

MY DHAKA

# 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, Palkhana 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.

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.

## Unite to build inclusive Bangladesh

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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 Alamgir in the chair.