



## Interim govt's missteps behind measles crisis

Say experts and officials; 294 children die of measles, symptoms; more than 45,000 suspected, confirmed cases

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The interim government's ineptitude and apathy that eventually led to a measles outbreak has so far left 294 children dead, say experts and officials.

The death toll, which includes suspected cases, continues to rise, just as the contagion spreads. As of yesterday, there were over 45,000 cases, confirmed and suspected, across 61 districts of Bangladesh.

The outbreak is largely attributed to the Yunus-led government's mishandling of a successful vaccination programme that had been recognised as a model for poor countries. The 18-month government that ran the country had attempted to change the method of procurement and funding source which caused procurement delays leading to a vaccine shortage and eventual stockout. This, in turn, led to an outbreak. Discontented health workers and intermittent strikes further compounded the situation, they said.

Although experts had alerted about a declining coverage and urged



**BASKET OF BROKEN DREAMS...** A farmer, visibly distressed, holds up a basket of unhusked paddy threshed from wet stalks that are already sprouting and no longer fit to be milled into whole-grain rice. The photo was taken yesterday in Dekhar Haor of Sunamganj.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

## Haor harvest stifled by rain, labour shortfall

SUKANTA HALDER, TAFSILUL AZIZ and JAYDUL ISLAM

Continuous rainfall over the past week has triggered a severe labour shortage in the haor region, compounding the challenges for farmers already racing against time to harvest their Boro crops.

Even after offering daily wages as high as Tk 2,000, farmers said they are struggling to find workers amid worsening waterlogging, torrential rains, and deadly lightning strikes.

Boro accounts for nearly 55 percent of Bangladesh's annual rice output, with the season running from

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

**The 18-month government that ran the country had attempted to change the method of procurement and funding source which caused procurement delays leading to a vaccine shortage and eventual stockout. This, in turn, led to an outbreak.**

for action, the government failed to carry out a campaign at any point of its 18-month tenure. The government was, in fact, due to run a special measles campaign in mid or late 2024, which never happened.

World Health Organisation (WHO) blamed this crisis on measles and rubella (MR1 and MR2) vaccines being out of stock in Bangladesh between 2024 and 2025, combined with routine immunisation gaps and the absence of nationwide supplementary campaigns since 2020.

The Daily Star spoke to a dozen experts, current and former officials of the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI), the health directorate and the ministry to understand how a well-established system broke down during the Yunus government.

READ PROF SAYEDUR RAHMAN'S FULL INTERVIEW ONLINE

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

## 'Form permanent media commission'

Say journos at Editors' Council-, Noab-organised event; Info minister suggests advisory committee for setting up the panel

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Journalists yesterday called for the establishment of a permanent media commission to enforce codes of conduct and ensure accountability.

Speaking at a seminar organised on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day at the CIRDP auditorium, Information Minister Zahir Uddin Swapon said the government would "definitely" move ahead with the plan.

The Editors' Council and the Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh (Noab)

organised the seminar.

"The government is always a party in the media world, and at times, an overbearing one. Historically, we have seen that governments themselves can commit offenses. Therefore, in such an environment, a media commission or a similar authority is essential."

Developed countries have created such authorities that can treat everyone, including the government, as a party and bring them under a framework, he said.

Swapon suggested forming a consultative

RELATED STORIES ON PAGE 12

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

## BB readying Tk 20,000cr factory revival fund

MD MEHEDI HASAN

The central bank is likely to introduce a Tk 15,000 crore to Tk 20,000 crore low-cost fund to help revive closed factories in the country.

Industries and factories that have been shut down due to unavoidable reasons and are willing to repay their loans will be able to access low-interest working capital loans from this fund. In some cases, firms may also receive term loans.

The interest rate on the loans could be set at 13 percent, with a possible 5 percent subsidy, The Daily Star learned this from Bangladesh Bank officials involved with the proceedings.

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman is expected to

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1



PHOTO: PMO

Newly elected members for the reserved women's seats taking the oath of office in the parliament building last night. The ceremony was administered by the Speaker of the 13th Jatiya Sangsad, Major (ret'd) Hafiz Uddin Ahmed.

## NEXT FISCAL YEAR'S BUDGET Tk 35,000cr likely to be set aside for new pay scale

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

About Tk 35,000 crore is likely to be allocated in the upcoming fiscal year's budget for the partial implementation of the new pay scale for government officials, pensioners and MPO-listed teachers and staff.

The finance ministry has already prepared a draft of the proposed budget factoring in the increased expenditure for the enhanced pay structure. The Daily Star has learnt from people involved with the proceedings. The draft will be finalised soon after a meeting with the prime minister.

Two options are under consideration for implementing the pay scale: one involves a three-year plan and the other option is to implement the pay structure over two fiscal years in several phases.

Under the first option, 50 percent of the recommended basic salary would be hiked in the next fiscal year and the remaining portion in the following year; the house rent and other allowances would be paid in two phases in the third year.

A committee led by the cabinet secretary has been formed to

**Full implementation of the pay commission's recommendations would require Tk 106,000 crore, of which Tk 80,000 crore would be needed for government officials and employees. The rest would go towards pensioners and MPO-listed teachers and staff.**

examine the proposals in light of the government's financial capacity and inflationary pressures.

Full implementation of the pay commission's recommendations would require Tk 106,000 crore, of which Tk 80,000 crore would be needed for government officials and employees. The rest would go towards pensioners and MPO-listed teachers and staff.

The upcoming fiscal year's budget is likely to be 18 percent higher at Tk 930,000 crore, with the revenue budget

SEE PAGE 5 COL 4

**UNBOWED**

On the occasion of **WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY** (May 3), The Daily Star continues its exhibition on the brutal attack on its Dhaka office on December 18, 2025. We invite you to walk through these scarred spaces and bear witness to what was endured. The exhibition remains open until **May 15 (11:00am to 8:00pm)** at The Daily Star Centre.

**Meril**  
SHOWER GEL

**Meril**  
BERRY BLISS  
Revitalize Skin  
Moisturizing Shower Gel

Perfumed  
Shower  
Moisturized  
Skin

শাওয়ার জেল  
নিট পরিমাণ: ২৫০ মিলি. b

SQUARE TOILETRIES LTD.

## 9 more die from suspected measles

Another die after testing positive, says DGHS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 10 people died from measles and measles-like symptoms in the 24 hours leading up to 8:00am yesterday, taking the total number of confirmed and suspected measles deaths to 294.

Confirmed measles deaths rose to 50 yesterday, with one additional death reported in the 24 hours, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The death was reported from the Dhaka division, according to the DGHS.

Meanwhile, nine more suspected measles deaths were reported during the same period, bringing the total number of suspected deaths to 244.

Of the latest deaths, four were reported from the Dhaka division, two from Barishal, and one each from the Chattogram, Khulna, and Sylhet divisions.

During the same period, 95 new confirmed cases were reported, raising the total number of confirmed cases to 5,313.

Besides, the DGHS recorded 1,166 new suspected cases in 24 hours, bringing the total number of suspected cases to 40,491.



Editors and senior journalists pose for a photo with Information Minister Zahir Uddin Swapon at a discussion programme organised by the Editors' Council and Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh at the CIRDAP auditorium in Dhaka, marking World Press Freedom Day yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

## 2 farmers die seeing paddy fields flooded

STAR REPORT

Two farmers collapsed and died on the spot after witnessing their ripe paddy fields go under floodwaters in Brahmanbaria and Kishoreganj on Saturday.

In Brahmanbaria, 55-year-old Ahad Mia collapsed after seeing his ready-to-harvest paddy submerged in Nasirnagar upazila, said Upazila Agriculture Officer Imran Shakil.

Around 1,500 bighas of land in the upazila had already been submerged over the past two days, he said.

Doctors suspect he may have suffered a heart attack, he added.

Ahad had reportedly taken loans of about Tk 50,000 to cultivate the land and was the sole earner for his family, which includes two sons and a daughter.

Several other farmers in the area have fallen ill after witnessing similar losses, with at least three currently undergoing treatment, the agriculture officer said.

Nasirnagar UNO Shahina Nasrin said a list of affected farmers would be prepared and necessary government assistance provided.

In Kishoreganj, 60-year-old farmer Akhter Hossain died after falling ill upon seeing his submerged paddy field in Austagram haor, said Nasima Akhter, a reserved member of Deoghar Union Parishad.

Akhter fell sick after seeing the damage to

SEE PAGE 8 COL 4

## Haor harvest stifled by rain

FROM PAGE 1

December to April.

In seven haor districts, Boro has been cultivated on 4.55 lakh hectares of land. Harvesting has so far been completed on 3.24 lakh hectares, or 71.26 percent, according to Md Jamal Uddin, additional director for monitoring and implementation at the Department of Agricultural Extension's (DAE) Field Services Wing.

He said heavy rainfall between April 26 and May 2 submerged 46,730 hectares of Boro fields, 10.27 percent of the total haor land. To give a complete picture, it will take three to four more days after the water recedes.

On Saturday afternoon at Karimganj's Boro Haor in Sylhet, farmer Saidur Rahman was seen harvesting paddy with a sickle while standing in knee-deep water, assisted by his sons, a ninth grade student and another from class 12.

His 10-year-old girl was carrying the bundles of paddy to a dinghy.

Before the rainfall, labourers were available for Tk 800 to Tk 1,000 per day, but now even Tk 1,500 to Tk 2,000 is not enough, Saidur said.

"For paddy selling at Tk 700 per maund [37.3242kg], what remains for the farmer if Tk 2,000 must be paid for a day's labour? That is why I am harvesting with my entire family," he added.

In Baratia Haor, Abdul Qadir echoed the crisis, harvesting with six family members.

He said combine harvester owners are delaying service, worsening the situation.

The owners also nearly tripled harvester rent. "In less affected areas, the cost would be Tk 6,000 to Tk 7,000 per acre. But here it is Tk 20,000 to Tk 25,000 now. Farmers are the most neglected," Abdul said.

"How can farmers survive if they

have to sell paddy at Tk 600 to Tk 700 per maund? It feels like no one is addressing this situation. Farmers seem like the most neglected," he added.

Farmers also reported difficulties drying harvested paddy due to waterlogged fields, while harvester wheels are getting stuck in mud, slowing operations.

In Kishoreganj, district DAE data showed 9,045 hectares of paddy land have been submerged, affecting around 32,000 farmers.

Its Deputy Director Md Sadiqur Rahman said 367 combine harvesters have been allocated for the haor, though demand far exceeds supply.

Farmer Farid Mia of Sadar upazila said, "Even with money, we can't find labourers, and machines can't enter the water."

"The paddy is ready, but we cannot harvest it. I have agreed to pay Tk 1,600 per katha, whereas last year it was only Tk 500. I am trying with five workers, but nearly five acres of my land are already submerged."

Shamim Mia of Holavanga Beel in Barhatia said, "Workers demand Tk 2,000 per katha. Even if we sell all our crops, we can't cover that cost."

Labourers themselves are working under life-threatening conditions.

In Kallian Beel of Kendua in Netrokona, worker Babul Mia said, "Even a slightly cloudy sky scares us. Lightning strikes are frequent. A few days ago, a worker died in Khaliajuri. Everyone says we charge more, but they don't see the risks."

In Habiganj's Ajmiriganj, Sujon Mia said, "There is always some risk during this season, but this time it is more severe. Many workers are afraid to go to the haor due to lightning."

This year, the labour shortage has worsened not only due to adverse weather at the start of the season but also because rising living costs have

reduced workers' availability and willingness to take up farm work.

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, inflation has outpaced wage growth for 50 consecutive months up to March. Wage growth stood at 8.09 percent in March, 0.62 percentage points below inflation of 8.71 percent. In February, the gap was even wider at 1.05 percentage points.

Agricultural economist Jahangir Alam Khan noted that every year groups of agricultural workers from Rangpur and Kurigram travel to the haor regions to harvest paddy. This year, however, their numbers have declined.

One major reason, he explained, is that harvesting has already begun not only in the haor areas but also across the plains, reducing the pool of available labour for haor farmers.

He added that the situation has been aggravated by the lack of proper government planning and management regarding the use of combine harvesters.

"The government must take swift and effective action by ensuring better coordination, timely deployment of machinery, and adequate support for farmers," Jahangir said.

Md Mosharrar Hossain, additional director of DAE in Sylhet division, warned that if the weather persists, submerged paddy will be completely damaged. "Moreover, paddy in the threshing floor was also damaged by rain, and we are calculating the loss too," he said.

According to Sylhet Divisional DAE data, harvesting has been completed on 75 percent of haor areas and 33 percent of non-haor areas, with an overall average of 57 percent. Damage has been reported on 33,913 hectares so far.

[Our correspondents Mintu Deshwara and Dwoha Chowdhury contributed to this report]

## Interim gov't's missteps

FROM PAGE 1

THE TRIGGER

The health ministry has been implementing the Health, Population, and Nutrition Sector Programme (HPNSP) since 1998, popularly known as Operation Plans (OPs), to provide a range of health, nutrition, vaccination, and family planning services.

The fourth HPNSP had ended in June 2024 and the then Awami League government had proposed a fifth edition of the OPs worth Tk 1.061 trillion for another five years.

Documents show that a project evaluation committee sat for 60 meetings at the planning commission between July and November, 2024, concluding that this fifth edition would be the final one. The committee asked the health ministry to prepare an exit plan.

But instead, the ministry scrapped the HPNSP altogether in March 2025 and decided to integrate the OPs into regular government programmes. This was done to improve coordination and strengthen infrastructure, officials said.

The ministry had also decided to adopt several "bridging projects" to complete unfinished tasks under the fourth HPNSP and continue the supply of medicines, vaccines, and other essential items.

However, approvals took time. It was not until November 2025 that the projects were given a green light. Then, it took several more months to appoint project directors to run the projects.

Consequently, disrupted procurement led to a suspension of services. It was not just vaccines, but OPs discontinuation meant that over 14,000 community clinics across the country saw their medicine supplies dwindle, leaving thousands to suffer. The 450 NCD corners, dedicated points at Upazila Health Complexes (UHCs) that provide free medicines for hypertension and diabetes, were also deprived of supplies.

Many UHCs could not operate ambulances due to a funding crisis, as fuel costs and drivers' salaries were covered under the programme. Two crucial national campaigns, deworming tablets and Vitamin A Plus capsules, have remained suspended for over a year, a disruption experts say may have worsened the measles outbreak.

Although the interim government made some allocations for medicines, these were insufficient and the shortage still persists.

Prof Be-Nazir Ahmed, a health expert and former director of disease control at the health directorate, said the programme, a proven mechanism, should not have been "discontinued whimsically".

He said that even if there had been allegations of corruption, the interim government could have addressed them instead of abruptly stopping it.

"Besides, where was the exit plan? Had there been an exit plan and had it been implemented properly, the situation might not have evolved like this," he told The Daily Star on May 2.

Epidemiologist Prof Mahmudur Rahman, also chair of the National Verification Committee for Measles and Rubella Elimination, said just as the OPs were suspended so were the services of line directors and programme managers.

As a result, there was a vacuum in manpower, and at one point only three officials remained at headquarters. "This was a major reason behind the problem."

He added that with no OPs in place, the associated funding had also ceased. "Various issues have arisen as authorities moved to a new system using funds from the revenue budget."

Prof Sayedur Rahman, special assistant to the chief adviser of the interim government for the health ministry, said as the sector had long relied on the OPs, the transition

required extensive inter departmental coordination, which took more time which they had not foreseen.

He said in a written interview that the delays were primarily because the officials were not accustomed to the new system and "bureaucratic inertia regarding the new initiative".

DELAYED PROCUREMENT

With the OPs scrapped and the bridging projects yet to be approved, Tk 842 crore was finally allocated in August 2025. Bangladesh used to procure vaccines through Unicef under the Direct Procurement Method (DPM). However, in September, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs decided to directly procure half through Unicef, and the other half through an open tender.

The committee also directed the health ministry to negotiate vaccine prices with Unicef.

"All these decisions caused complications, and we have not received a single vaccine through any of the methods to date," an EPI official told The Daily Star in early April, seeking anonymity.



Unicef strongly opposed the change, reported Science.org on April 30.

"It was very frustrating," Unicef Representative to Bangladesh, Rana Flowers told Science.org, a scientific research, technology and medical news site of the eponymous journal. "For God's sake ... don't do this," Flowers recalled telling the interim government's health adviser Nurjahan Begum, reads the Science.org article.

Another health directorate official, wishing not to be named, said under the OPs, the line director was authorised to place vaccine orders with Unicef simply with one approval from the finance ministry. "But the latest funds, allocated from the revenue budget, require approval from two cabinet committees, apart from other issues, which could take two to three months."

On the other hand, current officials have little experience in procuring vaccines through an open tender, which requires separate tenders for each type of vaccine, which takes even longer.

He said the interim government procured vaccines worth about Tk 200 crore late in 2025 from Unicef on credit when reports of shortage began to trickle in. "But it was not enough."

Stocks of six types of vaccines, including measles, were exhausted by March 2026. But, he said, there used to be a three-month buffer under the previous programme.

Prof Be-Nazir Ahmed said the fact remains that delayed procurement meant vaccination coverage was not properly maintained, resulting in the outbreak. "If responsibility is to be assigned, it falls on the interim government. Their failure to ensure proper vaccination meant herd immunity or collective protection was not achieved."

Prof Sayedur in a Facebook post on Friday said it was important for the government to build its own capacity and reduce dependence on external sources for a long-running vaccination programme. "So, the interim government tried to procure vaccines at competitive prices."

He told this newspaper that the Unicef warning had only reached him on December 30, 2025, when there was little time to review the process which was already in its last stages.

NO SPECIAL CAMPAIGN

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) risk assessment report on April 23, the current outbreak is occurring in the context of "suboptimal population immunity".

Bangladesh had made substantial progress in eliminating measles, with first dose coverage rising significantly between 2000 and 2016 and, later, with the second dose coverage between 2012 and 2024. Confirmed cases declined sharply during this period.

The crude vaccination (both valid and invalid vaccinations) of MR 1 was 100.1 percent in 2023, which fell to

92.73 percent in 2025, while MR 2 fell to 90.78 percent in 2025 from 98.1 percent in 2023.

But experts say the actual figure is likely lower, as some evidence suggests vaccinations were falsely reported from the field when health workers were on strikes three times in 2025.

Prof Mahmudur Rahman said that on several occasions, they informed senior officials of the health ministry about the decline but did not see any action.

Another health directorate official requesting anonymity said, even though half the vaccines had arrived following arrangements with Gavi in September 2025, the measles campaign was scheduled in April 2026. "This suggests a lack of understanding of the urgency."

Prof Sayedur, appointed in November 2024, said that the interim government was grappling with the treatment and services of wounded July warriors for the first six months.

Sayedur further prevaricated that there was no alert, warning, or red flag from any national or international authority indicating an urgent need to conduct the special campaign immediately.

When asked to respond to the public sentiment that the ministry's glaring lapses contributed to the tragic child fatalities, Prof Sayedur evaded responsibility and said, "We are all deeply saddened by the loss of these children. These tragedies touch every one of us."

He equivocated further that the ministry had provided timely approvals "according to established procedures" for vaccine procurement.

As much as 74 percent of the confirmed measles patients did not receive either of the two doses of the vaccine, while 14 percent received only one dose, government data show.

## 'Form permanent media commission'

FROM PAGE 1

committee to advise the government on the structure of the commission.

"We want to form this committee based on everyone's opinions. Even if it takes time, it must be credible. Once established, this commission will have the authority to handle news outlet registration and find ways to regulate the digital sphere," he added.

Sajjad Sharif, executive editor of Prothom Alo, reminded the audience that political parties had pledged to form an independent media commission before the elections.

"I remember our senior journalists working together to draft a roadmap for this commission. It focused on two main areas. First, addressing the chaos and irregularities of the last 15 years, where legal loopholes were exploited to control the media and lead it astray.

"Second, this government made an election pledge to fulfil this, but that promise remains unfulfilled. I request that the media should not be treated merely as a tool for running the government," he said.

Nurul Kabir, editor of New Age and chief of the Editors' Council, urged the government to act on past recommendations rather than offering new assurances to form commissions or enact laws.

"We want to engage with you, but when we begin that engagement, we want to know which pro-democracy information policies you already agree with, even before we meet. If the government has the will, we are ready. If not, it is our responsibility to realise our demands," he said.

Shamsul Huq Zahid, editor of The Financial Express, recalled that the Media Reform Commission had

submitted over 20 proposals on journalists' economic conditions and freedoms to the interim government, but these were never implemented.

Kamal Ahmed, consulting editor of The Daily Star and head of the Media Reform Commission, said, "There is supposed to be a distinct boundary between the owner and the editor, but often that line is blurring," he said.

He cited examples of newspapers suppressing or omitting names from reports on official lists of money launderers and loan defaulters.

"When the prime minister answered a query in parliament and released a list of those accused of money laundering abroad, and similarly, when a list of the top loan defaulters was published, on both occasions, we saw how certain newspapers handled the news.

"Either they suppressed the entire list, or they published it while intentionally omitting the name of their own organisation's owner. In such a scenario, how can the editor of that institution claim credibility before their readers? How can they claim to be delivering news that is accurate, objective, and unbiased?" he said.

Kamal stressed the need for a code of conduct but warned against government control. "The question remains: who will enforce this code? Our experience tells us that if we hand this power over to the government, it will lead to an abuse of authority. Therefore, it is our own responsibility to ensure that this code, our stance, and the core principles of journalism are followed," he said.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, announced that the Editors' Council is drafting two codes of conduct: one for owners and another

for editors.

"Suppose an investor builds a hospital. They are the owner. But can they run the hospital? If they do, patients will die. Equally, many people can be the owners of the media, but only the editor can run it. Because if the owner tries to run the media, it will lead to a deviation from media values," he said.

"We must be more ethical... We should remain within what I'd call ethical journalism, one grounded in values. We must not practise journalism with the intent to denigrate anyone regarding any matter," he added.

Reaz Ahmad, editor of Dhaka Tribune, said Bangladesh has a vibrant media landscape "in terms of quantity, if not always quality", and urged a transformation toward "qualitative excellence".

Several speakers expressed alarm over the spread of fake news on social media.

Hasan Hafiz, editor of Kaler Kantho, warned of rampant character assassination and obscenity on social media, particularly targeting women.

"People are hungry for information ... Because they do not get news from mainstream sources or fail to find truthful reporting, they turn elsewhere," he said.

Noab President and Manab Zamin Editor-in-Chief Matiur Rahman Chowdhury criticised the race for "likes" and "views" on platforms such as YouTube and Facebook.

"As long as this race continues, there is no way to escape misinformation. The mainstream media stands helpless," he said.

AMM Bahauddin, editor of Inqilab, and Shahriar Karim, executive editor of Sangbad, also spoke at the event.

## PUBALI SWADHIN SANCHAY

✓ Attractive Interest Rate / Profit  
[3 Months FDR rate plus 1% p.a.]

✓ Any amount can be deposited at any time as desired

AAA  
Rated Bankপূবালী ব্যাংক পিএলসি.  
PUBALI BANK PLC.Open your  
Account  
from anywherePI Banking-  
a Pubali Bank appsISO/IEC  
27001:2022

ইসলামী ব্যাংকিং সেবা প্রদানে 'ইসলামী ব্যাংকিং কর্ণার' পূবালী ব্যাংকের প্রায় সকল শাখা এবং উপশাখায়

## 49 reserved-seat MPs take oath

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Forty-nine newly elected Members of Parliament from the reserved women's seats of the 13th Jatiya Sangsad have taken their oath.

Speaker Hafiz Uddin Ahmad administered the oath in the Parliament's oath chamber around 9:00pm yesterday.

According to the Parliament Secretariat, 36 MPs from the BNP, 12 from the Jamaat-led 11-party alliance, and one independent took the oath together.

Afterwards, they signed the oath documents, registered in the MPs' list book, and completed formalities such as photographs and fingerprint collection for identity cards.

Out of the 50 reserved seats, BNP was allocated

SEE PAGE 9 COL 5



A child being treated with local remedies made from extracts of wild vines in Sinduk Mukh Para of Bandarban's Alikadam upazila. Due to poor access to healthcare, many families have turned to such practices to treat children with measles-like symptoms.

PHOTO: STAR

## 1st JS session failed to address reform roadmap

Says Nahid Islam

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

National Citizen Party (NCP) Convener Nahid Islam yesterday said the first session of the 13th parliament failed to address how reform proposals would be implemented, warning that continued disregard could lead to a mass movement.

"The session was supposed to discuss reform implementation, but the government ran parliament in its own way. If this continues, a movement with the people will become our only option," he said while chairing the closing session of a national convention titled "Energy, Economy, Human Rights, Reform and Referendum", organised by the NCP.

The programme was held at the Institution of Diploma Engineers in Kakrail, Dhaka.

Nahid said the July uprising was part of a

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4

## MEASLES OUTBREAK

## Healthcare still out of reach for hill children

Mro families in Alikadam turn to herbal remedies amid poor access to treatment

MONG SING HAI MARMA, Bandarban

Children with measles-like symptoms in several remote hill settlements of Kurukpata union under Bandarban's Alikadam upazila are being treated with local remedies and herbal medicine as Mro families struggle to access healthcare.

At least five children have died with measles-like symptoms, while scores of others have been infected across 10 to 15 remote hill villages in the area over the past few days.

Local residents said proper treatment remains largely inaccessible to them. As a result, many families have turned to herbal remedies, including extracts from wild vines, and other traditional practices to treat their ailing children.

In Sinduk Mukh Para along the Matamuhuri river, around

50 kilometres from Alikadam upazila headquarters, 13-year-old Kramum Mro was seen lying weak in her mother's arms.

Her body was covered with red rashes, and she had been suffering from high fever and extreme fatigue.



Kramum's mother, Nganrao Mro, 55, was trying to feed her a bitter concoction of herbal extracts, which made the child vomit.

"My daughter has been sick for seven days with high fever and rashes all over her body. She

cannot eat anything," Nganrao said.

Asked why she had not taken her daughter to a hospital, she sighed.

"In this rain, how can I take her walking down the hilly path, followed by a boat trip to Powa Muhuri Dari Para, and then by motorcycle to the upazila health complex miles away in Alikadam? It will also take several thousand taka for a round trip. Where will we get that money?"

Asked about the herbal remedy, Nganrao said they grind different wild vines and other items, mix the extract with water, and feed it to the child.

"It tastes very bitter, so she does not want to take it," she said. Almost all sick children in the village are being treated the same way.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4

## SHAPLA CHATTAR

At least 32 killed in crackdown  
Says ICT chief prosecutor

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The investigation into the Shapla Chattar crackdown on May 5, 2013, has so far found evidence of at least 32 killings in Dhaka, Chief Prosecutor Md Aminul Islam of the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) said yesterday.

"We have yet to complete the investigation... I cannot give the total number of victims, but we have found that 32 people were killed in Dhaka," he told reporters at his office.

He said the probe is being conducted carefully to ensure a fair and controversy-free outcome. "We are taking time so that those involved can be brought to trial through a proper investigation," he added, expressing hope that the report will be submitted soon.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Deliver on govt pledges with the spirit of progress  
PM urges DCs

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman yesterday called upon deputy commissioners (DCs) to play a proactive role in implementing the government's promises made to the people with a spirit to move ahead, stressing accountability, transparency and efficiency in building a people-friendly administration.

"I hope that, with your talent and competence, you will be able to play a vital role in efficiently implementing every promise made by the government to the people," he said while inaugurating the four-day DC Conference-2026 at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium.

The premier categorically said the government is committed to implementing every pledge of its election manifesto and the July charter as signed before the people. "We will implement each

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6



## 'No innocent journalist should be in prison'

Info minister tells event, quoting PM

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman made it clear that the government does not want any innocent journalist to remain in jail, according to Information and Broadcasting Minister Zahir Uddin Swapon.

Tarique had made the remarks during a meeting with the Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh (Noab), the minister said at a discussion marking World Press Freedom Day at the Tothyo Bhaban auditorium in Dhaka yesterday.

"While talking to [Noab], he [PM] said that we don't want any journalist to remain in jail without committing a crime," Swapon said. The meeting took place on April 21.

Swapon also said the government will ensure, in principle and under the law, professional security for all journalists.

Defamation cases and other legal complexities will be brought under institutional management through the Press Council, he said.

He said no individual or institution in the government would dictate terms to or call any media house.

"In our election manifesto and 31-point declaration, the BNP pledged to respect impartial

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4

লাখেরও অধিক  
গ্রাহকের আস্থাNexusPay  
মানেরই সবকিছু

+8801XXXXXXX

NEXUSPAY PIN

LOG IN

মাসে ২০ হাজার কোটি টাকারও অধিক  
লেনদেনের রেকর্ড নিয়ে আজ দেশেরসেরা ডিজিটাল অ্যাপ  
NexusPayডাচ-বাংলা ব্যাংক  
আপনার বিশ্বস্ত সহযোগী





US cutting 'a lot' more than 5,000 troops from Germany

President Donald Trump on Saturday doubled down on Washington's decision to withdraw 5,000 US troops from Germany...

The move follows a spat between Trump and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz...

Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell said Friday the withdrawal was expected to be completed over the next six to twelve months...

German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius said the US troop withdrawal "from Europe and also from Germany was to be expected."

Trump appears set to punish allies who have failed to back the Iran war or contribute to a peacekeeping force in the crucial Strait of Hormuz.

Kyiv hits Russian oil sites

Drones hits port, oil tankers, military ships; five killed in both countries

AGENCIES

Ukraine yesterday said it had hit several Russian ships -- a cruise missile carrier and three shadow fleet tankers -- as both sides fired hundreds of drones in a spree that killed at least five people.

Three were killed in Ukraine, one in Russia and one in Russian-occupied southern Ukraine, according to statements by local officials.

The two neighbours have been firing hundreds of explosive-packed drones at each other on a daily basis throughout the four-year war, as talks to end the conflict have gone nowhere.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky yesterday vowed to step up Kyiv's retaliatory strikes on Russian energy sites if Moscow did not halt its invasion.

The Ukrainian leader said his troops had struck a vessel equipped with cruise missiles at the port of Primorsk in Russia's northwestern Leningrad region.



The region's oil export terminals have been hit several times in recent weeks, knocking out billions of dollars' worth of exports, according to Kyiv.

Zelensky said three of Russia's so-called shadow tankers -- ageing vessels that ferry its sanctioned oil around the world -- were struck, one at Primorsk and two off the southern Black Sea port of Novorossiysk.

He posted black-and-white night-vision footage of a naval drone approaching one tanker at Novorossiysk.

Oil and gas revenues -- boosted by the war in the Middle East -- are critical for Russia's economy and funding its army.

The Russian governor of the Leningrad region had earlier confirmed a fire at the port after Ukrainian attacks.

The extent of the damage was not immediately clear and Russian officials gave no details.

Russian attacks on Ukraine's southern Odesa region -- a key maritime logistics hub -- killed two people, and one person was killed in the frontline Kherson region.

Russia fired 268 drones and one ballistic missile in the overnight barrage, Kyiv's air force said.

Ukraine's army launched 334 drones at Russia, Moscow's defence ministry said.

Kyiv's attacks killed a 77-year-old man in the Moscow region, which surrounds the capital, and a 15-year-old boy in the Russian-occupied part of Ukraine's southern Zaporizhzhia region, the local governors said.

Kyiv calls its attacks on Russia fair retaliation for Russia's nightly barrages of its cities.

Fourth term for TMC

FROM PAGE 12

voter turnout stood at 91.74 percent.

If exit polls are correct, a BJP win this time would mean the party that rules at the Centre gets to govern the key state of over 100 million people for the first time.

The Election Commission's Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls has further complicated predictions. While the TMC used the exercise -- which led to the deletion of 91 lakh voters, mostly Muslims -- to attack the BJP, its impact on

the ground remains unclear. Exit polls in India have a mixed record and can be inaccurate.

In 2021, several exit polls not only failed to capture the TMC's dominant showing of 215 seats in the 294-member assembly, but some also gave the BJP an outright majority. The BJP won 77 seats, well short of the 148 seat majority mark.

In every assembly poll since the TMC first came to power in 2011, the party has increased its seat tally, from 184 in 2011 to 215 in 2021.

Journo barred

FROM PAGE 12

official alleged that the journalist behaves rudely with officers whenever he goes abroad.

Mithu dismissed the claim as "baseless", stating that he rarely travels and had simply documented the facts of the encounter.

In a Facebook post, Mithu recounted the incident, saying that all of this happened at a time when national and international

events were being held to mark World Press Freedom Day.

He said the ordeal began while he was waiting in the immigration queue. A blue-uniformed officer called his name and seized his travel documents before escorting him to the office of the superintendent of police in charge of immigration.

"The SP came out and wanted to know about my profession," Mithu wrote.

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY
Pope laments violations, honours slain journos

AGENCIES

Pope Leo yesterday marked World Press Freedom Day by condemning persistent violations of media freedom around the world and paying tribute to journalists killed while reporting from conflict zones.

Speaking at the end of his weekly Sunday prayer, in a sun-flooded Saint Peter's Square, the pontiff said the day highlighted both the importance of independent journalism and the growing threats faced by reporters.

"Today we celebrate World Press Freedom Day ... unfortunately, this right is often violated, sometimes in blatant ways, sometimes in more hidden forms," he said.

The pope urged the faithful to remember journalists and reporters who have lost their lives pursuing the truth, particularly in areas afflicted by conflicts.

"We remember the many journalists and reporters who have been victims of war and violence," the pope said.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio will visit Rome and the Vatican this week, an Italian government source said yesterday, weeks after President Donald Trump's stinging criticism of Pope Leo.

Italian media reported that Rubio would meet the US pontiff himself on Thursday, but there was no immediate confirmation of this.



DCs seek PM's intervention on drug menace

FROM PAGE 12

Meanwhile, the Cox's Bazar DC suggested disbursing funds for government land acquisition through the iBAS++, a government software, to curb corruption and public suffering.

During the session related to the Ministry of Health, several DCs said health services are being disrupted at district and upazila levels due to doctor shortages and the absence of appointed physicians.

Health Minister Sardar Sakhawat Hossain assured the DCs that the ministry would take the necessary steps to address this issue.

Additionally, the DCs of Netrokona and Pirojpur proposed the allocation of water ambulances to ensure healthcare services

in the remote haor areas.

Following the session, Education Minister ANM Ehsanul Hoque Milton said DCs had flagged declining student interest in schools and stressed the need for joyful learning. He added that classroom competitions, curriculum updates, midday meals and school-uniform support are on the government's agenda.

Regarding proposals for a unified curriculum, primary schools in tea garden areas, and free education for children with disabilities, Milton said, "Every proposal is accepted. We must accept it and go ahead."

On Qawmi madrasa education, the minister said he has held three meetings with

representatives regarding degree equivalence and standardisation. He added that the ministry would soon submit a proposal defining the equivalence of Qawmi levels to SSC, intermediate, degree, and Dawra levels.

Addressing teacher shortages, Milton noted that 32,500 primary headmaster posts are currently tied up in court cases, while 14,300 primary teacher recruits are being brought "into discipline". He added that primary schools require an additional 32,500 teachers and 15,000 staff, while government high schools need 7,000 teachers.

He said if the PSC cannot provide teachers, the ministry will consider holding a special exam.

New primary teachers may be sent to Primary Training Institutes after joining, Milton said. "Those who fail the training will not be retained, and teachers will only be made permanent after two years of service."

Following yesterday's session, the DCs met with President Mohammed Shahabuddin. Today, the second day of the conference, discussions regarding 24 ministries and divisions will take place across five sessions.

The DCs will pay a courtesy call on the Speaker of the National Parliament this evening. The conference will continue until May 6, with 34 sessions scheduled over the four day period.

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
জেলা মৎস্য কর্মকর্তার কার্যালয়
গোপালগঞ্জ
www.fisheriesgopalganj.gov.bd
সাতভা ইকো রিসোর্ট ও ন্যাচারাল পার্ক এর ভিতরে অবস্থিত পুকুর সমূহ
ইজারা বিজ্ঞপ্তি
তারিখ: ৩০.০৪.২০২৬খ্রিঃ

Tk 35,000cr
FROM PAGE 1
being Tk 630,000 crore, according to the draft.
The revised budget for this fiscal year has been set Tk 788,000 crore, with the revenue budget increased by Tk 25,000 crore and development budget slashed by Tk 30,000 crore.
This year, Tk 84,114 crore has been allocated for salaries and allowances of government officials and employees, and Tk 35,657 crore for pensioners.
The Ninth Pay Commission has recommended partial implementation of the salary structure this year and the interim government has earmarked Tk 30,000 crore in this fiscal year's budget for partial implementation of the recommendations.
However, the implementation has been pushed back to the next fiscal year amid narrowing fiscal space due to low revenue mobilisation and rising fuel prices due to the Middle East conflict.
The commission recommended 20 pay scales, with the minimum salary proposed to rise from Tk 8,250 to Tk 20,000 and the maximum from Tk 78,000 to Tk 160,000, as it aimed to ensure that the real wages did not fall below the 2015 level.
Implementing the proposals would require an additional Tk 106,000 crore annually. Currently, the government spends Tk 131,000 crore a year for its 14 lakh employees and 9 lakh pensioners, the statement said.
The Eighth National Pay Scale was implemented in 2015 in two phases: the revised basic salary took effect from July 1, 2015, while revised allowances came into force a year later.
In fiscal 2014-15, the allocation for salaries and allowances stood at Tk 28,709 crore. Following implementation, the allocation rose sharply to Tk 50,775 crore the next year.

AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY-BANGLADESH
where leaders are created
Bangladesh's First QS 4-Star University
ADMISSION SUMMER 2025-26
PROGRAMS WE OFFER
UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Bachelor of Arts in English
Bachelor of Social Science in Journalism and Mass Communication
Faculty of Business Administration
Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) in
Accounting, Business Analytics, Finance, Business Economics
Faculty of Engineering
Bachelor of Architecture (BArch)
Bachelor of Science in Computer Engineering (CoE)
Faculty of Health and Life Sciences
Bachelor of Pharmacy
B.Sc in Biochemistry & Molecular Biology
Faculty of Science and Technology
Bachelor of Science in Computer Science & Engineering (CSE)
Bachelor of Science in Data Science (DS)
Bachelor of Science in Computer Network & Cyber Security (CNCS)

## Chaos returns in Dhaka's underworld

### Recent rise in criminal gangs' activities exposes systemic failure

The recent spate of violence by criminal groups across Dhaka points to a dangerous resurgence of organised crime in the capital that is reminiscent of underworld activities more than two decades ago. A recent report by *Prothom Alo* reveals that the weak law and order following the political changeover on August 5, 2024, opened doors for organised criminals to make a comeback. Many high-profile criminals secured bail at the time. Now, many of them have unleashed a wave of violence across the city to carve out territories to control.

Over the past 21 months, there have been reports of at least 23 incidents involving professional criminals. Among these incidents, several killings were carried out in public. In the latest incident, Khandokar Noyem Ahmed Titon, a top criminal who had been out on bail on August 13, 2024, following a long stay in prison, was gunned down by rivals in the New Market area on April 28. In many of these cases, the victims were targeted by their rivals in a bid to remove competition in "business." A number of them have some sort of political affiliation. Besides public execution, the criminal gangs are attacking establishments, issuing threats and making extortion demands—often via foreign numbers.

The report notes a pattern in these attacks that reflects a disturbing level of coordination and brazenness. Many of these incidents have been planned by fugitive kingpins abroad, communicated digitally, and executed by local gangs. Police say several local operatives are recruited from a pool of unemployed, vulnerable youths who are desperate for a source of income. These turf wars are rooted in a crime-driven economy where illegal income streams dictate power dynamics. Criminal groups are using violence as a tool to assert dominance, while ordinary businesspeople are silently enduring extortion demands, fearing retaliation and lacking confidence in legal protection.

A top police official confirmed to *Prothom Alo* that they were preparing an area-wise list of criminals and their associates, and would soon launch a "combing operation" against them. However, past experiences show that such operations often fail to root out this menace. Another failure on the police's part was weak monitoring of criminals who were out on bail. The lack of proper monitoring, combined with a gap in law enforcement since August 2024, provided these criminals a fertile ground to regroup.

Dismantling these organised crime networks, therefore, requires a practical approach. What we expect law enforcement agencies to prioritise is better intelligence coordination to identify the criminals and their locations, cutting off their reach from beyond the border, shutting down the flow of funds that facilitate such criminal activities, and ensuring airtight monitoring of bail-released criminals. Beyond that, the links binding these criminals and their political patronage must be severed. In addition, awareness campaigns and employment opportunities must be urgently planned to prevent jobless youths from turning to criminal gangs to make a living.

## End the motherhood penalty at work

### Investing in childcare is a must to stop mid-career exit of women

It is utterly frustrating that thousands of experienced women in the country are being pushed out of the workforce at the very stage when they are ready to assume leadership roles. A recent report by this daily shows how many women are forced to choose between their careers and caregiving responsibilities because of inadequate childcare support, inflexible workplaces, and unequal burdens at home. Over the past decades, the country has made significant progress in women's education, but that progress has not been fully translated into economic advancement in the absence of a conducive, women-friendly environment at workplaces.

The story of Feroza Ahmed, as reported in this daily, reflects the widespread reality of many women in the workforce. Despite having more than a decade of experience and a successful media career, she had to leave her job after the birth of her second child. While she successfully managed her department remotely during the pandemic, no hybrid or part-time option was offered to her when she needed it most. Such experiences are common across sectors, where motherhood often becomes a penalty for women.

According to a BRAC study, nearly 75 percent of 1,200 mid-career women now seeking employment had previously quit jobs due to domestic responsibilities or motherhood. Meanwhile, a Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics Time Use Survey found that married women perform 7.3 times more unpaid care work than men. These numbers expose how women continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of unpaid work while being expected to compete equally in the formal job market. The country loses valuable human capital as trained women professionals leave work. It is telling that less than seven percent of managerial roles in the country are currently held by women.

We therefore urge the government to formulate the necessary policies to create an environment where women do not have to leave their careers midway. Childcare and caregiving services must be expanded so that women from all economic backgrounds can access these services. Community-based and affordable day-care centres, certified caregiving services, workplace childcare facilities, flexible work arrangements, paid parental leave, and inclusive support for mothers of children with disabilities are all essential. Equally important is raising awareness and challenging the deep-rooted notion that caregiving is solely a woman's responsibility. A 2024 ILO report suggests that investing 3.99 percent of GDP in care sectors could create around 70 lakh jobs in Bangladesh by 2035, with 91 percent formal roles for women. If we are serious about economic growth, productivity, and equality, we must build a care economy that allows mothers to thrive at home and work.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

### First Grammy awards presented

On this day in 1959, the first Grammy awards were presented, the winners included Ella Fitzgerald as well as Frank Sinatra and the Kingston Trio, among others.

# Why are we paying so much for our metro rail?



Kallol Mustafa is an engineer and writer who focuses on power, energy, environment, and development economics. He can be reached at kallol.mustafa@yahoo.com.

KALLOL MUSTAFA

The issue of abnormally high costs in metro rail construction in Bangladesh has long been a subject of discussion and criticism. During the tenure of the Awami League government, the metro rail line from Uttara to Motijheel (MRT-6), built with loans from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), was alleged to have cost several times more per kilometre compared to similar projects constructed in other countries during the same period.

There was an expectation that after the fall of the AL government, the practice of excessive spending in infrastructure projects like metro rail would come to an end. However, as reported by *Prothom Alo*, for two new metro routes in Dhaka, Japanese contractors are now quoting costs per kilometre more than double those of the Uttara-Motijheel line. The cost per kilometre for MRT-6 was Tk 1,574 crore, whereas for the planned MRT-1 from Kamalapur to the airport to Purbachal and MRT-5 (North) from Hemayetpur to Bhatarata, the estimated cost per kilometre would be Tk 3,618 crore. Such high costs will not only increase fare pressure on passengers but also add to the country's debt burden.

A significant portion of Bangladesh's infrastructure development projects relies on foreign loans. These lending agencies are often referred to as "development partners," and their loans as "assistance." However, there is an ongoing debate about whether these loans truly support the recipient country's development or primarily serve to expand the lender country's business and exports.

In many cases, institutions from the lending country are involved in planning the project, conducting feasibility studies, consultations, and even implementation as contractors. Most procurement is also sourced from the lender country. This creates a conflict of interest, undermines objective cost assessment, and leads to inflated project costs. While corporations from the lending country benefit, the people of the borrowing



FILE PHOTO: STAR

For two new metro routes in Dhaka, Japanese contractors quoted costs per kilometre more than double those of the Uttara-Motijheel line.

country bear the burden due to high costs and questionable feasibility. Bangladesh's metro rail projects are a prime example of this dynamic.

JICA finances metro rail construction in Bangladesh. A Japanese consultancy firm, Nippon Koei, plays a key role in preparing and evaluating tender documents. According to a report by *Prothom Alo*, loan and tender conditions appear to be structured to make it easier for Japanese companies to secure contracts, effectively excluding competitors from other countries.

For instance, MRT-1 tender documents require the use of the "one-pass joint" method for tunnel construction, which is favourable to Japanese contractors. Similarly, only specific types of Japanese steel, produced by only three companies in Japan, are allowed for bridge construction. Even if contractors wish to use equivalent steel from other countries, they must obtain approval from the Japan Road Association.

Due to these conditions, even open tenders fail to attract contractors from outside Japan. Typically, only two or three Japanese firms participate in

the final bidding process, and their quoted prices must be accepted. As a result, metro rail construction costs under JICA financing are several times higher than comparable projects in neighbouring countries.

For example, MRT-6 in Dhaka had cost Tk 1,574 crore per kilometre. In contrast, similar elevated metro systems in India cost about Tk 150

crore per kilometre, and underground systems cost up to Tk 450 crore per kilometre. In other countries, costs are also significantly lower. According to an analysis by Dhaka Mass Transit Company Limited (DMTCL) cited by *Prothom Alo*, metro construction costs per kilometre are Tk 672 crore in Turkey, Tk 448 crore in the Ivory Coast, Tk 784 crore in South Korea's Seoul, and Tk 740 crore in Thailand's Bangkok. However, as already stated above, under the current JICA conditions for MRT Lines 1 and 5, costs in Dhaka are projected at Tk 3,618 crore per kilometre, which is much higher than global benchmarks and more than double that of MRT-6.

India also implements infrastructure projects using foreign loans, but does not accept conditions that undermine competitive bidding. As a result, local contractors often secure contracts, keeping costs lower. For example, metro construction in Patna, Bihar—also financed by JICA—is being executed by Indian contractors at a cost of Tk 450 crore per kilometre for underground sections. In contrast, Bangladesh's acceptance of restrictive loan conditions creates a severe

conflict of interest in which the same country's entities plan, finance, study, consult, and execute the project. JICA justifies higher costs by citing superior quality standards, arguing that higher upfront costs reduce maintenance and repair expenses in the long run. This argument is unconvincing. First, if JICA can maintain quality in Patna at Tk 450 crore per kilometre, why is Bangladesh's cost projected to be eight times higher? Second, according to a DMTCL report, the Uttara-Motijheel metro system has 45 defects and deficiencies, which contradict claims of superior quality. These include 10 issues in signalling and telecommunications, 16 in electrical systems, 10 in civil engineering, and nine related to trains and associated systems. The report also notes water leakage at 89 locations across 16 stations. Trains sometimes fail to stop precisely at designated points. Rust has appeared on tracks in depot areas. Sensor malfunctions have disrupted operations. Air conditioning systems have frequently failed. Ticket vending machines and energy storage systems often break down. Due to substandard bearing pads and design flaws, a bearing pad detached in the Farmgate area, causing the death of a pedestrian.

JICA also attributes cost escalation to expanded project scope, currency depreciation, and rising material costs. However, to verify these claims, open competitive bidding is essential. Currency fluctuations and global price increases affect all contractors, not just Japanese firms. Only through genuine international competition can the true cost be determined.

There is no doubt that the metro rail is necessary to address traffic congestion in a densely populated capital like Dhaka. However, constructing such infrastructure at abnormally inflated costs is unacceptable. There should be no obligation to accept unreasonable conditions out of gratitude towards a foreign lender. Loan repayments ultimately come from taxpayers, and higher construction costs translate into higher fares for the public.

Therefore, metro rail projects must ensure open tendering and fair competition, control excessive costs compared to global standards, and rely on domestic experts and institutions in decision-making. Otherwise, under the guise of development, public funds will continue to serve the commercial interests of foreign entities rather than the people of Bangladesh.

# Without NBR reform, the revenue crisis will only deepen



Md Asaduz Zaman is a journalist at The Daily Star. He can be reached at asaduz.zamanjbd@gmail.com.

MD ASADUZ ZAMAN

Throughout the interim government's tenure, reforming the country's revenue sector drew intense attention. The issue even spilled onto the streets, echoing through corridors of power, and igniting debates across bureaucracies. The "Revenue Policy and Revenue Management Ordinance 2025" was finally promulgated on May 12 and revised on September 01 last year. However, under the new BNP government, the fate of the revenue sector reforms has become uncertain as the parliament failed to ratify the ordinance within the constitutionally mandated 30-day period since its first sitting on March 12.

The ordinance aims to separate tax policymaking from tax administration to enhance efficiency, accountability, and revenue mobilisation by bifurcating the National Board of Revenue (NBR). This reform push evolved from Bangladesh's persistently low tax-to-GDP ratio, which hovers below seven percent, one of the lowest in the world, even among South Asian peers. Multilateral lenders, including the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, alongside businesses, economists, and policy analysts, have long advocated for such a structural separation.

The ordinance, however, drew criticism as the formulation procedure lacked proper consultation with

stakeholders. At the onset, NBR staff staged an unprecedented demonstration across the country over restructuring the revenue administration and sharing top posts between revenue and admin cadres. Although the ordinance was later revised, it could not be implemented due to a bureaucratic wrangle and a writ petition filed by an admin cadre official.

Following its lapse in the parliament, the incumbent finance minister, Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, said that his government would complete the separation of revenue policy and administration after further review. He labelled the ordinance as half-baked, but did not clarify what a more judicious reform would entail. Last week, a nine-member panel was formed to re-examine the ordinance and its amendment.

Yet, a critical question remains: is there any immediate prospect of reviving meaningful revenue sector reforms under the new government?

Reform is crucial for an already strained revenue system with limited fiscal space. In fact, the failure or uncertainty of the NBR bifurcation may even accentuate the impact of external shocks. For instance, uncertainty has arisen about the final tranche of IMF's \$4.7 billion loan programme (later revised to \$5.5

billion). There have been some media reports about IMF loan suspension due to uncertainty of major reforms, including the NBR bifurcation, but the government denied such claims.

While financial support from multilateral lenders remains uncertain at this point, Bangladesh's low tax-to-GDP ratio continues to severely constrain the government's ability to finance essential public services, from infrastructure and energy to health and education. As expenditure needs rise, driven by subsidies, debt servicing, and social protection, the gap between revenue and spending continues to widen.

On top of that, the ongoing US-Israel war on Iran has dealt a double blow to the country's revenue sector. Bangladesh is already "out of pocket by nearly \$2 billion" as soaring energy import costs force it to rely on volatile and expensive spot markets amid disrupted supply chains. Meanwhile, the revenue administration is facing a massive Tk 2.67 lakh crore shortfall in the current fiscal year. This has forced the government to rely more on bank borrowing, both domestically and externally. Increased domestic borrowing risks crowding out private sector credit, while external borrowing raises concerns about debt sustainability, especially in a volatile global environment.

Apart from addressing these financial issues, the separation stipulated in the ordinance is also important for ensuring efficiency and governance. The current structure of the NBR combines policy formulation and tax administration within a single entity, creating conflicts of interest and limiting accountability. Separating these functions could improve transparency, reduce discretion, and strengthen enforcement.

Also, Bangladesh's tax system remains narrow and uneven, with a heavy reliance on indirect taxes such as VAT, which disproportionately affect lower- and middle-income groups. As per the reform recommendations, a modernised revenue framework could be formed to help broaden the tax base, improve compliance, and make the system more equitable.

Finally, the reform could pave the way for a more research-driven and participatory tax policy framework, replacing the current system, which is widely seen as inefficient and slow to respond to emerging economic needs. A stronger institutional setup would allow evidence-based policymaking, greater stakeholder consultation, and more adaptive tax measures aligned with changing domestic and global economic realities.

This is why the argument for separation matters. An autonomous tax authority would not magically raise revenue overnight, but it could begin to change incentives. In fact, delaying reform carries mounting economic costs. Without a stronger and more efficient revenue system, the government's ability to sustain growth, manage fiscal pressures, and respond to external shocks will remain constrained.

As reforms hang in the balance, the implicit costs become higher for Bangladesh. Had the government started the reform programmes sooner, it would have strengthened revenue mobilisation. The government should, therefore, publish a credible reform roadmap to rebuild trust among multilateral lenders and local stakeholders, since uncertain reform may erode credibility.

The price of inaction is clear. The question is whether policymakers are willing to pay it.

# Pedagogy and power: Teacher-student relationships in our universities



**Psymhe Wadud**, currently on study leave, teaches law at the University of Dhaka.

PSYMHE WADUD

"The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy," Gloria Watkins (more widely known as "bell hooks") used to say. In discussions of politics, power, class, and authority, the classroom can indeed be such a space. In fact, higher education is incomplete if students' and even teachers' deeply held convictions are not challenged, or if members of the academy are not forced to intellectually engage with alternative worldviews. Besides this intellectual discomfort, interactions in and outside the classroom can be sources of visceral and affective unease, rendering academia a space of emotional vulnerability, anguish, and powerlessness, particularly for the students.

The alleged suicide of Munira Mahzabin Mimo, a student of the Department of Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Dhaka, brings to the fore critical questions on the latter. Sudip Chakraborty, an associate professor in the same department, has been arrested after a case of abetment of suicide was filed by Munira's father. Following the arrest, the department has relieved Chakraborty of all academic duties, including teaching and participation in exam committees. The case remains pending.

I do not wish to comment on the specifics of the case or on the culpability, if any, of the accused, who is also my senior colleague. Munira's family and Chakraborty are both entitled to due process as well as a fair and impartial trial, leading to judgment based on evidence rather than prejudice or pressure. I would rather discuss a system that continues to fail, one that neither prevents harm with any predictability nor reliably redresses it, and that lacks an appropriate code of conduct governing interactions within and beyond the classroom.

Complaints of sexual harassment and abuse of power against faculty members

and fellow students at universities are more common than we may assume because, as harsh as it may sound, we have grown apathetic to violence, so much so that anything other than deaths, or deaths by suicide, seems rather benign to us. This piece is not to be read as some claim of moral high ground, because I, too, am somewhat complicit as part of the system myself.

At the University of Dhaka, complaints against teachers and fellow students are generally handled ad hoc at the department level and may also be referred to the central authority (the committee on sexual harassment, for instance) if needed. The "need" for referral by and large inhabits a grey area, and in many cases, students feel discouraged to take their claims further due to uncertainty and lack of clarity about the process and about what to expect. Notably, there is still no written policy categorically defining sexual harassment or laying down a process of redressal.

In this context, the university follows the guidelines formulated by the High Court Division in a writ petition filed in 2009 by the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association. Nonetheless, my experience as a student advisor shows how the lack of a clearly written policy, specifically tailored to the university, grossly fails survivors, adds to their quandary and agony, and in many cases, undermines due process, at times bringing in disproportionate punishment. More importantly, our university does not have a written code of conduct to guide relationships between university staff (including teachers) and students.

In most higher education institutions in the West, policies on sexual harassment are categorical, clearly defining the terms to identify and establish claims and elaborating the specific processes to pursue if and when such incidents occur. Similarly, there are written policies to guide and regulate

relationships between members of the staff and students. Notably, since 2020, there has been a growing overlapping consensus among universities in the United Kingdom on banning or prohibiting intimate staff-student relationships. From around 2010-2015, leading universities in the US began categorically banning intimate relationships between students and staff.

These changes were introduced in response to the longstanding failure to adequately address sexual harassment and abuse cases at these universities. However, these prohibitions still operate, as critics say, largely within a risk-management or adult-control framework, as opposed to an equal rights paradigm. Nonetheless, some form of progress is better than chasing perfection or continuing with no code at all.

became pronounced later as a radical feminist claim. It is not even about consent, as feminist scholars eventually noted, but rather about equal rights in pedagogical contexts. Intimate relationships, even if consensual, between faculty members and students often reinforce the latter's unequal status, knowledge asymmetry, and pervasive lack of power in higher education settings. Even when there is no physical violence, abuse, or harassment, such relationships can lead to acute emotional vulnerability for the students involved.

University policies in the West now aim to categorically define prohibited forms of relationships and describe what such prohibition entails. For instance, as per the policy in force at the University of Oxford: "Intimate relationship" includes sexual or

and a student transgress the boundaries of professional conduct, or may be reasonably perceived to do so."

In cases where there is a pre-existing close relationship or one developed afterwards, the member of staff remains obligated to declare it to the appropriate authority (usually the head of a department or faculty). The Oxford policy also provides the caveat that it is "impossible to cover every potential situation which might involve (or be perceived to involve) transgression of the boundaries of professional conduct." Accordingly, it notes that any relationship "which involves (or is perceived to involve)" characteristics such as any form of dependence (whether emotional, practical, financial or otherwise) from either party and/or favouritism towards any student will always transgress the boundaries of professional conduct and must be declared. If in doubt, the policy notes, "the best course is to declare a relationship, or any interaction with a student that is of concern, so that appropriate measures (to protect both the student and the member of staff) can be considered by the authority."

Some policies also prohibit teaching staff from communicating with students outside of office hours or meeting them outside the university without declaring it to the appropriate authority.

In Bangladesh, in the absence of any written policies whatsoever, staff-student relationships are largely left to intuition, discretion, and instinct. At times, there are seemingly minor complaints of favouritism and hostility. In the worst cases, this may enable more serious dynamics of manipulation, harassment, and abuse.

We often approach crises in isolation, blinded by privilege and disabled by myopia, without understanding or appreciating the overarching system and power structure within which the so-called isolated incidents occur. Ad hoc fixes are ad hoc after all, and there is no alternative to predictable remedies when it comes to coexisting as a community and navigating potential contestation. While awaiting credible investigation and answers in Munira's case, we must also pause and look inward to interrogate the continuum of power and privilege we navigate, and address the reprehensibly consequential lack of written policies to govern our conduct and relationships with our students, as well as among the students themselves, as members of the academic community.



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

Indeed, for a long time, universities in the West by and large only discouraged, or deemed "inappropriate," intimate relationships between staff and students. Putting a complete ban on such relationships used to be frowned upon by both libertarians and some sections of feminists. Libertarians worried that a complete ban would curtail liberty, and some feminists would argue that such a ban would be read as condescending, disregard women students' agency in particular, and infantilise them. The view that relationships between teachers and students preclude consent due to a power imbalance

romantic relationships, marriage or life partnerships, regardless of gender, gender identity or sexual orientation, including a brief relationship and one-off occurrences, and whether they are conducted in person and/or online and/or via electronic or any other form of communication." The policy further regulates "close relationship" between staff and students, the definition of which excludes intimate relationships and refers to "a relationship where the nature, content, emotional involvement and/or frequency of interactions and/or communications between a staff member

## West Bengal polls: The dubious logic of 'logical discrepancy'



**Ashfaque Swapan** is an Atlanta (US) based freelance journalist.

ASHFAQUE SWAPAN

Today, the penny drops.

After a rambunctious and bitter electoral campaign followed by elections in two phases in West Bengal, vote counting begins today. By the end of the day, we will likely learn the verdict of our (mostly) Bengali neighbours across the border.

This assembly election has been marked by heavy-handed machinations of India's election commission. Here's an example of the Kafkaesque bureaucratic nightmare it is getting people into: according to reports, a number of poll officers (a significant number of them Muslim), while themselves barred from voting, are obliged to conduct the polls. This paradox reminds me of a situation I found myself in as a US graduate student decades ago. On the question of state residency, I was informed that for tax purposes I was considered in-state (I had to cough up the tax on my meager earnings), but for tuition purposes I was out-of-state (I had to cough up the extra out-of-state fees).

But let's not digress. The Election Commission faces legitimate, serious questions, but it is mitigated considerably by the fact that at the end of the day, West Bengal elections were held relatively peacefully, a huge achievement given the state's torrid record.

India's Election Commission has a storied reputation to defend. Its first chief, Sukumar Sen, was a stern, no-nonsense ICS officer who built the entire system from scratch, no mean achievement. India's first Lok Sabha elections were considered a huge success, and today's system rests largely on Sen's creation. Who can forget the delightfully cantankerous,

straight-shooting, and fiercely independent curmudgeon, T.N. Seshan, India's election chief in the 1990s, who brooked no nonsense from political heavyweights?

Today's Election Commission, it is fair to say, has lost a bit of its sheen. Its attempt to prune the voter rolls through a process called Special Intensive Review (SIR) makes sense,

**The fearsome scum that followed is heartbreaking. Desperate people, including the old and infirm, went from pillar to post with all their documents to have their names back in the voter rolls. The courts provided some relief by setting a deadline and ruling that anybody who got his or her name back in the voter roll by that deadline would be able to vote. But this was too little, too late.**

but what has raised the hackles of a huge number of voters is the way it has gone about it in West Bengal.

Some 91 lakh names were initially deleted following a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, according to data released by the EC. The SIR is a process to verify voter lists by removing ineligible, duplicate, or questionable entries. Later, using a murky algorithm, about 27 lakh voters have been

knocked off the voter rolls by a special procedure known as "logical discrepancy." Logical discrepancy, a broad category for inconsistent voter data, is criticised because it relies on subjective judgment rather than clear cut proof. Some of these cases are under adjudication.

However, plenty of anecdotal evidence show people had been wrongly removed from voter lists. A husband and children were voters, the wife was not. Somebody serving in the army for years was struck off. Kin of celebrities like Netaji Subhas Bose or Nandalal Basu were informed they could not vote. What made the situation precarious was that this was happening so soon before the elections that even if the court adjudicated in a person's favour; the relief for the voter would come too late and the lofty pledge of making sure every vote would be counted would prove to be hollow.

The fearsome scum that followed is heartbreaking. Desperate people, including the old and infirm, went from pillar to post with all their documents to have their names back in the voter rolls. The courts provided some relief by setting a deadline and ruling that anybody who got his or her name back in the voter roll by that deadline would be able to vote. But this was too little, too late. Out of the 27 lakh voters, barely a few thousand cases were adjudicated. And, here is the most remarkable part. Of the few thousand cases that were adjudicated, over 95 percent won back their right to vote.

This casts a heavy doubt on the entire process of logical discrepancy. If most of the cases that reached the appellate stage could be restored, how reliable were the original decisions that rendered these voters ineligible? And what does it say of an electoral verdict where millions of voters are effectively disenfranchised? Can it be enough to change the verdict?

Of course, there is the question of whether there is any discernible pattern in the way people have been struck off the voter rolls. Here's where the Election Commission's actions border on the sinister. The

voter data it has provided is not in machine-readable Excel sheets, where number-crunchers can get to work to see if any particular group has been targeted. It has been given out as "I am not making this up" PDF lists. Which means names have to be manually entered to make any sense of the data. The EC excuse, that this is done to maintain the security of the data, is patently absurd.

The state polls will determine whether firebrand Trinamool leader and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee will win a fourth term, or the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party will finally be able to topple Trinamool. BJP has pulled out all the stops. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, several BJP chief ministers have been making the rounds, and

BJP's Machiavellian mastermind and central Home Minister Amit Shah has stationed itself in West Bengal. As is the BJP's wont, its campaign is leavened with a heavy dollop of Muslim-baiting. BJP leader Shuvendu Adhikari likes to say there are about a crore Bangladeshi Muslims and Rohingyas in West Bengal. That's a lot of people. Where on earth are they? Why would they go to West Bengal, whose own people are leaving in droves to work as migrant workers in states as far as Kerala?

For all the huffing and puffing, the EC exercise, for all the turmoil it has caused and all the genuine suffering of millions of people of West Bengal, has failed to identify a single *ghuspetiya*, Modi's favoured epithet for (phantom) Bangladeshi Muslim migrant.

The Trinamool, to be sure, has its own handicaps. Allegations of extortion, large-scale corruption, and political shenanigans of all sorts bedevil the party but it has two solid strongholds in disadvantaged women through its Lakshmir Bhandar stipends, and Muslims who seem to depend on Didi to keep the big bad BJP wolf away. Ironically for the BJP, the whole SIR exercise might well turn out to be a Pyrrhic exercise. The anger it generated among multitudes of genuine voters who had to go through the indignity of their legitimacy being questioned has thrust this issue to the very top, undercutting the anti-incumbency sentiment.

Will Mamata Banerjee have the last laugh after all? We will know by the end of the day.

**Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh**  
Office of the Principal  
Rajshahi Medical College


Memo No. 59.14.8100.028.59.008.26-1505 Date: 03-05-2026

**e-Tender Notice-1/2025-2026 (OTM)**

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

Tender ID	Description	Tender/proposal publication date	Tender/proposal closing & opening date
1269011	Procurement for outsourcing manpower supply of Rajshahi Medical College for the FY: 2025-2026.	04-May-2026	17-May-2026

This is online tender where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the e-GP System Portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any e-GP registered bank's branches. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk ([helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd](mailto:helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd)).

  
**Principal**  
Rajshahi Medical College

GD-987

## MAHTIM SHAKIB voices rock- melody track

Mahtim Shakib is set to captivate listeners with his latest track, *Tuiyo Bhisshon Eka*. The song features lyrics by *Swatta* famed director and lyricist Hashibur Reza Kallol, who is currently serving as the CEO of Channel 9. It has been composed and musically directed by Sahriar Rafat.

Belonging to the rock-melody genre, the track was recorded yesterday and has already begun generating interest due to its distinctive mood and atmosphere. Notably, the song marks a departure from Mahtim Shakib's familiar musical style. Music enthusiasts are viewing it as a bold new experiment by Sahriar Rafat, particularly for its rock-oriented arrangement.

The release date is yet to be announced.

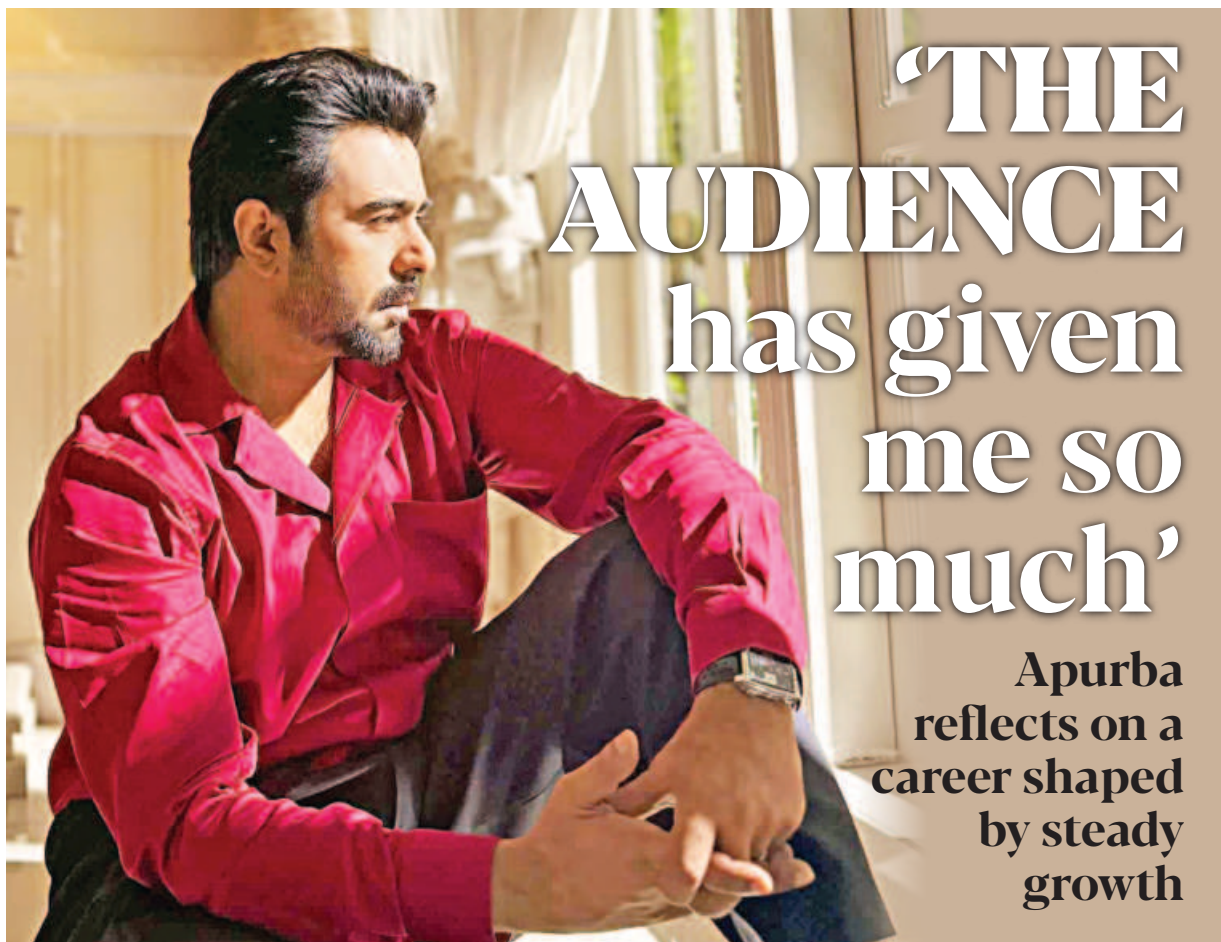


PHOTO: COURTESY

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Ziaul Faruq Apurba remains one of the most recognisable faces in Bangladesh's television drama landscape, with a career that continues to evolve and expand. Over the years, he has built an impressive body of work, with numerous popular fictions to his name, including the record-breaking *Boro Chele*. Beyond television, he has also carved out a space for himself on OTT platforms and received appreciation for his performances in films across the border in Kolkata.

This Eid, audiences will see him in two new dramas—*Ochena Ami*, directed by Taneem Rahman Angshu, and *Maya Pakhi*, directed by Jakaria Showkhin—further adding to his already prolific presence on screen.

In a recent conversation with The Daily Star, Apurba reflected on his journey, speaking candidly about his career, collaborators, and the relationships that have shaped him

as an artiste.

When asked how fortunate he feels in his position today, Apurba's response was immediate and heartfelt. "I see myself as extremely fortunate," he said. "Among so many professions, I belong to one where we receive immense love and respect from people. The audience has given me so much, and they continue to do so—I am deeply grateful."

Among those who left a lasting impression was Gazi Rakayet. "I must begin with him," Apurba said. "Working under his direction in my early days taught me a great deal. I also learned from him as a co-actor."

He also spoke fondly of his collaborations with fellow actors. "There was a time when I acted in numerous dramas opposite Tarin, and the audience responded very positively to those works," he said. "I've also worked extensively with Aupee Karim and Mahfuz Ahmed. From each of them, I received immense support and affection."

After more than fifteen years

in the industry, Apurba now finds himself working alongside a new generation of actors, many of whom look up to him. "I have deep respect and affection for juniors, and they, in turn, respect me," he said. "My journey has been very positive. Just as I respect my seniors, I try to extend the same warmth to those who are younger."

Among his many works, *Boro Chele*, directed by Mizanur Rahman Aryan, remains a defining milestone. "People still talk about it," he said. "It's a significant achievement in my career. So many viewers came up to me and shared their feelings. One young man told me that after watching the drama, he decided he would never hurt his parents again. That's when I realised the story would stay with people."

Speaking about the widely discussed *Eta Amaderi Golpo*, Apurba added, "After watching it, I called its director, Raz and actor Irfan Sajjad. The drama moved us to tears—it felt like our own story."

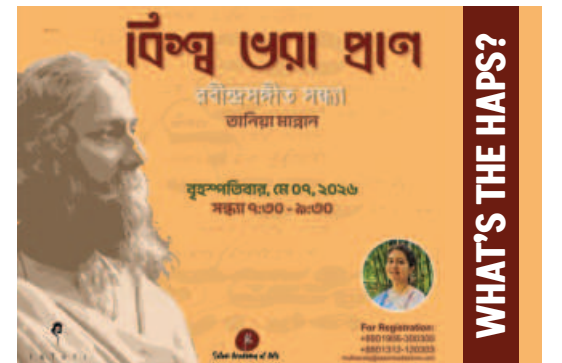


## Prangonemor celebrates 24 years with two stage productions

Theatre troupe Prangonemor will mark its 24th anniversary with two productions in Dhaka, highlighting over two decades of sustained work in Bangladesh's theatre movement. Founded on May 6, 2003, the group has built a reputation for consistent practice and acclaimed productions.

The celebrations begin on May 6 with *Tiner Talowar* at 7 pm at the National Theatre Hall, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy. Written by Utpal Dutt and directed by Ananta Hira, the play reflects politically charged 19th-century Bengali theatre traditions.

On May 12, the troupe will stage *Shesher Kobita*, adapted from Rabindranath Tagore, at the Studio Theatre Hall, directed by Nuna Afroze.



## 'Bishwo Bhora Pran'

An evening of Rabindra Sangeet unfolds in quiet reverence to Rabindranath Tagore, as Tania Mannan interprets a curated selection of his timeless songs. Her measured, expressive voice draws out the emotional depth and philosophical cadence that continue to define Tagore's enduring musical legacy.

DATE: THURSDAY | MAY 7, 2026

TIME: 7:30 PM - 9:30 PM

VENUE: HOUSE: 100, ROAD: 25, BLOCK A, BANANI

## NEWS

### Inability to probe disciplined forces

FROM PAGE 12

be classified as an A-status human rights institution as per the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, the global classification index assessing the effectiveness of human rights commissions.

"The most important aspect of A-status is ensuring that the body has been given the legislative power to be independent—politically independent, financially independent, and substantively independent, which means it gets to choose its own agenda within the broad framework of human rights," said Dr Edwards.

"There should be no political influence on this body, which also means a proper selection process for the commissioners who form the National Human Rights Commission," she said, adding, "The preference for these bodies is that they report to parliament and not to the government; it should not be the government that gets to choose who the commissioners are."

"Commissioners should also have security of tenure, knowing how long they are in their position without the worry that the government of the day may replace the head of the commission or its members with someone they prefer," continued Dr Edwards.

Beyond the NHRC, Dr Edwards pointed to the roles of parliamentarians and the law commission in upholding human rights.

"Parliamentarians themselves, for example, can and should be able to visit places of detention, meet victims and survivors, and put forward legislation. There is also the law commission, which has a role in initiating new legislative proposals that are human rights-compliant or in receiving instructions from the government."

She also backed the creation of an independent police complaints body or a police commission to investigate deaths or injuries in custody.

"There should also be an independent police complaints body. I also understand there was a proposal for a police commission, a body that, anytime there is an injury or a death in police custody or in the custody of the authorities, whether in a psychiatric hospital, a public hospital, or elsewhere, if there are unexplained deaths, there should be an automatic reporting mechanism to that body," the UN expert said.

She emphasised that the government must demonstrate a "strong backbone" and a willingness to confront the country's history of state violence.

"The government should be prepared. Once an open complaints

procedure is established, reported cases of torture will likely surge. It also needs to sensitise the public in advance to communicate that there will be an influx of old cases coming forward and that this is, in fact, a sign that society is opening up," said the UN expert.

When asked what incentive there is for a government to have autonomous human rights watchdogs, Dr Edwards responded, "If a government wants cycles of violence to continue against its own people, it is not representing those people. If it pursues revenge against its political opponents, it can be certain that revenge will come in return."

"This might sound a little unusual, but I think it comes down to a simple question: do your leaders want to be Nelson Mandela, or would they prefer to be Idi Amin?" she said, urging leaders to consider their long-term legacy.

The UN Special Rapporteur came down hard on the torture in police and judicial custody.

"One issue that has come up continuously during my visit to Bangladesh is the police practice of relying on confessional evidence, gathering confessions from suspects and witnesses as the sole or primary source of evidence. Where that is not supplemented by other investigative tools, we end up in a cycle of violence, beatings, coercion, and intimidation within the police force."

"Investigations need to happen beforehand. I have heard about shortcomings in forensic capacity and expertise in this country, and this is an area where the international community should assist," she pointed out.

"Even basic practices like fingerprinting are not always carried out. Wrongful identification, alibi checking, visiting the scene, photographing evidence—many ordinary policing methods appear to have been overtaken by the simple reliance on remand confessions. And police will tell you themselves—it is quite hard to extract a confession from someone who has not committed the crime," she continued.

Dr Edwards recommended making audio and video recording during interrogations mandatory and recommended logging all detentions in a database. In addition, she explained that this culture can only be changed if the leadership plays a role.

"It requires leadership from the very top, from parliamentarians, from leaders within the police and other uniformed services. Without that leadership, it falls on individuals to do better on their own. The national policing curriculum needs to be reviewed to ensure that police are

doing their job more effectively," she recommended.

The UN special expert also pointed fingers at judges for accepting ill-investigated cases, granting repeated remands, and holding people in pre-trial detention.

"Magistrates and judges should also be demanding better investigations and pushing back on cases that are poorly investigated," noted Dr Edwards. "Judges are repeatedly approving extensions simply because the police say they need more time. Those extensions should be limited. In most other jurisdictions, extensions are capped at 48 hours, then a maximum of 72 hours. If sufficient information has not been gathered by that point, the person cannot be charged and should be released. All of this reinforces why evidence-gathering must happen before someone is brought in."

Asked about the pre-trial detention of thousands of people in cases filed over the July uprising, the UN special rapporteur said, "This clearly requires judicial oversight. The police should be non-politicised, and the investigative body should be a professional police force operating to the same standards regardless of which political party a person represents."

She continued, "What I would really like to see is a recognition that a society cannot be built on cycles of revenge. It must be built on the rule of law, the separation of powers, and human rights."

### 17 top cops

FROM PAGE 12

Several commandants of Police Training Centres (PTC) were also on the list. They are Md Haidar Ali Khan (Noakhali PTC), Md Mahbubur Rahman Bhuiya (Khulna PTC), and Sheikh Mohammad Rezaul Haider (Rangpur PTC).

Other officials include DIG of Tourist Police Md Ruhul Amin, DIG of River Police Md Mizanur Rahman, and DIG at Police Headquarters Kazi Zia Uddin. Two more Highway Police DIGs—Md Rafiqul Hasan Gani and Rakhfar Sultana Khanam—were also forced to retire, along with DIG of Railway Police Md Golam Rauf Khan.

In the same order, the government sent Superintendent of Police Farhat Ahmed, who served as a Supernumerary Additional DIG of Railway Police, into retirement.

This follows a similar move on April 22, when the government sent 11 DIGs and two additional DIGs on forced retirement.

### Attacks, arrests mark grim

FROM PAGE 12

routine harassment, especially in district and upazila towns, where they are highly vulnerable.

Public trust in the media has hit rock bottom because it cannot operate independently, he opined. "The attack on freedom comes from two fronts. One is the government... The other factor is the media's economy and the influence of owners and corporate interests, which still persists," said Kamal, also consulting editor of The Daily Star.

"We want clear policy commitments from the government and a principled stance to ensure media freedom and protection. Until such commitments are made, I will remain skeptical."

Highlighting the financial struggles of television channels, Broadcast Journalism Centre (BJC) Chairman Fahim Ahmed said, "Out of 37 TV channels, 22 do not or cannot pay salaries of their employees regularly."

Except for one or two organisations, none offer provident fund or gratuity benefits to journalists, he alleged.

At the event, senior TV journalist Shahnaz Munni expressed frustration over poor remuneration. "Even university journalism graduates no longer want to join this profession. How can postgraduates start their careers with such incredibly low starting salaries?"

She also noted a decline in the number of female journalists, attributing it to workplace harassment, online hate campaigns, and a lack of security on the ground.

### 2 farmers die seeing paddy fields

FROM PAGE 2

his crop around 4:30pm and was later taken to a hospital. Doctors declared him dead in the evening, she said.

Family members said he had cultivated Boro paddy on three acres of land, much of which was inundated due to continuous rainfall. Although some paddy had been harvested, he could not transport it home due to logistical constraints.

His cousin Mansur Ali said Akhter had taken loans of about Tk 150,000 for cultivation and was under severe mental distress after the crop was damaged.

According to the Department of Agricultural Extension, vast low-lying haor areas in Kishoreganj have been flooded due to continuous rainfall, submerging thousands of hectares of ripe paddy and leaving farmers struggling to salvage their harvest.

Dhaka Tribune Editor Reaz Ahmad alleged that the governments are highly discriminatory in distributing state advertisements, often allocating funds to obscure newspapers.

He opined that Bangladesh has an abundance of "junk" or substandard media outlets, causing real journalism to get lost in the noise of hundreds of platforms.

Another speaker criticised the continued use of the cyber security law to file cases over political comments or social media posts. An apprentice journalist alleged that investigative reports are often dropped following phone calls from the high-ups to protect the media owners' interests.

Regarding the attacks on The Daily Star and Prothom Alo offices, TIB Executive Director Ittekkharuzzaman described the incidents and the government's silent role as "rare, not just in Bangladesh's history, but in the world."

"The media in Bangladesh has always been under pressure, but directly attacking institutions like this, putting human lives at risk, and actively trying to destroy them is unprecedented," he said.

He alleged that the then government made no active efforts to prevent the attacks. "These incidents did not happen suddenly; they were planned." Despite knowing this, the government did not deploy police personnel or other ground forces to protect the institutions, he added.

Referring to the same incidents, BJC Chairman Fahim said, "The interim

### 8 labourers killed

FROM PAGE 12

beside her husband, who pushed her to the side when the incident took place, and she lost consciousness.

Badrul's brother Alaur Miah said there was a concrete mixer on his pickup, which collapsed onto his brother, killing him on the spot. Badrul and Khadiza brother have four children.

Sohel Ahmed, uncle of deceased brothers Amir Uddin and Azir Uddin, said, "They moved to Sylhet city in search of work around a year ago. They have their ailing parents, and the younger

### Iran has not yet paid

FROM PAGE 12

In Iran, the military-backed Fars news agency quoted a senior official as saying a return to all-out conflict was "likely", four weeks after a ceasefire was brokered by Pakistan. Pakistani efforts to resume peace talks in Islamabad, after a first round broke up without

government did not impose restrictions on the media, but it didn't protect it either. It merely stood by and watched. We saw two media offices being burned down. Did the government not see it? Surely, they did. But they will simply say they didn't do it."

Zahed Ur Rahman, adviser to the prime minister on information and broadcasting, said the current elected government would not commit the "stupidity" of engaging in conflicts with the media.

"People can now criticise the government without any censorship... we want this to continue," he said.

About the arrests of journalists on various charges, including murder, during the interim government, Zahed said the prime minister has taken the matter into "serious cognisance" and expressed hope for a swift resolution.

He added that plans are there to form a special monitoring cell at the Prime Minister's Office to prevent cyberbullying against female journalists.

At the event, Susan Vize, head of office and Unesco representative to Bangladesh, said, "Independent, pluralistic, and professional media are central to informed public discourse. Strengthening journalist safety and information integrity is critical to rebuilding trust in today's complex information environment."

German Ambassador Rüdiger Lotz, and Paola Castro Neiderstam, first secretary at the Embassy of Sweden, among others, also spoke on the occasion.

brother's wife and three children."

Hearing of their deaths, their parents fainted and are now admitted to the local upazila health complex. Their elder brother, Ala Uddin, died three years ago. Now the family has no one to support, Sohail said.

Talking to reporters, Brig Gen Umar Rashed Munir, director of MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital, said, "So far, eight died in the road crash. We are doing everything to ensure the injured patients' treatment and will arrange advanced treatment if necessary."

agreement, have failed as each side set preconditions that the other refused to fulfill.

Asked on Saturday about the possibility of renewed hostilities, Trump said it was possible, adding, "If they misbehave, if they do something bad, but right now, we'll see."



# RAGHU RAI

## When life performs for the camera



A woman pushing a cart, Delhi, 1979.

PHOTO: RAGHU RAI/MAGNUM PHOTOS/ RAGHU RAI FOUNDATION



Churchgate Railway Station, Mumbai, 1995.

PHOTO: RAGHU RAI/MAGNUM PHOTOS/ RAGHU RAI FOUNDATION

### AMIRUL RAJIV

Raghu Rai (18 December 1942–26 April 2026) was an Indian photographer and the most celebrated photojournalist of South Asia. He documented some of the most significant events in modern South Asian history, including the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 and the Bhopal gas tragedy of 1984. He also worked extensively on major public figures such as Mother Teresa, the Dalai Lama, and Indira Gandhi, publishing books on their lives and legacies. His photo essays appeared in *Time*, *Life*, *The New York Times*, *The Independent*, and *The New Yorker*, and he served on the World Press Photo jury from 1990 to 1997.

For over 60 years, he shaped a visual language that defined the Indian subcontinent. From war to ritual and suffering to beauty, his lens revealed the poetry within everyday life. Through him, the lives of millions became part of a shared visual history.

I met and interviewed Raghu Rai over a span of more than two decades in Bangladesh and India. Starting from 2004, then 2012, 2016, 2019, and 2024—the last time he was in Dhaka.

This is an abridged version of the series of interviews I conducted in 2016 in multiple locations in Delhi. I want to thank Naim Ul Hasan of Duniyadari Archive for editing the interview, Mahfuj Hassan Sakib for the transcription, and Magnum Photos, the Raghu Rai Foundation, the Raghu Rai Centre for Photography, Creative Image, Amit Chauhan, Nitin Rai, Prem Kumar Gupta, Firoz Farhad Merchant, and Nirvair Singh Rai for their support during the interviews.

#### Did you grow up in Delhi?

I came to Delhi in my mid-twenties. Before that, I was in Ambala, Firozpur, and Karnal, which were part of greater Punjab. My early school days were there. My photography journey started after coming to Delhi.

#### You have had such a long and illustrious career. What has kept you going for over 50 years?

Basically, it is the ever-changing spirit of daily life and the ever-changing forms and energies of nature. These are fascinating to me. Still, I would say that I am a part-time photographer because I should be spending more time taking pictures, which I do not do. There are times when I don't shoot for days. But then when I shoot, I shoot like a madman. So that is also there. But the gaps in between sometimes tend to be too long because maybe I am editing and designing a book or preparing for an exhibition, which are very important and fascinating for me. But the fact remains that I am not engaged all the time the way I should be. So, photography has become a kind of part-time madness in my life, but when it comes, it comes in full force.

#### You started your career in 1966 and within seven years received the Padma Shri award in 1972 as the first Indian photographer. How did that affect you?

Whatever I do or achieve—books, exhibitions, awards—for the first two to three days it's nice. After that, it's life as usual for me. I am not carrying anything on my chest that I have done this or I have received this—it doesn't matter. It moves away very quickly. I am not static. I don't live in nostalgic nonsense—good or bad.

**What do you think about your master-heavy agency—Magnum's contemporary approach? Is the agency going through any major reform in its policy at present?** It is going through major changes because the world of photography is changing. Unfortunately, most photography magazines like *Life* and *Look* are dead and gone. So, you have to look for new avenues. It's not the same as getting two months' assignments from some magazine to do a great job. That

kind of canvas is not there anymore. There are many more people taking pictures due to the availability of digital technology. So many of us who are in our 60s or 70s, or maybe some in our 80s (chuckles), have become like guides who take workshops, take people along, shoot with them, and teach photography.

#### You are a self-taught photographer. What led you to set up the Raghu Rai Center for Photography?

Well, the need was very dire. It felt like a kind of responsibility and an inner call to share something so meaningful because when we were young, we did not have anybody to guide us. The existing schools teach anything and everything. And then there are photography magazines which are so commercial that they are like cousins of each other. So, all these things together compelled me to start a centre for photography with my son Nitin. But I didn't want to be a full-time teacher because I want to remain a full-time photographer. The idea was to ignite that creative spark in each individual and send them on to their own journey of creativity, and not teach them professional photography of this kind or that genre. After completing a diploma course, if someone wants to become a painter, he or she should be able to do so and understand where that creative spark comes from. This is the purpose of the centre; it is not limited to photography.

#### At a time when digital media is on the rise and print magazines are in decline, what motivated you to launch *Creative Image* and invest your time and effort in producing a high-quality physical magazine?

I know most magazines are folding up and losing their circulation. I remember when I told my old friend Aroon Purie that I was going to start a magazine, his first response was that nobody would read it. I said, "Aroon, this is not for reading; this is for seeing 'Darsan' (chuckling)."

A photographer is the one who has photographs, and who can hold these photographs in his hand, look at them, and preserve them.

Similarly, a serious magazine is the kind that you can hold, see, read, feel through, and then preserve. Look back at it also. What is a TV screen? It is an electronic image being created every time, and an illusion and excitement that comes and disappears.

Digital files are plastic things. They don't have the same feeling. Technology is for your advancement. But you do not become a machine yourself, nor do you turn into a digital file.

Nothing is dying. People, their attention span, and their interests are being replaced by something else.

#### How do you choose the works to be featured in the magazine?

I select instinctively. I see a lot of work. I have seen the works of the old masters for years. And today, when I look again at the works of Ansel Adams, Richard Avedon, André Kertész, and Henri Cartier-Bresson that I first encountered as a young man, I respond to them more instinctively. Which images have faded with time, and which still hold a magic that endures? With experience, this is what you learn. So, I pick the best, the masterpieces from each photographer that have survived the test of time.

You see, many things get washed away by time. But finally, what remains? This is called energy. The image still holds that energy, that current, which is captured instinctively.

**I was listening to Kuldeep Nayar at the launch of your *Creative Image Magazine* during the Delhi Photo Festival 2015 at IGNA. He spoke about his experience of working with you when he was an editor. Do you think you influenced or reshaped how your colleagues approached the use of photographs in print media?** Of course. Nothing is handed to you. When

you go out to photograph a political, social or cultural situation, you have to engage one hundred per cent—mentally, physically and spiritually—to truly capture its essence. Once you have done that, once you have invested mind, body and spirit, you carry back the energy you have captured. You do not return alone; you are charged with that energy.

So, when you meet the editor and present your work, you carry a greater strength as a human being, and I am sure it leaves an impression on the other person. Editors, after all, are sensitive people and are meant to respond to what they see. That is how I built my relationship with them.

My first editor at *The Statesman* was actually Evan Charlton—a British man—who was a great guy. I covered the split of the Congress Party in 1969 and got some very up-close and personal photos. *The Statesman* only published one photo. I sent the photographs to *The Times* in London, where three of them were published. My resident editor in Calcutta and Delhi saw the newspaper carrying three of my photographs and my name, and he said, "How can you sell your pictures outside? Why haven't you published here?" I said, "Because you people cannot see the pictures—what is good and what is bad!" And he was very angry with me—



Raghu Rai at Qutub Minar, 2016.

PHOTO: AMIRUL RAJIV/ DUNIYADARI ARCHIVE

how could I sell my pictures outside? Evan Charlton sent a telex message to the resident editor: "Please congratulate Raghu Rai for his excellent photographs, and why don't you use them."

Then came Kuldeep Nayar, with whom I worked for the longest time and had great chemistry. And then I was with M. J. Akbar on *Sunday* magazine. They were also very good friends. Then finally, ten years at *India Today* with Aroon Purie, whom I have known for a long time.

It was the understanding and my commitment to giving them the best, and then their respect for printing those works in the legitimate and required space.

#### You mentioned the role and influence of Deepak Puri, South Asia General Manager and Photo Editor at *Time*, in the field of photojournalism. Could you elaborate on that?

He was basically a warm, wonderful, honest person. And very helpful. So various photographers who were working for different magazines reached out to him whenever they had any problems. He was one of those people who supported and helped everybody; that's why people gifted him good photographs, important iconic photographs, with which he created his own archive of interesting works. His networking

with the government, airlines, and embassies was such that he could get you a visa in no time; he could make you fly by any airline. So, in return, many photographers worked for *Time* magazine for many years. He even gave me a blank cheque from *Time* magazine for an assignment within two weeks of our first meeting. That reflects the kind of warmth, trust, and network he had with people. Even James Nachtwey and Sebastião Salgado—whenever any of us needed anything, he was always there for us.

#### I was reading your critique of contemporary photography, where you discussed photographers influenced by Western styles. How would you define your own approach to photography?

I do not have a style. Styles come and disappear, and style becomes an attitude. Style becomes a way of looking at things. See, you are walking in the streets, and something from somewhere says 'hey', and you have to click it. You don't have time to think or plan. So where is the style? I am not fond of styles. To put it in a very apt way, it is like Kahlil Gibran's line: "Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself." My images are the same; I have to reflect life's longing for itself. They're not my photographs.

#### If someone were to say that you have developed a distinctly Indian or Eastern style of photography, how would you respond to that?

No. Let me tell you, there is no Eastern style, British style or French style. Where we can be different is the fact that I was born and brought up here. And I have been photographing my country, India, very deeply compared to any other Western photographer, except Bresson. He could work anywhere very instinctively. So instinct is the biggest asset, which gives you very precious moments—moments which are very deep and intense and embedded in the cultural life of the people. The difference is that, because I have lived and learned here, I understand many nuances and details. Compared to any Western photographer who comes to India, my images carry a deeper sense of those nuances and a richer detail of my country.

#### The people in your images often seem to take on a sculptural, almost iconic quality. What is it in your aesthetic that captivates the audience?

I will say my pictures of daily life should reflect lots of inner music. Because music is something so soulful for human beings that each of us has some kind of rhythm and music playing inside us. When we connect with reality and every inch of space mentally, physically and spiritually, the music and rhythm within us are reflected in the energies around us.

And that rhythm makes life playful. That play of life has its own structure. These are very sculpture-like qualities of characters taking shape in front of you. So, this is something very unique when you fully attend to reality or nature. With your intuitive responses, this music plays the tune of life right in front of you. So, nature and life begin to perform for you. Because you are within them and they are within you. You are not outside it.

#### I was thinking of your photograph of Ravi Shankar on the boat, with his hair blown by the wind. What were you feeling in that moment?

You see, this is what happens when you connect one hundred per cent. When you are completely dedicated to experiencing what's going on around you, then nature begins to perform for you. We were doing a special series on great masters of Indian classical music. I had been photographing him at his residence in Delhi, in concerts, and everywhere. So, he said, "You must come with me to Varanasi, where I have a school where we teach music." We spent days while he was

teaching his students, enjoying himself being with them. Later in the evening, I asked him what we would do now. He said, "My most favourite aspect of being here is to spend the evenings on the Ganga. Let's go to the Ganga and have a cup of tea." The boatman knew him. We were just going in the boat, then the breeze came, the magic happened, and we got the picture.

#### Can you remember the first time you met filmmaker Satyajit Ray?

There was a photography contest named 'Made for Each Other Photography Contest', and they invited Satyajit Ray and me to be part of the jury. That is where I met Satyajit Ray for the first time. But Manik'da, you know, the first day we met, said, "Raghu, your picture—the photograph where the woman is pushing the cart and the husband is in front—is such an amazing image that I can never forget it." So, that was something important to me.

That was a picture in my Delhi book. A woman is pushing a cart while her husband walks ahead, with a building and stacked boxes in the background, and he said the image had stayed deeply ingrained in his mind. That was quite a compliment for me, coming from a maestro like him.

#### How do you approach your vision, and how should young photographers choose their subjects?

It is very simple. To me, when I move around, everything matters in my space. Big, small, significant, insignificant—everything matters in my space. So, when you learn to relate to every inch of space, things come into a rhythm. If everything matters, then everything has some meaning and value. And if you look at the world like this, then the whole world is very meaningful. So is your frame.

#### You have photographed refugees of the Bangladesh War and figures like the Dalai Lama, and you yourself are a refugee. When you were five, your family fled Jhang in Pakistan. Did you ever consider returning there to take photographs?

When I went to Pakistan in 1977 with our foreign minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, this was the first time any Indian foreign minister went to Pakistan. Some of us journalists from India had gone with him. Zia-ul-Haq was the president back then. After the reception for our minister, we were all invited to the presidential house. So, when he met each one of us, he made it a point to ask us whether we were born there or in India. I said, "I was born here in Pakistan." He asked, "Where?" I replied, "In Jhang, Punjab." He then asked, "Would you like to visit?" I said, "I would love to." So, the next day, I got a presidential car from Zia-ul-Haq to go to my hometown, where I was born.

#### We noticed a deep connection between you and the plants in your six-acre school garden. What is the relationship between nature and how you feel?

You know, the connection is always there. Because I love nature. For me, nature has abundance, tenderness, and a freshness of its own kind. Tending to it and giving it time rejuvenates me. I walk into the space at the farm, and among the plants and the trees that I have planted over twenty years, somewhere nature has a beautiful surprise waiting for me. And I look at it, the tenderness of the leaves, the freshness of the colours, and the flowers that have just sprouted out of nothing. It signifies the magic that can revive you all over again in any given situation. Only nature can do something like that. Even if a tree is one hundred years old or one hundred and fifty years old, when spring comes, it is filled with tender, sprouted leaves and flowers. We humans can't do that. So, this is very important for me.

Amirul Rajiv is an art historian, curator, and co-founder of Duniyadari Archive.

## Concerns mount for Tigresses

SPORTS REPORTER

The recent three-match WT20I series in Sylhet has raised eyebrows and sparked concern over the Bangladesh women's team, with just over a month remaining before the Women's T20 World Cup in England and Wales.

Traditionally, the Tigresses have yet to establish themselves as a formidable force in T20 cricket, and apart from their 2018 Asia Cup triumph, they have achieved little of note in the format.

Moreover, their conservative approach has often left them under pressure. The team is yet to successfully chase a target of 150 in T20s, despite playing nearly 150 matches over the past 14 years.

Against Sri Lanka, Bangladesh won the toss in all three matches but opted to field first – despite their struggles while chasing. Additionally, captain Nigar Sultana Joty endured a lean run, scoring just 20 runs across three innings.

Chief selector Sazzad Ahmed Shipon acknowledged the team's struggles but said the series was used as an opportunity to experiment ahead of the global tournament.

"We changed the team in every match to try different combinations. For the first time in a while, we even played without a leg spinner in the last match. Even though we aren't typically strong in chasing, we chose to chase because we will face strong teams in the World Cup and need to be prepared for big targets," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

"To be honest, we are better in the ODI format. We aren't as strong in T20s because we have very few hard-hitting players who can clear the boundary," he added, while also expressing confidence in Joty.

"She scored runs in the ODIs. In T20s, we are trying a new combination. We tried Juairiya and Dilara as openers, and both performed well in the powerplay, scoring at nearly 10 runs per over. The issue is our batting pattern – we need to adjust it so we can accelerate and maintain intensity until the end of the innings."

Shipon informed that Bangladesh will finalise their squad for the World Cup on May 5, though it will not be disclosed immediately. He added that the same squad touring Scotland for the tri-series is likely to feature in the World Cup.

Bangladesh are expected to leave for Scotland on May 24 or 25 following a training camp in Mirpur.

"There is a camp starting on May 12 for eight days, until the 20th," Shipon said. "We will likely stay in Dhaka and use the indoor facilities or academy grounds."

The women's tri-series, featuring Bangladesh, Scotland and the Netherlands, will begin on May 28. Bangladesh will open their World Cup campaign against the Netherlands on June 14 in Birmingham.

# DPL begins amid renewed optimism

SPORTS REPORTER

Broader facilities, fresh initiatives, and the promise of fiercer competition have lifted spirits ahead of the Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League (DPL) 2025-26, which begins today across six venues. Above all, however, players are simply relieved to see the tournament return after a prolonged period of uncertainty.

The competition will begin without national Test players, who are set to miss the opening six rounds until May 20 due to Bangladesh's upcoming two-match Test series against Pakistan, according to Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) cricket operations in-charge Shahriar Nafees.

On the field, the prospect of a more competitive season has added to the excitement. With at least four teams in contention, defending champions Abahani skipper Mosaddek Hossain believes the balance across squads could make the difference.

"Previously, there were maybe four or five teams that stood out as very strong. But this year, everyone has tried to build fairly balanced sides. If the weather [overcast conditions] continues like this, any team can be dangerous on any given day," Mosaddek said.

Mohammedan captain Tawhid



(L) Players of defending champions Abahani take part in a training drill at the Cricketers' Academy in Purbachal on Sunday, ahead of today's opening round match of the Dhaka Premier League. However, with a home Test series of Bangladesh against Pakistan commencing on May 8, most of the embers of the Test side, including Mohammedan veteran Mushfiqur Rahim (R), were involved in a national team camp in Mirpur.



PHOTO: ABAHANI/FIROZ AHMED

Hridoy echoed that sentiment, promising to be "delivering as a unit," while remaining mostly relieved as the tournament starts after prolonged uncertainty.

"Even cricketers from the Second and Third Divisions didn't get opportunities recently, which is unfortunate. So it's a relief that the tournament is finally starting," he said.

This season carries added significance after a turbulent lead-up that left the tournament's fate in limbo. Several clubs had threatened a boycott over concerns regarding the legitimacy of the Aminul Islam Bulbul-led BCB, but the impasse was resolved following the formation of an ad hoc committee headed by Tamim Iqbal. The former national captain will be present at today's

inauguration ceremony, alongside State Minister for Youth and Sports Aminul Haque.

For Hridoy, there is further reason for optimism. The Mohammedan skipper, who was handed a four-match ban last season by the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolitan (CCDM) for dissent – ruling him out of the title decider – will not have the remaining three matches of his

suspension carried into this season.

"In domestic cricket, such incidents are counted for one year from the date they occur. Since that period has passed, he is now free to play," CCDM coordinator Mohammad Salim told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, the Tamim-led ad hoc committee's latest initiatives – including enhanced in-game medical support, healthier, fitness-focused meal plans, and reinstatement of Anti-Corruption Unit protocols for a fairer game – contributed to a more positive atmosphere around the competition.

All 12 teams will be in action on the opening day. Reigning champions Abahani face Dhaka Leopards at the Bashundhara Sports City Complex, the venue for the inauguration ceremony, while runners-up Mohammedan take on City Club at BKSP 3.

CCDM, in coordination with the BCB, has confirmed a single-league format for this year, scrapping the Super League and Relegation League phases.

A total of 66 matches will be played, with reserve days in place to minimise disruptions. The team finishing top of the table will be crowned champions, while the bottom two sides will be relegated to the Dhaka First Division Cricket League.

## Promise flickers, problems persist

EKUSH TAPADER

With galleries buzzing despite torrential rain, the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur seemed to regain its soul – fuelled by hopes of a T20I series win for Bangladesh.

Instead, the rain-hit third and final T20I against New Zealand on Saturday followed a familiar, frustrating script. Litton Das and Co. were beaten by an inexperienced touring side, leaving the three-match series drawn 1-1 after Bangladesh had won the opener, and the second game was washed out in Chattogram.

For a New Zealand team missing around 15 frontline players due to commitments in the Indian Premier League and the Pakistan Super League, the result raised questions. Yet Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) chief selector Habibur Bashar declined to term it as a "terrible outcome".

Bangladesh's T20 side has recently hinted at a shift in identity – moving away from their traditionally cautious approach towards a more proactive brand of cricket. However, that evolution remains largely untested at the highest level, especially after missing out on the most recent T20 World Cup.

This series marked the start of preparations for the 2028 edition, but the performances exposed lingering concerns. The top-order fragility resurfaced as a major issue, while the middle order had a fifty percent success rate.

In the first match, chasing 182, early wickets left Bangladesh on the brink. A spirited counterattack from Tawhid Hridoy, Shamim Hossain, and Parvez



Hossain delivered a convincing win, showcasing the potential of the middle order.

But in Mirpur, the same problems persisted. The top order faltered again, and this time the lower order followed suit, leading to a comprehensive defeat.

"Our first match was very organised, but we lost our way in the final game," Bashar told The Daily Star, urging caution in judging a series heavily affected by rain. "We are trying new things, so it's not right to be overly critical based on these two matches. I liked the look of this team – the

gelling, spirit, and teamwork are good."

With experienced pacers Mustafizur Rahman and Taskin Ahmed rested, the series offered opportunities to new faces. Ripon Mondol featured in both matches but went wicketless, while Abdul Gaffar Saqlain did not get a game. Shoriful Islam stood out as the lone bright spot, earning the Most Valuable Player of the Series award.

"The weather didn't help us," Bashar noted. "There is a long way to go. It's a new squad, especially in the bowling department. If these players contribute going forward, it will strengthen the team. Our two main bowlers will return, which will make us stronger."

Bashar also dismissed concerns over New Zealand fielding a second-string side, noting that experimentation is a natural phase for any team in the lead-up to a World Cup.

Bangladesh, too, are committed to that path, but only with the existing group as it appears. Further changes, including possible rotation in the batting order, are on the cards. Vice-captain Saif Hassan remains under scrutiny, having failed to register a fifty in his last eight T20Is while maintaining a modest strike rate of 104.5.

While Bashar emphasised giving "everyone a chance" to build competition within the squad, the experimentation so far has largely been limited to the existing group.

That raises a pressing question: will persistence with this core be enough, or is it time for a broader rethink before the countdown to the 2028 World Cup gathers pace?

**38 GOALS**  
**DAYS LEFT**



## Asia's trailblazers: South Korea

Among Asian teams, South Korea have played the most number of World Cup matches (38). They have won seven, drawn 10, and lost 21 matches. They also became the first team from outside Europe and the Americas to reach the semifinals, doing so in 2002, when they co-hosted the tournament with Japan.

**\*\* Visit The Daily Star's website to also read: "Atlas Lions unleashed: Morocco's unforgettable march to the final four."**

## Youth hockey gets major lift with Epyllion deal

SPORTS REPORTER

On the back of consistent success by youth hockey teams on the international stage, the Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) received a major financial boost ahead of the Men's and Women's U-18 Asia Cup in Japan, signing an MoU with Epyllion Group on Sunday.

Under the agreement, local clothing brand Sailor, a sister concern of Epyllion Group, will provide BHF with Tk one crore to support the participation of both the men's and women's teams in the upcoming AHF U-18 Asia Cup, scheduled to be held in Japan from May 29 to June 6.

Bangladesh have been drawn in Pool B of the men's competition alongside Pakistan, Malaysia and China. The women's team have also been placed in Pool B, where they will face China, Japan and Chinese Taipei.

"We usually work in the youth sector across different sports federations, universities and districts. This time, we have aligned with youth hockey, which has been performing well at the international level," said Sadequzzaman Khan, senior brand and marketing manager of Sailor,

at a press conference held at the BHF conference room on Sunday.

"If we can further empower this youth through sponsorship, they will have greater opportunities to flourish. With that in mind, we have joined hands with Bangladesh hockey," he added, noting that the company is also open to supporting other areas such as leagues and tournaments in the future.



"We require a significant amount of funding for both the boys' and girls' teams to take part in the Asia Cup. This sponsorship will cover around 45 percent of the total expenditure, and we now need to secure the remaining funds from other sources," said Reazul Hasan, general secretary of BHF.

He added that both teams are expected to leave for Japan on May 26. Meanwhile, the squads – comprising players from BKSP – will be guided by Moududur Rahman Shuvo for the men's team, while Zahid Hasan Raju will resume training of the women's U-18 side on May 5 following the senior team's return from the Asian Games Qualifiers.



Viktor Gyokeres nods home a looping header into the Fulham net as Arsenal beat their London rivals 3-0 at the Emirates Stadium in their Premier League fixture on Saturday. The Swede scored twice as the Gunners went six points clear of Manchester City at the top of the table. City, meanwhile, have played two matches less and can cut the gap to three points with a win over Everton tonight. (Inset) Meanwhile, Robert Lewandowski and Ferran Torres scored late as Barcelona edged Osasuna 2-1 in a frantic finish at Estadio El Sadar, inching closer to retaining the LaLiga title with a 14-point lead over chasers Real Madrid.

PHOTO: REUTERS/AFP



**BSRM**  
THE ONLY STEEL FACTORY IN BANGLADESH TO RECEIVE THE  
**GREEN FACTORY AWARD 2025**

**COMPLETE GUIDANCE APP FOR HOME BUILDING**

Available on the Google Play and App Store

## 17 top cops sent into retirement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has sent 17 more top police officials, including 16 deputy inspector generals (DIGs), on forced retirement in "public interest".

The home ministry issued a circular in this regard yesterday.

Signed by Senior Secretary Manjur Morshed Chowdhury by order of the president, the notification stated that the decision was made under Section 45 of the Public Service Act, 2018.

The law allows the government to retire any public servant who has been 25 years in service without providing any specific justification.

Those sent into retirement include DIG of the Anti-Terrorism Unit Mofiz Uddin Ahmed, DIG of Highway Police Intiaz Ahmed, DIG of CID Md Habibur Rahman, and DIG (TR) at Police Headquarters Saleh Mohammad Tanvir.

The list also features Director of National Security Intelligence (NSI) Md Harun-or-Rashid, DIG of Dhaka Police Staff College SM Akhtaruzzaman, and Commissioner of Rangpur Metropolitan Police Md Majid Ali.

SEE PAGE 8 COL 3



Workers reconnecting illegal fibre-optic cables to a utility pole on Topkhana Road in the capital's Purana Paltan just hours after authorities cleared hazardous overhead tangles to improve public safety and city aesthetics. Despite regular enforcement drives by city corporations, service providers often restore these connections immediately.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## Attacks, arrests mark grim press climate

Say speakers at event on World Press Freedom Day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Journalists in Bangladesh are still facing unprecedented difficulties, ranging from routine harassment and physical attacks to arbitrary detentions, speakers said at a discussion yesterday.

While speaking at the event to mark World Press Freedom Day, they called for clear policy commitments from the government and a principled stance to ensure media freedom and protection.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) and Unesco organised the programme at the graft watchdog's office in Dhanmondi.

Itteharuzzaman, executive director of TIB, said, "Strengthening media independence and protecting journalists are essential to ensuring that citizens have access to credible information and can hold institutions accountable."

Severely criticising the detention of journalists in various cases, including murder cases, following the August 5 mass uprising, he termed the arrests "revenge in the name of justice".

Kamal Ahmed, chief of the Media Reform Commission formed by the interim government, said reporters face

SEE PAGE 8 COL 4

## DCs seek PM's intervention on drug menace

During conference, they note disruptions in health services due to doctor shortages, absence of physicians

BAHARAM KHAN and ARAFAT RAHAMAN

Deputy commissioners yesterday warned that the growing availability of drugs among youth, despite regular enforcement drives, poses a grave threat to the nation, urging the government to adopt tougher measures to curb the menace.

During a discussion with Prime Minister Tarique Rahman on the opening day of the DC Conference, at least 11 deputy commissioners spoke, with four identifying drug abuse as one of the most pressing crises facing the country at present, according to sources present at the time.

Jhenaidah DC Noman Hossain mentioned that 10km of the district's border remains vulnerable, adding that inadequate controls are allowing drug shipments to enter the country and fuel addiction among youth.

He also flagged online gambling as a major concern, adding that drug users are frequently drawn into gambling as well, and called for central intervention.

The prime minister then assured the deputy commissioners that his government would take coordinated action to address this problem.

Meanwhile, other DCs raised district-specific issues.

Bogura DC Toufikur Rahman requested government support to expand the local machinery industry, which he believes could play a significant role in the region's development.

Khulna DC Hure Jannat drew the PM's attention to the sufferings in Dumuria upazila caused by chronic waterlogging and sought national-level measures to resolve the crisis.

Habiganj DC GM Sharfaraz requested the establishment of two 50-bed hospitals in tea garden areas, a proposal the PM assured would be addressed.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 5

## Fourth term for TMC or historic first for BJP?

West Bengal set to declare election results today

STAR REPORT

The result of the assembly polls in West Bengal is expected today, with the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) hoping to extend its 15-year rule and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) aiming for its first victory in a state long ruled by leftist parties.

Early trends and surveys indicate a fierce contest between TMC and BJP, with both parties holding strong ground in different regions. The final tally will determine the political trajectory of the state, with analysts watching closely to see whether the TMC maintains its strongholds or the BJP makes significant inroads.

After the second round of voting, several exit polls predicted that the BJP had a slight edge over the TMC. The saffron party has run a spirited election campaign spearheaded by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Mamata Banerjee, the firebrand supremo of the TMC and the chief minister of the state since 2011, has also left no stone unturned during the campaign.

The campaigns resulted in a record turnout in the two-phase election. According to the Indian Election Commission, the state recorded an overall voter turnout of 92.47 percent. Women turned out in even greater numbers at 93.24 percent, while male

SEE PAGE 5 COL 7

## Inability to probe disciplined forces shackles NHRC

UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Alice Edwards tells Star

**"They [the govt] have indicated to me that they intend to make some adjustments to the law ... but they should be in alignment with the A-status requirements of this international oversight body."**



ZYMA ISLAM

The National Human Rights Commission's current inability to investigate disciplined forces remains a major structural barrier to eradicating state-sanctioned human rights abuses in Bangladesh, according to United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture Dr Alice Edwards, who called for urgent legal reforms to align the body with global independence standards.

In an interview with The Daily Star, Dr Edwards noted that there needs to be a legislative instrument that grants full autonomy to the human rights watchdog if Bangladesh is serious about its human rights commitments. "Unfortunately, the ordinance that was meant to be extended from the interim government has lapsed," she noted.

"They (the government) have indicated to me that they intend to make some adjustments to the law. We don't yet know what those adjustments are, but they should certainly be in alignment with the A-status requirements of this international oversight body," said the UN expert.

She went on to outline what the NHRC needs to look like in order to

SEE PAGE 8 COL 1

## 8 labourers killed as truck rear-ends pickup

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Khadiza Begum and her husband Badrul Zaman boarded a pickup with other labourers from Sylhet city's Amberkhana yesterday morning to travel to their construction site.

On the way to Jagannathpur of Sunamganj, a jackfruit-laden truck rear-ended the pickup carrying around 20 labourers at Telibazar in Dakshin Surma upazila with a great force, causing them to fall on the road.

Four died on the spot.

Four others died while being taken to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

Six others, including Khadiza, are undergoing treatment there, while another critically injured was admitted to the ICU of a private facility.

Badrul is among the dead.

Other deceased are Suruj Ali, 60, of Sunamganj's Dirai upazila; Mst Munni, 26, and Faridul, 35, of the same upazila; Nargis, 45, of the district's Dharampasha upazila; Amir Uddin, 42, and his brother Azir Uddin, 35, of the district's Bishwambharpur upazila; and Pandab Biswas, 20, of Sylhet's Companiganj upazila.

Police officer Ranjit Talukder said, "I was on duty when the accident occurred. I saw that the truck recklessly hit the pickup from the back, and impact of the collision made the workers fall onto the road."

Injured Khadiza said she was sitting

SEE PAGE 8 COL 5

## Iran has not yet 'paid a big enough price'

Says Trump as he casts doubt on Iran's latest 14-point peace proposal; Tehran says ball is in US court

AGENCIES

Donald Trump has said he is reviewing the latest peace proposal from Tehran, but cast doubt on the prospect of a diplomatic breakthrough by claiming Iran had not yet "paid a big enough price" for its past wrongs.

Trump's remarks came amid growing speculation over the possibility of another round of US strikes against Iran aimed at forcing concessions, including a halt to the country's nuclear programme.

Israeli press reports quoted senior military officials as saying they were preparing for possible US strikes on Iran, and the likelihood that Tehran would hit back against Israel.

A senior Israeli officer who briefed reporters on Friday said any peace agreement without a cessation of Iran's uranium enrichment programme and the surrender of its stockpile of highly enriched uranium would be considered a failure.

Axios reported earlier in the week that Trump's envoy Steve Witkoff had asked for Tehran's nuclear programme to be put back on the negotiating table.

SEE PAGE 8 COL 5



Mourners weep next to the body of a Palestinian man, who was reportedly killed in clashes with Israeli soldiers during a raid in the Israeli-occupied West Bank city of Nablus yesterday. Since the start of the war in Gaza in October 2023, Israeli troops or settlers have killed at least 1,068 Palestinians in the West Bank.

PHOTO: AFP

## Journo barred from flying at Dhaka airport

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Immigration authorities at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport prevented Nazrul Islam Mithu, the Dhaka correspondent of Deutsche Presse-Agentur (dpa), a German-based news agency, from boarding a flight to China yesterday.

Mithu, who currently serves as the president of the Overseas Correspondents Association Bangladesh (OCAB), was scheduled to board a 2:00pm China Southern Airlines flight to Shanghai for a holiday.

Talking to The Daily Star, he said that he took a leave from his office and planned this trip.

Immigration Police did not comment officially on the matter. However, an official speaking on condition of anonymity claimed that Mithu was informed why he was not allowed to board. The

SEE PAGE 5 COL 7