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

Ishraque's resignation a welcome decision

Law must take its course over his armed anti-drug drive

We welcome Ishraque Hossain's resignation as the state minister for Liberation War affairs following widespread criticism of his role in a recent anti-drug operation in Dhaka's Gandaria area. The incident has not only embarrassed the government but also raised serious questions about its commitment to the rule of law. Therefore, while we appreciate the government taking this bold decision, it cannot be the end of the matter. In a media briefing on Monday, Ishraque defended his actions, saying he had committed no mistake. Such a response makes it all the more important that the authorities investigate the incident impartially and take appropriate legal action. As the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) has undertaken an investigation, we would like to know what progress has been made and whether the conduct of everyone involved is being examined.

We witnessed in the past that disciplinary action against party figures was often taken in response to public outrage and then quietly reversed once attention subsided. Such reversals undermine the credibility of disciplinary action and may encourage others to believe that they, too, can escape lasting consequences. This should not happen in this case. The BNP must take this incident seriously and ensure that its response sends the unequivocal message: political affiliation or proximity to those in power will not shield anyone from accountability. We would also like to know what action has been taken against Pavel Sikder, former convener of the Dhaka City South unit of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, who accompanied Ishraque during the drive while allegedly carrying a firearm illegally. Any allegation of illegal possession of a firearm must be investigated, and appropriate action must follow if a violation is proven.

We urge the government to ensure a transparent and impartial investigation and take appropriate legal action against anyone found to have broken the law. The police must demonstrate that they can tackle drug trading effectively, while the government must address institutional failures through proper oversight.

The incident has also raised questions about the effectiveness of the government's anti-drug efforts. If residents have repeatedly complained about drug trading and a public representative believes he must personally join an armed operation to address it, the government must examine whether the responsible agencies are doing their jobs right. The minister has claimed that he raised the matter with the police on numerous occasions, while the police have disputed allegations of inaction. The government must ensure that complaints are acted upon, operations are properly monitored, and the police and Department of Narcotics Control have the resources and capacity to dismantle the drug networks.

Meanwhile, we must also oppose all forms of vigilantism. The fight against drugs must be conducted through lawful operations, professional policing and accountability. Elected representatives can raise public concerns, organise awareness campaigns and press the authorities to act, but they must not take on the role of law enforcement officers.

We urge the government to ensure a transparent and impartial investigation and take appropriate legal action against anyone found to have broken the law. The police must demonstrate that they can tackle drug trading effectively, while the government must address institutional failures through proper oversight. Ishraque's resignation is a necessary first step, but the government must show through its actions that no one is above the law, regardless of rank or political affiliation.

Maintain what's built before building more

Revive Moulvibazar stadium by recruiting manpower, overseeing maintenance

A stadium built at a cost of nearly Tk 5 crore should be buzzing with crowds cheering at a sporting event, not with flies hovering over rubbish piles in a moss-covered pavilion and weed-filled washrooms. Yet that is exactly what the Saifur Rahman Stadium in Moulvibazar has become, 11 years after its inauguration. The main reason behind this, as with so many other public facilities—be it hospital buildings, bridges, or community centres that fall into disrepair—is the lack of proper maintenance.

According to a report by this daily, the 1,800-square-foot stadium, with a one-tier gallery, a District Sports Association (DSA) office, dressing rooms, and a playing field, has turned into an after-hours drug den. Groups gather there after sunset, consuming and trading cannabis, yaba, and Phensedyl. The few who still come to practise or play sports at the stadium now avoid the place after dark due to fear of getting mugged or harassed by the drug users/sellers. As the boundary wall has collapsed in places, grazing animals enter the grounds, feasting on the overrun weeds and grass. Some people, however, still come to practise cricket in a net-enclosed paved area on the southern part of the stadium, but they are discouraged by the unusable toilets and lack of drinking water access. Perhaps what's telling is that the 18,000-capacity stadium has only two temporary staff members for the grounds upkeep.

Sadly, this negligence extends to many other district and upazila stadiums across the country. Investment of public funds in building public service infrastructure is rarely matched by maintenance and staffing. For instance, the National Sports Council reportedly allocated Tk 18 crore this year for stadium repair work around the country, most of which would be spent towards upgrading venues for events, with only a couple of lakhs allocated to the DSAs to cover maintenance and office expenses.

In a country with shrinking open spaces and playgrounds, as well as rising concerns of addiction to screens and drugs among young people, a stadium of such size and potential should have been a solution. Instead, lack of oversight by authorities and a limited maintenance budgets have turned a well-equipped facility into a drug and crime haven. If the government is truly serious about improving the physical and mental wellbeing of our children, it should, before building new venues, invest money and manpower in the upkeep of existing stadiums.

Can BNP keep its own ranks in check?

A CLOSER LOOK



Tasneem Tayeb works for The Daily Star. Her X handle is @tasneem_tayeb.

TASNEEM TAYEB

As it transpires, BNP lawmaker Ishraque Hossain has resigned as state minister for Liberation War affairs but has no intention of abandoning the anti-drug campaign that brought him into controversy in the first place. On Monday, he said he would continue the campaign as a BNP activist in his constituency. He also declared himself ready to contest the Dhaka South mayoral election if his party nominated him.

His resignation followed the circulation of videos showing him carrying a pistol during an "operation" in Gandaria, accompanied by associates, some of whom were also armed. One was seen kicking a young man, while another was heard threatening to shoot. Ishraque maintains that his firearm was licensed and carried for self-defence. He disputes reports that Prime Minister Tarique Rahman instructed him to resign, saying he sought permission to step down himself. Reportedly, a police investigation into the incident is under way, but no findings have been announced yet.

Less than three weeks earlier, BNP's reserve-seat MP Ferdousy Ahmed resigned from parliament following allegations linking her to the attack and demolition of the Radda MCH-FP Centre in Mirpur. The prime minister instructed her to step down then. She denied involvement in the Radda attack, which saw a large group entering the premises, removing medical equipment and demolishing structures amid a long-standing property dispute. The looting and destruction went ahead in the presence of police. The OC of the local police station was subsequently withdrawn.

As of October 16, police arrested 25 people without identifying who organised the attack. Ferdousy lost her parliamentary seat, although no finding of responsibility against her was publicly announced. Police also did not explain why they failed to prevent the demolition.

So, the ruling party has, by now, seen two prominent politicians leave public office in less than three weeks. The leadership's response was swift, but the incidents have brought renewed attention to the conduct of party members and the supervision they require.

It may be recalled that, in September 2025, Tarique Rahman said more than 7,000 BNP members had faced disciplinary measures over allegations of extortion, corruption and other wrongdoing. Penalties ranged from demotion to expulsion. More have been announced since the party assumed power. But some expulsions have also been reversed. Seven expelled leaders' memberships were restored in October 2025 following appeals. The next month, the party reinstated 43 leaders expelled for contesting the 2023 Sylhet City Corporation election violating the party decision to boycott. Their expulsions were mostly in response to breaches of party instructions—not necessarily criminal wrongdoing.

Parties should be able to reconsider penalties, especially when an earlier decision was unjust or excessive. However, BNP's announcements so far offered little insight into how the appeals were assessed, what evidence was considered, or whether conditions accompanied reinstatement.

Ishraque's confrontation with Dhaka South City Corporation last year offers some context. After an election tribunal, in March 2025, declared him the winner of the 2020 mayoral election, followed by an Election Commission gazette the following month, his supporters occupied Nagar Bhaban in May, demanding his installation. The interim government, however, maintained that the corporation's tenure had expired. The blockade nonetheless continued for weeks, disrupting municipal services. In June, Ishraque held meetings with sanitation inspectors and ward secretaries under banners identifying him as "mayor," although he had not taken oath.

The Gandaria "operation" and Nagar Bhaban siege were not the only incidents where Ishraque's actions embarrassed the BNP. In February, he arrived late at the oath-taking ceremony of newly elected MPs, missing the swearing-in with his party colleagues and having to join the opposition and independent MPs instead. Earlier in October 2023, he was accused of helping a man appear at the party's Naya Paltan office, where the latter addressed the media claiming to be an adviser to then US President Joe Biden.

In Gandaria, Ishraque personally participated in an incident involving live weapons and detentions. A firearm licence does not confer one police powers, and concerns about crime do not override the legal requirements governing arrests and investigations. He says he acted alongside police and local residents. But what authority did he have to lead an armed operation? Under Sections 42 and 59 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, civilians may assist police when called upon or arrest someone in specific circumstances. Neither provision authorises an MP to conduct an armed raid. The 2025 firearms policy also prohibits displaying weapons in a manner likely to cause fear or annoyance.

In the Radda incident, BNP dissolved its Dhaka North City committee and took action against members of the affiliated organisations following the demolition. Investigators are still trying to identify those who directed the attack.

On October 4, journalists and students were attacked at Rajshahi University. *The Daily Star* identified several individuals from video footage, including leaders of the university's Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) unit. Still, the initial police complaint filed by RU authorities named "unidentified" persons. The university subsequently recommended suspending four students, while JCD expelled three members.

Among those identified were Ahsan Habib and Hasibul Islam. Both had been removed from JCD over extortion allegations in October 2024. Their penalties were later withdrawn, and they received positions in the university committee announced in August 2025.

BNP spent years in opposition, relying on local organisers who could mobilise supporters and sustain political networks. Many now operate with their party controlling the government. Political connections can carry considerable weight in dealings with police, universities and local administration. Officials may also face pressure to accommodate individuals who have no formal power to direct them.

BNP's ability to supervise its members cannot be measured solely by the number of sanctions it announces. In June, *The Daily Star* reported that the Prime Minister's Office had begun scrutinising ministers and lawmakers over allegations of corruption, lobbying, administrative interference and abuse of power. Three ministers or state ministers had reportedly received verbal warnings. The PM has warned party members to avoid extortion, land-grabbing and interference in public affairs on more than one occasion. Expulsions, committee dissolutions, and the recent resignations show that the leadership is prepared to impose political consequences.

BNP has organisational bodies empowered to discipline members and review penalties. At Rajshahi University, two JCD leaders were reinstated despite earlier extortion allegations, only to face fresh complaints. Their reinstatement raises legitimate questions about the scrutiny exercised by those responsible for such decisions.

The party may remove members from their positions, but police still have to investigate their wrongdoings. Neither Ishraque's resignation nor the action against Ferdousy Ahmed answers the questions surrounding the Gandaria operation and the Radda attack.

Ishraque has expressed interest in returning to the mayoral office through a fresh election. If BNP considers nominating him, it will have to weigh his political standing against a record that includes a prolonged confrontation over municipal administration and an armed operation now under police investigation.

BNP now faces a bigger challenge. Running a country is far more difficult than managing a political party. With its own leaders repeatedly accused of misconduct and overstepping their authority, how can it expect others to follow rules and regulations?



VISUAL: **SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR**

When did play stop being a part of childhood?



Ruhina Binta A Ghani is a researcher in children's movement behaviours, active play, sleep, and fundamental movement skills, affiliated with Hong Kong Baptist University and BRAC Bangladesh.

RUHINA BINTA A GHANI

A few months ago, while visiting a primary school, I asked a group of children what they liked most about school. I expected answers such as their favourite subject, teacher, or friends. Instead, several children spoke about the few minutes they were allowed to play. One child asked whether their activity session could be made longer because there was "hardly any time to play" after school. Another explained that most afternoons were divided among homework, coaching classes, and screens.

Over the past several years, I have worked with primary school children in both urban and rural communities across Bangladesh, including Dhaka, Khulna, and Noakhali. Through school visits, fieldwork, and research involving hundreds of children and their families, one message has emerged again and again: children enjoy being active, but finding the opportunity to move has become increasingly difficult in Bangladesh.

We often discuss children's education, examination results, and future careers. But far less emphasis is put on their need for movement, sleep, play, and overall development. Yet, these are essential parts of a healthy childhood.

Traditionally, studies in Bangladesh have relied largely on questionnaires asking children or parents to recall how active children were or how much they slept. In several of our studies, we instead used wearable activity monitors that recorded movement and sleep directly. We found that children were moving and sleeping less than we might have assumed from self-reported information alone.

Concerningly, many children are not achieving recommended levels of daily physical activity. Sleep duration is often lower than recommended for healthy growth and development. Recreational screen use is increasing, particularly in urban settings. More than half of the children in our research did not meet any of the recommended movement-health guidelines. However, the most important lesson from our work is that this is not due to children's choices, but the environments they are in.

One of the most striking findings emerged from our research in schools. Nearly nine out of ten children reported that they never participated in physical education classes. During school visits, it was common to observe children sitting during recess or lunch breaks rather than engaging in active play. In many schools, particularly in urban areas, playground space was either limited or unavailable altogether. Parents often told us that they wanted their children to be active, but stated concerns about traffic, safety, academic pressure, mosquito bites, and a lack of suitable places to play. In densely populated neighbourhoods, many children spend most of their time indoors. Several families explained that rooftops, narrow alleys, or small courtyards had become the primary locations for play.

In contrast, children from rural communities generally reported more physical activity, active play, and better motor skill development than children living in major urban centres. This does not necessarily mean rural life is easier. Rather, it suggests that access to open spaces and opportunities for movement matters. We found that children living in communities perceived as safer and more accessible were more likely to engage in active play. In urban communities, even small improvements in safety and access appeared to make difference.

Children who reported positive peer relationships, encouragement from friends, and opportunities to play together were also more likely to participate in active play and demonstrated better movement skills. This reminds us that physical activity is not only about exercise but is also determined by friendship, confidence, belonging, and enjoyment.

Perhaps most importantly, children who engaged in more active play reported fewer emotional difficulties and stronger social behaviours. Longer sleep duration was also associated with better outcomes. These findings challenge the idea that play is merely free time. Play is in fact an important process through which children learn, socialise, build confidence, and develop resilience.

Unfortunately, active play is increasingly competing with academic pressure. During our fieldwork, many parents expressed concern about balancing play with homework and coaching classes. But research consistently shows that movement, sleep, and wellbeing support learning rather than compete with it. This does not mean children should spend less time learning, but only that we need a broader understanding of what helps children thrive.

Schools can help by strengthening physical education, protecting recess time, and recognising movement as an important part of child development. Parents can encourage outdoor play, establish healthy screen-use routines, and prioritise adequate sleep. Local government and urban planners can create safer, more child-friendly neighbourhoods where children have the freedom to walk, play, and explore.

Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in expanding educational opportunities for children. But healthy childhoods also require safe spaces, supportive friendships, opportunities to play, and time to move. We regularly ask whether our children are studying enough. Perhaps it is time to ask if they are getting enough opportunity to simply be children.

The Daily Star Reg. No. DA 781 | **EDITOR & PUBLISHER: Mahfuz Anam** Printed by him on behalf of Mediaworld Ltd at Transcraft Ltd, 229, Tejgaon Industrial Area, editor@thedailystar.net | **Registered & Head Offices:** The Daily Star Centre 64-65 Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, Dhaka-1215 Phone: 09610222222 | **Newsroom:** Fax- 58156306 reporting@thedailystar.net | **Advertisement:** 01711623910 advertisement@thedailystar.net GPO Box: 3257 | **Subscription:** 01711623906 | thedailystar.net bangla.thedailystar.net/