



The American side tweets a lot, talks a lot. Sometimes confusing, sometimes, you know, contradictory.

Saeed Khatibzadeh
Iranian deputy foreign minister

The Daily Star

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Diesel now Tk 115, octane Tk 140

ASIFUR RAHMAN

The government last night raised fuel prices to record highs, increasing diesel by Tk 15 per litre, octane by Tk 20, petrol by Tk 19, and kerosene by Tk 18.

According to the new rates, which came into effect at midnight, diesel will cost Tk 115 per litre, up from Tk 100; octane Tk 140, up from Tk 120; petrol Tk 135, up from Tk 116; and kerosene Tk 130, up from Tk 112.

The price hikes were announced in a notification of the Ministry of Power, Energy, and Mineral Resources.

Fuel prices have not seen a mid-month change since the automated adjustment mechanism was introduced to reflect global trends in 2024.

The government has made the move despite global prices trending downward. On Friday, Brent crude fell 9 percent to \$90 a barrel, significantly down from late March, when it was close to \$120. The government, however, had not hiked the price then.

Energy Division spokesperson Monir Hossain Chowdhury said, "The government tried to keep prices stable in the local market until the very last moment. But volatility in the global market made it impossible."

"Prices change from morning to afternoon. We tried to keep them stable, but the economy just cannot afford it at this moment," Monir Hossain told The Daily Star last night.

"The government tried to keep prices stable in the local market until the very last moment. But volatility in the global market made it impossible."

Energy Division spokesperson MONIR HOSSAIN CHOWDHURY

He also mentioned that uncertainty over the Strait of Hormuz has disrupted imports.

Iran yesterday declared the strait closed, hours after opening it, saying it was responding to a continued US blockade of Iranian ports, calling it a violation of the ceasefire.

With Iran's tight grip on the strait, a conduit for roughly one-fifth of global oil trade, importing crude oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the Middle East has become a challenge for Bangladesh over several weeks.

On Friday, a 25,000-tonne octane shipment from Malaysia anchored at the Chatogram port, which is expected to be added to the national stock within a day.

With the latest shipment and ongoing local production, total stock of octane is expected to hit 55,500 tonnes, which is more than the country's maximum storage capacity of 53,000 tonnes and enough to last 45 days.

The stock initially improved after a 26,000-tonne octane shipment arrived on April 9, the first consignment since the US-Israel war on Iran erupted on February 28.

FUEL QUEUES SNAKE CITY STREETS — PAGE 12

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Govt achieved 60 milestones in 60 days

Says opposition blocking reform efforts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 60 steps taken by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman in his first 60 days in office are remarkable achievements, said Prime Minister's Office Spokesman Mahdi Amin yesterday.

"The government has taken up an unprecedented range of activities at a fast pace — the 180-day action plan covering all sectors and aimed at improving people's lives is itself a remarkable achievement," he said at a press conference organised yesterday to present the government's first 60-day activities under the 180-day action plan.

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Govt, IMF at odds over spending on polls pledges

Family Card scheme the latest flashpoint

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Bangladesh and the International Monetary Fund are locked in new disagreements over the country's economic programme, with tensions centring on social spending, revenue mobilisation, exchange rate policy, and the pace of financial sector reforms.

The latest flashpoint is the government's flagship "family card" scheme, a social protection initiative central to the ruling party's election manifesto. During meetings in Washington, the IMF raised concerns about the

cost of rapid implementation, urging Dhaka to conduct a feasibility study before committing substantial expenditure, officials familiar with the discussions told The Daily Star yesterday.

The social welfare ministry has already requested Tk 13,000 crore from the finance ministry for the next fiscal year to cover family cards for 40 lakh households — a sum that would make it one of the largest single expansions of social welfare spending in Bangladesh.

The IMF also pressed the government to align the scheme with existing social safety

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Iran shuts Hormuz again

Says US 'blockade' must end as Trump slams 'blackmail'; rivals harden stance ahead of talks

AGENCIES

Iran's military declared the Strait of Hormuz closed again yesterday, prompting ships to abandon attempts to transit the waterway and President Donald Trump to warn Tehran against trying to "blackmail" the United States.

Tehran said it was responding to a continued US blockade of Iranian ports, calling it a violation of the ceasefire.

"We're talking to them. They wanted to close up the strait again — you know, as they've been doing for years

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1




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Retirement allowance for senior journos in the works

UNB

The government is working to introduce a retirement allowance to ensure financial security for senior journalists, said Zahir Uddin Swapon, the information and broadcasting minister.

Although the media is regarded as the fourth pillar of a modern democratic state, journalists often work without institutional protection, leaving them in uncertain conditions.

"Journalism is a very important and respected profession. However, unfortunately, many senior journalists spend their final years in financial hardship. The government is working to address this situation so that they can live with dignity."

Swapon's comments came while visiting the ailing journalist Ismail Hossain Negaban at Bangladesh Medical University yesterday. He handed over a cheque of Tk 100,000 as financial assistance to Negaban on behalf of the Journalists Welfare Trust.

The government is formulating policies to ensure media freedom and responsibility while strengthening the activities of the Journalists Welfare Trust.



Displaced people drive back to their homes across the Litani river through a makeshift bridge as Israel destroyed most of the bridges in the area. The photo was taken from the southern Lebanese village of Bedias yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

JCD FACTIONAL CLASH MMC suspends classes, exams for a week

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

All classes and exams at Mymensingh Medical College have been suspended for a week after a clash between two factions of Chhatra Dal left two students injured.

Students were instructed to vacate the halls by 8:00am yesterday, said Principal Prof Dr Md Nazmul Alam Khan.

The decision was made at an emergency meeting of the academic council held early yesterday, he said.

Additional Superintendent of Police (Admin) Md Abdullah Al Mamun said the clash broke out around 9:00pm Friday at the college dormitory. The injured – Md Muaz and Mir Hamidur, both third-year students – belong to rival groups of the college unit of Jatitotabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD).

Quoting campus sources, the police official said Muaz went to Hamidur's room where a heated exchange over refuelling a motorcycle escalated into a scuffle. Hamidur and his associates allegedly beat Muaz and forced him out. Later, as Hamidur went out for tea, he was reportedly attacked and struck on the head with a blunt object. A chase and counter-chase followed between the two groups, triggering the clash.

Police rushed to the scene and brought the situation under control. The injured were admitted to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital. Muaz was later referred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, while Hamidur remains under treatment at MMCH.

Kotwali Model Police Station OC Shebirul Islam said one person, Naful Islam, 25, has been detained, though no case had been filed yet.

The college authorities have formed a three-member probe committee tasked with submitting a report within seven working days.

JCD unit convener Tanvir Abdullah denied it was a factional clash, claiming it may have resulted from personal enmity, and said the JCD central committee is also investigating.

Govt, IMF at odds

FROM PAGE 1

net programmes, warning that without proper coordination, increased spending may not yield the intended results. "The IMF has raised questions over how the government's electoral promises and safety net programmes will be implemented," one of the officials said.

Bangladesh is currently under a \$4.7 billion IMF loan programme agreed in 2023, which was later expanded to \$5.5 billion. Persistent gaps in the country's performance against IMF benchmarks could complicate the upcoming review and delay the release of the next tranche. By June last year, however, Bangladesh had received \$3.65 billion in five instalments.

Finance Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury held two meetings on the sidelines of the IMF-World Bank Spring Meetings in Washington on Thursday – one with Nigel Clarke, the IMF's deputy managing director, and another with Krishna Srinivasan, director of its Asia-Pacific department.

Speaking to reporters after the meetings, Chowdhury acknowledged that differences remain. "There are some unresolved issues with the IMF. We will try to resolve them through discussions over the next 15 to 20 days," he said. "Discussions will continue. We will try to find solutions," he added, without

specifying the unresolved issues.

The finance minister sought to cast the broader relationship in positive terms, saying development partners, including the IMF, were broadly aligned with the BNP's manifesto. "What is being discussed is the approach – how we implement it," he said.

Beyond social spending, disagreements have also emerged over revenue mobilisation and the pace of financial and banking sector reforms. The IMF is pushing for a more market-determined exchange rate – a longstanding demand that Dhaka has only partially addressed.

It has also called for concrete measures to raise tax revenue by 0.5 percentage points of GDP and voiced concern about the speed and sequencing of financial sector reforms.

Chowdhury pushed back on the timeline, citing the exceptional circumstances facing the new administration. Returning to power after 17 years, the government inherited a severe energy crisis, compounded by the Iran war, he said at the meetings. Implementing sweeping reforms within two months of taking office, he argued, was unrealistic, according to the officials.

"Revenue cannot be raised abruptly," one official quoted the minister as saying. He maintained that the pace and sequencing of reforms must reflect

domestic political and economic realities, rather than an externally imposed timeline.

When asked about the IMF's concerns over [how the government plans to implement its electoral commitments], Golam Mortoza, press minister at the Bangladesh Embassy in Washington, said: "Public interest, linked to the most important electoral promises, is at the heart of the government's governing philosophy."

"The government is unyielding on these matters. The finance minister has firmly presented that position before both the IMF and the World Bank – the government will not rush," Mortoza told The Daily Star.

In a statement, the Bangladesh Embassy in Washington said the IMF had reaffirmed its role as a development partner and expressed its willingness to continue working with the elected government. Both sides agreed that further dialogue could help bridge the remaining gaps.

Separately, following meetings with World Bank President Ajay Banga and other senior officials, the finance minister described those discussions as "very positive." He said the World Bank had expressed no disagreement with the government's electoral commitments and was ready to align with its development agenda.

aimed at ending the Iran war, with Field Marshal Asim Munir leaving Tehran and premier Shehbaz Sharif headed home from Turkey.

Munir met Iran's top leadership and peace negotiators during a three-day visit to the Iranian capital, a Pakistani military statement said.

Egypt, which has also been involved in diplomatic efforts, also appeared upbeat yesterday, with Foreign Minister Badr Abdelattay saying Cairo and Islamabad hoped to secure a final agreement "in the coming days".

He was speaking at the same event in Antalya as Khatibzadeh, who insisted no date had been set for the next round of direct talks.

The Speaker also criticised Trump for "tweeting a lot."

"The American side tweets a lot, talks a lot. Sometimes confusing, sometimes, you know, contradictory," he told journalists.

Islamabad has emerged as the lead mediator during the conflict, hosting a marathon first round of talks last weekend.

Diesel now Tk 115, octane Tk 140

FROM PAGE 1

Private condensate fractionation plants, which also produce octane and petrol, fear a storage crisis as the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) has decided to procure less locally produced fuel amid rising imported stocks.

Super Petrochemical PLC, the country's largest private refinery, recently informed the BPC that three of its barge tankers have remained idle for several days as the BPC's distribution companies have reduced fuel collection from them following the arrival of the first consignment of imported octane.

The government had earlier this month decided to keep domestic fuel prices unchanged for April

by absorbing rising import costs through heavy subsidies to shield consumers from global energy shocks following the US-Israel war on Iran.

With the latest decision, fuel prices have reached their highest level on record. When the Ukraine-Russia war began in 2022, the then government set diesel at a peak of Tk 114, octane at Tk 135, and petrol at Tk 130.

However, fuel prices were cut by Tk 5 within a couple of days amid widespread criticism from different stakeholders.

When fuel prices increase locally, it impacts the transportation, irrigation, and industrial production costs, inevitably driving up commodity prices.

Opposition leader and Jamaat-e-

Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman last night criticised the government's latest decision to raise fuel prices, calling it "very unfortunate" at a time when people are already grappling with high living costs.

In a post on his verified Facebook page following the announcement, Shafiqur said, "At a time when global fuel prices are declining, the government has announced an increase in fuel prices in the name of adjustment. This is very unfortunate."

He added that people are already struggling to cope with rising expenses, and the latest hike would worsen their hardship. "This will be a blow to people who are already suffocating under the pressure of living costs," he said.

Man sent to jail over post

FROM PAGE 12

not communicate with the honourable member of parliament before filing this case.

"I acted on my own because I felt bad. The whole Patharghata area is being portrayed falsely on Facebook over a minor incident every day. It has created unrest in the locality."

Asked about the legality of the case, Md Dawud Hossain, officer-in-charge of Gulshan Police Station, said, "It seemed cognisable to me, so I took the case ... The court will give directions if any law was violated in filing the case."

A team of the Detective Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police picked up Hasan Nasim from his house in the city's Agargaon area around 8:00pm on Friday.

Yesterday, he was produced before the court with a seven-day remand prayer after being shown arrested in the case.

Later, Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Md Hasib Ullah Pias rejected the remand prayer and sent Hasan to jail, according to a sub-inspector working at the court.

The court also fixed today (April 19) for the hearing of the bail petition, the SI added.

According to the police forwarding report, detectives arrested him after

finding his involvement during investigation.

In the case statement, the complainant said that on April 11, he saw a Facebook post on "Patharghata.com", which said, "Three whales were brought from the sea, two sharks are on the way, Inshallah – everyone's invited: Chief Whip".

Chief Whip Moni had, in fact, said these lines in parliament on April 10.

Meanwhile, the case statement further said that multiple screenshots of different posts were sent, with "an intent to blackmail", to the chief whip's WhatsApp number from an unknown number.

Complainant Nazrul also claimed that the same account had repeatedly published and circulated misleading information at different times. He said he later informed Moni about the matter.

Contacted, Moni said that five to seven Facebook pages had been consistently spreading propaganda since December last year. At that time, they filed general diaries with three police stations and also lodged a complaint with the returning officer. Based on that complaint, the cyber police informed him that they had tracked down the individual on Friday night.

Govt achieved 60 milestones in 60 days

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Mahdi went on to accuse the opposition of obstructing reform and development efforts instead of cooperating.

The BNP government had expected cooperation from the Jamaat-NCP alliance over what he described as positive measures taken in a short span of time.

"But we saw that instead of doing that, they chose another path, including creating chaos in the parliament, threatening movements on the streets and spreading rumours and propaganda – these are obstacles to the country's progress."

People had lost trust in the government and the state system.

"Prime Minister Tarique Rahman has now brought back that trust and confidence among the people of the country. He has brought back a transparent and accountable system – he is implementing the promises made in the election manifesto, which is a unique achievement."

Among the measures highlighted at the briefing were direct cash support under the Family Card scheme, the launch of the Farmers' Card programme, agricultural loan waiver of up to Tk 10,000, and fuel and commodity price controls.

The pilot phase of the Family Card programme has been completed, with 37,567 families receiving the cards so far. Each cardholder's family is receiving Tk 2,500 a month.

The Farmers' Card programme, which offers 10 benefits and cash support, had also been launched, initially covering more than 22,000 marginal, small and medium farmers in 10 districts.

Loans of up to Tk 10,000, including

interest, for about 12 lakh small and marginal farmers had been waived.

The government also settled 133 ordinances in the first session, said Mahdi, also one of the 10 advisers of the PM.

Of those, 16 ordinances, including the Human Rights Commission Ordinance and Disappearance Prevention and Redress Ordinance, would be reviewed and later placed before the parliament as bills.

The government had taken up a programme to excavate and re-excavate 20,000 kilometres of rivers, canals and water bodies, with work already under way in 54 districts.

Despite the global energy crisis, fuel oil prices had been kept under control, he said, adding that reining in the prices of essentials remained one of the government's priorities.

The government has set a target of producing 10,000MW of renewable energy by 2030, of which 35 megawatts were added to the national grid through rooftop solar and net metering in the first 60 days.

He also referred to the monthly allowances for religious leaders.

In the health and education sectors, the government had announced plans to recruit 100,000 health workers, with 80 per cent of them being women.

He also mentioned the planned introduction of an e-health card.

The government had decided to scrap re-admission fees, double scholarship amounts, recruit teachers at different levels, including religious teachers and make sports compulsory for students.

There is a plan to fill 468,220 vacant posts in government offices over six

months, one year and five years.

The government is working to reopen closed factories, reopen the Malaysian labour market and sign labour-related agreements with seven European countries.

Some 15 million saplings have already been produced as part of a five-year target to plant 25 crore trees.

An initiative has been taken to launch "Expatriate Card".

The Hajj cost has been reduced by Tk 12,000 per ticket and the Nusuk Hajj Card has been introduced for the first time in the country.

Intelligence and law enforcement agencies are taking swift action against extortion, with maintaining law and order given top priority, alongside initiatives to build a people-friendly police force.

The other initiatives mentioned included the Padma Barrage project, mandatory online applications for mutation and land development tax services and a draft legal amendment to treat river grabbing and river pollution as criminal offences.

Efforts towards the recovery of laundered money are ongoing and long-term plans have been formed to prevent river erosion in coastal areas.

Safeguarding human rights is one of the pledges in BNP's manifesto and the government's record over the past two months had met public expectations, Mahdi said.

The prime minister is staying at his Gulshan home instead of the state residence Jamuna, using his own car and paying for fuel, working on Saturdays and enforcing 9:00am attendance. He has also cut airport formalities during state visits.

Iran says reviewing 'new US proposals' | **8 ships pass strait during brief reprieve; 2 attacked** | **Tehran says no date set for next round of talks** | **Iran partially opens its airspace**

Washington is due to expire on Wednesday.

"Maybe I won't extend it, but the blockade is going to remain," Trump told reporters on Friday aboard Air Force One when asked if the ceasefire would be extended.

Asked about a potential deal, Trump said, "I think it's going to happen."

There was no immediate sign of direct US-Iran talks taking place over the weekend to end the war that the US and Israel launched on February 28.

Then, late yesterday morning, Iran's central military command said that, in response to the US blockade, "control of the Strait of Hormuz has returned to its previous status" and "is under strict management and control of the armed forces".

Shipping sources said at least two vessels reported coming under fire while trying to transit the waterway. In Mumbai, an Indian government source said India summoned Iran's ambassador after an Indian-flagged vessel carrying crude oil was attacked while trying to cross the Strait.

Tehran's renewed tough messaging injected fresh uncertainty around the Iran conflict, raising the risk that oil and gas shipments through the strait could

through a siege.

Meanwhile, in a written message, Iran's supreme leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, who had not been seen since taking power, said Iran's navy "stands ready" to defeat the United States.

Iran's Supreme National Security Council yesterday said that the country was reviewing "new proposals" received from the US.

"In recent days, with the presence of the commander of the Pakistani army in Tehran as an intermediary and mediator in the negotiations, new proposals have been put forward by the Americans, which the Islamic Republic of Iran is currently reviewing and has not yet responded to," it said in a statement.

It went on to say that Iran's negotiating delegation "will not make even the slightest compromise, retreat or leniency, and will defend with all its strength the interests of the Iranian nation".

Nevertheless, Trump appeared convinced that a deal could be finished shortly.

He declared Friday "GREAT AND BRILLIANT," and made a series of social media posts praising the progress in the talks.

Pakistan's powerful military chief and prime minister concluded separate visits

A second round is expected in the Pakistani capital this coming week, but it was not clear what impact Iran's latest move would have on that possibility.

In a sign that the two-week ceasefire remained stable, Iran's civil aviation agency declared its airspace was open again, with international flights able to transit Iran via the east of the country.

Nevertheless, differences remained on two major sticking points in the peace talks – Iran's stockpile of near-weapon-grade enriched uranium and the future of the Strait of Hormuz.

Speaking by phone with AFP on Friday, Trump said "we're very close to having a deal," adding that there were "no sticking points at all" left with Tehran.

Later the same day, at an event in Arizona, the president declared that Iran had agreed to hand over its 440 or so kilogrammes of uranium enriched to 60 per cent – close to that needed for a bomb.

"We're going to get it by going in with Iran, with lots of excavators," he said.

But hours before, Iran's foreign ministry had said its stockpile, thought to be buried deep under rubble by US bombing in last June's 12-day war, was not going anywhere.

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'Past govts' measles vaccination failure unforgivable crime'

Says prime minister

STAR REPORT

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman yesterday termed the "life-threatening failure" of the previous two governments to vaccinate children against measles across the country an "unforgivable crime".

"We all have to be vigilant so that such incidents never happen again," he said.

"Due to the current government's emergency initiative to vaccinate against measles across the country, by the grace of Almighty Allah, it has been possible to prevent further deterioration of the situation," said the premier, reports BSS.

Addressing the Upazila Health and Family Planning Officers (UHFO) Conference 2026 at Osmani Memorial Auditorium in Dhaka, the prime minister urged grassroots physicians to lead efforts in building an accessible, affordable, effective, and humane healthcare system.

"You are the main drivers in turning our dream of a healthy nation into reality," he said, outlining plans to raise health sector allocation to 5 percent of GDP.

The prime minister said he believes physicians will be able to establish an accountable, sustainable and people-centric health service, reports UNB.



SEE PAGE 5 COL 3



Eight-month-old Raima, who was brought from Kushtia, has been receiving treatment at the Infectious Diseases Hospital in Mohakhali for three days after developing measles-related complications. The photo was taken yesterday, when four more children were reported dead from suspected measles in the previous 24 hours till 8:00am.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

'Punish those responsible for measles deaths'

Doctors' platform calls for immediate measures

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Doctors' Platform for People's Health (DPPH) yesterday demanded that those responsible for the recent surge in preventable deaths of children from measles be identified and punished.

The organisation said negligence in vaccine procurement by the interim government, bureaucratic delays and institutional indifference towards public health have significantly contributed to the ongoing measles outbreak, leaving many children dead.

It called for immediate corrective measures, including launching a nationwide mass vaccination campaign, declaring the measles outbreak a public health emergency, and undertaking all-out efforts with the highest priority to contain the crisis.

DPPH, formed in May 2020, made the observations and demands at a press conference at Dhaka Reporters' Unity titled "Deaths of Children in Measles: What Should Be Done in this Public Health Emergency".

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

Reviving Saarc a key foreign policy goal: Khalilur

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman has said that reviving Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) is a major foreign policy objective of Prime Minister Tarique Rahman.

He made the comment at a ministerial panel at the Antalya Diplomacy Forum in Türkiye yesterday. Khalilur Rahman, Pakistan Deputy Prime Minister, and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar and Afghan Transport Minister Azizi participated in the panel.

Khalilur recalled the seminal contribution of former president Ziaur Rahman's initiative to establish Saarc, which has remained dormant for nearly a decade.

The panel agreed that the South Asian region

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Caught between arsenic and salinity

In Chapainawabganj Sadar, residents grapple with acute water crisis

SHOHANUR RAHMAN RAFI

Thousands of residents of Chapainawabganj Sadar upazila have been grappling with an alarming water crisis as ultra-deep wells yield saline water and deep aquifers remain contaminated with arsenic.

Several neighbourhoods under Chapainawabganj municipality are receiving water too salty for consumption, while people in other areas rely on groundwater much at risk of arsenic poisoning.

In many households, the tap water smells unpleasant and corrodes pipes, and residents say their skin itches after bathing.

As such, people are forced to collect safe drinking water from distant sources on a daily basis.

The crisis surfaced after three ultra-deep production wells - each around 1,000 feet deep - were installed in 2020 with assistance from JICA in the Rajarampur, Chandlai, and Rehaichar areas of the municipality. The wells were meant to identify arsenic-free aquifers and expand safe water access.



We cannot even rinse our mouths with this water. It's too salty and leaves my hands with blisters as I use it for domestic chores. We have to bring drinking water from far away.

PARVIN BEGUM, A housewife from Chandlai

However, the wells instead began yielding excessively saline and warm water, according to the Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE).

As per DPHE data, while the Bangladesh standard prescribes 150-600 mg/L of chloride and 1,000 mg/L of total dissolved solids (TDS), tests revealed significantly higher concentrations in water pumped from the deep wells - Rajarampur (965 ft) with chloride 1,280 mg/L, TDS 2,570 mg/L; Chandlai (1,000 ft) with chloride 830 mg/L, TDS 1,710 mg/L; and Rehaichar (1,009 ft) with chloride 830 mg/L, TDS 1,780 mg/L.

Although the wells yield arsenic-free water, the high salinity makes

them unsafe for drinking.

In contrast, five similar wells installed in the district outside the municipality in 2021 showed salinity and TDS levels within normal limits - suggesting that the problem is highly location-specific.

Meanwhile, water from deep aquifers across the municipality has been found highly contaminated with arsenic.

Prof AHM Selim Reza of Rajshahi University's Geology and Mining department said arsenic concentrations of around 1.2 mg/L were found at depths of 120-150 ft, far above both the Bangladesh standard of 0.05 mg/L and WHO guideline of 0.01 mg/L.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 3

NCP forms 53-member women's wing committee

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Citizen Party (NCP) has formed a 53-member central convening committee for its women's platform, Jatiya Nari Shakti.

The platform's Member Secretary Mahmuda Alam Mitu confirmed the development in a press release issued yesterday.

The committee was approved by NCP Convener Nahid Islam and Member Secretary Akhter Hossain, the release said.

NCP Joint Convener Monira Sharmin has been made convener, while Joint Member Secretary Saifun Bushra Mishma has been named senior joint convener. Mahmuda Alam Mitu will serve as member secretary.

Meanwhile, one of the listed leaders has announced her resignation from all party posts, expressing surprise at her inclusion.

Former Dhaka University student Dyuti

SEE PAGE 5 COL 6

Dhaka-EU ties set for new boost Comprehensive Partnership Agreement to be initialled in Brussels tomorrow

PORIMOL PALMA

Bangladesh and the European Union (EU) will initial the Comprehensive Partnership Agreement (CPA) tomorrow, adding a new dimension to the relationship that will boost trade, investment and other areas based on equal footing.

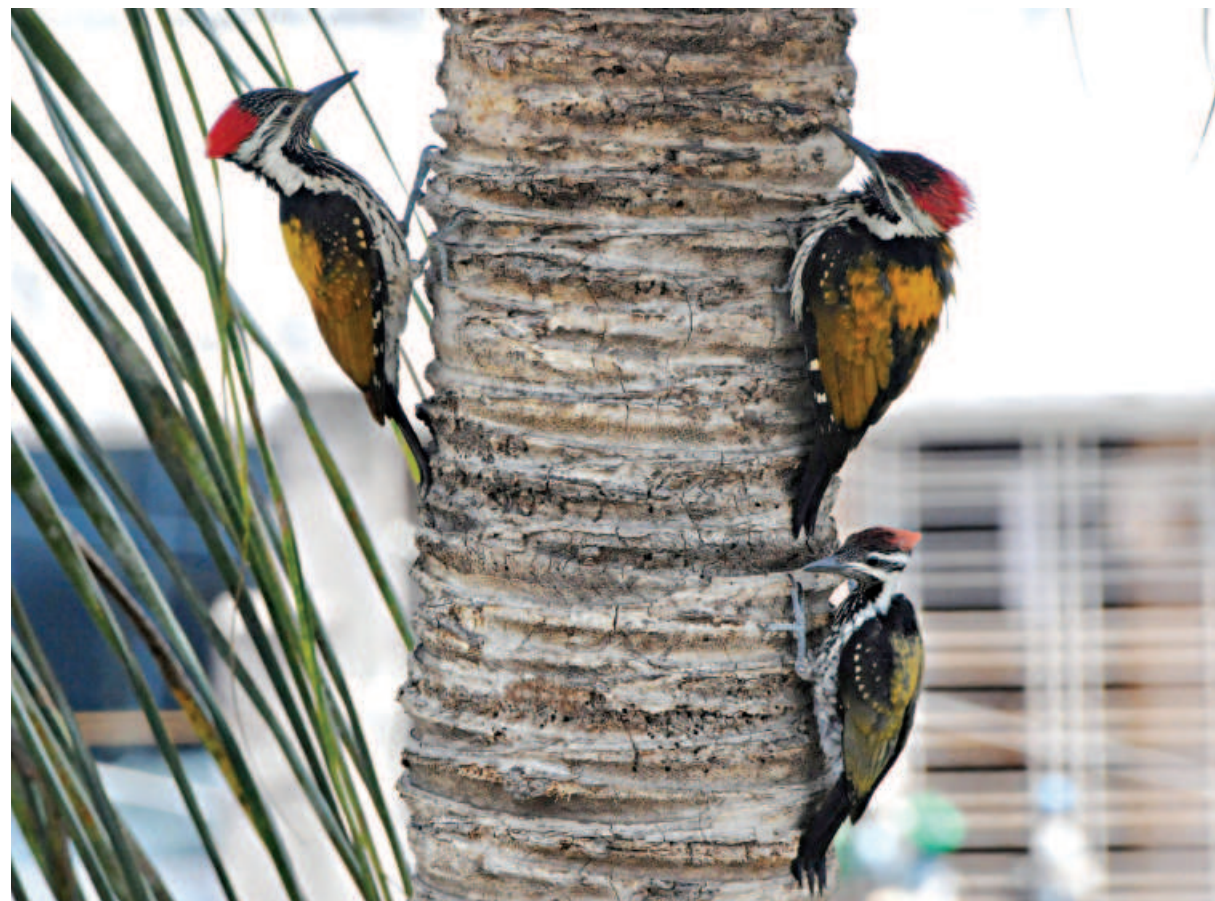
Initialling the CPA means the agreement will have a legal basis, with the draft finalised and agreed upon by both sides in January this year following five sessions of negotiation since 2024. However, the CPA will take a few months for translation to 24 European languages before it is signed.

The CPA will be initialled in the presence of Bangladesh's Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas in Brussels, said ministry officials. Khalilur Rahman will fly to Brussels today.

Officials said Bangladesh's relationship with the EU, the country's largest export destination, has been that of development cooperation under the Cooperation Agreement signed in 2001.

According to diplomatic sources, signing the CPA will be a significant elevation of the Bangladesh-EU relationship.

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Three woodpeckers assemble on a coconut tree, likely preparing to drill nesting holes with their long beaks. Often considered nature's quiet benefactors, they create cavities later used by other birds such as mynas and parrots. The photo was taken in the Bospara area of Rajshahi city yesterday.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

JORA SHIVMANDIR

A testament to Khulna's heritage

DIPANKAR ROY, Khulna

Located at Ghat-5 along the eastern bank of the Bhairab river in Khulna city, the 327-year-old twin Shiva temples, locally known as "Jora Shivmandir", are a historic marvel that has withstood the test of time.

The temples, known for their Shivalingams, are a symbol of both spiritual reverence and architectural grandeur.

Despite the temples' unique archaeological significance, they have not yet been taken into the custody of the Department of Archaeology.

Established in 1104 in the Bangla calendar by Dewan Krishnaram Bose of Murshidabad, the Jora Shivmandir was once a centrepiece of local life.

The grand complex featured a large pond, a lush flower garden, and held a vibrant eight-day-long fair during Shivratri that drew visitors from near and far.

Over the years, the pond and garden were grabbed and replaced by the encroaching infrastructure of a railway station and new buildings.

The Khulna-Jashore road separates Shibbari intersection and Jora Shivmandir. Today, no one can instantly remember that this intersection has a



connection to the twin Shiva temple.

After renovation the real wall's shape and colour were covered by bright cement and sand.

Both temples are similar in shape on square bases, with thick walls and east-facing entrances. There is an arched doorway on the south side.

A trident is placed on the southern peak. On the north wall, there is a grooved identification plaque. The wall also bears plaques commemorating recent restorations and renovations. Each of the two

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HSC, equivalent exams to begin July 2

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) and equivalent examinations will begin on July 2, Dhaka Education Board Chairman Khandokar Ehsanul Kabir said yesterday.

The decision was finalised at a meeting of the Secondary and Higher Education Division, chaired by Education Minister ANM Ehsanul Hoque Milon, with participation from education board heads, teachers, and guardians.

Authorities have been instructed to complete the examinations within five weeks. "The routine is now being prepared keeping that in mind," he added.

The exams were originally scheduled to start on June 7, but the date was revised following stakeholder consultations at the meeting.

MANIKGANJ TRIPLE MURDER Teen held, no case filed over mob killing of 2

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Police have arrested a 15-year-old boy in connection with a case filed over the killing of a seven-year-old girl in Manikganj Sadar upazila.

Acting on a tip-off, police arrested the teenager from Dhaka's Nawabganj area on Friday night, said Manikganj superintendent of police Sarwar Alam yesterday.

"He is currently in police custody. After interrogation, he will be produced before the juvenile court," the SP said, adding that drives were underway to arrest another accused named Roni.

Meanwhile, the mother of the child, Atika Akter, filed a murder case against five people, including the teenager, with Sadar Police Station yesterday, SP Sarwar also said.

However, no case has yet been filed over the killing of the arrested teenager's father and uncle in a mob attack on Thursday night, following allegations that the girl had been murdered.

The SP said no written complaint has so far been submitted by the relatives regarding the mob killing. "If they file any complaint, it will be registered as a case," he added.

According to police and locals, Atika Akter, daughter of Dudal Mia of Bonparil village, went missing from near her home on Thursday afternoon. 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. Police suspect that she was killed either during an attempted rape or robbery of her jewellery. Atika's family alleged that a teenage boy was involved. Later, agitated people beat up the teenage boy's elder brother Nazmul, 20; their father Pannu Miah, 45; and Pannu's brother Fazlu, 28.

On information, police went to the spot and rescued Nazmul alive but in a critically injured condition. Pannu and Fazlu were found dead, said Aminul Islam, inspector (investigation) of Manikganj Sadar Police Station.

"We have found evidence of rape attempt on the girl. However, details will be known after getting the autopsy report," Aminul added.

BERA UPAZILA IN PABNA

Lone river ambulance lies non-operational for years

Shoal residents struggle with emergency medical access

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU,
Pabna

For the residents of Char Pechakola, a shoal within the Jamuna river under Pabna's Bera upazila, a medical emergency is not just a health crisis; it is often a life-and-death struggle.

Though the distance to the nearest health complex is only around seven to eight kilometres, the journey usually takes around three hours through the shoal's shifting sands and Jamuna's waterways, making it an arduous task to take a critical patient to hospital in time.

To make matters worse, the lone river ambulance for medical emergencies in the region has long been lying non-operational.



As such, local residents always keep the phone numbers of local boatmen on speed dial. These boatmen remain awake throughout the night, ready to navigate the dark waters if an emergency arises.

"When someone falls ill, it brings a desperate time for the entire family," said Md Ibrahim from Char Pechakola village.

"We have to transport the patient across the sands via horse carts to the riverbank first, before finding a boat to cross the river to the mainland and finally reach the upazila health complex," he added.

The stakes are highest for pregnant women.

"Pregnant women suffer the most. No doctor ever visits this village. In critical moments, we are forced to



hire trained nurses from outside to perform deliveries here because we simply cannot take the patient to hospital in time under the present circumstances," Ibrahim explained.

While Ibrahim noted that there have been no recent fatalities in his specific village, the risk remains high in the absence of even the most basic facilities.

A similar scenario prevails in neighbouring Char Nagdah, Hatail Aralia, Char Pailanda, Char Aghashoha, Char Saffulla, Dewnai, Pukurpur, Sharifpur, Char Pagla, and other shoal villages under the upazila.

In 2013, the government, through the Directorate of Central Medical Store Depots (CMSD), allotted a specialised river ambulance to the Bera Upazila Health Complex under a project to serve over 1,00,000 residents of 22 shoal villages.

That ambulance, however, has long been lying abandoned and rotting on the mainland due to a lack of maintenance.

Confirming the matter, Dr Tahmina Yasmin, upazila health officer in Bera, said the project was hampered from the start.

"There was never a budget for fuel, maintenance, or a driver. Later, the

engine got stolen, and the vessel is now nothing but a hollow shell," she added.

Internal records regarding the project's cost or the disappearance of its machinery are also non-existent.

Dr Tahmina also said that despite routinely reporting the issue to the Directorate General of Health Services, no action has been taken.

Md Monzed Ali, executive director of an NGO named Jamuna Somaj Kollan Shangshta, termed it a part of a broader pattern of deprivation for the people of the region.

"While there is a mobile NGO hospital boat, it is not enough. Many patients died during the long journey to the mainland while being taken to hospitals," he added.

"An ambulance meant for the poor is left to decay because of a lack of maintenance. If functional, it would have eased a lot of suffering, especially for pregnant women and critical patients," said Md Abul Kalam, a local college teacher.

Contacted, Nuren Mayesha Khan, assistant commissioner (land) in Bera upazila, said an initiative is underway to resume the river ambulance service.

"Necessary steps will be taken to this end," the official added.

Lightning strikes kill 13 across country

STAR REPORT

At least 13 people were killed yesterday in lightning strikes across the country.

Of them, five died in Sunamganj; two each in Rangpur and Mymensingh; and one each in Habiganj, Netrokona, Lalmonirhat, and Kishoreganj.

In Sunamganj, five people were killed in separate lightning strikes in four upazilas of Sunamganj while harvesting and drying Boro paddy.

In Dharmapasha upazila, Habibur Rahman died after being struck by lightning while harvesting paddy in Togar Haor. In the same upazila, Rahmat Ullah was killed while drying paddy beside his house, said Dharmapasha Police Station Officer-in-Charge Shahid Ullah.

In Jamalganj, Nuruzzaman was killed while harvesting paddy in Pagnar Haor, confirmed Jamalganj Police Station OC Md Bande Ali.

In Tahirpur, Abul Kalam died while working in Matian Haor, said Tahirpur Police Station OC Aminul Islam.

Meanwhile, Liton Miah was killed while harvesting paddy in Kaliagota Haor, said Dr Prashanta Das Talukdar, resident medical officer of Tahirpur Upazila Health Complex.

In Mymensingh, Rahmat Ali Ujjal, 30, of Gouripur died after being hit by lightning while harvesting paddy, said Gouripur Police Station OC Md Kamrul Hasan.

Meanwhile, Momtaz Ali Khan, 58, of Gafargaon died while returning home after Zohr prayers, said Pagla Police Station OC Md Aminul Islam.

In Rangpur, two people were killed during a storm in Mithapukur upazila.

The deceased are farmer Taleb Uddin, 60, and fisherman Milon Islam, 42 — both from Boro Hazratpur Sakhipur area in the upazila.

Locals rescued and took them to Mithapukur Upazila Health Complex, where doctors declared Taleb and Milon dead, confirmed Mithapukur Police Station OC Nuruzzaman Ahmed.

In Habiganj, Sunam Uddin, 60, of Rampur village, was killed while harvesting paddy in Mamina Haor, said Nabiganj Police Station OC Md Monayem Mia.

In Netrokona, a farmer, Altu Mia, 65, died in Atpara upazila. Atpara Police Station OC Zubaedul Alam said Altu died on the spot when he went to the Meshir Haor to cut grass for his cattle.

In Kishoreganj, Haldut Mia, 37, of Kolabag village in Joyka union, died while harvesting paddy in a large haor in Karimganj, said UNO Umme Muslima.

In Lalmonirhat, Abdur Hossain, 55, was struck by lightning while working in a paddy field in Aditmari upazila, said OC Nazmul Haque of Aditmari Police Station.



A testament to Khulna's heritage

FROM PAGE 3

temples has a Shivalingam of a similar shape.

Md Mosharruf Hossain of DoA conducted an archaeological survey of the Greater Khulna district, where he cited the twin temples' terracotta motifs on the front. The structures were constructed with small masonry bricks and cemented with lime-mixed brick powder.

The then members of the Marwari community of Khulna's Barobazar area were patrons of this temple. The fair held on the Jora Shivmandir premises during Shivratri used to be one of the major fairs in South Bengal.

In his book "Khulnar Purakirti", Dr Mizanur Rahman wrote, "In 1343 Bangla year, Baldev Agarwal built a garden near the temple. In the eastern part of the temple premises, a school was established by locals. This school survived

till the Liberation War in 1971."

While constructing the Khulna Railway Station in 1880, a significant part of the pond adjacent to the temple was filled up. Gradually the garden also disappeared.

During the 1964 riots, the temples were damaged, and the identical Shivalingams were robbed by miscreants. At that time, the priest of Satya Narayan temple in Barobazar used to perform puja at the twin temples.

In the 1980s, the temple was grabbed by notorious criminal Ershad Shikder. During that time, people hardly ventured into the Jora Shivmandir premises.

Gopi Kishan Munda, an adviser of the temples' committee, said they finally entered the Jora Shivmandir again after years in 1999 with the help of district administration.

With financial support from Shivakrishna

Mundhara and the Khulna City Corporation, the damaged portions of the temples were repaired. New stone Shivalingams were installed, and a boundary wall was erected to secure the site. There is a priest who performs puja daily at the temples. "The archaeology department should conserve this site for its rich architectural history and cultural significance."

Lovely Yasmin, DoA regional director in Khulna, said the archaeological features of the twin temples have been damaged due to the use of modern construction materials.

"If the temple authorities commit to removing these materials and restoring the temple to its original state, we will take it under our responsibility. Otherwise, this situation does not fall within the scope of the Archaeology Act."

Reviving Saarc

FROM PAGE 3

has immense possibilities for cooperation and that dialogue and diplomacy are the only ways to overcome barriers to cooperation among countries in the region.

At another event on "Global Refugee Protection System in the Face of Displacement Crisis", Khalilur said the sustainable and effective solution to the Rohingya crisis lies within Rakhine State.

He emphasised that the international community should not restrict itself to humanitarian aid alone but must play a more active and productive role in creating a favourable environment for the safe, dignified, and voluntary repatriation of the Rohingyas.

Khalilur expressed deep concern over the decline in international donor assistance for the Rohingyas and called for urgent measures to increase funding, ensure stability and security in Rakhine, and protect human rights.

He maintained that the Rohingya crisis is a solvable problem, but it requires coordinated global initiatives and consistent international cooperation.

সিরাজুল ইসলাম চৌধুরী
সম্পাদিত
সাহিত্য-সংস্কৃতির ত্রৈমাসিক

২৪ বর্ষের তৃতীয় সংখ্যা

প্রকাশিত হয়েছে
স্টলে খোজ নিল/গ্রাহক হোন

প্রতি কপি ৮০ টাকা
বার্ষিক চাঁদা (সডাক) ৪০০ টাকা

এজেন্সী ও পুরাতন সংখ্যার
জন্য যোগাযোগ করুন

সম্পাদকীয় যোগাযোগ
উচ্চতর গবেষণা কেন্দ্র
কক্ষ ২০৪ (টিএসসি সংলগ্ন)
ঢাকা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়, ঢাকা-১০০০
ফোন: ০১৮১৭-০৫৭৭৮০
০১৬২০-২৩৫৬৬১

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

ধর্ম বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয়

বাংলাদেশ ওয়াকফ প্রশাসকের কার্যালয়

৪, নিউ ইস্কাটন রোড, ঢাকা-১০০০

স্মারক নং-১৬.০২.০০০০.০০১.১৮.০০৮.০৩/৯৭

তারিখঃ ০৩ বৈশাখ ১৪৩৩

১৬ এপ্রিল ২০২৬

বাংলাদেশ ওয়াকফ প্রশাসকের কার্যালয়ের প্যানেল আইনজীবী তালিকাভুক্তির বিজ্ঞপ্তি

বাংলাদেশ সুপ্রীম কোর্টের হাইকোর্ট বিভাগ ও আপীল বিভাগসহ জেলা পর্যায়ের বিভিন্ন আদালতে বাংলাদেশ ওয়াকফ প্রশাসনের স্বার্থ-সংশ্লিষ্ট গুরুত্বপূর্ণ মামলা পরিচালনা, প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বিতা ও রক্ষণক্ষমতা আইন কর্মকর্তাকে সহায়তা করার জন্য মহামান্য সুপ্রীম কোর্টের আপীল বিভাগের জন্য ২(দুই) জন, হাইকোর্ট বিভাগের জন্য ৩ (তিন) জন এবং ঢাকা, ফরিদপুর, টাংগাইল, নরায়ণগঞ্জ, ময়মনসিংহ, সিলেট, চট্টগ্রাম, কক্সবাজার, কুমিল্লা, নোয়াখালী, বরিশাল, পটুয়াখালী, বরগুনা, খুলনা, রাজশাহী, নওগাঁ, বগুড়া, রংপুর, দিনাজপুর ও ঠাকুরগাঁও জেলা জজ আদালতের জন্য ১ জন করে ২০ (বিশ) জনসহ মোট ২৫ (পঁচিশ) জন দক্ষ ও অভিজ্ঞ প্যানেল আইনজীবী তালিকাভুক্তির লক্ষ্যে আগ্রহী আইনজীবীগণের নিকট হতে নিম্নোক্ত শর্তে ওয়াকফ প্রশাসক বাংলাদেশ বরাবর আবেদন আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছেঃ

শর্তাবলীঃ

০১	মহামান্য সুপ্রীম কোর্টের আপীল বিভাগ, হাইকোর্ট বিভাগ এর প্যানেল আইনজীবী পদে আবেদনকারীদের ঢাকায় নিয়মিতভাবে বসবাসরত হতে হবে এবং জেলা জজ আদালতের জন্য আবেদনকারীকে স্ব-স্ব জেলায় নিয়মিতভাবে বসবাসরত হতে হবে;
০২	মহামান্য সুপ্রীম কোর্টের আপীল বিভাগের প্যানেল আইনজীবীর ক্ষেত্রে আবেদনকারীর বাংলাদেশ সুপ্রীম কোর্টের আপীল বিভাগে তালিকাভুক্ত হতে হবে। হাইকোর্ট বিভাগের প্যানেল আইনজীবীর ক্ষেত্রে আবেদনকারীকে আইনজীবী হিসেবে হাইকোর্ট বিভাগে মামলা পরিচালনায় কমপক্ষে ১০ (দশ) বছরের অভিজ্ঞতা থাকতে হবে। জেলা জজ আদালতের জন্য আবেদনকারীর ক্ষেত্রে সংশ্লিষ্ট জজ আদালতে মামলা পরিচালনায় কমপক্ষে ১০ (দশ) বছরের অভিজ্ঞতা থাকতে হবে। বিজ্ঞ প্যানেল আইনজীবীগণকে মুসলিম শরিয়্যা, ওয়াকফ ও ভূমি আইনে পারদর্শি হতে হবে।
০৩	নির্বাচিত আইনজীবীগণকে ওয়াকফ প্রশাসনের সাথে ৩ (তিন) বছরের জন্য চুক্তি করতে হবে।
০৪	কোন কারণ দর্শানো ব্যতিরেকে কর্তৃপক্ষ আবেদনকারীর আবেদনপত্র গ্রহণ বা বাতিল করার অধিকার সংরক্ষণ করেন। প্যানেল আইনজীবী নিয়োগের বিষয়ে কর্তৃপক্ষের সিদ্ধান্তই চূড়ান্ত বলে গণ্য হবে।
০৫	আবেদনের সাথে নিম্নবর্ণিত কাগজপত্রাদি দাখিল করতে হবেঃ
০৫.১	আবেদনকারীর নাম, মাতা ও পিতার নাম প্রযোজ্য ক্ষেত্রে স্বামীর নাম, স্থায়ী ও বর্তমান ঠিকানা, কর্মস্থল/চেষ্টারের ঠিকানা, জন্ম তারিখ, শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতা, ফোন নম্বর, মোবাইল নম্বর ই-মেইল আইডিসহ পূর্ণাঙ্গ জীবন বৃত্তান্ত। আবেদনপত্রে ও খামের উপরে যে আদালতের জন্য নিয়োগ পেতে চান তা উল্লেখ করতে হবে।
০৫.২	(ক) সদ্য তোলা ২(দুই) কপি পাসপোর্ট সাইজের ছবি, (খ) জাতীয় পরিচয়পত্র, (গ) শিক্ষাগত যোগ্যতার সকল সনদ, (ঘ) বার কাইলিগ কর্তৃক প্রদত্ত পেশাগত সনদ, (ঙ) আপীল বিভাগ/হাইকোর্ট বিভাগ/ জেলা জজ আদালতে মামলা পরিচালনার অনুমতির সনদ, (চ) অভিজ্ঞতার সনদ এবং (ছ) অন্য কোন প্রতিষ্ঠানে প্যানেল আইনজীবী হিসেবে নিয়োগপত্র (যদি থাকে) এর সত্যায়িত কপি।
০৬	উক্ত বিজ্ঞপ্তি সংক্রান্ত বিস্তারিত তথ্যাদি ওয়াকফ প্রশাসক, বাংলাদেশ এর ওয়েবসাইট www.waqf.gov.bd এ পাওয়া যাবে।
০৭	আগামী ১৯ মে ২০২৬ বিকাল ০৩.০০ ঘটিকার মধ্যে সরাসরি/ডাকযোগে নিম্ন ঠিকানায় আবেদন পৌছানো নিশ্চিত করতে হবে। ঠিকানাঃ ওয়াকফ প্রশাসক, বাংলাদেশ বাংলাদেশ ওয়াকফ প্রশাসকের কার্যালয় ৪ নং নিউ ইস্কাটন রোড, ঢাকা www.waqf.gov.bd

০৩.০৪.২০২৬

মোঃ শাহীন হোসেন

ওয়াকফ প্রশাসক, বাংলাদেশ

বাংলাদেশ ওয়াকফ প্রশাসন

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Addendum-01 to Expression of Interest (EOI) for Sponsorship Rights
BCB Official Drinking and Official Beverage Partner

Ref: BCB/Official Drinking and Official Beverage Partner/ 2026/339 Date: 19th April 2026

ADDENDUM-01

This Addendum is issued by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) in connection with the Expression of Interest (EOI) dated 04th March, 2026 (Ref: BCB/Official Drinks and Official Beverage Partner/2026/167).

To align the EOI process with the revised Series itinerary and operational requirements, BCB hereby introduces the following amendments:

- The revised sponsorship tenure for Official Drinking & Beverage Partner shall be for a period of two (2) years starting from 1st May, 2026 to 30th April, 2028.
- The revised deadline for submission of EOI is Sunday, 26th April 2026. BCB reserves the right to further extend or modify the timeline if required.
- All EOI submitted pursuant to the original EOI shall remain on record. However, all applicants shall be entitled, but not obligated, to revise, supplement or resubmit their EOIs within the revised timeline. Any applicant who does not submit a revised or supplemented EOI shall be deemed to rely upon its original submission, which shall be evaluated in accordance with the amended terms.
- All applicants, including new applicants, shall be afforded equal opportunity to participate in the process. No applicant shall be disadvantaged by reason of having submitted an EOI prior to this Addendum and no rights or legitimate expectations shall accrue solely on that basis.
- Save as expressly amended hereby, all other terms and conditions of the EOI shall remain unchanged and shall continue to be valid and binding. This Addendum shall form an integral part of the EOI.

BCB reserves its rights as set out in the EOI, including the right to amend, modify, suspend or cancel the process at any stage without incurring any liability to any party.

Chief Executive Officer
Bangladesh Cricket Board
Management Office : Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Mirpur-2, Dhaka-1216

Fuel queues snake

FROM PAGE 12
—around 25 percent higher
—is set to begin today.

During yesterday's visits, correspondents saw motorcyclists waiting four to eight hours for fuel, while cars queued for 10 to 14 hours.

At 5:00pm, a winding line of motorcycles outside Sonar Bangla Filling Station in Asad Gate stretched along Asad Avenue, crossed Mohammadpur Town Hall and reached Al-Amin Jame Mosque on Shahjahan Road.

"I'm getting fuel after nearly nine and a half hours. The entire day is gone," said Md Suman Mia, a ride-sharing driver. "My income is falling. It feels like I spend 15 days working and 15 days just standing in fuel lines."

He said a fuel pass now would allow him to receive Tk 1,000 worth of fuel at a time, compared to Tk 500 previously.

Another motorcyclist said he had queued from 4:00pm on Friday, only for fuel to run out at 11:00pm. "Two full days wasted," he said.

At nearby Talukder Filling and Servicing

Centre, fuel had yet to arrive, but motorcycle queues had already stretched to Zia Uddin, while car queues extended past the Parliament's LD Gate towards Khamarbari.

Near the front of the line, Syed Rumman Alam, a private-sector employee, said he took leave from work and joined the queue at 7:00am, only to learn fuel would not be available before evening.

Still, he waited, having already visited at least seven stations earlier in the day without success. His bike was also running near empty.

Similar scenes were observed at Tejgaon's Southern and Satata pumps, Paribagh's Meghna and Purbachal stations, and the Ramna pump near Matsya Bhaban, where queues weaved through key roads and intersections.

As of yesterday, diesel stock stood at 101,784 tonnes, enough for around 10 days. Petrol stock was about 18,800 tonnes — sufficient for more than two weeks of demand, with local production continuing as expected, officials said.

48hrs after teacher

FROM PAGE 12
under Munshipara Police Station in Kurigram.

Nazmul said she had married decades ago but was later divorced. She had no children and maintained little contact with her family.

She occupied one room of a three-room flat, while another family lived in the remaining two rooms as sub-tenants, said one of her neighbours, Md Milon. The family had gone to their village home early Thursday and returned on Friday afternoon, he added.

Abdul Mannan, a security guard at the building, said Firoza gave private tuition at various houses in addition to her teaching job. She usually left home every morning and returned around 10:00pm.

When she did not leave the house even after 10:30am on Friday, the guard went to check on her. Finding the door open, he informed local resident

Mohiuddin, and they entered the flat and found her lying on her bed in a pool of blood.

On information, Pallabi police went to the scene. The Crime Scene Unit of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) also collected evidence.

Alamgir Jahan, officer-in-charge of Pallabi Police Station, told The Daily Star that the incident likely took place in the early hours of Friday.

"The door was open. It is highly likely the killer was someone known to her, as she would not normally open the door to a stranger at that hour," he said.

The victim's brother, Nazmul Azam, filed a murder case with Pallabi Police Station.

Sub-Inspector Al-Amin, the investigating officer, said: "Despite collecting evidence from the scene and reviewing nearby CCTV footage, we have not been able to identify any suspects yet."

Punish those

FROM PAGE 3
Public health expert and DPPH convening committee member Mushtaq Husain read out their keynote paper.

He said the current measles situation is a serious public health crisis that has exposed weaknesses in the healthcare system and gaps in vaccination coverage.

Citing data from the DGHS, he said 206 children died from measles and measles-like symptoms between March 15 and April 16 this year. "These deaths could have been prevented if timely and effective measures had been taken," he added.

Of them, 34 cases were confirmed through laboratory tests, while the rest showed symptoms consistent with the disease. More than 20,000 people have been infected so far, with over 3,000 currently undergoing treatment in hospitals, he also said.

"We believe that negligence in vaccine procurement by the previous interim government, bureaucratic delays, and institutional indifference towards public health have contributed to this outbreak and weakened the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI). Those responsible for these preventable child deaths must be identified and held accountable," he said.

Replying to a query, he said a measles epidemic is currently underway in the country, whether the government acknowledges it or not.

"We are seeing the government take various emergency measures. However, it may be refraining from declaring

measles a public health emergency, possibly out of concern that it could create panic among people or have political consequences," he added.

Replying to another query, he said since the government has started mass vaccination, the rising trend of measles cases may decline within one and a half months, adding that the number of deaths, however, may take another month to come down.

AMZakir Hussain, former director of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), said in previous years, three out of every 1,000 measles patients died in the country, but this time the number has risen to 10.

"The government must conduct a thorough analysis to identify the reasons behind the increased death rate," he added.

DPPH Convener Prof Mahub E-Rashid said Bangladesh had been performing well in controlling communicable diseases, with the main concern shifting to the rise of non-communicable diseases.

However, the country has faltered in controlling communicable diseases like measles, attributing the situation to negligence by those concerned, he added.

PRAYER TIMING	
APRIL 19	
Fazr	Zohr
4:35	12:45
Asr	Maghrib
4:45	6:24
Esha	
6:24	7:45
JAMAAT	
5:10	1:15
5:00	6:28
8:15	
SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION	

Trade deal with US

FROM PAGE 12
to import-dependent energy strategies to serve vested interests, leading to the import of LNG instead of domestic gas exploration.

Institutions like the state-owned Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration and Production Company (BAPEX) were weakened.

There were major irregularities in energy imports, Bhattacharya said.

The government has formed a cabinet committee on energy security, but it should inform the public about its activities through transparency and bring the matter for discussion in the national parliament.

Although the government has spoken about forming a reform commission in line with its electoral promises, it has

not yet been made visible. The government should clearly disclose its plans for reforms in public financial management, revenue collection and incentives, Bhattacharya added.

While moderating the programme, Hassan Ahamed Chowdhury Kiron, chairman of Debate for Democracy, said that due to past corruption, Bangladesh failed to achieve self-reliance in energy.

Import dependence was increased for vested interests, while domestic production was neglected.

Therefore, ensuring energy security will be a major challenge for the government in the upcoming budget, he said.

The upcoming budget must reflect the expectations of ordinary

BNP nears final list of women

FROM PAGE 12
made to the party and their constituencies, and what roles they had played in political movements over the years.

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

Senior BNP leaders said the party was trying to maintain a balance between long serving and loyal women leaders and younger aspirants who could bring fresh energy and ideas to politics.

They said that Tarique, during the interviews, instructed the party's aspirants to accept the BNP's final decision and avoid any action that could undermine party discipline.

Among senior BNP figures under discussion are Jatiyatabadi Mohila Dal President Afroza Abbas and Mohila Dal General Secretary Sultana Ahmed, who was a reserved-seat lawmaker in 2001.

Others being considered include former reserved-seat lawmakers Rehana Akter, Bilkis Islam, Rasheda Begum Hira, Newaz Halima Arly and Helen Zerine Khan.

BNP central committee member Shirin Sultana, a former reserved-seat lawmaker in 1996, is also among the aspirants, along with Dhaka district BNP General Secretary Nipun Roy Chowdhury.

BNP Chairperson's Adviser and singer Baby Naznin and Mayer Daak Coordinator Sanjida Islam Tulee are also being discussed, according to party insiders.

Among leaders linked to the 2008 reserved seats, BNP Assistant Secretary for Local Government Affairs Shammi Akter and Assistant Secretary for Human Rights Affairs Syeda Ashifa Ashrafia Papia are also under consideration.

Meanwhile, Jamaat leaders said the party's women's central committee has already finalised a list of nominees, prioritising those considered capable of playing an effective role in parliament and meeting public expectations.

Party sources said Jamaat was also giving importance to women leaders from areas where it failed to win general seats, so that those regions could still have representation in parliament. It has also decided not to nominate family members of its current lawmakers.

Caught between arsenic

FROM PAGE 3
Parvin Begum, a housewife from Chandlai, said she could use tap water only for washing clothes.

"We cannot even rinse our mouths with this water. It's too salty and leaves my hands with blisters as I use it for domestic chores. We have to bring drinking water from far away," she said.

Mohammad Ali of the same area said the water comes from a very deep layer, so it is warm and salty. "Bathing with it leaves the body feeling itchy," he added.

Many others, including students, workers and families across the municipality, expressed similar frustrations.

Prof Chowdhury Sarwar Jahan of RU's Geology and Mining department explained that the salinity found in the area reflects ancient geological conditions.

He also said northern and north-western Bangladesh consist of two types of geological formations: the

uplifted Barind Tract and sediment-filled floodplains.

"However, millions of years ago, the sea extended much farther inland than it does today. What is now Chapainawabganj was once situated near a coastline.

As the sea retreated over time, salt deposits remained trapped underground," he said.

He added that such saline water is extremely harmful to health.

Toufikul Islam, executive engineer of Chapainawabganj municipality, said water is usually drawn from 120 ft wells at 24 locations across the town. The three ultra-deep wells, around 1,000 feet deep and installed in wards 8 and 13, are yielding saline and warm water.

"Except for parts of wards 1, 3, and 4, most other areas also have issues with iron and arsenic contamination," he said. "We often need to test 20-25 sites before identifying a viable source. In the affected wards, we

could not find arsenic-free water at regular depths, so we relied on those three ultra-deep wells."

He also said the municipality continues operating the ultra-deep wells to temporarily ease acute water shortages during peak demand. "Treating saline water is extremely expensive, so we have no such plan yet. We are now working on a project to treat river water and supply it to the affected zones."

Amit Kumar Sarkar, executive engineer at DPHE in Chapainawabganj, said the ultra-deep pumps were initially meant to explore clean groundwater sources but later proved unsuitable.

"Later, we installed five more test wells in the district outside the municipality, and their salinity was within acceptable limits. This means the problem exists only in specific zones," he said. "We are working to find alternative solutions to address the issue."

Zero malaria

FROM PAGE 12
Halimur Rashid, director (disease control) of DGHS, however, said they were on track to achieve the malaria elimination target.

In 2022, the national malaria elimination programme under DGHS had prepared "National Strategic Plan for Malaria Elimination and Prevention of Re-establishment of Malaria Transmission in Bangladesh 2024-2030".

The strategy aimed at attaining zero mortality due to indigenous malaria by 2027 and eliminating malaria by 2030.

"Bangladesh has demonstrated significant progress in reducing the malaria caseload over the years, although fluctuations are reported in terms of upsurges in 2014, 2019 and again in 2022," reads the executive summary of the strategy.

MA Faiz, former director general of DGHS, however, said that achieving both targets will be very challenging given the current situation.

Around 12 lakh Rohingya people are living in camps in Cox's Bazar, many of whom travel to hilly areas outside the camps and become infected with malaria.

Many of them are not aware of the risks of malaria and often seek diagnosis late, increasing the risk of transmission in Teknaf and Ukhia.

Besides, the four districts with the highest malaria burden share borders with neighbouring countries, meaning elimination efforts will also depend on controlling the disease across the border, he told this correspondent yesterday.

Funding for malaria control has shrunk globally as well as in the country, posing another challenge.

"Besides, we presumed that our 51 districts are malaria-free, but to achieve elimination, we have to prove this scientifically with evidence," he added.

NCP forms

FROM PAGE 3
Aranya Chowdhury, named as a joint member secretary, said she had already decided to become inactive in the party before the election.

"I am surprised to see my name on the Jatiya Nari Shakti central committee. I have no involvement with this committee; I have resigned from all NCP posts and submitted my resignation letter," she wrote in a Facebook post yesterday.

Dyuti previously served as NCP's northern region organiser and a senior joint member secretary of its youth wing, Jatiya Jubo Shakti.

Contacted, Mahmuda Mitu said they were unaware of Dyuti's decision to leave the party.

"We received her name from Jubo Shakti and assumed they had spoken to her. That is why we did not reconfirm it," she said.

Ignore people

FROM PAGE 12
Islam urged the government to immediately accept and implement the referendum verdict "while there is still time".

"Barely two months into assuming office, extortion has resumed. People are fed up with the harassment. You yourselves are creating mobs from within the ruling party, indirectly provoking the people."

He also called on the government to make an announcement in parliament about initiating constitutional reforms and implement the referendum verdict.

"Those of us who are in the Jatiya Sangsad will cooperate. Otherwise, be prepared to face protests in the days ahead," Azhar warned.

"People of Bangladesh know how you came to power. They are well aware of the extent to which you manipulated election results in various constituencies..."

The ground beneath your feet has begun to slip away. Understand the language of the people. Do not force them to take to the streets in protest. If the people do come out to the streets, they will not leave until their demands are met, Inshallah."

Urging activists of the alliance to mobilise people, he said, "If the government does not accept our demands, we will compel it to do so through peaceful means. In the meantime, we will continue to play our role in parliament and intensify the movement on the streets."

Also speaking at the rally, Jamaat Assistant Secretary General and alliance coordinator Hamidur Rahman Azad said the government's conduct suggests little has changed in Bangladesh since August 5, 2024.

"It does not appear that

Sheikh Hasina has fled to India or that fascism has fallen. Her government was anti-people, and the current one is also heading in the same direction.

"In the past, Sheikh Hasina tried to suppress us with counter programmes but failed before the power of the people. If the current government resorts to repression using state machinery like a fascist regime, people will resist unitedly and realise their demands."

Nasiruddin Patwari, chief coordinator of the National Citizen Party (NCP), alleged that the government has established "Zia-tantra" instead of democracy.

"They have taken control of our banks, parliament, and the Anti-Corruption Commission. Leaders of the 11-party alliance are being attacked in different places. The people, who voted with certain expectations, are now being made to stand in queues with empty buckets."

Earlier in the day, Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman criticised the government by saying allocations for the Bangladesh Shishu Hospital and Institute are inadequate amid rising concern over the disease.

Speaking to reporters after visiting the hospital in Dhaka's Shyamoli yesterday, Shafiqur said the facility's annual government allocation had been reduced from Tk 30 crore to Tk 28 crore. "Of that, only Tk 7 crore has been released in the first quarter, which is insufficient to operate the 700-bed hospital."

Later, after visiting a petrol pump in Asadgate, Shafiqur urged the government to disclose accurate information on fuel supplies, saying that delivering false information in the Jatiya Sangsad is "unfortunate and shameful for the nation".

Dhaka-EU ties set

FROM PAGE 3
Bangladesh is the first LDC with which the EU is signing the CPA.

The country's exports to the EU rose from \$2 billion in 2000-01 to over \$26 billion in 2024, and the duty-free facility that the EU has been providing for Bangladeshi goods under the 'Everything but Arms' scheme will be phased out in 2029.

After that, the EU will have Generalized System of the Preferences (GSP) Plus, and Bangladesh will have to implement a variety of UN conventions related to good governance, environment, and labour rights to have duty-free access under GSP Plus.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh has been part of EU's Global Gateway Initiative, under which the country can get funding for renewable energy projects. The EU also made Bangladesh part of its Talent Partnership, under which a skilled workforce can migrate to the EU countries.

Bangladesh has also been drawing close attention from the EU, being a country located in the Indo-Pacific region, as well as being among the countries most affected by climate change.

"The CPA is a foundational agreement. We will have different joint committees on various sectors, including trade, investment, environment, labour, etc.," said a foreign ministry official.

The official also said once the CPA is signed, Bangladesh will seek to sign a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and an investment protection agreement.

"We would like our exports to the EU protected and also ensure protection of European investments in Bangladesh," he said.

Bangladesh's former ambassador to the EU in Brussels, Mahub Hasan Saleh, said under the Cooperation Agreement of 2001, the Economic Relations Division (ERD) was the lead agency when it comes to dealing with the EU.

With the signing of the CPA, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will become the lead agency, and the relations will be based on equal footing, he added.

Saleh also said Bangladesh and EU have a variety of areas to boost cooperation, including renewable energy, clean technology, improving value chains, and standardisation of products.

3&4

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BADHON ACHE PRAANE PRAANE: OF HARMONY WITHIN

SRIKANTA ACHARYA AND ADITI MOHSIN

serenade Dhaka in stellar concert

FAIZA RAMIM

The High Commission of India in Dhaka, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), and HSBC Bangladesh welcomed the Bengali New Year with a musical evening featuring esteemed artists Srikanta Acharya and Aditi Mohsin on April 17 and 18, respectively. The title, *Badhon Ache Praane Praane: Of Harmony Within*, was drawn from Rabindranath Tagore's song *Amra Milechi Aaj*, reflecting the enduring idea that human connection transcends geography and political borders.

Pranay Verma, High Commissioner of India to Bangladesh, opened the event by emphasising that cultural bonds "run older and deeper than national boundaries." Md Mahubur Rahman, CEO of HSBC Bangladesh, followed by noting the significance of placing music at the center of cultural celebration—a rarity in an era where tradition often faces public pressure or narrow framing. The programme affirmed the region's secular, inclusive character, highlighting values of openness and shared heritage.

Among the dignitaries in attendance were Nitai Roy Chowdhury, Bangladesh's Cultural Affairs Minister, and Ranjan Bhattacharya, Managing Director and Head of Strategy for India and the Middle East at HSBC. Guests arrived at the High Commission in festive red and white attire, enjoying cuisine by Amari Dhaka before the performances began. On April 18, Zahir Uddin Swapon, Minister of Information and Broadcasting, attended the event.

The evening's musical journey

began with Aditi Mohsin, whose voice served as the event's spiritual anchor. Widely regarded as one of the most authoritative exponents of Rabindra Sangeet in the subcontinent, Mohsin brought an atmospheric depth to the stage that commanded immediate silence. Her performance was more than a recital; it was an invitation into the philosophical core of Bengali culture. She opened with Rajanikanta Sen's *Tumi Nirmol Koro* and Tagore's *Borisho Dhora Majhe Shantir Bari*.



and contemporary hope.

The evening transitioned into a collaborative segment as Mohsin was joined by the eminent Srikanta Acharya for duets of *Esho He Boishakh* and *Shei Bhalo Shei Bhalo*. Acharya, a renowned singer-songwriter and filmmaker from Kolkata, reflected on his 26-year relationship with Bangladeshi audiences, noting that every visit makes him feel "at home".

In his solo set, Acharya performed hits such as *Brishti Tomake Dilam*

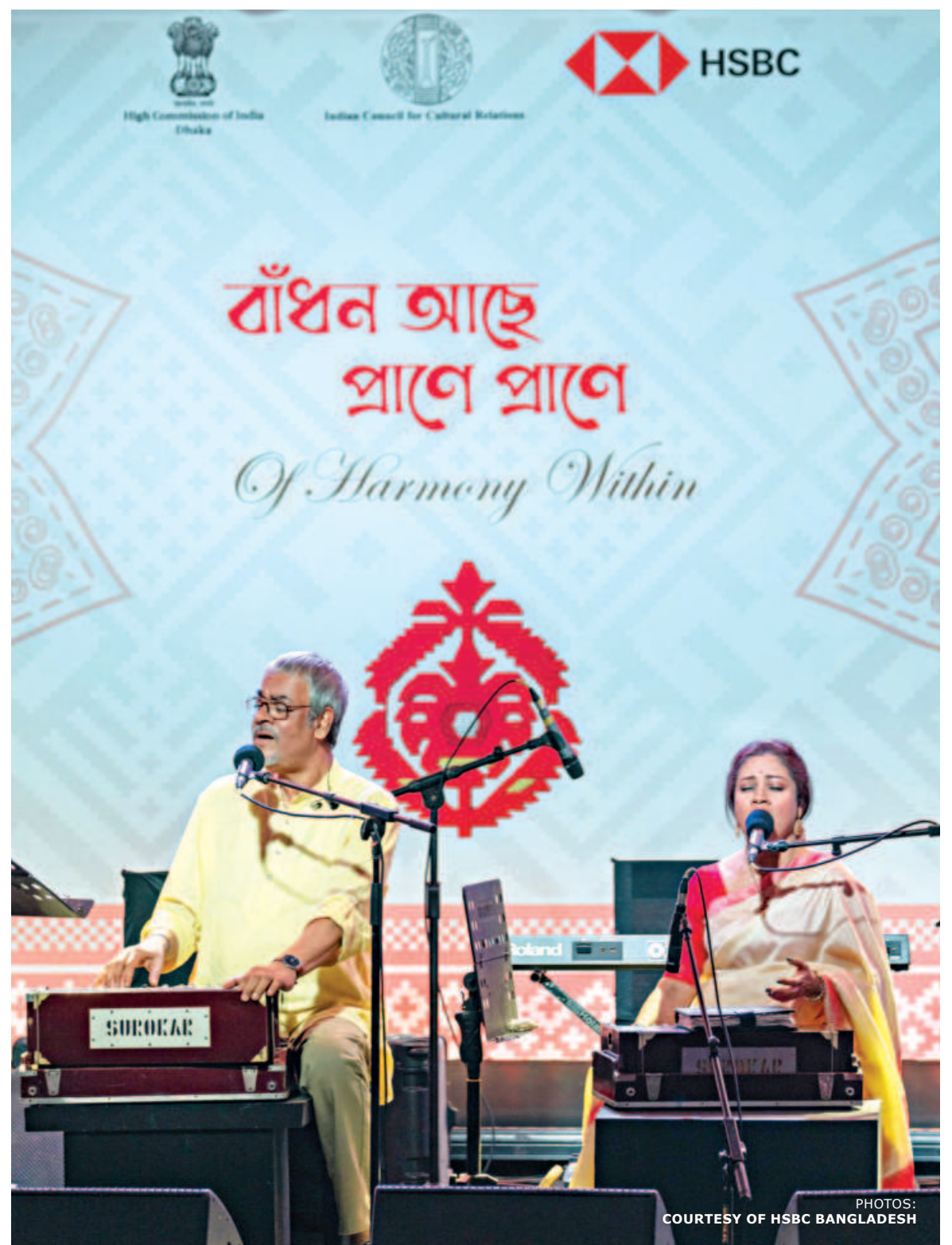


Set to the same raag, the pairing moved thoughtfully from a plea for personal purification to a global appeal for peace. A graduate of Visva Bharati University in Shantiniketan, Mohsin's performance reflected her deep academic training, as she situated each song within the evolution of Bengali music.

If the evening was about "Harmony Within", Srikanta Acharya was its living embodiment. For nearly three decades, Acharya has served as a cultural bridge between Kolkata and Dhaka, his voice carrying the weight of shared nostalgia

and *Cholo Let's Go*, alongside requested classics like *Tomar Ankhir Moto Akasher Duti Tara*. He also bridged linguistic styles with Jagjit Singh's *Jhuki Si Nazar* and a blended rendering of *Amay Proshno Kore Nil Dhrubotara*.

The programme concluded on a personal note with *Ami Shei Deshe Khujechi Koto*, a song written by Acharya's wife. Ultimately, the event served as a powerful reminder that shared cultural memory and music remain the strongest bonds between these two neighboring nations.



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF HSBC BANGLADESH

A magical night revives

JASIMUDDIN'S 'NAKSHI KANTHAR MATH'



PHOTOS: ABRAR FAIYAZ NILOY

The choice of date was deliberate. April 17 marks both International Dance Day and the 123rd birth anniversary of the poet. The performance retold the story of Rupai and Saju, a love story of separation and longing set in rural Bengal.

ANIKA TAHISIN HAFSA

The auditorium did not feel like an auditorium anymore. Women descended to a river to collect water. Men cut paddy in the fields. A *palki* swayed through a wedding procession. For a few hours, a convention hall in Dhaka had become a Bengali village.

This was MAYA Bengal in Motion Presented by MW Bangladesh, held on April 17 at Alok Convention Centre. Now in its third edition, the evening was a tribute to *Palli Kabi* Jasimuddin and his most celebrated work, *Nakshi Kanthar Math*. The event was jointly organised by MW Magazine Bangladesh and MAYA, a natural wellness brand under Square Toiletries Limited.

The event was presided over by Anjan Chowdhury, Managing Director of Square Toiletries Ltd. Welcome speeches were delivered by Rumana Chowdhury, Editor and Publisher of MW Magazine Bangladesh, and Malik Mohammed Sayeed, CEO of Square Toiletries Limited. Sayeed reaffirmed MAYA's commitment to supporting initiatives that celebrate the nation's art, culture, and heritage.

The choice of date was deliberate. April 17 marks both International Dance Day and



the 123rd birth anniversary of the poet. The performance retold the story of Rupai and Saju, a love story of separation and longing set in rural Bengal. The work has been translated into numerous languages worldwide. It was first adapted as a dance drama by Bulbul Lalitakala Academy in 1959.

Even before the performance began, the venue itself set the mood. *Nakshi kanthas* from several regions of Bangladesh were

displayed across the walls. Photographs of Jasimuddin captured significant moments from his life and literary journey. Lines from his poems hung throughout the hall. The entire environment felt like a reflection of Bangladesh's cultural heritage, quietly pulling everyone back to their roots.

Outside the auditorium, three women sat stitching *kanthas*. A single *kantha* takes one and a half to two months to complete. Village women stitch them in their free time, while raising children, keeping house, and managing daily life. Watching those needles move through layered fabric, right at the entrance of the event, offered one of the most quietly powerful moments of the evening.

The performance was curated by Anisul Islam Hero and featured renowned artistes Shamim Ara Nipa, Shibli Mohammad, and Nriyanchal. Through folk dance, music, and expressive storytelling, they brought rural Bengal to life on stage.

The performance will be broadcast on Maasranga Television on April 29 on the occasion of International Dance Day.

Jasimuddin wrote about a Bangladesh that many city dwellers have quietly drifted away from. On one April evening in Dhaka, that Bangladesh came back.

Tom Cruise-led 'Top Gun 3' officially enters production

Tom Cruise is set to return as Pete "Maverick" Mitchell as Paramount Pictures has officially confirmed that *Top Gun 3* is now in production.



The announcement was made during the studio's presentation at CinemaCon in Las Vegas, signalling the next chapter in one of Hollywood's most successful action franchises. Cruise will once again collaborate with long-time creative partner Christopher McQuarrie, who is attached to the project.

While details regarding the film's storyline, cast and release date remain under wraps, anticipation remains high following the massive success of *Top Gun: Maverick*. The 2022 sequel, directed by Joseph Kosinski, earned over \$718 million worldwide and revitalised the franchise for a new generation.

The original *Top Gun*, directed by Tony Scott, was released in 1986 and introduced audiences to Maverick, a naval aviator played by Cruise.

Ashes concert at Rabindra Sarobar cancelled over safety concerns



A scheduled concert by Ashes at Rabindra Sarobar in Dhanmondi has been cancelled due to safety and crowd management concerns, the band confirmed.

The show, set yesterday (April 18), was called off after organisers expressed concerns over the probable turnout for the open-air event. In a Facebook post, band vocalist Zunayed Evan said the venue was too small to safely accommodate the expected crowd.

He added that local authorities also raised concerns regarding security and traffic management, leading to a joint decision to cancel the event.

The band has been on an extensive tour schedule, performing 12 concerts across the country between April 1 and 17, including shows in Dhaka, Gazipur and Cumilla.

Fans were expecting the Dhanmondi concert to be another highlight of the band's ongoing run, but organisers prioritised public safety in making the final decision.

How the US naval blockade can accelerate multipolar global order

ARMAN AHMED

Contrary to analyses by some Western media, the US naval blockade of the Strait of Hormuz might achieve the precise opposite of its stated aims of submission of the Iranian regime, by empowering Tehran as a defiant power, and accelerating the very multipolar realignment Washington has long sought to contain. The main beneficiaries are already in Beijing and Moscow, watching the US lose itself, with quiet satisfaction.

Washington fails to recognise that Tehran did not close the Strait of Hormuz out of desperation. Iran weaponised the Strait deliberately transforming a geographic advantage into a coercive instrument, to respond to US aggression, which they've been preparing for. By restricting and conditioning commercial passage, charging tolls exceeding \$2 million per vessel, and selectively permitting or denying transit, Iran gained from a military confrontation in which the United States and Israel hold overwhelming conventional military superiority. The new supreme leader, Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, declared explicitly that the Strait's leverage "must undoubtedly continue to be used" not as a last resort, but as a deliberate strategy refined over decades.

The US administration's logic for the blockade seems straightforward: deny Iran the economic benefit of its chokepoint control. Stop the toll revenues. Interdict ships that have paid them. Force Tehran to choose between accepting US' terms or watching its economy implode. The logic has coherence. But its strategic flaw is equally coherent: it validates the Strait as the primary theatre of the conflict, and fails to account for the geopolitical repercussions that can arise from it.

Prior to the US blockade, Iran's stranglehold on the Strait already proved economically costly and diplomatically embarrassing for Washington. Now, the Strait is a contested chokepoint, a battleground, that Iran can credibly present to Beijing, Moscow, and the broader Global South as a reverberating message: the US will not only launch costly wars that spill across the world, but the US will also weaponise the arteries of the global economy.

Chinese President Xi Jinping warned that "we must not allow the world to revert to the law of the jungle." By unilaterally obstructing Iranian ports, the Trump administration's messaging could hand China a clear precedent: national security overtakes international laws. It's a dangerous precedent, one that could lead China to ignore the application of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait.

Washington has also handed Iran, and the

single miscalculation — a misidentified vessel, such as the US attacking a China-owned vessel will be detrimental for Washington. Each day of enforcement is a day Iran accumulates grievance, along with its allies.

US strategists tend to reach for the naval playbook as though historical precedents validate the tactic regardless of the current context. The Cuban Missile Crisis is invariably invoked as the template. But that confrontation had a precise and credible off-ramp: Soviet ships would turn back, missiles

remains is an open-ended siege with no stipulated terminus.

The parallel with Venezuela is more damning. From 2019 onward, the United States imposed sweeping sanctions and later naval pressure on the Maduro government, pursuing the same logic now applied to Iran: economic pain would produce political capitulation. It failed entirely. Maduro consolidated power, Russia and China undercut US leverage at every turn, and Washington's pressure campaign directly catalysed the adversarial alignment it sought to prevent. Iran, with its deeper institutional roots, its larger population, its revolutionary identity, and its incomparably greater strategic position, presents an even less favourable canvass for the same brush.

The US naval blockade is an outdated instrument that now injures US allies, destabilises emerging market economies. Proponents argue that Iran suffers more. But Washington suffers the global reputational damage of corroding the international world order, as many have already called out. While that may seem merely political, economic globalisation is increasingly dictated by geopolitics.

A realignment of the global order is already happening. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov arrived in Beijing on April 14 — the day after the blockade took effect for high-level consultations. Beijing called the blockade "dangerous and irresponsible," and both Russia and China vetoed a UN Security Council resolution aimed at protecting commercial shipping. These form coordinated acts of diplomatic solidarity signalling the formation of a coherent anti-Western bloc crystallising around the Iranian crisis.

China imports approximately a third of its oil through the Strait of Hormuz. By demonstrating that Washington will close vital sea lanes to enforce political objectives, the blockade has handed Beijing a compelling strategic incentive to accelerate overland pipeline infrastructure through Central Asia and Russia, permanently reducing Chinese exposure to US maritime leverage. And China has been preparing for this. For some 25 years, China has been buying and

building ports across the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf and around the world. Russia, meanwhile, benefits from elevated oil prices that cushion its sanctioned economy while it consolidates a non-Western energy and security architecture, whose appetite, Washington's own actions are feeding.

Now to play devil's advocate, one might ask: can the blockade actually dislodge the Iranian regime?

If the blockade succeeds — meaning if Iran accepts terms and Washington declares victory — the costs are still notable. Every non-Western government will have absorbed a lesson: the US is willing to impose a global energy shock to enforce its geopolitical preferences. That lesson will accelerate the diversification away from dollar-denominated systems and US controlled maritime corridors to shift to diversify to non-Western powers, who have been waiting for this opportunity. A victory that hastens the erosion of structural US hegemony is not a strategic success. It is a pyrrhic one.

Tehran not capitulating is the more probable outcome, given every historical precedent for external pressure on revolutionary states have already led analysts to draw comparisons to the 1970s oil crisis, when an Arab producers' embargo quadrupled prices and prompted fuel rationing across major economies. In this scenario, the US blockade becomes a sustained state of military and economic attrition, with Iran demonstrating to the world that it cannot be coerced by a carrier strike — a precedent that empowers every revisionist actor watching from the sidelines.

Neither scenario produces an outcome that does not denigrate US global credibility. The multipolar order being assembled in Beijing and Moscow does not need to defeat the US in the Strait of Hormuz. It only needs to wait for Washington to defeat itself, even as its President keeps claiming "victory" on television to cast a veil of his own reality onto a world that is now able to see right through it.

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PHOTO COLLAGE: AFP/STAR VISUALS

IRGC, a "global propaganda amplifier" in a war where narratives play increasingly important roles. Iran has already called the blockade "piracy" — a framing that will resonate in every capital that imports energy through that corridor. Washington's adversaries, mainly China, will take notes and frame their own agenda against the US, as standing up against a troubling superpower.

The Gulf of Oman is not a controlled theatre; it is a compressed geography where a

would be removed, and both superpowers had overwhelming incentives to de-escalate within days. The endgame was visible from the opening move.

No such clarity exists in the current war today. The IRGC — especially the empowered young leadership from the decapitation of its leadership — has domestic political incentives to continue to show defiance rather than accept humiliation. There is no nuclear symmetry to force Iran into giving up. What

Myanmar's recent election and what it means for Bangladesh

MD NAHIYAN SHAJID KHAN

Between late December 2025 and late January 2026, Myanmar held its first general election since the military junta, officially the State Administration Council (SAC), seized power in its February 2021 coup. Conducted over three phases on December 28, January 11, and January 25, the election was immediately and widely condemned by international bodies, including the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, and the US State Department, as neither free nor fair. The result was as predictable as it was troubling: the military's long-standing proxy, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), swept to a landslide victory, winning 89 of the first 102 declared seats in the initial phase alone.

For readers in Dhaka, this might seem like a distant internal affair, the latest chapter in Myanmar's tragic post-coup story. It is not. The outcomes of Myanmar's political theatre carry direct, concrete, and urgent implications for Bangladesh's foreign policy, its security posture, and its ability to resolve the most pressing humanitarian burden it carries: the presence of over 1.18 million Rohingya refugees on its soil. Understanding Myanmar's election, therefore, is not merely an exercise in regional studies. It is an exercise in strategic self-awareness.

A political landscape designed for one outcome

To understand why Myanmar's election matters to Bangladesh, one must first understand what the election was and was not. It was not a democratic exercise in the conventional sense. The National League for Democracy (NLD), which won 88 percent of national parliamentary seats in the last free election in 2020, was dissolved by the junta in 2023 after refusing to re-register under new political party laws widely regarded as designed to exclude genuine opposition. Along with the NLD, 38 other parties were disbanded. Aung San Suu Kyi, the civilian leader who commanded that mandate in 2020, remains imprisoned.

A new legal architecture was erected to ensure that only compliant parties could compete. New legislation required parties to possess at least USD 35,000 in funds, maintain 100,000 members (up from 1,000 previously), and contest half of all constituencies — requirements tailor-made to favour the USDP. The junta also enacted a law imposing the death penalty for any act deemed to "disrupt" the electoral process, and rolled out a sweeping cyber security law criminalising VPN use and the sharing of information from banned social media platforms.

In this suffocating political environment, nearly 60 parties registered to compete, but only nine planned to contest nationwide, and most were either small or military-aligned. Independent analysts at the Asian Network for Free Elections and the Special Advisory

Council for Myanmar concluded in their joint April 2026 report, pointedly titled *Old Generals, New Clothes*, that the elections "comprehensively failed to meet internationally recognised standards for genuine elections." In March 2026, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing stepped down as commander-in-chief to position himself as president of a nominally civilian government — a repackaging of military rule, not a departure from it. The International Crisis Group has since described this transition as a shift to "pseudo-civilian rule" that will do nothing to change the fundamental dynamics of conflict inside Myanmar.

Potential outcomes and their implications for Bangladesh

The consolidation of military rule in Myanmar under a thin civilian veneer — what analysts are now calling "authoritarian upgrading" — presents Bangladesh with a multi-dimensional strategic challenge. The most immediate implication is the near-permanent suspension of meaningful Rohingya repatriation. As the Crisis Group has noted, conditions in Rakhine State "offer no pathway to safe, voluntary, and dignified repatriation for Rohingya in the medium term." Within Myanmar, the Arakan Army, an ethnic Rakhine insurgent group, has made substantial territorial gains in Rakhine State, creating a complex and contested environment in which neither the junta nor the Arakan Army has demonstrated political will to guarantee Rohingya rights, citizenship, or safety. No major political force in Myanmar, whether aligned with the junta or opposed to it, has articulated any serious vision for Rohingya reintegration.

For Bangladesh, which by January 2026 was hosting 1,182,755 registered Rohingya refugees, this is not an abstract concern. The 2025-26 Joint Response Plan sought \$934.5 million in its first year to assist 1.48 million people. Global donor fatigue is already undermining this effort, with international attention and funding shifting towards other crises in Ukraine, Gaza, and the Gulf. The International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant against Min Aung Hlaing in November 2024 for crimes against the Rohingya; yet his political ascent since then signals the international community's limited capacity to translate legal accountability into practical pressure.

Another implication flows from the strategic footprint of China. Beijing has deepened its engagement with the Myanmar junta, and by late 2025 had effectively concluded that the military was the only force capable of maintaining even minimal stability. China's primary interest in Rakhine State centres on its infrastructure and energy corridor investments that form a critical part of the Belt and Road Initiative. This reality constrains Bangladesh's diplomatic room for manoeuvre. Dhaka cannot afford to alienate Beijing, its largest trading partner and a key development financier.

Historical ties: A relationship defined by asymmetry and crisis

Bangladesh and Myanmar share a 271-kilometre border and a relationship shaped as much by geography as by tragedy. The modern history of this bilateral relationship is, to a significant degree, the history of the Rohingya crisis. The first major wave of Rohingya refugees entered Bangladesh in 1978, followed by another in 1991-92. Notably, Ziaur Rahman and Khaleda Zia oversaw the repatriation of a significant number of Rohingya during their respective tenures. The current Bangladesh Nationalist Party government, led by their son, Tarique Rahman, has cited this experience as evidence that sustained diplomatic engagement with Myanmar can produce results.

However, the scale and severity of the 2017 crisis, when a brutal military crackdown drove nearly a million Rohingya into Bangladesh

conflict in Myanmar has effectively frozen these opportunities. Bangladesh's ambitions to position itself within larger Bay of Bengal and Indo-Pacific frameworks depend, at least partly, on a stable eastern neighbourhood — a stability that Myanmar's political dysfunction comprehensively denies.

Challenges and opportunities for Bangladesh's foreign policy

Bangladesh's new BNP-led government, which came to power following the country's own February 2026 election, has inherited a complex foreign policy landscape shaped in part by Myanmar's disorder. The challenges are formidable. The government must simultaneously maintain a working relationship with the junta for any prospect of repatriation diplomacy, engage China to preserve economic ties, coordinate with Western partners and UN agencies to keep the Rohingya issue alive on the global agenda,

that strengthens Dhaka's moral standing internationally.

The Arakan Army's growing control over parts of Rakhine State creates a new and unconventional interlocutor that Bangladesh could engage, cautiously and without formal recognition, to discuss humanitarian access and eventually repatriation conditions. The United States remains the single largest provider of humanitarian assistance for the Rohingya, having contributed nearly \$2.4 billion since 2017, and Washington's strategic competition with Beijing means it has incentives to keep Bangladesh diplomatically engaged and well-resourced.

The risk, however, is that without a coherent long-term strategy, Bangladesh may find itself cycling through the same diplomatic gestures — bilateral talks, multilateral conferences, and repatriation announcements — that go nowhere, while the structural conditions in Myanmar remain unchanged.

Navigating a neighbourhood in crisis

Myanmar's 2025-26 election was, at its core, not a democratic transition but a political manoeuvre — an attempt by a military establishment to clothe authoritarian continuity in the legitimacy of electoral procedure. The "Old Generals, New Clothes" framing offered by election observers captures this dynamic with uncomfortable precision. Min Aung Hlaing's likely ascent to the presidency changes the façade of power in Nanyidaw without altering its substance.

For Bangladesh, the sobering takeaway is this: the consolidation of junta control under a civilian veneer removes even the theoretical possibility of a genuine democratic transition in Myanmar that might create conditions for Rohingya return. This is not merely a humanitarian issue; it is a strategic one. As foreign policy analysts have observed, Bangladesh's aspirations for regional integration, economic connectivity, and middle-power diplomacy are all complicated by a fractured state on its south-eastern border.

The new government faces a test of strategic imagination. Managing the Rohingya crisis with dignity and sustainability will require moving beyond repatriation as the only diplomatic instrument, investing in Rohingya human development within Bangladesh, pursuing multilateral legal accountability, and finding pragmatic but principled channels to engage the emerging power dynamics inside Rakhine State. Most crucially, it will require recognising that Myanmar's hollow election has not resolved the country's crisis; it has merely institutionalised it. And in a region where instability travels, Bangladesh cannot afford to treat that institutionalisation as somebody else's problem.

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Myanmar junta chief Min Aung Hlaing is sworn in as president, continuing his rule from a civilian post five years after seizing power in a military coup.

PHOTO: AFP

in a matter of weeks, was unprecedented. Bangladesh has since attempted multiple rounds of repatriation negotiations, including agreements in 2018 and 2019 that collapsed entirely because Rohingya refugees refused to return without guarantees of safety, citizenship, and dignity that Myanmar was unwilling to provide. This history reveals a structural asymmetry: Bangladesh has far greater urgency to resolve the crisis than Myanmar has incentive to cooperate.

Beyond the refugee issue, Bangladesh and Myanmar have shared economic interests, including trade linkages through Cox's Bazar and the Teknaf-Maungdaw corridor, as well as the broader potential for connectivity within the Bay of Bengal region. But the ongoing

and manage growing domestic anti-Rohingya sentiment in communities around Cox's Bazar that have absorbed extraordinary strain.

Dhaka's Myanmar policy can be characterised as an "exhaustion trap", where Bangladesh keeps managing crisis fatigue rather than changing strategy, which threatens to become a permanent condition if no structural breakthrough occurs.

Yet there are also carefully calibrated opportunities. The BNP's historical record of successful repatriations provides political legitimacy for renewed engagement. Bangladesh's legal advocacy at the International Court of Justice, alongside The Gambia's genocide case against Myanmar, offers a track of principled diplomacy

Desperate journeys of hopeless Rohingyas

Rohingya plight getting harder to address with shrinking funds

At least 900 Rohingya refugees were reported dead or missing in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea in 2025. The number, revealed by the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, accentuates the increasingly wretched circumstances the Rohingyas find themselves in as they continue to live in camps in Bangladesh with no hope of repatriation in sight. While Bangladesh, with the help of international and local donors and organisations, is hosting more than one million Rohingyas, the recent drastic cuts in international funding and the influx of more than 150,000 Rohingyas since last year, fleeing the latest civil war in Myanmar, have worsened the crisis.

The birth of thousands of babies in the camps every year since 2017 has also increased the Rohingya population significantly. The World Food Programme (WFP) is now struggling with critical shortfalls in funding, forcing a reduction in food assistance from \$12 per person per month to a three-tiered system where \$12, \$10, and \$7 are given based on their perceived levels of vulnerability. This has exacerbated hunger and malnutrition. In 2025, 6,400 learning centres were closed down, leaving more than 400,000 children with no access to education. More than 4,000 Rohingya teachers lost their jobs along with their Bangladeshi colleagues.

The funding shortfall is attributed to the drastic reduction in humanitarian aid by the US, which provided over half of the total funding for Rohingyas in the last few years. This year, more than 2,800 Rohingyas have attempted hazardous sea journeys in the hope of reaching Malaysia or Indonesia. Over half of those who make these journeys are women and children who run the risk of being trafficked.

At this time, Bangladesh and all donor agencies must put pressure on the international community to increase funding and find long-lasting solutions. The US-Israel war on Iran has made it even more challenging to raise funds. But the global community must realise that the burden of the Rohingya crisis is not Bangladesh's to bear alone, but rather a collective responsibility. Until the crisis is solved, the Rohingyas will continue to make these dangerous journeys, with many of them dying and thousands ending up on the shores of other countries, which will then have their own refugee crisis to handle.

These countries as well as other influential global players must get together and join Bangladesh to stop these deadly journeys. Funds must be increased for food, education, and medical care in the camps. Learning centres and skills training centres must be reopened. The Rohingyas must be given opportunities to earn within the camps. The government must also enhance security, especially for women and children. Human trafficking agents must be identified and given appropriate punishment. As challenging as it is, until the civil war in Myanmar ends, Bangladesh may continue to host the refugees who are already here, but resettlement of some Rohingyas to other countries, and their eventual repatriation to Myanmar, must be on the cards.

Streamlining hawker markets a must

Authorities need to respond promptly to keep footpaths clear

Despite a massive drive by the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) to clear Dhaka's footpaths of hawkers not long ago, a recent report by *The Daily Star* has found many areas reoccupied already. This suggests that the DMP's promise to conduct follow-up operations to prevent reoccupation is not being fulfilled. Worse, the informal mechanism keeping hawkers on the streets is still in full swing, as they are reportedly paying tolls to so-called linemen in order to occupy spots in some areas of the capital. We must ask, what is the point of such drives if the authorities won't try to sustain their effect?

Dhaka is infamously unwalkable, and the presence of hawkers and roadside shops, along with construction materials, contributes largely to this reality. It is no doubt commendable that the government has taken notice of the issue and moved to action. Still more admirable is the Dhaka South City Corporation's plan to regularise such businesses by providing licences, designating operations schedules, and introducing "holiday markets" and "night markets." Already, the DSCC has issued a public notice banning the placement of goods on footpaths in front of markets—warning of strict legal action—including cancellation of trade licences. The Dhaka North City Corporation, too, has plans to make alternative arrangements for small-scale traders and introduce a token system to eliminate extortion.

However, we agree with experts that only a comprehensive plan can make changes sustainable and humane at the same time. While creating alternative employment and reducing poverty can be the long-term measures that reduce the overall number of hawking businesses, it is equally important to go for measures that are grounded in our current reality, such as creating alternative spaces for hawkers instead of providing them licences to operate on sidewalks. True, the prevalence of small informal ventures signals a lack of formal employment opportunities, but it is ultimately a symptom of a system that has been able to thrive partly because it serves local politicians by allowing them to extort the small business owners.

Shooing hawkers off footpaths without holding extortionists accountable and without first arranging an alternative space or employment for hawkers defeats the purpose of such drives. So we urge the authorities to not only clear footpaths but also keep at it by increasing oversight and developing rehabilitation plans for hawkers. It must also be ensured that larger businesses and private residences are not allowed to use pedestrian walkways as an extension of their warehouse or driveway.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

American Revolution begins

On this day in 1775, British troops confront 77 minutemen under Captain John Parker in Lexington, a shot is fired, and the brief clash leaves eight Americans dead and marks the beginning of the American Revolution.

Back, again, to the cycle of broken promises?



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ALTAf PARVEZ

In Bangladesh's political history, perhaps the most defining years are 1971, 1990, and 2024. Much has been said about the political, military, and social dimensions of these watershed moments. People made supreme sacrifices at these junctures to realise their political aspirations, but came up short each time. Curiously, the shortcomings receive little scrutiny in our history. We revel in glory, but avert our gaze from the erosion that follows. We hesitate to confront failure with honesty.

The Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci spoke of two interrelated spheres within the state: political society and civil society. At present, Bangladesh's civil society finds itself unsettled, even paralysed, by the conduct of the political society. Efforts at state reform and institutional renewal seem to have faltered, with the new parliament making it clear that the reformist demands of civil society will not be fulfilled so easily, nor is there a roadmap as to when or how those might be realised.

Members of the ruling BNP, despite campaigning for a "yes" vote in the referendum, have yet to take oath as members of a Constitution Reform Assembly. The gap between political commitment and action, further exemplified by the dilution, expiration, or repeal of key ordinances passed during the interim period, has left civil society largely disillusioned. More than 20 months after the uprising, it finds itself with diminishing agency, unable to either advance the reform agenda it once championed or meaningfully process the trauma of the uprising.

A similar pattern unfolded in the years after 1971. Freedom fighters and freedom-loving people who defeated the Pakistani military gradually lost ground to the entrenched bureaucratic order that effectively absorbed and neutralised the promise of transformation. The same policing system, the same DC offices, the same land administration, the same hierarchical structures returned, as if in a tribute to their colonial masters.

Similarly, the post-1990 period saw little substantive change. Military rule was overthrown, pro-democracy students and protesters handed a "ten-point" programme to the two leaders, but subsequent decades saw major parties alternate in practising the same politics of power, leaving the British-era bureaucratic order intact.

Alongside came political corruption, organised patronage networks, enforced disappearances, killings, the erosion of electoral systems, etc. So, civil society had to begin from scratch again. This time, school and college students stepped forward, their demand for safe roads taking aim at the dysfunction and injustices of the state. These students would later return to the streets to resist quota-based inequalities that subsequently evolved into a broader mass uprising.

So, another "December 16" moment came, powered by people's aspirations for building an inclusive society. Its



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

continuity led to the February 12 election and referendum. The interim government conducted various experiments on the ideas of reforms before finally placing a portion of uprising-induced demands before the nation through the referendum. Despite procedural flaws and signs of coercion in the reform process, the majority of voters endorsed it as an expression of collective will and necessity, including support from BNP. Yet BNP persistently refuses to join the Constitution Reform Assembly. Of the ordinances issued by the interim government, as per Law Minister Md Asaduzzaman, 97 have been ratified without changes, 13 amended before becoming law, and seven repealed, with the remaining 16 left to face further scrutiny and change. It is the fate of key ordinances that has caused particular concerns.

The message emerging from the conduct of the government and parliament over the past two months is

difficult to ignore. The last election, to them, seems little more than a regime-change vote. As if the "Red July" did not happen. As if hundreds were not killed to bring about this moment. As if thousands of young people did not want something through their defiance and ouster of an autocratic regime. During the interim period, BNP functioned as a principal political actor, deeply embedded in the process. The interim government could scarcely act without its consultation and consent. But since the election, many structural legal reforms have been diluted, dismantled, or stand at risk of meeting either fate. Ordinances aimed at preventing enforced disappearance, improving human rights conditions, and strengthening judicial independence have been lost to political inertia.

The contradictions are striking. At the outset of its election manifesto, BNP had pledged to implement its "31-point" reform programme alongside the July charter. It promised

have now been rendered ineffective through the repeal of Supreme Court-related ordinances.

Meanwhile, had a strong and independent human rights commission existed during the long Awami League period, it might have mitigated some of the widespread abuses committed then. Interim ordinances created space for independent investigations into allegations against security forces. But that, too, has now been stalled. Among the victims of such abuses, BNP leaders and activists form a significant proportion; one wonders what the families of those victims felt as these reform measures were quietly undone in parliament.

At its core, meaningful reform requires a transformation of political culture—a departure from entrenched hierarchies and colonial legacies. It demands an undiluted commitment to change. Recent parliamentary experience suggests that Bangladesh remains trapped within its old structures and tendencies. Political parties themselves do not appear ready for genuine transformation. When one party holds an absolute majority in parliament, the opposition can hardly do anything beyond protests and walkouts to impact outcomes. But after decades of bitter experience, people no longer wish to see the parliament reduced to a platform for rhetorical speeches without effect. We have yet to see meaningful reform legislation emerging with bipartisan support through discussions between the government and the opposition. Instead, there are growing signs that the aspirations of July are being sidelined.

BNP policymakers insist they will implement reforms in their own way. It is also true that a government barely two months old requires time. Civil society, too, must exercise patience.

But if the civil society is sceptical, it is because it has endured repeated cycles of hope and betrayal before. Since 1972, it has waited to see the realisation of the ideals of the Liberation War; since 1991, the implementation of the ten-point programme; and for the past 21 months, the fulfilment of the promise of "Red July." This prolonged uncertainty risks pushing society towards extremism on one hand, while allowing entrenched power structures to continually reproduce themselves on the other.

These commitments echoed the spirit of earlier reform agendas. The interim government's ordinances reflected similar intentions. For instance, provisions were introduced for a Supreme Judicial Appointment Council to recommend judicial candidates independently to the president. Measures were proposed to ensure that decisions on appointments, promotions, transfers, and discipline of judges would fall under a separate secretariat, reducing political interference. But such reforms

also raises an uncomfortable question: how much of our independence and uprisings since 1971 can still be claimed as unqualified achievements? Are we, in reality, still struggling to move beyond zero? For the country's oligarchic structures, neither 1971, nor 1990, nor 2024 appears to have posed a fundamental challenge. It is time for the citizens to look closely in the mirror and determine a workable course.

What's holding women back from riding bicycles?



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NAZMA SULTANA

Stand on any road in Dhaka. Men and boys cycle freely, weaving through traffic with ease. Now look for women—you will see very few. And when you do, they draw stares. This is not just cultural; it reflects a persistent economic exclusion the country has been facing for decades.

The stigma is rooted in perceived immodesty and a stubborn assumption about where women are meant to exist. Half the population is locked out of one of the cheapest and most liberating forms of transports available. According to a 2018 IMF estimate, reducing gender disparity in labour force participation could raise Bangladesh's GDP by almost 40 percent. Another figure by the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) shows that only around 42.5 percent of working-age women participate in the labour force in the country, against some 81.3 percent of men. Here, the reason is not that the women are not as

qualified or educated as men, but the fact that men are allowed to have more access and more freedom to move.

According to a programme by the Women's Empowerment for Inclusive Growth (WING) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) that connects women across five different districts to build their entrepreneurial skills, physical mobility is among the most pressing constraints for female entrepreneurs. Distance is also one of the main causes of dropouts among schoolgirls in the country and ensuring mobility could effectively tackle that problem. For example, India's Mukhyamantri Balika Cycle Yojana in Bihar—launched in 2006—was an initiative aimed at solving the distance problem many girls faced by providing them with bicycles. A study in the American Economic Journal found it raised girls' enrolment by up to 59.8 percent and cut the gender education gap by 51.2 percent. In Zambia, a UN-documented programme found girls

with bicycles experienced 22 percent less sexual harassment while travelling to school.

One of the barriers to women not using cycles to commute to and from their places of education or work is a lack of institutional support and infrastructural capacity. For example, the Netherlands—known for its cycling culture—heavily invested in safe

The stigma is rooted in perceived immodesty and a stubborn assumption about where women are meant to exist. Half the population is locked out of one of the cheapest and most liberating forms of transports available.

infrastructure including dedicated bike lanes with speed limits up to 50 kph to close the gender gap among people using cycles. So, one thing is fairly clear: infrastructure does not follow demand, it creates it.

There is also a public health lens that can be considered here. For example, a ten-year Swedish cohort study of 23,732 adults found that those who cycled to work had significantly lower odds of obesity, hypertension, and

elevated blood sugar. Another 2023 study found that active commuting reduces cardiovascular risk by around 11 percent, with stronger protective effects for women. In light of recent unrest in the Middle East, Bangladesh is facing a structural energy strain, with 46% of supply imported and costs rising and more people switching to cycling might help to solve this problem.

So, what methods can Bangladesh adopt to ensure more people—especially women—can safely pick up their bikes to make regular journeys? Well, three actors must stop waiting for each other. First, the private sector, especially the ready-made garment industry where women are the workforce majority, can introduce subsidised bicycle access for female employees. Development organisations can also come forward by initiating schemes like "Cycle to Work". The government can play the most important role by making roads safer, building cycling lanes, ensuring safety lighting, and running public campaign that would normalise women using cycles. It is worth remembering here that Bangladesh has shifted norms before—from girls' education to women's work. A bicycle has the potential to unlocks access to markets, schools, and healthcare. Keeping women off bicycles is not only cultural, it is an economic and social cost the country can no longer ignore.

As mob violence persists, we must confront the roots of impunity



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A new incident seems to shake the nation almost every week. Last Saturday (April 11) saw the shocking lynching of a Sufi pir, Shamim al-Jahangir, inside his shrine in Kushtia. A mob vandalised and set fire to the shrine after allegations spread on social media over an old video that was claimed to contain derogatory remarks about religious sentiments. Police recovered the victim from the scene in critical condition and rushed him to a hospital, where he was declared dead on arrival.

By now, incidents like these have largely lost their sense of novelty in Bangladesh. Just a day before the Kushtia killing, several people were assaulted and harassed (including women) in the capital's Shabbagh area by a group operating under the name "Azadi Andolon," who had labelled the victims as being homosexual. The pattern is unmistakable: it has become easy to launch attacks—even fatal ones—against anyone simply for holding or even seeming to hold different ideologies, beliefs, or opinions.

These incidents demonstrate how quickly collective violence can be executed, and how the perpetrators often get off scot-free. And if social media reactions are any indication, a sizable section of the population not only rationalises such incidents but also, in some cases, openly celebrates them. This is uncomfortable if not shocking. Incidents like these hardly ever occur in a vacuum. And, given the prevailing conditions, it would be naïve to assume we have seen the last of it.

According to the Human Rights Support Society (HRSS), at least 49 people were killed in mob violence and lynching incidents across Bangladesh in just the first three months of 2026, across 88 separate incidents. Some of these incidents were triggered by accusations of theft or robbery, others by personal disputes, and increasingly, by allegations of religious insult circulated on internet platforms.

In fact, the trend of mob attacks on shrines becomes more disturbing when viewed over a slightly longer timeline.

A recent study by Maqam: Center for Sufi Heritage, disclosed in February, documented 97 attacks on shrines across the country between August 2024 and December 2025, leaving three people dead and 468 injured. Despite the scale of violence, only 11 cases were filed, and investigations in 10 of those cases



The vandalised shrine of Sufi pir Shamim al-Jahangir in Kushtia. The photo was taken on April 12.

PHOTO: ANIS MONDOL

showed "no progress." In many instances, victims were beaten, displaced, or forced to abandon the shrines altogether, leaving them in no position to even pursue legal action. The study further found that most attacks were carried out by mobs under banners such as "tawhidi janata," with alleged involvement of political activists. In some cases, attackers used bulldozers and loudspeakers to mobilise crowds and destroy shrine structures.

Apart from shrines, Baul practitioners, cultural events, and artistic spaces have repeatedly been attacked in recent months and years. These are not random victims. They represent a long tradition of pluralism in Bengal's religious and cultural life—spaces where faith, music, and local traditions have historically coexisted. What makes these spaces particularly vulnerable today is not just ideological hostility, but a growing sense of social permission allowing it. Over

time, a form of collective consent has been manufactured—through sermons, online videos, informal local preaching networks, and social media bots—that frames shrines and similar institutions as being anti-Islamic. Once that perception takes root, attacks are no longer perceived by some as violations, but as corrections.

This sense of permissibility is reinforced in more subtle ways as well, including through

classic literary writings on shrines are being used to divert attention away from the main issue. For example, some people are criticising Syed Waliullah's *Lalsalu* (1948)—which examines blind faith and the manipulation of religion by fraudulent authority—as if it encouraged violence against pirs and shrines. Such a ludicrous claim connecting literature to mob killings is uncalled for, as literature does not function as an instruction manual

critique is subjected to intense scrutiny, while questions of internal accountability within religious structures are often addressed selectively, if at all.

The persistent attacks on shrines, even under the current government, expose another uncomfortable truth. During the interim administration, such violence was often attributed to weak governance and a lack of willingness to take firm action. The continuation of the same pattern of violence under a different, elected authority proves that this explanation was incomplete. Mob violence did not suddenly originate from within the interim government, as stated by a rights organisation in February this year; it became more visible during that period. The conditions enabling such violence were already entrenched in society, and what we are witnessing now is the extension of a longer deterioration that transcends any single regime or moment in power.

The authoritarian rule under Sheikh Hasina for more than 15 years significantly contributed to the deeper consolidation of religious fundamentalism in our society. While projecting an image to the outside world of being the safeguard against Bangladesh slipping into a Pakistan- or Afghanistan-like trajectory, her government, in practice, kept accommodating and mainstreaming various influential religious actors to consolidate domestic legitimacy. Over time, this process helped institutionalise certain extremist forces within the country's political and social fabric. The consequences are now steadily visible, as some of those actors operate with greater confidence and impact, fuelling the instability and tensions being witnessed today.

It is equally necessary to critically examine the institutional response, which remains uneven, reactive, and often too late to be effective. In many recent incidents, law enforcement has either been present but failed to prevent escalation or arrived after violence had already unfolded. Even legal follow-through remains slow and largely invisible. This lowers the perceived cost of participation in collective violence and effectively turns crowds into substitutes for institutions. It showcases a deeper legitimacy crisis, where formal justice is seen as being too slow to be meaningful, encouraging a distorted demand for instant, extrajudicial "justice."

Expectations from the elected government were sky-high, but its response has so far been underwhelming. As frustration grows, comparisons are increasingly being drawn with the interim period, which does not indicate nostalgia but rather the fear of an eroding confidence in state capacity to control mob violence and protect the marginalised. The sooner the government realises this, the better.

the language of mainstream media. In the Kushtia case, many outlets were quick to describe the victim as a "so-called" or "self-proclaimed" pir, or to place the word pir within quotation marks. On the surface, this may appear as an attempt at neutrality or scepticism. But, in effect, it introduces a dangerous ambiguity: as if the legitimacy of a spiritual identity has any bearing on whether killing a person can ever be justified. There was, in fact, little journalistic necessity to foreground or question in headlines whether the pir was "legitimate" or not; careful wording could have conveyed the facts without inserting doubt over his identity. If international agencies such as AFP can use descriptors like "spiritual leader" to cover this news, what prevents local media from adopting the same standard of clarity and restraint?

Sadly, unnecessary and flawed debates on

for violence; if anything, it compels reflection and discomfort. Therefore, it is also reductive and almost implausible to assume that the readership of *Lalsalu* and the actors of recent mob violence emerge from the same social and educational spaces. Conflating the two only serves to distort the discussion rather than clarify it.

Furthermore, it shifts the attention away from a more pressing question: why is there so little accountability from contemporary religious authority when violence is carried out in the name of religion? When mobs attack or kill by invoking faith, does that not directly contradict the moral order that religious leaders claim to uphold? Also, why do abuses within religious institutions, including repeated reports of sexual violence in madrasas, rarely become a central concern in sermons or organised religious discourse? The imbalance is unmistakable: progressive

Registration-based fuel rationing can ease long lines at filling stations

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is a Commonwealth scholar who served as a transport director at an international institution.

Nafis Ehsas Chowdhury
is a columnist and studies human resources management at United International University.

AKM LUTFUR RAHMAN and
NAFIS EHSAS CHOWDHURY

New crises! New vices! Stand in a fuel queue for an interminable 20 hours. Come back tomorrow and repeat the drill. This is not a dramatisation. This is what thousands of vehicle owners across Bangladesh have been living through. And the worst part is that most of this suffering is not being caused by an actual shortage; in fact, the country's octane stock has almost reached full storage capacity after a fresh consignment of 25,000 tonnes of octane arrived at the Chattogram port on Friday night. So, the suffering for fuel is being caused more by panic, hoarding, and the absence of any structured distribution

system. Energy security depends not just on supply availability but also on the equitable and efficient distribution of that supply to end users. When that distribution collapses into a free-for-all, even a country with "historically" large reserves can be pushed into a functional crisis beyond possibilities for swift recovery. That is precisely where we find ourselves.

In this context, our proposal for the distribution of fuel—particularly for vehicles—is straightforward: assign fuel access days based on the last digit of a vehicle's registration number. It may simply go like this: Digits 0 and 1 on Day 01, 2 and 3 on Day 02, and so on across every five consecutive days. A less complex odd-even system will not effectively solve the current remarkable situation. Every vehicle gets its designated window. No one will be permanently denied access. They are simply scheduled more constructively.

One might question, what if someone needs fuel on a day other than the one assigned to them? Our answer is simple. That

problem already exists. Right now, countless people cannot access fuel at all because they cannot physically afford to wait in a queue for 15 to 25 hours. A scheduled system does not create hardship; it distributes it more fairly and more predictably.

Fuel rationing during supply stress is not a radical idea. It is a tested instrument of crisis management. During the 1973 oil embargo, the United States introduced odd-even rationing by licence plate number to manage demand at the pump. The approach reduced queue lengths and curbed panic buying within weeks. The principle works because it replaces uncertainty with structure, and structure calms behaviour.

Unmanaged distribution systems disproportionately harm working-class citizens under fuel supply stress, while those with resources and connections find workarounds. Those with the capacity to keep a driver waiting for a full day are quietly filling every container they own. Those without that capacity are abandoning their vehicles entirely.

There is a second dimension to this that we cannot ignore. Individual-level hoarding creates an artificial scarcity that feeds on itself. Sometimes people hoard not because they need more but because they fear others will take it first. A rationing calendar breaks that psychological ratiol by removing the uncertainty that drives it.

The five-day plan also needs a geographic dimension to be effective. It should be designed in a way so as not to encourage people to drive 60 or 70 kilometres to the nearest open station in another district to refill fuel, which will then defeat the entire purpose.

If the five-day model proves insufficient, the fallback is a stricter 10-day system where one digit in the registration number gets one day exclusively. Under that model, no single vehicle can refuel within a 10-day window. That is not cruelty. Anyone who has genuinely managed their vehicle responsibly knows that a full tank may last longer than 10 days under normal usage. Genuine hardship comes from inequality of access, not from having a

scheduled access window.

We are not blind to implementation challenges. Enforcement needs cooperation from fuel station operators, law enforcement, and a verification mechanism tied to registration numbers. Bangladesh has demonstrated the capacity to roll out systems at scale when the political will exists. The question is whether that will arrive before this situation deteriorates further.

If we do not act, the demand-side disorder during supply disruption can push even a well-stocked economy into a genuine shortage within days. We are not at that point yet. But we are not far from it either if the Iran-US ceasefire doesn't hold. The response to these reasons and propositions can either be that they receive the intended attention, are scrutinised, and perhaps, following a few necessary changes here and there, a proactive initiative is taken to roll out the rationing system. Or, this proposition will be fired and disposed of with dozens of counter-arguments. It remains to be seen where we are headed as the queues for fuel keep getting longer.

CROSSWORD
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

A	C	H	E		R	A	D	I	O	S
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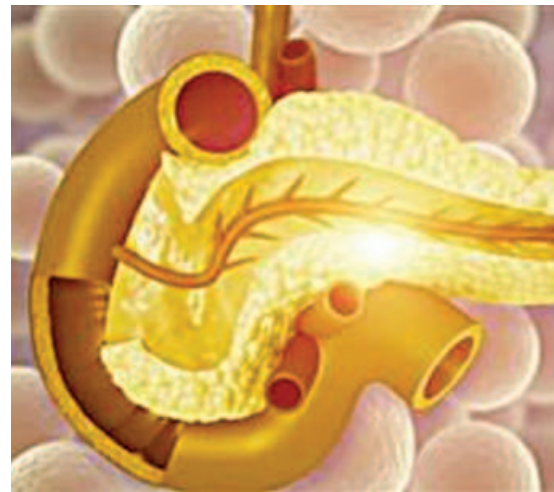
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DID YOU KNOW?

Pancreatic fat raises alarm over childhood obesity risks

A growing body of research is shedding light on a lesser-known risk in childhood obesity, fat accumulation in the pancreas. A new study presented at the European Congress on Obesity suggests that higher pancreatic fat levels in children and adolescents are linked to increased cardiometabolic risks, raising fresh concerns for early prevention.

Researchers found that young people with higher pancreatic fat were more likely to have elevated body mass index, increased abdominal and liver fat, higher diastolic blood pressure and signs of insulin



resistance. These factors are key contributors to conditions such as cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes.

The study analysed 283 individuals aged between 7 and 19 years using a safe, non-invasive imaging technique known as magnetic resonance spectroscopy. This approach allowed scientists to accurately measure fat levels in the pancreas and assess their relationship with broader health indicators.

Experts say the findings highlight the importance of early detection. Measuring pancreatic fat could help identify children most at risk, enabling timely intervention and targeted obesity management. However, researchers caution that further studies are needed to confirm whether reducing pancreatic fat directly improves health outcomes.



New research challenges long-held childhood obesity theory

STAR HEALTH REPORT

A long-standing belief about childhood obesity is being turned on its head, as new research suggests that what doctors have long called the "adiposity rebound" may not be about fat at all. Instead, scientists now argue that it reflects healthy muscle growth; not an early warning sign of obesity.

For more than four decades, the adiposity rebound theory has shaped how clinicians understand childhood growth. First proposed in 1984, it describes a pattern where a child's **body mass index (BMI)** rises in infancy, dips around age four, and then climbs again from about age six. Early rebound has often been linked to higher obesity risk later in life, prompting interventions aimed at altering this trajectory.

However, new findings presented ahead of the *European Congress on Obesity* challenge this narrative. Professor Andrew Agbaje of the University of Eastern Finland analysed data from over 2,400 children and adolescents using both BMI and a more precise measure of

body fat - the waist-to-height ratio (WHtR). While BMI appeared to follow the classic rebound pattern, WHtR told a different story.

Crucially, WHtR considered up to 90 per cent accurate in estimating body fat and did not show any rebound. Instead, it steadily declined until about age seven before gradually rising, never returning to early childhood levels. This suggests that the apparent BMI increase is driven not by fat gain, but by an increase in lean muscle mass as children grow.

"This is not an obesity problem," Agbaje explains. "It is a natural process of growth; a body composition reset that prepares children for later development."

The implications are significant. For years, clinicians have viewed early adiposity rebound as a risk factor, sometimes recommending dietary or lifestyle interventions in very young children. Yet evidence from long-term trials shows that such interventions do not alter the timing of this so-called rebound, reinforcing the idea that it is not a pathological process.

At the heart of this shift is a new

tool: the waist-to-height ratio. Unlike BMI, which cannot distinguish between fat and muscle, WHtR offers a clearer picture of body composition and associated health risks. Researchers now suggest it could serve as a more reliable, practical, and universal method for identifying excess fat in children and adolescents.

To support this transition, Agbaje's team has also developed a freely accessible WHtR calculator, enabling clinicians and families to assess children's health with greater accuracy.

The study also draws parallels with the so-called "obesity paradox" in adults, where higher BMI sometimes appears protective. In both cases, the confusion stems from BMI's inability to separate fat from muscle - a limitation that may have led to decades of misinterpretation.

Ultimately, the research calls for a rethink in paediatric health. Rather than treating adiposity rebound as a risk factor, experts now argue it should be recognised as a normal, even beneficial, stage of growth.

As Agbaje puts it, "Let's allow children to grow in peace."

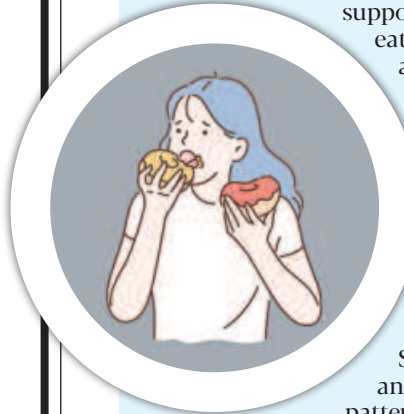
FOOD FOR THOUGHT The dangerous escape of emotional eating

DR SUMAIYA KHALED

Binge eating is often dismissed as mere overindulgence but health experts warn it is a serious eating disorder linked to emotional distress and long term health risks. Characterised by consuming large quantities of food in a short time, often without hunger, it leaves individuals feeling guilty, shame and loss of control.

Studies suggest binge eating frequently coexists with anxiety, depression and body image concerns, creating a harmful cycle. Episodes are often triggered by stress, restrictive dieting or emotional upheaval, making early recognition essential.

Unlike occasional overeating, binge eating is recurrent and can contribute to obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Experts emphasise that willpower alone is not enough. Treatment requires a combination of psychological support, mindful eating practices and sustainable lifestyle changes.



Small, consistent habits are emerging as effective ways to manage binge eating and restore balance.

Structured meals and mindful eating patterns appear to reduce impulsive episodes and improve awareness of hunger cues.

Psychological support, particularly for stress and emotional triggers, plays a crucial role in breaking the cycle. Limiting distractions such as screen use during meals may further encourage healthier relationships with food. Together, these practical steps highlight a gradual, sustainable path towards improved wellbeing and long term behavioural change.

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Pain today, disability tomorrow? The risk of ignored joint injuries

DR MEASIN ALI

Shoulder and knee pain, often dismissed as minor discomfort, may signal deeper health concerns that can disrupt daily life if ignored, experts warn. These joints, essential for nearly every movement, from walking and lifting to sitting and standing - are particularly vulnerable to injury and long-term wear.

Health specialists say a common mistake among patients is delaying care, assuming the pain will subside on its own. While some mild strains may resolve naturally, untreated injuries can evolve into chronic conditions, limiting mobility and quality of life.

A range of factors contribute to joint pain. Sudden falls, sports injuries, heavy lifting, and prolonged poor posture are frequent culprits. In the knee, ligament tears, meniscus injuries, and osteoarthritis are among the leading causes. Shoulder pain, meanwhile, is often linked to rotator cuff injuries, tendon inflammation, or dislocation. Lifestyle factors such as obesity, physical inactivity, and age-related degeneration further increase vulnerability.

Certain symptoms should not be overlooked. Severe pain, swelling, restricted movement, joint instability, or unusual sounds like clicking may indicate serious damage requiring prompt medical evaluation. Ignoring these warning signs can worsen the condition, making recovery more complex.



Immediate care following an injury plays a critical role in recovery. Experts recommend rest, avoiding pressure on the affected joint, and applying ice packs for 15 to 20 minutes several times daily within the first two days. Elevating the injured limb and using supportive bandages may also help. However, forceful massage or premature exercise can aggravate the injury.

Treatment approaches vary depending on severity. Physicians often rely on imaging techniques such as X-rays, ultrasound, or MRI scans to assess internal damage. Mild to moderate cases are typically managed with medication, controlled rest, and gradual movement to prevent stiffness. Supportive aids like braces or slings may be recommended.

Physiotherapy remains central to recovery, helping restore strength, flexibility, and balance through structured rehabilitation programmes. In more advanced cases, treatments such as steroid injections or platelet-rich plasma therapy may be used to accelerate healing. Severe injuries, including complete ligament tears or rotator cuff ruptures, may require surgical intervention—often performed using minimally invasive arthroscopic techniques for faster recovery.

Prevention, experts stress, is the most effective strategy. Regular exercise, proper warm-ups, maintaining a healthy weight, and practising good posture can significantly reduce the risk of joint injuries.

Above all, persistent pain should never be ignored. Early intervention and healthy habits remain key to preserving mobility and ensuring a pain-free, active life.

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JUNK FOOD TRAP Ultra-processed meals linked to rising teen obesity

A growing body of global evidence is sounding the alarm on adolescents' diets, linking ultra-processed foods (UPFs) to a sharp rise in overweight and obesity. A recent large-scale systematic review and meta-analysis of 23 studies involving over 155,000 adolescents across 16 countries reveals a troubling trend: teenagers consuming higher amounts of UPFs face significantly greater health risks.

Industrial formulations packed with added sugars, unhealthy fats, salt and chemical additives have become a staple in modern diets with UPFs. The analysis found that adolescents with high UPF intake had 63% higher odds of being overweight or obese compared to those consuming less. Alarmingly, newer studies suggest the risk may be intensifying, with some reporting more than double the likelihood.

The implications extend beyond weight gain. Early obesity increases vulnerability to type 2 diabetes, hypertension and metabolic disorders, placing long-term strain on health systems.

While the findings are based on observational data, researchers stress urgent action. Promoting fresh, minimally processed foods and strengthening nutrition education could be pivotal. As UPF consumption surges globally, safeguarding adolescent health has never been more critical.

A broken heart is not just a feeling, it's a medical emergency

PROF GOLAM NABI

A broken heart is often dismissed as a metaphor for emotional pain, but emerging medical evidence reveals it can be a life-threatening cardiac condition. Known as Takotsubo cardiomyopathy, or "broken heart syndrome", the disorder is increasingly recognised by clinicians worldwide as a serious yet often misunderstood disease.

Typically triggered by intense emotional or physical stress, the condition mimics a classic heart attack. Patients may present with sudden chest pain, breathlessness, palpitations, or even fainting - symptoms that demand urgent medical attention. However, unlike a conventional myocardial infarction, coronary arteries usually appear normal upon angiography, creating diagnostic challenges for physicians.

At its core, broken heart syndrome is linked to a surge of stress hormones such as adrenaline and noradrenaline. These hormones, essential in normal physiological responses, can overwhelm the heart when released in excess. Events such as bereavement, divorce, financial distress, academic failure, or major illness can act as triggers, causing temporary weakening of the heart muscle.

The condition predominantly affects post-menopausal



women, accounting for nearly 80 to 90 per cent of reported cases. Reduced oestrogen levels are believed to make the heart more vulnerable to stress-induced damage. While men are less frequently affected, studies indicate that mortality rates are significantly higher among male patients, particularly those with chronic illnesses or severe physical stress.

Despite its reversible nature, the syndrome is far from benign. Research suggests in-hospital mortality rates of approximately 6.5 per cent, with complications including heart failure, stroke, and cardiac arrest. These findings underscore the importance of early diagnosis and timely intervention.

Treatment typically involves supportive care in a hospital setting. Encouragingly, most patients recover fully within one to two months, though close

follow-up remains essential.

As awareness grows, experts stress the need to recognise the profound link between emotional wellbeing and physical health. What was once dismissed as poetic exaggeration is now a clinical reality which reminds us that heartbreak, in its most literal sense, can indeed be dangerous.

The writer is the Professor and Head of the Department of Medicine at ZH Sikder Women's Medical College & Hospital. Email: lotus.pharma75@yahoo.com

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সুষ্ঠিকর খাবার গ্রহণ

নিয়মিত শরীরচর্চা

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সঠিক অভ্যাস
সুস্থ লিভার

BEACON



Afif's struggle mirrors Tigers' woes

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

There was a striking similarity between the starts of New Zealand and Bangladesh in the opening ODI of the three-match series in Mirpur on Friday, but the contrasting approaches that followed defined the outcome.

At the centre were Bangladesh's Afif Hossain, who once again failed to fulfil the finisher's role entrusted to him, and New Zealand's Dean Foxcroft, who excelled at reading and adapting to the conditions.

Opting to bat, New Zealand lost their fourth wicket at 131 in 27.5 overs, bringing Foxcroft to the crease. Playing only his second ODI, the 27-year-old showed composure beyond his experience. Having toured Bangladesh with South Africa's age-level side during the 2016 ICC U-19 World Cup and with New Zealand 'A' last year, he appeared well-acquainted with the conditions.

Foxcroft struck a measured 59 off 58 balls, rotating the strike smartly and reading the situation astutely to guide his side to a competitive 247 for eight – a total that always looked challenging for Bangladesh, who

have won just one of their last eight ODI chases.

Bangladesh's innings began in a remarkably similar fashion. They too lost their fourth wicket around the same phase – at 132 in 27.2 overs – setting the stage for Afif. Despite the quick dismissals of set batters Saif Hassan and Litton Das, the hosts remained well-positioned, with Tawhid Hridoy at the crease and skipper Mehidy Hasan Miraz still to come.

At that point, the Tigers needed 116 runs from 136 deliveries – a manageable equation. However, this is where the parallels ended.

Instead of maintaining momentum, the middle order allowed pressure to build. Afif and Hridoy struggled for boundaries, managing just one during their 52-run stand, while dot balls pushed the required rate beyond six. Afif eventually fell for a sluggish 27 off 49 balls, holing out to long on in a desperate attempt to break free, leaving the chase in disarray, raising further questions about his role.

The 26-year-old, recalled after a 16-month absence during the recent home series against Pakistan, has yet

to justify his return. He did not bat in the first ODI, scored 14 in the second, and remained unbeaten on five in the third after being pushed down to number seven.

However, is Afif solely to blame? The issue appears deeper. The team management has persistently tried to mould him into a finisher, despite his domestic success coming up the order. His recent century in the Bangladesh Cricket League came at number four – a position he has also occupied regularly in domestic T20s, including the Bangladesh Premier League.

In contrast, his ODI record tells a different story: of his 33 innings, 27 have come at number six or lower, with only six in the top five. This mismatch between role and natural position has hindered his consistency at the international level.

Bangladesh's persistence with this experiment has yielded little success, and Friday's failure once again highlighted the risks of forcing players into unsuitable roles. If the approach remains unchanged, Afif's career may continue to drift, with the team's broader batting concerns unresolved.

Pakistan ring in changes for Bangladesh Tests

AGENCIES

Pakistan Cricket Board yesterday named four uncapped players in their squad for next month's two-Test series against Bangladesh, while also appointing Sarfaraz Ahmed as head coach.

Sarfaraz, who led Pakistan to the 2017 Champions Trophy title, replaces interim coaches Aaqib Javed and Azhar Mahmood, who had guided the side since Jason Gillespie's departure in December. Former Pakistan pacer Umar Gul joins as bowling coach.

Captain Shan Masood leads a squad featuring new faces Azan Awaiz, Abdullah Fazal, Amad Butt and Muhammad Ghazi Ghorri, rewarded for strong domestic performances.

The team will travel to Bangladesh on May 2 for the World Test Championship matches in Dhaka (May 8-12) and Sylhet (May 12-16). Pakistan are currently fifth in the WTC standings after a 1-1 home draw against South Africa last year.

Pakistan squad: Shan Masood (captain), Abdullah Fazal, Amad Butt, Azan Awaiz, Babar Azam, Hasan Ali, Imam-ul-Haq, Khurram Shahzad, Mohammad Abbas, Mohammad Rizwan, Muhammad Ghazi Ghorri, Noman Ali, Sajid Khan, Salman Agha, Saud Shakeel and Shaheen Afridi.

SHORT CORNER

Russian forward helps PWD out of relegation zone

Russian striker Marat Tareck scored a brace as PWD moved out of the relegation zone with a 2-0 win over Brothers Union in the lone Bangladesh Football League fixture in Munshiganj on Saturday. The win took PWD three points clear of the relegation zone, on eighth position with 13 points.

Allegri rules out taking Italy job

Massimiliano Allegri said Saturday that he was not interested in the vacant Italy job, the AC Milan coach saying that he was hoping to stay with the seven-time European champions. "My career speaks for itself: changing jobs often isn't part of my DNA," Allegri told reporters ahead of Sunday's Serie A fixture at Verona.

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Japan celebrate with the AFC U-20 Women's Asian Cup trophy after defeating defending champions North Korea in the final at Thammasat Stadium in Bangkok yesterday, sealing a record-extending seventh title. The triumph comes weeks after Japan's senior women's team also lifted the Asian Cup. The 12-team tournament in Thailand also featured Bangladesh, who were making their debut but exited at the group stage after three defeats. The top four sides -- Japan, North Korea, China and South Korea -- qualified for the 2026 FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup in Poland.

PHOTO: AFC

53 DAYS TO GO



Zabivaka steals the show

The wolf-like "Zabivaka" was selected as the mascot of the 2018 FIFA World Cup. It won with nearly 53 percent of the votes from over one million online voters. Its competitors, a tiger and a cat, received 27 percent and 20 percent of the votes, respectively. Notably, the tradition of World Cup mascots began in 1966.

** Visit The Daily Star's website to also read: 'Grit, bravery, and a medal for the doctor'

Mohammedan surge as DPL transfer power shifts

SPORTS REPORTER

For more than a decade, Abahani Limited built a squad resembling a national team in the Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League (DPL). Their dominance was reflected not only in their playing eleven but also in their bench strength, where even established national players often had to wait for opportunities. The results followed, with Abahani clinching six titles in the last eight completed editions, underlining a period of remarkable consistency.

However, with shifts in the country's administrative and political landscape, the balance of power appears to be changing. Their traditional rivals, Mohammedan Sporting Club, have emerged as the most aggressive side in the ongoing transfer window.

Yesterday, the opening day of the two-day transfer window, Mohammedan made a strong statement by signing 11 cricketers, including three current national players: Rishad Hossain, Tanvir Islam and Afif Hossain. They also added experienced domestic names such as Anamul Haque Bijoy, Mohammad Naim, Parvez Hossain Emon and Yasir Ali, along with promising pacer Ripon Mondol.

Their recruitment drive is expected to continue today, with several high-



"I think credit goes to Tamim [Iqbal] because he came and took this initiative.... cricketers always want to be on the field and play, and there's nothing bigger than that."

MAHMUDULLAH RIYAD, after joining Prime Bank from Mohammedan

profile players targeted, including Tawhid Hridoy, Taskin Ahmed, Mushfiqur Rahim, Tajul Islam and Mohammad Saifuddin. Mohammedan, champions last in 2009-10, are still chasing their first title since the league gained List A status in 2013-14, having finished runners-up to Abahani last season.

Abahani, however, have also remained active. On the opening day, they secured Jaker Ali, Soumya Sarkar, Mahidul Islam Ankon and

Khaled Ahmed, among others, and are expected to finalise deals with Najmul Hossain Shanto, Mosaddek Hossain Saikat and youngsters Jishan Alam, S M Meherob Hasan and Rakibul Hasan.

Elsewhere, Mahmudullah moved to Prime Bank Cricket Club from Mohammedan, Mominul Haque joined Dhaka Leopards from Abahani, while Tanzid Hasan Tamim and Tanzim Hasan Sakib also joined Prime Bank from Legends of Ruppangj.

A total of 79 players featured across eight clubs so far: Abahani Limited, Agrani Bank Cricket Club, Bashundhara Strikers, City Club, Dhaka Leopards, Gulshan Cricket Club, Mohammedan Sporting Club and Prime Bank Cricket Club. The remaining sides, including Gazi Group Cricketers, Legends of Ruppangj, Ruppangj Tigers Cricket Club and Brothers Union Limited, will complete their business today ahead of the season, set to begin in the first week of May.

This year's transfer window carried added significance amid earlier uncertainty over the league, following a boycott threat from clubs that had questioned the legitimacy of the Aminul Islam-led board. The situation eased after the board was replaced by an ad hoc committee headed by Tamim Iqbal, allowing the league to proceed.

'Like a final': City host Arsenal

AGENCIES

Manchester City host Arsenal on Sunday in a defining Premier League clash that could reshape the title race as the season nears its conclusion.

Arsenal, awaiting first league title in over two decades, arrive as league leaders with a six-point cushion, while City hold a game in hand and the advantage of playing at home, making the encounter finely balanced and intensely significant.

Erling Haaland has framed the fixture in the starkest terms, saying, "It's a massive game without a doubt. We all know the importance of this game. It's like a final."

His words reflect the mood inside the City camp, where players are fully aware that anything less than victory could severely damage their hopes of retaining the title.

Pep Guardiola has also spoken candidly about the stakes. "If we lose, yeah, it's over," he admitted, while also stressing that even a win would not guarantee success.

He added that Arsenal have been "the best team in England so far", warning his players not to become distracted by the pressure surrounding the race. "We want to challenge them," he said, highlighting City's determination to close the gap.

Arsenal's recent form has been inconsistent after a strong start to the campaign. Defeats in cup competitions, including the League Cup final against City, have contributed to a dip in momentum.

Injuries have added further difficulty, with Bukayo Saka and Mikel Merino unavailable,



⚡ Arsenal lead the table with 70 points from 32 games, but head to the Etihad in their worst run of the season. The North London side have won just one of their last five matches in all competitions: a 1-0 victory over Sporting in the Champions League quarterfinal first leg.

⚡ While Arsenal have stumbled, City are hitting top gear, recording statement wins over Arsenal, Liverpool and Chelsea in their last three matches across all competitions.

⚡ The stakes are massive. A City win would cut the gap from nine points to just three within a week, and a victory over Burnley days



later could send them top with five games remaining, leaving Arsenal staring at a fourth straight runners-up finish.

⚡ History offers mixed signals. The clubs have met 215 times since 1893. Arsenal lead with 101 wins to City's 66, with 48 draws. However, City have not lost a home league game to Arsenal in 11 years, yet Arsenal are unbeaten in their last five Premier League meetings with City.

⚡ Last meeting recap: In September's league clash, Gabriel Martinelli came off the bench to score a stoppage-time equaliser after Erling Haaland's early opener, as the sides drew 1-1.

while key figures such as Martin Odegaard and Jurrien Timber are being assessed ahead of the trip to Manchester.

Despite these setbacks, Mikel Arteta remains confident in his squad's mentality. "It is certainly the most important game, as it

is the next one," he said. "We have earned the right to be in this position." He also dismissed any suggestion of cautious tactics, insisting, "We are not going to spend one second about that (playing for a draw). We prepare every game to win."

Bundesliga and more in Bayern's sights

Just days after knocking out Spanish giants Real Madrid to reach the Champions League semifinals, Bayern Munich can cap a perfect week by sealing the Bundesliga title on Sunday -- with several records also within reach.

⚡ Already 12 points clear with five games left, Bayern's 35th league title is all but certain.

⚡ They can clinch the title at home today even with a draw after Hoffenheim beat second-placed Borussia Dortmund 2-1 on Saturday.

⚡ A 13th Bundesliga title in 14 seasons now feels inevitable given their dominance.

⚡ Bayern have scored 105 goals -- already a Bundesliga record -- and need 21 more in five games to set a new European league record.

⚡ Their scoring form suggests it is achievable: five goals scored six times, six goals three times, and eight goals once this season.

⚡ They boast a 78-plus goal difference, exceeding their 76-point tally. No team in Bundesliga history has ever won the league with a better goal difference than points tally.



PHOTO: FC BAYERN



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Ignore people at your peril

11-party alliance warns; urges constitutional reforms while 'there's still time'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of the Jamaat-e-Islami-led 11-party alliance yesterday urged the government to adopt a pro-people stance, warning that if the opposition's street movement continues, it would not "bode well" for the ruling party.

They alleged that the current government, like its predecessor, is heading towards earning the label of being "anti-people".

The remarks came at a protest rally held at the capital's Bijoynagar to press for implementation of the referendum verdict in line with the July charter.

Top leaders of the alliance spoke at the rally. Afterwards, a procession was brought out from the Bijoynagar intersection, which marched through the Nightingale intersection and ended at Shantinagar.

Addressing the rally as chief guest, Jamaat Nayeb-e-Amcer ATM Azharul

SEE PAGE 5 COL 7



Despite government claims of no fuel shortage, particularly of octane, long queues at filling stations and the suffering of motorists show no signs of easing. The photo, taken yesterday, shows lines of vehicles at Sumatra Filling Station snaking their way up and then down Matikata Road in the capital.

PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

Fuel queues snake city streets

ASIFUR RAHMAN and AHMED DEEPTO

Queues at filling stations across Dhaka yesterday resembled the early-2000s "Snake" game, with lines of octane- and petrol-powered vehicles snaking around pumps, spilling onto surrounding roads, and at times looping back to and past their starting points.

Growing longer by the day, the queues have turned routine refuelling into an hours-long ordeal, even as the country's octane stocks exceed storage capacity — signalling a breakdown in distribution rather than supply.

A visit by The Daily Star to at least 20 filling stations in Tejgaon, Asad Gate, Kuril, Nikunja, Badda, Paribagh and Matsya Bhaban found the rush has worsened over the past two weeks.

Although the government earlier said it would maintain supply at levels similar to the same period last year, supply was slightly reduced between April 1 and April 17, worsening the situation.

Officials now expect conditions to ease at the distribution end, as supply

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

Trade deal with US a threat to energy security

Says noted economist Debapriya

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The unequal agreement signed by the interim government with the US poses a major obstacle to energy security in Bangladesh rather than the disruption in fuel imports through the Strait of Hormuz, said noted economist Debapriya Bhattacharya.

"The Strait of Hormuz is indeed an obstacle to fuel imports, but the US trade agreement is a bigger barrier," he said at a pre-budget shadow parliamentary debate competition organised by the Debate for Democracy yesterday.

The Agreement on Reciprocal Trade (ART) signed on February 9, just three days before the election, commits Bangladesh to purchasing \$15 billion in US energy products, including LNG, over 15 years. It also restricts Bangladesh's ability to buy cheaper fuel from countries under US sanctions such as Russia.

"The current government says it will not pursue country-specific foreign policies. Yet that is exactly what is happening in the trade deal — we now need permission regarding whom we can buy oil from," said Bhattacharya, a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

However, Bangladesh should make the best of the 60-day waiver offered by the US on oil purchases from Russia. While criticising the deposed government, Bhattacharya said the energy policy was confusing and controversial, with exploitative policies adopted by an unholy nexus of bureaucrats, business groups and politicians.

Instead of productive investment, priority was given

SEE PAGE 5 COL 3



RESERVED SEATS BNP nears final list of women

Jamaat to announce nominees tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP is close to finalising its nominees for the women's reserved seats in the 13th Jatiya Sangsad, while Jamaat-e-Islami has completed its selection process and is expected to announce its candidates tomorrow.

BNP leaders said the party interviewed more than 900 aspirants over the last two days, and its parliamentary board is now reviewing the names before making the final announcement.

Aspirants from Chattogram, Sylhet, Cumilla, Dhaka and Mymensingh appeared before the board yesterday, while those from Rangpur, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barishal and Faridpur were interviewed on Friday.

According to party sources, the interviews were led by BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman and members of the party's Standing Committee.

Aspirants were asked why they were seeking nomination, what contributions they had

SEE PAGE 5 COL 3

Zero malaria death by next year a stiff challenge now

16 dies in 2025, highest in almost a decade

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

At least 16 people died of malaria in 2025, the highest in nine years, raising concerns over the country's goal of achieving zero malaria deaths by 2027.

A total of 10,162 malaria cases were recorded last year, which is lower than the previous year but still a significant number given the country hopes to eliminate the mosquito-borne disease by 2030.

The issue of malaria deaths came into focus following the death of Commerce Secretary Mahbubur Rahman from malaria on Friday, ahead of World Malaria Day on April 25.

Although 460 malaria cases were recorded in the first three months of the year, Mahbubur is the first to die from the disease, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The 58-year-old bureaucrat was admitted to a private 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.

Mahbubur had recently visited an African country and might have contracted malaria there, said DGHS officials. The directorate will conduct an "oral autopsy"

MALARIA CASELOADS AND DEATHS

YEAR	CASES	DEATHS
2025	10,156	16
2024	13,100	6
2023	16,567	6
2022	18,167	14
2021	7,294	9
2020	6,130	9
2019	17,225	9
2018	10,523	7
2017	29,247	13
2016	27,737	17

SOURCES: DGHS

to determine the circumstances surrounding his death.

Malaria is a life-threatening disease caused by parasites that are transmitted to people through the bites of infected female Anopheles mosquitoes.

According to DGHS data, a total of 10,158 cases were recorded from 13 districts last year. In addition, the central reporting team recorded four more cases, taking the total to 10,162.

Of these districts, the highest

number of cases — 5,023 — was recorded in Bandarban, followed by 3,614 in Rangamati, 845 in Cox's Bazar and 534 in Khagrachhari.

This means 10,016 cases, or 98.56 percent of the total, were recorded in these four districts.

A total of 16 deaths were reported last year, of which 11 were recorded in hospitals of Chattogram, two in the medical facilities of Cox's Bazar and one each in Khagrachhari and Rangamati. One additional death was recorded by the central team in Dhaka.

Last year's death toll is the highest since 2016, when 17 deaths were recorded, according to DGHS data. Between 2017 and 2024, the number of deaths ranged from six to 14.

A DGHS official said six deaths were reported from the Rohingya camps last year and hence the fatality rate is relatively high.

Between January and March, a total of 460 cases were recorded from five districts: Bandarban (214), Rangamati (179), Cox's Bazar (49), Khagrachhari (13) and Chattogram (5).

However, the numbers usually see a sharp rise during the peak malaria season, May to August, officials said.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 6

KILLING OF 2 CHILDREN Fresh protests, clashes in India's Manipur

AGENCIES

Fresh protests broke out across India's Manipur on Friday night, with large crowds taking to the streets in Imphal East over the killing of two children.

Night protests erupted at Khurai Lamlong Bazar in Imphal East, where large numbers of people defied curfew and took out rallies. The situation soon turned tense, with security forces stepping in to control the crowd.

Tear gas shells and mock bombs were used to disperse protesters, and several people were injured in the clashes. The injured were taken to Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences for treatment.

At least four people were killed, two of them by police fire, in India's northeastern state of Manipur on April 7.

On that day, two children from the mostly Hindu Meitei community were killed after a bomb exploded in a house in the Meitei-dominated Bishnupur district.

A day later, police opened fire to control a crowd that had stormed a camp belonging to security forces, killing two people, the state's interior minister, Govindas Konthoujam said.

The children killed in the unrest belonged to the Meitei community, whose members alleged the attack was carried out by Kuki militants. Kuki groups denied the accusations.

Anger continues to build across the Valley since the incident, with civil society groups calling for more protests in the coming days. The case has now been handed over to the National Investigation Agency (NIA).



Fishing boats remain anchored at the fisheries ghat along the Karnaphuli river in Chattogram amid the 58-day government-imposed fishing ban from April 15 to June 11, aimed at boosting marine fish breeding and production. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

48hrs after Pallabi teacher killing, cops clueless

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police are yet to identify any suspects 48 hours after a 68-year-old schoolteacher was killed with a hammer in her rented flat in the capital's Pallabi.

Police recovered the bloodstained body of Firoza Khanom Josna, a teacher at Holy Crescent Ideal School, on Friday afternoon.

The inquest report, prepared after an autopsy at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital morgue, noted severe injury marks on the left side of her head, as well as on her nose and eyes.

Police also recovered a blood-stained hammer at the crime scene, which they believe had been used in the killing.

Firoza had been living alone for 10 to 12 years in a rented room on the first floor of a six-storey building on Road 8, Block D, Section 12 in Mirpur, her brother Nazmul Azam told The Daily Star.

She hailed from Krishnapur

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