



PHOTOS: RASHED SHUMON, AZAHAR UDDIN

As part of The Daily Star's 35th anniversary celebrations, a discussion was held at the Rajshahi Shilpakala Academy yesterday afternoon. The programme opened with the national anthem and a minute's silence in memory of those who laid down their lives during the 1971 Liberation War, the 1990 anti-autocracy movement, and the July 2024 mass uprising. Visitors, including students, teachers and civil society members, toured a photo exhibition featuring images of the December 18, 2025 mob attack on the newspaper's Dhaka office alongside publications highlighting Rajshahi. Among others, Rajshahi-5 MP Nazrul Islam and The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam addressed the event.

Consumers stare at higher power bills

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At present, 200 units cost Tk 1,295; first 75 units at Tk 5.26 and the remaining 125 units at Tk 7.20. This excludes VAT and demand charges.

If the restructuring is implemented without tariff hikes, the same usage would cost Tk 1,440 because all 200 units would be billed at the higher slab rate.

With the proposed hike to Tk 8.20 from Tk 7.20 per unit for the higher slab, the bill would rise further to Tk 1,640, nearly 27 percent higher.

PDB estimates 35 percent of consumers would face extra billing pressure from restructuring alone, including 23 percent of lower-middle-income households.

The change could generate additional Tk 2,657 crore annually in retail revenue.

According to PDB data, Bangladesh has more than 4.31 crore residential electricity consumers. Of them, 43 percent are lifeline consumers using up to 50 units monthly, while another 22 percent consume up to 75 units.

Around 1 crore 53 lakh consumers use between 76 and 200 units monthly. These consumers are likely to be affected the most by the slab restructuring.

Beyond households, irrigation pumps, constructors, educational institutions, hospitals, commercial buildings, industries, and battery-charging stations would face hikes of 15–29 percent.

High-demand users could see 19–29 percent increases, while battery-charging stations face the steepest mid-level hike at nearly 24 percent.

Prof M Shamsul Alam, energy adviser to the Consumers Association of Bangladesh, said distributors lack authority to propose slab changes.

"PDB may propose tariff adjustments, but it cannot dictate how deficits should be recovered," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

He warned that abolishing slab benefits would hit middle-income households hardest.

"Slabs were introduced to protect poor and middle-income people. Such a proposal should be treated as an instigation to manipulate the regulator's judgement."

PASSING THE 'LOSSES'

Among the distributors, Dhaka Power Distribution Company (DPDC) and Dhaka Electric Supply Company (DESCO) proposed the highest retail hikes, while the Rural Electrification Board (REB) sought the lowest.

Most cited rising salaries, maintenance, office expenses, and the devaluation of the taka in ongoing projects.

PDB, which also distributes in Chattogram, Cumilla, Mymensingh, and Sylhet, said a 17 percent wholesale hike would raise distribution costs by 14.2 percent, while a 21 percent hike would raise costs by 17.76 percent.

DPDC reported Tk 1,083 crore deficit in FY23–FY25, and projects Tk 329 crore deficit in FY26 and Tk 441 crore in FY27 if tariffs remain unchanged.

It argues a 20 percent wholesale hike requires a 24.55 percent retail increase.

DESCO reported Tk 2,611 crore deficit in FY23–FY25, and projects Tk

821 crore more in FY26 under current tariffs.

REB, serving 77 percent of consumers, lost Tk 1,698 crore in FY25. It projects Tk 2,897 crore deficit in FY26 even without wholesale hikes.

Half its residential users are lifeline consumers paying Tk 4.63 per unit.

The agency said low consumption density in rural areas and subsidised lifeline consumers were major reasons behind Tk 3,300 crore annual losses.

NESCO, serving Rajshahi and Rangpur, also reports nearly half its residential users are lifeline consumers, which reduces its revenue.

WZPDC, serving Khulna, Barishal, and parts of Dhaka, proposed hikes of 8 percent for lifeline and 12.25 percent for other users. It reported Tk 514 crore losses in FY23–FY25.

Power Grid Bangladesh PLC reported Tk 1,280 crore cumulative losses in FY23–FY25. It said there was "no other option" but to increase wheeling charges to cover the losses.

Prof Shamsul criticised distributors for trying to make the consumers bear the costs of the companies' "unrealistic expenditure".

He said the distributors should explain how they made profits over the last 10 to 15 years by charging higher than necessary.

"Without holding them accountable, unrealistic expenditures in the name of development activities are going to be put on consumers' shoulders," he said.

"They were supposed to get all sorts of development activities approved by the regulator, but they never followed the process," he added.

Bangladesh, US sign deal on energy cooperation

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including Bangladesh, are facing serious challenges in ensuring energy security due to the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East.

"This MoU would contribute to the efforts of Bangladesh to enhance its long-term energy security by diversifying its energy sourcing options based on affordability and supply chain sustainability and would open up new avenues of broader energy cooperation between Bangladesh and USA," the statement said.

In his brief remarks at the signing ceremony, Khalilur termed the MoU another milestone in the growing Bangladesh-US relationship.

He said energy security was critical for all countries.

"We feel it every day given the war going on," Khalilur said.

"This MoU will give us a long-term energy access to Bangladesh," he said,

thanking the US government for what he said was lifting a heavy weight at this time.

US Energy Secretary Wright described the MoU as a historic development in Bangladesh-US ties.

"Partnership between Bangladesh and the US was great in the past and will be so in the future," he said in a short speech.

Bangladesh Embassy officials and senior officials of the US Department of Energy were present at the signing ceremony.

A foreign ministry official told this correspondent that the MoU means Bangladesh will buy more energy from the US and that it will support long-term energy cooperation between the two countries.

"Bangladesh's energy ministry will eventually sign purchase agreements with US companies to buy energy, be it LNG, LPG, diesel or petrol," he said.

The details of the prices will be

included in the purchase agreements, not in the MoU, the official added.

Earlier on May 13, US Ambassador Brent T Christensen discussed expanding energy cooperation with leading American energy companies.

The envoy met Javier La Rosa, president of Chevron, and Steven Kobos, president and chief executive officer of Excelerate Energy, to discuss ongoing cooperation in Bangladesh's energy sector, the US embassy in Dhaka said.

Chevron currently supplies nearly 60 percent of Bangladesh's natural gas.

They discussed ways to meet Bangladesh's growing energy demand through American innovation and expanded LNG and energy infrastructure.

The envoy recently led a delegation of 25 Bangladesh business leaders to the SelectUSA Investment Summit in Washington, DC.

'No breakthroughs' as Trump ends trip

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"We've settled a lot of different problems that other people wouldn't have been able to solve," Trump added, without elaborating.

Speaking to reporters aboard Air Force One, Trump said Xi had reiterated his opposition to Taiwan's independence.

"I heard him out. I didn't make a comment ... I made no commitment either way," Trump said. He added he would soon decide on a pending arms sale to Taiwan after speaking with "the person that right now is ... running Taiwan".

The leaders had been expected to discuss extending the one-year tariff truce that halted their bruising 2025 trade war during their last meeting in October.

But Trump later said the issue "wasn't brought up".

The remarks were Trump's first unscripted comments after two days in Beijing, during which he unusually restrained himself, largely limiting his public remarks to praising Xi's warmth and stature.

While Trump sought immediate business wins — such as a Boeing deal that failed to impress investors — Xi promoted a long-term reset and a pact to maintain stable trade ties with Washington, underscoring the two sides' differing priorities.

Xi described the relationship as one of "constructive strategic stability" — a sharp shift from the "strategic competition" framework used by former US president Joe Biden, which Beijing disliked.

"Until now, China hasn't proposed an alternative — now they have. If the US side agrees, that is progress," said Da Wei, director of the Center for International Security and Strategy at Tsinghua University in Beijing.

A brief US summary of Thursday's talks highlighted what the White House called the leaders' shared desire to reopen the Strait of Hormuz

and Xi's interest in buying American oil to reduce China's dependence on Middle Eastern supplies.

But just before the leaders met for tea yesterday, China's foreign ministry issued a blunt statement expressing frustration over the war.

"This conflict, which should never have happened, has no reason to continue," the ministry said, adding that China supported efforts to reach a peace deal in a war that has disrupted energy supplies and the global economy.

At Zhongnanhai, Trump said he and Xi had discussed Iran and held "very similar" views, though Xi made no public comment. On the flight home, Trump added that he was not "asking for any favours" on Iran.

Still, US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent had urged Beijing to use its leverage with Tehran to help secure a deal. Analysts, however, doubt Xi is willing to pressure Iran heavily or halt support for its military, given Tehran's strategic value to Beijing as a counterweight to Washington.

"What's notable is that there's no Chinese commitment to do anything specific with regards to Iran," said Patricia Kim, a foreign policy fellow at the Brookings Institution.

In another sign of the summit's limited scope, Trump's readout made no mention of the sweeping structural reforms previous US presidents had pressed Xi to undertake.

Unlike during his 2017 visit, Trump did not discuss "structural reforms", "global economic governance" or the "international trading system", according to the readout.

Boeing shares fell 4 percent after Trump said on Thursday that China would buy 200 Boeing jets — far fewer than the roughly 500 aircraft Reuters sources had said were under discussion.

Trump later suggested the order could rise to 750 aircraft "if they do a good job with the 200".

US officials said the two sides had agreed on farm export deals and made progress on mechanisms to manage future trade, with both expected to identify \$30 billion in non-sensitive goods.

But details remained scarce, and there was no sign of a breakthrough on sales of Nvidia's advanced H200 AI chips to China, despite CEO Jensen Huang's late addition to the delegation.

Trump also left without resolving the rare earths dispute that has strained ties since China imposed export controls on the critical minerals in response to Trump's tariff offensive in April 2025.

Although both sides reached a truce last October under which Washington lowered tariffs in exchange for continued Chinese rare earth exports, Beijing's controls have still caused shortages for US chipmakers and aerospace firms.

Asked whether the tariff truce would be extended beyond this year, Trump said he and Xi "did not discuss tariffs".

Such an extension would have been "the most basic benchmark" for judging the summit a success, Patricia Kim said.

Xi's warning that mishandling Taiwan — the democratically governed island Beijing claims as its own — could lead to conflict injected a sharp note into an otherwise cordial summit.

Taiwan, just 80 km off China's coast, has long been a flashpoint in US-China ties. Beijing has refused to rule out using force to take control of the island, while US law requires Washington to provide Taiwan with means of self-defence.

"US policy on the issue of Taiwan is unchanged as of today," Secretary of State Marco Rubio told NBC News.

Taiwanese Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung thanked the United States for its support.

Measles deaths climb to 451

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symptoms, leading to the admission of 1,016 people.

With this, the total number of suspected cases rose to 54,419.

Meanwhile, health experts have urged the government to prioritise the ongoing measles vaccination drive and set up "fever corners" at local health complexes for early screening of diseases such as measles and pneumonia.

They made the call at a joint press conference organised by the Bangladesh Lung Foundation and the Chest and Heart Association of Bangladesh at the capital's Abu Sayeed International Convention Centre yesterday.

Warning that pneumonia remains the primary cause of fatalities even during the ongoing measles outbreak, the experts proposed four specific measures: continuing the priority vaccination drive, establishing fever corners at district and upazila health complexes for quick screening, distributing WHO-approved treatment guidelines among all health workers, and raising mass awareness.

Presenting the keynote paper, Dr Ziaul Huq, a senior consultant at Evercare Hospital, said the fatality rate is 0.8 percent.

Around 99.2 percent of children infected with measles are still recovering, he said.

"We, along with all chest disease specialists in the country, are concerned about the overall measles



PHOTO: STAR

situation, but not alarmed," Ziaul said.

"Through the media and social networks, you often come across various information. For example, some reports claimed that measles was appearing alongside smallpox.

"Through investigation, we confirmed that it was actually a co-infection with chickenpox. We urge the public, through you, to remain alert against such misinformation."

The Evercare Hospital physician added, "It must be remembered that measles is a highly contagious disease that spreads very quickly. However, 99 percent of patients recover completely."

Prof Dr Ruhul Amin, senior vice-president of the Bangladesh Lung Foundation, said although 95 to 99 percent of measles patients recover

within seven to 10 days, many of the remaining patients develop severe complications, including pneumonia, diarrhoea, and brain infections.

He blamed malnutrition and lack of breastfeeding for the high mortality rate.

He said the exclusive breastfeeding rate has dropped to 56 percent, leaving even infants under nine months vulnerable.

In addition, reliance on packaged foods, supplementary infant formula such as packet milk or powdered milk, is increasing the risk of various illnesses among children, he said.

Eminent paediatrician Prof Abid Hossain Mollah said measles weakens the immune system, paving the way for fatal bacterial pneumonia.

Prices of essentials rise ahead of Eid

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Sajib Sheikh, an onion trader at Karwan Bazar, the largest wholesale kitchen market in the capital, said demand for the cooking item usually rises ahead of Eid-ul-Azha. "Many traders are releasing smaller quantities into the market anticipating further price hikes."

Ginger prices also surged significantly over the past week.

Traders said the spice was selling for Tk 170-190 per kg, while better-quality ginger crossed Tk 200 in some markets.

Meanwhile, local garlic prices remained largely stable due to adequate supply in the market.

Vegetable prices have remained high for nearly a month, consumers said, adding that even light rains were pushing the cost further up.

Most vegetables were selling above Tk 70-80 a kg yesterday.

Papaya, considered one of the cheapest vegetables in the market, cost Tk 60-80 per kg, while better-quality papaya reached Tk 100.

Hanif Mia, a vegetable vendor in East Shewrapara, said rain disrupts vegetable collection from fields. "When water accumulates in the fields, supply falls and prices go up."

Talking to this correspondent, Nazim Uddin, who works at a Begunbari factory, said his mother is suffering from kidney disease. As she cannot eat all vegetables, he buys papaya for her. Yesterday, he bought it for Tk 100 per kg at Kawran Bazar.

"If this continues, it will be difficult for me and other low-income people to manage our families," Nazim said, calling for stronger market monitoring so that traders cannot raise prices in the name of supply shortages.

Brinjal was selling for Tk 90-120 a kg depending on quality, while okra, snake gourd, sponge gourd, and ridge gourd cost Tk 80-100 a kg.

Prices of bitter gourd, yardlong beans, and teal gourd were even higher, ranging between Tk 100 and Tk 120 per kg.

Fish traders said shrimp prices

saw one of the sharpest increases this week, hitting customers hard.

Delwar Hossain, a fish trader at Karwan Bazar, said fish prices tend to rise slightly every Friday, but shrimp prices increased unusually this week.

Horina shrimp, which sold for Tk 750-800 per kg last week, cost Tk 900-1,000 yesterday, he said.

Jalal Hawlader, a fish trader at Mirpur-1 kitchen market, said fish supply generally declines during the monsoon season, pushing up prices.

According to him, prices of farmed fish such as rohu, katla, mrigel, tilapia and pangas increased by Tk 10-20 per kg.

Beef prices also increased ahead of Eid-ul-Azha.

Mohammad Bashir, a meat trader in Kazipara, told this newspaper that cattle prices rose by Tk 5,000-7,000 per head over the past month. As a result, beef prices surged to Tk 820 per kg from Tk 780-800 previously.

He, however, believes the hike is temporary and linked to Eid demand.