



GENEVA CAMP

Drug trade thrives despite crackdowns

Ringleaders still at large

SHAHEEN MOLLAH *and* MUNTAKIM SAAD

A few yards away from the rear gate of Geneva Camp in Mohammadpur, several men were selling heroin, cannabis and yaba in broad daylight. Holding polybags full of narcotics, they called out to potential buyers as pedestrians walked past.

This was the scene at midday in the

law enforcement following the July mass uprising, say camp residents. At least 10 people have been killed in clashes over the last 19 months, according to media reports.

Despite frequent raids and installation of police checkpoints in Mohammadpur area, the drug trade continues almost uninterrupted.

Inside the camp, many believe that information

Narco trade has spread to roads outside the camp

Drugs worth over Tk 1.5cr sold daily

Rival gangs fight for control of lucrative spots

At least **10** killed in clashes over the last 19 months

Around **500** people inside the camp directly involved in the trade

Info on raids leaked to kingpins in advance, allege locals



neighbourhood on April 20.

For decades, Geneva Camp has been known as one of Dhaka's most notorious drug hubs, with the illegal trade surviving successive governments and countless "special drives."

Residents say the scenario changed after August 2024. The narcotics trade, which was mostly confined to the camp's narrow alleys, has spilled onto the main streets. And it has become more organised.

To control lucrative spots, rival groups get locked in clashes, which have intensified amid lax

on raids is leaked to the kingpins beforehand. Only drug carriers, sellers and buyers are frequently arrested, while those controlling the flow of narcotics remain untouched.

Camp sources said a section of law enforcers and their informants have helped the ringleaders evade arrest in exchange for money. This is why the drug network could not be dismantled.

Some people who once struggled to make ends meet have amassed huge wealth, thanks to the illegal trade. For them, punishment or

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PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

Nazmul and Fatema are overwhelmed with grief after their seven-month-old son Nafiz passed away due to post-measles pneumonia at the Infectious Diseases Hospital in the capital's Mohakhali on Thursday afternoon. Three more patients died of measles in the 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, raising this year's death toll to 42.



Bangladesh remains at high risks from measles

Says WHO, calls for urgent action, 95% vaccine coverage, stronger surveillance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The World Health Organization has assessed the national risk of the ongoing measles outbreak as high, citing continued transmission, a large pool of susceptible children, immunity gaps, and suspected measles-related deaths.

Continued spread of the disease is likely unless urgent measures are taken to strengthen surveillance, rapidly detect and respond to cases, and close immunity gaps through an integrated vaccination campaign, WHO said in a report on Thursday.

"Despite Bangladesh's progress towards measles elimination, the current outbreak highlights the vulnerability of the population and underscores the fragility of immunisation gains," it said.

WHO says high transmission rate, number of susceptible children worrying

The UN body issued several recommendations, including maintaining at least 95 percent coverage of target children with both doses of the measles vaccine across all municipalities and strengthening integrated epidemiological surveillance to bring the situation under control.

The observations came as the country continued to see a rise in measles cases and deaths, with hospitals overwhelmed by patients.

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MY DHAKA

VOICES OF REMORSE

A New Perspective

TANZIRAL DILSHAD DITAN

The Liberation War Museum has recently hosted a special screening of the documentary “The 1971 War: In the Eyes of Pakistanis”, an emotional exploration of the 1971 genocide through the realisations and reactions of the Pakistani people.

The film serves as a bridge across a painful past, attempting to analyse the modern understanding of the cruelty and massacres that marked the path to Independence. It brings to light the harrowing humanitarian disaster that resulted in the loss of millions of lives and the systematic torture of women, framing these events as a dark chapter the world must never forget.

The visionary behind this project is Amirul Arham, an internationally acclaimed Bangladeshi filmmaker who has lived in Paris since 1985.

Arham began his cinematic journey at the Dhaka Film Archive before training under world-renowned filmmaker Jean Rouch, eventually gaining global recognition for works such as his documentary on “Social Business”. The film was selected for the “Cinema Positive” category at a major international festival and garnered widespread acclaim.

Reflecting on his work, Arham notes that his journey into this subject is an attempt to understand the tragedy from a fresh perspective, analysing the realisations and reactions of the



PHOTO: COURTESY

Pakistani people toward the cruelty and genocide of 1971. Millions of lives were extinguished, and the systematic abuse of women left scars that remain unhealed in Bangladesh's collective memory.

The film asks what ordinary people in Pakistan saw, what they were told, and how today's youth evaluate these events.

In this latest work, he captures perspectives from a wide array of individuals, from Pakistani labourers and businessmen who were present in then East Pakistan to today's politicians and youth re-evaluating their history.

Perhaps the most poignant moment

features the late Rowedad Khan (1923–2024), a former influential bureaucrat and politician. In a rare and deeply moving interview, Khan offers a heavy-hearted testimony and a formal apology on behalf of the people of Pakistan for the atrocities committed during the 1971 war.

Arham's connection to the subject dates back decades. In 1996, he worked on a film on the Bihari population, titled “Lost Souls of Bangladesh”, which was broadcast on French National Television in 2000.

Witnessing their lost dreams of a stable life in Pakistan sparked his curiosity about civilians who remained

there, including those who witnessed the horrors of 1971. This led to a clandestine journey of research and archival work to reach the right voices without drawing the attention of authorities.

Reflecting on a process that began in 2022, Arham notes the immense challenges of documenting a history five decades later, as many witnesses have passed away or are affected by ailments such as Alzheimer's. Yet, he found that many Pakistani civilians today admit they remain poorly informed about the genocide committed by their army in then-East Pakistan.

The Film Center is a division of the Liberation War Museum, where activities related to the Liberation War are conducted. Under the supervision of founding trustee Mofidul Hoque, the division organises film screenings, workshops, and research activities.

As part of this effort, the Film Center arranged the screening to provide a new perspective on the country's history. Naasehun Ameen, CEO of the museum, said the screening was organised as part of its continued commitment to preserving and promoting the history, values, and sacrifices of 1971.

Such initiatives help engage wider audiences, especially younger generations, and encourage deeper reflection on the Liberation War and its enduring impact.

Drug trade thrives despite crackdowns

FROM PAGE 1
imprisonment no longer serves as a deterrent.

OPEN TRADE
Drugs worth over Tk 1.5 crore are sold there every day, attracting a new, more aggressive generation of dealers, according to camp sources.

The scale of the trade is reflected in past recoveries. In two drives in June and August last year, army personnel seized Tk 1.13 crore from a group of dealers and Tk 2.45 crore from another group.

In February this year, police seized 1.5kg heroin valued at roughly Tk 1.5 crore from the camp. But it hardly impacted the illegal trade.

Sources said marijuana became available in the camp in 1972, a few months after its establishment, but its sales rose after 2000. Yaba was first brought to the camp in 2010, and its trade peaked in 2022.

These correspondents recently visited several drug spots and saw dealers selling drugs openly. Along the footpaths of Humayun and Babar roads, they traded purias or small packets of marijuana, yaba and heroin.

In nearby alleys,

transactions took place swiftly. Some buyers arrived on motorcycles, handed over cash, collected purias and left, while several others walked up slowly to sellers to buy heroin and yaba.

During one of the visits, a man in threadbare clothes was seen buying two purias of heroin from a dealer for Tk 400.

Identifying himself as Muklesur Rahman, the man said he has been addicted to heroin for 28 years.

“Back then, I used to buy a puria for Tk 12 and share it with another addict,” said the 55-year-old man in a raspy voice.

Muklesur, who is from Munshiganj, said he has a wife and two daughters, but is no longer in touch with them. He now sleeps on the streets, and begs to fund an addiction that already consumed more than half his life.

Many of the sellers are also trapped in a similar cycle.

Seeking anonymity, a 27-year-old cannabis dealer, who once worked at a clothing store, said he got addicted to marijuana about a decade ago.

During a raid on the camp several years ago, he

was arrested for possessing cannabis. But he was sent to jail on drug peddling charges. To facilitate his bail, he borrowed Tk 10,000 with interest. As he failed to pay the loan in time, he was approached by a drug trader who advised him to sell narcotics for a few days.

The man claimed that he was later implicated in two other cases and now faces at least 10 cases.

“Life in the camp or in jail is almost the same... But if you have money, you can live better in jail. People like me are not much afraid of landing in jail.”

The profit margins explain why sellers like him take the risk. They buy heroin for Tk 160 per puria and sell it for Tk 200. For yaba, the profit margin is up to Tk 100 per puria and for marijuana it's Tk 60.

Some sellers said they earn between Tk 10,000 and Tk 15,000 a day.

The trade runs round the clock, with activities peaking between 10:00am and 2:00pm, and again from 7:00pm to 10:00pm.

Sources said around 500 people inside the camp are directly involved in drug trade, while the ringleaders operate from outside. Over

50 lookouts have been set up near Suhrawardy Hospital, Shishu Mela and Residential Model School, where informants observe law enforcers' movements and alert dealers. They get Tk 1,000 to Tk 2,000 each per day.

THE NETWORK
About a decade ago, two drug kingpins – Ishtiaq and Nadim alias “Pochish” – largely controlled narcotics trade in the camp.

Nadim was killed in a gunfight with Rab members in 2018, while Ishtiaq died of Covid while receiving treatment in India in 2021.

Following their deaths, the illegal trade fell into the hands of small groups that now operate under two major rival gangs, locals said.

One is run by Soheli, locally known as “Buniya Soheli” and “Popla Munna”, while the other by Selim, known as “Chua Selim”, “Pichchi Raja”, and “Par Monu”.

Locals said that since August 5, 2024, groups led by Raja, Monu and Selim have been trying to take control of the trade from Soheli-led groups. The two sides fought on many occasions over the last 19

months.

In separate operations, Rab personnel arrested Soheli on November 1, 2024, and Selim on January 9, 2025, but both were released on bail within a few months of their arrests.

In September last year, joint forces raided two of Soheli's hideouts and seized narcotics and weapons. A couple of months later, army personnel carried out multiple drives and recovered nearly 200 crude bombs and five kilogrammes of bomb-making materials from one of Soheli's hideouts.

Law enforcers seized 77 crude bombs, 400 grammes of gunpowder, four samurai swords, yaba, heroin and Tk 4.25 lakh from Soheli's den on November 26. Soheli and his associates escaped.

Three days later, 50 members of rival groups attacked Soheli and his accomplices in Block-4 and 7, leaving him critically injured. Upon receiving information, joint forces rushed to the spot and took him to hospital. Police later showed him arrested in a narcotics case.

Hours later, two of his associates were arrested inside the camp with two

pistols and six rounds of ammunition.

With Soheli behind bars, groups led by Raja, Monu and Selim now control the drug trade, said locals.

Over the past few weeks, police conducted several raids in and around the camp and arrested dozens of suspects. The drug trade, however, continues.

When contacted, Abdullah Al Mamun, assistant commissioner of DMP's Mohammadpur Zone, said police are conducting raids in the Geneva Camp area almost every day. Many have been detained, and a number of them are now in jail.

Asked why the ringleaders have not been caught, he said the key operators stay outside the camp. They visit the camp secretly for a brief period and leave unnoticed. Several of them have been identified and efforts are underway to arrest them.

Regarding allegations that some law enforcers tip off ringleaders about raids in exchange for bribes, he said, “We also hear such allegations, but we have yet to get any evidence to support those.”

Shirin Akter

FROM JACKET 1

letter from Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protishtan arrived in her name, it brought not just opportunity but a storm of emotions: joy for the village, fear for her parents, and an unshakable resolve within her. She cried, she resisted, she refused to give up her dream, and that courage carried her forward. Even when she collapsed mid-race, she rose to the sound of victory. Today, as she lifts her 16th title as the nation's fastest woman, the feeling remains the same – not just triumph, but a reminder of every struggle she outran to get there. Beyond medals, she has become a story that travels from village to village, inspiring countless girls to believe that no matter where they begin, they too can run toward something bigger.

BNP men assault

FROM PAGE 14

noon and demanded money for a local gathering and financial records related to the former principal's tenure.

Aleya began recording the incident on her phone. Shahad tried to stop her, and she slapped him. Shahad then took off his sandal and hit her with that.

Another video shows the teacher assaulting Afaz on the college ground later on.

Shortly afterwards, BNP leaders and activists assaulted Principal Abdur Razzak and several other teachers and vandalised the office room, Aleya told The Daily Star.

At least five people, including the principal, Aleya, and Prof Rezaul Karim Alam, were injured.

Aleya claimed that the group had repeatedly demanded financial accounts as part of extortion attempts. “They attacked me because I stood by the principal and protested.”

Talking to this newspaper, Shahad, seen in the viral video, said, “I have leased a pond from the college for fish farming. I went to the college to pay the lease money. As the situation there was tense and there had already been an ongoing conflict between the college teachers and some other people, I wanted

to leave. At that point, Aleya got into an argument with me for no reason and slapped me. After being slapped, I lost control, took off my sandal and hit her several times.”

Akbar, vice president of Joynagar union BNP, claimed that they sought accountability over alleged irregularities and corruption. He also alleged that Aleya first attacked them, leading to escalation.

After the incident, Akbar was expelled from all party positions, including primary membership, for engaging in activities deemed against party discipline and principles, according to a press release signed by BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi yesterday.

Principal Razzak told this correspondent that the BNP group had been demanding money since he joined the college four months ago. The group got infuriated as he refused to pay the money.

Rafiqul Islam, investigation officer of Durgapur Police Station, said police had been present anticipating unrest and tried to restrain both sides. “However, some people entered the college premises forcibly and carried out the assault and vandalism,” he said, adding that no complaint has yet been filed.

Heatwave to linger

FROM PAGE 1

According to the BMD, yesterday's highest temperature was recorded at 37.3°C in Rajshahi, while Dhaka experienced a high of 37°C.

Shaheenul explained that temperatures between 36°C and 37.9°C are classified as a mild heatwave; 38°C to 39.9°C are moderate; 40°C to 41.9°C are severe; and temperatures above 42°C are a very severe heatwave.

The hot and humid weather is severely affecting residents. Low-income people, especially those living on footpaths or under open skies, are among the worst affected.

People who spend long hours outdoors are also struggling under the intense heat, particularly motorbike riders and passengers of vehicles without air conditioning.

Many individuals are experiencing health issues such as asthma, tonsillitis, and fever due to the extreme weather conditions.

“I felt nauseous in the morning and suffered from diarrhoea due to the intense heat, though it subsided after taking oral saline,” said Anwar Hossain, a resident of the capital's West Razabazar.

He added that rainfall is essential to bring relief from the ongoing heatwave.

In Khulna, the heatwave continues to intensify, with Jashore recording the country's highest temperature on Thursday.

The Met Office reported that Jashore recorded 38°C, followed by Khulna at 37.5°C and Mongla at 37.4°C. Temperatures in Chuadanga, Satkhira, and Kumarkhali hovered around 37°C, while Koyra recorded 36.8°C.

Meteorologists said the rising temperatures have

significantly increased discomfort, making daily life increasingly difficult.

Day labourers and rickshaw pullers reported a sharp decline in income due to the extreme heat. Monsur, a rickshaw puller who travels from Tala in Satkhira to Khulna city, said, “I have been pulling a rickshaw for nearly a decade, but I have never experienced such extreme heat. After dropping a passenger, I need to rest under a tree before continuing. Sometimes I cannot find passengers, and my daily earnings have dropped.”

At a road construction site, around 30 to 35 women were seen working under the blazing sun. One of them, Ruksana Parvin, said they earn Tk 450 a day and rely on saline water to cope with dehydration.

Samrididhi Swasty, a ninth-grade student of Khulna Government Girls' High School, said commuting to after-school coaching classes has become exhausting due to the heat.

Frequent power cuts have further worsened the situation. According to the West Zone Power Distribution Company Limited, at 1:00pm on Wednesday, power supply stood at 607 megawatts against a demand of 810 megawatts, resulting in a deficit of 203 megawatts.

A similar shortfall occurred later that evening, when demand reached 765 megawatts but supply was only 601 megawatts, leaving a gap of 164 megawatts.

Md Mizanur Rahman, in charge of the Khulna Meteorological Office, said the heatwave is likely to continue for the next few days. However, rainfall is expected today or tomorrow, which may bring some relief.

Ballal Hossain

FROM JACKET 1

modern techniques like a polynet house and built his nursery into a thriving business. Today, he earns around Tk 40 lakh annually, creates jobs

for others, and supplies quality seedlings across multiple districts, proving that even from the harshest beginnings, persistence and courage can rewrite one's destiny.

Rahima Khatun

FROM JACKET 1

she became a trusted figure known as “Doctor Apa”, working tirelessly to improve maternal health, raise awareness about family planning, and stand beside women in their most difficult moments. Her personal

pain has, in many ways, become the foundation of her compassion, driving her not only to serve but to uplift, often going beyond her duties and even bearing costs herself, leaving a lasting emotional and social impact on her community.

Nagina Najnin Banu

FROM JACKET 1

efforts carved a path for her in an industry few could have imagined thriving in rural Bangladesh. Her courage became contagious. Women from surrounding villages saw in her a reflection of what was possible for themselves. Inspired by her journey, many stepped out of financial dependence and into meaningful work, learning skills, earning an income, and discovering confidence they had

never known before. For them, she was more than an entrepreneur; she became proof that one woman's resilience can spark transformation in hundreds of lives. Today, as women across Thakurgaon shape mozzarella cheese that reaches markets far beyond their villages, they also carry forward the legacy of the woman who showed them that empowerment can begin with a single bold step.

Hope rekindles for US-Iran peace talks

FROM PAGE 1

Araghchi “will hold meetings with Pakistan's senior leadership to discuss the latest regional developments as well as ongoing efforts for regional peace and stability”, Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement, without directly referencing talks with Washington emissaries.

Vice President JD Vance is not currently planning to attend, but he will be on standby to travel to Islamabad if negotiations progress, according to CNN, which first recorded the travel plans.

Islamabad was the venue for the first round of talks between the US and Iran.

Meanwhile, US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, speaking around the same time the news emerged, told a briefing that Iran had a chance to make a “good deal” with the United States.

“Iran knows that they still have an open window to choose wisely ... at the negotiating table. All they have to do is abandon a nuclear weapon in meaningful and verifiable ways,” he said.

Reports on Araghchi's trip in Iranian state media and the Pakistani sources made no mention of Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, the speaker of Iran's parliament, who was the head of its delegation at the only talks held so far, earlier this month.

Pakistani sources had said earlier that a US logistics and security team was already in place in Islamabad for potential talks.

The second round of peace talks had been expected on Tuesday but never took place, with Iran saying it was not yet ready to commit to attending, and a US delegation led by JD Vance never left

Washington.

President Donald Trump unilaterally extended a two-week ceasefire on Tuesday at the 11th hour indefinitely to allow more time to reconvene the negotiators.

Oil prices fell yesterday over the prospect of more talks.

Equities traded mixed, however, although the tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite set a fresh record high in New York, thanks to a surge in stocks of chip manufacturing firms like Intel, which saw its shares rocket 25 percent higher after it smashed quarterly earnings expectations.

Oil prices had been climbing earlier in the day as investors worried about a lack of progress in ending the Middle East crisis, with Tehran keeping the Strait of Hormuz closed and the US maintaining a blockade of Iranian ports.

But they dropped as

reports of the possible talks came in. Brent crude, the international benchmark contract, fell back below \$100 a barrel.

The positive news from the market also came as Israel and Lebanon on Thursday extended a separate ceasefire for three weeks at a meeting at the White House brokered by Trump.

Trump said on Thursday he was in no rush to reach an agreement with Iran and wanted it to be “everlasting,” while asserting that the US had an upper hand in a standoff in the Strait of Hormuz.

Trump also said that he would not use a nuclear weapon in the war against Iran.

“Why would I use a nuclear weapon? We've totally, in a way, decimated them without it,” Trump told reporters at the White House when

KEY INSTALLATIONS PHQ warns of possible extremist attacks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police Headquarters has alerted law enforcement agencies across the country to a potential threat of attacks on key installations by supporters of a banned extremist organisation.

The warning, contained in an “urgent and confidential” letter issued on April 23, called for heightened surveillance and stronger security measures nationwide.

The directive was issued by a DIG (confidential) at Police Headquarters in Dhaka. Three senior Bangladesh Police officials confirmed the letter to The Daily Star.

According to the document, intelligence suggests regular communication between Istiak Ahmed Sami alias Abu Bakkar, also known as Abu Mohammad – a recently arrested member

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A tiger cools off in a water trough at Chattogram Zoo to escape the scorching heat. Other animals in the zoo are also struggling amid the intense temperature. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

‘No scope for partisan politics’ at universities Says Khosru

CU CORRESPONDENT

Finance and Planning Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury called for a strict stance against the entry of outsiders into the Chittagong University campus, saying that universities must remain dedicated solely to academic pursuits.

“Universities are for students. It must be ensured that no outsiders, regardless of their political affiliation or religion, can enter the campus,” he said while speaking as the chief guest at the inaugural ceremony of the Saraswati Gyan Mandir on the campus around 10:00am.

Highlighting the importance of diversity in higher education, he said, “Diversity is crucial for a university. Without diversity, progress is not possible.”

The minister noted that not all initiatives can be carried out by the government alone, emphasising the need for collective efforts from all sections of society to build a tolerant, sensitive, humane and stable country.

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HUMAN TRAFFICKING

When cases end in compromise, not conviction

Acquittals rise as victims withdraw, trials drag and evidence remains weak

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and TOUSIF KAIUM

After filing a case in 2020 accusing 14 people of trafficking his son to Libya and extorting money through torture, Mannan Munshi saw it move to trial and pass through years of hearings – only to collapse before charges were framed.

Mannan, from Shariatpur, filed the case with Paltan Police Station on June 14, 2020. He alleged that Monir Howlader, a fellow resident living in Libya, had agreed over the phone to take his son Md Rakib to the North African country.

According to the complaint, Monir initially said no money would be needed. Later, he asked Mannan to give Tk 5,000 and Rakib's passport to his cousin Mohosin for formalities. Mannan said he handed over both on April 4. Rakib's journey was later processed through a travel agency in June 2019 without further payment at that stage.

Soon after Rakib reached Libya, he was captured, Mannan alleged.

“They confined my son in a torture cell and started torturing him for money,” he said in the FIR, adding that traffickers would play his son's screams over the phone while demanding ransom.

Mannan said he sold houses and borrowed money to pay Tk 7.05 lakh in two instalments. The torture, however, continued.

He sought punishment for Monir, Mohosin, and others involved. Police submitted the charge sheet on June 6, 2021, and the Anti-Human Trafficking Prevention Tribunal received the case on September 5. The court later fixed 21 dates for hearings and charge framing.

On February 11, 2024, the tribunal

discharged the accused.

In its order, the tribunal noted allegations that Mohosin Howlader, Monir Hossain, Khokon Howlader, Saiful, Kabir, Shariful Islam Sharif, Jahangir Hossain Matubbar and others trafficked the victim to Libya with



YEAR-WISE ACQUITTAL TREND

2020: 13 of 14 disposed cases ended in acquittal

2021: Both disposed cases

2022: All 34 disposed cases

2023: 415 of 436 cases

2024: 342 of 363 cases

2025: 236 of 245 cases

false job promises and later extorted money through torture.

However, Mannan and the victim's mother Sohagi Begum later submitted affidavits of compromise and testified in court in support of them.

They said Rakib had gone to Libya through the accused but filed the case after losing contact with him. He later returned home after failing to secure a job and subsequently went to Malaysia.

They told the court they no longer had any complaint and had no objection to discharging the accused.

The tribunal said there were no grounds to frame charges under the Human Trafficking Prevention and Suppression Act, 2012, and released the accused.

The case reflects a broader pattern in Bangladesh, where trafficking cases often end in acquittal as victims or families, worn down by lengthy trials and financial strain, opt for compromise.

Shariful Hasan, associate director of BRAC's migration and youth programme, said, “The desperation to leave Bangladesh through irregular routes remains high, while the state response has fallen short.”

He said many migrants are still willing to risk death at sea or detention abroad rather than return home, fuelling trafficking networks.

Official data show how rarely such cases end in conviction.

In 2020, courts disposed of 14 cases, 13 of which ended in acquittal, allowing 43 accused to walk free. In 2021, both disposed cases resulted in acquittal. In 2022, all 34 disposed-of cases ended in acquittal, according to home ministry data.

The number rose sharply in 2023, when 415 of 436 disposed cases ended in acquittal, clearing 1,617 accused people. In 2024, 342 of 363 disposed cases ended in acquittal, releasing 1,250 accused.

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Compensate the survivors, ensure justice

Demand labour leaders marking
13th anniv of Rana Plaza tragedy

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Savar

Every year on April 24, 60-year-old Josna Begum arrives at the site of the Rana Plaza collapse, clutching a small placard bearing her son's photo – her grief still as raw as it was 13 years ago.

The body of her 20-year-old son, Suruj Mia, was never found beneath the rubble in 2013.

“My husband died when the children were young. I raised my two sons with great difficulty. My elder son is disabled and cannot work. Suruj was the sole earner. He disappeared under the rubble of Rana Plaza. Till today, I have not found his body. I have not received justice. I have not received compensation. As a mother, I want justice for the killing of my son,” she said, standing at the site yesterday, still searching for closure.

Marking the anniversary, relatives of the victims, injured workers, and leaders and activists of labour

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ACC seized, froze assets worth Tk 30,351cr in 2025

DIPAN NANDY

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) seized and froze movable and immovable assets worth a total of Tk 30,351 crore in 2025, after securing 370 court orders to this end, according to ACC's Asset Management Unit.

The figure marks a seven-year high, said the sources, adding that assets worth an average of Tk 2,529 crore were seized and frozen per month in 2025.

In 2024 also, the commission had filed a significant number of applications in court for asset seizure and freezing.

In 2025, the ACC obtained 221 court orders to seize immovable assets including 6,979.43 acres of land, 91 houses, 59 buildings, 192 flats, 60 plots, 450 vehicles, 14 commercial spaces, 10 shops, two markets, two ships, and a shotgun – worth Tk 6,137 crore 22 lakh 39 thousand and 657 – within the country, and assets including two flats, eight vehicles, and two houses worth Tk 96 crore 53 lakh 80 thousand and 25 abroad.

Additionally, through 256 court orders, the ACC froze movable assets worth Tk 23,172 crore 78 lakh 87 thousand and 496 within the country and Tk 944 crore 58 lakh 30 thousand and 916 abroad.

The frozen assets include 6,847 bank accounts, 107 savings certificates, over 60 crore shares in 421 companies, 40 FDRs, five lockers, 321 pay orders, investments in various companies, foreign currencies, and gold.

In 2024, the court ordered seizure of assets worth Tk 375 crore 53 lakh 41 thousand 583 and the freezing of assets worth Tk 300 crore 14 lakh 40 thousand 253 within the country. Outside the country, 244 flats, 20 plots, and 79 apartments

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Schoolboy vendor finds hope beyond hardship

S DILIP ROY

As evening falls over Rangpur city, eight-year-old Al Amin steps out onto the streets with packets of popcorn in his hands.

During the day, Al Amin attends school like any average eight-year-old. However, once night falls, he has to sell popcorn to earn enough money so that his family can survive.

Al Amin lives with his maternal grandparents – Nasir Uddin and Rabeya Khatun – in a makeshift hut on the land of an abandoned railway in the Muslimpara area near Rangpur Railway Station.

His father, Shahidul Islam, died three years back. After that his mother remarried, which is when he started to live with his grandparents.

Initially, Al Amin's grandparents looked after their expenses, but once grandfather fell ill a year back, the young boy willingly took on the burden of the household.

After struggling to make ends meet

for over a year, Al Amin's life changed last week.

On April 10, The Daily Star published a report about Al Amin's hardships titled, “Schoolboy by day, family's sole breadwinner by night”.

Lt Col (retd) Zahirul Islam, principal of Monno International School and College in Manikganj, read this report and was deeply moved by Al Amin's story.

“I was deeply saddened after reading Al Amin's story. Why should an eight-year-old have to bear the responsibility of an entire family? He should be going to school and enjoying his childhood. Receiving proper education is his right. It is the responsibility of society to stand beside such families so that children like Al Amin can continue their education without obstacles. That is why I stepped forward,” said Zahirul Islam.

The principal has offered to take personal responsibility for Al Amin's education.

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PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Banana trunk rafts race down the Mayur River in Khulna during a competition marking Khulna Day yesterday. Organised by the Greater Khulna Unnayan Sangram Coordination Committee to raise awareness against encroachment and pollution, the event also revived fading rural traditions.

Begum Fawzia Samad's death anniv today

STAR REPORT

Today is the 15th death anniversary of Begum Fawzia Samad, wife of late MA Samad, founder of Bangladesh General Insurance Company PLC, said a press release.

She was the founder and editor of Minar, the first Bangla children's magazine, published in 1949.

She showed remarkable courage during the Liberation War by allowing her Dhanmondi residence to be used to receive the first cache of arms in April 1971 and to shelter freedom fighters.

She also established free community schools, Kushumkoli, and other humanitarian initiatives. She served as the longest-serving president of the Dhaka Ladies Club from 1973 to 2011, which continues to serve the community.

Fawzia Samad was born on February 28, 1929, in Shillong, Assam, then part of British India. Her ancestral home was in Balaganj upazila of Sylhet.

She was the mother of Towhid Samad, chairman of BGIC, and Fancy Samad, Tamju Samad, and Sabrina Samad.

Govt unleashed

FROM PAGE 5
Shibir and mislead the public.

Addressing criticism that labels Shibir a "secret organisation", Parwar rejected the characterisation and defended the group's presence on university campuses, saying it continued to receive student support despite what he described as sustained propaganda.

The Jamaat leader also said the government had created a crisis over the implementation of the "July Charter", despite signing it, and urged authorities to respect what he termed the "verdict of 50 million voters".

He said incorporating the charter into constitutional law was necessary to resolve the ongoing political crisis.

"If the country is to be saved from political instability and further bloodshed, the July Charter must be implemented," he said, adding that their movement would continue both in parliament and on the streets until then.

Parwar also alleged "election engineering" in past polls and called for a judicial investigation, claiming that a former adviser had acknowledged such irregularities to the media.

He, however, said opposition parties were willing to work with the government to address the ongoing electricity and energy crisis.

He called on party leaders and activists to join protest marches under an II-party alliance in metropolitan cities today and in district towns on May 2.



Environmental activists and locals form a human chain at Rajshahi's Saheb Bazar Zero Point yesterday, demanding an immediate halt to river encroachment, pond filling, and noise pollution.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

Chicken prices drop in Dhaka markets

Eggs, sugar, onion get costlier

UNB, Dhaka

Prices of Sonali chicken in Dhaka markets fell sharply yesterday after more than a month of elevated rates, bringing some relief to consumers, though prices of eggs, sugar and onions moved in the opposite direction.

Retail surveys across key markets, including Karwan Bazar, Shantinagar, Rampura and Badda, showed Sonali chicken selling at Tk 350-360 per kg, down by nearly Tk 100 from Tk 430-460 earlier this month.

However, prices remain well above the Tk 280-320 per kg range seen at the start of March.



Traders attribute the decline to a reduction in bird flu mortality rates at farms. Narsingdi-based supplier

Aminul said avian influenza had wiped out 70-80 percent of Sonali chicken stocks at many farms in recent months. "As the death toll among poultry has eased somewhat, selling at lower prices has become possible again."

But transport costs continue to act as a floor on prices.

Karwan Bazar trader Ebadur said truck fares have risen by over Tk 3,500 per trip, making it impossible to bring retail prices back to Tk 280 per kg regardless of farm-gate improvements.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 6

Youth hacked to death in Kishoreganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kishoreganj

A youth was hacked to death on Thursday evening in Pakundia upazila of Kishoreganj over prior enmity.

Police have detained three suspects in this connection.

The deceased, Md Sunny, 22, of Hijlia village under the upazila, was returning home around 8:00pm when some local miscreants, allegedly led by one Mojful, swooped on him near the mosque in Hijlia Dakshin Para and hacked him with sharp weapons before fleeing the scene.

Critically injured, Sunny was rushed to Pakundia Upazila Health Complex and later sent to Kishoreganj Shaheed Syed Nazrul Islam Medical College Hospital, where a duty doctor declared him dead.

According to locals, Sunny had slapped Mojful during an altercation three years back, and Mojful allegedly attacked him as revenge.

Confirming the incident, SM Arifur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Pakundia Police Station, said police detained three persons suspected to be involved in the incident while the filing of a case was underway.

The body has been sent to the Kishoreganj Shaheed Syed Nazrul Islam Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy, the OC added.

Ex-Jubo Dal leader, others join NCP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Around 3,000 leaders and activists joined the National Citizen Party (NCP) yesterday, claimed the party.

Among them were former Jubo Dal leader Mohammad Ishaq Sarker; Fersamin Huq Iqbal, granddaughter of AK Fazlul Huq; content creator Nuruzzaman Kafi; and activist Mohiuddin Rony.

They formally joined the party at a programme held at the auditorium of the Institution of Diploma Engineers in Kakrail in the capital.

At the event, Convener Nahid Islam and other senior NCP leaders welcomed the new members with flowers after announcing their names.

Nahid said Fersamin joined the party at the central level and will work in Barishal. He also welcomed Nuruzzaman Kafi and Mohiuddin Rony, saying they would all work together in the party.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

Newborn's body recovered from roadside in Jashore

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Police yesterday recovered the body of a newborn girl from a carton left under a tree by the roadside in the Jamtala area of Goadadah village under Jashore Sadar upazila.

According to locals, a man was seen leaving a paper carton by the roadside and quickly fleeing the scene early yesterday. Suspicious of his behavior, the locals opened the box and found the body of a newborn girl inside. They immediately informed the police, who later arrived at the spot and recovered the body.

Masud Khan, officer-in-charge of Jashore Kotwali Police Station, confirmed the incident.

When cases end in compromise

FROM PAGE 3
The pattern continued in 2025, when 236 of 245 disposed cases ended in acquittal, with 857 accused walking free.

CID officials say trafficking persists despite arrests because demand for irregular migration remains strong.

"Many still choose these routes after seeing others succeed, often ignoring the risks," said Mohammad Badrul Alam Mollah, special superintendent of CID's Serious Crime Unit.

Officials also cited difficulties in obtaining evidence from abroad.

On low conviction rates, Badrul said, "Documentary evidence can often be collected, but field-level investigators struggle to properly apply trafficking laws, creating gaps that allow accused persons to walk free."

Another challenge is the difficulty of securing records and evidence from abroad in time for the trial.

One such case involves eight Bangladeshis who died when a boat sank off Tunisia on February 14, 2024, while en route from Libya to Italy.

Investigators are still waiting for autopsy and inquest reports from Tunisia, sought in August last year through mutual legal assistance.

The delay has held up the charge sheet, and several accused remain absconding, officials said.

The investigation officer in the case, CID Sub-Inspector Swapan Mia, said efforts are being made

to arrest the absconding accused.

Mostofa Kamal Khan, public prosecutor of Dhaka's anti-human trafficking tribunal, said repeated acquittals stem from structural weaknesses.

He cited poor awareness, poverty, weak understanding of the law among some lawyers and investigators, lack of technical support, and difficulty in collecting foreign evidence.

He added that cases often take around five years, leaving victims unwilling to continue, while witnesses are often unavailable.

Another recent case highlights how such networks operate.

Mohammad Zakir Hossain of Chandpur left Bangladesh on June 12, 2024, after being promised travel to Italy. Instead, he ended up in Libya, where he was confined in a "game ghar" for eight days, later jailed, and eventually returned home on August 28.

He said he had filed a case with CID but is willing to settle if the accused repays the remaining amount.

Zakir said he paid Tk 15 lakh for the journey and has recovered only part of it. One accused was arrested after the payment was traced to his bank account. The accused later agreed to pay Tk 6.5 lakh each to two complainants, but Zakir has so far received Tk 5 lakh.

He said they were promised legal travel to

Italy on visit visas but were instead taken to Dubai, then Egypt, and later Libya. Only after reaching Egypt did they realise the deception.

In Libya, he said, they were confined, given minimal food and water, and later detained before returning home.

To arrange the Tk 15 lakh, Zakir used Tk 2 lakh of his own savings, borrowed Tk 7 lakh from in-laws, and took loans from others.

After returning home, he said he remains burdened by debt.

CID data show 316 trafficking cases are currently under investigation, including 31 linked to Libya. In the past year, charge sheets were submitted in 123 cases.

Shariful Hasan said these cases show how trafficking routes through Libya continue to shift and expand, while legal responses lag behind.

"Stronger coordination at home and with foreign countries is needed to stop migrants from repeatedly falling into the same deadly trap," he said.

ACC seized, froze

FROM PAGE 3
were attached, along with assets equivalent to US\$ 200,000 being restrained.

Moreover, 400 new inquiries were added in 2025 to the 717 pending from the previous year, bringing the total to 909. Of these, 163 were completed, 449 were converted into cases, 47 were closed, and 13 were disposed of through other means.

Also, 29 new files were added to 60 already pending money laundering-related inquiries, of which 73 are ongoing inquiries and 16 were completed. In asset-related inquiries, 219 new files were added to the 377 pending, of which 60 were completed, 137 were converted into cases, and 20 were closed.

At the investigation stage, 449 cases were ongoing, including eight new cases. Out of total 794 investigation activities, 129 were completed, with 104 resulting in charge sheets and 21 in final reports.

In asset-related investigations, 468 were ongoing, with 166 new ones added. Of these, 70 were completed and 54 charge sheets were filed. In

money laundering-related investigations, five out of 189 were completed, and five charge sheets were submitted.

Manjur Morshed, director of the ACC's Asset Management Unit, said that during inquiries and investigations against various individuals, if assets suspected to be illegal are identified, applications are made to the court for issuing orders to seize and freeze those.

"As part of this process, assets worth over Tk 30,351 crore were seized and frozen last year under court orders," he said, adding that the ACC is continuing its efforts to repatriate assets seized and frozen abroad through maintaining communication with the respective countries and following necessary procedures.

PRAYER TIMING					
APRIL 25					
Fajr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha	
AZAN 4:20	12:45	4:45	6:29	8:00	
JAMAT 4:55	1:15	5:00	6:34	8:30	
SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION					

PADMA OIL PLC
(An Enterprise of Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation)
Strand Road, Shadarghat, Chattogram.
Ref: 28.22.0000.856.14.023.25/048 Date: 22/04/2026

2nd Corrigendum Notice
FOR

"Procurement of 3 Nos. x Aircraft Refuellers for POCL Aviation Refuelling Facilities at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, Dhaka, Bangladesh".

Ref. E&P/BPC Budget/R-Tender/HSIA/F-10/P-33/25-26

This is for information of all concerned that following amendments of Tender Notice have been made:

Sl no.	Existing	Amended
18	Tender Last Selling Date	29/04/2026 upto 12:00 PM
19	Tender Closing Date and Time	30/04/2026 at 02.00PM
20	Tender Opening Date and Time	30/04/2026 at 03.00PM

All other terms and conditions of the Tender Document shall remain unchanged.

(Md. Faruk Hossain Mahmud)
Deputy General Manager (Operations)

GD-908

On Her 15th Death Anniversary

"Rabbir Ham Huma Kama Rabba Yani Sagira"

Fawzia Samad
(1929 - 2011)

We Continue,
To remember her work as the Founder & Editor of *Minar* the first Bangla children's magazine published in 1949. Her courage in allowing her home at Dhanmondi to receive the first cache of arms in April 1971 and sanctuary to freedom fighters. Her setting up Free community schools "**Kushumkoli**" and such other humanitarian facilities she founded as the longest serving President of **Dhaka Ladies Club** and which still continue to serve the community.

A short silent prayer for her heavenly rest is requested.

-Family and well wishers

Four killed in road crashes in 3 districts

STAR REPORT

At least four persons, including a woman, were killed and another was injured in separate road accidents in Noakhali, Jhenaidah and Magura districts in the last two days.

In Noakhali, a speeding truck carrying nursery saplings hit a stationary cement-laden covered van around 7:00am yesterday morning, leaving two persons dead and one other critically injured on Noakhali-Feni regional highway in Senbagh upazila.

The deceased are Al Amin, 55, a nursery businessman, and Faisal, 35, the truck driver. Both hailed from Alankarkathi village under Swarupkathi upazila of Pirojpur.

The victims were rushed to Noakhali 250-bed General Hospital, where two succumbed to their injuries around 11:00am, while the injured individual was later sent to Dhaka for advanced treatment, said Milton Mondal, a sub-inspector of Chandraganj Highway Police Station.

The bodies have been sent to the hospital morgue for autopsy, the SI added.

In Jhenaidah town, a woman was crushed to death by a truck in the Arappur area yesterday afternoon.

The victim, Shammi Akter, 42, of Kushtia town, fell from her husband's motorcycle in front of Mashiur Rahman Girls' School due to the damaged condition of the Arappur-Chuadanga Stand road. A truck from behind ran her over. She died on the spot.

The body has been sent to Jhenidah Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy, said Shamsul Arefin, officer-in-charge of Jhenaidah Sadar Police Station.

In Magura, a man died as an oncoming private car hit a rickshaw-van in Sabinagar area under Sreepur upazila around 11:00pm on Thursday night.

The deceased, Hafizur Rahman, 42, was a teacher at Hat Fazlpur Secondary School and a resident of Sabinagar village.

Critically injured, Hafizur was rushed to Magura Sadar Hospital, where a duty doctor declared him dead.

Confirming the incident, OC Ataur Rahman of Sreepur Police Station said the car has been seized and legal steps were underway.



A farmer collects drinking water under the blazing sun at Madhyachar in Char Majhardia, Rajshahi, where 28 varieties of rice are ripening on thousands of bighas of land. With diesel shortages crippling irrigation, farmers struggle to water their crops, queueing for oil and enduring drought conditions on the Padma char. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

Eight years on, bridge over Karatoa still unfinished

S DILIP ROY

The much-anticipated Joyantipur bridge over the Karatoa River has remained incomplete eight years after work began, leaving nearly 8 lakh people across four upazilas grappling with daily transport hardship.

The 294-metre-long and 9.8-metre-wide bridge was intended to connect Pirganj upazila in Rangpur with Nawabganj, Birampur and Hakimpur in Dinajpur, ensuring direct communication between the regions.

However, prolonged delays have kept the project in limbo, frustrating residents who now face another monsoon without relief.

According to the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), the initiative was first taken in 2015, but administrative hurdles, tender delays and contractor-related complications slowed progress from the outset.

Construction formally began in 2018 under a firm named PPL, with an estimated cost of Tk 29.48 crore. The work came to a halt in 2023 following the contractor's death and ensuing management issues.

After a prolonged pause, LGED retendered the project in 2024, awarding the remaining work to AK SBM (JV) at a cost of Tk 22.24 crore. The revised deadline was set for March 2026, but that timeline has already passed with the project still unfinished.

Pirganj Upazila Engineer Asaduzzaman Bappi said the new contractor has submitted



a letter seeking time until December this year. The higher authorities are considering an extension of the deadline.

Officials say around 60 to 65 percent of the bridge work has been completed. However, approach roads on both sides are yet to be constructed, while only limited work on girders and slab casting is

currently underway.

In the absence of the bridge, residents continue to cross the river at considerable risk. During the dry season, a bamboo footbridge serves as a makeshift crossing, while small boats are the only option during the monsoon. Commuters, including students, patients and traders, are forced to endure long and costly detours.

Although the direct distance between Pirganj and Nawabganj is about 18 kilometres, people now travel nearly 55 kilometres using alternative routes, increasing both travel time and expenses. Transporting goods or accessing emergency services has become particularly difficult.

"Movement of ordinary people, including school and college students, has become very difficult. It is not possible to reach destinations on time. The bridge work should be completed quickly," said farmer Zahir Ali of Sodpur village.

College teacher Abchar Ali echoed the concern, saying, "We have to use an alternative route to travel to Rangpur. This increases both time and cost. We are suffering due to the delay in the work."

Health minister orders withdrawal of three officials Cites dissemination of misinformation to media

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

Health Minister Mohammad Sakhawat Hossain yesterday ordered the withdrawal of three hospital officials in Munshiganj, citing the dissemination of incorrect information to the media.

The officials are Munshiganj General Hospital Superintendent Dr Ahammad Kabir, Civil Surgeon Dr Kamrul Zomadder, and stenotypist Md Mizanur Rahman from the Civil Surgeon's Office.

The minister directed the withdrawals during a surprise visit to the 250-bed Munshiganj General Hospital in the evening.

There, addressing the journalists, he said the recent rise in measles cases is due to past governments' failures in ensuring regular vaccination for children.

"No nationwide measles vaccination campaign was carried out in the last six years. Due to this failure, many children were left unvaccinated, leading to the current outbreak," he said.

The minister added that the government has now launched a nationwide measles vaccination drive to contain the situation. Initially introduced in 30 upazilas, the programme has been expanded across the country since the 20th of this month.

"We hope the measles situation will come under control soon with this ongoing campaign," he said.

Earlier, the minister held a meeting to review healthcare services in Munshiganj.

Govt unleashed JCD against Shibir

Alleges Golam Parwar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenaidah



Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Mia Golam Parwar yesterday alleged that the government had "unleashed" Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal against Islami Chhatra Shibir amid the ongoing political situation.

Speaking at a Jamaat ward presidents' conference as the chief guest at a programme at Johan Dream Valley Park auditorium in Jhenaidah, he claimed that while the government talks about compromise in parliament, JCD activists have carried out attacks on Shibir members in different parts of the country.

Parwar alleged that Shibir activists were attacked in Chattogram, Cumilla, Pabna and Ishwardi. Student leaders elected by "30,000 votes" at Ducusu were also targeted.

He further claimed that misinformation and "false photo cards" were being used to discredit

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

Garbage piles up as CCC's centralised plan 'stalls'

Residents face irregular services

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Chattogram

The Chattogram City Corporation's (CCC) move to centralise door-to-door waste collection has faltered, leaving large swathes of the port city grappling with uncollected garbage and a resurgence of unauthorised fee collection.

Barely a month after Mayor Shahadat Hossain scrapped the private vendor-based system and declared a "free" service from April, residents say the new arrangement has devolved into "a complete shambles".

In neighbourhoods such as Jamal Khan, Shulakbahar, Patharghata and North Kattali, waste collection has become erratic. Locals report that the daily visits once ensured by private van pullers have largely disappeared, resulting in piles of garbage clogging bins and alleyways.

"The van pullers used to come every morning. Now, we don't see them for three days straight," said Mohammad Ismail of Sholoshahar, adding, "The garbage is piling up, creating an unbearable stench."

During visits to several areas,

including Jamal Khan By-Lane, Hem Sen Lane, Momin Road and Anderkilla, this correspondent found bins overflowing with household waste.

Although CCC Secretary Mohammad Ashraful Amin has warned that no third party is authorised to collect fees, residents allege that "shadow vendors", including former



workers, are demanding Tk 50-100 per household. Many say they pay out of fear their waste will otherwise be left unattended.

Nasir Ahmed of Bibir Hat said fee collection persists despite the mayor's declaration.

CCC officials, however, insist services are continuing. "Our conservancy workers regularly collect

wastes from the houses," said Deputy Chief Conservancy Officer Pranab Kanti Sharma. The corporation has deployed around 2,000 cleaners to replace the previous decentralised system, he added.

Yet logistical gaps remain stark. Of the almost 3,000 tonnes of waste generated daily, CCC can handle only about 2,500 tonnes, leaving roughly 500 tonnes accumulating in drains and canals, according to a 2022 study by Cuet's civil engineering department.

Defending the decision, Mayor Shahadat said the fee-based system was scrapped due to public reluctance to pay and multiple complaints. "We have coordinated our employees with the current vendors and are providing subsidies. Now, waste collection is being managed directly by the city corporation," he said.

With the monsoon approaching, residents fear the situation could get worse. "If the system isn't streamlined immediately, the first heavy rain will wash this garbage into the drainage network, paralysing the streets," said Soumen Barua of Jamal Khan.

Ex-Jubo Dal leader, others join NCP

FROM PAGE 4

Nahid, also the opposition chief whip at the parliament, specially welcomed Ishaq Sarker, a former Jubo Dal leader expelled from the BNP, noting that many of his followers had also joined the NCP.

He described Ishaq as the main attraction, citing his leadership roles in Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal and Jubo Dal and his involvement in anti-fascist movements.

"Ishaq is an inspiration who has stood with the people and the youth,"

Nahid said, adding that around 3,000 of his followers joined the party.

Speaking at the programme, Nahid said the NCP aims to reorganise the country in line with people's aspirations for change and reform.

"Before the election, we told people that this election was meant to change the country. But after coming to power, the government denied the referendum and turned it into a routine transfer of power," he said.

He alleged that reform initiatives were being

scrapped and criticised what he described as renewed politicisation of institutions.

"We are seeing bank looters being allowed to return. Institutions are being politicised, and in universities, muscle power and partisan politics are re-emerging," he said.

Calling for local government polls, Nahid said youth would dominate the upcoming elections.

"There will be a victory of the youth in local government elections, with the support of the NCP," he said.

NCP spokesperson Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuiyain, Chief Coordinator Nasiruddin Patwary, Chief Organiser (North) Sarjis Alam, and other senior leaders were present.

Earlier, on April 19, 44 leaders from the Amar Bangladesh Party (AB Party), United Peoples Bangladesh (UP Bangladesh), and the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement joined the NCP. Most were activists of UP Bangladesh, a platform formed by former Islami Chhatra Shibir leaders.

PHQ warns

FROM PAGE 3

of a banned extremist group -- and two dismissed army personnel. The letter, however, did not name the organisation.

Police Headquarters warned that these individuals may carry out attacks on "state important installations," including the National Parliament, Shabbagh intersection, and various places of worship. Police and army establishments, as well as entertainment centres, were also listed as potential targets.

The letter added that the group may have plans to target armouries of different forces as part of their preparations.

"They are extremely risky for the overall security of the country," the letter stated.

Profiles of the two alleged planners -- hailing from Sylhet and Dhamrai in Savar -- were attached to the letter.

In light of the threat, Police Headquarters instructed all concerned authorities to strengthen security at the mentioned locations, increase surveillance, and take appropriate legal action against those involved.

The letter was circulated to senior officials of multiple units, including the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), Special Branch, Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Anti-Terrorism Unit, highway police, industrial police, metropolitan police commissioners, range DIGs, and district superintendents of police nationwide.

No scope for partisan Compensate

FROM PAGE 3

Referring to the constitution, he said all citizens of Bangladesh have equal rights and there is no need to use terms like "minority" or other divisive labels.

"We must move forward as equal citizens," he said, adding that positive changes are already visible in the country.

Also speaking at the event, State Minister for Land and Chattogram Hill Tracts Affairs Mir Mohammad Helal Uddin said the government is committed to building a "Bangladesh of dreams" under capable leadership.

"We are determined to implement all promises made to the people, and God willing, within the next five years, each commitment will be realised," he said.

Among others, Prime Minister's Special Assistant Bijon Kanti Sarkar, PM's

Principal Secretary ABM Abdus Sattar, and the Chairman of CU Abdul-Anita Trust Abdul Kanti Chowdhury were present as special guests. The programme was presided over by CU Vice-Chancellor Prof. Mohammad Al-Forkan.

In 2011, in response to a demand from the Sanatan Dharma Parishad -- a council comprising Hindu teachers, students, and officials from various departments -- an initiative was taken to construct a temple on approximately 20,000 square feet of land in the university's north campus area.

Subsequently, in 2012, the proposal was approved by the university syndicate.

On February 4, 2019, work began on laying the foundation stone of the temple. The main structure, built in an elegant architectural style, was fully funded by the Adul-Anita Trust.

Chicken prices drop

FROM PAGE 4

Broiler chicken also dipped to Tk 180-190 per kg from Tk 200-220, while indigenous chicken eased to Tk 700-720 per kg from Tk 750-780 the previous week.

Egg prices rose by Tk 10-20 per dozen, with a dozen now fetching Tk 130-140 against last week's Tk 120. Loose sugar climbed to Tk 110-115 per kg from Tk 100-105, while onion prices edged up to Tk 40-45 per kg from Tk 35.

Beef prices, which spiked around Eid-ul-Fitr, remain stubbornly high at Tk 820-850 per kg, up from the pre-Eid norm of Tk 750-800, with no sign of retreat after two months.

Hilsa prices have

roughly halved since Pahela Baishakh, according to sellers. But shoppers remain sceptical. Rampura buyer Saidul said medium-sized Hilsa is still going for Tk 1,800-2,000 per kg, up from Tk 1,500 a month ago, while larger fish above one kilogram are selling at Tk 2,500-2,600 per kg compared to Tk 2,200 previously.

Bottled edible oil supply has yet to be normal. Consumers complained that five-litre soybean oil bottles are unavailable at most shops, forcing them to buy loose oil at premium prices. Shoppers called on authorities to step up market monitoring to restore normal supply conditions.

organisations gathered at the site to commemorate those killed in one of the country's deadliest industrial disasters.

They placed flowers at a temporary altar and reiterated demands for justice and compensation.

Rafiqul Islam Sujan, president of the Bangladesh Garment and Industrial Workers Federation, said April 24 should be declared a National Workers' Mourning Day.

He also called for the construction of a memorial monument at the Rana Plaza site, acquisition of the land, rehabilitation of affected workers, maximum punishment for those responsible, and compensation of Tk 4.8 million for injured workers -- equivalent to their lifetime income.

Taslima Akhter, president of Bangladesh Garment Workers Solidarity, told The Daily Star that justice has yet to be ensured.

"Even after 13 years, justice has not been ensured for the deaths of so many workers, and their rights have not been established. We hope the present government will fulfil our demands and ensure justice," she said.

Khairul Mamun Mintu, legal affairs secretary of the Bangladesh Garments and Sweater Workers Trade Union Centre, described the collapse as a "planned killing" and said justice for those involved remains elusive.

"The previous government did not fulfil any of the demands of the victims. We hope the present government will ensure justice and fulfil the long-standing demands of the workers," he said.



An Iranian man walks past symbolic belongings laid on the ground at Valiasr Square in Tehran yesterday, in tribute to the schoolgirls in Minab killed in an airstrike. The airstrike hit a primary school in the southern Iranian city on the first day of the war, killing at least 170 people, including students and teachers.

PHOTO: AFP



Putin's rating falls to lowest since 2022

REUTERS, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin's approval rating has fallen for a seventh week in a row to 65.6 percent, its lowest level since the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, according to state pollster VTsIOM.

Russia's paramount leader, who was appointed acting president by Boris Yeltsin just eight years after the fall of the Soviet Union, has ruled the country since 1999 either as president or prime minister.

A former KGB lieutenant colonel who watched the Soviet Union collapse while based in East Germany, Putin will overtake Josef Stalin and become Russia's longest-serving ruler since Empress Catherine the Great if he completes his current six-year term.

But his ratings, though still high by Western standards, have taken a hit in recent weeks. Putin's approval rating is down from 73.3% in March, while trust in him has slipped over the same period to 71% from above 77%, according to VTsIOM.

Free Suu Kyi, more prisoners

Asean chair urges Myanmar

REUTERS, Manila

The Philippines, chair of the regional bloc Asean, yesterday encouraged more prisoner releases in Myanmar, including ousted former leader Aung San Suu Kyi and said a recent amnesty was a positive step towards inclusive national dialogue.

"We reaffirm our commitment to assisting Myanmar, as an integral part of Asean, to achieve a peaceful and durable solution to the political crisis in the country," the Philippines said in a statement as chair of the 11-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Aung San Suu Kyi has been in detention since her elected government was toppled in a 2021 coup and her welfare was discussed this week by Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuanketkeow when he met Myanmar's new President Min Aung Hlaing.

Sihasak said Min Aung Hlaing, who led the 2021 coup, told him Aung San Suu Kyi, 80, was being "well looked after" and "good things" for her were being considered, without elaborating. Sihasak said he had conveyed Asean's concerns about her welfare.

Aung San Suu Kyi has been serving a 27-year sentence after being convicted of multiple offences. Her allies say the charges are politically motivated to keep her at bay.

Her sentence was commuted by one-sixth as part of an amnesty last week for thousands of prisoners that included the release of her ally, Win Myint, the ousted former president. Min Aung Hlaing led the coup that ended a decade of tentative democracy in Myanmar and triggered mass protests and a civil war, prompting an intervention by Asean and its exclusion of the then ruling generals from its summits.

War, drought, aid shortfall to fuel hunger in 2026

Global report says 266m face acute hunger across 47 countries

REUTERS, Rome

Conflict, drought and shrinking aid will keep global hunger at critical levels in 2026, with food insecurity expected to worsen in some of the world's most fragile countries, according to the 2026 Global Report on Food Crises.

The 10th edition of the hunger monitor, published by a coalition of development and humanitarian organisations, said that acute hunger had doubled over the past decade, with two famines declared last year for the first time in the report's history -- in Gaza and Sudan.

In total, 266 million people in 47 countries and territories faced high levels of acute food insecurity in 2025, while 1.4 million people faced catastrophic conditions in parts of Haiti, Mali, Gaza, South Sudan, Sudan and Yemen.

In 2025 alone, 35.5 million children worldwide were acutely malnourished, including nearly 10 million suffering from severe acute malnutrition.

Looking at this year, the report said severity levels remained critical, with only Haiti expected to escape from the worst "catastrophic" band thanks to a slight improvement in security and increased humanitarian aid.

"We are no longer seeing just temporary shocks, but persistent shocks over time," said Alvaro Lario, head of the UN International Fund for Agricultural



Development, which helps draw up the annual report.

"The main message is that food insecurity is not an isolated issue anymore, but is putting pressure on global stability," he told Reuters.

The US Israeli war on Iran has added to the alarm, Lario said, warning that prolonged disruption to energy and fertiliser trade could spill over into global food markets and worsen hunger in import-dependent countries already in crisis.

"Even if the conflict in the Middle East were to end right now, we know that a lot of the food price shocks and inflation will happen in the next six months," he said.

Even before the added stress of this latest war, West Africa and the Sahel looked likely to

remain under heavy pressure this year from conflict and persistent inflation, particularly in Nigeria, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso.

In East Africa, failed rains across much of the Horn of Africa are expected to deepen suffering in Somalia and Kenya, where drought, insecurity, high food prices and reduced humanitarian aid are likely to drive worsening conditions.

The report also warned that humanitarian and development financing for food sectors in crisis fell sharply in 2025 and is projected to decline further.

Humanitarian food-sector funding is estimated to have dropped by some 39% last year from 2024 levels, while development assistance contracted by at least 15 percent.

Americans blame Trump for gas price surge: poll

REUTERS, Washington

A clear majority of Americans blame President Donald Trump for surging gasoline prices, which is weighing on his Republican Party ahead of November's congressional midterm elections, according to a Reuters/Ipsos poll.

Some 77 percent of registered voters in the poll, which concluded early this week, said Trump bears at least a fair amount of responsibility for the recent rise in gas prices.

The view was widely shared across the political spectrum, with 55 percent of Republican voters, 82 percent of independents and 95 percent of Democrats pinning blame on the president for the higher costs.

Some 58 percent of voters, including one in five Republicans and two-thirds of independents, said they would be less likely to support candidates in the November 3 polls who support Trump's approach to the conflict with Iran.

Analysts say Trump's party faces an uphill battle to keep their US House of Representatives majority. Risks are also rising that they will lose control of the Senate.

Only 5 ships pass through Strait of Hormuz in 24 hrs

REUTERS, London

Only five ships, including one Iranian oil products tanker, have passed through the Strait of Hormuz in the past 24 hours, shipping data showed yesterday, after Iran seized two container ships this week and the US continues to blockade Iranian ports.

Shipping traffic passing through the crucial waterway at the entrance to the Gulf during an uneasy ceasefire between Washington and Tehran represents a fraction of the average 140 daily passages before the Iran war began on February 28.

"For most shipping companies, they will need a stable ceasefire and assurances from both sides of the conflict that the Strait of Hormuz is safe to transit," said Jakob Larsen, chief safety and security officer at shipping association BIMCO.

"In the meantime, shipping will be restricted to using routes close to Iran and Oman. Due to their confined nature, these routes cannot safely accommodate the normal volumes of shipping through the Strait of Hormuz," Larsen added.

Between April 22 and early April 23, seven vessels transited the strait, six of which were involved in Iran related trade, analysis from Lloyd's List Intelligence showed.

The closure of the strait has disrupted a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) supplies and triggered a global energy crisis.

Hundreds of ships and 20,000 seafarers remained stranded inside the Gulf with war risk insurers and oil companies watching for any sign that the risks may have eased so they can prepare to sail through.

US THREAT TO OUST SPAIN

Nato 'must remain united': Italy PM

AFP, Nicosia

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni yesterday urged Nato allies to stick together, after a report that the United States was mulling action against Spain over its refusal to support operations against Iran.

"Nato must remain united. I believe it is a source of strength," Meloni told reporters as she attended an EU summit in Nicosia, Cyprus.

The Reuters news agency cited an anonymous US official saying the Pentagon had outlined potential measures to punish allies over their response to the Iran war, including suspending Spain from the alliance.

There is no provision in the Nato treaty allowing for the suspension or expulsion of one of the alliance's members.

US President Donald Trump has repeatedly railed against Nato allies for refusing to help out more with the Iran war, saying he viewed it as a betrayal.

Some of them -- France, Spain and Italy -- did not allow US military aircraft deployed for the war to overfly their territories or to use bases.

Britain initially also refused, but later allowed US flights from its bases for "defensive" missions in the conflict.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, whose country was reportedly singled out for suspension, said Friday he was "not worried", stressing his country was a "reliable member" of Nato.

Meanwhile, as Trump deepens questions over whether Washington would help defend Nato allies, the EU is set to lay out a "blueprint" for how its own mutual assistance clause works if a country is attacked.



El Nino set to return as early as May: WMO

REUTERS, Geneva

The return of El Nino weather conditions are expected from as early as May this year, potentially affecting global temperatures and rainfall patterns, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) said.

A clear shift has been observed in the Equatorial Pacific, with sea-surface temperatures rising rapidly, suggesting a high likelihood of El Nino conditions developing between May and July this year, it said.

The weather pattern is known to disrupt regional climates, potentially bringing increased rainfall to southern South America, the southern United States, parts of the Horn of Africa, and central Asia, while causing drought in Australia, Indonesia, and sections of southern Asia.

According to WMO, El Nino typically lasts between nine to twelve months.



Residents look for their belongings in their flat, a three-storey residential building destroyed after a Russian drone attack in Odesa yesterday. Two people were killed and fifteen were wounded in the attack.

PHOTO: AFP

The cruelty of doing nothing at all

Why spaying and neutering matter

E RAZA RONNY

In Bangladesh, the conversation around spaying and neutering often gets stuck on one idea: “it’s not natural.” It sounds like a fair concern. Animals are meant to reproduce, so why interfere?

But step outside that argument for a moment and look at the streets.

Dogs and cats are not living in forests or balanced ecosystems. They are surviving in crowded cities, feeding on scraps, dodging traffic, and depending entirely on human behaviour. There is nothing natural about that environment. And when animals reproduce within it, the results are rarely gentle.

Around 75% of the world’s dogs are free-roaming, not pets in homes. Which may seem cute to those of us who love dogs. But not everyone does and for good reason. Many can become feral, and bite.



cycle of scarcity. Human tolerance also wears thin. Complaints rise. And in too many cases, cruelty follows.

So the real question is not whether spaying and neutering are “natural.” It is whether allowing this cycle to continue is humane.

Spaying and neutering are routine veterinary procedures that prevent animals from reproducing. When done properly, they are safe and controlled. Animals recover quickly and often become calmer, with fewer behavioural issues linked to mating instincts.

More importantly, these procedures reduce suffering at scale. Fewer births mean fewer animals fighting for survival. It means less disease spreading through dense populations. It lowers the chances of aggressive encounters between animals and humans.

In countries with structured animal control systems, population management is handled through policy, shelters, and enforcement. Bangladesh does not have that safety net at scale. Responsibility, in practice, falls on individuals, communities, and a handful of organisations trying to manage an overwhelming problem.

In that reality, spaying and neutering are not extreme measures. They are one of the few practical ways to reduce long-term harm.



It is easy to argue for leaving nature alone. It is harder to admit that what we are seeing is no longer nature at all, but the outcome of human environments left unmanaged.



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

A single unspayed female dog and her offspring can multiply into dozens within a few years. The same applies to cats. Without any system to manage these populations, the numbers rise quickly. Food does not. Shelter does not. Care certainly does not.

What follows is predictable. Too many animals competing for too little leads to hunger, disease, and aggression. Puppies and kittens are born into conditions where many will not survive. Those that do often grow into the same



MASTURA FARZANA MOHONA

Managing Director
Pawsitive Veterinary Clinic



“True love for a pet is shown through responsible care, requiring regular checkups and timely vaccinations to ensure a long, happy, and comfortable life.”

PAWSITIVE care for your beloved pets

Mastura Farzana Mohona, Managing Director of Pawsitive Veterinary Clinic, is reshaping the landscape of pet healthcare in Bangladesh. As pet ownership grows, she advocates for animal welfare as a fundamental pillar of public health. Through Pawsitive, she bridges the gap between basic care and advanced medical services. Mohona discusses why animal health is a communal necessity and how private organisations can lead the way toward a healthier future.

The Daily Star (TDS): From a healthcare organisation’s perspective, why is animal care an important issue today?

Mastura Farzana Mohona (MFM): Pet ownership is expanding immensely. Animal care today is closely connected to overall public health and wellbeing. Healthy pets reduce the risk of disease transmission and contribute to healthier communities. To establish a healthy environment for both animals and humans, animal care is now a vital necessity, not a luxury.

TDS:How can private healthcare organisations improve access to better pet care in Bangladesh?

MFM:Improving access requires practical and combined efforts. Private organisations must expand services beyond major cities so more people benefit. Pricing should be affordable and transparent so pet owners feel comfortable seeking medical care. They should also work toward raising awareness about preventive healthcare, as many problems are avoided with early detection.

TDS: What are the biggest gaps in pet care services in Bangladesh right now?

MFM: A crucial gap is the lack of 24/7 emergency services. Facilities often lack transparency and have limited access outside major cities. While many veterinary clinics exist, comprehensive treatment facilities which are capable of handling everything from routine checkups to complex surgeries under one roof are still exceptionally rare today.

TDS: What facilities does Pawsitive Veterinary Clinic offer? Where do you see it in 10 years?

MFM: We offer OT, post-operative care, daycare, vaccinations, deworming, and grooming. We have an exclusive isolation room for viral disease patients to prevent contagion. In 10 years, we aim to become a full hospital with advanced diagnostics and critical care systems like the ICU and CCU while expanding branches to ensure nationwide access.

TDS: What message would you give to pet owners about responsible care and prevention?

MFM: Our pet owners are very loving and caring. However, I suggest that prevention is always better than cure. Focusing on preventive healthcare through timely vaccinations and routine medical checkups is essential. These small yet timely steps ensure your beloved pets spend longer, healthier years with you.

Interview conducted by Samia Chowdhury

Positive Care for a Healthier Tomorrow

YOUR PET’S HAPPINESS IS OUR UTMOST PRIORITY

Our SERVICES

1 OPD

2 Surgery & Post OT

3 Vaccination

4 Deworming

5 Pet Supplies

6 Grooming

7 Day Care

Laboratory

Ultrasound

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Emergency

Pharmacy

pawsitivevetclinic.com

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Dhaka, Bangladesh

COMPASSION at the frontlines

On World Veterinary Day 2026, Dr Mir Nishat Tasnim Tania, Senior Veterinarian of Bangladesh Animal Care Center (BACC), emphasises how veterinarians are essential health workers safeguarding public health, food security, and animals.

The Daily Star (TDS): What are the most common health problems you see in pets, and how can they be prevented?

Mir Nishat Tasnim Tania (MNTT): Common issues include gastrointestinal problems, skin conditions, and infectious diseases. While deworming helps, vaccination offers 100% prevention. To avoid accidental injuries like “fall of building” or “hit by car,” owners must cat-proof homes and remain vigilant to ensure safety.

TDS: How important are vaccination, deworming, and proper nutrition in responsible pet care?

MNTT: Most infectious diseases have high mortality rates, making vaccination the only total prevention for pets and zoonotic threats like rabies. Contrary to local myths, the World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA) states puppies and kittens can start vaccinations at 45 days. Additionally, regular deworming prevents anemia, while proper nutrition and filtered water protect against heavy metal-induced kidney damage.

TDS: What role do veterinarians play in protecting public health and food safety?

MNTT: Veterinarians protect public health by ensuring food we eat is free of zoonotic diseases and antibiotic residues, which can cause antimicrobial resistance in humans. They also manage contagious disease outbreaks and promote

vaccination awareness to maintain a healthy community.

TDS: What should pet owners look for when choosing a good veterinary clinic or pet care service?

MNTT: Ensure the clinic follows Bangladesh Veterinary Council (BVC) standards regarding surgery, hygiene, and emergency equipment. One-stop solutions are ideal for immediate diagnosis and treatment. Crucially, verify the vet’s BVC license number and avoid illegal home service surgeries performed by unskilled quacks.

TDS: What can be done to improve care for stray and community animals in Bangladesh?

MNTT: We must prioritise rabies vaccination and population control through spaying and neutering to replace cruel culling methods. This requires a coordinated effort between the government, NGOs, and the vet community. Practicing societal empathy is essential for a safe, healthy coexistence with community animals.

TDS: How often should pets have a routine checkup and what does it include usually?

MNTT: Puppies start at 45 days. Healthy adults need yearly checkups, while seniors require biannual visits. At Bangladesh Animal Care Center (BACC), we perform TPR and comprehensive exams covering eyes, skin, and organs. Since patients cannot speak, BACC utilises thorough systemic physicals to identify abnormalities, ensuring accurate treatment. We then proceed with necessary diagnostic testing immediately.

Interview conducted by Samia Chowdhury



DR MIR NISHAT TASNIM TANIA

Senior Veterinarian
Bangladesh Animal Care Center (BACC) vet hospital



“In many localities, people still choose cruelty to control populations. We must prioritise spaying and neutering over violence and practice deep empathy to ensure a healthy coexistence within our society.”

Ensure justice for Rana Plaza victims

Rehabilitate, compensate the survivors properly

It is deeply frustrating that 13 years after the Rana Plaza tragedy, justice remains elusive for the victims and survivors. Reportedly, both key cases linked to the disaster continue to stall, largely due to the prosecution's failure to produce witnesses. At the same time, those affected by the incident and their families are still struggling for basic compensation and dignified living conditions. The authorities must explain why, after all this time, these basic requirements of justice and support remain unmet.

The collapse of the nine-storey building in Savar on April 24, 2013 killed more than 1,100 people and injured over 2,500, most of them garment workers. It remains the deadliest disaster in the history of the country's RMG sector. Multiple cases have been filed against those responsible, but progress has been painfully slow. According to the Bangladesh Legal Aid Services Trust, no case has reached a final verdict, and full legal remedies, including compensation in accordance with international standards, have yet to be secured.

In the murder case involving 41 accused, including building owner Sohel Rana, only 145 out of 594 witnesses have testified since the trial began in 2016. That leaves a staggering 449 witnesses still unheard. The building code violation case has fared even worse, with not a single witness testifying so far. Such prolonged delays are eroding public trust in the justice system and reinforcing a culture of impunity. For the victims and survivors, this is nothing short of a betrayal. Till today, thousands of the injured RMG workers continue to live in hardship, without adequate compensation, medical care or rehabilitation. Many are permanently disabled, unable to return to work, and struggling to meet even basic needs. Even when compensation has been provided, it has been insufficient to ensure a dignified life or long-term security for the survivors.

This is unacceptable. With a new elected government now in power, we think there is an opportunity to change the course. First, the government must ensure that the stalled trials are expedited by holding law enforcement accountable for producing witnesses and by prioritising these cases. Second, a comprehensive compensation and rehabilitation system must be implemented without further delay, including long-term medical care, income support, and employment opportunities for those affected. Third, compensation must be aligned with international labour standards.

Beyond Rana Plaza, there must be a renewed commitment to workplace safety across the industrial sector. This includes stricter enforcement of building codes, regular inspections, and meaningful penalties for violations. Workers must be empowered to voice safety concerns without fear, and regulatory bodies must be strengthened to act swiftly and independently. The country's economic progress has been built on the back of these workers. Ensuring justice, dignity, and safety for them is a responsibility that should no longer be ignored.

Make hiring at BMU facility transparent

Plan to resume recruitment for super-specialised hospital a positive move

We commend the recently appointed Bangladesh Medical University (BMU) Vice-Chancellor Dr FM Siddiqui for committing to fully operationalise the university's super-specialised facility within six months. The 750-bed hospital, built at the cost of Tk 1,868 crore in 2022, has almost turned into a white elephant. The world-class facility, capable of providing stem cell therapy, gene therapy, and robotic operations, sits idle due to a manpower shortage, while the government continues to pay back the Tk 1,047 crore loan taken from South Korea to complete the project. In this context, the VC's announcement to recruit specialised doctors at competitive salaries for the hospital appears hopeful.

The facility requires over 1,000 personnel, including doctors, nurses, medical technicians, and support staff. By June 7, 2023, it recruited only 250 people. Due to allegations of corruption, the recruitment process was halted during the Awami League's tenure. According to a 2024 *New Age* report, 157 hospital employees were sent to South Korea for training for two to four months using hospital funds, but a majority of the doctors and other medical professionals did not report back after completing their training. Several probe committees were formed as a result. During the interim government, the recruitment of 544 doctors, nurses, and other medical staff was scrapped as the committees found evidence of irregularities. Such a past allows only tempered optimism about the future hiring process.

Thus, we urge the BMU VC to ensure that the recruitment process at the super-specialised hospital remains transparent from the very beginning. Nepotism or partisanship must be avoided at all costs. Anticipating that offering the specialised doctors salaries higher than the existing government pay scale may elicit ire in other public hospitals, the VC must handle this issue carefully. However, the focus should not just be on doctor recruitment. If the specialised facility is to provide healthcare services to 5,000 patients daily, as originally envisioned, it must also ensure international standards in the quality of support provided by the hospital's nurses and other medical staff. Properly trained technicians are also required to operate and maintain the state-of-the-art medical equipment at this hospital.

While it remains to be seen whether this facility will actually begin providing the envisioned care in the next six months, one issue we urge the government to avoid is building healthcare facilities without a fully approved operational plan, including staffing, budgeting, and management frameworks. A country under fiscal strain cannot afford white elephants in its healthcare sector.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Massive earthquake rocks Nepal

On this day in 2015, a 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck near Kathmandu in Nepal, killing about 9,000 people. More than 600,000 structures in Kathmandu and nearby towns were damaged or destroyed.

How power cuts draw a map of inequality



Jannatul Naym Pical is a writer, researcher, and journalist. He can be reached at jn.pical@gmail.com.

JANNATUL NAYM PIEAL

Bangladesh's power shortage has increased recently, placing additional strain on an already stretched national grid. The Power Division revealed that Thursday's peak demand stood at 17,000MW, while generation was estimated to reach only 14,000MW, leaving a shortfall of around 3,000MW. The day earlier, a deficit of over 2,000MW translated directly into load-shedding.

The reasons are well-rehearsed by now: rising summer heat, gas shortages, coal constraints, higher import costs of fuel, and pressure on foreign exchange reserves. At present, 71 of the country's 143 power plants are either idle or operating below capacity due to shortages of gas, coal, and furnace oil. To meet peak summer demand, the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) requires about 1,200 million cubic feet of gas daily, but is receiving only around 870 million. This structural fuel gap alone explains a large share of reduced output.

Domestic constraints, however, are not the only pressure point. Internal data from Wednesday shows that India's Adani Power, currently Bangladesh's largest single source of imported electricity, temporarily reduced supply after one unit of its cross-border plant went offline for maintenance, cutting output by half to around 750MW. Since Bangladesh relies on these units for about 10 percent of daily electricity, even temporary disruptions deepen the crisis. The Power Division expects some easing from late April to early May with the phased return of generation units, including Adani as well as plants like Chattogram's SS Power and Patuakhali's RNPL.

But what is unfolding alongside this familiar energy stress is something more structurally revealing. The national figures, taken alone, suggest a system under pressure but still broadly functioning. But the experience of that shortage changes sharply once it moves from the grid to geography. Urban centres, particularly Dhaka, continue to receive relatively stable supply with shorter outages, even though State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Anindya Islam Amit said on Thursday that the government had decided to trial around 110MW of load-shedding in the capital.

District towns and rural areas face longer and more frequent interruptions, often stretching into hours. In Rajshahi, Rangpur, Barishal, and Sylhet's peripheral upazilas, rural outages now routinely stretch from 8-13 hours a day. Half-day shortages are becoming increasingly normal in some areas. Even within the same administrative regions, urban centres tend to remain relatively stable while the surrounding unions bear the heavier burden. A similar imbalance is visible in industrial zones: Gazipur and Narayanganj, for example, are prioritised to keep production running, whereas nearby rural belts absorb longer cuts.



Urban centres in Bangladesh, particularly Dhaka, continue to receive relatively stable electricity supply with shorter outages, while district towns and rural areas face longer and more frequent interruptions, often spanning hours.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

This is where the logic of "load management" reveals its deeper mechanism. Officially, it is framed as a technical necessity: protecting critical infrastructure, sustaining industrial output, and preventing grid instability. That rationale holds in operational terms. But in practice, it also becomes the channel through which scarcity is organised. Once prioritisation is introduced, it tends to stabilise into a pattern. Over time, the power distribution begins to reflect not just technical need but accumulated hierarchy.

In rural and semi-urban areas, this hierarchy is experienced through fractured daily life. Irrigation schedules collapse into uncertainty, directly affecting crop cycles, while rising

diesel dependency adds to the financial pressure. Water systems dependent on electric pumps become unreliable. Small industries and informal economic sectors face similar strain. Larger industrial clusters continue production but at higher operational costs and reduced efficiency, while smaller units absorb disproportionate losses.

There is also a quieter but increasingly visible cost in education. Students preparing for public examinations, particularly SSC candidates at present, deal with disrupted study environments during peak heat. Study hours are repeatedly broken, concentration becomes difficult, and preparation itself turns inconsistent.

And then, alongside uneven supply, another pressure is emerging on the consumption side. There is growing concern that electricity prices may rise further as generation costs increase and subsidy pressures intensify. This adds a second layer to the crisis: besides unreliable access, households face a rising financial burden. Crucially, this cost pressure is also uneven: those

Board (BREB) figures at times show significantly higher shortages than BPDB estimates for the same period, seemingly reflecting different calculation methods. Officials note that demand is often inferred rather than directly measured, while generation is shaped by fuel availability. Even within institutions, there is no fully aligned picture of the shortage being managed.

At the root of this imbalance is a fragile energy structure. Installed capacity remains high on paper, but a significant share is constrained by fuel dependency and operational limits. Gas fluctuations, imported coal logistics, furnace oil costs, and the pressure of payment to independent power producers all reduce effective generation. When fuel is tight, output falls unevenly, and shortages are managed through spatial prioritisation rather than uniform rationing.

Recent patterns also show that effective generation consistently falls short of installed capacity, as fuel constraints and operational limits keep a significant share of plants either underutilised or intermittently offline during peak demand. Capacity exists on paper, but its availability is variable and uneven, depending on fuel access, plant condition, and system-level prioritisation.

What is emerging eventually is a different kind of power discrimination, embedded in the management of scarcity itself, normalised through repetition until it appears inevitable.

And that is precisely where the conversation now needs to shift. Because if electricity has become a determinant of opportunity, productivity, and even basic dignity during extreme heat, its distribution cannot remain an administrative afterthought. The widening gap between urban continuity and rural disruption is no longer a seasonal inconvenience; it is a structural outcome that demands correction.

This requires more than short-term balancing during peak demand. It demands transparency in how load-shedding is allocated, alignment between reported data and distribution-level reality, and a serious rethink of whether critical services are being defined too narrowly around geography rather than need. It also requires investment choices that reduce over-centralisation, so that resilience is not concentrated in one part of the country while fragility is exported to another.

The heat will continue to rise, so may demand. Whether the burden of that rise continues to fall unevenly is not a natural outcome but a governed one. And anything that is governed can be redesigned.

PMO needs a policy and programme coordination cell



Ashfaq Zaman is founder of Dhaka Forum Initiative and a strategic international affairs expert.

ASHFAQ ZAMAN

In Bangladesh, big policy ideas have never been in short supply. With the new government, we have been hearing announcements like modern transport systems for Dhaka, renewed efforts to recover the city's canals, and new social protection tools like the Farmer Card and Family Card. These initiatives carry the promise of a state that works efficiently and serves citizens fairly. But anyone who has watched public policy in Bangladesh long enough also knows that there is a gap between policy announcement and policy delivery.

A transport project, for example, involves several ministries and agencies. Canal recovery requires city corporations, water authorities, land offices, and enforcement bodies to coordinate closely. Social protection programmes depend on digital databases from different institutions. In theory, this coordination should be routine work. However, in practice, that is not always the case. One ministry waits for another and files move slowly across departments. Responsibilities overlap and small delays accumulate. Eventually, the promising project begins to lose momentum, resulting in loss of public confidence.

Governments around the world face the same challenge. Designing a good policy is only half the job. Ensuring that it is implemented properly, on

time and across institutions, is an entirely different task. Over the past two decades, many countries have tried to solve this problem by creating small coordination teams at the centre of the government, usually inside the prime minister's office. These teams do not run ministries nor replace bureaucrats. They focus on making sure important policies are actually moving forward. Their job is to track priority programmes, monitor progress, and ask a few straightforward questions. Is the policy being implemented? Are results visible? If not, what is blocking progress?

The UK government in 2001 created the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit to track progress in areas like education, health, and policing. Its role was not to design policies, but to make sure they were delivered. When progress slowed, the unit tried to identify why and pushed institutions to resolve the problem. Malaysia also introduced a similar system with its Performance Management and Delivery Unit (PEMANDU) in 2009. Working inside the prime minister's department, PEMANDU was created to help ministries focus on clear national targets and closely monitor progress. When obstacles appeared, the unit brought agencies together to resolve them. The approach helped speed up

improvements in areas such as public services and crime reduction. Singapore has taken coordination even further. Inside the prime minister's office, specialised teams oversee national strategy and digital governance across ministries. Their systems track government programmes in real time and ensure that agencies operate less like separate islands and more like parts of a single system.

For Bangladesh, the relevance of this approach is becoming increasingly clear. Urban transport reform is not just an engineering project; it involves land authorities, city planners, transport regulators, financial institutions, and environmental agencies. Without strong coordination, even a well-designed project can drift into years of delay. The same challenge will appear in efforts to recover Dhaka's canals which are essential for the city's flood control, environmental protection, and long-term sustainability. Its implementation requires coordinated efforts, contributions, and approvals from multitude of different government ministries, agencies, and organisations. Initiatives like the Farmer Card and Family Card are aiming to distribute subsidies and essential goods more efficiently. These initiatives depend heavily on systems like agriculture databases, social safety net registries, and distribution networks, and a multitude of different ministries. If those systems do not communicate smoothly, the programmes will quickly become less effective.

Establishing a policy and programme coordination cell under the Prime Minister's Office is worth serious consideration to keep major national programmes aligned and moving forward. The cell could track progress

on priority initiatives and highlight problems early and when bottlenecks appear—whether regulatory delays, land disputes, or inter-agency disagreements—it could bring the relevant institutions together to resolve them quickly. A coordination cell could also help policymakers see the bigger picture. Real-time dashboards tracking major initiatives could show where progress is being made and where attention is needed. Another useful role would be bringing outside expertise into the policy process.

Many of today's challenges including energy transition, digital infrastructure, export diversification, extend beyond traditional administrative knowledge. Convening task forces of industry leaders, researchers, and practitioners could provide practical insights from people working directly in these sectors. Such groups could help identify obstacles early and suggest solutions grounded in real-world experience. This kind of coordination has become even more important for us as Bangladesh approaches a major milestone in graduating from least developed country status. Economic diversification, energy security, digital transformation, and urban infrastructure all depend on multiple parts of government working together.

We often forget that Bangladesh has already demonstrated remarkable ambition in its development journey. The next phase may depend less on announcing new policies and more on ensuring that the ones already announced actually reach the people they are meant to serve. Because in modern governance, success is not measured by how many programmes are launched but by how many are delivered.

Reimagining sustainability from the ground up



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

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

Recently, my university came together to celebrate a day that could have been just another checkbox for ranking metrics or media optics. Instead of confining Earth Day to a calendar event, we did something remarkable: we pulled together all our resources to see what we could do for a day dedicated to the planet that we inhabit. Quite fittingly, the last act was an *alpona* made with dried leaves.

My colleague Moniruzzaman Shipu's artwork made me think of the fleeting nature of all our efforts. This year, we consciously avoided overuse of the paint-based *alpona*, the quintessential Bangalee folk motif. These designs, tinged with toxic lead-heavy street paints and synthetic glues, are a terrible beauty. While they adorn our festive seasons, *alpona* designs quickly turn into unsightly scars under traffic, lasting in their true forms only a day or two. What remains is difficult to remove and harmful for breathing. Instead, Shipu's art was crunchy, organic and temporary. It was a protest against our obsession with permanence and a reminder that sustainability is not simply a product that you buy, but a mindset and a lifestyle that you adhere to.

As I looked at those leafy designs, I couldn't help but reflect on the performative "greenness" we often import from the West. This year's Earth Day motto—"Our Power, Our Planet"—shares a similar irony. As a small, soon-to-be developing country, we don't have the power to attack and secure an oil source before blockading the supply chain of fuel for others. Our powerlessness is

evident in the long queue as our fuel reserves start depleting in response to a clash of the titans in a faraway land.

When the "moral North" (a phrase borrowed from Lord Byron's critique of England) uses its compass to export environmental concerns as a compliance issue before purchasing our products, I can't help but reflect on the cycle of double standards. A foreign guest, for instance, came wearing a "Fair Trade" dress. For most of us in a country like Bangladesh, those "sustainable" shops are luxury labels that we can't afford. We don't always build sleek and expensive formulas for ourselves. In the North, recycling is a conscious, often trendy, choice. For a country like ours, recycling is not a trend; it is the default survival mechanism for the poor. Think of our sarees becoming quilts, quilts becoming baby wrappers or dusters, and eventually fuel for kitchen ovens.

This brings us to a challenging question: what does Earth Day really mean for us? Is it just another date to make word salad? Is it about capturing the moment with environmentally friendly optics?

Take the glass carales at high-level meetings, for instance. The water is transported and circulated in plastic bottles, only to be decanted into glass bottles to signal "eco-consciousness." Could we explore the possibility of implementing a proper recycling alternative? Changing the system is challenging. It requires a significant amount of investment. Therefore, we stick to easy eco-aesthetics. The same thing happened when we tried to avoid PVC banners. We found

ourselves trapped in a niche market of "green products" that are far too expensive for average citizens. The issue was discussed at a panel participated by industry experts; the verdict was we need policy-level interventions. Subsidies and soft loans for green products and tariffs on non-sustainable products—we need the carrot and the stick to go green. We need occasions to excite our imagination to tackle the climate crisis.

shared examples from literary texts.

Earth Day at ULAB was a week of radical imagination. Instead of a "celebration," students were engaged in a week-long immersion involving 38 distinct programmes organised by various schools, departments, and clubs. We embraced Earth Day not as a distant concept but as the opportunity to stocktake our resources and ideas. The campus became a laboratory for what Amitav

changing climate, and poetry slams that gave voice to the ecological anxieties of the Gen Z. There were discussions on eco-texts by teachers and students of the Bangla and English departments. A "Trashion Show" was held, transforming discarded materials into a spectacle of accountability.

The GED department organised a talk on the Buriganga River, and our students went to the nearby Turag River and took a solemn pledge to protect rivers. Our environmental science department held a talk on deforestation. They also made a GI-based (geographical indication) map of the campus for tree plantation that puts the right roots in the right soil for planned foliage and blooming.

We had representatives from China and Sweden, among others, to see what other nations are doing to make Earth a sustainable place. The EEE department discussed renewable energy. We talked about two major components of the climate crisis response: mitigation and adaptation. Throughout the week, we aligned ourselves to the global SDGs while practising how to live.

Some might look at these 38 programmes—the talks, the walks, and the workshops—and see them as fleeting, like the leaf *alpona*. Then again, they were designed with care, with a hope that the ideas would be blown away by the breeze to germinate in other places. Through the GI-based plantation or the discussion on green governance, we have started training a generation of leaders who should not be fooled by "greenwashing." We want them to know that a glass bottle filled with water that arrived in plastic is a lie. We want them to know that green labels used as a bargaining chip by the West are a lie. The real sustainability comes from our own culture, our own memory, our own heritage. These products may resemble a soap bar made from plants or artwork created by an artist using dried leaves. We have started nurturing the imagination needed to tackle the planetary crisis. We have started a green convo to know our planet and our power, the motto of this year's Earth Day.



Earth Day 2026 celebration at ULAB.

PHOTO: COURTESY

Our CSE students, thus, participated in a hackathon to come up with some green-solutions-based apps. Our business students did surveys on consumption to measure carbon footprints. Our sustainable club ran a workshop on making nature-based soap using aloe vera, neem or turmeric. Our media students did installation art on recycled materials, showed films and documentaries they made, and made interactive graffiti to create awareness. Our literature students

Ghosh calls the "crisis of imagination." For Ghosh, at its root, the climate crisis is a failure of our stories and our art. We first need to imagine a world that doesn't rely on the destructive habits of the last century. Then, we must share that imagination through storytelling.

Accordingly, our students and faculty participated in a wide array of interventions. There were letters to nature, where students articulated their grief and hope for a

The silent exclusion built into Bangladesh's ID system



Barrister Priya Ahsan Chowdhury
is advocate at the Supreme Court of Bangladesh and associate at Dr Kamal Hossain and Associates.

PRIYA AHSAN CHOWDHURY

When Haya (not real name) applied for an e-passport recently, the form allowed her to provide either her parents' names or those of a legal guardian. She listed her guardian. But during biometric enrolment, officials demanded the names of her biological parents. Weeks turned into months, and she found herself trapped in bureaucratic limbo as her opportunity to study abroad was slipping away.

Her story is far from unique. Across Bangladesh, obtaining a birth certificate, National Identity Card (NID) or passport, the trifecta of documents essential for daily life and travel, is often a puzzle where the pieces don't fit.

The Citizenship Act, 1951 provides that a person born in Bangladesh is a citizen of the country. As a corollary, every citizen is entitled to obtain key identity documents: a passport under the Bangladesh Passport Rules, 1974, framed pursuant to the Bangladesh Passport Order, 1973; a birth certificate under the Birth and Death Registration Act, 2004; and, if

eligible to vote, an NID under the National Identity Registration Act, 2010. While the law does not always require both parents' names, administrative forms, government circulars and digital systems frequently insist on them. The result is frustration, delay, and exclusion for many citizens.

The problem becomes clearer when each document is examined individually. For e-passports, adults can apply using a guardian's name instead of parental details. In practice, however, applications are often halted during biometric enrolment if the biological parents' names are missing, as in Haya's case. Applicants using guardians' names must also obtain a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the home ministry, an additional hurdle not imposed on those able to provide parental information.

For NIDs, there is no option to include a guardian's name in the application form, nor is there space for it on the card itself. As a result, some individuals who are not raised by their parents have had "*jana nei*" (not known)

recorded in place of parental names.

Birth certificates present similar challenges. Application forms and the certificate don't accommodate legal guardians' names. Although the law allows limited flexibility when parental details are unavailable, in practice, this often leads to inconsistent and improvised entries. These documents don't operate in isolation. To obtain an adult passport, personal information must typically match the NID; a child's passport must align with the birth certificate, and NID applications generally rely on birth registration data. A single discrepancy, especially in parental information, can cascade across systems, blocking access to multiple services. For individuals without known parents, this creates overwhelming barriers.

The impact is deeply unequal. Children raised by single mothers, individuals with other guardians than parents, orphans, abandoned children, and those born as a result of sexual violence are disproportionately affected. For them, this is more than an administrative inconvenience. Without a birth certificate, children may be unable to enrol in school. Without an NID, adults face barriers to opening bank accounts, accessing employment, paying taxes, or voting. Without a passport, opportunities for travel and education abroad are effectively closed.

In March 2024, rights organisations Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, and

Naripokkho filed a writ petition challenging these barriers. They contended that recognition of citizenship should not depend on naming parents, and that mandatory parental disclosure violates fundamental rights guaranteed under the constitution, including equality before the law, equal protection of law, non-discrimination, the right to life (encompassing education, healthcare, and work), and freedom of movement. The petition also argued that such requirements are inconsistent with Bangladesh's obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which prohibits discrimination based on sex and marital status, and adversely affect children unable to identify their biological parents, contrary to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

On March 10, 2024, the High Court issued a *rule nisi* asking the government to explain why it should not amend relevant forms and circulars to allow the inclusion of a guardian's name as an alternative to that of a father or mother. The court also questioned the continued use of derogatory terms such as "*jana nei*" and directed the government to report on steps taken to harmonise all three identity systems, while enabling correction of existing records. Yet, more than two years later, there has been no meaningful progress, leaving applicants like Haya stuck in bureaucratic uncertainty.

The principle is not new. In 2023, the High Court allowed students to use the name of a father, mother, or legal guardian on SSC and HSC examination forms. Extending this approach to identity documents is both logical and necessary. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of NID correction applications remain pending, many regarding errors in parental information. Delays stretch for months or even years, costing people jobs, educational opportunities, and access to essential services.

While proposals by the interim government for a unified civil registration commission could streamline administration, without removing exclusionary requirements of biological parents' details or placing extra hurdles for those naming legal guardians, such reforms will do little to resolve the problem. The solution is straightforward: shift from a lineage-based to a citizenship-based identity system. At the same time, processes and databases across agencies must be harmonised to ensure consistency and accessibility.

Haya eventually obtained her passport after months of struggle. But her NID still does not recognise her legal guardian. Many others remain blocked by rigid administrative practices that go beyond what the law requires. Recognition of citizenship should not hinge on naming a parent. Until Bangladesh's identity systems reflect that principle, some Bangladeshis will continue to ask whether they are truly equal before the law.

CROSSWORD
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS
- DOWN
- 1 Pivot
- 1 Chimney cleaner
- 5 Lose freshness
- 2 Bread buys
- 9 Our home
- 3 Memo stamp
- 11 Lover of drama
- 4 Wing
- 12 Aerie builder
- 5 Dictionary entry
- 13 City-based
- 6 Drink
- 14 Second person
- 7 Horseshoes score
- 15 Purpose of certain machines
- 8 Polynesian nation
- 17 Undecided
- 10 New Jersey team
- 19 Arthur of TV
- 11 Ladder step
- 20 Not moving
- 16 Put some zest into
- 21 That lady
- 18 Old radio feature
- 22 Digression
- 24 Animation frame
- 26 Singer Frankie
- 29 Buddy
- 30 Watching over
- 32 Bank business
- 34 Butter unit
- 35 Korean or Thai
- 36 Tony-winning musical of 1980
- 38 Halloween haul
- 39 Circle spokes
- 40 Amorous archer
- 41 Seasonal song

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12-13

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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

‘CHA GOROM’ A freshly brewed dose of Safa Kabir’s prowess



SADI MOHAMMAD SHAHNEWAZ

Cha Gorom doesn't have a traditional romance. It's not rife with action, suspense or drama – it almost completely relies on director Shankha Dasgupta's layered storytelling and the charm of lead actress Safa Kabir. Despite that, the Chorki film has amassed quite the adoration of the audience.

Set in the tea gardens of Sylhet, it intelligently tells of the woes of the marginalised tea labourers of Bangladesh, who still operate under colonial-era oppression and remuneration. It seemed pretty obvious that this was no ordinary venture for Safa Kabir, as the actress is well over a decade into her on-screen career. The opportunity cost was huge. "If I'm being honest, I could have done 10 traditional YouTube fictions by the time I prepared and shot for *Cha Gorom*," she said over the phone, audibly relieved at the return her efforts got her. Since there are over 167 tea estates in the country,

the production worked closely with Oxfam in Bangladesh to ensure the portrayal of these marginalised communities was both grounded and dignified.

"It was a process of about two months – getting acclimated with my role. I needed to get used to the specifics of becoming a doctor, how a stethoscope works, and how to correctly measure the blood pressure of patients."

The preparations bore fruition. Not only did she look convincing as an MBBS doctor, but her subtle expressions and bewilderment at the simple demands and misgivings of a tea labourer didn't feel choreographed. Instead, they seemed to come from a place of genuine intuition.

According to the actress, the gaps in dialogue were just as tricky as the parts with dialogue. "There was a lot to say not just with words, but subtle expressions – the dilemma of staying at a place with no network versus wanting to help an entire marginalised community do better. It was a rift between whether I wanted to go back to my old, comfortable life, or if I wanted to help a talented girl achieve her dreams."

The memorable performance comes after a self-imposed break by the actress herself. "After *Tickit*, I took a little break. I was giving myself time to reconsider what kind of projects I wanted to do. Luckily, *Cha Gorom* came to me at just the right time."

Over the years, Safa has starred in the likes of *Boli*, *Nishwas*, *Kuhelika*, effectively shedding her typecast image as the 'girl next door'. "I had done so many television projects at a point, that each script seemed like a continuation of the previous one," she said, pointing out the reason behind her becoming so selective. Indeed, the actress has notably moved to more character-driven, out-of-the-box roles that few others would conceive to be befitting of a 'heroine.'

What's next for Safa? "I guess we'll have to see. I want to do more work like *Cha Gorom* – that's for sure, especially on the OTT space."

PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA



'Embrace of the Earth'
April 24–26, 2026 | 2:00 pm – 8:00 pm
La Galerie, Alliance Française de Dhaka, Dhanmondi



'Natya Utsab 2026'
April 28–May 1, 2026 | 10:00 am – 8:00 pm
Jahangirnagar University



'Les Fleurs du Manguier – Lost Land'
May 2, 2026 | 5:00 pm
Nouvelle Vague, Alliance Française de Dhaka



STYLE STATEMENT

ALEXA DEMIE

At the *Euphoria* Season 3 premiere, Alexa Demie delivered a striking departure from her signature maximalist glam, opting instead for a natural appearance in a vintage Bob Mackie gown. The black silhouette was cut close to the body, etched with metallic arrow-like stripes that created a sharp, almost hypnotic visual.

A dramatic train extended the look into full red-carpet spectacle, enhancing the gown's sleek structure. Styled with minimal jewellery and pared-back makeup, Demie stood opposite of the *Euphoria* spectacle.

TRENDY STREAMS

Netflix:
Beef



Prime Video:
Balls Up



HBO Max:
Half Man



Apple TV+:
Criminal Record



Hoichoi:
Purulia-e Pakrao



WHAT'S PLAYING



‘Choosin’ Texas’ by ELLA LANGLEY

Choosin’ Texas places Ella Langley firmly within contemporary country's rising cohort, combining a steady guitar-led arrangement with a direct, narrative-driven approach. The track centres on choosing independence over compromise, with Langley framing place and identity as something actively claimed rather than inherited.

Since its release, the song has built momentum across country streaming playlists, drawing millions of streams on Spotify and

gaining traction on US country radio. Its performance reflects Langley's growing visibility within the genre, supported by touring exposure and increased playlist placement.

Musically, *Choosin’ Texas* aligns with the current wave of female-led country, where traditional instrumentation is paired with modern production. The track's reception suggests a steady expansion of Langley's audience, positioning her as one of the newer voices to watch in the country circuit.

TV TALKIES

‘Beef: Season 2’

Season 2 of *Beef* returns with a new story and a fresh cast. This time, the anthology focuses on a tense rivalry between country club managers and their employees. The season stars Oscar Isaac and Carey Mulligan. Released recently on Netflix, it explores class tension, power struggles, and personal conflict. The season marks a shift in tone and storytelling, moving away from the original's road rage premise to a more layered narrative. While it has no direct link to the first season, it retains the show's signature dark humour and emotional intensity.



FICTION

THE ROOFTOP

HAROONUZZAMAN

The rooftop is where she breathes. It is a square of cracked concrete five stories above the noise of Dhaka, and it belongs to no one. Or perhaps it belongs to everyone and no one at once—a space unsupervised, unspoken, unscripted. Up here, the air is thick with the sound of pigeon wings and the far-off scent of turmeric frying in someone’s kitchen. Up here, Asha can be someone else. Or, more precisely, she can be herself. She leans against the rusting water tank, barefoot, listening to the city hum beneath her. A motorcycle backfires on the street below. A woman calls for her son. A faint azaan echoes from a distant mosque. The sky is a bleached grey, promising rain, but delivering nothing. It is just after Maghrib, and Asha knows her mother will be calling soon. But she stays. She is 21 and unmarried, which, in her building, makes her either tragic or dangerous, depending on whom you ask. In the flats below, the women watch her closely—especially the widows. They nod at her in the elevator, but it is always a cautious nod, wrapped in disapproval. They do not like her lipstick, or how she laughs too loudly when boys pass by on the street, or how she does not cover her hair when she goes to buy bread. They do not understand why a girl like her lives alone.



ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

Inside, the gallery smells of paint and clean wood. Soft light falls on the canvases—Dhaka rooftops at twilight, old men dozing on verandahs, barefoot boys balancing on tin railings, women watering potted plants with uncovered hair.

She does not explain. Her mother lives in Narayanganj. Her father died when she was fifteen. Asha now teaches Bangla at a coaching centre in Kalabagan, and in the evenings, she comes home, climbs five flights of stairs, and stands on the rooftop—the only space in the city that does not judge her. On this rooftop, she has watched boys fly kites, watched clouds pull shadows across the pink-orange skyline, watched lovers whisper behind drying saris and steel rods. But this evening is different. There is someone else up here. A boy. Or rather, a young man in a faded green panjabi, sketching something in charcoal on a thick notepad. She stops. He looks up. Their

eyes meet. The moment lingers. Then, with a quiet nod, he shifts slightly to make space. She sits—carefully—not too close. He does not ask her name. She does not offer it. The silence between them is easy, like water settling in a glass. His name is Tanim, she learns a few evenings later. He studies architecture at BUET, but prefers drawing people to buildings. “Buildings do not lie,” he says one night. “But people... they refuse to lie properly. That’s what makes them interesting.” She laughs. “So you come up here to spy on people?” He smiles. “I come up here to see.” They talk for hours—about the heat, about films, about her students who mix English with Bangla like cake batter, about his childhood in Bogura, and how he used to sketch fishmongers and goats in the village market. He never asks why she lives alone. Or whether she is married. Or why she does not wear a scarf. He does not ask the questions everyone else does. And so she begins to wait for him. Some nights, they do not speak at all. He sketches. She sits beside him, watching the moonlight skim across rooftops and laundry lines. Once, she

touches a sketchbook page accidentally and leaves a faint oil mark from her fingertip. He does not mind. There is freedom here, in the dark air and shared silence. But nothing in Dhaka stays unsupervised for long. She stares at it, then looks at him. “You made me look free,” “You were,” he replies. The silence between them thickens, full of unsaid things. She folds the sketch slowly. “I think I am not supposed to be seen.” He hesitates. Then says, “Then do not let them see you shrink.” Three days later, she’s handed a notice: “Due to complaints from multiple tenants regarding inappropriate rooftop behavior, your lease will not be renewed.” No apology. No warning. She packs her things that night. Every fold of clothing is tight with fury. She does not cry. The sketch goes in last. She moves to a smaller flat in Shyamoli. It is cheaper, darker. No rooftop access. The windows barely open. There are no pigeons. No skyline. It takes time to adjust. She misses the air, the way the evening opened like a curtain. She misses Tanim, though she does

not message him. Some losses are too quiet for words. Weeks pass. One day, walking home from work, she sees a large banner hanging from an old colonial building in Dhanmondi: “Urban Lines: A Visual Essay on Dhaka’s Invisible People. Gallery Open to Public | 11.00 AM–8.00 PM.” She does not plan to enter. But something pulls her in. Inside, the gallery smells of paint and clean wood. Soft light falls on the canvases—Dhaka rooftops at twilight, old men dozing on verandahs, barefoot boys balancing on tin railings, women watering potted plants with uncovered hair. And then, on one far wall—it is her. The sketch. Larger now. Framed. Untouched except for a title card: “The Rooftop, 2025”–Tanim Hossain. A woman reclaiming space in a city that shrinks her. She stares at it. Her chest tightens. People walk behind her, murmuring. A little boy tugs at his mother’s hand and asks, “Is that lady real?” She smiles, faintly. For the first time in weeks. Later that night, she climbs the stairs of her new building. There’s no rooftop—just a locked gate and a final

step that leads nowhere. She stands there, one foot on the top stair. The air touches her face. It is not freedom. Not fully. But it is something. She stays there for a while. A month later, a letter arrives. No return address. Inside is a smaller sketch—quick, unfinished. It is her again. But she’s not alone this time. He’s drawn himself beside her, both of them looking up at the sky. Below it is just a line: “There’s a rooftop in Bogura. Come and see.” Her breath catches. She folds the letter carefully and tucks it into her drawer. Outside, a crow caws from a cable line. A neighbor’s child drops a ball down the stairwell. She hasn’t decided yet. But tonight, she’ll stand on that last step again. And this time, she won’t be alone—not entirely. Haroonuzzaman is a translator, novelist, poet, researcher, and essayist. Besides teaching English in Libya and Qatar for about 12 years, she has had 20 years of teaching experience in English Language and Literature at Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB).

ESSAY

The unheard theory: What the female voice in Sufi rituals reveals about modern life

RIMEL SARKER

It always felt like modernity flatters itself with a simple story: history moves from darkness to light, from superstition to reason, from inherited authority to critique. Freedom, in this case, arrives through publicity—speaking openly, arguing publicly, trusting rational debate. If something is wrong, we make it visible, name it, and the public sphere will do the rest. But modern life feels oddly disappointing. We have more platforms than ever to speak and act from, yet politics remains stuck. Critique circulates constantly, while domination adjusts its settings and survives. Perhaps the problem is not a lack of speech. Perhaps it is a failure



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

Abbas notes how many male researchers lacked access to women’s ritual spaces and often lacked the linguistic and cultural competence to grasp oral metaphor and performative nuance.

of listening—an “acoustics” that recognises only certain tones as knowledge. To see that, place three thinkers in the same frame: Jürgen Habermas on public reason, Zygmunt Bauman on “liquid” modernity, and Shameem Burney Abbas on women’s devotional performance in Sufi rituals. The point is not to fuse them. It is to question modernity’s deepest reassurance: that public reason is neutral, and that whatever matters will naturally appear within its authorised formats. Some truths are not merely excluded from the public sphere; they are disqualified

from counting as “public” in the first place. Bauman argues that late modern societies can host critical speech while remaining immune to its consequences. This is not censorship. It is critique turned into a consumer experience: you are permitted—encouraged—to be outraged, provided the outrage arrives as content that can be absorbed and moved on from. You post, denounce, perform, boycott; then the feed refreshes. Resistance becomes a lifestyle choice rather than a collective project. In Bauman’s wider picture, modern life “liquefies.” The institutions that once linked private lives to durable solidarities weaken. In their place comes a moral demand to be flexible, self-inventing, endlessly adaptable. Structural problems are pushed onto individuals as personal failure. Anxiety becomes a defect of character; precarity becomes poor planning. Life resembles a continuous audition. Habermas worried—at a more philosophical pitch—that critique could degrade into mere unmasking; the clever exposure of hypocrisy without the capacity to build shared norms. Bauman describes

the social world in which that worry becomes routine. Critique is everywhere, but consequence is scarce. We can explain endlessly; we struggle to organise. If we treat this only as a European story, we miss how “immunity” is produced elsewhere: by deciding in advance which voices can count as knowledge. Abbas’s work on Sufi rituals exposes one such decision. A common Western habit is to understand Islam through a Christian template: mosque as church, public congregation as the centre, scripture as the primary storehouse of meaning. Once this model is accepted, “religion” becomes what is visible in officially recognised spaces and what can be cited in texts—domains historically dominated by men. What disappears is the possibility that religious life is also constituted in homes, courtyards, shrines, oral transmission—in sound. Abbas shows that women’s voices in Sufi traditions are not decorative margins. They can be central carriers of devotion: women singing devotional poetry in shrine networks and domestic gatherings; repertoires preserved through embodied

practice; even male performers adopting feminine narrative voices in certain qawwali traditions. This world is often treated as “unknown” in scholarship not because it is hidden, but because it does not match what academic listening has been trained to treat as evidence. Here modernity’s self-image cracks. It imagines truth arriving through exposure—visible, recordable, debatable. Yet women’s devotional life has frequently been made invisible through a double justification: women are either “too insignificant” to document or “too sacred” to drag into the public glare. Either way, the archive stays clean, and the clean archive becomes proof that nothing was ever there. The crucial point is methodological. Abbas notes how many male researchers lacked access to women’s ritual spaces and often lacked the linguistic and cultural competence to grasp oral metaphor and performative nuance. Their inability to hear became their authority to describe. A scholar who cannot enter women’s domains concludes that women have no domains; a scholar who cannot interpret sung metaphor concludes that the metaphor is not theory. This forces a hard question back onto Habermas’s ideal of public reason: which publics? Whose arguments? If “public” is defined by institutional visibility—print, formal debate, official discourse—then the female voice in Sufi rituals is excluded before it speaks. Not because it is irrational, but because it is embodied and contextual, because it lives in performance rather than proposition. This is an excerpt. Read the full essay on The Daily Star and Star Books and Literature’s websites. Rimel Sarker is a North Indian classical vocalist, author, and independent researcher based in Dhaka.

POETRY

Tired of crying in CNGs

AYRA GAHAR

Every word I write is contemporary
My pain is urban
My troubles are suburban
My lungs are black.
When I speak
My tongue catches on the words,
In a language I have forced myself to think in.
So I am rural, to the other side of the sun
Uncouth, brown, dirty
Dry hair, dark knees.
I cannot pronounce “conscientious” without slipping and sliding and spitting.
I am both country and suburban
Literate and illiterate enough,
To get ravaged over and over again
And marvel at the lack of crows in my city.

Ayra Gahar occasionally contributes to Star Books and Literature.



PHOTO: MAISHA SYEDA

Tigresses eye SL milestone

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will be aiming to script history when they face Sri Lanka in the series-deciding third and final WODI at the Rajshahi Divisional Stadium today, with a maiden bilateral series win against the visitors at stake.

The Tigresses made a strong start to the series, securing their first-ever WODI victory over Sri Lanka with a thrilling three-wicket win in the opening match. However, they failed to build on that momentum, slipping to a four-wicket defeat in the second game.

Sri Lanka's resurgence in the second match was largely driven by the return of skipper Chamari Athapaththu, who had missed the opener due to injury. The all-rounder delivered a decisive performance, taking 3-36 to help bowl Bangladesh out for 165 before contributing a brisk 40 off 39 balls to steer her side to a comfortable chase.

The two sides last met in Sri Lanka in 2023, where the hosts won the WODI series 1-0 and the WT20I series 2-1. A victory today would provide a timely confidence boost for Bangladesh ahead of the T20 leg of the tour.

Following today's match, focus shifts to a three-match WT20I series at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium on April 28, 30 and May 2.



MAIDEN INTERNATIONAL VICTORY

Bangladesh women's hockey team players celebrate a goal during a 3-2 victory against Uzbekistan in the Women's Asian Games Qualifiers in Jakarta yesterday, as the women in red and green registered their first-ever victory at the senior level. Sharika Rimon, Kona Akter and Airin Riya each scored, with the latter adjudged player of the match. The historic result follows an impressive 5-5 draw against Chinese Taipei in their senior debut on Thursday. Bangladesh will play their last Pool A match tomorrow against Hong Kong, where a draw would be enough to see them through to the semifinals, sealing qualification for the tournament proper.

PHOTO: AHF

Mithu mistake decides key BFL battle

SPORTS REPORTER

Title contenders Abahani joined leaders Bashundhara Kings at the top of the Bangladesh Football League following a fortunate 1-0 win over Fortis FC in Cumilla yesterday, marking their first victory over Fortis in three years.

The match at the Shaheed Dharendra Nath Datta Stadium was decided within the first minute following an uncharacteristic error from 17-year-old defender Mithu Chowdhury, which resulted in an own goal.

The costly blunder occurred when Abahani forward Mirajul Islam delivered a low cross from the right flank, seemingly destined to be dealt with by Fortis goalkeeper Sujon Perera, who had rushed off his line. However, the SAFF U-20 Championship-winning captain attempted to intervene, only for his mistimed chest-down to send the ball rolling into the unguarded net.

Fortis were unlucky to leave empty-handed after creating several opportunities to equalise. Missing Gambian forward Pa Omar Babou, the attack looked blunt; Essa Jallow and Nigerian Onyekachi Okafor squandered two chances each.

The defeat saw Fortis slip from second to third place on 25 points from 14 matches – still holding the best defensive record this season, with only eight goals conceded so far. Conversely, Abahani secured their fifth straight triumph to pull level with Kings on 28 points, though the latter have played one match fewer than the Sky Blues.

At Shaheed Miraj Tapan Stadium in Manikganj, hosts Arambagh KS upset Rahmatganj MFS 1-0, avenging a 3-0 reverse-fixtue defeat. Kwame Kizito's 46th-minute goal lifted Arambagh out of the relegation zone to eighth, with 13 points from 14 games, while Rahmatganj stayed fourth on 19 points.

BCB plans key venue upgrades with dormitories

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI from Chattogram

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is planning to upgrade existing facilities nationwide, especially at international venues. On Thursday, officials visited Chattogram to oversee the venue and discuss these developments.

While initial plans include upgrading outer ground wickets and indoor facilities, the greater focus is on constructing dormitories to house cricketers from U-14 through to first-class levels. The agenda aims to improve player security, comfort, and the logistical efficiency of the various programmes the board runs throughout the year.

BCB ad hoc committee president Tamim Iqbal and board members toured the facilities to discuss proceedings. While discussions initially centred on the Bir Sreshtho Flight Lieutenant Matiur Rahman Stadium in Chattogram, the board intends to roll out these dormitories across major venues in eight divisions.

"We already have one [academy facilities] in Mirpur and in the eight to ten divisional venues in Chattogram, Sylhet, Khulna, Rajshahi, Bogura, Barishal and Cox's Bazar, where many matches take place," a BCB official noted. "We are considering 60-70 seat dormitories at these locations. The project will take five years to execute but will significantly reduce expenditure."

Sources indicate that while the national league has sufficient funding, the budget for U-14 programmes is limited, making hotel accommodation difficult to facilitate.

Previous plans for full-fledged facilities in Cox's Bazar – including wickets, practice nets, gyms and dormitories – were shelved, but the current board is now reviving the initiative. BCB facilities chairman Rafiqul Islam Babu confirmed the push, and sources added that the facilities are designed to endure despite changes in



board leadership.

Unlike the national team, which utilises hotels, junior and women's camps at major venues like Chattogram and Sylhet face ongoing accommodation challenges.

"If you have dormitories, the kids feel safe, as do their parents," said cricket operations in-charge Shahriar Nafees. "It allows us to maintain a proper environment and run educational programmes, which is always a logistical challenge under current circumstances. These programmes, covering etiquette, computing and English literacy, help prepare players for the national team."

Practice facilities remain the immediate priority. The outer grounds at Chattogram, featuring 11 wickets and an adjacent indoor facility, will be cordoned off to ensure ample space for touring teams and Bangladesh Premier League franchises, while ventilation in the indoor centre is also being upgraded.

47 DAYS TO GO



Germany top as Europe dominates WC podiums

Fifteen European teams have collectively occupied the top three positions at the World Cup – as champions, runners-up or third place – a total of 47 times so far. Germany top the list, having finished as champions, runners-up and third place four times each. Italy, in second place, have won the title four times, finished runners-up twice and claimed third place once.

**** Visit The Daily Star website to also read "Luis Monti: The only man to play World Cup finals for two nations".**

Alcaraz to miss French Open with wrist injury

AFP, Madrid

Two-time reigning French Open champion Carlos Alcaraz said on Friday he will not play at this year's tournament as he recovers from a wrist injury.

"We have decided that the most prudent thing to do is to be cautious and not participate in Rome or Roland Garros," Alcaraz said on social media.

"It's a complicated moment for me, but I'm sure we'll come out stronger from this," the Spaniard added, saying that he and his team would monitor his recovery before deciding when and where he would return.

Alcaraz sustained the injury during the first round of the Barcelona Open last week, where he beat Otto Virtanen but subsequently pulled out of the tournament.

The 22-year-old announced his withdrawal from the Madrid Masters on April 17, increasing concerns over whether he would be able to appear at the French Open.

Alcaraz became the youngest man to complete the career Grand Slam in January with his triumph at the Australian Open. He holds a 22-3 record this season and also won a title in Doha.

Ranked second in the world, Alcaraz lost top spot following his defeat by Jannik Sinner in the Monte Carlo Masters final on April 12.

The seven-time Grand Slam winner, an expert on clay, triumphed at Roland Garros in 2024 and 2025. He saved three championship points against Sinner in last year's final.



Wounded Arsenal aim to return to top

AGENCIES

Arsenal can reclaim the Premier League summit this weekend when they host Newcastle United as in-form Manchester City focus on the FA Cup.

Mikel Arteta's Gunners have watched their imposing nine-point lead vanish quickly, with City currently top on goals scored.

The Gunners are at risk of losing three straight top-flight games for the first time in four years, a fate that befell Newcastle in last weekend's home horror show against Bournemouth.

City's FA Cup commitments this weekend means that Arsenal only need a point against Newcastle to reclaim first place, but the form book suggests that will be easier said than done for Mikel Arteta.

Coming up short in the highly-anticipated blockbuster with Man City, Arsenal's 2-1 defeat saw the Gunners lose four domestic games in a row for the first time since Arsene Wenger's farewell season in 2017-18, as the inevitable 'bottle' accusations grow louder by the week.

Mikel Arteta's men also have a

Champions League semifinal with Atletico Madrid to look forward to next week.

Arsenal's last chance

City and Arsenal are locked together on 70 points, with five games left. Both teams have a plus-37 goal difference.

Two things separate the teams – the number of goals scored and experience of getting over the line.

City, who have netted three more times than Arsenal, have never failed to go on and win the title having led after 33 games or more in the Premier League.

The Gunners, who lost 2-1 at the Etihad last weekend, can return to the top with a win or a draw at home to Newcastle, with City taking on Southampton in the FA Cup semi-finals.

The following week, Mikel Arteta's men play first, meaning they could be six points clear before City face Everton on May 4.

Perennial runners-up Arsenal, who have the easier run-in on paper, must shrug off their recent collapse and put the pressure back on City.

The Citizens, currently topping the table for the first time since August, are favourites but it is not over yet.



(Clockwise from top left) State Minister for Youth and Sports Aminul Haque, Bangladesh Football Federation president Tabith Awal, Bangladesh Cricket Board ad hoc committee president Tamim Iqbal, and sprinter Shirin Akter attend the opening day's programme of The Daily Star's two-day 35th anniversary celebrations at its Dhaka office yesterday. Shirin, former fastest woman of the country, was also honoured with the 'Grassroots Nation Builder Award' alongside three others during the ceremony.

PHOTO: STAR



JUNGLE SALIMPUR

Of lawlessness and VANISHING HILLS

Located in Sitakunda, Jungle Salimpur lies just north of the Bayezid Bostami link road, opposite the Asian Women's University, spanning around 3,100 acres. Once covered with dense vegetation and elevated terrain, the area has largely been replaced by roads, settlements, and commercial establishments.

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN

Chattogram, long known for its undulating hills and hillocks stretching towards the Bay of Bengal, is gradually losing one of its defining features.

Over the years, indiscriminate hill cutting for construction across the city and surrounding areas has erased large portions of this natural terrain, raising serious environmental concerns.

Among the worst-affected zones is Jungle Salimpur -- an area where hill destruction has unfolded quietly for decades, largely beyond effective oversight.

Located in Sitakunda upazila, Jungle Salimpur lies just north of the Bayezid Bostami link road, opposite the Asian University for Women, spanning around 3,100 acres. Though administratively outside the city, it is, in practice, very much within Chattogram's urban sprawl.

Once covered with dense vegetation and elevated terrain, the area -- bordering Hathazari to the east and Bayezid Police Station to the south -- has largely been replaced by roads, settlements, markets, and commercial establishments.

A LANDSCAPE RESHAPED OVER TWO DECADES

According to local sources, law enforcement, and visible ground evidence, hill cutting in Jungle

criminals, with repeated failures by law enforcement to conduct operations.

However, the situation changed after the killing of Rab-7 Assistant Sub-inspector Motaleb Hossain Bhuiyan.

On March 9, around 3,500 security personnel carried out a major operation in Jungle Salimpur. The scale of environmental damage began to emerge afterwards.

The administration has since taken control, though the full extent of hill



PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

destruction remains unknown to the Department of Environment (DoE) and local authorities.

Jungle Salimpur is mainly divided into two parts: Chhinnamul and Alinagar. Previously, entry through Chhinnamul required a "special identity card", as armed groups controlled access. Even law enforcement faced attacks during earlier attempts to enter.

This control allowed hill cutting to continue uninterrupted for years.

Locals said around 15 cooperative societies were formed to facilitate settlements through hill cutting. These include Chattogram Mohanagar Chhinnomul Songrami Bostibasi Somonnoy Parishad, Chhinnomul Bohumukhi Samabay Samity, Ali Nagar Bhumihin Samabay Samity, Ekata Bhumihin Samabay Samity, Nur Nabi Shah Housing Estate, Jungle Salimpur Janakallan Kormajibi Samabay Samity, Gol Pahar Bhumihin Samabay Samity, Al Madina, Mayer Achal, Mukti Joddha Housing Samabay Samity, Nabi Nagar Bohumukhi Samabay, and Ali Nagar Bohumukhi Samabay Samity.

Using forged documents, plots were created and sold to landless people, low-income groups, and even wealthy buyers. Possession was often transferred using non-judicial stamps worth Tk 300.

ARMED GROUPS AND LAND CONTROL

Police and locals said hill cutting in Jungle Salimpur began in the 1990s under a criminal named Ali Akkas, who formed an armed group to control the area. The rugged terrain limited law enforcement access, enabling illegal land trading to expand.

After Akkas was killed in a reported gunfight with Rab, his associates -- including Kazi Mashur Rahman, Yasin Mia, Gafur Member, and Gazi Sadek -- formed rival groups.

During the Awami League government, Yasin reportedly had political backing from former Sitakunda MP SM Al Mamun.

He now leads the Alinagar cooperative, while Kazi Mashur and Gazi Sadek lead another group. Around 30,000 people are reportedly affiliated with these organisations.

After the Rab officer's killing, Yasin held a press conference warning against further operations, but has since gone into hiding. A rival group led by expelled Jubo Dal leader Rokon Uddin has also clashed with his faction.

ON THE GROUND

A recent visit shows extensive hill cutting and unplanned development.

At the Chhinnamul entrance, a large

hill has been cut to build an access road. Nearby are the shrine of Nurunnabi Shah (R), SM Pilot High School, markets, and numerous houses on slopes and foothills. Most shops remain open despite the recent operation.

Further inside, roads branch toward Alinagar, Kathaltola, Loknath Temple, and Lohar Bridge. Hills have been levelled with excavators, leaving little vegetation. Plots are marked with brick walls, with some already developed.

"Offices" of BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami were also seen. The Rab officer was killed near the "BNP office" during an earlier operation.

In Alinagar, entry was previously controlled by Yasin's group, with visitors requiring permission and local escorts. At the autorickshaw stand, there are three markets, with semi-pucca houses and enclosed vacant plots behind them.

At the entrance, iron gates had been brought in for installation but were left behind when the criminals fled ahead of the operation.

Further north are residential areas with brick-paved roads, houses, and enclosed plots. Electricity poles and meter connections are in place.

Large hills remain close to settlements, many already partially cut. The area includes markets, residential zones, and institutions such as Alinagar High School. Several signboards, including those bearing Yasin's name, mark land ownership.

In North Alinagar, extensive hill cutting is evident. Excavator marks remain, and plots and houses have been built at the foothills. In some places, hills were cut within tin enclosures.

The full scale of destruction remains difficult to determine. Even in undeveloped areas, electricity connections have been installed. A meter room marked "Meter No 7" was also seen.

Locals said excavators and bulldozers were used extensively and removed ahead of the recent operation.

Satellite imagery also indicates large-scale hill destruction between 2016 and 2025

Md Tanvir, a CNG parts shop owner, said CNG-run vehicles are the main mode of transport, and outside vehicles were previously restricted. He said the area includes both government and privately owned land.

Md Lokman, a resident of North Alinagar, said, "This is the main meter. We pay through sub-meters. There is also a water supply line, and we pay for that."

Several residents declined to speak after learning they were talking to a reporter.

GOVERNMENT PLANS AND ACTIONS
The DoE has no comprehensive data

on the extent of hill destruction. Even after the March operation, no formal assessment has begun, and no recent cases have been filed.

DoE Deputy Director (Chattogram district) Mozahidur Rahman said earlier cases saw little progress due to a lack of access. "Now investigations will begin," he said, adding that assessment plans are underway.

A special inter-departmental coordination meeting on May 9, 2022, addressed hill cutting and illegal occupation.

Chaired by then Additional Deputy Commissioner (Revenue) Masud Kamal, it adopted 11 recommendations, including a joint comprehensive operation.

On July 31, 2022, a meeting at the Chattogram Circuit House, attended by then principal secretary to the prime minister Ahmad Kaikaus, reviewed development proposals to recover occupied land.

A high-level meeting at the Prime Minister's Office on September 12 decided on five key points, including eviction through rehabilitation of genuine victims.

A total of 11 development projects have been proposed, including a sports village, Chattogram Central Jail, heart foundation facility, a safari or eco-park, rehabilitation schemes, a radio transmission centre, a customs dumping station, a green industrial zone, an army cantonment and military academy, and an Ansar and VDP training centre.

District administration sources said 48 government agencies have sought land allocation.

Chattogram Range's former DIG Ahsan Habib Palash, now transferred to Rab, said, "The entire area is now under law enforcement control. The situation in Jungle Salimpur, Chhinnamul, and Alinagar is normal. Two camps are operating."

He said surveillance systems used by criminal groups have been dismantled and urged swift implementation of development projects, along with possible rehabilitation.

Divisional Commissioner Md Ziauddin said administrative control has been established, and development plans will now be implemented in consultation with stakeholders.

Chattogram Deputy Commissioner Jahidul Islam said poor connecting roads in Alinagar are being upgraded through LGED to improve administrative mobility.

He said facilities, including toilets, are being set up for personnel stationed at police camps.

"Without proper assessment, we cannot comment on environmental damage," he said.



Salimpur has continued for more than two decades.

From 2000 to 2026, thousands of cubic feet of hills have been cut down. Natural vegetation has largely disappeared, replaced by roads, houses, shops, and commercial establishments. Hills ranging from 7 to 70 metres in height have reportedly been flattened.

Illegal hill cutting and land trading also led to the rise of multiple armed groups, fuelling crime. The area long remained a safe haven for

Rana Plaza’s haunting echo

What has changed and what must change

TASLIMA AKHTER

Some losses are irreparable. Some wounds, whether physical or mental, linger as unbearable memories, nightmares, and fear. Life is precious and invaluable to everyone, whether born in a hut or a palace. All share the desire to dream, to love, to be with loved ones, and to experience life fully. When life is lost or permanently scarred, its value cannot be measured in crores of taka or millions of dollars. Such loss, and the pain it leaves behind, are beyond comparison.

On April 24, 2013, 1,175 lives and thousands of dreams were crushed beneath the rubble of the Rana Plaza building. According to *Hajar Praner Chitkar* (2015, Bangladesh Garment Sramik Sanghati), 1,175 people died and 162 went missing, while around 2,500 were injured or permanently disabled. This is a date that cannot,



A scene of devastation at the Rana Plaza site in 2013, marking a catastrophic failure of industrial safety that claimed 1,175 lives.

on the third and eighth floors instead of the ground floor. Despite visible cracks appearing the day before, work continued. Shortly after the workday began, a power outage occurred. When the generators were switched on, the building collapsed with a deafening roar.

Workers like Rupali, Brojeswar, Shanthana, Shefali Madi, Runa Rani Das, Raja, Baby Akter, Anna, Mahedul, Ankhi, and Shahinara had come in as they did every day, unaware of what awaited them. What followed is now part of the country’s collective memory.

For survivors, the past remains ever-present. When Rozina looks at her severed hand, it is not only the physical loss she sees, but the trauma of being trapped for three days before cutting it off to survive. Shirin and Shahed, a married couple, left for work together and never returned. Mohsina from Joypurhat and her mother were also among the missing. Two brothers, Shahin Reza and Al Amin, died side by side. Rikta, from Bikrampur, and her daughter Jabin never came home. Workers from 59 districts had travelled to Rana Plaza in search of a livelihood; their stories of loss spread across the country.

The rescue operation continued

for 17 days. On the 20th day, it was formally called off. Even then, the full toll remained unknown. For days afterwards, human remains continued to be recovered from the debris. Thirteen years have since passed, but the memory of that day endures—unresolved, and impossible to forget.

The history of the labour movement in Bangladesh cannot move forward without addressing the Rana Plaza homicide. From 2013 to 2026, 13 years have passed. In that time, how much have workers’ living standards improved? What is the condition of those affected, and what has become of the perpetrators? How far have amendments to labour law progressed? Each year, as April 24 returns, these questions resurface.

It cannot be said that nothing has changed. The number of major building collapses and factory fires in the garment sector has declined, and structural safety has improved. Wages have also increased: from Tk 3,000 in 2013 to Tk 12,500 in 2026. Yet this rise has not kept pace with the growth of the industry or the cost of living. Surviving on Tk 12,500 remains difficult for most workers.

A year after the disaster, at the 2014 Dhaka Apparel Summit, industry

leaders set a target of transforming the sector into a 50-billion-dollar industry within 50 years of independence. That ambition has since expanded. In 2022, the BGMEA outlined 20 goals for a sustainable garment sector, including reaching 100 billion dollars in exports by 2030. Bangladesh’s economy remains heavily dependent on ready-made garment exports, with the country holding a leading position in denim exports to the European Union and the United States. There are now 280 LEED-certified green factories in Bangladesh, the highest number in the world.

Labour law has also undergone notable changes. Two of the most significant amendments came in 2013 and 2026. Within two months of the Rana Plaza collapse, on July 22, 2013, the labour law was revised across 87 sections. Thirteen years later, in 2026, a further 92 sections were amended, with stated aims of strengthening rights to life, livelihood, and freedom of expression for workers.

However, despite these developments, key issues remain unresolved. Compensation for victims and accountability for perpetrators continue to lag. Although there have been demands for compensation that reflects a lifetime’s loss, legal

provisions have changed little. In 2013, compensation ranged from Tk 1 lakh to 1.5 lakh; it now stands at Tk 2 lakh to 2.5 lakh. Cases related to the disaster remain pending, and the judicial process has been slow, hindered by a culture of impunity and political influence.

The broader political context has also shaped outcomes. The period from 2013 to 2024 was marked by an environment in which the judicial process struggled to remain independent. Individuals such as Sohel Rana were widely reported to have links with those in power. The absence of timely justice has weakened deterrence, allowing negligence to persist in parts of the sector.

Fires and industrial accidents, though less frequent, have not ceased. Incidents such as the Chawkbazar fire in 2019, Hashem Foods in 2021, the Bailey Road restaurant fire in 2024, and the N.R. Fashion fire in Mirpur in 2025 underscore continuing risks.

Thirteen years on, Rana Plaza remains both a turning point and an unfinished chapter.

The Rana Plaza disaster was a wake-up call. Yet even after such a tragedy, no comprehensive database was created to identify workers, and the site itself was not preserved. In the immediate aftermath, significant legal changes were introduced under domestic and international pressure. Safety committees were established, and the requirement for forming a union was reduced from 30 per cent worker participation to 20 per cent, leading to a rise in unionisation. Under the 2026 labour law, a union can now be formed with just 20 workers, and safety committees have been made mandatory. Many provisions were amended in 2013 and again in 2026.

An elected government and parliament are now in place. The strength of democracy can be judged by the living conditions of working people. An accountable state, a democratic path, and a united movement can challenge the long-standing culture of impunity and advance workers’ rights to life, livelihood, and dignity.

Taslina Akhter is the president of the Bangladesh Garment Sramik Sanghati and a member of the Political Council of Ganosamhati Andolon. She was also a member of the Labour Reform Commission (2024). She can be reached at taslima.74@yahoo.com



Relatives display portraits of the missing and deceased, symbolising the irreparable human cost and the ongoing struggle for accountability.

PHOTOS:
ANISUR RAHMAN

and should not, be forgotten. It remains one of the most devastating industrial disasters not only in Bangladesh, but in the world. Just five months earlier, on November 24, 2012, 119 workers were killed in a fire at Tazreen Fashions in Nishchintapur, Ashulia.

Rana Plaza, a nine-storey building in a densely populated workers’ area about an hour from Farmgate in Dhaka, was originally approved for only six storeys. It was illegally extended. The lower floors housed shops, banks, and a market; five garment factories occupied the middle floors, while the top floor was vacant. Generators were placed

Not just garment factories, all workplaces must be safe

SYED SULTAN UDDIN AHMMED

It is often said that Bengalis unite in times of disaster and celebration. The Rana Plaza collapse thirteen years ago in Savar offered a stark illustration of this truth. As news spread that an eight-storey factory building had collapsed with thousands of workers trapped beneath it, people seemed to reach the site faster than the news itself.

A vast coalition of volunteers, rescue workers, fire service personnel and day labourers abandoned their livelihoods to save the injured. The response was total. Van drivers ferried casualties to Enam Medical College Hospital, where intern doctors waited at the entrance to provide urgent care. Housewives brought home-cooked khichuri for survivors. Engineers worked alongside ordinary citizens, risking their lives in the debris. One poignant memory remains of a mosque muezzin from Manikganj who arrived at NITOR with funds collected from his village. Seeing the overwhelming support already present, he quietly approached a BILS volunteer, embarrassed by the modest size of his contribution but determined to help.

We carry countless such memories, yet they are slowly fading. The nation is now paying the price for that erosion. The collective awakening and compassion that emerged in the aftermath were not transformed into lasting change. Those entrusted with that responsibility—the state and policymakers—failed to make permanent the resolve that such a tragedy should never happen again, that no one should have to stand beside rubble crying, “Where is my child? Where is my mother? Where is my brother? Where is my sister?”

We also failed to extend the national and international cooperation that followed—through which significant improvements were made in structural and fire safety in one sector—into a broader national model. As a result, the lessons of such immense loss, collective empathy and global solidarity remained confined to a single industry and a single moment. We did not embed them in our national consciousness or build a lasting culture of workplace safety. Consequently, major industrial accidents have continued to occur, claiming lives year after year.

The pattern is tragically familiar. Thirteen firefighters died in the Chattogram container terminal explosion—an event rare in global history. Nearly eighty workers were killed in the Hashem Foods factory fire in Narayanganj, fifty-five of them children. Families could not identify their loved ones; DNA testing was needed to return remains to grieving relatives. Similar scenes unfolded in the gas lighter factory explosion in Keraniganj, where once again identification required DNA tests. In many of these disasters, one recurring factor significantly increased fatalities: locked factory gates. This was seen in Saraka Garments, Tazreen Fashions and again in Keraniganj.

Elsewhere in the world, such catastrophes have often led to systemic change, with nations learning, rebuilding and setting new safety standards. After Rana Plaza, there was hope that Bangladesh would adopt a firm “never again” stance. The record since then tells a different story. From Rana Plaza to 2025, there have been 5,427 workplace accidents, resulting in 6,785 deaths. Industrial disasters—and workers’ coffins—have not stopped.

Why did this happen? From the outset, there was a deliberate effort to let the incident fade from public memory. Offers of international rescue assistance were declined, the scale of the tragedy was downplayed, and investigation reports—both before and after Rana Plaza—were never publicly disclosed. Had the findings from investigations into tragedies such as Spectrum been properly disclosed, greater caution could have been exercised in granting building approvals, regulating structural use, and ensuring compliance. The collapse of Rana Plaza might itself have been averted. Likewise, had the findings of the Tazreen investigation been widely disseminated, the Hashem Foods fire might well have been prevented.

When the causes of accidents and regulatory failures are transparent, people take precautions. Instead, information was suppressed, institutions moved on, and, in time, the public was made to forget.

Through the Accord on Fire and Building Safety and the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety, a multinational initiative



The 2006 KTS factory inferno remains a haunting precursor to Rana Plaza, exemplifying a decades-long failure to transform “collective empathy” into the permanent, legally-enforced safety standards the nation still lacks.

PHOTO: STAR

developed over several years, a model for structural, technological and fire safety was established in the ready-made garment sector, at least in larger factories. Other countries are now seeking to follow that model. Yet in Bangladesh, no meaningful effort was made to extend, formalise or legislate these standards across other industries. The issue was framed too narrowly. The collapse of Rana Plaza was often reduced to an unauthorised building with structural weaknesses. That was only part of the story. The deeper causes lay in weak enforcement of laws, ineffective regulatory systems, negligent approvals, disregard for worker safety, and the absence of workers’ rights to speak or organise. These conditions allowed workers to be forced back into a visibly cracked building, reassured by officials over loudspeakers that there was no danger.

This entrenched culture of negligence is reflected in the near absence of justice. From Tazreen Fashions to Keraniganj, the pattern remains unchanged. Only one individual—Rana—has been imprisoned. Others have faced no meaningful accountability, nor has responsibility been clearly established. This lack of consequence has fostered recklessness

and indifference towards safety.

Justice is not only about punishment; it serves as a warning to society. That warning has not been delivered. Even where structural improvements have occurred in certain sectors, legal reform has lagged behind. In Bangladesh, the maximum penalty for death due to negligence remains four years’ imprisonment, while compensation typically ranges between BDT 200,000 and 250,000. Such minimal penalties do little to incentivise investment in safety. As one construction contractor remarked, safety equipment can cost more than the compensation paid after an accident. That stark calculation reflects a deeper systemic failure.

Without legal reform, strict enforcement and a commitment to learning from past failures, infrastructural improvements alone will not break this cycle. Escaping collective indifference is now an urgent task. Every workplace must be made safe, all workers brought under legal protection and a national database, and the right to refuse unsafe work without fear of losing employment must be guaranteed.

Participation is essential. Beyond

infrastructure and technology, safety requires a framework that actively involves workers, employers and inspectors. While Rana Plaza led to the formation of safety committees, these remain largely confined to a single sector and are often ineffective. Efforts have not been scaled or sustained.

The risks are visible in places like Keraniganj, Mirpur and Bailey Road, where factories are densely embedded within residential areas. Community awareness, local government engagement and the role of elected representatives are critical. With around 85% of economic activity occurring informally, even bystanders are at risk, as seen in the Tampaco explosion.

We do not argue for closing factories; we argue for making them safe. Safety strengthens productivity, employment and local economies. The claim that safety threatens livelihoods is false. Nothing is more valuable than life, and a safe industrial zone creates more sustainable growth.

Equally important is infrastructure in industrial areas. Older zones like Tongi and Tejgaon once offered healthcare, education and dignified living. Today, in Ashulia, Narayanganj and Gazipur, millions of workers lack basic civic facilities. This worsens disasters, hinders rescue efforts, and harms physical, mental and social well-being.

Industrial production must be planned. Neglecting it is neglecting life itself. If we adopt “Safety first, safety for all” as a national principle and openly examine past accidents, we can build awareness while learning from successful reforms.

One positive outcome of Rana Plaza was compensation based on ILO Convention 121, replacing token charity. Yet it was never codified into law or expanded, and disability assessment remains weak. Many survivors continue to suffer without long term care.

Forgetting does not heal. Our task is to turn sympathy into lasting commitment and make safe work a norm. Only then can we say we have learned—and ensure it never happens again.

Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmmed is the Executive Director of the Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS).

Compensation falls short and fails workers, it needs urgent reform

In conversation with AKM Nasim, Country Programme Director at Solidarity Center Bangladesh and a former member of the Labour Reform Commission.



▲
Relatives of Rana Plaza victims protest to demand justice and fair compensation.

PHOTO: TASLIMA AKTER

What provisions currently exist in Bangladesh's labour laws and related policies regarding compensation for workers affected by industrial accidents?

The legal framework is primarily governed by the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006, which establishes employer liability for workplace injuries and occupational diseases. On paper, workers are entitled to compensation depending on the nature of injury. In cases of death, compensation is Tk. 200,000, and for permanent total disablement Tk. 250,000. Partial disablement is calculated proportionately, while temporary disablement provides limited wage replacement for a short duration.

Supplementary mechanisms exist under the Bangladesh Labour Rules, 2015, particularly the Central Fund for export-oriented sectors. Under Rules 212-215, the fund is financed through a 0.03% levy on export orders and voluntary contributions. It provides additional benefits such as Tk. 300,000 for death or permanent disability, Tk. 200,000 in certain non-work-related cases, and up to Tk. 100,000 for loss of limb, along with support for treatment, education, and welfare initiatives.

Further support is provided under the Bangladesh Workers Welfare Foundation Rules, 2010. Rule 4 allows certain financial assistance for death

or permanent disability, for medical treatment, and educational stipends for workers' children.

In addition, the ongoing Employment Injury Scheme (EIS) Pilot introduces a more structured approach to compensation. Under this pilot, eligible workers or their dependents can apply for benefits through standardized application procedures, which include documentation of employment, injury, and medical assessment. The scheme provides monthly pension payments as income replacement, calculated based on the worker's age and previous earnings, rather than relying solely on lump sum compensation. It also includes provisions for disability assessment and, in some cases, rehabilitation-related support. While this represents a significant shift toward a more sustainable and rights-based model, the scheme is currently limited in scope, primarily covering the ready-made garment sector, and operates alongside existing mechanisms rather than fully replacing them.

Despite these provisions, entitlements remain limited. In most of the cases, compensation is largely one-time and capped, with no guaranteed system for long-term income replacement, structured rehabilitation, or reintegration. Medical and welfare benefits exist but are fragmented and

often discretionary rather than rights-based.

In practice, how effectively are these legal provisions implemented following industrial accidents? Where do the biggest gaps lie between law and practice in delivering reparations?

In practice, implementation is weak and inconsistent. Although legal provisions establish employer liability and supplementary funds, workers face major barriers in accessing compensation.

A key gap is the inadequacy and stagnation of compensation amounts. Even when combined with Central Fund or Welfare Foundation support, payments remain insufficient to meet long-term needs. Moreover, these benefits are not always paid promptly, and delays are common.

Enforcement remains limited. Employers often underreport accidents or negotiate informal settlements below legal standards. Oversight institutions lack sufficient capacity to ensure compliance across sectors.



AKM Nasim

Procedural barriers further restrict access. Workers must navigate complex application processes for Central Fund or Welfare Foundation benefits, which require documentation, verification, and administrative approval. These processes are time-consuming and discourage claims, especially among vulnerable workers.

Additionally, most benefits under Rule 4 and Central Fund provisions are discretionary and application-based, not automatic entitlements. This creates uncertainty and unequal access.

There is also a major gap in rehabilitation. While some provisions allow treatment support or even the establishment of hospitals, there is no

structured system ensuring long-term medical care, disability management, or reintegration into employment.

Overall, the system operates as a fragmented and limited safety net rather than an effective and accessible reparation mechanism.

How effective have past legal reforms been in addressing compensation and justice after incidents like Rana Plaza?

The Rana Plaza collapse led to significant attention and reforms, including improved safety measures, creation of the Rana Plaza Trust Fund, and establishment of the Central Fund for the garment sector.

However, these reforms have had limited structural impact. Statutory compensation under the Labour Act remains unchanged and inadequate. Much of the progress has relied on ad hoc arrangements driven by international pressure rather than systemic legal reform.

The introduction of the Employment Injury Scheme (EIS) through the 2026 amendment is a positive development. The current pilot in the garment sector covers millions of workers and provides monthly pensions as top-ups to lump-sum compensation, moving closer to international standards.

Despite this, the EIS remains limited in scope, sector-specific, and dependent on voluntary contributions. It is not yet a universal or fully institutionalized system.

Justice outcomes also remain weak. Twelve years after Rana Plaza, multiple labour and criminal cases are still pending, with several accused absconding and trials ongoing. This reflects serious delays in accountability and highlights the limited effectiveness of legal reforms in delivering timely justice and compensation.

What role do courts and legal precedents play in shaping compensation outcomes for victims?

Courts in Bangladesh play a limited role in shaping compensation outcomes. There is a lack of strong judicial precedents that expand or clarify workers' rights to compensation.

Most cases do not progress through formal litigation due to barriers such as cost, delay, and complexity. Workers often rely on administrative mechanisms or informal settlements instead of pursuing court remedies.

As a result, labour courts have not developed a consistent body of jurisprudence on key issues such as

adequacy of compensation, employer negligence, or long-term rehabilitation. This weakens accountability and reduces the deterrent effect on employers.

The prolonged pendency of cases related to Rana Plaza further illustrates the limitations of the judicial system. Even where criminal and labour cases exist, delays undermine the effectiveness of legal remedies.

Overall, the absence of strong judicial intervention means that compensation remains largely governed by statutory minimums and administrative processes rather than evolving through rights-based legal interpretation.

What specific legal or policy reforms are needed to address these gaps and strengthen the compensation system?

A comprehensive reform approach is necessary to address existing loopholes.

First, compensation amounts under the Labour Act should be significantly increased and linked to wages, age, and loss of earning capacity, with automatic adjustment for inflation.

Second, the Employment Injury Scheme should be expanded into a universal and mandatory system covering all sectors, with sustainable financing and clear legal guarantees to ensure that benefits meet or exceed existing entitlements.

Third, enforcement mechanisms must be strengthened through improved labour inspection, strict penalties for non-compliance, and mandatory reporting of workplace accidents.

Fourth, the claims process should be simplified by creating a single, time-bound mechanism that reduces administrative burdens and removes dependence on employer certification.

Fifth, a comprehensive rehabilitation framework should be introduced, including medical care, long-term treatment, vocational training, and reintegration support.

Sixth, existing welfare mechanisms such as the Central Fund and Workers Welfare Foundation should be strengthened. Benefit limits under Rule 4 should be increased, and the discretionary nature of assistance should be replaced with clearer entitlement-based provisions.

Finally, strengthening labour courts and promoting strategic litigation can help build legal precedents, improve accountability, and reinforce a rights-based approach to compensation.

The interview was taken by Miftahul Jannat.

Beyond compliance, towards care

Addressing the psychosocial crisis in Bangladesh's garment industry

SHAHIDUR RAHMAN

Thirteen years ago, the Rana Plaza disaster claimed over 1,100 lives and injured thousands, exposing the deadly costs of neglecting occupational safety. That tragedy sparked global reforms to workplace physical standards. While the tragedy prompted significant reforms in structural and building safety within the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector, it also underscored the need to look beyond physical compliance. Ensuring a healthy psychosocial working environment is the OSH Day (World Day for Safety and Health at Work) 2026 slogan. The psychosocial working environment encompasses the social, psychological, and organisational aspects of a workplace affecting employees' mental health, well-being, and performance. It goes beyond physical conditions to focus on how work is designed, managed, and experienced. Examples include work pressure, support from managers, job security, recognition, and work-life balance.

In a research project on declining female garment workers, initiated by GIZ, we used psychological insecurity—excessive work-related stress—to measure job insecurity. A woman worker, overwhelmed by responsibilities, may perceive inefficiency as a threat to her employment. We found that about 79% of women garment workers experienced psychological insecurity by the time they left garment factories. We asked whether they felt the workload was too much, and most responded affirmatively, highlighting the role of workload in their decision to leave. Overtime led to shifts into the night, creating social barriers.

Furthermore, the factories placed extra pressure on workers by requiring production of over 180 to 200 units per hour, while workers could only produce around 100 to 150 units. They

were asked to double their output, which was impossible to manage. Under this pressure, workers were not even allowed to leave for family or medical emergencies.

In another study supported by SITITCH, workers were asked about changes in their workload following the new minimum wage announcement in December 2023. According to the survey, 65.68% of workers reported an increased workload in 2024 compared to 2023. This was due to rising hourly production targets. In this context, a union leader who participated as a KIL noted, "Factories manage wage hikes by increasing individual production targets, causing worker stress and reduced job security."

This highlights how cost-cutting measures, such as higher targets, burden the remaining workforce, increasing physical and mental strain. Rights-based organisations raised concerns about the long-term sustainability of these practices, which compromise workers' well-being to accommodate wage hikes. Despite a wage increase, inflation harms workers' well-being, as one worker remarked, "We can barely live 15 days comfortably with such wages."

This statement illustrates the perceived inadequacy of wage adjustments and failure to keep pace with inflation and living costs. Under these circumstances, the concept of a living wage entered discussion, not without debate. From a poverty line perspective, an academic insightfully pointed out, "For a four person family, 12,500 taka divided per head is below the poverty line even in Bangladesh. If someone works 10 hours a day and his family's earnings per head are below the poverty line, this is an unsustainable model." This reflects how wage adjustments, while significant in percentage terms, fail to bring meaningful improvements in workers' lives and end in unhealthy

mental conditions.

Aside from fair wages, automation introduced new types of psychological and emotional stress. Integrating automated systems raises productivity goals and stricter performance monitoring, creating an environment of pressure and anxiety. Workers report feeling overwhelmed by the need to meet unrealistic expectations while adapting to new technologies. Additionally, while automation



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

reduced manual workload for some tasks, it increased the intensity of others. Workers operating automated knitting machines must remain constantly vigilant to ensure smooth operation, which leads to fatigue and mental strain. Fear of being replaced by machines also contributes to job insecurity, hurting workers' morale and motivation.

One of the biggest impacts of automation has been a decrease in overtime hours. Weekly overtime dropped from an average of 20 hours to 11 hours, mainly due to faster production cycles enabled by automated machines. While this allows workers more time for personal and family responsibilities, it significantly

lowers take-home pay, as overtime bonuses often made up a large part of income. This is supported by the worker survey in my study, conducted by BLF, which found 88% agreed that since automation was introduced, they needed fewer overtime hours than before. Fewer overtime opportunities mean less financial security for those who depend on extra hours to support families. This trade-off between income and work-life balance remains

a key concern. However, job losses to automation are also an important issue for psychosocial well-being. To address this, Sarah Krasly, CEO of Shimmy Technology, argued that digital literacy should focus on digital skills such as reading, changing, evaluating, troubleshooting, and, at the highest level, creating.

Education is essential for digital literacy. The benefits of educated workers who quickly understand English-language instructions and machine guidelines include reduced dependence on supervisors to operate machines. Reflecting this, a worker said, "The new machines show errors on the display. Even if a needle is broken, you can see it on

the display; you don't have to search for everything manually. If someone doesn't understand English, they can't read the display. If I had a better education, I could easily read and understand the functions. Even if I don't have experience, I might learn quickly if I am educated. Otherwise, I will have to learn by experience, which takes time."

To upskill workers, the Asian University for Women in Bangladesh initiated a program to provide primary education in English, Math, and computers to women garment workers. The former president of BGMEA argues that this education is essential for participating in digital-based training on tablets, understanding machine instructions, and absorbing training effectively. The trade representative also believes that workers with 11-12 years of education are better positioned to use changing machines and technologies.

The final concern is the connection between mental health and the negative effects of climate change on the workplace, based on research on EIT's efforts to promote a just transition. Rising temperatures pose a significant problem for factory workers. The ILO (2019) estimates that by 2030, 4.84 per cent of working hours in Bangladesh will be lost due to heat stress, equivalent to 3,833,000 full-time jobs. Women bear the brunt of these issues, as they are more likely to miss work due to disproportionate caregiving duties at home (ILO, 2019).

Green buildings can help reduce problems caused by climate change. There is a legal requirement to display a thermometer on every floor to monitor room temperature. Ideal settings are 30 °C, with humidity maintained between 55-65%. If anything unusual is detected, staff alert owners. Auditors check for worker suffocation during site visits, as it is not always visible on the thermometer. If the

brand finds the work environment unusual, they inform factory management. One brand noted that workers sometimes express needs directly to management. In sections prohibiting cooling systems, factory management provides workers with saline at intervals and a separate heat allowance.

Factories address worker issues through various committees, including health and safety, participation committees, and anti-harassment bodies. These platforms help brands understand worker needs and gather suggestions, particularly on environmental concerns.

"The health and safety committee plays a significant role in this aspect," one brand stated.

Programmes focusing on worker awareness remain the most effective approach. According to a buyer, "When management imposes things upon workers without teaching them, it gives us the required KPI, but in the long run, it does not sustain as the workers are not aware."

It illustrates how the psychosocial work environment links to fair wages, automation, and climate change, each of which generates stress due to the evolving nature of work. The Rana Plaza tragedy remains a powerful reminder that worker safety cannot be reduced to mere structural compliance.

On this 13th anniversary, Bangladesh must confront less visible risks shaping workers' lives: unrealistic workloads, inadequate wages, technological insecurity, and climate-related stress. The government, trade associations, factories, and labour organisations must monitor workloads and address mental stress through effective counselling and training.

Dr Shahidur Rahman is a Professor at BRAC University.

BANGLADESH STARTUP DREAM

Built and broken by borrowed money

After raising over a billion dollars, startups are struggling to make payroll -- and the foreign money is no longer coming

Global venture funding nosedived right after the 2021 boom. Global funding declined to \$445 billion in 2022 and \$285 billion in 2023. For companies in Bangladesh that had built their business plans around continued access to venture capital, the shift created immediate problems.

MAHMUDUL HASAN

In early March, Chaldal faced days-long protests outside its Jashore office by hundreds of employees over unpaid wages. Some had not received pay for up to four months. While such protests are commonplace in Bangladesh, this one was a discomforting reminder of the state of the country's once-booming startups.

Chaldal is no small player. Launched in 2013, it reportedly pioneered online grocery shopping in the country, becoming a household name across urban neighbourhoods. Between 2015 and 2025, it raised around \$40 million, with plans for expansion across 15 cities.

During the pandemic, its annual revenue shot up to \$40 million.

It had entered the market at a time widely seen as the boom period for startups. The 2010s gave rise to some of the most prominent startups in the country -- bKash, ShopUp, Shohoz, ShareTrip, Paperfly, Pathao and many more. Global franchises like Uber and foodpanda launched operations here.

bKash went on to be the country's only unicorn startup--meaning the company's valuation exceeds \$1 billion. The conditions were right. The



economy was growing fast, and digital transformation gained good momentum. Internet access spread considerably, and mobile phone penetration shaped how platforms were built and who could use them. Foreign money came pouring in.

At peak, over 1,200 active startups operated in the country, with some 200 more emerging each year. But a lot has changed over the last few years.

The boom stopped. Many of the rising firms that once expanded operations have been forced to lay off employees, cut down operations, and now face an uncertain future.

Chaldal CEO and founder Waseem Alim said, "In our 12-13 years, we had never faced difficulties paying salaries before August 2025."

Fahim Ahmed, CEO of Pathao, a leader in consumer tech with stable growth record, said, "It has been over the last two years that startups have been facing such a precarious situation. The conditions are deteriorating."

DECLINING DEALS, DECLINING MONEY

As per publicly available data, Bangladesh's startups have raised over \$1.126 billion, including over \$1 billion from foreign investors, since 2010.

The funds came through more than 460 deals, with just two deals accounting for nearly one-third of the total amount, according to LightCastle

Partners, a management consulting firm that specialises in tracking the startup ecosystem.

Over \$434 million from 94 deals came in 2021 alone. It was the high-water mark. The year also included the country's biggest startup deal of \$250 million between bKash and Japan's Softbank.

The boom was not exclusive to Bangladesh. Venture funding in 2021 broke records across the board, according to Crunchbase, a global startup and investment data platform. Fast growing startups were showered with capital. Global venture investment that year totalled \$643 billion, a 92 percent growth from the previous year.

The entire 2010s attracted less than \$300 million. But the decade saw steady growth. Startups bloomed. As operations expanded, bigger sums of money were needed. And after 2021, money started coming in smaller and fewer amounts.

In the years that followed, promising platforms got hit by the shocks of a global economic slowdown. Bangladesh reeled from the impacts of Covid-19, high energy costs, dwindling private investment, a fragile bank system, skyrocketing inflation, and a regime change through uprising.

"During the interim government's tenure, investors have been cautious," said Pathao CEO Ahmed.

By 2024, annual fund flow fell to \$42 million with 41 deals. The next year, only 12 deals took place, bringing in around \$124 million. Almost all of that capital came from a single transaction -- a \$110 million deal backing SILQ Group, formed through the merger of Bangladesh's B2B commerce platform ShopUp and Saudi-based marketplace Sary.

The industry as a whole is yet to recover.

"When one deal makes up almost the entire year's funding, it suggests the ecosystem itself is not truly recovering," said a venture capital executive involved in regional investments.

However, while Bangladesh will remain the operational base for supply and distribution under the SILQ arrangement, a significant share of

expansion spending is expected to flow toward Gulf markets.

"This funding is not exclusively for the Bangladesh market," said one startup executive, speaking anonymously.

Early-stage activity has been hit hardest, according to LightCastle.

Grant, pre-seed, seed, and pre-Series A rounds attracted around \$14 million across just three deals last year, compared to \$9 million spread across ten deals in 2024.

"Investors are now extremely cautious due to the macroeconomic situation," said Fahim Mashroor, former president of Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS).

WHY THE MONEY LEFT

The retreat of capital is not entirely a Bangladesh story, says Tanveer Ali, chairman of Constellation Asset Management and one of the country's earliest angel investors, with a portfolio of over a dozen local startups, including Chaldal, and ShopUp.

An angel investor is someone who provides capital for a startup in its earliest stages, typically in exchange for a minority stake.

"What is happening in Bangladesh is not unique," he said, pointing to rising global capital costs and geopolitical instability that have reduced venture funding flows to emerging and frontier markets broadly.

Global venture funding took a nosedive right after the 2021 boom. According to Crunchbase, the following year, global funding declined to \$445 billion and stood at around \$285 billion in 2023.

The US, the largest startup investment market with about half of all venture funding, saw a 37 percent decline in startup investment.

For companies in Bangladesh that had built their business plans around continued access to venture capital, the shift created immediate problems.



Local conditions amplified the pressure considerably. Currency volatility eroded returns, says Mamun Rashid, president of ShopUp. When many foreign investors entered the market, the exchange rate stood at around Tk 84 per dollar, which has since climbed to around Tk 122.

"Private equity and venture capital investors generally expect returns of 40 to 60 percent," he said.

"For American investors, the only viable exit route is often through external markets, as listing a Bangladeshi company on exchanges like the New York Stock Exchange remains extremely challenging."

Ali also pointed to the regulatory environment, describing it as "quite conservative" and uneven across sectors.

Globally, the startup funding started regaining its footing in 2024 as AI-based initiatives started to gain traction. Overall, startup funding reached close to \$314 billion, Crunchbase data analysis showed.

Last year, venture funding made a full recovery across the globe, as investors flocked towards AI. Investors poured \$425 billion into more than 24,000 private companies.

However, Bangladesh has attracted negligible interest.

"Global investor focus has also shifted towards AI startups, and Bangladesh is not attracting significant investment in AI ventures," said Pathao's Ahmed.

The domestic investor base has not filled the gap. Since 2010, local investors have poured only around \$76 million into startups, according to LightCastle. In 2024, local participation collapsed 95 percent year-on-year.

"That is why solid startups like Chaldal have not received as much funding as expected," said Mashroor.

LOCAL PROBLEMS

The funding drought exposed a second problem: many companies had expanded far beyond what their

fundamentals could support.

According to Ali, foreign investors often push founders in directions disconnected from Bangladesh's ground realities.

"Sometimes a lot of our founders get distracted by what investors say too much, especially foreign investors," he said.

The result, in several prominent cases, was rapid expansion into new verticals before the core business had found stable ground.

Chaldal expanded to Sylhet, Rajshahi, and Khulna during the pandemic, flush with investor confidence, moving into cities with lower smartphone penetration and higher operational costs.

When funding tightened, those expansions were quietly shut down. The company had planned to raise Tk 100 crore in 2025 but secured only about half.

"If you get only half, it doesn't work," said founder and CEO Waseem Alim.

"We haven't received any support from banks. Startups have limited access to bank loans compared to traditional businesses."

Sheba Platform Ltd, one of the country's largest digital marketplaces for household services, launched in 2016 as a home-services marketplace. It later added a business management app, then a payment service -- each venture burning through capital. The company is also facing a legal dispute involving unpaid taxes and employee dues.

Sheba CEO Adnan Imtiaz Halim said the company cut more than 300 jobs in recent months, bringing total employment down to around 110. Salaries are being paid in instalments.

The latest crisis was triggered when another round of investment, expected in November, was delayed.

"Our startup was built entirely on local investment. When funding suddenly stopped, and revenue fell sharply, it created a difficult situation," he said.

A NEW ERA

Startup investment in Bangladesh represents just 0.03 percent of GDP, compared to 0.3 percent in India, according to LightCastle.

The country has a large population, a growing digital economy, and an expanding middle class. But the institutional infrastructure -- domestic venture capital, accessible debt markets, viable exit pathways -- has never been built.

Foreign capital filled that gap for 15 years. When it left, the gap remained.

Ali sees the current pain as potentially clarifying. Founders, he argues, are being forced to shift from aggressive growth strategies toward financial discipline.

"It would lead to the emergence of a new type of startup in Bangladesh," he said.

One structural intervention is on the horizon. Bangladesh is preparing to launch its first large-scale government-backed venture capital firm, the Bangladesh Startup Investment Company, with nearly Tk 600 crore in initial capital.

Guided by Bangladesh Bank, it is set to begin operations on April 30, with plans to invest in at least three startups by June 30.

STARTUP SLOWDOWN

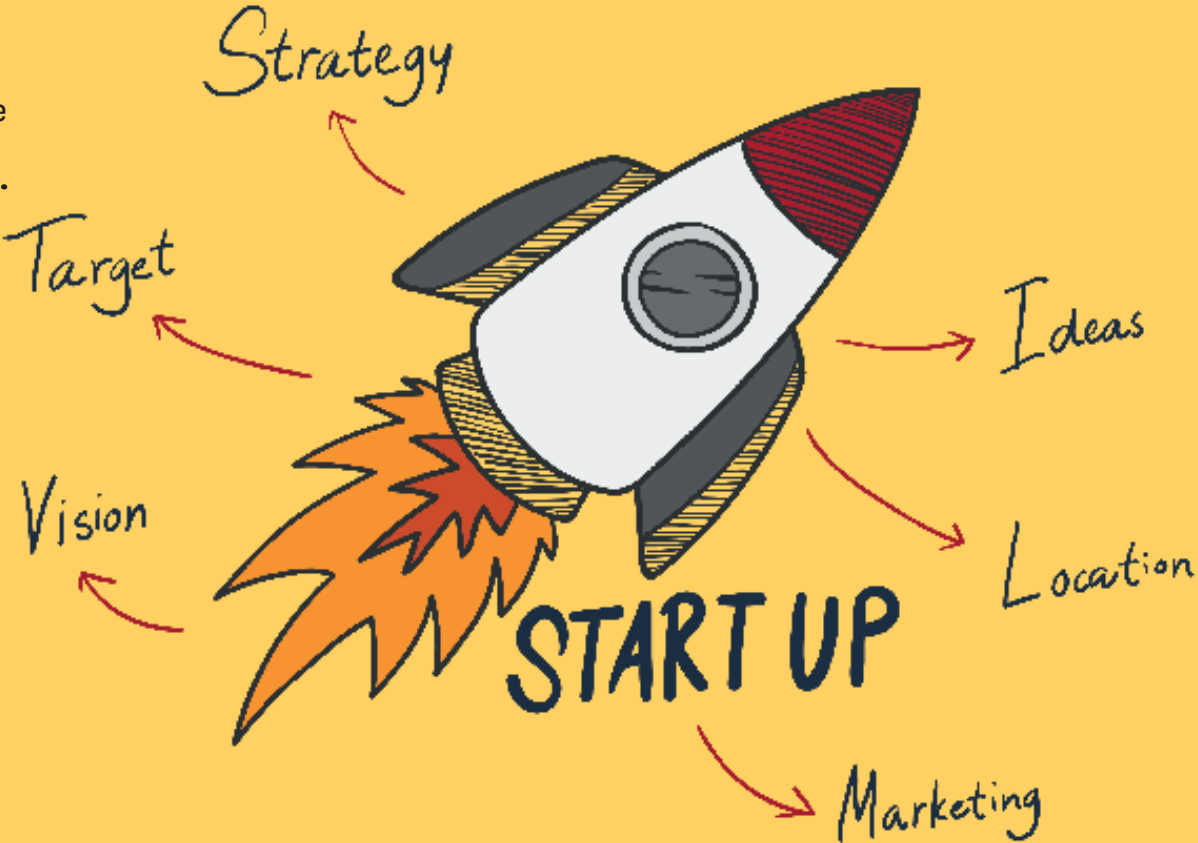
Funding has fallen, deals have slowed, and some of the country's best-known startups are struggling to survive

Startup funding

- 2021: \$434m raised with 94 deals
- 2024: \$42m came with 41 deals
- 2025: \$124m raised with 12 deals (\$110m from one deal)
- Total funding over last decade: \$1.12b
- Local investor contribution: \$76m (6.8% of total)
- Startup investment as share of GDP: 0.03%

Why funding fell

- Global startup funding fell sharply after 2022
- Higher interest rates, capital costs
- Political instability at home
- Taka depreciation
- Difficult for local firms to list on major stock exchanges
- Global investors now focused on AI ventures
- Bangladesh lacks infrastructure to attract AI-focused funding



Bangladesh Startup Investment Company

- Initial capital: Tk 600 crore
- Launch date: April 30, 2026
- Planned first investments: at least three startups by June 30

What went wrong inside startups

- Rushed expansions before becoming stable
- Many relied heavily on overseas venture capital
- Few alternatives to foreign funding
- Limited institutional lending or local investment

SLOWDOWN IMPACT

- Fewer startup launches
- Companies cutting staff to reduce costs
- Startups may avoid new sectors or products

SOURCES: LIGHTCASTLE PARTNERS, GOVT DATA



Ministers, opposition leaders, diplomats, businesspeople, and members of the civil society, among other guests, attend The Daily Star's 35th anniversary celebrations. PHOTO: STAR

Rising from the ashes, EVEN STRONGER

The Daily Star celebrates its 35th anniversary,
honours rescuers of Dec 18 attack

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As guests walked into The Daily Star premises to mark its 35th anniversary, they were not met with glossy interiors or a polished lobby.

Instead, they encountered the first two floors laid bare like a wound – hollowed out and fire-scarred from the night of December 18, 2025.

Spotlights lit up charred walls and peeling paint, while footfalls stirred soot from broken tiles, making the air hang heavy. Piles of burnt newspapers and shattered glass lined the walkways, and the summer heat made the scorched woodwork swelter.

On the first day of the two-day event yesterday, what was on display was not an aestheticised, carefully curated exhibit, but a raw, unflinching look at the heinous attack, which around 30 staffers of the newspaper survived.

However, after a day's gap, the newspaper was published with a single-word headline, "Unbowed".

As The Daily Star marked its three and a half decades, the ceremony served as a stark reminder that mobs could burn a building, but not its guiding principle of journalism without fear or favour.

Even when faced with the fear of death, its journalists upheld the newspaper's motto – "Your right to know".

The programme began with the national anthem, followed by a one-minute silence observed in memory of the 13th anniversary of the Rana Plaza collapse, the martyrs of the 1971 Liberation War, the 1990 anti-autocracy movement, and the 2024 July Uprising.

"When a free press is set ablaze, democracy burns with it," said Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of the newspaper, adding that democracy falters when presses are silenced.

He reminded the audience that the newspaper, founded on January 14, 1991, was born during the fall of General HM Ershad's autocracy. "Our journey began alongside the rebirth of democracy.

UNBOWED
The Daily Star
CELEBRATING
35
YEARS of
JOURNALISM WITHOUT
FEAR OR FAVOUR

"As a front-row witness for 35 years, I have seen where we excelled and where we faltered. Our greatest failure has been the inability to institutionalise democracy."

He said the February 12 election and the newly elected parliament mark a renewal of the pledge to democracy, and reminded the audience that this government is not "business as usual" because it emerged through the July uprising.

"As a non-partisan paper, we speak not of a partisan victory, but of an elected government that must reflect the dreams of its people," said Anam, adding, "You [the newly-elected government] are the product of a revolution led by students – the July uprising. This signifies something profound. Do not underestimate the dreams of that revolution; it is a perspective that must guide your path."

The newspaper's editor added, "I would like to tell my fellow journalists that your job is not to serve your owner. Your job is to

serve the people, your readers, your listeners. Sometimes you forget. I appeal to you to realise the value, the magnificent ethos of your profession."

Anam also appealed to the new leadership to pay heed to environmental destruction. "We are among the countries that have the highest number of rivers – all fresh water – while the world is dying for drinkable water. This is an asset. The rivers in the country are not being polluted by our enemies but ourselves. Meanwhile, groundwater, which is supposed to serve the next generations, is being extracted indiscriminately."

During the ceremony, the organisation handed over tokens of appreciation to members of the army, police, and fire service for their efforts in saving the lives of The Daily Star's staffers on the night of December 18, 2025, despite many challenges.

They included Lieutenant Colonel Sami Ud Dowla Chowdhury, director of ISPR; and Lieutenant Colonel Md Junnun Nahid, both of whom were recognised in absentia.

Also honoured were Kazi Nazmuzzaman, PFM, assistant director of the Fire Service and Civil Defence Directorate; Md Nazim Uddin Sarker, PFM, senior station officer at the Teigaon Fire Station; Mohammad Ibne Mizan, deputy commissioner (Teigaon Division) of

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Let media report freely, without fear

Politicians, diplomats, academics, business leaders, civil society members, and readers attend Star's 35th anniversary programme

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The attacks on The Daily Star and Prothom Alo offices were not merely assaults on newspapers but on freedom of press, dignitaries said yesterday, calling for an environment where the media can report facts freely, courageously, and without intimidation.

They shared their thoughts about the importance of independent journalism while reacting to the attacks as The Daily Star celebrated its 35th anniversary at its office in the capital, where scars of the December 18 assault were displayed.

After seeing the photographs, and installations made from the rubble, politicians, diplomats, academics, business leaders, civil society members, and readers praised The Daily Star's resilience and wished the newspaper continued strength

last such attack on The Daily Star. "What I liked most was that, no matter how much intimidation there is, journalists still want to express independent opinions, even at the risk of their lives," she said.

Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed said The Daily Star had left a memorable mark in journalism, media freedom and social responsibility. He hoped the paper and other media would help build a strong democratic state, in line with public expectations and the 2024 student uprising.

On the attacks on The Daily Star and Prothom Alo, he said those involved would soon be brought under the law. "The government is fulfilling its responsibility to uphold the rule of law. As the matter is under investigation, it is not appropriate to say more. But justice will be ensured, and all those involved will face legal action," he



I have been here from the first day of The Daily Star. Now I see that after 35 years, it is still alive fearlessly.

PROF REHMAN SOBHAN

in its pursuit of independent, objective, and courageous journalism.

They said the newspaper's decision to publish the next day, despite the arson attack on its office with journalists still inside, reflected the role the media must play in defending truth, public accountability, and democratic values.

Economist Prof Rehman Sobhan said he had been with The Daily Star from its first day. "Now I see that after 35 years, it is still alive fearlessly," he said.

About the celebration, he said the newspaper had managed to bring together all the main players, including the leader of the opposition and powerful ministers on the front bench. "This is a very good initiative," he said.

Abdullah Abu Sayeed, author and founder of Bishwo Shahitto Kendro, said he enjoys reading The Daily Star because it gives him new perspectives and new light, not always found in an average newspaper.

He also said the paper maintains neutrality and practises professional journalism. "For a nation, it is very important that such a newspaper stands strong," he said.

Political scientist Prof Rounaq Jahan said, "We cannot have our breakfast without The Daily Star."

She said readers trust The Daily Star as an objective and courageous newspaper, adding that the attack had shocked her. "It is beyond words that such a barbaric attack could take place on an independent newspaper. Nothing can be more condemnable than this," she added.

She hoped this would be the first and

said.

Information and Broadcasting Minister Zahir Uddin Swapon said the brutal attack showed how difficult The Daily Star's journey had been. "The evidence of destruction shown in the exhibition proves how difficult a path The Daily Star has had to cross."

He hoped the newspaper would continue to move forward by facing adversity, and should remain attentive to making every report objective. He also said the government had condemned the attacks on media outlets and pledged to resist them.

Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku said freedom of expression in newspapers must not be met with hostility. "If any group reacts with anger, it becomes a major obstacle on democracy's path. I hope we have overcome that. We must remain vigilant so such incidents do not recur," he said. "The Daily Star has always spoken for the people, for truth, and for democracy," he added.

Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman said, "Stars were born an eternity ago. They reside in the sky and deliver justice to everyone, showing equal light and guidance to all. The Daily Star will show that same thing – this is our expectation of it as a nation."

"... [We expect The Daily Star] to give equal importance to all," he said.

Reacting to the attacks, he said such attacks were regrettable and had happened before in Bangladesh, including the ones involving the Dainik Sangram and Daily Amar Desh. "We never support this kind

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THE GRASSROOTS NATION BUILDERS

Four individuals recognised for their outstanding contributions to society



RAHIMA KHATUN (Social Cause/ Healthcare)

Rahima Khatun's journey is not only one of service, but also of quiet resilience shaped by deep personal hardship. Early in her life, her mother-in-law cast her out, leaving her to struggle for survival and dignity at a time when support systems for women were scarce. Rather than breaking her, this experience strengthened her empathy for others, especially vulnerable women facing rejection, poverty, or neglect. Over more than three decades as a grassroots health worker in Chuadanga,

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BALLAL HOSSAIN (Farming)

Ballal Hossain's journey is a powerful story of resilience and transformation, from a struggling day labourer to a successful agricultural entrepreneur in Jashore. Forced to leave school after Class Five due to financial hardship, he took low-paid jobs just to survive. Instead of giving up, he gradually turned to farming, starting small and enduring setbacks such as storms that destroyed his early efforts. With determination and support from agricultural initiatives, he adopted

SEE PAGE 2 COL 7



SHIRIN AKTER (Sports)

For Shirin Akter, becoming Bangladesh's fastest woman was never just about speed. It was about refusing to stop, even when life tried to hold her back at every turn. From a young girl in a village, borrowing Tk 10 to make a phone call and running barefoot to a competition with torn sandals in her hands, she grew into a determined athlete who stood alone against doubt, even from her own family. Her journey is built on quiet defiance and deep resilience. The day a

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6



NAGINA NAJNIN BANU (Entrepreneurship)

At the heart of Thakurgaon's mozzarella cheese revolution stands Nagina Najnin Banu, a woman whose determination transformed not only her own life but also the lives of countless others around her. What began as a personal struggle gradually became a source of hope for an entire community. In a place where women's roles were often confined within the walls of their homes, Nagina dared to dream differently. Through hardship and uncertainty, her relentless

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PHOTO: STAR

Guests stand for the national anthem, followed by a one-minute silence in remembrance of those who laid down their lives for the country during the 1971 Liberation War, the 1990 anti-autocracy movement, and the July 2024 mass uprising, and also for the victims of the Rana Plaza tragedy.