



Amid the measles outbreak, each of the 15 beds at the isolation ward of Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital in Barishal is accommodating three infected children. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU KUMAR DAS

War putting migrants in ME at growing risk: HRW

UN says 4 million in region may be pushed into poverty

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ongoing regional conflict could push up to 4 million people in the Middle East into poverty, the United Nations has warned, while Human Rights Watch said migrant workers in the region face growing risks to their safety and livelihoods.

According to a press release from the United Nations Development Programme, a prolonged military escalation in the Gulf countries could deal a major blow to the region's economy.

The assessment, titled Military Escalation in the Middle East: Economic and Social Implications for the Arab States region, said regional economies could shrink by 3.7 to 6.0 percent of GDP, causing losses of \$120 billion to \$194 billion.

The report said the economic damage could exceed the region's total GDP growth recorded in 2025.

It also projected a sharp labour market impact, with unemployment rising by up to 4 percentage points, equivalent to 3.6 million jobs lost, while up to 4 million people could be pushed into poverty.

"This crisis rings alarm bells for countries of the region to fundamentally reevaluate their strategic choices," said Abdullah Al Dardari, UN assistant secretary general and director of the Regional Bureau for Arab States at UNDP. He stressed the need for stronger regional cooperation and economic diversification beyond hydrocarbon dependence.

The findings show uneven impacts across sub-regions. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Levant are expected to face the largest GDP losses,

ranging from about 5.2 to 8.5 percent, driven by trade disruptions and energy market volatility.

Meanwhile, HRW said millions of migrant workers across the GCC countries are facing heightened risks to their safety and livelihoods due to the ongoing regional conflict.

"Millions of migrant workers employed across the Gulf countries are navigating threats to their physical safety and job security amid the conflict," said Michael Page, deputy Middle East and North Africa director at HRW.

As of March 25, conflict-related incidents in GCC countries have killed and injured several migrant workers, according to media and official reports.

Among those killed were a Pakistani driver, a Nepali security guard, and Bangladeshi workers in the UAE and Bahrain.

Quoting family members, the New York-based rights body said Saleh Ahmed, a Bangladeshi driver, was killed in Ajman after debris struck his water tanker. Another Bangladeshi, AM Tarek, died in Bahrain after being hit by shrapnel while leaving work.

HRW said many workers have seen sharp drops in income, especially those in commission-based jobs. Workers in several countries, including the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar, also reported rising food prices. Some said their monthly food costs had doubled.

The rights body urged the Gulf states to take emergency steps to protect migrant workers, including compensating income losses, ensuring payment of living wages, enforcing employment contracts, and improving access to social security benefits.

Eastern Refinery nears temporary shutdown

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petrol, naphtha, furnace oil, and a portion of diesel.

Most of the country's petrol demand is met from locally produced condensate, processed at a government owned facility and three private refineries.

These facilities also produce octane by blending naphtha with petrol, meaning around half of the country's octane supply is also locally produced.

However, a halt in the ERL's operations could disrupt naphtha availability, affecting the blending process for petrol and octane.

However, local condensate production remains steady, according to Petrobangla data.

On the other hand, most of the country's diesel demand is met through imports.

Officials said a temporary operational stoppage at the ERL is unlikely to significantly disrupt supply in April, as additional shipments are already in the pipeline.

A diesel shipment worth 27,000 tonnes has arrived Chattogram port from Malaysia yesterday while another 30,000 tonnes is expected by April 7. Two more of similar volume due in mid-April.

To address potential octane pressure, a 25,000-tonne shipment is expected by April 7, followed by another in mid-April.

According to BPC data, these volumes would be sufficient to meet demand for the next two months, reducing the likelihood of any immediate shortage.

Meanwhile, domestic condensate processing is also continuing, providing a partial buffer.

The situation highlights Bangladesh's dependence on the Strait

of Hormuz, a key global oil transit route.

Industry insiders say the ERL is configured to process specific Middle Eastern light crude, limiting flexibility in sourcing alternatives quickly. However, officials stress that the current challenge reflects delays and disruptions rather than a complete supply cutoff.

Pressure on petrol and octane supplies has tightened in recent days, though officials expect some easing.

As of yesterday, BPC data showed octane stocks at 9,407 tonnes and petrol stocks at 12,810 tonnes – enough for about eight to nine days of demand, based on March 2025 averages.

Diesel stocks stood at 127,810 tonnes, providing a buffer of around 10 days. Furnace oil and jet fuel stocks are sufficient for the entire month of April, according to BPC.

Despite stable fuel prices for April, long queues were observed at several filling stations in Dhaka even yesterday.

Motorists reported waiting for hours to refuel, with some returning multiple times. At the Trust Filling Station in Mohakhali, queues stretched onto the street from early morning. At one point, the queue for private cars extended up to the railgate.

Before fuel tankers arrived from depots, many pumps experienced significant congestion.

Officials said the queues reflect distribution tightness and precautionary buying rather than a breakdown in overall supply.

BPC officials maintain that there are no technical barriers to restarting ERL operations once crude arrives.

"We have concern about the issue of shutting down the ERL. But we have alternative measures. We urge people not to panic, as we have already

secured supplies for April," said Monir Hossain Chowdhury, spokesperson for the Energy Division.

Data from Sylhet Gas Fields Limited shows that local production continues to supply around 720 barrels of octane and 3,318 barrels of petrol daily.

While three private refineries are processing this condensate, they lack the high octane blending components produced by the ERL's catalytic reforming unit.

Without the refinery's higher-grade output in case the Middle East tensions continue, the market may face both volume and quality constraints. Local production provides a buffer, but it lacks the capacity to replace the refinery's 1.5 million-tonne annual output.

Industry insiders say the situation underscores the risks of relying on a single, ageing refinery.

In this regard, Monir Hossain Chowdhury said the ERL is unable to process anything other than Arabian Light Crude and the Murban, which is mainly sourced from Saudi Arabia and UAE.

"As a result, we don't have any alternative crude sources, but we are exploring refined oil alternatives."

The long-delayed ERL Unit-2 project has left the country exposed to external shocks, particularly those linked to geopolitical tensions in key supply routes.

Although operations can resume quickly once crude arrives, rising freight costs and insurance premiums amid Middle East tensions are already adding pressure on the national exchequer.

As the timeline for the ERL's potential operational adjustments approaches next week, the situation remains manageable but dependent on the timely arrival of shipments.

\$234b laundered during AL regime

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approximately Tk 1.8 lakh crore, had been siphoned off."

Legal action would be taken against those identified as responsible, he said while responding to a question from Cumilla-9 MP Abul Kalam, during his first question-answer session in parliament.

The foreign ministry, he added, is working closely with relevant ministries and agencies to conclude Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties (MLATs) and exchange Mutual Legal Assistance Requests (MLARs) with other countries to repatriate laundered funds.

Nine countries and one territory have initially been identified as destinations for laundered money. They are the US, UK, Canada, Switzerland, Australia, Thailand, UAE, Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong.

Among them, Malaysia, Hong Kong and the United Arab Emirates have agreed to sign agreements while negotiations with the rest are ongoing, the prime minister said.

He also said an inter-agency task force, chaired by the governor of Bangladesh Bank, has been formed, and legal proceedings are underway in 11 prioritised cases identified by the body.

The cases are against ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina and her family, former land minister Saifuzzaman Chowdhury, S Alam Group, Beximco Group, Sikder Group, Bashundhara Group, NASSA Group, Orion Group, Nabil Group, HBM Iqbal and his family, and Summit Group, along with individuals and institutions linked to their interests, Tarique said.

Led by the Anti-Corruption Commission, investigations are being carried out with support from the CID, NBR's Central Intelligence Cell, and the Customs Intelligence and Investigation Department, he said.

Eleven Joint Investigation Teams have been formed, and courts have attached and frozen assets worth Tk 57,168.9 crore within the country as of March 25, 2026, he said.

In total, assets worth Tk 70,446.22 crore at home and abroad have been frozen, he added.

The prime minister said a total of 141 cases have been filed to recover laundered money, with charge sheets

submitted in 15 and verdicts delivered in six.

Responding to a supplementary question from MP Mujibur Rahman, the prime minister said the authorities were preparing a list of individuals involved in money laundering.

"In the past, we have seen various individuals in the government acting on their own wishes and interests, disregarding the country's laws, rules and ethics – detaining people as they pleased, forcing them to write whatever they wanted," he said.

"The current government, however, is respectful of the law. It seeks to act in accordance with the prevailing laws of the country and to ensure justice on a legal basis, so that no person is deprived of rightful justice. For this reason, we will proceed strictly through legal processes," he added.

"The law will advance at its own pace, and punishments will be determined according to the country's existing laws for those who have misappropriated the nation's wealth and laundered people's money," Tarique said.

FAMILY CARD

The prime minister also said that since the family card is issued in the name of the female head of household, "it will elevate their status within the family, and promote the empowerment of women both at home and in society."

He made the comments while responding to a question from MP ABM Mosharraf Hossain, who asked to what extent the government's newly introduced Family Card programme could create opportunities for women's empowerment.

He said that the philosophy of the programme is "not the individual, but the family is the main unit of development."

Currently, assistance is provided to disadvantaged groups through more than 95 social security programmes.

However, despite longstanding support, poverty reduction and improvements in nutrition and health have not reached desired levels, Tarique said.

Launched on March 10, 2026, the Family Card programme aims to cover four crore families nationwide within four years.

Responding to a supplementary question from NCP's Akhter Hossen,

Tarique said the exact budget figure is not being disclosed at this stage, but the programme will expand gradually.

He assured parliament that the government is not printing money, so inflation will not occur.

"Rather, the funds provided will remain within the local economy, as farmers and women are unlikely to launder them abroad. This spending will circulate domestically, strengthening the grassroots economy, creating employment, and improving living standards for marginalised groups."

MANIFESTO IMPLEMENTATION

Answering another question from MP Tahsina Rushdir, the prime minister said all ministries and divisions are taking necessary initiatives to formulate action plans for the next 180 days, the next fiscal year, and the next five years to implement the BNP's election pledges.

Significant progress has already been achieved in the implementation of some important activities announced in the election manifesto, he said.

Agricultural loans up to Tk 10,000 in crop, livestock and fisheries sectors have already been waived.

Before Eid-ul-Fitr, allowances for 9,102 beneficiaries, including 3,295 imams, 2,975 muezzins, 2,604 khadems, 114 Hindu temple priests, 83 servicemen, and principals and vice-principals of Buddhist monasteries, were transferred to their bank accounts.

A pilot project to issue 25 lakh e-health cards under a pilot programme in Khulna district is under the approval process.

The 20,000 km canal excavation and re-excavation programme in the next five years began on March 16, 2026. By June, 1,204 km of canals will be excavated or re-excavated.

Afforestation is underway with the aim of planting 25 crore trees and creating green jobs in the next five years.

Plans are also underway to distribute free school uniforms to 200,000 primary students this fiscal year.

To improve technical and language skills, 9,000 teachers of technical institutions will be provided with tablets within 180 days, and 3,832 multimedia classrooms will be set up.

Iran clears 6 tankers heading for Bangladesh

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"Initially, there were no specific details of the ships. When we informed Bangladesh of this, Dhaka shared the specific information last week. We have sent it to Tehran. Our National Security Council said it will help pass the six ships. We are checking the specification now," said Jahanabadi.

The Iranian envoy said the embassy in Dhaka has sent to Tehran the information and photos of Bangladeshis facing challenges due to the fuel crisis. "Bangladesh is a friendly Muslim country. The people here protested the martyrdom of our supreme leader."

The diplomat, however, said Iran is not happy with Bangladesh's statement after the US-Israel attacks on Iran. "Bangladesh has expressed concerns, but we would have been happier to see Bangladesh condemn the aggression against Iran."

Attacking a sovereign country is

a clear violation of the UN Charter, and the US and Israel have violated it, Jahanabadi added.

He said Iran considered Bangladesh a friend and thus expects a clearer statement, not any confusion.

Asked if Iran would send any formal communication to Dhaka expressing its dissatisfaction, the ambassador said no such letters were sent. However, he would raise the issue if he meets the prime minister.

He also mentioned that countries like Russia and China, despite not being Muslim-majority nations, have voiced condemnation on the issue. "We understand the limitation of Bangladesh whose millions of citizens work in the Gulf countries."

Jahanabadi said Iran has no intention of waging war with Muslim Arab countries and is only attacking US bases in the region. He blamed the Gulf countries for allowing US bases.

He also regretted the deaths of

Bangladeshis in the Gulf amid the war.

The Iranian envoy added that 180 Bangladeshis stranded in Iran have already returned home, while those still remaining there will receive all necessary assistance if they wish to return.

Jahanabadi also commented that US President Donald Trump is now seeking a way out of the war with Iran.

He added that a previous US president did not fall into what he described as the "trap" set by "Zionist Israel", but the current president has.

According to him, the US president is making inconsistent statements about the war, saying one thing in the morning, another at noon, and something different at night.

The diplomat criticised the UN's role, saying that it has failed to ensure the security of sovereign countries. "Thus, we have to defend ourselves."

Emergency measles shot drive from Sunday

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Infectious Diseases Hospital in Mohakhali, raising measles-related deaths at the facility to 26, said superintendent Tanzina Jahan. The hospital was treating 84 suspected patients yesterday, 30 of them admitted in the last daily count.

Another child, seven-month-old Hira Moni from Moheshkhali, died at Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital, where 38 others were receiving treatment. Doctors said she was also suffering from pneumonia and oral complications.

Rajshahi Medical College Hospital reported the other latest death, bringing its suspected deaths from measles to four, according to spokesperson Dr Shankar K Biswas.

However, Prothom Alo reported 12 deaths at RMCH until Sunday, though the hospital acknowledged

only one at that time.

EMERGENCY DRIVE

Children normally receive measles vaccines twice – at nine months and 15 months – under the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI).

Special campaigns are usually held every four years, but after the last one in 2020, the planned 2024 drive was cancelled due to the July uprising, the health minister said.

He said routine vaccination was also disrupted at least three times last year due to strikes by health assistants who administer the doses in rural areas. A funding crisis, triggered by suspension of the sector programme by the interim government, further hampered services.

EPI had planned a special campaign in mid-April, but Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, said syringes would

only be available between May and July.

The government has now decided to proceed immediately due to the surge in cases, the minister said.

Unicef has already identified the most affected upazilas, where the campaign will start, he said.

Shahriar Sajjad, director of EPI, said they were finalising the list and it was expected by last night. Replying to a question, he said syringes had been managed "somehow", allowing the drive to go ahead.

Earlier, he told this correspondent that while the central stock of measles vaccine for routine immunisation had run out, supplies remained at field level.

He confirmed receipt of 2 crore doses from Gavi for the emergency campaign.