

"Talks with Oman [to reopen Starit of Hormuz] approaching the final stages."

Abbas Araghchi
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The Daily Star

SECOND EDITION

DHAKA SUNDAY AUGUST 9, 2026

REGD. NO. DA 781 | VOL. XXXVI NO. 194 | SRABAN 25, 1433 BS | www.thedailystar.net | SAFAR 25, 1448 HIJRI | 16 PAGES: TK 15.00



FAMILY CARD

A cushion for those struggling to get by

Govt to take up Tk 2,400cr project for surveys, administrative costs

REJAUL KARIM BYRON, AHSAN HABIB *and* **SOHRAB HOSSAIN**

On a low-lying island in Patuakhali, 32-year-old Tanjila Begum's husband works irregularly as a day labourer in nearby watermelon fields, where seasonal tidal surges often destroy crops and wipe out daily earnings.

"We are a landless family. My husband works as a day labourer, and I also work in people's homes. But work is not always available, so we find it difficult to make ends meet," said Tanjila.

Now she receives Tk 2,500 every month directly into her digital account and sets aside Tk 500 as a reserve for periods when bad weather prevents outdoor work, using the rest to buy basic food and educational supplies for her young son.



- Tk 2,500 a month
- Women at the centre
- 1.61cr families by 2030
- AI-assisted verification

Tanjila is one of 808 initial recipients in a pilot project in Galachipa upazila under the government's nationwide Family Card programme.

"Most people in this coastal area live in poverty. They mainly depend on fishing and agriculture, particularly watermelon farming, for their livelihoods," said Abujar Md Ijajul Haq, upazila nirbahi officer of Galachhipa.

Building on experience from these remote and marginal communities, the government is now preparing to expand the mechanism nationwide, in what officials describe as the country's most comprehensive overhaul of its social welfare system in decades.

The Family Card programme seeks to bring Bangladesh's historically fragmented welfare schemes, often plagued by administrative leakages and political patronage, under a single digital safety net.

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PHOTO: MASUK HRIDOY

Locals block Dhaka-Sylhet highway in Ashuganj upazila of Brahmanbaria yesterday morning, demanding a stop to illegal sand lifting from the Meghna. The blockade in the Bahadurpur area triggered a 5km tailback on both sides of the busy highway. Demonstrators withdrew around two hours later as the local administration assured swift action.

Profiteers of fascism out to disrupt energy sector

Says Tarique

BSS, *Dhaka*

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman yesterday said beneficiaries of fascism remained active in the state, politics, governance and administration, and were trying to destabilise the country's power and energy sector by spreading misinformation.

"Those who have benefited from fascism are not sitting idle. This group is quite active in destabilising the country's energy and power sector in various ways. They were spreading misleading information about the sector," he said.

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Jamaat to join presidential race

Eyes 'befitting, acceptable' candidate; NCP undecided

MAMUNUR RASHID *and* **SHAMIMA RITA**

Jamaat-e-Islami has decided to contest the upcoming presidential election, with the 11-party alliance to finalise the candidate through discussions.

The announcement came last night shortly after a meeting of Jamaat's central executive council, where the decision was taken unanimously.

According to a press release, top leaders of the 11-party alliance will meet today to finalise the candidate.

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Govt may allow pvt firms to import fuel, sell in retail

Move comes after Bashundhara's proposal to bring in up to 33.5 lakh tonnes a yr; minister says it aims to introduce competition; BPC has 'reservations'

ASIFUR RAHMAN

The government is moving to create a framework for private companies to import and market refined petroleum products shortly after Bashundhara Group's proposal in this regard.

In a letter dated August 6, the Energy and Mineral Resources Division has instructed the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) to prepare a draft "Private-Sector Refined Fuel Import, Storage, Transportation, Distribution and Marketing Policy, 2026" by August 10.

The move could eventually allow private companies to participate in a market where the state-run BPC currently plays the central role in importing petroleum products. BPC's three subsidiaries, Padma Oil Company, Jamuna Oil Company and Meghna Petroleum, handle distribution and marketing.

The initiative comes after Bashundhara Oil and Gas Company Ltd and Anvir Bashundhara Group

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Shwapno

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Ukraine warns of tough winter as Russia strikes kill 4 in Kyiv region

AFP, *Belgrade*

President Volodymyr Zelensky warned yesterday, during a visit to Belgrade, that Ukraine was facing a winter with basically no working thermal power plants as overnight Russian strikes left four dead, including a child, in the Kyiv region.

Speaking alongside his Serbian counterpart, Aleksandar Vucic, the Ukrainian leader said Moscow's latest overnight attacks and shelling of frontline communities combined had killed 13 people in the last 24 hours.

"Russian missiles are aimed precisely at making the lives of Ukrainians unbearable," Zelensky told reporters during his first official visit to Belgrade, highlighting that the attacks often target Ukraine's energy infrastructure.

Ukraine was left with "virtually no intact thermal power plants" as it braced for the upcoming heating season, Zelensky said. Those plants are important complements to the nuclear energy which also feeds its grid.



Prime Minister Tarique Rahman addresses an event organised on the occasion of the 37th founding anniversary of the Doctors Association of Bangladesh at the LD Hall of Jatiya Sangsad yesterday morning. PHOTO: PID

Hamas says still ready to go ahead with Gaza plan

AFP, *Gaza City*

Hamas yesterday said it remained ready to proceed with a US-backed Gaza peace plan and urged pressure on Israel, which insists it did not agree to the latest part of the deal.

Hamas informed US President Donald Trump's Board of Peace that it stood by the latest stage of the plan, under which the militants would hand over weapons to a nascent Palestinian governing committee in the war-battered territory.

"Hamas and other factions have confirmed to mediators their readiness to begin implementing the agreement and move to the second phase, provided it receives Israeli approval and that Israel begins implementing the agreement," a Hamas official told AFP.

"Hamas is urging the US administration to exert pressure on Israel to compel it to abide by the agreement and move to the second phase," the official said on condition of anonymity.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who faces a tough reelection fight in October and wide opposition from his right-wing base to the Gaza deal, said on Tuesday that Israel had not agreed to the "draft" presented by the Board of Peace.

Trump last week had hailed as a breakthrough that Hamas had agreed to disarmament under the plan, with the Board of Peace saying Israel would in tandem carry out a phased withdrawal from much of Gaza.

Govt may allow pvt firms to import fuel, sell in retail

FROM PAGE 1

on May 24 sought permission from the energy ministry to directly import and market large quantities of refined fuel.

The company sought permission to import 15-20 lakh tonnes of diesel, 2 lakh tonnes of octane, 1.5 lakh tonnes of petrol and 8-10 lakh tonnes of furnace oil annually. That would amount to as much as 33.5 lakh tonnes of refined fuel a year.

Bangladesh's annual fuel oil demand is about 74 lakh tonnes, according to BPC data. In fiscal 2024-25, BPC imported 46.1 lakh tonnes of refined petroleum products.

The proposed volumes would represent a sizeable private sector entry into a market that BPC currently supplies largely through imports and domestic refining. The proposal comes as the government is already signalling a broader shift towards private participation in the energy sector.

At a programme on July 22, Energy Minister Iqbal Hassan Mahmood Tuku said the government was planning to allow private companies to import petroleum products in an effort to reduce the subsidy burden.

Three other private entities had earlier expressed interest in having larger roles in oil refining, but none sought to import refined fuel, The Daily Star has learnt from officials familiar with the proceedings.

Several private companies operate small-scale refineries in Bangladesh, but these facilities have traditionally processed locally sourced condensate rather than imported crude.

Bashundhara wants to import the products under its own management and sell and market them through its own arrangements as well as through the government's oil marketing companies.

It also says it has approval for 388 filling stations and sought permission to establish those stations and convert LPG/autogas stations into modern fuel stations.

Bashundhara's latest proposal is also materially different from the company's earlier initiative involving petroleum products.

In 2024, Bashundhara obtained permission related to importing crude, refining it, and marketing the products.

Its latest application seeks permission to import refined petroleum products directly and market them in Bangladesh.

The energy division sought the BPC's opinion on Bashundhara's application in a letter dated July 11.

The BPC subsequently formed an 11-member committee, including its senior officials and the managing directors of Padma, Meghna and Jamuna, on July 14.

The committee was asked to examine the legal basis of the proposal, the import quantities, the marketing arrangements, and the possible impact on BPC and Padma, Meghna, and Jamuna oil companies.

It was also asked to assess the proposal from the perspectives of fuel security, supply diversification, and the development of a competitive market.

The committee was given only two working days to submit its recommendations.

The BPC subsequently sent its response to the energy division on July 21, "objecting to the proposal" while noting that the ultimate decision rested with the government, a BPC official said, requesting not to be named.

However, on August 6, the energy division instructed the BPC to prepare a draft policy by tomorrow.

Tuku yesterday told The Daily Star that they want private companies to import refined petroleum products alongside the BPC to introduce competition and reduce the possibility of the state being held hostage by a single buyer or supplier.

He said, "We want private companies to bring [fuel] alongside us so that there is fair competition... We want to get out of the monopoly."

Tuku said the initiative was not intended to benefit any particular company and that the government had received applications from several firms.

The minister said the proposed framework was still at an early stage and had not received approval from the government's economic affairs committee or the cabinet.

He said the proposal would first be examined to determine whether it was feasible.

The energy division yesterday issued a statement defending the proposed policy after receiving flak from a section of the media and the opposition party.

It said the framework would seek to establish a transparent and competitive system and allow private-sector infrastructure and investment capacity to complement the existing government system, particularly during emergencies or crises.

It said the policy would only be considered if public interest, energy security, competition, transparency and accountability could be ensured. "There is no scope to provide special benefits to any particular individual, organisation or group through this policy."

M Shamsul Alam, energy adviser to the Consumers Association of Bangladesh, criticised the fast-paced process.

"The BPC was initially given two days to provide its opinion on the private company's proposal and was subsequently asked to prepare a broader guideline within four days.

"We have seen in the past how vested groups can have their interests secured at lightning speed."

Major changes in a key sector such as energy require proper assessment, consultation, and institutional scrutiny, rather than being hurried through within days.

Referring to the government's rationale that greater private sector participation would reduce the subsidy burden, Shamsul said, "This is not a realistic or evidence-based argument. Private operators would seek to maximise profits, which could ultimately increase costs and consumer prices rather than reduce them."

He also questioned whether Bangladesh's regulatory institutions have the capacity to effectively oversee private companies operating in such a strategically important sector.

"You cannot hand over a sector to private hands simply by relying on regulation," he said, arguing that an effective regulatory framework and competent institutions would have to be in place first.

Weak state oversight can allow irregularities to occur at the hands of the government or private companies.

A cushion for those struggling to get by

FROM PAGE 1

High-level priority for the scheme was reinforced at a recent cabinet committee meeting chaired by Finance Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, where senior officials reviewed its progress.

For nationwide surveys, data collection and administrative costs,the programme has a Tk 2,400 crore commitment, with Tk 900 crore coming from the World Bank's Social Protection for Inclusion, Resilience, Innovation and Transformation programme, and Tk 1,500 crore from the government.

The programme will formally be launched on August 16 in Kishoreganj and then gradually expanded to every upazila and union by late October, depending on the success and efficiency of the survey.

Before the inauguration by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, new software and an app developed from the survey database will undergo a trial run among families in Ward 8 of Latifabad Union in Kishoreganj.

The government plans to make the Family Card the cornerstone of its social protection system, expanding its coverage over the coming years.

According to a presentation at the cabinet committee meeting, the programme will cover 41 lakh families in 2026-27 fiscal year, 81 lakh in 2027-28 and 1.21 crore in 2028-29, before reaching its target of 1.61 crore households by 2029-30.

Under the restructured welfare system, payments will be made exclusively in the name of the eldest female member of each eligible household.

Officials say the arrangement is intended to strengthen women's decision-making power within families and encourage spending on household nutrition.

To prevent duplicate registrations across government agencies, technical teams at the ICT Division are linking the National Identification numbers and birth registration records of family members to create a unified digital family profile.

Payments will be made through a dual-interface smart chip card integrated with TakaPay, Bangladesh's national retail payment infrastructure.

Beneficiaries will be able to withdraw the money through commercial bank terminals and ATMs nationwide.

Distribution will be handled through 3,072 designated branches of three state-owned banks -- Sonali Bank, Bangladesh Krishi Bank and Janata Bank.

Eligibility will be determined using a Proxy Means Test scoring model based on national household income and expenditure survey data collected by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

The system will classify households into five income tiers and automatically enrol those in the bottom three.

A household will be deemed ineligible if any member receives a government pension, holds a regular government or state-affiliated job, pays income tax, has savings certificates worth more than Tk 5 lakh, owns a registered four-wheeler, or possesses more than half an acre of arable or commercial land.

For the baseline field survey, the administration is deploying 66,815 enumerators under the supervision of 6,681 field supervisors. Interest in the jobs has been high, with 4,69,103 applications submitted for enumerator positions through 583 social welfare offices nationwide.

Enumerators will receive Tk 165 for each household surveyed, while supervisors will be paid Tk 30 for each entry.

In Galachipa, scrutiny of applications is underway and 103 enumerators will be appointed, said an official of the upazila administration.

Unlike conventional census projects conducted solely by the BBS, the Family Card survey involves local administration and social service officials at every level.

Divisional commissioners, district administrators and UNOs have been tasked with overseeing field activities, while officials of the Department of Social Services have been appointed coordinators at divisional, district and unit levels.

"Field officers are treating the project with the utmost urgency under strict instructions issued to union-level authorities," said Mohammad Shaheed Hossain Chowdhury, deputy commissioner of Patuakhali.

Field staff will collect information through a paperless mobile system that requires live location tagging, photographs documenting living conditions and digital signatures, said Abdur Rashhid Khan, deputy director of the Patuakhali Social Services Department.

The collected data will be screened by AI-powered auditing software to flag discrepancies between reported income and living conditions. Supervisory teams will then recheck 5-10 percent of surveyed households to verify the information.

The survey aims to collect data on 4.45 crore families.

Under the pilot launched in March, data on 1,09,679 families were collected from selected areas across the country.

Nearly 77,000 were initially found eligible, but around 6,000 were later excluded after officials found pensioners, government employees or other disqualifying criteria among the family members.

In effect, the pilot successfully covered about 92 percent of the selected families.

For Tanjila and many other women of coastal Char Biswas union, the monthly payment has become a small but dependable cushion against the uncertainty of life in a climate-vulnerable community.

"The Family Card support is a great source of security for poor families like ours. We use the money to meet urgent household needs and save Tk 500 every month for the future, especially for times when storms or floods prevent us from earning.

"Our son is in primary school. We also save some money for him so that we can meet the costs of his education," she said.

Profiteers of fascism out to disrupt energy sector

FROM PAGE 1

The prime minister was speaking at a rally organised to mark the 37th founding anniversary of the Doctors Association of Bangladesh (DAB) at the LD Hall of the Jatiya Sangsad complex.

Tarique said unplanned projects and decisions taken by previous governments had left the power and energy sector in a fragile state, while the present government was working to address the resulting crises.

"The government is not denying that people are currently facing crises of electricity, gas and fuel. But the country, its people and the government are now paying for those unplanned schemes to provide special benefits to certain quarters," he said.

The government was formulating plans to gradually ease the gas, electricity and fuel crises, he said.

The prime minister also said the government had decided to recruit 1 lakh new health workers to raise public awareness about primary healthcare and urged doctors to train them properly.

He said the government believed in prevention rather than waiting for diseases to develop before seeking treatment.

On political involvement by students and professionals, Tarique said political awareness or organisation was not unreasonable in a democratic state, but excessive political involvement should not interfere with professional responsibilities.

Addressing the doctors, he said several proposals they had submitted to improve healthcare services would be considered in phases.

The proposals include recruiting 5,000 doctors through a special BCS examination, raising the age limit for doctors entering government service from 32 to 34, increasing their retirement age from 61 to 65, providing incentives for doctors working in remote areas and establishing specialised hospitals outside Dhaka.

Tarique said the government had already begun plans to establish specialised hospitals, including children's hospitals, outside the capital.

Earlier, Tarique and his wife, Dr Zubaida Rahman, planted neem and arjun saplings on the LD Hall premises before inaugurating the rally by hoisting the national and party flags and releasing balloons and pigeons.

DAB President Prof Dr Harun Al Rashid presided over the rally. BNP Secretary General and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, Social Welfare Minister Abu Zafar Md Zahid Hossain, Health Minister Sardar Md Sakhawat Husain and DAB Secretary General Dr Md Zahirul Islam Shakil, among others, attended the programme.

Jamaat to join presidential race

FROM PAGE 1

The meeting has been scheduled for 11:30am at the official residence of Jamaat Ameer and Opposition Leader Shafiqur Rahman on Minto Road, according to a separate press note issued late last night.

Contacted, Saiful Alam Khan Milon, a member of Jamaat's central executive council and the lawmaker from Dhaka-12, appeared to suggest that Jamaat was looking to field a candidate who would have broad public acceptance.

"We will field a very good candidate, InshaAllah. It will be a befitting candidate whom the nation will accept," he said.

Asked why Jamaat was participating despite the ruling party's parliamentary majority making the election outcome largely predictable, Milon said the party would not base its decision on the ruling party's position.

"The ruling party will do its job, and we are doing ours," he said.

Jamaat's press release added that the meeting also discussed the overall political situation in the country, constitutional reform and various programmes announced by the 11-party alliance, the release said.

Meanwhile, alliance partner National Citizen Party (NCP) had not yet decided whether to participate in the presidential election.

"Discussions are still under way. We have a meeting on Sunday [today], and we will be able to confirm our position after that," Member Secretary Akhter Hossen told The Daily Star last night.

Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, another partner in the alliance, has no plan to field a candidate.

The issue was not discussed at the party's monthly meeting of its central committee held yesterday, Secretary General Jalaluddin Ahmad said last night.

Asked about his personal view, Jalaluddin said the party has no intention of fielding a presidential candidate.

Pointing to the BNP's two-thirds majority in parliament, he said, "You know who the voters are in this election. The members of parliament are the voters. So what's the point of fielding a candidate?"

He went on to say he expected the 11-party alliance to eventually decide against fielding a candidate.

According to the Election Commission's announced schedule, August 13 is the deadline for submitting nomination papers for the presidential election.

Nomination papers will be scrutinised on August 16. If there is only one valid candidate, the Election Commission will declare that candidate elected.

Under the constitution, only members of parliament can vote in a presidential election. With the BNP holding an overwhelming majority in the current parliament, its nominee is considered the most likely to become president, although the party has yet to officially announce a candidate.

Mohammed Shahabuddin resigned as president on July 24, after which Speaker Hafiz Uddin Ahmed assumed the duties of acting president.

The constitution requires a new president to be elected within 90 days of the office falling vacant.

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Four more die with measles-like symptoms

Death toll now 867

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four more people died from measles and measles-like symptoms in the last 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, taking the country's combined confirmed and suspected measles-related death toll to 867 this year.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), two of the latest deaths were confirmed as measles-related, while the other two were suspected cases.

The latest figures bring the confirmed death toll to 98 and suspected deaths to 769.

Meanwhile, 677 new suspected measles cases were reported during the period, raising the nationwide tally to 1,35,332. Another 99 laboratory-confirmed cases took the total confirmed infections to 17,040.



All members of the 2nd Bangladesh Liberation War Course, along with some members of the first course, pose for a photo at the celebration of the 54th Commissioning and Fellowship Day of the Bangladesh Liberation War Courses at Kurmitola Golf Club in Dhaka Cantonment on Friday. Acting President Hafiz Uddin Ahmad was present as the chief guest at the event, organised by the Bangladesh Liberation War Courses Foundation. Chiefs of the three armed forces were also present.

PHOTO: COURTESY

'We must document the true history of Liberation War'

Says acting president

BSS, *Dhaka*

Acting President Hafiz Uddin Ahmad on Friday stressed the need to properly document and present the true history of Bangladesh's Liberation War, saying many significant chapters of the war remain unknown to the people.

"Many of those who assumed state power after independence did not want to present the true history of the Liberation War before the people. As a result, countless incidents, sacrifices and acts of heroism during the war remained unknown to the general public. That history must be accurately documented and presented before the people," he said.

The acting president made the remarks while delivering the chief guest's speech at the celebration of the 54th Commissioning and Fellowship Day of the Bangladesh Liberation War Courses at Kurmitola Golf Club in Dhaka Cantonment, organised by the Bangladesh Liberation War Courses Foundation.

Hafiz Uddin highlighted the significance of the two Liberation War courses and recalled how the gallant freedom fighters, after weeks of training, were ready to fight the well-equipped and highly trained Pakistan Army, describing it as an extraordinary achievement.

"Their contribution at that crucial time when we were facing the brutal Pakistani army needs to be properly evaluated and shared with the nation, especially the younger generation," he said.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

15,712 killed in motorbike crashes in 6yrs

Says Road Safety Foundation



16,065 motorcycle crashes recorded since 2020 | Motorcycles make up 71% of registered vehicles
30 times more dangerous than 4-wheelers | Quality helmets can cut death risk by 48%

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 15,712 people were killed and 14,143 others injured in 16,065 motorcycle crashes across the country between January 2020 and July this year, according to the Road Safety Foundation (RSF).

People aged between 13 and 35 accounted for 58 percent of those involved in the crashes, the RSF said in a report yesterday.

Heavy vehicles hit motorcycles in 6,314 crashes, accounting for 39.30 percent of the total. Riders lost control in 5,497 crashes, or 34.21 percent, while 3,548 crashes, or 22.08

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7

Nine killed in road crashes in 4 districts

STAR REPORT

At least nine people were killed and 18 others injured in road accidents in Natore, Sirajganj, Kishoreganj and Thakurgaon districts yesterday.

In Natore, three cattle traders were killed and five others injured when a bus hit a shallow-engine-run vehicle carrying cattle on Bonpara-Hatikumrul highway around 9:00am in Noyabazar area of Gurudaspur.

The deceased are Md Abdur Rahman, 69; Md Akkas Ali, 63; and his brother Jahangir Hossain, 51, -- all from Natore, said Md Moniruzzaman, officer-in-charge of Bonpara Highway Police Station. "The bus driver fled the scene after the incident," the OC said.

In Sirajganj, two people died on the spot and 10 others were injured when a truck collided with a bus

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7

EC plans phased local polls from early Oct

AHMED DEEPTO

The Election Commission plans to begin local government elections in the first week of October, starting with the haor and northeastern districts -- Sunamganj, Netrokona, Kishoreganj and parts of Habiganj.

The schedule is expected to be announced at the end of August.

According to the EC's draft roadmap for union parishads, municipalities, upazilas and city corporations, the polls will be held in phases. Letters were sent to field-level offices to finalise polling centres by July 31.

The commission has divided the country into four clusters to determine the timing of local polls -- haor and northeastern areas, hill and coastal regions, riverine and char areas, and plains and urban centres -- considering geography, weather, public examinations and religious festivals.

The EC will publish the draft voter list today and the final list on August 31.

Haor, northeastern districts to vote first
Schedule expected by end of August
Country divided into 4 polling clusters
Draft voter list to be published today
Final voter list due on August 31

The draft polling centre list will be published tomorrow, with the final list on August 27.

Those who turned 18 by July 31 and have applied for voter registration will be eligible to vote.

The roadmap sets August 15 as the deadline for amending laws and rules, with tasks outlined before and after the schedule announcement.

Two law-and-order meetings will be held with the armed forces and law enforcement agencies -- one 15 days before the schedule and another after the withdrawal of candidatures.

Results will be collected and distributed by post, with gazettes published within three to four days of voting and final gazettes naming elected candidates within six to seven days.

The EC is now eyeing October 1 as a tentative starting date.

EC member Abdur Rahmanel Masud told The Daily Star, "When I say October, assume the elections will start in the first week."

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4



Small changes key to major reforms

Hossain Zillur tells webinar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Small institutional and procedural reforms are essential alongside major state and constitutional reforms if Bangladesh is to achieve meaningful change, said Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) Executive Chairman Hossain Zillur Rahman yesterday.

Reform discussions often focused on "reform with a capital R", while everyday institutional and administrative changes received less attention, he said.

"Without progress on countless small reforms, the big reforms risk remaining on paper," he said at a PPRC webinar titled "The Multifaceted Potential of Youth in Post-Uprising Bangladesh".

Moderating the event, Hossain Zillur said the aspiration for change following the July uprising

SEE PAGE 9 COL 2

Pvt fuel imports may open 'new avenues for plunder'

Says Jamaat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami yesterday criticised the government's move to allow private companies to import and market refined fuel, calling it a potential "new avenue for plunder".

At a press conference at the party's central office in Dhaka's Moghbazar, Jamaat Secretary General Mia Golam Porwar said the proposed policy would replace the state monopoly with a private one dominated by a handful of powerful business groups.

He claimed the Energy and Mineral Resources Division was drafting a policy allowing private companies to import, store, transport, distribute and market refined fuel.

He added that officials were asked to prepare the draft within four days.

"This is not reform; it is a handover. It is a licence for corruption and plunder," he said.

Porwar argued that private fuel imports would not necessarily increase competition because the business requires deep-sea port facilities, storage terminals, pipelines and substantial

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



Finalists of Season 5 of "Our Planet, Our Responsibility", jointly organised by The Daily Star and ActionAid Bangladesh, take part in a mentoring session at The Daily Star Centre in the capital yesterday. Nine finalist teams, selected under the Green Business, Water Rights and Energy Transition categories, will present their ideas before the judges on August 15 to compete for the championship title.

PHOTO: STAR

'Indian aggression exhibits removed from July museum'

Alleges Nahid Islam

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Opposition Chief Whip and National Citizen Party (NCP) Convener Nahid Islam yesterday alleged that exhibits depicting "Indian aggression" had been removed from the July Mass Uprising Memorial Museum.

He made the allegation on the premises of the museum, formerly Gono Bhaban, the official residence of ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

Earlier in the day, Nahid, along with a delegation of more than 50 NCP leaders, visited the museum.

Nahid, a key coordinator of Students Against Discrimination, which spearheaded the July uprising, said the museum had a segment on border killings.

"There was a list of our brothers and sisters killed by the Indian BSF at the borders, along with a sculpture of Felani. Those have been removed. Some

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

Man stabbed to death over Tk 5,000

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Faridpur*

A man was allegedly stabbed to death following a dispute over Tk 5,000 in Goalanda upazila of Rajbari yesterday morning.

The deceased, Shariful Islam Hira, 40, of Bahadurpur in Goalanda, lived at his in-laws' house near Torai Mor-Kazipara in Goalanda municipality, police said.

Md Shafiqul Islam, officer-in-charge of Goalanda Ghat Police Station, said Shariful had an altercation with Kamrul Hossain in Torai Mor over Tk 5,000 that Kamrul allegedly owed him.

At one point, Kamrul allegedly stabbed Shariful with a knife, leaving him critically injured. Locals took Shariful to Goalanda Upazila Health Complex, where doctors declared him dead.

Kamrul was arrested around 3:00pm following a drive, said police.

OC Shafiqul said Shariful's wife filed a case against Kamrul as the sole accused.

The body has been sent to Rajbari General Hospital for autopsy.



Battery-run rickshaws and motorcycles navigate a waterlogged, pothole-ridden road in front of Malibagh Bazar in Dhaka yesterday. Poorly maintained roads make commuting difficult, with monsoon downpours further worsening the conditions. PHOTO: **FIROZ AHMED**

Probe body formed over Sylhet bus crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Sylhet*

The Sylhet District Administration yesterday formed a five-member committee to investigate the cause of a head-on collision between two buses that killed nine people, including women and children, in Osmaninagar upazila.

The committee, headed by Additional District Magistrate Pinky Saha, was asked to submit its report within five working days.

Its other members are representatives from the highway police, fire service, roads and highways department, and Osmaninagar upazila administration.

Abdullah Al Mamun, deputy commissioner of Sylhet, said the committee will examine the circumstances surrounding the crash, the movements of the two buses, the drivers' roles and road conditions.

The accident happened on Friday morning in the Kashikapan area when a Unique Paribahan bus collided head-on with a Bengal Paribahan bus on the Dhaka-Sylhet highway.

Seven people died at the scene, and two others died later in hospital. Another 14 injured passengers are receiving treatment at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

15 doctors against 81 posts at Barguna hospital

Patients suffer as shortage disrupts healthcare services

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, *Patuakhali*

Barguna General Hospital, the district's main government-run healthcare facility serving nearly 12 lakh people, has long been grappling with an acute shortage of doctors.

Only 15 doctors are currently posted at the 250-bed hospital against 81 sanctioned posts, according to hospital sources.

Of the 55 posts for medical officers, 47 are vacant, while only two doctors are working against 17 sanctioned posts for consultants and specialist physicians.

The shortage has severely disrupted healthcare services at the hospital, with patients often referred to hospitals in Barishal or Dhaka even for relatively minor complications, while many necessary surgical procedures remain largely unavailable.

Reshma Akter, a relative of a maternity patient, said, "Emergency maternity patients are also often referred elsewhere because there is no gynaecology specialist. This puts the lives of critically ill patients at risk."

Harun Ar Rashid Hawladar, vice-president of Barguna District Health Rights Forum, called for the prompt appointment of doctors to the vacant posts.

According to hospital authorities, more than 600 patients receive treatment at the outpatient department (OPD) on average every day, while over 350 patients are admitted to the hospital daily.



The entrance of the Barguna General Hospital. PHOTO: **STAR**

Dr Tajkia Siddiquah, resident surgeon at the hospital, said a doctor at the OPD has to examine 150-200 patients a day under the present circumstances.

"With such an enormous workload, it is not possible to provide enough time to each patient," she said.

Dr Mahmud Murshid Al Mamun, resident medical officer (RMO) at the hospital, said the facility was upgraded from a 100-bed hospital to a 250-bed one in 2010, but the necessary doctors and other manpower were not appointed accordingly.

"We have already informed the higher authorities regarding the manpower shortage in writing," he said.

Barguna Civil Surgeon Dr Abu Fattah said, "We send reports to the health ministry every month seeking the immediate posting of doctors to the vacant positions."

Dr Lokman Hakim, divisional health director in Barishal, said the crisis would no longer persist once new doctors were appointed.

Remain alert to protect political stability: Fakhrul

UNB, *Dhaka*



A vested quarter is trying to create instability in the country, said BNP Secretary General and Local Government Minister Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday, urging everyone to remain alert and help protect political stability.

"Whenever the country starts moving forward, a quarter tries to push it backwards through national and international conspiracies," he said while addressing a doctors' rally organised by the Doctors Association of Bangladesh on the LD Hall premises of the Jatiya Sangsad.

Fakhrul said BNP had taken responsibility for rebuilding the country after "its destruction under the Awami League government".

"While BNP is working to take the country forward, a quarter or a party is trying to create instability and take the country back into an unstable situation. I believe it would be unfair for them to engage in such activities with the aim of pushing the country back into another period of instability," the BNP leader said.

He urged doctors to make people aware of the importance of political stability and said Bangladesh needs to move forward under the leadership of Prime Minister Tarique Rahman.

Two arrested over rape, attempted rape charges

STAR REPORT

Two persons were arrested yesterday over rape and attempted rape charges in Jashore and Patuakhali, according to reports from our correspondents.

In Jashore, the accused was identified as Shahriar Rahman Raju, 25, a resident of Ektarpur village in Abhaynagar upazila.

According to the case statement, Raju raped an 18-year-old girl multiple times, promising to marry her. But he finally refused to marry the girl.

On Friday night around 10:30pm, the victim filed the case against Raju with Kotwali Police Station, said Inspector (investigation) Kazi Babul.

The accused was arrested around 4:00am yesterday from his residence, he said.

In Patuakhali, police detained a man on the charge of attempting to rape a nine-year-old girl child yesterday. The accused -- Sohag Hawlader, 25 -- is from Dumki upazila.

Police and locals said the girl was returning home from a local madrasa around noon. On her way, Sohag forcibly took her to a nearby bush and attempted to rape her.

At that time, an auto-rickshaw driver noticed the incident and raised an alarm. Nearby people rushed to the spot and caught Sohag.

Later, locals handed Sohag over to police. The process of filing a case was underway, said Dumki Police Station OC Mohammad Selim Uddin.

Pvt fuel imports may open

FROM PAGE 3

financial capacity, which only a few major groups possess.

He also rejected criticism of the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC), saying it made profits of Tk 3,943 crore in FY2023-24 and Tk 2,050 crore in FY2024-25, after losses in the previous two fiscal years.

Porwar expressed concern over the government's decision to reduce the tendering period for refined fuel imports for September-December this year from 42 days to 10 days.

He warned that the shorter window could discourage international suppliers, reduce competition and create opportunities for syndicates.

He also questioned private-sector control of fuel, a strategic commodity vital to agriculture, power generation, transport, aviation and national security.

Jamaat demanded an immediate halt to the proposed policy, publication of all related documents and at least 60 days of public consultation.

The party also called for BPC reforms, including an independent audit, professional appointments to its board, mandatory e-GP procurement and quarterly disclosure of fuel import prices and volumes.

It demanded faster implementation of Eastern Refinery's second unit, increased strategic fuel storage and withdrawal of proposals to curtail legal protection for fuel-sector workers.

Porwar said Jamaat was not opposed to private investment but opposed transferring public resources without accountability.

We must document

FROM PAGE 3

"Serving the nation at a crucial time like our liberation and in pivotal roles like leadership in the army must be properly assessed and given due credit. This had, regrettably, not been done," he added.

The acting president also emphasised the role of youth, villagers and ordinary citizens in turning the Liberation War into a "People's War". Their bravery and sacrifice were unmatched, he said.

"The history of our great patriotic war has not been properly written. The story has so far been told partially."

Hafiz Uddin said efforts were made after independence to create the impression that Bangladesh achieved independence solely through a few speeches.

"In reality, however, countless young people, sons, daughters and soldiers sacrificed their lives to achieve the country's independence," he said.

He said the Liberation War was a struggle to establish democracy, human dignity, equal rights and a discrimination-free state.

"Even after five decades of independence, that dream has not been fully realised," he said, adding that the July uprising carried out by the people was also an expression of their aspiration to establish democracy.

He urged the new generation to learn how Bangladesh achieved independence and what dreams the freedom fighters had, and called upon young people to work to realise those dreams and build a happy, prosperous and democratic Bangladesh.

Referring to the contribution of military officers to the Liberation War, he said after the Pakistani army launched genocide and brutal repression against unarmed people, Bangalee soldiers and officers of the East Bengal Regiment and the East Pakistan Rifles (EPR) declared rebellion and began armed resistance.

Hafiz Uddin said that if members of the East Bengal Regiment and the EPR had not revolted against the Pakistani forces in March 1971, the situation could have been different.

Describing the formation of the Bangladesh Army after independence, he said the force was small in 1972, but its greatest strength was its indomitable spirit and willingness to sacrifice lives for the country.

Liberation War Affairs Minister Ahmed Azam Khan attended the event as a special guest, while Major A Matin Chowdhury delivered the welcome address.

Also present as special guests were Chief of Army Staff General Waker-Uz-Zaman, Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Hasan Mahmood Khan and Chief of Naval Staff Vice Admiral Khondkar Misbah-Ul-Azim.

The event was presided over by Maj Gen (retd) Jamil D Ahsan, BP, president of the Bangladesh Liberation War Courses Foundation.

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GD-1913

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
বিচার প্রশাসন প্রশিক্ষণ ইনস্টিটিউট
১৫, কলেজ রোড, ঢাকা-১০০০।

সরবরাহকারী/ঠিকাদারী প্রতিষ্ঠানের তালিকাভুক্তি/নবায়নের বিজ্ঞপ্তি

২০২৬-২০২৭ অর্থ বছরে বিচার প্রশাসন প্রশিক্ষণ ইনস্টিটিউটের জন্য সীমিত দরপত্র পদ্ধতিতে পণ্য/সেবা ক্রয় ও সরবরাহের নিমিত্ত প্রকৃত ঠিকাদারী/সরবরাহকারী প্রতিষ্ঠানের তালিকাভুক্তি/নবায়নের লক্ষ্যে নির্ধারিত ফরমে সীলগালাযুক্ত খামে আবেদনপত্র আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে:

ক্রমিক নং	সংগ্রাহক সত্তা ও তথ্যাদির বিবরণ	আগ্রহী দরদাতাদের জ্ঞাতব্য ও যোগ্যতার বিবরণ
১	মন্ত্রণালয়/বিভাগ	আইন ও বিচার বিভাগ, আইন, বিচার ও সংসদ বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয়।
২	প্রতিষ্ঠান	বিচার প্রশাসন প্রশিক্ষণ ইনস্টিটিউট।
৩	সংগ্রাহক প্রতিষ্ঠানের নাম ও ঠিকানা	বিচার প্রশাসন প্রশিক্ষণ ইনস্টিটিউট, ১৫, কলেজ রোড, ঢাকা-১০০০।
৪	সংগ্রাহক প্রতিষ্ঠানের জেলা	ঢাকা।
৫	দরপত্র আহ্বানের উদ্দেশ্য	সরবরাহকারী/ঠিকাদারী প্রতিষ্ঠান তালিকাভুক্তি/নবায়ন।
৬	নথি নম্বর	১০.০৬.০০০০.০০১.৫০.০২৪.২৫.
৭	বিজ্ঞপ্তি প্রকাশের তারিখ	০৯/৮/২০২৬ খ্রিস্টাব্দ
৮	ক্রয় পদ্ধতি	সীমিত দরপত্র পদ্ধতি (LTM)
৯	আবেদনপত্র ক্রয়ের তারিখ ও স্থান	০৯/৮/২০২৬ খ্রিস্টাব্দ হতে ২৩/৮/২০২৬ খ্রিস্টাব্দ পর্যন্ত অফিস চলাকালীন, হিসাব শাখা, বিচার প্রশাসন প্রশিক্ষণ ইনস্টিটিউট, ১৫ কলেজ রোড, ঢাকা-১০০০ হতে সিডিউল সংগ্রহ করা যাবে।
১০	আবেদনপত্র জমাদানের সর্বশেষ তারিখ ও স্থান	২৪/৮/২০২৬ খ্রিস্টাব্দ দুপুর ১২:০০ ঘটিকা। পরিচালক (প্রশাসন), বিচার প্রশাসন প্রশিক্ষণ ইনস্টিটিউট, ১৫, কলেজ রোড, ঢাকা-১০০০-এর দপ্তর।
১১	বাজেট ও তহবিলের উৎস	ইনস্টিটিউটের অনুকূলে বরাদ্দকৃত রাজস্ব বাজেট।
১২	আবেদনকারীর যোগ্যতা	পাবলিক প্রকিউরমেন্ট বিধিমালা, ২০২৫ এর শর্ত অনুযায়ী যোগ্যতাসম্পন্ন হতে হবে এবং আবেদনপত্রে বর্ণিত কাগজপত্রসমূহ আবেদনপত্রের সাথে দাখিল করতে হবে।
১৩	আবেদন ফরমের মূল্য	১০০০/- (এক হাজার) টাকা (অফেরতযোগ্য) পরিচালক (প্রশাসন), বিচার প্রশাসন প্রশিক্ষণ ইনস্টিটিউট-এর নামে পে-অর্ডার/ব্যাংক ড্রাফট-এর মাধ্যমে দাখিল করতে হবে।
১৪	তালিকাভুক্তি/নবায়ন ফি	নির্বাচিত আবেদনকারী কর্তৃক ৫০০০/- (পাঁচ হাজার) টাকা+১৫% ভ্যাট (অফেরতযোগ্য) এবং নবায়নকারী কর্তৃক ২০০০/- (দুই হাজার) টাকা+১৫% ভ্যাট (অফেরতযোগ্য), একক মালিকানাধীন প্রতিষ্ঠানের স্বত্ত্বাধিকারী নারী হলে তালিকাভুক্ত ফি ৩০০০/-(তিন হাজার) টাকা+১৫% ভ্যাট (অফেরতযোগ্য) এবং নবায়ন ফি ১৫০০/- (এক হাজার পাঁচশত) টাকা+১৫% ভ্যাট (অফেরতযোগ্য) পরিচালক (প্রশাসন), বিচার প্রশাসন প্রশিক্ষণ ইনস্টিটিউট-এর নামে পে-অর্ডার/ব্যাংক ড্রাফট-এর মাধ্যমে দাখিল করতে হবে।
১৫	আবেদনপত্র আহ্বানকারীর নাম, পদবি ও ঠিকানা	এ. ই. এম. ইসমাইল হোসেন, পরিচালক (প্রশাসন), বিচার প্রশাসন প্রশিক্ষণ ইনস্টিটিউট, ১৫, কলেজ রোড, ঢাকা-১০০০।
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১৭	বিশেষ নির্দেশনা	(ক) সরবরাহকারী/ঠিকাদারী প্রতিষ্ঠানের নতুন তালিকাভুক্ত/নবায়ন করার ক্ষেত্রে পাবলিক প্রকিউরমেন্ট বিধিমালা, ২০২৫ এর বিধি বিধান পালন করা হবে। (খ) আবেদনপত্র যথাযথভাবে পূরণপূর্বক দাখিল করতে হবে। অসম্পূর্ণ তথ্য সম্বলিত আবেদনপত্র বাতিল বলে গণ্য হবে। (গ) ২০২৬-২৭ অর্থ বছরের হালনাগাদ ট্রেড লাইসেন্স দাখিল করতে হবে। হালনাগাদ ট্রেড লাইসেন্স না থাকলে ২০২৫-২৬ অর্থ বছরের ট্রেড লাইসেন্সের কপি-সহ ২০২৬-২৭ অর্থ বছরের জন্য ট্রেড লাইসেন্স নবায়নের আবেদনের রশিদের কপি জমা দিতে হবে।
১৮	কর্তৃপক্ষ কোন কারণ দর্শানো ব্যতিরেকে বিধি মোতাবেক যেকোনো বা সকল আবেদনপত্র বাতিল করার ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করেন।	

এ. ই. এম. ইসমাইল হোসেন
পরিচালক (প্রশাসন)
(সিনিয়র জেলা জজ)
ফোন: ০২-৪১০৫৩৭৪৪

GD-1914

We are yet to build an institution for theatre: Ramendu Majumdar

Theatre icon speaks to The Daily Star on 86th birthday

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Ekushey Padak-winning theatre stalwart Ramendu Majumdar turns 86 today. He is the founding secretary of the renowned theatre troupe Theatre, and has been editor of the Theatre magazine for more than five decades. He also served as President of the International Theatre Institute (ITI).

As a cultural icon, his contribution to stage theatre has been immense. Even at the age of 86, he continues to perform on stage in the productions ***Love Letters*** and ***Meraj Fakirer Ma***. His wife is the celebrated actress Ferdousi Mazumder, and their only daughter is Tropa Majumdar.

Sitting down with The Daily Star at his residence, he reflected on his glorious journey in his career, life and more.



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

Happy Birthday! If you are told to look back, how beautiful has life been?

As life gradually draws to a close, you realise just how beautiful it truly is. You begin to wonder why you could not have embraced it even more. Even so, I have no regrets. I often say that I have travelled in a bullock cart and travelled by aeroplane as well. In one lifetime, I have journeyed a long way. I consider myself fortunate.

There is a song that goes, "Ami Akriti Odhom Boleo To Kichhu Kom Kore Morey Dao Ni" (which loosely translates to, "Though I am unworthy and insignificant, you have never given me any less").

That sentiment resonates deeply with me. I may have unfulfilled aspirations when it comes to my art, but I have none when it comes to life.

> **Having Abdullah Al Mamun as our playwright was a great strength. He understood the troupe's vision. The Liberation War, youth, and women's empowerment were recurring themes. We have always believed theatre should offer more than entertainment—it should have a message.**

You mentioned having unfulfilled aspirations in your artistic journey. Could you elaborate?

When I look at Bishwa Sahitya Kendra, I see that Abdullah Abu Sayeed has built a permanent institution. We have not. I do, however, believe an artiste's sense of incompleteness never goes away.

What do you consider Theatre's greatest achievement over the past five decades?

We have always tried to stage plays rooted in real life, and I believe we have succeeded. Our productions have reflected contemporary issues.

Having Abdullah Al Mamun as our playwright was a great strength. He understood the troupe's vision. The Liberation War, youth, and women's empowerment were recurring themes. We have always believed theatre should offer more than entertainment—it should have a message.

Since his passing, producing contemporary plays has become more difficult, though we continue to try.

Another achievement is building a wider audience for theatre and helping establish it as a cultural force.

We have also published Theatre magazine for 54 years, and I have edited it throughout. That, too, is a significant achievement.

How important are art and culture to a nation?

No nation, especially the Bengali nation, can move forward without communal harmony. Art and culture are essential to nurturing that spirit. Children should be introduced to them from an early age, both at home and in school.

The government must also encourage this, so that young people grow up with an appreciation for art, literature and communal harmony.

What genuinely brings you joy?

Other people's success brings me joy. I enjoy reading stories of achievement in the newspapers.

For 12 or 13 years, I hosted a programme on Bangladesh Television featuring ordinary people. I interviewed around 400 individuals who had quietly devoted themselves to improving society. They did not seek fame—they simply wanted to do good.

One of them was a rickshaw puller who went on to build a hospital. Sharing stories like these brings me immense joy.

Why have you been less active on television over the course of your career?

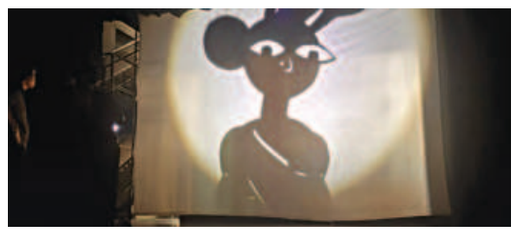
I acted in ***Ektala Dotala***, one of Bangladesh Television's first dramas. I also read the news for many years. At the time, newsreaders were not encouraged to act, so I did fewer television dramas. I was also more involved in organisational work.

I still perform in ***Meraj Fakirer Ma***and ***Love Letters***. Both give me great satisfaction. ***Love Letters*** is directed by my daughter, Tropa Majumdar.

What role has Ferdousi Mazumder played in your life and career?

I could not have done what I have without her. She looked after our home and our daughter's upbringing, allowing me to devote myself to my work.

We have shared the same artistic journey, and our daughter, Tropa, has followed it too. She is deeply committed to theatre. I feel our lives have been fulfilled.



'SULTANA'S DREAM' reimagined 121 years later in 'Project Ladyland 2026'

More than a century after Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain imagined a feminist utopia in ***Sultana's Dream***, HerStory Foundation is returning to Ladyland with a question: what might that imagined society look like today?

Inspired by Rokeya's landmark 1905 work, ***Project Ladyland 2026*** is a participatory theatrical production that reimagines Ladyland 121 years later, exploring how ideas surrounding gender, equality and social progress have evolved since Rokeya first conceived her utopian world.

The production is set to be staged in Dhaka on August 13 and 14 at Bangladesh Mahila Samity, before travelling to Chattogram for performances on August 24 and 25 at Theatre Institute, Chattogram.

'Malik' begins streaming on OTT after Eid release



After its theatrical release during Eid-ul-Azha, Arifin Shuvoo and Bidya Sinha Mim-starrer ***Malik*** has now made its way to streaming.

Directed by Saif Chandan, the film became available on the OTT platform Utshob from midnight on Thursday, August 6.

Centred on love, revenge and the power struggle, ***Malik*** follows a story driven by a son's fight to defend his mother's dignity and claim her rights. The film had generated considerable audience interest following its theatrical release earlier this year.

Alongside Shuvoo and Mim, the ensemble cast includes Dipjol, Misha Sawdagor, Shipon Mitra, Elina Shammi, Don, Kazi Hayat and AJ Rana, among others.

With its OTT release, ***Malik*** is now available to audiences who missed its run in theatres.

NEWS

174 Bangladeshis stranded for over 33hrs

FROM PAGE 12

the aircraft for around eight hours, during which the air-conditioning was not running, and were served only one meal. They were later taken to a waiting area.

"At one point, those with passports from Canada and the United States were taken to a hotel. Meanwhile, as night fell in Rome, the Bangladeshi passengers were taken to a lounge where they could get some food, but there were no facilities for them to rest. They were taken back to the waiting area at dawn and have been there ever since."

She said some passengers were travelling with babies but had no access to diapers or baby food.

The Toronto-Rome-Dhaka flight BG306, carrying 259 passengers, landed at Fiumicino on Friday morning for a scheduled refuelling stop when the technical fault was detected.

According to passengers, those holding Canadian, US or other foreign passports or relevant visas were allowed to clear Italian immigration and accommodated in hotels, while 174 Bangladeshi passport holders were unable to enter Italy and had to remain inside the airport.

Contacted by The Daily Star, Bushra Islam, general manager of public relations at Biman, said the airline had been unable to arrange hotels for the stranded passengers because they could not clear immigration. "We have managed to provide hotel accommodation to those who have foreign passports, but not to those who were travelling with Bangladeshi passports."

She added that there was no hotel inside Rome airport, unlike at airports in some other cities, such as Dubai. "We have kept the passengers in a holding lounge and provided all kinds of facilities. One of the female passengers fell sick, and our country manager there arranged medicine for her."

Passengers, however, alleged that the arrangements were inadequate.

In a video obtained by The Daily Star, Md Abu Sayeed, a senior lecturer in the Department of Computer Science at Independent University, Bangladesh, said elderly passengers, children and others had fallen ill during the prolonged wait.

He said the Bangladeshi passport holders had to spend the night on the floor or on chairs before being moved to a lounge.

Another passenger, Mohammad Rokonur Rahman, said elderly people, diabetic patients and children were particularly vulnerable, as some did not have access to their regular medication. He alleged that passengers were not receiving adequate information or assistance.

In a statement on Friday night, Biman said hotels had been arranged for all passengers. Its subsequent explanation, however, said accommodation could only be provided to passengers permitted to clear Italian immigration.

In an update yesterday, Biman said aircraft S2-AJY remained "AOG" (Aircraft on Ground) in Rome and that an engineering team carrying spare parts and equipment had left Dhaka at 1:53pm (Dhaka time) and was expected to reach Rome at 7:17pm (Rome time) to begin repairs immediately.

Subject to successful repairs, BG306 was scheduled to leave Rome at 11:00pm (Rome time) yesterday and arrive in Dhaka at 11:30am (Dhaka time) today.

If the flight left at the scheduled time, the passengers would have spent around 39 hours and 40 minutes in Rome since the aircraft landed there.

Md Ohidul Haque, whose mother is among the stranded passengers, wrote in a Facebook post around 6:50pm yesterday that the passengers had suffered severe physical and mental distress.

He alleged that adequate food, water and regular updates were not available and said his mother had been left exhausted by the prolonged wait.

Riyadh turns to Muslim powers

FROM PAGE 12

must manage its sizeable Shia population and its sensitive relationship with Tehran, while Turkey and Iran share concerns over Kurdish separatism despite competing elsewhere in the region.

Tehran repeatedly struck targets in Saudi Arabia during the war, including civilian infrastructure, energy facilities and US interests. Direct Iranian attacks on Saudi Arabia largely subsided after an April 8 ceasefire took hold, but Iran-backed groups in Yemen and Iraq continued targeting the kingdom.

Riyadh has been one of the war's most vocal opponents and has worked to restrain US President Donald Trump from escalating against the Islamic Republic. Yet the attacks Saudi Arabia continues to face from multiple fronts have left officials increasingly alarmed and frustrated.

A Saudi official told CNN on Thursday that the kingdom was bracing for a major, coordinated assault by Iran-backed militias in Iraq and Yemen, supported by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. CNN has also reported that Tehran warned Gulf nations that renewed US attacks would trigger retaliation against energy or desalination facilities across the region.

The treaty signed on Friday therefore serves as a warning to Tehran: another major attack on Saudi Arabia could invoke the pact, draw Pakistan and Turkey into the conflict and dramatically widen the war.

Reaction emerging from Tehran indicated their dissatisfaction toward the agreement, as a senior Iranian official warned that it will not guarantee Saudi Arabia's security.

Infantino bins claims

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said any suggestion of inappropriate conduct or a breach of regulations was defamatory.

"No employee at UEFA and FIFA has ever raised a complaint regarding Mr Infantino's behaviour because there never was an incident where he was involved," the spokesperson told the newspaper.

UEFA confirmed that a departure payment had been made to the woman but rejected any suggestion that it violated the organisation's rules. It said the payment also included fees for her to complete an MBA at a local business school.

The governing body said the payments complied with the regulations in force at the time, although those rules have since been tightened.

"[The regulations] reflect those found in a modern, high-profile organisation," UEFA said.

Aynaghar bears signs of brutal torture

FROM PAGE 12

regime," Aminul said.

Many of the cells were windowless, fitted with heavy exhaust fans designed to isolate detainees and prevent sounds from escaping. "Through this inspection, we could somewhat feel the brutal reality of how detainees were kept here," Aminul observed.

Earlier on August 1, ICT-1 judges inspected another secret detention site -- the Rab-run Task Force for Interrogation (TFI) cell in Uttara, which has 29 cells.

Aminul said two other facilities remain to be inspected: a Rab-2 site where investigators found an electric chair and a Detective Branch facility that has since been sealed.

He added that the JIC inspection revealed signs of evidence being erased after August 5, 2024. Despite subsequent plastering, writing linked to BNP leader Humam Quader Chowdhury remained visible in one cell.

The inspections come as the tribunal hears two major cases filed over crimes against humanity, including charges of enforced disappearance, secret detention and torture.

In one case, prosecutors accuse ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina and 12 others over the disappearance and torture of at least 24 people at the JIC between 2016 and August 2024.

The second case concerns the Rab-run TFI cell, where 17 people, including Hasina and senior military officials, face charges over the disappearance and torture of 14 people during the same period.

Former detainees have described harrowing conditions. Humam testified he was held at the JIC, marking days of confinement by scratching the wall. Another witness, Iqbal Chowdhury, said he was picked up in May 2018 and spent nearly a year in a cell lit constantly by a bulb and filled with the noise of an exhaust fan.

Defence lawyers argued that some witness accounts did not match what was observed during inspection. Aminul rejected the claim, accusing the defence of misleading arguments.

Aminul stressed that inspections would allow judges to compare testimony with physical evidence and strengthen the process.

The former government and those responsible for running the state would ultimately have to explain why citizens were held outside the normal legal process, he said.

"If a citizen commits a crime, he must face trial under the law. But no citizen should be subjected to extrajudicial killing or harassment. No one should be kept in such a detention facility for days, months or years," he added.



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

Child stunting putting our future at risk

Govt must address children's nutritional deficiencies urgently

The implication of 24 percent of our children (aged five and under) being stunted due to chronic malnutrition and poor health during early childhood can only be described as devastating. It is a deep-seated handicap in the future of our most precious asset—the human resources. This sobering statistic has come from Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics'(BBS), with experts highlighting the role of poverty, poor nutrition, early pregnancy, and unhealthy practices for the situation to reach this alarming level.

The BBS survey shows that one in four children have been deprived of proper nutrition in the first three years of their life, which is a critical period for physical and brain development. It is predictable how this deprivation will affect the future of these children, increasing their vulnerability to respiratory conditions and diarrhoeal diseases, even leading to premature deaths. Poor nutrition was a factor in the recent deaths of hundreds of children afflicted with measles and measles-like symptoms. Malnutrition also hinders one's brain development, adversely affecting cognitive abilities, and hampering learning and educational attainment. A World Bank study found that stunted children often enrol in school later, repeat grades, and have lower education levels compared to their healthier peers. If this learning gap remains unaddressed, it will lead to lower skills and educational levels with corresponding low-paying employment later.

Thus, malnutrition continues the vicious cycle of poverty. Clearly, we cannot plan for a prosperous country when such a large proportion of the population is deprived of reaching their productive potential. Sadly, the root causes of malnutrition have not been addressed effectively over the decades. One of these causes is child marriage, which remains very high in Bangladesh and often leads to early pregnancy, increasing risks for both mothers and their babies. Most women in poor households do not get the recommended minimum of four checkups during pregnancy, resulting in complications such as low birth weight and maternal malnutrition going unchecked.

Government interventions, therefore, must start with preventing child marriage using the relevant law, providing incentives for girls to stay in school, and conducting awareness campaigns about the harms caused by child marriage. Authorities must also keep food prices low, and increase the scope of open market sales (OMS) and other programmes that provide poorer citizens with subsidised or free food rations. Improving nutrition also requires massive awareness building and educating people on what constitutes nutritious food. Programmes to teach rural women, often in charge of family meals, to grow kitchen gardens near their homes, and which foods are nutritious and which are not, can go a long way. School curricula should also feature lessons on nutrition from the earliest classes.

To address the critical issue of our children growing up stunted, a comprehensive, sustained, and well-coordinated effort involving the government, communities, schools, and families is essential. Bangladesh cannot aspire to achieve higher economic growth and development while so many of its children are being denied the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Don't let another waterway project fail

Govt must learn from past failures, make waterways a reliable transport option

Historically, the country's government, irrespective of whether they were political or non-political, has usually ended up wasting resources—both natural and tax-funded. This is quite evident in the case of introducing and operating waterway transport surrounding the capital. A recent report by *Prothom Alo* illustrates how, since the beginning of the millennium, there have been several failed attempts and at least Tk 122 crore lost in establishing waterways and passenger waterbuses on the rivers and canals in and around Dhaka. More than two decades later, the incumbent BNP government is reportedly considering the revival of the capital's waterways to curb pollution, improve drainage, increase navigability, and introduce waterbuses. But before these plans materialise, will the authorities stop to really learn from past failures?

Reportedly, between 2000 and 2005, Tk 36 crore was spent to build 10 landing stations, seven terminals, and other infrastructure along 29 km on the Ashulia-Sadarghat route. Two launches, dubbed "waterbuses," were also introduced in 2004, but their service ended shortly after. Between 2007 and 2010, the 40-km water route from Ashulia to Kanchpur Bridge via Tongi was developed with three landing stations and using Tk 47 crore, while an additional Tk 38 crore went towards purchasing waterbuses. Although the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) claims that the services of these several waterbuses along multiple key routes failed due to a shortage of passengers, commuters cite the service's lack of punctuality as what drove them away.

Efficient public transport is perhaps one of the most needed services in and around the capital. Therefore, it is obvious that the circular waterway project has largely failed due to a combination of poor planning and inadequate service quality. For instance, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority data shows that of the 25 road bridges and three railway bridges across the circular waterway, at least 20 are too low to facilitate the passage of waterbuses. Besides, in 2017, a BIWTC committee made several recommendations to rectify issues such as the Buriganga's pollution, terminal inaccessibility, and lack of walkways on banks, which were unheeded. The same issues still plague the system today.

As the government considers reviving these waterways and incorporating them into the capital's transportation network, it must plan for decades ahead instead of hastily implementing projects to tout as achievements in the next election. The people of this country are painfully familiar with grand plans and wastage of crores of taka, with nothing to show but dilapidated components. This must not be the case for the next Dhaka circular waterway plan.

A rosy narrative on school decentralisation is not helpful



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MANZOOR AHMED

The narrative of a success story about reaching near-universal enrolment and closing the gender gap in primary education in Bangladesh is quite justified, but the achievement itself is neither exceptional nor improbable, as is sometimes claimed. An acceleration in the enrolment of both girls and boys in low-income countries globally has been the larger picture since the onset of the "Education for All" movement in the 1990s. The disappointment is that this growth in numbers has not been matched by children acquiring the basic skills of reading, writing and counting. Bangladesh and most low-income countries are struggling to overcome this schooling-without-learning challenge. The term "learning poverty," indicating the proportion of children who cannot read a simple text in the national language, has sadly become a key descriptor of education systems in many countries.

Clearly, there is no magic potion that can remedy the persistent problem of schooling without learning or mitigate learning poverty. As I explained in a previous article published by this daily, a focus on student learning achievements has specific implications for teacher preparation and school management, as well as for system governance, public investment and accountability, and ensuring acceptable quality for all children. It also has implications for a common core curriculum and learning content for all children, as well as assessment systems that provide a credible picture of what children learn.

The management of primary and secondary school education in Bangladesh is among the most centralised in the world, given the size of its enrolment and number of institutions. All major aspects of running a government-funded school—curriculum and learning content, teaching personnel, school calendar and teaching hours, infrastructure and facilities, student evaluation, and financing and budgets—are strictly regulated by laws, rules and directives from the divisions of two education ministries and a plethora of other bodies at the central level. Little room is left for schools to plan and manage education activities, teaching personnel and school budgets in order to make schools adaptive and responsive to the needs and circumstances of children and families in each community. There is no such thing as area-based planning of school education with a headcount of all children in an upazila to ensure that all of them are adequately served.

Yes, rhetorical support for greater authority and responsibility at the school and community level has been expressed in policy statements such as the National Education Policy 2010. This aspect of the policy has never been translated into operational measures, however. This is part of a larger picture of the state of politics and governance in Bangladesh. The ruling oligarchy comprising the political class, the business class, and the higher civil and military bureaucracy finds the highly unitary and centralised governance structure advantageous for itself. Article 59 of the Constitution of Bangladesh provides for local government bodies composed of elected representatives to carry out functions related to public order, public services and economic development. But this article is being continuously violated with the tacit consent of all major political parties.

In response to demands for decentralised school management, a small flat grant of Tk 20,000 per school per year was approved in 2009 to allow schools to buy learning materials and stationery while covering minor repairs and maintenance. No such fund was available to schools at that time. The grant was gradually increased under the Third Primary Education Development Program (PEDP3) and the PEDP4 to an amount of Tk 50,000-Tk 70,000, depending on the size of the school. This was called SLIP (or School Level Improvement Plan). The decision-makers, however, seemed to have overlooked the irony that a "slip" can also mean a careless or accidental mistake.

If SLIP was meant to be an initiative to change the historic practice and culture of top-down decisions regarding teaching-learning, teacher management, school maintenance, and student assessment, and to shift authority and decision-making down to the school level, its design and implementation were not up to the task.

Moreover, even after the increase in the per-school annual grant to Tk 50,000 to Tk 70,000, the SLIP grant amounts to one to two percent of the total government spending for a school. According to the primary and mass education ministry's Annual Sector Performance Report (ASPR) 2024, the total government expenditure per primary school student was Tk 17,613 in FY2023-24. The annual SLIP grant for an average government primary school enrolling 200-250 students translates to Tk 200 to Tk 300 per student. Up to 99 percent of public primary education spending is controlled centrally—mainly for teacher salaries, infrastructure, textbook distribution and administrative overhead—about which schools have no say.

Even the tiny amount available at schools is subject to detailed rules and restrictions, with many layers of control from the upazila education office to the central ministry level for approval of spending proposals and the actual transfer of funds. The grant, paid as reimbursement after the school provides documentation for spending the money according to an approved plan, has added to delays, red tape and scope for corruption. The most recent 2023 guideline for the SLIP grant is a 24-page, closely printed document detailing the procedures and formalities to be followed by the school. Thus, SLIP may be described as a highly centralised project to promote decentralisation.

By equating the transfer of a tiny fraction of school financing to schools (under various restrictions, no less) with greater authority and responsibility at the school and community level, SLIP limits and distorts the concept of decentralisation. One cannot help but wonder whether there is a lack of understanding of decentralised education governance among policymakers, or whether there is deliberate resistance to meaningful decentralisation.

The fifth phase of the Primary Education Development Program (PEDP5) is supposed to have begun in July this year. SLIP is again being seen as the mechanism for providing schools with expanded autonomy, shifting the emphasis from basic physical maintenance towards interventions directly linked to improving student learning, foundational literacy and numeracy, and climate-resilient school environments. A SLIP effectiveness study commissioned by the Directorate of Primary Education and Unicef was undertaken by the Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC). A policy brief based on the study ambiguously concludes that SLIP has "not failed" but it has "drastically underperformed its own design potential." The single largest reason for the drastic underperformance is seen to be the fact that "SLIP still operates on a reimbursement basis." *("Why Bangladesh's schools need financial autonomy," The Daily Star, August 1, 2026).*

It is disappointing that the PPRC policy brief based on the SLIP effectiveness study argues that an administrative detail—reimbursement versus advance payment—can determine whether decentralisation reforms succeed or fail. The brief further states, "As Bangladesh mulls the launch of PEDP5, more than any grand design... shifting from a reimbursement principle to one of advance payment is what now stands between Bangladesh's primary schools and the learning outcomes its enrolment statistics have long promised but not yet delivered." It thus reduces the concept of decentralisation of education governance and school management to a minor technical fix regarding the transfer of a small amount of funding to schools.

The effectiveness study itself implies that decentralised school management is much more than transferring a small amount of funding to schools and that SLIP's scope and procedures do not match its objectives. Given the current circumstances, what Bangladesh needs is not merely a better mechanism for administering SLIP, but a genuine rethinking of how primary education is governed and managed to improve learning outcomes. Meaningful decentralisation would give schools and communities real authority, resources and responsibility needed to respond to local needs, but within a framework that safeguards common standards and equity.



VISUAL: **ANWAR SOHEL**

We must restore parliament's oversight role



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MUHTASIM M. MUSANNA

The question of accountability and transparency in state institutions often arise when Bangladesh faces a major public controversy. But this question almost always remains without a meaningful answer. The lack of accountability is often caused by the weakness in the institutions that are supposed to ensure it. And some of the most consistently overlooked institutions for this task are the parliamentary standing committees.

The need for parliamentary standing committees is recognised in the Constitution of Bangladesh. Article 76 provides for the establishment of such committees, including those for individual ministries. It also empowers parliament to determine the composition and functions of these committees through the Rules of Procedure. The vision for this is straightforward: the parliamentary standing committees will continuously oversee how the executive branch of the government—the ministries and other officials—perform and implement policies.

Parliamentary oversight is considered a bedrock of democracy, and we often see it in practice. In the US, for instance, the Congressional committee hearings have compelled many influential figures to answer for their actions. We have seen Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg testify before the Senate on issues ranging from data privacy to misinformation spread. FBI directors often appear before the committees to answer questions on surveillance, investigations, and national security. In the UK, it is routine for Parliamentary Select Committees to question ministers about their handling of government policies and affairs. These hearings demonstrate a simple democratic principle: in a functional democracy, no public institution, official or corporation is beyond scrutiny.

The parliamentary standing committees in Bangladesh are designed for this function. Their tasks include reviewing proposed legislation before it reaches the floor of the House, examining the performance of ministries, scrutinising public expenses, and inviting officials and ministers to justify their actions. The hearings can take place behind closed doors if it's related to national security, or in a public setting, if appropriate. Furthermore, the standing committees have investigative authority to look into irregularities across sectors.

However, the reality is different. Parliamentary committees rarely exercise their independence and authority to ensure accountability in the public sector. The executive branch's influence over the legislature is a key reason that limits the committees' willingness to scrutinise ministries. In most cases, the committees are dominated by ruling party lawmakers, and those members often prioritise party loyalty over accountability, as a 2015 TIB report found. Also, the committees don't meet regularly, and there is poor coordination, limited technical support, and low public awareness.

A strong oversight mechanism is vital when governments exercise significant executive power. Decisions on issues such as public procurement, surveillance, digital governance, and the delivery of public services that affect the citizens should be questioned by effective parliamentary committees, which can review administrative actions and provide recommendations, and further improve accountability, transparency, and public trust in governance.

To this end, the country doesn't need any constitutional reform; Article 76 already outlines the framework of these committees. What is needed is to allow them to function independently and equip them with adequate resources so they can perform their oversight role effectively.

The Daily Star Reg. No. DA 781 | **EDITOR & PUBLISHER: Mahfuz Anam** Printed by him on behalf of Mediaworld Ltd at Transcraft Ltd, 229, Tejgaon Industrial Area, editor@thedailystar.net | **Registered & Head Offices:** The Daily Star Centre 64-65 Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, Dhaka-1215 Phone: 09610222222 | **Newsroom:** Fax- 58156306 reporting@thedailystar.net | **Advertisement:** 01711623910 advertisement@thedailystar.net GPO Box: 3257 | **Subscription:** 01711623906 | thedailystar.net bangla.thedailystar.net/

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

We cannot let Indigenous midwifery and its traditions disappear



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PAVEL PARTHA

There is no hospital near Mohanpur, an ancient village of the Banai community in Sunamganj's Madhyanagar upazila. The elderly midwives of the village are the only dependable support when a child is born. In the Banai language, midwives are called "daimai." Eighty-five-year-old Shibila Banai, of the Nakla Nikni (clan), is the village's renowned daimai. She learned the art of midwifery from her grandmothers, Chuiltamoni Banai and Sukumoni Banai, and has safely assisted in more than 50 births. Respected as practitioners of a sacred profession, the daimais use herbal medicine and spirituality through complex rituals and prayers, aiding humans in their journey from the womb into the world beyond.

However, their work in the Banai society is declining as no new daimais are emerging. There are several reasons. Domination by the mainstream Bangalee society, cultural hegemony, land grabbing and changes in agricultural production relations have made the Banai an impoverished community. There is no work in the village, so people are leaving in search of a livelihood. Some even risk their lives and cross the border to work in Indian coal and stone quarry areas.

Poverty, declining health as well as fear and uncertainty created by ethnic marginalisation are also reducing the childbirth rate in Banai society. Even Shibila, who possesses knowledge of an ancient civilisation, is struggling to survive. Neither the state nor wider society recognises her contributions. However, it is not just Shibila; across Indigenous and rural Bangalee communities in the country, traditional midwifery is gradually disappearing due to a lack of proper recognition.

In this context, this year's theme of the UN International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples—"Honouring indigenous midwives: Safeguarding life and well-being"—becomes relevant. It focuses on the contributions of Indigenous midwives, their traditional knowledge and philosophy and their marginalisation. It calls for the urgent preservation of Indigenous midwives' knowledge and recognition of their contributions. It also urges governments to guarantee the effective participation of Indigenous and traditional midwives in the country's healthcare system through necessary training, equipment and employment opportunities.

While the latest Population and Housing Census 2022 records the Indigenous population of Bangladesh as 16,50,159, belonging to 50 ethnic identities, it is not known how many among them are government- or NGO trained midwives. Besides, very little research on this subject has been carried out. The absence of statistics and documentation on rural and Indigenous midwifery demands critical discussion on this traditional profession.

Indigenous midwives of marginalised communities

The names and forms of midwifery differ from one ethnic community to another. Among the Bawm of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, midwives are known as "nau daumah"—"nau" means younger siblings, while "daumah" means to hold something; there is a silent "fa" which means a child. The name comes from the fact that midwives are the first to hold a child during childbirth. Rou Soom Bawm, well-known in Bandarban's Ruma upazila's Bethelpara, has not experienced a single unsafe delivery in her life as a midwife. However, arbitrary arrests and prolonged detention in prisons have affected the lives of women and children in the Bawm community, consequently impacting midwifery practice as well.

Among the Khumi, midwives are known by two names: "cha-nau-singnai-neumpui" and "daywongdi sangde". In Prafungma para in Ruma, Bandarban Chiling Khumi and Thongbe Khumi are well known for this work.

Midwives among the Lusai community are called "nau daumtu;" in the Marma language, they are called "waibaying syoma." But the Marmas of Bandarban, in their regional dialect, call them "wainek chhaa-rama". U Nume Marma from Daakchai para and Ma Mui Ching Marma of Bolipara have made names as midwives in Bandarban's Thanchi upazila.

Among the matrilineal Lyngam community, midwives are called "mau-munnu," and Chinchili Nongbrei of Sanyasipara in Netrokona's Kalmakanda was an extraordinary one.

The matrilineal Khasi people call midwives "ka nongpynkha khun." But in the regional War-sinteng language, midwives are called "satar." Rani Marlia is a reputed Khasi midwife from Jhimai Khasipunji in Kulaura, Moulvibazar.

In the matrilineal Mandi community, midwives or "khamal" are accorded the status of a household priest. They are known as "michiksa khamal." Miji Mree of Idilpur in Tangail's Madhupur was a well-reputed michiksa khamal, who also introduced pineapple cultivation in the area.

The Tripura community calls midwives "gumachouk" or "gumachok." Rachana Royaja of Thakurchhora and Suchirong Tripura of Bailyachhari in Guimara, Khagrachhari, are reputed gumachoks.

Among the coastal Rakhains, midwives are called "waadechhrama." They are respected as a matriarch or "emigrio," because they have the exclusive right to cut the "aesei" (umbilical cord). Semaching Rakhain, a centenarian from Tulatulipara in Kalapara, Patuakhali, is an experienced midwife.

Among the Chakma, midwives are called "oja." The Tanchangya call them "osapuri". Dayamugi Tanchangya of Tulachharipara and Dibi Tanchangya of Atotolipara in the Gainda union of Rajasthali, Rangamati, work as osapuri.



Moiladew is a birth ritual among the Indigenous Banai community of Sunamganj's Mohanpur, performed for child wellbeing. PHOTO: DHUBURAJ CHANDRA BANAI

The Santal call midwives "deurigin boodhi". Malati Hembrom of Barkona village in Parbatipur, and Dulhan Tudu from Matrigao in Thakurgaon Sadar, Dinajpur, are experienced midwives. The Mundas call a midwife "dhayani" or "daiyani". In the Mushahar community, midwives are known as "dhaaini". Lilmoni Rishi, from Fakdanpur in Thakurgaon Sadar, is both a dhaaini and a "khodni," one who does tattoos.

The science and philosophy of traditional midwifery

Elderly Indigenous midwives in Bangladesh say that their work is not merely about childbirth and ensuring safe motherhood. Rather, they carry out the spiritual and cultural responsibility of creating a connection between human beings, land and nature. They pass down the grand narratives of the universe and changing philosophies of life from one generation to the next.

To do this, they perform many rituals, observe various practices, and preserve numerous plants and natural resources. Their communities entrust them with the responsibility of cutting the umbilical cord after a child leaves the mother's womb. Therefore, it is not simply a profession. This responsibility carries profound meaning and encompasses a complex practice with cosmovision.

In most Indigenous communities, a specially made knife or blade made from a particular variety of bamboo is used to cut the umbilical cord, which establishes a newborn's first cultural connection with nature. Perhaps bamboo was among the first wild objects in nature to be domesticated by prehistoric humans. That ancient memory of the development of human civilisation is brought back through the bamboo knife, reminding people not to lose their sense of connection with nature and historical traditions and to remain conscious of their responsibilities and duties.

Among the Marma, this bamboo knife is called "waah kalaisong." The Lengma call it "sangsali;" the Tripura call it "yanthal" in their Kokborok language; the Chakma: "duluk;" the Tanchangya: "bai-sh duluk;" the Mandi: "wani gaandeleng;" the Munda: "patikhur;" the Bediya Mahato: "chanchor;" and the Santal language: "chhoilou" or "chhunchhuni."

Among the Santals, there was an ancient practice of cutting the umbilical cord with the tip of a bamboo arrow, which they believed established a connection between the memory of ancestors and the identity of a newborn. These bamboo knives differ from one community to another in their form, making, and use. They are generally made from specific bamboo such as Makla, Dalu and Parbo, and are collected from protected sacred forests or places of worship in the village.

The newborn is given holy water, honey or, sometimes, a drop of a culturally significant drink. Turmeric, neem, ash and various medicinal pastes are applied to the navel area of the newborn.

In most communities, a temporary "aatur ghar" or birthing room is built. The midwife and mother stay in this room for several days after childbirth. During this period, special food is prepared, healthcare is provided, and specific rules, customs and rituals are followed. Later, the midwife is ceremonially bid farewell through social rituals.

Effective policies and commitments

In Bangladesh, there are several laws to recognise, respect and protect the Indigenous and traditional knowledge and culture, including the Plant Varieties Conservation Act, 2019 and the Bangladesh Biodiversity Act, 2017. Besides, the National Cultural Policy 2006 speaks of strengthening the social harmony and cultural development of Indigenous peoples, while the Small Ethnic Groups Cultural Institutions Act, 2010 speaks of protecting their cultural rights. Indigenous midwifery, as part of traditional knowledge and culture, should therefore remain protected under these laws and policies.

Meanwhile, the National Health Policy 2011 notes that poor, socially disadvantaged, uneducated and marginalised people, Indigenous communities, women and labourers are being deprived of healthcare services. Although some programmes are being implemented for these groups, they are not being effective in their social and cultural contexts. Besides, the policy mentions ensuring adequate and skilled midwives at the field level in government health services and establishing systems for training the necessary human resources.

However, the policy lacks clear commitment to protecting rural traditional midwifery, including Indigenous communities' practices, and safeguarding their livelihoods. In this context, alongside an effective policy framework, it is essential to ensure the recognition of Indigenous midwives and coordinate initiatives to protect and develop their practices to match today's needs.

What research retractions reveal about our universities' weaknesses



Dr Syed Saad Andaleeb
is distinguished professor emeritus at Pennsylvania State University in the US and former vice-chancellor at Brac University.

SYED SAAD ANDALEEB

A recent *Prothom Alo* report on at least 325 retracted papers affiliated with researchers at Bangladeshi universities has attracted significant public attention, with indignation expressed at the state of Bangladesh's scholarly enterprise. One commented, "Although this is shocking, the problem has been widespread for some time." Another called it "shameful and corrosive," while a third opined that the phenomenon reflected "a broader moral crisis that extends far beyond academia." A high-ranking university official blamed the international journals for the retractions, stating that submitted papers are usually screened with Turnitin, a plagiarism-detection software, or similar tools, so the retractions make little sense.

Historically, retractions were rare events. Over the last two decades, however, retractions have increased substantially across disciplines and countries. A study highlighted an array of reasons for retractions, ranging from data and analytical errors to ethical breaches such as plagiarism and fraud. Another study questioned the peer review process and editorial oversight, suggesting that the prevalence of research misconduct may be on the rise globally. This suggests that Bangladesh is not an exceptional case in the latest retractions.

The retracted papers associated with Bangladeshi institutions closely resemble those documented internationally and include plagiarism, peer-review manipulation, unreliable data, and suspected paper mill activity. Paper mills refer to fraudulent organisations that make money by producing fake manuscripts and selling authorship to academic customers. The matter should, therefore, be understood from a global perspective characterised by increasing publication pressures, evolving forms of publication misconduct, the role of artificial intelligence (AI), and forms of problematic research trends such as commercial production.

Retractions are often interpreted primarily as indicators of individual misconduct, but such an interpretation is often incomplete. The critical question is not whether Bangladesh's retractions are egregious; they are, and cannot be excused; but even top-notch institutions of global repute experience instances of such breaches. My concern here is over the institutional conditions under which such problems emerge and the capacity and willingness of the institutions to respond effectively. Retractions can reveal situations in which publication expectations exceed available resources, incentive systems prioritise quantity over quality, governance mechanisms fail to detect problems early, and research capacity is unable to keep pace with institutional ambitions. These factors suggest that integrity failures frequently emerge within environments characterised by structural pressures and capacity limitations. I, therefore, want to emphasise that research integrity challenges in Bangladesh are closely linked to a variety of structural constraints within the national research ecosystem. Let us examine some of these constraints.

Teaching overload and time constraints: Faculty members in many Bangladeshi universities face substantial teaching and administrative responsibilities. Large student populations, extensive examination duties, committee service, and administrative obligations often limit the time available for research activities. In comparison, faculty members at research-intensive universities frequently benefit from lower teaching loads, research assistants, and institutional support structures that facilitate sustained scholarly engagement.

Limited research funding: High-quality research requires sustained investment in infrastructure, laboratories, equipment, databases, software, fieldwork, and collaborative activities. Yet historically, research funding in Bangladesh has been grossly inadequate. The country's gross research and development expenditure as a share of GDP was 0.35 percent, 0.31 percent, and 0.30 percent in FY 2018-19, FY 2019-2020, and FY 2020-21, respectively. A significant portion of this budget then goes to salaries and non-developmental expenses. Academics who place themselves on the altar of knowledge extension often dig into their own pockets or are forced to become "creative" to meet institutional demands. This affects the quality, reproducibility, and competitiveness of research.

Talent shortages: Although Bangladesh has expanded access to higher education considerably, the number of highly trained researchers remains limited in many fields. As I recently argued in an article published by *The Daily Star*, talent represents one of the most serious constraints of our universities. This places significant demands on a relatively small group of active scholars who must simultaneously conduct research, supervise students, secure funding, publish papers, and perform numerous administrative functions.

Brain drain: Bangladesh's most talented graduates pursue advanced education and research careers abroad, and many of them remain abroad because of the significantly greater opportunities and support they receive to explore knowledge horizons. While international mobility can generate important benefits, sustained outward migration weakens domestic research capacity, reduces mentorship opportunities, and limits institutional development.

Weak governance: Research integrity depends on effective institutional governance. Many Bangladeshi universities continue to face challenges related to the absence of policies on research misconduct, lack of ethics oversight, misconduct in investigation procedures, lack of data management policies, absence of ethics training, and poor research integrity in institutions.

In the absence of effective governance systems, problematic practices may persist unchecked until they are exposed through external investigations or publisher-led retractions. For years, I have advocated requiring all faculty research to be posted online. This would allow scholars to scrutinise one another's work, making knowledge generation measurable, replicable, falsifiable, and publicly verifiable, while also creating social pressure for greater rigour and care.

This situation also places a spotlight on the University Grants Commission (UGC), whose regulatory mandate extends beyond compliance to the cultivation of a healthy research ecosystem. Regrettably, over the years, the UGC has neither demonstrated the capacity nor the resolve to nurture research at the level required for sustained academic advancement. Sustainable improvements in research integrity demand institutional reform rather than sole reliance on punitive approaches. Several policy priorities emerge from this analysis that are not elaborated on due to space constraints. For instance, establishing dedicated research-integrity offices within universities, increasing national investment in research infrastructure and funding, strengthening ethics education and responsible-conduct-of-research training, improving mechanisms for investigating allegations of misconduct, and developing national frameworks for monitoring research integrity and publication practices.

Bangladesh's recent experience is a wake-up call for institutional action. Importantly, the retractions ought to be seen as symptoms of deeper structural tensions between growing research ambitions and limited institutional capacity. Ultimately, the future of Bangladesh's research and the pursuit of science will depend on meaningful investment in people, institutions, governance, and integrity. Retractions may signal where science may have gone astray, but they also point to something deeper: the need for a far stronger infrastructure of support, both human and material, to ensure that science can thrive with rigour, credibility, and trust.



SINGAPORE AT 61

Building on Shared Values and Enduring Friendship



DEREK LOH
Singapore High Commissioner to Bangladesh

This year, Singapore celebrates 61 years of independence. 2026 also marks the 60th anniversary of the launch of Singapore's Pledge, which is recited by Singaporeans on the 9th of August at our annual National Day Parade and other celebratory events throughout the country to commemorate our founding and purpose as a nation and people. The Pledge is taught in our schools and recited by our schoolchildren and by our national servicemen when they serve their mandatory military service. Written by our first Foreign Minister, Mr. S Rajaratnam, the Pledge calls on Singaporeans to commit ourselves as "one united people, regardless of race, language or religion, to build a democratic society, based on justice and equality, to achieve happiness, prosperity and progress for our nation".

The pledge entrenches the enduring four core values of Singapore: multiculturalism, ensuring no single group defines Singapore; democracy, guaranteeing citizens a voice through regular elections; justice, applying the rule of law equally regardless of rank or wealth; and equality, fulfilling founding Prime Minister's words when he announced separation from Malaysia - "This is not a Malay nation; this is not a Chinese nation' this is not an Indian nation. Everyone will have his place, equal: language, culture and religion." Multiculturalism, democracy, justice and equality have held Singapore and its people together, through difficult times such as Covid-19 and will serve as a critical bond in an increasingly turbulent global environment.

As we celebrate our nationhood, we thank our international partners, including Bangladesh, with whom we will mark 55 years of diplomatic relations in 2027. Singapore was the first Southeast Asian nation to establish diplomatic ties with Bangladesh in February 1972. Over the decades, our friendship has deepened. In 2025, trade in goods between our nations totalled SGD $3.9 billion, making Bangladesh Singapore's second-largest trading partner in South Asia, alongside over SGD $3 billion in foreign direct investment in 2024.

Singaporean firms Sembcorp, PSA International, Surbana Jurong and Singapore Airlines have a firm presence in Bangladesh's economy and are interested in expanding further. Singapore can also partner with Bangladesh in the digital economy, urban planning, infrastructure projects and healthcare.

At the people-to-people level, the ties are longstanding and predate our independence. Many Bangladeshis have lived and worked in Singapore since the Colonial times, helping to build Singapore and adding to our multicultural pot. More recently, some 2,200 Bangladeshi officials have come to Singapore to engage in the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP) on courses and seminars from finance and public administration to sustainable development, and aviation. The interaction between our citizens cannot be overemphasised – it builds mutual understanding and with understanding respect.

Singapore's High Commission in Dhaka was upgraded from a Consulate in October 2023. This reflects the development and growth in our ties. Following the upgrade, our mutual engagement has increased from government and political parties to culture and academia. Last year the High Commission, as part of our 60th independence year celebrations, held a series of events, including a donation of 60 books to the Bangladesh National Library, a movie screening at North South University featuring two Singaporean films, cooking classes on Singapore cuisine held at the Bangladesh National Hotel and Tourism Training Institute and a children's charity event with Action Aid Bangladesh.

This year, we have added a consular networking and information sharing reception, an alumni gathering for SCP participants and a Singapore-Bangladesh art exhibition co-organised with the Art Bangla Foundation.

We continue to value our warm friendship with Bangladesh and will work to foster even closer relations and ties not only between us but also on the global stage.

Even as we celebrate, we must keep a close eye on the increasing ructions geopolitically. In times like this, Singapore needs the cohesion afforded and made possible by multiculturalism, democracy, justice and equality more than ever. These four values not only bind but are the building blocks for wisdom. The pledge crafted by S Rajaratnam remains as relevant as ever for Singapore.

Connecting Singapore and Bangladesh: Building the Next Chapter Together

On behalf of DBS, I am delighted to join in celebrating Singapore's 61st National Day.

Singapore's journey from a young nation to a global business and financial hub reflects the values of resilience, openness and long-term vision. These same principles have guided DBS since our establishment as the Development Bank of Singapore in 1968. Today, as we support businesses across Asia, including in Bangladesh, we continue to build on this heritage of connecting markets and opportunities.



For more than a decade, DBS has supported growing trade and investment links between Singapore and Bangladesh. The opening of our Dhaka Representative Office in 2023 reaffirmed our long-term commitment to Bangladesh and our commitment to supporting our clients and stakeholders in the country. As businesses deepen their regional and international connections, DBS supports their ambitions through our Asian network, digital capabilities and deep industry expertise.

As we celebrate Singapore's National Day, we are honoured to be part of Bangladesh's growth journey. We look forward to continuing to support businesses and strengthen the longstanding ties between Singapore and Bangladesh in the years ahead.

TAHSINA BANU
Chief Representative
DBS Dhaka Representative Office



Inauguration of a rooftop solar system with battery storage at Sirajganj Sadar Hospital, supporting critical healthcare services with cleaner energy, 12 August, 2025.

Happy National Day, SINGAPORE!

As Singapore marks its National Day, Sembcorp proudly celebrates our nation's journey of resilience, progress and innovation. This occasion also reflects the strong and enduring ties between Singapore and Bangladesh, built on mutual trust, shared aspirations and a commitment to sustainable development.

In Bangladesh, Sembcorp is proud to contribute to the country's energy security through our 414MW power plant, helping to support economic growth and improve lives through reliable energy solutions.

Beyond powering homes and businesses, we remain committed to creating meaningful and lasting impact in the communities where we operate. Since 2017, our community programmes have reached more than 771,000 beneficiaries, supported by investments of over BDT 34.5 million across healthcare, education, skills development, clean energy initiatives and relief efforts for vulnerable communities.

This year, we further strengthened our commitment to sustainable development with the inauguration of a rooftop solar energy system with battery storage at Sirajganj Sadar Hospital, supporting critical healthcare services with cleaner energy.

As Singapore celebrates 61 years of nation-building, we reaffirm our commitment to Bangladesh's progress and look forward to deepening our partnership through responsible investments, reliable energy solutions and shared prosperity.

Together, we are powering a brighter and more sustainable future.

SIA Marks 40 Years in Bangladesh

Singapore Airlines (SIA) extends warmest wishes to Singapore on its 61st National Day in 2026. This year also marks 40 years of SIA in Bangladesh, connecting Dhaka to Singapore and beyond.

Since launching Dhaka services in 1986, SIA has connected Bangladesh to the world. Through its Singapore Changi hub, SIA provided access across Asia-Pacific, Europe and North America, supporting the country's role in international trade, education and investment.

Over four decades, SIA has partnered with government agencies, trade partners, and corporates to grow Bangladesh's aviation industry—boosting tourism, business travel, and cargo flows. Operating daily Dhaka–Singapore flights, SIA continues expanding in Bangladesh through cabin, digital, and service innovations, while maintaining excellence through staff training.



Committed to sustainable growth, Singapore Airlines is pursuing net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 through fleet modernisation, responsible resource use, and community support. While strengthening air links between Bangladesh and Singapore, SIA also enables passengers to calculate and offset their flight emissions through its Voluntary Carbon Offset Programme.

As Singapore celebrates its 61st National Day and SIA marks 40 years in Bangladesh, SIA reaffirms its long-term commitment to the country and looks forward to many more years of strengthening connections, fostering partnerships, and supporting Bangladesh's continued growth.

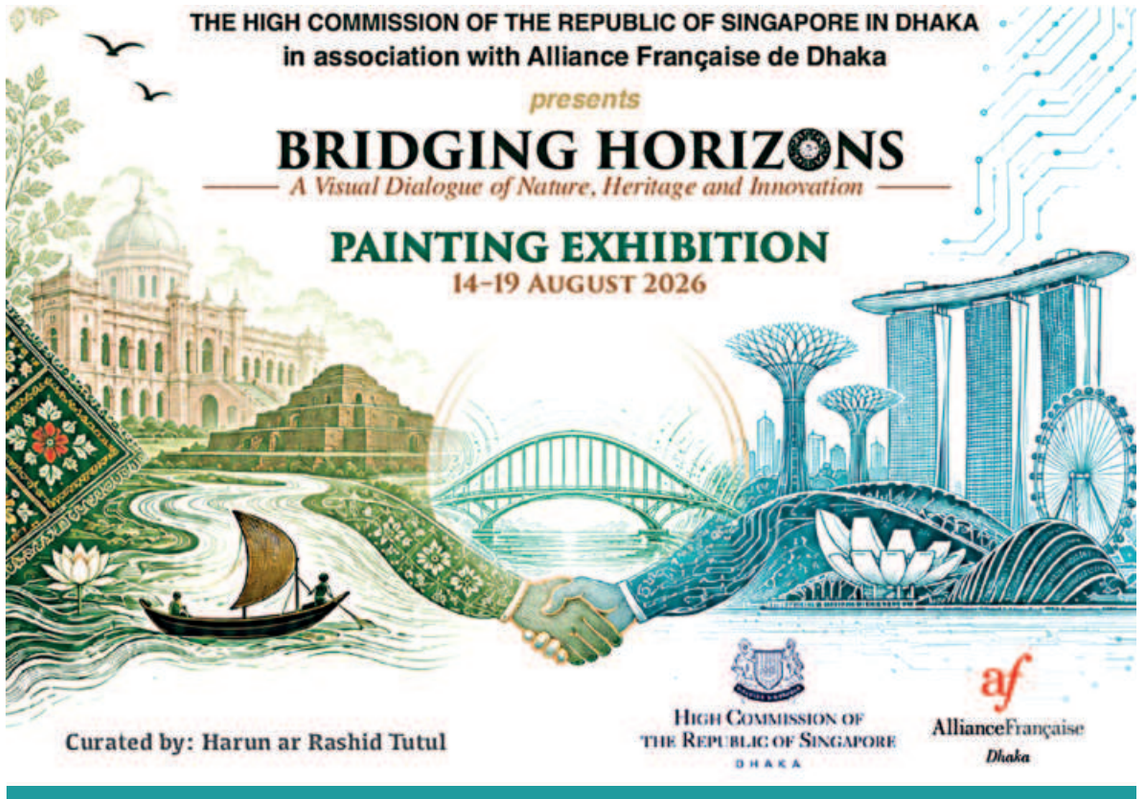
ROBYN CHENG KING
General Manager Bangladesh
Singapore Airlines Limited

SINGAPORE IN DHAKA: Events hosted by the Singapore High Commission in 2026



SINGAPORE MOVIE NIGHT

To celebrate the 37th Singapore International Film Festival, Chargé d'Affaires Mitchel Lee hosted a Singapore Movie Night on 2 July featuring Amoeba, a coming-of-age film about a high school girl who challenges convention and pushes boundaries. The film highlights the importance of embracing new ideas and perspectives.



MONTH LONG ACTIVITIES FOR SINGAPORE'S 61ST NATIONAL DAY

To celebrate National Day, the High Commission is hosting several events:

Aug 9: National Day Parade Screening

Aug 10: Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP) Alumni Dinner

Aug 11-13: Singapore Cuisine Cooking Class (at NHTTI)

Aug 14-19: Singapore-Bangladesh Art Exhibition (at Alliance Française de Dhaka)



University Talks

On 21 April and 11 May, Chargé d'Affaires Mitchel Lee delivered lectures at the University of Dhaka and North South University on Singapore's Experience and Role in International Law. Following last year's series on Singapore's Foreign Policy, these lectures addressed international legal issues surrounding the Strait of Hormuz.



VISA & CONSULAR NETWORKING SESSION

On 23 July, the Singapore High Commission brought together members of the diplomatic community for a Visa & Consular Networking Session, fostering friendship, professional exchanges and the sharing of best practices in visa and consular work.



Participants fly their kites during the International Kite Festival in Colombo yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Colombia's new president vows to 'defeat narco-terrorists'

AFP, *Cali*

Colombian President Abelardo de la Espriella vowed to restore order and eradicate "narco-terrorists" in a fiery first speech as leader on Friday.

The US-backed millionaire flew by helicopter to address soldiers in a military garrison after his inauguration in the southwestern city of Cali.

His mandate marks a sharp turn right for the Andean nation, with the 48-year-old keen to cozy up to Washington and come down hard on Colombia's patchwork of armed groups.

"There will be no room for maneuvers that undermine the stability of the nation," the president, who adopted a stiff military salute on the campaign trail, told hundreds of soldiers.

Iran, Oman 'very close' to deal on Hormuz

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the strait depended on other conditions, including US compensation to Iran.

The previous shipping traffic separation scheme through the strait was no longer acceptable to Tehran, he said, adding that Iran was discussing a temporary route with Oman while technical and legal issues surrounding a permanent route were resolved.

Iran has responded to the US attacks by targeting US bases in Gulf states and Jordan, and shipping in the narrow strait, which carried a fifth of the world's oil and gas shipments before the war.

The UAE yesterday said that Iran had attacked a carrier affiliated with its state oil company with a missile as it transited the Strait of Hormuz, with no injuries reported, in the latest escalation in attacks on shipping there.

There was no immediate comment from Iranian authorities. Iranian media quoted the UAE report without including the part in which the country blamed Iran for the attack.

In recent weeks, the Trump administration has repeatedly signaled that a deal to open the strait could be close, only to have Iran deny that talks are under way. It was unclear whether the latest flurry of negotiations would yield a more lasting arrangement.

"There is progress between Oman and Iran on the strait, and we expect a deal soon," a US official told Reuters on Friday. "Once the deal is announced to restore commercial shipping without impediments, the United States will lift the blockade of Iranian ports."

"As always, US actions will continue to be performance-based and tied to Iran's implementation of its commitments," the official said.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards also said yesterday that re-opening the Strait of Hormuz depended on Washington accepting Iran's conditions and was not related to the Iran-Oman negotiations.

Guards spokesperson Hossein Mohebbi did not specify the conditions but said Washington must stop interfering in the regional negotiation process.

"Whenever the United States accepts Iran's conditions, the Strait of Hormuz will certainly be reopened," he said, according to Iran's Tasnim news agency.

A proposed deal between Iran and Oman to help end five months of war between Iran and the US would give Tehran control over ships entering the Gulf through the strait, a senior Iranian source and two regional officials told Reuters on Wednesday, one of the biggest concessions yet to Iran.

US officials have repeatedly insisted they would never agree to Iran controlling access to the world's most important trade route for energy supplies. It was not clear whether they had sought to change the parameters of the deal.

Iran has used the hostilities to justify charging a toll on oil tankers. That, and the firing on ships that attempt to cross the strait without its permission, has badly disrupted global shipments, causing energy prices to surge and fueling inflation.

Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, one of the world's largest energy producers, said on Friday that 15 of its vessels had been struck in what it called unprovoked attacks while transiting the Strait of Hormuz since the start of the conflict. The attacks have killed one crew member and wounded 20 others, it said.

Iranian media often report attacks on ships saying they violated Iran's directives, without specifying that Iran was behind the attacks.

Iranian strikes on Strait of Hormuz shipping have been coupled with increased attacks by its Yemen-based allies, the Houthis, who have targeted ships at another oil chokepoint on the other side of the Arabian Peninsula between the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

New BTV DG

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of the law being made effective. If it is not in effect, there is no scope to make an appointment under it."

"If the act has been made effective through the issuance of a gazette notification, then there is no problem with the appointment," he added.

According to Ministry of Information sources, BTV DGs are appointed on deputation from among government officials of joint secretary or additional secretary rank, or on a contractual basis from outside the government. For contractual appointments, media personalities or professionals are selected under the "Public Service Act, 2018". Ministry of Public Administration sources said Mahbubul Alam, who was appointed during the interim government, received a contractual appointment under the Public Service Act.

Asked why the new DG was appointed under an inactive law when contractual appointments are possible under the Public Service Act, Golam Robbani, deputy secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration who signed the appointment notification, declined to comment and requested that senior officials be contacted.

Contacted, Nilufar Jesmin Khan, joint secretary of the Contract and Foreign Employment Branch of the Ministry of Public Administration, said, "We are discussing the matter. Please speak to our wing chief for comments on this."

Despite phone calls and text messages, Aknur Rahman, head of the Appointment, Promotion and Deputation Wing, did not respond.

Asked how the appointment happened despite multiple stages of scrutiny for contractual appointments, a senior Cabinet Division official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said, "Officers with the skills and personality required to run the state should be appointed to public administration. Otherwise, such problems will keep occurring."

"A few days ago, a retired officer was promoted from deputy secretary to joint secretary. This is the state of the Ministry of Public Administration," the official said, citing an example.

India can't play Hasina

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the Fall of the Fascist Government", organised by Sada Dal (White Panel), a pro-BNP teachers' organisation at Dhaka University, and the University Teachers' Association of Bangladesh (UTAB), marking the second anniversary of the July mass uprising.

He said Bangladesh wants friendly ties with India based on mutual respect.

"We want to maintain a friendly relationship with you. But we will never become the Awami League. We will maintain relations with you while upholding Bangladesh's interests, based on mutual dignity and respect and based on sovereignty and equality," he said.

On August 5, the Foreign Correspondents' Club of South Asia hosted a press conference in New Delhi where Hasina, her son Sajeeb Wazed Joy and other AL leaders spoke. The event was broadcast live on social media. Hasina reiterated her plan to return to Bangladesh in December this year.

Dhaka had earlier requested New Delhi to prevent Hasina from speaking at the event, saying it could affect bilateral relations.

On August 7, India's Ministry of External Affairs said the Indian government had no role in the event organised by a private media entity. It also said the government did not endorse anything said at the forum, "especially with regard to the duly constituted government of Bangladesh".

Referring to India's statement, Salahuddin said Bangladesh accepted the clarification but objected to Hasina being repeatedly allowed to speak to international media from India.

He rejected comparisons between Hasina's presence in India and BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman's political activities while in London.

Noting that Hasina has neither expressed remorse nor apologised to the people for the atrocities committed during the July uprising, Salahuddin questioned whether she could still be regarded as a democratic leader. He also alleged that Hasina was using her stay in India to make statements against Bangladesh's democratic process and create instability.

"The statements she is making from Delhi are against our democratic culture and the people of this country, and they are attempts to create instability -- these are our allegations. India cannot avoid responsibility for this," he said.

Turning to the interim government and its reform process, Salahuddin said some quarters had advocated extending its tenure for another five years, ignoring people's aspirations for a fair election and the transfer of power through a democratic process.

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi called for institutional and constitutional reforms and a change in the mindset of political leaders.

He said no single group could claim sole credit for the July uprising and noted that 142 Chhatra Dal leaders and activists were martyred during the movement.

Referring to a recent documentary screening at the official residence of Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman, Rizvi alleged that although the documentary mentioned Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, it did not mention former president Ziaur Rahman as the proclaimer of independence.

Dhaka University Vice-Chancellor Prof ABM Obaidul Islam said free thinking was obstructed on the campus during what he described as the fascist era.

DU Prof Md Mohiuddin moderated the event, chaired by UTAB Secretary General Prof Morshed Hasan Khan.

15,712 killed

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percent, were head-on collisions. The remaining 706 crashes occurred for other reasons.

Goods vehicles, including trucks, covered vans, pickups, tractors, trolleys and lorries, were blamed for the largest number of crashes. Their drivers were responsible for 6,481 crashes, or 40.34 percent, according to the report.

Motorcycle riders were solely responsible for 5,831 crashes, or 36.29 percent. Bus drivers were blamed for 2,164 crashes, three-wheelers for 732, private cars, microbuses, ambulances and jeeps for 438, pedestrians for 296, and bicycles and rickshaws for 123.

Regional roads saw the largest share of crashes, with 6,689, or 41.63 percent. National highways saw 4,773 crashes, while 2,646 occurred on urban roads and 1,957 on rural roads.

Motorcycles account for 71 percent of all registered motor vehicles in Bangladesh, the RSF said, adding that teenagers and young adults operate a large proportion of them.

The RSF blamed reckless riding, disregard for traffic rules, weak enforcement, unsafe road infrastructure, inadequate monitoring, and a shortage of affordable public transport for the high number of crashes.

It also said the way motorcycles are advertised encourages young people to associate speed with excitement.

Motorcycles are 30 times more dangerous than four-wheeled vehicles, the report said. It added that the use of substandard helmets was a major factor in motorcycle deaths and that quality helmets could reduce the risk of death in a crash by 48 percent.

The RSF called for standard helmets to be made compulsory, stricter enforcement of traffic laws, greater use of safety and surveillance technology, and safer road infrastructure.

It also recommended awareness campaigns at educational institutions and on social media, changes to the language used in motorcycle advertisements, and affordable, accessible and passenger-friendly public transport.

Indian

FROM PAGE 3

memories and photos of the anti-Modi movement have also been taken down," he said.

Asked by journalists, he said the BNP might be afraid of India. "If they weren't afraid, why would something that is a part of history be excluded?" he questioned.

He alleged that the current government had changed the museum's original plans.

Nahid further claimed that the museum's current state disproportionately highlights oppression faced by the BNP as a party, increasing its partisan narratives and statements.

The sections highlighting the July uprising should be more elaborate and follow a timeline, he said. "In particular, the roles of private university and madrasa students should be highlighted separately, which is missing [in the museum]."

He said there were similar stories of torture, brutality and resistance at various universities outside Dhaka and in different districts, but those aspects had not been included.

NCP lawmakers Akhter Hossen, Abdullah Al Amin and Nusrat Tabassum, among others, accompanied Nahid during the visit.

Small changes key

FROM PAGE 3

was Bangladesh's greatest strength. However, young people seeking systemic change must build alliances with other sections of society, as resistance to change remained strong.

Stressing decentralisation, he said farmers, women, entrepreneurs and ordinary people across the country should also be seen as agents of change, rather than viewing change as centred only on Dhaka and political leaders.

Citing education and health, he said forming an education commission alone would not transform the education system. Reforms were also needed in areas such as appointing vice-chancellors and ensuring education quality.

Similarly, small but important reforms were needed to make primary healthcare a pillar of the health system, he added.

He also urged people not to view young Bangladeshis' migration abroad negatively, saying they could not be blamed for leaving when adequate opportunities were unavailable at home.

Many, he added, want to return and contribute to the country. "The main question is whether we can create that environment."

He said reform was needed not only in state institutions but also in individual behaviour, citing traffic-rule violations and a lack of respect for women despite laws and public discussions on road safety and gender justice.

Speaking during the panel discussion, Alternatives organiser Tasnuva Zabeen said the July uprising had moved Bangladesh 10 to 15 years forward.

People can now speak out more freely, while political groups and civil society actors are raising their voices together, she said, calling for greater opportunities for women to enter politics.

Chairing the discussion, Supreme Court lawyer MM Khalequzzaman said systemic change was the long-term objective of the July uprising.

"We have long seen the 'politics of narrative'. Now we want to see the 'politics of performance'," he said.

He called for an autonomous judiciary free from executive control, a separate judicial secretariat and a review of laws from the British and Pakistani periods that are unnecessary or inconsistent with human rights.

Muneem Mobasher, co-founder of Bengal Institute of Peace and Economic Development, also spoke, among others.

Hafizur held

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Justice Md Rezaul Haque suspended Hafizur's bail until August 9 and ordered him to surrender within 24 hours.

The court also ordered law enforcement agencies to arrest him if he failed to surrender within the stipulated time.

PBI first arrested Hafizur from Keraniganj on the night of April 21 this year.

EC plans phased local polls

FROM PAGE 3

Meanwhile, LGRD Minister Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir on July 22 said local government elections were likely to be held by the end of this year or early 2027.

According to the roadmap, polls in the haor and northeastern areas -- Sunamganj, Netrokona, Kishoreganj and parts of Habiganj -- will be held between September and November, when water transport is easier.

EC member Masud said the roadmap also covers training for EC officials, voter list preparation, ink stocks, appointment of presiding officers and voter awareness campaigns.

The roadmap states that November to February has been marked suitable for polls in the hill and coastal belt -- Rangamati, Bandarban, Khagrachhari, Cox's Bazar and islands such as Hatiya and Sandwip, as well as parts of Barishal -- as the monsoon brings risks of landslides, heavy rain and tidal surges.

For riverine and char districts -- Kurigram, Gaibandha, Jamalpur, Sirajganj, Munshiganj, Shariatpur, Chandpur and Rajbari -- September to March has been set to avoid floods and erosion.

In the plains and urban centres -- all other divisions, districts, upazilas, municipalities and city corporations -- polls can be held any time outside the monsoon.

The workplan highlights challenges in phased polls, noting that short gaps in past elections led to clashes over nominations, scrutiny, appeals, symbol allocation, training of officials and ballot transport. Limited intervals also strained law enforcement as personnel had to move rapidly between areas.

As part of preparations, the EC has drafted codes of conduct for five tiers of local government and sought opinions from political parties.

On July 21, the commission finalised the rules with recommendations, such as including the armed forces in the definition of law enforcement agencies and disqualifying MPO-listed teachers, dual citizens, loan defaulters and guarantors from contesting local polls.

On July 7, Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin directed the swift finalisation of the code of conduct and election management manuals. According to the roadmap, rule-making is to be completed by August 15.

Masud said, "We will send it to the law ministry very soon. Work is also underway on the election management rules."

He also confirmed that local government polls would have domestic observers only, as foreign observers would be too costly.

He said BG Press had estimated Tk 41 crore for printing voter lists.

Bangladesh has 13 city corporations, 500 upazila parishads, 61 zila parishads and 4,580 union parishads, but no local government elections have been held in more than two years.

The Local Government Division removed 323 mayors and 323 councillors in August and September 2024, following the political changeover. It also removed 493 upazila chairmen and 494 vice chairmen, including female vice chairmen, in August 2024.

Among all these local bodies, 108 union parishads and 10 municipalities remain ineligible due to delimitation, voter list complications, and legal disputes. The rest are eligible for the elections, according to the workplan.

On July 9, the EC sought information from the LGD on the number of local government bodies eligible to go to polls.

It asked the LGD to respond by July 31, but EC officials said they had not received a reply.

Asked about the update, LGD Secretary Shahidul Hassan yesterday declined to provide specific details on the scheduling or formal communication for upcoming local government elections.

Asked whether the LGD would issue a letter to the EC for conducting local polls, he said, "Naturally, it should be given according to the rules."

Asked when such a letter might be sent, he said, "I can't say. It will be done when the government makes a decision."

Nine killed in road

FROM PAGE 3

in Nalka overpass area on the Jamuna Bridge highway around 1:00am, said OC Md Amirul Islam of Jamuna Bridge West Zone Police Station.

One of the deceased was identified as Md Monsur Ali, 26, of Bogura.

In Kishoreganj, two people were killed and two others injured when a passenger bus hit an auto-rickshaw at Boratia intersection in Pakundia municipality around 7:30am.

One of the deceased was identified as Selim Mia, 35.

OC SM Arifur Rahman of Pakundia Police Station said police seized the bus but its driver fled the scene.

In Thakurgaon, two persons were killed and another was injured as a motorcycle hit a pedestrian before crashing into an electric pole in the afternoon on the Thakurgaon-Baliadangi Road near Nengri Bazar in Sadar upazila.

The deceased are pedestrian Abul Hossain, 60, and motorcycle's pillion rider Arnab Islam, 13.

Md Likhon Hossain, a sub-inspector of Thakurgaon Police Station said filing of a case was underway.

PRAYER TIMING
AUGUST 9

	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



Too hot to handle: staying safe as temperatures rise

Extreme heat is no longer just an uncomfortable part of summer. As the planet warms, longer and harsher heatwaves are quietly becoming a serious threat to health, work and everyday life.

Between 2000 and 2019, an estimated 489,000 heat-related deaths occurred worldwide each year, with 45 per cent in Asia. Deaths linked to heat among people aged over 65 also rose by about 85 per cent between 2000–2004 and 2017–2021.

The danger begins when the body struggles to cool itself. Prolonged exposure can lead to exhaustion or heatstroke, while placing extra strain on the heart and kidneys. Hot weather can also worsen existing heart, lung and blood sugar problems. Heatstroke is an emergency and can be fatal.

Some people face greater risks than others. Older adults, children, outdoor and manual workers, athletes, people living with long-term illnesses and those in poorly ventilated homes are particularly vulnerable. Low-income communities may face even greater exposure because good housing and cooling are often out of reach.

Extreme heat can ripple far beyond individual illness. Hospitals may see sudden increases in patients, while power cuts can disrupt healthcare, transport and water supplies. Productivity falls, accidents become more likely, and schools or workplaces may struggle to function.

Simple precautions can make a difference. Avoid strenuous outdoor activity during the hottest hours, seek shade and spend time in a cool place. Keep homes cooler by blocking direct sunlight during the day and opening windows after dark when outside temperatures fall. Wear loose, light clothing, take cool showers and drink water regularly.

Children and animals should never be left in parked vehicles, even briefly. Check regularly on older relatives, neighbours and anyone living alone. Official heat warnings should be taken seriously, because illness can develop quickly.

Heat-related harm is largely preventable. As heatwaves become more frequent, staying informed and prepared may be one of the simplest ways to protect lives.

Source: *World Health Organisation*

WORLD BREASTFEEDING WEEK

Breastfeeding begins with a mother—but succeeds with a system

Countries urged to strengthen breastfeeding support and health systems to give every child a healthy start in life

STAR HEALTH DESK

As World Breastfeeding Week is observed from August 1–7, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNICEF have renewed a simple but urgent message: ***countries must stop treating breastfeeding as a mother's responsibility alone and start building health systems, workplaces and communities that make it possible.***

The call comes with encouraging news. Globally, the share of babies receiving only breast milk during their first six months has risen from about 37 per cent in 2012 to more than 47 per cent today. Breastfeeding up to two years has also increased, from 38 per cent to 50 per cent over the past five years.

But averages can hide gaps. Support remains weaker in poorer countries, crisis-hit communities and places where mothers struggle to reach reliable health services. WHO and UNICEF estimate that expanding breastfeeding could prevent nearly 400,000 child deaths and about 140,000 maternal deaths every year.

For Bangladesh, the message deserves attention. UNICEF's latest country data show that 56.6 per cent of infants under six months are exclusively breastfed. This is progress, but it also means a substantial number of babies are still missing the recommended start.

The problem is not simply whether mothers know breastfeeding is beneficial. A mother may leave a maternity ward without enough practical guidance, face pressure to introduce formula, return to a workplace without privacy to feed or express milk, or receive conflicting advice from relatives and health workers. In such circumstances, telling women to "breastfeed more" shifts the burden onto the very people who need support.

Bangladesh therefore needs to look beyond awareness campaigns.



Every maternity facility should ensure that mothers receive hands-on help soon after birth and know where to seek assistance once they return home. Frontline workers should give clear, consistent advice rather than leaving families to navigate myths, advertising and social pressure alone.

Workplaces are another missing link. A clean private room, reasonable feeding breaks, safe milk storage, flexible return-to-work arrangements and childcare nearby can determine whether a working mother continues breastfeeding. These should not be viewed as generous extras. They are practical investments in the health of families and the future workforce.

Protection from aggressive formula marketing matters too. Earlier UNICEF findings in Bangladesh showed that mothers can be influenced by recommendations for formula products, including advice coming through health professionals. Families deserve information shaped by a baby's needs, not commercial interests.

The 2026 World Breastfeeding Week theme, "Breastfeeding for a Sustainable Start in Life: Strengthen What Works", is therefore timely. Evidence already points towards what helps: trained support, community counselling, paid maternity leave, breastfeeding-friendly workplaces and safeguards against misleading promotion.

Breast milk may be natural, but successful breastfeeding does not always happen naturally. It often requires time, confidence, skilled help and an environment that protects a mother's choice.

Bangladesh has made gains. The next step is to turn breastfeeding support from a message into an everyday service; from delivery room to home, community and workplace.

STRESS MANAGEMENT

A calmer life may be closer than you think

AISHI DASTIDAR



Stress has quietly become one of the most common companions of modern life. A little pressure can sharpen our focus before an exam, help us meet deadlines or encourage us to perform better. Yet when that pressure refuses to leave, it begins to take a silent toll on both body and mind.

Many people dismiss ongoing stress as simply being part of a busy routine. Over time, however, it can steal restful sleep, trigger frequent headaches, leave muscles aching and make even simple tasks feel overwhelming. It can also drain motivation, affect relationships and reduce enjoyment in everyday moments.

The effects often stretch beyond personal wellbeing. Persistent stress can lower productivity at work, increase mistakes and make social interactions feel exhausting. If ignored for too long, it may also raise the risk of developing serious long-term health problems, particularly when paired with poor lifestyle habits.

The encouraging news is that stress does not have to control our lives. Recognising the warning signs early, taking regular breaks, staying active, talking to trusted people and maintaining healthy daily routines can make a remarkable difference.

Stress is an unavoidable part of life, but it should never become a permanent way of living. Managing it early is one of the simplest investments in a healthier future.

The writer is a Stress Management Coach. E-mail: aadastidar08@gmail.com



Her reproductive future may begin at six—what families should know

STAR HEALTH REPORT

A girl's weight during childhood may influence more than her health at the time. It could also be linked to her chances of becoming a mother later in life.

Researchers in Denmark followed more than 60,000 women, using their weight and height records from childhood and tracking whether they gave birth between the ages of 18 and 45.

They found that women who had lived with overweight or obesity as children were less likely to give birth as adults than those whose childhood weight remained around average. The difference began to appear from their mid-20s and became more noticeable in their 30s.

This does not mean that a girl who is overweight will necessarily experience fertility problems. The study found a connection, but it did not prove that childhood weight directly causes childlessness. A woman's weight in adulthood and many other health and personal circumstances may also influence whether she becomes a parent.

Still, the findings suggest that supporting healthy growth should begin early. The answer is not to shame children or place unnecessary pressure on them because of their appearance. Instead, families and communities can help children develop healthier habits by making nutritious food and regular physical activity easier to access.

Helping girls grow up in a supportive and healthy environment may benefit not only their wellbeing today, but also their reproductive health in the future.

Source: *JAMA Network Open*





Pain in every step: Simple ways to protect your legs

DR M EASIN ALI

A short walk should not feel like a test of endurance. Yet for many people, pain begins after only a few minutes on their feet; perhaps as a cramp, burning feeling, tingling, numbness or a sharp ache. While it is tempting to blame tiredness, repeated leg pain during walking deserves attention.

One of the simplest explanations is an overworked muscle. A long walk, sudden increase in exercise or starting activity without warming up can strain the legs, particularly when the body is not used to the extra effort.



Sometimes, however, the problem begins in the foot. Irritation of the strong band of tissue along the sole can trigger heel or sole pain, often at its worst during the first steps after waking or after sitting for a long time. Walking may then make the discomfort stronger.

Ageing joints can also turn everyday movement into a struggle. Wear and tear in the knees or ankles may cause aching and stiffness while walking, climbing stairs or standing for extended periods.

Not every painful leg starts with the leg itself. Pain may travel from the lower back through the hip and downwards, sometimes bringing numbness, tingling or weakness. Another warning pattern is pain that appears during walking but eases after resting. This can happen when narrowed blood vessels limit the flow of blood to the legs and should not be brushed aside.

Relief depends on finding the reason behind the pain. For a severe short-term strain, rest may help, while an ice pack applied for 15 to 20 minutes two or three times daily can ease discomfort. Gentle stretching and strengthening, particularly of the calf muscles, may also improve movement.

Shoes matter more than many realise. Comfortable, supportive footwear that fits properly can reduce unnecessary strain, while maintaining a healthy weight can lessen pressure on the legs and joints. Medicines for pain should be used under medical guidance. Persistent problems may need physiotherapy and guided exercises.

Prevention begins with everyday habits: regular light exercise, stretching, good posture and warming up before activity. Sudden bursts of excessive walking or running are best avoided, as is standing for very long periods without a break.

Most importantly, do not make a habit of walking through recurring pain. When discomfort keeps returning, becomes severe or refuses to improve, finding its cause early can protect mobility and help keep every step comfortable and preserve an active daily life.

The writer is the Chairman and Chief Consultant at Dhaka City Physiotherapy Hospital, Dhanmondi, Dhaka. Email: dreasin20@gmail.com

When '*staying strong*' starts hurting your health

SRINJOYA JUNAN



"Don't cry." "Stay strong." "Move on." These familiar words are often meant to comfort us. Yet when strength becomes a habit of hiding sadness, anger or fear, the feelings may not simply vanish. They can linger beneath the surface, while the body continues to carry the strain.

Suppressing emotion means deliberately pushing a feeling aside, covering it with a smile, distracting yourself or refusing to admit it is there. At times, keeping composure is necessary. The concern begins when bottling things up becomes a way of life.

One 12-year US study followed nearly 730 adults and found that people who regularly suppressed emotions had a 35 per cent higher risk of dying from any cause during the study period. Cancer deaths were also higher among those who suppressed more. However, researchers have found different patterns in some cultures, reminding us that emotional expression is shaped by society and context.

The body may offer part of the explanation. Studies in stressful situations show that people asked to hide their emotions can experience stronger physical stress responses, including faster heartbeats and higher blood pressure. Even when someone looks



perfectly calm, their body may still be behaving as though it is under threat. If that strain becomes constant, it may gradually take a toll.

The mind can suffer too. Habitually holding feelings in has been linked with anxiety, low mood and poorer overall wellbeing. This does not mean every emotion must be announced to everyone. Healthy expression is not the same as uncontrolled expression; it is about giving feelings somewhere safe to go.

That outlet can be surprisingly simple. In a well-known study, students wrote about upsetting experiences for just 15 minutes a day over four days. In the following six months, they made roughly half as many visits to their student health centre as students who wrote about ordinary topics.

For everyday life, the message is straightforward: feeling something is not a failure of strength. Talk to someone you trust. Write privately in a journal. Seek professional support when needed. Or simply pause long enough to name what you are feeling safely.

A brave face can help us through a difficult moment. But wearing it permanently may come at a hidden price. Sometimes, real resilience begins not by silencing an emotion, but by finally allowing it to be heard.

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Star
DHAKA SUNDAY AUGUST 9, 2026, SRABAN 25, 1433 BS
SPORT

What to WATCH

SONY SPORTS 1
SLC XI vs India
Day 3 of 3-day match
Live from 10:30 am

T SPORTS
Futsal League Bangladesh
Fakir FC VS BKSP FC (Women)
Live from 7:00 pm
Fakir FC VS BKSP FC (Men)
Live from 9:15 pm

TEN CRICKET
The Hundred
Live from 7:30 pm

Darwin warm-up raises alarm

SPORTS REPORTER

It took a little over two days for Bangladesh's batting frailties to be exposed in Australia as the visitors were bowled out for just 54 in their second innings, suffering an innings-and-38-run defeat to the Cricket Australia XI in their lone three-day warm-up fixture at the DXC Arena in Darwin yesterday.

Australian rookie pacer Campbell Thompson, who had played only one first-class match before this game, tore through Bangladesh's batting line-up on the final day, finishing with remarkable figures of 8-25. The visitors lasted only 17 overs after resuming on 19 for two.

The result was hardly surprising given Bangladesh's struggles throughout the match. The Tigers ended the second day 73 runs behind the CA XI's first-innings total of 355, needing a substantial batting effort to avoid defeat.

While No. 7 Mehidy Hasan Miraz's unbeaten 109 helped Bangladesh reach 263 in the first innings, there was no resistance in the second. Shadman Islam (31) and Najmul Hossain Shanto (37) had made useful contributions earlier, but the second innings collapsed like a house of cards, producing only one double-digit score -- opener Tanzid Hasan Tamim's 22.

Bangladesh's inability to handle both pace and spin remained a concern. Off-spinner Corey Rocchiccioli claimed 6-83 in the first innings, while Thompson exploited the conditions in the second. The manner of the dismissals was also concerning and could not be attributed solely to the bowlers. Experienced batters Mushfiqur Rahim, Mominul Haque and Shanto struggled against Thompson's swinging deliveries, while Soumya Sarkar edged behind.

> **I think we let ourselves down with the bat in this practice match. And you look at how we got out and it wasn't nice... Disappointing match, but we move on and we look forward to the Test match.**
>
> Bangladesh head coach **Phil Simmons**

Head coach Phil Simmons acknowledged the batting failures but remained hopeful that the team could address them before the first Test, beginning at Marrara Stadium in Darwin on August 13.

"Yeah, I think the three days that we've had and working on things, I think they've been very good. I think we let ourselves down with the bat in this practice match. And you look at how we got out and it wasn't nice," Simmons said.

Bangladesh also failed to capitalise with the ball after reducing the CA XI to 139 for five on Friday, as Teague Wyllie's 130 and Jake Duran's 76 helped the hosts recover to 355.

The obvious question now is: if Bangladesh struggled this badly against a Cricket Australia XI that did not feature any of Australia's established international bowlers, what awaits them against the likes of Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood and Nathan Lyon in the Test series?

"I trust that the guys are going to put in the work over this next three days to get us where we want to be for that Test match. Disappointing match, but we move on and we look forward to the Test match," Simmons added.

After waiting 23 years for a Test series in Australia, Bangladesh now have just three days to address the batting flaws exposed in Darwin. The warning signs could hardly be clearer.



Campbell Thompson celebrates after trapping Najmul Hossain Shanto lbw for an eight-ball duck, as Cricket Australia XI thrashed Bangladesh by an innings and 38 runs in the lone three-day warm-up game in Darwin yesterday. The Tigers were bundled out for just 54 in their second innings early on the final day, raising further concerns over their batting ahead of the two-Test series against Australia, which begins in Darwin on August 13.

PHOTO: CRICKET AUSTRALIA

When does the action begin?

With the FIFA World Cup now behind, Europe's footballing giants are ready to get into regular action. The continent's top five leagues are set to return one after another, with LaLiga leading the way. The Premier League and Ligue 1 follow before Serie A joins the action, while the Bundesliga completes the return of the big five at the end of the month. Before the league campaigns settle into their familiar rhythm, traditional curtain-raisers will offer the first taste of silverware for the new season.

LALIGA
League Starts: August 15, 11:30pm, Alaves vs Getafe
Defending champions: Barcelona
Supercopa de Espana: January 2027

PREMIER LEAGUE
League Starts: August 22, 1:00am, Arsenal vs Coventry City
Defending Champions: Arsenal
Community Shield: August 16, 8:00pm, Arsenal vs Manchester City

LIGUE 1
League Starts: August 22, 12:45am, Marseille vs Strasbourg
Defending champions: Paris Saint-Germain
Trophee des Champions: August 17, 12:45am, PSG vs Lens

SERIE A
League Starts: August 22, 10:30pm, Inter Milan vs Monza; Udinese vs Como
Defending champions: Inter Milan
Supercoppa Italiana: January 2027

BUNDESLIGA
League Starts: August 29, 12:30am, Bayern Munich vs Stuttgart
Defending champions: Bayern Munich
DFL-Supercup: August 23, 12:30am, Bayern vs Dortmund

UEFA SUPER CUP
Match Date: August 13, 1:00am Bangladesh time, PSG vs Aston Villa
** Before the major European league phases get fully underway, the traditional European curtain-raiser will see the continent's heavyweights collide. The match, to be held at the Red Bull Arena in Austria, will see defending Champions League winners PSG take on Europa League holders Aston Villa for the first continental silverware of the season.

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE
League Phase: September 8-10
Defending champions: PSG
** The revamped UEFA Champions League returns to action shortly after the first international break of the season.

UEFA EUROPA LEAGUE
League Phase: September 16-17
Defending Champions: Aston Villa
Following the Champions League, the UEFA Europa League will kick off its own league phase the following week.

** All fixtures in Bangladesh Time.

Messi's father Jorge passes away

REUTERS, *Buenos Aires*

Jorge Messi, the father of football star Lionel Messi, died on Friday night at the age of 68 at a medical clinic in the Argentine city of Rosario after a long illness, the Argentine footballer's family confirmed to Reuters.

Jorge spent his final months alternating between a medical centre in Rosario and his home, accompanied by his wife Celia and his children Rodrigo, Matías and María Sol, the family said.



Lionel Messi spent time with his father after the World Cup before rejoining his club, Inter Miami, for whom he returned to action a week ago.

Jorge closely accompanied his son Lionel throughout his career, beginning with his early years at Barcelona. He acted as a crucial pillar of support and, for several years, served as his representative.

"I always needed my dad's approval, ever since I was a kid. After every match, I'd ask him what he thought of how I played," the global star said previously.

During the World Cup, the captain of Argentine experienced mixed emotions after scoring a hattrick in the opening match against Algeria, breaking down in tears while celebrating his first goal. Later, Messi explained that his tears were due to "something unrelated to football" after going through "a few difficult, complicated days."

Days later, the family issued a statement regarding Jorge's "health situation", informing the public that he was undergoing medical treatment.

Maradona's 'Hand of God' ball heads to US auction

AFP, *New York*

The soccer ball that Diego Maradona used to score his infamous "Hand of God" goal during Argentina's win over England in the 1986 World Cup is expected to sell for $10 million at a US auction this month.

Maradona's goal in the quarter-final match at the Estadio Azteca saw him punch the ball past the England goalkeeper, with the South Americans ultimately winning 2-1.

After the game, the Argentine star said his goal was scored "a little with the head of Maradona and a little with the hand of God." His nation went on to win the World Cup.

Heritage Auctions, based in Texas, expects the ball will sell for eight figures when it goes under the hammer from August 21 to 23, with a $2.5 million opening bid.

"I think it's easily the most historic ball in the realm of soccer," Dan Imler, vice president of sports at Heritage Auctions, told AFP.

He noted it is also the ball that Maradona used, in the same match, to score the so-called "Goal of the Century" in which he dribbled past several English defenders before finishing past the goalkeeper.

"Both of the goals scored are just so iconic, so memorable," Imler said.

The jersey that Maradona, who died in November 2020, wore during the Argentina-England clash currently holds the record for the most expensive soccer shirt -- standing at $9.3 million.

'Warrior Bruno eager to make history'

AGENCIES



Bruno Guimaraes has arrived at Arsenal with a simple ambition: to win trophies, make history, and leave a legacy at the Premier League champions.

The Brazil midfielder completed his move from Newcastle United on Saturday for a reported fee of £75 million ($101.2 million), signing a long-term contract with Arsenal ahead of their title defence.

At 28, Guimaraes believes he is at the right stage of his career for a new challenge, and he sees Arsenal as the perfect place to take it on.

"I'm at the point of my life where I need a challenge like this. I want to win trophies, I want to make history and I think I'm in the right place to do it. I'm so excited to start," Guimaraes told Arsenal's media channels.

The Brazilian spent four-and-a-half seasons at Newcastle, becoming captain and helping the club end a 56-year wait for a major trophy by winning the 2025 League Cup. He also played a key role in Newcastle twice qualifying for the Champions League.

But Guimaraes is now looking beyond what he has already achieved.

"It's massive what I have done so far, but I want more. I want to win for Arsenal. I want to win more trophies in my career," he said.

Guimaraes is also relishing the chance to play alongside Declan Rice and a midfield he considers among Europe's best.

"Rice sent me a message: 'Come here and please no more fights, now we're friends!' I was happy he messaged me," he said.

"In my point of view, [the Arsenal midfield] is one of the best in Europe. Everyone is an amazing player."

Arsenal sporting director Andrea Berta believes Guimaraes can strengthen the heart of Mikel Arteta's team, with his ability to operate both as a defensive midfielder and a box-to-box player.

For Guimaraes, however, the task is clear.

"I can pass the ball, run a lot and play like a warrior, I'll never give up," he said. "I will try to help the team ... sometimes I can score some goals and hope to make everyone very, very happy here."

And he has one particular Arsenal great in mind as he begins his new chapter.

"Of course, Gilberto Silva. I love him as a player," Guimaraes said. "I hope I can follow his history here and make myself one of the very good players at Arsenal in history."

His ambition, ultimately, is to ensure his name remains at the club long after he leaves.

Arsenal kick off their season against Manchester City in the Community Shield next Sunday, before starting their title defence against newly-promoted Coventry five days later.



Bangladesh Police FC players and officials pose for a photograph at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka yesterday before flying to Amman, where they will face Syrian Premier League champions Al-Ittihad Ahli in the preliminary round of the AFC Challenge League, Asia's third-tier club competition, on Tuesday. It will be Police FC's first appearance in a continental competition after they finished fourth in last season's Bangladesh Football League. Fortis FC will also make their continental debut on Tuesday when they host Kyrgyz Premier League runners-up Muras United at Bashundhara Kings Arena.

PHOTO: BANGLADESH POLICE FC





'India can't play Hasina card and seek friendly ties'

Salahuddin warns of rethinking ties

DU CORRESPONDENT



Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed yesterday said Bangladesh would have to rethink its relations with India if New Delhi allows former prime minister Sheikh Hasina to conduct political activities from its territory, adding such activities aimed at destabilising the country are incompatible with India's desire for friendly ties.

"India will play the Hasina card and seek a friendly relationship with Bangladesh -- the two are contradictory. I hope the Indian authorities -- the Indian government -- will understand this," he said.

Salahuddin made the remarks at a discussion titled "Teachers' Role in

SEE PAGE 9 COL 7



PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

Makeshift stalls continue to operate on the railway tracks in Dhaka's Jurain yesterday, crowding the area and heightening fears of a major accident. A similar scene was captured in a photo published by The Daily Star in late May, showing that little has changed since then.

Aynaghar bears signs of brutal torture

ICT chief prosecutor says after visiting JIC cells

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The International Crimes Tribunal has found physical evidence inside the DGFI-run interrogation cell, widely known as Aynaghar, consistent with survivors' accounts of prolonged secret detention and torture.

According to its Chief Prosecutor Aminul Islam, parts of the facility appeared altered or concealed after the fall of Sheikh Hasina regime on August 5, 2024.

Aminul made the remarks yesterday after visiting the Joint Interrogation Cell (JIC) at the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) headquarters in Dhaka Cantonment.

He was accompanied by ICT judges, along with prosecution and defence lawyers, who inspected the site as part of proceedings in enforced disappearance and torture cases.

The JIC, located in Dhaka's Kachukhet area, has 26 cells. "Prime Minister Tarique Rahman was detained and tortured in one of the cells during the 1/11 caretaker

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

BIMAN FLIGHT FROM TORONTO

174 Bangladeshis stranded for over 33hrs in Rome

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

At least 174 Bangladeshi passport holders, including elderly people, women and children, had been stranded at Rome's Fiumicino International Airport for nearly 33 hours since landing there at 7:20am (Rome time) on Friday, after a technical glitch grounded a Biman Bangladesh Airlines aircraft.



Videos shared by passengers, copies of which were obtained by The Daily Star, showed some lying on the airport floor, while others sat on chairs and inside a lounge. Passengers and their relatives complained of exhaustion, illness, lack of sleep and difficulty accessing medicines and other essentials.

Amina Anjum Tonni, a private-sector employee in Dhaka whose parents are among those stranded, described their ordeal.

"It has already been over 28 hours. My father has had three bypass heart surgeries, and he has had no sleep at all, having sat upright the entire time," she told The Daily Star around 7:30pm (Dhaka time) yesterday.

She added that passengers were initially kept inside

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

TONU MURDER CASE

Hafizur held again after bail suspension

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Cumilla*

Retired army warrant officer Hafizur Rahman has been rearrested by the Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) for failing to surrender within the 24-hour deadline set by the court after his bail was stayed in the Sohagi Jahan Tonu murder case.

Hafizur was arrested from his residence in Dhaka's Keraniganj yesterday morning. He was later produced before a Cumilla court around 3:30pm, where Senior Judicial Magistrate Tayeb Uddin of Cognisance Court-5 ordered that he be sent to jail.

The PBI said Hafizur was arrested to prevent him from fleeing and to implement an order of the Appellate Division's chamber court.

Mahbubur Rahman, additional public prosecutor of the Cumilla Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court, said Hafizur was released from Cumilla Central Jail on August 4 after the High Court granted him bail.

The state later appealed, seeking to suspend the bail order.

On August 6, Appellate Division Chamber Judge

SEE PAGE 9 COL 3

SAUDI-TURKEY-PAK DEFENCE PACT

Riyadh turns to Muslim powers amid Iran war

CNN ONLINE

Saudi Arabia has drawn two of the Muslim world's most formidable military powers into its defense as the Iran war moves closer to the kingdom.

Pakistan and Turkey signed a Nato-style mutual defense pact with Saudi Arabia in Makkah on Friday, consolidating their longstanding security ties into a collective-defence alliance that stipulates an attack against any of them "shall be regarded as attack on them all."

That commitment could draw Pakistan and Turkey into a war they have carefully kept at arm's length.

The official rationale for the agreement is "to strengthen collective deterrence against any act of aggression" and further provide "for the enhancement of all aspects of defence cooperation among the three states," according to a statement released by all three countries.

More specifically, the pact gives Saudi Arabia a powerful new layer of protection beyond its longstanding security partnership with the United States amid growing regional doubts over whether Washington can still be relied upon to protect its oil-rich Gulf allies.

Turkey has the second-largest military in Nato, behind only the US, while Pakistan is the only nuclear-armed Muslim nation.

Such powerful allies strengthen Saudi deterrence and present a united Sunni-led military front against a mounting Iranian threat, though a Turkish official told CNN the agreement isn't directed against any specific actor and the Saudi foreign ministry insisted this "does not represent an effort to establish a military axis or a sectarian bloc."



Other regional countries can also join, the Turkish official added, raising the prospect of the alliance drawing in new members much like Nato.

The statement did not give specifics on the commitments each had accepted, and it is unclear how far the agreement would bind the three countries to any particular military action in each other's defence.

The pact also comes as Israel expands its military reach across the region and Riyadh's relations with the neighbouring United Arab Emirates fray.

Pakistan and Turkey each share a border with Iran and both have strong reasons to prevent the conflict from spiralling. Pakistan

SEE PAGE 5 COL 4

New BTV DG appointed under dormant law

JS passed act 25 years ago, but no activation gazette was issued

BAHARAM KHAN

Questions have been raised over the legality of appointing the new director general (DG) of Bangladesh Television (BTV).

Although media personality Kazi Jesin was appointed BTV DG last Thursday under the "Bangladesh Television Authority Act, 2001", neither the Ministry of Information nor the Ministry of Public Administration could provide information on whether the law is actually in effect.

BTV's website features at least 22 documents on its rules and regulations but makes no mention of the act, which was passed by parliament during the tenure of the then Awami League government to grant autonomy to BTV, according to sources.

However, no gazette notification to bring the act into force has been issued over the past 25 years, as required by the act itself. This means that although parliament passed the act, it has not yet taken effect. Yet the Ministry of Public Administration appointed the new DG by citing the same law.

Harun-or-Rashid, a former additional secretary who served as BTV director general from 2016 to 2021, told The Daily Star yesterday, "Although the 2001 law was formulated to run BTV, it was not in effect during my tenure. I have not heard

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Iran, Oman 'very close' to deal on Hormuz

REUTERS, *Cairo/Washington/Riyadh*

Iran yesterday said that a deal with Oman on control of the Strait of Hormuz was close but would not be enough to free up the waterway, and the United Arab Emirates said Iran had hit another ship there.

A US official, who declined to be identified, said on Friday that Washington anticipated an agreement soon between Iran and Oman, which sit on either side of the strait, so that normal oil traffic could resume.

US official says deal to reopen strait close | IRGC says US must accept conditions to open waterway | UAE says Iran struck a ship in strait with a missile

Oman also said that negotiations with Iran about the future administration of the Strait of Hormuz were "positive and constructive".

Agreement between the two countries over control of the strategic waterway is seen as crucial to a wider agreement to end the conflict that began with US and Israeli attacks on Iran on February 28.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Iran and Oman were "very close" to agreement on a new shipping route through the Strait of Hormuz but that reopening

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PHOTO: AFP

A building burns after being hit by a Russian ballistic missile in the Kyiv region yesterday. Russian strikes killed at least four people, including a child, in a district northeast of Ukraine's capital. Ukraine retaliated by striking two oil refineries in Russia.

Infantino bins claims of employee favouritism

AGENCIES



FIFA president Gianni Infantino has strongly denied allegations that UEFA made a six-figure severance payment to a woman with whom he was alleged to have had a relationship while he was secretary general of European football's governing body.

The allegations, reported by the Daily Telegraph, claim the payment was made during Infantino's time at UEFA, where he served as secretary general from 2009 to 2016 after joining the organisation in 2000.

An Infantino spokesperson described the allegations as "categorically untrue" and

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