

New pay scale comes with fiscal strain

Govt must go for credible tax reforms, stronger revenue mobilisation

The arithmetic of the new pay scale is, on the face of it, straightforward. The Ninth Pay Commission has recommended lifting minimum government salaries from Tk 8,250 to Tk 20,000 while raising the ceiling from Tk 78,000 to Tk 160,000. Finance Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury has confirmed that implementation will begin on July 1. The rationale is difficult to dispute: years of elevated inflation have quietly eroded the real wages of 14 lakh civil servants. What is less straightforward, however, is how the government intends to finance such a large expansion in recurrent expenditure.

Reportedly, the full implementation of the commission's recommendations would cost an additional Tk 106,000 crore annually, which comes on top of the current salary bill of Tk 131,000 crore. The new government has, sensibly, opted for a phased rollout rather than a single-year shock. Even so, the first-year cost alone is expected to reach Tk 35,000 crore. Bangladesh's fiscal position leaves little room for comfort. Revenue mobilisation remains persistently weak. The country's tax-to-GDP ratio hovers around 7 percent, among the lowest in Asia. The National Board of Revenue has repeatedly fallen short of its collection targets, while long-promised structural reforms—broadening the tax base, reducing exemptions, formalising greater parts of the economy, and improving compliance—remain incomplete.

The pressure is being compounded by external developments. Rising global fuel prices have inflated the import bill and squeezed fiscal space further. These twin pressures—weak revenue collection and higher energy costs—were among the reasons the new pay scale implementation was postponed from the current fiscal year in the first place. These underlying vulnerabilities still remain. Allocating such large sums to the pay structure will inevitably place pressure on capital expenditure at a time when Bangladesh's growth outlook depends heavily on infrastructure and productivity-enhancing investment. Annual Development Programme allocations, already hampered by chronic underspending and delays, will now have to compete more intensely with this recurrent expenditure.

The government may face a growing temptation to finance the gap through domestic borrowing. External borrowing, meanwhile, comes with its own constraints, as Bangladesh is expected by its development partners to demonstrate credible tax reforms, subsidy cuts, and greater efficiency in state-owned enterprises. It is also worth recognising who stands to benefit from the upcoming pay revision. The recipients are not the poorest citizens, but largely members of the formal-sector middle class, whose economic position remains considerably more stable than that of the rest of the population. Garment workers, day labourers, and rural smallholders are more likely to absorb the indirect costs of inflationary and fiscal pressure created by the adjustment.

None of this is an argument against revising public sector pay. Sustained wage compression carries serious long-term costs of its own. But the fiscal arithmetic cannot be ignored. The phased implementation is a prudent decision but what remains missing, at least publicly, is an equally credible and phased strategy for revenue reform. Without that, the new pay scale will be another test of Bangladesh's already fragile fiscal capacity.

An alarming surge in brutal killings

Collective action needed to restore public safety

The rising number of grisly murders across Bangladesh is indeed creating a growing sense of fear and insecurity among citizens. In the first four months this year, 1,142 murder cases have been filed nationwide—up from 1,017 during the same period last year. Many of these cases involved shocking levels of brutality. Another horrifying aspect is the number of children who have been victims of these crimes. Incidents ranging from gang-style killings to murders committed by family members, neighbours or acquaintances paint a distressing picture, raising an unavoidable question: why are such gruesome crimes becoming increasingly common, making people feel unsafe in their own communities?

According to Ain o Salish Kendra, at least 115 children were killed in the first four months of 2026. The recent murder of eight-year-old Ramisa Akter in Dhaka's Pallabi area has shaken the nation. Preliminary investigations suggest she was raped and murdered by a neighbour before her beheaded body was found. The incident has left many parents questioning whether children are safe even within their own neighbourhoods. Reports of entire families being killed, bodies being dismembered, and mob attacks—which claimed at least 71 lives in January-April 2026—reveal how deeply violence has seeped into everyday life. Recent attacks on law enforcers also raise concerns over declining public trust in law enforcement agencies.

While weak law enforcement and a prevailing culture of impunity have clearly emboldened the perpetrators, the current situation cannot be explained through the law-and-order lens alone. Experts point to political instability, economic inequality, weakening social bonds, and poor crime prevention measures as key drivers. They have also noted that our law enforcers largely respond after crimes occur, rather than prioritising preventive strategies. Effective policing requires stronger intelligence gathering, greater community engagement, closer monitoring of known offenders, and proactive interventions. Meanwhile, the involvement of family members and neighbours in many murders points to a wider deterioration in social values. Family conflicts, drug abuse, and intolerance are creating conditions where violence can thrive. Addressing these underlying causes will require long-term interventions that go beyond conventional law enforcement measures.

The government must investigate the recent crimes, particularly those against children, with urgency and bring the perpetrators to book. It must also take immediate steps to restore public confidence in law enforcement agencies through greater accountability and more effective policing. Beyond that, political actors, social organisations, communities, and citizens all have a responsibility to rebuild trust, strengthen social bonds, and reject the growing culture of violence. Without collective action, reversing the current trend will be difficult.

Pakistan whitewash and what it says about our Test cricket journey



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Bangladesh cricket has just witnessed a landmark moment, with player reactions and celebratory pictures already flooding social media. But before delving into this moment, it is important to remember that the back-to-back Test series whitewashes of Pakistan—first away in Rawalpindi in 2024, and now at home in 2026—represent a moment of vindication for a team that spent decades fighting ridicule, self-doubt, and structural shortcomings in the game's most demanding format. So, how did we arrive here?

It would be inaccurate to say that Bangladesh earned its Test status in 2000 as a qualified cricketing nation. The achievement was instead driven largely by political leadership, cricketing diplomacy, and the strength of the subcontinental bloc within the International Cricket Council (ICC). At that time, Bangladesh was the only Test-playing nation whose first-class domestic structure was formed only after receiving Test status. Much like a premature birth, initial survival was precarious. Consequently, Bangladesh spent its first few years struggling as the care required to nurture a “premature” cricketing structure was sorely lacking. The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) leadership often preferred shortcuts over visionary planning. Players were often fielded indiscriminately rather than based on their suitability for this format, making it difficult to build a solid foundation.

This trend began to shift after 2015, as signs of more deliberate nurturing emerged. By then, players like Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, and Mushfiqur Rahim had become established, and an aura of confidence began to develop. The victory against England at home in 2016, followed by the Test win against a powerhouse like Australia in 2017, marked a turning point. The secret behind these successes against superior sides lay in spin-friendly wickets. Having once been a team that lost consistently, Bangladesh achieved another landmark victory in

2017 in their 100th Test match, against Sri Lanka—a notable achievement given the latter's ability to win in subcontinental conditions.

However, relying solely on rank turners and a battery of spinners was insufficient for becoming a major Test nation. The BCB realised this about three years later, aided by the emergence of a promising group of pacers, which broadened its strategic



Bangladesh cricket team celebrates after defeating Pakistan 2-0 in a two-match home Test series on May 20, 2026.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

outlook. In 2022, Bangladesh secured a historic victory in New Zealand, prevailing in pace-friendly conditions. Pacer Ebadot Hossain played a pivotal role in that triumph at Mount Maunganui, a feat rarely achieved by other subcontinental teams like India, Pakistan, or Sri Lanka in New Zealand.

Then captain Mominul Haque successfully convinced team management of the importance of fast bowlers. Alongside Ebadot, the pipeline began to flourish with the likes of Taskin Ahmed, Shoriful Islam, Hasan Mahmud, and Khaled Ahmed. Amid this, the emergence of Nahid Rana, a young man from Chapainawabganj who is taller than the average Bangladeshi and bowls with surprising pace, added

a new dimension. It became urgent to manage their workloads, groom them, and devise strategies based on opposition teams. There is no denying that this approach has been followed consistently since 2022-23. Despite a lack of absolute consistency, the results began to show. Since then, we have also seen a more thoughtful approach to preparing home pitches, reflecting a renewed emphasis on pace.

After receiving Test status as the 10th nation, Bangladesh languished at the bottom of the rankings for years. Defeats were inevitable, often accompanied only by flashes of individual brilliance or “what if” narratives of narrow losses. For a long time, Bangladesh's rise to ninth place in the rankings had more to do with Zimbabwe's decline than our own progress. We remained around ninth for years, reaching eighth only once in

ahead of only Zimbabwe, Ireland, and Afghanistan. Now, by surpassing Pakistan and the West Indies, we have reached seventh place. Barring a major setback, this position should remain secure for the time being.

However, the next challenge is far from easy. Truth be told, we still have a long way to go before we can consistently compete with the top cricketing nations. The domestic first-class structure remains questionable, and the pipeline is not yet deep enough beyond a handful of players. There is a need for greater intensity among players to fight for every position. We must manage the euphoria following successes and look at ourselves in the mirror of reality, self-reflecting past the praise. There must also be a drive to build a “Test culture” in the country. It is encouraging that the current Test captain, Shanto, shares this realisation.

In Test cricket, battles occur within the battle—fights of mindset and cricketing intellect. To challenge the giants of the game in any condition, our foundations in these areas must be strengthened.

In the latest home series, Bangladesh also capitalised on a psychological advantage. Backed by the necessary cricketing skills, the team was brimming with confidence. From that position, they were able to rattle the opposition mentally during intense moments on the field, sending a clear message that they would not yield an inch. In cricket, especially in the Test format, sledging is an inevitable component during tense moments. While many may not like it, even the biggest cricketing nations are rarely seen playing with a gentle, submissive demeanour. At one time, crumbling under opposition sledging was our destiny; over the past few years, a mentality of responding eye-to-eye has emerged.

Bangladesh has made history by whitewashing Pakistan in Test series twice in a row. This is a significant step forward for the representatives of the red and green in this elite format. To maintain this momentum, it will be vital to manage emotions, embrace reality, and show the patience to follow each process consistently. The nature of cricket is constantly evolving. Instead of basking in complacency, we must adapt and develop with the times to maintain our place at the highest level. The role of organisational leadership will be crucial in the days ahead.

How long will healthcare remain a burden on citizens?



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In Bangladesh, falling sick often means facing a financial crisis. A recent report published by *The Daily Star* reveals that nearly 65 percent of healthcare needs remain unmet, while rising medical costs continue to push ordinary families deeper into hardship. For millions of ordinary citizens, especially those living in rural and marginalised communities, healthcare has become less a public service and more a personal finance battle. Families are selling their assets, taking on loans, or simply avoiding treatment because they cannot afford it.

Yet, amid this worsening situation, we often forget a fundamental truth: healthcare is not charity. It is a constitutional responsibility of the state and a basic right for citizens. A democratic state cannot distance itself from the responsibility of ensuring accessible, affordable, and equitable healthcare for all. Unfortunately, the current trajectory of Bangladesh's health system suggests that this obligation is frequently treated as secondary.

Bangladesh has made undeniable progress in several health indicators over the decades. Maternal mortality has declined, immunisation coverage has improved, and life expectancy has increased. But beneath these successes lies a structural weakness that receives far less attention.

The country's healthcare system remains heavily dependent on direct payments from citizens. According to various public health studies,

Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure in South Asia. This means that people pay from their own pockets at the time of illness instead of receiving protection through a strong public system or health insurance mechanism.

A poor family may survive poverty for years, but a single hospital stay can push them into long-term financial hardship. In remote regions, the burden becomes even more painful. Patients often travel long distances, lose working days, pay transportation costs, and still struggle to receive quality care after reaching a facility. In many public hospitals, shortages of medicines, diagnostic services, trained personnel, and patient-friendly management continue to frustrate citizens. As a result, many people turn to expensive private healthcare providers, even when they cannot afford them.

A central issue is our narrow understanding of what “health sector development” means. Many policymakers and even elected representatives tend to equate progress with visible infrastructure: constructing new hospitals, increasing the number of beds, or recruiting more doctors and nurses. While these are certainly necessary, they are not sufficient. A healthcare system must be evaluated by whether ordinary people can access timely, affordable, and quality care without suffering financially.

The reality is that Bangladesh's healthcare challenges are deeply systemic. Building more hospitals without improving governance, accountability, referral systems, primary healthcare, and financial protection mechanisms will not solve the crisis. In many cases, new infrastructure is added without addressing the inefficiencies already

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embedded in the system. Patients continue to wait for hours, face informal costs, and struggle to navigate fragmented services. Rural healthcare facilities often remain understaffed or under-equipped despite ambitious policy announcements.

Another concern is the absence of meaningful public discussion on healthcare reform at the national level. In parliament and public discourse, many critical health issues receive limited attention compared to political theatrics or short-term controversies. Healthcare should not become an occasional discussion during outbreaks or emergencies; it should remain at the centre of national development planning.

Bangladesh already has a growing body of public health researchers, academics, and practitioners who are producing valuable, evidence-based recommendations. Unfortunately, policy decisions do not always reflect these findings. Research on healthcare financing, community-based care, digital health systems, workforce distribution, and universal health coverage should play a far greater role in shaping national reforms. Public health expertise must move beyond conference rooms and become part of practical policymaking.

There is also much to learn from neighbouring countries. Several South Asian nations, despite having comparable economic constraints, have expanded community health protection schemes, decentralised primary healthcare, and strengthened public financing mechanisms. Bangladesh does not need to copy such schemes, but it must study successful regional models and adapt them to local realities.

Most importantly, a shift in mindset is necessary for true reform. Citizens should not feel abandoned during illness. Access to treatment should not depend on geography, political connections, or financial capacity. A mother should not fear hospital costs more than her child's disease. A day labourer should not have to choose between buying medicine and feeding his family.

Bangladesh has demonstrated its ability to achieve remarkable social progress when political commitment aligns with public need. The same urgency is now required for improving healthcare. What Bangladesh needs is a people-centred health system grounded in equity, accountability, and financial protection. In a democratic society, health is not a privilege for the fortunate few. It is a right that must be protected with seriousness, humanity, and long-term vision.