DHAKA SATURDAY OCTOBER 10, 2026



We are ready to do everything to contribute to the settlement of this situation [Middle East war].
VLADIMIR PUTIN

YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW

The Daily Star

SECOND EDITION

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Eight firms, one family, Tk 1,200cr 'embezzled'

Names of former Pirojpur lawmaker, family members come up in LGED probe

SUKANTA HALDER

Three years after the contract was signed, work on a 10.6km road in Bhandaria upazila, Pirojpur, has yet to begin. Yet the contractor has received Tk 13.23 crore, more than 80 percent of the Tk 15.92 crore contract value.

The road is one example of the alleged plunder of public money by a clique of government officials, contractors and influential politicians, including two former MPs from the district.

The Pirojpur district office of the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) investigated 17 projects undertaken between 2020 and 2024 and found corruption and embezzlement worth Tk 1,195 crore in at least eight.

All eight projects went to firms owned by members of one family: former Pirojpur-2 independent MP Mohiuddin Maharaj, his three brothers and a sister-in-law.

Documents show premature payments, duplicate payments for the same work, substandard materials and poor recordkeeping. Some official records are missing altogether.

In one case, a contractor received Tk 996 crore against an approved cost of Tk 936 crore, Tk 60 crore more than the contract value, according to an LGED monitoring report from August 2026.

The Southern Country Iron Bridge Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Project, aimed at improving connectivity in 42 upazilas in Barishal, was due for completion in June 2026. Only half the work has been completed.

The Daily Star's analysis of the eight projects shows that their combined contract value was Tk 2,141 crore. Based on the work completed, only Tk 826.38 crore should have been disbursed. Instead, Tk 2,069 crore was released -- about Tk 1,243 crore more than warranted.

In August, The Daily Star visited the proposed Maliar Haat-Koikhali Haat road in Bhandaria and found parts of the route in particularly poor condition.

Montu Hawlader, a motorcyclist who regularly uses the road, said, "I fell off my motorcycle six times in recent months. I escaped injury each time only because there was no traffic."

The road is part of the 179-package Barishal Division Important Upazila and Union Road Widening and Strengthening Project. Overall progress stands at just 15 percent.

Yet. Tk 624 crore -- 89 percent of the contract value -- has already been disbursed, documents show.

THE CLIQUE

The road contract went to EFTE. ETCL (Pvt.) Limited, run by managing director Merajul Islam, former Sadar upazila chairman and Mohiuddin's brother.

Merajul owns four of the eight firms: EFTE. ETCL, EFTE Enterprise, EFTE Trading Corporation Limited and South Bangla Trading Limited.

His wife, Shamima Akhter, owns a fifth, Shimu Enterprise. The sixth, Horinpala Trade International, belongs to Mohiuddin himself.

The remaining two firms belong to Mohiuddin's younger brothers: M/S Teli Khali Construction, owned by Md Shamsuddin, and Ishan Enterprises, owned by Mohammad Salahuddin, according to the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Potholes make the Sikdar Haat-Sripur Daktar Haat road difficult for vehicles to navigate. The photo was taken recently. PHOTO: **HABIBUR RAHMAN**



PHOTO: **STAR**

Award winners, organisers and hosts come together for a celebratory moment on stage at the fifth Blender's Choice-The Daily Star OTT & Digital Content Awards at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in Agargaon yesterday.

Bangladesh's storytellers bask in the spotlight

Blender's Choice-The Daily Star OTT & Digital Content Awards celebrates its 5th edition

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Some stories stay with viewers long after the screen goes dark. A memorable performance, a line of dialogue, a haunting melody or a scene that refuses to fade. Behind each are the creative minds who bring these stories to life.

Yesterday, it was their turn to take centre stage.

Actors, filmmakers, musicians and digital content creators gathered at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in Agargaon for the fifth Blender's Choice-The Daily Star OTT & Digital Content Awards, celebrating the best of Bangladesh's OTT and digital productions of 2025.

Nuhash Humayun's "Dui Shaw" dominated the evening with nine Critics' Choice awards, including Best Actor (Male) for Mosharraf Karim, Best Director, Best Screenplay and six technical honours. Afran Nisho and Mehazabien Chowdhury won the top Popular Choice acting awards.

Organised by The Daily Star with support from Ispahani Tea Limited, the ceremony honoured productions released between January and December 2025 across 28 categories. It began around 6:30pm with the national anthem, followed by a performance by Alifia Squad and Sarika Sabah.

In his welcome address, Ispahani Group Chairman Mirza Salman Ispahani said the growing volume of quality digital content made selecting winners increasingly difficult.

"It's becoming increasingly difficult to choose the right awardees because there is so much good content available," he said.

He thanked the jury for ensuring fair and transparent selections, congratulated the winners and encouraged other nominees to keep striving.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, called for greater recognition of artistes, writers and technicians whose work enriches lives and contributes to cultural development.

Reflecting on his career in journalism, he said much of his work involved confronting political and social problems, making evenings celebrating creativity a welcome change.

"On evenings like this, I really get into the world of art, the world of creativity."

He praised OTT platforms for bringing new dimensions to literature and storytelling.

"OTT has added so many beautiful dimensions to our lives," Anam said, praising scriptwriters, cinematographers and professionals working in lighting, sound and production for their contributions.

"The world of art is just as important to our lives as the economy, our professions and our skills."

He said memorable films and dialogue could leave lasting impressions. "This evening is not only a celebration of great performances; it is a celebration of our consciousness."

The Star editor urged artistes to embrace technological change while preserving Bangladesh's history and traditions, and thanked the Ispahani family for supporting the event for five years.

In the Popular Choice categories, Afran Nisho won Best Actor (Male) for "AKA" and Mehazabien Chowdhury Best Actor (Female) for "Neel Shukh".

Mehazabien said she had been so preoccupied with her dance performance that she had no time to prepare an acceptance speech. Thanking the production team, fellow

MORE ON PAGE 8

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VOTER LIST ROW

Delhi turns into a fortress

Thousands of security forces deployed ahead of protest; SC questions Delhi Metro shutdown

AGENCIES

Authorities in India's capital, New Delhi, yesterday deployed thousands of police and paramilitary personnel ahead of a protest scheduled for today by the "Cockroach" youth movement, which is demanding the election chief's resignation over a revision of voter lists.

Several long-distance trains bound for Delhi were also cancelled yesterday, while 57 metro stations were closed from the night, authorities said. Organisers said they expected thousands of people to join the protest.

The sweeping restrictions drew a sharp rebuke from the Supreme Court yesterday. The court said law-and-order measures must be proportionate and made clear that public transport could not be completely shut down.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohana asked the Centre to ensure that normal life was not brought to a halt.

CJI Kant said, "One very important principle that we follow for every citizen is the principle of proportionality. You have to prevent certain things. Take measures only to the extent necessary to prevent them. But that does not mean you use a hammer to kill a fly. That principle must be kept in mind."



India's Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi, along with leaders of the opposition alliance INDIA bloc, speaks with the media outside the Presidential Palace as they demand the resignation of India's chief election commissioner in New Delhi yesterday. PHOTO: **AFP**

SEE PAGE 9 COL 6

ATTACK ON JOURNOS

Probe body recommends suspension of 4 RU students

RU CORRESPONDENT

The probe committee formed over the recent attack on journalists at Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Hall of Rajshahi University (RU) has recommended the suspension of four students, further investigation into four others, and warnings for three students.

RU Vice-Chancellor Prof Faridul Islam disclosed the recommendations at a press briefing yesterday afternoon.

Those recommended for suspension are Ahsan Habib of law department and vice-president of RU unit of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD); Hasibul Islam Hasib of history department and joint general secretary of RU JCD; Bishal Chakraborty of economics and a JCD leader; and Ariful Islam, general secretary of Ziaur Rahman Hall parliament.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

Navi Pillay wins Nobel Peace Prize

ICC slapped with US sanctions hours after its ex-judge honoured

AGENCIES



The Nobel Peace Prize was awarded yesterday to South African jurist Navi Pillay, a lifelong human rights champion who has addressed allegations of genocide in Gaza, Rwanda and Myanmar.

Pillay, a former judge of the International Criminal Court (ICC), dedicated her award to the "survivors of international crimes".

Speaking from the courtroom in Nuremberg, Germany, where Nazi leaders were tried after World War II, she criticised attacks on institutions such as the ICC, which US President Donald Trump has repeatedly targeted.

Hours later, the United States announced sanctions on the ICC, vowing to cripple the tribunal's operations, drawing condemnation from all corners, except Israel.

Israel reacted angrily to the award, saying it legitimised "anti-Israel hatred" and that Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels must be "applauding from hell".

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

MYTHS, MEMES OR REALITIES DISSECTED

Do you really get mugged in MOHAMMADPUR?

JAWWAD SAMI NEOGI

I've been living in Mohammadpur for almost 25 years now, which means I should have been mugged at least 50 times by this point. That's how legendary the reputation is. Say "Mohammadpur" in a conversation, and someone will immediately feel tense about their phone and wallet.

But is it really true?

Short answer: yes and no. Long answer: also yes and no.

Across my 25 years of residency, I've had exactly four encounters. That's roughly one mugging attempt every six years. Pretty low, right? But the reality is that I don't know a single friend who has lived here and hasn't experienced something similar.

My personal flex? Not a single mugger has successfully taken anything from me. Not because I'm brave. Not because I'm fast. Simply because all my encounters happened when I was a student and Tk 20 was my daily pocketmoney.

My first encounter was cinematic. I was in class seven, returning home from coaching at night. Two young guys approached me with the classic opener: "Bhaiya, tumi Rashed na? Basha kothay tomar?" (You're Rashed, right? Where do you live?).

Before I could process, their hands were already hovering over my pockets. Unfortunately for them, my pockets contained nothing except existential confusion, and maybe a spider web.

To those brothers, I would like to formally apologise. I should have carried something; I didn't mean to waste your time.



PHOTO: JAWWAD SAMI NEOGI

Second encounter: Class eight, broad daylight. I was with my friend Raisul. We went to Islamia Library to buy copies with the exact amount of money required, no more, no less. Two strangers pushed us into an alley and asked, "Tora chinos amake?" (You guys know who I am?)

MY DHAKA

We didn't. Still don't. They checked our pockets anyway, found nothing and left. Honestly, I think they were more disappointed than we were scared.

Third encounter: Also with Raisul, who I now suspect, is some sort of mugger magnet. Three guys approached us wearing lungi, shorter than us, and visibly trying their best. I regret to inform you that we almost laughed out loud. Again, school day, empty pockets, zero profit for them. They eventually left, declaring us "bhalo chele" (good boys).

Which, in their terms, is the equivalent of disappointment.

Final encounter: In front of Shia Masjid. This one had actual tension. Three guys approached, and I thought I recognised one of them. So naturally, I started talking like we had met at some coaching centre. Meanwhile, I noticed a larger group forming in the background. Just as things were about to escalate, my friend arrived, and we exited the scene.

So yes, I've been lucky. But not everyone has been.

So, back to the question; is Mohammadpur dangerous?

There was definitely a time when muggers were more entrepreneurial. When I was in school, they were practically part of the neighbourhood ecosystem. But things have changed. Mohammadpur today is crowded, lively, and full of shops, food carts, and constant movement.

Does that mean it's completely safe? Not quite. Dark, quiet alleys still exist, and certain underdeveloped areas, especially towards Bosila, are not exactly ideal for late-night adventures unless you enjoy unnecessary suspense.

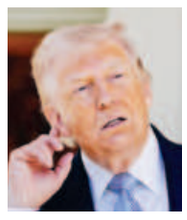
But for the most part, life goes on. You can roam around Salimullah Road, hang out near Town Hall, grab street food, visit Tokyo Square, and live your day without constantly checking over your shoulder.

And if you're still wondering whether you'll get mugged here, well, I've lived here 25 years, faced four attempts, lost nothing, and still haven't moved from Mohammadpur.

That should answer your question. Or at least confuse you a little less.

Oil retreats as Trump rules out pre-vote Iran attack

AFP, *London*



Stock markets climbed yesterday, and oil prices dropped after President Donald Trump ruled out a strike on Iran before next month's US midterm elections.

Trump said Washington was holding "productive discussions" with Tehran after reports that the White House had asked the Pentagon to draw up plans for a possible attack ahead of the November 3 vote.

Trump's post on his Truth Social platform followed a surge in oil prices on Thursday driven by media reports suggesting potential new US strikes prior to those elections.

"I want to make it clear to everybody that, while Iran is in very bad condition, both Economically and Militarily, and while the Blockade will remain in full force and effect...we will not be attacking Iran at any time prior to the Midterm Elections," he wrote.

"We are having productive discussions with the Islamic Republic of Iran," he added, without providing additional details.

The Atlantic magazine reported on Wednesday that the White House had asked the Pentagon to develop options to strike Iranian targets that could be used before the midterms. The New York Times published a similar report on Thursday, saying the plans were being developed despite Trump's "ambivalence".

The rise in crude oil prices has also been fueled by persistent tensions in the Strait of Hormuz -- a strategic chokepoint for the global oil trade -- as well as hostilities between Yemen's Iran-backed Houthis and Saudi Arabia.

Polls suggest that US voters are strongly dissatisfied over rising fuel prices, linked to the conflict launched by the United States and Israel against Iran in February.

The US leader has repeatedly insisted in recent weeks that the United States has effectively won the Iran war, despite ongoing unrest and a recent security threat that forced the withdrawal of American bombers from a base in England.

But Trump's claims that prices will fall as soon as the Iran war is over have so far fallen on deaf ears with voters.

Eight firms, one family, Tk 1,200cr 'embezzled'

FROM PAGE 1

Teli Khali and EFTE. ETCL together won nearly 375 contracts worth more than Tk 1,000 crore from the Pirojpur LGED executive engineer's office.

They were the sole bidders in nearly 200 cases, meaning others were not even allowed to compete, said Mohammad Tauhidul Islam, who studies public procurement at Transparency International Bangladesh.

"The way the money was siphoned off is unbelievable," a top LGED official told The Daily Star, requesting anonymity.

The scale of the corruption, the official said, points to the involvement of senior government officials, the ministry and local offices.

An LGED investigation report from January 2025 reached a similar conclusion.

It said the irregularities and embezzlement "was not possible without the direct support of politically influential figures at the local and national levels and the highest-ranking officials at the policy level of the previous [Awami League] government."

Besides Mohiuddin and Merajul, the report names SM Rezaul Karim, former Pirojpur-1 Awami League MP and minister; Nure Alam Shahin, Rezaul's brother and former Nazirpur upazila chairman; and Md Tofazzel Hossain Miah, former principal secretary at the Prime Minister's Office.

AKM Mozammel Hoque Khan, accounts officer at LGED's Pirojpur office, also told investigators that firms, politicians and officials had colluded.

He specifically named former executive engineer Abdus Sattar Howlader, who approved the bills.

Current Executive Engineer Md Azizur Rahman said all eight contractors had been blacklisted and their projects would be cancelled once the chief engineer approved the move. The office had received no instructions from headquarters on resuming the work.

A top LGED official said work on projects tainted by corruption allegations and legal proceedings would likely remain stalled until the legal processes ended. "So it will take considerable time before the work can resume," he said.

DOCUMENTS VANISHED

LGED investigators and a recent audit also found serious irregularities in project records.

In 2025, the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General raised audit objections worth Tk 2,666 crore across the 17 projects.

Among the anomalies were bridges built without approach roads and bills submitted for the same work under multiple projects.

Under the Supporting Rural Bridges Programme, a contract worth Tk 21.42 lakh was signed with EFTE. ETCL.

Yet, a cheque for Tk 15.04 crore was issued to Rupali Construction instead.

Officials at the District Accounts and Finance Officer's Office could not produce the bills, vouchers or other documents to explain the payment.

KEY FINDINGS

- Tk 2,069cr disbursed against Tk 826cr in work
- 340 accounting documents missing
- Firms owned by 2 brothers were sole bidders in nearly 200 contracts

Several files contained only note sheets signed by the accountant and the executive engineer.

At least 340 documents were missing from the accounts section.

Mozammel told the LGED investigation team in December 2024 that the documents had been kept by contractors on the executive engineers' instructions. He also said Abdus Sattar Howlader had asked him to sign irregular bills.

"Just sign it. You will not face any consequences; I will bear full responsibility," Mozammel quoted Howlader as saying.

UNDER ACC SCANNER

In 2025, the ACC filed eight cases against 27 people, including Mohiuddin, his three brothers, Merajul's wife and 22 officials of the local LGED and the District Accounts Office.

The cases concern the withdrawal of Tk 1,080 crore from schemes under the eight projects despite only partial completion of the work.

The ACC says the money was mainly drawn through the eight firms registered in the names of Mohiuddin and his relatives.

Six officials were arrested. Mozammel died in jail, while five other District Accounts Office officials are out on bail. The remaining accused are fugitives, said Md Aminul Islam, deputy director at the ACC's Pirojpur office.

In March 2026, the ACC filed nine more cases against Mohiuddin, Howlader and their families over assets allegedly acquired beyond their known sources of income. The cases are under investigation.

The ACC has also seized assets worth about Tk 300 crore belonging to the accused in Pirojpur and Dhaka, Aminul said.

Contacted by phone, Rezaul said he was neither a minister nor a contractor during the period and had no authority over LGED.

However, records show he became fisheries and livestock minister in a February 2020 reshuffle, after previously serving as housing and public works minister.

Shahin, elected chairman in 2024, denied that either he or his brother Rezaul was involved in the embezzlement.

Mohiuddin said he was elected an independent MP only in January 2024, served for seven months and held no significant position.

Merajul denied all allegations, saying many projects reported as incomplete had actually been completed.

He acknowledged some excess payments made to prevent allocated funds from lapsing at the end of the fiscal year, but insisted that no money had been withdrawn without work.

He said he still wanted to complete the projects and was willing to adjust any excess payments.

Tofazzel and Howlader's phones were switched off.

[Our Pirojpur Correspondent KM Habibur Rahman contributed to this report]



The Sikdar Haat-Sripur Daktar Haat road at Bhandaria upazila in Pirojpur is in a dilapidated condition as work on the 10.6km road has yet to begin three years after a contract was signed. The contractor has already received Tk 13.23 crore, 80 percent of the contract value. This photo was taken recently. PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Mauritanian PM, govt resign after power outages

AFP, *Nouakchott*

Mauritania's prime minister yesterday submitted his government's resignation, according to state media, following a scathing report on two electric facility fires that plunged parts of the capital into darkness for several days.

Mokhtar Ould Djay's resignation after more than two years in office came after President Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani received a report Thursday detailing multiple shortcomings leading to the blazes in August.

The fires broke out less than 24 hours apart on August 21 and 22, striking transformer substations belonging to the Mauritanian Electricity Company (Somelec) in Nouakchott and its suburbs.

The power outages affected large areas of Nouakchott as well as the towns of Ouad Naga, Idini and Aouleigat, and lasted three to five days depending on the location.

The report by an independent commission outlined "serious shortcomings regarding prevention, electrical protection, work supervision and emergency management", and linked the issues to three newly installed electrical power lines.

It additionally identified overheating as the most likely scenario leading to the fires and found no evidence of sabotage or operational error.

The hidden cost of scrolling

FROM PAGE 12

Muntasir Maruf, associate professor at the community and social psychiatry department of the National Institute of Mental Health, said excessive social media use is also affecting children's mental wellbeing, sleep patterns and concentration.

Easy access to smartphones, changing family dynamics and fewer opportunities for face-to-face social interaction are encouraging children to spend more time online, sometimes leading to addiction, he said.

"Children often become dependent on social media without realising it," he said, adding that online recognition can influence adolescents' emotions.

He urged parents to set limits on phone use at home, encourage children to take part in sports and cultural activities, and talk regularly with them about their online experiences. "Schools should also raise awareness of the risks and promote healthier social media use," he added.

Prof Shalahuddin Qusar said internationally, concerns over the mental health effects of excessive social media use are increasingly being discussed.

"But in Bangladesh, the issue remains largely confined to academic and professional discussions and has yet to receive sufficient attention at the policy level," he said.

"We also need more research to understand what is happening," the expert said, adding that ignoring the issue could make an already serious mental health burden even more difficult to address.

Probe body recommends suspension of

FROM PAGE 1

The committee recommended further investigation into allegations and available evidence against Takbir Ahmed Emon of the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) and also an RU JCD vice-president; Syed Sajharul Islam of management and RU JCD assistant general secretary; and Tanim Rahman of the mass communication and journalism and a JCD activist.

It also recommended further investigation before taking action against Rakibul Islam, assistant cultural affairs secretary of the Rajshahi University Central Students' Union (Rucsu), for his alleged role in instigating the incident.

Meanwhile, the committee recommended warnings for JCD vice-presidents Bulbul Rahman and Shariful Islam, and assistant office secretary Shahriar Alam.

At the briefing, the VC said the probe committee's report clearly stated that further investigation is needed into the matter.

Prof Rezaul Karim, convener of the probe committee, said Ariful Islam and Rakibul had played roles in instigating the incident.

Navi Pillay wins Nobel Peace Prize

FROM PAGE 1

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu later said the award showed that the committee had "lost its moral compass" by honouring "a bigot".

Pillay, 85, is currently a judge at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which is hearing a case accusing Myanmar of genocide. She has spent her career defending international law. She has also served as UN Commissioner for Human Rights.

She has been "instrumental in ensuring that war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide are prosecuted", said Jorgen Watne Frydnes, chair of the Norwegian Nobel Committee in Oslo.

The daughter of a bus driver in a family of Tamil descent, Pillay began her career in South African courts, defending anti-apartheid activists. She later served at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda following the 1994 genocide and at the ICC.

She also headed the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI), which does not speak on behalf of the world body and found last year that genocide was occurring in Gaza.

Pillay's "independence, her expertise and steadfastness have made her one of the most respected international jurists of our time", the Nobel committee said.

In Nuremberg, Pillay said world leaders had a "legal obligation to protect human rights and refrain from war".

"We are living through an era when international law and human rights are under significant political attack," she said, adding that this was "particularly visible with the attacks on the International Criminal Court".

Trump last month called on all ICC member states to withdraw from the body. On Friday, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Washington would ban transactions with what he called a "rogue court".

"Either the ICC will end its threats, or we will end the ICC," Rubio said in a statement.

The immediate impact of the sanctions was softened by a series of exemptions that effectively provide a six-month grace period.

The State Department said the period would give member states time to demonstrate "meaningful progress" towards addressing US concerns. It could be adjusted depending on the "success or failure" of those efforts, the department added.

The ICC rejected the sanctions as an attack on international law, warning that "history will judge this moment".

Canada, France, Germany, Japan and the United Kingdom said in a joint statement that they "strongly disagree" with the announcement.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called the US decision "a serious blow to our collective pursuit of international criminal justice, of which the ICC is a key pillar".

The European Union described the sanctions as "deeply regrettable" and said it was "ready to take any necessary measures to enable the court to carry out its work".

Amnesty International urged countries to "resist" the move, saying the sanctions were "designed to isolate and ultimately destroy" the court.

The Trump administration had already sanctioned 17 people linked to the ICC, including its prosecutor and several judges, over the court's investigations involving the United States and Israel. Israel, like the United States, is not an ICC member.

Earlier, reacting to news of her award, Pillay joked about Trump's well-documented desire to win the prize himself.

"If you clap a little bit more, I may share this prize with Trump," she said during a standing ovation in Nuremberg. Amnesty International Secretary General Agnes Callamard captured the moment on video and posted it on X.

The Nobel committee did not mention the allegations against Israel in Gaza in its comments on Pillay's award.

The prize includes a gold medal, a diploma and $1.2 million. It will be presented at a formal ceremony in Oslo on December 10, the anniversary of the 1896 death of its creator, Swedish inventor and philanthropist Alfred Nobel.



An unauthorised leguna stand operates beside the boundary wall of the 400-year-old Lalbagh Fort in the capital, while posters and banners plaster sections of the historic structure, undermining its heritage appeal. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: **FIROZ AHMED**

Mahalaya today

BSS, *Dhaka*

Mahalaya, an auspicious occasion that heralds the arrival of Goddess Durga, is being celebrated today through various rituals by members of the Hindu community across the country.

Mahalaya marks the end of Pitru Paksha (the dark fortnight dedicated to ancestors) and the beginning of Devi Paksha (the divine fortnight).

The countdown for Durga Puja, the largest religious festival of the Hindu community, begins with the celebration of Mahalaya.

On this day, Goddess Durga begins her journey from her matrimonial home in Mount Kailash to her paternal abode on Earth, marking the beginning of the Durga Puja festival.

Durga Puja will formally begin on October 16 with Maha Shashthi, followed by Maha Saptami, Maha Ashtami, Maha Nabami, and it will come to an end with the immersion of Durga idols on Bijoya Dashami on October 21.

Today, Dhakeshwari National Temple will host a one-hour-long special programme at 6:00am.

Mahanagar Sarbajanin Puja Committee general secretary Suvasish Kumar Biswas Sadhan said the Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka, Dinesh Trivedi, is expected to attend the ceremony.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

Idol makers race against time as Durga Puja nears

Rising costs, worker shortage add to pressure; traders report sluggish sales

RAKIB MADBER

Artisans in Old Dhaka's Shankharibazar and Tantibazar are working round the clock to complete idols ahead of Durga Puja, the largest religious festival of Bangalee Hindus, amid rising production costs and a shortage of workers.

The festival begins with Mahalaya today, followed by Maha Panchami on October 15, and concludes with Bijoya Dashami on October 21.

During a recent visit, artisans were seen shaping, drying and painting idols, with some workshops hiring additional workers to meet deadlines.

Artisan Biplab Das said he had received orders for three puja mandaps this year, charging Tk 85,000-90,000 per set, compared to less than Tk 80,000 last year. "The prices of various materials used to make idols have gone up, increasing production costs. There are also fewer people working in this profession, so the workload is much heavier," he said.

Another artisan, Gopal Pal, said he was working day and night to complete orders. "The decoration process takes considerable time and effort. With only a few days left and limited manpower, we are in a race against time," he said.



PHOTO: **MEHEDI HASAN**

An artisan puts the finishing touches to an idol at Banglabazar in the capital.



Visitors browse stalls at a traditional fair at Ramna Kali Temple in the capital, organised to mark Durga Puja.

Meanwhile, traders selling puja decorations, including crowns, hairpieces, sarees and garlands, reported sluggish sales despite rising prices.

At Sajghar in Shankharibazar, crowns for idols now cost Tk 300-7,000 per set, up from Tk 200-6,000 last year. Hairpieces have risen from Tk 190 to Tk 250-260, while saree fabric costs Tk 60-100 per yard, against Tk 50-80 previously, depending on quality.

Single-strand garlands now sell for Tk 30-35, up from Tk 20, while better-quality full garlands cost Tk 500-600, up from Tk 400-500 last year.

Prices of idols' weapons have increased from Tk 80-750 to Tk 130-1,000, while beaded garlands have doubled to Tk 800 per kg.

Ratan Daptar, owner of Sajghar, said higher prices were affecting customers' purchases.

Dipak Dhar, owner of Dhakeshwari Shankha Shilpalaya and Basanalaya, also reported slower sales. "Shops used to be crowded at this time of the year. This year, the usual rush has been missing," he said.

He attributed the price increases to higher transportation costs driven by rising fuel prices, as most decorative items are imported from India. Financial constraints among customers have further affected sales, he added.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

MIGRATORY BIRD DAY

Shrinking habitats, fading flocks

Study finds 12 of 20 Arctic shorebird species in decline

KHENGSAPRUE MARMA

At least 12 of 20 monitored Arctic shorebird species suffered population declines between 2009 and 2023, with habitat degradation at coastal stopover sites identified as a major cause, according to a recent study.

The findings underscore Bangladesh's importance as a wintering ground for threatened migratory birds, including the critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper and the endangered Great Knot and Nordmann's Greenshank.

Every winter, millions of shorebirds travel around 9,000 kilometres from the Arctic tundra and Siberia to Bangladesh's coastal mudflats and wetlands. The country hosts around 60 shorebird species, including 47 winter visitors.

Research based on 14 years of monitoring data, including satellite tracking from Sonadia Island, has revealed threats facing these birds along their migration routes.

A three-year tracking study at Nijhum Dwip National Park, launched in the winter of 2021-22, examined how shorebirds use the Bay of Bengal.



PHOTO: **SAYAM U CHOWDHURY**

A flock of Indian Skimmers. The entire population of this species depend on the south central coast of Bangladesh.

Led by Dr Sayam U Chowdhury, researchers affiliated with the University of Cambridge, the SCOPE Foundation and the Bangladesh Forest Department tracked selected species using lightweight GPS-GSM tags and colour leg-flags.

The findings showed strong site fidelity, with birds repeatedly returning to familiar tidal flats.

Common Redshanks and Whimbrels remained within small areas, while Black-tailed Godwits returned to the same feeding grounds after short trips.

A broader study by Dr Chowdhury and colleagues, published in Proceedings of the Royal Society B, found that 60 percent of monitored species declined between 2009 and 2023.

It also found that 64 percent of inland stopover sites along winter migration routes across the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau lie outside protected areas.

The birds face threats from illegal trapping, hunting, entanglement in fishing nets and unplanned coastal development.

In Bangladesh, mangrove plantations on natural tidal flats are shrinking feeding grounds, while pollution and human disturbance further threaten their habitats.

Conservationists warn that losing even one key stopover site along China's Yellow Sea or the Himalayan corridor could disrupt migration, regardless of protection efforts in Bangladesh.

Dr Chowdhury urged permanent legal protection for key feeding grounds and high-tide roosts, including Sonadia Island, Nijhum Dwip, Ganguirar Char near Sandwip and Jahajja Char.

He also called for using tracking data to designate protected areas, banning hunting and stopping mangrove plantations on natural tidal flats.

2.2km cycle track opens in port city

BSS, *Chattogram*

A 2.2km cycle track was inaugurated on Airport Road in Chattogram city yesterday, which the city corporation describes as "Bangladesh's first dedicated cycling track".

The project aims to ease traffic congestion and promote environment-friendly transport in the port city.

Finance and Planning Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury inaugurated the track.

Chattogram City Corporation Mayor Shahadat Hossain and Chattogram-9 MP Abu Sufian were also present.

Built under the city corporation's "Chattogram Airport Road Expansion and Other Physical Infrastructure Development" project, the four-lane road runs from Shah Amanat International Airport to the elevated expressway.

Footpaths line both sides, and a central median separated by kerbstones divides the carriageways. The cycle track runs alongside a landscaped walkway on one side.

Following the inauguration, the finance minister, mayor, local lawmaker, guests and cyclists rode along the new track.

Honouring literary legacies, nurturing new voices

Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury, Selina Hossain receive BRAC Bank-Samakal Literary Award for lifetime achievement; six others honoured

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury and novelist Selina Hossain received the Lifetime Achievement Award for 2024 and 2025, respectively, at the BRAC Bank-Samakal Literary Award ceremony in Dhaka yesterday.

The awards were presented at Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel, where six other writers were recognised in three categories for their contributions to Bangla literature.

Attending the event as chief guest, eminent economist and former interim government adviser Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud described the BRAC Bank-Samakal Literary Award as the most important literary award given by public and private institutions.

"They judged without hesitation and honoured those who deserved the awards. That is where the award's success lies," he said.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1



Awardees at the BRAC Bank-Samakal Literary Award ceremony in Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: **STAR**

NANIARCHAR IN RANGAMATI

Pineapple chips plant shut for five years

RIKORS CHAKMA, *Rangamati*

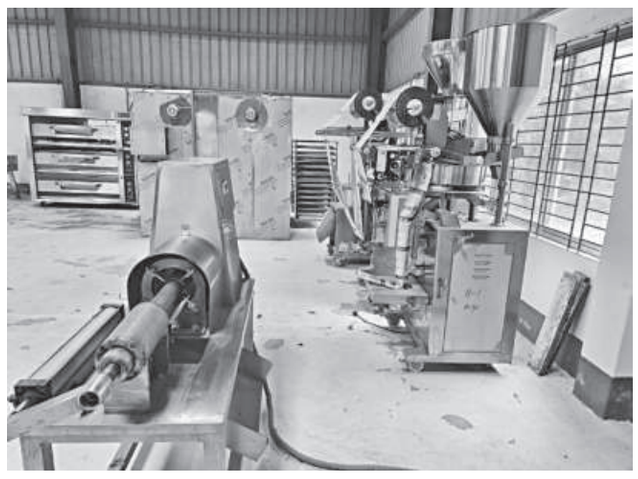
A pineapple chips processing facility in Naniarchar upazila of Rangamati has remained shut since 2021, a year after it was launched.

Naniarchar is widely known as a regional hub for pineapple cultivation, but local farmers often have to sell their produce at low prices due to inadequate marketing and storage facilities.

According to the Department of Agricultural Extension, the plant was set up at Naniarchar Horticulture Centre under the "Year-Round Fruit Production for Nutrition Improvement Project" at a cost of Tk 40 lakh to process excess produce into pineapple chips and support local farmers.

After construction was completed in 2020, pineapple chips were produced at the facility on a trial basis until the project expired in June 2021. It has remained closed since then.





The factory was set up at Naniarchar Horticulture Centre at a cost of Tk 40 lakh to process excess produce into pineapple chips and support local farmers. PHOTO: **STAR**

During a recent visit, the facility was found padlocked, with machinery inside covered in a thick layer of dust. Several parts were rusting, electrical wiring was hanging loose, rainwater was entering through holes in the roof, and plaster had peeled off the floor.

Md Ismail Hossain, a pineapple grower from Bogachhari, said wholesalers mostly buy large pineapples, leaving smaller ones to go to waste.

"If the plant were functional, these smaller pineapples could have been processed into chips and marketed, preventing wastage and bringing in some earnings for us," he said.

Another grower, Md Hanif, urged the authorities to resume the plant's operations.

Md Jobaidur Rahman Bhasani, horticulturist at Naniarchar Horticulture Centre, said the plant was run on a trial basis several times in 2020 following its installation.

"However, it could not be kept operational later due to a shortage of technically trained manpower. Prolonged closure left the factory's equipment in a deplorable state," he said.

"Senior officials have inspected the facility, and efforts are underway to explore if operations can be resumed through public or private initiatives," he added.

Md Mahbubur Rashid, deputy director of Rangamati Horticulture Centre, said, "We are consulting with senior officials and stakeholders across various sectors on how to make the plant operational. Several entrepreneurs have contacted us in this regard."

Md Moniruzzaman, DAE deputy director in Rangamati, said reviving the factory through government or private enterprise would benefit local pineapple growers and create employment for youth.

Driver arrested over murder of Cumilla girl

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Cumilla*

Police have arrested a CNG-run auto-rickshaw driver in connection with the murder of Jannatul Tazmin, a class 7 student, in Lalmai upazila of Cumilla.

Sumon was held at his brother's house in Chattogram yesterday, said Lalmai Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mizanur Rahman.

Police launched an investigation after recovering an abandoned CNG-run auto-rickshaw near the spot where Tazmin's body was found on Thursday. Later in the night, they took the vehicle's owner, Abul Hashem, to the police station for questioning.

The victim's father, Abdul Alim, filed a murder case with Lalmai Police Station, accusing unidentified individuals.

During the investigation, police identified Sumon, a resident of Joynagar in Lalmai, as the driver of the auto-rickshaw at the time of the incident.

They also detained his aunt-in-law and brother-in-law for questioning.

Tazmin's body was recovered from a paddy field in Jagatpur village of Lalmai upazila on Thursday morning. A CNG-run auto-rickshaw and a bag were also found near the spot. She was a student at Farida Bidyayatan in Cumilla.

3 more die with measles symptoms

Death toll now 1,147

UNB, *Dhaka*

Three children died with measles-like symptoms in the 24 hours until 8:00am yesterday, bringing the country's combined tally of confirmed and suspected measles-related deaths to 1,147 this year.

The total number of suspected measles deaths has reached 1,043, while confirmed deaths from measles have remained the same at 104.

A total of 1,268 new suspected measles cases were reported during the 24-hour period, taking the cumulative number of suspected cases nationwide to 2,02,893.

Meanwhile, 81 new confirmed measles cases were recorded, pushing laboratory-confirmed infections to 22,197.



PHOTO: **STAR**

As Padma closes in, school braces for worst

At least 100 students have left; teachers prepare for possible relocation

JAHID HASAN

Around 17 years ago, a char (shoal land) emerged in Purba Naodoba union of Shariatpur's Zajira upazila. A village called Alam Kha Kandi grew on it, and in 2017, the No 122 Altaf Hossain Khan Government Primary School was built there on 33 decimals of land.

At the time, the Padma river was nearly two kilometres away, out of sight from the school gate. But successive bouts of erosion over the past two years have brought the river to within just 50 metres of the school building.

Teachers, students and residents now fear the school could meet the same fate as neighbouring Painpara Government Primary School and Rizia Amin Government Primary School, which were swallowed by the river in 2024 and 2025 respectively.

During a recent visit, the edge of the school field and several trees were seen crumbling into the river. Nearby, the roof of a building already claimed by the river lay tilted against the shore.

Inside the school, tin fencing had been dismantled to allow for quick relocation if needed. Classroom partitions had been removed and ceiling fans taken down.

"Our school could be taken by the river at any time. If it happens, we won't be able to study here anymore. It feels very scary. Where will we study then? We want measures to protect our school," said Borna Akter, a fourth-grader.

Teacher Naimur Rahman Khan said fear of erosion had already driven at least 100 students away.

"We also always have to remain alert, because the school is at risk," he said.

Altaf Hossain Khan, the school's founder and union parishad chairman, said the area had been facing erosion for years. "We have repeatedly requested the Bangladesh Water Development Board to take action, but nothing has been done," he said over the phone.

Md Milton Hossain, executive engineer of the BWDB in Shariatpur, said the erosion at Alam Kha Kandi had been reported to higher authorities, but the Ministry of Water Resources was not currently taking emergency measures in char areas.

He said no NOC had been sought from the BWDB before the school was built on the char. Neither the district nor the upazila education department had informed his office that the school was at risk, he added.

"Even so, I will visit the area and take the necessary measures, subject to permission from higher authorities," he said.

Zajira Upazila Primary Education Officer Bazlur Rahman said preparations were underway to relocate the school before further erosion.

Idol makers race against time as Durga Puja nears

FROM PAGE 3

However, artisan Shubho Mondal said prices of traditional dhaks had fallen from Tk 10,000-15,000 last year to Tk 9,000-12,000 this year.

Joy Saha, a local resident shopping for puja, said rising prices had forced him to buy only essential items.

Chandan Dey, president of Tantibazar Puja Committee, said 22 mandaps across Shankharibazar and Tantibazar would host Durga Puja this year. "We are making every effort to complete the preparations in time, including security measures," he said.



PHOTO: **COURTESY**

Participants at the closing ceremony of a two-day BCDP Knowledge Conference 2026 in Dhaka on October 8. Mohammad Navid Safiullah, additional secretary (climate change), Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, chaired the event. Also present were Dr Md Habibur Rahman, deputy governor of Bangladesh Bank; Akira Matsunaga, deputy country director of the Asian Development Bank's Bangladesh Resident Mission; Dr Ahsan Uddin Ahmed, former member of the Independent Technical Advisory Panel of the Green Climate Fund; and AKM Sohel, additional secretary and UN wing chief at the Economic Relations Division. The conference called for coordinated efforts to mobilise climate investments and turn policy commitments into bankable projects.

Mahalaya today

FROM PAGE 3

Til-tarpan offering seeking eternal peace of departed souls of ancestors will be held at 7:30am while Mahalaya ghat installation and special prayers will be offered at 9:00am on the premises of the national temple, he added.

Besides, Ramna Kali Mandir will also host a large-scale Mahalaya celebration in at dawn, said Mintu Basu, a joint secretary of the temple management committee.

Dhaka University Jagannath Hall Upashanalaya chief priest Sadhan Chakrabarty said Goddess Durga will arrive on a horse and depart by boat this year. Her departure by boat traditionally signifies abundant crops and rainfall.

The most popular attraction of Mahalaya is recitation from the Sree Sree Chandi and singing devotional songs, highlighting the power and supremacy of Goddess Durga over all evil forces.

The sonorous recorded voice of legendary narrator and radio broadcaster Birendra Krishna Bhadra from Akashbani was once the main attraction of the day. Now similar programmes are aired on many broadcasting media.

The recorded version of Mahishasura Mardini (destruction of the demon king Mahishasura) is customarily played at predawn on Mahalaya day in every Bangalee Hindu residence everywhere.

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e-Tender Notice No: 44/2026-27
(Limited Tendering Method)

Memo No: EE/EED/Ctg/e-Tender/2026-27/44 Date: 08.10.2026

This is to notify all concerned that e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the Procurement of following works. Details are given below:

Sl. No.	Tender ID	Package No.	Name of Works	Last date & time of selling documents	Last date & time of submission documents
01	1345153	7016-SHED/2026-27/SL-06	SHED-7016/LOT-06: CONSTRUCTION OF VERTICAL EXTENSION OF EXISTING ACADEMIC BUILDING (1ST & 2ND FLOOR) IN/C. SANITARY, WATER SUPPLY & ELECTRIFICATION WORKS AT RAHMATPUR HIGH SCHOOL, SANDWIP, CHATTOGRAM. (2025-26) (VE-0203-CS-BRICKS CHIPS) RMS ID-1053534	25-Oct-2026 16:00	26-Oct-2026 12:00
02	1345154	7016-SHED/2026-27/SL-07	SHED-7016/LOT-07: CONSTRUCTION OF VERTICAL EXTENSION OF EXISTING ACADEMIC BUILDING (3RD FLOOR) IN/C. SANITARY, WATER SUPPLY & ELECTRIFICATION WORKS AT BIJOY SMARANI COLLEGE. SITAKUNDA, CHATTOGRAM. (2025-26) (VE-04-CS-BRICKS CHIPS) RMS ID-1053751	25-Oct-2026 16:00	26-Oct-2026 12:00
03	1345155	7016-SHED/2026-27/ SL-08	SHED-7016/LOT-08: CONSTRUCTION OF VERTICAL EXTENSION OF EXISTING ACADEMIC BUILDING (1ST & 2ND FLOOR) IN/C. SANITARY, WATER SUPPLY & ELECTRIFICATION WORKS AT SHITALPUR ML HIGH SCHOOL, SITAKUNDA, CHATTOGRAM. (2024-25) (VE-0203-CS-STONE CHIPS) RMS ID-1048117	25-Oct-2026 16:00	26-Oct-2026 12:00

The interested persons/firms may visit website (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) to get the details of the Tender. This is an Online Tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no Offline/Hard copies will be accepted. To Submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) is required. Further information & guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP Helpdesk; (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

(Md. Tanvir Islam)
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GD-2456

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Local Government Engineering Department
Office of the Executive Engineer
District: Cumilla
www.lged.gov.bd

Memo No. 46.02.1900.000.07.427.26.7062 Date: 08-10-2026

e-Tender Notice
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(Only for Social Procurement Category under PPR 2025 Rule 80 (1) (gha))

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Sl. No.	Package No.	Name of Works	Tender/ Proposal ID No.	Document Last selling/ downloading Date	Tender/ Proposal Closing Date	Method of Tender
1	LGED/GOBM/CUM/26-27/RW-36	Periodic Maintenance of Shantirbazar-Pipodda Rd. from Ch 1000m - Ch 1720m (Road ID: 419874130) under NANGALKOT Upazila, District: Cumilla.	1347480	27-Oct-2026	28-Oct-2026	LTM
2	LGED/GOBM/CUM/26-27/RW-34	LGED/GOBM/CUM/26-27/RW-34 Periodic Maintenance of Kolomiya (RHD) to Jadoppur Amin Master House -Mataincoat Road from Ch 00m - Ch 1120m (Road ID: 419925071) under LALMAI Upazila, District: Cumilla.	1347482	27-Oct-2026	28-Oct-2026	LTM
3	LGED/GOBM/CUM/26-27/RW-33	Periodic Maintenance of Nurpur bazar (R&H) - Changahata R&H road from Ch 2000m - Ch 3050m (Road ID: 419924010) under LALMAI Upazila, District: Cumilla.	1347483	27-Oct-2026	28-Oct-2026	LTM
4	LGED/GOBM/CUM/26-27/RW-32	Periodic Maintenance of Nurpur bazar (R&H) - Changahata R&H road from Ch 00m - Ch 2000m (Road ID: 419924010) under LALMAI Upazila, District: Cumilla.	1347484	27-Oct-2026	28-Oct-2026	LTM
5	LGED/GOBM/CUM/26-27/RW-29	Periodic Maintenance of Badhanathpur Baythurnoor Zama Mosque - Shibnagar GPS via Battola Bazar from Ch 0m - 1100m and Ch 00m - 645m (Road ID: 419885044) under MEGHNA Upazila, District: Cumilla.	1347487	27-Oct-2026	28-Oct-2026	LTM
6	LGED/GOBM/CUM/26-27/RW-27	Periodic Maintenance of Shibnagar-Baidanathpur Bazar Road. from Ch 00m - Ch 225m (Road ID: 419885015) under MEGHNA Upazila, District: Cumilla.	1347489	27-Oct-2026	28-Oct-2026	LTM
7	LGED/GOBM/CUM/26-27/RW-25	Periodic Maintenance of Simpur Uzir Digir Parchimpar to Comilla-Rasulpur Road via Shimpur Mosque. from Ch 00m - Ch 727m (Road ID: 419675228) under CUMILLA-S Upazila, District: Cumilla.	1347491	27-Oct-2026	28-Oct-2026	LTM
8	LGED/GOBM/CUM/26-27/RW-24	Periodic Maintenance of Rasulpur High School to Jariyanagar rail crossing Road. from Ch 00m - Ch 935m (Road ID: 419675106) under CUMILLA-S Upazila, District: Cumilla.	1347492	27-Oct-2026	28-Oct-2026	LTM

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To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) is required.
The fees for downloading the e-Tender Documents from the National e-GP Portal have to be deposited through online at any Branches of registered Bank.
Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd.)
The Tender Notice will be available on the website: www.lged.gov.bd and www.lged.comilla.gov.bd

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GD-2457

'Substantial' forces deployed in Saudi Arabia: Pakistan

AFP, *Islamabad*

Pakistan has a "substantial" number of forces deployed in Saudi Arabia acting in a defensive capacity, Pakistan's foreign ministry spokesman said yesterday.

"From Pakistan already we have a substantial number of forces as well as resources in town, in Riyadh," foreign ministry spokesman Sajjad Haider Khan told journalists, without specifying whether the deployment had grown under a major defence pact inked this year with Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

He added Pakistani military personnel in the kingdom "would not be crossing the borders of the other side for an attack on the Houthis, but of course (is acting) in the defence of the territory".

Yemen's Houthis have launched barrages of aerial salvos against Saudi Arabia including attacks on Riyadh's international airport on Thursday, killing three.

Pakistan signed a defence agreement with Saudi Arabia and Turkey in August committing the three countries to come to each other's aid in the event one was attacked.

The conflict between the Houthis and Yemen's Saudi-backed government has widened, with the Iran-backed fighters staging repeated attacks on Saudi targets since they began a lightning offensive just across the border.

Khan declined to say whether fresh Pakistani deployments had been made since Saudi Arabia's conflict intensified and said "how much and when and where" forces would be deployed would be up to the trilateral alliance, which is headquartered in Riyadh with a retired Pakistani general as its secretary general.

Khan noted that Pakistan's forces had been deployed in Saudi Arabia regularly since the 1980s, including following the signing of a bilateral agreement between Islamabad and Riyadh in 2025.



A man stands next to salvaged items as people search the rubble of a collapsed building following overnight Israeli airstrikes in Gaza City yesterday, before which the Israeli military had warned residents to evacuate the area. Since a ceasefire was declared last year, Israeli forces have killed at least 1,450 people in Gaza. PHOTO: STAR

Who is Navi Pillay?

AFP, *Johannesburg*

Former UN rights chief Navi Pillay -- awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on Friday -- is a fearless global rights defender who has also served on the International Criminal Court and was South Africa's first non-white woman High Court judge.

The 85-year-old has built a formidable reputation during a decades-long career that took her from South African courts to the ICC and International Tribunal for Rwanda.

She gained global prominence for her outspoken condemnation of government repression of popular protests in the Arab world, including Libya and Syria.

Between 2021 and 2025, she chaired a commission of enquiry created by the UN Human Rights Council to probe the root causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The panel, which does not speak for the UN and has faced harsh Israeli criticism, found that "genocide is occurring in Gaza and is continuing to occur", Pillay told AFP in 2025.

"The responsibility lies with the State of Israel," she said.

Pillay is currently an ad hoc judge at the International Court of Justice, working on a case deciding whether Myanmar's crackdown on the Rohingya breached the 1948 UN Genocide Convention, with a ruling expected in the coming months.

Born the daughter of a bus driver in South Africa's east coast city of Durban in 1941 to a family of Tamil descent, Pillay has had a groundbreaking career.

She grew up in a poor neighbourhood in the southeastern coastal city during white minority rule, and studied law at the University of Natal before attaining a Master's and Doctorate from Harvard.

She became the first non-white woman to open a law firm in Durban, where she carved out a reputation as a doughty defender of apartheid opponents.

In 1973 she won the right for political prisoners in the notorious Robben Island penal colony -- where jailed anti-apartheid leader Nelson Mandela was held at the time -- to have access to lawyers.

A year after Mandela became president in South Africa's first democratic vote in 1994, she made legal history by becoming the first woman of colour to be appointed to the country's high court.

Soon after, the late liberation hero recommended her to serve on a United Nations tribunal trying Rwandan genocide suspects.

- She held the position of UN rights chief
- Pillay oversaw UN report that found Israel committed genocide in Gaza
- She is now an ad hoc judge at the ICJ overseeing Rohingya genocide case

In 1998, she was among judges on the Rwanda tribunal that was the first to try rape as an act of genocide.

Ten years later, Pillay was appointed UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, a role she held until 2014.

Her upbringing in an unjust apartheid society spurred her to fight discrimination everywhere and earned her the reputation of being the voice of victims around the world.

"We put up with the worst insults and racial discrimination and abused and treated like dirt," Pillay told AFP in an interview in 2023.

That could have made you "weak and cry" or "fight every step of the way", she said.

IN BRIEF



Thieves steal wine worth $5.6m in Italy's Tuscany

AFP, *Rome*

Thieves in Tuscany have stolen 30,000 bottles of wine worth an estimated five million euros ($5.6 million) from the renowned Marchesi Antinori winery, the company said yesterday.

"As far as we know, there has never been such a big heist in Italy," a company representative, who asked not to be named, told AFP.

The stolen wines were three of the company's reds -- Tignanello, Solaia and Guado al Tasso -- which sell for 120 to 300 euros or more depending on the vintages.

"They are our among our most iconic labels and are certainly also prized by collectors," it said.

The theft happened last weekend at a warehouse in central Italy where the prized wines had been prepared for export.

The thieves deactivated the alarm and the theft was only discovered on Monday.

Houthi strikes on Riyadh airport kills three Saudis

REUTERS, *Riyadh/Dubai*

Thursday's attacks on Riyadh airport killed three people, Saudi authorities said yesterday, as Yemen's Houthi group stepped up missile strikes on the kingdom and tried to shut down its airspace in an escalating war triggered by the US-Iran conflict.

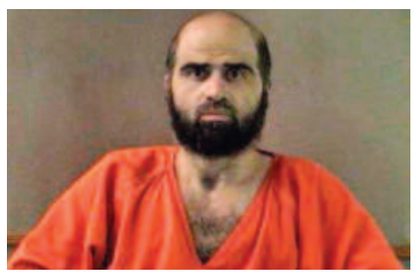
The strikes, which also injured several people, damaged a Saudia Airlines plane and sent smoke billowing over the airport, led many airlines to cancel flights to the Saudi capital days before it is due to host a major meeting of global oil chiefs.

Saudi airstrikes hit Houthi targets in the Yemeni capital Sanaa overnight, Houthi officials and affiliated media said, as part of an intensifying air war against the Iran-allied group aimed at reversing its recent territorial gains, threats to international shipping, and attacks on the kingdom.

A Saudi-led coalition backing government forces in Yemen said it had destroyed three missile launch platforms used by the Houthis and warned it would respond firmly to attacks on civilians.

The Houthis, who have encircled Yemeni government forces in Yemen's third-largest city of Taiz and are trying to defend positions on the Red Sea coast against a Saudi-backed offensive, had already killed three people with strikes on airports in the kingdom earlier this week.

US to livestream execution of Fort Hood shooter



AFP, *Washington*

The execution by firing squad of convicted military base shooter Nidal Hasan will be livestreamed, a Pentagon official said, drawing sharp condemnation yesterday of the plan to broadcast the killing.

Hasan's execution, set for December 3, is poised to be the first that the US military has carried out by firing squad since World War II.

"It will be livestreamed. Details will follow," the Pentagon official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told AFP of the death sentence imposed on the US Army psychiatrist who shot dead 13 people at Fort Hood in 2009.

The UN condemned the plan to livestream the execution, saying it would amount to torture.

The last US military execution was carried out in 1961, when John Bennett was hanged for rape and attempted murder.

Russia to 'do everything' to end war

Putin tells Pezeshkian; Iran says talks will only succeed without 'threats'

AFP, *Ashgabat*

Russia's President Vladimir Putin has vowed to "do everything" to help end the Middle East war when he met Iranian counterpart Masoud Pezeshkian for talks ahead of a regional summit, Russian media reported.

The leaders of two of the world's most sanctioned nations met after arriving in Turkmenistan for a summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) that started yesterday in the Caspian Sea resort of Avaza.

"We are ready to do everything that is in our power to contribute to the settlement of this situation," said Putin.

He added that Iran had made "real efforts to end the war" since US-Israeli attacks started on February 28, according to Russian news agencies.

Putin also noted the "positive evolution" in Iran-Russia relations.

The two countries have reinforced diplomatic and military links since Russia launched its offensive in Ukraine in February 2022, becoming increasingly reliant on each other.

The contacts came with Iran-US talks at an apparent impasse. Pezeshkian said this week that negotiations with Washington were "meaningless".

Diplomatic efforts to resolve Russia's offensive in Ukraine also appear deadlocked, even as both sides intensify attacks.

"We are engaged in dialogue, but every time we negotiate with the United States, they attack again," Iranian state media quoted Pezeshkian as saying at the talks with Putin.

Trump ruled out attacking Iran again before the US midterm elections on November 3, saying on Thursday that Washington was holding "productive discussions" with the Islamic republic.



In this pool photograph distributed by the Russian state agency Sputnik, Russia's President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian hold a meeting in Turkmenbashi on Thursday. PHOTO: AFP

Pezeshkian said Tehran wanted to see a "final framework" to end the war.

"Negotiation conducted in the shadow of force is not negotiation, it is imposition and coercion," he said, warning that sanctions on Iran would affect "regional trade, connectivity, energy, and order."

Putin and Pezeshkian will attend the summit of the CIS -- originally a grouping of former Soviet nations -- with leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Turkmenistan and other Central Asia states.

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This is an online Tender, where only e-Tenders will be accepted in e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, please register on e-GP system portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd).

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Sl. No	Tender ID No/ Package No	Name of works	Last date and time for Tender Security submission	Tender Closing/ Opening Date & Time.
1	2	3	4	5
1	1342562, 30/e-GP/FRD/ 2026-2027	Providing Skilled & Semi Skilled Labour for Executing Road repairing Branch Triming, Clearing & Grabbing of Roadway Embankment at November-2026 Under Road-Sub Division-II, Section-III Under Road division, Faridpur During the Financial year 2026-2027.	19/10/2026 12:00 hour	19/10/2026 12:30 hour
2	1342563, 31/e-GP/FRD/ 2026-2027	Levelling of Hard Shoulder by Dense Bituminous Surfacing Wearing Course with surface of main Pavement from Ch. 0+500m to Ch. 3+670m of Bhanga-Faridpur (Goalchamot) (N-804) Road Under Road Division Faridpur during the FY 2026-2027.	19/10/2026 12:00 hour	19/10/2026 12:30 hour

e-Tender details can be downloaded from 08/10/2026 time: 23:00 to 18/10/2026, time: 17:00 of e-GP system portal http://www.eprocure.gov.bd for pursue.
e-Tenders will be accepted only as stated in above list, accepted tenders will be opened online immediately as stated in above list.

(Khalid Saifullah Sardar)
ID No. 602287
Executive Engineer, (C.C) RHD
Road Division, Faridpur.

GD-2458

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

Ensure speedy trials for women, children

Monitoring cell urgently needed to ensure timely justice in violence cases

At a time when violence against women and children is on the rise in the country, failure to ensure speedy justice for the victims remains a serious concern. According to a report by this daily, as of June 30 this year, 1,16,392 cases were pending before 101 Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunals across the country. Of these, 26,249 had remained unresolved for more than five years. Although the backlog has declined from 1,42,575 cases in September last year, the number of pending cases remains too high. Equally worrying is the failure to implement a High Court directive issued a decade ago to monitor whether tribunals are completing trials within the time limit set by law. What is the point of having laws and judicial directives if the institutions responsible for enforcing them fail to act?

Under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000, trials must be completed within 180 days of the framing of charges. But this deadline is frequently missed. In a judgment delivered on December 5, 2016, the High Court directed the Supreme Court registrar general to establish a monitoring cell to oversee compliance with the deadline. The cell was supposed to include representatives from the home and law ministries and submit periodic reports to the Supreme Court and the government, enabling action against those responsible for unexplained delays. The law also requires tribunal judges, public prosecutors and investigating officers to submit separate reports explaining delays when trials cannot be completed within the stipulated period.

However, speeding up trials must not come at the cost of proper investigations. As we have previously argued in this column, faulty investigations and delays in obtaining forensic reports can undermine the pursuit of justice. Hence, the authorities must both procedural delays and the weaknesses that prevent cases from being properly investigated and prosecuted.

However, a decade later, the monitoring cell remains non-existent; leaving no mechanism to track compliance with the deadline. An official at the Supreme Court Registrar General's Office argued that the 180-day provision is directory rather than mandatory. Even so, this should not be an excuse for allowing cases to remain unresolved for years. Such delays deny survivors of rape and sexual violence, as well as the families of murder victims, timely justice and can undermine public confidence in the justice system.

However, speeding up trials must not come at the cost of proper investigations. As we have previously argued in this column, faulty investigations and delays in obtaining forensic reports can undermine the pursuit of justice. Hence, the authorities must both procedural delays and the weaknesses that prevent cases from being properly investigated and prosecuted. The aim should be to ensure both timely and fair trials.

We urge the Supreme Court administration to implement the High Court's 2016 directive without further delay. The monitoring cell must have clear responsibilities and a regular reporting mechanism to identify the causes of delays and hold responsible officials accountable. The authorities must also address other obstacles to timely trials, including difficulties in securing witnesses' attendance and obtaining forensic evidence. Setting deadlines alone will achieve little unless the institutions concerned have the capacity and commitment to meet them.

Dhaka needs a plan that's implementable

The capital of the country seems to have been built to fail

Socioeconomic inequality, waterlogging and frequent flooding, poor traffic coordination, broken public transport, and pollution of natural elements define Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh. Amid all this, citizens struggle to secure basic necessities and essential services. Meanwhile, as experts pointed out at a recent discussion, undeterred population growth is putting pressure on housing and driving the expansion of informal settlements, while weak enforcement of urban plans has allowed unauthorised buildings to emerge even on designated water bodies.

What we face now in Dhaka can be traced back to poor or irresponsible planning over the past several decades. Only three and a half weeks ago, in regard to a writ petition submitted by a human rights and social development organisation, the High Court issued a ruling asking the chairman of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha and other relevant authorities why the capital's Detailed Area Plan (DAP) has not been properly implemented and why the authorities' failure to do so should not be declared illegal. The plan for Dhaka itself has undergone a number of revisions since it was formulated in 2010. But it remains merely on paper while the city continues to rank as one of the world's least liveable cities.

Dhaka's rapid and unplanned urbanisation, alongside the lack of rural development, is to blame for this. Water bodies have been filled up with sand and concrete, and the city's boundaries are pushed further while lack of adequate government support for traditionally rural professions fuels in-migration. Even a small amount of rainfall causes its major roads to flood, directly impacting citizens' mobility, productivity and overall quality of life. With the effects of climate change being felt more strongly each year, heatwaves and non-seasonal rainfall hit Dhaka's concrete jungle hardest.

Every government over the last two decades has presented plans for Dhaka, but none have been implemented effectively, if at all. The current housing and public works minister's pledge to strengthen urban planning with a 10-year initiative (five years beyond his government's tenure), including regulations for buildings constructed without approved plans or in violation of approved designs, is commendable. But it will achieve little if the DAP remains unimplemented or the capital does not visibly improve in terms of liveability. It is high time the authorities realised that buildings are only one element of urbanisation, not the whole point of it.

The right to belong should not depend on moral policing

BLOWIN' IN THE WIND



Dr Shamsad Mortuza is vice-chancellor at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB).

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

A sportsman sporting his shorts in the field is no news. But it becomes one when he is stopped at a metro station for his attire on his way to the field. A woman clad in a veil in a university classroom of a Muslim country is no news. But it becomes one when allegations are raised that a teacher asked her to change seats out of the supposed fear that she might be a terrorist. Three adult women travelling to Nepal with valid travel documents is not newsworthy. But it becomes one when they are barred from boarding the plane because they are not married. Three incidents involving public spots—a metro station, a classroom, an international airport—became newsworthy when public accessibility to physical space became socially conditional. Entry depends on looking respectable, harmless or appropriately modern. Ironically, this "normative" look depends on the observer or onlooker; their judgement about clothing carries the power to restrict another person's movement, dignity or participation.

The idea of dressing for public participation to comply with institutional norms made me reflect on its complexities. A strictly religious family may demand wearing a hijab as a sign of modesty, and then the same conspicuous modesty may be treated as threatening in a different setting. The person has not changed. The attire has not changed. Simply by moving from one location to another, the interpretation of the dressed individual has changed. Individuals are within their rights to dress how they want. But such dressing is connected to practices, commitments and circumstances. We should not simply assume that freedom must take a particular visual form.

The allegations against the university teacher were raised by the students and were yet to be independently verified as of this writing. If found true, then the teacher's suspicion is circumstantial without any immediate evidence. Amid protests, the academic responsibilities of the teacher concerned were withdrawn. Hopefully, she will get a chance to tell her side of the story to make us understand why the situation nearly paralysed DU's English department.

The metro station incident also sparked controversies. Many men boarded trains in shorts to protest the authority's moral policing. But the height of such policing was evident when immigration officers questioned the clothing, finances and marital status of the Nepal-bound women. They contacted their parents and one woman's university dean and prevented their departure. Their complaint has now become the subject of a High Court order. These incidents, albeit different in terms of setting and seriousness, invite an uncomfortable question: how does someone's judgement about another person's appearance become the authority to delay, exclude or humiliate them? I wish I had a reliable sartorial solution. Why should an individual's choice of outfits have to conform to the expectations of others?



VISUAL: **SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR**

I have talked to many students about their clothing choices. The reality is far from what it seems. Female students don't always wear hijabs out of religious convictions. In some cases, they may wear them to protect themselves from the male gaze. Some women may wear hijabs to avoid receiving judgemental looks. Some may not have adequate changes of clothes or may feel pressured to look a certain way. Donning the veil might be a way, for some, to hide all these concerns.

Here, the question is about belonging. Public space is shaped by expectations about who belongs there, for what purpose, and under whose supervision. A public space may be open to all, but its gatekeepers may make some visitors feel unwelcome. A student wearing a veil may feel her attire is the only reason her parents will allow her to pursue higher education. Another woman can pursue the same mission while choosing to wear something completely different. We need to respect the choices of both these women. Clothes should not necessarily be the ready-made marker of respectability. The situation becomes more nuanced when a woman engages in leisure activities outside of work or education. Work or study may supply an explanation that leisure apparently cannot. We have seen several instances of harassment women were subjected to because they were "guilty" of wearing Western clothes. Why should women have to explain what they wear in a city they inhabit?

One of the women who were barred from travelling to Nepal was reportedly asked how she could travel abroad when her father was a farmer. If true, that remark would reveal an assumption about who is entitled to aspiration. Some travellers are recognised immediately as tourists; others must explain how they acquired the means to become one. Is it acceptable for an "upper-class" woman to participate in a beauty pageant, while a farmer's daughter is deemed unacceptable for merely visiting a foreign country? The male athlete's experience reminds us that men's bodies are also regulated.

It is time we tried to understand the mindset of the social force that uses its "affective economies" to circulate feelings around signs and bodies to brand particular people as appearing to embody danger. Western outfits can be feared as a virus affecting patriarchal and religious morale. Similarly, conservative attire can be feared as a sign of enslavement to patriarchy and ideological bondage, thereby throttling individual freedom. For a society to progress, we need to make our citizens responsible enough so that they control and examine their feelings before acting upon them. The question of freedom cannot be answered in the name of protectionism. We should ask whether an intervention enables participation or makes withdrawal the price of security.

As a university leader, I consider the classroom dimension especially troubling. Education should cultivate the ability to encounter differences without immediately converting it into a verdict. That responsibility applies to teachers, students and administrators alike. Protecting a complainant and hearing the person accused are both necessary to a credible inquiry. The sensible thing to do is to make the rules of the place transparent and accessible. Private individuals sharing public spaces must respect the space they are in. But their choices should not be curated by a selected few who assume moral authority to craft a preferred image of respectability or modernity.

The real solution to our garbage problem lies in governance



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ABDULLAH A DEWAN

Bangladesh's urban garbage problem has been addressed by many. The problem has become so dire and persistent that even foreign diplomats have felt compelled to comment. Denmark's ambassador, Christian Brix Møller, and Maria Stein Knudsen, in an article published on September 29, 2025, appropriately highlighted technology, storage, public awareness and international cooperation in addressing waste and food loss. The complementary issue is whether Bangladesh has the institutional and incentive structure needed to make such measures work. That is where the problem becomes a matrix: outcomes depend on how the elements interact. A central principle of systems thinking is that improvements in one part of a system may achieve little if weaknesses elsewhere continue to undermine its overall performance.

Waste management begins before the garbage truck arrives. Households decide whether waste is separated. Restaurants and markets decide how food waste is handled. Manufacturers determine how much packaging enters the system. Municipal authorities oversee collection, contractors influence where collected waste ends up, informal pickers recover recyclables, and recycling firms depend on receiving commercially usable material.

Mixed waste makes recycling difficult. Irregular collection encourages dumping in open spaces and drains. Weak recycling markets leave separation unrewarded, while minimal producer responsibility allows hard-to-recycle packaging to proliferate. Contractors paid without performance standards can absorb higher municipal spending without producing cleaner streets.

Dhaka's two city corporations account for about 6,500 tonnes of solid waste daily, roughly 75 percent organic and high in moisture. Community collectors transport it by rickshaw vans to secondary transfer stations, and hundreds of trucks carry it to the landfills at Aminbazar and Matuail. Official estimates of waste generation and collection vary considerably, making it difficult to assess the system's performance and hold those responsible accountable. Informal pickers recover recyclables along the way, largely unrecorded and unprotected.

Technology matters, particularly because Bangladesh loses food during production, transportation and storage. But a refrigerated supply chain requires reliable electricity, financing, maintenance, trained operators and commercial scale. Digital platforms work only if producers and buyers have incentives to use them and the infrastructure to complete transactions. Standards require monitoring and enforcement.

International partners can provide knowledge, equipment and technical assistance. Bangladesh must supply the institutional environment where these can function; otherwise, it imports the visible part of a foreign system while leaving behind the institutions that made it succeed.

Waste must therefore be examined across multiple dimensions: household behaviour, collection, municipal finance, regulation, producer responsibility, recycling markets, technology, informal labour and enforcement. Plastic discarded on the streets enters drains; blocked drains contribute to waterlogging, damaging roads and disrupting transportation. Accumulated waste and stagnant water also create conditions favourable to mosquito breeding, adding to public health risks.

Food waste follows the same pattern. Losses at farms and markets reduce farmers' incomes. Inadequate storage increases spoilage, shrinks effective supply and may push up prices. Food that has consumed land, water, labour, transportation and energy is discarded before providing nutrition. Its economic cost extends well beyond its market value.

Waste must be examined across multiple dimensions: household behaviour, collection, municipal finance, regulation, producer responsibility, recycling markets, technology, informal labour and enforcement.

Bangladesh should resist the search for one dominant solution. Awareness cannot substitute for reliable collection, collection without segregation limits recycling, and recycling cannot be commercially sustainable without markets for recovered materials.

Technology attracts policymakers because it is visible: waste-to-energy plants can be inaugurated and smart bins photographed, while institutional reform is less visible and slower. However, a sophisticated waste-to-energy facility cannot compensate for unsuitable waste composition or weak contract management, particularly where waste is overwhelmingly wet and organic. Sensors accomplish little if overflowing bins are reported electronically, but collection remains irregular.

Before adopting any technology, Bangladesh should ask what conditions must exist for it to work. That shifts the focus from procurement to performance. Officials usually count the plants built; the better measure is streets that stay clean month after month.

Bangladesh needs a waste management system that fixes responsibility across the entire chain. Households and businesses need practical source-segregation arrangements. Municipalities need measurable collection and cleanliness standards, with contractor payments tied to performance. Producers should gradually assume greater responsibility for packaging and hard-to-dispose products.

Informal waste workers, who already perform much of the country's recycling, should be brought into safer and more productive arrangements. Formal recognition would allow their contribution to be counted, supported and protected.

Financing, service obligations and accountability must move together. Citizens cannot reasonably demand services comparable to wealthier countries without adequate municipal capacity. Spending without accountability will not solve the problem either. Governance must establish who is responsible, how performance is measured, and how the system is financed. Technology should then be selected to serve that system, rather than substitute for it.

Cleaner cities will not come from another appeal not to litter, smarter equipment or a new project. They will come when every participant knows what must be done, who pays, who benefits from doing it properly, and who is accountable when the system fails.

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WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

‘New mothers must be supported to recover in every way, not just physically’

In Bangladesh, it is still uncommon for new mothers to receive help to deal with postpartum mental health shifts. On the occasion of World Mental Health Day, **Dr Sahar Raza**, a public health researcher and mental health expert, speaks to **Afia Jahin** of ***The Daily Star*** detailing the life-altering changes new mothers go through and discussing how communities and the healthcare sector can help narrow the existing gaps in care.

How do postpartum mental health issues manifest in new mothers, and how long can they last?

There is a normal level of emotional adjustment for all new mothers. Once you have a baby, it can be overwhelming as the postpartum period involves a major physical, psychological and even a social transition. That adjustment period may last up to two weeks or even longer. But then there is a mental health condition where symptoms are more persistent, severe, and which interfere more with the mother's everyday life. For example, a new mother may feel persistently sad and empty, worry excessively, and lose interest in the activities she usually enjoys. In many cases, she may even struggle to connect with her baby emotionally. This is when an assessment may be required.

Postpartum mental health issues can include anxiety and depression, but there can also be severe issues such as hallucinations, delusions, confusion, suicidal thoughts, or even thoughts of harming the baby which can signal postpartum psychosis. These severe issues are medical emergencies and need prompt attention. There cannot be a wait-and-watch approach.

In terms of how long postpartum mental health changes can last, the World Health Organization (WHO) conventionally defines the postpartum period as the first six weeks after giving birth. But there is no biological switch that turns off on Day 40 or 42. As much as we try to quantify the postpartum period, we need to make sure the mother is getting better beyond this point, too. Women still need support as their existing mental health issues may become more severe or they may develop new conditions after the six-week mark. One Lancet series titled "Maternal health in the perinatal period and beyond" states that there should be consideration about extending the postpartum period and that women should be coming in contact with health systems in order to be kept in check regarding their mental, physical and emotional health.

How common is it for new mothers in Bangladesh to seek professional help in dealing with postpartum mental health issues?

We found in one study that about 22 percent of reproductive-age women with anxiety or depression sought care from a healthcare provider, and only 8 percent used prescribed medication. During the postpartum period, the focus is more on the new baby than on the mother. Even during this time, when people visit to see the baby, the mother has to make sure that she is presentable. She will often be criticised or blamed for any issues with the baby, to the point of having her basic maternal instincts being questioned. This disallows her the space needed to navigate the first few weeks with her baby, which is an adjustment period for both of them.



Dr Sahar Raza

PHOTO: COURTESY

The onus of seeking help should not be imposed on the mother. A woman may recognise her mental health condition, but she may not know what to do about it. The people around her need to create an enabling, non-judgemental environment where she can have time, privacy, and the reassurance that her concerns are being taken seriously. This also means training healthcare providers to handle such cases. It has to be a holistic approach wherein everybody plays a role.

Also, in order to seek help, a new mother has to first realise that she is suffering. Many a time, new mothers' concerns are dismissed, with elders minimising the gravity of childbirth. At other times, the family may assume it is a period of adjustment that will eventually pass. Even for those who may recognise the problem, the stigma around mental health issues often becomes a barrier to seeking help.

There can also be uncertainty about where mental health services can be availed. And in our context, the decision-making is usually not with the mother as she may be dependent on a family member for money and mobility.

It should also be noted that the onus of seeking help should not be imposed on the mother. A woman may recognise her mental health condition, but she may not know what to do about it. The people around her need to create an enabling, non-judgemental environment where she can have time, privacy, and the reassurance that her concerns are being taken seriously. This also means training healthcare providers to handle such cases. It has to be a holistic approach wherein everybody plays a role.

In the rural areas, where lack of adequate services often deprives mothers of proper physical treatment during and after pregnancy, what is the level of awareness about postpartum mental health?

I would avoid saying that there is no awareness at all. Because of the level of connectivity we have now, even in rural areas, women do recognise when they are struggling. But a postpartum mother may not know that her symptoms could be part of a treatable mental health condition.

One local study evidenced this, finding that rural women often do not know which providers or facilities offer maternal mental healthcare. A new mother might also not realise that whatever she is going through is something other women feel too. That form of an enabling environment, which makes it easier for mothers to speak up, is lacking.

How can families and communities help new mothers cope better mentally during the postpartum period?

Families should offer practical support and active listening. This means helping the new mother with the baby, any older children, and with other responsibilities. Rather than making it all about the baby, relatives can ask after the mother as well. Families should foster a positive environment and avoid any unnecessary conflicts. A study done in Chandpur's Matlab area, for instance, highlighted how strained relationships with the mother-in-law and marital conflicts were associated with postnatal depression.

A new mother may seem functional, but could be struggling internally. Regardless of how many generations we have been giving birth for, childbirth will always be a massive physical, mental and psychological change. New mothers must be supported to recover in every way, not just physically. Also, different women may have different timelines for recovery, so it is important to eliminate any pressure for a new mother to bounce back quickly.

What should be done at the government level to raise awareness about postpartum mental health?

Mental healthcare should be an ordinary, expected and integrated element of maternal care that continues into postnatal care, rather than being a separate service that women are burdened to discover if they feel something is wrong. Starting from the antenatal period, mental health check-ups should be part of routine screenings.

This won't require the government to come up with a whole new screening system. For example, when a mother takes her baby to be vaccinated, that opportunity can be used to do a quick questionnaire-based screening to check on her mental state. The contact mothers are already making with the health system should be utilised as such.

Accessing mental healthcare providers can be challenging, so having these services within a regular health facility, where women can walk in, discuss whatever is on their mind, and get a primary screening done can be a good model. It is all about ensuring that a mother can say it openly when she is struggling mentally, that she is taken seriously, and that she receives care even after the first 40 days have passed.

Who listens when mental health struggles disrupt daily life?



Mahiya Tabassum is a contributor to The Daily Star.

■ MAHIYA TABASSUM

Ask a Bangladeshi newspaper reader to picture a mental health story. Perhaps a psychiatrist's quote comes to mind, a helpline number, or a headline about a student's death. Now ask them to picture the person who survived that despair, speaking about what living afterwards requires. Does the image come as easily?

This year, World Mental Health Day, observed on October 10, carries the WHO theme "Lived experiences heard: real voices, real change". It asks us to recognise people's experience of mental health conditions as expertise that should shape decisions. In Bangladesh, I think the question is what we are willing to change once someone speaks.

Recently, a close friend lost his job after his mental health struggles affected his performance. Years of strong work and contribution did not secure him support when he needed it. His employer chose to let him go.

What troubles me is how quickly the person disappears behind the word "underperforming". There is no space in that word for the effort it may take to get through an ordinary day, let alone perform as though nothing has changed. There is only the work that did not get done.

At home too, a meal, a shower, an unanswered message or call can become something they cannot manage. Relationships strain; even affection can feel difficult to return. Then comes the quieter hurt, beginning to see oneself through what remains undone, as though difficulty were a personal failing.

I cannot turn one friend's experience into a verdict on every employer. But it raises a question that a workplace wellness campaign should have to answer: what happens when someone's distress becomes inconvenient?

Compassion is easy when it asks nothing of us. It becomes harder when it requires a revised deadline, a different workload, time away. In a capitalist ordering of life, where usefulness is so closely tied to output, vulnerability can feel like something we must conceal to remain employable. We invite people to speak, then make them calculate what speaking might cost—a job, a friendship, an opportunity, or social currency.

There are practical alternatives. WHO recommends workplace adjustments such as flexible hours, modified assignments and time for health appointments, alongside support for returning to work. These are ways of keeping someone in working life while recognising their needs. They require an employer who treats distress as a reason to consider support, rather than simply a performance problem.

The Bangla language has words for sorrow, worry and despair. The difficulty is whether those words are taken seriously, especially when someone uses them. Between dismissing distress as ordinary "mon kharap" and turning "pagol" into an insult, how much room do we allow a person to explain what is happening inside them?

A sleepless night is not automatically a disorder. Nor should someone have to arrive with a clinical diagnosis before being met with patience. Sometimes the first useful response is to give a person room to explain. This is more than a matter of finding kinder words. WHO's 2020 assessment of Bangladesh documented widespread stigma and reliance on traditional and spiritual healers, particularly in the rural areas. An invitation to seek professional help means little if that help remains difficult to reach.



VISUAL: SHAIKH SULTANA JAHAN BADHON

Findings released from the 2019 National Mental Health Survey showed that 92.3 percent of adults and 94.5 percent of children identified with mental disorders received no treatment. These are survey findings from 2019, not a new measurement of Bangladesh in 2026. When the health minister cited the survey in parliament in July, the passage of time was itself unsettling. How much longer can an old finding remain the basis of our description of an urgent need?

Bangladesh has changed its legal language. The Mental Health Act, 2018 repealed the colonial Lunacy Act, 1912; Section 6 addresses rights including health, dignity and education, which is significant. But a person from a remote rural area or from a lower-middle-class group cannot take a statutory promise to a consultation. They need to know where to go, what it will cost, and whether they can return for the next appointment.

There is another revealing detail. Section 5 specifies the membership of district mental health review and monitoring committees: officials and a nominated psychiatrist or psychologist. It reserves no seat specifically for a person with lived experience, not assuring representation by the listed membership. Whose knowledge, then, are we building into oversight?

A person who has navigated treatment can tell us what a service looks like from the receiving end: whether an explanation made sense, privacy felt secure, and a follow-up plan could fit around work and travel. These are questions worth putting beside clinical expertise when services are designed and reviewed.

Participation should come with influence, such as opportunities to help design services, paid roles where appropriate, and a way to see what changed because of people's contributions without undermining privacy.

WHO's campaign also calls for a planned shift from long-stay psychiatric institutions towards community-based care, with funding, services and support following people into their communities. For Bangladesh, the test should be whether care can become part of ordinary life: accessible, connected, and shaped by the people who use it.

My friend needed that ordinary life to make room for him. He needed support while his ability to work was diminished. His years of contribution make the dismissal painful to recount, but they should not be the qualification for deserving care. Someone with no record of exceptional performance deserves consideration too.

This year, as we observe World Mental Health Day, we should linger after the story has been told. After the panel ends, after the awareness post is shared, when a person still needs an appointment, an adjustment, a livelihood. A voice can fill a room for a moment. Making room for the person who owns it takes longer.

Compassion is easy when it asks nothing of us. It becomes harder when it requires a revised deadline, a different workload, time away. In a capitalist ordering of life, where usefulness is so closely tied to output, vulnerability can feel like something we must conceal to remain employable. We invite people to speak, then make them calculate what speaking might cost—a job, a friendship, an opportunity, or social currency.



Mehazabien Chowdhury delivers a stage dance performance at the gala

PHOTOS: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

BLENDER'S CHOICE-THE DAILY STAR OTT & DIGITAL CONTENT AWARDS 2025





Team 'Daagi' receives the Best Film win (Popular/People's Choice) award at the gala

Mirza Salman Ispahani, Chairman of MM Ispahani LTD

A night of triumphs celebrating OTT's finest talents

The Bangladesh China Friendship International Conference Center (BCFICC) transformed into a hub of creative cultural vibrancy last evening as the fifth edition of the Blender's Choice–The Daily Star OTT & Digital Content Awards 2025 brought together the architects of the country's digital screen revolution.

Beyond the red-carpet couture, the gala served as a definitive measure of how rapidly local streaming has matured. A total of 29 awards spanned popular audience votes and jury evaluations, capturing an industry transitioning into a mainstream powerhouse.

The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam and MM Ispahani Limited Chairman Mirza Salman Ispahani opened the evening, reflecting on the medium's evolution before officially setting the stage.

Red-carpet hosts Priyontee Urbee and Prantar Dastider welcomed stars like Mehazabien Chowdhury, Manoj Pramanik, and Ashna Habib Bhabna amongst others, before hosts Rafsan Sabab and Afsan Ara Bindu took over main-stage proceedings.

Live showcases drove the night's tempo, featuring eclectic dance sequences by Sarika Sabah, Alif, and the Alifia Squad, alongside stage acts from Sunerah Binte Kamal, Irfan Sajjad, and Bengal Symphony.

When the major honors were announced, Sukorno Shahed Dhiman's Feu took home Critics' Choice for Best Series, while Nuhash Humayun earned Best Director for his horror anthology Dui Shaw.



Nuhash Humayun receives the award from Ferdous Hasan and Shahin Kabir Tutul for Best Director (Critics' Choice)



Raihan Rafi receives Best Director win (Popular) from Wahida Mollick Jolly and Shahin Sumon, president, film directors' association



Vicky Zahed receives Best Director award (Popular - Series) from Kamal Ahmed, consulting editor, The Daily Star, and filmmaker Matin Rahman

WINNER'S LIST

BLENDER'S CHOICE–THE DAILY STAR OTT & DIGITAL CONTENT AWARDS 2025

WINNERS' LIST

POPULAR CATEGORY

Best Actor (Male): Afran Nisho (AKA)
Best Actor (Female): Mehazabien Chowdhury (Neel Shukh)
Best Supporting Actor (Male): Manoj Pramanik (Omimangshito)
Best Supporting Actor (Female): Runa Khan (Bohemian Ghora)
Best Director (Drama/Series): Vicky Zahed (AKA)
Best Director (Film): Raihan Rafi (Amalnama)
Best Drama/Series: Bohemian Ghora (Hoichoi)
Best Film: Ghumpori (Chorki)

CRITIC'S CHOICE

Best Actor, Male (Critics' Choice): Mosharraf Karim (Bohemian Ghora)
Best Actor, Female (Critics' Choice): Tama Mirza (Amalnama)
Best Director, Film/Drama/Series (Critics' Choice): Nuhash Humayun (Dui Shaw)
Best Film/Drama/Series (Critics' Choice): Feu (Chorki)
Best Cinematographer (Critics' Choice): Joaher Musavvir Jyoti & Abdul Mamun (Dui Shaw)
Best Makeup Artist (Critics' Choice): Md Emon Hossen & Sworna Bhoumick (Dui Shaw)
Best Editing (Critics' Choice): Fuad Shourav (Dui Shaw)
Best Screenplay (Critics' Choice): Nuhash Humayun & Gultekin Khan (Dui Shaw)



Best Art Director (Critics' Choice): Rainirr Borshon (Dui Shaw)
Best Costume (Critics' Choice): Edila Farid Turin (Dui Shaw)

MUSIC / SONG

Best Lyricist: Jahid Preetom (Premeri Jokhom | Ghumpori)
Best Singer: Mahtim Shakib & Shithi Saha (Premeri Jokhom | Ghumpori)
Best Music Composer: Jahid Nirob (Premeri Jokhom | Ghumpori)
Best Music, Digital Platforms: Ishaan Mozumder (Gulbahar)
Critic's Best Background Score: Ruslan Rehman (Gulmohor)
Critic's Best Sound Design: Rajesh Saha, Sajib Ranjan Biswas & Rasheed Sharif Shoaib (Dui Shaw)

INDIVIDUAL CONTENT

Best Content Creator of the Year: Sunehra Tasnim & Syed Rashad Imam Tanmoy
Best Content Creator, Food & Recipe / Travel: Nadir On The Go
Best Content Creator, Infotainment/Podcast: Labid Rahat



Afran Nisho receives the Best Actor (Popular) award



Tama Mirza receives the Best Actress Critics' Choice award

Missing man found dead in Netrokona

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Netrokona*

Police recovered the body of a 55-year-old man from a wooded area beside the Kangsha river in Netrokona's Mohanganj upazila yesterday, two days after he went missing.

The deceased was identified as Fazlul Rahim Kajol of Kakiam village in Sunamganj's Dharmapasha upazila. He worked at a solar power project there.

A cattle grazer spotted the body on a tree branch in Birampur village around 8:00am after noticing a foul smell. A rope was found around his neck.

Kajol went missing on October 7 after leaving home to withdraw money from a bank for an office project. His family filed a general diary with Dharmapasha Police Station that day.

His elder brother, Fazlul Karim Bulbul, alleged that Kajol had been murdered and demanded a fair investigation.

Md Hafizul Islam Harun, officer-in-charge of Mohanganj Police Station, said police recovered the body and sent it to Netrokona Adhunik Sadar Hospital for an autopsy.

The cause of death will be confirmed after receiving the autopsy report, he added.



Fishermen unload nets bundled with fishing gear from a boat and move them to a riverside warehouse near Fishery Ghat in Chattogram following a 22-day nationwide hilsa fishing ban from October 8 to 29. The ban aims to protect spawning mother hilsa and boost production. Catching, transporting, storing, marketing, buying and selling hilsa are prohibited during the period. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: **RAJIB RAIHAN**

UN says Gaza faces grim winter without shelters

AFP, *Geneva*

Virtually all of Gaza's two million population will go through winter without adequate shelter as the Palestinian territory enters a fourth year under heavy Israeli war restrictions, the United Nations said yesterday.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) said nearly 1.8 million people in the territory "are facing a fourth winter without adequate protection from rain, flooding and cold".

The UN agency called for international funding for humanitarian aid and for Israel to ease the "constraints" on the entry of critical supplies.

A ceasefire in the Gaza war, sparked by the Hamas attacks on Israel on October 7, 2023, was announced in October last year but conditions remain dire in Gaza, according to aid agencies.

More than half of all the tents and makeshift shelters are in poor condition and should be replaced, the IOM said.

"With few alternatives available, many families are living in war-damaged buildings that pose serious risks to life."

IOM highlighted the deaths of 21 people, including 12 children, when a war-damaged six storey building collapsed in Gaza city last month.

"Shelter materials must enter quickly, predictably and at the scale required," said Amy Pope, the IOM director general.

The agency said the El Nino weather phenomenon risked making this year's winter rains more intense for Gaza which "could further weaken unsafe buildings, while heavily damaged drainage systems leave communities exposed to flooding".

A taste of winter at a steep price

FROM PAGE 12

because it was the first weekend after getting my salary. But it is not possible for me to continue buying vegetables at such prices."

Meanwhile, the price of round brinjal has increased by Tk 30 per kg. It was selling at Tk 150-160 a kg, up from Tk 120-130 last week.

Other vegetables, including long brinjal, okra, ridge gourd, sponge gourd, sweet pumpkin, and bitter gourd, were selling at Tk 50-80 per kg.

Mosharraf Hossain, a trader at Karwan Bazar, said prices of almost all vegetables went up, with papaya and potatoes being the exceptions.

"Customers are purchasing less because many say they don't have enough money," he said, adding that his sales had fallen sharply.

People are now buying smaller quantities or opting for smaller vegetables to stay within their budgets, he said.

Md Saifur Rahman Chowdhury, general secretary of the Karwan Bazar Kachamal Arat Baboshayee Malik Bohumukhi Somobai Samity, said all kinds of winter vegetables were available at Karwan Bazar.

"We have been seeing winter vegetables arriving early for the past five to six years, with tomatoes being an exception."

He explained that production costs remain high during the off-season, making it difficult to sell vegetables at lower prices. Traders' tendency to seek higher profits from early supplies also contributes to the high prices.

Regarding the recent surge in tomato prices, Saifur said locally grown tomatoes usually arrive in November. Until then, Indian tomatoes help meet market demand.

However, imports of Indian tomatoes have been suspended for the past few days, contributing to the price hike, he said.

Trafficking convictions fall despite rise in probes

FROM PAGE 12

terms ranging from three months to life imprisonment, along with fines between Tk 5,000 and Tk 5 lakh.

"The imposition of fines rather than proportionate jail time weakened deterrence and undercut the government's overall anti-trafficking efforts," the report said.

During the reporting period, the government investigated 961 cases involving 5,263 suspects, up from 811 cases previously.

The government identified 1,135 trafficking victims during the period, down from 1,462 previously. These included 199 victims of sex trafficking, 510 of forced labour, and 426 of unspecified forms of trafficking.

However, civil society organisations and international agencies identified an additional 4,758 victims.

The report said the government strengthened protections for migrant workers to reduce vulnerabilities to trafficking, but did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas.

"The government identified fewer victims, and victim protection and reintegration efforts remained insufficient, particularly for Rohingya refugees and returning Bangladeshi migrant workers. Additionally, the government continued to permit worker-paid recruitment fees that rendered many migrant workers indebted, increasing their vulnerability to trafficking."

More than one million Rohingyas live in Cox's Bazar and on Bhasan Char. They remained vulnerable to sex trafficking and forced labour in Bangladesh and through cross-border trafficking networks into India, Malaysia, and Nepal, according to the report.

It also pointed to the growing risk of Bangladeshis being fraudulently recruited for forced criminality in online scam operations, mainly in Southeast Asia.

High recruitment costs continued to leave many Bangladeshi migrant workers vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking.

The government maintained official recruitment fees between Tk 85,000 and Tk 2.62 lakh, which the report said were high enough to leave many workers indebted. Workers frequently paid far more than the official ceilings to recruitment agencies and intermediaries, commonly known as "dalals".

Rules governing sub-agents continued to permit fees equivalent to six to eight months of a worker's salary, adding to migrants' financial burden.

Nearly 100 recruitment agencies faced charges for collecting excessive fees, with the cases still pending, the report said.

Bangladesh's storytellers

FROM PAGE 1

artistes and her family, she dedicated the award to director Vicky Zahed and expressed excitement over his move into filmmaking.

Asked whether audiences could expect to see them collaborate on the big screen, she teased, "Something is cooking."

Nisho thanked viewers for voting for him, along with director Vicky Zahed, the producers and his family. He said the recognition meant a great deal but did not diminish the achievements of his fellow nominees, all of whom deserved appreciation.

He dedicated the award to the late actor Humayun Faridi, whom he considered his mentor.

Vicky Zahed won Best Director (Drama/Series) for "AKA", thanking producer Shahriar Shakil and the entire team for believing in its challenging storyline. Describing "AKA" as his third OTT film, he said bringing such a story to the screen required considerable courage.

Raihan Rafi won Best Director (Film) for "Amalnama". He said he had long wanted to explore a taboo subject and thanked Chorki for giving him the creative freedom to realise his vision.

He described the production as risky because of its sensitive subject matter but said he enjoyed taking such risks. He also urged audiences to support Bangladeshi cinema by watching films in theatres.

Manoj Pramanik won Best Supporting Actor (Male) for "Omimangshito" and Runa Khan Best Supporting Actor (Female) for "Bohemian Ghora".

Runa thanked viewers for their love and support for her portrayal of Ambia, as well as director Amitabh Reza Chowdhury, Hoichoi and the entire production team.

Hoichoi's "Bohemian Ghora" was named Best Drama/Series, while Chorki's "Ghumpori" won Best Film. "Daagi" received the People's Choice award.

In the Critics' Choice categories, Mosharraf Karim won Best Actor (Male) for "Dui Shaw", Tama Mirza Best Actor (Female) for "Amalnama", and Chorki's "Feu" Best Film/Drama/Series.

Accepting the award on Karim's behalf, Nuhash called him "a national treasure" and praised his generosity towards fellow artistes.

Tama said she had not expected to win against so many accomplished nominees. Describing her mother, who attended the ceremony, as her lucky charm, she thanked Chorki and director Raihan Rafi for the opportunities that helped shape her career.

Nuhash accepted the Best Director (Film/Drama/Series) and Best Screenplay awards for "Dui Shaw" alongside his mother, Gultekin Khan.

"I am dedicating this to my mom and to my whole Dui Shaw team," he said, thanking the crew for bringing his script to life. He added that recognition in his own country made the awards particularly special.

"Dui Shaw" also won Best Cinematographer for Joaher Musavvir Jyoti and Abdul Mamun; Best Makeup Artist for Md Emon Hossen and Sworna Bhoumick; Best Editing for Fuad Shourav; Best Art Director for Rainirr Borshon; and Best Costume Designer for Edila Farid Turin. Rajesh Saha, Sajib Ranjan Biswas and Rasheed Sharif Shoaib shared Best Sound Design.

In the music categories, "Premeri Jokhom" from "Ghumpori" won three awards: Best Lyricist for Jahid Preetom, Best Singer for Mahtim Shakib and Shithi Saha, and Best Music Composer for Jahid Nirob. Nirob thanked the singers for bringing the song to life.

Ishaan Mozumder won Best Music (Digital Platforms) for "Gulbahar", while Ruslan Rehman won the Critics' Choice award for Best Background Score for "Gulmohor".

Ruslan said awards made his otherwise ordinary life feel extraordinary for a few days, bringing particular joy to his mother and elder brother. He thanked the organisers for recognising background scoring, saying such honours helped music directors overcome the social anxiety associated with working largely behind the scenes. He also thanked his colleagues and the "Gulmohor" team.

In the Individual Content categories, Sunehra Tasnim won Best Content Creator of the Year under Popular Choice, while Syed Rashad Imam Tanmoy took the Critics' Choice honour.

"Awards have never been my primary motivation. It's my audience, their love and the work that I get to create that keep me going," Sunehra said.

Tanmoy recalled how a rickshaw puller once recognised his cartoons, convincing him that videos could take his drawings to audiences he had been unable to reach through newspapers over 15 years.

Nadir On The Go won Best Content Creator (Food & Recipe/Travel), while Sameerscane won Best Content Creator (Infotainment/Podcast).

Sameerscane, who said he had previously attended the ceremony only to support friends, thanked his family.

"I just want to thank my parents for always allowing me to pursue content creation," he said.

The evening also featured performances by Sunerah Binte Kamal and Irfan Sajjad, as well as Mehazabien Chowdhury. Musician Emon Chowdhury's band -- Bengal Symphony -- also took the stage.

Rafsan Sabab and Afsan Ara Bindu hosted the ceremony.

Four million displaced in central Sahel: UN

AFP, *Geneva*

The United Nations yesterday raised the alarm about a displacement crisis in the central Sahel where nearly four million people have been forced to flee their homes in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.

The number is more than double that of six years ago, the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) said, before a wave of coups in a region bedevilled by instability and violence.

It includes 818,000 refugees and asylum seekers, it added.

"The crisis is being compounded by continued attacks affecting civilians, climate-related shocks and severe humanitarian funding shortfalls," the UNHCR said in a statement.

In 2020, the UNHCR said the region had counted more than 1.7 million internally displaced people and 365,000 refugees.

"Together, these pressures are forcing more families to flee, eroding livelihoods and limiting opportunities for displaced people to rebuild their lives, contributing to further movements within and beyond the region," said Abdouraouf Gnon-Konde, UNHCR's regional director for west and central Africa.

"Unfortunately, the international attention is receding," he added in Geneva, following a visit to the region.

Gnon-Konde added that the instability was ramping up pressure on the asylum system as affected countries struggle with weak public services.

Delhi turns into a fortress

FROM PAGE 1

Anger over the voter verification drive, which began last year, has become one of the biggest political controversies since Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in 2014. The controversy comes ahead of crucial state elections beginning early next year.

Election Commission data, also cited by the BJP, shows that about 130 million names -- more than Japan's population -- have been deleted from voter lists during the verification exercise. These include 63 million people who had relocated, 30 million who could not be traced and 28 million who had died.

Opposition parties say the deletions affected the outcomes of some recent state elections won by Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), casting a shadow over the electoral process in the world's largest democracy.

A wave of street protests, including in New Delhi, has attracted key leaders from India's main opposition Congress party, including Rahul Gandhi, who was briefly detained during rallies this week.

Rahul, the leader of the opposition in parliament, and other opposition leaders met President Droupadi Murmu late yesterday and submitted a memorandum of their complaints against ECI chief Gyanesh Kumar over alleged voter theft.

"The president sought proof of vote theft... and we will share the proof happily," Rahul told reporters after meeting Murmu.

Thousands of police and paramilitary personnel, including some from sensitive areas such as Indian Kashmir, were being sent to the capital for the protest, according to a government document seen by Reuters.

The Cockroach movement, however, remained defiant.

"The youth of this country are no longer scared of you," founder Abhijeet Dipke said in a post on X, addressing Modi ahead of the protest.

PRAYER TIMING
OCTOBER 10

	Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN	4-40	12-45	4-15	5-45	7-15
JAMAAT	5-20	1-15	4-30	5-50	7-45

SOURCE: **ISLAMIC FOUNDATION**

Honouring literary legacies

FROM PAGE 3

He acknowledged the need for government patronage of arts and literature but cautioned against partisan divisions in such support.

"We do not want such divisions to enter the literary and creative fields," he said, stressing the importance of freedom of thought in intellectual pursuits.

Noting that literature is not a particularly lucrative profession, Wahiduddin said people pursue it out of creative instinct but deserve at least a minimum level of recognition.

"This award is a form of such recognition," he said, welcoming the initiative to recognise young writers as an encouragement to emerging talent.

At the 2024 awards, Abul Ahsan Choudhury won in the essay, autobiography, travel and translation category for his book "Vidyasagar, Bankimchandra, Rabindranath and Musolman Samaj".

Anwara Syed Haq won in the poetry and novel category for "Shomoy Bohiya Gelo", while Nizam Biswas received the Young Writer Award for writing "Jolmakorer Noukabaich".

For 2025, Nasreen Jahan won in the essay, autobiography, travel and translation category for her book "Paloker Chinhogulo".

Shaheen Akhtar won in the poetry and novel category for the book "Manchitra", while Mahbub Mayukh Rishad received the Young Writer Award for "Cyanide Phool".

A total of 460 books were submitted for the 2024 awards and 510 for 2025. A jury comprising Begum Akhtar Kamal, Faizul Latif Chowdhury, Abid Anwar and Khalikuzzaman Elias selected the winning books.

The Lifetime Achievement Award recipients received Tk 5 lakh each, while winners in the essay, autobiography, travel and translation, and poetry and novel categories received Tk 3 lakh each. The Young Writer Award winners received Tk 2 lakh each.

The winners were also given crests and citations.

BRAC Bank Vice Chairperson Faruq Mayeenuddin Ahmed said the award has become a unique example in society, inspiring writers and readers to engage more deeply with literature.

He said the initiative also carries a greater responsibility to nurture talent, intellectual depth and creativity across the country.

BRAC Bank Additional Managing Director and Head of SME Banking Syed Abdul Momen said the award has established a firm place in the country's literary landscape, encouraging creative minds and providing a platform for emerging writers.

Daily Samakal Editor Shahed Mohammad Ali said literature and culture are integral to quality journalism, adding that the newspaper will continue to promote cultural values as part of its journalistic mission.

AK Azad, managing director of Ha-Meem Group and Times Media Limited, said the initiative reflects a commitment to social responsibility and expressed hope that it would grow in scale and impact.

Literary figures and eminent personalities attended the event.

Probe body recommends

FROM PAGE 12

JCD assistant general secretary; and Tanim Rahman of the mass communication and journalism and a JCD activist.

It also recommended further investigation before taking action against Rakibul Islam, assistant cultural affairs secretary of the Rajshahi University Central Students' Union (Rucsu), for his alleged role in instigating the incident.

Meanwhile, the committee recommended warnings for JCD vice-presidents Bulbul Rahman and Shariful Islam, and assistant office secretary Shahriar Alam.

At the briefing, the VC said the probe committee's report clearly stated that further investigation is needed into the matter.

Prof Rezaul Karim, convener of the probe committee, said Ariful Islam and Rakibul had played roles in instigating the incident.

Dengue battle grows harder amid ICU crisis

FROM PAGE 12

HM Nazmul Ahsan, associate professor at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital, said such fluctuations were not typical of uncomplicated dengue but could occur due to additional infections or complications, particularly in severe cases involving shock.

He said hospitals were struggling to accommodate critically ill dengue patients, with ICU beds not always available.

At Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital, the existing 100 beds remained unchanged, but additional spaces were being arranged in different wards to accommodate dengue patients.

As a result, some patients were being treated outside designated dengue wards.

Nazmul said most dengue patients, including many who develop shock, could be managed in general wards with appropriate treatment and supportive care. Only a small proportion require ICU admission.

However, patients with other serious conditions, including heart disease, heart attacks or additional infections, may need advanced support beyond fluid therapy and might require transfer to hospitals with available ICU beds.

He also stressed the need for accessible dengue testing facilities near people's homes, particularly for low-income communities in urban and rural areas.

Early diagnosis was crucial, he said, as many patients resumed work once their fever subsided despite remaining vulnerable to complications.

"If a person knows that they have dengue, they may stay at home and rest for around 10 days," he added.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), at least 295 dengue patients died, and 95,451 others were hospitalised this year as of yesterday.





রাষ্ট্রপতি
গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ
বঙ্গভবন, ঢাকা।

২৫ আশ্বিন ১৪৩৩
১০ অক্টোবর ২০২৬

বাণী

বিশ্বের অন্যান্য দেশের ন্যায় বাংলাদেশেও 'বিশ্ব মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য দিবস ২০২৬' উদযাপনের উদ্যোক্তাকে আমি স্বাগত জানাই।

মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য-মানুষের সার্বিক সুস্থতা, কর্মক্ষমতা ও জীবনমানের একটি অপরিহার্য অংশ। পরিবর্তিত বিশ্বপরিস্থিতি, অর্থনৈতিক অস্থিতিশীলতা, সামাজিক অস্থিরতা, একাকিত্ব, মাদকাসক্তি, পারিবারিক ও কর্মক্ষেত্রের চাপ এবং দৈনন্দিন জীবনের নানা প্রতিকূলতা মানুষের মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যের ওপর গভীর প্রভাব ফেলছে। তাই শারীরিক স্বাস্থ্যের পাশাপাশি মানসিক সুস্থতার বিষয়টিও সমান গুরুত্বপূর্ণ।

এ বছর বিশ্ব মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য দিবসের প্রতিপাদ্য "Lived Experiences Heard: Real Voices, Real Change" অর্থাৎ "জীবনের কথা শুনি, বাস্তব পরিবর্তন আনি"-বর্তমান প্রেক্ষাপটে অত্যন্ত সময়োপযোগী ও তাৎপর্যপূর্ণ বলে আমি মনে করি। মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য সমস্যার অভিজ্ঞতা যাঁদের জীবনে সরাসরি রয়েছে, তাঁদের কথা মনোযোগ দিয়ে শোনা এবং তাঁদের অভিজ্ঞতা ও মতামতকে নীতি প্রণয়ন ও সেবা পরিকল্পনায় গুরুত্ব দেওয়াই এ প্রতিপাদ্যের মূল বার্তা।

বর্তমান সরকার মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবা জনগণের দোরগোড়ায় পৌঁছে দিতে বিভিন্ন উদ্যোগ গ্রহণ করেছে। এটিকে প্রাথমিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবার সঙ্গে সমন্বিত করার কার্যক্রম নেওয়া হয়েছে। মানসিক সমস্যা চিহ্নিত করতে ও প্রকৃত সেবা রোগীর কাছে পৌঁছে দিতে পরিবার ও সমাজের ভূমিকা অত্যন্ত গুরুত্বপূর্ণ। মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য সমস্যায় আক্রান্ত ব্যক্তিদের প্রতি সহমর্মিতা ও সম্মান প্রদর্শনের পাশাপাশি তাঁদের মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যের পরিচর্যা এবং পরিবার ও সমাজের সমর্থন জরুরি। ঝাড়ফুঁক বা অবিজ্ঞানভিত্তিক চিকিৎসার পরিবর্তে যথাযথ চিকিৎসাসেবা প্রদানের বিষয়ে জনসচেতনতা সৃষ্টি আবশ্যক।

আমি দেশের সকল নাগরিকের সার্বিক মানসিক সুস্থতা নিশ্চিত করতে সরকারি-বেসরকারি উদ্যোগের পাশাপাশি স্বাস্থ্যকেন্দ্র ও শিক্ষাপ্রতিষ্ঠান গুলোতে মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যবিষয়ক সচেতনতামূলক কার্যক্রম জোরদার করার আহ্বান জানাচ্ছি। মানসিক সুস্থতাসম্পন্ন ও কর্মক্ষম জাতি গঠনে সকলের সম্মিলিত প্রয়াস অব্যাহত থাকবে-এ প্রত্যাশা করি।

আমি 'বিশ্ব মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য দিবস ২০২৬' উপলক্ষে গৃহীত সকল কর্মসূচির সার্বিক সাফল্য কামনা করছি।

মির্জা ফখরুল ইসলাম আলমগীর



ডা. জুবাইদা রহমান
ভাইস প্রেসিডেন্ট
জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশন (জেডআরএফ)

বাণী

"মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য ছাড়া পূর্ণাঙ্গ স্বাস্থ্য সম্ভব নয়"-এই উপলব্ধি আমাদের মনে করিয়ে দেয় যে সুস্থতা শুধু শারীরিক সুস্থতার মধ্যেই সীমাবদ্ধ নয়। ব্যক্তি, পরিবার ও সমাজের সামগ্রিক কল্যাণের জন্য মানসিক সুস্থতা সমানভাবে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ।

এবারের বিশ্ব মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য দিবসের প্রতিপাদ্য- "Lived Experiences Heard: Real Voices, Real Change" মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য নিয়ে যারা নিজের জীবনে অভিজ্ঞতার মধ্য দিয়ে গেছেন, তাদের কথা শোনা ও মূল্যায়নের গুরুত্ব তুলে ধরে। তাঁদের অভিজ্ঞতা শুধু শোনাই নয়; মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যনীতি, সেবা পরিকল্পনা ও সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণের ক্ষেত্রেও তাঁদের মতামত ও অংশগ্রহণ নিশ্চিত করা প্রয়োজন।

বাংলাদেশে মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যকে জনস্বাস্থ্যের মূলধারায় আরও শক্তভাবে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করার এখনই সময়। গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকারের প্রধানমন্ত্রী তারেক রহমান এর সরকার একটি সুস্বাস্থ্যের বাংলাদেশ গড়ার লক্ষ্যে কাজ করছে। দেশের প্রাপ্তবয়স্ক জনগোষ্ঠীর একটি উল্লেখযোগ্য অংশ বিভিন্ন ধরনের মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য সমস্যায় ভুগছেন। তাই মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবাকে সহজলভ্য ও সাশ্রয়ী করা, সামাজিক কুসংস্কার ও বৈষম্য দূর করা এবং শিশু, কিশোর ও নারীর মানসিক সুস্থতার প্রতি বিশেষ গুরুত্ব দেওয়া জরুরি। একই সঙ্গে প্রাথমিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবার সঙ্গে মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবার কার্যকর সমন্বয় এবং প্রয়োজনীয় চিকিৎসা ও পুনর্বাসনসেবা সম্প্রসারণ করতে হবে।

বাংলাদেশে মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য নিয়ে সচেতনতা আজ আগের চেয়ে অনেক বেশি প্রয়োজন। শিশু থেকে বয়স্ক-জীবনের যেকোনো পর্যায়ে একজন মানুষ মানসিকভাবে বিপর্যস্ত হতে পারেন। কখনো একটু সহানুভূতি, কখনো একটি মনোযোগ দিয়ে শোনা কথা, আবার কখনো প্রয়োজন হয় পেশাদার সহায়তার। তাই মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবাকে সহজলভ্য করার পাশাপাশি আমাদের পরিবার ও সমাজে এমন একটি পরিবেশ তৈরি করতে হবে, যেখানে কেউ তাঁর মানসিক কষ্টের কথা বলতে ভয় পাবেন না। পর্যাপ্ত দক্ষ জনবল তৈরি, গবেষণা জোরদার, পুনর্বাসনসেবা সম্প্রসারণ এবং প্রত্যন্ত অঞ্চলের মানুষের কাছে মানসম্মত সেবা পৌঁছে দিতে সমন্বিত উদ্যোগ অপরিহার্য।

আসুন, আমরা এমন একটি সমাজ গড়ে তোলার অঙ্গীকার করি-যেখানে মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য নিয়ে কথা বলা হবে স্বাভাবিকভাবে, সহায়তা চাওয়া হবে নির্দ্বিধায় এবং প্রতিটি মানুষ মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবা পাওয়ার অধিকার ও মর্যাদা ভোগ করবেন।

ডা. জুবাইদা রহমান



প্রধানমন্ত্রী
গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

২৫ আশ্বিন ১৪৩৩
১০ অক্টোবর ২০২৬

বাণী

১০ অক্টোবর ২০২৬। বিশ্ব মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য দিবস। দৃশ্যত স্বাস্থ্যবান অথবা নীরোগ থাকাটাই স্বাস্থ্য নয়, বরং শারীরিক, মানসিক, আত্মিক ও সামাজিকভাবে ভালো থাকার নামই স্বাস্থ্য। সুতরাং, কোনোভাবেই মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যকে উপেক্ষা করার সুযোগ নেই। এমন বাস্তবতায় মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য সুরক্ষা বর্তমান সরকারের জনকল্যাণমুখী স্বাস্থ্যনীতির একটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ দিক।

এবারের বিশ্ব মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য দিবস ২০২৬-এর প্রতিপাদ্য "Lived experiences heard: real voices, real change": মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবায় মানুষের নিজস্ব অভিজ্ঞতা, অনুভূতি ও মতামতকে গুরুত্ব দেওয়ার প্রয়োজনীয়তার ওপর বিশেষভাবে গুরুত্ব দেওয়া হয়েছে। সারাবিশ্বের সঙ্গে বাংলাদেশেও দিবসটি যথাযথ গুরুত্বের সঙ্গে পালন করা হবে।

মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য কেবল চিকিৎসার বিষয় নয়, এটি মানুষের মর্যাদা, পরিবার, সমাজ ও রাষ্ট্রের সামগ্রিক কল্যাণের সঙ্গে গভীরভাবে সম্পৃক্ত। তাই মানসিক অসুস্থতাকে ঘিরে ভয়, লজ্জা, কুসংস্কার ও বৈষম্য দূর করতে আমাদের সম্মিলিতভাবে কাজ করতে হবে। কাউকে তার মানসিক সমস্যার জন্য অবহেলা বা বিচ্ছিন্ন না করে তার কথা শুনতে হবে, পাশে দাঁড়াতে হবে এবং প্রয়োজনীয় সহায়তার পথ সহজ করতে হবে। যারা মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যজনিত সমস্যার মধ্য দিয়ে জীবনযাপন করছেন, তাদের অভিজ্ঞতা ও অনুভূতিকে গুরুত্ব দিয়ে শোনা এবং সম্মানের সঙ্গে গ্রহণ করা প্রকৃত পরিবর্তনের পূর্বশর্ত।

বর্তমান সরকার এমন একটি স্বাস্থ্যব্যবস্থা গড়ে তুলতে চায়, যেখানে শারীরিক সুস্থতার পাশাপাশি মানুষের মানসিক প্রশান্তি, সামাজিক নিরাপত্তা ও জীবনমানের উন্নয়নও সমান গুরুত্ব পাবে। এই মানবিক দৃষ্টিভঙ্গিকে ধারণ করে মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবাকে মানুষের দোরগোড়ায় পৌঁছে দিতে উপজেলা ও প্রাথমিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবা পর্যায়ে সেবার পরিধি বাড়ানো, দক্ষ জনবল তৈরি, কার্যকর রেফারেল ব্যবস্থা এবং প্রযুক্তিনির্ভর কাউন্সেলিং সেবা সম্প্রসারণে সরকার কাজ করে যাচ্ছে।

বিশ্বজুড়ে মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য বর্তমানে একটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ জনস্বাস্থ্য চ্যালেঞ্জ। বাংলাদেশেও বিপুলসংখ্যক মানুষ মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যজনিত সমস্যায় ভুগলেও সামাজিক সংকোচ, সচেতনতার অভাব, সেবার সীমিত সুযোগ এবং প্রয়োজনীয় জনবলের ঘাটতির কারণে অনেকে যথাযথ চিকিৎসা ও সহায়তা থেকে বঞ্চিত হন। ফলে সরকার মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবার সহজলভ্যতা, গুণগত মান ও সক্ষমতা বৃদ্ধিতে বিভিন্ন উদ্যোগ গ্রহণ করেছে। প্রান্তিক মানুষের কাছে সেবা পৌঁছে দিতে উপজেলা ও জেলা পর্যায়ে সমন্বিত রেফারেল ব্যবস্থা এবং টেলি-কাউন্সেলিং সম্প্রসারণের উদ্যোগ নেওয়া হয়েছে। উপজেলা পর্যায়ে কর্মরত চিকিৎসকদের মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবায় প্রশিক্ষণ, সরকারি হাসপাতালগুলোতে মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য পেশাজীবীদের সক্ষমতা বৃদ্ধি এবং বিপুলসংখ্যক স্বাস্থ্যকর্মীকে এ বিষয়ে প্রশিক্ষণের পরিকল্পনা নেওয়া হয়েছে। পাশাপাশি গর্ভবতী মায়েদের মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য, শিশু-কিশোরদের মানসিক সুস্থতা এবং বিদ্যালয়ভিত্তিক মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবাকেও সরকার যথাযথ গুরুত্ব দিচ্ছে।

মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য পেশাজীবীদের প্রতি আমার আহ্বান আন্তরিকতার সঙ্গে মনোযোগ দিয়ে মানুষের কথা শুনুন, সহমর্মিতার সঙ্গে পাশে দাঁড়ান এবং প্রয়োজনীয় চিকিৎসা ও সহায়তা নিশ্চিত করতে সচেষ্ট থাকুন। একই সঙ্গে মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য সম্পর্কে পরিবার, শিক্ষাপ্রতিষ্ঠান, গণমাধ্যম ও সমাজের সর্বস্তরের মানুষের মধ্যে সচেতনতা বৃদ্ধি জরুরি।

আমরা বিশ্বাস করি, সরকার, স্বাস্থ্য পেশাজীবী, পরিবার, শিক্ষাপ্রতিষ্ঠান ও সমাজের সমিলিত প্রচেষ্টায় এমন একটি সুস্বাস্থ্যের বাংলাদেশ বিনির্মাণ সম্ভব, যেখানে মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য নিয়ে কথা বলতে কেউ সংকোচ বোধ করবে না, সহায়তা চাইতে কেউ লজ্জিত হবে না কিংবা নিজেকে একা বা অবহেলিত মনে করবে না। আমরা এমন একটি কল্যাণমূলক, নিরাপদ, মানবিক বাংলাদেশ চাই, যেখানে প্রতিটি মানুষ মর্যাদা, আশা ও সম্ভাবনা নিয়ে সুস্থ ও অর্থবহ জীবনযাপনের সুযোগ পাবে।

বিশ্ব মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য দিবস ২০২৬ উপলক্ষে আমি দেশের ও বিশ্বের সব মানুষের সুস্থতা ও কল্যাণ কামনা করছি। দিবসটির সর্বাঙ্গীণ সাফল্য কামনা করছি।

তারেক রহমান



মন্ত্রী
স্বাস্থ্য ও পরিবার কল্যাণ মন্ত্রণালয়
গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

বাণী

বিশ্বের অন্যান্য দেশের ন্যায় বাংলাদেশেও ১০ অক্টোবর 'বিশ্ব মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য দিবস ২০২৬' পালিত হচ্ছে জেনে আমি আনন্দিত। এ উপলক্ষ্যে জাতীয় মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য ইনস্টিটিউট কর্তৃক বিশেষ ক্রোড়পত্র প্রকাশের উদ্যোগকে আমি আন্তরিকভাবে স্বাগত জানাই।

এবারের বিশ্ব মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য দিবসের প্রতিপাদ্য "Lived Experiences Heard: Real Voices, Real Change" অর্থাৎ "জীবনের কথা শুনি, বাস্তব পরিবর্তন আনি" অত্যন্ত সময়োপযোগী। মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য সমস্যার মধ্য দিয়ে যাওয়া ব্যক্তিদের অভিজ্ঞতা, অনুভূতি ও মতামতকে গুরুত্ব দেওয়া এবং মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবা, নীতি ও পরিকল্পনা প্রণয়নে তাদের সক্রিয় অংশগ্রহণ নিশ্চিত করার ওপর এ প্রতিপাদ্যে বিশেষ গুরুত্বারোপ করা হয়েছে।

বাংলাদেশে মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবার পরিধি সম্প্রসারিত হলেও জনসচেতনতার অভাব, সামাজিক কুসংস্কার, বৈষম্য এবং প্রয়োজনীয় সেবা প্রাপ্তির সীমাবদ্ধতা এখনো আমাদের জন্য উল্লেখযোগ্য চ্যালেঞ্জ হিসেবে রয়ে গেছে। মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যকে সামগ্রিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবার অবিচ্ছেদ্য অংশ হিসেবে বিবেচনা করে প্রাথমিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবা থেকে বিশেষায়িত পর্যায় পর্যন্ত মানসম্মত, মানবিক ও অধিকারভিত্তিক সেবা নিশ্চিত করা জরুরি।

সরকার মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবাকে জনমুখী ও সহজলভ্য করতে প্রাথমিক ও কমিউনিটি পর্যায়ে সেবা সম্প্রসারণ, প্রয়োজনীয় দক্ষ জনবল গড়ে তোলা, টেলিসাইকিয়াট্রি সেবা চালুকরণ, আত্মহত্যা প্রতিরোধ, মাদকাসক্তি চিকিৎসা এবং মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যবিষয়ক সচেতনতা বৃদ্ধির কার্যক্রমকে আরো জোরদার করতে প্রতিশ্রুতিবদ্ধ। একই সঙ্গে মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য সমস্যার অভিজ্ঞতাসম্পন্ন ব্যক্তি ও তাঁদের পরিবারের মতামতকে সেবা পরিকল্পনা ও উন্নয়নের গুরুত্বপূর্ণ অংশ হিসেবে বিবেচনা করা প্রয়োজন।

আমি বিশ্বাস করি, পরিবার, সমাজ, স্বাস্থ্যকর্মী, গণমাধ্যম ও সংশ্লিষ্ট সকলের সম্মিলিত প্রচেষ্টায় মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য বিষয়ে কুসংস্কার ও বৈষম্য দূর করা সম্ভব। পারস্পরিক সহমর্মিতা, সচেতনতা ও অন্তর্ভুক্তিমূলক দৃষ্টিভঙ্গির মাধ্যমে আমরা এমন একটি সমাজ গড়ে তুলতে পারি, যেখানে প্রত্যেকেই মর্যাদা, অধিকার ও প্রয়োজনীয় সহায়তা নিয়ে সুস্থ ও স্বাভাবিক জীবনযাপনের সুযোগ পাবেন।

আমি 'বিশ্ব মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য দিবস ২০২৬'-এর সকল কর্মসূচির সার্বিক সাফল্য কামনা করছি।

সরদার মোঃ সাখাওয়াত হোসেন, এমপি



মন্ত্রী
সমাজকল্যাণ মন্ত্রণালয়
মহিলা ও শিশু বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয়
গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

বাণী

প্রতি বছরের ন্যায় এ বছরও ১০ অক্টোবর 'বিশ্ব মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য দিবস' পালিত হচ্ছে। এ উপলক্ষে আমি দেশের সকল নাগরিক এবং মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবার সঙ্গে সম্পৃক্ত সকলকে আন্তরিক শুভেচ্ছা জানাই।

এ বছরের প্রতিপাদ্য "Lived Experiences Heard: Real Voices, Real Change" অর্থাৎ "জীবনের কথা শুনি, বাস্তব পরিবর্তন আনি" আমাদের সামনে একটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ মানবিক ও সামাজিক অঙ্গীকার তুলে ধরেছে। মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য সমস্যার অভিজ্ঞতার মধ্য দিয়ে যাঁরা গেছেন, তাঁদের অভিজ্ঞতা কেবল ব্যক্তিগত গল্প নয়; উন্নত ও মানবিক সেবা গড়ে তোলার ক্ষেত্রে তা মূল্যবান জ্ঞান। বিশ্ব স্বাস্থ্য সংস্থাও এ বছর নীতি ও সেবা পরিকল্পনায় তাঁদের সক্রিয় অংশগ্রহণের ওপর বিশেষ গুরুত্ব দিয়েছে।

মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য কেবল চিকিৎসার বিষয় নয়; এটি মানুষের মর্যাদা, অধিকার, সামাজিক নিরাপত্তা, শিক্ষা, কর্মসংস্থান ও স্বাভাবিক জীবনযাপনের সঙ্গেও গভীরভাবে সম্পর্কিত। বাংলাদেশেও মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য সমস্যা ব্যক্তি ও পরিবারের পাশাপাশি সামাজিক ও অর্থনৈতিক ক্ষেত্রেও গুরুত্বপূর্ণ প্রভাব ফেলছে। মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য সমস্যায় আক্রান্ত ব্যক্তিদের প্রতি বৈষম্য, অবহেলা ও কুসংস্কার দূর করে তাঁদের সমাজের মূলধারায় সম্পৃক্ত করা আমাদের সম্মিলিত দায়িত্ব। পরিবার ও সমাজে তাঁদের কথা শোনা, প্রয়োজনের সময় পাশে দাঁড়ানো এবং শিক্ষা, কর্মসংস্থান ও সামাজিক সুরক্ষায় সমান সুযোগ নিশ্চিত করা অত্যন্ত গুরুত্বপূর্ণ।

সমাজকল্যাণ এবং মহিলা ও শিশু বিষয়ক মন্ত্রণালয় শিশু-কিশোর, নারী, প্রবীণ, প্রতিবন্ধী ও সমাজের ঝুঁকিপূর্ণ জনগোষ্ঠীর মানসিক সুস্থতা ও সামাজিক সুরক্ষা নিশ্চিতকরণের জন্য বিভিন্ন কর্মসূচি গ্রহণ করেছে। একই সঙ্গে পরিবার, শিক্ষাপ্রতিষ্ঠান, কর্মক্ষেত্র, গণমাধ্যম, সরকারি-বেসরকারি প্রতিষ্ঠান ও নাগরিক সমাজকে সমন্বিতভাবে এগিয়ে আসতে হবে।

মানুষের বাস্তব অভিজ্ঞতার কণ্ঠস্বরকে সম্মান ও সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণে গুরুত্ব দিলে মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবায় বাস্তব ও টেকসই পরিবর্তন আনা সম্ভব। আসুন, এমন একটি মানবিক ও অন্তর্ভুক্তিমূলক বাংলাদেশ গড়ে তুলি, যেখানে মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য সমস্যার কারণে কেউ বৈষম্য বা অবহেলার শিকার হবে না এবং প্রত্যেকে মর্যাদার সঙ্গে বেঁচে থাকার সুযোগ পাবে।

বিশ্ব মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য দিবস ২০২৬-এর সকল কর্মসূচির সার্বিক সাফল্য কামনা করছি।

অধ্যাপক ডা. এ জেড এম জাহিদ হোসেন, এমপি



প্রধানমন্ত্রীর স্বাস্থ্য বিষয়ক বিশেষ সহকারী (প্রতিমন্ত্রী পদমর্যাদা)
প্রধানমন্ত্রীর কার্যালয়

বাণী

বিশ্ব মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য দিবস ২০২৬ উপলক্ষে দেশবাসীসহ মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবার সঙ্গে সম্পৃক্ত সকলকে জানাই আন্তরিক শুভেচ্ছা ও অভিনন্দন।

মানুষের সুস্থ ও মর্যাদাপূর্ণ জীবনযাপনের সঙ্গে মানসিক সুস্থতা নিবিড়ভাবে সম্পর্কিত। জীবনের বিভিন্ন পর্যায়ে দুঃখ, উদ্বেগ, মানসিক চাপ কিংবা নানা প্রতিকূলতার মুখোমুখি হওয়া স্বাভাবিক। তবে এসব অভিজ্ঞতা যখন ব্যক্তির দৈনন্দিন জীবন, সম্পর্ক, শিক্ষা বা কর্মজীবনে দীর্ঘস্থায়ী প্রভাব ফেলে, তখন সময়মতো সহায়তা ও প্রয়োজনীয় সেবা পাওয়া অত্যন্ত গুরুত্বপূর্ণ।

এ বছরের বিশ্ব মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য দিবসের প্রতিপাদ্য "Lived experiences heard: real voices, real change", অর্থাৎ "জীবনের কথা শুনি, বাস্তব পরিবর্তন আনি"। এই প্রতিপাদ্য আমাদের সামনে একটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ বার্তা তুলে ধরে-মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য নিয়ে আলোচনায় শুধু বিশেষজ্ঞের মতামত নয়, যারা নিজের জীবনে মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য সমস্যার অভিজ্ঞতার মধ্য দিয়ে গেছেন, তাদের কণ্ঠস্বরও সমানভাবে গুরুত্ব পাওয়ার দাবি রাখে। তাদের অভিজ্ঞতা, প্রত্যাশা ও চ্যালেঞ্জকে সম্মান করা একটি সহমর্মী সমাজ গঠনের গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ভিত্তি। মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য নিয়ে প্রচলিত ভুল ধারণা, ভয় ও সামাজিক stigma অনেক মানুষকে প্রয়োজনীয় সহায়তা গ্রহণ থেকে দূরে রাখে। তাই পরিবার, শিক্ষা প্রতিষ্ঠান, কর্মক্ষেত্র, গণমাধ্যম এবং সমাজের বিভিন্ন পর্যায়ে মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য সম্পর্কে ইতিবাচক ও বাস্তবভিত্তিক ধারণা তৈরি করা প্রয়োজন। একজন মানুষ যখন তার সমস্যার কথা বলতে পারেন, বিচার বা অবহেলার পরিবর্তে সহানুভূতি পান এবং প্রয়োজনের সময়ে যথাযথ সহায়তার কাছে পৌঁছতে পারেন-তখনই একটি সুস্থ সমাজের ভিত্তি আরও শক্তিশালী হয়। আমাদের প্রত্যাশা, বিশ্ব মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য দিবস উপলক্ষে আয়োজিত কর্মসূচিগুলো মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য বিষয়ে জনসচেতনতা বৃদ্ধির পাশাপাশি মানুষের মধ্যে পারস্পরিক সহমর্মিতা ও দায়িত্ববোধ জাগ্রত করবে। একই সঙ্গে মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবা গ্রহণকে স্বাভাবিক ও গ্রহণযোগ্য করে তুলতে ইতিবাচক ভূমিকা রাখবে।

মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যকে জনস্বাস্থ্যের একটি অবিচ্ছেদ্য অংশ হিসেবে বিবেচনা করে সরকার সবার জন্য সহজলভ্য, সমন্বিত ও মানসম্মত মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবা নিশ্চিত করার লক্ষ্যে কাজ করছে। এ লক্ষ্যে প্রাথমিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবা ব্যবস্থার সঙ্গে মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যের মৌলিক ক্রিনিং ও প্রাথমিক শনাক্তকরণ কার্যক্রম সমন্বিত করা হবে, যাতে জনগণ নিজ নিজ কমিউনিটি ও প্রাথমিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবা কেন্দ্রে প্রয়োজনীয় পরামর্শ, প্রাথমিক চিকিৎসা ও যথাযথ রেফারেল সেবা পেতে পারে। একইসঙ্গে, মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যজনিত সমস্যায় আক্রান্ত রোগীদের প্রয়োজনীয় চিকিৎসা ও সহায়তা প্রদানের সক্ষমতা বাড়াতে সকল পর্যায়ের সরকারি হাসপাতাল ও স্বাস্থ্যসেবা প্রতিষ্ঠানকে প্রয়োজনীয় জনবল, প্রশিক্ষণ, অবকাঠামো, ঔষধ এবং অন্যান্য সহায়ক সেবার মাধ্যমে শক্তিশালী করা হবে। সরকারের এই উদ্যোগের মূল লক্ষ্য হলো মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবাকে স্বাস্থ্যব্যবস্থার মূলধারায় আরও কার্যকরভাবে সংযুক্ত করা।

আসুন, আমরা এমন একটি সমাজ গড়ে তোলার প্রত্যয় গ্রহণ করি-যেখানে মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য নিয়ে কথা বলা লজ্জার নয়, সাহায্য চাওয়া দুর্বলতার পরিচয় নয় এবং প্রতিটি মানুষের অভিজ্ঞতা মনোযোগ ও মর্যাদার সঙ্গে শোনা হয়।

বিশ্ব মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য দিবস ২০২৬-এর সকল আয়োজনের সাফল্য কামনা করছি।

ডা. এস এম জিয়াউদ্দিন হায়দার



প্রতিমন্ত্রী
স্বাস্থ্য ও পরিবার কল্যাণ মন্ত্রণালয়
গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

বাণী

প্রতি বছরের ন্যায় এ বছরও ১০ অক্টোবর 'বিশ্ব মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য দিবস' পালিত হচ্ছে। এ উপলক্ষে আমি দেশের সকল নাগরিক এবং মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবার সঙ্গে সংশ্লিষ্ট সকলকে আন্তরিক শুভেচ্ছা জানাই।

এ বছরের প্রতিপাদ্য "Lived Experiences Heard: Real Voices, Real Change" অর্থাৎ "জীবনের কথা শুনি, বাস্তব পরিবর্তন আনি" অত্যন্ত সময়োপযোগী ও তাৎপর্যপূর্ণ। এটি আমাদের স্মরণ করিয়ে দেয়, মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবায় প্রকৃত পরিবর্তনের জন্য সেবাগ্রহীতার নিজের অভিজ্ঞতা ও কণ্ঠস্বরকে গুরুত্ব দিতে হবে। তাঁদের কথা মনোযোগ দিয়ে শোনা, মর্যাদা ও অধিকারকে সম্মান করা এবং সেবা পরিকল্পনায় তাঁদের অংশগ্রহণ নিশ্চিত করা প্রয়োজন। মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য বর্তমানে বিশ্বব্যাপী একটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ জনস্বাস্থ্য ও উন্নয়ন ইস্যু। বাংলাদেশেও মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য সমস্যা ব্যক্তি, পরিবার, শিক্ষা, কর্মক্ষেত্র ও সামগ্রিক সামাজিক জীবনে উল্লেখযোগ্য প্রভাব ফেলছে। তাই মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবাকে সহজলভ্য, সমতাভিত্তিক, মানবিক ও অধিকারনির্ভর করা সময়ের দাবি।

সরকার মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবা জনগণের দোরগোড়ায় পৌঁছে দিতে এবং প্রাথমিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবার সঙ্গে এর সমন্বয় জোরদারে কাজ করে যাচ্ছে। একই সঙ্গে দক্ষ জনবল তৈরি, কমিউনিটিভিত্তিক সেবা সম্প্রসারণ এবং সময়মতো যথাযথ চিকিৎসা ও রেফারেল নিশ্চিত করা জরুরি। মানসিক অসুস্থতা নিয়ে কুসংস্কার, বৈষম্য ও সামাজিক লজ্জা দূর করতে পরিবার, শিক্ষাপ্রতিষ্ঠান, কর্মক্ষেত্র, গণমাধ্যম ও সমাজের সকল স্তরের সম্মিলিত উদ্যোগ প্রয়োজন। মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য সমস্যায় আক্রান্ত মানুষের কথা শুনতে হবে, তাঁদের পাশে দাঁড়াতে হবে এবং প্রয়োজনীয় চিকিৎসা ও সহায়তা নিশ্চিত করতে হবে।

আমি বিশ্বাস করি, সেবাগ্রহীতার বাস্তব অভিজ্ঞতা ও কণ্ঠস্বরকে গুরুত্ব দিয়ে সকলের সম্মিলিত প্রচেষ্টায় আমরা একটি মানসিকভাবে সুস্থ, মানবিক ও অন্তর্ভুক্তিমূলক বাংলাদেশ গড়ে তুলতে পারব।

বিশ্ব মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য দিবস ২০২৬-এর সকল কর্মসূচির সার্বিক সাফল্য কামনা করছি।

ড. এম এ মুহিত, এমপি



মহাপরিচালক
স্বাস্থ্য অধিদপ্তর, ঢাকা

বাণী

বাংলাদেশসহ বিশ্বের বিভিন্ন দেশে বিশ্ব মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য দিবস ১০ অক্টোবর ২০২৬ যথাযথ গুরুত্ব ও মর্যাদার সাথে পালিত হচ্ছে জেনে আমি আনন্দিত। এ উপলক্ষে মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবা গ্রহণকারী ব্যক্তি, তাদের পরিবার, পরিচর্যাকারী, স্বাস্থ্যকর্মী, মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য বিশেষজ্ঞসহ সংশ্লিষ্ট সকলকে জানাই আন্তরিক শুভেচ্ছা ও অভিনন্দন।

এ বছরের বিশ্ব মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য দিবসের প্রতিপাদ্য "Lived experiences heard: real voices, real change" অর্থাৎ "জীবনের কথা শুনি, বাস্তব পরিবর্তন আনি"। মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবাকে আরও মানবিক, অধিকারভিত্তিক, ব্যক্তিকেন্দ্রিক ও কার্যকর করার ক্ষেত্রে মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য সমস্যার মধ্য দিয়ে যাওয়া ব্যক্তিদের বাস্তব অভিজ্ঞতা ও মতামত অত্যন্ত গুরুত্বপূর্ণ। তাদের কথা শুধু শোনা নয়, বরং নীতি প্রণয়ন, সেবা পরিকল্পনা, বাস্তবায়ন ও মূল্যায়নের প্রতিটি পর্যায়ে তাদের অর্থবহ অংশগ্রহণ নিশ্চিত করা প্রয়োজন। মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য সামগ্রিক স্বাস্থ্যের একটি অবিচ্ছেদ্য অংশ। মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যজনিত সমস্যায় আক্রান্ত ব্যক্তিরা যেন বৈষম্য ও সামাজিক কুসংস্কারের শিকার না হন এবং প্রয়োজন অনুযায়ী সময়োপযোগী, সহজলভ্য ও মানসম্মত সেবা লাভ করেন-এ লক্ষ্যে স্বাস্থ্য অধিদপ্তর বিভিন্ন কার্যক্রম পরিচালনা করে আসছে। বিশেষ করে কমিউনিটিভিত্তিক মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবা সম্প্রসারণ, প্রাথমিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবার সঙ্গে মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যসেবার সমন্বয় এবং স্বাস্থ্যকর্মীদের সক্ষম

DHAKA SATURDAY OCTOBER 10, 2026, ASHWIN 25, 1433 BS

SPORT



The reason why I joined this club is because I completely trust the owner, the CEO, the sporting director, all the organisation...and the right moment to speak about this is when we win this appeal.

Coach **ENZO MARESCA** confident about City winning appeal over financial charges.

Batting remains Tigresses' Achilles heel

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh skipper Nigar Sultana Joty was quick to acknowledge her side's long-standing batting problem after they suffered a crushing seven-wicket defeat to Australia in the opening match of the three-match WODI series in Brisbane on Friday.

"Didn't get partnerships, so we lost our way," Joty said during the post-match presentation.

"We've got to be cautious against the new ball. Can't lose so many wickets in the Powerplay. Need to be calm and patient to get control," she added.

Despite the gulf between the two sides in terms of rankings, form and history, Bangladesh's hopes of making a mark in their first-ever bilateral series in Australia largely depended on how their batters fared against the hosts' formidable bowling attack at Allan Border Field.

However, Bangladesh's batting line-up was exposed inside the first Powerplay, as they slumped to 33 for three in 7.5 overs. All three top-order batters -- Farzana Hoque (0), Sarmin Sultana (4) and Sharmin Akhter (24) -- fell to Australia's pace attack.

Sobhana Mostary (2) soon followed suit, leaving Bangladesh in deep trouble. Joty and Shorna Akter then attempted to steady the innings with a 35-run partnership off 87 balls, but their slow



scoring rate left the visitors struggling to build momentum.

Joty eventually fell to her Australian counterpart Tahlia McGrath for 29 off 86 deliveries, at a strike rate of just 33.72.

Thanks to lower-order batter Ritu Moni, who top-scored with 45 off 63 balls, Bangladesh managed to reach 166 before being bowled out off the penultimate delivery of their innings. Nahida Akter contributed an unbeaten 19, while Rabeya Khan added 11. Bangladesh's highest partnership in the innings came at eighth wicket where Nahida and Ritu added 37 off 58 balls which also summed up their batting woes properly.

The total proved inadequate as Australia chased it down in just 25.4 overs. Opener Phoebe Litchfield struck 77 off 57 balls, while Annabel Sutherland, who had earlier claimed four wickets for 30 runs, remained unbeaten on 25.

The emphatic victory gave Australia a 1-0 lead in the series and underlined the gap between the two sides.

Apart from Ritu's fighting knock, Bangladesh's other major positive was the performance of debutant pacer Habiba Islam Pinky, who claimed two wickets. Joty also praised the youngster and her teammates for their efforts with the ball.

"Lots of positives. Habiba Pinky was aggressive, attacking. Whoever got the ball in hand bowled in the right areas. Should take these with us into the next game," Joty said.

However, Bangladesh have little time to address their batting shortcomings, with the second WODI scheduled for Sunday at the same venue. Unless they produce a more resilient performance against the new ball and build meaningful partnerships, they could face another difficult outing against the formidable hosts.

PHOTO: **BCB**

Litton limits damage after meltdown

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh dominated the first session of the one-off Test against Afghanistan pretty handsomely thanks to Tanzid Hasan Tamim's carnage yesterday. They looked well on course to end the second session on a high at 200 for two but lost three wickets in the space of four runs to go to lunch five down. From a topsy-turvy day of Test cricket at Abu Dhabi's Zayed Cricket Stadium, they found relief from a familiar saviour in Litton Das.

It was neither one of Litton's most notable innings with the team at dire straits nor one that completely quells the concerns over his recent form. Yet, his fifty helped stave off the prospect of being bowled out on the opening day after a strong start.

The wicket looked ominously good for batting, indicating that a big first-innings score would be the norm. Yet, after the collapse, with the Afghanistan attack on the surge, Litton and Mehidy Hasan Miraz added 62 for the sixth-wicket stand to wrest some control back. Afghanistan won the last two sessions as the Tigers ended at 317 for eight, well short of where they might have expected to be after the first session and the collapse that followed, when Mominul Haque, Mushfiqur Rahim and Najmul Hossain Shanto went back to the hut within 18 deliveries.

From 221 for two to 225 for five, Litton came in already under pressure, on the back of three consecutive ducks. He raised his bat towards



Tanzid Tamim's blistering 83 gave Bangladesh a solid start against Afghanistan, but the visitors were reduced to 317 for eight at stumps on Day 1.

his teammates for comic relief after getting off the mark and coolly guided the innings after the collapse.

Afghanistan had got well into the game, especially with pacers Mohammad Saleem and Ismat Alam finding the right channels with the older ball and getting the bit of reverse swing on offer. After finding some rhythm with a glorious cover drive, Litton was eager to take calculated risks to put pressure back on Afghanistan.

It was Mehidy's dismissal, however, that saw Afghanistan back on top in the third session. Right after reaching fifty, Litton's short-arm jab-pull was holed out at deep square leg as he departed after an 89-ball 53. While it was not one of his more eventful knocks, like the one in Rawalpindi in 2024 or the one in Sylhet this year, it did make Afghanistan toil a bit harder towards the end.

While Litton finding some flow would have eased nerves, the Tigers' think tank will reflect on how they squandered a great start. Tanzid looked in full flow at the top of the order, carrying on from his Darwin ton. The hosts planned his dismissal, keeping the batter rooted with the keeper up. Tanzid's focus appeared to waver, preventing him from building a bigger score as his innings ended at 83 off 71 balls. Shadman Islam and Mominul Haque also showed familiar signs of starting well before losing focus and departing for 67 and 39, respectively.

Mushfiqur Rahim's scalp was taken by a fantastic Yamin delivery, while Litton could have avoided falling prey to the short-ball trap.

Spin could become a challenge as the match progresses, but Bangladesh failed to maintain their momentum after gaining the upper hand. At a neutral venue, in conditions where they have struggled, the lesson for Bangladesh is to apply themselves better when opportunities such as the UAE track are on offer.

Excitement resumes as club football returns

STAR SPORTS DESK

Club football returns after an almost three-week international window, with a packed weekend across Europe. Arsenal must respond to their first Premier League defeat of the season, Manchester United and Tottenham meet amid mounting pressure, while Barcelona and Real Madrid resume their contrasting title campaigns ahead of the Clasico on October 25.

Reigning champions Arsenal host unbeaten Leeds United on Saturday, seeking a response to their 3-0 defeat to Brighton -- their heaviest loss in more than three years and only the second time in 158 matches they have conceded three goals.

Their injury concerns have deepened during the international break, with Kai Havertz and Christos Tzolis suffering hamstring injuries, while Ezri Konsa withdrew from England duty with a knock. All three are doubts, with Havertz and Tzolis potentially sidelined for weeks.

Manchester United and Tottenham both need a result at Old Trafford on Saturday. United have managed just one win and five points from their opening five games, leaving them 12th and 10 points behind leaders Manchester City. Spurs sit bottom with two points and are still searching for their first league win.

Head coach Roberto De Zerbi has taken responsibility for Tottenham's poor start and urged his squad, bolstered by more than £300 million in summer signings, to show more "fight".

Spurs face defensive concerns with first-choice centre-backs Micky van de Ven and Jan Paul van Hecke injured. Summer signing Carlos Baleba could make his long-awaited United debut, offering Michael Carrick a potential boost.

Barca aim to extend lead, Real seek revival

In La Liga, leaders Barcelona will look to maintain their advantage but must do without captain Raphinha for Saturday's clash against Getafe and Tuesday's Champions League meeting with Galatasaray after the Brazilian suffered a hamstring injury on international duty.

Barcelona have won all seven of their LaLiga matches and scored 31 goals. Raphinha has played a big part in that, having scored 14 goals in eight matches across competitions, making him the top scorer in Europe's major leagues.

Real Madrid, meanwhile, trail Barcelona by six points after defeats to Real Betis and city rivals Atletico left them fourth. They host Villarreal on Saturday before facing Sevilla, Roma and RB Leipzig ahead of the Clasico.

Jose Mourinho wants more from Vinicius Junior, whom he has defended while admitting the Brazilian is not at his "killer" best. Superstar Kylian Mbappe, who has seven league goals, is expected to return after a knee issue, while Ibrahima Konate is also expected to be available. Federico Valverde faces a late assessment on his ankle injury.

Inter, Roma and Bayern in action

In Serie A, leaders Inter Milan host Parma on Saturday, while Roma, level with Inter on 13 points, visit Cesc Fabregas's in-form Como on Sunday.

In the Bundesliga, Bayern Munich, two points behind leaders Borussia Dortmund, travel to Augsburg on Saturday.

WHAT TO WATCH

T SPORTS
Afghanistan vs Bangladesh
One-off Test, Day 2
Live from 12:00 pm

STAR SPORTS SELECT HD1
Premier League
Arsenal vs Leeds
Live from 5:30 pm
Chelsea vs Bournemouth
Live from 8:00 pm
Man Utd vs Tottenham
Live from 10:30 pm



A DUCK, YET A REMARKABLE STORY

Australia ended the opening day of the first of their three-Test series against hosts South Africa at 187 for six in 65.2 overs, but beyond the scoreboard, another intriguing personal story unfolded at Kingsmead yesterday. Australia batter Nic Maddinson returned to Test cricket after almost a decade, only for his 33-ball innings to end in a duck -- making him the Australian opener holding the record for facing the most balls and getting dismissed for a duck in Tests. Maddinson's journey back to the Australian side followed a life-threatening battle with testicular cancer. Diagnosed in April 2025, the disease had spread to his lungs and lymph nodes. He underwent nine weeks of chemotherapy, completing treatment in July before gradually rebuilding his fitness and returning to training in September. His recovery eventually led to a domestic comeback, before injuries to Josh Inglis and Cameron Green saw him get recalled at short notice. While his scoreless innings was disappointing, his return after cancer treatment marked a remarkable personal victory.

PHOTO: **AFP**

Newcomer Sabbir joins hattrick roll

SPORTS REPORTER

Newcomer forward Sabbir Hossain struck a hattrick as Bashundhara Kings thrashed Dhaka Wanderers Club 7-1 to register their first win of the 2026-27 Bangladesh Football League yesterday, while Fortis FC and City Club also won to remain joint leaders.

Fortis and City Club have seven points from three matches, three ahead of Kings who have played two matches. Bangladesh Police FC are second with six points from two.

At the Kings Arena in Dhaka, the defending champions bounced back from a 1-1 draw against Arambagh KS by scoring twice in the opening five minutes through Manish Dangi and Sabbir. Kings added five more after the break, with Sabbir striking twice more, becoming the season's second hattrick scorer after Fortis FC's Onyekachi Okafor. Rakib Hossain scored a double and Mohammad Abdullah also got his name on the scoresheet.

At Gopalganj District Stadium, Fortis thrashed hosts Brothers Union 6-0, scoring all six goals after the break, with Pa Omar Babou netting twice and Mohammad Ibrahim, Insan Hossain, Stephen Chukwudu and Rafayel Tudu each finding the back of the net.

Meanwhile, City Club beat Chittagong City FC 2-1 at Shaheed Barkat Stadium in Gazipur,



with Enamul Islam and Rafiqul Islam scoring in the first half before Kenta Hara pulled one back after the break.

Elsewhere, Rahmatganj MFS drew 1-1 with PWD SC after Rifat Kazi cancelled out Jamir Uddin's seventh-minute opener in the 17th minute.







A father gently feeds soup to his child undergoing treatment for dengue at Mugda Medical College Hospital in the capital, as the worried mother looks on. According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), at least 295 dengue patients died, and 95,451 others were hospitalised this year as of yesterday. PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

Dengue battle grows harder amid ICU crisis

HELEMUL ALAM

Mohammad Harun, a resident of Narsingdi, was shifted from the intensive care unit to a general ward at Dhaka Medical College Hospital around four days ago after spending nearly two weeks in intensive care.

Diagnosed with dengue in mid-September, Harun initially received treatment at a hospital in Monohardi, Narsingdi, for a day before being referred to DMCH after fluid accumulated around his kidney.

"My father is now a little better after receiving treatment in the ICU for around two weeks. He is still undergoing treatment in Ward 502 at DMCH," said his daughter Himi.

While Harun managed to secure an ICU bed, many critically ill patients are struggling to access intensive care amid heavy patient pressure at DMCH.

"Usually, we do not turn away any patient diagnosed with dengue. However, I had to refer a patient to another hospital one day back who urgently needed a coronary care unit or ICU bed because no beds were available in either unit at DMCH," said Dr Anika, a duty doctor at a dengue ward.

She said three wards had already been designated for dengue patients.

DMCH has 113 ICU beds in total.

During a visit, additional beds were seen in the wards, while some patients were receiving treatment on the floor due to a shortage of beds.

Julekha Begum brought her 17-year-old son, Abdullah Al Muktadir, to DMCH from BUET Medical Centre after his condition deteriorated following several days of treatment for high fever.

"After being admitted to DMCH, his platelet count rose to 130,000 from 40,000. But it dropped again to 110,000 yesterday," she said.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 5

The hidden cost of SCROLLING

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

As social media and internet use become increasingly embedded in everyday life, their impact on mental health is becoming a growing concern in Bangladesh, particularly among children and young people, mental health experts said.

However, the issue has received little attention in national-level mental health policy discussions and research, they noted, stressing the need for interventions at all levels, from policymaking to families and communities, to prevent further escalation.

The latest national mental health survey, conducted in 2019, found that 18.7 percent of adults aged 18 and above and 12.6 percent of children between the ages of 7 and 17 had a mental disorder.

In the absence of more recent national data, the current prevalence remains unknown. However, experts warn that growing social media and internet use could further add to the country's mental health burden.



- Experts warn excessive social media use may be worsening anxiety, sleep disorders
- A 2019 survey by the National Institute of Mental Health found that the treatment gap among adults was 91 percent, meaning only 9 percent of adults with mental disorders received medical attention

Meanwhile, treatment for mental health remains limited in Bangladesh.

The 2019 national survey by the National Institute of Mental Health also found that the treatment gap among adults was 91 percent, meaning only 9 percent of adults with mental disorders received medical attention.

Experts warned that if the mental health burden grows amid increasing social media use, the situation could deteriorate further.

Today is World Mental Health Day and it being is observed at home and abroad with the theme "Lived Experiences Heard: Real Voices, Real Change".

Niaz Ahmed, a private-sector employee, said he spent around six hours a day on social media, mainly Facebook and YouTube, often late at night.

"As a result, I'm getting less and less sleep and becoming easily irritable by the day. Sometimes, I also find it difficult to absorb new information," he said.

A small-scale study by a group of Bangladeshi researchers recently found using social media for more than four hours in a day is significantly associated with higher chances of depression and anxiety among young adults.

The paper titled "Social Media Use Time and Mental Health of Young Adults: A Cross-Sectional Study in Bangladesh" was published in the medical journal Wiely's Health Science Reports in July last year.

The researchers collected cross-sectional data from 440 young adults aged 18 to 35 from Dhaka and Cumilla between February and March 2024.

The study found that participants who used social media for more than four hours a day had significantly higher odds of depression than those who used it for less than two hours, Abdullah Al Zubaye, one of the authors of the study, told this correspondent, citing the paper.

Longer use was also associated with higher chances of anxiety, he added.

Mental health experts say excessive use of social media and the internet can contribute to addiction, sleep problems, poor concentration, irritability and other mental health difficulties.

"Social media has a tendency to perpetuate rumours and misinformation and confuse people, creating problems in personal and family lives. And internet addiction is increasing," said Prof MMA Shalahuddin Qusar, chairman of the psychiatry department at Bangladesh Medical University.

He said there are clear impacts of social media on mental health, and it should be recognised as such rather than treated as a separate issue.

"If we are forgetting things, unable to concentrate on work, losing sleep or becoming irritable because of it, then our mental health is certainly being affected," the expert said.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

A taste of winter at a steep price

Early vegetables hit city markets, but high prices leave buyers struggling

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Although most winter vegetables are already available at various kitchen markets in the capital, prices remain high.

Vegetables usually begin arriving in markets in November. However, over the past five to six years, they appear as early as September, thanks to cultivation ahead of the usual season in areas such as Narsingdi, Savar, and Manikganj.

Visiting Shewrapara, Kazipara, Ibrahimpur, Mirpur-11, Mirpur-1, Farmgate, and Karwan Bazar kitchen markets over the last two days, this correspondent found that traders were selling winter vegetables such as radish, cauliflower, cabbage, and Indian tomatoes.

Talking to The Daily Star at the Mirpur-1 kitchen market, Md Yamin, who works at a private company, said he bought beans at Tk 160 per kg and tomatoes at Tk 240 yesterday. "Their prices were Tk 140 and Tk 150 per kg, respectively, last week."

"I could buy them at steep prices

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

Trafficking convictions fall despite rise in probes

Says US State Department's report on Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh convicted fewer human traffickers and did not take adequate steps to address internal trafficking crimes, which remained pervasive, the US State Department said in its latest report.

The country remained on Tier 2 in the United States' 2026 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report for the seventh consecutive year, with convictions of traffickers falling despite an increase in investigations and the introduction of a new anti-trafficking law.

- Bangladesh remains on Tier 2 for 7th straight year
- India, Pakistan, Bhutan also remain on Tier 2
- Tier 2 means significant efforts, but minimum anti-trafficking standards not fully met
- US report flags inadequate victim protection

A Tier 2 ranking indicates that while the government has made significant efforts to combat human trafficking, it does not fully meet the minimum standards for its elimination. Among Bangladesh's South Asian neighbours, India, Pakistan, and Bhutan have also remained on Tier 2.

The report, released on Thursday, acknowledged progress in strengthening the legal framework, expanding investigations and prosecutions, and improving guidelines for identifying victims. However, it noted that the declining number of convictions and inadequate victim protection remained major concerns.

The findings come after Bangladesh introduced the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants Ordinance 2026 in January. Parliament passed an updated bill into law in April, shortly after the reporting period (from April 1, 2025 to March 31, 2026) ended.

According to the report, the courts and tribunal convicted 76 traffickers during the reporting period from April 1, 2025, to March 31, 2026, down from 103 in 2024 and 407 in 2023.

Of those convicted, 35 got prison

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1



A protester kicks back a tear gas canister during a labour union-based demonstration against the Federal Government's budgetary measures near the Brussels-South railway station in Brussels yesterday. Belgian workers were joined by protesting high-school students as they took to the streets for a fresh national strike against government austerity measures. The demonstration, inspired by student protests in France, was expected to draw thousands of people. PHOTO: AFP

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WEEKEND READ
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The Daily Star



The fading echoes of jatra

Once a cherished spectacle, the folk theatre tradition now struggles against declining audiences, financial hardship and social neglect in Chattogram

Folk tales like Rupban and Laili-Majnu always drew crowds and earned applause. PHOTO: STAR FILE

ARUN BIKASH DEY

"Hoi hoi kando, roi roi byapar... odyo rajaneer bishesh akarshan!" (An exciting, sensational affair... a grand spectacle awaits tonight!)

The announcement would ring out through rural neighbourhoods as a canvasser walked briskly with a portable loudspeaker, locally known as a hand-mike, inviting villagers to the night's jatra (folk theatre) performance.

For generations, jatra was an integral part of rural Bengal's cultural life. After the autumn harvest, as winter gradually set in, villagers would gather in their hundreds for night-long performances on empty paddy fields, school grounds and village centres, where makeshift stages were decorated in vibrant colours.

Today, those scenes seem like distant memories.

Once a cherished form of entertainment, jatra has gradually lost its appeal amid the rise of digital media, declining social recognition for performers and financial uncertainty.

For veteran theatre artiste Shipra Chowdhury, memories of jatra's golden era in Chattogram during the 1980s remain vivid.

"In mid-1982, acclaimed theater director Pranab Kumar Dasgupta decided to produce two jatra plays in Denga Para village under Chattgram's Patiya upazila and invited me to perform," she said.

"Jatra performances are structurally quite different from theater, so I was confused. Pranab da reassured me, and I went with our troupe to Denga Para, where a massive stage had been set up. I played the central female roles in both productions -- Sabitri in 'Maa Mati Manush' and Sita in 'Abar Bonobase Sita'. That was my only experience of performing in jatra, but the passion of the crowd there... those powerful dramatic sequences and the uproar that followed... those are unforgettable," Shipra recalled.

Jatra was not confined to villages. Shipra said performances were regularly staged at venues such as the Chattogram Muslim Institute Hall from the 1980s and continued intermittently until the mid-1990s, before gradually disappearing from urban cultural life.

Sagar Sen, a private-sector employee, also remembers watching jatra in his childhood village of Dhalghat in Patiya during the 1980s.

"During festivals and Pujas, the entire village gathered at the school ground to watch night-long live performances. The joy was elemental, unvarnished," he said.

Chattogram holds a significant place in the history of jatra in Bangladesh, particularly through Babul Opera, founded in 1958 by Amin Sharif Chowdhury.

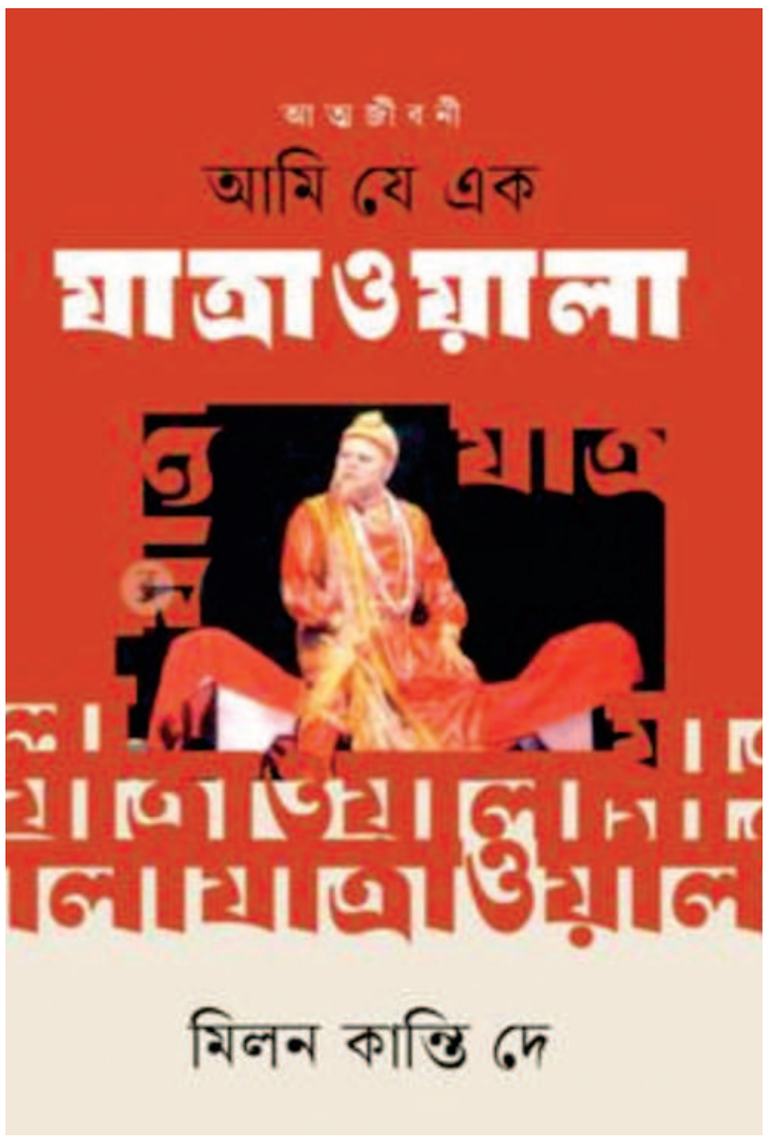
An adaptation of Babul Theatre, Babul Opera introduced female performers alongside male actors in 1960, challenging a longstanding tradition in which men dressed as women to portray female characters.

Renowned theatre personality Amalandu Biswas served as its director, while artistes such as Jahanara Begum, regarded as the country's first Muslim female jatra artiste, and Manjushree Mukherjee became prominent performers.

Manjushree, who debuted as the first formal female lead, went on to perform across the country during a career spanning 34 years.

Historical accounts describe Babul Opera's mid-20th-century performances at venues such as Jashore Town Hall as productions marked by artistic excellence and emotional depth, without the vulgarity that later became associated with some jatra shows.

But the art form's decline gathered pace after the 1980s.



The cover of thespian Milan Kanti Dey's autobiography "Ami Je Ek Jatrawala". PHOTO: COLLECTED

Artistes blame social neglect, financial insecurity and safety concerns for its dwindling popularity.

Shipra said jatra performers were never given the recognition they deserved.

"Performers were neglected and deprived of the respect they deserved as artistes, which prevented the younger generation from being drawn to the art form," she said.

Irregular performances made it difficult for artistes to earn a living, while negative campaigns against jatra exposed performers to harassment and physical attacks in some areas, she added.

Sagar believes the shift away from traditional storytelling contributed significantly to its decline.

"Earlier, performances depicted traditional folk and historical narratives like Laili-Majnu, Rupban, and Nawab Sirajuddaula. Since late 1980's, such narratives were replaced by various forms of vulgarity and obscenity that crept into jatra performances, initially in a bid to attract audience. However, it instigated unwarranted controversies and negative campaigns against jatra gained momentum, from which this traditional folk theater could never recover," he said.

The jatra community also lost one of its most influential figures this year with the death of Milan Kanti Dey (1948-2026), who died aged 77 on February 7.

A Bangla Academy Literary Award winner, Milan was a playwright, director, actor, researcher and university instructor who played a pioneering role in jatra in Chattogram and across Bangladesh.

His autobiography, Ami Je Ek Jatrawala, remains the only autobiographical account by a jatra artiste in Bangla literature.

Despite its decline, jatra retains a loyal audience in some rural areas, including parts of the Chattogram Hill Tracts.

Organisations such as the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy and Jatra Shilpa Unnayan Parishad continue to organise festivals and other initiatives, with government support, to preserve the tradition.

The Ministry of Cultural Affairs introduced the Jatra Industry Development Policy 2012 to revive rural cultural traditions, establish formal registration for troupes and streamline permission procedures for performances.

Syed Ayaz Mabud, cultural officer at the Chattogram District Shilpakala Academy, said government initiatives had helped the struggling industry.

"Under the Jatra Industry Development Policy 2012, troupes scattered across the country have been brought under formal registration," he said.

"Every year, the Shilpakala Academy organises central festivals featuring these registered troupes. Furthermore, the list of registered troupes is forwarded to district magistrates so local administrations can ensure full security whenever a troupe stages a performance," Ayaz added.

Yet artistes say these initiatives remain insufficient to revive jatra.

With too few performances to sustain a livelihood, many artistes now pursue jatra out of passion or alongside other occupations.

They also say government financial assistance remains inadequate. Although veteran performers are eligible for allowances, bureaucratic delays and alleged irregularities often prevent deserving artistes from receiving support.

For an art form that once brought entire villages together on winter nights, survival now rests on scattered performances, devoted artistes and efforts to preserve a fading cultural tradition.



A scene from a Jatra performance.



At the onset of winter after autumnal harvests, Jatra performances used to be a popular mode of entertainment in rural Bangladesh. PHOTO: STAR FILE



A scene from a Jatra performance.



Popular historical narratives were often depicted in Jatra performances. PHOTO: STAR FILE



The historical context of the fall of Nawab Sirajuddaula still remains a popular Jatra play. PHOTO: STAR FILE



PHOTO: **RASHED SUMON**

UNSAFE PESTICIDE USE IN BANGLADESH

Are we poisoning our food in the name of productivity?

REHMUNA NURAIN,
BAREESH HASAN CHAWDHURY

Agricultural crops are frequently affected by pests, weeds and diseases, which can significantly reduce crop yields and compromise food security. To address these challenges, pesticides have been widely adopted as an effective tool for protecting crops, minimising losses and enhancing productivity. Over the last few decades, Bangladesh has witnessed a dramatic increase in pesticide consumption. Reports indicate that pesticide imports rose from 3,000 metric tonnes in 1990 to over 45,000 metric tonnes in 2021 (DoE, 2022).

An expert from the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI) reported that chemical fertiliser use has increased from 8.8 kg per hectare to 700 kg per hectare. Data from the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) show that approximately 77% of farmers apply pesticides more than twice during a cropping season, while nearly 95% do not observe the recommended pre-harvest interval (PHI) before harvesting. According to scientific research reported by the Soil Resource Development Institute (SRDI) in 2022, about 80% of the country's agricultural land is losing organic matter. The SRDI's research has also raised serious concerns about soil contamination and food safety in the country. A Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) survey conducted in 2025 found that 44.37% of farmland is productive and sustainable, but only 1.20% qualifies as highly efficient.

Given the way pesticides are currently used, regulating and controlling their spread and effects is extremely difficult. Pesticides disperse through the air, soil and water, eventually spreading far beyond the areas where they are applied. Once released into the environment, pesticides can have a variety of consequences. Directly applied pesticides may be washed away by surface runoff, or they may percolate through the soil into deeper layers and groundwater. They can alter soil microbial diversity, inhibit soil respiration and contribute to soil infertility. In Bangladesh, pesticide-induced topsoil contamination has become a major environmental concern. One study reported that the application of 1 kg of pesticide per hectare can contaminate the upper 30 cm of soil. Another long-term study conducted in rice fields in the Jhenaidah and Kushtia districts found that the combined use of chemical fertilisers and different pesticides significantly reduced the nitrogen and carbon content of the soil, indicating a deterioration in soil quality.

Farmers in developing countries often have limited knowledge of the proper handling of pesticides and face a higher risk of health hazards due to excessive exposure and inappropriate application procedures. Alarmingly, only 4% of farmers understand proper pesticide use, while 47% are completely unaware of appropriate safety measures and take no precautions. The recurring detection of multiple pesticide residues in vegetables over the past decade underscores the growing risks to human health. Pesticide exposure can cause a variety of health problems, both chronic and acute, among farmers and consumers alike. Major health impacts associated with chronic exposure include cancer, reproductive and endocrine disruption, neurological damage and immune system dysfunction. A survey conducted by the National Institute of Cancer Research and Hospital (NICRH) found that 64% of cancer patients in Bangladesh are farmers, with unsafe pesticide application practices identified as a major contributing factor.

Due to their acute risks to human health and the environment, at least 17 active pesticide ingredients have been classified by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) as highly hazardous pesticides (HHPs) worldwide, particularly because of their persistence, bioaccumulation and long-term harm to non-target organisms. Paraquat and glyphosate are among the most hazardous of these pesticides. Around 70 countries have banned paraquat due to its extreme toxicity, while more than 10 countries have banned glyphosate. However, Bangladesh continues to use both. A study by the Bangladesh Crop Protection Association (BCPA) identified 25 highly hazardous pesticides (HHPs) that are registered and currently used in Bangladesh, raising significant concerns about public health and environmental safety.

These problems are largely caused by weaknesses in pesticide governance, including inadequate monitoring, weak enforcement, poor institutional coordination and limited accountability. Insufficient oversight of pesticide sales and use, along with inadequate training and awareness, has contributed to the misuse and overuse of pesticides. This reveals a significant gap between existing policies and their effective implementation. The Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), under the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), is the principal agency responsible for enforcing pesticide-related laws in Bangladesh. Despite its institutional responsibilities, the DAE appears to exercise limited oversight of local markets, where farmers continue to use numerous unknown and unregistered pesticide products. Illegal, expired and highly hazardous pesticides are reportedly entering the country through unauthorised channels and being sold without regulatory approval. Furthermore, the DAE website does not provide up-to-date data on pesticide registration, monitoring or enforcement, limiting transparency and public access to current information.

At the local level, farmers lack access to lists of registered pesticides and adequate safety guidance. Many are unaware of the importance of personal protective equipment (PPE) or what to do in cases of pesticide poisoning. Consequently, farmers tend to rely directly on dealers and retailers rather than agricultural officers, as dealers are more accessible and readily available. This dependence can contribute to inappropriate pesticide use and increased health risks. However, the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) has instructed local authorities to verify pesticide registrations before laboratory testing. It also has the authority to immediately seize unregistered products and initiate legal action through mobile courts in cases of violations. The DAE has also issued instructions prohibiting the sale of pesticides, particularly high-risk chemicals such as glyphosate and paraquat, in damaged packaging or open bottles due to the serious risks they pose to public health, livestock and the environment. Nevertheless, these pesticides continue to be used by farmers without effective regulatory intervention.

The Pesticides Act, 2018, established a comprehensive regulatory framework to control the entire lifecycle of pesticides, including their import, manufacture, formulation, packaging, repackaging, sale, distribution and use, with the aim of safeguarding human, animal and environmental health. The Act mandates the compulsory registration of pesticide brands and prohibits the approval of products that pose risks beyond their targeted pests. It empowers the relevant authorities to cancel registrations, restrict the import of adulterated or misbranded pesticides, revoke the registration of ineffective pesticides and enforce compliance through testing laboratories and expert advisory bodies.

The Act also requires mandatory testing of imported pesticide samples before their release onto the market and authorises inspectors to collect samples, conduct searches and seize products where necessary. It further strengthens the enforcement framework by providing for the confiscation of illegally marketed pesticides and empowering mobile courts to adjudicate certain pesticide-related offences. These provisions have the potential to strengthen regulatory control over the pesticide market, provided that the relevant authorities ensure effective monitoring, accountability and enforcement. However, there is little visible evidence of penalties being imposed or illegal, adulterated or misbranded pesticides being seized, raising serious concerns about the effectiveness of the Act's implementation. Conversely, the Act has certain limitations from a farmer-protection perspective. In particular, it does not establish a clear and comprehensive mechanism for compensating farmers who suffer financial losses, health problems or environmental harm resulting from pesticide contamination, improper application or misuse. The absence of such remedial provisions limits the Act's effectiveness in ensuring adequate protection and access to redress for affected farmers.

Despite these legal provisions, existing regulatory measures have failed to effectively control the use of unsafe pesticides and prevent food contamination. Political and institutional apathy, coupled with weak enforcement, has undermined the effectiveness of the existing legal framework. The government must ensure strict enforcement of the law, hold responsible authorities and pesticide companies accountable for violations, and prioritise the health and interests of farmers and consumers over commercial interests. Without effective monitoring, meaningful penalties and legal accountability, existing laws will remain largely ineffective.

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BANGLADESH'S ARTICLE 26 CHALLENGE

Reforming laws, protecting workers' rights

TASLIMA AKTHER

Just as we cannot breathe without oxygen, we feel suffocated when we cannot speak our minds freely or organise to defend our rights. We lived through such suffocation and isolation under the previous fascist regime. Speaking out could mean losing one's job, being demoted, punished or transferred, or even facing attacks, criminal cases, enforced disappearance or murder. Fear followed us everywhere.

The desire to escape that suffocating sense of isolation is closely connected to Article 26, a term that has attracted considerable attention in discussions about Bangladesh's labour environment in recent years. It encompasses labour law reform, freedom of association, easier trade union registration, the elimination of discrimination and unfair labour practices, and improvements to the government's labour inspection system. Addressing Article 26 is essential to protecting workers' lives, livelihoods and freedom of expression, strengthening Bangladesh's standing in global markets, and sustaining economic growth.

Bangladesh, as a member of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), has ratified three conventions: Convention 81 on labour inspection, Convention 87 on freedom of association, and Convention 98 on the right to organise and collective bargaining. However, Bangladesh's failure to implement these conventions adequately led to a complaint being lodged in 2019 under Article 26 of the ILO Constitution. Today, all three parties in the labour sector, the government, employers and workers, are particularly interested in resolving the complaint and implementing the necessary reforms. International representatives and domestic tripartite stakeholders are also actively engaged in the process. The ILO Governing Body is scheduled to meet this November, and the roadmap sets a deadline of March 2027.

The ILO and the Bangladesh government have identified four priorities in their roadmap for resolving the Article 26 complaint: labour law reform, trade union registration, labour inspection and enforcement of the law, and measures to address anti-union discrimination, unfair labour practices and violence against workers.

LABOUR LAW REFORM: UNDERSTANDING THE PROGRESS

To assess the first priority, the Labour Act 2026, we need to look back at the history of labour law reform in Bangladesh. Of all the amendments made to the Labour Act since 2006, two sets of reforms stand out as particularly significant: those of 2013 and 2026. On 24 April 2013, approximately 1,175 workers lost their lives in the Rana Plaza collapse. Just three months later, the labour law was amended, with changes to 87 provisions.

Thirteen years later, in 2026, another 92 provisions were amended. These changes followed the mass uprising, in which thousands of young people, students, workers and ordinary citizens lost their lives. On 20 November 2025, Bangladesh also ratified ILO Convention 155 on Occupational Safety and Health, Convention 187 on the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health, and Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work. The stated purpose of these reforms was to strengthen workers' rights to life, livelihood and freedom of expression.

I believe these changes would not have been possible at this time without the mass uprising. History shows that collective movements and the loss of lives compel governments to respond and consider new measures. Both the interim government and the democratically elected government that followed acted on the foundations laid by the uprising.

It cannot be denied that the 2026 law represents positive progress in the history of Bangladesh's labour movement, both in protecting workers' rights and in developing the labour sector. However, some provisions and ambiguities in the law could allow the problems underlying the Article 26 complaint to persist, even if the complaint is formally resolved. There is therefore an urgent need to formulate clear and consistent rules, amend existing provisions and, where necessary, enact further legislation.



When workers cannot speak freely or exercise their rights, society as a whole ultimately suffers. VISUAL: **REHNUMA PROSHOON**

Trade union registration must be simplified, labour inspection and labour courts expanded, and effective action taken against unfair labour practices. These measures will work only if workers remain united, vigilant and properly prepared. Without continued collective engagement and struggle, Article 26 may disappear from the formal agenda while the underlying restrictions remain embedded in other conditions.

FOUR PRIORITIES FOR MEANINGFUL REFORM

Workers, employers and the government must now concentrate on the four priorities identified in the roadmap. The following measures deserve particular attention.

1. Labour law reform and democratic rule-making

The priorities should be to amend the law wherever necessary; formulate implementing rules promptly through a democratic and participatory process; ensure that the drafting of laws and rules is free from intimidation and the undue influence of powerful interests; bring the laws governing export processing zones (EPZs) into line with the Labour Act 2026; guarantee the right to form trade unions in EPZs through appropriate legislation; ensure that workers' representatives can lead initiatives concerning workers' welfare in EPZs; and guarantee access to EPZs for the Ministry of Labour and labour inspectors.

2. Simplifying trade union registration and guaranteeing freedom of association

Trade union registration must become straightforward and free from harassment. Applications should be approved, or reasons for rejection communicated, within the statutory limit of 55 days. The registration system should gradually become fully digital, supported by a proper database.

Employers must maintain accurate worker registers and ensure that both the government and workers have access to them. The number of workers should not be verified through misinterpretations of Section 178(2)(a)(5) of the Labour Act, nor should applicants be required to submit unnecessary certificates or additional documents. Since 20 workers constitute the initial requirement for forming a union, the rules should not impose a separate application form that creates further obstacles. Documents submitted during registration, including workers' membership forms under Form 55A, resolution books and voter identification documents, should be returned within a specified period after objections have been resolved. Pre-registration assistance provided by the Department of Labour must become effective.The geographical boundaries for forming unions across groups of establishments should be determined through a simple process and in consultation with workers' representatives. Above all, workers must be able to exercise their right to bargain collectively and effectively with employers in practice, not merely on paper.

3. Expanding labour inspection and labour courts

The number of labour inspectors, labour courts, Department of Labour offices and Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) offices must be increased. Inspectors should receive appropriate training, particularly in identifying workplace hazards and occupational health risks. Labour inspection must be thorough and effective, with transparent and accountable procedures. Cases should be resolved within reasonable timeframes. Services provided by DIFE, the Department of Labour and workers' welfare funds should also be made available online to improve accessibility and accountability.

4. Ending anti-union discrimination, unfair labour practices and violence against workers

Effective measures are needed to prevent discrimination, harassment and other unfair treatment in the workplace. Workers must not be dismissed or punished for forming or joining trade unions. Workers and trade union leaders should receive regular training on their responsibilities, legal rights and available remedies. Such training should be organised both separately and through tripartite initiatives.

Trade union leaders should also be trained to serve as trainers themselves. Awareness and vigilance among workers must be strengthened so that they can quickly identify unfair treatment, rights violations and harassment in the workplace and report these incidents to the appropriate authorities. Workers must also be able to pursue their demands collectively through democratic means.

REFORM MUST GO BEYOND THE LAW

We hope that the tripartite efforts to resolve the Article 26 complaint will succeed and that the reforms will be genuine rather than merely symbolic or confined to paper. The process must go beyond appearances. It must be free from political interference, abuses of power and harassment. Otherwise, laws and rules may exist on paper while workers' rights to life, livelihood and freedom of expression remain unprotected.

The absence of a minimally democratic environment, including freedom of expression and freedom of association, benefits neither workers nor employers nor the government. When workers cannot speak freely or exercise their rights, society as a whole ultimately suffers.

The changes discussed here are essential to improving productivity and enabling Bangladesh's economy to meet the challenges it faces in global markets.

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What we get wrong about the INDO-ISLAMIC WORLD

In conversation with André Wink, a renowned historian of the medieval Indo-Islamic world and professor emeritus of history at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

The Daily Star (TDS): Let us begin with your intellectual journey. What drew you to the study of Indian Islam from such a broad historical perspective, and which intellectual influences shaped your approach?

André Wink (AW): I began my explorations in Indian history as an undergraduate and graduate student in the 1970s and early 1980s. Academic life in the Netherlands was very different then. These decades were a time of great prosperity in comparison with what came before, yet in Dutch academia everything was done on a shoestring and moved slowly; the humanities were mostly a cottage industry. But the Netherlands had still quite recently, and reluctantly, even traumatically, pulled out of its major overseas colony, the so-called Netherlands East Indies. There was still an intense interest in these decades, in Dutch society as a whole, in all things 'Indian', which mostly meant 'East Indian', and in the great era of Dutch/European overseas expansion that had now come to an abrupt end. It provided certain powerful impulses to the academic study of history as well.

At the time, unlike today, I myself was not particularly interested in the Netherlands East Indies, neither in the heroic exploits of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), which ended in bankruptcy, nor in the benevolent despotism of the colonial era, nor in the uniquely ill-executed Dutch-Indonesian decolonisation effort that drew such well-deserved international opprobrium. Instead, I had become interested in the pre-Mongol history of Afghanistan. I had the idea that the Mongol conquests, not the Umayyad or early Abbasid conquests, nor even those of the Ghaznavids or Ghurids, were the most important factor in the conversion to Islam and the social transformation of much of Afghanistan and other parts of Asia.

This was so, I conjectured, because the Mongol conquests were accompanied by widespread devastation and population and animal movements that overturned its antique 'pagan' culture and made possible, or invited, radical transformation. The idea was to an extent counterintuitive because all the medieval Muslim historians that I had read were in agreement that the Mongol conquests were the greatest disaster that ever happened to the Islamic world. However, I saw the Mongol conquests as a kind of medieval world war that changed the direction of social and religious as well as intellectual life, especially in those parts of Muslim-dominated Asia that suffered the most, somewhat in the way the First World War changed that of Europe. I still do, and I have taken up the subject again in the most recent volume of Al-Hind.

But, back then, my plans for further research on this question were thwarted by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. I relocated to western India, where I lived in Mumbai for a while, and taught myself Marathi in order to be able to read and immerse myself in the still-extant eighteenth-century archives and other documentation left behind by the Marathas. The aim was not only to study a major pre-colonial Indian state, but also to become better prepared for the study of the more fragmented medieval source material and, accompanied by extensive linguistic preparation in other relevant languages, eventually return to my original interest in the effects of the Mongol conquests in Afghanistan and elsewhere, and then also approach subsequent Mughal history from that angle.

After I completed a book on the eighteenth-century Maratha Svarajya, I thus moved back in that direction. At some point, I was invited to present an outline of my emerging understanding of the history of the entire 'world region' that I called 'the Indo-Islamic world' and the Arab geographers called 'Al-Hind' at one of the ongoing Cambridge-Delhi-Leiden-Yogyakarta conferences on the comparative history of India and Indonesia. Out of this came my multi-volume book Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World, which begins in late antiquity and will end in about 1800.

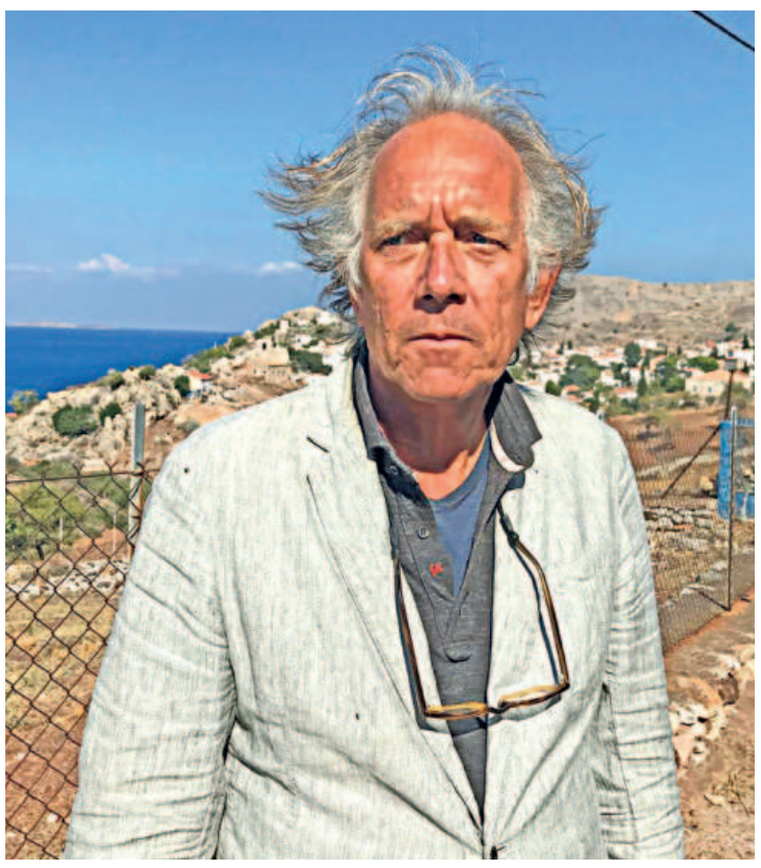
I now live in Greece, where, facilitated by the internet, I am producing the fifth volume (really the sixth, as the fourth volume consists of two sub-volumes), which is taking me back to the eighteenth century. Of course, neither that volume nor any of the other volumes of Al-Hind offers a theological understanding of history. In writing the entire series, I have benefited from innumerable historians and social scientists, as well as linguists and geographers, and many scientists, of the present and the past (including many from the colonial past), but I deal with the theologians only tangentially.

Most important for me has been the understanding offered by almost all pre-modern historians and geographers around the world, most famously by the ancient Greek historian Herodotus (5th century BC) and the North African historian/sociologist Ibn Khaldun (14th–15th century AD), that peoples and their roles in history should be understood within the environments in which they live, not as biological races. This is not to be overdeterministic about it, but rather to reflect a concern with the complementarity of different ecosystems and the historical interplay of peoples with different modes of life.

An entire modern literature of displacement has also been an important source of inspiration to me, including great writers like Joseph Conrad and V. S. Naipaul, and the rare others of similar stature, as well as many of lesser stature.

centuries, authors like Al-Masudi (c. 896–956 AD), Al-Biruni (973–1048), Al-Idrisi (1100–1165), and so on. These authors defined the medieval contours of India with remarkable precision and consistency, and at the same time with openness, as a world region ruled by both Hindu-Buddhist kings and, increasingly, Muslim rulers, extending from an area somewhat to the west of the Indus River and parts of Afghanistan in the west to the farthest recesses of the Malay-Indonesian archipelago in the east.

The essential point is that India embraced both what today we call South Asia and Southeast Asia, as well as much of the Indian Ocean world. This vision was not unique to the Arab geographers. The Ilkhanate historian Wassaf, in the fourteenth century, also speaks of Java as part of the bilād-i-Hind. Albuquerque regarded Aden, Hormuz and Malacca (Melaka) as the three most important cities in India, none of which are in India today.



André Wink

Ottoman documents from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century classify the Sultanate of Aceh, the vilāyat-i-Açi, in North Sumatra as part of India. The Dutch sometimes referred to the East Indies as Hindia. There are countless more illustrations of this. Terms like Bharat, on the other hand, have nothing to do with the Arab/Muslim geographical tradition or European influence, and it is therefore not surprising that contemporary Hindu nationalism uses that term for India rather than Al-Hind.

TDS: Historian A. B. M. Habibullah argued that while Arab merchants laid the foundations of India's earliest Muslim communities, it was the Turks and other Central Asian peoples who transformed Islam into a major political force. Similarly, you write that Central Asia was the principal reservoir of the mobile manpower and military power that enabled Islam to advance in India. Why is Central Asia so crucial to understanding the establishment and expansion of Islam in medieval India? More broadly, how did developments beyond the subcontinent shape the political and religious history of the Indo-Islamic world?

AW: A. B. M. Habibullah (1911–1983) was an important historian in India and later Bangladesh who wrote a seminal book called The Foundation of Muslim Rule in India, which I believe was first published in 1945 and went through many later editions, one of which, I am happy to report, I have in my library here in Athens. I have used it quite a lot. His emphasis on the importance of the Turko-Mongol world for Indian history is the same as mine, as you seem to agree. Might I suggest, in all modesty, that my book is partly an update of Habibullah's work, apart from being an attempt to go far beyond it?

This new emphasis on Central Asia that Habibullah adopted was an important corrective at a time when the Islamic world was still mostly associated with Arabia. The Arabs were, of course, also important in South Asia and Southeast Asia because they played a role in Indian Ocean trade and, whatever we mean exactly by 'Arabs', they were the main actors in the Islamic conquest of Sind. But after the tenth century, the Turko-Mongol world, and the Afghans within it, became far more important, 'the makers of the second Islamic world'. The reasons for this new prominence of the Turko-Mongol world have to do with the military and political institutions of the Central and Inner Asian nomads as developed from early medieval times and subsequently in interaction with an environment that differed widely from Arabia, West Asia and the Mediterranean. Many chapters in some volumes of Al-Hind are devoted to a new interpretation of this long-known process, giving special attention to the environment in which it occurred.

TDS: In your work, you suggest that the 'second Islamic world' in India was more detached from imperial and urban traditions than anywhere else in the 'first Islamic world' of the Arab lands. You argue that the unstable ecological conditions of monsoon India and its distinctive geography played an important role in shaping this outcome. Could you elaborate on how environmental and geographical factors influenced the development of Islam in India?

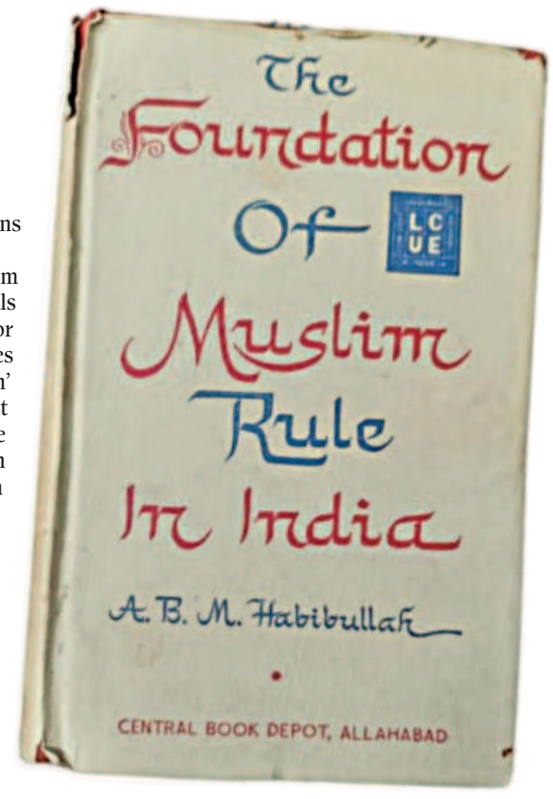
AW: I think there is a dimension of Indian history here that is woefully understudied, although less so in the colonial literature than in more recent scholarship. It is my conviction that, due to the region's geographical conditions, the pre-Islamic heritage of India (in the medieval sense) was radically different from that of Persia and the Mediterranean world, setting it on a different path from the outset. The Umayyad Caliphate emerged at the heart of the ancient world and took over its prodigious urban life. The Indo-Islamic world, as I see it, arose in a region without such an ancient imperial heritage and with no such continuous tradition of urban life.

Some people who heard or read this proposition for the first time initially reacted with scepticism or even disbelief, and, in rare cases, outrage. It is my experience, however, that such people almost without exception overcame their scepticism after reading the many pages I devoted to the subject. The evidence is quite compelling. In any case, I was not trying to provoke anyone and have massively substantiated the argument.

So again, the argument is that the ancient past, the heritage of the ancient past, and the transition from the ancient to the medieval past were entirely different here. Indeed, the 'second Islamic world' was disassociated from imperial and urban traditions to a degree not found anywhere in the 'first Islamic world'. It was largely the geographical factors at work in the unstable environment of monsoon India that thwarted the growth of such traditions.

If the Mediterranean became the most durably and densely urbanised of all major world regions, making 'the city' its pre-eminent analytical historical category, no comparably dense and durable patterns of urban life ever developed in the ecologically unstable environment of the river plains of monsoon India. This was demonstrably the major world region with the most extreme and highest-impact environmental instabilities of all kinds: hydrological, seismic, climatological, meteorological and volcanic, as well as all possible combinations thereof.

Often built from perishable materials rather than stone or brick, Indian cities were more like 'rurban' settlements and subject to a much higher degree of disruption than their Mediterranean counterparts. I call this pattern 'labile rurbanism'. The consequences for the development of the Indo-Islamic world were enormous. To understand the Indo-Islamic world, we have to abandon a cornerstone of Western historiography, which is that the city was the key category of historical development, the phenomenon that defined and propelled civilisations.



Cover of The Foundation of Muslim Rule in India by historian A B M Habibullah. 1976 edition.

TDS: Romila Thapar argues that 'Aryavarta' is a shifting geographical concept: 'In the Vedic texts, it extends from the Doab to about the middle of the Ganges valley. In the Buddhist texts, it moves a little eastwards. In the Jain texts, it moves still further east.' This seems to reflect the gradual eastward expansion of agriculture and settled society. You also write that significant agricultural expansion and the growth of a settled social order did not gain real momentum in India until the early medieval centuries. Could you elaborate on why agriculture spread relatively late to the east of the Indus and why, for a long time, it remained insufficient to sustain large empires? Why did early medieval India emerge as a land of kings, priests, peasant societies and the earliest Hindu temples in rural settings, rather than one dominated by ancient cities?

AW: I think what Professor Thapar has been arguing about the shifting meaning of the concept of Aryavarta is entirely correct and an important contribution among the very many she has made over a long career. I certainly look forward to acquiring a copy of her new intellectual autobiography, to learn about whatever more she has to say about history, including this issue.

I have observed, however, like many others, including Professor Thapar herself, a certain amnesia when it comes to the ancient Indian past. There have been people, like the noted medievalist and Sanskritist Johan Huizinga (1872–1945) in the Netherlands, who had an 'Indological crisis', despaired about the possibilities, or rather the potential, of Indian history, and threw in the towel. I am not one of them. I think such people have, to a large extent, been looking for the wrong thing in the wrong way at the wrong time.

What I mean is this: amnesia is itself a kind of empirical evidence that teaches us something important about the ancient past. In light of this, certain conclusions are possible. I have argued that we have to do more to reconstruct the settlement history and the process of agricultural expansion of the Indian subcontinent and other parts of monsoon Asia from ancient times onwards, building, in effect, on the insights of Professor Thapar and others. This means pulling texts, archaeology and the sciences together.

I have tried to present a rather rough and provisional outline of that momentous process in ancient and medieval times and came to the conclusion that it occurred rather late in comparison with that of the more arid territories to the west. That does not mean there was no agricultural expansion in ancient times. I do believe, however, that in the times of the Mauryas and the Guptas, it had not progressed far enough to sustain genuinely extractive imperial formations such as those we had in Persia and the Mediterranean.

To understand the Indo-Islamic world, we have to abandon a cornerstone of Western historiography, which is that the city was the key category of historical development, the phenomenon that defined and propelled civilisations.

Correspondingly, I regard these ancient empires, for the most part, as forms of ritual sovereignty rather than counterparts to the highly militaristic and centralised Persian or Roman empires. The earliest genuine empires of that kind do not emerge in India until early medieval times: the Gurjara-Pratiharas and other such proto-Rajput formations, the Rashtrakutas, Palas, Colas, and so on. The reason for this relative lateness is the simple fact that the monsoon lands were more difficult to clear because of the wetter climate, and demographic growth was much slower here. This is also the reason that the Neolithic Revolution of India occurred in the Indus Valley and not, for example, in Bengal.

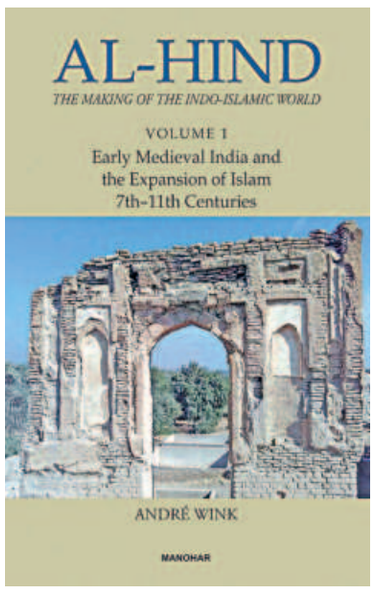
TDS: You note that the entire Indo-Islamic period formed part of a much broader phase of Islamic expansion and hegemony across the East. You also argue that one of its defining features was the growth of an Indian Ocean world economy, with India at its centre and the Middle East and China as its two dynamic poles. Could you elaborate on this larger economic system? How did the Indian Ocean world compare with medieval Europe's Mediterranean economy and the wider world of Christendom? In what ways were these two interconnected worlds similar or different in terms of trade, political power and cultural exchange?

AW: It is important to acknowledge, even if it seems rather obvious, that the Indo-Islamic world was open-ended. That it was connected to the rest of the world. Its historical development was not only one of Islamic expansion (through trade, migration, conquest, conversion and whatever other means). Europe and Africa played a role in it at all times, as did China. It was connected in all sorts of important ways to the Mediterranean world, already in Roman times, and even more so in the medieval period through Egypt and numerous other combined land-and-sea routes, as also in the early modern centuries, even after the opening up of the sea route from Europe to India and China.

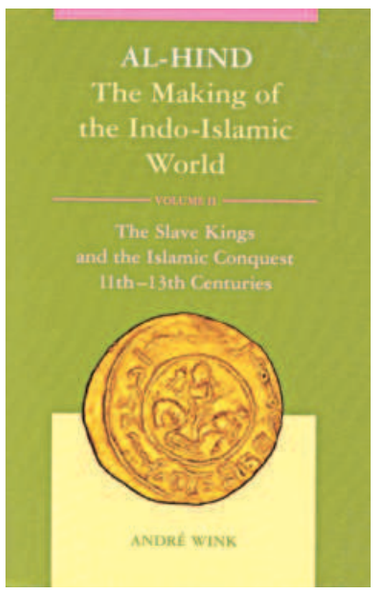
But it is one of the myths of Indian history that the Indian Ocean was a zone of 'peaceful navigation' and that it was the Portuguese who introduced 'the Mediterranean pattern of armed trade' here. This myth has been propagated by K. M. Panikkar, Fernand Braudel, K. N. Chaudhuri and virtually all other historians of Indian Ocean trade until fairly recently. In the light of new research by myself and others, I don't think this is tenable any longer.

To be sure, the Mediterranean has historically been a violent arena in which imperialism, politics, religion, war, trade, slavery and piracy were closely intertwined. But it was no different in the Indian Ocean. From one end to the other, slave-raiding, seaborne attack, naval escorts and patrols by warships, armed merchant vessels, the enforcement of sea and port blockades, protection rackets, piracy, taxes on maritime trade, coercive economic diplomacy, religious propaganda, enforced tribute payments, port rights, militarily enforced monopolies of shipbuilding, salvage rights, customary claims of maritime sovereignty against rivals – all these practices and more prevailed throughout the Indian Ocean for many centuries before and after the arrival of the Portuguese. Like the nomadic frontier to the north and west of the subcontinent, prior to the nineteenth century the maritime frontier was always a violent and lawless frontier of mobile wealth.

The interview was taken by **Priyam Paul.**



Cover of Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World by historian André Wink. Volume 1, 1991 edition.



Cover of Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World by historian André Wink. Volume 2, 1997 edition.

TDS: Could you explain how the ideas of Bharat or India were shaped in the Islamic intellectual tradition? Romila Thapar argues that al-Hind, which came into common use from around the twelfth century onwards, referred to all the lands beyond the Indus as viewed from West Asia. You also write that 'Muslims first defined India as a civilisation, set it apart conceptually, and drew its boundaries', particularly in the *'ajā'ib al-Hind* tradition. To what extent was this conception of India shaped by the expansion of Islam itself, and to what extent by political, commercial and intellectual interactions between South Asia and the wider Islamic world?

AW: Anyone who studies history will have to come to terms with the fact that for many centuries, and indeed millennia, the world was not divided into nation-states as it is today. The modern nation-state of India is something very different from historical India, or, let's say, India as it was understood in ancient, medieval and early modern times. My understanding of the meaning of Al-Hind, the socio-geographical term which I adopted as the title of one of my books, is mainly derived from the Arab geographers of the eighth to fifteenth



DURGA PUJA
grows into a retail season

Local brands are building dedicated Puja collections and banks report a spending surge



SUKANTA HALDER *and* **DIPAN NANDY**

Amid the shopping rush in Dhaka's Mirpur-10, Bina Roy is thinking mostly about the journey ahead. She has come with her daughter and son to buy clothes and gifts for her parents, sisters, brothers-in-law, nieces, nephews, cousins and in-laws. She has already been to New Market twice and ordered some items.

Her family usually celebrates Puja at her father-in-law's home in Shahjadpur upazila, Sirajganj, or at their own home in Shewrapara, Dhaka. This year they will go to her parents' home in Harina Bagbati, Sirajganj Sadar. Her two sisters live in different districts, and their children study elsewhere. After several rounds of phone calls, they fixed a date when everyone could be together. For Bina, Puja is much more than a festival of new clothes. "It is a chance to return home," she says.

This year's Durga Puja will be celebrated from October 16 to 21, with extended government holidays running from October 20 to 24.

Such journeys feed a seasonal spending pattern that has grown in recent years. Hindus make up about 8 percent of Bangladesh's population, according to the 2022 census, and Durga Puja is the country's fourth-largest festival. It now sits alongside Pahela Baishakh and the two Eids as a broader cultural occasion.

While there is no official data, industry insiders estimate that the two Eids account for about 70 percent of annual festival sales, Puja for about 10 percent, and Pahela Baishakh and other occasions make up much of the rest.

Shopping starts about a week before the festival and continues for at least a few days after it begins. Shopkeepers say sarees and salwar-kameez are the biggest draws, particularly katan, silk, embroidered and Jamdani sarees. Imitation jewellery shops at New Market report brisk sales of bangles, necklaces and rings. A significant share of products sold in the season is still imported.

Soumik Das, chief executive of Rang Bangladesh, says the Puja market once relied heavily on imports, but that dependence has declined sharply. A significant share of shoppers now wait specifically for locally made festival clothes, he says, and Puja has become a major retail season needing dedicated preparation, like Eid and Pahela Baishakh. The brand began producing limited Puja collections around 2005, and a strong market had emerged by 2009-10. Sales have since grown 15 to 20 percent a year, and the company now plans a 45-day selling window.

Sajjad Hossain, online sales executive at Cats Eye, says the brand has run Puja campaigns since its early years in its nearly 46 years in fashion. Customer response compares favourably with the two Eids and Pahela Baishakh, he says. Formal shirts remain the main sales driver, with smart casuals and panjabis also drawing interest.

Azharul Hoque Azad, president of the Fashion Entrepreneurs Association of Bangladesh, said it was difficult to estimate the overall increase in retail sales.

"Sales have not been significant so far this year. There are still a few days left, so sales should improve during that time," he said.

Azad also said it was difficult to compare this year's sales with those of the last two years.

"The situation is not the same now," he said.

For that reason, he added, it is too early to say how this year will ultimately compare with the previous two.

At footwear giant Apex, the festival matters far less. A senior company official says Puja has been part of its annual marketing for many years, and the brand runs a campaign each year, displaying Puja-themed materials in stores that focus on festive messaging, product availability and presentation. But Puja contributes only 1 to 2 percent of sales, well below Eid.

Some customers complete their Puja shopping during Eid, particularly when discounts are on offer, he noted.

The jewellery trade tells a similar story. Enamul Haque Khan, president of the Bangladesh Jewellers' Association, says gold was once gifted mainly at weddings and birthdays but is now also exchanged at Eid, Pahela Baishakh and Puja. Even so, Puja accounts for only a small share of annual sales. Sharp rises in gold prices have priced out many ordinary buyers, leaving purchases to upper-middle and upper-income groups.







Shoppers browse through a variety of clothing and accessories at Bashundhara City Shopping Complex in the capital as preparations for the upcoming Durga Puja gather pace. PHOTOS: **MEHEDI HASAN**

Food businesses report mixed effects. Mahbubur Rahman Bokul, head of Bangladesh operations at Ontario-based Premium Sweets, says the two Eids generate more sales than Pahela Baishakh, while Puja has a relatively limited effect. Pahela Baishakh is celebrated across religious communities, he says, whereas Eid has a broader commercial impact because Bangladesh is Muslim-majority.

The company receives few customers during the festival, though some visit on Dashami. Corporate gifting has also declined, he says.

OLD DHAKA'S TRADE

Part of the festival's economy sits outside the retail chains. In Shankhari Bazar in Old Dhaka, shoppers crowded the shops on both sides of the narrow street during a visit on October 4. Much of the buying is for the deities rather than for people: conch bangles, conch shells, vermilion, crowns, garlands, bells, pots and lamps. Sarees and ornaments for the goddesses Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati sell for between Tk 700 and Tk 20,000, depending on quality.

Sudip Sarkar, owner of Sajghar, says there is always a rush for idol decoration supplies before Mahalaya, and this year is no exception. Sarees imported from India for the deities are in high demand and almost sold out, he says, and wholesalers from across the country are buying them. Light shopping continues all year, but sales rise significantly during Puja.

Decorative lamps are a highlight. Artisans have laid out Shangkha Pradip, Padma Pradip and Mayur Pradip designs. Suman of Sur Brothers and his assistants were applying final coats of paint. The lamps, which burn before the deities, especially on Vijaya Dashami, sell for Tk 40 to Tk 200 depending on colour and design.

Shivabrata De, who travelled from Keraniganj via Babubazar, was buying conch bangles, vermilion, alta and a saree. "Puja is our biggest festival," he says. The idol will be decorated with these items on Mahalaya, and he plans another day or two of shopping for the family afterwards.

Dipankar Sur, owner of the clothing and cosmetics store Aashirbad, says the Puja mood is already evident but "anxiety still lingers among people" for various reasons, and sales have not yet picked up fully. He expects them to rise after Mahalaya on October 10.

For some businesses, Puja is the main event. Ananya, an e-commerce platform, formally expanded in 2020 to sell traditional naru, a coconut sweet. Chief Executive Joytirmoy Chaki says his in-laws have long experience of making it and the company wanted to bring that taste to a wider market. In its first Puja season, it relied on Facebook groups rather than formal marketing. Orders grew gradually, and volumes and operations expanded steadily in 2021.

He said they sold 200kg of naru in 2020. Last year, they sold 500kg. The company has set a significantly higher target this year.

He said usually 15 to 20 women work to make the naru, but during Puja that number rises to 40.

PAYMENTS, HOTELS AND TRAVEL

Banks and mobile financial services report a clear seasonal lift. Mahia Juned, additional managing director at City Bank, says transactions rise significantly in the weeks before Puja, as customers spend more on retail, dining, travel and lifestyle. In last year's Puja campaign, the bank recorded about 30 percent growth in transaction volume and 27 percent growth in transaction numbers against a regular period.

In a similar tone, an official of Mutual Trust Bank, seeking anonymity, said the bank sees a seasonal increase in the weeks leading up to Durga Puja. "Card transaction volumes could rise by around 10 percent compared with a normal month during the upcoming Puja season."

The bank expects spending to grow gradually as the festival approaches, particularly across clothing, jewellery, dining and travel.

"The pre-Puja period typically sees consumers increase purchases of new clothes and accessories, while spending on dining and leisure activities also rises during the festival," said the official.

Travel-related expenditure is also expected to increase as many people use the Puja holiday to visit family or take short trips, the official noted. Among the major spending categories, clothing is expected to record the strongest growth, followed by jewellery, food and dining, and travel.

"Also, we have observed that customers perform wedding shopping during this time due to the upcoming wedding season in the winter," said the banker.

Shamsuddin Haider Dalim, head of corporate communications at bKash, says festivals prompt people to buy new clothes, eat out, travel home and exchange gifts. Consumers spend on clothing, electronics, transport tickets, hotels and food, he says, and easier payment services have increased digital transactions. During the Puja season, bKash is offering more than Tk 8,000 in cashback and discounts at over 40,000 physical and online shops until October 31.

Hotels expect a seasonal surge. Zafren Reza, reservation executive at DuSai Resort & Spa, says room inquiries typically begin about a month before Puja, with occupancy well above normal. All 85 rooms have sold out in recent years, and a five-day holiday this year should keep occupancy strong.

Raxy Dominic Gomez, senior manager for marketing and sales at Mermaid Beach Resort, says the extended holiday should attract more guests. Schools and colleges are closed during the festival, boosting family travel, and better train services and a wider choice of flights mean two- or three-day breaks are now enough for many people to travel.

Niloy Kumar Biswas, executive director of tour operator Bengal Vista Tours, says demand rises significantly even among people with only a couple of days off. The longer holiday should generate stronger interest, with Nepal, Thailand and the Maldives being popular destinations. Nepal and the Maldives are particularly attractive because they require no prior visa. India remains an option, but getting a visa has become difficult. Travel demand is strong, he says, but remains below Eid levels.