

"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

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The Daily Star

SECOND EDITION

DHAKA SUNDAY AUGUST 2, 2026

REGD. NO. DA 781 | VOL. XXXVI NO. 187 | SRABAN 18, 1433 BS | www.thedailystar.net | SAFAR 18 1448 HIJRI | 16 PAGES: TK 15.00



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".

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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.

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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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