'Working to stop water flowing into Pakistan'

Indian minister says citing 'directives' from PM

AFP, *New Delhi*

India is working to ensure "not a single drop of water" will flow into neighbouring Pakistan, the water minister has said, after New Delhi suspended a major treaty last year.

Pakistan has previously said it would consider any attempt to change the flow of cross-border waterways as an "act of war", and says that the 1960 Indus Water Treaty (IWT) remains in force as there is no mechanism to unilaterally withdraw from it.

"It is certain, not a single drop of water will go (to Pakistan) in the coming years," Minister of Water C R Patil told India's ANI news agency late Tuesday.

Patil, speaking in Hindi, said that India is "actively working on it" after "directives" from Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The treaty governs the use of water from six rivers, whose headwaters originate in India but flow into Pakistan as part of the Indus basin -- a resource relied on by hundreds of millions.

Blocked by police barricades at the Secretariat entrance, marching protesters under the banner of Islami Bank Conscious Customers Forum stage a sit-in and block the Paltan-GPO street yesterday. The demonstrators protest against the recent appointment of Chairman Md Khurshid Alam and alleged conspiracies surrounding the lender. PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

Case filed over rape of mother, daughter in Cox's Bazar

ASK urges zero tolerance against such crimes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A case has been filed in connection with the alleged gang rape of a mother and her teenage daughter at their home in Cox's Bazar.

One of the victims, the mother, filed the case early yesterday, accusing seven named and five to six unnamed people, said Md Monir Hossain, officer-in-charge (OC) of Chakaria Police Station.

According to police, a group of eight to 10 men cut through a window grille of a house in the Dolnighona area, looted gold jewellery and cash, raped the woman and her teenage daughter, and fled.

At the time of the incident, the housewife was at home with her two daughters -- one a teenager and one 7-year-old. Her husband was in Chattogram for business purposes.

Police have arrested five of the named accused -- Tofazzal Hossain alias Babu, 23; Kefayat Hossain alias Puittya, 27; Mohammad Tanzid, 24; Mehedi Hasan, 24; and Mohammad Tareq, 26. Another person, Rezaul Karim, 36, was also arrested on suspicion.

However, another named accused, Jisan, remains at large, said the OC. The victims' family has identified him as the key figure behind the incident.

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Budget of big ambition

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never built a state apparatus that could pay for its ambitions. That has always been the contradiction at the heart of its economic miracle, and this budget will not resolve it. Nor does anyone expect it to.

The National Board of Revenue has spent most of the current fiscal year missing its targets. By April, it was already more than Tk 1 lakh crore short, a shortfall expected to persist through June. The government's planned response is a classic move: give the NBR an even larger target for next year, hope the economy overperforms, paper over the gap with borrowing, and move on. Every government in Bangladesh has done it.

Returning to office on a wave of democratic optimism, the BNP is discovering that the spreadsheets look considerably more alarming up close. While the latest data shows growth nudging upward, the broader economic engine is still sputtering. Exports have fallen, and private investment has declined. Khosru summarised it with typical bluntness during a recent pre-budget discussion: previous administrations left the BNP in a "fragile and precarious" situation. The metaphor he chose was a tubewell: pour water in when the water level drops. A broken economy demands no less.

There is a vast chasm between the nation's grand ambitions and the realities of its purse -- a gap that stretches to roughly Tk 2.43 lakh crore. It keeps the fiscal deficit at less than 4 percent of GDP, safely beneath the globally accepted ceiling of 5 percent. Yet, to bridge this divide, the government must cast a heavy net, drawing deep from local banks and leaning on foreign creditors.

Economists in Dhaka point out that this domestic borrowing squeezes private sector credit at precisely the moment the economy desperately needs investment. Private investment as a share of GDP has been falling steadily and is now near historic lows. Borrowing more to fund a state machinery that cannot collect its own taxes is, in this reading, counterproductive.

What makes this strategy especially precarious is that one of its key pillars -- external multilateral financing -- is currently under negotiation rather than secured. In January 2023, Bangladesh secured an IMF loan package (later expanded to $5.5 billion) to address a widening balance of payments deficit, a sliding taka, and declining foreign exchange reserves. While five tranches have been disbursed, the IMF withheld the sixth in December 2025, stating it wanted to wait for an elected government. The BNP won the election in February, yet the money hasn't arrived.

The delay stems from unmet conditions, including raising revenue collection as a share of GDP, enacting meaningful banking sector reform, and allowing a genuinely market-based exchange rate. The government has now asked for a new programme, with an IMF mission expected in Dhaka next month to negotiate terms. An active IMF programme acts as a seal of approval, unlocking parallel budget assistance from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

Khosru has a theory about what went wrong with Bangladesh's economy, and he isn't shy about sharing it. He pushed for the "democratisation of the economy". Economic output, he argued, does not only come from large factories and conglomerates; it also comes from rural women, blacksmiths, potters, weavers, and artisans. He believes these marginalised producers have been ignored. To change this, the new budget will feature direct allocations for the "creative economy", alongside plans to connect grassroots producers to global platforms like Amazon and eBay through NGO and private sector partnerships.

He also intends to tear up the paperwork. In his telling, Bangladesh's regulatory bureaucracy is a profound drag on growth. His solution is a single focal point for all government approvals with mandatory response deadlines. Furthermore, new projects will be approved only if they pass four strict tests: value for money, return on investment, job creation, and environmental sustainability. Everything inherited from the previous government that fails these tests will be scrapped.

To wean the economy off its dependence on bank lending, Khosru wants to rebuild the Securities and Exchange Commission and develop bond and capital markets. The previous chairman resigned, along with other commissioners. A new leadership is now in place, but whether it has the muscle to turn a market Khosru once called a casino into the capital engine remains very much to be seen.

Behind all of this sits an overarching ambition: transforming Bangladesh into a trillion-dollar economy by 2034. While the Boston Consulting Group previously estimated the country would hit that mark by 2040 at 5 percent growth, Khosru is aiming for it six years ahead. That would require almost double-digit GDP growth. Is it a concrete plan or merely an aspiration? The budget will need to begin answering that question and, for starters, the envisioned 6.5 percent growth falls drastically short.

Barely two weeks in office, the BNP government had to grapple with arguably the largest supply disruption in the history of the global oil market as Iran closed the Strait of Hormuz in retaliation for US and Israeli attacks. It choked off a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas, pushing crude prices past $114 a barrel. Bangladesh, which imports 95 percent of its oil and LNG, had never planned for such a contingency. Khosru estimates the conflict adds almost $3 billion to Bangladesh's energy import bill between March and June.

The cruel irony is that Bangladesh's new government came to power on promises of economic renewal just as a geopolitical shock, entirely beyond its control, began destroying its room to manoeuvre. Khosru cannot control the price of oil, nor can he reopen the strait. All he can do is present a budget that honestly accounts for the damage, hoping the war ends before things get worse.

For the new government, the banking crisis is an inherited disaster, but it makes everything harder. Bangladesh's non-performing loan ratio stood at 30.60 percent in December 2025, after peaking at 35.73 percent just three months earlier. It exceeded every other nation in South Asia, and most in the world. Five banks had NPL ratios above 90 percent. Some cannot, by any realistic assessment, be saved.

This creates a glaring tension: Khosru wants to develop bond markets as an alternative to bank financing, yet the upcoming budget must be financed partly through borrowing from the same struggling banking sector. This puts him in a difficult spot too, since the finance minister will have to be firm with reforms, tightening banking regulations and thereby steadying the economy.

More than anything else, this budget is a test of whether the new government can convert its rhetoric into plumbing. The soaring oratory of democratisation and transparency costs nothing. The plumbing -- the tax collectors who actually work, the permit approvals that arrive on time, the banking reforms that survive political pressure, and the social spending that actually reaches the vulnerable -- is much harder to build.

Khosru has asked the public for patience. It is the most honest thing a finance minister can say before presenting a budget.

When the budget speech is delivered today, the numbers will be large, round, and impressive-sounding. Khosru's colleagues will applaud. Economists will issue politely worded concerns. But the hardest questions will not be answered in parliament. They will best be answered with new jobs and stable prices.

We all hope that it happens, but experience sings a different song.

And so, the World Cup begins

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However, the tournament's location favours the Lionel Messi-led side in their quest to stitch a fourth star on their shirts, as South American teams historically dominate World Cups held in the Americas.

Brazil loyalists also have reasons for optimism of a record-extending sixth title. Under Carlo Ancelotti, Selecao arrive with renewed belief and an attack packed with star power. The setting may also stir fond memories, with the tournament returning to the United States -- the site of Brazil's memorable triumph in 1994.

Beyond the South American giants, Europe arrive with an imposing collection of contenders.

Spain have emerged as arguably the favourites to lift the trophy for a second time. Their hopes rest heavily on the brilliance of 18-year-old sensation Lamine Yamal, who has already established himself among the game's elite talents.

Two-time champions and last edition's finalists France are close behind. Led by captain Kylian Mbappe, Les Bleus possess one of the deepest and most dangerous attacking units in the tournament, giving manager Didier Deschamps enviable options.

England, meanwhile, travel to North America carrying perhaps greater expectations than ever before. Manager Thomas Tuchel has inherited a wealth of creative talent, while star striker Harry Kane remains the focal point of a side desperate to end a 60-year wait for major silverware.

Portugal also command serious attention. Cristiano Ronaldo joins Messi and Mexico goalkeeper Guillermo Ochoa in making a historic sixth World Cup appearance. Around him is a squad rich in quality, particularly in midfield, where Vitinha, Bruno Fernandes and Bernardo Silva provide both creativity and control.

Four-time champions Germany and three-time runners-up the Netherlands complete the group of traditional heavyweights. Although still in transition, Julian Nagelsmann's side will believe they have the talent to reach the latter stages and challenge for honours. Meanwhile, history shows the Dutch can never be counted out from making a lasting impact.

The host nations themselves enter the tournament buoyed by recent progress. Mexico appear well-equipped to navigate their group and potentially mount a deep run. The United States face a sterner immediate challenge in a highly competitive section packed with physical and tactically disciplined opponents. Canada, meanwhile, have a realistic opportunity to progress beyond the group stage.

As always, though, the World Cup's enduring appeal extends beyond the favourites, residing in the stories surrounding the underdogs and newcomers.

A surging Norway, with marksman Erling Haaland in their ranks, pose a real threat, alongside an ensemble of dangerous dark horses like Colombia, Ecuador, Senegal, Morocco and Japan -- teams capable of causing seismic shockwaves.

On the other hand, debutants in Cape Verde, Curacao, Uzbekistan, and Jordan can always dream of causing upsets.

In a tournament of this unprecedented scale, the stage is set for an epic, unpredictable, and entirely unmissable spectacle.

Host US beset by controversies

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None of this has come as a surprise. Immigration concerns have loomed over the tournament since Donald Trump's return to the White House. Restricting immigration and cracking down on undocumented migrants were central pillars of his 2024 re-election campaign. Last year, Washington even imposed a sweeping travel ban on citizens of 12 countries, including four World Cup participants -- Haiti, Iran, Senegal and Ivory Coast. Citizens of those countries are effectively barred from obtaining the type of visitor visas US authorities recommend for supporters attending the tournament.

The impact has been felt far beyond the stands. Julien Kouadio Adonis of Ivory Coast's National Committee for the Support of the Elephants told the BBC: "It's a form of segregation that doesn't dare speak its name, but the proof is there. No European country has faced this kind of restriction. Why Africa?" His organisation ultimately abandoned plans to travel to the United States.

Iran has faced some of the most significant challenges. Amid rising tensions between Washington and Tehran, Iran shifted its training base from Tucson, Arizona, to Tijuana, Mexico. According to the US Department of Homeland Security, Iranian players will be permitted to enter the United States only 24 hours before matches and must leave on the same day.

Although the players eventually secured visas, 15 members of Iran's management and administrative staff, including senior football federation officials, did not.

Iran's football federation has also accused the United States of revoking its allocation of tickets for group-stage matches, leaving it unable to distribute tickets to supporters through official channels.

Iraq has encountered similar difficulties. Striker Aymen Hussein was reportedly questioned for nearly seven hours at Chicago's O'Hare Airport before being allowed entry. The team's official photographer, Talal Salah, was denied entry altogether after a lengthy ordeal despite arriving as part of Iraq's 53-member delegation.

Even match officials have not been spared. Somalian referee Omar Abdulkadir Artan, named Africa's best men's referee last year, was denied entry to the United States upon arriving at Miami International Airport. US Customs and Border Protection said he was deemed "inadmissible due to vetting concerns". The decision ended Artan's hopes of becoming the first Somali referee to officiate at a World Cup.

The growing criticism has extended beyond football circles. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk urged the United States to reconsider its approach after fans, team officials and a top referee found themselves excluded from the tournament.

"I hope that the issues around racial profiling, around immigration enforcement are not going to affect this World Cup in the way that they have already," Turk said.

He also called for "a massive re-think" of immigration policies and an end to the "dehumanisation of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers".

With such hardline measures in place, questions are increasingly being asked about the US's suitability as host of the world's biggest sporting events. The concerns extend beyond football. Los Angeles is set to host the 2028 Olympics, a far more diverse gathering of athletes, officials and supporters from across the globe. The city has already experienced serious tensions surrounding immigration enforcement in recent years, and scrutiny is likely to intensify over how the US handles the arrival of participants from a diverse range of nations, including Olympic powerhouse China, one of Washington's principal geopolitical rivals.

The concerns are no longer limited to football. The World Cup is now being viewed by many as a test case for how the US will balance border security with the openness traditionally expected of a global sporting host.

FIFA has repeatedly stressed that immigration decisions remain the sovereign right of host nations. Legally, that may be true. But the World Cup is more than a sporting event. It is a celebration of cultures, identities and people from every corner of the globe. When supporters, officials and even referees are unable to participate because of immigration barriers, serious questions arise about the tournament's inclusivity and the scars such measures will have on its legacy; questions that will continue to shadow this World Cup long after the final whistle.

Govt unhappy with Ad-din's response

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included many narratives and explanations that are not acceptable to us.

"There are four or five pages of explanations, but no bullet-point responses to the specific questions. It's vague. We are not satisfied. We have not stepped back from the matter. We are looking into what can be done and will take the necessary action."

The hospital authorities submitted their reply on Tuesday in response to a show-cause notice issued by the Directorate General of Health Services over the deaths of six newborns, allegedly due to negligence.

The notice sought an explanation as to why the hospital's licence should not be cancelled after the babies, aged between one and four days, died between 5:00am and 9:00am on May 27.

The incident triggered public outrage and prompted authorities to shut down the post-operative room and form two investigation committees.

A DGHS probe committee found that clear negligence by the hospital authorities, nurses, and staff, as well as the absence of an on-duty physician, was responsible for the deaths.

The health minister disclosed the findings on June 4, the same day the show-cause notice was issued. The initial deadline for a response was 5:00pm on Sunday, but the directorate extended it by 48 hours upon the hospital authorities' request.

Contacted, DGHS Director General Prof Pravath Chandra Biswas said that although they did not hold a meeting with the minister yesterday, they were also reviewing the reply.

"We will take steps soon, expectedly within tomorrow [today]. We have followed all necessary procedures and will take appropriate action against the hospital."

Home minister's claim on Islami Bank 'false'

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parliamentary proceedings based on documentary evidence.

Speaker Hafiz Uddin Ahmad declined to entertain the point of order, saying such interventions must concern immediate or ongoing matters.

"This issue has already passed yesterday. It is no longer valid today. However, if you feel it is necessary, you may submit a formal notice," the speaker said before returning to the day's agenda.

Speaking in parliament on Tuesday, the home minister cited some numbers on the RDS and the bank's lending to Nabil Group.

However, The Daily Star's review of available records found that his figures contradict Islami Bank's annual reports.

Salahuddin alleged that Tk 22,000 crore had been distributed through the RDS -- Tk 11,000 crore before and another Tk 11,000 crore after the August 5 political changeover -- "to help a certain group cross the election river".

But according to Islami Bank's 2025 annual report, investment through the RDS rose only 1.1 percent year-on-year to Tk 6,789 crore at the end of the year. The scheme's financing stood at Tk 6,712 crore in 2024, Tk 6,473 crore in 2023, and Tk 5,588 crore in 2022.

Introduced in 1995, the RDS is Islami Bank's collateral-free microfinance programme aimed at meeting the investment needs of poor and marginal farmers, particularly in agriculture and off-farm activities. The programme seeks to generate employment and raise rural incomes to reduce poverty. It currently serves around 17.75 lakh members across 35,352 villages, with women making up the majority of beneficiaries.

The home minister also alleged that after the fall of the Awami League government, Nabil Group received Tk 700 crore in loans against letters of credit from Islami Bank but did not repay after selling imported goods. According to Salahuddin, the group's total liability stood at Tk 16,000 crore.

However, Islami Bank's annual report said Nabil Group's approved loan limit was Tk 2,900 crore, while outstanding loans stood at Tk 2,598 crore at the end of 2025 -- down 11.9 percent year-on-year.

Individuals affiliated with Jamaat and various Islamic organisations played a key role in establishing Islami Bank in 1983.

The bank later came under the control of S Alam Group in 2017 during the AL regime. The conglomerate subsequently channelled around 80 percent of the bank's loans to its own companies and affiliated firms, according to allegations widely documented in the banking sector.

Following the fall of the AL government in August 2024, Islami Bank was freed from the group's control and is now run by a board of independent directors appointed under Bangladesh Bank oversight.

The latest controversy arose after Md Khurshid Alam's appointment as chairman was announced on May 24. On June 1 -- the first working day after the Eid holidays -- hundreds gathered in Motijheel, demanding that Bangladesh Bank cancel the appointment and reinstate former managing director Omar Faruk Khan.

The protests have since triggered a sharp outflow of deposits, placing the country's largest Shariah-based lender under growing pressure. Islami Bank lost Tk 4,240 crore in deposits within seven days of demonstrations.

Islami Bank currently holds the largest volume of non-performing loans in the banking sector -- Tk 95,629 crore, equivalent to 50.88 percent of its total loans.