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Repeal of SC ordinances may return courts to political captivity
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'Islamisation in Bengal has no parallel in South Asia'
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LDC GRADUATION

UN report flags serious gaps in readiness

US-Israel war on Iran hurting Bangladesh economy as risks mount over export loss

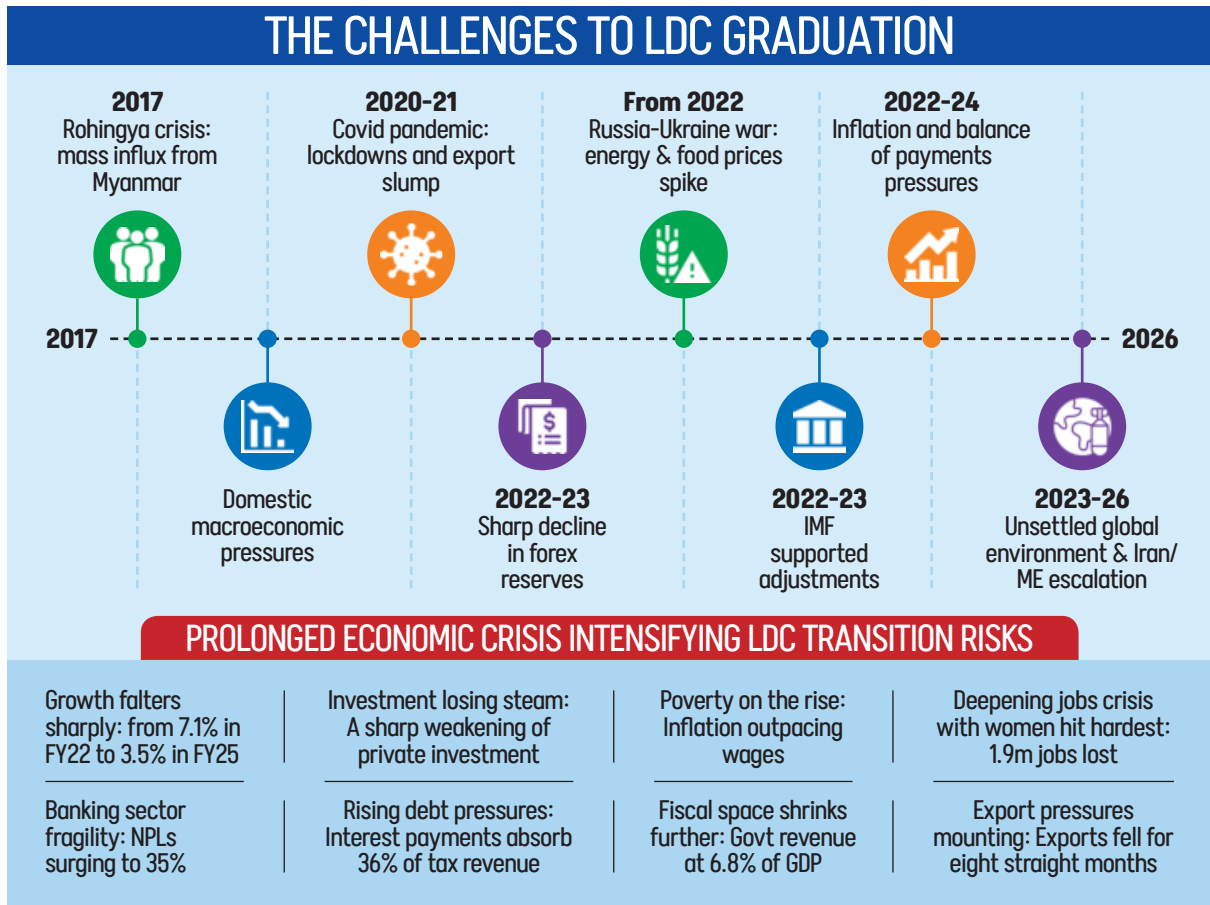
REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Bangladesh's readiness for graduation from least developed country status in November this year has been undermined by domestic and international crises, a UN assessment warns, with the US-Israel war on Iran adding a new threat.

The report, released yesterday, underscores a series of shocks the country has faced between 2017 and 2026. These include continued exposure to climate vulnerability; the Rohingya crisis; a prolonged macroeconomic downturn predating the regime change; Covid-19 fallout; political transition; the Russia-Ukraine war; inflation; and balance of payments pressures.

An expert panel of the United Nations Office of the High

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



'Ordinance repeal could have been handled better'

BNP leaders at Standing Committee meeting

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

Some senior BNP leaders have expressed disappointment with the way the repeal of several key ordinances, issued during the interim government, was handled.

They said the issue was poorly managed despite there being valid grounds for the move. As a result, the opposition is now using it to mobilise protests and question the ruling party's stance on the July charter, which could have been avoided with clearer and more timely public communication.

At a meeting of the Standing Committee, the highest policymaking body of the BNP, at its chairman's Gulshan office on Saturday night, they said that as an all-party parliamentary

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

Imported energy accounts for 59% of trade gap

Bangladesh's heavy reliance becoming structural burden, says global report

ASIFUR RAHMAN

Nearly three-fifths of Bangladesh's trade deficit is now driven by fossil fuel imports, underscoring how the country's growing reliance on imported energy has become a major structural burden on the economy, said the UK-based energy think-tank Ember.

The trade deficit in fiscal 2024-25 stood at \$20 billion, down from \$22 billion in fiscal 2023-24, according to Bangladesh Bank.

Heavy reliance on imported energy also leaves countries vulnerable to external disruptions, the report said, adding that geopolitical tensions in the Middle East have once again highlighted these risks. The cost of these imports has risen sharply as a result.

A trade deficit is an economic condition where a country imports more goods and services than it exports.

Spending on foreign oil and gas accounts for nearly \$0.60 of every dollar in the country's trade deficit, said the report titled "The Electric Fast-Track for Emerging Markets".

The report describes such spending as a persistent economic burden because it represents a recurring outflow of foreign currency rather than an investment that generates domestic economic value.

Ember prepared the analysis in partnership with the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), of which Bangladesh is a founding member.

Only 10 out of 74 member countries of the CVF produce enough

SEE PAGE 2 COL 7

US forces recover F-15 pilot in Iran

Trump hails rescue as 'one of the most daring' in its history; Iran says it 'foiled' mission after downing four US aircraft

AGENCIES

President Donald Trump yesterday said US forces safely extracted a second airman downed in Iran, calling it "one of the most daring Search and Rescue Operations" in its history.

Meanwhile, Iran said it had "completely foiled" the rescue operation and distributed images appearing to show the wreckage of several aircraft but did not confirm whether it had captured the US serviceman or that US forces had recovered him.

After announcing the rescue, Trump threatened in an expletive-laden post to strike Iran's power plants and bridges if it does not reopen the vital Strait of Hormuz.

The war, which erupted on February 28 with US-Israeli strikes on Iran, has engulfed the Middle East and convulsed the global economy. Iran has virtually blocked the Strait of Hormuz shipping lane, a conduit for roughly one-fifth of global oil trade, and launched strikes on Israel and its Gulf neighbours.

Trump warned Iran to stop choking traffic through Hormuz. "Open the f***ing Strait, you crazy bas****s, or you'll be living in Hell," he said in his social media post. The Daily Star has used asterisks in the quote due to obscene language.

Trump's warning came as the Omani and Iranian deputy foreign ministers reportedly held talks on easing passage through Hormuz.

RESCUE OPERATION

Trump said on Truth Social that the airman had been "behind enemy lines in the treacherous



- Trump threatens strikes on Iran's infrastructure if Hormuz remains closed
- Iran targets energy facilities in Kuwait, Bahrain, Abu Dhabi
- Hezbollah launches cruise missile at Israeli warship
- Oman and Iran hold talks on Strait of Hormuz

mountains of Iran, being hunted down by our enemies".

"He sustained injuries, but he will be just fine.

"This miraculous Search and Rescue Operation comes in addition to a successful

SEE PAGE 2 COL 7



A child receives a measles shot at the Nagar Matrisadan Health Centre in Barishal city's Kaunia area amid a sudden outbreak. A special emergency vaccination drive was launched yesterday across 30 upazilas in 18 districts, targeting children aged six months to five years. Story on page 12.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

SPORT



'Plenty of time left for politics, not much for cricket'

Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan says his priority is returning home after nearly two years abroad. While legal hurdles have complicated his comeback, the former Member of Parliament remains hopeful of resolving the issues soon and resuming cricket. The 39-year-old said time in sport is limited compared to politics, adding that he intends to continue in politics.

****Read full interview on P11**

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SHELTECH

Revisiting the city's social and cultural past

One of the book's strengths is the historical anecdotes it brings to light.



The narrative also uncovers lesser-known chapters of the city's history. According to the book, in 1790, foreign soldiers introduced horsecarriages for hire, marking an early chapter in public transportation in the city. The book also traces the origins of Ramna Park.

Speaking about the book, Akram emphasises the responsibility that

In that sense, Punashcha Dhaka works both as a collection of history and an invitation to rediscover the city. By bringing together archival sources, stories, and research, Ridwan Akram reminds readers that beneath Dhaka's busy present lies a rich past that still echoes through its streets.

Citing economists and other stakeholders consulted for the assessment, the report said rising import costs for fossil fuels create severe operational constraints

MAJOR ECONOMIC LOOPHOLES

Speaking about transition risks, the report mentioned

Bangladesh is also unprepared for the

As the largest LDC and the biggest beneficiary of international support measures, Bangladesh faces a uniquely complex transition. The process is

It said Bangladesh must urgently focus on nine priority areas: securing EU market access, stabilising

Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir, PM's adviser on finance and planning, said structural transformation, diversification, competitiveness, and productivity gains are essential to achieve the vision of a "Trillion Dollar Economy" by 2034.

On another front, Lebanon has increasingly been drawn into the conflict since the Iran-backed Hezbollah group

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi warned that continued attacks on the plant on the southern coast could eventually lead to radioactive fallout that would "end life in GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) capitals, not Tehran".

Bushehr is considerably closer to Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar than it is to the Iranian capital.

Spot LNG prices also climbed above \$20 per MMBtu, compared with roughly \$9-10 per MMBtu under long-term contracts.

As a result, managing the economic impact of energy imports will remain a major policy challenge for Bangladesh in the coming years, the report added.

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PM seeks support
of all faiths for
prosperous country

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister
Tarique Rahman
yesterday sought
cooperation
from people of all
religions to build a
happy, prosperous
and better Bangladesh.

“Let us all work together, regardless of religion or background, to build a happy, prosperous and better Bangladesh. People of all religions and communities must come forward for the greater cause of the country,” he said.

The prime minister made the call while exchanging Easter greetings with leaders of the Protestant Church at the Cabinet Room of the Prime Minister's Office in the Secretariat, according to his Additional Press Secretary Atikur Rahman Rumon.

A 13-member delegation, led by Bishop Philip P Adhikari, president of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Bangladesh, met the prime minister around 11:45am and exchanged views with him on the occasion of Easter Sunday.

Addressing the gathering, Rumon said the prime minister wished success and prosperity for the Christian community.



Accumulated waste pollutes the water and mars the scenic beauty of Gulshan Lake in Dhaka. The photo was taken near the Tejgaon-Gulshan Link Road yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

DMP FOOTPATH DRIVE

44 held, Tk 10 lakh
fine realised in 5 days

Vendors demand rehabilitation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 44 people were arrested, and around Tk 10 lakh was realised as fines during a five-day drive by the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) to reclaim encroached footpaths and roads in the capital.

The drive, which began on April 1 and ended yesterday, was carried out in different areas under the DMP's Lalbagh, Wari, Ramna, Mirpur, Motijheel, Tejgaon, Gulshan, and Uttara traffic divisions.

Additional Commissioner (Traffic) Anisur Rahman said follow-up operations will be conducted in the cleared areas to prevent reoccupation.

“We will continue monitoring so that encroachers cannot return. Our next steps will be announced through mass awareness campaigns,” he said.

He also said the government is actively working on the issue of evicted vendors' rehabilitation. “Initially, vendors may be accommodated in eight designated locations through holiday and night markets,” he added.

My daughter is a college student, and my husband is ill and unable to earn. I support my family through this business, but the eviction drive destroyed my livelihood.

SUMAIYA

A footpath vendor at Mirpur-10

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

NCP slams repeal of
reform ordinances,
warns of protests

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

National Citizen Party (NCP) spokesperson Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuyain yesterday protested the government's move to repeal several key ordinances issued by the interim government and warned of a larger movement.

Recall what happened in the past, learn from that experience, and show goodwill so we can build a better Bangladesh together.

“We call on the government to come to its senses. Recall what happened in the past, learn from that experience, and show goodwill so we can build a better Bangladesh together. Otherwise, we will have no option but to launch another movement, which will be a loss for the country,” he said at a press conference at the NCP central office in Banglamotor.

Asif alleged that ordinances strengthening the powers of the prime minister and the executive are being retained, while those ensuring public accountability are being repealed.

“This is a serious threat to democracy and a violation of the Constitution. If

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Dhaka Wasa turns to
groundwater despite
unfinished projectsTk 920cr ‘emergency’ plan draws criticism; experts
warn of falling water table, long-term risks

DIPAN NANDY

Despite growing concerns over the fast-depleting groundwater table, Dhaka Wasa is set to seek Ecne's approval for a Tk 920.85 crore “emergency” water supply project that will rely on groundwater extraction.

Titled “Emergency Water Supply in Dhaka City”, the proposed project aims to add 57 crore litres of water per day by replacing deep tube wells, installing new ones, and regenerating existing wells, according to project documents.

The project is likely to be placed at an Executive Committee of the National

**Wasa's goal was to reduce groundwater dependence, but failure to complete ongoing projects while returning to large-scale extraction is unsustainable.**PROF ADIL MOHAMMED KHAN
Urban planner

Economic Council (Ecne) meeting today. If approved, it would be implemented from January 2026 to June 2030

with government funding.

The move comes at a time when two of Dhaka Wasa's surface water projects, aimed at ensuring a sustainable water supply for the capital, remain incomplete.

It also triggered concern among experts, who say the initiative reflects a growing dependence on short-term fixes while structural solutions continue to face delays.

The projects -- Gandharbpur Water Treatment Plant (Phase I) and Saidabad Water Treatment Plant (Phase 3) -- were designed to shift the city away from its heavy reliance on groundwater. Once

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4

Govt renames
Baishakh
procession
'Baishakhi
Shobhajatra'

STAR REPORT

Cultural Affairs Minister Nitai Roy Chowdhury yesterday said the government has decided to rename the Bangla New Year procession as “Baishakhi Shobhajatra”, forgoing the terms “Ananda Shobhajatra” and “Mangal Shobhajatra”.

“We will not call it ‘Ananda Shobhajatra’ or ‘Mangal Shobhajatra’. The procession will simply be referred to as ‘Baishakhi Shobhajatra’,” he told reporters after a meeting at the Secretariat.

The minister said the government finalised the new name after discussions at multiple meetings to avoid division and end the ongoing debate over the traditional Pahela Baishakh procession's name.

“We do not want division

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

‘They killed my
son, destroyed
our dreams’Witness testifies at
ICT-1 against Salman F
Rahman, Anisul Huq

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A pall of grief engulfed the courtroom of the International Crimes Tribunal-1 yesterday as two bereaved family members recounted how their loved ones were gunned down in Mirpur-10 during the July uprising, testifying in a crimes against humanity case filed against former adviser Salman F Rahman and former law minister Anisul Huq.

Abdul Matin, father of Sheikh Shahriar Bin Matin, broke down to tears during cross-examination, holding up a laminated photograph of his son before the tribunal.

“Sir, this is my son's picture. They brutally killed my son and destroyed our family's dreams,” he said.

Fighting back tears, he described Shahriar as just 18 years old, a student sitting for his HSC examinations, whose education he had sustained through immense hardship.

When the defence sought to disclose his workplace, prosecutors intervened, warning that witnesses in similar cases had lost their jobs after being identified.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8



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KILLINGS OF SIX IN CTG

Charges against Hasan Mahmud, Nowfel pressed at ICT-2

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The prosecution yesterday pressed formal charges with the International Crimes Tribunal-2 accusing former ministers Hasan Mahmud and Mohibul Hassan Chowdhury Nowfel, former lawmaker ABM Fazle Karim Chowdhury and 19 others of crimes against humanity over killing six people and injuring over 100 others during the July 2024 uprising in Chattogram.

The prosecution of the International Crimes Tribunal yesterday submitted formal charges in the case to the tribunal's registrar office. The tribunal is expected to hold a hearing on the charges today before ICT-2.

The case earlier drew attention after allegations surfaced that a prosecutor had sought Tk 1 crore from Fazle Karim's family in exchange for arranging his bail in the crimes against humanity case.

According to the prosecution, the accused faces three charges.

The first charge relates to the killing of Wasim Akram, Faysal Ahmed Shanto and Faruq Ahmed during the uprising. The second charge concerns the killing of Tanvir Siddiquee, Saimon alias Mahin and Hridoy Chandra on August 4. The third charge involves the injuring of Jahid Hasan, Abdullah Kader, Achiya Khatun, Sanjida Sultana and Abdullah Lubab, along with more than a hundred others.

Other accused in the case include Awami League leader and former mayor of Chattogram City Corporation AJM Nasir Uddin; Awami League leader Rezaul Karim Chowdhury; Md Mohiuddin Bacchu; Helal Akbar Chowdhury Babor; former Chattogram city unit BCL general secretary Nurul Azim Rony; former ward-21 councillor Shaibal Das Sumon; Md Firoz; Abu Salek; Esrarul Haque; HM Mithu; Nur Mostafa Tinu; Debashish Paul Debu; Zamir Uddin; Azizur Rahman; Imran Ahmed Imu; Zakaria Dastagir; Mohiuddin Farhad; Sumon Dey and Tauhidul Islam.

Besides, the defence lawyer of Shahriar Kabir, former president of the Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee, sought divisional facilities for him in jail before International Crimes Tribunal-1.

The tribunal said it would consider the request in accordance with the rules. Shahriar is currently in jail in a case over the 2013 Shapla Chatarrakshak killings.

In the same case, the prosecution sought permission to interrogate former deputy inspector general Abdul Jalil Mondal. The tribunal granted the request.

Additionally, the tribunal allowed a defence prayer permitting accused army officer Lt Col Moshir Rahman Jewel to meet his wife, who is expecting a baby. As per the order of the tribunal, he will be allowed to meet her at the Combined Military Hospital during his wife's tough time.

NCP slams repeal

FROM PAGE 3
challenged in court, such laws may not stand," he said.

He claimed that institutions like the judiciary and the Anti-Corruption Commission are again becoming vulnerable to political influence, despite earlier criticism over their politicisation.

He also questioned the government's commitment to constitutional principles, citing the appointment of administrators instead of elected representatives in local government bodies. According to him, existing provisions allow the executive to remove elected officials at will, posing a threat to democratic processes.

Asif further criticised the repeal of privacy protections under the Right to Information framework, warning that multiple agencies could regain the power to intercept phone calls and private communications without proper judicial oversight.

"Dictatorships are born this way. We are seeing the signs again," he said.

He also warned that if the government does not accept the outcome of the recent referendum and enact reform-related ordinances into law, the NCP may declare the process illegitimate and intensify its movement.

Asif said the party had initially planned to focus on organisational work and local government elections but was forced to take to the streets due to government

inaction.

He also urged former advisers involved in drafting the ordinances to speak up in defence of constitutional rights.

He demanded that reform-related ordinances be enacted into law and that previous provisions introduced under special circumstances be repealed to demonstrate genuine commitment.

Govt renames

FROM PAGE 3
or conflict among people. We want unity in diversity," he said. He added that in a democratic society, people of different opinions and ideologies coexist, and such diversity reflects its strength.

The minister said the procession is a long-standing cultural tradition inherited from earlier generations, particularly from the farming community.

"As their successors, we find ourselves debating the name, and we want to resolve this issue," he said.

The minister said the procession will be organised with dignity and inclusivity, allowing people to participate with their own traditions, music, instruments, and attire.

"People will take part with their own cultural expressions, making it a festive and inclusive procession," he added.

He said the new name reflects the broader spirit of Baishakh, similar to how events like Baishakhi fairs are referred to.



Sat Tala slum dwellers illegally park their rickshaws and rickshaw-vans inside an old health office compound near the slum in the capital's Mohakhali area. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Fuel shortage halts Barishal trawlers, leaves fishers idle

Fish supply in local markets drops sharply

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

Thousands of fishermen across Barishal division have been passing idle days and suffering financial losses as most fishing trawlers are left anchored at docks amid the ongoing fuel shortage.

This in turn has disrupted the supply of fish in local markets to a significant extent.

More than 1,000 sea-going trawlers remain stranded in Alipur and Mohipur, leaving over one lakh fishermen and workers unemployed. Investors in the fishing sector are facing significant losses, particularly those operating with bank loans.

Pritam Das, owner of two trawlers that have remained docked at Mohipur river port since Eid, said each needs around 14 barrels of fuel per trip, but they have not been able to collect any fuel from dealers in Kalapara.

"As such, around 50 fishermen and crew members of the two trawlers are now sitting idle. We are spending nearly Tk 50,000 daily just to maintain them," he said, adding that despite informing the district fisheries office and the upazila administration, there has been no effective solution yet.

Abdul Jalil, owner of Messrs Moni Fish, said he owns six trawlers and has investments in around 200 others. "All of those are now stuck at the port amid fuel shortage," he added.

He explained that large trawlers require 20-30 barrels of fuel per trip, medium-sized ones need 10-15 barrels, and smaller vessels need at least two barrels. A typical fishing trip lasts around 10 days.

"No one is addressing our situation.

Thousands of fishermen and workers have become jobless. Many had previously taken bank loans and are now facing severe financial hardship," he added.

Md Israil Pandit, president of a fishers' association in Barishal division, said the crisis has severely affected around 5,00,000 fishing families.

The impact has also affected related industries. Fish supply to markets across Barishal has declined sharply, prompting a drop in ice production due to reduced demand, according to the Barishal Divisional Fisheries Office.



According to wholesale fish traders at the Port Road Market in Barishal city, they are now selling around 500 maunds of fish daily, half of what they used to sell daily around this time last year.

Gulam Kabir, an official of Barishal Ice Mill Owners' Association, said the demand for ice has fallen to only 200-250 maunds against the total production capacity of 1,500-1,600 maunds in the region's five ice mills.

Retail ice trader Suman said he usually sells

15-20 maunds of ice at Tk 400 per maund, but sales have dropped significantly due to the shortage of fish in the market.

According to Mohammad Anisuzzaman, senior assistant director of the Department of Fisheries in Barishal, fish supply at 108 landing stations across the division has declined by more than 30 percent, leading to an increase in price by 20-100 percent.

He also noted that a seasonal ban on sea fishing is scheduled to begin on March 15, but fishermen have already been unable to go to sea due to the fuel crisis.

"They have requested fuel support so they can at least make one trip before the ban," he added.

Meanwhile, some 2,30,389 of the around 3,00,000 registered fishermen in the division are currently receiving government food assistance, officials said.

Contacted, Anisur Rahman, a senior sales officer of Meghna Petroleum Company, denied any overall fuel supply shortage. He claimed that the company is meeting around 90 percent of demand, supplying up to 2,50,000 litres of fuel daily to 29 petrol pumps and 68 dealers in the region.

He, however, admitted that fishing trawlers have not been receiving fuel since Eid. "Following a request from the Kalapara upazila nirbahi officer, we have supplied around 27,000 litres of fuel to two local dealers for distribution," he added.

Confirming the development, Kalapara UNO Kawsar Hameed said 27,000 litres of fuel, allocated to two dealers in Kalapara, are being distributed among fishers.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

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Date: 5 April, 2026

Corrigendum

e-Tender ID No.	Original Last Date of Submission	Revised Last Date of Submission	Original Last Date of Opening	Revised Last Date of Opening
1244349	07/04/2026 15:00 (GMT+06:00)	21/04/2026 15:00 (GMT+06:00)	07/04/2026 15:00 (GMT+06:00)	21/04/2026 15:00 (GMT+06:00)

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

(Signature)
05.04.2026

Mir Zahid Hasan
Project Director (Additional Secretary)
ASSET Project
Telephone: 880-02-41024953
E-mail: pd@asset-dte.gov.bd

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e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP system portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd/>) for the procurement of the following goods:

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01	1251264	Replacement of Car Engine for BSCL Car No. Dhaka Metro Gha-15 7945	Ref:14.39.0000.000.012.07.0003.23.94(T) Date: 22.10.25	06-Apr-2026 Time: 10:00 AM	12-Apr-2026 Time: 17:00 PM	13-Apr-2026 Time: 17:00 PM

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. The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from National e-GP System portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank's branches. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP system portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

(Signed)
Md. Golam Sarwar
General Manager (Admin & Procurement)
Bangladesh Satellite Company Limited.

GD-728

Request for Quotation (RFQ) for Cleaning and Maintenance Services for BRAC Bank PLC.

BRAC Bank PLC. delivers a full array of banking services to individuals and businesses through a network of 194 Branches, 116 Sub-branches, 330 ATMs, 446 SME Unit Offices and 1,120 Agent Banking Outlets across the country. The Bank is currently seeking vendor(s) to provide **Cleaning and Maintenance Services** to ensure hygiene and cleanliness across its facilities. A pre-bid meeting has also been scheduled in this regard.

A Technical Request for Quotation (RFQ) is hereby issued for this purpose. The RFQ, along with details of the pre-bid meeting and the bidding process, can be found on the bank's website: <https://www.bracbank.com/en/page/e-tender>

Interested eligible bidders are requested to submit their technical offers as per Instruction to Bidder (ITB) outlined in the bidding process.

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GD-725

Director General

Request for Quotation (RFQ) for Cleaning and Maintenance Services for BRAC Bank PLC.

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BRAC BANK

আবদুল আজিজ

Yet another tragic fire at a factory

Govt must ensure Keraniganj factory fire is the last of such accidents

It is outrageous that fires at illegally-run factories keep claiming lives in our country, while authorities continue to produce patchwork solutions to address these recurring man-made disasters. On Sunday, a fire at a gas lighter manufacturing plant in Keraniganj took the lives of at least six people, including a young girl, and injured at least 15. It is feared that the death toll may rise, as several workers are still missing.

According to locals, there were at least 40 workers on the factory premises—mostly women and children—and many could not escape through the main gate, as it was locked during the fire. Although it was opened later, many workers had to find alternative ways to escape. This reminds us of the incident at the Rupnagar garment factory, where a chemical fire at an adjacent building took the lives of 16 workers, including minors, last year. They too could not escape the smoke and toxic fumes because the door to the roof was padlocked. Another disturbing similarity the Keraniganj fire shares with the Rupnagar fire is the lack of fire safety measures. Worse still, the factory was closed following a fire in 2024; yet it kept on operating without legal papers.

Sadly, similar disregard for the law appears to persist among many enterprises and business owners in this country. Otherwise, how can hazardous factories continue to operate in residential areas, as in the case of Rupnagar, or a minor as young as 12 work in a gas lighter manufacturing plant, as in Keraniganj? In fact, the way almost every unlicensed hazardous factory operates in Bangladesh is itself an accident waiting to happen. Thus, it is not a surprise that many of them lack fire safety measures or even a proper evacuation plan in case of fire.

While we appreciate that ministers visited the scene and announced financial help and medical treatment for the victims, this is not where their responsibility ends. The factory owner must be brought to justice, and the departments that failed to ensure that the shuttered factory remained closed must also be held accountable. Two probe committees were formed to investigate the incident, but such actions in the past have done little to prevent similar accidents from recurring. Therefore, we urge the government to take stern action based on the findings of the probe reports. The government must ensure that the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments has the manpower and resources to conduct routine drives against hazardous factories that operate without legal documentation or employ minors. Meanwhile, relevant authorities must ensure that all businesses and private enterprises have fire and building safety protocols and systems in place. Labour may be cheap in Bangladesh, but it must never be mistaken for cheap lives.

Protect Narsingdi's rivers

Stop polluters, restore navigability

It is deeply concerning that rivers flowing through Narsingdi are facing a severe environmental crisis. Once vital lifelines sustaining surrounding communities and ecosystems, rivers such as the Shitalakkhya, Meghna, Brahmaputra, Arial Kha, Haridhoa, and Paharia are now being pushed to the brink by the unchecked discharge of untreated industrial waste. A report in this daily has laid bare the scale of degradation, exposing the long standing failure of authorities to regulate industrial pollution in the district.

Over the years, rapid and unplanned industrial expansion along riverbanks has gone on with little regard for environmental protection. Factories have been releasing toxic effluent directly into rivers, severely contaminating the water. Illegal encroachment along the riverbanks has further worsened the situation. For much of the year, even small boats struggle to navigate many rivers due to reduced flow. Several rivers now have critically low dissolved oxygen levels. Even during the monsoon, when water levels typically rise, oxygen remains dangerously low, making survival difficult for fish and other aquatic life.

Among these rivers, the 38-km Haridhoa ranks second among the most polluted rivers in the country. According to a study by the River and Delta Research Centre, its dissolved oxygen level has dropped to a shocking 0.6 mg/L—far below what is needed to sustain aquatic life—while its alkalinity poses serious risks to biodiversity and human health. Although Tk 10 crore was allocated a year ago to address pollution in the river, the funds have yet to be fully disbursed. Such delays allow environmental degradation to continue unchecked. Meanwhile, initiatives such as re-excavating river channels to restore navigability are unlikely to succeed unless pollution is effectively checked.

In 2019, the High Court delivered a landmark judgment declaring rivers as “living entities” and appointing the then National River Protection Commission (now the National River Conservation Commission) as their legal guardian. The court also issued a series of directives to protect our rivers. Sadly, little has changed since then, with most of our rivers still on the verge of destruction. This situation cannot be allowed to continue.

We urge the government to take bold, decisive action against polluters and encroachers. Regulatory bodies, including the Department of Environment and the National River Conservation Commission, must step up efforts to protect the rivers in Narsingdi and throughout the country. Polluting industries must also be compelled to install and operate effluent treatment plants without exception. Without urgent and visible action, too many of our rivers could soon reach a point of no recovery.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

US officially enters World War I

On this day in 1917, two days after the US Senate voted 82 to 6 to declare war against Germany, the US House of Representatives endorses the declaration by a vote of 373 to 50. As a result, America formally entered World War I.

When reform becomes more power, less accountability



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KAMAL AHMED

With the parliamentary politics once again becoming vibrant and engaging, a clear fault line is gradually emerging between the ruling party, BNP, and the opposition, Jamaat-e-Islami (JI). Not too long ago, these two parties were political allies—both in government and in opposition—jointly leading street movements against the rise of authoritarian rule under Sheikh Hasina and her Awami League. Their eventual split largely stemmed from a redrawing of the country's political landscape following the uprising against Hasina's dictatorial regime, which ultimately consigned her party to political irrelevance.

Both parties have been victims of egregious abuses of power, including the criminalisation of state institutions under Hasina's rule. They endured severe persecution—enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, fabricated charges, prolonged detention without trial, and brutal physical violence. At one point, their political futures appeared nearly extinguished due to the judiciary's partisan alignment with the executive. In response, both parties championed sweeping reforms in governance and key state institutions, particularly the judiciary, security apparatus, and law enforcement,

The 13-member parliamentary committee also proposed that 15 ordinances be introduced in amended form, while 16 others should be deferred for further revision rather than presented as bills now. Most strikingly, the committee recommended scrapping four ordinances outright, three of which relate to judicial reforms widely considered essential for ensuring judicial independence.

with a shared commitment to accountability and the rule of law.

In the newly redrawn political landscape, both parties continue to profess support for fundamental reforms, though their interpretations diverge significantly. The reform process initiated by the interim government led by Professor Yunus—through 11 thematic commissions and a National Consensus Commission—resulted in the July National Charter as well as 133 ordinances aimed at overhauling governance and state institutions. Subsequently, the newly elected Jatiya Sangshad formed a parliamentary committee

that recommended legal validation of 98 of these ordinances without amendment. At first glance, such broad agreement might suggest an impressive level of political consensus.

A closer examination, however, reveals a far more troubling picture. The 13-member parliamentary committee also proposed that 15 ordinances be introduced in amended form, while 16 others



FILE VISUAL: ALIZA RAHMAN

to let certain ordinances lapse or be discarded. This raises concerns that Article 70 of the constitution—which restricts MPs from voting against party lines—is already being enforced, despite prior commitments by all parliamentary parties to limit the application of Article 70 to confidence votes and finance bills.

A review of the ordinances slated for approval, revision, or rejection suggests that the ruling BNP may be prioritising consolidation of power over accountability, contradicting its own 31-point reform agenda. Among the 98 ordinances likely to pass unchanged are provisions that expand executive authority, including powers to remove elected local government officials and discipline civil servants. Given Bangladesh's history of partisan interference in local governance, retaining such provisions risks replacing elected representatives with politically loyal administrators—an outcome that diverges sharply from BNP's stated commitments and undermines recommendations from the Local Government Reform Commission. Many of the remaining ordinances are administrative in nature and carry limited political significance.

The most contentious recommendation, however, is the decision to scrap three ordinances related to judicial independence, particularly those concerning judicial appointments and the establishment of a separate secretariat for the Supreme Court. These moves

effectively revive earlier practices that allowed significant executive influence over judicial appointments and the lower judiciary. This is especially striking given that many senior BNP leaders, including Tarique Rahman and Khaleda Zia, have themselves suffered from what many describe as the weaponisation of the judiciary under the previous regime. There are also suggestions that elements within the bureaucracy have resisted the creation of an independent judicial secretariat—claims that the government should address transparently to justify its position.

Equally concerning is the apparent retreat from efforts to strengthen institutional accountability. The parliamentary committee's recommendation to defer (meaning allowing to lapse) 16 ordinances includes key legislation such as reforms to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). Allowing this ordinance to lapse could effectively dismantle the current NHRC, which has arguably the potential to be the most effective in the country's history, as its members include experts who have investigated over 1,500 cases of enforced disappearance while leading a different probe commission. Reports indicate resistance from security agencies and bureaucratic actors to empowering the NHRC, particularly regarding its authority to investigate abuses and operate independently.

It is particularly troubling that a party with a significant number of victims of enforced disappearances now appears to accept national security justifications for limiting oversight. Such a position not only contradicts the spirit of the July mass uprising but also undermines fundamental human rights obligations. Mere pledges by the BNP to bring back these legislations with improved and stronger safeguards are least assuring, as such revisions could have been made during the ongoing process of validating other ordinances.

The opposition JI members of the committee are not without fault. Their revisionist proposals—particularly the suggestion to remove references to Jamaat-e-Islami, Muslim League, and Nezam-e-Islami as collaborators with Pakistani forces from the ordinance on Muktijoddha Council—are deeply problematic. This effort to sanitise historical wrongdoing avoids necessary accountability and reconciliation. A more responsible approach would involve acknowledging past actions and offering a formal apology. How JI's allies, especially the NCP, a party born out of the uprising and led by its youth leaders, respond to such revisionist tendencies remains to be seen.

Frugality is key to withstanding the energy shocks



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NAZMUN NAHER

Given the current worldwide energy crises, economic uncertainties, and rising geopolitical tensions, the principles of frugality and sustainable consumption are essential measures for preparing for major crises and conflicts. Practising mindful consumption today can strengthen us to withstand the shocks of tomorrow.

Frugality begins at home. Simple actions such as turning off lights and appliances when not in use, choosing energy-efficient devices, and minimising water wastage can reduce household energy consumption and contribute to broader resource conservation. Sustainable consumption also urges us to reconsider our purchasing habits, given that each unnecessary purchase carries hidden environmental costs such as the energy used in production, transportation, packaging, and disposal. Prioritising essential needs over wants can not only conserve resources but also builds financial resilience, which is crucial in times of crisis.

The government has already taken several measures to address energy shortages and resource management issues. Policies promoting energy efficiency, renewable energy adoption, regulated peak-hour electricity use, and public transport initiatives are steps in the right direction. However, the challenge lies in implementing and managing these measures effectively. Policies alone cannot achieve sustainable outcomes. Individuals must internalise these principles, ensuring that energy-saving behaviours, mindful consumption, and resource-conscious choices are practised consistently. Balancing economic development with energy conservation is delicate but essential. Of course, growth is necessary, but it must not come at the cost of depleting vital resources or weakening national resilience.

Travel, a significant contributor to energy consumption and carbon emissions, is another area where frugality matters. While mobility is important, frequent long-distance

trips or luxury travel during crises place additional strain on already struggling resources. Opting for local trips, combining journeys, or postponing non-essential travel reduces energy use, saves costs, and mitigates environmental impact. Using public transport, cycling, and carpooling further enhances sustainable practices while fostering collective preparedness.

Frugality is also a preparatory strategy for crisis management during wars or periods of geopolitical instability. Global conflicts often disrupt supply chains, increase resource scarcity, and create sudden pressures on energy or finances. Individuals and communities that practise frugality by conserving energy, limiting unnecessary consumption, and focusing on essential needs are naturally better equipped to withstand such shocks. Sustainable consumption becomes a form of strategic resilience, ensuring that families and societies can maintain stability even in extreme circumstances.

It should be noted that frugality does not equal deprivation. It is a deliberate, ethical approach to consumption that is guided by necessity, sustainability, and foresight. Every choice—from energy use to shopping habits to travel decisions—contributes to a better collective capacity for managing crises. Minimising food waste, choosing

reusable products, and supporting local goods reduce environmental pressures while building economic and social resilience. Each small action compounds to protect energy resources, reduce emissions, and maintain essential supply systems. Moreover, frugality reinforces national resilience. By limiting unnecessary expenditure and adopting energy-efficient practices, citizens contribute to the stability of the economy and the conservation of critical resources. In periods of conflict, the merit of these habits is felt strongly as they reduce dependence on strained supply chains and help create a buffer against sudden shortages.

Ultimately, sustainable consumption and frugality are essential acts of foresight and responsibility. Small, consistent choices can have far-reaching effects. The ongoing energy crisis, combined with global instability, demands that we embrace frugality as a guiding principle. By adopting sustainable consumption habits, supporting relevant policy measures, and prioritising essential needs, we can balance economic development with energy conservation while preparing for potential crises and conflicts. We must commit to frugality not as deprivation, but as a conscious strategy to ensure environmental sustainability, personal resilience, and societal preparedness.

Repeal of Supreme Court ordinances may return courts to political captivity



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KHAN KHALID ADNAN

The move to repeal the Supreme Court Secretariat Ordinance, 2025 and the Supreme Court Judges' Appointment Ordinance, 2025 is being presented as prudence. But it is actually the latest expression of an old political reflex: every ruling class in Bangladesh wants courts that speak the language of independence but operate within boundaries set elsewhere. Experts have seriously condemned and criticised the proposed repeal. The law minister's assurance that the texts can be scrutinised and returned later as bills should be read together with the rollback itself, not as a cure for it. Usually, first comes institutional retreat, then comes the promise of consultation, and then comes the graveyard of reform. Bangladesh has seen this script too many times now to mistake it for caution.

The real mistake in much of public discussion is to treat judicial independence as a noble abstraction. The issue is far more concrete and far uglier. A politically pliant judiciary helps governments do three things that raw executive power alone cannot do: it sanitises persecution, legitimises constitutional vandalism, and disciplines dissidents through procedure rather than openly through force. That is why these ordinances matter. They touch the two pressure points through which capture usually operates: who gets onto the bench and who controls judges once they are in office.

Anyone who thinks this is exaggeration should return to the 13th Amendment review judgment. The most damning passage in it is not the restoration of the caretaker framework, but the court's acknowledgement that, in the gap between the 2011 short order and the later full judgment, the judiciary appeared to have "buckled under the legislative pressure" (pp 59-61). That is an extraordinary admission. It amounts to a constitutional confession that the court could be bent at the very moment it was meant to operate in the nation's interest. Once the highest court says that politics may have shaped constitutional adjudication, appointments and institutional control cease to be technical questions and instead become factors influencing the survival of democracy. It is also noteworthy that former Chief Justice Khairul Haque, who authored the 13th Amendment judgment, has been in custody since July 24, 2025 (albeit on unrelated charges). The symbolism is difficult to ignore. The same pattern has been visible in other cases as well. Former Chief Justice SK Sinha



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

resigned following intense government pressure after the 16th Amendment judgment. He publicly denied claims of illness and stated he was forced to leave the country. He had to say openly before the media that he was neither sick, nor was he escaping, and that the government was misguided. In later interviews and in his book, *A Broken Dream*, he alleged intimidation by intelligence officials, coercion by senior state authorities (namely, the then prime minister, law minister, and attorney general) at Bangabhaban, and severe personal and institutional pressure to deliver a judgment favourable to the then government—which he had refused to do (pp 526-530).

In August 2024, then Chief Justice Obaidul Hassan and several Appellate Division judges resigned, again confirming how shattered

the August 8, 2024 regime change) describe the proceedings as a "manifestly contrived misapplication of the law" amounting to "malicious prosecution." This was not a minor judicial error, but a structural failure that demonstrated how laws can be weaponised when courts cease to function as independent adjudicators.

The historical justification for the repealed ordinances is, therefore, significant. Bangladesh's present situation is the result of a gradual weakening of constitutional safeguards. The original 1972 constitutional framework assigned the chief justice a role in judicial appointments, but later amendments and political practice steadily reduced the scope of the role. In practice, the consultation requirement was always limited, since Article 48(3) ensures that presidential authority

not to extend the same safeguard to Article 98, thus clearly violating the 1972 framework's structure. As a result, initial appointments to the High Court Division remain largely within executive control, creating space for political preference and favouritism.

The system relied on convention where firm legal limits were required, and that reliance proved misplaced. The 2008 attempt to establish a Supreme Judicial Commission was later abandoned with the return of electoral politics, not because it failed but because it restricted executive discretion. The underlying reality is clear: control over appointments is a source of power, and governments are reluctant to surrender it.

The Supreme Court Judges' Appointment Ordinance in particular was an attempt, admittedly an imperfect one, to replace that

opaque patronage system with a statutory process. The High Court itself (when asked to strike down parts of it) accepted that the existing scheme had defects and lacunae, noted the prevalence of political appointments, and described the ordinance as desirable in the national interest while leaving room for parliamentary debate and revision. That is the correct constitutional sequence: courts identify vulnerabilities and parliament improves the law. What the parliament must not do is destroy the framework first and promise improvement later. That is not refinement. It is a relapse.

The same is true of the Supreme Court Secretariat Ordinance. Judicial independence is not secured merely because judges write their own judgments. It requires administrative control over postings, promotions, discipline, staffing, and the everyday machinery through which careers are made or broken. The High Court's 2025 ruling restoring Supreme Court control over the lower judiciary and ordering a separate judicial secretariat was important precisely because it confronted the operating core of executive influence. A lower court judge who knows that administrative destiny still depends on the executive does not need to receive a direct order to understand the limits of courage. Institutional dependence teaches self censorship more efficiently than threats ever could.

Defenders of the repeal say no elected parliament should feel bound by ordinances issued by an interim government. That is a respectable argument only if it is applied honestly. These ordinances are being targeted not because they are procedurally impure, but because they constrain the two forms of influence that elected governments most prize: control over appointments and control over judicial administration. If there are defects in composition, age thresholds, disclosure rules, or selection criteria, amend them now. Strip out what is weak. Tighten what is vague. Add transparency where it is missing. But do not reopen the old void and ask the public to trust that something better will one day emerge from it. In Bangladesh, legal vacuums are rarely neutral and are almost always filled by the executive.

The real question before parliament now is brutally simple. Does it want an independent judiciary, or merely a friendlier one?

If these ordinances are allowed to die, the answer will become obvious. The country will be told once again that reform is admirable in speeches, expendable in office, and negotiable whenever it threatens the political class' control over the courts. That would not just be a waste of a historic reform moment; it would restore the institutional conditions that made constitutional distortion, partisan prosecution, and judicial intimidation possible in the first place. Bangladesh does not need that system repaired. It needs it buried and replaced with one that no government can quietly reclaim.

How 'middle powers' are leaving the Global South behind



Dr Dan Gay is an international trade and development economist based in the UK.

DAN GAY

At last week's World Trade Organisation (WTO) Ministerial conference in Cameroon, the world's big trading nations, including Europe, the UK, and Canada, effectively gave up on collective decision-making. Instead, they said they'd focus more on seeking voluntary agreements or plurilateral agreements among themselves. These types of deals diverge from normal WTO consensus-based decision-making, where every country is supposed to agree on everything.

The so-called middle powers have decided to strike trade deals with each other in e-commerce, digital trade, and services, ignoring international poverty or what the Global South wants. If these plurilateral agreements eventually become international law, all countries will be obliged to comply irrespective of whether they helped write the rules. The global South must either put up or shut up.

One advantage of multilateralism—the idea that all countries must be involved in decisions—was that smaller, less powerful countries had clout because they could block deals they didn't like. Whilst it was clunky in practice, at least it gave these countries a small voice.

Plurilateral agreements "aim to sideline multilateralism so that self-selective groups of more powerful states can cherry-pick what they negotiate," said Jane Kelsey, an emeritus professor of law at the University of Auckland. On top of these plurilateral agreements, the less powerful countries are increasingly

being subjected to regional and bilateral agreements. They risk being excluded as the middle powers do more deals.

Smaller economic size, skills, resources, and negotiating capacities often mean they are not proactive enough to initiate talks and do not negotiate effectively. In relative terms, their market access will decline unless they take action. January's India-EU trade deal, in effect, nullifies Bangladesh's zero-tariff arrangement with Belgium because Indian exporters now also enjoy lower tariffs on some products in Europe. Australia, the UK, and Canada's membership of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) enhances market access for the 12 countries involved in the deal compared to the least developed countries, none of which are part of it.

The death of the rules-based order

At the Davos meeting of the World Economic Forum in January, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney crystallised the hypocrisy. Carney, former governor of the Bank of England and Canada, pronounced the rules-based international order dead. He compared the system to "living within a lie" under the former Eastern Bloc countries, where the system only preserved itself because everyone else pretended to support it.

"The system's power comes not from its truth but from everyone's willingness to perform as if it were true. When even one person stops performing ... the illusion begins to crack." The former Goldman Sachs

banker continued: "We knew the story of the international rules-based order was partially false." But if you knew it was false, why did you promote it, benefit from it and shape it? If you knew the system you were promoting was a lie designed to benefit the rich while exploiting the poor, did all your rich, powerful friends at Davos know it was a lie, too?

For decades, countries in the Global South were told that the rules-based order

Europe often touts itself as a 'development partner.' Where was Europe as a partner when Trump was hammering the LDCs with tariffs? If Brussels had any muscles and meant what it said, it'd surely be pushing its interests. But no, in its feeble deal with the US, the EU managed to entirely forget about the impact on its supposed developing country sisters.

would make them prosperous. Join the WTO, open markets, and accept the dollar as the world's currency. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank will manage the global economy. Everything will be OK. The system worked for the North and for some less advantaged countries. China's WTO membership in 2001 hyper-charged its headlong rush into international markets and sparked the biggest mass reduction in poverty the world has ever seen. Hundreds of millions of people who'd otherwise have toiled as subsistence farmers began to form a new middle class. China became the most successful capitalist growth story in history. In Bangladesh, crores of people moved out of extreme poverty in a couple of decades as relative economic stability and more open

markets allowed the ready-made garment sector to prosper, although that success story may now be wobbling.

But for many, the gains were far more patchy. About 15 to 18 crores more Africans are extremely poor now than in 1990. Poverty reduction across the globe has gone backwards since 2020. The international rules-based order paid scant attention to the environment. The rules worked very well for the beneficiaries at the top of the mountain, while only a select few from the majority world were allowed to clamber up onto its lower slopes. They always knew the story was false.

Forgetting the poor

This abandonment of the less advantaged comes at a time when they most need support. Tariffs on exports from the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) have soared to over 28 percent in the United States on a trade-weighted basis, up from about 2.8 percent before the Trump tariffs. Astonishingly, LDCs on average now pay *more* than twice the rate charged to developed countries to access the US market. This is simple victimisation. Countries like Bangladesh and Cambodia face tariffs worth half the value of their exports. This huge new tax is directly killing jobs and putting low-income people out of work in poor countries.

Europe often touts itself as a "development partner." Where was Europe as a partner when Trump was hammering the LDCs with tariffs? If Brussels had any muscles and meant what it said, it'd surely be pushing its interests. But no, in its feeble deal with the US, the EU managed to entirely forget about the impact on its supposed developing country sisters, landing them in a worse position than itself.

My friend from Lesotho told me that a government delegation was rebuffed in its efforts to negotiate with a visiting US trade team in neighbouring South Africa. A quick phone call from the EU ambassador might

have helped.

The end of aid?

This process of desertion by the middle powers has a longer background: 22 countries have chopped tens of billions of dollars off official development assistance since 2023. The latest is the UK, which last month slashed official development assistance to less than 0.3 percent of gross national income—the steepest cut of any G7 economy and more than halving the level from its peak three years ago. Africa faces the worst cutbacks. A 40 percent decline in UK aid to the continent will take bilateral assistance to its lowest level since the 1970s, in effect unwinding decades of supposed commitment to the world's poorest.

The UK is hardly alone: Sweden, Germany, France, the Netherlands and other EU donors have also found themselves becoming less generous in recent years as they rediscover an appetite for war and austerity.

At a time when their supposed adversary, Trump, "threw the US Agency for International Development into the wood chipper," this seems a particularly bad moment to suck much-needed cash out of the Global South. It's strange how the so-called middle powers criticise Trump, then in some areas copy him.

It's also an own-goal. It'll erode whatever mild influence these governments wielded abroad. Fed up with the hypocrisy, governments from Nairobi to Dhaka are going their own ways or siding with China, which has abolished taxes on their exports and has spent the past decade or more spending a trillion dollars on useful things like building bridges, roads and ports.

Of course, many of us knew that the rules-based order was a lie, but now the truth is clear, as even its former proponents admit. And if there are middle powers, there must be higher powers and lower powers. It's a sad admission to rank the world's countries based on power rather than rules or justice.

‘PHOTOSEUM: LIFE OF POETREE’: Nasir Ali Mamun’s rhythmic lens on display



PHOTOS: ABRAR FAIYAZ NILOY

Mamun urged the younger generation to take part in a cultural movement that protects photography and honours those behind the lens, saying, “The GenZ youths who made the uprising possible are capable of working toward safeguarding the photo museum.”

NAVEEN ISLAM TOREE

The evening of April 3 marked the opening of the 66th solo exhibition of acclaimed photographer Nasir Ali Mamun, titled *Photoseum: Life of Poetree*, at La Galerie, Alliance Française de Dhaka.

The exhibition brings together two of Bangladesh’s most profound poetic voices—Shamsur Rahman and Al Mahmud—through a deeply visual dialogue. More than a photographic display, it invites viewers into an intimate encounter with literature, where poetry is not read but felt.

The inauguration ceremony, held at 6:00pm, was attended by a distinguished gathering of cultural figures and dignitaries, including Motiur Rahman, editor and publisher of Prothom Alo; Jean-Marc Séré-Charlet, Ambassador of France to Bangladesh; and eminent artist Monirul Islam.

Mamun, often described as the “poet of the camera”, has spent decades capturing the essence of



cultural icons. In this exhibition, his lens turns toward the inner worlds of Rahman and Mahmud—not merely documenting their likeness, but revealing the emotional and philosophical landscapes that shaped their words.

Opening the ceremony, Mamun shared his personal experiences with both poets, recalling moments from his life, including his time in prison. He talked about the distant and complex relationship between Rahman and



Mahmud. Even though they rarely shared the same space, Mamun said that his work connects them through photography and experience. He described the photographs as a “museum of memories.” He recognised the families of both poets and hoped that the exhibition honors their legacy.

He also shared how his friendship with the poets shaped the project, and mentioned the enthusiasm of Motiur Rahman in publishing stories surrounding

their lives and works. Despite the challenges posed by the poets’ ideological differences, Mamun worked with them individually, creating a tribute that bridges their separation.

Emphasising the importance of preserving visual history, Mamun called for greater recognition of photographers, even after their passing. He urged the younger generation to take part in a cultural movement that protects photography and honours those behind the lens, saying, “The GenZ youths who made the uprising possible are capable of working toward safeguarding the photo museum.”

What makes the exhibition particularly compelling is its ability to transcend biography. These are not merely portraits of two literary giants, but studies of presence, memory, and influence. The interplay of light and shadow, combined with minimal compositions, strips away distraction, leaving behind something deeply human.

As speakers reflected on Mamun’s lifelong contribution to documenting Bangladesh’s intellectual and artistic heritage, the evening came to a close with a full house feeling more connected to the lives and legacies of these remarkable poets.

Running until April 16, *Photoseum: Life of Poetree* is as much about photography as it is about connection—between art forms, between artists, and ultimately, between the viewer and the language of the human spirit.

Multiplexes suspend evening shows amid new govt directives

Amid a global energy crisis linked to ongoing conflict in the Middle East, the government enforced new fuel-saving measures, including reduced office hours and a directive to close shops and malls by 7:00pm.

In response, Blockbuster Cinemas at Jamuna Future Park announced on April 4, that all evening screenings were suspended from April 5 until further notice. Authorities confirmed that customers with advance bookings for affected shows would receive full refunds.

The cinema chain expressed regret over the inconvenience and sought public cooperation. Meanwhile, Star Cineplex also suspended shows, adding that further updates would be shared through their website.



WHAT’S THE HAPS?

‘Surongo’

Ethic Theatre presents the sixth staging of *Surongo*, adapted from Syed Waliullah’s sharp exploration of greed and illusion. Directed by Mintu Sardar, the play follows a young woman drawn into a quiet but unsettling mystery, where buried desire and deception slowly reveal a harsher, inescapable truth.

DATE: TUESDAY | APRIL 7, 2026
TIME: 7:15 PM ONWARDS
VENUE: EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE HALL, BSA



NEWS

Factory was sealed

FROM PAGE 12
owner Md Akram Ullah Akram, 64; his son Ahnaf Akif Akram, 34; Iman Ullah; and around seven unidentified individuals.

During a visit to the site yesterday afternoon, firefighters were seen continuing rescue operations. Several factory workers and anxious relatives were still gathered at the scene in search of their missing loved ones.

Shipon Mal was looking for his nephew, Nirob Dhali, 17, who joined the factory just a day before the fire. He has been missing since the incident.

“We searched everywhere possible after the fire but could not find him. We also spoke to the authorities, but they were unable to provide any information about his whereabouts.”

Alo Rani Dey, a worker who survived the fire, said the factory once caught fire in 2024 but resumed operations shortly afterwards.

Of the six bodies recovered, three have been handed over to their families, according to sources at Sir Salimullah Medical College morgue.

One of the victims has been identified as Mim Akter, 16.

Two other bodies were handed over based on information provided by family members. DNA samples have also been collected to confirm their identities.

Sabbir, who received the body of his mother Manju Begum, said, “My mother had the keys to our house in her hand, and part of the clothing on her back was not burned. I recognised her from these.”

He added that the hospital authorities handed over the body based on his statement, but asked them to provide DNA samples for confirmation.

According to the case statement, the factory had been operating illegally in a densely populated area for the past eight to 10 years, employing around 50 to 60 workers, including women and children.

Law enforcement agencies conducted multiple drives in the past and shut down the factory. However, the accused resumed operations later.

Investigators also found that no fire safety measures were in place despite the use of highly flammable materials, the case statement added.

Rafiqul Islam, investigation officer of the case, told this newspaper that efforts were underway to arrest the other accused.

Special drive in four cities

FROM PAGE 12
be rolled out simultaneously across the rest of the country, he said.

He blamed mismanagement by previous governments for the measles outbreak.

Meanwhile, MA Muhit, state minister for health, inaugurated the vaccination programme at Bhawal Mirzpur Union Council in Gazipur.

UNICEF is deeply concerned about the sharp rise in measles cases across Bangladesh, putting thousands of children, especially the youngest and most vulnerable, at serious risk, said Rana Flowers, its representative in Bangladesh.

“This resurgence highlights critical immunity gaps, particularly among zero-dose and under-vaccinated children, while infections among infants under nine months, who are not yet eligible for routine vaccination, are especially alarming,” she said, according to a UNICEF press release.

With coordinated action, this resurgence can be contained, she said, adding that UNICEF is working closely with the government and partners to reach every child, close immunity gaps and protect children from this preventable disease.

By targeting children aged 6 to 59 months in high-risk areas, followed by nationwide scale-up, this campaign will help prevent further tragic loss of young lives and close the immunity gaps driving the outbreak, said

Bangladesh not bound

FROM PAGE 12
Khalilur and the PM’s Adviser on Foreign Affairs Humayun Kabir were present at the meeting.

The foreign minister said claims that Bangladesh “needs permission” from the US to import oil under any agreement are “completely false”.

He added that sanctions on Russian oil apply globally, and any required approvals stem from those sanctions, not from any trade agreement between Bangladesh and the US.

On energy cooperation, Khalilur said some aspects could not be disclosed due to confidentiality, but added that the US assured support to help ensure Bangladesh’s energy security.

Replying to a question about whether the US could assist Bangladesh in tackling the current energy situation, he said the

Ahmed Jamsheed Mohamed, World Health Organisation representative in Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, 10 more suspected measles deaths have been recorded in the 24 hours until 8:00am yesterday. In addition, five previously unrecorded deaths were added to the tally, taking the total number of suspected deaths to 113, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

DGHS, however, said a total of 17 deaths have so far been confirmed as measles-related.

Asked about the reasons behind the large gap between suspected and confirmed measles deaths, a DGHS official said that samples from suspected measles patients are tested at the reference laboratories in Dhaka, which take a significant amount of time.

In the meantime, the number of suspected cases is included in the list, while confirmed cases are updated later, resulting in a discrepancy between the two figures.

Besides, rash and fever, the main symptoms of measles, are common to several other diseases, he said.

Therefore, not all suspected measles cases are ultimately confirmed, which contributes to the difference between suspected and confirmed deaths, he added.

A total of 974 new suspected cases were recorded in the last 24 hours, taking the tally to 7,610.

government is exploring multiple sources for energy imports and will procure oil from the most cost-effective options.

India, the Middle East, and the US remain open alternatives, he added.

The minister further said the government’s priority is to maintain a stable energy supply and ensure national energy security by sourcing fuel from the most competitive and affordable options in the global market.

During the meeting, the US ambassador handed over two photographs and a replica of the White House to the prime minister. One photograph features Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman and former US President Jimmy Carter, while the other shows former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and former US President George Bush Sr.

House ratifies ordinances on govt job age

FROM PAGE 12
The special committee has submitted a report on 133 ordinances, some of which have been allowed to lapse. These ordinances are significant and connected to the spirit of July. He said they wanted to discuss the matter in the House.

Law Minister Md Asaduzzman responded by saying that every ordinance would be brought before parliament and there would be opportunities for discussion. He added that the two bills introduced had been unanimously recommended by the special committee for unconditional passage.

AGE LIMIT
In the statement of objectives and reasons for the bill, Bari said the ordinance was issued in response to demands to raise the age limit for entry into government service and in recognition of its necessity. It increased the age limit for direct recruitment by two years, setting it at 32.

However, in some recruitment rules, the age limit for entry into

Ordinance flawed, there will be

FROM PAGE 12
If the government wants to make changes, it should first approve the ordinance, turn it into law and amend it later, he said.

“But if that is not done, then once the law expires on April 11, there will be no legal definition of enforced disappearance from April 12,” he said.

In reply, Asaduzzman said the way the ordinances of the Human Rights Commission and Enforced Disappearance Prevention have been framed would be unjust to victims of enforced disappearance.

The ICT Act already included the definition of enforced disappearance under crimes against humanity. The law did provide for trials and investigations of the crime.

“At the same time, in the enforced disappearance ordinance, we are proposing a separate investigation process. Under the ICT Act, the maximum punishment for perpetrators of enforced disappearance is either the death penalty or life imprisonment. But in the ordinance on enforced disappearance, the maximum sentence has been limited to 10 years.”

If the Human Rights Commission ordinance is kept in its current form,

government service was set at 33-45, which created complications. To resolve these complexities, the ordinance was further amended in 2025.

The state minister explained that as a constitutional body, Bangladesh Public Service Commission has already issued circulars keeping the maximum age limit for direct recruitment in the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) at 32 years, and recruitment is ongoing accordingly. Therefore, it is necessary to turn the ordinance into law.

Under this law, the maximum age limit for entry into all BCS cadres and all non-cadre government jobs will be 32 years. In addition, for direct recruitment to posts in autonomous bodies, statutory authorities, public non-financial corporations, and self-governed institutions, the age limit will also be 32 years.

Government Service Act
In 2025, the interim government amended the Government Service Act and issued an ordinance. Later,

victims of human rights violations will face additional harassment and further violations in the name of investigation because of the time frame stipulated in the law, said Asaduzzaman, who was previously the Human Rights Affairs secretary of the BNP central executive committee.

Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed, also a victim of enforced disappearance, recounted his days awaiting death, and spoke about how he was then dumped in a neighbouring country where he faced trial, and eventually returned to Bangladesh.

“There is no reason to think that those responsible for enforced disappearance will be able to slip through the cracks of the law. That is why we have said: the punishments prescribed in the enforced disappearance ordinance, the investigation procedures mentioned there and the provisions in the ICT Act regarding crimes against humanity must not conflict with one another. For this reason, these laws need careful scrutiny,” he added.

Speaker Hafiz Uddin Ahmad said the matter raised by the Jamaat MP Ahmad was “very important”.

“The law minister has assured

another amendment was made through a second ordinance. Keeping those amendments intact, State Minister Bari placed the Government Service (Amendment) Bill-2026 in Parliament.

The bill introduced special provisions regarding the conduct and penalties of government employees. It states that disobeying lawful orders of superiors, failing to comply with government orders, circulars, or directives without legal cause, obstructing their implementation, or inciting other government employees to do so will be considered misconduct.

Collective absence from duty or refusal to work without leave or reasonable cause will also be treated as disruptive misconduct. Preventing any government employee from attending work or performing duties will likewise be deemed misconduct.

For such misconduct, the law provides for demotion to a lower post or pay grade, compulsory retirement, or dismissal from service.

us that a stronger law to prevent enforced disappearance will be introduced later.”

Many prominent individuals and innocent political activists have been victims of enforced disappearance, he said.

“We hope that the government, ruling party members and opposition members together will enact such a strong law that no citizen will ever again fall victim to enforced disappearance. Please be patient. This parliament will surely pass such a law.”

Global oil shock

FROM PAGE 12
Countries have begun releasing a historic amount of oil from emergency stockpiles to offset the war’s impact. But much of the broadening supply crunch stems from a shortage of naphtha, a petroleum by-product and critical feedstock for synthetic materials, of which producers have far fewer reserves and no substitute.

Some petrochemical companies in Asia, which gets more than half its naphtha from the Middle East, have cut output or declared force majeure in recent weeks due to limited raw materials.



বাংলাদেশ বিদ্যুৎ উন্নয়ন বোর্ড

BANGLADESH POWER DEVELOPMENT BOARD

ব্যবস্থাপক (পরিচালন) এর দপ্তর

৪র্থ ইউনিট রি-পাওয়ার্ড সিসিপিপি, ঘোড়শাল বিদ্যুৎ কেন্দ্র, বিউবো, পলাশ, নরসিংদী।।

E-mail: manager.opn.ccpp4.gps@bpdb.gov.bd

ফোনঃ ০১৭৭৭-৭৬০০৫৩

Memo No: 27.11.6863.456.68.338.26-197
Date: 04/04/2026

Invitation for e-Tenders

e-Tenders are invited in the National e-GP System portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of following goods:

SI No.	Tender ID	Name of Goods	Publishing Date & Time	Closing/ Opening Date & Time
1	1251878	Procurement of reagent grade chemicals and safety equipment (Hand gloves, Eye safety, gas mask, gum boot etc.) for Laboratory testing of 4th Unit re-powered CCPP, BPDB.	02-Apr-2026 17:00	28-Apr-2026 11:00

These are online tenders, where only e-Tenders will be accepted in the e-GP System portal and no offline hard copies will be accepted. To submits e-Tenders, registration required in the National e-GP System portal.
(<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>).

The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from national e-GP System portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank. Further information and guidelines are available National e-GP System portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd) contract no. (01762625528-31).

বিদ্যুৎ/জন - ৯৬৬ (২)/০৫/০৪/২৬



(Jenifur Shahanz)

ID No. 7-0037

Chief Chemist

4th Unit Re-powered CCPP

Ghorashal Power Station

BPDB, Palash, Narsingdi.

“Islamisation in Bengal has no parallel in South Asia”

Richard M. Eaton, Professor of history at the University of Arizona and a leading historian of Bengal and modern South Asia, speaks to The Daily Star about his book *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760*, widely regarded as a seminal work on Bengal.

West and East Bengal had different religious histories owing to the timing of the arrival of Brahmanical culture from upper India. Simply put, by the time Muslim rule reached the region, Brahmanical culture had already penetrated more deeply in the west than in the east, making the latter region more receptive to a scripturally based religion like Islam.



Richard M. Eaton

I never found the terms ashraf or atraf in Mughal documents pertaining to land settlement. Those terms do not seem to have appeared until the British period, when many Bengalis, when asked by colonial officers about their origins, claimed that their ancestors were of high ashraf status.

The Daily Star (TDS): Before your intervention, the dominant idea about conversion in Bengal was that people moved from Hinduism to Buddhism and finally to Islam, with earlier scholarship commonly suggesting that the masses embraced Islam to escape the Hindu caste system. What prompted you to challenge this narrative and shed new light on the process?

Richard M. Eaton (RME): What prompted me to challenge the narrative you mention was the discovery that, though it seemed plausible, it could not be supported by evidence. Chapter Five (pp. 113–34) in my book explains those flawed ideas in detail and why they do not work.

For many natives of rural eastern Bengal, Islam was the first scripturally and liturgically based religion to which they had been exposed. Of course, Buddhist and Brahmanical cultures had already penetrated eastern Bengal to some extent, but not as much as in the western delta, and in any case, in the east they tended to be mainly urban- and elite-based. There were also Goddess and other cults in the region, but they lacked scripture and liturgies.

What written texts like the Qur'an and Hadith provided was a firm structure to religious belief and practice. It also helped that the technology of paper- m a k i n g arrived in Bengal not long after the establishment of Muslim rule.

TDS: Before the first census in 1872, there was no clear idea that Muslims formed a numerical majority in Bengal, a fact that later became politically decisive. Do you think the idea of a Muslim majority in Bengal has been retrospectively framed in teleological terms, particularly in relation to the creation of Pakistan and, later, Bangladesh?

RME: For more than a century, the British had practised classic “divide-and-rule” tactics to govern India, cynically promoted in the name of political “balance”. As ever larger groups of Indians were enfranchised into the electoral system, competition between religious communities dramatically intensified. In their haste to abandon India after the Second World War, the British, out of sheer expedience, succumbed to the respective demands of the League and the Congress. That was when the religious map of British India, based on the 1931 Census, became fatefully decisive.

TDS: What challenges did you face while researching such a vast region, with its land records, literary archives, evidence of geological shifts, and changing ecological and agricultural patterns? How did the Weberian method help you address these difficulties?

RME: Weberian sociology has always influenced me, but the school of historical theory that influenced me the most was the French Annales School, especially the work of Fernand Braudel. He was the one who understood history not as a function of any single discipline—politics, geography, literature, sociology, religion, architecture, environmental studies, and so on—but rather as the product of all of them interacting with each other. To understand religious change, therefore, it is not enough simply to study religion; one must understand all the other aspects of culture and nature that shape and colour it.

TDS: How crucial were geographical factors in shaping Bengal's history, culture, agriculture, and landscape, especially after the Padma shifted its main course away from the Ganga following a major earthquake? Why was West Bengal's experience of conversion different from that of East Bengal in terms of religious composition?

RME: Geographical and climatic factors are fundamental to Bengali history. All Bengalis understand how the entire delta is subject to immense wealth, given its plentiful water and rich topsoil, but also to the immense power, danger, and fickleness of



The Shatgumbad Mosque, or the Sixty Dome Mosque, a prominent monument of the Bengal Sultanate era, remains one of the most striking Islamic structures in the Indian subcontinent. PHOTO: MOAZ MAHMUD/WIKIMEDIA

the monsoon. Additionally, the rivers constantly shift, abandoning splendid cities, leaving them with stagnant and malarial waters, or opening up new areas for cultivation and population growth. As a result, the Bengal delta is one of the most geographically dynamic regions in the world.

West and East Bengal had different religious histories owing to the timing of the arrival of Brahmanical culture from upper India. Simply put, by the time Muslim rule reached the region, Brahmanical culture had already penetrated more deeply in the west than in the east, making the latter region more receptive to a scripturally based religion like Islam. For comparison, consider India's north-eastern corner (Nagaland, etc.), where Christianity in the 19th century had an enormous impact on local communities that had not already been exposed to Hindu, Buddhist, or Muslim influence. By contrast, Christian missions failed in India's great plains, long populated by Hindus and Muslims.

TDS: Could you elaborate on the patterns of conversion in Bengal in comparison with other regions of the Indian subcontinent, including the western frontiers, highlighting both similarities and differences? How might we explain Islam's deep penetration into rural Bengal, marked by its riverine geography, when in earlier periods its principal centres of influence were urban, such as Delhi, Agra, Bijapur, Lucknow, or Bihar Sharif?

RME: Islamisation in Bengal, in my view, finds no parallel elsewhere in South Asia. Central to its pattern was the overlapping of agrarian expansion, deforestation, and the Mughal government's policy of “settling” their eastern frontier. This they did by giving land grants to pioneers who were required to cut the forest, mobilise labour for rice cultivation, and build on their lands either mosques or temples, simple structures made of thatching and bamboo. The purpose of such institutions was to promote stability in frontier regions that were inherently turbulent. The Mughals were not concerned about the religion of those pioneers; their focus was on stability, revenue, and loyalty. But since most pioneers were Muslims, more mosques than temples were built.

I never found the terms ashraf or atraf in Mughal documents pertaining to land settlement. Those terms do not seem to have appeared until the British period, when many Bengalis, when asked by colonial officers about their origins, claimed that their ancestors were of high ashraf status.

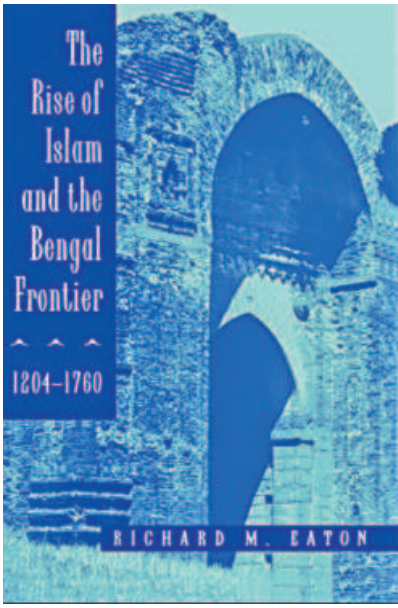
Nor have I seen evidence of tension between migrant Muslim elites and local Muslims in the precolonial period, probably because Islamisation had been such a gradual and unselfconscious process. As you yourself noted, it was not until the 1872 census that people became aware of eastern Bengal's substantial Muslim population.

TDS: Could you say something about the role of Sufis in agricultural expansion in the active delta, especially their active role as entrepreneur-pioneers with a religious calling, which is often linked to new Islamic conversions? At the same time, recent archaeological finds suggest that agriculture existed

even in the deep Sundarbans before the medieval period. So, what do you see as the main factors behind conversion?

RME: “Conversion” is a misleading term when reconstructing the growth of Muslim communities in Bengal, or anywhere else. Owing to its association with 19th-century Protestant missionary movements, “conversion” connotes a sudden and complete change in religious identity, as opposed to the gradual and unselfconscious religious change that actually occurred. Since this change was a gradual process, I consider the term “Islamisation” a more useful way to understand the phenomenon.

Sufis are understood as mystics who both practised and taught methods of achieving direct access to divine reality. The term pir, on the other hand, is associated with religious charisma, or “holymen piety”. Muslims capable of mobilising labour on the eastern frontier for the purpose of clearing forests and establishing rice cultivation were certainly charismatic. This is why



many of them were identified in both contemporary documents and Bengali folk literature as pirs. Over time, the vocabulary of popular Sufism stabilised the memory of such pioneers who had been instrumental in building new communities, which celebrated pirs as great shaikhs, even Sufis. Not infrequently, their graves became shrines (dargah) that attracted pilgrims and patronage, a process that illustrates Max Weber's notion of the “routinisation of charismatic authority”.

It is true that recent archaeological excavations in the deep Sundarbans have discovered evidence of rice cultivation, Buddhist institutions, and possibly even seaports before Bengal's Muslim period. What was new from at least the 16th century, however, was the association of the advent of agricultural operations with Muslim holy men (pirs), or with charismatic persons who were widely identified as such. Under their leadership, agrarian expansion either was initiated or, if it had already existed to some extent, was greatly intensified.

TDS: Apart from the expansion of agriculture, could you elaborate on the nature of Muslim rule in Bengal, with particular reference to patterns of patronage and the migration of Muslim populations from north to south? In this regard, how significant were sea and land trade routes, as well as the arrival of Afghans and Turks?

RME: The book describes how provincial and district officers of the Mughal Empire issued land grants to men willing to undertake the clearing of forest and the establishment of rice cultivation, on the condition that they build a mosque (or temple) and pray for the empire. As eastern Bengal became wealthy owing to the expansion of rice cultivation, Chittagong became especially important for exporting rice throughout the Bay of Bengal, as far east as the East Indies and as far west as Goa. Before the Mughal period, first Indo-Turks and then Afghans established the Bengal Sultanate, which created direct ties with Upper India, as well described by M.R. Tarafdar.

As for the Palas and the Senas, agrarian expansion, accompanied by social integration and stratification, had been under way in northern and western Bengal between the 6th and 11th centuries. Acting on their own authority, or that of the Pala state after the 8th century, local magnates mobilised indigenous non-sedentary forest tribes as agricultural labourers for large-scale works such as draining ponds, excavating tanks, and clearing forest tracts. These same notables enhanced their prestige by patronising the construction of Buddhist monasteries or Brahmanical temples. These themes would resonate several centuries later, when a different cadre of notables mobilised labour, again for agrarian expansion, while also patronising the construction of religious institutions, which in their case were mainly mosques. We also know that non-Muslim edifices continued to be used well after the Turkish conquest, refuting any idea that that conquest might have led to a rapid change in the region's religious culture.

TDS: Do you think that a larger number of people came into contact with Islam during the Mughal period, while the Sultanate period saw comparatively less expansion? If so, to what extent did Islamisation take place during these two periods of Muslim rule in Bengal, considering their different state policies?

RME: Yes. The evidence for the Sultanate period is very scanty, compared with the rich documentation we have for the Mughal period. So, it might appear that Islamisation was more pronounced in the 17th and 18th centuries. On the other hand, we have literary evidence reaching back to the Sultanate period for pioneering pirs associated with both rice cultivation and Islam. So, it seems reasonable to assume that the process of Islamisation in the eastern delta had begun well before the Mughals.

TDS: Our contemporary understanding of secularism and tolerance did not exist in the same form during the medieval period. In that context, how would you characterise the Muslim sultans' attitude towards non-Muslims in Bengal? How were relationships negotiated at the levels of state and society, particularly in light of records that mention instances of temple destruction or desecration, sometimes interpreted as symbolic assertions of political victory?

RME: M.R. Tarafdar has shown how Muslim sultans of Bengal integrated non-Muslims into their ruling structure.

As for “the role of Islamic religious creeds, rituals, and doctrinal

practices,” however, Ayesha Irani, Tony Stewart, and Thibault d'Hubert have all studied medieval Bengali literature in order to understand how Islamic creeds diffused among Bengali communities. For example, Irani has shown how, in the 17th century, Saiyid Sultan, author of the *Nabi-Bamsa*, presented Islam as continuous with existing Bengali traditions by incorporating Hindu deities into the Abrahamic “family of prophets”. That was an example of the sort of “creative adaptation” that gradually indigenised Islam in the precolonial period. For Sultan, Islamisation amounted to a recovery of the Bengalis' own lost religious heritage. For his part, Stewart studied the various translation strategies by which medieval poets expressed Arabic-based Islamic ideas in the Sanskrit-based Bengali language. And d'Hubert studied the circulation of Bengali texts like the *Nurnama* among lower-strata communities in rural 17th- and 18th-century Chittagong, by way of understanding how such literature not only reflected but also deepened Islamic ideas among such communities.

TDS: Would you please explain more about the roots of Islam in eastern Bengal, as you describe in your book, particularly through the ideas of inclusion, identification, and displacement, and how these processes negotiated earlier literary, cultural, and religious identities?

RME: The categories of Inclusion, Identification, and Displacement refer to the stages in the way that a community might identify the superhuman agencies it venerated. Because the identity of the superhuman agencies venerated by a community necessarily reflects the religious identity of the community itself, it becomes possible to reconstruct changes in the community's religious identity over time by establishing the approximate date on which texts mentioning those agencies were composed. Driving those changes were factors such as the expansion of agrarian society, the association of rice cultivation with charismatic Muslim pioneers, the diffusion of paper and literacy, which were necessary for a scripturally based religion, and, by the early 19th century, steamship and rail transport systems that facilitated the Hajj and thus “reform” movements. All of this suggests why Islamisation is better understood as a process, and not as an all-at-once event.

TDS: Finally, with the benefit of hindsight, what would you have done differently in your research and in writing *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760* (1993), which remains one of the most comprehensive works on Bengal more than three decades on?

RME: Since my book was originally published, exciting discoveries have emerged in archaeology, a field that is far more developed today than when I wrote the book. Moreover, historians (myself included) have been slow to integrate archaeological insights into their work. Focusing on politics and political change, most historians tend to see sharp breaks in time or make the mistake of associating cultural change with political change. The title of my book includes two political dates, 1204 and 1706, suggesting that Islamisation suddenly “began” on the former date and ended on the latter, which is highly misleading, to say the least.

On the other hand, archaeological data relating to Bengal show much continuity over time, rather than sharp breaks, as well as considerable fluidity between and across cultural traditions. For example, the archaeologist Swadhin Sen has identified religious structures in Rangpur District that had been established and appropriated by various rival traditions, with Brahmanical structures appropriating Buddhist space, Vaishnavas appropriating Saiva space, and vice versa. So, if I were to write the book today, I would integrate much more archaeological data into the study.

I also regret that I did not subject West Bengal to the same degree of intensive research that I did in Bangladesh. I doubt that the book's central argument would have been substantially different, but it might have benefited from more comparative evidence.

The interview was taken by Priyam Paul.

BCB in turmoil as resignations mount, probe adds pressure

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Since returning from Melbourne in late March, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Aminul Islam Bulbul has remained active in board affairs even as growing internal instability has continues casting a shadow over his tenure.

On Saturday, Bulbul spent nearly nine hours in the fourth board of directors' meeting at the BCB headquarters in Mirpur and the following day, he visited the national team's practice session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium. Despite the outward appearance of routine operations, Bulbul's leadership is under increasing strain.

In recent months, seven board directors have resigned, with six stepping down within the last three weeks, of which four resigned following Sunday's meeting, highlighting deepening instability within the current administration.

Most outgoing directors cited personal reasons in their resignation letters, but while speaking to The Daily Star on condition of anonymity, many of them cited a variety of causes including frustration over their limited influence, lack of consultation in key decisions and feeling excluded due to not having political backing.

"It's not just one issue. There have been consistent problems in how we operate. Changes are made in departments without consultation, whether by the president or others. If we are not informed, what is our role?" one of them said.

However, the question remains whether uncertainty surrounding the future of the current board and internal political dynamics influenced the directors' decision to step aside.



Adding to Bulbul's concerns is a probe report submitted yesterday by a five-member investigation committee, led by retired Supreme Court justice AKM Asaduzzaman, to the National Sports Council (NSC). The committee was formed by NSC on March 11 to investigate alleged irregularities in last year's BCB elections.

"We submitted a neutral report without accusing anyone. It objectively analyses the election process and includes recommendations for ensuring smoother elections and necessary reforms," Asaduzzaman said.

State Minister for Youth and Sports Aminul Haque said the government would consult the International Cricket Council (ICC) before taking further steps. "The report was submitted this morning. We have already held an inter-ministerial meeting to discuss its findings. We will inform the ICC and then decide our next course of action," he told reporters at BKSP.

With mounting resignations, internal discontent, and the implications of the probe report, the BCB finds itself at a critical juncture and the coming weeks are likely to be decisive for both the board and its president. Bulbul, however, is ready to see the matter to the end, declaring in a recent interview that amidst this exodus of directors, "I will be the last person to go."

‘Plenty of time left for politics, not much for cricket’

Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, a former Member of Parliament in the ousted Awami League government, has not returned to the country following the fall of his party in August 2024. However, the current State Minister for Youth and Sports, Aminul Haque, mentioned that the 39-year-old cricketer – who is now staying with his family in New York – would be welcomed back once he is able to clear all legal hurdles. In an exclusive phone interview with The Daily Star’s Ekush Tapader, Shakib spoke openly about his desire to return to the country, his political standpoint, and many other issues. The excerpts of the interview are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): Having been out of the country for almost two years, how much do you miss home?

Shakib Al Hasan (SAH): Naturally, when someone is unable to go to his own country, he is bound to miss it. I am no exception; I miss the country immensely. I hope to return soon, and it will certainly feel great when that happens.

DS: What is the probability of you returning to Bangladesh?

SAH: I am hopeful. The legal processes have begun. If I can resolve things as quickly as possible... otherwise, it might take time. But I am trying my best to settle these issues quickly. The faster these matters are resolved, the sooner I can return.

DS: Are you in communication with the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) or the Ministry of Youth and Sports?

SAH: From what I know, communication (with the Sports Ministry) is happening through BCB. I haven't had any direct contact. As for the BCB, sometimes there is communication, and sometimes there isn't. So, I am trying to handle everything on my own.

DS: What is your desire – returning to international cricket or retiring after playing a farewell match?

SAH: That is actually secondary. My first priority is returning to the country. I have seen in interviews and comments from the BCB and others that they want me to come and play. But since a legal process is ongoing, these things cannot just be said verbally; the issues must be resolved for me to return. Since I am far away, it would have been easier for me if the BCB had handled these matters on my behalf. I am not saying they haven't done anything at all, but if it had been done a bit better, there would have been a possibility of a quicker solution. Since that didn't happen and I am being delayed, I am doing my level best to find a solution.

DS: In what way would it have been easier if the BCB had stepped in?

SAH: If the legal processes were handled through the BCB, things could have been resolved much faster. Perhaps it isn't possible to do it that way. Since it is my matter, I have to do it myself. As I said, I will request [BCB] for any necessary help.

DS: There is currently a sort of instability within the BCB. Is it becoming difficult for you to maintain communication in this situation?

SAH: I am not communicating with any specific individual; I am maintaining contact with the BCB as an institution. It doesn't matter who is there or who will come; rather, I am communicating with that specific post or chair.

DS: Have you spoken with your teammates about the current state of the Bangladesh team and not getting to compete in the World Cup?



PHOTO: STAR

SAH: Yes, I talk to many of them. Many call me, and we talk. Not playing in the World Cup is definitely disappointing. The BCB cannot really speak against the decision the government took at that time. Because of the then government's decisions, Bangladesh could not play in the World Cup.

DS: As a former captain, how do you view the suspension of the Dhaka Premier League (DPL) and the conflict between the board and the clubs?

SAH: One thing I understand is that the only victims here are the players; no one else is suffering. I don't think anyone has the desire to understand the players' pain. Everyone is actually busy with their own power struggle and is using the players as tools...The biggest issue is that not playing the DPL is having a big impact on players' personal and financial lives.

DS: So, are the players helpless?

SAH: The players really have nothing to do. Suppose I am a club owner and I say I won't play. What can you do? If you are the BCB, at most you can request. Whatever everyone is doing, they are doing it to grab power. The BCB has a role to play here. It takes two to tango; it is happening from all sides. If there isn't sincerity to start the game, I don't see any chance of the league happening. The relationship has reached a point where it doesn't seem like anything will happen easily – unless it goes through the legal route.

DS: You have been playing in franchise leagues. How much longer do you want to continue playing?

SAH: My interest in the game is still as it always has been. The day I see that the interest is no longer there, I will step away.

DS: You entered politics but couldn't work for long. Do you think you will be able to resume your political career?

SAH: Politics can be done until death; there is plenty of time for politics. What I don't have a lot of time left for is cricket. I am trying to fix that first. As for politics, I believe it is a great platform from which significant changes can be brought. If I can do something for the people, I will feel good about it, and I still have that hope. I always will. Situations don't remain the same forever; they change. I hope a normal situation will return in the future where all parties will get equal opportunities and the people will decide who they want.

DS: How do you view the current situation in Bangladesh?

SAH: A new government has come, regardless of how it came. Immediately upon arrival, they face a massive challenge. At this moment, I feel their biggest responsibility is to work together with everyone. There is a difference between saying and doing. If they can work with everyone, Bangladesh can be freed from its problems. Although it is a global crisis, Bangladesh's crisis is even more severe than other countries – it is in the front row of crises. Here, everyone should work together. It is the responsibility of the politicians to bring back a sense of relief to the people of Bangladesh. I don't believe relief will return by pushing anyone away. And this doesn't happen in a democratic process either. I hope everything will be resolved soon.

DS: How do you view Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's urge for professional athletes to stay away from politics?

SAH: Look, I believe every citizen of Bangladesh has their own opinion on this matter. The Prime Minister has said what he felt was right from his position. It is his personal opinion, and I respect that.

DS: How are you spending your time nowadays?

SAH: Now it is just about giving time to the family. Spending time with family and getting the opportunity to think about the future – you could say that's a positive side in one way. Since our party doesn't have activities, I am trying to continue playing cricket. When the party activities start or we are able to do them, I might try to do politics again.

DS: Compared to the previous Sports Adviser's harsh stance, is the current Sports Minister's flexible attitude making your path back to the country easier?

SAH: I cannot say; we will understand whether it was easy or difficult while overcoming the legal hurdles. If I personally overcome the legal hurdles, then nothing else remains. I hope everything stays flexible. The main point is to overcome the legal obstacles. You are all seeing that the cases filed against me have no evidence, no basis – everyone is saying this. This has also come up in various news media. In Bangladesh, the system can wrap it up quickly or take a long time. It is a matter of goodwill. Just because you were attacked doesn't mean you should attack me too – I don't think that's right. If this continues, no change will come to the country. But I hope, the current government, which has been operating for a short period, will look at things neutrally, and those who are innocent will get proper justice. And it will happen within the fastest time. We must get out of the mindset that just because someone suffered before, others must be made to suffer now.

DS: Even if you cross the legal hurdles, the ones who oppose you might want to obstruct you.

SAH: No one in the world has everyone in favour of them. Despite everything, one has to move forward; everyone has to live together in a country. As we all are citizens of Bangladesh, we all will have to live together.

DS: Would you like to say something about those killed during the July movement?

SAH: No death is ever desirable; every death is painful. Every life is precious. I have said this many times before. I want a proper and impartial investigation into every incident to ensure justice. But no one should be falsely implicated.

DS: Have the bitter experiences or controversies of the last few years brought any change to your thinking?

SAH: People learn from mistakes; they keep learning. From that perspective, I am being able to learn even more new things.



PHOTO: FACEBOOK

Barca go seven points clear in LaLiga

Barcelona's Robert Lewandowski came off the bench to score a lucky late winner in a 2-1 victory away to 10-man Atletico Madrid on Saturday that moved the defending champions seven points clear of Real Madrid at the top of LaLiga. Barca had plenty of motivation after Real's 2-1 loss at Mallorca earlier on Saturday, but it was the hosts who took the lead six minutes before the break through Giuliano Simeone. The visitors responded with a Marcus Rashford goal three minutes later and Atletico had Nico Gonzalez sent off on the stroke of halftime. Lewandowski was in the right place to net a fortunate rebound three minutes from time.



Saints dump out Gunners in classic FA Cup upset

Southampton produced a classic FA Cup upset, knocking out Premier League leaders Arsenal with a 2-1 win in the quarterfinals at St Mary's yesterday. Ross Stewart gave the hosts a 35th-minute lead before Viktor Gyokeres equalised midway through the second half, with Mikel Arteta's side looking the likelier winners. But a late counter on 85 minutes saw Shea Charles strike to seal a memorable giant-killing. Wearing a special yellow kit to mark 50 years since their 1976 FA Cup triumph over Manchester United, Southampton advanced to the semis alongside Manchester City and Chelsea. The defeat, following their EFL Cup final loss to City, leaves Arsenal's quadruple hopes over, with only the Premier League and Champions League remaining.

PHOTOS: REUTERS

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Asia's first quarterfinalists

In the 1966 World Cup, North Korea scripted one of the tournament's most memorable underdog stories, becoming the first Asian side to reach the quarterfinals. Their defining moment came in the group stage, where they stunned Italy with a famous 1-0 win, sending shockwaves through the tournament. In the quarters against Portugal, the fairytale soared as North Korea raced into a remarkable 3-0 lead but the dream unravelled just as quickly. Portugal mounted a stunning comeback to win 5-3, ending North Korea's historic run.

****Visit The Daily Star website to also read "Argentina's 24-pass orchestra".**



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MEASLES VACCINATION Special drive in four cities from Apr 12

Emergency campaign underway in 30 upazilas

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The special measles vaccination campaign will be launched in four city corporations on April 12, while the drive in the remaining districts and upazilas will begin on May 3, said Health Minister Sardar Md Sakhawat Hossain.

The comment came yesterday at the inauguration of the emergency measles and rubella vaccination drive at Nababganj Upazila Health Complex.

The emergency drive kicked off in 30 upazilas across 18 districts where infection rates are relatively high, aiming to bring more than 13 lakh children aged six months to under five years under coverage.

A special vaccination campaign will be carried out in Dhaka North and South City, Barishal and Mymensingh City Corporations from April 12. From May 3, the vaccination campaign will

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Students of Dhaka University's Faculty of Fine Arts are crafting large masks and vibrant folk art for next week's Pahela Baishakh procession, which is central to the celebration of the Bangla New Year. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Bangladesh not bound by any US energy deal

Khalilur says after US envoy meets PM



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has no binding obligation regarding energy imports, Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman said yesterday, dismissing speculation about any secret agreement with the United States.

"There is no secret agreement with the United States; whatever agreements exist have already been made public," Khalilur told reporters at the Secretariat after US Ambassador to Bangladesh Brent T Christensen paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Tarique Rahman at his Cabinet Division office at the Secretariat.

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EC weighing fate of EVMs

1,599 units missing; storage costs continue to mount

AHMED DEEPTO and DIPAN NANDY

The Election Commission is weighing options for the fate of around 1.5 lakh electronic voting machines (EVMs), which are now lying idle amid rising storage costs, missing units, and growing uncertainty over their final disposal.

Election Commissioner Abdur Rahmanel Masud yesterday said the EC is set to take a decision based on a report from a committee formed with experts from Buot to assess the condition of the machines.

"What we're doing is determining how many EVMs are there, where they are, in what condition and whether they are usable based on expert opinion."

The expert committee will classify the machines into three categories – fully usable, partly usable, and completely unusable – and then submit a comprehensive report to the commission. "Action will be taken based on that report."

Masud added that the issue would be placed before the EC at a meeting to be chaired by CEC AMM Nasir Uddin today.

Insiders said the commission is currently under pressure to settle the future of the machines, which have remained unused. The issue, they said, has remained unresolved even after the current EC dropped plans to use EVMs in the February national election.

Speaking to The Daily Star recently, EC Secretary Akhtar Ahmed said, "These EVMs are lying around, taking up space, and have become a burden for us. Why would we get into more trouble by buying new ones? ... The decision on EVMs is that we will not use them. Full stop."

According to EC sources, among the 1.5 lakh EVMs purchased under a Tk 3,825.34 crore project, there are 148,401 in its inventory, while 1,599 cannot be traced. With each costing around Tk 2.35 lakh, the missing machines are worth about Tk 37.5 crore.

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ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE Ordinance flawed, there will be a stronger bill

Says law minister in JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Enforced Disappearance Prevention and Redress Ordinance, 2025 will be reintroduced at the parliament as one that is "more contemporary, more welfare-oriented and more effective in ensuring justice", said Law Minister Md Asaduzzaman yesterday.

The bill will be brought later in the session after consultations with stakeholders to ensure that offenders "cannot escape accountability under any circumstances", he said while speaking on a point of order in the parliament, following protests from Jamaat MP Mir Ahmad Bin Quasen.

Ahmad expressed shock that the special parliamentary committee had recommended dropping the ordinance and not ratifying it as a bill.

Fighting back emotion, Ahmad, who himself was a victim of enforced disappearance for about eight years, said he had lived in constant fear of death throughout that time and was now dismayed that the ordinance was being allowed to lapse.

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Global oil shock turning into everything crisis

Rising costs of plastic, rubber, polyester hit Asian markets

CNN ONLINE

One month into the war in Iran, a growing shortage of crude oil is threatening to morph into something worse: a shortage of nearly everything.

The conflict in the Middle East has crimped oil and natural gas flows through the Strait of Hormuz, reducing global supply by about one-fifth. The disruption has not only sent fuel prices soaring, but has squeezed supplies of petrochemicals needed to make everyday items like shoes, clothing and plastic bags.

That strain is now spreading into every corner of the consumer market as prices rise for materials like plastic, rubber and polyester. The impact is so far most evident in Asia, which accounts for more than half of the world's manufacturing and is heavily reliant on imports for oil and other commodities.

In South Korea, where people have been panic buying trash bags, the government has encouraged event organizers to minimize use of disposable items. Taiwan has started a hotline for manufacturers that have run out of plastic, while its rice farmers told local media they may hike prices because they can't get vacuum-sealed bags.

In Japan, the oil crisis has sparked fears that patients with chronic kidney failure won't be able to get treatment due to a lack of plastic medical tubes used in hemodialysis. Malaysian glove manufacturers say a dearth of a petroleum byproduct needed to make

rubber latex is threatening global supplies of medical gloves.

"This spills into everything very, very quickly: beer, noodles, chips, toys, cosmetics," said Dan Martin, co-head of business intelligence at Dezan Shira & Associates, an advisory firm that helps international businesses expand in Asia.



That's because plastic caps, crates, snack bags and containers are becoming more difficult to procure. Petroleum derivatives are also needed to make adhesives for footwear and furniture, industrial lubricants for machinery and solvents for paints and cleaning processes, Martin added.

"It's very fast transmission from oil and shipping disruption into petrochemicals and consumer goods," he said.

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House ratifies ordinances on govt job age, conduct

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Parliament yesterday passed two bills ratifying two ordinances – one determining a maximum age limit of 32 years for entry into government service and the other introducing special provisions concerning the conduct and penalties of government employees.

State Minister for Public Administration Abdul Bari placed the bills: the Government Service (Amendment) Bill and the Bill to Fix the Maximum Age Limit for Direct Recruitment in Government and Autonomous, Statutory Authorities, Public Non-Financial Corporations, and Self-Governed Institutions.

Both were passed by voice vote without discussion, as no amendment proposals were raised.

It took about eight minutes for the bills to be passed. During the voice vote, opposition members were not heard saying either "yes" or "no".

The Jatiya Sangsad began passing bills to ratify ordinances from yesterday.

Regarding the two bills, the parliamentary special committee tasked with scrutinising 133 ordinances issued by the interim government recommended that the ordinances be approved exactly as they are. With the passage of the bills, four ordinances have now been ratified.

Through the supplementary agenda, members of parliament were informed about the introduction of the two bills. Standing on a point of order, Opposition Leader Shaliquel Rahman said some bills had been brought under the supplementary agenda.

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Law enforcement and mobile court teams maintained a strong presence at filling stations across Rajshahi city yesterday. Motorcycles and other vehicles queued in an orderly manner to collect petrol, octane, and diesel. The photo was taken at Gul Gafur petrol pump in the city.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

KERANIGANJ FIRE Factory was sealed-off after a previous fire

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The gas lighter manufacturing factory in Keraniganj, where a devastating fire killed at least six people on Saturday, had been operating illegally, police said.

Mohammad Mossaraf Hossain, inspector (investigation) of Keraniganj Police Station, told The Daily Star that the factory was sealed off after catching fire about one and a half years ago.

However, the owners later resumed operations, allegedly with the support of a local influential – Md Iman Ullah, 50.

Police arrested Iman in connection with Saturday's incident. A 10-day remand has been sought, and a hearing on the petition is scheduled for today.

Sub-Inspector Jewel Rana filed a case with South Keraniganj Police Station, accusing factory

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