



“The United States is also now saying that it wants to take over the Nord Stream pipelines.”
Russian FM Sergei Lavrov

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‘Steer clear of US forces’

Tehran warns civilians across ME as Trump extends pause on striking Iranian energy plants

AGENCIES

Iran's Revolutionary Guards warned civilians across the Middle East yesterday to stay away from areas near US forces, in a mark of defiance after President Donald Trump claimed talks to end the month-long war were "going well".

Accusing US-Israeli forces of resorting to "human shields", Iran's Guards told civilians to "urgently leave locations where American forces are stationed so that no harm comes to you" — as Iran's military threatened to target hotels housing US soldiers across the region.

"When all the Americans (forces) go into a hotel, then from our perspective that hotel becomes American," armed forces spokesman Abolfazl Shekarchi told Iran's state television.

The warning came after Trump again extended a deadline for Tehran to open the Strait of Hormuz or face the destruction of its energy assets, pushing it from yesterday to April 6.

In announcing a new reprieve over the Hormuz blockade, which threatens lasting damage on the global economy, Trump insisted the Islamic republic wanted to "make a deal".

But the Iranian side, which has made it clear it wants to end fighting on its own terms, said it has not requested the 10-day pause on strikes on



Markets, roads, and homes are being built by cutting the hills of Jungle Salimpur at Alinagar in Sitakunda, Chattogram. The razed hills of the area lay bare the environmental impact of encroachment. This photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

US-Israeli airstrikes hit two steel plants, two nuclear sites in Iran
US weighs sending up to 10,000 troops to Middle East

Over 370,000 children displaced in Lebanon, 121 killed: UN

Kuwait's Mubarak al-Kabeer Port, Shuwaikh Port hit by drones

its energy plants and indicated no let-up in reprisal attacks against Israel and targets across the Gulf.

Meanwhile, the Pentagon is looking to send up to 10,000 additional ground troops to the Middle East to give Trump more military options even as he weighs peace talks with Tehran, The Wall Street Journal reported, citing Department of Defense officials with knowledge of the planning.

If attacked with ground troops, Iran has signalled it would use its Houthi allies in Yemen to target shipping in the Red Sea, which would open up a new front in a war of spiralling economic, political and military repercussions.

US-Israeli airstrikes yesterday damaged two major steel plants and two nuclear-related facilities in Iran, but there has been no release of radioactive material, Iranian state media says.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said yesterday that Tehran would exact a "HEAVY price for Israeli crimes" after attacks on two of the country's largest steel factories and nuclear sites.

"Israel has hit 2 of Iran's largest steel factories, a power plant, and civilian nuclear sites, among other infrastructure. Israel claims it acted in coordination with the US," said Araghchi in a social media post.

The US military has fired over 850 Tomahawk cruise missiles in four weeks of war on Iran, burning through the precision weapons at a rate that has alarmed some Pentagon officials and prompted internal discussions about how to make more available, the Washington Post reported, citing people familiar with the matter.

A month of US and Israeli attacks have damaged at least 120 museums and cultural and historic sites nationwide, a top Tehran official said,

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Bangladesh eyes \$1.6b ADB financing

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and WASIM HABIB

An opportunity has emerged for Bangladesh to tap as much as \$1.6 billion in Asian Development Bank (ADB) financing through a mix of new and ongoing support programmes.

The development comes as the government looks to shield the economy from the global shocks triggered by the US-Israel war on Iran.

Of the total, \$1 billion is expected to come from the Manila-based lender's special package, while \$600 million is likely to be extended as budget support under its economic management and governance programme.

The special package was unveiled on March 23 for ADB's developing member countries in Asia and the Pacific to help them cope with immediate economic pressures from the US-Israel war on Iran.

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Following the announcement, the Economic Relations Division (ERD) held informal discussions with ADB officials

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Five killed by train in Tangail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Five people were killed after being run over by a train in Tangail's Kalihati upazila last night. The deceased include three women and a child.

They have been identified as Sultan Mahmud, 28; Dola, 45; Nargis, 30; Ripa, 20; and Nirob, 12, from Sadullapur upazila in Gaibandha district, according to Mizanur Rahman, sub-inspector of Tangail Railway Station police outpost.

The accident happened around 7:45pm on the Tangail-Jamuna Bridge East rail line in the Jogar Char area.

How the victims got on the rail lines and how they failed to notice the train could not be ascertained immediately.

Citing witnesses, police said the deceased were passengers of a

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Unite to build inclusive Bangladesh

PM urges all

“The attempts made in the past to undermine Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman and deny his contributions only prove that he was an indispensable character in the Liberation War.”

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman



UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman yesterday urged all to work together to build an inclusive and self-reliant Bangladesh.

"Let the pledge of this Independence Day be that not just one section of society, but all of us will live together well... and we will do so, Insha'Allah," he said while addressing a discussion marking Independence and National Day.

The programme was organised by BNP at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh auditorium in the capital, where the premier attended as the chief guest.

Tarique said the current democratic government has

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A filling station at Paribagh in Dhaka puts up a notice yesterday afternoon, apologising to customers for inability to sell fuel due to what it says is no supply from Padma Oil Company depot. An official at the pump said it gets oil every other day amid the crisis triggered by the US-Israel war on Iran but there has been no supply since Wednesday, and fresh supply is unlikely until Sunday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Price shock threatens BPC's profit streak

ASIFUR RAHMAN and MOHAMMAD SUMAN

Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) may slip back into losses if fuel prices are not adjusted in the upcoming cycle, as global oil prices surge.

Officials and sector insiders warn that the state-run fuel importer is under mounting financial pressure due to the fallout of the US-Israel war on Iran.

Audit data show that over the last decade, BPC incurred losses in just one fiscal year — Tk 2,705 crore in FY22 — when domestic prices were kept below import costs as the Russia-Ukraine war drove up global oil prices.

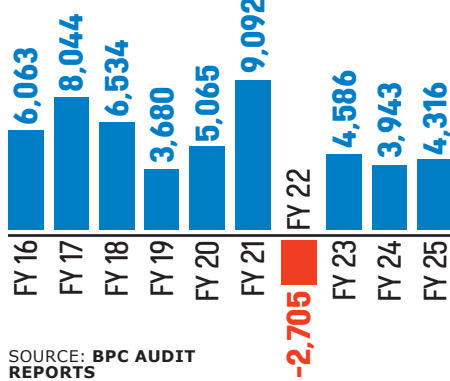
In March 2024, the government introduced an automated fuel pricing mechanism to align domestic rates with global markets. Adjustments are typically made in the last week of each month and take effect from the first day of the following month.

The last adjustment on February 28 — coinciding with the US-Israel attack on Iran — left prices unchanged.

Since then, global fuel prices have risen sharply, raising questions about whether the government will follow the formula or absorb the impact through subsidies.

After the losses in FY22, the corporation recorded profits consecutively — Tk 4,586

**BPC PROFIT/LOSS
IN TAKA CRORE**



SOURCE: BPC AUDIT REPORTS

crore in FY23, Tk 3,943 crore in FY24, and Tk 4,316 crore in FY25.

The current situation suggests a reversal may be imminent if global price pressures persist.

Anindya Islam Amit, state minister for power, energy and mineral resources, reiterated yesterday that there are no plans to raise fuel prices for now despite multifaceted economic pressures.

Speaking at a programme in Jashore, he explained that higher fuel prices would

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In the shade of Hirnal's ancient tree

RBR

In moments of dreamy, wistful escape, I wish I could live a stranger's life in a forgotten world, or even stand rooted like an ancient tree, radiating a quiet, zen-like energy to all who come near. It is a strange kind of bohemian pull I feel towards unknown villages, winding roads, ancient trees, and the quiet company of strangers. So when my friend planned a trip to see an old tree in Hirnal village, near the 300 feet Purbachal Expressway, we all jumped on the bandwagon.

We made full use of Dhaka's empty streets during the Eid holidays. We drove towards this unknown village, surrounded by rain-washed thickets, bamboo groves, and the maddening fragrance of wildflowers near the Purbachal New Town Project. This strange village, tucked deep inside the belly of Dhaka, housed a long-standing



PHOTO: STAR



living monument: an ancient Khirni tree (Manilkara hexandra), said to have taken root during the Mughal reign, some 500 years ago or even earlier. The recent war-induced fuel crisis could not contain our curiosity to witness the spirit of defiance and individuality of this tree, along with a few other majestic ones in the vicinity.

I have seen old trees on Jessore Road, in Barishal, Faridpur, and Rajshahi, but never one whose aerial roots had thickened into century-old trunks. Just behind the Khirni, probably the only one of its kind in Bangladesh, stood another ancient tree: the banyan. The village's history is defined by these two giants, the Khirni and the banyan, standing their ground like fraternal

twins, treasured for their rarity and historical importance, and revered for their cultural significance.

An absent-minded ascetic wandering under their massive canopies told us, "The Khirni is flowering now. In Falgun and Chaitra, the tree bursts into clusters of yellow, date-like fruits, while its flowers resemble delicate bakul blossoms. When ripe, they fall to the ground, and children eat them. But none of us ever pluck even a leaf. The villagers regard it with reverence. No one touches the orchids, ferns, or undergrowth growing on its branches."

Beside the tree lies a holy shrine, where prayers are offered and vows made beneath its colossal canopy. Once wishes are fulfilled, people return

with offerings. The villagers call the tree Shirnigota, a confusion born of mixing the name Khirni with shirni, the traditional sweet offering.

"The Khirni tree of Hirnal has stood through generations. My father said his father saw it just like this. Every elder has always referred to it as a centuries-old tree. At least five generations have passed down the same oral story. Its trunk is so wide that even a circle of people holding hands cannot encircle it. We decided to protect its base with masonry, to honour the powerful, palpable energy it gives out," the nameless mendicant said. With him, we too bathed in awe.

The village has a spirit that seems to connect you directly with the earth's grounding energy, promoting calm and balance. Just behind the mighty Khirni stood a twisted, knotted, mystifying, century-old frangipani tree. I have never seen a flowering frangipani that looked so old.

The experience of this short afternoon of forest bathing and tree hugging lifted our dampened spirits. We were grateful to nature for absorbing our negative energy and allowing us to soak in its calm. People in Dhaka should embrace the culture of tree hugging and forest bathing, for the vastness and grandeur of trees inspire gratitude. Gratitude shifts perspective and counteracts negativity.

Dhaka is too fast-paced, and we Dhakaites need only 10-15 minutes of walking or sitting among thickets, groves, and sprawling gardens to let go of piled-up frustration and embrace the electropositive spirituality of our chi, our soul. Trees, after all, provide positive energy.

1971 GENOCIDE

India supports Bangladesh in its desire for justice

UNB

India yesterday said Pakistan remains in denial over the atrocities it committed during "Operation Searchlight" in 1971, including the systematic and targeted killing of millions of innocent Bangladeshi people and widespread sexual violence against women, which forced millions to flee and seek refuge in India.

"These atrocities, needless to say, shook the conscience of the world at large. Pakistan, however, remains in denial to this very day of its crimes. We support Bangladesh in its desire for justice," Indian Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal told reporters at a regular briefing in New Delhi.

Earlier, Prime Minister Tarique Rahman said on the night of March 25, 1971, the Pakistani occupation forces carried out one of the most heinous genocides in history against the unarmed people of Bangladesh in the name of "Operation Searchlight".

The premier added that the Pak army indiscriminately opened fire on teachers, intellectuals and innocent civilians at various places, including Dhaka University, Pikhana and Rajarbagh Police Lines, killing many people.

"The genocide of March 25 was a pre-planned massacre."



Randhir Jaiswal

Japan to boost coal-fired power as war causes energy turmoil

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's government plans to temporarily lift restrictions on coal-fired power plants as it seeks to ease an energy crunch caused by the Middle East war, officials said yesterday.

Officials presented the plan at a meeting of a panel of experts, who approved the proposal, the industry ministry said on its website.

"Given the current situation in the Middle East affecting fuel prices, we believe that uncertainty regarding future LNG procurement is increasing," an industry ministry official said at the meeting, which was broadcast online.

Price shock threatens BPC's profit streak

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trigger increases in power tariffs, transport fares, and essential goods, making life more difficult.

The choice is proving expensive for the government.

"The government is providing a subsidy of Tk 167 crore on fuel every day to reduce public suffering," Anindya said.

Yet BPC officials say financial pressure is escalating rapidly. They have been asked to submit updated expenditure data, with a report expected by Monday.

The officials said that a team is working to determine subsidy requirements for different fuel types and will submit a report to the government this week.

Initial estimates suggest losses across major fuel types if current prices remain unchanged, including Tk 68-69 per litre on diesel.

Just a month ago, BPC was earning modest margins -- Tk 1-2 per litre on

diesel and Tk 3-4 per litre on petrol and octane, said an official. Rising import costs have now largely erased those margins, the official said.

Officials warned that without timely price adjustments or financial support, the corporation could face significant strain, potentially affecting future fuel imports.

Data from the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) show Brent crude has climbed by \$6-8 per barrel over the past month, reaching \$95-97 amid the war.

Diesel prices are rising more sharply. The international benchmark price for diesel (Singapore Gasoil 10 ppm) increased by about 17 percent from the previous week.

In Bangladesh, diesel accounts for about 65 percent of total fuel consumption, making the economy particularly sensitive to global price movements.

A BPC official, speaking anonymously, explained that import

costs vary depending on procurement methods.

"If fuel is imported from the spot market, prices fluctuate with global trends. Under government-to-government agreements, prices remain relatively stable, with a 2-5 percent tolerance depending on the product and contract," the official said.

Suppliers have recently been seeking higher prices due to the war, though negotiations on costs are still underway. "Nothing has been finalised yet, and there is room for discussion," the official added.

With regular procurement plans disrupted, including G2G and tender processes, the government has decided to purchase 3 lakh tonnes of diesel from third parties, a move that may further increase costs.

On the ground, rising demand and supply pressures are already visible, with long queues reported at filling stations in most parts of the country.

Bangladesh eyes \$1.6b ADB financing

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about the possibility of securing a loan, a finance ministry official said, requesting anonymity.

To access the funds, the government must submit a needs assessment report detailing the war's impact on the national budget and the additional financing required.

Once the report, along with the requirement, is submitted, the ADB will initiate the process of disbursing the loan.

"Bangladesh may get the funds within two to three months after submitting the report," the official said.

While the lender has provided a broad outline of the eligibility criteria, it is expected to communicate the detailed terms and conditions to Dhaka soon, the official added.

The loan, if approved, will carry interest based on the Secured Overnight Financing Rate (SOFR), plus 75 basis points, or three-quarters of a percentage point, repayable over 10 years with a three-year grace period.

The special package has two components. The first one is fast-disbursing budget support through ADB's Countercyclical Support Facility to help governments stabilise economies and protect vulnerable populations.

The second component is under

the Trade and Supply Chain Finance Programme to support the private sector in maintaining critical imports, including energy and food.

Finance ministry officials said that even before the package was announced, the government had formed a cabinet committee led by Finance Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury to devise a crisis management plan.

Based on its assessment, Bangladesh will seek support from different development partners, including the ADB.

The war has already strained Bangladesh's economy. The government ordered nine liquefied natural gas (LNG) shipments in the past three weeks at higher costs.

The annual fossil fuel import bill could rise by \$4.8 billion, a 40 percent increase from 2025 levels, due to the war, according to Zero Carbon Analytics.

ADB analysis shows disruptions to shipping routes amid the war have driven up costs and delivery times, extending risks beyond energy to petrochemicals and fertilisers, with potential knock-on effects on agriculture and food production.

Economies dependent on remittances and tourism face added vulnerabilities, while tightening financial conditions are pressuring

currencies and capital flows.

BUDGET SUPPORT

The ADB is likely to provide \$600 million in budget support by June as the second instalment of its economic management and governance reforms programme.

Budget support -- programme-based lending transferred directly to a government's treasury -- helps ease pressure on foreign exchange reserves and meet financing needs.

The lender released the first tranche of \$600 million in December 2024 following Bangladesh's political transition.

An ADB mission visited Dhaka earlier this month to review progress on reform conditions.

Officials said most of the 17 conditions have been met, with the rest expected to be fulfilled within two months. These conditions focus on improving state-owned enterprises and strengthening revenue collection by the National Board of Revenue.

In addition, Bangladesh may secure \$300 million in co-financing from the Japan International Cooperation Agency and the OPEC Fund for International Development under the same programme.

The ADB is currently in discussions with both partners to finalise the additional support.

'Steer clear of US forces'

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including the UNESCO-listed Golestan Palace -- sometimes likened to Versailles.

Iran's foreign minister branded a deadly strike on an Iranian school on the first day of the Middle East war as a "calculated" US assault.

The February 28 strike on an elementary school in Minab, in which "more than 175 students and teachers were slaughtered in cold blood", was a "calculated, phased assault", Abbas Araghchi said.

'HOSTAGE' Markets have been upended by Iranian attacks on trade and energy targets in the Gulf, with Kuwait saying its main commercial port was damaged in a drone attack at dawn.

The Shuwaikh port was targeted "by enemy drones; preliminary reports revealed material damage but no human casualties", the Kuwait port authority said in a statement on X.

A top Iranian official threatened to attack Saudi Arabia's Red Sea port of Yanbu, home to the Samref oil refinery, as well as the coastal Fujairah oil complex in the United Arab Emirates, should a ground invasion take place.

"Step onto Iranian soil, and \$150 becomes the floor for oil," Vice President Esmael Saghab Esfahani wrote on X. "Destruction of Fujairah and Yanbu are just our entry tickets."

Iran's message on Hormuz was just as defiant, with the Guards saying the strait was "closed" to vessels travelling

to and from ports linked to its "enemies" and that they had turned back three ships seeking to cross.

Oil prices rose and stocks fell yesterday as initial optimism over Trump's decision to again delay his deadline for strikes on Iran's energy assets faded.

With America's top diplomat Marco Rubio in France for G7 talks, counterparts pressed him for clarity on American plans for Iran.

Iran has reportedly replied to a 15-point US plan and is awaiting a response, having made its own demands, including war reparations and recognition of its sovereignty over Hormuz.

'HEAVY PRICE'

The Tasnim news agency said Tehran also called for an end to US and Israeli attacks on its territory and on aligned regional groups -- a reference to Lebanon's Hezbollah, among others.

But analysts at the Soufan Center warned the United States cannot "make any guarantees on behalf of Israel".

And in spite of the push for diplomacy, America's Israeli ally showed no sign of wavering, with Defence Minister Israel Katz vowing to "intensify and expand" strikes on Iran in response to missile attacks on its soil.

"They will pay a heavy price, an increasingly heavy one, for this war crime," Katz said in a video message.

The escalation threat came despite opposition leader Yair Lapid warning

its military was "stretched to the limit and beyond", especially on the front with Lebanon -- drawn into the war after Hezbollah fired rockets at Israel.

Lebanese media reported an Israeli strike hit Beirut's southern suburbs early yesterday, as AFP correspondents heard several explosions from the Hezbollah stronghold that Israel has repeatedly struck since war erupted this month.

More than 370,000 children have been forced from their homes in Lebanon in just three weeks, one of the fastest and largest population displacements in the country's history, UN officials said yesterday.

The Saudi defence ministry said it had "intercepted and destroyed" four drones over the kingdom's east.

Ukraine and Saudi Arabia have signed an air defence agreement during President Volodymyr Zelensky's visit to the kingdom facing Iranian drone attacks, two senior officials told AFP.

Five killed by train in Tangail

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Dhaka-bound bus from Gaibandha. SI Mizanur said the bus ran out of fuel, and the driver and helper pulled over and went to fetch fuel. Some passengers then got off and wandered onto the rail lines beside the highway.

Some of them may have not noticed the approaching train, the police official said.

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been formed by the people and belongs to them, adding that although the people's aspirations are vast, the country's resources remain limited, and there is a gap between the nation's ambitions and its means.

"But as a citizen and a political worker, I firmly believe that if we move forward in unity and work together for the country, we will surely be able to build our desired self-reliant Bangladesh. On this great Independence Day, I would like to convey this message to all democracy-loving people, my party colleagues across Bangladesh."

To achieve that goal, Tarique said the government has taken various initiatives targeting different sections of society, including the introduction of family cards, farmers' cards and canal excavation programmes, adding that steps have already been taken and their implementation has begun to improve people's living standards.

Coming to the topic of the Liberation War, Tarique paid tribute to his late father and BNP founder Shaheed Ziaur Rahman along with all martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the country.

He said the people of Bangladesh had secured victory against one of the strongest armies of the time. "So, the glorious history of our independence and the Liberation War will continue

to be discussed and researched for generations to come, and that is only natural."

The BNP leader said while the past must not be forgotten, it should not be overemphasised either, as excessive focus on the past has hindered the country's progress towards a prosperous future.

Drawing the attention of the younger generation, he said that Ziaur Rahman was an indispensable character in Bangladesh's independence and the Liberation War.

"The dream of Bangladesh's independence was something he [Ziaur Rahman] nurtured in his mind, and this is reflected in one of his writings. From that writing, we can clearly understand that he held the idea of independence and had long made mental preparations for a sovereign Bangladesh."

He was referring to Ziaur Rahman's article titled "Birth of a Nation", published on March 26, 1972, in the Dainik Bangla.

"In the article, he [Ziaur Rahman] wrote about the historic moment of 2:15am on March 26, 1971, describing it as a day the people of Bangladesh would remember forever... What happened at 2:15am on March 26, 1971, I believe, is an important piece of evidence for those who research the history of independence and the

Liberation War."

Tarique said when Ziaur Rahman's article was first published, the war had just ended and those who had been directly or indirectly involved were still alive, but no one raised any objection against the contents of the article.

Highlighting the value of independence, Tarique said the people of Bangladesh achieved independence in 1971 through immense sacrifice and defended it again in 2024 amid adversity.

Recalling recent struggles, he said many lives were lost in movements for democracy, adding that the ultimate goal of all struggles -- from 1971 to 1990 and 2024 -- was to establish a democratic Bangladesh based on equality, human dignity and social justice.

At the beginning of the event, a prayer was offered seeking eternal peace for the souls of the party's founder, Shaheed Ziaur Rahman, former prime minister Khaleda Zia, and martyrs of the Liberation War.

BNP Standing Committee members Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, Abdul Moyeen Khan, Nazrul Islam Khan, Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury and Salahuddin Ahmed, among others, spoke at the programme, with BNP Secretary General and Local Government Minister Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alangir in the chair.

Ex-army officials questioned over caretaker govt role

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Much of the questioning of two retired army lieutenant generals in remand has focused on their roles during the army-backed caretaker government in 2007–08, officials involved in the investigation said.

Sheikh Mamun Khaled, former chief of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), is on a five-day remand in a murder case linked to the July uprising, while Masud Uddin Chowdhury is on a five-day remand in a human trafficking case. Both key figures of the caretaker government are now under DB interrogation.

Senior Detective Branch (DB) officials told The Daily Star that Mamun Khaled has been questioned about the establishment of secret detention cells known as “Ayna Ghor” during his tenure at DGFI.

DB arrested Lt Gen (retd) Masud Uddin Chowdhury in a human trafficking case filed with Paltan Police Station and secured a five-day remand. Meanwhile, the former DGFI chief was arrested in the early hours of Thursday and was also put on a five-day remand.

Chowdhury, arrested on Tuesday in a human trafficking case filed with Paltan Police Station, was questioned

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Dust fills the air along the Dhaka-Sylhet highway in the Bhulta area of Narayanganj as vehicles speed by. Ongoing construction work and dry road conditions after a sudden spell of rain have worsened the situation. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Pallabi Jubo Dal leader killed in turf war

Says Rab, arrests two

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The killing of Pallabi Thana Jubo Dal leader Golam Kibria was driven by political rivalry and disputes over control of local criminal networks, said Rab yesterday after arresting two shooters involved in the incident.

At a press briefing at the Rab-4 battalion office in Mirpur, Company Commander and Additional Superintendent of Police Md Shahabuddin Kabir said the killing was carried out to establish dominance in the area.

“Kibria, member secretary of Pallabi Thana Jubo Dal, had been gaining popularity and was seen as a rising political figure, which may have made him a target,” he said.

On Thursday, a team of Rab-4 arrested two shooters – Rashed alias Lopen, 35, and Jahangir Hossain alias Kallu, 40 – from the Rupnagar and Diabari areas and recovered a foreign-made revolver and three rounds of ammunition used in the killing.

“Based on their confessional statements, interrogation, and analysis of seized devices, we found links with listed criminal Mashiur Rahman,” Shahabuddin Kabir said.

Mashiur Rahman, brother of top-listed criminal Mamun of the “Four Star Group”,

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‘We must face current crisis as one nation’

Jamaat ameer calls for unity, urges end to war

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer and opposition leader Shafiqur Rahman has called for an immediate end to the ongoing war and urged all parties to seek peaceful solutions, warning of its growing impact on Bangladesh’s economy and public life.

In a post on his verified Facebook page yesterday, he said the escalating conflict involving Iran has sent shockwaves through the global economy, with Bangladesh already feeling the strain.

He noted that fuel shortages have led to long queues, rising prices, and slowing industrial activity, while ordinary families are facing deep uncertainty about their immediate future.

“As the country resumes full-scale activities on March 29 following the Eid holidays, we are confronting a crisis

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A decade of stalled trials in 3 blogger murders

Prosecution struggles to secure testimonies as hearings pass without progress

EMRUL HASAN BAPPI

A decade after the murders of bloggers Oyasiquur Rahman Babu, Nazimuddin Samad and Niladri Chattopadhyay Niloy, the trials remain stalled as prosecution witnesses continue to skip court hearings, preventing proceedings from moving forward.

Case documents say members of the banned militant outfit Ansar al Islam, also known as Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), carried out the killings in Dhaka between March 30, 2015, and April 6, 2016.

Oyasiquur, known for his secular views and writings against fundamentalism, was hacked to death in



Oyasiquur Rahman Babu



Nazimuddin Samad



Niladri Chattopadhyay Niloy

broad daylight in the Tejgaon Industrial Area on March 30, 2015.

Later that year, on August 7, Niloy was killed inside his rented flat in the Goran area of Khilgaon.

On April 6, 2016, Jagannath University law

student Nazimuddin, who had been critical of extremism in his Facebook posts, was hacked and shot dead in the Sutrapur area of Old Dhaka.

According to the prosecution, the court has been summoning witnesses month after month to record

testimonies, but many have failed to appear, causing prolonged delays and leaving the cases unresolved.

OYASIQUR CASE

On the day of the attack, Monir Hossain Masud, Oyasiquur’s cousin and brother-in-law, filed a murder case with Tejgaon Industrial Police Station against four named individuals and several unnamed suspects.

On September 2, 2015, Shah Md Mashiur Rahman, an inspector of the Detective Branch of police, submitted a charge sheet accusing five ABT members – Zikrullah, Ariful Islam, Saiful Islam, Akram Hossain and Junaid Ahmed.

On July 20, 2016, the

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‘Waz, kirtan, baul songs will go on under my watch’

Says Brahmanbaria-2 MP Rumeen Farhana

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

Brahmanbaria-2 MP Barrister Rumeen Farhana has said any obstruction to shrine-based cultural practices in her constituency will not be tolerated.

She made the remarks on Thursday night while inaugurating the 58th memorial programme and annual urs of Abdul Qadir Shah (RA) at the Dagorisar intersection in Ashuganj upazila of Brahmanbaria.

“As long as I am responsible for this area, waz will be held, kirtan will continue, and baul songs will be performed,” she said.

The MP said that over 18 months under the interim government, shrines were vandalised, baul performances were obstructed, and artistes were harassed or jailed.

“I do not know whether other politicians have protested this. But I have protested every single

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STRATCOM SUMMIT Info minister calls for strong media and institutions

BSS, Dhaka

Information Minister Zahir Uddin Swapan yesterday

stressed the importance of credible communication, strong democratic institutions and free media to ensure stability in the evolving global order.

“The most effective response to misinformation lies in strengthening institutions, particularly an independent and professional media. A strong fourth estate is essential to protect truth, ensure accountability, and sustain public trust,” he said.

He made the remarks while speaking at the International Strategic Communication Summit (STRATCOM) 2026, held in Istanbul.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Vice President Cevdet Yilmaz, and Head of Communications Burhanettin Duran delivered the opening remarks at the event.

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PHOTO: COLLECTED

Prothom Alo Editor Matiur Rahman speaks at a discussion on his book, “Bhalobashay Barano Haat: Muktiyuddhe Bideshi Lekhok-Shilpi Bondhu”, held at Bengal Shilpalay in Dhanmondi yesterday.

Liberation War reflects global conscience

Speakers say at discussion on Matiur Rahman’s book

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh’s Liberation War was not merely a geographical struggle but a reflection of global conscience, said speakers at a discussion yesterday.

The discussion was held on Prothom Alo Editor Matiur Rahman’s book, “Bhalobashay Barano Haat: Muktiyuddhe Bideshi Lekhok Shilpi Bondhu” (Extended Hands of Love: Foreign Writer-Artist Friends in the Liberation War), at Bengal Shilpalay in Dhanmondi.

At the event, Matiur Rahman shared stories of global support during the 1971 Liberation War.

“Writers, artists, and religious leaders in Buenos Aires, led by Victoria Ocampo, marched to Argentina’s foreign ministry to express solidarity with the people of Bangladesh during our Liberation War,” he shared.

Sharing his research and investigative experience, Matiur Rahman said he began collecting information on the contributions of foreign friends to the Liberation War in 1988.

His collection encompasses events ranging from Joan Baez’s timeless song to the history of an obscure 11-hour concert held for Bangladesh at the Oval in London

during the war.

Matiur Rahman noted that the Pakistan government had opposed the “Concert for Bangladesh” held at Madison Square Garden in New York on August 1, 1971.

Despite resistance from the Nixon administration in the US, George Harrison stood firm in his decision and went ahead with the event, raising \$2.1 million for refugees through Unicef.

He also mentioned that Oscar-winning actress Glenda Jackson recited English translations of three Bangla poems in support of Bangladesh at another concert.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 7

UN chief reaffirms support, solidarity

Holds meeting with foreign minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has reaffirmed the United Nations’ unwavering support and solidarity with Bangladesh during a meeting with Foreign Minister Dr Khalilur Rahman at the UN Headquarters.

During the meeting held on Thursday, the UN chief extended warm congratulations to the newly formed government of Bangladesh.

He also highly commended Bangladesh for its continued humanitarian leadership and generosity in sheltering forcibly displaced Rohingya people.

The discussions also covered a range of contemporary global issues.

At the meeting, Khalilur raised the challenges faced by developing and vulnerable countries due to the ongoing global oil crisis.

He highlighted the disproportionate impact of the crisis on poorer nations. On behalf of Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, Khalilur extended an invitation to the UN secretary-general to visit Bangladesh at a mutually convenient time.

Guterres welcomed the invitation and expressed his appreciation.

PRAYER TIMING

MARCH 28

Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 4:45	12:45	4:45	6:20	7:45
JAMAAAT 5:20	1:15	5:00	6:25	8:15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

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March 29 to 31, 2026

Venue: Bangladesh China
Friendship Exhibition Center (BCFEC)
Purbachal, Dhaka

ENTRY FREE

Time: 10 am - 6 pm

Organizer:
বাংলাদেশ ঔষধ শিল্প সমিতি
Bangladesh Association of
Pharmaceutical Industries
Bangladesh Aushad Shilpa Samity

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Houthis ready to join war if needed

A leader of the Iran-backed movement in Yemen warns

REUTERS, Aden

Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi movement, whose attacks on the Red Sea caused international shipping and trade chaos during the Gaza war, stands ready to strike the key waterway again in solidarity with Tehran, one Houthi leader told Reuters, a move that would deepen a global oil and economic crisis brought on by the Middle East war.

If Houthis open a new front, one obvious target would be the Bab al-Mandab Strait off Yemen's coast, a key shipping chokepoint and narrow passageway that controls sea traffic towards the Suez Canal after Iran effectively shut the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran's Shia allies in Lebanon and Iraq have joined the war in the region unleashed by US and Israeli strikes on Tehran.



A woman holds a pillow amid rubble from an Israeli strike in Tyre, Lebanon yesterday. Unicef said more than 370,000 children have been displaced, with 121 killed and 399 injured during Israel's offensive against Hezbollah.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Pentagon eyes Ukraine military aid shift to ME

Washington Post reports

REUTERS

The Pentagon is weighing whether to redirect weapons originally meant for Ukraine to the Middle East, as the war in Iran strains supplies of some of the US military's most critical munitions, the Washington Post reported on Thursday, citing three people familiar with the matter.

The weapons that could be redirected include air defense interceptor missiles purchased through a Nato initiative launched last year, under which partner countries buy US arms for Kyiv, the report said.

The consideration comes as US operations in the region intensify. Admiral Brad Cooper, the Central Command chief leading US forces in the Middle East, said on Wednesday the US had hit over 10,000 targets inside Iran and was on track to limit Iran's ability to project power outside its borders.

A Pentagon spokesperson told the newspaper the Defense Department would "ensure that US forces and those of our allies and partners have what they need to fight and win."

Iran hardliners push for nuclear bomb

Sources say idea of quitting non-proliferation treaty comes up after Khamenei's death

REUTERS

The debate among Iranian hardliners over whether Tehran should seek a nuclear bomb in defiance of an escalating US-Israeli attack is getting louder, more public and more insistent, sources in the country say.

With the Revolutionary Guards now dominant following the killing of veteran Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei at the start of the war on February 28, hardline views on Iran's nuclear approach are in the ascendant, two senior Iranian sources said.

While Western countries have long believed that Iran wants the bomb - or at least the ability to make one very quickly - it has always denied that, saying Khamenei had banned nuclear arms as forbidden in Islam and citing its membership of Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

There was no plan to change Iran's nuclear doctrine yet and Iran had not decided to seek a bomb, one of the sources said, but serious voices in the establishment were questioning the existing policy and demanding a change.

The US Israeli attacks on Iran, which came midway through talks on Tehran's nuclear programme, may have changed the equation, convincing Iranian strategists that they have little to gain by forswearing a bomb or staying in the NPT.



The idea of quitting the NPT - something hardliners have previously threatened - has been increasingly aired on state media along with the idea - once taboo in public - that Iran should go outright for the bomb.

Tasnim News Agency, which is affiliated with the Guards, on Thursday published an article saying Iran should withdraw from the NPT as soon as possible while sticking with a civilian nuclear programme.

Hardline politician Mohammad Javad Larijani, brother of senior official Ali Larijani who was killed in a strike this month, was quoted by state media this week urging Iran to suspend its membership of the NPT.

"The NPT should be suspended.

We should form a committee to assess whether the NPT is of any use to us at all. If it proves useful, we will return to it. If not, they can keep it," he said.

Earlier in the month, state television aired a segment with conservative commentator Nasser Torabi in which he said the Iranian public demanded: "We need to act in order to build a nuclear weapon. Either we build it or we acquire it."

Nuclear policy has also been a subject of private discussion in ruling circles, said the two sources, adding that there was divergence between harder line elements including the Guards and those in the political hierarchy over the wisdom of such a move.

Teens as young as 12 to guard checkpoints in Tehran: official

AFP, Paris

Iran's security forces are recruiting children as young as 12 to man checkpoints and perform other duties during the war in the capital, a Revolutionary Guards official told state TV on Thursday.

Checkpoints have sprung up all around Tehran since the start of the war, with residents reporting teenagers in plainclothes manning some of them with machine guns.

Iranian authorities have launched a recruitment drive dubbed "For Iran" in Tehran to register people to join the security forces, lowering the minimum age of recruits to 12.

Rahim Nadali, an official with the Guards, told state television that people as young as 12 could register to help the Guards and the Basij youth volunteer militia stand "against the global bully".

The tasks include "collecting security data and operational patrols" as well as organising caravans of cars at night in the city, he said. "At the Basij checkpoints and patrols that you see across the cities, we had a very high number of volunteers among young people and teenagers who wanted to participate," he said.

CONFLICT WITH IRAN

US deploys uncrewed drone boats for patrols

Pentagon's GARC drones log over 450 hours in Operation Epic Fury

REUTERS, New York

The United States has deployed uncrewed drone speedboats for patrols as part of its operations against Iran, the Pentagon said, the first time Washington has confirmed using such vessels in an active conflict.

The deployment of the vessels - which can be used for surveillance or kamikaze strikes - has not been previously reported. It comes despite a series of setbacks in the US Navy's years long effort to field a fleet of uncrewed surface vessels, Reuters reported last year.

Uncrewed vessels have risen to prominence in recent years after Ukraine used explosive laden speedboats to inflict significant damage on Russia's Black Sea Fleet.

Iran has used sea drones to attack oil tankers in the Gulf at least twice since the US and Israel began strikes nearly a month ago. There was no indication the US had used uncrewed vessels for offensive strikes.

In response to Reuters' questions, Tim Hawkins, a Pentagon spokesperson for Central Command, said unmanned vessels built by Maryland-based BlackSea, known as the Global Autonomous Reconnaissance Craft, or GARC, had been used for patrols as part of the US campaign against Iran, dubbed "Operation Epic Fury."

"US forces continue to employ unmanned systems



Uncrewed vessels gained prominence after Ukraine used explosive speedboats to damage Russia's Black Sea Fleet.

in the Middle East region, including surface drone assets like the GARC. This platform, in particular, has successfully logged over 450 underway hours and more than 2,200 nautical miles during maritime patrols in support of Operation Epic Fury," Hawkins said in a statement.

Hawkins declined to name any of the other unmanned systems being deployed. BlackSea declined to comment for this story.

The US has for years been trying to build a fleet of autonomous uncrewed surface and underwater vessels, as a cheaper and faster alternative to manned ships and submarines, particularly to counter China's growing naval power in the Pacific. The effort, however, has fallen behind schedule and been dogged by technical problems, cost concerns and a series of testing setbacks.

Last year, Reuters reported the GARC, an angular speedboat about five meters long, was involved in multiple performance and safety issues, including one where it collided with another boat at speed during a military test.

In recent weeks, during another failed test in the Middle East, one GARC boat became inoperable, according to a source who was briefed on the matter.

Hawkins declined to comment on the testing setbacks.

"The GARC is an emerging capability and part of a fleet of surface drones operated by US 5th Fleet to enhance awareness of what's happening in regional waters," he said.

CLOSE TO TAIWAN STRAIT

China stations jets-turned-drones at six air bases: report

REUTERS, Hong Kong

China has stationed obsolete supersonic fighters converted to attack drones at six air bases close to the Taiwan Strait, according to a new report by the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies.

Satellite imagery of these airfields from the February report, "China Airpower Tracker," shows what appear to be lines of stubby, swept-winged aircraft matching the shape of J-6 fighters that first flew with the Chinese air force in the 1960s. Since their conversion to drones, these aircraft have been identified at five bases in Fujian Province and one in Guangdong Province, according to the report from the Arlington-Virginia based institute.

Senior fellow at the Mitchell Institute, J. Michael Dahm, said China's military, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), has deployed an estimated 200 or more obsolete fighters converted to drones to airfields near the Taiwan Strait.

These jets-turned-drones would fly into targets in the opening phase of an assault on Taiwan, Dahm, a former US naval intelligence officer, told Reuters. They would be used more like cruise missiles than autonomous or remote-controlled unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

"They will attack Taiwan, US or allied targets in large numbers, effectively overwhelming air defenses," said Dahm. He compiled the data for the report from open source intelligence and commercial satellite imagery. China dominates the global commercial drone market. It is also investing heavily in military drone technologies as it builds the firepower it needs to seize control of Taiwan by force if necessary.



Students march to protest against the government of President Jose Antonio Kast in Santiago, Chile on Thursday. Chile's new government announced on March 23 a historic increase of nearly half a dollar per litre in fuel prices, following a major overhaul of a government mechanism designed to cushion the impact of international price volatility.

PHOTO: AFP

2 aid boats en route to Cuba missing

Mexico's navy says amid US embargo on the island nation

REUTERS, Mexico City

Mexico's navy said on Thursday it had activated a search-and-rescue operation in the Caribbean to locate two sailboats carrying humanitarian aid to Cuba after the vessels failed to arrive in Havana as scheduled.

The navy said two boats left Isla Mujeres, in the Mexican Caribbean state of Quintana Roo, last week bound for Havana with nine crew members of different nationalities on board.

The vessels had been expected to arrive between March 24 and 25, but there had been no communication from them, the navy said.

The boats are part of a grassroots aid effort for Cuba, which has been suffering power outages and economic crisis after US tightened an embargo on oil and other goods.

Recurrent road tragedies must stop

High casualties during Eid holidays reflect systemic failure

It is deeply distressing that every occasion of Eid, which is meant to be a time of reunion and celebration with families, continues to be overshadowed by reports of mass casualties on our roads. This year's Eid-ul-Fitr was no exception. According to the Road Safety Foundation, at least 274 people were killed and over 1,500 injured in 342 road crashes across the country between March 16 and 26. Among the deadliest incidents was the one in Rajbari's Daulatdia, where a bus fell into the Padma River while waiting to board a ferry, leaving at least 26 dead and several others missing. In another tragedy, 12 people were killed in Cumilla when a train rammed into a bus at a level crossing. Many crashes during the Eid holidays have shattered families. The recurrence of these tragedies, year after year, is a stark reminder of how fundamentally flawed our transport system is.

Reportedly, both the number of accidents and fatalities have increased this year compared to last year. Despite repeated warnings from experts, it appears that the authorities have learnt little. The same causes—reckless driving, unfit vehicles, poor road management, and weak coordination among relevant authorities—continue to be major factors behind these crashes. Even basic safeguards such as enforcing speed limits or ensuring vehicle fitness tend to break down during the rush of Eid travel. The question is: how much longer will it take the authorities to address the systemic flaws that make our roads so dangerous? When will the long overdue reforms in the transport sector be implemented? And when will the state learn to value the lives that are lost on our roads, railways and waterways due to poor enforcement of the existing laws?

Unfortunately, our transport authorities continue to rely on ad hoc, short-term measures instead of implementing a long-term, comprehensive road safety strategy. As the Road Transport Act, 2018 remains largely unimplemented, holding those responsible for these road mishaps accountable becomes difficult. Transport experts have also pointed out that investigation reports into major accidents are rarely made public, and their recommendations are seldom implemented. This culture of impunity allows negligence to persist. If transport owners, drivers, and even regulatory bodies continue to face no consequences for their failures, little will change in the sector.

To ensure safe roads and prevent further loss of lives, the government must urgently reform the road transport sector. Strict enforcement of traffic laws must go hand in hand with the immediate removal of unfit and expired vehicles from the roads. At the same time, clear and enforceable policies on drivers' working hours and mandatory rest periods are essential. Road engineering flaws must also be identified and corrected to improve overall safety. Increasing highway police capacity is important, particularly during Eid holidays. Above all, better planning and coordination among transport authorities, engineers, law enforcement agencies, and policymakers are essential. Finally, conducting proper investigations into road crashes and taking firm action against those responsible is crucial to ensuring transparency and accountability in the sector.

ICU beds shouldn't be a matter of luck

Make all the existing ICU facilities operational

As citizens of this country, one of our basic rights is to live a life free from harm and have access to timely and adequate medical care when needed. But time and time again, that basic right is stripped away, leaving us vulnerable in precarious situations. One such incident reported by *Prothom Alo* recently occurred at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH) where some 33 children died within 11 days while waiting for admission in the hospital's intensive care unit (ICU). The RMCH ICU in-charge said timely admission to the ICU might have saved some of these lives. These deaths point sharply to a healthcare system that continues to fail its most vulnerable population.

What makes the RMCH crisis particularly inexcusable is that it was not simply a matter of scarcity but a gross failure to utilise the already existing facilities. The RMCH has a 60-bed ICU complex—with 20 paediatric beds and 40 adult beds—but only the 40 adult beds are functional. The hospital authority, in the absence of government support—including equipment and trained personnel—has allocated some 12 adult beds for children under special arrangements. The *Prothom Alo* report also mentions the 200-bed children's hospital constructed in the Lakshmipur area of Rajshahi. Built at the cost of Tk 34 crore, this hospital has 10 dedicated paediatric ICU beds. However, despite construction being completed in 2023, the facility has yet to become operational. Even at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital, the country's largest government hospital, only a fraction of patients seeking ICU care can be accommodated each day.

This troubling phenomenon, where infrastructure exists but remains unused due to a lack of institutional goodwill and sound operational plan, also leads to a massive waste of the already limited healthcare budget. We frequently hear about new hospital buildings built and then left abandoned all around the country. Meanwhile, nearly 80 percent of our annual health budget is wasted on purchasing equipment that is not needed, which often sits idle and unused.

What the RMCH crisis ultimately exposes is an unacceptable failure in governance, fuelled by negligence and a culture of lack of accountability. This cannot be improved without combined efforts from the policymakers, healthcare professionals, and general citizens. Only with greater transparency in government spending, optimal use of the existing resources, and a firm commitment to ensuring that every medical case receives proper and timely treatment can we ensure that lives are no longer needlessly lost.

The surcharge of Eid-time tragedies



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

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

SHAMSAAD MORTUZA

In Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*, a character with supposed authority intensifies the absurdity by quantifying emotion. Pozzo philosophises, "The tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep, somewhere else another stops. The same is true of the laugh." The inseparability and cyclical nature of joy and sorrow is found in the folkloric wisdom that we learnt at school, "The more the laughter, the more the tears—so said Ram Shonna." We are taught to accept the fact that joy is never permanent, and happiness carries within it the seed of its fading.

Call me a pessimist, but reports of accident-related deaths that marred our Eid celebrations have a sobering effect. As if nature had its own mechanism to warn us against joy and force us to recognise a type of emotional symmetry that posits laughter and tears not as polar opposites but as necessary neighbours, like yin and yang.

It was almost surreal to see a bus plunging into the Padma River from the pontoon attached to a ferry boat at Daulatdia ghat in Rajbari. A ferry hit the pontoon, causing the bus to lose control and roll over straight into the river with passengers inside. As of Thursday night, 26 bodies have been recovered, with some passengers escaping through the windows and locals pulling them ashore. The absurdity is further solidified when you get to hear that the driver was allegedly having tea at a nearby stall and the helper was behind the steering wheel. Whatever the situation might have been, we are dealing with deaths caused by callousness. The passengers did not follow the protocol of getting off the bus before boarding the ferry. The guardrail was not sturdy enough to prevent such accidents. The pontoons and the ferry were aligned in a dangerous curve. The constant river erosion doesn't allow the administration to prepare a proper dockyard, which exacerbates the risk of accidents.

My newsfeed is filled with anecdotal references to some of the deceased. Colleagues from my previous workplace are showering praise on a



FILE PHOTO: KHALID BIN NAZRUL

At least 12 people were killed on a bus that was hit by a train on a level crossing in Cumilla on March 22, 2026.

former debater and campus livewire, Raihan, who was among the victims. I have friends who had family members in that ill-fated bus. I cannot just brush away the incident as a distant accident. It could have been any one of us.

Every year, during Eid holidays, lives are claimed by road crashes. The Daulatdia ferry ghat accident will be a footnote in this year's road crash report, just like the report of a **bus ramming into a train** on March 22 at a level crossing in Cumilla's Paduar Bazar. Twelve passengers died with at least 15-20 injured in that incident. Add to that the crash in Burichang when a bus rear-ended a private car, killing all four members of a family as well as the driver.

There is no short supply of accident news during Eid holidays. You cannot blame the authority because they have done their part by issuing multiple directives. Yet, we continue to have tragic incidents like the one in Burichang. During such times, we often find ourselves lamenting

and families who face the harsh reality of risky journeys while yearning to be near their loved ones during the holiday season.

Behind each number of casualties, there is a human face. Imagine the trauma of the eight-year-old who was pushed out of the window as the bus was plummeting into the deep water of Padma; he will always blame himself for not being able to help his mother in her final moments. Should he consider his life a gift from his mother? Like many of us, should he simply blame "reckless drivers" and move on? What about fatigue, long hours, and a lack of defined limits for drivers? Whose profit-mongering allowed these drivers to be reckless? Why didn't the guards at the ferry terminal insist on the offboarding of passengers? Once we start asking these questions, we plunge into a void of moral choices. A system designed to compete with rivals and maximise profits for its owners compromises the drivers' agency. The passenger is but a commodity. But the "workers"

this celebration becomes a dangerous duty, we need to go beyond asking, "Why are our roads unsafe?" and start asking, "Why do we accept unsafe roads as normal at the very moment we claim to value family most?"

We can philosophise the Eid casualties as a seasonal fate. But there are pragmatic steps that can make Eid joy constant. This will require ferry terminals with adequate barriers, level crossings with efficient safety devices, drivers following labour rights and safety policies, and unfit vehicles being removed from service. Above all, the process will require action plans based on the investigation reports. We need to learn from every accident and stop burying the investigation reports along with the deceased.

As for the victims, the winds raged last night with their monsoon moods, and I listened to a favourite song of mine by Sting, "On and on, the rain will fall/ Like tears from a star, like tears from a star/ On and on, the rain will say, /How fragile we are, how fragile we are."

Bangladesh needs a national heat action plan



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MUNEM AHMAD CHOWDHURY

In the history of global climate, Bangladesh's vulnerability has been noted in facing risks from floods, cyclones, and rising sea levels. However, in recent years, a new factor has emerged in the vulnerability trajectory: heatwaves. This became particularly evident when the country experienced 24 days of heatwaves in April 2024, surpassing the previous record of 23 days set in 2019. The temperature in Jashore was recorded at 43.8 degrees Celsius, the highest in 52 years. Heat is our fastest-growing concern, yet it remains the most under-addressed national emergency.

This can be viewed as a systematic climatic shift. According to the World Bank report titled "An Unsustainable Life: The Impact of Heat on Health and the Economy of Bangladesh," temperature has risen by 1.1 degrees Celsius since 1980. However, the feeling of temperature, which is the true measure of human suffering, rose by 4.5 degrees Celsius, making the streets of Dhaka feel like open furnaces. With the urban heat island (UHI) effect, the capital's heat index is 65 percent higher than the national average.

We often believe that the consequences may be just

meteorological. But they have deep economic and personal impact as well. In 2024 alone, Bangladesh lost 25 crore workdays to heat-related illnesses, bleeding \$1.78 billion out of our GDP. For the rickshaw-puller in Dhaka, the farmer in Rajshahi or the garment worker in Gazipur, staying indoors is not merely an option but a choice between heatstroke and hunger.

The most alarming consequences are the hidden tolls on people's health. The rate of respiratory and waterborne diseases has doubled in recent summers. Beyond that, a new horizon has emerged: mental health crises. Studies reported that struggling with depression during extreme heat periods is increasing among all age groups. Moreover, women are particularly more vulnerable. They are 77 percent more likely to face heat exhaustion as most of the kitchens are poorly ventilated, trapping the burners' heat as well as the sun's fury.

Despite this, the country lacks a comprehensive national heat action plan (NHAP). When the mercury rises, the bare minimum is decided: to shut down the classrooms. There is also a lack of a proper plan for how academic activities will continue during this time. Meanwhile, hospitals struggle

to manage heatstroke season without dedicated cooling wards.

A NHAP is not a luxury; it is a survival strategy. These components should be incorporated into the design to yield better results: i) there should be a localised early warning system which will enable real-time heat alerts (before 48 hours) that reach the most vulnerable people via mobile phones

We often believe that the consequences may be just meteorological. But they have deep economic and personal impact as well. In 2024 alone, Bangladesh lost 25 crore workdays to heat-related illnesses, bleeding \$1.78 billion out of our GDP. For the rickshaw-puller in Dhaka, the farmer in Rajshahi or the garment worker in Gazipur, staying indoors is not merely an option but a choice between heatstroke and hunger. The most alarming consequences are the hidden tolls on people's health.

and community radio; ii) we must implement Geographic Information System (GIS)-based vulnerability mapping to identify heat hotspots and at-risk populations, allowing authorities to prioritise water tanker distribution; iii) urban redesigning is

another issue which may take time, yet some measures like building cooling sheds, restoration of urban water bodies, and the expansion of rapid growing green canopies in the most heat-experienced zones could be implemented initially; iv) one of the most import issues during this event is labour protection. Legally mandated heat breaks, hydration stations for outdoor workers, and social safety nets to cover lost income could be acted upon immediately; v) mandatory cool roof regulations for all new factories, high-rises and even for residential buildings should be in the respective authorities' guidelines; vi) for behavioural change, communication on hydration, symptoms, and cooling is necessary. Ads in local dialects in channels and posters in marketplaces and mosques could be circulated; and vii) specialised training is needed for healthcare providers to treat heat-related trauma and mental health issues. Besides, dedicated cooling wards for heat-related patients are also a crying need.

The escalating heatwave crisis in Bangladesh is an undeniable national emergency that demands immediate state action. Ad-hoc measures are no longer sufficient. A comprehensive NHAP is needed to protect vulnerable populations, redesign urban landscapes, and prepare the healthcare system. The country has successfully mastered the resilience needed to survive floods and cyclones. It must now direct that same urgency and planning towards surviving the heat. The mercury continues to rise, and the window for effective action is rapidly closing.

A war we did not start is coming for our rice fields



Md Kawsar Uddin
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MD KAWSAR UDDIN

No one in Bangladesh voted for the war. No one here had any say in whether the United States and Israel should attack Iran on February 28. Yet, as revealed by an Al Jazeera report on March 18, most fertiliser factories in the country have reportedly been forced to shut down. The Boro rice harvest, the single most important crop in our agricultural calendar, is weeks away from its critical fertilisation window. And the natural gas that keeps those factories running, which comes from the Gulf region, is facing severe disruption moving through a strait that two foreign militaries have turned into a battlefield.

This is the story the global conversation about the Iran war is almost entirely missing. Everyone is wondering about missile counts and oil prices and the fate of the Iranian regime. But in the rice fields across Bangladesh, a different kind of damage is quietly accumulating, and it has nothing to do with missiles.

Bangladesh is one of the most fertiliser-dependent agricultural economies in South Asia. Boro rice, our largest and most productive rice season, harvested between April and June, requires intensive nitrogen fertilisation during its growth phase. There is no negotiating with the biology of the crop. Without urea applied at the right moment, yields fall and the shortfall is not something that can easily be made up later in the season. Amid severe disruptions to Qatar's LNG exports linked to the conflict, QatarEnergy, the state-owned petroleum and natural gas company, reportedly halted output at one of the world's largest urea facilities in the country, cutting off a critical feedstock for nitrogen fertiliser production across the region, according to media reports.

UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)'s Chief Economist Máximo Torero was unusually direct in his assessment. Speaking to NPR on March 20, he named Bangladesh as one of the countries facing the most immediate impact in South Asia, alongside India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. And he said something that should alarm anyone



'Bangladesh is one of the most fertiliser-dependent agricultural economies in South Asia.'

FILE PHOTO: KONGKON KARMAKER

paying attention: unlike the 2022 Russia-Ukraine crisis, when countries scrambled and found alternatives from the Gulf, this time alternatives may be far more limited. The Gulf itself is the source of the problem.

The numbers behind this are genuinely staggering. According to estimates, nearly a

third of all globally traded fertiliser normally passes through the Strait of Hormuz. Nearly half of all globally traded urea, the nitrogen fertiliser that rice depends on most critically, comes from the Gulf region. Since the war began, urea prices have jumped roughly 50 percent, from around \$482 per metric ton on February 27 to over \$720 by mid-March, according to Argus, a specialist commodities pricing agency. For a Bangladeshi farmer

already operating on thin margins, a 50 percent increase in their single largest input cost is not just an inconvenience but potentially the difference between planting and not planting.

And here is the part that makes this particularly problematic. Bangladesh sources

a significant share of its fertiliser from the Gulf region. When a country that depends heavily on a critical agricultural import loses access to that supply at the exact moment its most productive crop needs it most, the consequences are felt everywhere: in the market, in the field, and eventually on the plate.

There is a broader point here that extends beyond Bangladesh. The Carnegie

Endowment for International Peace published a sharp analysis on March 12 noting that even if the Strait of Hormuz reopened soon, restarting fertiliser production and transport could take weeks. Weeks that Northern Hemisphere farmers simply do not have given where we are in the planting calendar.

As historian Adam Tooze has observed, wars that collide with agricultural cycles inflict damage that outlasts the fighting itself. The US and Israel do not seem to have factored that in.

The global conversation tends to frame the economic fallout of this war in terms of oil prices and stock markets, metrics that wealthy countries and financial professionals watch. But the deeper and longer lasting damage may be in food systems, and it will fall hardest on the people who are already most vulnerable. Analysts at Rabobank have specifically identified Bangladesh among the countries likely to be worst affected in the region, and the data supports that assessment. Rice and maize, the staple crops in South and Southeast Asia, are among the most nitrogen-intensive crops in the world. A sustained fertiliser shortage will eventually reduce yields. And reduced yields in a country of more than 17 crore people where food security and rice security are essentially the same thing is a different order of problem entirely.

What makes this moment particularly important to name clearly is the politics of who suffers. The countries that will pay the heaviest price for this war in food terms are not the countries that launched it. The US produces a large share of its fertiliser domestically. Even American farmers who have been hurt—and they have been—with urea prices at the Port of New Orleans up by 32 percent and the president of the American Farm Bureau Federation writing a letter to Trump asking for urgent intervention, still have domestic buffers that countries like Bangladesh simply do not possess.

We are not collateral damage in some abstract geopolitical sense. There are actual fields in this country where the timing of fertiliser application over the next few weeks will determine what kind of harvest comes in May and June. There are farmers making decisions right now about whether they can afford inputs whose prices have surged because of a war they had no part in starting.

On March 23, Trump paused his threats to bomb Iranian power plants, claiming negotiations were underway. Iran denied it. The markets briefly celebrated. Oil fell. On March 27, he extended the hiatus for 10 more days. Yet, the fertiliser that Bangladesh needed to produce is still not moving through the Strait of Hormuz, and the planting calendar does not care about diplomatic manoeuvring in Washington.

The world is debating who is winning a war. Bangladesh is wondering whether it will have enough urea for its rice.

How e-Health Cards can improve our patient care



Dr Syed Abdul Hamid
is professor of health economics at Dhaka University, convener at Wellbeing First Initiative Bangladesh (WFIB), and chief adviser at Universal Research Care Ltd.

SYED ABDUL HAMID

In line with its electoral commitment, the BNP government has initiated steps to introduce the national e-Health Card by June this year. It is an important step towards building an effective, modern and integrated healthcare system, the need for which experts have long emphasised, and which the Health Sector Reform Commission recommended.

If implemented properly, a unique e-Health Card could make the country's healthcare system more efficient, transparent, and accountable. It could improve the quality of healthcare services, ensure continuity of care, and strengthen accountability within the system. In particular, it would enable more effective use of patients' previous medical histories in diagnosis, control fraudulent patient registrations, establish an effective referral system, introduce family-based defined service packages, and monitor healthcare utilisation and expenditure.

In many countries, citizens are issued either a physical or digital e-health card. These cards usually contain the patient's name, photograph, health identification number, and a QR code. Healthcare facilities can quickly scan the card to retrieve patient information and access medical histories from electronic health record systems. As a result, healthcare delivery becomes faster, more accurate, and better coordinated.

Both approaches have advantages and limitations.

Global experience suggests that in most countries, national identification or birth registration numbers are not used as health identifiers. Instead, a health identification number is created specifically for use within the healthcare system. The main reasons for this approach are to protect personal privacy, ensure data security, and improve the efficiency of health information management. In such systems, national ID or birth registration numbers are generally used only during the registration process for identity verification while a separate health ID is used to manage patient information in hospitals, clinics, and diagnostic laboratories.

Under India's Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, citizens receive an Ayushman Bharat Health Account (ABHA) with a 14-digit health identification number that links patients' medical information across various hospitals and healthcare institutions. Similarly, in the UK's National Health Service (NHS), every patient is assigned an NHS number, which is used to identify individuals when they access healthcare services. In contrast, some countries, such as Estonia, which have highly advanced digital infrastructures, have integrated the NID number with health information systems. These systems also rely on robust data protection and cybersecurity mechanisms.

However, the most widely accepted approach is to create a dedicated health identification number for and use it on e-Health Cards to protect personal privacy, enhance the security

of health information systems, and allow inclusion of individuals who may not yet have NID documents, such as children or other vulnerable groups.

Regardless of the specific card format, introducing an e-Health Card is not merely a card distribution programme; it requires a comprehensive digital health ecosystem with several key components.

First, an electronic medical record (EMR) system is required to digitally store patients' medical histories, diagnostic tests, medications, and follow-up information. Second, a shared integrated health information platform is needed so that healthcare institutions at different levels—community clinics, union health centres, upazila health complexes, district hospitals, and specialised hospitals—can securely exchange necessary patient information. Third, hospital automation is an important component of this system. To manage hospitals or health facilities digitally, adequate technological infrastructure is required. This includes sufficient computers and other hardware, reliable high-speed internet connectivity, secure servers and data storage systems, and uninterrupted electricity supply. Considering the past uncertainties in electricity and internet services in our country, backup power solutions such as generators or solar energy systems should also be ensured.

In addition, skilled human resources are essential for the effective operation of digital systems. Each health facility should have trained personnel responsible for information management, software operation, and routine maintenance. At the same time, physicians and other healthcare workers must receive appropriate training so that the digital system simplifies their work rather than creating additional burdens.

Ensuring data security and privacy is also crucial for the successful implementation of the national e-Health Card system. Since health data is highly sensitive, strong cybersecurity measures and clear

policies governing the storage and use of patient information are necessary. The success of this initiative will also depend largely on governance structures and financing mechanisms. Effective coordination between the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) and the Directorate General of Family Planning (DGFP) is essential as healthcare and family planning services are currently managed through separate administrative systems.

At the same time, a strong data governance framework is needed to protect patients' personal health information and establish clear rules and accountability for data usage. Without ensuring privacy and cybersecurity, public trust in the system cannot be achieved. Equally important is realistic planning for sustainable financing. Producing e-Health Cards alone will not be sufficient. Long-term funding must be secured for infrastructure development, recruitment, training, system maintenance, and regular technological upgrades.

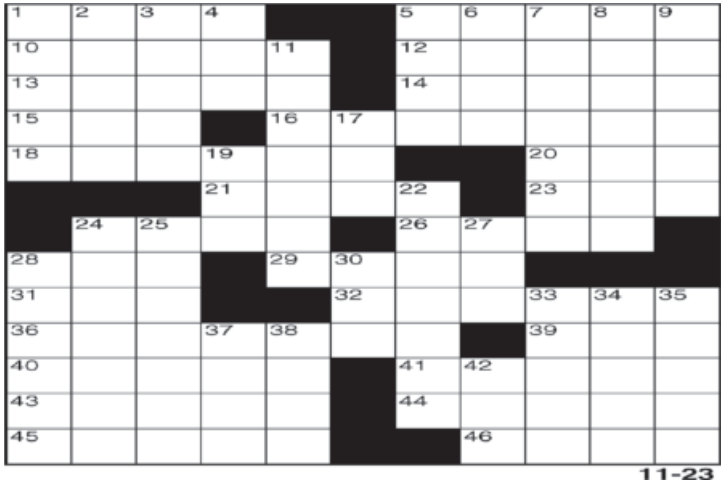
To ensure successful implementation, several practical steps may be taken. Pilot projects could be launched in selected districts to test different components of the digital health system. The new system should be effectively integrated with existing health information systems. Meanwhile, the technological capacity of grassroots health facilities should be strengthened gradually.

Public awareness campaigns are necessary for citizens to understand the benefits of using e-Health Cards and be motivated to access healthcare services.

With appropriate infrastructure, skilled human resources, effective governance, and realistic planning, the e-Health Card initiative has the potential to make Bangladesh's healthcare system more integrated, efficient, and accessible to the population. Now is the time to ensure that the necessary preparations are in place for its successful implementation.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
1 Self-satisfied
5 Sobbed
10 Apartment sign
12 Door feature
13 Say
14 Writer Chekhov
15 Negative link
16 Japanese "thanks"
18 Italian "thanks"
20 Model buy
21 Shade providers
23 Jargon suffix
24 Have a repast
26 Play group
28 Stake
29 Track item
31 Good times
- 32 Swahili "thanks"
36 Spanish "thanks"
39 History stretch
40 Sachet scent
41 Different
43 Summon up
44 Showed over
45 Hamper
46 Squirrel's cache
- DOWN**
1 Taken aback
2 Car part
3 Extreme
4 "My word!"
5 Spiced tea
6 Bout site
7 Gas pipes
8 Selfish one
- 9 Mean
11 Movie preview
17 "Stand" band
19 Buddhism branch
22 Cut
24 Strip
25 "That's expensive!"
27 Imitating
28 Made bull elk sounds
30 Bond rating
33 First Indian prime minister
34 Pick up the tab
35 Brings in
37 Bakery buy
38 Bakery worker
42 High card



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



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TUSHI

elevates the pressure

PHOTO: COURTESY OF 'PRESSURE COOKER' TEAM

“Reshma is a simple girl, neglected by society, whose life is defined by survival and pressure. Gradually, as she becomes Pakhi, she sheds that identity. Rafi told me, ‘You can become Reshma, but becoming Pakhi will be difficult. You’ll need Pakhi’s spark.’ Pakhi is an upper-class persona where everything revolves around money and power.”

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

Nazifa Tushi has been winning hearts with her unforgettable portrayal of ‘Reshma Pakhi’ in Raihan Rafi’s *Pressure Cooker*. Although the film debuted with a limited number of screenings, word of mouth spread rapidly; audiences are now captivated not only by the bold storyline but also by Nazifa’s mesmerising performance. The Daily Star caught up with Nazifa, who shared her journey into the character and her thoughts on the shifting landscape for female-led cinema in Bangladesh.

“Whenever we go to a cinema hall, people greet us warmly and with immense excitement; many are even bringing their families along,” Nazifa shared. “Sometimes the crowd is so large that tickets sell out almost instantly. Two of our shows were VIP screenings with tickets priced around 900 BDT, and they sold out completely.” She described the public response as both humbling and motivating. “Seeing sold-out shows and knowing the audience is truly enjoying the film is such a blessing. It shows that people value the work we’ve put into it. The feedback for my character has been incredibly positive. I usually shy away from self-praise, but it’s heartening to see how female audiences, in particular, are connecting with the story.”

Even though *Pressure Cooker* is classified as an 18+ film, Nazifa noticed many parents bringing their children to watch it. “The rating isn’t about extreme violence or cruelty; it’s about portraying realistic, socially grounded situations,” she explained. “Addressing these issues is vital—ignoring them would make the story incomplete. Meeting parents who felt it was important for their children to see the film

was very rewarding. It proved that the story resonates far beyond the screen.”

One of the primary draws for Nazifa was the film’s focus on a woman’s perspective. “*Pressure Cooker* presents a world dominated by women—a female-centric space,” she said. “The story unfolds entirely through Reshma’s eyes, revealing multiple layers of society through a hyperlink-style narrative.” Nazifa also reflected on the systemic challenges facing women in the industry. “A colleague once told me that films led by women don’t do well commercially, and that a strong male presence is necessary. That stayed with me, and I’ve always felt it was a flawed notion. Men dominate most aspects of the industry—commanding higher fees and enjoying more privileges. Even talented actresses don’t always receive equal opportunities or pay, despite showing the same dedication and professionalism.”

Fans have also been raving about the chemistry between Nazifa and her co-star, Rizvi Rizu. “We first worked together in a music video, which led to us both being cast in *Hawa*. After that, I hoped someone would pair us again. Finally, that wish came true in *Pressure Cooker*. Rafi gave Rizu a brilliant character, and working with him was an absolute pleasure. Our comfort and genuine chemistry come across naturally on screen, and I think that’s why the audience is responding so positively.”

To fully embody Reshma, a professional masseuse, Nazifa went above and beyond. “I wanted the character to feel authentic. Every character has a unique journey, and I try to live in their world as much as possible—method acting really helps,” she said. Nazifa visited various salons across the country, experiencing

massages firsthand and practicing the techniques on her family and friends to ensure her movements looked natural on camera. She also spent time with two women whose real-life experiences mirrored Reshma’s. “Observing how they moved, thought, and reacted helped me understand the character more deeply. Spending time with real people is essential for bringing authenticity to a role.”

The film also explores Reshma’s complex transformation into Pakhi. “Reshma is a simple girl, neglected by society, whose life is defined by survival and pressure. Gradually, as she becomes Pakhi, she sheds that identity. Rafi told me, ‘You can become Reshma, but becoming Pakhi will be difficult. You’ll need Pakhi’s spark.’ Pakhi is an upper-class persona where everything revolves around money and power.” To understand Pakhi’s environment, Nazifa visited various local and upscale bars at night, observing the intense and often aggressive interactions between clients and performers.

“It was a sensitive and exhausting environment, but I wanted to experience it fully. Initially, the physical and mental toll of that world is painful. You can’t truly understand it unless you live it. Every girl I portrayed gave me a glimpse into a hidden struggle. That suppression—that ‘pressure’—is what this film is really about.” For Nazifa, the emotional weight of the project made the success even sweeter. “I care deeply about this film. If the audience connects with it, I’ll feel more fulfilled than with any other project. I could have chosen an easy, guaranteed-hit story with a superstar lead, but I chose this challenge because this story needed to be told. Taking this risk was necessary, and I feel it was worth it.”

TRENDY STREAMS

Netflix
Peaky Blinders: The Immortal Man



Chorki
Cactus



Hoichoi
Ekshathe Alada



iScreen
Chokro



Bongo
Love Sitter



STYLE STATEMENT

ZENDAIA

At the Academy Awards, Zendaya delivered in modern glamour with a custom Louis Vuitton gown rendered in rich chocolate brown. The one-shoulder silhouette draped effortlessly across the body, its sculptural folds creating a soft, liquid-like movement that felt both minimal and deeply sensual. The monochromatic palette extended into her beauty look—bronzed tones across the eyes and cheeks, paired with a glossy nude lip—enhancing the warmth of the ensemble. Sleek, side-parted hair and statement earrings completed the look.



‘Elizabeth Taylor’ by Taylor Swift



Taylor Swift’s Elizabeth Taylor arrives with a clear sense of image and reference, drawing on old Hollywood glamour to frame a story about fame, perception and identity. The track leans into a polished pop arrangement, with measured pacing and a focus on vocal delivery rather than heavy production. Since its release, Elizabeth Taylor has gained strong streaming numbers across global platforms, appearing on major

pop playlists and driving consistent daily listens. Its performance reflects Swift’s continued ability to generate immediate audience attention with each new release. The song sits within a broader pattern in Swift’s work; using cultural references to anchor personal narratives. Here, the title functions less as tribute and more as a lens, placing the spotlight on how public figures are seen, remembered and reinterpreted over time.

OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA



Rishka Fest: Short Film Screening
Today (March 28) | 11 am–11 pm
Aloki, Gulshan



‘Pulsiraat’
March 29 | 7 pm onwards
Experimental Theatre Hall, BSA



‘Golmatha ar Chokhamatha’
April 17–18 | 7:30 pm onwards
Bangladesh Mohila Samity

TV TALKIES

‘Made in Korea’

Made in Korea is a Netflix original film starring Priyanka Arul Mohan. It follows Shenbagam, a girl from a small town in Tamil Nadu, who dreams of going to Seoul. In a new country, she faces unfamiliar languages, cultures, and challenges that teach her courage and self-discovery. The film combines Tamil, Korean, and English. Released on March 12, it quickly gained popularity on Netflix and is trending at the top for its heartwarming story.





PHOTO: STAR

Pabna litchi growers eye bumper harvest

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

Litchi farmers in Pabna are expecting a bumper harvest and record-breaking profits this summer after years of heavy losses -- thanks to favourable weather conditions.

However, they remain cautious about potential damage from nor'wester storms.

During a visit to Ishwardi -- Bangladesh's largest litchi-producing hub -- a spectacular bloom was seen in most trees.

Sheikh Mehedi Hasan of Shahapur village estimated a harvest of 10,000-12,000 fruits from large trees, 7,000-8,000 from medium-sized trees, and 4,000-5,000 from smaller ones each.

Wholesale prices are currently set at Tk 1,200 per thousand fruits for local varieties and Tk 1,700-1,800 for hybrids such as Bombay and China 3.

While the prices are slightly lower than last year's, farmers and traders believe the sheer volume of the fruits

will ensure record profits.

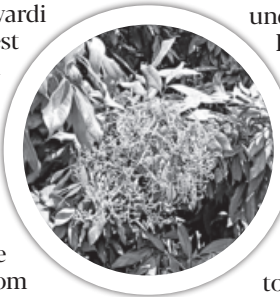
Sajahan Ali Badsha, a litchi grower in Pabna, said if 60-70 percent of the buds successfully mature into fruits, this year's business may exceed Tk 700-800 crore, surpassing all previous records.

According to the Department of Agricultural Extension, 4,620 hectares have been brought under litchi cultivation in Pabna this year, with over 3,000 hectares in Ishwardi alone.

Md Shah Alam, development section officer at DAE in Pabna, said last year's yield was the lowest in a decade at 34,898 tonnes, compared to 46,790 in 2024.

"We usually see an average yield of 10 tonnes per hectare, but this year we are expecting at least 11 tonnes per hectare due to abundant blooms," Alam said.

"We anticipate a total production exceeding 50,000 tonnes, provided there is no major damage from natural disasters."



Ex-army officials

FROM PAGE 3

on the third day of his remand about his alleged rise to influence during the caretaker government and claims that he later benefited under the Awami League government by misusing state machinery.

He did not provide any information on these matters, according to DB sources.

At least two DB officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said although Chowdhury was arrested in a human trafficking case, he has not yet been questioned about that case.

"His five-day remand has almost ended, and further time may be sought for interrogation," one official said.

Contacted, DB Joint Commissioner (Cyber) Syed Harun Or Rashid said the investigation is still at a preliminary stage, with no significant progress to report.

Mamun Khaled, arrested early Thursday in the murder case, was asked why "Ayna Ghor" was established, who the first victim was, and about detainees' experiences, a senior DB official said.

However, the former DGFI chief did not respond, added the official.

The official claimed that the detention cells were first introduced during Khaled's tenure.

Defence sources said Sheikh Mamun, who joined DGFI in December 2007 as director of the Forces Intelligence Security Bureau (FSIB), allegedly accumulated significant wealth by threatening political leaders and businessmen.

Another defence source claimed he was a key figure behind the establishment of "Ayna Ghor" and orchestrated staged militancy operations.

The Daily Star could not independently verify these claims.

Contacted, DB Joint Commissioner Nasirul Islam, however, said the questioning is focused on the case for which Mamun Khaled was arrested.

DB chief and Additional Commissioner of Dhaka DMP Shafiqul Islam echoed him. If evidence of sudden or unusual wealth accumulation emerges, the matter will be investigated further, he said.

Rescue operation

FROM PAGE 4

received Tk 25,000 in government assistance.

Officials said no new missing persons had been reported to the district or upazila administration. However, a woman named Mukta Akter, also known as Sohana Shova, from Baliakandi upazila informed the fire service that her elder brother, Ripon Sheikh, is missing.

Ripon, 40, a kiln worker of Shyamsundarpur village under Baharpur union, had left home on Wednesday afternoon with his younger brother, Sumon Sheikh, for Dhaka.

Sumon, who works at a factory in Islampur, Dhaka, said he left Ripon at the New Market poultry farm bus stand in Rajbari town and went to a nearby shop for tea. When he returned, he found his brother missing.

Assuming nothing unusual, Sumon continued his journey to Dhaka and later informed the family of his safe arrival. As Ripon

did not carry a mobile phone, the family was unable to contact him.

Mukta Akter told journalists that her brother had planned to buy a phone after reaching Dhaka and inform the family.

"We still don't know whether he reached Dhaka. Since the bus sank on Wednesday night, we have been in deep concern," she said, adding that Ripon's wife, who is now at her parental home in Rajshahi, has not yet been informed.

Fire service official Rana said the family has not been able to confirm whether Ripon was a passenger on the Souhardo Paribahan bus. "If another body is recovered, we will try to match it with the missing person," he said.

Meanwhile, the registration of the bus has been suspended, said Muhammad Ahidur Rahman, assistant director (Rajbari Circle) at the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority.

6,000 litres

FROM PAGE 4

The seized items have been taken into legal custody, and a case is being prepared in connection with the incident, the OC said.

Meanwhile, in Sherpur, a mobile court fined a businessman Tk 10,000 for illegally installing a fuel tank and storing diesel in a residential building in the district town early yesterday.

The court also ordered the removal of the stored fuel and the tank within the day.

The drive was conducted by Executive Magistrate Mahmudul Hasan around 12:30am in the Gopalbari area.

The businessman, Tapas Nandi, owns an establishment named M/s Shimla Traders.

Sherpur Sadar Police Station OC Md Sohel Rana said a tank with a capacity of 25,000 litres had been illegally installed on the ground floor of a multi-storey building to store diesel.

Tapas Nandi, along with one Shafiqul Islam, was storing diesel there. During the drive, approximately 18,000 litres of diesel were found.

In Chapainawabganj, a mobile court yesterday fined a filling station in Gomostapur upazila Tk 20,000 for refusing to sell fuel despite having a significant amount in stock.

The drive was conducted by Gomostapur UNO and Executive Magistrate Zakir Munshi at Brothers and Sisters Filling Station in the Boro Dadpur area.

During the operation, authorities found that the filling station had suspended fuel sales by displaying a "No fuel at the pump" sign.

However, upon inspecting the storage tanks, officials discovered 2,368 litres of petrol, 3,760 litres of diesel, and 3,655 litres of octane in stock, the executive magistrate confirmed.

He also ensured that the sale of the stored fuel resumed immediately.

(Our Chattogram, Sherpur, and Rajshahi correspondents contributed to this report)

New advisers in the offing

FROM PAGE 12

The government had initially considered five to six names but is now narrowing the list to around three individuals for final selection, sources said.

Among those under consideration is Ziauddin Hyder, an adviser to the BNP chairperson and a former senior official at the World Bank. Ziauddin also served as a member of the BNP's central election steering committee. A senior health specialist, Ziauddin has also worked with a number of international organisations. He is likely to be appointed with the status of a full minister, sources said.

Another name under discussion is Saimum Parvez, who serves as a special assistant to the BNP chairperson's Foreign Affairs Advisory Committee and is also a member of the party's central election steering committee.

Sources said his profile is being considered useful in a government that is trying to strengthen both policy communication and coordination.

Party sources said there is also discussion about Tanvir Ghani, the president of The Osiris Group, an Asian investment firm, being appointed as an adviser with the rank of state minister. His inclusion, if finalised, would add a business and investment background to the team being considered.

Seeking anonymity, a PMO official said, "Ziauddin Hyder's and Saimum Parvez's files are ready. Once signed, the appointments will be

announced."

PMO officials did not confirm the final list of names. They said discussions are still ongoing and any decision will require approval from the highest level of government. The final decision on the new advisers is expected soon, with formal announcements likely to be made once approvals are completed.

Sources said that PMO officials are now scrutinising the candidates, seeking feedback on their qualifications and past work, while also assessing their political loyalty before making final decisions. The timing may depend on the completion of paperwork and final clearance from the top level.

The government has already appointed 10 advisers since taking office, including five with the rank of minister and five with the rank of state minister. These advisers are working with different ministries to support policy work and daily operations.

The planned expansion comes as the government faces pressure on multiple fronts, working to deliver election promises and rebuild weakened institutions, while also dealing with an ongoing energy crisis that has added strain on its overall operations.

Officials said the pressure is both political and administrative, as ministries are being asked to move faster on decisions and visible delivery.

Ministries are also dealing with routine governance work, development projects, and

public service delivery. Managing these tasks with limited manpower has slowed the pace of work in some areas.

In some cases, sources said, senior officials are spending large amounts of time on immediate operational matters, leaving less room for planning and follow-up.

Seeking anonymity, a state minister said, "The prime minister wants, alongside ministers and state ministers, an expert team to support them. Some in the cabinet lack experience, and there is also a need for more expatriate expertise. In that context, adding advisers will help improve outcomes."

Cabinet sources said several key ministries have recently reported weaknesses in administrative capacity and delays in work processes, affecting timely decision-making and implementation of policies.

"The government is trying to move fast, but the system is under strain. Adding more experienced hands is one way to deal with that," a state minister told this newspaper.

Officials said the new advisers will focus on policy planning, inter-ministry coordination, and faster review of pending decisions, working closely with ministers and senior officials to prepare reports and ensure timely implementation.

In some cases, advisers may also play a role in handling international communication and managing relations with development partners, said cabinet sources.

1 killed, 25 hurt

FROM PAGE 4

dispute between the two families over control of the shoal land in the Madhumati river.

Locals alleged that members of the Biswas family attacked a youth named Arif Sheikh with a fishing spear while he was travelling on the Chitalmari-Patgati road.

The incident quickly escalated into a series of clashes between the two groups. Witnesses said more than 200 people, allegedly led by Sayad Biswas and Sohag Member, launched a coordinated attack on the Sheikh family's homes.

"They came with weapons, started beating people, and set our houses on fire," said local resident Md Bablu Sheikh. "As we tried to resist, police arrived and dispersed our people, while the attackers set fire to our homes right in front of them."

The damage extended to several multi-storey buildings.

Abdul Wadud, station officer at Chitalmari Fire Service, said four firefighting units worked for three hours to douse the blazes.

Police have arrested one Sourav Biswas, 19, in connection with the incident, while Rajib's body has been sent to Khulna Medical College Hospital morgue for an autopsy, said Bagerhat Additional Superintendent of Police (Sadar Circle) Md Shamim Hossain.

Additional police personnel have been deployed to prevent further clashes, while drives are on to arrest the culprits, he added.

Sri Lanka jails

FROM PAGE 12

Iran, triggering retaliatory attacks that disrupted global supplies.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's office said he had held talks with visiting Russian Deputy Energy Minister Roman Marshavin on securing oil supplies.

In a statement, Dissanayake's office quoted the Russian minister as saying: "Russia is prepared to support Sri Lanka in facing any challenges arising from the Middle East conflict."

Ex-rapper Shah sworn

FROM PAGE 12

patriotism and optimism for a bright future for Nepal.

"Nepal is not scared this time, the heart is full of red blood ... laughter and happiness will reach every household this time," Shah sang in the video featuring visuals of large crowds cheering him during his election campaign.

More than 200 Hindu priests and Buddhist lamas chanted hymns and peace prayers alongside the blowing of conch shells during the ceremony at the President House, attended by diplomats and senior government officials.

After being sworn in, Shah picked 14 members to his cabinet, keeping his campaign promise of having a small team to cut state expenses. He named Swarnim Wagle, a Harvard-educated economist, as finance minister.

"The first test of the new government lies in transparent and prompt delivery of services to people, who expect early signs of good governance from Sunday itself," political analyst Purnanjan Acharya said. Sunday is a working day in Nepal.

Acharya said Shah's early challenge is to implement the report of a panel that investigated the violence during the anti corruption protests, a key demand of the families of the victims. The report recommended the prosecution of those responsible for the crackdown, including then

Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli.

India and China congratulated Shah.

"I look forward to working closely with you to take India-Nepal friendship and cooperation to even greater heights for the mutual benefit of our two peoples," Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrote on X.

The Chinese foreign ministry said that Beijing would support its Himalayan neighbour in safeguarding its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The youth-led protests were fuelled by a lack of jobs and endemic corruption in the country of 30 million people, where a fifth of the population lives in poverty and an estimated 1,500 people leave the country daily for work abroad.

Political instability has been a bane, with 32 governments taking office since 1990 and none of them completing a five-year term.

The Nepali Congress party, the country's oldest party, became a distant second group in parliament with just 38 seats. The Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) of Oli, who was forced to resign after the Gen Z unrest, controls 25 members.

Former Chief Justice Sushila Karki led the nation through the interim period through to the parliamentary election.

Myanmar army

FROM PAGE 12

New Light of Myanmar newspaper quoted Min Aung Hlaing's deputy Soe Win as saying at an official dinner Thursday.

Lawmakers are set to begin the process of selecting a president next week following a walkover victory by pro-military parties earlier this year in elections overseen by the junta.

Democracy monitors said the elections were stage-managed to shut out opposition.

Under the constitution, Min Aung Hlaing would have to step down from his military post to become president, and Soe Win's comments reinforce expectations that he will do so.

He is already acting

Trump's name

FROM PAGE 12

and that of US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent will be printed in June, followed by other bills in subsequent months. The new bills may take several weeks to circulate through banks.

The Treasury is still producing notes bearing the signatures of former President Joe Biden's Treasury secretary, Janet Yellen, and former Treasurer Lynn Molerba.

Malerba will be the last of an unbroken line of treasurers whose

signatures have appeared on US federal currency since 1861, when the US government first issued it.

The signature change is the latest effort by the Trump administration and its allies to put the president's name on buildings, institutions, government programs, warships and coins. A federal arts panel, whose members Trump appointed, approved last week the design for a commemorative gold coin with Trump's image.

1.23 lakh tonnes

FROM PAGE 12

Business Ltd, the local agent for the two tankers, told The Daily Star that both vessels arrived on schedule.

Petrobangla sources said that although nine LNG cargoes were scheduled for March, only seven have arrived so far.

Two LNG shipments from Qatar, which were supposed to arrive this month, are yet to reach Bangladesh. Both vessels

remain stranded at Ras Laffan Port.

In 2025, Bangladesh imported 25.86 lakh tonnes of LNG. Of the total, 16.52 lakh tonnes, or 64 percent, came from Qatar.

Additionally, about 4,36,000 tonnes, or 17 percent, were imported from the US, while the rest was sourced from Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, Indonesia, Angola, Malaysia, and Australia.

Sonali chicken

FROM PAGE 12

Mir Rakib, a trader at Duaripara Market, said both demand and supply declined after Eid, leading to lower prices for some items.

However, tomatoes, cucumbers, green chilies, and lemons remained in demand.

Yesterday, tomatoes were sold at Tk 25-40 per kilogram, cucumbers at Tk 40-45, green chilies at

Tk 35-60, and half a dozen lemons at Tk 40-60.

Consumers expressed frustration at the renewed price hikes.

Borhan Uddin, a shopper at Tejturi Bazar, said prices had briefly eased after Eid, offering some relief.

"Now they are rising again. I paid nearly Tk 40 more per kg for a two-kilogram Sonali chicken," he added.

FICTION

Faded blue suitcase

Did Grandmother really leave that suitcase for me? Did she assign me the solemn right—the single right—to open it? What could be inside? Perhaps, behind that mysterious suitcase, another grandmother will be discovered—a grandmother I never knew. Or perhaps some unknown secret of hers will be revealed from within. Maybe she hid something there she would not tell anyone else;

ADNAN SYED

We once lived in Jackson Heights, Queens, New York City. Those days still return to me, especially when my grandmother's death anniversary comes around. At such times, I drift back into the past and live quietly within my memories. My grandmother was no ordinary woman. You may call her Birangona, but to me she was a brave freedom fighter of Bangladesh, shaped by courage and sacrifice. Her name will forever remain engraved in my hurt. The story is written in her memory.

The old, rusted key now rests in my hand.

As I run my fingers over its rough metal surface, I feel the soft, velvety touch of my grandmother's hand—as if time itself has folded back. And it's not only her touch I sense; I can also smell her. Grandmother used to rub jasmine and hibiscus oil into her hair. Whenever she entered a room, the air would fill with that sweet fragrance. Even now, I can smell it—as if she's standing right beside me, smiling softly, her hair scented with hibiscus oil.

My eyes are full of wonder, and my heart trembles with curiosity.

What could be inside this magical suitcase?

Before she passed away, Grandmother had said something strange:

"After my death, this suitcase will belong to my only grandson, Nabil."

From my very childhood, Grandmother had been my best friend. When I lived in Bangladesh, she was the center of my world. Once, she used to teach at a girls' school in a small town. Perhaps because she was a teacher, she had a deep love for reading and knowledge. It was she who first placed a



ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

book in my hands—the collection of children's stories.

Then one day, holding my parents' hands, I left for America. I was only 10 years old. But even after all these years, I've never been able to accept that separation from her. I remember pleading with my father again and again,

"Baba, why do we have to go to America?"

But he never really answered. He only said what all grown-ups say: America is the land of opportunities—better studies, a good job, more money...

No one thought of the loneliness we were leaving behind—of my grandmother who would be left all

alone. No one thought of the nights when I wouldn't fall asleep wrapped in her arms, or of the sky-high stories she would whisper into my ear.

Our separation began the very day we boarded the plane for New York. I still remember, at the airport she placed her hand on my head, whispered a prayer, kissed my forehead, and hugged me tightly. She said softly in my ear:

"Nabil, don't be sad, my dear. Life will have its hard times. But never forget your grandmother—ever! Write me a letter every month. Call me. I'll be waiting by the phone. And when you go to America, you'll read many new books, learn so many new things. But promise me, don't read alone—read to me too. You'll see, one day I'll come to

visit you there."

And she kept her promise—she came to America twice.

But America never felt like home to her.

No matter how hard we tried, we couldn't keep her there.

She used to say,

"How many days do I have left to live, my dear? I want to spend my last days in my own country—in my own soil."

Did Grandmother really leave that suitcase for me? Did she assign me the solemn right—the single right—to open it? What could be inside? Perhaps, behind that mysterious suitcase, another grandmother will be discovered—a grandmother I never knew. Or perhaps some unknown

secret of hers will be revealed from within. Maybe she hid something there she would not tell anyone else; maybe she wanted only me to know. The mystery tightened around me. For days I felt an odd mixture of curiosity and the scent of adventure. I could not wait.

Let me tell you a little about my father.

His name is Raqib Khan—a face full of quiet intelligence, fair complexion, a sharp, high nose. He stands nearly six feet tall. At first glance, he could easily be mistaken for a model. He works at a bank in New York and occasionally writes in Bangla newspapers. Recently, he has been working on a manuscript about the contribution of Bangladeshis around the world to Bangladesh's Liberation War—in other words, he is preparing himself to be a future researcher on the history of our independence.

Though he lives in New York, his heart remains in Bangladesh. In our living room in New York hangs a black-and-white photograph of my grandfather—Bir Muktijoddha Farooq Khan. On the TV stand rest two flags side by side—one American, one Bangladeshi. Even on our car dashboard, there's a small mat with the flag of Bangladesh. My father's pride in his homeland never fades. How could it? He lost his father in 1971—only three months before independence, on a dark night in September, when the Pakistani military attacked their home.

It's a long story, but let me tell it briefly.

This is an excerpt. Read the rest of the story on [The Daily Star](#) and [Star Books and Literature's websites](#).

Adnan Syed is a resident of New York, USA, and occasionally writes for [Star Books and Literature](#).

CREATIVE NONFICTION

Growing up with a new nation THE DHAKA WE ONCE KNEW

AHMED AHSANUZZAMAN

Children of 1972-73 came of age alongside Bangladesh itself. In Azimpur's close-knit colony, a telephone became a neighbourhood lifeline, television was a shared ritual, and the Buriganga was our afternoon escape.

There are generations whose childhoods are braided with the birth of a nation. Ours is one such cohort—those who walked into their first classrooms in 1972 and 1973, as Bangladesh itself took its first uncertain steps. We learned our lessons while the country learned to hope. The Dhaka of that time was

block. Neighbours used it freely and gratefully, passing messages to cousins across town. We became both switchboards and messengers: "Khalamma, call asche!" we would shout, and someone would hurry over, sari rustling. Connectivity then was communal, not personal; a single number stitched a dozen families together.

Most of us attended West End High School. There were no uniforms in those days; we wore what our mothers pressed and our fathers approved. We did not carry schoolbags either. Instead, we clutched sturdy briefcases—often leather, sometimes tin—whose metal snaps clicked like small declarations of purpose.



PHOTO: AZIMPUR COLONY CIRCA '40-'50S, COURTESY OF DHAKA DAILY PHOTO

not the relentless metropolis it is today; it was gentler, slower, a city that exhaled softly after dusk.

We lived in Azimpur government colony, in modest four-storey blocks that housed more love than luxury. Everyone knew everyone else. Parents of our friends were our Khalus and Khalammass; seniors were boro bhais, juniors choto bhais. Doors were rarely shut, and an unexpected knock was never an intrusion. We belonged to one another—at iftar tables in Ramadan, around winter stoves, and in the shaded squares where conversations skipped easily between households.

Only one family in our building owned a Philips television, and it turned their drawing room into a small cultural centre. On broadcast evenings, neighbours drifted in, seniors settling on chairs, stools (back then sofas were a luxury) and we, kids, on floors. The shows that etched themselves into our minds were imported wonders: Star Trek, Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea, Batman, The Saint, The Persuaders, and Hawaii Five-O. And how will I ever forget that wonderful children's serial Double Decker! The glow of that black-and-white set was less about pixels and more about proximity—the community gathered shoulder to shoulder, sharing delight.

Our home was one of the few with a telephone—a heavy, black rotary device that rang for the entire

Our school did not boast vast playgrounds; a compact field served us well. When we needed space, Azimpur's colony fields welcomed us with their forgiving grass and goalposts improvised from slippers.

As Class-V students, we often made for the Buriganga after school, swimming in waters that were then clear and kind. We returned home in the early afternoon, washed off the river, and ate with the happy hunger that only childhood provides. Then came the wait—the delicious, fidgety hour before late-afternoon games. Football in summer and rainy days; in winter, cricket, badminton, and volleyball. And always gollachut, daribandha, bouchi, race cue, and marbles, seasonless and timeless—games that asked little of money and everything of imagination.

Life in Azimpur moved to an internal rhythm—shaped by corridor conversations, stairwell secrets, and the comforting predictability of neighbours whose lives intertwined with ours daily. Parents discussed ration lines and rising hopes. Shared scarcity mingled with shared optimism, and somewhere in that mixture a neighbourhood identity formed: practical, resourceful, unafraid of inconvenience.

Mornings began with aluminium buckets clanging in impoverished kitchens. The milkman called out;

the newspaper boy slipped Daily Ittefaq and/or Bangladesh Observer under hinged doors or tossing them expertly onto balconies. Before school we stopped by neighbours' flats—sometimes to borrow a ruler or a fountain pen, sometimes because their breakfast smelled too good to ignore. The rituals were ordinary, but like beads on a tasbeeh they added up to something sacred: a sequence of small certainties that steadied our days.

Afternoons transformed the colony into a lively playground. Children spilled onto the fields behind the blocks, forming teams instantly. We lacked branded kits and level outfields but made up for them with invention. Older boys taught us how to float a slower ball from the back of the hand, how to bend a football barefoot, how to keep score with pebbles. When monsoon arrived, the fields flooded just enough to make football exhilarating—a festival of splashes, sliding tackles, and mothers shouting from balconies to mind our colds.

Winter brought badminton courts chalked on the ground, nets tied between bamboo posts, and the soft thwack of shuttlecocks slicing the crisp air. It also meant pitha-sharing evenings—bhapa, patishapta, chittoi—sent across homes by children, sometimes squashed slightly on arrival but always warmly received. In those exchanges, we learned a politics more durable than any slogan: the civic grace of giving and receiving.

By sunset, shadows stretched long across the grounds. Radios played songs or the news, and yet most children lingered outside, squeezing in the last minutes of play before mothers called them in. Friendships deepened in the dimming light—between marbles, stories, and whispered plans for tomorrow. If a quarrel broke out, it rarely survived the promise of

Afternoons transformed the colony into a lively playground. Children spilled onto the fields behind the blocks, forming teams instantly. We lacked branded kits and level outfields but made up for them with invention. Older boys taught us how to float a slower ball from the back of the hand, how to bend a football barefoot, how to keep score with pebbles.

another game the next day.

This is an excerpt. Read the rest of the article on [The Daily Star](#) and [Star Books and Literature's websites](#).

Ahmed Ahsanuzzaman is professor of English at Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB). He can be reached at ahsanuzzaman@iub.edu.bd.



DESIGN: MAHMUDA EMDAD

POETRY

Notice for the poems that won't be written

OHONA ANJUM JUI

One of these days, you will lose one or two limbs to the slow erosion of years, the same silence that took Grandfather's stories mid-sentence. There will not be a neighbour left to eavesdrop on our arguments over Father's stubborn land, our hysterical laughter shaking the old wood table, our boring complaints of parents, aunts kids, generational debt, and leftover sweets.

Not a soul to recall how Mother's voice, frayed as prayer, would stitch the dusk back together.

There will not be a tree standing.

No guava branch to scratch the roof in a monsoon, no shade where your daughter took her first steps.

You won't have your broom, the one you bound from coconut leaves, to sweep the dust of our name from this cracked threshold.

My death will not be news of terror, but a letter expected early, and came late.

The final stamp on a correspondence of worn-out silences. You will journey then, with an unknown woman on an exhausted donkey's back, through landscapes where only the wind answers.

You will ask the empty road, unknowingly, where to go? For the empire of our past is just those same leaves you swept from our backyard each evening figs, neem, and ash scattered beyond all recollection.

Our anthem of solitude was never sung; it hummed in the space between us as we shelled peas for dinner, a vibration in the heart not from love, not from fear, not from the "I" that once held you close in the dark. But listen. In closing, you will not merely remember that these battles are bigger than you.

You will wear that knowing, like the threadbare shawl Gentle woman embroidered with cranes, now loose at the hem.

They are of life, yes, but carved specifically for you the heirloom you wore without choice, the dust of our courtyard you inhaled into your very bones, the half-remembered lullaby Sister sang you to the other side of fear.

And when you finally look out, you will see a new world built on the weary bones of your mother, father, sister, brother, and stubborn light filtering through their absence.

You will realize the battle itself was, the only thing that could truly give: the quietness of the scar.

Then you will plant your one good hand in the earth, not thinking of poetry, but making a song of the silence, and calling it home.

Ohona Anjum writes, rhymes, and studies English literature.



ITALY KEEP World Cup hopes alive

Newcastle United midfielder Sandro Tonali scored a spectacular half-volley and set up another for Moise Kean as Italy negotiated a tricky home fixture against Northern Ireland with a 2-0 win in Bergamo on Thursday, setting up a World Cup playoff final against Bosnia and Herzegovina, who beat Wales on penalties. Tonali's rocket of a strike in the 56th minute and Kean's excellent finish 10 minutes from time saw Italy continue their bid to end a 12-year absence from the World Cup. Meanwhile, a Viktor Gyokeres hattrick helped Sweden cruise past Ukraine 3-1 in Valencia, as Denmark, Poland, Czechia, Kosovo, and Turkiye also advanced to the playoff finals.

2026 WORLD CUP EUROPEAN PLAYOFF FINALS

Bosnia and Herzegovina vs Italy
Sweden vs Poland
Kosovo vs Turkiye
Czechia vs Denmark

**** All the matches are set to be held on March 31, with the hosts' name mentioned first.**



Bangladesh grab compound GOLD IN ASIA CUP



SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh bagged gold medal in men's compound team event of Asia Cup Archery (World Ranking Tournament Stage-1) by beating Vietnam 231-225 in final held in Bangkok on Friday.

Bangladesh team, featuring Himu Bacchar, Aishwarzo Rahman and Newaz Ahmed Rakib, scored 57 against Vietnam's 55 in the first set and never looked back. Even though the men in red and green scored one less than Vietnam in the fourth set, they were overall three ahead of the opponents.

Bangladesh eventually scored 59 out of 60 in the fifth and final set to finish six points ahead of Vietnam to confirm first-ever gold medal in men's compound team event.

"It is the first-ever gold medal in compound event for Bangladesh beyond the South Asian region. Bangladesh had previously won men's team silver medal twice in Asia Cup in South Korea and Iraq in 2021 and 2022 respectively," Bangladesh archery team's assistant coach, Noor E Alam, told The Daily Star over phone from Bangkok.

Alam informed that it is also a maiden gold medal for all three archers -- Himu, Aishwarzo and Rakib. Himu was part of Bangladesh team during the silver medal triumph in South Korea and Iraq, while Rakib was a silver-winning member in Iraq.

U-20s face India challenge

SPORTS REPORTER

Reigning runners-up Bangladesh are all set to renew their rivalry with holders India in the SAFF U-20 Championship, as the two neighbours face off in the final Group B match at the National Stadium in Male, Maldives today. The match kicks off at 4:45pm Bangladesh time.

Both teams have already secured their semifinal berths with a game in hand. Former champions Bangladesh defeated Pakistan 2-0, while India beat the same opposition 3-0. As a result, today's clash has turned into a group decider, with the winners set to face Group A champions Nepal or runners-up Sri Lanka or Bhutan on April 1.

Bangladesh, who were bested by India in three finals, will need a victory to finish top of the group.

The task, however, appears challenging for the charges of Mark Cox. The team attended Thursday's India-Pakistan match, where they gathered valuable insights into their formidable opponents.

"We got two days to train after the Pakistan match, and we also watched the India-Pakistan game from the gallery. We've prepared accordingly, and our preparation has been really good," said Samuel Raksam, who came off the bench in the latter stages against Pakistan, in a video message sent by the Bangladesh Football Federation.

"After the match against Pakistan, we analysed our strengths and weaknesses. Watching the India-Pakistan match also helped us understand how to play against India," said Ashikur Rahman in another video clip.

Bangladesh will be hoping to deliver another strong performance in the group stage before heading into the semifinals, banking on the form of US-based forward Ronan Sullivan, who struck a brace against Pakistan.

Brazil lose but Ancelotti still 'half-satisfied'

STAR SPORTS DESK

Brazil coach Carlo Ancelotti said he was "half satisfied" despite a 2-1 defeat to 10-man France in a friendly in the United States on Thursday, insisting the performance displayed his side's ability to compete with the best.

Brazil fell behind in the first half at Gillette Stadium after Kylian Mbappe chipped past Ederson before France doubled their lead through Hugo Ekitike midway through the second half.

However, Brazil were handed an advantage when France defender Dayot Upamecano was shown a red card early in the second half. Brazil responded late on, with Gleison Bremer finishing from close range after an assist by Luiz Henrique to reduce the deficit.

"When you lose a game, you should never be happy... The result isn't the most important thing, but it does reveal what we did well and what we didn't," Ancelotti said after the game.

"In the overall context of the game, I am satisfied because the team competed and fought, even scoring from a set piece, which is

important. I am half-satisfied, but we certainly shouldn't be happy with the result."

The Italian also pointed to encouraging individual performances, particularly from



Raphinha and Vinicius Junior.

"I think Raphinha played very well... he had many opportunities and very good movement off the ball," Ancelotti said, adding that Vinicius "always tries" and "makes

the difference," even if he did not score.

Brazil were without several key players, including Alisson Becker, Gabriel Magalhães, Eder Militao, Bruno Guimaraes, Rodrygo and Estevao Willian.

There were also chants from fans for Neymar, who was not selected after missing a recent Santos match with muscle fatigue. Ancelotti, however, shifted the focus to the players on the pitch.

"Right now we have to talk about those who are here, who played, who gave everything... and I am satisfied," he said.

Despite the defeat, Ancelotti remained confident about Brazil's prospects ahead of the World Cup, where they will face Morocco, Scotland and Haiti in the group stage.

"I think today's game makes it very clear to me that we can compete with the best teams in the world. I have no doubt about that," he said.

Brazil will next take on Croatia in Orlando on March 31 as they continue preparations for the World Cup in North America.



Off the air in Bangladesh, IPL begins today sans glitz

STAR SPORTS DESK

The 19th edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL) will begin today and it is set to differ from all previous seasons in at least two regards.

Firstly, there will be no glitzy opening ceremony before the tournament opener between the defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) and Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) at the Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru today.

The ceremony is being skipped as a mark of respect to the 11 people who lost their lives at the same venue during RCB's trophy parade last year.

Secondly, for the very first time, IPL won't be telecast in Bangladesh.

On January 5 this year, the ICT Ministry had issued a letter, instructing all television channels and radio stations in the country not to broadcast the tournament.

The ministry claimed to have taken this decision in "public interest", in response to BCCI removing Bangladesh's Mustafizur Rahman from the IPL seemingly under pressure from right wing groups.

Mustafizur had been bought for INR 9.20 crore by Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) and was set to be the only Bangladeshi player in IPL this year, before being removed.

The issue snowballed into Bangladesh getting replaced by Scotland in the ICC T20 World Cup after the Tigers refused to travel to India over security concerns.

Recently, however, State Minister for Youth and Sports Aminul Islam has hinted at a possible reversal of the broadcast suspension.

"We have to know why it [IPL] was closed [broadcasting in Bangladesh], and later we can make a decision," Aminul was quoted by Cricbuzz. As it stands, however, the suspension remains in place.

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh cricketers geared into action following the Eid-ul-Fitr vacation with 37 players joining the national team's camp in Mirpur on Friday.

Players of all three formats showed up except those competing in the Pakistan Super League (PSL). Interestingly, head coach Phil Simmons also called up a few players outside of the current national team setup.

"Those who played in the last white-ball series, T20I team regulars and the red-ball players are here [in the camp]. Alongside them, there are players who the coach wanted to see and who will help in practice sessions," a BCB official informed.

From the High Performance Unit, all-rounders SM Meherob Hasan and Abdul Gaffar Saqlain were in the camp. Domestic regular Ruyel Miah and Mosaddek Hossain, who has not played for Bangladesh since 2022, were also present.

It was a demanding day at the office for the players after a long break, undergoing fielding and

conditioning drills on a hot and humid afternoon.

Taskin Ahmed resorted to cycling while Test

skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto was seen carrying weights attached to his waist, a drill designed to



improve strength for fielding purposes.

As per cricket operations officials, fielding and fitness will be the key agendas for the next few days. As the skill camp is yet to begin, local coaches Mohammad Salahuddin and Mohammad Ashraful were not part of the session yesterday.

"The next six days will be completely focused on fielding and fitness, which are part of the conditioning camp," a member of the team management informed.

The players of three formats have different regimen to follow after conditioning camp's first phase. The Test players will remain in the camp till April 16 before leaving for the first-class competition Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL), which starts on April 17 in Dhaka.

White-ball players will remain in the camp till April 13. The ODI squad will begin a three-match home series against New Zealand on April 17 in Dhaka.

The T20I squad will hold a separate camp, building up to a three-match T20I series against the Kiwis, starting on April 27.

75 DAYS TO GO



Spain's 75 and a perfect knockout run

Spain have conceded a total of 75 goals in 67 FIFA World Cup matches across 17 editions. They achieved a remarkable defensive feat during their 2010 title-winning campaign, conceding only twice, as they share the record for the fewest goals conceded by a champion with France (1998) and Italy (2006). They also remain the only World Cup-winning team not to have conceded a goal in the knockout phase.

**** Visit The Daily Star's website to also read: 'The stolen crown and a four-legged hero'**



1.23 lakh tonnes of LNG arrive in two tankers

Third LNG tanker from US due on April 4 with 70,000 tonnes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Two tankers carrying a combined 123,000 tonnes of liquefied natural gas (LNG) reached Bangladesh within a week – one on Thursday and another yesterday.

A third vessel, carrying about 70,000 tonnes of LNG, is scheduled to arrive on April 4, which will bring the total shipments to 193,000 tonnes.

According to Chattogram port sources, the LNG carrier HL Puffin reached Bangladesh on Thursday with 61,997 tonnes of LNG from Australia.

Another vessel, New Brave, arrived Friday carrying 61,000 tonnes from Indonesia.

A third tanker, Celsius Galapagos, is expected to reach by the end of next week with 70,000 tonnes of LNG from the US.

Md Nurul Alam, senior deputy general manager of Uni Global

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7



People ride on the roof of train carriages as the rush of Eid holidaymakers returning to the capital continues. This photo was taken from Khilgaon Flyover close to Kamalapur Railway Station in Dhaka around 4:00pm yesterday.

PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

New advisers in the offing

Move aimed at easing workload, speeding up decisions

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

The government is set to expand its advisory team, bringing in a couple of new faces to help ease growing pressure across ministries, as it seeks to speed up decision-making, improve coordination, and push forward its election pledges.

The step comes at a time when officials say the pace of work has slowed in some areas, making it harder for the administration to meet rising public expectations. New advisers are likely to be appointed in the coming days, according to sources at the Prime Minister's Office familiar with the matter.

Officials said the new appointments are aimed at easing the workload of existing ministers and helping ministries run more smoothly. Before the Eid, several ministries faced delays in taking decisions and carrying out plans, mainly due to overlapping responsibilities among senior officials.

Cabinet sources said many ministers are juggling political and administrative duties simultaneously, which has made it harder to maintain the pace of work expected from the government.

Officials said the pressure has been felt most in areas where ministries must deal with policy work, project supervision, and urgent public-facing decisions at the same time.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4

Ex-rapper Shah sworn in as Nepal prime minister



REUTERS, Kathmandu

Rapper-turned-politician Balendra Shah was sworn in as prime minister of Nepal yesterday, tasked with restoring political stability and creating jobs in the poor Himalayan nation long troubled by fragile governments and weak growth prospects.

Shah, who wore skin-tight trousers, a matching jacket, his signature black Nepali cloth cap and sunglasses at the ceremony, is Nepal's youngest prime minister in decades and the first Madhesi – people of the southern plains bordering India – to lead the Himalayan nation that is wedged between Asian giants India and China.

A former mayor of the capital, Kathmandu, Shah, 35, became prime minister after his three-year-old Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) won 182 seats in the 275-member parliament in the March 5 election, the first vote after the anti-corruption Gen Z protests in which 76 people were killed in September last year.

In a new music video posted on his Facebook page on the eve of his swearing in ceremony, Shah stressed

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7

Sri Lanka jails man for hoarding 4 litres of fuel

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka has jailed a man for three weeks after he admitted to hoarding four litres of petrol during a nationwide fuel shortage triggered by the Middle East war, local media reported yesterday.

The 48-year-old man initially said the fuel was for his lawnmower.

A magistrate in Nikaweratiya, 125 kilometres (78 miles) northeast of the capital Colombo, also imposed a fine of 1,500 rupees (\$5), according to the Lankadeepa daily newspaper.

It added that the man had been charged with hoarding petrol and trying to sell it on the black market at a time when authorities had imposed fuel rationing.

Motorists on the South Asian island are currently receiving fuel every other day. Authorities say existing diesel stocks are sufficient until mid-May, while petrol supplies could last about a week longer.

Fuel prices across Sri Lanka have risen by a third since the United States and Israel began bombing

SEE PAGE 9 COL 6

Sonali chicken, potatoes, lentil pricier after Eid

SUKANTA HALDER and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

The prices of Sonali chicken have risen sharply across Dhaka's kitchen markets following Eid-ul-Fitr, adding further strain to household budgets of consumers who prefer it over broiler chicken.

Alongside poultry, potatoes, onions, lentils, and several fish varieties have also become costlier, while some vegetables have remained stable.

In Dhaka's retail markets yesterday, potatoes were sold at Tk 20–25 per kilogram, up from Tk 15–20 a week ago.

Large grain lentils fetched Tk 90–105 per kilogram, compared to Tk 85–105 last week.

Mohammad Sabuj, a wholesale trader at Karwan Bazar, said middlemen and farmers are increasingly storing potatoes in cold storage, driving demand and pushing prices higher.

Recent rains have also caused potatoes to rot in several areas, worsening the situation. Heavy rains in mid-March had already damaged Rabi-season crops, including potatoes, across northern districts.

He noted that wholesale prices rose to Tk 14 per kilogram yesterday, from Tk 11 last week and Tk 10 the week before.

Onions too saw a rise, retailing at Tk 35–50 per kilogram yesterday, up from Tk 30–45 a

week earlier.

Wholesale prices climbed to Tk 26–35 per kilogram, compared to Tk 22–33 previously.

Abdul Majid, another Karwan Bazar trader, attributed the hike to increased demand and hoarding by farmers and traders, though he stressed there is no shortage in supply.

Sonali chicken prices surged

In contrast, demand for broiler chicken has fallen, leading to lower prices.

Fish prices also rose in the post-Eid period.

Rohu was sold at Tk 370–400 per kilogram yesterday, Tk 50–80 higher than usual.

Tilapia, Catfish, and Pangash prices increased by Tk 40–50 per kilogram.



after Eid.

Two days before the festival, they were sold at Tk 350–380 per kilogram.

From the fourth day of Eid, prices jumped by Tk 30–40, with current rates at Tk 380–410.

Ariful Islam, a meat seller at Shewrapara Market, explained that weddings and social events have kept demand high, preventing any price drop.

Khokon Chandra Samaddar, a wholesale trader at Jatrabari fish market, said demand has picked up after Eid, with hilsa seeing the sharpest rise ahead of Pahela Baishakh.

Hilsa weighing one kilogram is now priced at Tk 3,000, up from Tk 2,500–2,600 a week ago.

Vegetable prices showed mixed trends.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7

Dog removal move sparks outcry in Baridhara

TANGILA TASNIM

Fresh attempts to remove community dogs from Baridhara DOHS have drawn criticism from residents and animal welfare advocates, who warn the move risks repeating a history of cruelty in the area.

Members of Animal Welfare of Baridhara DOHS (AWBD), a resident-led group, described recent notices issued by the DOHS Parishad calling for the removal of stray dogs and restrictions on pet movement as unlawful and counterproductive.

"The Animal Welfare Act, 2019 clearly states that ownerless animals cannot be removed or killed outside specific provisions. The law promotes vaccination and sterilisation, not displacement," an AWBD representative said.

A resident said attempts to engage with authorities have failed.

"I have pet dogs, and I have received notices multiple times from the current DOHS Parishad president. I tried to have a dialogue, but he refused to

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4

Trump's name to mark US currency

Treasury confirms break with 165-year-old tradition



REUTERS, Washington

US paper currency will bear President Donald Trump's signature starting this summer, the first time a sitting president has signed American money, the Treasury Department said on Thursday.

The redesigned notes, planned to mark the 250th anniversary of American independence, will also for the first time in 165 years drop the signature of the US treasurer, who reports to the Treasury Secretary and oversees the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, the US Mint and other Treasury functions.

The first \$100 bills with Trump's signature

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7



PHOTO: REUTERS

People react at the site of a residential building damaged by a strike, amid the US-Israeli conflict with Iran, in Tehran yesterday.

Myanmar army signals change in leadership

AFP, Naypyidaw

Myanmar's junta signalled changes in the military's leadership ahead of the country's annual show of force yesterday, potentially clearing the way for defence chief Min Aung Hlaing to become president.

Thousands of soldiers will march for Armed Forces Day at a parade ground in the capital Naypyidaw, where Min Aung Hlaing will make his yearly speech to rally morale.

He has ruled by diktat since ousting the hugely popular government of Aung San Suu Kyi in 2021 – detaining the Nobel Peace Prize laureate, dissolving her party and triggering civil war.

There will be "leadership changes" in the armed forces after the ceremony, the state-run Global

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7

RELAY CROPPING

new hope for wheat in coastal lands

PINAKI ROY

Vast fields stretch along the banks of the Mongla-Ghashiakhali channel, where Aman rice was harvested nearly two months ago. While most of the fields now lie barren, ripe wheat can be seen swaying in the wind in a few plots.

These wheat fields belong to Partha Pratim Biswas, a farmer from Hurko village. Farmers here typically yield only one crop, but this year proved to be an exception. He sowed wheat seeds in late November while the Aman rice was still in the field, allowing the wheat to grow in the same plot after the rice harvest.



If the government takes an initiative to grow wheat cultivation, it is possible to produce over two million tonnes of additional wheat in the country following the relay cropping method.

Dr MG Neogi
Agricultural Scientist

This technique, known as relay cropping, involves planting one crop before harvesting the other.

Last year, agricultural scientist Dr MG Neogi approached a few farmers in Bagerhat's Hurko village. As part of his collaborative research with Griffith University in Australia, he encouraged a total of 12 farmers, including Partha Biswas, to adopt the relay cropping method for wheat this year.

Partha said he learnt a new thing from the scientist. He never believed that he could harvest wheat in this way.

Asked about his harvest, he said he would make around 10 maund of wheat from one bigha of land.

"Spending around Tk 5,000, I would harvest wheat worth Tk 15,000. If I did not cultivate wheat here, the land would be barren," said Partha while harvesting his wheat on February 28.

Partha said he cultivates Aman rice on his land, as Aman can be grown using only rainwater. But most farmers are unable to cultivate Boro rice on

these lands due to a scarcity of fresh water.

Asked about the river water flowing along the crop field, Partha said the river water also gets saline during the lean period and is not suitable for irrigation.

"So most of the farmers do not cultivate anything, except a few who try to grow sunflowers or mustard if their land is located near freshwater ponds."

Dr Neogi said he had previously taught the technique of cultivating wheat in Patuakhali and Barguna for two years.

"Following success there, I see immense potential for wheat cultivation in the saline soil coastal areas."

He explained that since wheat cultivation does not require significant irrigation, it is easily possible to grow the crop in the saline fallow lands of the coast by adhering to certain conditions.

Salinity In Coastal Area

Around 25-30 percent of the country's arable land is located in 21 coastal districts, of which 53 percent has become saline-affected, finds a recent government study by Khulna University.

According to the study, around 75 percent of land in Satkhira, 66 percent



in Bagerhat, 32 percent land in Khulna, and 72 percent in Barguna are affected by salinity.

In a study by the government in 2009, salinity-affected areas increased to 1.05 million hectares from 0.83 million hectares found in the previous government study in 1973.

When farmers harvest Aman rice, there is no other crop in the field, and the land dries up



due to sunlight. The salinity level of the land rises during this process.

When the soil is moist, the salt concentration is diluted. But when water evaporates after the December harvest, the salt remains, often forming a white crust on the surface. This prevents farmers from planting further crops till the next monsoon.

From his research in the last five years, Dr Neogi found it is possible to harvest 10 maund from a bigha of land (33 decimals).

So it is possible to grow 75 maund (2,799 tonnes) of wheat in a hectare of salinity-affected land using the relay cropping method. So it will be over two million tonnes of wheat only from salinity-affected fallow coastal land, he said.

The researcher reported yields of 3 to 3.5 tonnes per hectare. While this is slightly lower than the 4 tonnes achieved in Dinajpur, the production cost is significantly lower because no tillage is required.

In local measurements, the cost is approximately Tk 5,600 per bigha (33 decimals), while the output, roughly 10 maunds, is valued at Tk 15,000 to Tk 16,000.

This allows a farmer to earn a net profit of Tk 10,000 per bigha from land that would otherwise lie idle.

Currently, Bangladesh has a growing demand for wheat, which has reached 7.5 million tonnes. But the country is growing only one million tonnes of wheat a year, and the rest has to be imported.

Method of Relay Cropping

According to Dr Neogi, relay cropping in the coastal belt offers a solution to vast salinity caused by climate change.

Wheat is a winter-loving plant that requires temperatures below 15 degrees Celsius during its vegetative and heading stages.

As is known, the duration of winters in Bangladesh is shortening. The coastal region has around 15 degree Celsius temperature mostly in January.

"To get the best result, farmers have to sow the wheat by mid-November so that head formation, or inflorescence, occurs during the peak cold of January," he said.

However, farmers cannot sow in mid-November because the Aman rice is still in the field. Aman is typically planted in June or July, depending on the rains, and harvested in December.

This is where relay cropping, a method where a second crop is sown before the first is harvested, comes in, the researcher added.

In mid-November, while the Aman rice is still ripening, wheat seeds are broadcast into the standing crop. The residual moisture in the soil provides a favourable environment for germination. By the time the rice is harvested in early December, the wheat seedlings are already one to two inches tall.

"Although the seedlings may suffer minor trampling during the rice harvest, I see in my research they survive and recover," said Dr Neogi.

Wheat cultivation only needs light irrigation if the land becomes too dry.

Asked how farmers would ensure

light irrigation where arranging fresh water is a challenge, Neogi said according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), 347,671 water bodies are available in the coastal regions, covering an area of 37,530 hectares.

Using these water bodies for rainwater storage can facilitate relay wheat cultivation on 375,300 hectares of fallow land, where farmers can also engage in fish farming for a period of six months by utilising those water bodies.

Through renovation of these water bodies, farmers may ensure additional production of wheat, mustard and other crops from these fallow lands.

Also, farmers can dig a pond on 10 percent of their land, about six feet deep with six feet length and breadth, then place a thick plastic sheet at the bottom and around the pond to retain rainwater.

This water can support fish farming for six months and irrigate the remaining 90 percent of the land for relay wheat cultivation.

But Dr Neogi said farmers have to follow certain rules strictly to get the best result. According to his research findings, 20 to 22 kilogrammes of wheat seed will be required for coastal areas per bigha (33 decimals) of land.

For instance, if there is prior preparation and wheat seeds are to be broadcast in a paddy field, then the process must be managed properly, including how and when the paddy seeds are sown, the appropriate amount of fertiliser and the correct dosage of herbicide are applied. All these steps must be carried out meticulously to get a good harvest.

"This is a proven technology," he said. "If farmers follow the 12-step protocol, they will succeed."

But growing wheat in the coastal land would not be possible until the government takes it up as a programme and encourages farmers to grow wheat, he stressed.

"Now even if a farmer wants to cultivate wheat, he would not find wheat seed in his locality as traditionally wheat is cultivated only in the Northern region, which is a comparatively colder region," he said.

"If the government takes an initiative to grow wheat cultivation, it is possible to produce over two million tonnes of additional wheat in the country following the relay cropping method," he added.



Beyond Acacia and Eucalyptus

Rethinking forest restoration in Bangladesh

While fast-growing exotic species can produce timber efficiently, they do not necessarily restore the ecological functions of natural forests. Natural forests support complex biodiversity, including mammals, birds, reptiles, insects, and micro-organisms, along with intricate soil systems and hydrological processes.

REZA KHAN

Bangladesh is part of one of the world's richest biodiversity regions, yet its natural forests continue to shrink and degrade. In response, plantation programmes using fast-growing exotic species such as Acacia and Eucalyptus are often promoted as quick solutions to restore tree cover and meet timber demand. But an important question remains: can monoculture plantations truly replace the ecological functions of natural forests? The answer to that question will shape the future of Bangladesh's forests and wildlife.

A legacy shaping forest management
Since the birth of Bangladesh in 1971, the country's forestry administration has largely been shaped by institutional traditions inherited from earlier periods. The forestry bureaucracy evolved from the colonial forestry system established under the British Empire between 1864 and 1947, continued through the Pakistan period (1947–1971), and eventually became the foundation of the modern Bangladesh Forest Department.

This historical legacy has profoundly influenced how forests have been managed over the past half-century. Colonial forestry systems were



An Acacia monoculture in Sherpur is failing to prevent landslides. (Taken on May 26, 2025).

PHOTOS: DR. REZA KHAN



The pitiable condition of a Eucalyptus plantation inside Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary, where a wetland has been converted into an illegal fish farm. (Taken on June 27, 2025).

primarily designed to secure timber resources for administrative and commercial purposes. As a result, forest management often focused on timber production rather than ecological restoration or biodiversity conservation. Although Bangladesh today recognises the importance of environmental sustainability, many elements of earlier management approaches continue to shape policies and practices.

Declining natural forests

Despite having legal authority over large areas designated as Reserved Forests and Protected Areas since the late nineteenth century, forest governance in Bangladesh has faced persistent challenges. Over the decades, natural forests have declined both in area and ecological quality. In many cases, forest lands have been converted into commercial plantations or gradually lost to encroachment, settlement expansion, and infrastructure development.

The condition of several protected areas illustrates this challenge. Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary, declared in 1986 to protect forest ecosystems and wildlife habitats, has long been regarded as an important conservation site. Yet observations from researchers and conservationists indicate that parts of the sanctuary have suffered from degradation, encroachment, and changes in land use. These situations highlight the continuing difficulty of enforcing forest protection laws and maintaining ecological integrity in protected areas.

Such examples raise broader questions about the effectiveness of forest governance. Strengthening monitoring, enforcement, and long-term conservation planning remains essential if the country's remaining natural forests are to be preserved.

The rise of plantation forestry

Against this background, debates over plantation forestry have intensified. The Bangladesh Forest Department has historically promoted fast-growing exotic species such as *Acacia auriculiformis* and *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* in degraded forest areas. These species were widely introduced under social forestry and crop-sharing programmes, often supported by international development initiatives.

From a production perspective, such species offer certain advantages. They grow rapidly, provide fuelwood and timber within a relatively short time, and can quickly create visible green cover on degraded landscapes. For a country facing increasing demand for wood and energy resources, these characteristics have made them attractive options for plantation programmes.

However, the ecological implications of large-scale monoculture plantations remain widely debated. While fast-growing exotic species can produce timber efficiently, they do not necessarily restore the ecological functions of natural forests. Natural forests support complex biodiversity, including mammals, birds, reptiles, insects, and micro-organisms, along with intricate soil systems and hydrological

processes. Recreating these ecological relationships through single-species plantations is extremely difficult.

Bangladesh is also a signatory to several international environmental agreements that emphasise biodiversity conservation and ecosystem restoration. These commitments further highlight the need to evaluate plantation policies carefully in relation to long-term ecological sustainability.

Lessons from regional experience

Recent discussions within the forestry community reflect differing perspectives on this issue. Some officials argue that Bangladesh should reconsider restrictions on planting species such as *Acacia* and *Eucalyptus*, citing examples from neighbouring countries like India, where these species are cultivated widely for timber and pulp production.

However, developments within India itself illustrate a more nuanced approach. In the southern state of Kerala, forestry policy has increasingly recognised ecological concerns associated with monoculture plantations. The state's forestry programmes now emphasise sustainable plantation management, agroforestry, ecological restoration, and biodiversity conservation.

According to the Kerala Forest Department, efforts are being made to integrate traditional practices with modern techniques in order to enhance productivity while conserving ecosystem services. In several areas, policies have also encouraged

the gradual restoration of exotic plantations into more natural forest ecosystems that support biodiversity, water regulation, carbon storage, and wildlife habitats.

These developments demonstrate that plantation forestry and ecological restoration need not be mutually exclusive, but they require careful planning and clear conservation priorities.

Restoring indigenous forest ecosystems

Many conservationists and environmental researchers emphasise that restoring degraded forests ultimately requires rebuilding indigenous ecological communities. Native tree species have evolved within local ecosystems over thousands of years and therefore support complex interactions with wildlife, soil organisms, and surrounding vegetation.

In Bangladesh's tropical and subtropical forests, indigenous species such as *Sal* and diverse mixed-evergreen trees provide habitat and food resources for a wide range of wildlife. These forests also play critical roles in stabilising soils, regulating water systems, and maintaining microclimates that support biodiversity.

Planting native species in restoration programmes can therefore help to re-establish ecological processes that monoculture plantations often fail to replicate. While this approach may take longer to produce visible results than fast-growing exotic plantations, it contributes more effectively to long-term ecosystem recovery.

A balanced way forward

A balanced approach may offer the most practical path forward. Fast-growing plantation species could still play a role in designated production forests or community forestry areas, where timber supply and fuelwood production are primary objectives. Such plantations may help reduce pressure on remaining natural forests.

However, in degraded natural forests, wildlife sanctuaries, and biodiversity-rich landscapes, restoration strategies based on indigenous species and ecological principles are likely to produce more sustainable outcomes.

The larger issue, however, goes beyond the choice between exotic and native species. Bangladesh's forest future ultimately depends on strengthening governance systems, improving monitoring and enforcement, preventing illegal land occupation, and adopting science-based restoration strategies.

Dr Reza Khan is a wildlife biologist and conservationist with over four decades of experience in wildlife research, zoo management, and biodiversity conservation in Bangladesh and the United Arab Emirates.

Ten languages lost, countless stories gone

SAMAR M SOREN, CHARU HAQUE

Khidirpur village in Godagari, Rajshahi, bakes under the midday sun as dry, dusty winds blow through. But something even more parched than the land is the language once spoken here. Bhumij, an ancient language from the Austro-Asiatic Kol-Munda family, now survives in only four families, with just a handful of words left. Bhumij is not the only language that has disappeared. Studies show that at least ten languages—Birhor, Kherwar, Rajwar, Turi, Hodi, Ho, Bhil, Banai and Dalu—have already vanished from Bangladesh.

On the outskirts of the village, we spoke with Ranjit Bhumij, now in his sixties. Though time has left its marks on him, his memories of his mother tongue still remain. With a faint smile, he managed to exchange a few words in his native language. However, speaking was becoming increasingly difficult, as his words mixed with Bangla and Sadri, causing his mother tongue to slowly fade away.

Bhumij is an old language from the Austro-Asiatic Kol-Munda family, with deep roots in the subcontinent's history. Linguist George Abraham Grierson, in his famous survey, described how this language spread and noted its unique features in northern Bengal. Once, Bhumij was closely tied to the land, forests and daily life. Now, it survives only in the memories of four families in Khidirpur. Ranjit Bhumij recalls that in the 1980s, several Bhumij families still lived here. But social and economic pressures from larger communities forced many to leave. Those who stayed gradually lost their language.

Khidirpur's story is just one part of a bigger picture. The Barind region, along with greater Mymensingh, was once home to many languages. Birhor, Kherwar, Bhumij, Rajwar, Turi, Hodi, Ho, Banai, Bhil and Dalu each had their own traditions shaped by their environment. The Birhor lived in forests, Rajwar communities settled in small, remote



The Rajwar community in a social discussion, Chaitanyapur, Godagari, Rajshahi.

PHOTOS: SAMAR M SOREN

areas, and Kherwar groups lived on the plains. Each contributed to the region's rich cultural and linguistic landscape. But over time, migration, policy changes and the rise of dominant languages caused these languages to fade.

Sadri was once the common language in the region during colonial times, but later Bangla took its place through schools and government policies. As a result, people first replaced their mother tongues with Sadri, and then Sadri itself faded as Bangla became dominant. In just a few generations, whole languages disappeared. While the names of their speakers remain, the languages are forgotten. Many of these languages were never written down or recorded. They faded quietly, leaving no official trace. Once people stopped speaking them, they became part of history.

Over the years, several initiatives have attempted to address this crisis. The International Mother Language Institute

Act of 2010 was established to safeguard endangered languages and promote linguistic diversity. In 2014, a comprehensive language survey was conducted, raising hopes for concrete action. However, the survey's findings remain only partially published, leaving policymakers, advocates and communities without reliable data on which languages or groups are endangered or extinct. This lack of transparency has further complicated efforts to protect linguistic heritage. Moreover, many researchers and language activists report inconsistencies with observations from the field, deepening the uncertainty around the true state of language diversity in Bangladesh.

A collaborative initiative by Friends of Endangered Ethnic Languages (FEEL) and the Language Resource Hub found that languages such as Bhumij, Birhor, Kherwar, Hodi and Dalu have no written records. There are no dictionaries, audio or video recordings, or archives for them. The few words left in

languages like Hodi and Bhumij exist only in the memories of their last speakers. As these languages disappeared from families and communities, no one tried to save them. Without plans to pass them on, they vanished completely. Now, efforts to document them are mostly about piecing together lost history, not bringing the languages back. In the end, a language lives on only if people keep speaking it.

When a language disappears, it is not just words that are lost. The wisdom, traditions and community ties connected to it also vanish. Every language holds stories, healing methods, ways of seeing the world and shared beliefs. Language shapes how we think. When it fades, it changes not only our speech but also how we understand the world.

When Bhumij disappears, Barind loses an



The Bhumij community, Madhaipur, Godagari, Rajshahi.

important part of its cultural identity. The end of Birhor erases memories of a forest-dwelling, nomadic life. Losing Kherwar breaks a linguistic tradition in northern Bengal, and the silence of Rajwar dims a unique social identity from the border plains. The loss of Turi silences a local labour community, and Banai's extinction removes a key part of northern Bengal's culture. The vanishing of Bhil threatens the roots of one of the oldest communities in the region. The loss of Ho

silences another ethnic group, and Dalu's disappearance cuts historical ties near the Garo Hills. Hodi survives in only thirty-three words, a fragile remnant of a once lively culture.

It is alarming that these ten languages have vanished before our very eyes. The 2019 government gazette lists Bhumij, Birhor, Kherwar, Rajwar, Turi, Hodi, Ho, Bhil, Banai and Dalu as small ethnic groups. Yet, their languages remain unrecognised and undocumented, fading away in silence. These languages have vanished not only from daily life but also from academic research, policy discussions and official records.

Ranjit Bhumij's hesitant words show that language holds centuries of history. It carries a community's thoughts, stories and identity. When people stop speaking their language, silence spreads. Words are forgotten, sentences become shorter, and each new generation speaks less. Over time, silence fills homes, playgrounds and gatherings, replacing the conversations that once filled these spaces.

When a language vanishes, we must ask whether its worth lies solely in the number of speakers or in the unique culture and meaning it embodies. Without urgent intervention from governments, educators and researchers, more languages will persist only in the memories of a handful of individuals, like Ranjit Bhumij or Liton Debson of Hodi. In such cases, only the language's name remains, while its rich cultural legacy disappears. Preserving a language is a tribute to our past and a promise to future generations. When a language is lost, our perspective on the world narrows. To ensure a richer, more inclusive understanding for all, we must act to prevent this loss.

Samar M Soren and **Charu Haque** are researchers and language activists.

HOW PAKISTAN SAW 1971

Inside the Hamoodur Rehman Commission Report

SHAILA SHOBNAM

Imagine poring over a confidential war report that warns of unreliable data, only to find it quietly accepting the lowest figures possible. That is exactly the puzzle at the heart of the Hamoodur Rehman Commission's report on the 1971 War, an official inquiry set up by Pakistan after its defeat to investigate the military and political failures in East Pakistan. Early in the document, on page 32, the Commission acknowledges the fog of war: "it was hardly possible to obtain an accurate estimate of the toll of death and destruction". In other words, precise numbers were unknowable. Yet, in the very next chapter, it confidently defers to the army's own low-end estimate: "approximately 26,000" killed in 1971. Citing a "lack of any other reliable data", it declares that this figure, provided by GHQ (the General Headquarters of the Pakistan Army), is "reasonably correct".

The report warns us not to trust every testimony, yet then relies on those very accounts to apportion blame. In one striking passage, the Commission says it found evidence of "concerted efforts" by senior officers to give a "consistent, if not necessarily accurate, account" of events. In layman's terms, the generals were coordinating each other's stories in captivity. It even recounts how Lt Gen A. A. K. Niazi, while a prisoner of war, "persuade[d]... his subordinate commanders" by "threats and inducements" to present a uniform narrative that would deflect blame.

Yet, after documenting this collusion, the Commission turns around and uses those same synchronised testimonies to condemn top leaders. It bluntly assigns "final and overall responsibility" for the defeat to Yahya Khan and a handful of his generals (Pirzada, Umar, Mitha). In other words, it cautions, "these accounts may be rigged", then says, "we trust them completely for our verdict". This is a classic self-contradiction. If all high-ranking officers supposedly rehearsed their stories, logic demands scepticism. Ayesha Jalal, writing on that era, notes the deeper problem: the inquiry had no contemporaneous records at all—"no minutes were kept", she writes, "making it impossible to cross-check and verify" what Yahya or Bhutto told the Commission. Both Jalal and the report itself hint that the evidence base was shaky from the start. But the Commission refuses to adjust its conclusions for that weakness, effectively trusting a web of convenient falsehoods.

Framing the "proper perspective"
Very early on, the report tries to set the scene by pointing out violent incidents caused by Bengali nationalists, presumably to argue that the army was fighting a two-sided conflict. In one passage, it reminds us that before the crackdown in March 1971, rebel fighters and Indian-backed infiltrators "continued to indulge in killings, rape and arson" in East Pakistan. It reads like a pre-emptive justification: "See, even the Awami League cadres were violent, so Pakistani forces responded in kind."

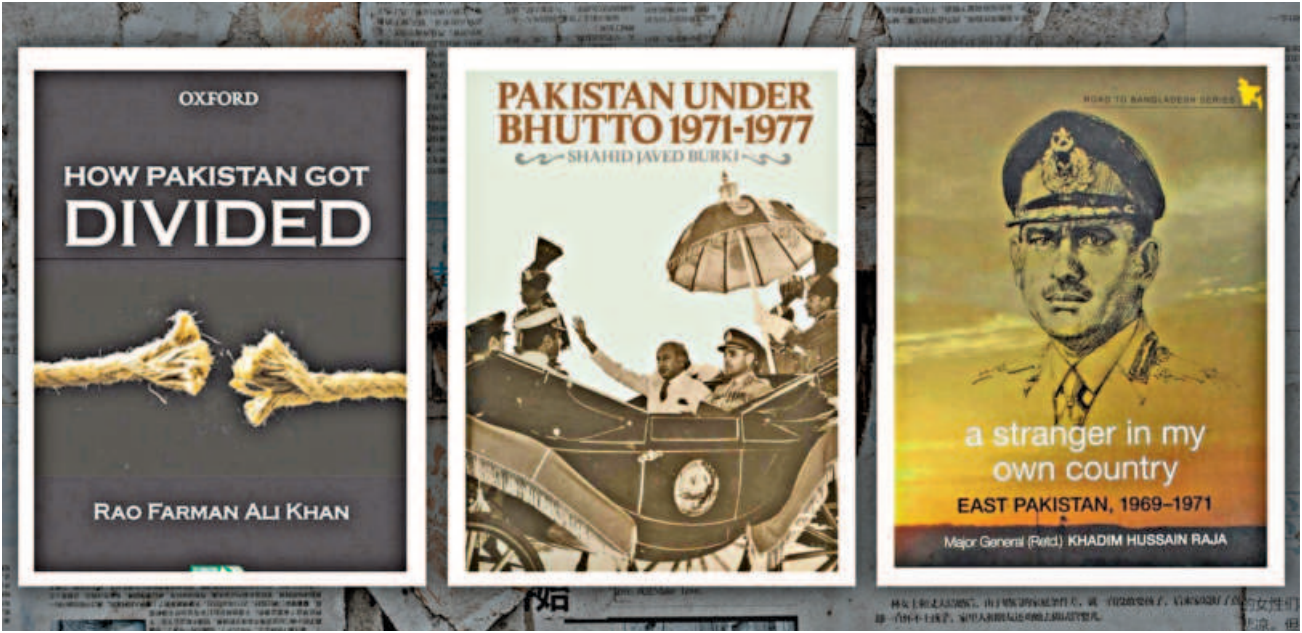
This framing shifts initial blame onto Bengali "miscreants", a narrative device the report calls giving the "proper

One of the most striking pieces of evidence is the testimony about "Bangladesh" itself. Officers told the Commission that when a suspected Bengali was "being sent to Bangladesh", it was code that he would never come back.

perspective". But the Commission's own later findings unravel that framing. When it finally tallies the evidence, the report admits plainly that Pakistani forces did commit massive "excesses" against civilians. Paragraph 38 concedes that "there is substance in the allegations that... excesses were indeed committed on the people of East Pakistan". It even insists that, "irrespective of the magnitude" of those atrocities, punishments are warranted. In short, the army's crimes were real and undeniable, which contradicts any notion that this was merely a tit-for-tat firefight.

To put that in context, US diplomats at the time were themselves horrified. A March 1971 telegram from American officers in Dhaka complained that while relief was sent for cyclone victims, world powers "condone[d] indiscriminate killing" of the same Bengali population by "an essentially alien army". The Commission may have been reluctant to use the word "genocide", but the message was clear: Bengali civilians were singled out for slaughter. Thus, the report's early attempt to blame the Awami League ends up sounding hollow. The narrative arc becomes: "They fired first" → "Our troops retaliated" → "No, wait, our troops also went too far." The inconsistent framing suggests that the Commission was torn between nationalistic pressures and the legal necessity to acknowledge crimes.

Discipline and decay at the top
Behind the scenes of the report is another tension: on the one hand, it portrays Pakistan's army as disciplined by orders; on the other, it depicts a command structure rotting from within. Officially, the text boasts that generals repeatedly warned soldiers to "refrain from acts of violence and immorality". It even credits Lt Gen Tikka



Pakistani memoirs and testimonies expose a fractured command structure, where collusion, denial, and shifting blame defined the military's conduct during the 1971 war.

Khan with taking complaints seriously: when told of abuse, he would "redress grievances and take disciplinary action". On paper, discipline was maintained.

But the more ominous side emerges elsewhere. The report hints at a senior leadership in moral freefall. It notes that "wine and women" were rampant among officers and describes how some top leaders gave what was essentially a green light to violence. A chilling example is the testimony that Lt Gen Niazi personally encouraged men to kill and rape Bengalis. The report explicitly says that Niazi's own words and actions "were calculated to encourage the killings and rape".

These stories undercut the disciplined narrative. They suggest that even as commanders ordered decency, their private instructions promoted brutality. The Commission does not highlight this clash sufficiently. Instead, it leaves us to stitch it together ourselves: one paragraph stresses that generals warned their troops against violence, and the next implies that those very generals were stoking the fires. It is as if someone wrote two conflicting plotlines on facing pages and walked away.

From the reader's angle, this means that the veneer of order is an illusion. When senior officers were on the sidelines enjoying revelry, field units acted with impunity. One telling passage records ordinary officers casually using "Bangladesh" as code for a one-way trip to death—a grim wink that checks and balances no longer applied. In the end, the Commission's formal emphasis on discipline rings hollow next to such accounts of the command climate collapsing.

The "Bangladesh" code word: Justice evaporates
One of the most striking pieces of



Justice Hamoodur Rehman presenting the report to Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, 1972.

evidence is the testimony about "Bangladesh" itself. Officers told the Commission that when a suspected Bengali was "being sent to Bangladesh", it was code that he would never come back. To quote directly: "being sent to Bangladesh – a code name for death without trial, without detailed investigations and without any written order by any authorised authority". This single line says it all: inside the army, "Bangladesh" did not mean exile or transfer—it meant summary execution.

Yet the Commission seems almost embarrassed by this fact. In its section on responsibility, Para 35, it states blandly that "there is nothing to show" the top brass ever planned atrocities. The contrast is jarring. On the one hand, subordinates testify to a chilling coded

execution policy; on the other, the report insists no formal policy existed. It is a classic "plausible deniability" manoeuvre. By focusing on the lack of explicit written orders or plans, the Commission effectively distances generals from guilt. But, of course, the testimonies indicate that no formal paperwork was needed—the code word and the atmosphere were orders enough.

This contradiction strikes at the heart of accountability. If there were truly no orders for brutality, one must ask: how did so many officers learn that "Bangladesh" meant murder? The report's silence on this gap is deafening. It quietly acknowledges that real atrocities took place, yet stops short of calling them intentional acts by commanders. In literary terms, it is as if the investigator says, "Our spy reports are questionable", then proceeds to rely on them. The code word story is credible and horrifying, but the conclusion is muted.

Admitted atrocities vs. rhetorical minimisation

The Commission's tone shifts like a pendulum whenever it describes atrocities. At times, it almost sounds like a human rights report: it laments that "excesses were indeed committed" and insists on punishment "irrespective of the magnitude". This phrasing resembles what one might find in an international tribunal—acknowledging suffering first, then addressing it. But immediately afterwards, the language flips back to damage control. The report chides the Bangladesh claims as "highly coloured and exaggerated", even suggesting that some incidents "did not, in fact, take place" at all.

This double-voice strategy serves to mollify opposing audiences. Legally and morally, the Commission must admit that atrocities happened. Politically, it must not alienate its own military and public. The result is an inconsistent narrative: a formal concession of guilt coexists with veiled accusations of fabrication.

Responsibility at the top vs. accountability on the ground

In the final reckoning, who is blamed and how? The Commission is careful to point fingers upwards in a political sense. It states clearly that ultimate responsibility lies with President Yahya Khan and a few of his generals. Their "final and overall responsibility" is on the record. Yet, at the same time, the legal language around intent is conspicuously hedged.

Most operational blame is quietly shifted downwards. The report notes that it was junior officers and soldiers who physically committed the murders, often disobeying discipline. By blaming "undisciplined" troops and local "excesses", the higher-ups save face. The division of blame becomes: top brass erred in judgement; bottom rung men erred in action.

This effectively admits a kind of moral responsibility for the generals, but not clear legal culpability. It is akin to a modern dictator saying, "My subordinates were corrupt." The language allows the report to claim it is prosecuting the leaders politically, while leaving room to doubt whether they actually planned each atrocity. In fact, the Commission did recommend trials for these officers, but those recommendations were never acted upon. The military establishment simply shelved the report. The net effect is a curious hybrid: "We're guilty, but not guilty in a court."

International reactions and the forgotten inquiry

Even as the Commission wrestled with its conscience, the outside world had

little doubt about what happened in East Pakistan. International newspapers and diplomats in 1971 used terms like "genocide" and "reign of terror" to describe the Pakistani crackdown. The US State Department's own records show diplomats decrying the massacre of civilians by what they called an "essentially alien army". The Commission, however, seems embarrassed that the world saw through the Pakistani narrative.

Ironically, it chastises Pakistan's leaders for allowing foreign scrutiny, for example by sending delegations to the UN, as if that hurt the regime's image.

After all was said and done, one wonders what real impact the Commission's report had on Pakistan. The answer is: none. Successive governments suppressed it. Decades later, only a few sections have been leaked to the press. Meanwhile, many of the generals and officials it lambasted went on to hold high office, as if nothing had been said.

A corroboration ledger: What holds up?

Let us take stock of what we can trust in this story: the report does admit that atrocities happened and that there is evidence of coordinated cover-ups. Historians and victims alike confirm that much abuse took place. Its legal findings that Yahya Khan and his generals failed their nation are supported by external analyses of the political context of 1971. Its own contributors acknowledge that the official Pakistani figures are low.

But the report's numbers and absolutions do not hold up under scrutiny: it knowingly adopts the lowest casualty count even as surveys point to 269,000. It discounts hundreds of thousands of rapes based on scant data, ignoring overwhelming evidence to the contrary. It records that "Bangladesh" meant execution, then downplays what that implies about command responsibility.

In the end, the Hamoodur Rehman Commission is most reliable when it indicts Pakistan's own system (moral failures, impunity) and least reliable when it tries to preserve that system (counts and blame). The raw evidence—survey numbers, victim testimonies, international witness accounts—emphatically favours the former interpretation.

The story of the Commission thus reads as a cautionary tale: an inquiry meant to seek truth, but constrained by politics and self-protection. It tells us exactly what Pakistani power-brokers were willing to admit: that things went horribly wrong in 1971. But it quietly omits any claim that those leaders acted with deliberate evil intent. For readers today, the takeaway is to read between the lines. Take the parts where the Commission embraces the guilt (mass killings, prison testimony, chain of command failures) at face value. Treat its conveniently "conservative" conclusions (low death counts, absolution of top intent) with scepticism.

In short, follow the evidence, not the apologies. The Hamoodur report opens a window to 1971, but it closes many others with a self-serving spin. By comparing its claims to independent data and context, we confirm that Pakistan's army committed far more horrors than this report will fully acknowledge.

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PHOTO: RASHID TALUKDER/DRK

Bodies of martyred intellectuals with hands and faces bound [Rayerbazar, Dhaka, December 18, 1971].

Think about that: the report admitted uncertainty, then chose the smallest plausible number anyway. It even dismisses higher counts as exaggeration. Bangladeshi leaders' claims of 3 million deaths and 200,000 rapes are summarily labelled "highly exaggerated", without presenting counter-evidence. This sleight of hand matters because independent research paints a far grimmer picture. A 2008 analysis of World Health Survey data found about 269,000 violent war deaths in Bangladesh (95% confidence interval: 125,000–505,000). In plain terms, that is roughly ten times the Commission's number. The survey even noted that Pakistan's own casualty reports captured only about one-third of actual deaths. By comparison, the Commission's 26,000 is an extreme outlier, aligning with the lowest estimates anywhere.

The contrast is even starker on sexual violence. The report flatly rejects the allegation of "200,000 rapes" by citing a British "abortion team" that allegedly handled only 100 cases. But, as scholars note, counting abortions grossly underestimates rape: not every victim becomes pregnant, and many pregnancies (and abortions) go unreported in such chaos. In fact, historians widely agree that the Pakistani military's campaign involved systematic mass rape—hundreds of thousands of women—an episode that Bangladesh later also described as genocidal.

Signals in the silence: Witness testimonies



A survivor of the Pakistan Army's atrocities [Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh, December 11, 1971]. PHOTOGRAPH: NAIB UDDIN AHMED

THE RENEWABLES GAMBIT

Race against time and tariffs

Bangladesh risks losing 30% of EU garment exports if it fails to reach mandated decarbonisation targets by 2030. But tariff structures threaten to strangle deployment

AHSAN HABIB

Bangladesh's garment sector faces a blunt ultimatum from its largest export market. When the European Union's (EU) carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM) takes full effect in 2030, Bangladeshi exporters unable to demonstrate meaningful decarbonisation may see orders evaporate overnight.

The South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (Sanem) estimates a potential 30 percent drop in exports to the bloc, which will likely devastate the garment industry, responsible for over 80 percent of national export earnings.

This is not hypothetical posturing. Global apparel brands have already committed to emissions targets aligned with the mechanism. American Eagle now demands that at least 10 percent of the electricity used by its tier-one and tier-two suppliers comes from renewables. Levi Strauss and GAP have pledged to cut emissions



national grid.

"The government should find a way so that wheeling charges do not eat up the whole dream of making renewable energy popular in the country," he added.

Jalal Ahmed, chairman of Berc, said the charge has not been officially implemented and remains at the discussion level among agencies like the Bangladesh Rural Electrification Board.

He said, "The government wants to implement the policy so that renewable energy can be boosted in the country. We will organise a meeting soon so that all stakeholders can transfer their views, reach a point and implement the policy."

Speaking at a recent event, Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), said that despite continuously emphasising the impact of unfair tariff barriers on renewable energy generation, the rates remain higher than those of fossil fuels.

He pointed out that import duty, customs duty and tax on solar panels, solar inverters and mounting structures reach 58.6 percent. Lithium-ion batteries face the same rate, while lead-acid batteries carry an 89.32 percent levy.

Advance income tax, regulatory duty, and supplementary duty further discourage investment, he added.

EARLY MOVERS

Some firms, however, are not waiting for policy clarity.

Ha-Meem Group, one of the largest RMG exporters of the country, has established rooftop solar capacity to generate 12 megawatts of electricity, mainly targeting continued orders from buyers after 2030 and ensuring energy security, according to AK Azad, managing director of the group.

"By setting up rooftop solar, we are getting a good advantage. For example, during loadshedding, it works as a backup," said Azad, a former president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

The system supplies electricity to the government through a net metering arrangement during loadshedding, adjusting the company's electricity bill accordingly.

"If we could not have renewable energy, we would have needed to depend on generators and diesel during load shedding. It would be highly costly and even problematic during the situation now prevailing amid the US-Israel war on Iran," he added.

Azad received subsidised funding from the central bank through IDLC Finance for his first solar installation. He argues that it should be continued to attract other firms to set up renewable energy. "If the government gives support now, it would benefit the government in future as it will get a chance to reduce subsidies in the electricity sector."

Bangladesh's gambit is clear: achieve rapid decarbonisation or risk losing access to its largest export market. With four years until the EU mechanism takes full effect, the window for building the necessary infrastructure is narrowing.

Whether the government dismantles the regulatory barriers strangling renewable deployment, or allows them to persist, will determine if Bangladesh's garment sector retains its competitive edge or watches orders migrate to rivals already racing ahead.

PHOTOS: COLLECTED



by 42 per cent by 2030.

The ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has set an ambitious target in response: 35,000 megawatts of power generation capacity by 2030, with renewable energy accounting for 20 percent of the total mix -- roughly 7 gigawatts.

However, the gap between aspiration and reality remains vast, and a poorly conceived tariff structure stands in the way of achieving this target.

COMPETITIVENESS GAP

Bangladesh is falling behind its direct competitors in the race toward industrial decarbonisation. While regional rivals rapidly green their industrial grids to meet Western buyer demands, Bangladesh's heavy reliance on fossil fuels places its exporters at a distinct disadvantage.

India's renewable energy share has reached over 50 percent, buoyed by strong federal incentives, government data shows. States like Karnataka and Tamil Nadu offer wheeling charge waivers that enable high industrial renewable uptake.

Cambodia derives 62 percent of its power from renewable sources -- its high reliance on hydropower provides a naturally lower carbon footprint for its textile sector. Meanwhile, Pakistan's renewable share stands at around 46 percent as of September 2025.

Bangladesh, by contrast, has installed just 5.38 percent renewable energy capacity for electricity generation, according to the

Sustainable and Renewable Energy Development Authority. Solar energy dominates this meagre share.

Without effective merchant power projects -- private power plants that sell electricity in the open market without specific power purchase agreements -- this gap is likely to widen, isolating Bangladesh from premium markets.

The problem extends beyond generation capacity. Bangladesh's existing renewable energy targets have been formulated primarily from a supply-side, "grid-mix" perspective.

Analysts point out that this approach focuses on total capacity but fails to account for the distinct, additional renewable electricity demand required by export-oriented industries.

OVERDEPENDENCE ON IMPORTS

Bangladesh's power and energy sectors are struggling with rising financial losses, mounting public debt and an increasing burden from fuel imports.

Heavy dependence on imported fossil fuels, particularly liquefied natural gas (LNG) and crude oil, has made the country highly vulnerable to global market volatility and geopolitical shocks.

Domestic gas output has stagnated, prompting imports since 2018 through floating storage and regasification units at Moheshkhali. In 2025, Bangladesh imported 109 LNG cargoes worth \$3.88 billion, up from 86 cargoes costing \$3.02 billion in 2024, according to LightCastle

Partners.

Recent tensions in the Middle East, which play a crucial role in global energy supply chains, have heightened the urgency of reform. Renewable energy offers a path toward both export viability and energy security.

But meeting the 7-gigawatt target will require more than good intentions.

Mustafa AK Khan, founder and managing director of FloSolar Solutions Ltd, argues that rooftop solar plays an important role but cannot deliver this scale within the required timeframe due to structural limitations and fragmented deployment.

His company recently signed 320-megawatt-peak agreements for merchant power projects with four multinational companies.

Bangladesh is falling behind its direct competitors in the race toward industrial decarbonisation. While regional rivals rapidly green their industrial grids to meet Western buyer demands, Bangladesh's heavy reliance on fossil fuels places its exporters at a distinct disadvantage

"Utility-scale merchant power projects are critical to unlock suitable land, achieve economies of scale, and attract long-term institutional capital," Khan said.

"A predictable wheeling and tariff framework would enable faster grid integration, competitive tariffs, and bankable structures for industrial consumers. Necessary investment is not the problem -- the problem is supportive policy," he added.

TARIFF TRAP

A policy has been formulated to enable private-sector investment in large-scale renewable energy. Yet the current regulatory proposal threatens to render it ineffective before launch.

The proposed tariff structure -- specifically, the inclusion of a Tk 2 to Tk 3 per kilowatt markup for legacy public subsidy recovery -- creates a

prohibitive cost barrier that makes merchant power projects commercially unviable compared to grid power, according to industry representatives.

The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) recently submitted an observation on the proposed tariff to the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (Berc).

The association argues that the markup artificially inflates utility costs for manufacturers already operating on thin margins, destroys the "bankability" of projects by deterring developers and lenders from committing capital necessary to build infrastructure by 2028.

Furthermore, it creates an environment where Bangladesh cannot compete with nations like Vietnam and India, noted the BGMEA.

"We call for a cost-reflective tariff based strictly on wheeling charges, decoupling private transmission from public subsidy recovery," the BGMEA stated. "This adjustment is essential not only to secure the RMG sector's survival but to safeguard the foreign exchange inflows and employment stability that underpin the Bangladesh economy."

Vidiya Amrit Khan, vice president of the BGMEA, said the proposed framework may place additional financial pressure on private green energy procurement. "Our manufacturers are already operating on very tight margins, and any increase in utility costs directly affects their competitiveness and long-term investment decisions."

"Investing in energy transition is capital-intensive, and the return on investment takes time. Therefore, flexibility for factories is crucial during this transition period," she added.

Echoing the concerns, Shahed Alam, Robi Axiata's chief corporate and regulatory officer, said, "To scale up sustainable power generation, a favourable pricing policy is essential."

He cautioned, "If industries need to spend much more to use renewable energy, it will not become popular, as it will directly impact their bottom line."

Alam urged the government to address structural barriers in the energy market, particularly wheeling charges -- the fees paid for transmitting electricity from producers to consumers through the

