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

KSRM
শেকড় থেকে শিখরে

REGD. NO. DA 781 | VOL. XXXVI NO. 255 | ASHWIN 25, 1433 BS | www.thedailystar.net | RABIUS SANI 28, 1448 HIJRI | 16 PAGES: TK 15.00

WR1 | THE FADING ECHOES OF JATRA
WR2 | ARE WE POISONING OUR FOOD IN THE NAME OF PRODUCTIVITY?
WR3 | WHAT WE GET WRONG ABOUT THE INDO-ISLAMIC WORLD
WR4 | DURGA PUJA GROWS INTO A RETAIL SEASON

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

SEE PAGE 9 COL 3

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