

"We'll be hitting him very hard and ... at some point they're going to say, 'We just can't take it anymore'."

Donald Trump

YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW

The Daily Star

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NARCO CURRENCY

Myanmar rebels trading drugs for goods

Bangladesh faces a growing drug crisis, with an estimated 8.2 million users. As the country does not produce narcotics, most are smuggled in from abroad. In a four-part series, The Daily Star explores the trafficking routes, the threats and the impacts of drug abuse. The second instalment looks at how drugs are used as a currency for illicit cross-border trade.



MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Bangladeshi smugglers have long supplied construction materials, fuel and food to armed groups in Myanmar's conflict-ridden Rakhine State.

But cash is no longer the only currency in the illicit trade.

Myanmar rebel groups, including the Arakan Army (AA), which controls large parts of Rakhine, are increasingly using yaba and crystal meth to make partial payment for smuggled Bangladeshi goods, according to officials and sources familiar with the trafficking network.

The exchange takes place through maritime routes across the Bay of Bengal, where fishing boats carry Bangladeshi goods to Myanmar and return with narcotics, they said.

According to a source familiar with the trade, Bangladeshi suppliers usually receive half the payment through hundi before shipments leave Bangladesh. Another 25 percent is paid after the consignments depart a Myanmar jetty, while the remaining amount is settled during handover at sea.

Smugglers on the Myanmar side prefer Bangladeshi goods such as

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Trees recently planted by the Forest Department collapsed into the Padma yesterday as severe river erosion continues in the Lalon Shah Mancha area of Rajshahi city's Pathanpara. Monsoon downpours and the onrush of water from upstream have intensified erosion at several points along the river. PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

$100 BILLION EXPORTS BY 2030

Businesses see energy crisis as main hurdle

PM promises solutions, stresses close cooperation

STAR REPORT

Businesses yesterday demanded a better investment climate and adequate energy supplies for industries as the government seeks to raise annual exports to $100 billion by 2030 from $48 billion in the immediate past fiscal year.

During the second consultation meeting with Prime Minister Tarique Rahman at his Tejgaon office in Dhaka, business leaders also called for steps to address issues related to the tax regime and regulatory complexities.

They said the energy crisis remains the biggest obstacle to achieving the 2030 export target.

In response, Tarique outlined both short- and long-term measures, assuring business leaders that the government is working to install a Floating Storage and Regasification Unit (FSRU) dedicated to industrial use within the next two years, in addition to the existing two.

FSRUs store liquefied natural gas (LNG), regasify it and feed it into the onshore pipeline network for power plants, industries and households.

The nearly four-hour meeting, which began around 10:00am, was organised by the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority, reports UNB, citing the prime minister's Deputy Press Secretary Mostafa Zulfiquar Hasan.

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US has strong confidence in Tarique's leadership

Its special envoy Sergio Gor says after meeting PM

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

US Special Presidential Envoy for South and Central Asia Sergio Gor's three-day visit to Bangladesh underscored US support for the new administration while signalling greater economic engagement through trade and investment.

Gor is the third senior US official to visit Bangladesh since the BNP assumed office, following Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs S Paul Kapur and Assistant US Trade Representative Brendan Lynch.

During talks with Prime Minister Tarique Rahman at his Tejgaon office yesterday, Gor, who also serves as the US ambassador to India, said Washington has "strong confidence" in his leadership under which Bangladesh has regained stability.

According to a foreign ministry statement, Gor said the US had positively revised its travel advisory for Bangladesh, sending an important signal to American businesses that the country is once again ready for investment.

The discussions covered trade, investment, food and pharmaceuticals, the Rohingya crisis and broader economic cooperation.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Gor announced that a delegation of US companies would visit Bangladesh next week to explore investment opportunities.

He identified pharmaceuticals and information technology as sectors with "incredible potential" for bilateral cooperation.

"We look forward to building on that and taking it to the next level," he said, adding that Washington holds Tarique "in the highest regard".

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4



Drivers wait for hours outside a CNG filling station in the port city's Kadamtali yesterday, as gas pressure remains low for more than a week. Vehicles inched forward in long queues that spilled onto nearby roads, causing traffic congestion. PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

SAUDI-LED MARITIME COALITION

Dhaka must shield ties with key actors

Experts say joining the alliance important, but largely symbolic

PORIMOL PALMA

Bangladesh's decision to join a Saudi Arabia-led maritime security coalition underscores Dhaka's commitment to protecting global sea lanes while carefully balancing relations with competing regional powers, analysts say.

The government recently joined the coalition alongside 13 other countries to help safeguard maritime security in the Red Sea and Gulf region -- waterways that have become increasingly vulnerable following Houthi attacks on commercial shipping amid the US-Israel war on Iran and its retaliation on US interests in the Gulf countries.

The disruption has affected one of the world's busiest maritime corridors linking Asia and Europe, increasing shipping costs and threatening global supply chains.

For Bangladesh, whose economy depends heavily on maritime trade for exports, imports and energy supplies, secure sea lanes are a strategic necessity.

The rise in energy prices since the war began has greatly affected Bangladesh's economy.

The alliance launched on July 30 aims to ensure the safe and unrestricted movement of all types of vessels through the Red Sea, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the Gulf of Aden.

Among the six Gulf Arab states, Oman and the UAE have not yet signed the statement.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

Tarique to pick BNP presidential candidate

Standing Committee leaves final decision to him

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

The BNP has entrusted party Chairman and Prime Minister Tarique Rahman with the authority to choose its candidate for the upcoming presidential election.

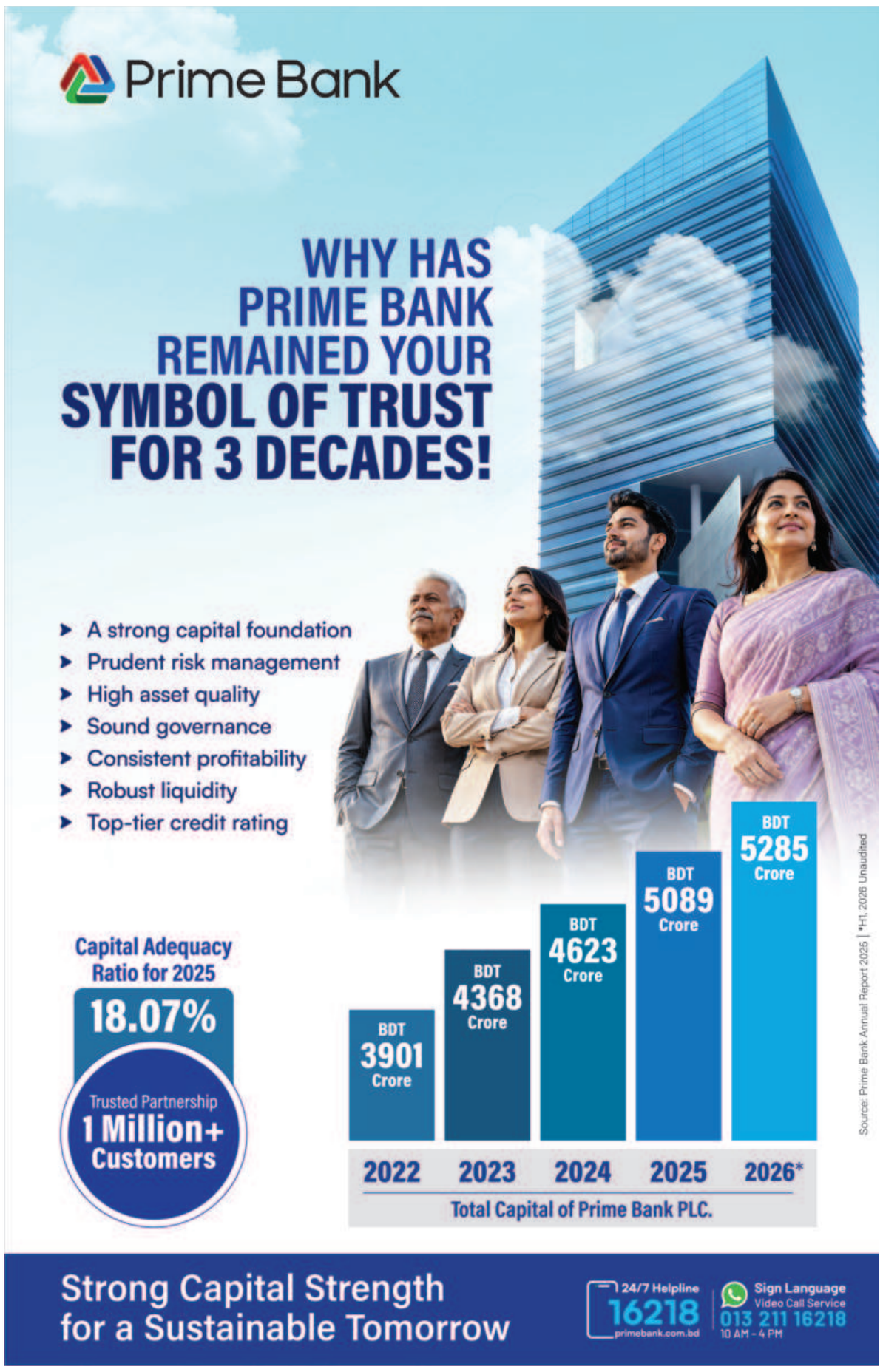
Senior leaders also urged the government to take urgent steps to ease worsening gas and electricity shortages.

The issues were discussed at a meeting of the party's Standing Committee, chaired by Tarique at his Gulshan office last night.

BNP Secretary General and LGRD Minister Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir briefed reporters after the nearly one-and-a-half hour meeting ended around 9:30pm.

The leaders also discussed

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Shishu Park: the missing piece of Shahbagh

JANNATUL BUSHRA

MY DHAKA



ILLUSTRATION: JAWWAD SAMI NEOGI

I often catch myself, almost involuntarily, looking towards the spot where Shishu Park once stood whenever I pass through Shahbagh. It doesn't matter whether I am heading to the university, Pathak Samabesh, or simply cutting through Suhrawardy Udyan. Somehow, my eyes still expect to find the familiar entrance gate waiting there.

I know the gates are gone. I know the little train no longer whistles its way around the park. There are no impatient children bargaining with exhausted parents for "just one more ride."

The metallic horses no longer go round and round to the endlessly cheerful "Amader deshta shopnopuri..." --a song that, despite the best efforts of adulthood, still lurks somewhere in the back of our minds.

For many of us who grew up in Dhaka in the late nineties or early 2000s, back when childhood was still blissfully screenless, the gates of Shishu Park marked the address of happiness.

Behaved well on your exams? Shishu Park. Relatives visiting from outside Dhaka and insisting on "seeing the city"? Shishu Park. Eid holidays? Shishu Park. A winter evening walk through Ramna with your father? Shishu Park.

Pahela Baishakh? Pahela Falgun? A book-hunting day at the Ekushey Book Fair that somehow ended with the promise of "just one ride?" Definitely Shishu Park!

Looking back, the destination almost didn't matter. The day could begin anywhere -- in Shahbagh, Ramna, or the Book Fair grounds. But somehow, it found its way to those familiar gates.

Sometimes, you did not even need an occasion. A lazy Friday afternoon with nowhere particular to be was reason enough.

It did not matter which part of Dhaka you came from: Mirpur or Mohammadpur, Dhanmondi or Jatrabari, Uttara or Old Dhaka. Inside those gates, every child wanted the same things -- to sit in the front compartment of the toy train, to wave from the top of the Ferris wheel, and to convince their parents that one more ride token would surely be enough. Which, again, was never enough!

Now, I don't think those of us who were children then were particularly fascinated by the rides themselves. Even by the standards of that time, they were modest. The paint peeled. The rides creaked. The little train probably travelled slower than a peddle rickshaw.

But none of that mattered.

A Tk 10 ticket was never just a ticket there. And those painted horses were never merely pieces of metal bolted to a merry-go-round. On some days, they were royal stallions galloping through enchanted kingdoms. On others, they carried us into battles that existed only in our heads.

Long before screens learnt to entertain us, Shishu Park quietly taught us how to entertain ourselves. All it took was a handful of tickets and an imagination willing to do the rest.

And then there was that one day every week when the park opened its gates to street children. Looking back, I doubt any of us understood the significance of that day. We only noticed that the queues were longer, the laughter was louder, and the toy train somehow looked more eager, carrying every child who climbed aboard.

And that, perhaps, was Shishu Park's greatest achievement. It belonged to everyone.

But we have perhaps lost it! And the strange thing about cities is that they rarely stop to mourn what they lose.

Even without Shishu Park, Shahbagh continues its familiar routine. The flower stalls still splash colour across the pavements. The National Museum still welcomes curious visitors. Dhaka University still spills students, slogans, festivals, and traffic onto the streets. Every February, the Ekushey Book Fair returns faithfully.

Everything seems to find its way back to Shahbagh.

Except the one place where a child's joy was never measured by where they came from.

Tourist dies after falling into sea while parasailing in Cox's Bazar

The man from Khulna was rescued and taken to hospital, where doctors declared him dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Cox's Bazar*

A tourist died after falling into the sea while parasailing in a Cox's Bazar beach yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Shouvik Roy, of Khulna, who was visiting Cox's Bazar with a group of 9. The accident occurred around 12:30pm at Dariyanagar beach, police said.

Officer-in-Charge of Cox's Bazar Sadar Model Police Station Sheikh Mohammad Ali said Shouvik fell into the sea while going on a parasailing ride.

Shouvik was rescued and taken to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital, where doctors declared him dead.

Resident Medical Officer Dr Subaktagin Mohammad Sohel said Shouvik was brought dead to the hospital at 2:10pm. The exact cause of the death can be determined after an autopsy.

Mahmudul Hasan, executive magistrate of the district administration's tourism cell, said the body has been kept at the hospital morgue.

He also said the district administration had instructed all parasailing operators to suspend operations due to adverse weather conditions. However, the operator involved in today's incident allegedly violated the directive and continued offering rides.

Since today's accident, the entire staff as well as the owner of the company have fled, he added.

Cox's Bazar Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Abdul Mannan said no operator has been officially authorised to conduct parasailing activities on the beach.

"We have repeatedly shut down these operations, but they resume after some time," he said.

According to locals, the parasailing service involved in the accident is operated by a company, owned by Mohammad Farid. They alleged that the same operator had been involved in previous parasailing accidents.

Although the service was reportedly suspended following earlier incidents, it was later allowed to resume operations, raising fresh questions about regulatory oversight and enforcement of safety standards.

Myanmar rebels trading drugs for goods

FROM PAGE 1

cement, pulses and ginger because of acute shortages in conflict-hit Rakhine, the source said.

One trafficking route begins at Ayeik Sit jetty in Myanmar's Ayeyarwady region, where drugs are packed and loaded onto fishing boats before being taken into the Bay of Bengal.

Another starts in Yangon and passes through Minbya, Ann, areas near Sittwe, Rathedaung and Maungdaw before reaching areas close to the Bangladesh border.

"Myanmar-side carriers allegedly use satellite devices to contact Bangladeshi receivers before handing over the consignments mid-sea," the source said, requesting anonymity.

The consignments then enter Bangladesh through different points along the Naf River, the source said.

Confirming the use of yaba as a form of payment by Myanmar rebel groups, Somen Mondol, deputy director of the Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) in Cox's Bazar, said daily essentials were being smuggled from Bangladesh while yaba entered the country in return.

"In many cases, fishing boats cross the border with goods. Later, while returning, they bring yaba in the same boats," he told The Daily Star.

He said hundi had long been used to settle transactions, but the pattern had changed.

"Now, along with hundi, goods are being sent from here, and drugs are coming in return."

Asked who was behind the trade, Somen said a section of Rohingyas was involved, assisted by local groups.

The source, who is familiar with the trade, also shared a wholesale price list for yaba and crystal meth.

According to the list, Diamond-brand yaba sells for Tk 120 per white tablet and Tk 110 per red tablet. Lion-Shingaw sells for Tk 105 per tablet, Seriya for Tk 100, Three Stars for Tk 95 and Zinfore for Tk 115.

Crystal meth, or "ice", sells for Tk 4.5 lakh per kilogram for higher-quality products and Tk 3.5 lakh for lower-grade varieties.

The list showed Diamond to be the most sought-after yaba brand.

The flow of yaba from Myanmar has increased over the past two years after the Arakan Army took control of large stretches of the border, according to officials.

Fighting between Myanmar's military and ethnic armed groups escalated in November 2023. The AA has since reportedly captured nearly 80 percent of Rakhine State. The military later cut off supply lines, triggering severe shortages of food, fuel and construction materials.

"To fill those shortages, the AA now depends heavily on supplies from Bangladesh, offering drugs in exchange," a senior police official monitoring activities along the Myanmar border told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity.

The DNC's Annual Drug Report Bangladesh 2025 also points to a sharp rise in trafficking.

Law enforcement agencies seized 43,562,811 amphetamine-type stimulant (ATS) tablets in 2025, up 90.58 percent from 22,857,751 in 2024. In 2023, the figure stood at 42,977,219.

ATS refers to synthetic stimulant drugs, including methamphetamine-based yaba and MDMA.

DNC Director General Md Hasan Maruf said the growing supply was linked to Myanmar rebel groups using yaba as a "narco-currency".

SHIPMENT TO MYANMAR

A suspected smuggler has been sending daily commodities, including cement, rice, lentils and edible oil, from Bangladesh to Myanmar at least three times a month and returning with yaba tablets, according to a fisherman who worked on his boat.

The suspect, identified as Khalil Majhi, lives in Manpura, Bhola, but operates a fishing boat between Chattogram port and Myanmar.

The fisherman, who requested anonymity, told The Daily Star that Khalil had been involved in the trade for the past year.

He said each round trip between Chattogram and Myanmar takes around five days. The head boatman receives Tk 3 lakh per trip, while other crew members are paid Tk 30,000 to Tk 40,000 each.

According to the fisherman, fishing nets and fish are kept on the boat's upper deck. On outbound journeys, daily commodities are stored on the lower deck. On the return trip, fish brought from Myanmar are loaded there, with yaba tablets concealed inside the fish.

Contacted by The Daily Star, Khalil denied any involvement in illegal trade.

"I rented out my boat for the last six months. The person who took it on rent is doing this business. I am not involved in any illegal trade. Once I came to know about the activities, I recently brought the boat back under my control," he said.

However, Khalil failed to identify the person to whom he claimed to have rented the boat.

SENT ABROAD

The source familiar with the trade with Myanmar rebel groups also claimed that while most of the drugs are consumed in Bangladesh, some consignments are flown to Oman, Saudi Arabia and Dubai through Dhaka and Chattogram airports.

Officials said almost all yaba and crystal meth entering Bangladesh originates in Myanmar, with 80 to 90 percent consumed domestically.

Only small quantities are smuggled abroad through air passengers or courier parcels, mainly to countries with large Bangladeshi migrant populations, a DNC official said on condition of anonymity.

"There have been attempts to send yaba to the Middle East, Europe and the United States, but these are not large-scale trafficking routes," the official said.

Another DNC intelligence official said such attempts had declined significantly after airports strengthened security through improved scanning systems and CCTV surveillance.

Officials said traffickers had also used courier services to send drugs to the Middle East, Europe, the United States and Australia, but tighter monitoring has made the route increasingly difficult.

CONTINUOUS FLOW

The Border Guard Bangladesh's 64 Battalion guards key stretches of the Naf River along Ukhiya and Teknaf in Cox's Bazar.

Its commanding officer, Lt Col Md Zahirul Islam, said traffickers frequently shifted routes whenever surveillance was tightened, moving through other border points or maritime channels.

"Whenever pressure increases in one area, they look for alternative routes," he said, adding that improved surveillance technology had helped increase yaba seizures.

The BGB said last year that the Arakan Army was directly involved in yaba trafficking and that smuggling had increased through remote areas of Bandarban's Naikhongchhari.

Recent operations by the Bangladesh Navy also point to the scale of the cross-border smuggling network.

On June 26, naval personnel detained 21 alleged smugglers and seized two fishing boats carrying 1,450 sacks of cement in separate operations in the Bay of Bengal.

Earlier that month, on June 2, another operation near Saint Martin's Island led to the arrest of 20 people and the seizure of 1,700 sacks of cement. The detainees told investigators the consignment was bound for Rakhine State, where the materials would fetch high prices.

In February, acting on intelligence about a major customs evasion network, the Navy detained 19 suspected smugglers near Saint Martin's Island and seized 1,140 sacks of cement, 250kg of pulses, 160kg of ginger and 360 bottles of energy drinks.

In another operation in December last year, the Navy detained 11 people and recovered 650 sacks of Bangladeshi cement and 1,000 litres of diesel that were allegedly being smuggled to Myanmar.

Officials said the repeated interceptions reflected the growing demand for

Bangladeshi goods inside conflict-hit Rakhine, where prolonged fighting and military supply restrictions have created acute shortages of essential commodities.

Sources said severe shortages in Rakhine have made Bangladeshi goods extraordinarily valuable. A bag of cement worth around Tk 500 in Bangladesh can reportedly fetch as much as 100,000 Myanmar kyats in conflict-hit areas, generating huge profits that keep cross-border smuggling networks active despite intensified enforcement.

NOT JUST MYANMAR

The use of narcotics as a form of currency is not confined to Myanmar rebel groups.

Officials and law enforcers familiar with anti-drug operations in border areas said similar informal settlement systems are used in the narcotics trade along Bangladesh's border with India.

They said traffickers also exchange narcotics such as Phensedyl, cannabis and heroin for commodities, alongside illegal hundi transactions.

Former Kasba Police Station sub-inspector Faruk Hossain, who served for several years in border areas and took part in multiple anti-drug operations, said traffickers use several covert methods to pay Indian suppliers for narcotics smuggled into Bangladesh.

According to Faruk and DNC officials, most payments are made through illegal hundi networks. Bangladeshi traffickers deposit money with local hundi operators or selected mobile financial service agents, while their counterparts in India receive the equivalent amount in rupees through coded transactions.

They said traffickers also use cash carriers to move money across the border, particularly in frontier areas. In some cases, cash or rupees are handed over directly to suppliers when drug consignments cross the border.

Faruk and DNC officials said payments are sometimes settled through cross-border trafficking of commodities such as gold, hilsa and other contraband instead of cash. In such cases, the value of those goods is adjusted against the price of narcotics supplied from India.

US has strong confidence in Tarique's leadership

FROM PAGE 1

The two sides also agreed to resume product testing activities in Bangladesh in cooperation with the US Food and Drug Administration, according to the foreign ministry.

Tarique invited US investment in warehousing facilities for soybeans, cotton, wheat and other agricultural commodities to strengthen Bangladesh's supply chains. He also sought greater investment in the country's IT sector.

Finance Corporation (DFC), with Gor expressing Washington's willingness to expand DFC cooperation.

Gor's emphasis on investment marked an important shift in US engagement, said M Humayun Kabir, a former ambassador.

"There has been considerable criticism of the reciprocal tariff agreement -- increased US investment could help offset those concerns."

The US could make substantial investments in IT, pharmaceuticals, education and agriculture -- sectors that Bangladesh urgently needs to generate employment.

"Both China and the US are interested in investing in Bangladesh. If Dhaka improves its investment climate and governance and manages these relationships wisely, it stands to benefit significantly."

Asked about Gor's meeting with Indian High Commissioner Dinesh Trivedi, a foreign ministry official said such consultations were unsurprising given the current state of India-Bangladesh relations.

The government should continue to engage all major powers under its "Bangladesh First" foreign policy, said Lailufar Yasmin, a professor of international relations at Dhaka University.



Prime Minister Tarique Rahman at a meeting with US Special Envoy for South and Central Asia Sergio Gor and US Ambassador to Bangladesh Brent T Christensen at the PMO in the capital's Tejgaon yesterday. PHOTO: PID

Gor said Bangladesh could eventually become a partner in the PAX Silica initiative, a US-led economic-security coalition launched in December 2025 to secure supply chains for artificial intelligence, semiconductors and critical minerals.

The two sides also discussed potential investment through the US International Development

"We are not against the interests of any country. We want to work with everyone in pursuit of Bangladesh's national interest."

Tarique's choice of China for his first foreign visit may initially have raised questions in Washington and New Delhi but Gor's remarks demonstrate US confidence in the current government, she added.

Dhaka must shield ties with key actors

FROM PAGE 1

Washington, a key Saudi ally, has yet to confirm it will join the coalition, although it is expected to do so.

Analysts say the move is consistent with Bangladesh's longstanding support for freedom of navigation, but cautioned that Dhaka carefully manages its ties with Iran, with which it has maintained traditionally friendly relations.

Bangladesh's participation should be viewed primarily through the lens of national interest rather than regional politics, though Bangladesh maintains strong relations with the Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia, where nearly seven million Bangladeshis work, said Ishfaq Ilahi Choudhury, a retired air commodore.

"Iran may see the alliance negatively, but we don't have much choice. Our economy depends on free navigation. Ensuring safe sea lanes is in Bangladesh's own national interest."

He recalled that Iran had previously prevented a Bangladesh-flagged vessel from navigating through its waters, demonstrating how maritime disruptions can directly affect Bangladesh.

"There is considerable public sympathy for Iran in Bangladesh following the recent US-Israeli attacks. But foreign policy cannot be driven by public emotion alone. Bangladesh must act according to its national interest and geopolitical realities," he added.

The Houthis are attacking from Yemen, with which Bangladesh does not have much of a relationship, said M Humayun Kabir, a former ambassador.

He described Bangladesh's membership in the alliance as "largely normative and symbolic" rather than an indication of a major military commitment.

"I do not think Bangladesh is currently in a position to deploy naval assets if the coalition requires operational participation. But extending moral and political support for the principle of freedom of navigation is important."

Bangladesh has previously joined Saudi-led security initiatives without assuming an active military role, he said.

In December 2015, Bangladesh became a member of the Saudi-led Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC), although Dhaka never deployed a full-fledged delegation to the coalition's headquarters in Riyadh.

He believes the current maritime coalition is likely to follow a similar pattern.

"Iran may not welcome Bangladesh's decision, but protecting maritime commerce serves Bangladesh's economy and national interest."

Bangladesh has earned global credibility through nearly four decades of participation in UN peacekeeping operations, said Shafqat Munir, senior fellow at the Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies.

"We can play an important role in safeguarding maritime security in the Red Sea and Gulf region through this coalition."

However, he cautioned that Dhaka should fully understand the alliance's operational framework before making deeper commitments.

"Before we fully commit ourselves, we need clarity on the command structure, Bangladesh's expected role and other operational modalities."

The Middle East is currently highly fractured, and Bangladesh has to ensure that its relations with all key actors are properly safeguarded, Munir added.

Too young to know she is gone

Mother falls ill caring for measles-hit children, dies on the way home

MONG SING HAI MARMA, *Bandarban*

Kainwai Mro, 2, and elder sister Dongwai Mro, 4, lie side by side on a narrow bed in the isolation ward of Bandarban Sadar Hospital, both undergoing treatment for measles.

Weakened by fever and exhaustion, they clutch their uncle's hand or look towards the ward entrance, as if waiting for someone.

But the person they are waiting for will never return.

Just days ago, their mother, Lengrung Mro, 26, spent sleepless nights in the same ward caring for her two ailing children. While nursing them, she



Dongwai Mro, 4, and Kainwai Mro, 2, lie in the isolation ward of Bandarban Sadar Hospital, unaware that their mother has died, as their uncle Krongtong Mro looks after them while their father remains bedridden at home. PHOTO: STAR

fell ill herself and later died on the way home from the hospital.

During a visit to the hospital on Friday, this correspondent found Dongwai and Kainwai still receiving treatment, unaware that the mother who had cared for them until she fell ill was no more.

Their uncle, Krongtong Mro, 19, was looking after them.

Dr Towhidul Anowar, residential medical officer at the hospital, confirmed that the children were being treated for measles in the isolation ward.

He said 24 measles patients were currently

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



Information Minister Zahir Uddin Swapon visits a photo exhibition titled "Fifteen Years of Fascism: 2024 Mass Uprising" at the Jatiya Press Club in Dhaka yesterday. The three-day exhibition, organised by the Bangladesh Photo Journalists Association and Amra BNP Poribar, was inaugurated by Liberation War Affairs Minister Ahmed Azam Khan. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

A life rooted in language and humanism

At Star Itihas Adda, speakers call for preserving and promoting Prof Mufazzal Haider Chaudhury's writings

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A century after his birth, martyred intellectual Prof Mufazzal Haider Chaudhury's writings and humanist philosophy remain vital to understanding the Liberation War and the values on which Bangladesh was founded, speakers said at an event yesterday.

They called for bringing his work closer to younger generations, saying his objective record of his time, commitment to Bangalee nationalism and vision of an inclusive society still offer enduring lessons.

Prof Chaudhury was killed by Pakistani forces at the age of 45. A humanist and thinker who refused



to see divisions between people, he believed in collective harmony -- a vision that remains relevant today, they added.

The remarks came at "Jonmo Shotoborshe Shwaron: Shaheed Buddijibi Mufazzal Haider Chaudhury", the 24th episode of The Daily Star Itihas Adda, held at The Daily Star Centre to mark his birth centenary.

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LOOKING BACK AT JULY

August 2, 2024: Thousands join 'Droho Jatra'



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

"Who do we go to when the police murders?" -- read a placard at a march of defiance titled 'Droho Jatra' that unfolded in Dhaka and was joined by thousands, including teachers, cultural workers, members of civil society, and leaders and activists from left-leaning political parties.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

Dhaka joins global AI body WAICO as observer

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has decided to join the World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organization (WAICO), initially as an observer, said the foreign ministry in a statement yesterday.

Headquartered in Shanghai, WAICO is an intergovernmental organisation formed on July 16, 2026.

Its stated goals include deepening international cooperation on innovation, promoting inclusive development by reducing the global digital divide, and supporting an open, fair and non-discriminatory environment for global AI development.

WAICO also seeks to advance AI regulations aimed at ensuring that the new and evolving technology remains beneficial and safe for humans.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres attended the signing ceremony alongside representatives of participating countries and international organisations, reports BSS. According to the founding agreement, WAICO will uphold the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, promote extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, and adopt a people-centred approach in advancing global AI cooperation.

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Chief Justice Mahmud Husain's death anniv

CITY DESK



Today is the 44th death anniversary of Chief Justice Syed AB Mahmud Husain, said a press release.

On the occasion, a doa mahfil will be held on the High Court mazar premises after the Asr prayers.

His relatives and well-wishers are requested to attend the programme.

Mahmud Husain died in 1982 at the age of 65.

He was the chief justice from 1975 to 1978.

Justice Abu Sayeed's death anniv today

CITY DESK



Today is the 38th death anniversary of former president Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, said a press release.

Justice Chowdhury, also a former vice-chancellor of Dhaka University, played a leading role in mobilising world opinion in favour of Bangladesh during the Liberation War.

He was also elected chairman of UN Human Rights Commission in 1985.

He authored four books – "Probashe Muktijuddher Dinguli", "Manobadhikar", "Muslim Family Law in the English Courts", and "Human Rights in the Twentieth Century".

On the occasion of his death anniversary, Qurankhwani and a milad mahfil will be held at Nagbari Jame Mosque in Tangail.

Fareena Samhee's debut solo exhibition opens at Batighar



PHOTO: COLLECTED





STAR REPORT

Artist Fareena Samhee Nethee's debut solo exhibition, "Silent Expressions", opened yesterday at Batighar Art Space in Dhaka's Banani.

Organised by Mongol Deep Foundation and curated by Faridur Rahman Razib, the showcase features 61 acrylic paintings that explore emotions beyond spoken language and reflect Fareena's experience as a speech- and hearing-impaired artist.

Rubaba Dowla, country managing director of Oracle Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan, inaugurated the exhibition. Veteran actor and painter Afzal Hossain and Gallery Chitrak Executive Director Md Muniruzzaman were also present.

The exhibition will remain open daily from 4:00pm to 8:00pm until August 10.

Four killed in truck-pickup collision



OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Bogura*

Four people were killed on the spot after a truck and a pickup van collided head-on in Bogura's Kahaloo upazila yesterday.

The accident occurred around 10:00am in the Bou-Bazar area on the Bogura-Naogaon regional highway, according to police and locals.

Kahaloo Police Station OC Shafiqul Islam said all four of the deceased, including the driver, were travelling in the van. "Preliminary information suggests the victims were residents of Mymensingh district. One of them has been identified as Lutfor Rahman, while the identities of the remaining victims could not be confirmed immediately," he said.

Kahaloo Fire Service and Civil Defence Team Leader Arju Ahmed said fire service personnel were working at the scene.

No explosives found in bags at two metro stations

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday found no explosives or hazardous materials in two suspicious bags recovered from Mirpur-10 Metro Rail Station and near Farmgate Metro Rail Station in Dhaka.

Around 11:45am, metro rail authorities alerted police after an unattended bag was spotted on the first floor of Mirpur-10 station.

According to a DMP press release, an X-ray scan detected a container-like object inside the bag. Bomb disposal personnel neutralised the suspected object before opening the bag.

They found betel leaves and a container of chewing tobacco inside.

Inspector Md Sohel Chowdhury of the MRT Police said the station was reopened around 1:40pm after the bag was declared safe.

In a separate incident, another abandoned sack was spotted on a road divider near Farmgate station, prompting a security response.

Bomb disposal personnel examined the sack and found no explosives or dangerous materials inside.

Dhaka roads claimed 1,384 lives since 2020

Show Road Safety Foundation data

UNB, *Dhaka*

At least 1,384 people were killed and 2,488 injured in 1,849 road accidents across the capital between 2020 and July 2026, with pedestrians and motorcyclists accounting for more than 80 percent of the fatalities, according to the Road Safety Foundation (RSF).

RSF data show that of those killed, 1,034 were men, 219 women and 131 children.

Pedestrians were the worst-affected group, accounting for 592 deaths. Road crashes were most frequent at night, when 519 people were killed.

Heavy vehicles, including trucks, covered vans, pickups, tankers and garbage trucks, were involved in 33.25 percent of the accidents, followed by motorcycles at 26 percent, buses at 21.75 percent, auto-rickshaws, CNG-run vehicles and legunas at 12.73 percent, and private cars, microbuses and jeeps at 6.25 percent.



- 1,849 crashes since 2020
- Six major hotspots identified
- Pedestrians, bikers account for over 80% of deaths
- Nighttime crashes were deadliest

According to the analysis, the absence of bypass roads forces heavy vehicles to travel through the capital between 10:00pm and dawn, increasing the risk to pedestrians.

It also noted that prolonged traffic congestion contributes to impatience and aggressive driving, further increasing the likelihood of crashes.

The report attributed the high number of accidents to inadequate road capacity compared with the growing number of vehicles, the mixed movement of slow- and high-speed traffic, encroached footpaths, poorly located or unusable footbridges, and a lack of awareness among road users.

Jatrabari, Demra, Mohammadpur, Kuril, Biswa Road and Airport Road were identified as major accident hotspots.

August 2, 2024: Thousands join

FROM PAGE 3

They demanded justice for those killed, the release of those arrested, the withdrawal of the curfew, and the reopening of educational institutions.

Addressing the gathering, Professor Anu Muhammad, an economist, said, "We don't want anything from this government. We must hold the government accountable and ensure justice. Those who were arrested must be freed, and the filing of cases and suppression must stop, and the curfew must be withdrawn."

Meanwhile, at least two persons were killed and scores injured in clashes with police and Awami League activists across the country.

In a statement issued that day, Nahid Islam and five fellow coordinators of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement said the video of their announcement to withdraw the protests was made at the Detective Branch (DB) office on July 28 under duress.

They disavowed it publicly and called for continuing the protests, announcing a protest march for August 3, and a full non-cooperation movement from August 4.

The coordinators also said they would gather at the Central Shaheed Minar in Dhaka after the march.

From the afternoon, Facebook and Telegram were once again shut down on mobile networks for around five and a half hours.

At night, the prime minister Sheikh Hasina held an emergency meeting with leaders of the 14-party alliance at Gono Bhaban.

She also instructed several AL leaders to initiate dialogue with the movement coordinators in an attempt to calm a situation that was rapidly slipping from the government's grip.

FLAT for SALE

Due to special circumstances, a 2,250 sq.ft. Flat (Flat No. 2/1103, Eastern Rokeya Tower, 98, Bara Moghbazar, Ramna, Dhaka) is urgently for sale.

WhatsApp # 01709692717

প্লট বিক্রয়

পূর্বাচল সেক্টর#২৫, রোড#৩০৮ (৩০ ফুট রাস্তা) প্লট নং #০২ বাউন্ডারি ঘেরা ০৩ কাঠার (ব্যবসায়িক ক্যাটাগরি) প্লট বিক্রয় হবে। যোগাযোগ : শুধু মাত্র প্রকৃত ক্রেতা #০১৮১৮-০০৬৮৩৬

আবাসিক প্লট বিক্রয় হবে

পূর্বাচল, সেক্টর- ১৭

জমির পরিমাণঃ ১০.৭৫ কাঠা।

প্লট নংঃ ০০৫, রোড নাম্বারঃ ৩০১/কে

যোগাযোগঃ ০৯৬৪৪৮৪০১৪০, ০১৮৮০৫২৬০৪৫

Gazipur Development Authority
Ministry of Housing & Public Works
Gazipur, Bangladesh.

Reference No: gda-rev-2026-2027-1-1 Date: 02 August 2026

e-Tender Notice

e-Tender is invited by National e-GP system portal (www.egp.gov.bd) for the procurement of

Tender ID	Name of Work	Last selling Date and Time	Opening Date and Time
1314297	Outsourcing of Sedan Rental Services for GDA Official Use.	13-08-2026 12:00	13-08-2026 17:00

Sd/-
30/07/2026
Md. Mehedi Hassan
Secretary (Deputy Secretary)
Gazipur Development Authority,
Gazipur
Phone: +8802224424048
E-mail: secretary@gda.gov.bd

GD-1876

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Ministry of Women and Children Affairs
Prevention of Violence and Harmful Practice against Children and Women in Bangladesh Project
Bangladesh Shishu Academy Doyel Chattar Road, Shahbagh, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh.

e-Tender Notice

Invitation Reference no: MOWCA/PVHP/Procurement/2026/36-429 Date: 29-07-2026

e-Tender is invited in an open tender at the National e-GP system portal for the procurement of the following goods. No hard copies will be accepted. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

Ministry & Project	Prevention of Violence and Harmful Practices against Children and Women in Bangladesh (PVHP) Project. Ministry of Women and Children Affairs
Description Of Works	Printing and supply of various Registers, IEC Materials, Modules, etc., Child Protection Community Hubs of the PVHP Project.
e- Tender ID	1312739
Last Selling Date and Time	11- August -2026 ; 12:00 pm
Closing & Opening Date and Time	11- August -2026 ; 13:00 pm
Name, Designation & Address of Official Inviting Tender	Dr. Bilkish Begum Deputy Secretary & Project Director (Additional Charge), PVHP Project, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Bangladesh Shishu Academy, Doyel Chattar Road, Shahbagh, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh .

29.07.2026
Dr. Bilkish Begum
Deputy Secretary & Project Director
(Additional Charge)
PVHP Project
Ministry of Women & Children Affairs
Phone No: +880-41053937

GD-1875

Too young

FROM PAGE 3

receiving treatment there, including 15 children, six women and three men.

Krongtong said the family lives in Chinipara village under the remote Goyalenga union of Ruma upazila in Bandarban.

He said Lengrung brought her two children, both suffering from measles, to Bandarban Sadar Hospital on July 26. While caring for them, she suddenly fell ill and lost consciousness on July 28.

Doctors advised the family to take her to Chattogram Medical College Hospital after her condition deteriorated. However, the family decided against it because of poverty, language barriers, and concerns over treatment costs, he said.

"My elder brother, Krongsong Mro, 28, cannot speak Bangla well. He heard that treatment in Chattogram would be very expensive. So, he decided to return to the village with his wife for traditional treatment instead, leaving the two children in my care," Krongtong said.

Lengrung died on July 29 after reaching the village. Her funeral was held the following day.

Krongsong later developed a fever and is now bedridden at home.

The remote hill areas of Ruma upazila have recently seen a measles outbreak. Poor transport links, poverty, delayed access to treatment and gaps in vaccination have left children from the Mro and other ethnic communities particularly vulnerable.

HOTLINE 16665

STATE UNIVERSITY OF BANGLADESH
join the trendsetter

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

Applications are invited from eligible and distinguished academicians for the following positions:

Vice-Chancellor

- PhD from a recognized university.
- Minimum 20 years of teaching experience at the university level.

Pro Vice-Chancellor

- PhD from a recognized university.
- Minimum 15 years of teaching experience at the university level.

Applicants must meet the eligibility requirements as prescribed under the Private University Act, 2010 and other applicable rules and regulations.

Interested candidates are requested to submit their application with a detailed CV, copies of academic and professional credentials, list of publications, and a recent passport-size photograph within 15 (fifteen) days from the date of publication of this advertisement.

Registrar
State University of Bangladesh
696 Kendua, Kanchan, Rupganj, Narayanganj, Dhaka–1461
E-mail: hr@sub.edu.bd
Website: www.sub.ac.bd

PRAYER TIMING
AUGUST 2

	Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN	4-20	12-45	5-00	6-47	8-15
JAMAAT	4-55	1-15	5-15	6-50	8-45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

গ্রামীণ ব্যাংক
প্রধান কার্যালয়
মিরপুর-২, ঢাকা-১২১৬।

বিজ্ঞপ্তি নং- ১২/২০২৬ **টেন্ডার বিজ্ঞপ্তি** তারিখ: ০২-০৮-২০২৬

গ্রামীণ ব্যাংকের বিভিন্ন অফিস ভবন নির্মাণের জন্য সরকারি/আধা-সরকারি/স্বায়ত্বশাসিত প্রতিষ্ঠানের তালিকাভুক্ত প্রকৃত ইমারত নির্মাণকারী প্রথম শ্রেণির ঠিকাদারী প্রতিষ্ঠানের নিকট হতে নির্ধারিত ফরমে সীলমোহরকৃত দরপত্র আহবান করা যাচ্ছে।

গ্রামীণ ব্যাংক, যোনাল অফিস, যশোর (চাকলাদার ভবন, পালবাড়ি মোড়, কোতয়ালী, যশোর-৭৪০০)।

লট নং-০১ : গ্রামীণ ব্যাংক, যশোর যোনাল অফিস ভবন নির্মাণ কাজ।
মৌজাঃ খোলাডাঙ্গা, পোঃ ভেকুটিয়া, উপজেলাঃ যশোর সদর, জেলাঃ যশোর।

গ্রামীণ ব্যাংক, যোনাল অফিস, রাজশাহী (বনলতা বানিজ্যিক এলাকা, আর.ডি.এ ভবনের পূর্ব পার্শ্বে, সপুরা, রাজশাহী-৬২০৩)।

লট নং-০২ : গ্রামীণ ব্যাংক, দামকুড়া পবা শাখা অফিস ভবন নির্মাণ কাজ।
মৌজাঃ আলোকছত্র, পোঃ দামকুড়া হাট, উপজেলাঃ পবা, জেলাঃ রাজশাহী।

গ্রামীণ ব্যাংক, যোনাল অফিস, বরিশাল (কুসুমবাগ-ফরাজী ওয়ার্কসপ সংলগ্ন, সি.এন্ড.বি রোড, বরিশাল-৮২০০)।

লট নং-০৩ : গ্রামীণ ব্যাংক, বাটাজোড় গৌরনদী শাখা অফিস ভবন নির্মাণ কাজ।
মৌজাঃ দেওপাড়া, পোঃ বাটাজোড়, উপজেলাঃ গৌরনদী, জেলাঃ বরিশাল।

দরপত্র জমাদানের নিয়মাবলীঃ

১) উল্লেখিত কাজের টেন্ডার সিকিউরিটি বাবদ মোট উদ্ধৃত দরের ২.৫% পে-অর্ডার/ব্যাংক ড্রাফট/ব্যাংক গ্যারান্টি (প্রযোজ্য ক্ষেত্রে) এর মাধ্যমে যে কোন সিডিউল ব্যাংক হতে **"গ্রামীণ ব্যাংক, প্রধান কার্যালয়"** এর অনুকূলে জমা দিতে হবে।
২) লট-০১ এর জন্য টেন্ডার দলিলের মূল্য ৪,০০০/-(চার হাজার) টাকা এবং লট-০২ ও ০৩ এর জন্য টেন্ডার দলিলের মূল্য ২,০০০/- (দুই হাজার) টাকা (অফেরৎযোগ্য)।
৩) কার্য সম্পন্ন করার সময়ঃ লট-০১ এর জন্য ২৪ (চব্বিশ) মাস এবং লট-০২ ও ০৩ এর জন্য ১২ (বারো) মাস।
৪) বাজেট ও অর্থের উৎস: নিজস্ব অর্থায়ন।
৫) উল্লিখিত কাজের টেন্ডার দলিল গ্রামীণ ব্যাংক প্রধান কার্যালয় নির্মাণ শাখা, মিরপুর-২, ঢাকা-১২১৬ ও সংশ্লিষ্ট যোনাল অফিস হতে আগামী ০৩-০৮-২০২৬ থেকে ২৩-০৮-২০২৬ তারিখ পর্যন্ত অফিস চলাকালীন সময়ে ঠিকাদারী প্রতিষ্ঠানের লেটার হেডপ্যাডে আবেদন সাপেক্ষে সংগ্রহ করা যাবে।
৬) আগামী ০৫-০৮-২০২৬ থেকে ২৩-০৮-২০২৬ তারিখ পর্যন্ত অফিস চলাকালীন সময়ে এবং ২৪-০৮-২০২৬ তারিখ বেলা ১১:০০ টা পর্যন্ত উপরোল্লিখিত স্থানসমূহে রক্ষিত টেন্ডার বাক্সে টেন্ডারসমূহ গৃহীত হবে এবং ঐদিন অর্থাৎ ২৪-০৮-২০২৬ তারিখ বেলা ১১:৩০ টায় ঠিকাদার বা তাঁদের প্রতিনিধিদের উপস্থিতিতে (যদি কেহ উপস্থিত থাকেন) টেন্ডার বাক্স খোলা হবে। টেন্ডার বাক্স খোলার দিন কোন টেন্ডার দলিল বিক্রি করা হবে না।
৭) টেন্ডার দাখিলের নিয়মাবলী টেন্ডার দলিলের সাথে সংযুক্ত থাকবে।
৮) লট-০১ এর ক্ষেত্রেঃ
ক) দরদাতাকে প্রধান ঠিকাদার/উপ-ঠিকাদার হিসেবে কমপক্ষে ১০(দশ) বছরের অভিজ্ঞতা সম্পন্ন হতে হবে।
খ) গত ৫ বছরের মধ্যে একক কার্যাদেশে সফলভাবে সম্পন্নকৃত ন্যূনতম ৯ (নয়) কোটি টাকার ভবন নির্মাণ কাজের অভিজ্ঞতা থাকতে হবে।
গ) গত ৩ বছরে গড় বার্ষিক আর্থিক লেনদেনের পরিমান ৯.৫(নয় দশমিক পাঁচ) কোটি টাকার বেশি হতে হবে।
ঘ) টেন্ডারদাতার ন্যূনতম Liquid Asset/Working Capital অথবা Credit Line (ঋণ সীমা) ০৪ (চার) কোটি টাকা হতে হবে। তবে টেন্ডার জমাদানের পূর্ববর্তী ৭ (সাত) দিনের আগে ইস্যু করা তরল সম্পদের সনদ মূল্যায়নের জন্য গ্রহণযোগ্য হবে না।
৯) লট-০২ ও ০৩ এর ক্ষেত্রেঃ
ক) দরদাতাকে প্রধান ঠিকাদার/উপ-ঠিকাদার হিসেবে কমপক্ষে ৩ বছরের অভিজ্ঞতা সম্পন্ন হতে হবে।
খ) গত ৩ বছরের মধ্যে একক কার্যাদেশে সফলভাবে সম্পন্নকৃত ন্যূনতম ১.৬ (এক দশমিক ছয়) কোটি টাকার ভবন নির্মাণ কাজের অভিজ্ঞতা থাকতে হবে।
গ) গত ৩ বছরে গড় বার্ষিক আর্থিক লেনদেনের পরিমান ৩(তিন) কোটি টাকার বেশি হতে হবে।
ঘ) টেন্ডারদাতার ন্যূনতম Liquid Asset/Working Capital অথবা Credit Line (ঋণ সীমা) ৫০ (পঞ্চাশ) লক্ষ টাকা হতে হবে। তবে টেন্ডার জমাদানের পূর্ববর্তী ৭ (সাত) দিনের আগে ইস্যু করা তরল সম্পদের সনদ মূল্যায়নের জন্য গ্রহণযোগ্য হবে না।

কর্তৃপক্ষ কোন কারণ দর্শানো ব্যতিরেকেই উক্ত টেন্ডার গ্রহণ/বাতিল, সংশোধন, পরিবর্তন করার ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করেন।

মহাব্যবস্থাপক
সেবা ও সম্পত্তি বিভাগ

BEYOND GEOPOLITICS

Rethinking regional cooperation in South Asia

ASHISH BANIK

For the last four decades, regional cooperation in South Asia has been interpreted primarily through the prism of geopolitics and traditional security. South Asia has long been recognised as one of the least integrated regions in the world despite its shared geography, cultural connections and historical links. The policy discourse on regional connectivity and integration has largely revolved around the issues of rivalry between India and Pakistan, territorial disputes, military competition, divergent security interests and political tensions. This long-standing trend of mutual distrust and animosity has largely hampered the functioning of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), founded in 1985. Political tensions have repeatedly stalled regional initiatives, postponed summits and prevented the organisation from realising its full potential.

South Asia is now confronting a new generation of risks, vulnerabilities and security threats that are largely non-traditional and transboundary in nature, requiring coordinated action by both state and non-state actors. The evolving security landscape demands a fundamental rethink of how regional cooperation is understood and practised.

UNDERSTANDING THE NEW SECURITY LANDSCAPE IN SOUTH ASIA

The strategic environment of South Asia has been undergoing a profound transformation owing to both traditional and non-traditional security threats. Today, policymakers across South Asia are increasingly concerned with "what threatens South Asia" rather than "who threatens South Asia." This shift in understanding clearly reflects the growing importance of transnational challenges that affect all countries regardless of their political alignments or military capabilities. For example, climate change has emerged as perhaps the single greatest threat to the lives and livelihoods of people across South Asia. Accelerating glacier melt in the Himalayas, increasingly erratic monsoon patterns, rising sea levels and more frequent extreme weather events have disrupted agricultural patterns and productivity, damaged infrastructure, and threatened the livelihoods of millions over the past two decades. Moreover, the region's interconnected river systems demonstrate how environmental challenges transcend national borders, making unilateral responses both inadequate and costly.

Beyond climate change, the region is confronting a complex web of interconnected risks in cybersecurity, pandemics, human trafficking, organised crime, maritime insecurity and energy market disruptions. The intersection of these risks and vulnerabilities often creates cascading crises that many analysts describe as hybrid threats.

The consequences of non-cooperation in responding to these complex and interconnected security threats are becoming increasingly visible across the region. The absence of coordinated disaster response systems, limited cooperation on transboundary water management, inadequate regional preparedness for public health emergencies, and weak collaboration on digital security have all contributed to rising human and economic costs during emergencies and crises. Consequently, these shortcomings resulting from insufficient regional cooperation have increased dependence on external powers for financing, technology transfer and strategic support, often compromising the region's ability to shape and secure its own future.

The costs of non-cooperation are perhaps most evident in the digital domain. As social media platforms have already surpassed traditional media in both reach and influence, the rise of political and religious extremist voices across South Asia has created enormous potential for fuelling tensions throughout the region. In the absence of any regional fact-checking mechanism, this growing disorder in the information space has undermined public trust, heightened tensions between neighbouring societies, and complicated diplomatic engagement.



PATHWAYS FOR BUILDING REGIONAL COOPERATION AND COLLABORATION

If South Asian countries are to move beyond decades of geopolitical stalemate, regional cooperation must begin where national interests and priorities already converge. There are significant opportunities to build trust incrementally through practical cooperation in areas that can generate tangible benefits for all. The following four areas represent critical starting points where even modest regional cooperation could deliver measurable improvements in people's lives while creating the confidence necessary for deeper regional engagement.

1. Water security and climate cooperation

The Indo-Gangetic and Brahmaputra river systems support the livelihoods of nearly 400 million people, and the broader Indus, Ganges and Brahmaputra basins depend heavily on the Himalayan glacier system, which provides freshwater to approximately 750 million people across South Asia. Bangladesh, for example, depends on transboundary rivers for approximately 97 per cent of its surface water, while India and Bangladesh alone share 54 transboundary rivers, underscoring the extent of their hydrological interdependence. These shared ecological realities make unilateral responses increasingly ineffective. The region therefore requires an integrated approach that prioritises joint river basin management, integrated flood forecasting, glacier monitoring, climate data sharing and coordinated disaster preparedness. Investments in regional early warning systems and climate adaptation programmes would reduce humanitarian losses while strengthening resilience across borders, building mutual trust and demonstrating that shared environmental challenges can become opportunities for confidence-building.

2. Digital cooperation and information resilience

The second major driver affecting the lives of ordinary citizens in South Asia is the rapid pace of digital transformation, which has emerged as both an opportunity and a challenge. It has created enormous opportunities for economic growth and social connectivity, but it has also exposed societies to new forms of insecurity. Misinformation, disinformation and cyber threats increasingly transcend national boundaries, influencing public opinion, spilling over into street mobilisation and vandalism, undermining trust, and occasionally fuelling diplomatic tensions through confrontational rhetoric. As a result, strengthening digital resilience through regional cooperation, promoting media literacy and collaborative fact-checking has become not only essential but also inevitable for advancing peace and security in South Asia. Regional cooperation across borders to counter information disorder is important not only for protecting the digital space but also for safeguarding democratic institutions and critical infrastructure, while strengthening public trust so that it does not become an obstacle to regional cooperation itself.

3. Blue economy and regional energy cooperation

The Bay of Bengal represents one of South Asia's greatest untapped opportunities for regional collaboration. It supports fisheries, maritime trade, tourism, offshore renewable energy and marine biodiversity while connecting South Asia with Southeast Asia and the wider Indo-Pacific. Yet the bay also faces growing pressures from marine pollution, overfishing, coastal erosion and increasingly severe climate-induced disasters. The sustainable management of this shared maritime space requires coordinated regional efforts rather than fragmented national policies. Joint marine conservation initiatives, scientific research, sustainable fisheries management and disaster response mechanisms could generate significant economic and environmental benefits for all littoral states.

Like the blue economy, regional energy cooperation offers an equally promising avenue. Nepal and India's north-eastern states possess substantial hydropower potential, estimated at 40 GW and 63 GW respectively, while Bangladesh faces rising energy demand as its economy continues to expand. Cross-border electricity trade has already demonstrated its feasibility through existing power exchanges between Bangladesh and India, as well as recent arrangements enabling Nepalese hydropower exports to Bangladesh through the Indian grid. Greater cooperation in hydropower development would significantly expand regional connectivity, strengthen regional interdependence, and reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels.

4. Border management and human mobility

While borders in South Asia are conventionally viewed through the lens of territorial sovereignty and national defence, they also represent complex intersections of humanitarian, environmental and development challenges. Recent trends in cross-border migration, forced displacement, human trafficking and climate-induced mobility have highlighted the need for a regional policy framework that balances security imperatives with humanitarian standards and international law. For example, the recent episodes of unilateral "push-backs" and "push-ins" along the India-Bangladesh border, together with the prolonged Rohingya refugee crisis, point to the highly complex nature of managing cross-border mobility in today's world. Traditional approaches to border management have frequently contributed to humanitarian crises by creating de facto no-man's lands populated by stranded people along border regions. Effective border management in South Asia must therefore move beyond coercion and embrace a comprehensive framework that addresses the structural causes of human mobility. Rather than viewing such cooperation as a compromise on state sovereignty, regional actors should recognise it as a pragmatic necessity for addressing shared transnational challenges that no country can effectively manage in isolation.

FUNCTIONAL EEGIONALISM: A PRAGMATIC ROADMAP

Regional organisations such as the European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) did not begin with comprehensive political agreements. Instead, these organisations evolved through sustained cooperation on practical issues that gradually delivered tangible benefits to their citizens. The history of the European Union demonstrates how initial cooperation in coal and steel ultimately evolved into broader political and economic integration. Likewise, ASEAN has gradually strengthened regional cooperation through consensus-based initiatives in trade, connectivity, disaster management and economic development despite considerable political diversity among its members.

While South Asia's circumstances are undoubtedly unique, and neither model can be replicated in its entirety, the region can nevertheless draw an important lesson: trust is often the outcome of sector-specific cooperation rather than its prerequisite. A similarly pragmatic roadmap could be developed for South Asia by strengthening existing regional and subregional mechanisms, including SAARC, BIMSTEC, BBIN and other sector-specific initiatives. Alongside governments, universities, research institutes, civil society organisations, youth networks, women's organisations and the private sector should all be given greater opportunities to initiate regional and subregional cooperation. Only then can South Asia make meaningful progress in climate resilience, disaster risk reduction, transboundary water sharing, renewable energy, digital security and humanitarian response through regular technical exchanges, joint research and coordinated policy platforms.

Ashish Banik *is Director of the Bay of Bengal Society.*

The dragon, eagle, elephant and tiger in a changing South Asia

ZILLUR RAHMAN

Three years ago, I used four animals—the dragon, eagle, elephant and tiger—to describe the competing ambitions shaping South Asia. The dragon represented China, the eagle the United States, the elephant India, and the still-emerging tiger Bangladesh.

The metaphor remains useful, but the geopolitical landscape surrounding these animals has changed considerably. The contest is no longer simply between an established US-led international order and a rising China. It now encompasses trade wars, technological rivalry, maritime security, supply-chain competition, domestic political transitions, and the increasingly assertive diplomacy of smaller states.

South Asia is not merely witnessing this contest from the sidelines. It has become one of its most consequential arenas.

The dragon changes its modus operandi

China's ambitions remain clear. China seeks an international order in which it is free from the constraints of institutions and rules established largely by the West. However, its method of pursuing this ambition has changed.

In the early days of the Belt and Road Initiative, the dragon was obsessed with constructing large-scale projects such as ports, highways, power stations, railways and industrial zones. When concerns were raised about the sustainability of these projects and the dependence they created among recipient countries, the dragon became less obsessed and began talking about high-quality BRI cooperation involving digital infrastructure, renewable energy, artificial intelligence, industrial investment, and smaller projects with greater commercial viability.

This does not mean the old obsession with constructing infrastructure has disappeared. Rather, the dragon has learned that it can build its long-term influence through technology, finance, education, trade, defence cooperation, and politics. South Asia continues to be of crucial importance to China in its ambition to shape an international order.

Pakistan continues to be important to China for its westward connectivity. Sri Lanka lies beside some of the busiest shipping routes in the Indian Ocean. Nepal and the Maldives are of geopolitical significance to India. Bangladesh's location between South and Southeast Asia and on the Bay of Bengal makes it economically and strategically important to China.

Consequently, relations between Dhaka and Beijing have not been confined to infrastructure. During the high-level engagements of 2025 and 2026, the two countries highlighted maritime cooperation, the blue economy, industrial development, education, and people-to-people linkages. Even the Teesta River management project, which inevitably carries strategic significance because the river originates in India, has drawn Chinese interest and participation.

However, the dragon's challenge is one of trust. While many South Asians welcome Chinese investment, they remain concerned about political dependence, a lack of transparency, and the long-term consequences of strategic infrastructure projects. The dragon can finance many of the things that others cannot, but financial capability alone does not generate public confidence.

The eagle becomes more transactional

The United States remains the most powerful external player in the Indo-Pacific. Nevertheless, US Indo-Pacific policy is becoming increasingly transactional.

While the US continues to advocate for a free, open and peaceful Indo-Pacific, it has developed strong security partnerships with Japan, Australia and India, and views India as an indispensable partner in maintaining the regional balance. The two countries have enhanced cooperation in defence technology, intelligence, logistics, maritime security and supply chains. Their stated goal of increasing bilateral trade to US$500 billion by 2030 speaks volumes about the economic dimension of this strategic partnership.

However, US policy is now more transactional, with decisions increasingly driven by calculations concerning market access, tariffs, technology, defence procurement and economic reciprocity. Values such as democracy and human rights have not disappeared, but they increasingly compete with an "America First" approach that emphasises strategic and commercial gains.

Bangladesh should avoid interpreting strategic autonomy as equidistance between Washington, Beijing and New Delhi. These relationships are not interchangeable.

Thus, while South Asian countries have many opportunities in this evolving landscape, they also face many complications in an increasingly transactional world. The US remains an important partner for Bangladesh and other South Asian countries in development, security and trade. It is Bangladesh's largest export market, primarily for ready-made garments. Security cooperation encompasses maritime security, counterterrorism, peacekeeping, and defence institution-building.

However, unlike China, the US has been reluctant to finance many large-scale infrastructure projects without imposing extensive requirements relating to economic, environmental and governance standards.

Washington's comparative advantage in the region lies not only in its military power but also in the appeal of its markets, universities, technology, financial systems and democratic institutions. The eagle remains extremely powerful, but it needs to demonstrate that its Indo-Pacific vision offers smaller countries more than simply a place within a strategy directed against China.

The elephant faces a neighbourhood problem

India, the elephant, is no longer merely an emerging country. It is now an indispensable global power—a major economy, a nuclear power, an influential voice among developing countries, and a strategic partner of the US, Japan, Europe and Australia.

Nevertheless, while India has become a global power, it continues to face serious problems in its neighbourhood.

Its relations with Nepal, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have frequently been marred by tensions. Political changes occurring in neighbouring countries are often viewed in India primarily through the lens of its strategic competition with China. At the same time, political leaders in South Asian countries frequently raise concerns about Indian interference.

The fact of the matter is that India cannot change its geography. Nor can Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan or Sri Lanka escape the reality of India's economic and security importance. But geography alone does not create leadership. Leadership depends on the confidence of neighbours that their sovereignty and interests will be respected.

Bangladesh has a particularly complicated relationship with India because the two countries share much in terms of history, rivers, trade, energy, transit, culture and their land boundary. No government in Bangladesh can hope to pursue a sustainable foreign policy if it ignores India's existence and continuing relevance.

Nonetheless, because of unresolved issues concerning Teesta water sharing, border killings, trade barriers and political interference, public confidence in this relationship has suffered. During Bangladesh's political transition after 2024, the relationship deteriorated to the point of becoming a potential trigger for geopolitical realignment in South Asia.

It is hoped that India will learn a lesson from this experience. To remain a natural partner in the region, it must stop thinking and acting like a big brother.

Can the hidden tiger come out of the shadows?

Bangladesh has ceased to be the geopolitical cub it was once considered to be. Its population, manufacturing capacity, strategic location, role in UN peacekeeping, and control of a key section of the Bay of Bengal give it considerable geopolitical importance.

Nevertheless, these strengths do not make it a strategic power.

Bangladesh's economy is facing slower growth, inflation, financial-sector vulnerabilities, low levels of investment, and increasing economic pressures. The World Bank has underscored the need for stronger institutions, financial-sector reforms and job creation to sustain the recovery of exports and remittances following recent disruptions.

All these domestic weaknesses limit Bangladesh's capacity in foreign policymaking. A country with weak institutions, a poor regulatory regime and unstable politics has limited capacity to negotiate effectively with major powers. It becomes dependent on external finance instead of using external relations to advance its national interests.

Bangladesh should avoid interpreting strategic autonomy as equidistance between Washington, Beijing and New Delhi. These relationships are not interchangeable. China is a major source of infrastructure, defence equipment and industrial investment. The US and Europe are essential export markets and sources of technology, investment and institutional support. India is Bangladesh's inevitable neighbour, with shared interests in water, energy, security and connectivity. Japan, South Korea, the European Union, ASEAN members and the Gulf countries offer further opportunities for diversification.

Issue-based alignment—cooperation with different powers according to Bangladesh's national interests, without falling strategically into the orbit of any one of them—should remain the guiding principle of its foreign policy.

This will require transparency in infrastructure projects, competitive procurement processes, the protection of national assets, and careful evaluation of debt and environmental consequences. Most importantly, it will require Bangladesh to pursue a foreign policy shaped by institutions rather than by the personal relationships of its leaders.

Diplomatic credibility begins at home. Democratic legitimacy, good governance, an independent judiciary, media freedom and political stability are not only domestic virtues but also strategic strengths. A government that commands public confidence can engage with foreign powers from a position of greater authority and resist external pressure more effectively.

The old unipolar order is fading away. A new multipolar order has yet to replace it. The dragon advances, the eagle repositions, and the elephant struggles to overcome its neighbourhood complexities amid its growing global ambitions.

The future of the tiger depends on how Bangladesh engages with these animals diplomatically and strategically rather than merely reacting to their actions.

Zillur Rahman *is a political analyst and President of the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS). He hosts Tritiyo Matra on Channel i and writes on geopolitics, strategic affairs, and governance. Follow him on X: @zillur.*

The Daily Star
FOUNDER EDITOR: **LATE S. M. ALI**

End the criminality within crime fighters

Revelation that Pranto was a victim of dirty policing calls for stern action

It comes as little surprise that a police investigation has confirmed what the family of Mirza Ishtiaq Ahmed Pranto, a law student who died in June while in custody of the Detective Branch (DB) of police in Faridpur, had been desperately trying to establish: that the narcotics charges brought against him were fabricated. The inquiry has found that there was no evidence that Pranto had drugs in his possession when arrested, and that "financial negotiations with Pranto's family" had taken place while he was in custody. All these factors, the report concluded, could have caused mental stress that may have contributed to his death.

It is encouraging that the investigating team has established the truth of Pranto's innocence. But it does not change the fact that a young man is dead after being framed by corrupt law enforcers. The allegations of torture made by his family now seem more plausible. This is a pattern that we have seen repeatedly in the past—law enforcers arrest an individual, bring made-up charges against them, take them into custody, and soon after, declare them dead with no credible explanation. Pranto's case could have ended the same way if it had not received such public attention. A *The Daily Star investigation* last month also revealed several contradictions in the police version of events. All this may have played a role in bringing the truth to light.

But what happens when there is no public pressure or media attention? When deals are made quietly and victims are released if they are fortunate, and dead if they are not? According to the Human Rights Support Society (HRSS), at least 39 inmates died in prisons in the first three months of the year alone. Among them, 16 were convicts and 23 were awaiting trial. Twelve were leaders and activists of Awami League (Pranto was reportedly a Chhatra League activist). Evidently, despite the ouster of a regime that wielded power through torture, abduction, and killings, these practices have not been eliminated from the system. This is especially unacceptable for a government formed in the spirit of the uprising, which gave people hope that the days of arbitrary arrests, fabricated cases, custodial torture, and deaths in custody were over.

In the Faridpur case, the inquiry committee has recommended departmental action against 11 DB members over their conduct in the incident. This cannot be an end in itself. The government must acknowledge the gravity of the alleged crimes of filing a false case, torture, extortion, and causing the death of a detainee, and take necessary punitive and preventive measures. The amended Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013 must be enforced rigorously and uniformly across the country. The government must ensure impartial investigations into every custodial death case reported, including alleged suicides of inmates, and punish those responsible. It must demonstrate that it will not tolerate corruption and criminality within the law enforcement and security agencies.

Bring the stranded Bangladeshis home

Govt must dismantle networks luring young men to Russia-Ukraine war

We are alarmed by a recent report that highlighted the horrors faced by Bangladeshi migrant workers who were lured to Russia with promises of a better future but later had little choice but to fight in the Ukraine war. Many of them also ended up in Ukrainian jails as prisoners of war (POWs). The stories of these men go beyond isolated incidents, pointing to exploitation by domestic actors and their transnational network, the crippling desperation and helplessness plaguing the country's youth, and the government's apathy and unpreparedness. This is especially alarming given that at least 104 Bangladeshis had been reportedly recruited into the Russian military as of February 2026, while at least 34 of them had been reportedly killed.

The experiences of three POWs in Ukraine—Rimel from Gaibandha, Sarwar from Mymensingh, and Kamrul from Brahmanbaria—suggest that trafficking networks are not confined to any isolated region, nor does their recruitment strategy easily raise doubts in the minds of potential migrants. For instance, Rimel was offered a scaffolding job in Russia for which he spent Tk 6 lakh; but once he lost this stable work, he had to join the Russian military. Like him, Sarwar paid an exorbitant amount to an agency and travelled to Russia to work on a gas project, but when the project expired, he signed contracts written in Russian and joined the military. Kamrul, meanwhile, alleged that he was deceived by an Uzbek broker who offered to take him to Italy, but after he gave them several lakhs of taka in advance, he too ended up in Russia. All three men mentioned in our report were desperate to recover the money they had spent on a journey built on deception, which pushed them towards increasingly dangerous choices.

What is puzzling is that none of the POWs were contacted by the Bangladeshi authorities. Why is the government showing such apathy in repatriating these men who only hope to return home as soon as possible? The indifference on the government's part, compounded by the lack of initiatives to dismantle the trafficking networks preying on young desperate men, deeply disappoints us. We strongly urge the government to begin the repatriation process of the stranded Bangladeshis in war zones. Also, investigations against the local recruiting agents and their related offices involved in such fraudulent activities must be strengthened, along with initiating widespread awareness programmes. Above all, the root of the problem that leads a section of our youth to consider sailing for the dangerous unknown must be addressed. Young people should be able to see at least a safe future in their own homeland.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Iraq invades Kuwait

On this day in 1990, Iraqi forces invaded their tiny, oil-rich neighbour Kuwait, overwhelming their defence forces.

PROPERTY REFORM FOR PARENTS

A step in the right direction, but mind the gaps



MIND THE GAP

Barrister Noshin Nawal
is a columnist for The Daily Star. She can be reached at nawalnoshin1@gmail.com.

NOSHIN NAWAL

On July 30, 2026, Law Minister Md Asaduzzaman stated that the government is considering amending the Transfer of Property Act, 1882 to allow parents to retain the right to possess and enjoy property during their lifetime even after transferring ownership to their children. Speaking to reporters at the Secretariat, he said the proposed reform aims to protect parents from becoming dependent on their children after gifting or transferring property, and to reduce family disputes and property-related civil litigation. Its stated objective is straightforward. Parents who transfer property during their lifetimes should not have to fear losing the security of their home or becoming dependent on the goodwill of the very children who receive it.

Viewed through the narrow lens of elder protection, the law minister's proposal is both practical and overdue. It addresses a genuine concern that has long discouraged many parents from making lifetime gifts, which, in legal terms, mean a transfer of ownership of property between living persons without any price attached. Yet its implications extend far beyond protecting elderly parents. It raises important questions about Muslim personal law, succession, women's property rights, and the future of property transactions in Bangladesh. The first question is whether the proposal conflicts with Islamic inheritance law. At first glance, some may assume that it does. After all, Islamic law prescribes fixed inheritance shares for heirs, including daughters, and those rules are regarded by many as both legally and religiously significant. Legally, however, the position is more nuanced.

Inheritance law applies only upon death and governs the estate, i.e. everything a person owns at the time of his/her death. A hiba, by contrast, is an *inter vivos* transfer, a gift made during the donor's lifetime. Once a valid hiba is completed under the applicable principles of Muslim personal law, the property generally ceases to form part of the donor's estate. The proposed reform does not appear to alter that fundamental principle. Rather, it modifies the legal consequences of the gift by allowing the donor to retain possession and beneficial use during their lifetime. In other words, the proposal does not rewrite Islamic inheritance law. It changes when inheritance law comes into force. That distinction is subtle, but significant.



VISUAL: **ANWAR SOHEL**

If more property is transferred during a person's lifetime, less property may ultimately remain within the estate to be distributed under the ordinary rules of succession. The proposed amendment, therefore, shifts the practical importance of inheritance law without necessarily changing its legal content. That shift has important implications for women. Some social media commentators have suggested that the minister's proposal could strengthen women's property rights, and there is a credible argument supporting that view. Many parents hesitate to transfer property during their lifetime because doing so has traditionally meant surrendering ownership, control and, in many cases, their own sense of security. Allowing parents to retain lifetime possession may remove that psychological and practical barrier. A parent who has long intended to transfer property to a daughter may now feel sufficiently protected to formalise that intention without fearing displacement. Yet the opposite outcome is equally conceivable.

Because lifetime gifts generally fall outside the estate later governed by inheritance law, a parent, feeling secured by the proposed change, may also choose to transfer substantial assets exclusively to their son before succession rules ever become operative. In such circumstances, daughters would inherit only from the assets remaining in the estate at death. If little remains, the practical value of their inheritance rights may be significantly reduced, even though the law governing inheritance itself remains unchanged. This is not a contradiction. It is the inevitable consequence of shifting wealth distribution from succession to lifetime transfers. Whether that development ultimately advances or weakens women's economic security cannot be answered by examining the statute alone. The proposal is legally neutral. Its social consequences will depend upon how families choose to use it. That is precisely why the debate should not be reduced to slogans about protecting parents or empowering daughters. It concerns both, but it is ultimately about something larger: how legal rules interact with social realities.

The proposal also raises practical questions that will require careful legislative drafting. What precisely does "lifetime possession" entail? Does it include the right to lease the property and receive rental income? Who bears responsibility for maintenance, taxation, and insurance? How will retained possessory rights be reflected in the land registration system? Can a child mortgage property that remains subject to a parent's lifetime right of occupation? What protection will exist for third-party purchasers or creditors acting in good faith? Without clear answers, the proposal risks replacing one category of litigation with another.

This should not be read as an argument against reform. On the contrary, the proposal demonstrates a welcome recognition that good private law seeks to prevent disputes rather than merely resolve them after relationships have broken down. But good legislation should also be judged by the legal relationships it reshapes along the way. The proposed amendment does more than protect elderly parents. It recalibrates the relationship between lifetime gifts, inheritance, and property ownership. Whether that recalibration ultimately promotes fairness, strengthens family autonomy, or produces unintended inequalities will depend not only on the wording of the final legislation, but also on the choices families make once the law places a new legal tool in their hands.

Blaming the youth is easy. We must rethink how we support parents



Dr Sina Akand
is a London-based sociologist and development consultant. She can be reached at sinaaknd@gmail.com.

SINA AKAND

Over the last two years, there have been many reports of young people attacking someone or engaging in violent acts in public places, educational institutions, or even at government offices. Many parents also say that their children have become increasingly disrespectful at home and that managing their behaviour has become more challenging. While we cannot see what happens behind closed doors, the increasing aggression, violence, and mob behaviour seen in our communities suggest that something is going wrong long before these young people enter public life.

Social media is full of debates about the decline of moral education, or *noitik shikkha*. Many argue that today's young people lack respect, empathy, and a sense of responsibility. Others look back 20 or 30 years and wonder why behaviour that was once considered unacceptable has become increasingly common. Some blame declining family values, while others point to schools, weakening social cohesion, social media, political culture or shortcomings in the justice system. Some incidents appear to be politically motivated, while others are simply acts of indiscriminate violence with little regard for the consequences. While each of these factors may play a role, one reality is difficult to ignore: the foundations of moral education are laid long before children encounter schools, social media or the wider world. It begins at home.

Children's behaviour is shaped by a complex interaction of family, education, community, peer influence, technology, and wider social conditions. Their earliest lessons about respect, empathy, self-control, and responsibility, however, are learned within the family. They learn how adults treat one another, manage emotions, respond to conflict, and resolve disagreements. Many of us learned social behaviours by watching our parents and grandparents and seeing how they treated one another, neighbours, and even strangers, regardless of their religion, social class or gender. This is why parents, together with the extended family, are a child's first and most influential teachers.

Research consistently demonstrates that early childhood experiences have lifelong consequences. Children who grow up in homes where harsh or violent discipline is common, or who witness violence such as intimate partner violence (IPV) and frequent family conflict, are more likely to experience emotional and behavioural difficulties later in life. When violence, aggression, and intimidation become normal within the home, children may carry these behaviours into school, friendships, and eventually the wider society. Their early experiences shape how they treat others, understand respect, empathy, and fairness, communicate, and judge what is acceptable behaviour. In many cases, they repeat these behaviours because they have come to see them as normal. This does not mean that every child exposed to adversity will become violent. Many children demonstrate remarkable resilience and go on to lead healthy and productive lives despite difficult circumstances. However, supportive parenting, positive role models, and safe, nurturing home environments remain among the strongest protective factors against future violence and disrespectful behaviour.

Evidence from Unicef and the WHO shows that strengthening parenting interventions can play a significant role in preventing violence against children and intimate partner violence. By promoting positive parenting, reducing harsh or violent discipline, and strengthening caring family relationships, these interventions create safe and supportive environments in which children learn positive values and behaviours. Preventing violence in the home is therefore not only about protecting children today; it is also about shaping the values, attitudes, and behaviours they will carry into adulthood.

In the UK and many other high-income countries, parenting is recognised as a skill that can be strengthened through education and support. In Bangladesh, however, parenting is often viewed through the lens of physical health: ensuring children receive vaccinations, nutritious food, and access to healthcare. While these are essential, parenting is about much more than meeting a child's physical needs; it is about supporting a child's overall wellbeing. This includes nurturing emotional wellbeing, modelling respectful behaviour, and helping children develop the values, empathy, and self-control that guide their behaviour. Parenting today is far more challenging than it was for previous generations. Families face increasing economic pressures, the constant influence of digital technology, and the daily challenge of managing children's screen time and online exposure. Yet, many parents remain reluctant to seek or accept parenting support. If we want to raise a responsible generation that respects the dignity of others, shows empathy, and rejects violence, supporting parents must become a national priority.

Unfortunately, parenting education is yet to be integrated into Bangladesh's education or public health systems. As Bangladesh has allocated a record education budget this year, this presents a timely opportunity to invest not only in schools but also in parents. Dedicated funding should be allocated to develop comprehensive parenting programmes, beginning during pregnancy and continuing throughout early childhood and adolescence as part of a national early intervention strategy. Supporting parents should not be viewed as a social welfare expense but as an investment in national development. Equipping parents with the knowledge and skills to raise confident, respectful, and resilient children is one of the most effective ways to prevent violence, strengthen communities, and build a healthier society. Parents matter. Empowering them may be one of the most important investments we can make not only for our children, but for the future of our society.

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What kind of president do we need?



Mir Aftabuddin Ahmed
is a public policy columnist. He can be reached at mir.ahmed@mail.mcgill.ca.
Views expressed in this article are the author's own.

MIR AFTABUDDIN AHMED

Mohammed Shahabuddin's less-than-ceremonious exit from the presidency allows the ruling BNP to draw a line under months of ambiguity over two issues. First, his resignation, citing health concerns, brings down the curtain on the last remnant of the Awami League regime still occupying a constitutional office and playing a formal role in the affairs of the state. Second, it removes any grounds for criticism of BNP for having retained him without clarifying whether he would serve out the remainder of his five-year term.

History will likely distinguish between Shahabuddin and the office he occupied. The former president, serving at a crucial time in Bangladesh's history, exercised limited influence over the transition that followed the 2024 mass uprising. His principal function was to formalise decisions reached by the student leadership, BNP, Jamaat, and the armed forces. It began with supplying the institutional vehicle through which Sheikh Hasina's ouster was converted into a new governing arrangement. The interim government, as we know, was formed under the authority of the presidency through recourse to Article 106 of the Constitution and the rarely invoked doctrine of necessity. Its ordinances drew their baseline legality from the same source.

After August 5, 2024, the state machinery had been depleted of moral authority and administrative capacity. Bangabhaban became the solitary bridge between the ousted regime, the interim administration led by Dr Muhammad Yunus, and the elected government now led by Tarique Rahman. The mechanism through which power changed hands also helps explain why 2024 is better understood as an uprising than as a revolution.

Recall how the AL government ceased to exist and became, *de facto*, null and void. Parliament was dissolved. The overarching power structure built around Sheikh Hasina collapsed. Yet, the basic architecture of the state remained intact, with the president continuing in office and providing the constitutional mechanism through which the vacuum created by the absence of the executive branch was addressed. In other words, Bangabhaban enabled the transfer of power without dismantling the organs of the republic. A revolution in the fuller sense would have required the replacement of that architecture and the suspension of the Constitution. Neither occurred.

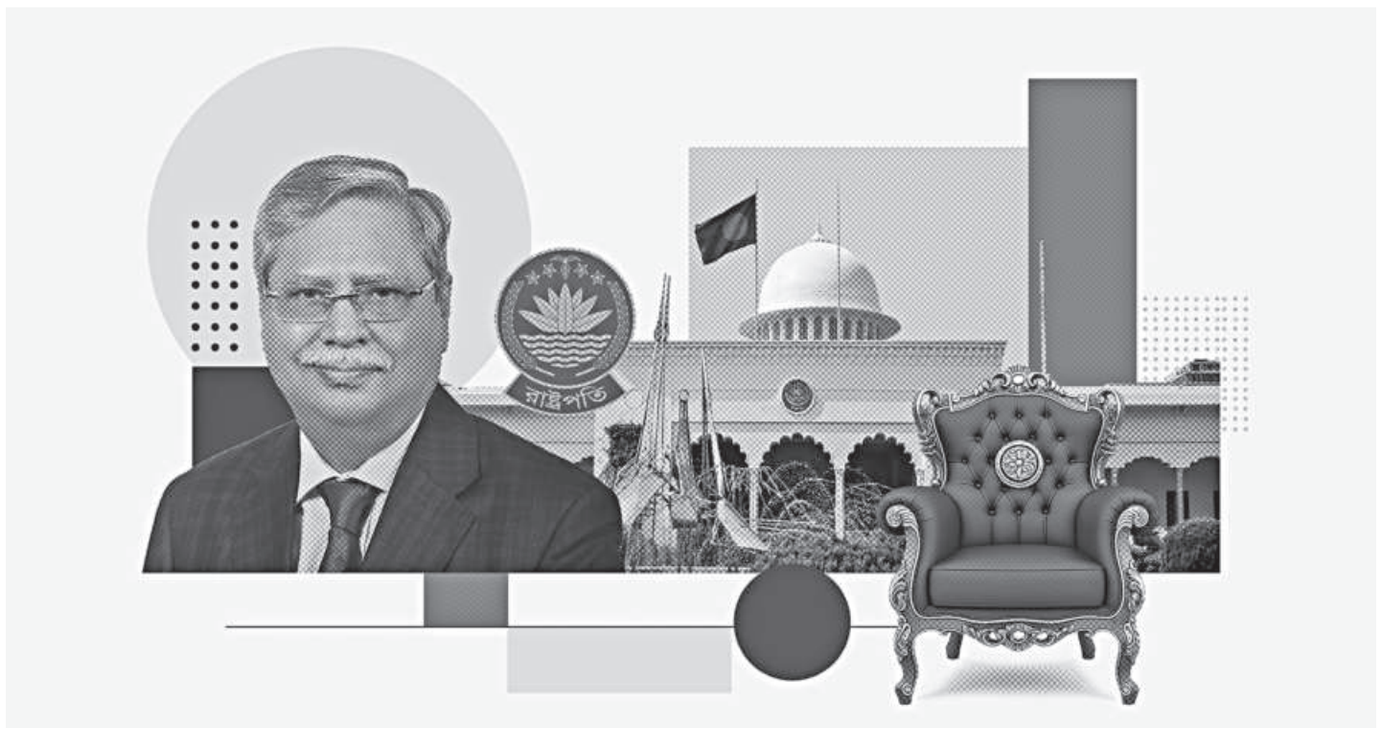


ILLUSTRATION: **ANWAR SOHEL**

The resulting settlement was neither ideal nor expressly contemplated by the Constitution. The events from August 5 to August 8, 2024 may continue to face political and judicial scrutiny in the years to come. But it should be acknowledged that leveraging Bangabhaban provided the closest available approximation to a by-the-book transfer of executive power to Dr Yunus. As in the past, the presidency served as the last resort when the constitutional text provided no direct answer. By giving formal expression to the outcome of the uprising, the office also conferred a measure of legitimacy on the interim government.

In a Westminster-derived system, a ceremonial head of state ordinarily acts on the advice of the elected executive, led by the prime minister as head of government. The president embodies the state and serves as a nexus among the three branches of government: the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary. When the executive branch ceases to function, the residual powers of the head of state provide the conventional basis for constituting a new administration. This role resembles the reserve powers of the British monarch. Normally dormant, these powers acquire importance when the chain of executive advice breaks down and the continuity of government comes into question.

Bangabhaban performed that function in August 2024.

The debate now turns to the profile that BNP may seek in its presidential nominee. Its thumping majority in parliament guarantees that its candidate will enter Bangabhaban, so the decision rests with the prime minister and the BNP Standing Committee now. The July charter has clearly raised the stakes. Depending on how fully its proposals are enacted, the reforms will expand the president's role in appointments to key state bodies and place Bangabhaban at the centre of the process of forming the caretaker government ahead of the next election.

So, what kind of president should BNP seek? Broadly speaking, it has three options for the presidency.

The first is a seasoned BNP leader who commands respect beyond the party. The advantage here would be experience. A veteran politician would understand how crises develop, how parties behave under pressure, and how disputes among competing centres of power escalate. Years in national politics would also ensure cross-party relationships that can be helpful. A potential drawback in this scenario would be public perception of the nominee's association with BNP. Resignation from any party position before assuming the presidency is a given, but opponents and segments of the public may still view that person through the partisan identity that carried them to Bangabhaban.

Bangladesh's experience in this case offers mixed lessons. Abdur Rahman Biswas acted firmly to avert a military coup in 1996. By contrast, A.Q.M. Badruddoza Chowdhury resigned in 2002 after losing the confidence of BNP parliamentarians. Both were BNP stalwarts, though their tenures in Bangabhaban unfolded very differently.

The second option for the presidency would be a civil society leader without formal BNP affiliation. The principal advantage would be distance from party politics. Such a nomination would present the presidency as a non-partisan institution rather than a seat reserved for rewarding party loyalty. A candidate from outside mainstream politics could enter Bangabhaban with greater credibility across party lines. The disadvantage, however, would be limited experience in handling crises. Academic distinction, professional achievement, and personal integrity offer only partial preparation for the complexities of dealing with rival parties, senior bureaucrats, security actors, and so on.

Iajuddin Ahmed remains an unfortunate example in this case. A respected academic, he assumed the additional role of chief adviser in 2006 amid criticism from across the political spectrum. He failed to command confidence, and his decisions contributed to the breakdown that culminated in the military-backed takeover of January 2007. His tenure exposed, among other things, the shortcomings of a civil society background unaccompanied by the political acuity required of a president.

The third option would be a senior civil servant, such as a retired secretary to the government, or a former judge. The advantage here would be an inner knowledge of the state machinery. Such a person would understand how political direction translates into bureaucratic implementation and how legal mandates become public policy. The disadvantage would be the outlook formed by a long career inside the bureaucracy. Bangladesh's civil service is rightly criticised as bloated, insular, and resistant to reform. A former bureaucrat may bring command of procedure while remaining attached to the caution, hierarchy, and inertia that have slowed efforts to modernise public administration.

Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed represents the best case for this profile. He guided Bangladesh from military rule to parliamentary democracy in the early 1990s. When he was elected president in 1996 after being nominated by the AL government, he brought a reputation for neutrality unmatched by his successors.

Mohammed Shahabuddin is the counterexample. His service in the judiciary and the Anti-Corruption Commission gave him the credentials associated with this category. His tenure, however, fell short of the independence associated with Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed and remained clouded by allegations of corruption, abuse of power, and sycophantic subservience to the AL regime.

The fragility of today's political environment favours a seasoned politician. The next president, in my view, will face five tests. First, the successful nominee must restore the dignity associated with Bangabhaban. Second, they must remain above day-to-day politics while staying attuned to the public mood. Third, they must possess the autonomy and competence to advise, caution, and warn the government when its decisions threaten the national interest. Fourth, they must safeguard Bangladesh's effort to rebuild the state machinery and return its principal organs to full working order. Fifth, they must serve as a guardian of the spirit of the Constitution.

Since Mohammed Shahabuddin's resignation, speculation has been rife about who would be his successor. Several names have emerged, but BNP has so far kept any decision closely guarded. One thing is certain, however. Bangladesh is entitled to expect the government to deliver a president with the clean public image that is sacrosanct to the office of head of state.

How Bangladesh can build a more powerful passport



Dr AKM Ahsan Ullah
is professor at the Faculty of Arts and Social Science in the University of Brunei Darussalam. He can be reached at akmahsanullah@gmail.com.

AKM AHSAN ULLAH

A passport may seem like a simple travel document, but at a foreign border it also represents the credibility of the state that issued it. Immigration authorities assess not only the individual traveller, but also the reliability of the country's identity records, document security, migration management and willingness to accept responsibility when citizens violate immigration rules.

Bangladesh's weak position in global passport rankings, therefore, deserves attention without national embarrassment or sensational comparison. The Henley Passport Index ranks 199 passports by the number of destinations accessible without a prior visa, using International Air Transport Authority (IATA) data, and according to its latest calculation, Singapore leads the 2026 ranking, while Bangladesh ranks 97th, sharing the position with North Korea. The index does not measure a nation's dignity or cultural worth; it simply indicates how much mobility confidence other governments extend to its passport holders.

Clearly, we need improvement that requires more than asking friendly states for visa-free access. Bangladesh needs a national mobility strategy combining diplomacy, secure identity systems, labour recruitment, border management, aviation, trade and consular responsibility.

First, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should create a specialised passport and mobility diplomacy unit. It could identify realistic partners, prepare country-specific negotiating dossiers, and coordinate the ministries whose decisions affect international travel. Bangladesh should prioritise countries with growing trade, investment, education, labour, tourism or aviation links, especially where Bangladeshi travellers do not overstay or engage in irregular employment much.

The objective need not always be complete visa exemption. Practical gains may come through electronic visas, visas on arrival, long-term multiple-entry visas for businesspeople and academics, accelerated student processing, simplified transit rules, and trusted-traveller programmes. If evidence of compliance could be generated from such limited access, it could increase confidence in Bangladeshi travellers and thus lead to wider access.

Although Bangladesh's e-passport system is an important achievement, a sophisticated booklet cannot compensate for inconsistent civil records. Passport issuance increasingly relies on NID data for identity verification, but interoperability among the databases maintained by the institutions responsible for birth registration, national identity cards, and passports remains limited. As a result, variations in names, birth dates, parental identities, and transliteration continue to create the potential for suspicion even when they result from administrative error rather than fraud.

The value of an e-passport also depends on whether foreign borders can authenticate its chip. The International Civil Aviation Organization's Public Key Directory enables states to exchange the digital certificates needed to verify electronic travel documents. Bangladesh should ensure prompt reporting of lost, stolen, cancelled, and fraudulently obtained passports while its missions regularly explain the country's verification and anti-fraud procedures to host authorities.

Also, it must be noted that passport strength is affected by travellers' conduct abroad. Visa overstaying, unauthorised employment, fraudulent student admission, document manipulation, and unsubstantiated asylum claims can trigger restrictions against an entire nationality. The actions of a minority then impose higher costs and longer scrutiny on legitimate tourists, students, researchers, businesspeople and family visitors.

Since irregularity often begins before departure through deceptive recruitment, excessive migration costs, unsuitable visas, and unregulated intermediaries, Bangladesh should strengthen recruitment oversight, pre-departure information, and legal assistance abroad. It should also respond quickly when another government seeks to verify the nationality of a person subject to lawful return. A state cannot credibly request easier entry while appearing unwilling to take responsibility for citizens who no longer have a legal right to remain abroad.

Besides, for visa negotiations with priority countries, Bangladesh should use evidence such as data on visitor numbers, timely return, tourism spending, tuition payments, investment, research collaboration, and contributions to bilateral trade. Its bargaining assets include a large consumer market, garments, pharmaceuticals, information technology, aviation demand, a global diaspora, and substantial education and medical travel. Bangladesh is also among the major contributors to UN peacekeeping, an international role that can be integrated into a broader narrative of reliability and cooperation.

Also, through BIMSTEC, BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal), and bilateral arrangements, Bangladesh can pursue easier travel for businesspeople, students, researchers, patients, cultural professionals, and organised tour groups. Harmonised online applications, reduced fees, business-travel cards, and simpler land-border permits may not immediately change a global ranking, but they would increase the passport's practical value.

Notably, mobility privileges are also reversible. In March 2026, the European Commission suspended visa-free travel for holders of Georgian diplomatic, service, and official passports, citing failures to uphold commitments linked to the visa-free regime. The wider lesson is that passport power depends on continuing confidence in state institutions, documentation, migration governance, and adherence to international obligations.

Bangladesh, therefore, should adopt a five- or 10-year mobility strategy with measurable targets: new e-visa, visa-on-arrival and visa-waiver arrangements; lower visa-refusal and overstay rates; faster identity verification; fewer fraudulent documents; and quicker consular and readmission decisions. An annual mobility report should publish progress and assess the performance of diplomatic missions.

The power of a passport comes from confidence that the document is genuine, its holder is identifiable, immigration conditions will be respected, and the issuing state will act responsibly when problems arise. A stronger Bangladeshi passport must therefore be built not only at the foreign ministry, but also in birth-registration offices, passport departments, recruiting agencies, embassies, border databases, and courts. It is ultimately a project of national credibility, connectivity and negotiating capacity.

Corrigendum

In the crossword published on Page 9 of *The Daily Star* on August 1, 2026, incorrect clues were published inadvertently. The correct crossword has been published today. We regret the error.

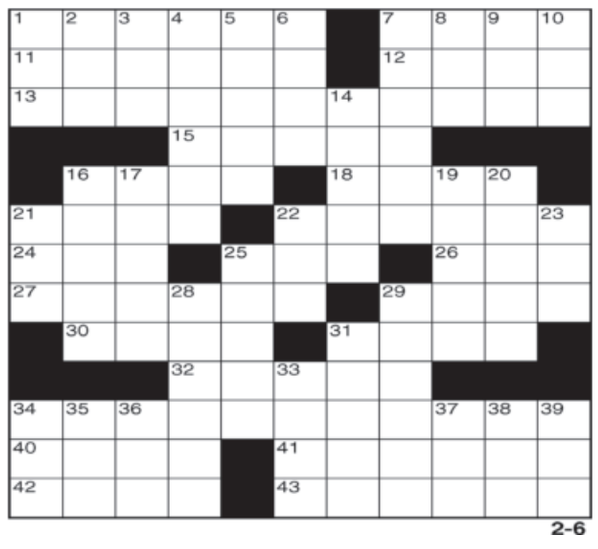
CROSSWORD
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Human ancestor
7 Latte topper
11 Gomez of "Only Murders in the Building"
12 Bumpkin
13 Workplace motto
15 Inventor Nikola
16 Olympus leader
18 Vaccine type
21 Easy win
22 Got a C, say
24 Company abbr.
25 Yoga need
26 Sedan or SUV
27 Cheated at hide-and-seek
29 Office leader
30 Glade grazer
31 Smoker's discard
32 Cap feature
34 Sturdily made
40 Cuzco native
41 Flowering shrub
42 South African farmer
43 Do over

DOWN

1 Donkey
2 Stew sphere
3 North Pole worker
4 Get together
5 Pays to play
6 Opposing votes
7 Some brothers
8 Owned by us
9 Crunch targets
10 Ran into
14 Parade sight
16 Like urban areas
17 Game show host
19 Fancy neckwear
20 Minimum amount
21 Tear
22 Knee protector
23 Hosp. workers
25 Deserve
28 Vest material
29 Coarse fabric
31 Hooch
33 Sirius or Polaris
34 Shirt protector
35 First número
36 Cubes in a glass
37 Pub stuff
38 Neptune's domain
39 Skin art, for short



2-6

FRIDAY'S ANSWERS

S	O	F	A	S	■	G	A	S	P	S
A	L	I	E	N	■	E	X	P	E	L
T	E	R	R	A	■	N	E	A	T	O
■	■	■	O	G	R	E	■	N	E	W
C	L	A	S	S	I	S	M	■	■	■
H	A	R	M	■	D	I	E	S	E	L
A	T	E	I	T	■	S	T	O	V	E
D	E	A	T	H	S	■	A	M	E	N
■	■	■	H	E	E	D	L	E	S	S
S	A	P	■	C	A	R	L	■	■	■
P	L	A	Z	A	■	A	I	S	L	E
U	T	T	E	R	■	I	C	I	E	R
D	O	S	E	S	■	N	A	D	E	R

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO
dsopinion@gmail.com

How Zaineen became 'THE DIFFICULT BRIDE'

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

When Rubaiyat Hossain's ***The Difficult Bride*** made history as the first feature-length film from Bangladesh to compete at the Venice International Film Festival, it wasn't just the film that had everyone talking. Curiosity quickly turned to its leading lady, Zaineen Chowdhury Karim, who, interestingly, shares her first name with the character she plays. One question lingered above all else: what made Rubaiyat believe that Zaineen was her "Difficult Bride"?

Many actresses auditioned for the role, but it was Zaineen who ultimately won Rubaiyat's confidence. As filming progressed, she proved exactly why she had been chosen.

Over a warm cup of coffee, Zaineen recounted the unexpected journey that took her from working behind the camera as an assistant director (AD) to becoming the protagonist.



PHOTO: **SCREENGRAB FEATURING ZAINEEN FROM 'THE DIFFICULT BRIDE'**

Their paths first crossed through Smith College in Massachusetts, where both had studied years apart. A former professor introduced them over email, initially with the idea of collaborating on an academic paper exploring the male gaze in Bangladeshi cinema. But when Zaineen visited Rubaiyat's home, the conversation soon shifted.

"She mentioned she was preparing her fourth feature film, and the idea came up that I could work as an assistant director on the project. The opportunity to be on a real film set and watch everything unfold was impossible to pass up."

What began as an assistant director's role gradually evolved into something much more. A writer by profession, Zaineen found herself reading drafts of the screenplay and sharing feedback as Rubaiyat developed the script.

"It was a project very close to her heart. She would send me drafts, I'd give her notes, and for a long time, we were shaping the script together. In many ways, we were building this character together."

But fate had other plans. While driving to pick up her cousin from the airport, Zaineen kept receiving calls from the team asking her to join a virtual script reading for the art, costume, and production departments.

"I was sitting in a moving car, reading the script from my phone. I'd lived with it for so long that I couldn't help but perform it with a little emotion."

A few months later, Rubaiyat asked a question that caught her completely off guard.

"She said, 'Would you consider auditioning for the part?' I remember thinking, 'Me?' It hadn't even crossed my mind."

Although she had acted in school and university theatre, starring in a feature film was never part of Zaineen's plans. Still, she decided to audition, believing she had nothing to lose.

For Zaineen, the casting also challenged conventional ideas of what a leading lady should look like. She admits she never imagined herself pursuing acting because she didn't fit the industry's traditional mold.

"I'm not tall, fair, or really skinny. I'm just a regular person," she said. "My character is struggling with her weight and trying to achieve perfection. People are already calling me fat, and I know there will be hate comments. I'm trying to prepare myself for that."

Ironically, those insecurities made her an even more natural fit for a character grappling with impossible beauty standards.

If landing the role was unexpected, sharing the screen with three National Film Award-winning actors was another challenge altogether.

Zaineen admitted she was initially intimidated, especially by Azmeri Haque Badhan, whom she considered an incredible actress. She described Reekita Nondine Shimu as "an absolute powerhouse" and said she often turned to her for guidance during scenes, while also praising Sunerah Binte Kamal for her talents.

Set inside Mayfair, a historic beauty salon in Dhaka, ***The Difficult Bride*** follows a bride-to-be preparing for her wedding. As the celebrations draw closer, she is pulled into an increasingly unsettling world where beauty, faith, memory, and fear collide.

To prepare for the role, Zaineen spent a day at a beauty salon, experiencing a full bridal package herself.

"I wanted to understand what brides actually go through. There were body scrubs, massages, eyebrow threading—so many procedures. Then, during filming, they even did traditional bridal makeup on me, using a foundation that was several shades lighter—which, in our society, is actually considered 'normal.'"

She believes those rituals become even more intense once marriage enters the picture.

"The pressure to lose weight, become fairer, and look perfect increases so much when you're about to get married. We wanted to explore that pressure and question why marriage is often treated as a woman's greatest achievement."

Those conversations weren't confined to the script. Throughout pre-production, she and Rubaiyat often discussed how women continue to be judged by their marital status, regardless of their accomplishments.

"Rubaiyat *apu* would joke that she could win an Oscar and people would still be happier if she got married. That's the reality. No matter what a woman achieves, someone will ask why she's still unmarried."

For Zaineen, those conversations made the film deeply personal. Rather than glamorising beauty, ***The Difficult Bride*** examines the pressure women face to meet impossible standards.

As the film gears up for its world premiere at the Venice International Film Festival, Zaineen is excited to introduce audiences to a different side of Bangladesh.

"It's my first film, and I think it's a very special story," she said. "International audiences often expect stories about poverty and suffering from Bangladesh. This film explores luxury and modernity while also revealing the violence that can exist beneath that opulence. I am really happy that I got to be part of this wonderful project."



PHOTO: **SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED**

TRENDY STREAMS

Netflix
TÁR



Apple TV+
Ted Lasso



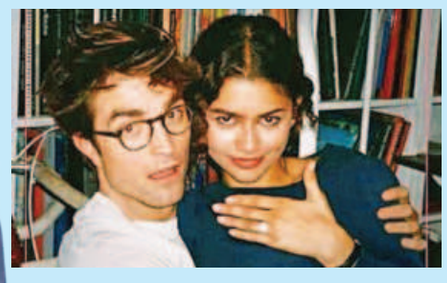
Prime Video
Sterling Point



Chorki:
Rockstar



HBO Max
The Drama



OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA



'Beyond the Brief'
July 18–August 8, 2026 | 4:00pm – 8:00pm
Bengal Shilpalay, Dhanmondi, Dhaka



'Chowkath'
July 31–August 8, 2026 | 3:00pm – 9:00pm
Opening: July 31, 2026 | 6:00 pm
Alliance Française de Dhaka, Dhanmondi



'Dhaka POP & Cosplay Fest 2026'
Friday, 7 August 2026 | 11am-9pm
Tokyo Square Convention Center, Mohammadpur

TV TALKIES

'Con City'

Con City is a crime comedy starring Arjun Das and Anna Ben. The film follows a group of con artists whose carefully planned scam spirals into a series of unexpected twists, forcing them to outsmart rivals and survive dangerous situations. Blending humour with suspense, the story balances clever cons, fast-paced action, and emotional moments. The performances, particularly by Arjun Das, have been widely praised, while the engaging screenplay has helped the film gain popularity with audiences after its digital release. The film is now streaming on Netflix



WHAT'S PLAYING

'Boba Tunnel' by ANUPAM ROY



Released in 2014 for Srijit Mukherji's ***Chotushkone***, ***Boba Tunnel*** remains one of Anupam Roy's most enduring songs. Written, composed and sung by Roy, the track centres on love that arrives too late, words left unsaid and the sense of distance that can remain even between two people who once felt close.

Its appeal lies in the way he keeps the arrangement simple and lets the writing do most of the work. There is no dramatic flourish; the song builds through small images, missed chances and the recurring question of whom one turns to when a relationship has already slipped away.

More than a decade after its release, ***Boba Tunnel*** has crossed 15.7 million streams on Spotify and remains among Roy's most-played songs on the platform. Its continued popularity shows how effectively a film song can outgrow its original setting and become part of the emotional vocabulary of its listeners.

Businesses see energy crisis as main hurdle

FROM PAGE 1

Twelve ministers and 15 business leaders from different sectors spoke at the meeting.

The prime minister said the government has identified 10 promising sectors, including garments, pharmaceuticals, electrical and electronic products, motor parts, man-made fibre garments, ceramics and tableware, and leather and leather goods, to help achieve the $100 billion export target by 2030.

He said the country's economic challenges could be overcome through close cooperation between the government and the business community.

Many issues raised by business leaders during earlier consultations have already been resolved, while the concerns highlighted yesterday will also be addressed, he added.

"We all acknowledge there are many problems. The government has at least demonstrated that it is trying. The government is not yet six months old, but we have already held several meetings with the business community. We are addressing sector-specific challenges one by one."

The prime minister said another meeting with business leaders would be held within the next two to three months.

"The more we sit together, the better we will understand your problems and the easier it will be to resolve them."

He said sustained engagement between the government and the private sector could bring meaningful improvements to the economy within four to five years.

Officials informed the meeting that decisions have already been taken on 21 of the 28 issues discussed during the previous consultation, while work on the remaining seven is underway, adds UNB.

THE DECISIONS

The decisions included exploring alternatives to the time-consuming Letter of Credit (LC) system for business transactions and reducing the import duty on solar panels to 2 percent from nearly 35 percent. The 15 percent VAT on solar panel imports, however, will remain unchanged.

The government has also decided to waive all duties on imports of raw materials for sodium-ion and lithium-ion batteries, except customs duties of 1 percent and 15 percent, according to a keynote presentation by the Prime Minister's Office.

Other decisions include involving private sector representatives in National Board of Revenue policy formulation, simplifying approval of bond licences, expanding bond facilities for all export-oriented industries, extending the tenure of bond licences to five years, and allowing companies to continue using bond facilities during audits.

At the request of business leaders, the government also decided to reduce the gap between the assessment value and customs value of imported goods. The government will also assist businesses in establishing a light engineering hub in Bogura.

Two business leaders who attended the meeting told The Daily Star that the government has already acquired 50 bighas of land near the Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (API) Industrial Park in Gajaria upazila of Munshiganj to set up a steam generator for the park.

They also urged the government to allow industrial units to buy CNG from filling stations at night, when vehicle demand is lower.

According to them, filling station operators are reluctant to sell CNG to industries during the day because of high demand from vehicles.

Garment sector leaders recently made the same request, citing an acute gas shortage that is disrupting industrial production.

The meeting also discussed Bangladesh's challenges in graduating from the group of least developed countries (LDCs) and issues related to the Third Terminal of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka.

Famed climber Purja, 9 more die

FROM PAGE 12

internationally after the Netflix documentary chronicling his journey "14 Peaks: Nothing Is Impossible" was released two years later.

Nepal's Prime Minister Balendra Shah offered his condolences over the "tragic" deaths of Purja and the other climbers, which he said "has shocked us".

Police in the mountainous northern Gilgit-Baltistan region said in a statement that high-altitude porters and rescue teams were carrying out a second day of the operation yesterday after the search was paused due to difficult weather conditions a day earlier.

Rescuers and military helicopters had been scouring the area, and teams stayed at the base camp overnight, according to the regional government.

The team was last in contact on Thursday morning, the official statement said, with reports emerging that evening of the powerful avalanche.

"Data from their tracking devices indicates that they were thrown hundreds of metres down the mountainside," Naila Kiani, from Pakistan's Alpine Club, told Le Monde newspaper.

Purja had written on X this week that he was close to becoming the first person to climb all 14 "super peaks" twice without oxygen.

"Broad Peak, I ask for nothing but safe passage up and back down," he wrote.

He had climbed all 14 "eight-thousanders" (peaks above 8,000 metres) in six months and six days between April and October 2019 -- then a record.

Broad Peak is the world's 12th highest mountain, located in the Karakoram range in northern Pakistan, and is regarded as one of the toughest and most technical climbs of all the 8,000-metre-plus ascents.

It was first summited in 1957 by an Austrian team.

Dhaka seeks info on Bangladeshi POWs

FROM PAGE 12

embassy official in Russia said, "The Bangladesh mission in Poland, which handles matters relating to Ukraine, will pursue the issue, although identifying the three men and obtaining details may take time.

"Any effort to repatriate them could be complicated, as prisoners of war are generally returned through negotiations or exchanges between the countries involved in the conflict."

He added, "Russia will have to request their return, and Ukraine will have to agree.... Repatriation will be possible only if both sides reach an understanding."

Whether Ukraine would agree depends on negotiations between Moscow and Kyiv, the official said.

Meanwhile, the Russian Embassy in Dhaka had not responded to The Daily Star's email seeking comment on the three Bangladeshis by the time this report was filed.

The three men are Rimel Mia, 27, from Sundarganj in Gaibandha; Sarwar Sumon, 40, from Trishal in Mymensingh; and Kamrul Hasan, 38, from Nabinagar in Brahmanbaria. They had all travelled to Russia for civilian employment before joining, or allegedly being drawn into, the Russian military.

In exclusive interviews with The Daily Star, Rimel and Sarwar said they joined the military after losing stable employment and coming under financial pressure, while Kamrul alleged that a broker, promising to take him to Italy, instead made him sign documents linked to the Russian armed forces.

The contracts were written in Russian, a language they said they did not understand.

Rimel was captured by Ukrainian forces on December 8, 2025, after spending around a month at a frontline position.

Sarwar and Kamrul surrendered on May 13, 2026, after spending around five days at a forested position where, they said, they had been deployed ahead of other foreign recruits.

None of the men said they had fired their weapons. Their families received little or no information about them for months.

Rimel's parents learnt that he was alive after seeing The Daily Star's interview with him shared on Facebook. Sarwar's relatives had feared he had been killed, while Kamrul's wife said she had received no direct news from him for more than two months.

The families have urged the government to establish official contact with the Ukrainian authorities and take steps to secure the men's safe return.

"We are poor and uneducated. We do not know whom to approach or what to do," Rimel's father, Md Syed Ali, told this newspaper. "The government knows what can be done."

Tarique to pick BNP presidential candidate

FROM PAGE 1

the country's overall political situation, public administration, the government's development activities and the proposed local government elections.

Standing Committee member and Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed told reporters that the Election Commission has already begun preparations for the presidential election, which must be held within 90 days of a vacancy under the constitution.

Asked about the BNP's nominee, he said, "Once the election schedule is announced, party Chairman Tarique Rahman will decide who will be the party's candidate."

Party sources said Fakhrul raised the issue during the meeting and sought the views of senior leaders. Recalling that Khaleda Zia had previously been entrusted with making such decisions as party chief, the leaders unanimously requested Tarique, as the current chairman, to make the final decision on the nominee.

The candidate nominated by the parliamentary majority is typically elected. With the BNP holding a majority in parliament, its nominee is almost certain to become the next president.

Party insiders said no Standing Committee member proposed any name from within or outside the party. The leadership remained cautious because of its previous experiences with two former presidents.

The meeting also reviewed the timing of local government elections and assessed whether the prevailing political, administrative and security conditions were suitable for holding the polls.

After reviewing the situation, the Standing Committee concluded that holding local government elections before January 2027 would not be practical.

A Standing Committee member, requesting anonymity, said, "The law and order situation has still not improved as expected. If the government cannot hold peaceful elections, it will have a negative impact."

During the discussion, Salahuddin assured the leaders that law and order would improve significantly within a short period.

Sources familiar with the meeting said they discussed how the worsening gas and power shortages have disrupted industries, power plants and fertiliser factories since July 22. Many households are also receiving little or no gas for cooking.

The gas shortage has reduced electricity generation and sharply increased outages. Last week, the power deficit exceeded 2,500 megawatts, up from less than 1,000MW earlier, the sources said.

Senior leaders warned that prolonged disruptions could fuel public dissatisfaction, hurt industrial production and put further pressure on the economy. They urged immediate administrative and technical measures to improve gas supplies and boost power generation.

Sources said the leaders decided to form, reconstitute or reorganise committees at different levels across the country ahead of the local government elections.

They also discussed strengthening the party's grassroots organisation, improving coordination among leaders and activists, and resolving internal disputes.

The meeting further reviewed the government's state reform initiatives and preparations for the BNP's national council.

The Standing Committee also reviewed recent political developments, including programmes announced by opposition parties to mark the July mass uprising anniversary, and clashes between BNP and National Citizen Party activists in different areas.

$20,000 US visa bond now mandatory

FROM PAGE 12

of Homeland Security, and the Department of the Treasury to assess the feasibility of administering a visa bond programme, has provided sufficient data to suggest that a visa bond programme is an effective tool for enforcing compliance among bonded visa holders."

In the pilot programme, consular officers could require bonds of $5,000, $10,000 or up to $15,000. The final rule eliminates the $5,000 option and raises the maximum bond to $20,000.

The final rule goes into effect on August 3 when it is scheduled for publication in the Federal Register.

In the list of 50 countries for whose citizens this program applies, 30 are from Africa. The list includes Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan.

Citizens of these countries applying for US tourist or business visas will now need to post a bond as a standard, permanent requirement, not a temporary pilot measure. This could affect students, workers and families from the region who travel to the US regularly or plan to in future.

US officials say the policy is intended to reduce visa overstays. State Department officials call the 2025 visa bond pilot a success. In 2024, nearly 45,500 visitors from the 50 listed countries overstayed their visas. In the pilot's first 10 months, that number dropped to fewer than 50 among covered applicants, according to the notice.

Immigration advocates argue it will deter legitimate travel to the United States.

Jamaat man arrested

FROM PAGE 12

confirmed Abdul Motin, officer-in-charge of Paba Police Station.

According to police, Faruk has long been providing healthcare services as a village doctor in the area. He also runs a pharmacy attached to his home, where he and his wife provide private tuition to children.

According to the case statement, the victim went to Faruk's house for private lessons on July 12. After she arrived, he sent the other students away and sexually harassed her.

After returning home, the girl broke down in tears and told her mother about the incident, the statement read.

Contacted by The Daily Star, the victim's mother said that when she confronted the accused's father, he advised her family not to pursue the matter and instead settle it between themselves.

"They are influential people, so we remained silent. But when news of the incident spread and police found out, they took Faruk into custody."

She demanded exemplary punishment for the accused.

Abdur Rahman Milon, chief of Jamaat's Boro Gachhi union unit, said Faruk is a full member of the party, while his brother serves as a ward secretary.

He claimed that BNP activists were exaggerating the incident.

"As far as I have heard, the incident took place quite some time ago. It had already been settled between the two families. Now BNP people have called the police and had him picked up."

Asked whether the party had taken any organisational action despite the incident having occurred some time ago, Milon said he had only recently become aware of it.

"I came to know about it only recently. I have already informed the responsible leaders. An investigation will now be conducted. If he is found guilty, organisational action will be taken."

Inside house of horror

FROM PAGE 12

the 2024 political changeover. Piles of debris still litter many of the rooms.

The narrow entrance on the ground floor, tucked beside a staircase, offers little clue to what lies inside. Visitors must lower their heads to squeeze through a cramped passage barely wide enough for one person. A few steps later, the passage opens into a maze of dim, narrow corridors lined with windowless concrete chambers.

Some of the chambers are so small they resemble concrete graves more than prison cells.

On the ground floor, investigators showed seven such compartments measuring roughly two feet by four feet, with ceilings so low that even a child would struggle to stand upright. An adult could do little more than sit with knees pressed against the chest. There was no sunlight, no fresh air, only a water tap and a small drainage opening through which detainees were forced to urinate and defecate.

Prosecutors, citing victims, said these are called the "cells of death". They said that after the change of government in 2024, a wall had been built to seal off the entrance to these cells. Investigators later broke down the wall during their inquiry.

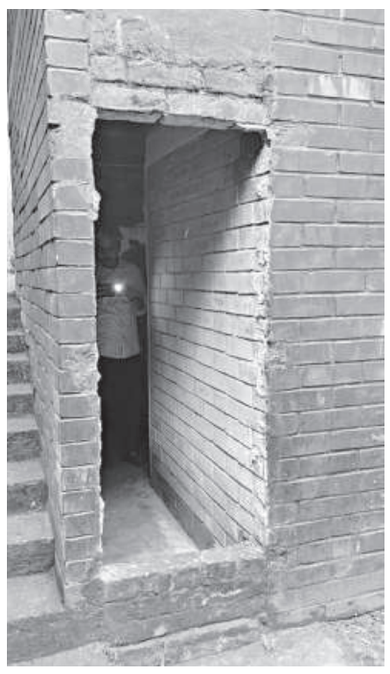
"Those seven cells were known as death cells because those taken there either never returned alive or were later taken away to be killed," Prosecutor Shyikh Mahdi, a member of the investigation team probing enforced disappearance cases, told The Daily Star during the visit.

Mahdi alleged that many detainees were injected with heavy sedatives before being taken away unconscious, shot dead, their abdomens slit open, their bodies wrapped in sacks and dumped into rivers.

According to him, the TFI facility was operated by Rab's intelligence wing until the fall of the Awami League government following the July uprising.

Outside the cells stood Sanjida Islam Tulee, coordinator of Maayer Daak, whose brother Sajedul Islam Sumon has remained missing since his enforced disappearance in December 2013.

"What we have learned is that my brother was picked up by Rab-1 members. We believe he was kept in one of these death cells," she told The Daily Star.



Entrance to Aynaghar

"There can be no greater violation of human rights than this," she said, demanding punishment for those responsible.

Although the building's western wall stands only a few yards from the busy Dhaka-Mymensingh highway, prosecutors said no outsider could have known what was happening inside because the cells had no windows, only a few openings for exhaust fans.

Another staircase descends to a lower section containing 10 more small cells – five on each side of a narrow corridor. Each measures about five feet by eight feet and can only be entered through another low, narrow doorway. Every cell has an open hole to be used as toilet.

Prosecutors said current Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed had been held in one of those cells for several days before being forcibly pushed across the Indian border.

Rab personnel assigned to guard the TFI cells, also referred to as the "hospital", stayed in another section of the ground floor.

Because the building has no electricity connection, prosecutors accompanying journalists carried torchlights throughout the inspection.

The first floor contains another 10 cells, each measuring about 14 feet by four to five feet. Another section houses two larger so-called VIP cells each with a small attached toilet.

Mir Quasem Bin Arman, now Jamaat lawmaker was allegedly held in one of the VIP cells for around eight years before being released, prosecutors said.

Directly opposite the VIP cells are three soundproof interrogation rooms, prosecutors said. The rooms once contained equipment including a motor-powered rotating steel chair and electric shock tools used to torture detainees.

Those on trial in two cases concerning alleged enforced disappearances and secret detentions at the TFI Cell and the Joint Interrogation Cell allegedly operated by DGFI include deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina and several former Rab officials who have denied the allegations.

"Many people may think the stories about the Aynaghar are nothing more than rumours. But this is the grim reality," Chief Prosecutor Aminul at a briefing at Rab-1 premises after the inspection.

"Several victims came out of the detention cells after August 5, 2024. We still do not know the whereabouts or fate of more than 250 victims of enforced disappearance, including Ilias Ali and Sumon."

Asked whether those responsible for allegedly destroying evidence at the TFI Cell would be brought to justice, Aminul said investigators would look into the matter.

ABM Hamidul Mishbah, a defence lawyer representing some of the accused Rab officials, told the briefing that the prosecution had failed to make any specific allegation that his clients had detained victims at the facility. "What is stated in the formal charge does not match what is here," he said.

Infantino's U-turn

FROM PAGE 12

unite and improve," Infantino said.

"As a result, this proposal will not proceed."

He added that the project had been designed to strengthen member associations but acknowledged that it had become too divisive.

"Having listened carefully to all the views, it has become clear that the project has created divisions of a nature that, regardless of the level of support, are no longer in the interest of the objective set out in the first place," he said.

Infantino pledged to rebuild consensus, saying he would bring stakeholders together "in the spirit of shared interest in our game."

UEFA, however, issued a scathing response, saying the damage to trust had already been done.

"The current FIFA leadership has not only lost UEFA's confidence but also that of many other members of the football family," the European governing body said.

It accused Infantino of abandoning promises of transparency that helped him win election in 2016.

"On both these promises, he has failed to deliver," UEFA said.

"The shabby, back room, opaque deal he hatched and tried to force through was anything but transparent."

UEFA also argued that FIFA, with reserves of more than $5 billion, should already be using its own resources to benefit the game instead of seeking outside investors.

The AFC welcomed FIFA's decision to withdraw the proposal but stressed that any initiative affecting global football should be "presented and discussed with the Confederations, the FIFA Council, Member Associations and other stakeholders in a timely, transparent and meaningful manner."

The controversy represents the most significant challenge to Infantino's authority since he became FIFA president in 2016. Having previously secured two unopposed re-elections and expected to seek another term next year, he now faces growing criticism from some of the world's most influential football bodies.

A life rooted in language

FROM PAGE 3

Tanvir Haider Chaudhury, son of Prof Chaudhury and CEO of Kazi Food Industries, shared glimpses of his father, who was abducted when Tanvir was only four years old.

He recalled how he and his late brother, Sumon, would eagerly ask their father what he had brought for them when he returned from Dhaka University.

"A heart full of love," their father would initially reply, laughing at their disappointed faces before pulling gifts from his pockets.

Tanvir also recalled the chilling irony of the abductors telling his father not to eat lunch at home, claiming that "arrangements for food" had been made at their destination.

He said the trauma of December 14, 1971, remained a defining moment for the family. It happened at his uncle's house in Tikatuli just before lunch.

Masked men speaking in Bangla arrived, addressing his father as "Sir" and assuring the distraught family that they would return him shortly. One of the abductors' masks slipped, revealing Chowdhury Mueen Uddin, who was later convicted in absentia for war crimes, he said.

Tanvir also spoke about his father's academic legacy.

Prof Chaudhury stood first class first in Bangla Honours at Calcutta University in 1946, securing record-breaking marks in a hundred years at the Bangla department.

Addressing contemporary socio-political shifts, Tanvir expressed concern that the "July spirit" was being used to distance the nation from its Bangla roots and Rabindranath Tagore.

He said during the recent student-led movements, he found himself posting Tagore's poems on social media because of their relevance to the struggle against injustice.

"It is surprising that some now suggest we must abandon Tagore to embrace the July spirit," he said, emphasising that his father lived and died for a vision of universal humanism and a secular Bangalee identity that should not be discarded.

Tanvir said his father's 1971 diary revealed a deep commitment to the idea of "Bangladesh" long before it became a reality, with entries describing students marching with the new flag in March 1971.

He said the nation must return to the martyrs' ideals of a secular, liberal society to truly honour them.

Educationist and historian Prof Perween Hasan recalled Prof Chaudhury as a quiet, disciplined and deeply principled man whose outlook was shaped by Santiniketan.

"He did not merely study at Santiniketan; he carried Santiniketan within him," she said, adding that his speech, conduct and commitment to Bangalee culture set him apart.

She said he had drawn up plans for "Ananda Kanan", a nature-based school modelled on Santiniketan that he hoped would one day become a university.

Prof Souvik Reza of the Department of Bangla at Rajshahi University said Prof Chaudhury's martyrdom had ultimately overshadowed his birth centenary because of his sacrifice and intellectual legacy.

Rooted in the environment of Tagore's Santiniketan, Chaudhury's diverse works -- spanning stories, poems and essays -- carried a deep political consciousness. Though not a politician, he could not evade the political realities of a turbulent era, Reza said.

During the 1971 non-cooperation movement, the otherwise composed scholar displayed rare fervour, reciting a passionate poem at the Bangla Academy, he added.

Chaudhury's literary contributions, notably his 1963 book "Robi Parikrama", were praised by Dr Muhammad Shahidullah for illuminating Tagore's genius.

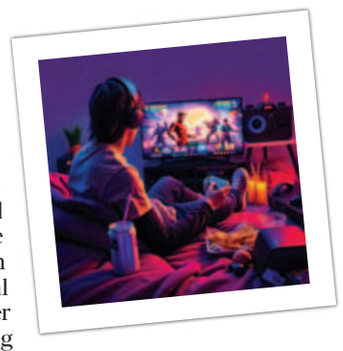
Reza said Chaudhury viewed literature as a "crystal" with multifaceted truths rather than an exact science, applying this humanist perspective to figures such as Vidyasagar and contemporary young writers whom he championed.

He said if Prof Chaudhury were asked about his identity today, he would likely reply with the simple yet profound realisation: "I am still awakened".

The event was moderated by The Daily Star journalist Emran Mahfuz.

Can the right video game help tackle loneliness? The answer may surprise you.

STAR HEALTH DESK



Video games have long been blamed for keeping people indoors, but new research suggests the right kind of game could actually become part of the solution to severe social isolation. Rather than encouraging withdrawal, carefully designed games may help people reconnect with others and gradually rebuild confidence.

Researchers surveyed 529 adults in Japan who regularly play video games to understand what people at greater risk of long-term social withdrawal enjoy most in gaming. Surprisingly, they found that favourite game genres were largely similar regardless of a person's level of isolation. The difference lay in how people preferred to play and what they hoped to gain from the experience.

Those who were more socially withdrawn showed a stronger preference for story-rich adventures, thoughtful strategy, and games that encourage teamwork rather than competition. Many also reported unpleasant experiences with hostile online players, making them more likely to favour supportive, cooperative play instead of confrontational matches. The findings suggest that games with engaging stories, memorable characters, simple controls and shorter playing sessions may offer a more welcoming space. Players also appreciated relaxing tasks, a sense of gradual progress and the freedom to play at their own pace. These features may provide comfort without adding pressure, while encouraging small but meaningful social interactions.

Researchers also recommend limiting toxic behaviour in online communities and rewarding kindness and cooperation. Some games that encourage players to explore their neighbourhoods could even motivate people to spend more time outdoors and meet others naturally.

The authors stress that games are not a replacement for professional support. Excessive gaming can create its own problems. Instead, they believe thoughtfully designed games could become a gentle stepping stone, helping isolated people regain confidence, form positive connections and, eventually, re-engage with the world beyond the screen.

GLOBAL STANDARDS in healthcare could reshape Bangladesh's future

DR MD ABU KAWSAR SHAPON





Every year, thousands of Bangladeshis leave the country in search of medical care they believe they cannot find at home. Their journeys often begin with hope but come at an enormous financial cost, draining billions of dollars from the national economy. While this trend highlights gaps in healthcare, it also reveals an opportunity that Bangladesh can no longer afford to ignore.

The country has made remarkable progress in expanding healthcare services over the years, reaching millions who once had limited access to treatment. Yet many families still choose hospitals in neighbouring countries because they trust the quality of care, modern facilities and overall patient experience more than what they expect locally.

According to available estimates, between 450,000 and 800,000 Bangladeshis travel overseas each year for treatment. Their combined spending is believed to reach almost US$5 billion annually. If even a large share of that money remained within the country, it could strengthen hospitals, create jobs and stimulate wider economic growth.

Improving healthcare, however, is about much more than constructing impressive buildings. Patients also expect timely treatment, reliable equipment, clean surroundings and respectful communication. Confidence is built when people feel safe, informed and cared for throughout their journey, from diagnosis to recovery.

Emergency transport is another area demanding urgent attention. Patients in critical condition often lose valuable time travelling between districts in search of specialised treatment. Faster ambulance services, better coordination and improved emergency response could save countless lives while strengthening public trust in the healthcare system.

Modern healthcare also depends on organised record keeping, better use of digital tools and continuous learning among healthcare workers. Equally important is kindness. A reassuring conversation, clear explanations and compassionate care can shape a patient's experience just as much as medicines or machines.

Experts believe Bangladesh could become a destination for international patients if the country invests wisely, raises service standards and promotes itself with confidence. Such progress would not only reduce the need for Bangladeshis to seek treatment abroad but could also attract visitors from neighbouring nations, creating a new source of national income.

Achieving this vision will require cooperation between the government, private hospitals and healthcare professionals. Encouraging local innovation, supporting research and ensuring fair access to quality care should become national priorities. Long-term planning, rather than short-term fixes, will determine whether Bangladesh can compete with established regional healthcare destinations.

The country has already demonstrated that determined reforms can transform important sectors. Healthcare deserves the same ambition. By investing in quality, trust and patient-centred services, Bangladesh has the chance to keep more families at home during their most difficult moments while opening the door to a stronger economy. Better healthcare is no longer only a public service; it is an investment in the nation's future.

The writer is a joint general secretary of the Association of Bangladesh China Alumni (ABCA), and Managing Director of Long Life Hospital, Dhaka. E-mail: shapon.ch2000@gmail.com



Beauty beyond the mirror

DR SUMAIYA KHALED



Smooth skin, fuller lips and sharper features have become more common than ever. Social media filters, celebrity culture and constant exposure to polished faces have made aesthetic treatments seem almost ordinary. While many people choose these procedures to feel more confident, experts warn that the growing trend also raises questions about how we see ourselves.

The desire to improve one's appearance is not new. What has changed is the pressure to meet increasingly narrow beauty ideals. Endless scrolling through edited images can make ordinary faces appear inadequate, leading some people to believe they must change their looks to feel accepted.

For many, aesthetic treatments bring genuine satisfaction and help restore confidence after illness, injury or personal insecurity. Yet when self-worth depends entirely on appearance, confidence can become fragile. The pursuit of perfection often shifts the goalposts, leaving people wanting just one more change.

Mental wellbeing thrives when confidence comes from more than the reflection in a mirror. Healthy relationships, personal achievements, kindness and self-acceptance all shape lasting self-respect.

As aesthetic treatments continue to rise in popularity, the real challenge is not deciding whether to alter our appearance, but ensuring our value is never measured solely by it. Beauty may attract attention, but self-respect sustains confidence.

E-mail:
sumaiya.khaled@thedailystar.net

What if the loudest threat to our health isn't audible?

From quieter streets to mindful habits, small actions can create healthier cities for everyone.

DR B A SADIQ



The modern city rarely pauses. From the first rush of morning traffic to the late-night hum of construction, generators and crowded streets, noise has become the soundtrack of everyday life. Many people accept it as the price of progress, yet this constant roar carries a hidden cost that often goes unnoticed. What surrounds us every day is not simply sound—it is a growing threat to our health and happiness.

Unlike many other distractions, noise cannot simply be switched off by the mind. Even when people believe they have become used to it, the body continues to react. Constant exposure keeps us on edge, making it harder to relax, focus or enjoy moments of peace. Over time, this can lead to tiredness, irritability and difficulty concentrating, affecting both work and personal life.

Children are among those who suffer the most. A noisy environment can make it harder for them to read, learn and stay attentive in the classroom. Adults are not spared either. Busy workplaces filled with constant background noise often see reduced productivity and more mistakes, while homes lose their role as places of comfort and rest.

The impact extends beyond mental wellbeing. Long-term exposure to loud surroundings has been linked to hearing problems, disturbed sleep and an increased risk of several long-lasting health conditions. Poor sleep alone can weaken the body, reduce energy and affect overall quality of life, creating a cycle that is difficult to break.

For cities like Dhaka, the challenge is especially urgent. Heavy traffic, unnecessary honking, construction work and loudspeakers often push noise levels far beyond what is considered safe. Although laws exist to control excessive noise, weak enforcement and limited public awareness continue to allow the problem to grow.

Creating quieter communities does not require silence everywhere. It begins with small but meaningful changes, such as avoiding unnecessary honking, following construction rules, respecting quiet hours and designing neighbourhoods with people's wellbeing in mind. Stronger policies and greater public awareness must work hand in hand.

A peaceful environment is more than a luxury. It allows people to think clearly, sleep better, learn effectively and connect with one another. As cities continue to grow, protecting moments of calm may become one of the simplest yet most powerful investments we can make for healthier, happier lives and future generations.

The writer is the Manging Director of Surecell Medical Bangladesh Ltd.
E-mail: dr.sadiq70@yahoo.com





Turning the tide on drowning

A simple roadmap to reduce drowning through safer communities, better awareness and stronger preparedness.

Every year, nearly 300,000 people lose their lives to drowning, making it one of the world's most overlooked yet preventable causes of death. Children aged between five and 14 are among those most at risk, while more than 90 per cent of deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries. Rivers, ponds, lakes, wells, household water containers and swimming pools all become dangerous when safety measures are absent. Climate change is adding to the threat as floods, storms and rising temperatures increase people's exposure to water hazards.

Ahead of World Drowning Prevention Day, which is July 25, the World Health Organisation unveiled "PROTECT", a package of seven practical actions designed to help countries save lives. The approach focuses on creating safer places around water, improving rescue skills, protecting people who work on or near water, making water transport safer, teaching children swimming and water safety, strengthening childcare and supervision, and preparing communities for floods and other emergencies. Rather than relying on a single solution, PROTECT encourages governments, schools, families and local communities to work together.

Experts say every drowning is a tragedy that can often be prevented. By turning proven ideas into everyday action, countries can reduce needless deaths and protect future generations. The message is clear: preventing drowning begins long before anyone enters the water; with awareness, preparation and collective responsibility.

When hidden stones strike from within

DR M A KARIM



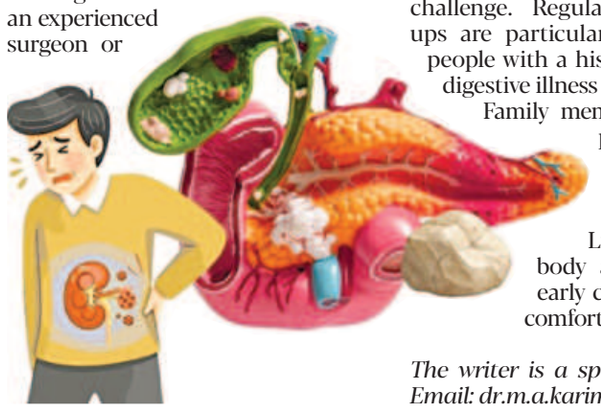
Most people have heard of kidney stones or gallstones, but few realise that stones can also develop in the pancreas. Although the thought sounds alarming, specialists say there is no reason to panic because timely treatment can prevent serious problems. The real danger lies not in the condition itself, but in ignoring persistent warning signs.

These stones form when hard deposits build up inside the small passage that carries digestive juices from the pancreas. Once that pathway becomes blocked, the body struggles to digest food properly, leading to discomfort that often worsens over time. Severe pain in the upper abdomen, pain spreading to the back, repeated vomiting, unexplained weight loss and yellowing of the eyes or skin should never be dismissed as ordinary stomach trouble.

Long-standing inflammation of the pancreas remains the biggest risk factor. Heavy alcohol use can increase the likelihood by damaging the organ over many years. In some people, gallstones may trigger the problem, while others inherit a greater tendency because of their family history.

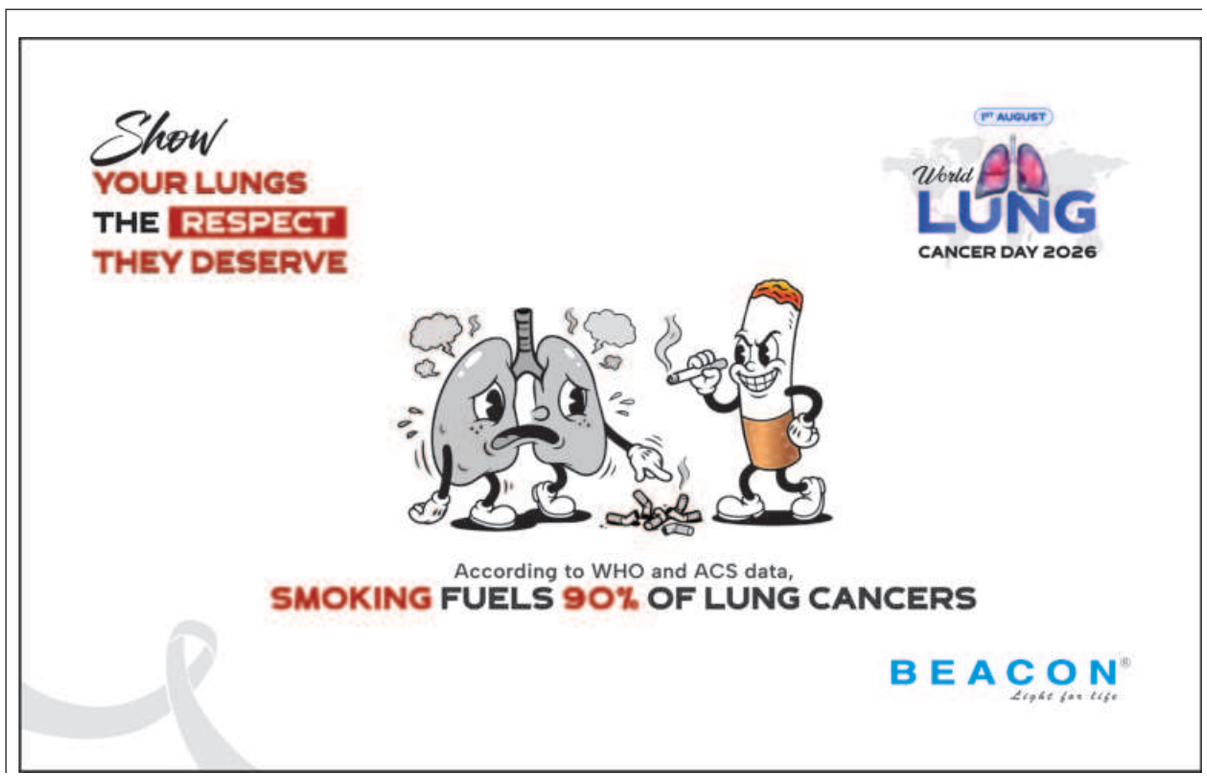
The encouraging news is that modern care has transformed the outlook for people living with this condition. Doctors can now identify the problem through appropriate tests and recommend treatment that suits the size and position of the stones. Early medical attention often relieves pain, restores normal digestion and helps prevent further damage.

Health experts also urge people to avoid self-medication or relying on home remedies when symptoms continue. Painkillers may briefly mask discomfort, but they do not remove the underlying blockage. Seeking advice from an experienced surgeon or specialist remains the safest course of action.



The message is simple: do not ignore persistent abdominal pain, especially when it is accompanied by vomiting, digestive difficulties or sudden weight loss. While pancreatic stones are less common than other forms of stones, they are treatable when recognised early. Prompt diagnosis, sensible lifestyle choices and professional medical care can make all the difference. Rather than fearing the condition, people should focus on recognising the warning signs and acting without delay. Awareness, not anxiety, is the strongest defence, reminding us that early action often turns a frightening diagnosis into a manageable health challenge. Regular health check-ups are particularly important for people with a history of long-term digestive illness or heavy drinking. Family members should also pay attention if symptoms keep returning instead of disappearing. Listening to the body and seeking help early can protect health, comfort alike.

The writer is a speacialist surgeon.
Email: dr.m.a.karim23@gmail.com



Star
DHAKA SUNDAY AUGUST 2, 2026, SRABAN 18, 1433 BS
SPORT

What to WATCH

SONY SPORTS 5
Commonwealth Games
Live from 2:00 pm
T SPORTS
Lanka Premier League
Dambulla vs Jaffna
Live from 8:00 pm
TEN CRICKET
The Hundred
Live from 7:30 pm

INFANTINO'S FAILED GAMBLE

STAR SPORTS DESK

FIFA yesterday abandoned its proposal to sell a minority stake in its commercial business after the plan triggered fierce opposition from confederations and member associations over concerns about transparency and governance. The governing body had hoped to raise up to $4.2 billion by selling around 20 per cent of a new commercial entity, FIFA Forward Enterprise (FFE), valuing it at $20 billion. While the proposal has now been shelved, the backlash has continued, with UEFA, several national associations, and others saying the episode had eroded their confidence in FIFA president Gianni Infantino's leadership because of the way the plan was conceived and presented.

JULY 28, 2026

The Times reveals FIFA is quietly exploring a multi-billion-dollar private equity deal involving the commercial rights to FIFA-run events, including the World Cup, sending shockwaves through world football.

JULY 29, 2026

FIFA unveils FFE, saying it aims to raise $4.2 billion by selling minority, non-controlling stakes to long-term investors.

Member associations are promised a $20 million upfront payment in early 2027, with funding for the 2027-2030 cycle rising from $8 million to $20 million.

Backlash begins immediately. UEFA condemns the proposal, while CONCACAF, the English FA, AFC, and EU sports chief Glenn Micallef all question the plan and the lack of consultation.

FIFA sets September 19 as the deadline for member associations to back the proposal to qualify for the financial payout.

JULY 30, 2026

Infantino insists the proposal is "an opportunity, not an obligation."

CAF calls for consultation with its members before taking a position.

UEFA and its 55 member associations threaten to boycott FIFA competitions, including the World Cup, if the proposal proceeds.

JULY 31, 2026

CONCACAF's 41 member associations unanimously reject the proposal.

AFC joins UEFA and CONCACAF, expressing serious concerns and calling for greater consultation.

Former US Soccer president Carlos Cordeiro, a senior adviser to Infantino, resigns, calling FFE "a bad deal for football."

FIFA vows to continue consultations despite mounting opposition.

"Having listened carefully to all the views, it has become clear that the project has created divisions of a nature that, regardless of the level of support, are no longer in the interest of the objective set out in the first place... As a result, this proposal will not proceed."

Infantino statement on Saturday



AUGUST 1, 2026

FIFA chief operating officer Kevin Lamour distances himself from the proposal, describing it as "the project of one person" and saying staff felt "deceived".

FIFA scraps the proposal, with Infantino conceding that the divisions it had created outweighed its intended benefits.

REACTIONS AFTER FFE WAS SCRAPPED

UEFA: "The current FIFA leadership has not only lost UEFA's confidence but also that of many other members of the football family... This is a victory for the whole game. But rebuilding trust in FIFA has only just begun."

England FA: "We fully support UEFA's position. It is time for a full review of FIFA's leadership and governance to ensure the game is run transparently and for the benefit of all 211 member associations."

German FA (DFB): "The FIFA President acted unilaterally, without transparency... A fundamentally different culture must take hold at FIFA, where decisions are discussed and made collectively."

Dutch FA (KNVB): "The way this process unfolded has led to a fundamental breach of trust... The KNVB no longer has confidence in Gianni Infantino's leadership."

AFC: "The future of global football must be shaped through proper consultation, collective dialogue and respect for established governance structures."

WHAT IT COULD MEAN FOR INFANTINO

FIFA's next presidential election is on March 19, 2027, in Rabat, Morocco, where Infantino can seek a final four-year term. Infantino was elected in 2016 for his first term and re-elected unopposed in both 2019 and 2023.

A candidate needs the backing of 106 of FIFA's 211 member associations. The backlash from major confederations has complicated Infantino's political position.

Strong criticism from AFC president Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa, Infantino's main rival in 2016, has fuelled speculation over a possible challenge. Candidates can enter the race until November 18, 2026.

The abandoned FFE project was widely seen as a potential platform for Infantino to retain significant influence over FIFA's commercial operations even after his presidency ends.

Injury-hit Tigers receive Litton boost

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh received a timely boost amid their injury concerns as wicketkeeper-batter Litton Das was yesterday added to the squad for the opening Test of the two-match series in Australia, beginning on August 13, after recovering faster than expected from a calf injury.

Litton had been sidelined since sustaining the injury during the home ODI series against Australia on June 14 and was omitted from the initial squad announced on July 26. Although the injury was not considered serious, his recovery took longer than expected, ruling him out of the subsequent T20I series against Australia and the tour of Zimbabwe.

After treatment and medical assessments in Bangladesh and Singapore, Litton was initially expected to return for the second Test. However, his rehabilitation progressed well enough for him to be added to the squad for the series opener.

"The 31-year-old batsman has been sidelined since June due to the injury, but has responded well to his rehabilitation programme and will be in consideration for selection for the opening Test," the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) said in a press release yesterday.

BCB cricket operations in-charge Shahriar Nafees echoed that view but stressed Litton must still pass a fitness test before being considered for the first Test.



PHOTO: BCB

"There is still time for him to undergo a fitness test before the first Test, and even more time before the second. His recovery has been very satisfactory, which is why the BCB felt it was worthwhile to send him with the squad."

BCB cricket operations in-charge **Shahriar Nafees**

"When the Test squad was announced on July 26, based on the assessment at that time, he was not fit enough. However, from July 26 to today [August 1], his recovery has been very encouraging," Nafees told The Daily Star.

"The BCB medical department and the selectors are now confident that his rehabilitation is progressing well... He has already resumed training, batting and hitting.

"There is still time for him to undergo a fitness test before the first Test, and even more time before the second. His recovery has been very satisfactory, which is why the BCB felt it was worthwhile to send him with the squad," added the former Bangladesh captain.

Litton's inclusion is a major relief for Bangladesh, who are already without pace spearhead Nahid Rana for the series and will miss fellow pacer Shoriful Islam in the opening Test due to injury.

Batting at lower-middle order, Litton has displayed outstanding red-ball form since 2025, scoring two centuries and three fifties in his last six Tests. Both centuries came in his last five innings, and Bangladesh will hope he can carry that form into their first tour Down Under since 2003.

The first contingent of the Bangladesh team departed for Darwin on Friday, while the second group, including Litton, is scheduled to leave Dhaka today.

Bangladesh will play a three-day warm-up match against a Cricket Australia XI at the DXC Arena from August 6 to 8.

The first Test will be held at Marrara Cricket Ground in Darwin from August 13 to 17, while the second will take place at the Great Barrier Reef Arena in Mackay from August 21 to 25, marking the venue's first-ever Test. Both matches are part of the 2025-27 ICC World Test Championship cycle.

Bangladesh grouped with Sri Lanka, Bhutan

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh have been drawn alongside Sri Lanka and Bhutan in Group A of the 2026 SAFF Championship, while holders and record nine-time champions India will face the Maldives and Pakistan in Group B.

The 15th edition of the tournament will be held in Dhaka from November 4 to 17, marking Bangladesh's return as hosts of the regional showpiece after the 2018 edition.

The draw, held at the SAFF Congress in Thimphu yesterday, kept the region's two biggest football markets apart in the group stage. Bangladesh were placed in a separate pot as hosts, while India were seeded as the highest-ranked team in South Asia (138), ensuring the two sides could not be drawn in the same group.

Bangladesh will now begin their campaign against a group featuring two familiar regional opponents, while Nepal's participation remains uncertain. Nepal were excluded from the draw due to their FIFA suspension, but SAFF have given them until September to have the ban lifted. If they receive clearance within the deadline, they will be added to Group A.

GROUP A
Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka

GROUP B
India, Maldives, Pakistan

*** Nepal will be in Group A if FIFA ban is lifted*
*** The top two teams from each group will progress to the semifinals*

SALAHUDDIN RE-ELECTED UNOPPOSED

Kazi Salahuddin has been re-elected unopposed as president of the South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) for a fifth consecutive term yesterday.

The former BFF president and ex-Bangladesh captain, now 72, has led the region's football governing body since 2009.

A previous clause in SAFF's constitution barred anyone over the age of 70 from holding office, but that provision was removed during a constitutional overhaul last year, paving the way for Salahuddin's continuation, extending his tenure as the longest-serving president in SAFF's history.

In a congratulatory message, SAFF said: "Heartiest congratulations to Mr Kazi Md Salahuddin on being re-elected as the President of SAFF!"

"This achievement is a testament to your dedication, vision, and unwavering commitment to the development of football in South Asia. May your new term bring greater progress, unity, and success for the region's football family. Wishing you all the best for the journey ahead!" the statement added.



Sri Lanka's Rumesh Tharanga Pathirage celebrates after winning the men's javelin throw final during the athletics competition at the Commonwealth Games at Scotstoun Stadium in Glasgow on July 31, 2026. After India's Neeraj Chopra won Olympic gold at Tokyo 2020 and Pakistan's Arshad Nadeem triumphed in Paris 2024, it was the turn of Sri Lanka's 23-year-old former cricketer to claim the Commonwealth title. Pathirage took gold ahead of Chopra, while Nadeem finished ninth.

PHOTO: AFP





Up to $20,000 US visa bond now mandatory

Bangladesh, 49 others put on permanent list

AGENCIES

The US State Department will make permanent a visa bond programme that could require applicants from 50 countries, including Bangladesh, to post bonds of up to $20,000 when seeking US visas, according to a federal notice posted online on Friday.



The Federal Register notice applies to B1 and B2 visas, which are issued for business and tourism travel, reported Reuters.

"Consular officers may require covered nonimmigrant visa applicants to post a bond of up to $20,000 as a condition of visa issuance, as determined by the consular officers," the notice said.

"The 2025 visa bond pilot, which provided a framework for the Department of State, the Department

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Students restore graffiti at Dhaka University yesterday ahead of the second July Uprising Day on August 5. The university is preserving graffiti painted across the campus during the 2024 student-led mass uprising.

PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

Inside house of horror

ICT travels to Aynaghar in Rab's Uttara HQ

SHARIFUL ISLAM *and* SIRAJUL ISLAM RUBEL

From the outside, the ageing two-storey building inside the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab)-1 headquarters in Uttara appears almost idyllic.

Blanketed by lush green trees whose branches swayed gently in the breeze, the building offered a rare respite from the oppressive summer heat.

Behind those walls, however, lies one of Dhaka's darkest secrets.

For the first time, local journalists were allowed inside the Task Force for Interrogation (TFI) Cell -- widely known as "Aynaghar" -- where investigators allege scores of political opponents and perceived dissenters under the Awami League government were secretly detained, tortured and, in some cases, never seen again.

Yesterday, judges of the International Crimes Tribunal-1, accompanied by prosecutors, defence lawyers, members of the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances inspected the alleged detention centre as part of ongoing crimes against humanity trials over enforced disappearances.

The building, surrounded by nearly 10-foot-high boundary walls topped with barbed wire, contains 29 cells spread across its upper and lower floors. Prosecutors said almost all of the cells had their walls broken or removed in what appeared to be an attempt to destroy evidence after

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Dhaka seeks info on Bangladeshi POWs in Ukraine

Missions in Russia, Poland, Russian embassy in Dhaka contacted



Rimel Mia



Sarwar Sumon



Kamrul Hasan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The foreign ministry has contacted Bangladesh's missions in Russia and Poland, as well as the Russian Embassy in Dhaka, seeking details about three Bangladeshis being held as prisoners of war (POWs) in Ukraine, a ministry official said yesterday.

The development came after The Daily Star interviewed the three men, whose families appealed to the government to bring them home after months of uncertainty.

"The recent incident involving three Bangladeshis being held as prisoners of war in Ukraine has come to our notice," the foreign ministry official, requesting anonymity, told The Daily Star.

The ministry has asked the Bangladesh embassies in Moscow and Warsaw, and the Russian Embassy in Dhaka, to inquire into the matter and take the necessary steps, the official said.

According to the official, the Russian Embassy informed the foreign ministry that it had alerted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow about the issue.

Speaking to this newspaper separately, a Bangladesh

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Escalation feared as US tells citizens to leave ME

US media say strikes could begin this weekend as Trump threatens to hit Iran 'very hard'

AGENCIES

US embassies in several Middle Eastern capitals yesterday warned American citizens to beware an "unforeseen escalation" in the regional conflict and urged them to be ready to leave hours after President Donald Trump threatened to hit Iran "very hard".

His threat came as US media reported Trump was considering renewed heavy attacks as soon as this weekend, including against energy infrastructure targets.

"Americans in the region should consider departing, or be prepared to depart should there be escalation," said a security alert, versions of which were posted on social media by the US missions in Amman, Jerusalem, Muscat, Baghdad and Beirut.

The messages urged citizens to check flight details and to follow safety advice from local authorities.

"Americans currently in the Middle East should exercise caution and heightened vigilance and should be prepared for flight cancellations, periodic airspace closures, and potential travel disruptions," it said.

After more than five months of war, which began on February 28 when the United States and Israel launched strikes on Iran, there is seemingly no end to the conflict, with resumed tit-for-tat attacks.

"We'll be hitting him very hard and, you know, at some point they're going to say, 'We just can't take it anymore'," Trump said Friday as he hosted a cabinet meeting at the Camp David presidential retreat in Maryland.

The Wall Street Journal later reported that Trump had ordered a fresh attack aimed at convincing Tehran to surrender, which could begin as soon as this weekend, citing unnamed US officials.

CBS News meanwhile reported that the United States and Israel were planning joint strikes on energy-related targets, possibly throughout the weekend. Such targets would likely be oil refineries and power plants.

Trump has repeatedly threatened to strike Iran's vital infrastructure throughout the war, vowing last week to destroy a bridge or power plant every time ships in the vital Strait of Hormuz are attacked.

The president had not yet given the green light for the campaign, but Israel and the US were coordinating, CBS said, citing multiple unnamed sources.

The report comes just days after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited Washington and met with Trump and US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth.

Some White House aides voiced strong objections to the plan at the cabinet meeting, the CBS report said.

If the plan went forward, it would mark the first time that Israel has joined in attacks on Iran since the initial phase of the war.

Reports say attacks may target Iran's energy infrastructure | Iran warns flames of war will engulf the region, US | Reports of attack come after Israel PM visits White House | Tanker struck by 'unknown projectile' off Oman

AVALANCHE ON BROAD PEAK

Famed climber Purja, 9 more die

AGENCIES

Celebrated Nepali climber Nirmal Purja, who set a record for the fastest ascent of the world's 14 highest mountains, died in an avalanche during an expedition in Pakistan, his company said yesterday.



"Today it is with profound sadness and immense heartbreak that we confirm that Nirmal 'Nimsdai' Purja tragically lost his life following the avalanche on Broad Peak," his expedition organising company Elite Exped said in an Instagram post.

"We have also received confirmation that other members of the expedition sadly did not survive," it added, without giving details.

Purja, 43, and nine others had been missing since Thursday after being struck by an avalanche on the 8,051-metre (26,414-foot) Broad Peak, the world's 12th highest mountain, a technically difficult climb in Pakistan's Gilgit-Baltistan region.

The 10 mountaineers were caught in an avalanche around midday on Thursday. Six of the 10 climbers were Nepalis, and the others were from Pakistan, Oman, the US and China.

Purja, who served with Britain's Brigade of Gurkhas before joining the Special Boat Squadron of the Royal Marines, broke multiple climbing records since becoming a full-time mountaineer and tour guide.

Purja completed the record-breaking feat in six months in 2019. He became widely known

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Infantino's U-turn fails to quell backlash

AGENCIES

FIFA president Gianni Infantino's leadership came under renewed scrutiny on Saturday after he abandoned plans to bring private investment into the commercial rights of the World Cup, prompting UEFA to declare it had lost confidence in the FIFA leadership.

The proposal, unveiled on Tuesday, would have seen FIFA create a new commercial subsidiary, FIFA Forward Enterprise (FFE), to manage competitions including the World Cup and Club World Cup. FIFA said selling a stake in the venture could raise up to $4.2 billion, based on a valuation of $20 billion.

Under the plan, each of FIFA's 211 member associations would have received a one-off payment of $20 million in early 2027, while funding through the FIFA Forward programme for 2027-2030 would have increased from $8 million to $20 million.

However, the proposal sparked a fierce backlash from UEFA, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) and CONCACAF, all of whom criticised FIFA for failing to consult key stakeholders before announcing the plan.

Hours after shelving the proposal, Infantino defended his decision, saying unity remained FIFA's priority.

"Our purpose has always been -- and will always be -- to

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Rescuers work outside a multi-storey residential building damaged in a Russian air attack on Kyiv yesterday. Russia pounded Kyiv and the region in a heavy ballistic missile attack early yesterday, killing 10 people, as President Volodymyr Zelenskiy warned that Ukraine had run out of interceptor missiles for its US Patriot air defence systems.

PHOTO: AFP

Jamaat man arrested over child sexual harassment

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Rajshahi*



Omar Faruk

A Jamaat-e-Islami activist on Friday was shown arrested in a case over the sexual harassment of a nine-year-old girl in Rajshahi's Paba upazila.

The detainee, Omar Faruk, is a full member of Jamaat-e-Islami's Ward 4 unit of Boro Gachhi Union and works as a village doctor, police and a local Jamaat leader said.

Police detained him from Pakarmatha on Friday evening, after which the victim's mother filed a case against him under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act.

Faruk was then shown arrested in the case,

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