



In Adui Para, hope climbs uphill to school

WR1



Rose Garden: a palace where legacy blooms

P3



Iran still has major missile launch capacity: sources

P5



Breaking the 'barriers' of tea gardens

WR4

SUSPECTED MEASLES 94 deaths in 19 days: govt

Cases surge to 5,792 nationwide

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The government yesterday reported 94 suspected measles deaths, mostly among children, over the past 19 days, alongside 5,792 suspected cases nationwide, suggesting the outbreak is far more severe than earlier thought.

Only nine deaths have so far been confirmed as caused by measles,

Health officials and experts attribute the surge largely to immunisation gaps, citing long intervals between special campaigns, repeated disruptions to routine vaccination, and supply constraints.

the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) said in its report as the highly infectious disease has seen a sharp rise this year, particularly since March.

The rise in measles cases has raised serious public health concerns, prompting the government to announce emergency vaccination drives in high-burden areas from tomorrow.

As most of the deaths reported by hospitals were among unvaccinated

PHOTO ON PAGE 12

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Motorists line up for fuel from a pump in the city's Asad Gate with the queue stretching to the Crescent Lake bridge over a kilometre away on Thursday midnight as the energy crisis worsens amid the US-Israel war on Iran.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

15 hours in queue for fuel worth Tk 2,000!

ASIFUR RAHMAN

Jan-E-Alam, 50, joined a long queue of vehicles around 1:30am yesterday near Mohakhali Railgate to get fuel from Trust Filling Station near Bijoy Sarani, about 2km away.

He finally managed to buy fuel around 4:30pm, after nearly 15 exhausting hours.

Adding to his ordeal, he could take octane worth Tk 2,000, as the station, amid mounting pressure from a growing number of vehicles, was forced to impose caps on sales around 2:00pm.

"It was a holiday, and I thought I would rest after refuelling and spend time with my family. But all my plans were wasted in the queue," he told The Daily Star.

The pump was selling fuel worth Tk 600 to

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

NEWS ANALYSIS

Opportunity for reforms slipping away once more

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Bangladesh's political journey has repeatedly swung between hope and disappointment. The question now is whether the country is about to witness yet another repeat of that cycle.

The 13th Parliament sat on March 12. But the ruling party did not convene a Constitution Reform Council as mandated by the July National Charter (Constitutional Reform) Implementation Order, 2025. Nor were there any attempts to convene such a council. The main opposition Jamaat-e-Islami brought it up at parliament leading to heated exchanges and debate.

But the BNP's reluctance to adopt a clear path towards reforms, citing constitutional complexities, coupled with the special committee's decision against ratifying 20 ordinances, has only deepened the uncertainty around July charter proposals for change. Many of these ordinances were central to reform -- judicial independence,

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

DROPPED ORDINANCES

Hard-earned reforms at risk

Say rights activists, experts



The fact that people's lives can become extremely difficult in the absence of an effective Human Rights Commission, an independent judiciary, and provisions for preventing enforced disappearances should not be forgotten by those in power, including the head of the ruling party.

TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman



ASHUTOSH SARKAR and MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Eminent rights activists have criticised the parliamentary special committee's recommendation to drop key ordinances issued by the interim government, noting that most of them are tied to crucial reforms.

Out of 133 ordinances issued by the previous government, four are set for repeal, while 16 would be allowed to expire.

The activists and experts said the move by the committee, tasked with reviewing the ordinances, has deepened

concerns over the future of judicial, anti-corruption and human rights reforms.

From retired judges to leading civil society figures, many have warned that the stance risks undoing hard-won gains.

The special committee's report, placed before parliament by chief whip Zainul Abedin on Thursday, said 16 ordinances would later be reintroduced in the House as bills following scrutiny and further strengthening. That means these 16 ordinances are not going to be adopted within the stipulated time.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 3

AUSTERITY MEASURES

Development projects now on the back burner

BAHARAM KHAN and SAJJAD HOSSAIN

The government has decided to step back from new development projects and cut public spending in a broad austerity drive, as it seeks to conserve state resources and manage rising pressure on fuel supply and distribution.

It has also announced several steps, including a 30 percent cut in fuel use for the official vehicles of the prime minister, ministers, and state ministers, the phased removal of old vehicles from roads, and a halt to interest-free car loans for some civil servants.

In the meantime, the Power Division has set a target to save around 3,100MW of electricity a day to help reduce pressure on the power and fuel sectors.

The decisions were made as part of a wider effort to prepare for possible strain on the economy and the energy sector in the coming months as the US-Israel war on Iran escalated.

Officials indicated that the government wants to keep more money in hand so that it can respond quickly

SEE PAGE 2 COL 7

BNP govt being tested by turmoil

Ministers grapple with fuel crisis, measles, backlash over reforms

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

The BNP-led government is navigating multiple challenges in running the country and managing its own ranks, party leaders and political analysts said.

Since assuming office on February 17, the government has been dealing with multiple crises, including the fallout of the US-Israel war on Iran, a surge in measles cases, and opposition demands over the July charter.

The war, which broke out in late February, has severely strained fuel supplies. Long queues at filling stations and rising fuel import costs have compounded the crisis.

The rise in measles cases has also added pressure on the government. Cases have surged since January, as routine vaccination programmes, particularly for measles, were disrupted by vaccine shortages after the previous interim government failed to release funds on time, according to government sources.

Political analyst Mohammad Mojibur Rahman said the government is facing multifaceted pressure -- political, cultural, social, and economic -- but decisions are being taken in haste. "These things will create problems for the government," he told The Daily Star.

Mojibur, also a professor at the Institute of Education and Research at Dhaka University, said the party needs

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5



Bangladesh players celebrate after winning the SAFF U-20 Championship, beating defending champions India 4-3 on penalties following a goalless final at the National Stadium in Male, Maldives yesterday. USA-based youngster Ronan Sullivan sealed the deal for the 2024 champions with an audacious Panenka in the fifth kick after Samuel Raksam's effort struck the crossbar.

PHOTO: BFF

Trump vows to destroy 'what's left in Iran'

Threatens to target it's bridges, power plants next; Tehran claims downing US jet as it steps up attacks on Israel, Gulf states

Kuwait refinery, desalination plant, UAE gas complex hit

UN vote to reopen Hormuz faces China veto

US army chief fired; \$1.5t defense budget requested

FAO says longer war may roil food security

AGENCIES

Iran stepped up its attacks on Israel and targets across the Gulf yesterday, as US President Donald Trump warned Washington had yet to begin "destroying what's left" of Iran's infrastructure.

Meanwhile, a push by Gulf states to the UN Security Council to open the key Strait of Hormuz yesterday met with Chinese opposition.

As the war continues to roil the global economy, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization yesterday warned that global food security might take a big hit if the war continues for a long time.

The war started more than a month ago with US-Israeli strikes on Iran, triggering retaliation that spread the conflict

throughout the Middle East.

Tehran yesterday claimed to have downed a US F-15E fighter jet over southwestern Iran.

A spokesperson for Iran's military command, Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, said the jet had been "completely destroyed" and that the pilot's chances of survival were low, in comments carried by the semi-official Tasnim News Agency.

Initially, the Iranians claimed the jet was an F-35, but US military sources later briefed the media that it was an F-15E that had been downed.

Both the US and Iranian militaries have launched a search for the pilot. Iranian citizens have been urged to join the hunt by authorities.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 3



PHOTOS: GALLERI KAYA

Sunflowers and beyond WITNESSING CROSSROAD

RBR

By sheer stroke of chance, I stepped into the exhibition space of Galleri Kaya in Uttara and managed to take a quick look at the group art exhibition titled “CROSSROAD ... not a project”.

Organised by Galleri Kaya and sponsored by ADN Group, it is an extraordinary presentation by 11 contemporary Bangladeshi artists.

What struck me immediately were the yellow canvases. From the very entrance, two enormous works – A Drying Sunflower and A Fallen Sunflower – rare displays of Sahid Kazi’s brilliance in oil, exerted a hypnotic pull with muted greens and luminous yellows. Turning left, Shahanoor Mamun’s monumental acrylics, Rhythm of the Reapers and Whispers of the Harvest, transfixed viewers with their golden glow.

Colour here was not just pigment, it was power. The brief, informal preview felt like stumbling into a magical loop, leaving me quietly exhilarated. Mamun explained:

“Harvest expresses the energy of the countryside; it is more than an agricultural act. It is a celebration of patience, resilience, and the enduring bond between people and nature. Through vibrant, impressionistic brushstrokes, the warmth of the sun radiates across the canvas, capturing the rhythm of labour and the gentle

sweep of wind through ripened grain.” His words echoed the radiance of his canvases.

For me, yellow has always been a radiant colour: the sweep of sunflower fields, the layered gold of ripened paddy, the cheerful mustard blossoms, the soft calendula petals, the luminous Alamanda blooms. Even the smallest stroke of yellow paint feels like a fragment of sunlight caught and set free.

Stepping deeper into the gallery, the

for the first time, I admired its ease: free of heavy concepts, yet quietly majestic.

The exhibition brings together a dynamic group of Bangladeshi artists born between 1970 and 1989, straddling both Generation X and the Millennials. This carefully chosen group has played a pivotal role in shaping the contemporary art landscape of Bangladesh. The growing demand for their works – driven by diverse trajectories of practice, thought, and visual language – continues to draw

discourse, teaching at the University of Dhaka and shaping emerging artists while sustaining active studio practices.

“The title CROSSROAD ... not a project suggests neither a fixed theme nor a prescribed curatorial framework. Rather, it acknowledges a moment – an intersection of experiences, ideologies, and visual vocabularies. The exhibition resists being framed merely as a project; it is instead a confluence of practices that reflect personal histories, socio-political consciousness, material exploration, and evolving aesthetic languages.”

Featuring 46 works in ceramic, stoneware, brass, welded iron, oil, acrylic, gouache, mixed media, and watercolour on paper and canvas, the exhibition showcases creations by Abdus Sattar Toufiq, Ashim Halder Sagor, Azharul Islam Chanchal, Azmeer Hossain, Monjur Rashid, Nabaraj Roy, Shahanoor Mamun, Sahid Kazi, Shohag Parvez, Sushanta Kumar Adhikary, and Ekushay Padak 2026 recipient Tejesh Halder Josh.

Inaugurated by the High Commissioner of India to Bangladesh, HE Pranay Verma, the exhibition will remain open daily from 11:30am to 7:30pm until April 16, 2026 – a luminous stop during the Pohela Boishakh break in Dhaka.

For further queries, visit Galleri Kaya’s Facebook page.



mood shifted. Abdus Sattar Toufiq’s aqua greens and blues offset the yellows with bold variations of line and form, laying bare his inner landscape. Then came Azmeer Hossain’s boats, drifting in soft watercolour washes, merging with reflections of cloudy skies – the fluid medium capturing the lush Bengal monsoon with striking ease.

Beyond the spell of yellow, Monjur Rashid’s acrylics Steadfast-I and Mother elevated seemingly insignificant subjects – hens and roosters – into regal figures. Encountering his work

the attention of collectors, compelling them to enrich their collections with creations of remarkable splendour and significance.

“This generation stands at a decisive intersection – between tradition and experimentation, academic engagement and independent practice, locality and global discourse,” said Goutam Chakraborty, Director of Galleri Kaya. “Some continue as freelance practitioners, navigating exhibitions and commissions, while others contribute to institutional

94 deaths in 19 days: govt

FROM PAGE 1

children, health officials and experts attribute the surge largely to immunisation gaps, citing long intervals between special campaigns, repeated disruptions to routine vaccination, and supply constraints.

Measles, a highly infectious disease, often leads to complications such as pneumonia, diarrhoea, ear infections, and encephalitis. It also weakens immunity, putting children and those with comorbidities at higher risk.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), at least 56 of the country’s 64 districts had reported measles cases as of March 28, indicating widespread transmission. Officials fear the number may now be higher, as cases may have emerged in eight additional districts since that report.

The DGHS began publishing measles data on its website on Thursday. Its initial report recorded 3,709 suspected cases between March 15 and 8:00am Thursday, including 585 confirmed infections. It also mentioned 27 deaths, of which 13 were confirmed.

Yesterday, the DGHS revised its data and reported the suspected deaths and cases between March 15 and 8:00am.

It included three deaths and 947 suspected cases in the previous 24 hours. The number of confirmed deaths was revised down to nine from 13. Officials said five deaths were excluded due to incorrect reporting from district-level offices, while one more previously unreported death was added.

An official from the

DGHS Management Information System (MIS) said most of the dead were children.

Hospital data show that of the 5,792 suspected cases, 3,776 patients have been admitted since March 15, and 2,527 have already been discharged.

Division-wise, Dhaka recorded the highest number of suspected cases (2,394), followed by Rajshahi (1,243) and Chattogram (717), while Rangpur reported the lowest (119).

The government had not formally disclosed such high death figures earlier. Around a dozen health officials contacted by this correspondent also did not indicate numbers this high. Most newspapers had reported deaths between 50 and 65, with this newspaper reporting 50 on Thursday.

WHY SO SEVERE

Data from the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) showed crude vaccination coverage under its regular campaign declined over the past two years.

Special campaigns are held every four years to cover those missed, with the last campaign held in 2020.

But the planned 2024 campaign could not be conducted due to the situation surrounding the political changeover, said Shahriar Sajjad, deputy director of the EPI.

Routine vaccinations were also disrupted at least three times last year due to strikes by health assistants in rural areas.

A funding crisis following the suspension of the Health, Population, and Nutrition Sector Programme (HPNSP) further affected services.

Since 1998, four HPNSPs have been implemented, with the last ending in June 2024. The interim government scrapped the proposed fifth programme in March 2025, opting to integrate sectoral programmes into regular ones.

Several projects were later approved to continue unfinished tasks and ensure supply of medicines and vaccines, but approvals were delayed, some until November last year.

In August last year, Tk 842 crore was allocated to buy vaccines. However, procurement complications arose after the interim government decided to source half through Unicef’s direct procurement method and the rest via tender.

“We still couldn’t buy vaccines due to these complications,” a DGHS official said last week, adding that the shortage led to rationing since January.

Stocks of six vaccines, including measles, were exhausted at headquarters, with shortages also reported at field level, according to the official.

The then health adviser Nurjahan Begum could not be reached for comment over phone.

EPI’s Shahriar Sajjad said although the central stock of routine measles vaccines was exhausted, two crore doses were received from Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, for a special campaign planned for mid-April. However, the campaign is likely to be delayed until June or July due to shortages of syringes and other logistics.

The emergency vaccination drive starting tomorrow will proceed after syringes “had been

managed”, he added.

Prof Halimur Rashid, DGHS director (disease control), said the emergency campaign will initially run for two weeks in high-burden areas, with possible extension. A meeting is scheduled for tonight to finalise details before a formal announcement.

5 MORE DEATHS

Reports from districts indicate the outbreak’s human toll is continuing to rise. Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed insisted the government is doing its best to cope with the situation. “Like many other countries, Bangladesh is facing challenges from the US-Israel war on Iran. Under the prime minister’s direction, we are moving forward. Prices have not increased yet, but depending on the situation ahead, decisions may be taken if needed,” he told The Daily Star.

Salahuddin, also a BNP Standing Committee member, said the government managed”, he added. Prof Halimur Rashid, DGHS director (disease control), said the emergency campaign will initially run for two weeks in high-burden areas, with possible extension. A meeting is scheduled for tonight to finalise details before a formal announcement.

Acting Civil Surgeon Mahiuddin Alamgir said 92 samples had been sent for testing, with 30 returned positive so far.

In Tangail, a 13-month-old child died yesterday at Tangail General Hospital, while another child died in the district on Thursday.

In Rajshahi, a patient with measles-like symptoms died at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, taking the death toll there to six since March 29. The hospital did not disclose the identity of the deceased.

In the 24 hours till noon yesterday, 12 new suspected patients were admitted to the hospital and 13 were discharged, said spokesperson Shankar K Biswas.

In Mymensingh, one suspected measles patient died at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital in the 24 hours ending early yesterday, bringing the total deaths there to six.

BNP govt being tested by turmoil

FROM PAGE 1

committed and skilled people to make governance more effective, which in turn will help tackle the crises.

“There were many talented and qualified individuals the party could have used in different ministries and other areas,” he said, adding that it should have had a think tank to guide it on ongoing problems.

Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed insisted the government is doing its best to cope with the situation. “Like many other countries, Bangladesh is facing challenges from the US-Israel war on Iran. Under the prime minister’s direction, we are moving forward. Prices have not increased yet, but depending on the situation ahead, decisions may be taken if needed,” he told The Daily Star.

Salahuddin, also a BNP Standing Committee member, said the government has already taken several steps to handle the situation, including austerity measures. According to party insiders, the situation has been further complicated as some cabinet members are still adjusting to key ministries after a long absence from government. “Some of our cabinet members are inexperienced, which makes it difficult to handle complex responsibilities and urgent national challenges,” said a senior party leader, speaking on condition of anonymity, adding that the number of experienced officials is also limited.

A minister said separately that fulfilling the party’s election promises had become a challenge, but they insisted the promises would be kept. The administration is also facing political pressure over the July charter and the handling of reforms and ordinances in parliament.

15 hours in queue for fuel worth Tk 2,000!

FROM PAGE 1

motorcycles, Tk 1,500 to cars, and Tk 2,000 to SUVs till at least 2:00am today.

A rent-a-car driver, Alam last bought fuel worth Tk 5,000 on March 25, which was nearly exhausted by then.

“With Tk 2,000 worth of fuel, my hybrid SUV can run about 200 kilometres. I usually drive over 100km a day, which means I will have to queue again within the next two days,” he said.

“It’s becoming increasingly difficult to manage work under such conditions.” Queues stretching across multiple roads have grown longer over the past few days, despite earlier expectations from officials that the situation would ease after the government announced no increase in local fuel prices.

In the capital, in many areas, queues from one filling station extended up to the next, effectively occupying the entire first lane of the road, and sometimes disrupting traffic flow.

A visit between 3:00pm and 5:00pm to 12 filling

stations in Tejgaon, Mohakhali, and the Gulshan link road area found three stations closed, while the rest were struggling to handle the queue.

The Tejgaon-Mohakhali road was busier than usual for a holiday, with traffic police managing both signals and congestion caused by long queues at fuel pumps.

Visits to the same stations over the past week suggest the situation is worsening. At the same spot before the Trust Filling Station, Md Jasim Uddin was seen waiting in line at 1:00pm on April 1 after joining the queue at 4:00am – a wait of around nine hours.

Tensions occasionally flared after station-imposed sales limits, with customers protesting after hours of waiting.

“Why didn’t you inform us earlier about the cap? Did I wait 14–15 hours just for Tk 1,500 worth of fuel?” a private car owner shouted at staff.

He also questioned why some VIP vehicles were being served from the other side of

Development projects

FROM PAGE 1

if the external situation worsens and creates deeper pressure on imports, transport, power generation, and public expenditure.

According to the Cabinet Division, the government will not go ahead with any new development project for the time being. The move is meant to slow fresh spending commitments and help preserve funds for urgent national needs.

Officials added that spending on land acquisition would be reduced by 100 percent.

A Cabinet Division officer, wishing anonymity, said that a 100 percent reduction in land acquisition costs means that ongoing projects requiring the acquisition will remain halted.

At the same time, the government will not undertake any new projects needing land acquisition, at least in the current fiscal year, he added.

Another officer said it is a very tough decision for a new government.

“This is because not taking such projects will effectively create a major stagnation in development work, which will decrease the government’s popularity.”

The measures announced by the government cover fuel use, electricity consumption, transport, office hours, official travel, training, and a range of other state expenditures.

The government has also stopped giving interest-free loans to officials for buying cars until further notice.

Under the 2020 policy, officials from deputy secretary rank and above were allowed to take interest-free loans of up to Tk 30 lakh to purchase vehicles.

Sources said all government-funded foreign training programmes would remain suspended until further orders, while spending on domestic training would be reduced by 50 percent.

In addition, hospitality costs at meetings and seminars will be cut by 50 percent, seminar and conference expenses by 20 percent, and travel expenses by 30 percent.

As part of the new

measure, the 30 percent reduction will apply to the use of fuel, electricity, and gas across all public offices, meaning ministries, departments, and other state institutions will be required to scale back their routine consumption of energy to reduce overall government demand.

Meanwhile, the government has also ordered cuts in expenses on beautification work.

Expenditure on the beautification of residential buildings will be reduced by 20 percent, while spending on non-residential buildings will be slashed by 50 percent.

Over the power saving target, the Cabinet Division said importance would be given to irrigation for agricultural land, fertiliser production, fertiliser storage, and proper distribution.

It added that fuel supply to industries would continue on a priority basis so that factories can keep running and economic growth is not badly affected.

Sources in the Prime Minister’s Office said that while the government wants to cut waste and reduce non-essential energy use, it does not want the austerity plan to hurt farming, fertiliser supply, or industrial output, all of which are closely linked to food production, jobs, and market stability.

The government has also revised office and business hours. Government and private offices, as well as banks and financial institutions, will operate from 9:00am to 4:00pm, while banking services will be available from 10:00am to 3:00pm.

Except for emergency services, all office buildings, shopping centres, and commercial establishments must close by 6:00pm.

The government also approved a proposal allowing registered educational institutions to import brand-new electric buses without duty.

In other cases, such buses may be imported at a total duty of 20 percent. The decision appears intended to encourage cleaner transport and lower long-term dependence on conventional fuel.

reserved seats for women in parliament. Party insiders acknowledged that BNP is also trying to control the activities of some members whose conduct has harmed party image.

Political analysts said the government’s ability to manage this phase depends not only on administrative performance but also on how the BNP strengthens its organisation from grassroots to national levels with capable people.

“BNP needs to give more attention to reorganising the party now,” said Al Masud Hasanuzzaman, former professor of Jahangirnagar University.

“New faces are being seen in the government. The head of government probably thinks that by giving them responsibility, he can test their ability. In some cases, the results are satisfactory, but some are falling short of what is needed,” he added.

shortages at the stations.

The government said a ship brought 25,000 tonnes of octane on April 1, and another ship is expected to bring a similar shipment in mid-April. The shipments are expected to meet the country’s demand for around 40 days.

On March 30, Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Iqbal Hassan Mahmood Tuku said fuel sales at Trust Filling Station rose in March to 10,620 litres per day, up from 5,400 litres per day in March 2025.

Meanwhile, the BPC is trying to secure up to 3,30,000 tonnes of diesel in 14 vessels and three consignments through the pipeline.

A vessel carrying 27,000 tonnes of diesel from Singapore reached Chattogram Port yesterday, according to Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC). Another vessel carrying around 30,000 tonnes is expected to arrive within the next couple of days.

JUDICIARY, RIGHTS TIB expresses concern over rollback of key ordinances

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) yesterday expressed strong disappointment over government moves to repeal two ordinances related to the appointment of Supreme Court judges and a separate secretariat and to suspend the National Human Rights Commission Ordinance for review.

In a statement, TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman urged the government to place these ordinances before Parliament in their original form.

He also called for other ordinances recommended for suspension – including those on the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), Police Commission, and Right to Information – to be reviewed with stakeholders and enacted without delay.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1



A child shares a playful moment with her mother as she arranges flowers for sale on the roadside at TSC on the Dhaka University campus, reflecting a glimpse of everyday resilience and warmth amid work. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

Fogging operations go on amid diesel shortage concerns

DNCC, DSCC claim there is no immediate risk

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

City corporations are continuing fogging operations for mosquito control in Dhaka amid concerns over the ongoing diesel shortage in the country during the monsoon, the usual time for outbreaks of Aedes mosquitoes.

Officials from both Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) and Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) claimed there is no immediate risk, as contractors responsible for ensuring fuel supply and the authorities concerned have already taken steps to avoid any disruption.

DNCC uses malathion, mixed with diesel at a ratio of 5 percent per litre for fogging, while DSCC uses deltamethrin, mixed at 0.1 millilitres per litre of diesel.

Sources say DNCC currently needs about 3,25,000 litres of diesel for fogging, while DSCC requires around 2,00,000 litres. Both city corporations, alongside contractors, are also contacting relevant government agencies to secure the fuel supply.

DNCC, which has 54 wards, requires about 1,100 litres of diesel-mixed malathion daily. As of March 30, it had around 27,000 litres in stock – barely enough to continue operations till April 25.

On March 12, DNCC issued a Tk 16.29 crore work order to procure a supply of 3,60,000 litres of malathion by May 11. However, contractor Habibur Rahman Gazi has informed authorities that he is unable to supply due to the diesel shortage, noting that 3,27,000 litres of diesel are needed to produce the required amount.

Brig Gen Imrul Kayes Chowdhury, DNCC's chief health officer, said there is no shortage until April 21, with detailed

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

DNCC currently needs about 3,25,000 litres of diesel for fogging, while DSCC requires around 2,00,000 litres. Both city corporations, alongside contractors, are also contacting relevant government agencies to secure the fuel supply.

Heatwave grips parts of country

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After several months of mild winter, people across the country have started to feel the intensity of rising temperatures as summer approaches.

According to the Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD), a mild to moderate heatwave is sweeping over Rajshahi and Khulna divisions, as well as the districts of Tangail, Faridpur, Manikganj and Nilphamari, and it may spread further.

The highest temperature in the country until 10:00pm yesterday was recorded 39.7 degrees Celsius in Chuadanga, while the temperature in Dhaka reached 36.4 degrees Celsius.

Weather officials said the gradual increase in temperature indicates the transition from winter to summer, with warmer days expected to continue in the coming weeks.

Residents in different parts of the country are already experiencing discomfort, especially during midday hours. Many are also afraid of not getting uninterrupted electricity supply during the scorching heat due to the current global oil crisis.

"I am planning to purchase an IPS fearing disruption of power, as the oil crisis is now a global issue and we do not know when it will be resolved," said Amowar Hossain, a resident of Dhanmondi.

Rose Garden: a palace where legacy blooms

Iconic Old Dhaka landmark turns into modern entertainment centre

DIPAN NANDY and SUKANTA HALDER

Hidden within the bustling alleys in Old Dhaka's Tikatuli lies a regal architectural gem – the Rose Garden.

Built in the early 20th century, the palace that once reflected an elite lifestyle now carries the scent of history, the echoes of political discourse, and the essence of cultural heritage.

Located on KM Das Lane, the Rose Garden now stands as a preserved heritage site and public entertainment centre.

The estate features an elegant white marble mansion exuding Greek architectural style, white marble sculptures, a field with an artificial fountain at the centre, a pond with a paved bank, and a lush green garden with rows of rose bushes, creating a mesmerising ambience of grandeur.

The ground floor of the palace consists of eight rooms, all currently closed. On the upper floor, four of the five rooms are open to visitors. Along the wooden staircase to the second floor, there are colourful glass designs that make the palace come alive in a play of light and shadow.

The palace features a large hall, which was once the ballroom, with every corner intricately adorned and the ceiling featuring chandeliers that are still ready to shine.

On one side of the palace is the Bengal Studio, where the Bangladeshi film "Harano Din" was

shot.

Every day, a host of local and foreign visitors visit the Rose Garden.

Shiuly Akter, a visitor, said, "The architecture of old houses and palaces always fascinates me. The Rose Garden is not just a palace. As I entered, I felt as if I were standing as a witness to time. Its serene beauty

resident, said, "I was born and brought up in this area. The Rose Garden is the symbol of pride not only for our locality but for the whole country."

The story of Rose Garden begins during the British era in 1931, when Rishikesh Das, a nouveau riche businessman, constructed the mansion.



is enchanting. If anyone ever seeks tranquillity, history, and beauty, then an afternoon visit to the Rose Garden is highly recommended."

Rajnin Farhana, another visitor, said, "I heard about the palace since it reopened. A number of my friends visited earlier and posted photos on social media. Now I came to visit the palace and take a lot of photos."

Monowar Hossain, a local



Once, after being humiliated at a cultural gathering at Baldha Garden, Rishikesh decided to host his own events at a grand garden house. Due to the abundance of rose bushes, the estate was named "Rose Garden".

However, before the decoration of the building could be completed, Rishikesh went bankrupt and had to sell the property in 1937 to

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

BANGABAZAR FIRE

Victims yet to be compensated three years on

Tk 6.25cr raised for affected traders remains frozen in bank

DIPAN NANDY and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Even after three years since the devastating fire at Dhaka's Bangabazar on April 4, 2023 that gutted thousands of shops just days ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr, victim traders have yet to receive any compensation.

A fund of Tk 6.19 crore collected to assist affected traders remains frozen in bank accounts, growing to Tk 6.25 crore with interest, while most traders, now burdened by debt, are struggling to restart their businesses.

Also, the Dhaka District Administration raised Tk 3.5 crore, with 600 traders and 1,200 employees were disbursed Tk 25,000 each, officials claimed. However, victims allege that the aid reached only a handful, leaving many in the dark about the distribution process.

Moreover, the then-prime minister announced a Tk 15 crore grant for the affected traders, but those funds were never deposited following her ouster.

Belayet Hossain, owner of Tahmid Garments, lost

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7



Woman, five-year- old son found dead at home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A woman and her five-year-old son were found dead at their home at Tilpa Para area in Dhaka's Khilgaon yesterday afternoon, police said.

The deceased were identified as Nargis, 35, and her son Mahim.

Sub-Inspector Rafiqul Islam of Khilgaon Police Station said police visited their house in the afternoon after receiving information and recovered their bodies.

The police station OC Shafiqul Islam said the child was found with his throat slit, while the woman's body was found hanging from the ceiling fan.

"The woman might have stabbed the child and later died by suicide. The door was found locked from inside," said the OC, adding that her husband was not home during the incident.

Members of the Crime Scene unit of the Criminal Investigation Department, along with senior officials, visited the scene. Police said they are trying to gather further details about the incident.

3RD TERMINAL AT HSIA Govt eyes deal with Japan while safeguarding interest: minister

BSS, Dhaka

Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister Afroza Khanam Rita yesterday said the government prefers to assign operational responsibility of the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport's 3rd terminal to the Japanese consortium through negotiations while safeguarding national interests.

Bangladesh and Japan yesterday held the second round of a high-level meeting to advance negotiations on the operation and maintenance of the 3rd terminal, signalling renewed momentum towards finalising the long-delayed deal.

"The discussions are now focused on the revenue-related aspects. Once we reach a mutual understanding on that, we will be able to arrive at a decision. So, we will sit down for discussions again," Afroza told reporters after emerging from the meeting.

"We are repeatedly sitting at the table to safeguard national interests. We want to make the terminal operational as soon as possible," the minister added.

At the meeting, State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism M Rashiduzzaman Millat urged the Japanese side to reconsider Bangladesh's proposals and submit a revised offer, reiterating the government's interest in working closely with Japan.

The meeting, held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was attended by Foreign Minister Dr Khalilur Rahman, Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister Afroza Khanam Rita, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shama Obaed Islam, Prime Minister's Foreign Affairs Adviser Humayun Kabir, State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism M Rashiduzzaman Millat, Executive Chairman of the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority Chowdhury Ashik Mahmud Bin Harun and CAAB Chairman Air Vice Marshal Md Mostofa Mahmood Siddiq, among others.

The Japanese delegation was led by Assistant Vice Minister of Japan's Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Nakayama Rieko.

ANTI-HOARDING DRIVE 1,550 litres of fuel seized, Tk 10,000 fine imposed

STAR REPORT

As the government continues its drives against hoarders, large quantities of fuel have been seized in two districts.

In a joint operation, law enforcement and intelligence agencies seized 800 litres of fuel in Chandanaish of Chattogram on Thursday night for being transported illegally to be sold at higher prices.

Chandanaish Assistant Commissioner (Land) and Executive Magistrate Jhantu Bikash Chakma led the raid in Dewanhat area.

According to upazila administration sources, 600 litres of diesel and 200 litres of octane, stored in four large drums, were being transported on a trolley from Dohazari to Baitali Yunus Market in the upazila.

Md Sayeed, son of Nur Mohammad from the market area, was intercepted while transporting the fuel, upazila administration officials said.

Investigators said the fuel was intended to be sold at inflated prices in the local market, bypassing official regulations.

Chandanaish Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Rajib Hossain confirmed the seizure. In Noakhali, the Subarnachar upazila

administration seized 750 litres of diesel that had been illegally stored in a rooftop water tank of a residence in Char Jabbar union on Thursday night.

The hoarder was fined Tk 10,000 for illegal stockpiling.

The operation was conducted by Executive Magistrate and Subarnachar UNO Akib Osman.

Acting on a tip-off, the mobile court raided the house of Bashir Sareng and recovered the fuel, the UNO said.

Meanwhile, in Barguna and Patuakhali, a prolonged shortage of diesel and petrol has left many fishing trawlers non-operational, rendering several thousand fishermen jobless.

Yusuf Fakir, a trawler owner from Mohipur in Kalapara upazila of Patuakhali, said he had prepared to head to sea with his fishing vessel, FB Ma-Babar Doa, after the Eid holidays.

"I spent around Tk 50,000 on preparatory work such as collecting ice and hiring fishermen. However, the trip was cancelled due to the fuel shortage," he said.

(Our respective correspondents contributed to the report.)



JCD leader hacked to death in Pabna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) leader was hacked to death by unidentified assailants in Pabna's Ishwardi upazila on Thursday night.

The victim, Imran Hossain Sohag, 26, was a member of the upazila unit of JCD, said police.

He was the member secretary of a proposed committee from a faction of the unit.

According to police and locals, the attack took place near a railway line in Sara Gopalpur around 11:00pm. Sohag, from Baghoil Mannabipara village in Pakshi union, was chatting with friends at a roadside tea stall when a group of assailants arrived.

Following a heated argument – believed to be rooted in a long-standing dispute – the attackers hacked him and fled the scene. Sohag died on the spot.

Contacted, Pranab Kumar, additional superintendent of police (Ishwardi circle), said police were trying to arrest the attackers.



Two bodies recovered in Narsingdi, Kishoreganj

STAR REPORT

The bodies of two young men have been recovered in two districts, report our correspondents.

In Narsingdi, the body of Monsur Ali, 25, an auto-rickshaw driver from Changao village in Madhabdi upazila, was recovered from a pond yesterday morning.

Family and locals said Monsur had gone missing since he left home on Thursday night. His body was later found floating in a pond in the same village.

Police recovered the body and sent it to the hospital morgue for autopsy, said Kamal Hossain, officer-in-charge of Madhabdi Police Station. The cause of death could not be confirmed immediately.

"My son had no known enemy with anyone. I cannot understand why he was killed...", said Monsur's father, Motalib.

In Kishoreganj, police recovered the decomposed body of Abir Hossain, 20, from a maize field in Angrail Haor under Nikli upazila Thursday evening.

Abir, a resident of Bhatiboratia Uttar Para, had been missing since March 9, said family. A complaint was filed with the police on March 13.

Locals discovered the body and informed police. Two people were arrested in this regard, said Rafiqul Islam, OC of Nikli Police Station.

Garer Canal gasps under encroachment, pollution



MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

The centuries-old Garer Canal, an integral part of the history and geography of Habiganj's Baniachong, is now facing a severe crisis due to encroachment and pollution.

This 19-kilometre-long waterway was once vital for transportation, flood control, irrigation and fisheries in the vast haor region.

On the ground, illegal structures line both banks. In several stretches, parts of the waterway have allegedly been filled in to build houses and shops.

Waste from nearby markets and residential areas is being dumped directly into the canal, making the water unusable and threatening aquatic biodiversity, including native fish species.

Local farmer Mifta Mia said the canal's declining navigability has worsened water management in the area.

"During the rainy season, waterlogging occurs due to poor drainage. In the dry season, there is a severe shortage of irrigation water. As a result, Boro cultivation on several thousand acres is being disrupted,"

he said.

Resident Shahjalal Ahmed recalled a time when large boats used to ply through the canal. Now, even small boats cannot pass.

According to officials, the Bangladesh Water Development Board implemented a canal restoration and excavation project in the 2022-23 fiscal year, covering 31.6 kilometres of the main canal, including its branches, at a cost of Tk 7.12 crore.

The stated objective was to ensure year-round water retention and improve irrigation for agricultural land. However, within two and a half years of the project's completion, locals claim there is little visible evidence of proper excavation.

Sajedul Islam, another resident, alleged that excavation work was not carried out in accordance with the approved map.

"There is no water in many parts of the channel due to unplanned excavation," he said.

Pintu Das, a local, claimed that the actual canal lies to the west of the excavated stretch.

"They dug another channel instead of the original one. Unnecessary

branches were excavated while the main canal was neglected," he alleged.

Contacted, Sayedur Rahman, executive engineer at the Habiganj Water Development Board, said, "The contract value was Tk 7.12 crore, and our official records state that the excavation work has been completed."

Asked about allegations of irregularities and misuse of tree-planting funds, he said he was not posted there at the time and would need to verify the details.

Another BWDB official, who did not want to be named, said, "About 70 percent of the canal has been excavated, and only 54 percent of the contractor's bill has been paid."

Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (BAPA) Habiganj unit General Secretary Tofazzal Sohel said the Garer Canal is not just a source of water flow, it is an important part of the environment, agriculture, and biodiversity of Baniachong.

He urged the government to adopt scientific and planned re-excavation of canals, ponds and other water bodies to preserve biodiversity and ensure water retention.

Mother, child fatally run over by train in Gazipur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

An unidentified woman and her three-year-old son were killed after being run over by a train in Gazipur yesterday.

The incident occurred around 10:00am in Rajendrapur along the Dhaka-Mymensingh railway line, according to station authorities.

Railway officials said a Dewanganj-bound passenger train from Dhaka struck the woman and her child when they came onto the tracks.

The woman, estimated to be around 35, died on the spot, while the child was rescued by locals and taken to Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmad Medical College Hospital, where doctors later declared him dead.

Saidur Rahman, station master of Sreepur Railway Station, confirmed the incident, saying the victims' identities could not be immediately established.

Mahmudul Hasan, station master of Joydebpur Junction, said railway police recovered the bodies from the scene.

4 killed, 16 injured in road accidents

STAR REPORT

At least four people were killed and 16 others injured in separate road accidents in Faridpur and Sirajganj yesterday.

In Faridpur, a woman was killed, and her husband was injured after an unidentified vehicle rear-ended their motorcycle on the Dhaka-Barishal highway.

The deceased was identified as Sudiba Biswas, 30, of Dhopadanga Chanpur village in Faridpur Sadar upazila. Her husband, Subir Biswas, 37, who was riding the motorcycle, sustained serious injuries and is undergoing treatment.

The accident occurred around 10:00am near Bakhunda Bridge in Gerda union of Faridpur Sadar.

According to the Bhanga Highway Police, the couple were travelling from Shibchar to Faridpur when an unidentified vehicle rear-ended the motorcycle and fled the scene, causing it to overturn.

Locals rescued the victims and took them to Faridpur Medical College Hospital, where on-duty doctors declared Sudiba dead, police said.

Md Helal Uddin, OC of Bhanga Highway Police Station, said efforts were underway to identify the vehicle involved, and a case would be filed.

In Sirajganj, at least three people, including a driver and his helper, were killed and 15 others injured when a bus crashed into a road divider and the base of an overpass in Nalka.

The accident occurred around 11:00am on the west side of Jamuna Bridge after a Bogura-to-Mymensingh bus of Bushra Paribahan suffered a tyre burst, causing the driver to lose control, said Amirul Islam, OC of Jamuna Bridge West Police Station.

"The driver and helper died on the spot, while another passenger died on the way to the hospital," he said, adding that the identities of the deceased had not yet been confirmed.

Emergency services rescued at least 15 passengers and took them to different hospitals.

Authorities launched a recovery operation to remove the wrecked bus, while highway police were working to restore normal traffic on the route till last reported yesterday evening.

(Our correspondents from Faridpur and Pabna contributed to this report.)

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
প্রধান প্রকৌশলী (পূর্ব) এর কার্যালয়
বাংলাদেশ কলকাতা, সিআরবি, চট্টগ্রাম-৪০০০।
ই-মেল: ceo@railway.gov.bd

ফোন: +৮৮০৩১২৮০৩১৬২, ই-সেল: +৮৮০৩১২৮০৩১৬২

তারিখ: ০২.০৪.২০২৬ খ্রি।

প্রধান প্রকৌশলী (পূর্ব), বাংলাদেশ কলকাতা, সিআরবি, চট্টগ্রাম কর্তৃক National Electronic Government Procurement Portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) এ নিম্নলিখিত কাজের দরপত্র আহ্বান করা হয়েছে:

ক্র. নং	ক্রয়ের ধরণ ও কাজ/সরবরাহ কাজের নাম	দরপত্র/পূর্ণ দরপত্র পদ্ধতি	সরবরাহ/পূর্ণ দরপত্র দাখিলের তারিখ ও শেষ সময়
১	CE/E/Rev/TS/14/e-RE-Tender/2025-26 Goods: Supply of Fish plate 04 hole (75 lb A & 90 lb A Rail) for regular maintenance of Railway track under DEN-1 & 2/Dhaka Jurisdictions.	OTM (NCT)	16-April-2026 at 12:10Hrs.
২	CE/E/Rev/TS/20/e-RE-Tender/2025-26 Goods: Supply of Fish bolts (75lbs 'A' & 90lbs 'A') for regular maintenance of Railway Track under DEN-1 & 3/CTG Jurisdictions.	OTM (NCT)	16-April-2026 at 12:10Hrs.
৩	CE/E/Rev/TS/19/e-RE-Tender/2025-26 Goods: Supply of different sizes Hook bolts for regular maintenance of Bridge Sleeper at Railway Track under DEN-1 & 2/DA Jurisdictions.	OTM (NCT)	16-April-2026 at 12:10Hrs.
৪	CE/E/Rev/TS/18/e-RE-Tender/2025-26 Goods: Supply of different sizes Hook bolts for regular maintenance of Bridge Sleeper at Railway Track under DEN-1 & 3/CTG Jurisdictions.	OTM (NCT)	16-April-2026 at 12:10Hrs.
৫	CE/E/Rev/TS/15/e-Tender/2025-26 Works: At SSAE/Way/CTG Section: Maintenance of MG track including supplying of necessary fittings and fastening, PSC sleeper, Special wooden sleeper, ballasting, mechanical tamping, track renewal by 75'A' rail (S/H), overhauling of point and crossing, overhauling & carpeting of level crossing gate with other related works from km. 0/9 to 22/6 (UP line) in between Chattogram-Kumira section under DEN-1/Chattogram's Jurisdiction.	OTM (NCT)	23-April-2026 at 12:10Hrs.
৬	CE/E/Rev/TS/17/e-Tender/2025-26 Works: At SSAE/Way/FNI section: Emergency maintenance of LWR track of MG track with de-stressing including supplying, fitting & fixing p-way materials at km 91/3-93/5 (Up line) in between station FNI-SRS section with other allied works under AEN/FENI Jurisdictions.	OTM (NCT)	20-April-2026 at 12:10Hrs.
৭	CE/E/Rev/TS/16/e-Tender/2025-26 Works: At SSAE/Way/CTG Section: Maintenance of MG track including supplying of necessary fittings and fastening, PSC sleeper, Special wooden sleeper, ballasting, mechanical tamping, track renewal by 75'A' rail (S/H), overhauling of point and crossing, overhauling & carpeting of level crossing gate with other related works from km. 0/9 to 22/6 (Dn. line) in between Chattogram-Kumira section under DEN-1/Chattogram's Jurisdiction.	OTM (NCT)	23-April-2026 at 12:10Hrs.

বিঃদ্রঃ ১. শুধুমাত্র ই-প্রক্রিয়া সিস্টেমে নিবন্ধিত eligibility পরীক্ষার পূর্বসূরী দরদাতাদের সঙ্গারই অংশগ্রহণ করতে পারবেন।
২. দরপত্র অংশগ্রহণের জন্য দরপত্র দলিল ক্রয় ও দরপত্র জমাের বাকি প্রাপ্য অর্থ নির্ধারিত ব্যাংকে জমা প্রদান করতে হবে।

S(26) 226

GD-716

(মোঃ আব্দুল মতিন সারদা)
ট্রাক সার্ভাই অফিসার (পূর্ব)
পক্ষে- প্রধান প্রকৌশলী (পূর্ব)
বাংলাদেশ রেলওয়ে, চট্টগ্রাম।

Fogging operations

FROM PAGE 3

zone-wise stock records in place. Meanwhile, the delayed shipment, now expected on April 7, will be processed and delivered within five working days, he added.

"Suppliers have assured timely delivery following our intervention. We expect the supply between April 12 and 15, ahead of Pahela Baishakh," he said.

Meanwhile, DSCC, which has 75 wards, has sought 2,00,000 litres of diesel from the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation.

A letter sent to BPC on March 11 by DNCC CEO Jahirul Islam noted that a contractor tasked with supplying over 6,21,000

litres of deltamethrin is facing difficulties due to diesel unavailability, warning that mosquito control could be affected if the situation persists.

However, DSCC officials said operations remain normal. "We submit demand requests and receive supply accordingly. So far, there has been no refusal," said a top official wishing anonymity.

Official also said DSCC currently has enough chemicals in stock for two to two and a half months while trying to ensure timely arrival of the next shipment, expected next week, which would be sufficient for three to four months more.

NOTICE

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF BANGLADESH
HIGH COURT DIVISION
(STATUTORY ORIGINAL JURISDICTION)
COMPANY MATTER NO. 247 OF 2026

An Application under section 81(2), 85(3) read with Section 396 of the Companies Act, 1994
Shahed Murshed -----Petitioner

Building Experts Limited -VERSUS- ----- Respondent

Notice is hereby given to all concerned that an application on behalf of the Petitioner under Section 81(2), 85(3) read with Section 396 of the Companies Act, 1994 for condonation of delay in holding AGM of **Building Experts Limited** was filed before the Hon'ble High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh. Upon preliminary hearing, the Hon'ble Company Bench by its order dated 09.03.2026 was pleased to admit the said application and directed the petitioner to publish notices in the "Daily Star" and in the "Protdinor Bangladesh" within 3 (three) weeks from date and to file an affidavit-in-compliance within 3 (three) weeks from date and to file an affidavit-in-compliance. Any person or persons being interested in the said application may appear either personally or through duly authorized Advocate on or before the date so fixed. Copy of the said application may be obtained from the office of the undersigned on payment of required costs.

Md. Abdul Matin Sardar, Advocate, Supreme Court Navana Rahim Ardent, Suite - C10, 39, Kakrail, Dhaka-1000.

NATIONAL CREDIT AND COMMERCE BANK PLC.
COMMON SERVICES DIVISION
Head Office: NCC Bank Bhaban, 13/1-2, Toyenbee Circular Road
Motijheel C/A, Dhaka-1000, Phone: 223390053
IP: + 8809666700008, Ext: 930-130

NOTICE OF INVITING PROPOSALS

Sealed proposals are hereby invited by National Credit and Commerce Bank PLC. (the Bank) from reputed Companies/local Agents/Authorized Distributors/Service Providers for the below mentioned requirements under the terms and conditions mentioned detail in the Request for Proposal (RFP) documents.

Item Description	RFP collection start date	RFP collection end date	Date and time for RFP Submission
Item 1: RFP for Consulting, Implementing, Re-Certification and Training of ISO/IEC 27001 for NCC Bank PLC.	April 05, 2026	April 13, 2026	April 16, 2026 on/before 11:00 AM
Item 2: RFP (re-tender) for supplying, installing, commissioning & implementing of AI Based Virtual Trade Solutions of NCC Bank PLC.			

The schedule containing detailed Terms & Conditions may be collected from the Common Services Division, Level-5, NCC Bank PLC. Head Office, Dhaka and submit the same under sealed envelope to the Tender Box placed at Common Services Division (CSD). The Price of the RFP document (for each item) is Tk. 2,000/- (Taka Two Thousand) only in the form of Payment Order (non-refundable) favoring National Credit and Commerce Bank PLC. by any scheduled bank of Bangladesh. Failure to submit offer within the stipulated time frame will be treated as "Disqualified" for the bidding. The Bank authority reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposal without assigning any reason whatsoever.

Vice President & Head of Common Services Division

BAKHRABAD GAS DISTRIBUTION COMPANY LIMITED
(A Company of Petrobangla)
Head office, Chapapur, Cumilla
Engineering Service Department, Cumilla.
(Website: www.bgdcl.org.bd)

Reference No.: 28.11.0000.000.711.33.0001.26/2235

Date: 31/03/2026

e-Tender Notice (OTM)

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of:

Tender ID No	Package No.	Description of Works	Last Selling Date and time	Closing Date and time	Opening Date and time
1245526 Re-Tendered ID: 1212254	28.11.0000. 000.712.36. 005.26	Work of Illegal Pipeline Removal and Riser killing Related Work at Various Upazilas in Cumilla District Areas 2025-26, Phase 2.	15-Apr-2026 17:00	16-Apr-2026 12:00	16-Apr-2026 12:00
1230628	28.11.0000. 000.712.36. 004.26	Work of Construction & Installation of 06 (six) nos. Manual Odorant Plant of different DRS and Installation of 01 (One) Meter at Cantonment DRS under Engineering Service Department, Cumilla.	15-Apr-2026 17:00	16-Apr-2026 12:00	16-Apr-2026 12:00

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the Nationale-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank branches.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd.) For more details please contact to the PE's Support desk (01770791430)

31.03.2026
(Engr. Sagir Ahmed)
Deputy General Manager
Engineering Service Department, Cumilla
BGDCL, Chapapur, Cumilla-3500

GD-714

US-ISRAELI STRIKES ON IRAN

How high can oil prices go after fresh surge?

AFP, London

Having once more soared beyond \$110 per barrel on Thursday, could oil prices reach new records beyond \$150 as some analysts believe? President Trump's latest belligerent tone over the Middle East war has reignited concerns about persistently high crude costs and the limited measures available to tackle the fallout.

\$200 OIL?
Since the start of the US-Israeli conflict with Iran, benchmark oil prices have soared more than 50 percent largely owing to the Strait of Hormuz -- through which normally one-fifth of the world's crude passes -- shutting to most tankers.

French bank Societe Generale said \$150 is a "credible" outcome on a prolonged war, while most analysts estimate crude hitting \$130-\$140. Australian bank Macquarie forecast \$200 crude should the war still occur in June.

At around \$110, consumers are already facing heavy financial pain, as prices of gasoline and diesel soar around the world.

'INSUFFICIENT' OIL RESERVES

In an unprecedented decision in response to the Mideast war, the 32 nations belonging to the International Energy Agency (IEA) pledged to unlock 426 million barrels, equivalent to more than one third of their combined reserves.

The United States, itself a major oil producer, is to release 172 million barrels, or 40 percent of its strategic reserves. These emergency releases "are not sufficient", UBS commodities analyst Giovanni Staunovo told AFP, noting that the maximum pace of release is around three million barrels per day compared with 15 mpd failing to reach the market because of the war.

SOLUTION?
For countries dependent on oil and gas transiting through the Strait of Hormuz -- in particular those spread across Asia and Europe -- the situation appeared bleak.

In the short term, calls for energy-use moderation are multiplying, such as the European Commission's request to member states to reduce their oil demand, or Bangladesh's call for its civil servants to turn off lights and lower air conditioning.

Several countries, including Malaysia and Sri Lanka, are encouraging people to work from home if they are able to do so. "The reality is, the economic shocks caused by this war will be with us for months," Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese warned on Wednesday.



Damage at a factory struck by a missile in Petah Tikva, east of Tel Aviv, Israel, yesterday. Israel's military reported a new missile salvo from Iran, with its air defences activated to down them.

PHOTO: AFP

Iran still has major missile launch capacity: US intel

CNN ONLINE

Roughly half of Iran's missile launchers are still intact and thousands of one-way attack drones remain in Iran's arsenal despite the daily pounding by US and Israeli strikes against military targets over the past five weeks, according to recent US intelligence assessments, three sources familiar with the intel told CNN.

"They are still very much poised to wreak absolute havoc throughout the entire region," one of the sources said in Iran.

The US intelligence assessment total may include launchers that are currently inaccessible, such as those buried underground by strikes but not destroyed.

Thousands of Iranian drones still exist -- roughly 50 percent of the country's drone capabilities -- two of the sources said the intelligence indicated.

The intelligence, compiled in recent days, also showed a large percentage of Iran's coastal defense cruise missiles were intact, the sources said, consistent with the US not focusing its air campaign on coastal military assets though they have been hitting ships. Those missiles serve as a key capability allowing Iran to threaten shipping traffic in the Strait of Hormuz.

The intelligence offers a more nuanced picture of Iran's continuing capabilities compared to sweeping assessments of military victory offered publicly by President Donald

Trump and administration officials.

In remarks to the nation on Wednesday evening, Trump said Iran's "ability to launch missiles and drones is dramatically curtailed, and their weapons factories and rocket launchers are being blown to pieces, very few of them left."

As of Wednesday, the US has struck more than 12,300 targets inside Iran, according to US Central Command. The sources said intelligence showed US military has degraded Iran's military capabilities, and key senior leaders have been killed in the strikes, including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and Ali Larijani. In addition to the country's missile launchers, Iran maintains a large number of missiles, according to the intelligence.

TIT-FOR-TAT RETALIATION

Iran publishes 'hit-list' of Gulf bridges

MIDDLE EAST MONITOR ONLINE

Iranian media published a "hit-list" of major bridges across the region on Thursday, hinting at a "tit-for-tat" retaliation following a US-Israeli attack on a key bridge in the northern city of Karaj, Anadolu reports.

The semi-official Fars News Agency said that several prominent bridges in regional countries could be possible targets after two strikes hit the BI bridge early Thursday.

The list includes Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah Sea Bridge in Kuwait, King Fahd Causeway linking Saudi Arabia to Bahrain, Sheikh Zayed Bridge and Sheikh Khalifa Bridge in the United Arab Emirates, as well as King Hussein Bridge, Damia Bridge, and Abdoun Bridge in Jordan.

The US and Israel carried out two strikes early Thursday on the BI bridge, a vital transport link in Karaj in Alborz province, killing two people and causing its destruction.

According to media reports, the BI bridge is one of Iran's notable modern engineering projects, stretching about 1,000 metres and designed to ease traffic congestion between Tehran and Karaj.

US strikes on Iran may amount to war crimes

Dozens of law experts say

REUTERS, Washington

Dozens of international law experts in the US have signed an open letter saying that American strikes on Iran may amount to war crimes, after President Donald Trump reiterated his threats this week to strike Iran's power and desalination plants.

Trump said in a televised speech on Wednesday that the war could escalate if Iran did not give in to Washington's terms.

Over 100 international law experts in the US, including from schools like Harvard, Yale, Stanford and the University of California, said in the letter released on Thursday that the conduct of US forces and statements by senior US officials "raise serious concerns about violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including potential war crimes."

Opportunity for reforms slipping away

FROM PAGE 1
prevention of enforced disappearances, and strengthening anti-corruption and human rights institutions -- long-standing demands of citizens and rights groups.

Of the four to be repealed, three are related to judicial independence. These ordinances included the country's first legal framework for appointing judges to the apex courts, creating a Supreme Court Secretariat, and granting the judiciary administrative and financial autonomy -- steps meant to break free from executive dominance.

The constitution states that the president shall appoint judges in consultation with the chief justice. But Article 48(3) limits the president's powers, requiring the prime minister's advice

for all functions except appointing the prime minister and Chief Justice. In practice, this means Supreme Court appointments ultimately reflect the prime minister's preference. As things stand, that practice is likely to continue, until such time course, that the parliament enacts a law on Supreme Court judges' appointment.

Rights activists have long accused the Awami League of using enforced disappearances to silence opposition. The relevant ordinance criminalised enforced disappearance and set death penalty as the maximum punishment.

The Anti-Corruption Commission (Amendment) Ordinance, 2025, expanded the ACC's powers, allowing direct case filings, covering financial crimes abroad, and increasing commission membership.

The Revenue Policy and Revenue Management Ordinance, 2025, separated revenue policy from collection, creating two divisions under the finance ministry.

The Human Rights Commission ordinances empowered this body to launch its own investigations and act as a real watchdog. The commission was empowered to inspect facilities controlled by security agencies, and summon documents. A search committee was introduced to free appointments from government control, and removal of the chairman was tied to the same process used for Supreme Court judges.

Together, these were encouraging attempts to increase accountability of the ruling government.

These would eventually foster strong democratic institutions of this republic. But dropping these ordinances means we are back to square one, as authority reverts to the executive.

This move risks stalling the key reform initiatives introduced by the interim government. For citizens who saw these measures as historic breakthroughs, the setback is a sobering reminder of how fragile reform remains when faced with entrenched political interests.

At the same time, ongoing debate over the formation of the Constitution Reform Council, coupled with opposition's dissent on nearly all ordinances set to expire, is likely to deepen divisions. As a result, reform itself may become a new fault line in Bangladesh's political arena.

The disappointment is sharper because these reform hopes emerged in a moment of renewed aspiration. The BNP came to power after two decades, following an acceptable national election held in the wake of a mass uprising.

The July Charter, forged through the National Consensus Commission, was a hard-won agreement that brought parties across the spectrum together. Unlike earlier documents, it was the product of extensive consultations, where political rivals agreed on contentious reform issues that had plagued Bangladesh for decades.

That spirit of consensus raised hopes that the cycle of missed opportunities might finally be broken. Yet history offers sobering reminders.

In November 1990, at the height of the anti-Ershad movement, three major alliances

declared the Tin Joter Ruprekha -- a tripartite roadmap pledging judicial independence, fundamental rights, and reforms to restore voter confidence. After Ershad's fall, most of those promises faded away.

In 1991, Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed's interim government set up 29 task forces under Rehman Sobhan, engaging over 250 of the country's brightest minds. Their detailed recommendations were widely praised, yet largely ignored by the incoming government.

Fast forward to 2007, when the caretaker government led by Fakhruddin Ahmed established the Regulatory Reforms Commission (RRC) under Akbar Ali Khan. The commission submitted 153 recommendations to modernise governance and administration. By 2009, Khan resigned, citing non-cooperation. Only a fraction of the proposals was implemented, and the RRC's 131-page report remains only on paper.

Yet it remains a case of hoping against hope -- a ray of hope still persists, as the special committee recommended that the 16 ordinances can be reintroduced in parliament as stronger bills following scrutiny and further improvement. Shelving these ordinances would not only again weaken institutions but also betray the aspirations of citizens who had hoped for meaningful change. One can only hope that, after so many years, a democratically elected government will heed the people's call and allow good sense to prevail."

The greater interest of the nation demands that these aspirations not be abandoned but reintroduced with stronger political will and broader consensus.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Divisional Forest Officer
Sylhet Forest Division, Sylhet
www.forest.sylhetdiv.gov.bd

Memo No. 22.01.0000.672.01.001.26.

Date: 01/04/2025

e-Tender Notice

This is to notify all concern that the following tenders have been published through e-GP Portal.

SL No	Tender ID, Package No	Name of Package	Publishing date and Time:	Online Tender Last Selling Date and Time	Online Tender Closing Date and Time
01	1251416, SFD/Rev/2025-26/WR-1	Repair of Residential Building (Sreemangal ACF Quarter)	01- April- 2026, 18:00	12- April-2026, 12:00	13- April- 2026, 12:00
02	1251783, SFD/Rev/2025-26/WR-2	Repair of Non-Residential Building (Sunamganj SFNTC Office Building, Shahpur R.O.S Quarter cum Office, Shahzibazar Mali's Barrack)	01- April- 2026, 18:00	12- April-2026, 17:00	13- April- 2026, 12:00

The interested Person/firms may visit the website www.eprocure.gov.bd to get the details of the tender. This is an online Tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender registration in the National e-GP system portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is Required.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP system portal and from e-GP help desk. (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd , +8809609112233, +880176225528, +8801762625529).

(Mohammad Abdur Rahman)

Divisional Forest Officer
Sylhet Forest Division
Sylhet

GD-715

AHQ, E IN C'S BRANCH, WORKS DIRECTORATE, DHAKA CANTONMENT
INVITATION FOR TENDERS

Notice no. 300/Ad/68/E-3/32

Dated: 25 March 2026.

MILITARY ENGINEER SERVICES

1.	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Defence			
2.	Agency	Military Engineer Services			
3.	Procuring Entity Name	E in C			
4.	Procuring Entity District	Dhaka			
5.	Procurement Method	Open Tendering Method (OTM)			
6.	Budget and source of Funds	GOB			
7.	Development Partners (if applicable)	None			
8.	Project/Programme Name (if applicable)	Infrastructural Development for Mongla Commander Flotilla west (Comflot west).			
9.	Selling of tender will commence from	05 April 2026 (During Office hour).			
10.	Selling of tender will Close on	16 April 2026 (During Office hour).			
11.	Last date & time of submission of Tender	19 April 2026 at 1200 hours.			
12.	Date & time of opening of Tender	19 April 2026 at 1230 hours.			
13.	Name & Address of the Office(s)				
	- Selling Tender Document	Tender Selling & Information Centre at GE (Army) Central Dhaka & AHQ, E in C's Branch, Works Directorate, Dhaka Cantonment.			
	- Receiving Tender Document	Tender Selling & Information Centre at GE (Army) Central Dhaka			
	- Opening Tender Document	Tender Selling & Information Centre at GE (Army) Central Dhaka			
14.	Eligibility of Tenderer	a. MES enlisted contractors Class 'C' & 'D' for lot no. 15(a). b. On receipt of DGFI clearance with others Department (equivalent classes) contractors may also apply for tender. c. Contractors having experience in similar works with enlistment in other Govt., Semi, Government & Autonomous Organization may also apply. d. Having experience of similar work mentioned in Lot No 15(a) amounting Tk. 58,68,000.00 in a single tender during last 05 (Five) years.			
15.	Brief Description of Works				
Lot No	Identification of Lot	Location	Price of Tender Document (Non Refundable)	Tender Security in the form of Bank Draft/ Pay order in favour of AHQ, E in C's Branch, Works Directorate, Dhaka Cantt. (Taka)	Completion Time in weeks/ Months
1	2	3	4	5	6
a.	Manufacture & Supply of Furniture for 1 x 50 Bed Hospital 2 nd floor at Mongla Commander Flotilla West (Comflot West) under AGE (Navy) Mongla.	AGE (Navy) Mongla	2000.00	2,50,000.00	12 (Twelve) Months
16.	Name of Official Inviting Tender	Director of Works			
17.	Designation of Official Inviting Tender	Director of Works			
18.	Address of Official Inviting Tender	Army Headquarters, E in C's Branch, Works Directorate, Dhaka Cantonment. Web address : www.army.mil.bd			
19.	Contact details of Official Inviting Tender	Tel No. 9832870	Fax No. 9832882	e-mail- wksdtrc@army.mil.bd	
20.	The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject all tenders				

আই এস পি আর/সেনা/২৭৭

XEN E/M
For Director of Works
Works Directorate
Engineer in Chief's Branch
Dhaka Cantonment
Tel: Mili: 8711111 Ext:2886
Civil: 9832886

GD-713

Austerity measures are a necessary move

We must navigate this difficult time with careful balance

As the US-Israel war against Iran continues to disrupt global energy flows, Bangladesh, like many other countries, faces the economic aftershocks. With the rising oil prices and the resultant pressure on foreign exchange reserves, the government has announced immediate cost-cutting measures to ease the strain on fuel, gas and electricity supplies. Reportedly, all government and private offices will now operate from 9am to 4pm, while banks will close transactions at 3pm and shut fully at 4pm. Shopping malls will close by 6pm, with exceptions for essential services such as pharmacies and food outlets. The austerity measures will also apply to the prime minister, cabinet ministers and state ministers, whose fuel allocations for official vehicles will be reduced by 30 percent. We welcome these measures.

In addition to reduced working hours, the government expenditure on fuel, power and gas are to be cut by 30 percent, while foreign training for civil servants has been suspended until further notice. Purchases of government vehicles, vessels and aircraft have been put on hold. Hospitality budgets for meetings and seminars will be halved, domestic training programmes reduced by 50 percent, and non-essential travel expenditure cut by 30 percent.

The Middle East remains Bangladesh's key source of fuels and fertilisers, but Gulf suppliers have raised prices or curtailed deliveries. The impact is increasingly visible in our daily economic life. Reduced diesel availability is already affecting irrigation in agriculture, while rising fertiliser and transport costs are putting more burden on farmers. Export-oriented industries are scaling back production due to rising input costs and logistical uncertainty. Concerns are also mounting over potential electricity shortages during peak summer demand, given constrained gas supplies. Recently, the price of cooking gas cylinders has been raised, which will inevitably drive the food costs higher.

Across Asia, governments are responding to the energy shock with a mix of austerity and market interventions. The Philippines has declared a national energy emergency and moved to a four-day work week with consumption caps and subsidies, while Thailand and Vietnam are encouraging remote work and stabilisation funds. India is rationing LPG to prioritise essential use, and Pakistan has introduced compressed workweeks and school closures alongside broader consumption controls. Bangladesh's move towards energy austerity is, therefore, not out of the ordinary. It is necessary.

However, such measures also raise difficult questions about economic resilience in the long run. Shortened working hours may reduce productivity in both public and private sectors, while restrictions on consumption and investment could further slow down an already fragile growth momentum. Reduced business hours may conserve electricity, but they also risk dampening commercial activity, disproportionately affecting small businesses and daily wage earners. Without targeted support, the burden of adjustment risks becoming uneven and unjust. Moreover, the possibility of adjusted school schedules and blended learning raises further concerns about disruptions to education, particularly for students with limited access to digital resources.

The government, therefore, must navigate this crisis with careful balance. Its response must go beyond austerity to ensure that the burden does not fall disproportionately on ordinary citizens. At the same time, it should actively engage with the international community to call for an end to the war and coordinated support for economies bearing its indirect costs.

Arrest Faridpur gang rape perpetrators

The state must ensure women's safety in public places

We are deeply disturbed by a recent report on gang rapes in Faridpur and the fact that such incidents continue to occur unabated. According to the report, one woman was allegedly gang-raped in a moving microbus in the district's Pangsha upazila, while another was gang-raped in a field in Bhanga upazila. These incidents once again expose the extreme insecurity faced by women in public spaces in Bangladesh. That such crimes continue to occur with an alarming regularity is a grim reflection of how deeply entrenched sexual violence has become in our society.

Almost every day, there are reports of women and girls being harassed and attacked in public spaces, on the streets, in workplaces, and even within their own homes. According to Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), in the first two months of this year alone, 66 women and girls were raped across the country. However, these figures reflect only the reported incidents, while many more remain unreported. We must ask: why are such crimes continue to take place unabated? And why do perpetrators so often feel emboldened to commit them?

Worryingly, according to a 2024 survey by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), around 50 percent of women in the country don't know where to report incidents of assault. In cases of rape, even when incidents are reported and cases are filed, conviction rates remain low and uncertain. Lengthy legal processes, inadequate investigations, weak forensic capacity, and insufficient witness protection all contribute to a system where accountability is often delayed or denied altogether. This culture of impunity sends a dangerous message to potential offenders: that sexual violence carries limited consequences. At the same time, survivors are often left to bear the burden alone. Beyond the physical trauma, they face severe psychological distress, social stigma, and a lack of adequate state support. Without strong medical, legal and psychological assistance, the pursuit of justice becomes all the more difficult.

As cases have already been filed by the survivors in the Faridpur incidents, we call for the immediate arrest of all those involved and demand that they be brought to trial without delay. Justice must be swift and transparent in such cases. At the same time, the authorities must ensure full medical and psychological support for the survivors, along with adequate protection for them and their families. We urge the government to also make an unequivocal commitment to ensuring women's safety everywhere and to bring an end to all forms of gender-based violence once and for all.

Austerity and the crisis of fuel, confidence and coordination



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND
Dr Shamsad Mortuza
is vice chancellor at the University of Liberal Arts
Bangladesh (ULAB).

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

Last week, while buying vegetables from an open market, I could not help feeling dissatisfied over the hiked price of every item. "It seems you are still in a moon-sighting mode," I said, to which the seller responded nonchalantly, "What can I do? There is not enough supply after Eid." The market had yet to resume its usual motion. This was the week when we were supposed to recalibrate, when offices returned to their routine, factories picked up their rhythm, and transport networks started wheeling. But the flight to regularity was stalled by both geo- and domestic political concerns, leading to increased uncertainty and anxiety among businesses and consumers alike.

The proverbial flap of butterflies—understatement intended—in the Gulf straits has caused a tsunami in the rest of the world. The queues at the refilling stations extend beyond miles; altercations among punters stretch beyond their patience limits as we muse over the tit-for-tat missions in Tehran and Tel Aviv. Even though we are listed among the few privileged countries whose ships are allowed through the Strait of Hormuz, the fear of fuel shortages remains high. UK-based newspaper *The Independent* has marked Bangladesh as "the country that could be the first to run out of fuel

Austerity must be intelligent. The danger is not austerity itself, but austerity that is poorly timed and distributed, which can lead to increased social unrest and economic instability if not managed effectively. The government must demonstrate its sincerity in addressing structural asymmetries while urging citizens to conserve, endure, and adapt. Any administrative imposition must have narrative coherence.

due to the US-Iran war." Although the government sources cited in the report vehemently deny any such possibility, recent austerity measures make the warning quite likely.

Attempts like fuel price passes,

temporary rationing, and directives on "economical use" highlight our structural vulnerability. We import roughly 95 percent of our primary energy requirement, making us susceptible to global price shocks and foreign exchange pressures. In theory, the call for austerity is pragmatic demand management, but its timing could not have been worse. The decision comes when the economy has



Motorcyclists wait in long queues to purchase fuel at a refilling station in Narsingdi.

FILE PHOTO: JAHIDUL ISLAM JOY

just begun to restart from a prolonged festive shutdown. Then there are the fun-seekers who are already eyeing another long weekend by manoeuvring the Bangla New Year holiday next week. Even under normal conditions, the post-holiday economic recovery phase produces friction. With austerity overlaying this moment, when fuel becomes pricier and less available, the friction can deepen further. On top of that, there are some mixed administrative signals: rationing of fuel, school openings on alternate days, and a plan to allow tax-free EV buses for educational institutions.

Then there is this divide between public and private sectors. The private sector does not have the luxury of getting a salary from a national exchequer. It must maintain its cash flow despite different shutdowns. Export-oriented industries—particularly RMG—operate under rigid delivery schedules dictated by global buyers. The deadlines do not get obliterated; they simply get

facilitate recovery efforts. This is where austerity begins to feel less like policy and more like imbalance.

To be clear, Bangladesh's current measures are not austerity in the classical deflationary sense. The situation is not akin to the European context marked by wholesale fiscal contraction. Instead, the approach is a hybrid model where automatic fuel pricing shifts global cost fluctuations onto the consumers in smaller increments. The administrative controls are imposed to manage demand as well as to signal discipline. But the underlying logic is not free from familiar risks.

First, let us consider the question of distribution. The austerity measures have created a sensation that prices may go up, leading scrupulous traders to hoard essentials, including fuel. If the government is forced to adjust fuel prices, the charges will cascade through transport costs into food prices and eventually affect every household, particularly the low-income ones. The

Remembering our songbird, Dalia Nausheen



Sadya Afreen Mallick
is chief of Culture Initiatives at The Daily Star
and founder of Gems of Nazrul.

SADYA AFREEN MALLICK

I woke up before dawn on Wednesday to a call from my younger sister, Nazia. The ICU doctors had asked that the family come in. A quiet fear settled in my chest. And then, as gently as a song reaching its last note, my first cousin Dalia Nausheen, our beloved Dalibu left us.

She fought for so long, decades of illness, a relentless battle with cancer that would have dimmed most spirits. But not hers. Nothing could keep her from what she loved most: music, travelling, friendship, and above all, her fierce independence. Even in her final days, when the body was tiring, her mind was moving ahead, planning the next journey, the next performance, the next step. That is how she will remain with us: always looking forward, always alive with purpose.

Dalia was the daughter of legendary architect Muzharul Islam and Husne Ara Islam, born into a home where

art, intellect, and culture were not just appreciated but lived. Our childhood in Paribagh was not ordinary. It was a world of constant movement, of voices and ideas, of music that never quite stopped. We grew up surrounded by artists, thinkers, and leaders, absorbing without even realising—a way of life rooted in creativity and expression.

We took our first steps into music together at Chhayanaut. Those early lessons shaped us, but more importantly, they bound us. Whether it was music, cricket, drama or dance, we cousins shared a closeness that defined our lives. In that shared world, Dalibu stood out, not by trying but because she was. Her voice carried something deep, something that stayed with you long after the song ended.

In 1971, while still so young, she crossed into then Calcutta and joined the Bangladesh Mukti Sangrami Shilpi Sangstha. With nothing but her

voice, she became part of the struggle, singing for freedom fighters, for refugees, for a nation just born.

Music, for Dalibu, was never just performance; it was devotion. Whether she sang DL Roy, Atul Prasad, or semi-classical compositions, there was always depth, always meaning. It was a lifelong journey of refinement, even till her final days.

But her creativity could not be contained within music alone. It flowed into everything she touched: jewellery design, cooking, hand painting sarais. When I began my journey with block-printed sarais in early 1984, she was there, designing my first exhibition with care and imagination. That was Dalibu—present, engaged, quietly shaping the worlds of those she loved.

She was also the centre of a vast and vibrant circle of friends, many of whom had stood at the forefront in 1971, and many who continue to shape our cultural life today. People were drawn to her, not just because of her talent, but because of her spirit. She was warm, gracious, and deeply loyal, but not quite predictable. Her wit could disarm you, her dry humour could catch you off guard, and when she chose, her words could land with sharp, unflinching clarity. She spoke her mind, always.

Life asked much of her. She lost her husband, Azad Hafiz, in 2014. Her sons, Diraan and Ayan, built their lives

initial attempt at rationing encouraged informal markets to thrive and led to selective enforcement.

Second, there is the question of perception. Austerity is not only about economic adjustment but also about legitimacy. Households implicitly question whether they share the burden when asked to conserve energy, limit consumption, and absorb the rising costs. Are elites equally constrained? The SUVs with hooters are still roaming the streets while ride-sharing bikers are forced to spend one-third of their shifts collecting fuel. Is discipline being demanded only downward?

This brings us to the third point: the question of governance style. The formation of monitoring cells must entail transparency, grievance mechanisms, and participatory communication. Tools of enforcement can poke deeper tension: austerity can stabilise an economy, but it can also destabilise trust. The post-holiday moment magnifies this tension because it exposes the lived experience of policy. A garment worker returning to Dhaka does not encounter "automatic pricing mechanisms"; they encounter higher transport fares. A factory manager does not see "demand management"; they see delayed shipments and rising input costs. Small traders perceive fuel directives as a limitation rather than as a sign of macroeconomic caution. And yet, alternatives exist—not in abandoning austerity, but in recalibrating it.

We expect the government to make burden-sharing visible. If fuel prices are adjusted, there should be targeted protections for those most affected. Demand management should prioritise transparency over coercion. Temporary limits can work, but they must be accompanied by clear communication of stock levels, timelines, and grievance channels. Otherwise, rationing becomes a theatre of control rather than a tool of stability. Above all, the public sector must sync its tempo with the private economy during recovery periods.

Austerity, in other words, must be intelligent. The danger is not austerity itself, but austerity that is poorly timed and distributed, which can lead to increased social unrest and economic instability if not managed effectively. The government must demonstrate its sincerity in addressing structural asymmetries while urging citizens to conserve, endure, and adapt. Any administrative imposition must have narrative coherence. The ongoing energy crisis is real, as are its fiscal constraints. But crises do not only test economies; they test political imagination. The question is not whether we conserve energy but how we conserve legitimacy. At this moment, we must fuel our economy with trust, not abstinence, to return to our rhythm.

abroad. Elder brother Sajjad Shahrear passed away recently. Yet, she never allowed loneliness or hardship to define her. She carried herself with dignity, choosing resilience over compliance, independence over dependence. Her other elder brother, Tanvir Mazhar, stood by her with unwavering devotion, a constant presence in her life.

Even towards the end, she remained connected to her arts. Her last performance at *The Daily Star*, organised by Gems of Nazrul in the birth anniversary of Kazi Nazrul Islam in October 2025, was a memorable one—a refusal to step away from the stage that had defined her.

Her contributions did not go unrecognised. The Ekushey Padak in 2020 and the Nazrul Padak in 2024 were acknowledgements of a life given to music and to the cultural soul of this country. But for us, her true legacy lies in the memories she leaves behind, in the lives she touched, and in the music that continues to echo.

Saying goodbye is never easy. It asks us to accept what the heart resists. But perhaps with Dalibu, we can hold on to something more enduring. Not the loss, but the presence she created. The gatherings she inspired and the courage she embodied.

Your battle was long, your music was our solace. Now you rest, my dear Dalibu. And in the quiet that follows, we can still hear you...

How forest loss, water crisis and inequality collide



Pavel Partha,
an ecology and biodiversity conservation researcher,
is director at Bangladesh Resource Centre for
Indigenous Knowledge (BARCIK). He can be reached at
aninistbangla@gmail.com.

PAVEL PARTHA

Last month, three special days of observation occurred in succession. March 21 marked both World Forest Day and the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, while March 22 was observed as World Water Day. Historically, the themes of these days have been deeply intertwined. But in our civic and academic narratives, these issues have always been treated separately. Why is there no water in the streamlets of Soroi hill in Bandarban or in the Madhabkunda waterfall in Moulvibazar? In the name of establishing a commercial rubber plantation, the Lama Rubber Industries Ltd took over the Soroi hill area, cut down the forest, and poisoned the streamlets. On the other hand, under the guise of creating an eco-park, the Forest Department enclosed Madhabkunda, built artificial infrastructure incompatible with the local forest, and leased out this ancient waterfall to a private company. Reckless tourism has turned streams into dumping grounds for plastic waste. The very stones that retain water have been looted by powerful outsiders. That is why the streams in the hills are dying.

What is the relationship between the dying forests and water sources and racial discrimination? It is one that is historical and colonial. For the sake of profit and trade, water bodies and forests have been repeatedly plundered, occupied, and polluted. Authoritarian binaries and neoliberal power structures have legitimised this practice. Why does this looting and grabbing continue against poor farmers, forest dwellers, Indigenous communities, and fishers? Why must the rural “lower classes” be evicted from their ancestral land, streams, and sacred forests? Amid all this, the politics of historical racism and division continues to thrive.

In the 1700s, British colonial official Robert Lindsay wanted to take control of the limestone hills in Sylhet, but the local Khasi people fought against that. However,

the Hajongs in an independent Bangladesh could not save the hilly mounds of Durgapur in Netrakona; to trade white clay and china clay, the entire area has been gouged out and mutilated. Why did they plan to build a five-star hotel on Chimbuk Hill, where there is not a drop of water? Why did Birsa Munda, Piren Snal, Abinash Mura, Salik, and Goni surrender their lives to save the jungle throughout history? To some, the jungle is a way of life, and to others, it is a profit mine.

Not just for forests, but the so-called lower classes have sacrificed their lives fighting to secure the right to water as well. In the haor region, the Bhashan Pani Movement arose with the aim to secure every individual’s right to accessing public water. For this, Barun Roy endured imprisonment and repression. Similarly, Karunamoyee Sardar and Zayeda of the southern region gave their lives to save wetlands and land from the salinity of commercial shrimp enclosures.

Just as forests cannot grow if water does not flow freely, so too water flow dies down when forests are ravaged. But in the conventional discussions on resolving water crisis or the conservation and management of forests that dominate the space, these interrelationships and multidimensionalities are always suppressed. There are also some stereotypical debate on the “elimination of racial discrimination.” However, in those discussions, the multidirectional tendencies of power, marginality, commerce, the relationship with nature, and hegemony remain strongly absent. Why do Indigenous and farmer households get upended in the name of coal or gas surveys? Why does a poor woman in the coast, the Barind, the hills, or the urban slums have to wait for hours to collect a single pitcher of water, or why does a poor farmer, after backbreaking agricultural labour, die by suicide after not getting a decent price for their harvests? Despite not having used fossil fuel in her lifetime, why

is the life of a rural woman shattered by cyclones, floods or drought? Why do the rich of the world get to drink one bottle of Kona Nigari water for Tk 60 lakh, while poor fisherwomen in Bangladesh are forced to have their wombs removed because of sores caused by increased salinity in their water? Why do millions of children in the world go to sleep in agony without food every day, while the United Nations prepares lists of countries

expend valuable time to bring home water. Meanwhile, men typically end up either bottling up public water for sale or becoming part of the syndicate that keeps water under hostage. In a country plagued by barriers to accessing water, various multinational companies bottle up and sell gallons upon gallons of it. Why are there no protests against this on the streets or in parliament? Water is fundamentally a matter of power.

foresters is an imposed division, which has created a distance between the authorities and the forest dwellers and forest-dependent Indigenous peoples. At the same time, because the authorities never question this binary, they have not been able to learn from the foresters’ folk knowledge about ecology and conservation. The coloniality and historically established control still remains in force. With such a discriminatory attitude from the authorities, the development and expansion of natural forestland is not possible as such an ecosystem can only develop through the combination of natural and social forces.

The forest has its own right to develop and adapt itself per its needs. Legal recognition of forests’ personhood is urgent. At the same time, it is also important to legally recognise the rights of the people dependent on forests, as well as all other forest-dependent species. To this end, the government should start working on a forest rights law.

When the soul burns

On the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination this year, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said, “The ancient poison of racism is alive and kicking in every community, society, country and region of the world. The antidote is unity and action.” Do we have enough of this antidote?

In 2022, after two Santal farmers in Rajshahi’s Nimghatu village died by suicide because they were deprived of water for irrigation, other Santal farmers from the same village said, “There is no water. The soil’s soul is burning.” In Satkhira’s Gabura village, one Bangalee farmer told me about the paddy harvest suffering due to the lack of water. Every day, one could hear the cries of the forests as well. At the Beribadh slum in Dhaka, I have heard from many people the stories of souls being crushed by water scarcity. Across the country, souls are burning. The souls of water, soil, birds, fish, people, settlements, villages, wetlands, and forests are all ablaze. Not a single agency of the state will be able to handle this crisis or protect the citizens by itself. Effective coordination is needed among all the ministries and departments, alongside inclusive action. Shedding all biased outlooks, the state must stand on the side of every burning soul.

This article has been translated from Bangla.



Hills in Bandarban terraced for rubber plantation.

FILE PHOTO: PHILIP GAIN

that waste food? These questions have yet to find any space in our racial discrimination discourse.

It is only against the poor, the powerless, the peasants, the fishers, the Indigenous peoples, the traditional healers, the forest dwellers, and the landless that ruthless discrimination and division go on unquestioned. All the facets of modern racism carried forward from the colonial legacy must be brought into mainstream discussion.

Isn’t access to water a fundamental right?

The theme for this year’s World Water Day was “Water and Gender.” Across the country, every day, it is our women who are burdened with the responsibility of household water management. Walking mile after mile, they fight, endure getting shoved, and

The High Court recently declared free, safe drinking water to be a fundamental right of every citizen, in light of Article 32 of the constitution. Will the government implement this order?

A law to ensure forest rights is urgent

The theme for World Forest Day this year was “Forests and Economy.” Forests in Bangladesh have always been viewed in terms of how many cubic feet of timber could be yielded from them. Not a single forest in the country is intact, let alone healthy. Each one is surviving against the unjust actions of the influential quarters in the country. Yet, geographically, the diversity of our forestry is quite notable.

Usually, in any conversation on forests, the forest authorities’ name come up not as a protector but as an adversary. Forest versus

Maternal vaccination can close the immunity gap for newborns

Aniqa Tasnim Hossain
is associate scientist at icddr,b.

Dr Ridwana Maher Manna
is study physician at icddr,b.

Dr Shams El Arifeen
is senior scientist at icddr,b.

ANIQA TASNIM HOSSAIN,
RIDWANA MAHER MANNA
and SHAMS EL ARIFEEEN

Despite remarkable progress in child survival, newborn deaths remain a major challenge in Bangladesh. According to recent estimates, about 60,000 newborns die each year in the country, with nearly three-quarters of these deaths occurring in the first week of life. Many of these deaths are caused by infections that strike before infants are old enough to receive routine vaccines. While Bangladesh expanded childhood immunisation and maternal health services over the past decades, protecting babies in the earliest days of life requires additional strategies. Maternal vaccination, which allows mothers to pass protective antibodies to their babies during pregnancy, offers a promising opportunity to reduce these preventable deaths and strengthen newborn survival. Yet, despite this potential, maternal immunisation remains absent from routine pregnancy care in Bangladesh, reflecting a collaboration gap between antenatal care services and the national immunisation programme.

The recent measles outbreaks in Bangladesh, where around 50 children have died and hundreds of cases have been reported this year, serve as a reminder of the risks posed by immunity gaps and the consequences of delayed or incomplete protection against infectious diseases. While measles primarily affects older infants and children, it reflects broader vulnerabilities in maintaining population immunity and protecting those who are too young to be vaccinated. This underscores the importance of complementary strategies such as maternal vaccination, which can provide early protection to newborns and help bridge the critical window before routine vaccination.

Maternal vaccination falls between two health platforms. Vaccine delivery is managed through the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI), while pregnancy care is provided through antenatal services. Because these systems often operate in parallel, vaccination is not routinely integrated into antenatal visits, and opportunities to counsel or vaccinate pregnant women may be missed. Bridging this gap will be essential to expand maternal immunisation and prepare for new vaccines that protect mothers and newborns.

Encouragingly, public trust in vaccines remains one of Bangladesh’s greatest strengths. Decades of successful childhood immunisation have built strong confidence among communities, families, and frontline health workers. National immunisation coverage for many childhood vaccines remains above 90 percent, and vaccination

has become widely accepted as a normal part of protecting children’s health. Many women, therefore, view vaccination as an important step in safeguarding their own and their babies’ health. In community discussions, participants frequently expressed willingness to accept vaccines when they understand their benefits. As one pregnant woman mentioned during our qualitative fieldwork, “If the doctors or healthcare providers explain that this will help the child and prevent illnesses, of course I will say yes. Why would I want harm?” This deep-rooted trust creates a favourable environment for introducing new maternal vaccines, provided that pregnant women receive clear information and guidance from trusted health providers.

Antenatal care offers one of the most promising platforms for strengthening maternal immunisation in Bangladesh. According to the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2022, more than 85 percent of women receive at least one antenatal care visit during pregnancy. These contacts provide crucial opportunities to counsel women about vaccination and deliver vaccines at the right time. Timing is particularly critical for maternal vaccines, as they are most effective when administered during specific stages of pregnancy. Accurate assessment of gestational age is therefore essential. Ultrasound examinations, used by 94 percent of women who sought antenatal care during their pregnancies, can help determine gestational age and support the appropriate timing of maternal vaccination.

However, a significant proportion, around 70 percent of antenatal care in Bangladesh is delivered through the private sector, where vaccination services are not always systematically integrated with the national immunisation programme. Strengthening coordination among immunisation programmes, public antenatal care services, and private providers could transform routine pregnancy visits into effective opportunities for maternal vaccination.

At the same time, the global maternal immunisation landscape is evolving rapidly. Tetanus toxoid-containing vaccines have long been administered during pregnancy to prevent maternal and neonatal tetanus, and some countries have introduced pertussis vaccination for pregnant women to protect newborns from severe respiratory infection. More recently, maternal vaccines against respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) have emerged as a promising tool to reduce severe illness in early infancy, while vaccines against Group B Streptococcus (GBS) are under development. Importantly, these vaccines are also considered highly cost-effective public health strategies because a single dose given during pregnancy can protect newborns during their most vulnerable months and reduce hospitalisations and healthcare costs. For Bangladesh, these innovations present both opportunities and challenges. While maternal vaccines could significantly strengthen newborn protection, their successful introduction will require preparedness across the health system.

Without clear delivery strategies, provider training, and coordination across health services, new vaccines may face delays or low uptake. Planning must begin well before the vaccines arrive.

Research and evidence will play a critical role in guiding this process. The Maternal Immunisation Readiness Network in Africa and Asia (MIRNA), funded by the Gates Foundation, is a nine-country consortium working to strengthen the evidence base for maternal vaccination in low and middle-income countries, including Bangladesh. Through collaborative research, the network aims to understand maternal vaccine demand, acceptance, and implementation challenges across health systems to help policymakers address key questions before introducing new maternal vaccines.

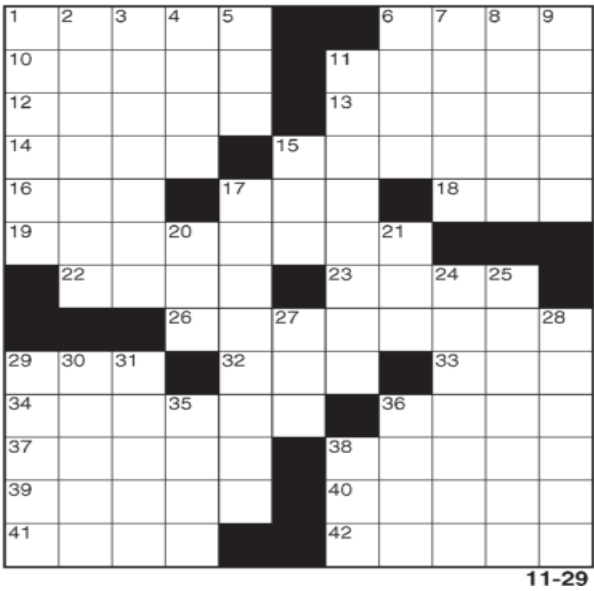
Protecting newborns begins before birth. As maternal vaccines such as those for respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) approach introduction, Bangladesh has an opportunity to prepare its health system now. Recent measles outbreaks point to the need for stronger efforts to close immunity gaps early in life, through routine immunisation, including vaccination during pregnancy. Strengthening coordination across immunisation and maternal health services, engaging both public and private providers, and building on the country’s strong trust in vaccines can make maternal vaccination routine part of pregnancy care and help protect newborns in their most vulnerable early days.

CROSSWORD
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS
1 Javelin
6 Pull forcefully
10 Momma’s mate
11 Head, in slang
12 Space visitor
13 National symbol
14 Alley prowlers
15 Dojo doings
16 Pitching stat
17 Snapshot
18 Twisty fish
19 Shredded
22 Herring’s kin
23 Teller of tales
26 Bundled for cold weather, say
29 Beat walker
32 Spying org.
33 Soccer’s Hamm

34 Bare one’s soul
36 Join the choir
37 Home design
38 Writer Puzo
39 Make blank
40 African antelope
41 Rational
42 Hagar’s wife
DOWN
1 Keyboard bar
2 The North Star
3 Headstone words
4 Some primates
5 Operated
6 Calendar span
7 Pond growth
8 Nick of movies
9 Prepare to propose
11 Guilty

admission
15 Young one
17 Toe treatment
20 Poet
Octavio
21 Diner
dessert
24 Navy bigwig
25 Spoiling
27 Card spot
28 Asian temple
29 Message systems
30 Sung
drama
31 Praline bit
35 Snowman’s
carrot
36 Store event
38 “Doesn’t excite
me”



YESTERDAY’S ANSWERS

VAMPS ZEBRA
IDIOT OGRES
COTTONWOODS
ARTROIOWE
RESTATE DIN
AGEVENT
LADLE RIDES
ALOE POE
YIN MALWARE
ABE ELLBAA
WAFFLE IRONS
ABOUT NUDGE
YARNS STEED

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

LUMINOUS JYOTIRMOYEE

in a post- ‘Prince’ world

ZAHHID AKBAR

This Eid-ul-Fitr marked the debut of Kolkata’s Jyotirmoyee Kundu in the Bangladeshi film industry, starring opposite Shakib Khan in *Prince*. Having begun her journey on television with *Bodhua* in 2024 and making her big-screen debut in 2025 with *Prajapati 2* alongside Dev, the young actor is still only three years into her career.

Following the Eid release of *Prince*, directed by Abu Hayat Mahmud, Jyotirmoyee travelled to Bangladesh, visiting cinemas on the first day to experience audience reactions firsthand, before sitting down for a photoshoot and interview at The Daily Star.

After ‘Prince’ hit theatres, you visited cinemas across Bangladesh. What stood out from the audience response?

The song *Pori* has really taken on a life of its own. Everywhere I went, people kept calling me ‘Pori’—that’s what I’ve been hearing the most. We had hopes for the song, but the love it has received has gone beyond our expectations. That warmth is what brought me to Bangladesh. If audiences continue to embrace me like this, I would love to do more films here. I also witnessed the incredible craze for Shakib Khan across both Bengals—it’s something I’ll always remember.

How did your family react?

My mother absolutely loved *Pori*. She told me how much she enjoyed it after it was released. I’ve also received a lot of positive feedback on social media. I think the chemistry between Shakib Khan and me felt fresh to the audience. The excitement around the film has been truly overwhelming.

What was it like working opposite Shakib Khan? Did it feel challenging?

Of course—it’s a big challenge for any newcomer to work opposite someone like Shakib Khan. But it was also a huge learning experience. He supported me throughout and helped me in every way possible, which made the process much easier. Despite being such a big star, he never made me feel intimidated. The director and the entire team were equally supportive. *Prince* has given me a certain recognition, and with that comes a greater sense of responsibility moving

forward.

You’ve now worked in both industries. How do you see the experience?

Acting doesn’t really belong to any one place, but working in both industries has been very fulfilling for me. Shakib Khan’s professionalism stood out—he’s not just a star, but a wonderful co-actor. People here are incredibly warm and hospitable. In 2025, I worked opposite Dev in *Prajapati 2*, and I learned a lot from him as well. Overall, it’s been a very enriching journey.

There has been some criticism about your dialect in ‘Prince’. How do you respond to that?

I followed the director’s instructions when delivering my lines. Beyond that, there isn’t much I can say. I simply tried to do justice to the character.

What about love—does it have a place in your life right now?

Not at the moment. Right now, my focus and my love remain my work. Perhaps I’ll fall in love in the future, but for me, love isn’t a casual thing. It comes with depth and responsibility. It’s about care. If someone does enter my life, I’ll definitely share it.

What lies ahead for you as an actor?

I want to keep rediscovering myself with every role. I’m looking to take on meaningful work in both industries and grow step by step, rather than rushing the process. I respect criticism, as it helps us improve. I’m preparing myself for a long journey, and there are already conversations around a few exciting new projects. I’m hopeful about what’s to come.



OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA



‘Photoseum: Life of Poetree’

April 3-16 | 6 pm onwards
Alliance Française de Dhaka,
Dhanmondi



Documentary Film Retrospective: Amirul Arham

April 9-11 | 3 pm–5 pm
Alliance Française de Dhaka,
Dhanmondi



‘Golmatha ar Chokhamatha’

April 17–18 | 7:30 pm onwards
Bangladesh Mohila Samity



STYLE STATEMENT

Elle Fanning

On the Academy Awards 2026 red carpet, Elle Fanning delivered a vision of modern fairytale glamour in a custom Givenchy gown by Sarah Burton. The strapless bodice was intricately embellished, its silver detailing melting seamlessly into layers of soft, voluminous tulle.

The silhouette balanced structure with lightness, creating a sense of effortless movement as she walked. Paired with a sleek updo and delicate diamond jewellery, the look remained refined and uncluttered.

Netflix Something Very Bad Is Going To Happen



Apple TV+ For All Mankind



Hulu Dear Killer Nannies



Disney+ Star Wars: Maul – Shadow Lord



Chorki Cactus



WHAT’S PLAYING

‘Hooligan’ by BTS

Hooligan stands out as one of the most talked-about tracks from BTS’ latest album *Arirang*, which recently debuted at No 1 on the Billboard 200. The song shifts into a more confrontational space, built on hard-edged hip-hop production and a tighter, more percussive sound than their recent releases.

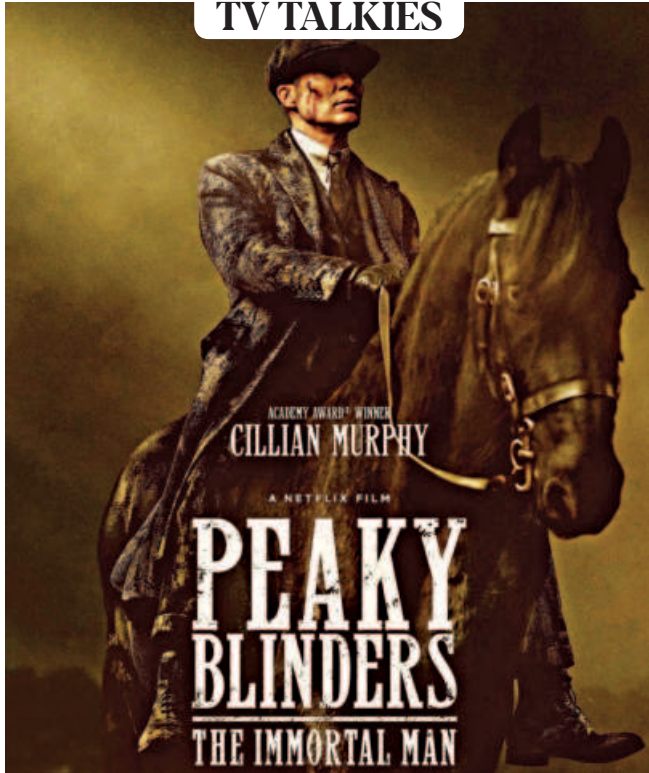
Lyrically, *Hooligan* centres on rebellion and self-definition; pushing back against expectations, public scrutiny and the pressure of maintaining a global image. It frames the idea of being labelled an “outsider” or

“troublemaker” as something to reclaim rather than reject, a theme that has resonated strongly with listeners.

Since the album’s release, *Hooligan* has drawn millions of streams across platforms, featuring prominently on global playlists and contributing to *Arirang*’s strong first-week numbers. As part of a chart-topping project, it stands as a key example of how the group continues to evolve while maintaining its global reach.



TV TALKIES



‘Peaky Blinders: The Immortal Man’

Peaky Blinders: The Immortal Man is a crime drama that continues the story of the *Peaky Blinders*, centred on the enigmatic and powerful Thomas Shelby. Set against the backdrop of World War II, the film explores themes of legacy, power, and survival. Shelby faces new political threats and personal reckonings in a rapidly changing world. Starring Cillian Murphy and created by Steven Knight, the film promises a cinematic continuation of the series’ gritty narrative.

Respect people

FROM PAGE 12

"We don't believe in violence," said Shafiqur, adding that if they are met with any violence, they will stand firm and resolute.

Speaking about constitutional reform, he said that what is needed is not merely an amendment but a meaningful reform that addresses fundamental flaws.

Questioning how fascism took root despite repeated amendments to the constitution, he said, "This constitution has been amended time and again. How did fascism emerge despite so many amendments?" He argued that the provisions responsible for enabling fascism must be "banished" from the constitution through reforms.

The Jamaat chief said fascism is a disease, and it spreads from one person to another, and they are already witnessing transmission. "The blatant disregard, disrespect, and denial of the people's mandate mark the beginning of fascism. We don't want fascism in the country anymore.

He also criticised the ruling party for favouring amendment over reforms.

Blaming the government for creating the current "crisis", Shafiqur said it failed to take a responsible role by not convening the Constitutional Reform Council. "We took two oaths, you took one. It was your responsibility to request the competent authority to convene the reform council. You only

asked for a parliamentary session, not for the reform council. You have failed in your responsibilities and broken your commitment to the people."

He added that there is still time for a resolution, and it could be achieved in parliament if the government wishes. "We wanted a solution inside parliament. You did not take that opportunity. You have pushed us to go back to the people.

"The people who, with bare hands, confronted armed miscreants and brought change are still alive," he said, urging the youth to "sharpen once again the tools of your revolution -- patriotism and faith."

He warned that the movement would continue until their demands are met and that they would return to the streets if necessary. "An equity-based Bangladesh is not possible without fulfilling the demands."

Clarifying his party's stance on the constitution, he said they have never called for scrapping it altogether. "We have said we want reforms, not that we want to throw it away. False allegations have been made against us."

The Jamaat chief also demanded independence of the judiciary, media, anti-corruption, and human rights commissions. "We don't want to see any subjugation in these four areas. But we fear that attempts may be made again to control them."

Rose Garden: a palace

FROM PAGE 3

Khan Bahadur Abdur Rashid. The mansion was then renamed "Rashid Manzil".

Later, it came under the ownership of Kazi Mohammad Bashir (popularly known as Humayun Saheb) and subsequently to Kazi Abdur Rakib and his wife Laila Rakib.

The mansion is deeply entwined with Bangladesh's political history. Following the Partition of India, many significant political meetings were held here, including the first informal meeting to establish the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League in 1949. Numerous renowned politicians and leaders from Bangladesh and India were hosted here.

In 1966, the property was leased to Bengal Studio. In 1993, the Rashid family regained ownership. In 2018, the Government of Bangladesh acquired the

property for Tk 331 crore.

After 2022, the building was restored and reopened on July 30 last year. Now, visitors can enter the building from 11:00am till 6:00pm. It remains fully closed on Sundays. On Mondays, it remains open partially from 2:00pm to 6:00pm. Entry tickets are priced at Tk 30 for regular visitors and Tk 10 for students each.

Afroza Khan Mita, regional director of the Department of Archaeology, said the Rose Garden has seen a steady stream of local and foreign visitors since its reopening.

"In August and September last year alone, we earned a total of Tk 17 lakh from ticket sales. Clearly, there is immense public interest. The site offers Dhaka residents a peaceful retreat while also contributing to government revenue," she said.

TIB expresses concern

FROM PAGE 3

"Among the 133 ordinances issued during the interim government, some made significant progress in strengthening democratic and institutional foundations," he said.

"These include the Supreme Court Judges Appointment Ordinance, the Supreme Court Secretariat Ordinance, and the Human Rights Commission Ordinance. Repealing or suspending them sends a worrying message about the government's commitment to judicial independence."

Referring to the ruling party's election pledge, he questioned whether the move reflects its commitment to ensuring judicial independence and strengthening a separate Supreme Court secretariat.

"It is highly disappointing that, within such a short span of time, the government appears to have forgotten how compromised the judiciary had become during the previous authoritarian regime and how it was used as a tool to suppress dissent," he said.

Dr Iftekharuzzaman warned that suspending the Human Rights Commission Ordinance could create uncertainty in protecting citizens' rights.

"The fact that people's lives can become extremely difficult in the absence of an effective Human Rights Commission, an independent judiciary, and provisions for preventing

enforced disappearances should not be forgotten by those in power, including the head of the ruling party."

He said political parties that had suffered rights violations in the past should support the immediate enactment of these laws.

He also questioned the rationale behind reviewing ordinances related to enforced disappearances, cautioning against using the process to weaken protections or shield perpetrators.

On the ACC Ordinance, he urged revision in line with the ACC Reform Commission's recommendations, including provisions for an independent selection and review committee and extending anti-corruption measures to the private sector.

Regarding the Police Commission Ordinance, he said it fails to establish a neutral, independent commission needed for professional policing.

He also urged revision of the Right to Information (Amendment) Ordinance, including definitions of information, commissioner appointments, and tenure, before placing it in parliament.

The TIB emphasised that all ordinances should be reviewed with expert and stakeholder input and enacted into law promptly to strengthen governance, judicial independence, and human rights in Bangladesh.



The B1 bridge damaged by a strike, as the US-Israeli conflict with Iran continues, in Karaj, Iran, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Trump vows to destroy

FROM PAGE 1

Israel's military also reported a new missile salvo from Iran, with its air defences activated to down them. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

Israeli emergency services reported some damage to houses and cars from an unintercepted cluster missile, while Israeli military radio said a train station in Tel Aviv was damaged by shrapnel.

The Iranian fire came as Trump said the US military "hasn't even started destroying what's left in Iran. Bridges next, then Electric Power Plants!" on his Truth Social platform, after saying Iran's tallest bridge had been destroyed.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi posted that "striking civilian structures, including unfinished bridges, will not compel Iranians to surrender".

Meanwhile, over 100 international law experts in the US, including from schools like Harvard, Yale, Stanford and the University of California, said in the letter released on Thursday

that the conduct of US forces and statements by senior US officials "raise serious concerns about violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including potential war crimes."

The experts said they were "seriously concerned about strikes that have hit schools, health facilities, and homes," noting a strike on a school in Iran on the war's first day.

The letter particularly noted a mid-March comment from Trump where he said the US may conduct strikes on Iran "just for fun." It also cited comments from Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth from early March in which he said the US does not fight with "stupid rules of engagement."

Writing in the US journal Foreign Affairs, Iran's former top diplomat, Mohammad Javad Zarif, said that Tehran should make a deal with the United States to end the war by offering to curb its nuclear programme and reopen the Strait of Hormuz in exchange for sanctions

relief.

Iran has virtually blocked the Strait of Hormuz since the war began, where in peacetime one-fifth of the world's oil and natural gas passes through. As a result, fuel prices have skyrocketed worldwide.

Iranian military spokesperson Ebrahim Zolfaghari warned that in response to Trump's threats to attack infrastructure, Iran would increase its own attacks on energy sites in the region, calling on "countries hosting US military bases" to "force the Americans to leave their countries".

A drone attack on a refinery owned by Kuwait's national oil company yesterday sparked fires at several of its units, state media said.

An air strike also hit a power and desalination plant in the country. Kuwaiti authorities blamed Iran for the strike. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) denied responsibility and blamed Israel.

Hard-earned reforms at risk

FROM PAGE 1

According to the constitution, parliament must approve or reject ordinances within 30 calendar days of its first sitting, which was on March 12. If they are not ratified by April 10, the ordinances will expire.

Of the four ordinances the committee recommended for repeal, three are related to judicial independence, creating judicial posts, and the development of the judiciary.

Masder Hossain, retired district judge and member of the Judiciary Reform Commission formed by the interim government, expressed disappointment.

He told The Daily Star that repealing these measures would frustrate the Supreme Court's landmark judgment separating the judiciary from the executive. He cautioned that appointments and control of judges could revert to politicisation and nepotism.

If the judiciary is not strong, how would the human rights of people be established, he questioned.

Supreme Court lawyer and human rights activist ZI Khan Panna said the rule of law has to be established first in the country, then the human rights commission or the inquiry commission on enforced disappearances might be constituted.

TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said, "The fact that people's lives can become extremely difficult in the absence of an effective Human Rights Commission, an independent judiciary, and provisions for preventing enforced disappearances should not be forgotten by those in power, including the head of the ruling party."

"If they have truly learned any lessons from the authoritarian rule and the bloodshed of the July uprising, they should demonstrate this to the people by taking immediate steps to have these ordinances placed in parliament in their original form for approval."

He questioned as to why the government, whose own party leaders had been victims of enforced disappearances and killings during the previous regime,

has placed the ordinances related to the prevention of enforced disappearances into the "trap" of further review.

On the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) Ordinance, Iftekharuzzaman, also chair of the ACC Reform Commission formed by the interim government, urged that the ordinance be revised in line with the recommendations of the ACC Reform Commission that were included in the July charter with consensus from all political parties, including the BNP.

Calling for the repeal of the Police Commission Ordinance, the TIB executive director said, "The ordinance fails to reflect the need for an independent and neutral police commission, which is essential to transform the police into a people-friendly and professional force."

The Right to Information (Amendment) Ordinance, 2026, must be revised – particularly regarding the definition of information, expansion of jurisdiction, and provisions related to appointment, status, and tenure of commissioners – before being placed in parliament as a bill.

"We strongly demand that all ordinances, including those recommended for suspension, be reviewed with the involvement of relevant experts and stakeholders and enacted into law without delay," Iftekharuzzaman said.

Human rights activist Nur Khan Liton also expressed concern over the dropping of several key ordinances, saying the move risks undermining institutional reforms and accountability mechanisms.

Liton argued that amendments could have been introduced during the current parliamentary session without allowing the ordinances to expire. "That would have avoided any legal or institutional gaps," he said.

He warned that the expiry of the ordinances would create a vacuum, weaken institutions, and expose vulnerabilities in governance and human rights protection.

About the ordinance on

Artemis II

FROM PAGE 12

to the moon began, known as the translunar injection burn.

The maneuver, which began at 7:49 pm ET (2349 GMT), is an orbital exit ramp slinging them out of Earth's orbit and onto a figure-eight shaped trajectory toward the moon. It's the final major thruster firing of the mission, leaving the Orion capsule largely under the influence of orbital mechanics for the remainder of the mission.

Commander Reid Wiseman, testing cameras as the crew flew roughly 40,000 miles away from Earth earlier on Thursday, saw the planet as a shrinking sunlit globe, and said taking photos from that distance made it difficult to adjust exposure settings.

"It's like walking out back at your house, trying to take a picture of the moon. That's what it feels like right now trying to take a picture of Earth," he told mission control in Houston as he snapped photos of his home planet with an iPhone.

Wiseman earlier faced a minor tech issue when his initial attempts to use Microsoft Outlook to check emails failed, but that was fixed quickly with help from mission control.

Pakistan hikes

FROM PAGE 12

Prices driven by the US-Israeli war on Iran, reports Reuters.

State-run public transport in Pakistan's capital and most populous province will be free for the coming month, officials said yesterday.

The country's Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb separately in the news conference announced subsidies aimed at offering relief to small farmers, motorcyclists and intercity transportation of goods and passengers.

Malik said the government had given a subsidy of 129 billion rupees in the last three weeks, but it was no longer affordable due to the hike in international oil prices.

In Australia, the government yesterday urged motorists to fill their cars at city petrol stations if they're planning long road trips over the Easter holiday, as rural towns face fuel shortages.

Energy Minister Chris Bowen said hundreds of service stations had run out of diesel nationally and over a hundred were without unleaded petrol, reports AFP.

Bangladeshi

FROM PAGE 12

a hammer. When Yasmin came out of the store to confront him, the attacker approached and struck her in the head, causing her to collapse. He then hit her several more times in the head before fleeing.

Police launched a large-scale search operation following the incident. As a precautionary measure, three nearby schools were placed on lockdown.

Although the suspect initially managed to flee, police were able to identify him. Authorities also said he may be linked to an unsolved homicide that occurred several months ago.

Yasmin was originally from Lakshmipur district. Her death has cast a shadow of grief in the Bangladeshi community in Florida.

Myanmar

FROM PAGE 12

power since he toppled the administration of Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi in 2021 and put her under arrest, sparking widespread protests that morphed into nationwide armed resistance against the junta.

Yesterday, lawmakers from the dominant Union Solidarity and Development Party and the military's quota of appointed armed forces legislators coalesced to back Min Aung Hlaing, with the former commander-in-chief winning the vote by a huge margin.

EC yet to set women

FROM PAGE 12

political party alliances. "Right now, our top priorities are the reserved women's seats election, the Bogura 6 by-polls, and the postponed Sherpur-3 election."

He confirmed that all political parties have already submitted letters regarding their desired alliances, which are being processed for distribution.

Akhtar also noted that independent candidate Rumeen Farhana has stated she will not join any alliance, while parliament election results in Chattogram-2 and Chattogram-4 remain pending – which may affect the calculations.

Under the relevant act, the 50 reserved seats for women are divided by the 300 general seats. The resulting ratio is multiplied by the number of seats a party or alliance wins, determining its share of reserved women's seats.

As per this law, BNP will get 35.16 seats, rounded to 36; Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami will get 11.33 seats, or 12 in total; and independent candidates will receive 1.16 percent, equivalent to two seats (if they ally). The National Citizen Party will get one seat. Other smaller parties will not get any unless they form alliances.

POSSIBLE ALLIANCES

EC Secretary Akhtar said that in the distribution of reserved women's seats, Bangladesh Jatiya Party's Andaleeev Rahman Partho, Ganosmahati Andolon's Md Zonayed Abdur Rahim Saki, and Gono Odhikar Parishad's Md Nurul Haque Nur are joining hands with the BNP in this regard.

Meanwhile, the National Citizen Party (NCP) and Jamaat-e-Islami are forming an alliance. "In addition, there is a separate front of independent candidates," he added.

Independent winners in the national election are – AZM Rezwatul Haque in Dinajpur-5; Md Abdul Hannan in Chandpur-4; Atikul Alam in Cumilla-7; Md Lutfur Rahman Khan Azad in Tangail-3; Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Iqbal in Kishoreganj-5; Mohammad Salman Omar in Mymensingh-1; and Rumeen Farhana in Brahmanbaria-2.

However, Rumeen informed the EC that she would not join any alliances.

Victims yet to be

FROM PAGE 3

goods worth Tk 20-22 lakh in the fire, much of it bought on credit. "I did not receive any compensation from the city corporation. My two employees received Tk 25,000 each, but I got nothing," he said.

Belayet now sells children's clothing in a makeshift setup in front of the burnt market. "I am somehow managing to live. I don't know when I will get a shop again," he added.

After his shop was entirely gutted in the fire, Ibrahim Khalil, 32, owner of Dewan Fashion, failed to sustain a pavement stall, and now works as a shop employee in Annex Tower. Facing the uncertainty, his brother left for Saudi Arabia two months ago, he added.

According to sources, after the blaze, a joint account was opened with IFIC Bank by Bangladesh Shop Owners Association president Helal Uddin, Bangabazar Shop Owners Association general secretary Johirul Haque, and Gulistan section's shop owners' association president Nazmul Huda. A fund of Tk 6.19 crore was collected from institutions like the FBCCI and Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC), and kept in the account, where it remains unspent while growing to Tk 6.25 crore with interest accumulated over the past three years.

Contacted, Helal Uddin said, "The money is still in the bank. It could not be distributed due to complications over the list of affected shop owners." "We wanted to distribute

RESERVED SEATS: A HISTORY

In the 12th Jatiya Sangsad, formed through the January 7, 2024 national election, the EC published the list of reserved seat members on February 27.

For the 11th parliament, elected on December 30, 2018, members for the reserved seats were sworn in on February 20, 2019.

In the 10th parliament, elected on January 5, 2014, voting for reserved seats had been scheduled for April 3. However, with no rival contesting candidates, the Election Commission on March 19 declared all candidates elected unopposed.

The 2014 and 2024 national elections were widely criticised as one-sided, with most opposition parties boycotting the polls amid allegations of dummy candidates. The 2018 election, though contested, was overshadowed by claims of ballot stuffing, voter intimidation, and institutional failures.

Historically, elections to women's reserved seats in Bangladesh have seen the ruling party secure the majority, with members often criticised as offering unconditional support in parliament.

Critics have at times dubbed them "doll MPs", as nominations often hinge on whether they are wives, daughters, or relatives of ruling party parliament members.

Contacted by The Daily Star on Thursday, former EC additional secretary Jasmine Tuli said the party that wins the most seats in parliament also secures the majority of reserved women's seats. "This was why the Electoral Reform Commission had recommended allocating reserved seats proportionately, based on the percentage of votes each party received."

The proposal, however, was never implemented.

Asked whether ruling party relatives dominate nominations for reserved seats, Tuli, a former member of the Electoral Reform Commission, said, "History says so. Experience shows that most nominations go to family members of party leaders. A few grassroots leaders have made it to reserved seats, but the percentage is very low."

the money through the city corporation, and they had given us assurance in this regard. However, no decision has been made yet," said Johirul Haque.

Ghulam Faruq Khan, former vice-president of the joint committee of the four Bangabazar markets, said reconstruction is ongoing, with three to four floors completed. He noted that shop allocations would follow once the salami is fixed and payments are made in instalments, though he admitted the process would take time.

DSCC data indicate 3,845 shops were destroyed in the blaze that had likely originated from a short circuit or mosquito coil. However, some traders now allege that the market may have been deliberately set on fire to clear the land for a new complex.

On October 22, 2024, trader Kamal Hossain Ripon filed a case against 30 people, including the then DSCC Mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Tapas, alleging damages of Tk 500 crore.

Contacted, DSCC Administrator Abdus Salam said initiatives to compensate the traders would be taken soon, noting that disputes over the list of beneficiaries had stalled the process.

For the victim traders of Bangabazar like Belayet Hossain, official explanations offer little comfort.

"We lost everything in the fire. Funds were collected in our names, but we received nothing. Now it is just a fight to survive," he said.

THE SHELF

4 fictional case studies in incel pathology

Patrick Bateman’s violence is compulsive, spontaneous, and nihilistic; it is not a reaction. The women have not done him any wrong. Much like the Underground Man, Bateman sees himself as superior. But unlike the former, Bateman takes action in a postmodern world, showing how the tides have changed with time, and how he is one of the most repulsive portrayals of an incel in literature.

SAJAL HOSSAIN DHALY

You should never judge a book by its cover, but you can definitely judge a person by the covers lining their bookshelf. The term ‘incel’, shorthand for ‘involuntary celibate’, gained traction through internet subcultures. But incel ideology long predates the word itself. Inceldom is about sexual absence, of course, but also how the loneliness caused by celibacy is converted to entitlement. Literature, particularly those taking place in modern settings, has always featured alienated men struggling with their masculinity, desire for intimacy, and their role in society. Today, the term has been relegated to a mere derogatory slang slung around as a stand-in for “you have no social life.”

The following are books populated with characters that embody—or orbits close to—what is now called inceldom. If you know someone who agrees with any of these characters, it may be time for an intervention.

Notes From Underground
Fyodor Dostoevsky; Richard Pevear, Larissa Volokhonsky (translators)
Vintage Classics, 1864

The Underground Man is frequently referred to as a proto-incel in modern literary discourse, and with good reason. A spiteful, self-loathing, misogynistic middle-aged man squatting under a railway track in self-imposed isolation, the Underground Man displays almost all traits synonymous with inceldom. A true hallmark of the incel archetype is wounded masculinity, and the Underground Man reeks of it, using his self aggrandising narration as a way to mask it. The titular notes themselves function as not only the narrative structure, but as a key component that is widespread in inceldom. Incels—the social pariahs of modernity—resort to manifestos to express their thoughts and inner turmoils in a monological manner, for incels often cannot engage in dialogue, thanks in part to their social awkwardness.

The Underground Man’s sense of self-importance and ego stands at a crossroads with his wounded masculinity; his spite and loathing towards people beneath his social standing—such as sex workers like Liza—stands in the way of his desire for affection and intimacy. When he is rejected by Liza, he retaliates through a barrage of verbal assaults, calling it his intellectual superiority.

The Catcher in the Rye
J.D. Salinger



ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

Little, Brown and Company, 1951

Holden Caulfield is an incel without the misogyny. Unlike the Underground Man, he does not convert rejection into entitlement. His discomfort with sexuality stems from grief, fear, and innocence. When faced with sexual opportunity, he withdraws rather than lashing out. Women are not his enemies; he idealises and protects them, almost like a white knight. This is seen when he is protective of Jane Gallagher, particularly in relation to Stradlater, the two of which can be likened to the “Stacey” and “Chad” archetypes popular in inceldom. However, Holden is merely sexually inexperienced, and is uncomfortable with adult sexuality. He is not contemptuous towards it, nor blames women for his shortcomings. His contempt is rather directed at society, and all of its “phonies.”

Holden is often forgiven for his sexual juvenility in literary discourse because of the sexual trauma he alludes to having gone through himself throughout the novel. Perhaps this is the singular

factor keeping Holden Caulfield from turning into the Underground Man, and what makes *The Catcher in the Rye* such a longstanding beloved coming of age novel. Because despite Holden Caulfield’s faults, underneath he is just a kid trying to do good.

Fight Club
Chuck Palahniuk
W. W. Norton & Company, 1996

“I am Joe’s Enraged, Inflamed Sense of Rejection”: The unnamed Narrator of Fight Club occupies a different sphere of inceldom. He is not celibate nor overtly misogynistic, but he shares with incels disdain for society, sexual frustration, and a fragmented masculinity. Also of note, the narrator literally has to invent an alter ego, Tyler Durden, in order to access desire and intimacy with his love interest Marla Singer. That relationship itself is awkward and dysfunctional, yet the narrator never directs those failings towards Marla. Instead, he directs his rage at late-stage capitalism, emasculation, and the loss of meaning in modernity.

Tyler Durden’s rhetoric is anti-feminisation and embracing a masculinity that is almost mystical, all of which overlaps with incel talking points. However, to Palahniuk’s credit, he does not romanticise this worldview. Tyler Durden is not a solution for the narrator’s predicament; he is a symptom born out of his most violent, depraved fantasies. The book’s narration reads like a manifesto itself, and the narrator’s repetitive deadpan declarations reasserts how these are the innermost thoughts of a person who is on the verge of moral collapse.

American Psycho
Bret Easton Ellis
Vintage Books, 1991

Patrick Bateman represents the opposite extreme of inceldom. Where incels are defined by social exclusion, sexual rejection, and wounded masculinities, Bateman is defined by having excess of all that a traditional incel claims to desire. He has the looks of a “Chad”, is privy to consensual sexual encounters, is financially stable,

and has a favourable social standing. Despite all of these, Bateman still feels hollow, and is a raging misogynist.

The character highlights how inceldom is not simply about celibacy, but also about the loss of morals and dehumanisation. He does not hate women because they reject him, rather because he does not recognise their humanity. Patrick Bateman’s violence is compulsive, spontaneous, and nihilistic; it is not a reaction. The women have not done him any wrong. Much like the Underground Man, Bateman sees himself as superior. But unlike the former, Bateman takes action in a postmodern world, showing how the tides have changed with time, and how he is one of the most repulsive portrayals of an incel in literature.

Sajal Hossain Dhaly is a contributor at Star Books and Literature. He is a final year undergrad student who loves fantasy literature, gym culture, and playing the guitar to his cat. Send him your epic fantasy hot takes @sajalhossain.dhaly@gmail.com.

CREATIVE NONFICTION

MELBOURNE: Where weather performs live

FARHANA SULTANA

When I first landed in Melbourne in January, the heat greeted me like a shockwave. 45 degrees Celsius, feeling like 48. The air pressed against my skin: dry, bright, unyielding. For a brief, disoriented moment, I wondered if I’d taken the wrong flight and ended up somewhere near the Sahel. I had no idea Melbourne could be this hot.

Australia’s weather can be explained on paper: reversed seasons in the Southern Hemisphere; an ocean-ringed continent with a vast, dry interior; the driest inhabited landmass; and the powerful push and pull of El Niño and La Niña. But what science captures in maps and diagrams, Melbourne delivers through sensation. Across the continent, climate shifts are like pages in a book: the tropical north breathing through its wet and dry seasons, the arid interior stretching into heat and silence, the temperate south cooling

I often joke that Melbourne’s weather has no parents—it behaves like a spoiled child that never learned any manners. And I smile because some days that feels exactly right. The theatrics, the sudden sulks and sudden warmth, the grand entrances and messy exits—they all echo the long tradition of poets trying, and failing, and trying again to capture this place in words.



Flinders Street station, Melbourne CBD



Cherry Lake, Altona, Melbourne

into winter and even offering snow in the alpine spine. The coastline softens some edges, sharpens others. Heatwaves, bushfires, floods, and cyclones thread themselves into everyday language. And what the atlas shows as neat climatic zones, Melbourne performs live—sometimes all in a single day.

Before I left, my Aussie (informal nickname for Australians) supervisor in Bangladesh—practical, quietly wise—offered one piece of advice: “Always keep an umbrella and a sweater in your bag.” At the time it sounded like courtesy. Later I understood it was practically a Bible instruction. The light in Melbourne does not simply shine; it asserts itself. My cheeks, hands, and feet learned this quickly by tanning. Coming from Bangladesh, where skincare is woven into daily life and still

affordable, I suddenly realised how costly self-protection could be here. Standing beneath that white, unblinking sky, I thought: This heat alone could send me home.

And yet, I stayed. What I learned more slowly was that this sun asks for awareness. In Australia, sunlight is treated with a kind of respect—spoken about openly, planned around, taught early in schools as it comes with consequences. The brightness that bleaches the sky also carries a risk people speak about plainly: skin cancer. Colleagues reminded me, gently but firmly, that this is not vanity or overcaution; it is care. The 1980s “Slip (on a shirt), Slop (on sunscreen), Slap (on a hat)” is not a slogan here; it is a public health memory. I began to see the sun not only as warmth, but as something to

enjoy mindfully, with small acts of preparation that help you stay safe while still appreciating its brightness.

Melbourne sits by the ocean and seems to borrow its temperament. One moment the day burns white and blinding; the next, a cool change sweeps in, quick and insistent. Clouds gather, rain needles down, and then, without apology, the sun returns. Calm follows disruption, and light follows storms.

“Four seasons in one day” is not a saying here. It’s routine.

Australians have tried for generations to name this restlessness of land and sky. Dorothea Mackellar reached for it in the poem “My Country” (1885–1968), calling Australia a “sunburnt country... of droughts and flooding rains”, a line held almost like collective

memory—recited in classrooms, quoted by grandparents, whispered whenever the weather grew dramatic. Henry Lawson, in contrast, wrote with a bush-worm honesty, capturing a land where wind, dust, and distance shape the rhythm of living. In his poems, the wind is never merely weather; it is a companion with a temper, a wandering voice that keeps its own counsel. That spirit still feels alive. Some days the wind in Melbourne moves exactly as those poets described—restless, insistent, unwilling to stay still for long. The sky changes its mind the way a storyteller shifts scenes. Clouds gather, leave, return, and then vanish again before you’ve finished a cup of tea.

I often joke that Melbourne’s weather has no parents—it behaves like a spoiled child that never learned any manners. And I smile because some days that feels exactly right. The theatrics, the sudden sulks and sudden warmth, the grand entrances and messy exits—they all echo the long tradition of poets trying, and failing, and trying again to capture this place in words.

So I leave home carrying both an umbrella and a sweater, or a jumper, as Australians insist on calling it—no matter what the morning promises. In Melbourne, you don’t check the weather app; you watch the weather. The sky performs live, revising itself constantly. Here, weather is not something you observe from a safe distance. It’s something you negotiate with.

This is an excerpt. Read the full article on The Daily Star and Star Books and Literature’s websites.

Dr Farhana Sultana is a postdoctoral fellow at the School of Public Health at the University of Queensland, Australia. She is based in Melbourne and can be contacted at farhana_ju@yahoo.com.



Bangladesh break India jinx to lift SAFF U-20 title

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh finally broke the jinx against India in finals to clinch the title of the SAFF Under-20 Championship with a 4-3 win in the penalty shootout after the regulation time ended in a goalless draw at the National Stadium in Male, Maldives yesterday.

US-based forward Ronan Sullivan delivered the winning penalty, applying the famous Panenka technique to deceive the Indian goalkeeper Suraj Singh, who leapt to his right only to see Ronan gently chipping the ball into the net, followed by wild celebrations of Bangladeshi players and the expatriate fans.

Interestingly, the score line was almost a repeat of the final of the 2025 edition where India beat Bangladesh 4-3 in the shootout after the regulation time produced a 1-1 draw. But this time, Ronan and Co turned the tables.

"I had been waiting for this title for the last four years and



"It was an incredible feeling after stopping the first shot because I thought I protected the dream of 20 crore people of the country."

Bangladesh goalkeeper Ismail Hossain Mahin

we finally got it," said captain Mithu Chowdhury, thanking the expatriate spectators for their tremendous support throughout the championship.

Before Ronan made the final his own with a penalty kick that will go down as an iconic moment in the country's football history, it was Bangladesh goalkeeper Ismail Hossain Mahin who set the tone of the shootout by diving to his right to stop India's

first shot taken by Rishi Singh.

"It was an incredible feeling after stopping the first shot because I thought I protected the dream of 20 crore people of the country," said Mahin in a video message sent by BFF.

Bangladesh's first three takers Murshed Ali, Chandon Roy and Abdul Riyad Fahim converted from the spot but Samuel Raksam, following a break in flow caused by Indian

goalkeeper's sudden cramp injury, hit the crossbar, leaving the shootout locked at 3-3.

India, however, failed to grasp the opportunity as Omang Dodum, named the most valuable player of the tournament, drove the ball miles of the target, setting the stage for Ronan, who made history.

Friday's final was keenly contested with both sides neck-on-neck throughout the 90 minutes, though India had the edge in terms of creating chances.

Bangladesh coach Mark Cox, who stood at the dugout in the final after his semifinal suspension, made one change to the starting XI that beat Nepal 1-0 in the semifinal by drafting defender Abdul Riyad Fahim in place of Sani Das.

Both sides started cautiously, however, it was India who launched the first attack when Md Arbash headed wide a well-judged cross from Rohen Singh in the fourth minute.

Bangladesh also came close

to breaking the deadlock but captain Mithu narrowly missed the far post with a header off a Ronan free kick in the 14th minute.

Four minutes later, Murshed released a nice low cross for Ronan but the forward was a bit late to the ball.

The ball was mostly confined to the midfield in the first half with both sides busy on clearances instead of keeping the ball on the ground.

After resumption, India put a lot pressure on the Bangladesh backline, which held strong. India twice came close to scoring the winning goal in the final minutes, but both efforts went wide.

After regulation time, the match went down to a shootout, where Bangladesh regained their title.

Previously, Bangladesh, who lifted their maiden trophy in 2024 beating Nepal in the final, had failed to beat India in the regional youth championship finals in 2019, 2022 and 2025.

Gattuso resigns as Italy coach after WC flop

AFP, Rome

Gennaro Gattuso quit as Italy coach on Friday as the Azzurri failing to reach a third straight World Cup continued to send shockwaves through Italian football.

A World Cup winner in 2006, Gattuso leaves after less than a year in charge of Italy, a team which has fallen far behind historic rivals like France and Spain in the last two decades.

Defeat on penalties to Bosnia and Herzegovina in Tuesday's qualification playoff final ended up costing Gattuso his job, as Gabriele Gravina, the man who hired him, also stepped down as president of the Italian Football Federation (FIGC).

Gabriele Gravina had asked Gattuso to stay on immediately after elimination in Zenica but his departure, and that of national team general manager Gianluigi Buffon, paved the way for the 48-year-old to resign.

Gattuso took charge of Italy in June last year following the sacking of Luciano Spalletti, himself a victim of a dismal title defence at Euro 2024 and a 3-0 hammering at the hands of Erling Haaland's Norway in their first World Cup qualifier.

His record, however, is impressive on paper, with six wins, one defeat, and one draw in eight matches with 22 goals scored and 10 conceded.

Selectors juggle choices in hunt for stability

SPORTS REPORTER

The new national selection panel led by former captain Habibul Bashar have been entrusted to build a team for the 2027 ICC ODI World Cup, and one of the first challenges they will have to tackle to make it happen is to create a solid batting order.

To do that, the selectors will have to nurture a batting unit that has all its bases covered, has fixed starters and ideal backups waiting in the dressing room.

But in the Bangladesh batting line-up, especially in the ODI format, stability has been in short supply for a while now.

A big indicator of the lack of solidity is the fact that Bangladesh have used 22 different opening pairs in ODIs in the last five years. And the biggest victim of this constant chopping and changing has been Soumya Sarkar.

Soumya has featured in four separate opening pairs during this period, symptomatic of his own lack of traction in the setup since debuting in 2014.

Despite a match-winning 91 off 86 balls against the West Indies at home in October last year, he did not get a game in the Pakistan series last month.

Saif Hassan and Tanzid Hasan Tamim opened in all three matches. Although Saif did not score many runs, as Bangladesh won the series 2-1 and there is always an aversion to breaking a winning combination, Soumya's chances in the upcoming series against New Zealand



don't look too great.

Chances have come and gone for the 33-year-old in the national team, akin to a game of musical chairs. There was a time when he was even tried out at No.7.

However, a member of the selection panel feels that Soumya too needs to make his chances count.

"Soumya is such a good player, he should have been the main batter. Considering the calibre he had as a player, the thought of forming the team without

him should not even arise. But he couldn't hold onto it," one of the four members of the selection panel rued.

But playing someone so grossly out of position like Soumya at seven suggests a deeper problem in Bangladesh cricket.

"What were they thinking when playing an opening batter at No.7?... I think it absolutely effects players. If you want to destroy a career, you can easily do it like this. But he [Soumya] should have had the guts to say he won't be a No. 7," a team official said on conditions of anonymity.

The Tigers' dearth of middle-order options is also apparent after veterans Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah stepped aside.

After the struggles of Jaker Ali, Mahidul Islam and Shamim Hossain, as there are no new, exciting batters sitting in the reserves, the management has no choice but to bring back tried and discarded names.

Alif Hossain made a comeback in ODIs in the Pakistan ODIs and ahead of the New Zealand series, Mosaddek Hossain, who has not played for Bangladesh in any format since 2022, was asked to join the national team camp recently on head coach Phil Simmons' request.

The selectors are also keeping an eye on the 30-year-old.

"I have asked him to get in shape to be able to play well till 2027 and he looks good so far," a member of the selection panel said.



Seven editions, nine regulars

From 1998 to 2022, the World Cup featured 32 teams in each edition. Across those seven tournaments, a total of 68 different nations took part. Among them, nine teams appeared in every single edition: Argentina, Brazil, England, France, Germany, Japan, Mexico, South Korea, and Spain.

**** Visit The Daily Star's website to also read: 'Gazza's tears: A 'child's' dream spilled on the grass of Turin**

‘Never thought of losing to Sri Lanka’

SPORTS REPORTER

Seeing Bangladesh's hockey team slump to a shocking 3-2 defeat against Sri Lanka in a Pool B match of the Men's Asian Games Qualifiers in Bangkok yesterday must have felt like cruel deja vu for head coach Mohammad Ashiquzzaman.

The loss marked Bangladesh's first defeat to Sri Lanka in 20 years. Incidentally, Ashiquzzaman himself had been part of the side that suffered a 2-0 loss in the bronze-deciding match of the South Asian Games hockey event in Colombo in 2006.

"We never thought of losing to Sri Lanka," Ashiquzzaman told The Daily Star over the phone yesterday.

"We simply could not play well. We had problems in the left-side midfield and in man marking in deep defence, while the hot and humid weather [above 40 degrees] might have been one of the reasons for the poor performance," he added.

Ashiquzzaman also felt the absence of midfielder Shohanur



Rahman Sabuj -- who was withdrawn from the camp by his service team on disciplinary grounds -- might have affected the outcome. However, the Bangladesh coach vowed to bounce back with a win over Uzbekistan in their final Pool B match on Monday, which would secure a place in the semifinals and confirm their berth in September's Asian Games.

"All the players and I are confident that we will bounce back against Uzbekistan to qualify for the semifinals and compete for the trophy," he said.

With one win from two matches, Bangladesh currently sit third in the group, behind table-toppers Sri Lanka and second-placed Uzbekistan. While Bangladesh must beat the Uzbeks in their final

group game to ensure a semifinal spot, the men in red and green only need to finish among the top three in the group, as the top six teams from the two groups in the qualifiers will make it to the Asian Games.

Regardless of the permutations, the defeat to Sri Lanka has prompted reflection on the issues plaguing the sport in Bangladesh.

"You know well that Bangladesh have had no domestic competitions for a long time, and the boys came here to play the qualifiers without any warm-up matches," Ashiquzzaman explained. "Meanwhile, Sri Lanka introduced a franchise-based hockey league alongside their premier league, and they also played a tri-nation tournament in Hong Kong before arriving in Thailand four days ahead of the competition."

Ashiquzzaman also mentioned that luck did not favour his side. Despite earning more circle penetrations and penalty corners, Bangladesh failed to capitalise, while the Sri Lankan goalkeeper denied them on several occasions.



PHOTO: MANCHESTER CITY

CITY HOST LIVERPOOL IN FA CUP QUARTERS

Manchester City welcome Liverpool to the Etihad in Saturday's high-voltage FA Cup quarterfinal, aiming for a swift Wembley return after their Carabao Cup triumph, where the Citizens beat Arsenal 2-0. Despite trailing the Gunners by nine points in the league, Pep Guardiola's side have momentum and are chasing a record 18th straight home FA Cup win. In Guardiola's 10th season, City have reached at least this stage in all but one campaign and are targeting an eighth successive semifinal, with their run of seven straight semifinals already a competition record. Liverpool have a reputation in this stage as they progressed from 17 of their last 19 quarterfinals. City, however, have already beaten the Reds twice in the Premier League this season.



Respect people’s mandate or face movement

Jamaat ameer warns govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Issuing a warning to the government, Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman yesterday said any attempt to “kill” the people’s mandate again or curtail their rights would trigger a movement.

“We struggled before and achieved results. That struggle will begin again if needed,” the opposition leader told a rally organised by Dhaka district Jamaat in Keraniganj.

He also called for a united effort to build the country amid a volatile global climate. “If the government moves forward with that goodwill, we welcome it.”

Referring to the 11-party programme today “in protest against the disregard of the referendum verdict and the chaos in the fuel market”, the Jamaat chief said their programme would be within the bounds of rules.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1



PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

A mother comforts her child with measles at Dhaka North City Corporation Hospital in Mohakhali yesterday, as cases surge among children. The facility, once used for Covid-19 and later dengue patients, has now opened a dedicated measles ward.

Food commodity prices soaring

FAO says, cites war pushing up energy, fertiliser costs

AFP, Rome

The war in the Middle East has pushed food commodity prices higher due to higher energy and fertiliser costs, the UN’s food agency said yesterday.

The UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said its Food Price Index, which measures the monthly changes in international prices of a basket of food commodities, had increased 2.4 percent in March from February.

It was the second rise in a row, which the agency said was largely due to higher energy prices linked to conflict in the Middle East.

Within the index, the category of vegetable oil saw the sharpest rise, of 5.1 percent over February, as palm oil prices reached their highest point since the middle of 2022, due to effects from spiking crude oil prices, FAO said.

However, a “broadly comfortable” supply of cereal has cushioned the damaged from the conflict, FAO said.

“Price rises since the conflict began have been modest, driven mainly by higher oil prices and cushioned by ample global cereal supplies,” said FAO Chief Economist Maximo Torero in a statement.

But he warned that if the conflict goes on beyond 40 days and the high prices on fertiliser continue, “farmers will have to choose: farm the same with fewer inputs, plant less, or switch to less intensive fertilizer crops”.

“Those choices will hit future yields and shape our food supply and commodity prices for the rest of this year and all of the next.”

Artemis II leaves orbit, sets course for the moon

REUTERS, Orlando

The Orion capsule carrying four astronauts on Nasa’s Artemis II mission fired thrusters early yesterday, propelling the crew out of Earth’s orbit and onto a path toward the moon, committing them to the farthest distance humans have ever traveled in space.



The successful maneuver put the crew on a path to enter the moon’s sphere of gravitational influence by Sunday morning, as they prepare to beat the distance record set by Apollo 13 in 1970.

“We are getting just a beautiful view of the dark side of the Earth lit by the moon right now. Phenomenal,” Canadian astronaut Jeremy Hansen told mission control some 10 minutes after the thruster firing.

Since launching 26 hours earlier from Florida, the astronauts spent their first day in space testing cameras, steering their Orion spacecraft and dealing with small toilet and email issues that were later fixed.

They had been in a highly elliptical Earth orbit swinging them as far as 43,000 miles (64,000 km) away on one end and about 100 miles close on the other, from where the key thruster firing

SEE PAGE 9 COL 6

Bangladeshi woman killed in Florida

Suspect held

STAR REPORT

A Bangladeshi woman was beaten to death with a hammer at a convenience store in Fort Myers, Florida, on Thursday, triggering a police operation that ended with the suspect’s arrest later in the day.

The victim, identified as Yasmin, was a Bangladeshi expatriate living in Fort Myers.

According to local police and emergency service sources, the attack took place around 7:14am (local time). Personnel from the Fort Myers Fire Department and Lee County EMS responded swiftly and rescued Yasmin with severe injuries. She was declared dead later.

Preliminary investigations indicate that a man with a history of mental illness entered the store armed with a hammer and attacked her.

Prior to the assault, he vandalised a vehicle parked outside the premises.

CCTV footage from the scene shows the suspect wearing a yellow graphic T-shirt, black shorts, yellow or orange sneakers and carrying a backpack. He is seen striking the woman’s vehicle multiple times with

SEE PAGE 9 COL 6

EC yet to set women’s seats election date

Six weeks left within 90-day deadline; meeting on Monday to decide

AHMED DEEPTO

With around six weeks remaining in the 90-day legal timeframe to hold the election for the women’s reserved seats in parliament, the Election Commission has yet to fix a polling schedule.

The commission has also yet to finalise the party- or alliance-wise list of members, though it said the voter list for the election has been prepared, and work on the party-wise distribution is underway.

According to the constitution, the election for reserved seats for women has to be held within 90 days of a parliamentary election.

The 13th national election, along with the referendum, was held on February 12, with results published the next day.

Fifty parties, including the BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, and Jatiya Party, contested the polls. Of them, only nine parties won seats. The remaining 41, including the Jatiya Party, failed to secure any.

Contacted by The Daily Star on Wednesday about a tentative timeline for the women’s reserved seats election, Election Commissioner Abdur Rahmanuel Masud said the commission will hold a meeting on April 6 to set the date for the election to the reserved women’s seats in the 13th

Jatiya Sangsad. “The schedule and polling date may be announced that day.”

Speaking to The Daily Star on February 24, he had said the schedule for the reserved women’s seats election would be announced during Ramadan.

He added that of the 50 seats,

According to the Jatiya Sangsad (Reserved Seats for Women) Election Act, 2004, the Election Commission must complete the election within 90 days of publishing the final results in the government gazette. The law also requires the EC to issue a notification setting dates for

Fifty-four years ago, a provision was included in the constitution to reserve seats for women in parliament for greater representation of women in the legislative body. It began with 15 seats in Bangladesh’s first parliament in 1972. Since then, the number has increased several times and now stands at 50.

a party must have won at least six parliamentary seats in the general election to qualify for one reserved seat.

Fifty-four years ago, a provision was included in the constitution to reserve seats for women in parliament for greater representation of women in the legislative body. It began with 15 seats in Bangladesh’s first parliament in 1972. Since then, the number has increased several times and now stands at 50.

nomination, scrutiny, withdrawal, and voting. In addition, within 30 working days of gazette publication, the commission must prepare separate lists of elected members by party or alliance.

Contacted, EC Senior Secretary Akhtar Ahmed said, “The voter list is ready and we’ve asked for the calculations to be completed so the file can be prepared.”

On seat distribution, he said the percentages depend on

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7



Myanmar junta chief elected president

REUTERS

Myanmar junta chief Min Aung Hlaing was elected president yesterday after breezing through a parliamentary vote, formalising his grip on political power in the war-torn nation five years after he ousted an elected government in a coup.

His carefully choreographed journey from top general to civilian president follows a lopsided election in December and January that was won in a landslide by an army-backed party and derided by critics and Western governments as a sham to perpetuate military rule behind a veneer of democracy.

The 69-year-old general has had a torrid time in

SEE PAGE 9 COL 6

Trump orders new pharma tariff

Reshapes metal duties

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump on Thursday ordered new tariffs on certain medicines, alongside an overhaul of metal duties, doubling down on his trade agenda a year after unleashing trade wars on virtually all partners.

The latest pair of orders he signed pile pressure on pharmaceutical companies to manufacture more in the United States, while separately targeting firms that officials accuse of “artificially manipulating” metals prices.

Finished products containing substantial amounts of steel, aluminum and copper will also face a lower 25 percent tariff on their full value instead of being targeted for the amount of metals they contain, a move to simplify an onerous system for firms.

It is not immediately clear how these would affect consumer prices, but a senior US official told reporters they did not expect to see any effect on affordability.

The moves come on the anniversary of what Trump had dubbed “Liberation Day,” when he announced varying tariff rates on goods from dozens of economies last year, roiling financial markets and snarling supply chains.

Although the Supreme Court struck down these global tariffs this February, Trump has been working to reinstate duties using different authorities.



The Department of Environment and the local administration shut the brick kilns in Rangamati and fined the owners around a month ago. Nearly 10 of these illegal establishments, a major source of air and soil pollution and built by cutting hills, have resumed operation, burning wood from the forests. This photo was taken in Rajasthali upazila a few days ago.

PHOTO: RIKORS CHAKMA

Pakistan hikes fuel prices sharply

AGENCIES

Pakistan has hiked consumer prices for diesel and petrol sharply, its second increase in less than a month, amid rising global oil prices spurred by the conflict in the Middle East.

The price of diesel would be raised by 54.9 percent to 520.35 rupees (\$1.88) per litre, and petrol by 42.7 percent to 458.40 rupees per litre.

“It was inevitable to raise the prices due to the international market prices going out of control after the US-Iran war,” Pakistan’s Petroleum Minister, Ali Pervaiz Malik, said in a news conference telecast on state television Thursday evening, along with the country’s finance minister.

Last month, the South Asian nation raised consumer prices for diesel and petrol by about 20 percent, citing higher oil

SEE PAGE 9 COL 6



In Adui Para, hope climbs UPHILL TO SCHOOL

Built by locals, volunteers, 'Owangnim Kiyang' keeps education alive in Bandarban village despite isolation, hardship

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

In Adui Para, a remote village in Alikadam upazila in Bandarban, the road to school is a hill path of stone, dust and patience.

Every morning, children climb it to reach "Owangnim Kiyang", a Mro language school known as "School in the Clouds". Some come barefoot. Others wear thin sandals, nearly worn through by the rough ground. They arrive with dust on their legs, and in winter the cold leaves them trembling on the morning walk.

Most carry their books pressed tightly against their chests because they do not have school bags. A few have bags, but most hold their books steady with both forearms and hands as they move along the narrow hill tracks.

Their clothes tell their story: torn school uniforms, worn and stained, often too large for their small bodies, and faded blue shirts whose colour has long been drained by sun, dust and time.

"We got these shoes and this uniform two years ago. Sometimes my friends wear them too because we do not have another one," said five-year-old Long Rau Mro, a student in the pre-primary section.

Yet the children arrive. They line up for assembly, attend lessons, and smile easily.

For families in Adui Para, a village about eight kilometres from the Myanmar border, this daily journey is part of life. More than two dozen families here are raising their children under the same harsh conditions. Still, each morning begins with the same quiet determination: to send their children to school.

The village falls under ward-4 of Kurukpata union. The school rests on the slope of a hill, around 198 metres above sea level. To reach it, one must leave the main road and walk for about four hours.

Locals said the nearest alternative school is more than

two hours away on foot. For a small child, it is almost impossible, with steep climbs, stream crossings and hours of walking along the way.

DAY BEGINS WITH 'AMAR SHONAR BANGLA'

Every morning, children gather in a small clearing on the hillside. At the edge of the yard, parents and older siblings stand silently, keeping their distance as the children take their places.

Thongpray Mro, a village chief and temporary teacher, steps forward as the school struggles to hire qualified teachers because of a lack of funding.

He calls the children into rows. They shuffle into position, brushing dust from their clothes and wiping their hands on their sides. A short parade follows, with small, careful steps over uneven ground. Then they stand still.

The anthem begins. "Amar shonar Bangla, ami tomay bhalobashi."

The children sing together, their voices rising in one steady tone and carrying across the hillside, through trees and homes.

The school has 11 children in the pre-primary section, where classes run from 8:30am to 9:30am. There are four students each in Class I and Class II, and two in Class III, with each class lasting one hour.

The school was set up by villagers with the help of several travellers, as there were no government appointed teachers, no regular supply of books, and no infrastructure.

"We did not want our children to grow up

learning," said Thongpray. "Even if it is small, this is something."

Owangnim Kiyang School is being run almost entirely through community effort. Local indigenous residents remain at the centre of its operation, while four privately employed supporters from Dhaka help fund the initiative and

a group of travellers from Dhaka visited the village. After hearing about the long-standing need for a school, they decided to help.

One of the travellers, Mohiuddin Al Muhit, said, "We thought we needed to do something for the hills. We are trying our best to do everything we can."

the school will spread the light of education to every corner of the hills."

Tanvir Saita, another founder, said, "We believe that education can change a society. From that belief, we set up this free school for the children."

Sifat Amin Adil, another founder,

a sustainable plan."

A SCHOOL WITHOUT BASICS

A visit to the school last month found there is no school vehicle, no smart board, no painted corridor, no fan turning above benches in the heat, and no steady supply of learning materials.

Two small classrooms and one office room are built of tin and wood on a hillside, and in front of the schoolyard stands a wooden Shaheed Minar, also built by locals.

Inside the classrooms, the lessons are basic but meaningful: Mro language, Bangla, English, and mathematics. The school teaches from pre-school to Class III.

Despite these limitations, four students from the school have gone on to continue their education in town. One of them is Mang Chang Mro, now a Class VI student at a school in Alikadam.

"Without this school we would not get the opportunity," he said.

For children who want to continue their education, however, the real difficulty begins once they have to leave for town.

Sending a child beyond the village means transport, cost, lodging, and uncertainty. For many, the burden is simply too heavy.

Quoting locals, Man Wai Mro, a member of the school committee, said the school needs proper classrooms, a well-structured establishment, trained teachers, learning materials, and basic facilities.

Even in all this hardship, hope remains.

Parents in Adui Para know their children walk barefoot to a small school on a distant hill, yet they continue to send them with the hope that it can be the first step towards change.



look after its needs.

Together, they manage

the school's limited

finances, maintain basic facilities, and try to ensure that classes continue. With little outside support, the school survives on personal contributions and voluntary labour.

Residents said they had struggled for years to establish a school for local children. The turning point came around five years ago, when

'LIKE A DREAM'

The school was founded by a group of friends who believed education could change a community from within.

Muhit described the school as a dream he is trying to make real.

"Owangnim Kiyang feels like a dream to me, and I am slowly trying to make it real. From a wish to give something back to the hills, I started this journey together with the most left-behind Mro community."

"I am hopeful that with everyone's joint effort, one day

said the school was inspired by the children themselves.

"We started this school so that geographical hardship or economic limits do not stand in the way of these children dreaming... When we see a child writing their name for the first time, all our hard work feels worth it."

"We need support from everyone, and we also need



Rethinking secularism in South Asia today

In conversation with Akeel Bilgrami, Sidney Morgenbesser Professor of Philosophy and a faculty member of the Committee on Global Thought at Columbia University, and a renowned scholar of political philosophy. This is the second part of a two-part interview with the eminent scholar. The first part was published under the title ‘Does South Asia Need Secularism?’ on March 30, 2026.

The Daily Star (TDS): We have discussed secularism in the pre-independence period. How did it evolve in independent India?

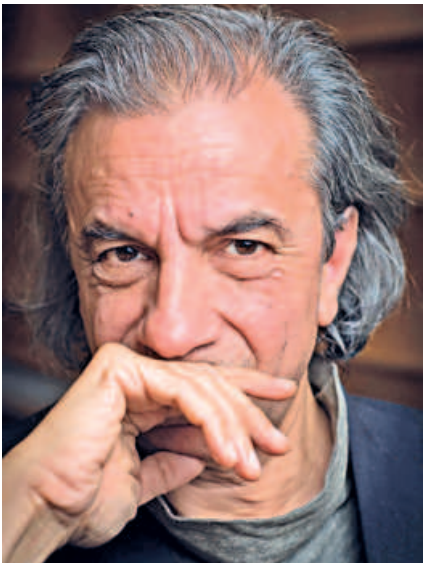
Akeel Bilgrami (AB): In post-independence India, secularism surfaced initially, primarily in the legal sphere of the reform of religious law—in the formulation, for instance, of the Hindu Code Bill. It has become a commonplace to say (Radhakrishnan said it first, then Amartya Sen has also said it, and now troops of academics have started saying it, and indeed, in some of the case law, even confused judges have been saying it) that Indian secularism is different from the secularism of the West. I think this tendency is due to a confusion in some of the metaphors and slogans that have become commonplace in characterising secularism in the West—such as the ‘wall of separation’ between church (more generally, religion) and the state. There is no way for secularism to be implemented anywhere without the state perforating this so-called ‘wall’ that separates it from religion.

You cannot, in general, constrain religion in the political sphere unless the state breaches the wall. As it happened, in independent India, this occurred in the project of reforming religious law. So, the right way to characterise the notion of secularism (whether in Western nations or in India), where liberal constitutions have been adopted, is to say something like this:

Secularism is characterised by three commitments:

1. A commitment to freedom in the practice of religion,
2. A commitment to certain constitutional principles (just to give one example, freedom of speech), which neither mention religion nor opposition to religion,
3. A higher-order commitment which says that if there is a clash between 1) and 2), then 1) must get priority.

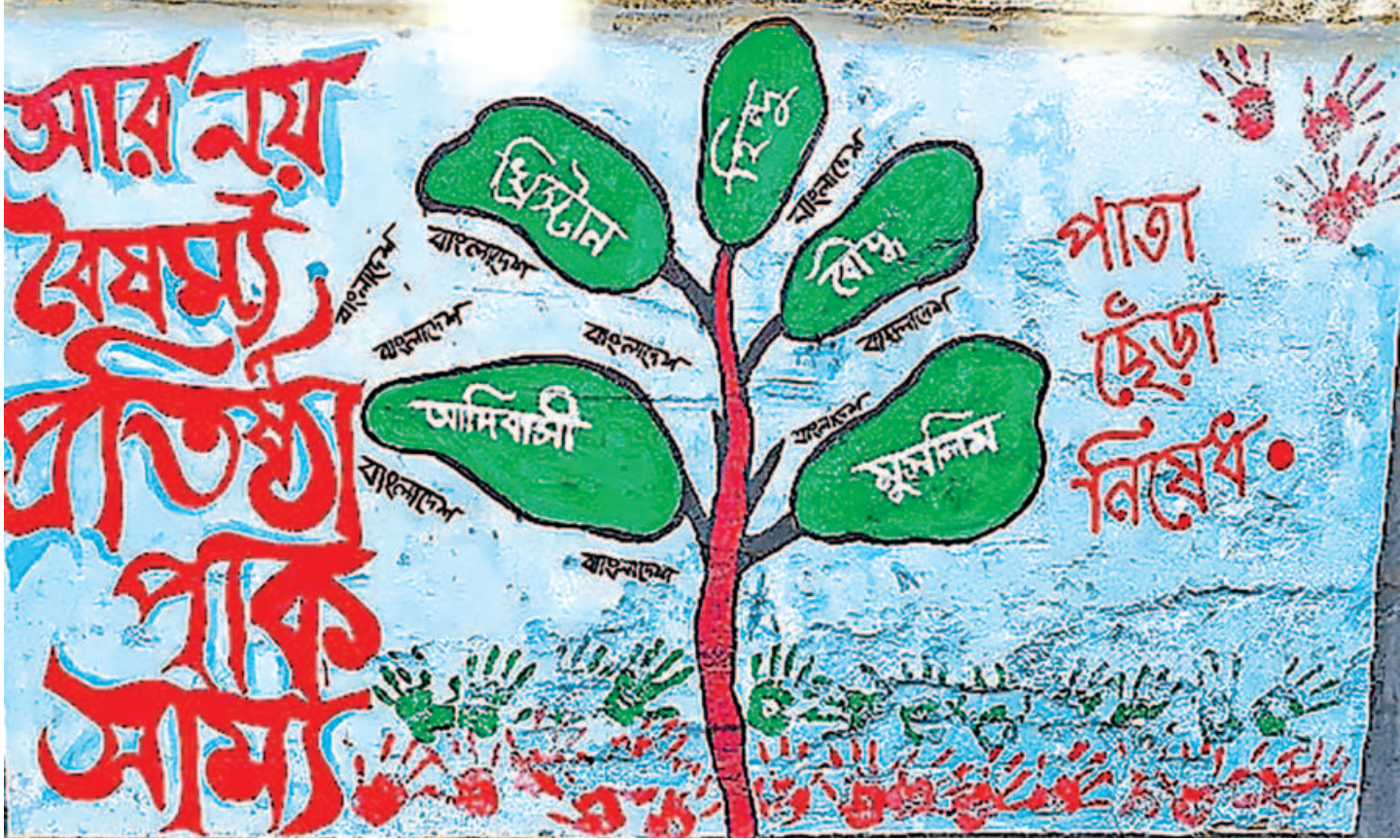
Once you eschew misleading slogans and metaphors to characterise it, this is the secularism that was, by and large, adopted by liberal democratic societies in the West (though, as I said earlier to you, countries like Turkey and France went further and adopted state-enforced secularisation, but these are exceptions). It is also the secularism that India adopted, and it is what was implemented in the reform of Hindu law. Practices sanctioned by particular religious laws clashed with 2), so 3) kicked in and permitted the reform of those laws.



Akeel Bilgrami

So, when Radhakrishnan and Sen say secularism in India is different, that it is ‘the state’s principled neutrality and even-handedness between religions’ (this is sometimes captured in the phrase ‘sarva dharma, sama bhava’), I think they are getting it quite wrong. Certainly, this rhetoric of ‘principled neutrality and even-handedness between religions’ surfaced often in India, but it was never intended as an alternative definition of secularism. Rather, it was intended as a constraint on the implementation of the only definition of secularism that was adopted in India, i.e., the three-clause definition I have outlined. In other words, in the implementation of 3), when 2) and 1) clash, one must do it even-handedly; one must not apply it to one religion while failing to apply it to another, if the clash occurs with both religions.

Of course, as it turned out, as is well known, this constraint was not applied to the reform of religious law. Reform was not even-handedly implemented because Hindu personal law was reformed and Muslim personal law—despite extensively clashing with 2)—was not. But, as is also well known, there were reasons given for this asymmetry, reasons regarding a minority community having suffered great losses during Partition, so they should at least be allowed their personal laws until such time as they gained the psychological confidence, as a community, to accept the state’s reform of it.



The iconic graffiti titled “cvZv †Quov wb‡la” (Do Not Tear the Leaves), drawn on walls after the July Uprising, depicts five leaves of a tree bearing the words Adivasi, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim as a symbol of inclusivity.

Secularism, of course, surfaces in relevance outside the reform of law as well, but until the 1980s, it was mostly wielded in this sphere. Ever since the 1980s, secularism became a very urgent issue in many other spheres because India began to mimic the European form of nationalism that we discussed earlier, the damaging consequences of which, as I said, had prompted secularism as a damage-repair doctrine in the first place.

TDS: When secularism appears to fail or falter, many have said that multiculturalism or pluralism offers a better framework for the subcontinent. What is the difference between secularism and multiculturalism, and where do you stand on this matter?

AB: Multiculturalism, like secularism, also originated in Europe, but some centuries later, in the last quarter of the 20th century. As a result of the Second World War, there was a loss of manpower in Western European nations. They, therefore, allowed (indeed, initially even sought) migration from their erstwhile colonies to pick up the slack (in the case of Germany, it was not from a former colony, but, by various treaty-like arrangements, from Turkey). Over the next few decades, these migrants, displaced from their own cultures and religious settings, found themselves suffering under racist, xenophobic attitudes of the host populations, and therefore began to seek a sense of dignity and autonomy in the comfort zone of their own religions and cultures, and so began to demand that they be allowed to live more in accord with these than secularism—given its exercise of clause 3) in my definition—would allow. That is the origin of multiculturalism as a doctrine, which then spread with a lively intensity to such places as Canada and Australia, pushed not just by immigrants but also by advocates for indigenous communities long suffering from racism in those countries.

The Partition emerged as an outcome of leaders and their negotiations (and failures of negotiation), not a mass movement of any kind. And in Bengal, the Muslim masses, as I said, were wielding Islamic ideas for solidarity in a class struggle, not for a struggle to establish a Muslim Zion. The idea of an Islamic nationalism as underlying the creation of Pakistan is not a plausible reading of the events of the late 1930s and mid-40s.

It is, in many ways, a more democratic doctrine than secularism, especially in countries with large and diverse religious populations, as in our part of the world and, as a result of migration, increasingly in the West too. But, alas, I think it is a fantasy to think that, in a country like India today, so completely dominated as it is by a Hindutva majoritarian party in power, Muslims could effectively make demands for a multiculturalist polity. That might have been possible from the 1980s to around 2014, when Hindutva was only laying down roots but was not in full-fledged power; but in the last decade or more, it has seemed very unlikely that multiculturalist demands can get anywhere.

Even the remarkable Shaheen Bagh movement a few winters ago, which spread to many small towns in India, was not demanding multiculturalism. It was demanding, on behalf of Muslims, that the secularist commitment of the Constitution should curb the power of Hindu majoritarianism that was seeking

to undermine the notions of citizenship that the Constitution had enshrined. (It is actually rather fascinating that the campaigns of that movement extensively and brilliantly used multicultural rhetoric and slogans—poetry, songs, art from diverse cultures—but what these were demanding was a proper implementation of a set of secular commitments already present in the Constitution.)

More recently, a constitutional path to multiculturalism is being indirectly proposed by political theorists in a demand for a much greater federalist de-centring of the polity (echoing the provincial autonomy themes we talked about earlier). Since different regions and states have different cultures, more autonomy for the states in a federated system would, in effect, be a kind of multiculturalism. This demand is not surprising because the only opposition to the Hindutva majoritarianism in power is to be found in the regions.

At the centre, there is virtually no serious opposition due to the abject failures of the Congress party. But the BJP-led alliance’s victories in Maharashtra, Haryana, and Bihar state elections are disheartening for this strategy. Bengal and some of the southern states are still holding out in opposition, but the BJP is now beginning to adjust its Hindi-culture Hinduism and seeking to find a path to accommodate southern Hinduism in its understanding of Hinduism. If it succeeds in that, and if Bengal too finds itself loosening its local culture to accommodate Hindi-oriented cultural elements, as it has begun to do in the last decade, then this entire federalist strategy will not amount to much.

Should that turn out to be so, secularism may remain the only plausible discourse to revive, since it is already there in various constitutional commitments. However, I say all this with the utmost tentativeness—it is not really possible to have any certain opinions in

this matter. It remains an open question.

TDS: Finally, how do you understand these issues of nationalism, secularism, Muslim politics, and so on that we have been talking about in the context of the political and social transformations in East Bengal, East Pakistan, and Bangladesh over the last century or more?

AB: Muslim participation in Indian nationalism in the first half of the twentieth century took different forms as the freedom movement evolved. As I said in response to one of your earlier questions, the Gandhi–Nehru-led Congress party did try to mobilise Muslims, specifically under the name of ‘Muslim’, in two mass movements—the Khilafat movement and the Muslim Mass Contact Programme. And in the Khilafat period especially, Bengali Muslims were very much affected, and you can see this in the range of outcomes around the C.R. Das Pact that brought Hindus and Muslims together,

and the Swarajist Party’s intervention in the legislative councils in the first half of the 1920s.

Just to give you one example, Muslim representatives in the provincial assembly voted for the women’s suffrage bill even though they had refused to do so just a few years earlier on the ground that, unlike Hindu women, Muslim women, due to the custom of purdah, would not come out and vote if they had the franchise. The only thing that intervened between the first vote and the second vote was the Khilafat movement’s impact on Bengal. This shift is a clear instance of the progressive effects of the movement. By the late 1920s, this kind of impact of ‘Hindu–Muslim’ unity in democratic politics had dissipated, thanks mostly to the strenuous efforts to undermine it by upper-caste Bengali Hindu politicians.

But you see, you cannot just see that as a shift from progressive nationalism to communal nationalism. I repeat what I said earlier—the shift is as much to do with the contrast between Muslim involvement in mass politics and their involvement in a quite different ‘representative’ politics forced on the freedom movement by the Crown’s constitutional concessions.

I have to say that this entire period is not very well understood. Many even see the Khilafat movement as a communalisation of Muslim nationalist politics. I think that is a serious misunderstanding. Even so interesting and thoughtful a scholar of that period as the Pakistani leftist Hamza Alavi (for that matter, even Eqbal Ahmad, another astute political analyst) gives a very distorted picture of the movement, calling it a forerunner of communal Muslim politics. It was not that. In fact, I do not believe the more class-based mobilisations of the 1930s—on which the Congress leadership did not always have control—would have been possible without the remarkable progressive impact of the earlier Khilafat movement and its follow-up in the non-cooperation movement immediately after.

Now, of course, Khilafat involved Muslims much more widely than just Bengali Muslims, though it had particularly dynamic effects on Bengali Muslims, and your question is just about the latter. If you focus just on Bengali Muslims in East Bengal, then what is conspicuous is that their class composition was predominantly of petty producers in a large agrarian economy, who were caught up in an economic struggle often made particularly acute due to the hardships forced on them by remote economic events elsewhere on the globe because of the regional economy’s reliance on jute, a cash crop in demand elsewhere and, therefore, subject to shifts in the global market.

This economic struggle surfaced with much intensity and with some passing successes, both of the KPP in the late 1930s and of the Muslim League’s radical wing under Abul Hashim’s leadership some five or six years later. The struggle is often presented by left historians as a purely class struggle (nothing to do with Bengali Muslims being Muslims), but it is not obvious that that is an entirely or exclusively right description of it. The cohesiveness that Islamic egalitarian ideals might have provided to bring together peasants in this struggle is worth studying and exploring as an overlay on the class dimension of the struggle.

Nothing like this sort of struggle existed

in the Muslim-majority areas of the north. In Punjab, for instance, the Unionist Party represented the well-off landlord class. Sikandar Hayat, its leader, was deeply committed to provincial autonomy (even more so than Jinnah) and only allied his party with the Muslim League partly because he was, in some ways, outmanoeuvred by Jinnah, but also partly because he was anxious for the future of the class he represented in the wake of the threatening rhetoric of impending land reform that the Congress party had taken up under Nehru’s leadership.

As we know, in East Bengal, the class struggle was not, in the end, successful because the Dhaka Nawab, representing the Ashraf Muslim aristocratic class, lined up with Jinnah and the national-level Muslim political agenda of the Muslim League. And that level of Muslim politics was, as we discussed earlier, caught up with issues of regional autonomy around the Cabinet Mission, and the impasse around those issues is what led to Partition.

So, in answering the part of your question about Muslims and nationalism in the colonial period leading up to Partition, all of this shows that what recent historians like Dhulipala have been arguing, viz., that Pakistan was created by an evolving momentum for a modern Muslim state, and even Devji (who speaks of Muslims seeking a state as an exilic community like the Jews in Europe), are quite off-beam.

The Partition was primarily a result of the failure of ideas regarding provincial autonomy (that motivated Jinnah) to carry the day with the Congress leadership. The Partition emerged as an outcome of leaders and their negotiations (and failures of negotiation), not a mass movement of any kind. And in Bengal, the Muslim masses, as I said, were wielding Islamic ideas for solidarity in a class struggle, not for a struggle to establish a Muslim Zion. The idea of an Islamic nationalism as underlying the creation of Pakistan is not a plausible reading of the events of the late 1930s and mid-40s.

As is well known and oft told, after the creation of Pakistan, Bengali nationalism within the nation emerged in the Bengali language movements in the early 1950s against an increasingly dominant West Pakistan. That movement shattered the myth of religion as a binding force for the creation and sustenance of the new nation, and it simmered for almost two decades until the violence that led to the break-up of the nation; and one might say that that break-up echoed the proper understanding of what lay behind the events that led to Partition in the first place: the drive for regional autonomy as a way of protecting a people and its culture and language.

The Bangladesh that emerged, however, ended up—just as in India under the Congress—standing for a kind of hegemonic nationalist ideal, seeking to bring together, in a consensus, the various different communities in what might rightly be called—again echoing India after independence—a bourgeois democratic polity and political economy.

What followed Sheikh Mujib’s assassination in 1975 was a slow falling apart of this hegemonic consensual nationalism, first under military rule and then with the rise of the BNP and the Jamaat’s greater centrality in politics than it had ever possessed, culminating in the spectacular events that led to the fall of Sheikh Hasina.

The neoliberal cast of the political economy that Bangladesh has embraced in recent decades, consolidated in a number of decisions made by Dr Yunus’s interim government, may well have the effect of intensifying the Islamist presence both in the electoral field and on the streets, as it has in India since 1991. For all the BNP’s current claims to eschewing that presence in its own government, the fact is that, in the neoliberal period, political leaders in power do tend to work on two fronts: a free-market, open political economy, fully given to globalisation, offering the promise of growth and opportunity to the middle classes to gain their support, and, at the same time, a politics invoking more primordial sentiments—around religion—to extend that gain of support to other classes, who will certainly not reap any of the fruits of such growth.

Though I just mentioned India in passing, I am not at all suggesting that anything like the scenario that exists in India will emerge in Bangladesh. The contexts are very different. Hindu nationalists in India have effectively manipulated the apparatus of the modern state to undermine minorities, and that sort of exercise of power is not always replicable in other nations with rather different histories and different institutional structures in place. I am only suggesting that we should not leave out matters of political economy in seeking to understand the increasing presence of religion in the politics of countries like India and Bangladesh.

The interview was taken by Priyam Paul.

OUT OF THE TEA GARDENS

Bangladesh’s tea estate workers remain among the country’s most deprived — landless, underpaid, long excluded from the mainstream. But new generations are breaking those barriers

JAHIDUR RAHMAN AND
MINTU DESHWARA

In the history of her family, Chompa Naidu, 30, is the first to leave the Longla Tea Garden of Kulaura, Moulvibazar, for higher education in another country. Up until her, most of them spent their whole lives inside the gardens, plucking leaves.

Even two generations ago, no one in her family thought of going to school. The order of things was to work. “Many couldn’t even write their own names,” says Chompa’s grandmother, Thandharana Naidu, 81. “Education was a luxury.”

A whole day’s work would get her Tk 5. Failure to meet the target meant a wage cut. “No work meant no pay. Work was relentless. It didn’t matter if it rained or we got sick. There was no chance to dream,” she recalls.



The first tea workers were brought to Sylhet in the mid-1800s from the Indian states of Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha under British colonial rule. Recruitment agents known as “arkattis” enticed impoverished villagers with false promises of easy money. Some were told that gold could be found by digging the soil.

Tea workers remain one of the most deprived communities in Bangladesh. They have no rights to the remote, hilly land they live on. Access to education, healthcare and water is minimal. For a long time, they were not even allowed to vote. They remain among the lowest paid workers in the country, long trapped in a cycle of plucking tea leaves, largely excluded from the mainstream.

But a new wave is gripping the tea estates. Slow changes with every new generation have culminated in a new era. Now they can dream of leaving the gardens.

TRICKED, TRAPPED, EXPLOITED

The first tea workers were brought to Sylhet in the mid-1800s from the Indian states of Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha under British colonial rule. Recruitment agents known as “arkattis” enticed impoverished villagers with false promises of easy money. Some were told that gold could be found by digging the soil.

The Labour Immigration Act of 1863 formalised the trap, establishing a legal framework for transporting labour — what many describe as a system of modern slavery. Workers were legally bound to plantations, losing their freedom to move or work elsewhere. They faced disease, poisonous snakes, wild animals and brutal treatment while being forced to build lavish bungalows for the “shahebs”.

After some 50 years of abuse, on May 20, 1921, thousands of workers set off for their homeland under the slogan

Mulluk Cholo — “return to homeland”. Armed British forces stopped them. Hundreds were reportedly shot dead. Those who fled were caught, tortured and sent back to work. Returning home was no longer an option.

According to Farida Yasmin, statistics officer at the Bangladesh Tea Board, there are 116,762 registered tea workers across 166 gardens. Union leaders estimate that nearly 10 lakh people live within tea garden communities.

Kamran Tanvirur Rahman, chairman of the Bangladesh Tea Association, believes tea workers enjoy more facilities than workers in other industries.

Workers and international organisations say otherwise. A 2017 study by the International Labour Organization found 63 percent of workers at risk from working conditions — 84 percent experience headaches, 74 percent muscular pain, 71 percent back pain, 65 percent skin diseases.

In the tea gardens of Moulvibazar, Habiganj and Sylhet, the leprosy rate is one in 1,700 people — compared to the national rate of one in 57,000, according to Philip Gain, founder director of the Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD), who has documented the exploitation of tea workers for over three decades.

Wages remain a central issue. In 2022, after a mass movement, daily wages were raised from Tk 120 to Tk 170. By 2025, they stand at Tk 187, far

below the workers’ demand of Tk 300. Payment delays sometimes stretch to 20 weeks.

Kamran argues that workers receive housing, rations at Tk 2 per kilogramme, free medical care and free education. “Together, they get above Tk 500” when in-kind benefits are included.

Land ownership remains out of reach entirely. “They have no land rights. They never did,” says Gain. “The land they live on belongs to the government, leased to the companies — 20 to 40 years depending on the garden category. When leases are renewed, the government could grant rights to the workers. There has been no sign of that intention so far.”

THE WINDS OF CHANGE

The first major wave of change came by the time Bangladesh achieved independence. Voting rights and awareness regarding education had touched even the tea estates.

Thandharana’s daughter-in-law, Savitri Naidu, 50, studied up to HSC before financial constraints forced her to stop. There was no secondary school inside the estates — there still isn’t in most of them, only primary schools. Continuing would have meant more strain on the family. Savitri came back. She picked leaves. She raised Chompa. “She’s my pride,” Savitri says. “She’s the first from the garden to get a PhD.”

But Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmmed of the Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS) argues that the celebration around such milestones masks a deeper failure. “This community has been part of our nation for nearly 200 years. In villages elsewhere, a PhD today is unremarkable. By that measure, a doctor from a tea garden was not even supposed to be newsworthy.”

“The backwardness and discrimination against them are so acute that it should be a source of shame for the nation — that an entire community has been kept confined like this. Not just physically, within the garden boundaries. We have confined their thinking too: that nothing more is possible, that their children can at best become labourers, or if lucky, a low-level clerk. They must be freed from

that,” he says.

A 2025 study of tea garden schools, published in the European Journal of Inclusive Education, found that seven in ten parents in these communities cannot read, that most girl students feel unsafe travelling to school, and that more than half of all tea garden children report hostility from classmates and teachers.

Gain notes that this year, children from tea gardens enrolled in 33 universities — but adds that the quality of education inside the gardens remains poor. Many schools have one teacher per class; some pay teachers daily wages.

Language compounds the barrier. “Many children do not speak Bangla fluently, and mainstream society,” he says, “tends to be hostile toward them.”

Chompa grew up inside the gardens with the same constraints. But with help and hard work, she achieved milestones that many can’t.

In 2007, she sat a competitive exam and won admission to Camellia Duncan Foundation School, a residential institution for the children of garden workers. She completed her SSC in 2012 with a GPA of 5, her HSC in 2014 with the same, while receiving a monthly scholarship from the Dutch Bangla Foundation. An Indian Council for Cultural Relations scholarship took her to India, twice. She is now completing her PhD at Andhra University.

“My mother believed deeply in the transformative power of education,” Chompa says. “Though resources were scarce, she ensured that my studies continued. Whatever I have achieved is not mine alone. It is rooted in her resilience and the encouragement of my family, teachers, mentors and well-wishers.”

“A turning point came when I enrolled at Camellia Duncan Foundation School, which provided free education, accommodation and exposure beyond the estate.”

Tapan Dutta, divisional president of Bangladesh Trade Union Kendra (TUC) for Chattogram and a former member of the interim government’s Labour Reform Commission, notes that some material changes are also visible.

Transportation and housing have improved since the pre-independence

era, he says, though from a very low baseline. “The roads used to be broken, full of holes and mud. Now they have better ones. Many now take loans from NGOs to buy motorcycles and transport people from one garden to another. This has become a popular source of income.”

Ahmmed of BILS is direct about what still needs to change. “The garden-based education system is in a sorry state. There are no skill development centres. Special health facilities must be ensured. Above all, space must be created for them to practise their social and cultural heritage. Discriminatory laws must be repealed or amended. They must be brought into the mainstream.”

ROOTS, ROUTES, RESILIENCE

Like Chompa’s mother, a growing number of tea workers have recognised that education leads to better jobs, and better jobs to financial stability.

Take the case of Bijay Rudra Paul of Dhamai Tea Garden. He could not afford to sit his SSC in 2000 or 2001. He finally sat it in 2002, with money he earned working as a bicycle mechanic, while supporting his family. He enrolled in college in 2006 on a para-teacher’s salary of Tk 500 a month, doing private tutoring on the side. He passed his HSC in 2008, joined a government job in 2009 and completed his MSS while working.

In 2010, he established Chhota Dhamai Ideal Academy, where around a hundred students now study. He later launched the Shila Merit Scholarship Project, named after his mother, tracking A+ students from 92 tea gardens across Moulvibazar and rewarding them from his own pocket.

Pranesh Goala, son of a tea worker, has been elected chairman of Kalighat Union three consecutive terms. “This would have been almost impossible 40 years ago. The people of the tea gardens are no longer just voters; they are now part of leadership and decision-making.”

But many remain confined to a meagre existence, finding ways within it or beyond. Kanai Lal Bhar of Palkichara Tea Garden cultivates vegetables on rented land. “If we depend only on the garden wage, the future is dark,” he says. Subash Rabidas, from Kaliti Tea Garden, took a factory job for a fixed monthly salary.

Maloti Ghatual of Begumkhan Tea Garden works outside the plantation cutting soil when garden work dries up. “I want them to live a more secure life than mine,” she says of her children.

Sohag Chhatrri, 35, is plain about it: “Our generation has to learn multiple jobs at once. Otherwise, it is difficult to survive.”

Gain puts it in generational terms: “This is the fifth generation of tea garden families. Change is happening — but measured against national progress, they remain far behind.”

Most are still deprived of their basic rights. But now, every morning, uniformed teenagers walk the sandy path between the tea rows toward the school, moving through the same green canopy their grandparents worked beneath.



PHOTOS:
MINTU DESHWARA