DHAKA THURSDAY OCTOBER 8, 2026



The biggest problem I have is nobody knows who the hell is running the country.

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Cancer queues long, families stretched

A surge in cases collides with a health system that has too few machines

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

On a September midday, Sabuj Mia dozed on a bench on the ground floor of the National Institute of Cancer Research and Hospital (NICRH) in Mohakhali, the country's only public specialised cancer hospital. The 42-year-old was waiting for his radiotherapy session. His wife, Nurunnahar, in her late 30s, sat beside him clutching a small bag, anxiety etched on her face.

More than 100 people, mostly patients, crowded outside the radiotherapy rooms. With too few seats, some slept on the floor, waiting for treatment, a consultation or a test. At NICRH, this is a regular scene.

Bangladesh's cancer cases are growing, but no one can say precisely how fast. The country has no population-based cancer registry, according to Johirul Islam, an associate professor who heads NICRH's cancer epidemiology department and edits its cancer registry reports.

The hospital's own figures cover a single institution, not the country. Last year, 42,494 patients attended its outpatient department, 31,046 of them newly diagnosed with cancer.

In 2020, the department saw 26,202 cancer patients, new and existing. Set against that, the 2025 count of new diagnoses alone is about 18 percent higher. The true number of new diagnoses may be higher still, since some patients confirmed through tests at the hospital never enter the registry.

Johirul urges caution about what the rise means. "It could be because public awareness and access to cancer services have improved. But it could also indicate an actual increase in the number of cancer cases. To determine that accurately, we need a population-based study," he said.

Lacking one, Bangladesh leans on GLOBOCAN, the estimates published by the International Agency for Research on Cancer, the WHO's specialised cancer research arm. These are extrapolated from limited Bangladeshi data and from other countries, so they may not fully capture reality.

Even so, they are sobering. New cases rose to 1,87,263 in 2024 from 1,67,256 in 2022, an increase of about 12 percent. Cancer deaths climbed faster, to 1,38,906 from 1,16,598, or about 19 percent, over the same period.

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- Cancer cases rose 12% between 2022 and 2024; cancer deaths 19%
- Bangladesh has only 30 radiotherapy machines
- Only seven public-sector radiotherapy machines are functional
- Govt plans to install 17 therapy machines



People place their belongings on the floor to hold their places in chemotherapy token queue at NICRH in Mohakhali. FILE PHOTO



AD10S, LEO!

Lionel Messi waves to the monumental crowd after his final international appearance for Argentina, following a 3-0 victory over Benin in Buenos Aires yesterday. After 21 years, 208 appearances and 126 goals, the 39-year-old brought his international career to an emotional close, scoring from the penalty spot and providing two assists in front of more than 85,000 spectators and millions watching worldwide. PHOTO: REUTERS

Talks with IMF for new loan to continue in Bangkok

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Talks with the International Monetary Fund on a new loan programme worth up to $5 billion are set to continue next week in Thailand on the sidelines of the 2026 annual meetings of the IMF and the World Bank.

There would be several meetings on the size of the loan and the associated policy conditions on the sidelines of the annual meeting, which is hosted outside the multilateral lenders' Washington headquarters every three years.

Bangladesh could access between $4.5 billion and $5 billion based on its IMF quota.

Negotiations are expected to revisit carryover conditions from the previous programme, focusing primarily on exchange rate management, banking sector reforms, subsidy cuts in electricity and fertiliser, and domestic revenue mobilisation.

If the talks in Thailand make sufficient headway, an IMF mission is expected to visit Dhaka later this month, The Daily Star has learnt from finance ministry officials involved with the proceedings.

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Biman places order for 10 Airbus planes

Seeks delivery of at least one aircraft by 2026-27

TASNEEM TAYEB

Biman yesterday ordered 10 Airbus aircraft.

The order for four A350-900s and six A321neos brings Airbus planes into a fleet that is mostly Boeing. It comes on top of orders for 25 Boeing aircraft, thirteen 787-10s, two 787-9s, and ten 737 Max8s.

Rumee A Hossain, chairman of Biman, and Jürgen Westermeier, president and managing director of Airbus India and South Asia, signed the purchase agreement at the Radisson Blu Dhaka.

The value of the order and its delivery schedule were not disclosed.

Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister M Rashiduzzaman Millat asked Airbus to deliver at least one aircraft by 2026-27, saying Biman was struggling to meet passenger demand.

Biman carries about 20 percent of the country's passengers, and the government wants to raise the share to at least 50 percent, Millat said.

Biman's current fleet has 19 aircraft.



Four Airbus A350-900s, six A321neos have been ordered. Biman also has thirteen Boeing 787-10s, two 787-9s, ten 737 Max-8s on order.

As the existing fleet reaches the end of its life cycle, the new aircraft will seamlessly replace them to ensure operational continuity, Rumee said.

He said the expansion programme was a "data-driven modernisation strategy", aimed at meeting growing international travel demand. He noted that Bangladesh has a global diaspora of about 15 million people.

NEW MARKETS

Millat described the Airbus deal as a "significant step towards building a sustainable mixed Biman fleet".

Rumee said the A350-900s would be deployed on high-demand routes across the Middle East, Europe, North America and Australia, and the narrowbodies on regional and medium-haul Asian routes.

Westermeier said more than 7 lakh passengers travel annually between Dhaka and 10 global cities, with no direct flights on those routes. Airbus expects another 5 lakh passengers a year to enter those markets by 2030.

"These untapped passenger flows represent prime, high-yield route opportunities that are really waiting to be captured by Bangladeshi carriers," he said.

He said the A350s could support connections to the US East Coast, Canada, Europe and Australia, while the A321neos could underpin expansion across South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Middle East.

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