DHAKA SUNDAY OCTOBER 18, 2026



Unfortunately, the lifting of [US] sanctions [on Russia] will continue. I believe the 'diesel deal' is just the first step.

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY
Ukrainian president

YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW

The Daily Star

SECOND EDITION



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Ashikul Islam, *right,* holds Nila, the wife of his maternal uncle-in-law Masud, as they sit in wheelchairs at Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital yesterday. Masud, *centre,* holding a water bottle, is also among three family members who survived the deadly fire at Tup Tup Resort in Inani yesterday morning. Six of the nine-member family who were at the resort remain missing or are feared dead. PHOTO: MOKAMMEL SHUVO

At least 10 killed as blaze rips through Inani resort

'Six of a family' among the dead; the fire department flagged the place as 'hazardous' months ago

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Cox's Bazar*

At least 10 people were killed when a fire burnt down the three-storey Tup Tup Resto & Resort in the Patuartek area near Inani Beach in Cox's Bazar yesterday morning.

The fire broke out around 6:30am. Two units from the Ukhiya Fire Service Station, about 20km away, were alerted at 7:25am and reached the scene at 8:00am. The blaze was completely extinguished by 11:00am, according to the fire service.

Cox's Bazar Fire Service Deputy Assistant Director Syed Mohammad Morshed Hossain told The Daily Star that six bodies were found initially, followed by four more in a bathroom.

The rescue operation ended around 2:40pm, with no more bodies believed to remain inside, he said.



The bodies were handed over to police, but severe burns made identification difficult.

Cox's Bazar Superintendent of Police ANM Sajedur Rahman said the extent of the burns could make it difficult even to determine the victims' sex and age. Authorities would examine available records

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

'If had a minute or two, I could've saved my wife'

Survivor recounts escape as 6 family members feared dead

MOKAMMEL SHUVO, *Cox's Bazar*

Ashikul Islam's wife, Israt Jahan Maliha, woke him up early yesterday morning as the couple and her family prepared to leave Tup Tup Resort in Cox's Bazar's Inani.

She then went to the other rooms to wake the rest of the family, while Ashikul remained in bed.

That was the last time he saw her.

About 10 minutes later, Ashikul heard a commotion outside and stepped out of their room, only to find flames engulfing the resort.

"As soon as I opened the door and stepped out, I felt the heat of the flames on my face. Within moments, smoke filled the room. The fire outside was terrifying. Our room was on the first floor, and I somehow managed to break a window and jump out."

The fire had broken out at the resort around 6:30am.

Two Fire Service units brought it under control by 8:15am. Fire Service officials said 10 bodies were recovered from the scene.

Ashikul had travelled from Dhaka to Cox's Bazar with nine members of his wife's family for a holiday. They arrived on

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

Nearly half of families in debt

Finds govt survey on standard of living for pay commission

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

As many as 47.42 percent of households across Bangladesh have fallen into debt for soaring living expenses against stagnant earnings, with rural families hit harder than city dwellers, according to a special survey by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) at the request of the National Pay Commission.

Over the past year, 51.91 percent households in rural areas, 40.19 percent in urban areas and 32.11 percent in city corporation areas were forced to borrow to cover basic living expenses, found the Living Standard Survey 2025 conducted by BBS's Poverty and Livelihood Statistics Cell.

The average national monthly household income stood at Tk 33,513, while the average national monthly expenses amounted to Tk 35,311, the survey found.

It found the average national monthly household income stood at Tk 33,513, while the average national monthly expenses amounted to Tk 35,311.

City corporation areas recorded the highest average monthly expenses of Tk 46,778, followed by urban areas (Tk 37,344) and rural areas (Tk 32,532).

At the national level, monthly expenses are split evenly between food and non-food items, but it diverges by region. Rural areas spend more on food, while urban areas spend more on non-food items. Non-food expenses account for 56.7 percent of city corporation households' monthly expenses.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 5

Slain journalist warned SP of threat to life



"...They are waiting on the road with two firearms. One of them is a 9mm pistol, and they have five bullets. They are waiting to shoot me when I leave..."

- ALIF FAKIR
told police super around 11 months ago

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Netrokona*

"I am sitting here with you right now, but I have received a message saying they are waiting on the road with two firearms. One of them is a 9mm pistol, and they have five bullets. They are waiting to shoot me when I leave. But I am not going that way today."

These were the words of Netrokona journalist Lutfozzaman Fakir, also known as Alif Fakir, 44, who warned the district's superintendent of police about threats to his life on November 30, 2025, nearly 11 months ago.

Alif was the Netrokona correspondent for private IPTV channel Ruposhi Bangla. He also ran a Facebook page called "Detective Article", where he regularly published investigative reports on local crime, drug peddling, smuggling and corruption.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

Arms-brandishing Ishraque's anti-drug drive stirs outrage

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Videos showing State Minister for Liberation War Affairs Ishraque Hossain carrying a firearm while chasing several people during what he described as an "anti-drug operation" in Gandaria in his constituency have drawn intense scrutiny.



After Ishraque uploaded the videos to his verified Facebook page around 5:15pm yesterday, netizens questioned the display of firearms, taking the law into one's own hands, and confidence in the police.

In a video captioned "Ishraque's action: Drug dens demolished, dealers handed over to police", the minister and several others were seen getting out of a vehicle and chasing a group of people.

Ishraque and another individual were carrying firearms. Parts of the firearm were blurred in one of the videos.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4



Prime Minister Tarique Rahman points to a toilet during a surprise visit to Kuwait Bangladesh Friendship Government Hospital in Uttara yesterday. He also visited several other hospitals and educational institutions in Dhaka to assess the dengue situation and cleanliness activities. PHOTO: PMO

PM makes 13 surprise visits, urges cleanliness

UNB, *Dhaka*

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman yesterday made surprise visits to 13 locations across Dhaka, including hospitals, educational institutions and government residential quarters to assess the quality of public services, cleanliness and overall management.

Starting at 9:10am, he visited different areas of Dhaka until 1:41pm, speaking to officials and examining cleanliness, service quality and overall management at various facilities, according to his press wing.

He first visited Kuwait-Bangladesh Friendship Government Hospital in Uttara, followed by Rajuk Uttara Model College and Mirpur Cantonment Public School and College.

He then visited the National Heart Foundation

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

Dhaka seeks details from Riyadh over execution of 2

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Bangladesh has sought detailed information from Saudi Arabia about the execution of two Bangladeshi nationals, as neither the foreign ministry nor the Bangladesh mission there was notified beforehand, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shama Obaed Islam said yesterday.

"There is no doubt that Bangladesh enjoys good relations with Saudi Arabia, especially since the new government took office," she said, adding that Dhaka was awaiting details from Riyadh.

Asked whether Saudi Arabia had

SEE PAGE 9 COL 2



A fruit seller in Moghbazar has installed solar panels to meet his shop's electricity needs, demonstrating how individuals can turn to renewable energy as an alternative. The photo was taken yesterday. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Bangladesh gets first woman chief information commissioner

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Prof Nahreen Islam Khan of Jahangirnagar University has been appointed the country's first woman chief information commissioner (CIC).

The president appointed the professor of the Department of Geography and Environment as CIC, while journalists SAM Mahfuzur Rahman, currently working as speech writer of Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, and Khan Mohammad Abul Hossain, assistant editor of the Daily Dinkal, were appointed information commissioners.

Asked for comments on her appointment as the first female chief information commissioner, Nahreen Khan told The Daily Star yesterday, "Every initiative will be taken by this institution to protect the citizens' right to know as the owners of the state. At the same time, I thank everyone concerned for considering me worthy of heading one of the country's most important institutions."

The appointments were made under Section 15(1) of the Right to Information Act, 2009, according to two separate notifications issued by the Press-2 branch of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting yesterday.

At least 10 killed

FROM PAGE 1

and other identifying features to establish their identities.

Deputy Commissioner Md Abdul Mannan of Cox's Bazar said a five-member committee had been formed to investigate the incident. DNA samples would be collected from the bodies and matched against samples from relatives before they were handed over to the families.

Seven people were taken to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital with burn injuries. Two were discharged after initial treatment, while five remained hospitalised, said Resident Medical Officer Sabuktagin Mahmud.

"One of the patients is in a critical condition and will be referred elsewhere," he told The Daily Star. The injured had burns covering around five percent of their bodies, he added.

The resort, beside Cox's Bazar-Teknaf Marine Drive about 40km from Cox's Bazar town, was built with concrete, wood, bamboo and tin.

One side had a brick wall, while much of the remaining structure was made of combustible materials. Staff quarters were on the ground floor.

The second floor had eight rooms, and all rooms at the resort were booked on Friday night, according to information available at the scene.

The resort had been operating without a fire safety licence despite receiving an official warning four months ago, the Fire Service and Civil Defence said.

At a press briefing at the fire service headquarters in Dhaka, its Director General Brig Gen Sultanul Afreen Junaid said an inspector had visited the resort in June and served a notice on June 11, declaring the building "hazardous".

"They [resort authorities] paid little heed to the warning and kept the business running," he said, adding that the resort was effectively operating without permission.

Fire service officials at the scene said the resort had faulty documentation, lacked adequate fire extinguishers, and had no proper firefighting arrangements.

Abdullah, a next-door neighbour, said his sister woke him around 7:00am and told him that the building was on fire.

When he went outside, he saw flames coming from the kitchen area. The reception was beside the kitchen, and the only staircase leading to the upper floors was nearby, he said.

"The fire spread within moments and flames shot into the sky. The entire resort was engulfed and burnt down in a short time. By the time the fire service arrived, much of the damage had already been done," he said.

Some people escaped by breaking windows and jumping out, while others found their way out of the burning building, he added.

Dr Shihab Uddin, a physician at Mugda Medical College Hospital, and his wife, Nafisa Newar Khan, were among those staying at the resort.

Shihab said they were asleep when heavy smoke woke them. When they tried to leave, they found the front section engulfed in flames, blocking their way out.

They managed to escape by jumping from a rear balcony, he said. Both suffered burns to their feet, but doctors told them their conditions were not critical.

Locals, Border Guard Bangladesh members and police joined firefighters in the rescue operation.

6 FAMILY MEMBERS 'MISSING'

Relatives said six members of the same family were missing.

Police and administration officials suspect they were among those killed in the fire and are yet to be identified.

The missing family members are Isra Jahan Maliha, 28, daughter of retired government official Mamunur Rashid and a resident of Dhaka's Banasree area; her sister Layla Jahan Nabila, 26, from Khilgaon; their cousin Milita Mehzabin Alvi, 23; another cousin, Fariha Kabir, 33; Fariha's five-year-old child, Faizan Ahmed; and Fariha's brother, Nafis Te Hami, 26.

Ashikur Ashikul Islam, Maliha's husband, who survived the incident, said they had checked into the resort on Thursday and were scheduled to return to Dhaka yesterday.

Nafis is a student of Dhaka University's Chinese language and culture department from the 2020-21 academic session. Nabila studies at Jagannath University, while Alvi goes to East West University.

Two women who requested anonymity at the hospital said that they had been staying at the resort with a third friend. They had gone out for a morning walk, but their friend, Nasrin Akter Mukta, 28, was still inside the resort and could not escape.

Further details about other people who remained missing were not immediately available.

Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister M Rashiduzzaman Millat expressed sorrow over the deaths and offered condolences to the bereaved families in a statement.

He urged the authorities concerned to continue searching for missing people, investigate the cause of the fire, and take steps to ensure tourists' safety.

He also directed the Bangladesh Tourism Board to send a team to the scene to assess the situation, determine the extent of the damage, and assist tourists affected by the incident.

'If had a minute or two, I could've saved my wife'

FROM PAGE 1

Thursday morning (October 15) and were scheduled to leave for Dhaka at 10:00am yesterday.

One family member, however, had left Cox's Bazar the previous night, leaving nine at the resort when the fire broke out. Of them, Ashikul and two others escaped, while the remaining six, including Maliha, are missing and feared dead.

The other two survivors, Maliha's maternal uncle Masud and his wife Nila, also received treatment at Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital. All three were flown to Dhaka in the evening.

The three were among at least nine survivors this correspondent saw at the hospital following the fire.

Fire Service officials said the recovered bodies could not be identified because they were severely burnt.

At the hospital, Ashikul repeatedly broke down in tears as he recounted his ordeal.

"If I had stayed there for even one more minute, I would have suffocated to death ... If only I had had another minute or two, I could have rescued my wife."

The six missing family members are Maliha, 28; her sisters, Layla Jahan Nabila, 26, and Fariha Kabir, 33; Fariha's five-year-old son, Faizan Ahmed; and Maliha's cousins, Milita Mehzabin Alvi, 23, and Md Nafis Tehami, 26.

Ashikul said Fariha's husband, Ifti, had left for Chuadanga the previous night.

Around 2:00pm yesterday, Cox's Bazar Deputy Commissioner A Mannan visited the injured at Sadar Hospital, where Ashikul provided details of his missing family members.

The DC said DNA samples were being taken from the recovered bodies, which would be handed over to their families once their identities were confirmed by matching the samples with those of relatives.

"However, as the identification process is still underway, we cannot immediately confirm whether any of the six missing family members are among the recovered bodies," he added.

Abdul Ahad Sarkar, a Jagannath University student and a relative of the family, said six of the nine family members staying at the resort had died, while three were injured.

"One brother-in-law had already returned last night. Of the remaining nine who were there, six [presumably] died and three were injured," Ahad said.

Nabila had studied chemistry at Jagannath University, while Tehami was studying Chinese language and culture at Dhaka University's Institute of Modern Languages.

DU Vice-Chancellor Prof ABM Obaidul Islam expressed deep sorrow over the deaths and called for the cause of the fire to be determined and those responsible brought to justice. He said the university would also provide necessary assistance to the bereaved family.

(Our DU and JnU correspondents contributed to this report.)

PM makes 13 surprise visits

FROM PAGE 1

of Bangladesh at Mirpur, Paikpara Staff Quarters and Government Bangla College.

Tarique later inspected Bangladesh Shishu Hospital and Institute and Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College and Hospital at Agargaon.

He also visited his alma mater Dhaka Residential Model College, where he addressed students and urged them to help build a clean Bangladesh and plant more trees.

Tarique subsequently visited Dhanmondi Government Boys' High School, Kalabagan Staff Quarters and Azimpur Government Officers' and Employees' Residential Quarters.

Expressing dissatisfaction with poor cleanliness and management at several locations, he gave the authorities concerned two weeks to improve cleanliness at the Azimpur government quarters.

Earlier, during his visit to Kuwait-Bangladesh Friendship Government Hospital, he gave the authorities seven days to improve the hospital's environment and cleanliness arrangements.

During his visit to Bangladesh Shishu Hospital and Institute, Tarique found Associate Professor Dr Rafiqul Islam smoking in his untidy room and immediately instructed the hospital chairman to take action against the doctor. Rafiqul was subsequently suspended.

He also visited a footpath freed from hawkers at Mirpur-10.

Dhaka North City Corporation Administrator Shafiqul Islam Khan Milton was present during the visit.

Throughout the surprise inspections, Tarique spoke to officials, students and members of the public, stressing the need for responsible action by the authorities concerned to improve public services, maintain cleanliness and protect public health.

3 of a family among 5 killed as truck rams auto-rickshaw



PHOTO: COLLECTED

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Lalmonirhat*

Five people, including three of a family, were killed when a paddy-laden truck rammed into a battery-run auto-rickshaw in Roumari upazila of Kurigram yesterday afternoon.

The victims are Lipi Begum, 32, her children Rishad Islam, 12, and Tuba Akter, 7, of Chotlakanda village in Char Shoulmari union, Lipi's sister Sharifa Begum, 42, of Kartimari Bazar, and the auto-rickshaw driver, whose identity could not be known immediately, said police.

The accident occurred near Sayedabad Bazar on the Roumari-Dhaka highway around 2:30pm.

Sharifa's daughter, Brishti Khatun, 25, was critically injured and referred to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.

A witness, Mofizul Islam, said the truck hit the auto-rickshaw at a high speed, flinging the passengers on the road. Three people died at the scene, while two children died on their way to hospital.

Mohammad Nabiul Islam, resident medical officer at Roumari Upazila Health Complex, confirmed that five people had died and one critically injured person had been referred to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.

Kausar Ali, officer-in-charge of Roumari Police Station, said the auto-rickshaw was travelling towards Kartimari when the truck, coming from the opposite direction, hit it.

Assistant Superintendent of Police Russel Kabir said the truck driver and helper fled after the accident. Police seized the truck and were examining its documents.

The accident disrupted traffic on the highway for nearly two and a half hours. Traffic returned to normal after 5:00pm.

Slain journalist warned SP of threat to life

FROM PAGE 1

A video of the exchange between Alif and the SP was obtained by this correspondent, who attended the meeting.

In the presence of fellow journalists, whom he asked to bear witness, Alif described threats from armed criminals and expressed fears of an attack.

His fears ultimately came true.

Around 8:00pm on Thursday (October 15), unidentified assailants shot him dead as he was returning from a tea stall near his in-laws' house in the Telanjia area of Netrokona's Durgapur upazila.

Md Tarikul Islam took charge as Netrokona's superintendent of police on November 29, 2025. The following day, he met journalists from across the district at his office.

In the video, Alif is seen describing threats to his life and urging action against armed criminal gangs operating in the border upazilas of Durgapur and Kalmakanda.

"I report on organised crime, and my colleagues in this district will certainly attest to that. I cover notorious armed gangs operating here, from drug trafficking to other criminal activities."

He warned that law and order could deteriorate without effective action. "These organised gangs will wreak havoc in your district. Whether it is crude bombs, explosives or drugs, they are involved in it all."

Alif also said he had been assisting law enforcement agencies by providing information about criminals.

Frustrated by the lack of action and fearing for his safety, he said, "I am saying this in front of everyone, with them as witnesses. If these accused persons are not arrested, I will either have to leave the country or become a bigger criminal than them. Now, you have to make that decision."

When the SP asked whether police had failed to arrest the criminals or had been unable to do so, Alif replied, "There has been no attempt whatsoever to arrest them."

He also explained that although his ancestral home was in Kalmakanda upazila, he had been living with his wife and child at his in-laws' house in Durgapur after marrying a woman from an ethnic minority community.

He also feared for the safety of his in-laws and other family members. "They could set fire to this indigenous family's houses at any time. They threatened to do so yesterday [November 29, 2025] but failed. Today, perhaps because I am not there, they may try again. This could trigger communal violence in the area."

Alif's warnings have now resurfaced, raising questions about what steps were taken to protect him. However, investigators have yet to establish whether the armed gangs he mentioned were linked to his killing.

Earlier, on November 10 last year, assailants hacked and injured Alif near Teribazar ghat on the Someshwari River in Durgapur upazila. They also threatened a colleague of his with a weapon and chased him when he tried to intervene.

'HE LAST MET ME ON OCT 5'

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, Netrokona Superintendent of Police Tarikul Islam said Alif had met Alif 10 days before his killing.

"He last met me on October 5. He gave me the names of several people and said they were planning a major operation along the border and needed my cooperation. I assured him of my support.

"He regularly provided me with information, so I did not ask about his sources. That was my last meeting with him. When I heard about his killing on October 15, I was shocked to the core."

Asked what steps police had taken to protect Alif after he reported threats to his life, the SP said, "When he told me about the threats at the meeting, I instructed the officer-in-charge of Durgapur Police Station to ensure his security at all times. I also asked Alif to inform us whenever he felt unsafe. But he did not report any further security concerns."

Asked about the armed gangs Alif had mentioned, Tarikul said, "He [Alif] did not tell me about all the gangs, but he mentioned a young man named Emon. We arrested Emon and sent him to court, but he has since been released on bail. He is a charge-sheeted accused in a case and remains on our list of suspects. We are still looking for him."

Asked about the investigation, the SP said, "It was a targeted killing, which is why the investigation is taking time. I am doing my best. We have some leads on the perpetrators and have formed an investigation committee. I hope we will get results very soon."

GROUPS CONDEMN KILLING

The Quick Response Support Team (QRS) and the Human Rights Support Society (HRSS) have condemned Alif's killing, demanding a prompt, impartial investigation and scrutiny of why earlier threats to his safety were not adequately addressed.

QRS, a platform of journalists, civil society representatives and academics, began operating on January 1, 2026, to monitor, document and respond to threats to journalists' safety.

In separate statements issued yesterday, both groups noted that Alif had been attacked and critically injured on November 10, 2025, over his journalism.

Calling the murder a grave blow to press freedom and the rule of law, QRS said police had acknowledged the earlier attack and the threats to his safety.

"When a journalist who has reportedly faced previous attacks is killed, the authorities must establish not only who committed the crime, but also whether earlier threats were adequately addressed," it said, adding that any failure by law enforcers to act on known risks must be examined as part of the investigation.

HRSS called for an impartial inquiry into any possible link between the November 2025 attack and Alif's killing, as well as the steps authorities took if he had previously sought protection.

Both groups urged the government and the home ministry to immediately arrest those responsible for planning and carrying out the murder.

They also demanded adequate security, legal aid and compensation for Alif's family and witnesses, along with a coordinated mechanism to assess risks and protect journalists covering crime and corruption nationwide.

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INTO THE MYSTIC

Baul artistes perform songs of Fakir Lalon Shah at Zainul Udyan in Mymensingh city yesterday, marking the mystic poet's 136th death anniversary. Organised by Samaj Rupantar Sanskritik Sangha, the programme, titled "Manush Bhajle", celebrated Lalon's musical legacy and philosophy. Similar programmes were held across the country, including in Kushtia, Pirojpur and Manikganj.

PHOTO: **COLLECTED**

IN FOCUS

50 hurt as RMG workers, police clash in Uttara

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 50 people, including 18 police personnel, were injured in a clash between garment workers and law enforcers in Dhaka's Uttara yesterday.

The clash ensued around 11:30am near Rajlakshmi as police charged batons and used sound grenades and water cannons to disperse workers attempting to block the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway for the fifth consecutive day, demanding higher wages and payment of arrears.

Locals said workers from garment factories in Uttarkhan and Dakshinkhan areas began gathering around 10:00am at several locations, including Kasaibari, Jamtala, Azampur railway gate and the Holy Mill intersection near Jasimuddin, before assembling on Road 13 in Sector 4.

The workers hurled brickbats at policemen, triggering the clash with chase and counter-chase for nearly an hour.

After being dispersed from the Rajlakshmi area, some protesters vandalised a vehicle belonging to the Industrial Police in Sector 4, and also assaulted an Industrial Police constable.

Several workers, requesting anonymity, said at least 30 workers sustained injuries.



SCREENGRAB

The clash ensued around 11:30am near Rajlakshmi as police charged batons and used water cannons to disperse workers attempting to block the highway for the fifth consecutive day, demanding higher wages.

Rezaul Karim, deputy commissioner (Uttara Division) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said police initially tried to persuade the demonstrators to leave the road, but the situation escalated as the workers attacked law enforcers.

"Around 17 to 18 policemen were injured, including an Industrial Police constable who suffered a broken hand," he said.

Rezaul said that while the government was working to form a wage board and had already constituted a committee regarding the wage issues, workers from a few factories in Uttara were repeatedly blocking roads, causing public suffering.

He also claimed that workers from one particular factory, owned by an Awami League leader, made up the majority of the protesters.

Sadikur Rahman, assistant commissioner of the Industrial Police, said the motorcycle of an assistant superintendent of police (ASP) was vandalised by protesters.

"They also assaulted a constable who had no involvement in the incident," he said, adding that legal steps were underway.

'Judge Farrukh Ahmad by his poetry, not politics'

Say speakers at 33rd edition of Star Itihas Adda

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Poet Farrukh Ahmad has often been judged through the lens of his political identity, with his literary contributions overlooked, said speakers at an event yesterday.

They called for assessing his literary works, evolving ideas and personal identity beyond such biases.

They made the remarks at the 33rd edition of The Daily Star Itihas Adda, titled, "Farrukh Ahmad Amid Political Changes", held at The Daily Star Centre in the capital.

They said dismissing a poet's work because of his political beliefs or portraying him solely as a representative of a particular ideology would be unfair to his legacy.

Poet Zakir Abu Zafar said Farrukh's literary strength had been overlooked because of assessments based on his political identity. "When a nation weighs its art, literature, poetry and poets on political scales, it can never become a civilised nation," he said.



PHOTO: **STAR**

Participants at the 33rd edition of The Daily Star Itihash Adda, held at The Daily Star Centre yesterday.

Highlighting the language, imagery and humanist outlook of Farrukh's poetry, Zakir said, "Farrukh Ahmad has not endured merely because of his ideology. He has endured because of his words, his message and his imagery. He is a humanist, a poet of universal humanism."

Referring to the relevance of Farrukh's poetry after the July uprising, he said, "When we read Farrukh Ahmad's poetry, it sometimes feels as though these poems were written after the July revolution."

Poet, essayist and art critic Sakhawat Tipu said judging a poet solely by political identity made it difficult to appreciate the significance of his language, imagination and aesthetics.

Referring to Farrukh's love for Bangla and his role in the Language Movement, Sakhawat said the poet should not be confined to a single political or religious identity.

Khorshed Alam, professor of Bangla at Jahangirnagar University, highlighted the influence of Arab-Persian traditions, Bangla folk literature and humanist thought on the poet's work.

Referring to "Sat Sagorer Majhi" (The Sailor of the Seven Seas), which he said had attained classical status, Prof Khorshed said, "This Bangladesh will rediscover Farrukh Ahmad."

Farrukh Ahmad's son, Syed Wahiduzzaman, said his father always wrote for people, keeping marginalised communities at the centre of his thoughts.

The poet was mentored by politician, journalist and writer Abul Mansur Ahmad, he said.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

Bangladesh economy caught in 'structural trap'

Rising poverty, household debt, stagnant investment threaten growth, says PPRC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh's economy is trapped in a cycle of household distress, stagnant investment and weak governance, undermining sustainable growth, according to a new analysis by the Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC).

The think tank said breaking the cycle requires deep institutional reforms rather than a focus on headline growth targets.

Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairman of PPRC, and Namira Shameem, a senior research associate, presented the findings yesterday at the launch of a publication titled, "State of the Real Economy: Dynamics of Reversals and Resilience in Bangladesh".

"This is not a temporary economic downturn. The economy is caught in a deep structural trap, and breaking out of this trap is the biggest challenge," Zillur Rahman said.

He said economic challenges went beyond rising poverty, as households faced greater financial vulnerability, inadequate savings and growing debt.

Poverty, which had been declining, is rising again, while the middle class is becoming increasingly fragile, he said.

"The issue is no longer just the poverty rate. We must now consider the dimension of vulnerability, particularly the lack of buffers between household income and expenditure."

The PPRC survey found that 27.93 percent of the population lived below the upper poverty line in May 2025, while extreme poverty stood at 9.35 percent. Another 17.97 percent of households were vulnerable to falling into poverty.

In 2022, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics reported poverty at 18.7 percent and extreme poverty at 5.6 percent.

The PPRC survey found that 27.93 percent of the population lived below the upper poverty line in May 2025, while extreme poverty stood at 9.35 percent. Another 17.97 percent of households were vulnerable to falling into poverty.

Household debt also exceeded average savings by 44.6 percent. Among the poorest 10 percent, average debt stood at Tk 62,767, against savings of Tk 19,737, the survey found.

Zillur Rahman said job insecurity, inadequate

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4



Workers sort discarded plastic items by colour and quality at a recycling facility in Khulna's Lata Mor area yesterday. Collected from different locations, the plastic waste is sorted, cleaned and processed for reuse as raw materials to manufacture new products.

PHOTO: **HABIBUR RAHMAN**

Another beef feast at JnU

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *JnU*

A beef feast was organised at Jagannath University for a second consecutive day yesterday, with the university unit of Bangladesh Khelafat Chhatra Majlis hosting the event under the banner of a "harmony feast".

Organisers slaughtered a cow on the road between the vice-chancellor's building and the mathematics department in the morning. Beef tehari was distributed in front of the Central Shaheed Minar from 3:30pm to 5:30pm, alongside a scheduled evening qawwali programme.

Students paid Tk 40 each to register for the feast. The organisers said they had bought the cow for Tk 85,000 and made arrangements to serve around 600 students.

Obaidul Islam, member secretary of the JnU unit of Bangladesh Khelafat Chhatra Majlis, said disagreements among students over a recent campus incident, along with

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

Measles outbreak worsens across Chattogram

Over 10,000 cases reported, 39 dead so far

ARUN BIKASH DEY, *Chattogram*

The measles outbreak in Chattogram continues to worsen, with the number of cases reaching 10,073 yesterday and hospitals struggling to cope with the influx of patients.

Since the outbreak began in mid-March, 39 people have died from measles and measles-like symptoms, while 9,749 patients have recovered and returned home, according to the Chattogram Civil Surgeon's Office.

In the 24 hours till yesterday morning, two suspected measles deaths and 38 hospitalisations were recorded in the district.

"The measles situation in Chattogram is difficult to bring under control at the moment. A large number of patients continue to be hospitalised with measles symptoms. We are genuinely worried," said Divisional Health Director Sheikh Fazle Rabbi.

Chattogram Medical College Hospital is particularly overwhelmed, with patients more than double its designated capacity for treating measles and similar symptoms.



People being treated on the floor of the CMCH due to the influx of measles patients. PHOTO: STAR

The hospital has a 50-bed measles unit, 15 beds in the Paediatric ICU and 16 in the isolation ward.

During a visit yesterday, three children were seen sharing one bed, while many others were being treated on the floor.

Akbar Hossain from Halishahar said his two-and-a-half-year-old son had been receiving treatment on the hospital floor for five days due to a shortage of beds.

Prof Dr Mohammed Musa, head of CMCH's Pediatric Health Department, said 157 children were receiving treatment in the measles block and another 10 in the ICU.

Around 25-30 new patients were arriving daily, he added.

CMCH Director Brig Gen Taslim Uddin said overcrowding and inadequate space were making it increasingly difficult to prevent cross-infection.

Health officials have identified nine high-risk wards in the port city: Jalalabad, Chandgaon, North Pahartali, Lalkhan Bazar, East Bakalia, Alkaran, South-Central Halishahar, South Halishahar and North Patenga.

Dr Kamrun Nahar, associate professor of Pediatric Health at CMCH, recommended raising routine measles vaccination coverage above 95 percent and reviewing the national immunisation schedule to consider administering MR vaccines at six months.

She also called for vaccinating women aged 15-45 to strengthen maternal immunity, improving hospital infection control through rapid patient screening, isolation and ventilation, strengthening child nutrition programmes, ensuring regular Vitamin A supplementation and introducing laboratory-backed outbreak surveillance.

Bandarban NCP leader held in rape case, sent to jail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Bandarban*

A leader of Bandarban district committee of National Citizen Party (NCP) has been arrested in a rape case and sent to jail following a court order.

Police arrested Shoi Kya Ching Marma, 55, a joint convener of the committee, on Friday night, hours after a 43-year-old woman filed the case against him with Bandarban Sadar Police Station around 10:00pm.

Shoi Kya Ching is a resident of Bandarban Sadar upazila.

Kamrul Islam, an investigation officer at Bandarban Sadar Police Station, said police launched an operation following the complaint. Ching was arrested from his residence, the official added.

District NCP Convener Mongsa Pra Prue Chowdhury said appropriate action would be taken against Ching in line with the party's constitution and decisions of the central leadership.

7 more die of dengue, 1,872 get hospitalised

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Seven more dengue patients died and 1,872 others were hospitalised in the 24 hours till yesterday morning.

Of the deaths, three were reported in Dhaka division, three in Dhaka city and one in Mymensingh division, according to the Directorate General of Health Services.

With the latest fatalities, the country's dengue death toll rose to 342, while the total number of cases reached 1,10,312.

Currently, 5,771 dengue patients are receiving treatment at hospitals across the country.

Prime accused in Satkhira mob killing arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police last night arrested the prime accused in the murder of Wahiduzzaman Shamim, who was beaten to death by a mob over allegations of hurting religious sentiments in Satkhira's Debhata upazila.

Fazlul Haque Amini, was detained during a joint drive by police and the SRB at a relative's house in the Krishnanagar area of Kaliganj upazila, Satkhira SP Abu Saleh Md Ashraful Alam told The Daily Star.

Shamim was beaten in two separate attacks on October 13, including at Debhata Upazila Health Complex, where police had taken him after rescuing him from the first assault.

His elder brother, Md Abdul Jalil, filed a murder case with Debhata police on Thursday, naming 10 people, including Amini, a local leader of the self-proclaimed "Tawhidi Janata", and 200 to 250 unidentified suspects.

Police earlier arrested Mukter Hossain Khan, 53, and Asadul Islam Molla, 46, the fifth and sixth accused in the case. A court later sent them to jail.

According to Shamim's family and the case statement, an audio recording of a conversation between Shamim and his wife over a family dispute circulated locally, triggering allegations that he had made derogatory remarks hurting religious sentiments.

Shamim's younger brother, Tausif Rahman Sagar, said Amini went live on Facebook on October 13, alleging blasphemy and calling on people to gather.

Soon afterwards, a mob attacked Shamim outside a village doctor's chamber in Kulia, where he had been taken for treatment after allegedly attempting suicide by ingesting poison.

Police took him to Debhata Upazila Health Complex. Around 9:00pm, another mob attacked him inside the facility in the presence of police officers. He was later declared dead at Satkhira Medical College Hospital on arrival.

Shamim's family said he had mental health problems.

Renata PLC.
Corporate Headquarters: Plot # 1, Milk Vita Road
Section-7, Mirpur, Dhaka-1216, Bangladesh.
Website: www.renata-ltd.com

PRICE SENSITIVE INFORMATION

This is to inform our valued Shareholders that, the Board of Directors in its 242nd Meeting held on Saturday, October 17, 2026 at 2.30 pm has decided, declared and recommended in regard to 53rd Annual General Meeting of the Shareholders of Renata PLC. for the year ended June 30, 2026 as follows :

1. Recommended Dividend : Cash Dividend : @ 55%

		2025-26 Taka	2024-25 Taka
2. Net Profit (in million)	:	3409	2,003
3. EPS	:	29.72	17.46
4. Net Profit-Consolidated (in million)	:	3643	2,221
5. EPS-Consolidated	:	31.76	19.36
6. Net Asset Value (NAV) Per Share	:	322.95	301.11
7. Net Asset Value (NAV) Per Share-Consolidated	:	329.19	305.49
8. Net Operating Cash Flows Per Share (NOCFPS)	:	48.35	38.61
9. Net Operating Cash Flows Per Share (NOCFPS) -Consolidated	:	49.88	41.16

10. Date & Time of 53rd AGM : **Saturday, December 19, 2026 at 11.30 am**
11. Venue of 53rd AGM : Using Digital Platform
12. Record Date : **Sunday, November 15, 2026** (The shareholders, whose names would appear as shareholders in the Register of Members on the Record Date, shall be entitled to receive the Dividend, if approved as above).

By order of the Board
Md. Jubayer Alam
Company Secretary

Dated: October 17, 2026

Notes:

- Shareholders are requested to check and update their BOID's e-mail address, mobile number and Bank A/c details along with Routing Number to get Dividend online through BEFTN system.
- In Compliance with the BSEC Notification No.BSEC/CMRRCD/2006-158/208/Admin/81 dated 20 June 2018, Annual Report 2025-2026 will be duly sent in soft form to the respective shareholders e-mail addresses available in their Beneficial Owner (BO) Accounts maintained with the DP. These will also be available in Company's website: www.renata-ltd.com
- Pursuant to Section 117 of the Income Tax Act, 2023 (as amended by the Finance Act, 2026), Tax Deducted at Source (TDS) on dividend disbursements will apply at 15% for individual shareholders and 20% for non-individual shareholders (including companies, institutions, and legal entities).

Office of the Director Planning and Development
University Of Barishal
Kamakhati, Barishal Sader, Barishal
☎0431-2177765, Email:directoreplanning@bu.ac.bd,web: www.bu.ac.bd

Memo No:BU/PORI OH UNNAH/MONI.DR./EGP TENDR/2026-27/125-30 Date:18/10/2026

Invitation for e-Tender (OTM)

e-Tenders is invited in the National e-GP system portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of the following goods under the Revenue Budget of University of Barishal.

SL No.	Tender/ Proposal ID No.	Invitation Reference No.	Name of works	Tendering Method	Tender/ Proposal Publication & Opening Date and Time	Tender/ Proposal Document last selling & Security Submission Date and Time
01	1351587	BU/PORI OH UNNAH/MONI.DR./EGP TENDR/2026-27/125	Supply of 19 types of stationery items for Barishal University	OTM	18-Oct-2026 09:00 & 28-Oct-2026 15:00	28-Oct-2026 12:00 & 28-Oct-2026 14:00

This is an online tender, where only e-Tenders 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 system portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender document from the National e-GP System portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank's branches.
Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

(Md. Humayun Kabir)
Director,
Planning and Development Office,
University of Barishal,
E-mail : hkabirbslbd1999@gmail.com,
Mobile Number: 01781334070

GD-2533

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Ministry of Home Affairs
Bangladesh Coast Guard West Zone
Digraj, Mongla, Bagerhat

INVITATION FOR TENDER

Invitation for Tender no- 44.08.0158.300.08.150.26.86 dated 17 Oct 2026

e-Tender Notice

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the following procurement:

e-Tender ID No	Description of Package	Method	Online Publication Date & Time	Last Selling Date & Time	Closing & Opening Date & Time
1356347	Repair of General Broadcast System (SRE) at BCG Base Mongla	OTM	18-Oct-2026 05:25	28-Oct-2026 05:25	28-Oct-2026 08:00

This is an online Tender, where only e-Tenders 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 System Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) is required.
The fees for downloading the e-Tender Documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered Bank Branches.
Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gpv.bd).

Staff Officer (Electrical)
For Zonal Commander West Zone
Bangladesh Coast Guard

GD-2531

PRAYER TIMING
OCTOBER 18

	Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN	4-50	12-45	4-00	5-38	7-15
JAMAAT	5-25	1-15	4-15	5-41	7-45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

ফ্ল্যাট বিক্রয়
জরুরী ভিত্তিতে গুলশানে ও বনানীতে ছোট/বড় কয়েকটি ফ্ল্যাট বিক্রয় করা হবে। প্রকৃত ক্রেতাগন যোগাযোগ করুন। মোবা: ০১৭৩২-১৯৫২৮৪

FACULTY SEARCH: SPRING 2027

NORTH SOUTH UNIVERSITY
Center of Excellence in Higher Education
The First Private University in Bangladesh

FACULTY POSITION

Applications are invited for faculty member positions in the following areas:

SCHOOL OF BUSINESS & ECONOMICS (SBE)
- Accounting (PhD only)
- Finance (PhD only)
- Business Analytics (PhD only)
- AI in Business (PhD only)
- Business Intelligence (PhD only)
- Management Information System (PhD only)
- Supply Chain Management (PhD only)
- Operations Management (PhD only)
- Engineering Management (PhD only)
- Operations Research (PhD only)
- International Business (PhD only)

SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING & PHYSICAL SCIENCES (SEPS)
- Computer Science and Engineering (Theoretical Computer Science, Software and Systems)
- Mathematics/Computational Mathematics/Computational Science
- Financial Mathematics/Applied Mathematics
- Actuarial Mathematics
- Mathematics for Data Science and Machine Learning
- HPC for Applied Mathematics with Data Science
- Statistics/Applied Statistics/Computational Statistics (PhD only)

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES (SHSS)
- Law (PhD only)
- English Linguistics (PhD only)
- History (Bangladesh History and World Civilization) (PhD only)

SCHOOL OF HEALTH & LIFE SCIENCES (SHLS)
- Epidemiology
- Biostatistics
- Microbiology

Required Qualifications: Candidates will be considered eligible if they have obtained their degrees from globally reputed universities. A Master's degree is required for Lecturer and Senior Lecturer positions, while a Ph.D. or higher qualification is required for Assistant Professor and above positions. Please note that only shortlisted candidates will be contacted.

Benefits: NSU offers a comprehensive benefits package that includes 50% house rent allowance based on the basic salary, medical allowance, festival bonuses, leave encashment, transport allowance, gratuity, provident fund, and insurance coverage. Salary packages are negotiable for outstanding candidates.

Application Process: Interested applicants are requested to visit the NSU website and submit their applications by the deadline of **November 01, 2026**, through the following link for faculty positions in the relevant academic field or area. **Link: https://jobs.northsouth.edu/**

QS WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS ASIA 2026 Ranked #149
QS WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS #901-950 in QS World University Rankings 2027
THE World University Rankings 2027 Times Higher Education NSU Joint 1st in Bangladesh RANKED #801-1000

Vice-Chancellor
NORTH SOUTH UNIVERSITY
Bashundhara, Dhaka-1229
www.northsouth.edu

Invitation to Bid (ITB) for Reagents and Lab Supplies

Tender Ref. No. icddr,b/SCM/OTM/971/2026 **Date: 18th October, 2026**

icddr,b invites renowned Reagents and Lab Supplies manufacturers and their authorized Agent/Distributor to participate in the bidding process for supply of Reagents and Lab Supplies under Fixed Rate **Long Term Agreement** for 02 (Two) Years.

Interested bidders can download the ITB Documents from the below web Link:
https://www.icddrb.org/tender-notices

Pre-Bid meeting will be held on **27th October, 2026** at 11:00 AM BST through Microsoft Teams. Interested bidders should notify icddr,b about their interest for participating in the pre-bid session through email **[iasraful@icddrb.org]** within **26th October, 2026**. Please mention 'Bid reference' and 'Interested in Pre-bid Participation' in the email subject.

Tender submission: Tenderers shall submit both the Technical Offer and Financial Offer through the following channels: **Physical or Email** submission as detailing in ITB. Bid must be received not later than **08th November, 2026**; 2:00 PM BST. Bid opening session will not be conducted as a Public Opening.

icddr,b reserves the right to accept or reject all/part bids without assigning any reason whatsoever. This ITB invitation will also form a part of the contract and will be binding upon the bidder.

icddr,b

Senior Manager
Supply Chain Management

Tarique Rahman's Japan visit

Turning trust into tangible gains

ZILLUR RAHMAN

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman should arrive in Tokyo with a clear message: Bangladesh is ready to become a dependable economic and strategic partner for Japan. But goodwill alone will not be enough. He must show what Bangladesh can offer, how it intends to protect investment and why Japan should place greater confidence in its future.

The reported four-day visit, beginning on October 26, is expected to focus on economic cooperation, investment and a possible arrangement for Bangladeshi workers. These are promising areas, but negotiations are not achievements. The visit should produce practical commitments that both countries can follow through on.

Japan has been one of Bangladesh's most trusted development partners. Its contributions to infrastructure development have been substantial. The challenge now is to build on that relationship through stronger trade, industrial investment, skilled employment and maritime cooperation.

The partnership has a long history. Japan recognised Bangladesh in February 1972, and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman visited Tokyo the following year. President Ziaur Rahman visited in 1978 and 1980. An air services agreement and the first bilateral meeting on commerce and economic cooperation in 1980 showed that relations were moving beyond diplomatic goodwill.

Begum Khaleda Zia's visits in 1994 and 2005 carried this engagement forward. The 2002 technical cooperation agreement provided an institutional framework, while her July 2005 talks with Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi gave the relationship a wider economic and strategic direction. Their joint statement recognised Bangladesh as a bridge between South and East Asia and placed Japan within Dhaka's "Look East" diplomacy. Investment, technology, training and good governance were already priorities. Two decades later, the question is how much Bangladesh has delivered on them.

The 2014 comprehensive partnership and the 2023 strategic partnership deepened cooperation in infrastructure, connectivity and economic security. Tarique Rahman inherits these commitments, along with the responsibility to make them work. Relations with Japan must remain a national priority, not a political possession that changes hands with each government.

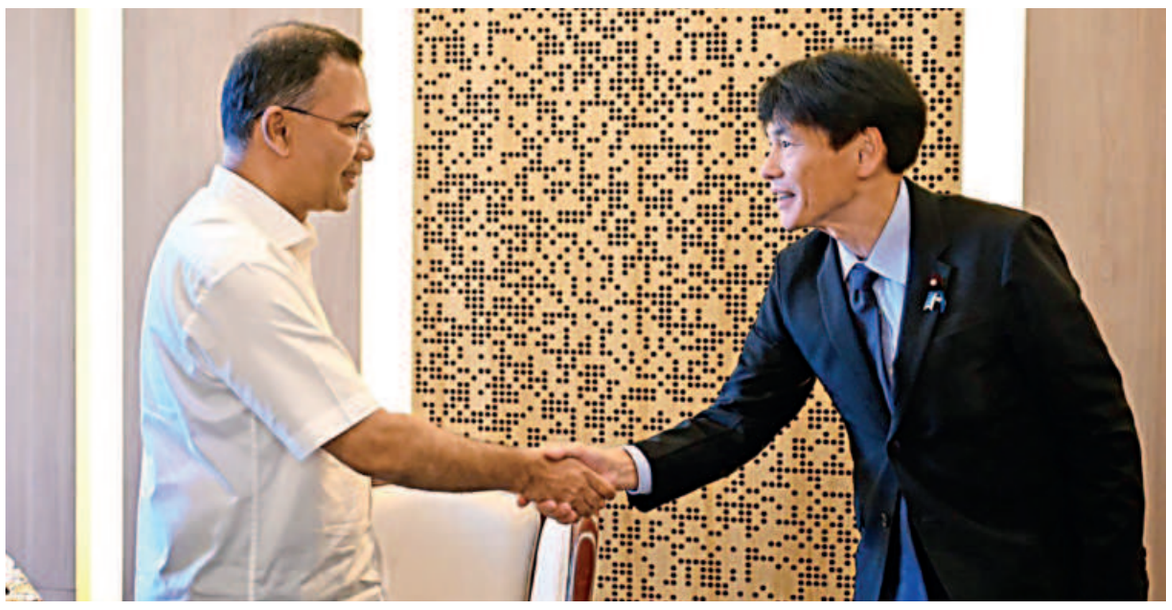
Bangladesh offers more than a need for development assistance. It has a sizeable domestic market, a growing industrial base and a strategic position on the Bay of Bengal. Japan wants reliable supply chains, commercial opportunities and secure maritime routes. Dhaka should understand these interests and negotiate from a position of confidence.

Matarbari's deep-sea port and the Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt, or BIG-B, illustrate the possibilities. Together, they could strengthen logistics, energy and industrial connectivity, including links with India's northeast.

Yet geography does not guarantee success. A modern port is of limited value without efficient customs, dependable transport, competitive charges and industries that generate cargo. Bangladesh has spent too many years celebrating ambitious projects before asking whether they will deliver. Matarbari must not become another example. The government should be clear about the costs, deadlines and benefits, particularly when regional connectivity is involved.

The immediate trade priority is the Economic Partnership Agreement signed on February 6, 2026, Bangladesh's first. Covering far more than tariffs, it includes customs, services, investment, electronic commerce, procurement, labour and environmental provisions. The Tokyo visit should help turn this agreement into something businesses can use. That will require administrative preparation, clear rules and support for exporters.

With Bangladesh scheduled to graduate from least developed country status on November 24, 2026, although it has requested an extension, preparation is urgent. Whatever happens to the timetable, the country cannot depend indefinitely on preferential market access.



Prime Minister Tarique Rahman meets a Japanese delegation led by Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Shimada Tomaki at the Prime Minister's Office on July 1, 2026. Discussions covered key issues, including the energy crisis, airport terminal development and Rohingya repatriation. PHOTO: PMO

Japanese assistance with product testing, certification and supplier development could help Bangladeshi firms meet demanding international standards. Footwear, processed foods, light engineering and technology services deserve attention alongside garments.

Investment is another area where opportunity and frustration coexist. Japan's foreign ministry recorded 338 Japanese companies operating in Bangladesh as of October 2025. A JETRO survey presented in March 2026 found that 56.9 per cent of surveyed firms planned to expand within one or two years.

That interest is encouraging, but investors will judge Bangladesh by their everyday experience. Delayed approvals, inconsistent tax decisions, unreliable utilities and difficulties in resolving disputes can undermine even attractive investment prospects.

The Japanese-backed economic zone at Araihazar should become a working example of how Bangladesh can do better. Businesses need predictable services, published deadlines and effective grievance mechanisms. Routine problems should not require intervention from the highest levels of government.

Financial discipline matters equally. JICA's June 2026 emergency support agreement offers up to ¥50 billion for economic resilience and a stable energy supply, with a published annual interest rate of 3.05 per cent. Such financing can help, but every commitment must be assessed against its economic benefits, repayment obligations and currency risks.

Bangladesh cannot afford projects that look impressive at inauguration but become costly burdens afterwards. Transparent procurement, timely completion and sound financial management are essential. Energy cooperation should also place greater weight on efficiency, grid reliability and renewables rather than creating further dependence on imported fuels.

Employment cooperation could produce some of the visit's most direct benefits. Japan needs skilled workers, and Bangladesh has young people seeking opportunities. But sending workers abroad is not simply a matter of signing an agreement.

Language proficiency, technical training and recognised qualifications must match employers' needs. Recruitment costs should be reasonable, contracts should be understandable and workers should be protected against exploitation. Success should be measured by actual placements, wages and working conditions, not ambitious recruitment announcements.

Security cooperation is also growing. The defence equipment and technology transfer agreement signed on February 3, 2026, established a framework for future transfers. Japan's handover of five patrol boats in July under its Official Security Assistance programme added a practical maritime dimension.

Bangladesh should focus on surveillance, search and rescue, disaster response, training and maintenance. It must also preserve strategic flexibility. Japan is a US ally, while Bangladesh has important relationships with India, China and others. Cooperation with one partner need not come at the expense of another. Sovereignty, international law and independent decision-making should remain the guiding principles.

The Rohingya crisis also deserves attention. In March 2026, Japan announced ¥2.57 billion in additional assistance for refugees and host communities. Bangladesh should seek continued humanitarian support and stronger diplomatic engagement towards safe, voluntary and dignified repatriation. Instability across the border threatens the very regional connectivity both countries hope to develop.

Nor should Bangladesh forget the seven Japanese citizens killed in the July 2016 terrorist attack while working on preparations for Dhaka's mass transit development. Japan continued supporting Bangladesh afterwards. Protecting foreign professionals and everyone working for the country's development is an obligation that goes beyond diplomacy.

A successful visit should leave behind more than a joint declaration. Bangladesh needs a clear plan to implement the Economic Partnership Agreement, firm infrastructure deadlines, specific reforms to improve the investment climate, a credible worker recruitment system and concrete commitments on maritime and humanitarian cooperation.

Ultimately, the harder test lies at home. The 2005 joint statement recognised the importance of governance to investment. That lesson remains unfinished. Predictable rules, credible courts, accountable institutions and respect for contracts will attract lasting Japanese investment more than repeated assurances in Tokyo.

Tarique Rahman has an opportunity to build on a relationship nurtured by successive generations of leaders. Japan's trust is a national asset. The visit should honour that history, but its success will be judged by something more immediate: better jobs, stronger businesses and lasting opportunities for Bangladeshis.

Zillur Rahman *is a political analyst and President of the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS). He hosts Tritiyo Matra on Channel i and writes on geopolitics, strategic affairs and governance. Follow him on X: @zillur.*

How can Bangladesh maximise the gains from free trade agreements?

SELIM RAIHAN

Bangladesh's trade policy has entered a different phase. For decades, the country could expand exports without making reciprocal trade agreements a central part of its strategy. LDC-specific preferences gave Bangladeshi exporters favourable access to several major markets, particularly in Europe, while the country retained considerable protection at home. That arrangement supported export growth, especially in ready-made garments. But it cannot provide the basis for Bangladesh's trade strategy indefinitely. As preferential advantages associated with LDC status diminish and competitors secure better market access through bilateral and regional agreements, Bangladesh has little option but to become much more active in negotiating FTAs and economic partnership agreements.

The case for doing so is strong. Bangladesh remains heavily dependent on exports of ready-made garments and on a relatively small number of markets. At the same time, the international trading environment is increasingly being shaped by preferential agreements. Vietnam already enjoys preferential access to the European Union through its FTA, while India and other competitors have been pursuing agreements with major trading partners. If Bangladesh remains outside this process, its exporters could find themselves competing on increasingly unequal terms.

FTAs should, therefore, no longer be seen as an optional addition to Bangladesh's trade policy. They are becoming an important instrument for preserving market access, opening new markets, attracting investment and integrating Bangladeshi firms into regional and global value chains. They can also reduce the cost of imported intermediate and capital goods, which matters for an economy seeking to diversify beyond garments. The issue is not whether Bangladesh should pursue FTAs. It should. The more difficult questions concern which agreements should receive priority, how they should be negotiated and what domestic changes are required to make them effective.

This distinction matters because FTAs are reciprocal. Bangladesh will seek better access to partner markets, but it must also offer concessions at home. Exporters can gain from lower foreign tariffs and cheaper imported inputs. Consumers may benefit from greater competition and lower prices. At the same time, some domestic industries will face stronger import competition, and the government may lose tariff revenue. A successful FTA strategy must recognise these adjustment costs rather than use them as an argument for avoiding liberalisation.

Different trade and economic modelling exercises suggest that bilateral and regional trade agreements can generate gains in exports, output and welfare for Bangladesh. Deeper regional integration can also create opportunities through larger markets, investment and participation in supply chains. But the gains vary considerably across agreements and sectors. Some arrangements can strengthen Bangladesh's existing comparative advantage in garments, while others may create opportunities in processed food, pharmaceuticals, services or other manufacturing activities.

This is where the design of the FTA strategy becomes important. Bangladesh has been trying to diversify exports for decades, with limited success. FTAs can support that objective, but diversification will not happen automatically. If new market access mainly expands garment exports, aggregate exports may rise without significantly changing the structure of the economy. Negotiators, therefore, need to look beyond the immediate interests of existing exporters and consider where future export capacity can develop.

The trade and economic modelling evidence also points to a broader lesson. Domestic reforms can generate substantial and more widely distributed gains, and they can increase the benefits obtained from trade agreements. This should not be interpreted as a choice between FTAs and domestic reform. Bangladesh needs both. Indeed, the stronger case for FTAs is precisely that they can provide an external anchor for reforms that the country already needs.

The tariff regime is a good example. Bangladesh continues to maintain relatively high levels of protection through customs duties, supplementary duties and regulatory duties. This has benefited firms producing for the domestic market, but it has also raised the cost of imported inputs and created an anti-export bias. The RMG industry largely overcame this problem through bonded warehouse facilities. Many potential exporters outside the garment sector have not enjoyed comparable access to duty-free inputs.

FTA negotiations can create pressure for gradual tariff rationalisation. That would be beneficial if it is properly sequenced. Firms that have invested under a highly protected regime cannot be expected to adjust overnight. Some sectors will need time to restructure, invest in technology and improve productivity. But transition periods should be used for adjustment, not simply to postpone it. Protection that continues without a credible path towards greater competitiveness ultimately raises costs for consumers and export-oriented firms.



FILE PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

As Bangladesh pursues free trade agreements, improving port efficiency, customs procedures and trade infrastructure will be essential to reducing costs and strengthening the competitiveness of its exporters.

There is also a fiscal constraint. Import-related taxes remain an important source of government revenue because Bangladesh's domestic tax mobilisation is exceptionally weak. Lower tariffs under FTAs will, therefore, have revenue implications. This is another reason to accelerate tax reform.

Bangladesh cannot pursue deeper trade integration indefinitely while maintaining a revenue system heavily dependent on imports. Stronger VAT administration, a broader direct tax base and fewer discretionary exemptions will be necessary. Otherwise, the fiscal cost of tariff liberalisation will eventually appear elsewhere, through higher taxes, greater borrowing or reduced public spending. Trade reform and domestic resource mobilisation, therefore, have to proceed together.

Institutional capacity presents another challenge. Modern FTAs are no longer mainly about tariffs. They cover services, investment, intellectual property, digital trade, standards, rules of origin, public procurement and dispute settlement. Negotiating these issues requires lawyers, economists, sector specialists and regulators capable of assessing both the opportunities and the obligations created by an agreement.

Bangladesh's negotiating capacity remains relatively thin and fragmented across ministries and agencies. This needs to change quickly. As the country negotiates more agreements, it requires a permanent, professional FTA negotiating unit with expertise in trade law, economics, sectoral analysis and regulatory issues. Negotiations should be supported by economic modelling, sector-level assessments and systematic consultation. Institutional memory is equally important. Bangladesh should not have to rebuild its negotiating knowledge whenever discussions with a new partner begin.

Private-sector consultation also needs to become more structured. Large exporters, importers, protected domestic industries, SMEs and emerging exporters do not necessarily share the same interests. Well-organised business groups naturally have greater access to policymakers, but an FTA strategy cannot simply reflect the demands of the most influential sectors. Negotiators need to identify potential new exporters, sectors likely to face adjustment pressures and areas where market access could stimulate investment.

Trade defence capacity must develop alongside liberalisation. Greater openness can expose domestic producers to import surges or unfair trade practices. Bangladesh has anti-dumping, countervailing and safeguard instruments, but the institutional capacity to use them remains limited. Strengthening these mechanisms is not inconsistent with an open trade regime. On the contrary, credible and rules-based trade defence can make liberalisation more sustainable by giving firms legitimate remedies when unfair competition occurs.

The ability to use preferential access is just as important as negotiating it. A zero tariff offers little benefit if Bangladeshi exporters cannot satisfy rules of origin, technical standards, sanitary requirements or environmental and labour regulations. These requirements are becoming more demanding in major markets. Larger RMG exporters may be able to absorb the compliance costs. Smaller firms in agro-processing, leather, light engineering and other potential export sectors often cannot.

Investment in testing laboratories, certification, customs modernisation and standards infrastructure should, therefore, be treated as part of the FTA strategy itself. Otherwise, preferential access may disproportionately benefit firms that are already established exporters, while new exporters remain unable to enter international markets.

Bangladesh also needs a clear national FTA roadmap. This should not be a catalogue of countries with which the government hopes to sign agreements. Potential partners should be assessed according to market access gains, investment opportunities, diversification potential, import competition, fiscal implications and Bangladesh's readiness to implement commitments. Recently signed economic partnership agreements with Japan and South Korea, potential agreements with India and China, engagement with GCC economies and possible participation in wider regional arrangements such as RCEP offer different opportunities and require different approaches.

Sequencing will matter. Bangladesh should move decisively on FTAs, but speed should not be confused with success. Some agreements can provide valuable experience with higher-standard trade rules. Others offer much larger markets but also greater competitive pressures. Regional integration can open access to supply chains that Bangladesh has so far struggled to enter. The objective should be to build a portfolio of agreements that strengthens market access while gradually increasing the economy's capacity to compete.

This requires a change in how Bangladesh thinks about trade policy. FTAs and domestic reforms are not competing strategies. They reinforce each other. FTAs can secure markets, attract investment and create pressure for greater efficiency. Domestic reforms determine whether Bangladeshi firms can exploit those opportunities.

Bangladesh should, therefore, pursue FTAs with greater urgency, but also with preparation and a clear sense of economic priorities. Tariffs need gradual rationalisation, the tax system must become less dependent on imports, customs and standards institutions require upgrading, and negotiating capacity has to become professional and permanent. Exporters outside the garment sector need access to competitive inputs and credible certification systems.

The opportunity is significant. Bangladesh is moving from a trade regime built substantially on preferences granted by others towards one in which market access will increasingly have to be negotiated. FTAs are an essential part of that transition. But agreements alone will not make Bangladesh competitive. Their real value will depend on whether the country uses them to reinforce the domestic reforms needed to diversify exports, raise productivity, attract investment and create better jobs. That is where the harder work lies, and where the larger gains are likely to come from.

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FOUNDER EDITOR: **LATE S. M. ALI**

Riyadh owes Dhaka a clear explanation

Bangladesh needs answers about the execution of two nationals in KSA

Four days after Saudi Arabia announced that it had executed two people it identified as Bangladeshi nationals, Bangladesh's consulate in Jeddah still cannot confirm who they were. A note verbale asking for formal confirmation has yet to be answered. Dhaka learnt of the deaths the same way everyone else did: from a statement by the Ministry of Interior of Saudi Arabia carried by the state news agency. Bangladeshi officials say they had no prior knowledge of the case.

The Saudi account was brief. Nazerul Islam Abdul Basir and Siti Akhtar were arrested, investigated and charged. A court found the charges proven and sentenced them to death under ta'zir, the discretionary category of Islamic punishment. The offence was described only as an "immoral act" inside a mosque in Makkah. The sentences were upheld, and a royal order authorised the executions. The Saudi statement does not say when the two were arrested, how long they were held, whether they had lawyers or interpreters, whether they understood the proceedings against them, or even whether their families knew they were on trial, let alone facing death—a basic human right denied.

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Both Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia are parties to the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations. Article 36 of the convention requires authorities to tell a detained foreigner, without delay, of the right to have their consulate informed, and to notify the consulate if the detainee asks. It also gives consular officers the right to visit, communicate with, and arrange legal representation for their nationals in custody. Article 37 requires the receiving state to inform the relevant consulate without delay when a foreign national dies.

Bangladesh's bond with the kingdom is, first and foremost, one of faith. Besides, Saudi Arabia is also the largest destination for Bangladeshi migrant workers, whose remittances sustain millions of households and prop up the country's foreign reserves. Many of these workers hold low-paid, precarious jobs, speak little Arabic and know little of the kingdom's legal system. That is precisely why the Bangladesh government must at least seek information from the kingdom.

Rights groups have long criticised the use of the death penalty under ta'zir, where the absence of a fixed penalty leaves wide room for judicial discretion. The Arab Charter on Human Rights, 2004, which Saudi Arabia has ratified, obliges states that retain the death penalty to reserve it for the "most serious crimes" and to use it only in exceptional circumstances. Saudi authorities executed at least 356 people in 2025, setting a new record in the country for the highest number of executions in one year since Human Rights Watch began monitoring. Executions of foreign nationals for nonlethal drug crimes drove the surge in executions in 2025.

Dhaka should ask, formally, for the full record: dates of arrest, the charges, the evidence, details of legal representation, whether consular notification was offered, and whether the families were informed. It should seek the return of the bodies or clear information on burial, and support for the families left behind. Riyadh, for its part, owes Dhaka a clear explanation.

Stop this deadly negligence

DSCC must prevent unauthorised driving of its garbage trucks

At a time when reckless driving is claiming so many lives nationwide, people would expect a public institution not to put lives at further risk through its own negligence. But the reality is different. A recent investigation by *Prothom Alo* revealed that at least 22 garbage trucks of Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) were being driven by people other than their assigned drivers. Some designated drivers are drawing salaries without driving the vehicles themselves, allowing assistants or outsiders to take the wheel.

At least 18 people have reportedly died in 16 accidents involving DSCC garbage trucks since 2017. Among them were Notre Dame College student Naim Hasan, school student Mahin Ahmed, and laundry shop employee Iqbal Hossain. In all three cases, the vehicles were being driven by someone other than the assigned driver. Following student protests after Naim's death in November 2021, DSCC suspended nine drivers and dismissed a transport supervisor, who was later reinstated. The practice of handing over vehicle keys to others has however continued, while the victims' families are still waiting for justice. The *Prothom Alo* investigation has also raised serious questions about possible fuel theft and the role of those responsible for supervising the transport operation.

While the DSCC has a large fleet of garbage trucks and other equipment, it has a shortage of permanent drivers. But can they allow unauthorised or unqualified people to operate heavy vehicles on roads? Also, the responsibility for the deaths cannot solely fall on the drivers. Officials who fail to supervise them and anyone who facilitate such arrangements must be held accountable. The DSCC administrator has said that instructions have been issued to prevent unlicensed people from driving the vehicles and that disciplinary action will follow if further violations are found.

The city corporation should urgently verify the identities and licences of all drivers and ensure that its garbage trucks are operated only by authorised drivers. It must recruit more drivers to address the shortage and establish an effective oversight mechanism. It should also inspect the roadworthiness of its fleet and strengthen monitoring of fuel allocations and consumption. The allegations of irregularities must be investigated impartially. Other city corporations should also review their vehicle management practices to prevent similar irregularities and deaths. Finally, the families of those killed by DSCC vehicles must get justice.

Two executions and the limits of diplomatic friendship



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■ **KHAN KHALID ADNAN**

A friendship between two states means little if one discovers through the news media that the other has executed its citizens. On October 14, Saudi Arabia executed two people it identified as Bangladeshi nationals for an "immoral act" inside a mosque in Makkah. Bangladesh's Consulate General in Jeddah has confirmed that it received no advance notification. The question here is not simply whether diplomatic courtesy was neglected. It is whether safeguards that could have mattered while the two were alive were ever available.

The publicly reported Saudi statement leaves the precise offence undisclosed. It describes a discretionary death sentence under ta'zir, subsequently approved for implementation. That account does not permit a reliable assessment of the evidence or the offence's gravity. Neither does invoking the sanctity of the place explain why death was justified. The official account also omits basic details about the proceedings: when the two were arrested, how long they remained in custody, whether they had legal representation and whether their families were informed. Without these details, it is impossible to assess whether the defendants had a meaningful opportunity to challenge the charges and sentences.

Saudi Arabia ratified the Arab Charter on Human Rights in 2009. Article 6 of the charter restricts capital punishment to the 'most serious crimes' and recognises the right to seek pardon or commutation. Article 16 protects access to counsel, interpreters, adequate defence preparation and appeal. Were these protections effective in practice? A statement announcing final approval cannot answer that question. These are commitments Saudi Arabia itself accepted, not standards Bangladesh would be inventing after the event.

According to a report published by *The Daily Star* on October 17, Bangladesh was still awaiting a formal Saudi response to its note verbale seeking confirmation of the executions and verification of the individuals' identities and nationality. These uncertainties require investigation, not speculation. But a government identifying the executed as foreigners should be able to explain how their consular rights were protected.

Saudi Arabia has jurisdiction over offences committed within its territory, but this does not make its treatment of defendants exclusively a domestic matter. Sovereignty includes obligations voluntarily accepted through treaties. Bangladesh need not claim a veto over Saudi judgments to insist that those obligations be respected. Both countries are parties to the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations. Article 36 of the convention requires authorities to inform detained foreigners of their consular rights without delay. If a detainee requests it, the relevant consulate must also be notified without delay. Consular officers are entitled to visit and communicate with their nationals in detention and arrange for legal representation, unless the detainee expressly opposes such assistance. The obligation to explain these rights does not depend on the detainee already knowing enough to ask.



ILLUSTRATION: **SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR**

Legal precision matters here. Article 36 does not expressly impose an unconditional requirement to notify the foreign government before every execution. Article 37(a), however, separately requires consular notification of a foreign national's death when the authorities have the relevant information. The immediate questions, therefore, are whether the two were informed of their consular rights, whether they requested consular assistance, whether access was obstructed, and whether notification followed the deaths. The absence of advance notice alone does not answer all these questions.

These are not administrative technicalities. In the case Avena and Other Mexican Nationals, the International Court of Justice required the United States to provide effective review and reconsideration of convictions and sentences, taking account of consular violations and possible prejudice. Its reasoning demonstrates why consular protection belongs within the administration of justice, not outside it as diplomatic decoration. Execution without an effective opportunity for such review forecloses the possibility of correcting a conviction during the defendant's lifetime.

The proportionality question is equally serious. Saudi Arabia ratified the Arab Charter on Human Rights in 2009. Article 6 of the charter restricts capital punishment to the 'most serious crimes' and recognises the right to seek pardon or commutation. Article 16 protects access to counsel, interpreters, adequate defence preparation and appeal. Were these protections effective in practice? A statement announcing final approval cannot answer that question. These are commitments Saudi Arabia itself accepted, not standards Bangladesh would be inventing after the event.

The UN Human Rights Committee interprets "most serious crimes" as crimes of extreme gravity involving intentional killing (General Comment 36, p. 8, paragraph 35). Saudi Arabia is not a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which the committee was interpreting, so that interpretation cannot simply be presented as its treaty obligation. It remains an important benchmark, while the Arab Charter supplies an independent legal restraint. Nothing in the published account of Saudi Arabia identifies an intentional killing, so the authorities should explain how the offence in question satisfied the exceptional threshold for taking two lives.

Advance warning also has an international foundation beyond consular law. Human Rights Council resolution 30/5 calls for adequate advance information about executions for prisoners, their families, and legal representatives (p. 3, paragraph 4). This is not a binding treaty requirement to notify another government. It is, however, a clear standard against leaving those most affected to discover an execution afterwards. Whether these families received such information must be established.

Bangladesh should also examine its own consistency. Both Dhaka and Riyadh voted against that resolution in 2015. A vote against the whole text does not establish opposition to every safeguard it contains. Nevertheless, protections for people facing execution should not become important only when our own nationals need them.

Our bilateral relationship makes these questions harder to evade. Bangladesh sent more than 750,000 workers to Saudi Arabia in 2025. Pilgrimage sustains another substantial connection between the two countries. These ties should strengthen expectations of reliable consular cooperation. This is not to suggest that Bangladesh's nationals deserve special treatment because of their religious connection or because their labour benefits Saudi Arabia, which would make it sound like a reward or entitlement. But nothing justifies the withholding of established rights or safeguards either.

Dhaka, therefore, should seek verified identities, judgments, dates of arrest and detention, and records of access to legal representation and interpretation. It should explain its findings to the families and disclose any institutional failures without compromising private information. Its own mission's conduct also requires review, without assuming negligence where officials genuinely lacked notice. Where violations are established, Bangladesh should pursue accountability and appropriate reparation.

For future cases, Bangladesh should negotiate a protocol requiring timely consular notification, subject to the detainee's wishes, and advance execution notice, backed by funded legal assistance and systematic monitoring of capital cases. Pending that, it should seek stays in other capital cases where access and defence safeguards remain unverified.

A diplomatic protest after an execution cannot restore the opportunity to contest a charge, challenge a sentence, or say goodbye. The measure of a bilateral relationship is not how warmly the governments describe each other, but whether their cooperation protects people before protection becomes impossible.

Social media witch-hunts must not replace dialogue or due process



Barrister Sara Hossain is a senior advocate at the Supreme Court.

■ **SARA HOSSAIN**

Recently, Tasneem Siraj Mahboob, an associate professor in Dhaka University's Department of English, was relieved of her teaching duties following a complaint that she had made inappropriate remarks to a female student about her clothing.

Since I am not familiar with Dhaka University's rules and regulations governing such departmental actions, I would refrain from commenting on that. However, what I find particularly concerning about the ongoing situation is how quickly the issue has escalated and, in particular, the role social media has played in this process. While the suspension is in place, the accused is being subjected to extreme vilification on social media. It effectively amounts to a social media trial, forcing her to defend herself publicly.

A university should be a place where views are exchanged and ideas are debated through civil discourse. So, while there can be room for difference around the opinions she expressed—which, first of all, must be determined through a fair and impartial investigation—her opinions can't be predetermined through a toxic social media campaign. Besides, these issues could be resolved through discussion on campus rather than through the kind of witch hunt that we can see going on.

This is not the first time we've seen this sort of incident and social media trial happen. In the past, under the Awami League government, we saw women being threatened and vilified for having their heads covered. Now we are seeing the opposite situation where women are being attacked and identified in particular ways and tagged for not having their heads covered or for making comments about head covering.

Actually, we have an important judgment of our High Court, which says that it's the right of every woman to choose what she wears; it is part of her freedom of expression protected by our constitution and protected by human rights law. That case was decided in April 2010, in the context of a school principal who was accused by an upazila education officer of not covering her head. In that context, the High Court said that whether she covers her head or not is a matter of choice. Equally, today if a woman does choose to cover her head, that is a matter of choice.

I would, however, go a bit further and say that if you're in a public space—for example, in an educational context or work context—there may be situations where you need to uncover your face in order for someone else to communicate more clearly with you. Those are things we can discuss and debate, but they're not issues around which any person should be vilified to the extent that Professor Tasneem is, and it is certainly not an issue around which she should be prevented from carrying out her work.

With regard to the current rhetoric around Islamophobia in Bangladesh, which resurfaced following the DU incident, I find it quite problematic. We are an overwhelmingly Muslim-majority country, and I don't think Muslims face significant difficulties in expressing their views or practising their faith. Islamophobia has a different meaning in contexts where Muslims are a minority and may find themselves subjected to discrimination because of their faith, dress or manner of expression. It is more difficult to understand how the concept applies in Bangladesh.

It is also problematic to speak about Islamophobia without putting it in a context of discrimination based on other grounds. For instance, we speak about Islamophobia, but most of us aren't really concerned about discrimination based on other religions, or discrimination against people of other religions. Similarly, most do not seem to be concerned about discrimination based on gender or sexuality or political opinion or nationality. Being concerned about discrimination is extremely valid, and we should be concerned about all forms of discrimination. However, selectively picking out one area of perceived discrimination is somewhat problematic.

It is one thing to discriminate against people because they're expressing their faith in their dress or their speech or their conduct. It's another thing to say phobia exists against an entire religion. It is because we don't talk about Christianity-based discrimination or Hinduism-based discrimination. That is not to say that discrimination against Muslims is not possible, but it is less likely in a Muslim-majority context, especially at a policy level.

Our goal as conscious citizens—55 years on from the liberation of Bangladesh, and over two years on from the July uprising—should be to strengthen and entrench protection against discrimination of all forms, especially against vulnerable groups, so that we can build a more equal and just society.

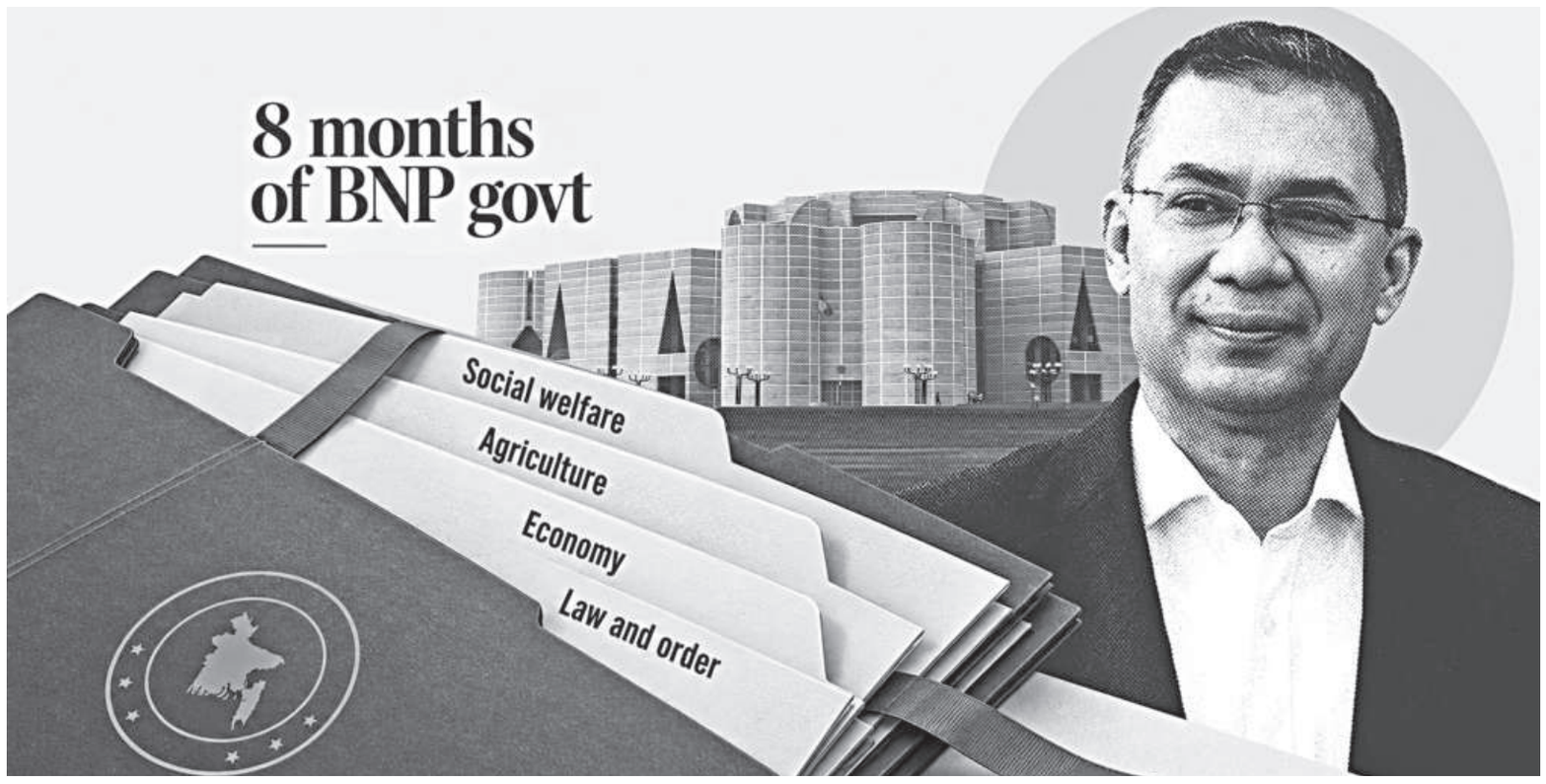
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BNP's first eight months: Promise, power, and the test of change



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■ ZILLUR RAHMAN



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

Eight months after BNP returned to power, the general mood in Bangladesh seems to be shifting away from euphoria. The relief of securing an elected government's return following the fall of the Awami League government is giving way to a tougher question: is the country being run differently, or are different people simply running it?

This question has much to do with the expectations created by the 2024 uprising. People did not endure so much suffering just to see new faces in familiar seats of power. They wanted institutions that can stand up to politicians, police that are accountable to the law rather than party offices, and a government that listens even when it is being criticised.

Law and order are an even more immediate test. Allegations of extortion, land grabbing, intimidation, and violence involving people connected to the ruling party have not disappeared. The BNP has disciplined some members, and that is better than ignoring the problem. But expelling someone from a party does not settle a criminal complaint. If the law genuinely applies to everyone, investigations and prosecutions must follow the evidence, regardless of political connections.

There is some good news. The elected government has brought back a measure of stability after years of disruption. Parliament is back in session, the executive authority has a democratic mandate, and the country has regained something it badly needed: a sense of political direction. None of that should be dismissed.

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman himself has been different in certain ways. His relatively modest public manner, resistance to unnecessary privileges, and willingness to bring new faces into government are welcome. In a political culture that often confuses authority with grandeur, even small changes in tone can matter.

But tone is not the same as change. A prime minister can reject excessive protocol while an ordinary citizen still needs political contact to get work done at a government office. The real test is what happens away from the cameras, where people encounter the state in everyday life.

Some of the government's social initiatives deserve fair hearing. The Family Card and Farmer Card programmes could genuinely relieve households under pressure. Canal restoration and agricultural support are also practical priorities in a country where political debate too often obscures rural livelihoods. What matters now is who benefits. Are people selected because they need help, or because they know someone? Are these programmes financially sustainable and properly monitored? If assistance becomes another form of political favour, a promising initiative will have been wasted.

The economy gives the government little room for comfort. It inherited weak banks, stubborn inflation, sluggish investment, and tight public finances. Nobody should expect those problems to disappear in eight months. Still, the scale of the challenge demands more urgency than the public has seen so far. September inflation reached 8.34 percent. The World Bank projects growth of only 3.4 percent for FY2026 and FY2027, alongside worrying signs of rising poverty, weak employment, and banking sector instability.

These figures may sound abstract, but their consequences are painfully familiar: families cutting back on groceries, graduates searching endlessly for decent jobs, and small business owners postponing expansion because the future looks uncertain. People need to see and experience the fruits of political stability in everyday life. They need a believable plan to restore confidence, repair the banking system, secure energy supplies, and create jobs. More importantly, they need evidence that the plan is working.

Law and order are an even more immediate test. Allegations of extortion, land grabbing, intimidation, and violence involving people connected to the ruling party have not disappeared. The BNP has disciplined some members, and that is better than ignoring the problem. But expelling someone from a party does not settle a criminal complaint. If the law genuinely applies to everyone, investigations and prosecutions must follow the evidence, regardless of political connections. Otherwise, people will understandably wonder what has changed beyond the party flags.

The attacks on journalists as reported in recent months are equally troubling. A party that benefited from demands for democratic freedom should understand why a critical press matters as well as the importance of taking measures to ensure that it not only survives but also flourishes. Democracy means allowing people to question those in power, even when their questions are uncomfortable.

Then there is the question of political reform. Let us set aside the persistent disputes over the July Charter and referendum for a moment. What about BNP's own 31-point reform agenda and the promises made in its election manifesto? The party pledged to limit the concentration of power, strengthen democratic institutions, ensure judicial independence, and make the government more accountable. These were not demands imposed by its opponents; they were commitments BNP itself made to the people. Now that it holds power, the question is simple: how much of its own reform agenda is it genuinely prepared to implement? Surely, the public has every right to expect the party to honour its own promises.

Parliament must be able to scrutinise the executive, courts must remain independent, and elections, including local government polls, must be free, credible and, of course, violence-free. These should be common democratic commitments, not bargaining chips in a contest between political parties or other prevailing forces.

On foreign policy, it has been a mixed bag so far. Closer engagement with China, Japan, and other international partners makes sense, but the India question seems to remain as unresolved as during the interim government's tenure. Diplomacy, however, should ultimately be judged by the investment, trade opportunities and jobs it brings home, not the number of meetings held or agreements announced. So where does that leave the government?

The PM has shown an understanding of the public mood. There is greater stability, a less extravagant leadership style, and some useful policy initiatives. Yet the old problems—political influence, public insecurity, economic anxiety, and institutional weakness—remain close to the surface.

Eight months is too soon for a final verdict. But it is long enough to see what a government tolerates, what it challenges and what it is genuinely prepared to change. Bangladesh has had powerful prime ministers before. What it has lacked are institutions strong enough to restrain them. That is the lesson its political history keeps teaching, often at a heavy price.

PM Tarique Rahman's greatest achievement would not be to become another powerful prime minister. It would be to build a system where no prime minister, including himself, could exercise power without effective oversight and accountability. That would be a legacy worth remembering, and a change Bangladesh could finally believe in.

Give SSC students who failed a second chance, but fix the learning gaps too



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■ ARAFAT RAHAMAN

Last week, Education Minister ANM Ehsanul Hoque Milon announced that SSC examinees who failed two subjects could retake those exams within 15 days of the results. Such a decision, if implemented, would be a positive step for students, because those who fail one or two subjects should not have to wait an entire year to try again, after passing every other paper. But a retake only addresses the immediate individual problem of failure; it does not answer why so many students failed in the first place. The latter is what the government must look into, and it is a harder task than allowing students to retake exams sooner.

Before the minister's announcement, the education boards had informed the ministry that they could hold supplementary examinations within three months of the results, beginning with this year's HSC and equivalent candidates. For SSC students, this could begin next year. The minister has now proposed a much shorter time frame. These are encouraging signs, but for either proposal to become policy, the ministry must clarify which students qualify, when the proposed system will begin, and how it will affect admissions.

Before these announcements, I had the opportunity to hear what the existing system of having to wait a year to retake exams meant for unsuccessful candidates. They shared their experience at a conference, organised by the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) and Plan International Bangladesh. A student from Munshiganj, who passed her other subjects but failed chemistry, blamed curriculum changes and delayed textbooks for disrupting her preparation. She added that she had completely broken down when the results came out. So distressed was she that she did not seek re-scrutiny of her answer script. Meanwhile, a mother shared how her daughter's ambition to study nursing was almost crushed when she failed to obtain pass marks in chemistry.

Students, teachers, and guardians described different difficulties but called for the same change: retakes within three months instead of a year's wait. The demand is reasonable. Supplementary examinations need not weaken academic standards; students would still have to earn passing marks. An early opportunity to retake the exams would help students avoid a prolonged interruption to their studies, additional costs, and uncertainty over admissions. For poorer households, losing a year can threaten a child's prospects of continuing his/her education altogether.

This year, 6,90,608 candidates or 37.75 percent of all candidates, were unsuccessful in SSC and equivalent examinations. However, after answer-script re-scrutiny, 4,585 of the 6.9 lakh candidates were declared successful. The proposed retakes would cover only those who failed up to two subjects, not all unsuccessful candidates. But the high failure rate demands an examination of what these students learnt during their years at school, whether they received adequate teaching, and what support was available to those struggling academically.

Poverty, illness, irregular attendance, and curriculum changes can affect examination performance. Schools and education authorities nevertheless have questions to answer. Did students have qualified subject teachers? Were lessons completed? Were those struggling academically identified and helped before the public examinations? Failure should not be treated solely as a measure of inadequate individual effort when the conditions of learning vary so widely in the country.

An investigation by *The Daily Star*, based on Education Management Information System records published on October 9, found that 3,861 secondary schools and higher secondary colleges had no ICT teachers, 2,744 had no mathematics teachers, and 2,625 had no English teachers. Many teachers taught subjects outside their areas of expertise, practical classes were disrupted, and some students turned to coaching centres or YouTube to compensate for gaps in classroom instruction. Another concerning picture came from the National Assessment of Secondary Students 2023, which recorded an average science score of just 32 percent among 26,601 pupils in Class 8. The assessment did not examine teacher shortages as a cause, but it showed that weaknesses in learning were visible well before the SSC.

These findings do not prove that teacher vacancies caused particular students to fail, nor do they fully explain the results across all education streams. They do, however, provide grounds for investigation. Do schools without mathematics or English teachers have higher failure rates in those subjects than adequately staffed institutions? A school-level result comparison, staffing records, and attendance could help distinguish the effects of teaching shortages from other disadvantages. It would also show where support is most urgently needed.

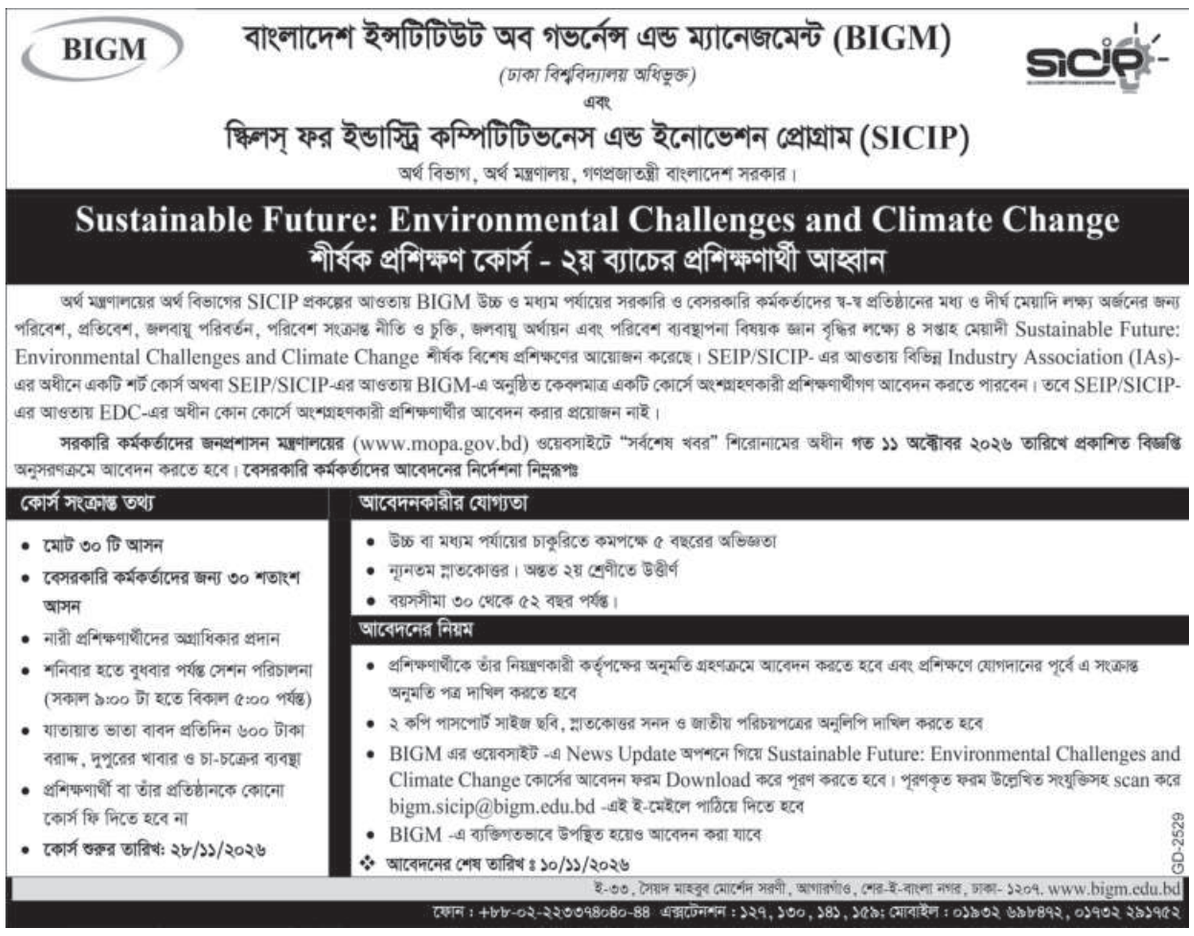
Teachers, too, must answer for the instruction they provide. However, they do not have the power to resolve recruitment delays; that is the administration's responsibility. Similarly, families should not have to pay for private coaching to compensate for inadequate classroom lessons. The ministry must identify schools with persistent learning difficulties and ensure that students receive help before their next public examination, rather than simply allowing them to retake exams early. Moreover, the findings should be published and deadlines should be set for resolving persistent shortages, so that progress can be assessed.

Lastly, the proposed 15-day interval for retests calls for scrutiny. A candidate who narrowly misses the pass mark may be ready to try again quickly, but someone who has struggled throughout the year may need more time. Remedial classes, feedback and accessible materials should accompany retakes. Otherwise, students could be examined again without a meaningful chance to improve.

The education minister also said students who fail the retest could be directed towards technical and vocational education. At the CAMPE conference, Prime Minister's Adviser Mahdi Amin said that the PM had directed the ministry to develop career options for unsuccessful candidates, including technical training, language courses, and possible entrepreneurship support. Such opportunities are welcome. But vocational education should be a choice, not a destination assigned to students after two failed examinations. Students should receive guidance based on their interests and be allowed to pursue general education, if they choose to do so.

Besides, in April, the education minister told parliament that 8,770 of the 15,844 sanctioned teaching posts at technical institutions were vacant. Directing more students into that stream without adequate teachers and facilities risks reproducing the shortages affecting general education. How, then, would the vocational institutions accommodate additional students if unsuccessful SSC candidates were enrolled in this stream?

What the education ministry should do now is decide on eligibility for retaking exams, fees, preparation time, and admission deadlines, and explain whether this year's unsuccessful SSC candidates will benefit. The government's response should extend beyond arranging another test. The objective of this reform should be to identify why so many students failed, improve the teaching available to them, and prevent the same problems from recurring.



জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশন–এর বিশেষ ক্রোড়পত্র

ঢাকা রোববার ০২ কার্তিক ১৪৩৩
Sunday 18 October 2026



জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশনের প্রেসিডেন্টের বাণী

জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশনের ২৭তম প্রতিষ্ঠা বার্ষিকী উপলক্ষে ফাউন্ডেশনের সঙ্গে সংশ্লিষ্ট পেশাজীবী বিশেষ করে চিকিৎসক, কৃষিবিদ, প্রকৌশলী, সাংবাদিক, শিক্ষাবিদ, স্বেচ্ছাসেবক, শুভানুধ্যায়ী এবং মানবতার সেবায় নিয়োজিত সবাইকে জানাই আন্তরিক শুভেচ্ছা ও অভিনন্দন।

মানুষের কল্যাণে কাজ করার প্রত্যয় নিয়ে ১৯৯৯ সালে জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশন—জেডআরএফ–এর পথচলা শুরু হয়েছিল। মানবিক মর্যাদা প্রতিষ্ঠা, অসহায় ও সুবিধাবঞ্চিত মানুষের প্রতি সহায়তার হাত বাড়িয়ে দেয়াই হচ্ছে জেডআরএফ–এর ব্রত। অর্থের অভাবে যারা প্রয়োজনীয় চিকিৎসাসেবা গ্রহণ করতে পারেন না, সেই পিছিয়ে পড়া ও হতদরিদ্র মানুষের পাশে দাঁড়ানোকে জেডআরএফ তার অন্যতম প্রধান দায়িত্ব হিসেবে গ্রহণ করেছে।

দীর্ঘ ২৭ বছরের পথচলা সবসময় মসৃণ ছিল না। নানা প্রতিকূলতা, বিশেষ করে দীর্ঘ দেড় দশকের বেশি সময় ধরে চলা ফ্যাসিবাদী শাসন শোষণের সময় জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশনের স্বাভাবিক কর্মকাণ্ড বাধাগ্রস্ত হয়েছে। তবে মানুষের প্রতি ভালোবাসা ও মানবসেবার যে অঙ্গীকার নিয়ে জেডআরএফ–এর জন্ম, তা কখনো থেমে যায়নি। প্রতিকূলতার মধ্যেও এই সংগঠনের নিবেদিতপ্রাণ কর্মী ও চিকিৎসকগণ মানুষের পাশে থাকার চেষ্টা অব্যাহত রেখেছেন।

যে কোনো দুর্যোগে ছুটে গেছেন দুর্গত মানুষের কাছে। বন্যা, ঘূর্ণিঝড়, মহামারি কিংবা অন্য কোনো মানবিক সংকটে মানুষ যখন অসহায়, তখন জেডআরএফ–এর কর্মী ও স্বেচ্ছাসেবকেরা নিজেদের নিরাপত্তার কথা না ভেবে মানুষের পাশে দাঁড়িয়েছেন। দীর্ঘ দেড় দশকের বেশি সময় ধরে, ফ্যাসিবাদবিরোধী আন্দোলনের কঠিন সময়েও সংগঠনের সদস্যরা আন্দোলনকারী ও আহত মানুষের জীবন রক্ষায় সাহসের সঙ্গে চিকিৎসা সেবা দিয়েছেন।

সংগঠনের গৌরবময় প্রতিষ্ঠা বার্ষিকীর এই দিনে আমি বিশেষভাবে সেসব চিকিৎসক ও স্বাস্থ্যকর্মীদের স্মরণ করতে চাই, যারা মানব সেবাকে কেবল পেশা হিসেবে নয় বরং মানুষের প্রতি দায়িত্ব হিসেবে গ্রহণ করেছেন। প্রতিকূল সময়ে, জীবনের ঝুঁকি নিয়ে যারা অসুস্থ, আহত ও বিপন্ন মানুষের চিকিৎসা দিয়েছেন, তাদের অবদান কোনোদিন বিস্মৃত হওয়ার নয়। মানুষের জীবন বাঁচানোর চেয়ে মহৎ কাজ আর কী হতে পারে?

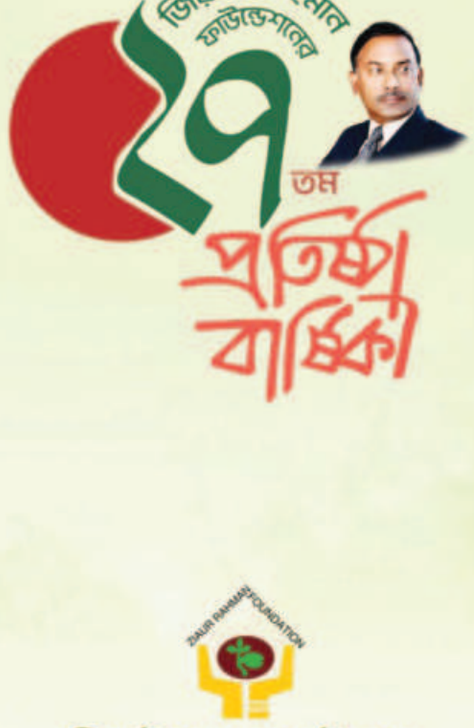
আমি বিশ্বাস করি, একটি সংগঠনের প্রকৃত শক্তি তার ভবন, অর্থ কিংবা সাংগঠনিক কাঠামোতে নয়; তার প্রকৃত শক্তি মানুষের জন্য কাজ করার মানসিকতায়। জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশনের সবচেয়ে বড় অর্জন হলো—দুঃসময়ে মানুষের পাশে থাকার এই মানসিকতা, যা আজও অটুট রয়েছে।

আমার দৃঢ় বিশ্বাস, অতীতের মতো আগামী দিনেও জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশন তাদের কর্মপরিধি আরো বিস্তৃত করবে, সেবার পরিসর আরো বাড়াবে। চিকিৎসাসেবা, শিক্ষা, কৃষি, দুর্যোগ মোকাবিলা, দরিদ্র ও মেধাবী শিক্ষার্থীদের সহায়তা এবং সমাজের পিছিয়ে পড়া মানুষের জীবনমান উন্নয়নে সংগঠনের কার্যক্রম আরও গতিশীল করতে হবে। একটি অসহায় মানুষের চিকিৎসার ব্যবস্থা করা, একজন দরিদ্র শিক্ষার্থীর হাতে বই তুলে দেওয়া, একজন কৃষকের পাশে দাঁড়ানো কিংবা দুর্যোগে বিপন্ন একটি পরিবারের কাছে সাহায্যের হাত বাড়িয়ে দেওয়াও মানবতার একেকটি উজ্জ্বল দৃষ্টান্ত।

জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশনের ২৭তম প্রতিষ্ঠা বার্ষিকতে তাই আমাদের অঙ্গীকার হোক—মানুষের দুঃখে আমরা পাশে থাকব, তাদের বিপদে এগিয়ে যাব এবং সাধ্য ও সামর্থ্যের সবটুকু দিয়ে প্রতিটি অসহায় মানুষের মুখে হাসি ফোটানোর চেষ্টা করব। যারা গত ২৭ বছর ধরে নীরবে, নিঃস্বার্থভাবে এবং সাহসের সঙ্গে মানবসেবার এই অভিযাত্রাকে এগিয়ে নিয়েছেন, তাদের প্রত্যেকের প্রতি রইল আমার আন্তরিক কৃতজ্ঞতা ও শ্রদ্ধা।

আসুন, মানবতার পতাকাকে আরও উঁচুতে তুলে ধরি। মানুষের সেবাকে আমাদের পরিচয় এবং মানবতাকে আমাদের পথচলার প্রেরণা হিসেবে গ্রহণ করি। জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশনের ২৭তম প্রতিষ্ঠা বার্ষিকী সফল ও সার্থক হোক। আল্লাহ আমাদের সবাইকে মানুষের কল্যাণে কাজ করার তৌফিক দান করুন।

তারেক রহমান
প্রেসিডেন্ট, জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশন





জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশনের ভাইস প্রেসিডেন্টের বাণী

১৯৯৯ সালের ১৮ অক্টোবর আর্তমানবতার সেবায় জন্ম নেওয়া জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশন (জেডআরএফ) আজ তার কলেবর বৃদ্ধি করে বিভিন্ন পেশার মানুষকে একই ছাদের নিচে এনে পরস্পরের মধ্যে আস্থা ও বিশ্বাসের বীজ বপন করতে সক্ষম হয়েছে। একটি অরাজনৈতিক, বেসরকারি ও সেবামূলক প্রতিষ্ঠান হাওয়ায় জনগণের প্রয়োজনে সেবা দিয়েছে বিরামহীনভাবে যা জনগণ প্রত্যক্ষ করেছে করোনাকালীন সময়েও।

জনকল্যাণমূলক প্রতিষ্ঠান হিসেবে সংগঠনটি মানুষের কল্যাণে নিরলসভাবে কাজ করে যাচ্ছে। প্রতিটি উদ্যোগের কেন্দ্রে রয়েছে মানুষের প্রতি ভালোবাসা, মানবিক মর্যাদা এবং স্বনির্ভর বাংলাদেশ গড়ার প্রত্যয়। আজকে জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশন জাতির কাছে ভরসার এক প্রতীক হিসেবে বিবেচিত হয়েছে। ফাউন্ডেশনের প্রতিটি কাজ দেশ–বিদেশে হয়েছে সমাদৃত ও প্রশংসিত।

সাম্প্রতিক সময়ে শিক্ষা ও জ্ঞানচর্চার পাশাপাশি স্বাস্থ্যসেবা ও পরিবেশ রক্ষায় কার্যকর ভূমিকা রেখে যাচ্ছে জেডআরএফ। একদিকে যেমন ছিল কোভিডকালীন মানসিক স্বাস্থ্য বিকাশে ভার্চুয়াল বিজ্ঞান মেলা : ভবিষ্যৎ বিজ্ঞানীর খোঁজে, কড়াইলবাসীর হৃদরোগ ও শ্বাসকষ্টজনিত রোগীদের জন্য বিশেষায়িত মেডিকেল ক্যাম্প, ডেঙ্গু প্রতিরোধে জনসচেতনতা বৃদ্ধিতে সচেতনতামূলক লিফলেট ও মশারী বিতরণ, মাইলস্টোন ট্রাজেডিতে আহত শিশুদের চিকিৎসার ব্যবস্থা, প্রাইমারি স্কুল সংস্কার। একই সাথে ছিল পরিবেশ রক্ষায় ঢাকা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়সহ বাংলাদেশের বিভিন্ন শিক্ষা প্রতিষ্ঠানে বৃক্ষরোপন কর্মসূচির মতো আয়োজন। উল্লেখ্য, ফাউন্ডেশন কর্তৃক আয়োজিত তৃতীয় বিজ্ঞান মেলা "ভবিষ্যৎ বিজ্ঞানীর খোঁজে ২০২৬" অনুষ্ঠিত হতে যাচ্ছে।

গরীব ও মেধাবী শিশুদের মাঝে বই বিতরণ, জিপিএ–৫ প্রাপ্ত শিক্ষার্থীদের বৃত্তি প্রদান, মাদ্রাসা শিক্ষার্থীদের হেলথ চেক আপ ও ঔষধ প্রদানসহ শিক্ষা উপকরণ প্রদান, বিশেষ চাহিদাসম্পন্ন ও সুবিধাবঞ্চিত শিশুদের জন্য প্রতিষ্ঠিত সুরভি স্কুলের শিক্ষার্থীদের জন্য বিশেষায়িত হেলথ চেক আপ ও ঔষধ প্রদানের ব্যবস্থা, বগুড়াতে মুক ও বধির স্কুলের শিক্ষার্থীদের জন্য বিনামূল্যে চক্ষু ক্যাম্প এর আয়োজন, ভাষানটেক, সাততলা, কড়াইলবাসী যেন নিয়মিত স্বাস্থ্যসেবা পায় সেজন্য ভলান্টিয়ার টিম তৈরি করা, ভাষানটেক সরকারি প্রাথমিক বিদ্যালয় মাঠে বিনামূল্যে চোখের ছানি অপারেশনসহ চক্ষু ক্যাম্প এর আয়োজনের মতো উদ্যোগগুলো কেবলমাত্র সামাজিক কর্মকান্ডে সীমাবদ্ধ ছিল না, বরং এই কর্মযজ্ঞে সম্পৃক্ত মানুষগুলোকে "যেখানেই ভাল কাজ সেখানেই জেডআরএফ" এই মূলমন্ত্রে উজ্জীবিত করেছে।

প্রতিষ্ঠাকালীন সময় থেকে আজ অবধি অভিজ্ঞতা ও অর্জনের মধ্য দিয়ে জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশন দেশের মানুষের আস্থার একটি মানবিক প্রতিষ্ঠান হিসেবে তার অবস্থান সুদৃঢ় করে চলেছে। স্বাস্থ্যসেবা, শিক্ষা, বিজ্ঞানচর্চা, কৃষি, পরিবেশ, নারীর ক্ষমতায়ন ও দুর্যোগ মোকাবিলাসহ মানুষের জীবনের সঙ্গে সম্পৃক্ত বিভিন্ন ক্ষেত্রে এর কার্যক্রম অব্যাহত রয়েছে। আমাদের বিশ্বাস, ছোট ছোট উদ্যোগ ও সম্মিলিত প্রচেষ্টাই মানুষের জীবনে বড় পরিবর্তন আনতে পারে।

মানবিক সেবার এক অনন্য প্লাটফর্ম জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশনের স্বপ্নদ্রষ্টা প্রেসিডেন্ট জনাব তারেক রহমান–এর দেখানো পথেই এগিয়ে যাচ্ছে সংগঠনটি। ২৭তম প্রতিষ্ঠা বার্ষিকীতে ফাউন্ডেশনের সঙ্গে যুক্ত সকল সদস্য, স্বেচ্ছাসেবক ও শুভানুধ্যায়ীদের জানাই আন্তরিক শুভেচ্ছা ও অভিনন্দন। মানুষের প্রতি ভালোবাসা, দায়বদ্ধতা ও সেবার অঙ্গীকার নিয়ে আমাদের এই পথচলা অব্যাহত থাকুক। প্রতিটি উদ্যোগ মানুষের জীবনে স্বস্তি, সম্ভাবনা ও আত্মনির্ভরতার নতুন দিগন্ত উন্মোচন করুক।

পরিশেষে, ফাউন্ডেশনের পক্ষ থেকে আমি সকলের সুস্বাস্থ্য ও শুভকামনা করছি।

আল্লাহ হাফেজ।

ডা. জুবাইদা রহমান
ভাইস–প্রেসিডেন্ট
জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশন

মানবতার সেবায় ২৭ বছর

● অধ্যাপক ডা. ফরহাদ হালিম ডোনার



বর্তমান প্রধানমন্ত্রী জনাব তারেক রহমান ১৯৯৯ সালে চিন্তা করলেন, তাঁর বাবার নামে একটি ফাউন্ডেশন করবেন। নাম হবে জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশন। সেই সময় তাঁর মূল উদ্দেশ্যই ছিল রাজনীতিকে রাজনীতির স্থানে রেখে, রাজনীতির বাইরে সাধারণ মানুষের জন্য কী করা যায়, সে উদ্দেশ্যকে সামনে রেখে জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশনের পদযাত্রা শুরু। তিনি প্রথমে খুলনা জেলার তেরখাদা উপজেলার দিঘুলিয়ায় একটি মেডিকাল ক্যাম্প করেন। এই মেডিকাল ক্যাম্পের মাধ্যমে তাঁর যাত্রা শুরু হয়। পরবর্তী পর্যায়ে তিনি চিন্তা করলেন–এ দেশের সাধারণ মানুষের আর্থ–সামাজিক উন্নয়ন করতে হলে তাদেরকে আর্থিকভাবে উন্নয়ন করতে হবে।

এ সময় তিনি সারা দেশের তৃণমূলের সংগঠন গোছাচ্ছিলেন। সারা দেশে তৃণমূল সমাবেশ করতেন। সেই সমাবেশের সময় পাশাপাশি তিনি প্রত্যেকটি জেলার প্রান্তিক মানুষকে হাঁস, মুরগি, গাছের চারা, গরু, ছাগল প্রভৃতি উপকরণ দিতেন। তাঁর মূল উদ্দেশ্য ছিল–এর মাধ্যমে ওই ব্যক্তির আর্থিকভাবে উন্নতি সাধন হবে, সামাজিকভাবে সচ্ছল হবে এবং এর মধ্য দিয়ে অর্থনৈতিক চাকা সচল হবে। এই প্রকল্প যে খুব একটা বড় ছিল তা কিন্তু নয়। তাঁর এই প্রকল্পের মূল উদ্দেশ্যই ছিল মানুষকে উদ্বুদ্ধ করা। তাঁর এই কর্মকাণ্ড দেখে দেখে অন্যরাও যাতে একই ধরনের কাজ করতে পারে এবং বাস্তবে তাই–ই দেখা গেছে। তিনি যখন থেকে হাঁস, মুরগি, গরু, ছাগল–এগুলো দেয়া শুরু করলেন তখন অন্যান্য জায়গায় যেখানে আমাদের জেডআরএফ নেই, সেখানে মানুষ একই কায়দায় প্রান্তিক মানুষকে দান করতেন। এইভাবে তাঁর কর্মকাণ্ড চলতে থাকে। এই ফাউন্ডেশনের প্রথম যে কমিটি হয়েছিল সেখানে তিনিই একমাত্র নন–ডাক্তার; বাকি ২১ জন ডাক্তার নিয়ে এই সংগঠনের যাত্রা শুরু হয়। এই যাত্রা বিরামহীন চলতে থাকে।

অসচ্ছল মেধাবীদের পাশে

তারেক রহমানের নির্দেশে জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশন–এর উদ্যোগে ২০০৫ সালে চালু হয় বৃত্তি প্রদান প্রকল্প। আর্থিকভাবে অসচ্ছল অথচ মেধাবী শিক্ষার্থীদের শিক্ষাজীবন ধরে রাখতে এই প্রকল্পের মাধ্যমে সহায়তা করা হয়। ২০০৫ সালে ঢাকার এলজিইডি ভবনে প্রথম আনুষ্ঠানিকভাবে এই বৃত্তি প্রদান শুরু করা হয়। পরবর্তীকালে রাজনৈতিক বিপর্যয়ের কারণে কিছুদিন কার্যক্রম স্থগিত থাকলেও পরবর্তীতে এটি আরো বিস্তৃত পরিবারের মধ্যে চালু করা হয়। ফাউন্ডেশনের প্রেসিডেন্ট জনাব তারেক রহমান ও ভাইস প্রেসিডেন্ট ডা. জুবাইদা রহমানের দিক–নির্দেশনায় পুনরায় ২০২৩ সালে সারাদেশের মেধাবী ও অসচ্ছল শিক্ষার্থীদের পাশাপাশি গণতান্ত্রিক আন্দোলন ক্ষতিগ্রস্ত বিএনপি নেতাকর্মীদের ১৯ জন সন্তানকে শিক্ষা উপবৃত্তি প্রদান করা হয়।

অসহায় মানুষের স্বাস্থ্য সেবায়

দেশের যে কোনো দুর্যোগ সঙ্কটকালে ও জরুরি অবস্থায় জেডআরআফ নিয়মিত ফ্রি মেডিকাল ক্যাম্প আয়োজন করে থাকে। এসব ক্যাম্পে রোগীদের সুচিকিৎসাসহ প্রয়োজনীয় ঔষধ প্রদান করা হয়। স্বাস্থ্যবিষয়ক পরামর্শ দেওয়া হয়। খুলনার রূপসা, ঢাকার যাত্রাবাড়ী, করাইল বস্তি, গাজীপুর, রাজশাহী, চট্টগ্রাম ও বগুড়ায় সম্প্রতি এসব সেবা প্রদান করা হয়। বিশেষ করে যারা নিয়মিত স্বাস্থ্যসেবার সুযোগ থেকে বঞ্চিত তাদের কাছে এই ক্যাম্পগুলো অত্যন্ত গুরুত্বপূর্ণ।

বিএনপি'র ভারপ্রাপ্ত চেয়ারম্যান ফাউন্ডেশন–এর প্রেসিডেন্ট জনাব তারেক রহমান ও ভাইস প্রেসিডেন্ট ডা. জুবাইদা রহমানের পরামর্শে শহীদ প্রেসিডেন্ট জিয়াউর রহমানের জন্মস্থান বগুড়ায় নিজ বাড়িতে স্বাস্থ্য সেবা ক্যাম্প করা হয়। গত বছর ১৮ অক্টোবর ফাউন্ডেশন–এর ২৬তম প্রতিষ্ঠা বার্ষিকী উপলক্ষে আয়োজিত সেই স্বাস্থ্য সেবা ক্যাম্পে প্রায় ৭ হাজার রোগী সেবা গ্রহণ করেন। ফাউন্ডেশনের চিকিৎসক এবং সদস্যরা সুবিশাল স্বাস্থ্য শিবিরের কাজ অত্যন্ত সফলভাবে সম্পন্ন করেন। শীতের কারণে ঠাণ্ডাসহ চোখে আক্রান্ত মানুষকে চিকিৎসা দেওয়ার জন্য ঢাকার কাকরাইল বস্তিতে ফ্রি মেডিকাল ক্যাম্প আয়োজন করা হয়। সিলেটে চক্ষু চিকিৎসা ক্যাম্প আয়োজন করে সেবা প্রদান করা হয় কয়েক হাজার রোগীকে।

স্বাভাবিক জীবনে ঠোঁটকাটা রোগী

জননেতা তারেক রহমানের আগ্রহে একটি বিশেষ উদ্যোগ হিসাবে জেডআরএফ জার্মান বিশেষজ্ঞ সার্জনদের সহযোগিতায় বগুড়া, খুলনা এবং গাইবান্ধায় প্লাস্টিক ও রিকন্সট্রাকটিভ সার্জারি ক্যাম্প আয়োজন করে। এই ক্যাম্পগুলোতে প্রায় ৪৫০ জন ঠোঁটকাটা, তালুকাটা ও পোড়া রোগীকে বিনামূল্যে অস্ত্রোপচার করা হয়। আর্থিক অভাব বা চিকিৎসা সুবিধার অভাবে সার্জারি করতে না পারলেও এসব ক্যাম্পের মাধ্যমে অনেকেই নতুন জীবন ফিরে পেয়েছেন। এখনও বিভিন্ন জেলায় এ কার্যক্রম অব্যাহত রয়েছে।

অ্যাজমা রোগীদের সেবায়

বাংলাদেশের প্রায় ৭০ লাখ মানুষ অ্যাজমা রোগে আক্রান্ত। এটি ২০০৩ সালের সরকারি হিসাবের ধারণা। একটি মাত্র সমন্বিত অ্যাজমা সেন্টারে এমন রোগীদের জন্য পর্যাপ্ত সেবা পাওয়া কঠিন। এই প্রয়োজন অনুভব করে মানবিক তারেক রহমানের দিক–নির্দেশনায় ২০০৩ সালে বগুড়া এবং ২০০৪ সালের চট্টগ্রামে অ্যাজমা সেন্টার প্রতিষ্ঠা করে। বগুড়ায় প্রায় ৫,৮৭১ জন এবং চট্টগ্রামে ৩ ১১৯ জন রোগী সফল চিকিৎসা সেবা পেয়েছেন। বর্তমানে এই সেবা চলমান রয়েছে।

কৃত্রিম অঙ্গ প্রতিস্থাপন

মানবতার সেবক তারেক রহমানের দিক–নির্দেশনা ও তাঁর সার্বিক তত্ত্বাবধানে গণতান্ত্রিক আন্দোলন বা দুর্ঘটনার কারণে যারা হাত, পা হারিয়েছেন তাদের জন্য জেডআরএফ কৃত্রিম অঙ্গ প্রতিস্থাপন কার্যক্রম পরিচালনা করে আসছে।

সংগঠনের প্রতিষ্ঠাকাল থেকেই এ সহযোগিতা চলছে এবং বহু মানুষ এর মাধ্যমে নতুন করে চলাফেরা ও কর্মজীবনে ফিরতে সক্ষম হয়েছেন। পাশাপাশি জেডআরএফ শহীদ পরিবার, নিখোঁজ বা নির্যাতিত পরিবারের পাশে থেকেছে এবং সহযোগিতা অব্যাহত রাখার প্রত্যয় ব্যক্ত করছে।

বিশুদ্ধ কমল পানি সরবরাহ

ঢাকার দাসের কান্দি এলাকার মানুষের জন্য বিশুদ্ধ পানির সমস্যাটি দীর্ঘদিনের। সেখানে পয়ঃনিষ্কাশন ব্যবস্থার ত্রুটির কারণে পানি দূষণ মারাত্মক পর্যায়ে পৌঁছায়। তারেক রহমানের নির্দেশে এই সমস্যার সমাধানে জেডআরএফ বগুড়া পল্লী উন্নয়ন একাডেমির সহযোগিতায় কমল (শহীদ রাষ্ট্রপতি জিয়াউর রহমানের ডাক নাম কমল সেই হিসাবে এই পানির নাম রাখা হয়েছে) পানি প্রকল্পটি চালু করে। প্রায় ১২০টি পরিবার এই প্রকল্পের আওতায় বিশুদ্ধ পানির সুবিধা পাচ্ছে। পাশাপাশি এখানে আরও ১৬০টি পরিবার ক্ষুদ্র ঋণ প্রকল্পের সুবিধা গ্রহণ করছে। এই উদ্যোগ স্থানীয় জনগোষ্ঠীর জীবন মান উন্নয়নে সরাসরি ভূমিকা রেখে চলেছে।

করোনাকালে সেবা

মহামারী করোনাকালে মানুষ যখন জীবনের ভয়ে গৃহবন্দী তখন জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশনের চিকিৎসক, কৃষিবিদসহ বিভিন্ন পেশার প্রতিনিধিরা জীবনের ঝুঁকি নিয়ে করোনা আক্রান্ত মানুষের দ্বারে দ্বারে পৌঁছে দিয়েছেন অক্সিজেন সিলিন্ডার, প্রাইভেট মেডিকেল পিপিই, ওষুধসামগ্রী। আবার যারা অনেকটাই গৃহবন্দী তাদের জন্য চালু করা হয় হটলাইন স্বাস্থ্যসেবা।

দুর্যোগ দুর্বিপাকে জেডআরএফ

তারেক রহমানের নির্দেশে ২০২৪ সালে ফেনীর বন্যায় ক্ষতিগ্রস্তদের মাঝে ত্রাণ সহায়তা, জুলাই আন্দোলনের সময় আহতদের চিকিৎসা সেবা, মাইলস্টোন ট্রাজিটিতে দক্ষ ছাত্র ও শিক্ষকদের সহায়তা, দেশব্যাপী বৃক্ষরোপণ, ডেঙ্গু ও অ্যানথ্রাক্স প্রতিরোধে সচেতনতা বৃদ্ধি, হৃদরোগ প্রতিরোধক প্রচারণা, মাদ্রাসা ও এতিমখানায় ঈদ উপহার ও স্বাস্থ্যসেবা প্রদান–এ সবের মধ্যে কিছু সাম্প্রতিক কার্যক্রম এখন তুলে ধরা হচ্ছে।

ভেটেরিনারি মেডিকাল ক্যাম্প

তারেক রহমানের দিক–নির্দেশনায় দেশব্যাপী ফ্রি ভেটেরিনারি মেডিকাল ক্যাম্প আয়োজন করেছে ফাউন্ডেশন। এরই ধারাবাহিকতায় ৩০ আগস্ট ২০২৫ জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশনের উদ্যোগে ময়মনসিংহ জেলার সুতিয়াখালী গ্রামের জহির উদ্দিন উচ্চ বিদ্যালয় মেডিকাল ক্যাম্প অনুষ্ঠিত হয়েছে। এ সময় স্থানীয় কৃষকদের মাঝে ফলদ ও ঔষধি গাছের চারা বিতরণ করা হয়।। ক্যাম্পে গ্রামের কৃষকের গবাদি পশুকে বিনামূল্যে চিকিৎসা ও ঔষধ প্রদান করা হয়। চট্টগ্রাম বাঁশখালীতে ফাউন্ডেশনের উদ্যোগে ফি ভেটেরিনারি মেডিকাল ক্যাম্প ও ফলজ গাছের চারা বিতরণ অনুষ্ঠান অনুষ্ঠিত হয় ১৫ নভেম্বর ২০২৫। এছাড়াও ৪ অক্টোবর ২০২৬ তারিখে সিলেটের গোয়াইনঘাট উপজেলায় অনুরূপ অনুষ্ঠানের পাশাপাশি কৃষকদের মাঝে এডারিউডি কিট বিতরণ করা হয়।

পরিষ্কার–পরিচ্ছন্নতা কর্মসূচি

যত্রতত্র ময়লা আবর্জনা এবং পলিথিন ফেলে রাখার কারণে আমাদের স্বাস্থ্যহানি ঘটে এ বিষয়টি গভীরভাবে উপলব্ধি করেন ফাউন্ডেশনের ভাইস প্রেসিডেন্ট ডা. জুবাইদা রহমান। এইসব ময়লা–আবর্জনা গলিপচে পশুর পেটে চলে যাওয়ার ফলে তাদের মধ্যে নানা ধরনের ক্ষতিকারক জীবাণুর অনুপ্রবেশ ঘটতে পারে এবং সেই মাংস মানব স্বাস্থ্যের জন্যও ক্ষতিকর। এজন্য তার নির্দেশে ফেনী, খুলনাসহ আরো বেশ কয়েক জায়গায় পরিষ্কার–পরিচ্ছন্নতা কর্মসূচি পালন করা হয়।

আইডিয়া ফেস্ট ২০২৫ মিনি হ্যাকাথন

বৈষম্যহীন সমৃদ্ধ বাংলাদেশ গড়ার অভিপ্রায় তারুণ্যের ভাবনায় আগামীর বাংলাদেশ' শিরোনামে আইডিয়া ফেস্ট ২০২৫ মিনি হ্যাকাথন' তোমাদের ক্যাম্পে ক্যাম্পাসে শীর্ষক কর্মসূচি গ্রহণ করে জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশন। বাংলাদেশ নানা সমস্যায় জর্জরিত। এসব সঙ্কট মোকাবিলা করে দেশকে এগিয়ে নিতে হবে তরুণদের। ফলে তাদের দক্ষ ও যোগ্য হিসাবে গড়ে তুলতেই ফাউন্ডেশনের এই উদ্যোগ অর্থাৎ তরুণরা যেন দেশের সমস্যা চিহ্নিত করে তা সমাধানের পথ নির্মাণ করতে পারে। এই আইডিয়া ফেস্ট'র মূল লক্ষ্যই সেটি। জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশনের ভাইস প্রেসিডেন্ট ও বিশিষ্ট কার্ডিওলজিস্ট ডা. জুবাইদা রহমানের নির্দেশে এই ট্যালেন্ট হান্ট বা মিনি হ্যাকাথনের আয়োজন করা হয়। পরবর্তীকালে এই সকল তরুণদের নিয়ে চূড়ান্ত প্রতিযোগিতার আয়োজন করা হয়। চূড়ান্ত প্রতিযোগিতায় বিজয়ীদের মাঝে ফাউন্ডেশনের প্রতিষ্ঠা বার্ষিকীর দিনে পুরস্কার তুলে দেওয়া হয়। দেশের সীমানা পেরিয়ে আন্তর্জাতিক মানবিক উদ্যোগে যুক্ত জেডআরএফ দেশের সীমানা পেরিয়ে জেডআরএফ আন্তর্জাতিকভাবে মানবিক উদ্যোগেও যুক্ত হয়েছে। তুরস্কের ভয়াবহ ভূমিকম্পে ক্ষতিগ্রস্ত মানুষের সহায়তায় জেডআরএফের সদস্যদের নিয়ে গঠিত একটি টিম ঢাকাছ তুরস্ক দূতাবাসে কাল হস্তান্তর করে।

পরিশেষে বলা যায়, জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশনের ২৭ বছরের যাত্রা মূলত মানব কল্যাণ, সহমর্মিতা, উন্নয়ন ও সেবার ইতিহাস। শিক্ষা, স্বাস্থ্য, পানি, কৃষি, সামাজিক নিরাপত্তা, দুর্যোগ পরিস্থিতি এবং মানবিকতার প্রতিটি ক্ষেত্রেই ফাউন্ডেশন বাস্তবমুখী উদ্যোগ গ্রহণ করেছে। সমাজের পিছিয়ে পড়া মানুষের পাশে দাঁড়িয়ে তাদের জীবনমান উন্নয়নে ভূমিকা রেখে চলেছে। মানবতার প্রতি অঙ্গীকারাবদ্ধ এই সংগঠন ভবিষ্যতেও দেশের মানুষের জন্য কাজ করে যাবে। আরও বড় পরিসরে চলতে থাকবে আর্তমানবতার সেবা। মানবতাবাদী গুণে গুণান্বিত একজন তারেক রহমান যখন জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশনের প্রেসিডেন্ট তখন অত্যন্ত স্বাভাবিকভাবেই এর কর্মকাণ্ড বিস্তার লাভ করবে। প্রত্যন্ত অঞ্চলসহ শহরের সকল জনসাধারণের জন্য ক্রমেই এই ফাউন্ডেশন তার কার্যক্রম বাড়িয়ে চলবে। বিভিন্ন পেশার প্রতিষ্ঠিত ব্যক্তিত্বের সমন্বয় গঠিত একটি চৌকস টিমের মানব সেবার তীব্র আগ্রহকে কাজে লাগিয়ে জনবান্ধব এই সকল কর্মসূচি অতীতের মতো ভবিষ্যতেও চলবে। আছ এই শুভদিনে মহান সৃষ্টিকর্তার কাছে নিবেদন– তিনি যেন আমাদের প্রাণপ্রিয় প্রেসিডেন্ট জনাব তারেক রহমানের সুস্বাস্থ্য অক্ষুণ্ন রাখেন। আমরা জেডআরএফ–এর সকল সদস্য তারেক রহমানের মানবতাবাদী এই প্রতিষ্ঠানকে অনন্য উচ্চতায় নিয়ে যেতে বদ্ধপরিকর। তারেক রহমানের মানবতার দর্শনকে দেশের প্রতিটি মানুষের হৃদয়ে পৌঁছে দিতে আমরা নিয়োজিত রয়েছি।

লেখক: নির্বাহী পরিচালক, জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশন

আহ্বায়কের শুভেচ্ছা



আজ ১৮ অক্টোবর, জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশনের ২৭তম প্রতিষ্ঠা বার্ষিকী। হাঁটি হাঁটি পা পা করে দীর্ঘ ২৭ বছরের পথপরিক্রমায় ফাউন্ডেশন সাধারণ মানুষের আস্থার প্রতীক হিসেবে প্রতিষ্ঠা লাভ করেছে। আজকের এই শুভক্ষণে ফাউন্ডেশনের সব পর্যায়ের সদস্য, শুভানুধ্যায়ী ও সেবামূলক কর্মকাণ্ডে সম্পৃক্ত সকলকে জানাই আন্তরিক শুভেচ্ছা ও অভিনন্দন।

প্রতিষ্ঠালগ্ন থেকে জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশন মানবসেবা, শিক্ষা, স্বাস্থ্য, কৃষি, পরিবেশ সংরক্ষণ ও জনকল্যাণমূলক কর্মকাণ্ডের মাধ্যমে মানুষের পাশে দাঁড়ানোর প্রচেষ্টা চালিয়ে যাচ্ছে। চিকিৎসক, কৃষিবিদ, প্রকৌশলী, শিক্ষক, সাংবাদিক ও আইনজীবীসহ বিভিন্ন পেশার মানুষের সম্মিলিত উদ্যোগ ফাউন্ডেশনের কার্যক্রমকে সমৃদ্ধ করেছে।

আমি বিশ্বাস করি, মানবিক মূল্যবোধ, সামাজিক দায়বদ্ধতা ও দেশপ্রেমের চেতনায় উদ্বুদ্ধ হয়ে আমরা আরও সুসংগঠিতভাবে মানুষের কল্যাণে কাজ করতে পারব। প্রতিষ্ঠাবার্ষিকীর এই মাহেন্দ্রক্ষণে সবার সম্মিলিত প্রচেষ্টায় ফাউন্ডেশনের অগ্রযাত্রা আরও গতিশীল ও অর্থবহ হোক—এই প্রত্যাশা করি।

সবাইকে আন্তরিক ধন্যবাদ ও শুভেচ্ছা।

অধ্যাপক ড. মোর্শেদ হাসান খান
আহ্বায়ক
২৭তম প্রতিষ্ঠা বার্ষিকী উদযাপন কমিটি

সদস্য সচিবের শুভেচ্ছা



জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশনের ২৭তম প্রতিষ্ঠা বার্ষিকী উপলক্ষে ফাউন্ডেশনের সকল সদস্য, শুভানুধ্যায়ী ও সেবাকর্মে সম্পৃক্ত সবার প্রতি জানাই আন্তরিক শুভেচ্ছা ও অভিনন্দন।

১৯৯৯ সালে প্রতিষ্ঠার পর থেকে জিয়াউর রহমান ফাউন্ডেশন শিক্ষা, স্বাস্থ্য, কৃষি, পরিবেশ ও মানবকল্যাণে নিরলসভাবে কাজ করে যাচ্ছে। শিক্ষার্থীদের বৃত্তি প্রদান, প্রান্তিক কৃষকদের সহায়তা, চিকিৎসাসেবা, দুর্যোগে ক্ষতিগ্রস্ত মানুষের পাশে দাঁড়ানো, বৃক্ষরোপণ

BNP backtracking on July charter pledges: NCP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP betrayed the nation by forming a special parliamentary committee to amend the constitution instead of implementing the July charter, alleged National Citizen Party (NCP) Secretary Akhter Hossen yesterday.

Speaking at an event marking the first anniversary of the charter's signing at the NCP office in the capital, he said the committee undermined the referendum verdict and would not resolve the constitutional crisis.

Akhter alleged that the BNP was backtracking on agreements reached during the National Consensus Commission talks.

He cited the repeal of the interim government's ordinance on the Supreme Court Secretariat and the failure to give opposition lawmakers chairmanships of parliamentary standing committees.

He said political parties had agreed to form a Constitution Reform Council to ensure lasting constitutional changes and prevent legal challenges.

Meanwhile, at a separate programme, Revolutionary Workers Party General Secretary Saiful Haque said the BNP had a major responsibility to implement the charter fully.

At another event, Rastro Songskar Andolon President Hasnat Quaiyum called for a united political movement to implement the July charter and uphold the referendum verdict.

Another beef feast at JnU

FROM PAGE 3

"misleading information", had created a negative impression of the university.

"Bangladesh Khelafat Chhatra Majlis organised this harmony feast to maintain goodwill and harmony among students of all religions and beliefs at the university," he said.

Obaidul also described the event as a protest against what he called a communal decision imposed by the university administration.

University Proctor Prof Azam Khan said students had organised a beef feast on Friday as well, which took place peacefully despite objections from the administration.

"The Khelafat Chhatra Majlis also wanted to organise a beef feast. We initially did not want to grant permission. However, a leader of the organisation called the vice-chancellor and requested permission. It was later granted subject to certain conditions," he said.

The back-to-back feasts followed a dispute over restrictions on cooking beef khichuri on campus. On Friday, leaders of the Shibir-dominated Jagannath University Central Students' Union (JnUCSU) and several other student organisations slaughtered a cow and distributed beef and khichuri in protest against the university's restrictions.

The dispute began on the night of October 12, when students of the 2021-22 academic session of the Department of Islamic History and Culture arranged to cook near the campus open stage to celebrate completing their honours degrees.

As the site was close to the university's central temple, several Hindu students objected. Allegations also emerged that bricks from the temple had been used to build the cooking stove.

The organisers later removed the bricks, built an alternative stove and apologised for the "unintended mistake". The incident nevertheless prompted protests by Hindu students.

On October 14, the proctor's office issued a notice directing students not to slaughter animals on campus, citing public health, cleanliness and the need to maintain a hygienic environment.

In protest, JnUCSU leaders and other students held a procession and rally that night. The following day, the university administration said students could organise activities on campus as long as they did not disrupt others' activities.

Judge Farrukh Ahmad by his poetry, not politics

FROM PAGE 3

Wahiduzzaman urged readers to study the memoirs of Farrukh's colleagues to understand his character and called for his works to be included in school, college and university curricula.

Journalist Shamsuddoza Sajen said a broader assessment of the poet's literature, ideas and personality is needed.

Born in 1918, Farrukh Ahmad is known in Bangla literature as the "poet of the Muslim Renaissance".

Alongside Muslim heritage and Arabic-Persian influences, his poetry explored exploitation, poverty and the aspiration for human liberation. He died in 1974.

The discussion was moderated by Emran Mahfuz.

Dhaka seeks details from Riyadh

FROM PAGE 2

violated its obligations under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations by failing to notify Bangladesh before the trial, Shama said the government had yet to receive a full account of the incident.

"Our mission was not informed of when or how the incident occurred. I do not wish to comment at this stage on why the mission was not notified, as the Saudi government has not yet provided us with complete details.

"Once we receive the full information, I will be able to explain the matter more clearly."

Shama said Bangladesh learned about the executions on October 14 -- the day the two were executed.

As neither the foreign ministry nor the Bangladesh mission in Saudi Arabia had been informed beforehand, Dhaka sought details from Riyadh.

"We have not yet received detailed official information from the Saudi government. We will have to wait a little longer."

She said Saudi Arabia had its own legal framework under which punishments for serious offences were carried out. However, she stressed that Bangladesh needed a full account from Saudi authorities before commenting further, adding that the incident should serve as a lesson.

Citing a message from the labour welfare wing of the Bangladesh mission, Shama said the two Bangladeshis were allegedly involved in adultery inside a mosque in Mecca, an act that could be considered a grave offence under Saudi law.

The identities of the two Bangladeshis and further details of the case were not immediately available.

Asked about the repatriation of their bodies, the state minister said both countries were processing the necessary formalities.

"Only after receiving a clear picture from the Saudi government of what actually happened can we discuss the next steps, including how and when to bring their bodies back."

Trump waives key sanctions, tariffs

FROM PAGE 12

face increased costs largely attributed to the US-Israeli war on Iran, analysts have said.

The legislation, whose primary backer in Congress was the late Senator Lindsey Graham, a South Carolina Republican, would have imposed tariffs of up to 100% within 30 days on all goods brought into the US from the five largest importers of Russian crude oil or gas, as well as any country that knowingly bought oil or gas 30 days after the law was enacted or was among the top five countries helping Russia evade sanctions.

The order said the waiver will remain in effect until Trump or his top officials determine that "further action is appropriate."

Trump signed the Lindsey O Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026 in mid-September.

"I have submitted to the Congress a certification that the issuance of such a waiver at this time is in the national interests of the United States," Trump said in the order.

Countries such as China and India, which are among the biggest buyers of Russian oil, have raised concerns about the Russia sanctions bill.

Beijing has said it "consistently opposed long-arm jurisdiction that lacks a basis in international law" while India warned Washington that new tariffs could impact bilateral ties.

The law allows the president to waive sanctions simply by informing Congress that he has determined that they are not in the national interest.

US Representative Don Beyer, a Virginia Democrat, blasted Trump for the waiver, saying he was giving in to Putin.

"Trump's latest surrender to Putin again betrays our Ukrainian partners and defies clear congressional intent of legislation designed to punish Russia for its illegal war of aggression," Beyer said in a statement.

Trump had also faced criticism from several US senators, including some Republicans, over a recent diesel deal with Russia in which Trump agreed to lift sanctions on Russian exports and Russia agreed to supply diesel to global markets in an effort to lower fuel prices. The lawmakers who criticized the deal said it would help fund Russia's war efforts.

Putin's investment envoy, Kirill Dmitriev, called Trump's waiver "a truly historic moment," posting on X that the legislation could have effectively brought all economic cooperation between Russia and the US to a halt.

Oct 31 deadline looms over 1,800

FROM PAGE 12

32 Bangladeshis at Phnom Penh airport as they attempted to leave after allegedly being exploited in online scam centres.

Sources said they were detained over irregular immigration status and other complications during immigration checks.

Two of them were released earlier, while the remaining 30 were held at an immigration detention centre until Friday evening following prolonged diplomatic negotiations.

The 30 people are expected to return in the next couple of days, Zahir Imam, first secretary (labour) at the Bangladesh Embassy in Thailand, told The Daily Star. Sources said they would pay for their own tickets.

However, the fate of hundreds of others remains uncertain, including those unable to afford tickets home.

Bangladesh has no embassy in Cambodia, and its Bangkok mission handles consular affairs there.

Imam said the mission had received requests concerning 1,796 Bangladeshis stranded in Cambodia through phone calls, emails, direct applications and community contacts.

Around 350 to 400 have returned since July, but the mission could not independently verify all the names or establish the current whereabouts and circumstances of everyone on its list, he said.

Cambodian authorities had interviewed Bangladeshis seeking repatriation to determine whether they were trafficking victims or linked to scam centres and trafficking networks. Those verified as victims were allowed to return, Imam said.

The process has temporarily stopped, and the Bangladesh mission has requested its resumption.

Anirban Survivor Voice Foundation estimates that more than 2,000 Bangladeshis remain stranded, with around 1,800 facing uncertainty over the October 31 deadline under an arrangement concerning immigration overstay penalties. Its president and co-founder, Al Amin Nayon, said the organisation had sought clarification on the arrangement's conditions, eligibility criteria and provisions for waiving fines.

Nayon said the foundation would submit a memorandum to the expatriates' welfare and overseas employment minister today, with copies to the foreign affairs and home ministries. It is demanding urgent repatriation, individual screening to identify trafficking victims, protection from punishment for crimes committed under coercion, rehabilitation and action against trafficking networks.

FAMILIES IN DEBT

Kabir Hossain said he had spent around Tk 13 lakh supporting his 24-year-old son Shawon since he travelled to Cambodia nearly one and a half years ago.

Shawon was promised a computer-related job paying around Tk 1.5 lakh a month. His family borrowed much of the Tk 6 lakh needed for his journey, but he could not send money home. Instead, Kabir repeatedly sent money for his son's food, accommodation and other expenses.

"Now I don't know how I will repay these debts," Kabir, who works for a private company, told The Daily Star.

He said he had lost money on two attempts to arrange his son's return and was preparing to buy another ticket, hoping Shawon could return on October 19 or 20.

QUESTIONS OVER OVERSIGHT

Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) records show that 15,963 Bangladeshis received employment clearance for Cambodia between January 1, 2025, and September 30, 2026.

Shariful Hasan, associate director of BRAC's Migration Programme and Youth Platform, questioned the lack of effective monitoring of workers' employers, working conditions and whereabouts despite the clearances.

"We have sent around 16,000 people there with BMET clearance, yet we do not have a mechanism to find out where they are or what they are doing," he told The Daily Star.

He cited allegations of harassment and torture against Bangladeshis trying to leave Cambodia. Survivors have described being lured by promises of legitimate jobs and then forced into cyber scam operations. Some said their passports were confiscated and they faced threats and extortion.

On October 8, the bodies of three Bangladeshis were brought home from Cambodia, including 23-year-old Sohag Ahmed of Jhenaidah, who allegedly became trapped in a scam compound after travelling with BMET clearance.

Shariful said the government must identify those stranded, establish their circumstances and ensure their safe return.

17 killed in Kolkata Durga Puja stampede

FROM PAGE 12

and safety lapses.

Last year, a stampede at India's Kumbh Mela religious fair killed 30 people and injured several others, and 11 fans were crushed to death in Bengaluru during celebrations for the local cricket team's first Indian Premier League title.

The same year, 36 people were killed after a stampede broke out at a campaign rally of a popular actor-turned-politician in southern Tamil Nadu state.

In 2024, 121 people were killed in northern Uttar Pradesh state during a Hindu religious gathering.

Arms-brandishing Ishraque's anti-drug drive stirs outrage

FROM PAGE 1

At one point, Ishraque was heard shouting "halt" while communicating over a walkie-talkie. He also said any discussion would take place only after police arrived.

A man wearing jeans and a shirt was seen pointing a firearm at several people at the scene and kicking an unidentified individual.

Sources identified him as one of the minister's guards. Several members of the entourage were also seen apprehending at least three people.

The minister was accompanied by two privately appointed bodyguards, Tofazzal Hossain and Lavlu, as well as a government-appointed security guard, according to sources.

His privately appointed guards were also carrying firearms, while the government-appointed guard was seen pointing a firearm at people at the scene.

Another video showed police officers handcuffing several people and taking them away.

According to Ishraque's Facebook post, the operation targeted drug dens near the Gandaria railway line.

Gandaria Police Station Officer-in-Charge Moniruzzaman Khan told The Daily Star that the minister's security guard had informed police around 3:30pm that several suspected drug users had been detained.

"A patrol team was sent to the spot, and six people were detained," he said.

Asked whether police personnel at the scene had seen the minister carrying a firearm, the OC said he had questioned those present, but they told him they had not seen a weapon in the minister's hand.

"However, I have also seen the weapon in his hand in the video," he added.

Repeated attempts by The Daily Star to contact Ishraque, also the MP for Dhaka-6, for comment were unsuccessful.

However, speaking to Prothom Alo, the minister said the firearm he was carrying was licensed, and he obtained it after Inqilab Mancha leader Sharif Osman Bin Hadi was shot on December 12, 2025. As he acquired the firearm after that date, he could not include it in his election nomination papers, he said.

The deadline for submitting nomination papers was December 29, 2025, and Ishraque submitted his papers on December 28.

Explaining why he carried the firearm during the operation, Ishraque said residents of the area around Dayaganj Ghuntighar, adjacent to Gandaria railway station, had repeatedly complained about the drug trade.

"I have held meetings with the police at least 30 to 40 times. They give different explanations each time, saying they lack manpower and vehicles," he said.

He also claimed that several police personnel had been shot while conducting raids in the area.

The minister said police had yet to recover fully from the aftermath of the July uprising and that drug traders sometimes fired at law enforcers from a distance. This, he said, was why he carried a firearm during the operation.

"I did not fire it, nor did I use it to intimidate anyone. Yes, we conducted the operation, and we are building a social resistance [against drugs]," he said.

Former inspector general of police Baharul Alam said firearms could be used only when there was a threat to life or public safety. Displaying a firearm in a manner that caused fear or discomfort to others was prohibited, he said.

Under the Firearms Licence, Renewal and Use Policy 2025, a licence holder may carry or use a licensed firearm for self-defence but cannot display it in a way that causes fear or discomfort to others.

The policy also states that guards at financial institutions and other establishments cannot display firearms in public without wearing uniforms.

It further prohibits licence holders from being employed as armed guards to protect other people or their property, warning that such employment could lead to immediate revocation of the licence.

Dr Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, said a firearms licence was issued for personal protection, not to apprehend or punish suspected offenders.

"Taking the law into one's own hands is an offence for any citizen. When an elected representative and a minister does so, it is even more serious," he told The Daily Star.

He said such actions amounted to an abuse of power and sent the wrong message that anyone could take the law into their own hands.

"It also demonstrates a lack of confidence in the police on the part of the government. If a minister takes such action, what is the role of the police?" he asked.

Islami Andolan Bangladesh "vehemently rejected" such actions by Ishraque. "Through this reprehensible act, he has effectively promoted terrorism," the party said in a statement.

Bangladesh economy caught in 'structural trap'

FROM PAGE 3

employment opportunities and underemployment were growing concerns.

More than half of households also had at least one member with a chronic illness, exposing them to repeated healthcare expenses, he added.

He identified stagnant investment and sluggish growth as the second dimension of the structural trap.

"There are countries where households face economic hardship, but investment continues to grow. In our case, however, household distress is accompanied by stagnant or declining investment and sluggish growth," he said.

The third dimension, he said, is political economy and governance, which determine the country's ability to address household distress and lack of economic dynamism.

Zillur called for a comprehensive transition compact built around five pillars: economic democracy, new growth drivers, quality education and skills, productive transformation, and faster governance.

"Bangladesh needs new growth drivers," he said, urging diversification beyond garments and remittances, greater support for promising sectors such as pharmaceuticals, and faster, evidence-based decision-making.

At the event, Prof Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, warned that poverty and inequality could be higher than estimated if poverty lines were not adequately adjusted for inflation.

He called for higher revenue collection to expand public spending, along with improved agricultural productivity and stronger links between farmers, industry and global markets.

Describing quality education as the country's biggest challenge, he called for greater investment in technical education, digital skills, high-speed internet and emerging sectors to create jobs and improve competitiveness.

Jean Pesme, World Bank country director for Bangladesh and Bhutan, said the economy needs urgent structural transformation in trade, public finance and energy efficiency.

He also stressed the need to align education and skills with private-sector needs to restore confidence and create jobs.

Fazlul Hoque, administrator of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, said no sector beyond garments had taken off in the past two decades, leaving the economy increasingly dependent on RMG exports.

He added that degrees no longer guarantee jobs and criticised bureaucratic delays, saying young people will not tolerate visiting government offices 30-40 times to obtain routine permits.

Farah Kabir, country director of ActionAid Bangladesh, said informal workers are struggling with rising food prices and the lack of minimum wage guarantees.

As female employment in the RMG sector declined, she called for alternative jobs in agro-ecology, childcare centres and gender-sensitive investment.

Nearly half of families in debt

FROM PAGE 1

In contrast, the 2022 Household Income and Expenditure Survey found the national average household income to be Tk 32,422 and the national average expenses Tk 31,500.

The commission ordered the special survey to aid in its recommendation for salary hike under the ninth pay scale.

The survey, which was conducted from September 14 to September 18 last year, gathered data using tablet devices and digital Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing across 150 primary sampling units, interviewing 3,000 households across rural, urban and city corporation areas.

The latest survey findings serve as a mirror image of the weak macroeconomic environment Bangladesh has experienced since the pandemic, said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

There has been a steady decline in economic growth in recent years alongside high single-digit or double-digit inflation that is showing no signs of abating. At the same time, employment has remained stagnant while real wages have steadily fallen, he said.

Inflation has outpaced wage growth for 56 consecutive months in September, government data show.

In September, wage growth fell to 7.9 percent from 8.05 percent the previous month, according to the BBS's Wage Rate Index, which tracks monthly wages of low-paid skilled and unskilled workers across 63 occupations in agriculture, industry and services.

"Under these circumstances, asking any family about their situation yields the expected answer that incomes are dropping while costs are climbing, leaving many with no choice but to take on debt," Zahid said.

He stressed that the surge in expenses is not driven by an improved quality of life, but rather by the rising cost of living.

Explaining why rural debt is higher than urban debt, he pointed out that income stagnation is far more pronounced in villages, whereas cities offer relatively more economic opportunities.

While remittance income serves as a positive factor in rural areas, its benefits reach no more than 7 to 8 percent of the rural population. Consequently, a large portion of the population is now surviving by depleting savings built up in earlier years, he said.

"This survey data confirms the WB's macroeconomic projections that poverty rates are on the rise," Zahid added.

A prolonged slowdown is eroding household welfare through weak labour demand and persistent inflation, pushing national poverty to an estimated 22.5 percent in 2026 from 18.7 percent in 2022, according to the WB's latest Bangladesh Development Update, released on October 6.

Extreme poverty, measured at the $3-a-day international line, rose from 5.9 percent to an estimated 10.1 percent over the same period.

The economic strain is largely driven by a four-year inflationary surge that has systematically squeezed household purchasing power.

This is compounded by acute energy shortages that have curtailed business operating hours, forced factory closures, and stalled job creation, particularly within the country's industrial sectors, the WB report added.

The beating heart of Durga Puja

FROM PAGE 12

I expected more," Binoy admits candidly. "I had a better offer in Cumilla, but I didn't go out of loyalty to this mandir."

"It's devotion to my craft and to Goddess Durga that has kept me going for more than a decade," Binoy says, his eyes lighting up as the evening prayers begin. "The feeling I get when I play in front of Durga is otherworldly."

Across the city at the Dhakeshwari National Temple, the epicentre of the country's celebrations, a different group of dhakis speak of similar devotion.

Leading the temple's drummers is Shanti Ranjan Das, 70. He is the senior-most dhaki, having slung the heavy wooden instrument over his shoulder for 45 years. Alongside him are Tapan Chandra Das, 47, and Ripon Chandra Das, 42, both permanent employees at the temple.

Ripon takes home a fixed monthly salary of Tk 8,000.

"I learned the craft from my father at the age of 17," Ripon says.

To supplement his income, he manages a local "band party" that performs on demand at weddings and household pujas.

"My devotion to the craft and to Goddess Durga, and my wish to uphold my father's legacy, have been my guiding forces all these years."

But that legacy may stop with him. His 21-year-old son, Shaon Chandra Das, watched his father struggle and chose a different path. He now works as a journalist at a local newspaper.

The younger generation's reluctance to inherit the drumsticks is compounded by a shift in the seasonal migration of artists across the country. Historically, the capital has been the destination of choice for seasonal performers during Durga Puja.

"There was once a time when dhakis from all over the country would come to Dhaka during Durga Puja in search of work and stay until Kali Puja," Ripon recalls. "There was better pay here than in the suburbs and villages."

Now, a reverse seasonal migration is occurring as urban expenses rise. "Nowadays, they're reluctant to come to Dhaka because the costs outweigh the pay," Ripon explains. "There are better opportunities in suburban towns where puja organisers backed by wealthy donors offer better pay to employ local dhakis."

The financial anxieties of the drummers stand in sharp contrast to the festival's global profile.

In 2021, UNESCO inscribed Durga Puja on its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, recognising the festival's extraordinary cultural value and the many traditional art forms that sustain it.

Heritage, however prestigious, cannot guarantee livelihoods.

As the nights of Durga Puja unfold across Dhaka, the city's temples continue to pulse with the familiar rhythms of the dhak. Worshippers sway to its cadence. Priests move in step with its tempo. Children watch in fascination.

Few pause to consider the uncertain future of the men producing those sounds.

For now, the beat endures.

For five autumn days, the dhakis will breathe life into the festival, sustaining a tradition that has endured for generations, even as the heartbeat of their own profession grows fainter with each passing year.



WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY 2026

It's time to listen to those who have lived it



DR SUMAIYA KHALED

Imagine being invited to tell your story, only to discover that nobody wants your opinion when decisions are made. For millions living with mental health conditions, this is an all too familiar reality.

In Bangladesh, where conversations about mental health still carry whispers of shame, people experiencing depression, anxiety and other difficulties often struggle to be understood. Their experiences are frequently dismissed, their choices questioned and their voices missing from discussions about their own care.

This year's World Mental Health Day, observed on 10 October, challenges that silence with a powerful message: "*Lived experiences heard: real voices, real change.*"

The World Health Organisation (WHO) is urging governments, healthcare providers and communities to recognise something remarkably simple: people who have experienced mental health difficulties understand challenges that textbooks alone cannot explain.

They know what it feels like to seek help and face judgement. They understand the loneliness of being misunderstood, the fear of speaking openly and the frustration of receiving care that overlooks their needs.

Yet, being heard is not the same as being included. According to WHO's Mental Health Atlas 2024 survey, only 45 per cent of responding countries reported ongoing collaboration with people who have experienced mental health conditions and their families in planning, delivering or reviewing mental health services.



Although 80 per cent of countries with mental health policies reported consulting these individuals, meaningful involvement remains far from universal.

The gap becomes even more troubling when examining how people receive care.

Across responding countries, only nine per cent have fully moved away from relying on psychiatric institutions towards care within communities. Meanwhile, nearly half of reported psychiatric hospital admissions happen without patients' consent, and 23 per cent of hospital stays exceed one year.

Behind these figures are human lives, interrupted relationships and opportunities lost. WHO is therefore advocating a shift towards care that allows people to remain connected to their families, communities and everyday lives, supported by appropriate services rather than unnecessary isolation.

For Bangladesh, this message deserves particular attention. Mental health support should not end at hospital doors. Universities, workplaces, neighbourhoods and primary healthcare centres can help create environments where seeking support feels safe rather than shameful.

Equally important is giving people with personal experience a genuine place at the decision making table. They should help shape awareness campaigns, identify barriers to treatment and evaluate whether services actually work.

Families, too, must learn that compassion means more than offering sympathy. It means respecting choices, protecting dignity and listening without judgement.

This World Mental Health Day, perhaps the most important question is not whether we are talking enough about mental health.

It is whether we are finally allowing those who know its struggles best to lead the conversation themselves.

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Obesity: The silent epidemic weighing on our future

Obesity is no longer just about waistlines. It is a growing health crisis, silently threatening millions of lives. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), one in seven people worldwide lived with obesity in 2024. Bangladesh, too, faces growing concerns as unhealthy diets and inactive lifestyles become increasingly common.

Excess weight increases the risk of diabetes, heart disease and certain cancers. In 2023, unhealthy weight contributed to approximately 3.7 million deaths globally. Children face additional challenges, including bullying, emotional distress and difficulties at school. Without action, obesity could cost the global economy $3 trillion annually by 2030.

Bangladesh faces a troubling paradox. While many families struggle to afford nutritious meals, others increasingly depend on cheap, sugary and fatty foods. Consequently, undernutrition and obesity can exist within the same communities,



creating overlapping health challenges.

The solution begins with healthier everyday habits: balanced meals, regular exercise, adequate sleep and fewer sugary drinks. Breastfeeding and healthy childhood routines also offer lasting benefits.

Yet individual choices alone cannot solve this crisis. Affordable nutritious food, accessible healthcare, safer walking spaces and responsible food marketing are equally important.

Ultimately, tackling obesity means making healthier living possible for everyone.



When pain refuses to leave, can light offer relief?

MD SAIDUR RAHMAN

For countless Bangladeshis, persistent back pain, stiff knees and aching shoulders have become unwelcome companions. From office workers spending hours at desks to older adults struggling with painful joints, everyday discomfort can gradually steal independence. But could a beam of light help ease the burden?

Laser therapy is emerging as an additional option in physiotherapy, offering a gentle approach to managing certain types of pain and injury without surgery.

Unlike the powerful lasers used in operations, this treatment uses carefully controlled light directed towards affected areas. The aim is to support the body's natural healing processes, ease discomfort and reduce swelling.

For people living with long-standing neck, shoulder or lower back pain, laser therapy may provide some relief. It is also used for painful joints, muscle strains, sprains and certain sports injuries. Some specialists use it alongside other treatments for nerve-related pain and wounds that are slow to heal.

The appeal is understandable. Sessions are generally brief, involve no cutting and usually cause little discomfort. Patients can often return to their usual activities immediately afterwards.

However, laser therapy is not a miracle cure. Research suggests that benefits vary depending on the condition, treatment approach and individual patient. While some people experience meaningful improvement, others may notice little difference. Its effectiveness for certain problems remains uncertain.

Importantly, relief from pain does not necessarily mean that an underlying injury has completely healed.

In Bangladesh, where many people delay seeking professional help until pain disrupts daily life, early assessment remains essential. A qualified physiotherapist can identify the likely cause, recommend suitable treatment and determine whether laser therapy might help.

Regular exercise, strengthening weakened muscles, improving posture and maintaining healthy movement remain central to recovery. Laser therapy, when appropriate, should complement these measures rather than replace them.

Patients should also seek properly trained professionals, as incorrect use can pose risks, particularly to the eyes.

Ultimately, the promise of laser therapy lies not in dramatic claims but in its potential to make recovery more comfortable. Sometimes, finding relief begins with understanding that no single treatment can do everything.

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Why people born in the same year may age differently

Why does one 60-year-old enjoy morning walks, family gatherings and an active life, while another struggles with diabetes, high blood pressure and frequent hospital visits? Their birth certificates may reveal the same age, but their bodies tell different stories.

In Bangladesh, where long-term illnesses increasingly affect middle-aged and older adults, this question carries particular importance.

New research published on 9 October 2026 in WashU Medicine offers a fascinating explanation: the body's natural defence system may reveal how well someone is ageing.

Researchers from Washington University School of Medicine and collaborating institutions examined millions of blood cells from more than 2,600 adults worldwide.



They discovered that the balance between two types of protective blood cells could distinguish healthier ageing from patterns linked to future illness.

Further analysis involving 50,000 people found that certain blood patterns were associated with greater risks of diabetes, high blood pressure, kidney problems and even premature death over the following decade.

The exciting possibility? Scientists are developing a simple blood test that could identify warning signs years before symptoms appear.

For Bangladesh, where early detection could prevent suffering, this discovery offers hope.

A familiar song, a gentle touch: Rethinking dementia care



DR QAZI SHAFAYETUL ISLAM

Imagine looking at your own home and feeling like a stranger. Or seeing your children but believing they are still at school. For people living with dementia, such confusion can turn ordinary days into frightening experiences.

In Bangladesh, an estimated six lakh older adults live with dementia, a condition that gradually affects memory, thinking and everyday activities. With the country's ageing population, this number could reach 20 lakh by 2050.

While medicines may ease certain symptoms, they cannot cure dementia. Yet comfort, connection and dignity can still be preserved through surprisingly simple activities.

Sometimes, the most powerful care begins without a prescription. Music, painting, gardening, gentle exercise and familiar conversations can help people with dementia feel calmer, happier and more connected to their surroundings.

A favourite childhood song may awaken comforting memories. Colouring flowers can offer an outlet for emotions when words become difficult. Holding someone's hand or sharing an affectionate hug may provide reassurance when familiar faces seem



unfamiliar.

For Bangladeshi families, these approaches need not involve expensive equipment or specialised facilities.

Consider an elderly woman who spent decades preparing meals for her family. Although she now struggles to recognise her loved ones, washing vegetables or sorting familiar kitchen items may restore a sense of purpose and belonging.

Similarly, walking around the courtyard, listening to familiar music or reminiscing about childhood can make daily life more enjoyable.

Maintaining familiar surroundings also matters. Frequently rearranging furniture may increase confusion, while a predictable routine can offer reassurance.

When someone insists that their grown-up child is still attending school, arguing may only deepen their distress. Instead, acknowledging their feelings and gently redirecting attention towards a comforting activity can help.

These approaches are not substitutes for medical care. Their effectiveness varies, and activities should always match the person's abilities, preferences and safety needs.

Even when memories disappear, the need to feel loved remains unchanged.

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DHAKA SUNDAY OCTOBER 18, 2026, KARTIK 2, 1433 BS

SPORT



If it were me in his [Vinicius Jr's] place, probably I wouldn't be here. In this last summer I would have forced an exit to a league, a country, to somewhere there are rival clubs and stadiums that respect him.

Real Madrid manager **JOSE MOURINHO** ahead of his side's LaLiga fixture against Sevilla at home tonight.

Bangladesh Super League on the cards again

SPORTS REPORTER

Ten years after a failed attempt to introduce a franchise-based football league, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has revived the idea of a big-budget tournament, signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Bangladesh Strategic Partnership at the BFF House yesterday.

The Bangladesh Super League (BSL) was launched amid much fanfare in 2016, with industrialist and sports organiser Tarafder Ruhul Amin playing a key role, but the tournament never materialised despite a logo unveiling, reportedly due to a lack of infrastructure.

With many of the challenges facing Bangladesh football still unresolved, the BFF has now received a fresh proposal to launch the Bangladesh Super League (BDSL) next year. However, the MoU is non-binding, non-exclusive and non-obligatory, and the UK-based company has been asked to submit a concrete, detailed proposal within six months.

The initiative was presented by Nazir Alam, executive chairman of Bangladesh Strategic Partnership, who claimed the company's sports-related portfolio exceeded $20 billion. Speaking after the MoU signing, Nazir said the initiative was backed by diaspora-owned companies with experience in international football and investment.

He acknowledged the challenges involved but said the commercial potential was significant, pointing to Bangladesh's passion for football, particularly the popularity of Argentina and Brazil during World Cups, and research into the domestic football market.

The proposed competition would feature 10 teams in a hybrid model, combining six regional franchise-based sides with four traditional clubs. A double round-robin format is under consideration, while football academies and infrastructure development would form part of the broader plan.

BFF vice-president Fahad Karim said the federation had asked the company to submit a comprehensive proposal detailing the number of teams, investment plans, operational arrangements and those responsible for running the competition.

"They have proposed bringing in five to six regional teams representing districts or divisions like Sylhet, Chattogram and Dhaka. Our president stipulated that the top four or five teams from the existing Bangladesh Football League must also participate," Fahad said.

Both Nazir and Fahad acknowledged the difficulties and the lessons of previous failed initiatives, but expressed optimism about the tournament's prospects.



First goal in 5 years for Jamal but Brothers held

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh captain Jamal Bhuyan scored his first goal in Bangladesh's top-tier professional league in five years as Brothers Union held Rahmatganj MFS to a 2-2 draw in the ongoing Bangladesh Football League (BFL) at the Bir Shreshtha Ft Lt Matiur Rahman Stadium in Munshiganj on Saturday.

Jamal, the 36-year-old midfielder, scored his fifth top-flight goal with a long-range effort from the edge of the box to give Brothers a ninth-minute lead. Abhishek Limbu equalised from the spot 10 minutes later, before Syed Reza restored Brothers' advantage on the stroke of half-time.

Sazzad Hossain, however, rescued a point for Rahmatganj with an equaliser 13 minutes into the second half. The draw took Rahmatganj to seventh place with three points, while Brothers remained 11th with two.

The other match between Bangladesh Police and Arambagh KS at Shaheed Barkat Stadium in Gazipur also ended in a 1-1 draw. Rabby Hossain Rahul gave Police the lead in the 30th minute before Samar Joy Tanchangya equalised on the stroke of half-time.

Despite dropping points, Police retained top spot with 10 points from four matches.

Meanwhile, six-time champions Abahani climbed to fifth place with seven points after beating Chattogram City FC 3-1 at Mymensingh District Stadium.

Michael Babatunde, Anthony Okachi and Mohammad Al Amin scored for Abahani, while Raphael Odoyin netted Chattogram City's consolation goal.



Bangladesh's Saif Hassan celebrates after dismissing Zimbabwe skipper Sikandar Raza, who edged one to wicketkeeper Nurul Hasan Sohan, during the opener of the UAE ODI Tri-Series, also featuring Afghanistan, at the Zayed Cricket Stadium in Abu Dhabi yesterday. Saif dismissed Raza (4 off 5) in his second over, having earlier removed Brendan Taylor (81 off 101) to break his threatening 150-run fourth-wicket stand with Craig Ervine, who fell just seven runs short of a century. Taylor, meanwhile, surpassed Andy Flower (6,786 runs in 213 ODIs) to become Zimbabwe's all-time leading run-scorer in ODIs with 6,837 runs in his 211th appearance in the format. Saif's breakthroughs helped the Tigers fight back after Zimbabwe recovered from Taskin Ahmed's three early wickets. Zimbabwe, however, still managed to post 271 for eight in 50 overs. PHOTO: **ACB**

Litton's fitness woes refuse to fade

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Bangladesh's recurring fitness concerns surrounding white-ball captain Litton Das have repeatedly forced the team management to make last-minute changes, ruling the wicketkeeper-batter out of several national assignments in recent months.

The latest setback came yesterday when vice-captain Tawhid Hridoy attended the toss in place of Litton ahead of Bangladesh's tri-series opener against Zimbabwe in Abu Dhabi. Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) later confirmed that Litton would miss the entire tournament due to discomfort in his right hip joint.

"Litton Das complained of right hip joint discomfort yesterday, so we had done an MRI. The report shows a slight issue in his right hip joint," national team physio Bayjedul Islam Khan said in a video message. "Litton still attempted a fitness test today [yesterday] to see if he could play, but he could not clear the required benchmark. So, he is unavailable for this series," he added.

Appointed full-time ODI captain in July until the 2027 ODI World Cup in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia, Litton had previously led Bangladesh in seven ODIs. The tri-series was meant to mark his first assignment as full-time ODI captain, but his latest injury has delayed that opportunity. Left-handed batter Parvez Hossain Emon, who can also keep wicket, has been drafted as his replacement.

Litton's latest setback follows a series of fitness-related absences. In June, he suffered a Grade 1 tear in his left calf muscle during the final ODI against Australia and missed the subsequent home T20I series, despite attending the official trophy photo session alongside Australia captain Mitchell Marsh on the eve of the series.



The circumstances were similar ahead of the ongoing tri-series, when Litton attended Friday's pre-tournament photo session alongside Zimbabwe captain Sikandar Raza and Afghanistan skipper Rahmat Shah, only to be ruled out the following day.

Litton also missed Bangladesh's tour of Zimbabwe in June and July. Initially named in the squad for the one-off Test, he was ruled out due to inadequate match fitness. He then missed the three-match T20I series and, despite travelling to Zimbabwe to join the ODI squad, was not fit enough to feature.

Initially left out of the squad for the first Test against Australia in August, Litton was later declared fit and featured in both Tests. Although his wicketkeeping was impressive, he registered three consecutive ducks. He subsequently led Bangladesh briefly at the 2026 Asian Games before earning the Player of the Match award in last week's drawn Test against Afghanistan.

A member of the national selection panel acknowledged the difficulty of assessing injuries from the outside, saying neither the team nor the physio could be certain of a player's discomfort without the necessary checks.

"Only the person who is injured can truly understand what they are going through," he said. "The note will come from the player, stating that I'm not feeling comfortable or that something doesn't feel right. Then the physio would conduct the necessary checks and assessments.

"When someone says about injuries, you just have to accept the situation. There's nothing you can do about it."

The concern extends beyond Litton's injuries to their timing. Last-minute withdrawals complicate preparations and force changes to team combinations. Having scored a fifty and a hundred against Afghanistan while spending considerable time behind the stumps during the five-day Abu Dhabi Test, Litton may have needed more time to recover before returning to action. His latest setback has renewed questions about his workload management, recovery and long-term fitness.

As Bangladesh prepare for the 2027 ODI World Cup and the 2028 T20 World Cup while seeking to improve their standing in the ongoing World Test Championship cycle, Litton's availability remains crucial. His ability to contribute across all three formats makes his fitness a key factor in the Tigers' ambitions, with the team needing to ensure that recurring setbacks do not continue to disrupt preparations at critical moments.



Haaland brace keeps City perfect

Erling Haaland netted twice to help Manchester City maintain their perfect Premier League record with a 3-2 win over Ipswich Town at the Etihad Stadium yesterday. Haaland, who could have had a hattrick but saw a goal denied due to an offside call, became the fastest player to score 100 non-penalty goals in Premier League history, achieving the feat in 139 games. The victory meant that City, embroiled in controversy since being found guilty of financial breaches, made it seven wins from seven games to stay top of the league.

PHOTO: **AFP**

Rabada 'raring to go' as Proteas hope to level series

AGENCIES

South Africa's pace spearhead Kagiso Rabada is ready to make his Test comeback after 12 months as the hosts look to level the three-match series against Australia in the second Test in Gqeberha, starting today.

Australia took a 1-0 lead with a commanding 214-run win in Durban and will aim to wrap up the series with another win, while South Africa will need a much-improved performance to keep their hopes alive.

Rabada has been cleared to play after recovering from a hamstring injury that kept him out of the series opener. The fast bowler has not played a Test since facing Pakistan in Rawalpindi last year, but is confident heading into his return.

At St George's Park in Gqeberha, Kagiso Rabada boasts a bowling strike rate of 40.8, the best among bowlers at the ground. He also claimed 11 wickets when Australia last toured South Africa in 2018.



"Right now, I feel ready. I feel confident. But it's sport. There's always some mystery," Rabada said ahead of the match.

"I know what it means for me, and that's going there and giving my best and trying to get those Australian batters out."

South Africa captain Temba Bavuma believes Rabada's return will provide a significant boost to the attack, particularly after Australia piled up 390 in their second innings in Durban despite being reduced to 124 for six.

"He is raring to go. The bowlers feed massively off him. He leads the attack in everything that he does, and it brings an extra level of confidence to the unit," Bavuma said.

Rabada's record against Australia offers further encouragement for the hosts. He claimed 23 wickets at an average of 19.26 during South Africa's 2018 home series victory over the visitors. He also took nine wickets in the World Test Championship final at Lord's last year, helping South Africa defeat Australia and lift the mace.

South Africa are expected to make changes after their opening defeat, with Matthew Breetzke in contention to feature and the team reconsidering its two-spinner combination. Australia, meanwhile, could retain their winning combination as they seek to secure the series and strengthen their bid for a third consecutive World Test Championship (WTC) final.

WHAT TO WATCH

T SPORTS
Pakistan ODI Tri-Series
Pakistan vs Sri Lanka
Live from 2:00 pm
World Championship of Legends
Final: England vs West Indies
Live from 9:30 pm
LaLiga
Real Madrid VS Sevilla
Live from 1:00 am (Monday)

STAR SPORTS SELECT HD 1, RAJDHANI TV
Premier League
Leeds vs man United
Live from 7:00 pm
Nottm Forest vs Arsenal
Live from 9:30 pm







A dhaki for 45 years, Shanti Ranjan Das (right), leads his troupe during Maha Shashthi of Durga Puja at Dhakeshwari National Temple on Friday evening. For musicians like him, devotion to tradition must contend with the hard realities of making a living in Dhaka.

PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

The beating heart of DURGA PUJA

For Dhaka's vanishing dhakis, devotion outlasts the pay

SUBRATA ROY *and* **DOWEL BISWAS**

Inside the dimly lit courtyard of the ancient Ramna Kali Mandir, the scent of burning incense, its smoke curling through the air, and the rhythmic beating of the dhak lend an ethereal quality to the atmosphere. Dusk settles on Maha Shashthi, and the priest begins offering the first Sandhya Aarti to Goddess Durga.

The slow, heavy thuds of the dhak initially match the measured arcs of the priest's panchapradip. Then the dhakis shift to mid-tempo patterns, alternating deep beats with sharp, wooden rim shots.

Suddenly, the drums explode into a deafening crescendo, transforming the solemn ritual into an electric celebration.

There is a saying among Bangalee Hindu devotees: "Dhak chhara Durga Puja hoy na" -- Durga Puja cannot take place without the dhak.

A large, barrel-shaped wooden drum wrapped in animal hide, the dhak is the literal heartbeat of the ritual. When dhakis strike its hide, the sound is not just heard but felt, vibrating through the chest. It is a sacred language, integral to Sharadiya Durga Puja celebrations.

Yet, this centuries-old craft is sustained by a class of traditional musicians who are navigating a modern world where legacy is fighting a losing battle against the cost of living in a megacity.

For Binoy Das, 35, the five days of the festival offer a brief, transcendent escape from his everyday life. A garment factory worker in Gazipur, he travels to the capital every autumn to perform as a seasonal drummer at Ramna Kali Mandir, bringing with him a seven-member troupe that includes a sanai (traditional oboe) player, a flautist, and a bell player.

None of them are full-time musicians. They are salon owners and agricultural labourers who put down their scissors and sickles and pick up their instruments when the festival arrives.

Binoy has been a dhaki for 14 years. This year, he will receive Tk 18,000 for his performance, an amount he says isn't enough for five days of intense physical labour in an inflation-weary economy.

"Considering the cost of living in Dhaka and the quality of my work,

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Trump waives key sanctions, tariffs on Russia

Zelensky says move emboldens Putin

AGENCIES

President Donald Trump waived key Russia-related US sanctions and tariffs days before they were to take effect under a law he signed last month, including duties on the country's goods and penalties for buying its oil and gas.

X yesterday, said Trump's latest action emboldens Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"A US sanctions blackout, easing pressure on the aggressor, financial rewards for Putin – all of this only encourages him to keep attacking. We must not give up ground," wrote Zelensky, who said Russia on Friday struck more than 15 Ukrainian power generation and transmission sites. "We must keep trying to end the war. To end it, not give Putin every reason to continue it indefinitely."

Weeks before US midterm elections in which Trump's Republicans are battling to maintain their narrow grip on both chambers of Congress, the new measures could have risked further raising oil prices as Americans

The law is meant to increase pressure on Russia for its invasion of Ukraine that began in 2022. Trump, however, has been warming toward Moscow while publicly criticising Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, including suggesting Kyiv needs a new leader.

In an executive order released by the White House on Friday, Trump said the waiver was in the national interests of the United States.

The law is meant to increase pressure on Russia for its invasion of Ukraine that began in 2022. Trump, however, has been warming toward Moscow while publicly criticising Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, including suggesting Kyiv needs a new leader.

Zelenskiy, in a message posted on

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Biman suspends Riyadh flights indefinitely

Plans to resume Dammam flights Oct 21

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Biman Bangladesh Airlines has suspended Riyadh-bound flights indefinitely following attacks on Saudi airports.

Meanwhile, it plans to resume flights to Dammam in Saudi Arabia from October 21, subject to clearance from airport authorities.

In a press release yesterday, the national flag carrier said flights to Riyadh would remain suspended for passenger safety until further instructions from the airport authorities.

Meanwhile, Biman said its flights to Jeddah and Madinah are operating as usual, and passengers needing to travel urgently to Saudi Arabia can use these airports.

The airline said it would continue using higher-capacity aircraft on the Madinah route until October 18 before returning to Boeing 787 aircraft from October 19.

Biman is also arranging additional flights to Jeddah based on passenger demand, although it has not announced a schedule.

The airline said it would provide further updates on flight operations and schedules. Passengers have been advised to contact Biman sales offices for ticketing, bookings, and travel information.

17 killed in Kolkata Durga Puja stampede

At least 25 injured; 13 women, 1 child among the dead

AGENCIES

At least 17 people, including 13 women and a child, were killed and two dozen more injured yesterday in Kolkata after a stampede that was likely caused by sudden rainfall during a Hindu religious gathering, officials said.

West Bengal's Chief Minister Suvendhu Adhikari told reporters the fatalities included a seven-year-old girl, adding that 25 others were injured outside a pavilion "in a stampede" at the Hindu festival of Durga Puja.

"Six bodies have so far been identified," Adhikari said.

A senior police official at the scene told AFP an announcement caused "commotion" after it started raining at night and the "crowd waiting outside the pandal (pavilion) was pushing, pulling and rushing forward and fell on the ground, leading to the stampede."

"Today, around 19:40, a stampede occurred at the exit gate of the Sarada Park (Chor Bagan) Puja Pandal in the Girish Park Police Station area due to heavy crowds of pandal visitors amid rain. All injured persons were rescued and taken to MCH (Medical College and Hospital)," the Kolkata Police said in a statement.

A witness told news agency ANI that many people lost consciousness during the stampede. Many were rushed to the hospital on motorcycles.

Another witness blamed narrow entry and exit gates for the tragedy.

"The entrance was very narrow, and the exit gate was also narrow. There was no lighting in the area....My daughter and granddaughter are hospitalised," he said.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi termed the incident extremely distressing. He has announced interim compensation of Rs 2 lakh for the families of those who died. The injured will receive Rs 50,000 each.

Deadly crowd incidents are a frequent occurrence at Indian mass events, such as religious festivals, due to poor management

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STRANDED IN CAMBODIA

Oct 31 deadline looms over 1,800

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Mohammad Sentu has been stranded in Cambodia for three and a half years. Jobless and with an expired visa, he has repeatedly tried to return to Bangladesh but failed.

"I have been cheated repeatedly. I bought tickets two or three times but lost the money," said Sentu, from Singair in Manikganj.

"I have no money left to buy a ticket," he said. He now occasionally cooks for other Bangladeshis in exchange for food.

The Bangkok mission had received requests concerning 1,796 Bangladeshis stranded in Cambodia through phone calls, emails, direct applications and community contacts.

Sentu is among hundreds of Bangladeshis stranded in Cambodia after being lured by promises of lucrative jobs. Some were allegedly forced to work in online scam centres and tortured when they tried to escape.

Government data show that around 1,300 to 1,400 Bangladeshis are awaiting return, while Anirban Survivor Voice Foundation, a survivor-led rights organisation, estimates that more than 2,000 remain stranded. Around 1,800 face uncertainty over an October 31 deadline linked to immigration overstay penalties, the organisation said.

The plight of those trying to return came into focus on September 3, when Cambodian immigration police detained

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Masked protesters react amid tear gas during clashes at Place de la République in Paris yesterday, as "Yellow Vests" protests over the cost of living and rising fuel prices spread across France. The demonstrations have drawn students, teachers, parents, workers, farmers, retirees and labour unions, with demands ranging from better school conditions to government action in addressing inequality.

PHOTO: REUTERS