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.

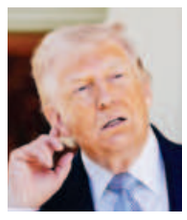
But for the most part, life goes on. You can roam around Salimullah Road, hang out near Town Hall, grab street food, visit Tokyo Square, and live your day without constantly checking over your shoulder.

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

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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.