electricity, including shutting down educational institutions. Three of Bangladesh's long-term LNG suppliers (QatarEnergy, Excelerate Energy, and OQ Trading Limited) have already declared force majeure, a legal tool that allows them to suspend or delay contractual obligations in events beyond their control, pushing the government back towards the volatility of the spot market and climbing prices.

All this chaos over fuel supplies is something that our policies cannot influence but only prepare for, and even then, we have little control over the outcome. This is how energy insecurity becomes macroeconomic insecurity. It is also where our energy conversation needs to shift. The countries best cushioned from the unfolding shock are those that have prioritised resilience and diversification—not just in fuel suppliers, but in the sources of their energy. According to a recent analysis, Pakistan, for example, is finding itself largely cushioned from the supply shock associated with the Strait of Hormuz closure due to its "solar boom" in rooftop installations. As of February 2026, the country's solar surge reportedly helped to avoid about $12 billion in oil and gas imports, showing that renewables can deliver not only fiscal relief but structural reductions in geopolitical risk.

Similarly, Spain finds itself well positioned in the European market due to its massive renewables build-out, accounting for over 50 percent of its energy mix and reducing the influence of gas on its energy pricing by 75 percent. China, the global leader in renewables, has prepared for the current crisis for decades, utilising a long-term strategy to electrify its economy and transport sectors while its demand for fossil fuels has steadily declined. The Strait of Hormuz disruptions will only accelerate that transition.

These examples highlight how the debate on energy security is fundamentally shifting. Renewable energy is no longer just a niche climate commitment. It is pivotal for ensuring insulation from global supply shocks and fiscal instability. It is part of the essential architecture of 21st-century energy security and must be treated as such. Bangladesh, however, has been slow in this journey, hindered by corruption, profiteering, and cronyism in the energy sector. A Transparency International Bangladesh analysis estimated Bangladesh's installed electricity capacity at 28,616.5 megawatts, of which only 1,314 megawatts come from renewable sources. TIB also found that 96.7 percent of nearly $30 billion in foreign investment in the power sector between 2010 and 2023 went to fossil-fuel projects. By comparison, as of March 1, 2026, Bangladesh's renewable installed capacity stood at a meagre 1,694.94 megawatts, according to the Sustainable And Renewable Energy Development Authority (SREDA).

If disruptions along one chokepoint can shake the world so much, it just goes to underscore the fragility of the systems we rely on. Bangladesh is doubly exposed: first to price hikes and freight and insurance shocks, and second to the knock-on impacts those shocks create in power costs, inflation, and pressure on public finances. The country should therefore stop treating renewable energy as a peripheral programme and start treating it as essential infrastructure—something that shows up visibly on rooftops, public buildings, industrial facilities, and in community-scale solutions.

Energy efficiency should be pursued with seriousness because the cheapest and most secure unit of energy is one that we do not have to import. Every long-term fossil lock-in should be evaluated with one clear test: will this decision make Bangladesh safer when the next geopolitical shock comes?

We must keep reminding ourselves that our fossil fuel dependence is not only driving climate catastrophe, but also concentrating risk and exposure. Energy security today requires a deeper understanding of energy sovereignty and strategic autonomy that can be strengthened through long-term investment in and build-out of renewables and battery storage. A renewable-powered future is often framed as an environmental preference, but in moments like this, it is better understood as a source of stability. For Bangladesh, let this be the moment to lay the foundations for a new, resilient power system.

A tanker sails in the Gulf, near the Strait of Hormuz, on March 11, 2026. FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

Evidence, not assumptions, should guide education reforms

A rebuttal to 'We need education reforms that actually work'

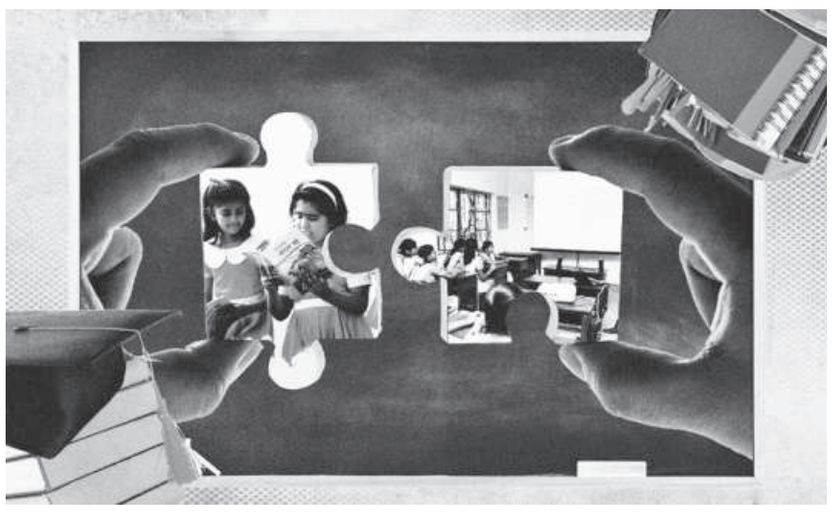
Dr Shamsul Arifeen Khan Mamun
is a professor of economics and former senior education officer at the Asian Development Bank. He also served as lead consultant of World Bank-funded College Education Development Project.

SHAMSUL ARIFEEN KHAN MAMUN

This piece is a rebuttal critically examining the article titled "We need education reforms that actually work," published in *The Daily Star* on March 15, 2026. Dr Manzoor Ahmed's evaluation of recent education reforms in Bangladesh contains assumptions and analyses without adequate research evidence. My aim is to present evidence that contradicts the article's argument and analysis, thereby creating scope for further improvement on critical issues.

The article suggests that poor classroom teaching drives the rising demand for private tutoring and coaching centres. However, there is no supporting evidence from global or local research for this claim. Conversely, a 2012 study by the Asian Development Bank indicates that private tutoring is a widespread phenomenon across Asia. Countries like Singapore and South Korea, renowned for their educational excellence, also have high private tutoring participation, highlighting its global prevalence rather than a direct link to classroom quality. One study claimed that the success of Singaporean children in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) ranking in math, science, and reading is largely attributed to private tutoring despite strong classroom teaching. Similarly, in South Korea private tutoring is popular despite significant government investment and policies aimed at reducing it. Research indicates that household spending on private tutoring in South Korea continues to grow rapidly, highlighting its importance for students' academic achievements. These trends suggest that private tutoring can play a crucial role in educational success by complementing formal education systems and reflecting cultural emphasis on academic excellence.

As a teacher, I have observed that the demand for coaching centres surges ahead of major public exams, driven by intense competition in our country's examination and admission systems. These centres offer specialised preparation materials, including practice tests, prediction of questions, and test-taking strategies, which complement classroom instruction rather than replace it. A research article titled "Shadow Education and Its Academic Effects in Bangladesh: A Vygotskian Perspective" indicates that private tutoring can effectively enhance students' academic performance. Attributing the growth of private tutoring solely to inadequate classroom teaching presents a narrow view of the education system, overlooking the broader factors that influence students' pursuit of academic success and the role of supplementary coaching in their preparation process.



FILE VISUAL: SHAIKH SULTANA JAHAN BADHON

The second argument in Dr Ahmed's article suggests that education reform should focus on optimising outcomes by analysing education through an input–process–output (IPO) framework. However, this approach is overly simplistic and reductionist as it fails to capture the complexity of educational systems. While the IPO model is commonly used in policy analysis—where inputs like teachers, infrastructure, and materials are transformed into outputs such as exam results—current research indicates that education systems do not operate through linear mechanisms. Some researchers have concluded that the IPO approach is flawed and should be abandoned because a large body of research found no systematic relationship between input and output. One of the key reasons was that in the given approach inputs are under the control of public policymakers rather than families or households. As a result, the role of socioeconomic background and students' aspiration for education is completely ignored. US sociologist James C Colmen found that "the socioeconomic background of the individual child" rather than school quality matter the most when it comes to students' learning outcomes. The finding by Colmen aligns with my observations, indicating that children from educated, financially stable families tend to perform better in exams. As such, framing education reform solely as an optimisation within an IPO model risks oversimplifying the complex institutional factors influencing educational outcomes, which require a more nuanced understanding beyond basic models.

The third argument suggests that scholarship examinations are problematic within our education system. However, viewing school-level scholarship exams as barriers to academic growth ignores their practical benefits. For many students in Bangladesh, these exams serve as motivation and a chance for recognition. They provide hardworking students, often from modest backgrounds, with acknowledgment of their efforts and talent. Additionally, financial incentives help cover educational expenses. Scholarship exams signal to parents and school authorities the potential of specific students rather than all. It is unreasonable to expect every student to progress equally, as individual abilities vary. Recognising these differences, scholarship exams can motivate high-achieving students and promote a merit-based approach for rewarding them, which is essential for fostering excellence and encouraging talented students to reach their full potential.

Framing scholarship examinations as a problem risks shifting attention away from deeper systemic issues. If concerns exist surrounding excessive exam pressure or coaching culture, the solution lies in improving how such exams are implemented—not in dismissing a mechanism that has historically inspired many students to strive for excellence.

Finally, effective education reform must be grounded in rigorous evidence rather than assumptions. The issues highlighted—such as private tutoring, the limitations of the IPO model, and the role of scholarship examinations—demonstrate the complexity of the education system. Simplistic explanations often dominate public discourse but risk diverting attention away from critical social, institutional, and behavioural factors that influence student learning and outcomes. To develop meaningful reforms, policymakers and educators need to rely on evidence-based analyses to identify effective strategies. Such an approach ensures that reforms are well-conceived, sustainable, and capable of addressing specific educational challenges. Ultimately, thoughtful, data-driven decision-making is essential for designing future education policies that genuinely enhance student outcomes.

CROSSWORD
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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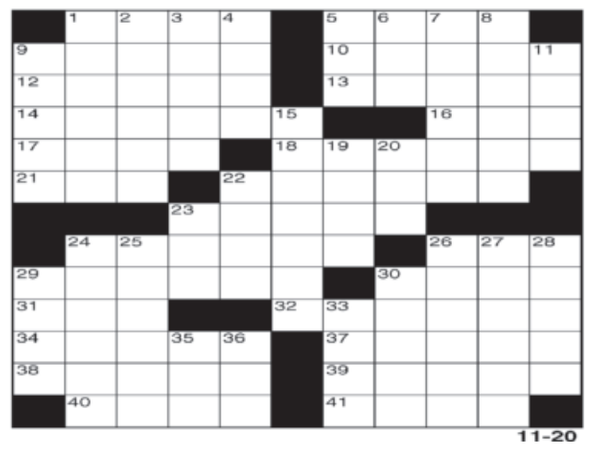

11-20

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO
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Flawed people can change, and I love showing that on-screen: TANIM NOOR

"Growing up with music from the '80s and '90s, I fell in love with band culture," he said. "Those musicians were dreaming big, trying to reach global audiences, yet their songs still feel so close to us. Music is more than just sound—it's emotion, it's memory, it's part of who we are. That's why I always try to bring it into my work."

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

Amid a wave of violence and full on action movies, director Tanim Noor is choosing a different path—one rooted in emotion, music, and stories that bring families back to theatres. After delivering ***Utshob*** last year, he returns this Eid-ul-Fitr with a new film inspired by Humayun Ahmed's short story ***Kichukkhon***, with a multi-starrer cast.

In a conversation ahead of the release, the director opened up about what drives him as a filmmaker and it's clear that for him, cinema is as personal as it is creative.

"We recently had an event where we showcased the trailer on the big screen," he shared. "We've already released the lyrical version of ***Chaite Paro*** by Aurthohin, and more songs will follow. Audiences will get a new track on Chand Raat, and we'll be visiting halls during Eid as well. We're still planning the promotions, but I just want people to come in and have a really good time watching the film."

Music, in many ways, defines Tanim Noor's storytelling. It's not just a stylistic choice—it's something deeply personal. From using ***Oniket Prantor*** by Artcell in ***Contract*** to bringing ***Chaite Paro*** into his latest film, he consistently weaves nostalgia and emotion through songs.

"Growing up with music from the '80s and '90s, I fell in love with band culture," he said. "Those musicians were dreaming big, trying to reach global audiences, yet their songs still feel so close to us. Music is more than just sound—it's emotion, it's memory, it's part of who we are. That's why I always try to bring it into my work."

That same emotional connection is what drew him to literature—particularly the works of Humayun Ahmed. For Tanim Noor, adapting ***Kichukkhon*** wasn't just a creative decision, but a deeply personal one.

"I used to read a lot growing up—even newspapers—and at one point I wanted to become a journalist," he said with a smile. "Humayun Ahmed's writing always stayed with me. His characters are quirky, imperfect, yet incredibly relatable. ***Kichukkhon*** felt special because of how beautifully all the characters are layered. I felt this is a story people will instantly connect with."

In an industry where commercial success is often tied to action and spectacle, Tanim Noor stands firm in his own beliefs.

"I'm a very non-violent person, and I don't enjoy showing violence on screen," he said. "It goes against what I believe in. I'm more interested in telling stories about flawed people who grow and change. But that doesn't mean I want to stay in one space—I do want to explore other genres, even horror. Audiences will see me experiment more in the future."

'Smritir Sur' revisits five legends of Bangla music

This Eid, singer Agun returns to television with ***Smritir Sur***, a tribute to five icons of Bangla music—Azam Khan, Ayub Bachchu, Shafin Ahmed, Khalid and Farida Parveen.

Produced and directed by Najmul Alam Rana, the programme assembles those who knew these artistes best—their peers, collaborators, and family members. Each episode moves between recollection and performance, pairing intimate conversations with live renditions of the artistes' most enduring songs.

Smritir Sur will air from Eid day for five consecutive evenings, from 6 pm to 7 pm, on Channel 24. It will also be streamed on the channel's Facebook and YouTube platforms.

Babita to headline BTV's Eid special 'Adda'

Bangladesh Television is set to air a special Eid edition of its talk-based programme ***Adda***, bringing together artistes from two generations for an evening of stories, music and memories.

The highlight of the show will be legendary actress Babita, a recipient of the Ekushey Padak. In a segment with Shafiul Alam Babu, she will share her acting journey, Eid memories and career experiences. Produced by Abdullah Al Mamun, this segment will air at 6 pm on the second day of Eid.

Other guests in the programme include veteran actor Abul Hayat, actress Dilara Zaman, singer Khurshid Alam, actress Ainun Nahar Putul, vocalist Tania Sultana Liza, Muhin Khan and actor Nirob.

The two-part programme will be broadcast at 6 pm on Eid day and the third day of Eid.

PHOTO: SHAHREAR KABIR HEEMEL

NEWS

Extortion, weak sales double

FROM PAGE 12

don't know how we will manage."

He has been running his small stall for over a decade, laying out a wooden platform on the pavement. Over the years, he said, paying regular extortion money to local collectors has become an unavoidable part of doing business in the area.

"When sales were good, it wasn't too hard to pay the extortion. But this year, sales are slow across the entire market."

According to him and several other vendors, around Tk 100 is collected nightly from each stall, along with an additional Tk 150 weekly -- allegedly in the name of local law enforcers.

Expressing frustration, he said, "Before the election, MP candidates promised that extortion would stop if elected... but the reality is different."

The same allegations were echoed along the stretch from Jahangir Tower to the BTMC building and up to Ambar Shah Mosque, where around 100 makeshift stalls operate, selling clothes, shoes, and other items. Vendors there also said daily collections typically range between Tk 100 and Tk 150.

Meheraj (not his real name), who has been selling clothes on the footpath for nearly five years, said the amount of extortion used to be higher before August 5.

"For a few days after August 5, the collections stopped, but resumed after a while, though the amount has somewhat reduced."

Following government directives, several police units recently prepared a list of alleged extortionists across the country, including in the capital, categorised into six groups.

A list related to the Karwan Bazar area, seen by The Daily Star, includes 37 individuals allegedly involved in collecting extortion from footpath vendors. According to the document, most are political actors.

However, a separate investigation by The Daily Star found that at least 50 to 60 individuals are involved in extortion in the area.

There are also allegations that some members of Tejgaon Police Station are involved in the collection process.

Rabeya Begum (not her real name), a vegetable vendor near Super Market No-2 in Karwan Bazar, said she personally does not pay extortion, but others nearby are forced to pay between Tk 200 and Tk 500 daily.

"People are afraid to speak about extortion... if someone speaks out, the extortionists beat them, harass them, and sometimes force them to leave the area."

Karwan Bazar, one of the capital's largest wholesale markets, sees hundreds of trucks arrive every night carrying vegetables, fish, and other goods from across the country. Vendors allege that large sums are also collected from these trucks and vans as well.

A small trader, preferring anonymity, said,

"At the makeshift wholesale spots near the Prothom Alo office, vendors have to pay between Tk 500 and Tk 1,000 per stall every day... In addition, Tk 100 is collected from each shop in the name of Tejgaon Police Station."

Contacted for comment, Kya Swee Nue Marma, officer-in-charge of Tejgaon Police Station, denied the allegations. "If anyone collects extortion in the name of the police, provide the names. They will be brought to justice."

ATTACK ON ANTI-EXTORTION PROTEST: CASE FILED

On December 29 last year, traders organised a human chain in Karwan Bazar protesting extortion, which was later attacked by a group of assailants armed with sticks.

At the time, several participating traders alleged that some local leaders and activists of Jubo Dal were present during the attack.

A case was filed with Tejgaon Police Station the next day against around 30 individuals, including the expelled member secretary of the local Jubo Dal.

Contacted recently, several small traders who had led the anti-extortion movement declined to speak on record. Others, requesting anonymity, said extortion continues in the area.

"Collections are still ongoing using the names of different political leaders," one trader said, alleging that law enforcement agencies are aware of the issue but remain silent.

Anwaruzzaman Anwar, a senior member of the convening committee of Dhaka North BNP, said several leaders and activists accused of involvement in extortion in Karwan Bazar had already been expelled from the party.

"If anyone still uses the party's name to carry out extortion, action will be taken based on evidence, and they will be handed over to law enforcement agencies."

Another Bangladeshi killed in ME

FROM PAGE 12

Mamun's family would receive financial assistance in line with the government rules, the ministry said.

Mamun's cousin Shawon Morol said he was the father of a son and that his death had cast a pall of grief over both the family and the village.

He urged the authorities to bring Mamun's body back to Bangladesh quickly.

Earlier on March 8, two other Bangladeshis -- Bacchu Miah of Katiadi in Kishorganj and Mosharraf Hossain of Shakhipur in Tangail -- were killed in the same Al Kharj aerial attack, where several others, including Mamun, were injured.

Another Bangladeshi, Ahmed Ali, also known as Saleh Ahmed, died in the UAE on February 28, while SM Tareq died in Bahrain's Salman Industrial Area on March 2.

Amid the deteriorating situation, the ministry said its control room set up on March 10 to support Bangladeshi migrants will remain operational during the Eid holidays.

The control room will operate round-the-clock, seven days a week, until March 24, according to an office order on March 16.

A total of 20 officers and 24 staff members will work in three shifts at the Probashi Call Centre, located on the seventh floor of Probashi Kallyan Bhaban in Eskaton.

The hotline numbers are toll-free 16135 for callers within Bangladesh and +8809610102030 for calls from abroad. Officials have been instructed to maintain communication with labour welfare wings abroad, if necessary, and to collect and submit information in a structured format.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh missions in Qatar and Kuwait have issued separate notices restricting public Eid-ul-Fitr gatherings due to the ongoing conflict.

In a notice dated March 17, the Bangladesh embassy in Doha said Eid congregations would not be organised at Bangladesh MHM School and College premises this year, in line with the directives from Qatari authorities.

Bangladeshi nationals have been advised to offer prayers at nearby mosques and follow local instructions.

In Kuwait, the Bangladesh embassy announced on March 18 that all public gatherings, including cultural programmes, concerts and community events, have been prohibited by the government as part of security measures.

As a result, the traditional Eid greetings programme at Bangladesh House will not be held this year.

The mission urged the expatriate Bangladeshis to remain cautious and comply with the host country guidelines.

Over in Bahrain, the Bangladesh embassy has arranged a special flight to facilitate the return of Bangladeshi nationals.

In notices issued on March 15 and March 18, the mission said a Gulf Air flight on the Manama–Dammam–Dhaka route would be operated, with a tentative travel date set for March 20 or a nearby date.

The fare has been fixed at approximately 300 Bahraini dinars. Each passenger will be allowed to carry 23kg of checked baggage and one handbag.

Interested passengers have been asked to register through the embassy's official Facebook page and complete ticket formalities at the Gulf Air office in Seef Mall. Airline representatives will be available on March 18 and March 19 from 9:00am to 3:00pm.

Passengers have been instructed to report to the designated assembly point at the Golden Tulip Hotel in Manama at least 10 hours before departure.

The embassy said further instructions would be provided by Gulf Air and urged passengers to strictly follow the guidelines.

Meanwhile, flight operations at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka have remained disrupted since February 28 due to the closure of airspace in Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar and Jordan.

A total of 614 flights out of the scheduled 714 have been cancelled in the last 19 days since February 28, according to the airport's flight management department.

Of these, 26 flights were cancelled yesterday, including those operated by Kuwait Airways, Air Arabia, Gulf Air, Qatar Airways, Emirates, Jazeera Airways and flydubai.

At Shah Amanat International Airport in Chattogram, flight operations on Middle East routes have also been severely affected, with eight international flights cancelled yesterday.

Of these, Biman Bangladesh Airlines cancelled two outbound flights, US-Bangla Airlines cancelled one arrival and one departure flight and Air Arabia cancelled two arrival flights from Sharjah and two departures to the same destination.

Since February 28, a total of 145 international flights have been cancelled at the airport.

Despite the disruptions, nine arrival flights and five departure flights on the Middle East routes were operated by different airlines yesterday.

Drive against extortionists after Eid

FROM PAGE 12

For instance, in Dhaka city alone, there are about 1,000 names, with most of them located in Mohammadpur, Mirpur and Pallabi.

The Kawran Bazar area has 30 extortionists who collect tolls from the street vendors. Jatrabari has 17 people who collect tolls from the footpath.

Four police stations in Mirpur division have 284 names in total, including 162 narcotics dealers.

Lists from several divisions have already been received, and the remaining divisions are expected to submit their lists very soon, said Tareq Jubayer, deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police's crime division.

The other police units and agencies are also preparing separate lists.

"Once those are completed, we will cross-check them to ensure that innocent people are not harassed. Before that, the lists cannot be shared," he added.

This newspaper contacted Feni, Magura, Satkhira and Nilphamari district police and Khulna, Chattogram and Rajshahi metropolitan police and all of them said that it will require at least another week to finalise the list.

The form has sought the names of extortionists under five categories, along with a separate list of top criminals. Along with their personal information, the areas from which extortion was collected, the amount of money they received weekly or monthly and details of cases in which they were previously accused in -- have been sought.

"Such information cannot be gathered within three days. There is also a concern that a wrong person's name might be included, which could cause personal harm," said an official of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police.

Khandakar Rafiqul Islam, additional IGP (crime and ops), however, acknowledged that it may take some more time to prepare the final list.

The government must take strict action without giving weight to anyone's political identity, said Md Tawohidul Haque, associate professor at the University of Dhaka's Institute of Social Welfare and Research.

"Often, no action is taken because of links between criminals and people within the administration. Those in the administration who are connected to criminals must also be brought under the law. Otherwise, this initiative, like many in the past, will fail," he added.

Though the extortionists use some political identities to complete their illegal tasks, they do not belong to any political party, said Belal Hossain, joint secretary of Kawran Bazar Traders' Association.

"We want action against these extortionists."

LALMONIRHAT-BURIMARI

34 lives lost in 15 months on road

DILIP ROY

The 100-kilometre Lalmonirhat–Burimari highway in northern Bangladesh has become one of the country's most dangerous roads, plagued by accidents, narrow width, and flawed design.

Built in 1988 and declared a national highway in 1989, it now carries around 5,000 vehicles daily, including trucks and buses, despite being only 5.5 metres wide against the standard 10.3 metres.

According to district police and highway police data, 65 accidents occurred between January 2025 and March 17, 2026, leaving 34 dead and 55 injured. Twenty-seven cases have been filed. The highway's 84 bends and 11 railway crossings, coupled with potholes and carpeting swellings, make commuting perilous.

On March 17, a truck hit NGO worker Shariful Islam's motorcycle near the Model Mosque in Patgram upazila, killing him, his wife, and one child.

Truck driver Mashiur Rahman, 48, said, "I drive trucks on different highways, but I have never seen so many bends, railway crossings, and such a narrow road anywhere else. Even at 30–35km per hour, accidents still occur."

Another driver, Zia Islam, 45, noted it takes three and a half hours to pass the road, adding, "Driving overloaded trucks on such a narrow road is extremely risky."

Night coach driver Sohag Islam, 50, said vehicles often overturn at bends, injuring drivers and pedestrians.

Transport worker Mominul Islam said workers have long demanded expansion and modernisation.

Sub-Divisional Engineer Mozammel Haque of Lalmonirhat RHD said, "No other highway in the country has so many bends and railway crossings. It is extremely risky. Without a project, the problems cannot be solved. For now, repairing potholes and carpeting swellings is urgent, but we have not received allocation."

Workers dry papad or papadum (thin crisps made from ground pulses) under the sun from early morning until afternoon before moving to the next stage of production. Ahead of Eid, production of this popular snack rises, as it is sold at fairs and across the country at wholesale prices of Tk 120-150 per kilogramme. The photo was taken in Dakkhindihi village of Phultala, Khulna yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Progress in reducing child mortality slowing

UN warns, says around 4.9m children under five died in 2024

AFP, *United Nations*

Progress in reducing child mortality is slowing, the UN said in a report Tuesday, with an estimated 4.9 million children worldwide dying in 2024 before reaching the age of five.

"Most of these deaths are preventable with proven, low-cost interventions and access to quality health care," said the joint report by the World Health Organization and Unicef.

The organizations noted that the number of deaths among children under five has fallen by more than half since 2000. But since 2015, the pace of this decline has slowed by more than 60 percent.

Child deaths remain heavily concentrated in a few regions: in 2024, sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 58 percent of all these deaths and South Asia for one-quarter.

Of the 4.9 million children who died worldwide, the report estimated that 100,000 of them, aged 1 to 59 months, died from severe malnutrition.

"The toll is far greater when indirect effects are considered, as malnutrition weakens children's immunity and increases their risk of dying from common childhood diseases," the report said.

The main causes of newborn mortality are complications related to premature births (36 percent of cases) and those occurring during labor and delivery (21 percent).

Beyond the first month of life, preventable infectious diseases such as malaria, diarrhea, and pneumonia remain major causes of death.

"Evidence shows that investments in child health remain among the most cost-effective development measures," the report said.

Low-cost interventions, such as vaccines, treatment for severe acute malnutrition, and skilled care at birth "deliver some of the highest returns in global health, improving productivity, strengthening economies and reducing future public spending."

Fuel supply holds steady despite

FROM PAGE 12

last few days ahead of the Eid rush. Yesterday was no exception, though the lines were shorter compared to previous days.

Only Trust Filling Station in the capital's Bijoy Sarani had heavy pressure of motorcycles and private cars. In other city pumps, motorcycle queues have shortened, but those of private cars remained the same as before.

Only one station was found not selling fuel -- Eureka Enterprise in Mohakhali railway gate. But some pumps were rationing fuel on their own, as bikes were not allowed to fill more than Tk 500 worth of fuel and cars Tk 3,000.

Workers at the pumps said they needed to ration fuel as demand will still remain during the Eid holidays and the depots will remain closed.

Meanwhile, the government is still looking for alternative sources to import fuel from the international market, as some scheduled consignments are yet to be ensured, raising concerns over supply amid the Middle East crisis.

BPC officials said they are now actively considering all available procurement routes -- including direct purchases, government-to-government (G2G) deals, and open tenders -- as supply disruptions intensify.

The BPC currently imports around 50 percent of its yearly fuel demand through G2G arrangements, with the remaining half sourced via international tenders. Under existing agreements, crude oil is brought from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates and processed at the Eastern Refinery in Chattogram.

However, geopolitical tensions escalating since early March have reduced shipments through the Strait of Hormuz -- a critical route that carries around 20 percent of global oil trade as well as crude oil for Bangladesh -- disrupting shipment schedules.

At least three crude oil shipments were uncertain, according to BPC officials.

According to the Energy Division, although 17 letters of credit (LCs) were opened in March to import fuel oil by the BPC, only six consignments have arrived so far. Four are currently awaiting delivery, while the remaining seven face uncertainty.

A similar trend is emerging for April, where only three shipments have been confirmed against 15 LCs, raising concerns over reliance on previously committed cargoes.

As a result, the government has moved to secure fuel under emergency arrangements by importing 100,000 tonnes of diesel and 25,000 tonnes of octane through direct procurement from Dubai-based supplier Petrogas International Corporation, which is supplying fuel to countries in the GCC and Europe.

Besides, efforts are underway to scale up imports from India and explore options from Africa and the United States. Different proposals from various international suppliers are being evaluated based on capacity, quality, and pricing.

In addition, amid the rise in prices of fuel and liquefied natural gas in the global market, the government has been increasing dependence on coal for electricity generation.

According to Argus Media, a London-based energy and commodity analyst, the amount of imported and arriving coal in March stood at 1.5 million tonnes.

Besides, Bangladesh has bought a small amount of coal from South Africa this time, in addition to typical imports from Indonesia. About 608,000 tonnes of Indonesian coal has been discharged in Bangladesh this month so far, alongside 55,000 tonnes from South Africa.

A further 837,000 tonnes of coal from Indonesia is scheduled to arrive in Bangladesh over the rest of March, according to preliminary fixtures. Coal prices are also increasing following the Middle East conflict, with the latest 5,000 kcal/kg priced at $72.46 per tonne, up from $69.60 per tonne.

Power Grid Bangladesh data shows power demand has dropped to between 11,000 megawatts (MW) and 12,000MW as the Eid holiday started, down from between 13,000 MW and 14,000MW.

Of the total, 4,500MW is coming from coal, which is nearly on par with gas-fired power generation.

Afghans search

FROM PAGE 12

Independent experts said it was challenging to establish the truth about the target in the face of the competing claims without a third-party investigation.

Yesterday, relatives gathered at the site looking for their missing loved ones who were among the hundreds recovering there. Many said they did not know whether their relatives were alive or dead.

"We came here looking for our patient, he is missing," said Mazar, 50, who gave only one name. "We checked the lists, but his name was not in the list of the living. Maybe he is injured or has been killed," he said.

The Afghan interior ministry said funerals of some of those killed at the centre took place yesterday. Afghanistan and Pakistan have fiercely disputed the target of the air strike.

Afghan authorities said the attack had clearly targeted a well-known rehabilitation centre, a former Nato military base named Camp Phoenix that had been converted into a civilian facility about a decade ago.

Pakistan has said it hit Camp Phoenix, a "military terrorist ammunition and equipment storage site." It added that secondary detonations visible after the strikes indicated the presence of large ammunition depots there.

The EU, UN agencies and international aid groups have said civilian and medical facilities should not be targeted during a conflict and called for immediate de-escalation.

"There are enough elements to confirm that this was a civilian facility that was hit," said Jacopo Caridi, country director for aid group Norwegian Refugee Council in Afghanistan, adding that military infrastructure may have been located nearby. "They might have missed the objective, but the result is that civilians were killed or injured."

Jennifer Brick Murtazashvili, a political scientist at the University of Pittsburgh and an Afghanistan expert, said it was plausible for civilian facilities to be located within or near former military sites in Kabul.

Rohingya food aid to be slashed

FROM PAGE 12

This reduced ration will be activated from April 1.

The vulnerability level has been determined mainly by socioeconomic conditions. About 33 percent of the 1.2 million Rohingya have been categorised as highly vulnerable, 50 percent as moderately vulnerable and 17 percent as vulnerable, Rahman said.

The funding shortage was already on the decline in the last several years, but it accelerated after the Donald Trump administration drastically withdrew funding, said an official of the UN High Commissioner for the Refugees in Bangladesh. "The Rohingya were feeling the impact since early 2025, but now, it will be even more. Funding shortage will have a direct impact on the health and overall wellbeing of the refugees," the official said.

The total funding requirement for the Rohingya in 2025 was $934 million, but only 53 percent of the sum was received, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

In 2024, 64 percent of the funding was received, in 2023 71 percent and in 2022 70 percent.

After the US cut funding worldwide, the WFP had decided to halve monthly rations to the Rohingya to $6 per person ahead of the Eid-ul-Fitr last year.

The ration cut did not take place after the Trump administration announced $73 million in new aid to the Rohingya through the WFP.

"As of now, we have not received any new funding commitment from the US this year. Plus, overall funding has now declined significantly," said the UN official, preferring anonymity.

The UN and the Bangladesh government, meanwhile, will be launching the Joint Response Plan (JRP) to the UN in Geneva in April or May.

The JRP is now pending with the foreign ministry for review, the UN official said.

Given the current global scenario, the fund requirement has now been revised down by 26 percent from 2025, he added.

According to the office of the RRRC, there are 1.2 million Rohingya, including new arrivals of 144,000.

About 750,000 Rohingya fled the military campaign in 2017, and annually, about 30,000 babies are born in the refugee camp, while new influxes take place every day.

"Rohingya continue to enter Bangladesh every day -- that's the report that we are getting from the field despite our border forces keeping a strong watch along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border," said RRRC Rahman.

The situation in Rakhine State -- call it security, socio-economic or health -- still remains worrisome as the Myanmar military and Arakan Army continue to be locked in battle, according to the UN and government officials.

Therefore, Rohingya repatriation is still a far cry, which contradicts the then Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus's pledge made on March 14 last year.

After joining an iftar with one lakh Rohingyas at the Rohingya camp in Cox's Bazar in the presence of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, he had pledged to work collectively with the UN to ensure that the Rohingyas can celebrate Eid this year by returning to their homes in Myanmar's Rakhine state.

After the new government was formed in February, the foreign ministry is taking stock of various stakeholders on the next course of action on the Rohingya.

"Given the current situation in Rakhine State, I don't think we can start the repatriation anytime soon. We would give a special focus on this, however, to make it happen at the soonest," a foreign ministry official told this correspondent yesterday.

Doctor shortage

FROM PAGE 4

Shirin Akter, a Sharankhola resident, recalled her narrow escape when her labour pain started at night. "We first went to the local health centre, but there was no specialist. We had to rush to Khulna. It took several hours. Fortunately, nothing bad happened," she said.

Public health experts say the shortage of doctors and overstretched facilities leave the residents extremely vulnerable while also facing crises such as rising salinity and natural disasters.

Md Noor Alam Sheikh, a member of Dhoriti Rokhhay Amra (DHORA), noted that climate-change impacts in the region make regular medical supervision a necessity for local residents.

"The existing healthcare gaps also directly affect maternal and child health outcomes," he added.

Contacted, Bagerhat Civil Surgeon ASM Mahabubul Alam acknowledged the crisis.

"We are aware of the doctor shortage. Process is ongoing to recruit doctors against the vacant posts," he said.

He, however, could not specify when these vacant posts would be filled.

Trump issues threat again, Cuban leader

FROM PAGE 12

resistance," he wrote in a statement on X.

Cuba is open to broad talks with Washington and allowing more investment, but it will not discuss changing its political system, an envoy told AFP on Tuesday.

Tanieris Dieguez, Cuba's deputy chief of mission in Washington, said the two neighboring countries "have a lot of things to put on the table" but that neither should ask the other to change its government.

"Nothing related with our political system, nothing with our political model -- our constitutional model -- is part of the negotiations, and never will it be part of that," she said.

"The only thing that Cuba asks for any conversation is respect to our sovereignty and to our right to self-determination."

The New York Times, quoting unnamed US officials, said the Trump administration has called for Cuba to sack Diaz-Canel, who is seen as resistant to change.

Rubio denied the report late Tuesday, writing on X that the article was "fake" and was among media reports that relied on "charlatans and liars claiming to be in the know" as sources.

A total electricity breakdown Monday underscored the parlous state of Cuba's economy.

The country lost Venezuela as its chief regional ally and oil supplier this January after a US military operation toppled Venezuela's socialist leader Nicolas Maduro.

Power was restored to two-thirds of the country early Tuesday, including to 45 percent of the capital Havana, home to 1.7 million people.

"What we fear all the time is that the blackout will drag on and we will lose the little bit that we have in the fridge, because everything is so expensive," said Olga Suarez, a 64-year-old retiree.

"Otherwise we are used to it because here almost all the time you go to bed and wake up without electricity," she told AFP.

Adding another scare, a 5.8-magnitude earthquake struck off Cuba's coast early Tuesday. There were no immediate reports of casualties or damage.

Cuba's ageing electricity generation system is in shambles, with daily power outages of up to 20 hours the norm in parts of the island, which lacks the fuel needed to generate power.

But since Maduro's January 3 ousting, the island's economy has been further hammered by a de facto US oil blockade.

No oil has been imported to Cuba since January 9, hitting the power sector while also forcing airlines to curtail flights to the island, a blow to its all-important tourism sector.

And Trump is explicitly saying he wants the Cuban government to fall.

It has potential

FROM PAGE 3

canals. In 2023, LGED listed 10,642 canals. Proper definitions are necessary.

DS: What was the context of the 1976 canal excavation programme, and how does it compare to the present?

Rokon: Although the late President Ziaur Rahman launched the programme on a large scale in 1977, it actually began in November 1976 in Jashore. The first two projects were rivers, not canals. At that time, apart from Farakka, there were no major barrages, sluice gates, or bridges like today, so the river system was different.

DS: What are the major risks in implementing the current project?

Rokon: Corruption is a major concern. It existed before but has increased. Over the last 15 years, river excavation projects have suffered from poor governance and technical flaws, such as deepening rivers without widening them and leaving excavated soil on the banks. As a result, the relationship between ecological and fish-breeding rivers and floodplains has been damaged. Without proper oversight, the current project may also end up benefiting contractors or influential groups.

DS: What is your advice regarding river and canal excavation in terms of technicalities?

Rokon: A scientific or morphological plan is essential. Contractors often cut and sell soil arbitrarily, which must be stopped. Excavated soil should not be used to fill agricultural land or wetlands. There must be specific planning to ensure that. Rivers and canals should be treated as an integrated system, like a tree -- rivers are the trunk, and canals are the branches. You have to save the trunks to save the branches, not one or the other.

DS: Does the current programme have any detailed master plan?

Rokon: I have not seen any central master plan or detailed design. There may be small local plans, such as the Shahpara Canal in Dinajpur, but I have not seen any overall prioritised list or a national-level plan so far.

DS: What were the environmental and economic impacts of the canal excavation programme in the 1980s?

Rokon: There was no scientific assessment conducted at that time, but it is generally believed that it had a positive impact on fish production, irrigation, and groundwater recharge. Politically, it increased President Ziaur Rahman's popularity. The current programme may also have political benefits, but scientific supervision is needed for environmental and agricultural gains.

DS: What role does river excavation play in addressing climate change and salinity?

Rokon: Preventing salinity requires sufficient upstream freshwater flow, which is currently lacking. Maintaining the navigability of major rivers through dredging alone is costly and almost impossible. Instead, if their natural water flow can be increased, rivers can maintain their own navigability. However, deepening canals can help increase rainwater storage capacity, which will be highly useful during the dry season.

DS: What are your thoughts on canals in Dhaka city?

Rokon: Canals in Dhaka are primarily important for drainage, and there are separate World Bank projects for them. The problem is that although projects are often undertaken in the name of cleaning canals, the sources of waste are not stopped. If these canals are restored and waste sources controlled, they could enable water transport, ease Dhaka's traffic issues, and generate revenue through tourism. There are plenty of examples globally of how canals in urban areas can be used for amusements. They can also improve the overall urban environment.

DS: Finally, what is your main message for making this programme successful?

Rokon: The programme is highly promising, but to make it sustainable, it must be part of a broader water management system. If implemented properly, it can bring revolutionary changes in agriculture, fisheries, and the environment. Otherwise, it will simply be a waste of money.

2 patients die

FROM PAGE 4

"We saw smoke coming from old bed foams stored in the room," he said, adding that the fire might have originated from a lit cigarette.

During the fire, panicked patients, attendants, doctors and nurses from different floors rushed outside, and several people sustained minor injuries while descending the stairs, including three Ansar members who were assisting in managing the situation. A ward master was also injured, witnesses said.

At the time of the fire, 66 patients were admitted to the medicine department. All were later shifted to the hospital's main building, the hospital director said.

Kazi Ansar Ali, retired assistant commissioner of BMP, said his father Ataur Rahman died due to a lack of oxygen while being brought down from the fourth floor amid the panic. He alleged that oxygen could not be arranged from a private ambulance stationed on the hospital premises.

Abul Hossain's son said his father had been undergoing treatment at the hospital for several days. He rushed there after hearing about the fire and found his father dead.

THE SHELF

Small businesses that female literary characters would bring to an Eid mela

AGNILA ROY

Strings of light stretch across the streets, storefronts glow a little brighter than usual, and the air seems to carry the quiet excitement of Eid drawing near. All across the city, there are melas at nearly every corner. Even if you had no plans to go, the endless stream of photos and videos is enough to give anyone a serious case of FOMO. Somewhere between the excitement and the indecision about which mela to visit and what to buy, one cannot help but admire the women behind these ventures. Seeing so many thoughtful, creative businesses come alive makes it exciting to imagine what our literary women might have brought to the Eid mela scene.

ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

Ashima Ganguli from *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri (2003)

Steam would gather first on the inside of steel lids, then on people's memories. Fried onions darkening at the edges, roasted jeera, cardamom cracked open, ghee warming somewhere just out of sight. Her stall would be full of things that look simple until you look closer. Jars of homemade snacks sealed with care. Spice blends packaged in small paper packets. Slim recipe booklets tucked between trays, holding dishes people learn only in kitchens where someone always says, "a little more of this." There would be gift boxes packed for students in hostels, newly married couples, and relatives abroad. Small cards tied to some of them, saying what to serve when guests arrive unannounced, what tastes best with evening tea, what to make when homesickness becomes louder than hunger. Ashima would not only be feeding people but arranging memories neatly enough to carry home in a bag.

A woman might come for achar and leave with an infused oil and strict instructions on how to warm it. A tired college student would buy tea masala and leave with balm tucked into the bag, as though the stall itself had noticed the shadows under her eyes. That is what would make her corner impossible to forget. It would feel like being read.

Joygun from *Surjo Dighol Bari* by Abu Ishaque (1955)

Her stall would be the one people circle back to after all the walking and calculating. No glittering signboard, no shelves pretending abundance. Just things laid out with the kind of order that comes from knowing every item must earn its place. Small, thoughtful bundles made for people who need things to work. An iftar pack of two peyajus, two begunis, and a handful of chola, handed over in a simple leaf plate. A dry breakfast pack of muri, chira, and gur for the next morning. Fresh bhapa pitha for anyone craving warmth on the spot, but also ready-to-steam pitha bundles with rice flour and coconut-molasses filling so customers can take them home and make more with little effort. For children, tiny packets of batasha, nimki, and roasted nuts still make room for a little joy. Handwritten notes might lean against a few items. Best when one meal has to stretch into two: saves both fuel and time. That would be the real intelligence of Joygun's corner. It would understand the consumer before they need to explain themselves: the mother who wants the table to feel festive but is counting every taka in her head, the family that cannot afford extravagance and still refuses to let the day look bare.

Nazneen from *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali (2003)

Nothing on her racks would begin where it ended. That would be the first thing. A tote bag cut from an old saree's achol. A blouse whose sleeves clearly belonged to another orna once. Blankets pieced together from softened cotton scraps that still remember their previous life. Even the prettiest things at her stall would carry a history stitched into them somewhere. You could imagine women standing in front of the display and suddenly recognising a familiar print, the kind that once lived in mothers' wardrobes and old trunks. Off to one side would be the busiest corner of all, a small table where people bring worn-out clothes and ask if they can be turned into cushion covers, patchwork potlis, a child's frock, a new tote. Someone might be choosing scraps for a custom bag, pressing two pieces together, changing her mind. She knows what it means to live inside something already cut out for her and still, slowly, patiently, make room within it. Nothing at her stall would be discarded too easily.

Tilo from *The Mistress of Spices* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (1997)

Rows of spices would catch the light like little omens. Reds, ochres, deep browns, green flecks caught in glass. Nearby, achars would glow jewel-bright in jars, oils steep with herbs, and small tins of balm wait among folded paper packets tied with thread. Instead of neat cards saying turmeric or cloves, there would be notes that sound almost like secrets. For restless sleep. For heaviness after long afternoons. For kitchens that need better luck. People would arrive thinking they wanted one thing and leave with another, because Tilo is not the sort of seller who simply hands over what was asked for. She would watch a customer hesitate between two jars and already know which belongs in her hand. A woman might come for achar and leave with an infused oil and strict instructions on how to warm it. A tired college student would buy tea masala and leave with balm tucked into the bag, as though the stall itself had noticed the shadows under her eyes. That is what would make her corner impossible to forget. It would feel like being read.

Deepa from *Satkahon* by Samaresh Majumdar (1989)

A knot of students would always be gathered there, trying not to look too invested. One flipping through planners and trying to act casual. Another testing three pens with far too much seriousness. Two more bent over a stack of notebooks, arguing over which cover looks more like someone who has their life together. Planners with proper monthly grids. Folders for certificates and exam papers. Desk organisers, sticky notes, study lamps, candles for nights when the power goes out but the work does not stop. But that would only be half of it. Scholarship lists tucked into clear sleeves. Interview prep cards. Somewhere in the middle of it all, Deepa herself answers the questions young people do not always know where to take. Which subject leads where. Whether one bad result ruins everything. What to do if money is tight. How to begin. She would never run a stall that treats ambition like a cute accessory. Hers would be the kind of place where someone comes to buy a notebook and leaves feeling a little less embarrassed by how badly they want more from life.

Agnila Roy *is slightly offended that exams arrived at the same time as the melas. Send her your favourite startup story at agnilaroyy@gmail.com while she misses them all.*

BOOK REVIEW: FICTION

A ceaseless stream of being: FOSSE'S PROSE FLOWS LIKE A RESTLESS ROSARY

Review of Jon Fosse's 'Vaim' (Transit Books, 2025)

NAJMUS SAKIB

The novel, as a form, for a long time, has been concerned with the representation of consciousness. From the intricate psychological portraits of Henry James to the stream-of-consciousness experiments of Joyce and Woolf, the great novelists have sought to capture the texture of thought. Jon Fosse, in his quiet and unassuming way, is a worthy heir to this tradition. His slow prose, with its long, unpunctuated sentences and subtle shifts in perspective, is a remarkable instrument for the rendering of inner life. In *Vaim*, his first novel since the Nobel anointing, he narrates the lives of three, no, four ordinary people in a remote Norwegian fishing village, and in doing so, his hypnotic prose exacts the utmost attention from the reader.

Far from being an act of authorial vanity, this demand for attention is the primary tool of Fosse's metaphysical probing. The effect is achieved through a deliberate, almost monastic, set of stylistic choices. Incantatory repetition, for instance, does not serve to advance a plot but to create a sort of liturgical rhythm, turning a character's simple internal monologue into a kind of prayer or chant. The recursive syntax, where phrases circle back and qualify themselves with a constant stream of "I think," "yes," "or maybe," mirrors the anxious, non-linear flow of actual memory and doubt.

By dissolving traditional punctuation and paragraph breaks, Fosse blurs the distinction between speech, thought, and narration, locking the reader into a single, continuous stream of being. The result is that the reader is hypnotically submerged into the life of the protagonist. In the novel's long opening section, a trip to the city to buy a needle and thread becomes a vessel for a lifetime of regret, loneliness, and unspoken love. The reader is made to inhabit the narrator, Jatgeir's state of mind, its rhythm and cadence, experiencing the past as a persistent and palpable presence.

ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

The novel unfolds as a triptych, a three-part structure that refracts a connected set of events through the lives of its narrators. It begins with Jatgeir, the aging solitary whose life was irrevocably altered when Eline, his great unrequited love, suddenly left her husband to live with him. The second part shifts to Elias, Jatgeir's only friend, a pensive and isolated observer whose own lonely existence provides a quiet counterpoint to Jatgeir's drama. Finally, the novel circles back in time to give us the voice of Frank, the husband Eline abandoned, completing the Moebius strip. At the novel's centre is Eline—a character we never hear from directly, but whose life and choices determine the shape of all three narratives. The novel seems less like a three sequential stories, and more like one story told in triplicate, an exploration of how a single life, that of Eline, leaves deep and divergent echoes in the consciousness of others, and how identity itself is a fragile construct, perpetually rewritten by love and the relentless haunting of loneliness.

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The plot of *Vaim* is very thin and simple: a woman leaves her husband for an old love, lives with him until his death, and then returns to the husband she first abandoned. And unlike most novels, plot is not of significance in Fosse's world, it barely provides the skeleton of the story. The purpose of the plot, here, is to provide a shape, however faint, around which the vast, nebulous clouds of consciousness can gather.

By eschewing narrative complication, Fosse clears a space for his true subject: the texture of being. The reward of reading *Vaim* is, therefore, not the discovery of what happens next, but the sustained, unbroken immersion in a continuous present—a present, for Jatgeir, Elias, and Frank, that is always saturated with the past. There are no authorial intrusions or narrative signposts to offer respite; the reader is held captive within each man's mind, adrift on the endless, circling currents of his thought. This is literature as a meditative practice, where the story is but a quiet room in which to inhabit the rambling and often painful music of another's soul.

This quiet room is, it turns out, a place Fosse intends to revisit. *Vaim* is the first of three planned works set in the same fictional village. In a recent interview with *The New Yorker*, Fosse clarifies that he views them as "three separate novels," whose primary connection will be this shared imaginary place. He describes Vaim, the setting of the novel, as an amalgam of "various places in the western part of Norway," and also reveals a deeper and more personal connection. As he states, "The language, the landscape, the moods derive from that place"—the village of his own formative years.

Søren Kierkegaard, the founding father of Christian melancholia, insisted that faith required a leap into the absurd, an objective uncertainty held fast with the most passionate inwardness. It is difficult to read the fiction of Jon Fosse, and particularly his newest novel, without seeing it as a long, sustained literary enactment of this leap. The narrative, shorn of full stops and conventional plot, flows like a rosary, its repetitions and refrains mimicking the act of prayer.

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Star SPORT
DHAKA THURSDAY MARCH 19, 2026, CHAITRA 5, 1432 BS

What to WATCH

T SPORTS
AFC Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers 1
Live from 9:00 am

SONY SPORTS 1, 2, 5
Europa League
Live from 11:45 pm

Busy Eid for Bangladesh's football teams

STAR SPORTS DESK

While most people in Bangladesh will be busy over the next week, celebrating Eid-ul-Fitr with their families and friends, three separate national football teams of the country will be away from home, preparing for crucial international assignments.

The men's senior national team will leave for Vietnam tomorrow night to play an international friendly match against the hosts on March 26, on their way to Singapore where they will play their final AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers fixture. Singapore have already booked their place in the continental tournament and Bangladesh already out, but this will mark the first international match for the men in red and green. The Singapore fixture could also mark the end of coach Javier Cabrera's tenure.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh women's under-20 team will leave on the same night for Thailand to play their maiden Women's U-20 Asian Cup, which begins on April 1. Debutants Bangladesh have been pitted in Group A against Thailand (April 1), China (April 4) and Vietnam (April 7). Eight teams from the 12-team competition will play in knockout stage.

On the morning of March 21, Bangladesh under-20 men's football team will depart for Maldives to participate in the SAFF Under-20 Championship. Mark Cox's charges will face Pakistan on March 24 and India on March 28 in three-team Group B. Group A features the four other nations of SAFF – Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Three days in, Cox sees promise in U-20s

SPORTS REPORTER

Irish coach Mark Cox has begun shaping his understanding of the Bangladesh U-20 squad after three days of training, ahead of their departure for the Maldives on March 21 for the SAFF U-20 Championship.

Last edition's runners-up Bangladesh open their campaign against Pakistan on March 24, before facing defending champions India in their final Group B match on March 28. The top two teams from each group will advance to the semifinals.

"I've been with this group now for three days. I had done some research on a few of the players and, by speaking with my coaches, I've also developed a good understanding of them," Cox said in a video message shared by the Bangladesh Football Federation after yesterday's training at the National Stadium in Dhaka.

Cox highlighted the potential within the squad, while underlining the need for greater cohesion and tactical awareness. "There is a lot of potential within Bangladeshi footballers. They play well as a team, but we need to bring them together more. They are technically sound, and now we need to give them better tactical understanding," he said.

He also pointed to the importance of building the team beyond physical attributes. "Physically, they are naturally fit, but I want to see how they blend socially and psychologically. That's crucial for a team. It's about giving them that extra 10 percent they need to compete at international level."

The squad has also been bolstered by five overseas-based players -- US-based Ronan Sullivan, Declan Sullivan, Farzad Aftab and Amir Sami, along with UK-based Ibrahim Nawaz -- who have been training alongside the 28 home-based players.

Defender Moltazin Alam Himel believes the team is already benefiting from the new coach's approach. "Training has been good. We've worked hard over the last three days with a focus on the March 24 match," he said.

"The coach is guiding us on what to do and how to prepare through high-intensity sessions. We are getting ready for our first match against Pakistan," Himel added.

USA-based Ronan Sullivan chases the ball as Nazmul Huda Faysal passes it to a teammate during a training session of the under-20 team at the National Stadium in Dhaka yesterday. The Bangladesh team will depart for Maldives on Saturday morning to participate in the SAFF U-20 Championship, which begins on March 23. PHOTO: BFF

BCB grants partial NOCs, Mustafizur exempt from NZ T20Is

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh players are off vacationing after the ODI series triumph against Pakistan and while most of them will reassemble after the Eid-ul-Fitr to prepare for the home white-ball series against New Zealand, the plans for the six Pakistan Super League (PSL)-bound players will be different.

The Tigers will play three ODIs against New Zealand on April 17, 20 and 23 respectively and will then lock horns in a three-match T20I series against the same opponents on April 27, 29 and May 2.

Before the series, Bangladesh are set to begin a white-ball camp from March 27.

However, the PSL-contracted players -- Mustafizur Rahman, Parvez Hossain Emon (Lahore Qalandars), Shoriful Islam, Nahid Rana, Tanzid Hasan Tamim (Peshawar Zalmi), and Rishad Hossain (Rawalpindi Pindiz) -- will not join the camp as they have been granted No Objection Certificates (NOCs) from the Bangladesh Cricket

Board (BCB) to play in the league, set to run from March 26 to May 3.

At the time of filing this report, Tanzid's signing had not been made official, however, sources at the BCB's cricket operations had confirmed that he had been picked by Peshawar.

The BCB has granted partial NOCs to all of the players, wanting to keep majority of them available for the ODI series, as qualification for the next year's ICC ODI World Cup is still on the line.

Left-arm pacer Mustafizur, who recently shrugged off an injury scare in the third ODI against Pakistan at Mirpur, has been given a two-part NOC.

"Mustafizur has been given NOC from March 26 to April 12 and then April 24 to March 3. Mustafizur will be available for the ODI series. He will be exempted from the T20I series as we look at other bowling options," a BCB official informed The Daily Star.

Tanzid, Shoriful, Rana and Rishad were handed NOCs till April 12, and will be available for selection for both ODI and T20I series.

Meanwhile, Parvez was granted NOC till April 21 as he is only being eyed for T20Is for now.

BCB cricket operations chairman Nazmul Abedeen Fahim had previously mentioned in a media brief that the board will protect its interest in regards to NOC but at the same time would grant it if it feels the players can gain valuable experience from competing in franchise leagues.

With the 2-1 series win over Pakistan, Bangladesh have climbed one spot to ninth in the ICC ODI rankings. Although the team won't leap any higher even if they win 3-0 against New Zealand, the team has the chance to bridge the gap with England, who are currently eighth and leading Bangladesh by nine rating points.

The Blackcaps are set to arrive in Dhaka on April 13.

Ruthless Japan set up final with Australia

A ruthless and clinical Japan powered past South Korea 4–1 on Wednesday, booking their place in the Women's Asian Cup final, where they will face Australia on Saturday. While Australia have battled through a series of hard-fought matches to reach the final, Japan's journey has been nothing short of dominant. They have scored an astonishing 28 goals across five games, conceding just once; a remarkable run that highlights both their attacking firepower and defensive solidity. PHOTO: AFP

84 DAYS TO GO

From goal glut to goal drought

A total of 84 goals were scored in 18 matches at the 1938 World Cup in France, giving an average of 4.67 goals per game. However, this is not the highest goals-per-match record in World Cup history. The 1954 tournament in Switzerland produced a record average of 5.38 goals per match. In contrast, the lowest average -- 2.21 goals per game -- was recorded in the 1990 World Cup in Italy.

****Visit The Daily Star's website to also read: 'Oliver Kahn: The final sigh of a fallen titan'**

Senegal seeks inquiry into AFCON title removal

REUTERS, DAKAR

Senegal's government yesterday called for an international investigation into what it said was suspected corruption within the Confederation of African Football (CAF) after the country was stripped of its 2025 Africa Cup of Nations title.

CAF's appeals board ruled on Tuesday that Senegal had "forfeited" the January final by briefly leaving the pitch in protest during stoppage time, converting a 1-0 extra-time win into a 3-0 default defeat in favour of hosts Morocco.

In a statement, the government condemned CAF's ruling as "grossly illegal and profoundly unjust" and called for the opening of an international independent investigation to address what it described as suspicions of corruption inside CAF's leadership.

CAF did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Senegalese Football Federation earlier said it would appeal the decision to the Court of Arbitration for Sport, calling the ruling unprecedented and unacceptable and vowing to file its challenge in Lausanne "as soon as possible."

PSG, Real, Arsenal dominate; Sporting stage comeback

AGENCIES

Paris Saint-Germain, Real Madrid, and Arsenal advanced to the Champions League quarterfinals, while Sporting CP completed a major comeback to end Bodo/Glimt's remarkable run.

PSG delivered the most dominant performance of the night, defeating Chelsea 3–0 at Stamford Bridge and progressing 8–2 on aggregate.

The tie was effectively decided early when Khvicha Kvaratskhelia scored in the sixth minute after capitalising on a defensive mistake. Bradley Barcola added a second with a well-taken finish, and substitute Senny Mayulu scored in the second half to complete the win.

Chelsea, already trailing heavily from the first leg, were unable to respond. PSG's overall control and efficiency highlighted their return to strong form as they move into the next round.

Manchester City were also eliminated after losing 2–1 at home to Real Madrid, going out 5–1 on aggregate.

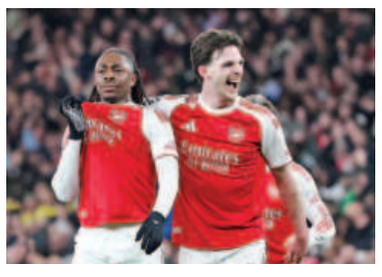
Real had built a commanding lead in the first leg, and the second match quickly tilted further in their favor when City's Bernardo Silva was sent off for a handball that denied a clear goal.

Vinicius Junior converted the resulting penalty. Although Erling Haaland equalized before halftime, Madrid remained in control and added another late goal to secure the win. The result marked another instance of Real Madrid knocking City out of the competition.

Arsenal progressed with a 2–0 victory over Bayer Leverkusen, sealing a 3–1 aggregate win. Eberechi Eze opened the scoring with a long-range effort late in the first half. Declan Rice added a second goal after the break to confirm Arsenal's place in the quarter-finals. The team created additional chances but were unable to extend the margin further. Their overall performance was solid and consistent across both legs.

The most notable comeback came from Sporting CP, who overturned a 3–0 first-leg deficit against Bodo/Glimt by winning 5–0 after extra time. Gonçalo Inacio and Pedro Gonçalves scored in regular time, and a late penalty from Luis Suárez leveled the aggregate score to force extra time.

Maxi Araujo then gave Sporting the lead in the tie early in extra time, and Rafael Nel scored a fifth goal late on to complete the turnaround.



WAR ON IRAN

Another Bangladeshi killed in ME

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN *and* RASHIDUL HASAIN

Mamun

Another Bangladeshi migrant worker has died from injuries sustained in an Iranian missile strike in Saudi Arabia, raising the death toll of Bangladeshis from the Middle East war to five.

Migrant worker Mohammad Abdullah Al Mamun, 35, from Rasulpur village in Gafargaon upazila of Mymensingh succumbed to his burn injuries at 11:00am on Tuesday while undergoing treatment in Riyadh, said a statement from the expatriates' welfare ministry.

About 90 percent of Mamun's body was burned when a missile fired from Iran struck Saudi Arabia's Al Kharj area on March 8, hitting a workers' camp of Al Towaiq Baladia Company shortly before iftar.

SEE PAGE 8 COL 3

Fuel supply holds steady despite import concerns

ASIFUR RAHMAN

The government will not be increasing the fuel supply beyond the existing amount, as it needs this month's stock to finish while it explores alternative options for next month's consignments.

Meanwhile, coal power generation is being increased amid uncertainty over fuel oil imports.

Since March 15 this year, the state-owned Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) has increased the daily diesel supply by 10 percent and petrol and octane by 15 percent, compared to the average daily supplies of March 2025.

As per the BPC's instruction, from today to March 22, depots will disburse fuel at a minimum scale. On Eid day and the following day, fuel depots will be closed.

The supply will be the same as the March 2025 amount between March 23 and 25 this year. Last year, the average diesel supply was 12,777 tonnes, while petrol supply was 1,496 tonnes and octane supply was 1,193 tonnes.

Since Monday till yesterday, following the withdrawal of the fuel purchase cap, diesel supply from distributor companies was 14,055 tonnes, petrol was 1,720 tonnes, and octane was 1,372 tonnes a day.

The BPC, meanwhile, has secured around 2.75 lakh tonnes of fuel for April, against the monthly demand of 5.5 lakh tonnes, officials said.

Though supply was increased, refuelling stations in Dhaka and its outskirts have seen huge crowds over the

SEE PAGE 9 COL 3

Rohingya food aid to be slashed from next month

- Monthly rations to be tiered: $12 (highly vulnerable), $10 (moderately), $7 (vulnerable)
- New ration system to take effect from April 1
- Funding decline worsened after US cuts; no new US commitment this year
- 2025 funding reached only 53% of $934m requirement (down from 64% in 2024)

PORIMOL PALMA

The World Food Programme (WFP) is set to slash food aid for the Rohingya in Bangladesh due to a significant funding shortfall amid crises in various parts of the world.

At present, each refugee in the camps gets monthly food aid of $12. However, now the entire Rohingya population will be categorised into three segments -- highly vulnerable group, vulnerable and moderately vulnerable groups -- for the food ration.

The highly vulnerable segment of the Rohingya will get $12, the moderately vulnerable segment will get $10 and the vulnerable segment will get $7 a month, Mohammed Mizanur Rahman, the Refugee, Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC), told The Daily Star.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 3

Drive against extortionists after Eid

TOUSIF KAIUM *and* MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Police are preparing fresh lists of extortionists, armed criminals and other notorious offenders, with a drive expected to begin just after Eid amid growing allegations.

On March 2, police units nationwide were instructed to compile a list of extortionists within the next three days. However, the final list has yet to materialise due to the breadth of information stipulated by the home ministry.

So far, a preliminary list of extortionists by sector has been prepared by multiple intelligence agencies, including the police's special branch and detective branch, said Ali Hossain Fakir, the inspector general of police (IGP).

From the multiple lists, officials are now separating the common names to start a special drive, he said, adding that the operation will begin soon.

The drive will begin after Eid, said officials at the Police Headquarters (PHQ).

The lists include suspects involved in extortion from the transport sector, markets and footpaths, as well as those active at autorickshaw, rickshaw and leguna stands, they said.

SEE PAGE 8 COL 3

KARWAN BAZAR

Extortion, weak sales double blow for footpath vendors

TOUSIF KAIUM *and* SHAHEEN MOLLAH

While rows of colourful clothes in makeshift stalls along the busy footpath beside the BMTC building remain untouched despite Eid approaching, vendors in the capital's Karwan Bazar are grappling with low profits and the continued burden of extortion payments.

They allege they are still being forced to pay, even as the expected brisk business in the latter half of Ramadan has failed to materialise.

Speaking to The Daily Star on the night of March 13, Riaz (not his real name), a 55-year-old vendor who sells children's clothes at the market, said, "Usually from the 15th of Ramadan, the market becomes lively and sales pick up. But this year, it still hasn't taken off.

"On top of that, we have to pay Tk 100 in extortion every night. With only about a week left before Eid, I

SEE PAGE 8 COL 1

Trump issues threat again, Cuban leader vows 'resistance'

AFP, *Havana*

Cuba's leader on Tuesday said the US would face "unbreakable resistance" if it tries to take over the impoverished island nation, as communist authorities scrambled to fix a nationwide electricity blackout.

Cuba's government is under increasingly crushing pressure, with Washington enforcing an oil blockade and openly stating it wants to end the nearly seven-decade-old US standoff with the one-party communist state.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Cuba's decision announced this week to let exiles invest and own businesses did not go far enough to allow free-market reforms that the Trump administration demands.

"What they announced yesterday is not dramatic enough. It's not going to fix it. So they've got some big decisions to make," Rubio, a Cuban-American and vociferous critic of the country's ruling party, told reporters at the White House.

President Donald Trump, who has heaped pressure on Cuba's communist government, said Monday he would "take" Cuba, adding: "We'll be doing something with Cuba very soon."

But his Cuban counterpart Miguel Diaz-Canel was defiant in the face of Washington's threats.

"Faced with the worst-case scenario, Cuba has one guarantee: any external aggressor will encounter an unbreakable

SEE PAGE 9 COL 3

PAKISTAN STRIKES

Afghans search for loved ones at rehab centre

UN agency puts death toll at 143; Taliban claims 408

REUTERS, *Kabul*

Families and friends of people undergoing treatment at a rehab centre in the Afghan capital Kabul searched for their loved ones yesterday, two days after it was bombed by Pakistan in the deadliest incident in the months-long conflict between the neighbours.

The Afghan Taliban government has said that more than 400 people were killed and 265 wounded in the air strike that took place on Monday night, just as people and staff at the centre were praying, days before the end of the holy month of Ramadan.

But the casualty numbers shared by authorities have not been independently verified. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan told Reuters yesterday that 143 people were killed and 119 wounded in the attack.

Pakistan rejected the Taliban's claims about the strike, saying it had "precisely targeted military installations and terrorist support infrastructure".

The strikes mark a new low point in the relationship between the Islamic neighbours at a time of heightened instability for the region due to the US-Israeli attacks on Iran.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

People search for the names of missing relatives on a list at the site of a drug rehabilitation centre destroyed in what the Taliban said was a Pakistani airstrike in Kabul, Afghanistan, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Life insurers face mounting unpaid claims, now at 12 lakh
B1

HASANAH ISLAMI BANKING البنكية الاسلامي
Prime Bank

PRAYER TIMING
MARCH 19

AZAN	Fajr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
JAMAAT	4-50	12-45	4-30	6-11	7-45
	5-00	1-15	4-45	6-21	8-15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

SEHRI, IFTAR TIMING

RAMADAN	MAR	SEHRI	IFTAR
29	19		6:11
30	20	4:47	6:11