



'Mother Teresa' of Sherpur

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Iran's top diplomat meets Hamas leader

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Why Kier Starmer's fall should surprise no one

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Banks got Tk 76,000cr liquidity support: Khosru B1

National health hotline going cold

Govt inertia leaves popular service struggling

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Bangladesh's national teleconsultation service, Shastho Batayan, is stumbling as the government's contract with its private service provider expired nearly two months ago, and many phone calls are going unanswered.

Accessible through the 16263 hotline, the round-the-clock service enables citizens across the country to consult doctors and receive health information and advice free of charge over the phone.

Since its launch in 2015, Shastho Batayan has handled more than 2.72 crore calls until June 24 this year, providing a vital healthcare lifeline to countless people, particularly those in remote and underserved areas.



The crisis has deepened as the service provider, Synesis IT, says it has not received payments for the past 22 months, forcing it to slash manpower by half and raising fears over the future of one of the country's most widely used free health services.

While Shastho Batayan typically receives between 5,000 and 6,000 calls on average a day, its reduced workforce now allows it to answer only around 3,000 to 3,500 calls, leaving thousands of callers without assistance.

The service proved indispensable during the Covid-19 pandemic, when it emerged as a critical channel for remote medical consultation at a time when access to hospitals and clinics was severely disrupted.

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Switzerland's Ruben Vargas celebrates scoring his team's first goal in a 2-1 win over co-hosts Canada in Vancouver today, as the Swiss progressed to the World Cup Round of 32 as Group B champions. Canada also advanced to the knockouts for the first time. [Inset] Bosnia and Herzegovina kept alive their hopes of progressing as one of the best third-placed teams by knocking Qatar out with a 3-1 win in Seattle.

PHOTO: REUTERS



ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE

'Loophole in draft law could enable secret detention'

Warn UN experts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A coalition of United Nations human rights mandates has raised alarm over Bangladesh's draft law on the criminalisation of enforced disappearances, saying it does not go far enough to prevent and prosecute the violation.

In a formal joint communication to the government dated June 17, 2026, the UN experts warned that the draft "Prevention and Remedy of Enforced Disappearance Act, 2026" contains a loophole that could enable enforced disappearances.

The concern centres on a provision stating that an arrest would not be considered an enforced disappearance if the individual is produced before a court within 24 hours, even if authorities keep the arrest completely secret until the person's production before the court.

"This creates a significant carve-out that can be exploited to shield secret detention from criminal responsibility," the letter said.

It noted that the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances,

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Banking sector a key hurdle to \$1tn economy

Says World Bank, approves \$450m reform programme

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The World Bank has warned that Bangladesh's distressed banking sector remains the biggest obstacle to the government's ambition of becoming a trillion-dollar economy by 2034.

To address the challenge, the global lender has approved a \$450 million programme to support sweeping reforms aimed at restoring stability and confidence in the financial system and enabling the sector to better support economic growth and job creation.

Project aims to protect small depositors, support restructuring

BB's IT systems, risk-based supervision capacity to be strengthened

Govt intends to amend Bank Company Act under programme

Cleared by the World Bank board on Tuesday, the Financial Sector Support Project II is expected to back major legislative and institutional changes.

"Bangladesh's vision of attaining a trillion-dollar economy requires a stable and inclusive financial sector. But the banking sector -- which accounts for about 90 percent of total financial sector assets -- faces mounting stress," said Jean Pesme, World Bank division director for Bangladesh and Bhutan, according to a press release issued yesterday.

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THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH

'Hey Jude', England will be fine

SHABAB CHOWDHURY

"Hey Jude, don't make it bad; take a sad song and make it better."

Paul McCartney's iconic Hey Jude remains one of the great anthems of comfort and encouragement. At its heart lies a simple message: move forward, overcome disappointment, and turn a negative into a positive.

That is exactly the song England need after their frustrating goalless draw against Ghana in Group L of the FIFA World Cup in Boston yesterday.

Yes, it was disappointing. Yes, it was frustrating. But from an English perspective, there is little reason for alarm.

Despite the inevitable scrutiny that follows England wherever they go, this is far from a crisis. Credit must instead go to a Ghana side that arrived with a plan, committed fully to it, and executed it brilliantly.

Carlos Queiroz's men defended with discipline, intensity and conviction. England's attacking display in the 4-2 win over Croatia had fuelled expectations of another comfortable evening for Thomas Tuchel's side, but sometimes football

demands appreciation for the team pulling off a defensive masterclass for the desired result.

England remain top of Group L after two games and are still masters of their own fate. A win over Panama in their final match guarantees a place in the knockout rounds and will almost certainly secure top spot. England beat Panama 6-1 in their only previous meeting at the 2018 World Cup. There is not much to worry about.

Anyone concerned by the stalemate should remember England have topped their group in each of the last three major tournaments despite stumbling in their second group game. Following yesterday's draw, England have now failed to win their second match at each of the last four major tournaments.

This result follows 0-0 draws against Scotland at Euro 2020 and the United States at the 2022 World Cup, as well as a 1-1 draw with Denmark at Euro 2024. Across those four matches, England have produced 48 shots, averaged 61 percent possession, generated 4.14 expected goals (xG), and scored only once.

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CR7 rewrites the narrative

NABID YEASIN

"There is a player more dangerous than Cristiano Ronaldo... it's Cristiano Ronaldo who didn't score in the previous match."

The true reflection of this famous quote from now Brazil manager Carlo Ancelotti, spoken years ago, was once again on display at the Houston Stadium in Texas on Tuesday night.

Ronaldo didn't just announce his arrival in this World Cup -- he reminded everyone exactly how he does it best: with goals that silence critics and reset the narrative in an instant.

On paper, Portugal's 5-0 win over Uzbekistan in their second Group K match may not have been a surprise. With a squad stacked with elite talent and a superstar of the stature of Ronaldo -- the game's all-time leading scorer -- the expectation was always dominance.

But the meaning of the victory ran far deeper than the scoreline.

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Red carpet rolled out for PM in Beijing

BSS, Beijing

A red carpet was rolled out as Prime Minister Tarique Rahman reached Beijing yesterday by a bullet train after joining the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Dalian city.

Tarique, accompanied by his wife Zubaida Rahman, reached Beijing Chaoyang Railway Station at 5:35pm local time.

Sun Meijun, minister and secretary of Communist Party of China Committee of the General Administration of Customs of China, received the PM at the station. The premier was also accorded a static guard of honour and a ceremonial welcome.

From the station, Tarique and members of his entourage was taken to Diaoyutai state guest house in a ceremonial motorcade.

The PM's entourage includes Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman, State Minister for Power, Energy, and Mineral Resources Aninda Islam Amit, PM's Foreign Affairs Adviser Humaiun Kobir, Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment Adviser Mahdi Amin, and Defence Adviser Brig Gen (retd) AKM Shamsul Islam.

Earlier in the day, Tarique attended

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Prime Minister Tarique Rahman and his wife Dr Zubaida Rahman being welcomed by a delegation led by Sun Meijun, Minister and Secretary of the CPC Committee of the General Administration of Customs of China, upon their arrival in Beijing from Dalian yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Grocery stores, beauty parlours to pay VAT

Says finance minister in JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government plans to bring several business sectors, including grocery stores and beauty parlours, under Value-Added Tax coverage in the 2026-27 fiscal year.

Finance Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury disclosed the plan during the parliament's question and answer session yesterday.

Responding to a query from reserved-seat MP Selina Sultana, the minister said ready-made garment retailers, confectioneries, cosmetics shops, and sellers of plastic and ceramic household goods would also be brought under the VAT net.

Other businesses listed for VAT coverage include shoe stores, hardware shops, decorators, retailers of mobile phones and electronic appliances such as air conditioners, refrigerators and ovens, sanitary fittings and tiles shops, corrugated tin sheet sellers, rod and cement traders, furniture stores, sweetmeat shops, and restaurants.

The minister also said VAT revenue collection reached Tk 1,41,586 crore in the 2024-25 fiscal year.

According to the National Board of Revenue, collection of VAT and SD from domestic sources grew 10 percent year on year to Tk 1,40,168 crore until May this fiscal year.

In the budget for 2026-27 fiscal year, the government has set the VAT collection target at Tk 2,23,480 crore.

