



"We don't want that (confrontation) but it is our duty to be ready to avoid it, and if it were unavoidable, to win it."

Cuban President Miguel Diaz Canel on possible US attack

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## Strait of Hormuz NOW OPEN

Says Tehran as Lebanon ceasefire takes effect; oil drops 11%; Trump says 'no sticking points' in deal with Iran

AGENCIES

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi yesterday said the Strait of Hormuz was open following a ceasefire agreed on in Lebanon, while US President Donald Trump said he believed a deal to end the Iran war would come "soon", though the timing remained unclear.

"The passage for all commercial vessels through the Strait of Hormuz is declared completely open for the remaining period of the ceasefire," Araqchi said on X.



Trump says Israel banned from bombing Lebanon

Trump rejects Nato offer on Hormuz, says Iran removing mines

Iran says ban remains on military vessels

US says blockade on Iran to remain until a final deal

US president terms Iran war a 'little diversion'

It was unclear whether he was referring to the 10-day truce between Israel and Lebanon that took effect at midnight, or an earlier two-week truce between Iran and the United States that began on April 8.

Iran, which had effectively blocked the crucial waterway, had made extending a ceasefire to Lebanon a condition for reopening it.

A senior Iranian military official told state television that only civilian vessels would be allowed to pass through designated routes with permission from the navy of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

"The passage of military vessels through the Strait of Hormuz remains prohibited," the official said.

Trump welcomed Iran's announcement but said the US naval

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Children gesture from a vehicle as displaced people return to their homes in Lebanon's Tyre yesterday after a 10-day ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel took effect.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Octane imports now beyond storage capacity

ASIFUR RAHMAN and MOHAMMAD SUMAN

Bangladesh's octane stock is set to reach near full storage capacity after a fresh consignment of 25,000 tonnes anchored at the outer anchorage of Chattogram Port last night.

With the latest shipment and ongoing local production, total stock is expected to hit 55,500 tonnes, which is more than the country's maximum storage capacity and enough to meet

more than 45 days of demand.

Additionally, around 700 tonnes of octane are being produced locally in a day.

The country's total octane storage capacity is 53,000 tonnes across 16 depots, including 20,000 tonnes at Eastern Refinery (ERL) and 22,000 tonnes at Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation's main storage in Chattogram.

"The country has never witnessed such a high level of fuel

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

- Octane stock now 55,000 tonnes
- Storage capacity 53,000 tonnes
- Supply increased by 25% at pumps
- Supply more than March 2025 and 2026
- Supply for Apr-May ensured

## IMF, WB assure Dhaka of funds to absorb war shocks

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Bangladesh has secured assurances of substantial financial support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and other multilateral lenders to tackle the energy crisis triggered by the US-Israel war on Iran.

"I believe we will get the package [to recover from the energy shock], and things are moving positively. I expect Bangladesh will receive an improved package," Finance Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury told reporters on the sidelines of the IMF-World Bank Spring Meetings in Washington on Thursday night (Bangladesh time). He did not say how much Bangladesh may receive.

Leading an 11-member delegation, the minister has held a series of meetings with the IMF, World Bank, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and other donor agencies over the past four days.

Officials in the delegation said Bangladesh pressed for additional funds to cover the shortfall caused by the energy crisis, beyond regular budget support.

Speaking to journalists, Amir Khosru said that the energy crisis was a common topic in all meetings. "We need support here. This concern has been raised in meetings with the IMF, World Bank, and other multilateral bodies. The discussions have been very positive, but we must wait to see what the package will be."

He added that talks with development partners will continue, with their teams expected to visit Bangladesh. "My impression is that we will get the package," he said.

Meanwhile, Krishna Srinivasan, director of the IMF's Asia and Pacific Department, said discussions on additional financial support for Bangladesh are ongoing.

Responding to a question on the

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নতুন

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৫ বছর বয়স পর্যন্ত শিশুদের জন্য পুরোজা






## BED TEA

### A Quiet Ritual Across Time

RBR

In 1930s colonial Dhaka, bed tea was the first act of waking life. Balancing a tray of porcelain cups, a pot of steaming milk tea, and a plate of biscuits, the master of the house reclined against embroidered cushions, unfolding the newspaper, while his wife joined him. Together they sipped their bed tea—sweet, milky, comforting—exchanging gentle words before the city's bustle intruded.

For them, this ritual was more than refreshment; it was a symbol of refinement, a colonial custom reshaped to Bengali taste, a cocoon of intimacy at the threshold of the day. Bed tea was intimacy made tangible, a quiet ceremony that marked the transition from rest to rhythm. In those moments, tea was not just a drink but a cultural marker, a sign of belonging and care.

Dhaka's beautiful, slow-paced colonial habits have now completely taken a U-turn. By the 1970s, the city's mornings grew faster, and bed tea began to fade. The streets pulsed with life—rickshaw bells ringing, vendors calling out, workers gathering at cha-er dokan, the tea stalls that lined the lanes. Tea was poured into glass cups, strong and sweet, brewed over coal fires. Clerks, students, and labourers sat shoulder to shoulder, dipping biscuits into their tea, debating politics or gossiping.

Unlike the exclusivity of bed tea, the tea stall was democratic, a place where everyone participated in the same ritual, stripped of hierarchy. Bed tea, once a symbol of leisure and intimacy, gave way to communal energy and conversation.

Yet many old timers and couples still held on to the idea, and their habit of bed tea became fodder for people like me—someone who loves tea and harbours fanciful imaginations of rituals.



I developed the habit of having bed tea because of stories I heard from my aunt, who was newly married to a tea estate manager at the time. She would sit in the tea gardens with her English tea set, the pot wrapped in a hand-embroidered tea cosy, pouring with such grace that even the steam seemed ceremonial.

At 92 now, she has placed in my hands a few pieces of her antique English porcelain dinnerware and

teacups—fragile treasures, yet strong with memory. Later in life, whenever I visited her, I recall her mornings and evenings: crisp cotton saris, pearl strands around her graceful neck, tiny danglers catching the light, and always the tea, always the ritual. Watching her, I absorbed more than the taste—I learned the rhythm of housekeeping, the joy of baking, the quiet dignity of order.

But my rituals are nothing elegant like hers. Mine are rushed, and I cannot begin my day before two cups of steaming black tea liquor, steeped in ginger and cloves. My husband brews the perfect morning tea I love—it charges my battery. Even though I claim to be a tea person, I always brew a runny, flat tea. What I truly love is the aroma of tea brewing, filling the house, marking the start of our day. For some thirty-odd years now, our mornings at 6 a.m. have begun on that fine note, a rhythm of life that continues to this day.

Fast forward to today, and Dhaka's mornings are transformed. Bed tea has all but vanished, replaced by hurried breakfasts and the vibrant culture of roadside stalls and cafés. Young professionals often begin their day with coffee, signalling a cultural shift.

Bed tea survives only as nostalgia, remembered fondly by older generations or offered occasionally in boutique hotels as a gesture of charm. Now bed tea retains its symbolic role—comfort, hospitality, and continuity—though modest compared to the porcelain cups and leisurely mornings of Dhaka's elite past. Bed tea today is not about refinement but about warmth, a simple act of beginning the day together.

Bed tea has travelled from the private luxury of colonial Dhaka to the communal energy of modern tea stalls. It may no longer define Dhaka's mornings, but its memory continues to whisper the gentle pace of days gone by.

## UPDF's youth wing leader shot dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

A leader of youth forum of United People's Democratic Front was shot dead by unidentified assailants in Rangamati Sadar upazila yesterday.

His two sisters, Kripa Sona Chakma and Bhagya Shobha Chakma, sustained bullet injuries as they tried to save their brother.

The deceased was Dharma Sing Chakma, 42, central vice president of the Democratic Youth Forum, Muhammad Abdur Rakib, superintendent of Rangamati police, told The Daily Star.

He said police handed the body over to his family after post-mortem, adding that the two injured were taken to Chattogram for treatment.

The incident occurred around 7:00am in the Kutukchhari residential area. An armed group surrounded the house of Dharma. As he attempted to flee, the attackers opened fire, killing him on the spot, said a statement of the

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## 3 more die of measles in 24hrs

STAR REPORT

Three more patients died of measles in the 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, raising this year's death toll to 37, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

Of the three, two deaths were reported in Barguna district under the Barishal division and one in the Dhaka division.

In addition, the DGHS recorded two more deaths with measles-like symptoms during the same period, taking the number of suspected measles deaths to 174. Both suspected deaths were reported in Dhaka division.

In the last 24 hours, 1,115 new suspected cases were recorded nationwide, including 127 cases confirmed through laboratory testing.

Since March 15, a total of 3,192 measles cases have been confirmed, while 21,467 people have been identified as suspected cases, the DGHS report said.

During the same period, 11,243 patients have recovered and returned home after treatment.

## Strait of Hormuz now open

FROM PAGE 1

blockade of Iranian ports would remain until a peace deal was reached.

"The naval blockade will remain in full force and effect as it pertains to Iran only, until such time as our transaction with Iran is 100% complete," he said on Truth Social, adding the process "should go very quickly".

He also claimed that Iran has "agreed to never close the Strait of Hormuz again. It will no longer be used as a weapon against the World".

He also said Iran was removing mines from the Strait with US assistance.

However, Trump criticised Nato over what he described as an offer to help secure the waterway, telling the alliance to "STAY AWAY".

The US-Israeli conflict with Iran, which began on February 28, has killed thousands and destabilised the Middle East. It also effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz, through which about a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas passes, triggering a historic oil shock.

Following Araqchi's remarks, oil prices fell about 11 percent, extending earlier losses.

The International Monetary Fund this week lowered its global growth forecasts and warned the world economy could tip into recession if the conflict persists.

Later, in an interview with AFP, Trump said there were "no sticking points" left for a peace deal with Iran.

"We're very close. Looks like it's going to be very good for everybody. And we're very close to having a deal," Trump said in a brief telephone call with AFP from Las Vegas, adding there were "no sticking points at all" left with Tehran.

"The strait's going to be open; they already are open. And things are going very well," he added.

Trump, at an event in Las Vegas, also described the war as a "little diversion"

during his second term, amid polling showing public unease.

"We had the best economy in the history of our country in my first term. And we're blowing it out now... And despite our little diversion to the lovely country of Iran... we had to do that," he said, referring to Iran's nuclear ambitions.

A Quinnipiac University poll published Wednesday found 65 percent of US voters blamed Trump for



Women inspect their destroyed home upon returning to Nabatieh in southern Lebanon after a 10-day ceasefire was announced yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

rising gas prices linked to the Strait's closure. Only 36 percent approved of his handling of Iran, while 58 percent disapproved.

Trump had said on Thursday that talks could begin as soon as this weekend, but that appeared increasingly unlikely by yesterday afternoon due to logistical challenges in assembling officials in Islamabad, where the talks are expected.

Despite his optimism, Iranian sources told Reuters that "gaps remained" before a preliminary deal could be reached.

A Pakistani source involved in mediation said there had been progress in backchannel diplomacy and that an upcoming meeting could produce a memorandum of understanding, followed by a comprehensive deal within 60 days.

"Both sides agree in principle. Technical details come later," the source said, speaking anonymously.

One key sticking point is Tehran's nuclear programme. The US has

on transferring enriched uranium to the US had taken place.

Meanwhile, a US-backed ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon appeared largely to be holding, despite reports from the Lebanese army of Israeli violations.

The deal has been praised by major countries, and the UN has commended the US for brokering it.

The Israeli military said it was lifting wartime restrictions, allowing civilian movement and economic activity to return to normal, although Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned that the campaign against Hezbollah was not over.

Trump, however, rebuffed this idea, promising that the US would work with Lebanon to "deal with" Hezbollah.

"Israel will not be bombing Lebanon any longer. They are PROHIBITED from doing so by the U.S.A. Enough is enough!!!" Trump said, in another social media post.

Pakistan, acting as mediator, said a parallel ceasefire in Lebanon was essential to any broader agreement on Iran.

The deal does not require Israel to withdraw from southern Lebanon, where Israeli troops have been destroying villages and infrastructure after ordering residents south of the Litani River to flee. The area makes up about 8 percent of Lebanese territory.

Meanwhile, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that respect for international law is under strain.

Marking the 80th anniversary of the International Court of Justice, he said: "Today, violations of international law are unfolding before our eyes."

"The force of law must always prevail over the law of force."

The ICJ has recently drawn attention, including in a case brought by South Africa against Israel, alleging breaches of the UN Genocide Convention.

## IMF, WB assure

FROM PAGE 1

additional package at a press conference at the IMF headquarters in Washington on Thursday night, he said Bangladesh, like many other Asian countries, has been affected by the energy shock due to its heavy reliance on imports.

"We are working with the authorities in terms of policy support and on the programmes, and negotiations are ongoing," he said. "We'll have to just wait and see how those things pan out."

### \$3 BILLION EMERGENCY FUND

The government is aiming to secure around \$3 billion in emergency assistance from development partners including the IMF and World Bank to cover surging energy and fertiliser import bills for the March-June period triggered by the war.

A Finance Ministry impact analysis estimates Bangladesh will need an additional \$2.61 billion in foreign exchange to meet these costs. Total import expenditure on oil, liquefied natural gas (LNG), and fertiliser over the four-month period is projected at approximately \$5.62 billion, an 86.7 percent jump from a year earlier, it added.

Bangladesh is trying to secure funds from the multilateral lenders, as they have launched special programmes for war-affected countries.

The World Bank announced it could mobilise up to \$100 billion over the next 15 months, surpassing the \$70 billion provided during the Covid-19 pandemic. The IMF has separately declared up to \$50 billion in emergency support for developing and low-income countries, while the Asian Development Bank has unveiled a dedicated package for its Asia-Pacific members.

### REGULAR BUDGET SUPPORT

Beyond the emergency assistance, Bangladesh is set to receive more than \$2 billion in budget support from three development partners in the current fiscal year.

Beyond emergency assistance, Bangladesh is on track to receive more than \$2 billion in regular budget support this fiscal year: \$1.3 billion from the IMF's \$5.5 billion loan programme (in two instalments) by June, \$400 million from the World Bank, and \$750 million from the ADB.

However, progress hinges on meeting IMF reform conditions—many of which remain unfulfilled, particularly around exchange rates and revenue. Failure to satisfy these benchmarks could jeopardise financing from other institutions as well.

Krishna Srinivasan was candid about Bangladesh's fiscal performance, saying the country has not done well in terms of revenue intake.

"Revenue intake has slipped over the last three years. A lot of reforms are needed—both on the fiscal side and on the revenue side," he said, adding that there is work to be done across all three programme pillars: revenue reform, financial sector rehabilitation, and exchange rate adjustment.

Officials said Bangladesh is also pushing for additional budget support from the development partners under relaxed conditionality, similar to arrangements made during the pandemic. Discussions are underway with the World Bank to repurpose up to \$1.5 billion in undisbursed funds from existing projects toward new initiatives or policy support.

## Octane imports now beyond storage capacity

FROM PAGE 1

stock at a time," said Anindya Islam Amit, state minister for power, energy, and mineral resources.

The fuel demand for April and May has already been secured, and preparations for the June schedule are underway.

"We are fully prepared to meet the fuel demand for April and May," Amit added.

Amid the rising stock, the government has increased the octane supply to filling stations by 25 percent from the average daily release in the first half of April.

Currently, depots are supplying about 1,382 tonnes of octane daily, up from 1,115 tonnes between April 1 and 15.

Officials hinted at a further increase in supply due to lack of storage facilities after the unloading of the latest shipment.

In March, when the US-Israel war on Iran escalated, the average daily supply stood at 1,217 tonnes—slightly higher than 1,193 tonnes of March last year.

At the time, the government had

imposed a supply ceiling to match March 2025 demand levels following panic buying.

However, amid uncertainties over timely shipments and tightening stock margins, the BPC reduced daily supply by around 100 tonnes, though officials did not formally acknowledge the cut.

But the long queues still persist at filling stations in Dhaka and Chattogram. Motorcyclists and cars that run on octane were seen lining up from early morning, with many failing to get fuel after daily supplies to the pumps ran out.

The increased release aims to ease pressure at pumps, though restrictions on distribution may remain in place as stations need to serve as many customers as possible, said BPC officials.

In addition, the "fuel pass" system will be gradually introduced all over the country, they said.

As of yesterday, the petrol stock stood at 19,500 tonnes, enough to meet demand for at least two weeks. Besides, there is regular production from local condensates in five fractionation plants.

Diesel stock stood at 81,600 tonnes, enough to meet a week's demand. However, a total of 110,000 tonnes of diesel consignments in three shipments are awaiting unloading at Chattogram Port.

The refined fuel stocks are at a comfortable level, Amit said.

Jet fuel reserves, in particular, are sufficient for nearly six weeks, with adequate supply planned for April and May and preparations underway for June, he added.

ERL, the country's lone refinery, is currently operating two of its four units, producing limited quantities of petrol and bitumen.

Crude oil stocks have run out after three consignments were delayed due to disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz following the outbreak of war.

However, the authorities have secured two new shipments via the Red Sea from Saudi Arabia's Yanbu port. The shipments are expected next month.

"We hope ERL will not face a complete shutdown as the first consignment is scheduled to arrive in

the first week of May. Meanwhile, we are utilising the downtime to carry out maintenance on two units," said ERL Managing Director Md Sharif Hasnat.

ERL contributes only about one-fifth of the country's total fuel supply, according to Amit.

To manage the situation, the government has approved increased imports of refined fuel to offset the shortfall, he said, adding that plans are underway to install a second unit at ERL with an annual refining capacity of 3 million tonnes by 2029.

The government is also preparing to float an international tender in May after finalising whether to go for foreign funding or domestic resources.

This will allow Bangladesh to diversify crude import sources beyond the Middle East, reduce exposure to global volatility and regional disruptions, he said.

ERL, which was established in 1968, has a refining capacity of 1.5 million tonnes, while the country's annual demand exceeds 7 million tonnes of refined fuel.

## Mob kills 2

FROM PAGE 12

brother Fazlu, 28, said locals and police.

On information, police went to the spot. Pannu and Fazlu were killed on the spot and Nazmul was critically injured but was rescued alive by police, said Aminul Islam, inspector (investigation) of Manikganj Sadar Police Station.

Nazmul was first taken to Manikganj 250-bed Hospital and later sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, he added.

"During primary investigation, we have found evidence of rape attempt on the girl. However, details will be known after getting the autopsy report," Aminul told The Daily Star.

No complaint was filed and no one was arrested as of filing of this report around 9:00pm yesterday.

Additional police personnel have been deployed in the area to fend off any untoward incident, he added.

Talking to reporters, Atika's uncle

Rabiul Alam claimed that the teenage boy went into hiding after killing his niece by tying a cloth around her neck. Later, the agitated people beat up the teenager's father, uncle, and brother.

Her mother Arifa Begum, in a choked voice, said, "Why did you kill my daughter? You need money; you should have told me. I would have given you money. My daughter was killed for her earrings and gold chain."

Meanwhile, Nargis Begum, wife of deceased Pannu Mia, complained, "If my son [the teen] was guilty, he could have been handed over to the police. But why were my husband and brother-in-law killed? Why was my elder son [Nazmul] beaten up?"

Mohammad Sarwar Alam, superintendent of Manikganj police, said there might be an attempt to rape the girl child and to rob her jewellery. And then she was killed.

Police are investigating the incident and legal action will be taken upon investigation, he said.

## DHAKA

Scrap 'anti-state'  
US trade dealProf Anu Muhammad  
urges govt at rally

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prof Anu Muhammad yesterday expressed strong concern over parliament's silence on the controversial trade agreement with the United States, demanding its immediate cancellation to protect the country's economic security.

Speaking at a rally organised by the Democratic Rights Committee at Shahbagh in the capital, he said, "An elected government has come to power for the first time since 2014, but it is unfortunate that not a single lawmaker has uttered a word against this anti-state deal so far."

The eminent economist alleged that the interim government signed the agreement in a "hurry" and with "over-enthusiasm" on February 9, just three days before the 13th national election.

Calling the move "beyond the jurisdiction" of the Prof Muhammad Yunus-led government, he said the debt and insecurity resulting from the deal would burden future generations.

He also described the agreement as a "colonial bond" that would allow the US to influence Bangladesh's trade and military-strategic interests. He claimed it would force

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Hawkers occupy much of this road in the capital's Gulistan area, just 10 days after Dhaka Metropolitan Police cleared encroachments and fined street vendors. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

Delhi reviewing  
Dhaka's request to  
extradite HasinaSays Indian Ministry of  
External Affairs

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

India is reviewing Bangladesh's formal request for the extradition of deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina through established legal and judicial channels, said the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) yesterday.

"The request is being examined as part of ongoing judicial and internal legal processes. We will continue to engage constructively on the issue with all the stakeholders. We follow all developments very closely," said MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal at a weekly media briefing.

Dhaka had made a formal request to New Delhi seeking the extradition of Hasina, who fled to India after the July uprising in 2024.

The relations between the two countries had strained since then. After the BNP government assumed power,

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Footpaths reoccupied despite  
citywide DMP crackdownHawkers back within days; experts urge  
rehabilitation for lasting solutionHELEMUL ALAM, MUNTAKIM SAAD  
and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Just 10 days after a massive drive by Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) to reclaim encroached footpaths and roads, many areas across the capital have again been occupied by hawkers.

At least 44 people were arrested, and around Tk 10 lakh was realised in fines during the drive from April 1 to April 5. The operation covered areas under DMP's Lalbagh, Wari, Ramna, Mirpur, Motijheel, Tejgaon, Gulshan and Uttara traffic divisions.

Additional Commissioner (Traffic) Anisur Rahman told The Daily Star on the final day of the drive that follow-up operations would

continue to prevent reoccupation. "We will keep monitoring so that encroachers cannot return," he said.

However, visits to Gulistan, Mirpur, Tejgaon and Mohammadpur found that hawkers have already resumed operations, reoccupying footpaths and roads.

Both sides of the road and adjacent footpaths in Gulistan, from Gulistan Hall to Golapshah Majhar Road, have once again fallen under the control of hawkers. Many hawkers have set up makeshift stalls using cloth and plastic so they can quickly move during drives, while others operate more permanently.

"We are running our businesses at risk, as there is no alternative. We pay Tk 100 as toll to linemen,

though business has become uncertain," said a hawker, requesting anonymity.

Similar scenes were observed in other areas.

In the first week of April, police cleared hawkers from key locations in Mohammadpur, including Town Hall, BRTC bus stand, Allah Karim Market and Basila Road, evicting around 500 shops. Although many returned within days, police carried out additional drives.

During a visit on Thursday, vendors were again seen occupying the left lane from Mohammadpur Bus Stand to Basila Tin Rasta, with goods spilling onto footpaths and restricting pedestrian movement.

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78,500 pilgrims  
to perform Hajj  
this yearPM inaugurates Hajj  
flights, seeks blessings  
from them for country

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman inaugurated the Hajj flights at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) last night.

The prime minister formally opened the first Hajj flight at 11:57pm, which was scheduled to depart the Dhaka airport at 12:20am today for King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah in Saudi Arabia, carrying 418 pilgrims.

Earlier, Tarique Rahman, also BNP chairman, arrived at the airport around 11:30pm and went straight inside the aircraft.

At that time, he was seen talking to each of the pilgrims onboard and shaking hands with them. The prime minister joined a munajat (prayer) inside the aircraft, seeking blessings of Almighty Allah for the successful accomplishment of the Hajj rituals.



PHOTO: PMO

Later, addressing the pilgrims, the prime minister sought doa from them for the country and its people and his government as well.

Earlier, the prime minister visited the Ashkona Hajj Camp in the city and exchanged pleasantries with the Hajj pilgrims there.

According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, a total of 14 flights are scheduled for today, including six to be operated by Biman Bangladesh Airlines, four by Saudia airlines, and four by Flynas.

Pre-hajj flights will end on May 21. A total of 207 pre-hajj flights are scheduled, including 102 by Biman Bangladesh Airlines, 75 by Saudia, and 30 by Flynas.

Bangladesh, one of the world's largest Hajj pilgrim-sending countries, is expected to send around 78,500 pilgrims to Saudi Arabia this year. Of them, 4,565 pilgrims will perform Hajj under government management, while 73,935 under private agencies.

Energy-focused urban  
development amid  
global changes crucial

Speakers tell discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a discussion yesterday said integrated urban development and transport planning aligned with sustainable energy systems is crucial in the context of the evolving global situation.

They stressed the need for energy impact assessments to measure and reduce energy consumption across sectors.

The discussion, titled "Urbanisation and Development Thinking in Bangladesh in the Context of the Energy Crisis and Changing Global Situation", was organised by the Institute for Planning and Development (IPD) at the Bishwo Shahitto Kendro's conference room in Dhaka.

IPD Executive Director Prof Adil Muhammed Khan identified energy-efficient lighting and effective public transportation as key ways to reduce demand.

**IPD Executive Director Prof Adil Muhammed Khan identified energy-efficient lighting and effective public transportation as key ways to reduce demand.**

He called for strengthening rail-and-water based transport services, warning that overdependence on roads and fossil fuels is unsustainable in the long term.

He also recommended planned expansion of electric vehicles, highlighted the need for energy demand mapping and realistic rationing during power shortages, and underscored expanding public-private partnerships (PPP), microfinance, and community-based initiatives, alongside raising awareness through education, research, and alternative energy use.

Dr Ariful Islam, president of the Bangladesh Institute of Planners and also IPD director, said rural energy shortages are accelerating migration to cities, hindering decentralisation and sustainable development.

He stressed improved public transport, green buildings, transit-

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MOB ATTACK  
AT SHAHBAGH  
370 citizens  
slam 'police  
inaction'

DU CORRESPONDENT

Condemning the April 10 mob attack in Shahbagh, 370 citizens have accused law enforcement agencies of failing to act.

They also expressed deep concern over "police indifference, lack of cooperation with victims, and reluctance to register a case, even though the assault took place near a police station."

During the attack, several individuals were beaten up and sexually assaulted.

In a statement issued yesterday, the signatories — including civil society members and rights activists — said the failure to act against perpetrators already identified through videos circulating on social media raises questions about the state's ability to fulfil its responsibilities.

They stressed that every citizen, irrespective of

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'No chaos over nominations,  
accept party decisions'

Tarique tells reserved seat aspirants; interviews begin

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairman and Prime Minister Tarique Rahman has instructed party leaders seeking nomination to the women's reserved seats in parliament to accept the party's final decision.

He also directed all aspirants not to create any chaotic situation over the nominations, warning that such actions could harm the image of both the BNP and the government.

The issue was discussed during the BNP's interviews with aspirants at the chairman's Gulshan office yesterday afternoon, where members of the party's standing committee were present.

During the interviews, aspirants were asked about their political



**During the interviews, aspirants were asked about their political background, organisational work, and ability to represent women in parliament.**

background, organisational work, and ability to represent women in parliament.

Senior BNP leaders said the party is trying to strike a balance by giving importance to both long-serving, dedicated women leaders and younger faces who may bring new energy and ideas to politics.

About two hours before the interviews, aspirants, along with their supporters, gathered in front of the office. They discussed their chances, shared updates about the selection process, lobbied informally with party insiders, and tried to assess who might secure nomination.

On the first day, aspirants from Rajshahi, Khulna, Barishal,

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Change of Date

25<sup>th</sup>

The Daily Star Prime Bank

O&A  
LEVEL  
AWARDSSaluting the Nation Builders of  
TomorrowNew date:  
Saturday, 25 July 2026~~Previous Date: 18 April 2026~~Due to an unforeseen technical  
issue at the venue, the event  
has been rescheduled  
to 25 July 2026.We regret  
any inconvenience caused.

## Commerce Secretary Mahbubur Rahman passes away

STAR REPORT

Commerce Ministry Secretary Mahbubur Rahman passed away early yesterday morning while undergoing treatment. He was 58.

Rahman was admitted to Square Hospital in Dhaka on April 13 due to a decrease in blood platelet levels.

Later, he was diagnosed with malaria, according to a press release from the ministry.

He leaves behind his wife, three daughters, and numerous well-wishers.

Mahbubur Rahman joined the civil service under the customs and excise cadre. He joined as commerce secretary on February 25, 2025.

Commerce Minister Khandakar Abdul Muktedir expressed deep shock and sorrow at Rahman's death.

In a condolence message, he said, "Mahbubur Rahman was a skilled, honest, and dedicated officer. His professionalism, sense of duty, and integrity contributed significantly to the activities of the Ministry of Commerce." "With his untimely death, the country has lost an experienced administrator, which is difficult to replace."



Women artisans weave sheetal pati at Kathalia village in Bakerganj upazila of Barishal, preserving a traditional craft passed down through generations. Depending on size and quality, each mat sells for Tk 2,000 to Tk 3,000. The photo was taken recently. PHOTO: TITU DAS

## Nor'wester wreaks havoc in five districts

5 killed in lightning strikes, 50 injured; storms cause extensive loss to agriculture

STAR REPORT

Five people were killed and over 50 injured as a sudden nor'wester and lightning strikes swept across several districts on Thursday night, report our correspondents.

The region experienced strong winds, hailstorms, and lightning. Houses were damaged, trees uprooted, and electric poles knocked down, disrupting power supply in several areas.

In Shahapur village of Jashore, farmer Lutfar Rahman Sardar died after being struck by lightning while returning from the field.

Twenty people were injured in Jashore, while 16 electric poles were toppled, 50 trees uprooted and over 20 houses destroyed.

Keshabpur Upazila Agriculture Office said around 150 bighas of paddy fields were flattened, while mango and jackfruit orchards suffered significant losses.

Upazila Agriculture Officer Abdullah Al Mamun said assessments were underway to determine the extent of crop damage.

Mosharrar Hossain, deputy director of the Department of Agricultural Extension in Jashore, however, said, "Some Boro paddy fields have leaned, but we do not expect major losses. About 18mm rainfall has been recorded, which is beneficial for paddy."

Jashore Palli Bidyut Samity 2 general manager Hadiuzzaman said at least



16 power poles broken and numerous electric lines damaged by fallen trees in Manirampur and Keshabpur.

District Relief and Rehabilitation Officer Sheikh Abdul Kader said local authorities had been instructed to assess losses.

In Jhenaidah's Maheshpur, a woman

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

## Ensure security at shrines: speakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government should ensure security at shrines and khanqahs across the country through monitoring and effective presence from law enforcement agencies, demanded leaders of a youth forum yesterday.

At a human chain in front of Jatiya Press Club, Mainia Youth Forum also demanded that those responsible for recent attacks on mazars, as well as individuals who incited violence, be brought to justice.

"Human rights violations have continued across the country for years without any effective remedy," said Syed Mashuk E Moineddin, president of the forum.

"We hoped that after the new government assumed office, law and order along with people's civil liberties would be restored, but to no avail," he said.

Mashuk also urged the government to arrange a national dialogue soon, warning that they would be compelled to launch a larger movement if mob violence and extrajudicial killings continued.

## Mujibnagar Day observed unofficially

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Mujibnagar Day, marking the swearing in of Bangladesh's first government in 1971, passed yesterday without any official programme.

The day commemorates the historic oath taken at the mango grove in Mujibnagar, Meherpur, during the Liberation War.

Despite the absence of a state programme, local freedom fighters and members of the Freedom Fighters' Children Command Council placed wreaths at the Mujibnagar Memorial around 9:00am.

Officer-in-Charge Zahidul Islam of Mujibnagar Police Station said the day was observed privately.

Among those present were freedom fighter Capt (ret) Abdul Malek, Haji Ahsan Ali Khan, and local leaders of the council. Others who attended included journalist and writer Abu Sayeed Khan; former CPB general secretary Ruhin Hossain Prince; and BASAD assistant general secretary Rajekuzzaman Ratan, among others.

Abdul Malek said, "April 17 is not a political day. It is a significant day for our independence. Regardless of which government is in power, the day should be observed officially."

## Experts urge front-of-package labelling to tackle rising NCDs risks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Health experts and activists have stressed introducing front-of-package labelling (FOPL) on ultra-processed food products to combat the spread of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in the country.

Otherwise, the risk of NCDs linked to consumption of ultra-processed food will increase at an alarming rate, they warned.

They said this at a two-day journalists' workshop titled "Front-of-Package Labelling (FOPL) in Bangladesh: Necessity, Progress and Way Forward", organised by PROGGA (Knowledge for Progress), with support from the Global Health Advocacy Incubator (GHA), on April 15-16 at the Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) auditorium in Dhaka. It was attended by 29 journalists from different media platforms.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7

**PRAYER TIMING**  
APRIL 18

Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 4:35	12:45	4:45	6:24	7:45
JAMAT 5:10	1:15	5:00	6:28	8:15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

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### গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলী সওজ এর কার্যালয় সড়ক বিভাগ, টাঙ্গাইল।

☎: ০৯২১-৬৪০৪৩

E-mail : eetan@rhd.gov.bd/ae.rhd.tangail@gmail.com

স্মারক নং- ৪৭৪.০৭.০১.২৬-২০২৫

তারিখ- ১৬-০৪-২০২৬ইং।

### "হাতুড়ান্না সেতুর টোল আদায়ের ইজারা কোটেশন বিজ্ঞপ্তি (৬ষ্ঠ আন্ধান)"

০১।	ইজারা কোটেশন নং	:	০১/কো৪/ইই/টিআর/২০২৫-২০২৬
০২।	ইজারার বিবরণ	:	২০২৫-২০২৬ অর্থ বৎসরে টাঙ্গাইল সড়ক বিভাগীয় মির্জাপুর(গোড়াই)-সখিপুর সড়কের ৪র্থ কিলোমিটারে হাতুড়ান্না সেতুর উপর দিয়ে যানবাহন পারাপারের জন্য টোল আদায়ের নিমিত্তে ইজারা প্রদান।
০৩।	ইজারা চুক্তির মেয়াদ	:	৩(তিন) অর্থ বৎসর (১০৯৬ দিন)।
০৪।	ইজারা কোটেশনের সিডিউল মূল্য	:	টাকা ৫০০০.০০ (পাঁচ হাজার টাকা) মাত্র (অফেরতযোগ্য)
০৫।	বায়নার টাকার পরিমাণ	:	ইজারা উদ্ধৃত দরের ১০% (শতকরা দশ ভাগ) নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলী, সওজ, সড়ক বিভাগ, টাঙ্গাইল এর অনুকূলে যে কোন তফসিলভুক্ত ব্যাংক হতে ব্যাংক ড্রাফট/ পে-অর্ডার আকারে ইজারা কোটেশনের সাথে জমা দিতে হবে।
০৬।	ইজারা কোটেশন বিক্রয়ের শেষ তারিখ ও সময়	:	২৬/০৪/২০২৬ খ্রিস্টাব্দ তারিখ বিকাল ৩.০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত (অফিস চলাকালীন সময়)
০৭।	মুখবন্ধ অবস্থায় ইজারা কোটেশন গ্রহণের শেষ তারিখ ও সময়	:	২৭/০৪/২০২৬ খ্রিস্টাব্দ তারিখ দুপুর ১২.০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত
০৮।	ইজারা ডাকে অংশ গ্রহণের যোগ্যতা	:	ড্যাট ও আয়কর সনদধারী প্রতিষ্ঠান/নাগরিক, সরকারী/বেসরকারী/ স্বায়ত্বশাসিত সকল প্রতিষ্ঠানের ঠিকাদার।
০৯।	যে সকল কার্যালয়ে ইজারা কোটেশন ক্রয়ের জন্য পাওয়া যাবে	:	বিভাগীয় কমিশনার, ঢাকা/ জেলা প্রশাসক, টাঙ্গাইল/ নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলী, সড়ক বিভাগ, টাঙ্গাইল/উপ-বিভাগীয় প্রকৌশলী, * সওজ, সড়ক উপ-বিভাগ, টাঙ্গাইল/মধুপুর/মির্জাপুর।
১০।	যে সকল কার্যালয়ে ইজারা কোটেশন মুখবন্ধ অবস্থায় গ্রহণ করা হবে	:	(ক) নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলী, সড়ক বিভাগ, টাঙ্গাইল। (খ) জেলা প্রশাসক, টাঙ্গাইল।
১১।	ইজারা কোটেশন খোলার স্থান, তারিখ ও সময়	:	স্থানঃ নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলীর কার্যালয়। সড়ক ও জনপথ অধিদপ্তর, সড়ক বিভাগ, টাঙ্গাইল। তারিখঃ ২৭/০৪/২০২৬ খ্রীষ্টাব্দ। সময়ঃ দুপুর ৩:০০ ঘটিকা।
১২।	ইজারা আন্ধানকারী যে কোন সময় যে কোন কোটেশন/সকল কোটেশন বাতিলের ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করেন।	:	

(ড. সিনথিয়া আজমীরা খান)  
পরিচিতি নং-৬০২২১৪  
নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলী, সওজ  
সড়ক বিভাগ, টাঙ্গাইল।

**বাংলাদেশ অভ্যন্তরীণ নৌপরিবহন কর্তৃপক্ষ**  
১৪১-১৪৩, মতিঝিল বাণিজ্যিক এলাকা, ঢাকা-১০০০।

**ইকোপার্ক ইজারা/লাইসেন্স প্রদানের উন্মুক্ত টেন্ডার বিজ্ঞপ্তি**

বাংলাদেশ অভ্যন্তরীণ নৌপরিবহন কর্তৃপক্ষ (বিআইডব্লিউটিএ)-এর নিয়ন্ত্রণাধীন নিম্নবর্ণিত ৩টি ইকোপার্ক ২০২৬-২০২৭ অর্থ বছর হতে ২০২৫-২০২৬ অর্থ বছর পর্যন্ত ১০ (দশ) বছরের জন্য ইজারা/লাইসেন্স প্রদানের লক্ষ্যে পাঠ্যে বর্ণিত তারিখে ১ম দফা উন্মুক্ত টেন্ডার অনুষ্ঠিত হবে।

ক্রঃ নং	সংশ্লিষ্ট নদী বন্দরের নাম	ইকোপার্কের নাম	১ম দফা টেন্ডারের তারিখ
১	ঢাকা	মিরপুর বড় বাজার ইকোপার্ক পয়েন্ট	২৯-০৪-২০২৬
২	নারায়ণগঞ্জ	বিআইডব্লিউটিএ ইকোপার্ক, হাজীগঞ্জ, নারায়ণগঞ্জ।	২৯-০৪-২০২৬
৩	চন্দী	চন্দী ইকো পার্ক	২৯-০৪-২০২৬

২। আগামী ২১-০৪-২০২৬ খ্রিঃ তারিখ হতে ১ম দফা টেন্ডার সিডিউল সংশ্লিষ্ট বন্দর নিয়ন্ত্রণ কর্মকর্তার দপ্তর এবং বিআইডব্লিউটিএর প্রধান দপ্তরস্থ বন্দর ও পরিবহন বিভাগ হতে জমা করা যাবে। উক্ত ২টি দপ্তরস্থ সংশ্লিষ্ট জেলা প্রশাসকের কার্যালয় এবং নৌপরিবহন মন্ত্রণালয়ে স্থাপিত টেন্ডার বাজেটের নির্ধারিত তারিখ সকাল ০৯:০০ ঘটিকা হতে বেলা ১৩:০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত টেন্ডার দাখিল করা যাবে। টেন্ডার সন্মুক্ত বিস্তারিত তথ্য গত ০৮-০৪-২০২৬ খ্রিঃ তারিখে সৈনিক বাংলাদেশ প্রতিদিন ও সৈনিক ইন্ডেক্স এবং ০৯-০৪-২০২৬ খ্রিঃ তারিখে সৈনিক যুগান্তর ও ডেইলী স্টার পত্রিকায় প্রকাশিত বিভিন্ন ঘাট/পয়েন্ট ইজারার টেন্ডার বিজ্ঞপ্তিতে উল্লেখ করা হয়েছে। বিআইডব্লিউটিএর ওয়েব সাইটেও (www.biwa.gov.bd) উক্ত বিজ্ঞপ্তি আপলোড করা আছে। এছাড়াও বিআইডব্লিউটিএর বন্দর ও পরিবহন বিভাগ, ঢাকা প্রধান দপ্তর এবং সংশ্লিষ্ট নদী বন্দর নিয়ন্ত্রণ কর্মকর্তার দপ্তর হতেও টেন্ডার সন্মুক্ত যাবতীয় তথ্য জানা যাবে।

৩। টেন্ডার এবং লাইসেন্স প্রদান ও নবায়ন সন্মুক্ত নিয়মাবলীঃ

(ক) ২০২৬-২০২৭ অর্থ বছরের ০১-০৭-২০২৬ খ্রিঃ তারিখ হতে ২০২৫-২০২৬ অর্থ বছরের ৩০-০৬-২০২৬ খ্রিঃ তারিখ পর্যন্ত ১০ বছরের জন্য ইকোপার্কের লাইসেন্স প্রদান করা হবে। তবে ১০ (দশ) বছরের জন্য লাইসেন্স প্রদান করা হলেও লাইসেন্সটি প্রতি বছর নবায়ন করতে হবে।

(খ) ইকোপার্ক ইজারা গ্রহণে আগ্রহী ব্যক্তিগণ ১০ (দশ) বছরের মধ্যে প্রথম বছরের অর্থাৎ ২০২৬-২০২৭ অর্থ বছরের ০১-০৭-২০২৬ খ্রিঃ তারিখ হতে ৩০-০৬-২০২৬ খ্রিঃ তারিখ পর্যন্ত ১(এক) বছরের জন্য দর উদ্ধৃত করবেন। উক্ত উদ্ধৃত দর (অফার) প্রথম বছরের লাইসেন্স ফি হিসেবে গণ্য হবে। উক্ত লাইসেন্স ফির উপর ১৫% মুসক ও ১০% আয়কর আরোপযোগ্য হবে।

(গ) প্রথম বছরের (২০২৬-২০২৭) লাইসেন্স ফির উপর পরবর্তী ৯ বছরে প্রতি বছর ৫% হারে চক্র বৃদ্ধিতে লাইসেন্স ফি ধার্য হবে। উক্ত ধার্যকৃত লাইসেন্স ফির উপর ১৫% মুসক ও ১০% আয়কর বাদ অর্থ আরোপযোগ্য হবে। সরকার কর্তৃক সময় সময় উক্ত হার পুনর্নির্ধারিত হলে উক্ত হারে তা পরিশোধযোগ্য।

(ঘ) আগ্রহী দরদাতা ১ম বছর অর্থাৎ ২০২৬-২০২৭ অর্থ বছরের জন্য উদ্ধৃত দরের ৫০% আন্ধান (অগ্রীম লাইসেন্স ফি), ১৫% মুসক ও ১০% আয়কর বাদ বিআইডব্লিউটিএ কর্তৃক নির্ধারিত তফসিল ব্যাংকসমূহ হতে ইস্যুকৃত ৩টি পৃথক পে-অর্ডার/ডিডি দরপত্রের সাথে সংযুক্ত করবেন।

(ঙ) বিআইডব্লিউটিএর তরফ হতে সফলকাম দরদাতার অনুকূলে সন্মুক্ত প্রদানের ৩০ (ত্রিশ) দিনের মধ্যে লাইসেন্স ফির অবশিষ্ট ৫০% অর্থ জমা প্রদানসহ নির্ধারিত শর্তাধীনে ৩০০ টাকা মূল্যমানের নন জুডিশিয়াল স্ট্যাম্পে সংশ্লিষ্ট বন্দর নিয়ন্ত্রণ কর্মকর্তার সাথে চুক্তিনামা সম্পাদন করতে হবে। উক্ত ৩০ দিনের মধ্যে ৫০% অর্থ জমা প্রদানসহ চুক্তিনামা সম্পাদনে ব্যর্থ হলে টেন্ডারের সাথে জমা কৃত সমুদায় অর্থ বাজেয়াপ্ত করণ পূর্বক পুনঃ টেন্ডারের ব্যবস্থা গ্রহণ করা হবে। এক্ষেত্রে কোনরূপ নোটিশ প্রদান করা হবে না।

(চ) প্রতি অর্থ বছরের মার্চ মাসের ৭ তারিখের মধ্যে পরবর্তী অর্থ বছরের লাইসেন্স নবায়নের জন্য যথার্থভাবে আবেদন করতে হবে। এপ্রিল মাসের ০৭ তারিখের মধ্যে বিআইডব্লিউটিএর তরফ হতে নবায়নের বিষয়ে চূড়ান্ত সিদ্ধান্ত প্রদান করা হবে। নবায়নের সন্মত প্রদানের পর এপ্রিল মাসের ৩০ তারিখের মধ্যে ধার্যকৃত লাইসেন্স ফি, মুসক ও আয়কর বাদ অর্থ সংশ্লিষ্ট বন্দর নিয়ন্ত্রণ কর্মকর্তার দপ্তরে জমা প্রদান করতে হবে। নির্ধারিত সময়ে আবেদন না করলে বা নবায়নের জন্য ধার্যকৃত অর্থ যথাসময়ে জমা প্রদান না করলে লাইসেন্স বাতিল করে পুনঃ টেন্ডার আহবানের মাধ্যমে আগ্রহী দরদাতার অনুকূলে লাইসেন্স প্রদান করা হবে।

৪। লাইসেন্সের শর্তাবলীঃ

ইকোপার্ক ইজারা/লাইসেন্স গ্রহণের পালনীয় কতিপয় শর্ত নিম্নে প্রদত্ত হলো। তবে বিস্তারিত শর্ত টেন্ডার সিডিউলে উল্লেখ আছে।

(ক) দরদাতা কর্তৃক দরপত্রের সাথে একটি প্রাথমিক বিনিয়োগ পরিকল্পনা (স্থাপিতব্য স্থাপনা ও সুযোগ-সুবিধার বিবরণ, রাইড ও অন্যান্য বিনোদনমূলক আইটেমসহ উন্নয়নমূলক কর্মকর্তার বিবরণ এবং সম্ভাব্য বায় ইত্যাদি) সংযুক্ত করতে হবে।

(খ) ইকোপার্ক স্থায়ী কোন অবকাঠামো নির্মাণ করা যাবে না। শুধুমাত্র অস্থায়ী বা ভাসমান স্থাপনা দ্বারা এবং বিভিন্ন ধরনের রাইড স্থাপনের মাধ্যমে পার্কের কার্যক্রম পরিচালনা করতে হবে।

(গ) পার্ক পরিচালনার কার্যক্রম প্রাক্তির পর লাইসেন্সী কর্তৃক স্থাপিতব্য স্থাপনা এবং রাইডসমূহের পূর্ণাঙ্গ লে আউট গ্র্যান্ড জমা দিয়ে কর্তৃপক্ষের পূর্বন্যূনমত প্রদান করতে হবে। স্থাপনা ও রাইডসমূহ বিআইডব্লিউটিএর স্থানীয় বন্দর নিয়ন্ত্রণ কর্মকর্তা এবং সংশ্লিষ্ট ডিভিশনের নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলীর তত্ত্বাবধানে স্থাপন করতে হবে। অনুমোদিত স্থাপনা ও রাইডের অতিরিক্ত কোন কিছুই স্থাপন করা যাবে না।

(ঘ) সরকার কর্তৃক নির্ধারিত সড়কহার, ২০১৯ অনুযায়ী ইকোপার্ক প্রবেশ ফি বাদ আদায় করা যাবে। উভয়ের মধ্যে গ্রহণযোগ্য অটোমেশন পদ্ধতিতে প্রবেশ ফি আদায় করতে হবে। প্রবেশ ফি বাদ আদায়কৃত অর্থ হতে ২৫% অর্থ বিআইডব্লিউটিএ প্রাপ্য হবে যা অটোমেশন পদ্ধতিতে তৎক্ষণিকভাবে বিআইডব্লিউটিএর তহবিলে জমা হবে। তবে অটোমেশন চালু করার পূর্ব পর্যন্ত মাসিক ভিত্তিতে বিআইডব্লিউটিএর অংশ সংশ্লিষ্ট বন্দর নিয়ন্ত্রণ কর্মকর্তার দপ্তরে জমা দিতে হবে।

(ঙ) সরকার কর্তৃক অধিভুক্ত প্রবেশ ফির পরিমাণ পুনর্নির্ধারিত করা হলে উক্ত হারে তা আদায় করা যাবে এবং বিআইডব্লিউটিএকে আনুপাতিকভাবে উক্ত হারে অর্থ প্রদান করতে হবে। একইভাবে সরকার কর্তৃক মুসক ও আয়করের পরিমাণ বর্ধিত করা হলে বা নতুন কোন চার্জ ধার্য করা হলে বর্ধিত হারে এবং নতুন ধার্যকৃত চার্জ পরিশোধ করতে হবে।

(চ) লাইসেন্সী কর্তৃক ইকোপার্ক কর্তৃপক্ষের অনুমোদিত নির্দিষ্ট স্থানে অস্থায়ী ক্যান্টিন/দোকান, টাফেট, কফি বা টি স্টল নিজ বরতে স্থাপন করতে পারবে।

(ছ) ইকোপার্ক, সল্যাং এলাকায় কচিসমত বিল বোর্ড, বিজ্ঞাপন, সাইন বোর্ড কর্তৃপক্ষের অনুমোদনক্রমে স্থাপন করতে পারবে।

(জ) দর্শনার্থীদের আকর্ষণের জন্য ইকোপার্ক-এর সল্যাং নদীতে নির্দিষ্ট স্থানে কর্তৃপক্ষের অনুমোদন সাপেক্ষে প্যাডেল বোট বা স্পীড বোট পরিচালনা করে করতে পারবে, তবে নদীর প্রশস্ততা বিবেচনায় স্পীড বোটের গতি সীমিত রাখতে হবে।

(ঝ) এছাড়াও লাইসেন্স দাতার অনুমোদন/অনুমতি সাপেক্ষে মুক্তিসংগত অন্যান্য কাজ করতে পারবে।

(ঞ) রাষ্ট্রীয় কাজের প্রয়োজনে বা বিআইডব্লিউটিএর কাজের প্রয়োজনে ৩ (তিন) মাসের নোটিশে লাইসেন্স দাতা কর্তৃক লাইসেন্সটি অবসান করতে পারবেন। একইভাবে লাইসেন্স গ্রহীতা মেয়াদ পূর্ণ হওয়ার পূর্বেই ইকোপার্ক পরিচালনায় অনগ্রহী হলে ৩ মাসের আগাম নোটিশে তা সমর্পণ করতে পারবেন। এক্ষেত্রে পূর্ববর্তী সকল পাওনা (যদি থাকে) এবং চলমান পূর্ব বছরের লাইসেন্স ফিসহ যাবতীয় অর্থ পরিশোধ করতে হবে।

৬। কোন কারণ দর্শানো ব্যতিরেকে যে কোন টেন্ডার গ্রহণ বা যে কোন টেন্ডার বাতিল এবং সকল টেন্ডার বাতিল করার ক্ষমতা কর্তৃপক্ষ সংরক্ষণ করেন।

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## US Senate vote on arms sale to Israel shows huge 'cracks'

AGENCIES

A vote in the United States Senate to block military equipment for Israel this week ended in defeat. But rights advocates are hailing the result as an "inflection point" that shows growing frustration with Israeli policies.

Democratic senators overwhelmingly supported the measure on Wednesday, which aimed to stop the sale of military bulldozers to Israel. Only seven crossed party lines to join the Republican majority in sinking the bill in a 40-59 vote.

Activists are calling the tally a sign of "historic" progress, reports Al Jazeera online. Beth Miller, the political director at the advocacy group Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) Action, said it was "shameful" that US lawmakers continue to vote to arm Israel.

In her view, the 40 votes in favour of Wednesday's resolution "shows massive cracks in the political pillar that upholds the US-Israel alliance".

**Only seven crossed party lines to join Republican majority in sinking the bill in a 40-59 vote**

"While the measure didn't pass, the vote makes clear that a majority of Senate Democrats now oppose unconditional aid to Israel, aligning with the views of most Americans," said Hassan el-Tayyab, legislative director for Middle East policy at the Friends Committee on National Legislation, a peace advocacy group.

"This was not only a vote about arms sales, but a vote against further escalation, including a wider war with Iran."

The bill, introduced by progressive Senator Bernie Sanders, came amid growing anger over conflict with Iran, which President Trump launched jointly with Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu without congressional authorisation.



Smoke rises on the Lebanese side of the Israel-Lebanon border after an explosion, a day after a 10-day ceasefire took effect, as seen from Israel, yesterday. Lebanon's National News Agency reported the first violation after an ambulance was hit in Kounine near the border, causing casualties among medical workers. PHOTO: REUTERS

## China intensifies Iran diplomacy

Analysts say Xi Jinping's upcoming Trump summit shapes Beijing's Middle East stance as energy security concerns loom

REUTERS, Beijing

China is accelerating its efforts to end the Iran war, walking a diplomatic tightrope as it prepares for a summit next month with US President Donald Trump while trying not to alienate Tehran.

President Xi Jinping's mid-May meeting with Trump is shaping Beijing's approach to the Middle East conflict even as the world's top crude oil importer, reliant on the Middle East for half its fuel, seeks to safeguard its energy supplies, analysts say.

China's modulated approach to the war has protected its back-channel leverage enough that Trump credited Beijing with helping to get Iran to last weekend's peace talks in Pakistan.

"You've heard President Trump repeatedly mention how the Chinese talked to the Iranians," said Eric Olander, editor-in-chief of the China-Global South Project, an independent organisation that analyses China's engagement in the developing world. "That puts them in the room with negotiators, even if it's not a seat at the table."

Considering Trump transactional and susceptible to flattery, China is seeking to advance its goals on trade and its claims on



Chinese FM Wang Yi has held nearly 30 calls, meetings with counterparts seeking ceasefire

Taiwan at the summit, people familiar with China's thinking told Reuters. The dominant view in Beijing is to "butter him up, give him a red-carpet welcome and preserve strategic stability", one person said.

China's foreign ministry did not respond to questions about its diplomacy ahead of the summit, the first visit by a US president in eight years. Trump says it will take place May

14 and 15.

With the US naval blockade of Iranian ports as a direct and growing threat, China has engaged in a flurry of diplomatic activity and refrained from strong criticism of Trump's conduct of the war so that the summit, postponed once by the conflict, can go smoothly, analysts say.

Xi broke his silence on the crisis on Tuesday with a four-point peace plan that calls for upholding peaceful coexistence, national sovereignty, the international rule of law and balancing development and security.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi has held nearly 30 calls and meetings with counterparts seeking a ceasefire, according to a Reuters count, while special envoy Zhai Jun has toured five Gulf and Arab capitals.

Travelling at one point by road to avoid contested airspace, Zhai could hear air raid sirens, he told reporters. Xi announced his peace plan in a meeting with Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince, Sheikh Khalid bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, as he sought to deepen ties with a rival to Iran while pressing Tehran towards dialogue. Still, some analysts say, Iran needs China more than China needs Iran, allowing Beijing to press for a ceasefire while protecting the summit with Trump.

## WEST BENGAL ELECTION Delimitation seen as conspiracy to delete voters' names: Mamata

Shashi Tharoor also slams govt over the move

AGENCIES

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday alleged that linking Bills related to women's reservation and the proposed delimitation commission was a "conspiracy" to delete voters' names from electoral rolls and implement the National Register of Citizens.

Addressing an election rally at Mathabhanga in Cooch Behar district, Banerjee said attempts were being made to "divide India" by linking the two issues, reports The Hindu online.

"Attempts are being made to divide India by linking women's reservation and delimitation Bills. Connecting these two Bills is a conspiracy to delete voters' names and implement NRC," she said.

Union Ministers Arjun Ram Meghwal and Amit Shah moved to introduce three bills in Lok Sabha on Thursday to amend the women's quota law and set up a delimitation commission, amid protests by the opposition, which termed the proposed legislations as "anti-constitutional".

Meanwhile, senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor yesterday termed the proposed delimitation exercise "political demonetisation" and criticised the Centre for linking implementation of women's reservation to the expansion of Parliament and constituency redrawing based on the Census.

Participating in a Lok Sabha debate on the three bills, Tharoor said the government had unnecessarily tied a widely supported reform to a highly contentious political process, reports TNN.

"Delimitation will turn out to be political demonetisation. Don't do it," Tharoor said.

He said there was near-unanimous political support across parties for women's reservation and argued that the measure should be implemented immediately without being made dependent on delimitation.

Tharoor referred to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks supporting women's representation, but said the proposal had been burdened with unnecessary conditions.



A medical worker carries a child at the site of a Russian drone strike on an apartment building in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

## Int'l law 'matters more than ever' in chaotic world

Says UN chief Antonio Guterres

AFP, The Hague

International law is more important than ever at a time when even core countries in the global system are calling it into question, the United Nations secretary general said yesterday.

Marking the 80th anniversary of the International Court of Justice, the UN's top court, Antonio Guterres said: "Today, violations of international law are unfolding before our eyes."

"It is precisely because the international system is under such strain that adherence to international law matters more than ever — especially in this era of changing power relations," he said.

"The force of law must always prevail over the law of force."

Guterres was speaking at a special

sitting of the world court at the sumptuous Peace Palace in the Hague also attended by Dutch King Willem-Alexander.

He noted that as the court — which settles disputes between states — turned 80, it was busier than ever.

The ICJ has been in the headlines, notably for a case brought by South Africa against Israel, alleging that its campaign in Gaza is in breach of the UN Genocide Convention.

It also last year issued a landmark environment ruling, obliging states to tackle climate change and paving the way for reparations if they failed to do so.

But institutions such as the ICJ that uphold international law are increasingly "questioned and challenged," said the UN leader.

## MANDELSON ROW British PM again under pressure to resign

REUTERS, London

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer came under renewed pressure to resign yesterday despite sacking a senior official following news that Britain's former ambassador to the United States had failed security vetting but was still handed the job.

Starmer, who won the largest majority in modern



history for Labour at a national election in 2024, faces fresh questions both over his judgment and his ability to govern, just three weeks before his party is expected to be punished in local elections in England, and regional votes in Scotland and Wales.

Following the resignation of Labour veteran Peter Mandelson as US ambassador over his ties to the late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, Starmer had managed to win a brief reprieve from his critics after limiting Britain's role in US President Donald Trump's and Israel's war in Iran. However, on Thursday it emerged that Mandelson had failed the security vetting conducted before his appointment as envoy.

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**দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি**

১। চিটাগাং ড্রাই ডক লিমিটেড (সিডিডিএল) কর্তৃক ডকের অভ্যন্তরে অথবা বাহিরে উপঠিকাদার হিসেবে কাজ করার নিমিত্তে নিম্নবর্ণিত প্রতিটি ক্যাটাগরিতে ০২ বছরের জন্য নতুন তালিকাভুক্তি/তালিকাভুক্তি নবায়নের জন্য অভিজ্ঞ প্রতিষ্ঠানের নিকট হতে দরপত্র আহবান করা যাচ্ছে:

শিডিউল/ ক্যাটাগরি নং	কাজের বিবরণ
১।	জাহাজের হাল, ট্যাংক, কার্গোহোল্ড, একোমোডেশন, ইঞ্জিন রুম ইত্যাদি পরিষ্কার ও রংকরণ সংক্রান্ত কাজ।
২।	জাহাজের প্রেট, পাইপ লাইন ও বিভিন্ন স্টিল স্ট্রাকচার নবায়ন কাজ; জাহাজের বিভিন্ন মেকানিক্যাল মেরামত কাজ যেমন রাডার, প্রপেলার, ভাস্ক, কুলার, পাম্প, ইঞ্জিন, ফ্রেন, ডেরিক ইত্যাদি মেরামত এবং এ সংক্রান্ত কাজ।
৩।	জাহাজের গায়ে (ভিতরে/বাহিরে) স্যান্ড ব্লাস্টিং, স্মিট ব্লাস্টিং ও শট ব্লাস্টিং এবং সিডিডিএল এলাকায় বিভিন্ন স্টিল ম্যাটেরিয়েল যেমন প্রেট, এ্যাংগেল, চ্যানেল, পাইপ, আই-বীম ইত্যাদির স্যান্ড ব্লাস্টিং, স্মিট ব্লাস্টিং ও শট ব্লাস্টিং সংক্রান্ত কাজ।
৪।	জাহাজের ইলেকট্রিক্যাল ও ইলেকট্রনিক্স ইকুইপমেন্ট, নেভিগেশনাল ও কমিউনিকেশন ইকুইপমেন্ট ইত্যাদির মেরামত/নবায়ন/সার্ভিসিং/টেস্টিং কাজ এবং জাহাজের ইঞ্জিন, কন্ট্রোল সিস্টেম, জেনারেটর, টার্বোচার্জার, বয়লার, বিভিন্ন মোটর ইত্যাদির মেরামত/সার্ভিসিং/ওভারহলিং সংক্রান্ত কাজ।
৫।	জাহাজের বিভিন্ন স্ট্রাকচারের Non Destructive Test সংক্রান্ত কাজ।
৬।	স্টিল স্ট্রাকচার নির্মাণ ও এতদসংক্রান্ত পূর্ত কাজ।

২। দরপত্র শিডিউল আগামী ২০ এপ্রিল ২০২৬ হতে ১৪ মে ২০২৬ তারিখ পর্যন্ত অফিস চলাকালীন (সকাল ০৮:০০ থেকে বিকাল ০৩:০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত) সিডিডিএল-এর অর্থ ও হিসাব বিভাগ হতে সংগ্রহ করা যাবে।

৩। দরপত্র আগামী ১৭ মে ২০২৬ তারিখ রবিবার দুপুর ১১:৩০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত মহাব্যবস্থাপক (পরিকল্পনা ও প্রাক্কলন) এর দপ্তরে রক্ষিত টেন্ডার বাজে জমা দিতে হবে। একই দিনে দুপুর ১২:১৫ ঘটিকার সময় টেন্ডার উন্মুক্ত করা হবে।

৪। কর্তৃপক্ষ কোন কারণ দর্শানো ব্যতিরেকে যেকোনো দরপত্র গ্রহণ বা বাতিল করার ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করে।

মোহাম্মদ মাহাবুবুল আলম  
ক্যাপ্টেন বিএন  
পক্ষে ব্যবস্থাপনা পরিচালক

GD-849

## Fix our ailing hospitals

MPs' concerns must lead to concrete health sector reforms

It is encouraging to see our lawmakers raising issues relating to public welfare in parliament. In a recent session, MPs highlighted the daily struggles of patients seeking even basic medical services, and during discussions under Section 71 of the Rules of Procedure, they drew the health minister's attention to the alarming condition of hospitals and health complexes in their respective constituencies. From crumbling infrastructure to severe shortage of medical personnel, the failure is all pervasive.

An MP's remark that a hospital in her constituency is "like a patient" itself underscores the extent of institutional neglect in healthcare. Located in Brahmanbaria's Sarail upazila, the 50-bed hospital in question reportedly has 64 vacant posts, including critical shortages of physicians, nurses, and technical staff. Services are continuing in a dilapidated facility, compromising patient care. Meanwhile in Rajshahi, a single health complex serves around 400,000 people, with doctors working in cramped conditions. The absence of something as basic as an ambulance driver has had fatal consequences, with critically ill patients unable to reach referral hospitals in time. In Bagerhat, despite getting an upgrade to 250 beds, the Sadar hospital remains crippled by staff shortages, with most consultant posts lying vacant. Even a newly inaugurated ICU has remained non-functional from day one, which is another example of infrastructure without operational readiness.

This daily has reported on such gaps in our healthcare systems many times, but little seems to have changed. A recent report found that 80 health facilities across 18 districts remain idle due to manpower shortages, lack of equipment, and bureaucratic delays, leaving thousands deprived of essential healthcare. Disturbingly, at a time when many hospitals are struggling to cope with a growing number of child patients amid the ongoing measles outbreak, six specialised children's hospital buildings have remained unused for years after their completion. Every time a public health crisis arises in the country, these gaps in our healthcare system become evident. There is a persistent disconnect between planning and implementation in the health sector, turning vital institutions into symbols of inefficiency.

Addressing this problem requires a comprehensive and coordinated response. First and foremost, the government must urgently fill vacant posts at all levels of the healthcare system, ensuring that facilities are adequately staffed to meet patient needs. Second, strict accountability mechanisms must be put in place to prevent delays and the abandonment of development projects. Third, operational readiness—including staffing, equipment, and maintenance—must be a prerequisite for any infrastructure upgrade or inauguration. Equally importantly, ICU facilities in all hospitals must be made functional so that critically ill patients are not forced to travel long distances at great risk.

The concerns raised in parliament should serve as a wake-up call. The government must act decisively to address these long-standing deficiencies in our healthcare management. Lastly, all the MPs should raise issues troubling their constituencies and help make our parliament truly people-oriented.

## Secure cooking fuel for Bhasan Char

Prolonged LPG shortage is causing rapid deforestation

It is disheartening to learn that Rohingya refugees living in the camps of Bhasan Char are struggling due to an LPG shortage. According to a report in this daily, with the supply of LPG cylinders halted because of a fund crunch, residents of the island are forced to cut down trees to harvest firewood for cooking. This has been going on for months as LPG supply began to dwindle in August last year. Since then, more than 250,000 trees have reportedly been cut down.

The consequence of this LPG shortage and the resultant tree felling is two-pronged. Not only are the Rohingya refugees being deprived of reliable cooking fuel, but the chopping down of trees at such a large scale is also causing rapid deforestation in an already environmentally vulnerable area. Being a coastal area, it is the vegetation that keeps Bhasan Char safe from the dangerous impact of cyclones, storm surges, and erosion. While the Rohingya—around 34,000 of them—living on the 40 sq km island have little choice but to adapt to the fuel shortage this way, it is the authorities' lack of action to prevent this crisis that disappoints us the most.

The Islamic Relief Bangladesh, a local subsidiary of a US-based NPO by the same name, has been supplying 8,000 Rohingya families with a 12kg LPG cylinder each on a regular basis since 2020. However, due to the US president's slashing of foreign aid last year, the supply of LPG cylinders to the island took a hit in August last year. Over the following months, this supply slowed and then halved against a requirement of 5,000 cylinders per month. No solution has yet been found despite repeated correspondence from the Bhasan Char and Cox's Bazar offices of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) and the NGO Affairs Bureau.

More concerning, there is apparently no government fund to ensure an uninterrupted supply of LPG to Bhasan Char. We find it unacceptable that a project like Bhasan Char, which has been planned extensively, should be deprived of an item as essential as cooking fuel for so many months. We urge the government to take note of this urgent matter and work with funding organisations to find a lasting solution. Planning for this island also involved massive afforestation efforts. That must not be undone as it would make the island population even more vulnerable than they already are.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Zimbabwe becomes independent



On this day in 1980, Zimbabwe gained independence from the United Kingdom.

# Cox's Bazar at the crossroads of beauty without design

BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

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



SHAMSAD MORTUZA

The sea and the sand have no qualms against humans. Waves crash in, staining the dunes in their own rhythm, like an artist engrossed in its own creativity. The longest unbroken natural beach of Cox's Bazar and its deep blue water offers beauty to the beholders, just like it does for any other littoral country with a similar shoreline. As someone who has travelled across the waters, Cox's Bazar makes me reflect on nature's ambivalence. During a recent visit, it also made me pause to reflect on the opportunities glimpsed but not quite taken.

Anyone who has visited coastal belts in Thailand and Indonesia will dial up a mental analogue and rue the absence of services and activities that could have made Cox's Bazar even more attractive, particularly for foreign tourists. Think of places like Krabi or Bali, where similar topographies are carefully curated to maintain their local character but structured to welcome the world. The layering is well-designed with designated tourist zones, cultural districts, managed beachfronts, and planned activities. The infrastructure and layout in any popular tourist destination consider visitors' expectations and are designed accordingly.

In contrast, Cox's Bazar seems uncomposed. To be fair, there is a vibrant ecosystem comprising mostly local tourists. They travel in big numbers to clasp the setting sun in one camera shot, ride the beach motorcycle, opt for horse-riding or even paragliding, enjoy local food, and buy souvenirs to sponsor informal economies or small businesses. Corporate houses sponsor events that promote local tourism. This democratic access to leisure is no small feat. But the absence of zoning is telling. There have been attempts to do so without much success. The prying eyes, intrusion of privacy, and safety concerns have systematically discouraged international tourism. There is no promenade or night market that visitors can go to without risking personal safety. The cutthroat rates of public transport, the unstructured growth of tong shops, dirty pavements,

incidents of attacks and muggings, and lack of public hygiene make you wonder if there is a reason why the sea is so indifferent about the people on the seashore.

The Marine Drive is arguably one of the most scenic coastal roads in South Asia. Thanks to our uniformed outfits, we have a road that has protected the



FILE PHOTO: BSS

Cox's Bazar has a vibrant ecosystem comprising mostly local tourists.

shoreline. You see the future project signs and realise how some of these jobs have become personal. The signs will announce many welfare associations of groups or individuals connected to those who built the roads (according to the driver who took us from Inani Beach to Teknaf). Then there are the political goons or business tycoons who have taken over most of the beachfront property. To access the Marine Drive from the city, you have to negotiate a narrow stretch that remains underdeveloped, reportedly stalled by local political contestations, which has led to significant delays in improving transportation and access to the coastal areas. In the city, you see a five-star hotel just where the beach should be. These are symbolic of a broader infrastructural fault. Personal or group interests preceded the greater interest of people, leading

to decisions that prioritise profit over community needs and environmental sustainability. The lack of imagination and sincerity has literally bottlenecked the growth of the location as a world-class tourist destination.

The place also remains filled with the silences that we carry within ourselves. On our way to Teknaf, we saw the site associated with the killing of a retired army officer. It is a sharp reminder of the fragility of law on the road. It is not simply a "spot" but an index of how quickly a destination's narrative can shift from promise to caution. The red sign is a reminder of the informal economy of smuggling and the godfathers and their organised crime. The hills remain equally ambivalent. They have witnessed the troubles and pains of migrant

spaces that tell the story of the coast and the shared heritage of maritime histories? Where are the thoughtfully designed activity zones: water sports with safety protocols, eco-trails, and guided cultural walks? Where are the upscale eateries that could showcase coastal cuisine with both authenticity and refinement? Yes, there are some attempts, but they are not good enough. Also, there seems to be an absence of tourists of different price ranges. Most South Asian countries benefit from backpackers. Somehow our modestly priced hotels do not match the services of similar types of hotels or hostels in Thailand or Indonesia.

Countries that earn most of their revenues from tourism have created an ecosystem: air, rail and road transport, local transport, nightlife, craftsmanship, promenades and marine drives, trekking, and activities like scuba diving, underwater swimming and turtle hatcheries. We plan these elements. Bali's beach clubs coexist with temple rituals. Phuket's night markets translate local culture into experience without entirely diluting it, showcasing traditional crafts, local cuisine, and cultural performances that reflect the region's heritage. In both places, there is a conscious effort to maintain a narrative of place, of identity, even while scaling tourism.

There were previous attempts to brand Bangladesh and pitch Cox's Bazar. But somehow we have relapsed. We are neither fully preserving local culture nor effectively packaging it for a global audience. The result is a kind of cultural thinning, where values are eroded informally without being meaningfully rearticulated, leading to a loss of identity and connection to heritage among the local population.

Nobody questions the potential of Cox's Bazar. Clearly, it can compete with any of the top class beaches elsewhere. For that, the administrators need to think beyond immediate, narrow interests. They need to plan access roads despite local pressures. They need to designate zones for overseas tourists and local tourists. Instead of the current practice of thinking of tourism as a seasonal surge, there should be infrastructural and ecological investment to make Cox's Bazar a long-term national project.

The sea can maintain its rhyme and rhythm. But we, too, can create our own to benefit from it by developing sustainable tourism practices that respect the natural environment and promote year-round visitation.

# The fiscal burden of interest-free car loans

Tashzid Reza  
works in a trade finance company operating as a  
liaison office in Bangladesh.

TASHZID REZA

It is often the quietest policies that carry the loudest consequences. One such long-standing but rarely scrutinised provision is the interest-free vehicle loans extended to senior public officials and select banking-sector employees, including those at the central bank. Up until recently, officials of the rank of deputy secretary and above were entitled to borrow up to Tk 30 lakh without interest to purchase personal vehicles, with repayment structured so that depreciation charges effectively settle the liability over time. In effect, the borrower neither pays interest nor bears the true economic cost of capital.

In a telling policy reversal, the government recently suspended this facility in response to fuel price shocks and mounting fiscal pressures. This reveals more about the nature of the policy than years of its quiet continuation ever did. If the facility were truly benign—merely an administrative convenience or a neutral compensation tool—why would it be among the first to be curtailed during economic stress? The answer is straightforward: because it carries a real, albeit hidden, cost.

The suspension can be seen as an admission that such benefits are not costless. They contribute to fiscal strain, foreign exchange demand (through vehicle imports and fuel consumption), and broader macroeconomic pressures. When fuel

prices surge and external balances tighten, the continuation of such policies becomes difficult to justify. This brings us back to a fundamental issue: interest-free loans do not eliminate cost, but merely obscure it. Whether financed through budgetary allocations or institutional balance sheets, the subsidy embedded in such loans must ultimately be borne by someone—taxpayers, depositors, or the economy at large.

The inflationary dimension, while often dismissed due to the relatively small scale of these loans, cannot be ignored in principle. Any allocation of capital at zero cost encourages demand that would not exist under market conditions. It promotes consumption without a corresponding increase in productive output. Even if the direct impact on inflation is modest, the policy sets a precedent for non-market allocation of financial resources. More importantly, the suspension of the provision during a fuel crisis highlights another channel of cost: external sector pressure. Private vehicles increase fuel consumption, which is heavily import-dependent. Encouraging vehicle ownership through subsidised financing indirectly raises demand for imported fuel, thereby exerting pressure on foreign exchange reserves.

But if a policy must be withdrawn during times of stress because it exacerbates macroeconomic vulnerabilities, should it exist in the first place? The opacity surrounding the true cost of this facility is also troubling. Additional benefits—maintenance allowances, fuel support, and other vehicle-related

expenses—are often embedded within institutional budgets, making it difficult to ascertain the full fiscal burden. The absence of transparent disclosure undermines accountability and weakens the credibility of broader fiscal policy.

At a time when governments call for subsidy rationalisation, energy conservation, and prudent use of foreign exchange, the coexistence of such hidden benefits creates contradiction. In a country where most individuals face high interest rates on personal loans, the provision of interest-free credit to a select group represents a clear departure from market principles. It creates a dual financial system where one is governed by market discipline for the majority, and another is shaped by administrative privilege for the few. The recent suspension does not resolve this inequity, as, unless the policy is fundamentally re-evaluated, it remains available for reinstatement when conditions improve.

The justification often offered for such benefits is the need to attract and retain talent in public service. While this is a valid concern, the method of compensation matters. Transparent salary structures, subject to taxation and public scrutiny, are preferable to opaque, distortionary perks. The latter obscures the true cost of employment and creates incentives for preserving privilege rather than enhancing performance. The link between such benefits and service delivery also remains tenuous. There is little evidence to suggest that ownership of a subsidised private vehicle significantly improves the efficiency of public

officials. In many cases, official duties can be adequately supported through shared or institutional transport arrangements.

The contrast of the provision in question against policies in the non-government sector is particularly stark. For instance, companies in the readymade garments sector—operating amid intense global competition—cannot afford such privileges. They function within hard budget constraints, where every cost must be justified by productivity. The idea of offering interest-free vehicle loans to employees without clear returns is simply not viable. While the private sector must continuously adapt to cost pressures, parts of the public and financial sectors operate with embedded cushions that dilute incentives for efficiency.

From a policy standpoint, the way forward lies in rationalisation and transparency. If employee benefits are to be provided, they should be explicitly budgeted, clearly disclosed, and linked to measurable outcomes. Interest-free loans could be replaced with market-based credit, accompanied by targeted and transparent subsidies if deemed necessary. More fundamentally, policies must be evaluated not only in terms of their immediate administrative convenience but also their broader economic implications.

In an economy facing multiple challenges—exchange rate pressures, inflation, and fiscal constraints—the need for consistency and coherence in policy is paramount. Every allocation of resources must align with the principles of efficiency, equity, and sustainability.

# 'We still hope a solution on the reforms will arise out of parliament'

Nahid Islam, founding convener of National Citizen Party (NCP) and a first-time parliamentarian, sits down with Zyma Islam of The Daily Star to discuss his experience in the House, the repeal of key ordinances, and the ongoing impasse on the implementation of July National Charter.

**You wanted to go to parliament to implement the July charter. Will you succeed?**

I think the current government has ruined all possibilities for reform, but we still hope that a solution will arise out of parliament. We are talking about waging a movement, but for how much longer will people sacrifice their lives? It would not be responsible behaviour on our part as politicians to keep asking people to take to the streets.

We are not regular lawmakers going to parliament to simply talk about roads and culverts. This parliament is a legacy of the July uprising. If we cannot come to a consensus about the reforms in parliament, we will have to wage a movement outside the House.

**Since you say that you don't want any more bloodshed, what will this movement look like?**

It will be a political movement, and we hope that those who voted "Yes" in the referendum will join us, because they want to see their vote implemented. I believe they, particularly the youth, are disappointed because their vote has not been upheld.

We are walking out only temporarily, and we don't plan on walking out for good, given that the commitment to implement the July charter is upheld.

**The treasury bench is talking about forming a Constitutional Amendment Committee instead of the Constitutional Reform Council. Will NCP join?**

The Constitutional Amendment Committee will be a ruse, set up only to implement the ruling party's agenda. Our experience at the special parliamentary committee created to analyse the interim-era ordinances was not very pleasant. Three members from the opposition bench were in that committee, but their

voices were trampled, and crucial ordinances were either repealed or allowed to lapse.

The proposal for a Constitutional Amendment Committee has a fundamental flaw. A committee of a few individuals lacks the mandate to decide on the major reforms we demand.

I don't know why they are doing this. These debates took place during the sessions of the National Consensus Commission, and we came to an agreement.

**Did you really reach an agreement at the National Consensus Commission, or is that an assumption?**

I thought we had agreed on the need for a new constitution, to be decided by parliament, and that the parliament must be empowered to make those decisions, because otherwise, it can be challenged and scrapped by the courts, like the caretaker government system.

Even parties currently allied with the BNP had suggested a body to deliberate on constitutional changes during the consensus commission sessions; the BNP then requested a referendum.

They, too, asked people to vote "Yes" in the referendum during their election campaigns; the chairperson of the party himself did that.

**Within the current framework of the parliament, can you truly be an effective opposition?**

Current parliamentary rules restrict the opposition's power. Since bills pass with a simple majority, the opposition cannot block legislation. Its role is limited to shaping public opinion and convincing the populace. The government can either respond to these arguments or ignore them and face potential political consequences.

We tried talking to BNP lawmakers about the ordinances on enforced

disappearance and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), but Article 70 prevents members from voting against their party.

**The law minister challenged the legitimacy of the ordinances on enforced disappearance, the NHRC, and judicial independence by picking apart certain clauses. Did the opposition present an adequate rebuttal?**

I think we tried our best. But the parliament is making decisions by browbeating the opposition. The decisions were already made prior to entering parliament, and the arguments presented by the treasury bench are simply being done for the sake of maintaining the semblance of a debate.

The current law minister, who is a former attorney general, knows all the doors and windows of the ordinances, and because he knows them, he is closing them for us. The optics of it look like the ruling party does not care about establishing a system of checks and balances. They want undeterred power, not accountability.

**You are now in an alliance with the right wing. Are you also moving right of the spectrum?**

We have not taken any such policy after entering this alliance that is different from our ideology. We are still upholding the "centrist" political ideology we pledged to do. Our alliance with the right revolves around common objectives surrounding reforms, and we are also in conversation with a few other political parties not in the alliance concerning these.

**Why did you not support Jamaat-e-Islami's objection to the Jatiya Muktijoddha Council Act?**

Just because we are in an alliance does not mean we are on the same

page on all issues. We are a separate party. We have a lot of ideological differences, and this will not be the last time we will vote differently from them. That's why we believe in floor crossing—so that a lawmaker can vote against their own party.



NAHID ISLAM  
 PHOTO: ZIAUDDIN SHIPLU

**What complications arise from being allied with the right?**

Every party wants to flourish on its own. Parties build alliances when faced with political realities. Our alliance has a party which has more seats than us, whose organisational distribution is stronger. We are often seen in the same "framing" as them. This is a challenge when building our identity. It allows others to spread propaganda about us. If we had participated in the election alone, we would probably have a stronger grassroots network nationally.

But we stand by our decision to enter the electoral alliance, and this realisation became even stronger after the election.

**There was a lot of resistance even within your party concerning this alliance, especially from female politicians. Do you see a gender divide?**

I don't think this alliance should be seen through the lens of a gender

divide. A lot of men were also against this alliance. Similarly, a lot of women sided with our decision. They contested the election with the NCP ticket. The female politicians who left NCP were not in decision-making positions as women or because they were women. They were our top brass and I don't think we can assume that they dissented because they are women.

The more common opinion among the dissenters was that since NCP is a new party, it would be better for us to contest the election on our own. There may be some isolated opinions. However, the majority of the party believed that it was far more important to get a seat in parliament.

**Will you contest the local government elections as an electoral alliance?**

As of yet, we are thinking of contesting the local government elections alone. We have given the nod to five candidates for the upcoming city corporation elections, and they are already in the field. But we believe in grassroots leadership, and since the party symbol will not be a factor in local government elections, there are sometimes alliances at the local level. We want to support the candidates.

**Gen Z came to power in Nepal. Why did that not happen in Bangladesh?**

All of the traditional political parties in Nepal became unpopular at some point. In Bangladesh, popular traditional political parties supported the movement, and they have their own vote banks. We had to wage a cold war with the traditional parties.

But after some self-reflection, I believe that right after the uprising, we spent more time fighting for reforms instead of building our own party. The fact that more than 60

percent of the voters voted "Yes" in the referendum is the outcome of our movement. As a result, we contested the election almost unprepared.

**You led the population to the streets during the July uprising. Certain factions remained on the streets, sometimes taking the identity of a violent mob. Your critics often conflate the party with them. Will you take any stronger steps to distance your party from them?**

Our group has consistently acted during such crises, and we have addressed this issue publicly.

We maintained a firm stance on all incidents, including the attacks on *The Daily Star* and *Prothom Alo*, even during the interim government. But even after all that, there is an attempt to smear the NCP.

To prevent mob violence, you must accurately identify the root causes of the mob's actions, rather than just involving any group. The responsibility for stopping the "mob" lies with the law enforcement agencies. This is entirely a law enforcement issue.

Yes, after any uprising or revolution, the law enforcement agencies are very lax. From our side, since August 5, 2024, we have played a responsible role. We told everyone to go home; we told everyone to guard the temples; we warned people against taking the law into their own hands. After the uprising, whether it was traffic management or activating the police stations, the students did it all.

Taking advantage of this, many opportunists from various interest groups have used the name of the student masses to implement their agendas. We have never indulged them; we are always against it. However, we have always said that legitimate protests should not be called mobs.

## From degrees to jobs: Rethinking higher education in Bangladesh



Dr Md Aktaruzzaman is a technical education, digital learning, and cybersecurity expert based in Melbourne, Australia.

MD AKTARUZZAMAN

Over the past decade, I have closely observed how leading universities around the world design their programmes to contribute to their national economies. My experiences have led me to one clear conclusion: Bangladesh urgently needs a paradigm shift in higher education.

Across the globe, education and work are increasingly converging. Education can no longer remain limited to the traditional idea of knowledge acquisition alone. Instead, it must embrace work-oriented learning that prepares graduates for real-world employment. In today's global knowledge economy, education is not merely a public service but also a strategic sector that drives national development. Bangladesh must therefore rethink how universities operate and how they contribute to employment and economic growth.

One possible solution is the "unitec" model, which proposes closer collaboration between universities, polytechnics, and industries. The aim of this model is not to commercialise education, but to make universities sustainable institutions that produce job-ready graduates. Once the system matures, it may also attract international students and generate significant revenue.

At the same time, we must recognise an important reality. Out of every 100 students completing higher secondary education, only about 10-20 become engineers, doctors or high-ranking officers. What happens to the remaining students? Often, employment outcomes are not directly linked to academic results. Many cite India as an example of success in sending skilled professionals abroad. However, a closer look shows that for every highly skilled migrant, several

others migrate as general workers. This suggests that Bangladesh must plan not only for the top-performing students but also for the majority who require practical and marketable skills. Its economy still relies heavily on RMG export and remittances. In this context, skilled workers are just as important as officers. Therefore, this is the right time to rethink higher education and align it with systems such as the National Intelligence for Skills, Education, Employment, and Entrepreneurship (NISE3) to measure its impact nationally and internationally.

Under the "unitec" model, students would complete two accredited skill or certification programmes alongside their academic degree. In the first year, students would achieve an internationally recognised proficiency level in English instead of taking traditional general English courses. During the second and third years, students would complete two practical certification programmes. For example, a mechanical engineering student might learn automobile maintenance or driving skills; an electrical engineering student might complete training in electrical wiring or plumbing. Similarly, a social science student could learn graphic design, animation, or video editing alongside carpentry or other practical skills. In the final year, students could undertake internships, or learn additional languages if they aim to work in international markets.

Such a model requires strong collaboration between universities, polytechnics, and industries. In Australia, universities such as Victoria University, RMIT University, Swinburne University, and Federation University operate alongside

affiliated Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes, which function similarly to polytechnics in Bangladesh. In the US, many universities maintain partnerships with community colleges that offer vocational and technical programmes. These institutions provide flexible certification programmes that anyone, even PhD graduates or senior professionals, can take to upgrade their skills. While one may not pursue multiple PhD degrees, professional certification and skill development can continue throughout a career. Our universities should therefore consider establishing affiliated polytechnics and stronger industry partnerships to produce graduates aligned with national and international labour market demands.

University curricula should be flexible, demand-driven, and time-efficient. One option is to introduce block-mode learning, in which students take one course intensively over a short period rather than multiple courses simultaneously. Such systems already exist in many developed countries and allow students to work part-time while studying full-time, gaining valuable experience before graduation. Similarly, many universities now emphasise master's by coursework rather than master's by research, reserving intensive research training primarily for PhD programmes. These coursework-based programmes attract millions of international students and produce graduates ready for the workforce. Certification programmes could also be recognised under an "academic bank of credits" system. For example, a student holding a Cisco Certified Network Associate credential could receive credit for introductory networking courses.

Higher education financing must also become more sustainable. In countries such as Australia, the UK, Canada, and the US, the total cost of a bachelor's degree can range from Tk 1-3 crore, depending on the discipline. Bangladesh could introduce a tiered system where universities are classified by a framework and tuition fees vary accordingly. Students would continue

paying their standard tuition fees, while the remaining portion would be recorded in their student records. Once graduates begin earning above a certain income threshold, they would gradually contribute back to their universities. Importantly, this would not necessarily be a loan but a contribution towards strengthening higher education. The funds could support career counselling, research projects, technical skill development, internships, job fairs, and international study opportunities.

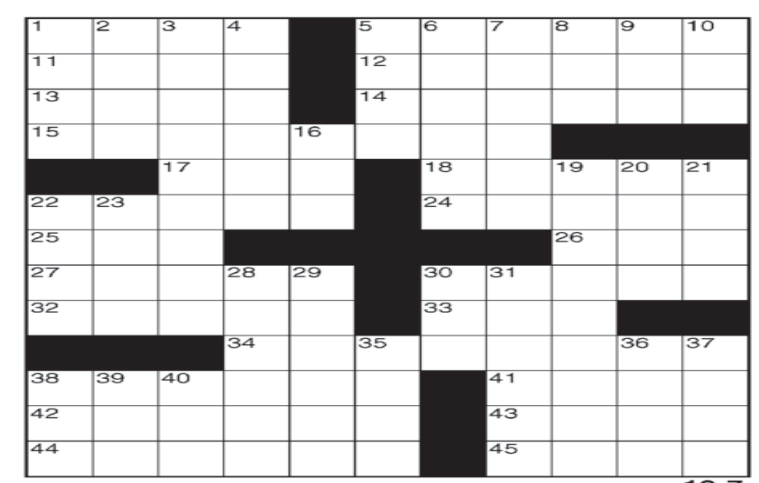
If implemented effectively, such a higher education model could significantly improve graduate employment outcomes. Even a modest increase in employment rates could transform the national economy through higher productivity and increased remittances. Within a decade, Bangladesh could also attract international students by offering quality education and practical training through online and blended learning systems. This could eventually help build a global brand.

As the Fourth Industrial Revolution advances, some jobs will change or disappear. Yet many essential technical skills will remain indispensable. Artificial Intelligence may automate many tasks, but it will not come to our homes to repair electrical lines, gas systems, or water supply networks. The demand for skilled technical workers will continue to grow worldwide. For universities with limited resources or impact, consolidation or stronger vocational orientation may be necessary to ensure sustainability.

Bangladesh aims to become a developed country by 2050. Achieving that goal will require strong educational institutions capable of producing skilled graduates who can compete globally. If policymakers adopt innovative approaches such as the "unitec" model, we can realistically expect that at least 50 Bangladeshi universities could position themselves competitively on the global stage by 2050. The time has come to connect education, employment, and the economy to ensure prosperity for the country and meaningful opportunities for its young people.

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**  
 1 Massage target  
 5 Hams' needs  
 11 Sound of agony  
 12 To do list  
 13 Shed feathers  
 14 Struck out  
 15 "The Mikado," for one  
 17 Oxygen: Prefix  
 18 Chaser of Bugs  
 22 Patisserie array  
 24 Long attack  
 25 One - kind  
 26 Sinking signal  
 27 Corbin Bernsen series  
 30 Wild party  
 32 Vestige  
 33 Gun, as a motor
- 34 Neighboring  
 38 Wee amount  
 41 Pine or palm  
 42 Depends  
 43 Balder's father  
 44 Finally  
 45 Tenant's fee
- 10 Blue  
 16 Hosp. parts  
 19 National park in Colorado  
 20 Big heads  
 21 Take a breather  
 22 Future stallion  
 23 Miles off  
 28 National park in Maine  
 29 Cheese buys  
 30 Lingerie item  
 31 Church reader  
 35 Witty remark  
 36 German denial  
 37 Circus sight  
 38 Mrs., in Madrid  
 39 Ran into  
 40 Suffering



### YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



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# RAZZ'S REDEMPTION

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF HOICHOI



**Sariful Razz is not the kind of actor who settles. Across a career that has taken him from the modelling ramp to some of Bangladesh's most talked-about films including 'Hawa', 'Poran', 'No Dorai', 'Insaaf' and now 'Bonolota Express', he has consistently defied the expectation that a successful actor must find a lane and stay in it.**

**"From the very beginning of a shoot, I place my trust in the director," he says. "My belief system and my basic instincts work toward understanding what the director wants, how they see the film, and how they envision my character."**

ANIKA TAHSIN HAFSA

In an exclusive interview with The Daily Star, the actor reflects on his layered role in *Bonolota Express*, the struggles behind his success, and why his hunger for great cinema remains far from satisfied.

When Sariful Razz first read the novel *Kichukkhon* by Humayun Ahmed, on which *Bonolota Express* is based, he felt something stir in him. "When I read the book, the characters were described very beautifully," he recalls. "Reading it felt very comfortable because I wasn't seeing Humayun Ahmed sir's other characters in front of me yet. I was reading them fresh."

But comfort gave way to challenge once the cameras rolled. Dr Ashhab, the soft-spoken and emotionally restrained physician, was unlike anything Razz had played before. "This doctor is a little different," he explains. "He has an understanding with his mother,

a personal conflict in his backstory, and then a meaningful romance with Chitra. I really enjoyed the shooting."

The character's quiet complexity demanded a very different physicality as well. The director asked Razz to appear completely clean-shaven, a look far removed from his usual screen presence. "I hadn't trimmed my beard in a long time, so it felt a little strange at first," he admits with a smile. "But as we started working, I gradually understood why the director wanted it this way. I think this could become a classic film someday."

One of the most charming elements of Dr Ashhab's character is his passion for magic tricks. Razz did not simply mime the craft. He actually learned it. "Two people helped me," he says. "My writer Shadhin, and Nehal, Sabila's husband. Nehal is actually a much better magician than I am. He helped me a great deal."

It is a detail that speaks to a broader truth about how Razz approaches his work. "I simply listen to my directors, observe them, and try to deliver what they want from me," he says. "If I have any talent of my own, I think it exists because of the directors. The credit goes fully to them."

Over the course of his career, Razz has collaborated with some of Bangladesh's most prominent filmmakers, including Raihan Rafi, Tanim Noor, Mejbaur Rahman Sumon, among others. Each collaboration has pulled something different out of him, and he has developed a clear philosophy about how that works. "From the very beginning of a shoot, I place my trust in the director," he says. "My belief system and my basic instincts work toward understanding what the director wants, how they see the film, and how they envision my character."

For *Bonolota Express*, directed by Tanim Noor, that trust proved decisive. "I believe the biggest contributor to this success is Tanim Noor," Razz says with conviction. "He made a well-crafted film. Our tagline was '100% Pure

Bangladeshi Cinema' and I think those who have seen the film have now found the reason behind it."

Razz appreciates and highlights the role of the ensemble cast of *Bonolota Express*, which includes Mosharraf Karim and Shamol Mawla alongside his co-star Sabila Nur. "When I was shooting, I could see Chitra in front of me. She truly was that Chitra," he says. "Looking at Mosharraf bhai, it felt like he really was a mathematician. Every artiste, even those in smaller roles, made a big impact. That is the magic. Small things become something very significant."

He reserves particular praise for one unexpected standout. "Nitu made a huge impact," he says. "Our magic lies precisely there."

*Bonolota Express* is by any measure an unconventional Bangladeshi film. Its entire story unfolds over the course of a single night aboard a train. It was on paper a risk. But for Razz, risk is nothing new. "The risk-taking didn't start here," he says firmly. "I made *No Dorai*, I made *Hawa*. I never wanted to get stuck in one pattern."

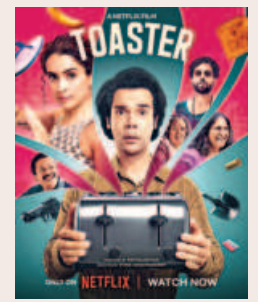
*Bonolota Express* has been running successfully in cinemas, with shows selling out in the United States, Canada and Australia. "When family audiences are enjoying it this way, I feel that I have succeeded in the purpose and vision with which I made the film," he says quietly. "People are talking about it, discussing it, critiquing it, and the majority are enjoying it."

Looking ahead, the actor is already working on his next project, a film called *Jibon Opera*, written and directed by Alvi Ahmed. He will star alongside actress Bidya Sinha Mim. "We are working in what you could call a parallel universe genre, something rooted in reality but reaching beyond it," he says, clearly enthused.

For an actor who has made a habit of surprising his audience, that quiet confidence feels entirely earned.

## TRENDY STREAMS

Netflix:  
Toaster



Prime Video:  
The Boys



HBO Max:  
Euphoria



Apple TV+:  
Margo's Got Money



Chorki:  
Cha Gorom



## STYLE STATEMENT

### TASNIA FARIN

The ever-gorgeous Tasnia Farin set aside her glamorous avatar to embrace the charm of a traditional Bangali girl in a saree.

Draped in a classic red and off-white ensemble, she captures the festive spirit of Pahela Baishakh while keeping the look effortlessly modern. The bold red puff-sleeved

blouse adds a striking, fashion-forward edge, perfectly balancing tradition with contemporary flair.

Her layered gold jewellery—from the ornate necklace to the delicate nose pin and stacked bangles—adds richness without excess, completing a look that feels both regal and beautifully understated.



PHOTO: RAF

## OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA



**'Anandaloke Mangalaloke'**  
April 12–25 | 11:00 am – 7:00 pm  
Centrepont, Ground Floor, Uttara



**'Dilnawaz'**  
April 20–21, 2026 | 7:00 pm  
Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy



**'All Quiet on the Western Front'**  
April 23–24, 2026 | 7:00 pm (opening); 4:00 pm & 7:00 pm  
National Theatre Hall, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy



## WHAT'S PLAYING

### 'Chaite Paro' by AURTHOHIN

*Chaite Paro* remains one of Aurthohin's most recognisable tracks, a defining release from their early catalogue that continues to resonate across generations of listeners. Originally released on the album *Dhrubok* in 2003, the song helped establish the band's place in Bangladesh's alternative rock scene.

The track has seen renewed attention in recent months after being featured in

*Bonolota Express*, introducing it to a newer audience while tapping into nostalgia for long-time listeners. Its reappearance in the film's soundtrack has contributed to a fresh wave of streams and online engagement.

For Aurthohin, the song's continued circulation highlights the longevity of their early work in a rapidly changing music landscape.

## TV TALKIES

### 'Chokro 2'

*Chokro 2* is a psychological thriller on iScreen, directed by Vicky Zahed. The story is inspired by a 17-year-old tragic incident in Mymensingh involving the alleged suicide of nine family members. The eight-episode series expands on the chilling storyline established in its first season, weaving themes of trauma, mystery, and psychological conflict. Released on March 26, featuring performances by Tawsif Mahub, Azmeri Haque Badhan, and an ensemble cast, the series has received a strong response from audiences.



## 370 citizens slam

FROM PAGE 3  
gender identity, is entitled to equal constitutional rights, security, and dignity and that ensuring these rights is a state obligation.

On April 10, a crowd rallying under the banner of "Azadi Andolon" assaulted at least four people in Shahbagh over their perceived gender identity.

The statement listed six demands, including legal action against on-duty police personnel for "negligence"; prompt investigation and exemplary punishment for those involved in the attack; public accountability from the home minister for "failing to ensure citizens' safety"; legal action against "extremist groups" operating under the banner of "Azadi Andolon"; a clear stance of the state on the rights of gender diverse individuals and effective steps to stop hate-motivated violence; and the formulation and enforcement of an effective policy to curb harassment in the name of mobile journalism.

The signatories include economist Anu Muhammad of Jahangirnagar University; Khushi Kabir, coordinator of Nijera Kori; Shirin Parveen Haque of Naripokkho; Safia Azim and Geeta Das of the same organisation; Mirza Taslima Sultana of Jahangirnagar University; artist Wakilur Rahman; former Dhaka University professor Fahmidul Haq; filmmaker Reetu Sattar; Supreme Court lawyer

Zobayer Khan; artist Razib Datta; writer and researcher Sushmita S Preetha; and Dhaka University professors Kazi Maruful Islam, Kamrul Hasan Mamun, Samina Luthia, and Moshahida Sultana, among others.

In a separate statement yesterday, South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR), a regional network of human rights defenders, also condemned the Shahbagh mob attack and expressed concern over the government's lack of response and the "apathy of the law enforcement".

It said mobs had been mobilised in the days leading up to the incidents through hate speech and calls for vigilante justice, yet the law enforcers failed to act.

"Police have not arrested the perpetrators despite video and CCTV footage clearly identifying them. Such inaction points to continued impunity," the statement said.

The civic platform Gonotantrik Odhikar Committee has also condemned the incident.

In a statement issued on April 12, the platform voiced concern and anger over the inaction of law enforcement agencies.

Meanwhile, one of the victims, Kazi Tahsin Agaz, yesterday told The Daily Star that many of the victims had filed a general diary online.

"We tried to file it on the day of the attack, but Shahbagh police only recorded a general complaint," he said.

## Nor'wester wreaks

FROM PAGE 4  
named Rozina, 35, died after being struck by lightning, while another farmer was injured.

In Chuadanga's Darshana, Alimul Azim, a ninth-grader of Memnagar DB Secondary School; and Russel Hossain, 25, a farmer of Ghoshnagar village, were killed in lightning strikes.

In Meherpur's Gangni upazila, day labourer Jarjit Hossain, 50, was killed by lightning strike at Bhatpara village, according to local officials. Nine others were injured in Meherpur.

Meanwhile, in Gazipur, severe damage to agricultural crops was reported following a nor'wester storm accompanied by hail.

"Around 300 hectares of crops were destroyed in Sreepur in the storm, causing damage to nearly 1,800 tonnes of crops. Also, 300 families have been affected as numerous houses were either

## Energy-focused urban

FROM PAGE 3  
oriented development, and energy efficiency.

He also pointed to limited use of solar energy and reliance on private transport as major challenges, warning that without immediate action, urban and energy crises will intensify.

Sajedul Haque, president of the Bangladesh Traffic and Transport Forum, noted that unplanned, reactive decisions and a lack of people-friendly infrastructure remain key barriers and emphasised organised and innovative spatial planning as the foundation for long-term development.

He recommended public transport-based mobility, integrated bus routes, shaded sidewalks, dedicated bicycle lanes, behavioral change, integrating rickshaws into modern systems, and promoting electric and hybrid vehicles.

KM Asif Iqbal, IPD research fellow and also faculty member at the State University of Bangladesh, urged for immediate approval of an effective renewable energy policy.

Dr Farhadur Reza of Jahangirnagar University said buildings account for 40-50 percent of global energy use, making green buildings and energy-efficient technologies essential.

completely or partially damaged," said Sreepur UNO Sajib Ahmed.

He added that emergency relief will be requested for the affected families. "A proposal will be made to allocate up to 30kg of rice per family. Once government allocation is received, distribution will begin immediately.

For families whose homes were destroyed, a request for corrugated iron sheets will be sent through the Deputy Commissioner to the Department of Disaster Management," he said.

Field visits revealed extensive damage in Bapta, Beildia, and Nandia Sangun villages under the upazila. Vast stretches of Boro paddy fields were seen flattened, with crops damaged completely on most fields.

Upazila Agriculture Officer Sumaiya Sultana said agricultural officials have been working to prepare list of affected farmers.

## Abuse, exploitation haunt women

FROM PAGE 12  
most cases. For example, only 14 of the 110 agencies accused of wrongdoing last year were compelled to pay compensation.

These resolutions are frequently categorised as repatriation or administrative dismissals due to a lack of documentation and evidence, which are largely inaccessible to workers isolated in private households without access to their passports or contacts.

Several women workers who suffered abuse abroad told this newspaper that their employers took away their mobile phones immediately after they started work, cutting them off from the outside world. This is why they couldn't contact embassies or their relatives for help.

According to the WEWB annual report, 395 migrant workers received legal aid from Bangladesh missions abroad in fiscal 2024-25, and only 11 of them were women. Most of the cases were linked to harassment allegations filed by employers or foreign authorities.

When contacted, Md Ashrafuzzaman, joint secretary of the Mission and Welfare Wing at the expatriates' welfare ministry, said that safe homes overseen by Bangladesh missions abroad provide immediate protection and security to victims, support legal process, and facilitate reintegration or further employment.

He, however, acknowledged that gaps persist in implementation. At present, Bangladesh has four overseas safe homes - two in Saudi Arabia and one each in Oman and Lebanon. Though women returnees or their families can file complaints through the expatriates' welfare ministry and district BMET offices, many of them are either unaware of the procedure or choose not to take that path due to uncertainty over redress.

Only cases of human trafficking, deception or exploitation by brokers or local agents fall under the jurisdiction of police in Bangladesh, ATM Mahbub-Ul-Karim, joint secretary at the

expatriates' welfare ministry, told The Daily Star.

Migration expert Mamun Ur Rashid said that when high-skilled professionals such as doctors or engineers migrate, they receive protection under the World Trade Organization (WTO) protocols (Mode-4). Their psychological well-being, medical needs, and social status are guaranteed, with specific safeguards for dispute resolution.

"For our migrant workers, there are no such safeguards; when the state focuses only on remittance figures, it forgets that these individuals have rights," said Rashid, coordinator of the non-profit women's rights group Badabon Sangho, which facilitates 20 forums across seven districts to transform the struggles of female returnees into collective action for systemic change.

Shariful Hasan, associate director of BRAC and head of its Migration Programme, said victims of abuses abroad have no viable path to justice.

"When a woman migrant worker escapes, her attempts to file complaints are often blocked by employers who file cases on various charges including theft... As a result, embassies prioritise repatriation over justice, leaving the victim with no avenue for redress."

He emphasised that every case must be reported to host authorities to prevent further abuse. "Otherwise, one woman may return safely, but another will suffer the same fate."

Hasan noted that unlike other nations that send delegations to check on workers, Bangladesh lacks a formal follow-up system.

"Regular contact such as monthly phone calls could help... Abuse often begins the moment a migrant worker's communication with the outside world is cut off."

Criticising Bangladesh's "submissive diplomacy" in foreign agreements, Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed, executive director of Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies, said there

is hardly any precedent where host authorities were held accountable for abuses of women migrant workers.

"Our policy is driven by the need for dollars. The mindset is: 'Let them go any way they can, do any job, and send back dollars.' This cannot be a state policy," he said.

Rahnuma Salam Khan, national project manager of the International Labour Organization, said Bangladesh has strong rights-based frameworks on paper but enforcement is weak.

"We do not know how often agencies are penalised for unethical practices," she added.

To break the cycle of abuse, Bangladesh's labour law needs to be amended to allow migrant workers to form trade unions and associations, suggest rights activists.

They say such collective representation will help protect the rights of women migrant workers who currently do not have any bargaining power.

When contacted, Nurul Haque Nur, state minister for expatriates' welfare, acknowledged that migrant workers' rights often take a back seat due to restrictive laws and practical constraints in destination countries. "The government has not always spoken out or lodged formal protests as strongly as it should have."

However, protection of migrant workers is now a top priority, he said.

"We are engaging with destination countries to prioritise workers' safety, rights and ILO standards. Their lives, dignity and social protections will be secured."

"Previously, we lacked any mechanism for legal redress, particularly for the large number of distressed women returning from the Middle East, especially Saudi Arabia. There was effectively no platform to seek justice there," he said, pointing out that the government already appointed two legal firms through its mission in Saudi Arabia to help workers pursue redress and compensation.

The ministry will ensure stricter oversight of recruitment agencies through a new grading system, he added.

## Dark hand

FROM PAGE 12  
siphoned off abroad in the past, no effective initiatives have been taken to recover the money. He also alleged that efforts to bring those responsible under law have been stalled.

The Jamaat chief said there was a political interference in the process of changes in the central bank's leadership, which he described as risky for the country's financial system. He added that even a loan defaulter has been given the scope to reschedule loans and be appointed to a key position.

He urged people to remain vigilant and act as "guardians" to protect their deposits.

The opposition leader said there are inconsistencies in the government's statements on the energy situation, adding that while the government claims that there is no energy crisis, prolonged load-shedding, and public suffering in buying fuel suggest otherwise.

According to him, the energy shortage is putting industries at risk due to a lack of furnace oil, while rising transport costs are driving up commodity prices.

The Jamaat ameer also alleged that extortion is adding further pressure on people.

Regarding the walkout of the House, the opposition leader said although the Speaker pledged neutrality on the first day of the parliament session, the opposition did not see that in practice. They were compelled to walk out as they were not given the scope to speak on important issues.

He expressed dissatisfaction over the limited time allocated for parliamentary debate.

"No parliamentary debate can take place in two minutes, in which one can only make a comment," he said, adding that although the time was later slightly increased, it remained insufficient, while treasury bench lawmakers were allowed extended speaking time.

Shafiqur said global situations, caused by US-Israel war on Iran, have impacted Bangladesh, internal weaknesses and policy failures have worsened the crisis. He called on the government to engage in open discussions, both in and outside parliament, to find solutions in the national interest.

He added that necessary steps must be taken to implement the referendum verdict, and reform ordinances should be presented in parliament as bills in line with public expectations.

The Jamaat chief also warned that ignoring public opinion would undermine democratic practices and could lead to a bigger crisis in future.

"The culture in which the party is bigger than the country must change," he said, calling for collective efforts to address the crisis.

## Delhi reviewing

FROM PAGE 3  
there have been efforts from both sides to improve relations.

Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr Khalilur Rahman recently visited New Delhi and held meetings with several top ministers, including Minister of External Affairs S Jaishankar.

He also requested Hasina's extradition.

"I would also like to emphasise that the external affairs minister reiterated India's desire to engage constructively with the new government and further strengthen bilateral ties," Jaiswal said.

"The two sides agreed to explore proposals for deepening the partnership through the relevant bilateral mechanisms," the spokesperson said.

He said official meetings are expected to take place at an early date for both sides' views on regional and global issues of mutual interest, Jaiswal said.

## Experts urge front

FROM PAGE 4  
The speakers stressed that FOPL is an effective way to raise awareness, as such labelling enables consumers to easily identify food items high in salt (sodium), sugar, or saturated fat and make healthier dietary choices accordingly.

They also called for swift approval and implementation of a draft regulation to introduce mandatory FOPL, prepared by the Bangladesh Food Safety Authority (BFSA).

Around 97 percent people in Bangladesh consume packaged food at least once a week, but most struggle to understand the complex nutritional information provided on the back of packages, limiting their ability to assess health risks, they added.

The speakers argued that clear FOPLs would enable consumers to make informed decisions and choose healthier foods.

Globally, 44 countries that introduced FOPL, including 10 making it mandatory, have reported greater consumer awareness and reduced consumption of unhealthy

food, they noted. BFSA member Prof Mohammad Shoaeb expressed hope that the government's initiative to introduce FOPL would be implemented soon.

Abu Ahmed Shamim, associate scientist at the BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, said FOPL can help consumers make healthier choices and lower the risk of NCDs by reducing dependence on ultra-processed foods.

Samina Israt, programme officer (diet-related risk factors) at the World Health Organization (WHO), said introducing FOPL aligns with Bangladesh's national health and nutrition policies and will help create a supportive food environment that promotes healthy eating habits.

Muhammad Ruhul Quddus, Bangladesh country lead of GHAI, said implementing FOPL would help lower healthcare costs for both the government and individuals.

Dhaka Tribune Editor Riaz Ahmed called for continued media coverage to press policymakers for introducing FOPL.

## No chaos over

FROM PAGE 3  
Rangpur, and Faridpur divisions were interviewed. More than 400 aspirants took part.

A member of the Jatiyatabadi Mohila Dal from Ranisankail upazila in Thakurgaon said Tarique Rahman and Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir conducted the interviews. There was no fixed time for each aspirant, she added.

Requesting anonymity, the woman leader said she was asked what she would do if not selected and whether she would remain with the party.

Several leaders said they had struggled over the past 17 years and hoped the party would evaluate their contributions.

They also assured the board they would accept the party's final decision.

Party insiders said the BNP parliamentary board, including standing committee members, asked aspirants about their reasons for seeking nomination, their contributions to the party and their constituencies, and their roles in movements.

They were also asked about their priorities if elected, past experience as public representatives, whether they would support the party's nominee, and what they would do if denied nomination.

Speaking to reporters, BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi said the party will prioritise the contributions of

women leaders, especially their roles during the past 15-16 years of political struggle.

He said many women leaders faced harassment, including cases, attacks, and intimidation during that period.

Educational background, ability to speak in parliament, and knowledge of lawmaking will also be considered, he added.

The interviews were conducted under the leadership of Tarique Rahman, with standing committee members Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain, Gayeshwar Chandra Roy, Nazrul Islam Khan, Salahuddin Ahmed, Selima Rahman, Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku, and AZM Zahid Hossain present.

Party sources said around 1,300 nomination forms were sold over three days, of which nearly 900 have already been submitted.

Aspirants from Chattogram, Sylhet, Cumilla, Dhaka, and Mymensingh divisions are scheduled to be interviewed today, they added.

According to the Election Commission, there are 50 reserved women's seats in parliament. EC estimates that the BNP-led alliance will secure 36 seats, the Jamaat-led alliance 13, and independents one.

Nomination submission ends April 21, scrutiny will take place on April 22-23, and voting is scheduled for May 12.

## Scrap 'anti-state' US

FROM PAGE 3  
Bangladesh to import unnecessary items, such as Boeing aircraft and weapons, at exorbitant prices.

Stressing that parliament must ratify any international treaty for it to take effect, he placed a three-point demand.

They include immediate discussion and cancellation of the deal, publication of a white paper detailing the damages caused by the interim government and accountability for those responsible, and building national capacity for oil and gas exploration instead of relying on foreign companies.

Addressing the rally, researcher Maha Mirza termed the deal a "national betrayal". She warned that it would force Bangladesh to import \$15 billion worth of LNG exclusively from the

US over the next 15 years, posing serious risks to the local energy sector.

She also cautioned that duty-free imports of US frozen beef, chicken, eggs, and powdered milk under the agreement will systematically destroy the local poultry and dairy industries.

Calling the agreement an act of "US subservience", she urged the government to show resolve, citing Malaysia as an example, and scrap the deal.

Dhaka University Associate Professor Musahida Sultana, Democratic Rights Committee's Mymensingh district representative Abul Kalam Al Azad, and physician Harun or Rashid also addressed the rally, which was moderated by rights activist Mahtabuddin Ahmed.

## UPDF's youth wing

FROM PAGE 2  
Democratic Youth Forum.

In the statement, the UPDF blamed the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS), led by Santu Larma, for the killing. However, PCJSS denied the allegation.

Talking to this newspaper, Sajib Chakma, assistant information and

publicity affairs secretary of PCJSS, said he learned of the death through social media, adding that there was no question of their organisation being responsible for the incident.

Protesting the murder, UPDF activists blocked the Rangamati-Khagrachhari regional highway for an hour.

FICTION

# Body Selim

**A bit of an argument followed; then he found himself inside a perimeter of five policemen, being led to the station—a five-minute walk. He stopped arguing. If he had given them the 500-taka note in his wallet, it would be over. He didn't. It wasn't that he refused; he simply didn't remember to.**

NASIMA ANIS

We know Body Selim. If you look around, you'll find that after this incident, many people came to know him through the newspapers. You may have known him in an official capacity, and you may hear of him again. I know him personally; he used to come to Suhrawardy Udyan, almost regularly, to "take the stuff." We used to ask, "Selim bhai, how many push-ups can you do at once?" Selim bhai would laugh—a naive, innocent laugh. Then he'd say, "Not many, I've got no shokti!"

Before taking the stuff, he was quiet; after taking it, he became an incredible chatterbox. To put it simply, he was unmatched at spinning tall tales. It's true that by working as a bodyguard for powerful industrialists and bank chairmen, and by becoming an accomplice in their countless misdeeds—acting as a part-time supplier of alcohol, drugs, and women—he had reached a certain "special" level. He found relief in vomiting out these stories to us. Perhaps it was for this added release, along with the marijuana that he left his own neighborhood to come to ours. He always tried to prove that his neighborhood wasn't beneath him, but we understood why he came here. After pulling on the stuff together, we didn't really have much contact; none of us wanted to take this relationship home to our families. Even if someone shared something personal while high, no one kept it in mind. Yes, we kept his phone number just to exchange news on the availability of "the stuff." By "stuff," you understand, right? Tobacco, tobacco... ha ha ha!

After the incident—or perhaps a small one, really—occurred, Body Selim called me. He said, "Brother, I have your number memorised. Inform my wife. Tell her to arrange to get me out. Tell her to go home first. Saba is alone in the room." Before I could ask where his phone was, the line cut. I called back and learned he was at the police station. The crime: caught with drugs.

In the afternoon, his wife had gone to her sister's house with their two eldest children. Saba, two and a half years old, had a dentist appointment; Selim was left with her, since the wife would be back by night anyway. After bringing her back from the doctor in



PHOTO: FILE PHOTO | DESIGN: MAISHA SYEDA

the evening, he put Saba to sleep by giving her Tofen, as per the doctor's advice. Niru told us all this later.

My guess is, how long can an unemployed man watch television? While guarding the child, a craving must have kicked in. A winter evening can't be passed without a hit. As evening faded, he probably realised he didn't have a single stick left. Oh, how will I manage today? Niru might not be back until 10 PM—then what? Yes, Niru is his wife—foul-tempered, slightly promiscuous, and terrifyingly beautiful. She stayed under the same roof despite almost leaving several times. Even after having three kids, she had nearly walked out.

One afternoon, a year ago, in the scorching heat, I got a call from Suhrawardy: "Kajol bhai, can you come for a bit?"

"In this heat?"  
"I have some business!"  
I went and found his face flushed, a brown envelope in his hand. He held it out and said, "Read this to me."

Opening the paper, I was stunned. A lawyer's divorce notice. I read it aloud—as he could not read. I said, "Brother, your wife sent a legal notice. She won't stay with you anymore. She won't take the kids either; she's giving them to

you. What happened? Where is bhabi now?"

Selim bhai started crying—crying like a child, tears streaming down his cheeks. I felt bad. I said, "Tell me everything. We're here, don't worry!"

I didn't say out loud: Hey, you married her by force after getting caught red-handed. These things are bound to happen. I said nothing. I've learned not to take advantage of someone when they're down.

I stayed there until evening, ditching my own work. I called Topu and Atiq with their bikes, and Rehan and Sojib too. I told them, "There's a small job to do after evening. Tonight, I'll treat you to a full belly of kacchi biryani."

Body Selim was still sitting with his head bowed. I said, "Brother, call your wife. Track her location." Niru didn't pick up. Selim said, "She's probably at Sutrapur, at Rajib's house. That Rajib ruined my family!"

"Do you know the house?"  
"I do. The scoundrel used to be my friend."

Six of us arrived on three motorbikes. With a toy pistol and a few punches, it didn't take much to overpower the frail Rajib. The next day, Niru showed up with the three kids. We gave some Humayun Ahmed-style dialogues

on the field: "There are vitamins in beating, Selim bhai. Give us a hundred push-ups." Selim bhai did the push-ups and let out a roaring laugh: "I've got no shokti!"

Niru didn't like me after that. No matter how much I said, "Selim bhai, don't stay out at night. Bhabi manages three kids, it's hard." We used to head home around nine. Selim bhai would stay back to brag to someone else—descriptions of how many types of perfumes were in Atiq Muhammad's toilet, the bathroom fittings in the bank chairman's house, or about the Jamil Group. He had plenty of time to talk. Talking was perhaps his primary entertainment; we truly had less time. However, this wasn't every day—two or three days a week. He had his own work schedule too.

Once or twice a month, he would bring expensive bottles—gifts from his bosses. Why wouldn't they? He was the one who collected these shipments from various places at great risk. If he ever got caught, those powerful parties would get him out in an instant. If caught with the goods, he used to laugh and say, "Pick up the phone, Sir. Just talk to them!"

A night or two in lockup was just a minor inconvenience for him—he'd

get treated like a son-in-law there. The sentries would think, what luck, even in jail! He didn't show off his muscles; they just stood out on their own as he walked out of the station—like Mr Bangladesh! Some bosses would even send a car. The police would look on with respect. A grand life indeed!

But a winter evening doesn't pass easily. After two or three hours, he saw it was only 7:30 PM. Three-year-old Saba was asleep. Pacing back and forth, Selim gathered the courage to step out. It's a 15-minute walk; he took a rickshaw. Five minutes to go, one minute or less to buy, five minutes to return. In 11 minutes, he'd be back; the girl wouldn't realise a thing.

It took a bit more than five minutes to get there, but only seconds to get the packet. He had let the rickshaw go. Before looking for another, the world felt like his own; he shook his shoulders and looked at the sky. Everything was shrouded in fog; no planets or stars were visible. People brushed past him—he liked them too. He felt a bit cold; he realised that in his excitement, he hadn't taken his winter clothes. He had just wrapped the red muffler around his neck as he left. He tried to remember: was he wearing winter clothes inside the house? He couldn't recall.

He hailed a rickshaw. There was a light jam on the main road. He thought of his daughter—just two more minutes! Before the main road ended, someone suddenly grabbed the rickshaw handle. The rickshaw stopped with a heavy jolt. Two policemen surrounded him from both sides.

"Get down!"  
"What do you mean, get down?"

He got down. He wanted to say, "I am Body Selim, everyone knows me. How dare you!" Before he could say anything, they barked, "Hand over the stuff!"

Only then did he realise he hadn't brought his phone.

**This is an excerpt. Read the full story on *The Daily Star* and *Star Books and Literature's* websites. Translated from Bangla by Alamgir Mohammad.**

Nasima Anis is a Bangla Academy Literary Award winning writer.

Alamgir Mohammad teaches literature at the tertiary level and has published 25 book titles.

REFLECTIONS

# Boishakh in fragments: Food, storms, and memory

NADIA KABIR BARB

There is a tendency to become nostalgic about the smallest of things, and nostalgia can be a powerful emotion. It has a way of weaving itself into memory, quietly colouring moments. Memories themselves have a way of appearing unbidden, never seeking consent. I find myself treasuring my memories, guarding them in case they slip away. A song drifting from a shop doorway, the familiar smell of someone's deshi cooking as I walk down the street, the soft haze of a misty morning—and suddenly I am somewhere else, transported to another time, to another place. I often wonder whether my childhood memories of Pohela Boishakh are snapshots in time, blurred at the edges, or borrowed memories from snippets of conversation or old photographs, my mind filling in the gaps.

In London, the celebrations are smaller and more intentional. They are arranged around busy schedules, often taking place in someone's home rather than out in the open. There is food, music, and conversation—familiar elements but quieter and on a smaller scale. There is a different kind of intimacy here: a sense that the celebration exists because we must make space for it, all of us gathering to recreate something of what we remember.

Over the years, with friends having moved away, and my children having grown up, there is a lessening of the flurry of activity, the excitement less palpable. I miss going to the Boishakhi mela that takes place in May, around the Brick Lane area in East London, famously dubbed 'Bangla Town.' The first time I went was 20 years ago. I took my children because I wanted them to experience Pohela Boishakh for themselves instead of a second-hand retelling.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

We arrived just as the procession began, instantly greeted by the rhythmic pulse of musicians and the graceful movements of dancers making their way through the crowd. Among the highlights was a large metal tiger float, followed closely by children wearing colourful tiger masks and waving Bangladeshi flags. The atmosphere grew even more vibrant with a couple dressed in traditional bridal attire, perched atop a rickshaw. As the procession gradually wound down, our focus shifted towards the stage in an adjacent field, where an eclectic line-up of performances awaited. The sounds of Bangla rock reverberated through the air, followed by Bollywood melodies, energetic bhangra, and innovative East-West fusion. The scent of festival food mingled with the music, while the swirl of costumes and lights added to the sensory richness. This diverse entertainment reflected the

festival's inclusive spirit, appealing not only to the Bangladeshi community but also welcoming a broader audience eager to immerse themselves in the rich tapestry of culture and celebration.

The last time I celebrated Pohela Boishakh in Bangladesh was in 2019. Dhaka is always bustling, but even the streets had a different energy. The intricate designs of the alpona painted on the long stretch of Manik Mia Avenue leading to the Jatiyo Sangsad Bhaban was a sight to behold. I had been invited to a lunch organised by friends, and I felt like a child once again, rummaging through my mother's wardrobe and wearing her off-white jamdani saree with red motifs, and slipping matching bangles onto my wrists. What I remember most is the food—a spread of several types of bharta, panta bhat, fried hilsa served with green chillies and onion, and more dishes than memory can do justice to.

The food was presented in clay bowls and pots, others on banana leaves. My eyes were definitely bigger than my stomach by the time the mishti was served. For a moment, it felt as though memory and reality had quietly met.

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

Nadia Kabir Barb is a British Bangladeshi writer and journalist whose work has appeared in international literary journals and anthologies. Her debut short story collection, *Truth or Dare*, was named one of the Indie Press Network's "Best of 2023" and was a finalist for the 2024 Eyelands Book Award. She was also longlisted for The Bridport Prize Peggy Chapman-Andrews "First Novel Award" and The Novelry's 2025 "The Next Big Story".

POETRY

# The aviary within

SHIBLEE SHAHED

I slip into your hut  
and salvage bones, a soul,  
the core architecture of living cells.  
Feathers, if they fall my way, are a blessing—  
I press them softly against my chest.  
Thus, bit by bit,  
a sanctuary of birds has flourished within me.  
Behold—cuckoos, parrots, kingfishers, egrets,  
and the long-billed hoopoe—  
that timeless envoy of history.  
I tend to them, unflinching, twice a day.  
At times, I read them from Tolstoy.  
Delighted, they break into songs of shifting  
seasons.  
Listen—my urge toward self-destruction has  
ebbed.  
My steady self has finally found its way  
as I earn my keep bartering wind—  
and sustain myself on the invisible.

Dr Shiblee Shahed is a public health specialist, essayist, poet, and translator. His debut poetry collection was published in 2013 by Shuddhashar Publications. His poems and articles have appeared in numerous national and international outlets. He is a regular contributor to *The Daily Star*.



ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

## SHORT CORNER

### DPL transfer window opens today

Premier League clubs are ramping up preparations for the players' transfer window, set to be held on Saturday and Sunday, with Mohammedan leading the way with a string of high-profile signings.

### Australia confirm Bangladesh white-ball tour in June

Cricket Australia on Friday confirmed the itinerary for their white-ball tour of Bangladesh in June, making slight changes to the schedule provided earlier in the year by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB). Australia will play three ODIs and three T20s. The three-match ODI series, initially slated to start on June 5, will now be held on June 9, 11, and 14, with all games taking place in Mirpur. The three T20s are scheduled for June 17, 19, and 21 in Chattogram.

### SL women arrive for Bangladesh white-ball series

The Sri Lanka national women's team, led by Chamari Athapaththu, arrived in Bangladesh on Friday to play a white-ball series against the hosts, scheduled to begin in Rajshahi on April 20. The three-match WODI series will be held at Rajshahi Divisional Stadium on April 20, 22, and 25. Following the WODI series, both teams will travel to Sylhet for a three-match WT20I series

*\*\*Read full stories on The Daily Star's website*



New Zealand players celebrate as Bangladesh captain Mehidy Hasan Miraz takes the long walk back to the pavilion after getting dismissed for a 14-ball six in the opening match of the three-match ODI series at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. (Bottom) Bangladesh head coach Phil Simmons alongside chief selector Habibul Bashar and selector Naeem Islam wear concerned look at the dug-out following the home team's 26-run defeat against a second-string New Zealand side.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Kings slip amid foreigners' boycott

SPORTS REPORTER

League leaders Bashundhara Kings stumbled in the Bangladesh Football League (BFL), playing out a 1-1 draw against Rahmatganj MFS after being forced to field an all-local eleven as three of their foreign recruits skipped the crucial tie in Munshiganj over alleged unpaid wages.

Five-time champions Bashundhara Kings, who have already received 10 FIFA registration bans over unpaid wages to players and coaches, took to the field without any foreign players for the first time this season.

However, it was learned that Nigerian defender Emmanuel Tony, forward Emmanuel Sunday and Brazilian striker Dorielton Gomes had also skipped training sessions prior to the game, demanding their dues be cleared. They reportedly issued an ultimatum, refusing to play the match unless their wages were settled before Friday's fixture.

When The Daily Star tried to contact club president Imrul Hasan and manager Wasimuzzman, none of the officials responded.

There were also whispers that club officials persuaded the local players to take the field by pledging to clear part of the payments by next week. However, Kings dropped points after three straight wins, during which Dorielton and Sunday had combined for six of the seven goals scored by the team in their last three league matches.

Despite the stalemate, Kings remain top of the 10-team table with 28 points from 13 matches. Rahmatganj's Ernest Boateng cancelled out Shahrear Emon's 13th-minute opener in first-half stoppage time, before both sides were reduced to 10 men in the second half.

The result allowed contenders Abahani to close in on the title race to second place, reducing the gap to three points, following an emphatic 3-1 win over Bangladesh Police FC in Gazipur.

Meanwhile, at the Bashundhara Kings Arena, 10-man Fortis FC played out a goalless draw against lowly Arambagh KS, while Mohammedan SC registered a 3-0 win over Fakirpool Young Men's Club in Cumilla, with Joy Ahamed, Jewel Mia, and Rafayel Tudu scoring one goal each.

# Experience fails to translate as middle order falters

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Experience-wise, Bangladesh were far ahead of the current New Zealand squad, but it ultimately counted for little as the visitors secured a 26-run win in the opening fixture of the three-match ODI series at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Bangladesh players had a combined 761 ODI appearances compared to New Zealand's 368 before the match. Only four members of Bangladesh's 15-man squad had played fewer than 10 ODIs, whereas eight in New Zealand's 14-member group fell into that category. Moreover, only Tom Latham, Henry Nicholls and Will Young had prior experience of international cricket in Bangladesh.

Those numbers, however, had little bearing once play began. New Zealand posted a competitive 247 for eight, built on half-centuries from Nicholls (68 off 83) and Dean Foxcroft (59 off 58) on a tricky Mirpur surface, executing their plans effectively against a side that have struggled in chases.

Over the past two years, the Tigers have failed to win a single match while chasing 250 or more, with their highest successful chase in this period being 115-2 against Pakistan in March -- the only success in eight



**“The wicket was fine — we had an idea of how it might behave. But it was a bit more uneven than expected. Still, there's no point in giving excuses.”**

Bangladesh opener Saif Hassan

### SCORES IN BRIEF

**New Zealand:** 247 for 8 in 50 overs (Nicholls 68, Foxcroft 59, Young 30; Shoriful 2-27, Rishad 2-44, Taskin 2-50)

**Bangladesh:** 221 all out in 48.3 overs (Saif 57, Litton 46, Hridoy 55; Tickner 4-40, Smith 3-45)

**Result:** NZ won by 26 runs  
**Player of the match:** Dean Foxcroft

44th over, the required rate had climbed to nearly nine, having been under five earlier.

Eventually, Hridoy's 55 off 60 came too late, with Bangladesh already eight down, as they were bowled out for 221 in 48.3 overs.

Although the pitch became more challenging due to uneven bounce, New Zealand's pacers -- Blair Tickner (4-40) and Nathan Smith (3-45) -- adapted well with disciplined, slower-paced deliveries.

Miraz and teammates will rue a missed opportunity. With a solid platform in place, the lower middle-order needed composure, but too many dot balls and a tendency to take the game deep proved costly.

Saif later admitted that a "prolonged period of dot balls" and wickets at key moments hurt the chase, noting they were "in the match until around the 22nd or 23rd over" before falling behind -- they went 90 balls without a boundary from 24th over -- while insisting the opposition's relative inexperience was "not a factor" given their skill level.

"Hridoy was there -- if we, the other batsmen, could have supported him a bit more, it might have been easier.

"The wicket was fine -- we had an idea of how it might behave. But it was a bit more uneven than expected. Still, there's no point in giving excuses," he said.

attempts.

Despite losing two early wickets, the hosts recovered through a 93-run third-wicket stand between Saif Hassan and Litton Das, which came off 116 balls and left them needing 134 in more than 27 overs.

The quick dismissals of Saif (57) and Litton (46), however, shifted the momentum, leaving the lower middle-order with the

task of finishing the chase. That phase proved decisive, as Tawhid Hridoy, Afif Hossain and captain Mehidy Hasan Miraz allowed the innings to stall despite having six wickets in hand.

Afif, returning to the ODI side after a 16-month hiatus, made 27 off 49 without a boundary, struggling to rotate strike, while Mehidy managed just six off 14. By the time he fell in the

Ollie Watkins brought up a century of goals for Aston Villa on Thursday, helping his side thrash Bologna 4-0 in their Europa League quarterfinal second leg at Villa Park, securing a commanding 7-1 aggregate victory. Following the win, Villa will now face Nottingham Forest, who beat 10-man FC Porto 1-0 in Nottingham to seal a 2-1 aggregate success, in an all-English semifinal.

PHOTO: ASTON VILLA

### EUROPA LEAGUE SEMIFINALS

Nottingham Forest vs Aston Villa  
Braga vs SC Freiburg

*\*\* Teams listed first will play the first leg at home on May 1 (1:00am), with the second leg away on May 8 (1:00am)*



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## Mob kills 2 over murder of child

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Two people were killed and another sustained serious injury in a mob attack in Manikganj on Thursday night, following allegations against a member of their family of killing a seven-year-old girl.

According to police and locals, Atika Akter, daughter of Dudal Mia of Bonparil village in Manikganj Sadar, went missing from near her home around 5:00pm that day.

Following her disappearance, the family took to social media and megaphones to let people know and to locate her. Around 10:00pm that night, locals found Atika's body in a maize field near her home.

The girl was found with her hands and legs tied, and police suspect she was killed either during an attempted rape or robbery of her jewellery.

Atika's family alleged that a teenage boy was involved.

Around one hour later, agitating people beat up the teenage boy's elder brother Nazmul, 20, their father Pannu Miah, 45, who is an autorickshaw driver; and Pannu's

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5



Boro harvest season has begun in the haor region of Kishoreganj. After harvesting and threshing, farmers boil the paddy in large steel pots. This process of boiling rice in its husk improves its nutritional value, makes it easier to process, and extends its shelf life. The photo was taken recently in the Badla area of Itna upazila.

PHOTO: TAFSILUL AZIZ

## ROHINGYA REFUGEES 900 dead, missing in shipwrecks in 2025: UN

REUTERS, Geneva

Nearly 900 Rohingya refugees were reported missing or dead in the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal in 2025, making it the deadliest year on record for the route, the United Nations refugee agency said yesterday.

More than one in seven of the estimated 6,500 Rohingya refugees who attempted the sea crossing last year were reported missing or dead, the highest mortality rate worldwide for refugee and migrant sea journeys, UNHCR spokesperson Babar Baloch told reporters in Geneva.

The dangerous sea crossings have continued into 2026, with more than 2,800 Rohingya embarking on such journeys up until April 13 this year, Baloch said.

"This sad and tragic trend continues, this sense of desperation among the Rohingya population," he said.

Deadly maritime journeys have become a recurring feature of a long-running humanitarian crisis resulting from conflict in Myanmar, as members of the Rohingya minority continue to risk their lives on overcrowded, unseaworthy boats in search of safety and opportunity.

Their departures are driven by violence at home and desperate conditions in crowded refugee camps in Bangladesh. They hope to reach safety and opportunity in countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia or Thailand.

In recent years, more than half of those attempting these crossings have been women and children, UNHCR said.

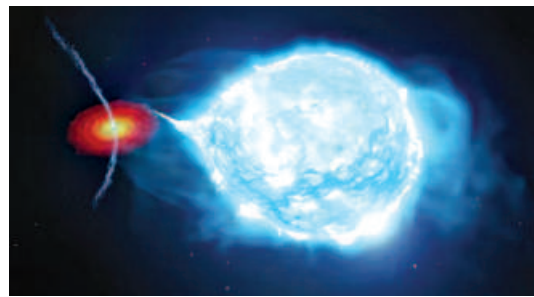
## Black hole jets as powerful as 10,000 suns found

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Scientists have, for the first time, directly measured the astonishing power of jets erupting from a black hole, revealing an instantaneous energy output equivalent to 10,000 suns.

This groundbreaking observation also tracked the jets' incredible speed, clocking in at approximately 355 million mph – half the speed of light.

The focus of this unprecedented study was



Cygnus X-1, a binary system located 7,200 light-years away, notable for being the first black hole ever identified over half a century ago.

It features a black hole constantly drawing gases from its companion, a blue supergiant star.

Led by the University of Oxford's Steve Prabu, the international research team utilized 18 years of high-resolution radio imaging from a global telescope network.

Their findings, published in Nature Astronomy, allowed them to measure the swift power of these "dancing jets" as they were pushed in opposing directions by the stellar wind, a feat previously impossible as jet power could only be averaged over millennia.

## Abuse, exploitation haunt women migrant workers

Systemic failures deny justice to many in host countries; experts call for stronger oversight, safeguards

NILIMA JAHAN

Abandoned by her husband, Rahima (not her real name), a mother of two, considered a broker's offer of a job in Saudi Arabia as a lifeline.

In 2020, she left Narsingdi for Saudi Arabia on the promise of an "office job" with a monthly salary of 1,400 riyals (around Tk 46,000).

However, following her arrival at a recruitment agency guesthouse in Riyadh, she was not taken to any office. Instead, she was moved to a sprawling mansion where she was made to do hard labour for 1,100 riyals (around Tk 36,000) per month.

"I worked until 1:00am every day. Whenever I sat down to rest for a while, the madam at the mansion would holler at me," said Rahima, now in her early 40s.

Her employer would give her very little food, often leaving her to scavenge leftovers.

"One day, I couldn't bear the hunger. I went out and brought some food from outside. When they found out, they beat me mercilessly and locked me up for a week. I was hardly given any food."

A few days later, she fell off a high stool while cleaning curtains. She suffered leg injuries and her lip was cut. Her employer gave her only painkillers and forced her to keep working.

### PRIMARY COMPLAINTS

- Physical and mental abuse
- Substandard food, awful living conditions
- Breach of contract regarding job roles
- Non-payment of wages or allowances

SOURCE: BMET

As her condition worsened, she begged her employer to let her return home. Her employer then arranged a phone call with the recruitment agent who told her: "We bought you. If you want to leave, you must pay 1,500 riyals."

She had to work with a limp for months because she couldn't pay.

Physically and mentally broken, Rahima finally managed to contact the Bangladesh embassy after a couple of years, only to be sent back home without her last two months' wages.

"The embassy staff kept me in their safe home for three days and told me to leave

Riyadh since my employer had paid for an air ticket," said Rahima who returned home in 2023.

Rahima's ordeal highlights a broader pattern of abuse. While the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) does not have specific data on women migrant workers who faced abuses abroad, the BRAC Migration Programme reports that at least 69,090 women have returned home since 2019. Many of them experienced physical, psychological or sexual abuse, food deprivation, unpaid wages, and excessively long working hours.

BMET records show that over 12.5 million Bangladeshi women migrated for work, primarily to Saudi Arabia (4.05 million), the UAE (2.15 million), and Oman (1.65 million) between 2004 and 2025.

According to the Wage Earners' Welfare Board (WEWB), the bodies of 799 female migrant workers were returned to Bangladesh over the past eight years. Most of their death certificates listed suicide as the cause, with the majority of cases reported from Saudi Arabia, followed by Jordan and Lebanon.

Official data show that women migrant workers filed 2,036 complaints with BMET between 2021 and 2025. Though 1,969 of those were "resolved", the recruiting agencies accused of malpractice were not punished in

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## 'Dark hand' extending towards banks Says Jamaat ameer

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Opposition Leader and Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman yesterday said that a "dark hand" is set to grip scheduled and commercial banks, "as it did with Bangladesh Bank".

"Banks don't belong to any party; they belong to the people," he said while speaking as the chief guest at the opening session of Jamaat's district and metropolitan ameer conference at Al-Falah auditorium in the capital's Moghbazar.

Expressing concern over the banking sector, Shafiqur said although "hundreds of thousands of crores of taka" had been looted from banks and

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## WAR ON GAZA

## 38,000 women, girls killed till end of 2025: UN

AFP, Geneva

Over 38,000 women and girls were killed in the Gaza war by the end of 2025, the UN estimated yesterday, amounting to over half of the 71,000 deaths recorded by the territory's health ministry.

"Between October 2023 and December 2025, more than 38,000 women and girls were killed in Gaza – the result of Israeli air bombardment and land military operations," the UN Women agency's spokeswoman Sofia Calltorp told a press briefing in Geneva.

"This includes over 22,000 women and 16,000 girls, amounting to an average of at least 47 women and girls killed every day."

"On top of a staggering death toll, nearly 11,000 women and girls in Gaza have sustained injuries so devastating that they survive only with lifelong disabilities," said Calltorp.

She said the war had reshaped Palestinian families, with tens of thousands of Gaza households now headed by women, who having lost their husbands, were now having to sustain their families "without income, without support, or access to essential services".

Nearly a million women and girls have been repeatedly displaced during the conflict, while nearly 790,000 women and girls having experienced crisis-level or catastrophic-level food insecurity.

She said the Middle East war, which erupted with the US Israeli attack on Iran on February 28, had escalated the difficulties in Gaza, "as border crossing closures and humanitarian access constraints further reduce access to life-saving support".



An excavator removes heaps of solid waste from the Kazla canal in the Jatrabari area of Dhaka yesterday afternoon. While the Dhaka South City Corporation has undertaken the project to improve drainage and reduce waterlogging, numerous illegal structures remain along the banks of the canal, complicating the restoration efforts.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## Myanmar cuts Suu Kyi's jail term

Frees former president Win Myint

REUTERS

Myanmar has reduced the sentence of imprisoned ex-leader Aung San Suu Kyi, her lawyer told Reuters yesterday, as part of an amnesty by a new president who ousted her government in a coup five years ago.

Suu Kyi, 80, was serving a 27-year sentence for a litany of offences her allies said were politically motivated to keep her at bay, ranging from incitement and corruption to election fraud and violating a state secrets law.

The sentence has been cut by one-sixth, but it remains unclear whether the Nobel Peace Prize winner will be allowed to serve the rest of her sentence under house arrest, the lawyer said.



OLD DHAKA

# HERITAGE

## crumbling in plain sight

**Old Dhaka's historic houses are more than architectural relics. They reflect patterns of trade, migration, colonial administration and cultural exchange. Each building carries traces of prosperity, displacement and adaptation.**

RAKIB MADBER

Old Dhaka is where history refuses to stay silent. It breathes through narrow lanes, faded facades and river-worn walls. Stretching from Gendaria and Faridabad to Hazaribagh Tannery Mor, and from Sadarghat to Nawabpur, this oldest part of the capital is not just a neighbourhood – it is a living archive. What stands there today is not just a dense urban neighbourhood, but a layered archive of commerce, culture and memory.

Yet many of its historic buildings are disappearing in plain sight. Rapid urbanisation, commercial pressure and years of neglect have pushed several landmarks to the brink. Some have been restored, some are partially occupied, and some are crumbling

and cracks appeared along the walls. For years, it stood as a reminder of what once was.

Recently, the Dhaka South City Corporation undertook renovation work with funding support from the World Bank. The restoration included structural repairs, repainting and replacement of damaged elements. Today, visitors once again gather in its courtyard. Many come to take photographs, while others simply sit on the steps and watch the river breeze pass by. The building looks renewed, though it still carries the weight of its age.

Sutrapur Zamidar Bari  
Sutrapur's name traces back to the "sutradhaars", traditional wood craftsmen who once lived in the area. Dhaka was known for boat-building and intricate woodwork, and these artisans contributed to that reputation. Over time, the locality became associated with their craft.

Before Partition, the area was renamed Rup Lal Das Lane, but the old name continues to survive in everyday speech.

On Reboti Mohan Das Road stands a zamidar house built by Reboti Mohan Das. The complex consists of two adjacent buildings constructed in different periods. During Partition in 1947, the family left the property. It later came under state control.

The southern structure is the older and more striking of the two.

patterns and circular motifs adorn the façade. Inside, there are around 35 rooms of varying dimensions, arranged around corridors and open spaces.

The northern building, constructed in 1942 by a relative of the family, is comparatively newer. It also features a broad entrance and multiple rooms. Together, the two buildings reflect a blend of colonial and classical design



Lakshmi Villa

elements.

Today, the century-old premises house more than 50 families of the Fire Service and Civil Defence. Toilets and kitchens have been installed to make the building habitable. A two-storey barrack for officials and a shed for fire trucks stand within the compound. There are also plans to set up a Fire Service museum at the site.

A fire service official, requesting anonymity, said the building is risky but they have little choice. "Every year some repair works are done, but the structure is old," he said. "We try to maintain it, but it still feels unsafe sometimes."

Rup Lal House

Further along the river stands Rup Lal House, one of the most talked-about mansions of nineteenth-century Dhaka. Facing the Buriganga, the building once symbolised wealth and status. European visitors were said to have admired its scale and ornamentation.

The house was originally built around 1825 by an Armenian zamidar named Aratun. Around 1835, businessman Rup Lal Das purchased it and renamed it after himself. From modest beginnings in small-scale trade and investment, Rup Lal rose to become one of the wealthiest businessmen in the city. The mansion reportedly had around 50 rooms, reflecting both prosperity and ambition.

He did not merely buy the house. He renovated and expanded it to match his personal taste. The building's layout resembles the English letter E when viewed from above. Its longest wing stretches nearly 60 feet along the riverbank.

The most celebrated part of the mansion was its jalsaghar, or music hall, which faced the Buriganga. The western chamber featured intricate wooden ceiling work. Historical narratives claim that renowned musicians and performers from across South Asia visited the house. Among the names frequently mentioned are Alauddin Khan and Kazi



Lal kuthi

Nazrul Islam.

At one time, Rup Lal House was considered one of the two most opulent residences in Dhaka, the other being Ahsan Manzil. Comparisons between the two were common in local lore.

After Partition, the property changed hands. Ownership disputes followed for years.



Dhola Zamindar Bari

In 1958, Mohammad Siddique Jamal acquired the house and renamed it Jamal House. Even today, different sections of the building bear different signboards: Rup Lal House, Jamal House and Noorjahan House.

The mansion's present condition reflects decades of fragmented ownership and limited maintenance. Portions of the walls have collapsed. Some rooms have been used as storage for spices and agricultural goods. Informal occupants have settled in parts of the structure.

Recently, the Department of Archaeology moved to free certain sections from commercial encroachment. However, the building has not yet been fully restored or opened for public access.

Standing outside Rup Lal House, Sukkur Ali, 62, who has lived in Farashganj his whole life, said the changes over the years have been painful to watch.

"When we were children, these buildings looked alive," he said. "There were lights, programmes, people coming and going. Now most of them are just standing there, slowly breaking. We pass by every day, but nobody really looks."

Dhola Zamindar Bari  
In Wari, at 38 Rankin Street, stands Dhola Zamindar Bari, a building that reflects late nineteenth and early twentieth century architectural trends. The structure blends Indo-Saracenic and colonial styles, with red brickwork and ornamental details

that recall the design of Curzon Hall.

Originally built as the residential palace and recreation centre for the zamindars of Tarail in Kishoreganj, the house later entered a different chapter. In the 1950s, it became associated with Dr MN Nandi, a noted humanitarian figure. During the 1960s, the Pakistan government used it as a textbook office.

At present, the building serves as residential quarters for officials of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board. The continued use has helped maintain the structure to some extent. The gardens flanking the entrance and the open verandas still create a sense of calm amid the busy streets of Wari.

However, public access remains restricted. Visitors cannot freely explore the interiors, and much of the building's story remains confined within its walls.

Lakshmi Villa

In Farashganj's BK Das Lane stands Lakshmi Villa, a century-old residence tied closely to the story of Partition. Built in the early twentieth century by businessman Basanta Kumar Das, the house reflected the prosperity he achieved through trade in brick, conch-shell and textiles.

In 1947, the property was exchanged with that of barrister Asrarul Hossain of Calcutta. Following the riots of 1950, the Das family left East Pakistan, and the Hossain family assumed ownership. The building later functioned both as a residence and as a law office.

Years of neglect left visible damage. Cracks developed in the walls and parts of the structure weakened. Recently, partial renovation was carried out, focusing on stabilising the core framework while preserving original features. The front section remains mostly closed, while families occupy the rear portion.

The restoration has provided temporary relief, but questions about long-term conservation remain.

Old Dhaka's historic houses are more than architectural relics. They reflect patterns of trade, migration, colonial administration and cultural exchange. Each building carries traces of prosperity, displacement and adaptation.

As the city expands vertically and commercially, these structures face increasing pressure. Some have found new uses, while others remain entangled in ownership disputes. Without consistent policy and sustained conservation efforts, many may not survive another generation.



Rup Lal House

behind shopfronts and warehouses.

A walk through Old Dhaka shows how fragile this heritage has become.

Northbrook Hall (Lal kuthi)

Near the banks of the Buriganga, a red brick structure rises above the surrounding chaos. Locals call it Lal Kuthi. Officially, it is Northbrook Hall.

Built in 1874 during British rule, the building was named after Lord Northbrook, then governor general of India. In its early years, it was also referred to as the Town Hall. Constructed in Victorian architectural style, the hall quickly became a social and cultural centre for Dhaka's elite. Zamindars, wealthy traders and educated middle-class gathered there for theatre performances, musical soirees and civic meetings.

Over the decades, however, the structure fell into neglect. The plaster peeled off, wooden fixtures decayed



Its entrance, rising nearly 50 feet, is supported by three Corinthian columns. Decorative floral



Sutrapur Zamidar Bari  
PHOTO: STAR

# Rana Plaza, 13 years on NO JUSTICE, NO MEMORY



▲ Akhi Akhter, 18, and her colleagues from the New Wave Style factory pose together on Pohela Boishakh (Bengali New Year), April 14, 2013. Exactly ten days later, on April 24, 2013, the Rana Plaza building collapsed. Of the eight women pictured here, only one survived; Akhi and her six friends were amongst the victims. Photo: Bangladesh Garments Sramik Samhati

## ADIBA AFROS AND SIFAT E NUR KHANAM

Thirteen years after the Rana Plaza building collapse, any mention of the disaster is often treated as an inconvenience.

Some argue that Bangladesh has come a long way since, and that is all we should talk about. It now has the highest number of LEED certified "green" factories in the world, and there is no need for "negative press" when so many other problems demand attention.

There has definitely been notable progress within the RMG industry regarding improvements in fire, electrical, and structural safety. But the fact remains that, after 13 years, there has been little movement on accountability – not a single court has yet delivered a final judgment. While humanitarian aid was provided, no compensation has been paid for the most devastating

heal from this national tragedy.

## Justice denied

Today, a total of 14 cases filed in relation to the Rana Plaza disaster remain in limbo.

The Department of Inspections for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) had filed 11 of these cases in the Labour Court against 14 individuals, including the building and factory owners, for failure to give notice of accidents and contravention of the law with dangerous results. Among them, 11 of the accused are absconding, while three others have been discharged.

There are three (03) criminal cases filed on the Rana Plaza incident in 2013, all pending trial. Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (RAJUK) had filed one case under the Bangladesh Building Construction Act, 1952, which has been transferred to the Court of the Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate, Dhaka, for trial.

Two cases were filed under the Penal Code, 1860 – one by the Sub-Inspector (SI) of Police, Mr Wali Ashraf of Savar Police Station, and another by Ms Sheuly Akter, whose husband Jahangir Alam was among the deceased. Although charge sheets have been filed in the cases, each case is currently pending, awaiting the next date of proceedings.

Under the last Interim Government, renewed emphasis has been placed on concluding the long-stalled trials. The Additional Public Prosecutor, Advocate Faisal Mahmud, noted that collecting the testimony of 594 witnesses, many of whom reside outside Dhaka, remains a key obstacle in an already complex process. The Court has since taken a step to prioritise essential witnesses only, in an effort to accelerate proceedings.

In addition to the 14 cases, five writ petitions are also pending for hearing before the High Court Division of the

Supreme Court of Bangladesh. These include a petition by BLAST and Ain O Shalish Kendra (ASK) seeking an investigation into the reasons for the collapse, action against those responsible, and compensation for those affected.

When asked about the impact of the pending cases on the industry's image, Sadaf Siddiqi, a long-time industry actor and a member of the BGMEA Standing Committee on the Ready-Made Garment Sustainability Council (RSC), acknowledged that "Bangladesh cannot fully heal and move on from the Rana Plaza tragedy unless we are able to achieve some kind of closure for those who lost their loved ones. Those who violated the law need to be held accountable. The justice system needs to ensure a fair and just completion of the pending cases."

The prolonged trial processes have left victims' families and the injured wondering whether justice will come in their lifetimes. For some, like Nasima Begum, who survived Rana Plaza only to lose her life in the Daulatia bus accident, there has been no respite from disasters caused by negligence within a single lifetime.

## Safety for export only

Rana Plaza propelled workplace safety onto the compliance agenda of the global fashion industry.

It gave rise to national initiatives like the Sustainability Compact, which sought to strengthen labour legislation and increase DIFE's inspection capacity.

Prominent international initiatives included the Accord on Fire and Building Safety, which in Bangladesh has now transitioned into the tripartite Ready-Made Garment Sustainability Council (RSC); this international model is now being replicated in countries like Pakistan. The Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety was another initiative that subsequently

If Bangladesh is to create "10 million jobs in 18 months", governing institutions must urgently address these gaps to establish safer workplaces and ensure the state can effectively enforce the law.

Moreover, as Syed Sultan Ahmed emphasised: "Sustainable workplace safety depends on more than just physical infrastructure. It requires the active participation of both owners and workers, supported by a robust system of legal rights and protections to ensure lasting remediation."

## The unfinished struggle for worker compensation

Part of this wider system of protection includes the contested topic of compensation. In the immediate aftermath of Rana Plaza, approximately BDT 127 crore (approximately USD 15.9 million) was donated to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund, of which 15% was directly disbursed and another BDT 23 crore (approximately USD 3 million) was distributed through the Rana Plaza Arrangement. The remaining BDT 85 crore (approximately USD 10.6 million) is still unaccounted for. A Probe Committee was formed under the IG to investigate this, but its findings have not yet been made public.

The Rana Plaza Arrangement was the largest single disbursement of funds to survivors and families of the deceased. Workers and their representatives campaigned to engage international brands, which donated a total of USD 30 million. Under ILO supervision, funds were disbursed to 5,109 beneficiaries, but as a one-time donation, not legal compensation.

Taslima Akhter, President of Bangladesh Garments Sramik Samhati (BGWS), was clear on the distinction: The Arrangement was voluntary humanitarian aid, not based on an adequate compensation law and framework, which is essential to

shown both that the model works and where it needs strengthening before it can be scaled.

Ensuring a mandatory national framework that covers all workers, not only those in exporting garment factories, requires a policy decision and budget commitments that the current government has yet to make. This can certainly help realise its ambitions to build a "safe and humane" Bangladesh.

**No grave, no plaque, no memorial**  
Court judgments, law, and compensation frameworks matter enormously and must be urgently addressed. But they are not enough for what is needed in response to such a national tragedy.

The experience of Rana Plaza must also be preserved as part of the people's history – to learn from the past and ensure such a disaster is never repeated.

Remembering is also a way to honour the courage and humanity of people from all walks of life – rickshaw pullers, students, rescue workers, trade unionists, NGO staff, employer organisations, and people from across Bangladesh and beyond – who rushed to the site or contributed through various means. They included young volunteer rescuers like Nowshad Hasan Himu, whose astounding bravery ultimately cost him his life.

Online archives such as *Outcries of a Thousand Souls* by BGWS and *After Rana Plaza* by Ismail Ferdous have been crucial for preservation and remembrance. But the Rana Plaza site itself remains littered with garbage, where the remains of people like seventeen-year-old Shanta Akhter, whose body was never recovered, have long since been absorbed into the earth.

Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed contends that burying Rana Plaza victims in the Jurain graveyard, rather than in Savar, was a "deliberate attempt



Rescuers and volunteers navigate the catastrophic ruins of the Rana Plaza building in Savar following its collapse on April 24, 2013. FILE PHOTO: STAR

evolved into the Nirapon Safety Management Programme.

While these models of industrial safety governance, trialled and tested in Bangladesh, have spilled over to other countries, within Bangladesh they unfortunately remain confined to exporting garment factories, as noted by Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed, Executive Director of the Bangladesh Institute for Labour Studies (BILS). He also highlighted persistent weaknesses in factory building approval processes and the supervisory capacity of local administration.

These concerns are echoed by the Joint Inspector General of DIFE, Md Mahfuzur Rahman Bhuiyan, who pointed out that DIFE still cannot verify whether buildings are constructed to proper standards because it has not been included in RAJUK's (Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha) building approval committee, as was also the case during Rana Plaza.

Expanding DIFE's monitoring capacity has been slow, though some progress has been made. The department now has 554 inspectors, with 122 more expected to join soon, to monitor the 83,591 establishments listed in the public database. It remains to be seen whether it can sufficiently cover the agency's broad mandate, which includes overseeing safety standards of "all factories, shops, industrial and commercial establishments, tea gardens, inland water transport, road transport, etc." across the country, along with filing complaints in the labour court, investigating worker complaints, and issuing licences.

ensure proper support and corporate accountability.

That framework is long overdue. Sections 150 and 151 of the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 still set arbitrary limits of BDT 2 lakh for deaths and BDT 2.5 lakh for permanent disablement, which are critically low. There is an urgent need to reform these limits in alignment with international standards and High Court precedents that emphasise 'loss of lifetime earnings' rather than arbitrary lump sums.

Demands for such a compensation framework remain unaddressed, despite repeated efforts by workers' organisations and platforms like BGWS, the Sramik Nirapotta Forum, Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad (SKOP), and most recently the Labour Reform Commission under the IG.

The consequences of failing to learn from Rana Plaza are still being felt across other industries. Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed noted that families of the 55 children killed in the Hashem Food factory fire received only BDT 2 lakh in compensation. Without a national disability assessment system, many injured workers across sectors still cannot access rehabilitation, long-term treatment, or psychological support. Integrating these services into a national policy framework is not a one-time relief measure but a pathway back to dignity.

One notable initiative is the Employment Injury Scheme (EIS), which has been piloted primarily in exporting RMG factories to provide social insurance coverage against work-related accidents and occupational diseases. The pilot has

to erase their memory", as authorities have ignored or failed to act on the demands by Sromik Nirapotta Forum and others for a memorial and plaque at either site.

Sadaf Siddiqi believes the industry could play a role in "remembering and honouring the victims, the amazing potential that was in all of those who lost their lives. Perhaps a landmark memorial, which also symbolises the resilience of an industry that has changed Bangladesh, with workers as its backbone".

Setting aside differences to co-create a space for remembrance could set a meaningful precedent. Rather than an admission of weakness, it would demonstrate that the industry has the maturity to acknowledge the past and the resolve to build a more just and sustainable future.

In a few days, 24th April will mark the passage of yet another year without justice or accountability since Rana Plaza. Beyond the commemorations on this single day, we hope there will be justice for the survivors and the families who lost their loved ones, and systemic change to ensure protection for all workers, not just in garments, but across the country.

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**Advocate Sifat E Nur Khanam** is a Legal Specialist at the Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) and an Advocate of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh.



A young girl in school uniform lays flowers at a makeshift memorial in Savar. Thirteen years after the Rana Plaza disaster, families continue to honour those lost while the promise of full accountability and comprehensive reparations remains unfulfilled. PHOTO: MD. ATQUR RAHMAN

catastrophe in the history of the global fashion industry.

This was a preventable disaster. It occurred because of the failures of different individuals and entities. Their actions and inaction killed 1,136 people – workers like Akhi Akhter and her friends – inflicted life-long injuries on 2,438 more, and left lasting trauma on families, communities, and rescue workers.

Beyond the denial of justice, Bangladesh still lacks adequate laws to ensure reparations for victims of work-related accidents and deaths, including justified compensation for those injured or bereaved families of those killed, long-term rehabilitation support for severely injured survivors, a well-resourced industrial safety governance system that extends beyond fire and building safety in export garment factories, and meaningful ways to remember and



A survivor is carefully lowered to safety using makeshift fabric slides during the harrowing rescue operations at the garment factory site. FILE PHOTO: STAR

## Sexual harassment in workplaces and educational institutions Why survivors still struggle to be heard

**BADRUL HASSAN**

Suppose you learn about a case of sexual harassment at your workplace or educational institution.

- » Do you know where and how to file a complaint?
- » Are you aware of the laws and rights that protect employees, learners or co-workers from sexual misconduct?
- » Is there a designated person or mechanism in your organisation responsible for addressing sexual harassment?
- » Have you ever seen a case of sexual harassment formally reported and acted upon?

If your answer to any of these questions is 'no', this article is for you. Even if your answers are 'yes', it is still worth asking whether existing systems function in practice and are aligned with national law and international standards.

Over the past two decades, cases of sexual harassment have repeatedly surfaced in court proceedings, media investigations, institutional inquiries and public debate. Yet each episode tends to follow a familiar pattern: intense public attention followed by gradual silence, with limited institutional accountability or systemic reform. Yet the recurrence of similar incidents across sectors

women. A study reported that 79.3% female and 82% of garment workers had experienced or witnessed sexual violence and harassment at work.

Another study in 2025 found that within six months of the study period, 22% of workers reported frequent factory sexual harassment, primarily by co-workers (37%) and supervisors (33%).

Studies indicate nearly 52% of female tea workers have experienced some form of harassment or torture.

Young, unmarried women experienced nearly double the harassment rates of married or older female workers.

Rigid management hierarchies and intense production pressures often discourage complaints. Many workers fear that reporting harassment could jeopardise their employment.

**Media houses and the entertainment industry:** Female journalists have described harassment both inside newsrooms and during field reporting. Investigative reporting by various media outlets has documented cases where women journalists experienced harassment from colleagues, interview subjects and sources while carrying out professional duties.

Performers in Bangladesh's entertainment sector have also raised concerns about harassment during casting and production processes. The "casting couch" has emerged

highlighting gaps in oversight and complaint systems within parts of the religious education sector. Available reporting suggests that boys are especially vulnerable in some of these settings, though the issue remains underreported and lacks robust national data.

A 2013 UN Women situational analysis covering eight universities in Bangladesh found that about 76% of female students reported experiencing sexual harassment in educational environments.

At the tertiary education level, complaints

distress, reduced motivation, and errors at work. It also lowers productivity and the overall quality of work. Nonetheless, it is often seen as a personal ordeal, but its financial consequences can also be profound.

**A study titled Paying Today and Tomorrow:** Charting the Financial Costs of Workplace Sexual Harassment estimates that survivors pushed out of well-paid professions may lose up to \$1.3 million in lifetime earnings due to job loss, stalled careers and lost benefits.

Organisations also face high costs. Research on the business impact of

Convention on Violence and Harassment at Work (ILO Convention 190) in 2025, committing the country to adopt stronger prevention policies, complaint mechanisms and enforcement systems.

UN agencies and NGOs operating in Bangladesh are required to adhere to Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) standards, grounded in the UN's zero-tolerance policy and reaffirmed in United Nations General Assembly Resolution 73/302 (2019). These mechanisms are embedded across both humanitarian and development programming through inter-agency coordination and compliance frameworks. However, integration within government-led systems remains uneven, highlighting persistent gaps in institutionalisation and accountability.

### ACCOUNTABILITY AND ENFORCEMENT: BEYOND LAW TO PRACTICE

Despite legal progress, enforcement remains uneven. Complaint committees are often absent or exist only on paper, lacking independence and authority. In practice, many fail to function, leaving survivors without effective recourse.

Strengthening accountability requires more than laws—it demands institutional capacity and oversight. Police, labour inspectors and judicial authorities need targeted training, clear procedures, and consistent application of standards.

### The Financial Cost of Workplace Sexual Harassment



### IMPACT OF WORKPLACE SEXUAL HARASSMENT ON WORKERS

#### MISSING WORKDAYS



#### SUPPRESSING ANGER



#### FEELING INSULTED & LOSING MOTIVATION



#### MISTAKES DUE TO LACK OF CONCENTRATION



#### Workplace impact

Sexual harassment reduces quality of work and overall productivity.

Source: MJF study on sexual harassment against female workers at workplace, 2019.

suggests that the underlying problem remains unresolved.

### THE DATA DILEMMA AND FRAGMENTED EVIDENCE

One major obstacle to addressing sexual harassment in Bangladesh is the absence of reliable and consolidated data. There is no central database tracking workplace or educational institution harassment, and law enforcement and labour authorities do not routinely publish sector-specific statistics.

Most available evidence comes from broader violence-against-women or gender-based violence surveys, which mainly focus on domestic or intimate-partner violence. While these studies provide valuable context, they rarely isolate workplace, campus, or professional setting harassment as a distinct category.

Women working in private-sector offices have reported harassment by colleagues or supervisors. In tightly connected professional circles, many employees hesitate to report sexual misconduct, concerned that speaking out could damage their career prospects or professional reputation.

A limited number of sector-specific studies—covering universities, predominant industries and healthcare institutions—have documented harassment in particular environments. However, these studies remain narrow in scope and geographic coverage. As a result, Bangladesh still lacks a comprehensive national assessment measuring the prevalence and patterns of sexual harassment across sectors.

### HARASSMENT ACROSS WORKPLACES AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

**Women labour force:** The ready-made garment (RMG) sector—the backbone of Bangladesh's export economy—employs around 4 million workers, many of them

as a widely discussed issue in social media videos shared by many female performers, underscoring how such practices are normalised yet rarely addressed formally. These accounts highlight the risks created by informal employment arrangements and unequal power dynamics in the industry.

**Health facilities:** A cross-sectional study of nurses in Bangladesh found that around 70% of respondents had experienced workplace violence in the previous year, underscoring the vulnerability created by steep hierarchies and high-pressure institutional environments. While this is broader than sexual harassment alone, it points to conditions in which abuse and intimidation can thrive.

Hospitals and medical colleges operate within steep professional hierarchies. Junior doctors, nurses and medical trainees often work under the authority of senior physicians who influence training opportunities, evaluations and career progression. Such power imbalances can create conditions in which harassment goes unchallenged.

Some trainees report that long working hours, academic pressure and dependence on supervisors for career advancement discourage formal reporting of misconduct.

**Educational institutions and children in the workplace:** Students in institutions and children in workplaces in Bangladesh are facing recurring allegations of sexual harassment and abuse, raising serious concerns about student safety and institutional accountability.

Cases involving teachers accused of sexually harassing students periodically appear in national media, highlighting the need for stronger child-safeguarding frameworks and accessible reporting mechanisms.

Reports have also emerged from madrasa institutions across different districts,

range from inappropriate comments and intimidation to pressure for sexual favours by teachers or peers. Yet many victims still avoid formal reporting due to fear of retaliation, reputational damage or institutional reluctance to act against influential faculty members.

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics found that 82.9% children face abuse or harassment by pedestrians, and 49.8% cent were subjected to violence at the place of work.

**Social welfare institutions:** Children living in orphanages and other residential care institutions remain particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment and abuse because they depend entirely on caregivers and institutional authorities for protection and daily support.

Broader child protection data illustrates the scale of vulnerability. UNICEF estimates that around nine out of ten children aged 1–14 in Bangladesh experience violent discipline each month, affecting more than 45 million children. While violent discipline is not the same as sexual abuse, it reflects a broader culture of acceptance of violence and weak child protection that can enable abuse in settings meant to provide care.

**Political party:** Political environments can complicate responses to allegations of harassment. Many cases have surfaced in which complainants reported harassment within political organisations. In at least one instance, the complainant reportedly received no redress after filing a formal complaint with the senior leaders and was instead compelled to resign from the organisation.

In 2026, women participating in election campaigns have also reported harassment during political mobilisation activities. Media reports suggest that most political parties lack formal protection policies or complaint mechanisms for campaign workers.

**Sporting arena:** Sport is often portrayed as a realm of discipline, merit and national pride. Yet it is also shaped by sharp power imbalances between administrators and athletes, coaches and players, selectors and aspiring professionals. The recent case involving cricketer Jahanara Alam is a living example of prolonged institutional inaction. Her complaint was lodged in 2022, but the Bangladesh Cricket Board acted only in February 2026, following the High Court's intervention.

Allegations of sexual harassment and abuse of authority have surfaced in several sports, including cricket, football, shooting and tennis.

Women athletes often face difficult choices when reporting misconduct, as speaking out may jeopardise their careers. These cases highlight broader structural weaknesses in safeguarding and accountability systems within sports institutions.

In several cases, responses from sports federations were delayed or contested, sometimes requiring judicial or administrative intervention. Taken together, these incidents point to a broader structural failure to meet safeguarding and accountability obligations that institutions are already expected to uphold.

**Government offices:** Sexual harassment in Bangladesh government offices, including law enforcement and military institutions, has been documented in various reports, encompassing physical abuse, sexual assault, and harassment during investigations.

Reports suggest that security forces (including police and paramilitary units like RAB) have been accused of engaging in violence, including sexual assault, and using torture to gather information or intimidate individuals, particularly in sensitive areas.

### COST OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

A study on RMG found that sexual harassment leads to absenteeism, emotional

harassment shows that investigations, legal proceedings, reputational damage, productivity losses and declining staff morale can impose substantial financial burdens.

In international research, local authorities spent around £1.7 million paying the salaries of employees suspended during harassment investigations. Such examples illustrate how institutional failures to prevent or address harassment can generate significant financial liabilities.

### EVOLVING LAWS, LACK OF PROTECTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Bangladesh's legal response to sexual harassment has evolved gradually, though enforcement gaps remain.

The turning point came in 2009, when the High Court delivered its landmark judgment in Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA) v Government of Bangladesh. The Court recognised sexual harassment as a violation of constitutional rights to equality and dignity. It issued binding guidelines requiring all public and private institutions to establish complaint committees, ensure confidentiality and investigate allegations within defined timelines.

The Court declared that these directives would remain enforceable until Parliament enacted specific legislation.

Before recent reforms, responses to workplace harassment relied on several overlapping laws. The Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 addresses workplace misconduct but does not clearly define sexual harassment. The Bangladesh Labour Rules 2015 require grievance procedures in workplaces, though they do not by themselves create a comprehensive sexual harassment regime.

Criminal provisions such as the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 2000 and sections of the Penal Code may apply in cases involving sexual abuse or assault. Still, these laws were not designed specifically for workplace harassment.

Public-sector employees are governed by the Government Servants (Discipline and Appeal) Rules 2018, under which harassment may be treated as misconduct or abuse of authority.

A new legal framework has recently emerged. On 9 January 2026, the interim government gave final approval to the draft Prevention of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace and Educational Institutions Ordinance, 2026. The draft codifies the 2009 High Court guidelines, provides clearer definitions, including digital harassment, and mandates institutional complaint mechanisms. It is expected that the Parliament will pass the law soon.

The Bangladesh Parliament unanimously passed the Bangladesh Labour (Amendment) Bill, 2026, on April 9, 2026. A major pillar of the amendment is its alignment with ILO Convention No. 190, which introduces strict legal prohibitions against forced labour, violence, and sexual harassment. Notably, sexual harassment has been clearly defined for the first time, and all institutions are now required to form dedicated complaint committees with a prioritised focus on female representation.

### INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS AND NORMS

International obligations also shape Bangladesh's legal approach. The country has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which obliges states to ensure women's right to work free from discrimination and violence.

In the BNWLA judgment, the High Court relied on CEDAW. It is related to UN guidance, noting that gender-based harassment undermines equality in employment and must be addressed as a form of discrimination. Bangladesh has also ratified the ILO

### 2009 High Court Guidelines:

- Receive sexual harassment complaints, normally filed within 30 working days of the incident.
- Resolve minor cases with consent of the parties or conduct a formal inquiry where required.
- Summon parties and witnesses, hold hearings, gather evidence, and examine documents.
- Ensure confidentiality, record testimony in camera, and avoid humiliating or abusive questioning.
- Submit investigation report with recommendations within 30/60 days (extendable to 60 days).
- The High Court directed that these guidelines be strictly followed in all workplaces and educational institutions until legislation is enacted.

Accessible reporting systems are essential. Workplaces and educational institutions should offer multiple safe channels— independent committees, helplines and digital platforms—backed by strong protections against retaliation.

Digital systems, if designed responsibly, can play a transformative role. Secure online reporting platforms can lower barriers to disclosure, allow anonymous or confidential submissions, and enable timely tracking of cases. However, their effectiveness depends on safeguards for data privacy, protection against misuse, and clear links to offline response mechanisms so that complaints lead to real action rather than remaining within digital interfaces.

For children, this must include a child-sensitive approach for schools, madrasas, residential care, and sports. Reporting should be simple and safe, with clear pathways to trusted adults and caregivers, ensuring complaints can be made without fear or procedural burden.

Trade unions, universities, professional bodies and civil society also have a role in reinforcing standards and encouraging reporting, helping shift harassment from a private issue to a matter of rights.

### TURNING THE LEGAL REGIME INTO REAL PROTECTION

Bangladesh has made important progress in recognising sexual harassment as a legal and social issue. The 2009 High Court ruling laid the foundation for institutional safeguards, and the 2026 draft law represents a step towards a dedicated framework. Parliament must now enact and implement it without delay.

Yet laws and guidelines alone are not enough. The real test lies in whether institutions enforce mechanisms, protect complainants, and ensure impartial investigations as part of organisational culture.

Safe and respectful workplaces are not only a matter of rights and dignity—they are essential for economic progress, social stability and international credibility. The responsibility now lies with the government, employers and educational institutions to turn legal commitments into real protection.

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# FROM SEA BREEZE TO POWER BLADES Cox's Bazar leads wind energy push

From early pilot schemes in Feni and Kutubdia to Sirajganj initiatives, Bangladesh's wind power is maturing, with the beach town's 60MW plant setting a national benchmark

MOKAMMEL SHUVO, AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU and SOHEL PARVEZ

Passengers on board planes about to land in Cox's Bazar, the country's most popular beach destination, often spot rows of wind turbines standing across crop fields beside the shoreline.

Wind power is rare in Bangladesh, so the tall structures with 90-metre rotating blades come as a surprise to many.

In the presence of sufficient wind speed, the 60-megawatt (MW) wind power plant in Khurushkul and Chowfaldandi unions of Cox's Bazar Sadar upazila – the largest such plant in the country – supplies electricity directly to the national grid.

The Cox's Bazar 60 MW Wind Power Plant Project was implemented by US-DK Green Energy BD Ltd with an investment of about \$120 million and support from the Chinese company SPIC Wuling Power Corporation. It was inaugurated in March 2024 and soon began full-scale power generation.

**Bangladesh has about 28,500MW power generation capacity but remains energy-deficient, relying heavily on imported fuel for its \$450 billion economy. Over 95% of capacity comes from fossil fuels, mostly imported, while solar, hydropower and wind contribute minimally, with wind under 1%**

Each of the plant's 22 wind turbines has a capacity of 3MW. It has generated an average power output of about 10MW over the past two years and supplied around 184 million kilowatt-hours (kWh) to the national grid during its first two years, according to Imtiaz Ahmed Faridi, a deputy director at the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB).

The government buys electricity at \$0.12 per kWh and has paid about \$22 million over the past two years.

## RISING DEMAND, IMPORT DEPENDENCE AND WIND POTENTIAL

Bangladesh has an installed power generation capacity of about 28,500MW but remains energy-deficient, relying heavily on imported fuel to run its over \$450 billion economy.

More than 95 percent of capacity is based on fossil fuels, mostly imported, while the rest comes from solar, hydropower and wind.

Wind contributes less than 1 percent. Imported fossil fuels – largely sourced from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar – account for about 90 percent of electricity generation.

The US-Israel war on Iran caused Tehran to close the Strait of Hormuz, a key global route for oil, liquefied natural gas and fertiliser trade. The consequent supply disruption and rising fuel prices have raised concerns and strengthened calls to diversify energy imports and power generation sources.

Experts have recommended accelerating solar development, including rooftop systems for commercial and industrial use. Wind power is also seen as an alternative.

Under national targets, Bangladesh aims to generate 20 percent of its electricity from renewable sources by 2030 and 30 percent by 2040, including solar, wind, biomass and biogas.

A 2018 study by the US Department of Energy's National Renewable Energy Laboratory, conducted for Bangladesh's Power Division, found strong wind potential in coastal areas.

It reported that Khulna, Barishal and Chattogram divisions have wind speeds above 6 metres per second at 120 metres height.

The study estimated that over 20,000 square kilometres of land have wind speeds between 5.75 and 7.75 metres per second, with a total gross wind power potential of more than 30,000MW.

Project officials said the average wind speed in Cox's Bazar is about 5.5 metres per second, with the strongest winds between May and August, when electricity generation also peaks.

Md Billal Hossain, assistant manager and engineer at US-DK Green Energy, said, "The turbines start generating electricity at wind speeds of about 3 metres per second, while around 9 metres per second is needed to reach the full 3MW capacity."

"Our experience shows that wind conditions are generally better from afternoon to night, when electricity demand is higher, which helps increase production," he added.

He also said each 3MW turbine uses only about 20 decimals of land. "In a densely populated country like Bangladesh, this is a major advantage," he added.

However, the plant's capacity factor – the share of actual output compared to its maximum capacity – is about 17 percent, lower than in India.

Mukit Alam Khan, an engineer involved from the start and now chief business officer at Akij Engineering Ltd, said initial expectations were around 23 percent.



"The wind pattern in Cox's Bazar has been somewhat weaker in recent years. This can happen for several years at a time," he said.

However, he assured that once conditions improve, the plant will be able to produce more electricity.

"In coastal regions with stronger winds, there is strong potential to establish more wind power plants. If the government undertakes more projects like this, it could make a significant contribution to the country's electricity generation."

Zahurul Islam Khan, managing director of US-DK Green Energy Ltd, said, "We are satisfied with the current level of electricity generation and see good prospects ahead."

"We secured investors for another similar project, but previous governments did not approve it. As a result, we have not been able to move forward with new renewable energy initiatives," he added.



Officials said the project may take around 10 years to recover its investment. Turbines can operate for about 20 years with relatively low operation and maintenance costs.

Md Muzibur Rahman, director of renewable energy at Sustainable And Renewable Energy Development Authority (SREDA), said, "Investors in the wind power project in Khurushkul, Cox's Bazar, now want to expand, which clearly shows there is potential."

He added that a Danish firm is preparing a feasibility study for a 500MW offshore wind project.

A 2022 European Union (EU)-funded feasibility study identified six high-potential sites: Patuakhali, Moheshkhali, Inani Beach, Cox's Bazar, Teknaf and Parki Beach.

It proposed six projects that could add 260MW to the national grid if implemented. It also said this could help Bangladesh meet 40 percent of its unconditional Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) and 33.5 percent of conditional targets by 2030, while cutting carbon dioxide emissions by about 609,737 tCO<sub>2</sub>e (tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent) per year.

It may be noted that NDCs are national climate action plans by each country under the Paris Agreement.

The study added that falling technology costs are improving prospects, with equipment prices dropping between 2010 and 2018 by 33 percent for offshore wind and 20 percent for onshore wind projects.

## FROM PILOT PROJECTS TO EXPANSION PLANS AND CLIMATE RISKS

Wind energy exploration in Bangladesh began in 1982, when a study using data from 30 meteorological stations found that Chattogram and Cox's Bazar were suitable for wind power, according to SREDA.

The first wind power plant was established 23 years later in 2005, as a pilot project near the Muhuri River in Feni, close to coastal char areas of Sonagazi upazila. It was connected to a rural electrical feeder to meet local demand.

An electrical feeder transmits power from substations to distribution points. From 2007, the project remained shut

for several years due to technical faults, mismanagement, and low wind speed. It was restarted in February 2014 and later stopped again.

Another plant in Kutubdia, Cox's Bazar, with 50 turbines of 20KW each (1MW total), is currently not operating due to mechanical faults.

The BPDB later launched a 2MW wind power plant project in Sirajganj in 2018, the first in northern Bangladesh. Located in the Malshapara area, it has eight units of 250KW each.

The project was delayed by seven years and, even after completion in April 2025, has not reached the expected output. Md Masud Rana, manager of the Sirajganj wind plant, said turbines do not receive enough wind to rotate properly.

SREDA officials said all projects except the Cox's Bazar 60 MW plant were pilot schemes that did not achieve expected results.

Md Muzibur Rahman said proper wind mapping and turbine design based on wind flow are essential, and poor data matching and unsuitable design affected performance.

Officials also said weak maintenance and cyclone damage contributed to failures.

The EU-sponsored study also highlighted cyclone risk in Bangladesh, which remains a key concern for policymakers and the private sector.

It referred to Cyclone Sidr, one of the worst disasters in the country, with wind speeds of 120 miles per hour, and said that only a few turbines can currently withstand cyclones.

The study suggested a stronger turbine design using water-resistant components and better drainage systems.

It also recommended alternative risk transfer solutions, such as parametric insurance, to protect wind power plants from tropical cyclone damage. "Such insurance can cover not only physical damage to components but also the economic impact of downtime and repair of affected components."

SREDA's Rahman said initial investment for wind turbines, especially towers, is higher in Bangladesh than in countries like Germany.

Despite high costs, the wind power plants have become a popular attraction for visitors, as Sharmin Sultana, a housewife from Chowfaldandi village, said, "People come from far away to see it."

