





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